

Fighting for Information in Large-Scale Combat Operations: Cavalry in the American Civil War

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

Fighting for Information in Large-Scale Combat Operations: Cavalry in the American Civil War, by MAJ Trevor M. Jones, US Army, 55 pages.

With the October 2017 publication of Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, the US Army declares that large-scale combat operations is its most significant readiness requirement. This monograph seeks to answer how the ability to fight for information in reconnaissance and security operations shapes the outcomes of campaigns in large-scale combat operations. It researches cavalry operations in the American Civil War for insight. Historical analysis illustrates that how efficiently cavalry forces supported their armies in the conduct of reconnaissance and security operations determined the degree of success or failure of Civil War campaigns.

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Acronyms

JEB	James Ewell Brown
RMA	Revolution in Military Affairs
(S)BCT	(Stryker) Brigade Combat Team
US	United States

Illustrations

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Introduction

The Prussian army bore down on the French's right at the Battle of Froeschwiller. Positioned atop a hill, a brigade of cuirassiers weaved down a wooded slope to break up an advancing Prussian infantry company. Adorned with decorative helmet plumes and burnished breastplates, the cuirassiers embodied traditional European heavy cavalry. European infantry formed into hollow-squares to receive charges by heavy cavalry. The Napoleonic tactic minimized the damage inflicted to the infantry. In other words, when cavalry charged, infantry did their best to survive.

On that day in 1870, the Prussian infantry did not form into hollow squares. Armed with breech-loading rifles, the infantry company moved into open-order ranks. Prussian platoon leaders barked fire commands as the cavalry neared. At close range, volleys of rifle fire met 1,200 charging cuirassiers. As quickly as it started, the charge ended, with a mass of cuirassier casualties fifty yards short of the Prussians.¹

The onset of massed firepower caused military practitioners during the late-nineteenth century to reconsider cavalry's role. Commanders could no longer rely on cavalry for their *coup de main*. The Prussians prudently adapted their cavalry before the Franco-Prussian War. Chief of the Prussian General Staff, Helmuth von Moltke, converted his army's heavy cavalry into light cavalry, which was ideal for reconnaissance operations. Hungarian hussars provided Western European countries a model for light cavalry. These fast-moving cavalry continuously supported their field commanders, screening their armies while collecting intelligence on enemy movements. The new Prussian cavalry rarely acted independently from the army.²

¹ Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 132-133.

² Ibid., 61-62.

The cavalry arm in the American Civil War evolved similarly but with variation. Neither Confederate nor Union armies possessed a unified vision of cavalry's role. Prospects of 'game-changing' raids enamored many commanders. Raiding, however, seldom yielded the strategic or operational outcomes intended.³ One historian opined that "[on] the general Civil War doctrine of raiding . . . the use of cavalry for raiding was not only a deliberate turn away from the hope of victory on the battlefield, but it actually removed the means by which victory might have been won."⁴ Other commanders retained the vision of cavalry charging infantry at decisive moments in battle. Some cavalry existed in name only, fighting as mounted infantry. Federal cavalry regiments existed before the war as dragoons.⁵

Cavalry became central to the outcomes of campaigns as the war progressed. First, cavalry kept field army commanders informed with accurate, timely information on enemy movements. Keeping information on friendly movements from opposing armies proved as important. Cavalry required an ability to fight for information, as the enemy equally desired to collect and protect information. Secondly, with technological advantages in firearms, Federal commanders chose increasingly to incorporate their cavalry into combined-arms attacks rather than dispatch them on the eve of battle for raids. Towards the war's conclusion, Federal cavalry fought alongside infantry in decisive battles.

Military professionals rethought how to incorporate cavalry after World War I. Mechanization had recast the battlefield. Mechanized cavalry emerged during the interwar years.⁶

³ Christopher R. Gabel, *The Vicksburg Campaign: November 1862 – July 1863* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2014), 21. Headline-grabbing raids occurred throughout the American Civil War. However, regarding a raid's ability to decide a campaign's outcome, only Earl Van Dorn's Holly Spring raid during Grant's Vicksburg Campaign stands out. Van Dorn's raid compelled Grant to cease his overland route to Vicksburg and re-design his operational approach.

⁴ Paddy Griffin, *Battle Tactics of the American Civil War* (Ramsbury, Great Britain: The Crowood Press, 1987), 183-184.

⁵ Edward G. Longacre, *Lincoln's Cavalrymen: A History of the Mounted Forces of the Army of the Potomac, 1861-1865* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000), 16.

⁶ Matthew Darlington Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies: The Death and Rebirth of the Modern U.S. Cavalry* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 8.

American doctrine envisaged mechanized cavalry's role more for surveillance, conducting reconnaissance from afar.⁷ The interwar doctrine viewed the new armor branch, along with infantry, as principal combat forces. However, during World War II, cavalry groups, supporting corps, re-staked cavalry's role as a fighting force. The Normandy Campaign reinforced the idea that reconnaissance and security operations, even on the mechanized battlefield, still required the ability to fight for information, as it did during the Civil War.⁸

The US Army's attention to reconnaissance and security operations for division- and corps-level engagements decreased in the post-9/11 era. Large-scale combat operations, justifiably so, were not the Army's focus. Nevertheless, developments in the international arena suggest that the Army must prepare for a return to conventional-style war against near-peer adversaries.⁹ If, as an implication, the Army must fight campaigns with corps-level tactical engagements, then the Army must possess reconnaissance and security forces that can fight to protect and collect information at an operational level.¹⁰ Armored cavalry regiments served this purpose when they existed, and arguably the capability remains between separate formations.

The US Army tested a reconnaissance and security brigade construct with 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT), 4th Infantry Division. In 2017, the brigade participated in a Warfighter Exercise run by Mission Command Training Program and a training rotation at the National Training Center. This monograph parallels the US Army's reconsideration of reconnaissance and security operations by investigating how cavalry actions during the Civil War contributed to the success or failure of major battles and campaigns. By doing so, this monograph

⁷ US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 1-02, *Terms and Military Symbols* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 1-87.

⁸ Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies*, 147, 225.

⁹ US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 1-2.

¹⁰ US Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 3-98, *Reconnaissance and Security Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 1-5.

seeks to better understand the conditions under which reconnaissance and security operations evolved.

The Civil War provides an appropriate setting for historical inquiry on this topic. The scale of that war approximates today's focus on conventional-style campaigns against near-peer adversaries. Furthermore, the Union and the Confederacy extensively used cavalry for reconnaissance and security during campaigns, providing a rich source of history for analysis. The historical question therefore focuses on what insights from the American Civil War can modern military professionals draw upon to better understand how reconnaissance and security forces shaped the outcomes of campaigns.

The military historians MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray describe evolutionary changes in operations, directed by military institutions, as revolutions in military affairs (RMAs). Innovations in doctrine, organization, tactics, and technology constitute RMAs. Doctrine refers to the ideas and concepts developed beyond published manuals. Cavalry's evolution during the Civil War did not necessarily constitute a RMA. However, the RMA construct offers a tool for exploring how military institutions adapted their forces to increase efficiency in battle.¹¹

Doctrinal, organizational, tactical, and technological factors explain how cavalry evolved to shape the outcome of campaigns in the Civil War. Whether or not an army commander retained his cavalry for reconnaissance and security, or detached it for raiding, poses a doctrinal question. A cavalry arm's composition and size presents an organizational question. The appropriateness of mounted and dismounted cavalry tactics, given the combat situation, constitutes a tactical question. Finally, how cavalry implemented their weaponry yields a technological question. Commanders best employed cavalry forces by retaining them in support to their army, massing them with assigned artillery into a single command, allowing for flexible

¹¹ MacGregor Knox and Williamson Murray, *The Dynamics of Military Revolution: 1300 – 2050* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12.

use of mounted and dismounted operations, and adapting tactics to leverage weapon systems with greater fire superiority. How efficiently cavalry forces supported their armies determined the degree of success or failure of Civil War campaigns.

This project analyzes Civil War cavalry actions by investigating both the Union and Confederate armies in different theaters. For evenness of comparison, cases evaluate the chiefs of cavalry supporting their respective army commanders. For the Confederate cases, this monograph investigates Major General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry division under General Braxton Bragg during the Stones River Campaign in 1862-1863 in the Western theater. Major General J.E.B. Stuart's cavalry division under General Robert E. Lee at the Battle of Chancellorsville in 1863 provides the case in the Eastern theater. For the Union cases, this monograph surveys Major General Alfred Pleasanton's cavalry corps under General George G. Meade at the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863 in the Eastern theater. Brigadier General James Wilson's cavalry corps, under Major General George Henry Thomas during the Franklin and Nashville Campaign in 1864, provides the case in the Western theater.

This monograph selected cases based upon their representativeness but also their peculiarities. Bragg was one of the first commanders to consolidate his cavalry into a single command. Wheeler's support to Bragg during the Stones River Campaign provides an early look at how cavalry supported their armies. The cases attempt to capture cavalry's evolution but at the expense of notable characters. For instance, General Philip Sheridan, the innovative Federal chief of cavalry that most fully demonstrated cavalry's potential, is excluded.¹² However, the cases cover his disciple, Wilson, during the Franklin and Nashville Campaign towards the war's end.

Following case studies, a case comparison offers insights to explain how reconnaissance and security forces shaped campaign outcomes. This reveals commonalities that reinforce reconnaissance and security concepts in current US Army doctrine. The criteria for analysis

¹² Griffin, *Battle Tactics of the American Civil War*, 186-187.

follows the considerations for reconnaissance and security as detailed in FM 3-98:

Reconnaissance and Security Operations, July 2015. This monograph concludes with a summary of the findings and parallels to a modern context.

Campaign Analyses

Confederate Cavalry

Western Theater – Stones River Campaign, 1862-63

The Confederacy took the initiative in the Eastern and Western theaters during the summer of 1862. Lee marched into Maryland and Bragg invaded Kentucky.¹³ The South's hopes turned to frustration. Lee retired his army to Virginia after the costly Battle of Antietam. Bragg withdrew to Tennessee after a tactical draw at the Battle of Perryville. Meanwhile, General Ulysses S. Grant began isolating Vicksburg, the Confederate town strategically situated on the Mississippi River.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the Union felt vulnerable. General-in-Chief Henry Halleck worried that Rebel success in Tennessee could persuade England to join the Confederate's side.¹⁵ President Abraham Lincoln appointed to General Major General William Rosecrans, commander of the Army of the Cumberland, to confront Bragg in Tennessee. A battlefield victory promised to boost Lincoln's enactment of his Emancipation Proclamation, set for January 1, 1863.¹⁶

Following his Kentucky Campaign, Bragg's primary objective became the occupation of Middle Tennessee to protect Chattanooga.¹⁷ Bragg occupied the Stones River Valley for this purpose. From Rosecrans' position in Nashville, the Confederate logistical hub in Chattanooga

¹³ Charles R. Bowery Jr., *The Civil War in the Western Theater* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2014), 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

¹⁵ Dennis W. Belcher, *The Cavalries at Stones River: An Analytical History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2017), 57-58.

¹⁶ Earl J. Hess, *Banners to the Breeze: The Kentucky Campaign, Corinth, and Stones River* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2000), 180.

¹⁷ Peter Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die: The Battle of Stones River* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 30.

lay 130 miles to the southeast. Seizing Chattanooga unlocked the door to the South's industrial center, Atlanta. In October, Bragg consolidated his cavalry brigades under the command of Brigadier General Joseph Wheeler, conferring upon him the title of chief of cavalry.¹⁸

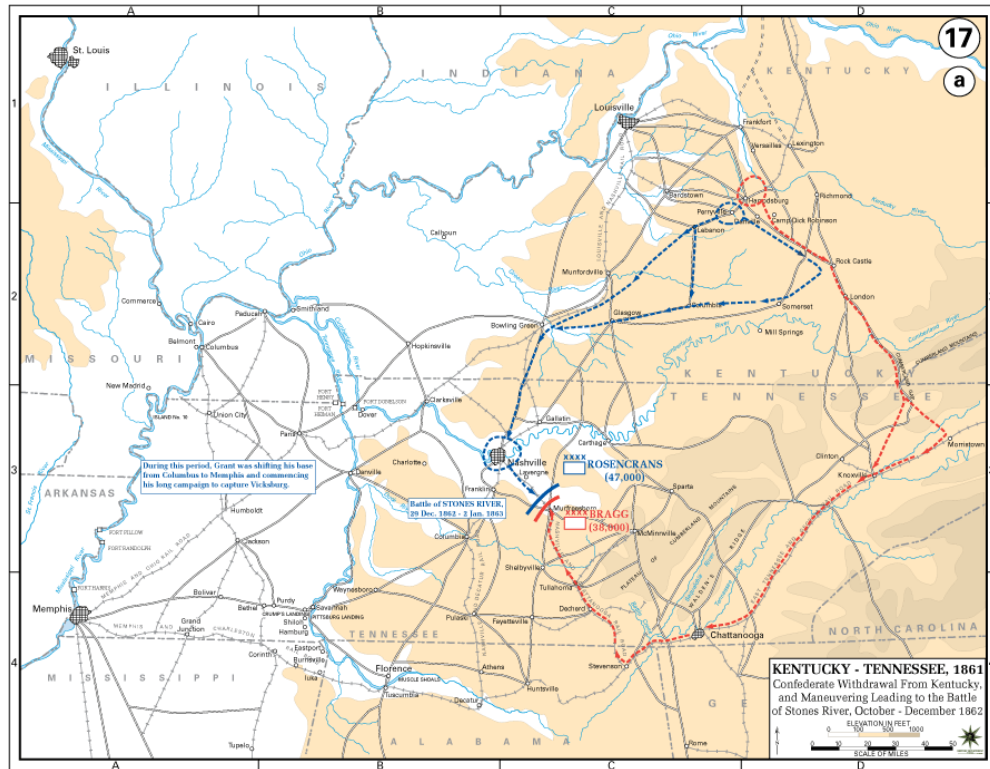


Figure 1. Stones River Campaign: Situation October-December 1862. “Atlas for the American Civil War,” map courtesy of the USMA, Department of History, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/American%20Civil%20War.aspx>.

Including three artillery batteries, Wheeler only commanded three of the five cavalry brigades in Bragg's Army of Tennessee.¹⁹ Brigadier Generals Nathan Bedford Forrest and John Hunt Morgan held independent commands. During Stones River, Morgan and Forrest raided in

¹⁸ Hess, *Banners to the Breeze*, 185. Bragg received authority to combine the Army of the Mississippi and the Army of Kentucky into the Army of Tennessee, then consolidated his cavalry.

¹⁹ Dan C. Fullerton, *Armies in Gray: The Organizational History of the Confederate States Army in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 205. Pegram's cavalry brigade attached to Wheeler's command for the Stones River Campaign, substituting for the Confederate cavalry leader Abraham Buford's brigade. Buford's brigade, part of Wheeler's command, remained in the army's rear at McMinnville.

Kentucky and western Tennessee, respectively.²⁰ Bragg settled his army into winter quarters at Murfreesboro, thirty miles southeast from Rosecrans in Nashville. Discounting a Federal attack during winter, Bragg nevertheless directed Wheeler to reconnoiter around Nashville.²¹

With three brigades, Wheeler picketed west to east between Franklin and Lebanon, a frontage over forty miles.²² Wheeler commanded his own brigade in the center with Brigadier General John Wharton's cavalry brigade off his left and Brigadier General John Pegram's brigade on his right. Although encumbered with the commands of his own brigade and the cavalry division, Wheeler handled the operation well. Wheeler had distinguished himself during the lead up to Perryville by resisting the Union's advance with a guard. There, Wheeler integrated artillery with his cavalry to delay the Federal advance through successive rearward bounds.²³ He would reprise these tactics during the Stones River Campaign.

While reconnoitering Nashville in December, Wheeler sensed that Rosecrans would attack sooner than expected.²⁴ Rosecrans' movement on December 26, 1862 verified his estimate. Rosecrans' army marched towards Bragg with a division-sized cavalry force, under General David S. Stanley, screening the advance.²⁵ Wheeler stalled Stanley's movement short of La Verge by the close of the twenty-sixth. Summoned back to Murfreesboro, Wheeler left his troops

²⁰ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series I, vol. 20, pt. 1 (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 663. Herein after cited as *O.R.*

²¹ Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die*, 40. Holding to his assumption that Rosecrans would not attack during the 1862-1863 winter, Bragg released General Forrest's brigade of 2,500 cavalry against Grant's line of communication to immobilize his army operating against Vicksburg.

²² *O.R.*, series I, vol. 20, pt. 1, 958.

²³ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 16, pt. 1, 896-897. See also Hess, *Banners to the Breeze*, 105.

²⁴ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 20, pt. 1, 77-78.

²⁵ Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die*, 45-46.

to confer with Bragg. Wheeler apparently promised to buy Bragg two or three days. From the twenty-seventh through the twenty-ninth, Wheeler's cavalry upheld his promise.²⁶

The Rebel cavalry, with attached infantry, fought to buy time.²⁷ Creeks offered cover from enemy fire, allowing Wheeler's cavalry to place more effective fires from dismounted positions. Wheeler also employed artillery. These combined-arms teams achieved local fire superiority over fording sites along creeks.²⁸ Once pressured, Wheeler's cavalry used the mobility afforded by their mounts to rapidly displace to the next rearward creek. Wheeler traversed between Wharton and Pegram to coordinate efforts.²⁹ The Federals eventually pressed Wheeler to withdraw behind Bragg's army by the evening of the twenty-ninth.³⁰

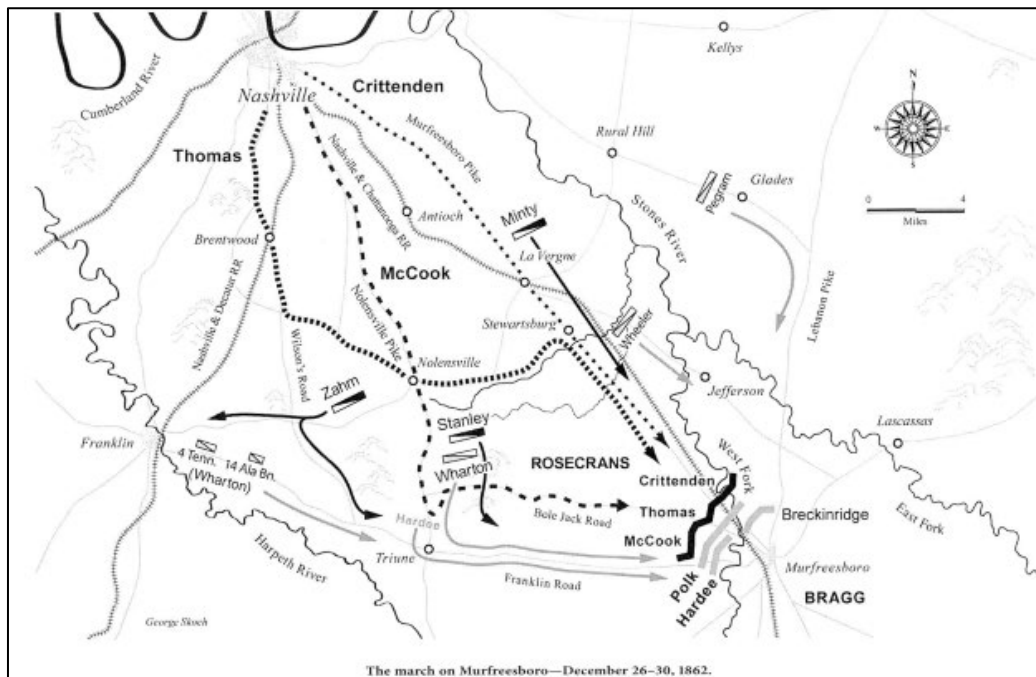


Figure 2. Stones River Campaign: Rosecrans' March from Nashville, December 26-30, 1862. Belcher, *The Cavalries at Stones River*, 116.

²⁶ Edward G. Longacre, *Cavalry of the Heartland: The Mounted Forces of the Army of the Tennessee* (Yardley, PA: Westholme Publishing, 2009), 179.

²⁷ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 20, pt. 1, 623.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 457-458.

²⁹ Longacre, *Cavalry of the Heartland*, 178.

³⁰ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 20, pt. 1, 958.

For the upcoming battle, Bragg planned for a concentrated attack against Rosecrans' right flank. Bragg intended to divert Rosecrans' attention away from his main attack by threatening Rosecrans' lines of communications with Nashville. On the thirtieth, he sent Wheeler to raid Rosecrans' logistics. Wharton would participate in the main attack by attacking with Bragg's left flank while Pegram screened off the right.³¹

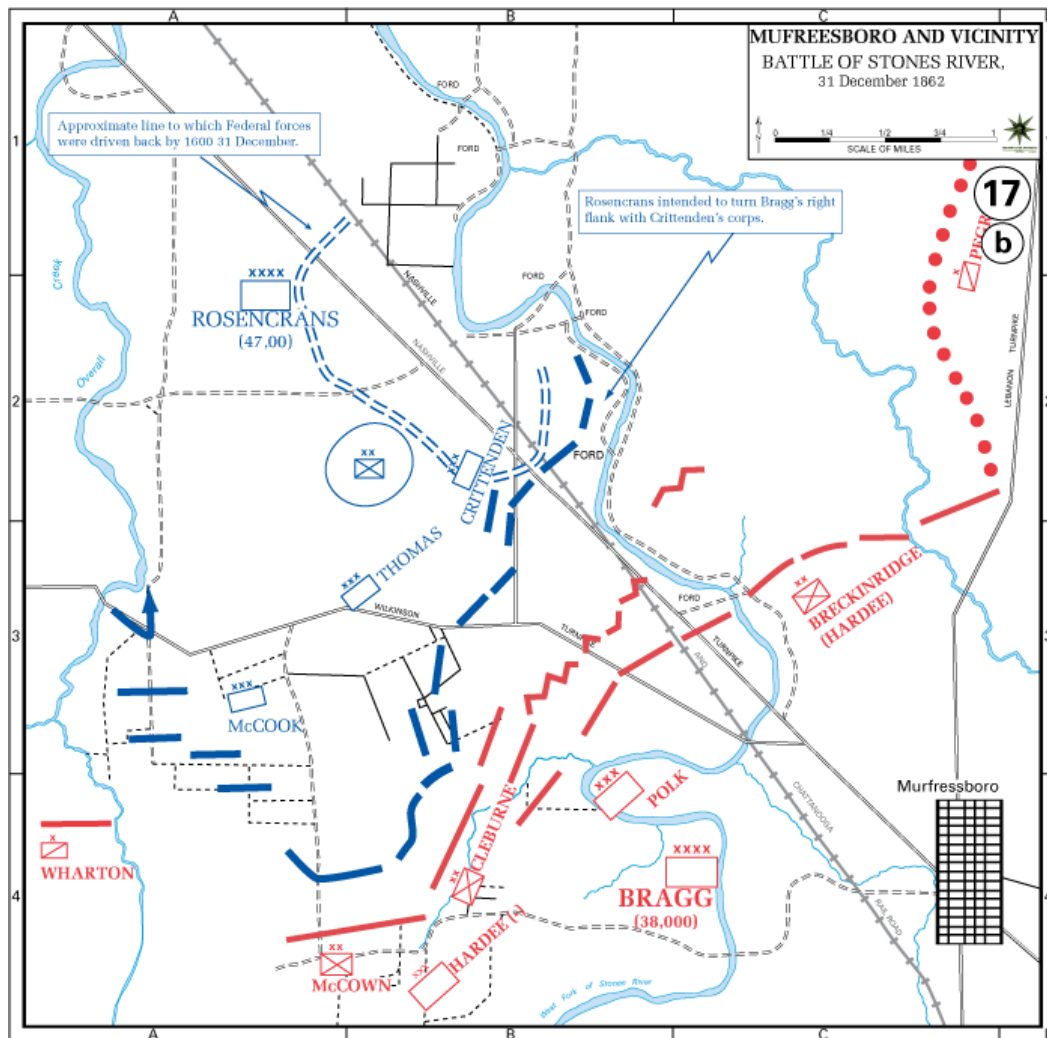


Figure 3. Battle of Stones River: Situation early December 31, 1862. "Atlas for the American Civil War," map courtesy of the USMA, Department of History, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/American%20Civil%20War.aspx>.

³¹ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 20, pt. 1, 664.

During the morning hours on December 31, the first day of battle, Bragg rolled Rosecrans' lines back towards the Nashville Pike. Rosecrans' lines reformed on that road and put up a resistance during the afternoon. Meanwhile, Wheeler had destroyed enough wagon trains to pull Stanley off the battlefield with a third of the Yankee cavalry to secure their rear. However, the remaining Federal cavalry on Rosecrans' right, led by Colonel Lewis Zahm, prevented Wharton from turning their flank.³² By early afternoon, Wharton's brigade culminated, exhausted from continuous combat. Returning from his raid in the afternoon, Wheeler resumed Wharton's attacks with a sortie on the Nashville Pike west of Overall Creek.³³ Brigadier General Abraham Buford, having just been called up with his cavalry brigade from McMinnville, joined Wheeler. Stanley, arriving at the scene, charged the Rebel cavalry. Rebuffed, Wheeler and Buford retired.³⁴

On the battlefield's eastern side, a sequence of events developed that would plague Bragg through January 2. Major General John C. Breckinridge's infantry division formed Bragg's right flank east of the Stones River. Pegram's brigade picketed east and north of Breckinridge's position. While Bragg commenced his attack on Rosecrans' right, Brigadier General Horatio Van Cleve, leading a Federal infantry division, forded east across Stones River to engage Breckinridge. Overwhelmed with Bragg's attack, Rosecrans summoned Van Cleve back to support his crumbling right flank. Pegram's cavalry reported Van Cleve's initial crossing to Breckinridge. However, in the confusion of battle, Breckinridge never obtained the information that Van Cleve had withdrawn. When Bragg requested Breckinridge to displace to the western side of the battlefield to support his attack, Breckinridge refused. Breckinridge feared displacing would present an assailable flank to Van Cleve.³⁵

³² Belcher, *The Cavalries at Stones River*, 171-172.

³³ Edwin C. Bearrs, "Cavalry Operations in the Battle of Stones River," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1960): 125.

³⁴ Belcher, *The Cavalries at Stones River*, 216-217.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

The following day, January 1, Bragg directed Wheeler to strike again at Rosecrans' rear. Bragg continued believing that Rosecrans would retire to secure his lines of communications. Wheeler struck north, with Buford and Wharton, shooting for the junction of Stewart's Creek and the Nashville Pike. The Federal cavalry greeted Wheeler with dug-in positions. Checked again, Wheeler returned to the Wilkinson Pike under darkness the morning of the second.³⁶

Bragg rested his infantry on New Year's Day, preparing for a final assault on January 2 if Rosecrans remained in place. The Federal commander wrung his hands but decided to hold ground.³⁷ Bragg initiated an attack on January 2, but the Federal defense proved too stout. Judging the cost of his casualties, Bragg decided to retire. The tactical actions yielded an indecisive result but the operational and strategic implications of Bragg's withdrawal from Stones River hurt the Confederacy.³⁸

After Bragg yielded Murfreesboro, Rosecrans out-maneuvered Bragg at Tullahoma during the spring of 1863. Bragg then abandoned Middle Tennessee to put distance between himself and Rosecrans.³⁹ Soon the Yankees would threaten Chattanooga. With over 24,000 combined casualties, Stones River's casualty ratings neared those at the battles of Shiloh and Antietam. The South felt these losses more acutely than the North. Struggling to defend the breadth of the Western theater, Confederate forces concentrated in Mississippi and Middle Tennessee in 1863, a disposition that facilitated Grant's Vicksburg Campaign.⁴⁰ The political boost from the Federal's victory at Stones River balanced their loss at Fredericksburg to Lee.⁴¹

³⁶ Bearrs, "Cavalry Operations in the Battle of Stones River," 130-134.

³⁷ Longacre, *Cavalry of the Heartland*, 185.

³⁸ Hess, *Banners to the Breeze*, 227, 233.

³⁹ Longacre, *Cavalry of the Heartland*, 231-233.

⁴⁰ Hess, *Banners to the Breeze*, 234.

⁴¹ *History*, "Battle of Stones River," accessed January 17, 2018, <http://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/battle-of-stones-river>. Lincoln wrote to Rosecrans: "you gave us a hard victory which, had there been a defeat instead, the nation could scarcely have ever lived over."

Analysis of Wheeler's Cavalry Division

As demonstrated by Wheeler's Cavalry Division in support of Bragg's Army of Tennessee during the Stones River Campaign in 1862-1863, how efficiently cavalry forces supported their armies determined the degree of success or failure of Civil War campaigns. From an operational perspective, Wheeler prevented Rosecrans from achieving outright success. Bragg did not expect Rosecrans to attack during the winter. Wheeler resisted a larger force to buy Bragg three days of defensive preparations. The chief of cavalry optimized his organizational structure by massing his cavalry against Rosecrans' approach. Wheeler struggled to provide the same level of service during the actual battle.

If Bragg had utilized his cavalry more effectively during the battle, then the outcome could have favored the Rebels. Bragg owned the blame for sending his chief of cavalry off raiding on the eve of battle. A Rebel staff officer at the battle critiqued Bragg's use of Wheeler, writing "First win the battle, [then] the enemy's wagon trains fall into your hands."⁴² By ordering Wheeler to lead raids on Rosecrans' logistics throughout the battle, Bragg failed to appreciate Wheeler's responsibility as his eyes and ears. Breckinridge's gaffe on Bragg's right flank illustrates this point. Wheeler could have alleviated the confusion by coordinating information between Pegram, Breckinridge, and Bragg – a chief of cavalry's job.⁴³

Bragg's advantage was at no higher point than when he attacked Rosecrans on the morning of the thirty-first. Wharton achieved success by attacking with Bragg's left flank on Rosecrans' right. If Wheeler followed Wharton as a pursuit force during the initial attack, then Bragg may have prevented Rosecrans from reforming the Federal line along the Nashville Pike

⁴² Belcher, *The Cavalries at Stones River*, 216-217.

⁴³ Ibid., 209.

that afternoon. The Confederates would never dislodge Rosecrans from the Nashville Pike from that point onward.⁴⁴

Neither side could claim a victory, but Bragg surrendered the field to Rosecrans. Bragg's withdrawal had a meaningful operational and strategic effect on the Confederacy in the Western Theater. Bragg would eventually abandon Middle Tennessee, making the Federals that much closer to their eventual target – Atlanta.

Eastern Theater – Chancellorsville Campaign, 1863

The Union's strategic outlook brightened during the months leading to the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863. Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, found himself pressed on all sides. Bragg's grip on Middle Tennessee loosened after Stones River while Grant continued to threaten Vicksburg. Yankee strongholds in southeastern Virginia loomed large over the Confederate capitol. Under the guidance of Davis' Secretary of War, James Seddon, Lee dispatched two divisions from James Longstreet's First Corps to guard Richmond.⁴⁵ Sitting above the Rappahannock River, the Army of the Potomac appeared poised for a campaign, but for what objective remained unknown.⁴⁶

For the Union, President Lincoln desperately needed a commander for the Army of the Potomac that could beat Lee. Lee's string of victories in the east, most recently at Fredericksburg in December, 1862, had a depressing effect on the Union. Moreover, the Emancipation Proclamation drove pro-slavery troops within the Union Army against their fellow soldiers.⁴⁷ A victory over Lee could steady Lincoln's political turbulence.

⁴⁴ Bearrs, "Cavalry Operations in the Battle of Stones River," 130.

⁴⁵ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 18, 878, 922. See also Edward J. Stackpole, *Chancellorsville: Lee's Greatest Battle*, 2nd ed., (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1988), 74-75.

⁴⁶ Stackpole, *Chancellorsville*, 90.

⁴⁷ Samuel P. Bates, *The Battle of Chancellorsville* (Meadville, PA: WM. Rutter & Co., 1882), 20.

The operational problem centered on the Rappahannock River for the Rebel and Federal armies. Lee's position on Fredericksburg's bluffs, on the river's south bank, afforded him security but he lacked the strength and logistical capacity to fight a river crossing.⁴⁸ Since assuming command of the Army of Northern Virginia in June of 1862, Lee defeated Major General George B. McClellan at the Seven Days Battles in June and again in August at the Second Battle of Manassas. However, the Battle of Antietam in September bloodied his army badly. The cost of these battles, along with materiel shortages, prohibited Lee from launching another campaign until he could strengthen his command. Major General Ambrose Burnside, commander of the Army of the Potomac, attempted a frontal attack over the Rappahannock against Lee at Fredericksburg in December, 1862. He failed by a wide margin. Later in January 1863, Burnside attempted to outflank Lee by marching upriver. The Rappahannock's muddy banks foiled his campaign. By January 25, Lincoln appointed a new commander for the Army of the Potomac, Major General Joseph Hooker.⁴⁹

Hooker used the remaining winter to prepare for a spring campaign against Lee. Hooker perceived Lee's sustainment issues and calculated that he could compel his adversary's withdrawal from Fredericksburg by interdicting his logistics along the railroad connecting Fredericksburg to Richmond. He assigned this mission to his newly formed cavalry corps, led by Brigadier General George Stoneman.⁵⁰ Hooker then planned to corner Lee between Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg.

Hooker would keep two infantry corps across Fredericksburg while three other infantry corps surreptitiously broke camp. The three corps would then march upriver towards Kelly's Ford to cross the Rappahannock. Once across, the three corps would march to Chancellorsville to turn

⁴⁸ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 25, pt. 2, 658.

⁴⁹ Bates, *The Battle of Chancellorsville*, 14-16.

⁵⁰ Hooker testimony, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War at the Second Session Thirty-Eight Congress* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1865), 115.

Lee's defense at Fredericksburg.⁵¹ Chancellorsville lay roughly ten miles west of Fredericksburg in an area named the Wilderness. Hooker's operational security measures would keep Lee uninformed and unprepared. Hooker's Chief of Staff, Major General Dan Butterfield, knowing that Rebels had cracked the Yankee signal code, sent a false message to an outpost suggesting an impending campaign through the Shenandoah Valley. This threw General J.E.B. Stuart, Lee's Chief of Cavalry, off the scent of the Federal river crossing at Kelly's Ford on April 28.⁵²

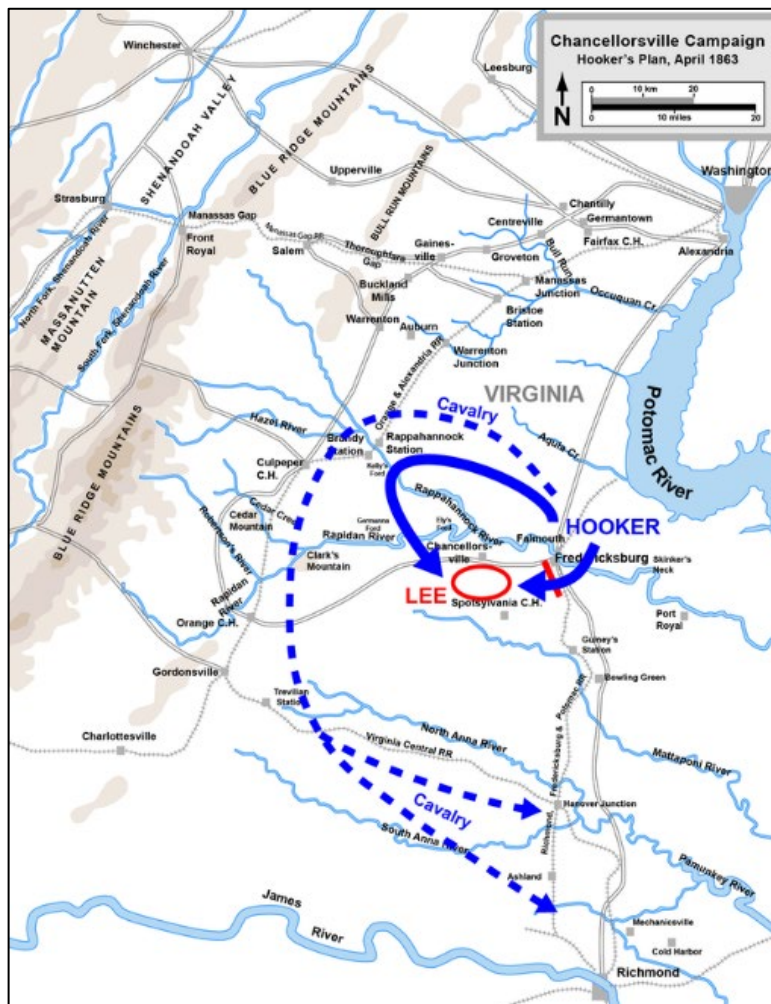


Figure 4. Chancellorsville Campaign: Hooker's Plan April 1863. "Cartography Services by Hal Jespersen," map by Hal Jespersen, accessed January 14, 2018, www.cwmaps.com.

⁵¹ Hooker testimony, *Report of the Joint Committee*, 116.

⁵² Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 131-132.

Stuart's cavalry formed an independent division within Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Stuart's command consisted of three cavalry brigades and four batteries of horse artillery.⁵³ One of his cavalry brigades, led by Brigadier General Wade Hampton, was reconstituting south of the James River and did not participate at Chancellorsville.⁵⁴ On the twenty-ninth, Stuart's cavalry spotted Yankee infantry approaching Germanna Ford. Stuart captured prisoners from the columns to learn their unit assignments and then alerted Lee via telegraph. Lee ordered Stuart to join him with the majority of his cavalry division on the twenty-ninth. Stuart left two regiments under Brigadier General William "Rooney" Lee's command, to follow and disrupt Stoneman's raid. Stuart retained the majority of Rooney Lee's brigade, along with Brigadier General Fitzhugh "Fitz" Lee's entire brigade under his command.⁵⁵ Stuart's telegraph did not reach Lee until the thirtieth. However, with the telegraph's information, Lee better visualized the battlefield. Lee interpreted Hooker's maneuver as an attempt to turn him out of Fredericksburg.⁵⁶

The thirtieth witnessed a meeting engagement near Alsop's farm, well south of the Rapidan, between Lieutenant Colonel Duncan McVicar's regiment and Stuart. Stuart remained saddle-born during the combat at Alsop's farm, where both Yankee and Rebel cavalry charged and counter-charged the other.⁵⁷ The tactical result favored neither side but the seemingly ubiquitous presence of Rebel horsemen across the Wilderness convinced Hooker that Stuart's

⁵³ Fullerton, *Armies in Gray*, 360. Brigadier General William "Grumble" Jones led a cavalry body over five-thousand troops separate from Stuart's command during Chancellorsville. Jones' troops were assigned to the "Valley District" of the Shenandoah.

⁵⁴ Stackpole, *Chancellorsville*, 61.

⁵⁵ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 25, pt. 1, 1046. Germanna Ford was a river crossing site on the Rapidan River. The Rapidan fed the Rappahannock and lay between Kelly's Ford and Chancellorsville.

⁵⁶ Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 174. Stuart's telegraph on the twenty-ninth did not reach Lee until the thirtieth due to a service outage but he had heard of enough Yankee infantry sightings from other sources to doubt that the Shenandoah was Hooker's objective.

⁵⁷ Stackpole, *Chancellorsville*, 161.

cavalry accompanied General Lee in force. Brigadier General Alfred Pleasonton relegated the remaining cavalry brigade not on Stoneman's raid to guard Hooker's trains.⁵⁸

On May 1, Lee sent General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson to contest Hooker's advance while Lee pondered how he could take the initiative. That evening, Lee and Jackson schemed a surprise attack on Hooker. The plan called for a secretive flanking maneuver by Jackson while Lee demonstrated east of Chancellorsville.⁵⁹ For the maneuver to work, Jackson needed to identify the exact location of Hooker's right flank and an approach to access it undetected.

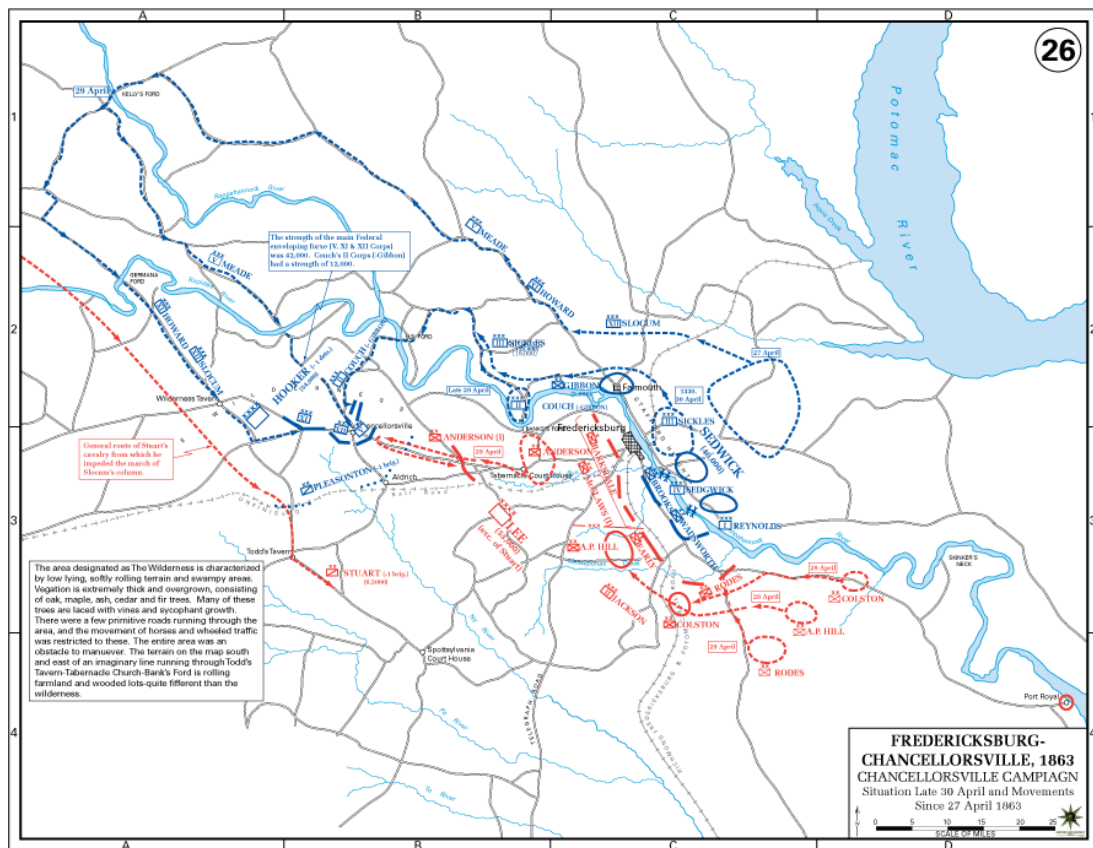


Figure 5. Chancellorsville Campaign: Situation Late April 30, 1863. "Atlas for the American Civil War," map courtesy of the USMA, Department of History, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/American%20Civil%20War.aspx>.

⁵⁸ Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 237.

⁵⁹ Bates, *The Battle of Chancellorsville*, 81-82.

Jackson's flanking force departed on May 2 from McGee's Hill on Furnace Road. Fitz Lee headed Jackson's column, screening in advance and to the right of the Rebel infantry.⁶⁰ Stuart's cavalry secured intersecting paths ahead of Jackson to ensure complete secrecy. During a route reconnaissance along the Plank Road, Fitz Lee identified a knoll near Burton's Farm that provided a panoramic view of Hooker's line. The view revealed that Hooker's right flank stretched further west along the Orange Turnpike than Jackson had originally thought. If Jackson attacked by continuing up the Orange Plank Road as intended, then his flanking maneuver would convert to a frontal attack. Jackson therefore swung further west and then cut due east to access Hooker's rear on the Orange Turnpike.⁶¹ When Jackson finally established his assault positions later in the afternoon, he would achieve complete surprise on Hooker's army.

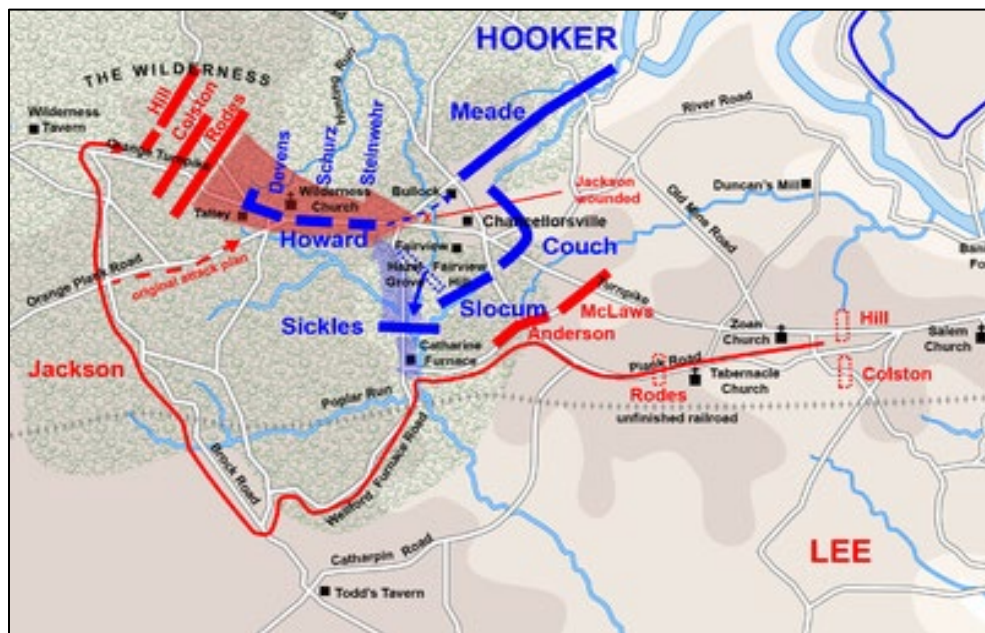


Figure 6. Battle of Chancellorsville: Jackson's Flank March, May 2, 1863. "Cartography Services by Hal Jespersen," map by Hal Jespersen, accessed January 14, 2018, www.cwmaps.com.

⁶⁰ Stackpole, *Chancellorsville*, 207. Stuart's cavalry accompanying Jackson totaled three and half regiments. "Rooney" Lee remained separated from Stuart since April 29 with two regiments from his brigade to shadow Stoneman's raiders.

⁶¹ Fitzhugh Lee, "Chancellorsville," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 7 (1879): 571-573.

Jackson lunged at Hooker's right flank late in the afternoon on May 2. The recipient of that attack, Major General Otis Howard's Eleventh Corps, disintegrated. Lee regained the initiative that day and used it to defeat Hooker at Chancellorsville over the next two days. However, Lee lost Jackson's service when friendly fire wounded his corps commander. Stuart succeeded to Jackson's command and directed major portions of the fighting in concert with Lee on the third.⁶² Yankee cavalry enjoyed less success.

Stoneman's raiders returned to Kelly's Ford on May 6 empty-handed. Stoneman had disrupted the Virginia countryside, but neglected the target directed to him by Hooker, Lee's line of communication connecting Fredericksburg to Richmond.⁶³ The operational picture remained unchanged with both armies re-occupying their positions on the Rappahannock. Disappointed again, Lincoln retained Hooker for the meantime. Despite his victory, Lee recognized that the severity of his losses gained him, in his words, "not an inch of ground" on the Union.⁶⁴ He could, however, gain ground on the Union by invading Pennsylvania.

Analysis of Stuart's Cavalry Division

As demonstrated by Stuart's Cavalry Division in support of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia during the Chancellorsville Campaign in 1863, how efficiently cavalry forces supported their armies determined the degree of success or failure of Civil War campaigns. Stuart's performance as Lee's chief of cavalry played a significant role in Hooker's defeat at Chancellorsville. Early on, Stuart's cavalry failed to detect Hooker's crossing of the Rappahannock. This owed more to Hooker's cunning misdirection. However, as the campaign unfolded, Stuart provided timely intelligence to rectify his error. He then won the reconnaissance

⁶² Bates, *Chancellorsville*, 116. Lee would never regain Jackson's services. The friendly fire mortally wounded Jackson.

⁶³ Hooker testimony, *Report of Joint Committee 1865*, XLIX.

⁶⁴ Henry Heth, "Letter from Major-General Henry Heth, of A.P. Hill's Corps, A.N.V.," *Southern Historical Society* 4 (1977): 154.

battle at Alsop's farm, which facilitated the success of the most decisive operation of the campaign – Jackson's flanking maneuver.⁶⁵

Jackson's attack on May 2 played the decisive role in the battle by regaining the initiative for Lee. Pleasonton had already withdrawn the one remaining cavalry brigade available to Hooker. Screening ahead of Jackson prevented Yankee infantry pickets from detecting the marching Rebel infantry columns. The difficulty of hiding a marching infantry corps, even in terrain and vegetation such as the Wilderness, cannot be understated. Stuart's cavalry also supported the route and enemy intelligence requirements for Jackson to find Hooker's far-right flank. Jackson had Stuart's cavalry to thank for his final route adjustment, which allowed him to gain Hooker's right rear.

The performance of Stuart's cavalry seemed somewhat muted after Jackson's attack, but at this point Stuart had succeeded to Jackson's place. Three unengaged Yankee infantry corps, lurking north of Chancellorsville, required observation. Lee and Stuart worked well together, the former providing the latter considerable latitude, and the latter providing the former invaluable intelligence.⁶⁶ Lee's victory at Chancellorsville reverberated with operational and strategic implications. Lee forestalled the campaign objectives for another Union army commander once more. While Hooker and Lincoln contemplated their loss, Lee planned a campaign to bring the cost of war on Union soil.

Federal Cavalry

Eastern Theater – Gettysburg Campaign, 1863

Following Chancellorsville, the Civil War coursed towards a strategic crossroads at Gettysburg. Lee had embarrassed another Union commander. Lincoln retained Hooker in command, hoping he could regain the initiative. Vexing over popular support for the war after

⁶⁵ Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 232-233.

⁶⁶ Warren G. Robinson, *Jeb Stuart and the Confederate Defeat at Gettysburg* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 46.

Chancellorsville, Lincoln exclaimed, “My God! my God! What will the country say! What will the country say!”⁶⁷ If Chancellorsville gained the Confederacy any strategic opportunity, then the South had a narrow window to exploit it.

Lee preferred taking the offensive rather than waiting for Hooker’s next move. Time worked against the South. Grant laid siege to Vicksburg in May, threatening the geographic bifurcation of the Confederacy. War necessities pressed the South as the Union’s production capacity outpaced the Confederacy’s. Lee reasoned that he could relieve Virginia’s war strain by foraging Union territory.⁶⁸ His victories on Confederate soil had yet to push Lincoln to the bargaining table. Lee reckoned that a victory on Union soil would compel Lincoln to negotiate.⁶⁹

Hooker suspected that Lee had designs for an offensive. He ordered his cavalry in early June to reconnoiter Confederate positions around the Rappahannock. Unsatisfied with Stoneman’s performance, Hooker replaced him with Pleasonton on May 20.⁷⁰ With Hooker’s orders, Pleasonton sought out his counterpart, Stuart. Lee began his northward movement out of the Fredericksburg-Culpeper on June 9. Incidentally, the largest cavalry battle of the war occurred that day.⁷¹ Stuart had just concluded a pass and review ceremony at Brandy Station, Virginia, thirty miles northwest of Fredericksburg. Pleasonton sprung an attack. The battle resulted in a draw yet signified the Federal cavalry’s growing competence.⁷² Brandy Station possibly affected

⁶⁷ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), 520-21.

⁶⁸ John Macdonald, *Great Battles of the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 100.

⁶⁹ Paul Calore, *Land Campaigns of the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2000), 118-119.

⁷⁰ Stephen Z. Starr, *The Union Cavalry in the Civil War: Volume I, From Fort Sumter to Gettysburg, 1861–1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 367-368.

⁷¹ Robinson, *Jeb Stuart and the Confederate Defeat at Gettysburg*, 16-19. Lee begun shifting corps to Culpepper, approximately 35 miles west of Fredericksburg, on June 3.

⁷² Longacre, *Lincoln’s Cavalrymen*, 162.

Stuart's psyche. Afterwards, Stuart stated his desire to "strike a blow" against the Yankees, and disconnected his cavalry from Lee's army on June 25 to raid through Maryland.⁷³

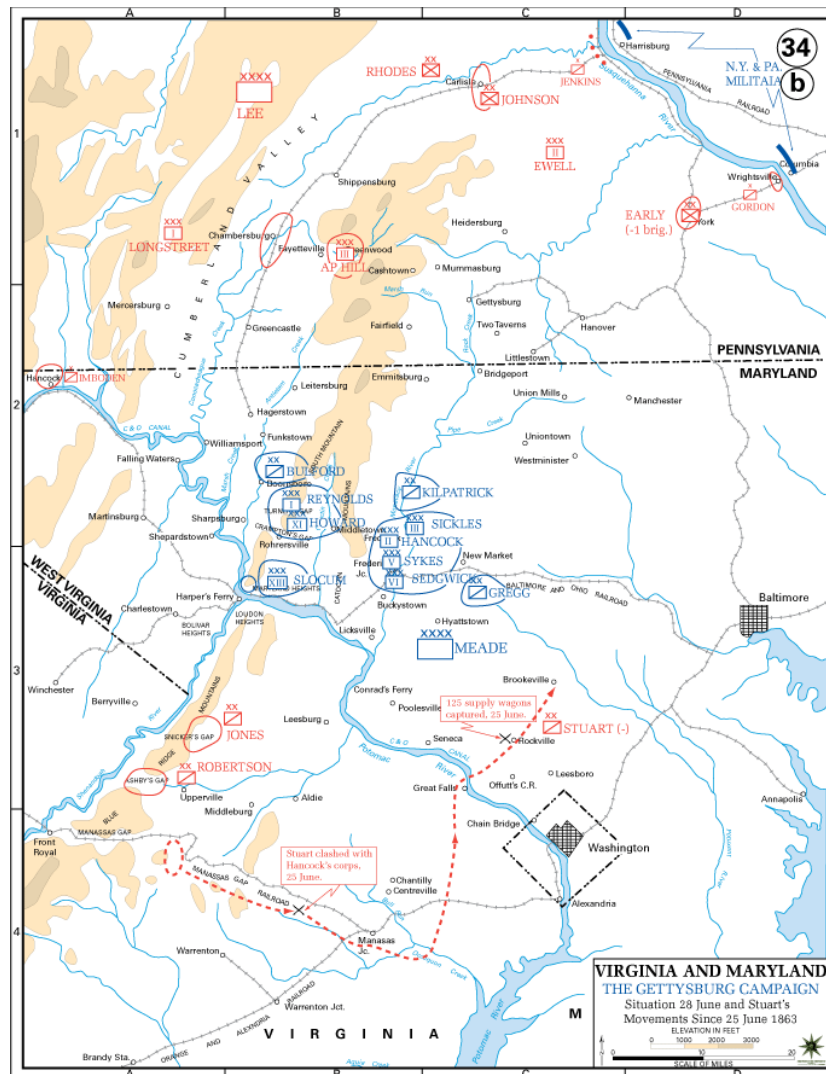


Figure 7. Gettysburg Campaign: Situation June 28, 1863. "Atlas for the American Civil War," map courtesy of the USMA, Department of History, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/American%20Civil%20War.aspx>.

By June 13, Hooker pieced together enough information to ascertain Lee's movements. Hooker wanted to exploit the axis on Richmond that Lee had uncovered. Lincoln prodded Hooker to forestall Lee, instructing the general that his operational objective had shifted to protecting the

⁷³ Robinson, *Jeb Stuart and the Confederate Defeat at Gettysburg*, 21, 68.

Union capitol in Washington.⁷⁴ After pursuing Lee over the next two weeks, Hooker offered his resignation of command. On June 28, Lincoln replaced him with his subordinate, Major General George Gordon Meade.⁷⁵ Meade continued the pursuit, planning to defend in northern Maryland should Lee suddenly about-face to attack. Three days later, the Army of the Potomac's cavalry opened the Battle of Gettysburg.

Hooker had consolidated the Army of the Potomac's cavalry under a single command in February 1863.⁷⁶ Pleasonton's cavalry corps contained three divisions and two assigned horse artillery brigades.⁷⁷ During their pursuit, Brigadier General John Buford's division covered the army's left and forward-most flank, Brigadier General Judson H. Kilpatrick's the center, and Brigadier General David M. Gregg's the right.⁷⁸ Being the leading edge of the army, Pleasonton pushed Buford towards Gettysburg to maintain contact with Lee. Rebel infantry patrols encountered Buford's cavalry northwest of the town on June 30. Conducting route reconnaissance, Buford's scouts identified Lee's army approaching from the north and west of Gettysburg. Stuart's cavalry was notably absent. Reading the situation, Buford began picketing the ridgelines along the western approaches to Gettysburg.⁷⁹

Buford spent the thirtieth preparing for Lee by posting his two brigades into videttes on parallel ridgelines northwest of Gettysburg.⁸⁰ Videttes operated in four-to-five man teams and worked as an alert system of skirmishing pickets. After skirmishing, each vidette would collapse to a rearward position. Federal cavalry positions therefore increased in strength as the videttes

⁷⁴ Calore, *Land Campaigns of the Civil War*, 122-123.

⁷⁵ Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*, 531. Hooker had requested to be relieved once earlier during his pursuit of Lee in June. Lincoln declined Hooker's request.

⁷⁶ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 25, pt. 2, 51.

⁷⁷ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 27, pt. 1, 166-167.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 400, 924.

⁸⁰ Longacre, *Lincoln's Cavalrymen*, 183.

collapsed inwards. Colonel William Gamble's brigade established between Fairfield and Mummasburg Roads, covering Chambersburg Pike. Colonel Thomas C. Devin's cavalry covered the northern approaches between Mummasburg Road and Carlisle Pike.⁸¹

Confederate infantry marched into Buford's videttes on the morning of July 1. Buford's horsemen raked the oncoming Rebels with breech-loading rifles from dismounted positions. Horse artillery supported with fires. Challenged by Gamble's brigade, Major General Henry Heth's division, from Lieutenant General A.P. Hill's corps, deployed into battle formation astride the Chambersburg Pike near Herr Ridge. Devin's brigade used the same tactics to delay Major General Robert E. Rode's division from Lieutenant General Richard Ewell's corps approaching from the north.⁸² Without Stuart's cavalry, Lee's infantry marched blindly into Buford's videttes.

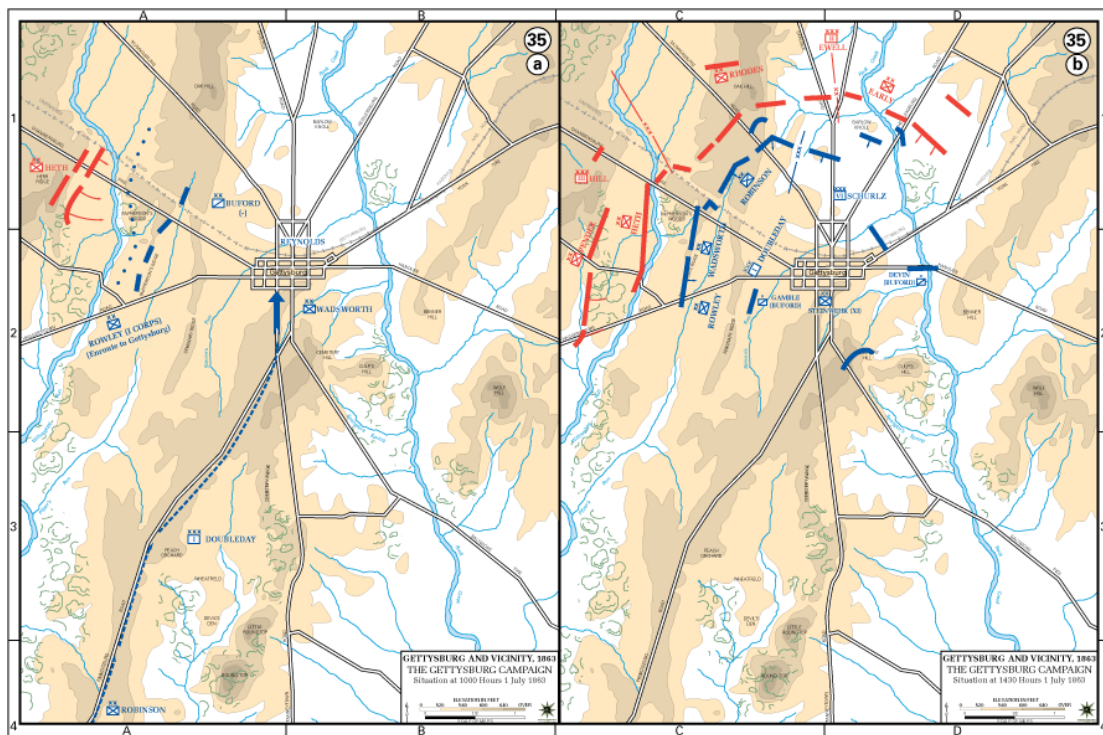


Figure 8. Gettysburg Campaign: Situation at 1000 and 1430 hours July 1, 1863. “Atlas for the American Civil War,” map courtesy of the USMA, Department of History, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/American%20Civil%20War.aspx>.

⁸¹ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 27, pt. 1, 927, 934, 938-39.

⁸² *O.R.*, series I, vol. 27, pt. 2, 642-643, 646, 648.

While fighting the Rebels, Buford maintained communications with Meade's lead infantry corps, commanded by Major General John F. Reynolds. Updated by Buford, Reynolds reinforced positions around the cavalry. By the afternoon, Hill's and Ewell's corps had displaced Buford and Reynolds to Cemetery Ridge, south of Gettysburg.⁸³ The majority of the contest between the armies took place in that vicinity over the second and third.

Gregg's division neared Gettysburg from the southeast early on July 2. Pleasonton directed Gregg to guard Meade's rear east of Cemetery Ridge. Gregg defended his position that evening from multiple attacks by the 2nd Virginia Infantry.⁸⁴ The Rebel regiment and her brigade intended to join the left flank of Ewell's attack on Culp's Hill. Gregg sent Lieutenant Colonel Edward S. Jones' 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment, supported by horse artillery, to defend along a stone fence facing the Virginians. The Pennsylvanians prevented the 2nd Virginia and her brigade from contributing to Ewell's attack, which nearly seized Culp's Hill.⁸⁵

Stuart arrived at Gettysburg mid-day on July 2 with three cavalry brigades, approaching from the east. He had effectively conducted his own campaign since June 25, leaving his commander without his services that were vital to Lee's previous victories.⁸⁶ Stuart posted his cavalry three miles east of Gettysburg on the northern half of Cress's Ridge. This position allowed him to secure Ewell's left but also provided an assembly area to attack the Federal rear.⁸⁷

On the morning of July 3, Pleasonton sent Colonel George Armstrong Custer's brigade from Kilpatrick's division to relieve Gregg so the latter could reinforce Culp's Hill. Having reports that Stuart lurked in the east, Gregg refused to displace from his position.⁸⁸ Around noon,

⁸³ O.R., series I, vol. 27, pt. 1, 927, 934. See also Longacre, *Lincoln's Cavalrymen*, 188.

⁸⁴ O.R., series I, vol. 27, pt. 1, 956, pt. 2, 504, 518.

⁸⁵ Longacre, *Lincoln's Cavalrymen*, 191-192.

⁸⁶ Robinson, *Jeb Stuart and the Confederate Defeat at Gettysburg*, 130, 108.

⁸⁷ Starr, *The Union Cavalry in the Civil War Volume I*, 431.

⁸⁸ O.R., series I, vol. 27, pt. 3, 502, pt. 1, 956.

Rebel artillery began shelling Cemetery Ridge in preparation for Major General George Pickett's attack on Meade's center. Around this time, Stuart launched skirmishers and cannon fire towards Custer's direction, who had formed a screen at Hanover and Low Dutch Roads in Gregg's sector.⁸⁹ The opposing cavalry forces skirmished for about two hours when Brigadier General Wade Hampton's cavalry brigade, from Stuart's command, charged Custer. Custer counter-charged Hampton with horse artillery in support. The dueling cavalry brigades collided into their opponents' sabers. Mounted and dismounted cavalry from Gregg's division supported Custer with fires. Neither cavalry vanquished the other, but Custer and Gregg stymied Stuart's movement to threaten Meade's rear during the height of Pickett's charge.⁹⁰

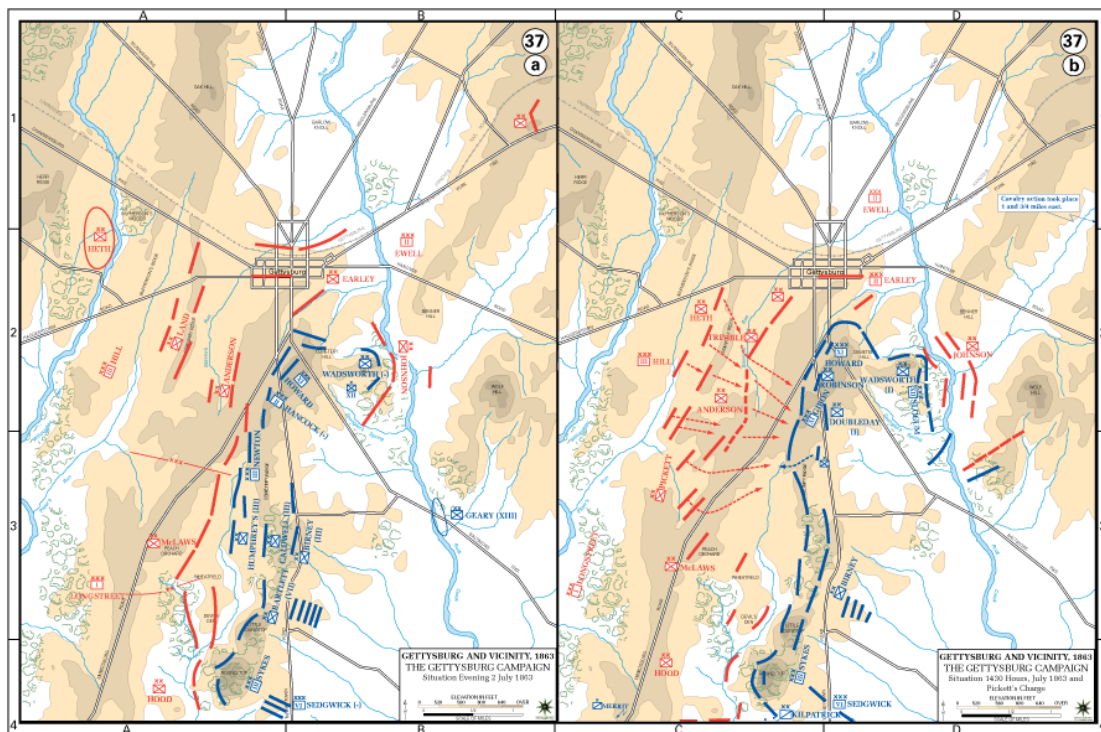


Figure 9. Gettysburg Campaign: Situation evening July 2 and 1430 July 3, 1863. “Atlas for the American Civil War,” map courtesy of the USMA, Department of History, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/American%20Civil%20War.aspx>.

⁸⁹ Paul D. Walker, *The Cavalry Battle that Saved the Union: Custer vs. Stuart at Gettysburg* (Gretna, LA: Pelican Publishing Company, 2002), 125, 127.

⁹⁰ O.R., series I, vol. 27, pt. 1, 957, pt. 2, 698; Longacre, *Lincoln's Cavalrymen*, 199-200.

Kilpatrick struggled to contribute as consequentially. Late in the afternoon on the third, Kilpatrick ordered his subordinate, Brigadier General Elon J. Farnsworth, to lead his brigade on a mounted charge against Rebel infantry positioned on the base of Round Top. Lee's far right shredded Farnsworth's brigade; however, the result had no effect on Gettysburg's outcome.⁹¹ Meade's center had already broken Pickett's Charge before Farnsworth set out.

Lee suspended his campaign the next day, retreating for Virginia.⁹² The war for the Confederacy began a downward trajectory thereafter. Lee lost over a third of his army at Gettysburg while ceding the initiative to the Federals. Grant's capture of Vicksburg on July 4 dealt the South a simultaneous blow. The dual victories gave credence to the Union's resolve, which Lincoln reinforced later in his Gettysburg address.⁹³ Yet fighting remained and cavalry would continue to influence subsequent campaigns, no less in Middle Tennessee during 1864.

Analysis of Pleasonton's Cavalry Corps

As demonstrated by Pleasonton's Cavalry Corps in support of Meade's Army of the Potomac during the Gettysburg Campaign in 1863, how efficiently cavalry forces supported their armies determined the degree of success or failure of Civil War campaigns. As Chief of Cavalry for the Army of the Potomac, Pleasonton provided Hooker and Meade an adequate performance. Stuart's abilities as a cavalryman exceeded Pleasonton's. However, Stuart failed Lee at a crucial juncture. Given the timing of his raid, Stuart failed to provide Lee with reconnaissance on Meade's movements and security for friendly movements.⁹⁴ Alternatively, Buford reconnoitered Lee's movements and fought to keep Cemetery Ridge, the decisive terrain, in the Union's possession. Stuart's absence in the days leading up to July 1 thus effected how the battle unfolded thereafter. Pleasonton deserves credit for supporting his commander when it counted most.

⁹¹ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 27, pt. 1, 993, 1005, pt. 2, 397.

⁹² Longacre, *Lincoln's Cavalrymen*, 204, 207.

⁹³ Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*, 586.

⁹⁴ Robinson, *Jeb Stuart and the Confederate Defeat at Gettysburg*, 144.

Buford and Gregg demonstrated the Federal cavalry's efficiency for reconnaissance and security. Fighting dismounted with cover and concealment, Buford and Gregg used mass and horse artillery against the Rebel infantry. Their divisions leveraged the fire power, lent by their breechloaders, to dismounted fighting. Acting as dragoons, their cavalry used horse mobility for bounding rearwards.⁹⁵ Alternatively, Custer employed the cavalry charge, but he used it appropriately against another cavalry force, unlike Kilpatrick. Moreover, Custer's battle with Stuart forestalled an attack on Meade's rear during the height of Pickett's charge.⁹⁶ Unquestionably, Gettysburg possessed operational and strategic significance. Pleasonton's cavalry played no little role in Meade's victory.

Western Theater – Franklin and Nashville Campaign, 1864

Victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg tipped the scales of war in Lincoln's favor. Social and economic problems beset his counterpart. Davis' constituents feared Vicksburg and Gettysburg had sealed their fate. Crippled economically from sustaining the war, Southern communities deteriorated into near-starvation. Yet Davis remained determined to settle his political aim on the battlefield. The loss of territory rallied the Confederacy to defend its core territories around Virginia.⁹⁷ For the Union, Lincoln grappled with how to repair the South after war. Lincoln's post-war plan to reintegrate the Confederacy stirred political controversy. Lincoln needed a battlefield victory, as much as ever, for his re-election bid.⁹⁸

Grant defeated the Confederate Army of Tennessee at Chattanooga in November 1863, opening an approach on Atlanta.⁹⁹ Major General William Tecumseh Sherman succeeded Grant's

⁹⁵ Starr, *The Union Cavalry in the Civil War Volume I*, 438-439.

⁹⁶ Walker, *The Cavalry Battle that Saved the Union*, 135-136.

⁹⁷ Lepa, Jack H. *Breaking the Confederacy: The Georgia and Tennessee Campaigns of 1864* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2005), 3-5.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 7, 10.

⁹⁹ David A. Powell, *Failure in the Saddle: Nathan Bedford Forrest, Joseph Wheeler, and the Confederate Cavalry in the Chickamauga Campaign* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2010), 199. Federal and Confederate armies battled over possession of Chattanooga beginning in September 1863.

command of the Military Division of the Mississippi in March 1864. Sherman defeated General John Bell Hood outside of Atlanta in September. Following his defeat, Hood lurked north of Atlanta with his Army of Tennessee, hoping Sherman would give chase. If timed well, Hood could do an about-face and attempt an open battle against Sherman.¹⁰⁰ However, rather than pursue Hood, Sherman felt he could achieve the Union's strategic goals by waging war against the Southern population. Sherman delegated his rear command to Major General George Henry Thomas and embarked on November 15 to wage war through the Georgian countryside.¹⁰¹

Headquartered in Nashville, Thomas inherited the scattered units remaining within the Military Division of the Mississippi. Thomas set about consolidating and reorganizing the command, which included designating a cavalry corps for all mounted troops within the Military Division of the Mississippi.¹⁰² Major General James H. Wilson was appointed that corps' first commander and the chief of cavalry on October 24.¹⁰³

Sherman's abrupt departure left Thomas vulnerable if Hood invaded Middle Tennessee. In late October, Thomas directed Major General John M. Schofield, commander of the Army of Ohio, to guard against Hood while Thomas consolidated forces at Nashville.¹⁰⁴ Wilson's cavalry supported Schofield by screening the Tennessee River. However, Wilson had only one brigade of cavalry positioned near the Tennessee when Hood threatened invasion in late October.¹⁰⁵ His command encompassed nearly all the Yankee cavalry in the region and required reorganization and consolidation.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Jerry Keenan, *Wilson's Cavalry Corps: Union Campaigns in the Western Theatre, October 1864 through Spring 1865* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1998), 13.

¹⁰¹ Lepa, *Breaking the Confederacy*, 151.

¹⁰² Keenan, *Wilson's Cavalry Corps*, 16.

¹⁰³ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 39, pt. 3, 414-415.

¹⁰⁴ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 45, pt. 1, 340.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 572.

¹⁰⁶ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 39, pt. 3, 714, vol. 45, pt. 1, 555.

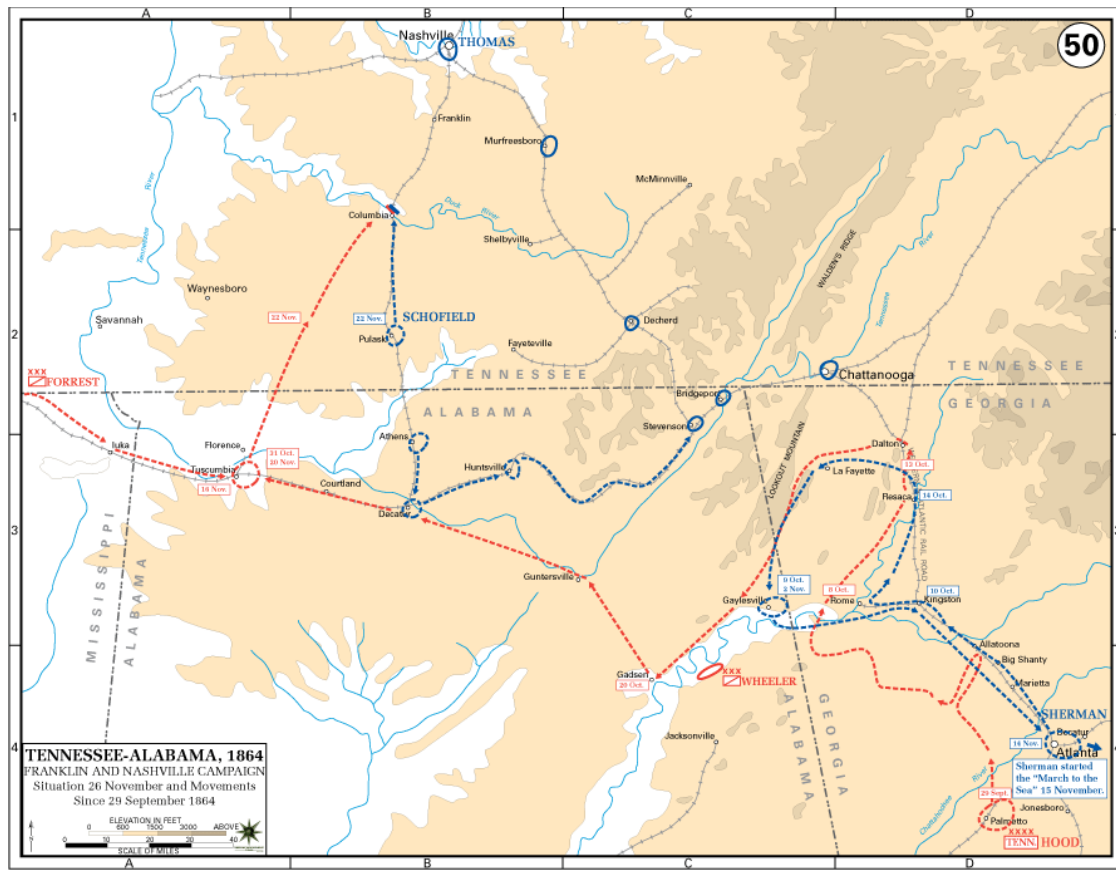


Figure 10. Franklin and Nashville Campaign: Situation November 6, 1864. “Atlas for the American Civil War,” map courtesy of the USMA, Department of History, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/American%20Civil%20War.aspx>.

Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest’s three divisions of cavalry joined Hood’s army after crossing the Tennessee River on November 18. Leading the invasion, Forrest struck north into Tennessee on November 21.¹⁰⁷ Forrest drove the Yankee cavalry northwards while threatening to interdict Schofield’s line of withdrawal to Nashville. Pressured, Schofield withdrew thirty miles to Columbia and re-established along the Duck River on the twenty-fourth.¹⁰⁸ Wilson guarded Schofield’s flanks at Columbia yet lacked the manpower to screen every proximate fording site. Forrest, with two infantry corps, crossed the Duck River east of

¹⁰⁷ Brian Steel Wills, *The Confederacy’s Greatest Cavalryman: Nathan Bedford Forrest* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 278.

¹⁰⁸ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 45, pt. 1, 341.

Columbia on the twenty-eighth to gain Schofield's left flank.¹⁰⁹ Wilson could not resist Forrest but warned Schofield of his presence. Schofield withdrew towards Spring Hill the following morning.¹¹⁰

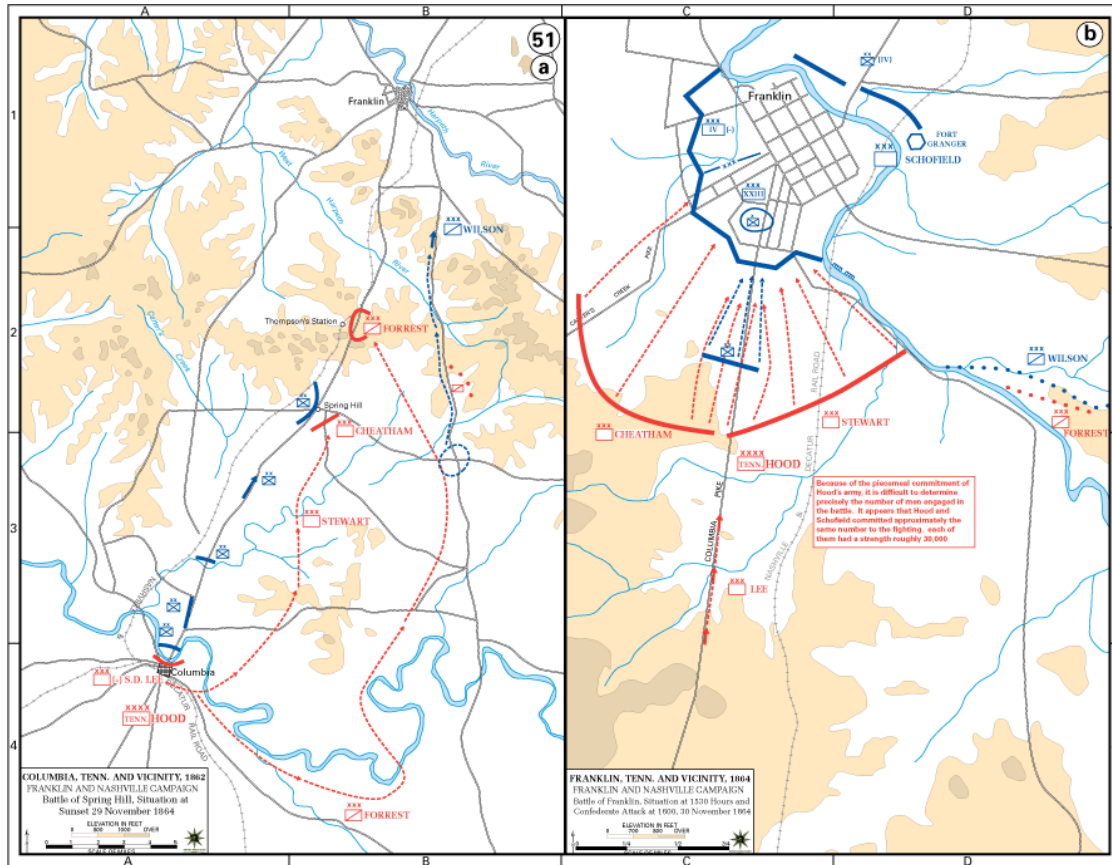


Figure 11. Franklin and Nashville Campaign: Situation at Sunset November 29, 1864. “Atlas for the American Civil War,” map courtesy of the USMA, Department of History, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.westpoint>.

A running battle unfolded along the Columbia-Franklin Pike on the twenty-ninth as the armies raced towards Spring Hill, ten miles north of the Duck River. Schofield rebuffed Hood at Spring Hill and continued north to Franklin overnight. Reaching Franklin in the early morning, Schofield formed a defense above the Harpeth River.¹¹¹ Thomas had been feeding Wilson

¹⁰⁹ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 45, pt. 1, 341, 752.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 113-114, 1137.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 148-149, 1169.

additional brigades since Hood crossed the Tennessee. Wilson now had over two divisions of cavalry, which he consolidated east of Franklin to guard Schofield's rear.¹¹² Hood launched a frontal assault against Schofield at Franklin that day, November 30. One of Forrest's divisions guarded Hood's left flank while a second guarded the right, leaving Forrest one division to contest Wilson.¹¹³ Positioned north of the Harpeth, Yankee cavalry harassed their Rebel counterparts. Armed with Spencer carbines, Wilson repelled Forrest southward across the Harpeth.¹¹⁴

The Spencer featured breech-loading action with cartridges, which made it a "repeating" firearm, capable of firing multiple shots without reloading. In contrast, most Confederate infantry and cavalry used single-shot muzzleloaders, which provided Wilson's cavalry a tremendous fire power advantage. A Chicago reporter, witnessing the Spencer's use at Franklin in the hands of the Second Michigan Cavalry, a regiment under Wilson, wrote on its effect:

We saw [Second Michigan] slide from their saddles and rush forward . . . to . . . a . . . slope that shielded their horses from the fire of the enemy, and here they fell . . . hugging the ground . . . Presently . . . a column of Louisiana cavalry . . . dismounted, and forming in line of battle, came rushing forward, pouring from their Enfield rifles volley after volley . . . [responding, Second Michigan] arose to her knees, and . . . poured into the enemy a sheet of fire which could be hurled from no other arm than the Spencer carbine. For a full minute an incessant stream of fire poured from the muzzles of those carbines, drifting upon the heavy columns of the enemy a sheety spray of lead, such as no human power could resist.¹¹⁵

Further west, Schofield cut Hood's main attack at Franklin to pieces. Schofield praised Wilson for preventing Forrest from gaining his rear. Wilson acknowledged that the absence of Forrest's other divisions improved his odds.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Keenan, *Wilson's Cavalry Corps*, 61-62.

¹¹³ Wills, *The Confederacy's Greatest Cavalryman*, 284-285.

¹¹⁴ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 45, pt. 1, 560, 754.

¹¹⁵ Marshall P. Thatcher, *A Hundred Battles in the West: St. Louis to Atlanta, 1861-1865* (Detroit, MI: Detroit Book Press, 1884), 305-306.

¹¹⁶ James Harrison Wilson, "The Union Cavalry in the Hood Campaign," in *Battles and Leaders in the Civil War*, vol. IV (New York: The Century Co, 1884), 467.

Wilson secured Schofield's left flank as the Federals retired to Nashville on December 1. Hood followed and established south of the town the next day.¹¹⁷ Despite steep losses at Franklin, Hood deployed one infantry and two cavalry divisions, under Forrest's command, to raid the railroad connecting Nashville and Murfreesboro.¹¹⁸ With the arrival of reinforcements, Thomas now outnumbered Hood at Nashville two to one. Harried by Washington to attack, Thomas delayed, partly to allow Wilson time to outfit his troops.¹¹⁹ Wilson's command suffered from administrative issues since his appointment. A massive shortage of horses in the Federal supply chain posed the greatest hurdle. Wilson also sought to arm his troops with Spencer carbines.¹²⁰

On December 15, Thomas advanced three infantry corps and Wilson's cavalry out of Nashville for battle. Wilson's corps participated in a turning maneuver on Hood's left flank. Wilson's corps formed Thomas' far right, tying into the right of Major General A.J. Smith's infantry corps.¹²¹ Wilson led three and one-half cavalry divisions, composed of seven cavalry brigades and several artillery batteries. Wilson designated Brigadier General Edward Hatch's 5th Division as his main effort.¹²²

¹¹⁷ John Bell Hood, "The Invasion of Tennessee," in *Battles and Leaders in the Civil War*, vol. IV (New York: The Century Co, 1884), 436.

¹¹⁸ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 45, pt. 1, 654, 754-755.

¹¹⁹ Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-1865* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1900), 132-133; *O.R.*, series I, vol. 45, pt. 2, 114.

¹²⁰ Keenan, *Wilson's Cavalry Corps*, 78-79.

¹²¹ *O.R.*, series I, vol. 45, pt. 2, 183-184.

¹²² James Harrison Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, Vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), 108. From east to west, Wilson's line included Brigadier General Edward Hatch's 5th Division, Brigadier General John T. Croxton's 1st Brigade of the 1st Division, and Brigadier General R.W. Johnson's 6th Division. Brigadier General Joseph T. Knipe's 7th Division provided Wilson's reserve.

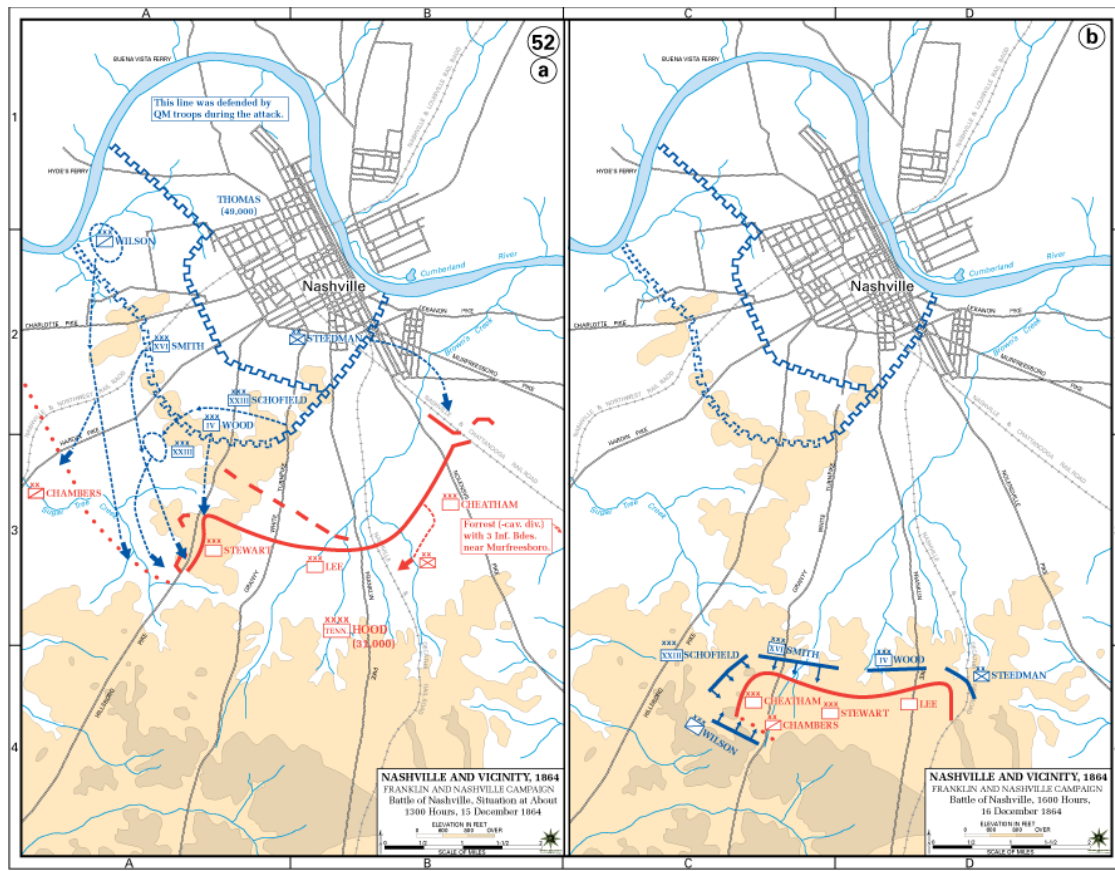


Figure 12. Battle of Nashville: Situation on December 15-16, 1864. “Atlas for the American Civil War,” map courtesy of the USMA, Department of History, accessed January 14, 2018, <https://www.westpoint.edu/history/SitePages/American%20Civil%20War.aspx>.

A series of rebel-held redoubts lay before Hatch. Negotiating the redoubts’ inclines on horseback, under fire, was untenable, thus Hatch’s cavalry fought dismounted alongside Smith’s infantry. Hatch’s cavalry foot-raced Smith’s infantry to capture the Rebel redoubts first.¹²³ Half of the brigades in Wilson’s other divisions remained mounted during the pivot action to gain Hood’s rear. By the day’s close, Wilson’s cavalry had pushed Hood’s left flank back four miles.¹²⁴ Hood re-formed his lines during the evening. The next day, December 16, Wilson’s cavalry traversed the undergrowth blanketing Brentwood Hills on foot to attack Hood’s new

¹²³ O.R., series I, vol. 45, pt. 1, 589-590.

¹²⁴ Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, vol. 2, 108, 111-112.

line.¹²⁵ Hood tried to plug holes on his left, center, and right. Eventually his line ruptured under Thomas' continuous pressure. Hood's army broke into retreat that evening.¹²⁶

Wilson's cavalry struggled to perform one specific cavalry function at the Battle of Nashville. Having fought dismounted for two days, Wilson's cavalry delayed their pursuit while waiting for their horses to be brought up. The Confederates freed themselves of Wilson, but not without skirmishing on the Granny White Pike during hours of darkness.¹²⁷

Thomas' victory at Nashville nearly disintegrated the Army of Tennessee. Any hope for reclaiming Middle Tennessee, much less Kentucky, evaporated. Fighting continued in the Western theater, but the Confederacy's defeats at Franklin and Nashville effectively closed the theater to any further strategic endeavors.¹²⁸ After Nashville, Wilson would conduct his Selma Campaign in Alabama during the spring of 1865. In May, his troops captured Davis, only a few weeks after Lincoln's assassination on April 14, 1865.¹²⁹

Analysis of Wilson's Cavalry Corps

As Wilson's Cavalry Corps demonstrated in support of Thomas' Military Division of the Mississippi during the Franklin and Nashville Campaign in 1864, how efficiently cavalry supported their armies determined the degree of success or failure of Civil War campaigns. The contingent nature of Sherman's campaign for the Georgian coast left Thomas unprepared to deal with Hood. Benefiting from the lack of concentration of Federal forces within the Military Division of Mississippi, Hood's army penetrated into Tennessee with relative ease.¹³⁰ With both numerical superiority and initiative on his side, Forrest kept Wilson on his heels between the

¹²⁵ Ibid., 108, 114-115; O.R., series I, vol. 45, pt. 2, 215-216.

¹²⁶ Hood, "The Invasion of Tennessee," in *Battles and Leaders in the Civil War*, vol. IV, 437.

¹²⁷ Stephen Z. Starr, *The Union Cavalry in the Civil War: Volume III, The War in the West, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 551.

¹²⁸ Lepa, *Breaking the Confederacy*, 205-206.

¹²⁹ Keenan, *Wilson's Cavalry Corps*, 217.

¹³⁰ O.R., series I, vol. 45, pt. 1, 341, 1085, 1105.

Tennessee and Harpeth Rivers. He suffered from the near simultaneous timing of Hood's invasion and his appointment to chief of cavalry. Regardless, Wilson prevented Forrest's attempt to interdict their line of withdrawal towards Nashville by keeping Schofield informed with timely and accurate information on the enemy's movements.¹³¹

Thomas made better decisions with the employment of his cavalry than Hood. Hood diluted Forrest's cavalry at the Battle of Franklin by sending it piecemeal across the battlefield. While Hood sent Forrest with two-thirds of his corps off raiding before the Battle of Nashville, Thomas delayed his campaign to allow Wilson more time to outfit his troopers.¹³² Wilson's cavalry became increasingly efficient as the campaign wore on. He exploited the technological advantage offered by the Spencer carbine by fighting mounted or dismounted as circumstances dictated. He successfully maneuvered over three divisions of cavalry in battle at Nashville. Despite Forrest's greater reputation as a cavalry commander, Wilson provided his commander greater service. Furthermore, the tactical victory at Nashville was not without operational and strategic significance. Thomas' victory ended Hood's campaign. More importantly, the once mighty Confederate Army of Tennessee collapsed, all but closing the Western theater.

Cross Campaign Analysis

Doctrine

The doctrinal discussion centers on how army-level commanders employed their cavalry. Generally, army commanders used their cavalry for reconnaissance and security operations or for raids. Raiding could also answer information requirements. Prior to Chancellorsville, Stuart encircled Union armies before two major battles, returning to Lee with valuable intelligence.¹³³

¹³¹ O.R., series I, vol. 45, pt. 1, 1112.

¹³² Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, vol. 2, 36.

¹³³ Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 47.

Other commanders assigned cavalry raiding duties during battles. However, commanders enjoyed greater success when they retained their cavalry throughout their campaign.

Wheeler best supported his army by opposing Rosecrans' approach between Nashville and Murfreesboro. Wheeler's attentive area reconnaissance outside Nashville deserves mention because Bragg did not expect Rosecrans to conduct a winter offensive.¹³⁴ Wheeler then bought his commander three days of reaction time by stalling Rosecrans' movement. Wheeler's operation resembled a defensive cover, a security task. Wheeler possessed the organic assets, including artillery, to carry out the operation independently from Bragg. Additionally, Wheeler denied Stanley, his Federal counterpart, from collecting information on Rebel dispositions while Bragg prepared his defense.¹³⁵

Bragg dispatched Wheeler on a raid at his greatest hour of need. When Bragg commenced his attack on Rosecrans the following day, he lacked his chief of cavalry's principal service: his eyes and ears across the battlefield. The logic of interdicting Rosecrans' logistics held some value, but Stanley's cavalry proved fast learners by defeating successive attempts. The two other Rebel cavalry brigades, led by Morgan and Forrest, unavailable at Stones River, conducted raids elsewhere. If their raids provided benefit to Confederate operations in the Western theater, then it came at Bragg's expense at Stones River.

Stuart remained available to Lee at all times during Chancellorsville. Stuart's route reconnaissance in support of Jackson's flank maneuver stands out, but the cavalry played a broader role in Lee's victory.¹³⁶ By drawing Stuart up river with Butterfield's signal ruse, Hooker surprised Lee, a rare feat, crossing Kelly's Ford with three infantry corps. Practicing the fundamentals of reconnaissance, Stuart re-oriented on Hooker's movement and then promptly

¹³⁴ US Army, FM 3-98 (2015), 5-16.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 6-19, 6-22.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 5-18.

notified Lee via telegraph.¹³⁷ This information alerted Lee to his now precarious position at Fredericksburg. Lee had spare time to react to Hooker's river crossing, but with Stuart's information he possessed a firmer grasp on Hooker's intentions. Stuart also won the reconnaissance battle, although rather easily, considering that Stoneman's raid left Hooker with only a single brigade of cavalry.¹³⁸

Pleasanton supported his commanders throughout the Gettysburg Campaign. From the Rappahannock's banks to Gettysburg, the Federal cavalry conducted an offensive cover in advance of the Army of the Potomac's northward movement. Although Lee held the initiative, Pleasanton's cavalry demonstrated aggressiveness, fighting at Brandy Station and other locations to keep Hooker, and later Meade, informed on enemy movements.¹³⁹ Buford's zone reconnaissance north and west of Gettysburg on June 29 yielded terrain intelligence necessary to conduct engagement area development on June 30. Buford's proactiveness prepared his cavalry to fight a successful guard to open the battle.¹⁴⁰

Buford's security operation along the avenues of approaches west and north of Gettysburg reflected a flank guard. Buford could not resist the two Rebel infantry corps indefinitely. However, his close communications with Reynolds and terrain analysis facilitated a successful battle handover with Reynolds' infantry corps.¹⁴¹ Meade would likely have failed to fortify Cemetery Ridge without Buford's flank guard west of Gettysburg. Lee never wrested that terrain from Meade for the remainder of the battle. Gregg's division guarded an underappreciated vulnerability to Meade's rear from the east during Ewell's attack on Culp's Hill. When Stuart

¹³⁷ Ibid., 5-1, 5-2.

¹³⁸ US Army, FM 3-98 (2015), 1-5. See "Fight for Information."

¹³⁹ Ibid., 6-20.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 6-15.

arrived at Gettysburg, Custer's battle with him on July 3 denied Lee any real support from his chief of cavalry. Pleasonton certainly benefited from Stuart's absence from June 25 to July 2.

Wilson operated in close coordination with his commanders throughout the Franklin and Nashville Campaign. Wilson mostly conducted security operations, buying time for Thomas to consolidate forces at Nashville. However, in accordance with the fundamentals of security, reconnaissance was inherent to Wilson's operations.¹⁴² Wilson's updates to Schofield on Forrest's attempts to interdict their route of withdraw best illustrated this aspect. Wilson partly owed his success to how Hood employed his cavalry.

At the Battle of Franklin, Hood incorporated two cavalry divisions for the main attack, leaving Forrest with only one cavalry division to oppose Wilson. East of Franklin, Wilson denied Forrest access to Schofield's rear. If Forrest had succeeded, he could have turned Schofield's defenses on the Harpeth, which would have supported Hood's otherwise ill-conceived frontal attack. At the Battle of Nashville, Thomas defeated Hood on the offense, despite owning just a two-to-one numerical superiority. Wilson's participation in that attack boosted the Federals' strength, overwhelming Hood's lines.

Organization

Federal and Confederate armies in the Eastern and Western theaters trended towards consolidated cavalry organizations. Cavalry organizations also graduated in size from division to corps. In Army doctrine today, echelons above brigade may assign BCTs reconnaissance and security duties. If the BCT proves inadequate for the reconnaissance and security requirements, then a division may receive a guard or cover mission.¹⁴³ When the Civil War began, Confederate

¹⁴² US Army, FM 3-98 (2015), 6-2.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 1-7.

and Union armies possessed a similar organizational structure to the Army today, with cavalry distributed across subordinate infantry commands.¹⁴⁴

Consolidated cavalry commands, with chiefs of cavalry, became the rule for Union and Confederate armies in both theaters. Massing cavalry provided army commanders two advantages. First, consolidated cavalry organizations provided better information collection when working for a chief of cavalry who answered to the army-level commander fighting the campaign. Second, cavalry organizations performed better when operating as an organic whole. Civil War army commanders achieved greater success in campaigns when they consolidated their cavalry arms into one command under a chief of cavalry.

Bragg organized his cavalry brigades into a division before the Stones River Campaign. Bragg lowered the cavalry division's efficiency, however, by maintaining two cavalry brigades independent from Wheeler's command. The consolidated cavalry proved successful during Wheeler's cover operation between Nashville and Stones River. Wheeler fought three brigades with assigned artillery batteries together. However, Wheeler reverted mostly to leading his own brigade during the battle at Stones River. This impeded his ability to carry out his duties as chief of cavalry. The confusion with Pegram and Breckenridge on the eastern side of the battlefield illustrated this point. Not having Wheeler available to manage information hindered Bragg's ability to coordinate efforts.

¹⁴⁴ Belcher, *The Cavalries at Stones River*, 77.

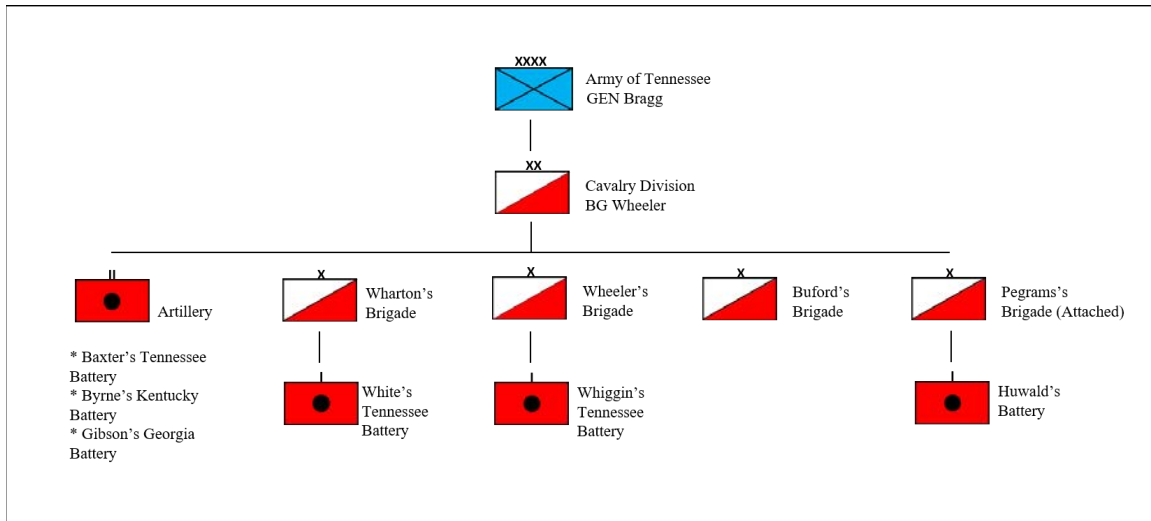


Figure 13. Wheeler's Cavalry Division, Stones River Campaign. Data adapted from Fullerton, *Armies in Gray*, 205.

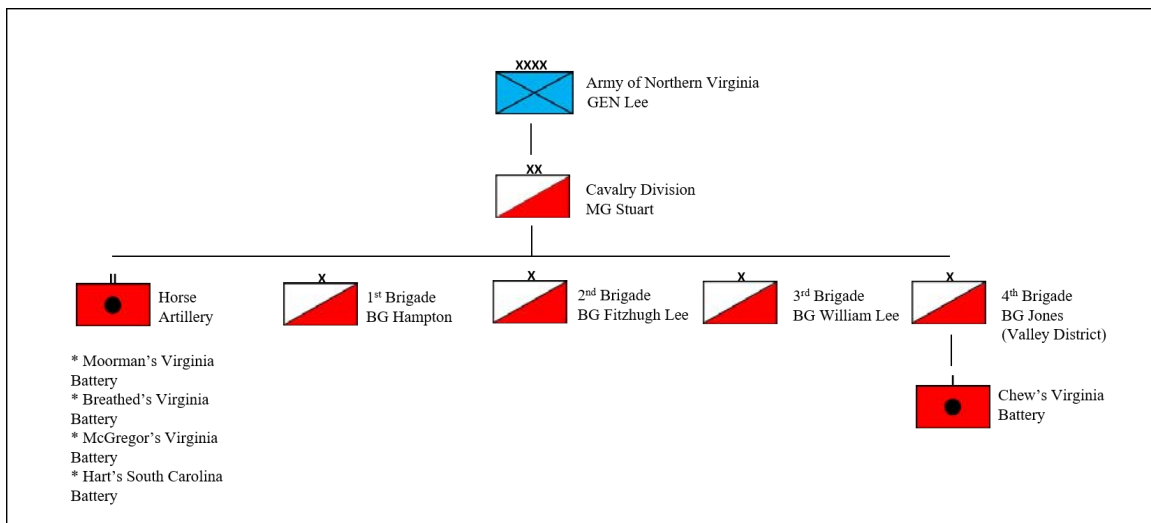


Figure 14. Stuart's Cavalry Division, Chancellorsville Campaign. Data adapted from Fullerton, *Armies in Gray*, 360-361.

Consolidation of Lee's cavalry into a single command under a chief of cavalry increased the efficiency of Stuart's operations at Chancellorsville.¹⁴⁵ The organizational structure afforded

¹⁴⁵ Robinson, *Jeb Stuart and the Confederate Defeat at Gettysburg*. 35-37. The Army of Northern Virginia consolidated cavalry into a division in 1862, with Stuart appointed as the Chief of Cavalry.

Stuart the flexibility to divide his force in the manner most fitting for information collection. For instance, after Stuart recognized Hooker's objective was not the Shenandoah, he detached an economy of force mission under Rooney Lee to trail Stoneman's raid. This allowed Stuart to inundate the road networks surrounding Hooker's position in Chancellorsville with his remaining cavalry. Rather than working for subordinate corps commands, Fitz Lee and Rooney Lee reported directly to Stuart, who then answered to Lee. This organization kept reconnaissance activities in line with Lee's collection priorities and prevented information from stove-piping between separate infantry corps.

The establishment of a cavalry command facilitated Pleasonton's ability to conduct mission command. Under its first chief of cavalry, George Stoneman, the cavalry achieved little apparent success. Nevertheless, the organizational change improved the cavalry by allowing the Federals to exploit the Union's quantitative superiority in manpower, equipment, and horses. With seven brigades of cavalry filling three divisions, Pleasonton's cavalry constituted a corps. A centralized command structure streamlined operations. For instance, during Meade's movement through Maryland in June, Pleasonton's cavalry corps covered ahead of the army. The subordination of the cavalry under a chief of cavalry supported the logistical and mission command requirements for orchestrating a large-scale movement of this type.

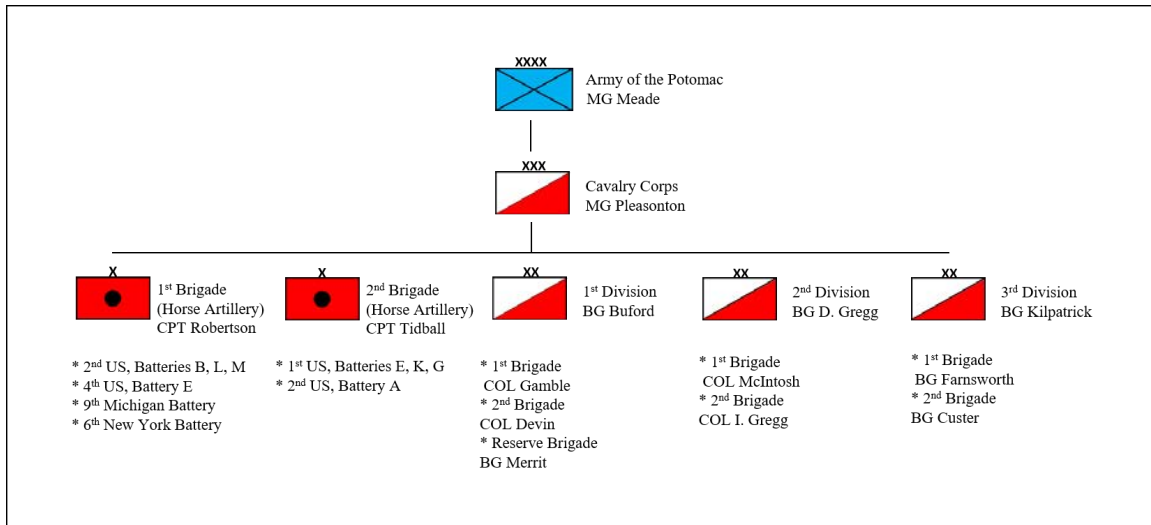


Figure 15. Pleasonton's Cavalry Corps, Gettysburg Campaign. Data adapted from Jay Luvaas et al., eds., *The U.S. Army War College Guide to the Battle of Gettysburg* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 222-223.

The Military Division of Mississippi's designation of an independent cavalry command, organized into a corps-sized element, signified the significance the Federals placed on cavalry. The timing of Hood's invasion coinciding with Sherman's departure forced Wilson to commit forces piecemeal as Federal units re-positioned across Tennessee and Mississippi. The operational advantage of a consolidated corps-level cavalry command came to fruition at the Battle of Nashville. Wilson possessed seven cavalry brigades, along with artillery batteries, forming a considerable mass on Thomas' right wing.

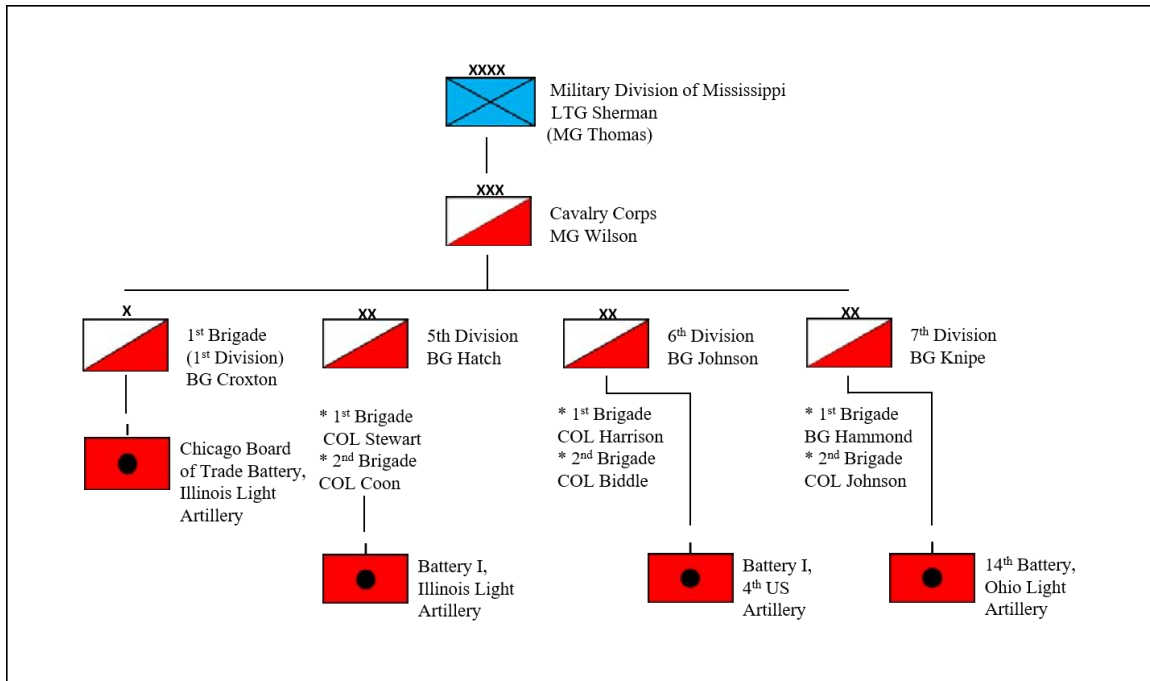


Figure 16. Wilson's Cavalry Corps, Franklin and Nashville Campaign (Battle of Nashville). Data adapted from Wilson, *Under the Old Flag*, 108; *O.R.*, series I, vol. 45, pt. 1, 95-96.

Chiefs of cavalry relied on assigned artillery to provide responsive fire support. Army doctrine espouses a similar vision with combined arms air-ground teams conducting reconnaissance and security operations.¹⁴⁶ Units designated “horse artillery,” assigned to Pleasonton and Stuart, demonstrated a likeness to today’s combat aviation. Horse artillery possessed greater mobility than horse-drawn artillery. Their cannons weighed less but still delivered destructive effects at range of 1,850 yards and five degrees elevation – essentially direct fire mode. Horse artillerists also rode horses, rather than riding the limber and caisson like their fellow artillerists did when traveling with infantry.¹⁴⁷ These factors provided horse artillery the speed and maneuverability required to deploy, fire, and reposition in rapidly developing cavalry actions. The fundamental difference between the Army today and the Civil War is that the horse artillery were assigned to their cavalry units. In this sense, horse artillery was cavalry.

¹⁴⁶ US Army, FM 3-98 (2015), vi.

¹⁴⁷ Longacre, *Lincoln's Cavalrymen*, 76.

Tactics

Federal and Confederate cavalry in the Eastern and Western theaters incorporated mounted and dismounted tactics. Yankee cavalry in both theaters tended to dismount when the tactical situation suited fighting on their feet. Similarly, Rebel horsemen in the Western theater also fought equally on or off horseback depending on the situation. Current US Army doctrine shares the same view by advising mounted or dismounted tactics depending on the tactical situation.¹⁴⁸ In contrast, Stuart's cavalry in the east tended to fight mounted. This preference seemed influenced by Stuart's identification with European cavalry. Custer did not differ too much in this regard. Regardless, Civil War army commanders achieved greater success in campaigns when their cavalry demonstrated tactical flexibility in their use of mounted and dismounted tactics.

Wheeler's cavalry demonstrated tactical flexibility in their use of mounted and dismounted tactics. Wheeler delayed Rosecrans for three days by fighting dismounted when it best suited the terrain and enemy situation. His use of creek beds proved ideal for his fight-then-bound-back tactics that he had practiced at Perryville and then perfected between Nashville and Stones River. Wheeler's cavalry resembled dragoons, which was not uncommon for either Rebel or Yankee horsemen in the Western theater.¹⁴⁹ Stanley's cavalry similarly used mounted and dismounted tactics against Wharton's and Wheeler's attacks on the Nashville Pike.

Stuart's cavalry demonstrated less tactical flexibility given the chief of cavalry's preference for mounted operations. However, Stuart never employed his cavalry in a situation inappropriate for mounted tactics. Stuart had already cemented his legacy as a great raider prior to Chancellorsville, maximizing horse mobility to circle around Union armies. Those particular

¹⁴⁸ US Army, FM 3-98 (2015), 1-1.

¹⁴⁹ Longacre, *Cavalry of the Heartland*, 37. Dragoons fought mounted or dismounted as the situation required, as opposed to traditional cavalry which fought only on horseback. Distinct from dragoons, mounted infantry used their mounts only to ride to battle, then dismounted to fight.

raids provided information on Federal dispositions to help Lee form his battle plans. Stuart similarly exploited the horse's mobility to reconnoiter the area surrounding Chancellorsville, which compelled Pleasonton and his lone brigade to forfeit the reconnaissance battle.

The Federal cavalry at Gettysburg demonstrated flexibility in mounted or dismounted tactics. Buford's pickets could place more accurate shots by firing dismounted behind covered and concealed positions. With artillery in support, the pickets concentrated fires on the Rebel infantry along key avenues of approach. Gamble's brigade compelled Heth's infantry division to deploy into a battle formation on the Chambersburg Pike. Buford's cavalry could block the Rebel infantry, yet possessed the mobility provided by their horses to collapse to the next rearward picket and resume fighting. Gregg's cavalry similarly held a stone fence to fire from dismounted positions with artillery in close support. Custer's and Stuart's battle, although stereotyped by either leader's romanticism for cavalry charges, was tactically appropriate for the situation. In the burgeoning age of massed firepower, cavalry charges against fixed infantry positions became suicidal, as illustrated by Farnsworth's attack against Rebel infantry at the base of Little Round Top. However, in open terrain, the best way for one cavalry force to receive an enemy cavalry charge was to counter-charge.

Wilson's cavalry demonstrated tactical flexibility throughout the Franklin and Nashville Campaign. Screening the Tennessee and Duck Rivers, mobility mattered because Wilson lacked the manpower to picket all the fording sites. Wilson's cavalry made use of dismounted tactics at the Battle of Franklin and Nashville. At Nashville, Hatch's division attacked dismounted to negotiate the redoubts. Additionally, Wilson used mounted and dismounted operations to keep his movement synchronized with the overall tempo of Thomas' attack. Dismounting kept Hatch's division abreast with Smith's infantry corps. However, the far right of Thomas' line had a greater distance to cover during their pivot. Remaining mounted therefore helped those cavalry on the perimeter sustain the tempo of the overall Federal attack, which facilitated Thomas' ability to apply uniform pressure across Hood's front.

Technology

Firearm technology provided the Federal cavalry significant advantages. The Confederacy's disadvantage in firearm technology stemmed from the material weaknesses they suffered throughout the war. Confederate troops particularly felt the disparity in firearms performance with the Union's introduction of the Spencer carbine. Wilson's use of the Spencer at the Battle of Franklin illustrated the superiority of breech-loading repeaters over single-shot muzzleloaders. The Rebels compensated for technology inferiorities by accommodating their tactics and use of terrain to their weaponry. Doctrine today similarly emphasizes mission, terrain, and other considerations when planning direct and indirect fires for engagement areas.¹⁵⁰ Civil War army commanders achieved greater success in campaigns when their cavalry accommodated their tactics to maximize their technology.

Rebel cavalry at Stones River suffered technological disadvantages in armament. The non-standardization of firearms and the predominance of single-shot muzzleloaders in Wheeler's cavalry limited firepower. The Rebel cavalry therefore focused on achieving momentary firepower superiority in close quarters over small areas like fording sites. Most of Wheeler's cavalry self-equipped with an assortment of firearms because of supply limitations in the army. Troopers carried firearms with shorter barrels to allow for easier employment on horseback. Armed with sawed-off shotguns or shortened rifles, these weapons lacked the range of infantry rifles. Wheeler would outfit his command with the "Short Enfield" rifle later in 1863, but that weapon was also a single-shot muzzleloader, taking longer to fire than breechloaders. Wheeler's cavalry used sabers and pistols less often.¹⁵¹

Lee's chief of cavalry embodied the traditional saber-wielding hussar of Europe's light cavalry. The saber was most effectively used while charging enemy cavalry, a tactic Stuart

¹⁵⁰ US Army, FM 3-98 (2015), 5-10.

¹⁵¹ Longacre, *Cavalry of the Heartland*, 36.

preferred and used at Alsop's Farm.¹⁵² Stuart's cavalry also used the pistol in close quarters or in pursuit of fleeing infantry. The Federal cavalry outmatched the Confederates in the Eastern theater in 1863 with the Union's issuance of single-shot breechloaders.¹⁵³ These carbines' shorter barrels allowed for easier use on horseback. Alternatively, the average trooper in Stuart's command carried a muzzle-loading rifle, which was more awkward on horseback and took longer to re-load. Stuart never charged a fixed Yankee position at Chancellorsville, indicating that he acknowledged the Federals' firepower superiority. If Stoneman's cavalry had been present at Chancellorsville with their breechloaders to contest Stuart, then the campaign's outcome may have favored Hooker.

At Gettysburg, the growing uniformity of breechloaders in the Federal cavalry provided the Yankees a significant edge over Rebel cavalry and infantry. The possession of single shot breech-loading carbines in the Union armies had become more ubiquitous by late 1862.¹⁵⁴ Most of Pleasonton's cavalry carried single-shot breechloaders. The breech-loading action allowed for faster reloading, which in turn increased volume of fires. With a uniformity of breech-loaders in the ranks, Yankee cavalry could concentrate fires on natural choke points for longer intervals, illustrated by their guard along the Chambersburg Pike at Gettysburg. For close-quarters combat, Federal cavalry in the Eastern Theater used the pistol. However, Pleasonton's cavalry were also fond of their sabers, perhaps more so than Stuart's troopers. Often when Yankee cavalry burnished their sabers, Stuart's cavalry exclaimed, "Put up your sabers and fight like

¹⁵² Ron Field, *Combat: Eastern Theater 1861-1865, Confederate Cavalryman Versus Union Cavalryman* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2015), 22.

¹⁵³ Edward G. Longacre, *The Cavalry at Gettysburg: A Tactical Study of Mounted Operations during the Civil War's Pivotal Campaign, 9 June–14 July 1863* (London: Associated University Press, 1986), 60.

¹⁵⁴ Longacre, *Lincoln's Cavalrymen*, 42.

gentlemen!”¹⁵⁵ Yankee and Rebel horsemen relied on their sabers and pistols during Custer’s and Stuart’s cavalry battle at Gettysburg.

When Wilson’s cavalry fought in mass, wielding with Spencer, Rebel cavalry and infantry suffered alike. Perhaps the Spencer’s most notable use during the Civil War occurred with Wilson’s corps during the Franklin and Nashville campaign.¹⁵⁶ Wilson’s cavalry accommodated their tactics to exploit the Spencer’s breech-loading, repeating action. Riding to battle, the Yankee horsemen dismounted where the terrain provided cover and would then gain fire superiority over their opponents. If Rebel numerical superiority offset Yankee fire superiority, then Wilson’s cavalry used their horses to break contact. Hatch’s cavalry exploited the Spencer while dismounted at the Battle of Nashville to overwhelm Rebel infantry manning the redoubts. Boasting of Hatch’s success, Wilson exclaimed that Yankee infantry “had never seen dismounted cavalry assault a fortified position before.”¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

Cavalry rarely decided the outcomes of campaigns, but that arm significantly factored into the degree of a commanders’ success or failure. Army commanders conducted campaigns at what doctrine describes as the operational level of war.¹⁵⁸ Cavalry actions during the Civil War were tactical affairs. However, reporting on enemy movements – reconnaissance, and preventing the enemy from observing friendly movements – security, shaped how army commanders planned and executed their campaigns. Reconnaissance and security operations occurred from a few days to several weeks in advance of battle, and sometimes stretched theater boundaries.

¹⁵⁵ Longacre, *Lincoln’s Cavalrymen*, 44.

¹⁵⁶ Keenan, *Wilson’s Cavalry Corps*, 79.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁵⁸ US Army, FM 3-0 (2017), 1-5. The manual defines the operational level as the “[link between] the tactical employment of forces to national and military strategic objectives, with the focus being on the design, planning, and execution of operations using operational art.”

Fighting for information—its collection or protection, therefore posed a major operational-level consideration for army commanders.

All four cases illustrated this point. In the Stones River Campaign, Bragg did not expect Rosecrans to launch a winter offensive. Wheeler's reconnaissance and security operations between Nashville and Stones River offset Bragg's miscalculation. Successful commanders retained cavalry for reconnaissance and security during the battle. Stuart's cavalry proved instrumental to Lee's victory at Chancellorsville by alerting him to Hooker's river crossing and reconnoitering Jackson's flank march. However, Stuart's raid during the Gettysburg campaign demonstrated how lack of reconnaissance and security could derail a campaign. Cavalry also made its presence known during decisive battles.

Army commanders gained a decisive advantage by integrating their cavalry into battle. Wilson's role on Thomas' right flank at the Battle of Nashville best illustrates this. Armies skirmished throughout campaigns, but the decisive battles occurred when commanders pitted the full weight of their armies against their opponent. These battles determined the outcome of campaigns, which yielded strategic implications at the theater and national levels. Thomas enjoyed a decisive advantage when he used an entire cavalry corps to extend his line at the Battle of Nashville. The battle's result, of course, was not without operational or strategic implications. Wilson's cavalry also signifies the apogee of cavalry's evolution during the Civil War.

Doctrinal, organizational, tactical, and technological factors molded cavalry's evolution. Although the preference for raiding never abated during the Civil War, commanders developed a greater appreciation for cavalry's role as the war progressed. Bragg was the archetypal commander that could not visualize cavalry's potential. Alternatively, his countryman, Lee, better understood cavalry's role as his eyes and ears. Lee certainly missed Stuart during the first half of battle at Gettysburg.

Organizational changes in Federal and Confederate armies in both the Eastern and Western theaters trended towards independent cavalry commands, directly subordinate to the

army commander. This trend suggests that other army commanders valued information enough to establish independent cavalry commands led by chiefs of cavalry. The movement from division to corps-sized cavalry commands reinforced the trend.

Cavalry tactics did not evolve uniformly. Some cavalymen retained their preference for mounted charges. The more successful cavalry forces operated either dismounted or mounted depending on the tactical situation. Those that preferred the cavalry charge, like Custer, knew when to employ the tactic. Others, like Kilpatrick, acted less wisely by charging fixed infantry positions. Finally, as illustrated by Wilson's cavalry, the adaptation of tactics to leverage technological advantages in firearms yielded impressive battlefield results. Fighting with infantry and supported by artillery, cavalry realized its greatest potential as a combined-arms force that could fight dismounted when called upon.

Retrospective analysis of cavalry's role during the Civil War underscores the fundamentals of reconnaissance and security operations in today's doctrine. This analysis does not derive any new ideas on the conduct of reconnaissance and security operations for the modern military professional. Rather, the analysis calls attention to the campaigns and battlefields where reconnaissance and security fundamentals took form. These fundamentals are not fixed principles, but they are concepts that trace back to Civil War cavalry.¹⁵⁹ Regarding the differences between how cavalry operated in the Civil War and today's doctrine, the greatest contrast exists in organization. Modern military professionals should remember that the pre-Civil War armies' view on cavalry organization did not differ too much from today's doctrine. The scale of the combat and the size of theaters caused army commanders to rethink how they organized their cavalry. Massing cavalry into divisions and corps with assigned artillery became the rule, not the exception, during the Civil War.

¹⁵⁹ US Army, FM 3-98 (2015), 1-1, 1-2.

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