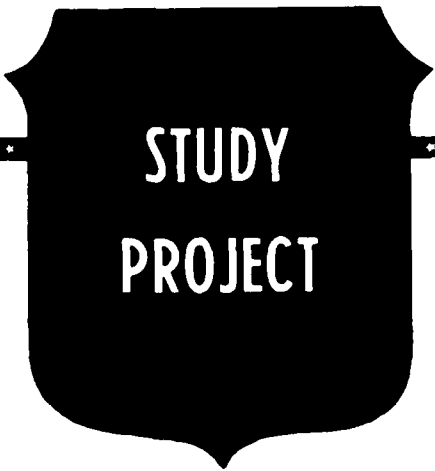


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ROBERT E. LEE
GREAT CAPTAIN OF HISTORY?

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LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN J. MEYERS, FA

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The basis of our analysis of Lee's tactics and strategy will be the Principles of War, as dictated by Napoleon and interpreted by Jomini. These principles serve as a practical checklist for the analysis of the strategic concepts, plans and tactics of Robert E. Lee.

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ROBERT E. LEE
GREAT CAPTAIN OF HISTORY?

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel John J. Meyers, FA

Dr. James Williams, MHI
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
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Can Robert E. Lee be considered one of the great captains of history, in the ranks of Alexander, Napoleon and Frederick the Great? As a great captain did he accomplish great things by conforming to the rules and principles of war? Great captains are capable of strategic and operational planning for an entire campaign as well as an individual battle. They consistently demonstrate the ability to organize their forces to best accomplish their mission utilizing the best leaders available.

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ROBERT E. LEE
GREAT CAPTAIN OF HISTORY?

CHAPTER I

A STUDY IN COMMAND

Great Captain or Simple Soldier

Robert E. Lee is undoubtedly one of the most beloved figures in American history. His fame rests on his military achievements, Commanding the Army of Northern Virginia, in the face of overwhelming odds. History holds Lee as a great soldier, "gentle in temper, wise in counsel, patient in preparation, and swift in decision."¹ Praised by his men and southern writers as a "Master in the Art of Warfare." Robert E. Lee became for them a "Confederate Napoleon," a grand strategist and tactician, one whom men would follow willingly into battle. Can Robert E. Lee be considered one of the great captains of history, in the ranks of Alexander, Napoleon and Frederick the Great? As a great captain did he "accomplish great things by conforming to the rules and natural principles of the art of war"?²

This study will evaluate Robert E. Lee's performance as a senior leader, based on certain demonstrated abilities and characteristics of the great captains of his time.

Great captains are capable of strategic and operational planning for an entire campaign as well as an individual battle. They consistently demonstrate the ability to organize their forces to best accomplish their mission utilizing the best leaders available. In addition our study will analyze Lee's tactics and campaign strategies from his early years as the military advisor to the President of the Confederacy, followed by his command of the Army of Northern Virginia, from 1862 through his Gettysburg Campaign of 1863. The basis of our analysis of Lee's tactics and strategy will be the Principles of War, as dictated by Napoleon and interpreted by Jomini. These principles, proven through experience are not hard and fast rules, appropriate for every occasion. They serve as a practical checklist for the analysis of the strategic concepts, plans and tactics of Robert E. Lee.

The Napoleonic Influence

No man in the history of war has exerted a greater influence on the development of modern warfare than Napoleon Bonaparte.

Napoleon's strategic maneuvers were designed to bring the French armies into the best possible position, with the maximum possible force necessary to deliver battle. Following the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, all of the major militant powers established military schools for the professional education and the training of their officers. At West Point, the lessons learned and

interpretations of these campaigns were absorbed into the curriculum and became the foundation of the teaching of strategy.³ The most respected strategists emphasized the continuity between the old form of war and the new. They brought together the expertise of Napoleon and of Frederick, showing how the fundamental principles of strategy "timeless and unchanging" could be applied to future wars.⁴

Napoleonic warfare became a simple problem of maneuver. Threatening the enemy flanks and lines of communications, while safeguarding one's own. Ensuring a superiority of strength at the decisive point on the battlefield. Jomini's theory of warfare, based on Napoleon's strategy, conforms to the basic principles "of operating with the greatest possible force in a combined effort against the decisive point."⁵ Deciding how to attack will depend on the specific situation, but attack is essential; the initiative must not be left to the enemy. "Once committed the commander must inspire his troops to the greatest possible effort by his boldness and courage. If beaten the enemy must be pursued relentlessly."⁶

Principles of War

The first principle of any military strategy is to determine the objective or purpose.⁷ Strategy always has a clear political purpose and the political purpose determines the military objective.⁸ The use of military force without a clear political

purpose is ultimately futile and self-defeating. As a strategist, Napoleon showed a capacity to visualize an entire campaign. To discern the objective of the military operations, whether it was isolation of an adversary, or the total destruction and elimination of a powerful opponent.⁹ Political objectives must also be considered for they dictate strategic planning, and strategic planning is directed towards discerning the decisive point in the enemy position and striking against it with irresistible force. With numerically superior opponents the decisive point was that which divided their forces, making possible defeat in detail. With an inferior enemy it was the point at which his communications and supply base was most vulnerable, forcing him to fight at a disadvantage or surrender.¹⁰

Offensive operations are the most effective means to gain and retain the initiative, and with it the freedom of action.¹¹ Retaining the initiative allows the attacker to determine where and when to strike. Using Napoleon's tactics, skirmishers and sharpshooters went ahead of the main force to disorganize the enemy resistance. Artillery raked the enemy lines before the infantry columns charged the enemy defenses until a decisive point was identified, against which his artillery could concentrate and the reserves could be launched.¹² Offensive operations proved to be extremely costly in the face of artillery and rifle barrage from well fortified positions.

The third principle is that of concentration or mass. Concentrating sufficient forces at the proper time and place, to accomplish a decisive purpose is indispensable to the successful prosecution of war.¹³ By the 1800's Napoleon had demonstrated how artillery could be concentrated, to make and exploit a breach in the enemy line of battle. He stressed tactical concepts such as the interdependence of fire and movement and the advantage of oblique over direct fire, but always he came back to the need for concentration of effort. "We must collect the greatest number of troops and a greater quantity of artillery at the point where we wish to break the enemy.... We must multiply our artillery on the points of attack which must decide the victory.... Artillery, thus intelligently sustained and multiplied, brings decisive results."¹⁴ Superiority in numbers is not a prerequisite to achieve success. A proper concentration of forces at the decisive point would permit inferior forces to prevail.

Closely connected with concentration of forces is the principle of economy of force.¹⁵ When forces are concentrated at one place on the battlefield it is due to economy elsewhere. Economy of force calls for judgement and willingness to accept calculated risks.

Maneuver implies the ability to rapidly shift strategic emphasis and respond to plans or unexpected opportunities.¹⁶ Napoleon's autonomous divisions, of infantry and cavalry, gave greater speed and flexibility to military movement. Clever strategists avoid costly frontal assaults by relying on

imaginative approaches whenever possible. If the enemy divides his forces on an extended front, the best direction of maneuver is upon his center. If possible, maneuver against his flanks and then his rear.

The principle of surprise does not guarantee success; however, it does increase the odds in its favor, especially when surprise is used in conjunction with secrecy, speed and deception.¹⁷

Morale in war often results in a test of wills, not just by the armies involved in the battles, but by the people of the nations.¹⁸ Napoleon was convinced that a strong morale and fighting spirit added to his offensive strength and was often decisive. Morale of an army is influenced by leadership, discipline, self-respect and belief in a cause.

The final principle we shall consider is that of exploitation or pursuit.¹⁹ Once an enemy's decisive point has been attacked with sufficient mass to break his lines causing him to falter and withdraw, pursuit is critical to destroy his forces. "Napoleon would unleash his cavalry in a pursuit designed to complete the destruction of the enemy; as well as spread panic and destroy all hope of recovery."²⁰

Background

With the inauguration of President Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth President of the United States, the Union was destroyed, and our

great nation was thrust into a civil war. When war came in 1861, Robert E. Lee faced an agony endured by few Southerners. He hated both slavery and secession, and loved the Union more deeply than most.²¹ Lee knew both the men of the North and the South, and the devotion Southerners could apply to any one cause. He knew likewise, the stubborn, determined strength of the Northern will that many in the Confederacy took for a passing whim.

Knowing full well, if Virginia seceded, the war would be fought in her territory, Robert E. Lee shunned potential military eminence in the Army of the United States and chose to fight for his home state of Virginia. After over three decades in the regular army, Robert E. Lee, only a lieutenant colonel, had yet to demonstrate his ability to command in the field. Yet, on 31 August 1861, at the insistence of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, the Confederate Congress bestowed upon Robert E. Lee the rank of full General, the highest rank in the Confederate Service.²²

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CHAPTER II

THE SOUTH SEEKS A STRATEGY

Lee's First Duties

After the attack on Fort Sumter and the secession of Virginia, both sides marked time. Neither was eager to assume the offensive and neither was prepared to do so. After an extensive study, Lee submitted a report to Governor Letcher of Virginia, on the status of military and naval preparations for the defense of the state.¹ Lee knew better than anyone else his states capabilities and was very familiar with the defenses around Richmond, which in most cases he helped to plan. In late July, 1861, Lee started from Richmond to perform his first field duty for the Confederacy, as an advisor to the field commanders in western Virginia.² From the time he arrived he encountered a state of affairs unlike anything he had ever seen in war, "panic exhausted in paralysis."³ General Lee saw first hand the political bickering among petty commanders resulting in the erosion of their armies troop strength due to a lack of morale and discipline and poor sanitation conditions. Lee saw the reality of dealing with raw militiamen whose zeal for war had been dampened by contact with its bloody realities.

The Confederate Strategy

Contrary to Napoleonic principles the Southern planners, dominated by President Jefferson Davis, showed that in the circumstances facing the Confederacy, the best strategy would be defensive, reminiscent of Washington's during the War of the Revolution.⁴ Washington's defensive strategy kept his army concentrated, allowing him to conserve his limited number of men and left most of the coastal areas to defend themselves with their own fortifications and their own militia.⁵ Davis' problem was that the southern states would not accept less military protection from the new government at Richmond than they had received from the old government in Washington.⁶ Davis was forced to scatter his already limited forces to make at least an appearance of a defense of the borders of the Confederacy. The Confederacy conveniently adopted a modified political strategy designed for the late 1700's which had no military objectives to support their political purpose. They were merely trying to counter every Northern move, resulting in a disjointed defense and a violation of the basic principle of concentration.

Though the North was in population and in wealth preponderantly superior to the South, the contest was far from being so unequal as it appeared to be from a first glance. In the first place, the South was fighting for the right to secede; the North, to preserve the Union. For the North to succeed in preserving the Union, they would have to invade and hold an area

as large as all western Europe, an achievement without parallel in modern history.⁷ Distances less serious had caused the defeat of Napoleon at the height of his power. Railways in the South were few; roads were not good and in winter all but impassable, making resupply of an invading army difficult. The subjection of a hardy and determined population, scattered over such an area, was a military task which no power had proposed to undertake in one or even a few campaigns.⁸ Tenacious defense served the Confederate purpose, particularly considering the advantage rifled weapons and artillery conferred on the defender. However, by adopting a passive defensive policy, the South from the start placed itself in great jeopardy, yielding the initiative, and giving the Union time to mobilize and the choice of where and when to fight.

Military Advisor to the President

In March 1862, President Davis recalled Lee to Richmond, after eleven months in the Carolinas. Confederate armories were almost empty of powder, thousands of soldiers who had signed on to serve one year were at the end of their term of service not wanting to reenlist.⁹ The same people, boastful and overconfident in 1861, were now in a state of panic believing that President Davis was making so many mistakes that the war would certainly be lost unless someone competent took charge of the armies.¹⁰ Davis was finally forced to agree to a compromise with his Congress on

13 March 1862, General Order #14 resulted: "Gen. R.E. Lee is assigned to duty at the seat of government under the direction of the President, charged with the conduct of military operations in the Armies of the Confederacy."¹¹ An impressive title; however, Lee found himself not in a command position, nor has he any authority over any of the field commanders. Lee's role as military advisor was one concerned with the most mundane chores of the expediter. Despite his lack of authority, "the general is ever willing to receive the suggestions of the President, while the President exhibits the greatest confidence in General Lee's experience and ability and does not hamper him with executive interference."¹² This would prove extremely important in his follow on assignment as Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.

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CHAPTER III

LEE TAKES COMMAND

An Army in Name Only

On the afternoon of 31 May 1862, President Davis and General Lee were present and under fire while Joe Johnston launched his counteroffensive at Seven Pines. Johnston was wounded at Fair Oaks and compelled to leave the field.¹ On the afternoon of 1 June 1862, Lee took command, of a badly organized army, driven to the very outskirts of its capital by an enemy stronger in numbers and supplies.

Lee inherited an army in name only, composed partly of Johnston's old Manassas army, with all the laxity of his indifferent administration, and Magruder's Yorktown force, which had never been incorporated into the army. Another part of his force was Huger's division, whose commander had been the victim of Johnston's charges of incompetence at Seven Pines, and the newly-formed large division of A.P. Hill.² This was a totally uncoordinated force with inexperienced commanders who had never worked together. The men were poorly equipped, many untrained. Few had learned the importance of rigid discipline, or had forgotten their traditions of personal independence. Discipline, which had been very lax under Johnston, was a major problem. Men unused to control of any sort were not disposed to obey "without good and sufficient reason given."³ The line officers, chosen by

the men and appointed by the governors of the States, were in many instances grossly incompetent."

Lee's Leadership Ability

Having won Davis' trust by tact, Lee communicated with the President constantly and advised him in advance of any plans, giving Davis the impression that everything was shared between them. The result for Lee was that he became at this stage the only field general on either side to enjoy the complete confidence and support of his government.³ Lee indicated where he expected to fight by the name he gave his forces gathered in front of Richmond. The Army of Northern Virginia was to be indicative of his strategic thrust.⁴ Lee's leadership and organizational abilities brought the separate commands into unity with general headquarters. Excess baggage was sent to the rear and broken down vehicles and animals were sent back to depot for refitting. Lee worked on the morale of his force and changed slovenly camps into lines where troops were ready for action. His men gradually came to feel themselves part of a "total force directed by a single purpose."⁷ Division chiefs of artillery were appointed to maintain the efficiency of the individual batteries and provide a reserve for each division. His chief of ordnance, Porter Alexander, made revolutionary improvements in the wagon trains that support the guns, increasing the mobility of the artillery along with the morale of the gunners. As part of their

new mobility, the old heavy smoothbores were replaced by handier field pieces.⁹ Lee called an extraordinary conference of all his general officers. They gathered at a house, known as the Chimneys, out on the Nine Mile Road. For the first time, the field officers, who were to lead the Army of Northern Virginia, felt themselves a vital part of the growing force; Lee instilled in them the feeling that the commander knew their problems and valued their opinions.⁷ In this single meeting Lee subdued the defeatist attitude held by some of his generals.

In a short period of time, Robert E. Lee demonstrated some of the leadership abilities and traits. He organized his army and improved their living conditions. He instilled a sense of unity to his command for the Confederate cause. Lee's tempered control of the army was not due to iron rigor; his discipline depended rather on morale.¹⁰ Lee cared for his soldiers and shared their very existence in the field. As a result his army willingly followed him into battle, regardless of the cost: "such was the love and veneration of the men for him, that they came to look upon the cause, as General Lee's cause and they fought for it because they loved him. To them he represented cause, country and all."¹¹

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CHAPTER IV

THE SEVEN DAYS CAMPAIGN

Lee's Campaign Strategy

While General McClellan methodically moved his army down the Peninsula within seven miles of Richmond, Lee unveiled his offensive strategy. Lee intended to disregard his country's political strategy of passive defense. He planned to seize the initiative from McClellan, concentrate his forces, maneuver and strike a decisive blow. Lee intended to use surprise and deception to initiate his counteroffensive against McClellan. A paradox arose here: In pursuing Napoleonic principles, Lee's aggressive nature and belief that his strategy was best for Virginia and the Confederacy caused him to consciously violate one of the most important principles of war, requiring the military strategy to support the political purpose.

Jackson was to deceive the enemy into believing he was about to open a new offensive in the Valley, while he moved his army to unite with Lee's near Richmond.¹ Magruder and Huger's Division's were to stage a show of force, south of the Chickahominy, to intimidate McClellan.² By using an economy of force south of the river, Lee planned to attack McClellan's weaker right flank, north of the Chickahominy. Lee's objectives were to disrupt McClellan's lines of communications, sever the York River

Railroad, and destroy McClellan's supply base from the sea. If Lee's attack went as planned, he expected McClellan to either shift his forces north of the Chickahominy to defend his lines of communications or to withdraw everything south and establish a new supply base on the James River. Either action would force McClellan into an awkward crossing of the Chickahominy and render him vulnerable to further offensive action.³ To attempt an intricate operation such as the concentration of forces on the march, over difficult terrain, resulting in a coordinated attack by all involved would be difficult for even the most experienced units, and impossible for his newly assembled force.

Lee firmly believed in the need for good and timely information on the enemy which can be quickly used or promptly exploited by other forces.⁴ For his plan, Lee needed information on the enemy's lines of communication and the way they were guarded. To obtain this information Lee, acting as his own intelligence officer, studied the northern newspapers and the chief reports which came to the army on affairs in Washington and Federal camps.⁵ In addition, he sends Jeb Stuart with 1200 cavalry and a section of artillery to explore the Federal right. Jackson's brilliant deception in the Valley was so successful that it precluded Lincoln from sending additional reinforcements to McClellan. It also tied up 70,000 troops in northern Virginia and along its borders worrying about where Jackson would strike next.⁶ On 23 June 1862, McClellan deployed, four of his five corps, south of the river. Seventy five thousand Union troops

were within six miles of Richmond defended only by Magruder and Huger's divisions.⁷

26 June - 1 July 1862: The Seven Days

26 June 1862: Mechanicsville

Lee saw the uncoordinated efforts of his army directed by inexperienced commander's against an enemy in well fortified positions. He was forced to fight where he had not expected and failed to execute a concentration of his forces against a decisive point, resulting in a piecemeal frontal assault against a strong defensive position. Lee was able to concentrate only 14,000 troops in the action and lost nearly 10% of them, without accomplishing any of his objectives.⁸ On the morning of 26 June 1862, A.P.Hill, D.H. Hill and Longstreet posted their divisions on the south bank of the Chickanomy in readiness to cross when word was received from Jackson.⁷ Jackson was to initiate the attack by assaulting the Federal flank at Beaver Dam Creek. Jackson miscalculated the time it would take for him to move his troops into position, and his army was about six hours behind. As the day progressed, Hill became impatient, crossed the river, drove in the enemy's outposts from Mechanicsville without any support from Jackson. Around 5 p.m., Lee found A.P. Hill who explained that, having received no word from Jackson and fearing that the whole day would be lost, he advanced on his own initiative, compromising Lee's entire plan.¹⁰ Hill's initiative

had drawn Lee's troops into battle, where Lee never planned to fight.

By nine o'clock the firing ended, bringing to a close Lee's first battle. Lee lost the whole element of surprise. McClellan possessed more information about Jackson's whereabouts than did Lee, who failed to send couriers out during the day to locate Jackson and determine his status and position. Lee was still determined to hold onto the initiative and continue the offensive the following morning. McClellan's superiority in numbers was more than counterbalanced by his disposition astride the Chickahominy. Lee gambled his country's capital on his assessment of McClellan's reluctance to risk an attack.

27 June 1862: Gaines Mill

Lee would have to accomplish by sheer weight of force what he was unable to accomplish through maneuver. Lee met with Jackson at Walnut Grove Church and issued new orders for the coordinated attack of Jackson and Hill near Gaines' Mill.¹¹ This was to be a repeat of the previous days plan, except it lacked the critical element of surprise. Lee planned another coordinated attack by Hill on the Union center, supported by Longstreet on his right and Jackson on his left.¹² Lee's entire counteroffensive now hung in the balance; for, if the Federal's could not be driven off, McClellan's lines of communications would not be threatened and Lee would be forced to rush the remnants of his force back to defensive positions in front of Richmond. Many years later,

General Ulysses S. Grant would write, "In every battle there comes a time when both sides consider themselves beaten; then he who continues the attack wins." Lee proves the point at Gaines' Mill, long before Grant could apply it to him.¹³ Late that day Lee's shock troops, Hood's Brigade of Texans, finally add the necessary weight to the attack to break the enemy lines.¹⁴ Lee successfully concentrated his troops at the decisive point giving him the victory. As darkness falls over Gaines' Mill, the Federals were driven from their strong positions, leaving more than a dozen fine artillery pieces, thousands of rifles and military stores to the short-rationed Confederates. Lee's success at Gaines' Mill forced McClellan to shift his supply base from White House on the Pamunkey to Harrison's Landing on the James.¹⁵ McClellan's base troops successfully moved 3,000 wagons and a herd of cattle while the Confederate troops sat idle, failing to exploit their initial success.

That night Lee, Longstreet and Jackson talked of renewing the offensive the following day in an attempt to finish off McClellan on the next stand he made to protect his supply lines. Lee remained confident that his subordinates would carry out his orders for the pursuit. That trust proved misplaced. Lee's method of command had been one of complete decentralization. He would plan the strategy and tactics for the campaign, leaving the operational plans and details as well as the control of the battle to his subordinates.¹⁶ This would leave his subordinates free to exploit the situation as it develops. This leadership

technique demanded a great deal of trust and was only practiced by great captains in charge of many armies. Lee's poor judgement in trusting his inexperienced subordinates would prove disastrous in many of his future campaigns.

28 June 1862: McClellan Withdraws

While Federal troops began retreating toward the James River on 28 June, Lee lost an opportunity and an entire day, by his inability to gain positive information as well as waiting to see what was to be McClellan's purpose. Lee successfully drove the enemy from the field of battle and across the river; however, this crossing was just what his opponent was endeavoring to effect.¹⁷ That night Lee devised a plan which calls for concentrating his 70,000 man force and then striking at the rear and flank of the withdrawing Federals.¹⁸ Lee returned to his headquarters on the Williamsburg Road, in comparative remoteness from Magruder's developing pursuit around Fair Oaks. Lee showed he had not learned the lessons of command in battle from the two previous days actions. He assumed that his divisions would function cooperatively without a central figure directing their actions.

29 June 1862: Savage Station

McClellan's forces abandoned their positions in front of Richmond. Magruder made an uncoordinated attack on the enemy's rear at Savage Station on the afternoon of 29 June.¹⁹ Jackson,

also ordered to pursue and attack the enemy's flank, was delayed by the necessity of reconstructing a bridge across the river. McClellan's forces continued their withdrawal and cross the White Oak Swamp without interference and then destroyed the bridge.

Lee's plan failed because his leaders failed to conduct a reconnaissance of the terrain over which they would travel and attack the enemy. It is difficult to explain the failure of the Confederates, due to a lack of adequate maps or unfamiliarly with the terrain around Richmond. The entire operation was carried on within a dozen miles of their capital. Lee fought almost entirely and gained all of his greatest successes in that part of his own state with which he was best acquainted. This reflected two of Frederick the Great's comments, "If I had exact information of our enemy's dispositions I should be at him every time." "If I were mindful only of my own glory, I would choose always to make war in my own country, for there every man is a spy and the enemy can make no movement of which I am not informed."²⁰ Napoleon, also owed much of his success and marvelous triumphs to the care with which he studied the topography of his campaigns. This knowledge alone enabled him to maneuver his forces so as to have them, however apparently separated, brought together at the right moment. "The great art of war, consists of knowing how to separate in order to subsist and how to concentrate in order to fight."²¹

30 June 1862: Glendale (Frazier's Farm).

Lee planned to maneuver his forces and envelope McClellan's army, while they are strung out on the march. Magruder was to attack the Union rear, causing the retreating Federals to spread out as they are trying to cross the White Oak Swamp at the crossroads of Glendale. Longstreet and Hill moved around the Union force to attack McClellan's front, while Huger assaulted the Union flank.²² Jackson's pursuit and progress was again hampered at White Oak Swamp by Union soldiers left behind to resist reconstruction of the bridge.

Lee again failed to concentrate his forces resulting in a series of uncoordinated attacks that were totally indecisive.²³ Frayser's Farm is one of the great lost opportunities in Confederate military history and one of the bitterest disappointments Lee ever sustained. Two years of campaigning would not produce another situation where envelopment seemed possible.

1 July 1862: Malvern Hill

The battle of Malvern Hill was fought without plan or concentration. Of the more than 70,000 men, that Lee had within two hours march, less than 30,000 were brought into the action.²⁴ Opposed to this force was the whole union army of 85,000 men holding a position they could have held against twice their number. With such odds there could be but one outcome. Lee suffered 5500 casualties in the brief assault on Malvern Hill.

The assault, which never should have been made, violated almost every principle of war as well as common leadership practices.

McClellan concentrated his forces on Malvern Hill. Lee failed to seize the opportunity to send troops in a rapid drive to close the Federal escape route.²⁵ Harvey Hill of Jackson's command warned Lee of the Federal positions on Malvern Hill: "McClellan is there in force, we had better let him alone." The terrain leading up to that plateau would not support an attack against the fortified position.²⁶ Lee conducted a personal reconnaissance of the ground in front of the Western Run and sent Longstreet to observe the area in front of Malvern Hill. Longstreet appraised Lee that, with 60 to 80 guns in the Poindexter farm clearing, a crossfire could be brought on the Federal guns that would open the way for an infantry advance.²⁷ Without ever seeing the Union positions on Malvern Hill and disregarding an earlier warning of the Union strength on the hill, Lee ordered Jackson's artillery forward and told Longstreet to set up the artillery position.²⁸ Lee ordered his chief of staff, Colonel Chilton, to write up an order for his division commanders explaining the situation. The order directed that if and when the artillery raked the enemy lines, Armistead, who could witness the effect of the fire would charge, other divisions were to do likewise.²⁹

By 3 p.m. Lee realized his artillery bombardment was a failure and resigned himself to passing the day without an attack on McClellan.³⁰ Meanwhile Armistead ordered a local advance against union sharpshooters who had ventured too close under the

protection of their own guns. During the course of this advance, Magruder reached the field with the first of his brigades and received Lee's order. Having been accused of lacking vigor at Savage Station, Magruder immediately dispatched a staff officer to Lee reporting he was on the field and ready to exploit Armistead's advance. Again, without being present, Lee sent Magruder an order to "advance rapidly, enemy is reportedly getting off the plateau, press forward your whole line and follow up Armistead's success."³¹

The most disappointing aspect of the Seven Days Battle occurred after the seventh day. McClellan had been driven to the Westover Plantation with his army, supply and baggage trains. Stuart's cavalry in pursuit of McClellan gained control of the key terrain overlooking the Federal army. By Stuart's commanding those heights, the enemy's position was altogether untenable. Unless he attacked and recaptured the heights, his forces were in danger of being annihilated. Stuart sent couriers to Lee urging him to rush reinforcements to his assistance. Stuart's cavalry held the heights from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. but were finally driven off by artillery and infantry assaults.³² Longstreet, enroute to Stuart's relief, took the wrong road and ended up six miles from the battle. The next day, Jackson arrived on the scene was briefed on the situation, the terrain and the best way to assault the enemy force commanding the heights. Jackson would not assault the enemy's defensive position. When Lee finally arrived and saw the Federal positions, he also would not commit to the attack. So

ended the battle of Seven Days and Lee's campaign against McClellan.³³

Campaign Results

Lee's strategy during the Seven Days Campaign showed his adherence to most of the principles of war. Lee's campaign plan for the Seven Days was brilliantly planned, yet poorly executed. Lee had shown determination and the willingness to take great risks in the face of superior forces. Lee's counteroffensive was of a boldness that had not appeared before in Confederate Strategy. Lee was successful in lifting the siege of Richmond and reviving a people who had been enduring invasion with waning hope.³⁴ To the people of the Confederacy, Lee emerged as the authentic Confederate hero, a "Confederate Napoleon," and the most famous soldier in the world. Lee won the full confidence of his soldiers, and was looked upon as a leader who dares to give battle against heavy odds.

The battle made Lee acutely aware of his failures and of the shortcomings of his key subordinates, but he knew that no good would come from blaming others when he had been so much at fault. Lee started his first campaign with 85,000 men, now 20,141 were casualties. Half of the wounded were doomed to die or be permanently incapacitated for further field duty.³⁵ Lee achieved less than he had hoped, less than he believed he should have accomplished. Some attribute Lee's failure during the Seven Days to Jackson's lateness. Although Jackson's failures may have been

a factor they are not the issue. Lee's failures throughout this campaign were based on several reasons reflecting his capabilities. First, Lee failed to obtain adequate information on the enemy who was operating in close proximity to the very heart of the Confederacy, Richmond. Also Lee and his subordinates failed to conduct any reconnaissance of the terrain over which their forces were to march and fight resulting in an inability to effectively maneuver against their opponents. Second, Lee failed to employ his artillery at the decisive point on the battlefield before assaulting with his infantry, increasing his casualties. Third, Lee failed to concentrate his forces on the battlefield at the decisive point making his attacks uncoordinated and ineffective. Fourth, as the commander of the army, Lee needed to be physically present at the scene of the battle to control the fight and direct operations and not relinquish operational control to his divisional commanders, who continuously failed him. Fifth, as D.H. Hill commented, "throughout this campaign we attacked just where and when the enemy wished us to."²⁴ Finally, his feeble and spiritless pursuit of the retreating McClellan cost the best opportunity Lee had for destroying the Army of the Potomac. Even the press carped at his failure to win a more decisive victory and complained that he had not followed up his advantage.

Lee Reorganizes His Army

Following Seven Days Lee's immediate need is to reorganize his army. The most pressing part of that reorganization was to provide better divisional leadership for his soldiers. Longstreet emerged as a trusted lieutenant, D.H. Hill's performance had been admirable, A.P. Hill had marched well and fought hard, but Magruder was too excitable. Huger proved unreliable, while Holmes was slow to act.³⁷ Lee transferred Hill to Jackson's command because of a conflict between Hill and Longstreet. Magruder left the command enroute to Texas while ineffective Holmes was transferred to Arkansas. Sluggish Huger was made an inspector in the ordnance department.³⁸

Lee abandoned operating with large semi-independent divisions. Instead he established what were in truth two corps, with smaller divisions and an independent cavalry force. The Confederacy did not recognize such army units as corps, but they now came into being, known only as "commands."³⁹ Neither Jackson nor Longstreet had performed with distinction during the Seven Days; still both emerged as Lee's key lieutenants, while Jeb Stuart remained in command of the cavalry. While Lee made a substantial reorganization of his army, he failed to reorganize his artillery and made no changes to his general staff. As a result of this, Lee came gradually to act as his own chief staff officer.

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CHAPTER V

THE SOUTH FINDS A GREAT CAPTAIN AND HIS NAME IS STONEWALL

A True Tactical Genius

Jackson's performance at Second Manassas showed him to be a master of deception and a true tactical genius. Jackson meticulously planned his actions. His field of battle was always selected for a defensive fight. His opponents were always forced to attack under unfavorable conditions.¹ As soon as the enemy gave signs of weakening, Jackson quickly resumed his attack in force. It was precisely such tactics which he employed at Second Manassas. It was mainly due to Jackson's brilliant achievements, both strategically and tactically, that Pope was defeated before a junction could be made with McClellan. Jackson showed his abilities as a great captain.

Despite his army's condition, Lee was determined to pursue the offensive. Lee could not afford to be idle and if he could not destroy the enemy, then he must at least continue to harass him. Lee's army was not properly equipped for an invasion of the North. It lacked much of the materials of war; men lacked clothing and in thousands of instances were without even shoes."² Lee was determined to resolve his previous reservations about Jackson's performance during the Seven Days; returning him to semi-independent command in which he previously flourished.

Jackson was sent with a small force of 12,000 troops to Gordonville to counter the arrival of Pope's Army of Virginia.³

Lee recognized the Union course of action to join McClellan and Pope and he planned to engage and defeat the scattered Union armies individually, before they could unite. Lee's bold strategy again called for an offensive campaign to throw back the Federals beyond the Rappahannock line and open the way for more important offensive operations.⁴ Part of Lee's strategy in invading Maryland was political, based on believing that Maryland had strong Confederate sympathies and an invasion would afford her the opportunity "to throw off the oppression to which she is now subject."⁵ Many felt it wrong to invade the North; for, now, they would be considered the invaders. In the presence of the enemy, Lee divided his army and sent nearly one half of them under Jackson along the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge to come down upon Pope's lines of supply and communications with Washington.⁶ Pope was truly amazed at the audacity of the Confederate general. Lee risked an encounter in which the very existence of Jackson's command would be imperilled.⁷

The Forces Deploy

When McClellan made no apparent move to send troops after Jackson, Lee sent 12,000 more troops under A.P. Hill to join up with Jackson. Lee used an economy of force to counter McClellan.

Soon after Hill's arrival Jackson crossed the Rapidan and defeated a force under General Banks at Cedar Mountain, near Culpepper Court House.¹⁰ While Jackson was engaged with Banks, Lee made the decision to move against Pope before he could link up with McClellan. Lee left two divisions of infantry to guard the Richmond lines and marched his force northwest toward Gordonville. On 24 August 1862, while Pope was trying to concentrate his forces along the Rapidan, Jackson swung around his rear and destroyed Pope's headquarters and supply depots at Manassas Junction. Pope's supply base proved to be a prize of enormous dimension. Tons of every sort of food were captured for his hungry troops.¹¹ Jackson then marched west to Groveton, took up a defensive position and awaited Pope's pursuit.

Second Manassas

On 29 August Pope assaulted Jackson's lines. Meanwhile, Longstreet came up the valley between the Blue Ridge and the Bull Run Mountains, and turned east through Thoroughfare Gap, which Pope left practically undefended. The following day Longstreet attacked Pope's flank, sending his whole army reeling toward Bull Run.¹² On 30 August, Lee decisively defeated Pope on the plains of Manassas. In a series of engagements Lee captured more than 7,000 prisoners, 30 pieces of artillery, upward of 20,000 stands of small arms, numerous colors and a large amount of stores.¹³ Pope withdrew to the defenses of Washington; two days later he

was relieved of command and replaced by General McClellan.¹²

Second Manassas was a showpiece of Napoleonic warfare. This brilliantly executed campaign of maneuver drew Pope into a disadvantageous position and then stunned him with a decisive blow. Lee was forced to take risks or to await attack by a force which he knew would, before long, be overwhelmingly superior.¹³ But Lee also knew that Pope's first duty was to cover Washington, a mission which did not encourage risks or freedom to maneuver.

Lee deliberately violated the principle of concentration in the face of the enemy, by dividing his army. This was not out of contempt for Pope rather, an attack on Pope's lines of communications seemed to be the only means of causing a superior force to retreat.¹⁴

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CHAPTER VI

THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN

Lee's Campaign Strategy

Lee's campaign strategy for the invasion of Maryland was to carry the war to the North without having to fight a major battle. Lee intended to feed his army on Northern grain and reprovision his troops, thus relieving the pressure on Virginia and the South. By cutting the B. & O. and, possibly, the Pennsylvania Railroad, Lee would temporarily isolate Washington bringing the realities of war to the people of the North.¹ Antietam was the most desperately fought struggle of the war. Of all Lee's actions in the war, Antietam seems to be the most open to criticism. He could have withdrawn across the Potomac without difficulty on 15 September and returned to Virginia, with the many prisoners and quantities of stores captured at Harper's Ferry.² In addition, the ground he chose for battle, while admirably suited for defense, left him no opportunity for a good counterstroke.

Sharpsburg (Antietam Creek)

On 7 September 1862, the Army of Northern Virginia forded the Potomac near Leesburg and reached Frederick City. Lee planned to move up the Cumberland Valley, gathering supplies for his

troops and seizing the important railroad center at Harrisburg.³ Lee hoped that his movement across the Potomac would cause the Federal troops to withdraw from Harper's Ferry.

When Union forces did not evacuate Harper's Ferry as expected, Jackson was ordered to move against Harper's Ferry with six divisions, while Lee continued toward Hagerstown with three divisions.⁴ As McClellan approached with his customary caution, Lee sent D.H. Hill to South Mountain to block the enemy advance. Lee's Special Order 191, detailing the entire campaign plan, fell into McClellan's hands.⁵ On the morning of 15 September 1862, Jackson captured Harper's Ferry along with 11,000 prisoners and a substantial amount of supplies. Jackson was now enroute to join Lee with five of his six divisions.⁶ A.P. Hill remained at Harper's Ferry to police up the prisoners and stores; he was to follow Jackson as soon as possible.⁷

With his rear now safe, Lee moved back near where the stream called Antietam flows into the Potomac, by the little Maryland town of Sharpsburg. Here he entrenched his army along Antietam creek, his flanks resting on two bends of the Potomac. Lee has only 18,000 men. His army was badly scattered and McClellan was in hot pursuit with a force of 70,000.⁸ McClellan's cautious approach allowed Jackson's five divisions to join Lee, bringing the Confederate force to 40,000 men near Sharpsburg.

The dawn of 17 September 1862 brought the bloodiest one-day fight ever to occur in the war. McClellan attacked again and again, only to be repulsed by the Confederates in strong

defensive positions.⁷ Each of these assaults was repulsed, because Lee carefully managed his reserves and committed them at the Union point of impact. After a long, costly fight the Confederate lines seemed broken and the very existence of Lee's army in jeopardy, when A.P. Hill's division from Harper's Ferry came onto the field, at a double time, restoring the lines and saving the day.¹⁰ By nightfall McClellan had not broken the Confederate lines nor had he used his reserves. Federal losses in killed and wounded were 14,000 men, while the Confederates suffered over 11,000 casualties.¹¹ Despite the severe repulse, Union generals were in favor of renewing the fight the following morning, if they could have 5,000 fresh troops. McClellan was again cautious; he knew that the Union cause could not afford a defeat. For, if the Army of the Potomac was defeated, Maryland and Pennsylvania would be open to Southern exploitation. McClellan decided to postpone the attack. Lee contemplated his own offensive, on the morning of the 18th, which he was forced to abandon because of lack of maneuver space and the dominant positions held by the Federal artillery.¹²

The Campaign Results

Antietam was the most desperately fought struggle of the war. The action was in all respects a draw: Lee's army had inflicted a greater absolute loss than they had suffered; but they had suffered, in proportion to their strength, far more than they had

inflicted. McClellan ended Lee's hopes for an invasion of Maryland, by positioning his army between Lee and his projected line of march into Pennsylvania.¹³

Lee's army showed it had finally developed the necessary teamwork to fight as a unit and not as separate divisions.¹⁴ Lee's army now became a new fighting machine which had absolute confidence in itself and in its leaders. Yet, at Mechanicsburg, Gaines' Mill, Malvern Hill and now Antietam many of Lee's bravest and most skilled leaders had been shot down at the head of their troops while leading gallant and costly charges.¹⁵ Even in defeat the army did not lose faith in Lee. Lee did not drive his men. He led them and they followed him because he lived amongst them, because they knew of his constant anxiety for their welfare, because "his honesty and complete lack of self-seeking was obvious to the least observant," and because his early victories had given him a prestige so high that it could not be lowered even by defeat.¹⁶

So ended in failure a remarkable campaign. Lee had cleared Eastern Virginia of all Federal troops, save a few detachments. Antietam could have been the decisive battle of the war. A victory by Lee would not have altered the military situation, for the Confederate commander could not have followed up his victory with a pursuit. But a victory by the Federals would have cut Lee off from his base or destroyed him and exposed Richmond to imminent capture. Although tactically indecisive, Antietam had two consequences of strategic importance. First, the indecisive

Union victory afforded Lincoln the opportunity to issue his proclamation for the abolition of slavery.¹⁷ Secondly, and perhaps the greatest military asset flowing from this proclamation, was the large scale recruitment of black men into the Union Army during the first half of 1863.¹⁸

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CHAPTER VII

THE CHANCELLORSVILLE CAMPAIGN

Background

By the Spring of 1863, after two years of struggle, the South still stood defiantly and vigorously fought off the invaders, who continued to pound against her defenses in the major military theaters. The danger to the North was that if Southern resistance persisted, the federal government would give up its efforts to conquer the Confederacy; the South would gain independence by default.¹ The North had organized its sprawling economy efficiently enough to sustain the material well-being of its civilians. The Southern economy, undermined by external and internal forces, had begun a rapid decline in many areas from scarcity to real want.²

Lee's Campaign Strategy

With the coming of spring Lee again was determined to carry the war to the North in an offensive campaign. By 1 May 1863, Lee wanted to send Jackson sweeping through the Valley. This action would again threaten Washington and thus compel Hooker to withdraw north of the Potomac. These actions were to be followed by another invasion of the North.³ Lee's belief that the

best defense for Richmond was at a distance from it had not changed in the two years of conflict. In addition, the North still has the provisions Lee needed for his army. By crossing high up the Potomac, Lee believed he could draw the enemy after him, clear Virginia of Federals, and perhaps force the enemy to recall the forces that were troubling the South Atlantic coasts and threatening the railroads.⁴ Exposing the population of the North to the realities of war would increase the peace movement which seemed to be gathering strength.⁵

Chancellorsville

Of all the battles fought by the Army of Northern Virginia, Chancellorsville stands first as illustrating the audacity and military skill of commanders and the valor and determination of the soldiers from the South. Lee, with 57,000 men, was intrenched along the line of hills south of the Rappahannock, near Fredericksburg. Hooker's massive 130,000 man Army of the Potomac, occupied the bluffs on the opposite side of the river.⁶ On 29 April 1863, Lee using the principle of economy of force, divided his army, as he had against Pope. Lee contained Sedgwick's Corps and moved the remainder of his army, of some 48,000 men toward Chancellorsville.⁷ On 30 April, Slocum's Corps ran into the well-entrenched Confederates along the road leading to Fredericksburg. Instead of attacking, Hooker mysteriously withdrew his forces to Chancellorsville. Lee wasted no time in

seizing the initiative and going on the offensive. Lee's confidence in his men and his leaders caused him to further divide his army, sending Jackson to attack Hooker's flank and rear while Lee attacked the Union front with less than 14,000 men.⁹ With a series of flanking attacks Lee rolled up Hooker's exposed flank and forced his army to retreat across the Rappahannock. Lee continued his offensive and concentrated his scattered army the following day.

Results of Chancellorsville

The success of the Chancellorsville campaign so changed the military situation that the army of the Potomac did not again undertake a march on Richmond for a full year.⁷ It was undoubtedly the most remarkable victory Lee ever achieved. From a Confederate point of view, the Battle of Chancellorsville was Lee's most dazzling and flawless victory. The battle was accompanied by the death of Lee's most trusted corps commander, Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson.¹⁰ Within two months Lee and the Confederacy would realize the extent of its loss by the lack of Jackson's bold and brilliant maneuvers which neutralized superiority of numbers and turned doubtful situations into victory. A Confederate chaplain summed up the loss of Jackson, "When in Thine inscrutable decree it was ordained that the Confederacy should fail, it became necessary for Thee to remove Thy servant Jackson."¹¹

Lee Reorganized His Army

Jackson's death caused Lee to again reorganize his army into three corps under Longstreet, Ewell and A.P. Hill. At this critical hour of the Confederacy two-thirds of the army was under new leadership. Lee's reorganization showed his intimate knowledge of all of his units and involved the mixing of new units with the veteran regiments under commanders who are familiar with General Lee and his tactics.¹² Lee reorganized his forces as follows: Longstreet's First Corps was reduced to the three divisions of McLaws', Pickett's and Hood's. The Second Corps, now Ewell's, included the divisions of Early, Johnson and Rhodes. A.P. Hill was now given command of the Third Corps composed of Anderson's, Heth's and Pender's divisions.¹³ In addition to reorganizing the infantry, Lee finally reorganized his artillery into battalion formations and also divided his general reserve artillery among the three corps.¹⁴

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CHAPTER VIII

THE GETTYSBURG CAMPAIGN

Background

Lee was eager to capitalize on his recent success by carrying the war to the North. He asked for permission to invade the North since, the early spring, but a great strategic debate had negated his request.¹ With Vicksburg in jeopardy and the entire Confederacy subject to being split with the loss of the Mississippi, Davis wanted to reinforce the western Confederacy from the ranks of Lee's army. Lee argued that the only way to relieve the pressure on the west was to invade the North and defeat the Army of the Potomac. If this were accomplished Lee could march against one of their prominent cities causing Lincoln to pull forces from the West.² In 1863, as throughout his entire tenure as commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee's military strategy did not support the political strategy of the Confederacy. His strategy centered on his army and the borders of Virginia.³ Yet, even Lee knew the Confederacy was greater than Virginia. To keep it from being cut in two, by the fall of Vicksburg, Lee should have taken the same desperate chances that he took when he divided his army before Pope at 2d Manassas, or again before Hooker at Chancellorsville.⁴ Lee should have considered taking a portion of his army to the West, linking up and assuming command of Gregg's and his own forces. With these

forces Lee could have driven back Rosecrans and cut Grant's line of communications at Vicksburg. Lee could then have moved against Vicksburg, thus placing Grant between the city's defenders and his army. The whole West would have then been open to Lee.⁵ Lee's loyalty and devotion to his native Virginia overshadowed his operations and his campaign strategy. Ultimately his loyalty to his state doomed the Confederacy.

Lee's Campaign Strategy

Lee, still convinced that the only way for the South to obtain peace which it sought was to convince the North that an attempt to keep the South within the Union was not worth the cost. The surest way to bring this about was to win a victory in the North. By luring the Union Army out of Virginia, Lee would give the people of his state a reprieve from the ravages of war. The South would then have a chance to harvest their crops free from the interruption of military operations from both sides. Lee's military strategy to defeat of the Northern armies was but a means to an end, which was the weakening of the morale of the people of the North.⁶ By June 1863, Lee's strength rose to 73,000 men. Lee realized that time was now on the side of the North, and he therefore determined to risk everything on his invasion into Pennsylvania.⁷

The Forces Deploy

In early June, Lee began to move his army north by way of Culpepper. Longstreet had the lead, Ewell followed, and A.P. Hill was left in front of Fredericksburg to restrain Hooker from advancing against Richmond.²⁸

On 15 June 1863, Ewell attacked the Union force under General Milroy at Winchester, scattered his force and drove the Federal garrison from Harper's Ferry. Ewell captured four thousand prisoners and 29 guns.²⁹ Lee now advanced Ewell into Pennsylvania to seek supplies. If Ewell was successful, Lee intended to march his entire army into the Cumberland Valley. As the march northward began, Lee issued strict orders against the maltreatment of the non-combatant population, in the country through which they will pass. Lee had no desire to alienate the peace party of the North by any ruthless conduct by his army. While this approach may not alienate the peace party, it failed to bring the harsh realities of war to the non-combatants. Something which Lee believed to be critical to the success of his strategy.

Lee sent Stuart on an expedition around Hooker's rear with three brigades; the remaining two brigades Lee used to protect his communications and rear. Without Stuart and by keeping the two cavalry brigades tied up guarding lines of communications to Virginia, Lee was without accurate information on the movement of the enemy. An army without cavalry in a strange and hostile

country is "as a man deprived of his eyesight and beset by enemies; he may be never so brave and strong, but he cannot intelligently administer a single effective blow."¹⁰

On 29 June 1863, Lee learned that Hooker's army had crossed the Potomac and ordered his army to concentrate. Lee recalls Ewell, and sent Hill to the east of South Mountain to act as a flank guard and cover his concentration while investigating the strength of enemy forces in Gettysburg.¹¹

Gettysburg

Without his cavalry and being unfamiliar with the terrain, Lee could not remain in one place too long without inviting attack. Lee lacked sufficient artillery ammunition to fight a major defensive battle so far from his lines of communications in Virginia.¹²

On 1 July 1863, Heth's division moved towards Gettysburg. Heth's orders were to ascertain the size and strength of the enemy at Gettysburg, without forcing an engagement, if infantry were present.¹³ Lee arrived on the scene and found Heth's division actively engaged in a serious fight.¹⁴ Fighting on the first day at Gettysburg saw the Confederates push the Union army to strong defensive positions along Cemetery Ridge. As Lee watched, large numbers of Federal troops fell back to Cemetery Hill in confusion. Lee realized that if he could follow up his initial success, before the fleeing Federals could rally, the key

terrain of the hill could be captured. Hill's troops were tired; so, the task fell to Ewell's troops to carry the hill. Lee sent an officer to Ewell describing the situation and telling him that, "if it were practical based on his judgement, assault and occupy the hill."¹³ Ewell, not accustomed to using his own judgement, did not attempt the assault.¹⁴

Lee was present at a decisive point on the battlefield, where a concentrated effort by his troops could have resulted in a decisive battle. Lee failed to take control and direct the attack of his troops and loses the opportunity to take the high ground that dominates the terrain around Gettysburg.

That evening, the two commanders had done little more than direct their troops toward a place of strategic importance. Neither had definitely decided on battle; yet, even to the inexperienced leader, the Union positions on the evening of 1 July were formidable.¹⁷

Victory laid in attacking before Meade could concentrate his forces. Lee's plan was to make his main attack against the Federal left with Longstreet's Corps, while Ewell's Corps kept the union right occupied.¹⁸ Lee entrusted the main attack to the one subordinate, Longstreet, who was notoriously averse to initiating an attack. That evening Longstreet disagreed with Lee's plan and recommended the army slide around the strong union positions, get between Meade and Washington, and wait for Meade to attack.¹⁹ Lee rejected this advise and ordered the attack for the following day.

Lee's offensive plan for 2 July failed to provide the necessary coordination and timing for the attack. Lee was at breakfast before daylight and rode out to a position on Seminary Ridge where he could observe the upcoming offensive. Lee observed the Federals on Cemetery Hill; but, so far as he could see, nearly all of the ridge south of the hill remained unoccupied.²⁰ The two Union corps that had been defeated the previous afternoon still appeared not to have been reinforced. Lee sent two engineer officers to conduct a reconnaissance of the Round Tops. These officers found no Federal troops on the hills and so reported to Lee.²¹ In reality, the Federals had been on Little Round Top during the night and were repositioned before the engineers had arrived. An hour later, Federal troops again moved into positions around the Round Tops.²² Lee anxiously awaited Longstreet's veterans to seize the initiative and march to seize the ridge south of the Cemetery. Longstreet delayed, not wanting to attack the Federals at all, until the arrival of Pickett's division. Longstreet was so certain that he had the superior plan for battle that he attempted on two consecutive days to force it on Lee. When it was not accepted, he sulked, and deliberately delayed his attack, hoping that by being slow he could compel Lee to change his mind.²³ Lee again watched an opportunity to attack at a decisive point slip away, as Union reinforcements arrived on the scene. With the arrival of Pickett's division, Longstreet finally attacked at 4 p.m. By then, the Union Sixth Corps arrived reinforcing Meade's left. Longstreet's attack on the Union left

failed to carry the ridge.²⁴ Lee still believed in the courage of his soldiers and that he could win the following day.

Lee's plan for the next day, 3 July 1863, was to have Longstreet continue his attack against the Union center and left, while Ewell's forces attack the Union right. Longstreet was again entrusted with the main attack, although Lee again failed to issue a written order to any of his commanders specifying when the coordinated attack was to begin.²⁵ Following the uncoordinated attack and repulse of Pickett's Division at Gettysburg, Lee regroups his shattered army and awaited Meade's counterattack. The counterattack does not come; and, on the evening of 4 July, Lee begins his retreat.²⁶

Campaign Results

The invasion of Pennsylvania cost Lee not just an opportunity to smash a Federal army but approximately 23,000 casualties. Almost one third of his army. Without Jackson's bold offensive maneuvers, Lee ordered repeated frontal assaults against well fortified Union positions. Lee had been decisively beaten and his strategy had been crushed along with the Army of Northern Virginia's offensive capability.

After Gettysburg Lee saw the growing power of the North and the increased determination of its people. This made it impossible to break their will to abandon the struggle by an offensive campaign. Now, Lee was forced to resort to a defensive

strategy. One he believed would ultimately end in defeat.

Gettysburg was lost by Lee's desire to seize the initiative and attack, defeating the enemy at any cost. Lee suffered his second in command "to argue instead of march and delay rather than attack."²⁷ Lee's unwillingness to take control of his army and direct their actions at the decisive point of the battle cost him dearly at Gettysburg.

So ends our study of Robert E. Lee and his campaigns through July of 1863.

ENDNOTES

1. Clifford Dowdey, Lee, p. 204.
2. Henry Alexander White, Robert E. Lee and the Southern Confederacy, 1807-1870, p. 281.
3. Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee of Virginia, p. 220.
4. Ibid., p. 220.
5. Ibid., p. 221.
6. F. Maurice, Robert E. Lee, The Soldier, p. 190.
7. Maurice, p. 190.
8. White, p. 282.
9. Ibid., p. 284.
10. Walter H. Taylor, Four Years with General Lee, p. 93.
11. Maurice, p. 202.
12. Edwin B. Coddington, The Gettysburg Campaign, p. 116.
13. Freeman, p. 232.
14. Taylor, p. 93.

15. Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, For The Common Defense, A Military History of the United States of America, p. 129.

16. Ibid.

17. Millett and Maslowski, p. 127.

18. Ibid., pp. 127-129.

19. Ibid.

20. Richard Harwell, Lee, p. 330.

21. Ibid.

22. Millett and Maslowski, p. 130.

23. Ibid., p. 127.

24. Maurice, pp. 210-211.

25. Ibid.

26. Harry T. Williams, The History of the American Wars from 1745 to 1918, p. 291.

27. Margaret Sanborn, Robert E. Lee, The Complete Man : 1861-1870, p. 127.

CHAPTER IX

ANALYSIS

Lee the Soldier

Robert E. Lee was undoubtedly one of the most beloved figures in American history. His fame rests on his military achievements, Commanding the Army of Northern Virginia, in the face of overwhelming odds. Robert E. Lee was the epitome of a gallant soldier and distinguished native of Virginia. His image exemplified everything good about a commander; intelligence, self-respect, discipline and courage. Robert E. Lee cared for his soldiers, provided for their welfare, appointed the best officers he had available to command them and led them by his example. He was a unique leader who so loved and cared for his soldiers that "the love and veneration of his men for him was such, that they came to look upon the cause as General Lee's cause, and they fought for it because they loved him. To them he represented cause, country and all."¹

Lee used the principle of morale to increase the fighting spirit of his army. The high morale of his soldiers added to his offensive strength and often proved decisive in the face of overwhelming odds.

Lee's greatest fault was in the overconfidence he placed in his army and its commanders, believing that for them nothing was impossible.² As the army commander, Lee should have maintained a

more centralized control of his forces, directing their actions, at the decisive point on the battlefield. As a senior leader and a commander of troops during the great Civil War, Robert E. Lee, shall be forever linked with his beloved Army of Northern Virginia.

Lee's Tactics and Campaigns

Lee effectively used the principles of offensive, economy of force, surprise and maneuver in his campaign planning and in his tactics. However, his military objectives did not support the political strategy of the Confederacy. In addition Lee failed to use concentration as it pertains to concentrating his artillery to support his infantry assaults and exploitation to destroy his enemy and spread panic amongst the people of the North. Although his tactics closely adhered to the basic principles of war, casualty lists reveal that the Army of Northern Virginia destroyed itself by its use of an offensive strategy, making bold and repeated attacks they could ill afford. Reckless charges in the face of artillery and strong infantry defensive positions resulted in mass slaughter. Confederate forces attacked in 8 of the first 12 major engagements of the war resulting in 97,000 casualties, 20,000 more than their Union opponents.³ The South lost 175,000 soldiers in the first twenty-seven months of combat. More than 80,000 fell in just five battles. At Gettysburg three out of every ten soldiers became casualties.⁴ Lee merely bled his

beloved army to death in the first three years of the war by taking the tactical offensive in nearly seventy percent of the major actions.⁵ In the end, Lee's pursuit of the climactic battle and his obsession to annihilate the Army of the Potomac cost him the very life blood he was so determined to preserve.⁶

Lee's Strategy

From the very start, Lee's military strategy as the Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia did not support the political strategy of his government. Lee was not a great strategist in the true sense of the word, because he was unable to grasp the conditions on which such planning hinged.⁷ As the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee persistently neglected the logistical implications of the western campaign. Lee should have taken a portion of his army to the west, driving back Rosecrans and cutting Grant's line of communications at Vicksburg. He could then have moved against Vicksburg placing Grant between the city's defenders and his army.⁸ The whole West would have been open to Lee. Perhaps his native Virginia was too much a part of his strategy.

His strategy reflected his very character and nature which were aggressive; seeking every opportunity to attack, seize the initiative and force a decision by boldness and enterprise. He believed that the surest way to cause the North to abandon its attempt to impose union would be to seize the seat of the Federal

Government or, at least, to isolate it from the rest of the Union. A feat he was never able to accomplish.⁹ For a belligerent with the limited manpower resources of the Confederacy, Lee's dedication to an offensive strategy was at best questionable. The South only had to be defended to survive; throughout the war, the side that attacked usually suffered the most casualties, both proportionally and absolutely. One of his severest critics, his "Right Arm," Longstreet, once commented, "On the defensive, Lee was absolutely perfect,... but of the art of war, more particularly of that of giving battle, I do not think General Lee was a Master. In science and military learning he was greatly the superior of General Grant or any other commander on either side. But in the art of war I have no doubt that Grant and several others were his equals and on the field his characteristic fault was headlong combativeness."¹⁰

Some have compared Lee to Napoleon, indicating that both had a complete grasp of the fundamental principles of war. Although both men may have had an understanding of these principles only Napoleon was able to adhere to these principles throughout most of his campaigns.¹¹

Robert E. Lee's overall strategy for the defeat of the Union was flawed, and his tactics and campaigns clearly bled the South of its manpower. Robert E. Lee is clearly a man loved by all within his native Virginia and the Confederacy; yet, his overall performance falls short of what is expected of a great captain of history and "Master in the Art of War."

ENDNOTES

1. Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee of Virginia, p. 190.
2. Walter H. Taylor, Four Years with General Lee, p. 196.
3. Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jemison, Attack and Die, p. 9
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War, p. 127.
7. Ibid., pp. 127-130.
8. Ibid.
9. F. Maurice, Robert E. Lee, The Soldier, p. 81.
10. Ibid., p. 272.
11. Freeman, p. 126.

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