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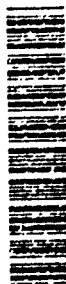
**A COMPARISON OF INITIATIVE  
DURING THE 1864 VIRGINIA  
OVERLAND CAMPAIGN**

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

**MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE**

by

**JEFFREY S. SHADBURN, MAJ, USA**  
B.S. in B.A., John Carroll University,  
University Heights, Ohio, 1977



**91-15641**

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
1991

**91 1112 107**

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1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)		2. REPORT DATE 7 June 1991		3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Masters Thesis, 8-1990 to 6-1991
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE A Comparison of Initiative During the 1864 Virginia Overland Campaign			5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Jeffrey S. Shadburn				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 66027-6900			8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)			10. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
12a. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; distribution is unlimited.			12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE A	
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words) This study is an analysis of the competing initiative displayed between Generals Grant and Lee during Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign in Virginia. It begins with Lincoln's appointing Grant as Lieutenant General and General in Chief of all Union armies on March 9, 1864, and concludes with the failure of Grant's June 18 assault at Petersburg, Virginia. Grant and Lee's campaign intentions are analyzed, their means are compared, and their armies' actions are described and analyzed to determine that Lee displayed greater initiative than Grant. Lee demonstrated superior initiative during the campaign because he forced Grant to deviate from his plans and attack formidable defensive positions, and because he held the final initiative. Each of Grant's flanking movements was an attempt to gain the initiative, followed by the destruction of Lee's army. Each time Grant moved, Lee seized the initiative and barred Grant's progress. Grant came closest to achieving his desired objective when he crossed the James River and attacked Petersburg. The attack failed because Grant's senior commanders failed to sustain the Federal initiative.				
14. SUBJECT TERMS Initiative, 1864 Virginia Overland Campaign, Grant, Lee, Wilderness, Spottsylvania Court House, North Anna River, Cold Harbor, Petersburg			15. NUMBER OF PAGES 213	
			16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UL	

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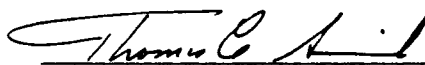
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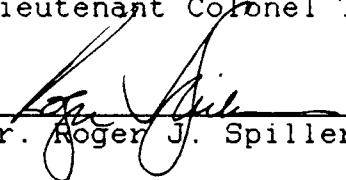
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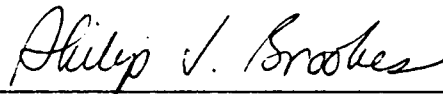
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, Member, Graduate Faculty  
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, Member, Graduate Faculty  
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## ABSTRACT

A COMPARISON OF INITIATIVE DURING THE 1864 VIRGINIA OVERLAND CAMPAIGN by MAJ Jeffrey S. Shadburn. USA. 213 pages.

This study is an analysis of the competing initiative displayed between Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee during Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign in Virginia.

It begins with Lincoln's appointing Grant as Lieutenant General and General in Chief of all Union armies on March 9, 1864, and concludes with the failure of Grant's June 18 assault at Petersburg, Virginia. Grant and Lee's campaign intentions are analyzed, their means are compared, and their armies' actions are described and analyzed to determine that Lee displayed greater initiative than Grant.

Lee demonstrated superior initiative during the campaign because he forced Grant to deviate from his plans and attack formidable defensive positions, and because he held the final initiative. Each of Grant's flanking movements was an attempt to gain the initiative, followed by the destruction of Lee's army. Each time Grant moved, Lee seized the initiative and barred Grant's progress. Grant came closest to achieving his desired objective when he crossed the James River and attacked Petersburg. The attack failed because Grant's senior commanders failed to sustain the Federal initiative.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This study is an analysis of the competing initiative displayed between Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee during Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign in Virginia. The legacies of Generals Robert E. Lee and Ulysses S. Grant record their places as two great generals in U. S. history. Even today, Robert E. Lee is revered throughout the southern United States, and U. S. Grant rode his military record into the White House.

These two generals met continuously on the field of battle for nearly a year. Their initial campaign against each other, beginning in May 1864, exhausted their two armies. The campaign resulted in six pitched battles as each commander maneuvered across the North Virginia landscape. Generally, Grant was the operational attacker, and Lee the defender. Lee's defenses bled Grant's forces as Grant attacked repeatedly for over seven weeks. Yet, Grant's campaign ended with Lee's army trapped in a siege at Petersburg. Lee would never escape the siege. The campaign



itself presents many opportunities for the modern officer to study initiative in both offensive and defensive combat.

Grant and Lee each used virtually every means they had against the other. Even so, the campaign ended in a stalemate. Grant's powerful army did not overcome Lee's masterful defensive warfare. At the same time, Lee's bludgeoning of Grant's attacks failed to secure victory. This leaves unanswered the question, did Grant or Lee display the greater initiative during Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign?

Determining who demonstrated greater initiative between two opposing generals requires an understanding of what initiative is. The U. S. Army's current AirLand Battle doctrine "is based on securing or retaining the initiative and exercising it aggressively to accomplish the mission."<sup>1</sup> Field Manual 100-5--Operations describes the U.S. Army's AirLand Battle doctrine. Its theoretical discussion of initiative in battle will serve to establish a framework for understanding initiative.

Initiative means setting or changing the terms of battle by action. It implies an offensive spirit . . . initiative requires a constant effort to force the enemy to conform to our operational purpose and tempo while retaining our own freedom of action.<sup>2</sup>

It is important to understand where initiative fits into military strategy before understanding initiative's necessity. General Maxwell D. Taylor identified strategy as

a combination of ends, ways, and means. The ends are the "objectives towards which one strives." The ways are the "courses of action." The means are the "instruments by which some end can be achieved."<sup>3</sup> This definition of strategy applies to the concept of military strategy.

A means to a political end can be stated as a military objective.<sup>4</sup> This military objective is translated as an end in military strategy. The means are the available military forces which can be employed to attain military objectives. A commander is assigned military forces to achieve a military objective. The commander specifies how the forces will be used to achieve the assigned objective. The method chosen by the commander is a course of action, or way, and must "be attainable with the means at hand."<sup>5</sup>

Intent establishes how forces (the means) are applied (the way) to gain an objective (the end). The most effective and decisive way to achieve a military objective is through maintaining the initiative.<sup>6</sup> The commander has the initiative when he uses action to combine the means and ways to set or change the terms of battle in to achieving the ends.

Going back to the definition of initiative: "It implies an offensive spirit."<sup>7</sup> Field Manual 100-5 further states that "the offensive is the decisive form of war - the commander's . . . imposing his will upon the enemy. . . . Even in the defense itself, seizure and retention of the

initiative will require offensive operations."<sup>8</sup> The initiative forces the enemy "to react rather than to act."<sup>9</sup> When the attacker has the initiative, the enemy is unable to recover from the attack's initial shock.<sup>10</sup> For the defender, "initiative implies quickly turning the tables on the attacker," and negates

the attacker's initial advantage of choice of time and place of attack. . . . Once the attacker is committed to a particular course of action the defender must frustrate it, then preempt any adjustments. This will cause the initiative to pass to the defender.<sup>11</sup>

The defender gaining the initiative creates opportunities to shift to offensive action.<sup>12</sup>

This study concerning Grant and Lee has several limitations. The results only apply to Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign. Identifying each commander's intent is a subjective evaluation. Even when a commander states his intent after the fact, it is only an indicator of his real intent.

The campaign clearly started when the Army of the Potomac left its Culpeper Court House winter quarters and crossed the Rapidan River on May 4. Identifying the end of the campaign is not as easy. Some historians mark the end as June 3, after Grant's last major assault at Cold Harbor. These historians identify Grant's subsequent shift south of the James River as the beginning of the Petersburg siege. I chose to identify the end of the campaign as June 18,

because this was the end of Grant's last attempt to avoid assaulting Lee's army.

This thesis does not try to accomplish several things. It does not determine who was a superior commander during the campaign. It does not describe the detailed tactical movements out of the immediate control of army commanders. It does not analyze the development of national policies.

This thesis analyzes actions contributing to achieving, changing, or interfering with the campaign goals. It compares initiative at the critical decision points, and any campaign goal changes. It also identifies actions or decisions to maintain, establish, or deny initiative. Lastly, the thesis identifies the initiative displayed by each commander, and determines who demonstrated superior initiative.

Chapter Two identifies the campaign's historical setting. It compares Union and Confederate plans to win the war. It describes the military situation along the southern coast, in the Trans-Mississippi, east of the Mississippi River to the Appalachian Mountains, and east of the Appalachian Mountains. Grant's appointment to lieutenant general is described. Military strategies are described and analyzed. The military situation in Virginia is then described.

Chapter Three identifies the means at Grant and Lee's disposal. It identifies certain personality traits, scopes of authority, and the fighting forces under their control. The chapter also discusses the relationships between the commanders, their superiors and key subordinates. Finally, their political and logistical supports are described.

Chapter Four is an analysis of each of the general's intentions. It begins with an identification of the operational war aims, and a description of the campaign plans to achieve those war aims. The campaign alternatives are also identified.

Chapters Five through Nine look at each major battle during the campaign, and compares the initiative displayed by Grant and Lee. The battles described are the Wilderness, Spottsylvania Court House, North Anna, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg. Each chapter reviews the appropriate campaign objectives, the means available, the chosen courses of action, and the initial intentions. The appropriate phase of the campaign is then described and analyzed. The initiative displayed by each commander is then compared.

Chapter Ten describes Grant and Lee's ability to continue fighting after the Battle of Petersburg. It then compares their accomplishments against their intentions. Lastly, it answers the thesis question of whether Grant or

Lee demonstrated superior initiative as compared to each other.

#### END NOTES

1. U.S. Army, FM 100-5, Field Manual--Operations (Washington: United States Department of Defense, 1986), 14.
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12. Ibid., 131.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE WAR IN 1864

In 1863, Federal victories at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga generated waves of northern optimism.<sup>1</sup> To many, the end of the war was in sight. Three long years of terrible violence were over, and expectations for peace were high.

Confederate leaders declared their resolve to die before surrendering southern independence. But they couldn't agree among themselves on how to prevent Federal victory. Worse, they divided over who to blame for Confederate defeats. The "southern economy was a shambles, civilians were hungry and disaffected, Confederate armies lacked supplies, and peace movements had sprung up in North Carolina and elsewhere."<sup>2</sup>

The northern quest for union required conquering the Confederacy. This quest was hindered by the lack of northern unity on how, or even if, to prosecute the war. President Lincoln held together a fragile political coalition. This coalition maintained enough popular support



to legitimize his war leadership. The north needed victory quickly before discontent spread.<sup>3</sup>

President Davis understood from the beginning that the Confederacy only needed to survive until northern public sentiment demanded the war's end.<sup>4</sup> The war, then, became a war of public resolve as much as military might.

But in order to 'win' on their terms, the Confederates, like Americans in the Revolution or North Vietnam in the 1960s, needed only to hold out long enough and inflict sufficient punishment on the enemy to force him to give up his effort to annihilate resistance. This was a strategy of political and psychological attrition - of wearing down the other side's will to continue fighting.<sup>5</sup>

A test, perhaps the final test, of northern will was scheduled for November 1864. During the 1860 Presidential election, Lincoln won with only a plurality of the popular vote. He could easily lose the 1864 election, if he lost too much popular support. The Confederacy still hoped for "survival if the Democrats could win the Presidential election of 1864."<sup>6</sup>

Confederate strategy sought to influence the outcome of that election. On previous occasions when the war had gone badly for the North, the Copperhead peace faction of the Democratic party had grown in strength with demands for an armistice and peace negotiations - which would have amounted to southern victory. Confederate's had cultivated this antiwar faction in the North with some success. In 1864 they sought ways to promote a Democratic victory in the Union election. Southern military leaders planned their operations around the objective of holding out until November.<sup>7</sup>

Spring of 1864 dawned with the North sensing victory. All major southern ports were closed except

Mobile, Charleston, and Wilmington.<sup>8</sup> Ports and islands were occupied in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and at the Rio Grande's mouth to support the blockade.<sup>9</sup>

West of the Mississippi River, Union forces controlled everything north of the Arkansas River.<sup>10</sup> Major General Nathaniel P. Banks was in Louisiana with 30,000 men. His objective was "to seize cotton and expand the area of Union political control in the state." Banks was opposed by 15,000 men under General Richard Taylor.<sup>11</sup>

Union forces guarded the Mississippi River from St. Louis to its mouth, as well as a few points east of the River in Louisiana. Federal troops controlled all the land east of the Mississippi River and north of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad as far east as Chattanooga. The Union line of control then ran along the Tennessee and Holston Rivers. Also, West Virginia was under Union control.<sup>12</sup>

Lincoln realized Grant translated political objectives into military strategy after his successes at Vicksburg and Chattanooga.<sup>13</sup> Congress revived the rank of lieutenant general and Halleck saw Grant appointed with the rank.<sup>14</sup> This made Grant the senior officer in the U. S. Army. On March 9, 1864, Halleck recommended to Lincoln that Grant be made General in Chief of the Army. Lincoln complied with the request.<sup>15</sup> Grant assumed command of the United States Army on March 15.<sup>16</sup>

Lincoln appointed Halleck as Chief of Staff under the direction of the Secretary of War and the Grant commanding.<sup>17</sup> Even with the change in title from General in Chief to Chief of Staff, Halleck kept his same Washington residence, and he performed the same duties.<sup>18</sup> Grant let Halleck handle the administration of the armies while Grant directed their operations.

Grant met with Lincoln in Washington and then proceeded to Major General George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac headquarters at Culpeper Court House, Virginia. He arrived on March 24.<sup>19</sup> In the eastern theater, Union forces controlled all of Virginia north of the Rapidan River and east of the Blue Ridge Mountains.<sup>20</sup> Grant had to develop a strategy that combined military actions in the Eastern, Western, and Trans-Mississippi theaters into northern victory.

Southern strategy was defensive. Davis considered his strategic situation similar to George Washington's: keep military forces concentrated and in being, and wear down the enemy's will to fight. Washington did not have to retain territory. The enemy could occupy territory as long as friendly forces were kept together and intact. Unlike Washington, Davis had to disperse his forces along the coast. Confederate territorial integrity had to be maintained, with ports kept open. This dispersion led to weakened forward defenses.<sup>21</sup>

This unhappy prospect generated a strategic design different from the one President Davis would have preferred, a conviction among some Confederate military leaders that the Confederacy could not afford an essentially passive defense such as George Washington had employed. The only way to prevent the Union from applying fatal pressures somewhere along the Confederate circumference. . . was to seize the initiative. The Confederacy ought to adopt an offensive-defensive strategy, permitting the South and not the Union to determine in which places the critical military confrontations should occur. Then the Confederacy might muster adequate numbers and resources at the critical places despite overall inferiority of strength. The principal advocate of the offensive-defensive strategy of capturing the initiative came to be General Robert Edward Lee. The great question which an offensive-defensive strategy in turn posed was that of its cost in manpower; it was Washington's defensive passivity which had made it possible for him to conserve his limited numbers of men.<sup>22</sup>

Northern military leaders espoused two distinct civil war strategies. They were to occupy places, and to destroy armies. McClellan, Sherman, and Halleck were place takers.<sup>23</sup> Grant and Lincoln wanted to destroy armies. Either way, the Union was seen as operating on exterior lines when the Confederacy was viewed as a single war front. McClellan and Halleck were firm practitioners of war according to Jomini. They, and other Union generals, did not believe in fighting a war on exterior lines. They possibly came to regard several theaters as independent fronts. Within a front, it was hoped to gain an advantage on interior lines.<sup>24</sup>

This preoccupation with interior lines "contributed to the willingness of Union officers to concentrate upon a march to Richmond; for if a Union force advanced from

Washington against Confederate defenders scattered through Virginia from the Shenandoah Valley through Mannassas Junction to Hampton Roads, the Washington forces appeared to possess the interior lines."<sup>25</sup> In the west, the ability to operate on interior lines was less clear.

As of March 8, Lee thought the Union main effort would be in the west, therefore Confederate strength needed to be concentrated there.<sup>26</sup> Lee instructed Longstreet, detached from Lee, to meet with General Joe Johnston to discuss the feasibility of Johnston and Longstreet uniting in middle Tennessee. The united force could "cut the armies at Chattanooga and Knoxville in two, and draw them from those points, where either portion could be struck at in succession as opportunity offered."<sup>27</sup>

While Longstreet threatened offensive movements into Tennessee, Nathan Bedford Forrest continued raiding into Tennessee and Kentucky. These raids became serious enough that Grant later ordered Sherman to get Forrest.<sup>28</sup> After the April 12 massacre at Fort Pillow, Grant directed Sherman to detach forces, if necessary, to drive Forrest out of Tennessee.<sup>29</sup>

Grant took control of the eastern forces after arriving at Culpeper Court House. For the first time since before McClellan's Peninsula campaign, all Union forces in Virginia had the same military commander. These forces were individually commanded by Sigel, Meade, Butler, and Burnside. They "had an unconscious, unmitigated fear of

Lee." Grant came from the west where the Union generals were contemptuous of their opponents.<sup>30</sup> It remained to be seen if Grant could overcome the eastern general's fear of Lee.

When given General in Chief status, Halleck decided to concentrate McClellan's and Pope's armies on a Jominian direct approach instead of McClellan's peninsular indirect approach.<sup>31</sup> This direct approach would force the Confederates to battle, threaten Richmond, and protect Washington. McClellan wanted to work around enemy flanks, forcing their retreat without a major battle. Lincoln accepted Halleck's views, and rejected McClellan's.<sup>32</sup> Generals McClellan, Burnside, and Hooker were all willing to abandon Washington. To attack Richmond, the generals "realized that the war in the East must be one of concentration against Lee's army and that the Confederate army, not Richmond, was the true objective." Halleck and Lincoln overruled each in turn.<sup>33</sup> The current Army of the Potomac commander, Meade, was incapable of forming his own plans, and Halleck would not plan a campaign for him.<sup>34</sup> Grant's appointment to overall command forever changed the timidity of the direct approach between Washington and Richmond.

Grant was confident that the Army of the Potomac could defeat Lee's army. He resented the praise heaped on Lee, and believed the adoration was meant to raise

confidence in southern troops and intimidate the enemy.

According to Grant, the Army of the Potomac was superior to the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>35</sup> According to James

McPherson:

To win the war, Union armies had to conquer and occupy southern territory, overwhelm or break up Confederate armies, destroy the economic and political infrastructure that supported the war effort, and suppress the southern will to resist. . . . Grant controlled the Union armies that had the power to destroy the Confederacy. Grant's powerful forces in Virginia and Georgia stood poised for invasion that they confidently expected to crush Confederate resistance well before the presidential election in November.<sup>36</sup>

#### END NOTES

1. James M. McPherson, "War and Politics," in The Civil War: An Illustrated History, auth. Geoffrey C. Ward (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 350.
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3. Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1973), 128.
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21. Weigley, 96.
22. Ibid., 97.
23. Ambrose, 46.
24. Weigley, 95.
25. Ibid.
26. Jones, 327.
27. Ibid., 328.
28. Grant, Papers, 229.
29. Ibid., 284. McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 748.
30. Ambrose, 149.
31. Ambrose, 64.
32. Ambrose, 86.
33. Ambrose, 159.
34. Ambrose, 147.
35. Grant, Memoirs, 598.
36. McPherson, "War and Politics," 350.

## CHAPTER THREE

### GRANT AND LEE'S MEANS

Grant planned to conquer the South with simultaneous campaigns by all possible Union forces. Federal commanders tried the same thing in 1862 and 1863, but they failed to coordinate the efforts of the scattered Federal field armies. Grant would succeed in coordinating the actions of most Federal forces.

Grant understood the means available to wage a new phase of the Civil War. The major means at Grant's disposal were the force of his personality; his authority as General in Chief; the fighting forces under his control; his superior and subordinate leaders; and his political and logistical support.

Grant's military and civilian careers before the war were failures, and when the war began, he was a clerk for his father in the Galena, Illinois family store.<sup>1</sup> Grant tried answering Lincoln's first call for volunteers in 1861. His military skills were not wanted, until the governor of Illinois, Richmond Yates, appointed him to command the 21st

Illinois Infantry, nearly four months after the call.<sup>2</sup> His first military expedition with the 21st Illinois was an attack against a Confederate encampment, commanded by Colonel Thomas Harris.<sup>3</sup> In Grant's words:

As we approached the brow of the hill from which it was expected we could see Harris' camp, and possibly find his men ready formed to meet us, my heart kept getting higher and higher until it felt to me as though it was in my throat. I would have given anything then to have been back in Illinois, but I had not the moral courage to halt and consider what to do; I kept right on. . . . The place where Harris had been encamped a few days before was still there and the marks of a recent encampment were plainly visible, but the troops were gone. . . . It occurred to me at once that Harris had been as much afraid of me as I had been of him. . . . From that event to the close of the war, I never experienced trepidation upon confronting an enemy, though I always felt more or less anxiety. I never forgot that he had as much reason to fear my forces as I had his. The lesson was valuable.<sup>4</sup>

To this point, the development of three critical aspects of Grant's personality are clear: his ability to cope with failure, his persistency, and his mastery of his fears.

Grant was involved in four major military campaigns before his promotion to lieutenant general. They were the Forts Henry and Donelson campaign, Pittsburg Landing or Shiloh, the Vicksburg campaign, and the Chattanooga siege. All four faced disaster before Grant turned apparent failure into success. According to J. F. C. Fuller:

at Donelson he was at his best when things were at their worst. It was not so much that he could think more clearly when chaos surrounded him, but that he could think just as clearly as when it did not. When others were at their wits' ends Grant was perfectly calm and collected. No General can have

ever beheld a more depressing scene than faced him at Shiloh. When he hobbled on crutches off his ship . . . he was met by a terrifying spectacle . . . All appeared lost, but to Grant no battle was ever lost. . . . Once Grant took control it was the enemy who was lost, because confusion had no terror for him.<sup>5</sup>

Failure, to Grant, was an event recognized by others, but not himself. He used adversity to harden his will and direct his efforts toward moving forward. Battlefield victory was merely an event. It was more important to be always moving forward without looking backward. Success came to the one who refused to quit.

Grant analyzed his fears, and mastered them. "He learned . . . that he who fears the least holds the initiative, and that he who can make his adversary fear more than he does himself has already defeated him morally."<sup>6</sup> Grant's great moral and physical courage stemmed from his ability to understand his own fears, know his opponent suffered from the same fears, and then use the knowledge to increase his strength and conviction.

Grant's new command consisted of seventeen distinct commands. They were Sherman's, previously Grant's, Military Division of the Mississippi; the Army of the Potomac; and fifteen separate military departments. All acted independently. This gave the Confederacy opportunities to deplete one command to reinforce one pressed. Grant's authority could force coordination among the distinct commands.<sup>7</sup>

As of March 15, Grant had already decided to stay in the field and intended to "move from one army to another so as to be where my presence seems to be most required."<sup>8</sup> Nine days later, he arrived at the Army of the Potomac's headquarters for the first time,<sup>9</sup> and on March 26, decided to make his headquarters at Culpeper Court House. His headquarters was now located with the Army of the Potomac.<sup>10</sup>

Grant administered his command of the armies through his staff. His headquarters' staff included a chief of staff, Brigadier General Rawlins, three assistant adjutant generals, an assistant inspector general, an assistant quartermaster, two secretaries, and six aide de camps.<sup>11</sup> Most of the staff was with Grant in the West, and they knew each other well. They would function efficiently from the start.

Major General Halleck remained in Washington as the Army chief of staff. Stanton agreed to Grant's request for their communications to pass through Halleck unless Grant wanted to communicate specifically with Stanton.<sup>12</sup> Grant was now ready to control all his forces without direct political oversight and direction. His authority enabled him to structure and equip each command to complement each other in simultaneous offensives and economy of force operations.

How did Grant structure his fighting forces? His primary striking forces were organized into three groupings.

They were the Military Division of the West, the Department of the Gulf, and the forces in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Grant increased the strength of each of these forces.

Officers and soldiers on furlough, of whom there were many thousands, were ordered to their proper commands; concentration was the order of the day, and to have it accomplished in time to advance at the earliest moment the roads would permit was the problem.<sup>13</sup>

Grant advised Halleck to request state governors, and commanders of the northern most departments to send "all recruits, new organizations, and all the old troops it is possible to spare from their Dept. with the greatest dispatch."<sup>14</sup> The response was gratifying. On April 21, General Canby reported he was forwarding 2,818 men from New York.<sup>15</sup> The governors of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa offered 100,000 fully equipped men within twenty days from notification, for three months.<sup>16</sup> Not all commanders cooperated. Grant instructed Rosecrans, in St. Louis, on March 26 to ready at least 5,000 infantry for duty elsewhere so that the Union could field as large a force as possible during the coming campaign.<sup>17</sup> Rosecrans refused Grant's order on April 5.<sup>18</sup>

Grant's search for more infantry extended beyond normal transfer and reinforcement. At least one prisoner of war camp was inspected to reduce the number of guards. This was one method used to increase regimental strengths.<sup>19</sup> Another new method was the reorganization of heavy artillery from the Washington defenses into infantry regiments. They

were then forwarded to the Army of the Potomac.<sup>20</sup> Grant had a reverse problem with artillery. Grant wrote:

This arm was in such abundance that the fourth of it could not be used to advantage in such a country as we were destined to pass through. The surplus was much in the way, taking up as it did so much of the narrow and bad roads, and consuming so much of the forage and other stores brought up by the trains.<sup>21</sup>

Grant sent back over one hundred artillery pieces after the Battle of Spottsylvania Court House because he had more than he could use.<sup>22</sup> Sherman also reduced his artillery.<sup>23</sup>

Sherman's Military Division of the Mississippi was divided into four departments. It included all troops west of the Allegheny Mountains and north of Natchez, Mississippi, with a large movable force at Chattanooga.<sup>24</sup> This force was organized into three armies and totaled about 112,000 men.<sup>25</sup> Sherman's command also included a corps attached to Banks for his Red River expedition. Grant wired Sherman not to expect that corps back.<sup>26</sup> Grant's primary front of operations extended from the Army of the James on the Peninsula to Memphis, Tennessee. His center was the Army of the Potomac.<sup>27</sup> The Army of the Potomac numbered about 93,000 men.<sup>28</sup>

On March 15, Grant ordered Burnside's 9th Corps to move from Knoxville, Tennessee to Annapolis, Maryland.<sup>29</sup> It had about 25,000 men.<sup>30</sup> Grant intended the 9th Corps to be a reinforcement or to act in support of the Army of the Potomac. On April 16, Grant ordered Halleck to send all the troops that could be spared to Burnside.<sup>31</sup>

The Army of the James, commanded by Major General Benjamin Butler was at Fort Monroe. Grant considered all the troops south of Butler "as a force in rear of the enemy." They were only strong enough to hold their position. Grant depleted these forces, and abandoned some positions altogether. Grant wrote that he added 10,000 men to the Army of the James from South Carolina alone.<sup>32</sup> Butler was ready to start the spring campaign with 36,000 men.<sup>33</sup> The forces left at Charleston could not accomplish anything meaningful except protect themselves.<sup>34</sup>

Major General Franz Sigel had an independent command in the Shenandoah Valley and West Virginia with 2,000 infantry and 5,000 cavalry.<sup>35</sup> Grant planned to reinforce Sigel with four infantry regiments from Washington.<sup>36</sup>

When Grant took command, Banks was committed to his Red River expedition. Grant said: "It seemed best that he should take Shreveport on the Red River, and turn over the line of that river to General Steele, who commanded in Arkansas." Grant expected Banks to end the campaign, return Smith's corps to Sherman, and get back to New Orleans in time for the spring campaign. This would provide 40,000 additional troops for the concentric movement.<sup>37</sup>

By the end of April, Grant's striking forces were organized as follows:



<u>Commander</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Number</u>
Meade	North Virginia	93,000
Burnside	Maryland	25,000
Sigel	Shenandoah	17,000
Butler	Fort Monroe	36,000
Sherman	Chattanooga	112,000
Banks	Louisiana	<u>40,000</u>
Total		323,000

This massive array of forces was not new. What was new was the General in Chief's relationship with the Commander in Chief, President Lincoln. According to Jomini, when a commander takes the field, he should agree with the head of state upon the character of the war.<sup>38</sup> Grant had Lincoln's support as long as Grant took responsibility and acted. McClellan and Halleck had the same confidence from Lincoln initially, but were found wanting. Grant would act with all the forces under his command. Grant recognized Lincoln's authority, and Lincoln exercised that authority through appointments of military commands.

Grant anticipated problems with the Army of the Potomac. Grant originally planned to exercise his new command from the West. Once he saw the situation in Washington, he realized he belonged in the East. He could not rely on anyone to resist the pressure which would occur to scrap his plans and follow someone else's.<sup>39</sup> Grant's

decision to stay in the East was an easy one because neither Halleck or Meade planned campaigns for the Army of the Potomac. Grant locating his headquarters near Meade's presented some problems. He stated that he found Meade's position as a subordinate embarrassing, because of his constant presence.

I tried to make General Meade's position as nearly as possible what it would have been if I had been in Washington or any other place away from his command. I therefore gave all orders for the movements of the Army of the Potomac to Meade to have them executed.<sup>40</sup>

Grant tried to keep his headquarters near Meade's so that Grant could avoid giving Meade's subordinates direct orders. Occasionally, their headquarters were separated and Grant would issue direct orders to Meade's subordinates.<sup>41</sup> Before Grant's promotion, Meade reorganized the Army of the Potomac from five corps to three. Meade also offered to step down from command in place of Sherman or any other officer Grant preferred. Grant had no intention of replacing Meade. Grant wrote:

This incident gave me a more favorable opinion of Meade than did his great victory at Gettysburg the July before. It is men who wait to be selected, and not those who seek, from whom we may always expect the most efficient service.<sup>42</sup>

Grant kept Meade in command of the reorganized Army of the Potomac. Grant's proximity to Meade caused Grant to be intimately involved in Meade's command. Meade could be counted on to not make tactical mistakes leading to decisive defeat, but he could also be counted on to not be singularly

aggressive. General Phil Sheridan was a division commander in Thomas' Army of the Cumberland. Sheridan was hand picked by Grant to replace General Alfred Pleasanton as commander of Meade's cavalry corps. Grant told Lincoln that Sheridan was "the very best man in the army for that command."<sup>43</sup>

Burnside was an effective independent commander of corps sized units.<sup>44</sup> He proved it during his 1862 operations in North Carolina, and again at Knoxville against Longstreet. Grant trusted Burnside to operate independently of the other armies. In fact, Burnside and the War Department both thought the 9th Corps was intended for such an expedition.<sup>45</sup> Grant said little of General Sigel in the Valley. He did seem to initially trust his judgment. Grant changed his plans regarding Sigel's command according to Sigel's advice.<sup>46</sup> Later, Grant would be disappointed with the results.

Grant visited General Butler, and asked for Butler's views. Grant found that Butler's views corresponded with his own.<sup>47</sup> He apparently thought Butler would be an effective commander for the Army of the James, and only later became convinced that Butler was inept.

The Army of the Potomac's three infantry corps commanders were Major Generals G. K. Warren, W. S. Hancock, and John Sedgwick. General Warren was the savior of Little Round Top on July 2, 1863 at Gettysburg. Grant liked Warren. He thought Warren "a man of fine intelligence, great earnestness, quick perception, and could make his

dispositions as quickly as any officer."<sup>48</sup> Grant expected Warren to be the Army of the Potomac's best commander, but became disappointed. Grant was impressed with Hancock. He considered Hancock "the most conspicuous figure of all the general officers who did not exercise a separate command." Grant was complimentary of Hancock as a military leader.

His genial disposition made him friends, and his personal courage and his presence with his command in the thickest of the fight won for him the confidence of troops serving under him.<sup>49</sup>

Grant learned to count on Hancock's 2d Corps during the campaign. He thought Sedgwick "brave and conscientious, . . . willing to do any amount of battling, but always wanted someone else to direct." This observation was based on knowing Sedgwick in Mexico. Sedgwick would be killed before Grant "had an opportunity of forming an estimate of his qualifications as a soldier from personal observation."<sup>50</sup>

Before Spottsylvania Court House, Grant was not sure of the infantry corps commanders. At the time, he considered Warren to be the best, and Meade's successor if needed. This may have influenced his decision to lead the campaign's first movement with Warren.<sup>51</sup> Grant's primary field force for operations in Virginia consisted of the Army of the Potomac and Burnside's 9th Corps. Burnside was organized separately from the Army of the Potomac until later, but Grant integrated it with Meade's army. The organization constituted an order of battle. It was not a

concrete, won't change, organization. An order of battle is an arrangement of troops indicating an intention to execute a certain maneuver.<sup>52</sup> Grant and Meade moved divisions among the different corps as the situation required. The two forces were organized as follows:<sup>53</sup>

#### ARMY OF THE POTOMAC

Major General George Gordon Meade

Major General W. S. Hancock, 2d Corps

Brigadier General Francis C. Barlow, 1st Division

Brigadier General John Gibbon, 2d Division

Major General David B. Birney, 3d Division

Brigadier General Gershom Mott, 4th Division

Major General G. K. Warren, 5th Corps

Brigadier General Charles Griffen, 1st Division

Brigadier General John C. Robinson, 2d Division

Brigadier General Samuel W. Crawford, 3d Division

Brigadier General James S. Wadsworth, 4th Division

Major General John Sedgwick, 6th Corps

Brigadier General H. G. Wright, 1st Division

Brigadier General George W. Getty, 2d Division

Brigadier General James B. Ricketts, 3d Division

Major General P. H. Sheridan, Cavalry Corps

Brigadier General A. T. A. Torbert, 1st Division

Brigadier General D. McM. Gregg, 2d Division

Brigadier General J. H. Wilson, 3d Division

Brigadier General Henry J. Hunt, Artillery

## NINTH CORPS

Major General A. E. Burnside

Brigadier General T. G. Stevenson, 1st Division

Brigadier General Robert B. Potter, 2d Division

Brigadier General Orlando B. Willcox, 3d Division

Brigadier General Edward Ferrero, 4th Division

The last critical subordinate to identify is Major General Henry W. Halleck. Halleck was once Grant's commander, and campaigned for Grant's appointment to lieutenant general. Yet, Grant replaced Halleck as commander in chief. A post Halleck gained because of his intellectual stature in the military community. Dennis Hart Mahan was the major West Point influence on Halleck.<sup>54</sup> Halleck read and supported the writings of Jomini. "When he made his own contribution to the 'art of war,' Halleck changed none of Mahan's and Jomini's dogmas."<sup>55</sup> His major contribution was his Elements of Military Art and Science, used at West Point as a text.<sup>56</sup> When the war started, he "never doubted that the war would be a limited one, fought along the lines that he had so carefully absorbed from Jomini."<sup>57</sup> Halleck's teachings were held in high regard. Grant said of Halleck: "He is a man of gigantic intellect and well studied in the profession of arms."<sup>58</sup> In April, 1864, Sherman wrote to Halleck:

You possess a knowledge . . . of the principles of war far beyond that of any other officer in our service. . . . Stand by us and encourage us by your

counsels and advice. . . I know Grant esteems you,  
and I assure you I do"<sup>59</sup>

The casual observer would be surprised to find a strong bond between Grant and Halleck. Early war years were difficult on their relationship. Halleck even removed Grant from command of the Army of the Cumberland after Fort Donelson.<sup>60</sup> Grant regained his command after the new commander died.<sup>61</sup> Halleck then made Grant's movements the most important in the West until Vicksburg's fall on July 4, 1863.

Halleck's assistance in Washington allowed Grant to stay in the field. As chief of staff, orders and reports between Grant and other field commanders were relayed through Halleck.<sup>62</sup> This partnership used Halleck's administrative strength to counterbalance Grant's administrative weakness. Halleck kept the political Washington atmosphere from interfering with Grant's military operations. Halleck learned to comprehend Lincoln's thought processes. He assumed "the invaluable position of liaison between Lincoln and his generals." He passed on Lincoln's expectations to Grant.<sup>63</sup> Lincoln expected Grant to win the war as quickly as possible. This could be done in the East with a war of concentration against Lee's army.<sup>64</sup> As long as Grant moved against Lee's army, and kept pressure on him, there would be no political interference. Conversely, if he became cautious as predecessors did, Lincoln would again search for a new general.

Grant's forces were logistically sophisticated for the day. The Army of the Potomac had an advanced communications organization. The telegraph and signal corps maintained communications down to each division whenever the army moved.<sup>65</sup> The chief quartermaster general, Rufus Ingalls, marked each wagon to identify corps affiliation and contents. Empty wagons returned to base for identical loads and yielded right of way to full wagons. Full wagons were parked near brigades they belonged to. The system cut down the train consuming forage because "they consumed their's at the depots."<sup>66</sup> Grant also had the entrenching tools available to make his lines stronger than Lee's everywhere during the campaign.<sup>67</sup>

Grant did have some logistical problems. A major one was manpower. He estimated at least half his main field armies were doing garrison duty, occupation duty, or otherwise unavailable to the field armies.<sup>68</sup> Russell F. Weigley wrote:

the northern reservoir of manpower was not inexhaustible, even apart from the moral consideration that excessive losses in battle might destroy the relatively fragile Northern will to continue the war. With that moral consideration added to the physical ones, the Northern generals faced perplexing problems in waging an offensive war of conquest, in pursuit of rapid victory, without suffering casualties so severe that they would destroy the very resolution which the quest for rapidity of conquest was supposed to sustain.<sup>69</sup>

Not only could manpower become a problem, horses were in short supply. As of mid April, Halleck was keeping cavalry regiments dismounted to send every available horse



to the Army of the Potomac.<sup>70</sup> Other department's horse requisitions remained unfilled. Grant responded to the problem by suggesting Stanton authorize department commanders to convert 40 per cent of their cavalry into infantry.<sup>71</sup> The North had other large logistics problems. The mass armies required large stockpiles of supplies. Northern armies maintained higher living standards to preserve army and home morale. Operations in enemy territory required careful management of lines of communications. While railroads helped alleviate supply problems, they also presented a vulnerability.<sup>72</sup>

Grant had powerful means at his disposal to end the war. His dogged determination and supreme military authority were suited to lead the Union's mass armies. Grant was confident in most of his subordinates and had Lincoln's complete confidence. Banks and Butler were the only subordinates who would have major detrimental impact on the coordinated campaigns. These powerful forces had adequate support, but logistical support and the political atmosphere required constant attention.

The Army of Northern Virginia was battle hardened and confident. It was unbeatable on southern soil since Lee took command in June 1862. Much of their confidence was owed to one man, General Robert E. Lee. The Army of Northern Virginia protected Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy. This army outmaneuvered Union armies for three

years along the short stretch from Washington to Richmond. Its exploits captured attention throughout the North and the South. It represented southern hope for independence.

Lee became the embodiment of the Southern ideal. He was a good man with no personal ambition, and very generous. He had a polite sense of humor, and was extremely modest. Lee stood out from all other leaders because of his virtues.<sup>73</sup> J. F. C. Fuller wrote of Lee: "He stood so apart from his men, that in their eyes he became the cause for which they were fighting."<sup>74</sup> In his biography of Lee, the Reverend J. Williams Jones wrote:

But modest humility, simplicity, and gentleness were most conspicuous in his daily life. Scrupulously neat in his dress, he was always simply attired and carefully avoided the gold lace and feathers in which others delighted. During the war he usually wore a suit of gray, without ornaments, and with no insignia of rank, save three stars on his collar, which every Confederate colonel was entitled to wear. But he always kept a handsomer (though equally simple) uniform which he wore upon occasions of ceremony.<sup>75</sup>

On May 31, General Joseph Johnston was wounded leading the Confederate army at Seven Pines. On June 1, Lee took command and immediately named his army The Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>76</sup> Lee summoned General Thomas Jackson and his foot cavalry from the Valley, and on June 26 massed the Army of Northern Virginia on McClellan's right flank and began the Seven Days battles.<sup>77</sup> Lee and his army began their rapid climb to fame. For the next two years, he stymied every Northern attempt to penetrate Virginia's interior.

Lee's men revered their commander. His son, Robert,

described the army's devotion through the Overland Campaign:

It never occurred to me, and to thousands and thousands like me, that there was any occasion for uneasiness. We firmly believed that 'Marse Robert,' as his soldiers lovingly called him, would bring us out of this trouble all right.<sup>78</sup>

Captain Lee, summarized the mutual love, respect, and esteem between Lee and his men.

The feeling for him was one of love, not of awe or dread. They could approach him with the assurance that they would be received with kindness and consideration, and that any just complaint would receive proper attention. There was no condescension in his manner, but he was ever simple, kind, sympathetic, and his men, while having unfounded faith in him as a leader, almost worshiped him as a man. These relations of affection and mutual confidence between the army and its commander had much to do with the undaunted bravery displayed by the men, and bore a due share in the many victories they gained.<sup>79</sup>

Lee's men saw the cause as Lee's cause. He represented "their cause, country, and all."<sup>80</sup> Lee knew how to motivate his men. There are frequent accounts of General Lee preparing to lead charges or getting forward, in danger, with his men. The troopers then called for him to go more to the rear and they would do all he asked. They fought because they loved him. General Long analyzed this technique.

It was under such circumstances as this that General Lee, by his readiness to share their dangers, endeared himself to his men. The assertion has been made, however, that he exposed himself purposely, courting death through sheer despair of success. This idea is entirely unfounded. On the occasions mentioned, his army was in no more serious danger than it had been twenty times before. His

presence and action were necessary to stimulate the men to greater deeds of valor.<sup>81</sup>

As commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee's authority extended to that army, and to Confederate forces in the Shenandoah Valley. His command did not include forces in or south of Richmond. Lee coordinated his actions with other forces through General Braxton Bragg and the War Department. General Charles Venable, one time member of Lee's staff, said of the situation:

This marred greatly the unity, secrecy, and celerity of action so absolutely essential to success. . . . he [Lee] considered this separation of commands, and the consequent circuitous mode of communication with its uncertain results, a very grave matter.<sup>82</sup>

General Lee recommended to President Davis, on April 15, that Davis redistribute his field forces against the Union major threats. Lee suggested reinforcing Johnston's Army of the Tennessee from Mobile. He stated General Beauregard, in North Carolina, could oppose General Burnside along the coast or along the James River. Lee thought General Buckner's command should unite with the Army of Northern Virginia, unless he could take Knoxville or unite with Johnston. Lee wrote: "We shall have to clear troops from every quarter to oppose the apparent combination of the enemy."<sup>83</sup>

Longstreet stayed in eastern Tennessee after Grant defeated Bragg at Chattanooga, and was not detected moving toward Virginia until March 29.<sup>84</sup> In mid April, Longstreet left a division at Cumberland Gap and moved to

Charlottesville,<sup>85</sup> because he had been ordered to rejoin Lee's command.<sup>86</sup> General Long wrote:

By recalling Longstreet from Tennessee and ordering into the ranks the convalescents and the conscripts that had been raised during the winter, and by using every other means at his disposal, he could only raise an effective force of 64,000 men.<sup>87</sup>

The Official Records of the War of Rebellion credit the Army of Northern Virginia, less Longstreet's corps, with 62,913 men present on April 20.<sup>88</sup> Longstreet's I corps numbered about 9,600 more men.<sup>89</sup> Major General John C. Breckinridge commanded Lee's forces in the Shenandoah Valley. He reported 7,777 troops present for duty on April 20. Major General Arnold Elzey commanded the Richmond garrison. He reported another 8,587 present for duty on April 20.<sup>90</sup> While not under his command, the Richmond garrison anchored Lee's southern flank. Lee received significant reinforcements to his army during the campaign. General George Pickett tried to capture New Berne, North Carolina until May 5. This made his division and Hoke's brigade, 7,300 men, available as reinforcements.<sup>91</sup> General Breckinridge also joined Lee with 2200 men after driving back Sigel in the Valley.<sup>92</sup> As the campaign developed, Lee picked up another brigade at Hanover Junction, under General R. Johnston.<sup>93</sup>

General Beauregard commanded the Confederate forces below Richmond. He drew forces from the Carolinas except for Pickett and Hoke. This gave him a force of about 21,600 to face Butler.<sup>94</sup> Eventually, Lee and Beauregard merged

their forces south of the James River. Before merging, Beauregard added another 16,100 men to Lee's army from his command. Four brigades joined Lee with Pickett. Beauregard sent a 7,000 man division, under General Hoke, and another brigade to Lee at Cold Harbor.<sup>95</sup> Bragg also sent a new regiment numbering about 1,100 men to Lee at Cold Harbor.<sup>96</sup> Following is a summary of Confederate forces opposing Grant:

<u>Commander</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Number</u>
Lee	Rapidan R.	72,500
Breckinridge	Shen. Valley	7,800
Elzey	Richmond	<u>8,600</u>
INITIALLY		88,900
LATER:		
Pickett/Hoke	Reinf.	8,400
Beauregard	S. of Richmond	<u>21,600</u>
TOTAL		105,200

At best, the South had about 105,000 men to face Grant's 171,000. Grant believed he did not have a numerical advantage. He said Union figures accounted for every enlisted man and commissioned officer, no matter how employed. The Confederate army counted only fighting troops. He estimated Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had 80,000 men at the campaign's start, using Union accounting methods.<sup>97</sup>

Grant also thought Lee's strength was increased by the locale. In his memoirs, Grant described Lee's

territorial advantage:

In a country in which every stream, every road, every obstacle to the movement of troops and every natural defence was familiar to him and his army. The citizens were all friendly to him and his cause, and could and did furnish him with accurate reports of our every move. Rear guards were not necessary for him, and having always a railroad at his back, large wagon trains were not required. All circumstances considered we did not have any advantage in numbers.<sup>98</sup>

Paroling prisoners was still a common practice.

Grant was concerned that the Confederacy had not yet matched his release of Vicksburg and Port Hudson prisoners. Grant expressed concern over the paroled prisoners known to be in his front.<sup>99</sup> Grant cut off the prisoner exchanges.

Indirectly, this led to the vast increase in prisoner of war camp population, North and South. Neither side was prepared.

General Braxton Bragg was appointed the general in chief of the Confederate armies. He had an unusual position because he was not superior to officers of equal or greater rank. Lee was superior in rank, so Bragg exercised no authority over Lee.<sup>100</sup> General Beauregard also outranked Bragg. Bragg's only influence was as a coordinator between Lee and other commands. For example, Lee sent his requests for Pickett and Hoke's return to Bragg.<sup>101</sup> Lee's primary subordinates consisted of Generals James Longstreet, Richard S. Ewell, Ambrose P. Hill, J. E. B. Stuart, and John C. Breckinridge. All were competent, experienced commanders. Longstreet and Stuart are legendary.

Longstreet commanded the I Corps, and was Lee's most trusted commander. After Longstreet's devastating attack at Chickamauga, Lee wrote: "Finish the work before you, my dear general, and return to me. I want you badly and you cannot get back too soon."<sup>102</sup> Lee relied on Longstreet's return to make his army whole. General Ewell commanded Lee's II Corps. He was placed in command, after returning from a sickness, just before the Gettysburg campaign.<sup>103</sup> Lee doubted Ewell's ability to command forces away from his supervision, because Ewell had problems making decisions as a corps commander.<sup>104</sup> Lee was also concerned with Ewell's poor health.<sup>105</sup> Hill commanded the III Corps. He demonstrated vigor and a lust for battle as a division commander, but he was often sick after he achieved corps command. Lee became disappointed in Hill's inability to act aggressively as a corps commander, and even rebuked Hill severely for not attacking isolated Federal forces on May 23.<sup>106</sup> In J. E. B. Stuart, Lee had a brilliant cavalry officer.<sup>107</sup> Lee always counted on Stuart to get any assigned mission done, and Stuart almost always did it.<sup>108</sup> Lee best described his high regard for Stuart with his announcement to the army of Stuart's death at Yellow Tavern.

Among the gallant soldiers who have fallen in this war, General Stuart was second to none in valor, in zeal and in unfaltering devotion to his country. His achievements form a conspicuous part of the history of this Army, with which his name and services will be forever associated. To military capacity of a high order and all the nobler virtues of the soldier he added the brighter graces of a



pure life, guided and sustained by the Christian's faith and hope.<sup>109</sup>

Major General Breckinridge commanded Lee's forces in the Shenandoah Valley. Davis assigned Breckinridge to the command in February, 1864 from the Army of Tennessee.<sup>110</sup> Lee had little personal knowledge of Breckinridge, and gave Breckinridge the freedom to handle his command independently. Lee approved Breckinridge's defensive arrangements in a March 23 letter.<sup>111</sup> The approval indicates Lee considered Breckinridge trustworthy. Breckinridge's later action proved Lee's trust was well placed.

Lee's forces were organized as follows:<sup>112</sup>

#### **Army of Northern Virginia**

General Robert E. Lee

Lieutenant General James Longstreet, I Corps

Brigadier General Joseph B. Kershaw

Major General Charles W. Field

Lieutenant Richard S. Ewell, II Corps

Major General Jubal A. Early

Major General Edward Johnson

Major General Robert E. Rodes

Lieutenant General Ambrose P. Hill

Major General Richard H. Anderson

Major General Henry Heth

Major General Cadmus M. Wilcox

Major General James E. B. Stuart, Cavalry Corps

Major General Wade Hampton

Major General Fitzhugh Lee

Major General William H. F. Lee

**Western Department of Virginia<sup>113</sup>**

Major General John C. Breckinridge

The army's morale was excellent. When it moved against Grant's forces in May, it moved confidently.<sup>114</sup> For a time, high morale and outstanding leadership overcame poor arming, wretched equipping, and poor supplies.<sup>115</sup> Lee wrote Davis in mid April that he doubted the army could operate with its lack of supplies. Lee was concerned that any further break down would force a retreat into North Carolina.<sup>116</sup> Lee had to send his cavalry and artillery away for the winter, to find forage for the horses.<sup>117</sup> As of April 16, Lee's supply situation prevented his cavalry and artillery from rejoining the army. Yet, Lee could be attacked any day.<sup>118</sup> Weigley sums up the South's logistics nightmare as follows:

Despite the limitations of Southern industry and agriculture, despite Confederate losses of logistically critical areas, despite indifferent management of the Confederate armies' supply system, despite the gradual breakdown of the Confederacy's internal transportation system, and despite the blockade, the Confederacy did not lose a battle or campaign from a shortage of supplies until the very end, when supply failures converged with multiple additional causes of defeat to produce a disintegration of the Confederate armies.<sup>119</sup>

General Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia were legendary. Their exploits intimidated their Union counterparts. The army was not a small superhuman force. Lee's 72,500 men prevented Grant's 118,000 men from overwhelming them with size, especially combined with Lee's skillful use of well known terrain.

Lee had Davis' unflagging support, and the devotion of his men. Lee's subordinate commanders were known, battle hardened, and experienced veterans. He knew their weaknesses and their tendencies. Lee knew, and could predict, his corps commander's actions better now than in the summer of 1863.

Lee's one major problem was the lack of logistical support to his army. The army ate from day to day. Soldiers were hungry , and forage was unavailable. The resulting poor diet contributed to Lee and several key commanders becoming ill during the campaign.

The Army of Northern Virginia was still potent. Its skillful leadership overcame its logistics problem. It was still possible to defeat the Army of the Potomac, but Lee could not make many mistakes.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### INTENTIONS

Grant's appointment as general in chief ushered in a new destructiveness to the war. Grant wanted to end the war as fast as possible. He knew conquering the enemy's organized armies was more important than acquiring territory.<sup>1</sup> In May 1864, Grant launched a campaign to destroy the South's organized armies. Lee knew Grant was different than the other generals to oppose him. Lee planned to catch Grant off guard, and take advantage of any mistakes Grant might make.

Grant stated in his final report from July 22, 1865, that he

was firm in the conviction that no peace could be had that would be stable and conducive to the happiness of the people, both North and South, until the military power of the rebellion was entirely broken.<sup>2</sup>

He intended to accomplish his aim in two ways. First, he used "the greatest number of troops practicable against the armed forces of the enemy." Grant wanted to prevent Davis shifting the same Confederate forces between different Union

threats, and prevent the Confederate armies from recovering.<sup>3</sup> Second, he wanted "to hammer continuously against the armed force of the enemy and his resources until . . . there should be nothing left." The hammering would compel the South to submit.<sup>4</sup> There were two Confederate armies requiring Grant's attention. They were Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, and Johnston's Army of Tennessee.<sup>5</sup> Grant's problem was forcing the Confederate armies to fight.

Grant decided to threaten the political and logistical centers of Richmond and Atlanta to force the two main Confederate armies into battle.<sup>6</sup> Grant and Sherman met several times the last half of March to discuss their plans. Sherman agreed to attack Johnston and try to destroy the Army of Tennessee. Then, Sherman was to capture Atlanta and hold it.<sup>7</sup>

Grant's plan intended Banks to capture Mobile, establishing a Union held line from Atlanta through Mobile. If Banks failed, Sherman would still hold Atlanta and command the railroad running east and west. This would cut the Confederacy in two again.<sup>8</sup> Grant planned to operate against the Army of Northern Virginia himself. In his memoirs, Grant said:

Lee, with the capital of the Confederacy, was the main end to which all were working. Johnston, with Atlanta, was an important obstacle in the way of our accomplishing the result aimed at, and was therefore almost an independent objective. It was of less importance only because the capture of Johnston and his army would not produce so immediate and decisive

a result in closing the rebellion as would the possession of Richmond, Lee and his army.<sup>9</sup>

Grant recognized his campaign against Lee could be immediately decisive. Sherman's campaign was a supporting campaign because it could not be decisive in 1864. The critical agreement between Grant and Sherman was that their offensives would start simultaneously. Grant said he would fix "the day to start when the season should be far enough advanced, it was hoped, for the roads to be in condition for the troops to march."<sup>10</sup>

Initially, Grant selected April 30 for the campaign start. Grant was concerned that the Confederacy would shift forces to concentrate against Grant or Sherman with combined armies. The South could gain one victory rather than defeat everywhere along the line. The South could also hope that an ignored Union army, meeting no resistance, would rest on its laurels after penetrating to a certain point.<sup>11</sup> Grant gave Sherman the following special instructions just in case Lee and Johnston united.

If the enemy in your front shows signs of joining Lee follow him up to the full extent of your ability. I will prevent the concentration of Lee upon your front if it is in the power of this Army to do it.<sup>12</sup>

Grant was disappointed with Banks' Red River campaign. On April 17, Grant directed Banks to stop any operation away from the Red River, or into Texas. He ordered Banks to concentrate his forces and then advance on Mobile.<sup>13</sup> Banks failed to move on Mobile, and never brought

additional pressure against the key Confederate armies. Instead, Johnston drew reinforcements from Mobile.

Grant was concerned with two other Confederate forces that threatened to disturb his simultaneous advances. The first was General Nathan Bedford Forrest who was actively raiding into Tennessee. Forrest attracted extra attention after the Fort Pillow massacre. On April 15, Grant finally directed Sherman to detach forces, if necessary, to drive Forrest out of Tennessee.<sup>14</sup> Sherman did so. The second force was Longstreet's Corps. On March 29, Sherman reported to Grant that Longstreet and other Confederate forces were leaving East Tennessee.<sup>15</sup> On April 8, Grant warned Sherman of a Confederate raid into Kentucky. Grant also stated Longstreet's force could be added to Breckinridge's in the Valley. In Grant's words, this would "upset offensive movement on our part." He told Sherman to turn any rebel raid into a Confederate disaster, and still act offensively from Chattanooga.<sup>16</sup>

Grant's general plan was "to concentrate all the force possible against the Confederate armies in the field."<sup>17</sup> Even forces besides the main field armies were important in concentrating against the Confederacy. For example, the Confederates had to guard the Shenandoah Valley, because it was a "great storehouse to feed their armies from, and their line of communications from Richmond to Tennessee." Forrest's threatening raids into Tennessee caused Grant to station large forces to prevent Confederate

invasions of northern states.<sup>18</sup> The Army of the Potomac, the Army of the James, and Sherman's three armies, also "guarded their special trusts." Grant said they could guard their trusts by advancing from them, just as well as they could remain at them. "Better indeed, for they forced the enemy to guard his own lines and resources at a greater distance from ours, and with a greater force."<sup>19</sup>

Confederate strategy was to influence the 1864 Presidential election against Lincoln. Southern survival, alone, would significantly influence the election. An early break up of Northern offensives would prevent Northern recovery of position and morale until after the election.<sup>20</sup>

As early as April 5, Lee expected the Union main effort to be in Virginia, with Burnside moving to North Carolina. He suspected the Northern concentration in Virginia would weaken the other Union armies. Lee thought any Union weakening "ought to be discovered and taken advantage of by our respective commanders." Longstreet's Tennessee position supported Lee's opportunistic thinking with the ability to move west or east.<sup>21</sup> During the winter, Lee considered the possibility that new Union advances against Richmond might come from the mountain areas of Western Virginia. Guarding against this possibility prevented Longstreet's early return to the Army of Northern Virginia. In January, Lee wrote to Longstreet, "I thought it was best you should remain where you are until spring or

until it was determined what could be done."<sup>22</sup> This left Longstreet in a position to penetrate into Kentucky when spring arrived. This could relieve pressure against Johnston's army. it would "take the initiative . . . derange their plans . . . and embarrass them the whole summer."<sup>23</sup> Lee recommended a second way to disrupt northern plans. He could draw Longstreet secretly and rapidly to the Army of Northern Virginia. He would then attack Meade and force him back to Washington. Writing about both methods, Lee said:

We are not in a condition, . . . to invade the enemy's country with a prospect of permanent benefit. But we can alarm and embarrass him to some extent, and thus prevent his undertaking anything of magnitude against us.<sup>24</sup>

Confederate strategy, then, was to upset the tempo of Northern advances with offensive action. A confused enemy would fail to achieve their objectives. To contribute to the confusion, Lee positioned Longstreet where he had greater flexibility of action. This caused Grant to become concerned before launching his spring campaign. If Lee could prevent Union successes, Lincoln might lose the upcoming election because of failing Union resolve.

Asa Mahan wrote in A Critical History of the Late American War that Grant despised strategy. He wrote that Grant:

held to but one method, falling directly upon the enemy wherever he might be formed, and by precipitating upon him an overwhelming force, crush him outright, and all this without regard to the sacrifice of life and limb which such a blind method might involve.<sup>25</sup>



Grant concentrated every possible force in an attempt to crush the Confederacy in one season. Grant wrote Butler on April 2:

concentration can be practically effected by Armies moving to the interior of the enemy's country from the territory they have to guard. By such a movement they interpose themselves between the enemy and the country to be guarded, thereby reducing the numbers necessary to garrison important points and at least occupy the attention of a part of the enemy's force if no greater object is gained.<sup>26</sup>

Grant planned to press inward around the circumference of the Confederacy. It has already been identified that Grant and Sherman's offensives were designed to break up Lee and Johnston's armies. Grant also planned offensives by Sigel in the Shenandoah Valley, and Banks against Mobile to limit reinforcements to Lee and Johnston. He also planned on Butler advancing from Fort Monroe to pressure Lee directly, and to tie up more troops. Grant instructed Sherman as follows:

to move against Johnston's army, to break it up, and to go into the interior of the enemy's country as far as he could, inflicting all the damage he could upon their war resources.<sup>27</sup>

Grant also told Sherman to prevent Johnston from joining Lee.<sup>28</sup> Grant said of Sherman's offensive: "Johnston's army was the first objective, and that important railroad center, Atlanta, the second."<sup>29</sup>

Grant ordered Banks to abandon his expedition toward Texas, and concentrate his forces. Grant further instructed Banks to attack Mobile with at least 25,000 men. Grant wrote Banks that he was willing to reinforce Banks with more

troops and Admiral Farragut's fleet.<sup>30</sup> Grant directed Sigel to advance in two columns. The first column, under Sigel, was to advance up the Shenandoah Valley to threaten the Confederate forces there. The other column, under General Crook, would take Lewisburg, destroy stretches of the Tennessee Railroad, including the New River bridge, and the Saltville salt works.<sup>31</sup> Butler's objective was Richmond, and Grant told Butler to coordinate his movements with the Army of the Potomac. Grant also gave Butler permission to cut the railroad south of Richmond.<sup>32</sup> Grant decided the Army of the Potomac's objective was the Army of Northern Virginia. He stated his reasoning in his memoirs.

Richmond was fortified and intrenched so perfectly that one man inside to defend was more than equal to five outside besieging or assaulting. To get possession of Lee's army was the first great object. With the capture of his army Richmond would necessarily follow. It was better to fight him outside of his stronghold than in it.<sup>33</sup>

Grant planned to move all the armies simultaneously, and in coordination with each other. Grant held himself responsible for the coordination. Each major commander received instructions from Grant on how to gain their objectives. He would stay with the Army of the Potomac, increased by Burnside's corps, and "operate directly against Lee's army wherever it may be found."<sup>34</sup> Grant told Meade to go wherever Lee went, after first crossing the Rapidan River. Grant had Halleck move some of the Washington

garrison to hold the bridge between Bull Run and the Rappahannock River. This freed up some of Meade's troops.<sup>35</sup>

In order to crush Lee, Grant wished to attack the Army of Northern Virginia in the open. If Grant could catch Lee without time to entrench, Lee would be at a significant disadvantage. Alternatively, if Grant could intervene between Lee and Richmond, Grant could force Lee to attack the Army of the Potomac.<sup>36</sup> Grant planned for Burnside to support the Army of the Potomac.<sup>37</sup> Grant began concentrating Burnside's 9th Corps at Annapolis.<sup>38</sup> Grant identified why he used Annapolis in his memoirs.

This was an admirable position for such a reinforcement. The corps could be brought at the last moment as a reinforcement to the Army of the Potomac, or it could be thrown on the sea-coast, south of Norfolk, in Virginia or North Carolina, to operate against Richmond from that direction. In fact Burnside and the War Department both thought the 9th corps was intended for such an expedition up to the last moment.<sup>39</sup>

On April 19, Grant shifted Burnside's concentration to Alexandria, Virginia.<sup>40</sup> Four days later Grant ordered Burnside further south. Burnside took position along the road between Bull Run and the Rappahannock River. Grant also ordered Burnside's corps to carry fifteen days supply, and to reduce baggage.<sup>41</sup> Grant instructed Butler to move simultaneously with Meade to "seize City Point and operate against Richmond from the south side of the river."<sup>42</sup> Grant planned to link up with Butler if Lee fell back to the Richmond defenses. So he instructed Butler "to secure a

footing as far up the south side of the river as you can, and as soon as possible."<sup>43</sup> Grant knew a siege of Richmond was possible.<sup>44</sup> On April 17, he wrote the following to General Meade:

Should a siege of Richmond become necessary, siege guns, ammunition, and equipments can be got from the arsenal at Washington and Fort Monroe very rapidly. Every preparation is made for all classes of transportation by water so that those things can be directed to any point, by water, we may require them. Once at the nearest landing, with the means of transportation with an army, they can be readily moved to any point inland they may be wanted.<sup>45</sup>

Grant sent campaign instructions to Sigel on April 4.<sup>46</sup> The instructions were designed to force the enemy to protect the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, and prevent large amounts of forage and provision from falling into Union hands. Sigel was to also block the Confederate invasion route through the Shenandoah Valley.<sup>47</sup> That is why Grant required Sigel to operate with two separate columns. Sigel's most important purpose was meeting any enemy movement on his line. He could ignore all other orders if he tied down more enemy troops.<sup>48</sup> Sigel presented Grant with an alternative plan for the Valley forces. Grant approved this new plan on April 19.<sup>49</sup>

In his memoirs, Grant wrote that he ordered Banks "to assemble all the troops he had at New Orleans in time to join in the general move, Mobile to be his objective."<sup>50</sup> Grant considered Mobile's capture important enough to provide Banks with more troops to insure success.<sup>51</sup> An attack on Mobile was the one move not requiring simultaneous

action. Grant did not expect Banks to move from New Orleans before May 1. For the move, Grant ordered Banks to turn over the Red River defense to Steele in Arkansas, and the navy. Banks was also to abandon Texas except the Rio Grande, and then concentrate "not less than 25,000" for the move on Mobile.<sup>52</sup>

For the Army of the Potomac and Burnside's corps, Grant had several courses of action to choose from. He could attack Lee frontally on the Rapidan River, move around either of Lee's flanks, repeat McClellan's move to the Peninsula, or unite Burnside and Butler for a move on Richmond while Grant tied Lee up. Grant chose to move around Lee's right flank.

Grant first arrived at Culpeper Court House to find a well entrenched Army of Northern Virginia directly behind the Rapidan River. Grant immediately decided Lee's formidable lines could not be carried with a frontal attack.<sup>53</sup> Moving around either of Lee's flanks presented Grant with the best alternatives. Grant wrote the following regarding a move around Lee's right:

The Potomac, Chesapeake Bay, and tributaries would furnish us an easy line over which to bring all supplies to within easy hauling distance of every position the army could occupy from the Rapidan to the James River. But Lee could, if he chose, detach or move his whole army north on a line rather interior to the one I would have to take in following.<sup>54</sup>

A movement around Lee's left flank would not place Lee on a northerly interior line, but it would require Grant

to bring all his supplies overland.<sup>55</sup> The railway running south from Culpeper would support turning Lee's left, but Lee could fall back easily and keep Richmond covered. General Pope had already tried operating in this country in 1862, and Lee used the terrain well against him.<sup>56</sup> Grant decided to cross below Lee's right, and turn that flank. This movement was shorter, preserved communication with Washington, and threatened Lee's communication with Richmond. It stood the best chance of bringing Lee to battle.<sup>57</sup>

Grant could have moved the Army of the Potomac to the James River, leaving Burnside to cover Washington. Lee could have moved part of his force, and Beauregard's force, into the Richmond defenses. Then Lee could move on Washington. Grant partially implemented this plan by ordering Butler up the James River.<sup>58</sup>

Grant could have combined Butler and Burnside's forces. Their combined force could move on Bermuda Hundred, then Richmond, while Grant attacked Lee on the Rapidan River. Alternatively, the Butler/Burnside force could unite at Annapolis, secretly move to the Rappahannock River, then through Fredericksburg to Richmond. Again, Grant would keep Lee occupied on the Rapidan River.<sup>59</sup> Also, Grant correctly identified Lee's army as the objective point of his campaign. Lee and his army represented Southern hope. Its destruction could lead to the Confederacy's immediate

collapse. Sherman's forces had too far to go, in difficult terrain, to be decisive in 1864. Especially since road conditions delayed Sherman's advance by two months.<sup>60</sup> Grant positioned himself with the Union main effort, where he could supervise compliance with his orders. His presence also prevented political interference with his fighting forces. The plan he chose to follow was based on his western experience. He knew he could make it work.

Moving around Lee's right flank presented significant problems. Initially, Grant would have to shift his line of communications from the Culpeper/Washington rail line to the water. Grant learned during his Vicksburg campaign that water born communications were safe from interdiction. Grant's quartermaster experience prepared him for solving the initial logistics difficulties. Changing his communications led to four initial difficulties. First, the lack of forage in Northern Virginia required the carrying of ten days rations.<sup>61</sup> Meade acquired sixteen days, and Burnside acquired fifteen days, of rations for the initial move.<sup>62</sup> Second, rations, medical supplies, and ammunition required 5,000 wagons (1 per 26 men).<sup>63</sup> Grant wrote:

To provision an army, campaigning against so formidable a foe through such a country, from wagons alone seemed almost impossible. System and discipline were both essential to its accomplishment.<sup>64</sup>

Grant's logistical solutions were previously described, but first he had to cross through the Wilderness.

Third, the Wilderness roads were few, and those were bad.<sup>65</sup> Grant did not realize how difficult it was to negotiate the Wilderness. He would soon learn "to what advantage Lee could turn the Wilderness, with its woods, ravines, plank roads, and dirt roads."<sup>66</sup> Fourth, crossing the Rapidan River risked losing surprise. Grant, then, started the movement under cover of darkness, even though the wagons hampered the crossing. Grant's selected movement possessed the relative advantage of position. It secured a new line of communication by water, and at the same time, threatened the enemy's.<sup>67</sup> None of the other considered options threatened Lee's communications while securing Grant's. Moving around Lee's right flank gave Grant's movement the best chance of success.

General Lee knew of Grant's preparation. As early as March 30, Lee believed Grant would personally direct the Army of the Potomac during the coming campaign. He also knew Burnside was organizing a large force at Annapolis, and that Union reinforcements were arriving in the Valley. Lee anticipated Grant would "concentrate a large force on one or more lines."<sup>68</sup> Lee looked to move Longstreet into the Valley to counteract Union movements. He then considered following Longstreet's Valley move with their uniting on the Rapidan River.<sup>69</sup> Lee summed up his expectations of Union intentions in an April 15 letter to Davis. Lee predicted that the Army of the Potomac would move on Richmond while



Burnside attempted to take Richmond from the flank or rear. He believed that Union efforts to seize Charleston had ceased, and that Banks was too shattered to threaten Mobile. Lee asked Davis to send reinforcements from Charleston and Mobile for himself and Johnston.<sup>70</sup>

Lee proposed to unite with Longstreet, then move "right against the enemy on the Rappahannock." A "crowning victory" on the Rappahannock would dissipate Union plans and cause the recall of Union forces to defend Washington. Lee considered an offensive movement the best "plan for the defense of Richmond."<sup>71</sup> Lee's campaign objective was to defend Richmond. Lee suggested to Davis that Beauregard oppose Burnside, whether Burnside moved overland on Richmond, or along the James River. Beauregard's ability to defend Richmond was a prerequisite for Lee's proposed attack on Meade.<sup>72</sup> Lee believed Beauregard could resist any strong demonstration made against Richmond from north or south of the James River. Lee also reminded Davis, on April 30, that General Breckinridge was prepared to meet any Union moves in the Valley. Lee was free to deal with the Army of the Potomac.<sup>73</sup>

Lee knew Grant would try turning his right.<sup>74</sup> Lee's right was bounded by the Wilderness, which Lee used to defeat General Joe Hooker the previous summer. He knew the area's advantages, Grant did not.<sup>75</sup> Lee let Grant into the Wilderness. It was not the open ground Grant looked for, and artillery had little effect.<sup>76</sup> This would be Lee's

second attempt to defeat a large enemy army in the Wilderness. Two days before Grant moved out of the Army of the Potomac's winter camp, Lee predicted the Army of the Potomac would cross the Rapidan at Germanna or Ely Fords.<sup>77</sup> After crossing, Lee expected Grant would attempt to move directly on Richmond, but that Grant's supply dependence would cause the Army of the Potomac's movement to be easterly until it could establish waterborn communications.<sup>78</sup> Lee apparently predicted the length of time the Army of the Potomac would be vulnerable as they crossed the Rapidan River. Brigadier General Law wrote:

When the Federal army was known to be in motion, General Lee prepared to move upon its flank with his whole force as soon as his opponent should clear the river and begin the march southward.<sup>79</sup>

As soon as Grant advanced far enough into the Wilderness to be vulnerable, Lee would move with his whole force against Grant's right flank.<sup>80</sup> According to General Law:

General Lee had deliberately chosen this as his battleground. He knew this tangled wilderness well, and appreciated fully the advantages such a field afforded for concealing his great inferiority of force and for neutralizing the superior strength of his antagonist.<sup>81</sup>

Armistead Long, in his memoirs of Lee, wrote of Lee's cheerfulness the morning after Grant's Rapidan crossing.

He was, indeed, in the best of spirits, and expressed much confidence in the result - a confidence which was well founded, for there was much reason to believe that his antagonist would be at his mercy while entangled in the these pathless

and entangled thickets, in whose intricacies disparity of numbers lost much of its importance.<sup>82</sup>

General Lee had four realistic courses of action available in the Spring of 1864. They were: first, retreat to Richmond; second, retreat to the Carolinas; third, move north on a new invasion; and fourth, attack or meet Grant in Northern Virginia. Lee rejected retreating to Richmond or the Carolinas because "the Central Railroad, Charlottesville, and all the upper country will be exposed, and I fear great injury inflicted on us."<sup>83</sup> Abandoning Virginia to improve subsistence would sacrifice even more, the political center of the Confederacy. Lee wished to drive the enemy from the Rappahannock with his own attack. This would cause the enemy "to look to the safety of his own capitol instead of the assault on ours." Lee's lack of forage and supplies prevented such an offensive action.<sup>84</sup>

Grant started Sigel two days before the Army of the Potomac.<sup>85</sup> This was a spoiling move to prevent Lee from initiating a possible move north with Longstreet. Lee chose to attack Grant as he traversed the Wilderness. This appeared to be a foolhardy move. Lee, with 72,500 men would attack Grant, with 118,000 men and a superiority in artillery. Lee made the attack largely because he was unaware of Grant's large superiority. He believed Meade had 75,000 men instead of his actual 93,000. Also, he was unaware that Burnside would join Grant in the Wilderness.<sup>86</sup> Lee also retarded his Wilderness attack by

posting Longstreet's Corps at Gordonsville. According to Clifford Dowdey:

Until Grant committed himself Lee could not eliminate the possibility of a southwesterly swing which would threaten the Virginia Central. For this reason Longstreet remained in camp at Gordonsville, a days march farther than the corps of Ewell and A. P. Hill.<sup>87</sup>

Longstreet's arrival would be barely in time.

According to Jomini: "the best thing for an army standing on the defensive is to know how to take the offensive at a proper time, and to take it."<sup>88</sup> The defender should be constantly alert to improve all opportunities of assailing the attacker's weak points. Lee attacked Grant on a field he knew well, with his entire army, at a time he judged was the time to strike.<sup>89</sup> Grant's movement through the Wilderness was on a single line of operation in front of a prepared foe. Lee could cut Grant's line of movement from several roads diverging from Lee's position. Lee used the Wilderness to screen his movements, which allowed him to pick the best time and place to attack. Grant helped Lee by not guarding the flank of his extended movement.<sup>90</sup>

Instead of Grant threatening Lee's communication, it became Lee who threatened Grant's communication without exposing his own.<sup>91</sup> Lee could always let Grant get a days start on him without endangering the Army of Northern Virginia. In Lee's words:

In a wooded country like that in which we have been operating, where nothing is known beyond what can be

ascertained by feeling, a days march can always be gained.<sup>92</sup>

Lee understood the risks he could afford to take. At the Wilderness, he took the appropriate risk attacking Grant when and where he did. If Lee's attack failed, he could easily fall back into prepared lines, and stay between Grant and Richmond. His chosen course of action was the only one that offered a significant opportunity for victory. Lee had fortified positions at intervals from the Rapidan River to Richmond. If necessary, Lee would always had a fortified position to fall back into.<sup>93</sup>

Another northern invasion was not possible for Lee's poorly supplied force to undertake. Lee waited until the last moment to recall his cavalry and artillery from forage further south. He thought the lack of supplies could cause his retreat from the Rapidan River without enemy action.<sup>94</sup> Lee fed his army from day to day, and encouraged Davis to cease all pleasure travel by the population to free up transportation for a supply build up.<sup>95</sup>

Grant intended to destroy the military power of the South, as embodied in Lee and Johnston's armies. He planned simultaneous advances from several forces to crush the Confederate military. Grant would personally direct the forces arrayed against Lee. Confederate strategy was to influence the 1864 Presidential election against Lincoln. They planned to erode northern support with excessive Union losses and little progress. Lee expected the Union's main

effort to be in the east. He intended to break up the Union offense in Virginia early, and prevent northern recovery of position and morale until after the election.

Both Grant and Lee selected plans that they thought gave them the best chance of victory in 1864. Both accepted risks, and took steps to minimize those risks. Each was a combatant who disliked waiting on the enemy. The night of May 4, both embarked on a slugging match unknown before on the American continent.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE WILDERNESS

May arrived with Northern Virginia roads dry, the Army of the Potomac rested, and Grant ready to destroy Lee's vaunted Army of Northern Virginia. Lee knew Grant was coming, and he knew how he was coming. Lee had supreme confidence in his army, and they in him. He was ready to send the Army of the Potomac reeling with another brilliant counterstroke. The stage was set for the Battle of the Wilderness.

Grant's preparations were finished. On April 27, Grant ordered Sigel to begin his move up the Shenandoah Valley on May 2.<sup>1</sup> Grant directed Butler to start the night of May 4, and get as far up the James River as he could by daylight. He also informed Butler that the Army of the Potomac would move the night of May 4.<sup>2</sup> Grant moved Burnside to a position between Bull Run and the Rappahannock River on April 27, and directed Meade to bring the Army of the Potomac forward.<sup>3</sup> Lee was waiting.

Lee's veterans were lean and mean. Rarely bested, they intended to fight strongly for their home ground. Lee expected Grant to cross the Rapidan River, and his cavalry watched the likely crossing sites. Lee could have defended the river crossings, but chose not to. Grant was deceived by the lack of a forward defense, and headed south after crossing the Rapidan River on the mistaken assumption that Lee was retreating. Grant thought speed was important to head Lee off, but Lee's strategy was to catch Grant's army in the flank.<sup>4</sup> Armistead Long wrote that Lee "took care to do nothing to obstruct so desirable a result."<sup>5</sup> Lee's 72,500 troops knew the Wilderness. This knowledge magnified their numbers and decreased Grant's. Horace Porter described the Wilderness as follows:

The ground upon which the battle was fought was intersected in every direction by winding rivulets, rugged ravines, and ridges of mineral rock. Many excavations had been made in opening iron-ore beds, leaving pits bordered by ridges of earth. Trees had been felled in a number of places to furnish fuel and supply sawmills. The locality is well described by its name. It was a wilderness in every sense of the word.<sup>6</sup>

Grant, in his memoirs, acknowledged the defensive value of the Wilderness.

The country was heavily wooded at all points of crossing, particularly on the south side of the river. The battle-field from the crossing of the Rapidan until the final movement from the Wilderness toward Spottsylvania was of the same character. There were some clearings and small farms within what might be termed the battle-field; but generally the country was covered with a dense forest. The roads were favorable for defensive operations.<sup>7</sup>

Lee's audacity enabled him to recognize the opportunities inherent in using the Wilderness. Above all, his attack was unexpected.

Grant used two fords to cross the Rapidan River. The closest of the two was Germanna Ford about ten miles beyond Lee's right flank. Ely's Ford was a further six miles downstream. Grant moved in two infantry columns after dark on May 3. Each column was preceded by a cavalry division. The right column consisted of the 5th Corps, followed by the 6th Corps. This column crossed at Germanna Ford. The 2d Corps crossed at Ely's Ford. One cavalry division stayed north of the Rapidan River to prevent Confederate crossing of the river into the Federal rear. Confederate pickets were driven off, and pontoons laid by 0600 on May 3.<sup>8</sup> During the day on May 4, Meade crossed all three of his infantry corps and two cavalry divisions.<sup>9</sup>

Wilson's cavalry division moved through the Wilderness Tavern to Parker's Store on the Orange Plank Road. Gregg's cavalry division moved to Chancellorsville. The 5th Corps reached the Wilderness Tavern by noon and entrenched. The 6th Corps crossed and camped on the river's south side by sundown. The 2d Corps moved about as far as the 5th Corps and camped about six miles east of it.<sup>10</sup>

The encumbrance of moving the wagons across the Rapidan River prevented further advances on May 4.<sup>11</sup> The 9th Corps moved from Warrenton to the fords once they

learned of the Army of the Potomac's crossing. They made a night march during the evening of May 4, and began crossing in the early morning.<sup>12</sup> Butler arrived at Bermuda Hundred early in the day.<sup>13</sup> On this first night, the Army of the Potomac exhibited a defensive technique new to Grant. According to Grant: the army entrenched with every change of position or halt for the night.<sup>14</sup>

For this purpose they would build up piles of logs or rails if they could be found in their front, and dig a ditch, throwing the dirt forward on the timber. Thus the digging they did counted in making a depression to stand in, and increased the elevation in front of them.<sup>15</sup>

The engineer officer directed strengthening or changing the hasty breastworks when in the presence of Lee's army or when preparing to assault.<sup>16</sup> The nightly impromptu fortifications hindered Lee's ability to attack.

Lee responded to the Union cavalry crossing the fords by bringing his artillery forward.<sup>17</sup> He also reported Grant's movements to Bragg, and requested that Bragg send Pickett's Division from North Carolina toward Spottsylvania Court House.<sup>18</sup> Lee sent a letter to Davis on May 4 reporting the crossing, and warned Davis to expect Butler's advance.<sup>19</sup> Lee's army was spaced on a twenty mile arc from ten miles above Germanna Ford to Gordonsville. The army headquarters was at Orange Court House. From Lee's army, two good roads ran east through the Wilderness, the Orange Court House Plank Road to the south, and the Orange Turnpike to the north. They intersected with the Brock Road, in the

Wilderness. These roads enabled Lee to easily concentrate his forces in the Wilderness.<sup>20</sup>

Lee ordered Ewell and Hill to concentrate on the Wilderness. Ewell used the Orange Pike, and Hill used the Orange Court House Plank Road.<sup>21</sup> Longstreet, at Gordonsville, was at least twenty miles away. Starting at 1600, he moved on back roads until reaching the Orange Court House Plank Road west of the battlefield.<sup>22</sup> Lee's advanced forces occupied the old Mine Run position by evening.<sup>23</sup> Lee sent Breckinridge a telegram on May 4 directing Breckinridge to meet Sigel's movement, now approaching Front Royal. Breckinridge was ordered to check Sigel's movement as soon as possible.<sup>24</sup>

Grant was unaware of Lee's response to the Federal crossing. He directed that the Army of the Potomac continue south the morning of May 5.<sup>25</sup> Meade moved his headquarters to the Wilderness Tavern, and Grant remained at the fords to hasten Burnside's movement.<sup>26</sup> Ewell's eastern movement ran into the flank of Warren's 5th Corps moving south.<sup>27</sup> Ewell formed a line of battle and informed Lee. Lee instructed Ewell to avoid a general engagement until Longstreet was up, while Meade ordered Warren to "halt his column, concentrate his command on the pike, and . . . attack any force in his front."<sup>28</sup> Meade surmised that Lee left a division in the Wilderness to slow the Union advance, so that Lee could prepare a position along the North Anna River. Meade wanted



to bag that lone Confederate division before they could retreat to Mine Run.<sup>29</sup>

Warren's corps attacked Ewell at about noon. Meade ordered Sedgwick's 6th Corps to support Warren, and Hancock's 2d Corps to move up in support. Warren's initial attack successfully drove Ewell back, but Sedgwick was unable to support Warren. The attack stalled.<sup>30</sup> While maneuvering, Crawford's division of Warren's corps engaged Hill's arriving corps. Pressed by two Confederate corps, Meade ordered Hancock to attack as soon as his 2d Corps came up. Sedgwick's corps finally got into action on Warren's right, but with little effect.<sup>31</sup> On the right, Union advances became confused affairs. Units became lost, Confederates were found on the Union flanks, and units were unsupported. By midafternoon, the Union line stopped and entrenched.<sup>32</sup> General Evander Law described the Wilderness fighting on May 5.

It was a desperate struggle between the infantry of the two armies, on a field whose physical aspects were as grim and forbidding as the struggle itself. It was a battle of brigades and regiments rather than of corps and divisions. Officers could not see the whole length of their commands, and could tell whether the troops on their right and left were driving or being driven only by the sound of the firing. It was a fight at close quarters too, for as night came on, in those tangled thickets of stunted pine, sweet-gum, scrub-oak, and cedar, the approach of the opposing lines could be discerned only by the noise of their passage through the underbrush or the flashing of their guns. The usually silent Wilderness had suddenly become alive with the angry flashing and heavy roar of the

musketry, mingled with the yells of the combatants as they swayed to and fro in the gloomy thickets.<sup>33</sup>

May 5 ended with two corps of the Army of Northern Virginia in the Wilderness, facing east. Ewell was on the left, and Hill was on the right. Longstreet was nearly in supporting distance, coming up behind Hill. The Army of the Potomac had all three infantry corps present in the Wilderness, facing west. Hancock's 2d Corps was in the south, Warren in the center, and Sedgwick on the right. This alinement was relatively loose because some divisions were employed as part of another corps. Burnside was in supporting distance of the Army of the Potomac. Also, the Union trains were across the river by dark.<sup>34</sup>

During the night, Meade ordered each of his corps to attack at 0500, May 6. Grant ordered Burnside to support the Army of the Potomac by attacking between the two east-west roads.<sup>35</sup> This placed the bulk of his corps between Warren and Sedgwick. Burnside was additionally ordered to swing to the left and envelop Hill's Corps if he broke through the Confederate center.<sup>36</sup> Only Hancock's attack, with one additional division from each of the 5th and 6th Corps had any success. They drove Hill's Corps a mile back down the Orange Plank Road.<sup>37</sup> Longstreet arrived as Hancock's troops penetrated to the artillery posted in Hill's rear.<sup>38</sup> General Law described Longstreet's arrival.

In perfect order, ranks well closed, and no stragglers, those splendid troops came on, regardless of the confusion on every side, pushing

their steady way onward like 'a river in the sea' of confused and troubled waves around them.<sup>39</sup>

Longstreet's men stopped Hancock's attack, and began seizing the initiative. They started by pushing Hancock back to the previous night's Union breastwork. The battle swept back and forth with charge and counter-charge for over two hours near where it had begun on May 5.<sup>40</sup> The Federal left was collapsing under a Longstreet led counterattack. In the confusion, Longstreet was seriously wounded by his own men. A delay of several hours occurred as Lee took charge of the attack. A renewed attack was made at 1600 against what was now, a strongly fortified line. It failed.<sup>41</sup> The fighting in the Wilderness on May 6 was particularly ferocious. Grant described the fighting on the Union left.

The woods were set on fire by the bursting shells, and the conflagration raged. The wounded who had not strength to move themselves were either suffocated or burned to death. Finally the fire communicated with our breastworks, in places. Being constructed of wood, they burned with great fury. But the battle still raged, our men firing through the flames until it became too hot to remain longer.<sup>42</sup>

Just before dark, Ewell launched an attack against Sedgwick's right flank and smashed a Federal brigade. It then made no further progress.<sup>43</sup> According to Brigadier General Alexander Webb, a Union 2d Corps brigade commander:

The battle was finished over on the left so far as Hancock and Burnside were concerned. Grant had been thoroughly defeated in his attempt to walk past General Lee on the way to Richmond.<sup>44</sup>

The cavalry was not idle as the infantry battle raged. Sheridan and Stuart's commands skirmished all day beyond the Union left around Todd's Tavern, and the Furnace and Brock Road intersection. This forced Hancock to post troops on the left as a flank guard.<sup>45</sup> Both armies entered the night in confusion, and low on ammunition.<sup>46</sup> Lee's army withdrew to their entrenchments during the night. Union cavalry drove the Confederate cavalry back to Todd's Tavern the morning of May 7.<sup>47</sup> Neither Grant or Lee resumed the battle on the 7th.<sup>48</sup> The Battle of the Wilderness was over.<sup>49</sup>

The Army of the Potomac finished the battle thoroughly disorganized and with no initiative. On the left, every general had command of an organization different from what he started with.<sup>50</sup> The spirit of Grant's army was not shattered, but it was shaken. General Webb described at least part of the army's attitude.

We had seen the mixed Second and Ninth corps driven in, in detail, on our left. We knew that the Fifth and Sixth corps were blocked, and we felt deeply the mortification consequent upon our being driven back to the Brock road. From personal contact with the regiments who did the hardest fighting, I declare that the individual men had no longer that confidence in their commanders which had been their best and strongest trait during the past year.<sup>51</sup>

During the two day battle, Grant lost 2,246 men killed, 12,037 wounded, and 3,383 missing. This was an aggregate 17,666 casualties, 15 per cent of Grant's initial strength.<sup>52</sup> Lee lost 8,949 killed or wounded, and 1881

captured for a total of 10,830 casualties. This was also 15 per cent of his original strength.<sup>53</sup> Grant's attempt to get between Lee and Richmond ended quickly in the Wilderness. Grant described his change of direction to attack Lee.

It was my plan then, as it was on all other occasions, to take the initiative whenever the enemy could be drawn from his intrenchments if we were not intrenched ourselves. Warren had not yet reached the point where he was to halt, when he discovered the enemy near by. Neither party had any advantage of position. Warren was, therefore, ordered to attack as soon as he could prepare for it.<sup>54</sup>

Lee followed his plan to attack Grant as Army of the Potomac marched through the Wilderness. At 1800 on May 5. Lee's aide-de-camp notified Ewell that Lee intended to crush the Federal left.<sup>55</sup> General Lee profited from Grant's willingness to "throw away . . . the immense advantage his great superiority in number . . . gave him."<sup>56</sup> Lee got what he hoped for. Grant advanced unaware into the Wilderness. Lee then seized the initiative and attacked Grant. Grant was unable to bring his numerical superiority to bear. Lee turned the Army of the Potomac away from Richmond and from turning his right flank.

Lee failed to sustain his initiative and crush the Federal flank as he had at Chancellorsville. He came close the afternoon of May 6, but Longstreet's untimely wounding destroyed his last chance. The Army of the Potomac's learned skill of hasty entrenchments canceled the Army of Northern Virginia's momentum. Grant never expected Lee's smaller army to attack the Army of the Potomac. He expected

Lee to try and get into a blocking position somewhere on the road to Richmond. Meade said he expected that someplace to be on the North Anna River. Lee reinforced Grant's expectations by leaving only a cavalry screen at the fords.

Both armies were severely damaged. In past years, Lee would watch the Army of the Potomac slink away, but not any more. Grant failed in the Wilderness, but he would try again. Grant's plan became unhinged from the very beginning. On only the second day, Grant was surprised by Lee's vigorous attack in the Wilderness. The two day battle left both armies disorganized but still powerful despite heavy losses.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### SPOTTSYLVANIA COURT HOUSE

Lee's Wilderness attack convinced Grant that the Army of Northern Virginia was unassailable in its Wilderness position.<sup>1</sup> Grant expected a possible attack by Lee on May 7,<sup>2</sup> but this was an unlikely possibility because Grant's army still greatly outnumbered Lee's. Grant's combat power was unchanged relative to Lee's. Exact strength figures are not recorded but Grant had about 100,000 men to Lee's 62,000. Grant enjoyed better than a 1.6:1 advantage, and the advantage increased as Halleck reinforced Grant's army with 8,000 men during this phase of the campaign.<sup>3</sup> General Robert O. Tyler organized these reinforcements into a division and reported to the Army of the Potomac on May 17.<sup>4</sup>

Grant began the second of his leftward movements on May 8. This move culminated at Spottsylvania Court House where a series of engagements eclipsed the Wilderness in ferocity and slaughter. While in the Wilderness, Grant became aware of leadership problems among his key commanders. He decided Warren was not his best corps commander. Warren had two problems. First, Warren

concerned himself too much with how the rest of the army supported him. Second, he attacked with one division at a time, holding the others as reserves. This enabled Warren to personally supervise the one attacking division.<sup>5</sup> It also led to Warren's piece-meal defeat. Warren was not Grant's only commander problem. Meade and Sheridan failed to develop a productive relationship. In response to Meade's criticism, Sheridan commented: "If I am permitted to cut loose from this army I'll draw Stuart after me, and whip him too."<sup>6</sup> Grant then sent Sheridan on a raid toward Richmond on May 9, leaving the Army of the Potomac without effective cavalry support for sixteen days.

Lee also had command problems. Hill became too ill to command, and was replaced by General Early.<sup>7</sup> Early was an outstanding division commander, but had no experience at corps command. Major General R. H. Anderson, another experienced division commander, took command of the I Corps after Longstreet's wounding. Ewell was now Lee's only experienced corps commander.

Grant revised his objective slightly after the Wilderness. He now wanted to prevent Lee from getting back to Richmond and crushing Butler, as well as draw Lee into the open field.<sup>8</sup> Grant considered Lee to have the capability of leaving his front. Lee could then move south of Richmond, destroy Butler, and then return to the Richmond defenses with a secure southern flank and united with Beauregard. Perhaps Grant suspected Lee could defeat him

when united with Beauregard. because Lee had already fought Grant to a draw without Beauregard.

Grant decided to seize the initiative with a night, past Lee's right flank, and occupy Spottsylvania Court House. This was a strong strategic crossroads on the road to Richmond.<sup>9</sup> Lee expected Grant to retreat back across the Rapidan River, but he was alert for a possible move southward.<sup>10</sup> Lee made plans to head off a possible Federal move to the crossroads. He even had a new road cut to White Hall Mill on the way to Spottsylvania Court House. He told Ewell that this road was "the best route that I know of" to reach Shady Grove Church.<sup>11</sup> This gave him an interior line for any of Grant's moves, and enabled him to beat Grant to the crossroads.

After two days in the Wilderness, Grant decided what to do. He had three choices. He could attack Lee in his entrenchments, move forward around Lee's right flank, or retreat. At this point, moving around Lee's left flank moved the army back north of the Rapidan River.<sup>12</sup> It was the same as a retreat. Neither retreating or attacking Lee in entrenchments supported Grant's desire to attack Lee in the open. Instead they offered a chance to shatter his nearly demoralized troops. Grant's only reasonable choice was to again move past Lee's right flank. Grant's advance provisioning was depleted down to seven days supply on hand. Grant changed his base on May 7 to take advantage of Union

sea control, and headed south in an attempt to seize the initiative at midnight.<sup>13</sup>

Lee had two courses of action to choose from. He could either attack Grant again in the Wilderness, or defend Richmond against any moves southward Grant might make. Grant was too close to Richmond for Lee to hazard his own invasion of the North, or any long move around Grant's right flank. Lee knew that attacking Grant's army when it was divided or surprised held a reasonable chance of success. Attacking a united and waiting, numerically superior army, was suicide. Lee's only chance of successfully defending Richmond was to anticipate Grant's next move south and deny him the initiative.<sup>14</sup>

At 0630 on May 7, Grant ordered Meade to prepare for a night march to Spottsylvania Court House. Grant wanted Meade's three infantry corps to occupy positions from Spottsylvania Court House to Todd's Tavern. Grant suggested Warren move first from the center, passing behind Hancock on the left. Hancock would then follow Warren. This would end the move with Hancock as the right flank and Warren the left.<sup>15</sup> Grant expected Sedgwick to move away from the Wilderness battlefield to Chancellorsville, then south to a supporting position between Hancock and Warren. He informed Meade that Burnside would follow Sedgwick. The trains followed Sedgwick by moving up to the Ny River, northeast of Spottsylvania Court House.<sup>16</sup> Grant intended to continue moving past Spottsylvania Court House "to form a junction

with General Butler as early as possible, and be prepared to meet any enemy interposing." Grant had not planned out his exact route to the James River.<sup>17</sup>

On May 8. Grant directed Sheridan to undertake a cavalry raid behind the Army of Northern Virginia. The purpose of the raid was to annoy the enemy, protect Grant's flank by drawing off Lee's cavalry, and save the Union trains from carrying cavalry forage.<sup>18</sup>

General Lee knew Grant intended to move toward Spottsylvania Court House. General Ewell reported the Federals had abandoned the Germanna Road, their supply line north. Lee also knew Grant would open a new line of communications toward Fredericksburg, so he had Stuart scout the roads to Spottsylvania Court House.<sup>19</sup> On May 7, Lee ordered Anderson (Longstreet's Corps) to march on Spottsylvania Court House at 0300 May 8. He informed Ewell to expect the II Corps to follow Anderson if it should "be discovered that the enemy is moving in that direction, or should any change in his position render it advisable."<sup>20</sup>

The terrain at and north of Spottsylvania Court House was outstanding defensive terrain. There was a range of hills about a mile north and northeast of the crossroads, marked by a court house. Two ridges dominated the area to the east and directly south of the court house. These paralleled the road to Richmond. The surrounding countryside consisted of farms within large bodies of

timber. The Spottsylvania Court House area was not the open terrain Grant looked for. The country was relatively level south and southwest of Spottsylvania Court House,<sup>21</sup> and may have been Grant's hoped for open ground.

Warren and Hancock's route through Todd's Tavern was opened by Sheridan on May 7.<sup>22</sup> Generals Grant and Meade preceded Warren's corps with a cavalry escort. Shortly after passing Hancock's left on the way to Spottsylvania Court House, Grant's party came to a fork. They took the right hand fork because it appeared Sheridan had taken his cavalry down that road. Colonel C. B. Comstock, of Grant's staff, galloped ahead. He returned quickly and reported that Lee was moving and the road led into Lee's lines. The group returned to the fork, left a guide, and continued to Todd's Tavern, arriving after midnight.<sup>23</sup> Grant was already aware he was not gaining the initiative over Lee despite the night movement.

Lee was alerted by Stuart of Grant's impending move, and had ordered Anderson's march. Anderson's defensive lines were threatened by fire, so he left early, three hours before Warren. Lee, in effect, had a jump on Grant, and a shorter route, to the same destination. Both Lee and Grant sent their cavalry to the crossroads ahead of their armies. A second setback struck Grant when Stuart beat Sheridan to Spottsylvania Court House.<sup>24</sup> Again, Lee had denied Grant the initiative.

Sheridan ordered Merritt's division to hold the bridge over the Po River on Anderson's route to Spottsylvania Court House. Meade changed the order and left the route open for the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>25</sup> Sheridan ordered Wilson's division to capture Spottsylvania Court House, which Wilson did.<sup>26</sup> Stuart moved past the Po River and blocked Warren's advance along the Brock Road.<sup>27</sup> About 0800, Warren's corps advanced on Stuart's Brock Road line. Anderson came up and sent three infantry brigades to support Stuart. The strengthened Confederate forces repulsed Warren's attack, and the head of Warren's corps entrenched.<sup>28</sup> The rest of Anderson's corps advanced on Spottsylvania Court House, and Wilson's division retired without fighting. Lee, confirming the Army of the Potomac was moving to Spottsylvania Court House, ordered Ewell up.<sup>29</sup> In the afternoon, Sedgwick arrived, and joined Warren.<sup>30</sup>

Sedgwick launched his and Warren's corps against Anderson's right as night approached. Just in time, Ewell's Corps arrived to repel the Federal attack.<sup>31</sup> Lee ordered Early, commanding Hill's Corps, to move to Spottsylvania Court House on the same road Warren and Hancock used.<sup>32</sup> Early ran into Hancock at Todd's Tavern, detaining Hancock from reaching the Spottsylvania Court House battlefield that evening, and forcing Early to find another route.<sup>33</sup>

Burnside crossed the Ny River on the Spottsylvania Court House - Fredericksburg Road, and drove Confederate



pickets away from the bridge. Burnside's lead brigade was then attacked, but held their position. Hancock and Burnside's skirmishers led Grant to believe Lee was attempting to cut Grant off from his new base at Fredericksburg.<sup>34</sup> Early's Corps arrived in the morning. By noon on May 9, Lee occupied a semi-circular position, with Anderson facing northwest with his left flank on the Po River, Ewell facing north in the center, and Early facing northeast, crossing the Fredericksburg Road.<sup>35</sup> The Army of the Potomac had Warren covering the Brock Road on the right, Sedgwick was in the center, and Burnside was on the left. Hancock started at Todd's Tavern, but was later ordered to Warren's right.<sup>36</sup>

General Burnside judged that Lee was ready to move north on Fredericksburg. Grant ordered Hancock to cross the Po River and find Lee's left, and by 2100, Hancock had completed the crossing, placing a river between Hancock and the rest of Grant's army.<sup>37</sup> Lee reacted to Hancock's move by reinforcing his left during the night.<sup>38</sup> This day, another unfortunate incident occurred for the Army of the Potomac. Sedgwick was killed while developing his position. General H. G. Wright replaced him.<sup>39</sup>

Earlier on May 9, Sheridan left with 10,000 cavalry to cut Lee's communications and dash into Richmond if possible. Stuart started following Sheridan the same day with 3,000 cavalry. Lee sent an infantry brigade to help Stuart.<sup>40</sup> Stuart cut Sheridan off from Richmond six miles

north of the city. There, at Yellow Tavern, he waited for Sheridan.<sup>41</sup> Sheridan arrived at Yellow Tavern on May 11 after destroying railroad tracks, and supplies along the way. Sheridan attacked Stuart, driving off the Confederate cavalry and mortally wounding Stuart. Subsequently, Sheridan passed along the Richmond defenses, and moved to link up with Butler at Bermuda Hundred.<sup>42</sup> Sheridan would be nonproductive for the next two weeks.

During the night of May 9, Meade issued orders for the next day. He directed Hancock find Lee's left. He ordered the 6th Corps, now commanded by Wright, to probe the Confederate center. Meade sent one of Hancock's divisions to join Burnside for a morning attack against Early from the east.<sup>43</sup> On the right, Hancock found Lee's left entrenched on high ground, overlooking the Po River to the west. Therefore, Grant abandoned the idea of attacking Lee's left flank. Even a successful attack would leave Hancock two rivers away from support. He'd be isolated, so Grant ordered Hancock to return across the Po River.<sup>44</sup>

Grant figured Lee had weakened other parts of his line to meet Hancock's threat. He therefore ordered Hancock to command an attack by Warren and Wright's corps. Only one division from Hancock's own corps would participate, with another of his in reserve. One other of Hancock's divisions stayed across the Po River. Grant ordered the attack for 1700.<sup>45</sup> Burnside was to reconnoiter in force and attack if

the opportunity arose. Meanwhile, Early attacked Hancock's division left south of the Po River. Early's attack was repulsed twice, then Hancock's division withdrew to safety across the Po River.<sup>46</sup>

General Wright attacked with a dense column of twelve regiments under Colonel Emory Upton. Upton's attack got into the Confederate works, but all the supporting attacks failed. Upton's partial success forced further unsuccessful and bloody supporting attacks. In the end, Upton withdrew. Grant wrote: "Upton had gained an important advantage, but a lack in others of the spirit and dash possessed by him lost it to us."<sup>47</sup> The Federal forces lost 4,100 casualties during these attacks. The Confederates only lost about 2,000.<sup>48</sup>

Grant lost an opportunity to seize the initiative when Burnside had completely turned Lee's right, but he was not aware of the advantage. Instead, Grant ordered Burnside to withdraw because Burnside's corps was greatly separated from Wright's corps. Grant blamed himself for the lost advantage: "I attach no blame to Burnside for this, but I do to myself for not having had a staff officer with him to report to me his position."<sup>49</sup>

It was raining on May 11, and there was no serious fighting. The Federals discovered a salient, and Grant decided to assault it on May 12 with the 9th and 2d Corps. It took most of the night to move these corps into position for a 0400 attack.<sup>50</sup> Grant sent two of his staff officers

to impress upon Burnside "the importance of pushing forward vigorously." Grant ordered the 5th and 6th Corps to be prepared to join in the assault.<sup>51</sup>

General Law wrote:

Late in the afternoon, under the impression that General Grant had actually begun another flanking movement, General Lee ordered that all the artillery on the left and center that was 'difficult of access' should be withdrawn from the lines, and that everything should be in readiness to move during the night if necessary.<sup>52</sup>

All the artillery was withdrawn , except two batteries from General Edward Johnson's front.<sup>53</sup> Law described Johnson's front as

an elevated point somewhat advanced from the general line, and known as 'the salient,' the breastworks there making a considerable angle, with its point toward the enemy. . . . To provide against contingencies, a second line had been laid off and partly constructed a short distance in rear, so as to cut off this salient.<sup>54</sup>

General Johnson realized the enemy was concentrating against the salient. He requested the artillery's return, and kept his men alert all night and ready.<sup>55</sup>

While Grant planned the May 12 attack, the War Department updated Grant on Butler's campaign. Butler succeeded in cutting the railroad south of Richmond, and was advancing slowly to Drewry's Bluff. He failed to move quickly when Richmond was almost defenseless.<sup>56</sup> Not until May 15 did Grant learn that Butler captured the Drewry's Bluff outer works.<sup>57</sup> Also, Sigel was defeated by Breckinridge at the Battle of New Market on May 15.<sup>58</sup>

The Federal assault on May 12 started a terrible, all day fight. The initial attack caught Johnson's division without adequate artillery. Nearly his entire division and 20 pieces of returning artillery were captured in the onslaught. Only stout defenses on either flank of the breakthrough prevented a Confederate route.<sup>59</sup> Grant had finally gained the initiative and he tried to sustain it by pushing his supporting attacks forward with no success. Only Burnside got into the Confederate works, but his corps was forced back out. Lee attempted to prevent Grant from sustaining his initiative by bringing a division from the left to block Hancock's breakthrough. The Confederate counterattack succeeded in forcing the Federals back to the salient's base.<sup>60</sup>

Lee continued to feed in every brigade he could get. Slowly, Hancock's men were forced back to the original breastworks. There, the Federals held the breastwork from the Union side, while the Confederates occupied their side.<sup>61</sup> Grant fed Wright into the fight, followed by half the 5th Corps.<sup>62</sup> General Law described the fighting.

All day long and until far into the night the battle raged with unceasing fury, in the space covered by the salient and the adjacent works. Every attempt to advance on either side was met and repelled from the other. The hostile battle-flags waved over different portions of the same works, while the men fought like fiends for their possession.<sup>63</sup>

During the night, Lee completed new field works across the base of the salient. He retired from the salient into the new works before daylight. Grant decided to not

attack these new works. Grant had lost the initiative gained by the initial May 12 attack. May 13 started five days of relative calm.<sup>64</sup> On May 14, Lee began pressing Davis and Bragg for reinforcements. He sent for Breckinridge if Breckinridge could drive the Federals out of the Valley.<sup>65</sup> General Grant started opening a supply route to Aquia Creek, and he expected reinforcements as well.<sup>66</sup>

The night of May 14, Grant tried a new move against Lee's center, but he quickly found it stronger than before. Lee also picked up on Grant's strategy of extending his army to the south.<sup>67</sup> Also on May 14, Sheridan finally reached Butler's lines at Bermuda Hundred, and started his return on May 17.<sup>68</sup>

On May 16, Grant wrote Halleck that several days of rain made the roads impassable. He needed twenty four hours of dry weather before offensive operations could resume.<sup>69</sup> Also on May 16, Beauregard attacked Butler and stopped the Army of the James active contribution to the campaign.<sup>70</sup> Lee learned that Sigel's second column left the Valley, and ordered Breckinridge, on May 17, to move to Hanover Junction.<sup>71</sup> Breckinridge left General Imboden to oppose Hunter, who replaced Sigel on May 18.<sup>72</sup> On May 18, Grant launched a last unsuccessful assault at Spottsylvania Court House.<sup>73</sup>

On May 19, Lee sent Ewell north of the Ny River to threaten Grant's communications. Ewell ran into Tyler and

his newly organized division. Hancock forced Ewell back, but Grant delayed his next attempt to gain the initiative over Lee because of the engagement.<sup>74</sup>

Losses were heavy for both sides at Spottsylvania Court House. Grant lost 16,141 killed or wounded, and 2,258 captured. A total of 18,399 casualties; about 18 per cent of his force. Lee lost 6,519 killed or wounded, and 5,543 captured. A total of 12,062 casualties; about 20 percent of his force.<sup>75</sup>

The Battle of Spottsylvania Court House was really a series of engagements as Grant kept trying to gain the initiative by turning Lee's flank. The Po River threatened to divide Grant's army into two parts with any Federal flank move. The Confederate Spottsylvania Court House defenses were actually stronger than in the Wilderness.<sup>76</sup> Grant's troops had to attack the center of these defenses. Those defenses were well prepared. A member of Colonel Upton's brigade described the Confederate works assaulted on May 12.

The enemy's defenses at this point were elaborately constructed of heavy timber, banked with earth to the height of about four feet; above this was placed what is known as a head log, raised just high enough to enable a musket to be inserted between it and the lower work. Pointed pine and pin-oak formed an abatis, in front of which was a deep ditch. Shelves ran along the inside edges of these works (a series of square pits) and along there flank traverses which extended to the rear; upon these shelves large quantities of 'buck and ball' and 'minie' cartridges were piled ready for use, and the guns of the dead and wounded were still pointing through the apertures, just as the men had fallen from them.<sup>77</sup>

After May 8, Grant spent two days gathering a good picture of Lee's dispositions. First, Grant tried the flank move around Lee's left, but never ordered an attack across the Po River. Later, part of the Army of the Potomac's flanking force was counterattacked by Lee. Grant did order an attack against Lee's right flank, thinking Lee's left flank had tied up Lee's reserves. It also failed.<sup>78</sup>

Lee stayed in his well prepared defenses. The only moves Lee ordered out of his lines were the May 10 counterattack, and Ewell's May 19 movement. His semi circular position, anchored on the Po River, forced Grant to make frontal attacks or break off the battle. Lee effectively used interior lines to shuttle units into threatened areas. His only impediment was the extensive construction throughout his defenses, which prevented the effective movement of his artillery.

Lee's lack of interior maneuverability caused his premature withdrawal of artillery the night of May 11. Lee had anticipated another shift by Grant to the east, and Lee was reacting to the supposed move. The Federal shuffling that led Lee to this conclusion was actually Grant's preparation for a major assault. Too late, Lee understood a new assault was imminent. He directed an artillery battalion back to the salient, but it was delayed by the elaborate Confederate works. The battalion was captured before reaching the salient.



Lee displayed superior initiative by anticipating Grant's move to Spottsylvania Court House. Lee's cavalry blocked the Federal infantry until Confederate infantry arrived. Colonel Henderson wrote:

When Grant reached the field he was much disappointed to find that he had been outmaneuvered, that his midnight march had been no good, and that he was again confronted by lines of breast-works.<sup>79</sup>

Lee's building a new road from the Wilderness to Spottsylvania Court House had a lot to do with Lee's gaining the initiative to Spottsylvania Court House. Grant blamed Anderson's disobedience of orders for the Union failure to get around Lee's flank.

It is impossible to say now what would have been the result if Lee's orders had been obeyed as given; but it is certain that we would have been in Spottsylvania, and between him and his capital. My belief is that there would have been a race between the two armies to see which could reach Richmond first, and the Army of the Potomac would have had the shorter line.<sup>80</sup>

Grant could have ordered Hancock to lead the Spottsylvania Court House advance. Hancock's Wilderness position was an hour closer to the court house than Warren's position. If Anderson then beat Hancock to Spottsylvania Court House, Hancock could have crushed Anderson before Ewell's arrival. Instead, Grant ordered a more conservative move which protected against a Confederate attack while moving.<sup>81</sup> Lee had taught him well.

Lee never considered himself capable of attacking Grant's army at Spottsylvania Court House. Instead, he looked for limited offensive opportunities to strike at

Grant's force. Otherwise, Lee prepared defenses that drew Grant into suicidal attacks. He described his defensive intention to Davis in a May 18 letter.

The Federal army occupies the Valley of the Ny extending across the road from Spottsylvania C. H. to Fredericksburg. His position is strongly entrenched, and we cannot attack it with any prospect of success without great loss of men which I wish to avoid if possible. The enemy's artillery is superior in weight of metal and range to our own, and my object has been to engage him when in motion and under circumstances that will not cause us to suffer from this disadvantage. I think by this means he has suffered considerably in the several past combats, and that his progress has thus far been arrested. I shall continue to strike him whenever opportunity presents itself, but nothing at present indicates any purpose on his part to advance. Neither the strength of our army nor the condition of our animals will admit, of any extensive movement with a view to draw the enemy from his position.<sup>82</sup>

Grant's one nearly decisive stroke was the May 12 attack against the salient. Grant's preparatory movements caused Lee to weaken his defenses at the wrong time. Lee reacted desperately to the attack, throwing in units a brigade at a time. Grant kept up the pressure feeding in units waiting to support the attack. On this day alone, Grant demonstrated superior initiative. It was enough to balance Grant and Lee's initiative since leaving the Wilderness.

By May 18, Grant was discouraged. Not only had his army failed to defeat Lee, other parts of his plan were a disaster as well. Butler was stopped by Beauregard. Sigel was in retreat. Banks was useless. Even Sherman was making

only gradual progress. Grant summed up his reaction to these events.

All this was very discouraging. All of it must have been known by the enemy before it was by me. In fact, the good news (for the enemy) must have been known to him at the moment I thought he was in despair, and his anguish had been already relieved when we were enjoying his supposed discomfiture.<sup>83</sup>

Grant's one bright spot was Sheridan's raid. Grant believed the raid had all the effects of an independent campaign.<sup>84</sup> Grant summed up all Sheridan's accomplishments.

Sheridan in his memorable raid passed entirely around Lee's army: encountered his cavalry in four engagements, and defeated them all; recaptured four hundred Union prisoners and killed and captured many of the enemy; destroyed and used many supplies and munitions of war; destroyed miles of railroad and telegraph, and freed us from annoyance by the cavalry of the enemy for more than two weeks.<sup>85</sup>

Lee's supply problem was principally transportation, and Lee continued to have just enough food present for his army to eat in spite of Sheridan's raid. Sheridan's actual primary accomplishment was to absent his 10,000 troopers from Grant for sixteen days, and kill Stuart.<sup>86</sup> Otherwise, Sheridan's raid had little effect on Lee, and kept Grant in the dark regarding Lee's disposition. Lee lost 3,000 troopers for only a few days.

Grant made his only possible offensive decision when he decided to seize Spottsylvania Court House. He erred in letting Lee anticipate his move. Lee was at his best in defending Spottsylvania Court House. He moved troops efficiently and at the right time. He made only one serious error. The decision to pull artillery out of the salient on

May 11. Grant took advantage of that mistake. Grant's corresponding action, involving all four of his infantry corps, was nearly decisive.

Losses were heavy for both sides, but their relative strengths were unchanged. Except for that one day, Lee had the initiative, but Grant's one devastating day balanced their initiative.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### BATTLE OF THE NORTH ANNA

Both Grant and Lee displayed initiative between May 20 and 26 during movements to and at the North Anna River. General Grant started another turning movement the night of May 20, because the attacks at Spottsylvania Court House failed to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia, and further attacks could destroy the Army of the Potomac. Grant moved to pull Lee away from his strong fortifications. This turning movement ended on May 26 without a major battle. Grant had finally recognized the uselessness of frontal attacks against a well prepared adversary. Lee headed Grant off where the Telegraph Road crossed the North Anna River. Here, he used the river to divide Grant's army into three distinct pieces.

Grant still determined to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia, on the other hand, he had to find another way. It was clear, by May 18, that Spottsylvania Court House was not the place.<sup>1</sup> Lee was still just as determined to prevent Grant from gaining the initiative and getting

between him and Richmond. He still looked for opportunities to attack Grant, but had not become discouraged with being forced closer and closer to Richmond. I knew that Grant's difficulties were increasing as he advanced.<sup>2</sup>

At the North Anna, Grant lost some of his numerical advantage. The heavy losses of the Wilderness and Spottsylvania Court House exhausted Grant's army, and it began to lose its spirit. Also, Grant became concerned that Sigel and Butler's being driven back would spare Confederate troops for Lee's army. To further aggravate the shrinking disparity between the two antagonists, Lee and Beauregard were approaching supporting distance of each other.<sup>3</sup> Grant's growing concern was well placed. With Sheridan missing, his army now numbered just 81,500.

Grant's last organized reinforcements arrived with Tyler on May 18.<sup>4</sup> He further decreased his combat power on purpose by sending over 100 artillery pieces back to Halleck. The close terrain and offensive action prevented their use. Thus, Grant saved his supply train from hauling the extra artillery forage and ammunition.<sup>5</sup>

Grant established unity of command among his fighting forces, and improved the organization of his forces, by officially merging Burnside's 9th Corps into the Army of the Potomac on May 24.<sup>6</sup> This finally got rid of the clumsy command arrangement in which Grant used Burnside's separate corps as if it was part of Meade's army.

On May 17, Lee ordered Breckinridge to Hanover Junction,<sup>7</sup> and held Breckinridge in reserve. Pickett's division failed to capture New Berne, North Carolina in a May 5 attack<sup>8</sup> which freed his division to join Lee at the North Anna on May 22.<sup>9</sup> Four other brigades were released by Beauregard and joined Lee on May 20.<sup>10</sup> Lee also picked up a brigade originally posted at the North Anna to guard the Telegraph Road crossing. Breckinridge, Pickett, and Hoke added 8,500 men to the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>11</sup> With all reinforcements, Lee's army now numbered about 64,800 men. Grant's numerical superiority had slipped from 1.6 : 1 to 1.2 : 1.

Lee's army met with a disaster on May 24. Lee fell ill and was disabled for over a week.<sup>12</sup> This meant Lee and two of his three experienced corps commanders were out of action. This prevented Lee from taking advantage of the near parity in numbers.<sup>13</sup>

To seize the initiative, Grant ordered another flank march to the east, because a flank march to the west only returned Lee's army to its previous Wilderness defenses. He added a new twist to this flank march. In his words:

I believed that, if one corps of the army was exposed on the road to Richmond, and at a distance from the main army, Lee would endeavor to attack the exposed corps before reinforcements could come up; in which case the main army could follow Lee up and attack him before he had time to intrench.<sup>14</sup>

Grant also needed to increase his numerical strength, on May 25, he ordered Hunter to move up the Valley, cut rail lines

toward Lynchburg, then return to his base or join the Army of the Potomac.<sup>15</sup>

Lee was still looking for opportunities to deny Grant the initiative. He needed to catch Grant on the move to have Grant at a disadvantage. If he couldn't attack, Lee intended to still stay between Grant and Richmond. While Lee held the North Anna line, Beauregard pressed Davis and Bragg to send enough of Lee's troops south to enable him to destroy Butler. Lee fended off Beauregard's pleas, because he convinced Davis that Butler could only be destroyed with costly assaults, but could be effectively contained with a small force. It would be easier to defeat the Army of the Potomac on the move rather than the Army of the James entrenched in Bermuda Hundred.<sup>16</sup>

Lee didn't try to attack, because he thought Grant was secure from attack along his route across the Mattaponi River.<sup>17</sup> As late as May 22, Lee was not certain of the line Grant would take.<sup>18</sup> Yet, Grant still intended to fight it out on the same line from Washington to Richmond.<sup>19</sup> Grant intended to gain the initiative by getting around Lee's flank. Grant ordered Hancock to move behind the line, to the southeast "to get as far toward Richmond on the line of the Fredericksburg Railroad as he can make." Hancock was to fight any force encountered. If Lee went after Hancock, the other three corps would follow and attack Lee before he could entrench.<sup>20</sup>

Douglas Southall Freeman postulated that Davis may have urged Lee to consider withdrawing to Richmond. This is what Beauregard urged Bragg and Davis to do. Lee then wrote a reply to Davis in cipher which indicates he was aware that he could fail to prevent Grant's movements towards Richmond. The reply included the following:

Am fully alive to importance of concentration and being near base. The latter consideration may impel me to fall back eventually. Will do so at once if deemed best. . . . I have posted Breckinridge at Junction to guard communication, whence he can speedily return to Valley if necessary.<sup>21</sup>

On May 20, Lee showed no signs of leaving his lines, so Grant ordered another left flank movement for the night of May 20-21. Grant finally got a jump on Lee. Hancock led, followed rapidly by Warren.<sup>22</sup> Federal dismounted cavalry and infantry alerted Lee when they drove away his cavalry pickets where the Telegraph Road crosses the Ny River.<sup>23</sup> Lee's aide-de-camp wrote Ewell:

The enemy seems to be lengthening out his line down the Ny, offering us our opportunity to strike at him. The general wishes to know whether you discover any movement of the enemy in your front.<sup>24</sup>

Lee ordered Ewell to move at dawn on May 21 to the Army of Northern Virginia's right flank, then move south across the Po River along the road which led to the North Anna River.<sup>25</sup> From Spottsylvania Court House, Hancock crossed his Federal corps to the north side of the Ny River, then moved eastward to the Richmond, Fredericksburg, & Potomac Railroad. Hancock then followed the east fork of the Mattaponi River south to Milford Station. Here, he ran

into a detachment from Pickett's Division coming to reinforce Lee. Hancock stopped there for the night.<sup>26</sup> Warren followed, stopping for the night when he reached the railroad. Burnside and Wright stayed at the North Anna to hold Lee if possible. Grant intended Burnside and Warren to give Hancock and Warren a chance to get between Lee and Richmond.<sup>27</sup>

Lee marched to the North Anna River crossings as soon as Grant's movement was discovered.<sup>28</sup> Ewell's Corps led off the Confederate march from the left flank, followed by Anderson's and Early's Corps. The Confederate III Corps, had a quick fight with the Federal 6th Corps as the Confederates left their lines. Lee's army used the Telegraph Road, because it was the direct route to the North Anna.<sup>29</sup> Lee also ordered Breckinridge to defend his Hanover Junction position if Grant got past the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>30</sup>

The evening of May 21, Burnside, then Wright, followed by Hancock and Warren, began the movement away from Spottsylvania Court House.<sup>31</sup> The 6th and 9th Corps marched the entire the hot May night, through choking dust clouds. Supply wagons took up the middle of the road as the infantry walked on each side.<sup>32</sup> On May 22, Hancock's corps rested at Milford Station. Warren crossed the Mattaponi River and arrived at Harris' Store on the Telegraph Road well north of

the North Anna. Burnside and Wright moved north and east of the Ny River.<sup>33</sup>

Grant ordered his force to continue the march at 0500, May 23. He directed his cavalry and infantry, using all roads, to move south and find Lee's army. He directed the corps to cross at three different sites on the North Anna River, at or west of where the Telegraph Road crossed the river.<sup>34</sup> The 5th and 6th Corps headed for the Jericho Ford, about four miles west of the Telegraph Road. The 9th Corps moved to Ox Ford, midway between Telegraph Road and the 5th Corps crossing. The 2d Corps went to Chesterfield Bridge on the Telegraph Road.<sup>35</sup>

Lee had his whole army in a strong position behind the North Anna River on May 22. He beat Grant by a full day,<sup>36</sup> denying Grant the initiative once again. On May 23, Warren crossed unopposed at Jericho Ford, and moved out from the river. He quickly ran into Hill's Corps, stopped, and entrenched. The 2d Corps assaulted a Confederate detachment from Lee's I Corps at the Chesterfield Bridge, brushed aside the detachment and seized the bridge. Lee did not seriously resist either of the crossing attempts.<sup>37</sup> The only Confederate action was an attack by Early on Warren's right flank, but it was driven back.<sup>38</sup> Wright's corps reached the North Anna by that night. Burnside's corps reached Ox Ford too late to cross.<sup>39</sup>



By the morning of May 24, Lee pulled his left and right flanks back from the river. He kept his center as the point of a wedge on the center ford.<sup>40</sup> Colonel Henderson described the resulting position.

His whole force was now massed in a space not more than two and a half miles broad, and his enemy was not only widely separated, but would have to cross the river to reinforce one wing from the other. He [Lee] could reinforce a point attacked in one-third of the time that Grant could reinforce at the same point.<sup>41</sup>

Grant was intimidated by Lee's new position.

He found that he had two corps on one wing, one corps on the other, separated by a wide interval and by the river. It was evident that nearly the whole Confederate army might fall either on one or on the other.<sup>42</sup>

Hancock and Wright crossed the North Anna in the morning.<sup>43</sup> Hancock found Anderson and Ewell positioned for battle across the Telegraph Road.<sup>44</sup> General Law described Grant's dilemma.

The two wings of Grant's army were safely across the river, but there was no connection between them. Lee had only thrown back his flanks and let them in on either side, while he held the river between; and when General Grant attempted to throw his center, under Burnside, across between the ford and the bridge, it was very severely handled and failed to get a foothold on the south side. A detachment from Warren's corps was sent down on the south side to help Burnside across, but was attacked by Mahone's division, and driven back with heavy loss, narrowly escaping capture. General Grant found himself in what may be called a military dilemma. He had cut his army in two by running it upon the point of a wedge. He could not break the point, which rested upon the river, and the attempt to force it out of place by striking on its side must of necessity be made without much concert of action between the two wings of his army, neither of which could reinforce the other without crossing the river twice; while

his opponent could readily transfer his troops, as needed, from one wing to the other, across the narrow space between them.<sup>45</sup>

Grant covered the six miles between his wings with only one division after sending two of Burnside's divisions across the river. One of these divisions joined Warren's corps, and the other Hancock's corps.<sup>46</sup> Also on May 24, Sheridan returned to the Army of the Potomac.<sup>47</sup> Grant spent May 25 and May 26 trying to find a vulnerable point in Lee's line, and couldn't. He also never learned that Lee was sick, and bed ridden.<sup>48</sup> The night of May 26, Grant crossed his army back to the north side of the North Anna. He was ready to attempt another move around Lee's right.<sup>49</sup>

Losses were relatively light at the Battle of the North Anna. Grant had 1,973 killed and wounded, 165 captured, for a total of 2,138 casualties. Lee lost 690 killed or wounded, 561 captured, for 1,251 total casualties.<sup>50</sup>

Both Lee and Grant failed in their attempts to bring on a battle as Grant moved from Spottsylvania Court House. Grant moved quickly, but on a circuitous route. He wanted to draw Lee into an attack by using a single corps as bait. Instead, he divided his army in two, and kept a river between the parts and Lee until they were united. Then, he moved his army behind a river so that it was safe from attack while moving. Lee hoped to catch Grant on the move. Yet, he moved his army behind a formidable river barrier.

This same river prevented Lee from attacking Grant until the Army of the Potomac closed up to the North Anna River.

Lee's selection of a defensive position was superb. He used a river, crossable at only four points, with high bluffs as a defensive anchor. Lee's North Anna defenses were the equal of Spottsylvania Court House's.<sup>51</sup> When Warren crossed the North Anna on May 23, Lee immediately saw an opportunity and ordered an attack on the isolated and vulnerable Federal corps. However, Early's May 23 attack failed to drive Warren into the river, and by the evening of May 24, the Federal bridgeheads were solid, and the Army of Northern Virginia was strongly entrenched. The Confederates held an advantageous central position, and they could easily move against either the 5th and 6th Corps, or the 2d Corps. The Federals, as before, could only launch bloody assaults against prepared works.<sup>52</sup> Because of Lee's illness he missed this opportunity to defeat the Army of the Potomac in detail.<sup>53</sup> Grant himself thought Lee had missed his last offensive opportunity. Referring to Lee's ability to concentrate on either Federal flank, Grant wrote:

But he did not avail himself of either opportunity. He seemed really to be misled as to my designs; but moved by his interior line - the Telegraph Road - to make sure of keeping between his capital and the Army of the Potomac. He never again had such an opportunity of dealing a heavy blow.<sup>54</sup>

General Venable also recorded the opportunity, as well as Lee's desire to attack the split Union army.

Lee would gladly have compelled battle in his position there. He was anxious now to strike a telling blow, as he was convinced that General Grant's men were dispirited by the bloody repulse of their repeated attacks on our lines. Lee had drawn Picket and Breckinridge to him. But in the midst of the operations on the North Anna he succumbed to sickness, against which he has struggled for some days. As he lay in his tent he would say, in his impatience, 'We must strike them!' 'We must never let them pass us again!' 'We must strike them!' . . . He was much disappointed in not securing larger results from the attack which prevented the junction of Hancock's and Warren's columns after they had crossed the North Anna.<sup>55</sup>

Both Lee and Grant displayed mixed levels of initiative after leaving Spottsylvania Court House. Grant refused to attack Lee in the Spottsylvania Court House lines again. He kept his army safe from attack while moving, and refused to attack Lee again in prepared works. Immediately after deciding Lee's line was not weak at any point, Grant withdrew to the north side of the North Anna River. Lee had again succeeded in forcing Grant to find another way to force Lee to battle. Lee seized the initiative from Grant with a swift movement to the North Anna River, and a careful disposition of his forces. It was impossible for Grant to attack Lee without a serious risk to his army. Grant dampened the effect by his quick withdrawal back across the North Anna River which prevented Lee's taking advantage of the Federal disposition. Grant's mistake was dividing his army divided in front of Lee for three days. Lee had the strength to outnumber either Union wing. Lee missed an opportunity to strike a telling blow.

Leaving Spottsylvania Court House, Lee moved further south than necessary. Pickett was in a position, with Ewell able to support quickly, to contest Hancock's crossing the Mattaponi River on May 22. Lee chose to defend at the North Anna instead. This gave him an extra day to unite his army before Grant arrived. It also placed Lee into a previously prepared position. He had posted a brigade in the vicinity during the Battles of the Wilderness and Spottsylvania Court House. Also Lee may have reacted to pressure from Davis, Bragg, and Beauregard to move closer to Richmond.

Whatever his reasons, Lee cleverly allowed the Army of the Potomac to cross the river on either of his flanks, but not in the center. His army was perfectly placed on interior lines, and the Army of the Potomac was divided and dispersed. More experienced corps commanders would have seized the opportunity, without direction, on May 24. However, Early and Anderson did not do so. They were still learning to control corps, and needed Lee's direction, advice, and approval.

Grant and Lee were consistent in their objectives. Grant was still trying to destroy Lee's army, and Lee was still defending Richmond. The movement to the North Anna was Grant's third attempt to turn Lee's right, and it failed as the first two did. Again, Lee blocked Grant's move from well constructed entrenchments, but Grant appeared to be learning. He did not attack Lee's strong lines this time. Instead, he made an early decision to try another flanking

movement. Lee had lost this opportunity to defeat Grant's army in detail.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### BATTLE OF COLD HARBOR

Grant and Lee did not lock horns at the North Anna River. The North Anna River was a barrier neither army wanted to fight across. Grant left his North Anna position on May 26, skirmished with portions of Lee's army, and then assaulted Lee's lines at Cold Harbor on June 1 and 2 in a last attempt to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia.

This time Grant moved much closer to the Army of Northern Virginia than his move to the North Anna. Portions of the armies maintained contact, fighting skirmishes as Grant searched for an open flank. He wanted to sustain the initiative he gained by withdrawing from his exposed North Anna position before Lee could attack, and make one more effort to get between Lee and Richmond. In his memoirs, Grant wrote that he expected to fail. "I had no expectation now, however, of succeeding in this; but I did expect to hold him far enough west to enable me to reach the James River high up."<sup>1</sup> He no longer thought the Army of the Potomac could destroy Lee. His immediate objective was now

to unite with Butler's Army of the James. Then, with the united armies, attack Lee or Richmond. The purpose of the Valley forces under Hunter was no longer to tie up Confederate forces, but to attack Lee's lines of supply.<sup>2</sup>

Lee's primary objective shifted from defending Richmond to attacking Grant. Lee wrote letters to Hill, Anderson, and Davis between May 30 and June 6 emphasizing his desire to attack Grant. On May 30, he wrote of Grant's flanking moves: "It can only be arrested by striking at once."<sup>3</sup> He wrote to Hill that he "must be prepared to fight him in the field," and that Lee expected all corps commanders to cooperate.<sup>4</sup> On June 4, Lee wrote Anderson again, expressing a desire to "move down and attack him with our whole force, provided we could catch him in the act of crossing" the Chickahominy River.<sup>5</sup> In a letter to President Davis dated June 6, Lee stated that "Early with Ewell's Corps is advancing down our front to try to attack the enemy in flank."<sup>6</sup>

Secondarily, Lee still defended Richmond. On May 28, he wrote to President Davis that his coming movements were to intercept Grant's march to Richmond.<sup>7</sup> Later, Lee resisted Davis' desire to dispatch forces to meet Hunter in the Valley. Lee wrote a June 11 letter to Davis stating he did not wish "to hazard the defense of Richmond."<sup>8</sup> Lee adhered to his belief in offensive warfare by defending Richmond while looking for offensive opportunities.

Both Grant and Lee struggled to maintain army strength. Grant was down to about 87,800 men, and Lee to about 63,500. Both armies needed greater combat power to continue the bloody struggles that characterizes this campaign.

On May 22, Grant directed Halleck to send General Smith's 18th Corps from Butler's army. Additionally, on May 22, Grant shifted his base to Port Royal,<sup>9</sup> and on May 26, Grant directed Halleck to change the Army of the Potomac's base once again, to White House.<sup>10</sup> His base of operations was now due east of Grant's original line of March.

Butler delayed sending Smith, but by May 29, Smith and 16,500 men left Bermuda Hundred.<sup>11</sup> Smith had 16,000 infantry, 16 artillery pieces, and a squadron of cavalry.<sup>12</sup> Smith left 2,500 of his men at White House to protect Grant's new base.<sup>13</sup> Smith's withdrawal left Butler with Gilmore and 8,000 infantry to hold the Bermuda Hundred lines.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, Butler was incapable of offensive action, and Beauregard could shift forces to Lee. The addition of Smith's 18th Corps raised Grant's strength to about 101,800 men.

Grant had other problems. Meade and his corps commanders were dissatisfied with the campaign's progress. General W. F. Smith related a June 5 conversation between Meade and himself.

On the morning of June 5 General Meade came to my headquarters to say that he was going to fill the

gap on my right, and during his visit I asked him how he came to give such an order for battle as that of the 2d. He replied that he had worked out every plan for every move from the crossing of the Rapidan onward, that the papers were full of the doings of Grant's army, and that he was tired of it, and was determined to let General Grant plan his own battles.<sup>15</sup>

The dissatisfaction permeated the corps commanders to such a degree that the validity of Grant's orders were questioned behind his back. After the Battle of Cold Harbor, the Army of the Potomac began siege operations. Brevet Brigadier General Martin T. McMahon, a lieutenant colonel and Hancock's assistant adjutant general in June 1864, related the following event.:

Another strange order came . . . It opened with a preamble that . . . the enemy had without provocation repeatedly opened fire during the night upon our lines, therefore, at midnight of that day, the corps commanders were directed to open fire from all their batteries generally upon the enemy's position and continue it until daylight. This was coupled with the proviso that if in the opinion of a corps commander the fire would provoke a return from the enemy which would inflict severe damage upon his troops, then he was exempted from the operation of the order. The commanders of the three corps holding the front communicated with one another by telegraph with this result: Smith was satisfied that the fire which he would provoke would inflict upon him disproportionate damage. Hancock for the same reason did not intend to fire unless the fire provoked by the other corps reached his lines. Wright adopted the same rule of action. Twelve o'clock came, and the summer night continued undisturbed.<sup>16</sup>

This was not the only time Grant's orders were disobeyed.

Once Lee learned that Grant was going to be reinforced by Smith's corps, he suggested that he and Beauregard collaborate against Grant. Beauregard, independently made

the same suggestion to Davis for possible emergencies.<sup>17</sup> Lee sent a letter directly to Beauregard on June 1 urging him to leave a guard against Butler's depleted forces, and then move north with the rest of his forces, unite with the Army of Northern Virginia, and take command of Lee's right wing.<sup>18</sup>

Beauregard's desires were different. He wanted Lee to move a large force to unite with him. Then, that combined force could crush Butler, and then turn on Grant.<sup>19</sup> Beauregard resisted joining Lee, but sent substantial reinforcements to Lee at Cold Harbor. Hoke's Division was under Lee's control by June 3, followed on June 4 by Ransom's Brigade.<sup>20</sup> Bragg also added a new regiment of about 1100 South Carolinians to Lee's command.<sup>21</sup> To oppose the Army of the Potomac, Lee had about 74,000 men. Grant's 101,800 enjoyed only a 1.4 : 1 manpower superiority. Further, about June 4, Confederate General W. E. Jones arrived in the Shenandoah Valley with 3,000 to 4,000 men. He was to defend against Hunter's new Union move up the Valley.<sup>22</sup>

General Hill returned to duty after recovering from his illness. Instead of returning to his division, Early replaced Ewell, who had become ill, as commander of the II Corps on May 27. Ewell never returned to the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>23</sup>

Grant slipped east from the North Anna River in another attempt to flank Lee.<sup>24</sup> His next natural obstacle

was the Pamunkey River. Once across, Totopotomoy Creek and the Chickahominy River were the only natural obstacles between Grant and Richmond. As he did to cross the Mattaponi River, Grant moved well east of Lee's position. Grant had one advantage he didn't have when he moved to the North Anna. He now had Sheridan's cavalry to lead the army's movement. Once across the Pamunkey River, Grant could move west to the Virginia Central Railroad, or move southwest toward Mechanicsville,<sup>25</sup> and screen his movement with cavalry.

Grant sent orders for this next move on May 25. He ordered Sheridan to send cavalry on the afternoon of May 26 to seize crossings over the Pamunkey River, directed Warren and Wright to march for Hanover Town on the Pamunkey River after dark on May 26, and directed Hancock to hold until the way was clear. Also, Grant directed Sheridan to make a cavalry demonstration against Lee's left on the North Anna.<sup>26</sup>

Lee faced a challenge if he was to attack Grant. He had to catch Grant spread out and on the move, but Grant now used the rivers to guard his flank until he was concentrated. All Lee could do was interpose his army between Grant's army and Richmond. Then, hope Grant's army wasted itself in futile attacks. Lee could then take advantage of a demoralized army and attack it.



Lee learned the Army of the Potomac was moving the night of May 26, and by morning, he knew that Federal cavalry and infantry were across the Pamunkey River near Hanover Town. Lee sent his cavalry to check the Union movement from Hanover Town, and decided to start moving his infantry to Ashland.<sup>27</sup> Later on the evening of May 27, Lee ordered the army further along to Atlee's Station. At that point, Lee intended to defend on a ridge behind Totopotomoy Creek.<sup>28</sup> Lee knew Grant had several route choices against his front. Regardless of which direction Grant moved, Lee intended to intercept Grant's march to Richmond, and positioned his army to shift accordingly. Lee also told Davis he would be "near enough to Richmond for General Beauregard to unite with me if practicable."<sup>29</sup>

Grant was making good use of his initiative. By the time Lee reacted on May 27, he was eight miles further away from Richmond than Grant.<sup>30</sup> Grant spent May 27 concentrating his entire army on the Pamunkey River,<sup>31</sup> and Lee didn't move Anderson's Corps from the North Anna until 0300 on May 28.

Grant moved the 2d, 5th, and 6th Corps across the Pamunkey River on May 28. The 9th Corps was left to guard the trains. Grant formed a line extending south from the river facing west. Wright was on the right, Hancock in the center, and Warren on the left.<sup>32</sup> Grant sent Sheridan towards Mechanicsville to find Lee's position.<sup>33</sup> Sheridan

encountered Lee's cavalry near Haw's Shop that afternoon.<sup>34</sup> Lee and Grant both sent infantry supports to their cavalry.<sup>35</sup>

The following day, Grant pushed Wright to Hanover Court House, while Hancock and Warren moved toward Lee's line. Burnside was kept in reserve. Sheridan covered Grant's left flank as the army moved west.<sup>36</sup> On May 30, Hancock reached Totopotomoy Creek where Lee was strongly fortified. Wright moved up on Hancock's right, and Burnside to Hancock's left. Warren moved to the extreme left flank at Huntley Corners.<sup>37</sup> In the evening, Early attacked Warren, and drove the Federals back at first, threatening the Union left flank. Grant ordered Hancock to attack toward his front to relieve the pressure on Warren's corps. Hancock captured the Confederate rifle pits to his front and Warren repulsed Early.<sup>38</sup> Grant probed Lee's position and found the enemy defense on the Totopotomoy too strong to attack. Grant made a new move around Lee's flank, but this time Grant stayed close to Lee. Lee kept pace with him, and stayed between Grant and Richmond.<sup>39</sup>

Meanwhile on May 30, Smith's 16,500 man 18th Corps arrived at White House. Grant was concerned Lee might try to cut Smith off from the Army of the Potomac's left flank, so he had Meade instruct Sheridan to establish communication with Smith and cover the 18th Corps' move. Grant also informed Smith of the danger.<sup>40</sup> Grant intended the 18th Corps to help sustain the initiative he was now struggling

to maintain. He ordered Smith to leave a garrison at White House, and move up the south side of the Pamunkey to New Castle. The 18th Corps marched at 1530, but with no wagons for supplies or ammunition.<sup>41</sup>

Sheridan attacked and carried the Confederate entrenchments at Cold Harbor.<sup>42</sup> Lee threw Anderson's Corps, part of Hill's Corps, as well as Hoke and Breckinridge's Divisions across the front of this new Federal advance.<sup>43</sup> Grant ordered Wright to Sheridan's relief. Wright, however, didn't reach Cold Harbor until 0900 on June 1. While waiting for infantry support, Sheridan repulsed two assaults.<sup>44</sup>

On May 30, Grant also ordered pontoons to be sent from Washington to City Point.<sup>45</sup> This indicated either a possible crossing of the James River by the Army of the Potomac, or a possible move of the Army of the James north to join Grant, to sustain his initiative if he continued to encounter the Army of Northern Virginia in strongly entrenched lines.

At daylight on June 1, Smith received an order from Grant to proceed to New Castle Ferry and place his command between the 5th and 6th Corps. After arriving at New Castle Ferry, Smith could not find the 5th or 6th Corps, and sent a message to Grant asking for a verification of the order. Grant's reply stated Smith should have been ordered to Cold Harbor instead, and directed him to Cold Harbor.<sup>46</sup> The

delay in Smith's arrival contributed to a coming loss in initiative. Meade sent Smith orders to follow the 6th Corps and form on its right at Cold Harbor. Smith was to join the 6th Corps in an attack that day.<sup>47</sup> The 18th Corps reached Cold Harbor at 1500.<sup>48</sup>

Earlier that morning, Meade ordered Warren to attack Anderson's Corps, ordered by Lee to oppose Wright and Smith's arrival, as it moved along Warren's front. Meade also ordered Wright to move out into Anderson's front to assist Warren. Warren was slow and ran into Early's Corps occupying strong lines. Anderson, instead of moving on Wright, fortified itself facing to the east.<sup>49</sup> Wright and Smith finally made their assault at 1800. They captured and held the first line of rifle pits from Anderson. At the same time, Lee attempted to seize the initiative from Grant. He had Early assault Warren's line three times, but Early was repulsed all three times. Lee continued trying to wrest the initiative from Grant with several night attacks, but he failed to drive the Federals out of their rifle pits.<sup>50</sup>

Lee knew Grant may head for the James River. He wrote a letter to Beauregard at 1600, June 1 warning Beauregard. He suggested Beauregard try to move north of the James River and link up with the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>51</sup> The same day, Pickett arrived with another brigade from Beauregard.<sup>52</sup>

Sheridan spent June 1 searching for crossings over the Chickahominy River.<sup>53</sup> The Confederate Cold Harbor lines

covered the approaches to the Chickahominy, which was the last major obstacle before the Richmond defenses.<sup>54</sup>

Hancock moved to Wright's left so that Grant could attack the morning of June 2. It was in position by 0730. Warren's corps shifted left to connect with Smith. Burnside moved into reserve at Bethesda Church.<sup>55</sup> The Union lines now ran from Bethesda Church, by Old Cold Harbor, to the Chickahominy River with a cavalry division guarding the right. Lee's line corresponded to the Union line from the Totopotomoy Creek to New Cold Harbor.<sup>56</sup>

Grant made preparations for a June 2 afternoon attack, but it never happened.<sup>57</sup> He was beginning to lose the initiative. After Smith reminded Meade he had no ammunition with him, Smith received a 0230 order postponing the attack until 1700. He finally received ammunition from Wright's 6th Corps at 0700. At 1430, the 1700 attack order was rescinded, postponed to 0430 on June 3.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, Lee continued his efforts to seize the initiative. He had Early attack Burnside's corps while it was moving that afternoon. Early also struck the flank of Warren's corps. This attack contributed to Grant's loss of initiative by upsetting Warren and Burnside's cooperation during the June 3 attack.<sup>59</sup>

Grant was not ready to surrender the initiative. He ordered a 0430 June 3 assault by Hancock, Wright, and Smith's corps, as Warren and Burnside's corps threatened

Lee's left.<sup>60</sup> Lee's army used the June 2 respite to adjust and improve their lines. He intended to deny Grant the initiative with formidable defenses in difficult terrain. To the Confederate's front "was a wooded country, interspersed with clearings, . . . sparsely populated, and full of swamps."<sup>61</sup> McMahon provided the following description of the Confederate defenses:

The enemy's general line, although refused at certain points and with salients elsewhere, because of the character of the country, was that of an arc of a circle, the concave side toward us, overlapping on both flanks the three corps intending to attack. The line of advance of Wright's command holding the center was therefore perpendicular to that of the enemy. Hancock's line, connecting with Wright's left, extended obliquely to the left and rear. A movement upon his part to the front must necessarily take him off obliquely from the line of advance of the center. The same was true of Smith's command upon the right. What resulted from this formation the 3d of June developed. No reconnaissance had been made other than the bloody one of the evening before. Every one felt that this was to be the final struggle. No further flanking marches were possible. Richmond was dead in front. No further wheeling of corps from right to left by the rear; no further dusty marches possible on that line, even "if it took all summer."<sup>62</sup>

General Law described his adjusted line as placing a clear sweep of fire across the marshy ground any attack would have to cross.<sup>63</sup> Law's men were ready, as was the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia. Law described the beginning of the Federal attack.

Our troops were under arms and waiting, when with the misty light of early morning the scattering fire of our pickets, who now occupied the abandoned works in the angle, announced the beginning of the attack. As the assaulting column swept over the old works a loud cheer was given, and it rushed on into the marshy ground in the angle. Its front covered

little more than the line of my own brigade of less than a thousand men; but line followed line until the space inclosed by the old salient became a mass of writhing humanity, upon which our artillery and musketry played with cruel effect.<sup>64</sup>

The attack started as ordered. Outer rifle pits were captured . Then the attacking units had to cross ground "cut up with deep ravines and a morass difficult to cross."<sup>65</sup> There was a two mile gap between Smith and Warren's corps. Therefore, Smith refused his right flank which effectively pulled a division out of battle.<sup>66</sup> Other corps had similar problems. Each corps attacked in directions that diverged from each other. The Union attack was decimated. Grant's initiative was gone.

General Law described the impact Smith's attack had on his brigade.

On reaching the trenches, I found the men in fine spirits, laughing and talking as they fired. There, too, I could see more plainly the terrible havoc made in the ranks of the assaulting column. I had seen the dreadful carnage in front of Marye's Hill at Fredericksburg, and on the 'old railroad cut' which Jackson's men held at the Second Manassas; but I had seen nothing to exceed this. It was not war, it was murder. When the fight ended, more than a thousand men lay in front of our works either killed or too badly wounded to leave the field.<sup>67</sup>

The Federal attack failed. Grant ordered a second assault. Some troops moved forward to ground already taken, while others fired from obstacles already reached. The corps commanders reported the attack had been made, and it failed. Grant then ordered a third attack.<sup>68</sup> General Smith, for one, admitted he refused to obey the order.<sup>69</sup> The initial attack was over in an hour. That hour cost

Grant 13,000 men, while Lee lost just over 1,000.<sup>70</sup> All the fighting was over by 0730, and Grant decided to make no more assaults at Cold Harbor because of Lee's strength.<sup>71</sup> The Army of the Potomac spent the rest of the day strengthening its defensive line.

Grant canceled all further offensive action, and fell back on the defensive. His concern, now, was to resist Confederate assaults he thought were forthcoming.<sup>72</sup> Lee, though, would not attack. Since the Chickahominy and James Rivers prevented any further flanking moves by Grant, Lee's Cold Harbor lines protected Richmond, and kept the Army of the Potomac where it could do little damage. Lee seized the initiative from Grant by interposing between Grant and Richmond in such a way that Grant had to abandon his attempts to force Lee into the open, or continue with futile assaults. The Army of the Potomac settled in dug zig-zags and parallels at night for the next twelve days.<sup>73</sup> Bragg strengthened Lee's army with Ransom's Brigade from Beauregard's forces on June 3. Lee considered an assault on the Army of the Potomac, and ordered probing attacks against Grant's flank and rear June 6-7. He found the Army of the Potomac protected with strong entrenchments.<sup>74</sup>

Confederate General W. E. Jones attacked Hunter at Piedmont on June 5. Jones was not only defeated, he was killed. Hunter continued south toward Lynchburg, and laid waste to the country his forces passed through, including



burning the Virginia Military Institute.<sup>75</sup> Grant sent Sheridan toward Lynchburg to meet with Hunter and order his movement to the Army of the Potomac. Grant was trying to rebuild his strength.<sup>76</sup> Lee reacted and sent Generals Hampton and Fitz Lee, with their two divisions, to tag along with Sheridan.<sup>77</sup> The Confederate cavalry met Sheridan at Trevilian Station June 11-12. Sheridan's 10,000 and the Confederate 5,000 fought to a draw, but Sheridan was blocked from reaching Hunter and fell back to Grant's line.<sup>78</sup>

Lee recommended sending Breckinridge back to the Valley with his division to take charge. For the first time in the campaign, Lee was prepared to detach troops. He stated his reasons to detach Breckinridge in a letter to Davis on June 6. It indicated he knew he had enough troops to contain Grant.

It is apparent that if Grant cannot be successfully resisted here we cannot hold the Valley. If he is defeated it can be recovered. But unless a sufficient force can be had in that country to restrain the movements of the enemy, he will do us great evil and in that event I think it would be better to restore Genl Breckinridge the troops drawn from him.<sup>79</sup>

Lee reacted to Hunter by detaching Breckinridge to the Valley.<sup>80</sup>

Lee sent Ransom's Brigade back to Beauregard, and also prepared to send Hoke's Brigade when Butler advanced a column toward Petersburg on June 9.<sup>81</sup> He expected Grant to make a move to the James River, and told Davis that an attack on Grant, strongly entrenched, would "run great risk

to the safety of the army."<sup>82</sup> Even so, Lee was prepared to firmly seize the initiative with offensive action. On June 13, Lee detached Early's Corps from the Army of Northern Virginia and sent it to the Shenandoah Valley. Early's Corps had 8,000 infantry and 24 guns. Later, Lee added 1,500 cavalry, 2,000 infantry, and 16 more guns.<sup>83</sup> Early succeeded in driving Hunter out of the Valley, defeated a Federal force at the Monocacy River in Maryland on July 9, and advanced to Washington's outskirts.<sup>84</sup>

The Army of the Potomac suffered heavily after leaving the North Anna River. Grant suffered 13,154 killed or wounded, 2,508 captured for a total of 15,662 casualties. Lee lost 4,576 killed or wounded, 1,430 captured, for a total of 6,006 casualties.<sup>85</sup>

Grant's confidence that he could destroy the Army of Northern Virginia was finally shaken. His thoughts turned more toward what Lee could do than what Grant could do to Lee. As early as May 30, Grant wrote to General Smith that Lee's movements indicated an intention to "get between you [Smith] and the Army of the Potomac."<sup>86</sup> Because of Lee's strength, Grant decided to make no more assaults.<sup>87</sup>

After losing over 50,000, mostly veteran, troops, Grant gave up attacking Lee's army. His intention changed to disrupting Lee's supplies with Hunter and Sheridan.<sup>88</sup> In a June 3 letter to Meade, Grant described this major change.

To aid the expedition under General Hunter it is necessary that we should detain all the army now with Lee until the former gets well on his way to

Lynchburg. To do this effectually it will be better to keep the enemy out of the intrenchments of Richmond than to have them go back there.<sup>89</sup>

Grant's new goal was to prevent Lee from accomplishing any offensive action, and he ordered his commanders to resist assaults, and be ready to assault Lee if Lee broke through Smith's lines. Lee, on the other hand, continued to fight brilliant defensive battles, intercepting Grant's army in such a way that Grant had to make frontal assaults or find other ways to get Lee into the open. His desire for offensive action was finally satisfied by Early's detached Corps. Early's Valley offensive forced a reaction from Grant in July, when Grant dispatched Sheridan and two corps to confront Early.<sup>90</sup> Grant surrendered the initiative at Cold Harbor, and Lee seized it. First, by drawing Grant into suicidal attacks on an extremely strong position. Second, with a raid by Early which later shattered northern morale.

Lee's intentions never wavered. In a letter to Davis dated June 6, Lee stated he was still trying to maneuver forces to attack Grant's flank. He also reported that "the labyrinth of fortifications made by the enemy" hampered the maneuvers. Lee continued:

I shall make every effort to strike at him, but fear that his usual precaution will prevent unless I undertake to assault his fortifications which I desire to avoid if possible.<sup>91</sup>

Lee refused to attack Grant at the risk of decimating the Army of Northern Virginia. His first priority was defending

Richmond with an intact army, and would only attack on terms favorable to himself.

Before the bloody repulse at Cold Harbor, Grant's control of the army was deteriorating. This became evident when Grant sent General Smith to the wrong place on June 1.<sup>92</sup> Another incident highlighted the Army of the Potomac's corps commanders flagging spirits. Lee's troops attacked Warren and Burnside several times while Union troops shifted positions on June 2. Warren and Hancock repulsed the Confederate attacks, but didn't counterattack. Warren and Hancock had an opportunity to catch part of Lee's army in disarray, and out of their entrenchments. They failed to take advantage of the situation, and attack the repulsed Confederates. Grant expressed his disappointment as follows:

The attacks were repulsed, but not followed up as they should have been. I was so annoyed at this that I directed Meade to instruct his corps commanders that they should seize all such opportunities when they occurred, and not wait for orders, all of our manoeuvres being made for the very purpose of getting the enemy out of his cover.<sup>93</sup>

Each Union corps commander blamed adjacent corps commanders for the failed June 3 assault. They complained that the flanking corps commanders failed to support their advances "from enfilading fire by silencing batteries in their respective fronts."<sup>94</sup> The Union corps commanders started to worry about self preservation, not whipping Bobby Lee. Grant's command system was no longer capable of

supporting or maintaining the initiative, and Grant was unable to control his corps by himself.

Grant's June 3 plan of attack was a disaster.

Colonel Henderson critiqued the attack as follows:

There was no attempt at any formation beyond drawing up the army corps each in two lines. The artillery was ordered to do what it could in the way of bombardment, but that was very little.<sup>95</sup>

General Smith was even more critical of what he termed an "absence of any military plan."<sup>96</sup>

Giving up the few advantages belonging to the assailants, it increases largely the chances of successful defense, and would never be adopted by a trained general, except perhaps under certain peculiar conditions, where also the attacking force had an overwhelming superiority in numbers. Aghast at the reception of such an order, which proved conclusively the utter absence of any military plan, I sent a note to General Wright, commanding the corps on my left, asking him to let me know what was to be his plan of attack, that I might conform to it, and thus have two corps acting in unison. General Wright replied that he was 'going to pitch in.' This left to me only the attack in front contemplated in the circular.<sup>97</sup>

Many consider Grant's plan to have ended the morning of June 3. Grant failed to destroy Lee, but nearly destroyed the Army of the Potomac. Wright's assistant adjutant general judged the campaign a failure in these words:

In the opinion of a majority of its survivors, the battle of Cold Harbor never should have been fought. There was no military reason to justify it. It was the dreary, dismal, bloody, ineffective close of the Lieutenant-General's first campaign with the Army of the Potomac, and corresponded in all its essential features with what had preceded it. The wide and winding path through the tangled Wilderness and the pines of Spottsylvania, which that army had cut from

the Rapidan to the Chickahominy, had been strewn with the bodies of thousands of brave men, the majority of them wearing the Union blue. No great or substantial success had been achieved at any point. The fighting in the Wilderness had told heavily against us, as it must necessarily against an assaulting army in such a country.<sup>98</sup>

Grant wasn't thrilled with the results either. "I have always regretted that the last assault at Cold Harbor was ever made." Grant's failure seemed to revive Confederate hopes temporarily, and it dashed the hopes of the Army of the Potomac until they reached the James River.<sup>99</sup> Grant thought the Confederacy was not sufficiently cheered by the June 3 assault to take the offensive. Grant remarked: "nowhere after the battle of the Wilderness did Lee show any disposition to leave his defences far behind him."<sup>100</sup>

Lee was probably surprised that Grant stopped his offensive action. He thought the June 4 lull portended another Union shift around his right flank. Lee wrote the following to Anderson on June 4:

I apprehended from the quietude the enemy has preserved today that he is preparing to leave us tonight, and I fear will cross the Chickahominy. In that event the best course for us to pursue in my opinion, would be to move down and attack him with our whole force, provided we could catch him in the act of crossing. I wish you would keep your pickets on the alert tonight and endeavor to detect any movement in your front, and should you discover that he is abandoning his position be prepared to move your whole corps.<sup>101</sup>

Lee's intention rarely varied. He still wanted to attack Grant in movement.

Grant left the North Anna River still trying to destroy Lee's army. He finished the Battle of Cold Harbor convinced Lee was safe. Lee continued to bloody the Army of the Potomac mercilessly as he remained interposed between Grant and Richmond. Grant failed to gain any positive advantage over Lee, finally abandoning the initiative on June 4 and Lee seized it on June 13.

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## CHAPTER NINE

### BATTLE OF PETERSBURG

Grant stopped cold at the battle of Cold Harbor and ceased attacking Lee's army directly. Next, he'd try to seize the initiative by evading Lee, and getting into Richmond from south of the James River. His last attempt to outmaneuver Lee ended with Grant extending siege lines toward the Weldon Railroad after June 18.<sup>1</sup>

Grant realized that Lee's defense could not be carried at Cold Harbor. He changed his primary intention from destroying Lee's army to attacking Richmond from the south, and cutting Lee's communication with the rest of the Confederacy.<sup>2</sup> Grant's greatest frustration stemmed from Lee's unwillingness to face him on less than equal terms. On June 5, Grant wrote the following to Halleck:

I now find, after more than thirty days of trial, that the enemy deems it of the first importance to run no risks with the armies they now have. They act purely on the defensive, behind breast-works, or feebly on the offensive immediately in front of them, and where in case of repulse they can instantly retire behind them.<sup>3</sup>

In that same June 5 letter, Grant announced his new objective was "to transfer to the south side and besiege Lee in Richmond or follow him south if he should retreat."<sup>4</sup> This is the earliest reference Grant made to a siege being his objective. Grant no longer expected victory in 1864. Meanwhile, Lee still pursued his objective of disconcerting the Union advances with offensive action. As Grant now understood, Lee refused to risk his army's destruction to take that offensive action. Grant never gave Lee an opportunity after the Wilderness to attack a vulnerable Army of the Potomac. This forced Lee to reluctantly detach Early's Corps to attack Federal forces in the Valley.<sup>5</sup>

Grant's Cold Harbor losses reduced his manpower superiority to 1.25 : 1 on June 4. Grant's immediate problem was to improve his relative combat power. This was the reason for Sheridan's second cavalry raid. It ended at Trevilian Station without bringing Hunter's command back from the Valley.<sup>6</sup> His manpower need also influenced his decision to move south where he could absorb Butler's 8,000 men into the Army of the Potomac.<sup>7</sup> When the Army of the Potomac crossed the James River on June 15, it was hot, they wore tattered uniforms and worn out shoes, and a fine clay powder covered their bodies. This didn't matter, hope was back in their stride, they had Lee cornered, and Grant was regaining the initiative lost at Cold Harbor.<sup>8</sup> This time, Grant didn't seize the initiative overnight. First, he

shifted his line of communications. He ordered the York River Railroad taken up and transferred to City Point on June 7. Then, Grant directed all arriving reinforcements be diverted to City Point on June 9.<sup>9</sup> Grant's shift to Petersburg was beginning.

The reinforcements from Beauregard raised Lee's strength to nearly 68,000 by June 4. This was accomplished by accepting risk opposite Butler, where Beauregard was left with only 2,200 men to Butler's 8,000.<sup>10</sup> Lee felt strong enough to detach Breckinridge and Early to the Valley by June 13.<sup>11</sup> This reduced the Army of Northern Virginia facing Grant to 57,900 men. Grant's manpower advantage remained less than 1.5 : 1. A greater advantage proved inadequate during the battles of the Wilderness and Spottsylvania Court House. Grant faced the real possibility that his campaign ended in defeat with the battle of Cold Harbor. The dilemma he faced was to continue his assaults, stay where he was, move around Lee's left flank, or move around Lee's right flank.

It is likely that the refusal of the Federal corps commanders to continue the Cold Harbor assaults convinced Grant that more frontal attacks were out of the question.<sup>12</sup> Grant faced the same prospect whether he attacked again at Cold Harbor, or tried to pass around Lee's left flank. He could not stay where he was on the defensive. He described the folly of doing so in his June 5 letter to Halleck.



A full survey of all the ground satisfies me that it would not be practicable to hold a line northeast of Richmond that would protect the Fredericksburg railroad, to enable us to use it for supplying the army. To do so would give us a long vulnerable line of road to protect, exhausting much of our strength in guarding it, and would leave open to the enemy all of his lines of communication on the south side of the James.<sup>13</sup>

Grant simply could not keep himself secure and supplied somewhere between the Fredericksburg Railroad and the James River. Eventually, he had to move. Only a move around Lee's right flank was left. Grant contemplated a swing, similar to his previous attempts to get past Lee's flank, over the Chickahominy, and then striking at Richmond, staying north of the James River. He rejected this option because:

Lee's position was so near Richmond, and the intervening swamps of the Chickahominy so great an obstacle to the movement of troops in the face of an enemy, that I determined to make my next left flank move carry the Army of the Potomac south of the James River.<sup>14</sup>

Instead, Grant opted for a turning movement, strategic in scope, by moving south of the James River. His army would then be in communication with his gunboats and could be resupplied without fear of Confederate interdiction.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, Grant would threaten Lee's line of communication south from Richmond.<sup>16</sup> This would seize the initiative by forcing the Army of Northern Virginia out of its previously prepared lines, and into the city of Richmond, cut off from supplies, or force Lee's army to flee from Virginia. As long as Grant remained in his

Cold Harbor lines, Lee was content to wait and improve his fortifications. These fortifications extended past Lee's right from the Chickahominy River to the James River.<sup>17</sup>

Grant's move from Cold Harbor was hazardous. The Army of the Potomac had to cross the Chickahominy River with its marshy and heavily timbered approaches and all bridges east of Lee destroyed, protracting any crossings. Lee had a shorter line and better roads to Grant's destination.<sup>18</sup> In Grant's words:

Lee, if he did not choose to follow me, might, with his shorter distance to travel and his bridges over the Chickahominy and the James, move rapidly on Butler and crush him before the army with me could come to his relief.<sup>19</sup>

Grant was also aware Lee could concentrate more forces against Hunter once the move started.<sup>20</sup> Lee might have gained the initiative himself by attacking and destroying Butler or Hunter's forces before Grant could intervene. "But the move had to be made, and I [Grant] relied on Lee's not seeing my danger as I saw it."<sup>21</sup> Grant wrote on June 5:

My idea from the start has been to beat Lee's army, if possible, north of Richmond, then, after destroying his lines of communications north of the James River to transfer the army to the south side and besiege Lee in Richmond, or follow him south if he should retreat.<sup>22</sup>

Contrary to his statement, Grant did not plan to move south of the James River until after the battle of Cold Harbor. If he had, he would not have waited until June 5 to order ferries be made available on the James.<sup>23</sup> Brigadier

General H. W. Benham, commanding the engineer brigade at Fort Monroe, didn't even know where the pontoon bridges were from the Rappahannock River. He started searching for the bridges after June 5.<sup>24</sup> The decision to move away from the Army of Northern Virginia was based on the current situation, not any long range plans.

Grant took all possible precautions to guard against dangers before moving to the James River. On June 8, Grant ordered Meade to fortify a line to the Chickahominy to cover the army's movement.<sup>25</sup> He ordered Butler to sink stone loaded ships in the James River to prevent Confederate gunboats from interfering with the crossing,<sup>26</sup> sent a staff officer to Butler to make sure Butler was secure from Lee before Grant started the move.<sup>27</sup> Grant started the move after dark on June 12. The 18th Corps went directly to Butler by water. The rest of the army crossed the Chickahominy at Long Bridge and Jone's Ford. They then headed to the most practicable crossing below City Point. Smith's 18th Corps was to reach Butler by night on June 13, to help secure Butler from Lee.<sup>28</sup>

Grant cautioned Butler not to attempt to take Petersburg with Smith unless Butler felt sure he could take it.<sup>29</sup> Warren's corps and Wilson's cavalry division demonstrated toward Richmond to cover the army's move south to the James River.<sup>30</sup> Lee knew what Grant was doing on June 13. He learned Grant's entire army as moving, and

determined that Warren's corps and the cavalry division was the head of Grant's movement, or a cover. He tried to attack Warren the morning of June 15, but Warren was already gone confirming his use as a cover. Lee wrote Davis that Grant was either fortifying Harrison's Landing on the north side of the James River or was crossing to the south side.<sup>31</sup>

Lee moved Hoke's Division to the Confederate James River crossing site as a precaution. Lee thought Grant intended to take possession of Petersburg, but he was not yet ready to commit the Army of Northern Virginia south of the James River.<sup>32</sup> Lee could not stop protecting Richmond from north of the James River until he was sure Grant had crossed the river.<sup>33</sup> Anticipating denying Grant the initiative at Petersburg, Lee continued to conservatively shift his forces south while he endeavored to learn if Grant had crossed. He badgered Beauregard for information about possible Army of the Potomac forces south of the James River, but Beauregard became secretive about the forces to his front.

Grant crossed the Chickahominy River with two corps at Jone's Ford, and one at Long Bridge on June 13.<sup>34</sup> They continued moving toward the James River throughout the day.<sup>35</sup> This was the same day Lee sent Early to join Breckinridge in the Valley. Lee kept track of the Army of the Potomac, and positioned forces to deny Grant the initiative. Lee's pickets found Grant's army gone on the 13th, so Lee crossed to the south side of the Chickahominy

that day, and moved eastward until his cavalry made contact with Grant's cavalry and the 5th Corps.<sup>36</sup> Hoke's Division was also placed in a position to quickly reinforce Beauregard.<sup>37</sup>

Butler's forces erected a pontoon bridge over the James River in eight hours on June 14,<sup>38</sup> and Hancock started across that evening at Charles City Court House.<sup>39</sup> Once Lee realized Warren's force was a cover, he still didn't know that the Army of the Potomac had reached the James River, or what their purpose was.<sup>40</sup> Beauregard reported the return of the 18th Corps to Butler the evening of June 14. Even so, Lee was still hesitant to act as swiftly as he had at Spottsylvania Court House.<sup>41</sup> Grant decided to take advantage of his now regained initiative, and ordered Butler to attack Beauregard, at Petersburg, on June 15 with the arriving forces.<sup>42</sup> Beauregard defended Petersburg with less than 3,000 men. Smith's corps made progress with an early evening assault, and Petersburg was close to capture.<sup>43</sup> Federal cavalry remained active on the north side of the James River, and reinforced Grant's initiative by keeping Lee from learning Army of the Potomac's exact whereabouts.<sup>44</sup> Lee made his first tentative move to deny Grant his initiative by ordering Hoke's Division and Ransom's Brigade to reinforce Beauregard.<sup>45</sup> That night, Hoke and Ransom arrived at Petersburg, and Beauregard ordered General Bushrod Johnson's Division to Petersburg from Bermuda

Hundred. Beauregard now had 10,000 men to defend Petersburg, but this left the Bermuda Hundred line undefended.<sup>46</sup>

Lee learned Beauregard abandoned the Bermuda Hundred defenses at 0200 on June 16.<sup>47</sup> Lee responded by sending Pickett's Division, Field's Division, and himself south of the James River in the morning.<sup>48</sup> When Lee reached Drewry's Bluff, he sent a message to Beauregard requesting information.<sup>49</sup> Lee tried to confirm Grant's status.<sup>50</sup> Beauregard did not respond on June 16 to confirm that it was Grant's forces assaulting Petersburg.<sup>51</sup>

Grant recognized the opportunity between Bermuda Hundred and Petersburg. He sent parts of the other corps to join the attack.<sup>52</sup> By evening, 70,000 Federal troops took advantage of the initiative and launched an attack against Beauregard's comparatively small force.<sup>53</sup> Lee and Pickett's Division tried to recapture the Bermuda Hundred works that had been vacated by Beauregard's departing troops as Beauregard repulsed weak attacks by the growing Federal forces.<sup>54</sup> The weak Federal attacks were wasting Grant's initiative. Grant's troops continued to press Beauregard on June 17,<sup>55</sup> and all Federal forces finished crossing from the north side of the James River.<sup>56</sup>

Also on June 17, Beauregard finally sent Lee confirmation of the Army of the Potomac's presence south of the James River.<sup>57</sup> Lee began his attempt to regain the initiative, and force Grant into attacking well manned and

formidable defenses, by ordering the rest of his army south of the James River. Beauregard successfully resisted the uncoordinated attacks against his position with 14,000 men.<sup>58</sup> By evening, Pickett and Field finished retaking the Bermuda Hundred works.<sup>59</sup> During the night, Lee began to his rush forces to Petersburg.<sup>60</sup> All of them arrived by the evening of June 18.<sup>61</sup>

Grant was ready to launch coordinated attacks with his whole army on June 18. It was too late. He had lost the initiative. Lee was in place, fortified with 40,000 veterans.<sup>62</sup> Grant's assault failed to do anything except force Lee's army into inner defenses. It was a close contest, but Lee finally denied Grant the initiative, and made it to Petersburg in time.<sup>63</sup> The effort cost Grant another 8,150 casualties to Lee's 4,752.<sup>64</sup> Grant stopped his attacks. According to Grant: "The army then proceeded to envelop Petersburg toward the South Side Railroad, as far as possible, without attacking fortifications."<sup>65</sup> The siege had begun.

Butler, with Smith's corps, failed to move effectively and speedily on the Petersburg defenses when Grant had the initiative. Grant's Petersburg assaults ended in failure.<sup>66</sup> Federal subordinates' cautiousness and mistakes denied Grant sustained initiative, and enabled Lee to save Petersburg and Richmond.<sup>67</sup> After the Battle of Petersburg, the Army of the Potomac was exhausted, Grant had

no more room to maneuver, and he couldn't attack Lee's fortifications successfully. If he abandoned his efforts against Petersburg by moving back toward Washington, Lee could retake all of Northern Virginia as he did in 1862. Grant decided to stay south of the James River and commenced siege operations.

Lee stopped trying to attack Grant's army. The Army of the Potomac consisted of battle hardened veterans, and they outnumbered Lee's forces at all times. Grant was too astute to leave Lee an opening to defeat the Federals in detail. Still, Lee recognized the opportunity presented by Grant's shift in plans and took the initiative with offensive action by detaching a corps from his army. Early secured the Valley from Hunter, pursued Hunter up the Valley, and threatened Washington. Early's raid prevented Grant from concentrating overwhelming forces against Lee at Petersburg.

Grant engineered a masterful stroke transferring the Army of the Potomac south of the James River. He took advantage of the James River splitting the Confederate forces, and forced Lee to cover the northern Richmond approaches, even after the Army of the Potomac was across the James River. Lee expected Grant's move and still couldn't react swiftly. Grant finally succeeded in using the initiative to outmaneuver Lee and beat him to the next objective. Except for the May 12, Spottsylvania Court House attack, this was the only time Grant clearly showed greater



initiative than Lee. He brought a vastly superior force to bear on an isolated part of the Confederate defenses for three days, because he prevented Lee from receiving detailed intelligence. This last attempt to turn Lee's flank ended in failure because Grant's senior commanders were unable to sustain the initiative, and Lee successfully reacted on June 17 to permanently deny Grant the initiative at Petersburg.

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## CHAPTER TEN

### AFTERMATH

The Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia suffered terribly during the campaign. Between them, there were 98,924 casualties. A staggering 52 per cent of the combined army strengths that entered the Wilderness in May. Neither Grant or Lee was capable of further large scale offensive action. Their armies had to heal first. The Army of the Potomac, including the 9th Corps was reduced from a strength of 118,000 to under 80,000 men by June 30. The Army of the James was reduced to a strength of 31,000 from May's 36,000 men. These final strength figures include reinforcements sent by Halleck.<sup>1</sup> Grant suffered 62,000 casualties between May 4 and June 18.

Grant resisted over-reacting to Early's raid. He believed the raid posed no real threat. Initially, he detached the 6th Corps to confront Early outside Washington. When Early retired up the Valley, Grant recalled Wright. Early then started back north again, and Grant sent Wright back to cover Washington.<sup>2</sup>

The James River was a reliable line of communication for Grant. He kept the Army of the Potomac well supplied and even wounded were quickly evacuated.<sup>3</sup> Grant could comfortably remain outside Petersburg indefinitely. Grant's army was "shaken in its structure, its valor quenched in blood, and thousands of its ablest officers killed or wounded."<sup>4</sup> It got the chance to recover outside Petersburg.

By June 18, Lee had lost all capacity to maneuver. He was forced into static fortifications with Richmond at his back.<sup>5</sup> The Army of Northern Virginia was still impressive considering the loss of 36,000 men. The army numbered 55,800 men; 77 per cent of its original strength. Bragg kept Lee's strength up by stripping North Carolina and combining Beauregard's forces with the Army of Northern Virginia. This final strength is even more impressive when you consider it doesn't include the forces detached with Early in the Valley. The morale of Lee's army continued to be excellent. "Their successful defence against their powerful opponent had raised the spirits of the men and their confidence in their general to the highest pitch."<sup>6</sup> Supplies were still adequate as well. Grant never severed Lee's communication with the rest of the Confederacy.<sup>7</sup> Lee's army was nearly as strong as it was at the beginning of May. His army responded well to his commands, and subordinate commanders acted with authority. The Army of

Northern Virginia felt successful from inflicting the heavy damage to the Army of the Potomac.

Grant had run out of options. Every move he made was blocked by Lee. Now, any further moves around Lee's right flank put his own line of communication in danger. Grant could not abandon the James River as his right flank anchor. Shifts around Lee's left flank would cause the rivers to cut his army into many separate detachments.<sup>8</sup> Attacking Lee's lines would repeat the Spottsylvania Court House and Cold Harbor tragedies. Grant had had enough of attacking Confederate breastworks.<sup>9</sup> Of Grant's other coordinated offenses only Sherman's operation was still ongoing. It was bogged down, but still active.

Lee's position was secure. Grant could not take his lines by assault, and he lacked the strength to stretch Lee's lines to the breaking point. He held adequate farm land for subsistence and forage with secure communications west. Also, the possibility existed for Lee to add three ironclads to his strength, then undergoing construction in Richmond.<sup>10</sup> Lee dispatched Early to the Valley, to secure it and attract forces away from Grant. It worked beautifully. It drew an infantry corps away from Grant, prevented reinforcement by another, threatened Washington, and secured the Valley.<sup>11</sup>

Lee's one other course of action available was to evacuate Richmond and Petersburg, and fall back into the



interior. He would be nearer supplies, and within supporting distance of Johnston. Lee and Johnston then could combine against Sherman.<sup>12</sup> Grant would have pursued Lee, as he had promised Sherman. The Confederacy might have lost the logistics structure they had left. The only advantage would be the reduction of Grant's army with detachments left to guard his line of communication.<sup>13</sup> Lee stayed to defend Richmond. The decision was probably political, but Richmond's munitions industry was also vital militarily. Lee's army was on half rations with no reserves left to fill out depleted ranks, and the army shrank daily from battle casualties and disease. Lee was at least secure for the next ten months, and defied Grant's attempts to flank him.

Grant and Sherman originally attempted to draw Lee and Johnston out of their entrenchments, into the open battle. There, superior Union strength would destroy the Confederate armies.<sup>14</sup> By mid June, both Confederate armies remained intact, and the Federal armies were frustrated. Grant threatened to cut Lee off from Richmond and forced Lee to give battle, but was devastated by heavy losses battles at the Wilderness, Spottsylvania Court House, North Anna, Cold Harbor, and Petersburg.<sup>15</sup> Grant's strategy failed to destroy Lee's army, and failed to prevent Lee from detaching troops. One of Grant's original intentions was prevent Lee from reinforcing Johnston. Lee's detachment of Early's Corps demonstrated he could have done so after Cold Harbor,

if it had been necessary.<sup>16</sup> For now, Johnston was effectively holding Sherman at Kennesaw Mountain, and Lee was in greater danger.

Grant failed to gain the initiative with simultaneous offensives to break the Confederacy. Banks never moved on Mobile, nor provided troops to the Army of the Tennessee. Beauregard effectively stopped Butler allowing significant forces to reinforce Lee at critical times.<sup>17</sup> Sigel's column in the Valley lost a battle to General Breckinridge at New Market, which also enabled Lee's army to be reinforced.<sup>18</sup> Later, Early drove Hunter into West Virginia which opened up Washington to attack, and forced Grant to detach large forces to deal with him. Eventually, Grant sent Sheridan to command 60,000 men against Early's 12,000, but not until Lee used the Valley to supply his army.<sup>19</sup>

Grant's quartermaster experience enabled him to organize a logistics system that kept the Army of the Potomac stronger than the Army of Northern Virginia. He transferred his base of operations four times during the campaign.<sup>20</sup> From the James River base at City Point, Grant kept his army filled with replacements, and well provisioned.<sup>21</sup> He was well prepared to start siege operations after the failed attack on Petersburg.<sup>22</sup>

Lee's defensive initiative illustrated the steadiness, courage, and constancy of the Army of Northern

Virginia, and the great faith the army had in Robert E. Lee.<sup>23</sup> Lee intended to attack the Army of the Potomac to protect Richmond and weaken Northern resolve. His only large scale offensive initiative occurred in the Wilderness, where Grant left his flank open as he moved through the Wilderness, and Lee gained the initiative when he forced Grant to respond to his attacks. Lee's attack suffered from poor execution. Initially, Longstreet was nearly out of supporting distance, and barely reached the battlefield in time to save Lee from defeat. Longstreet's subsequent flank attack was stopped when Longstreet was wounded.<sup>24</sup> Because of the attack, Grant became more security conscious and protected himself from attack after the Wilderness.

Even after the battle of the Wilderness, Lee was prepared to give Grant battle in the open if favorable circumstances arose. Fortunately for Lee, Grant was very willing to attack.

It would have been utter folly for Lee to leave his [fortifications] when he found his antagonist willing to attack him behind his breastworks, thus giving him that advantage of a defensive position which the smallness of his army imperatively demanded.<sup>25</sup>

Lee fought primarily defensive battles for the rest of the campaign.

Lee's subsequent defensive positions met two essential conditions for strategic positions. First, his positions were more compact than Grant's. Second, Lee could concentrate all parts of his army without Grant's

interference using interior positions.<sup>26</sup> Lee selected his Spottsylvania Court House, North Anna, and Cold Harbor positions with a knack of forcing Grant to sacrifice his initiative and attack hastily fortified positions with secure flanks. Lee gained this defensive initiative despite waging a campaign over a very large area. "His eye for ground, then, had much to do with his successful resistance to Grant's overwhelming numbers."<sup>27</sup> Lee ably protected Richmond with his constant moves to block Grant's flanking movements.

Lee satisfied his intention of weakening Union resolve with Early's offensive in the Valley. Lee's lines at Richmond and Petersburg were nearly impregnable,<sup>28</sup> so he could take the initiative with Early's raid that shocked the North and forced Grant to react. Early beat General Wallace at the Battle of Monocacy, and arrived before Washington on July 11. Grant reacted by sending Wright's 6th Corps to Washington's relief. He also diverted the 19th Corps to Washington which had been sent from Louisiana to reinforce the Army of the Potomac.<sup>29</sup> Early's July 9 victory at Monocacy concerned Lincoln. Even though he was not concerned for Washington's safety, he wired Grant, on July 10, a suggestion to deal with Early.

Now, what I think is, that you should provide to retain your hold where you are, certainly, and bring the rest with you personally, and make a vigorous effort to destroy the enemy's forces in the vicinity.<sup>30</sup>

The North's spring optimism became despair by late summer. Even Lincoln expected to lose the 1864 election.<sup>31</sup> James McPherson identified the importance of that election.

That election was seen as referendum on whether the union should continue fighting the Civil War to unconditional victory. The result of the political campaign did as much to determine the outcome of the war as did the events on the battlefield. But military campaigns, in turn, decisively influenced the election.<sup>32</sup>

The democratic party adopted a peace platform which demanded an end to hostilities, followed by peaceful attempts to restore the Union. The democratic nominee was George B. McClellan, a war democrat, who believed an immediate cessation of hostilities would constitute Confederate victory making a restoration impossible.<sup>33</sup>

Even Grant recognized the damage done to Northern spirit.

Anything that could have prolonged the war a year beyond the time that it did finally close, would probably have exhausted the North to such an extent that they might then have abandoned the contest and agreed to a separation.<sup>34</sup>

On August 23, Lincoln drafted a memorandum saying: it seems exceedingly probable that this administration will not be reelected."<sup>35</sup> Lee was close to obtaining his hoped for political objective of causing Lincoln's fall. His presidency was saved by Sheridan's Valley successes culminating in the October 18 Battle of Cedar Creek, and Sherman's September capture of Atlanta.

Initiative is setting or changing the terms of battle through action. It requires a desired end, the means to achieve that end, and the will to use those means. Grant's desired end was the destruction of Lee's army, followed by the end of the rebellion. Lee's desired end state was the successful defense of Richmond and the shattering of Northern will to continue the war. Both Lee and Grant had powerful means to attain their ends. The Army of the Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia locked horns in deadly combat through five battles from May 4 to June 18, 1864. Both Lee and Grant rearranged forces to maintain their fighting strength, and both had the will to use their armies in ferocious combat. Neither flinched from battle. Grant and Lee acted to set or change the terms of battle throughout the campaign to the detriment of the opposing commander. Who was more successful in setting or changing the terms of those battles?

Grant attempted to bypass Lee's Rapidan River defense with a quick march through the Wilderness. Lee, instead, attacked Grant in the flank, and forced Grant to fight on terrain where the Army of the Potomac's superior manpower and artillery was nullified. The battle was tactically a draw, but Lee succeeded in stopping Grant's initial move toward Richmond.<sup>36</sup> During the Battle of the Wilderness, Lee demonstrated superior initiative.

Lee anticipated Grant's next move to Spottsylvania Court House, and built a new road to speed his army's march. Grant failed to get a jump on Lee, and found his way to Richmond blocked. Grant launched a series of frontal attacks against the position, because Lee's flanks were unassailable. Lee's interior position kept him ahead of Grant's move. Until May 12, Lee had greater initiative at Spottsylvania Court House. On May 12, Lee incorrectly anticipated Grant's next move. Grant, instead, made an early morning attack that shattered the salient. Grant fed the rest of his prepared army into the fight. Lee narrowly fended off a decisive defeat with swift reactions. On May 12, Grant showed superior initiative.

Lee correctly anticipated Grant's movement from Spottsylvania Court House on May 18. Grant then found the Army of Northern Virginia fortified behind the North Anna River in such a way that Grant could only attack with a divided army. Grant withdrew after a limited attack by Lee. At the North Anna River, Neither Grant or Lee demonstrated more initiative than the other.

Grant and Lee then sparred through a series of moves until they faced each other across their lines at Cold Harbor on June 3. Grant launched an assault that thereafter he regretted ever making.<sup>37</sup> The Army of the Potomac suffered horribly in front of the Confederate works. At the battle of Cold Harbor, Lee had the initiative.

Grant next devised a move around the James River aimed at Petersburg. A feint fooled Lee, delaying his movement of the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>38</sup> Grant used the respite to concentrate superior force against the Petersburg defenses on June 16 and 17. Lee's arrival on June 18 prevented Petersburg's loss. Grant lost his opportunity because his army was at the end of its rope. He demonstrated superior initiative over Lee by moving on Petersburg more quickly than Lee could respond.

Lee punctuated the campaign by launching Early against Hunter in the Valley. Early's raid forced Grant to dedicate two infantry corps to Washington's defenses, and almost cost Lincoln the election. It also kept Richmond safe until Early was defeated by Sheridan. Lee definitely held the initiative throughout Early's raid.

Lee's intentions were more consistent, and came closer than Grant in carrying them out. Lee held the initiative through the battles of the Wilderness and Cold Harbor, as well as Early's raid. Grant held the initiative for the battle of Petersburg. Both held the initiative during parts of the battles of Spottsylvania Court House, and North Anna. Most importantly, Lee stuck to his original intention of influencing the 1864 Presidential election. Seizing the initiative with Early's raid shocked the North, and demonstrated Grant's inability to destroy Lee's army in 1864. Further, Grant's failure to capture Petersburg confirmed that he had exhausted the Army of the Potomac



against Lee's well placed and organized defenses. Lee demonstrated superior initiative, mostly because he drew Grant into attacking his formidable positions, and because he held the final initiative.

This campaign demonstrated that initiative is a transient state. Not only can it shift between the offensive and defensive commanders, but there is a difference between offensive and defensive initiative. It is more natural to view initiative as normally belonging to the attacker, because the attacker can pick the time and place to attack, or not to attack at all. The defender can also have the initiative. It's more difficult for the defender to seize the initiative, but he can seize it by forcing the attacker to conform his plans to the defender's liking.

The problem with defensive initiative is that the defender has a difficult time sustaining the initiative. The attacker can prevent the defender from sustaining the initiative by not conforming to the defender's plan. The defender, then, sustains the initiative by constantly adjusting the action to seize and reseize the initiative. The attacker sustains his initiative with coordinated action, oriented on denying the defender opportunities to seize the initiative. Regardless of who has the initiative at the beginning of a campaign, it is likely to shift between the attacker and the defender.

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McPherson, James M. "War and Politics." In The Civil War: An Illustrated History, Geoffrey C. Ward. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.

This article was a four page essay detailing how Grant's campaign brought the Republican party to the brink of defeat. Then, it was saved by Sherman's and Sheridan's string of 1864 victories. The usefulness to me was that Grant's campaign may have brought the South close to some measure of victory.



Paret, Peter. "Clausewitz." In Makers of Modern Strategy from Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age, edited by Peter Paret, 186-213. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Rodenbough, Theo. F., Brevet Brigadier-General, U. S. A. "Sheridan's Richmond Raid." In Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Vol. 4, Retreat With Honor, edited by Robert Underwood Johnson. New York: Century Company, 1884 to 1888; reprint, Secaucus, New York: Castle.

Provides more information on why Sheridan's raid was launched. Otherwise, it's a very detailed narration of the raid.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Sheridan's Trevilian Raid." In Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Vol. 4, Retreat With Honor, edited by Robert Underwood Johnson. New York: Century Company, 1884 to 1888; reprint, Secaucus, New York: Castle.

Same help as "Sheridan's Trevilian Raid."

Saint, Crosbie E., General, U. S. Army. "A CINC's View of Operational Art." Military Review 9 (September 1990): 65-78.

In this article, General Saint expressed his view of how to fight an army group to attain strategic goals. The piece that helped my thesis formulation was on focusing combat power.

Schneider, James J. and Lawrence L. Izzo. "Clausewitz's Elusive Center of Gravity." Parameters XVII no. 3 (September 1987): 46-57

This article included a statement that "the cumulative victories of each encounter . . . serve to set the terms of the operation and so maintain the initiative."

Smith, William Farrar, Brevet Major-General, U. S. A. "The Eighteenth Corps at Cold Harbor." In Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Vol. 4, Retreat With Honor, edited by Robert Underwood Johnson. New York: Century Company, 1884 to 1888; reprint, Secaucus, New York: Castle.

A strong account of the Battle of Cold Harbor from the Eighteenth Corps commander. General Smith is very critical of General Grant.

Venable, Charles S., Lieutenant-Colonel, C. S. A. "General Lee in the Wilderness Campaign." In Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Vol. 4, Retreat With Honor, edited by Robert Underwood Johnson. New York: Century Company; reprint, Secaucus, New York: Castle.

Venable was a member of Lee's staff. He had daily contact with Lee. His account is often not detailed, but gives insight into Lee's actions during the campaign. As others, Venable says nothing to tarnish General Lee's reputation.

Webb, Alexander S., Brevet Major-General, U. S. A. "Through the Wilderness." In Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Vol. 4, Retreat With Honor, edited by Robert Underwood Johnson. New York: Century Company, 1884 to 1888; reprint, Secaucus, New York: Castle.

This account is very detailed, but I used it for more interpretation at an early stage of my research.

#### OTHER SOURCES

Balkoski, Joseph M. Lee vs Grant. New York: Victory Games.

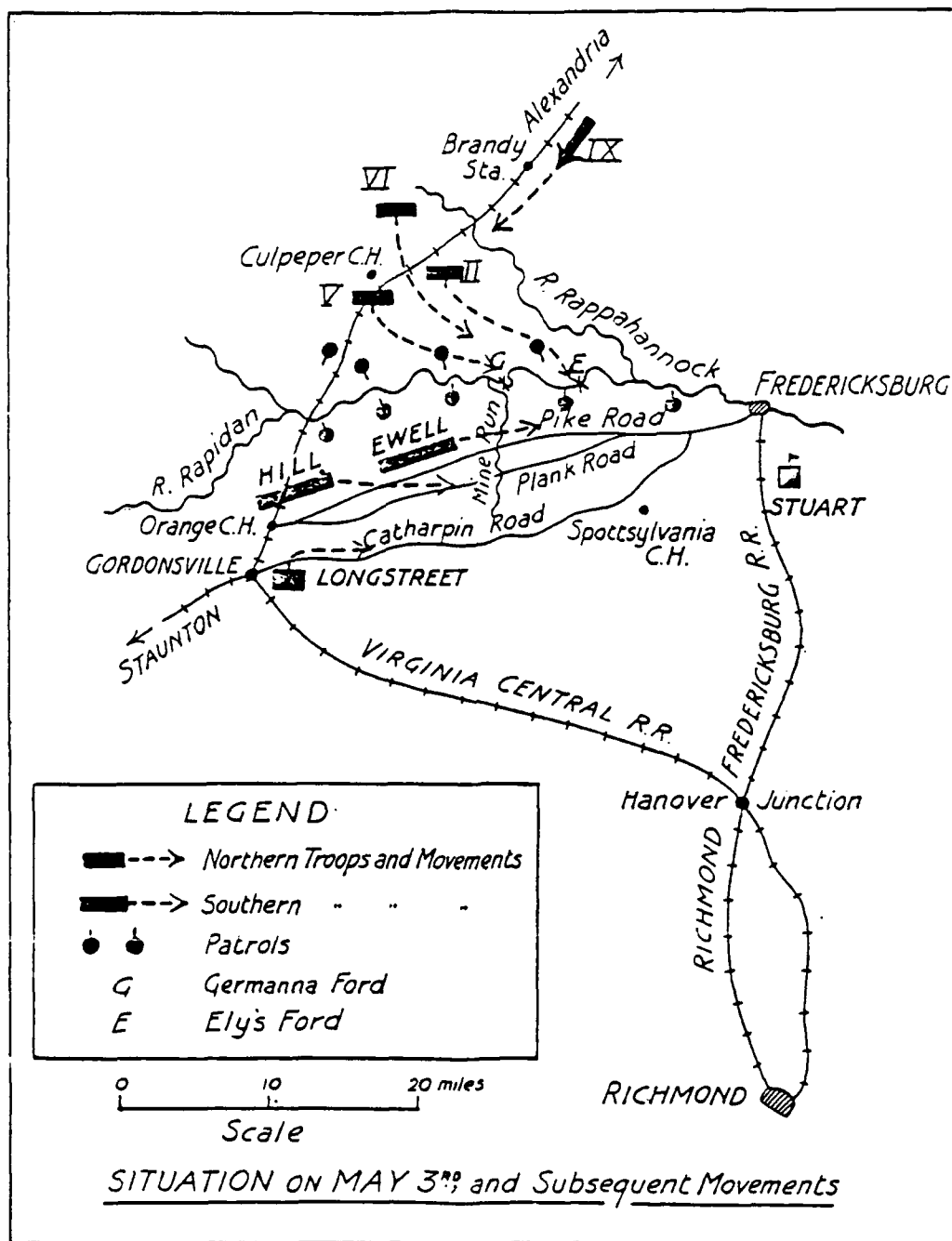
This is a game covering the entire campaign. It is done representing corps and detached divisions. It was instrumental in exploring alternatives.

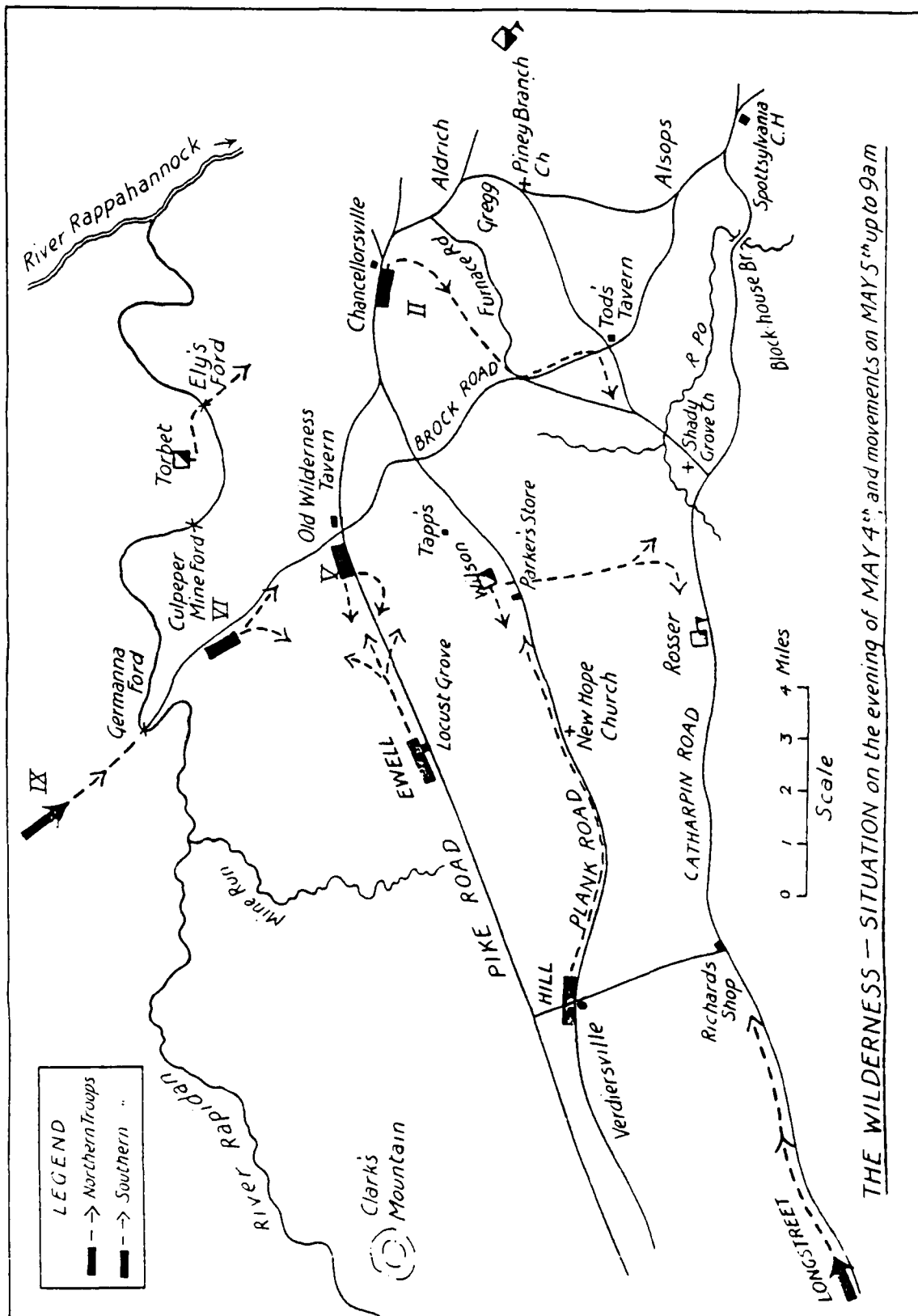
Esposito, Vincent J. The West Point Atlas of the Civil War. New York: Praeger, 1962.

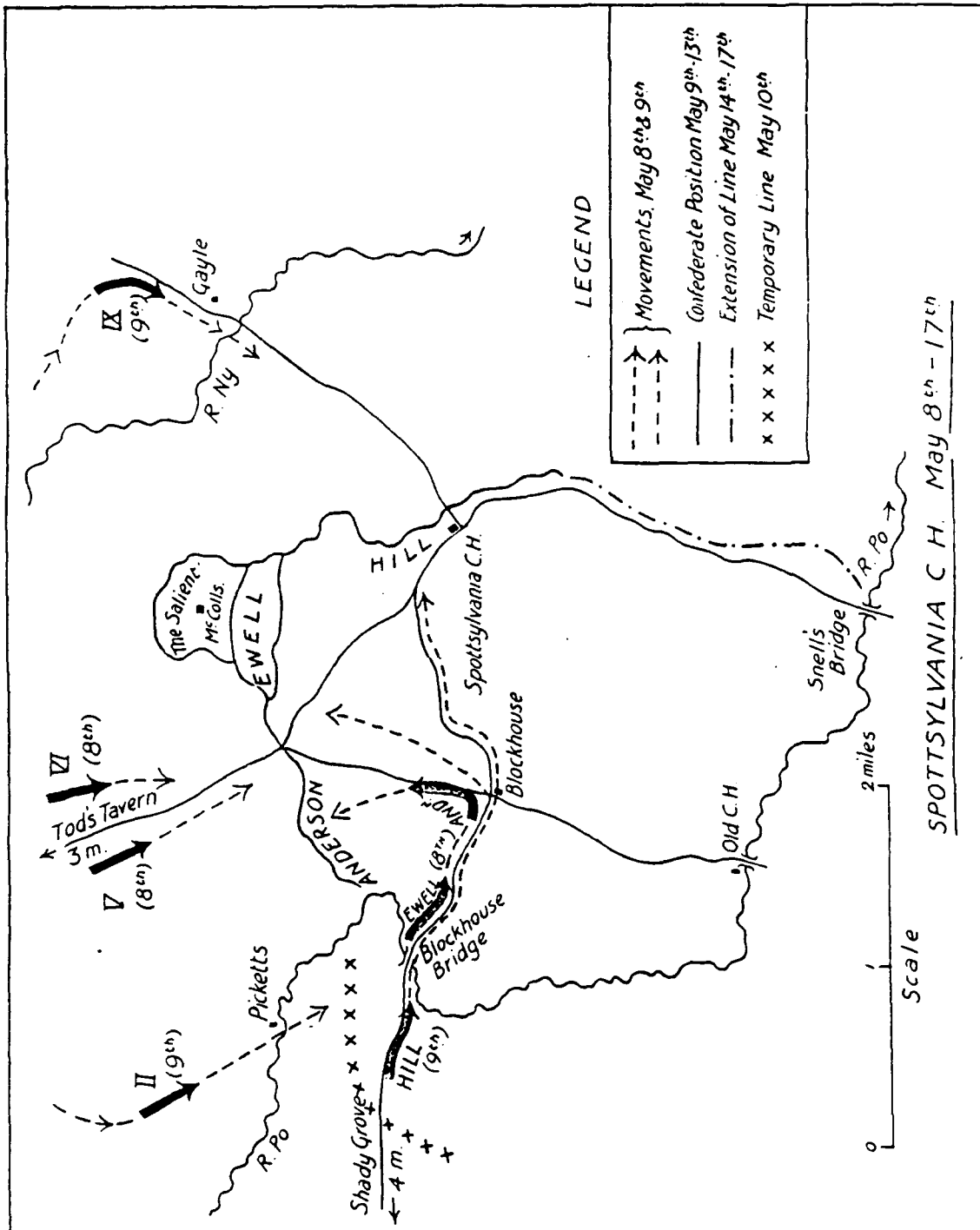
Micropro International Corporation. Wordstar Professional Release 5. MicroPro International Corporation, San Rafael, California.

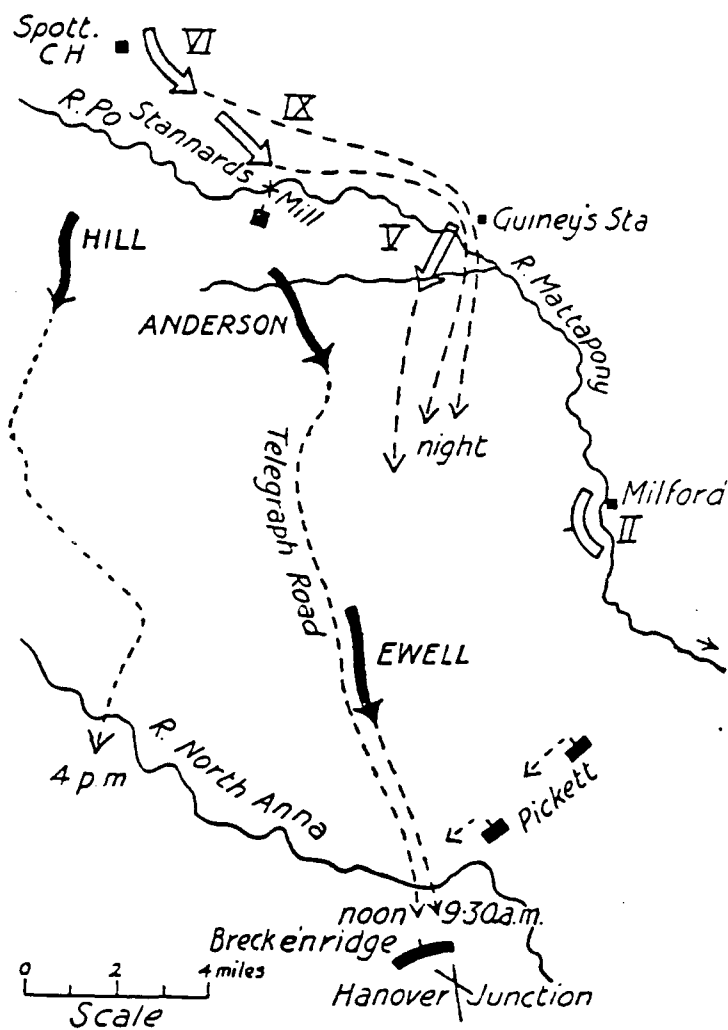
## MAPS

The following maps are reproduced from Lee, Grant, and Sherman: A Study in Leadership in the 1864-65 Campaign by Lieutenant Colonel Alfred H. Burnw, D.S.O., published by Gale & Polden, Limited in 1938.

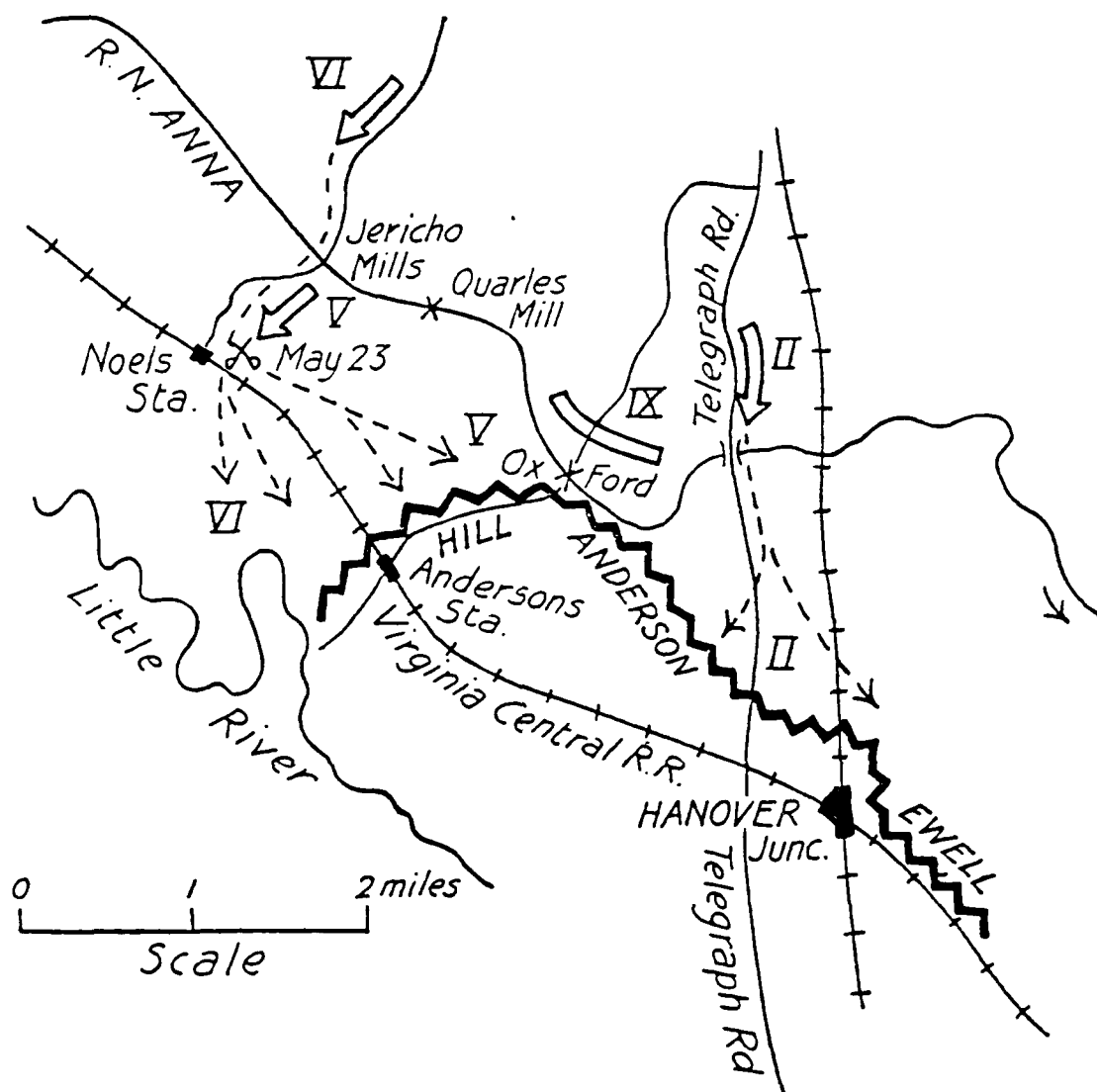






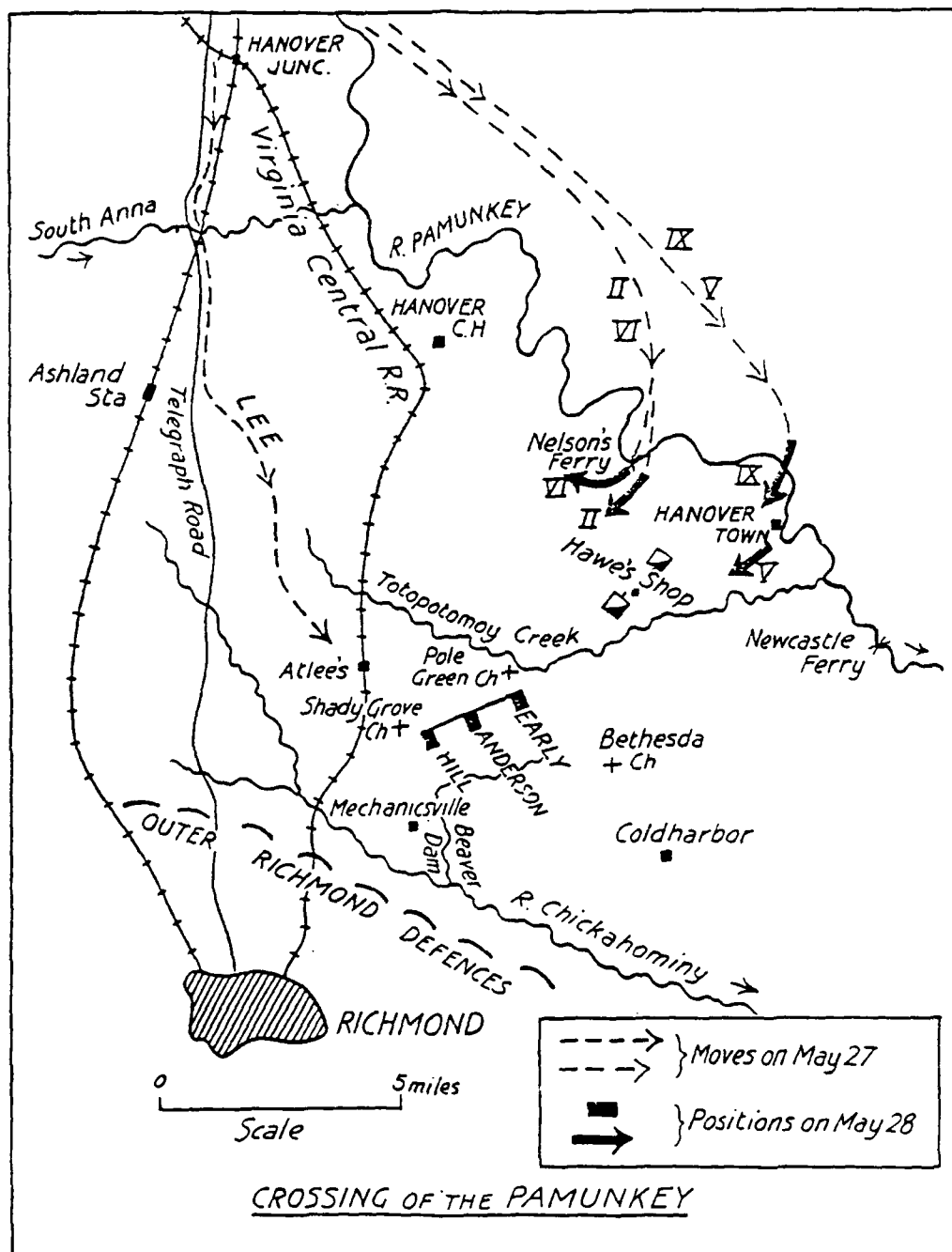


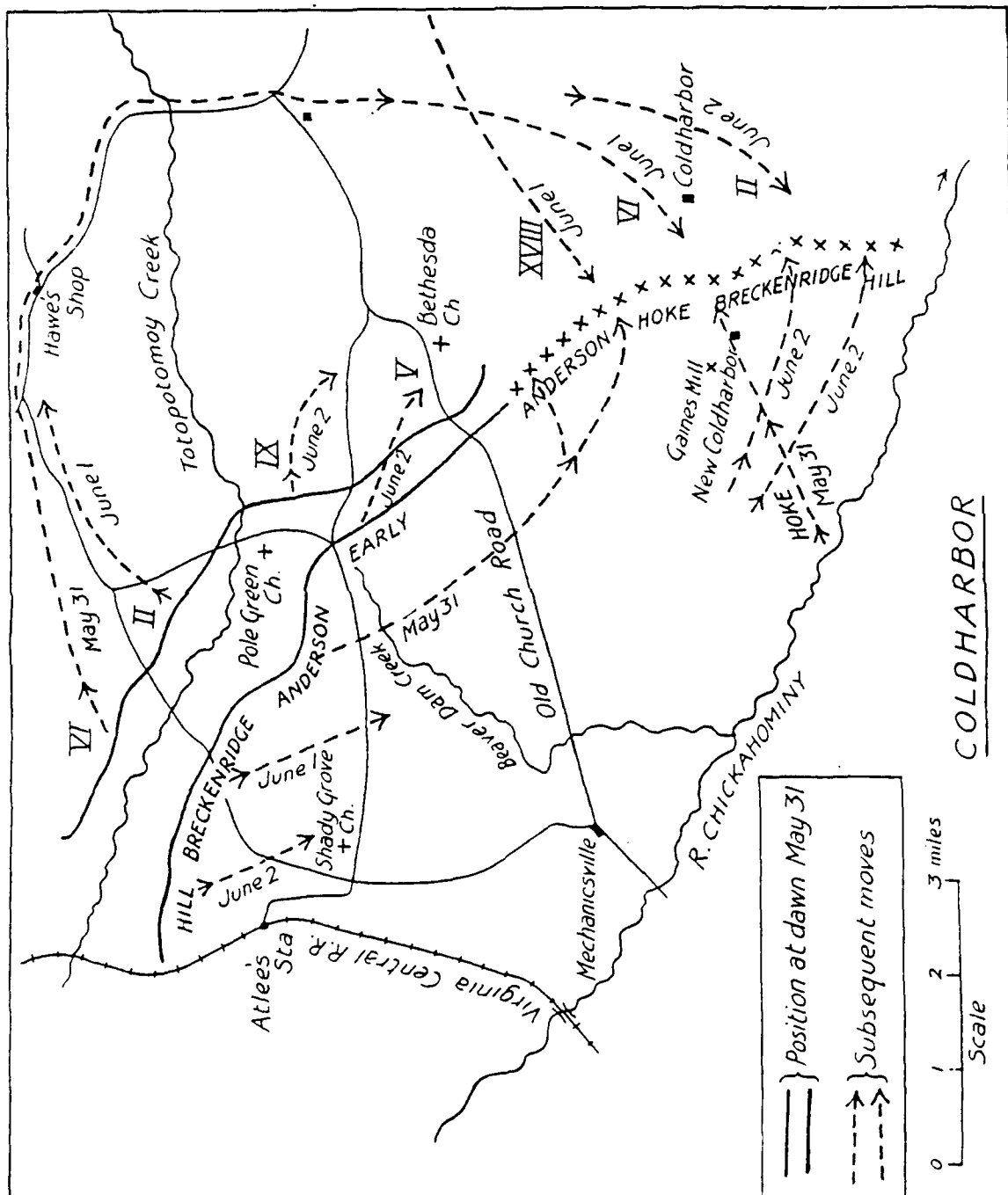
MAY 22<sup>nd</sup> at dawn :  
and Subsequent movements during the day  
 (Railroads not shown)

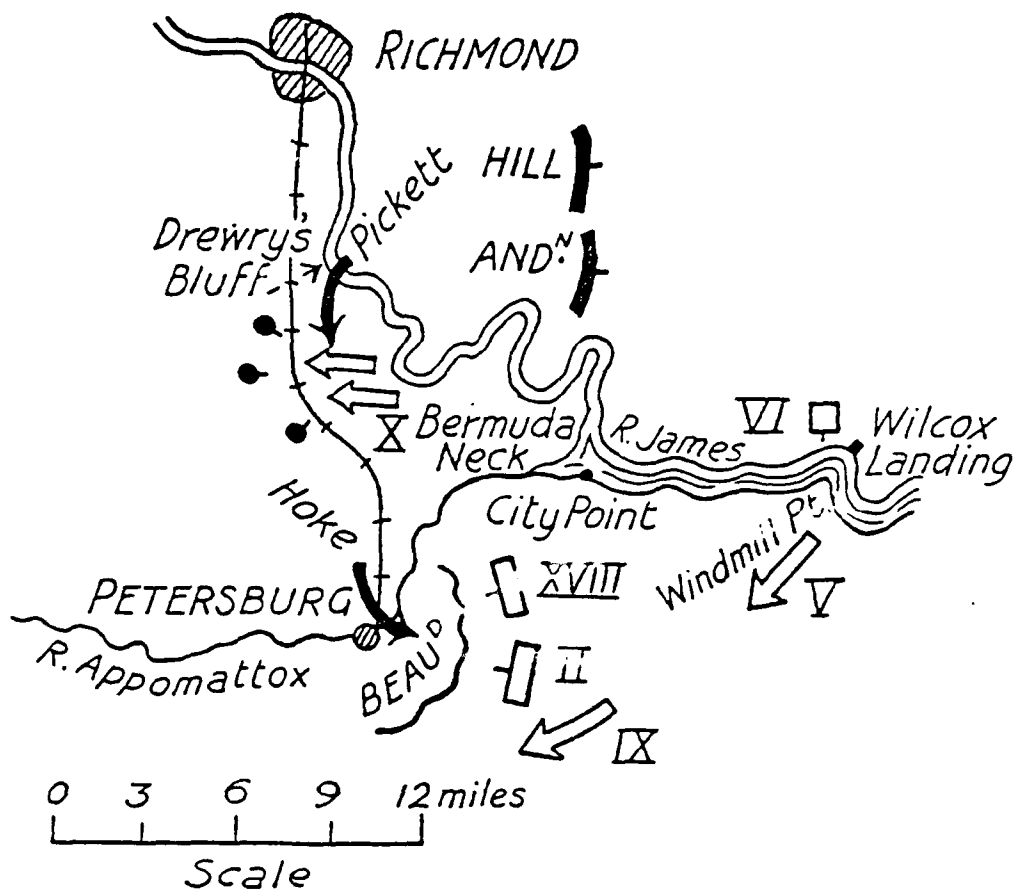


THE NORTH ANNA, May 23<sup>rd</sup>/24<sup>th</sup>









CROSSING of the JAMES RIVER  
Situation at 8a.m. June 16<sup>th</sup>

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