



OFFENSIVE INFANTRY TACTICS DURING THE  
BATTLE OF CHANCELLORSVILLE, MAY 1863

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

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

DAVID J. BONGI, CPT (P), USA  
B.A., Kean College of New Jersey, Union, New Jersey, 1982

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
1993

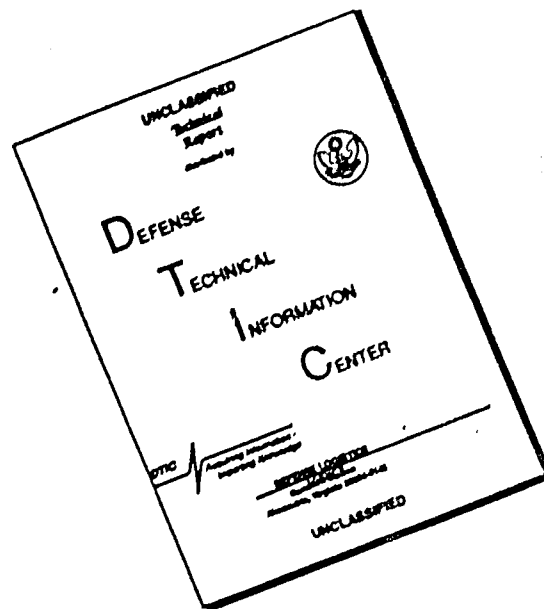
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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

UNION AND CONFEDERATE OFFENSIVE INFANTRY TACTICS DURING THE BATTLE OF CHANCELLORSVILLE, MAY, 1863 BY CPT (P) David J. Bongi, USA, 161 pages.

This study examines the effectiveness of Union and Confederate offensive infantry tactics during the Battle of Chancellorsville, May 1863. The analysis of offensive infantry tactics focuses on three types of offensive operations: meeting engagement, hasty attack, and deliberate attack. The primary echelons of command through which tactics are analyzed are brigade, division, and corps.

The meeting engagement occurs between a Union and a Confederate division at the start of the battle on 1 May. The hasty attack is a Union operation directed against the 2d Confederate Corps on 2 May and the deliberate attack occurs later that afternoon by the 2d Confederate Corps against the Union Army's right flank.

The results of this study indicate that the senior Confederate leaders employed their forces more effectively than did the Union commanders. The Confederate offensive tactics demonstrated a superior ability at the art of war. Following the Jominian principles of interior lines and concentration of forces, the Confederates, despite vast numerical inferiority, created physical and psychological advantages over the Union forces that helped secure victory in each engagement.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The whole of the military activity must . . . relate directly or indirectly to the engagement. The end for which a soldier is recruited, clothed, armed, and trained, the whole object of his sleeping, eating, drinking, and marching is *simply that he should fight at the right place and the right time.*<sup>1</sup>

The offense is the decisive form of war; it is the means by which a commander imposes his will upon the enemy.<sup>2</sup> Tactics is the art by which the commander translates combat power into successful offensive engagements--in essence, the maneuvering of combat forces to the right place and the right time to gain an advantage over the enemy.

The American Civil War offers endless studies in the use of offensive infantry tactics; it was a war dominated by infantry forces. Chancellorsville, more than others, was a battle dominated by infantry formations since the thickly wooded terrain greatly limited the employment of cavalry and artillery. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the effectiveness of Union and Confederate offensive infantry tactics during the Battle of Chancellorsville. The analysis does not examine the entire battle. Instead, it isolates and analyzes infantry tactics employed in three types of offensive operations: meeting engagement, hasty attack, and

deliberate attack. Rather than an analysis of the entire battle, this method permits a more focused examination of offensive tactics. The meeting engagement examines both the Union and Confederate tactics in the same operation. The hasty attack focuses on a Union mission, while the deliberate attack is a Confederate operation. In all three operations, the primary echelons of command through which tactics are analyzed were brigade, division, and corps. Research for the three missions was focused on answering the primary research question: Despite the Confederate victory at Chancellorsville, were the Union infantry offensive tactics superior to those of the Confederates?

This study did not focus on analyzing tactics against the current day Civil War drill manuals such as Winfield Scott's Infantry Tactics, William J. Hardee's Rifle and Infantry Tactics, and Silas Casey's Infantry Tactics. These were drill manuals; and while the drills and formations espoused in these manuals were essential to both control and standardization, they fell short of tactics. FM 100-5 defines tactics as an art by which corps and smaller unit commanders translate potential combat power into victorious battles and engagements. Essential to the art of war is the ability to arrange forces on the battlefield to apply overwhelming combat power at the right time and right place.

Drills had little, if anything, to do with decisions of when and where to strike the enemy. Drills were part of

tactics but were not tactics in and of themselves. FM 25-101 defines a drill as a collective action that is rapidly executed without a deliberate decision-making process.<sup>3</sup> Drills allow units to apply maneuver to commonly encountered situations which require an instantaneous response to an enemy action, e.g., react to an ambush. Thus, drills are simply executed procedures derived from tactics.

While these definitions apply to today's doctrine, there is certainly an argument that the current definition of tactics should not be applied to the Civil War period. It will be helpful to briefly review the definitions of tactics offered by some of the influential military theorists of the nineteenth century.

Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, the French military theorist whose theory was founded on the use of interior lines of operations and concentration, wrote that tactics involved using one's forces at the decisive moment and at the decisive point on the field of battle.<sup>4</sup> Ardant du Picq, another French military theorist who based his theory on the human element in battle, wrote that tactics was the science of making men fight with their maximum energy. Carl von Clausewitz, the Prussian military theorist offered a philosophical approach to defining tactics as the doctrine of the use of armed forces in battle.<sup>5</sup> Finally, a simpler explanation was offered by Freiherr Heinrich Dietrich von Bülow, an 18th century Prussian theorist, wrote that tactics



was "the science of military movements in the presence of the enemy."<sup>6</sup>

At least three conclusions can be drawn from these definitions. First, these definitions were based on various theories of war ranging from the abstract which dealt with what motivates man to fight in battle, to the utilitarian theories based on scientific methods, angles of approach, and geometric lines of operations. Second, as a corollary to the first conclusion, there was not one standard definition of tactics. Lastly, and more importantly, these definitions clearly indicate something which transcend the realm of drills. They indicate ideas about when and where to fight the engagement, about linking available tactical forces (means) to achieve certain tactical objectives (ends), and about the employment of effective organization, weapons, and procedures to capitalize on man's ability to fight.

Furthermore, while the focus of this analysis was clearly on offensive infantry tactics, this study was not committed to reductionism. The human element in battle, discipline, leadership, and morale are important elements of tactical performance in combat and quite often provide the reason why a unit fails or succeeds. While some of the analysis in this study does raise the issue of leadership--especially in the deliberate attack--the study focused on the more tangible aspects of the tactical organizations for combat and the techniques and procedures of battle tactics.

In analyzing offensive infantry tactics, the Battle of Chancellorsville offers a great deal of information. Sources include autobiographies, biographies, unit histories, and first-hand accounts published in periodicals such as the Southern Historical Society Papers, the Confederate Veteran, and Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Although the sources mentioned above provided a great deal of information, their validity, at times, can be questionable. This occurred for several reasons. First, they were normally written years after the actual event and as a result, some of the facts became distorted. Second, unit histories, much like autobiographies, tend to be what Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch in their book Military Misfortunes. The Anatomy of Failure in War called "history as monument." In other words, no author wrote an overall negative account of his unit's actions in combat. It was written to emphasize that unit's achievements in combat, not its failures. Likewise, no author wrote about himself in a negative way. The positive results were generally embellished, while the negative aspects were suppressed. Finally, even the first-hand accounts of battles were still subject to the author's interpretation. In some cases these accounts were slanted in such a way as to explain some negative event with as little damage to the unit or individual as possible.

The majority of the information in this study is derived from the unit reports published in the Official

Records of the War of the Rebellion. This 128 volume collection provides the single most comprehensive source of information to analyze tactics. Although it contains a prodigious amount of information on the Civil War, the Official Records presents a problem common to battlefield reports even today. The ambiguity and the contradictions among reports in the same engagement make it difficult to gain a clear picture of exactly what happened. The French military theorist, Ardant du Picq, summarized the problem in his treatise Battle Studies, when he said:

It is interesting to compare tales of feats of arms, narrated by the victor (so-called) or the vanquished. It is hard to tell which account is truthful, if either. Mere assurance might carry weight. Military politics may dictate a perversion of the facts for disciplinary, moral or political reasons.<sup>3</sup>

Two perplexing aspects about the commander's reports dealt with time and location. Relating a particular time to an event was difficult for two reasons. First, the U.S. did not establish standard time zones until 1880, so there was great disparity among timepieces. Second, although some participants did have watches, the synchronization of time in battle had not yet occurred at this point in the war. In his memoirs, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, noted that the first synchronized attack was during the Vicksburg Campaign.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the Civil War battlefield was, much like today's battlefield, a very confusing place. However, in the absence of surveyed, topographic maps, determining a unit's location

became more of a guessing game; and, the thickly wooded terrain of the Wilderness made guessing one's location even more inaccurate.

My technique for addressing the contradictions and inaccurate accounts was to gather information from multiple sources for each particular event. It was for this reason that various figures are given for areas dealing with time, distances, and number of troops and equipment. When examining a particular event, I started by reading general accounts of the action and then got progressively more focused until in the end, I read the actual reports from the battle. Using this technique gave me a general understanding of the event; therefore, I was better prepared to filter out obvious contradictions between reports. In some instances where the facts were non-existent, I made assumptions; and, they were clearly identified as such in my analysis.

With a great deal of information about the battle, it was apparent that I would need a methodical way of organizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and interpreting the information to arrive at conclusions. Below is a brief description of the 13-step analysis framework I developed for this study which helped to relate cause and effect.

Step one is to determine the analysis criteria against which tactics would be evaluated. Each offensive operation contains different criteria drawn from the Army's current Airland battle doctrine. In selecting the analysis criteria,

careful emphasis is placed on ensuring they are not dependent on advances in technology that clearly did not exist during the Civil War. In step two, an event is selected. This event is stated as an effect, e.g., the reconnaissance failed to identify the enemy position. Step three is to break up the event into its natural phases, i.e. preparation, movement, execution, etc. Step four is to review all the facts from various sources and identify as many causes to the effect as possible. Step five eliminates all cause not directly related to infantry tactics, e.g., if an attack failed because of numerical inferiority but the cause of numerical inferiority was due to a failure in the logistics system, then that had nothing to do with infantry tactics and it was eliminated. Step six is to gather all facts concerning each cause. Step seven then refines each cause as significant or insignificant with the latter being eliminated if necessary. Step eight classifies each cause under the analysis criteria, i.e., how each cause adversely affected the attainment of the analysis criteria. For example, the first analysis criteria in the meeting engagement was "Seize the initiative early." All causes that prevented the force from seizing the initiative early were then grouped under this criteria. Step nine then prioritizes these causes from most important to the least. Step ten is to search for trends that linked the causes. Step eleven identifies both the negative and positive aspects of each cause, e.g., a

negative aspect of the reconnaissance is that it did not locate the enemy position, but a positive aspect was that it did not compromise the attack. This step is especially useful in identifying opposing views about the cause. Step twelve focuses on drawing conclusions and identifying possible solutions. Finally, step thirteen determines the need for the cause to be included in the study.

This thesis contains six chapters. Chapter one is the introduction and gives some background information, defines key terms, identifies the research methodology and problems associated with the research. Chapter two focuses briefly on areas which influence tactics. It was not a comprehensive study, but identified key areas such as leadership, terrain, and command and control and then reviewed their influence in this battle. Chapter three analyzes the meeting engagement, chapter four the hasty attack, and chapter five the deliberate attack. Finally, chapter six presents the conclusions and is broken down into specific and general conclusions. It also answers the research question and identifies enduring value from this study for today's infantry forces.

#### The Strategic Setting (See figure 1, page 147.)

After the spring weather of 1863 dried the roads, President Abraham Lincoln had begun to pressure the Union's Army of the Potomac Commander, Major General Joseph Hooker to resume the offensive. Besides the Union's sagging morale,

the President was concerned about the nearly 30,000 enlistments which would expire in May. Another reason for the President's desire to resume the offensive was the numerical superiority the Army of the Potomac enjoyed over the Confederates' Army of Northern Virginia. The seven corps of Hooker's army totaled approximately 135,000 soldiers and were positioned on the east side of Fredericksburg and the Rappahannock River. The Confederates were not as fortunate in terms of available strength. The Army of Northern Virginia was organized in two corps consisting of about 60,000 soldiers; but this ratio could change at any moment with the return of Major General James Longstreet's Corps from Southern Virginia.

Since the Confederates had greatly improved the defenses at Fredericksburg, a renewal of the attack on Fredericksburg was not practical. Therefore, in order to avoid the strengthened defenses and the artillery at Marye's Heights, Hooker developed a plan to out flank the Confederate defensive positions at Fredericksburg. Hooker would move approximately one third of his army west crossing both the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers about 20 miles west of Fredericksburg. Turning back east, the Union force would reunite about 10 miles west of Fredericksburg at Chancellorsville. Chancellorsville was not a town, but a crossroads where a large red brick, white columnar mansion called Chancellor House stood. Around the house was an

irregular clearing of about 100 acres. Chancellorsville's operational value lay in the meeting of several roads of which the two most significant were the Orange Plank Road and the Orange Turnpike (also referred to as "Turnpike"). Both of these major roads connected Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. A third, smaller, road was the River Road which ran from Fredericksburg along the Rappahannock River to the vicinity of Mineral Spring Run in the north, and then ran south to Chancellorsville.

Once at Chancellorsville, Hooker intended to lead his three corps east toward Fredericksburg and crush Lee from the rear. Moving eastward out of the Wilderness area would also allow Hooker to maneuver more efficiently in open terrain and he could then bring the great preponderance of the Union Army's artillery to bear.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 95.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. Army, FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations--Operations, (Washington: Department of the Army, 1986), 91.

<sup>3</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, FM 25-101, Field Service Regulation--Battle Focused Training (Washington: Government Printing Office, September 1990), 4-8.

<sup>4</sup>James D. Hittle, Jomini and His Summary of the Art of War, (Harrisburg: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1947) 158.

<sup>5</sup>Michael Howard, Clausewitz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 35.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>7</sup>Elliot A. Cohen, and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War, (New York, Vintage Books, 1991), 37.

<sup>8</sup>Ardant du Picq, Battle Studies, Roots of Strategy, (PA: Stackpole, 1987), 160.

<sup>9</sup>Ulysses.S. Grant, The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant, (New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1885), 311.

CHAPTER 2  
PRE-CIVIL WAR INFLUENCES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
INFANTRY OFFENSIVE TACTICS

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly review the influences on the development of infantry offensive tactics prior to the start of the Civil War followed by a short review of the two most influential drill books used during the conflict.

The impact of industrial technology made the Civil War the first modern war. The advent of the rifled musket in the 1850's soon dated the traditional infantry tactical formations and gave new strength to the defense. The use of the telegraph made electronic communications possible at the strategic and operational levels of command and gas-filled balloons broadened the commander's vision of the battlefield. Furthermore, the advent of railroads and the expanded use of water transportation increased logistical capabilities and gave commanders unprecedented strategic and operational range.

As a result, war-fighting had become more efficient. For the assaulting infantryman, who faced improved weapons capable of killing at greater distances with increased

accuracy, an innovative tactical doctrine was needed to close the gap between technology and tactics. However, innovations in tactics were slow. For the infantryman, the price was paid in increased casualties as losses for an attacking infantry regiment might be as high as 50% of its strength in one battle and still not succeed in its mission.

In reviewing the early influences of American military thought prior to the Civil War, one should be aware that this is still very much a debated issue amongst historians. Therefore, it is not the intent of this section to prove or disprove any particular theme, but to present what are generally accepted as some of the major influences on American military thought prior to the war.

Certainly any discussion of American military thinking prior to the Civil War must address what many historians consider to be the single greatest influence upon the foundation of tactical thought in the mid-nineteenth century, Napoleonic warfare. This revolutionary form of warfare was dominated by operational maneuver, driven by a strategy of annihilation with an invariable reliance on the offense. In Napoleonic warfare, only the offense could lead to decisive results. As a result of Napoleonic warfare, armies gained a new and stronger appreciation for concentration. A master of synchronization, Napoleon skillfully maneuvered his corps on the battlefield to achieve mass at the decisive point. This was essential to Napoleon's strategy because concentrating

and attacking the decisive point, normally on the enemy's flank, and conducting a deep penetration would split his opponent's force. The decisive point was not always on the enemy's flank. Frontal assaults were also used by Napoleon; however, it was used as a last resort and only if it could achieve a deep penetration.

It was through the historical accounts and interpretations of Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini (1779-1869) that Napoleon influenced American strategic and tactical thoughts in the early nineteenth century. Jomini's attempt to isolate the enduring principles of warfare of the Napoleonic wars produced a prescriptive, almost pedantic, approach to the conduct of war. But this was Jomini's style as he wrote principally as a practitioner of war. He intentionally steered away from the philosophic probity of thought typified by his rival and contemporary, Karl von Clausewitz. This approach to warfare was not surprising since Jomini was a product of the French Enlightenment. This was a period predominated by definitive systems aimed at reducing, among other areas of human endeavor, the art of war to rules and principles deduced from military history that would have universal applicability. History was an important part of Jomini's life, so much so, that he believed that only theories based on history were credible.

To comprehend Jomini's theory of war, one must first understand his definition of war. Jomini defined war as an

art that was based on a small number of principles and their maxims that could not be violated without dangerous consequences. Although Jomini admitted that no theory could provide the precise answer in every situation that confronted a commander, he wrote that in the hands of "skillful generals and brave troops these rules thus become the means for almost certain success."<sup>1</sup> Thus, Jomini's ultimate purpose was to provide military leaders with the fundamental truths of war. In this way, the art of war could be reduced to man's intellectual ability to apply the rules. In this ability, Jomini wrote, consisted the whole of man's genius for war.<sup>2</sup>

In his studies of military history, Jomini examined the campaigns of two great captains--Frederick the Great and Napoleon. Jomini believed that there was a common formula underlying the successes in their campaigns. Jomini believed that if he could identify this common formula in their successes, he could then distill the fundamental truths or principles of war. In searching for these principles, he became convinced that the fundamentals of war were unchanging, objective, and independent of either weapons or time. Jomini wrote:

There exists a small number of fundamental principles of war, which could not be deviated from without danger, and the application of which, on the contrary, has been in almost all time crowned with success.<sup>3</sup>

At the core of Jomini's theory lies the one great principle deduced from the campaigns of Frederick and

Napoleon: the principle of concentration. Jomini was so convinced of the importance of concentration that he believed every maxim relating to war employing concentration was good. Furthermore, he provided four maxims which "must be followed in all good combinations":

1. To throw by strategic movements the mass of an army, successively, upon the decisive points of a theater of war, and also upon the communications of the enemy as much as possible without compromising one's own.
2. To maneuver to engage fractions of the hostile army with the bulk of one's forces.
3. On the battlefield, to throw the mass of the forces upon the decisive point, or upon that portion of the hostile line which it is of the first importance to overthrow.
4. To so arrange that these masses shall not only be thrown upon the decisive point, but that they shall engage at the proper times and with energy.<sup>4</sup>

These maxims formed the foundation of his theory of war. They were integrated into the fabric of his theory from the strategic to the tactical level of war. He defined strategy as:

the art of bringing the greatest part of the forces of an army upon the important point of the theater of war or of the zone of operations.<sup>5</sup>

On the subject of tactics he wrote:

[it] is the art of using these masses at the points to which they shall have been conducted by well-arranged marches; that is to say, the art of making them act at the decisive moment and at the decisive point of the field of battle.<sup>6</sup>

Jomini recognized that part of the art of war was in recognizing where the "decisive point" lies; for it made

little sense to concentrate at any other location. The decisive point on the battlefield, he said, was dependent upon the arrangement of the contending forces and the terrain. He broke it down into three areas: features of the ground; relation of the local features to the ultimate strategic aim; positions occupied by the respective forces.<sup>7</sup>

On the battlefield, for example, if a line of battle was overextended, the center would be the proper place to concentrate because it would not only be the enemy's weakest point, but also provide the attacker with the greatest advantage by dividing the enemy force. However, if the center was strong, then the decisive point lay in one of the extremities. In the rare event that it lay in both flanks, the attacker should only attempt a double envelopment if he possessed a vast numerical superiority.

While the principle of concentration formed the basis of Jomini's theory, it was through the proper use of the lines of operations that concentration could be achieved at both the strategic and tactical levels of war. Jomini wrote:

If the art of war consists in bringing into action upon the decisive point of the theater of operations the greatest possible force, the choice of the line of operations (as the primary means of attaining this end) may be regarded as fundamental in devising a good plan for a campaign.<sup>8</sup>

To Jomini the clear choice of the lines of operations was interior lines. Jomini's logic was simple. An army operating from interior lines could shift forces more quickly on the battlefield than its opponent operating on exterior

lines. The ability to shift forces more rapidly than one's opponent meant that one could achieve an overwhelming majority of forces at a given location. Thus, using interior lines, as Lee did initially at Chancellorsville, allowed a army to concentrate forces quicker than its opponent.

If concentration at the decisive point to deliver a decisive blow was intrinsic to Jomini's theory, it then follows that Jomini emphasized the offensive. At the strategic level, Jomini favored the offense when conducted as part of a single operation that aimed at attacking the enemy's communications. This was the most advantageous form because the enemy was struck quickly at a vital point; therefore, he was deprived of his resources and compelled to seek a termination of the contest. Moreover, ever aware of the potential for confusion on the battlefield, Jomini believed that the simpler a decisive maneuver was, the more effective it would be since there was less chance for misinterpretation of orders.

At the tactical level the real question was, as Jomini put it, whether or not the line of battle should consist of deployed battalions depending chiefly upon their fire, or in battalion columns of attack relying on its force and impetuosity.<sup>9</sup> In answering this, Jomini espoused five methods for forming troops in the attack: (1) as skirmishers; (2) in deployed lines, either continuous or clockwise; (3) in lines of battalions formed in column on the central division; (4)



in deep masses; and (5) in small squares.<sup>10</sup> Jomini wrote that each situation must be approached differently and that any one of these formations described is always good or bad; but, more importantly, a formation suitable for the offense must possess the characteristics of solidity, mobility, and momentum.<sup>11</sup> However, Jomini favored the half-deep order over the deep order (deep columns) saying that the former was excellent for the offense, while the latter was dangerous.<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of the method employed, the overriding concern was to be in the proper position to deliver the decisive blow at the right moment. Therefore, the tactical positioning of forces was critical. Jomini recommended twelve "orders of battle" to help achieve a decisive attack at the tactical level. These orders of battle (see figure 2, page 148) were not intended to be used regardless of the existing enemy situation and the terrain, but had to be used in light of the existing conditions and used in good combinations to produce success. Even in the defense, Jomini asserted that it offered advantages only if it was an active defense--one that allowed for offensive opportunities because a purely passive defense was fatal and should only be assumed in the event of serious reverses or by a positive inferiority.

It was Jomini's theory of war and his doctrinal approach to fighting war that became the foundation of the teaching of strategy at the United States Military Academy.<sup>13</sup>

Jomini's ideas were promulgated primarily through the instruction of the most influential American tactical theorists of the mid-nineteenth century, Dennis Hart Mahan. Mahan taught at West Point and espoused the Jominian theory of war to an entire generation of soldiers who had been:

exposed to Jomini's ideas, either directly, by reading Jomini's writings or abridgments or expositions of them; or indirectly, by hearing them in the classroom or pursuing the works of Jomini's American disciples.<sup>14</sup>

The key to the Jominian theory of war and the application of Civil War strategy and tactics was that many of these same students would go on to lead divisions, corps, and armies in this war, carrying with them, as General J. D. Hittle's stated, "a sword in one hand and Jomini's *Summary of the Art of War* in the other."<sup>15</sup>

In Mahan's own book, An Elementary Treatise on Advanced-Guard, Out-Post, and Detachment Service of Troops, and the Manner of Posting and Handling Them in Presence of an Enemy, first published in 1847, the Jominian foundations were evident. In the offense, Mahan's system divided infantry forces into three distinct elements: advanced guard, the main body, and the reserve. The mission of the advanced guard was to fix the enemy in position and clear the way for the main body to execute the main attack while the reserve could then be employed to deliver a decisive blow. Mahan, like Jomini, favored a mixture of line and column formations according to the tactical situation. In a line formation, both favored

the two-line formation over the three line. Both also favored light column formations rejecting the idea of heavy columns. Since heavy columns were also deeper (deep order), they required additional forces to secure its flanks and this reduced the number of troops actually fighting since only the head of the column was engaged. Finally, both discussed the defense in terms of a momentary phase in the battle. It was considered momentary because both men believed that regaining the offense was critical. As Jomini had written: "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>16</sup>

While the Jominian theory was present in Mahan's work, it was also in the books of two other writers on the art of war at the time: H. W. Halleck and P. G. T. Beauregard. Halleck, coincidentally a student of Mahan at West Point and eventually a general officer in the Union Army during the war, published his book Elements of Military Art and Science in 1846--one year before Mahan's. Halleck, is credited by Russell F. Weigley as being the first American writer to attempt a systematic exploration of the principles of strategy.<sup>17</sup> Once again, the Jominian influence permeated Halleck's definition of strategy: the art of directing masses on decisive points, or the hostile movements of armies beyond the range of each other's cannon.<sup>18</sup> While the latter part of this definition is dated, the remainder of it showed Halleck's firm belief in the Jominian principle of

Halleck, the most important rule in the offense:

[concentration] will not only prevent misfortune, but secure victory,--since, by its necessary operation, you possess the power of throwing your whole force upon any exposed point of your enemy's position.<sup>19</sup>

Tactically, the Jominian influence in Halleck's lines of battle was clearly evident. Halleck noted that the simple parallel order, his first line of battle, (two ranks of friendly forces faced by two ranks on enemy in the same situation) was the worst possible for battle and that skill in this situation made little or no difference. Although Jomini recommended this parallel order in his order of battles, he only advised using it when, as a result of a turning movement, an army was able to gain access to the rear of another army. Otherwise, Jomini said that if both sides opposed each other in this formation that the "parallel order is the worst of all for it requires no skill to fight one line against another, battalion against battalion, with equal chances of success on either side: no tactical skill is needed in such a battle."<sup>20</sup> Halleck's second formation was the same as Jomini's third: line of battalions in column of attack. Halleck's third formation was a combination of one and two, again another Jominian variation. Finally, Halleck, like Jomini and Mahan, opposed the heavy column attack for essentially the same reasons as the other two theorists.

Like Halleck, P. G. T. Beauregard was also a West Point graduate; however, Beauregard joined the Confederacy.

Beauregard published his work, Principles and Maxims of the Art of War, during the war in 1863. In this treatise, the Jominian principle of concentration formed the basis of Beauregard's initial three maxims on the art of war:

The whole science of war may be briefly defined as the art of placing in the right position, at the right time, a mass of troops greater than your enemy can there oppose to you.

Principle 1--To place masses of your army in contact with fractions of your enemy.

Principle 2--To operate as much as possible on the communications of your enemy without exposing your own.

Principle 3--To operate always on interior lines (or shorter ones in point of time).<sup>21</sup>

While the writings of these military theorists helped influence American military thinking, the U.S. Army's experience in the Mexican War (1846-48) also helped form the American art of war. The Mexican War was the only major American war fought during the generation before 1861 and included participants such as Grant, Lee, Bragg, Beauregard, Hooker, Jackson, McClellan and Meade to name just a few. However, while this experience would prove successful for the army and its commanders, the tactics employed in this war were ill-suited for the battlefields of the Civil War.

Infantry offensive tactics employed during this war were similar to those of the early nineteenth century and in essence duplicated the Napoleonic tactics of warfare in the offense. Infantry marched in columns and deployed into lines to fight. Normally two companies of skirmishers were

deployed in front of an attacking regiment in line of battle formation. The whole idea was for the main body of the regiment to continue advancing and fire a concentrated volley at the enemy at as close a range (approximately 100 yards) as possible. Infantry would then follow up this volley with a bayonet charge intended to carry the defender's position. Generally, these tactics proved to be quite successful given the weaponry of this period and the low morale of the Mexican Army. Even frontal assaults against strongly defended Mexican positions were successful and gave further credibility to these tactics.

As previously mentioned, tactical developments are tied to weapons' technology. During the Mexican War the musket and the bayonet were the main infantry weapons. The inaccuracy and slow rate of fire from the smoothbore musket meant that infantry formations could often get close enough to carry the defense with a bayonet assault. In order to concentrate both fire and bayonet assault, it was necessary to maintain close order formations since loose order formations, such as those employed by skirmishers, weakened a unit's ability to concentrate fire at a given point. For this reason, close order formations were the standard formation for infantry forces in the attack during the Mexican War.

Besides the success of these tactics, the low casualty rate helped to reinforce the use of traditional close order

tactics. In four separate offensive operations: Contreras, Churubusco, Molino del Rey, and Chapultepec; the combined American casualties totaled approximately 2,700.<sup>22</sup>

Ironically, the Union's 11th Corps suffered nearly the same number of casualties in one engagement during Chancellorsville. As a result, the offensive was emphasized over the defensive as the superior form of warfare.

The confidence gained by the U.S. Army in the use of vigorous assaults made with the bayonet and traditional close order formations during the Mexican War proved disastrous when employed on the Civil War battlefields. The introduction of the rifled musket as the infantry's primary weapon reversed the virtual superiority of the offense over the defense. The rifled musket's greater range and accuracy meant that the attacker now had to advance across a larger kill zone which was extended in both time and space. As Major General Arthur L. Wagner, one-time instructor at the U.S. Infantry and Cavalry School, wrote in his book, Organization and Tactics, (1894), the effects of the rifle at 500 yards may be called "decisive," while at 300 yards and under, it was practically "annihilating."<sup>23</sup> The lag of tactical developments behind weapons' technology meant far greater casualties on the battlefields of the Civil War.

#### The Drill Books

Civil War drill books played a significant role in this war. Most importantly, for new officers without much

military training it acted as their only guide in many cases. Drill books gave commanders a method for the quick and orderly movement of troops about the battlefield. Once at the location where they intended to fight, they prescribed a system for forming and controlling the rate of march and fire for the attacking forces. The drill books were important to tactics since their methods were derived from the tactical theory of the day. However, probably the greatest shortcoming of the drill books prior to the start of the war was they failed to recognize the potential of the rifled musket.

During the Mexican War the most influential drill manual was General Winfield Scott's Infantry Tactics, or Rules for the Exercise and maneuvers of the United States Infantry; it was officially adopted as the army's tactical doctrine on 10 April 1835.<sup>24</sup> Scott's system was based on the French tactical ideas and models evolved during the Napoleonic Wars. Scott's Tactics was a three volume work which, prior to the Civil War, comprised the most comprehensive document on infantry drills. Volume one dealt with individual and company level training; it was called "School of the Soldier and Company." Volume two which dealt with battalion level drills was called "School of the Battalion and Instruction for Light Infantry or Rifle." Finally, volume three provided instruction on brigade level maneuvers was called "Evolution of the Line."



In all three volumes from company to brigade, Scott's basic formation to be used was the close order line of battle formation in either two or three ranks. Absolute control was essential to Scott's procedures, therefore, formations were compact, allowing for only thirteen inches between the ranks.<sup>25</sup> This ensured that the advancing formation could mass fires and then follow up with a bayonet assault at the right moment. Given the nature of the weaponry, these tactics were not only possible, but were quite effective when employed during the Mexican War. Except for very close ranges (50-60 yards), the inaccuracy of the smoothbore musket gave the defender little chance of hitting an advancing formation. This inadequacy caused Scott to consider speed in the attack of little importance. Of more importance was to advance in a precise, regulated cadence since the faster the attacking formation moved, the more likely the chance of disorganization in their lines, and, as already noted, control of the formation was essential to Scott's drills. During the attack, Scott recommended a pace of 90 to 110 paces per minute for advancing troops, but he also recognized the importance of increasing the pace during the final few yards of the assault; therefore, he prescribed an increase of up to 140 paces per minute in the final assault.<sup>26</sup>

In 1855 the rifled musket replaced the smoothbore musket as the principle weapon of the infantry and thus ushered in a new era of tactical theory. Secretary of War

Jefferson Davis, realizing the new weapon would require a modification in the current infantry drills, tasked Lieutenant Colonel William J. Hardee to develop such a manual. Hardee's Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of Troops when acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen, was published in two volumes and approved in 1855 for "the instruction of the troops when acting as Light Infantry or Riflemen."<sup>27</sup> Like Scott's, Hardee's volume one provided instruction for the soldier and company, but also gave additional instruction for the use of skirmishers, while volume two dealt with the battalion level.

As was the case with Scott's Tactics, Hardee's volumes were based on current French ideas. New ideas had been generated in French tactical thinking as a result of their recent experience in Algeria. Essentially the French had found that the traditional methods of employing heavy infantry columns were ineffective against the smaller and much more agile organization and tactics of the African tribesmen. Thus, the French replaced their heavy columns with light infantry formations called "comrades in battle." Comrades in battle consisted of a four man skirmish-type unit that was not only more agile due to size, but also employed a faster cadence.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of the improved capability of the defender with the rifled musket, Hardee adopted this faster cadence while also providing a method for a quicker transition from

column formation into line of battle. Hardee attempted to compensate for the rifle's increased capability by advancing the attacker at a quicker pace than what Scott had recommended. While the basic rates of movement remained the same as Scott's system, Hardee applied the "double quick time" to the movement of large unit formations. The double quick time was performed at 165 paces per minute and could be increased, in emergencies, to 180 steps a minute. This, in theory, would reduce the time an advancing formation would have to spend in the "kill zone," or the area within lethal range of the defender's rifle. Furthermore, Hardee adopted the two line formation over the three rank line of battle.<sup>29</sup>

Another area that Hardee refined was in the organization and employment of skirmishers. Hardee based his skirmish organization on the "comrades in battle" concept he learned from the French. The key to this organization was team work that would provide, as Hardee instructed, the necessity to "sustain one another."<sup>30</sup> He envisioned the soldiers of this group maintaining close contact with one another, adjusting intervals within their own formation and between their formation and the main body. The adjustment was based on the "extent of the ground to be covered;" however, Hardee also wrote that they were not to lose sight of each other.<sup>31</sup> Hardee's system provided skirmishers considerably more freedom for skirmish tactics than did Scott, who equated skirmish tactics with rifle tactics.<sup>32</sup>

Scott's method relied upon a stricter command and control even in loose order formations. In his section on skirmish tactics Scott wrote:

the movements of a body of skirmishers, though made in loose files, require to be systematized in order to give their commander the means of directing them according to his views and with the greatest possible promptitude.<sup>33</sup>

While the skirmish tactics and the increase in movement rates were definite improvements, Hardee's system did little in the way of improving the traditional close order line of battle formations. Thus, Hardee's system was basically the same as Scott's. In fact, the War Department attempted to use the two systems together. Hardee's second volume ended at the battalion level. In order to fill the needs of brigade and higher, Scott's third volume was used, but combining the two systems did not work as one might imagine. Regardless, at the outbreak of the war, Hardee's Tactics was the standard infantry manual used by both sides.

In conclusion, American military thinking prior to the Civil War was influenced by Napoleonic warfare and practical lessons drawn from the army's experience in the Mexican War. Tactical theory during this time placed a great deal of confidence in bayonet assaults and traditional close order formations. Military theorists, such as Jomini and Mahan, had helped to develop early American strategic and tactical concepts which favored the offensive form of war. In offensive operations, Civil War commanders were armed with

the concepts and methods for waging war that Jomini and his disciples had espoused: concentration of forces, flank attacks, interior lines of operations, and the decisive point. These battle tactics formed the foundation of Civil War offensive operations, but did little in the way of adjusting the tactical formations and techniques used by the infantryman in assaulting across the final 300 yards of the defender's kill zone. In this area, the tactics of assaulting infantrymen remained a shoulder to shoulder affair.

# Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>James D. Hittle, Jomini and His Summary of the Art of War, (Harrisburg: The Military Service Publishing Company, 1947) 159.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., 43.
- <sup>4</sup>Antoine Henri De Jomini, The Art of War, (California: Presidio Press, 1992) 70.
- <sup>5</sup>Hittle, Jomini and His Summary of the Art of War, 158..
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., 67.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid. 80-81.
- <sup>9</sup>Jomini, The Art of War, 291.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., 292.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., 297.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., 298.
- <sup>13</sup>Russell F. Weigley, The American Way of War, (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1973), 83.
- <sup>14</sup>T. Harry Williams, "The Military Leadership of North and South," in Why the North Won the Civil War, ed. David H. Donald, (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 37-38.
- <sup>15</sup>Hittle, Art of War, 2.
- <sup>16</sup>Jomini, The Art of War, 183.
- <sup>17</sup>Weigley, The American Way of War, 84.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup>Jomini, The Art of War, 188-189.

21 Thomas L. Connelly and Archer Jones, The Politics of Command. Factions and Ideas in Confederate Strategy, (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 29.

22 Perry D. Jamieson, "The Development of Civil War Tactics." Doctor of Philosophy. Dissertation, Department of History, (Wayne State University, 1979), 23

23 Arthur L. Wagner, Organization and Tactics, 2d ed., (Kansas City: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Company 1894), 51.

24 Winfield Scott, Infantry Tactics. 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), 1: 5.

25 Ibid., 9-10.

26 Ibid., 82, 132; Thomas Vernon Moseley "Evolution of the American Civil War Infantry Tactics." Doctor of Philosophy. Dissertation, Department of History, (The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1967) 255-264; Jamieson, 38-41.

27 William J. Hardee, Rifle and Infantry Tactics. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co. 1855), 1:4.

28 Henry J. Osterhoudt, "The Evolution of U.S. Army Assault Tactics, 1778-1919: The Search for Sound Doctrine." Doctor of Philosophy. Dissertation, Department of History, (Duke University, 1986), 65.

29 Jamieson, 39-43.

30 Hardee, Rifle and Infantry Tactics. 1: 174.

31 Ibid., 171-176.

32 Jamieson, 9-10.

33 Scott, Infantry Tactics, 2: 88.

### CHAPTER 3

#### MEETING ENGAGEMENT

A meeting engagement is the combat action that occurs when elements of one force engage an enemy force, static or in motion, concerning which it has inadequate intelligence.<sup>1</sup> The meeting engagement is often the result of a movement to contact where one or both sides decide to attack, to seize and retain the initiative. This constitutes the basic principle in conducting the meeting engagement: seize and retain the initiative. This, in turn, allows the commander relatively greater flexibility in selecting subsequent courses of action.

Jomini referred to the meeting engagement as the "unexpected meeting of two armies on the march."<sup>2</sup> He thought that an unexpected meeting of two forces gave rise to one of the most imposing scenes in war because each finds the other where it does not anticipate a meeting. Since an unexpected meeting produced a very fluid situation, Jomini believed that the control of events was critical. In order to achieve control, a skillful general would require all his genius to achieve control.



Seize the initiative early. FM 100-5 states that initiative means setting or changing the terms of battle. In order to seize and maintain the initiative, the attacker must not allow the defender to recover from the initial shock of the attack. He must exert constant pressure on the defender through speed, concentration, flexibility, and attacking the defender's weak points.

Develop the situation and initiate maneuver rapidly. In order to seize the initiative, the attacker must aggressively develop the situation by quickly deploying his combat forces. Through this rapid deployment, the attacker attempts to gain an advantageous position over the enemy from which the attacker can quickly overwhelm the defender before he can organize a coherent defense.

Attack violently and resolutely. Once the attack is underway, the attacker must strike with determination and violence of action in order to maintain constant pressure on the defender to ensure his defeat.

#### The Meeting Engagement

The best example of a meeting engagement during the Chancellorsville Campaign occurred on 1 May 1863 along the Orange Turnpike approximately two miles east of Chancellorsville; it was the first engagement of the Battle of Chancellorsville. The following summary reviews the status

of both the Union and Confederate armies which includes the mission, troops available, time, and the surrounding terrain.

Mission. The mission of the Union forces was to move on the Orange Turnpike leading from Chancellorsville heading east to Fredericksburg. Upon arriving at Mott's Run, the Union forces were to initially defend and prepare for an attack on Fredericksburg. The Confederates' mission was to block the Union advance into the Confederates' rear area by attacking west along the same road leading from Fredericksburg heading towards Chancellorsville.

Troops. The Union's 2d Division, 5th Corps, commanded by Major General George Sykes, consisted of three infantry brigades and a divisional artillery element consisting of two artillery batteries. The division numbered about 3,700 men.<sup>3</sup> The Confederate forces consisted McLaws's Division, 1st Corps, commanded by Major General Lafayette McLaws. McLaws's forces initially consisted of four maneuver brigades: Wofford's Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General W.T. Wofford; Kershaw's Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Joseph B. Kershaw; Semmes's Brigade, commanded by Brigadier General Paul J. Semmes; and Mahone's Brigade (of Major General Richard H. Anderson's Division), commanded by Brigadier General William Mahone. This division numbered approximately 8,700.<sup>4</sup> However, the brigades of Brigadier Generals C. M. Wilcox and E. A. Perry arrived soon after the

initial engagement in support of McLaws. This further strengthened McLaws force by an additional 3,300 men.

Time. The time of contact was approximately 1145 on 1 May 1863.

Terrain. Generally the entire area was thickly wooded with small rolling hills and ridges which run almost perpendicular to the Orange Turnpike. This made the off-road movement of infantry, artillery, and cavalry forces very difficult and also restricted their fields of fire. The terrain north of the road was heavily wooded with minor exceptions. South of the road was somewhat less restrictive with some areas permitting observation of the Plank Road to the south. Streams, which eventually ran into the Rappahannock River, crossed the Turnpike at several locations. The restrictive nature of the surrounding terrain impeded even the mobility of the infantry as noted by Major General Joseph Hooker, the Union Army Commander, when he said, "[along] the narrow roads in these interminable forest . . . it was impossible to maneuver my forces. . . ."

#### The Battlefield Situation

Hooker's plan to turn the flank of the Army of Northern Virginia had worked well up to this point. Hooker succeeded in maneuvering three corps (5th, 11th, 12th) on the north side of the Rappahannock River to the vicinity of Kelly's Ford. Once they crossed both the Rappahannock and

Rapidan Rivers, these three corps gained access to General Robert E. Lee's left flank and rear area. Advancing slowly on 1 May, Hooker headed eastward out of Chancellorsville with his 11th and 12th Corps on the right along the Plank Road while his 5th Corps advanced along the Union's left flank paralleling the River Road. This force of approximately 70,000 did not escape the notice of the Confederates as Lee ordered Lieutenant General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's 2d Corps to attack west along the Plank and Orange Turnpike Roads and block the Union advance.

### The Battle is Joined

General Sykes's division advanced east along the Orange Turnpike with three brigades in column formation. Second Brigade led, followed by the 1st and 3d Brigades. The Confederate division under General McLaws was moving west along the same road. Mahone's Brigade (of Anderson's Division) led McLaws's Division and was followed by Semmes's, and then Wofford's Brigades. The brigades of Perry, Wilcox (both of Anderson's division) and Kershaw were not part of this formation; they arrived later in support of McLaws.

The initial contact between the Union and Confederate forces occurred approximately two miles east of Chancellorsville. Union cavalry (8th Pennsylvania Volunteers) and McLaws's skirmishers were engaged along the

Orange Turnpike. In his official report, Sykes commented that he found some cavalry engaged with the enemy's skirmishers and the former were giving ground, and, by their behavior, confidence to the Confederates.<sup>6</sup> Sykes immediately responded by deploying his lead brigade, Burbank's 2d, into a line of battle across the road. Burbank's brigade deployed with the 2d and 6th Regiments to the right of the road, and the 7th, 10th, and 11th to the left.<sup>7</sup> (see figure 3, page 149). The 17th Regiment deployed as skirmishers to the brigade's front on both sides of the road. The 310 men of this regiment covered a front of approximately one half mile. Sykes's two remaining brigades remained on the Orange Turnpike deployed with regiments on line, one behind the other. By noon, fighting erupted between the divisions' lead elements; the Union 2d brigade and the Confederate brigades of Semmes and Mahone and, as General Mahone reported, "it was quite a brisk little engagement - artillery and infantry."<sup>8</sup>

For the Confederates, McLaws reacted cautiously and more deliberately to the initial engagement by delaying his division's deployment until the Union Army appeared in force. Once he did deploy, McLaws deployed the entire division. This gave him a wider frontage, approximately one and a half miles. Semmes's Brigade deployed across the road, overlapping it on to the north and south, while Mahone's and Wofford's brigades deployed to the right of the Orange Turnpike. Because McLaws was concerned about securing the

Mine Road approach on the division's northern flank, he positioned Perry's newly arrived brigade the right, thereby extending the Confederates' front and protecting his right flank.

Sykes's lead brigade was in a poor position; they were exposed along the side of a hill. His lead brigade commander, Burbank, realized this and ordered his brigade to advance to the bottom of the hill since it offered cover and concealment. As they advanced, the 2d Brigade drove in the Confederate pickets and recovered the ground initially lost by the Union cavalry. However, once at the bottom, Sykes ordered Burbank to advance to the crest of the hill directly to his front.

Burbank's assault reached the top of the hill. In his report, Burbank stated that his attack was stubbornly opposed by the Confederates, but the advance of the line was irresistible causing the Confederates to flee.<sup>9</sup> The top of the hill was on the edge of an open area which provided both concealment and excellent fields of fire. Exploiting these fields of fire, Sykes quickly positioned Lieutenant Malbone F. Watson's Company I, Fifth U.S. Artillery (four guns) to engage the Confederates. With the lead brigade now occupying good defensive ground, Sykes ordered Burbank to hold this position "at all hazards."<sup>10</sup>

Concerned about the Union advance, Jackson sent two additional brigades, Kershaw's and Wilcox's, to support

McLaws. Kershaw's brigade (of McLaws's Division) was placed in support of Semmes's brigade on the left to further strengthen and extend the division's front. Wilcox's Brigade (of Anderson's Division) occupied positions to the right of Perry in the north protecting the Confederate northern flank along the Old Mine Road.

Although Sykes's division made excellent progress by driving in the Confederate pickets, Sykes now found himself in a quandary. His forward position had left his division virtually isolated from the remainder of the Union Army. Consequently, his flanks were exposed and could be exploited easily by the Confederates who were now threatening both flanks. Sykes reported the situation as follows:

Both . . . flanks rested on a dense growth of forest, and as I was completely isolated from the rest of the army, I felt that my rear could be gained by a determined movement of the enemy under the cover of forest. Griffin [1st Division Commander, 5th Corps] was far to my left, Slocum [12th Corps Commander] far to my right, the enemy in front and between me and both of those officers. In this situation, without support, my situation was critical.<sup>11</sup>

Both Anderson's Division on the Plank Road and Kershaw's Brigade in the south threatened an envelopment of Sykes's right flank. In addition, Semme's Brigade deployed a strong line of skirmishers from the 10th Georgia. This force was able to deliver enfilade fire on Burbank's right flank. In the north, the brigades of Mahone and Wofford were also threatening a flank attack.

Aware of his dilemma, Sykes responded by deploying the 1st Brigade (Ayers) north to block the Confederates and six companies of the 146th New York Volunteers to the southern flank. However, the Confederate envelopment seemed inevitable, so under orders from Hooker, Sykes withdrew his forces toward Chancellorsville. Sykes, in his report, gave no indication that he prematurely withdrew his forces, saying that he was determined to hold his position as long as possible.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Major General Warren, Chief Engineer of the Army of the Potomac, left Sykes and went to the rear in an attempt to get Hooker to reconsider but failed. Warren reported that he delivered Hooker's response back to Sykes and then the latter withdrew his forces.<sup>13</sup>

#### Analysis of the Meeting Engagement

Seize the initiative early. Sykes seized the initiative early by quickly deploying his lead brigade. Once in a line of battle, the lead brigade fixed the Confederate force and set the stage for his own attack. Union artillery along the Orange Turnpike helped to drive in the Confederate skirmishers. This initial response allowed Sykes to set the terms of battle. The momentum of the engagement was clearly in Sykes's favor.

With his lead brigade in a line of battle, Sykes was able to concentrate firepower in the crucial early stages of the engagement. The restrictive terrain also helped to



concentrate firepower. Burbank's brigade deployed into a close order line of battle formation which was the formation most desired by commanders since it exploited the unit's firepower. This concentration, along with the artillery on the Orange Turnpike, provided maximum frontal firepower. In the early stages of this engagement this was critical since it forced the Confederates, who were still deploying, to do so while under fire. In terms of casualties or kills, the accuracy of this fire was not very effective. In fact, an examination of the commanders' reports indicate fewer than five. However, deploying under fire presented the Confederates with a psychological disadvantage. Ardant du Picq, the French military theorist, would have thought this psychological or "moral effect" as significant since the courage and discipline of the Confederates was shaken by this disadvantage.

Moreover, quickly deploying into a stationary position gave Sykes the natural advantages of the defense: stable firing positions, protection, and relatively easier command and control. It was, of course, easier to fire from a reasonably stable position than to fire while on the move. Also, stable firing positions, in theory, would have improved marksmanship. Except for soldiers skilled at rifle marksmanship, the average Civil War infantryman was not a highly trained rifle marksman. Although the rifled musket did give the infantryman unprecedented range and accuracy,

for the typical soldier it was difficult to hit anything, save for close-in targets. However, good firing positions would increase the quality of firepower through stabilization. Increasing the probability of a kill also requires identifying the best fields of fire and ensuring an adequate coverage of fire in all sectors. An early deployment gave Sykes additional time to do all of this.

Besides increasing his unit's ability to deliver accurate fire, an early deployment also meant Sykes's lead brigade was able to achieve a greater degree of protection and it made command and control easier. A unit in a static position, while formed into a close order line of battle formation required little from its leadership except to give the command to fire. Since soldiers were stationary and lined up close together, the leader could inspire and control his men more efficiently. His ability to direct the fire of his unit received his full attention since he was not attempting to control any movement.

During the initial stages of the engagement, McLaws's forces reacted differently. When his skirmishers engaged the Union cavalry, McLaws continued to slowly advance his main column deploying only after the enemy appeared in force.<sup>14</sup> Tactically, this delay was understandable. Not having a clear knowledge of the enemy situation, the delay provided McLaws time to get a clearer picture of what lay ahead and to develop an appropriate course of action. For all McLaws

knew, it was nothing more than Union cavalry for which an infantry division need not deploy. However, McLaws knew that deploying his division was just a matter of time as there was more than just cavalry forces. Jackson's plan called for McLaws's Division to advance along the Turnpike and to attack the Union forces that were advancing toward Fredericksburg and Lee's rear.

Additionally, by delaying his deployment, McLaws may have been choosing to deploy on more favorable terrain providing some maneuverability and good fields of fire. As mentioned earlier, except for a few open areas, the surrounding terrain was thickly wooded. Infantry drills were difficult enough in open fields for the average unit, but when executed in this terrain they were nearly impossible to conduct. Furthermore, assuming its location was right, occupying the edge of an open area would have given McLaws an advantage by providing less cover and concealment for the attacker. Despite these two considerations, the Confederates' delay, in combination with the Union's quicker deployment, allowed the Union forces to seize the early initiative.

Develop the situation and initiate maneuver rapidly  
The Union forces did not remain long in their hasty defense. Instead, Sykes began to develop the situation by aggressively continuing the attack. Analyzing the terrain, Sykes's lead brigade commander, Burbank, saw that the terrain to his front

Confederate artillery. Burbank advanced his brigade and gained this position with only minor opposition. However, shortly after arriving Sykes ordered Burbank to continue the attack to the hill directly to Burbank's front. Burbank later reported that this attack was stubbornly opposed by the Confederates; nonetheless, Burbank's brigade captured the crest of the hill.<sup>15</sup>

So far, Sykes was successful--he drove the Confederates back and secured the ground assigned to his division. Unfortunately, by doing so, Sykes ignored an essential requirement of both an attacking and a defending force: mutual support. Sykes's forward position completely uncovered his flanks. He reported back to Hooker that he was isolated and his rear area could be gained by a determined attack.<sup>16</sup>

McLaws, aware of Sykes's predicament, quickly threatened Sykes's exposed northern and southern flanks. McLaws exploited his two most significant advantages: favorable terrain and his superior positioning. The thickly wooded terrain provided McLaws with good covered and concealed routes leading into Sykes's flanks and rear area. And, it was clear that McLaws fully intended to attack Sykes's flanks when McLaws sent word back to Jackson indicating that the terrain was favorable for a flank attack.<sup>17</sup> Tactically, McLaws's wider frontage created an over-lapping effect. As a result, it placed the Confederates

in an excellent position to threaten Sykes's isolated division.

Sykes reported that the enemy partially out-flanked him right and left and was maneuvering to turn both of his flanks.<sup>18</sup>

Although the Confederates enjoyed numerical superiority in this engagement, numerical superiority in itself did not guarantee them a flank attack option. Undoubtedly numerical superiority certainly helps, but the skill of the commander in positioning his forces relative to the enemy was more important. This required McLaws to exploit both the terrain and Sykes's isolation by arraying his forces to gain a positional advantage. McLaws did this by placing a brigade to strengthen his forward line of contact. In doing so, he reinforced his front with additional combat power, thereby increasing his relative combat power ratio. This placed more pressure on Sykes's line and fixed the bulk of his forces in position. This same action helped to tie in McLaws's left flank with Anderson's right in the south and further strengthen their mutual support. McLaws also reinforced his northern flank with two brigades to guard the approach along the Old Mine Road blocking a possible Union counterattack. With his forces now fully deployed and his flanks protected, McLaws was in an excellent position to threaten Sykes with encirclement. This gave McLaws, what Jomini said was the perfect result of the proper application of an order of battle: the double advantages of "fire of the arms and of the moral effect produced by the onset."<sup>19</sup>

However, the most important result of McLaws's actions was that it allowed him to wrest the initiative from Sykes. Sykes, now reacting instead of initiating action, responded to his threatened flanks by deploying his 1st Brigade (Ayers) to protect the northern flank, and six companies of the 146th New York Volunteers to protect the southern. This was a desperate attempt by Sykes to prevent his forces from being surrounded and clearly demonstrated that Sykes was no longer initiating action, but reacting to the will of McLaws.

The reason why Sykes delayed his deployment lay in his initial success. As his lead brigade continued making excellent progress, Sykes possibly saw no need to employ the remainder of his division. Thus, the two remaining brigades were, in effect, dragged along behind the success of the lead brigade. Had he deployed them to the front or even to the flanks, Sykes may have reasoned that this would have only slowed the advance of his lead brigade.

#### Attack violently and resolutely

Commanders exert a sense of determination and violence of action through their plan of attack. Plans should seek to employ a force's full potential of combat power with aims at decisive results. Sykes, although he deployed quickly, attacked with only a brigade for the majority of this engagement. The other two brigades remained behind the lead brigade. They were not employed in earnest until Sykes's flanks were threatened and then employed only in a defensive

role. Attacking piecemeal and faced with serious opposition, the Union forces quickly lost the momentum. The result was to lose the initiative.

Hooker's actions were equally irresolute in this engagement. The timely employment of his reserves could have provided both the additional combat power needed to protect the threatened flanks and to reestablish communications between adjacent units. However, by the time Hooker did reinforce, Sykes was nearly surrounded. Conversely, McLaws's attack, and Jackson's support of him, demonstrated a determination to force their will upon the Union Army through developing the situation, exploiting their advantages, and committing their reserves.

So great were the Confederate physical and psychological advantages in this engagement that they caused Hooker to withdraw his forces back toward Chancellorsville. Undoubtedly the most questionable decision of Hooker's career, it cost the Union army a potential victory.

Prior to this decision, Hooker's Army of the Potomac had a real chance of defeating Lee. Leading three of his corps, Hooker had outflanked Lee's army with a brilliant move giving him access to Lee's rear area (see figure 4, page 150). If he had continued the attack, Hooker could have pinned Lee's army between the three Union corps at Fredericksburg and the three at Chancellorsville. However, from the moment Hooker withdrew his forces, his chances of

derreating Lee began to decrease rapidly. Assuming the offense, Lee seized and retained the initiative for the remainder of this battle.

Hooker's decision to withdraw in the face of the enemy damaged the morale of commanders and soldiers alike.

"Fighting Joe", as he was known, had backed down without really striking a blow at Lee's army. The soldiers of Sykes's division had fought hard and were now forced to abandon their positions. So adamant were Hooker's commanders about not withdrawing that General Warren suggested to General Couch (who reinforced Sykes) that he disobey the order.<sup>20</sup>

Hooker's new plan to concentrate in a defense around Chancellorsville actually weakened the Union's position rather than strengthening it. By abandoning Sykes's commanding position, Hooker gave the Confederates a near perfect artillery position from which they could engage the Union line defending Chancellorsville. Furthermore, the terrain surrounding Chancellorsville made an ideal static defense for infantry, but, void of good fields of fire, the bulk of Hooker's artillery was useless.

As stated earlier, this meeting engagement caused the Union army to lose the initiative. Two actions contributed to the loss: Sykes's isolation and McLaws's better development of the situation. Both have already been



examined, but the question that remained was: How could Sykes allow his division to become so poorly positioned?

To ensure a coordinated and mutually supported attack, attacking forces must advance in unison across the front. Without this mutual support, they run the risk of a piecemeal attack as well as exposing their flanks to enemy attacks. Despite modern technology, this task still remains a difficult one today; however, it is not an impossible task, even for Civil War armies. As the right flank division of the 5th Corps, Sykes was responsible for communications with the 12th Corps' left flank division along the Plank Road in the south. To his north, Sykes's communications were with one of his sister divisions in the corps, the 1st Division. Although in a key area, the boundary between two attacking corps, Sykes failed to maintain communications with these forces. General Warren noted that ". . . no connection, however, could even thus be made with our own troops on the right [12th Corps] . . . ."21 Warren dispatched his aide to the location where he and Sykes believed the 12th Corps to be and instead found enemy skirmishers advancing.

There are several reasons why this happened. Meeting engagements are characterized by uncertainty, particularly of the enemy force and its activity. In Civil War days, void of today's electronic technology, the ability of commanders to "see the battlefield" was reduced to information collection assets such as cavalry forces, skirmishers, and spies. But

all too often, these reports were untimely and limited to the observer's interpretation or, worse yet, third hand information. This often caused commanders to make decisions when they lacked a clear understanding of the enemy and the friendly situation.

Moreover, in this situation the heavily wooded terrain compounded the problem as General Alfred Pleasonton noted after the battle:

The position of the army at Chancellorsville extended about three miles from east to west in the narrow clearings, which did not afford sufficient ground to maneuver an army the size of the Army of the Potomac. Besides this, we were ignorant of what might be going on outside of this cordon of woods, and were giving the enemy every opportunity to take us at a disadvantage.<sup>22</sup>

In sum, the clash of a Union and Confederate division while in a very fluid battlefield situation characterized this meeting engagement. The bold and somewhat impetuous drive by Major General Sykes seized the early initiative for the Union Army. However, while it accomplished limited tactical gains, it resulted in the isolation Sykes's division and helped to create the conditions for a Union withdrawal. Unlike the meeting engagement, the Union's hasty attack was never able to seize the initiative. The examination of the hasty attack follows in the next chapter.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Army, FM 71-100. Field Service Regulations-- Division Operations, (Washington: Department of the Army, 1990), 4-26.

<sup>2</sup>Antoine Henri De Jomini, The Art of War, (California: Presidio Press, 1992) 207.

<sup>3</sup>John Biglow Jr. The Campaign of Chancellorsville, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1910), 246-248.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Samuel P. Bates, "Hooker's Comments on Chancellorsville," Battles and Leaders of the Civil War 4 vols. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds. (New York: Century, 1887-1888), 3: 218.

<sup>6</sup>U.S. War Department. The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. 128 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901) vol. 25, part 1: 525. (Cited hereafter as OR., unless otherwise indicated, all references are to Series 1.)

<sup>7</sup>Timothy J. Reese, Sykes' Regular Infantry Division, 1861-1864, (Jefferson North Carolina: McFarland, 1990) 210.

<sup>8</sup>Mahone to Mills, 27 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:862..

<sup>9</sup>Burbank to Ryan, 7 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:533.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Sykes to Locke, 8 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:525.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Warren to Butterfield, 12 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:199.

<sup>14</sup>McLaws to Taylor, 10 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:825.

<sup>15</sup>Burbank to Ryan, 7 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:533.

<sup>16</sup>Sykes to Locke, 8 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:525.

17McLaws to Taylor, 10 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:825.

18Sykes to Locke, 8 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:525.

19Jomini, The Art of War, 201.

20Harry Hansen, The Civil War, (New York: The New American Library, November 1961), p. 301.

21Warren to Butterfield, 12 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1:198.

22Alfred Pleasonton, "The Successes and Failures of Chancellorsville," Battles and Leaders of the Civil War 4 vols. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds. (New York: Century, 1887-1888), 172-188.

## CHAPTER 4

### HASTY ATTACK

In a hasty attack, forces attack quickly without extensive preparations to gain the upper hand or to keep the enemy from organizing a defense.<sup>1</sup> A hasty attack can often result from a meeting engagement or successful a defense and are generally not planned in detail. However, to achieve a synchronization of combat power, commanders must anticipate a hasty attack. The initial stages of a hasty attack are the most crucial as the commander attempts to overwhelm the enemy and prevent his recovery. The following criteria were used to guide the analyses for this hasty attack.

Allocation and organization of forces to accomplish the mission. Unlike the meeting engagement, the hasty attack is characterized by an increase in intensity and enemy resistance. Furthermore, commanders may have additional information about the enemy. However, despite additional information, the enemy situation can still be very nebulous. Consequently, commanders must organize and employ reconnaissance and security forces to guide and protect the main body. The main body should contain enough combat power to defeat the enemy and react to contingencies.

Rapid deployment of forces to attack the enemy quickly.

Timing is an essential part of this criterion since a poorly timed attack can miss the opportunity to strike the enemy when and where he is vulnerable. Once initiated, forces attack quickly from existing dispositions to gain a positional advantage or to keep the enemy from organizing a resistance. Movement formations must allow for forces to transition quickly into the attack.

Integration and synchronization of combat, and combat support. The commander arranges the combat, combat support and combat service support activities in time, space, and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at the decisive point.

The Hasty Attack

This hasty attack occurred near Catharine Furnace astride the Furnace Road, approximately two and one half miles south of Chancellorsville. The following summary reviews the status of both forces including the mission, troops, time, and terrain. Moreover, the battlefield situation section gives a summary of the forces and battlefield events leading up to the hasty attack.

Mission. The mission of the Union's 3d Army Corps was not really clear, but it appears that the corps was to conduct a hasty attack into the flank of Jackson's 2d Confederate Corps as it marched along the Furnace Road.

Troops. The Union's 3d Corps consisted of Birney's and Whipple's divisions. Later in the fight, it was reinforced with Williams' division of the 12th Corps and Barlow's brigade of the 11th Corps. Once all forces were committed, they numbered about 20,000. Confederate forces included the 23d Georgia Regiment and a battery of Virginia Artillery. Other Confederate forces were involved at various times during the fight and are described later in the chapter.

Time. Hooker gave Sickles the order to attack at approximately 1200 on 2 May 1863.<sup>2</sup>

Terrain. The terrain between Hazel Grove and the Furnace Road was thickly wooded and carved up with numerous small streams (tributaries of Scott's Run), deep ravines, and marshes. Cross-country movement by infantry was slow while movement by cavalry and artillery was impossible. The road network included a north-south road which ran from the Orange Turnpike, intersecting with the Furnace Road near Catharine Furnace. At this intersection, the Furnace Road turned south and was bisected by a railroad cut three quarters of a mile down the road. The road continued to the southeast past the Welford House and eventually connected with the Brock Road in the west.

### The Battlefield Situation

After withdrawing back to Chancellorsville the night of May 1st, the Union Army occupied defensive positions around the Chancellorsville's crossroads. Hooker, hoping Lee would conduct a frontal attack, deployed strong outposts of infantry, reinforced natural obstacles, and oriented the majority of his combat power to the east, southeast, and south. In the east, Meade's 5th Corps held the left flank of the Union Army anchored to the Rappahannock River. Connecting with Meade's corps was Couch's 2d Corps which curved around the Chancellorsville crossroads, defending the approach from the Orange Turnpike. Slocum's 12th Corps completed the curve covering the Chancellorsville area. Birney's division, from Sickles's 3d Corps, defended south of the Turnpike, near the bare plateau known as Hazel Grove and connected Slocum's corps with Howard's 11th Corps in the west. Howard's corps defended to about a mile past the Wilderness Church and was Hooker's right flank. The remainder of Sickles's 3d Corps--Berry's and Whipple's divisions--was positioned near the Chancellorsville House in reserve.

After seizing the initiative on May 1st, Lee assumed the offensive with a plan to crush Hooker's defense. Splitting his force in two, Lee sent Jackson's 2d Corps (approximately 28,000 soldiers) on a 12 mile long march to envelop the Union's western flank. This was a risky venture since the route along Furnace Road took Jackson laterally



across the Union's front, and it came within one and a half miles of the Union defensive positions. Although the dense vegetation along the route provided good concealment, there were at least a couple of areas on the east side of Lewis Creek that permitted Union observation. Jackson had realized that this put his forces at risk so he used Stuart's cavalry to screen between Furnace Road and the Union line.

Furthermore, he secured the crossroads near Catharine Furnace with the 23d Georgia Regiment (of Brigadier General Colquitt's Brigade, Hill's Division). Their mission was to "guard the flank of the column in motion against a surprise." The commander of the 23d Georgia, Colonel Emory Best, had a challenging task. The dense vegetation and his exposed flanks made a Union attack possible from three directions. To safeguard against a Union surprise, Best deployed almost half of his regiment as skirmishers. The remaining five companies secured the crossroads at Catharine Furnace. Lee also supported Jackson's movement. He had McLaws's and Anderson's Divisions extend their fronts to occupy the area previously defended by Jackson's entire corps and Anderson also secured the Orange Plank Road. Additionally, both divisions conducted strong demonstrations along the Union eastern flank to deceive and fix the Union Army.

Union observers from Birney's division spotted Jackson's movement shortly after 0800. His column consisted of infantry, artillery, ambulances, and wagon trains moving

from Captain Robert Sims's B Battery, New Jersey Light Artillery, on Hazel Grove to engage the Confederates approximately 1500 yards to the south. As Sims' guns engaged the Confederates, Jackson ordered his infantry to double-time past the impact area and detoured his trains to a road further south paralleling Furnace Road. Engaging the column with artillery was not enough for Sickles. Sickles wanted to attack the column with his corps, but Hooker hesitated. Sickles believed that the movement was either a retreat toward Gordonsville, or an attack on the Union's right flank. After numerous pleas from Sickles to advance against the Confederates, Hooker finally granted permission to his corps commander to "advance cautiously toward the road followed by the enemy and harass the movement as much as possible."<sup>4</sup>

#### The Battle is Joined

Sickles ordered Birney's division to "follow the enemy, pierce the column, and gain possession of the road over which it was passing."<sup>5</sup> Preceding the main body, Sickles deployed Colonel Hiram Berdan's Sharpshooter Brigade (Whipple's 3d Brigade) as his reconnaissance force and Birney deployed the 20th Indiana as his advanced guard. The 3d Brigade (Colonel Samuel Hayman) led the main body, followed by the 1st Brigade (Brigadier General Charles Graham), and then the 2d Brigade (Brigadier General J. H. Hobart Ward). Whipple's Division remained in position until ordered forward later in the

...struggling through dense woods and marshy terrain, Birney's division moved with great difficulty. Bridges had to be built or rebuilt over Scott's Run, soldiers had to cut their way through thick underbrush, and a solid network of briars and branches impeded the movement of Birney's infantry along the entire route.<sup>6</sup>

Except for the terrain, Berdan's Sharpshooters initially met little resistance; however, they eventually came under heavy fire near the forge three quarters of a mile from the point at which they had entered the woods. A company of skirmishers from the 23d Georgia Regiment (the remainder of the regiment had displaced to the south near the Welford House) opened fire, but was steadily pushed back by the Sharpshooters until the Georgians eventually rallied around a large building. Lee, in the east with the remainder of his army, became concerned about the Union advance, so he dispatched Posey's Brigade from Anderson's Division to dislodge the Union forces.<sup>7</sup> Posey, who now had access to an exposed Union flank, engaged it with such intensity that it caused Birney to divert Graham's brigade in support of Hayman in the east, and Sickles ordered his reserve (Whipple's division) to close up behind Birney. By this time Jackson had received word of the Union attack and orders were sent back to Colonel Brown's Battalion of Virginia Artillery (traveling with the artillery reserve in the rear of Jackson's column) to position a battery near the Welford House to support the

rear guard. Supported by the 20th Indiana, Berdan's Sharpshooters continued the Union's advance and skillfully out-maneuvered the company from the 23d Regiment forcing their surrender. At this point, Wright's Brigade, also from Anderson's Division, was moving from near the Orange Plank Road toward the Furnace to support Posey.

Sickles's exposed flank between his left and the right of Slocum's 12th Corps started to widen as he advanced; this prompted him at about 1500 to have to request reinforcements (see figure 5, page 13X). In the meantime, the Sharpshooters, supported by the 20th Indiana and now the Fifth Michigan, began to press the attack. When they did, the brigades of Posey and Wright engaged Birney's division on its left flank with a "galling fire."<sup>8</sup> Firing from the vicinity of the Welford House, Brooke's Battery of four Napoleon 12-pounders checked Birney's advance as well. Birney responded with counterfire from Turnbull's battery, while Sickles sent up Livingston's battery--later replaced by Randolph's--and an artillery duel commenced. Sickles now ordered Birney to hold his position until the arrival of Whipple's division and a brigade (this eventually turned out to be a division) on his left from the 12th Corps. When Whipple finally did arrive, Sickles had him cover Birney's left flank and to connect with William's division of the 12th Corps which was enroute. Barlow's brigade (sent by Hooker at about 1600) from the 11th Corps arrived at about 1645 and

Brigadier General Barlow informed Birney that he was on Birney's right and had "completed the connections between it and his corps."<sup>9</sup>

Word of the Union attack had reached Brigadier General J. J. Archer, a brigade commander in Hill's Division, who was in the rear of Jackson's column. Archer's brigade, as well as Brigadier General E. L. Thomas's brigade turned around and headed back to the Welford House to support the beleaguered 23d. Colonel Best and Archer linked up near the railroad cut and the latter took command. While under the fire of the artillery duel, Archer ordered Best to hold his position until told to withdraw. Best informed Archer that he could hold if Archer could secure his flanks, especially his left flank.<sup>10</sup> Archer deployed skirmishers to protect Best's flanks, but after about thirty minutes, Archer withdrew his skirmishers. Archer ordered Best to withdraw as well, but Best received the order too late. The reason for this withdrawal was not clear. One reason may have been, as Archer stated in his report, that upon his arrival the enemy had already been repulsed. This may have been true, but they did not go very far.

Meanwhile, the artillery fight was decided shortly after 1700 when Turnbull's battery expended all the ammunition in their limbers (in order to lighten their load, they left their caissons back at Hazel Grove when they were called forward).<sup>11</sup> Sickles then called up Jastram's battery

to resume artillery support. With Archer's withdrawal, Birney advanced to gain control of the road further south near the Welford House. At approximately 1730 Birney's advance guard (Sharpshooters, 20th Indiana and the Fifth Michigan) attacked and outflanked the 23d Georgia-- who were now minus their flank protection--capturing the remainder of the regiment totaling 365 prisoners including 19 officers.<sup>12</sup> (Col Best put the figure at 25 officers and 250 enlisted including his wounded and killed.)<sup>13</sup> Colonel Best, with the regimental colors, managed to escape.

By 1810 Birney's advance guard controlled the road; reinforcements were securing his flanks and Jastram's battery was moving into position. Sickles was now ready to launch a major attack into what he thought was Jackson's flank. He reported:

Returning to the front, I found every indication that looked to a complete success as soon as my advance could be supported. The resistance of McLaws's [mostly Anderson's] division had almost ceased . . . it was evident that in a few minutes five or six regiments would be cut off and fall into our hands.<sup>14</sup>

However, by this time, Jackson's corps was nearly one hour into their attack, having secured their second objective: Dowdall's Tavern. Sometime shortly after 1900, Hooker recalled Sickles toward Chancellorsville as the Union's right flank was crushed.

Organization and allocation of forces to accomplish the mission. Since the major lessons learned--and the majority of the fighting--in this criterion deals with reconnaissance and security forces, the following analysis focuses on them. Since skirmish forces comprised these elements, a brief review of skirmishers and their roles follows.

Although the tactical theories during the Civil War varied in the organization of skirmish forces, the roles of skirmishers generally remained constant. As the war continued, attacking in skirmish order proved to be very effective and its use actually increased. But attacking in skirmish order produced two major disadvantages: lack of command and control due to the loose-order formation, and reduced firepower.<sup>15</sup> Different echelons of command employed skirmishers as needed. At Regimental level, two companies were deployed as skirmishers with additional skirmishers being deployed by brigades and divisions.<sup>16</sup> In the offense, skirmishers were employed in different ways. They would advance in loose-order formation, using available cover and concealment to close within musket range of the enemy; this made them difficult targets. When in range of the enemy, they would fix the enemy with fire while the main body maneuvered to a flank. Skirmishers were also used in a screening role to provide early warning and limited protection to the flanks of the main body. In a

reconnaissance role, skirmishers probed the enemy's defense to locate weak points for the main body to concentrate against in the attack.

Reconnaissance Forces for the Hasty Attack. In this attack, the surrounding terrain and the enemy situation clearly warranted a strong reconnaissance force. The thick vegetation and marshy swamps along the corps axis made movement extremely difficult; it also placed the force in a vulnerable position susceptible to attack. Reconnaissance elements in this environment would have been invaluable to the main body by not only guiding them through difficult terrain, but also around enemy strong points.

It appeared that Sickles understood the need for reconnaissance. He was aware he was attacking a force of considerable size, able to wield significant combat power, but that was about the extent of his information. So, as noted earlier, he employed a Sharpshooter brigade (consisting of two regiments) as skirmishers and flankers to provide both a route reconnaissance and enemy information. Sickles stated that he "...brought up two battalions of Sharpshooters...to be deployed as skirmishers and flankers, so as to get all possible knowledge of the enemy's movement and of the approaches to his line of march."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Berdan acknowledged that he was ordered to report to Birney for a "reconnaissance" mission, but as the following will show, he failed to accomplish his primary mission.



There is no doubt that the Sharpshooters demonstrated their superior fighting skills. From the start of the attack, they engaged in fighting. In fact, the majority of all the fighting that occurred in this attack involved the Sharpshooters; they were directly responsible for nearly all of the prisoners captured. But by doing so, they violated the cardinal rule of scouting: do not become engaged. If the Sharpshooters were fighting, then they were not gathering information for the commander. Since he ordered his Sharpshooters to "drive the Rebels from the woods," it is questionable whether Berdan ever intended to conduct a reconnaissance as directed.<sup>18</sup>

Had they performed their reconnaissance mission, they could have told Sickles that the element at Catharine Furnace was merely a rear guard protecting the force that he aimed to attack. Avoiding the rearguard by shifting his main axis to the west, the Sharpshooters could have led Sickles to intersect the column's line of march in an area with no security force. Also, they could have reconnoitered, while the 20th Indiana, traveling close behind, could have secured the north-south trail leading down from Birney's position at Hazel Grove to the vicinity of Catharine Furnace. Doing so would have avoided the difficult terrain the division had to fight their way through wasting valuable energy and precious time. Moreover, if an aggressive reconnaissance force was employed in this operation to "get all possible knowledge of

the enemy's movement," it postulates the possibility of identifying Jackson's true mission--not a retreat, but an attack.

Security Forces (Frontal, Flank, and Rear). While frontal security for the main body proved sufficient, the lack of flank and rear security caused this attack to stall. The advance of the main body was Birney's own 20th Indiana commanded by Colonel Wheeler, from the 2d Brigade. This force--which was normally provided by the lead main body force--was the commander's way of protecting his main fighting force. The stated mission of this force was to "skirmish and feel the enemy."<sup>19</sup> In advance guard terms, this meant preventing the main body from being surprised, thwarting the enemy's attempt to delay the movement of the main body, and to develop the situation. Wheeler's force performed these tasks up to and including the capture of the 23d Georgia. Later in the action near Catharine Furnace, Birney further strengthened his frontal security with another regiment, the Fifth Michigan. This force, in conjunction with the Sharpshooters and the 20th Indiana, was able to outflank the 23d Georgia causing their surrender. In their official reports, Union officers generally praised the operation specifically with the capture of the 23d Georgia. Even the Confederates felt the 23d had failed. In fact, several months after the battle, a Confederate court "cashiered" the commander of the 23d for his unit's actions.<sup>20</sup> Instead, a

commendation was probably more appropriate for holding Sickles at bay long enough for the trains to pass, saving everything but one artillery caisson.<sup>21</sup> Although it may have boosted Union morale, tactically the capture of the 23d accomplished very little.

While the frontal security proved sufficient, the lack of ample combat forces devoted to flank and rear security did not and caused this attack to lose its momentum. Momentarily reviewing the battlefield, Sickles attacked with a substantial Confederate force to his east--the two divisions of Anderson and McLaws were both within two miles of Sickles's flank--and an unclear enemy situation on his western flank. Operating forward of the Union Army as he advanced, Sickles also extended his lines of communication. Consequently, he had to secure them to prevent being cut off from the remainder of the army. This requirement necessitated substantial forces devoted solely to flank and rear security. Instead, the main body (Birney's Division) provided their own internal flank security initially, but had to be augmented when this became insufficient.

Although Sickles called for the sharpshooters to be deployed as "flankers," two regiments were insufficient to cover the flanks of the corps and execute their frontal reconnaissance mission. Whether or not Berdan's Sharpshooters even deployed to the flanks, other than the maneuver to outflank the enemy, was questionable since there

was never any mention of this in the reports. Berdan stated that he deployed his 1st Regiment in the woods, using the 2d Regiment as a reserve.<sup>22</sup>

Insufficient flank and rear security forces caused Sickles' attack to reach what Carl Von Clausewitz called, the culminating point of an attack.<sup>23</sup> Clausewitz suggested that the strength of an attacking force usually will diminish as the attack continues. Eventually an attacking force will reach a point where its strength no longer exceeds that of the defender, and beyond which continued offensive operations risk over extension, counterattack, and defeat.<sup>24</sup> In Sickles' official report he described reaching the culminating point in a somewhat different fashion:

Ascertaining from a careful examination of the position that it was practicable to gain the road and break the enemy's column, I reported to the general-in-chief, adding that I must expect to encounter a heavy force and a stubborn resistance and bearing in mind his [Hooker's] admonition to move cautiously, I should not advance farther until supports from the Eleventh and Twelfth Corps closed up on Birney's right and left.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, lacking sufficient combat forces to secure his exposed flanks and rear, he over-extended his lines of operation and had reached his culminating point before he could launch the main attack. The battlefield situation required a brigade in the west and a division in the east devoted solely to flank and rear security. This was what Sickles eventually requested and received, but not before Jackson's column had slipped away.

The main body for this operation consisted initially of one division. Sickles ordered the follow-on division forward but had to be diverted to provide left flank security. Further discussion of the main body will follow later in this chapter.

Rapid deployment of forces to attack the enemy quickly.

Hooker's hesitation resulted in the attack missing all but the very tail end of the column. Equally important was his failure to clearly state the purpose for the mission; this caused confusion and resulted in contradicting orders. The rigidity of traditional Civil War infantry drills also delayed the attack.

Hooker's hesitation caused him to delay the attack for approximately four hours. He started receiving reports on the Confederates' movement as early as 0800 on May 2d. As the reports continued, Hooker became perplexed; he could not understand Lee's intentions. He knew it was unlike Lee to flee without a fight, but Hooker wanted to believe the movement indicated a retreat toward Gordonsville. His belief was reinforced by the direction in which the column was moving. After Catharine Furnace, the road turned abruptly south. As the Confederates marched down this trail, they turned their backs to the Union defenses causing some, including Hooker, to believe they were retreating.<sup>26</sup>

That afternoon at 1400, Hooker told his 2d Corps Commander, Major General Couch, "Lee is in full retreat

toward Gordonsville."<sup>27</sup> He also telegraphed Sedgwick back at Fredericksburg, "We know that the enemy is fleeing, trying to save his trains."<sup>28</sup> Yet earlier that morning at 0930, Hooker had Brigadier General Van Alen send the following message to Howard (who denied ever receiving it):

I am directed by the Major-General commanding to say the dispositions you have made of your corps has been with a view to a front attack by the enemy. If he should throw himself upon your flank, he wishes you to examine the ground, and determine upon the position you will take in that event, in order that you may be prepared for him in whatever direction he advances. He suggests that you have heavy reserves well in hand to meet this contingency.<sup>29</sup>

Keeping in mind the need for a strong reserve, herein lies another contradiction. During Sickles' attack, Hooker dispatched Barlow's brigade from the 11th Corps. (Howard had told Hooker that he could not afford to send any troops, but Hooker ordered him to do so anyway at 1600). This unit was Howard's best trained and manned brigade, but more importantly, it was Howard's only reserve. The actual number of Barlow's brigade varies from 1500 to as many as 3100; however, the 11th Corps' historian puts the figure at exactly 2,950.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, if Hooker believed an attack was imminent, then why did he create a one mile gap in the defensive line between the 11th and 12th Corps by ordering Sickles to attack? Additionally, he never went back to ensure Howard's defense was re-oriented to the west as he had ordered. If he had, he would have noticed a two mile gap between his right flank and the Rapidan River.

Tactically, Birney's route selection also contributed to delaying the attack by moving his entire element cross-country. This ordeal consumed precious time and, other than possibly achieving surprise, Birney's reasoning was not clear. As noted previously, there was a north-south trail which led from Hazel Grove to Catharine Furnace. By securing it with his advanced guard, Birney's main body could have saved time by using the road.

Like timing, a clear mission statement and a commander's intent with an expected end-state for the mission was essential to the rapid deployment of the attacking force. Neither a staff, nor a commander can properly plan and organize forces to accomplish a mission without a clear purpose and intent. Hooker's guidance to Sickles was to "advance cautiously," when it should have been to attack aggressively. In fact, Hooker never even used the word "attack," and his warning of caution was one reason why Sickles did not press the attack.

Hooker's guidance was not only inappropriate, but also confusing. Sickles reported that the orders from Hooker were to harass the Confederates' movement as much as possible.<sup>31</sup> However, after dispatching Sickles, he told his 2d Corps commander that he had sent Sickles to "capture Lee's artillery."<sup>32</sup> Sickles gave his lead division commander the order to "follow the enemy, pierce the column, and gain possession of the road over which it was passing."<sup>33</sup> Birney

attack the enemy, if found between the point of entrance [into the woods] and the road alluded to."<sup>34</sup> Colonel Graham's brigade, next in order, received the mission to support Hayman's brigade, but his mission was changed to keep the lines of communication open.<sup>35</sup> Finally, the last brigade commander, Brigadier General Ward, was ordered "to the front."<sup>36</sup> The point here is at no time was any order given to "pierce the column," or to "gain possession of the road," or to "capture Lee's artillery." Instead of starting out to seize the initiative, which demanded a clearly defined mission and purpose, this force was reacting to the Confederates instead of attacking their "retreating" column.

One now wonders, What was their mission? While Hooker's thoughts are impossible to discern with absolute certainty, his actions indicate a half-hearted attempt to seize the initiative. Moreover, without Sickles' insistent requests to attack, it is questionable whether Hooker would have ever left the security of his defense to strike at Lee. Whether the Confederates were attacking or retreating, Hooker should have committed to an early attack with two full corps. By attacking early and with sufficient combat forces, he could have driven a wedge between Lee and Jackson. Using his overwhelming combat power, Hooker could have fixed Jackson's corps in the west while he attacked with Meade's and Couch's corps into the flank of Lee's two divisions in the east.



corps that was more preoccupied securing their flanks and rear than to mount anything meaningful against Jackson's column.

At the soldier level, the rigid drills and formations of Civil War infantry movements were ill-suited to the dense terrain. The terrain, known as "The Wilderness," was probably the worst for the movement and fighting of large forces in either theater. It fostered confusion, deprived leaders of initiative, slowed down communications, reduced the effectiveness of supporting arms, and generally increased the "fog of war." Operating in this type of terrain remains a challenge even today despite the vast technological edge and flexible tactics that current day leaders enjoy over Civil War commanders. Performing infantry maneuvers (drills) at company, regiment, and brigade levels was difficult enough on an open parade ground for Civil War leaders. The neat and orderly formations that were performed so well in an open field soon broke down when executed in thickly vegetated terrain, scattered with marshes, swamps, and creeks which permeated the area. This often caused confusion as can be seen in the statement of Colonel Collins', the commander of the 114th Pennsylvania Infantry:

I constantly received orders from staff officers of the most conflicting character--one minute ordered to move forward, the next by flank to the right, and the next to fall back; once ordered to form a line diagonal to the regiment in front, when the order intended was parallel to the line.<sup>37</sup>

inflexibility of the infantry drills. The result was the centralization of command and control which only further delayed their attack. The 2d Brigade Commander, Colonel Ward, noted this centralization when he reported, "the brigade, with the whole division, now steadily advanced with the view of cutting off the enemy's trains [and the division] advanced step by step, under the direction of General Birney."<sup>38</sup>

A heavy use of skirmishers could have been more effective in this terrain. The loose-order techniques became more popular as the war continued, but many commanders, especially the senior ones, were reluctant to relinquish the tighter command and control offered by the close-order line of battle formations.

Integration and synchronization of combat and combat support. The lack of synchronization between infantry forces is vital to understanding how Sickles piecemealed his attack.

Sickles was never able to concentrate his combat power. This was especially true in the crucial early stages of the attack when he needed to overwhelm the rear guard position quickly. Lack of concentration occurred for two reasons: (1) As mentioned earlier, he lacked sufficient combat power having diverted nearly half to cover his eastern flank; (2) He employed his forces incrementally. Sickles initially advanced with Birney's division, but it was not until

ordered his next division to advance within supporting distance.<sup>39</sup> The gap this created between his maneuver units, intensified by the terrain, caused them to arrive at different times in the battle. For example: Birney's last regiment did not start to move from Hazel Grove until approximately two and one half hours after the lead regiments had deployed.<sup>40</sup> In terms of battlefield synchronization, this meant that Birney's advance guard had already captured the company at the forge and was now attacking to gain control of the road. By the time Sickles's second division did arrive, it had to be diverted to a flank security role, thus adding little to the combat power of the main attacking force.

Due to the thick terrain, the integration of supporting arms was difficult as well. Although Sickles requested and received cavalry forces (Sixth New York Cavalry from Major General Pleasonton's division, of the Cavalry Corps), the terrain prohibited their use. Sickles told Pleasonton that the enemy was giving way and that cavalry could be used to pursue.<sup>41</sup> But, after a personal reconnaissance, Pleasonton declined and pulled his cavalry back saying that it was no place for cavalry to operate.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike the Union cavalry, the Union artillery did get into the fight and performed well. The first rounds fired of any type were those of CPT Sims's battery. Employing a section of Sims's rifled cannons from Hazel Grove, Birney was

able to shell the Confederate column 1600 yards away on Furnace Road. Realizing the Confederates were moving in force, Birney prepared for the employment of his remaining divisional batteries--Turnbull's F and K Batteries, 3d U.S. Artillery, and Jastram's E Battery, 1st Rhode Island Light--by positioning them near Hazel Grove.

In a limited sense, Sims's battery demonstrated its ability to affect the Confederate movement by firing interdiction fires. Interdicting fires seek to disrupt, delay, and destroy enemy forces that cannot fire their primary weapon systems on friendly forces.<sup>43</sup> Although it had limited overall impact, the Union artillery was able to disrupt the Confederates forcing them to scatter and divert their column to a road further to the south.

Another important role was counterfire. As Birney's division neared the forge, their movement was halted by a Confederate artillery battery positioned in an opening near the Welford House. Taking what Sickles called a "destructive fire" from the enemy, Birney ordered Turnbull's Battery into a position near the forge. Faced with very restrictive terrain, confusion abounded as the Union artillerymen scurried to position their guns, eventually returning fire. This counterfire helped to relieve Birney's advance guard from the destructive fire of the Confederate artillery because the Confederates were too preoccupied firing their own counterfire.

In sum, this hasty attack failed to accomplish anything tactically significant. Poor planning and leadership, inadequate intelligence, and an insufficient allocation of combat forces from the beginning of the operation resulted in a missed opportunity to strike at the Confederates.

Unlike the hasty attack, the Confederates' deliberate attack did not miss the opportunity to deliver a massive blow to the Union Army. The examination of the deliberate attack follows in the next chapter.

# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Army, FM 100-5. Field Service Regulations--Operations, (Washington: Department of the Army, 1986), 116.

<sup>2</sup>U.S. War Department. The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies. 128 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901) 25: 386. (Cited hereafter as OR., unless otherwise indicated, all references are to Series 1), 408.

<sup>3</sup>Colquitt to Grattan, 15 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 975.

<sup>4</sup>Sickles to Williams, 20 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 386.

<sup>5</sup>Birney to Hart, 9 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 408.

<sup>6</sup>Theodore A. Dodge, The Campaign of Chancellorsville (2ed.) (Boston: Ticknor, 1881), 67.

<sup>7</sup>Anderson to Chilton, 6 June 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 851.

<sup>8</sup>Birney to Hart, 9 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 408.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Best to Brocke, 8 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 980.

<sup>11</sup>Clark to Walker, 12 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 444.

<sup>12</sup>Berdan to Dalton, 7 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 502.

<sup>13</sup>Best to Brocke, 8 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 980.

<sup>14</sup>Sickles to Williams, 20 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 387.

<sup>15</sup>Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, Attack and Die Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage (Alabama: University of Alabama Press), 33.

<sup>16</sup>Perry D. Jamieson, "The Development of Civil War Tactics." (Doctor of Philosophy. Thesis, Department of History, Wayne State University, 1979), 116.

<sup>17</sup>Sickles to Williams, 20 May 1863, OR. 25, pt. 1: 386.

- 18Berdan to Dalton, 7 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 502.
- 19Wheeler to Henry, 7 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 431.
- 20Ernest B Furgurson, Chancellorsville 1863: The Souls of the Brave (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 154.
- 21Moore to Archer, 9 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 934.
- 22Berdan to Dalton, 7 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 502.
- 23Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 528.
- 24FM 100-5, 181.
- 25Sickles to Williams, 20 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 386-387.
- 26George F.R. Henderson, Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War (MA: Peter Smith, 1968), 519.
- 27Darius N. Couch, "The Chancellorsville Campaign," Battles and Leaders of the Civil War 4 vols. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds. (New York: Century, 1887-1888), 3: 163.
- 28Van Allen to Butterfield, 2 May 1863, 1610, OR, 25, pt. 2: 363.
- 29Van Allen to Howard, 2 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 2: 360.
- 30Hamlin, 53.
- 31Sickles to Williams, 20 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 386.
- 32Battles and Leaders, 3: 163.
- 33Birney to Hart, 9 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 408.
- 34Ibid.
- 35Birney to Hart, 9 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 408; Graham to Brevoort, 10 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 413.

36Ward to Brevoort, 9 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 429.

37Collis to Birney, 6 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 423.

38Ward to Brevoort, 9 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 429.

39Sickles to Williams, 20 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 386.

40John Biglow Jr, The Campaign of Chancellorsville, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1910), 283.

41Alfred Pleasonton, "The Successes and failures of Chancellorsville." Battles and Leaders of the Civil War 4 vols. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds. (New York: Century, 1887-1888), 3: 179.

42Ibid.

43 U.S. Army, FM 6-20-30,, Field Service Regulations--Fire Support for Corps and Division Operations, (Washington: Department of the Army, 1989), B-6.



## CHAPTER 5

### DELIBERATE ATTACK

Deliberate attacks are well planned, fully synchronized combat operations in which the commander employs all available assets to defeat the enemy.<sup>1</sup> Commanders will normally have additional time for planning, coordination, and preparation prior to execution. The criteria used to guide the analysis of this deliberate attack are:

Timely intelligence. In order to exploit enemy weaknesses, the commander must rely on intelligence that is detailed enough to allow for adequate planning.

Rapid concentration of forces to attack the decisive point. Once the decisive point is identified, the commander masses his combat power against the enemy's weakness.

Organization in depth. By organizing his forces in depth, the commander adds flexibility in the attack and is better able to address contingencies.

Positive, aggressive leadership at all echelons of command. The most important ingredient of all aspects of the deliberate attack is competent and confident leadership. Through their actions, leaders will determine the degree to which combat power is applied.

## The Deliberate Attack

The following summary reviews the status of both forces including the mission, troops, time, and terrain. Moreover, the battlefield situation section gives a summary of the battlefield and the events leading up to the deliberate attack.

Mission. Jackson's 2d Confederate Corps was to conduct a 12-mile march to turn the Union's right flank and attack east to eventually connect with Lee's right wing, who was demonstrating in the east and southeast. There were three distinct terrain objectives Jackson wanted to seize in this mission. First was the high ground known as Taylor's Farm about 1000 yards down the Orange Turnpike; it was also the Union's 1st Division's command post. This high ground was key as it dominated the second objective Dowdall's Tavern. Besides being the 11th Corps' command post, capturing Dowdall's Tavern would open a shorter route back east to the remainder of the Confederate Army as this was also the intersection of the Orange Plank and Turnpike Roads. Third was Chandler's Farm north of the Plank Road. Again, this was another piece of high ground where his artillery could dominate Chancellorsville and his infantry and artillery could sever the Union's lines of communication to Ely's and the United States Ford along the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers.<sup>2</sup> While Jackson's order did not specify it, the

Hawkins' Farm in the rear of the 11th Corps was an implied objective; it was high ground that dominated the 11th Corps' rear area.

Troops. Jackson's 2d Corps consisted of three of his four infantry divisions (Early's division was back at Fredericksburg): Hill's commanded by Major General A.P. Hill, D.H. Hill's commanded by Brigadier General R. E. Rodes, and Trimble's commanded by Brigadier General R. E. Colston. The historical record was unclear as to how many troops Jackson had for this mission. The Assistant Adjutant General of the 2d Corps reported 22,000.<sup>3</sup> The Adjutant General of the Army of Northern Virginia initially reported 34,000, but later agreed with the morning report which indicated 26,000.<sup>4</sup> Brigadier General Devens, the right flank division commander of the 11th Corps who received the brunt of Jackson's attack, estimated it between "25,000 to 30,000."<sup>5</sup> Still, Biglow in The Campaign of Chancellorsville, estimated the force at 31,000.<sup>6</sup> Generally, most historians give the figure as approximately 28,000. Jackson's force included three regiments of Stuart's Cavalry (approximately 1,450) while his artillery totaled 112 guns.<sup>7</sup>

The Union's 11th Corps, which was the object of Jackson's initial assault, consisted of three infantry divisions: 1st Division Commanded by Brigadier General Charles Devens Jr., 2d Division commanded by Brigadier General Adolphus von Stienwehr, and the 3d Division commanded

by Brigadier General Carl Schurz. The total number of regiments was 25 with six artillery batteries totaling 34 guns. The total number of personnel at the time of the attack was approximately 11,000. This figure was from the morning report on 2 May and includes the loss of Brigadier General Francis C. Barlow's brigade of approximately 3,000.<sup>9</sup>

Time. Jackson's corps began its flank march at 0530 on May 2d. The participants did not agree on the actual time of the attack. The Union's 3d Corps chief of staff put the time of attack as early as 1500. However, this lacks credibility since there are numerous sources that placed Jackson's force enroute along the Brock Road at that time. The lead division commander, General Rodes, stated that Jackson gave him the order at 1715, but the two follow-on division commanders reported it was 1800 when the advance started.<sup>9</sup> Lee recalled later that the advance was made at 1800.<sup>10</sup> In his autobiography, General Howard wrote that it was already 1800 when he first heard the attack.<sup>11</sup> (This was questionable since other sources placed him enroute from the Furnace and nowhere near his corps at 1800.) But just prior to the attack, Major Moorman said that Jackson asked him for the time of day and he replied, "Five forty, General."<sup>12</sup>

Terrain. The terrain on the western flank was best described by the commander who had to defend it. General Howard said:

The nature of the country in the neighborhood of the three adjoining farms, Dowdall's, Talley's, and Hawkins's [sic], became well known to the Army of the Potomac in subsequent experiences, never to be forgotten. It is the terrible "Wilderness" where, later in the war, so many brave men fell. Here were stunted trees, such as scraggy oaks, bushy firs, cedars, and junipers, all entangled with a thick, almost impenetrable undergrowth, and criss-crossed with an abundance of wild vines. In places all along the south-west and west front the forest appeared impassable and the skirmishers could only work their way through with extreme difficulty.<sup>13</sup>

The road network leading into and through Howard's area included the Orange Turnpike which ran parallel (east to west) to his front. The Orange Plank Road, which intersected Orange Turnpike near Dowdall's Tavern, headed south-west connecting with the Germanna Plank Road after about one mile. The Germanna Plank Road headed north-west where it eventually connected with the Orange Turnpike Road near the Wilderness Tavern.

#### The Battlefield Situation

On the western end of the 11th Corps sector was Devens' 1st Division consisting of two brigades. The 1st Brigade (Colonel Leopold von Gilsa) had four regiments. Two of the regiments occupied a line parallel to the Orange Turnpike facing generally south to south-west. The other two were placed at right angles to the Turnpike facing to the west. Additionally, facing to the west were two guns placed along the pike.<sup>14</sup> Approximately two companies of pickets were positioned 1000 yards out on either side of the Turnpike.

Connecting on the eastern end of the 1st Brigade was the 2d (Brigadier General Nathaniel C. McLean), with three regiments along the Turnpike facing south and two regiments to the rear of the other three, one in second line, the other farther back about 500 yards with the mission to support the 1st Brigade if necessary.<sup>15</sup> On the left of the 2d Brigade were the remaining four guns of Captain Julius Dieckmann's battery (the other two west on the Turnpike); they were sighted on the Plank Road to the south.

The 3d Division's two brigades came next. The 1st Brigade (Brigadier General Alexander Schimmelfennig) connected with Devens's left flank with three regiments defending forward paralleling the Turnpike and two to the rear. The 2d Brigade (Colonel W. Krzyzanowski) was next with its four regiments. One regiment was defending along the same line mentioned, one regiment (75th Pennsylvania) was displaced well forward south of Lewis Creek as pickets. The remaining two regiments were protecting the road leading to Ely's Ford oriented to the west. An unattached regiment in this division (82d Ohio, Colonel James S. Robinson) was placed to the rear of the two regiments on the road to Ely's Ford; it also faced to the west.<sup>16</sup> The division's artillery battery was positioned near the Wilderness Church and, like four guns from the 1st Division was sighted on the Plank Road.

The 2d Division (Brigadier General Adolph von Steinwehr) came next and defended the eastern sector of the 11th Corps. The 1st Brigade (Colonel Adolphus Buschbeck) had three of its regiments forward of the Turnpike (approximately 1/8th mile) defending in line, facing south. The fourth regiment (the 29th New York) defended the area on the north side of the road which was left open by the loss of Barlow's brigade.<sup>17</sup> The divisional artillery battery was positioned between two of the regiments on line and sighted in on the Plank Road. Finally, the corps command post was located at Dowdall's Tavern near the eastern flank of the corps.<sup>18</sup>

In approximate numbers, this meant that five regiments (2,200 infantry soldiers) were oriented to the west and 20 regiments (8,600 infantry soldiers), along a front of 2,200 yards in length, were defending to the south (Barlow's brigade is not counted in this figure.)<sup>19</sup> Of the five regiments facing west, two (the 54th New York and the 153d Pennsylvania) were on the western flank with 1st Brigade, two (the 26th Wisconsin and the 58th New York) were back to the east about 750 yards just north of the Hawkins Farm, and one (the 82d Ohio) was about 500 yards just south of the Farm. Mutual support did not exist between the five regiments facing west.

Once in position, Jackson's corps was arrayed in three lines perpendicular to the Turnpike about two and one half miles west of Chancellorsville. Each line extended about a

mile on either side of the Turnpike. A line of skirmishers preceded the first line by 400 yards.<sup>21</sup> The first line contained D. H. Hill's Division (commanded by Brigadier General Rodes) who had two brigades north and two south of the road. His fifth brigade (Brigadier General S. D. Ramseur) was positioned in the second line on the right flank to provide security.<sup>22</sup> The second line contained Trimble's Division (commanded by Brigadier General Colston) minus E. F. Paxton's Brigade which had been detached to the cavalry. Although the right flank brigade overlapped the Turnpike some, nearly all of Colston's three brigades were on the north side and about 200 yards behind the first line.<sup>23</sup> (Actual distances vary between commander's reports. Rodes, as well as one of his brigade commanders Ramseur, says it was 100 yards.)<sup>24</sup> The third line contained A. P. Hill's Division, minus the brigades of Brigadier Generals J. J. Archer's and E. L. Thomas's who were involved in the fight with Sickles at the Furnace. Brigadier General W. D. Pender's Brigade started from the Turnpike and went north until it connected with Brigadier General Henry Heth's Brigade which was Hill's northern most brigade. Brigadier General J. H. Lane's Brigade was in column formation on the Turnpike closing up on the rear of the formation. Finally, Brigadier General S. McGowan's Brigade was enroute along the Brock Road half way between the Furnace and the Turnpike. The orientation of



Jackson's forces north of the Turnpike was such that as they advanced forward they came upon the Union's rear.

The majority of Jackson's artillery was formed in column of pieces along the Brock Road. The lead division's artillery battalion (Lieutenant Colonel T. H. Carter's-20 guns) was formed in an open field to the south of the Turnpike behind the second line. The remainder of the artillery was in several places. Colonel J. Thompson Brown's battalion was enroute except for Brooke's battery which was still in the fight at the Furnace. Two batteries from Alexander's battalion were with Paxton's Brigade at the intersection of Germanna Plank Road and the Orange Plank Road.<sup>25</sup>

Cavalry and infantry forces comprised Jackson's security for his main body. Paxton's Brigade occupied the intersection mentioned above with a cavalry squadron and two batteries of artillery. The 23d North Carolina Regiment secured the northern flank of the first and second lines.<sup>26</sup> Further north of this force was the 2d Virginia Cavalry on the road to Ely's Ford.

#### The Battle is Joined

It is important to note here the disposition of Howard's troops just prior to the attack. Most were preparing an evening meal, some were playing cards, others sleeping, and the majority had stacked arms.<sup>27</sup> However,

contrary to popular belief, many did have time to get their weapons, and occupy defensive positions.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the corps commander was not present since he had departed about one hour prior with Barlow's brigade in support of Sickles at the Furnace. At the time of the attack, he was nearly three miles away.

Jackson's first line was within a half mile of the right flank of the 11th Corps when he gave Rodes the order to attack. As the first line advanced, they quickly came to a halt as they ran into the rear of the skirmishers who had not received the word to move. After some slight confusion and delay, the advance of the first line continued followed by the second and third. Union pickets fell back quickly as the Confederate skirmishers came upon them firing. As the lines advanced, two pieces of Stuart's horse artillery rode forward down the Turnpike and fired off several rounds. Major R. F. Beckham, Stuart's commander of horse artillery, had been directed by General Stuart to advance with and support the infantry. Despite Union obstacles along the Turnpike, Beckham managed to stay up with the advancing first line with at least a gun or two.<sup>29</sup>

Keeping the Turnpike as their guide, the Confederate brigades moved quickly despite the thick vegetation tearing at their clothes and bodies. (At this time Barlow's brigade, the 11th Corps' only reserve, had just arrived on Birney's right flank near the Furnace.) As Rodes's first line came

upon Von Gilsa's two regiments that were facing south (the 41st and 45th New York) and two facing west (the 153d Pennsylvania and 54th New York), the regiments of Doles's Brigade split to outflank Union defense by sending one regiment to the right to engage the two Union regiments facing south, one regiment to the left to engage the same two regiments from the rear, and two regiments straight ahead to assault the two Union regiments facing west (see figure 6, page 152).<sup>30</sup>

The two regiments facing south (the 41st and 45th New York) broke without firing a round.<sup>31</sup> Von Gilsa's two artillery pieces on the Turnpike fired two or three times and tried to retreat, but were quickly overcome and captured by the 44th Georgia. The two regiments facing west (the 54th New York and the 153d Pennsylvania) were soon joined by remnants (Hamlin put it at 300) of the two regiments that broke in the south and this joint force of 1,000 men fired off about three rounds per man before it broke and ran as well.<sup>32</sup> As they retreated, they came upon the Seventy-fifth Ohio who had advanced about 400 yards and established a line of battle in support of Von Gilsa about 200 yards west of the Ely's Ford path; they held for nearly ten minutes while confronted with the combined power of two Confederate brigades and Stuart's artillery pouring canister rounds into them from the Turnpike. Eventually over-powered and out-

maneuvered, the Seventy-fifth Ohio retreated, but not before its regimental commander and 150 soldiers were killed.

Many fell back to a hasty defense established near the Taylor House; many kept on running and did not look back. Meanwhile, Jackson's left flank had not moved as rapidly as the center. Fighting the thick underbrush, they did not come in contact with Union Third Division's regiments near Hawkin's Farm until the fight in the center was well underway. Likewise, the right flank fell well behind the center. The brigade commander, Colonel Colquitt, received a spot report that the enemy was attempting to turn his right flank. Reacting, Colquitt maneuvered his brigade by the flank to the right and halted in an attempt to protect his flank. This action halted the brigade directly behind him, Ramseur, whom Colquitt warned of a possible flank attack. In turn, this further blocked Paxton's Brigade and Stuart's two cavalry squadrons both on the Orange Plank Road. The enemy force turned out to be a small cavalry detachment which, as Colquitt stated, "galloped away as soon as the regiment [19th Georgia] advancing toward them was discovered."<sup>33</sup> Colquitt eventually linked up with the first line once the fight was carried to the 11th Corps' 3d Division.

The 25th, 55th, and 107th Ohio, and the 17th Connecticut, formed a hasty defense near Talley's farm across the Turnpike.<sup>34</sup> While the Union forces were attempting to reorient their lines of battle to the west, the Confederates

"fired musketry and grape and canister [and] killed and disabled many of our men before the formation was completed," said Major Jeremiah Williams, the commander of 25th Ohio.<sup>35</sup> Attacking from three directions, three of Rodes's brigades, together with Stuart's artillery (having been moved down the Turnpike and firing at very close range), quickly enveloped the position; capturing, killing Union soldiers or causing them to retreat.

The time was just a few minutes after 1800 and every mounted Union officer had been struck down, confusion abounded, and the attack quickly turned into a rout as described by the 11th Corps Commander :

I could see numbers of our men--not the few stragglers that always fly like chaff at the first breeze, but scores of them--rushing into the opening, some with arms and some without, running or falling before they got behind cover of Devens's reserves . . . .<sup>36</sup>

Within one hour, Jackson had crushed the 4,000 men of the 1st Division and gained possession of both the high ground at Taylor's and Hawkins' Farms.<sup>37</sup> Having gained his first objectives, Jackson's next important terrain objective was Dowdall's Tavern and the intersection of Orange Plank and Turnpike Roads. Schurz, the 3d Division commander, had managed to reorient some of his regiments and formed a hasty defensive line near the Tavern, consisting of about 3,000 men facing to the west. This constituted the 11th Corps' second line of defense. As Rodes's first line approached the Tavern, he decided he needed help. The second line, having

advanced so vigorously, was directly behind the first. Colonel E. T. H. Warren's and Brigadier General J. R. Jones's Brigade from the second line responded and, joining the first line, pushed on through and captured Jackson's second objective.<sup>38</sup> The time was approximately 1830. Sickles, thrashing around in the deep forest, had just gained control of the Furnace Road near the Welford House and was preparing to launch his main attack on the column; however, unbeknownst to him, Jackson was almost directly in his rear area! It is also interesting to note that the sounds of this massive onslaught were so deadened by the surrounding terrain that Hooker, sitting on the porch of the Chancellor House, still knew nothing of the attack.<sup>39</sup>

By 1830, Jackson had his second objective and had shattered the 11th Corps' second defensive effort. What was left of Schurz's line retreated back to Buschbeck's line and this force totaled about 4,000 to 5000 men.<sup>40</sup> It consisted of four of Buschbeck's regiments, six from Schurz's, fragments of Devens' division and together they occupied a line not more than 1,000 yards long.<sup>41</sup> This line, which was the 11th Corps' last defensive attempt, held for about twenty minutes.<sup>42</sup> However, Jackson kept strong pressure along the entire front while the brigades of Colquitt and Ramseur swept around the Union's right flank, and Brigadier Generals Alfred Iverson's and F. T. Nichols's hit the left flank, causing the Union line to withdraw once again.<sup>43</sup> Schurz's regiments

withdrew north of the Orange Plank Road and Buschbeck's south of it, both eventually occupying the works left by Williams' division (12th Corps) which had been diverted to Sickles' attack. However, neither stayed long and retreated back to Fairview, without defending the log works.

The time was about 1900 and Jackson had seized the 11th Corps' last line of defense. As the Confederates continued to advance, they came upon the log works of Williams' former position. Rodes' first line and Colston's second line assaulted the works together and became, as Rodes described it, "inextricably confused" and owing to the confusion of mingled forces, darkness, and Union obstacles, he halted the force.<sup>44</sup> Rodes sent word back to Jackson requesting that Hill's third line pass through him and Colston's and resume the attack. But not everyone along Rodes' line received the word as fragments of some of the lead brigades continued advancing.<sup>45</sup> Paxton's Brigade, after being unmasked by Colquitt's Brigade along the Orange Plank Road, had advanced up that road and taken the rifle pits of Buschbeck's old line.<sup>46</sup> Both Colquitt's and Ramseur's Brigades halted near Dowdall's Tavern at approximately 1930. (The 11th Corps reserve, Barlow's brigade, was one mile south of the Welford house and received orders to return.) At approximately 2000, Jackson withdrew Stuart's exhausted horse artillery and replaced them with the corps artillery now arriving at the front.<sup>47</sup> He also dispatched Stuart and some cavalry to seize

the road to Ely's Ford. Meantime, shortly after becoming thoroughly mixed up with Colston's line, Rodes went forward on a reconnaissance down the Plank Road and later wrote:

[I] satisfied myself that the enemy had no line of battle between our troops and the heights of Chancellorsville, and on my return informed Colonel Crutchfield, chief of artillery of the corps, of the fact, and he opened his batteries on that point.<sup>48</sup>

But he apparently missed a part of Buschbeck's defensive line. Schurz described it as: "A confused mass of men belonging to all divisions, whom we made every possible effort to rally and reorganize, a thing extremely difficult under the fire of the enemy."<sup>49</sup>

This defensive line ran north to south across the Orange Plank Road just on the west side of the swamp near Fairview and was being reinforced from units outside of the 11th Corps. Schurz's force, which included Buschbeck, McLean's and other 11th Corps units totaled approximately 3,500.<sup>50</sup> A small cavalry detachment, along with an artillery battery left by Sickles was positioned at Hazel Grove. Birney's and Whipple's divisions, who would both eventually reinforce Hazel Grove were enroute from the Furnace. The two brigades of Major General Hiram G. Berry's division (from 3d Corps and Hooker's reserve) assumed a defensive line between Schurz's force in the north and the Plank Road. Williams's division, which had just returned from supporting Sickles, assumed a defensive line from near Hazel Grove to just south of the Orange Plank Road and Captain Best, Chief Artillery



Officer for the Twelfth Corps, had positioned artillery pieces in the opening at Fairview. With the line strengthened, Schurz's battered force withdrew back toward Chancellorsville at about 2030.

Despite the rapid gains by his two lead divisions, Jackson now became somewhat impatient with the mix-up of his first and second lines so he ordered his third line, A.P. Hill to assume the lead.<sup>51</sup> Out of five brigades, Hill only had the use of Lane's brigade to spearhead his attack.<sup>52</sup> Thomas and Archer were still enroute from the Furnace, and Heth's and Pender's Brigades fell behind in the thick woods on the left flank.<sup>53</sup> Lane, on the other hand, remained on the road in column formation following behind the second line. Although Union artillery delayed his deployment for about 15 minutes, Lane eventually deployed his brigade into a line of battle on either side of the Turnpike. Preceding the brigade was one of its regiments, the Thirty-third North Carolina; they were deployed as skirmishers. At this point in the engagement, Jackson's frontage had gone from two miles in length to about half a mile.<sup>54</sup>

As the Union's new defensive line continued to receive units, soldiers were scurrying about to seal gaps in their defense for it was the last line between Jackson and Chancellorsville. Even with these efforts, a 600 yard gap existed in the northwest between Berry's division, which extended to near Little Hunting Run, and the left flank of

the 2d Corps. A brigade from the 2d Corps (Hay's) was dispatched to fill the hole; however, the position they finally occupied was nowhere near the gap. Instead, Hay's brigade was about 400 yards to the south and oriented on the Orange Plank Road. The gap was to remain there open for nearly the entire evening.

Troops and wagons were moving on Lane's right flank at about the time Lane was preparing to advance. Thinking they were Lee's (Anderson's Division) forces attempting to link up, Hill ordered Lane to advance, but Lane delayed the deployment until he knew for sure. Lane sent out a small reconnaissance force which quickly came upon, and captured, a Pennsylvania Regiment.<sup>55</sup> The forces Lane heard moving were not Lee's, but Williams' division and some of Sickles's Corps. Lane quickly withdrew his left flank and reinforced his right.<sup>56</sup> No further advances were made by the Confederates who began to strengthen their lines. The time was a few minutes after 2100.

Analysis (see figure 7, page 153)

Timely intelligence. There can be no doubt that timely intelligence contributed to the success of this attack. From the very start, Stuart's cavalry (Virginia Cavalry under Brigadier General Fitzhugh Lee) had reconnoitered and identified a weak Union flank in the west; it was with this information that Lee and Jackson developed their plan.

Despite Jackson's good information that helped him plan the attack, it faltered both just before and during the attack causing serious consequences.

Although Jackson's intelligence told him of the exposed Union flank, it was not as thorough as it should have been. In order to strike the Union's flank, Jackson's original axis of advance was to attack along the Orange Plank Road.<sup>57</sup> If he had taken this axis, it would have resulted in an oblique rather than a flank attack.

At about 1400, Jackson approached his turn off at the intersection of the Brock and Orange Plank Road and was met by one of his cavalry commanders, Fitz Lee. Lee not only told him of the information concerning the orientation of attack, but also told him if he continued up the Brock Road to the Turnpike, he could strike the Union's line in the flank and the rear. After confirming this for himself from the high ground at Burton's Farm, Jackson ordered Rodes (lead division) to continue until he reached the Turnpike where Jackson would meet him.<sup>58</sup>

The fact that Jackson did not find out about this critical piece of information until 1400 added additional movement time to his divisions when he could least afford it. His lead division now arrived at their eastward turn-off along the Turnpike at 1600 and, considering the various reports and times, took between one and two hours to deploy into a line of battle.<sup>59</sup> This loss of at least two hours

contributed to halting Jackson's attack prior to reaching his final objectives. Sunset on the 2nd of May was at 1852, with total darkness following quickly amongst the dense forest.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, despite the reconnaissance from Burton's Farm that identified the Union's defenses facing south, it did not identify Von Gilsa's small brigade hidden in the trees. Although the two regiments of Von Gilsa's brigade did not offer much resistance, it did surprise the first line.<sup>61</sup>

Probably the most damage done to Jackson's effort was caused by a single piece of incomplete information and a commander's reaction to it. Not long after the attack had commenced, Colquitt's Brigade received some intelligence from skirmishers that a "body of the enemy" was upon his right flank.<sup>62</sup> Based solely on this information, Colquitt halted his force and reoriented a portion of them to the south. Colquitt further exaggerated the information by sending the brigade commander behind him (Ramseur) a report that the enemy was attempting to turn his right flank.<sup>63</sup> He did this without ever confirming the report or making any contact with the enemy. Ramseur responded to Colquitt that this indicated a sharp fight with Doles' Brigade forward of them and that they should advance in his support. Unfortunately, it was nearly one hour before they resumed their movement. Colquitt's action halted his brigade and the brigades of Ramseur and Paxton as well as Stuart's two cavalry squadrons. In all, Jackson lost the use of thirteen regiments or nearly

5,000 men from his attacking force. Had these regiments attacked along their southern axis as planned, it was doubtful that Devens's division would have been able to escape total destruction.

Several versions exist as to the identity of this force or if the force ever existed in the first place. Colquitt says it was a small body of cavalry that soon galloped away. But as Hamlin described in his book, The Battle of Chancellorsville, no Union cavalry was in that location at the time. This led to his theory that it must have been Confederate cavalry dressed in United States uniforms. Ramseur stated that he, "prosecuted the search for half a mile, perhaps, but not a solitary Yankee was to be seen."<sup>64</sup> Regardless of whether there was a force or not, if Colquitt had been given a complete report, it was doubtful that he would have stopped an entire brigade for a small body of cavalry.

At one point in this attack, Jackson had the opportunity to advance completely into the Union rear and gain control of the high ground along the Chandler plateau and the Chancellorsville area. This move would have placed the entire Army of the Potomac in great peril by controlling the crossroads at Chancellorsville, cutting off Sickles in the south, severing both of the Union's lines of communications to the Rapidan and Rappahannock rivers, and

capturing the Union Army headquarters. However, it appeared that Jackson was unaware of his opportunity.

This opportunity opened up shortly after 1900. By this time Jackson had defeated the last line of resistance of the 11th Corps and his two lead divisions had just cleared the log works at Williams' old position. Here the first and second line became intermingled and between Rodes and Colston halted the advance to reform and requested that Hill take up the lead. It was during this window of opportunity that timely intelligence could have told Jackson that he needed to press the attack because the only thing between him and the Bullock Road was Schurz's battered force of about 1200 men. Along the Orange Plank Road was Buschbeck's force which numbered about 1,000 and together with some other corps units, this force totaled about 3500 men between Jackson and Chancellorsville. Equally important was the physical and mental condition of these soldiers. These were not fresh troops, but men who had been severely beaten. By the time Jackson considered advancing, the Union's defensive position was strengthened by Berry's division, Hay's brigade, Best's artillery; and, the 3d Corps was approaching from the south. This strengthened Union line presented another intelligence mishap for neither Jackson nor Hill was aware that they now faced a stronger defense. One can only assume that if they had, Jackson would not have continued the attack leading with just Lane's brigade. Moreover, if Jackson was receiving the

information he needed, then there was no reason for him and a division commander to ride forward of their front lines.

Even with the strengthened Union defensive position, Jackson still had one more opportunity. As the Union forces hastily formed a defense, they left a gap in it. The gap was located between the 2d Corps' left flank and the right flank of Berry's division; it was about 600 yards wide. Maneuvering wide to the north and attacking through the gap, while fixing the forces to his front, would have given Jackson access to the rear of three divisions and the artillery at Fairview. Notwithstanding the Union's attempts to close it, the gap remained unmanned for several hours.

Organization in depth. In preparation for the attack, Jackson carefully organized his divisions to achieve depth as well as breadth by attacking in three successive lines (see figure 8, page 154). Each line started the attack with approximately 150 yards between them. In theory, the advantage of this organization was in its ability for each line to provide mutual support; it also provided a means of quickly replacing weakened front line brigades with fresh units. But in practice, it ran into serious problems and eventually halted the attack.

Jackson's instructions to his brigade commanders clearly indicated his intent for emphasizing mutual support and avoiding any lulls in fighting. These instructions stated that if any portion of the first line needed

reinforcements, the officer commanding this portion of the line could call for and receive aid from the portion of the line to his rear without going through the division commander.<sup>65</sup> This could provide lead commanders with a great amount of flexibility in conducting their fight. As mentioned earlier, it was only about 15 minutes into the attack when a lead brigade commander requested and received assistance from the brigade directly to his rear. While both brigades attacked together and carried the position, they soon became intermingled.

There was no doubt that successive lines would not only provide the mutual support needed to press the attack, but also mass firepower. However, extended close order successive linear formations were too difficult to control. Even under perfect conditions (daylight, open field void of obstacles) successive lines would have been difficult for Jackson's subordinate commanders to control. When applied to the existing conditions (enemy fire, darkness, terrain, obstacles), command and control broke down and halted the attack far sooner than Jackson wanted.

The extended successive linear formation was clearly the most difficult to control; however, when executed at night in that terrain it made any organized movement impossible. In their reports, all three division commanders, nearly every brigade commander, and most regimental commanders commented on the adverse effects the terrain and



darkness had in controlling their formations and pressing their advances. A division commander wrote: "it was impossible to advance in any order." A brigade commander noted that "darkness prevented further operations," while a regimental commander reported that "a great deal of tangled undergrowth, which impeded our progress, and, as darkness came on, some different regiments became very much intermingled." These kind of statements are typical throughout the official reports.

The results of operating in difficult terrain were clearly evident when Jackson ordered the forward passage of the third line through Rodes' and Colston's lines. When Hill got the order, the only part of his division immediately available to assume the lead was one brigade. Fighting their way through the thick vegetation, his two other brigades on the left flank were unable to keep up. Heth said:

It was now becoming quite dark. The undergrowth was so thick and entangled that it was impossible to advance in any order.<sup>66</sup>

Heth, under his own initiative, abandoned the left flank and reformed on the Orange Plank Road. Pender's Brigade experienced the same problems and was eventually ordered to use the road.<sup>67</sup>

Their inability to control intervals between successive lines prevented what could have been a highly successful attack. The attacking lines started off well. Bugle calls signaled the start of the attack and formations advanced in

unison. But within 15 minutes the first and second line became mixed. In Colston's report he stated: "The troops of my division had pressed on so ardently that they were already within a few steps of the first line, and in some places mixed up with them."<sup>68</sup> This obviously caused command and control problems, but because there was still enough daylight and Rodes and Colston were in a relatively open area, the attack continued.

As darkness fell and the battle progressed, so did the merging of the lines. This increased confusion and made control impossible. As Colonel Daniel Christie, commander Twenty-third North Carolina and in the first line, stated: "It was unfortunate that the supporting line was so close, or not better managed. The consequence was, that no officer could handle a distinct command without halting and reforming."<sup>69</sup> Delaying the attack to halt and reform was a costly mistake. By 1900 the battle had reached Slocum's log works. Up to this point, Jackson had crushed the Union's 11th Corps and was within a mere one mile of the Chancellorsville crossroads. But because of the merging, the Confederates lost momentum and the attack ground to a halt. Confederates were so bunched together that Union officers reported afterwards that they thought the Confederates were attacking in column formation. Rodes eventually halted the formations saying that because of the confusion and darkness that it was not deemed advisable to make a farther advance

and requested that Hill take up the lead while he and Colston sorted things out. Unfortunately, this forward passage of lines, a difficult maneuver to do during daylight, occurred at the very time the Union defenses were at their weakest. Even an unorganized attack against the weak Union defense would very likely have prevailed.

How could the Confederates have been organized to better adjust to the terrain? What may have been more effective was to attack with at least a portion of the force in column formation. Coincidentally, the Union's 6th Corps executed a column attack the next day. Although the column attack succeeded in breaking the Confederate line, Union forces under Major General John Newton did suffer severe losses. However, the two attacks are not comparable since the Union attack was against prepared Confederate positions and lacked the element of surprise. What Jackson really needed was mobility to penetrate deep into the Union's rear, capturing key terrain, severing lines of communications, and preventing any organized defense. The successive lines did just the reverse by paralyzing his tactical mobility, eventually grinding the attack to a halt and allowing the Union forces time to organize a defense.

Rapid concentration of forces to attack the decisive point. Jackson displayed supreme skill in positioning a force of 28,000 into three successive lines, in nearly impenetrable terrain while not more than a half mile from the enemy. It

clearly illustrates one of the best examples of massing one's forces against an enemy's weakness. How was he able to do it? What other advantages, beside overwhelming combat power, did it give him? To answer these questions, it is necessary to go back in the scenario to look at the events that occurred and how they effected the thought process of the Union commanders.

Jackson's lateral movement across the Union's front was, in itself, a deception. So deceiving was this movement that it allowed Jackson to gain unopposed access to the Union's flank and rear. Lee's army was split between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville as was Hooker's. Although Lee had the advantage of operating on interior lines, he was badly outnumbered. It was inconceivable for a commander to split his force again, for this would violate the most basic principle of war: mass. By doing so Lee ran the risk of being crushed by Hooker's wing at Chancellorsville. Therefore, Jackson's movement could only indicate one thing: retreat. However, upon further examination, even this theory defies logic. Why would Lee further increase the Union's numerical superiority by sending part of his force retreating?

Although Hooker claimed afterward that he suspected that the movement observed on the Furnace Road indicated a flank attack, his actions did not support this.<sup>70</sup> That afternoon at 1400, Hooker told his 2d Corps Commander: "Lee

is in full retreat toward Gordonsville."<sup>71</sup> He also telegraphed Sedgwick back at Fredericksburg, "We know that the enemy is fleeing."<sup>72</sup> He sent a corps on a useless attack that not only left a one mile gap in his defense, but also took the only reserve from his right flank corps.

Moreover, even when reports told them otherwise, Union commanders ignored them. Lieutenant Colonel Carmichael, 157th New York, was in charge of a portion of Howard's pickets early morning on May 2d. He heard the distinct sounds of troops and wagons moving past his front clearly indicating that the Confederates were not moving south. When he reported this to headquarters, he was told that new troops were easily frightened.<sup>73</sup> Devens, the right flank division commander, refused to believe reports that a large body of troops was moving to his rear. Howard, who said in his autobiography that he believed the Confederates were retreating, received a sketch from a local citizen showing how the Confederates could reach his flanks by the routes they were pursuing and did nothing with this information. The pickets from McLean's brigade observed the Confederates moving towards their flank and reported it. Finally, Major James T. Schieter, 74th Pennsylvania, conducted a reconnaissance at about 1500 on May 2nd. The major came back and reported that he had found the enemy in great force as they were preparing for their attack. Schieter then went to the 11th Corps Headquarters where he reported his findings to

the corps staff and ". . . was laughed at for his views and told not to get alarmed."<sup>74</sup>

Besides concentrating his combat power at the decisive point, Jackson was able to achieve a certain degree of surprise. (It is obvious from the statements above that his attack was not totally unsuspected, but most of this knowledge mentioned above never made it down to the soldier-level.) Surprise results from attacking the enemy at a time, place or in a manner for which he is unprepared.<sup>75</sup> Despite the reports, the 11th Corps was unprepared. Jackson's timing, whether intentional or not, caught Union soldiers busy cooking supper and preparing for an evening's rest. By facing soldiers unprepared to fight, Jackson multiplied his combat power. So unexpected was Jackson's attack that the psychological effect on Union soldiers was devastating. Two of Von Gilsa's four regiments fled without firing a round; the other two got off about two or three before they fled. In fact, many soldiers quickly divested themselves of anything that would slow them down.<sup>76</sup>

One must wonder then if Jackson was not able to achieve surprise, would he have been able to achieve relative numerical superiority at the decisive point? Depending on Hooker's actions, numerical superiority may not have been a Confederate advantage. Shortly after Hooker received reports about Jackson's movement, he issued an order to Howard warning him to prepare for an attack on the right. There was

still plenty of time to sufficiently reinforce this flank. Moreover, if Hooker had avoided sending Sickles on a worthless attack, it would have provided the Army of the Potomac with an additional 20,000 soldiers between Chancellorsville and Howard's position which was otherwise unmanned during the attack.

Positive, aggressive leadership at all echelons of command. FM 100-5 indicates that leadership is the most essential element of combat power. It is through competent and confident leadership that a unit will succeed in combat. Soldiers who believe in their leader will fight harder to accomplish the mission. Save for Lee, no Civil War commander was respected by his men more than Jackson. Yet, one leader cannot personally control 28,000 men. It took the combined efforts of leaders at all levels to do this. There was no doubt about the courage and determination of Jackson's leaders. Leading troops directly into a deliberate attack, preceded by an all-day march with little rest and almost no food, was commendable in itself. But such a difficult operation needed more; it required positive control during the attack. Clausewitz wrote: "In the soldier the natural tendency for unbridled actions and outbursts of violence must be subordinated to the demands of a higher kind: obedience, order, rule, and method."<sup>77</sup> This was the one area in which Jackson's leaders had failed him; they failed to assert the

necessary control over their men, attacking in a structured, methodical manner required by successive lines.

The numerical superiority, surprise, violence of action and the sheer moral dominance the Confederates cast upon their Union opponents caused them to pursue their foe with such tenacity that they became disorganized and soon lost control. Leaders allowed soldiers to quicken the pace in anticipation of "getting into the fight." Linear formations where no longer aligned but swayed back and forth. Even when formations stopped, some soldiers continued on in search of food and other items left strewn about the battlefield. Once formations encountered the enemy's fire, thick terrain, and darkness, control was lost turning this domineering force into a disorganized mob as described by a brigade commander:

The second line . . . closed in with us at his point, and caused great confusion, the two lines rushing forward pell-mell upon the enemy, and becoming mingled in almost inextricable confusion, no officer being able to tell what men he commanded.<sup>78</sup>

The results of losing control have already been discussed in the section under organization yet one more still remains: fratricide. While there is no way to accurately determine what percentage of soldiers fell victim to fratricide, Confederate casualties were high for a force whose opposition was surprised, numerically inferior, and completely routed. In fact, despite this being Lee's greatest victory, the total number of Confederate casualties was not much less than that of the Union's: 11,116 to



10,746.<sup>79</sup> Casualty reporting was not very accurate, especially from the Confederates; however, some regiments did admit to high casualty rates. In this engagement, the Twelfth Alabama lost 76 men out of 330 or nearly 25%, and the Tenth Virginia lost about 50 killed and wounded.<sup>80</sup>

Commanders were rightfully concerned about fratricide caused by the confusion of merged lines. After taking command of the corps and reaching the front, General Stuart stated: "I was also informed that there was much confusion on the right, owing to the fact that some troops mistook friends for the enemy and fired upon them."<sup>81</sup> Colonel Brockenbrough, commander of the Fortieth Virginia, stated:

The rapid flight of the enemy, the eagerness of our pursuit, the tangled wilderness through which we had marched, and the darkness of the night, created much confusion in our ranks, which at this point, was increased by a deadly fire poured into our ranks by friends and foes from right, left, and front.<sup>82</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Christian, commander Fifty-fifth Virginia, experienced similar problems when his regiment was fired upon by another Confederate regiment to his immediate left.<sup>83</sup> Colonel Garrett, commander of the Fifth North Carolina, was wounded by his own men and, alas, even the corps commander, General Jackson, fell victim to fratricide.

Leaders needed to exercise positive control during the fight to avoid problems like fratricide. Why and how the Confederate leadership broke down is worthy of a thesis in itself; however, one assertion has already been made: it was simply beyond the Confederate leaders' control to manage a

force of this size given their method of attack under the existing conditions. The other possible explanation deals with leader to led ratios. Were there enough leaders to do the job? Many factors such as training, morale, and discipline should be considered in this equation. However, considering only leader to led ratios, it appeared that they had sufficient leadership on the battlefield.

Strength reporting at the lower levels of command was neither frequent nor precise. Therefore, these figures below gave only a representation of the leadership structure within the corps and did not distinguish between non-commissioned officers and enlisted men.

The division in the first line of Jackson's attacking corps had an officer to enlisted ratio of 1 to 11.6.<sup>84</sup> The second line division had a 10.7 ratio and the third line division had a 10.6 ratio.<sup>85</sup> For the brigades of the first line division, the ratios are: Doles--1 to 11.1, Iverson--1 to 12.2, Ramseur--1 to 10.3, Rodes--1 to 11.5, and Colquitt--1 to 12.3.

The standard infantry regiment at full strength had 1,046 men.<sup>86</sup> Of this number, approximately 39 positions were held by officers equaling a 1 to 25 officer to enlisted ratio. Of the regiments which reported their strengths for this attack, the ratio of leader to led was significantly bigger. Assuming that these leaders were good ones, the larger ratio meant that they were better led since more

leaders were available. The 12th Alabama reported 26 officers and 304 non-commissioned officers and privates; the 23d North Carolina reported 34 officers and 396 men; the 48th Virginia reported 28 officers and 317 enlisted; the 49th Georgia reported 35 officers and 363 men; and the 12th North Carolina reported 25 officers to 200 men for an average for the four regiments of just over 1 to 10.<sup>87</sup>

In sum, while the deliberate attack achieved significant tactical gains, it fell short of its operational goals. The inability to control a 28,000 man attacking force in successive lines was beyond the battlefield command and control structure of Civil War. The following chapter presents the specific and general conclusions from chapters three, four, and five.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Army, FM 100-5, Field Service Regulations--Operations, (Washington: Department of the Army, 1986), 99.

<sup>2</sup>Augustus Choate Hamlin, The Battle of Chancellorsville, (Maine: Hamlin, 1986), 17; William K. Goolrick, The Civil War Rebels Resurgent, (Alexandria: Time-Life Books, 1985), 130; John Biglow Jr., The Campaign of Chancellorsville: A Strategic and Tactical Study, (New Have: Yale Univ Press, 1910), 293-300 passim..

<sup>3</sup>Theodore A. Dodge, The Campaign of Chancellorsville, 2ed, (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1881), 63.

<sup>4</sup>Hamlin, 9.

<sup>5</sup>Devens to Adjutant General, 11th Corps, 1 Aug 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 634.

<sup>6</sup>;Biglow, 273.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Oliver O. Howard, "The Eleventh Corps at Chancellorsville," Battles and Leaders of the Civil War 4 vols. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds. (New York: Century, 1887-1888), 3: 193.

<sup>9</sup>Rodes to Pendleton, \_\_\_ May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 941; Colston to Pendleton, 28 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 1004; Hill to Taylor, 8 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 885.

<sup>10</sup>Southern Historical Society Papers, 47 vols., (New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1977), vol 30, 234.

<sup>11</sup>Howard, 370.

<sup>12</sup>S.H.S.P., vol 30, 111.

<sup>13</sup>Oliver O. Howard, "The Eleventh Corps at Chancellorsville," Battles and Leaders of the Civil War 4 vols. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds. (New York: Century, 1887-1888), 3: 192.

<sup>14</sup>Devens to Adjutant General, 11th Corps, 1 Aug 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 633.

- 15Schurz to Howard, 12 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 651.
- 16Ibid.
- 17Steinwehr to Howard, 8 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 645.
- 18Howard to Hooker, 13 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 630.
- 19Biglow, 286.
- 20Goolrick, 130; Biglow 285.
- 21Rodes to Pendleton, \_\_\_\_ May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 941.
- 22Rodes to Pendleton, \_\_\_\_ May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 940.
- 23Colston to Pendleton, 28 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1:1004.
- 24Rodes to Pendleton, \_\_\_\_ May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 940.
- 25Funk to Hall, 26 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 1013.
- 26Iverson to Peyton, 13 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 984;  
Christie to Halsey, 7 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 992.
- 27Joseph P. Cullen, "The Battle of Chancellorsville",  
Battle Chronicles of the Civil War 1863, ed. James M.  
McPherson, (New York: MacMillan, 1989), 34.
- 28Hamlin, 64.
- 29Beckham to McClellan, 12 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1:  
1050.
- 30Doles to Peyton, 9 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 967.
- 31Hamlin, 65.
- 32Ibid.
- 33Colquitt to Peyton, 15 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1:975.
- 34McLean to Devens, \_\_\_\_ May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 637-  
639; Brady to McLean, 9 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1:639-640;  
Williams to Smith, 8 May 1863, QR, 25, pt. 1: 640-641; Lee  
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<sup>81</sup>Stuart to Chilton, 6 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 887.

<sup>82</sup>Brockenbrough to Finney, 18 May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 894.

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<sup>84</sup>Rodes to Pendleton, \_\_\_\_ May 1863, OR, 25, pt. 1: 947.

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## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and discuss the specific and general conclusions, to answer the research question, and identify enduring value for today's infantry forces.

#### Specific Conclusions

In the hasty attack, it was clear that Major General George Sykes, the Union's 2d Division Commander, 5th Army Corps, established the terms of battle by seizing the initiative early through the rapid deployment of his lead brigade. He was not only able to secure his assigned objective, but also able to gain good defensible terrain, allowing him to retain control of it. Sykes was able to achieve this because he acted aggressively; he was not hesitant about making contact with the Confederates. Once contact was made, he continued to press the attack. His boldness and perseverance were certainly laudable and were chiefly the reasons why he was able to gain the initial advantage. However, this determination clouded his tactical

judgment and eventually contributed to losing the initiative, forcing a withdrawal.

Leaders at all levels must consider what impact their actions may have on the plans of their higher commanders. Although Sykes's initial deployment was quick and aggressive, it was certainly not decisive. Boldness and calculated risk are important to offensive actions. No plan of attack can guarantee complete success; therefore, the commander must be willing to take acceptable risks and bold action to win. He does this through the audacity of his plan and the forcefulness by which he executes it. Prudent risks that emphasize bold action are a vital part of offensive operations, but they must be consistent with sound tactical reasoning. This was Sykes's failure. His actions indicated a somewhat impetuous plunge into an engagement without considering what effect his actions would have on the commander's mission--two levels up. In other words, Sykes needed to analyze his decision more closely by asking himself: "Do my actions help accomplish the commander's intent or do they jeopardize it"?

This is not to imply that Sykes could not have used prudent risk-taking as part of his scheme, but his actions were somewhat closer to a gamble than a well calculated risk. The price of achieving a limited tactical success caused Sykes to break communications with adjacent forces and isolate his division from the remainder of the Union Army.

Had he maintained communications, the Union Army would have presented a more cohesive and mutually supported defensive front. With the 2d Corps' reinforcements, numerical superiority and good defensible positions would have allowed the Union Army to hold its ground. Moreover, they would have been able to continue the attack.

Clausewitz wrote: "Boldness will be at a disadvantage only in an encounter with deliberate caution, which may be considered bold in its own right . . . ." Major General Lafayette McLaws, division commander in the 1st Confederate Corps, acted with deliberate caution in his response to Sykes's advance. Furthermore, McLaws's response was similar to that of a delay. As Sykes's continued to press the fight, McLaws was developing the situation by allowing Sykes to overextend himself. McLaws did so not out of timidity, but merely to trade space for time. This additional time allowed him to conduct an analysis of the terrain and the enemy situation. By looking beyond the immediate situation and taking the time to consider his position, the terrain, and the enemy situation, he was able to mentally wargame options that would have a greater impact. Thus, he developed a deliberate approach that included the full employment of his division, rather than just one brigade. Since his battlefield analysis indicated a weak northern flank, there was no hesitation on McLaws's part on where and how to employ the two additional reinforcing brigades. The final result

was a tactical approach that focused on exploiting both his advantages and his opponent's weaknesses. In essence, McLaws had identified what Jomini said was a critical aspect of all offensive operations, the "decisive point." In this particular case, Sykes's exposed flanks were the decisive point through which an attack or even a mere threatened attack placed the Union troops at a great disadvantage.

Unlike the meeting engagement, in the hasty attack the Union Army never seized the initiative; nor did it gain anything of tactical significance. In this mission, the term "hasty attack" was misleading. It gave the illusion of an unforeseen opportunity to attack the enemy whereby the attacker had to rely on limited planning time and execute mainly by standard procedures. Nothing could be further from the truth. There was enough time for the Union Army to properly plan an effective attack that could have interdicted the Confederate column and impeded the eventual Confederate attack. This was a complex operation that required more than hasty preparation and execution. It needed good tactical intelligence and demanded the synchronization of forces to strike the Confederates at the right time and place. With the proper use of time, a tactical plan could have been developed that was suited to the battlefield situation. However, this was not the case. Poor intelligence, hasty planning and timid execution caused the Union Army to be

unprepared to conduct an offensive operation of this scope given the terrain and the enemy situation.

There is a tendency when analyzing military failures to somehow invariably trace the cause back to an "intelligence failure." Accurate or not, intelligence failures probably account for the cause of more military defeats than any other reason. In this hasty attack, lack of good intelligence was indeed a key reason that contributed to its failure.

Furthermore, it was not beyond the capability of the Union Army to acquire more tactical intelligence for this mission than was actually collected. After sighting Jackson's column through both balloons and spotters at Hazel Grove, there appears to have been little effort to saturate the area to find out exactly what the Confederates were doing. On this question of intelligence, Jomini wrote: "How can any man say what he should do himself, if he is ignorant what his adversary is about"? Jomini wrote that a general should never neglect any means of gaining information on the enemy's movements. He must use all means available: spies, bodies of light troops, signals, and questioning prisoners of war.

The synchronization of Major General Daniel E. Sickles's 3d Corps demanded good operational and tactical intelligence. Perfect intelligence was, and still is today, impossible. However, while the Confederates were busy exploiting their intelligence, the Union Army commander, Major General Joseph Hooker, and his staff failed to use all

available assets to acquire it. A good source of gathering information was the cavalry corps, but Hooker misused his cavalry. Most of it was far from this battlefield attempting to cut General Robert E. Lee's communications with Richmond and the remaining one brigade did little in the way of gaining information. Instead, Hooker and his commanders relied on conjecture as a means for filling in the gaps of information. Moreover, when the Union commanders did receive information from pickets and local patrols they refused to believe it because the information contradicted their speculations about what the Confederates were doing. Appearing content behind their defenses, the Union Army made little effort to maintain constant observation of Lee's army.

Tactical, like operational intelligence, was also vital to success. The lack of good operational level intelligence caused Sickles's corps to attack into a very nebulous battlefield situation with a corps that was severely fragmented from Hazel Grove to Catharine Furnace. The extent of Sickles's information consisted of knowing that a substantial force lay to his east and one directly to his front along Furnace Road in the south. Sickles failed to get any information that could further refine his knowledge of the situation. His attempt to have the Sharpshooters conduct a reconnaissance failed when the first shots were fired and they assumed a fighting role instead of a reconnaissance role. This degraded Sickles's ability to see the

battlefield. Without this ability, he never had a good understanding of the enemy situation. This lack of understanding the enemy situation caused the most serious flaw of all--he could not anticipate his opponent. Two reports indicate his lack of understanding of the battlefield situation: (1) His message to Hooker indicating that he was facing a brigade entrenched in rifle pits when in reality, it was the rear-guard consisting of little more than a regiment (approximately 400 men total); (2) The report sent to Hooker indicating that Sickles was prepared to launch his main attack on the Confederate column, supposedly to his front; at the same time, Lieutenant General Thomas T. Jackson's 2d Confederate Corps was almost directly in Sickles's rear area having just crushed the Union's right flank. Thus, Sickles could not make timely decisions that focused on seizing the initiative, but could only react to the Confederates' will.

Without having a basic understanding of the enemy situation, neither Hooker nor Sickles was able to adequately allocate the proper amount of forces for this operation. Although the attack eventually involved 20,000 men, one must consider when Sickles received those forces. His reinforcements did not start arriving until approximately 1700 hours. Sickles's reserve, ( Whipple's division) and one brigade from his main force division, were tied up with left flank security. This diversion of forces from his main attack reduced the combat power of his main body to two

brigades. And, of the two brigades, nearly all the fighting was done by three regiments. Good intelligence and proper planning would have identified the need for allocating additional forces specifically for this security role.

Additionally, lack of adequate intelligence made any sensible mission analysis impossible. What exactly was Sickles's mission? The varying mission statements described in chapter four would make any effort to connect the ends sought with the ways and means impossible. There was no need for an elaborate decision-making process supported by staff estimates. During this era of warfare, the whole process was normally done by just one man: the commander. He did, however, require basic information: (1) What was the enemy situation? (2) What was the mission? (3) What resources were available? (4) What were the limitations? While Sickles did know what resources were available to him, he could not adequately plan for their employment without understanding what he had to accomplish and under what conditions.

Although not peculiar to this mission, another contributing factor was the rigid formations and drills which were ill-suited to this type of terrain. What Sickles's force needed was speed and mobility. The traditional linear formation worked against his infantry in this terrain by paralyzing their movement. Given the heavily wooded terrain, loose order or skirmish order may have been better suited.



The lack of confident and aggressive leadership also played a significant role. Hooker's poor leadership and lack of self confidence created significant tactical and operational implications. Hooker's delay caused Sickles's attack to miss, what Carl von Clausewitz termed, the "center of gravity." Jackson's source of power in this operation was his combat divisions. If Sickles had inflicted enough damage to Jackson's center of gravity, Jackson's ability to have launched a flank attack would certainly have been diminished. Furthermore, he could have accomplished the same results without delivering a decisive blow to Jackson's divisions. By attacking him at the right place and time, Jackson's movement would have been delayed long enough to make any hope of reaching Hooker's flank in daylight impossible. With this extra time, Hooker could have reinforced his defense.

The paradox of Sickles's attack was that it assisted the Confederates in accomplishing their mission since the attack failed to hit Jackson's center of gravity. While it was impossible to ascertain with absolute confidence how much of a difference Brigadier General Francis C. Barlow's brigade would have made to the 11th Corps defense, one can assume that it would have been employed more effectively defending the Union's weak western flank, than in a half-hearted attack. In both his official report and his autobiography, Major General Howard, the 11th Corps Commander, wrote that the loss of Barlow's brigade was one of the reasons for his

corps' disaster. Moreover, when Hooker finally did commit Sickles's corps to an attack, Hooker not only gave up part of the army's reserve (Whipple's division), but also created a one-mile gap in the army's defense, ruining the mutual support between its corps. This was true especially of the 11th Corps whose left flank, as well as their right one, was left open.

It was precisely this isolation of the 11th Corps that Jackson sought to exploit in his deliberate attack. Although a tactically successful operation, it too was plagued with problems. Ineffective command and control, lack of timely tactical intelligence, and an inability to fight at night prevented this attack from achieving its final objectives.

The tactical command and control system was unable to provide effective control for an operation of this size and complexity. Commanders were unable to keep lines separated; and once merged, they were also unable to untangle them without halting the attack and reforming. This wasted valuable time and created lulls in the fight and further ruined the momentum of the attack. Certainly, the terrain and darkness made the command and control even more difficult, but this maneuver would have been difficult even on an open field during daylight. The system for tactical communications at the time did not allow the Confederates to operate extended lines in succession. A commander's direct personal control that he may have enjoyed over smaller

formations was impossible here. The noise of the battle was enough to completely drown out any voice commands. Jackson's system of couriers between him and the division commanders did little in the way of controlling the individual soldier. Consequently, soldiers were fighting individually and failed to maintained any semblance of order with the rest of their unit. This mode of fighting was the least effective as it meant a break down in teamwork and unity of effort. It also meant that there was little or no fire control resulting in a wastage of ammunition. In some cases, commanders reported entire regiments running out of ammunition. Again, one must wonder, did that many targets present themselves or did soldier fire at random to maintain a psychological edge?

Assuming for a moment that Confederate leaders could control the formations, extended close order successive linear formations in this attack was an inefficient use of combat power. This formation clearly emphasized firepower along the breadth of the formation and was intended to place the defender under constant pressure. But a great amount of the line was unopposed. To better illustrate this, one needs to consider relative combat power ratios. At the first point of contact, the Union army had two regiments and two pieces of artillery--total personnel, about 1,000. Given a six to one attacker to defender ratio with the average strength of a Confederate brigade at 1500, the Confederates should have assigned three brigades to defeat the Union flank. In

actuality, the element of surprise together with the lack of real defensive positions facing west, caused the better part of Colonel Leopold Von Gilsa's entire brigade to be defeated by one Confederate brigade. This meant that the remaining 22,000 man force could have been used to maneuver deeper into the Union's rear. What Jackson really needed was mobility to allow his force to penetrate deep, capturing key terrain, severing lines of communications, and preventing any organized defense. The successive lines did just the reverse by paralyzing his tactical mobility, eventually grinding the attack to a halt and allowing the Union forces time to organize a defense. As stated in chapter five, a combination of a smaller front followed by units in column formation would have provided great flexibility and mobility.

While the Confederates' efficient use of cavalry identified the weak Union flank in the west, their means of keeping the commander updated during the battle was slow and ineffective. Inadequate tactical intelligence failed to keep Jackson apprised of the situation to his front. As mentioned earlier, there were at least two occasions during the attack in which the Union's disposition was exceptionally weak. It would appear, based on his actions, that Jackson was unaware of these events. He acquiesced to a halt by his two lead divisions at the very time the Union defenses between him and Chancellorsville were the weakest. Once he was prepared to

resume the attack, he was unaware of the Union's strengthened position.

Finally, the night-fighting ability and discipline of Jackson's forces were insufficient to conduct an attack of this complexity. Nearly every Confederate commander above regimental level mentioned darkness as one of the reasons for needing to halt the attack. Yet sunset was only about an hour and a half after the initiation of the attack. Consequently, they must have understood that the attack would continue into the night and that they would have to continue the mission regardless. General Lane wrote in his report that he understood that he would be making a night attack. On the issue of discipline, one can only conclude that soldiers were simply carried away by their initial successes and, filled with the desire to chase down the Federals. Their method of attack, which required very high levels of discipline and attention to detail broke down as a result of this.

As previously noted, Jackson's attack was a tactical victory, but it fell short of the operational goal of either the destruction or capitulation of the Army of the Potomac. In fact, Lee still remained in a very precarious position at the conclusion of this attack. His army was split three ways: Jackson, for the moment checked on Hooker's right flank, Lee, badly outnumbered with 14,000 troops on Hooker's left, and Major General Jubal A. Early in Fredericksburg

opposed by one Union corps. Additionally, Major General John F. Reynolds, commander, 1st Union Corps, had crossed the Rappahannock in the north and was moving on Jackson's (Stuart's) left flank. Lee decided to resume the attack, unite his two wings, and drive the Union Army from the defenses of Chancellorsville.

Although the attack fell short of its intended gains, it did achieve significant results. In terms of men and equipment, this attack killed or wounded over 2,600 Union soldiers of which 130 were officers.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the Confederates captured an untold number of prisoners and, in a few cases, whole regiments. The Army of the Potomac reported a loss of over 31,000 knapsacks and, depending on the various reports, as many as 24 artillery pieces were captured.<sup>4</sup> Operationally, this attack shattered any hope by Hooker to defeat Lee by entrenching himself in a defense around Chancellorsville. When Lee resumed the attack the next day, he had Stuart attack Hooker on his right flank while he attacked from the south. This attack, with the help of Hooker, who abandoned Hazel Grove, succeeded in pushing back the Union Army to a position where they covered their lines of communication across the Rappahannock. With this defeat and his failed attempt to destroy Lee's right wing with Sedgwick, Hooker had had enough and on 6 May withdrew across the Rappahannock in defeat.

## General Conclusions

Lack of good tactical intelligence appears to have been a problem for both armies. It contributed to the failure of the hasty attack to accomplish anything of significance and the deliberate attack to achieve its greater potential. In the hasty attack, the lack of essential information plagued Sickles with problems from the start and eventually caused him to reach his culminating point prior to launching his main attack. To a lesser extent, lack of intelligence also affected the deliberate attack. Jackson had at least two opportunities that, if exploited, could have further weakened any Union attempt at organizing a coherent defense.

As stated earlier, perfect intelligence did not exist and obtaining good intelligence was difficult. However, adequate intelligence was within the armies' abilities as demonstrated by the Confederates in gaining operational-level intelligence when they identified the weak Union flank. The distinction between operational level intelligence and tactical intelligence was in the ability of the commander to exploit it. Tactical intelligence, if acquired at all, was normally gained during the fight. In order to exploit this intelligence, there had to be a great deal of flexibility in both plans and forces. This was not the case in these offensive operations as the need for absolute control of forces created a set plan of attack that was not only difficult to deviate from, but also stifled the initiative to

exploit unforeseen opportunities. There was no indication of commanders receiving tactical intelligence in a timely manner which would have caused them to significantly alter their scheme. Shifting one's forces because the enemy was pouring fire into one's flank was not exploiting intelligence. This was reacting to an event which good intelligence could have predicted. Assuming momentarily that tactical intelligence did reach the commander during the fight, it was doubtful that he would be in a posture to exploit it. Commanders were concerned with controlling the immediate fight. In some cases, additional information may have even overloaded the commander. Overloading the commander may have distracted or even prevented him from his most important task of command and control .

Another factor which plagued all three attacks was the traditional Civil War formations and drills. The surrounding terrain made movements in step and forming a line of battle in unison nearly impossible. As a result, standard drills executed in this terrain exacerbated the command and control problems, broke up attack formations, and greatly reduced the already limited mobility of the foot soldier. There was no doubt about the general value of these formations and drills. Without them, there would be no organized way to effectively move forces around the battlefield, but once in the fight, sound tactics demanded that these formations conform to the terrain and the enemy situation. To do otherwise would



eventually grind an attack to a halt as in Jackson's deliberate attack.

Finally, the lack of confident and aggressive leadership caused serious problems for the Union Army in both the meeting engagement and the hasty attack. General Hooker's actions during these attacks clearly indicated a man who had lost the self confidence needed to lead the Union Army. Hooker's lack of self confidence affected both his ability to think clearly and to act resolutely. When he should have held his ground in the meeting engagement by reinforcing Sykes, he chose to withdraw his forces. When he should have attacked Jackson's column early and aggressively, he hesitated until it was too late. This leadership failure requires much more analysis than it could ever receive in this paragraph, but its affect on combat operations was critical.

The research question for this thesis was: Despite the Confederate victory at Chancellorsville, were the Union infantry tactics superior to those of the Confederates? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to revisit the definition of tactics offered in chapter one and, more importantly, the influences on American military thinking examined in chapter two; for Jomini's theory of war offered the greatest influence on the tactics employed by Civil War commanders.

Tactics is an art by which commanders translate potential combat power into victorious battles and engagements. Effective tactics seek a unique approach in each battle adjusting to a myriad of conditions influenced by the enemy situation, weather and terrain, and friendly forces, to name just a few. An essential part of tactics is the skillful positioning of forces through one's ability or knowledge of warfare, to place, as Jomini espoused, the mass of one's forces at the decisive moment and at the decisive point of the field of battle. In a broader sense then, tactics is a part of the art of war: the effective employment of forces through the application of one's knowledge about warfare.

In analyzing these offensive operations, I have concluded that senior (division and above) Confederate leaders employed their forces more effectively than the Union leaders did their forces. In a wider sense, the Confederate offensive tactics in these operations were superior to those of the Union Army because senior Confederate leaders were better at the art of war. The Confederates experienced many of the same problems at the unit level as did the Union Army. Their drills and formations, being nearly identical to the Union Army's, were just as ineffective in the Wilderness. Similar problems dealing with lack of mobility, flexibility, and command and control abounded on both sides. Despite these similar problems, the Confederates were better at

gaining great psychological and physical advantages over the Union Army. The psychological advantage, in terms of the moral effect, helped to break down Union command and control, while the physical, in terms of superior positioning, helped to create the psychological. In the meeting engagement, Confederate psychological and physical advantages were so great that they caused the withdrawal of three Union Corps with very little fighting--truly the acme of superior tactics. In the deliberate attack, positional advantage caused not only the concentration at the Union's "decisive point," but also a great psychological advantage which led to the rout of an entire corps. At every opportunity, Confederate leaders positioned their forces to threaten Union weaknesses by exploiting the terrain and by using the indirect approach.

The Confederates also exploited what was arguably the most significant weakness of the Union Army: poor leadership on the part of Hooker. While an analysis of Hooker's leadership is beyond the scope of this study, it was evident that the Confederates identified his reluctance to fight and exploited it to their tactical advantage. In the meeting engagement, Hooker backed down to the Confederates even after gaining good defensible terrain. During the hasty attack his hesitation in attacking Jackson aggressively set the conditions for a tactical victory in the deliberate attack.

In short, Confederate tactics forced the Union Army to conform to the Confederate will; and, as Clausewitz wrote: "War is thus an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will."<sup>5</sup>

#### Enduring value for today's infantry forces

Many of the lessons learned in this battle are still relevant to today's infantry forces. The author of this thesis has experienced many of these same problems in his command of both heavy and light infantry companies.

First was the importance of good intelligence. Despite the unprecedented capabilities of today's intelligence collection assets, perfect intelligence is still impossible. The need for good intelligence requires combat forces to continue to acquire information that may fill in gaps of information that are vital to understanding the enemy, terrain, and weather. It is, therefore, absolutely essential that infantry forces continue to train soldiers to be part of the collection effort. Spot reports are a vital link in the gathering effort, and the SALUTE format offers the best way for providing soldiers with method for insuring all pertinent information is gained and then transmitted in a logical fashion.

Second, the need for proficient night-fighting capabilities of infantry forces is essential to successful night operations. Despite technological advances in night

vision equipment, night fighting requires simple plans that are well rehearsed. Moreover, infantry forces must routinely train at night in order to sustain a high level of proficiency as this ability is very perishable. Techniques to assist in command and control during night attacks are critical. Simple plans that are well rehearsed are important, but when the plan needs adjusting, as it invariably does, soldiers must be able to react confidently and aggressively to continue the attack. Avoiding fratricide is one of the greatest concerns of attacking forces--whether day or night. Desert Storm has shown that despite advanced technology in fire control systems, friendly force are still apt to engage one another. The confusion of the battlefield demands solid control measures for restricting fire. However, that is only a start because restrictive fire lines do not stop bullets; they merely indicate a location where one should not fire. The best means for avoiding fratricide still remains a well rehearsed plan, executed by well-trained infantry forces.

Finally, the need for confident and aggressive leadership at all levels of command remains a staple of infantry forces. Jackson's leaders performed superbly in preparation for and movement to the deliberate attack, but they fell short of adequately controlling their forces during the attack. In a much more significant effect, Hooker's leadership failures contributed to many of the problems

experienced by the Union Army. In order to develop quality leaders, the Army must continue to emphasize leader development programs at all levels. As the former Chief of Staff of the Army, General Carl E. Vuono, said: "The competence of our future leaders and their leadership abilities are determined by our ability to educate and train them . . . ." Conducting terrain walks, studying military history, and war gaming are all excellent techniques for teaching the art of war to junior leaders; for it is proficiency in the art of war that allows military leaders to achieve victory at the least possible cost.

### Endnotes

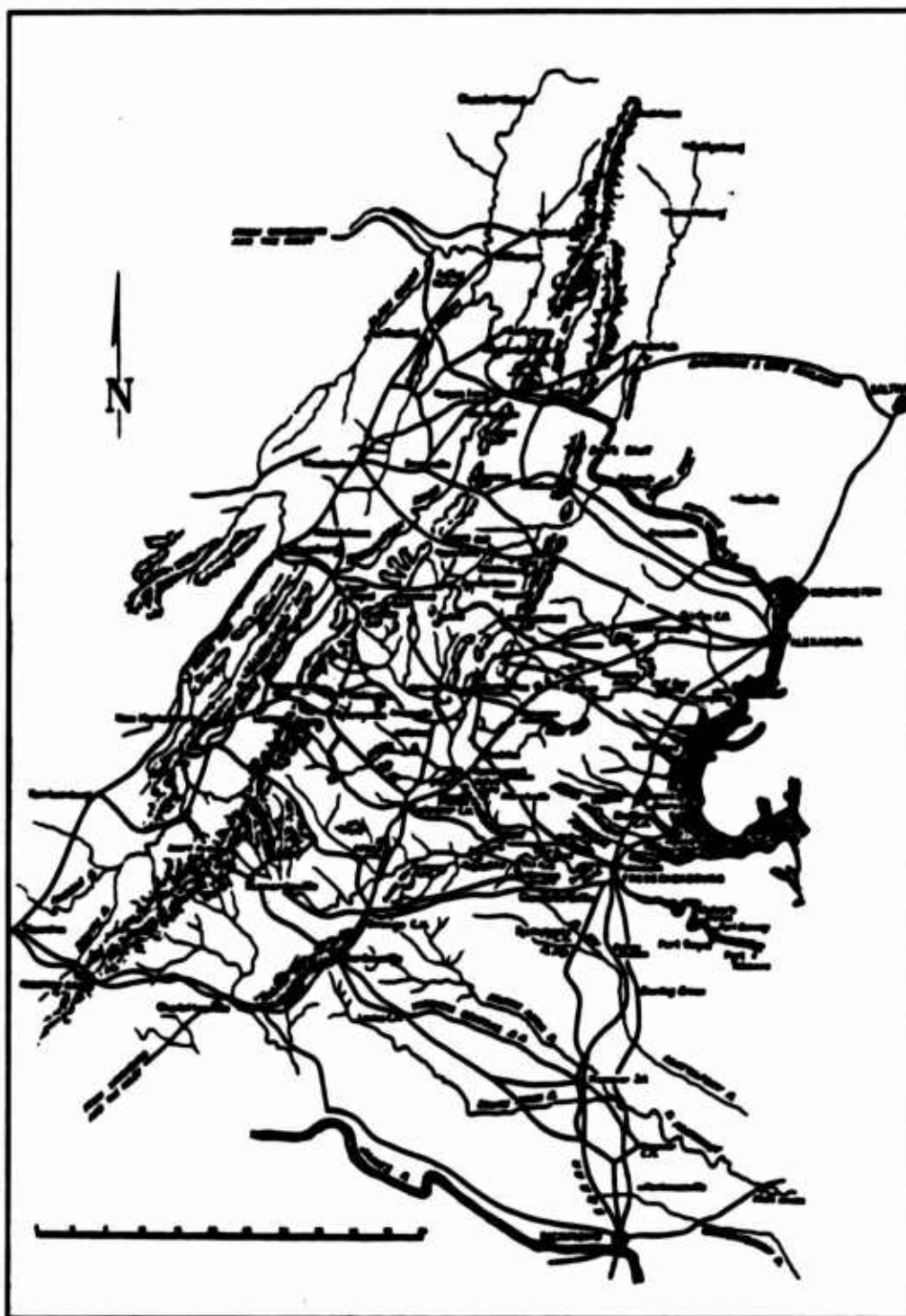
<sup>1</sup>Carl Von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 190.

<sup>2</sup>Jomini, Antoine Henri De, The Art of War, (California: Presidio Press, 1992), 268.

<sup>3</sup>Augustus Choate Hamlin, The Battle of Chancellorsville, (Maine: Hamlin, 1986), 131.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 134, 135.

<sup>5</sup>Clausewitz, On War, 75.



*Fig. 1. Theater of Operations.*

(Map by Edward Stackpole reprinted from: Chancellorsville: Lee's Greatest Battle, 1958, page 1.)



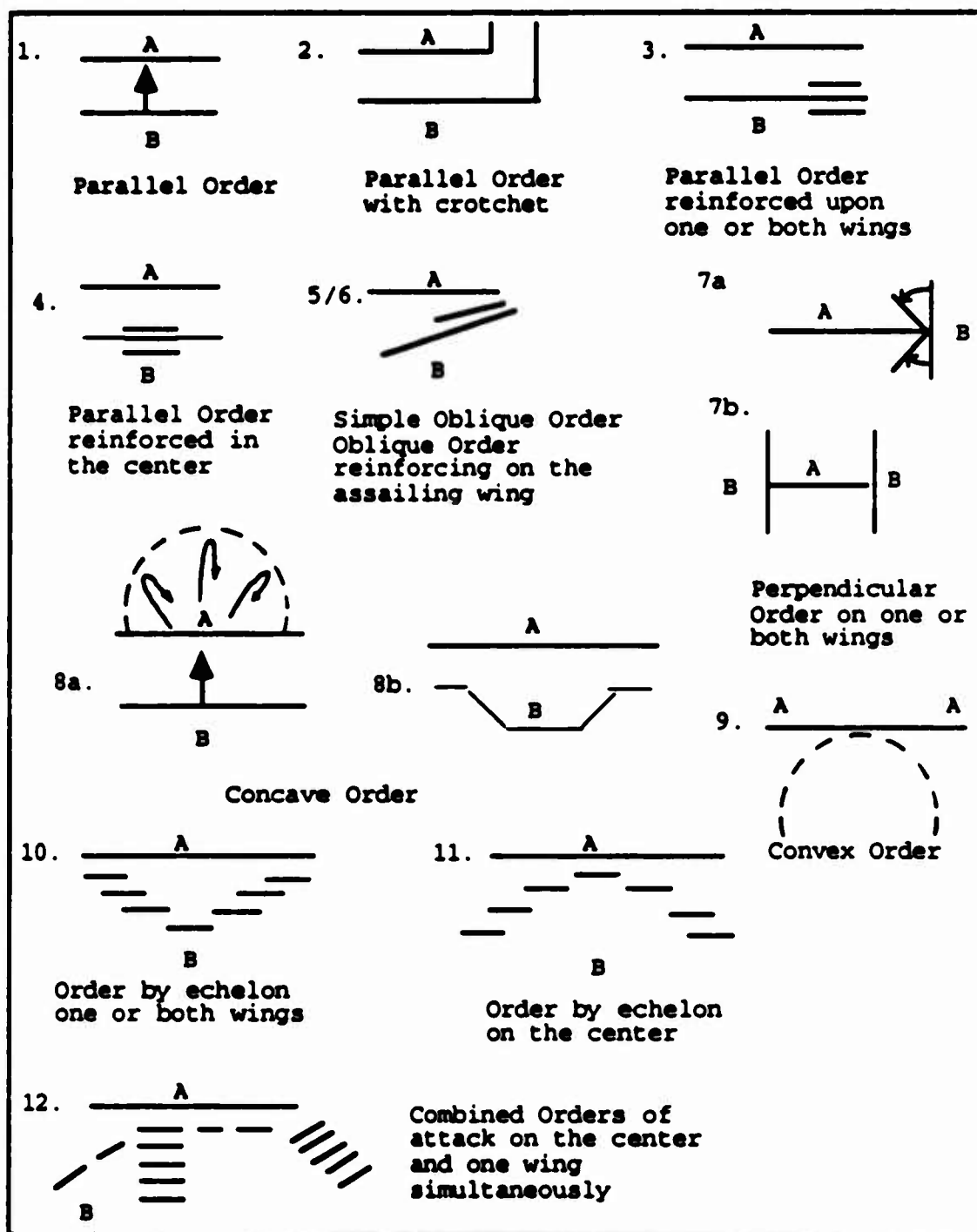


Fig. 2. Jomini's Twelve Order of Battles.

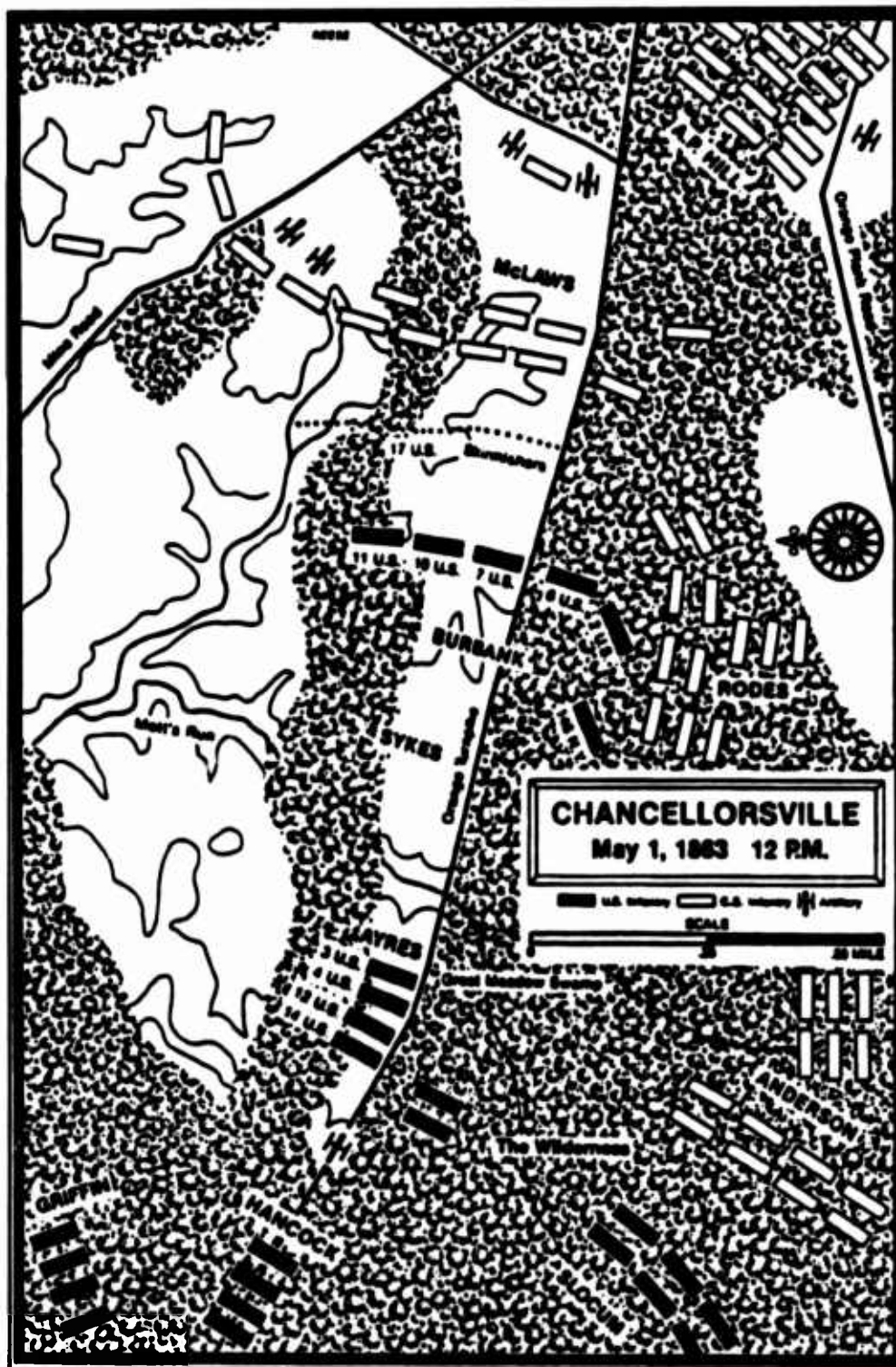


Fig. 3. Meeting Engagement, 1 May, 1863.

(Map by Timothy J. Reese reprinted from: Sykes' Regular Infantry Division, 1861-1864, 1990, page 211.)

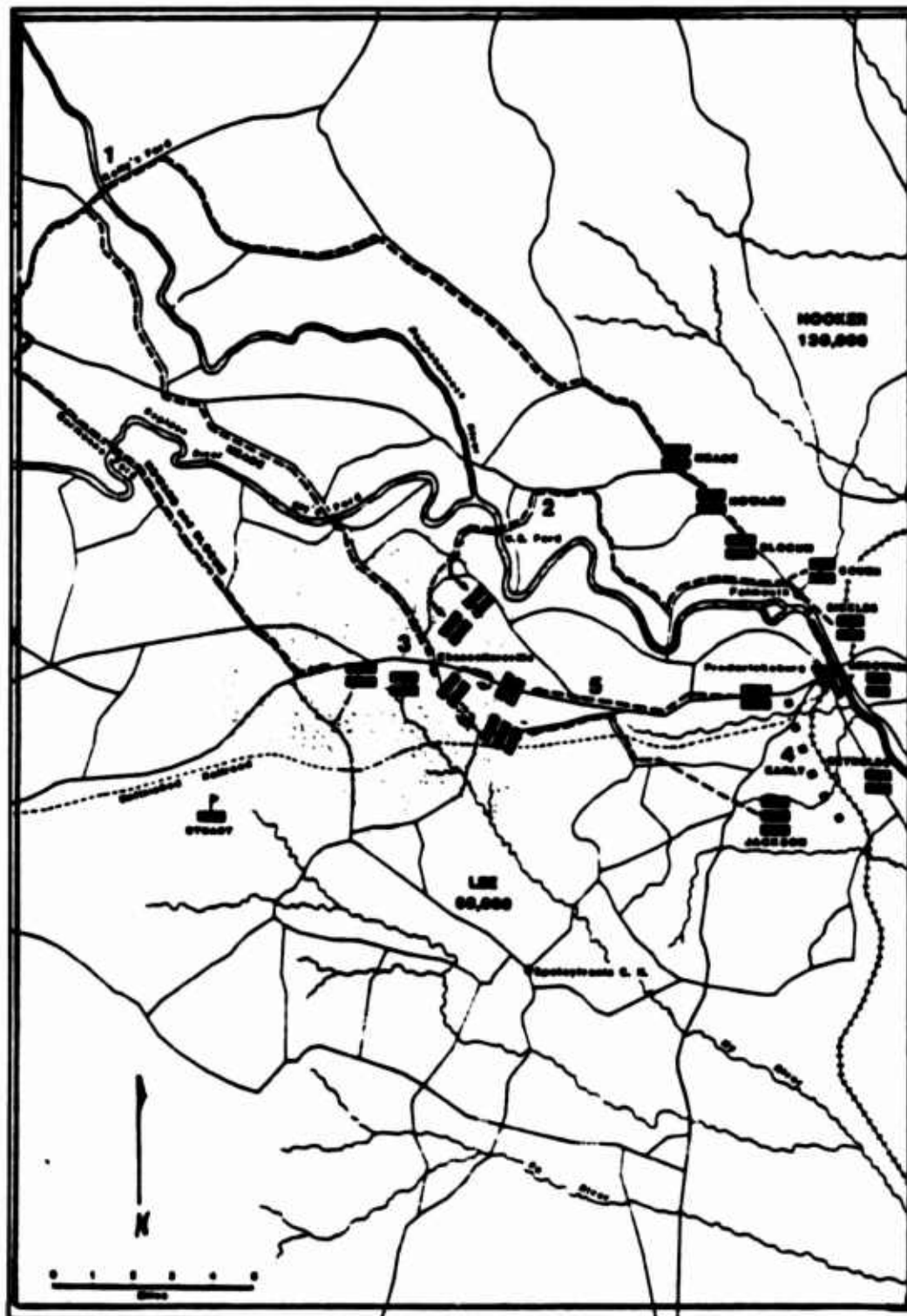


Fig. 4. Hooker's Turning Movement, 1 May, 1863.

(Map by Craig L. Symonds reprinted from: A Battlefield Atlas of the Civil War, 1983, page 56.)



*Fig. 5. Hasty Attack, 2 May, 1863.*

(Map by William K. Goolrick reprinted from: The Civil War, Rebels Resurgent, Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville, 1985 page 127.)

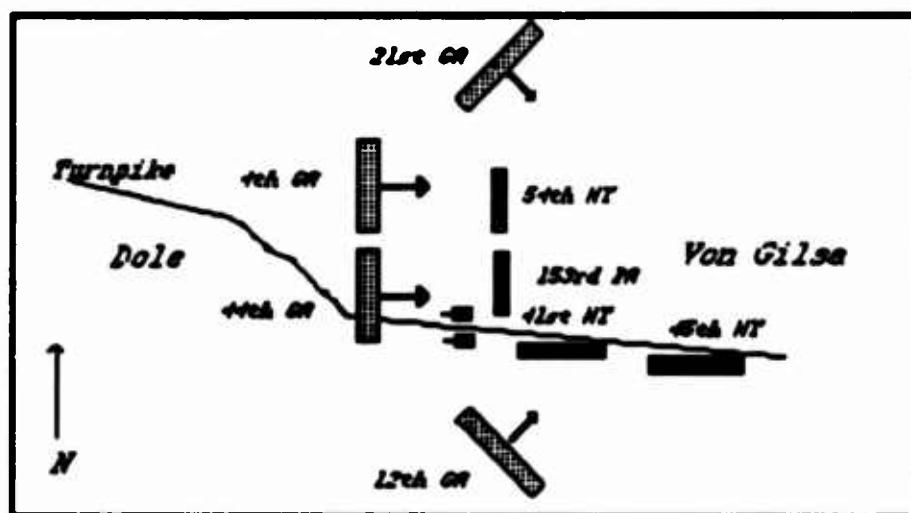


Fig. 6. Attack by Doles's Brigade on 2 May, 1863.

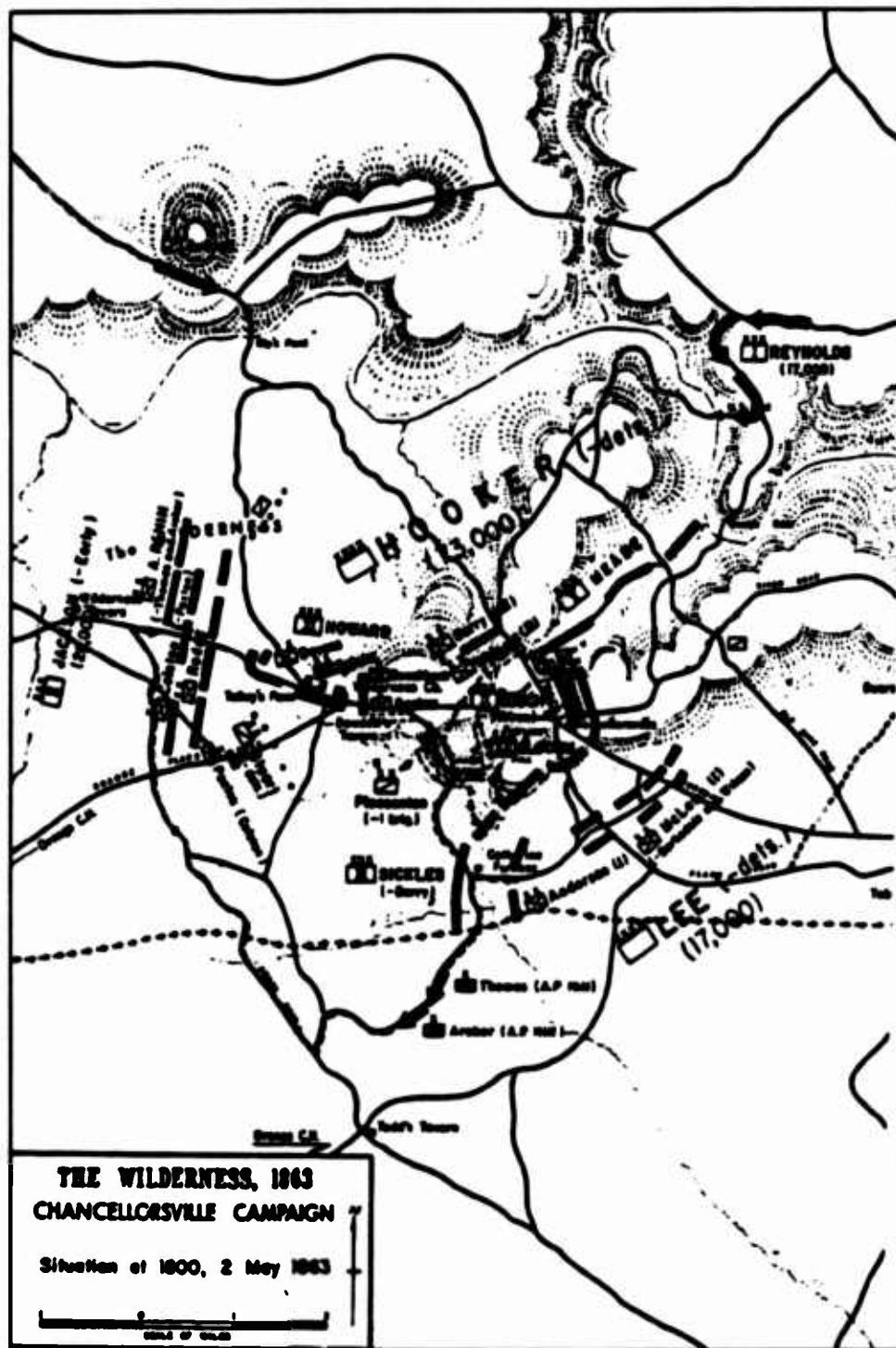


Fig. 7. Jackson's attack on the Union right flank, 2 May 1863.

(Map by Thomas E. Griess reprinted from: The West Point Military History Series Atlas for the American Civil War, 1986, page 29.)

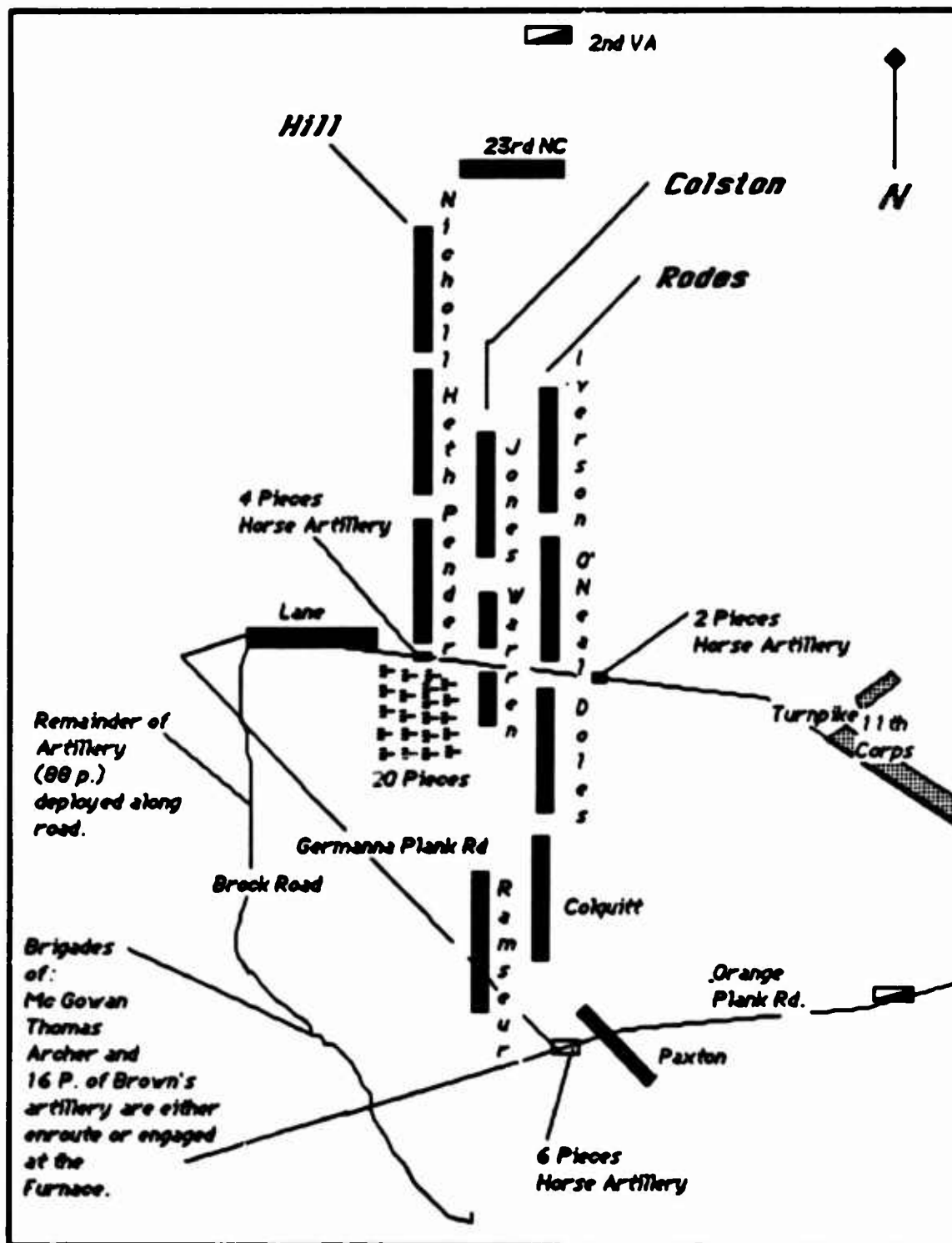


Fig. 8. Jackson's organization for combat, 2 May, 1863.

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