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JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE

JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL



CHANGING FACE OF WARFARE

By

Kyle Reichle

LTC, USAR

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Kyle Reichle

LTC, USAR

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

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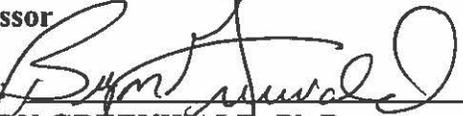
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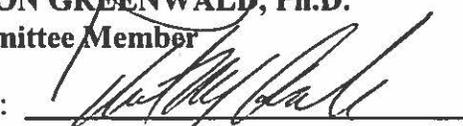
Signature: _____

**BRYON GREENWALD, Ph.D.
Committee Member**



Signature: _____

**ROBERT ANTIS, Ph.D.
Director, Joint Advanced Warfighting School**



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ABSTRACT

When thinking about war, it is critically important to understand lessons learned of the past, and how post conflict changes influence doctrine and thinking on waging the next conflict. Examining the American Civil War, it is easy to ask why the armies engaged in such outdated tactics in the face of advanced weaponry. What conditions should have been examined during the pre-war period to understand the changes in warfare? What changes should occur as a result of what is understood? How are the lessons learned by the soldiers on the battlefield to be taken into account? These questions as well as many others should be examined, debated and addressed. At the very least, the questions should drive a reevaluation of tactical employment of units.

The experience of the 24th Georgia Infantry Regiment and its adjutant / commander, Lieutenant Colonel C.C. Sanders, will be used to answer the questions above. Two pivotal 1862 campaigns in the Eastern Theater will highlight the changing characteristics of warfare in the 19th century. The Maryland campaign, which includes the battles of Crampton's Gap and Antietam, will reveal the devastating results of outdated tactics practiced with modern weapons. The Fredericksburg campaign will reveal the overwhelming strength of the defensive against outdated tactical maneuver. The results of these campaigns clearly indicated to Sanders that the tactics employed lagged far behind the advancements in weaponry.

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Chapter 1: Historical Framework

“Vivid in the memory of the writer”¹

The 24th Georgia regiment, mustered into service in August 1861, was typical of Confederate Civil War units organized between secession and the draft of 1862. The regiment was composed of volunteers, largely comprised of farmers, merchants, tradesmen and laborers from White, Banks, Towns, Rabun, Gwinnett, Elbert, and Hall counties of northeastern Georgia.² While excited for what they believed to be the “great adventure” the regiment possessed little military education or background.

Usually wealthy or politically connected men raised these local units whether they had a military background or not. The newly minted soldiers then elected the majority of their company and field grade officers. The leaders were selected more often than not without regard to actual military experience. Those who could sway the men with rousing speeches or provide ample quantities of liquor were most successful in these elections. While this process may have promoted cohesion and contributed to morale, it also served to limit what a leader could do, especially in terms of imposing discipline. Thus the military effectiveness of these volunteer units was quite varied at the beginning of the war.

¹ C. C. Sanders, *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 29, (Richmond, VA: Southern Historical Society, 1901), 172. Sanders post war comment of a field hospital in May 1863. Christopher Columbus Sanders will be referred to in this paper as Lieutenant Colonel C.C. Sanders, C.C. Sanders or Sanders in this paper. His war and post war signatures read C.C. Sanders.

² John Rigdon, *Historical Sketch & Roster: The GA 24th Infantry Regiment*, (Clearwater, SC: Eastern Digital Resources, 2006), 21. The Twenty-Fourth Georgia Infantry was organized in late June and early July, 1861. The men were organized into units by county which comprised of ten companies: “A” Banks County Independent Volunteers, “B” Hart County, “C” White County White County Marksmen, “D” Towns County Hiawasse Volunteer, “E” Rabun County Rabun Gap Riflemen, “F” Gwinnett County Gwinnett Independent Blues, “G” Hall County, “H” Franklin County Currahee Rangers, “I” Hall County Glade Guards Volunteer Rifles, and “K” Habersham County McMillan Guards.

The regiment's first commander was Robert McMillian who raised a company of infantry from Habersham County nicknamed the McMillian Guards. Political maneuverings elevated McMillian to the rank of colonel and command of the 24th Georgia.³ A grocer, dry goods merchant, and state senator of Georgia from 1855 to 1856, his civilian careers did little to prepare him for the role of an infantry unit commander.

McMillian, born on January 7, 1805, was one of the oldest colonels in the Confederate army.⁴ His advanced age extracted a heavy physical toll and he was frequently granted furlough to rest and recover in Georgia. It was a young man's army; the average age of a Confederate colonel was just over thirty-two years of age in 1861.⁵ His age combined with his lack of military background prompted a former Confederate general to characterize McMillian as, "zealous and gallant but quite ignorant of his duties."⁶

Colonel McMillian was not alone in his lack of prewar military background, many of his contemporaries lacked formal military experience. Less than half of the colonels had some military schooling or service background.⁷ Only about ten percent had U.S. Army experience of any kind.⁸ Of the officers with actual U.S. Army experience, many had been regular company grade officers or even privates in the Mexican War.

³ William Price, *Civil War Handbook*, (Fairfax, VA: L.B. Prince Company, 1961), 11. The average infantry regiment of 10 companies consisted of 30 line officers and 1,300 men. However, by the time a new regiment reached the battlefield, it would often have less than 800 men available for combat duty. Sickness and details as cooks, teamsters, servants, and clerks accounted for greatly reduced numbers. Actually, in many large battles the regimental strength averaged no more than 480 men.

⁴ Bruce S. Allardice, *Confederate Colonels: A Biographical Register* (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2008), 269.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 269. General McLaws considered McMillian "zealous" and "gallant" but "quite ignorant of his duties". The basic unit of Civil War era armies was the regiment and was the essential maneuver element on the battlefield.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

Thus, military expertise, tactical knowledge, and senior leader skills were generally lacking in the new volunteer units. Much on the job training would be necessary, normally through trial and error. This lack of experience was also prevalent in company grade and non-commissioned officers. This situation allowed those individuals with military schooling and experience to rise quickly. C.C. Sanders was one of these men.

A recent graduate of the Georgia Military Institute, Sanders had attempted on a number of occasions to obtain a leadership position in one of the newly forming regiments.⁹ His desires unfulfilled, he enlisted in the 24th Georgia. C.C. Sanders was over qualified as a private. At the close of each academic year and with the annual examinations complete, the Georgia Military Institute participated in training exercises that lasted a minimum of two weeks, but never exceeded four weeks.¹⁰ Instead of living in barracks, the cadets lived in tents to replicate a field environment and conducted tactical drills. These training events provided Cadet Sanders with the basic knowledge and understanding of military tactics and deployment of formations into battle lines. His education provided him “greater martial expertise than many of his superiors.”¹¹ Sanders provided the military background McMillian desperately required.

⁹ Bowling C. Yates, *History of the Georgia Military Institute* (Marietta, GA, 1968), 9. C.C. Sanders attended the University of Georgia during the academic year of 1857-1858. He applied for, passed the required entrance exam and was accepted to attend the Georgia Military Institute (GMI). Sanders entered the institute with 52 other cadets in the summer of 1858 and graduated in June 1861. Based on the West Point model, GMI had an attrition rate of 50 percent to 75 percent each year due to the physical and academic standards. GMI would furnish to the Confederate army one brigadier-general, two colonels (of which Sanders was one), four majors, sixteen captains, nine lieutenants – a total of thirty-four commissioned officers.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹ Timothy J. Reese, *Sealed With Their Lives: The Battle for Crampton's Gap Burkittsville, Maryland September 14, 1862* (Baltimore, MD: Butternut and Blue, 1998), 119.

In his final year at the Georgia Military Institute, Sanders served as cadet captain of Company A.¹² This experience provided him the basic knowledge of administratively managing future soldiers. Additionally, prior to graduation in June 1861, the cadets served at Camp Brown, Georgia and provided training for Confederate officers and non-commissioned officers.¹³ After graduation Sanders served as a drill master at Camp McDonald, Georgia.¹⁴ The lessons learned as a cadet would prove critical over the coming years.

Colonel McMillian's lack of military experience clearly contrasted with the obvious military skills and knowledge of the twenty-two year old Sanders. As author Timothy J. Reese points out, Sanders possessed "greater martial expertise than many of his superiors."¹⁵ Sanders' military training led to his election as adjutant and a promotion to lieutenant colonel and second in command of the 24th Georgia.

The challenges of drill, discipline, and the day-to-day management of the unit fell heavily upon Lieutenant Colonel Sanders shoulders. One member of the regiment recalled, "Our Lieut-Col. did most of the drilling; however, our Col. tried his hand. He was a much better lawyer than drill officer. On one occasion, the companies got terribly mixed, no one in his right place. They straightened by command unknown to Hardee."¹⁶

¹² Yates, *History of the Georgia Military Institute*, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵ Reese, *Sealed With Their Lives*, 119.

¹⁶ "The Ups and Downs of Company B" *Hartwell Sun*, September 4, 1878. In 1855, the tactical manual used by the American army was updated by Lieutenant Colonel William Hardee. It was based on new French manuals and was recognized as the defining authority on tactical matters. Thus, the manual was in wide use by officers learning their trade.

His work clearly cut out for him, Sanders had to transform what another soldier described as the “poorest” and “worst disciplined regiment” into an effective fighting force.¹⁷

Sanders drilled the regiment in the accepted tactics of the day which entailed close order tactical maneuver. Like Sanders, most infantry commanders learned tactics at West Point or state military colleges as cadets. They never again revisited their education, and if they had battlefield experience, the tactical lessons only confirmed what they had learned. Commanding officers who had little or no formal military education learned tactics from textbooks used by generations of soldiers for nearly one hundred years. Technological advances, especially in weaponry, change the fundamental dominance of certain tactical precepts. Such was the case during the American Civil War.

The results of technological advancements would prove devastating. Writing forty years after the war, Sander’s most vivid memory was of a field hospital after a battle. “Even the stoutest hearts of those who had been long inured to scenes of blood and suffering, stood pale and speechless and trembling as they behold these heart-rending sights.”¹⁸ Sanders recalls in exact detail the horrific scene he encountered, “The amputated limbs were piled up in every corner almost as high as a man could reach; blood flowed in streams along the aisles and out the doors; screams and groans were

¹⁷ Benjamin Edwards Stiles Jr, letter dated April 4, 1862 to his mother in Goldsboro, NC. Southern Historical Collection, University Archives, Southern Folk Life Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill CB #3926

¹⁸ C. C. Sanders, *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 171-172. Years after the event, Sanders recorded his account of what he witnessed at Salem Church being used as a field hospital following the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863. The commanding officer of the 24th Georgia Infantry Regiment, Colonel Robert McMillian, recorded a similar description. Advances in weapons technology produced horrifying results when 19th century tactics were employed against the new weapons systems. Scenes such as the one described were common place in the aftermath of American Civil War battles.

heard on all sides, while the surgeons, with their assistants, worked with knives, saws, sutures, and bandages to relieve or save all they could from bleeding to death.”¹⁹

Sanders experience of witnessing “scenes of death and carnage” that “no human tongue or pen can adequately describe” was not new to warfare.²⁰ What was new and different were the numbers of wounded. The sight, Sanders recalled, “Was perhaps, never equaled within so limited a space, every available foot of space was crowded with wounded and bleeding soldiers. The floor, the benches, even the chancel and pulpit were all packed almost to suffocation with them.”²¹ Witnessing the scenes of the field hospital, Sanders had encountered the direct and most obvious results of a change in warfare and its horrible effects.

When thinking about war, it is critically important to understand lessons learned, and how post conflict changes influence thinking on waging the next conflict. Looking back a century and a half later, it is easy to ask why the armies engaged in such outdated tactics in the face of advanced weaponry. What conditions should have been examined during the pre-war period to understand the changes in warfare? What changes should occur as a result of what is understood? How are the lessons learned by the soldiers on the battlefield to be taken into account? These questions as well as many others should be examined, debated and addressed. At the very least, the questions should drive a reevaluation of tactical employment of units.

The experience of the 24th Georgia Infantry Regiment and its adjutant / commander, Lieutenant Colonel C.C. Sanders, will be used to answer the questions

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

above. Two pivotal 1862 campaigns in the Eastern Theater will highlight the changing characteristics of warfare in the 19th century.²² The Maryland campaign, which includes the battles of Crampton's Gap and Antietam, will reveal the devastating results of outdated tactics practiced with modern weapons. The Fredericksburg campaign will reveal the overwhelming strength of the defensive against outdated tactical maneuver. The results of these campaigns clearly indicated to Sanders that the tactics employed lagged far behind the advancements in weaponry.

At the outset of the war, Sanders military training had taught him the tactics of the day. Over the course of the war, over 2,000 men passed through the ranks of the regiment, many were battlefield casualties'. Having to recruit many new men to fill the ranks throughout the war would have been a strong indicator to Sanders that accepted tactics against the advancements in weaponry called for an adjustment in tactical application.

²² C.C. Sanders enlisted in the 24th Georgia in August of 1861 after having attempted in securing a commission as an officer in a newly forming regiment. He was elected lieutenant colonel and adjutant presumably based on his military schooling at the Georgia Military Institute. Sanders would command the regiment on numerous occasions due to the Colonel Robert McMillan's frequent absences. Born January 7, 1807 Colonel Robert McMillan, who had raised the regiment and was its first commanding officer, was fifty-six years old at the outset of the war. McMillan's advanced age made it extremely rough on him as the price of primitive field conditions, campaigning demands and, the actual combat experience extracted a heavy physical toll. Colonel McMillan submitted his resignation on September 27, 1863 which was accepted on January 9, 1864. Sanders, promoted to colonel on April 27, 1864, formally took command of the 24th Georgia Infantry Regiment.

Chapter 2: Technological Advancements, Accepted Tactics, and Harsh Lessons

Technological Advancements

“Pistols for wounding the owner or some of his friends”¹

Prior to the American Civil War, a number of technological advances in weaponry took place; the most important was the development of the rifled musket and the corresponding ammunition, the Minie’ ball. These advances greatly enhanced the accuracy and distance of the weapons. At the outset of the war, there were many types of weapons in use. One historian noted that “between 1861 and 1865 Union and Confederate infantry forces were armed with between forty and fifty types and models of muskets and other infantry weapons.”² However, after 1862 rifled muskets were predominately in use on both sides.

Both the North and South were ill-prepared to arm the men rushing to volunteer in 1861. Rifled muskets were in short supply. As a result, volunteers brought their own weapons, which varied greatly in type and accuracy. Both North and South looked to Europe for weapons, many of which were of questionable utility. One reason for the shipment of so many inferior weapons to America was the fact that most European nations had already adopted rifle muskets and could sell their surplus of antiquated models to the eager Americans. According to the Count of Paris, “The refuse of all Europe passed into the hands of the American volunteers.”³

¹ “The Ups and Downs of Company B”, *Hartwell Sun*, September 4, 1878.

² Gregory A. Coco, *The Civil War Infantryman: In Camp, on the March, and in Battle*, (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1996), 65.

³ Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 290.

Until more modern rifles could be procured or manufactured, the dominate infantry weapon in 1861 was the smoothbore musket, which was an advanced weapon compared to the flintlocks and shotguns others carried.⁴ The smoothbore musket was fairly effective, but not accurate much beyond fifty to seventy-five yards. In a test conducted in 1968, three marksmen in a row, firing a smoothbore musket, failed to hit a target measuring four by six feet standing at a distance of fifty to seventy-five feet.⁵ With the smoothbore musket, soldiers were relatively safe at a distance of one hundred yards or more. On many occasions Union soldiers, on ascertaining that their opponents were armed with the smoothbore, exposed themselves and taunted their opponents for the ineffectiveness of their fire.⁶ The flint locks and shotguns were even less effective than the smoothbore musket.

The rifled musket was loaded and fired in the same manner as the smoothbore, a process unchanged since the 18th century. Rifling, however, in conjunction with the Minie' ball, a soft lead bullet with a conical base designed to expand when fired which pressed the bullet into the grooves of the barrel was a great improvement over the smoothbore.⁷ Rifling along with the Minie' ball allowed the trajectory to stabilize, resulting in greater accuracy at longer distances.

⁴ Coco, *The Civil War Infantryman*, 66.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 65-66.

⁶ Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb*, 290.

⁷ Coco, *The Civil War Infantryman*, 65. This bullet was called the minie' ball invented by French Captain Claude Minie', and perfected by American James H. Burton.

Maker	Model	Type	Attempts	Hits	Distance
British	Enfield Model 1853	Rifled Musket	15	13	400 yards
U.S.	Springfield Model 1863	Rifled Musket	15	7	400 yards
U.S.	1842 Smoothbore	Smoothbore Musket	15	0	400 yards
Austrian	Austrian Rifled Musket	Rifled Musket	15	3	400 yards

Table 1. Gregory A. Coco, *The Civil War Infantryman*, 65.

The graphic above illustrates the results of a test of Civil War firearms conducted in 1971.⁸ The tests used targets 72"x72" in size and were set up at 400 yards, when 15 shots were fired by several Civil War muskets, the results varied.⁹ The tests clearly demonstrate the accuracy and effectiveness of the rifled musket. Based on results, combining the British Enfield and American Springfield models, the two most common rifled muskets used in the war, the soldiers would have had a sixty-seven percent accuracy rate. Additionally, a test of the Confederate Richmond rifled musket resulted in a marksmen hitting a saucer ten out of ten times fifty to seventy-five yards out.¹⁰

As the test reveals, not all rifled muskets produced the same results. The Austrian rifled musket, which had considerable use in the Confederate army, produced a twenty percent accuracy rate, not much better than the smoothbore musket. The Austrian rifle, as one author has noted, "was despised because of its unwieldiness and ineffectiveness. Likened to a howitzer, when a soldier got ready to fire one of these monstrosities, he was apt to take a tight grip, brace himself for the shock, draw a bead, shut his eyes and pull the trigger."¹¹ The result was an ineffective weapon much like the smooth bore musket.

⁸ Ibid., 65.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 66.

¹¹ Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb*, 290.

Another weapon in use by the Confederacy (and the 24th Georgia) in the early parts of the war was the Belgian rifle. “These weapons were of such fragile structure as to be easily broken; the bore was uneven and the barrels of some were crooked. Yankee soldiers who had to use these shabby guns referred to them contemptuously as “pumpkin slingers.”¹² As with the Austrian rifled musket the Belgian rifle was ineffective.

Common with volunteer regiments, the 24th Georgia’s weaponry included mostly “smoothbores predominating with a peculiar scattering of at least five varieties of rifled muskets.”¹³ Additionally, the wide varieties of rifled muskets with mixed calibers created supply problems. In a note dated July 15, 1862, Sanders provided a “descriptive list of firearms based on company commanders’ returns. The list included two hundred thirty-one Springfield muskets .69 caliber, one hundred twenty-two Minie muskets .58 caliber, one hundred eighty-two Enfield rifles .54 caliber, eight Springfield rifles, seven Harpers Ferry rifles .54 caliber, four Belgian rifles, two Mississippi rifles for a total of 556 arms.”¹⁴ Out of the total weapons in the regiment, 353 were smoothbore muskets compared to 203 rifles.

Compounding the issue, weapons in the hands of amateurs could be a dangerous thing as a soldier in company B recorded, “The Confederacy would not have us unless we were armed with something. Every soldier was armed, too, with a big knife and a pistol of some sort, from a “pepper-box” to a navy six-shooter. These knives were serviceable for cutting meat in camp, and the pistols for wounding the owner or some of his friends.”¹⁵

¹² *Ibid.*, 291.

¹³ Reese, *Sealed With Their Lives*, 119.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 349.

¹⁵ “The Ups and Downs of Company B”

By late 1862, most of the obsolete weapons had been replaced by the Enfield and Springfield rifled muskets. As the campaign season began in the spring of 1862, soldiers and leaders of both armies would be confronted with a new condition on the battlefield. The rifled musket would have a shocking impact on the accepted tactics of the day.

Accepted Tactics
“The futility of the whole exercise”¹⁶

Popular images of the American Civil War show lines of infantry, battle flags waving overhead crossing an open field towards lines of defenders which is winking and flashing with rifle fire.¹⁷ Attackers fall, officers screaming orders, men try to move forward, with difficulty the flags are kept aloft but the hail of lead is too much. The attack loses momentum and melts away, leaving a corpse-strewn field and a sense of either anger or sorrow for the futility of the whole exercise. Surely the officer who ordered this butchery should have realized the breasts of his soldiers were no match for the onward march of military technology in the age of science and outdated tactical practice.¹⁸

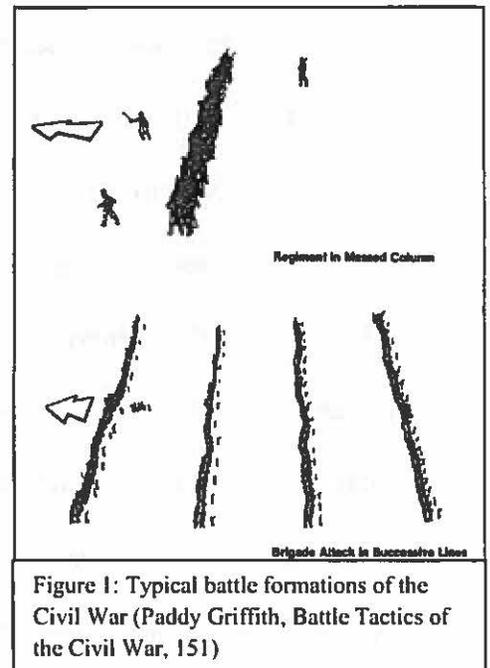


Figure 1: Typical battle formations of the Civil War (Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*, 151)

The first full American drill manual was issued in 1779 and was based on the Prussian drill manual of Fredrick the Great.¹⁹ By 1812, the American drill manual was

¹⁶ Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 99.

based on the French model, reflecting the influence of Napoleon's new tactics. In 1835, an updated French drill manual was translated into English and issued with the title *Infantry Tactics or Rules for the Exercise and Manoeuvres of the United States Infantry*.²⁰ The manual actually showed little change from the basic tactical formations and drills that Frederick the Great's soldiers knew.

The Mexican War of 1846-1848 marked the first time the United States invaded another country, operated on widely-opened axes of advance, and had relatively large armies fighting geographically separated campaigns. It was classic Napoleonic warfare. The battles that made up these campaigns were also Napoleonic in structure. Both the Mexican and United States armies fought these battles according to the accepted tactical doctrine. Both armies, armed primarily with smoothbore muskets, marched and maneuvered in order to mass firepower on the battlefield.

The Battle of Buena Vista in 1847 is an excellent example of these standard offensive and defensive tactics. The battle was one of maneuver by American infantry, which applied first defensive, then offensive tactics to defeat the enemy. Artillery and cavalry played a critical role as both armies were employed effectively to disrupt enemy infantry. As the battle developed, infantry in formation employing massed firepower and using the bayonet countered the larger, but less effectively employed Mexican army. Against close knit formations, massed firepower by the infantry and the effective employment of artillery produced havoc on the Mexican formations. The tactical

²⁰ Ibid.

doctrine outlined in the 1835 drill manual worked: “the tactical offensive based on close-order infantry assaults supported by artillery won battles.”²¹

Artillery had undergone dramatic improvements as well. Newer rifled pieces made their appearance on the battlefield. These pieces were lighter and effectively range from 2,800 to 3,000 yards. Although the pieces could be employed as an offensive weapon due to its lighter weight, the improved range of the weapons only strengthened the defensive.

In addition, the decisive element of the combat was the bayonet charge. “Bayonet charges could succeed because double-timing infantry could cover the last eighty yards during the twenty-five seconds it took defending infantrymen to reload their muskets after firing a volley.”²² These were the offensive tactical lessons that future Confederate and Union leaders learned. These lessons were reinforced at West Point and state military schools as well.

The 1835 manual was updated by Lieutenant Colonel William Hardee in 1855. Hardee’s work did not appreciably modify the basic tactics, but modified other aspects to reflect Napoleonic influences. It was based on new French manuals that captured innovative thinking and thoughts on the “rifle revolution.”²³ The work took into account the accuracy and distance of the rifled musket by advocating the exchange of volleys at long range. Despite this, Hardee believed the bayonet would still carry out the final decisive stage of the infantry attack requiring infantry a double quick movement to close the remaining 200 plus yards to engage the enemy. For Lieutenant Colonel C.C.

²¹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1989), 473.

²² *Ibid.*, 473-474.

²³ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*, 101.

Sanders, like many front line officers, combat experiences would prove the manual lacking in forethought.

At the outset of the Civil War, infantry tactics closely resembled 18th century tactics, characterized by control through the use of tight battle formations to maintain cohesion and discipline. Offensive tactics ruled the day, despite the lessons of Buena Vista revealing the importance and devastating effects of artillery. During the Civil War, soldiers would advance against the increased range and accuracy of the rifled musket and artillery. These close knit formations provided excellent targets for the rifled musket resulting in heavier casualties at a longer distance and far away from the point of the bayonet. These formations against the rifled musket culminated all too often with Sanders' memory of the field hospital and its horrors.

Harsh Lessons

"In the 1,000 yard 'shooting gallery'"²⁴

Between September 1861 and March 1862 the 24th Georgia continued its development into a functional combat unit. This meant repetitive drills for marching and changing formation, loading and firing on command, and the bayonet charge. Assigned to the Department of North Carolina, the men dealt with the boredom and routine of camp life. While instilling the mechanics of drill and discipline was essential, there was no way Sanders and the regiment could prepare for the impact technological changes would have on tactics.

In March 1862, the six hundred and sixty men of the regiment were ordered north to Virginia to reinforce the defensive lines at Yorktown, Virginia.²⁵ The regiment did not

²⁴ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*, 170.

²⁵ Rigdon, *Historical Sketch & Roster*, 22.

see action, other than trading rifle fire occasionally with Union pickets. Abandoning the defensive works with the rest of the army in May, the regiment found itself in the defensive works around the Confederate capital of Richmond. The first real combat action the regiment participated in was at Malvern Hill in June during the Seven Days battles.

The 24th Georgia, arriving at Malvern Hill late, provided time for Union positions atop the hill to entrench and mass large amounts of artillery. The attacking Confederates faced about a thousand yards of open fields covered by massed Union artillery batteries on rising ground.²⁶ The order to advance came about 5:30 pm. Part of a nine brigade attack on the Union left, advancing in the standard close order formations, the 24th Georgia along with the 2nd Louisiana and 15th North Carolina began to advance from the tree line. Union artillery ripped holes in the attacking close knit formations almost immediately.

“In the 1,000 yard ‘shooting gallery’ at Malvern Hill it is thought that fifty per cent of the Confederate casualties were attributable to artillery.”²⁷ While exposed to artillery fire, the 24th Georgia exchanged limited volleys with Union infantry. The 24th Georgia sustained thirty-three casualties; however, 2nd Louisiana and 15th North Carolina sustained one hundred eighty-two and one hundred thirty-one casualties, respectively.²⁸ Magruder’s division, Cobb’s brigade, to which the regiment was assigned, suffered five hundred casualties of the fifteen hundred men engaged.²⁹ General Ambrose Wright

²⁶ Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*, 118.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁸ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, Vol 11 (Part II), Chapter 23, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887) 505 and 979.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 750.

recalled the scene: “the fire was terrific now beyond anything I had ever witnessed - indeed, the hideous shrieking of shells through the dusty gloom of closing night, and incessant roll of artillery and small-arms, were enough to make the stoutest heart quail.”³⁰

Despite the limited role the regiment played in the battle, the combat experience provided Sanders some initial insight into the importance of employing the rifled musket. Sanders wrote a post battle report with recommendations of employing the rifled muskets to maximize effectiveness. Because Sanders was well versed in drill and demonstrated a standard knowledge of tactics, his observations are worth noting. His first battle experience reinforced what he understood about the tactical employment of the rifled musket. Sanders recommended that the weapons be employed on the flanks for effect to take advantage of the increased accuracy and distance the rifled musket provided.³¹ This was a common tactical approach and reflected his knowledge of doctrine. “Before the 1850s only special regiments or one or two companies per regiment were equipped with rifles. These companies were used as skirmishers – that is, they operated in front and on the flanks of the main body, advancing or withdrawing in loose order and shooting at will from long range at enemy targets of opportunity.”³²

A common tactic of the day was to gain the flanks of the enemy and overwhelm the linear formation, a technique dating back to Napoleon. Sanders, witnessing the threat to an infantry formation attempted to rely on a standard tactical solution. He would soon discover that these recommendations would have no effect on the battle.

³⁰ Ibid., 814-815. General Ambrose Ransom Wright was a lawyer and Georgia politician prior to the Civil War. At Malvern Hill, assigned to General Huger’s Division, Wright commanded a brigade consisting of the 3rd Georgia, 4th Georgia, 22nd Georgia, 1st Louisiana and 44th Alabama.

³¹ Reese, *Sealed With Their Lives*, 119.

³² McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 474.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

Case Study 1 – The Maryland Campaign

By the late summer of 1862, Confederate military operations in the Eastern Theater had reached a zenith. The Confederate army had turned back an offensive designed to capture the Confederate capital during the Seven Days Battles. The invaders withdrew to Harrison's Landing, Virginia, just twenty miles from Richmond. The Union army entrenched in a heavily fortified defensive position at the landing, as it prepared to evacuate to Washington by river transport.

Another Union army prepared to advance from the vicinity of Washington to threaten Richmond. Union forces at Harrison's Landing were ordered north to support the offensive maneuver. With the failure of the Union army during the Peninsular Campaign culminating in the Seven Days Battles, Lincoln relieved popular General George McClellan from command. His army would combine with General John Pope's army to form a formidable fighting force and once again move to threaten the Confederate capital.

To counter this threat, the Confederate army moved to strike before the two armies could converge. Through a series of maneuvers, the Confederates were able to turn the western flank of the invaders. The result was a Confederate victory at the Battle of Second Manassas that turned back the Union offensive. The routed and demoralized army retreated to the safety of Washington, D.C. President Lincoln quickly reacted to the defeat by relieving General Pope of command and once again turning to General McClellan.

After an unsuccessful attempt to strike a fatal blow and the threat removed from Virginia soil, Confederate President Jefferson Davis approved a plan to invade northern territory. The goals were to threaten Washington, D.C. and win a decisive victory on northern soil. These goals, President Davis believed, would force the United States to recognize the Confederate States as an independent nation, or influence European powers to side with the Confederacy and ensure independence.

In what would become known as the Maryland Campaign, the Confederate army began movement north in late August 1862. The campaign consisted of two separate engagements, the Battle of Crampton's Gap and the Battle of Antietam. The invasion began with Confederate forces divided. Part of the army detached to neutralize a Union garrison at Harpers Ferry while another part of the army was spread out heading north. Union forces moved aggressively to defeat the Confederate invaders in detail. The Union army moved through passes and gaps in the South Mountain range, forcing the Confederate defenders to retreat and concentrate along the Antietam creek near Sharpsburg, Maryland. The Union army pursued and sought a climactic battle.

Lieutenant Colonel Sanders found himself in command of the regiment during the Maryland campaign, as Colonel McMillian had been granted a furlough. Additionally, at Antietam Sanders temporarily took command of Cobb's Brigade during the Battle of Antietam. The Battle of Crampton's Gap, fought in the South Mountains on September 14, 1862, resulted in one of the heaviest casualty rates suffered by the 24th Georgia during the war. The Battle of Antietam fought on September 16, 1862, known as the single bloodiest day in American history, did not result in the number of unit casualties as the regiment suffered at Crampton's Gap. In both battles the regiment was

employed to counter a union offensive attack. Although successful, the Napoleonic tactics from the standard drill manual Sanders relied on resulted in heavy casualties.

Crampton's Gap

*"We would catch hell down there"*¹

Late afternoon on September 14th, Brigadier General Howell Cobb, the brigade commander, received an urgent message from General William Wofford to rush troops to Crampton's Gap. In General Wofford's official report, he stated he received an order which, in part, read his troops "must hold the gap if it cost the life of every man in the command."² The 24th Georgia was rushed forward.³ By the time of its arrival, the outnumbered Confederate forces were heavily engaged and beginning to break under the weight of the Union attack. Union forces numbering about 9,000 men stormed Crampton's Gap against roughly 2,150 Confederate defenders.

Arriving at the top of the mountain with the orders to "report to someone who would place them in position,"⁴ Lieutenant Colonel Sanders found no such person or direction. Hearing the intensity of the fight at the base of the mountain, Sanders rushed his men forward to stem the overwhelming tide. The regiment was met with panicked Confederate soldiers streaming from the battlefield who warned that Sanders and his men "would catch hell down there!"⁵

¹ "The Ups and Downs of Company B"

² Gerald J. Smith, *One of the Most Daring of Men: The Life of Confederate General William Tatum Wofford*, (South Carolina: Southern Heritage Press, 1997), 77.

³ Reese, *Sealed With Their Lives*, 286. Order of battle: the 24th Georgia was assigned to Brigadier Howell Cobb's Brigade, Major General Lafayette McLaws Division, Lieutenant General James Longstreet's Corps. The brigade consisted of the 16th Georgia, 24th Georgia, Cobb's Legion Infantry, 15th North Carolina and one section of the Troup (Georgia) Artillery which consisted of one 12 pounder howitzer and one 6 pounder howitzer. Fox's Regimental Returns shows the highest percentage of losses at Crampton's Gap by regiment as: 16th Georgia, 24th Georgia and the 15th North Carolina.

⁴ "The Ups and Downs of Company B"

⁵ *Ibid.*

Facing the 96th Pennsylvania Sanders quickly deployed his unit, employing his regiment's rifled muskets on the flanks. His initial tactical action met with success. According to Colonel Cake, commanding the 96th Pennsylvania, his men were "shocked, but not repulsed (and) the men bounded forward, determined to end it with the bayonet."⁶ However, other Confederate units failed to provide support and the 24th Georgia found itself being out flanked. The line began to falter and finally broke, movements to support the regiment failed.

The soldiers fell back, taking advantage of trees as cover to return fire before continuing to retreat. Sanders heroically attempted to delay the Union advance. As Private E.H. Sutton recalled, "here we found Lieutenant Colonel Sanders, who was in charge of the regiment, with a handful of men, holding the enemy in check and covering the retreat of the brigade."⁷ The fighting subsided in the gathering darkness and the regiment reformed and took a position "two miles from the mountain."⁸

The 2,150 Confederate defenders suffered 962 casualties in the action.⁹ The 24th Georgia entered the battle with 292 soldiers fit for duty, of which 126 were killed, wounded or missing.¹⁰ For company B the butcher's bill read sixteen of twenty-four men lost in twenty minutes of fighting.¹¹ Other companies of the regiment reported similar results.

⁶ Bradley M. Gottfried, *The Maps of Antietam: An Atlas of the Antietam (Sharpsburg) Campaign, Including the Battle of South Mountain, September 2-20, 1862*, (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie LLC, 2012), 82.

⁷ E.H. Sutton, *Civil War Stories* (Demorest, GA: Banner Printing Co., 1910).

⁸ "The Ups and Downs of Company B"

⁹ McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam The Battle That Changed the Course of the Civil War* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 111.

¹⁰ Reese, *Sealed With Their Lives*, 300

¹¹ "The Ups and Downs of Company B"

Cobb's Brigade Casualties at Crampton's Gap							
Regiment	Brigade	Division	Engaged	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
16th Georgia	Cobb	McLaws	368	24	56	107	187
24th Georgia	Cobb	McLaws	292	12	59	55	126
15th North Carolina	Cobb	McLaws	402	11	48	124	183
Cobb's Infantry	Cobb	McLaws	248	11	23	156	190
Troup Artillery	Cobb	McLaws	31	1	3	none	4
			1341	59	189	442	690

Table 2. Timothy J. Reese, *Sealed With Their Lives*, 300.

What began as a defensive stance by Confederate forces became a limited counter attack by Cobb's Brigade to stem the tide of retreat and hold the position as ordered. The tactics were sound, but the Confederates were heavily outnumbered and for the first time faced infantry close combat. Closer examination of the casualty figures reveals the cost of the offensive tactics employed by Cobb's Brigade at Crampton's Gap. The brigade suffered the greatest percentages of loss among all Confederate forces; 690 casualties of the 1,341 engaged, in just twenty minutes of fighting – fifty-one percent of the brigade.¹² The 24th Georgia suffered forty-three percent casualties. The 16th Georgia and 15th North Carolina suffered fifty and forty-five percent casualties, respectively. Cobb's Infantry suffered seventy-six percent casualties. As common with the close of battle, these statistics were gathered amid the chaos of defeat, reflecting considerable guesswork by company officers to account for those missing or separated from their commands.¹³ The rifled musket was revealing its influence on the battlefield.

¹² Reese, *Sealed With Their Lives*, 300. It is also worth noting that a startling number of family groupings or cells were found among Confederate casualty lists, made up of two or more soldiers of the same surname, company and regiment. Undoubtedly reflecting father-son, brother or cousin relationships – as well the close-knit flavor of locally raised units – twenty-four such cells were found. Among the dead and mortally wounded appear four family cells, all from Cobb's brigade."

¹³ *Ibid.*, 300.

The men spent a restless night of September 14th preparing for a Union offensive which never materialized. As September 15th dawned, Sanders now in command of the brigade marched to support Confederate forces at Harper's Ferry.¹⁴ On September 16th the regiment, along with General McLaws division, began movement toward Antietam to reinforce General Lee.

Antietam

*"The sharp roar of musketry in large numbers is the fiercest and most terrible sound I have ever heard"*¹⁵

Lieutenant Colonel Sanders, in command of Cobb's Brigade, consisted of the 16th and 24th Georgia, the 15th North Carolina and Cobb's Georgia Legion. The brigade numbered approximately 357 men still recovering from the shock of the fighting at Crampton's Gap.¹⁶ Marching and counter-marching over the past two days also took a tremendous physical toll on the soldiers. Sanders, himself ill, would lead the brigade initially before turning command over to Lieutenant Colonel William MacRae of the 15th North Carolina.

The brigade crossed the Potomac at daybreak on September 17th and halted near General Lee's Headquarters west of Sharpsburg.¹⁷ Soon after arriving the brigade was

¹⁴ Reese, *Sealed With Their Lives*, 267. Resentment towards Cobb "within the army, coupled to persistent homesickness, prompted Cobb to request a transfer from the army with his sons in tow as personal staff. First serving in the defense of the Georgia-Florida coast, he eventually got the posting he wished back home in Georgia where he surrendered to General James Wilson in Macon at war's close. Crampton's Gap was his last significant field command. Although it can be truthfully said that as a career politician he lacked firm military ability, the same can be said of many political generals, North and South, who rose to considerable prominence."

¹⁵ Auburn University Libraries, "Starr Family Letters (1861-1863), Auburn University Libraries. Special Collections and Archives, <http://content.lib.auburn.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/civil2/id/20741/rec/5> (accessed on May 14, 2015). Doctor Starr was the regimental surgeon for the 24th Georgia. His letters to his wife provide invaluable early to mid war accounts of the regiment.

¹⁶ *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of Rebellion*, series 1, Vol 19, part 1, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 871.

¹⁷ Steve Hawks, *Stone Sentinels: Antietam or Sharpsburg, 2007-2015*: <http://www.antietam.stonesentinels.com/MarkersCS/M363.php> (accessed December 10, 2014). The

ordered into action with General McLaws' division. The men quickly came into range of musket and artillery fire and became detached from the main division effort. Taking a position behind a fence, Sanders ordered the men forward, only to be met once again with heavy musket fire. Discovering the movement was unsupported, Sanders ordered the brigade to fall back to protect his exposed right flank as Confederate forces retreated. At this point Sanders was physically unable to continue and passed command to Lieutenant Colonel William MacRae of the 15th North Carolina.¹⁸ Taking cover behind a stone fence momentarily, the order to advance once again was received. The brigade, now numbering about 250 men moved to check the advance of the 1st Delaware, threatening the left center of the Confederate line. Advancing to within one hundred yards, the brigade delivered a destructive fire and drove them back. Three times Union troops attempted to dislodge the brigade, and each time they were repulsed. Only after their ammunition ran out, and without support did the brigade fall back. Out of the 250 engaged, 50 remained.¹⁹

Maryland Campaign impact on the 24 th Georgia				
	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
Crampton's Gap	12	59	55	126
Antietam	4	39	2	45
Total	16	98	57	171

Table 3. *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of Rebellion*, 861.

marker is located on the east side of Hagerstown Pike, south of the Sunken Road. The marker (no. 363) reads: "Cobb's Brigade crossed the Potomac at daybreak and halted near General Lee's Headquarters west of Sharpsburg. At about 9:20 A.M., it formed line on the south side of Bloody Lane, its left resting at this point and, with Rodes' and portions of Garland's and Colquitt's Brigades, participated in the engagement with French's Division of the Second Corps. Later in the day the Brigade changed front to the right, facing east, and supported D. H. Hill's Division and George T. Anderson's Brigade in resisting the advance of Richardson's Division."

¹⁸ *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies in the War of Rebellion*, series 1, volume 19, part 1, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 871. Lieutenant Colonel William MacRae filed the official report describing the action on September 23, 1862. MacRae wrote, "Colonel Sanders, though very unwell, had gallantly remained on the field, cheering his men by words and example until this moment, when he was too much exhausted to remain any longer." (871-872).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 872.

The battle of Antietam was the bloodiest day in American history. Twenty-six thousand casualties littered the field at the conclusion of the fighting on September 17th. The brigade's experience in this battle illustrated how tactics no longer applied to the new conditions on the battlefield. When Sanders ordered the brigade advance, it came under accurate musket fire almost immediately. The improved range and accuracy of the rifled musket forced the brigade to take cover, and then it came under artillery fire, forcing Sanders to retreat.

It then moved to support General Hill at the sunken road, where a natural ditch created a defensive parapet. For most of the afternoon, Union divisions would crash against this position until finally overwhelming it. Cobb's Brigade (with the 24th Georgia) held the left flank of the line, turning back repeated assaults and engaging the enemy at close range. The brigade had no advantages of cover, and therefore stood in ranks to deliver fire as well as to receive fire from the enemy. The aborted attack and follow on stand up fight was typical of this terrible battle.

For the 24th Georgia, the regiment would suffer a total of one hundred seventy-one casualties of the two hundred ninety-two engaged, a fifty-eight percent causality rate. Company B, which had suffered heavily at Crampton's Gap, could only muster one man on September 18th. The company commander, P.E. Davant survived, but counted "eight bullet holes in his clothing."²⁰

²⁰ Confederate Military History Extended Edition, Vol 7 Georgia, (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing, 1987), 960.

Fredericksburg

“The troops stood as firm as the wall itself”²¹

In the aftermath of Antietam, Lee’s army retreated back to Virginia to take up defensive positions against a counter offensive that never materialized. President Lincoln, after conferring with General George B. McClellan on the Antietam battlefield and urging him to press the Confederates, finally removed him after a glacial advance into Virginia.

Lincoln turned to a new commander, Ambrose Burnside, who offered up an ambitious, but unimaginative, plan to out flank Lee at the town of Fredericksburg on the Rappahannock River, then advance south to Richmond. Burnside’s movements were countered when Lee had General James Longstreet’s corps positioned at Fredericksburg and recalled General Thomas Jackson’s corps to protect crossing further south. Burnside, delayed by the late arrival of pontoon bridges to allow his army to cross, gave Lee valuable time to establish a strong defense.

Sanders returned to command the 24th Georgia. As part of Longstreet’s corps, the regiment would find an ideal defensive on Marye’s Heights overlooking a broad flat plain that separated the town from the high ground. Brigadier General T.R.R. Cobb described the position, “We have a magnificent position,” the brigadier wrote, “the best perhaps on the line.”²² Cobb placed three regiments – the 18th Georgia, 24th Georgia, and the Phillip’s Legion – behind a “rock wall which was about 3 ½ feet high and built against a bank making a very good protection from the enemy.”²³ General Lee questioned General Longstreet about the strength of the position. Longstreet’s reply certainly

²¹ “The Ups and Downs of Company B”

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

satisfied any concerns Lee might have had. Longstreet told his commander “If you put every man now on the other side of the Potomac on that field to approach me over the same line, and give me plenty of ammunition, I will kill them all before they reach my line.”²⁴ Longstreet was more prosaic in describing the position after inspection of the line. He said it “A field upon which a chicken could not live.”²⁵

Longstreet’s seven mile defensive averaged about 11,000 men per square mile according to one author.²⁶ The combination of a defensive position with the troop density made the killing potential enormous. As one historian concluded, “The Confederates had prepared a defensive scheme more elaborate than the Federals imagined, and stronger than even the Southerners had guessed.”²⁷

The regiment poured volley after volley into the attacking forces. Colonel McMillian, now in command of the brigade, was remembered as ordering “his men to hold their fire until the enemy should come within range.”²⁸ Sanders recalled, “I saw the devoted Irish charge up to our breastworks, to be mowed down by a line of Confederate fire that no soldiers could withstand I saw the Irish battalions cut down like grain before the reaper, yet the survivors would magnificently close up their ranks only to have huge gaps again cut through them.”²⁹ Repeatedly the Union soldiers would advance only to be

²⁴ Randy Buchman, *Fredericksburg: A Field upon which a Chicken could not Live*, December 15, 2012, <http://enfiladinglines.com/2012/12/15/fredericksburg-a-field-upon-which-a-chicken-could-not-live/>, (accessed February 20, 2015).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Price, *Civil War Handbook*, 12.

²⁷ Francis Augustin O’Reilly, *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 249.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 308.

²⁹ C.C. Sanders, *The Journal of the American-Irish Historical Society*, Vol 3, (July 10, 1908): 104.

“forced back they rallied and came bravely on again, only to be riddled with bullets and torn by artillery.”³⁰

Union assault after assault came toward the strong defensive line. “Their fifth charge” Sanders recalled “was made with greatly decimated ranks that slowly recoiled like the waves of a tempestuous sea.”³¹ “The noble fellows coming up in steady columns to be mowed down before our lines of solid flames of fire from our entrenched position behind the rock wall and the terrible fire from the Washington Artillery on Marie’s Hill [Marye’s Heights], just in our rear and commanding every inch of approach.”³²

Union attacks would be met with well-directed, steady and firm rifle fire. As Sander’s remembered, “When great gaps were cut through their ranks by the artillery, would reform under the incessant fire, come again, sink down and rise again, trample the dead and wounded under foot and press the stone wall of liquid fire, then recede a few feet and come again, like an avalanche into the very jaws of death, until strength and endurance failed, having been forced back by shell and the deadly minie ball that no human being could withstand. The field of battle ran great streams of blood, and the immortal Irish Brigade recoiled before the living wall of fire in glory.”³³ Sanders would add, “In our immediate front one could walk on the dead for hundreds of yards. When twilight descended upon the scene, a spectacle was presented unequaled in warfare.”³⁴ For the 24th Georgia, only thirty-six were counted as the casualties.³⁵

³⁰ Ibid., 105.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Rigdon, *Historical Sketch & Roster*, 22.

Despite the great damage inflicted on the Union army, it was not defeated and remained an effective fighting force. While the defensive had proven quite superior to the offensive, both armies sought the decisive battle that would bring ultimate victory. This meant offensive action.

Throughout the rest of the war, armies would join in titanic battles, seeking the elusive victory. Attrition seemed the only solution – a strategy the Union could use and the Confederacy could not afford. In the end with everything exhausted but courage, the Confederate armies surrendered in the face of overwhelming and seemingly limitless power of the armed might of the north.

Chapter 4: Aftermath

“The South simply bled itself to death”¹

The effects of the rifled musket were devastating to massed formations in the offensive. Confederate forces attacked in eight of the first twelve major battles of the war. In these eight assaults 97,000 Confederates fell – 20,000 more men than the Federals lost in these same battles.²

The use of offensive tactics employed by the 24th Georgia during the Maryland campaign resulted in 171 casualties, 58 percent of the 292 engaged. Casualties for the regiment at Battle of Gettysburg were 83 of the 303 men, or 27 percent of the regimental strength.³ The brigade as a whole went into battle with 1,394 men, 275 of whom would be casualties or missing, totaling almost 20 percent of the brigade.

Of the casualty data available, the 24th Georgia would sustain the most losses during offensive operations. During the course of the war, 2,100 men would pass through the ranks of the regiment. At the surrender at Appomattox in April 1865, just four officers and fifty-six men were paroled.⁴ As for Sanders, he was captured at Sailor’s Creek just days before the surrender.

During the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864, a chaplain observed, “Whenever the Federal troops moved forward the Rebels appeared to have the advantage. Whenever

¹ Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Tactics and the Southern Heritage*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1982), 7.

² *Ibid.*

³ Jay Jorgensen, *Gettysburg’s Bloody Wheatfield* (Shippensburg, PA: White Maine Books, 2002), 137.

⁴ Rigdon, *Historical Sketch & Roster*, 22. In comparison, in April 1862, the regiment totaled 660 men in its ranks.

they advanced, the advantage was transferred to us.”⁵ The observation of the chaplain should have been obvious to the military leaders making such assaults. Often, offensive tactics without maneuver in the face of the rifled musket resulted in failure. Both Ulysses Grant and Robert E. Lee suffered their worst defeats in battles where they took the offensive against a prepared defense.

“Now that the war is ended,” the Army and Navy Journal editorialized in November 1865, “some of our officers evidently fancy it to be the proper time to start a new school of warfare which, no doubt, they would call the ‘American School.’”⁶ Eager to apply the lessons learned from the Civil War, the American military sought to move from the “useless, brain-confusing evolutions to the monarchial Europe.”⁷ Indeed, the accepted European tactical evolutions adopted in the American manuals prior to the Civil War had played a part in the estimated 650,000 deaths inflicted.

However, during the 1870s and 1880s, the American military tended toward the use of tactics favoring the offensive. Sir Edward Bruce Hamley’s work played an influential role in American military thinking. His work, *Operations of War*, stressed the importance of the offensive to the “suicidal in the defender.”⁸ Hamley’s work became a text at West Point in 1870 and eventually was taught at the artillery school and the school for infantry and cavalry. The strength of the defensive had been acknowledged, however, the acceptance of the offensive was stressed.

⁵ Perry D. Jamieson, *Crossing the Deadly Ground: United States Army Tactics, 1865-1899*, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 17. Commanding General of the Army William T. Sherman, 1869 to 1883, praised Sir Edward Bruce Hamley’s work, and endorsing its findings.

The monumental question for the American military became how to justify the offensive. The foundational question underpinned the requirement of commanders controlling soldiers in battle during an offensive movement. To support this argument a key concern arose, “the safety of the army cannot be entrusted to men in open order with whom it is difficult to communicate.”⁹

Theory collided with accepted tactics during this time. The United States was engaged in a new war, fighting Indians. “Indian operations meant offensive strategy and tactics: finding the tribal bands, overcoming their mobility and elusiveness, and defeating them in battle or forcing them onto reservations” ruled military operations.¹⁰ Field officers acknowledged the importance of defensive operations such as forts, however, to successfully fight Indians the offensive operations were critical to achieve national goals.

Weapons technology continued to advance. Gatling guns, improved artillery, and breech loading rifles were some of the improvements the new generation of officers would employ. “Infantry fire against masses is now as effective at 2,000, 2,500, and even 3,000 yards, as formerly at 800 yards.”¹¹ The defensive was now even more formidable.

While officers and theorists recognized this danger, at the same time they maintained their confidence in the offensive. They looked for tactics to assist attackers overcome rapid-firing weapons and sophisticated entrenchments for defenders. However, they could not provide an answer for overcoming the dominance of the defensive. The limited technology of the day hindered the solution.

⁹ Ibid., 18. Drawing on his Civil War experience, General Emory Upton was an intense student of tactics. Upton acknowledged communication and small unit tactics were linked in conducting offensive operations versus defensive formations.

¹⁰ Ibid., 48.

¹¹ Ibid., 70. The observation cited was made by Lieutenant Colonel Henry Lazelle in 1881.

During the late 1880s and into 1891 a board studied tactical problems and the work represented the United States Army's first true tactical manual and emphasized small-unit movements. The manual introduced squad tactics that spread out advancing infantrymen in loose-order formations. In theory, the attackers would be less vulnerable to the firepower of defenders.

The Spanish-American War proved too brief to provide a test any of the 1891 tactics. The largest battles, El Caney and on the San Juan Heights, suggested defenders would continue to dominate. Even with more data at their disposal to analyze and debate, the desire for the offense remained just as it had twenty years earlier. Regardless if the new generation of officers refused to take the lessons learned, weapons technology would continue to advance into the twentieth century, giving an even greater advantage to the defense.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

At the opening of this paper three questions were posed: What conditions should have been examined during the pre-war period to understand the changes in warfare? What changes should occur as a result of what is understood? How are the lessons learned by the soldiers on the battlefield to be taken into account?

For the pre-Civil War era soldier and theorist, the technological advances in weaponry should have been recognized and explored in more depth. The rifled musket, in limited use during the Mexican War, provided a glimpse of potential if used in greater quantities. No longer could attackers close to within bayonet striking distance to successfully close out the fight. Rifled muskets were effective at distances of four hundred yards, much greater than that of the smoothbore musket. Massed firepower worked both ways, however.

Units standing in double ranks, exposed to accurate fire would cause or suffer significant casualties. These insights were not applied to tactical manuals, nor were significant adjustments made to tactics after witnessing the strength of the defensive. There was not enough evidence, experimentation, or testing after the Mexican War to influence tactics from 1850 to 1861. During the war, the evidence was largely ignored.

While the American military updated its tactical manual in 1855 and acknowledged the increased distance and accuracy of the rifled musket, only moderate changes were made in the application of tactical maneuver. The manual still prescribed the bayonet would still carry out the final decisive stage of the infantry attack. As an example, the theory requiring infantry to close with the enemy then double quick movement to close the remaining 200 plus yards to engage the enemy. In the face of

improved weaponry, the accepted tactic of the bayonet charge, as well as lines of massed infantry simply would fade in front of a hail of lead.

What questions should theorists consider today? Have the combat experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past thirteen plus years provided a glimpse into future operations? One thing is for certain, the soldier on the ground in the close fight will receive the first lessons as to how the enemy will prosecute their fight.

The key becomes, understanding the technological improvements, analyzing lessons learned and not dismissing the information because it does not fit into our traditional ways. Lieutenant Colonel C.C. Sanders' accepted ideas about warfare were directly challenged by his combat experience. His recommendation in moving his rifles to the flanks to provide better firepower is an indicator he understood that the accepted tactics did not stand up in combat. As such, tactical adaptations manifest prior to major maneuver units adaptations. These lessons learned are not always retained in the post war period as technological developments often outpace doctrine. When thinking about war, theorists and strategists must account for the domino effect of technology and its impact on prosecuting the fight to a successful conclusion. Starting with the known improvements provides a base line for thinking through complex issues.

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VITA

Lieutenant Colonel Reichle is a native of Oviedo, Florida. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Geography from Florida State University and earned his commission through ROTC. Lieutenant Colonel Reichle's education also includes a Master of Arts in Human Science: Executive Leadership from Liberty University.

Most recently he was assigned to Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) as a Project Office (TPO) Mobile. His duties included centralized planner, manager, and integrator for all requirements in support of the \$61M TRADOC near-term mobile computing initiative.

As a logistics officer his assignments include deputy brigade commander of the 1189th Transportation Surface Brigade, Deputy Chief of Staff G1 mobilization policy officer, and Office of the Chief Army Reserve Aide De Camp.

