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DECISIONAL DILEMMA VICKSBURG OR GETTYSBURG?

A Research Paper

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Major Rex A. Davis

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Preface

This research paper was prepared as part of a much larger graduate level thesis on the events surrounding the Confederate decision to conduct a campaign into Pennsylvania during the summer of 1863. My own fascination with the subject began as a thirteen year old Boy Scout during my first trip to Vicksburg National Military Park. I will never forget one of the historical markers that informed me of the Confederacy's simultaneous engagement at Gettysburg. The innocence of youth could not quite fathom the intricate depth of that single marker. I was aware that the Confederacy was the outmanned, outgunned, and outindustrialized little brother, so why in the world would they have become involved at Gettysburg when Vicksburg was under siege? The issue was that simple at the age of thirteen. Almost twenty five years later, including thirteen years as a professional soldier and five staff rides through the entire area of Grant's Vicksburg campaign, I have continued to wonder about the Confederate decision involving offensive action into Pennsylvania as opposed to reinforcement of Mississippi. I have yet to read a complete and satisfactory explanation regarding the Confederate decisional dilemma of the spring and summer of 1863. This paper is my attempt to provide such an account and I would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Frederick Pfanz, United States Army, for his encouragement, advice, and shared enthusiasm on the subject.

Abstract

This paper is a discussion of the events surrounding the Confederate decision to conduct an offensive campaign into Pennsylvania as opposed to an alternative course of action of reinforcement against the Union siege of Vicksburg during the summer of 1863 in the American Civil War. No primary accounts of the meetings of the Confederate War Cabinet on the issue are known to exist. This paper summarizes the existing secondary accounts of what happened in meetings between General Robert E. Lee and the Confederate War Cabinet during the month of May, 1863. It then explores the strategic environment of 1863 in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the many potential influencing factors bearing upon the Confederacy's decision. The traditional instruments of national power are used to frame the discussion: economics, military capability, and politics. In addition, the increasingly recognized element of how a nation uses information as an instrument of power is applied in retrospect to further understanding of the Confederate decision.

The discussion of the strategic environment of 1863 is based upon several primary and secondary sources, as well as statistical records. It is impossible to determine all of the influencing external and internal factors that may have contributed to the Confederate decision to conduct offensive action into Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863. However, given the existing conditions as outlined in the research, the paper concludes that the Confederate decision was a rational, understandable attempt to gain a decisive victory on

Northern soil in order to take advantage of the political climate and bring the war to a successful close by means of a negotiated settlement.

The importance of the paper is that it offers an historical application of the national instruments of power and the surrounding strategic environment in order to better understand how to apply the process for present and future scenarios. In applying a relatively new and formal process of analysis (Warden's five rings coupled with nodal analysis) to events of the past, attempts to apply the same process to events of the future may result in a greater understanding and awareness of the influencing factors that weigh upon the minds of statesmen and soldiers as they seek to make decisions within their given strategic environment.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

—Proverbs 3:13,14

The introductory remarks of this research paper must first state what it is not as opposed to what it is. This inquiry is not an attempt to answer the question of when or where the so called “high tide” of the Confederacy occurred. Numerous authors have expressed varying opinions on that issue since the close of the Civil War. My purpose is more quizzical. I simply seek to understand a historic decision and therein lies the purpose of the paper. It is an attempt to gain a better understanding of the events surrounding the Confederate decision to conduct a raid into Pennsylvania as opposed to reinforcing Vicksburg in the early summer of 1863. The decision was more than just a military decision by Robert E. Lee; the decision was one made by the Confederate War Cabinet, which places it in the realm of national policy making in pursuit of national objectives.

It becomes immediately apparent that the internal and external factors involved in the decision were of a multiple and complex nature. Consequently, any attempt at understanding the decision and the events surrounding such a complex issue requires some type of focused guideline. In *Military Misfortune -The Anatomy of Failure in War*, the

authors cite Carl Von Clausewitz as having such a focused guideline in his attempt at understanding military theory and the art of war in his three step approach to critical analysis. The intent of such critical analysis is not to place blame or to imply that we could have done it better, but rather to simply learn more about why things happened as they did. “Clausewitz helps us realize that our chief concern is not the awarding of demerits or prizes to defeated or successful commanders, not deciding whether a decision to relieve them from or retain them in their positions was just, but to discover why events took the turn they did.”¹ It is with such a spirit that I attempt to gain a better understanding of the Confederate decision involving Vicksburg and Gettysburg.

Notes

¹Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1991), 46.

Chapter 2

Decisional Dilemma: Vicksburg Or Gettysburg?

The real way to get value out of the study of military history is to take particular situations, and as far as possible get inside the skin of the man who made a decision, realize the conditions in which the decision was made, and then see in what way you could have improved upon it.

—Field Marshal Earl Wavell

The history behind the Confederate decision to conduct an invasion into Pennsylvania rather than attempt to relieve the siege of Vicksburg is not one that is well documented, nor does it seem to receive the discussion it is due. The lack of discussion, knowledge, and even apparent interest in the subject is probably due to the generally accepted belief that “no minutes were kept—at least none have been found—so there is no way of knowing exactly what Lee said in favor of his proposal or what questions were asked of him.”¹ However, even in the absence of detailed minutes of the meetings between General Lee, President Davis, and the Confederate War Cabinet, several reasonably accurate conclusions can be drawn from the data that is available.

Lee was summoned to Richmond and arrived on May 15, 1863, departed on the 18th, and then came again on the 26th. The reason that Lee was summoned to Richmond by President Davis was to discuss the dilemma of what to do in response to Grant’s ongoing efforts against Vicksburg. Having dismissed any possibility of an attempt to make a major effort at reinforcing Vicksburg, Lee advocated conducting an invasion into Pennsylvania.

He made his proposal in terms of only two alternatives; either 1) stand a siege in front of Richmond which would ultimately lead to surrender, or 2) conduct an invasion into Pennsylvania which might lead to a decisive victory and a negotiated settlement with the North. Based on Lee's convincing arguments², he left with the civilian government's approval to conduct an invasion into Pennsylvania as the presumed answer to the dilemma of what to do about Vicksburg. Finally, later letters in early June of 1863 between Davis and Lee show confusion on Davis' part as to many of the details of the plan that Lee apparently intended to carry out.

Considering the very limited but basic details of the decision, the arena of national policy considerations, the associated strategic environment, and the decisions that are made at a given moment in history, the period of May 14-26, 1863 is arguably one of the most fascinating periods in American history. How well this paper reviews the results of the spring and summer of 1863 will determine whether the reader shares such fascination.

Notes

¹Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study In Command*, (New York, Scribner's, 1984), 7.

²Shelby Foote reports that Lee received formal approval on his first visit to Richmond in May. Edward Coddington reports that Lee received formal approval on his second visit to Richmond in May. Both historians agree that the formal War Cabinet vote was 5 to 1 in favor of Lee's plan.

Chapter 3

The Strategic Environment Of 1863

Effects in war seldom result from a single cause; there are usually several concurrent causes.

—Carl Von Clausewitz

In any attempt to understand a particular decision, influencing factors must be taken into account. Most current studies on military operations frame such an analysis within the context of the strategic environment. However, no formal definition exists for that term. Consequently, the strategic environment is defined in this study as the set of existing conditions under which the Confederate leadership made decisions in an attempt to attain national objectives. Four national instruments of power are used to frame the discussion: economics, political, military, and information. This chapter will provide insight into each one of these areas in an attempt to assess their collective effect on Confederate leadership and decision making in 1863 as it pertained to the impending problem of what to do about Vicksburg.

Many factors were at work in the strategic environment. The Southern economy was in shambles. Supplies for both Southern soldiers and citizens was lacking. Southern manpower was dwindling. Southerners looked for hope in the expectation that Lincoln would be defeated in the Presidential election of 1864 and be replaced by someone who would negotiate a settlement. The “peace movement” was gaining ground in the North

due to outspoken proponents such as Ohio Congressman Clement L. Vallandigham. Southern leaders, particularly Robert E. Lee, were beginning to think about how to leverage existing or potential strength against Northern weakness. Could the growing “peace movement” be exploited to hinder Lincoln’s ability to prosecute the war? That was only one potential question of many as Lee and the Southern War Cabinet discussed strategic options for 1863.

Economics

There have been numerous books and articles written on the economic conditions existing on both sides at the outset of the war. However, most critical to our discussion is the impact that the protracted war had on the respective sides. The Northern economy was primarily based on an industrial system that thrived on war. More industry and more demand for finished products meant more jobs. More jobs generally led to more prosperity and the resulting impact was a boost in the morale of the civilian populace. Conversely, the Southern economy was primarily based on an agricultural system that was ravaged by the war, especially when the majority of the war was fought on the home farmland of such an agrarian society. In addition, those that normally farmed the land were now fighting a war. The end result was a decrease in the ability to cultivate cotton and food crops such as wheat, an associated loss of income, and continual deterioration of morale in the civilian populace.

It was under such an adverse economic situation that the war continued for the Confederacy in 1863. The South initially thought that cotton would be the tool (the instrument of power) to win the war. In 1860, cotton exports accounted for 57 percent of

the total value of all American exports and Southern leaders initially had speculated that withholding shipments to England and France, both of which depended heavily upon cotton for textile manufacturing, might force them to intervene on the South's behalf in order to restore trade. The South also thought the withholding of cotton would cripple the North's foreign trade ability since cotton was obviously the premiere American export. However, King Cotton diplomacy failed. There was an initial surplus of cotton in England and France in 1861 and by the time they needed additional cotton, the North had effectively implemented the blockade of the South. In addition, the North was able to make up her export revenue by replacing the loss of the South's cotton with increased exports of wheat. England was able to offset her loss of textile revenue from the loss of cotton imports by selling arms to both sides. Furthermore, nations such as China, Egypt, Brazil, and India also began to export cotton to Europe in place of the South.¹ The net result was a dismal economic atmosphere for the South by 1863.

In addition, the results summarized above were basically the external factors that affected the Confederacy—there were also numerous internal factors resulting from government fiscal policies that were, at best, questionable. The Confederate government was unwilling to tax its people and relied on increasingly worthless issues of paper money. Government agents seized personal property for the use of the military and failed to compensate the citizenry at fair market values. Government leaders made no arrangements for the centralized control of manufacturing output and transportation schedules to support the war effort. Some critics have noted that the Confederacy “died of Democracy” because “the Southern people insisted upon retaining their democratic liberties in wartime”² instead of making the necessary self sacrifices.

In terms of the economic instrument of power, the North was not without its problems. "Poverty was widespread and becoming more so among laborers in large cities with a substantial immigrant population. New York packed an immense populace of the poor into noisome tenements, giving the city a death rate nearly twice as high as London."³ However, in summarizing the economic situation in 1863, at least two things become apparent. First, an army requires money to raise it, organize it, field it, and then supply it. The Federals were able to do this much more effectively. The Union Armies in 1863, both in the East and the West, were usually well fed, well clothed, and well supplied. "The Confederate Army was poorly clothed and miserably fed."⁴ Secondly, the civilian populace in the South was feeling the economic strains of the war in 1863 more greatly than its Northern counterparts. The war was being fought in the South and the citizenry there was paying the price in blood, loss of income, disruption of day-to-day life in many places, and the resulting loss of morale. One particular episode in Richmond bears this out and it is relevant for the insights that it provides into the mix of factors that led to the South's decision to conduct the invasion into Pennsylvania.

A seemingly contradictory account of the South's dismal economic conditions in 1863 was that upon successfully crossing the Mississippi River below Vicksburg and into central Mississippi, General Grant reported his surprise at seeing fields full with harvest and fat cattle grazing in the pastures.⁵ Unfortunately, for the South, this was not an accurate picture of what was occurring elsewhere in the majority of the Confederacy and the aforementioned occurrence in Richmond is instructive for the insight that it provides on the things that must have weighed upon the minds of Davis, Lee, and others in the spring of 1863.

“On April 2, 1863, a shattering event occurred in Richmond but, for the sake of morale on the Confederate home front, no newspaper reported it.”⁶ The non-reported event was a “bread riot.” The notes from a personal diary of a Richmond resident report that the day started off with a gathering of over one hundred women and boys who met in the Capitol Square, complaining that they were hungry and must have food. The number of people involved quickly grew to over one thousand and although the mob seems to have maintained some sense of order, it pillaged everything in sight, including not only foodstuffs but silk, jewelry, and other items. The affair ended when President Davis climbed on a market cart and implored the crowd to cease the looting. “The ‘bread riots’ in Richmond were not an isolated incident; similar outbreaks occurred in Augusta, Columbus, and Milledgeville, Georgia, in Salisbury, North Carolina, and in Mobile, Alabama. The turmoil in Richmond occurred just six weeks before Lee’s arrival to discuss the Vicksburg problem and he surely was aware of that event , which drove home the painful reality of the Confederacy’s increasing inability to feed its people and its armies in the field. What Grant saw in Mississippi was not the case in the heart of Dixie Alabama, Georgia, and Virginia. More importantly, for Robert E. Lee, the heart of Dixie was Virginia and Virginia alone. He was a Virginian first and a Southerner second, and Virginia was bearing the brunt of the devastation of war.

Political

Numerous works have been devoted to the political ramifications of the war, but two specific items stand out as critical to the strategic environment of 1863 the growing peace movement in the North and Lincoln’s issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. A

rather detailed examination would be required to analyze the various political party factions at work during the war. However, for purposes of this discussion, the primary focus will revolve around the two major parties (Democrat and Republican) and the two opposing stances that appeared within each party with respect to Northern politics and ensuing public opinion on the war effort. The Republican Party of President Lincoln was split between Radicals and Conservatives. The Radicals favored the abolishment of slavery suddenly and violently and the consequential restoration of the Union only on that premise. The Conservatives wanted to see an end to slavery, but they were more willing to take a gradual approach and were more concerned with restoration of the Union first. During the election of 1860, the Democratic Party had split between Northern Democrats and Southern Democrats. The war removed the Southern Democrats from national politics and the remnants of the Democratic Party splintered into war and peace factions.

The significance of those factions in 1863 was that the “Peace Democrats” were beginning to gain momentum in their opposition to Lincoln’s prosecution of the war. Democrats had made significant gains in the Congressional elections of November 1862 and the general perception, especially in the South, was that the Northern peace movement was gaining in popularity in 1863 and that Lincoln was facing certain defeat in the approaching Presidential election of 1864. Lee wrote to Jefferson Davis on several occasions that everything possible should be done on the part of the Confederacy to encourage the peace movement in the North. In addition, surely the thought that a negotiated settlement would be possible after the anticipated Democratic victory in 1864 was a prevalent one among the Southern leadership. The issue of the impact of the peace movement upon the decision to conduct a military invasion into Pennsylvania will be

addressed in both the **information** sub-section of this chapter and in the concluding chapter. Suffice it to say for now, it must have been at the forefront of considerations while the Southern War Cabinet was making the national policy and military strategy decisions of 1863.

The other most significant political event of late 1862 and early 1863 was the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. This document has a storied history and was the cause of much preliminary debate. Most historians agree that Lincoln's primary concern in prosecuting the war was to restore the Union, but there was constant pressure from abolitionists to take action against slavery. Lincoln had the foresight to know that the issue would involve much more than just the freeing of slaves. The larger social issue of total and equal political and social equality loomed and "he knew that the great mass of white people would not consent." ⁷ Thus, his seemingly justified hesitance to directly involve the issue of slavery as a basis for the war.

Four major considerations seem to have kept Lincoln from pursuing the slavery issue earlier: (1) there was strong racial prejudice in the North, (2) he did not want to alienate the loyal slave-holding border states, (3) he believed in a program of gradual state voluntary emancipation with monetary compensation for slaveholders, and (4) the issue was not one of military necessity. It was only when the issue did become one of military necessity that Lincoln deemed it time to act.

The year 1862 had begun with promise for the North as New Orleans fell and Grant was able to take Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, forcing the Confederates out of Kentucky and half of Tennessee. However, Grant was later surprised at Shiloh in a bloody fight, and Lee had repelled the Union from the front door of Richmond during the Seven Days

battles that summer. “The war effort was flagging, perhaps failing.” Immediately after the Seven Days, Lincoln called upon the states for 300,000 additional volunteers, but they answered with only 90,000. The voice of the abolitionists was now louder. They pointed out that slavery “was contributing nearly all the subsistence by which the enemy in arms was supported; it built the greater part of their fortifications; it dug the greater number of trenches; it alone enabled nearly all the able-bodied whites to join the Confederate army, &c.”⁸ In addition, Lincoln was also aware of the attitude of Europe, especially England, in terms of anti-slavery sentiment. In discussions with one of his ministers in Europe, Lincoln stated that he could not imagine the possibility of European intervention on the South’s behalf if it were to become clear that the Union stood for freedom and the Confederacy stood for slavery. This is a prime example of how various internal and external factors add to the complexity of strategic policymaking Lincoln’s internal political decisions were also subject to the influence and pressure of foreign diplomatic considerations.

Lincoln had decided to issue the proclamation by mid July 1862, but he wanted to do so on the heels of military success so as to avert the appearance of desperation on the Union’s part. He had to wait until Lee was turned back at Antietam in late September. The proclamation was a preliminary one to the formal document that would take effect on January 1, 1863.⁹ The issuance of the preliminary document late in September met with predictable results it was controversial to say the least. It did not gain the total support of abolitionists because it did not declare all slaves to be free. It “alienated moderate Republicans and war Democrats” because they thought the verbiage in effect conceded slavery as the most important war issue as opposed to restoration of the Union. It put

more political ammunition into the hands of the opposition (peace) Democrats because it also contained verbiage that could easily be construed as a preliminary basis for a negotiated settlement on the issue of slavery in order to end the war. It also had no immediate effect in England. The English public scorned the contents, as did the abolitionists, on the basis that it only freed the slaves of the Confederate states and did not address the status of those in the loyal slave-holding states. As the *London Spectator* put it, “The principle is not that a human being cannot justly own another, but that he cannot own him unless he is loyal to the United States.”

As with all issues, however, the proclamation was rather Newtonian in nature for each action there is an equal and opposite reaction. While skeptics at home and abroad criticized the proclamation, Lincoln’s pronouncement “seized on the popular imagination.” It won important endorsements, including those of the *New York Times* and a group of Northern governors. It also found enthusiastic support on the part of the race that was the subject of all the fuss—the African Americans. It was not that there was a massive uprising and exodus into freedom, but the news of the proclamation “encouraged slaves to become restive, to refuse to work, and to steal within Union lines when armies advanced into their sections.” Blacks also enlisted in growing numbers after January 1, 1863. Lincoln wrote to a critic later that year that some of his most important field commanders were reporting that the “emancipation policy, and the use of colored troops, constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion.”¹⁰ In the end, the impact of the proclamation would have a devastating effect on the manpower of the Confederacy as opposed to the enormous boost it gave the Union.

There were many factors at work in the strategic environment of 1863 with regard to politics and diplomacy. It can be seen that certainly two of the most critical were the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the Southern hope for a continuance of the Northern peace movement. In these two areas another Newtonian aura existed - one was crippling in terms of its impact on the Southern war machine and the other provided a light, flickering unknown in the distance, that victory might still be possible if the right combination of military success and political pressure could merge at some decisive point in the not so distant future.

Military

The military situation in 1863 did not bode well for the Confederacy. Manpower was an increasingly crucial problem. At the start of the year, the decline of available Southern manpower was becoming an obvious factor to deal with in war planning from Richmond, but it was arguably counterbalanced by the psychological impact of the perceived invincibility of General Robert E. Lee. The issue of manpower will be addressed first before turning to Lee.

Manpower strength accounting in the Civil War is one of the more hazardous endeavors in any study, but a general framework is necessary to understand the events of 1863. One source reports the total Union strength on January 1, 1863 as 918,200 of which 547,600, or roughly 60%, were present for duty. The Southern total for the same date was 446,600 of which 272,500, or roughly 61%, were available for duty.¹¹ The Union thus outnumbered the South by a 2:1 ratio at the beginning of 1863. But that numerical imbalance did not loom as a strategically decisive factor or a source of great

distress for the Confederate government at that juncture. After all, it was nothing new and the South had managed to do rather well in spite of it since the outbreak of the war in 1861. The more pressing question was whether or not the South could continue to replace the heavy losses it was sustaining in major battles. The answer is that it could not.

The South refused to use slaves in any manner until it was virtually too late in 1865. Consequently, the white male population was the only pool from which to draw recruits and it only numbered approximately 6 million as compared to almost 22,000,000 in the North.¹² The best estimate available is that 900,000 Southerners served a full three-year enlistment during the war as opposed to 1,500,000 men who served an equal term in the Union army. The 900,000 Confederate soldiers represented a larger percentage of the total Southern population than the Union troops did of the Northern population, but the North still had the larger numbers and, more importantly, was able to continue to replace casualties whereas the South was not. The South already had suffered 150,323 total casualties (killed, wounded, and missing) by the end of 1862 as opposed to 146,493 for the Union.¹³

The South thus faced an overall 2:1 manpower disadvantage, but was suffering casualties at the same rate (1:1) as the Union. Such a conclusion and the supporting figures attest to what in fact actually happened in terms of manpower - a simple war of attrition.¹⁴ The most telling fact in support of the effect of attrition is that by the spring of 1865, blacks alone serving in the Union army equaled the number of Confederate infantry.¹⁵

“The faster ones own reserves have shrunk in relation to the enemy’s, the more it has cost to maintain the balance.”¹⁶ Clausewitz’s maxim, unknown in America at the time, is

extremely indicative of the Confederate problem and there is little room for doubt that the problem of attrition weighed heavily on the minds of Lee and the Confederate War Cabinet as he traveled to Richmond in May 1863 to discuss the Vicksburg problem. Indeed he had brought the problem of manpower to Secretary of War Seddon's attention earlier that year and shortly after the Richmond conclave, Lee wrote to Jefferson Davis lamenting the North's advantage in "numbers, resources, and all the means and appliances for carrying on the war." The South would have to "carefully measure and husband" its military assets, Lee emphasized, because "our resources in men are constantly diminishing, and the *disproportion in this respect between us and our enemies* is steadily augmenting."¹⁷

One important military factor that gave Confederate leaders ground for optimism was leadership. The man summoned to Richmond for strategic consultation was no ordinary general. This was the son of a revolutionary war hero. This was a Mexican War hero in his own right. This was a former superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point. More importantly, this was the recent victor against all odds at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. This was Robert E. Lee. Much has been written about the South's best known and most beloved son, but disregarding whatever element of myth that surrounds him, what is fact is that he enjoyed enormous prestige and exercised great influence on Confederate strategy.

Lee was well respected within the United States Army at the outbreak of the war. He had recently served with the Second Cavalry in Texas as a lieutenant colonel and had been in charge of the federal force that had captured John Brown in his attempt to capture the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry in 1859. Lee was so highly regarded that Lincoln had

offered him command of the Union army, but Lee resigned his commission in order to serve his native Virginia. Appointed a general in the Confederate army, he served in various functions in the defense of Virginia and the Atlantic coast until he became military advisor to President Davis in March 1862. After Joseph Johnston was wounded in May of that year, Lee took over command of the main Confederate army in Virginia and his place in American history began to unfold.

In June 1862, he drove Union forces away from Richmond in the Seven Days' Battles. In August, he won again at Second Bull Run and chased the Union army to the defenses of Washington. He followed this up with an invasion of Maryland in September. The Maryland campaign culminated in the Battle of Antietam, the single bloodiest day of the entire war. Most historians call this battle a draw and some call it a tactical victory for Lee in that he struck the last blow of the battle by sending General AP Hill against the flank of Union General Burnside and ending initial Union advances. The South lost 10,000 men compared to Union losses of 13,000. It caused Lee to withdraw, but the fact remained that he was still undefeated at the tactical level on the field of battle. Union forces then attacked Lee at Fredericksburg in December 1862 with almost a 2:1 force advantage, but he made them pay with over a 2:1 ratio in casualties from his prepared defensive positions. Lee won again at Chancellorsville in April 1863, although he lost 13,000 men compared to Union casualties of 17,000. Lee was thus an undefeated general as of the spring of 1863. In most cases, he had sustained only slightly less losses as the Union in terms of the total casualty count, but he nonetheless arrived for discussions in Richmond in May, 1863 as a victor. More importantly, he arrived with a reputation of winning in the face of overwhelming odds. As he arrived in Richmond, it seemed that the

odds were definitely stacked against the Confederacy in its attempt to hold Vicksburg. What better person to suggest a course of action in the face of impending doom than Robert E. Lee?

Information

The use of information as an instrument of power only recently has received the formal recognition of the significance it plays in military affairs. Current awareness of this particular instrument is due in large part to the global rise of “information age” technology and newly developed war fighting doctrinal concepts, such as “information dominance,” that have appeared since the close of the Gulf War in 1991. This new information age includes what many analysts and writers refer to as the “CNN factor” in deference to the global impact of modern mass media. Although advances in technology have changed the speed and the scope with which news and information are presented to the public, late nineteenth century newspapers cannot be overlooked for their potential impact on public opinion and governmental decision making in 1863.

Information, whether defined as an instrument of power or a tool of war, is arguably the most critical element in evaluating decision making. Information can be controlled, it can be manipulated, and it can be exploited. Three areas are significant for this study: 1) the use of censorship in both North and South, 2) the fact that General Lee was an avid reader of Northern newspapers, and 3) the numerous Northern newspaper accounts of the growing peace movement in 1863.

No single source document, to my knowledge, covers the use of censorship by both governments during the Civil War. However, accurate assumptions are attainable by

piecing various statements together. One source states “In this, as in all wars, more went on than met the average eye; and in the North as well as in the South censorship was employed to keep from the home front the seamy side of governmental activities.”¹⁸ A more telling statement comes from a source that quotes General Grant in his own memoirs as having ‘always admired the South...for the boldness with which they silenced all opposition and all croaking, by press or by individuals, within their control.’¹⁹ This statement implies that, at least from Grant’s personal perspective, the South was relatively successful in their censorship efforts as opposed to Northern efforts. The major point in addressing censorship is not necessarily the South’s success but rather some of the North’s difficulty with it and the possible relationship of that fact to Lee’s readings of the Northern papers.

Censorship in the North basically became a hot and decisive issue in reference to First Amendment rights and freedom of the press. Some papers felt obliged not to criticize administration policy too harshly, but many believed it a constitutional duty to voice all opinions, whether complimentary or not, to the public. This also included reports of troop movements and strategic intents, on more than one occasion, to Lincoln’s annoyance. “Try as hard as it might, the government never succeeded in enforcing the Washington censorship to the letter. The press, both Republican and Democratic, took the position that any news of troop movements could be handled if it came from some source other than the Capital.”²⁰ This Northern difficulty in censorship of military operations certainly provides a partial explanation of why Lee was an avid reader of Northern newspapers. He could use the papers to gather not only general knowledge of political conditions, but some information of military value might be attained.

Most biographers of Lee recognize his intellectual abilities and interests, to include his habit of reading the papers.²¹ A search of the *Official Records* and Lee's own *Recollections and Letters* will easily prove the traditional claim. Lee wrote to General Thomas J. Jackson in the summer of 1862 regarding Union General Pope's movements that "the course indicated in his orders, if the newspapers report them correctly, cannot be permitted and will lead to retaliation on our part." In April, 1863 during the precise time of the Vicksburg-Gettysburg discussions, Lee wrote to General Samuel Cooper, the Confederate Adjutant and Inspector General, that "if the statements which I see in the papers are true, General Grant is withdrawing from Vicksburg, and will hardly return to his former position there this summer." He then writes to President Davis in May concerning the possible reinforcement of the Army of the Potomac for operations in Virginia. He begins his letter by stating "I judge from the tone of the Northern papers that it is the intention of the administration at Washington to re-enforce the army of General Hooker. The Chronicle, the Herald, and the World state this positively." In April, 1864 Lee again writes to Davis telling him that "the tone of the Northern papers" seem to indicate that Grant is preparing to make a move toward Richmond. Lee's own letters show an obvious trend that he heavily depended upon Northern newspapers as a source of information.²²

Lee also could learn from the Northern press that the peace movement seemed to be gathering steam. Indeed, there was a widespread perception, or hope, in the South of 1863 that Lincoln would be defeated in the 1864 election. The most prominent spokesman for the "Peace Democrats," an Ohio Congressman named Clement L. Vallandigham, had been outspoken in his advocacy of a political solution to the conflict.

All of his activities, and those of like-minded Northerners, encouraged Southern hope and seemingly constituted a vulnerability to be exploited.

After the Federal Congress adjourned on March 5, 1863, Vallandigham made a major speech in Philadelphia, followed by appearances in New York City, Albany, and several other New England cities. He returned to Ohio in April and blasted administration policy in speeches at Dayton, Hamilton, and Columbus. On May 1, Vallandigham spoke at Mount Vernon, Ohio during an all day fanfare for patriotism, democracy, the Union, and reconciliation with the South. The event received the usual press exposure. Vallandigham was arrested three days later by Union soldiers for having violated General Burnside's General Order No. 38, which prohibited any declaration of sympathy for the enemy. The incident caused a major outcry among peace supporters, and Vallandigham was put on trial as Lee traveled to Richmond in mid May. On May 16, Vallandigham was found guilty of publicly expressing sympathy for the enemy and was sentenced to imprisonment for the duration of the war. Lincoln commuted the sentence three days later and had Vallandigham released, but escorted to the South beyond Federal lines in compliance with the lesser of the two possible penalties for violation of General Order No. 38. This incident was obviously "fuel on the fire" for the Southern hopes of continuing discord among the political factions of the North. "Burnside's arrest of Vallandigham had encouraged many Confederates to believe that Lincoln and his cronies were quaking in their boots at the growing force of Copperhead opposition to the war."²³ This major political embarrassment for Lincoln, and the North in general, occurred on May 4. This was just eleven days prior to Lee's arrival in Richmond and there is no doubt that he was following developments in the North. Following the Richmond conference, he wrote

Davis urging that the South “give all the encouragement we can...to the rising peace party of the North.”²⁴ There is little doubt that Lee intended to exploit Northern political weakness as he traveled to Richmond in mid May to make recommendations on the Vicksburg problem.

So Robert E. Lee, undaunted and undefeated, returned to the Confederate capitol. He had won against overwhelming odds at Fredericksburg. He had violated several time honored maxims of war at Chancellorsville and had outfought Fighting Joe Hooker through flexibility and innovation. But the war had still taken a turn for the worse in the South. King Cotton Diplomacy had failed. Internal fiscal policies were not working. The available manpower was dwindling. Food supplies were running short. The initial expectation of a short war had vanished long ago and the hope of ultimate victory was truly in doubt. The only two bright spots were the apparent rise of the Northern peace movement and the continuing aura of invincibility surrounding Robert E. Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia. The former was a perceived enemy weakness; the latter, a friendly strength. How could the South’s strength be exploited against the North’s weakness to bring the war to a close? Robert E. Lee had a plan to do precisely that.

Notes

¹Bruce Catton, *The Civil War* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1987) 8 and notes taken from Civil War history lectures at Fort Polk, Louisiana, January - March, 1995.

²David Donald. ed. *Why the North Won the Civil War* (New York, Macmillan Publishing, 1962) 90.

³James M. McPherson. *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988) 23.

⁴Ropes and Livermore, 105.

⁵Ropes and Livermore, Vol. III, Part 2, 278. The authors cite the *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (1885) 488 and 493.

⁶Paul M. Angle and Earl Schenck Miers. *Tragic Years 1860-1865*. (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1960) Volume 1, 526.

Notes

⁷James A. Rawley. *Turning Points of the Civil War* (Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1966) 130.

⁸Rawley, 132, 133.

⁹It is interesting to note that it contained none of the five essential points of Lincoln's original plan, one of which was compensation, but the details of which are not pertinent to the present discussion.

¹⁰Rawley, 140, 142.

¹¹Ropes and Livermore, 104.

¹²Statistics obtained from Hattaway and Jones, 17.

¹³Statistics obtained from Phisterer, *Statistical Record of the Armies of the United States*. (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907) 213-215.

¹⁴Numerous supporting examples can be cited. The South suffered 11,000 total casualties at Shiloh compared with 14,000 on the Union side. Southern casualties were 8,000 as opposed to 6,000 Union losses during the Battle of Seven Pines and Fair Oaks. The Seven Days Battle saw Southern losses outweigh those of the Union by a count of 18,000 to 15,000. Data obtained from Phisterer, 213-215.

¹⁵notes from Civil War history lectures at Fort Polk, Louisiana, Jan-Mar 1995.

¹⁶Carl Von Clausewitz, edited by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. *On War* (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1989) 231.

¹⁷Lee to Seddon, January 10, 1863, in Alan T. Nolan, *Lee Considered*, 79; Lee to Jefferson Davis, June 10, 1863, in *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1880-1901, Series I, Volume 27, Part III, 881. Italics mine.

¹⁸Angle and Miers, Volume 1, 530.

¹⁹Satterlee, Scott K. 119 quoted from *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 444-445.

²⁰Robert S. Harper, *Lincoln and the Press*, (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1951) 133.

²¹Douglas S. Freeman. *Robert E. Lee*. (New York, Charles Scribner, 1940) vol. 1, 454.

²²Lee to Jackson, July 27, 1862, *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. XII, Part III, 918-919. Lee to Cooper, April 16, 1863, OR, Series I, Vol. XXV, Part II, pp. 725-726. Lee to Davis, May 11, 1863, *Ibid.*, p 791. Lee to Davis, April 6, 1864, *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee*, ed. by his son Captain Robert E. Lee (New York, Garden City Publishing, 1904) 122.

²³Angle and Miers, Vol. 2, 600.

²⁴Lee to Davis, June 10, 1863, in *Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 27, Part III, 881.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

One brief month ago we were apparently at the point of success. Lee was in Pennsylvania threatening Harrisburg, and even Philadelphia. Vicksburg seemed to laugh all Grant's efforts to scorn....Now the picture is just as somber as it was bright.. Yesterday we rode on the pinnacle of success-today absolute ruin seems to be our portion. The Confederacy totters to its destruction.

—Gen. Josiah Gorgas, CSA chief of ordnance
July 28, 1863

The primary task of this research paper and the larger original thesis document is to draw some sort of conclusion in trying to understand why the South chose to engage in a major campaign in Pennsylvania when they were faced with impending disaster at Vicksburg. In short, right or wrong aside, can we understand why they chose the Gettysburg option? The answer is yes. In this concluding section, we will examine why this is so.

The preceding chapter on the strategic environment of 1863 looked at two potential influencing factors under each of the national instruments of power in reference to the Vicksburg/Gettysburg decision. But the larger issue still remains: what did Lee and the Confederate government really hope to attain by the Gettysburg alternative and can we understand their reasoning?

The traditional explanations of what Lee hoped to achieve in Pennsylvania are aptly described in writings by Shelby Foote and Alan T. Nolan. According to Foote, Lee offered three possible results of a northern invasion: 1) possible relief of Vicksburg, 2) removal of Union forces from Virginia during the harvest season, and 3) possible decisive victory against Union forces, the ensuing capture of Washington, and then hopefully drawing foreign intervention. Alan T. Nolan's summary states "the Gettysburg justifications include the necessity to upset Federal offensive plans, avoidance of a siege (on Richmond), alleviation of supply problems in unforaged country, encouragement of the peace movement in the North, drawing the Federal army north of the Potomac, and even the relief of Vicksburg."¹ Nolan also cites authors that are proponents of the opposing schools of thought that Lee either WAS or WAS NOT seeking to become decisively engaged in Pennsylvania. This is the crux of the matter in attempting to understand the Vicksburg/Gettysburg decision.

Two major pieces of evidence would seem to imply that Lee was indeed looking to become decisively engaged. The first and most obvious is Gettysburg. The simple fact is that Lee was the attacker and not the attacked. He was not outmaneuvered. He was not outflanked. He was not turned. Lee chose a frontal assault at Gettysburg against an enemy that was well protected by dominant terrain. Why did the victor of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville seemingly ignore every common sense axiom of battlefield tactics and send Pickett charging across an open field? Surely the most plausible answer is that Lee was seeking decisive victory. Surely it was because he knew the tattered heroes of the Army of Northern Virginia could not continue a war of attrition indefinitely with the endless line of blueclad soldiers of the Army of the Potomac. Maybe they could carry the

day just one more time. Here at Gettysburg. A decisive engagement, a final battle of classic Napoleonic annihilation in an attempt to end it all.

The second piece of evidence for decisive engagement is an often overlooked letter that was sent by Davis with Vice President Alexander H. Stephens to convey to President Lincoln at just the right moment. Stephens and Lincoln had been friends and close political allies before the outbreak of the war. Stephens was instructed to carry the letter north and ask for passage into the Federal lines when the moment of opportunity came. “This letter was the peace offer. It would be laid on the White House table when Lee had shattered the Northern army somewhere beyond the Potomac.”² The only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from that event is that Davis and the Confederate War Cabinet anticipated much more from Lee’s invasion than a simple frustration of any potential Federal offensive plans or alleviation of supply problems in Virginia. No other conclusion can be drawn but that they were expecting decisive engagement with an associated victory that would provide the means for a negotiated settlement. In the face of diminishing resources and the potential loss of Vicksburg, the leadership of the Confederacy was taking a calculated risk to end the war in Pennsylvania. As Lee had written to Davis on June 10, the desired end state was to get the North to propose peace. The actual terms could be dealt with later and the South could still pursue her desire for “a distinct and independent national existence under the influence of peaceful measures...”³ But first, decisive engagement.

The constraints of a brief research paper do not allow for a formal system analysis to aid the argument that the Confederacy was seeking decisive engagement at Gettysburg. However, the possibility does exist that Warden’s five ring analysis, as currently taught at

the Air Command and Staff College, can be applied in retrospect to the Confederate decision in an attempt to better understand it. It is an available methodology that can be adapted to offer a potential explanation of the South's actions by using the five ring analysis to determine possible centers of gravity, followed by a nodal analysis to determine the actual targets within each center of gravity.

By utilizing Warden's methodology and ceding the fact that Lee did not have access to such a formal system analysis tool as the five ring approach, a case can be made that Lee would have been thinking along the lines of Lincoln, the Northern public, and the Army of the Potomac as his potential targets, or centers of gravity as they would later become known.⁴ The issue then becomes how best to effect or attack the chosen centers of gravity.

The FY97 ACSC curriculum teaches nodal analysis as a means to analyze centers of gravity in order to determine the critical node or most vulnerable element to attack. A simple Civil War example would be an army's logistic system as a potential center of gravity. The nodes, or parts, of that logistic system at a very macro level would include the actual supplies, the storage facilities, the means of transportation, and the logisticians. An often selected critical node for attack was the rail network, because of its vast impact upon the entire supply system. By following this line of thinking and using the nodal analysis approach, it is an effective tool in gaining an understanding of why the South chose the Gettysburg option. In thinking about three potential centers of gravity Lincoln, the Northern people, and the Army of the Potomac Lee would have been pondering potential critical nodes in an effort to affect those strategic targets. He would have wanted to affect such items as the press, public opinion, and the morale of the enemy

army. There are many potential critical nodes under this scenario. However, the most important node that Lee had to get at was Lincoln's ability to prosecute the war and that ability depended heavily upon the will and support of the people. Lee had to strike fear and panic in both the press and the people to get the desired results. Given the fact that he was strictly opposed to physically terrorizing the civilian populace, he had to undermine their confidence in their army's ability to protect them. He had to psychologically terrorize them. Lee was seeking a decisive engagement, of classic Napoleonic annihilation with ensuing victory. The result would be encouragement of the Northern peace movement, a very unattractive political situation for the Union president seeking re-election, possible foreign intervention on the South's behalf, and hopefully a negotiated settlement to bring the war to a close. Thus Gettysburg.

Notes

¹Nolan, p 98 "(on Richmond)" added for clarity.

²Glenn Tucker, *High Tide at Gettysburg*, (Dayton, Ohio, Morningside Bookshop, 1983), 26. Unfortunately, Tucker does not annotate the historical basis for these statements. Rudolph Von Abele's 1946 biography of Stephens casts doubt on whether Tucker's statements regarding the letter are fact or assumption. Von Abele reports that Davis did not trust Stephens and would not consent to his proposed mission as a peace envoy. Davis allowed Stephens to go North to discuss prisoner exchange as the sole issue. In addition, Stephens did not leave Richmond until July 3rd - one day before Vicksburg surrendered and Lee began his retreat from Gettysburg. Consequently, Von Abele's version does not support Tucker's claim that Stephen's' mission was a well calculated element of Lee's invasion. Von Abele annotates the *Official Records* and the *Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States* (written by Stephens) as his sources.

³*Official Records*, Series I, Vol. 27, part III, 882.

⁴Clausewitz is the creator of the center of gravity idea. According to his definition, it is a singular entity - thus "center." Warden's five ring approach contends that the possibility exists that more than one center of gravity exists thus "centers." Both methods have merit and should be applied accordingly within the strategic, operational, or tactical context in which they are being used.

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