

**THE BATTLE OF SAILOR'S CREEK: A STUDY IN LEADERSHIP**

A Thesis

by

CLOYD ALLEN SMITH JR.

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2005

Major Subject: History

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Joseph Dawson
Committee Members,	James Bradford
	Joseph Cerami
Head of Department,	Walter L. Buenger

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**ABSTRACT**

The Battle of Sailor's Creek: A Study  
in Leadership. (December 2005)

Cloyd Allen Smith Jr., B.A., Slippery  
Rock University

Chair: Dr. Joseph Dawson

The Battle of Sailor's Creek, 6 April 1865, has been overshadowed by Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House several days later, yet it is an example of the Union military war machine reaching its apex of war making ability during the Civil War. Through Ulysses S. Grant's leadership and that of his subordinates, the Union armies, specifically that of the Army of the Potomac, had been transformed into a highly motivated, organized and responsive tool of war, led by confident leaders who understood their commander's intent and were able to execute on that intent with audacious initiative in the absence of further orders. After Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia escaped from Petersburg and Richmond on 2 April 1865, Grant's forces chased after Lee's forces with the intent of destroying the mighty and once feared

protector of the Confederate States in the hopes of bringing a swift end to the long war. At Sailor's Creek, Phil Sheridan, Grant's cavalry commander was able to put his forces south and west of Lee's Army trapping it between Sheridan's cavalry and George Meade's Army of the Potomac. After fighting a brutal, close quarters engagement, Union forces captured or killed the majority of two of Lee's corps, commanded by Richard H. Anderson and Richard S. Ewell, and severely attrited a third corps under John B. Gordon, leaving Lee only James Longstreet's corps intact to continue the struggle.

To Caitlyn and Chloe

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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I owe special thanks to my wife Camile and sister Stella who proofread early versions of chapters and gave some clarity to my somewhat awkward prose.

Most of all I would like to thank my mother for her constant support throughout my life and encouragement to go after my dreams.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
II CONTRASTS IN COMMAND.....	23
III THE RETREAT: THE BEGINNING OF THE END.....	62
IV THE BATTLE: THIS IS THE END.....	106
Amelia Court House.....	106
Marshall's Crossroads.....	115
Hillsman's House.....	118
Lockett Farm.....	126
V CONCLUSION.....	147
REFERENCES.....	165
VITA.....	177

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

If someone were to mention the Civil War in a room full of Americans and ask them to recite a fact or two about the end of the war, many would list Robert E. Lee's surrender of his Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant. Others, if asked about a decisive battle during the war, might select Gettysburg, Vicksburg or Antietam. Few, if any, in response to either question would cite the Battle of Sailor's Creek on 6 April 1865.<sup>1</sup> This, the last desperate and decisive battle of the Civil War, has been all but forgotten in American history, overshadowed by the devastation in Richmond and Petersburg and even more so by Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House, Virginia, three days later.

In his memoirs, General Philip H. Sheridan, the ranking Union general at Sailor's Creek, stated that although the battle was "one of the severest conflicts of the war . . . the fight was so overshadowed by the stirring

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This thesis follows the style of *Journal of Military History*.



events of the surrender three days later, that the battle has never been accorded the prominence it deserves."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed the fog of war has obscured the historical account of the Appomattox Campaign, for even now, over a century later, the words of Brigadier General J. Warren Kiefer still hold true: "It may be strange that, under such circumstances, one of the greatest battles of the bloodiest of modern wars should be overlooked by the writers of history."<sup>3</sup>

As winter turned to spring in 1865, Union forces under Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant were preparing for the upcoming spring offensive. Southern military leaders thinking about the approaching warm spring weather and the renewed clashes it would bring with Grant's massive war machine were contemplating how they were going to survive.

Confederate officers focused on efforts to keep the hungry and desperate men in their ranks from deserting and devoted a number of infantry and cavalry units toward the sole purpose of policing up the deserters.<sup>4</sup> In *Lee's Miserables*, historian J. Tracey Power contends that above the continuous casualties from disease and federal bullets, desertion was "a constant drain on the army's effective strength and [was] never more so than during the last year

of the war."<sup>5</sup> In Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, many units came from outside the state. Regiments from Georgia, Alabama, Texas, Mississippi, South Carolina, and North Carolina made up a large portion of Lee's army.<sup>6</sup> Beyond the normal concerns of hunger and fear of being killed, soldiers from these regiments deserted in large numbers to go and protect their homes against William Tecumseh Sherman's punitive march across Georgia and into the Carolinas. Colonel Archer Anderson, assigned by the Secretary of War to inspect conscript service outside of Richmond, wrote that the Army of Northern Virginia "was demoralized, not by the enemy in its front, but by the enemy in Georgia and the Carolinas."<sup>7</sup> Many family members encouraged their men in correspondence to desert and come home.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the previous winter, Lee's army was further reduced when state governors called on Lee to return some of their state regiments to defend against Sherman's invasion. The Confederate commander sent several of his best units including a division and brigade of infantry and more importantly a division of cavalry to North and South Carolina to help defend against Sherman's onslaught. In December 1865, Lee sent Major General Robert Hokes'

division to North Carolina. The following January, Brigadier General James Conner's Brigade, from Major General Joseph Kershaw's Division, followed. Many considered Conner's brigade, once commanded by Kershaw himself, the finest in the Army of Northern Virginia, and a significant loss to Lee's combat strength. The following month, Lee ordered Major General Matthew Butler's cavalry division to South Carolina.<sup>9</sup> Despite Lee's efforts to appease the leadership of the states that Sherman invaded, many Southerners still hurled criticism at the Confederate government for abandoning the defense of its Southern states. Governor Joe Brown of Georgia declared that his state "was abandoned to her fate neglected by Confederate authorities and while her Army of able bodied Sons were held for [defense] of other States. . . . Georgia was compelled to rely upon a few old men and boys."<sup>10</sup> Lee spread his remaining forces in a thin defensive line around Petersburg and Richmond, defending the capital—the symbol of the Confederacy.

Some within the South proposed the drastic solution of recruiting slaves into the ranks to solve their shortage of soldiers. As early as September 1864, General Lee, responding to the mounting pressure of defending an ever-

increasing line against the Union envelopment, wrote to President Davis to recommend that slaves be used in the ranks to relieve able-bodied white men currently being employed as "teamsters, cooks, mechanics, and laborers."<sup>11</sup> That same month Lee wrote Confederate Secretary of War, James A. Seddon, requesting immediately "five thousand Negroes for thirty days to labor on the fortifications."<sup>12</sup> By March 1865, the Confederate Congress, unable to ignore the shortage of manpower within the Confederate army, passed a law supported by Davis himself, allowing for the recruitment of former slaves into the ranks.<sup>13</sup> Once again, Lee wrote to Davis requesting immediate implementation of the new law.<sup>14</sup> What relief the new law had in manpower is questionable; at Sailor's Creek there were no Confederate colored units, but its passage clearly indicated the desperate shortage of soldiers in the Confederacy. Indeed, historian Bruce Catton is right when he states, "here was the final confession that the foundations upon which the Confederacy had been built were being destroyed."<sup>15</sup>

As early as June of 1864, Lee told General Jubal Early, that, "we must destroy this army of Grant's before it gets to [the] James River. If he gets there, it will become a siege and then it will be a mere question of

time."<sup>16</sup> By early spring of 1865, Lee realized that it was just a matter of time before Grant's forces would envelop his army. In a letter dated 22 February 1865, Lee wrote to the newly appointed Secretary of War, John C. Breckinridge, "Grant, I think, is now preparing to draw out by his left with the intention of enveloping me. He may wait till his other columns approach nearer, or he may be preparing to anticipate my withdrawal."<sup>17</sup> On 4 March, Lee informed President Davis that it was not if, but when he would have to abandon the defenses.<sup>18</sup>

On 25 March, Lee attempted to retake the initiative and relieve the pressure on his lines by attacking the extreme right of the Federal defenses southeast of Petersburg. At the recommendation of General John B. Gordon, Lee ordered a daring night assault on Union held Fort Stedman.<sup>19</sup> Gordon's men, wielding axes and marked by white scarves to prevent fratricide during the close quarters night fighting, successfully infiltrated Federal pickets and were initially successful in taking the fort.<sup>20</sup> However, the weakness of the Confederate forces proved a fatal factor when Lee was unable to support Gordon's breakthrough of the Union lines.<sup>21</sup> Gordon acknowledged that the assault was the "last supreme effort to break the hold

of General Grant. . . . [and] was the expiring struggle of the Confederate giant, whose strength was nearly exhausted and whose limbs were heavily shackled by the most onerous conditions."<sup>22</sup> Lee might not have shown his men that defeat was inevitable, but his sons, upon seeing him riding back to headquarters from the failed assault, noticed "the sadness of his face."<sup>23</sup> For Lee knew that his last valiant, but desperate effort to break the Union siege had failed and that any further delay in his retreat from the area of operations meant certain defeat and capture of his beloved Army of Northern Virginia. On 26 March, Lee wrote to Davis stating that the attack on Fort Stedman had failed and he did not "deem it prudent that this army should maintain its position until [Sherman] shall approach too near."<sup>24</sup>

Unlike his Confederate counterpart, who was unable to regain the units he sent south, Grant got a refreshing reinforcement in both leadership and mobility when General Philip Sheridan's Army of Shenandoah returned to the Richmond-Petersburg area of operations.<sup>25</sup> Most notably, Sheridan brought with him a cavalry corps that would be instrumental in the following month. Grant used this to his advantage by ordering Sheridan to attack on 29 March, in the area of Five Forks. By taking control of the South

Side Railroad Grant cut off Lee's final line of supply into Petersburg.<sup>26</sup> A combination of Union resolve and failures in Confederate leadership led to a Union tactical victory. Sheridan, with a clear understanding of his commander's intent, pushed both his cavalry and the supporting infantry relentlessly, not only to cut the Confederate supply lines, but also to capture as many Confederates as he could during the two days of fighting. The Union victory forced Lee to abandon his lines. His only hope was to attempt to link up with Joe Johnston's Army of Tennessee in order to combat General Grant's armies one at a time to level the numerical superiority the Union had over the Confederacy.<sup>27</sup>

After retreating from Richmond and Petersburg, Lee marched his army day and night through thick muddy backcountry Virginia roads in an attempt to reach Danville, Virginia, where he could then move south to link up with Johnston's army. Union forces reached Jetersville first, blocking Lee's route to Danville, forcing him to change his march objective to Lynchburg. Repeated flanking attacks by Federal cavalry and constant rear guard pressure from Union infantry caused Lee's forces to spread out so far on the retreat that the once grand Southern corps failed to support each other and Union cavalry and infantry attrited

or destroyed them piecemeal in three separate engagements, collectively known as Sailor's Creek.

Despite the extreme conditions, tenacious fighting, large capture of both soldiers and leaders, and the direct effect that Sailor's Creek brought to the dissolution of the Confederacy, the events of 6 April have received little scholarly attention in the 50,000 volumes and thousands of articles that have been written on the Civil War. Works dealing with the Appomattox Campaign devote anywhere from a couple of pages to a chapter in describing the battle. Most of these books give a limited description of the events that unfolded that day and mainly focus on the human drama of the battle. The authors write about the desperation of the half-starved Confederate soldiers who fought doggedly along that swampy river constantly referring to the day as "Black Thursday" or "Black day of the Army."<sup>28</sup>

Two books and three modern magazine articles have been written on the battle. The first article is by retired Colonel Joseph B. Mitchell, author of *Decisive Battles in the Civil War*, entitled "Sayler's Creek." Mitchell seems to be the first historian to give credit to the Union troops for catching Lee's army and posits that if Gordon



had not chosen an alternate route he would have experienced the same fate as Ewell's Corps. Mitchell concludes that if it had not been Sailor's Creek, a crushing blow would have happened somewhere else along the route of retreat.<sup>29</sup> The second article, "Hurtling Toward the End," written by Chris Calkins is the first to identify the three different engagements around Sailor's Creek as all part of the same battle. Mitchell neglects the Marshall's Crossroads engagement even though it was less than a mile from the creek and a critical factor in Ewell's surrender. Calkins argues that Sailor's Creek "Shattered [Lee's] force beyond repair."<sup>30</sup> The third article, "Black Thursday for Rebels," by Gary Glynn, glorifies the rebel fight and fails to give proper credit to Union leadership. In referring to Grant and General George Gordon Meade, Glynn argues, "neither man had much influence on unfolding events."<sup>31</sup> All three authors limited themselves to narration with little analysis.

Most literature on the Appomattox campaign depicts the valiant efforts of the smaller Confederate force against overwhelming Union superiority in manpower and equipment. The Southern Historical Society, led by Confederate General Jubal Early, the first president of the organization, set

the tone for writings on the Civil War.<sup>32</sup> Early, unlike many of his comrades in arms, never seemed to accept the Confederacy's defeat. Historian William Marvel points out that the initial impetus for such historiography came from the Southern Confederate historian Edward A. Pollard.<sup>33</sup> In his book, *The Lost Cause*, Pollard depicts the heroic struggle of Confederate perseverance and courage against the Union's overwhelming force.<sup>34</sup> By concentrating on Confederate memoirs and not analyzing the facts, many historians have fallen into the trap of failing to point out weaknesses in the Confederate efforts. Marvel argues that this comes from "the perceived infallibility of Lee."<sup>35</sup> The first to question earlier myths was Chris Calkins who by searching the ground and researching the parole records has more accurately listed Confederate numbers as well as reduced the importance of the repeating rifle used against Lee's forces as a critical factor to their success.<sup>36</sup>

Two authors have published books dedicated to the topic. Greg Eanes argues that the "defeat of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia at . . . Sailor's Creek hastened the end of the war."<sup>37</sup> Eanes uses quotations ranging from Confederate privates to General Lee to support his thesis. His book provides a good narrative summary of

the battles at Sailor's Creek. Even though he cites limited Union primary sources and appears objective in his analysis, he is neither critical of Confederate failures nor does he give credit to Northern commanders for their successes. He glorifies the Confederate soldiers in the battle and virtually ignores the efforts of those Union soldiers who fought with tenacity and courage that day. Identifying his leanings up front, Eanes starts out his work with a poem that reads, "The Confederate Soldiers were our kinfolk and our heroes" and "We commemorate their valor and devotion."<sup>38</sup> He also fails to point out known mistakes and exaggerations in some of the Confederate reports. Most of his mistakes in this area come from citing Confederate memoirs that discuss force ratio numbers. Eanes attempts to evaluate the battle using the principles of war, but confuses military terms like objective, task and mass in his analysis.

More recently, journalist Derek Smith wrote *Lee's Last Stand: Sailor's Creek Virginia, 1865*. Smith writes a balanced account of the battle that adds some features that Eanes did not include. Smith's thesis is that the Battle of Sailor's Creek, despite being overlooked by many Civil War historians, was "the coup de grace to General Robert E.

Lee's Rebel army, setting it on a virtual funeral procession to Appomattox Court House where Lee surrendered three days later."<sup>39</sup> Despite several new accounts that Smith adds to his description of the battle that Eanes left out, the journalist provides little analysis of the battle or the events leading up to it.

Two other authors wrote notable accounts. Burke Davis in *To Appomattox: Nine Days in April* presents the most evocative description of not only the battle, but also the impoverished and morose conditions facing both the soldiers and citizens of Richmond and Petersburg.<sup>40</sup> Despite his unmatched writing skills, there is no analysis of the conditions. Instead, Davis chose to tell a story of the events. Only one author, William Marvel, in *Lee's Last Retreat*, has attacked the historiography on the Appomattox Campaign, but even he fails to give appropriate credit to the audacity, vision and leadership abilities of Union officers for their victory at Sailor's Creek.

Starting with Charles Ramsdell's presentation at the American Historical Association in 1924, many authors have written about morale within the Confederacy being a critical factor in ending the war.<sup>41</sup> In 1937, Charles Wesley followed Ramsdell's lead and argued that the

"turning points in Southern morale" started in 1863. He continued, "the last six months of the Confederacy, so far as the populace was concerned, were a sham. The will to fight had been broken."<sup>42</sup> Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William Still Jr., also address this phenomenon in their book *The Why the South Lost the Civil War*. They argue that, "the defeats, shortages, reduced standard of living, and change of war goals, as well as the war's length . . . placed a severe strain on the Confederates' dedication to their cause."<sup>43</sup> They contend that in the end, the Confederate soldiers "did not want an independent Confederacy badly enough to continue the struggle, and they placed the welfare of their loved ones ahead of the creation of a new nation."<sup>44</sup> An examination of the effects of the morale of the men based on both imminent battlefield dangers and the lack of support from their home front will factor into the overall analysis of the battle.

Although biographers have contributed to the historiography of the Appomattox Campaign, the work of Douglas Southall Freeman on Robert E. Lee has by far the most detailed account of the campaign and even more importantly attempts to analyze the psyche of Lee in those

final days of the Confederacy. Through Lee's discussions with subordinate leaders and his dispatches to the Confederate President and the War Department, Freeman depicts Lee's consternation at realizing the inevitability of a difficult retreat out of the capital. Freeman also gives detailed analysis of the Confederate resupply fiasco at Amelia Court House. Like most other biographers, however, Freeman adheres closely to the viewpoint of Lee and therefore, he leaves out details about Union decisions and even subordinate Confederate decisions.<sup>45</sup>

One other author, although he did not write on Sailor's Creek, accurately points out the impetus behind the lopsided Union Victory. Russell Weigley, in his book *The American Way of War*, argues that "the Civil War tended to fix the American image of war," in that "the complete overthrow of the enemy, the desertion of his military power, is the object of war."<sup>46</sup> Although criticized by historian Brian Linn for attempting to cover all post Civil War American wars under the general definition of "annihilation," Weigley's thesis is still significant in understanding Grant's strategy, which in turn led to the Battle of Sailor's Creek.<sup>47</sup> Weigley, in describing the Shenandoah Campaign, states that Grant instructed Sheridan

"to put himself south of the enemy and follow him to his death."<sup>48</sup> Despite the fact that the Shenandoah Campaign depicts Grant's strategy executed brilliantly by Sheridan, the outcome came not from a constant assault of Union forces, but from a failed attack by Jubal Early's forces at Cedar Creek.<sup>49</sup> One can find a better example of Grant's strategy of annihilation in the Appomattox Campaign where the apex of the successful strategy occurred at Sailor's Creek.

This thesis will take a fresh look at the Battle of Sailor's Creek, examining the multiple factors that led to such a lopsided result. In studying any battle, there are always predicated factors that are necessary to identify if one hopes get a full understanding. Leadership, morale of the men, support from the home front, supply, and reinforcement of the fighting units are all significant factors in determining the reasons for success or failure of a particular unit in combat. Official reports, messages, correspondence, and other documents of the most significant officers are the critical sources. These can be found mainly in the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*. They are supplemented from several other edited collections of documents and letters and materials from the

National Archives. Memoirs, while often self serving of the authors, also form a key set of references. Many of the veterans on both sides left significant memoirs and recollections. Selected newspapers of 1865 will provide contemporary flavor. Several collections were consulted at the Virginia Historical Society, yielding some helpful details. A wide variety of biographies and other secondary works will be used to assist in evaluating the leaders and morale of both armies.

This thesis will address a number of questions. What key factors led to the capture of so many of the Confederate forces at Sailor's Creek? What leadership failures and successes were important in determining the outcome of the battle? Why was General John B. Gordon's Corps, decimated after the earlier assault on Fort Stedman, and assigned to conduct a rear guard action the entire day, able to escape capture while Union forces were able to virtually annihilate General Anderson's Corps and completely capture General Ewell's Corps? What Union factors led to an unprecedented increased morale and audacity to chase down and capture the fleeing Confederate Army? Does Russell Weigley's thesis help explain the



Union tactical outcome of the battle based on the strategic importance of destroying their enemy?

This study will begin with an initial examination of the main leaders on both sides. This foundation will give the reader a clear understanding of the leaders who played a significant role. After examining officers on both sides, the conditions within Richmond that factored into the morale of the leaders and the soldiers will be considered. I will analyze the events leading up to the battle beginning with the Battle of Five Forks on 1 April 1865. That battle turned Lee's flank and cut his supply lines into the two cities of Richmond and Petersburg, forcing him to abandon his fixed defenses and retreat towards Danville. This was his army's last movement and several of the events along the way were critical in the development and outcome of the battle that took place at Sailor's Creek five days later. The actions of the selected leaders during the three different engagements will be discussed. The conclusion of this thesis will sum up the critical factors that led to Union victory.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Sailor's Creek is a tributary that runs south from the Appomattox River. A mile up the creek the tributary branches into two separate creeks, Big and Little Sailor's Creeks. Although most historians refer to the battle as having taken place on Sailor's Creek, it would be a correction to note that all three engagements of the battle took place along Little Sailor's Creek. Lee observed Anderson's Corps routed and retreating toward Farmville at an overlook along Big Sailor's Creek to the west of Little Sailor's Creek. In the interest of brevity, I will refer to the battle throughout the thesis as Sailor's Creek.

<sup>2</sup> Philip H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan: General United States Army*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1888), 2: 180-81.

<sup>3</sup> J. W. Kiefer, quoted in Greg Eanes, *Black Day of the Army: April 6, 1865, The Battles of Sailor's Creek* (Burkeville, Va. E&H Publishing Co., 2001), 8.

<sup>4</sup> John S. Wise, *The End of an Era* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1902), 384-91.

<sup>5</sup> Tracy J. Power, *Lee's Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 300.

<sup>6</sup> Ray F. Sibley, *The Confederate Order of Battle*, vol. 1 *The Army of Northern Virginia* (Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane Publishing Co., 1996), 1: 200-17.

<sup>7</sup> War Department, *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 Parts in 70 Volumes, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series 1, Volume 46: 1205; quotation in Robert E. Lee Jr., *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (1904; reprint, Old Saybrook, Conn.: Konecky & Konecky, n.d.), 149.

<sup>8</sup> Power, *Lee's Miserables*, 303-07.

<sup>9</sup> Sibley, *The Confederate Order of Battle* 172,182; Peter Carmichael, ed., *Audacity Personified: The Generalship of Robert E. Lee* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 137.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A. to Jefferson Davis and the War*

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*Department of the Confederate States of America, 1862-1865* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1957), 341.

<sup>11</sup> Clifford Dowdey and Louis Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1961), 847-50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 853-54.

<sup>13</sup> Burton J. Hendrick, *Statesmen of the Lost Cause: Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1939), 5.

<sup>14</sup> Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 914.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Catton, *Reflections on the Civil War* (New York: Promontory Press, 1981), 119.

<sup>16</sup> Lee, quoted in Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 3: 398.

<sup>17</sup> Quote in Lee, *Recollections and Letters of Robert E. Lee*, 145-46; Patricia Faust, ed., *Historical Times Encyclopedia of the Civil War* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 78, 665. Seddon resigned from his position as Secretary of War.

<sup>18</sup> Carmichael, ed., *Audacity Personified*, 147.

<sup>19</sup> John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 403-05; Ralph Lowell Eckert, *John Brown Gordon: Soldier, Southerner, American* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 108-10; Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches*, 342. Lee stated to Davis after the failed attempt that he has not been willing to sacrifice men in such an effort but he had been "induced to assume the offensive."

<sup>20</sup> Eckert, *John Brown Gordon*, 110-13; Philip Katcher, *Civil War Source Book* (New York: Facts on File, 1992), 35.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, 395-413.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 412.

<sup>23</sup> Lee, *Recollections and Letters of Robert E. Lee*, 147.

<sup>24</sup> Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches*, 345.

<sup>25</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York: Century Co., 1895), 1: 599; Faust, ed., *Historical Times Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, 233.

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<sup>26</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 599-602.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Marshall, *An Aide-De-Camp of Lee* Edited by Frederick Maurice (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1927), 258; Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 4: 8; Eanes, *Black Day of the Army*, 9. Lee was unclear in his dispatches about how exactly he planned to link up with General Joe Johnston, but Freeman explains in his biography that Lee and Gordon talked about going to North Carolina and linking up with Johnston to fight Sherman.

<sup>28</sup> Wagner, et al., eds., *Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference*, 326; Eanes, *Black Day of the Army*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph B. Mitchell, "Sayler's Creek," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 4 (October 1965), 11, 12-13, 16.

<sup>30</sup> Chris M. Calkins, "Hurtling Toward the End," *America's Civil War* 17 (March 2004), 44.

<sup>31</sup> Gary Glynn, "Black Thursday For Rebels," *America's Civil War*, (January 1992), 24.

<sup>32</sup> Faust, ed., *Historical Times Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, 233.

<sup>33</sup> William Marvel, *Lee's Last Retreat: The Flight to Appomattox*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), x.

<sup>34</sup> Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E. B. Treat & Co., 1866), 701, 705, 707.

<sup>35</sup> Marvel, *Lee's Last Retreat*, xii.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, xi. Marvel gives Calkins credit for objectivity and more accurate force depiction; Calkins, *Appomattox Campaign*, 207-09.

<sup>37</sup> Eanes, *Black Day of the Army*, 8. Gregory Eanes, a retired military veteran and local high school and community college teacher in Burkeville, Virginia, initially produced the work for his master's thesis at the American Military University.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Derek Smith, *Lee's Last Stand: Sailor's Creek Virginia, 1865* (Shippensburg, Pa.: White Maine Books, 2004), xi.

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<sup>40</sup> Burke Davis, *To Appomattox: Nine April Days, 1865* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1959), 9-19, 239-71.

<sup>41</sup> J. Franklin Jameson, "The Meeting of the American Historical Association at Richmond," *American Historical Review* 30 (April 1925): 468; J. Cutler Andrews, "Confederate Press and Public Morale" in *Journal of Southern History* 32 (November 1966): 446-47, 453. Jameson's article cites Charles Ramsdell's unpublished manuscripts belonging to James W. Silver's private collection.

<sup>42</sup> Charles H. Wesley, *The Collapse of the Confederacy* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1937), 76, 85.

<sup>43</sup> Richard E. Beringer, Herman Hattaway, Archer Jones, and William N. Still Jr., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 434.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>45</sup> Discussion of other biographers' viewpoints will be included in later chapters.

<sup>46</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War* (1973; reprint, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), xx-xxi.

<sup>47</sup> Brian M. Linn, "American Way of War Revisited," *Journal of Military History* 66 (April 2002): 501-33.

<sup>48</sup> Weigley, *American Way of War*, 143.

<sup>49</sup> Faust, ed., *Historical Times Encyclopedia of the Civil War*, 678.

## CHAPTER II

### CONTRASTS IN COMMAND

When trying to motivate their men before a mission, brigade and division commanders often tell them that "generals don't win wars, but they can lose them. It is the men on the ground fighting the battle who win the war." However true that is, the general has to get many things right in order to ensure the opportunity for victory, not least of which is to motivate his men to fight. *Field Manual 22-100*, the Army leadership guide, gives historical examples of leadership in trying situations. From the Civil War it cites only one case, that of Colonel Joshua Chamberlain inspiring his men to make a determined stand on Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg.<sup>1</sup> In the same chapter that depicts Chamberlain's heroics, leadership is defined as the art of "influencing people--by providing purpose, direction and motivation."<sup>2</sup> Understanding this definition, one can evaluate aspects of the leadership of both armies during the events leading up to the Battle of Sailor's Creek and during the engagement itself.

Besides motivating their men, combat leaders also have to take into consideration the principles of war. These principles include Objective, Offensive, Mass, Economy of Force, Maneuver, Unity of Command, Security, Surprise and Simplicity, all factors that date back to Sun Tzu, and were deduced by Henri Jomini from his study of Frederick the Great and from his experience fighting with Napoleon Bonaparte.<sup>3</sup> Denis Hart Mahan studied these principles in France and returned to teach them at the United States Military Academy, where he served as a professor of engineering from 1832 to 1871. Mahan taught cadets the art of war based on Jomini's studies and published a book, *Outpost*, to provide further instruction in military art.<sup>4</sup> Many Civil War generals were "greatly influenced" by Mahan's instruction.<sup>5</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, who graduated in 1843, took Mahan's class entitled "Engineering and the Science of War."<sup>6</sup> Although Robert E. Lee graduated in 1829, before Mahan had started teaching at West Point, Lee may have been influenced by Mahan when Lee returned to the academy to serve as superintendent from 1852-1855. Historian Donald D. Chipman credits Lee's knowledge of Jomini's principles for Lee's success at Chancellorsville.<sup>7</sup> If fact, by the end of the war even the readers of the

Richmond newspapers knew of Jomini's principles. In a letter to the editor of the *Richmond Dispatch*, the contributor argued that academy-trained commanders were superior to volunteer commanders because of their knowledge of the principles of war.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of how they learned the basic principles of war, Grant and Lee were familiar with them, thus the degree to which each adhered to them provides a measure by which to evaluate both leaders and their subordinates' actions during the Appomattox Campaign and the Battle of Sailor's Creek.

In addition to the training and motivational abilities of the leaders involved at Sailor's Creek, another element of command was crucial in defining what historian T. Harry Williams labels as a critical trait in his study of Civil War generals--character. The level of command experience and the outcome of battles previously participated in contribute to defining the character of a commander.<sup>9</sup> The best Civil War generals possessed the ability to fight and win not only when the conditions are advantageous, but when they were the underdog as well. Therefore it is important to examine those leaders' experiences up to Sailor's Creek in order to better assess their actions in the battle itself.



As introduced in Chapter 1, the common reasons given for the Confederate defeat in the Civil War relate to factors other than leadership: most importantly the overwhelming strength in numbers of their federal opponents, the superiority of logistic support available to the Northerners, and the advantages of communications held by the North over the South. For example, historian Ezra Warner surmises that nothing could "compensate for the undiminished resources and determination of the Federals, nor the steadily waning resources at [Lee's] own command."<sup>10</sup> Historian Gary Gallagher writes that "the Army of Northern Virginia. . . . finally capitulat[ed] in the face of overwhelming Union manpower and resources."<sup>11</sup> In his farewell to his troops, Lee laid foundation for this assessment when he cited the far superior strength of Union forces as his reason for seeking terms of capitulation. Lee declared in General Orders Number 9, that "the Army of Northern Virginia has been compelled to yield to overwhelming numbers and resources."<sup>12</sup> A year later, this viewpoint appeared in *The Lost Cause*, whose author Edward Pollard wrote that "there is no doubt that this superiority in numbers had great weight," and that "the Confederates have gone out of this war, with the proud, secret,

deathless, dangerous consciousness that they are THE BETTER MEN, and that there was nothing wanting but a change in a set of circumstances . . . . to make them the victors." Pollard concluded, "but at last the unequal contest was terminated."<sup>13</sup> Although northern armies were better supplied and larger than their southern counterparts, anyone citing these as the sole decisive factors fails to take into account so many of Lee's earlier victories over more numerous and better supplied Union foes.

The war developed in such a way as to bring the two best commanders face to face for this final epic battle. The old U.S. Army was small and its officers were likely to cross paths several times during their military careers. As early as the Mexican War Grant and Lee met.<sup>14</sup> By 1864 news of Grant's successes out West had preceded him to the Eastern Theater.<sup>15</sup> Mary Chesnut, in January 1864 wrote that despite Grant's drunken ways, "He fights to win. . . . He is not distracted by a thousand side issues. . . . He is narrow and sure."<sup>16</sup> Newspapers tracked his progress to Washington as if he was a victorious army marching east to save the country, and he was greeted like a hero while stopping over in Philadelphia.<sup>17</sup> So it is to no surprise that Lee understood he now faced an opponent who would not

only not retreat, but who would press him with the audacity and courage yet unseen in any of his previous counterparts in blue.<sup>18</sup> In Lee, Grant saw an admirable foe, but Grant neither feared nor idolized Lee. Far from believing in the myth of Lee's invincibility, Grant stated that he had known Lee prior to the war and that he "knew he was mortal."<sup>19</sup>

Ironically, although Lee had been offered command of the Union armies prior to the war, he was not appointed general in chief of the Confederate armies until a year after Grant had been appointed to the same position in the Union army.<sup>20</sup> Grant, as general in chief of all Union forces, placed himself at the decisive point in the conflict by accompanying the Army of the Potomac as it invaded Virginia in 1864.<sup>21</sup> Although Grant could have chosen to remain out West to watch over his subordinate commander, in that theater, William T. Sherman, or plant himself in Washington as General Henry Halleck had done after being appointed general in chief, he chose instead to collocate his headquarters with that of the Army of the Potomac.<sup>22</sup> Opposite this army stood the most capable Confederate general in command of the most feared Southern army. Historian Peter Carmichael states that unlike Lee, Grant understood "Civil War armies were virtually

indestructible."<sup>23</sup> In fact, Grant understood his objective to be just that--to destroy Lee's army. On 9 April 1864, Grant explained to Meade that "Lee's army will be your objective point. Wherever Lee goes there you will go also."<sup>24</sup> With such a goal the Army of the Potomac became Grant's main force and he placed himself accordingly.<sup>25</sup>

Historiography on the Civil War has consistently assessed Lee to be the best commander on either side. Only recently has Grant's star started to shine while Lee's reputation has started to sag.<sup>26</sup> Ulysses S. Grant was indeed a surprise hero of the Civil War. His career started well, but after commendable service during the Mexican War, Grant began drinking. He received a warning from his commanding officer for his alcohol problem and resigned his commission. T. Harry Williams puts it best when he wrote that Grant "left the army, if not under a cloud, certainly with mutual relief to both parties."<sup>27</sup>

His attempt at making a living in the civilian world was less than spectacular. Having failed at multiple endeavors, he ended up clerking in a leather store run by his two brothers.<sup>28</sup> When the Civil War started, Grant's military talents could once again be put to good use. A month into the war Grant wrote to the Adjutant General

asking for a commission, stating that he was competent to command a regiment. The letter was mislaid and never acted on.<sup>29</sup> As historian Bruce Catton points out, Grant might have withered away the war guarding trains in eastern Missouri had it not been for Illinois Congressman Elihu B. Washburne.<sup>30</sup> Each congressman was allowed to promote one officer to brigadier general and Grant was from Washburne's hometown of Galena, Illinois. Having no knowledge of Grant's abilities mattered not, for at least Washburne could show his constituents that he was working for them.<sup>31</sup> Through Washburne's nomination, Grant was promoted to brigadier general and put in command of the military district of southeastern Missouri, headquartered in Cairo, Illinois.<sup>32</sup>

Though far from the center of the war, Grant used his commands out West to their fullest. Successes at Forts Henry and Donelson and his stunning victories at Vicksburg and Chattanooga proved he was the best Union commander. After Congress authorized his promotion to the rank of Lieutenant General, Grant came east to prove he was the best commander on both sides of the conflict. Unlike Lee, Grant was not cheered everywhere he went. In fact, T. Harry Williams points out that, "only once is it recorded

that the men cheered him."<sup>33</sup> After suffering a loss during the Wilderness Campaign, Grant had turned his army south, towards the enemy instead of retreating toward the federal capital as his predecessors had when their initial endeavors were checked. Union soldiers were so used to retreating after engaging the revered Army of Northern Virginia, that when they realized they had a leader who would press the fight home against the Confederate forces they cheered the Lieutenant General as he passed by.<sup>34</sup>

One can only imagine the consternation Meade must have felt upon Grant's promotion to lieutenant general. By the time General Grant had taken command, General Meade, a West Point graduate of 1835, had been in command of the Army of the Potomac for almost a year. Although Meade had adequately fought as a corps commander in the Federal defeat at Chancellorsville, his most able performance was within a few days of his assuming command of the Army of the Potomac. But, even his victory in one of the epic battles of the Civil War would be stained with criticism. After he soundly defeated General Lee's army at Gettysburg in July 1863, Meade let the Army of Northern Virginia escape back across the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers without any attempt to catch and destroy it. Lincoln,

distraught over the missed opportunity to annihilate Lee's Army had written, but never sent a letter admonishing Meade for failing to follow up his victory at Gettysburg.<sup>35</sup> After receiving criticism from Washington on the missed opportunity, Meade offered his resignation, but at least initially Lincoln was reluctant to fire the hero of Gettysburg who drove the enemy from his home state. Instead Meade was promoted to brigadier general in the regular army and offered thanks in the form of a congressional resolution for defending Pennsylvania from the invading army.<sup>36</sup>

Meade failed to brighten his star during the rest of the year, and if anything fell further from favor after the failed Mine Run Campaign of that November.<sup>37</sup> Realizing Lee's fortifications were too strong, Meade, instead of attacking, withdrew back to Union lines for the rest of the winter. The following spring Grant was promoted. Even prior to Grant's arrival in the East, Meade worried about being outdone by the man from the West, fearing that Grant would be given more resources to use against the enemy, with them achieve success, and therefore look that much better the commander for having achieved success against Lee.<sup>38</sup>

Although their first meeting was amicable enough, several pressures soon created fissures within their professional relationship, driving Meade to the edge of envy and disgust. The *New York Times* reported that Grant's newly appointed chief of staff, Major General W. F. Smith, would now direct "whoever maybe nominally in command of the Army of the Potomac."<sup>39</sup> Despite that both Meade and Grant's headquarters were in the same vicinity, of Culpepper, Virginia, newspaper headlines read that Grant was eight miles closer to the enemy than Meade was.<sup>40</sup> It also seemed that any blunder or setback on the part of the Army of the Potomac was attributed to Meade, but any successes were credited to Grant's close supervision and leadership over the Army of the Potomac.<sup>41</sup> The final straw came when both Philip Sheridan, who had been junior to Meade, and Sherman were promoted to the rank of major general in the regular army ahead of Meade. Meade believed that Grant was showing favoritism to his boys from out West and demanded justice. Lincoln saw to Meade's orders being adjusted so that he outranked Sheridan and thus possibly averted Meade's resignation.

In the end, Grant and Meade were able to work together effectively. General Rufus Ingalls was probably most



prophetic when he told Grant that with his close supervision over Meade, Grant "couldn't have a better man than Meade."<sup>42</sup> Meade showed during the Appomattox Campaign, even while very sick, that although not as aggressive a combat commander as Sheridan, he would execute Grant's orders to the best of his abilities.

Described by historian Clarence Macartney as "a tonic for Grant's soul," Major General Philip Sheridan possessed the ability to inspire confidence in both his commanders and subordinates alike.<sup>43</sup> Sheridan proved not only a capable combat commander, but had a unique relationship with Grant. Grant knew that he had a fighter in Sheridan and the subordinate not only trusted in Grant's abilities, but drew strength from them.

Grant's most able lieutenant, Philip Sheridan was lucky to be in the army at all. Unlike Grant, who never dreamed of military greatness, Sheridan, motivated by the Mexican War, read military history in his leisure time prior to attending the U.S. Military Academy.<sup>44</sup> Hot tempered and not apt to follow orders from those he did not respect, Cadet Sheridan was suspended from the academy for attacking an upperclassman. First he had lunged "at an upperclassman with a bayoneted rifle," then he later beat

Cadet Sergeant William R. Terrill, with his fists prior to being suspended.<sup>45</sup> The Commandant, taking into account Sheridan's good conduct prior to the incident, suspended Sheridan for one year instead of expelling him.<sup>46</sup> Sheridan returned to West Point and graduated in the middle of his class. He was commissioned into the infantry and sent to the West until the beginning of the Civil War. As a captain Sheridan held only an administrative position until he was able to maneuver into command of a regiment of cavalry in 1862.<sup>47</sup>

It was during his short stint as a regimental commander that Sheridan formed his first and not so flattering impression on the future general in chief. After being ordered to reinforce General Don Carlos Buell in Louisville, Sheridan was confronted by Grant, who stated that he did not want Sheridan's regiment to be sent. Anticipating that Kentucky would be where the action was, Sheridan told Grant that he wished to go. Grant had later recalled that Sheridan's answer was so "brusque and rough," that "I don't think Sheridan could have said anything that could have made a worse impression upon me."<sup>48</sup> Shortly afterward, Sheridan assumed command of a brigade of cavalry

and first saw combat during a successful raid on Boonville, Mississippi.

By October 1862, Sheridan was a brigadier general in command of an infantry division. While fighting under General Buell at Perryville, Kentucky, Sheridan showed a characteristic similar to General George S. Patton during World War II. During the heat of the battle General Buell rode up to Sheridan's command and heard the redheaded Irishman cursing up a storm. When Buell warned him about where he might be eternally heading that day, Sheridan declared, "we must hold this point and my men won't think I'm in earnest unless I swear at them like hell."<sup>49</sup> Within a couple of months, after being cited for gallantry at the Battle of Stones River, Sheridan pinned on the rank of major general of volunteers.<sup>50</sup>

At Grant's request Sheridan was transferred to the East and placed in command of the Union cavalry. Grant realized, despite the profane officer's rough edges that he was a fighter through and through. Although Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and President Lincoln were not impressed when they met Sheridan, who stood only five feet, five inches tall and weighed 115 pounds, Grant had no doubt in his abilities. When visiting the War Department shortly

after Sheridan's meeting with Stanton, Grant was asked whether the "little fellow [could] handle your cavalry." Grant replied "You will find him big enough for the purpose before we get through with him."<sup>51</sup> It was rather fortunate for the Union that Grant did have supreme confidence in Sheridan because within a short period of time the little fighter would once again nearly alienate another superior.

As commander of the cavalry of the Army of the Potomac, Sheridan reported to Major General George Meade. Sheridan, following Grant's intentions of reform, wanted to turn the Union cavalry into an effective fighting force, conducting raids and used as a highly mobile striking force, while Meade felt more comfortable with his cavalry performing the traditional role of screening, scouting and guarding lines of communications and his flanks. During the Wilderness Campaign Meade had countermanded Sheridan's orders and, without consulting Sheridan, ordered his cavalry to carry out different orders. During the battle the cavalry got intermingled with the infantry and Meade blamed the cavalry for blocking the roads that the infantry were supposed to use. Sheridan snapped back that if that were true, Meade was to blame since he bypassed Sheridan's command and he "could henceforth command the Cavalry Corps

himself."<sup>52</sup> When Meade went to complain to Grant about Sheridan's insubordination, he mentioned the cavalry commander's boast about being able to whip Confederate cavalry commander J.E.B Stuart.<sup>53</sup> Grant replied, "Well he generally knows what he is talking about. Let him go out and do it."<sup>54</sup> The next day Sheridan went out and did just that. During his famous raid on Richmond, Sheridan's cavalry not only defeated Stuart's vaunted cavalry, but mortally wounded Stuart as well.<sup>55</sup>

Through these actions Sheridan built a strong esprit de corps among his cavalry that served the Union well in the final days of the war. Grant again called on his most able fighter to destroy Confederate Jubal Early's army when it threatened Washington from the Shenandoah Valley in the fall of 1864. After soundly defeating Early at Winchester, Virginia, in September of 1864 and during a return trip from Washington, Sheridan raced twenty miles across the valley in order to rally his routed Army of Shenandoah against a surprise attack by Early at Cedar Creek. With Sheridan's reputation as a combat commander solidified to both the country and to Grant, the general in chief would call on his little cavalryman to make a star appearance in the final show of the war in the East.

Sheridan was the instrument Grant used to force Lee's retreat from Richmond and was the anvil Grant used in which he smashed a major portion of Lee's army up against, with II and VI Corps being the hammer, several days later. After the war Grant, always willing to heap praise on his subordinates, said of Sheridan: "He belongs to the first rank of soldiers, not only of our country but of the world. I rank Sheridan with Napoleon and Frederick and the great commanders of history."<sup>56</sup>

Within Meade's command two corps commanders would lead their men in the fight against Lee's forces at Sailor's Creek. Major General Horatio Wright graduated from West Point in 1841, two years prior to Grant. Virginia state forces captured Wright early in the war, but later released him, and in September 1861, he was promoted to brigadier general of volunteers. In February 1862 he led an independent, but inconclusive expedition against the Florida coast and followed that up by commanding a Union division in the battle of Secessionville, South Carolina. Wright commanded a division in VI Corps at Gettysburg, and when the VI Corps commander, Major General John Sedgwick, was killed during the Wilderness Campaign in the spring of 1864, Wright took over the corps. Sheridan specifically

requested Wright's Corps for the attack on Five Forks in April 1865, even though Wright had failed to rally his routed troops at Cedar Creek, Virginia, the previous year while serving under command of Sheridan. On that occasion, Sheridan rallied the Union forces and defeated Early's army.<sup>57</sup> The fact that Sheridan retained faith in Wright despite this, proved vital to the success of Union forces at the Battle of Sailor's Creek.

Another important Federal leader, Major General Andrew Humphreys, graduated West Point in 1831 and prior to the beginning of the war, spent most of his time conducting hydrological studies of the Mississippi Delta Region. He started out the war as an aide to Major General George McClellan then after being promoted to brigadier general of volunteers in April 1862, became chief topographical engineer of the Army of the Potomac. Like Wright, Humphreys commanded a division at Gettysburg before serving briefly as Meade's chief of staff. When the wounds sustained by Winfield Hancock at Gettysburg forced his retirement as a corps commander, Humphreys took over command of Hancock's Corps, and stayed at that position until the end of the war.<sup>58</sup>

Major General Wesley Merritt, commander of Sheridan's cavalry corps, was of little importance during the battle, but two of his subordinate division commanders played key roles. Generals George Armstrong Custer and George Crook were instrumental in stopping two of Lee's corps that day. George Armstrong Custer, like George Pickett, was one of the most colorful figures to emerge from the Civil War. After graduating last in his class in 1861 from West Point he was ordered to the Army of the Potomac where he served as a dispatch runner during the Battle of First Manassas. By June of 1863, after distinguishing himself over a dozen times Custer was promoted from 1st lieutenant to brigadier general of volunteers. From that point on he commanded and fought in every cavalry engagement of the Army of the Potomac distinguishing himself as a hard-nosed fighter.<sup>59</sup>

Another cavalry commander who proved vital in stopping the Confederate army on 6 April was Brigadier General George Crook. After graduating from West Point and being commissioned a lieutenant in the infantry in 1852, Crook spent the next eight years stationed in northern California and Washington. During the first year of the war Crook was appointed served as colonel of the 36th Ohio Regiment. In 1863 Crook took command of a cavalry division in George H.



Thomas' Army of the Cumberland. After being promoted to major general of volunteers Crook was captured in one of the most daring Confederate raids of the war by Captain Jesse McNeill's "Partisan Rangers." Paroled in Richmond, Crook returned to command a cavalry division in Sheridan's cavalry corps.<sup>60</sup>

These Union commanders faced a group of battle-tested Confederate officers. Robert E. Lee, the senior commander, was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, the son of Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee, hero in the American Revolution. Lee excelled at West Point and graduated in 1829 without a demerit posted against him. Seventeen years later Lee was brevetted three times in the Mexican War up to the rank of colonel. After serving as superintendent at West Point for three years, Lee was promoted to the regular rank of lieutenant colonel and took command of the 2nd Cavalry Regiment.

Lee, a thirty year veteran of the army at the outbreak of the Civil War turned down a senior appointment in the Federal army, resigned his commission, and traveled to Richmond where he was appointed a brigadier general in the Confederate Army and placed in charge of all land and naval forces of Virginia. After an unsuccessful foray into West

Virginia, Lee was assigned to act as military adviser to Confederate President Jefferson Davis. When Joseph Johnston was wounded at the Battle of Seven Pines, General Lee took command of what he would refer to as the Army of Northern Virginia. During the first two years of the war, that army would rack up victory after victory against Union forces causing President Lincoln to shuffle commanders in an attempt to get the one that could defeat General Lee.<sup>61</sup>

If leadership is such a critical factor in war, then why did the man deemed by many historians to be the best military leader of the Civil War lose? Historian Burton Hendrick posits that if the Confederate statesmen had ruled with the "same skill that Lee" had led his army "the result [of the war] might have easily been very different."<sup>62</sup> Historian Burke Davis states that Lee "handled his inferior force as if he could literally smell out the intentions of the enemy."<sup>63</sup> Peter Carmichael offers that Lee's "greatest strength . . . was his ability to [turn] perilous situations into moments of opportunity."<sup>64</sup> What situation could have been more perilous given the state of Lee's army retreating from the emboldened Union forces chasing after them as they left the Richmond and Petersburg siege lines? Yet for some reason Lee's vaunted leadership was unable to

turn the tide like it had done at Second Manassas, Chancellorsville, Fredericksburg, or the Seven Days battles.

Some writers blame Lee's limited and inefficient staff system for logistical difficulties throughout the war.<sup>65</sup> Historian Robert E. L. Krick in his book, *Staff Officers in Gray*, shows that Lee had requested several times that the Confederate Congress establish a General Staff to improve the efficiency of the support elements within the Confederate Army. With the exception of the ordnance officers, most officers viewed staff assignments with ridicule and disdain, and therefore the Confederate staff system might not have been manned by the best of the Confederacy.<sup>66</sup> One can conclude, after examining the results of the Appomattox Campaign, that Lee's logistical support was at best, inefficient. However, it was not the first example in the Civil War in which the Confederate supplies were meager. When invading Pennsylvania in 1863, the Army of Northern Virginia relied heavily on forage from the countryside. By the Battle of Cold Harbor in 1864, Confederate soldiers faced starvation and resorted to extreme measures, like scraping Yankee blood off crackers in order to survive.<sup>67</sup> One must look beyond Lee's

inadequate staff and lack of logistical support, and focus on the conditions that faced the Army of Northern Virginia by 1865, on Lee's subordinate commanders, and on how they reacted to those conditions.

One of the senior Confederate commanders taking part at Sailor's Creek was Lieutenant General Richard Stoddert Ewell, an 1840 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy who, prior to the Civil War, spent twenty years serving in the Southwest, earning a brevet promotion for gallantry in the Mexican War. At the start of the Civil War Ewell resigned his commission in the U.S. Army and accepted one as a brigadier general in the Confederate Provisional Army. When Lee lost Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson, the officer that he called his "right arm," at Chancellorsville, Lee selected Ewell to take command of the irreplaceable Jackson's 2nd Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>68</sup> Having lost a leg in the Manassas Campaign, some say Ewell also lost some of his nerve. At Gettysburg he proved he was a lesser commander than Jackson when he failed to order his men to take Cemetery Hill and what would become the right flank of the nearly impenetrable Union defensive positions.<sup>69</sup> Lee stated it was due to health reasons caused by the loss of Ewell's leg that kept him from

undergoing "the arduous duties of a Corps Comm[ander]" when he wrote to President Davis in June 1864.<sup>70</sup> He recommended to the Adjutant General, General Samuel Cooper, that Ewell be given command of the defenses of Richmond, no doubt to relieve some of the sting of the relief of command.<sup>71</sup> After the war Lee would recount that had he still had "Stonewall" Jackson, Gettysburg would have been another victory for the Confederacy. Lee confided that "Ewell was a fine officer, but would never take responsibility for exceeding his orders and having been ordered to Gettysburg, he would not go farther and hold the heights beyond the town."<sup>72</sup>

One can imagine the distress that came over Lee during his retreat from Richmond, when the commander he decided was ill-suited for field command played a critical role in the final hours of the war. Although he had been the rear guard commander as Lee's forces withdrew from Gettysburg, Ewell did not face the persistent attack then from Union forces that he would face when retreating through the Virginia countryside almost two years later.<sup>73</sup>

Lee's eldest son played a critical role at Sailor's Creek. Born in September, 1832, at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, George Washington Custis Lee graduated at the head of his West Point class in 1854. Prior to the Civil

War, Custis served in various engineering jobs, and in 1861, he resigned his commission in the Federal army, and became a captain in the Confederate army. Custis Lee was an unlikely effective combat leader during the battle. Unlike other Confederate commanders he did not have the combat experience often critical to becoming an effective battlefield leader. Throughout the war Custis served on the staff of President Davis and never saw combat until the last couple of months of the war. As the Confederate manpower reached critically low levels near the end of the war, Custis Lee was promoted to major general and ordered to organize clerks and mechanics within Richmond into a fighting force to help defend the city. During the retreat out of Richmond he led an understrength hodgepodge division under Ewell. While commanding the Confederate left flank, above the tributary, Little Sailor's Creek, at the engagement near Hillsman House, Custis, not used to defeat like his fellow officers were, fought on after Ewell had already surrendered the corps.<sup>74</sup>

Fighting along side Custis Lee, General Joseph Brevard Kershaw commanded one of Longstreet's divisions. Kershaw did not attend West Point but did take part in the Mexican War as a lieutenant in the Palmetto Regiment. Although

Kershaw did not attend college he did study law and passed the bar. Kershaw was twice elected to the South Carolina legislature and was involved in the secession convention in 1860. Like Ewell, Kershaw was present for the artillery bombardment on Fort Sumter. For the rest of the war he served in Longstreet's Corps. Although, like Grant, Kershaw had for a time had a problem with alcohol, but he overcame it and commanded one of the best brigades in the Confederate army. In November 1863, Kershaw was promoted to command a division, a position he held until the end of the war.<sup>75</sup>

By 1865 Richard H. Anderson, another key Confederate commander at Sailor's Creek, stood in contrast to the younger Lee. After graduating from West Point in 1842, he saw combat in the Mexican War and earned a brevet promotion to first lieutenant.<sup>76</sup> A captain in the 2nd Dragoons in 1861, he like many of his counterparts, resigned from the U.S. Army to join the Confederacy.<sup>77</sup> Commissioned a major of infantry, Anderson was present during the shelling of Fort Sumter, and after being promoted to brigadier general, he succeeded General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard in the command at Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>78</sup> In 1862, Anderson was assigned to Lee's Army of Northern Virginia,

and commanded at the brigade and division level in General James Longstreet's Corps.<sup>79</sup> Anderson stopped the Federal advance at Williamsburg and won Lee's commendation for his actions at Gaines' Mill.<sup>80</sup> He eventually commanded the corps for a short time while Longstreet recovered from wounds received during the Wilderness Campaign. Early on Lee had noted Anderson as a "capital officer" and told Davis that he would make a fine corps commander some day.<sup>81</sup> Anderson led a corps at Sailor's Creek.

General George E. Pickett was responsible for a critical piece of the Confederate defense at Sailor's Creek. Gary Gallagher states that "few Confederate generals enjoy a more romantic image" than Pickett.<sup>82</sup> Graduating last in his West Point class of 1846, Pickett was brevetted twice during the Mexican War for gallantry. After the war he spent the next twelve years serving in frontier posts in Texas and Washington. In July 1859, Captain Pickett took sixty-six men and occupied San Juan Island, in the waters between British Columbia and Washington, preventing British troops from landing on the island until October. Again he was commended for "gallant and firm discharge of duty."<sup>83</sup> At the outbreak of the Civil War Pickett accepted a major's commission in the



Confederate army and after a short time commanding a span of the Rappahannock River defenses he was promoted to brigadier general. During the Peninsula Campaign the brigade he commanded put up a stubborn defense against a superior Union force commanded by General Joseph Hooker at the Battle of Seven Pines.<sup>84</sup> After recovering from a wound received at the Battle of Gaines' Mill, Pickett, now a major general, commanded a division in James Longstreet's Corps during the invasion of Maryland.<sup>85</sup> In fact, up until the Battle of Gettysburg, one could argue that Pickett's leadership had been quite impressive. Even after the fatal assault in which Pickett won so much fame, Lee told Pickett that "you and your men have covered yourself in Glory."<sup>86</sup> But at Gettysburg Pickett's division was annihilated and from that point forward his leadership would be found wanting. After returning from the defeat at Gettysburg, Pickett took command of the Department of North Carolina, while most of his depleted division was parceled out to other departments within the Confederacy until only one brigade remained under his control. Union raids and marauding bands of deserters, made it difficult for Pickett to maintain control over his department, and after what many considered a lackluster performance he was relieved of

command.<sup>87</sup> Only through the loyalty of a commander to his subordinate commander, was Pickett able to take the field again. Pickett's old corps commander, Longstreet, restored him to command of a reconstituted division he had commanded at Gettysburg.<sup>88</sup> Pickett, after having fought poorly at Five Forks on 1 April, found himself in the unenviable position of being detached from General Longstreet's Corps and under the temporary command of General Anderson.

Alongside Pickett, and also under the command of Anderson during the final campaign, was another West Point trained officer. Bushrod Rust Johnson graduated from the Military Academy in 1840 and fought in both the Seminole and Mexican Wars. In 1847 Johnson resigned his commission and taught at several institutions in the South. In 1861, he held the rank of colonel in the Kentucky state militia and entered the war at that rank. In January 1862, within a month of his promotion to brigadier general, he barely escaped capture at Fort Henry. After occupying Fort Henry, Union forces under Grant took Johnson prisoner at Fort Donelson. Johnson was paroled shortly afterward and at the battle of Shiloh, was severely wounded. After recovering from his wound, Johnson led his brigade at Murfreesboro and Chickamauga. In 1864 after defending Petersburg the first

time against General Benjamin Butler's army, Johnson was promoted to major general.<sup>89</sup> During the Battle of Sailor's Creek, Johnson's division fought alongside of Pickett's division against flanking Federal cavalry.<sup>90</sup>

By 1865 one of the most surprisingly able of Lee's lieutenants was General John Brown Gordon. Unlike Lee's other corps commanders, Gordon did not attend West Point. Instead he attended the University of Georgia, though he did not graduate. A businessman, Gordon became involved in developing coal mines in northwest Georgia. When war broke out, Gordon was elected as a captain in the "Raccoon Roughs," a volunteer infantry company from the Georgia-Tennessee-North Carolina region, and fought bravely despite being wounded several times during the war.<sup>91</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman concludes from his exhaustive research of Civil War Confederate officers that by the second year of the war, of Lee's roughly one-hundred fifty regimental commanders, only two, Gordon and William Mahone, "added materially to the vigor of high command," and were therefore capable to fill higher commands.<sup>92</sup> During the battle of Seven Pines Gordon's horse was shot out from under him, his coat was pierced by a bullet, and his own brother was shot through the lungs in front of him, but he

gallantly led his regiment forward against the Union forces. By evening, 60 percent of his regiment lay dead or wounded on the battlefield.<sup>93</sup> At the Battle of Gaines' Mill Gordon, once again leading his 6th Alabama Regiment, possessed the insight in the heat of the battle to order his men to lie down in line and wait for the federal artillery and musket fire to slacken before retiring to the cover of the swamps.<sup>94</sup> At Malvern Hill, Gordon assuming command for the weakened Robert Rodes, fought the brigade valiantly.<sup>95</sup> In November 1862, he was promoted to brigadier general.<sup>96</sup> Gordon fought brilliantly in the Wilderness Campaign and under Jubal Early in the Shenandoah Valley against Sheridan's forces. In May 1864 he was promoted to major general and during the siege of Petersburg led a valiant yet failed assault on Fort Stedman in order to relieve pressure on Lee's constantly extending defensive perimeter.<sup>97</sup> It is no wonder that during the retreat out of Richmond, Lee chose Gordon to conduct the rearguard fight against the relentless Federal attacks.

The critical conclusion to be drawn from the assessment of generals is that in 1865 Grant led a force with competent and in some cases hand chosen leaders who had faced Lee in the past and won. More importantly,

Grant's actions since the Wilderness Campaign proved to his subordinate leaders and his men that he did not fear Lee. Grant's soldiers were now ready and most willing to get after Lee and his vaunted Army of Northern Virginia.

Lee, on the other hand, led combat commanders who although they had tasted victory in battle, had more recently felt the sting of defeat. They all had taken part in the battle of Gettysburg and by the time of the Appomattox Campaign had become weary from the unrelenting attacks from Grant's newly revived forces. Unlike Grant, who brought some of his fighters from the West, Lee lost several of his seasoned commanders by this time in the war. The loss of Thomas Jackson at Chancellorsville was irreplaceable, and the recent death of A.P. Hill on the beginning of Lee's retreat out of Richmond and Petersburg meant that another seasoned corps commander was missing. Unlike Grant, Lee was not able to draw on successful combat leaders from other theaters. Indeed, Lee had to make do with what he had left.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Department of the Army, *FM 22-100: Leadership* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1987), 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-6.

<sup>3</sup> John I. Alger, *Definitions and Doctrine of the Military Art*, "The West Point Military History Series," Edited by Thomas E. Griess (Wayne, N.J.: Avery Publishing Group, 1985), 8, 10-11; Donald D. Chipman, "Principles of War," in *Oxford Companion to American Military History*, Edited by John Whiteclay Chambers II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 557-58 (hereafter cited as, *American Military History*, ed. Chambers).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen E. Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1966), 99-102.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 100; Margaret Wagner, Gary W. Gallagher, and Paul Finkelman, eds., *Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 339.

<sup>6</sup> James Spencer, ed., *Civil War Generals: Categorical Listings and a Biographical Directory* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 115, 117; Ambrose, *Duty, Honor, Country*, 100; Alan T. Nolan, "Robert E. Lee," in *American Military History*, ed. Chambers, 388.

<sup>7</sup> Donald E. Chipman, "Principles of War," in *American Military History*, ed. Chambers, 558.

<sup>8</sup> Bohemian, "The Art and Science of War," *Richmond Dispatch*, 24 December 1864, 1.

<sup>9</sup> T. Harry Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant* (Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 3-5.

<sup>10</sup> Ezra J. Warner, *Generals In Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1959), 182.

<sup>11</sup> Gary W. Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), xi.

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 1: 154.

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<sup>13</sup> Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E. B. Treat & Co., 1866), 728, 729.

<sup>14</sup> Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, 1: 235, 271, 285, 298; Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph over Adversity, 1822-1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 38-47; Wagner, et al., *Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference*, 339. In Freeman's four volume work on Lee, he states that although Lee had met Grant, he had "no remembrance of" (1: 298) him during his time in Mexico, but according to Wagner, Lee had commended Grant during the Mexican War, which seems likely considering some of Grant's heroic exploits.

<sup>15</sup> Grant quoted in Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 261.

<sup>16</sup> C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981.

<sup>17</sup> *New York Times*, 22 March 1864, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A. to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of The Confederate States of America, 1862-1865* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1957), 140-45; A. L. Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee: His Military and Personal History* ed. Marcus J. Wright (New York: J. M. Stoddart & Co., 1886), 322-24. Clifford Dowdey and Louis Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of R.E. Lee* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1961), 37-41. Dowdey and Manarin show Lee's concern over Grant taking command by his requests for return of troops from the Carolinas and preparations for the defenses at Richmond and all of Virginia.

<sup>19</sup> Quote in Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York: Century Co., 1895), 1: 116; Robert Hendrickson, *The Road to Appomattox* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 19.

<sup>20</sup> John Y. Simon, "Ulysses S. Grant," in *American Military History*, ed. Chambers, 302; Nolan, "Robert E. Lee," *ibid.*, 388.

<sup>21</sup> Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 263. Simpson points out that although initially Grant had planned on returning to the West in time for the spring offensives, his trip to Washington made him realize the importance of remaining in the Eastern Theater.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph B. Mitchell, *Military Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1972), 126; Ezra Warner, *Generals In Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 196. Halleck took a more administrative role

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when appointed to overall command of the Union armies and maintained that position as a chief of staff to Grant when Grant was appointed over him.

<sup>23</sup> Peter S. Carmichael, ed., *Audacity Personified: The Generalship of Robert E. Lee* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>24</sup> John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* 26 vols. (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), 10: 274.

<sup>25</sup> Alfred H. Burne, *Lee, Grant and Sherman: A Study in Leadership in the 1864-65 Campaign* (1938; reprint, Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 7 (page reference is to reprint edition).

<sup>26</sup> Carmichael, ed., *Audacity Personified*, xii-xiii.

<sup>27</sup> Williams, *McClellan, Sherman, and Grant*, 79.

<sup>28</sup> Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 63-74; Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 184-85.

<sup>29</sup> Mitchell, *Military Leaders in the Civil War*, 108.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce Catton, *This Hallowed Ground: The Story of the Union Side of the Civil War* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1956), 67.

<sup>31</sup> Mitchell, *Military Leaders in the Civil War*, 109; Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 9-11. Mitchell points out that Congressman Washburne picked Grant because he was one of the few officers from his district that Washburne did not have to worry about campaigning for his office after the war. Grant received his appointment to West Point from Congressman Thomas Hamer, on the last day Hamer was in office, before retiring, from Georgetown, Ohio. Therefore it is very unlikely that Grant was watched over by any congressman during his West Point years.

<sup>32</sup> Edwin C. Bearss, "Ulysses S. Grant," in *American Military Leaders*, eds., Roger J. Spiller and Joseph G. Dawson (New York: Praeger, 1989), 95 (hereafter cited as, *American Military Leaders*, eds., Spiller and Dawson).

<sup>33</sup> Williams, *McClellan, Sherman, and Grant*, 83.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>35</sup> Freeman Cleaves, *Meade of Gettysburg* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 186.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 187; Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 316.



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<sup>37</sup> Clarence Edward Macartney, *Grant and His Generals* (New York: McBride Co., 1953), 32.

<sup>38</sup> George G. Meade, *The Life and Letters of General George Gordon Meade*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 2: 176, 182; Macartney, *Grant and His Generals*, 34.

<sup>39</sup> *New York Times*, 24 March 1865, 8. Rumors of Meade being relieved had surfaced and even reported within the newspapers.

<sup>40</sup> Macartney, *Grant and His Generals*, 34; *New York Times*, 24 March 1865, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Macartney, *Grant and His Generals*, 41-43.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph G. Dawson, "Philip H. Sheridan," in *American Military Leaders*, eds., Spiller and Dawson, 281.

<sup>46</sup> Macartney, *Grant and His Generals*, 112.

<sup>47</sup> Dawson, "Philip H. Sheridan," 281.

<sup>48</sup> Macartney, *Grant and His Generals*, 110.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-15.

<sup>50</sup> Dawson, "Philip H. Sheridan," 281.

<sup>51</sup> Macartney, *Grant and His Generals*, 115.

<sup>52</sup> Philip H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan: General United States Army* 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1888), 2: 368-69.

<sup>53</sup> Cleaves, *Meade of Gettysburg*, 242-43.

<sup>54</sup> Grant quoted in Macartney, *Grant and His Generals*, 116.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-17.

<sup>56</sup> Grant quoted in John Russell Young, *Around the World with General Grant* (New York: American News Co., 1879), 297.

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<sup>57</sup> Richard O'Connor, *Sheridan the Inevitable* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953), 224-27; Roy Morris Jr., *Sheridan: The Life and Wars of General Phil Sheridan* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1992), 212-19; Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 575-76.

<sup>58</sup> Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 241-42.

<sup>59</sup> Jay Monaghan, *Custer: The Life of General George Armstrong Custer* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1959), 42,133; Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 108-10.

<sup>60</sup> Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 102-04.

<sup>61</sup> John T. Hubbell, "Abraham Lincoln," in *American Military History*, ed. Chambers, 393-94; Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 179-83.

<sup>62</sup> Burton J. Hendrick, *Statesmen of the Lost Cause: Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1939), 7.

<sup>63</sup> Burke Davis, *To Appomattox: Nine April Days, 1865* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1959), viii.

<sup>64</sup> Carmichael, ed., *Audacity Personified*, xviii.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, xix.

<sup>66</sup> Robert E. L. Krick, *Staff Officers in Gray: A Biographical Register of The Staff Officers in The Army of Northern Virginia*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1-34.

<sup>67</sup> Hendrickson, *Road to Appomattox*, 37.

<sup>68</sup> Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches*, 91-92.

<sup>69</sup> Donald C. Pfanz, *Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier's Life*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 308-11.

<sup>70</sup> Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches*, 783.

<sup>71</sup> Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of R.E. Lee*, 776.

<sup>72</sup> Robert E. Lee Jr., *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (1904; reprint, Old Saybrook, Conn.: Konecky & Konecky, n. d.), 415-16.

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<sup>73</sup> Jed Hotchkiss, *Virginia*, Vol. 3, "Confederate Military History," Edited by Clement A. Evans (Atlanta: Confederate Publishing Co., 1899), 414.

<sup>74</sup> Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 179; Greg Eanes, *Black Day of the Army: April 6, 1865, The Battles of Sailor's Creek* (Burkeville, Va.: E&H Publishing Co., 2001), 96-103.

<sup>75</sup> Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 170-71. In March 1862 Kershaw was temporarily relieved of command because he reacted to slowly to a order to move his brigade. He was drunk at the time. For a description of Kershaw's Brigade see, Augustus D. Dickert, *History of Kershaw's Brigade* (1899; reprint, Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1976).

<sup>76</sup> Cornelius Irvine Walker, *The Life of Lieutenant General Richard Heron Anderson of the Confederate States Army* (Charleston: Art Publishing Co., 1917), 18.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 21, 26.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>79</sup> Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 8-9.

<sup>80</sup> Ellsworth Eliot Jr., *West Point in The Confederacy* (New York: G. A. Baker & Co., 1941), 291.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>82</sup> Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals*, xii.

<sup>83</sup> Hotchkiss, *Virginia*, 651.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 239; Hotchkiss, *Virginia*, 659.

<sup>86</sup> Lee quoted in Davis, *To Appomattox*, 41, 45, 46, quote on 41.

<sup>87</sup> Lesley J. Gordon, *General George E. Pickett in Life & Legend*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 123-125; Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of Lee*, 638-39; Gordon, *General George E. Pickett*, 91-92, 99-100, 136.

<sup>88</sup> Gordon, *General George E. Pickett*, 137.

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<sup>89</sup> Eliot, *West Point in the Confederacy*, 362; Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 157-58.

<sup>90</sup> John S. Wise, *The End of an Era* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1902), 428-30.

<sup>91</sup> Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 111.

<sup>92</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), 3 vols. *Gettysburg to Appomattox*, 1: xxvi.

<sup>93</sup> John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 56-57; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 1: 244, 251-52.

<sup>94</sup> Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 1: 533.

<sup>95</sup> Ralph Lowell Eckert, *John Brown Gordon* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 29-30; Allen P. Tankersley, *John B. Gordon: A Study in Gallantry* (Atlanta: Whitehall Press, 1955), 96-99; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 1: 589, 602.

<sup>96</sup> Eckert, *John Brown Gordon*, 38; Warner, *Generals in Gray*, 111.

<sup>97</sup> Eckert, *John Brown Gordon*, 111-12; Warner, *Generals in Gray* 111; Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches*, 342.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE RETREAT: THE BEGINNING OF THE END

While visiting in Richmond one afternoon Lieutenant John Wise, son of the Confederate Brigadier General Henry Alexander Wise, former governor of California, watched a battalion of men he called "darkeys" march through Richmond's town square. The *Richmond Dispatch* presupposed that if Lincoln stated he needed two hundred thousand Negro soldiers to win the war, then what if the South could field an army of three hundred thousand? "According to [Lincoln's] own premises . . . it will be impossible to put down the rebellion."<sup>1</sup> But many saw the measure for what it was—an act of desperation on the part of the Confederacy. Wise thought to himself, "Ah, this is but the beginning of the end."<sup>2</sup>

There were many other factors that affected the young lieutenant which caused him to consider such a dreadful, yet prophetic thought. Conditions within the Confederate capital were far different than celebrations at Charleston four years earlier when Confederate forces bombarded Fort Sumter. Shots fired in the spring of 1865 had a far

different meaning than those in April 1861. They were not celebratory fire, but shots fired in anger, for the Union army had been besieging the Confederate capital since June of the previous year.<sup>3</sup>

During the winter of 1864 and the spring of 1865, Grant slowly started to close Richmond and Petersburg off from the rest of the Confederacy and the rest of the world. Historian Emory Thomas writes in *The Confederate State of Richmond*, "Of all southern cities, Richmond felt the war's privations most keenly."<sup>4</sup> Ordinary items became scarce yet demand for them did not fall. Accordingly, the price for such items became unbearably expensive. Nearing the end of the war, a cheap cigar in the home of tobacco cost ten dollars and a pull of whiskey cost five dollars.<sup>5</sup> Mary Chesnut, wife of a Confederate official in Richmond, spent seventy-five dollars for "a little tea and sugar," eighty-five for some "forlorn shoes," and as early as February 1864, paid two-hundred and eighty dollars for twenty-four yards of flannel to make shirts for the soldiers.<sup>6</sup> During the final winter of the war, Lieutenant Wise, making only one-hundred and twenty dollars a month, had to borrow money to pay for a new uniform coat that cost two thousand Confederate dollars. A black felt hat cost him another

hundred dollars and a pair of boots made from his own leather cost another one-hundred and fifty dollars.<sup>7</sup> Confederate enlisted men suffered far worse. Two soldiers who deserted into the Union ranks that final winter told their captors that they made eleven Confederate dollars a month and that a good meal in Petersburg cost them thirty six dollars.<sup>8</sup> Inflation rocked the Confederacy, not quite to the level of post World War I Germany, but seriously enough that the most popular quip in Richmond was, "You take your money to market in the market basket, and bring home what you buy in your pocket book."<sup>9</sup> Not only were the citizens within the city strapped, but the city itself had run out of money. From April 1864 through February 1865 the city spent over 1,700,000 dollars while taking in only 450,000 dollars in taxes. Even after selling off almost one million dollars in railroad stocks, the city found itself bankrupt and the only way to remedy the situation was to increase taxes on an already strapped citizenry.<sup>10</sup>

Although as early as January 1865, there was talk of ending the war, most Virginians were not optimistic of a peaceful conclusion which left their Confederacy intact. Confederate Captain D. Augustus Dickert wrote, in *History of Kershaw's Brigade* that "Lincoln's reelection caused the

South to despond of any other solution of the war than the bloody end."<sup>11</sup> Historian Alfred Grant correctly points out that "the growing awareness of defeat did little to lift the men's spirits. Antietam, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, Atlanta and Chattanooga. . . had a cumulative effect."<sup>12</sup> In January 1865, an article in the *Richmond Whig* stated that the peace proposal brought on by Francis Preston Blair was "nothing more than one of those tricks."<sup>13</sup> Josiah Gorgas, the Confederate Ordnance Chief, wrote on 3 February 1865 that, "the peace commissioners probably reached Washington yesterday," but "no one expects any result." In fact, the meeting took place at the placid location of Hampton Roads, but even the calming effect of the location did little to weaken Lincoln's resolve.<sup>14</sup> The President stated that nothing could be discussed until the rebellious states once again recognized Federal authority. This was the one thing above all else that the Confederate delegation could not agree to and so the conference ended after some short discussion but no resolution on prisoner exchanges and property rights.<sup>15</sup> Within days an "enthusiastic meeting on the war," was held at the African Church in an attempt to rebuild Confederate war fervor.<sup>16</sup> Several senior Confederate officials led by President Jefferson Davis gave



speeches condemning Lincoln for his unwillingness to discuss peace.<sup>17</sup> Within days several brigades within the Army of Northern Virginia passed resolutions vowing to fight to the last man.<sup>18</sup> However, false motivation seldom lasts in the face of overwhelming facts that confirm otherwise.

Sherman's march across the South provided a constant source of bad news for Confederacy. On 13 December 1864 the *Richmond Dispatch* stated that Sherman's army was "confronted by a strong Confederate force . . . and our generals had . . . expressed [that they were] fully able to cope with the enemy."<sup>19</sup> However, by 20 December the story was less optimistic. "The news from Tennessee furnished us by the Yankee press is not of the most delightful and cheery."<sup>20</sup> The issue printed the day before Christmas warned against too much normal "Yule Tide" celebration and showed, beyond patriotic rhetoric, the true war weariness that Southerners were feeling.

"Certainly this is not a time for insensate joy. There is scarcely a fireside in the Confederacy which has not a vacant chair in the Christmas circle—the father, the husband, the brother, gone forever, or miserable captives in Northern prisons. The very homes of thousands have disappeared from the last of the earth; fruitful regions transformed into deserts; battlefields white with bones of the unburied

dead; hospitals crowded with sick and dying countless hearts breaking with the agonies of late bereavement. Or if sorrows of others cannot touch our sensibilities, the possibility that their fate may be our own should serve to chasten the exuberance of natures which have never known affliction. . . . with a vast army at our very doors thirsty for our destruction, and a powerful government preparing to strike one more and that a colossal blow."<sup>21</sup>

On 21 February, Josiah Gorgas wrote, "The greatest consternation prevails on account of the continued advance of Sherman."<sup>22</sup> That same day, after hearing that Charleston was evacuated and Columbia was occupied by Sherman, Samuel Pickens, a soldier in the 5th Alabama Infantry Regiment, wrote, "I trust in the Lord that his successful career will soon be brought to a close."<sup>23</sup> Also on 21 February, Lee notified the Confederate Secretary of War that "in the event of the necessity of abandoning our position . . . I shall endeavor to unite the corps of the army about Burkeville."<sup>24</sup> Three days later the *Richmond Whig* wrote that the "march of Sherman through South Carolina seems to have inspired the Yankees. . . . one would imagine the whole Yankee nation to be afflicted with Sherman on the brain" and that "The unopposed transit of a Union army through its hated South Carolina has raised them to quite an unparalleled exaltations."<sup>25</sup>

As early as mid January 1865, Lee, who had turned so many situations around to the favor of the Confederacy in the past, began to lose hope. On 29 January, he requested that President Davis publish an order to prepare all excess cotton and tobacco to be stored so that it could be burned easily on the approach of the Yankees.<sup>26</sup> The following day he warned Davis that if Grant was reinforced, he "will be enabled to envelope Richmond, or turn both of our flanks."<sup>27</sup> He wrote to his wife, "I pray we may not be overwhelmed, I shall however, endeavor to do my duty and fight to the last."<sup>28</sup> The first week of March, General John Brown Gordon met with Lee at his headquarters on the outskirts of Petersburg. Gordon, upon entering the house, "saw a look of painful depression" on Lee's face.<sup>29</sup> With Generals James Longstreet and Richard Ewell too far away in Richmond and A. P. Hill on convalescent leave, Lee had called on Gordon to discuss the prospects of the war. In reflection on that moment Gordon wrote, "the hour had come . . . when he could no longer carry alone the burden, or entirely conceal his forebodings of impending disaster."<sup>30</sup> Gordon recalled that after Lee shared many negative reports from across the army, Gordon presented three alternatives: To settle for peace, to retreat from Richmond and Petersburg, or to

attack.<sup>31</sup> On 2 March, Gorgas wrote "people are almost in a state of desperation, and but too ready to give up the cause. . . . there is a sentiment of hopelessness abroad."<sup>32</sup> That same day Lee wrote to Grant directly seeking a meeting between the two, to attempt to end "the present unhappy difficulties" and "put an end to the calamities of war," "by means of a military convention."<sup>33</sup>

Although Lee was forthright in his dealings with his wife and the Secretary of War, he did not come right out and tell Jefferson Davis that it was a lost cause.<sup>34</sup> Breckinridge, in hoping to convince Davis of the impending disaster, asked Lee to state to the President the "military condition of the country." Instead, General Lee wrote that, "while the military situation is not favorable, it is not worse than the superior numbers and resources of the enemy justified us in expecting from the beginning." He continued, "everything in my opinion has depended and still depends upon the disposition and feelings of the people."<sup>35</sup> The question should be asked, was everyone's trust in General Lee's ability to save the Confederacy so great that although he knew in his heart that the position of the South was impossible, he was unable to admit it?

In December the *Richmond Dispatch* stated that Lincoln had "let the golden days of autumn slip by and winter cometh when no man can fight."<sup>36</sup> The weather in February and March had been particularly rainy. The roads were in horrible condition, but warmer, dryer weather was just around the corner. Usually an infantryman constantly exposed to the elements appreciates the coming of warmer, dryer weather, but Johnny Reb knew that as spring approached so did the active campaigning season. Samuel Pickens of Company D, 5th Alabama Regiment noted this dilemma in his diary on 10 February 1865. He wrote, "This is a bright mild delightful day—such a one as we used to hail with joy, as the welcome herald of approaching Spring. But now how different is it! For we can't enjoy pleasant weather, knowing that it will, in all probability, bring active movements & bloody collisions."<sup>37</sup> On 6 March, Brigadier General Josiah Gorgas, Chief of the Confederate Ordnance Department, entered in his diary that "the crisis of our fate is rapidly approaching, and men's minds are harassed with doubts, fears & perplexity."<sup>38</sup>

A combination of the aforementioned factors caused Confederate soldiers to start abandoning their posts and desert their beloved army. On 14 February, Lee wrote to

the new Confederate Secretary of War, John C. Breckinridge, to inform him of the "alarming number of desertions. . . . chiefly from the North Carolina regiments."<sup>39</sup> In one night thirty-seven soldiers from the 45th North Carolina Regiment deserted.<sup>40</sup> Secret peace societies began to appear across the Confederacy and in Georgia a group of soldiers belonging to one of these organizations "planned to desert then attempt to win over the other soldiers to do likewise in order to end the war."<sup>41</sup> Lee, so concerned with the mass desertions, published General Orders Number 8 on 27 March 1865. The order declared that soldiers could not discuss even in jest the idea of desertion. The penalty for violating the law was death.<sup>42</sup> Despite such a stiff penalty, soldiers still deserted. The dreadful conditions within the army were magnified by the lack of support soldiers received from the home front. Samuel Pickens wrote that soldiers recently back from leave "give a deplorable account of the sentiments of the people in Alabama and also in Georgia and South Carolina. Everybody whipped and despairing of our cause: wanting peace on any terms. . . . How shameful!"<sup>43</sup> One Georgia soldier admitted, "I wish this war would come to a close and I don't care how all I want is peace."<sup>44</sup>

Besides morale and desertion problems, Lee faced the constant worry of being surrounded and his lines of communications to the rest of the Confederacy being cut. If Grant was able to sever Lee's resupply lines, he could literally starve Lee into submission and the most powerful Confederate army would be no more. As early as 21 February, Lee warned Breckinridge that he might have to abandon his defenses and that he thought "Lynchburg or some point west, the most advantageous to remove stores from Richmond."<sup>45</sup> On 9 March, Lee told Breckinridge that if he could save the army in an "efficient condition" he did not regard the loss of the capital as "fatal to our success."<sup>46</sup> On 14 March 1865 President Davis approved an act of the Confederate Congress "authorizing him to remove the archives and to assemble Congress elsewhere."<sup>47</sup> The failed attempt by Gordon on 26 March to relieve pressure on his extended lines might have been enough to break Lee's resolve to maintain his defense of the capital.<sup>48</sup>

On the other side, for some of the same reasons, the Union forces were upbeat, confident the end was near, and that victory would be theirs. Ever since Grant had taken command, many soldiers felt that the long and dreadful war would finally come to a conclusion. As early as the summer

of 1864, Lieutenant James J. Hartley wrote to his wife, that "Richmond will be in our hands very shortly. The troops are all in very good spirits. . . . I think this campaign is going to end the war." In speaking of his commanders, Hartley avowed that Grant "is the best general that has ever been over this army and Grant and Meade combined, the intrepidity of the one combined with the prudence of the other, form a combination that cannot be beaten."<sup>49</sup>

Despite the confidence of the Union troops in their commander, the Northern populace, like their Southern counterparts, was growing tired of the war.<sup>50</sup> Grant understood what Lincoln had failed to impart on George C. McClellan; that a general at times must do something "to promise victory" to the people supporting the war at home. If not, they might "become discouraged and give up."<sup>51</sup> That coming spring he planned renewing the confidence of the Union's people.

On 26 March, Sheridan met with Grant to discuss the upcoming campaign. After reading his orders, Sheridan told Grant of his reservations about moving south and supporting Sherman against Johnston in North Carolina.<sup>52</sup> Johnston and Sherman had just fought at Bentonville, North Carolina, the



week prior and Sherman was currently marching towards Raleigh with Johnston following.<sup>53</sup> Grant eased Sheridan's concerns by stating that his instructions were somewhat of a decoy and informed the cavalry commander on what his true mission would be.<sup>54</sup> Grant told his subordinate commander "that, as a matter of fact, I [intend] to close up the war right here, with this movement."<sup>55</sup> Sheridan spent the next couple of days refitting his cavalry for the upcoming mission. At City Point on 28 March 1865, Grant explained to a worried President Lincoln aboard the paddleboat *River Queen*, "that the crisis of the war was now at hand."<sup>56</sup> With Sheridan now back from the Shenandoah, Grant planned on maneuvering his forces surrounding the southern side of Petersburg westward to "cut [Lee] off from the Carolinas." Grant continued that his "only apprehension was that Lee might move out before him and evacuate Petersburg and Richmond, but if he did there would be a hot pursuit."<sup>57</sup>

On 29 March, Grant moved his headquarters from City Point to directly behind the Union lines southwest of Petersburg.<sup>58</sup> That same day Sheridan started his movement toward Five Forks.<sup>59</sup> The constant rain had considerably hindered Grant's westward flanking movement on Lee. General Rawlins suggested to Grant that it might be better

to fall back from Petersburg and confront Johnston's army before attacking Lee. Grant, confident in his abilities and remembering lessons learned at Vicksburg, told Rawlins, "that if Johnston could move rapidly enough in such weather. . . . he would turn upon him with his whole command, crush him and then go after Lee."<sup>60</sup> After his meeting with Grant, Sheridan took on his mission with the tenacity of a pit bull. Like Grant, Sheridan decided that nothing was going to get in the way of his mission, including the rain. After refitting his men and moving them towards Dinwiddie Court House, he had to pause because the extremely muddy and almost impassable roads slowed the flow of supplies needed by his men. Grant considered postponing the movement, but after conferring with Sheridan decided to push through despite the harsh conditions.<sup>61</sup> When asked by one of Grant's staff how he would combat the poor road conditions to supply his army, Sheridan replied, "I will get up all the forage I want. I'll haul it out if I have to set every man in the command to corduroying roads, and corduroy every mile of them from the railroad to Dinwiddie. I tell you, I'm ready to strike out to-morrow and go to smashing things."<sup>62</sup> To offset the heavy rains and prepare to springboard the Union armies westward to

counter any escape attempt by Lee, engineers were detailed to oversee large numbers of men in corduroying the roads.<sup>63</sup>

In modern warfare American combat commanders receive both a task, and a purpose for that task in their orders. Sheridan understood that his purpose of attack at Five Forks was two fold. The South Side Railroad was not much as railroads go. Its iron rails were worn out and there were no facilities close enough to help if any of the old and dilapidated locomotives broke down on it. But it was the last supply line into the Confederate capital and Grant knew it was critical to Lee's ability to defend the two cities.<sup>64</sup> So Grant made sure Sheridan understood that he wanted him to not only sever the last remaining supply line into Petersburg, but also to bring Lee out of the trenches with the intent on capturing Lee's army.<sup>65</sup> The general in chief also hoped that by forcing Lee to move troops to his right flank to protect the railroad, Lee would weaken the center of his defenses allowing Grant the opportunity to assault the entrenchments on the southern side of Petersburg.<sup>66</sup> So sure that Sheridan would succeed, the Union general in chief ordered General Godfrey Weitzel, commanding Union forces on the north side of the capital,

to be ready to enter Richmond as soon as the Confederate army retreated.<sup>67</sup>

Initially General Pickett succeeded in pushing back Sheridan's attack, but after realizing he was badly outnumbered, he requested permission to withdraw. After his initial preparations for the defense of his new position, Pickett left his command to enjoy a fish bake with General Thomas Lafayette Rosser of the Confederate cavalry. Sheridan attacked Pickett's lines on 1 April. Several times he was warned about the Union forces approaching his position, but failed to return to his defenses. It was not until his forces were under attack that the Confederate division commander returned. By the time Pickett returned to his lines, Sheridan's forces had routed his division.<sup>68</sup>

After initial success against Pickett's division, which Lee sent out to protect the South Side Railroad, Sheridan begged Grant for an infantry corps claiming that "we at last have drawn the enemy's infantry out of its fortification, and this is our chance to attack it."<sup>69</sup> Although Sheridan requested Wright's Corps, due to familiarity and trust gained between the two commanders during the Shenandoah Campaign, Grant, due to proximity,

attached Major General Gouverneur Warren's Corps and Brigadier General Ranald Mackenzie's cavalry to Sheridan for the attack. Sheridan, after jumping his mount over Pickett's breastworks, yelled to the Confederate prisoners, "Are there any more of you? We need you all."<sup>70</sup> Unlike Lee, who up until the end of the war failed to relieve Pickett and others for their incompetence, Sheridan had no reservations relieving a corps commander who was only attached to his command. In supporting Sheridan's cavalry attack, Warren's Corps had moved too slowly for Sheridan and Warren failed to push his men into Pickett's flank during the attack. Thus, Sheridan relieved Warren of command, naming Major General Charles Griffin as his replacement. Grant and later Sherman, during the review board, supported Sheridan's decision to relieve Warren.

The next day, Lee, realizing that Grant was closing the trap on his forces, ordered the evacuation and retreat of his army from the entrenchments that protected Richmond and Petersburg. The Confederate government departed the capital on trains on the afternoon of 2 April.<sup>71</sup> That night Confederate forces began withdrawing west, burning key bridges on as they passed over them and out of the city.<sup>72</sup> Jefferson Davis tried to depict Lee's retreat as one of a

strategic move towards Southern victory. He wrote that since Lee's army was "relieved from the necessity of guarding particular points, our army will be free to move from point to point, to strike the enemy in detail far from his base."<sup>73</sup> But it had been rumored around town that this was not the case, and that General Lee, the hero of the Confederacy, had lost all hope of victory and did not have a plan to save the South. Mary Chesnut wrote in her diary, "They say General Lee is utterly despondent, and has no plan if Richmond goes—as go it must."<sup>74</sup>

Knowing that Lee would have to thin his lines to reinforce Pickett and protect his western flank after Sheridan's initial success at Five Forks, Grant ordered a general assault all along the lines for the following morning. At 5:00 a.m. on 3 April the artillery opened up on the Confederate trenches and at 6:00 a.m. the Union infantry assaulted.<sup>75</sup> Despite stiff isolated pockets of resistance, the assault was successful. Grant's plan so far had worked. He now had the opportunity to destroy the most powerful force in the Confederacy.

At 5:10 that morning, Meade informed Grant that Colonel Ralph Ely's Brigade of the 1st Division, IX Corps was in possession of Petersburg.<sup>76</sup> Upon entering Petersburg

with Meade, Grant realized that Lee's Army had escaped. He quickly turned his forces west and ordered an all out pursuit of the enemy. Grant deliberately kept most of his forces out of the trenches around Petersburg and Richmond "so as to start them out on the Danville Road early in the morning."<sup>77</sup> And part of General Edward Ord's Army of the James was sent on a parallel southern route in order to block any attempt by Lee to move towards Danville. General Meade and his Army of the Potomac, minus the IX Corps which was ordered to guard the South Side Rail Road and gain control of Petersburg, were immediately sent after Lee's demoralized troops.<sup>78</sup> V Corps followed closely behind Sheridan's cavalry. Major General Andrew Atkinson Humphreys moved his II Corps along River Road in directly behind V Corps.<sup>79</sup> General Wright immediately turned his VI Corps, Army of the Potomac, down River Road in pursuit of Lee's force as well.<sup>80</sup>

Not resting on the most significant victory of the war so far, Grant reiterated his intent by writing in a dispatch, "Rebel armies are now the only strategic points to strike at."<sup>81</sup> His forces now in pursuit, Grant took the time to telegraph Lincoln that he was in control of Petersburg and to ask the now exuberant President to meet

him at the city.<sup>82</sup> By 8:00 a.m. on the same day Union soldiers entered the Confederate capital. Shortly after the meeting between Grant and the President, General Weitzel notified the Lieutenant General that he was in control of Richmond and was putting out fires within the city. Weitzel also stated that the Confederate government was gone.<sup>83</sup>

Over the next three days, Union forces pursued Lee's fleeing army along the River and Namozine roads.<sup>84</sup> Confederate soldiers marched day and night attempting to escape Grant's forces. Captain Thomas Blake, commander of the Company E, 10th Virginia Artillery Battalion, stated, "we made very slow progress" the first night. Several times during the night he remembered they would "move a few yards and then halt for an hour or two."<sup>85</sup> Confederate infantryman St. George Tucker Coulter Bryan wrote in his diary, he could not "remember sleeping a single night." He "must have slept. Have repeatedly slept on [the] march." Provost guards had to work all night "arousing & starting off men who had fallen asleep on roadside."<sup>86</sup> The anxiety of being captured, mixed with the constant marching, took its toll. Lieutenant J. F. J. Caldwell, remembered "Some



of us were so worn, that we slept like the dead—others so anxious and harassed that we could not sleep at all.”<sup>87</sup>

The rain made the roads an obstacle for both sides. General Meade stated that, “the progress of the troops was greatly impeded by the bad character of the road.”<sup>88</sup> General Hunt, chief of the Army of the Potomac’s artillery, observed that, “the severe marching . . . . over the bad roads . . . broke down many of the horses which at the commencement of the campaign were not in very good condition.”<sup>89</sup> Colonel Theodore Lyman wrote in his diary that, the “steady and drenching rain . . . . reduced these sandy, clayey roads to a puddling or porridge.”<sup>90</sup> Of the two forces however, it hurt the Army of Northern Virginia the most. Infantrymen can move on such roads better than wagons or horse-drawn artillery. Cavalry, although slower than normal, still had the advantage of speed. The Army of the Potomac’s Chief Quartermaster stated that in such dreadful conditions it took “600 wagons with the aid of 1000 engineer troops. . . . fifty six hours [to move] five miles.”<sup>91</sup> Lee’s supply trains, numbering more than one thousand wagons, were spread out over thirty miles of road and were being pulled by weak horses.<sup>92</sup> Therefore the fastest elements of the Union army could out pace Lee’s

wagons, causing Lee's rear units to conduct a constant rear guard fight.<sup>93</sup>

On 3 April, the rain stopped and the weather was "warm and pleasant."<sup>94</sup> A brigade of Confederate cavalry was left at Namozine Creek, assigned to delay Sheridan's men while the slow-moving Confederate column made its way to Amelia Court House, another ten miles up the road. After heavy fighting between the 2nd North Carolina Cavalry and the 8th and 15th New York Cavalry Regiments, most of the Carolinians that were left in the depleted unit were killed or captured. Those who did escape made their way to Namozine Church. There, General George Armstrong Custer committed the 15th New York against the remnants of the 2nd Cavalry, most of whom turned and fled. The Confederate infantry brigade under the command of General Rufus Barringer was guarding a Confederate wagon train, but once the 15th New York routed the 2nd North Carolina Cavalry, Barringer's Brigade collapsed as well. General Barringer himself almost escaped, but after spotting gray-clad cavalrymen he joined the men and proposed to set out and find Major General Fitzhugh Lee. Shortly afterward, the gray clad cavalrymen dropped their disguise and raised their pistols and announced that they were Sheridan's

Scouts.<sup>95</sup> That same afternoon, the 1st District of Columbia Cavalry captured three hundred confederate soldiers, four guns, and some wagons.<sup>96</sup> The V Corps, after following the South Side Railroad to the Namozine and River Roads, ran into Confederate cavalry under Fitzhugh Lee on the night of the 3 April, but darkness curtailed much of a fight.<sup>97</sup>

The roads leading out of Petersburg were so congested with Union infantry, wagons and cavalry that priority had to be set between which units could move and which had to give way to the others. On 4 April, Meade ordered General Wright and his II Corps to give way to the cavalry and to the V Corps.<sup>98</sup> Several hours later that afternoon Meade redirected Wright to push by V Corps and the cavalry trains and to get as far forward as possible.<sup>99</sup> Fifteen minutes after directing Wright to push forward, Meade contacted Sheridan requesting to know what roads the cavalymen were taking so that Meade could use alternate routes to get his infantry corps up after Lee as fast as possible.<sup>100</sup> On 4 and 5 April, Meade wrote to Sheridan explaining that his cavalry trains had cut off Humphreys' II Corps.<sup>101</sup> The limited roads heading west caused considerable difficulties in the Union forces closing on the enemy, but the fact that

they crowded on these roads together shows their determination to get after Lee.

Planning to march to Burkeville before moving south to Danville, Lee ordered his subordinate commanders to rally at Amelia Court House. According to Lee, he had made arrangements to have supplies awaiting his army at the train station there, but was sorely surprised to find none when he arrived there on the morning of 4 April.<sup>102</sup> Instead he found boxes of ammunition and some artillery harnesses.<sup>103</sup> According to historian William Marvel, the first of Lee's forces at the Court House were able to draw a partial ration from a small but inadequate stockpile.<sup>104</sup> With a starving army to feed and only part of his troops at the rally point, Lee sent out men and wagons to scour the countryside to feed his army. Lee also sent a dispatch from the telegram office in Jetersville requesting 200,000 rations to be sent immediately to Amelia.<sup>105</sup> The lines, however, were cut at Jetersville as well, and Lee's dispatch rider continued on toward Burkeville with the intention of telegraphing the request for supplies from there. Sheridan's troopers, however, captured the dispatch carrier and upon searching him, they found the dispatch in his boot.<sup>106</sup> Sheridan's own trains were far behind and the

Union cavalry also needed provisions, so, in a stroke of brilliance, he ordered some of his men to Burkeville to send the dispatch just as it had been written, in the hopes that his cavalry would be resupplied by the graces of the Confederacy.<sup>107</sup> However, after receiving several telegrams requesting that supplies be sent, General Henry Harrison who was in charge of guarding the Richmond-Danville Railroad, believed it to be an enemy ruse and chose not to send the supplies.<sup>108</sup> Some of Lee's foragers were captured in the countryside surrounding Amelia Court House by Union cavalry.<sup>109</sup> Confederate cavalry pushed further down the road toward Jetersville to scout Lee's advance when they ran into Union troops along the rail line near Jetersville.<sup>110</sup>

On the morning of 4 April, Sheridan ordered Major General George Crook to move his division of cavalry toward Jetersville and destroy part of the Danville Railroad. The V Corps had followed close behind. Hearing from his scouts that Lee's entire army was at Amelia, Sheridan hurried to Jetersville. Arriving there at 5:00 p.m. that evening, he confirmed Lee's position. Part of Sheridan's cavalry and the V Corps entrenched that night along the Richmond-Danville Railroad.<sup>111</sup> The cavalry commander sent both Meade

and Grant a dispatch stating, "the whole of Lee's army is at or near Amelia Court House, and on this side of it. . . . We can capture the Army of Northern Virginia if force enough be thrown to this point."<sup>112</sup> Based on Lee's request for rations that Sheridan's men had intercepted, the cavalry commander also informed Grant that they were out of rations. Grant, realizing that only one corps of infantry and a small contingent of cavalry stood between Lee and escape, ordered Meade to Jetersville "with all dispatch."<sup>113</sup> Meade ordered his army to conduct a forced night march to Jetersville. Humphreys started toward Jetersville between 1:00 and 2:00 a.m. and Wright started his movement an hour later.<sup>114</sup>

At 1:00 p.m. in the afternoon Lee moved toward Jetersville and conducted a reconnaissance of the area. He also attempted to get information from local farmers. After conferring with his son, Fitzhugh Lee, in charge of the cavalry, Lee decided that Union forces were too strong to attack. Instead, he ordered his army to move toward Farmville and eventually wanted to reach Lynchburg, more than fifty miles away.<sup>115</sup> That day Lee ordered his slow and cumbersome train of wagons to move to the northwest to get a head start on his army.

Sheridan was a busy man on 5 April. There before him stood Lee's Army, the final objective of the war in the East. Knowing that Lee had been conducting a reconnaissance of his positions, Sheridan ordered a brigade of cavalry to conduct a reconnaissance of the Paine's Crossroads. Crook sent Davies' brigade of cavalry and the Union horsemen caught Lee's trains attempting to move out in front of his main force. Davies attacked, and initially the Confederate infantry pushed the overzealous cavalymen back. After Sheridan reinforced Davies with two additional brigades of cavalry, the horsemen were able to burn over two hundred of the enemy wagons and also captured five pieces of artillery.<sup>116</sup>

The II Corps reached Jetersville between mid-afternoon and early evening on the 5th.<sup>117</sup> Meade arrived at approximately 2:00 p.m., but was not feeling well, so he requested that Sheridan emplace his troops. He told Sheridan that he planned on attacking Lee once all of his forces were up. General Meade ordered General Humphreys to "push on as rapidly as possible . . . without fear of [his] flanks."<sup>118</sup> "It being plain that Lee would attempt to escape as soon as his trains were out of the way," Sheridan urged Meade to attack right away.<sup>119</sup> Meade, always cautious

and insistent on setting the conditions, did not want to attack Lee until VI Corps had arrived. The frustrated cavalry commander sent Grant another dispatch, reiterating the momentous opportunity they had and requesting Grant's presence. The VI Corps did not arrive at Jetersville until sometime shortly before or right after dark on the 5th and immediately threw up breastworks. The opportunity to attack Lee that day was gone.<sup>120</sup>

After getting the frustrated dispatch from Sheridan late that night, Grant decided to go to Jetersville and meet with his commanders. He needed to personally assess the situation and talk to both of his subordinate commanders face to face. Along with a few staff officers and a small cavalry escort, Grant moved first to Sheridan's then Meade's headquarters. Once there, Grant reinforced Sheridan's sense of urgency and prodded Meade into action. Apprised of the situation, Grant told Meade that they "did not want to follow the enemy; [they] wanted to get ahead of him, and that his [Meade's] orders would allow the enemy to escape."<sup>121</sup>

Almost as if hearing Grant's guidance to Meade to press forward, Lee realized the window of escape would close the next day and ordered an early morning movement on



6 April. General James Longstreet's First and Third Corps, led the Confederate column out of Amelia. Richard Anderson's Corps was behind Longstreet, and General Richard Ewell's Corps followed next. What was left of the Confederate wagon train followed Ewell's column, protected by John Gordon's Corps which also acted as rear guard.<sup>122</sup>

The issue of supplies at Amelia Court House created controversy in 1865 and among historians for more than a century. Some historians consider this delay to have been the last nail in Lee's coffin. Burke Davis writes that "loss of a day's march would bring the enemy on their heels."<sup>123</sup> Emory Thomas stated, that Lee's failure to gather supplies at Amelia Court House would rank "among the hypothetical imponderables of the Confederate War."<sup>124</sup> Most of this speculation comes from Lee himself, who stated in a letter to President Davis that "the delay was fatal and could not be retrieved."<sup>125</sup>

There are two factors to consider when dealing with the supply controversy. First of all, why were the supplies that Lee had expected at Amelia not there, and secondly, should Lee have paused for a full day there to gather supplies to feed his army knowing the Union armies were chasing after him? Some historians, including Robert

Hendrickson and Burke Davis, simply rely on Lee's letter to President Davis about his fatal delay at Amelia Court House, as proof that supplies were ordered but failed to arrive. Of all who have written about this campaign only Edward Pollard and Douglas Southall Freeman have addressed this issue in detail. Pollard blamed the affair on the "authorities in Richmond." He argued that Lee had "dispatched a most distinct and urgent order that large supplies of commissary and quartermaster's stores should be sent forward from Danville to Amelia Court House."<sup>126</sup> The trains that were filled with supplies did not stop at Amelia to resupply General Lee's army, but instead were pushed on into Richmond to relieve the flood of government evacuees out of Richmond.<sup>127</sup> Freeman goes further in identifying the different points of view. One point of view argued that the trains laden with rations had been rerouted at the last minute to continue on to Richmond. Freeman also reveals that Fitz Lee cited an unnamed source who stated that the officer in charge of the supplies was met at Amelia Court House by an unidentified representative from the government who ordered the train to continue on to Richmond without unloading the supplies. President Davis stated that neither he nor the Richmond authorities had

been involved in rerouting the trains laden with supplies onto Richmond. To defend himself, Davis went so far as influencing General Isaac Munroe St. John, the Confederate Commissary General, and others to write letters stating that Lee did not request that supplies be sent to Amelia Court House. Freeman argues that these letters were proof that Lee had not specifically requested in writing for supplies to be sent to Amelia.<sup>128</sup> Lee's biographer goes further in identifying the dispatch on 2 April, in which Lee told Breckinridge that he was to "give all orders that you find necessary in and about Richmond, the troops will all be directed to Amelia Court House."<sup>129</sup> There is no doubt that at least one of Lee's corps commanders thought there would be supplies at Amelia Court House. Longstreet recalled that, "orders had been sent for provisions to meet us at the Court-House."<sup>130</sup> Colonel Walter Taylor, Lee's chief of staff, stated that the last order to Breckinridge was satisfactory in Lee expecting that supplies would be sent to Amelia Court House.<sup>131</sup> One thing is certain: someone was responsible for the supply failure.

Historian Robert Krick, in his book *Staff Officers in Gray*, posits that the Confederate general staff was lacking throughout the war and considering the amount of grief

given to commissary officers, the department "could not have attracted many enthusiastic patriots."<sup>132</sup> One can surmise that such a weak staff would be even less effective during an evacuation of their capital. In support of Lee's claim, some ordnance and other supplies were delivered to Amelia Court House. Therefore, Lee's request for supplies must have been effective in getting supplies sent to Amelia Court House. Thus Fitz Lee's account of the logistical nightmare is possible. Lieutenant Wise's account of the Confederate government leaving Richmond supports this theory as well. Stationed at Clover Station, he watched as each train passed on its way out of Richmond toward the new Confederate capital of Danville. Wise recalled that "train after train . . . [were] all loaded to their utmost capacity."<sup>133</sup> This leads one to believe that every car was needed, and that in the frenzy of escaping the enemy, some representative of the Confederate government ordered Lee's supply trains on to Richmond.

This issue resolved, one may question Lee's decision to remain at Amelia to gather supplies. Marvel cites some evidence that Lee's army had adequate food supplies and that his delay was less from a lack of supplies and more from the slowness of his supply trains in getting to Amelia

Court House.<sup>134</sup> Historian Chris Calkins offers that Lee's Commissary General had over 300,000 rations at Richmond. At Danville, there were 1,500,000 rations of meat and 500,000 bread rations. Lynchburg contained at least 180,000 rations of bread and meat. Lee's army was not hungry due to a lack of rations, but in his inability to procure and distribute the rations to his troops because they were under the constant attack of the Federal forces.<sup>135</sup> In reality, Lee's decision to stop for a day at Amelia Court House was based on the need to wait for the rest of his army to get there. "As late as 10:00 P.M [on the night of 4 April]" General Ewell's column "was still trying to find its way across the Appomattox," and Anderson's and Gordon's Corps had still not arrived either.<sup>136</sup> Ewell's Corps did not arrive at Amelia Court House until 5 April. It was held up first in an attempt to control the mobs within Richmond then by the failure of Confederate engineers to provide a pontoon bridge at the flooded and unusable Genito Bridge.<sup>137</sup>

On the night of 5 April, and early the next morning, Lee's army finally departed the rallying point at Amelia Court House with all his men. Given these facts, one can argue that it was convenient for Lee to blame his failure

on an issue that was out of his hands. As Marvel posits, Lee might have "uncharacteristically sought to shift responsibility from himself . . . . to some faceless functionary."<sup>138</sup> This argument's validity is strengthened by the fact that Lee, even when pressed by Breckinridge to explain to Davis that he could no longer win the war, instead chose to state that the matter would be based on "the disposition and feelings of the people," ignoring the military realities.<sup>139</sup>

In fact, Lee's pause at Amelia Court House caused the only hesitation of the Union commanders during their pursuit. While General Sheridan pushed for a hurried attack on Lee, Meade cautiously decided to wait until all of his forces were present before the attack.<sup>140</sup> This allowed time for Lee's forces to concentrate and move westward. Had Lee not stopped at Amelia Court House, Meade's leading corps might have cut off some of the Army of Northern Virginia.

Motivated by Grant's talk on the night of 5 April, Meade ordered his army to attack at 6:00 a.m. the following morning.<sup>141</sup> Lee's decision to wait for his forces and attempt to gather supplies, the speed of movement by the Union cavalry and the V Corps, Meade's insistence on having

the entire army present before attacking, and Grant's prodding of his subordinate leaders, would set the conditions for the Battle of Sailor's Creek the very next day.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> *Richmond Dispatch*, 28 December 1865, 1.

<sup>2</sup> John S. Wise, *The End of an Era* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1902), 394-95.

<sup>3</sup> Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (Des Moines, Iowa: Dyer Publishing Co., 1908), 944.

<sup>4</sup> Emory M. Thomas, *Confederate State of Richmond: A Biography of the Capital* (Austin: University of Austin Press, 1971), 185-86.

<sup>5</sup> Wise, *End of an Era*, 393.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Diary From Dixie*, Edited by Ben Ames Williams (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), 331, 368, 382.

<sup>7</sup> Wise, End of an Era, 393-94.

<sup>8</sup> Robert McAllister, *The Civil War Letters of General Robert McAllister*, Edited by James I. Robertson (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1965), 517.

<sup>9</sup> Chesnut, *Diary From Dixie*, 368.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas, *Confederate State of Richmond*, 185-86.

<sup>11</sup> D. Augustus Dickert, *History of Kershaw's Brigade* (Dayton, Ohio: Press of Morningside Bookshop, 1976), 495.

<sup>12</sup> Alfred Grant, *The American Civil War and the British Press* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2000), 168.

<sup>13</sup> *Richmond Whig*, 20 January 1865, 1.

<sup>14</sup> Wise, *End of an Era*, 196.

<sup>15</sup> Charles W. Sanders, "Jefferson Davis and the Hampton Roads Peace Conference," *Journal of Southern History* 63 (November 1997): 814, 818.

<sup>16</sup> Josiah Gorgas, *The Journals of Josiah Gorgas, 1857-1878* Edited by Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 151.

<sup>17</sup> G. Ward Hubbs, ed., *Voices from Company D: Diaries by the Greensboro Guards, Fifth Alabama Infantry Regiment, Army of Northern Virginia* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 352.



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- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., 353.
- <sup>19</sup> *Richmond Dispatch*, 10 December 1864, 1.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 20 December, 1864, 1.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 24 December, 1864, 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Gorgas, *Journals of Josiah Gorgas*, 152.
- <sup>23</sup> Hubbs, ed., *Voices from Company D*, 355.
- <sup>24</sup> Robert E. Lee Jr., *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (1904; reprint, Old Saybrook, Conn.: Konecky & Konecky, n.d.), 145.
- <sup>25</sup> *Richmond Whig*, 24 February 1865, 2.
- <sup>26</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, ed., *Lee's Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A. to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of The Confederate States of America, 1862-65* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1957), 328-29.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 331.
- <sup>28</sup> Lee, *Recollections and Letters of Robert E. Lee*, 146.
- <sup>29</sup> John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 385.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 386.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 389.
- <sup>32</sup> Gorgas, *Journals of Josiah Gorgas*, 153.
- <sup>33</sup> Lee to Grant in Clifford Dowdey and Louis Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of R.E. Lee* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1961), 911.
- <sup>34</sup> Peter Carmichael, ed., *Audacity Personified: The Generalship of Robert E. Lee* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 149. Carmichael correctly points out that although Lee understood defeat to be inevitable he failed to inform Davis.
- <sup>35</sup> Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 912-13.
- <sup>36</sup> *Richmond Dispatch*, 10 December 1864, 1.

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<sup>37</sup> Hubbs, ed., *Voices from Company D*, 355.

<sup>38</sup> Gorgas, *Journals of Josiah Gorgas*, 155.

<sup>39</sup> Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 910.

<sup>40</sup> Hubbs, ed., *Voices from Company D*, 357.

<sup>41</sup> Grant, *American Civil War and the British Press*, 168.

<sup>42</sup> Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 918.

<sup>43</sup> Hubbs, ed., *Voices from Company D*, 353.

<sup>44</sup> Soldier quoted in Tracy J. Power, *Lee's Miserables: Life in the Army of Northern Virginia from the Wilderness to Appomattox*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 303.

<sup>45</sup> Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 906.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 913; Lee, *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee*, 145.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas, *Confederate State of Richmond*, 189.

<sup>48</sup> Lee, *Recollections and Letters of Robert E. Lee*, 147.

<sup>49</sup> James J. Hartley, *The Civil War Letters of the Late 1st Lieutenant James J. Hartley, 122nd Ohio Infantry Regiment*, Edited by Garber A. Davidson (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 1998), 89-90.

<sup>50</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York: Century Co., 1895), 1: 599.

<sup>51</sup> T. Harry Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, (Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 27; Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 610.

<sup>52</sup> Philip H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan: General United States Army*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1888), 2: 126. In his memoirs, Sheridan wrote that he explained to Grant why he did not want to link up with Sherman's forces, but does not explain his reasoning.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Hughes, *General Johnston*, "Great Commanders Series," Edited by James Grant Wilson (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 268, 270.

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<sup>54</sup> Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 126-28.

<sup>55</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 600.

<sup>56</sup> Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: Century Co., 1897), 423.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 423.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 426.

<sup>59</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 599.

<sup>60</sup> Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 428.

<sup>61</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 600-01.

<sup>62</sup> Sheridan quoted in Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 429.

<sup>63</sup> Report of Brevet Captain Charles Howell, 19 April 1865, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: GPO, 1880- 1901), Series. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 655 (hereafter cited as OR).

<sup>64</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences of the War*, 376.

<sup>65</sup> Burke Davis, *To Appomattox: Nine April Days, 1865* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1959), 27; Chris Calkins, *Thirty-Six Hours Before Appomattox: The Battles of Saylor's Creek, High Bridge, Farmville and Cumberland Church* (Farmville, Va.: Farmville Herald, 1998), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 601.

<sup>67</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 605.

<sup>68</sup> Lesley J. Gordon, *General George E. Pickett in Life & Legend*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 151-52; Davis, *To Appomattox*, 41, 45, 46. Pickett fled the battlefield, as he would do again a week later while his men sacrificed their lives in order to allow his escape.

<sup>69</sup> Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 432.

<sup>70</sup> Davis, *To Appomattox*, 57; Sheridan quoted in Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 440; Ed Bearss and Chris Calkins, *Battle of Five Forks* (Lynchburg, Va.: H. E. Howard, 1985), 94.

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<sup>71</sup> Thomas, *Confederate State of Richmond*, 193; Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 610.

<sup>72</sup> Report of Brigadier General Henry W. Benham, 22 April 1865, OR, Ser. 1, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 641.

<sup>73</sup> Davis quoted in Edward A. Pollard, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E. B. Treat & Co., 1866), 701.

<sup>74</sup> Chesnut, *Diary From Dixie*, 518.

<sup>75</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 708.

<sup>76</sup> Meade to Grant, 3 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, p. 255, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, Record Group (hereafter RG) 393, National Archives and Record Administration (hereafter NARA), Washington D.C..

<sup>77</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 610.

<sup>78</sup> Hazard Stevens, "The Battle of Sailor's Creek," *Military Historical Society of Massachusetts. The Shenandoah Campaigns of 1862 and 1864 and the Appomattox Campaign 1865* vol. 6 (Boston: The Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 1907), 440.

<sup>79</sup> Report of Major General Andrew A. Humphreys, 21 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 680.

<sup>80</sup> Report of Major General Horatio G. Wright, 22 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 904-05.

<sup>81</sup> Grant quoted in Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 453.

<sup>82</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 608, 612.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 612-13.

<sup>84</sup> Report of Major General George G. Meade, 30 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 604.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Blake, "Retreat From Richmond," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 25 (January-December, 1897): 136.

<sup>86</sup> St. George Tucker Coulter Bryan, October 1864, Unpublished Manuscript, p. 3, Mss1G8855d 263-268, Virginia Historical Society, (hereafter VHS), Richmond, Va.

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<sup>87</sup> J. F. J. Caldwell, *History of a Brigade of South Carolinians Known First as "Gregg's and Subsequently as "McGowan's Brigade* (Philadelphia, Pa.: King & Baird, 1866), 225.

<sup>88</sup> Report of Major General George G. Meade, 30 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 604.

<sup>89</sup> Report of Brevet Major General Henry J. Hunt, 1 June 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 661.

<sup>90</sup> Theodore Lyman, *With Grant and Meade from the Wilderness to Appomattox*, Edited by George R. Agassiz (1922; reprint, Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 330.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>92</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 4: 59.

<sup>93</sup> Gordon, *Reminiscences of the War*, 423-24.

<sup>94</sup> Report of Surgeon John A. Lidell, 24 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 629.

<sup>95</sup> Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 172-74; Roger H. Harrell, *The Second North Carolina Cavalry* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2004), 369-73; Edward G. Longacre, *The Cavalry at Appomattox Tactical Study of Mounted Operations During the Civil War's Climactic Campaign, March 27-April 9, 1865* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2003), 118-21.

<sup>96</sup> Report of Brigadier General Ranald S. Mackenzie, 8 May 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1245.

<sup>97</sup> Report of Brevet Brigadier General Richard Coulter, 26 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 897.

<sup>98</sup> Meade to Wright, 4 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, p. 261, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>99</sup> Meade to Grant, 4 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, p. 264, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964 Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>100</sup> Meade to Sheridan, 3 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, p. 264, Stack Area

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10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>101</sup> Meade to Sheridan, 4 and 5 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, pp. 266-67, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>102</sup> Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 4: 599; A. L. Long, ed., *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee: His Military and Personal History Lee's Last Retreat: The Flight to Appomattox*. (New York: J.M. Stoddart & Co., 1886), 412.

<sup>103</sup> Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 4: 66; James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America*, Edited by James I. Robertson (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1960), 609; Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee*, 412; Chris Calkins, "Hurtling toward the End," *America's Civil War* 17 (March 2004): 40.

<sup>104</sup> William Marvel, *Lee's Last Retreat: The Flight to Appomattox* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 50-51.

<sup>105</sup> Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 4: 510.

<sup>106</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 615. Grant stated in his memoirs that the dispatch was found in the telegraph office, but Sheridan recalled that his soldiers captured Lee's dispatch carrier on the way to Burkeville. It is hard to believe that a courier would leave a vital dispatch revealing Lee's position and situation in the telegraph office and Sheridan, being more directly involved, was in a better situation to remember the specifics of the information.

<sup>107</sup> Wise, *End of an Era*, 416; Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 175.

<sup>108</sup> Wise, *End of an Era*, 417-18.

<sup>109</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 615-16.

<sup>110</sup> Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 610.

<sup>111</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 616; Report of General Philip Sheridan, 16 May 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1106.

<sup>112</sup> Sheridan quoted in Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 616.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 610.

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<sup>116</sup> Stephen Z. Starr, *The Union Cavalry in the Civil War*, 3 vols. (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 2: 464-65; Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 176; Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 616, 617.

<sup>117</sup> Report of Brevet Major General Nelson A. Miles, 20 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 712; Report of Colonel George W. Scott, 10 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 715; Report of Captain Lucius H. Ives, 12 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 717.

<sup>118</sup> Brigadier General A. S. Webb to Humphreys, 5 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, pp. 267-68, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>119</sup> Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 177.

<sup>120</sup> Report of Major General Horatio G. Wright, 29 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 905; Report of Brevet Brigadier General J. Warren Keifer, 18 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 997; Meade to Humphreys, April 5, 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, p. 269, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>121</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 617-18.

<sup>122</sup> Chris M. Calkins, *The Appomattox Campaign: March 29 - April 9, 1865*, "Great Campaigns Series," (Conshohocken, Pa.: Combined Publishing, 2001), 99.

<sup>123</sup> Burke Davis, *Gray Fox: Robert E. Lee and The Civil War* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1956), 375.

<sup>124</sup> Emory M. Thomas, *Robert E. Lee* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 356-57.

<sup>125</sup> Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 936. Robert Hendrickson, *The Road to Appomattox* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 166.

<sup>126</sup> Pollard, *The Lost Cause*, 703.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 4: 509-10.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 512; Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 926.

<sup>130</sup> Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 609.

<sup>131</sup> Freeman, *R. E. Lee*, 4: 512.

<sup>132</sup> Robert E. L. Krick, *Staff Officers in Gray: A Biographical Register of The Staff Officers in The Army of Northern Virginia*, "Civil War America," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2-36, quote on page 30.

<sup>133</sup> Wise, *End of an Era*, 416.

<sup>134</sup> Marvel, *Lee's Last Retreat*, 40-50.

<sup>135</sup> Calkins, *The Appomattox Campaign*, 115-17.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>137</sup> Report of Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell, C.S. Army, 20 December 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 1293, 1294; Donald Pfanz, *Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier's Life*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 434.

<sup>138</sup> Marvel, *Lee's Last Retreat*, 51.

<sup>139</sup> Dowdey and Manarin, eds., *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 913.

<sup>140</sup> Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 177.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 2: 269.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE BATTLE: THIS IS THE END

#### **Amelia Court House**

As dawn approached on the morning of 6 April, the Union army was stretched in a four-mile long line of battle. Soldiers from both armies were awakened by a heavy rain.<sup>1</sup> George Armstrong Custer's cavalry division was on the right flank with Ranald Mackenzie's division covering the left flank. Three infantry corps of the Army of the Potomac were in between the cavalry divisions, with the II Corps on the southern or left side, the V Corps in the middle, and the VI Corps on the right, all facing in a northeasterly direction. Because VI Corps and the Union cavalry "had formerly served so harmoniously and so efficiently in the valley" Grant ordered the VI Corps to move to the far left of the line so that it was next to Sheridan's cavalry and in the best position to block the retreat of Lee's army.<sup>2</sup>

Lee's army had now moved fifty miles from Richmond and, although his army had been attrited along the way, it was still managing to evade a major engagement with the

pursuing Union forces. In order to flank the Federals at Jetersville and once more escape the Union juggernaut, Lee ordered his army to march early on the morning of 6 April. With his route to Danville blocked, Lee's only option was to retreat toward Lynchburg. Longstreet's Corps led off, moving before daylight. His mission was to "head off and prevent the enemy's infantry columns [from] passing [them] and standing across [their] march."<sup>3</sup> Lee could ill afford to let the Union forces block his path again. Behind Longstreet came Lieutenant General Richard Anderson's Corps, then Lieutenant General Ewell's. Gordon's Corps was last in the order of march; his mission was to protect the trains and to act as rear guard for the army.<sup>4</sup>

While the better part of General George Meade's Army of the Potomac was encamped around Jetersville the night of 5 April, part of Major General E. O. C. Ord's Army of the James was entrenched around Burkeville.<sup>5</sup> Grant ordered him to move west on 6 April and "cut off all the roads between there and Farmville."<sup>6</sup> Ord, understanding the commander's intent, actually struck out of Burkeville before Grant's orders arrived. Realizing the importance of High Bridge, Ord sent a detachment of two infantry regiments along with eighty cavalrymen to burn the bridge to deny it as an

escape route to the enemy. The mission was a tactical failure in that the Union infantry and accompanying cavalrymen did not succeed in burning the bridge.<sup>7</sup> In fact, in a sharp engagement with Confederate cavalry, every officer and soldier within the detachment was either killed, wounded, or captured.<sup>8</sup> Despite the tactical failure, the mission to High Bridge was a strategic Union victory for two reasons. First, General Longstreet at the front of Lee's column thought the two regiments were an advanced party of a larger Union column and entrenched his corps preparing for an attack by Union forces. This slowed the whole Confederate movement into Farmville, causing a time delay just enough for Union forces to prevent Confederate forces from burning the same bridge after they crossed the Appomattox River the next day. More directly involved with Sailor's Creek, the action at High Bridge caused the majority of the Confederate cavalry assets to be pushed forward. Up to that point, Lee's cavalrymen had been plugging holes in the Confederate column and checking the Union cavalry. Longstreet realized that with Ord located at Burkesville, High Bridge was his only escape route across the Appomattox River. Therefore, Longstreet ordered all the available cavalry forward to save the

bridge, and thus none were available to plug the gap between Anderson's and Longstreet's Corps at Marshall's Crossroads.<sup>9</sup>

On the morning of 6 April, Sheridan ordered his three cavalry divisions to follow a southern parallel route to that of the Confederates and at every opportunity to attack the rear of the army. Sheridan knew that he would have to stop Lee's column in order to allow the Union infantry time to catch and destroy it.<sup>10</sup>

If one of his divisions had success the other two divisions were to move in and support that division. If a division faced too much opposition, the other divisions were to leap-frog forward along the parallel route and attack further along the Confederate column.<sup>11</sup>

Major General Andrew Humphreys' II Corps, the first corps into Jetersville the day before, departed in pursuit of the Confederate column at 6:00 a.m. with the Second and First Divisions abreast and the Third Division following the First Division. One division commander in Humphreys' Corps had made the mistake of not possessing the sense of urgency shown by the rest of the Army of the Potomac. Brigadier General William Hays' Second Division failed to depart on time. Humphreys proceeded to Hays' headquarters

where he found everyone sleeping. He promptly relieved the division commander and assigned Brigadier General Thomas Smythe to command until the newly assigned Brevet Major General Francis Barlow could take command.<sup>12</sup> As in the case of Sheridan with Warren and V Corps, Grant's subordinate commanders knew the commander's intent to catch and destroy Lee's army, and there was no toleration for those officers not putting forth their full efforts in achieving that goal.

Initially Humphreys' Corps moved in a northeast direction, but due to the broken ground and trees in the area, his infantrymen deviated almost directly north. They left the roads and instead moved across the fields and through the woods. This deviation proved critical to the success of Humphreys' lead elements spotting Lee's rear guard. Had they not veered to the left while marching north to attack the Confederate army, they might have missed Lee altogether. Lee's forces burned the bridge at Flat Creek, but Union engineers quickly built several others to replace it. After crossing over the creek a reconnoitering detachment from II Corps found the enemy on the left of the corps moving in a westerly direction. Humphreys immediately swung his corps to the left, ordered

a brigade to attack the enemy and reported to Meade the enemy's position. Shortly after, by midmorning, Humphreys received a dispatch from Major General Alexander Stewart Webb, Meade's chief of staff, directing him to push towards Deatonsville. VI Corps would move through Jetersville and reposition on Humphreys' southern flank.<sup>13</sup> Humphreys ordered General Gershom Mott, commanding Third Division, to lead the corps toward Deatonsville and Ligontown.<sup>14</sup> Third Division, II Corps was now closest to Gordon's rear guard.

The II Corps battled with Gordon's Corps in a running fight throughout the rest of the day.<sup>15</sup> Union skirmish duty continued to rotate between the regiments; as the advanced regiment, acting as skirmishers, ran out of ammunition they moved aside and the next regiment would take the lead and push skirmishers forward.<sup>16</sup> General Mott, knowing the importance of maintaining contact with the rear of Lee's army, moved to the front of his division to personally oversee the fight. While conferring with Brigadier General Regis de Trobriand, the First Brigade, Third Division commander, Mott was shot through the leg and handed the division over to De Trobriand.<sup>17</sup> The new division commander was supposed to link the right flank of his forces with the First Division, II Corps, but having moved along another

route, General Nelson Miles' First Division had not caught up yet. A level-headed new commander, not understanding Grant's intent, might have waited for the First Division to catch up so that his flank was not exposed, but De Trobriand "realized that the enemy's was within [his] reach if [he] advanced promptly."<sup>18</sup> He formed the 40th New York Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Madison M. Cannon, and advanced on the enemy. De Trobriand stated in his official report that the "élan of the men was remarkable and argued well for the success of the day."<sup>19</sup> As the rear guard hastily formed behind makeshift breastworks, De Trobriand's line of battle would assault and carry the position. When stiffer resistance was met, Captain John Roder's 4th United States Artillery Battery along with Captain James Webb Adams' 10th Massachusetts Light Artillery Battery, which traveled near the front behind the skirmishers, would deploy and support the assault.<sup>20</sup>

De Trobriand received confirmation that his bold pursuit was the right action when Humphreys sent him instructions "urging the importance of pressing the enemy without loss of time."<sup>21</sup> At Deatonsville, where Gordon's men "held a strong position", Humphreys joined De Trobriand's

command and recommended that when possible the men should especially concentrate on capturing the enemy's guns.<sup>22</sup> One can only speculate that Humphreys was keeping in mind that Brigadier General Henry Davies' First Brigade, Second Cavalry Division, had captured some of General Fitzhugh Lee's artillery two days earlier.<sup>23</sup> This indeed was prophetic, for later that day General Ewell's lack of artillery in the second engagement of Sailor's Creek, at Hillsman House, allowed Union artillery to move unhindered within eight hundred yards of the Confederate breastworks across Sailor's Creek. As De Trobriand continued to strike the rear of Gordon's Corps, Union cavalry were positioning to attack and slow down Ewell's and Anderson's Corps.

After riding hard that morning, Custer stopped to let his division water their horses and was warned by an aide that they had found a gap in Lee's column. Not wasting any time, he ordered his brigade to mount up and off they went toward Marshall's Crossroads.<sup>24</sup> Two and a half miles southwest of Deatonsville, Colonel Peter Stagg's Michigan Brigade of Brigadier General Thomas Devin's First Cavalry Division caught up with the rear of the Confederate wagon trains. Not wanting the Confederate column to slip away, General Sheridan authorized General Devin to order Colonel



Stagg's Michigan Cavalry to conduct a mounted charge supported by artillery against Gordon's veteran troops.<sup>25</sup>

Meanwhile, Custer's Division pushed on down the parallel route and moved north past Sailor's Creek and attacked a gap in the line between General William Mahone's Division of Longstreet's Corps and General Richard Anderson's Corps. By 12:40 p.m. Sheridan reported that he had checked the enemy advance and urged the infantry to move quickly up to attack.<sup>26</sup> He wrote to Grant, "We are shelling their trains and preparing to attack their infantry. Our troops are moving on their left flank, and I think we can break and disperse them."<sup>27</sup> General Wright sent his staff forward to coordinate with Sheridan and report on the progress of his corps.<sup>28</sup>

By the time the leading elements of the Humphreys' II Corps reached Holt's Corner, a crossroads just northeast of Sailor's Creek, General Horatio Wright's VI Corps, along with some of Sheridan's cavalry, approached from the south. Gordon attempted to make a stand there by using a slightly sunken road as partial coverage. This defense, more than any other, had to hold because the Army of Northern Virginia's supply train of three hundred wagons was literally on the other side of the Confederate lines,

jammed up against Sailor's Creek. Initial assaults by leading elements of Humphreys' Corps and Sheridan's cavalry had failed, but Brigadier General Truman Seymour's Third Division, VI Corps approached from the south and flanked Gordon's men, carrying the position.<sup>29</sup>

### **Marshall's Crossroads**

When Custer's cavalrymen arrived at Marshall's Crossroads, the only Confederate combat unit in the area was an artillery battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Frank Huger. Huger, realizing that a gap was growing between Major General William Mahone's division and Major General George Pickett's division in Anderson's Corps, moved his artillery train forward and had just passed the crossroads when the Union cavalrymen arrived.<sup>30</sup> Custer's men charged the trains and only two of Huger's artillery pieces were able to unlimber and fire before being overrun by the red-scarfed cavalrymen. Custer's troopers captured at least 15 of Huger's guns.<sup>31</sup> As Custer's men were torching the wagons, Anderson's divisions under Pickett and Major General Bushrod Johnson charged and drove off the Union cavalrymen.<sup>32</sup> Custer sent dispatches to both Devin and Crook stating that he had captured a large portion of the

trains, but was hard pressed by infantry and called for their assistance.<sup>33</sup>

Both divisions rode to support Custer. Devin brought up his division on Custer's flank and was able to check the infantry assault by Pickett's and Johnson's divisions.<sup>34</sup> Upon arriving, General Crook, the Second Cavalry Division Commander, ordered J. Irvin Gregg's Brigade to the west to cut off Anderson's escape.<sup>35</sup> While Gregg's brigade blocked off the road to the west, General Davies's First Brigade conducted a mounted charge, leaping over the breast works along the road.<sup>36</sup> The Confederate infantry entrenched and put up hasty breast works. Colonel William R. Aylett, commanding the 53rd Virginia Infantry Regiment within Pickett's division, stated after "marching and fighting" for days, we had to "stay and fight to avoid being ridden over by the troopers."<sup>37</sup> Custer and Devin's divisions made several dismounted and mounted assaults against the Anderson's Corps, but were repulsed. Like Sheridan at Five Forks, Custer used his division band to start playing during a final mounted charge that drove off the infantry brigades in front of them.<sup>38</sup>

Anderson attempted to have his divisions cover one another as they bypassed the Union cavalry. First,

Pickett's Division would form against the cavalry while Johnson's moved behind, and then Johnson's Division would form to allow Pickett to bypass. Johnson's Division was moving around Pickett's Division when Custer mounted his final cavalry assault. Some Union cavalry got behind Pickett's Division during that last assault and Pickett ordered a retreat. As Pickett's Division retrograded across an open field, an aide brought one of Pickett's brigade commanders, Brigadier General William A. Terry, his horse. Mounting his horse, Terry fled the battlefield, leaving his brigade to fend for itself. Seeing Terry's departure caused a general panic among the rest of the brigade, and the command disintegrated and ran for the woods. The Federal cavalry charged and before the Confederate column could reach the woods, the men in blue were on them.<sup>39</sup> Anderson told Pickett that his men should attempt to fight their way out, but every time they attempted to escape, Custer's cavalry charged and drove them back into the woods.<sup>40</sup> Colonel Aylett remembered that when the "retreat was ordered" they "were not in good running order" and after being "enveloped" they "could not get away."<sup>41</sup> Approximately six hundred men from Pickett's Division escaped the Union onslaught. Due to their closer

proximity to the rest of Lee's Army, and in part by leadership displayed by men like Henry Wise, more of Bushrod Johnson's Division escaped.<sup>42</sup> Once again Pickett, as well as Bushrod Johnson, abandoned their divisions and fled the battlefield.<sup>43</sup> After routing almost two complete Confederate divisions under the command of Johnson and Pickett in Anderson's Corps, the Federal cavalry turned to the northeast, coming up directly behind Ewell's line of battle.<sup>44</sup>

### **Hillsman House**

Historian Joseph Mitchell correctly stresses the fact "that Grant's troops were able to close with the retreating Confederates is an indication of how hard and fast they also had been marching."<sup>45</sup> VI Corps, being the last to bivouac the night before near Jetersville, got only about two to three hours of sleep that night. On the morning of 6 April, thinking that Lee was still at Amelia Court House, VI Corps initially marched for a couple of hours in the wrong direction. However, after hearing the sounds of gunfire from the Federal cavalry and receiving the orders from Sheridan to move with all possible haste, Wright's Corps marched hard the last hour over plowed, wet fields in order to get to the battle in time. Upon arriving at the

battlefield, the men of Wheaton's First Division "with the greatest spirit," "double-quickened" into position to attack Ewell's Corps.<sup>46</sup>

Ewell, informed that a large force of cavalry held the road in front of Anderson, rode forward to discuss their options with Anderson. At about that time, he found out that a large force of Union infantry was forming for attack around the Hillsman House. Anderson suggested that Ewell check the assault in the rear and he would make the attack on the Union cavalry in the front. Ewell then entrenched his corps along the military crest on the southern side of Sailor's Creek.<sup>47</sup> Custis Lee placed his division on the left flank of the Confederate line and General Joseph Brevard Kershaw placed his division on the right.<sup>48</sup> The length of Ewell's line of battle could not have been more than a few hundred yards long. What little force he had left was concentrated, for the most part, in plain view of the Hillsman House. Sheridan ordered Colonel Peter Stagg's brigade of cavalry to demonstrate against Ewell's Corps in order to hold them in position until Wright's infantry arrived. Stagg was drastically outnumbered, but his feint attack worked, holding Ewell's Corps in position. As

Stagg's men fell back to the left of the Hillsman House, Wright arrived at the head of Seymour's Division.<sup>49</sup>

When Seymour's Division flanked Gordon at Holt's Corner, Gordon had to move on a northerly route which separated the last two Confederate corps. Seymour then rounded the turn at Hillsman House and deployed his division to the right side of the road leading to Sailor's Creek. It was approximately 3:00 in the afternoon. As parts of Brigadier J. Warren Keifer's Third Division, VI Corps attacked through Gordon's line at Holt's Corner they became entangled in II Corps, which was attacking to their right. For some reason officers from II Corps failed to release these men back to VI Corps for their attack on Ewell's Corps across the creek.<sup>50</sup> General Frank Wheaton's First Division was deployed to the left of Seymour's and both started down the road to the creek, meeting some skirmishers along the way.<sup>51</sup>

Brevet Major General George W. Getty's Division did not make it to Sailor's Creek in time for the assault. Of the two divisions of Wright's Corps that fought at Sailor's Creek, both attacked Ewell without the full complement of their command. First, Keifer's incomplete brigade in Seymour's division was still entangled with II Corps, and

additionally Brevet Brigadier General William Penrose's First Brigade was not up to make the hurried attack. Sheridan, positioned at the Hillsman House, found out from a brave Union cavalryman who rode straight through the Confederate lines to report that Anderson's Corps was being routed.<sup>52</sup> He then ordered Wright's incomplete corps into battle in order to mass forces with his cavalry on the opposite side of Ewell.<sup>53</sup>

VI Corps artillery hurried into position around the Hillsman House approximately five to six hundred yards from Ewell's line of battle.<sup>54</sup> At approximately 5:30 p.m. the entire brigade of VI Corps artillery commanded by Major Andrew Cowan, bombarded Ewell's Corps without fear of counter battery fire, for the only artillerymen still with Ewell at Sailor's Creek had been converted into infantrymen and were holding the center of Ewell's line.<sup>55</sup> Ewell's error in judgment, failing to ensure his corps traveled with some sort of artillery, was costly. Captain Webb Adams, commanding the Massachusetts 10th Light Artillery Battery, stated that his battery alone fired thirty-seven rounds at Ewell's line.<sup>56</sup> As the Confederate forces turned to get into position defending about a third of the way up the hill Union artillery rained down upon their lines.<sup>57</sup>



Upon reaching the flooded Sailor's Creek that caused so much heartache for the Confederates, the Union infantrymen crossed the swampy river while exposed to "severe front and enfilading fire."<sup>58</sup> Wheaton's men tried to form on the far side of the river, but the ground in front of his right flank, Third Brigade, nearest the road, was not steep enough and the Confederate line easily fired down upon them.<sup>59</sup> On the right side of the road Seymour's Division exited the creek first and ran directly into Custis Lee's Division, and as the first line of Union infantry exited the creek, the converted artillery brigade under Custis Lee's command discharged heavy and accurate plunging fire into the Union line. Despite the heavy fire from the Confederate lines, the Union lines pushed on up the hill into the Confederate breastworks. The converted Confederate artillerymen under command of Colonel Stapleton Crutchfield fought hand to hand with the Union infantrymen. The center of the Confederate line then charged and pushed part of Edwards' Third Brigade, along with Seymour's Division, back into the creek.<sup>60</sup> During this countercharge by the Confederate forces, Colonel Crutchfield was shot in the head.<sup>61</sup> As soon as the Confederate held southern slope was free of Union forces, the Union guns around the

Hillsman House vaulted artillery rounds into the Confederate counter attack.<sup>62</sup> Seeing the Confederate charge, Brevet Colonel Egbert Olcott turned part of his 121st New York Volunteers toward the charging Confederate forces and charged, driving them back.<sup>63</sup> There was some confusion in Custis Lee's Division when officers attempted to restore the line. Commodore John Tucker mistook the calls to fall back to the original line of defense for orders to fall further back up the hill away from Sailor's Creek. Upon realizing the mistake, he faced his men about and marched them back to the line under heavy fire.<sup>64</sup> Some Confederate soldiers near the water's edge, not knowing which way to turn, "floundered through the creek and gave themselves up as prisoners" to the men they had just driven back across the creek.<sup>65</sup>

Confederate soldiers in the Savannah Guard from Kershaw's Division, which was located on the extreme right of Ewell's battle line, noticed that Union infantry, probably from Brevet Brigadier General Joseph Hamblin's Brigade, were attempting to flank them through some thick woods.<sup>66</sup> Before the Union soldiers could exit the woods, which were covered by thick underbrush, the Savannah Guard

fixed bayonets and counterattacked Wheaton's men, driving them back through the woods.<sup>67</sup>

As elements of Wheaton's Division started to flank Kerhsaw's Division, he ordered his division to back up the hill in an attempt to keep the Union infantry in front of him. While backing up, he ran into elements of General Custer's cavalrymen approaching from the rear. Kershaw advised his men to attempt to make their escape, but surrendered with the better part of his division.<sup>68</sup> Approximately two hundred of his men were able to escape by running through the woods.<sup>69</sup> Many dropped their guns and other accoutrements while fleeing the battlefield.<sup>70</sup>

Most of the Confederate soldiers that were not killed or captured along Sailor's Creek were rounded up by the Union cavalry approaching from the south.<sup>71</sup> General Ewell himself saw none of the main engagement of his corps. He went back to Anderson's Corps to see how Anderson's attack on the Federal cavalry was making out.<sup>72</sup>

According to historian Jay Monaghan, Ewell surrendered to Custer. However, Colonel William Truex, commanding Third Brigade, Third Division, VI Corps, reported that he received Major Pegram in a flag of truce that rendered General Ewell's surrender to him.<sup>73</sup> Wheaton stated in his

official report that the 5th Wisconsin Volunteers captured Ewell.<sup>74</sup> Ewell's biographer asserts that Ewell surrendered to Custer or one of his cavalrymen, who then allowed Major Pegram to take a note from Ewell to Custis Lee informing him that he was surrounded and that Ewell had surrendered.<sup>75</sup> Ewell wrote in his official report that he surrendered to a cavalry officer.<sup>76</sup> It very well may have been that Pegram ran into Colonel Truex's men when he attempted to get word to Custis Lee, and that is how Truex mistakenly believed that Ewell had surrendered to him. Pegram failed to reach Custis Lee's lines, but soon the Confederate general was surrounded.<sup>77</sup> A brave Union cavalry officer, presumably from Custer's Division, charged into Custis Lee's line and begged them to surrender explaining to the bedraggled Confederates that they were surrounded. The Confederate soldiers did not fire upon the cavalry officer because they admired his daring. The Union infantrymen within Seymour's Division again approached from the creek, this time with smiles on their faces. After capturing their Confederate counterparts they opened their haversack's and shared their hardtack with the hungry soldiers.<sup>78</sup>

The last unit to surrender at Hillsman's House was surprisingly the Confederate Marine and Navy detachment

commanded by Commodore John R. Tucker. Tucker had backed his men into a stand of trees and continued to fire until men from the 121st New York Volunteers and the 37th Massachusetts moved forward and convinced them to surrender.<sup>79</sup>

### **Lockett Farm**

A half-mile from Sailor's Creek, Gordon had a portion of his command entrenched across the road leading to the creek in order to give the wagon trains time to get across. They kept up a constant fire on the approaching Federal forces. Gordon resupplied ammunition to his rear guard by horseback, but the firing was so intense that the horse was shot as well. First Division, II Corps assaulted and carried the line, causing Gordon's men to retreat across the creek abandoning the wagons that had not yet crossed.<sup>80</sup> Then elements of Second Brigade, Third Division of Humphreys' Corps, which was on the right flank of First Division, assaulted the flank of the Confederate line and into the ravine where the Confederate wagons were huddled, waiting their turn to attempt to cross the stream.<sup>81</sup> After driving off what Confederate soldiers were guarding the train, Humphreys' men captured approximately two hundred wagons and seventy ambulances along with about half the

horses and mules needed to pull them.<sup>82</sup> Lead elements of II Corps crossed the creek that night in pursuit of the Confederate column, but, "owing to darkness the pursuit was disconnected for the night."<sup>83</sup> Although Humphreys' Second Corps was able to destroy or capture most of the wagons that Gordon was protecting, Gordon's Corps had escaped across Sailor's Creek as the sun set, but firing continued "long after nightfall."<sup>84</sup> Humphreys worried about the intermixing of his Corps' elements throughout the day called off the pursuit until he could straighten his lines the next morning.<sup>85</sup> By daylight the next morning, General Gordon led his fragmented corps across High Bridge, tired and demoralized, but in far better shape than what was left of Lee's other two corps.<sup>86</sup>

Neither Ewell nor Anderson had taken the time that day to notify Lee of the engagement they were involved in. Lee had ordered General William Mahone up to support General Longstreet, who was facing elements of Ord's army at Rice's Station. Lee was scolding Mahone for "the severity of [his] note in respect to Colonel Marshall's interference with [his] division the night before," when Colonel Andrew R. Venable informed him that the Confederate wagon trains was captured at Sailor's Creek. Lee excitedly

asked "Where is Anderson? Where is Ewell? It is strange I can't hear from them."<sup>87</sup> Having no cavalry readily available, Lee ordered Mahone to Sailor's Creek. The army commander accompanied Mahone toward the creek, but upon reaching the crest of the hill along River Road overlooking the crossing of Big Sailor's Creek, they realized they were too late. Mahone remembered, "the disaster which had overtaken the army was in full view . . . teamsters with their teams and dangling traces, retreating infantry without guns, many without hats, a harmless mob, with massive columns of the enemy moving orderly on."<sup>88</sup> When Lee had seen what was left of two of his routed corps, he exclaimed, "My God! Has the army been dissolved?"<sup>89</sup> Mahone replied, "No General, here are your troops ready to do their duty." Lee replied, "Yes General, there are some true men left." In referring to the approaching Union forces he asked, "will you please keep those people back?"<sup>90</sup> Shortly after reaching the top of the crest General Mahone saw General Anderson approaching. Mahone rode down to see him and "discovered at once that he had lost his heart in the cause."<sup>91</sup> General Anderson looked defeated. Mahone had requested that Anderson follow him to the top of the hill where Lee awaited him. Upon reaching the top of the hill,

Lee without even looking at Anderson and with a fling of his left hand, ordered him to take the stragglers to the rear out of the way of Mahone's troops, and then stated emphatically, "I wish to fight here."<sup>92</sup> However it was too late in the evening and although Federal cavalry rode close to Mahone's Division there was no more fighting that night.

Not all Confederate leadership within Ewell's and Anderson's embattled corps abandoned their men that day. General Wise, despite the difficult situation of being nearly surrounded and outnumbered, maintained his brigade's lines and fought his way out to Lee's lines across the Appomattox River. Anderson had no idea of the fate of one of his brigades. Lee feared that despite "fighting obstinately at Sailor's Creek," Wise's Brigade was "surrounded by the enemy," and that the General was "captured or worse."<sup>93</sup>

Union casualties for the three different engagements totaled approximately twelve hundred men.<sup>94</sup> General Wright, in addressing his corps, stated that they had marched "with great cheerfulness and enthusiasm," and "went into the fight with a determination to be successful seldom evinced by the best troops." He went on to say that, through "valor" the corps made Sailor's Creek, "the most important



of the last and crowning contests." "The corps has always fought well, but never better than in the assault at Petersburg, and at Sailor's Creek."<sup>95</sup> Another testament to the valor displayed by Union soldiers at Sailor's Creek is the fact that fifty-five men earned the Medal of Honor for their actions that day.<sup>96</sup>

Although General Sheridan estimated to *New York World* reporter George Townsend that there were about ten thousand prisoners captured at Sailor's Creek, the number was closer to 7,700, with approximately another one thousand Confederate soldiers killed or wounded.<sup>97</sup> In all, Lee lost almost 9,000 men along with ten flag officers and over three hundred wagons. All but two hundred of Ewell's 3,600 man corps was either killed, wounded or captured. Anderson's Corps, which numbered 6,400 men prior to Sailor's Creek, lost an estimated 2,600, split evenly between Pickett's and Johnson's divisions. Only the brigades of General Wise and Wallace escaped.<sup>98</sup> The combined losses at Sailor's Creek were devastating to the Army of Northern Virginia's commander. After Sailor's Creek Lee's army consisted of only two corps.<sup>99</sup> The day had been devastating to Lee's forces and even so resourceful a general as Lee had few options left.<sup>100</sup> Burke Davis writes

that Lee had "a last desperate plan to save the army" by using the Appomattox River as a shield between his forces and Union forces.<sup>101</sup> In fact, Lee was not sure what to do. He asked Mahone, who he believed knew the area well enough, "how are we to get away from here?"<sup>102</sup> Mahone suggested that he march through the woods to High Bridge and cross the Appomattox River there and that Longstreet should follow through Rice's Station to Farmville.<sup>103</sup> By 11:00 p.m. Mahone withdrew his forces and headed for High Bridge. Once there he had come upon General Anderson and General Gordon, who were agreeing on the fact that their army's situation was hopeless.<sup>104</sup>

That night while Union forces encamped around Sailor's Creek, Sheridan sent a dispatch to Grant, giving numbers of soldiers and the names of Confederate generals captured. He wrote, that "If the thing is pressed, I think that Lee will surrender." Grant forwarded the message on to Lincoln and the President responded, "Let the thing be pressed."<sup>105</sup>

A young messenger, Lieutenant John Wise, sent by President Davis, finally linked up with Lee after midnight. After Lee told Wise to inform Davis that he would not be heading to Danville, but instead attempting to reach Lynchburg, the dispatch carrier asked if there was any

point where Lee might try to defend. Lee sadly responded, "No; I shall have to be governed by each day's developments. . . . A few more Sailors' Creeks and it will all be over—ended—just as I have expected from the first."<sup>106</sup>

As Wise and Lee discussed the future of the Confederate army, Wise's father, Brigadier General Henry Wise, covered in mud and wearing an old blanket for warmth, led the remnants of his brigade across the Appomattox at High Bridge. He immediately sought out General Lee. Wise was cursing his division commander, General Bushrod Johnson, for fleeing the battlefield and leaving Wise's brigade to fight its own way out.<sup>107</sup> After at least mockingly reprimanding Wise for criticizing his superior officer, Lee asked him what he thought of their situation. Wise responded, "There is no situation! Nothing serious remains, General Lee, but to put your poor men on your poor mules and send them home in time for Spring [plowing]. This army is hopelessly whipped, and is fast becoming demoralized." Wise then exclaimed, "the blood of every man who is killed from this time forth is on your head." Lee responded that he could not surrender. "What would the country think of me, if I did what you suggest?" Wise

responded, "Country be d--d! There is no country. . . . You are the country to these men. They have fought for you."<sup>108</sup> Whether Lee made up his mind that night is unknown, but soon Federal forces under Grant would force the decision upon him.

The Union columns continued their relentless pursuit of the depleted Confederate army.<sup>109</sup> Officers and soldiers within Lee's army were "utterly demoralized," sure that "all was lost."<sup>110</sup> Lieutenant Wise, on an errand from President Davis, witnessed first hand the demoralization of the army after Sailor's Creek. He recalled that "the roads were filled with stragglers. They moved ahead looking behind them, as if they expected to be attacked and harried by a pursuing foe."<sup>111</sup> Wise's father cast his bony finger at his son and exclaimed, "This is the end!"<sup>112</sup>

When the younger Wise was getting ready to return to Danville to explain to President Davis Lee's situation, his father turned down his offered horse because it "was too pretty a little animal to make a present to a Yankee."<sup>113</sup> As the young messenger departed Lee's camp he "felt that [he] was in the midst of the wreck of that immortal army which, until now, . . . [he] had believed invincible."<sup>114</sup>

On 7 April several senior officers under Lee "believing the extrication hopeless," went forward to tell General Lee that they thought further resistance was pointless and that they should surrender.<sup>115</sup> General Gordon requested that General William Nelson Pendleton, Lee's Chief of Artillery, due to his closeness to Lee be the one to inform him of their opinion. Pendleton went to Longstreet with this information and Longstreet did not agree, but according to Pendleton, felt that he should side with the others. All, except Longstreet, signed a piece of paper affirming their opinion that surrender was inevitable, and Pendleton took it to Lee. Lee thanked him for trying to relieve him of the burden of responsibility, but stated that it was his responsibility.<sup>116</sup>

On 8 April 1865, Lee formally relieved Anderson, Pickett and Johnson of command. Although Pickett had virtually no forces left, the other two generals still had men left in their units. While Lee did not state why he relieved them, their conduct during the battle of Sailor's Creek must have factored into his decision.<sup>117</sup>

That same day, Union forces had once again blocked Lee's army. Since Lee had crossed the Appomattox River and the Union forces had stayed south of the river they had to

move less of a distance along the straighter route. Lee's route had circled north and then due southwest finally connecting back up to the South Side Railroad at Appomattox Station.<sup>118</sup> Meade ordered his II and VI Corps commanders to attack "the enemy now in its front," at 6:00 a.m. the next morning. II Corps was designated to make the main effort with VI Corps in support.<sup>119</sup> Before the attack commenced near Appomattox Court House, General Lee requested a suspension of hostilities with Meade's Army of the Potomac. A similar truce had been negotiated on the other side of the court house as well.<sup>120</sup> Meade recommended to Grant that the two commanders should meet and that he thought Lee would accept the terms of the surrender.<sup>121</sup> Grant replied that he had no authority to suspend hostilities, until "it is with distinct understanding that [Lee was] prepared to accept" his surrender terms.<sup>122</sup>

Within a few days Lee surrendered what was once the most feared army in the Civil War. The destruction of two corps, attrition of a third, and the loss of ten flag officers was a blow that even General Lee could not overcome.<sup>123</sup> Lee's surrender "shattered the morale of remaining Rebels in the field."<sup>124</sup> Lieutenant John Wise returned to tell the Confederate President that he thought

that Lee's army was doomed and that the sooner he surrendered the better.<sup>125</sup>

Joe Johnston, commanding approximately thirty thousand soldiers in North Carolina, heard about Lee's surrender on 10 April. Within two days he met with President Davis at Greensboro, North Carolina, to persuade him to authorize a peace initiative.<sup>126</sup>

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Beck Walton, *A Pennsylvanian in Blue: The Civil War Diary of Thomas Beck Walton*, Edited by Robert A. Taylor (Shippensburg, Pa.: Burd Street Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Grant quoted in Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York: Century Co., 1895), 1: 620; Sylvanus Cadwaller, *Three Years with Grant*, Edited by Benjamin P. Thomas (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1955), 315; Philip H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan: General United States Army* 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1888), 2: 182.

<sup>3</sup> James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America*, Edited by James I. Robertson (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1960), 611.

<sup>4</sup> John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 423.

<sup>5</sup> Cadwaller, *Three Years with Grant*, 315.

<sup>6</sup> Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 617-18, 621.

<sup>7</sup> Bernarr Cresap, *Appomattox Commander: The Story of General E. O. C. Ord* (San Diego, Calif.: A. S. Barnes & Co. 1981), 190-93.

<sup>8</sup> Cornelius Hart, *Diary of Cornelius Hart*, p. 8, Mss5:1C1974:2, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va. (hereafter VHS); Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 1: 621; Edward G. Longacre, *Lee's Cavalrymen: A History of the Mounted Forces of the Army of Northern Virginia, 1861-1865* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books), 331.

<sup>9</sup> Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 611-13; Longacre, *Lee's Cavalrymen*, 330-31.

<sup>10</sup> Richard O'Connor, *Sheridan the Inevitable* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953), 262-63.

<sup>11</sup> Report of Major General Philip Sheridan, 16 May 1865, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: GPO, 1880-1901), Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 1107-08 (hereafter cited as OR); Chris M. Calkins, *The Appomattox Campaign: March 29 - April 9, 1865*, Great Campaigns Series (Conshohocken, Pa.: Combined Publishing, 2001), 99.

<sup>12</sup> Report of Major General Andrew A. Humphreys, 21 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 681-82; General Humphreys quoted in James



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Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 611; Calkins, *The Appomattox Campaign*, 99.

<sup>13</sup> Report of Major General Andrew A. Humphreys, 21 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 681-82.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Report of Major General Andrew A. Humphreys, 10 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 674.

<sup>16</sup> Report of Colonel Russell B. Shepherd, 17 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 783-84.

<sup>17</sup> Alan D. Gaff, *On Many a Bloody Field: Four Years in the Iron Brigade* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1996), 414.

<sup>18</sup> Report of Brigadier General Regis de Trobriand, 17 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 778-80.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Report of Brevet Lieutenant Colonel John G. Hazard, 19 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 793; Organization of Union Forces under Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 568.

<sup>21</sup> Report of Brigadier General Regis de Trobriand, 17 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 778-80.

<sup>22</sup> Report of Brigadier General Regis de Trobriand, 17 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 778-80; Report of Brevet Captain Charles W. Holwell, 19 April 1865, 656-57.

<sup>23</sup> Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 176.

<sup>24</sup> Jay Monaghan, *Custer: The Life of General George Armstrong Custer* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1959), 236.

<sup>25</sup> Report of Philip H. Sheridan, 16 May 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 1107-08.

<sup>26</sup> Meade to Humphreys, 6 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, p. 271, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, Record Group (hereafter RG) 393, National Archives and Record Administration (hereafter NARA), Washington D.C..

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<sup>27</sup> Frederick C. Newhall, *With Sheridan in the Final Campaign Against Lee*, Edited by Eric J. Wittenberg (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 88.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>29</sup> Report of Philip H. Sheridan, 16 May 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 1107-08; Report of Major General Horatio G. Wright, 29 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 905-07.

<sup>30</sup> C. Irvine Walker, *The Life of Lieutenant General Richard Heron Anderson* (Charleston: Art Publishing Co., 1917), 209. Walker blamed the gap in Pickett's division on the route being blocked by wagons. This is the only account that offers that excuse for Pickett's failing to maintain contact with Mahone's Division.

<sup>31</sup> Report of Brevet Major General George A. Custer, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1132; Report of Colonel Alexander C. M. Pennington, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1136.

<sup>32</sup> Report of Brevet Major General George A. Custer, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1132; George Armstrong Custer, *Custer in the Civil War: His Unfinished Memoirs*, ed. John M. Carroll (San Rafael, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1977), 63; Monaghan, *Custer*, 237; O'Connor, *Sheridan the Inevitable*, 263. In both his official report and in his unfinished memoirs Custer stated that Ewell's Corps initially drove off his cavalrymen from the trains. In fact, it was Pickett's and Johnson's divisions under Anderson. At the time Custer was being counterattacked, Ewell was entrenching Custis Lee's and Kershaw's units along the southern side of Sailor's Creek. Monaghan uses Custer's official report but does not cite any other references from the Confederate side and therefore is incorrect in his description of Marshall's Crossroads. Additionally, Sheridan's biographer, Richard O'Connor, misreads the battle as well, stating that Ewell was in charge of both "wings" of the Confederate corps that were captured or destroyed at Sailor's Creek. In fact, both Ewell and Anderson were two separate commanders and although they discussed their options together there was no unified Confederate commander at the battle.

<sup>33</sup> Report of Brigadier General Thomas C. Devin, 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1124.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Report of Major General George Crook, 18 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1142.

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<sup>36</sup> Report of Brigadier General Henry E. Davies Jr., 14 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1146.

<sup>37</sup> Colonel William R. Aylett, "Pickett's Division", Aylett Family Papers, p. 1, Mss1Ay445a2123, VHS.

<sup>38</sup> Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: Century Co., 1897), 430.

<sup>39</sup> C. F. James, "Battle of Sailor's Creek: Recollections of One Who Participated in It," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 24 (January-December, 1893): 86-87.

<sup>40</sup> Eppa Hunton, *Autobiography of Eppa Hunton* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1933), 122.

<sup>41</sup> Colonel William R. Aylett, "Pickett's Division", Aylett Family Papers, p. 1, Mss1Ay445a2123, VHS.

<sup>42</sup> Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 614.

<sup>43</sup> Lesley J. Gordon, *General George E. Pickett: Life & Legend*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 154. Gordon, although giving some detailed account of Pickett's failure at Five Forks, glossed over Pickett's leadership mistakes at Sailor's Creek.

<sup>44</sup> Report of Brigadier General Henry E. Davies Jr., 14 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 1144, 1145.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph B. Mitchell, "Sayler's Creek," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 4 (October 1965): 11.

<sup>46</sup> Report of Brevet Major General Frank Wheaton, April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 913-15.

<sup>47</sup> Report of Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell, C.S. Army, 20 December 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1294.

<sup>48</sup> George Washington Custis Lee, "Crutchfield's Artillery Brigade: Report of its Operations, April 3-6, 1865, when it was captured with Lee's Division at Sailor's Creek," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 25 (January-December, 1897): 39-41.

<sup>49</sup> Newhall, *With Sheridan*, 88-89.

<sup>50</sup> Report of Brevet Brigadier General J. Warrn Keifer, 18 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 998.

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<sup>51</sup> Report of Major General Horatio G. Wright, 29 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 905-07.

<sup>52</sup> Report of Major General Philip H. Sheridan, 16 May 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 1107-08.

<sup>53</sup> Brevet Major General Frank Wheaton, 20 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 914-15.

<sup>54</sup> Report of Major General Horatio G. Wright, 29 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 905-07.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas E. Pope, *The Weary Boys: Colonel J. Warren Keifer and the 110th Ohio Volunteer Infantry* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2002), 106; Report of Brevet Major Andrew Cowan, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1011; Report of Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell, C.S. Army, 20 December 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1295; Greg Eanes, "The Battle of Saylor's Creek," *Crewe-Burkeville Journal: Special Commemorative Issue*, April 5, 1990, 6. Ewell stated in his official report that his artillery was with the trains.

<sup>56</sup> Report of Captain J. Webb Adams, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 795.

<sup>57</sup> Major W. S. Basinger, "Crutchfield's Artillery Brigade," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 25 (January-December 1897): 39.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 914.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Report of Brigadier General Truman Seymour, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 980.

<sup>61</sup> Captain McHenry Howard, "Closing Scenes of the War about Richmond: Retreat of Custis Lee's Division and the Battle of Sailor's Creek," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 31 (January-December 1898): 141-142.

<sup>62</sup> Newhall, *With Sheridan*, 94-95.

<sup>63</sup> Report of Brevet Brigadier General Joseph G. Hamblin, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 932; Report of Major General Horatio G. Wright, 29 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 905-07.

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<sup>64</sup> Howard, "Closing Scenes of the War about Richmond: Retreat of Custis Lee's Division and the Battle of Sailor's Creek," 142.

<sup>65</sup> Newhall quoted in Newhall, *With Sheridan*, 95.

<sup>66</sup> Anonymous, "Battle of Sailor's Creek: Part Taken in it by the Savannah Guard," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 24 (January-December, 1896): 252.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*; Major W. S. Basinger, "Crutchfield's Artillery Brigade," 42. It is interesting to note that Major Basinger describes a similar charge into Union forces. This could be a coincidence or from severe confusion in the Confederate lines.

<sup>68</sup> Donald C. Pfanz, *Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier's Life*, "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 439.

<sup>69</sup> Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 614.

<sup>70</sup> St. George Tucker Coulter Bryan, October 1864, Unpublished Manuscript, p. 3, Mss1G8855d 263-268, VHS; William Mahone, "On the Road to Appomattox," *Civil War Times Illustrated*, 9 (January 1971): 9-10.

<sup>71</sup> Brevet Major General Frank Wheaton, 20 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 915.

<sup>72</sup> Pfanz, *Richard S. Ewell*, 438.

<sup>73</sup> Report of Colonel William S. Truex, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 984; Custer, *Unfinished Memoirs*, 63; Monaghan, Custer, 238-39.

<sup>74</sup> Brevet Major General Frank Wheaton, 20 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 913-15.

<sup>75</sup> Pfanz, *Richard S. Ewell*, 439.

<sup>76</sup> Report of Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell, C.S. Army, 20 December 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1295.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 1296.

<sup>78</sup> Captain Thomas Ballard Blake, "Retreat From Richmond," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 25 (January-December 1897): 141-142.

<sup>79</sup> Brevet Major General Frank Wheaton, 20 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 914-15.

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<sup>80</sup> Brevet Captain Charles W. Howell, 19 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 657.

<sup>81</sup> St. George Tucker Coulter Bryan, October 1864, Unpublished Manuscript, p. 3, Mss1G8855d 263-268, VHS.

<sup>82</sup> Brigadier General Byron R. Pierce, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 786-87; Report of Brigadier Regis de Trobriand, 17 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 778-80; Humphrey's to Meade dispatch as reported in the *New York Times*, 8 April 1865, 1.

<sup>83</sup> Report of Brevet Captain Charles W. Howell, 19 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 657.

<sup>84</sup> Brigadier General Byron R. Pierce, 15 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 786-87; John S. Wise, *The End of an Era* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1902), 427.

<sup>85</sup> Humphreys' dispatch to Meade as reported in *New York Times*, 8 April 1865, 1.

<sup>86</sup> Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 614-15.

<sup>87</sup> Lee quoted by Mahone in Mahone, "On the Road to Appomattox," 9; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 614-15.

<sup>88</sup> Mahone quoted in Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 614-615.

<sup>89</sup> Lee quoted by Mahone in Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 614-15.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Mahone quoted in Mahone, "On the Road to Appomattox," 10.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.; Douglas Southall Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), 4: 86. In Freeman's version Anderson is unnamed and only described as a "General of exalted grade," and Lee waves his right hand instead of his left, but the realization that Lee is disappointed in Anderson's performance is clear in both accounts.

<sup>93</sup> Lee quoted in Wise, *The End of an Era*, 430.

<sup>94</sup> Report of Casualties in the II Army Corps, 28 March - 10 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 686; Report of Brevet Captain Charles W. Howell, 19 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 657; List of Casualties in the VI Corps on 6 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol.

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46, pt. 1, p. 909; Numerical List of Casualties in the First, Second and Third Divisions of Cavalry, Commanded by Major General Philip H. Sheridan, from 28 March - 9 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 1111.

<sup>95</sup> Report of Major General Horatio G. Wright, 29 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 907.

<sup>96</sup> Medals of Honor Awarded for Distinguished Services during April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 1257-1261.

<sup>97</sup> Davis, *Nine April Days*, 59; Eanes, *Black Day of the Army*, 174.

<sup>98</sup> Calkins, *Thirty Six Hours before Appomattox*, 71.

<sup>99</sup> Charles Marshall, *An Aide-De-Camp of Lee* Edited by Frederick Maurice (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1927), 254.

<sup>100</sup> Peter Carmichael, ed., *Audacity Personified: The Generalship of Robert E. Lee* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), xviii. Carmichael discusses how one of Lee's greatest strengths was his ability to turn "perilous situations into moments of opportunity."

<sup>101</sup> Davis, *Nine April Days*, 382.

<sup>102</sup> Mahone, "On the Road to Appomattox," 10.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 615; Mahone, "On the Road to Appomattox," 42.

<sup>105</sup> Lincoln quoted in Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 187.

<sup>106</sup> Lee quoted in Wise, *The End of an Era*, 429. It is unknown whether Lee meant from the first of the war or from the first time Grant had surrounded Lee's forces around Petersburg and Richmond.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 430, 432.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>109</sup> Webb to Meade, April 8, 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, pp. 280-81, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA; Meade to Grant, 8 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, p. 280, Stack Area

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10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>110</sup> Wise, *End of an Era*, 428.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 435.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 436.

<sup>115</sup> Colonel Charles Marshall quoted in Marshall, *An Aide-De-Camp of Lee*, 255.

<sup>116</sup> Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 618; Susan P. Lee, ed., *Memoirs of William Nelson Pendleton, D. D.* (Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle Publications, 1991), 401-02; Robert E. Lee Jr., *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (1904; reprint, Old Saybrook, Conn.: Konecky & Konecky, n. d.), 151; A. L. Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee: His Military and Personal History* (New York: J.M. Stoddart & Co., 1886), 416-17.

<sup>117</sup> Calkins, *The Appomattox Campaign*, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander*, Edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 525.

<sup>119</sup> Meade to Humphreys, 8 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, p. 261, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>120</sup> Meade to Grant, 10 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, pp. 284-86, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>121</sup> Meade to Grant, 9 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, p. 282, Stack Area 10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>122</sup> Grant to Lee, 9 April 1865, Division and Department and Army of Potomac, July 1861-June 1865, 46, Pt. 1, pp. 283-84, Stack Area



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10W2, Row 40, Compartment 1, Volume 8 of 8, Entry 3964, Letters Sent, RG 393, NARA.

<sup>123</sup> Calkins, "Hurtling Toward the End," 44.

<sup>124</sup> Philip Thomas Tucker, *The Final Fury* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2001), 3.

<sup>125</sup> Wise, *End of An Era*, 446.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Being outnumbered was nothing new to Robert E. Lee. There is no doubt that the Union army was much larger than its Confederate counterpart. Various writers have stressed that these numbers were critical to Lee's defeat in the Appomattox Campaign. The matter of the Confederate strength can be reconsidered.

Through analysis of prisoner exchanges, Confederate stragglers, casualties during the assault on Petersburg, and desertions, historian William Marvel puts Lee's strength at between 51,200 and 57,000 men when he reached Amelia Court House the day before the battle at Sailor's Creek.<sup>1</sup> Historian Chris Calkins estimates Lee's strength at between 55,000 and 58,000 effectives at Amelia Court House.<sup>2</sup> For the Union side, IX Corps did not take part in the Army of the Potomac's pursuit of Lee's army. Only part of the Army of the James was involved in chasing after Lee. The combined numbers from what was left of the Army of the Potomac and the Army of the James coupled with Sheridan's 12,000 cavalrymen, totals approximately 80,000 Union

soldiers that were involved in Lee's pursuit. Based on these estimations, Union forces did not even have a two to one advantage over Lee's army.

Looking at opposing strengths in another Civil War battle can be instructive. At Battle of Chancellorsville, Lee's most trumpeted victory, General Joseph Hooker had approximately 134,000 men to Lee's 61,000. During the battle, Hooker's cavalry outnumber Lee 11,500 to 4,500.<sup>3</sup> Despite these odds, Lee's bold, daring actions during the battle resulted in the rout of the Union Army and victory for the Army of Northern Virginia.

A ratio of three to one is commonly used by military planners when evaluating numbers of soldiers needed to attack a defensive position.<sup>4</sup> Clearly, Union forces did not have a three to one advantage over Confederate forces during the Appomattox Campaign. Understanding this, one must consider that factors other than Lee's diminished strength were decisive in the Union victory at Sailor's Creek. More than focusing on the numbers, evaluating the Confederate leaders' failures to adhere to the principles of war and the contrasting morale of the soldiers and leaders on both sides helps better to explain the overwhelming Union victory.

From 1862 to 1863, General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia dominated its northern counterpart, even though he was almost always outnumbered. Union leadership was characterized as cautious, slow and even incompetent. Although the Army of the Potomac was able to maintain its formidable defensive position and therefore defeat Lee at Gettysburg, General Meade's failure to exploit Lee's defeat and chase after him was criticized by many. Even as late as the battle at Cold Harbor in June 1864, Union soldiers still feared Lee's vaunted army. Soldiers sure of death wrote their names and addresses and pin them to the backs of their coats so that their families could find out if they were killed.<sup>5</sup>

One critical factor changed the Union soldier's outlook—leadership. Starting with the bloody Wilderness Campaign, despite the fact that Lee checked Grant's advance, the Union soldiers began to have confidence in their commander. For the first and only time of the war when Grant turned them south, he was cheered by his men. They understood that this commander was different and began to have hope that the war would end with a Union victory.<sup>6</sup> As historian T. Harry Williams argues, "Grant above all other Northern generals grasped the great truth—that the

ultimate objective in war is the destruction of the enemy's principle army."<sup>7</sup>

Sheridan declared in his memoirs that once Grant's military history was analyzed "it [would] show . . . he was the steadfast center about and on which everything else turned."<sup>8</sup> The confidence and determination of one man had infected an army. The officers who served with Grant "found him clearheaded and cool in battle at all times."<sup>9</sup> Sheridan affirmed that "From the moment he set our armies in motion . . . it could be seen that we should be victorious ultimately."<sup>10</sup> By the spring of 1865, General Grant knew he had a general in Sheridan that would fight and win at any cost.<sup>11</sup> The combination of the confidence, audacity and intuitiveness of the two men propelled the Union army after Lee's forces at the beginning of April 1865. Historian George Milton calls Grant's pursuit of Lee, the most "magnificent march" in the history "of the Army of the Potomac."<sup>12</sup> Unlike in previous campaigns, the Union soldiers knew they were chasing after victory. Union soldiers carried additional rations attempting to move unhindered by their supply wagons, and "were expected to cover thirty miles a day," in order to catch Lee's army. "Your legs must do it, boys!" their officers kept shouting

to them. "Your legs must do it!"<sup>13</sup> Although weather, terrain and logistics may have caused the decisive battle to happen at Sailor's Creek, Union soldiers with high morale inspired and led by brilliant leadership made Lee's defeat highly probable.

On the other hand, the Southerners started losing faith in their leadership. Despite claims by Davis and false reports in Southern newspapers, both citizens and soldiers saw that the early victories the South had tallied against the North were a thing of the past. Southerners saw in Grant a leader who unlike previous Union commanders was relentless and focused on their destruction. As historian Robert Hendrickson explains, "The end could already be foreseen."<sup>14</sup> There was no denying Sherman's invasion of the deepest parts of the South. Mary Chesnut called General Longstreet a "slow old humbug" and wrote, "Oh for a day of Albert Sydney Johnston, out west; and Stonewall, if he could only come back to us here!!"<sup>15</sup> Colonel William B. Taylor of Lee's staff, even before Sailor's Creek, wrote to his mother, "Our army is ruined."<sup>16</sup> Ewell's words around the campfire the night they were captured by the Union army reflect a feeling of despair that existed within many Confederate soldiers by then. He

avowed that ever since Grant's army crossed the James River and laid siege to Richmond, the South had been doomed.<sup>17</sup> Speaking to General Horatio Wright the night they were captured, Ewell argued that Lee should surrender and waste no more lives.<sup>18</sup> General Henry Wise's comments to General Lee after Sailor's Creek show that even those with fight left in them thought it "murder" to continue on.<sup>19</sup>

One cannot discount Lee's lack of supplies during the campaign as having a detrimental effect on Confederate soldiers' morale, but once again this deficiency falls under leadership. Had Davis heeded Lee's warnings that the defenses of Richmond could not be maintained for much longer, and removed the Confederate government earlier, part of Lee's difficulties during his retreat might have been solved. Whether some official from the government ordered the trains carrying supplies for Lee's army at Amelia Court House or not, the fact is that due to some sort of mistake, the supplies did not reach Lee. Had the government been established in Danville and not frantically evacuating Richmond, with Union soldiers at its heels, the supplies might have reached Lee at Amelia Court House and in time to replenish his hungry army prior to the Battle of Sailor's Creek. Without that confusion and desperate

situation to evacuate the Confederate government, the trains could have possibly stopped where Lee had intended them too.

Leaders' ability to capitalize on or failure to adhere to, the principles of war are even more directly tied to the results at Sailor's Creek. Lee violated the principle of Security in the final campaign. He allowed his forces to become spread too thin in an attempt to outrun the two Union armies that opposed him. As a result, the different corps under his command were unable to support each other when smaller Union cavalry forces struck them from the south at Marshall's Crossroads. Grant had forced this frantic pace upon Lee by ordering his cavalry to constantly harass Lee's columns while the Army of the James attempted to block Lee's advance and Meade's Army of the Potomac caught up.

Unity of Command was probably the most critical principle of war violated by the Confederate leadership that day. The Army of Northern Virginia had four separate corps operating during the retreat out of Richmond and three of them were operating virtually independent of each other on 6 April. Not one of the senior commanders seemed to take charge of the entire Confederate effort, or call on



their beloved commander for instructions or assistance until it was too late. Both Ewell and Anderson conferred with each other, but neither chose to take advantage of their interior lines and instead chose to fight two separate engagements.<sup>20</sup> Lee's top subordinates failed to perform as well as their Federal counterparts.

Indeed, Grant gave his subordinate commanders a clearly identifiable and attainable objective. Grant made it clear to his officers and men that not Atlanta, nor Petersburg, not even Richmond was their objective. Their objective was Lee's army. In modern military terms, Major General E. O. C. Ord's Army of the James was to block Lee's avenue of escape to Danville. Sheridan's cavalry was ordered to attrit and pin down Lee's army wherever it could along the route, and Meade's Army of the Potomac would destroy it wherever Sheridan could fix it.<sup>21</sup> All three senior commanders and their subordinate officers understood their mission and their commander's intent. In this example, one can identify Grant's successful use of the principles of Simplicity and Objective.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Grant had the right man at the right place in charge of the right forces to destroy two of the Confederate corps. Sheridan, located at Hillsman House, directed the combined

efforts of both the infantry and cavalry. Subordinate to him, Wright commanded the infantry and Major General Wesley Merritt commanded the cavalry.<sup>23</sup> Sheridan's ability to mass both of his forces against Ewell's Corps was essential in causing the Confederate units within Ewell's Corps to surrender so quickly.

One of the major criticisms of Grant is that he bashed away at the enemy head on, despite the extreme loss of life to his forces. Defenders of Grant offer the Union commander's successful maneuvers around Vicksburg as an example of Grant's ability to effectively use the principle of Maneuver against his opponents. Because of Grant's comment to Meade in the Spring of 1864, about "not maneuvering," his defenders shy away from citing any battle after that to prove his abilities to capitalize on the principle of Maneuver. Critics focus on Grant's dispatch to Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton during the Battle of Spotsylvania, when he wrote that he would "fight it out on this line if it takes all summer," to argue that he was unimaginative in his approach to fighting Lee.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, some of Grant's closest allies might have unintentionally fueled this criticism in some of their descriptions of him. Even Grant's own wife may have hurt

his cause when she told a *New York Herald* reporter that "I have no doubt that Mr. Grant will succeed, for he is a very obstinate man."<sup>25</sup> One of Grant's staff officers had inadvertently added to this characterization by writing that Grant "habitually wears an expression as if he had determined to drive his head through a brick wall, and was about to do it."<sup>26</sup> But, in reality, during the Appomattox Campaign, Grant had maneuvered his forces several times causing Lee to react slowing his escape.<sup>27</sup> From the point of Five Forks on to the battle of Sailor's Creek, Grant capitalized on the principle of Maneuver, by first maneuvering an infantry corps along with his cavalry to Lee's right flank and vulnerable supply lines, putting Lee at such a disadvantage he had to thin his lines in order to lengthen his right flank with Pickett's division. Grant took advantage of this maneuver by massing his forces for an attack all along the lines the next morning causing Lee to abandon his defenses around the city. Then, Grant's subordinate commanders, understanding his intent, maneuvered their forces several times in an attempt to put Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at a disadvantage. The constant attacks by the Federal cavalry significantly slowed the Confederate column by causing them to deploy to

meet the constant threats.<sup>28</sup> First Sheridan was able to put just his security detachment of two hundred cavalryman but then additional cavalry and an infantry corps in front (south) of Lee at Jetersville, forcing Lee to abandon his planned route of retreat. Ord's attempt at burning High Bridge, despite the failure, caused Longstreet to push all available cavalry assets toward the bridge in order to save it. Another important factor in the final outcome was the Union cavalry's ability to destroy so many of Lee's supply wagons. By out maneuvering his forces, Union cavalry on several occasions destroyed Lee's ability to resupply his army. At Appomattox, Lee asked Grant for provisions for his army. Lee told Grant "his men were nearly starving: that they had been living on parched corn for several days."<sup>29</sup>

Although Grant did not have a distinguished academic background, he may have paid attention to Professor Mahan's class on the art of war. For, besides all of the other principles, the one principle that the Federal general in chief used most successfully was the principle of Offensive. Unlike previous Union commanders, Grant took the war to the enemy. One is hard pressed to find another commander who fought against Lee and was able through his

own personal character to motivate his men in order to impose his will upon the enemy like Grant had done. By continuing to lengthen his lines around Petersburg, then attacking on Lee's flank, Grant made Lee react to him. Once he forced the Army of Northern Virginia out of its prepared defenses, he and his aggressive subordinates pushed his forces upon Lee, constantly making the rebel commander react to him. First, due to being hotly pursued by cavalry and infantry, Lee had to place his cavalry along with the supply trains in an ultimately failed attempt at securing them. Additionally, a hastened Union infantry approach march after the Confederate army forced Lee to use a whole corps to fight a rear guard action, further slowing his bedraggled army. At Amelia Court House Sheridan was able to execute Grant's intent by blocking Lee's retreat toward Burkeville and Danville, forcing Lee to react yet again by moving his army in the direction of Farmville and the supposed safety of the Appomattox River. Confederate General John B. Gordon best described the effects of Grant's use of the principle of Offensive when he recalled the retreat march in his memoirs. He wrote,

"To bring up the rear and adequately protect the retreating army was an impossible task. With characteristic vigor General Grant pressed the

pursuit. Soon began the continuous and final battle. Fighting all day, marching all night, with exhaustion and hunger claiming their victims at every mile of the march, with charges of infantry in rear and of cavalry on the flanks it seemed the war god had turned loose all his furies to revel in havoc."<sup>30</sup>

In fact, after a close look at the river and the terrain, one can surmise that this further exacerbated Lee's difficulties in attempting to get away from the Union columns. By moving above the river and following it toward Lynchburg, Lee moved in a circuitous path as compared to that of the Union infantry giving General Ord the ability to get in front of Lee's forces near Appomattox Court House. Lee, speaking to Lieutenant Wise the night of Sailor's Creek, admitted that Grant had indeed gotten within Lee's decision cycle when he told the young dispatch carrier that, "I shall have to be governed by each day's developments."<sup>31</sup>

T. Harry Williams, in describing Grant, states that according to Grant, "the art of war was simple enough. Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike at him as hard as you can and as often as you can, and keep moving on."<sup>32</sup> Historian Russell Weigley argues, "Grant proposed a strategy of annihilation based

upon the principle of concentration and mass, hitting the main Confederate armies with the concentrated massive federal forces until the Confederate armies were smashed into impotence."<sup>33</sup> Although Weigley identifies Grant's strategy correctly, he did not identify it in consideration with the Appomattox Campaign and Sailor's Creek.

Confederate forces under Ewell and Anderson did not use what is termed today as combined arms. Although there were limited artillery assets still within their commands, they failed to ensure they had any supporting artillery along with them. Gordon, although attrited significantly during the fight, maintained his artillery with his corps and used it in extricating himself away from Humphreys' Corps. Union leaders, on the other hand, maintained their artillery near the front to support their infantry assaults against the Confederate lines.<sup>34</sup> Grant summarized this ability in his memoirs when he wrote "The armies finally met on Sailor's Creek, when a heavy engagement took place, in which infantry, artillery, and cavalry were all brought into action."<sup>35</sup>

No one can argue about the strategic importance of the capture of Vicksburg. Nor can anyone deny that General Lee's vaunted army had been soundly defeated at Gettysburg.

But neither was decisive in the final outcome of the war. It is time for historians and students of the Civil War to acknowledge that the Battle of Sailor's Creek had been a decisive blow to the great Army of Northern Virginia. In no other battle were so many general officers captured nor had Lee ever had such a large proportion of his army captured or destroyed in one battle. Unlike previous battles, Union forces were not satisfied with holding the ground or merely pushing Lee's army in one direction or the other. The objective was not terrain, but the enemy force itself. Grant had inspired, reshaped, and reoriented the Union army to hunt down and destroy their enemy—the Army of Northern Virginia.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> William Marvel, *Lee's Last Retreat: The Flight to Appomattox* "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher. (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 202.

<sup>2</sup> Chris M. Calkins, *The Appomattox Campaign: March 29 - April 9, 1865*, "Great Campaigns Series," (2001; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), 63.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest B. Furgurson, *Chancellorsville 1863: The Souls of the Brave* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 48, 69, 88, 123.

<sup>4</sup> Burton J. Hendrick, *Statesmen of the Lost Cause: Jefferson Davis and His Cabinet* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1939), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Hendrickson, *The Road to Appomattox* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 32.

<sup>6</sup> T. Harry Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant* (Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1962), 83.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>8</sup> Philip H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan: General United States Army*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles L. Webster & Co., 1888), 2: 204.

<sup>9</sup> Hendrickson, *Road to Appomattox*, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 203.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Wittenberg, *Little Phil: A Reassessment of General Philip H. Sheridan* (Washington: Brassey's, 2002), 91.

<sup>12</sup> George Fort Milton, *Conflict: The American Civil War* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1941), 386.

<sup>13</sup> E. M. Woodward, *History of One Hundred and Ninety-Eighth Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Trenton, N.J.: MacCrellish & Quigley, 1884), 23.

<sup>14</sup> Hendrickson, *Road to Appomattox*, 41.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Diary From Dixie*, Edited by Ben Ames Williams (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), 336.

<sup>16</sup> Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs*, 2: 178.

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<sup>17</sup> Donald Pfanz, *Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier's Life* "Civil War America Series," Edited by Gary W. Gallagher. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 442.

<sup>18</sup> Shaff Morris, *The Sunset of the Confederacy* (Boston: John W. Luce and Co., 1912), 113-14.

<sup>19</sup> John S. Wise, *The End of an Era* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1902), 434.

<sup>20</sup> Alan T. Nolan, *Lee Considered* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 113-33; John D. McKenzie, *Uncertain Glory: Lee's Generalship Re-Examined* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1997), 302-07; Emory M. Thomas, *Robert E. Lee* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 355-59; Clifford Dowdey, *Lee* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1965), 557-86; Douglas Southall Freeman, *R.E. Lee: A Biography*, 4 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), 4: 53-86, 509-13. It is important when criticizing Lee for his failure to adhere to the principle of security that one realize that Lee understood the importance of security and demonstrated that importance by waiting to gather his army at their rally point at Amelia Court House. Lee also sacrificed security on purpose in order to attempt to outrun Grant's pursuing armies. None of Lee's biographers blame him for violating this principle of war in the final campaign and of those who cover the Appomattox Campaign and the Battle of Sailor's Creek in depth (Clifford Dowdey and Douglass Southall Freeman), they tend to place blame on Lieutenant Generals Richard Ewell and General Richard H. Anderson. Emory Thomas almost negates any argument about security by emphasizing the need for speed. Even in Alan T. Nolan's *Lee Considered* or John D. McKenzie's *Uncertain Glory: Lee's Generalship Re-examined*, neither historian finds fault with Lee's tactical abilities during the final campaign. McKenzie states that Lee missed an opportunity to strike the smaller Union force at Amelia Court House, but finds nothing wrong with Lee's leadership throughout the campaign.

<sup>21</sup> The modern military task given to a unit to pin down the enemy is to fix the enemy.

<sup>22</sup> John I. Alger, *Definitions and Doctrine of the Military Art*. The West Point Military History Series, Edited by Thomas E. Griess (Wayne, N.J.: Avery Publishing Group, 1985), 10.

<sup>23</sup> Given the nature of cavalry operations during the Civil War, brigade and division commanders often operated comparatively independent of their commander. This seems to hold true for Merritt's Cavalry Corps during the Appomattox Campaign. Little evidence exists that Merritt directly influenced the events at Sailor's Creek. It is

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however clear that through Merritt, Generals Crook, Custer and Devin understood Grant's and more directly Sheridan's intent and executed their mission brilliantly.

<sup>24</sup> Grant quoted in John Y. Simon, ed., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, 26 vols. (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), 10: 422; Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph over Adversity, 1822-1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2000) 307-308.

<sup>25</sup> Julia Grant quoted in Hendrickson, *Road to Appomattox*, 38.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore Lyman, *Meade's Headquarters, 1863-1865: The Wilderness to Appomattox* Edited by George R. Agassiz (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1922), 81.

<sup>27</sup> See Alger, *Definitions and Doctrine of the Military Art*, 10. Alger defines maneuver as "place[ing] the enemy in a position of disadvantage."

<sup>28</sup> Report of Brigadier General Ranald A. Mackenzie, 8 May 1865, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: GPO, 1880-1901), Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, pp. 1245. (hereafter cited as OR)

<sup>29</sup> Sylvanus Cadwallier, *Three Years with Grant*, Edited by Benjamin P. Thomas (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955), 328.

<sup>30</sup> John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 423.

<sup>31</sup> Wise, *End of An Era*, 429.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 105; Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 361-390. Simpson, although not in the same words, supports Williams's argument in his chapter entitled "Planning the Grand Offensive."

<sup>33</sup> Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War* (1973; reprint, Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1977), 142.

<sup>34</sup> Report of Brevet Colonel John G. Hazard, 19 April 1865, OR, Ser. I, vol. 46, pt. 1, p. 793.

<sup>35</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York: Century Co., 1895), 2: 618-20.

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**VITA**

Cloyd Allen Smith Jr. received his Associate of Arts in General Studies from New Mexico Military Institute in 1992 and his Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education from Slippery Rock University in 1996. His Military Schools include Airborne, Ranger, Combined Arms Services Staff School and Infantry Captain's Career Course. In 1996 he entered active service in the United States Army serving in forward deployed locations of Germany, Bosnia, and Egypt prior to attending Texas A&M University. After completing his studies at Texas A&M, he taught military history at the United States Military Academy, West Point, New York. Major Smith can be reached at the Department of History, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York. His email address is cloyd.smith@us.army.mil.