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LIEUTENANT GENERAL A.P. HILL: UNRAVELING THE PERPLEXING TACTICAL DECISIONS

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LIEUTENANT GENERAL A.P. HILL: UNRAVELING THE PERPLEXING TACTICAL DECISIONS OF THE ENIGMATIC CONFEDERATE WARRIOR.

A Master Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of

American Public University

by

Daniel Jacobs Spivey

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

November 2017

American Public University

Charles Town, West Virginia
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DEDICATION

To Caleb McKelly, George, Owen, Enoch, William Jasper, John, William Pink, Jesse, and Grandfather Franklin. All Spivey’s of the American Civil War. Your voices echo across the ages.

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?
   Then said I, Here am I; send me.”
   Isaiah 6:8
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the love of my life, my wife Denise, for her patience and smiles during my frequent journeys back to the war. It is never lost upon me that of all the places you could have been, you were right beside me the entire time. I would also like to thank my instructors who have guided me throughout my graduate studies. Your insight and knowledge are a part of me. Thank you, Dr. Robert Young, for all your thoughts and invaluable guidance on my thesis journey. A special thank you to Jennifer Huff with the Virginia Historical Society for your help in guiding me through the Hill Family Papers. Last, and certainly not least, I would like to thank the Confederate dressed soldier from North Carolina who approached me at Gettysburg in July 2007 near the eternal flame and questioned me about my family lineage in the war. After telling him where I was from in North Carolina, and explaining I really knew nothing about my family’s involvement in the war, he smiled and told me I should. And then he was gone.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

LIEUTENANT GENERAL A.P. HILL: UNRAVELING THE PERPLEXING TACTICAL DECISIONS OF THE ENIGMATIC CONFEDERATE WARRIOR.

By

Daniel Jacobs Spivey

American Public University, Approval Date Here

Charles Town, West Virginia

Professor Robert Young, Thesis Advisor

This study will examine the constant succession of major tactical errors committed by Ambrose Powell Hill while commanding units at the brigade, division, and corps level during the American Civil War. This study will examine Hill’s pre-war life and what effect, if any, it had on his leadership style. This study will examine Hill’s performance during the Peninsula Campaign when he prematurely launched an assault against Union positions. This study will examine the constant squabbling between Hill and his senior corps commanders resulting in his arrest on two separate occasions. This study will examine Hill’s inexplicable decision to leave a large gap in his lines at Fredericksburg which nearly unhinged the entire right wing of Robert E. Lee’s army. This study will examine Hill’s slow pace at Chancellorsville resulting in the flank attack beginning while his troops were still filing into position. This study will examine Hill’s inability to control his troops west of Gettysburg resulting in the beginning of the massive battle. This study will examine the disastrous consequences of Hill’s failure to deploy a skirmish line near Bristoe Station. This study will examine Hill’s tactical decisions in the Wilderness and North Anna River eventually resulting in a stinging rebuke from Lee. Finally, this study will examine Hill’s decisions at Petersburg, the last resulting in his death on the battlefield.
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Introduction

The American Civil War is the defining moment in the short history of the United States. The surrender of the Confederacy at Appomattox Court House a mere eighty-nine years after the founding fathers declared independence brought an end to a gruesome four-year conflict that wrecked a large swath of the nation. Noted documentary filmmaker and producer Ken Burns is of the belief while the war itself is not the most important event in our nation’s history in the context of world history, the Civil War is the most important event in the nation’s history as it pertains to the country itself. He states, “it [the war] changed us from a union of many things to a nation of one thing…”1 Our history is akin to an hour glass with the thin neck between the two ends representing the war itself. Everything above the neck represents United States history prior to the Civil War and led directly to the war, while everything below the neck is a result of the conflict. Burns’ unique perspective, while broad in its interpretation, does not understate the significance of the war. The destructive struggle pivoted the entire nation and changed our society forever.2

The proverbial match that set into motion the worst crisis in the history of the United States was the Presidential election of 1860. For decades prior to the election, the Northern and the Southern states argued vehemently over the issue of slavery in the country. The Northern economy migrated away from the need for slaves long before 1860 while the very existence of the Southern way of life was deeply rooted in the foundations of slavery. The Founders debated the issue throughout the Constitutional Convention in 1787 without reaching a national

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2 Ibid.
consensus as to the future of the institution of slavery. Beginning with the Missouri Compromise in 1820 and continuing for decades, Congress had succeeded in pushing through multiple compromises to avoid direct confrontation between the states. Intense regional sectionalism reigned supreme across the nation. When war finally arrived in the spring of 1861, Americans found themselves in the middle of a storm that had been brewing for over 70 years.³

For months prior to the 1860 presidential election, multiple states across the South threatened secession from the United States if Abraham Lincoln won. On November 6, 1860, the fears of the southern states became reality when Lincoln achieved victory. He won the election despite receiving less than 40 percent of the popular vote and receiving zero votes in ten states across the southern United States. Lincoln’s victory was a worst-case scenario for the South as they clearly felt the institution of slavery, as well as their ability to control it, was threatened by the federal government. South Carolina began the initial seven state secession march that eventually resulted in the new Confederate States of America.⁴

Lincoln did not have to wait long for the secession situation in the South to play out. On April 12, 1861 Confederate artillery batteries ringing Charleston Harbor in South Carolina opened fire on the Union garrison at Fort Sumter. Fort Sumter was a defensive fort built near the mouth of Charleston Harbor on a small island. Thirty-six hours after the bombardment began Major Richard Anderson surrendered the garrison to the Confederate forces. The American Civil War was underway.⁵

³ Steven E. Woodworth, This Great Struggle: America’s Civil War (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2011), 4-20.


⁵ Donald, Lincoln, 292.
Neither side, North or South, could have possibly imagined the destruction and devastation to be unleashed when the conflict began militarily in the spring of 1861. In response to the Confederate shelling of Fort Sumter, Lincoln issued a call to the Northern states for 75,000 volunteer state militia troops to put down the uprising in the South. In addition to the militia call up, Lincoln expanded the regular United States Army by adding 23,000 additional soldiers and 18,000 naval personnel. Lincoln expected a short conflict evidenced by his only assigning a ninety day term to the volunteers to “… suppress said combinations [reference to the states in rebellion] …”

Confederate President Jefferson Davis faced the dilemma of creating an army from scratch. While dozens of highly qualified officers resigned from the United States Army to return home to their southern homes, the ranks of the common soldier had to be filled rapidly to defend the newly formed country. On March 6, 1861 Davis ordered the creation of a 100,000-man volunteer army to serve a twelve-month term. Much like his counterparts in the North, Davis and the Southern government did not envision the lengthy conflict that lay ahead for the two sides as evidenced by the short term of enlistment. The shock of the fighting at Manassas in July 1861 was the reality check for both sides that the war would be an extended and bloody ordeal.

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7 Ibid.


Only days after the stunning defeat at Manassas, Lincoln authorized 500,000 volunteers to serve a three-year term.\textsuperscript{11} Congress followed up Lincoln’s action with a second authorization for an additional 500,000 troops to fill out the army.\textsuperscript{12} The Confederacy reacted to the news from the North by authorizing an additional 400,000 troops.\textsuperscript{13} The pressing issue created by the formation of the two massive armies was where to find the quantity and quality of military leaders to guide the massive forces. Both Lincoln and Davis found themselves faced with the task of appointing a command structure to successfully lead the armies. Both Presidents settled upon a mixture of experienced military officers as well as political appointees to fill the ranks of general officers. While regular army officers had little use for the political appointees, both Lincoln and Davis understood the necessity of such moves to prosecute the war from a political perspective. The political support reward simply outweighed the military risk. As for the military appointees, both sides had no choice but to appoint prior junior officers to senior ranks as the quantity of Colonels and Generals necessary to lead the armies simply did not exist prior to the war. The leadership appointees were clearly a hit and miss prospect for both Lincoln and Davis.\textsuperscript{14}

As the war raged on, seemingly with no end in sight, the losses in manpower for both sides swelled to ghastly proportions. The Southern losses were exasperated by the surmounting loss of key military leaders with the passing of each major battle. Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee found themselves trying to replace key commanders from an ever-shrinking pool of


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.


qualified candidates. When the war finally closed, the Confederacy saw the death of one army commander, three corps commanders, and sixty-two brigade commanders—a staggering seventy-three general officers killed in battle with replacements needed for each. The ripple effect of promoting replacements cascaded throughout the ranks. As each new commander was promoted, a vacancy was created at the position previously held by the officer. For example: a colonel is promoted to brigadier general to replace a fallen brigade Commander. A lieutenant colonel now replaces the colonel, a major replaces the lieutenant colonel, a captain replaces the major, a lieutenant replaces the captain. The constant shuffling of the ranks from a dwindling number of capable officers compounded leadership problems within the Confederate ranks. After the carnage of Chancellorsville, Lee said as much himself in a letter to Major General John Bell Hood, “There were never such men in an army before. They will go anywhere and do anything if properly led. But there is the difficulty—proper commanders. Where can they be obtained?”

The aftermath of Lee’s extraordinary victory at Chancellorsville in May 1863 also left the Army of Northern Virginia’s Commander with his most important reorganization of the war. The fighting had cost Lee his most trusted and aggressive subordinate, Second Corps Commander Lieutenant General Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. Lee stated as much when he sent word to the mortally wounded Jackson, “…say to him, he has lost his left arm, but I my right arm.” Outside of the loss of Jackson, the loss of brigade-level commanders and below was staggering. Among

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the 13,460 casualties suffered by Lee’s army at Chancellorsville were seven general officers (one of every six). Lee’s infantry losses amounted to over 23 percent of his army including officers from the regimental level on down.

Out of necessity, Lee used the opportunity to completely restructure his army. His boldest move included adding a third new corps to his army. The loss of Jackson, coupled with the addition of the new corps, meant Lee needed to appoint not one, but two, new corps commanders within his army. With Longstreet firmly in control of the First Corps, Lee settled on Richard Ewell to take command of Jackson’s old Second Corps. Lee looked to Jackson’s old Second Corps as well to find his new Third Corps Commander. He settled upon division commander A.P. Hill to ascend to the newly created position.

Lee’s selections for his corps Commanders shaped his army for the remainder of the war. While he had no crystal ball to foresee future events, Lee had to go with the information he had available at the time to make his decisions—the most important likely being past performance. Keeping Longstreet as First Corps Commander was an obvious choice at the time. Lee affectionately referred to Longstreet as his “old warhorse” and he was a veteran of every major battle except for Chancellorsville. Ewell had a proven track record under Jackson during the infamous Valley Campaign and was a ranking Major General when he returned from convalescing wounds received at Second Manassas. Historian Stephen Sears calls Ewell,

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19 Sears, Chancellorsville, 442.

20 Sears, Gettysburg, 43-45.

“…Jackson’s most trusted divisional commander…” The choice of A.P. Hill to command the Third Corps is one that burdened Lee the remainder of the war.  

Hill is a difficult figure of the American Civil War to interpret. The presence of an experienced senior-ranking General in the Army of Northern Virginia by the spring of 1865 was a rarity to say the least, but Hill was the exception. He played a significant factor in every major campaign undertaken by the army beginning with First Manassas in the summer of 1861 until his death at Petersburg just days before the war ended in April 1865. Some historians present Hill as an aggressive, hard-fighting leader who was one of Lee’s most trusted subordinate commanders. General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior by James I. Robertson, Jr. and William W. Hassler’s, A. P. Hill: Lee's Forgotten General, are two significant pieces that exist on Hill today. Hassler calls Hill the Confederacy’s “…able, dashing commander of the Third Corps…” and describes him on the battlefield as “…bold, skillful, [and] tenacious…” While unquestionably a hard fighter, Hill consistently performed poorly in terms of execution from his earliest days in command throughout the war. His decisions consistently put his unit and the army in difficult positions and exasperated the already tenuous tightrope Lee was walking. Robertson, Jr. refers to Hill as a “brilliant corps commander and devoted patriot.” despite his decision making while serving as a corps commander being consistently lacking.

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22 Sears, Gettysburg, 45.

23 Ibid.


25 Ibid., 3.


27 Ibid., ix
Lee himself surprisingly called Hill “…the best soldier of his grade with me”\(^{28}\) when recommending his promotion to Lieutenant General and command of the Third Corps to President Jefferson Davis. Lee’s endorsement of Hill to the President is even more puzzling considering the significant mistakes made by Hill in previous engagements, beginning with his first major action under Lee during the Peninsula Campaign. Lee laid out a complex plan to assault the Union advance just west of Richmond heavily dependent on the arrival of Stonewall Jackson’s forces from the Shenandoah Valley region. Jackson’s forces were to unhinge the Union line from the north and Hill was to launch an ensuing flank attack from west to east. While Jackson was clearly late arriving, Hill inexplicably launched the assault without Jackson resulting in heavy casualties.\(^{29}\)

The pace of Jackson’s rapid march into the rear of Pope’s Union Army proved difficult as well for the then division commander Hill. He struggled to get his troops on the march in accordance with Jackson’s wishes, drawing the ire of his superior. In a harbinger of things to come just four months later at Fredericksburg, Hill inexplicably left a large gap in his line covering the left end of Jackson’s line in the railroad cut allowing the Union to deliver a punishing blow through the breach.\(^{30}\)

Hill was at his absolute best at Antietam. While absent from the heavy fighting most of the day, he led his division on a grueling march from Harper’s Ferry to deliver the decisive blow of the battle that likely saved Lee’s army from being wrecked. His arrival on the battlefield could


not have possibly occurred at a more desperate moment for Lee, resulting in the glowing praise he received afterwards from the Army Commander. Lee spoke of Hill to President Davis, “Next to these two officers [Longstreet and Jackson], I consider General A.P. Hill the best commander with me.”

Hill’s decision to leave a large gap in his lines at Fredericksburg resulted in a massive breach by Union forces and seriously jeopardized Stonewall Jackson’s right wing of Lee’s army early in the fighting in front of Prospect Hill. At Chancellorsville, Jackson fumed about the major delay in getting his infamous flank march underway due to multiple division commanders [Hill included] not being prepared to march early as Jackson had ordered. Hill’s Division brought up the rear, and Jackson’s attack later in the day began while Hill’s troops were still filing into line of battle.

In his first combat action as Third Corps Commander, Hill’s performance fell completely flat. On July 1, 1863, Hill’s troops initiated battle just west of Gettysburg while under strict orders to not bring on a general engagement, directly resulting in the three-day struggle for survival. Hill failed to control his troops after receiving warnings the previous evening that Union regulars were in the Gettysburg area. His leadership failure led to catastrophic consequences for the Army of Northern Virginia.

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33 Sears, *Gettysburg*, 160-163.
Hill’s poor decision making only intensified after the disaster at Gettysburg. He recklessly pushed his troops forward at Bristoe Station without properly reconnoitering the area resulting in a stinging surprise flank attack from undetected Union forces. The sharp fight resulted in over 1,300 casualties for Hill and a rebuke from Robert E. Lee.\(^{34}\)

Hill’s slide continued as Grant began the Overland Campaign in the spring of 1864. His subordinate commanders warned him, multiple times, the night of the first day’s fighting in the Wilderness about the poor condition of their lines and the urgent need to reform, yet Hill refused to allow the critical maneuver to take place. Union forces overran his positions the following morning. Weeks later at the North Anna River, Lee rebuked Hill again for his tentativeness and refusal to commit his forces to an all-out assault against Grant’s fragmented forces. Hill’s final major error cost him his life. He rode far too close to Union lines near Petersburg with only a single aide by his side where he was shot down by a Union infantryman.\(^{35}\)

A.P. Hill was a tough, hard-hitting fighter whose name is woven into the story of virtually every major American Civil War battle fought in the Eastern Theater, yet his poor tactical decisions and judgment caused many problems for the Army of Northern Virginia. Hill’s poor decisions on troop placements, his inability to control his troops at times, and his inability to follow the orders of superior commanders are all perplexing for a skilled military officer and West Point graduate. This examination of A.P. Hill will show his glaring weaknesses overshadowed his fighting capabilities on multiple occasions in key battles. His story begins in Culpepper County, Virginia.

\(^{34}\) Robertson, Jr., *General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior*, 236-239.

Chapter 1

Antebellum Hill

“I shall make tracks for home ...”
Lieutenant General A.P. Hill

Culpeper County lies in north-central Virginia thirty-five miles northwest of Fredericksburg. It was here, in 1748, English immigrant Russell Hill staked his roots. Hill prospered in the area, building a large estate. Hill’s son Henry was a Revolutionary War figure who served under future Virginia governor “Light Horse Harry” Lee—the father of Robert E. Lee. Henry married prominent local Anne Powell in 1771. The marriage produced five children, one of which was Thomas Hill.36

Much like his father and grandfather, Thomas Hill was a prominent and influential figure in the Culpepper area. Thomas established the estate Greenland and married Fannie Russell Baptist. The two were parents of seven children. On November 9, 1825, the final of four sons was born to Thomas and Fannie and named Ambrose Powell Hill, Jr. As he had an uncle named Ambrose Powell Hill, he went by the name Powell in his youth.37

Powell Hill proved to be active and well educated as he grew into adulthood. He excelled in education, attending boarding school, and was an avid reader. Hill learned the outdoor life from his father who taught him the art of hunting and fishing. His father also got him up onto a horse at an early age. Powell Hill excelled at horseback riding to which author William Hassler


writes, “…the son soon acquired a graceful mastery…”38 At the young age of only sixteen, Powell Hill was accepted into and reported to the United States Military Academy at West Point, incoming class of 1842. Fate would have Hill roomed with a young, newly-arrived cadet named George McClellan, future Commander of the Army of the Potomac and General-in-Chief of all Union Armies.39

Hill’s future was bright within his class as he had risen to twenty-third in his class of sixty-six cadets as his second year ended. The summer between his second and third year changed his life forever. Although all cadets were warned repeatedly by the Academy Commandant to avoid stopping in New York City due to the temptations of the brothel district as they traveled home for the summer and returned in the fall, Hill likely made a stopover despite the warnings. His excursion into the city must have been on his return trip, as he fell sick within weeks after returning to West Point. He was extremely ill with the venereal disease gonorrhea. By November, he had returned home to convalesce for three weeks which turned into months. By the late spring of 1845, Hill remained incapacitated to the degree his local physician requested another extension of his furlough. In June, he was notified by the Military Academy that he would have to repeat the entire third year due to the extensive time missed due to his illness. The worst remained ahead as Hill’s ailment morphed into chronic prostatitis which would have debilitating effects on him the remainder of his life.40

As the fifty-nine cadets received their commissions and graduated in the class of 1846, Hill could only watch his former classmates ship off to war in Mexico. While the United States

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38 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 8.
39 Ibid., 8-9.
40 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 11-12; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 11-12.
Army made its way towards Mexico City, Hill labored away to complete his final year with new classmates Ambrose Burnside and Henry Heth. He received his commission on June 19, 1847. In late August Hill was ordered to Mexico to fill a void created when a young Second Lieutenant was promoted to First Lieutenant—former classmate and graduate of Hill’s original class of 1846, Thomas Jackson. Hill arrived as the conflict was entering its final stages and while he did experience some combat, the heavy fighting had come to an end. Hill was the only member of the Class of 1847 to make it to Mexico prior to the surrender.41

War’s end saw Hill assigned to Fort McHenry near Baltimore for a year followed by extended duty in Florida. Hill spent six years in swamps participating in the Seminole Wars. Hill’s Florida duty proved difficult on him. The conditions were not agreeable with his prostatitis and he battled yellow fever as well. Of the mosquitos who tormented him he wrote, “My God, will these mosquitos never satiate their vampirean appetite for blood? Buggy, Buggy, Buggy. There is no peace for the wicked, saith the good book [sic]. Mosquitos were especially sent on earth as a torment to the wicked. Wonder if Noah had any in the ark with him!”42 Hill also found time during his duty in Florida to write his brother concerning the lynching of a black man back in his home Culpeper. He wrote of the incident,

… shame, shame upon you all, you good citizens of Culpeper that you have allowed her fair fame to be sullied, and by this one act of outrageous mobocracy, destroyed the structure of years, and classed our noble old State as one under the head of Texas, Arkansas, etc. Her proud crest must now be lowered, and humbled in the dust … You cannot imagine the effect it has had in the country and the talk it has given rise to …43


42 A.P. Hill Personal Diary, October 16, 1848, MSS1H5503a, Hill Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

43 A.P. Hill to Edward Baptist Hill, August 16, 1850, MSS1H5503a, Hill Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.
When read in the context of the entire letter, it appears Hill is more concerned with the sullied reputation of Virginia and the impact on him personally as a Virginian more so than the incident itself. He writes, “I fear the Adjutant General will think I am rather a troublesome fellow, and my name will be the signal for some petition …”\textsuperscript{44} Hill’s tenure in Florida came to a merciful end when he applied for and was assigned to a position with the United States Coast Survey Office in Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{45}

It was while on assignment with the Survey Office Hill became involved romantically with a young socialite named Ellen Marcy. She was the daughter of Army Captain Randolph Marcy. Oddly enough, Hill competed with his former West Point roommate, George McClellan, for the affections of the young Marcy. As the relationship between Hill and Ellen intensified to the point of engagement, an irritated Captain Marcy left no doubt with his daughter that her parents would have none of it. He wrote to her, “I have inquired about Mr. Hill’s family at Corpus Christi and I am inclined to believe that they are in very moderate circumstances so far as property goes … I forgive you, but I shall expect that you at once abandon all communication with Mr. Hill … Do nothing therefore my dear child without choosing between me and him …”\textsuperscript{46} Ellen Marcy eventually succumbed to her father’s wishes but not before her mother had leaked stories about Hill’s past medical issues. Hill accused her of saying, “no mother could yield her daughter [to Hill] unless to certain unhappiness.”\textsuperscript{47} Against the backdrop of the personal attack, Hill immediately flashed the intense personal need for redress which years later

\textsuperscript{44} A.P. Hill to Edward Baptist Hill, August 16, 1850, MSS1H5503a, Section 3 (4-7), Hill Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

\textsuperscript{45} Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 19-26; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 15-16.

\textsuperscript{46} Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 18-19.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 20.
would continue to bring him difficulty. He wrote Captain Marcy, “… I ask it of you as one gentleman to another, as one officer who has been wronged, from a brother officer, who can right him, that you put this matter right in the proper quarter, and that your wife correct this false impression with whomever she may have had any agency in hearing it …”48 In a heated dispute, the mother accused McClellan of notifying Hill of what she said. The ugly affair ended with Hill and Ellen Marcy parting ways and her eventual marriage to George McClellan. This must have been a stinging incident for Hill that he carried well into the Civil War years. Hill was never one to simply let disputes go their way, and to be shunned and publicly humiliated by the Marcy’s undoubtedly must have affected his pride and personality as he went forward.49

Hill’s personal life took a turn for the better when he met Kitty Morgan McClung of Kentucky. The wealthy twenty-three-year-old widow whom Hill called Dolly was the sister of John Hunt Morgan. The two struck off into a romantic relationship and the smitten Hill asked for her hand after a two-year courtship. They were married in July, 1859 in Lexington, Kentucky. Ironically the following spring in May, 1860, McClellan and Ellen Marcy married while Hill attended as a groomsman.50

The clouds of the coming war became a storm in 1860. The Presidential election of 1860 sent shock waves rippling across the United States. Abraham Lincoln of Illinois won the election despite his name failing to appear on ballots across the southern states. Lincoln’s public words against the institution of slavery and his election to the Presidency served as the ignition source for the state secession march to begin. One by one, the Deep-South states began to

48 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 21.


announce their decisions to dissolve their constitutional ties to the United States. South Carolina became the first state to secede in December 1860. A state level convention held in Charleston published the *Declaration of the Immediate Causes Which Induce and Justify the Secession of South Carolina from the Federal Union* filled with multiple references to slavery and made clear South Carolina’s belief in its right to maintain the practice. Slavery was clearly the main issue in South Carolina as the state delegates wrote of Lincoln, “he has declared that that Government cannot endure permanently half slave, half free, and that the public mind must rest in the belief that slavery is in the course of ultimate extinction.”

Multiple Southern states followed South Carolina’s secession act rapidly in early 1861 when Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, and Arkansas seceded in order. North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia held their hand and played a waiting game. The game ended on April 15, 1861 when the newly formed Confederacy bombarded Federal troops at Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. Following the barrage on Fort Sumter, President Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 troops to suppress the rebellion. Lincoln’s call for troops proved to be the tipping point as the three hold-out states seceded and joined the Confederacy.

Hill could see the coming fight and submitted his resignation on March 30, 1861 prior to the Fort Sumter action. He fulfilled an obligation he made to himself years earlier in an 1850 letter to his brother Edward, “If the Union is dissolved I shall make tracks for home, and offer

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my sword to the Governor, and intimate my modest desire for a Brigade at least …”\(^54\) Hill got his wish when he was appointed a Colonel of Virginia Volunteers and given command of the 13\(^{th}\) Virginia Infantry Regiment. His journey to brigade command and much more than even he likely imagined was under way.\(^55\)

\(^{54}\) A.P. Hill to Edward Baptist Hill, August 16, 1850, MSS1H5503a, Section 3 (4-7), Hill Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia.

Chapter 2

The Valley to the Peninsula

“... I will remain in command of my gallant little regiment until the war closes.”
Lieutenant General A.P. Hill

The military career of A. P. Hill as a Confederate military officer began in earnest in May, 1861. He took command of his new regiment at Harper’s Ferry in Northern Virginia. Hill’s 13th Virginia Infantry Regiment was part of the newly formed Army of the Shenandoah commanded by General Joseph Johnston. Much like his counterparts in the new army, Hill found himself with the difficult task of converting civilians into soldiers. Daily drill and training rapidly became the norm for Hill’s Regiment as he developed his troops into a fighting force. Of interest is Hill’s refusal to allow his regimental chaplain to conduct religious services during this timeframe. When asked for permission by the chaplain to conduct the services, Hill simply replied, “A good fighter now is more desirable than a good preacher.”56

Hill’s troops saw action for the first time in early June. Johnston dispatched two regiments to Romney in northwestern Virginia believed to be occupied by 2,000 Federal troops.57 Hill was placed in overall command of the force. The advancing Confederates found Romney unoccupied although the town had been raided earlier. Hill sent a portion of his force on to New Creek in pursuit of the Federal raiding party. The advance group sent by Hill found only a few Federals in New Creek and easily dispatched the raiders after a brief skirmish. Although he did not personally participate in the skirmish at New Creek, Hill returned to many accolades.

56 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 36-37; Hassler, A. P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 28-29.

57 Hassler, A. P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 30.
Albeit on a very small scale, Hill commanded a successful excursion against opposing forces and accomplished his objective of clearing the Romney area of Federals. Promotion to Brigadier General seemed certain for Hill due to his early success, yet it was not to be. He found himself passed over when Johnston reorganized his army into four brigades. Hill could only watch as he and his 13th Virginia found themselves under the command of Colonel Arnold Elzey of Maryland. A second brigade went to Hill’s old West Point Classmate—Thomas Jackson also newly promoted to Brigadier General.58

A despondent Hill told a friend who was attempting to use his influence to get Hill promoted, “You will never succeed…President Davis does not like me. If he has his way, I will remain in command of my gallant little regiment until the war closes.”59 Hill’s thoughts to his brother years earlier about his desire to command a brigade must have been foremost on his mind at this point. He had successfully led an expedition against enemy forces, and his 13th Virginia was among the finest regiments in Johnston’s army, yet he found himself passed over for brigade command. The fuse for the smoldering resentment that characterized Hill the remainder of the war was lit.60

The first large-scale encounter of the war was brewing hot by July 1861. Clear to both North and South was a major engagement near Manassas Junction in Northern Virginia. Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard had occupied positions in Northern Virginia for months and now had positioned his troops along the banks of Bull Run Creek near Manassas. President Abraham Lincoln found himself under intense media pressure as well as the impending

59 Ibid., 40.
60 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 30-31; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 39-40.
expiration of thousands of ninety-day enlistments. In a late June meeting with his cabinet and military commanders, Lincoln ordered Major General Irvin McDowell, Commander of the Army of the Potomac, to move against Beauregard’s troops at Manassas. McDowell’s odds of success hinged primarily on Johnston not being able to move his Army of the Shenandoah to Manassas in time to assist Beauregard. To pin down Johnston, McDowell tasked Robert Patterson and his 15,000-strong force currently operating in the Shenandoah Valley near Johnston.61 Ironically, it was a portion of Patterson’s force that Hill had skirmished with weeks earlier at New Creek.62

McDowell’s plan began to unravel rapidly when Patterson was unable to keep Johnston and the Army of the Shenandoah occupied in the valley. Johnston boarded his troops on trains and made way for Manassas to join Beauregard in the fight. On July 20, the lead elements of Johnston’s force began to off-load near Manassas. Jackson’s Brigade constituted the van of the Army of the Shenandoah while Hill’s 13th Virginia found itself at the very end of Johnston’s line. By the time Hill’s troops finally boarded trains for Manassas almost 24 hours later, the battle was underway. Of the approach Robertson writes, “…as the train neared Manassas, the sound of battle grew louder. The great contest had begun.”63

Hill now experienced yet another bitter setback at this early stage in the war. As his troops rapidly left the train believing they were heading towards the sounds of the battle, his regiment was dispatched away from the brigade. While the remainder of the brigade headed forward into battle, Hill’s Regiment was tasked to protect the railroad junction at Manassas and guard against a Federal flank attack which never came. Hill was stunned after the Confederate victory. Dozens of his counterparts had directly participated in a shocking victory over the

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61 McPherson, Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief, 39.


63 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 42.
Federal Army causing a panicked retreat by McDowell’s army back to Washington. Hill’s Regiment had nothing to show for the effort but rear-guard duty. Of Hill’s role in the Battle of First Manassas Robertson writes, “Hill was furious. His chance to take a leading role in the war would be gone if the Yankees gave up after one battle, as was expected. So the troops waited and listened and fumed as the afternoon wore along and shouts of Confederate victory eventually filled the air. Another disappointment now marked Hill’s military career. He must have wondered if he was under some kind of curse.”

The sweeping Confederate victory at Manassas in July 1861 changed the course of the war. Both sides realized the conflict would be anything but short. Lincoln also realized McDowell was not the leader he wanted for the Army of the Potomac. The search for a new commander turned up perhaps Hill’s closest friend from his prewar years—George Brinton McClellan. McClellan not only was given command of the Army of the Potomac, but eventually appointed General in Chief of all Union armies, to which Hill’s old pal responded, “I can do it all.” Lincoln and McClellan never meshed. It became painfully evident in short order the two had different views as to how the war should be prosecuted. Lincoln pushed his young general to make a move against Richmond while McClellan simply came up with any reason he could muster as to why he should wait. July turned into August, August to September, and so on. Winter arrived, and McClellan focused his efforts on training and equipping the army. Any movement against the Confederacy would be in the spring.

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64 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 42; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 33-34.

65 McPherson, Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief, 44-45, 51.

66 Ibid., 50-54.
Under immense pressure from Lincoln and Congress, McClellan finally produced a plan to strike at the South. Johnston had slipped his entire army quietly away from the lines at Manassas, enraging many in Washington. With Johnston headed south, McClellan proposed to strike down the coast. Rather than an overland route, McClellan proposed moving his entire army by water down the Chesapeake Bay to the Yorktown Peninsula of Virginia. Once disembarked, his army would move overland and capture the Confederate capital of Richmond. On March 13, 1862, desperate for McClellan to take any action, Lincoln approved the plan.\textsuperscript{67}

February 1862 delivered the promotion to Brigadier General that Hill had sought for so long. His name was first on a list of Colonels recommended for promotion and resulted in the loss of his 13\textsuperscript{th} Virginia Regiment. Hill’s promotion meant he was now in charge of four regiments comprising the First Brigade of James Longstreet’s Second Division. Longstreet himself was promoted to division command and Hill assumed command of Longstreet’s former brigade. The 1\textsuperscript{st}, 7\textsuperscript{th}, 11\textsuperscript{th}, and 17\textsuperscript{th} Virginia comprised Hill’s Brigade. While many in his old 13\textsuperscript{th} Virginia were sad to see Hill depart, some were not. They felt Hill placed his desire for promotion over the well-being of the regiment. Robertson, Jr. writes:

Hill’s preoccupation with his own advancement irritated several members of the 13\textsuperscript{th} Virginia. Some soldiers acted adversely to the idea of Hill’s leaving the regiment; others took umbrage at being “neglected.” One private went so far as to assert that during this time Hill “was regarded by many of his regiment as very ambitious for promotion…I don’t think he ever afterwards paid a visit to his old regiment…I have always remained impressed with the idea that his greatest motive power was promotion and military distinction.”\textsuperscript{68}

Hill’s Brigade moved south with the army as Johnston completed the withdrawal from the Manassas Line. In late March, McClellan’s Federals began off loading at Fort Monroe near the


\textsuperscript{68} Robertson, Jr., \textit{General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior}, 46.
mouth of the James River. The Federal force consisted of over 121,500 men, 14,592 animals, 1,224 wagons, 44 batteries of artillery, and thousands of pounds of supplies and equipment.\(^6^9\) McClellan arrived on April 1\(^{st}\) to command his massive force on its drive to Richmond. Hill found himself in line with Longstreet’s Division only a short distance away near Williamsburg in what appeared to be a showdown with his old friend.\(^7^0\)

Longstreet’s troops filed into the lines southeast of Williamsburg in mid-April to reinforce the positions already held by Brigadier General John Magruder. Magruder’s small force had duped McClellan for days into believing a much larger Confederate army blocked the path to Richmond. The ruse by Magruder bought the Southerners much needed time to reinforce the positions and force McClellan to fight his way up the peninsula towards Richmond. A.P Hill and his brigade found themselves almost directly in the center of the fortifications. For days, the primary effort expended involved strengthening the fortifications already in place. Rain came down in torrents adding more misery to the work being performed by Hill’s troops. By late April, Johnston made the decision to pull his line back towards Richmond.\(^7^1\)

On May 5, most of Johnston’s army marched through the Williamsburg area and was northwest of the city on their way to the Richmond lines. Longstreet’s Division was left as rear guard to protect the army. Early the same morning the Federals finally made a move. A Union division commanded by Major General Joseph Hooker attacked Longstreet’s line in force. The initial assault focused on the positions held by a Confederate brigade commanded by Brigadier

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\(^7^1\) Robertson, Jr., *General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior*, 50-51; Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign*, 51.
General Richard Anderson. Anderson’s position faced being overrun when Longstreet called for Hill’s Brigade to move forward “with all dispatch.” For the first time, Hill finally saw the opportunity before him to lead troops into large-scale combat. He moved his regiments forward in what became an all-out charge in short order. The fight raged for hours between the advancing Federals and Longstreet’s stubborn brigades. Hill’s Regiments charged a second time with bayonets when ammunition ran low. By late afternoon the fighting in the heavy rain subsided. Neither side gained much in the fight, and Hill withdrew his exhausted brigade to reform and reconstitute ammunition. By all accounts Hill performed well in his first battle. He was “erect, magnificent, the god of war himself, amid the smoke and thunder.” While likely not exactly the god of war himself, Hill’s Brigade made a name for itself. Longstreet wrote of Hill’s troops, “[the Brigade] was perfect throughout the battle, and it was marched off the field in as good order as it entered it.” The troops behaved well on the field and executed their duties under fire as Hill shined during his first major test. There was no reason to suspect the future was anything but bright for the new brigade commander.

Hill waited little time to find out he was promoted to Major General on May 27. His performance at Williamsburg had garnered him the attention he needed within the Confederate high command only three months after his initial promotion to Brigadier General. He found himself in command of six brigades of infantry and nine batteries of artillery. Of note is Hill’s

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72 Robertson, Jr., *General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior*, 52.

73 Ibid, 55.


strict demands for discipline and authority within his new division. Robertson, Jr. writes, “Hill would not tolerate either lax discipline or usurpation of authority. Barely a week after assuming division command, he issued a directive that all indiscriminate musket-firing in camp was henceforth strictly prohibited…His anger flared quickly when a surgeon took it upon himself to grant furloughs to two of Hill’s regimental officers.” Hill demanded respect for authority and adherence to orders from his subordinates. His desires for high command expressed years earlier as a young lieutenant were now a reality along with the great responsibility that comes with it.

The gravity of the situation became clear in late May 1862. McClellan’s army advanced its way up the peninsula to the outskirts of the Confederate capital. Richmond found itself in danger of falling to the Union. Joseph Johnston was severely wounded in fighting near Seven Pines, just west of Richmond, resulting in General Robert E. Lee taking command of the Confederate Army. Lee had little time and virtually no space to conduct operations, so he chose the only option available—attack.

His plans were difficult for a veteran army command structure to carry out much less one as inexperienced as what he inherited. Lee’s plan called for Stonewall Jackson’s Army of the Shenandoah to sweep down from the north onto McClellan’s right flank. In turn, A.P. Hill’s Division would begin a large-scale assault against the Union lines from the north that would cascade south through multiple divisions. The key to Lee’s plan was Jackson successfully turning McClellan’s attention north. If Jackson proved unsuccessful, then any assault from the west by the remainder of the army would be a frontal with frightening losses likely. On June 23,

76 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 64.

77 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 58; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 43-44.

78 Sears, To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign, 145, 151.
Lee met with Longstreet, Jackson, D.H. Hill and A.P. Hill and laid out his plan. There is no question the parties involved left the meeting understanding the coordination required, and Jackson’s attack from the north would be the signal flare for A.P. Hill to begin the attack by the main line. June 26 was agreed upon as the execution date.79

Lee’s orders to his division commanders stated Jackson would launch his attack from the north at 3 a.m. on the twenty-sixth. All of Lee’s units were in place ready to go that morning with one major exception—Jackson. The starting point of the assault was at least five miles away with his lead units having failed to reach his designated point on time from the valley. There is no question Jackson was not in place on time with his troops. For a variety of reasons, he did not make it to the field as expected, the biggest being he simply overstated what his movement capabilities were at the previous meeting with Lee and his fellow division commanders. What occurred next at the hands of A.P. Hill is simply inexcusable.80

Had Jackson begun his movement on time, he would have struck the Union lines somewhere between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. The sound of his opening attack in turn would move Hill’s Division forward. Jackson found himself over six hours behind schedule pushing his troops forward over unfamiliar terrain. Robertson Jr., describes what occurred next:

Hill’s nerves were wound tight. His patience was exhausted. Lee was two miles away. It would be too time-consuming to try to confer with him. McClellan would fall back, or would himself attack, if the Confederates waited any longer. Hill felt compelled now to cross the Chickahominy and initiate the turning movement. To delay longer would be to hazard failure of the whole plan. Surely, by the time he made contact, Jackson would be there.81

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80 Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign*, 192.

Hill launched the assault without Jackson in place directly into the teeth of a heavily fortified Union line. Union artillery punished Hill’s advancing troops with canister fire. Union infantry hammered away at Hill’s Brigades until some simply ran out of ammunition. By nightfall 1,475 Confederates were casualties while only 361 Union soldiers had been lost. Hill’s actions defy sound military tactics. He launched the attack “without communicating with anyone at all” and had nothing to show for it at nightfall except hundreds of dead and wounded troops.

The following day brought little relief for Hill. While his coordination was much better with his counterparts, not to mention Lee was close to him much of the day, he continued the frontal assaults against the Union lines that had now moved back and re-situated along Boatswain Creek in the Gaines Mill area. The results were little different than the previous day. Hill’s Division came under fierce artillery fire from Union batteries and simply could not gain ground. By nightfall on the twenty-seventh, Hill had lost an additional 2,154 men. In just over twenty-four hours, he had lost twenty-five percent of his entire division and again had nothing to show for his efforts. With Jackson finally in place, Hill could only watch with his mauled brigades as the remaining divisions swept forward, pushing Union troops out of the positions. But for patience and better decision-making, he would have been in line with them. In his first engagement as a new division commander, he showed all the undesirable decision-making traits that plagued him throughout the war.

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82 Sears, To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign, 208.
83 Ibid, 208.
84 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 73-75; Sears, To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign, 208.
85 Sears, To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign, 226.
86 Sears, To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign, 208, 226, 236-239; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 73-75.
The second major fight of the Seven Days’ Battles involving Hill occurred at Glendale on June 30. Lee’s army was biting hard at McClellan’s retreating line. Lee’s plan for the thirtieth involved the divisions of Longstreet and Hill striking the retreating column from west to east. Lee tasked Jackson to again attack from the north in addition to a fresh division commanded by Benjamin Huger. If successful, the attack could sever almost one-half of McClellan’s army from the other, presenting the opportunity to deliver a possible death blow. Again, Jackson was late and Huger did not show as well. Lee ordered Hill and Longstreet forward, and the Battle of Glendale began. Amid desperate fighting, the two divisions struck a major blow to the retreating column. Both Hill and Longstreet pushed forward hard and, for a short time, cut the column in half. The failure of Jackson and Huger to support the advance eliminated any chance of Hill and Longstreet being able to hold the position. The opportunity slipped away, but Hill flashed the potential again which made him difficult to understand against his previous decision making. The cooperation and coordination success on the battlefield at Glendale between the divisions of Hill and Longstreet would seem to point to future success between the two. While the overall objective was not achieved at Glendale, it was through no fault of either Hill or Longstreet. While a successful pair appeared in the making, Hill’s thin skin and short temper proved otherwise.87

The ensuing weeks after the successful Seven Days that pushed McClellan back to the James River away from Richmond should have brought Lee’s division commanders together to form a more cohesive fighting force, yet it was not the case. Lee began to better organize his command structure, turning to Longstreet and Jackson as his two primary lieutenants. Hill’s

Division was assigned to Longstreet. During the previous fighting, a reporter for a Richmond newspaper observed much of the fighting while traveling with Hill’s staff. Upon return to Richmond, he heaped much praise upon Hill while writing of the Battle of Glendale. The writer erroneously stated Hill commanded both his division and the division of Longstreet during the action to which the latter took offense. Longstreet felt Hill could have corrected this error and, if not, was involved in its publication. He submitted a rebuttal through his staff officer to a second newspaper, deeply offending Hill.\(^8^8\)

In a July 12 letter to Lee, Hill wasted no time in asking to be “relieved from the command of Major-General Longstreet.”\(^8^9\) Before Lee could act, the situation spiraled out of control. Rather than wait for Lee to act, Hill instigated an informal investigation of the affair which served only to heighten tensions. Hill continued to inflame the problem when he refused to answer a request Longstreet had made through a staff officer. Hill refused to speak with Longstreet’s staff officer. When Longstreet himself made the written request, Hill disrespectfully ignored it and returned it unanswered. Longstreet had enough and sent his Chief of Staff, Moxley Sorrel to place Hill under arrest. Hill was relieved of command of his division and confined to his quarters. Even while under arrest, Hill continued to exchange heated letters with Longstreet, and the entire situation came to a boiling point when Hill challenged his superior to a duel. Lee had no choice but to intervene quickly at this point. Lee’s solution was to move Hill and his entire division from under Longstreet’s command over to Jackson. He hoped time and space would diffuse the tensions between the two. What Lee did in effect was allow Hill to walk away

\(^8^8\) Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 67-68.

unscathed after blatantly showing disrespect to a superior General Officer and disregarding a
direct order from the same multiple times. Hill was empowered by Lee’s action and wasted little
time in repeating the behavior with his new corps commander.\textsuperscript{90}

Chapter 3

The Northern Virginia and Maryland Campaigns

“My troops were not in a moment too soon.”

Lieutenant General A.P. Hill

The stinging defeat dealt to George McClellan and the Army of the Potomac on the Peninsula sent shockwaves through the North. For almost a year after the debacle at First Manassas, tens of thousands of new troops had been added to the rolls in addition to millions of pounds of necessary supplies. McClellan had spent months training the new recruits and organizing the army. Twelve months later, the only thing to show for the effort was a humiliating retreat back to Washington. Lincoln’s patience with McClellan was up, and he turned his attention to a new military leader—Major General John Pope. While McClellan was completing his evacuation of the Peninsula, Lincoln placed Pope in charge of the new Army of Virginia.91

Pope wasted no time in establishing a reputation for himself in Northern Virginia. He distributed orders to his command, “… authorizing his officers to seize rebel property without compensation, to shoot captured guerillas who had fired on Union troops, to expel from occupied territory any civilians who refused to take the oath of allegiance, and to treat them as spies if they returned.”92 Lee reacted angrily to Pope’s banter as the war was being ratcheted up to a new level. On July 13, Lee dispersed Jackson north, telling him, “I want Pope to be suppressed.”93

91 McPherson, Battle Cry of Freedom, 501.
92 Ibid.
Jackson departed with the divisions of Brigadier Generals Richard Ewell and Charles Winder beginning his search for Lee’s “miscreant.”

When Robert E. Lee reassigned A.P. Hill’s Division from the command of James Longstreet to Stonewall Jackson, he believed he avoided a confrontation that likely would have resulted in the death of either Hill or Longstreet. What Lee failed to see, or believed to be the lesser of the two evils, was the fact that Jackson was, without question, the authoritarian and disciplinarian of the Army of Northern Virginia. Jackson demanded his orders be followed to the letter and did not tolerate subordinates who defied his instructions. Hill was known to be short tempered and easily offended. Jackson was known to rarely confide in his subordinates the details of his plans and upcoming operations. Lee knew as much when he relayed to Jackson, “A.P. Hill you will, I think find a good officer, with whom you can consult, and by advising with your division commanders as to your movements much trouble will be saved you in arranging details, as they can act more intelligently. I wish to save you trouble from my increasing your command.”

Robertson, Jr. hints Hill resented being placed under Jackson due to the failures of Jackson on three separate occasions during the preceding Seven Days Battles. He writes, “… Hill came out of the Seven Days convinced that the eccentric and overpublicized Jackson had totally fouled up the most critical campaign of the war to that time.” The mixture of Hill and Jackson was an explosion waiting to happen and Lee sensed it. Short of relieving Hill, Lee’s options were


96 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 99.
limited. He had only two wings in the army commanded by Longstreet and Jackson, and Hill already challenged Longstreet to a duel. On July 27, Lee sent Hill north with six brigades to join Jackson on the hunt for Pope.97

By early August Hill’s seven brigades had linked up with Jackson. It took little time for the fireworks to begin. Jackson issued orders the night of August 7 for the following day’s march. Ewell’s Division was to go first, followed by Hill’s Division, and finally Jackson’s old division commanded by Winder. The march was to commence at dawn. Jackson amended his orders at some point that same night but Hill did not receive the updated orders. Ewell’s Division was west of Orange Court House near Liberty Mills on the south side of the Rapidan River. The divisions of Hill and Winder were in and around Orange Court House. Hill expected Ewell’s Division to march through Orange Court House where his division would then fall into line. He had his division up and ready to march, yet there was no sign of Ewell the morning of August 8. Jackson had Ewell cross the Rapidan at Liberty Mills and march along the north bank. The change cut significant distance and time off Ewell’s march. Jackson expected Hill to now lead the way out of Orange Court House followed by Winder. The routes of Ewell and Hill intersected north of Orange Court House where Hill paused and allowed Ewell to take the lead.98

When Jackson arrived at Orange Court House the morning of August 8, he found no troops in motion. Hill was resting awaiting Ewell’s expected advance through town. Winder and his entire division in turn waited for Hill’s troops to move forward. Jackson the authoritarian was incredulous at the scene. He ordered Winder’s Division to march, and forward they went. Hill now believed the troops marching by were those of Ewell’s Division. It took only a short time for him to realize the troops did not belong to Ewell but were Winder’s Brigades. Hill could only

97 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 73.
watch as what should have been the end of Jackson’s line marched by his division. As with any infantry column, what follows the end of the infantry line is a miles-long wagon train. Rather than stop the train and move his troops into line, Hill watched for hours as the train passed before moving his division onto the road. Hill now found himself unhinged from the main column by the wagon train and far behind the center of the line where he should have been. As dusk began to settle, Hill’s Division had barely marched one mile out of Orange Court House the entire day. Hill returned his division to its starting point and bivouacked for the night. Again, Jackson was furious.\textsuperscript{99}

Hill stated that the order to return to Orange Court House for the night came from Jackson. Jackson denied having ever issued such an order and demanded Hill produce the communication. Hill stated he received the order from Major Paxton of Jackson’s staff, yet he could not be positive if Paxton was the officer who delivered the order. Hill stated, “… my recollection is that it was from Major Paxton—of this however I am not sure, only that such directions were recd [received] by me. Of this there is no doubt.”\textsuperscript{100} Paxton also denied delivering any such order to Hill. The account of Hill also seems doubtful as to his recollection of being sent back to his starting point to camp. Why would Jackson want him to move backwards to camp? Why not camp in the current location? Jackson clearly was not the type of commander who found interest in recovering old ground. The aggressive nature of Jackson would suggest stay where you are or move forward. Hill’s recollection of receiving the order

\textsuperscript{99} Krick, *Stonewall Jackson at Cedar Mountain*, 37.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
verbally, possibly from Paxton, but maybe not Paxton, but I know I received the order, simply
does not stand up.101

While debate still exists today as to whether Hill received the updated orders from
Jackson to begin the day’s march, there is little debate as to Hill’s performance as the day wore
on. There is simply no excuse that can be given for Hill allowing the wagon train to interpose
itself between his division and the rest of the infantry column. Any veteran regimental
commander would recognize the blunder much less a major general commanding a division. Hill
should have stopped the wagon train and moved his troops. Of the August 8 fiasco, historian
Robert Krick writes, “A.P. Hill clearly was wanting in initiative and energy that morning.”102
The fuse between the strict Jackson and hot-tempered Hill was lit and neither of the two intended
to back down.103

Jackson’s force hit stride on August 9. Ewell’s Division again found itself in the van,
followed by Winder, with A.P. Hill’s Division in the rear. Around mid-afternoon the lead
elements of Ewell’s Division made contact with the lead elements of Pope’s army commanded
by Major General Nathaniel Banks slightly west of Cedar Mountain and about six miles south of
Culpeper. Ewell’s lead brigade commanded by Brigadier General Jubal Early formed a line of
battle beginning slightly northwest of the Crittenden House extending out to the Culpeper Road.
Ewell’s two remaining brigades moved off to the right to the base of Cedar Mountain. Early’s
orders from Jackson were to “advance on the enemy.”104 Winder’s Division was closing fast

101 Krick, Stonewall Jackson at Cedar Mountain, 37.
102 Ibid., 29.
103 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 100-102; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s
Forgotten General, 75-76; Krick, Stonewall Jackson at Cedar Mountain, 25-29.
104 Krick, Stonewall Jackson at Cedar Mountain, 51.
behind Ewell. Early received instructions not to begin the advance until Winder was up and ready to provide support.  

The battle began with an intense two-hour artillery duel. Hill’s approaching division could hear the roar of cannon in the distance and increased their pace forward. Near the end of the artillery exchange, Winder was mortally wounded when struck by a Federal shell. With Winder’s Division, now commanded by Brigadier General William Taliaferro, up and in place, Early prepared his line for advance. Before the advance could begin, two Federal brigades charged across the open field towards the battle line drawn up by Early. A third Federal force struck to the left of Early along the front manned by Taliaferro’s troops. Intense fighting ensued as the left of the Confederate main line broke under the Federal onslaught. Early’s center section found itself under intense pressure facing the very real danger of breaking apart as well.

With the fate of the battle most certainly hanging in the balance, A.P. Hill’s seven brigades came crashing onto the battlefield completely turning the tide of momentum. As Hill’s thousands of troops rapidly formed and advanced forward, Jackson admonished the division commander for being late again. As darkness fell, Hill’s Division certainly saved Jackson’s army. The Federals were in full retreat, and only the darkness saved them from Hill’s infantrymen who were nipping at their heels. Hill’s performance in battle as a fighter was, as usual, first-rate. While he received much credit for his timely arrival on the field which turned the battle, the same arrival was significantly influenced by his poor effort the day prior, and his slow march the day of the battle. His less than stellar performance put him in the position to succeed. Had he aggressively pushed his troops the preceding thirty-six hours, he would have found his division on the front line with Early rather than bringing up the rear. Hill’s massive

105 Krick, *Stonewall Jackson at Cedar Mountain*, 51, 57.

division was as large as Early’s and Ewell’s combined. Winder’s Division would have constituted the reserve. Hill had little standing with Jackson at this point.  

With Pope’s army still at large, Lee decided to reunite the Army of Northern Virginia around Gordonsville. Jackson’s force moved back across the Rapidan River awaiting the arrival of Longstreet and the remaining half of the army. In an effort to pin down Pope, orders went out from Lee for Jackson to march on August 20. Lee’s orders called for Jackson’s wing of the army to march at dawn with Hill’s Division in the lead. To get things moving early, Jackson changed the start time to “as soon as the moon shall rise.” Hill ignored Jackson’s change to the marching order and when Jackson and his staff arrived to oversee the beginning of the large-scale movement, they found Hill’s entire division asleep in camp—a move which William Hassler describes as “inexcusably negligent.” A furious Jackson ordered one of Hill’s Brigades up and to begin preparations to move out. Believing he could not trust Hill to follow his movement orders, Jackson assigned a member of his staff to Hill’s Division to ensure his orders were being executed properly.

Movement is precisely what Jackson’s troops accomplished over the ensuing six days. Implementing Lee’s plan to get into the rear of Pope, Jackson led his force on a grueling march that culminated in fifty-four miles being covered in the final thirty-six hours. Jackson’s three divisions had marched completely around Pope’s right flank, turned to the north, and cut off Pope’s lines of communication and resupply. To make matters worse, Jackson’s Divisions

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captured a massive Federal supply depot at Manassas Junction, helping themselves to literally every piece of equipment and food they lacked. The depot prize at Manassas was one the greatest captures of the war to this point and re-energized Jackson’s tattered infantry.\textsuperscript{111}

Hill again came under fire as he was unable and unwilling to control his troops. Upon arriving at Manassas, Hill turned his division loose on the stores to plunder at will. Brigadier General Isaac Trimble, assigned by Jackson to guard the massive haul, wrote of Hill, “It was with extreme mortification that, in reporting to General A.P. Hill for orders about 10 o’clock, I witnessed an indiscriminate plunder of the public stores, cars, and sutlers’ houses by the army which had just arrived, in which General Hill’s Division was conspicuous, setting at defiance the guards I had placed over the stores.”\textsuperscript{112} Hill’s troops were only brought under control when an approaching Union brigade proved to be more important than the plundering at hand.\textsuperscript{113}

Late on August 27, Jackson had the Manassas depot put to the torch and moved his three divisions over the old battlefield of First Manassas. On the northwest side of the battlefield Jackson placed his infantry into a mile-long line down in an unfinished railroad cut after marching through the darkness. A.P. Hill’s Division comprised Jackson’s left flank, Taliaferro’s Division held the right flank, and Ewell’s Division anchored the center. Jackson’s twenty-four thousand infantrymen hunkered down and waited for John Pope and the Union Army of Virginia’s arrival.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{111} Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 85-86.


\textsuperscript{113} Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 112-113.

Jackson sighted the first Union division of Pope’s army marching down the Warrenton Turnpike late in the day on August 28. The Federals were completely oblivious to Jackson’s position in the unfinished railroad cut running parallel to the turnpike. With the simple command, “Bring out your men, gentlemen,” Confederate artillery opened the fighting followed by the advance of Taliaferro’s Division. Ferocious fighting broke out between the Union Brigadier General John Gibbon’s Iron Brigade and Jackson’s old Stonewall Brigade. The fighting yielded little results for either side but the cost for Jackson was high. Both Ewell and Taliaferro were seriously wounded in the fighting and a major fight loomed the following morning. The remaining division commander, A.P. Hill, clearly was not in Jackson’s favor. As darkness fell, both sides prepared for what promised to be a hard day to come.

Hill’s Division held down Jackson’s left during the early fighting. Hill placed Brigadier General Maxcy Gregg’s South Carolina Brigade on the far left of his line with the Georgia Brigade of Brigadier General Edward Thomas to the right of Gregg. Gregg also represented the far left of Jackson’s entire line. Brigadier General Charles Field’s Virginia Brigade anchored itself to the right of Thomas. Hill’s second line from left to right included Brigadier General James Archer’s Brigade manned by troops from Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia, along with Brigadier General Dorsey Pender’s North Carolina Brigade, and finally a second Brigade of North Carolinians commanded by Brigadier General Lawrence Branch. In positioning his troops, Hill inexplicably left a 175-yard gap on his front line between the Brigades of Gregg and Thomas. Pender’s second-line Brigade covered the face of the gap well behind the front line.

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116 Ibid, 166-167, 173-182, 188.
Any Union incursion at this point posed a serious threat to Hill’s entire position, yet it went uncorrected. Hill’s “blatant oversight”\footnote{Robertson, Jr., \textit{General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior}, 119.} was a ticking time bomb.\footnote{Ibid., 117-119.}

Hill’s fears became reality just after 3 p.m. on August 29. Pope arrived earlier and was now in command of the Federal army. Under orders from Pope to strike at Jackson’s left, Union Major General Joseph Hooker ordered a New England Brigade commanded by Brigadier General Cuvier Grover to charge Hill’s line. Unknowingly, Grover had the great fortune of aligning his five regiments directly in front of the breach in Hill’s line. The command to charge was given, and the New Englanders rushed forward. After receiving a massive volley from Thomas’ Georgia Brigade, Grover’s troops poured into the gap left by Hill. Hill’s position was in peril as was the entire left flank of Jackson’s line. The Georgia Brigade under Thomas broke first, melting away under the intense pressure of the Federal onslaught. Gregg’s Brigade faced being cut off from the rest of Hill’s Division as Grover’s troops continued their surge forward.\footnote{Hennessy, \textit{Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas}, 248.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{pope-exploits-hill-lines.png}
\caption{Pope exploits Hill’s lines at Manassas.\footnote{Robertson, Jr., \textit{General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior}, 118 (Note: Arrows depicting direction of Union attacks have been enhanced to provide clarity).}}
\end{figure}
Hill found himself saved on August 29 by Union ineptitude. Grover’s charge struck a major blow against Jackson’s line, yet the only chance of real success was proper support of the charge. Grover needed fresh Union troops on his heels to follow up his advance and overrun the stunned Confederate line. Although promised help would come, Grover’s Brigade found themselves alone deep inside the Confederate position. Gregg struck hard at the right of Grover’s advancing line, and Pender rapidly brought his Tarheels roaring up to stop the advance. Hopes of breaking Jackson’s left vanished as Grover’s troops were now in a fight for survival. Hennessy writes, “In a matter of moments, the Federals went from being the pursuers to the pursued.” In a little more than thirty minutes of fighting, Grover’s Brigade had suffered almost five hundred losses at the hands of Hill’s troops—a staggering thirty-three percent casualty rate. Hill’s huge mistake in positioning his brigades was overshadowed by the fighting spirit of his division. He was most certainly fortunate in the afternoon hours of August 29.

Shortly after Hill’s troops sealed the gap and ejected Grover’s troops from their lines, Longstreet unleashed a tremendous assault on the Union left flank with the remaining half of Lee’s army. Completely oblivious to the arrival of Longstreet along with tens of thousands of additional Confederate troops, Pope’s Army of Virginia simply disintegrated under the pressure. Hill unleashed his division forward to strike at the Union line now turned to the west trying to stop Longstreet. The result was a Union retreat towards Washington in panic and pandemonium. Pope was overwhelmed by the rush of Confederate troops. The Battle of Second Manassas effectively ended with Pope’s demise. Hill’s fighting spirit shined again on the plains of Manassas. Despite his success during the fight, he continued to commit serious errors in his

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121 Hennessy, Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas, 256.

122 Ibid., 245-257.
decision-making, jeopardizing his troops as well as the army. His problems with Jackson were about to explode.\textsuperscript{123}

Lee’s intentions did not include allowing Pope to escape back to the capital. On the morning of August 31, he dispatched what was left of Jackson’s battered wing to march rapidly to the northeast and cut off Pope’s retreat near Jermantown. The primary objective for Jackson was to get his infantry between Pope’s retreating troops and Washington, forcing a showdown. Longstreet would again follow and the two would deliver a final destructive blow to Pope’s Army of Virginia. Shortly after noon Jackson’s column was on the road heading east with A.P. Hill’s Division in the van.\textsuperscript{124}

Even the normally aggressive Jackson, who consistently pushed a brisk pace for a march, realized his troops had little left after the action of the past week. The two days of brutal fighting preceded by the hard march to Manassas had robbed his infantry of much of its energy. Jackson could see straggling in large numbers and sent orders to Hill up front to slow down the pace. Hill did not comply to the degree Jackson wanted and the infantry column began to break apart. Furious with Hill again, Jackson ordered a halt for the night, having only covered about ten miles. Adding misery to the difficult situation was the weather. A steady rain developed throughout the day, turning the roads to mud and drenching the troops. In an initial effort to move rapidly, much gear was left at Manassas. Jackson’s troops settled in for a long night without shelter, with little food, and with a drenching rain coming down upon them.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{123} Robertson, Jr., \textit{General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior}, 124-125.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 126-127.

The early morning hours of September 1 offered little relief to Jackson and his infantry column. Longstreet’s column did not arrive overnight, meaning the trains carrying much needed food and supplies was nowhere to be found. Jackson’s three divisions again would march on empty stomachs. Perhaps in an effort to move the column at the pace he desired, Jackson reversed the order of the march pushing Hill’s Division to the rear. This change of order was not uncommon following a long, dusty march the previous day, as it allowed the rear columns that had choked on dirty air all day to gain relief. The previous day’s march for Jackson’s Division was wet and muddy. There is no other explanation for the change but for Jackson losing confidence in Hill’s ability to regulate a pace that met his desires.\textsuperscript{126}

By late afternoon, Jackson encountered elements of Pope’s retreating column at Ox Hill near Chantilly. A short but fierce exchange ensued, in what can only be described as a violent thunderstorm. Wet powder plagued both sides as they struggled in the weather to maintain their fighting capability. By nightfall of September 1, little was gained by either side as the storm raged but for the loss of two key Union Generals—Phil Kearney and Isaac Stevens. The Manassas affair ended as did any hope John Pope maintained of keeping his command. His disastrous performance in command of the Army of Virginia induced panic across the North. Lee and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia were virtually at the gate of Washington. Lincoln had little choice but to turn back to Hill’s old friend McClellan to bring order to the Union army.\textsuperscript{127}

The Confederate tide was rising following the string of victories put together by the Army of Northern Virginia in the spring and summer of 1862. The success propelled Lee to

\textsuperscript{126} Welker, Tempest at Ox Hill: The Battle of Chantilly, 112-113.

\textsuperscript{127} Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 126-128; Welker, Tempest at Ox Hill: The Battle of Chantilly, 112-113, 223-225; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 95-96.
implement his plan to invade the North for the first time. His goals included getting the war out of Virginia, enlarging his army by persuading sympathetic Marylanders to join, and perhaps gaining credibility from European countries which most certainly would bring great pressure on Washington to end the conflict. Lee revealed his plans to Longstreet and Jackson to move the army into Maryland and wasted no time putting it into action. On September 3, the movement began as 53,000 Confederate troops began the march north.¹²⁸ Lee’s troops forded the Potomac River at Leesburg into Maryland the following day marking the beginning of the invasion.¹²⁹

As his troops made camp the evening of September 3 in preparation for the invasion, Jackson decided to ensure his division commanders understood exactly what he expected for the September 4 river crossing and ensuing march. Jackson had his three division commanders meet with him at his headquarters to discuss the movement. Jackson relayed he wanted the march to begin at exactly 4 a.m. the following morning. Once again, the division of A.P. Hill found themselves tasked to take the lead of Jackson’s column as it headed north. Jackson instructed his division commanders to set their watches with his to ensure there would be no confusion the following morning regarding time. At 4 a.m. on the morning of September 4, Jackson was up on his horse and ready to get his troops underway. He found Hill’s troops unprepared to begin the march. Many were milling around still gathering water in canteens as A.P. Hill arrived. Jackson rebuked Hill sternly for not being ready to advance, “There are but few commanders who properly appreciate the value of celerity!”¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 97.

¹²⁹ Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 129; David A. Welker, Tempest at Ox Hill: The Battle of Chantilly, 225; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 97.

¹³⁰ Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 130-131; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 97.
Hill’s failure to get his troops on the road at 4 a.m. coupled with Jackson’s comments set the stage for the day ahead. Jackson’s marching orders included a 30-minute stop around noon to allow his infantry a respite from the long day ahead. Once on the road, Hill took the lead of his division and set much too fast a pace for the long column to keep up. Hill likely at this point moved briskly attempting to not give Jackson any further reason to lecture him. Hill’s action made a bad situation even worse. The infantrymen could not keep the pace and the line became more and more fragmented. Stragglers were everywhere. Jackson seethed at Hill’s inability to keep his ranks formed and move at the prescribed pace.\textsuperscript{131}

The final straw came when Hill ignored Jackson’s order for the thirty-minute mid-day break and kept the line moving. Jackson found and ordered the brigade of Thomas to halt for the break which had the desired effect of stopping the entire column behind him. Jackson got Thomas moving after the break and moments later Hill looked back and saw the gap the stop had created in his ranks. He found Thomas and demanded to know why he stopped the march and Thomas relayed to him, “I halted because General Jackson told me to do so.”\textsuperscript{132} An enraged A.P. Hill stormed up to Jackson for all to see and offered his sword tantamount to resigning. Jackson replied, “Put up your sword and consider yourself in arrest.”\textsuperscript{133} Jackson elevated Lawrence Branch to command the division, and in the ultimate measure of humiliation, ordered Hill to march on foot at the rear of his division. For the second time in just two months, A.P. Hill found himself under arrest. He failed to follow orders from two different corps commanders.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{131} Robertson, Jr., \textit{General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior}, 131.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 131-132.

After an extended layover in and around Frederick, Maryland, Lee laid out his plan to Longstreet and Jackson. He decided it best to temporarily split his army in enemy territory as he moved west through Maryland. Longstreet was to head west through the South Mountain passes towards the Boonsboro area of western Maryland. Jackson’s task was to seize Harper’s Ferry southeast of Boonsboro and clear out the Federal garrison in the area. Jackson’s force would have to cross back over the Potomac to get at Harper’s Ferry and cross a third time back into Maryland at some point to rejoin Lee. Jackson began his rapid march west on September 10 with Hill still marching in the rear if his division. While unaware of the final objective, most sensed a battle loomed not far on the horizon. For the first time, Hill gathered himself and attempted to extend an olive branch to Jackson. He asked through an intermediary to be allowed to command his division during the upcoming fight. He offered to go back into arrest conditions once the fighting ceased. Jackson, knowing he needed every fighting commander available, accepted Hill’s proposal.¹³⁵

As Jackson struggled to get his unit in place to break the Federal stronghold at Harper’s Ferry, a lost copy of Lee’s orders for the entire movement fell into the hands of a Union soldier and in turn made its way to McClellan. Now aware of what Lee intended in Maryland, McClellan slowly put the army into motion from Frederick. On September 14, fierce fighting erupted in the South Mountain passes east of Boonsboro between the rear elements of Longstreet’s units and the lead elements of McClellan’s army. On September 15, the Union garrison at Harper’s Ferry surrendered to Jackson. Jackson placed Hill in charge of executing the details of the surrender. Jackson reported the capture of “about 11,000 men … 73 pieces of

artillery, some 13,000 small-arms, and other stores.”136 By nightfall on September 15, Lee had Longstreet’s units in defensive positions on the west side of Antietam Creek just north of Sharpsburg. Jackson messaged Lee that he was in route with his force, with the exception of Hill’s Division, whom he tasked to remain at Harper’s Ferry to complete the orderly execution of the large-scale Federal surrender.137

Jackson’s Divisions, minus Hill, arrived to join Lee on September 16. The troops from Harper’s Ferry made their way just north of Sharpsburg and took up positions on the left of Lee’s lines. McClellan had typically moved excruciatingly slow allowing Lee to form most of his army west of Antietam Creek. McClellan’s Army of the Potomac was up in force on the east side. Union infantrymen outnumbered their Confederate counterparts almost two-to-one. Heavy well-placed artillery was present on both sides. The stage was set for the worst day of fighting in American history and the pivotal figure in the battle was miles away still at Harper’s Ferry.138

Daylight came early just after 5 a.m. over the rolling hills of western Maryland on September 17, 1862. Union First Corps Commander Major General Joseph Hooker moved his divisions across Antietam Creek in the late afternoon of the previous day, positioning them for an early morning assault from the north against Lee’s heavily outnumbered lines. Hooker ordered his troops forward south into a cornfield and east into a wooded area on the west side of the cornfield. The carnage of Antietam began. Heavy Confederate artillery fire began to rake Hooker’s infantry lines entering the cornfield. Ahead of Hooker’s advancing troops were 7,700

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137 Stackpole, From Cedar Mountain to Antietam, 351-352, 354-355; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 138-139.

138 Stackpole, From Cedar Mountain to Antietam, 366-369; Sears, Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam, 174-179.
battle-hardened veterans commanded by Stonewall Jackson minus Hill’s entire division. The fighting rapidly morphed in what can only be described as the most desperate of the war to date. As Hooker’s Divisions surged forward, Jackson found himself in a situation rapidly spiraling out of control. His outnumbered line faced grave danger from Hooker’s aggressive attack with the entire Union Twelfth Corps beginning to form behind Hooker.

Jackson’s final move to save his line was an order to Brigadier General John Bell Hood to come forward with his Texas Division to thwart the Federal advance. Hood’s Division roared into the Cornfield in what Stephen Sears writes could only be described at this point as a “seething, smoking caldron.” Hood’s well-timed counterattack stopped Hooker’s assault in its tracks at a ghastly price—sixty percent, almost 1,400 of Hood’s veteran fighters were struck down. Hood watched as 2,600 First Corps infantrymen were shot down and he was eventually wounded as well. The frantic fighting through the cornfield was over by 7:30 a.m. with a punishing blow dealt to both sides. Sears writes Jackson and Hooker saw their units, “reduced to mutual shambles.” The day was just getting started.

Robert E. Lee knew the night of September 16 his situation was serious. His outnumbered troops faced a difficult task the following day. Knowing he needed every available


140 Ibid., 176, 197.

141 Ibid., 199.

142 Ibid., 202.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid., 201.

infantryman, Lee sent word to A.P. Hill at Harper’s Ferry to get his troops on the road to Sharpsburg quickly. Lee’s courier arrived at Hill’s headquarters around 6:30 a.m. on the morning of September 17. Hill clearly realized the situation for what it was—dire. Uncharacteristically for Hill, he put his troops on the road and moving in under one hour. As the fighting roared through the cornfield, Hill’s troops began a grueling seventeen-mile march towards Antietam.146

By mid-morning, an eerie silence swept across the battlefield. Both sides prepared for the second stage of the unfolding massive encounter. The wailing of thousands of blue and grey troops lying wounded on the battlefield replaced the missing sounds of the battle. Around 10:30 a.m., and somewhat reinforced by two divisions from Longstreet, the aggressive Jackson struck back. Jackson’s troops swept through the West Woods clearing the Federals now advancing from Union Major General Edwin Sumner’s Second Corps. In minutes, 2,200 Federals belonging to Sumner joined the ever-growing casualty list.147 By noon, Jackson succeeded in clearing the north end of the field of further danger with the fight shifting to the center of the battlefield. “Mutual exhaustion”148 mercifully brought the morning fighting on the north end to a halt while Hill’s Division continued to steadily close the gap to Sharpsburg.149

The second phase at Antietam began to unfold shortly after 10 a.m. Major General D.H. Hill positioned his division of infantrymen from North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama in the center of the battlefield roughly six-hundred yards south of the earlier fighting. Years of wagon traffic had deeply rutted out the area and created a channel-like feature in the area known as the

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146 Sears, Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam, 197.

147 Stackpole, From Cedar Mountain to Antietam, 395.

148 Ibid., 400.

149 Ibid., 394-396.
Sunken Road. Two Confederate brigades manned the Sunken Road taking advantage of the geographical protection afforded by the steep sides. Despite holding a commanding position in the center of the fight, the troops of D.H. Hill found themselves outnumbered as well almost two to one.  

The struggle began when a large Union brigade commanded by Brigadier William French advanced on the Sunken Road. Tremendous volleys of musketry rolled back and forth between the two sides. By 10:30 a.m. the fighting reached a frantic pace with Stephen Sears describing it as, “… a great whirlpool, sucking more thousands into its vortex.” Hundreds of Southern troops continued to pour into the road taking advantage of its protection as multiple Union brigades now advanced on the position. The pressure of the Union wave surging forward caused the Confederate line to snap. Sometime between noon and 1 p.m., Confederate troops broke for the rear in swarms. The safety afforded by the Sunken Road initially now become a death trap for hundreds of trapped infantrymen. The steep sides, coupled with the tremendous Federal musketry and artillery fire, made escape almost impossible. Those who made it out later described the ordeal as, “… a terrible slaughter.” The fighting in and around the Sunken Road struck down four Confederate generals along with three Union generals. The Army of Northern Virginia lost 2,600 troops just in the fighting in and around the road. Lee’s northern sector under Jackson was decimated in the early morning and his center section was obliterated. Lee

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150 Sears, Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam, 236.

151 Ibid., 240.

152 Sears, Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam, 245.

153 Ibid., 252.
and his army now faced the very real possibility of being destroyed by the surging Federal Army of the Potomac.\textsuperscript{154}

Unlike his counterpart Lee, Union Commander George McClellan chose to oversee his army from the rear of the fight. Had McClellan chosen to move forward and oversee the movement of his army more closely, he would have easily seen that by 1 p.m., the Confederate Army was in grave danger of collapse. Instead, McClellan continued to deploy his units piecemeal rather than one final massive assault that would have surely broken the Confederates. Even in this ragged fashion, McClellan ordered Major General Ambrose Burnside to move forward on the southern end of the field with his Ninth Corps. Whether he realized it or not, Burnside possessed the ability and the force to deliver the final blow to Lee’s army. Burnside ordered his four divisions forward for the final phase of the fight at 3 p.m. James Robertson, Jr. describes the Confederate plight:

\begin{quote}
Burnside had only to drive a half mile farther and Federals would sever Lee’s single line of retreat. The Civil War, at least in the Eastern Theater, would end then and there … Most of the Confederate brigades were down to regimental size. At three o’clock, Federals came over the hill in three lines with the sole intention of smashing the Confederate flank. Lee watched helplessly. Waves of enemy slowly swept forward, as artillery, musketry, and yells combined to make a deafening sound. At three forty, another advancing line was coming from the south.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

Around 2 p.m., A.P. Hill’s Division forded the Potomac back into Maryland and began their final push towards Sharpsburg. Approaching from the southwest, Hill marched his exhausted lines at the point of his sword as he drove them towards the roar of the fighting. Hill’s troops, many dressed in Union blue coats seized during the capture of Harper’s Ferry, constituted the advancing column from the south. Shortly after 3:30 p.m. Hill’s Brigades came pouring onto

\textsuperscript{154} Stackpole, \textit{From Cedar Mountain to Antietam}, 400-405; Sears, \textit{Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam}, 245-252.

\textsuperscript{155} Robertson, Jr., \textit{General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior}, 143.
the field, striking Burnside’s advancing lines squarely on the flank. The effect was catastrophic for the Union Ninth Corps. Hill’s troops punished the advancing Union line with oblique fire from artillery and muskets. The timing of Hill’s arrival halted Burnside’s advance in its tracks and forced a general retreat on the part of the Union Ninth Corps. He later reported, “My troops were not in a moment too soon.”

A.P. Hill and his division covered seventeen miles in seven hours and delivered a stunning blow to the Federal Army.

Hill’s counter against Burnside was over by 5 p.m. and brought a merciful end to the fighting west of Antietam Creek. The toll on both sides was staggering. In twelve hours of fighting, 12,410 Union soldiers were dead, wounded, or missing. Confederate losses stood at 10,316 troops. Despite his previous failures and questionable decisions, A.P. Hill’s performance was brilliant at Antietam. He forced his division to the field during a grueling seventeen-mile march from Harper’s Ferry and delivered a shocking conclusion to a battle that had come within minutes of destroying Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. Hill accomplished much on the afternoon on September 17 to right his reputation. His task now simply was to take advantage of the stock he gained.

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157 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 141-147.

158 Ibid., 147.

159 Ibid.
Both Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson realized the magnitude of A.P. Hill’s impact on the Battle of Antietam. While Jackson had Hill previously placed under arrest, he had little interest in renewing charges against Hill. Jackson now realized Hill’s value as a hard fighter and seemed willing to let things be and allow Hill to continue in his role as a division commander. He told Lee as much in an October 3 letter stating, “I do not consider further action on my part necessary …”\footnote{Thomas J. Jackson to R.H. Chilton, October 3, 1862, in \textit{The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies}, Series I, Vol. XIX, Part II, Chapter 31, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 731.} Lee’s views on the matter were no different than Jackson’s. If the testy Jackson found the ability to let the matter go, Lee viewed it as a simple solution to a complex issue between two senior leaders.\footnote{Robertson, Jr., \textit{General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior}, 153.}

The problem lay with A.P. Hill himself. Despite his brilliant performance at Antietam and the accolades heaped upon him, Hill allowed his personal pride to overcome his good

judgement and refused to let the previous disputes with Jackson go. He wrote to the Assistant Adjutant General to Lee in late September:

I have the honor to represent that on the 4th of this month I was arrested by Maj. Gen T.J. Jackson, whilst at the head of my Division [sic], for neglect of duty. In reply to a respectful request to know in what I had been guilty of neglect of duty, it was replied that should the interest of the service require that my case should be brought before a court, a copy of the charges would be sent me—on the eighth day I was released and ordered to the command of my Division [sic]. I respectfully represent that I redeem myself to have been treated with injustice [here followed the words ‘feel it deeply’ which were crossed out] censured and punished at the head of my command, and request that a court of Inquiry be granted me.163

Hill could not have overplayed his hand any more than he did at this point. He likely believed that his performance and success at Antietam elevated him to Jackson’s level in Lee’s eyes. If so, he was completely wrong.164

Lee was already in the process of finalizing a new command structure within the army that would divide it into two large corps. He chose Longstreet to command the First Corps and Jackson to command the Second Corps. Hill had been arrested by both leaving Lee with no option other than settle the dispute between Hill and Jackson. Moving Hill back under Longstreet would be placing him under the command of someone he recently challenged to a duel. Lee and Jackson must have been stunned at Hill’s move. The letter made its way through Jackson’s Headquarters on its way to Lee, leaving Jackson no option other than to respond in some way without the situation exploding for a second time. Jackson chose to include the specified charges that would have been levied against Hill had the case gone to court martial. Since Hill was no longer under arrest, the matter essentially was dead unless Hill reopened it. Lee, much like Jackson looked for a way to end the issue. He replied to Hill:

163 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 112.

164 Ibid., 112.
Respectfully returned to Gen. A.P. Hill who will see from the remarks of General Jackson the cause of his arrest. His attention being now called to what appeared to be neglect of duty by his commander, but which from an officer of his character could not be intentional and I feel assured will never be repeated, I see no advantage to the service in further investigating this matter nor could it without detriment be done at this time.165

Lee’s comments offered everyone a way out. Jackson was not seeking to pursue the matter, and Lee in writing, stroked Hill’s ego by telling him that he knew the neglect would never be repeated and it was not intentional. Lee’s closing words should have appealed to Hill’s senses the most—to pursue the issue would bring detriment to the army.166

Hill refused to relent. In a second letter to Lee, he wrote, “I again respectfully reiterate my request for a court of inquiry, to involve the matter of these additional allegations, and ask that a speedy answer be given me.”167 After unsuccessfully bringing Jackson and Hill together to attempt a face-to-face resolution, Lee simply let the matter remain open, hoping it would eventually fade. A.P. Hill would not let the issue die away and was prepared to disrupt army operations if it resulted in his perceived exoneration. His pride did not allow him to see the obvious fact that in the eyes of Lee and Jackson, he exonerated himself at Antietam.168


168 Ibid., 112-114.
Chapter 4

Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville

“The almighty will get tired, helping Jackson after awhile ...”
Lieutenant General A.P. Hill

The star of A.P. Hill never burned brighter across the Confederate sky than after his striking success at Antietam. Hill’s epic march from Harpers Ferry saved the Army of Northern Virginia and earned him high praise from Robert E. Lee. In a dispatch to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Lee wrote of Hill, “Next to these two officers [referring to Longstreet and Jackson] I consider General A.P. Hill the best commander with me. He fights his troops well and takes good care of them.” Despite Lee’s accolades, Hill continued to simmer over his dispute with Second Corps Commander Stonewall Jackson, calling him a “… crazy old Presbyterian fool …” in a letter to Cavalry Commander J.E.B. Stuart. Hill continued in his letter to Stuart, “The Almighty will get tired, helping Jackson after awhile, and then he’ll get the damndest thrashing—and the shoe pinches, for I should get my share and probably all the blame, for the people will never blame Stonewall for any disaster.”

While Hill basked in the glory of Antietam and struggled with Jackson, his old West Point classmate George McClellan was relieved of duty by Lincoln for the second and final time. McClellan’s failure to strike at a severely damaged Confederate Army in the aftermath of Antietam was more than Lincoln could accept from someone who already proved for months that


171 Ibid.
aggressiveness was not his strongpoint. In an effort to turn the fortunes of the Army of the Potomac, Lincoln turned to another of A.P. Hill’s closest West Point friends—Major General Ambrose Burnside. Burnside and Hill were very close comrades at the military academy and knew each other very well. Hill’s medical issues at the academy moved him into Burnside’s Class of 1847. Lincoln had once before offered command of the army to Burnside who refused to accept the appointment. Lincoln made a second attempt with Burnside and decided to pressure him into accepting command of the army. The courier carrying Lincoln’s order for Burnside to take command of the army relayed to Burnside the appointment would go to Major General Joseph Hooker if Burnside refused. Burnside accepted the command change rather than see Hooker assume control of the army.172

On November 9, only two days after assuming command, Burnside forwarded aggressive plans to the War Department to strike at the Confederacy. Burnside’s plan included attempting a feint to make Lee believe the Federals would attack in around the Culpepper or Gordonsville area. Burnside’s true intent was to then move his army quickly and cross the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg for an ensuing drive on Richmond. His planning included the assumption that Lee would not offer battle in or around the Fredericksburg area and would likely retreat.173

The key to the successful execution of Burnside’s plan was the availability of pontoon boats to get his army across the Rappahannock rapidly. Any substantial delay in crossing afforded Lee the necessary time to react to Burnside’s movement. In discussions with General Henry Halleck, United States Army General in Chief, Burnside asked that the pontoon boats be


173 Ibid., 21.
readied and moved to the Fredericksburg area to ensure their availability if his plan received the President’s approval. Halleck agreed to Burnside’s pontoon request.174

Lincoln’s approval of Burnside’s plan to cross the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg and proceed towards Richmond arrived on November 14. Lincoln caveated his approval with the stipulation, “move very rapidly; otherwise not.”175 Lincoln clearly realized that speed was the key to a successful operation at Fredericksburg. Giving the Confederates ample time to react to the crossing would allow Lee to maneuver his army into the Fredericksburg area and take up position between the Federals and Richmond.176

Burnside began to move the Federal Army almost immediately. By November 17, a mere three days after Lincoln’s approval, Sumner’s Right Grand Division was on the north and east side of the Rappahannock at Falmouth overlooking Fredericksburg. The Grand Divisions of Hooker and Franklin followed behind and arrived in short order. Upon arriving at Fredericksburg, the Federals found all the bridges spanning the Rappahannock burned and destroyed. Even more disturbing was the complete absence of the pontoon bridges that had been promised by the War Department. Although he had clearly outmaneuvered Lee in his effort to get to Fredericksburg rapidly and cross the river, Burnside and his Army of the Potomac found itself paralyzed in its effort to move forward towards Richmond. Lee now gained the time he needed to move on the Federals.177


176 Ibid.

177 Ibid., 7-8.
Lieutenant General James Longstreet’s First Corps arrived first to Fredericksburg. Entering the area from the west, Longstreet’s troops took up position on the heights overlooking the western side of Fredericksburg. Known as Marye’s Heights by the locals, the position offered superb defensive positions for receiving a frontal assault. Longstreet immediately set about entrenching along the heights including artillery pits for his field pieces. At the base of the heights ran a sunken road parallel to its face, protected on the east side by a stone retaining wall and on its west side by the heights. Longstreet had his troops entrench and fortify this position as well for infantry fire as it directly faced any approach out of the city of Fredericksburg.\(^{178}\)

Longstreet’s left flank was securely anchored on the Rappahannock with his lines stretching south from that point over the heights. His lines ended just south of the city at Telegraph Hill where the heights leveled out to a more sloping ridge which continued for miles southward. Longstreet was defending his heavily entrenched and fortified position with nearly 40,000 troops and over 300 artillery pieces.\(^{179}\)

Stonewall Jackson’s Second Corps line began just south of Telegraph Hill. Longstreet’s Divisions under Pickett and Hood served as the bridge between the First and Second Corps. Jackson’s line occupied the ridge that extended from Telegraph Hill southward for approximately three miles with his right flank anchored by cavalry under the command of Major General James E. B. (JEB) Stuart.\(^{180}\)


Jackson line included Stuart’s Cavalry, Hill’s Division, Brigadier General Jubal Early’s Division, Brigadier General William Taliaferro’s Division, and finally Major General Daniel Harvey (D.H.) Hill’s Division. A.P. Hill’s Division was up front stretched out down the Military Road. The divisions of Taliaferro and Early fell in behind Hill to the left and right respectively. D.H. Hill’s Division fell into line a few hundred yards to the rear of Early and served as Jackson’s reserve force.\(^{181}\)

A.P. Hill began the arduous task of moving his brigades into line of battle and once again his better judgement somehow escaped him at this critical juncture. Hill had six brigades at his disposal and anchored his right with the Virginians of Colonel John M. Brockenbrough. To Brockenbrough’s left was Brigadier General James Archer’s Brigade. To Archer’s left and separated by an almost six-hundred-yard-wide gap was Brigadier General James Lane. Brigadier General Edward Thomas’ Georgia Brigade and Brigadier General Dorsey Pender’s Tarheels formed behind Lane. The final brigade of South Carolinians led by Brigadier General Maxcy Gregg formed in the rear of the gap in a wooded area. Herein lay Hill’s problem—the gap. Hill inexplicably left the area uncovered in the center of his line. Both Lane and Archer’s Brigades to the left and right of the gap raised serious questions to Hill who referred to the opening as merely an “interval.”\(^{182}\) Hill assured both Jackson and Lee the opening was a marshy wetland and impassable to infantry. Gregg’s Brigade was also in the rear of the marsh to react if Union infantry breached the gap yet even he was misaligned. Hill place Gregg almost a one-quarter of a mile behind the gap in a heavily wooded area with little to no visibility. Any breach of the line would penetrate deep before Gregg could or would even know to react. There is simply no


\(^{182}\) Ibid., 129.
logical explanation for Hill leaving the center of his line open. Even if the area proved impassable, and it was easily passable, Hill had more than adequate forces at his disposal to cover the breach and ensure his line was intact. There was simply no shortage of troops available and no reason to leave the opening. His poor judgement in the placement of troops and ignoring the concerns of his brigade commanders in developing stages of the battle showed once again the questionable leadership abilities that lurked within A.P. Hill.183

In the afternoon hours of December 11, while Lee finalized his troop’s arrangements west of Fredericksburg, the Army of the Potomac finally began to cross the Rappahannock. The assembly of the pontoons was fiercely opposed by Confederate infantry fire from Fredericksburg which succumbed to heavy artillery fire from Union positions on the east side of the Rappahannock. Over three weeks had passed since Burnside had intended to make his initial surprise crossing at Fredericksburg, and now the element of surprise was completely lost. Lee had no intention of initiating an engagement at this point as he was still awaiting the arrival of a large portion of Jackson’s forces from the south. On December 12, Federal forces under Franklin and Sumner began the crossing in mass almost simultaneously, and by late afternoon, the Federals had crossed the river with Franklin’s Left Grand Division south of town facing Jackson’s still forming line. Sumner’s Right Grand Division was across in Fredericksburg.184

Burnside finalized his plan the night of December 12 in a meeting with Franklin and a group of his subordinate generals. The agreed upon plan was for Franklin’s Left Grand Division to strike the initial blow on the right side of Lee’s line. This area of Lee’s line was manned by Jackson’s Second Corps who were continuing to arrive on the field that very night. The area also


did not present the commanding heights that Longstreet’s First Corps occupied just to the west of Fredericksburg and north of Jackson. Franklin and his subordinates believed the key to success was to strike Jackson’s lines early and rapidly in the morning hours. Burnside’s final orders for the assault did not arrive until sometime after 7 a.m. Franklin read Burnside’s orders and found them different from what had been agreed upon the previous night. Burnside instructed Franklin to “seize”\(^\text{185}\) the position held by Jackson, inferring that he [Burnside] did not fully comprehend that Jackson had arrived in force. Burnside further instructed Franklin to use only one division to accomplish this task which shows he did not understand Jackson’s Corps was on the field in mass.\(^\text{186}\)

Franklin now believed that his assault on the Confederate right was not the primary thrust of the Union attack yet it still was in Burnside’s mind. Burnside had done a terrible job of relaying his intentions in the written orders that went to his Grand division commanders resulting in much confusion. Burnside still intended for the main assault to come from Franklin on Lee’s right. Any assaults on Marye’s Heights would be to keep Lee from sending help to Jackson from the troops in and around Marye’s Heights.\(^\text{187}\)

Franklin ordered Major General John Reynolds to open the assault with his First Corps. Reynolds choose the division of Major General George Meade to lead the attack on Jackson’s lines. Reynolds, despite Burnside’s orders otherwise, used his entire First Corps for the assault as he was obviously aware that a single division could not possibly take and hold Jackson’s position with any measure of success. Reynolds began to move his First Corps forward rapidly. Meade’s

\(^{185}\) O’Reilly, *Stonewall Jackson at Fredericksburg: The Battle of Prospect Hill*, 32-33.


Division lead the assault as planned with Gibbon’s Division forming to his right and Doubleday’s Division moving onto his left flank.\footnote{Shelby Foote, \textit{The Civil War: Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville} (New York: Random House, 1963), 36.}  

The Federals found themselves under immediate artillery fire from their left. Confederate horse artillery under Major John Pelham was delivering a nerve rattling artillery barrage into the Federal left flank, and the heavy morning mist made it difficult for Federal gunners to locate the position. Pelham’s artillery fire became so intense that Meade stopped the advance and had the troops take cover on the ground. At this point, Federal artillery from the east side of the river began a massive shelling of the area where Pelham’s fire was originating as well as Jackson’s lines in general. After almost one hour of non-stop artillery fire, the Federal gunners ceased and Meade signaled for the assault to continue.\footnote{Ibid., 34.}  

As Meade’s troops rose to their feet and began to move towards the Confederate lines ahead, Jackson’s artillery unleashed a ferocious fire into the Federals. Confederate artillery was concentrated on advancing Union infantry. The Union artillery barrage had done little to damage Jackson’s positions as they never truly found the range. Jackson had held his fire until the last possible moment to inflict the most possible damage. As Meade’s men were now advancing, the Union batteries could offer little help for fear of striking their own men. Confederate artillery decimated the Union lines in a brutal crossfire that caused Meade to stop the assault for a second time and signaled for a second Union artillery barrage. Now that Jackson had unleashed his artillery, Union gunners could much better gauge their positions.\footnote{Paddy Griffith, \textit{Battle Tactics of the Civil War} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 168; Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, \textit{Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage} (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press), 1982), 113.}
Federal gunners had no problem locating Confederate artillery positions during the ensuing artillery barrage. The damage inflicted on Confederate guns, limbers, and artillerymen was tremendous. The loss of horses was staggering. Jackson’s primary artillery position on Prospect Hill was termed “Dead Horse Hill”\(^{191}\) by his own men. Around 1 p.m. the second Union artillery barrage ceased, and Meade ordered an all-out charge. As Meade’s troops swept forward, they struck Jackson’s lines dead center directly into the massive gap left earlier by A.P. Hill.\(^{192}\)

Federals poured through the breach in Hill’s line between the brigades of Lane and Archer. Lane was the first to realize his fears were becoming a reality as Meade’s Division rolled towards the gap. Heavy musketry broke out between Meade’s advancing troops and Lane’s right flank. South of the gap Federal’s were heavily engaged with Archer’s left flank. As the fighting intensified, Federals entered the area Hill had deemed impassable entering the heavy woods in a direct line towards the unsuspecting Gregg and his South Carolinians. Gregg, not believing the Federals could possibly have penetrated to his line a quarter mile behind Lane and Archer believed the approaching Federals to be Confederate troops and ordered his regiments not to fire. Gregg actually ordered his brigade to stack arms in an effort to reduce the chance of friendly-fire incidents. As the blue-clad troops appeared, Gregg’s troops scrambled for their weapons and lives. Shortly thereafter, Gregg was mortally wounded.\(^{193}\)

\(^{191}\) O’Reilly, *Stonewall Jackson at Fredericksburg: The Battle of Prospect Hill*, 55.


\(^{193}\) Robertson, Jr., *General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior*, 164-165.
The Federals began to push westward and hammered the flank of Archer’s Brigade as well. Archer repeatedly sent urgent messages to Gregg for assistance not knowing that the South Carolinians had been wrecked and Gregg was dying. Reinforcements were not in the offering for Archer, and Meade’s troops began to roll up Archer’s line left to right.\footnote{O’Reilly, *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock*, 181.}

As Meade’s Division continued to force their way into the breach of Jackson’s line, Gibbon’s Division struck the Confederates under Lane on the Confederate left side of the gap. Gibbon’s assault on Lane’s Brigade came about 30 minutes after Meade’s initial breach, and had it come simultaneously, “the situation on [the] front could have been much worse than it was; and it was bad enough,”\footnote{James Gillispie, *Cape Fear Confederates: The 18th North Carolina Regiment in the Civil War* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2012), 123.} writes James Gillispie. During heavy fighting, the North Carolinians under Lane gave way to the superior Federal numbers intensifying the dangerous break in Jackson’s line. Unknown to Burnside and Franklin, Meade and Gibbons had pierced the

\footnote{Ibid., 176.}

\footnote{George Francis Robert Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2006), 647; O’Reilly, *Stonewall Jackson at Fredericksburg: The Battle of Prospect Hill*, 89.}
Confederate Second Corps literally in half and the Federals were now occupying parts of the Military Road in Jackson’s Rear. The breach, albeit for a short time, if properly supported with reserve troops, could turn Lee’s entire position to the North. Upon receiving Meade’s request for reinforcements, Franklin dispatched only Brigadier General David Birney’s single division from Hooker’s force to assist. Birney moved his troops forward rapidly, but upon arriving near the fighting, he refused to accept orders from Meade as they were both division commanders. As Meade searched for reserves, it gave the Confederates the needed time to strike back.198

Once advised of the gravity of the Federal incursion, Brigadier General Jubal Early wasted little time in reacting. He dispatched multiple brigades forward with no orders to do so realizing that a delay would be catastrophic. Two fresh Confederate brigades pushed forward from the rear of Archer and began the difficult task of closing the breached line. The earlier gains of Meade began to rapidly disintegrate due to Federal inaction and poor coordination. Birney, likely realizing the implications of his earlier refusal to support Meade, pushed his troops forward too late. As Birney’s troops came forward, the Confederates, including the remnants of the mauled brigades of Lane and Archer were in the final stages of reclaiming the breached area. The gap had been sealed due to Union inability to coordinate reinforcements when needed and by the action of Early moving troops forward. By 2:30 p.m., the heavy fighting had subsided on the south end of the battlefield and any hope of turning Lee out of his positions from the south was lost.199

Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia sidestepped a potential disaster in the Prospect Hill fighting at Fredericksburg. Hill’s gaffe in aligning his troops allowed elements of the Federal


First Corps to partially split Jackson’s line. Had the breakthrough been properly supported, the
results would have been disastrous for Lee. The fact of the matter is that most of Franklin’s
troops never engaged Jackson’s line on December 13. During the engagement against Jackson’s
front, Franklin used only three of his eight divisions. One entire corps of 24,000 men assigned to
Franklin’s never saw action. Burnside’s plan found initial success and then failed due his
failure to clearly communicate his plan and a failure of leadership by his subordinates. Federal
incompetence and a fast-acting Jubal Early saved A.P. Hill. The ensuing frontal assaults against
Longstreet’s positions at Marye’s Heights north of Jackson’s doomed Burnside and the Federal
Army. Fredericksburg stood now as the dominant Confederate victory of the war.

Jackson clearly felt Hill created the near disaster resulting in the breakthrough and he
took Hill to task considering him “negligent.” Jackson swiped at Hill in his official report on
what transpired, “… before General A.P. Hill closed the interval which he had left between
Archer and Lane, it was penetrated, and the enemy, pressing forward in overwhelming numbers
through that interval, turned Lane’s right and Archer’s left.”

Hill’s performance once the fighting began was uncharacteristically poor. Hassler writes:

… also apparent was the lack of Hill’s sure hand on his brigades during the critical
breakthrough. Customarily in the right place at the right time, Hill had been
conspicuously deficient in directing the defense and coordinating the rally. Pre-
arrangements were so faulty that when Lane was assailed he sent an aide to request
reinforcements from Gregg, and if that officer was unable to send them, to apply to
Thomas or anybody else whom he might see in command of troops for assistance.

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201 Ibid.

202 Hassler, *A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General*, 123.

203 Thomas J. Jackson to R.H. Chilton, January 31, 1863, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the
Printing Office, 1888), 630-635.

204 Hassler, *A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General*, 123.
Just three months prior at Antietam, Hill accomplished much to erase some of his earlier missteps, only to see it slip away again at Fredericksburg.\footnote{Hassler, \textit{A.P. Hill: Lee's Forgotten General}, 123-124.}

Hill’s struggles at Fredericksburg did little to ease the difficulties with Jackson. While Jackson and Lee quietly let the issue settle, Hill continued to press for redress. Just weeks after the Confederate victory at Fredericksburg, Hill fanned the flames. He wrote to Lee again asking for his trial and the opportunity to address the matter formally in a court martial. Again, Lee attempted to persuade Hill to drop the matter. He wrote to Hill on January 12, “I do not think that in every case where an officer is arrested there is a necessity for a trial by court martial … upon examining the charges in question, I am of the opinion that the interests of the service do not require that they be tried, and have, therefore returned them to General Jackson with an indorsement to that effect. I hope that you will concur with me that further prosecution is unnecessary, so far as you are concerned, and will be of no advantage to the service.”\footnote{Robert E. Lee to A.P. Hill, January 12, 1862, in \textit{The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies}, Series I, Vol. XIX, Part II, Chapter 31, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 732.}

Lee’s plead to Hill had no effect. With complete disregard to Lee’s suggestion that continuation of the matter would harm the army, Hill for the first time responded back baring his raw emotions and bitterness towards Jackson. He wrote to Lee:

> In my own case the commanding general having returned the charges against me by General Jackson without trial is a rebuke to him, but not as public as was General Jackson’s exercise of power toward me. The general must acknowledge that if the charges preferred against me by General Jackson were true, that I do not deserve to command a division in this army; if they are untrue, then General Jackson deserves rebuke as notorious as my arrest.\footnote{A.P. Hill to R.H. Chilton, January 29, 1862, in \textit{The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies}, Series I, Vol. XIX, Part II, Chapter 31, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 732-733.}
Hill made obvious his true feelings and the heart of the matter to Lee. Jackson humiliated him by forcing him to march on foot at the rear of his division after placing him under arrest. Hill revealed to Lee in his writing he would settle for nothing less in Jackson’s case. Hill wanted Jackson to suffer an equally humiliating event. Hill’s words represented a dangerous escalation of the issue. He now attempted to not only force Lee’s hand on the issue, but also decide the punishment for an officer senior to him. He continued even further by asking Lee to place Jackson on trial. Hill far overestimated his value to Lee if he believed the leader of the Army of Northern Virginia would sacrifice one of his most trusted and talented senior commanders to appease a slighted division commander with a questionable track record at best. Lee saw value in A.P. Hill, but certainly not at the expense of embarrassing Stonewall Jackson. Once again, Hill far overplayed his hand.208

The issue boiled over in April 1863. Jackson, under orders from Lee, initiated an investigation related to a security leak. Lee directed Jackson to find the culprit and relieve him from duty. Jackson found the person responsible who happened to be on Hill’s staff and proceeded to relieve him. The situation intensified when the staffer told Jackson that Hill instructed him to disregard any orders from Jackson that did not come directly from Hill. Hill exploded in fury that Jackson relieved a member from his staff without going through him [Hill] first. He fired off another letter to Lee complaining about his treatment, at which point Jackson could take no more. Recognizing the situation as untenable, Jackson wrote to Lee, “When an officer orders in his command such disregard for the orders of his superiors, I am of the opinion

208 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 128-129; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 171-172.
that he should be relieved from duty with his command, and I respectfully request that Genl. [sic] Hill be relieved from duty in my Corps [sic].”

Lee found himself in an untenable situation as well. Something must be done to end the dispute between Hill and Jackson. Jackson clearly was not going anywhere and the only good place to send Hill at this point was west. Lee faced a most difficult decision in the final days of April and could not possibly know a terrible solution was in the making only days away.

President Lincoln as well found himself faced with the difficult decision to again replace the Commander of the Army of the Potomac—this time Burnside. As the shock and totality of the Fredericksburg defeat took hold within the Union ranks, overall morale began to plunge. Faced with the despondency within the army overall with what had transpired, Lincoln had but little choice to make a move. He chose to relieve Burnside of his duties and appoint Major General Joseph Hooker as the new commander of the Army of the Potomac in January 1863.

The question of how to get at Lee by maneuver was foremost on the mind of Joseph Hooker in the early months of 1863. Lee anchored his Army of Northern Virginia on the heights above the western side of Fredericksburg and his fortified lines stretched miles to the South. The terrible defeat suffered by the Federal’s under Burnside’s command in December had already shown the likely result of another frontal assault on Lee’s now heavily fortified lines. Having been involved in the December catastrophe, Hooker clearly had no interest in assaulting Lee’s lines west of town. Rather than assault the Confederates fortifications directly, Hooker intended to attempt a large-scale turning maneuver against Lee’s army by getting into its rear from the

209 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 175; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 131.

210 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 131-132.

west. The key to this turning strategy was getting a substantial force into the rear of the Confederates quickly and quietly.  

Hooker called for marching three corps of infantry up the north side of the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers and fording the rivers undetected well in the rear of Lee’s army. A fourth corps constituted the reserve. Two Union corps remained in the lines east of Fredericksburg to give the appearance that the entire Army of the Potomac was still encamped and to hold Lee’s army in position. The rapid movement west by five corps of infantry began in the early morning hours of April 27. Hooker was as confident as he had ever been in his plan to strike at Lee when he said, “My plans are perfect, and when I start to carry them out, may God have mercy on General Lee, for I will have none.”

Late in the evening on April 28, advance units of the Army of the Potomac began to ford the Rappahannock River well to the west of Lee’s positions around Fredericksburg. As the bulk of Hooker’s forces crossed the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers throughout the night, Major General John Sedgwick and the remaining Federals at Fredericksburg initiated their part of the Union strategy. Sedgewick’s men laid pontoon bridges over the Rappahannock south of Fredericksburg and began crossing the river late the same evening. As morning broke early on April 29th, the seriousness of the situation began to emerge to Lee. Sedgwick’s crossing was obvious and reports of large Federal activity in the rear of the Army of Northern Virginia began

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212 Sears, Chancellorsville, 118-119.


214 Ibid., 117-120.
to arrive from Stuart’s cavalry. Hooker had succeeded in turning Lee to the west and now had the rebel army caught in between the two large wings of his army.\textsuperscript{215}

As the magnitude of the Federal movement became clear, Lee began to put his strategy into motion to deal with Hooker. Rather than retreat, Lee decided to take advantage of his interior lines and take on the Federals by splitting his army to deal with the threats from Hooker in the West and Sedgwick in the East. Lee left Major General Jubal Early and 12,400 infantrymen in the fortified positions just west at Fredericksburg to deal with Sedgwick’s force which had crossed the Rappahannock the previous night.\textsuperscript{216} He simultaneously began a large-scale movement of his own by dispatching his remaining troops west towards Hooker’s oncoming force.\textsuperscript{217}

Lee and Jackson met late in the night on May 1 to develop a strategy for dealing with the impending crisis. The plan was anything but simple. Lee remained in front of Hooker’s force with just 14,900 troops. Jackson took the remaining 33,000 on a difficult march through the Virginia Wilderness completely around the Federal right to strike Hooker from his completely exposed flank.\textsuperscript{218}

Saturday, May 2 was execution day for Lee’s plan. Brigadier General Robert Rodes’ Division marched first, followed by Brigadier General Raleigh Colston’s Division, and finally A.P. Hill’s Division in the rear. Jackson’s line stretched for miles through the dense Wilderness. The lead elements of Jackson’s line formed into line of battle on the Federal right around 1 p.m.


\textsuperscript{216} Sears, Chancellorsville, 198.

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 239.
Jackson’s troops filed in for hours, filling the massive two-mile-long attack line. Rodes’ Division was north of the Plank Road, a mere half mile from the Federal flank with Colston’s Division to the South. Hill’s Division filed into line to the rear of Colston and Rodes. Jackson became increasingly impatient with the pace of the troop arrivals as precious daylight slipped away. Regardless of Jackson’s impatience, the slow movement of his troops was no fault of Hill. As the rear element of Jackson’s huge force, they found themselves marching to a stop and go pace throughout the day. Hours had passed since Rodes troops arrived, and Hill’s troops could only wait their turn to move into line. Longacre writes of Hill’s position, “The third line was to consist of A.P. Hill’s troops, many of whom were still on the pike, waiting to be deployed, when the rest of the column prepared to go forward to the attack.”

Jackson could wait no longer. Shortly after 5 p.m., he looked to Rodes and with the simple order, “You can go forward then,” the assault began. The Confederate wave swept forward from west to east through the wilderness underbrush, overwhelming the unsuspecting Union Eleventh Corps. The divisions of Rodes and Colston tore through Federal camps as Jackson urged the masses to “Press forward! Press forward!” The attack swelled like a snowball rolling downhill. Jackson’s Second Corps moved forward at breakneck speed while the stunned Federals desperately attempted to make fragmented stands where possible. A.P. Hill’s Division began moving forward in the rear of the main line of attack as his final brigades arrived from the march.

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221 Ibid., 280.

Darkness fell across the raging battlefield after 7 p.m. as Jackson formulated a plan to finish Hooker’s army. The lead divisions of Rodes and Colston enjoyed wild success, yet they were also extremely disorganized and misaligned due to the fight. Jackson called for A.P. Hill to move his brigades forward past Rodes and Colston and resume the fight. His orders to Hill included a night attack to push the Federals back to the United States Ford on the Rapidan River. The task assigned Hill was a difficult one under the best of circumstances, much less to be carried out in a raging battle at night. Despite the inherent difficulties in moving Hill’s Division forward, Jackson “manifested great impatience to get Hill’s troops into line and ready to move promptly.”

Jackson met Hill in the darkness and ordered him to, “… push right forward. Allow nothing to stop you. Press on to the United States Ford.”

Jackson rode forward into the darkness with his staff ahead of Hill’s advancing line. Hill followed shortly thereafter with his staff. Both Generals were surveying the area for Hill’s impending advance. Both parties found themselves in a virtual no-man’s land. Stephen Sears writes:

No one in Lane’s brigade — at least no officer — realized that Jackson’s party, and then A.P. Hill’s, were riding out in front of the lines. Jim Lane was off to the right positioning his forces and knew nothing of it. Perhaps Jackson’s party assumed that someone in Hill’s would take the usual precaution of warning the troops; after all, Lane’s brigade [sic] was in Hill’s division [sic]. Perhaps someone in Hill’s party assumed someone in Jackson’s had done so when passing through Lane’s line. In any event...Jackson and Hill had gone out to the front, and in the darkness—they were not easily seen.

Herein lies the disconnect. Even if Hill’s staff believed Jackson’s staff had warned the rebel line that Jackson would be out front, Jackson’s staff would not have known that Hill’s staff would

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224 Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 292-293.

225 Ibid., 293.
soon follow. At a minimum, Hill’s staff out of absolute necessity would need to warn their own troops that Hill himself would be riding out in front to survey the field. Hill’s staff failed to warn troops that in the darkness, the corps Commander and division commander were in front, and disaster ensued.\textsuperscript{226}

Shortly after 9 p.m., the 18\textsuperscript{th} North Carolina of Lane’s Brigade unleashed a ferocious volley of musketry towards what they believed to be advancing Union cavalry. In the confusion of the darkness, Lane’s Tarheels had mistakenly fired multiple volleys into Jackson’s group as well as Hill’s. Jackson was struck down with three Minié balls while Hill went unscathed. Minutes later, in the confusion of trying to remove Jackson from the field, shrapnel from Union artillery struck Hill, rendering both commanders unable to continue. While it is implausible to say that the failure of Hill’s staff to issue warnings to the infantry about the advanced location of the two generals was the cause of Jackson and Hill being wounded, there is no question the failure to communicate their location was a contributing factor to the incident.\textsuperscript{227}

The Battle of Chancellorsville was over for both Jackson and Hill. Eight days later, Jackson succumbed to his wounds and was dead. Brigadier General Harry Heth led Hill’s Division through the battle’s end. With his wounding, Hill’s opportunity to cap the dramatic flank attack was gone and his opportunity to lead the Second Corps to final victory slipped away as well. His performance at Chancellorsville is incomplete as there is little evidence to make any judgements against. His division was last in line on the march and was in the process of moving forward to strike the final blow when both he and Jackson were struck down. Even more important to Hill, the death of Jackson removed any chance to clear his name in the war of words

\textsuperscript{226} Sears, \textit{Chancellorsville}, 293.

\textsuperscript{227} Longacre, \textit{The Commanders of Chancellorsville}, 216-217.
and charges that boiled between the two for the previous eight months. Lee’s dilemma with Jackson and Hill was over at the cost of the life of his best field commander. Hill would also have to wait another day to put his poor performance at Fredericksburg behind him and little did he know it was but eight weeks away on the largest stage of the war.\footnote{Sears, \textit{Chancellorsville}, 314.}

As the smoke settled around Chancellorsville, Robert E. Lee faced difficult decisions regarding the organization and structure of the Army of Northern Virginia. Second Corps Commander Stonewall Jackson was dead and Lee now faced the difficult decision of how to replace the aggressive leader whom he had affectionately termed his “right arm.”\footnote{Douglas Southall Freeman, \textit{Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command} (New York: Touchstone Books, 1998), 517.} Even before the heavy losses at Chancellorsville, Lee considered reducing the size of his two corps. Longstreet and Jackson each had commanded between thirty and thirty-five thousand troops within their respective units. Lee considered the size much too large and the loss of Jackson afforded him the opportunity to reorganize his army. The solution involved restructuring the Army of Northern Virginia into three corps.\footnote{Allen C. Guelzo, \textit{Gettysburg: The Last Invasion} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 20.}

Longstreet easily enjoyed Lee’s confidence as the First Corps Commander. Lee turned to an old Jackson confidant to take the reins of the Second Corps—Major General Richard Ewell. Ewell served under Jackson in every major campaign from the Valley through Second Manassas. Ewell shined under the fiery Jackson but suffered serious wounds at Second Manassas, resulting in the loss of his lower left leg. He took a lengthy furlough to convalesce his wounds and was now available. Lee likely hoped that Ewell would continue the aggressive mindset and ability to
rapidly move troops at which his mentor Jackson greatly excelled. Lee’s choice to command the newly formed Third Corps was A.P. Hill.231

Lee’s choice of Longstreet to retain the First Corps is undebatable. Longstreet’s performance through May 1863 was rock solid, leaving Lee little reason to question his future performance. While Ewell convalesced for nearly ten months, Lee had every reason at the time to believe that he learned much under Jackson. Ewell was also very familiar with the units and leaders of Jackson’s old Second Corp. Lee’s choice of A.P. Hill is puzzling. While Ewell was the ranking Major General in Lee’s army, A.P. Hill certainly was not second in line. Both Lafayette McLaws and D.H. Hill were senior to Hill in rank. Lee had the advantage of a long track record established by Hill to this point on which to base his decision. Hill’s record simply did not warrant his promotion to command of the Third Corps.232

Hill was a fighter, not a leader. Corps command requires both skills. Two different corps commanders under which Hill served placed him under arrest for failure to follow orders and

231 Guelzo, Gettysburg: The Last Invasion, 21-23.

232 Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command, 524-527.
neglect of duty. Hill constantly squabbled with his superiors and alienated himself amongst his peers. Of greater concern was Hill’s decision-making ability on the battlefield. The early attack on the Peninsula, his inability multiple times to get his troops moving, and the gaps in lines at Second Manassas and Fredericksburg were critical judgement errors committed at the division level that, if repeated at corps level, could spell disaster. Lee possessed other options other than Hill. The Army of Northern Virginia possessed solid commanders without Hill’s baggage. John Bell Hood of the First Corps represented a far safer choice. Hood’s record was impeccable up to this point in the war. While Hill saved the army late in the day at Antietam, it is without question Hood who did the same earlier the same morning in Miller’s Cornfield. Hood displayed fewer of the judgment errors that plagued Hill and could easily stake a claim to the position.233

A second choice for Lee to command the Third Corps is one rarely considered. Lee had at his disposal a superb young Major General who excelled at every task given to him to this point. He was brilliant on the Peninsula, worked splendidly with Jackson through Second Manassas, held back a Union corps at Fredericksburg with a handful of artillery, and took command of the Second Corps of Lee’s army at Chancellorsville when Hill and Jackson went down wounded. He led the Second Corps to victory after Jackson went down—James Ewell Brown (J.E.B.) Stuart was the choice for the position. Stuart held Lee’s confidence and showed none of the personality issues Hill displayed with his superiors. Stuart cooperated with Jackson and Longstreet throughout the first two years of the war and shined at what he did. Unlike the infantry arm of Lee’s army, a serious replacement candidate to command the cavalry existed in Wade Hampton. Hampton was himself a tremendous horseman who could easily ascend to Stuart’s position if Lee chose Stuart to command the Third Corps. The move involved a measure

233 Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command, 524-527.
of dynamic thinking on Lee’s part and did not happen. Later in the war, Union General Ulysses
Grant reaped the rewards of such a gamble by moving Major General Phillip Sheridan from
infantry to cavalry and watched as Sheridan became one of the great leaders of the war. Lee
missed that opportunity with Stuart. The bottom line is that Robert E. Lee had more qualified
candidates to become a Corp Commander than A.P. Hill in late May of 1863.\textsuperscript{234}

\textsuperscript{234} Freeman, \textit{Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command}, 524-527.
Robert E. Lee began his preparations for a second invasion of the North well before the Battle of Chancellorsville took place. Three months prior to the battle in February, 1863, Lee tasked topographical engineers to secretly work their way down the Shenandoah Valley, making their way through Western Maryland and into Pennsylvania. The objective was to map the entire route for future operations. Lee’s actions in the late winter of 1862-63 indicate his thoughts were focused on a second invasion of the North to complete what he failed to accomplish during his first attempt. He intended to bring the war North and destroy the Federal Army.²³⁵

Lee initiated his plan on June 3 when Longstreet’s First Corps began to depart their Fredericksburg positions and assemble near Culpeper approximately 30 miles to the west. Once Longstreet’s troops departed, Ewell and the Second Corps fell into line and joined the assembling army near Culpeper. While the First and Second Corps departed, A.P. Hill and the Third Corps remained in their positions across the Rappahannock River from the Federal Army. Hill’s primary mission at this point was deception. Lee hoped to steal a march on the Federal Army and the effectiveness of the ruse of Hill’s troops bought the time needed to get the movement underway.²³⁶

While the Federal Army probed at Hill’s positions, Lee’s plan worked to perfection. Two corps of troops were successfully pulled from the Fredericksburg lines and relocated to the west

²³⁵ Guelzo, Gettysburg: The Last Invasion, 33-34.

²³⁶ Sears, Gettysburg, 59-60; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 198-199.
while the Federal Army remained in place. Hill’s game of deception lasted ten days before the
Federals realized Lee outmaneuvered them once again. On June 14, eleven days after Longstreet
began the Confederate movement, and with clear indicators the Federal Army was rapidly
departing positions on the east side of the Rappahannock, Hill began the task of putting his Third
Corps on the march to rejoin the army. While Hill’s troops trekked west, Ewell’s Second Corps
was advancing up the Shenandoah Valley, clearing the area of Federals. The First Corps moved
parallel to Ewell east of the valley, screening and protecting his northward drive.237

When Richard Ewell led the Second Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia over the
Potomac River at Williamsport into Maryland on June 22, 1863, A.P. Hill and the newly formed
Third Corps of Robert E. Lee’s vaunted army was miles away rapidly shrinking the distance
between the lead and rear elements of army. By June 23rd, Hill’s troops made their way past the
First Corps still screening from the east. As Hill passed, Longstreet moved north simultaneously.
The Third Corps crossed the Potomac on June 25th at Shepherdstown while Longstreet’s
Divisions crossed just to the north at Williamsport. Just prior to the crossing, Hill proclaimed to
his troops that they would “… conquer a glorious peace on their [‘their’ referring to the North]
own soil!” 238 Although last to leave the Fredericksburg area, Hill’s troops now found themselves
second in the line behind Ewell’s advancing force, with Longstreet’s First Corps now in the rear
and Pennsylvania squarely in their sights.239

Hill led an uneventful advance into Southern Pennsylvania. Ewell’s Second Corps
preceded Hill and raided much of the countryside ahead of the advancing army. While Lee

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237 Sears, Gettysburg, 74-75, 78-81.
238 Gillispie, Cape Fear Confederates: The 18th North Carolina Regiment in the Civil War, 155.
239 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America, 349; Hassler, A.P.
Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 148-149.
issued specific orders forbidding his troops from plundering and looting, enforcement was nonexistent. A Confederate officer stated, “although positive orders were issued prohibiting soldiers from disturbing private property, [the army] paid no attention to any order of the kind, and took everything they could lay their hands on…”

Accompanied by Lee, A.P. Hill and his Third Corps entered Chambersburg and made camp just to the east near Fayetteville on June 27. Two days later, on June 29, Hill’s troops resumed their march to the east and made camp in and around Cashtown, eight miles west of the crossroads town of Gettysburg.

Hill’s inexperience as a corps Commander and questionable decision-making skills appeared once again as reports surfaced of possible Federal troops approaching from the east. His first mistake was the marching order of his three divisions. The Third Corps was newly assembled, and the division and experience of Major General Richard Anderson was by far Hill’s best of the three available. While the veteran Anderson’s Division should have been at the van of the column, Hill instead chose Major General Henry Heth to lead the march. Hill’s choice of Heth is baffling. Anderson was a division commander for over a year prior to Gettysburg with a solid, hard-fighting reputation. Heth commanded a division for barely six weeks and never commanded a unit of its size in combat, yet Hill pushed him out front, with Major General Dorsey Pender second in line. Anderson, the most experienced of the three, marched last. Hill’s order of march seriously impacted the Confederate movement over the next forty-eight hours.

Heth pushed a brigade towards Gettysburg on June 30 in search of supplies and he chose perhaps his greenest unit for the task. Newly arrived from North Carolina, Brigadier General

240 Gillispie, Cape Fear Confederates: The 18th North Carolina Regiment in the Civil War, 156.
241 Sears, Gettysburg, 116, 134-135.
242 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 204.
Johnston Pettigrew’s Brigade was given the assignment. Under orders not to engage any “organized troops”\textsuperscript{243} of the Federal Army, Pettigrew and his large brigade marched off to Gettysburg without cavalry support while both Hill and Heth remained behind in Cashtown. Pettigrew himself harbored serious reservations about the mission and his own inexperience as well. As they neared the western outskirts of Gettysburg, they passed through a Confederate picket manned by the 55\textsuperscript{th} Virginia under the command of Colonel William Christian. Pettigrew’s reservations became glaringly evident when he requested Colonel Christian and the 55\textsuperscript{th} Virginia to accompany his North Carolinian’s due to Pettigrew’s own admission to his lack of experience. Christian and his Virginia Regiment joined the march and, shortly thereafter, Pettigrew made initial contact with Brigadier General John Buford’s Union cavalry just west of Gettysburg. Mounted Federal troopers along McPherson Ridge were visible to Pettigrew causing him to pause. Considering his orders to not engage the enemy, Pettigrew withdrew his forces westward back to Cashtown to report his findings to Heth.\textsuperscript{244}

Pettigrew debriefed Heth the evening of June 30 as to what he saw earlier in the day just outside Gettysburg. Union cavalry were clearly visible on the ridge west of town and Pettigrew personally witnessed their movements. He was not relying on second hand information or intelligence reports of scouts. While Pettigrew delivered his report to his superior, A.P. Hill arrived and joined in the conversation. Unbelievably, both Hill and Heth dismissed the magnitude of Pettigrew’s report. Historian Stephen Sears calls Pettigrew “exasperated”\textsuperscript{245} at this point. Pettigrew went as far to have Lieutenant Louis B. Young, who previously served under

\textsuperscript{243} Sears, \textit{Gettysburg}, 136.


\textsuperscript{245} Sears, \textit{Gettysburg}, 137.
Hill’s command, join in the conversation. Young stated to the three Generals what he observed earlier, “[they] were undoubtedly those of well-trained troops and not those of a home guard.” Young’s report seemed to have little effect on Hill’s assessment of the situation. Sears states, “Powell Hill remained emphatic in his disbelief, but with a bravura flourish said he hoped the Potomac Army was up…”

Hill’s state of mind must be questioned at this point because if the Federal Army were up, Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia was in serious jeopardy. Now, more than ever, was the time for caution. The army was scattered across enemy territory in south-central Pennsylvania, missing its cavalry commander along with a large portion of the cavalry, and two corps of troops were backed up for miles from Cashtown back to Chambersburg. Heth, in a move that showed little respect for Pettigrew ended the conversation by asking Hill, “If there is no objection, I will take my division tomorrow and go to Gettysburg and get those shoes!” to which Hill replied, “None in the world.”

Simply no excuse can be made for Hill’s choice of inexperienced troops for the trek from Cashtown to Gettysburg, which looks even worse when Hill refused to believe Pettigrew’s factual account of Federals in Gettysburg later that evening. The intelligence delivered directly to Heth and Hill from Pettigrew’s excursion to Gettysburg on June 30 was likely the most reliable and dependable the corps Commander received as to any location of Union forces in southern Pennsylvania. Hill incredibly dismissed Pettigrew’s findings despite the fact the information came directly from one of his brigade commanders—not a questionable scout or spy.

246 Sears, Gettysburg, 137.
247 Ibid.
248 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 206.
249 Sears, Gettysburg, 137; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 206.
Lieutenant Young would write later of the encounter, “blindness in part seems to have come over our commanders, who, slow to believe in the presence of an organized army of the enemy, thought there must be a mistake in the report taken back by General Pettigrew.” Hill remained under orders not to bring on a general engagement at this point, yet his dismissal of Pettigrew’s report and his actions the following morning led directly to the beginning of the largest battle ever fought on North American soil the following day.

A.P. Hill awoke the morning of July 1 feeling ill. Historian James I. Robertson, Jr. writes of Hill’s illness, “The malady could have been upset stomach, diarrhea, simple exhaustion, or a flare-up of the old prostate problem. Whatever the illness, Hill was confined to his cot for the first part of the morning…” Author Clifford Dowdey went as far to infer, “he [Hill] was probably suffering from overstrained nerves.” Hill’s predicament left his division commanders in a difficult position. Now, more than ever, Richard Anderson’s veteran leadership was needed, yet Hill proceeded to dispatch Heth and his entire division back to Gettysburg. Pender’s Division fell into line behind Heth. Hill went as far as to turn over field command to Heth, who had been a Major General for a little more than a month at this point. Inexperience ruled the day and Hill’s decision-making fueled the growing problems. Hill put two divisions of Confederate infantrymen and two battalions of artillery on the road to Gettysburg under the command of two new division commanders with reliable intelligence that Federal forces were ahead while he remained in

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251 Sears, Gettysburg, 137-138.

252 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 206.

Cashtown in bed. Despite Lee’s orders to not engage the enemy at this point, Hill’s actions point to the absolute opposite. Stephen Sears writes of Hill’s actions:

Discretion, however was not characteristic of the aggressive Powell Hill. Lacking any cavalry, his would have to be an all-infantry reconnaissance. Instead of directing Heth to mount a simple reconnoiter, with just enough force behind it to brush aside the home guards he was expected to encounter, Hill put two-thirds of his corps – two full divisions, some 13,500 infantrymen, supported by two battalions of artillery – on the road to Gettysburg that morning. It was too large a force for a reconnaissance mission … and too large a force to back away from any Yankee challenge.254

While he warned Heth again, “Do not bring on an engagement,”255 Hill put his inexperienced division commander in a position where he could not disengage if he encountered Federals in Gettysburg. Reversing two divisions back to Cashtown down the Chambersburg Pike was ludicrous. If Heth found Yankees in Gettysburg, there would be a fight. Hill possessed more than enough experience to realize this fact. He sent two-thirds of his corps to Gettysburg without adequate leadership and no way out, looking for a fight, and a fight is exactly what they found.256

The early morning of July 1, 1863 dawned to cloud-covered skies with temperatures rising into the mid-seventies. The two divisions of Harry Heth and Dorsey Pender marched along the Chambersburg Pike closing on Gettysburg from the west as the sun rose. Brigadier General James Archer’s Brigade of Tennesseans and Alabamians occupied the van of the Confederate column. First contact occurred at 7:30 a.m. when dismounted Union cavalrymen fired on Archer’s approaching troops. Archer sent forward a skirmish line to feel out his front and as the exchange of gunfire increased, moved his brigade to the right of the road. Heth’s second brigade in line commanded by Brigadier General Joseph Davis moved off to the left of the pike while

254 Sears, Gettysburg, 161.

255 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 207.

256 Dowdey, Lee and His Men at Gettysburg: The Death of a Nation, 92-93; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 206-207; Sears, Gettysburg, 161.
Heth ordered Archer’s troops forward towards McPherson Ridge. Archer protested the movement and despite the reservations, Heth ordered Archer forward a second time.\textsuperscript{257} At this point, Pettigrew’s warnings from the previous night should have brought a moment of pause to Heth yet he aggressively pushed forward. Of Heth’s complete disregard for Lee’s order to not bring on a general engagement, Stephen Sears writes:

In the spirit of General Lee’s orders – the instructions to Heth on June 30 not to bring on a general engagement may or may not have been repeated to him on July 1 (the record is ambiguous), but certainly they had not been rescinded – General Heth should have broken off the action at this convenient stopping point and withdrawn to Cashtown to report his findings. Alternatively, he might have held the good high ground on Herr’s Ridge and sent back to A.P. Hill for consultation and further orders. Instead he ordered Archer and Davis “to move forward and occupy the town.”\textsuperscript{258}

As the first shots rang out west of town, Heth never hesitated in placing his two lead brigades into line of battle. Hill, whose combat experience was sorely needed at this critical point, was miles away in Cashtown, while two divisions of his Third Corps launched into a large-scale fight with Union regulars. Pettigrew’s observations and reports to Hill and Heth that were completely disregarded the night prior proved completely accurate.\textsuperscript{259}

The fighting west of Gettysburg on McPherson Ridge and Herr Ridge exploded as Union infantry arrived on the field. Heth’s decision to move forward and Hill’s absence found the Confederate Third Corps locked in a life and death struggle with the two Union corps. As Archer moved forward on the right and Davis to the left of the pike, Major General John Reynolds and the Union First Corps arrived on the field in force. Archer’s men plunged into Herbst Woods unaware that the “Black Hats” of the vaunted Union Iron Brigade led by Brigadier General


\textsuperscript{258} Sears \textit{Gettysburg}, 164-165.

\textsuperscript{259} Pfanz, \textit{Gettysburg: The First Day}, 53, 60.
Solomon Meredith were directly ahead. The reasoning behind Lee’s orders not to engage was perfectly clear at this point as the fighting spiraled out of control. Heth had no idea whatsoever as to the force in front of him yet he continued to press forward. Meredith’s battle-tested brigade charged and completely overwhelmed Archer’s Brigade. The rout was capped off when over 1,500 of Archer’s troops were captured including the brigade commander himself. The destruction of Archer’s command was total and complete.

The fighting to the left of Archer across the Chambersburg Pike proved no less intense. Heth’s second brigade in line led by Brigadier General Joseph R. Davis slammed in to a Federal brigade led by Brigadier General Lysander Cutler. With only three of four regiments available, the gray-clad troops from Mississippi and North Carolina hammered Cutler’s Brigade. As the losses mounted, the 6th Wisconsin of the Iron Brigade wheeled hard right, crossed the pike, and caught hundreds of Davis’s unsuspecting troops completely by surprise in an unfinished railroad.


261 Ibid., 98-100.

cut. While succeeding in routing Cutler’s command, the losses suffered in the process were no less staggering for Davis. Hundreds of Confederates were captured in the railroad cut and the loss of regimental level officers was extreme.\textsuperscript{263}

The arrival of Robert E. Lee in Cashtown and the distant sound of artillery fire to the east brought A.P. Hill out of bed mid-morning. Hill sent two divisions forward to Gettysburg while he remained behind in Cashtown feeling poorly and could hear the sounds of battle despite his orders to not bring on an engagement. Hill had no suitable answer to Lee’s inquiry as to what was occurring to the east other than to mount his horse and ride ahead to see for himself. Lee paused in Cashtown while Hill galloped ahead to survey the situation in Gettysburg. Hill left no orders for his remaining division, and likely his best and most experienced, in Cashtown commanded by Major General Richard Anderson. Lee summoned Anderson and after discussion of the current situation, and the arrival of couriers from Ewell’s Second Corps with news that Ewell was moving south towards Gettysburg, Lee could wait no longer. Lee personally ordered Anderson to move his division forward and rode towards Gettysburg to find Hill and see for himself what the Third Corps started.\textsuperscript{264}

As Hill and Lee had yet to arrive at Gettysburg, Heth reformed his lines and prepared to move forward a second time. The remnants of Archer’s Brigade and Davis’s Brigade were pulled back and the unusually large brigade of Pettigrew formed a battle line east of Herr Ridge. Pettigrew’s Brigade numbered around 2,000 strong—twice the size of some brigades.\textsuperscript{265} The brigade of Colonel John M. Brockenbrough formed on Pettigrew’s left. The division of Dorsey Pender arrived as Pettigrew’s Regiments moved into line. Hill arrived around this time and

\textsuperscript{263}Sears, \textit{Gettysburg}, 172, 174-178.


\textsuperscript{265}Pfanz, \textit{Gettysburg: The First Day}, 117.
finally began to direct his corps. He dispatched Pender’s Division to the left and right of the
Chambersburg Pike and advanced skirmishers.\textsuperscript{266}

Around 1:30 p.m. Lee found Hill east of Gettysburg and surveyed the unfolding situation
for the first time. Lee must have been taken back at what he saw. Two of Heth’s Brigades were
already wrecked and two more were forming to move forward. Pender’s Division formed in line
of battle just behind Heth’s lines and prepared to move as well. Hill was now overseeing the
placement of troops. What of Lee’s order to not start a large-scale fight? Heth arrived in a frenzy
relaying that Ewell’s Corps was arriving from the North and asked Lee if he could resume the
fight. Lee’s answer was a reiteration of his previous orders, “I do not wish to bring on a general
engagement today.”\textsuperscript{267} Heth returned to his battered division to await further orders. Hill must
have recognized at this point that Lee was unhappy with what occurred during the morning
hours. Lee must have recognized, despite his orders, that Hill’s Third Corps had begun a general
engagement that proved difficult to withdraw from.\textsuperscript{268}

Ewell’s arrival from the North spiraled the fight out of control. His lead division
commanded by Robert Rodes formed for battle as the outlay of the entire fight in front of them
between Hill and the Union Cavalry and First Corps was clearly visible. Lee had no other option
at this point than to allow the fight to play out. He sent orders to Ewell to advance the remainder
of his corps and to Hill to resume the fight. Pettigrew swept forward towards McPherson Ridge
and engaged the Iron Brigade in what can only be termed as savage fighting. Both sides suffered
tremendously. By the time the fighting ended, the famed Union Iron Brigade was shattered and
Pettigrew’s Brigade of North Carolinians was wrecked. In the 26\textsuperscript{th} North Carolina Infantry

\textsuperscript{266} Pfanz, \textit{Gettysburg: The First Day}, 117-118.

\textsuperscript{267} Sears, \textit{Gettysburg}, 196.

Regiment alone, over 800 men entered the woods on McPherson Ridge and 212 emerged.\textsuperscript{269} The casualty rate of 73 percent for the 26\textsuperscript{th} North Carolina and 65 percent in the Iron Brigade was but a preview of what lay ahead for both sides.\textsuperscript{270}

Near 4 p.m., the Union lines broke. Pender’s Division was pushing hard from the east, picking up where Heth’s wrecked units fought earlier. Early’s Divisions were now rolling down from the North as well when Hill, once again, found himself at a pivotal juncture. Lee could clearly see that two unoccupied hills southeast of town dominated the field. They would be key to any fighting the following day. Lee asked Hill if he could gather what remained of his division and seize Cemetery and Culps Hill. At this point, it would have likely taken little more than a couple of regiments to seize the heights. Hill responded that his men were done for the day, and Lee moved the issue on to Ewell. Day One at Gettysburg for A.P. Hill and the Third Corps came to an end. His debut in combat as a corps Commander was a failure—complete in every way.

Historian Robert Krick writes of Hill’s performance on Day One:

Where were the Southern division and corps commanders who might have been expected to superintend green commanders and green troops at a critical moment? Heth was far enough to the rear that he had no impact whatsoever on Davis’s defeat, and A.P. Hill was nearly ten miles away at Cashtown, totally insulated from the action. By contrast, Hill’s Union counterpart, John F. Reynolds, hurried to the front, where he was able to inspirit the defense and throw troops into the decisive zone. Reynolds paid with his life for being in the thick of things, but not before he had done is job successfully. Hill did not do his job at all, and Heth did not do his completely… Confederate troops went into action, without adequate high-level supervision …\textsuperscript{271}

\textsuperscript{269} Rod Gragg, \textit{Covered with Glory: The 26\textsuperscript{th} North Carolina Infantry Regiment at the Battle of Gettysburg} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 141.

\textsuperscript{270} Ibid., 141, 235.

Hill’s performance, in and around Gettysburg, on the night of June 30 and the ensuing day of July 1 simply did not measure up to what was necessary from a corps Commander. His dismissal of Pettigrew’s solid intelligence late on June 30 and his decision the following morning to move two full divisions towards Gettysburg while he remained behind are inexcusable.272

Day two at Gettysburg brought little improvement for the fortunes of A.P. Hill. The division of Harry Heth no longer resembled a fighting force after the day one fighting. Heth himself was struck in the head by a Minié ball and knocked unconscious. Pender’s Division was heavily engaged, leaving only Richard Anderson’s Division unscathed. Lee’s Day Two plan called for Longstreet’s First Corps to strike the Union line along Cemetery Ridge from the South. Anderson’s Division would join the fight as Longstreet’s lines rolled into action from south to north. Pender’s Division was north of Anderson while Heth’s Division was in reserve.273

Around 4 p.m., Longstreet unleashed his massive attack. As the First Corps units rolled into action, striking the Wheat Field and Peach Orchard, Anderson’s Division moved forward around 6 p.m. Inexplicably only four of Anderson’s five brigades attacked and one of the four retired early. The brigades were poorly arranged for the attack and the coordination between the advancing lines failed. William Hassler writes of Anderson’s attack, “Each brigade had formed in a single line without support, and each advanced with its left flank in the air with intervals of space and time separating each attack.”274 Hassler goes on to state, “Before the attack, Lee had enjoined him to develop the assault into a major action should the opportunity arise. The successful penetration of the Federal Front by Wilcox and Wright certainly offered just such an

272 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 212-213.
273 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 159-162.
274 Ibid., 161.
advantage, but Hill failed to support it by throwing in Heth’s reserve division or by advancing Pender.”

Two brigades fought their way to Cemetery Ridge with Brigadier General Ambrose Wright’s troops breaching the Union line while Pender’s entire division and what was left of Heth’s command never moved forward. Anderson lost 1,561 men with nothing to show for the effort. To make matters worse, Dorsey Pender was struck by a shell fragment as he rode down his lines, suffering a wound that took his life a week later. Hill personally oversaw the posting of Anderson’s Division and spent most of July 2 riding back and forth between Anderson’s position and talking with Lee. He knew Lee’s orders, and he clearly could see the dire need for support as Anderson’s Brigades rolled forward yet chose to hold the remainder of his corps back. As night fell on day two, Hill’s decision-making seemed to be paralyzed and again he delivered little to nothing to aid in victory. He failed to state in his report on the action why he never ordered his remaining divisions forward to support Anderson’s breach of the Union lines.

The climactic Day Three at Gettysburg did little to shine any light on A.P. Hill. Lee brought his corps Commanders together the morning of July 3 and laid out his plans for a massive assault on the center of the Union line on Cemetery Ridge. Longstreet would direct the assault while only supplying one of his First Corps divisions. Robertson writes that Hill, “… endorsed the assault idea and begged Lee to let him commit the entire Third Corps to the action.” Lee quickly declined, telling Hill that Anderson’s Division would be the reserve. As

275 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 162.


278 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 221.
Lee explained the plan for the grand charge, it must have dawned on Hill that he failed the army at Gettysburg. Lee included the divisions of both Heth, now commanded by Pettigrew, and Pender’s, now commanded by Major General Isaac Trimble, in the attack. Two of the three advancing divisions belonged to Hill’s Third Corps, yet Lee declined Hill’s offer to join in the attack. Under normal circumstances Hill should have directed the action, but Lee showed no interest. Hill’s involvement at Gettysburg, for the most part, ended. He was but an observer from Seminary Ridge as his troops marched away to devastation that afternoon.279

The great battle at Gettysburg was over. Lee was drawn into a battle not of his choice, but by the failure of A.P. Hill to control his division commanders. The toll proved staggering. Hill’s Third Corps alone suffered 7,671 casualties—the equivalent of a full division or one-third of his strength.280 Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia suffered terribly. The casualty rolls swelled to 27,125 for the entire campaign, roughly one third as well for the army.281 Nothing was gained yet much was lost. All the momentum achieved during the past year was swept away in Pennsylvania.282

The stinging defeat at Gettysburg made evident the serious leadership issues within the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee’s performance was far from his best, and each of his three corps Commanders failed him badly during various points of the three-day clash. Hill’s performance lacked from the initial stages of the battle straight through to the end. The flaws he displayed while in command of a division became magnified under the spotlight of corps command. He no

279 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 220-221; Sears, Gettysburg, 358-359.

280 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 225.

281 Sears, Gettysburg, 498.

282 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 225; Sears, Gettysburg, 498.
longer had a corps Commander with which to squabble and deflect blame away from himself. He was the corps Commander, and the responsibility fell squarely at his feet. 283

Even more pressing to Lee than the leadership failures, was the second major reorganization of the army since May. Barely three months after the tremendous losses at Chancellorsville, Lee faced the death of six generals at Gettysburg, the wounding of eight more, along with three captured—seventeen general officers were casualties of Gettysburg. Hill’s Third Corps was decimated at the leadership level. Only Anderson came away unscathed. Archer was a prisoner of war, and Heth suffered wounds, albeit minor. Pettigrew, who replaced Heth on Day One and during Pickett’s Charge, was dead. Perhaps the worst loss to Hill was Dorsey Pender, who was mortally wounded. Pender was Hill’s most trusted subordinate, and his loss was irreplaceable. Of Pender, Hill wrote, “No man fell during this bloody battle of Gettysburg more regretted than he, nor around whose youthful brow were clustered brighter rays of glory.” 284 Third Corps leadership had a much different look in late July of 1863. Anderson retained his division, as did Heth after his recovery. Cadmus Wilcox assumed command of Pender’s Division. Archer’s Division literally became a casualty of war. The losses and destruction were of such magnitude that it ceased to exist. The remnants were distributed out to other divisions. 285

After the difficult journey out of Gettysburg, what remained of Hill’s Third Corps staked out their camps near Hill’s hometown of Culpeper. Barring another major engagement in the near future, Hill’s task was to get his three divisions into fighting shape. The lull proved a great

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283 Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command, 598-605.


285 Ibid., 225; 230.
benefit to Hill’s troops. Wounded soldiers had the needed time to recover, and newly arrived troops begin to fill the ranks. Rations and supplies were plentiful as the army slowly reconstituted itself. By September the Third Corps swelled to twenty thousand strong, exceeding the number of troops Hill carried north just a few months earlier.\textsuperscript{286}

By October, Meade was back in Northern Virginia still leading the Army of the Potomac. Both Lee and Meade had sent large numbers of troops west to assist in the devastating fighting around Chattanooga. Neither army could boast full strength in early October. Meade was north of Culpeper near the Rapidan River. Lee decided to make a move similar to Jackson’s a year prior and get into the rear of Meade’s army. Lee dispatched Hill’s Corps who moved north to get around Meade. Unlike his predecessor Pope, Meade acted swiftly when he learned of Hill’s approach. Instead of remaining stationary and allowing the Confederates to turn his rear, Meade skillfully began a precisely organized retreat to the north up the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. Meade’s goal was to fall back on Manassas Junction and get his army away from the rivers and out into the open where he could maneuver on the battlefield. A third Battle of Manassas appeared imminent. Hill’s Third Corps caught up with the rear of Meade’s retreating line at Bristoe Station on the Orange and Alexandria, just seven miles south of Manassas.\textsuperscript{287}

Lee left little to chance in this attempt to strike back at Meade. Hill was his advance unit with Ewell’s Corps closing fast. Hill observed what he believed the final Union corps crossing Broad Run near Bristoe Station. Thousands of troops were waiting to ford the river with hundreds more in the water heading to the far side. Hill saw a Jacksonian opportunity he could only dream of—a chance to decimate an entire Union corps by surprise. Hill rapidly moved

\textsuperscript{286} Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 172-174; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 230-231.

Heth’s lead division into line of battle and ordered an advance. Hill took no time to have the enemy position scouted and ordered his brigades forward so rapidly that a heavy skirmish line was never formed. Heth’s Division marched into the jaws of a perfect trap.288

Shortly after the advance began, Hill became aware of Federal infantry to the right of his advancing line. The troops were down inside a railroad embankment much like Jackson’s position the previous year at Second Manassas. Hill ordered only a momentary pause in the advance while he ascertained the situation. Believing he possessed enough troops moving forward in reserve as well as artillery, he ordered the flawed attack to continue. As Heth’s line moved forward, the railroad embankment perpendicular to his right flank erupted in a virtual sheet of musketry fire. Heth, unknowingly and at Hill’s order, marched his flank directly onto the entire Union Second Corps commanded by Major General Gouverneur Warren. The result of Warren’s trap was devastating. Hundreds of Confederate infantrymen were swept away by the onslaught of musketry. In just thirty minutes of action, 1,900 of Hill’s troops lay dead, wounded, or captured at Bristoe Station.289 But for a quick reconnoiter of the area, and a simple skirmish line, the surprise would have been sprung long before any of Hill’s advancing battle line was threatened. Robertson, Jr. writes:

Every General in the Civil War had his low point: Lee at Gettysburg, Sherman at Kennesaw Mountain, Grant at Cold Harbor. For Hill, it was Bristoe Station. Horrifying casualties were a reflection of how unnecessarily precipitate the attack was. The brigades of Cooke and Kirkland had been battered. The former lost 700 men, the latter, 602. The 27th North Carolina, which caught the full force of the enfilading fire, suffered 290 casualties of 416 engaged—thirty-three of its thirty-six officers were killed, wounded, or captured. Hill’s total losses were … roughly one man lost every two seconds of the engagement.290

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288 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 176.

289 Foote, The Civil War: Tullahoma to Meridian, 133.

290 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 238-239.
Hill delivered his worst performance of the war, and his troops paid a terrible toll. He allowed himself to be overwhelmed by an opportunity in front of him that did not exist. He believed he was dealing with a portion of one Union corps in the process of crossing Broad Run when in effect a second entire Union corps was waiting in the wings, unaccounted for by Hill.291

For the first time on a large scale, Hill received scathing rebuke from those around him as well as the press. Freeman writes, “Criticism of Hill was on every lip.”292 After listening to Hill’s explanation of the events, Lee stated, “Well, well, General, bury these poor men and let us say no more about it.”293 Lee’s words represented a stinging rebuke to the overly sensitive Hill. For the first time, they were coming from the Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.

After reading the official report from Lee and Hill on the affair, President Jefferson Davis responded, “There was a want of vigilance.”294 Hill’s previous blunders fell under the purview of his corps Commanders—Longstreet and Jackson, and in some ways, were masked from Lee as he did not deal with a division commander on a day to day basis. After Gettysburg and Bristoe Station, Hill’s serious shortcomings were now on full display for all to see. His ascension to corps command ensured his glaring mistakes could not be shuffled away. For the first time, Hill’s competence on the battlefield faced serious questions.295

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292 Freeman, Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command, 627.
293 Ibid.
Chapter 6

Checkmate—The Overland Campaign and Petersburg

“... why didn’t you throw your whole force on them and drive them back as Jackson would have done?”

General Robert E. Lee

Both the Army of Northern Virginia and the Army of the Potomac spent the long winter of 1863-64 preparing for what lay before them on the horizon—a brutal spring fighting season. The long winter proved even more difficult as the harsh defeats of the previous summer and fall left Lee’s veteran troops in a difficult position. The war now entered its fourth year and the Confederacy felt the harsh logistical impact of the conflict. Simply put, the Confederacy could not supply the needs of the Army of Northern Virginia at this point and the situation had little hope of improving once the fighting reopened in the coming weeks. Exasperating the supply issue was one of manpower. The casualties of the past three years drained the Confederacy of its most critical asset—able-bodied men capable of fighting. Historian Gordon Rhea writes, “In February 1864, Richmond tacitly conceded that the Confederacy had been bled dry. Decisions there broadened compulsory military service to include all white males from seventeen to fifty years of age. They also extended terms of enlistment for the war’s duration … [the] draconian measures bore little fruit.” Lee faced the difficult reality that what he currently possessed in terms of manpower was all he had left, and the Confederate supply system had little hope of even keeping those left clothed and fed.

Abraham Lincoln and the Union high command had quite a different problem than their counterparts in the South. While the army boasted literally anything a soldier could want or need

296 Rhea, The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864, 9.

297 Ibid., 8-9.
in its supply trains, George Meade accomplished little since leading the North to a remarkable victory at Gettysburg the previous summer. Meade simply did not show the aggressive nature that Lincoln sought for three years in a long line of failed commanders. Lincoln’s decision regarding Meade proved even more difficult as to how could he explain to the public if he relieved the only commander to defeat Lee on the battlefield. Lincoln faced difficult decisions in the early months of 1864, and in typical Lincoln style, he found his way out. He decided to leave Meade in command of the Army of the Potomac. In turn, he summoned the hard-fighting Ulysses Grant from the western theater to Washington. Lincoln promoted Grant to Lieutenant General and General of the Armies. Grant now found himself in control of all Union forces in the war, both in the Eastern and Western Theaters. Not surprisingly, Grant assigned himself to travel with Meade and the Army of the Potomac. While Meade technically remained the Commander of the Army of the Potomac, he now took his orders from Grant within the same camp. Lincoln effectively relieved Meade without carrying out the act. The showdown in the East was Grant and Lee to decide the war.\(^{298}\)

By late April, 1864, the Union Army had swelled to over 120,000 strong.\(^{299}\) Lee could barely muster 65,000.\(^{300}\) Under cover of the darkness of night on May 3, and the early morning hours of May 4, thousands of blue-clad soldiers marched east towards the fords of the Rapidan River. The size of the army and its accompanying supply trains defied belief. Every soldier carried six days’ rations and fifty rounds of ammunition on their person. Meade’s quartermaster, Brigadier General Rufus Ingalls stated, “… no army on earth ever before … was in better


\(^{299}\) Rhea, The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864, 21.

\(^{300}\) Ibid.
condition in every respect than was the Army of the Potomac.”301 In addition to what the troops carried, the army mustered 4,300 supply wagons, ten days of food and ammunition in reserve for the entire army, 835 ambulances for battle, and a live herd of cattle to provide fresh beef to the troops.302 The army possessed everything it needed to fight it out with Lee and bring the war to a close.303

Once the massive army made its way over the Rapidan, Grant intended to swing west and strike a crushing blow upon the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee’s troops spent the winter entrenching the upper fords of the Rapidan, forcing Grant to move east to get over the river. Grant’s move east and then back towards the west forced him to move the army through the same Wilderness region in which the two armies fought during the Chancellorsville carnage the previous year. The heavily wooded area boasted almost impassable areas of scrub and thickets that would surely hamper Grant’s advance. Grant’s chance of success in this initial fight with Lee rested on his ability to get his army through the Wilderness and out into the open rapidly. Any fight in the Wilderness surely favored the smaller, more lean and agile Confederate army. While Grant believed Lee would remain behind his entrenched lines along Mine Run west of the Wilderness, Lee had no intention of waiting. Poor Union cavalry scouting throughout the day on May 4 failed to recognize that Lee’s troops were in motion. Ewell’s Second Corps swung east towards Grant on the Orange Turnpike, while A.P. Hill’s Third Corps marched parallel to Ewell to the south on the Plank Road. Hassler writes, “Lee rode with Powell Hill at the head of the Third Corps probably with a view to keeping a rein on his most impulsive Lieutenant

301 Rhea, The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864, 33.
302 Ibid., 33.
303 Rhea, The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864, 20-21; 33.
The timing of Lee’s attack was key as Longstreet’s First Corps was miles away, still approaching from the southeast. Lee needed to keep Grant in the Wilderness while buying time for Longstreet to arrive. He could not afford to have Hill have a lapse in judgment at this critical juncture. Grant’s army made camp in the late afternoon on May 4 exactly where Lee wanted them—in the middle of the Wilderness.

The fighting erupted just prior to noon on May 5, when advancing Union troops located Ewell’s advancing line along the Orange Turnpike. Hill’s advancing corps south of Ewell made contact shortly thereafter and the Battle of the Wilderness exploded. Hill pushed his troops forward down the Plank Road towards the intersection with the Brock Road. He was retracing the route in reverse of that which Jackson used the previous year in the stunning march around Hooker’s right flank. The intersection of the two roads in the heavily thicketed wilderness area represented a critical geographic feature of the region. Roads suitable for moving troops through the wilderness were few and far between. Whichever side occupied the juncture would control a wide expanse of the area.

Union infantry won the race to the intersection and began to entrench the area. Ferocious fighting raged throughout the day as both sides attempted to seize the vital intersection. Heth’s Division of Hill’s Corps repulsed seven separate Union assaults against his position roughly one mile west of the road. The fighting in the dense thicket made organized movement impossible as visibility was non-existent. Heth’s Division, supported by the division of Wilcox, held back

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304 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 186.

305 Rhea, The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864, 77-86; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 186-187; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 251-252.

306 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 186; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 254.
40,000 Union troops throughout the afternoon with only 15,000 of their own.\(^{307}\) Robertson, Jr., calls the first day in the Wilderness, “[Hills] most brilliant as a corps Commander.”\(^{308}\) Darkness ended the fighting on May 5 with both sides prepared to resume the action early the following morning.\(^{309}\)

Hill found himself in a grim position on the night of May 5. The repeated assaults took a terrible toll on his exhausted lines. Without support from Longstreet’s advancing divisions the following morning, Hill faced the real likelihood of being overwhelmed by the Union Second Corps that was firmly entrenched only a few hundred yards to his east. To make matters worse, Hill’s health began to rapidly deteriorate throughout the day. The old prostatitis from his West Point days kicked in, leaving Hill suffering badly.\(^{310}\)

The earlier fighting left the divisions of both Heth and Wilcox in a jumbled mess in the Wilderness. Both division commanders approached Hill the night of May 5 about the precarious situation and the urgent need to reform their lines to receive the anticipated attacks in the morning. Be it his medical state at the time, or another example of his consistently demonstrated inability to position troops, Hill balked at their requests. He told his two division commanders, “Longstreet will be up in a few hours. He will form in your front. I don’t propose that your division will do any fighting tomorrow, the men have been marching and fighting all day and are tired. I do not wish them disturbed.”\(^{311}\)

\(^{307}\) Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 259-260.

\(^{308}\) Ibid., 260.

\(^{309}\) Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 189-190; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 254, 259-260.

\(^{310}\) Rhea, The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864, 276-277.

\(^{311}\) Ibid., 277.
Even if Longstreet were in position to move to the front in the early morning hours, and he was not, no rationale reason exists for Hill refusing to allow his division commanders to reform their lines. Any coordinated Union assault in the morning could easily overwhelm his current position and both Heth and Wilcox knew it. The two continued to assess the precarious positions their respective divisions occupied and revisited Hill multiple times to voice their concerns. On the final attempt Hill lashed out at Heth, “Damn it Heth … I don’t want to hear any more about it; the men shall not be disturbed.”\footnote{Rhea, \textit{The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864}, 279.} With thousands of Union troops massed directly in his front, he voiced no concern about allowing his jumbled lines to remain in their positions overnight. At this point, Hill proved incapable of retaining his command.\footnote{Ibid., 276-279.}

At first light, a tidal wave of blue-clad troops struck Hill’s disjointed and unorganized line. Without surprise to either Heth or Wilcox, the Confederate positions were overwhelmed and began to collapse in short order. Gordon Rhea writes, “Some rebel brigades put up a stiff fight before dropping back. Others fired a few random shots and retreated. But across Hill’s entire battle line, the picture was generally the same. The Confederate Third Corps crumpled under the Union onslaught.”\footnote{Ibid., 285.} Hill’s failure to command his corps the previous night now proved disastrous. The Third Corps found itself saved, not by Hill, but of the simple geography of the region itself. The Wilderness represented a double-edged sword. The same dense forests and thickets that dismantled Hill’s lines the previous evening now imposed the same on Hancock’s advancing Second Corps. Union troops found themselves separated and scattered everywhere. The initial attack was rapidly becoming unhinged due to the inability to see. Hill’s Corps was in full retreat, back through the underbrush and down the Plank Road. The only thing

\footnote{Rhea, \textit{The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864}, 279.}
\footnote{Ibid., 276-279.}
\footnote{Ibid., 285.}
keeping his corps from complete destruction at this point was fire from a Confederate twelve-gun artillery battalion in a small clearing just north of the Plank Road.315

The precious time the artillery bought allowed Longstreet’s Divisions to move forward. His troops were on the road at 1 a.m. frantically closing the ten-mile gap to the Wilderness. Longstreet arranged his nine brigades three-deep down the Plank Road and attacked. The result proved devastating to the earlier Union advance. Longstreet’s troops were well formed, well led, and realized the magnitude of the moment. The Confederate First Corps hammered Hancock’s lines and began to rapidly push the lines back towards Brock Road. Longstreet’s assault proved even more lethal when Hill’s third division commanded by Richard Anderson arrived from rear guard duty. Lee placed Anderson under Longstreet’s command rather than Hill’s to continue the

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push forward. Lee recognized at this critical point that Hill was not the battlefield commander who could save the army—he went all in with Longstreet. 317

Unwilling to settle for any type of stalemate along the Plank Road, Longstreet dispatched four brigades into the Wilderness thicket in search of Hancock’s right flank. Led by one of Longstreet’s staff members, the four brigades assembled in an unfinished railroad cut, directly onto the right flank of Hancock’s Second Corps. The ensuing attack proved overwhelming to Hancock. As the Confederate brigades swept forward, Longstreet began to surge forward again from the west with his remaining troops. The Union Second Corps found themselves under attack from two directions. Of the disaster, Hancock later told Longstreet, “You rolled me up like a wet blanket.” 318

Longstreet now hoped to deliver one final blow by surging up the Plank Road and seizing Brock Road. As he made his way forward with multiple brigade commanders at his side to begin the final push, his party was caught in a torrent of musketry fire. Unbelievably, less than a mile from where Jackson had been wounded the previous year by his own men, Longstreet suffered the same fate. A Confederate-fired minie ball tore through his neck exiting his shoulder. In the chaos, brigade commander Micah Jenkins was shot dead. 319

While Longstreet’s advance to Brock Road stalled due to the chaos created by his wounding, Hancock’s Corps was finished. Grant had Meade begin withdrawing troops back to reform after the tremendous losses of the day. Lee and his heavily damaged Army of Northern Virginia found themselves in control of the Plank Road and Brock Road south of the intersection

317 Rhea, The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864, 297-308; 313; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 265-267; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 195-196.

318 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America, 583.

319 Rhea, The Battle of the Wilderness: May 5-6, 1864, 352, 356-362, 370
after two furious days of fighting. A stalemate in the Wilderness ensued. Crippled by the prostatitis, Hill messaged Lee that he must surrender command of the Third Corps. He was simply too sick to continue. Lee appointed Jubal Early to temporarily command Hill’s Corps as the standoff in the Wilderness continued.320

Hill’s first day performance in the Wilderness was spectacular. He skillfully managed and guided his troops and displayed the typical fighting aggressiveness for which he was known. In a fashion that had become all too familiar, his performance from day one was marred just hours later by terrible decision making. He failed in his duties by not re-organizing his lines, resulting in the Third Corps being overrun the following morning. While Lee clearly wanted the troops rested after the heavy fighting on day one in preparation for what lay ahead, he also had a reasonable expectation that a corps Commander would reorganize his lines to preclude being decimated by an attack. Hill failed the Third Corps and the Army of Northern Virginia. Hill’s role as a key player in the battle ended when Longstreet arrived and cleaned up his mess.321

Grant realized the situation in the Wilderness had become untenable. Both sides found themselves locked in a stalemate in the dense underbrush of the area. To force the issue, Grant ordered Meade to push the Army of the Potomac on a grueling march to Spotsylvania Court House, approximately fifteen miles south. Grant’s move offered two opportunities. The first would get the fighting out of the Wilderness and out into the open where the huge Union advantage in infantry and artillery could be fully utilized against Lee. The second involved speed. If Meade could push the army fast enough and beat Lee to Spotsylvania Court House, the Union army would be between Lee and the Confederate capital of Richmond. Lee would be


forced to fight to save the capital, exactly what Grant wanted. On May 7, Meade put Grant’s plan into motion. The plan was good, but the execution was not. The massive movement of the army was anything but fast. Lee, upon realizing Grant’s intentions, put his much smaller force on the roads south and easily beat Grant to Spotsylvania Court House. When the Army of the Potomac finally arrived, Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia were firmly entrenched and prepared for the impending fight.322

The fighting along the lines at Spotsylvania Court House proved to be some of the worst the war offered. Although still traveling with the army, and able to view some of the fighting, Hill remained unable to command. An incident that occurred during the fighting at Spotsylvania Court House offers much insight to the current state of the relationship between Hill and Lee. Lee had ordered a brigade commanded by Brigadier General Ambrose Wright to take up a new position during the battle. Wright, one of Hill’s brigade commanders, botched the movement. Lee and Hill observed Wright’s poor execution causing Hill to explode in anger. In a moment that can only be described as the height of hypocrisy by Hill, he threatened to have Wright charged for his mistakes in moving and placing his troops. Lee instead used the moment to deliver a cold dose of reality to Hill by stating:

These men are not an army, they are citizens defending their country. General Wright is not a soldier; he’s a lawyer. I cannot do many things that I could do with a trained army. The soldiers know their duties better than the general officers do; and they have fought magnificently. Sometimes I would like to mask troops and then deploy them, but if I were to give the proper order, the general officers would not understand it; so I have to make the best of what I have and lose much time in making dispositions. You understand all this, but if you humiliated General Wright, the people of Georgia would not understand. Besides, whom could you put in his place? You’ll have to do what I do: When a man makes a mistake, I call him to my tent, talk to him, and use the authority of my position to make him do the right thing the next time.323

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322 Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern: May 7-12, 1864*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 13-14, 44.

There is no question Lee was reminding Hill of many of his earlier missteps as he counseled him on Wright, and unlike Wright, A.P. Hill was a career military officer who could offer no excuse for his many errors over the course of the war to date.\textsuperscript{324}

Early led the Third Corps throughout the gruesome affair that mercifully ended on May 12. Combined Union losses from the fighting in the Wilderness and Spotsylvania totaled a startling 33,000 men.\textsuperscript{325} Lee fared little better. The Army of Northern Virginia suffered 23,000 casualties during the same timeframe.\textsuperscript{326} While significantly lower than the Union numbers, the Army of the Potomac dwarfed the size of Lee’s army. Grant again remained the aggressor and ordered Meade south with the army. He hoped a third attempt to intercede his army between Lee and Richmond would prove successful. For the third time, Meade could not move the army fast enough and found Lee entrenched and waiting on the south banks of the North Anna River.\textsuperscript{327}

Lee wasted no time in preparing his lines along the North Anna River. He placed his troops into an inverted “V” position with the tip of the angle anchored on the river itself. A.P. Hill proclaimed himself fit for duty and took command of the Third Corps on the left arm of the inverted “V” while the Second Corps manned the right. Anderson, now commanding the First Corps in Longstreet’s absence, manned the center. A railroad connected the open base of the inverted “V” allowing Lee to shuttle troops to either side as needed. The position presented itself

\textsuperscript{324} Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 203-204.

\textsuperscript{325} Rhea, The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern: May 7-12, 1864, 319.

\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., 324.

\textsuperscript{327} Rhea, The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern: May 7-12, 1864, 327.
as formidable to the enemy as Lee ever occupied during the war. Lee himself fell ill during the preparations, rendering him unable to oversee the impending fight.\footnote{Rhea, To the North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13-25, 1864, 322-323, 327.}

Grant’s massive army spilt into multiple columns as it closed on the North Anna River to make use of the roads and to improve speed. On May 23, the Union Fifth Corps, commanded by Major General Gouverneur Warren of Gettysburg fame, began to cross the North Anna west of Hill’s line. Lee got exactly what he wanted. The Union Army of the Potomac was fragmented, and the opportunity existed to attack Grant’s forces in their piecemeal state. The key lay with Hill assaulting Warren’s isolated corps in force. Unable to mount his horse due to his worsening condition, all Lee could do was wait for the reports to flow in from Hill’s front.\footnote{Rhea, To the North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13-25, 1864, 322-35.}

Hill did little to impede Warren’s crossing. The opportunity before him was perhaps the greatest of the war. He could destroy an entire Union corps in the difficult process of making a

\footnotetext[328]{Rhea, To the North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13-25, 1864, 322-323, 327.}

\footnotetext[329]{Rhea, To the North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13-25, 1864, 322-35.}

\footnotetext[330]{Ibid., 309.}
river crossing. Instead, Hill sent troops forward piecemeal himself and accomplished nothing. The haphazard attacks allowed Warren to move his entire corps over the river and fortify their positions. Lee was incensed. He could take no more of Hill’s blunders. He arrived by horse carriage at Hill’s headquarters, and in one of the few documented instances of the war, exploded in anger at his subordinate. Lee roared, “General Hill, why did you let those people cross here … why didn’t you throw your whole force on them and drive them back as Jackson would have done?” For the first time, Hill saw Lee’s inner feelings about his leadership capabilities by comparing him to Jackson. The scolding from Lee must have seared every measure of Hill’s intense pride as Lee chose Jackson of all people for the comparison. Hill loathed everything about his former commander, yet it was Jackson with which Lee used to scold the temperamental Hill. The damage was done as Grant realized the overwhelming geographic advantage Lee held. He began what was proving to be the difficult process of moving his army to the right around Lee for a fourth time.

Late on May 26, and through the day on May 27, long blue-clad columns of Union troops marched to the southeast away from the North Anna earthworks. Lee put his smaller army on the road in the morning hours of May 27 in an effort to once again get out in front of Grant. By May 29, Lee’s veterans once again outpaced their counterparts and were firmly entrenched in lines along Totopotomoy Creek just east of Richmond. Grant and Meade found themselves in the dark as to Lee’s location.

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331 Rhea, To the North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13-25, 1864, 326.
332 Ibid., 353, 362-363.
Grant pushed out three columns of infantry to the east to ascertain the exact whereabouts of Lee’s army. It took little time for the blue clad Union troops to realize Lee’s army occupied entrenched fortifications that appeared impregnable. A.P. Hill’s Third Corps occupied the left of Lee’s fortified line. Three days of probing convinced Grant that the position could not be successfully assailed, and he attempted to slide his army just to the south, near Cold Harbor. Lee moved Hill’s troops from the left of his current position down to Cold Harbor to meet Grant. Hill’s troops dug in and entrenched their new positions extending Lee’s lines for six miles just to the east of Richmond. The two armies found themselves facing off on the same ground McCllellan and Lee fought over two years prior.\textsuperscript{334}

At this point, Grant’s patience ran out. Five times he ordered Meade south to move the Union Army in between Lee and Richmond, and five times Meade failed. Likely out of frustration rather than good military judgement, Grant ordered a massive Union assault along the entire six-mile front early in the morning on June 3. The result was devastating—\textdegree 7,000 Union troops shot down along the lines in front of Lee’s army.\textsuperscript{335} But for a minor breech in Hill’s sector, the Army of Northern Virginia completely and totally repulsed Grant’s assault. Hill handled the breech quite well when he pushed forward a brigade to stop the incursion. Once again, the two opposing armies sat deadlocked, separated by only a few hundred yards.\textsuperscript{336}

The standoff continued for nine long days. Little fighting occurred while both sides employed sharpshooters to snipe anyone who dared put their heads above the entrenched earthworks. Of remaining at Cold Harbor, Grant wrote to Chief of Staff Henry Halleck, “Without


\textsuperscript{335} Robertson, Jr., \textit{General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior}, 280.

\textsuperscript{336} Robertson, Jr., \textit{General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior}, 278-280; Hassler, \textit{A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General}, 208-211.
a greater sacrifice of human life than I am willing to make … all cannot be accomplished that I have designed …”  

On July 13, Lee discovered the Union entrenchments were empty. Grant and the entire Union army slipped away in the night. Lee now assumed the role of trying to seek out his adversary. He dispatched A.P. Hill to find Grant’s army. Hill’s troops made contact with the rear elements of Grant’s army near Glendale, sight of a major battle two summers prior.

Grant had ordered pontoon bridges just under one and a half miles long built over the mighty James River and was in the process of moving his entire army to the south side. He intended to assail Petersburg and cut off Lee and Richmond from the rest of the South. The potential fall of Petersburg and its critical rail lines to the southern states spelled doom for Lee and the Army of the Northern Virginia as well as the Confederate capital at Richmond.

On June 18, Lee dispatched Hill and the Third Corps to move rapidly to Petersburg. Union troops already assaulted the small force in Petersburg multiple times without success.

Hill’s troops took up positions on the right of the small Confederate line and began to entrench themselves and fortify their positions. They unknowingly began a terrible nine-month ordeal in the trenches.

On June 22, Union troops attempted to seize sections of the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad east of Jerusalem Plank Road. The railroad represented a main supply artery into southeastern Virginia critical to the Confederate war effort. Hill dispatched a division

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339 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 215; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 283-284; Bearrs and Suderow, The Petersburg Campaign: The Eastern Front Battles, June-August, 1864, 152.
commanded by Brigadier General William Mahone to stop the incursion. Mahone delivered a fierce blow to the attacking Union lines, inflicting 3,000 casualties, and capturing four artillery pieces as well as a multitude of small arms.\textsuperscript{340}

In the early morning hours of July 30, the tactics of the grueling conflict elevated to a new level. Union engineers tunneled under the Confederate line and placed eight thousand pounds of explosive charges.\textsuperscript{341} The detonation blasted a massive hole under the Confederates, killing hundreds. Thousands of Union troops poured through the gap and into the large crater. Hill acted rapidly and aggressively and pushed Mahone forward again. Mahone’s men caught the bulk of the advancing Union line in the bowl of the crater, unleashing furious volleys into the mass. Mahone’s troops turned to the bayonet when ammunition ran low, and the affair rapidly turned into a slaughter. Despite the early blast, Union losses totaled 4,500 while Lee’s casualties were 1,600.\textsuperscript{342} Hill’s Third Corps fought exceedingly well early at Petersburg, and Hill himself appeared to be much more in command of his decision making.\textsuperscript{343}

On August 17, Grant made a major push to the west attempting to seize the Weldon Railroad connecting Petersburg to North Carolina. The Weldon line was essential in the Confederacy ability to continue the war. On August 18, Heth’s Division struck the Union line with a hard blow. Hill followed up by bringing in Mahone’s Division the next day to augment Heth. The result was overwhelming. Union losses amounted to almost 4,455 or approximately

\begin{footnotesize}
\bibitem{Robertson2007}

\bibitem{Bearrs2007}
Bearrs and Suderow, \textit{The Petersburg Campaign: The Eastern Front Battles, June-August, 1864}, 215.

\bibitem{Ibid2007}
Ibid., 235-236.

\bibitem{Robertson2009}
\end{footnotesize}
22 percent of those involved. While Grant gained control of the northern Weldon line, Hill’s troops imposed heavy losses on the attackers. While Hill continued to perform well, the strain of the fighting began to take a heavy toll on his body. His old prostatitis again flared, and he became noticeably weaker. Hill stated that his condition played a factor in the fighting when he wrote, “The blow struck them has been a very severe one, and I regretted my weakness prevented me from following it up as I would have like to have done.” Grant was slowly tightening the knot around Lee and Hill, but at a gruesome price.

Just days later, Grant struck again. Attempting to seize more of the Weldon Railroad, he dispatched Hancock and the Union Second Corps to Reams Station south of Petersburg. Hill’s condition worsened to the point he could not stand, and he lay down at times during the fighting. Hill’s troops did anything but lie down. They delivered a blistering attack on Hancock’s Second Corps inflicting 2,742 casualties of which 2,150 were captured. The Union Second Corps was routed at Ream’s Station to the point where Major General John Gibbon of Iron Brigade fame offered his resignation out of embarrassment for the way the blue-clad troops behaved on the battlefield. Ream’s Station marked one of the final clear-cut Confederate victories of the war.

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The consistent heavy losses inflicted on the Army of the Potomac rapidly dwindled Grant’s available manpower. Between June 30 and August 31, 1864, Union infantry, present and equipped for duty, dwindled from 86,702 down to 45,963.\textsuperscript{349} Grant needed time to regroup and the heavy fighting drifted into a lull until late September.\textsuperscript{350}

Union infantry made a move on the Southside Railroad on September 29-30, resulting in a sharp skirmish at Peeble’s Farm. Hill’s infantry kept hold of the railroad, yet Grant again extended his ever-growing line to the west. On October 27, Grant continued to push his lines west. Hancock’s Second Corps moved to seize the Boydton Plank Road and Southside Railroad. Hill responded and while able to maintain control of the Southside tracks, Hancock entrenched his corps along the Boydton Plan Road. Unable to command the defense of the Southside Railroad due to his worsening medical condition, Hill sent two divisions forward with cavalry support and repulsed 43,000 Union infantrymen at Burgess Mill.\textsuperscript{351} Hill’s Corps performed superbly between June and October 1864. Lee acknowledged as much when he wrote to Hill, “I am much gratified by the results obtained and pleased with the good conduct by the officers and men. You have rendered a valuable service, and I desire to tender to you, and to the officers and men engaged, my thanks for what they have accomplished.”\textsuperscript{352}

Both sides prepared for the oncoming winter as the calendar flipped to November. Hill’s main concern at this point was how to feed and clothe his Third Corps. The supply of food arriving from the south dropped daily resulting in scant rations for those manning the trenches

\textsuperscript{349} Bearrs and Suderow, The Petersburg Campaign: The Eastern Front Battles, June-August, 1864, 411.

\textsuperscript{350} Bearrs and Suderow, The Petersburg Campaign: The Eastern Front Battles, June-August, 1864, 411; Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 302.

\textsuperscript{351} Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 306.

around Petersburg. The harsh weather only worsened the misery for the hungry troops. Desertion became widespread through the ranks as 500 bolted from Hill’s Corps in one two-week period. Dozens slipped away each night to return to their homes and escape the desperate situation around Petersburg. Grant’s army swelled back to its original spring of 1864 proportions as thousands of new recruits and conscripts poured in from the northern states. Hill’s health collapsed as the winter wore on. Robertson, Jr. writes:

Protracted urinary and kidney infections had now progressed into uremia. Swollen kidneys, flank pain, inability to urinate, drowsiness from taught nerves and lack of sleep—all were making Hill increasingly lethargic. He occasionally had difficulty in orienting himself. Being attentive and able to carry on a conversation was at times beyond his ability. He was not aware of his exact condition—or the fact that if untreated, uremia is a fatal ailment.

Hill temporarily turned over his command on March 20, 1865 to deal with his worsening state. Grant could see the end in sight as one of Hill’s infantrymen wrote, “[the] wolf was almost at the door.”

A.P. Hill returned to duty the morning of April 1, still weakened from his serious medical condition. With the arrival of spring, he found his lines abuzz in anticipation of the impending assaults by the massive Union army assembled in their front. As darkness fell, Union artillery began to shell the Confederate lines through the night. The rapidly increasing intensity of the barrage clearly signaled to Lee and Hill the impending crisis. Hill arrived at Lee’s headquarters in the early morning darkness of April 2 to discuss the situation. Near dawn, reports began to flow in rapidly that Union infantry were attacking across the Confederate front. Hill mounted his

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353 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 235.

354 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 310.

horse and raced to the front with only two of his staff at his side. One courier returned quickly, guarding captured prisoners, leaving only chief courier George Tucker with Hill. At this point, the entire Confederate line began to cave in. Hill and Tucker found themselves alone making their way through an entangled line of infantry, unaware of the exact location of the front as it fell backwards. Unknowingly, the two were behind the initial Union assault line in a virtual no-man’s land. Robertson, Jr., describes Hill’s final moments:

They came out of the woods into an open field opposite Heth’s line. Massed Federals stood in the road. The two men halted. Hill raised his field glass, looking through it for a moment, and then remarked, ‘They are there’... Tucker pushed ahead to the edge of the trees, then slowed his horse to a walk. He peered intently through the woods. The trees were thick, and the ground fell away slightly towards a swampy branch. Tucker saw a half dozen or more Federals lurking in the woods. Suddenly two of them ran behind a large tree only yards from the edge of the woodland. Both men aimed their muskets, one man’s weapon under the other’s ... In that confused moment Tucker looked to Hill. The general had ridden up on his right. ‘We must take them,’ Hill said in a low tone ... ‘Stay there,’ Tucker implored Hill. The courier advanced a few steps and shouted: ‘If you fire, you’ll be swept to hell! Our men are here! Surrender!’ ... Beyond the trees were two members of the 138th Pennsylvania. Corp. John W. Mauck, a twenty-nine-year-old carpenter from Bedford County, Pa., looked down at his compatriot, Pvt. Daniel Wolford. ‘I cannot see it,’ Mauck whispered. ‘Let us shoot them.’ Both men fired. Wolford’s shot missed Tucker. The .58-caliber bullet from Mauck’s rifle ran true. Hill never felt the pain of death. The bullet cut off his left thumb in the gauntlet, passed directly through his heart, and ripped out his back. Hill died instantly.356

Just seven short days before Robert E. Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Grant at Appomattox Court House, A.P. Hill met a soldier’s death. Upon learning of his demise, Lee simply stated, “He is at rest now, and we who are left are the ones to suffer.”357

Even at the moment of his death, Hill’s poor decision making surfaced for the final time in his life. He clearly understood the lines were collapsing, yet he allowed himself, a Lieutenant General and corps commander, to ride into an oncoming enemy front without his staff and the


357 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 315-318; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 240-242; Bearrs and Suderow, The Petersburg Campaign: The Western Front Battles, September-April, 1865, 545-546.
protection they afforded. Lee himself became concerned at the “utterly reckless” manner Hill departed for the front and sent a staffer to caution him.\textsuperscript{358} Despite Lee’s warning, Hill pressed forward. Hill then doubled-down on the first mistake with an even bigger second blunder. His decision to attempt a capture of two lowly Union infantrymen while the fate of the army hung in the balance defies logic, and cost Hill his life. Four years of poor decision making, both on and off the battlefield, finally caught up with A.P. Hill.\textsuperscript{359}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{site_of_a_p_hill_s_death}
\caption{Site of A.P. Hill’s death, Petersburg, Virginia (Photo by author)}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{358} Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 240.

\textsuperscript{359} Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 315; Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 240.
Conclusion

A.P. Hill’s long track record of foolhardy decisions and impetuous tendencies on the battlefield finally caught up with him at Petersburg. He never established a consistent level of success in the eyes of his superiors, and he knew it. His problems started early in the war with Longstreet, exploded later under Jackson, and became obvious to everyone under Lee.

Hill lacked the ability to accept criticism of his decisions, always bristling at those who critiqued his performance. Outside of Bristoe Station, where there was clearly no one else that could be blamed, Hill always seemed to deflect blame away, or simply ignored it. The constant sound of criticism consumed A.P. Hill in the last year of the war, as he became painfully aware that even Robert E. Lee longed for the return of the man Hill loathed more than anyone—Stonewall Jackson.360

Hill’s performance at Antietam provided him an opportunity that few enjoy: The ability to see all of his past missteps and mistakes washed away; yet he ignored the obvious. He chose to reignite a fire that clearly was on the verge of extinction, pushing the patience of both Jackson and Lee to their absolute limits. He placed personal vengeance above all, making the part greater than the whole in his mind—a dangerous proposition for Lee.

A.P. Hill was a man at war with himself. He never seemed to be comfortable within himself or with his decisions when around his peers. His inner demons tormented him in the heated squabbles with Longstreet and Jackson. The only two corps commanders he served under placed him under arrest just months apart. The situation with Jackson bore Hill’s inner turmoil for all to see, most notably Robert E. Lee. Hill was never interested in justice for himself. His only interest was in seeing Jackson humiliated to the same degree that he believed was placed

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360 Robertson, Jr., General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior, 239.
upon him. He did not seek justice, but rather revenge. Hill wrote of himself in a letter to Stuart, “I am like the porcupine—all bristles, and all sticking out too, so I know we [speaking of himself and Jackson] shall have a smash up before long.”361 His words to Stuart prove he recognized his deficient character traits, yet he did little to improve them. He pined for a blowup with Jackson, and he got exactly what he sought. His behavior fell far short of what would be expected from a commander at any level.362

In a military environment at every level of command, including the General officer level, having a strong leadership vision is critical to success. While that vision is unique to each individual leader, the subordinate must always be mindful of the absolute necessity of their vision meshing with that of their superiors. The relationship between Jackson and Lee perfectly illustrates this concept. Perhaps no other subordinate in the Confederate Army was more strong-willed and grounded in his beliefs than Stonewall Jackson, yet he possessed the ability to interlock his vision into what Lee desired. The result was perhaps the most effective combination of the war. The relationship between the two was textbook successful. Hill never figured out this critical concept and only complained when his superiors chose not to do things his desired way. In many cases, rather than simply adapt his methods to those of his superiors, he simply did things the A.P. Hill way, resulting in massive blowups and clashes within the chain of command. The end result was a breakdown of good order and discipline within the ranks.

The path to a Confederate victory in the American Civil War was razor thin with little margin for error. While Lee always faced an ever-dwindling pool of candidates from which to choose when replacing fallen commanders, his choice of Hill is inexplicable based on the latter’s


proven record to that point of the war. At no time was A.P. Hill ever qualified to command a corps within the Army of Northern Virginia. His inability to effectively function within the chain of command and his constant trail of poor decisions leave little doubt he was unqualified to command at the division level either. The keys to success on the battlefield for a commander at the corps or division level are simple—having the fortitude to strike a massive blow to the enemy and knowing when the time is right to strike the blow. Hill can never be accused of being timid on the battlefield, yet he consistently failed to recognize the critical point of timing and troop placement. He was all bluster on the field. His lack of patience and self-control constantly left the army wanting for better out of him. Lee faced a terribly difficult decision in May, 1863 as to how to diffuse the Hill-Jackson dilemma. The situation resolved itself with the death of Jackson which begs the question—what if Jackson had survived at Chancellorsville? Prior to his death, Jackson formally requested that Hill be relieved of his command within the Second Corps. Short of sending Hill to the Western Theater, Lee’s only valid option seemed to be moving Hill to oversee defensive operations in or around Richmond.363

Command at the brigade level is clearly the highest position to which Hill should have ever ascended. Hill’s fighting qualities were well-suited to command a brigade. The bulk of the decision making and troop placement would be made above his head at the division command level. Hill’s duties as a brigade commander would be simple—fight! Fighting aside, the question remains whether Hill could control his personality, even at the brigade level. He clearly did not control himself as a division or corps commander, so it must be considered that he would not at any level. The personality traits of AP. Hill simply did not suit him to function within a chain of command, especially one molded by the authoritarian Stonewall Jackson, that demanded absolute adherence to every detail. No other option existed outside of promoting Hill to

command the Third Corps in the face of both Jackson and Longstreet which seems highly unlikely after everything that had transpired between the three.

Not surprisingly, even in his final moments, Hill struggled to keep himself composed. His rashness and lack of good judgement unnecessarily cost him his life. While the war was essentially over at this point, Hill did not survive to see the final surrender at Appomattox, and perhaps it is a fitting end to his story. Post-war years likely would not have been kind to the Third Corps Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia. Death on the battlefield silenced the internal struggles that consumed A.P. Hill throughout the war, and made him by far one of the most perplexing leaders of the conflict. Lee sadly summed up Hill’s fate, “He is at rest now, and we who are left are the ones to suffer.”364 Perhaps the ancient military philosopher Sun Tzu had Hill and those like him in mind when he wrote of Generals:

When people discuss a general they always pay attention to his courage … As far as a general is concerned, courage is but one quality. Now a valiant general will be certain to enter an engagement recklessly and if he does so he will not appreciate what is advantageous … An impulsive man can be brought to rage and brought to his death. One easily angered is irascible, obstinate and hasty. He does not consider difficulties … One anxious to defend his reputation pays no regard to anything else … The ruin of the army and the death of the general are inevitable results of these shortcomings. They must be deeply pondered.”365

And so it was with Ambrose Powell Hill.

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364 Hassler, A.P. Hill: Lee’s Forgotten General, 242.

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