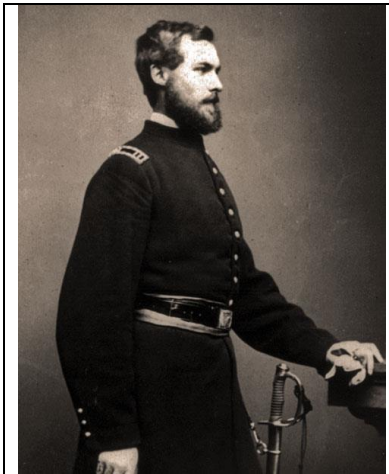


The Army of Northern Virginia and the Gettysburg Campaign - *“We came here with the best army the Confederacy ever carried into the field”*

D. Scott Hartwig

In the decades since the Civil War historians have wrestled with two broad questions associated with the Gettysburg campaign and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia: Why did Robert E. Lee invade Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863? And what was the effect of the battle and the Pennsylvania campaign upon the Army of Northern Virginia, and Confederate fortunes in the war? The two questions are linked, for what one might believe were Lee’s reasons for mounting an invasion of Pennsylvania often informs one’s opinion of the outcome of the campaign. For example, if someone believes, as some historians do, that the principal purpose of the invasion was to gather supplies for the army, then despite the tactical defeat at Gettysburg, the campaign was a strategic success, since the army did seize a great quantity of supplies. It might be imagined that with all the ink that has been lavished on this campaign that in nearly 150 years historians would have arrived at some consensus on these questions. But they have not. Historians remain divided, and the debate continues. The purpose of this paper is to venture into this debate and see if it is possible to arrive at an unbiased interpretation of these questions that is rooted in primary sources from the time of the campaign. With each question however, it is valuable to first review the historiography to understand how interpretations and opinions have been shaped in the decades since the battle.

Why Did Lee Go North? - Reviewing the Historiography



The Comte de Paris in 1862. (LOC)

The earliest serious study of the Gettysburg campaign was written by the Philippe Albert d’Orleans, the Comte de Paris, a Frenchman and grandson of the last Bourbon king of France, who was deposed by the revolution of 1848. The comte served as a volunteer aide de camp to Union General George B. McClellan from 1861 through the end of the Peninsula campaign. His 1886 book, *The Battle of Gettysburg*, was actually an authorized excerpt from his four-volume English edition of the history of the Civil War in America. The comte focused almost exclusively on the operational and tactical aspect of the campaign and battle and offered no opinion on the strategic objectives of Lee’s Pennsylvania campaign other than that it was to decide “the future of America.”¹

Historian John Codman Ropes, whose brother Henry was killed on July 3 at Gettysburg while serving in the 20th Massachusetts, published his multi-volume *The Story of the Civil War* in 1913. Ropes believed that Lee had multiple strategic objectives, which he presented in no particular order. “By taking the offensive, he [Lee] could feed off the enemy’s country; he thought that by invading Maryland and Pennsylvania, he could prevent Lincoln from sending troops to Grant and so alarm him for the safety of Washington that they would not allow Hooker to take Richmond but would recall his army behind the Rappahannock.” Ropes thought that Lee also hoped to defeat and destroy the Army of the Potomac, “and, perhaps, push on to Baltimore or Philadelphia, levy contributions, and take possession of the land.” But since he could not hold the terrain his army had

seized, “[Lee] thought that after such a display of power, the foreign powers might recognize the Southern Confederacy and raise the blockade, and that the peace party at the North might declare the war a failure.”²

Jesse Bowman Young’s *The Battle of Gettysburg* was published in the same year as Ropes’s volume. Like Ropes, Young offered multiple reasons for Lee’s march north. They included placing the Army of the Potomac in such a condition that Washington was compelled to draw troops from other theaters to reinforce it, relieving Virginia of the burden of the opposing armies, feeding the Army of Northern Virginia, exploiting political division in the North, and possibly causing the fall of Washington or at least gaining Confederate control over western Maryland, western Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. Young also thought that Lee’s general contempt for the Union army influenced his decision to invade the North.³

Sir Frederick Maurice, a British soldier, published *Robert E. Lee the Soldier* in 1925. Maurice contended that Lee’s intentions in the North were both pragmatic and straightforward. According to Maurice, Lee believed that the best hope for the Confederacy to win its independence was to convince the Northern public that the effort to keep the South within the Union was not worth the cost, and that the surest way to influence Northern opinion was a victory in the North. “What Lee most earnestly desired,” wrote Maurice, “was that political and military strategy should go hand and hand. He had followed most closely political developments in the North, he was aware of Lincoln’s embarrassments, and he wished to turn them to account in the prosecution of the war.” Maurice disagreed with Ropes that Lee hoped to gain foreign recognition through the campaign. The Emancipation Proclamation, he contended, “had settled the question of intervention, and that no British Government could go against the steadily rising tide of popular opinion in favor of the Northern cause.”⁴

In 1935 Douglas Southall Freeman published his beautifully written and hugely influential four-volume biography, *R. E. Lee*. While Freeman noted that an invasion of the North would draw the Federal army out of Virginia and disrupt its plans for a summer offensive as well as fuel the Northern peace movement, he believed it was a lack of supplies that drove the need for invasion. Lee, wrote Freeman, “had to invade the North for provisions, regardless of all else.”⁵

There were no more significant Gettysburg works published until the 1950s. In 1956 Edward Stackpole, a World War I Medal of Honor recipient who rose to the rank of major general, published the widely read *They Met at Gettysburg*. Two years later, two highly popular books were published. Clifford Dowdey, a writer of historical fiction and nonfiction, produced *Death of a Nation*, and Glenn Tucker, a journalist, *High Tide at Gettysburg*. Each had a different interpretation on Lee’s motives for mounting an offensive into Pennsylvania. Stackpole believed that in the aftermath of Chancellorsville Lee thought it an opportune moment for a bold stroke that might win the war for the Confederacy in a few short weeks. Stackpole sided with Ropes on the issue of foreign recognition, writing that “recognition by England and France was still a definite possibility, with all the advantages such backing would entail.” Dowdey thought there were two fundamental reasons for Lee’s offensive into Pennsylvania, one strategic, the other practical. The strategic purpose was to break up the enemy plans for the campaign season. The practical reason Dowdey advanced, echoed Freeman, which was “to victual his army.” Dowdey concluded that, “From this viewpoint, the Gettysburg campaign can be called the largest commissary raid in the history of modern warfare, and the desperate necessity was symptomatic of the collapse of the Confederate resources.” Dowdey’s popular study helped further develop and strengthen the interpretation that it was a desperate supply situation that figured most prominently and importantly in the Lee’s campaign planning; Lee had to invade the North simply to feed his army. Tucker agreed in certain respects with both Stackpole and Dowdey. “A march into Pennsylvania,” he wrote, “offered the opportunity to win the war with a single stroke,” but feeding the army “remained the number-one priority.” Tucker added another twist to the interpretations for the Pennsylvania campaign. A threat to New York City and Philadelphia might create a panic in these financial centers, placing gold at a high premium and causing Northern business interests to demand peace. Tucker thought European recognition still a viable possibility, but only if Confederate victory in Pennsylvania was “clear and compelling.”⁶

The theme that the critical supply situation was the driving force behind Lee's decision to invade Pennsylvania was continued by Wilbur S. Nye in *Here Come the Rebels*, published in 1965, and by Kent Masterson Brown in his 2005 study of Lee's retreat, *Retreat from Gettysburg*. Both Nye and Brown believed the seizure of supplies to feed the army was *the* primary objective of the invasion. Brown wrote, "Although Lee undoubtedly visualized a peace dividend, his objectives for the invasion of Pennsylvania appear to have been nothing more complicated than to feed and equip his army and to keep it intact, although he communicated those objectives to no one. Nevertheless, Lee's officers quickly surmised his intentions."⁷

The works of Edwin Coddington (*The Gettysburg Campaign* [1968]), Craig Symonds (*American Heritage History of the Battle of Gettysburg* [2001]), Noah Trudeau (*Gettysburg; A Testing of Courage* [2002]), and Stephen Sears (*Gettysburg* [2003]), are all more circumspect in assigning reasons for Lee's move north. While noting that multiple reasons influenced Lee's thinking, and that acquiring supplies was important, each of these historians ascribed military and political factors as the primary reasons influencing Lee's decision to mount the Pennsylvania campaign. Principally, their interpretation was that Lee sought both to upset the plans of the Union by carrying the war north, and to deliver a blow to the Army of the Potomac that would fuel the peace movement in the North and raise the prospects of Southern independence. They also noted that any success in Pennsylvania would offset defeat at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Symonds went farther than the others by suggesting that Lee argued with Jefferson Davis that a Maryland-Pennsylvania invasion might force the Federal government to recall Grant from Vicksburg and so save the citadel on the Mississippi as well.⁸

Interpretations have clearly not come together in the nearly 150 years since the campaign. There is a wide gulf between what Kent Brown argued was Lee's primary objective and Stephen Sears's or Noah Trudeau's interpretation. Who is right? Was Lee's invasion primarily a giant raid into Pennsylvania to gather supplies that went awry when he was drawn into a battle at Gettysburg, as Freeman, Dowdey, Brown, and others have argued? Or, did Lee instead march north seeking a decisive battle in Pennsylvania that would alter the military/political map of the war, as Coddington, Sears, and other have asserted? Did Lee hope for European recognition, and did he contemplate threatening or capturing Northern cities like Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington? Did he believe that his campaign would help relieve Vicksburg?

What makes it difficult to reconcile these conflicting views is that historians have often projected their own opinions or biases into their interpretation of the historical record. For example, Lee's defeat at Gettysburg appears less damaging if the invasion of Pennsylvania is interpreted as a giant foraging expedition that went wrong. Yes, the battle was the lost, but the campaign was a success, because it seized vast quantities of supplies and the army escaped to fight another day. Lee's reputation suffers less damage in this narrative. But the Gettysburg defeat becomes extremely significant, and Lee's generalship exposed to more critical scrutiny, if his purpose is thought to be seeking a knock-out battle in Pennsylvania.

Re-Examining the Primary Sources

If we try to remove the opinion and bias that color our perspective and objectively examine the existing primary source evidence, answers to the above questions reveal themselves, and it becomes possible to understand why Lee believed an invasion of Pennsylvania was the best strategic option available to the Confederacy in 1863, and what he hoped to accomplish by doing so. We have available to us what Lee and some of his staff wrote both during and after the campaign as well as the decisions Lee made during the campaign. The combination provides a clear understanding of both why Lee thought the campaign necessary and what he hoped to achieve by shifting the war north of the Potomac in the summer of 1863.

It is well known that the Confederacy faced a strategic dilemma in the spring of 1863. Its resources were diminishing, while those of the Union were increasing. In Mississippi a Union army under General Ulysses S. Grant was maneuvering to threaten Vicksburg. In Tennessee, another Union army under General William Rosecrans faced the Confederate army of General Braxton Bragg, while in

Virginia, Lee's Army of Northern Virginia confronted the powerful Army of the Potomac under General Joseph Hooker. Union forces threatened the Confederate Atlantic coastline in North Carolina and South Carolina; they had troops on the Virginia peninsula and at Suffolk, and a small army under General Nathaniel Banks was operating on the Louisiana coast. The need to confront these threats, and to sustain the forces doing so, placed a further strain on limited Confederate manpower and resources. Lee summarized the Confederate dilemma in a letter to Inspector General Samuel Cooper on April 16, 1863: "I believe the enemy in every department outnumber us, and it is difficult to say from which troops can with safety be spared."⁹ On the same day Lee wrote President Jefferson Davis and presented his strategic thinking on the situation along the Virginia front:

I think it is all important that we should assume the aggressive by the first of May, when we may expect Genl Hooker's army to be weakened by the expiration of the term of service of many of his regiments, and before new recruits can be received. If we could be placed in a condition to make a vigorous advance at that time I think the valley could be swept of Milroy and the army opposite me be thrown north of the Potomac. I believe greater relief would in this way be afforded to the armies in middle Tennessee and on the Carolina coast than by any other method.¹⁰

In this period immediately before Chancellorsville Lee thought in terms of a spoiling offensive that would clear the Shenandoah Valley of Federal troops, force the Army of the Potomac above the Potomac River, and offer some relief to the pressure being felt along the coast and in Tennessee. Hooker moved against him before Lee could complete a concentration of his army. This advance climaxed in Lee's great victory at Chancellorsville. But the success in Virginia was tempered by a fresh crisis in Mississippi, where Grant crossed the Mississippi River on April 29, defeated Confederate forces in the Battle of Port Gibson on May 1, and advanced toward the state capital at Jackson. The Confederate high command considered how best to meet this emergency. Davis and Secretary of War James Seddon favored reinforcing General John Pemberton, who commanded the forces opposing Grant, with Pickett's division from the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee strongly disagreed with this policy and wrote Seddon on May 10:

If you determine to send Pickett's division to Genl Pemberton, I presume it could not reach him until the last of this month. If anything is done in that quarter, it will be over by that time, as the climate in June will force the enemy to retire. The uncertainty of its arrival and the uncertainty of its application cause me to doubt the policy of sending it. Its removal from this army will be sensibly felt. Unless we can obtain some reinforcements, we may be obliged to withdraw into the defenses around Richmond.¹¹

Lee's critics have accused him of adopting a parochial view of the conflict, but his strategic thinking here was sound. Reacting to an enemy success 1,000 miles away by detaching a single division from the main field army in the east was not a recipe for victory and was more likely to produce piecemeal defeat on all fronts. With supreme confidence in his army and his own abilities, Lee believed he could accomplish more than anyone to stabilize or improve the Confederate strategic situation if his army were reinforced so that it could conduct offensive operations. Twice in a May 11 letter to President Davis, Lee stressed that if he could be reinforced and maneuver his army above the Rappahannock River, "I should certainly draw their [Federal] troops from the Southern coasts and give some respite in that quarter."¹²

Lee visited Richmond twice during the month of May to discuss strategy with Davis and his cabinet, first on May 14 to 17, and again on May 26. Although no minutes of the meetings were preserved, Lee outlined the plan he probably presented in his two official reports of the campaign, written on July 31, 1863 and in early 1864, respectively:

The position occupied by the enemy opposite Fredericksburg being one in which he could not be attacked to advantage, it was determined to draw him from it. The execution of this purpose embraced the relief of the Shenandoah Valley from the troops that had occupied the lower part of it during the winter and spring, and, if practicable, the transfer of the scene of hostilities north of the Potomac. It was thought that the corresponding movements on the part of the enemy to which those contemplated by us would probably give rise, might offer a fair opportunity to strike a blow at the army then commanded by General Hooker, and that in any event that army would be compelled to leave Virginia, and, possibly, to draw to its support troops designed to operate against other parts of the country. In this way it was supposed that the enemy's plan of campaign for the summer would be broken up, and part of the season of active operations be consumed in the formation of new combinations, and the preparations that they would require. In addition to these advantages, it was hoped that other valuable results might be attained by military success.¹³

There were similarities to his mid-April plan, but this was a more ambitious offensive. Its principal goal was to maneuver the Army of the Potomac out of Virginia, break up the enemy's plans for a summer campaign, and hopefully compel them to withdraw forces then operating along the Atlantic coast. If opportunity offered, Hooker would be attacked. There was also hope that military success might produce "other valuable results," by which Lee certainly meant favorable political results and damage to Northern morale. Significantly, there is no mention of gathering supplies as a necessity or as an objective of the campaign. The plan reflects Lee's experience in the late summer of 1862 when the Confederacy concentrated its largest army of the war in Virginia. Lee subsequently went over to the offensive, defeated the Army of the Potomac in front of Richmond, marched north and defeated another army at Second Manassas, then pushed across the Potomac into Maryland. The offensive completely disrupted Federal plans and caused great consternation in the Union capital. The Lincoln administration combined the entire Army of the Potomac and Army of Virginia in front of Washington and also drew additional troops from western Virginia, the North Carolina coast, and the Virginia Peninsula to protect the capital and confront Lee in Maryland. That campaign ended in disappointment at Antietam, but yet it seriously upset the Union war effort and Lincoln's Republican Party suffered setbacks in the fall elections. Lee had not failed to heed these results. Lee now led a more experienced, better equipped and more disciplined army, and was confident that he could accomplish more than he had in September 1862.

Lee's Characteristics as a Planner

To understand how the Gettysburg campaign unfolded it is important to appreciate that Lee was not a rigid planner. He was an opportunist and a flexible thinker who adapted and modified his plans as a situation developed. This is not to say that he did not plan carefully, but he was quick to adapt or change his plans if opportunity knocked. While he certainly hoped to carry the war into Pennsylvania when he embarked upon his campaign of maneuver, there was no guarantee that he would be able to do so, or that it would even be necessary. If Hooker offered battle in northern Virginia or Maryland, and the situation offered advantage to the Confederates, then Lee would have fought there.

Colonel Armistead L. Long, who served as a military secretary to Lee, maintained after the war that "before the movement began his plans of operations were fully matured, and with such precision that the exact locality at which a conflict with the enemy was expected to take place was indicated on his map. This locality was the town of Gettysburg, the scene of the subsequent great battle." But there is not a shred of evidence to support Long's statement, and it is at odds both with what Lee said and wrote and how he conducted operations. In his two after-action reports Lee stated that it had not been his intention to deliver battle so far from the army's base of supplies and that the battle at Gettysburg was forced on him on July 1. In William Allan's memorandum of an April 15, 1868 conversation with Lee about

Gettysburg, the general stated that “he did not intend to give battle in Pa. if he could avoid it,” and that, “he did not want to fight, unless he could get a good opportunity to hit them in detail.” While Lee may have anticipated that Gettysburg was a possible location for a battle if his army reached Pennsylvania, since it was a crossroads and centrally located, his actions, correspondence, and postwar comments point to a general who sought to engage in battle where and when he could do so to his advantage, not at some pre-determined place.¹⁴

Lee’s offensive assumed huge importance following news that the situation in Mississippi had further deteriorated. Grant had defeated Pemberton at Raymond on May 12, at Jackson on May 14, and at Champion Hill on May 16, and now besieged Pemberton’s army in Vicksburg. As Edwin Coddington noted, “At this stage of the war a major victory in the East would go further toward solving the strategic dilemma of the Confederacy than any other event.”¹⁵

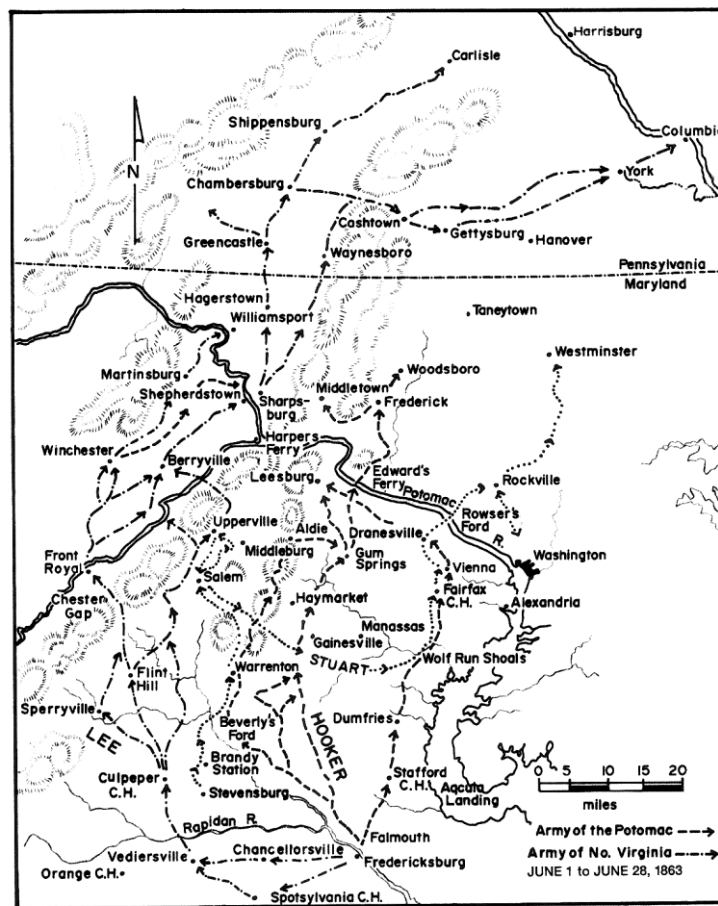
The army began to move from its positions below the Rappahannock near Fredericksburg on June 3. As the army maneuvered across Virginia toward Maryland, Lee left a written record of what he hoped to accomplish. On June 8 he responded to a letter from Secretary of War James Seddon, who remained uncomfortable with Lee’s offensive plans and still favored sending part of the Army of the Northern Virginia to the Mississippi theater. “I am aware that there is difficulty & hazard in taking the aggressive with so large an army in its front, entrenched behind a river where it cannot be advantageously attacked,” Lee wrote. “Unless it can be drawn out in a position to be assailed, it will take its own time to prepare and strengthen itself to renew its advance upon Richmond, and force this army back within the entrenchments of that city. This may be the result in any event, still I think it is worth a trial to prevent such a catastrophe.” Lee’s language is revealing. The use of “taking the *aggressive*,” “*advantageously attacked*,” and “to be *assailed*,” [italics added] are the word choices of a commander who is thinking aggressively and seeking battle.¹⁶

Seven days into the campaign, on June 10, Lee wrote President Davis a long letter about the Northern peace movement and the Southern reaction to it. Specifically, he worried that the reaction of Southern journalists and others were generally discouraging to Northern peace overtures and served to “give much encouragement to those who urge a continuance of the war.” “We should neglect no honorable means of dividing and weakening our enemies,” wrote Lee. “It seems to me that the most effectual mode of accomplishing this object, now within our reach, is to give all the encouragement we can, consistently with truth, to the rising peace party of the North.” This was not a time to “make nice distinctions between those who declare for peace unconditionally and those who advocate it as a means of restoring the Union, however much we may prefer the former.” Stephen Sears described Lee’s thinking as “positively Machiavellian,” which it may have been, but it was also practical and reflected a realistic understanding of the Confederacy’s military capabilities. With its diminishing resources and manpower, a cessation of hostilities, even a temporary one, worked to the Confederacy’s advantage. Lee’s statement that it was now “within our reach” to give encouragement to the rising peace party of the North reflects the political objectives he hoped his offensive might achieve.¹⁷

By June 20, the campaign of maneuver had succeeded in drawing the Army of the Potomac away from the line of the Rappahannock “toward the Potomac,” but Lee remained uncertain what its destination or purpose was. Did it intend to cross the Potomac or to strike at him below that river in northern Virginia? He had pushed part of Ewell’s corps across the Potomac into Maryland, and the cavalry brigade of General Albert Jenkins, operating with Ewell, had entered Pennsylvania and marched as far north as Chambersburg. But the main body of the army remained in Virginia, with Longstreet supporting Stuart’s cavalry, which was skirmishing with Federal cavalry in front of the Blue Ridge around Aldie, Middleburg, and Upperville, and Hill’s corps just beginning to arrive in the Shenandoah Valley. That same day Lee corresponded with General Samuel Jones, commanding Confederate forces in Dublin, Virginia (near West Virginia), encouraging him to threaten West Virginia (which was admitted to the Union on that day). “A more favorable opportunity will probably not occur during the war,” wrote Lee, a statement that highlights both the importance Lee attached to his offensive as well as his acknowledgement that this was a fleeting opportunity the likes of which might not occur again in the war.¹⁸

What Gettysburg was *Not* About

Two days later, on June 22, Lee sent instructions to his 2nd Corps commander, Lt. General Richard Ewell, that are crucial to our understanding of Lee's campaign objectives and whether or not the offensive was, as Clifford Dowdey claimed, "the largest commissary raid in the history of modern warfare." The Federal cavalry had withdrawn from east of the Blue Ridge, and Hill's corps had reached the Shenandoah Valley. Since Hooker had refused to offer battle in northern Virginia, Lee seized the opportunity to expand his offensive by pushing Ewell's entire corps into Pennsylvania and to follow with Longstreet's and Hill's corps. But how far north the army pushed would depend upon what Ewell discovered. Lee advised him, "it will depend upon the quantity of supplies obtained in that country [the Cumberland Valley of Pennsylvania] whether the rest of the army can follow. There may be enough for your command, but none for the others. Every exertion should therefore be made to locate and secure them."¹⁹



Campaign of Gettysburg, June 1863. (Map by John Heiser, GNMP)

These sentences should conclusively answer the question of whether or not Lee's Pennsylvania invasion was first and foremost a supply expedition. It was not. Lee was unaware whether or not the Cumberland Valley could sustain his entire army with subsistence and forage. It was part of Ewell's mission to determine this. If Lee's purpose for a risky advance into Pennsylvania had "been nothing more complicated than to feed and equip his army and to keep it intact," as Kent Brown and others argue, then logic dictates that a commander as smart as Lee would have known before he undertook his offensive that

the Cumberland Valley could not only sustain his army but would provide a surplus he could stockpile. But he did not know this—so clearly, feeding his army, while critical to its ability to maneuver and remain in the field, was a secondary, not a primary, objective of Lee’s campaign.²⁰

Also in the secondary tier of objectives was the capture of Pennsylvania’s state capital at Harrisburg. Lee’s June 22 instructions to Ewell are clear on this. “If Harrisburg comes within your means, capture it,” Lee writes. But before this he advises to Ewell, “Your progress and direction will of course depend upon development of circumstances.” Lee understood the political and military value that capturing Harrisburg would accrue, but it was secondary to the larger objective of this stage of the campaign, which Charles Marshall, of Lee’s staff, described as “compelling the recall of Hooker from the Rappahannock and enabling the parts of General Lee’s army to reunite without hindrance.”²¹

By June 23 Lee had confirmation that his army’s northward thrust had drawn the Army of the Potomac from the line of Rappahannock and that they were moving north toward the Potomac, fulfilling one of his campaign objectives. The withdrawal of Union cavalry from the Loudoun Valley enabled Lee to push Longstreet’s and Hill’s corps north up the Shenandoah Valley with a view to crossing the Potomac and widening the scale of the Pennsylvania invasion. News from his intelligence sources told Lee that, as he had hoped, his army’s movements had raised the alarm in Washington. He wrote Davis on June 25, “You will see that apprehension for the safety of Washington and their own territory has aroused the Federal Government and people to great exertions, and it is incumbent upon us to call forth all our energies.” Lee recognized the opportunity to duplicate his success of September 1862, but his army could not do it alone, and he recommended to Davis that the Confederates seize the moment by going over to the offensive in other theaters and by creating an army, “even if in effigy,” under General Pierre G. T. Beauregard, at Culpeper Court House, to confuse and divide the Federals. Lee’s strategic thinking again was sound, but even had Davis been able to assemble a force in northern Virginia under Beauregard—and he was not—it could not have been accomplished quickly enough to help Lee. The timing of Lee’s suggestion lends even greater weight to the thesis that he did not march north with a carefully scripted campaign plan that he and Davis’s cabinet had agreed upon. It was a campaign of opportunity. No one could have predicted that Hooker would allow the Army of Northern Virginia to cross the Potomac and enter Maryland, but when he did, Lee imagined the possibilities. Yet in his correspondence Lee continued to be both cautious and realistic about what his army might achieve north of the Potomac. He advised Davis that he felt confident he could “throw Genl Hooker’s army across the Potomac and draw troops from the south, embarrassing their plan of campaign in a measure, if I can do nothing more and have to return.”²²

Taking Advantage of the Opportunity Presented Him

In the days ahead Lee’s maneuvers accomplished more than he may have thought possible when he first planned a summer offensive. Pennsylvania proved to have a bounty of forage, food, and other supplies that not only fully supplied his army, but exceeded its needs and allowed the surplus to be moved south for later use. His divisions marched across south-central Pennsylvania with impunity, occupying Chambersburg, the Cumberland Valley, Carlisle, York, and Gettysburg, threatening Harrisburg, spreading fear and consternation across the North. June 28 proved critical in the campaign’s outcome. On this day Lee learned two pieces of important information. First, that the Army of the Potomac had advanced north to Frederick, Maryland, and second, that General George G. Meade had replaced Hooker as commander of that army. Both were good news. That the Federal army was in Frederick meant that the important objective of drawing the Union army north of the Potomac had been accomplished. The replacement of Hooker with Meade provided a fresh opportunity. Meade would take time to take control of the army and develop his plans. He was also likely to proceed cautiously at first. Lee’s reaction to this intelligence about Meade and the location of his army revealed the true primary objective of his campaign: the Army of the Potomac. Had Lee’s primary purpose been to forage for supplies, he would have blocked the mountain passes while he ran goods and supplies south from the Cumberland Valley, then withdrawn

south to the Potomac. Had his objective been the capture of Harrisburg, he could have used part of his army to keep Meade's army east of South Mountain while the other part seized Harrisburg and destroyed the bridges over the Susquehanna. Once this was accomplished he could have avoided battle by withdrawing down the Cumberland Valley to Maryland. But Lee's decisions were those of a general seeking battle, not attempting to avoid it. He sensed that he had achieved the circumstances where the enemy could be "advantageously attacked."

John B. Hood recalled a conversation with Lee shortly before the battle, where Lee exclaimed, "Ah! General, the enemy is a long time in finding us; if he does not succeed soon, we must go in search of him." Lee ordered the army to concentrate east of South Mountain near Cashtown, which was a convenient point to effect a concentration but also close to Gettysburg, whose road junction would provide Lee both offensive and defensive options. It had the additional advantage of keeping the Union army east of the mountains and off his line of communications, and by positioning his army east of South Mountain it posed a threat that the Federals could not and would not ignore. This would draw Meade north to the battle Lee sought.²³

In the aftermath of his defeat at Gettysburg, Lee claimed that he had not sought a battle. In both his preliminary and final reports of the campaign he wrote, "It had not been intended to fight a general battle at such a distance from our base, unless attacked by the enemy, but, finding ourselves unexpectedly confronted by the Federal Army, it became a matter of difficulty to withdraw through the mountains with our large trains." After the war, in conversation with William Allan, Lee repeated this, saying, "he did not want to fight, unless he could get a good opportunity to hit them in detail." The battle, Lee maintained, had been forced upon him. Lee's defenders have accepted this explanation unquestioningly. Yet this explanation does not reconcile with his actions and decisions between June 28 and July 3. Lee permitted A. P. Hill to conduct a reconnaissance in force to Gettysburg on July 1, an aggressive movement that spoke to his intention to move his army to Gettysburg once it was fully concentrated. His orders to Richard Ewell that same day were "in case we found the enemy's force very large, he did not want a general engagement brought on till the rest of the army came up." The intent to engage the enemy is clear in these orders. Lee wanted to fight, but not before the army was fully concentrated.

Once the battle was joined on July 1 it still remained possible for Lee to disengage. Contrary to his comments about the difficulties of withdrawing through the mountains with the army's large trains, many of the army's trains had not yet crossed the mountains when the battle began; they remained in the Cumberland Valley. The defeat of the Federals on July 1 rendered it entirely possible to have withdrawn the army during the night to South Mountain, and to pursue precisely the type of campaign Lee claimed he intended in his conversation with William Allan: "He expected to move about, to maneuver & alarm the enemy, threaten their cities, hit any blows he might be able to do without risking a general battle, & then towards Fall return nearer his base." But when the opportunity arose to strike the enemy a blow and not engage in a general battle, Lee chose to risk a battle. This was a conscious, deliberate decision, not one that was forced on Lee. He chose battle because the military and political payoff from a victory in a major battle over the Army of the Potomac on Northern soil was far greater than maneuvering and alarming the enemy. This was in keeping Lee's opportunistic nature. The July 1 battle was unexpected, but Lee believed its result had rendered the Army of the Potomac vulnerable to defeat in detail far from its base of supply and the fortifications of Washington. Such an opportunity might never present itself again, and he seized it.²⁴

Lee's Ultimate Objective

This brings us back to the question of why Lee invaded Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863. We have eliminated the possibility that it was to supply and equip his army. Lee never said that this was his intention during the war, and his campaign correspondence indicates that he was not even certain that Pennsylvania could provide enough food and forage to sustain his entire army. That it did in fact provide

ample supplies for the army is irrelevant for our question of Lee's primary campaign objectives. Lee did not risk the safety of Richmond and the Confederacy's best field army to gather supplies.

What Lee intended is clear from his campaign correspondence and actions. He first intended to draw the Army of the Potomac from the line of the Rappahannock and disrupt its plans for the summer. If he was successful in this, his next move depended upon the actions of the Federal army. When it backed off from an engagement in northern Virginia, Lee seized the opportunity to widen his offensive and carry it north across the Potomac into Pennsylvania, with the hope that he would draw the Army of the Potomac even farther north. This movement opened even greater possibilities for the campaign. It then became possible to influence the growing peace movement in the North and provide some relief for the hard-pressed Confederate forces in Mississippi. He could achieve these objectives in part by entering Pennsylvania, but to fully realize them he would need to defeat the Army of the Potomac in battle. This was Lee's ultimate objective in the campaign, for it offered the greatest benefits and opened up a tantalizing range of possibilities. Lee could claim, after the fact, that a decisive battle with the Army of the Potomac had not been his objective, but his actions from June 28 to July 3 provide abundant evidence that it was.

The Results of the Gettysburg Campaign

What did Gettysburg cost the Army of Northern Virginia? Was it a turning point in the war or merely a tactical setback? Historians are nearly as divided on this question as they are on the question of why Lee invaded Pennsylvania. In his 1867 book *The Twelve Decisive Battles of the War*, writer William Swinton grandly claimed that Gettysburg "was the crisis of the war—the salvation of the North."²⁵ In 1881, former Confederate president Jefferson Davis, in *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government*, concurred with the importance Swinton had attached the battle, writing:

The consequences of the battle have justified the amount of attention it has received. It may be regarded as the most eventful struggle of the war. By it the drooping spirit of the North was revived. Had their army been there defeated, those having better opportunities to judge than I or any one who was not among them, have believed it would have ended the war.²⁶

The Comte de Paris took a more conservative tone in his 1886 study of the battle, writing simply that after Gettysburg, "The war was about to enter into a new phase."²⁷

More recent scholarship has been divided on the question. The title of Clifford Dowdey's 1958 Gettysburg study, *Death of a Nation*, aptly summarized his view of the battle and campaign's outcome. Dowdey saw Gettysburg as a definite turning point in the war, one that marked the beginning of the end for the Confederacy.²⁸ In 1997, Richard McMurray, reflecting the growing opinion, particularly among historians who favored or focused on the western theater of the war, that Gettysburg's importance had been greatly exaggerated, offered the following opinion:

... the Battle of Gettysburg is often called "the high water mark" or the "high tide" of the Confederacy. It is frequently described as "the turning point," the "pivotal battle," or "the decisive battle" of the war. In truth, the Battle of Gettysburg was none of these things. It was, in fact, an engagement that had no impact on the outcome of the war."²⁹

Kent Brown, in *Retreat from Gettysburg*, offered a completely different interpretation. He argued that although Gettysburg was a tactical defeat for the Army of Northern Virginia, that the campaign had been a strategic success. The outcome of the campaign, wrote Brown, "restored the balance of power between the two great, contending armies in the eastern theater of war. Although a costly tactical defeat for the Army of Northern Virginia, Gettysburg cannot be viewed as the turning point of the Civil War or

even a turning point of the eastern theater of war after Lee's remarkable retreat." In this version the Gettysburg campaign has become something of a victory for the Confederates, or at worst, a draw.³⁰

Gary Gallagher produced an excellent, well-balanced analysis of the question of Gettysburg's impact upon the Army of Northern Virginia and the Confederacy in his 1994 essay "Lee's Army Has Not Lost Any of its Prestige: The Impact of Gettysburg on the Army of Northern Virginia and the Confederate Home Front." Gallagher questioned the prevailing interpretation that the Battle of Gettysburg had crippled the Army of Northern Virginia and plunged the South into despair. While not ignoring the significant effects of the defeat at Gettysburg, Gallagher argued that the results of the battle did not seriously shake confidence in Lee as a commander, either within the army or with the larger Confederate public, and that the Confederate soldiers did not view the battle's outcome "as a harbinger of eventual ruin," as Dowdey believed, but that they recovered quickly from the defeat at Gettysburg and remained confident that they would still prevail in the war.

While I concur with Gallagher that Gettysburg did not sound the death knell of the Confederacy, and that confidence in Lee remained high within the army, much of Gallagher's evidence that the army recovered quickly from the battle and remained confident in ultimate victory came from Confederate officers, not enlisted men. A careful study of Lee and the Army of Northern Virginia after Gettysburg reveals an army that suffered appalling casualties in the campaign, far higher than has previously been acknowledged, and there is considerable evidence that indicates the army did not recover quickly but experienced a serious morale crisis in the months following the battle. The army ultimately recovered from Gettysburg, but it would never be the same again, and while it is true that the army fought on, and fought tenaciously, how it recovered and why its fighting men continued the struggle is misunderstood.³¹

Counting the Cost of the Battle

Historians and students of Gettysburg have long wrestled with accurately determining the losses the Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg campaign and battle. The initial returns for the army were submitted by Medical Director Surgeon Lafayette Guild on September 1, 1863. Guild's report included only killed and wounded, and he gave the army's losses at 14,278. He also included a report of casualties in the cavalry division during the campaign, which were 1,206 killed and wounded; for Ewell's 2nd Corps at Winchester, where it lost 252 killed and wounded; and for those killed or wounded in the various skirmishes during the army's retreat, a total of 316 killed and wounded. The grand total for the campaign came to 16,052 killed and wounded.

Guild amended his September 1 report with a second, undated, report that included captured or missing, which he reported as 5,150. Guild's revised casualty figures gave the army's total loss as 20,451, but owing to the failure of some commands to file a casualty return, Guild stated that the reported losses must "be regarded as approximate." To underscore this statement, the compilers of the Official Records included a note at the end of the returns stating that the office of the adjutant general possessed prisoner of war records bearing the names of 12,227 wounded and unwounded Confederates captured at Gettysburg, and that the number of captured Confederate wounded reported by the medical director of the Army of the Potomac was 6,802. Subtracting the number of captured and missing that Guild actually reported from the number of prisoners reported by the U.S. Adjutant General, it appears that the Confederate returns were low by 7,077 men, being the difference between 12,227 and 5,150.³²

In 1901 Thomas L. Livermore published his widely read *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War*. Using a rather convoluted method, Livermore determined Confederate losses at Gettysburg to be 27,823, which became the basis for the traditionally quoted 28,000 Confederate battle casualties, with Livermore's number simply rounded up.

Eighty years later, Bob Krick, an authority on the Army of Northern Virginia, conducted the first systematic effort to accurately document Confederate losses by tediously pouring over records in the National Archives, newspapers, muster rolls, and other sources. Krick gave each statistic—whether for a regiment or battery, or a brigade or battalion—a numerical designation that reflected his opinion on the

accuracy of the figures he compiled. The designation ranged from a 1, which meant the numbers were based on a search of the Compiled Service Records and Krick was confident that they were accurate, to a 4, which indicated that the numbers were no better than Guild's original returns. The results are the best figures we have yet for Confederate losses at Gettysburg, but they remain imperfect because for 21 of the army's 43 infantry and cavalry brigades, Krick assigned their casualty figures a 3 or 4, meaning the figures for nearly one half of the army were not greatly improved over Guild's 1863 tabulation. Krick documented 22,587 casualties, including 4,546 killed and mortally wounded.³³

We shall probably never know with the precision that some would like the extent of the Confederate losses at Gettysburg. But limiting our investigation of the army's losses to only the three-day battle overlooks the heavy loss the army sustained, particularly in missing and captured, between July 4 and July 14, when it crossed the Potomac into Virginia. When these losses are included, it becomes clear that the Gettysburg campaign was far more devastating to the Army of Northern Virginia than has been acknowledged. Statistics the author compiled for several brigades showing their losses in missing and captured between July 1 and July 14 underscore how significantly higher Confederate losses were compared to those reported. The losses for the brigades listed in the table below were compiled using the American Civil War Research Database, which breaks down Confederate losses by day for many regiments.

Brigade	Guild (Krick in parenthesis) reported losses of missing and captured	Actual losses of missing and captured July 1 – July 14
Scales	110 (289)	536 (226) ³⁴
Lane	238 (448)	520 (136)
Pettigrew	0 (411)	1092(365)
Iverson	308 (565)	610
Ramseur	87 (153)	155
Daniel	116 (236)	608
Walker	87 (121)	214
Semmes	91 (170)	122

Based on Guild's statistics, these six brigades lost 1,029 captured or missing from July 1 through July 14, but their actual loss in this category was 3,857, a figure that is 74 percent higher. When added to the numbers reported killed and wounded, compiled by Krick, it becomes apparent just how appalling were the losses some brigades suffered in the campaign. Daniels's brigade had a June 30 strength of 2,177, from which it lost 227 killed, 583 wounded, and 608 captured or missing, a total of 1,418 men or 65 percent. Pettigrew's brigade entered Pennsylvania the strongest brigade in the army with 2,740 men on June 30. By the end of the campaign it had 347 men left after suffering 386 killed, 915 wounded, and 1,092 captured or missing. Lane's brigade had approximately 963 effectives left from the 1,839 men it counted on June 30. Davis's brigade of Heth's division is another example, although not included in the table above. According to Krick the brigade suffered 1,030 casualties between July 1 and July 3 from a June 30 strength of 2,446, but subsequent research into regiments of this brigade give a loss of more than 1,450, or 59 percent. Every field officer in the brigade had been killed or wounded. The 2nd Mississippi reported 60 to 80 effectives left of the 492 they carried into action on July 1. The 55th North Carolina re-crossed the Potomac with perhaps 145 men of the 679 present on June 30.³⁵

What is also significant about these losses is that they are from the combat effectives, the best and most fit men in the regiment. A percentage of every regiment was comprised of men detailed to non-combat duties. These men were often not up to the physical demands of serving in the line companies, or were troublemakers that company commanders sought to get rid of, or were soldiers wounded in earlier battles who had recovered sufficiently to perform non-combat duties but not combat service.³⁶

The picture that emerges from this admittedly limited study of casualties is that the damage suffered by the Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg campaign was shocking. The June 30 muster gave the army's strength at 80,025 officers and men. A later return, probably from July 31, after the army had returned to Virginia, gives its aggregate strength as 53,286 and its present for duty at 41,135. An army cannot sustain such massive losses and not experience damage both to morale and combat effectiveness. Key leaders are lost and discipline slips when less experienced or less motivated officers and enlisted men move up to fill in positions they are not qualified or trained for. Yet, despite the severity of the army's losses, it is unsurprising that a number of soldiers, but particularly officers, attempted to diminish both the battle's significance and its impact upon the army.³⁷

Lee's Morale Challenges after the Battle

With its string of victories over the Army of the Potomac in the battles of 1862 and 1863, many soldiers in the Army of Northern Virginia felt utter contempt for the enemy and had difficulty coming to grips with the reality of their army's failure in Pennsylvania. Colonel Clement Evans, a regimental commander in General John B. Gordon's Georgia brigade, was representative. On July 4 he wrote his wife, "We have over six thousand prisoners, killed the Yankees in hordes, & their wounded fill the houses of the town. Our loss is tolerably heavy, but nothing like the Yankee loss," although he did admit that they had failed to dislodge the Federals from their position. Six days later, after having heard that Northern newspapers were claiming Gettysburg as a victory he reacted angrily: "I am told the Yankee papers claim a great victory at Gettysburg," he wrote his wife, "but do not believe a word of it. We whipped them utterly on the first day & slaughtered them on the 2nd and 3rd; on the 4th we offered them battle on fair ground which they declined & on the 5th both armies moved back. We certainly sustained much less loss by half than they did."³⁸ After the army re-crossed the Potomac into Virginia he reviewed the results of the campaign in his diary:

Thus ended for the time being the Pennsylvania Campaign. The success of the movement was not as great as was to be desired—Had our wishes been gratified the Yankee army would have been demolished & Washington captured, but I doubt if either was expected ... The general results of the last 40 days are not at all unsatisfactory. The Federal army has been forced out of Virginia—the enemy have learned to their cost what invasion is, and have one great battlefield with all its horrors on their own soil to contemplate. We have given the Federal army a shock at Gettysburg in the loss of over 40,000 killed, wounded & prisoners from which it will not recover. We have drawn from the enemy subsistence stores for the whole army for two months. We have furnished our trains, cavalry & artillery with new & good horses—We have supplied ourselves with quite a thousand new wagons. The capture of ordnance & ordnance stores have been abundant.³⁹

Evans clearly was not whipped or demoralized by the battle's outcome, but his diary entry and letters to his wife sound like someone who needed to rationalize the great effort and cost of the campaign and convince himself that the army had accomplished something positive in Pennsylvania.

Lafayette McLaws, a division commander in Longstreet's corps, writing to his wife on August 14, did not claim that the campaign had been successful, but neither did he think the army had been defeated. This point of view, as we shall see, largely resembled Robert E. Lee's. "Our invasion of Maryland & Pennsylvania was unsuccessful, because we failed in the battle of Gettysburg, which if gained would have given us Baltimore or any other town we may have wished for in the north, south of New York," wrote McLaws. "We did not have troops enough, was the cause of failure—but we are back again concentrated, are in the interior, and are increasing daily in strength and efficiency, have all our old spirit and self confidence, and know that we have fallen back, not from fear of the Yankees but because it was necessary to obtain supplies."⁴⁰

Colonel William Speer, commander of the 28th North Carolina, echoed some of McLaws's comments about the army's confidence in a letter written the same day:

We are here still in our camp in a beautiful place. We have been here for 12 days. Our men are in lively spirits as ever I seen them. They seem to have forgotten all their former hardships. They are getting plenty of rations. [They] all got new clothes & new shoes & have just been paid off up to the 30th of June ...

If we had not gone into P.N. [Pennsylvania], I think it would have been better for us, although I believe that the battle of Gettysburg has done more to strike terror to them than anything else.⁴¹

British army observer Fitzgerald Ross added more evidence of a strong overall morale, observing after the army had returned to Virginia:

The army is in good spirits in spite of our own retreat and the bad news from the west. As for despondency, or being weary of resistance and of the war, which kind of feeling I see the Northerners are fond of attributing to the South, there are certainly no symptoms of it in this army. "We will fight them, sir, till h___ freezes, and then, sire, we'll fight them on the ice," said an energetic officer to me; and the same spirit seems to animate every one, though they do not all express themselves in such strong language.⁴²

There were others in the army however, who though not outwardly demoralized or discouraged, questioned whether they had gained anything positive by the invasion. Writing to a friend, Colonel David Aiken, commanding the 7th South Carolina, observed,

We have captured thousands of cattle, subsisted an immense army, stole a few horses, purchased a great many more, done no harm to any property that I can see, lost [?] men, & effected nothing that I can value, but the simple withdrawing of Meade's army from Virg to Md, and of course delaying him in his next grand move to invade, for I don't know where he will or can next strike.⁴³

In a July 13 letter to his wife Aiken declared that the news from Vicksburg had somewhat depressed the men but added, "I believe it will only make our men fight the harder, & of course whip the enemy easier." Then, toward the end of the letter he observed, "I don't think Genl Lee or anyone else will ever get it [the army] back into Maryland again. I never want to try it over certain." Aiken was not demoralized, but Gettysburg had definitely shaped his view of the war and impacted the confidence in the course of the war with which he had entered Pennsylvania.⁴⁴

Lt. Colonel Franklin Gaillard, in the 2nd South Carolina, which lost 170 men at Gettysburg, was even more blunt in his assessment of the battle and campaign. He made no effort to rationalize the battle or spin defeat into a sort of victory. In a July 17 letter to his sister-in-law Maria, he wrote, "The battle of Gettysburg was, I think, the most sanguinary of the war and was as clear a defeat as our army ever met with." He considered the battle "an unfortunate one." He continued:

Our army went into it in magnificent style and I never saw it fight better but the position defeated us. For this I blame our Generals. In a day by our injudicious attack they defeated the most brilliant prospects we have ever had. It was caused by their overconfidence. The greatest misfortune is that it destroyed the unbounded confidence reposed in Gen. Lee. Before, the army believed he could not err. They now see that he can once in a while. Viewed in a political aspect it was a disaster to us, in my judgment. Its injurious effect can only be counteracted by them attacking us and being well

whipped. I think such will be the result. I hope they may come dashing upon us, expecting to find us demoralized.⁴⁵

While Gaillard intends to fight on, his sober assessment of the campaign contrasts sharply with that of Evans or McLaws. He admits that Gettysburg was a clear defeat, which very few Confederate officers could bring themselves to do even if they believed it. He further admits that the battle had shaken the army's confidence in Lee, and that it had been politically disastrous to the Confederate cause. No one could question Gaillard's commitment to the Confederate cause. As editor of the widely read *South Carolinian* in Columbia, South Carolina, before the war, he had been a forceful advocate of states' rights and secession, and was later killed in action in the Wilderness.⁴⁶

Lieutenant Alexander McNeill, also of the 2nd South Carolina, disagreed with Gaillard's grim opinion that the battle had been a Confederate defeat. "We were not defeated in our engagement with the enemy at Gettysburg," he declared in a letter to his wife on July 7, but added that, "our Generals failed to carry the position of the enemy, but we inflicted a severe loss upon him," which presumably meant the same thing that Gaillard had pointed out: that there had been a lack of generalship. Yet, even though he professed to think Gettysburg something other than a defeat, his final judgment of the campaign contradicted this. "We came here with the best army the Confederacy ever carried into the field," he continued, "but thousands of our brave boys are left upon the enemy's soil and in my opinion the army will never be made up of such material again." McNeill too fought on, but with a less optimistic view of the future.⁴⁷

The reaction in the enlisted ranks to the battle and campaign differed markedly from that of the army's officers. This is not surprising since the officers tended to be drawn from families with a greater personal stake and commitment to Confederate independence and hence were more likely to try to place the outcome at Gettysburg in the best possible light. While determination to fight on remained generally strong in the enlisted ranks, the campaign sent tremors through the confidence in the Confederacy's eventual victory that many had held in the days before the battle. The men had fought as hard and courageously as on any other field and spilled more blood than ever before, but it had not been enough. Their leaders and the newspapers might claim the Pennsylvania campaign had been a victory, but the sadly thinned ranks that the survivors looked upon each day spoke differently. On July 20, Private W. J. O'Daniel, in the 23rd North Carolina of General Alfred Iverson's brigade, wrote the mother of a comrade who had been killed on July 1. His letter dripped with depression: "I am sorry to hear that their is another call for more men in N. Carolina. I don't think their is any their to spair. We kneed recruits here verry bad. Their is but 7 in our Company. Times are verry disheartening here at present. We have bad news from the west."⁴⁸

Writing home ten days earlier, Private John F. Coghill, in a different company of the 23rd North Carolina, told his family, "It is reported here that the yankees has broken Vicksburg and our soldiers are [?] near give up all hope of ever whipping the yankees but I hope that wee will yet conquer and come out victorious." Assistant Surgeon William W. Marston, of the 12th North Carolina, confided to his diary on July 15, the day after the last of the army had crossed the Potomac to Virginia, "Just one month ago we were marching on our way to Wmsport. Oh! How different the aspect of our army now. Many a valuable life since that time has been offered as a sacrifice for his country. Our men are despondent and the same confidence that guided them through has been lost." Private Alexander T. Barclay, in the 4th Virginia Infantry of the famous Stonewall Brigade, wrote his sister on July 8 that his regiment had only 66 men left and that "the whole division suffered proportionally through the folly of our hard fighting [division commander General Edward A.] Johnson."⁴⁹

It is possible to find many different opinions about an event as large and impactful as Gettysburg in an army the size of the Army of Northern Virginia. But another way to assess Gettysburg's impact is to compare and contrast how the army's highest ranking officer, General Robert E. Lee, and an average enlisted soldier, Private Ross Stilwell, 53rd Georgia, responded to the battle and campaign's outcome. Their ranks span the army from highest to lowest. They are only two men, but they are representative of thousands.

Lee's Assessment of the Battle

In his initial report to President Davis from the battlefield on July 4, Lee said nothing about the outcome of the battle or that he intended to retreat. He merely related some details of the battle and that a major attack on July 3 had failed to dislodge the enemy. Three days later he wrote to inform the president that the army was withdrawing—he did not use the word *retreat*—because the enemy position was too strong to be carried and the army was hindered in its ability to gather supplies. On July 8 he admitted that the army was reduced in numbers by the battle and hardships of the campaign, although he gave no numerical estimates for its losses, but added that its condition was good and its confidence unimpaired. That all was not well, however, seemed evident in the following sentences Lee added: “I hope Your Excellency will understand that I am not in the least discouraged, or that my faith in the protection of an all merciful Providence, or in the fortitude of this army, is at all shaken. But, though conscious that the enemy has been much shattered in the recent battle, I am aware that he can be easily reinforced, while no addition can be made to our numbers. The measure therefore that I have recommended is altogether one of a prudential nature.” This language indicated that the army had suffered a reverse, but it remained unclear how costly the reverse had been or how serious.⁵⁰

On July 12, with his army backed up to the Potomac, Lee took time to write his wife. “You will have learned before this reaches you that our success at Gettysburg was not as great as reported,” he wrote. “In fact, that we failed to drive the enemy from his position & that our army withdrew to the Potomac. Had the river not unexpectedly risen, all would have been well with us. But God in His all wise Providence willed otherwise, & our communications have been interrupted & almost cut off.” In a letter to Davis the same day Lee wrote,

Had the late unexpected rise [of the Potomac] not occurred, there would have been no cause for anxiety, as it would then have been in my power to recross the Potomac on my first reaching it without molestation. Everything would have been accomplished that could have been reasonably expected. The Army of the Potomac had been thrown north of that river, the forces invading the coasts of North Carolina and Virginia had been diminished, their plan of the present campaign broken up, and, before new arrangements could have been made for its resumption, the summer would have been ended.⁵¹

In light of the discouraging outcome of the battle and campaign, in both of these documents Lee appears to be either attempting to convince himself that his army had achieved some measure of success, or, in the case of his letter to Davis, hoping to shape how the campaign would be perceived in Richmond and temper the inevitable criticism of its outcome. But the logic in the letter to Davis is curious. Had it not been for the unexpected rise of the Potomac, the army would have crossed the river and, “everything would have been accomplished that could have been reasonably expected.” In other words if the Potomac had not been flooded, or the army’s pontoon bridge still been intact, the campaign would have been a success. But Davis might have asked if the campaign had been successful, why would it have been necessary to cross the river to Virginia? And how could an unhindered crossing of the river have enabled the army to achieve everything “that could have been reasonably expected”?

Lee repeated his conviction that the campaign had essentially been successful in a July 15 letter to his wife, written the day after the army had completed crossing the Potomac to Virginia. The army had returned to Virginia “rather sooner than I had originally contemplated,” wrote Lee, but it had “accomplished what I purposed on leaving the Rappahannock, vis., relieving the Valley of the presence of the enemy & drawing his army north of the Potomac.” And since it had accomplished its mission, continued Lee, “I determined to recross the latter [Potomac] river.” In this version, the bloody Battle of Gettysburg had played no role in Lee’s decision to withdraw to the Potomac, and the Army of the Potomac was a non-factor in his decision of whether to cross the river into Virginia or not. It was Lee’s

decision, not damage done to his army at Gettysburg or pressure from the Army of the Potomac that led to the movement back to Virginia.⁵²

Lee offered no estimate of the damage his army had sustained in any of his correspondence with Richmond until the end of July. Instead, he consistently reassured Davis and the War Department that the army was in “good health and spirits” or that its confidence was “unimpaired.” To Davis and Secretary of War Seddon he admitted that the men were “a little foot sore” and that they were in need of clothing and shoes, but this was all. Not until July 29, after he received Guild’s initial report of casualties, did Lee relate any casualty figures for the campaign. He admitted that the losses were heavy, approaching 20,000, but softened the blow of this massive figure by adding that it included the slightly wounded “and those who straggled from the ranks who are now rejoining us.” He also disclosed that it was reported on July 4 that about 5,000 well men had started back to overtake the trains with the wounded, and that he feared most of those men had been captured. Lee explained this alarming development of having nearly a division’s worth of soldiers straggle away by complaining, “Our people are so little liable to control that it is difficult to get them to follow any course not in accordance with their inclinations.”⁵³

On July 31 Lee received a note from Davis containing a clipping from the *Charleston Mercury* that sharply criticized the Pennsylvania campaign. As details of the campaign became clearer and evidence accumulated that it had ended badly, the *Mercury* had stepped up its attacks. The July 28 edition contained a scathing attack on Davis, and by default upon Lee, and the strategy that had sent Lee’s army into Pennsylvania rather than using it to reinforce the western theater. “A vast complication of incompetency and folly, by which our cause has received the heaviest blows inflicted since the war,” it complained, adding:

If President Davis had *listened to remonstrances*, and had sent twenty or thirty thousand men whom we have lost in this campaign in Maryland to General Bragg or General Johnston, to save Vicksburg and Port Hudson, and the valley of the Mississippi, from the results of incompetency, and had kept the army of the Potomac where it now is—on the defensive—he would have displayed some “ability,” and would have secured to us peace in the fall.⁵⁴

On July 30 the *Mercury* continued, “It is impossible for an invasion to have been more foolish and disastrous. It was opportune neither in time nor circumstance.” Lee calmly responded to Davis, writing that he was prepared “for similar criticism & so far as I am concerned the remarks fall harmless.” But he bristled at any criticism of the army’s performance. “No blame can be attached to the army for its failure to accomplish what was projected by me, nor should it be censured for the unreasonable expectations of the public. I am alone to blame, in perhaps expecting too much of its prowess and valour.” He continued to hold on to his belief that the campaign had been an overall success: “[The army] however in my opinion achieved under the guidance of the Most High a general success, though it did not win a victory.” In other words, the army did not win a victory at Gettysburg, but the campaign had been successful. As more details about the campaign and battle emerged, this was an opinion that never gained traction.⁵⁵

Despite Lee’s regular assurance that the army remained confident and in good condition, in reality the massive losses suffered in the campaign had created a serious manpower shortage. But more worrisome was the significant rise in desertions and absenteeism that occurred after the army’s return to Virginia in late July and August. That this spike in desertion occurred after such a difficult and costly campaign cannot be accidental. Lee initially attempted to confront the problem by appealing to his men’s honor. On July 26 he issued General Orders No. 80 ordering all officers and men absent from the army to return immediately. “To remain at home in this, the hour of our country’s need, is unworthy the manhood of a Southern soldier,” it read. A day later Lee wrote Davis to complain that he did not believe “that the activity and efficiency of the conscription bureau is as great as it might be.” Too many men were exempted by local medical officers or detailed for special duty with commissaries and quartermasters who

gave positions to friends and relatives to keep them out of active duty with the army in the field.⁵⁶ Lee returned to the problem of desertion at the end of the letter, writing:

There are many thousand men improperly absent from this army. I have caused to-day an appeal to be made to them to return at once to duty. I do not know whether it will have much effect, unless accompanied by the declaration of an amnesty. I doubted the policy of this, but I would respectfully submit that perhaps a general amnesty declared by Your Excellency might bring many delinquents back to the different armies of the Confederacy.⁵⁷

General orders that Major General J. E. B. Stuart issued to his cavalry division on July 29 reflected that the problem of desertion, absenteeism, and slipping discipline was not confined to the infantry. “The major-general commanding is convinced that unless a more sure means of detecting and punishing the guilty and preserving the strength of this command can be devised, all discipline is gone, and with it the efficiency of the cavalry division,” it read in one passage. Stuart’s orders continued, “. . . owing to the inefficiency of a portion of the company officers, and the forgetfulness on the part of many of the men of their high duty and the patriotic resolve which has hitherto been the rule of their action, its members are rapidly diminishing, and its efficiency becoming consequently impaired.”⁵⁸

The next day, July 30, Lee received a report from Colonel William L. J. Lowrance, commanding Scales’s North Carolina brigade—which had lost 1,069 killed, wounded, captured, or missing in the campaign from a June 30 strength of 1,433—that in a single night 50 men from the brigade had deserted, mostly from the 22nd North Carolina. If they were caught Lowrance wanted them all shot. He feared that the problem might spread like a disease if forceful measures were not adopted. “Let us hope to check it now,” he wrote, “for if this should pass by unnoticed, many more will very soon follow. I ask what to do.” Lee took the report seriously, not as an isolated incident with a brigade that had suffered grievous casualties, and forwarded it on to Secretary of War Seddon, adding mildly that he hoped “that something may be done to counteract these bad influences,” and that it would be a great benefit “to the army to catch them, in order to make some examples as speedily as possible.” Lee recognized the growing problem of desertion but had not yet determined a solution to stem the rate at which the men were disappearing.⁵⁹

The July 31 loss returns provided the first hard evidence of the damage the army had suffered in the Gettysburg campaign. There were 45,396 men were present for duty on July 31—34,629 fewer than had mustered on June 30.⁶⁰ Criticism of the army’s expedition in the public press was increasing, and Lee sensed that there were those in the army who agreed with the critics, although they said nothing to him. On August 8 he wrote the president and suggested that perhaps it was time to name “another commander for this army.” He did not offer to resign—on the contrary, his letter indicates a determination to do his duty and carry on, but he did request that Davis “take measures to supply my place.” Historians have debated the sincerity of the offer, suggesting that it may have been more a gesture than a genuine offer to step aside, but whether a sincere offer or merely a gesture, the statement reflected Lee’s acknowledgement that while he believed the Pennsylvania campaign to be a “general success,” public opinion, and possibly an element of the army, did not. It also raises the question of whether he really believed his own rationalization that the campaign had been a success. Generals who have won battles and led successful campaigns do not offer to step down from command.⁶¹

Davis replied immediately that it would be an “impossibility” to find anyone more fit to command or who enjoyed the confidence of the army more than Lee. “Were you capable of stooping to it, you could easily surround yourself with those who would fill the press with your laudations, and seek to exalt you for what you had not done, rather than detract from the achievements which will make you and your army the subject of history and object of the world’s admiration for generations to come,” wrote Davis on August 11. If one of Lee’s purposes was to seek moral support from Davis in a very difficult period for him personally, the president provided it.⁶²

The same day the president wrote Lee, the Inspector General’s office, at Lee’s urging, issued General Orders No. 109 pardoning all officers and men in the Confederate army who were absent without

leave but who returned within twenty days. In addition, all men, accused, convicted, or undergoing sentencing for desertion or absence without leave, except for those who had been convicted of desertion more than once, were to be returned to their commands. Lee also authorized the granting of furloughs, something that had not been done previously in the Army of Northern Virginia, hoping that this would help reduce the number of desertions.⁶³ The results were disappointing. On August 17 Lee wrote the president to complain:

The number of desertions from this army is so great and still continues to such an extent, that unless some cessation of them can be caused, I fear success in the field will be seriously endangered. Immediately on the publication of the amnesty, which I thought would be beneficial in its effects, many presumed on it and absented themselves from their commands, choosing to place on it a wrong interpretation. In one corps the desertions of North Carolinians and to some extent of Virginians has grown to be a very serious matter.

... I would not respectfully submit to Your Excellency the opinion that all has been done which forbearance and mercy call for, and that nothing will remedy this great evil which so much endangers our cause except the rigid enforcements of the death penalty in future in cases of conviction.⁶⁴

Mid-August appears to have been a turning point for Lee. Perhaps it was his remarkable resiliency, or perhaps the letter from Davis expressing his unequivocal confidence in the general gave him a needed boost. Whatever it was, there is a change in the tenor of his correspondence, as if he has consciously chosen to move on from Gettysburg. The army too was beginning to recover some of its losses. The August 31 returns showed that it had recovered 11,000 men since July 31 and now numbered 56,326 effectives present for duty.⁶⁵

Michael Fellman, author of *The Making of Robert E. Lee*, writes,

The potential catastrophe after Gettysburg created such enormous immediate anxieties that Lee had no time or energy for much reflection on the battle itself. He suppressed his sense of defeat while focusing on other immediate problems. Self reproach or harsh criticism of others would have been counterproductive in such a situation. As events began to recede a bit, however, Lee reframed the memory of Gettysburg into a tactical setback from which the army could and would rally because its honor and courage remained intact.⁶⁶

Yet, even if he had chosen to move on, Lee never escaped the dark shadow of Gettysburg. Much as he might try to downplay what he expected to accomplish in the campaign in his two after-action reports and in the few times he permitted himself to talk about the battle, it is clear that while he began the campaign with modest objectives and expectations, as the campaign developed and the army was able to advance north into Pennsylvania, his expectations for what he might be able to accomplish became more ambitious. Lee sensed a unique opportunity was at hand to change the political and military landscape of the war and it might not present itself again. This helps explain the risks he undertook at Gettysburg, particularly his decision to make Pickett's Charge on July 3. For a man as prideful and confident as Lee, the failure at Gettysburg was devastating, incomprehensible, and difficult to come to grips with. The possibilities had been so great. Much as he tried to reassure himself that the army had achieved a general success in Pennsylvania, he knew differently, but that reality was a bitter, difficult one to accept. Fellman writes that after Gettysburg, Lee,

... returned to a more fatalistic sense of the meanings of the war and to a greater humility about himself and his army. Although he regained his equipoise and carried on stoutly after his prideful and victorious year had ended so harshly, doing much to keep the

Confederacy going during its darkest hours, never again could he admit the consequences of his audacity nor the size of the defeat at Gettysburg. Neither, finally, could he accept responsibility for his own role in that defeat, nor restate the immensity of what he had attempted and lost during those three bloody days.⁶⁷

For Lee, Gettysburg had surely been a turning point.

A Common Soldier's Reaction to the Battle

Gettysburg was also a turning point for Private Ross Stilwell, of the 53rd Georgia. Stilwell was a pious 22-year-old from Henry County, Georgia, who enlisted on May 3, 1862. He is representative of an average soldier in the Army of Northern Virginia, one who did his duty faithfully but did not stand out as deserving of promotion. Stilwell's letters home to his wife Molly indicate that he was not a physically robust man, which may explain why he was detailed from his company to serve as a courier for the brigade quartermaster. Nevertheless, his role as courier exposed him to danger on the battlefield. Like thousands in the army he began the campaign brimming with confidence. "I am in good heart. I think we will end the war [with] this campaign. I hope I will be able to write to my dear from Baltimore or Philadelphia in a few weeks," he wrote to Molly on June 20. Six days later, with the army in Pennsylvania, he would write, "I think old Abe is gone up this time ... I think we will go to Harrisburg PA, that is the capital of this state, but I do not know but one thing sure: we are now making the greatest movement of the war and will make Yankedom howl and I hope to God, make them cry out 'Peace, peace.'"⁶⁸

Stilwell belonged to Brigadier General Paul Semmes's brigade in Major General Lafayette McLaws's division. On July 2 Semmes's brigade and Stilwell's regiment were heavily engaged in the vicinity of the Wheatfield, accruing 99 casualties, including 30 dead. Semmes was badly wounded in the battle, and Stilwell helped carry him off the field.⁶⁹

Stilwell did not have an opportunity to write Molly again until July 10. Like many soldiers in both armies he was still attempting to process the battle and his experience in it. "You want to know something about the battles," he wrote, continuing:

I know we have had a very hard battle and lost a good many killed and wounded. I don't know which got the worst of it ... Molly a few more battles and our regiment will be gone. It isn't much larger now than our company was when it came out. Oh the horror of war, who can tell, if this war lasts much longer there won't be any left ... We don't know how the war is going on at Vicksburg nor nowhere else.⁷⁰

Three days later, as the army was waiting in the lines at Hagerstown for the pontoon bridge over the Potomac to be completed to permit their withdrawal to Virginia, news of Vicksburg's surrender reached the men. The news further discouraged Stilwell. "Molly, we have just heard of the fall of Vicksburg," he wrote, adding:

Oh, how sorry I am, that is a great slam on us if it be so and I fear it is. I fear this army will all be destroyed before this campaign is over. We can't fight many more years longer if it don't stop. The men will all be dead ... I always speak the truth. I am discouraged, don't believe the war will close in a long time. Everybody is tired of it but they don't look to the right source for help [God].⁷¹

The army's safe return to Virginia did not improve Stilwell's morale. "I am very much discouraged at the fall of Vicksburg and the threatened fall of Charleston," he wrote on July 16. He

admitted that the campaign into Maryland and Pennsylvania “has not been very successful.” In contrast to what many officers were writing, the army, he noted,

... is much discouraged, men never suffered worse for the length of time than our army will while we were near the river. It rained most all the time and the mud was knee deep, a great many barefooted and wounded. I am fully convinced that it is not right for us to invade their country. God has showed his displeasure every time we go over there and has never bless our army with such success as he has in our own country. Therefore I don't think it is right.⁷²

Stilwell may have been suffering from what today we call post-traumatic stress disorder, although there is no way to know this. But the shock of the battle at Gettysburg, the loss of so many comrades, the lack of sleep, and the exposure to terrible weather conditions during the retreat, all combined to exert extreme physical and mental stresses that Stilwell may have had difficulty coping with.⁷³ In his July 19 letter to Molly he continued to dwell on the misery of the campaign and gloomy thoughts about the future:

I have had a hard time, even my clothes was not dry day or night for most a week but I have got along this far and hope I may be able to do so in future, though what is in [the] future for me God only knows for I don't see any prospect of the war closing in a long time unless we give up and that won't do, but many are of the opinion that we will have to stop. If it goes on much longer there won't be anybody left. I hope they will settle it some way this year and stop the flow of brothers blood. I have seen enough to satisfy me forever.⁷⁴

Gettysburg had crushed Stilwell's optimism that the invasion of Pennsylvania might end the war. He now faced the depressing reality that the war would not end for a long time, “unless we give up,” which he refused to do. He was not alone in these thoughts. As he indicated to Molly, *many* of his comrades had come to believe, “we will have to stop.” It is not surprising that the army experienced a spike in desertions after a campaign as arduous and bloody as Gettysburg. But what made it different from the Seven Days battles, 2nd Manassas, Fredericksburg or Chancellorsville, and more difficult to come to grips with, was that the army had fought as hard and heroically at Gettysburg as it had in any battle of the war, yet it had not been enough to win a victory. For all the blood shed and comrades lost, the men had essentially accomplished nothing apart from causing many casualties to the Federal army. This was a losing game, the veterans knew, and it fueled the depression of men like Stilwell. If the courage and blood expended at Gettysburg were not enough to win, then what level of sacrifice was necessary? Would anyone survive the conflict? Large numbers decided they had done enough, or had enough, or that the war had become unwinnable, and they deserted. The majority, including Stilwell, remained, but with a more fatalistic view of the war, much like that which their army commander had adopted.

As July passed into August, Stilwell remained discouraged. On August 6 he wrote Molly: “Oh, the suffering that our troops has to suffer. Just think of the searching rays of sun of August and men marching with their baggage on their back. I have seen men fall by the roadside fainting almost every day. Marching barefooted, their clothes almost torn off them and [on] half rations. God deliver our people from the curse that overhangs them.”⁷⁵ A week later he admitted,

I am in the enjoyment of good health but not of spirits. Oh, Molly, how dark, this indeed is a dark day for the Confederacy, hundreds of our men are deserting and those that remain are discouraged and disheartened and people at home are whipped and want us to give up. To give up is but subjugation, to fight on is but dissolution, to submit is awful, to fight on is death. Oh, what shall we do? ... The men from North Carolina held meeting yesterday, I believe they will go back in the Union. The men from Georgia say that if the

army invades Georgia they are going home. I don't believe our army will fight much longer. I know that many will or would say that 'I am whipped.'⁷⁶

On September 2 in a letter to his brother John, Stilwell admitted, "Our army is much discouraged at our late reverses and fear that we will not be able to defend ourselves much longer."⁷⁷

Recovering from Gettysburg

Two months after Gettysburg, Stilwell remained depressed and discouraged as a result of the battle and campaign. His comments about the army's morale and Lee's correspondence with Davis regarding the number of desertions from the army during this time period are evidence that the Army of Northern Virginia did not quickly recover its morale and prestige after Gettysburg, but in fact suffered a serious morale crisis.

The army endured the crisis however, and although it never fully regained the strength it carried into Pennsylvania, recovered much of its efficiency and fighting edge. Several factors led to the army's recovery from Gettysburg. Lee managed to staunch the flow of deserters from his army through a carrot-and-stick approach: amnesty and furloughs and harsher punishment, including capital punishment, for those who continued to desert. Religion was a second, and important factor. Men like Stilwell sought solace and hope in their faith during this dark period. "My hopes and trust is in God, a present help in time of trouble," wrote Stilwell to his brother on September 2. Both Lee and Davis encouraged the troops to turn to God for help in this moment of self-doubt. "We must expect reverses, even defeats," wrote Lee. "They are sent to teach us wisdom and prudence, to call forth greater energies, and to prevent our falling into greater disasters." President Davis called for a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer for the people of the Confederacy in the wake of the summer's military disasters. Lee issued a proclamation to the troops for his army's observation of this day, admonishing all that "we have relied too much on our own arms for the achievement of our independence. God is our only refuge and strength. Let us humble ourselves before him." Historian Bell Wiley noted that both civilians and soldiers "began to question the invincibility of Southern arms" after the defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, and that the "feeling gained wide currency that God would not permit the South to triumph unless and until her people humbled themselves, did genuine penance, and committed themselves to the keeping of providence." Thousands in the army responded and evangelism flourished in the months after Gettysburg, providing a means for participants to find meaning in their defeat and new strength to carry on the struggle.⁷⁸

Colonel William Speer, commanding the 28th North Carolina, reflected a third reason for the army's recovery. Speer had strongly opposed secession in 1861 but volunteered when his state left the Union. Now, two years and many battles later, he reflected on the defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in a letter to his father: "I want to see peace as bad as any man & I am as sick or sicker of the war than any man, but backing down will not do now. It would have done some time ago but [it] is too late now. A strong front will do us more good than anything else."⁷⁹

Many in the army who longed for peace or who had lost the ardor with which they had gone to war would have agreed with Speer's sentiments. Stilwell was one of them. He had seen enough blood "to satisfy me forever," yet refused to advocate giving up or to desert. Stilwell, Speer, and thousands of others were utterly sick of war and depressed about the future of the Confederacy after Gettysburg, but backing down or giving up was not an option they contemplated. They had suffered too much and lost too many comrades to give up. Union victory also meant emancipation and an end to slavery, a prospect dreaded by nearly all Southern whites. President Davis drew upon this fear to warn the army of the ruin that Confederate defeat would mean in a proclamation to the troops in August. "No other alternative is left you but victory or subjugation, slavery and the utter ruin of yourselves, your families and your country," he wrote. Such appeals had lost their ability to motivate some in the army, but for others they served as a reminder of the fate that would befall them and their families if defeated, and also of how deeply they hated their Yankee foe.

One such was Major Eugene Blackford of the 5th Alabama. He seethed with hatred of the Yankees. He wrote to his sister Mary on August 4: “I have ceased to recognize the Yankees as Christian enemies ... I would have their bones to lie bleaching in the sun, to be undisturbed by our posterity even.”⁸⁰

For these reasons the army recovered its fighting edge and slowed the hemorrhage of desertions. The process took months rather than days or weeks. Still, the army that confronted Meade at Bristoe Station and Mine Run that fall, and Grant in the Wilderness in May, had clearly lost something at Gettysburg that it never fully regained. Author Stephen Sears concluded, “In command and capability, indeed in offensive power, the Army of Northern Virginia would never recover,” from Gettysburg, and it difficult to disagree with his conclusion. The Army of Northern Virginia never again mounted an offensive as large and ambitious as it did in the summer of 1863, never seized the operational or strategic initiative again, never fully recovered from its manpower losses or the quality of the men it had lost, and although it managed effective counterattacks in the Battle of the Wilderness, it was unable to ever again put together the offensive combinations it had mounted at Gettysburg and in earlier battles.⁸¹

But Gettysburg did not extinguish all hopes of Confederate independence. Lee did not return to Virginia, as Clifford Dowdey has suggested, knowing “that the retreat home started him along a road that could have only one destination.” Neither did Lee’s skillful retreat from Gettysburg turn a tactical defeat in that battle into a sort of victory for the Confederates and restore the balance of power between the two opposing armies in the east, as Kent Brown argues. Gettysburg was a turning point for the Army of Northern Virginia, but not in the sense that the road from Gettysburg led to Appomattox—in fact, Confederate independence remained a real possibility until the capture of Atlanta and the defeat of Jubal Early in the Shenandoah Valley in the autumn of 1864.

What made Gettysburg a turning point is that it changed the strategic options available to Lee. He had foreseen that the campaign into Pennsylvania might represent an opportunity that would not occur again during the war, and this proved true. Due to the extensive damage done to his army in that battle, the grand offensives such as he had attempted in 1862 and 1863 were no longer an option, and this limited Lee to a defensive, attritional strategy that reacted to enemy movements and hoped to bleed the enemy into a negotiated peace. This was not an option Lee turned to by choice. He chafed against it and attempted to seize the initiative and go over to the offensive in the fall of 1863 and during the spring and summer of 1864 yet never succeeded.

Gettysburg was a turning point for other reasons. It destroyed the myth of the invincibility of Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia. It raised, rather than damaged, Northern morale, particularly when combined with the Union victories at Vicksburg and Port Hudson. The long-term strategic damage the Confederacy suffered after Gettysburg—in terms of limiting its ability to project the military power necessary to win the war—far outweighed the temporary success Lee achieved by seizing supplies and disrupting the Northern war effort in the East.

Lee and his officers’ claims that the campaign was essentially a success ring hollow when cast beside the excessive price paid for these fleeting achievements. The war returned to Virginia five weeks after Lee’s army stirred from its camps around Fredericksburg to begin its grand offensive, and the supplies seized in Pennsylvania were quickly exhausted. Lee’s ambitious gamble blunted the army’s effectiveness, shook the faith of his men in ultimate victory, and caused a morale crisis that took months to recover from. Alexander McNeil unknowingly offered the most accurate, succinct judgment of what had befallen the Confederate cause on the fields of Gettysburg in a July 7 letter to his wife:

But Tine, in my opinion we have made nothing yet by this campaign. We came here with the best army the Confederacy ever carried into the field but thousands of our brave boys are left upon the enemy’s soil and in my opinion the army will never be made up of such material again.⁸²

Endnotes

- ¹ Comte de Paris, *The Battle of Gettysburg* (Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1987), 1.
- ² John C. Ropes, *The Story of the Civil War* (New York & London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1913), 2:345.
- ³ Jesse Bowman Young, *The Battle of Gettysburg* (New York & London: Harper & Bros., Publishers, 1913), 14-22.
- ⁴ Sir Frederick Maurice, *Robert E. Lee The Soldier* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1925), 189-192.
- ⁵ Douglas S. Freeman, *R. E. Lee* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1935), 3:19.
- ⁶ Edward J. Stackpole, *They Met at Gettysburg* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1982), 2-3; Clifford Dowdey, *Death of a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 25-26; Glenn Tucker, *High Tide at Gettysburg* (1958; reprint, Dayton, Oh.: Morningside Bookshop, 1973), 19-20.
- ⁷ Wilbur S. Nye, *Here Come the Rebels* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 6-7; Kent Masterson Brown, *Retreat From Gettysburg: Lee, Logistics and the Pennsylvania Campaign* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 16.
- ⁸ Edwin Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign* (Dayton, Oh.: Morningside Bookshop, 1979); Craig Symonds, *American Heritage History of the Battle of Gettysburg* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001); Noah A. Trudeau, *Gettysburg: A Testing of Courage* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002); Stephen Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003).
- ⁹ Clifford Dowdey, ed., *The Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1961), 433.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 435.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 482.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 483-484.
- ¹³ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1889), Series 1, 27(3):305. (Hereafter cited as *OR*.)
- ¹⁴ Armistead L. Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee* (Secaucus, N.J.: Blue and Gray Press, 1983), 268; *OR*, Series 1, 27(2):305, 313; Gary Gallagher, ed., *Lee the Soldier* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 13-14.
- ¹⁵ Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 9.
- ¹⁶ Dowdey, *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 504-505.
- ¹⁷ *OR*, Series 1, 27(3):881-882; Sears, *Gettysburg*, 76.
- ¹⁸ *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):297; *OR*, Series 1, 27(3):906.
- ¹⁹ Dowdey, *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 524.
- ²⁰ *OR*, Series 1, 27(3):914. Armistead L. Long, in his *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee*, stated that Lee "entertained the reasonable expectation that with his powerful cavalry he would be able to obtain all necessary supplies in Pennsylvania. It was his intention to subsist his soldiers on the country of the enemy, and he knew that the fertile Cumberland Valley could supply an army of any size. He had strong confidence of success in this movement, relying greatly on the high spirit of his army and the depressed condition of Hooker's forces." Long apparently never read Lee's dispatch to Ewell, which contradicts this claim.
- ²¹ *OR*, Series 1, 27(3):914; Frederick Maurice, ed., *An Aide-de-Camp of Lee* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1927), 185.
- ²² *OR*, Series 1, 27(2):297; Dowdey, *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 530-531. For more on Lee's suggestion of creating an army in northern Virginia and his mistaken belief that the Union threat to Richmond was relieved see, Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign*, 116-118.
- ²³ John B. Hood, *Advance and Retreat* (Secaucus, N.J.: Blue and Gray Press, 1985), 55.
- ²⁴ Gallagher, *Lee the Soldier*, 14.
- ²⁵ William Swinton, *The Twelve Decisive Battles of the War* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, publishers, 1867), 353
- ²⁶ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1881), 2:448.
- ²⁷ Comte de Paris, *The Battle of Gettysburg*, 244
- ²⁸ Dowdey, *Death of a Nation*, 349-350.
- ²⁹ Richard McMurray, "The Pennsylvania Gambit and the Gettysburg Splash," in *The Gettysburg Nobody Knows*, ed. Gabor Boritt (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 200.
- ³⁰ Brown, *Retreat from Gettysburg*, 390.
- ³¹ Gary Gallagher, "Lee's Army Has Not Lost Any of its Prestige," in *The Third Day at Gettysburg and Beyond*, ed. Gary Gallagher (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 1-30.
- ³² *OR*, Series 1, 27(2):326-337, 338-346.
- ³³ Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War* (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), 103; Robert K. Krick, *The Gettysburg Death Roster* (Dayton, Oh.: Morningside Bookshop, 1985), 5, 17.

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- ³⁴ The numbers in parentheses are those known to have been captured or reported missing from July 4 to July 14.
- ³⁵ Krick, *The Gettysburg Death Roster*, 14; John Busey & David Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg*, (Hightstown, N.J.: Longstreet House, 1994), 290.
- ³⁶ Krick, *The Gettysburg Death Roster*, 14. Krick found no missing or captured records for the 2nd and 42nd Mississippi, and it is known that both regiments suffered losses of prisoners on July 1 and July 3. He gives the loss for the 11th Mississippi as 312, but a subsequent history of the regiment found their losses to be 341. See, Steven H. Stubbs, *Duty-Honor-Valor: The Story of the Eleventh Mississippi Regiment* (Philadelphia, Miss.: Dancing Rabbit Press, Inc., 2000), 435. Statistics from *civilwardata.com* give losses of 314 POWs from the 55th North Carolina between July 1 and July 14. Krick's table gives only 64+. According to the history of the 2nd Mississippi Infantry published on www.2ndmississippi.org, and based on the compiled service records, the regiment lost between 388 and 411 casualties between July 1 and July 3. During the retreat the regiment lost an additional 23 men. Krick records the regiment's losses as 232.
- ³⁷ *OR*, Series 1, 27(3):1065; Busey and Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg*, 129.
- ³⁸ Robert G. Stevens, Jr., *Intrepid Warrior: Clement Anselm Evans* (Dayton, Oh.: Morningside Press, 1992), 225, 235.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 238.
- ⁴⁰ John C. Oeffinger, ed., *A Soldier's General: The Civil War Letters of Major General Lafayette McLaws* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 199-200.
- ⁴¹ Allen P. Speer, ed., *Voices from Cemetery Hill* (Johnson City, Tenn.: The Overmountain Press, 1997), 110.
- ⁴² Fitzgerald Ross, *Cities and Camps of the Confederate States* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1958), 81.
- ⁴³ David Aiken to "Dear Capt," no date, Col. David W. Aiken letters (Gettysburg: Gettysburg National Military Park Library, Vertical File 7-SC7a).
- ⁴⁴ David Aiken to his wife, July 13, 1863, Col. David W. Aiken letters (Gettysburg: Gettysburg National Military Park Library, Vertical File 7-SC7a).
- ⁴⁵ Franklin Gaillard to Maria, July 17, 1863, Franklin Gaillard Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, (copy, Gettysburg: GNMPL)
- ⁴⁶ Mac Wyckoff, *History of the 2nd South Carolina Infantry, 1861-1865* (Fredericksburg, Va.: Sergeant Kirkland's Museum and Historical Society, 1994), 184; eHistory Archive, "Franklin Gaillard," http://ehistory.osu.edu/uscw/features/regimental/south_carolina/confederate/KershawsBrigade/Gaillard.cfm (accessed August 28, 2011).
- ⁴⁷ Alexander McNeil to his wife, July 7, 1863, United States Army Military History Institute (copy, Gettysburg: GNMPL).
- ⁴⁸ W. J. O'Daniel to Mrs. Torrence, July 20, 1863 (Gettysburg: GNMPL Vertical File (VF) 7-NC23)..
- ⁴⁹ John F. Coghill to Pappy, Ma and Mil, July 10, 1863, John F. Coghill Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Asst. Surgeon William W. Marston diary, Robt. W. Woodruff Library, Emory University; Alexander T. Barclay to his sister, July 8, 1863 (Gettysburg: GNMPL Vertical File VF7-VA4).
- ⁵⁰ Dowdey, *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 539, 541, 544.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 547-548.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 551.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 552, 555, 563.
- ⁵⁴ Editorial, *Charleston Mercury*, July 28, 1863.
- ⁵⁵ Editorial, *Charleston Mercury*, July 30, 1863; Lee to Davis, July 31, 1863, in Dowdey, *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 564-565.
- ⁵⁶ *OR*, Series 1, 27(3):1040.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1040-1041.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1050.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1052. Scales's brigade lost 175 killed and mortally wounded, 358 wounded, and 536 captured or missing during the campaign. For the brigade's Gettysburg losses and strength see, Busey and Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg*, 182, 292.
- ⁶⁰ *OR*, Series 1, 27(3):1065.
- ⁶¹ Dowdey, *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 589.
- ⁶² *OR*, Series 1, 29(2):639.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 641-642; Dowdey, *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 591.
- ⁶⁴ Dowdey, *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 591.
- ⁶⁵ *OR*, Series 1, 29(2):681

⁶⁶ Michael Fellman, *The Making of Robert E. Lee* (New York: Random House, 2000), 163-164.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ronald Moseley, ed., *The Stilwell Letters: A Georgian in Longstreet's Corps, Army of Northern Virginia* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer Univ. Press, 2002), 176, 179, 185.

⁶⁹ Mosely, *The Stilwell Letters*, 185; Busey and Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg*, 282. The actual losses of the 53rd Georgia were evidently considerably higher as Stilwell wrote his wife that the regiment lost half its men, which meant between 150 and 200 men.

⁷⁰ Moseley, *The Stilwell Letters*, 186-188.

⁷¹ Ibid..

⁷² Ibid., 189.

⁷³ Ibid..

⁷⁴ Ibid., 190.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 198.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 201-202.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 206.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 206; Dowdey, *Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee*, 589; Robert E. Lee, Jr., *Recollections and Letters of General Robert E. Lee* (Garden City, N.J.: Garden City Publishing Co., 1926), 105-106; Bell I. Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb* (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1943), 183-184.

⁷⁹ W. Asbury Speer to his father, August 14, 1863, in Speer, *Voices from Cemetery Hill*, 112.

⁸⁰ Moseley, *The Stilwell Letters*, 190; Eugene Blackford to Mary, August 4, 1863 (Gettysburg: GNMPL Vertical File V7-AL5). Blackford was from Lynchburg, Virginia, but served from Alabama, where he was teaching school at the outbreak of the war. Curiously, his mother, Mary Blackford, believed slavery to be morally wrong and at odds with the tenets of the American Revolution, and was active in the efforts of the American Colonization Society to relocate emancipated slaves to Liberia. But Blackford's father did not share his wife's views on slavery and neither did her boys as they grew into young men. And, despite Mary's personal aversion to slavery, the family owned slaves during the antebellum period, and while they emancipated some, they did not emancipate all of them. In 1853 Mary wrote that her influence upon her sons was waning as she grew older and "they think my notions [on slavery] womanly." See, Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1998), 62-65. Also see, Elizabeth R. Varon, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery* (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1998), 181.

⁸¹ Sears, *Gettysburg*, 499.

⁸² Alex McNeil to Wife, July 7, 1863, United States Army Heritage and Education Center; copy at (Gettysburg: GNMP Library, Vertical File VF7-SC2).