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Longstreet's Delay at Gettysburg,
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FROM:

TO:

LOOSEBERRY'S DELAY AT GETTYSBURG, July 2, 1863

The activities of Generals Robert T. Lee and James Longstreet on July 1 and 2, 1863, in brief, were as follows: On July 1, Longstreet joined Lee on Cemetery Ridge where both observed the Federal retreat to Cemetery Hill. No plans for the following day were discussed beyond Longstreet's proposed maneuver around to the Federal rear.

Later in the evening, Lee visited Ewell's headquarters and was in turn visited by Ewell. At the time of Lee's visit to Ewell, he was told that Ewell's Corps could not attack Union positions on Cemetery Hill and resolved, therefore, to move Ewell's Corps to the right where it could be more effectively employed. Ewell's visit to Lee late that evening was prompted by a report of his scouts that Culp's Hill was unoccupied and by his desire to remain in his positions north and east of the town. He received permission to do this.

Longstreet was with Lee during a portion of the evening of July 1 and may have been present during Ewell's visit.

McLaw's Division, Longstreet's Division, had reached Marsh Creek west of Gettysburg shortly after dark and was joined by Hood's Division about midnight. Lee's Brigade, detached at New Bullford some twenty miles west of Gettysburg, was detached about midnight.

Lee was visited by Longstreet early in the morning of July 2. These officers were soon joined by Hood, whose division had advanced to an assembly point immediately behind Seminary Ridge near Lee's headquarters, and Generals LeFayette Polk and A. P. Hill. An attack against the Union left was discussed. While these conversations were in progress, officers of Lee's staff were reconnoitering the Union left and Colonel Venable of the staff was conferring with Hill. Lee then

rode to Dwell's headquarters. On his return there was more discussion with Longstreet, and that officer was ordered to commence a move to the right. A delay ensued until Lee's Brigade came on the field and Longstreet's Corps moved to Warfield's Ridge opposite the Round Tops by a circuitous route. The corps reached its assigned positions sometime before 4 p.m. and began its attack at 4:30.¹

The orders given Longstreet to initiate this attack and his subsequent actions have been a matter of controversy since an address given by General Jubal Early in Lexington, Virginia, in January 1872. In this and another address by General William N. Pendleton in January 1873, it was charged that Longstreet had been ordered to attack at sunrise on July 2 but had delayed. It was implied that the delay had given the victory at Gettysburg to the Union and had lost the war for the Confederacy. Since these addresses, there have been charges and counter-charges - Longstreet in his writings refuting the charges of his principal assailants: Pendleton, Early, Cadmus Wilcox and even Fitzhugh Lee. Criticism of Longstreet has continued into the present, perpetuated in great part by the late Douglas S. Freeman, who, in his biography, R. E. Lee, wrote of Longstreet and his men on July 2:

"It was not theirs to know - such are the crimes of war - that some hundreds of them were to be needlessly slain before the fiery sun had set, because the pique of one man had thrown away the advantages that an early assault would have given them"

And later, in his Lee's Lieutenants, Freeman said simply of Longstreet, "In plain, ugly words, he sulked".²

The basis for such statements are not set forth in the official

reports of Lee and his subordinates, but in later writings, principally in those published by the Southern Historical Society after Lee's death. None of these are conclusive. Longstreet's principal antagonists: Pendleton, Early and Wilcox, were in no position to know firsthand what transpired between Lee and Longstreet, for, though on Lee's staff, Pendleton appears to have been elsewhere during these talks and neither Early nor Wilcox were in positions that would have entitled them to more than brief glances at what transpired in the higher echelon of command. Longstreet's testimony, though often convincing, was undeniably partisan and improved by hindsight. The remainder of the sources, the official reports excluded, were written over a decade after the battle and must be accepted with caution. Unfortunately, Lee did not see fit to leave a written account of what happened, beyond his report and, because of his prominent position, did not even receive the criticism from his subordinates that he must have deserved. Another officer who could shed light on the controversy was Lieutenant General A. P. Hill, who, unfortunately, left no written accounts of his activities beyond his reports.

The first charges made against Longstreet said, in effect, that he was ordered by Lee to attack at sunrise on July 2. Since these charges have been refuted so successfully, they are no longer worthy of consideration. As Longstreet indicated, it was not Lee's practice to issue specific orders to his corps commanders and, in any case, Longstreet's Corps could not have attacked at sunrise on July 2. Longstreet was also able to secure letters from three of Lee's staff officers - Walter Taylor, Charles Marshall and Charles S. Venable - which stated that none of these men had known of any order by Lee for Longstreet to attack at sun-

rise. Had such an order been issued, these men would, presumably, have been aware of it.³

Furthermore, General Pendleton's report itself would seem to refute his 1873 speech, for he wrote that soon after sunrise on July 2 he surveyed the enemy's position in order to gain an estimate of the ground. Such reconnoitering continued into the morning and from it the route to be taken by Longstreet in his move to the right was determined.⁴

The question then remains, if Longstreet was not to attack at sunrise, when was he to attack? Lee, in his report, said that the attack was determined to be made and gives no more details. Colonel Baylor, Lee's adjutant, wrote some ten years later that the attack was to be made at an early hour. Other staff officers - Colonel Marshall, Long, and possibly Venable - are in substantial agreement. Colonel Long recorded that Lee told Longstreet and A. P. Hill on the evening of July 1 that they would attack on the following day as early as practicable and that during his visit to Ewell's headquarters on the morning of July 2, Lee became impatient when he did not hear the firing of Longstreet's guns. Colonel Marshall is in agreement with Long on Lee's conversation on July 1, saying that Lee even told Longstreet of the plan of attack, including Ewell's role in it. Colonel Venable, however, believed that no early attack was contemplated, because he had been sent to Ewell that morning to get that officer's views regarding the possibility of an attack on his front, all of which indicated to Colonel Venable that Lee's plan for a morning attack had not matured at that point.⁵

The idea of an early attack was shared by both Ewell and Early. Ewell reported that he had received "a communication" early in the morning

saying that the commanding general wished that the main attack be made by the 1st Corps on the right and that the 2nd Corps make a diversion on the left as soon as the 1st Corps' guns opened. In his report, Early stated that he had been informed that an attack on the Union right and left flanks was planned "very early" next morning and that the attack had not begun as expected. These impressions are said by Freeman to have been obtained as a result of the conference of the evening of July 1. It may be assumed also that the impatience and remarks of Lee at Bull's headquarters on the morning of July 2 contributed to the impression that a morning attack was to be made.⁶

General A. P. Hill should have been aware of all attack orders, but has left no written statement regarding any such orders which may have been issued July 1 or 2. However, his Chief of Artillery, Colonel R. L. Walker, in 1878, wrote a letter to Fitzhugh Lee in which he stated that Hill had ordered him to ready his artillery for an attack at daybreak on the morning of July 2. This report is not supported by what appears to have been Hill's orders to Anderson. In his report, Anderson stated that he was in the rear on the morning of July 2 until ordered to take up a position on the right of Pender's Division. Anderson's Division did not approach this position then until nearly noon of July 2, when Wilcox's Brigade, moving to the right, had a skirmish with elements of the 1st Sharpshooters and the 3rd Maine Infantry. It would appear, therefore, that either Hill received no orders for the day's operations, in which he was to participate, prior to the morning of the second, or that he was most dilatory in executing them.⁷

Testimony that Longstreet was to attack on the morning of July 2 is given by one of his own generals. In a letter received by Longstreet from General Hood, it was stated that at the time of the meeting between himself, Lee and Longstreet on Seminary Ridge early on the morning of July 2, Lee seemed anxious for Longstreet to attack that morning, but that Longstreet wanted to await the arrival of Pickett's Division. According to Freeman, McLaws wrote that Lee gave McLaws instructions as to how his division should attack when he presented himself on Seminary Ridge. This, of course, would have been early in the morning shortly after daybreak.⁸

The testimony of Longstreet himself does not clarify the picture. He stated that when he had left Lee on the night of July 1, Lee had planned to attack but had not determined where the attack should be made. Although he mentioned Lee's sending Colonel Venable to see Ewell and Lee's going himself, he fails to offer any suggestion that he, Longstreet, was to attack until Lee had returned from his visit to Ewell's Corps when, at about 11 a.m., Lee issued orders for Longstreet to move his corps to the right. He explained the delay in Lee's issuing of orders after his return from Ewell's headquarters by saying that Lee had not yet heard the report of the reconnaissance made to the right. Orders to move were given to Longstreet, therefore, about 11 a.m., July 2.⁹

After learning of Lee's plans, Longstreet, as indicated, did not commence his movement to the right until the arrival of Law's Brigade, which was possibly sometime between 11 a.m. and noon. Previous to this time, he had remained on Seminary Ridge near Lee's Headquarters. Once his movement had begun, his column wound to the west of Seminary Ridge

seeking to avoid being observed by Union forces. The corps went into line a short time before 4 p.m.

Lee apparently was of the opinion that Longstreet had begun his move when Lee left Seminary Ridge for Ewell's Headquarters. Otherwise, he would not have exhibited the impatience attributed to him by Colonel Long and observed by officers at Ewell's Headquarters. Previous to going to see Ewell, as indicated above, Lee had discussed a plan of attack with Longstreet, Belaws and possibly Hood and had placed Belaws under the guidance of Colonel Johnson. However, Longstreet did not move.

Longstreet's motives are known only to himself, but his delay is given two explanations: Lee's plan of attack had not been decided prior to Lee's return from Ewell's Headquarters at 10 a.m. and that Longstreet had received no order to move previous to that time and, in any case, he did not wish to attack without Pickett and/or Law.

Longstreet stated that the results of Ewell's efforts to occupy Culp's Hill during the night had not been reported to Lee, and, therefore, Lee could not plan the operations of July 2 without knowing Ewell's situation. Colonel Venable was dispatched about sunrise to Ewell's headquarters and was followed by Lee. While Lee was visiting the left, Longstreet remained with the troops at Lee's headquarters awaiting orders.¹⁰

Longstreet is supported in this by Colonel Venable who stated that Lee had sent him to Ewell to learn what Ewell thought of the advantages of an attack from that position. He observed that Lee was explicit in saying that the question was whether or not all of the troops should be moved to the right and the attack made from that side.¹¹

The reconnaissance on the right also is introduced by Longstreet in defense of his actions. He indicated that it was some time after Lee's return from the left before the reports of the reconnaissance from the right were received. This is refuted by evidence submitted by Freeman in which he maintains that Lee talked with Captain Johnston, his Engineer Officer before visiting Ewell and was told by Johnston that Little Round Top was unoccupied. In the words of Johnston, quoted by Freeman, Lee turned to Longstreet and said, "I think that you had better move on". Lee then rode to see Ewell.¹²

Possibly the weightiest evidence supporting Longstreet's view that Lee's plans had not materialized and that he could not have attacked were the movements of A. P. Hill's Corps. As indicated by the fact that Wilcox's Brigade was moving to the right when it encountered Jordan's Sharpshooters at 11:45, that corps would not have been in a position to support Longstreet's attack until after noon. Nor would it have been possible for Longstreet to have forced on their right until after they had taken up their positions. Longstreet stated that Hill's Corps did not receive its orders to move to the right until after Lee's return. If so, the time of their march is so explained. If, however, Hill had been ordered to move to the right, previously, as Longstreet was alleged to have been ordered to move, his delay was as serious as Longstreet's is charged to have been.¹³

After Lee returned and at about 11 a.m., Longstreet was ordered to move to the right with the portion of the command that was up. According to Hood, Longstreet had expressed an unwillingness to attack without Pickett's Division. If he expressed this to Lee, and he probably did, Lee apparently overruled his objections. Then, after Lee returned from

the left and issued his 11 a.m. order, Longstreet requested permission to await the arrival of Lee. This permission was granted and Longstreet delayed forty minutes until Lee's arrival.¹⁴

The march, too, is a matter of controversy. Longstreet spoke of delays resulting from repeated halts and countermarches made to avoid being seen by the enemy. In so far as Longstreet was concerned, the march was being conducted by Captain Johnston and Longstreet had no responsibility for its conduct, but did hurry it forward. His state of mind is indicated by the fact that, at the halt near Black Horse Tavern, Hood's Division was moved to the head of the column while McLane was left standing because McLane was under the technical command of Captain Johnston and Longstreet refused to intervene. It should be noted that Lee accompanied Longstreet on this march for about an hour.¹⁵

Captain Johnston, in post-war writings, expressed surprise that he had been placed in command of the column and ridiculed the idea that Lee would have placed him in command of an army corps so close to the enemy. Furthermore, he states that he was not even told of the destination of the movement, and that he knew only that he was to accompany the column, presumably to give its commanders the benefit of knowledge gained from his morning reconnaissance.

Captain Johnston's opinion that the delay of July 2 was not caused by the route of the march, but by the delay in starting, the slowness of the march, the time lost by halting McLane at Black Horse Tavern and the time lost in getting into action may be construed as criticism of Longstreet's passive leadership. However, it would seem that the general has received but little other criticism on this last score.¹⁶

Colonel Taylor presented the pitfalls of such an accusation when he noted that Longstreet could not have alone been responsible for the delay in attacking after his arrival on the field, for it was natural that some time had to be spent in discussion and in putting troops. How much time was actually spent is a matter of conjecture. Korshaw indicates that he moved on line about 3 p.m. and that he was ordered to advance about four; Robertson of Hood's Division stated that he was only in position a few minutes before he was ordered to advance. It would seem that, though the time element expressed here is vague, the delay in attacking must not have been exceeding great.¹⁷

Before concluding, it would be well to consider the basis of the charges that Longstreet sulked. It can be said that he was displeased with the situation and the plan of operations. The Corps' Medical Director, Dr. J. S. D. Cullen found him not cheerful with the results of the battle of July 1 and of the opinion that the Union positions south of Gettysburg could be taken only with great sacrifice. Longstreet himself said that on the night of July 1 he left Lee planning for an attack which he would prevent, if possible.¹⁸

On the following day, Longstreet was not a cheerful man. He displayed irritation when the movements projected for Monday were discussed, and told Hood that General Lee wanted him to attack but that he was reluctant to do so without Pickett. A junior officer is said by Freeman to have observed that he was depressed, but the most graphic observation was later recorded by one of his staff officers, G. Duxley Sorrel, who noted that his chief failed to conceal his anger, that there was apparent apathy in his movements and that they lacked the "fire and point of his usual bearing on the battlefield". His state of mind may

possibly be indicated by his refusing to assume authority for changing the orders of the head of his marching column when it was halted near Black Horse Tavern because it had direct orders from Lee to follow Colonel Johnston and by his insistence on following Lee's orders in the subsequent attack, though the situation believed in effect when the orders had been issued had obviously changed. It must be said that Longstreet, in writing of this, stated that he was of the opinion that Lee had considered the possibility of a change in the Union position and that further consultation and delay were not necessary.¹⁹

It then appears that Longstreet lacked enthusiasm for the job he was ordered to do and that he may have become stubborn. It is impossible to say, however, to what extent Longstreet was affected by this condition and how much it actually slowed his attack.

In conclusion, certain things seem clear. It is obvious that the testimony to the events of July 2 and their causes is conflicting, inconclusive and will probably never be resolved. Therefore, it would seem presumptuous to condemn Longstreet for his delay on July 2 on the basis of this testimony, particularly when such an intangible factor as his attitudes are concerned. That there was some delay is apparent, but it must be questioned whether this delay was not caused by a genuine feeling that he must await the arrival of Pickett, or at least Law, before attacking; by his not receiving categorical orders to move prior to 11 a.m. or by his belief that Lee's plan of operations was wrong and his alleged sulking. All factors were probably present. As indicated above, Lee acknowledged Longstreet's need for additional strength by allowing him to await the arrival of Law's Brigade. A misunderstanding of orders seems possible because, regardless of Lee's intentions, Longstreet seems

to have recalled no orders to move prior to that at 11 a.m. and Hill failed to move until late in the morning. Furthermore, though its effect on his movements is too nebulous to be assessed, Longstreet did not accept Lee's plan of operations cheerfully.

Lee's part in this is also to be considered. Longstreet was in Lee's presence almost continually on the morning of July 2 except for that time spent by Lee at Ewell's headquarters. This being so, Lee must have been aware of Longstreet's opinions and activities. It is then difficult to understand why, if Lee ordered Longstreet to move early in the morning before he visited Ewell, he was unaware of Longstreet's hesitation in starting, for he should have expected some movement to be made as soon as the order was issued. Should the movement have started, it may be wondered why, at Ewell's headquarters, Lee expected to hear guns announcing the opening of the attack. He must have realized that the movement south, over two miles on a direct route, would have taken two or more hours to complete and it seems unlikely that he would have been in Ewell's headquarters for that length of time.

Another point must also be considered. Although it was Lee's practice to give orders of a general nature, expecting their details to be worked out by the corps commanders, it would appear that, had Lee appreciated the urgency of the situation and desired Longstreet to move, as Longstreet's opponents claim, he would have issued an order that would have left Longstreet no doubt as to its meaning. This was not done, prior to 11 a.m. at least, and being remiss in this, a portion of the guilt for Longstreet's alleged tardiness must be shared by Lee.

FOOTNOTES

1. See various general accounts of the battle, including Douglas S. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, Vol. III, pp. 73-157; the reports of Generals Lee and Longstreet in War of the Rebellion: Official Records . . ., Vol. XVII, Pt. 2, pp. 317-322 and 363 (hereinafter abbreviated O. R. 27) and the volumes cited below.
2. Reformers to the Early address and its contents is described in a manuscript prepared by a Dr. John Sachs and temporarily on file in this office. Dr. Sachs cites as his primary source of information a volume, J. William Jones, Personal Recollections of Gen. R. E. Lee, pp. 32-34. March on Longstreet, Lee and Longstreet at High Tide, p. 56; Freeman, op. cit., p. 115 and Douglas S. Freeman, R. E. Lee, Vol. III, p. 94.
3. James Longstreet, "General Longstreet's Account of the Campaign and Battle" (of Gettysburg), Southern Historical Society Papers, Vols. V and VI, n.p. (hereafter abbreviated Longstreet, SHSP); and Walter Taylor, Four Years with Lee, pp. 101-102.
4. Report of Brig. Gen. William W. Pondleton . . ., September 12, 1863, O. R. 27, Pt. 2, p. 350.
5. Taylor, op. cit.; A. H. Long, Memirs of P. T. Lee, p. 277; Frederick Maurice, ed., An Aide-de-Camp of Lee, p. 293 and Longstreet, SHSP.
6. O. R. 27, Pt. 2, pp. 445, 470; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, Vol. III, p. 102 and Long, op. cit., p. 281.
7. Fitzhugh Lee, "A Review of the First Two Days' Operations at Gettysburg and A Reply to General Longstreet", SHSP, Vol. V and VI, n.p. and O. R. 27, Pt. 2, pp. 613-614.
8. Letter, John B. Hood to General Longstreet, n.d.; Longstreet, SHSP and Freeman, op. cit., p. 113.
9. James A. Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, pp. 364-365; James A. Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg", Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Vol. 3, p. 340 and Longstreet, SHSP.
10. Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, p. 363 and Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg", Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Vol. III, p. 340.
11. Letter, Colonel Venable to General James Longstreet, University of Virginia, May 11, 1875; Longstreet, SHSP.
12. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, Vol. III, p. 113.
13. Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, p. 365.
14. Letter, James B. Hood to General Longstreet, n.d.; Longstreet, SHSP.
15. Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg", Battles and Leaders, Vol. III, p. 340 and Longstreet, SHSP.

16. Pittman Lee, SHSP; Taylor, op. cit., p. 101 and O. R. 27, Pt. 2, pp. 367, 404.
17. Taylor, op. cit., p. 101 and O. R. 27, Pt. 2, pp. 367, 404.
18. Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, pp. 303-384.
19. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, Vol. III, pp. 113, 115-117; G. Moxley Sorrel, Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer, pp. 163-164 and Longstreet, SHSP.

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