

ScholarWorks@GSU

The Confederacy's "Hardest Hitter": Reevaluating James Longstreet's Civil War Record on the Tactical Offensive

Authors	Callaway, Joseph
Citation	Callaway, Joseph. "The Confederacy's "Hardest Hitter": Reevaluating James Longstreet's Civil War Record on the Tactical Offensive." Thesis. Georgia State University, 2018. https://doi.org/10.57709/11962915
DOI	https://doi.org/10.57709/11962915
Download date	2026-06-18 14:52:08
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14694/8311

THE CONFEDERACY'S "HARDEST HITTER": REEVALUATING JAMES
LONGSTREET'S CIVIL WAR RECORD ON THE TACTICAL OFFENSIVE

by

JOSEPH DEWITT CALLAWAY

Under the Direction of Wendy Hamand Venet, PhD.

ABSTRACT

James Longstreet is most often remembered by scholars of the Civil War and Civil War hobbyists as a general who favored defensive tactics over offensive ones and generally loathed launching large-scale assaults. This thesis argues that this common perception is incompatible with the facts gleanable from a close inspection of Longstreet's war record. By tracing the preparation, execution, and accomplishments of his four largest-scale assaults during the Civil War, I seek to reposition Longstreet in Civil War historiography as the most innovative, creative, and ultimately successful subordinate commander in terms of assuming the tactical offensive.

INDEX WORDS: Robert E. Lee, Army of Northern Virginia, Stonewall Jackson, Second Manassas, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, The Wilderness

THE CONFEDERACY'S "HARDEST HITTER": REEVALUATING JAMES
LONGSTREET'S CIVIL WAR RECORD ON THE TACTICAL OFFENSIVE

by

JOSEPH DEWITT CALLAWAY

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

Copyright by
Joseph DeWitt Callaway
2018

THE CONFEDERACY'S "HARDEST HITTER": REEVALUATING JAMES
LONGSTREET'S CIVIL WAR RECORD ON THE TACTICAL OFFENSIVE

by

JOSEPH DEWITT CALLAWAY

Committee Chair: Wendy Hamand Venet

Committee: Jeffrey Young

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2018

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Brant and Peggy Callaway. Thank you so much.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would especially like to thank my advisor Dr. Wendy Hamand Venet, without whose help this project would not have gotten very far. I would also like to thank Dr. Jeffrey Young for serving on my committee. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Venet and Dr. Young for their support both in securing me funding and encouraging me throughout my entire graduate career. The road has not always been an easy one, and I owe them a great deal.

I would also like to thank Dr. Joe Perry of Georgia State University. Like Dr. Venet and Dr. Young, he was a great source of inspiration during difficult times. He, along with Dr. John McMillian, helped me grow immeasurably as a writer. Their willingness to read overly-drawn out, rambling papers and make constructive suggestions proved invaluable when I was working on this project.

I would also like to thank several other of my mentors in my pursuit of writing and the study of history, as the completion of this project has been a long time in coming. Dr. Randy Reid, Sally Harris, Dr. H. William Rice, Dr. J. Ryan Stackhouse, and Dr. Charles Upchurch all encouraged me to keep working and reminded me why I find studying history inspirational. I wish you all the success you deserve.

Alex Fahey-Ho was my friend most crucial to the writing of this thesis and my graduation. Her keen editing skills helped a great deal of my writing, but her encouragement and unwavering friendship, which sustained my resolve during some very bleak times, were even more valuable. So, thank you, Alex! I know life has great things in store for you and yours.

A handful of other personal friends and relatives who, whether they realized it or not, were instrumental in the completion of this thesis deserve mention: Brantly Callaway (my grandfather), Dr. Brantly Callaway (my brother), Sharon Callaway, Paul Callaway, Haley

Callaway, Ansley Roan, David Criner, Wister Cook, Andrew Lastrapes, John Pratt, Tony Salloum, and Ben Williams.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
1 Introduction.....	1
2 Chapter 1: Second Manassas, August 30, 1862.....	14
3 Chapter 2: Gettysburg, July 2, 1863	33
4 Chapter 3: Chickamauga, September 20, 1863.....	72
5 Chapter 4: The Wilderness, May 6, 1864	108
6 Conclusion	132
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	137
Secondary Sources:.....	137

1 Introduction

Shortly after the Civil War, John Bell Hood, a subordinate commander in James Longstreet's 1st Corps throughout much of the conflict, summed up his estimation of his former chief. "Of all the men living," he remarked, "not excepting our incomparable [Robert E.] Lee himself, I would rather follow James Longstreet... He was our hardest hitter." Significantly, Hood was referring not to defensive tactical operations, for which Longstreet is now most famous, but to offensive ones. This thesis seeks to rectify the common perception among professional historians, students of the Civil War, and Civil War hobbyists that Longstreet thrived primarily on the defensive. I argue that a full appreciation Longstreet's role as a wing/corps commander in the Civil War requires a heightened focus on the battles in which he launched his most devastating attacks. This thesis will reposition Longstreet in the historiography by examining the tactics he employed and the scope of his achievements in four of the largest assaults he coordinated and executed during the war: ones at Second Manassas on August 30, 1862; at Gettysburg on July 2, 1863; at Chickamauga on September 20, 1863; and at the Wilderness on May 6, 1864. Tracing these assaults reveals the magnitude to which Longstreet's conception of offensive tactics evolved as the war progressed. Contrary to the verdict of much of the historiography, Longstreet was the most successful subordinate commander on either side in terms of offensive tactical innovation and launching large-scale assaults.¹

Before analyzing these innovative tactics and major assaults, it is important to ask the question: Why is Longstreet now remembered largely as a general who thrived only on defensive tactics and consistently and often bitterly opposed Lee's penchant for going on the offensive?

¹ O.P. Fitzgerald, *Judge Longstreet: A Life Sketch* (Nashville: Barber & Smith, 1891), 19. *Judge Longstreet* is a biography of Augustus Longstreet, James Longstreet's uncle, and includes Hood's quote.

The first plausible answer is that his record on the tactical defensive was so impressive that it obscured his offensive one. In addition to his renowned stand at Antietam, Longstreet most famously defended Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg, where he bloodily repulsed wave after wave of Union assaults. However, despite the brilliance of these performances, Antietam and Gettysburg were the only major battles in which Longstreet fought exclusively on the defensive. They were outnumbered by the battles in which Longstreet launched major assaults. This first answer, then, is largely unsatisfactory. A close attention to Longstreet's war record proves that Longstreet's defensive resume should not overshadow his offensive one.²

A second, better answer to the question of why many historians perceive Longstreet as a general who considered defensive tactics infinitely superior to offensive ones is that popular and professional historians have been and remain preoccupied with the Battle of Gettysburg, in which Longstreet *did* advocate for the defensive, at the expense of other battles. But even concerning Gettysburg, many historians distort Longstreet's performance in the interest of presenting a tidy and convenient narrative that depicts Longstreet as overly invested in a defensive tactical philosophy. Scholar James M. McPherson is perhaps the most celebrated contemporary historian who promulgates this view. In *Battle Cry of Freedom*, McPherson asserts that "Longstreet liked best the tactical defensive" and that his absence from the Battle of Chancellorsville blinded him from the superior opportunities offensive tactics tended to create. Some historians even imply that Longstreet's hesitance to assault the Federal position at

²² For an excellent narrative of the Battle of Antietam, see Stephen W. Sears, *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam* (Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2003). For an excellent narrative of the battle of Fredericksburg, see George C. Rable, *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

Gettysburg exonerates Lee, at least to a degree, from responsibility for the Confederate defeat there.³

While some pieces of this narrative are true, as a whole it rings false. It must be admitted that at Gettysburg Longstreet counseled Lee to be cautious and on July 3, 1863, vehemently opposed and only executed with the most extreme reluctance what became known as “Pickett’s Charge.” But by acknowledging these facts at the expense of acknowledging Longstreet’s stunningly successful attack, given the odds it faced, on July 2, many historians woefully mislead their audiences as to his documentable tactical philosophy. Longstreet launched an attack on July 2 that proved immensely jarring, albeit not fatal, to the Army of the Potomac. If he had thought another attack on July 3 had a reasonable chance of success, no evidence exists to suggest he would not have enthusiastically launched another no-holds-barred thrust at the blue line.⁴

A final, equally good answer to the question is that after the war a legion of ex-Confederate generals deliberately distorted Longstreet’s war record in an effort to smear him more generally. Quick to acknowledge the Confederate defeat and promote national reconciliation, Longstreet joined the Republican party—the party of Lincoln and the political impetus behind the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution—but in the eyes of these ex-Confederate generals and a great many whites in the postwar South his most unforgivable sin was his audacity after Lee’s death to critique Lee’s judgment during the war. Speaking about the Battle of Gettysburg years after the war, Jubal Early, a former colleague of Longstreet’s in the Army of Northern Virginia and a man eager to cultivate for himself a heroic public image after compiling a suspect war record, blamed the

³ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 566. Please also see James M. McPherson, *Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

⁴ Bryan Conrad and H.J. Eckenrode, *James Longstreet: Lee’s War Horse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 185-189; Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg—The Second Day* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 429, 431.

defeat almost exclusively on the fact that Longstreet did not initiate his July 2 attack until late in the afternoon. John Brown Gordon, another former colleague of Longstreet's, seconded this critique even more vitriolically when he contended that "General Lee died believing that he lost Gettysburg at last by Longstreet's disobedience of orders."⁵

Gordon's claim is utterly specious. Longstreet never disobeyed any of Lee's orders at the Battle of Gettysburg or any other battle, and no record exists to suggest that Lee ever insinuated or said that he did. Still, Early's critique that Longstreet manifested dilatory tendencies deserves more serious consideration. This critique extended beyond Gettysburg. Early and his partisans also accused Longstreet of delaying his massive flank assault at Second Manassas to the peril of Stonewall Jackson's beleaguered wing and upbraided him for allegedly arriving late at the Wilderness, when Ambrose Powell Hill's 3rd Corps had been all but destroyed. The premise behind their charges was that Longstreet was so committed to the tactical defensive that he deliberately and unnecessarily "dragged his feet" out of sullenness, placing the Army of Northern Virginia more than once in mortal danger. In reality, however, while Longstreet was a staunch believer in the essentiality of preparation, this attention to detail, despite the time it consumed, was in large part what allowed his assaults to be so successful and ultimately advanced, as opposed to hindered, the Confederate cause. At no time did Longstreet place Lee's army in an existential crisis because he disagreed with Lee's orders. To the contrary, he saved it more than once with the decisiveness inherent in his attacks.⁶

⁵ Helen D. Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide: Gettysburg in the Light of the Official Records* (Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1989), 56; Jubal A. Early, "General Early's Second Reply to Longstreet," *The Southern Historical Society Papers*, Ed. By R.A. Brock, 52 (Richmond: The Southern Historical Society, 1876-1959); John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 161.

⁶ Early, "General Early's Second Reply to Longstreet," *The Southern Historical Society Papers*, 5: 274-278. For an excellent account of Longstreet's deliverance of Lee's army at Second Manassas, see John J. Hennessey, *Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999). For an

However, despite its baselessness, the Early school's critique gained much traction. It was closely intertwined with the "Lost Cause" narrative, which the Early school also played a large role in creating. The "Lost Cause" narrative largely deified Lee and attempted to qualify the Confederate defeat, and Longstreet's critical attitude to his former commander and his quick acknowledgement of the totality of the Union victory stood in abject defiance of it. Largely isolated in his opinions, he proved the perfect scapegoat for recalcitrant Southerners. His tendency to be quarrelsome only further provoked Early, his followers, and a great many white Southerners. While Longstreet's quite public feud with Early was not one he incited, his willingness to reciprocate Early's verbal sparring only added fuel to a fire that was quickly burning out of control and singeing Longstreet's reputation much more than it was singeing anyone else's.⁷

But by now the Longstreet-Early saga has been well-documented, and exploring it further is *not* the purpose of this project. Still, it is essential to this thesis because it had an extremely palpable and protracted influence on the professional historiography concerning Longstreet that gradually developed after the war. This professional historiography, which had been germinating for some time but really exploded with the publication of Douglas Southall Freeman's *R.E. Lee: A Biography* in 1935, generally took up where Early and his disciples had left off and continued to denigrate Longstreet's contribution to the Confederate war effort.⁸

Renowned Civil War scholar Gary Gallagher claims that more than any other historian Freeman damaged Longstreet's reputation and set the tone for the future of the historiography. Freeman was a professional historian writing at a time when professional Civil War history was

excellent account of Longstreet's deliverance of Lee's army at the Wilderness, see Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6, 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

⁷ Gary W. Gallagher, "How Lee's Old War Horse Gained a New Following," *Civil War Times* (June 2011), 50: 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

beginning to proliferate. Many Civil War scholars, and especially subsequent biographers of Robert E. Lee, regarded Freeman with a palpable awe, if not always as a perfect scholar. In Gallagher's words, in *R.E. Lee* Freeman "presented a devastating portrait of Longstreet as a sulking, minimally gifted soldier." In the tradition of the Early school, Freeman especially singled out what he perceived as Longstreet's insubordination at Gettysburg as indicative of his character as a soldier. That "battle was... decided," Freeman boldly asserts, "in the mind of Longstreet, who[, late on the night of July 1, 1863,] was eating his heart away in sullen resentment that Lee had rejected his long-cherished plan of... a tactical defensive." In no small part due to such eloquence, Freeman was ensconcing the Early school's characterization of Longstreet into the nascent Civil War historiography.⁹

Though still negatively disposed to Longstreet generally, in *Lee's Lieutenants*, published in 1943, Freeman somewhat moderated his tone. In that book, Freeman observes that "if one is looking for a lieutenant"—that is, Longstreet—"who had come to consider himself the superior of his chief"—that is, Lee—"one can interpret Longstreet's [correspondence to Lee] to confirm that view." But Freeman also admits it is just as reasonable to interpret Longstreet's letters as indicative of "a plain-spoken and somewhat cautious man [who]... was not insubordinate or unreasonable." If this was not an about-face, it was certainly a more charitable estimation. Freeman's quite remarkable acknowledgement of a counter-perspective is indicative of his oft-ignored tendency to appreciate the nuances and sometimes even downright contradictions inherent in his subjects. Still, his language, especially when he claims that even viewed in the most generous light Longstreet stands out as "somewhat cautious," betrays a residual tendency to accept the dogma of the Early school without a degree of skepticism essential to writing good

⁹ Douglas Southall Freeman, *R.E. Lee: A Biography*, 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935); Gallagher, "How Lee's Old War Horse Gained a New Following," 1; Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 89.

history. This tendency would ultimately prove as misleading as it was influential to a generation of historians.¹⁰

Albeit rarely, Freeman even goes so far as to praise Longstreet, but even his praise reinforces his characterization of Longstreet as cautious, and sometimes exceedingly so. In his chapter on Longstreet's performance at Fredericksburg (one he calls "brilliant" in the index) Freeman does not go so far as to say the battle confirmed Longstreet as an overall superb or even capable corps commander. Instead, he claims that Fredericksburg "confirmed [Longstreet's] faith in the tactical defensive." This logic—that any one battle could "confirm" any general's overarching philosophical approach to making war—is dubious. Even in the moment of his highest praise, Freeman perpetuated a myth contrary to the evidence gleanable from a detailed study (which Freeman certainly made, a fact which makes his misinterpretation all the more curious) of Longstreet's resume.¹¹

For all Freeman's admirable efforts in *Lee's Lieutenants* to moderate his stance on Longstreet, by 1943, thanks in large part to *R.E. Lee*, the die had already been cast. In the meantime, Hamilton J. Eckenrode and Bryan Conrad had published *James Longstreet: Lee's War-Horse*. Largely inspired by Freeman's work, the biography claimed to be the first scholarly history focused exclusively on Longstreet's war record. It proved a scathing indictment. First the biographers assaulted Longstreet's character. They aver that Longstreet was a stranger to "introspection [and] misgivings" and that "he could think of the mistakes of others, never of his own." Lacking "internal qualms" and "searchings of the heart," the authors continue, Longstreet was "egotistical" to the extreme. They believed this egotism was most evident in his treatment of Lee, who he "lecture[d]... like a professor condescending a schoolboy." Such a belief echoed the

¹⁰ Douglass Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), 2: 480.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2: 368.

Early school's and Freeman's verdict that Longstreet refused to be appropriately subordinate to the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia.¹²

If Eckenrode and Conrad were acerbic in their summation of Longstreet's character, they were positively venomous in their estimation of his generalship. First, they argue that Longstreet had "given little thought to the art of war." They then foiled what they saw as his apathy toward military education to Stonewall Jackson's zeal for it. Unlike "Jackson, the student," they contend, "Longstreet was no reader of books." Instead, his tactical philosophy was acquired "casually." Switching to outright invective, Eckenrode and Conrad surmise that while Longstreet had possibly heard of the much-studied French general Henri Turenne, "he could hardly have read of the French strategist, for Longstreet did not read books." Because "Longstreet was not a student of war [and] not a deep thinker on the subject of war," Eckenrode and Conrad write sneeringly, "when placed in positions demanding knowledge and initiative he failed... He did not," they conclude, "know what to do." It is strange, then, that only two pages later the authors acknowledge that Longstreet's successful "tactics at [Antietam], Chickamauga, and the Wilderness" as if none of these successes depended on "knowledge and initiative."¹³

At least in passing, other Civil War scholars continued to second the hypercriticism of Freeman and especially Eckenrode and Conrad, and it was not until 1952 that a full-length biography attempted to resurrect his wartime reputation. The book was a remarkable departure from the verdicts of Freeman and Eckenrode and Conrad. Donald B. Sanger's section, *I. Soldier*, of *James Longstreet*, a biography he co-wrote with Thomas R. Hay, places Longstreet as "superior to both [Jackson and Lee] in battle leadership and an appreciation of tactical values." Sanger contends that Longstreet had an uncanny sense of when to counterattack and that his

¹² Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, viii, 360-361.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 363.

“well-timed assaults” at the four battles discussed in this project were “eloquent testimonials of his skill on the offensive.” This statement, and especially Sanger’s contention that these attacks were “well-timed,” flatly contradicts the previous historiographical consensus. Concluding with even higher praise, Sanger ranks Longstreet as “the best fighting general in the armies of the Confederacy and the best corps commander, North or South.” In *Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History*, published in 1987, David B. Piston seconded this contention, arguing that Longstreet’s fighting prowess rendered him “perhaps the best corps-level commander of the war.”¹⁴

While our theses are undeniably similar, Sanger’s work deviates from my own in that he apparently feels little compulsion to examine in depth the battles in which Longstreet proved adept on the offensive. For instance, he only devotes one short paragraph to the entirety of Longstreet’s approximately 25,000-man strong attack on the Federal left flank at Second Manassas. Furthermore, he only cites Longstreet’s own memoirs to support his brief account. *Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant* is susceptible to a similar critique. Incredibly, for a book written to rehabilitate Longstreet’s reputation, Piston’s account of Longstreet’s performance at Second Manassas is even shorter than Sanger’s. Like Sanger, Piston also employs very few sources. As we will see, there is a dearth of primary source material on Longstreet’s attack at Second Manassas and the attack was *not* Longstreet’s most tactically brilliant offensive performance, but these authors could have done better. It can prove misleading when a historian justifies his or her narrative praising any historical figure by presenting an article written by that figure—who, as it turns out, was involved in his own struggle to rehabilitate his legacy when he wrote it—as a dispassionate recounting of facts. As I have argued, truly restoring Longstreet’s wartime

¹⁴ Thomas R. Hay and Donald B. Sanger, *James Longstreet: I. Soldier, II. Politician, Officeholder, and Writer* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1952), 3; William G. Piston, *Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), x.

reputation requires as thorough an examination of his most successful attacks as the sources allow, one more detailed than Sanger's or Piston's. I seek to rectify this shortcoming of Sanger's and Piston's still quite valuable contributions to the historiography.

Professional historians have made immense progress in rehabilitating Longstreet's legacy. Still, too often they ignore or deemphasize the fact that Longstreet's assaults often jarred or broke formidable Union formations. In addition to the residual influence of the Early school, this is in large part because the rise of Longstreet's reputation has largely been a byproduct of historians' increasingly voluminous denunciation of "Lost Cause" mythology as opposed to an actual appreciation of Longstreet's aggressive war resume. Considering the degree of polarization between the two men when sullen, unrepentant Confederates created this myth, refuting Jubal Early has involved, naturally and perhaps necessarily, resurrecting Longstreet.

Numerous histories which concern the Civil War era and allude to Longstreet illustrate this point, but perhaps none better than Gary Gallagher's *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory*. In that book, Gallagher launches into his defense of Longstreet not by first reminding readers of Longstreet's impressive war record, but instead by summarizing the imperatives of "Lost Cause" ideology. One of these imperatives was the need for scapegoats, and Longstreet fit the bill perfectly. As refuting "Lost Cause" propaganda is of paramount importance to him, Gallagher focuses as much on the "blatant lies" of Early and his partisans as he does on blatant truths of Longstreet's accomplishments, especially when it comes to Longstreet's capacity for tactical aggression.¹⁵

The author who best avoids the pitfall of only contrasting Longstreet against the "Lost Cause" portrayal of him and thus ignoring many of his military accomplishments is Jeffrey D.

¹⁵ Gary W. Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 66, 141, 152.

Wert. In *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier*, the most recent, full-length biography of Longstreet during the war, Wert admirably portrays Longstreet's record without much reference to "Lost Cause" propaganda. Indeed, while Wert and I see Longstreet's performances at Second Manassas and on the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg differently, our conclusions about his actions at Chickamauga and the Wilderness are similar. The most important difference between Wert's work and my own concerns historiographical engagement. While Wert escapes the "Lost Cause" trap concerning Longstreet that ensnares so many other historians, in seeking simply to document Longstreet's military career he does not consistently engage the historiographical controversy more generally. For all the critical acclaim it has received, by not addressing the historiographical controversy, *General James Longstreet* has done little to turn the historiographical tide. Longstreet's treatment in Gallagher's *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory*, written years after Wert's book, exemplifies how Wert's work did little to settle the historiographical controversy in the minds of leading Civil War historians. In contrast, I will engage the historiography whenever possible. By doing so, I will blend Wert's documentation with a dialogue on the historiographical treatment of Longstreet throughout the years, in addition to my own observations.¹⁶

With each chapter dedicated exclusively to one of the four battles under discussion, the project will proceed chronologically. While Longstreet's assumption of the tactical offensive was not limited to these four battles, his performances in them collectively serve as a good microcosm of his war record and encompassed his largest-scale assaults. My desire is to detail these performances as much as is practical, given my space limitations, without focusing too much attention on the war as a whole. I will pay little attention to the broader unfolding of the

¹⁶ Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).

war because I believe placing too much focus on it often undermines the significance of the assaults at the time they were launched. Placing Longstreet's attack at Chickamauga in the larger context of the war is the best example of the misleading potential of that approach. While the assault precipitated a resounding Confederate victory, since the Confederate victory in the battle ultimately went unexploited and proved pyrrhic the historiography tends to marginalize or even ignore the fact that Longstreet's attack was one of the largest and most determinative assaults in the entire war in terms of battle outcome.

The primary purpose of this thesis is *not* to narrate each battle under discussion. Instead, it is to examine the preparation, coordination, execution, and accomplishments of Longstreet's assaults in each battle on a tactical level and to trace Longstreet's tactical maturation from one battle to the next. Necessarily, this will require a great deal of narration, but while I will place each of these attacks in the context of the battle and campaign of which it was apart, this contextualization will be brief—just enough to for the reader to understand the purpose of each of Longstreet's assaults. A detailed narration of each campaign and battle is available elsewhere and would do little to advance my argument or address the historiography centered around Longstreet.

The chapters will vary in length due to both a disparity in available sources concerning each battle under discussion and the degree of tactical acumen Longstreet displayed in it. For instance, Chapter 1: Second Manassas will be shorter than the other chapters. Although Longstreet attacked with approximately 25,000 men in that battle and achieved one of his greatest successes in the war, primary sources do not recount it in much depth. Also, while the attack's achievements were prodigious, they were not entirely the result of Longstreet's tactical genius. Instead, circumstances out of his control rendered him largely unable to coordinate the

execution of the assault and dictated that tactical decisions be made largely by his subordinates. Only mentioning Longstreet a handful of times in over one hundred pages devoted to the attack, Scott Patchan's *Longstreet's Attack: The Struggle for Chinn Ridge* depicts how division, brigade, and regimental commanders contributed to the unfolding of the assault more than Longstreet. Second Manassas is crucial to this project not because it demonstrated Longstreet's superior tactical capacity but because it demonstrated his unparalleled battlefield instincts for timing large-scale assaults and foils his more tactically sophisticated attacks later in the war. The battle is an excellent starting point to begin tracing Longstreet's tactical evolution on the offensive.¹⁷

Contrary to much of the historiography, and especially the most famous portion of it, James Longstreet was the most successful subordinate commander on either side during the Civil War at coordinating and launching large-scale assaults. One can detect a significant maturation in his approach to offensive warfare from his assault at Second Manassas to his assault at the Wilderness. His attack at Chickamauga marked the peak of his tactical success, and his assault at the Wilderness marked the culmination of his tactical experimentation and flexibility, but neither of these assaults would have been possible without the experience he gained at Second Manassas and at Gettysburg. These truths are only appreciable through a detailed look at his role in each of these four major battles and by using evidence to dispute the hypercritical parts of the historiography.

¹⁷ James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952); James Longstreet, "Our March Against Pope," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff Inc., 1956); Scott C. Patchan, *Longstreet's Attack: The Struggle of Chinn Ridge* (Sterling, Potomac Books, 2011).

2 Chapter 1: Second Manassas, August 30, 1862

In his postwar writings, like most of his Civil War colleagues James Longstreet presented his wartime actions in the most favorable light possible. He was also a prolific author with a dramatic bent. His summation of his massive flank assault on August 30, 1862, at Second Manassas, published in the collection of firsthand accounts of Civil War campaigns and battles known as *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, provides a good example of what often resulted when Longstreet married self-aggrandizement with his penchant for literary flair. “A third time,” he wrote, “the batteries tore the Federals to pieces, and as they fell back under this terrible fire, I sprung everything to the charge. My troops leaped forward with exultant yells, and all along the line we pushed forward. Farther and still farther we pressed them, until at 10 o’clock at night we had the field.” This was no mere egotistical bluster; Longstreet’s assault at Second Manassas wreaked more damage and came closer to annihilating a major Federal army than any other assault launched by any of Lee’s subordinate commanders in the Army of Northern Virginia.¹⁸

However, Longstreet’s grand thrust at Second Manassas was *not* the most tactically brilliant large-scale assault he would launch during the war. It was delivered largely piecemeal, and his assaults at Gettysburg on July 2, 1863; at Chickamauga on September 20, 1863; and at the Wilderness on May 6, 1864, would outperform it in coordination, creativity, and daring. Nor was the assault documented as comprehensively as the other three. Despite the enormous scale of the attack and the carnage it induced on both sides, only Longstreet himself and his chief-of-staff for much of the war, Moxley Sorrel, recounted the attack in any detail in their memoirs.

Longstreet’s artillery chief for much of the war, Edward Porter Alexander, usually effusive in his

¹⁸ See Thomas R. Hay’s section “Politician, Officeholder, and Writer” of Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet* for details on Longstreet’s extensive postwar writings; James Longstreet, “Our March Against Pope,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 (New York: Thomas Yoseloff Inc., 1956), 2: 521. See Patchan, *Second Manassas* for details on the accomplishments of Longstreet’s assault.

accounts of Longstreet's battles, was not there to witness the assault. While Longstreet would supplement the account in his memoirs with the paragraph from *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* quoted above, this addendum only summarized the account in his memoirs as opposed to expounding upon it. As can be gleaned from an examination of prominent histories dealing with Longstreet and Second Manassas, historians have largely been forced to make do with this paucity of firsthand information.¹⁹

Given the wealth of primary accounts dealing with the Second Manassas campaign as a whole and the role of Stonewall Jackson and his wing of the Army of Northern Virginia in the battle, the failure of witnesses, including Longstreet himself, to adequately convey on a grand scale the unfolding of the massive August 30 assault is odd. Explaining it is difficult and requires speculation. It could be that the victory of Longstreet's wing was so emphatic that no one thought providing more detail was necessary. Perhaps a better explanation is that the attack was so impromptu and uncoordinated that no one (again, including Longstreet himself) knew exactly what had gone on. This line of reasoning posits that the absence of tactics that would make the difference in battles like Chickamauga and the Wilderness made expounding upon the attack difficult if not impossible. The verdicts of historians like John J. Hennessy, who claims that "unfortunately for Longstreet, with the objective set and the attack under way, he could do little to coordinate the movement of his divisions," and Scott C. Patchan, who examines the assault at primarily a brigade and regimental level while only mentioning Longstreet a handful of times, seem to support this latter supposition. Whatever the reason, the sparsity of firsthand accounts

¹⁹ James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 188-190; G. Moxley Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, ed. by Bell Irvin Wiley (Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1958), 98-101; Porter E. Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander*, ed. by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 134; Longstreet, "Our March Against Pope," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 2: 521.

detailing the unfolding of the attack on a broad scale and the lack of tactical sophistication inherent in the assault dictate that this chapter will be shorter than the others.²⁰

This thesis seeks to engage as many sources as possible while devoting special attention to tactics. Given that, the dearth of thorough narrations by Longstreet and many of his most prominent subordinates concerning the attack as well as the crude nature of its tactics cannot help but beg the question: Is Longstreet's assault at Second Manassas worthy of inclusion in this project? The question is a valid one, but the answer is still "yes." At Second Manassas Longstreet attacked with approximately 25,000 men, more than he would send forward in any other offensive throughout the war. I am concerned with broad scale assaults on the wing or corps level, and to omit this one would be to consciously ignore the broadest scale assault of them all. Also, as I have mentioned, the grand stroke would mark the nearest Lee ever came to destroying a major Union army. To exclude the assault would be to neglect what is perhaps the cardinal achievement on Longstreet's resume. Including it is incumbent for these reasons alone.²¹

However, including Longstreet's attack at Second Manassas is also incumbent because it provides an appropriate foundation on which we can begin to construct his tactical evolution. Longstreet had certainly launched attacks before, but never on this scale. While his assault on August 30, 1862, was largely bungled, this chapter argues that it nevertheless reflected the emergence of his intuitive capacity for recognizing the exact moment at which his adversary was most vulnerable, a capacity which permitted his blow at the Union line to be extremely forceful in spite of its tactical shortcomings. For Longstreet, preparation and timing were always of paramount importance when assuming the offensive. Had Longstreet attacked any earlier at Second Manassas, he likely would have made less progress or even faced a bloody repulse.

²⁰ Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 381; Patchan, *Second Manassas*.

²¹ Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 364.

Above all, Longstreet's experience in the battle would prove invaluable when he was devising his other most famous assaults later in the war. The Confederate victory at Chickamauga and Lee's deliverance from disaster at the Wilderness directly resulted from lessons Longstreet learned at Second Manassas. It is impossible to appreciate the culmination of Longstreet's tactical experimentation in the former two battles without appreciating the tactical difficulties he encountered in the latter. Just because the Confederates largely neglected tactics at Second Manassas on the afternoon of August 30, 1862, does not mean historians should.²²

Accordingly, much attention will be placed on the unfolding of the attack itself with a special emphasis on how it foundered out from under the tactical direction of Longstreet's guiding hand. However, since much of this chapter's argument emphasizes that the assault succeeded largely due to Longstreet's expert timing and preparation, much attention will be placed on those factors as well. Attending to the timing of and preparation for the attack necessitates engaging the critiques of Longstreet's colleagues in the Army of Northern Virginia who after the war presumed to indict him for "dragging his feet" at Second Manassas when, in their minds, he could and should have attacked sooner. Finally, engaging with these critiques compels engaging the historiography, which largely developed from the foundation laid by Longstreet's detractors. This chapter argues that Longstreet's detractors and many historians predisposed to be hypercritical of him not only were mistaken in their charges but fundamentally misunderstood the crucial role Longstreet's attack at Second Manassas played in his maturation as an offensive commander.

However, before detailing the assault or engaging the critiques of it and historiography concerning it, I must first place Longstreet's assault in the campaign and Battle of Second Manassas. After Robert E. Lee thrashed George B. McClellan in the Seven Days Battles, which

²² Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 177-178; Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 118.

ended on July 1, 1862, McClellan retreated to the protection of his gunboats on the James River and his fortifications at Harrison's Landing. As the armies rested and regrouped during the first part of July, the authorities in Washington decided to concentrate their forces in northern and western Virginia into a larger, single army. They styled this new fighting force "The Army of Virginia" (not to be confused with Lee's Army of Northern Virginia) and placed it under the command of John Pope, one of Longstreet's former West Point classmates who had already won several victories in the Western theater. Pope immediately moved to threaten the railroads between Richmond, the Shenandoah Valley, and the West.²³

While it was much too complex to recount fully here, a protracted campaign Longstreet would call "clever and brilliant" ensued. Lee had two primary goals. The first was to prevent Pope and McClellan pinning the Army of Northern Virginia between them. The second was to prevent Pope and McClellan from joining their armies. If the Federals could achieve either of these things, they would be able to crush Lee with their superior numbers. To thwart the Union plans, Lee detached Stonewall Jackson and sent him north to Gordonsville to threaten Pope. Jackson deftly maneuvered, and on August 9 at the Battle of Cedar Mountain he attacked and defeated part of Pope's force that had moved too far in front of the rest of the army to be properly supported. Still, Jackson's severe losses and the Federal detachment's escape convinced Lee that Jackson could not destroy Pope on his own. Days later, Lee received intelligence that McClellan was forwarding soldiers to Pope. If Lee were to defeat Pope before his force became too large to assault, he must bring him to battle quickly. Deciding to reinforce Jackson with Longstreet, whose five divisions comprised most of the remainder of the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee gambled that McClellan would not launch a drive on Richmond in the time it took

²³ Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 88-89; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 156-157.

him to deal with Pope. Lee, Longstreet, and their approximately 30,000 troops reached Gordonsville on August 15-16.²⁴

For a moment, it seemed like Lee had Pope trapped in the V formed by the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers, but on August 20 Pope became apprised of the Army of Northern Virginia's concentration and withdrew. Lee now formulated a plan for Pope's destruction. Splitting his army again, Lee sent Jackson beyond Pope's flank to cut his communications with Washington, D.C. Lee suspected that Pope would be under immense political pressure to remove Jackson from the capital's doorstep and attack. Jackson would defend his lines and hold Pope in place until Lee and Longstreet could come to his rescue and sweep the field.²⁵

The Second Manassas campaign was one of the few Civil War campaigns that went almost exactly according to plan. On August 25 Jackson began to march north astride the Rappahannock with approximately 23,000 men. Largely playing a game of hide-and-seek while Pope's army tramped around the Virginia countryside in search of him, Jackson finally attacked a Union division late on the afternoon of August 28. After an indecisive engagement, he quickly realized he had assaulted the main body of the Army of Virginia and posted his men in a defensive position in an unfinished railroad bed near the old Manassas battlefield. On August 29 Longstreet's men filed into line on Jackson's right. The juncture of the two commands formed an approximately 160-degree angle. Together, the wings of the Army of Northern Virginia stood open like a gaping jaw, reading to chew Pope up and spit him out if he were reckless enough to attack into it.²⁶

²⁴ Longstreet, "Our March Against Pope," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 2:522; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 89-93; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 157-158; Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 2: 261-281.

²⁵ Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 95-97; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 158-161.

²⁶ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 2: 304-321; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 98-104; Helen D. Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide: Gettysburg in the Light of the Official Records* (Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1989), 177; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 2: 121.

An impatient Lee wished to attack Pope first instead, but Longstreet advised against such a move, and Lee relented. This decision—which was ultimately Lee’s, and not Longstreet’s—was almost assuredly the right one. The ground across which Longstreet would have had to cross did not look promising, the Confederates did not know the strength of the Union forces, and Longstreet’s right flank would necessarily be exposed to any Federal contingent marching up the Centreville Turnpike toward the battlefield. Moreover, Longstreet’s advice was not out of the ordinary, as he counseled Lee throughout the war.²⁷

Still, while no one censured Longstreet until years later, his suggestion that Lee wait to attack until he could further reconnoiter the Federal lines would ignite a firestorm of controversy after the war which would significantly shape the initial historiography concerning him. Early first brought up Longstreet’s demurrals to assault the Federal position on August 29 as evidence of the latter’s tendency to “drag his feet” in *The Southern Historical Society Papers* in 1878. Early contended that it was “well known to the whole army that Longstreet was very slow in his movements on all occasions” and that the “conclusive evidence of [the] truth” of his charge stemmed from Longstreet’s own statement in his memoirs that he heard gunfire from Jackson’s front at noon but was not ready to engage the enemy until 3 PM and did not begin to fight until nightfall.²⁸

Although Early’s argument was ultimately a specious one, there was at least an element of truth in his claims. Jackson certainly could have used Longstreet’s help on August 29, because after Longstreet had advised against an immediate assault, Pope had indeed taken the bait and

²⁷ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 2: 321-323; *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 2: 120-121; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 168.

²⁸ Jubal A. Early, “Reply to General Longstreet’s Second Paper,” *The Southern Historical Society Papers*, 5: 275. The Southern Historical Society was founded in 1868 by ex-Confederates. Its *Papers*, published between 1876 and 1959, were comprised of articles written by Southerners on matters related to the Civil War. In the late nineteenth century, many ex-Confederate officers, including Longstreet and many of his detractors, engaged in a dialogue via the *Southern Historical Society Papers*.

thrown himself in a series of frontal assaults against Jackson's defenses. While Jackson repulsed the thrusts, he still found himself severely pressed. However, Early missed the fact that the results of an attack by Longstreet were still extremely uncertain even after Pope began his assaults on Jackson. Longstreet personally scouted the Federal left and found that it extended far south of the Centreville Turnpike and actually covered half of his own front. Any assault he launched would largely be a frontal assault against an enemy equal in numbers to his own and in a superior position. Though Longstreet again counseled Lee to refrain from attacking for the time being, once again, the decision was Lee's. As historian Gary Gallagher deftly notes, to indict Longstreet for convincing Lee not to attack Pope's left in support of Jackson on August 29 one must also indict Lee as someone susceptible to being dominated. As Lee would prove at battle after battle, this was impossible. When Lee determined that attacking was his best option, he would do so.²⁹

The nascent historiography was nonetheless heavily influenced by Early's critique and pounced on Longstreet's hesitance to immediately attack as evidence of his proclivity for defensive tactics and his deleterious influence on Lee. Douglas Southall Freeman's *R.E. Lee: A Biography* and H.J. Eckenrode's and Bryan Conrad's *James Longstreet: Lee's War-Horse* are the best examples of this tendency to accept Early's critique at face value. Freeman contends that Longstreet's counsel to delay any forward movement was crucial in Lee's Civil War career not so much because of the effect it had on the battle but because of the precedent it set for his future relations with Longstreet. "The seeds of much of the disaster at Gettysburg," Freeman famously

²⁹ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 168-169; *R.E. Lee*, 2: 322-323; Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory*, 150.

argues, “were sown... when Lee yielded to Longstreet and Longstreet discovered that he would.”³⁰

Conrad and Eckenrode contend that in listening to Longstreet Lee was ignoring his superior battlefield instincts. They reason that if Lee had assaulted Pope’s left early on the afternoon of August 29, he might have won an even greater victory than he did on August 30. They conclude his failure to do so rested solely on Longstreet’s shoulders. In their minds, while Jackson fought for survival, Longstreet was “making his leisurely observation, surely a characteristic Longstreetian touch.” However, in criticizing Longstreet Freeman and Eckenrode and Conrad are not only implicitly demeaning Lee, who they usually idolize, but they are also ignoring the battlefield conditions on August 29. Fitz-John Porter, commander of the Union V Corps, would assure Longstreet after the war that he actually *wanted* Longstreet to attack where Lee suggested he do so. Longstreet’s right flank would have been exposed, and Irvin McDowell’s III Corps could have easily reinforced Porter. Porter wrote Longstreet that he was “very sure that if you had attacked me [on August 29] that your loss would have been enormous.”³¹

Generals like Early and historians like Freeman and Eckenrode and Conrad were wrong that Longstreet was fundamentally averse to aggressive tactics; instead, he was only averse to ill-timed aggressive tactics. Finding around 5 PM that McDowell had marched toward the Federal right to help in Pope’s assault against Jackson, Lee thought it was time to go forward. Now Longstreet agreed with him that circumstances seemed more propitious. However, he suggested delaying the assault until dawn because daylight was running out. What Longstreet suggested instead was a “reconnaissance in force.” John Bell Hood’s division would lead seven brigades of

³⁰ *R.E. Lee*, 2: 325.

³¹ Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 105-106; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 172.

Longstreet's total of twelve in an advance south of the Centreville Turnpike and "feel" the enemy. As the sun was setting, Hood's lead brigade crashed into a Federal column, shoved the surprised Union soldiers back, and drove them over a mile.³²

Hood's mission, though, was not to drive in the Union left so much as it was to gain information about its disposition, and his initial progress probably would not have presaged a successful general assault by Longstreet's entire wing. Instead, what the usually insatiably aggressive Hood saw seemed foreboding. His division was in the middle of the left half of the Federal line, and his subordinate commanders could not distinguish their own men from the enemy's. Accordingly, around 10 PM Hood rode to Lee's headquarters and reported the facts to Lee and Longstreet. He advised a withdrawal. While it is not clear if Lee or Longstreet gave the final order, Hood was indeed called back to Longstreet's main line, and the dawn assault was postponed indefinitely. Once again, Longstreet's battlefield instincts had proven correct. Had he attacked in force between 5 and 6 PM, Hood's reconnaissance revealed that the assault would have met with heavy resistance and probably fizzled out before it had time to pick up steam. All element of surprise would have been lost, and Pope very well might have withdrawn before morning.³³

I argue that Hood's reconnaissance in force was a perfect example of Longstreet's offensive tactical philosophy. He had not hesitated to send more than half of his wing on an offensive, but he would not press that offensive when new intelligence proved it impractical to do so. Although his detractors would never realize it, Longstreet's innate caution and instinct for timing were what allowed his largest scale assaults to be as successful as they were. In other

³² Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 170-171; John Bell Hood, *Advance and Retreat: Personal Experiences in the United States & Confederate States Armies*, ed. by Richard N. Current (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), 34.

³³ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 171; Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 34-35.

words, by “dragging his feet” Longstreet might have ruffled the feathers of many of his colleagues, but he immeasurably enhanced the Confederacy’s chances to win this and other battles.

Longstreet’s decision to withdraw during the night of August 29-30, 1862, paid heavy dividends because it convinced Pope that the Confederates were retreating. Ironically, the Southerners were convinced that Pope was retreating. Each army commander now sought to prevent the other from escaping the field without further injury. According to Longstreet, Lee had decided against attacking the ominous Union position until Pope had fully committed himself to a renewed attempt to break Jackson’s wing, but Lee still desperately wanted to fight a major battle at Manassas. After hesitating for most of the day, around 3 PM Pope obliged him. Longstreet later said that the entire Army of Virginia “seemed to surge up against Jackson as if to crush him with an overwhelming mass.” Jackson repulsed Pope for about an hour, but then he sent a messenger to Lee to request assistance. Lee instructed Longstreet to send a division to reinforce Jackson’s wing.³⁴

Longstreet got the message, but by this point he had already independently determined it was time for him to make his mark in the battle. Porter’s Union V Corps, which had opposed him for the entirety of August 29, was now attacking Jackson and exposed to enfilade fire from Longstreet’s and other Confederate batteries to its left. Longstreet reasoned he could aid Jackson much more quickly by breaking up Pope’s attack with artillery than by sending the troops of an infantry division as direct reinforcements. Over twenty cannons now sprang into action along Longstreet’s front. Pope’s lines quickly dissolved under the galling fire, reformed, and dissolved again. Longstreet now resolved to throw his whole command against Pope’s cracked left and

³⁴ Longstreet, “Our March against Pope,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 2: 520; Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 2: 123-124.

center. His troops would push northeast to Henry Hill and try to seize the Stone Bridge on Bull Run Creek. If they could do so, they would sever Pope's last line of retreat.³⁵

Longstreet designed the attack so that his whole line would move forward in concert, in opposition to the piecemeal way Confederate assaults had proceeded too often during the Seven Days Battles. Unfortunately for Longstreet, the sheer breadth of his line and the terrain virtually precluded any united advance. The troops on his left were only a little over a mile of open ground away from Henry Hill. The troops on his right were over two miles away, and the ground they would be crossing was broken by woods and fences. Thus, while Eckenrode and Conrad claim that "the charge was splendidly made... by the whole line" and Freeman contends that "the whole of the right went forward simultaneously," this is an exaggeration. According to battle historian John J. Hennessy, the attack was made "piecemeal."³⁶

The assault of Hood's lead brigade, which Longstreet failed to detail in his memoirs, provides a good example of the piecemeal nature of the attack. The brigade promptly crushed the Union resistance in its immediate front, and *The Richmond Enquirer* noted that "the ground was piled with the slain" in its wake. However, in their enthusiasm, the Southern troops outpaced their support. Longstreet tried to reach Hood to restrain him, but by that point the brigade had penetrated too far into the Union lines. By the time the rest of Hood's division arrived, it was already falling back. Had Hood waited, Longstreet would have had three full divisions with which to assault the new Union stronghold on Chinn Ridge. Now the attack devolved into haphazard thrusts on the brigade and regimental levels.³⁷

³⁵ Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 134; Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 331-333; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 107-109; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 187-188.

³⁶ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 2: 333; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 109; Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 362-364.

³⁷ Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 378-380; *The Richmond Enquirer*, September 9, 1862; Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 118.

The early ill-advised foray of Hood's lead brigade into the Federal defenses fatally injured the coordination of Longstreet's blow. The separation of this brigade exposed to Longstreet the difficulty, and perhaps impossibility, of moving numerous brigades from varying distances to the same spot simultaneously. As such, Longstreet had to give up most of his personal control over the battle. His admirer Sorrel would claim in his memoirs that "Longstreet was at his best during the battle. His consummate ability in managing troops was well displayed that day and his bodies of large men were moved with great skill and without the least confusion." However, in reality the rest of the attack would be conducted largely under the supervision of Longstreet's subordinates, skill would be scarce, and confusion would be abundant. His offensive tactical genius, of which he had shown hints here, was largely obviated by circumstances out of his control.³⁸

Hood's disjointed advance also revealed another problem: in Longstreet's words, "Jackson failed to pull up even on the left." Lee had ordered Jackson to "look out for and protect" Longstreet's left, or northern, flank, but Jackson had not yet moved forward. Consequently, Pope was able to reinforce his crumbling left with impunity. Federal artillery now began to train in on Longstreet's troops as well. According to Longstreet, Lee ordered Jackson to capture the Federal batteries bombarding his men, but Jackson's force failed to materialize. When *The Richmond Enquirer* contended that "we drove the enemy on both wings," it was incorrect. Longstreet caved in Pope's left flank, but Jackson made no effort against his right. While various theories abound for why Jackson did not attack, he should have made at least some effort to relieve pressure on Longstreet's exposed flank. Eight of his fourteen brigades had

³⁸ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 189; Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 98; Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 378-380; Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 118.

spent the entire day resting. Even as a diversion, the advance of Jackson's wing would have exponentially enhanced Longstreet's chances of taking Henry Hill before nightfall.³⁹

Without cohesion in Hood's advance and the support of Jackson on its left flank, Longstreet's assault, which initially faced little organized resistance, ground to a bloody halt on the slopes of Chinn Ridge. Now James Kemper's and D.R. Jones' divisions formed on Hood's right. Their orders were to wheel left, or north, and drive the Federal holdouts from the last formidable defensive position in front of Henry Hill, but their elements arrived in staggered succession and made progress only slowly. While Kemper's lead brigade inched up the ridge, desperate Union soldiers shot its soldiers down in scores, and McDowell scraped together reinforcements from the right of Pope's line. All the while Pope remained blissfully ignorant of the mortal crisis on his left, even going so far as to ask McDowell if in ordering so many troops to the left he was not overreacting.⁴⁰

Kemper eventually managed to get his last two brigades into the fight and tilted the sanguinary stalemate on Chinn Ridge in favor of the Confederates. At the same time, Jones' division finally hit the field and wheeled left. It enveloped the exposed Federal left flank, and the panicked Union soldiers raced northeast toward Henry Hill and the Stone Bridge. It was now 5 PM, and Longstreet's troops had won Chinn Ridge. Still, the achievement was bittersweet: Longstreet's wing had suffered the majority of its casualties for the entire battle in this limited space and time, and the hour or so bought by the Union stand on the crest of Chinn Ridge gave more Federal reinforcements an opportunity to coalesce on Henry Hill and save Pope from ultimate destruction. Longstreet claimed in his memoirs that "Hood's aggressive force was well

³⁹ Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 381-382; Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 123-125; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 189.

⁴⁰ Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 50; *The Richmond Enquirer*, September 9, 1862; Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 338-394.

spent when his troops approached the Chinn House,” but in reality, by this time most of the “aggressive force” of Longstreet’s entire wing had dissipated. While the resolve of Pope’s army should not be underestimated, this dissipation was as much the victim of poor coordination as it was Federal shells and musket balls.⁴¹

Poor coordination, this time in the form of a breakdown in command structure, continued to haunt Longstreet’s wing as it prepared to make a mad dash up Henry Hill. As Hood launched the initial advance at 4 PM, Longstreet ordered General Cadmus Wilcox to bring his division up on Hood’s left flank and support the assault. The problem was that Wilcox commanded both the division and a brigade in that division, and he thought Longstreet wanted only his brigade to attach to Hood’s left. To make matters worse, Wilcox moved slowly and got lost. Later, Longstreet ordered Wilcox to assist in the assault on Henry Hill, but Wilcox’s division never materialized, and Longstreet would come to blame Wilcox (along with Jackson) for Pope’s eventual escape. Longstreet certainly exaggerated Wilcox’s culpability, as he or his staff could have delivered his orders more clearly and prevented the confusion. Nevertheless, had Wilcox arrived promptly, the weight of another fresh division might very well have proved the difference as the sun set on Henry Hill.⁴²

Wilcox’s absence left the responsibility of destroying Pope to Longstreet’s last two fresh divisions under D.R. Jones and Richard H. Anderson, respectively. As the Confederates seized Chinn Ridge, Pope had personally supervised the construction of a defensive line facing west on the Sudley Road, a thoroughfare running roughly north to south across Henry Hill. In the fashion of the division commanders who had gone before them, Jones and Anderson could not

⁴¹ Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 400-405; Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 78-80; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 189.

⁴² Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 188; Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 121; Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 411-412.

coordinate a joint attack. Jones encroached upon the road first, and he quickly perceived an opportunity to seize a tactical advantage and cut off Pope's line of retreat. Ordering one of his three brigades to march south around the Union left flank, he launched a frontal assault up the slopes of Henry Hill with the other two. He expected his flanking brigade to "roll up" the Union line and turn Pope's last defensive contingent into a panicked mob. Unfortunately for Jones and the Confederates, the flank assault never materialized. The commander of the flanking brigade, Thomas F. Drayton, feared what turned out to be a phantom Union cavalry force on his right flank and never went forward. His brigade thus made no contribution, and Jones' clever tactical conception degenerated into a series of straight-ahead, bloody charges.⁴³

As Union soldiers mowed down Jones' attackers and Jones' subordinates reluctantly ordered a retreat, at 6:30 PM Anderson's division emerged from the south on Jones' right. Like Drayton's brigade only moments before, the fresh division was directly on the left flank of Pope's position. Well supported by artillery, it stood poised to administer the *coup de grace* by charging due north up the Sudley Road. Instead of attacking, however, Anderson balked. By doing nothing, he squandered the Army of Northern Virginia's most promising opportunity of the day—and perhaps the war—at total victory. While the reasons for Anderson's inaction remain unclear, Hennessy speculates that "maybe a lack of guidance from above"—that is, guidance from Lee or Longstreet—drove him to be overly cautious.⁴⁴

Given Longstreet's penchant for coordinating and executing such maneuvers, which he would demonstrate on many future battlefields, one cannot help but believe that Jones' assault or a hypothetical assault by Anderson could have completely severed Pope's army from the Stone Bridge had Longstreet been present to assist his division commanders, either by better

⁴³ Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 83, 87; Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 412.

⁴⁴ Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 87; Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 420-421.

coordinating Jones' promising design or by pressuring Anderson into going forward. As it played out, however, the best Longstreet could do was to use the piecemeal thrust against Henry Hill as a valuable, if extremely sanguinary, learning experience. Robert E. Lee might not have another chance as promising as this one to destroy a major Union army, but Longstreet would have other opportunities to break stubborn Federal lines.

The fighting raged for another thirty minutes after Anderson's demurral to attack, but with his flanks on the Sudley Road unassailed and darkness setting in, Pope could breathe a heavy sigh of relief. Robert E. Lee and James Longstreet would not destroy his entire army on August 30. Still, although they did not manage to sever Pope's last escape route, the pair had achieved a victory unprecedented not only in this war, but perhaps in any modern one. *The Richmond Enquirer* was not exaggerating when it claimed that a similar battle had "never occurred on the continent." The casualties told a great deal of the story. In just three hours of fighting, Longstreet lost 4,700 men (more than Jackson lost in all three days of the battle), but while the number of casualties the Federals incurred as they retreated toward Bull Run Creek is unclear (since Union casualty figures are only available for the battle as a whole), it almost certainly exceeded 4,700. All told, out of the 77,000 troops Pope deployed at Second Manassas, he lost over 16,000 of them.⁴⁵

The reaction of the the Northern media and the authorities in Washington, D.C. told the rest of the story. On August 31 *The New York Herald* reported that "the enemy were driven from the field, which our forces now occupy" and that the Confederates were "badly beaten," but Northerners were quickly disabused of this notion. Pope had not, as the paper contended, "accomplished the achievement of this war, and earned for himself the proud title of victor of the

⁴⁵ Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 117. The exact casualty estimates are my own, based on Patchan's documentation of the percentage of each army that was killed, wounded, or captured in the battle; *The Richmond Enquirer*, September 8, 1862.

second battle of Bull Run.” United States Secretary of War Edwin Stanton commanded that the federal arsenal be transported to New York, and Union General-in-Chief Henry Halleck, who had so recently transferred a great deal of McClellan’s soldiers to Pope, now literally begged McClellan to save the capital. Abraham Lincoln felt compelled to unconditionally restore McClellan to command. McClellan soon combined the soldiers of the now defunct Army of Virginia with his troops of the Army of the Potomac and regrouped around Washington. Changing its tone from August 31, on September 7 *The New York Herald* echoed widespread popular sentiment on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line when it reported that “the arrival of General McClellan to reinforce Pope was all that saved the army of the latter from utter annihilation.” Now superfluous, Pope would eventually be sent west to fight Indians instead of the Confederates.⁴⁶

The Richmond Enquirer would assure its readers that “we may rest satisfied... that our consummate and energetic General (Lee) and his brave and hardy troops will pursue their advantage to the farthest practical verge.” While the Southern press was often woefully inaccurate concerning details of battles, on this point the newspaper in the capital of the fledgling nation hit the mark. The Federals’ gravitation toward Washington inspired Lee’s first invasion of the North, which would culminate less than a month later in a bloodbath along Antietam Creek in Maryland.⁴⁷

While much of this chapter has been dedicated to the tactical shortcomings of Longstreet’s August 30 assault, the attack’s accomplishments should not be marginalized. Longstreet’s wing had advanced with considerable speed over a wide swathe of broken ground, hit Pope’s wavering lines within forty-five minutes of its outset, and driven the beleaguered

⁴⁶ *The New York Herald*, August 31, 1862; Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 451-453; *The New York Herald*, September 7, 1862.

⁴⁷ *The Richmond Enquirer*, September 9, 1862.

Union army several miles to its last lifeline. *The Charleston Mercury* aptly described the fighting as “a rout... equal to that of Bull Run, of the 21st July 1861.” Longstreet’s preparation had been through; his timing, impeccable. In terms of results the attack outperformed any assault Stonewall Jackson or any other of famed Lee’s subordinates would deliver throughout the war. Large Union hosts would feel the reverberations of Longstreet’s giant thrust at Second Manassas when he sent forward similar massive contingents of troops at Gettysburg, Chickamauga, and the Wilderness.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Patchan, *Second Manassas*, 117; *The Charleston Mercury*, September 8, 1862; Hennessy, *Return to Bull Run*, 459-460.

3 Chapter 2: Gettysburg, July 2, 1863

“To express it as briefly as possible & as nearly as I can find the exact figures,” Confederate 1st Corps chief artilleryist E.P. Alexander would write years later, James Longstreet’s two available divisions, able to muster only “13,000 infantry with 62 [cannons],” launched an offensive “against a strong position & captured it, fighting successfully for three hours against 40,000 infantry & 100 guns, & holding the ground gained.” Alexander concluded that the attack was “not excelled... by any record of our war—nor, for that matter, of any other war.”⁴⁹

While, like most generals, he was predisposed to portray all his actions and the actions of his troops in the best possible light in his postwar writings, Longstreet especially prized his soldiers’ performance in this fight. He did “not hesitate to pronounce” that the 1st Corps’ fighting that day constituted “the best three hours’ fighting ever done by any troops on any battle-field.” While he was not quite as adulatory, Robert E. Lee could find nothing with which to quibble concerning Longstreet’s attack. Less than a month after the fighting in question he reported that the Federals “were dislodged [from their position] after a severe struggle [and] retired, leaving a number of [their] batteries in our possession.”⁵⁰

It might come as a surprise that the battle to which Alexander, Longstreet, and Lee were referring was *not* one of the Army of Northern Virginia’s great victories. They were referring instead to the Battle of Gettysburg, a catastrophic Confederate defeat regarded by many historians as the “turning point” of the Civil War in the Eastern theater. Specifically, they were referring to Longstreet’s attack, made with two of his three divisions, on the Union left flank on July 2, 1862, in which the Confederate 1st Corps captured Union strongholds like the “Peach

⁴⁹ Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 354-355; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 241-242.

⁵⁰ Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*, 40; Robert E. Lee, *The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee*, Ed. by Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin (New York: Da Capo Press, 1961), 577.

Orchard,” the “Wheatfield, and “Devil’s Den,” which to those who fought there would retain legendary significance.

Selecting Longstreet’s attack on July 2, 1863, at Gettysburg, to serve alongside his attacks at Second Manassas, Chickamauga, and the Wilderness as an example of one his greatest assaults admittedly might seem odd. In the other three battles Longstreet’s attacks either delivered the Confederates an overwhelming victory or at least staved off a devastating defeat. At Gettysburg, Longstreet’s July 2 attack did neither of these things. If anything, it set up the Confederates to be cripplingly repulsed the next day in what would become known as “Pickett’s Charge.”

But this thesis argues that a full appreciation of Longstreet’s role as a ranking subordinate commander in the Civil War requires a heightened focus on the battles in which he launched his most destructive attacks, not just on the battles he had a large hand in helping the Confederates win. And while there is certainly no shortage of “focus” on Gettysburg—on the contrary, the amount literature on the battle can often seem overwhelming—too often this focus overemphasizes July 3 at the expense of July 2. Since the principal protagonists in the battle and historians knew at the time they were writing of the ultimate Confederate defeat, for which “Pickett’s Charge” on July 3 is the perfect microcosm, they gloss over Longstreet’s documentable success on July 2. These commentators reason that since the Confederates wasted all the fruits of Longstreet’s July 2 progress on July 3 and retreated on July 4, thus giving up the ground Longstreet gained, there is little point in detailing the attack, unless it is to show how the attack might have been *more* successful, to show how it exemplified Longstreet’s “insubordinate” behavior, or to show how it set the Confederates up for disaster the next day.

Such logic might make sense if one were trying to explain the broad course of the war, but espousing such an approach to explain Longstreet's war record, and especially to argue whether he proved more adept on the offensive or the defensive, is dangerously misleading. I contend that to a large degree the historiography underestimates Longstreet's prowess on the offensive because too often his contemporaries failed and historians fail to acknowledge his July 2 accomplishments. The primary purpose of this chapter, then, is to document Longstreet's July 2 attack, including the preparations that made it possible, the tactics that made it successful, and the ways in which it enhanced Confederate chances for a larger victory in the battle, and thus reposition it in the historiography alongside Longstreet's attacks at Second Manassas, Chickamauga, and the Wilderness.

Documenting the attack's accomplishments will inevitably involve engaging both Longstreet's contemporaries and historians who claimed at the very least that Longstreet's July 2 attack should have been *more* successful and at the most that Longstreet was insubordinate toward Lee on July 2 and thus responsible for the Confederate defeat. While William Pendleton first enunciated the latter part of this critique and a bevy of former high-ranking Confederate officers led by Jubal Early bear responsibility for its proliferation into "Lost Cause" dogma, John B. Gordon epitomized it best and most vitriolically when he wrote: "General Lee died believing that he lost Gettysburg at last by Longstreet's disobedience of orders." Together, these men helped launch an effort based on the premise that Longstreet was "disobedient" principally by "dragging his feet" and attacking too late in the day. Devotees to this effort claimed that had he attacked earlier a complete Confederate victory would have been almost guaranteed. Ultimately, while this chapter will not serve as an apology for Longstreet's conduct at Gettysburg, it does

seek to show how it have been impossible for Longstreet to attack any earlier than he did on July 2.⁵¹

However, recounting Longstreet's July 2 attack at Gettysburg first requires positioning it within the context of the Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania and the first day's fighting. Lee wrote in his official report of the Gettysburg campaign he submitted in January 1864 that after the Union Army of the Potomac retreated from Chancellorsville, it returned to the ground it had held prior to the battle north of the Rappahannock River and across from Fredericksburg, "where it could not be attacked excepting at a disadvantage." Lee's goal was to lure it from this formidable position into open terrain where it could be destroyed. He thought the Pennsylvania countryside a suitable site for the great battle that he foresaw. Consequently, Longstreet's 1st Corps and Ewell's 2nd Corps marched north on June 3. On June 15, Ewell's 2nd Corps crossed the Potomac, and the 1st Corps crossed on June 24, reaching Chambersburg on June 27. By that time, A.P. Hill's 3rd Corps had spread out over the Cumberland Valley, and Ewell's 2nd Corps encamped twenty-five miles away between Carlisle and York. Two weeks before, on June 13, Lee had allowed J.E.B Stuart to cross the Potomac River with most of the Confederate cavalry to the rear, or east, of the Army of the Potomac. Stuart had still not reestablished communication with headquarters and would not do so until late on July 2.⁵²

Unfortunately for the widely-dispersed Confederates, by June 27 Union General Joseph Hooker's army had also crossed the Potomac. For all the timidity he had shown at the Battle of Chancellorsville, Hooker was responding with surprising alacrity to the Army of Northern Virginia's latest invasion. Lacking his cavalry, the eyes and ears of any nineteenth-century army, Lee had no idea the Army of the Potomac was so close in pursuit. It was only late on June 28, the

⁵¹ Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*, 56; Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, 161.

⁵² Lee, *The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee*, 570; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 158, 161-163.

same day that Abraham Lincoln replaced Hooker with George Meade as commander of the Army of the Potomac, that Lee finally learned the truth as to his adversaries' whereabouts. Realizing that Meade could now bring him to battle within a day or two, Lee was forced to concentrate his army. The town where most of the roads in the vicinity converged, Gettysburg, seemed the logical place to do so. By June 29, however, Gettysburg would already be teeming with Union cavalry. Even if it was only by a tiny fraction of the Army of the Potomac, this early Federal investment of the town would prove ruinous to the entire Confederate campaign. Had Lee been aware of the Federal occupation of Gettysburg, he would have never attempted to reunite his army there because he wanted to avoid a "general engagement." Instead, he would have remained with Longstreet at Cashtown and looked for an alternative place to bring his three corps back together.⁵³

A.P. Hill knew that the Union held Gettysburg with at least some force by June 30 at the latest, but thinking that force was probably only militia (although he really had no intelligence to confirm or disabuse himself of this notion) and under orders to meet the rest of Lee's army there, he sent his lead division under Henry Heth barreling down a country road heading southeast into the town the next morning. Lee had given express orders to all his corps commanders not to incite a "general engagement," but Heth promptly ignored these orders and attacked John Buford's division of Union cavalry anyway on an extended hill known as Seminary Ridge. The fight soon exploded as Heth funneled more and more troops into the fight and Buford called for and received help from John Reynolds' 1st Union Corps. The Confederates quickly killed Reynolds, "the favorite commander" of the troops in the Army of the Potomac according to *The New York Herald*, but could make little headway against what was now a substantial Union

⁵³ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 59-62; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 179-180.

contingent. As Hill became more committed to the fight and his casualties mounted, it looked more and more like he had committed a major blunder by attacking in the first place.⁵⁴

However, Ewell also had orders to converge on Gettysburg, and just when Reynolds' men were dealing Hill a severe blow, his 2nd Corps came upon the battle from the north. Hill was attacking from west to east with his lines arrayed from north to south. By complete chance, Ewell had arrived precisely on the Federals' right, or northern, flank. He placed his men in lines stretching east to west and lost no time in attacking to rescue the beleaguered Hill. Just as Ewell's attack picked up steam, though, the Union 11th Corps arrived from the south and refused the Union 1st Corps' right flank at a right angle. Now both Hill and Ewell were launching frontal assaults into stronger positions. At midday, Lee finally arrived. Finding around half of his army already committed to breaking the blue host, he decided to reform his lines and renew the attacks.⁵⁵

Lee was famous for successfully coordinating and executing such attacks, and July 1, 1863, added to his litany of such successes. With Lee's guiding hand and the numerical superiority, Hill broke the Union 1st Corps from the west and Ewell broke the Union 11th Corps from the north. Their lines having collapsed, the surviving Federals retreated in a panic through Gettysburg and onto a large, rocky hill with a cemetery on it. By 5 PM Ewell's forces had captured the town and were quickly approaching what would become known as Cemetery Hill from the north. Lee ordered Ewell to assault Cemetery Hill "if practicable," but Ewell demurred. *The New York Herald* did an admirable job summing up the first day's fighting, saying "Gen. Reynolds was killed, and the Union troops were driven into the town and through it, and south of it for some distance, when night put an end to the battle." *The Charleston Mercury* agreed in

⁵⁴ *The Charleston Mercury*, July 7, 1863; Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg* (Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2004), 166-255; *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1863.

⁵⁵ Allen C. Guelzo, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (New York: Knopf, 2013), 216-219.

substance, even if it was more succinct and opted for more partisan language. “We whipped the enemy badly,” it reported.⁵⁶

Longstreet had been riding with Lee from Cashtown to Gettysburg, but upon hearing the sounds of battle in the distance, Lee had galloped ahead. When Longstreet finally joined him late in the afternoon just as Ewell’s brigades were arriving at the foot of Cemetery Hill, he studied the terrain on which the Union troops were rallying with his field glasses. As *The New York Times* put it, the ground “was excellent for defensive purposes.” Two features stood out above the rest. The first was a Cemetery Ridge, a streak of relatively high ground that stretched south from Cemetery Hill. The ground on its south and southwestern side was especially broken and rocky. The second was a country thoroughfare, known as the Emmitsburg Road, running roughly north to south between Seminary Ridge and Cemetery Ridge west of the town. Even though Union troops occupied Cemetery Hill and were much closer to Cemetery Ridge than the Confederates, Longstreet thought the situation played right into the Confederates’ hands, especially if they could control the Emmitsburg Road. He told Lee the Southerners could not have “call[ed] the enemy to position better suited to our plans.” Longstreet counseled that by interposing the Army of Northern Virginia between the Army of the Potomac and Washington, D.C., via the Emmitsburg Road, Lee could force Meade to attack him at a disadvantage.⁵⁷

Longstreet continued to study the nuances of the terrain and became even more convinced of its defensive tactical value. West of Seminary Ride, where Lee and Longstreet stood facing east, was a valley. Then the ground elevated at about the point of the Emmitsburg Road. East of the Emmitsburg Road was a stony hill about 600 feet tall called Round Top. A slight distance to Round Top’s northeast was a second hill, slightly lower, styled Little Round

⁵⁶ *Ibid*; *The New York Times* quoted in *The Charleston Mercury*, July 10, 1863.

⁵⁷ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 358; *The New York Times* quoted in *The Charleston Mercury*, July 10, 1863.

Top. Cemetery Ridge extended north of Little Round Top for about two miles and ended at Cemetery Hill. For all the devastating attacks Longstreet had launched in the past and would launch in the future, this seemed, beyond all doubt, a bad position to assault. However, in Longstreet's mind, it would be a very easy one to maneuver around because the Emmitsburg Road was the Confederates' for the taking.⁵⁸

The conversation that followed between Lee and Longstreet would be the most consequential and controversial that the two ever had. Longstreet thought the Confederacy must better manage its dwindling manpower resources and attack only under the most favorable circumstances. He advised Lee to march south around the Union holdouts and occupy a strong defensive position. He reasoned that "finding our objective is Washington, the Federals will be sure to attack us. When they attack," he continued, "we shall beat them, as we proposed to do before we left Fredericksburg, and the probabilities are that the fruits of our success will be great." This statement alone convinces the great majority of the historians to associate Longstreet with defensive tactics. However, Longstreet was not advising strictly defensive tactics for the duration of the campaign. Reaping "the fruits of success" a defensive victory would give the Confederates would surely mean attacking what was left of the decimated Federal army. Just because Longstreet was not in favor of striking the first blow does not mean he opposed all offensive tactics.⁵⁹

Longstreet specifically wanted to maneuver around the left, or southern, portion of the Union line. However, while the majority of the historiography contends that what Longstreet was proposing to Lee late on the afternoon of July 1 was a strategic maneuver, historian D.B. Sanger proposes that it was a tactical one. In light of Longstreet's prior experiences and the tactics he

⁵⁸ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 72.

⁵⁹ James Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 339; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 189.

had employed before and would employ after Gettysburg, Sanger believes Longstreet was probably advising Lee to make “a wide tactical envelopment of the Union left flank.” In other words, Longstreet was not advocating for fighting on the defensive at all; instead, like Lee, he wanted to attack, just in a different fashion and at a slightly different point on the Union line. Sanger reasons that a “skilled tactician” like Longstreet must have realized a battle was imminent and all considerations of terrain and Federal troop deployment “seemed to favor such a plan.”⁶⁰

Moreover, an examination of Union sources indicates that many high-ranking Federals understood that their disposition would invite a tactical envelopment of their left by Lee’s army. After the war Meade claimed he worried the Confederates would engulf and attack his southern flank from the south and east, but correspondence penned by and exchanged between members of the Northern high command just before and during the battle reflected such fears as well. On June 30, the day before his collision with A.P. Hill and subsequent death, John Reynolds wrote to Dan Butterfield, the chief-of-staff of the Army of the Potomac, that Lee would “undoubtedly endeavor to turn our left by way of... the Emmitsburg [Road].” Late on the night of July 1, the 3rd Corps commander Daniel Sickles told Butterfield that “our left and rear are not sufficiently guarded.” In Sanger’s mind, Reynolds and Sickles foresaw the Confederates executing what Longstreet was in the meantime suggesting to Lee on Seminary Ridge.⁶¹

As Sanger suggests, Lee’s reaction to his conversation with Longstreet implies that Longstreet’s suggestion might indeed have been a tactical one. Ewell contended that he could not attack the Union right, or northern, flank, except at a disadvantage. Doubting that Ewell and Longstreet could successfully coordinate their assaults were the latter to attack the Union left

⁶⁰ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 170.

⁶¹ John Reynolds to Daniel Butterfield, June 30, 1863, in *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: [s.n.] 1894) XXVII: III: 417.; Daniel Sickles to Daniel Butterfield, July 1, 1863, *OR*, XXVII: III: 468; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 170; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 192.

given that the Confederate lines would be stretched so tautly and lengthily around Cemetery Ridge, Lee considered it “better to shorten the line, to concentrate heavily on the [Union left], and to throw the three corps against that position.” This would have been, at least in large part, an adoption of what Sanger argues that Longstreet was proposing—an envelopment of the southern tip of Cemetery Ridge and an all-out assault on the Union forces there. This contradicts Eckenrode’s and Conrad’s indictment of Longstreet on the grounds that he that “did not have definite plans to substitute” for Lee’s.⁶²

Ewell, though, counseled against such a maneuver. Moments before he had discovered a promontory just east of Cemetery Hill called Culp’s Hill. It commanded the entire Union position because artillery could be placed on it that would be able to fire down on Cemetery Hill and Ridge and thus render them untenable. Ewell supposed it (incorrectly, as it turned out) to be unoccupied. Ewell’s revelation convinced Lee to change his mind. If the 2nd Corps could, from the position it held already, force the Union troops off Cemetery Hill and Ridge simply by occupying Culp’s Hill, there was no reason to move it all the way down to the southern flank. Therefore, Lee scrapped the order for Ewell to move to the right and ordered him to take Culp’s Hill as soon as he could. Any plan to attack the Federal right flank would be on hold, at least for the moment. In his memoirs Longstreet claimed that when he left Lee’s headquarters around 7 PM, Lee “had formed no plans beyond that of seizing Culp’s Hill as his point from which to engage, nor given any orders for the next day.”⁶³

Yet that was not how John Gordon and Jubal Early remembered it. Gordon asserted after the war that “Lee distinctly ordered Longstreet to attack early on the morning of the second day.” Early said in substantive, if not exact, agreement with Gordon that Lee wanted Longstreet to

⁶² Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 82-83; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 192.

⁶³ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 83; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 361.

attack the Federal left flank “at a very early hour on the morning of the 2d.” He added later that “it is beyond all dispute that General Longstreet thwarted General Lee’s purpose of attacking the enemy at as early an hour as possible, by his reluctance and procrastination.” Douglas Southall Freeman admits that “Lee gave no positive order to attack at any particular point in the morning,” but he still sides with Early and Gordon over Longstreet in this bitterest of controversies. Freeman opines that Longstreet should have realized that Lee wanted the 1st Corps on the battlefield as soon as possible and that “Lee intended to attack as soon as it arrived, in the hope of driving the Federals from their position before the whole Army of the Potomac was concentrated in his front.”⁶⁴

Longstreet later would counter Early’s assertion by saying “General Lee never, in his life, gave me orders to open an attack at a specific hour. He was perfectly satisfied that, when I had my troops in position, and was ordered to attack, no time was ever lost.” But Longstreet denying that Lee ever ordered him to “attack at a specific hour” misses the point in Freeman’s mind. Freeman explains that Lee was satisfied with simply explaining his tactical conception because he thought his corps commanders could supervise and execute the attacks on the corps-level better than he could himself. He was merely continuing this custom “when he refrained on the night of July 1 from giving Longstreet direct orders.” According to Freeman, Longstreet was taking advantage of Lee’s good faith to suspend a maneuver and assault in which he had no confidence. While Longstreet would produce voluminous denials, many of them from former officers not extremely disposed to be partial to him, that a “sunrise attack order” ever existed, many of his detractors considered this beside the point as well. As Early neatly summarized their arguments, “the testimony General Longstreet has adduced is very far from establishing the fact

⁶⁴ Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*, 160; Jubal A. Early, “Causes of Lee’s Defeat at Gettysburg,” *The Southern Historical Society Papers*, 4: 59; Early, “Reply to General Longstreet’s Second Paper,” *The Southern Historical Society Papers*, 5: 275. 5: 280; Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 83.

that General Lee did not direct the attack to be made by him at a much earlier hour than at which it was made.”⁶⁵

However, Freeman only cites Early and his partisans in his account of Lee’s late night July 1 council of war, and as such, his account seems suspect. Historian Jeffrey D. Wert disagrees with Freeman that Longstreet and Lee had any understanding whatsoever about a morning assault on the Union left. Wert contends that arriving at Cemetery Ridge just after daybreak on July 2, Longstreet discovered that while Lee remained determined to maintain the initiative, he had still not exactly finalized his plans. Wert argues that Lee by necessity had to wait for daylight before even planning an attack, much less launching one, because he needed see how the Union position had changed overnight and scout the terrain over which his troops would be attacking. Not until this informal early morning conference did Longstreet know for certain that Lee would employ the 1st Corps to spearhead his main assault.⁶⁶

Sanger falls somewhere between Freeman and Wert in the argument. He argues that when Lee and Longstreet went their separate ways for the night an implicit understanding existed between them that the 1st Corps should file into line on the Confederate right and make the attack as soon as possible. According to Sanger, Lee neither gave official orders nor designated a time at which Longstreet should launch his attack because it was still too uncertain when a force numerically sufficient enough to execute the plan could realistically be assembled. Ultimately, Sanger concludes (and it is at this point that he departs most significantly from the Early school) that Lee was not even sure that the situation in the morning would render his assault plan still tenable. In other words, the plan was always a hypothetical one, based on contingency and

⁶⁵ James Longstreet, “The Campaign in Pennsylvania,” *The Annals of the Civil War: By Leading Participants North and South*, (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1994), 422; Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 83-84; Early, “Causes of Lee’s Defeat at Gettysburg,” *The Southern Historical Society Papers*, 4: 288.

⁶⁶ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 260.

designed to conform to developments. Lee would have to wait for scouts to report the situation on the field in the morning before he could give final orders.⁶⁷

At this point the historiography becomes hopelessly polarized, and Freeman, as the most prominent pioneering scholar on Lee's army, is mostly to blame. In Freeman's mind, by the morning of July 2 the battle was already lost for the Confederates. Although he provides no source for the dramatic allegation, he insists that overnight Longstreet had been "eating his heart away in sullen resentment that Lee had rejected his long-cherished plan of a strategic offensive and a tactical defensive." Freeman's famous assertion would set the course of much of the historiography concerning Longstreet for a generation. Certainly it provided a convenient narrative for "Lost Cause" devotees: a sulking Longstreet sabotaged Lee's pristine battle plans because they espoused aggressive and not defensive tactics. This reasoning contends that Longstreet's quite successful attack on July 2, which began at 4 PM, might have broken the Union line on Cemetery Ridge had Longstreet been industrious and obeyed Lee's orders in good faith.⁶⁸

Fortunately, Sanger shows that when attempting to adjudge whether Longstreet was guilty as charged or merely a scapegoat at Gettysburg, combining documented facts with logical reasoning makes it feasible to retrace the 1st Corps' progress toward the battlefield on July 2 and the days leading up to it fairly precisely. John Bell Hood, the commander of one of Longstreet's divisions, recalled leaving Chambersburg immediately when the battle began at Gettysburg on July 1 and reaching Seminary Ridge around sunrise on July 2 along with Longstreet's other division under by Lafayette McLaws. Hood emphasized that Longstreet's orders had demanded that he advance his troops as quickly as possible and allowed his men only "two hours" of rest.

⁶⁷ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 172.

⁶⁸ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 73; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 173-174.

According to Hood's account, it would have been impossible for Longstreet to attack at daybreak because Hood's division had only just arrived, Lafayette McLaws' division was only just in front of it, and both were still several hours' march away from where Lee supposed the Union left to be at that time.⁶⁹

Longstreet's column consisted of only Hood's and McLaws' divisions, since, in the absence of cavalry, George Pickett's division was stuck guarding the 1st Corps' trains at Chambersburg. However, the column was still a lengthy one. Utilizing his penchant for making complex logistical computations, Sanger contends that it would have taken three and a half hours to march from one end of Longstreet's formation to the other. In other words, if the first of Longstreet's troops arrived at sunrise, the last could not have arrived until three and a half hours later, and these still would have been miles away from Longstreet's designated jumping-off point. According to Sanger, while Longstreet's men could have gained perhaps an hour if they had marched all night, they were already exhausted from their day march of July 1. By denying them rest, Longstreet would have risked weakening the impact of their thrust when they finally reached the battlefield. Ultimately, Sanger can detect "no unreasonable delay" in the 1st Corps' approach to Gettysburg. Given his rigorous method, it is hard to disagree with Sanger's assessment.⁷⁰

While Longstreet and Hood each acknowledged the alacrity and dogged determination that allowed the 1st Corps to reach Gettysburg as soon as it did, they diverged somewhat concerning Lee's attitude at the time of Hood's arrival. Hood wrote years after the war to Longstreet that Lee was "anxious" for Longstreet to attack in the morning. Longstreet remembered things a bit differently. According to him, Ewell had neglected to report whether he

⁶⁹ Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 56.

⁷⁰ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 73; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 173-175.

had been able to capture Culp's Hill, so Lee sent a staff officer to find out. Longstreet contended that regardless of whether Culp's Hill was in Confederate hands, at this point in the morning Lee was still considering having Ewell launch the main Confederate assault of the day against the Union right. The possibility of having Ewell march south on the Emmitsburg Road to file in to the 1st Corps' right and swamp the Union left, like Sanger contends that Longstreet suggested Lee do the night before, also remained a possibility.⁷¹

At 9 AM, with his staff officer still having not yet returned, Lee set out for the 2nd Corps headquarters to investigate for himself. By this point Hood's division had been on Seminary Ridge for some time, but Longstreet remained at Lee's headquarters in case orders arrived. Both the 1st Corps infantry and artillery were resting. Since Hood had witnessed Lee's anxiousness to attack as soon as possible firsthand, he might have regarded Longstreet's inactivity as being purposefully dilatory (although if he felt that way, he never mentioned it). However, to Longstreet, who still thought there was a reasonable chance that Lee would elect to concentrate on the Union right flank opposite Ewell's 2nd Corps, his commander's indecision provided an opportunity to grant his worn-out veterans some much-needed rest.⁷²

While conflicting accounts of the battle, written often by officers out to destroy one another after the war, make it difficult to exactly pin down Lee's plan as it stood on the morning of July 2, in *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion*, historian Allen C. Guelzo makes a convincing attempt. According to Guelzo, Lee decided to trap the remnants of the part of the Army of the Potomac that had survived the fighting on July 1 much like he had trapped Pope's Army of Virginia at Second Manassas, for he believed that he was still up against only the shattered remains of the 1st and 11th Union Corps. Longstreet would execute a maneuver similar to the one

⁷¹ Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 57; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 363.

⁷² Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 363.

Stonewall Jackson had executed at Chancellorsville. Marching in a wide arc and making sure to stay out of the Federal line of sight, Longstreet would “roll up” the Union line wherever it ended on Cemetery Ridge or Cemetery Hill parallel to the Emmitsburg Road from the south. If Longstreet were to provide the hammer, Ewell would provide the anvil. When he heard Longstreet’s cannons signal the start of the 1st Corps’ attack, Ewell would attack due south. The Union fugitives, fleeing from what was sure to be a heavy blow from Longstreet, would run right into the waiting hands of the Confederate 2nd Corps. With that, Lee would have disposed of more than a third of the Federal infantry and would catch the rest, strung-out, exhausted, and demoralized, in short order. It was a plan beautiful in its simplicity and promising in the fruits it seemed poised to yield.⁷³

But while Lee certainly had many concerns that morning, his most pressing was that he had no idea where the Union left he so desperately wished to attack actually was. It was conceivable that Union reinforcements had extended the Union line down from Cemetery Hill, perhaps even all the way to Round Top. To find out for sure, and thus to see if he could proceed with his plans or must modify them, Lee ordered a reconnaissance of Cemetery Ridge. The difficulty was that cavalry commander J.E.B. Stuart was still missing. In place of Stuart, then, in one of the grandest disasters to ever to befall the Army of Northern Virginia, Lee entrusted his topographical engineer, or chief mapmaker, Captain Samuel Johnston, with the mission. Gone about three hours, Johnston and his small party returned at some point still relatively early in the morning to report their findings. Pointing at Little Round Top, Lee asked: “Did you get there?” and Johnston replied in the affirmative. During his entire reconnaissance he had only seen a handful of Federal cavalrymen. The rest of Cemetery Ridge south of Cemetery Hill and the ground to the west of it—and thus all of the Peach Orchard, Devil’s Den, Little Round Top, and

⁷³ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 235-241.

Round Top—Johnston conveyed to Lee, was clear of Federals. That meant Longstreet’s flank march and attack could proceed as planned.⁷⁴

However, there was a problem with Johnston’s “intelligence”: it was, to the eternal detriment of the Confederate cause, completely false. How Johnston made such a colossal error is still unclear to this day. Confederate detachments had already run into Federals just north of the Peach Orchard, and since the Union 3rd Corps had reached Cemetery Ridge after marching most of the night, from his lofty perch Johnston should have observed at least some Federals straggling up the Emmitsburg Road. Johnston certainly should have seen a good deal of the Union 3rd Corps around Little Round Top since the worn-out members of that unit had slept on the ground just north of the eminence the night before. Finally, if he could not have *seen* the Union 2nd Corps, Johnston should have at least *heard* it, because the route it had taken was well within a mile of the summit of Little Round Top. Apparently, Johnston must have ridden to the peak of some other hill, although in that area there were no hills that any reasonable, observant person could have confused with the Round Tops.⁷⁵

Whatever the cause of his mistake, Johnston’s mistake would doom Lee’s design for assaulting the Union left flank on July 2. Had Johnston’s report been accurate and apprised Lee of the Federal reinforcements, Lee would have realized his plan was obsolete and likely changed strategies. However, since Johnston’s information was wrong, Lee sent forth Longstreet in his wide flank march never realizing that the ground he had designated as Longstreet’s jumping-off point—which he thought to be squarely on the Union left, or southern, flank—would actually be directly in the front of much of the Union army. Lee’s ordered attack “up the Emmitsburg Road”—an assault which, in his mind, would “roll up” the Union left—would actually be

⁷⁴ Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 106-107.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

impossible to execute since the Union line now extended all the way down Cemetery Ridge to Little Round Top. Longstreet's only hope of faithfully executing Lee's orders would be to first launch a frontal assault, break the Union line in half, and then pivot north, parallel to the Emmitsburg Road.⁷⁶

Even before Longstreet discovered the exact location of the Army of the Potomac's left flank, it is clear there existed some misunderstanding with Lee about where it should be. An episode that has long been used by historians to illustrate Longstreet's supposed intransigence illustrates this point well. At some point in the morning, Lafayette McLaws approached Lee and Longstreet to announce the arrival of his division. Lee pointed to a spot on the map, and Longstreet motioned to McLaws the direction in which he wished McLaws to attack. Apparently thinking that the Federal line extended past the spot to which Lee was pointing, Longstreet directed McLaws to attack from west to east, or, in other words, to make a frontal assault. "No," McLaws remembered Lee saying, "I wish [McLaws' division] placed just opposite." Lee now indicated that he wanted McLaws to attack south to north, by the Union left flank, or, in other words, "up the Emmitsburg Road."⁷⁷

McLaws reported that Longstreet was "irritated and annoyed." Freeman interprets Longstreet's reaction as evidence of his frustration that Lee would not let him hijack his plans, but more probably, Longstreet's reaction was evidence of his frustration that, even in the supposed light of the Johnston reconnaissance, no one in the Confederate high command really knew where the Union left was that he was supposed to be attacking. If, of course, McLaws attacked in the direction Lee ordered him to and the Federal line extended past that point, McLaws would suicidally expose his right flank to enfilade fire. Johnston's reconnaissance had

⁷⁶ Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 241-243.

⁷⁷ Lafayette McLaws, "Gettysburg," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 7: 68.

been so amateurish and pathetic that neither Lee nor Longstreet really knew what was going on.⁷⁸

It was a recipe for disaster on the battlefield, but it was also a recipe for the sparking of a historiographical controversy of the first degree. Freeman contends that in the face of such sullen intransigence from Longstreet Lee would have been justified in arresting him. Had Stonewall Jackson been in Lee's place, he certainly would have done so. In Freeman's mind, Lee let the matter drop because his innate nobility inspired him to be uncommonly tolerant of his subordinates' "shortcomings." Here, in attempting to polarize the characters of Lee and Longstreet, Freeman misses a golden opportunity to recognize that what Longstreet was exhibiting to Lee and McLaws was not insubordination; instead, it was genuine, justifiable confusion at a poor tactical plan that had been conceived in ignorance. As opposed to being evidence of a "shortcoming," Longstreet's frustration bespoke of his keen instinct for detecting flawed tactics.⁷⁹

Indeed, if, like Freeman, they do not see Longstreet as giving up on the battle on the night of July 1, many prominent historians see him as giving up on it here. Certainly, by this point on July 2 Longstreet did not want to attack, probably even if Lee's orders had permitted him to envelop the Union left, as Sanger claims he wanted to do on July 1 and as Hood would beg him to do later in the day. In a letter to Longstreet years after the war, Hood claimed Longstreet had told him: General Lee "is a little nervous this morning; he wishes me to attack; I do not wish to do so without Pickett. I never like to go into battle with one boot off." According to Alexander, "Longstreet did not wish to take the offensive. His objection to it was not based at all upon the particular strength of the enemy's position for that was not yet recognized"—although

⁷⁸ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 89-90.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

Longstreet would have surely disputed this point—“but solely on general principles.” Perhaps most damning of Longstreet is the contention of Moxley Sorrel, Longstreet’s chief-of-staff and fierce partisan, that the 1st Corps commander wasted much of the day in “sullen inactivity.” Still, in order to depict Longstreet as “insubordinate” or having “dragged his feet” on July 2, historians either have to rely mostly on impeachable “Lost Cause” sources or make inferences concerning Longstreet’s mindset that are simply unverifiable.⁸⁰

This is largely because the chief piece of evidence at which Longstreet’s detractors point to justify such claims, the fact that Longstreet did not launch his assault on the Union left until 4 PM, is really only evidence of how long it had taken Lee to develop a plan of attack and how pathetic Lee’s reconnaissance had been. According to Longstreet, Lee did not order him to attack at all until 11 AM. Still, Longstreet could not yet start on his flank march because Lee had decided that Longstreet should wait for Evander Law’s brigade to return to Hood’s division, and it would take thirty minutes for it to arrive. In theory, Longstreet could have attacked the Union left without Law’s brigade, but he was already without Pickett’s entire division, and losing even more troops could have potentially fatally weakened his coming thrust. Taking pains to emphasize just how far and for how long Law’s troops marched, Longstreet forcefully challenged the charge that he was killing time. He noted that Law was ordered to the battlefield at 3 AM and led his troops on a march of almost thirty miles, arriving on Seminary Ridge in only eleven hours. Longstreet concluded that this was “the best marching done in either army to reach the field of Gettysburg,” and no prominent primary or secondary sources contest his conclusion.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 57; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 237; G. Moxley Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, Ed. by Bell Irvin Wiley (Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1958), 168.

⁸¹ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 365.

Longstreet's procession to what was supposed to be the Federal left flank *was* a lengthy comedy of errors, but this reflected Lee's lack of sufficient preparation and Johnston's incompetence much more than any sullenness on Longstreet's part. While as they were massed on Seminary Ridge Longstreet's men were only three miles "as the crow flies" from their jumping-off point, "the twists and turns of the mountain trails" to which the 1st Corps soldiers had to keep to disguise their march from Federal scouts actually doubled or tripled this distance. Again employing his talent for logistical computations, Sanger calculates that it should have taken Longstreet at least three hours, and at most six, to reach the ground Lee had designated him to occupy. That means the earliest Lee could have expected Longstreet to go forward was 2 PM, but an attack even at 6 PM would not necessarily have indicated an unreasonable delay. Attacking as he did at 4 PM was about par for the course.⁸²

If one takes into account Johnston's role in the march, Longstreet's achievement in attacking at all on July 2 becomes impressive. Believing, as he was led to, that Johnston was familiar with the area, Lee had appointed Johnston to serve as a guide for Longstreet's march while Longstreet rode with Lee near the middle of the column. However, it soon became apparent that Johnston knew neither where he was nor what he was doing. In a letter written in 1877, Alexander provided a good example of Johnston's haplessness. While preparing his artillery battalions for the coming attack, Alexander came upon the head of Hood's column, stationary and visible to Union observers on Round Top. According to Alexander, Hood's troops "had been instructed to avoid being seen." Now exposed, they sent back to Lee or Longstreet for instructions. Alexander remembered "a long and tiresome waiting," which was only ended by "an order to turn back and take another road." He concluded that the delay and necessary countermarch cost the Confederates three hours. Such an estimate might have constituted an

⁸² Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 176.

exaggeration, but Alexander's point as it concerns the frustrating nature of the 1st Corps' march, besotted as it was by frequent stops and countermarching, is well worth noting.⁸³

Bitterly noting that he was at the mercy of "the reconnoitering officer"—that is, Johnston—since no cavalry was available, Longstreet admitted that "our march seemed slow" and that "there were some halts and countermarches." In the article he wrote for *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, Longstreet referred specifically to the incident Alexander mentioned in his 1877 letter. Longstreet recalled that after being on the road for some time the column stopped, and he rode forward to discover the cause. When he heard it was because his troops were in full view to Federals on Round Top, he ordered the countermarch.⁸⁴

The 1st Corps' marching troubles were still far from over, however. In *Battles and Leaders* Longstreet recalled another delay, to which he responded by employing a tactical innovation to "save as much time as possible." As a result, Hood's division, which had been second in line, became the lead division. While none of the hypercritical historiography mentions this adjustment, none of it challenges Longstreet's contention, either. But while Longstreet's decision saved some time, it did not strike at the root of the constant halts—the fact that Union soldiers could see the Confederates at various twists and turns in the road. Observing "that I could see the [Union] signal station [on Round Top], and there was no reason why they could not see us, it seemed useless" to Longstreet "to delay the troops any longer with the idea of concealing the movement." Thus he went ahead and ordered the advance, and "General Lee at the same time gave orders for the attack to be made by my right."⁸⁵

⁸³ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 365-366; Edward Porter Alexander, "Causes of Lee's Defeat at Gettysburg," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 4: 101-102.

⁸⁴ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 366; Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 340.

⁸⁵ Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 340.

As I have said, Alexander's and Longstreet's testimonies are crucial because they speak to the magnitude of Johnston's incompetency, thus absolving Longstreet of responsibility for the lateness of the hour at which he was finally able to deliver the attack and making his success all the more impressive. The testimonies are perhaps even more remarkable, though, for something else they reveal. By the end of Longstreet's flank march, the Confederates *knew* the Union line extended at least almost to Little Round Top, as evidenced by their spotting of Federal signal officers on top of the larger Round Top. Thus Lee, who at that time was riding with Longstreet, *must have realized the truth about the concentration of the Army of the Potomac on Cemetery Ridge and decided to attack anyway*. This is a staggering inference that many, including prominent historians and high-ranking 1st Corps officers, either failed to make or could not make due to a lack of information, but it must be the correct one, since Longstreet mentions Lee's final orders *after* he mentions sending his divisions forward.

Lee's ordering of an attack on the Federal left when he already knew that it extended to, or almost to, Little Round Top evinces an almost inconceivable stubbornness bordering petulance on his part. Given the topography and the Union position, which I will detail shortly, such an attack was rash in the extreme and almost doomed to fail, no matter the caliber of troops who made it. It would inevitably have to be a frontal assault and would rightly seem suicidal to even Longstreet's most insatiably aggressive subordinates. Lee must have been infuriated that his sure-fire morning plans had gone so badly awry and out of frustration resolved to disregard every tactical consideration and press forward in a desperate swipe at Cemetery Ridge. Such an inference, at least given the evidence at hand, is the only one that can be made.

The inference also goes a long way in explaining Longstreet's actions in the moments before Hood and McLaws went forward, which for a century and a half has been difficult for

those sympathetic to the 1st Corps commander. Longstreet realized as he pressed east from Seminary Ridge in battle formation that the Federals had not only extended their line south almost to Little Round Top; they had also pressed it far forward, to the west, almost all the way to the Emmitsburg Road. While Union 3rd Corps commander Daniel Sickles was supposed to occupy a good deal of the southern portion of Cemetery Ridge, this ground was much flatter than the term “ridge” implies. Consequently, Sickles decided to advance his line far out in front of the rest of the Union army. Now in between the two ridges, his formation took the shape of a concave V with its apex at the Peach Orchard. The advance of Sickles’ 3rd Corps so that it was almost nose-to-nose with Longstreet at the Emmitsburg Road meant that Longstreet would not only have to make one successful frontal assault but two: one to smash in Sickles’ salient and another to break the main Union line that was taking shape behind Sickles on Cemetery Ridge.⁸⁶

Hypercritical of Longstreet for his actions before reaching his jumping-off point, the majority of the historiography manifests outright hostility when detailing his actions upon his arrival. Freeman’s evaluation is the best example. According to Freeman, “Longstreet’s mood now changed: he was determined to carry out orders literally and thereby to put on the commanding general all the responsibility for the failure he anticipated.” But Freeman wants to have in both ways. That is, he abruptly switches from criticizing Longstreet for “insubordination”—for not following what were, in his mind, Lee’s clear, if only implied, instructions—to criticizing him for following Lee’s instructions too closely. As such, Freeman’s analysis, at least concerning this point, makes little sense, and it seems clear that Freeman would have regarded whatever Longstreet might have done on July 2 (save, perhaps, for driving the entire Federal army off Cemetery Ridge) with contempt.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*, 8; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 238.

⁸⁷ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 3: 194.

Longstreet's actions *did* at this point exhibit clear signs of fatalism, but such a fatalism is completely understandable once one realizes that Lee knew of the extension of the Federal left but ordered Longstreet to attack anyway. Longstreet now realized he had no choice but to go forward, no matter the odds. Lee himself had seen these odds firsthand and ignored their implications. What followed, then, was nearly a full-scale mutiny in the 1st Corps high command. Hood's lead brigade commander Law, who had an excellent record in offensive actions, sent out a reconnaissance force which found that the woods around Round Top had concealed the rocky and broken nature of the ground over which his troops would be advancing. According to Law, this discovery "increased fourfold the difficulties of the attack." Infantry formations would break traversing such terrain, and finding level ground on which to place cannons would prove nearly impossible.⁸⁸

Hood, who had already built a legendary reputation in the Army of Northern Virginia with vicious, line-shattering frontal assaults at Gaines' Mill and Antietam, not to mention his flank assault at Second Manassas, already discouraged by Sickles' salient, now saw Devil's Den and thought that proceeding with the assault as ordered was suicidal. According to a letter he wrote Longstreet after the war, he predicted that these "immense boulders of stone, so massed together as to form narrow openings, would break our ranks and cause the men to scatter whilst climbing up the rocky precipice." Recognizing the dangers presented by the double Union line, Hood remembered worrying "that my division would be exposed to a heavy fire from the main enemy in position on the crest of the high range." He concluded "it almost an impossibility to clamber along the boulders" around the Round Tops and break the Union left.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Evander Law, "The Struggle for Round Top," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 321.

⁸⁹ Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 58.

As Hood was seeing the terrain for himself for the first time, Law sent out another reconnaissance team to pinpoint the left of the Union position, which had now extended so far as to be out of sight. Reporting the Union left to be just south of Little Round Top, the scouting party persuaded Law that this flank was indeed the “most vulnerable point” of the Union formation. A few newly-captured Federals only increased Law’s conviction. These prisoners told him that the area south and east “of Round Top [was] insecurely guarded” because no Federals with any authority thought the Confederates would attack there. Furthermore, they claimed that about a mile away existed a functional road that led directly to Round Top’s rear. Extremely relieved and excited, Law rode off to report the discovery to Hood. In the midst of his journey, one of his scouts caught up to him and told him that while the Federals now occupied Little Round Top, Round Top itself was unguarded. All the Confederates had to do to “roll up” the Union line was to occupy Round Top, place artillery on it, and attack north. If Sanger is correct that on July 1 Longstreet was proposing a tactical envelopment of the Union left, such a maneuver and assault would have constituted a realization of his plan.⁹⁰

Even before Law arrived at his side with his revelation, Hood had independently come to the same conclusion. He remembered communicating to Longstreet that “it was unwise to attack up the Emmitsburg road” and pleaded that Longstreet allow him “to turn Round Top, and attack the enemy in flank and rear.” However, Longstreet no longer felt like he had any discretion in the matter. In vain, he had been making the same argument to Lee for almost twenty-four hours that Hood was making to him now. He responded coldly via courier that “General Lee’s orders are to attack up the Emmitsburg Road.” An incredulous Hood sent two more couriers, only to receive the same word-for-word response each time. All the while, Hood was continuing to study the ground, and he detested what he saw more and more. He later explained to Longstreet that

⁹⁰ Law, “The Struggle for Round Top,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 321

“the enemy occupied a position by nature so strong—I may say impregnable—that, independently of their flank fire, they could easily repel our attack by merely rolling and throwing stones down the mountain side.”⁹¹

At some point during the time Hood was sending successive messages to Longstreet, Law arrived and apprised Hood of his discovery concerning the open Union flank south of Round Top. Law would remember that Hood completely agreed with him but insisted that he had peremptory orders to make a frontal assault. An exasperated Law now made a formal protest. In the first place, it contended that “the great natural strength of the enemy’s position” made it unlikely that a frontal assault would succeed. Second, it argued that even if the attack were successful, the Confederates would be too bloodied to capitalize upon their progress. Finally, Law observed that the Federals’ failure to occupy Round Top obviated the need for a frontal assault. An “easy” march around the Federal left would accomplish more with none of the costs. Hood at some point submitted his own “urgent protest”—“the first and only one,” he emphasized later to Longstreet, “I ever made during my entire military career”—but one of Longstreet’s staffers reached Hood before Longstreet ever received it. Law remembered the aide saying that “General Lee’s orders are that you begin the attack at once.” Hood turned glumly to Law and asked, “You hear the order?” and Law began the attack.⁹²

Law later admitted that he “did not know whether [my] protest ever reached General Lee, [but] from the brief interval that elapsed between the time it was sent to General Longstreet and the receipt of the order to begin the attack, I am inclined to think it did not.” That Longstreet never forwarded the protest to Lee only makes sense. As Law put it, “General Longstreet... repeatedly advised against a front attack and suggested a movement by our right flank. He may

⁹¹ Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 58.

⁹² Law, “The Struggle for Round Top,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 321-322; Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 58.

have thought, after the rejection of this advice by General Lee, that it was useless to press the matter further.” However, whether Lee received it or not, Law would come to see the dismissal of his protest as the point at which Gettysburg “was lost to the Confederate arms.” Although Freeman claims that the Confederates lost the battle on the night of July 1, when Longstreet ate “his heart away in sullen resentment that Lee had rejected his long-cherished plan,” the evidence seems better suited to support Law’s assessment.⁹³

As Hood’s lines pressed forward, Longstreet finally met Hood in person. Hood again communicated his dismay at Longstreet’s refusal to let him flank the Union position. This time Longstreet was a bit more sympathetic and at least explained to Hood his rationale for denying the protests. “We must,” he intoned, “obey the orders of General Lee.” A disgusted Hood then rode to the head of his line to lead, as usual, from the front. In the meantime, Longstreet rode off to the ground just opposite the Peach Orchard to supervise McLaws’ advance.⁹⁴

An extremely savage fight ensued, even by Civil War standards. Much has been made of the tactics—or the seeming absence of tactics, according to some—that constituted the attack. Alexander, for one, was astounded by what he saw. He contended that “few battlefields can furnish examples of worse tactics.” However, a closer examination of his statement reveals that Alexander did not blame Longstreet as much as he blamed Lee’s original plan and the topography Lee had insisted the 1st Corps troops traverse. “Made in the peculiar way that [the attack] was,” he wrote, “all of Hood’s men & part of McLaws’s had to bring their front parallel to that of the enemy. This always produces a certain amount of confusion, & especially in broken ground.” This “peculiar” method of advance led to units becoming detached from one another and having their flanks exposed. While he did not completely absolve Longstreet of

⁹³ Law, “The Struggle for Round Top,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 322.

⁹⁴ Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 59; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 370.

responsibility, Alexander noted that “every commanding officer takes great risks when he leaves such important movements without supervision.” In doing so, he implied that Lee should have been on the battlefield himself.⁹⁵

Despite Alexander’s critique, there *was* tactical logic inherent in Longstreet’s assault. The attack was made *en echelon*, which means the attack was begun by the brigade on the extreme end of the line (in this case, Law’s) and followed in staggered succession by the brigades to its left. The goal was to tempt one’s opponent into deploying all his forces against the first assault, thus making the points in the line to be attacked next more vulnerable. This led a large number of contemporary observers and subsequent commentators to believe that the attack had been made “piecemeal” when there was actually a calculated method behind Longstreet’s forwarding of his troops into the battle.⁹⁶

A good example of someone confused in this manner is Joseph Kershaw, a brigade commander in McLaws’ division. Kershaw remembered that upon crossing the Emmitsburg Road he was just hearing the drum of Barksdale’s brigade to his left “beat the assembly.” In other words, Kershaw’s brigade had already advanced some distance before Barksdale’s even began to advance at all. Kershaw recalled ruefully that this signaled to him that he “should have no immediate support on [his] left, about to be squarely presented to the heavy force of infantry and artillery at and in the rear of the Peach Orchard.” However, what Kershaw failed to realize was that this was Longstreet’s plan all along. Because Kershaw attracted the bulk of Federal reinforcements in the area, Barksdale managed to seize the Peach Orchard from Union hands. When Kershaw concluded that the reason Longstreet’s command could not take Cemetery Ridge was because of a lack of “simultaneous movement and cooperation between the troops

⁹⁵ Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 240-241; Alexander, “Causes of Lee’s Defeat at Gettysburg,” *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 4: 101-102.

⁹⁶ Sears, *Gettysburg*, 298.

employed,” he could not have been further from the truth. What he saw as a lack of “simultaneous movement and cooperation” was actually the textbook unfolding of an *en echelon* attack. Contrary to thwarting Longstreet, it allowed him to make as much progress as he did. Anyway, given the terrain, an advance in unison by both of Longstreet’s divisions would have scarcely been possible.⁹⁷

Before Barksdale could take the Peach Orchard at the apex of Sickles’ V, Hood had to charge across the ground to McLaws’ right. In that section of the field “the enemy was tenacious,” Longstreet remembered. “His skillfully-handled batteries swept through the passes between the rocks[, and] the more deadly fire of infantry concentrated as our men bore upon the angle of the enemy’s line.” Law remembered the maelstrom similarly: “We soon came upon their first line of battle,” he wrote after the war, “running along the lower slopes of the hills known as Devil’s Den... The fighting soon became close and severe.” The *New York Times* succinctly agreed with the two Southerners. It claimed that “the battle now became perfectly fearful[, and] the armies engaged each other at very short range.” Law’s troops were easy targets for Union infantrymen and the cannons on Cemetery Ridge. Still, Longstreet’s men made steady progress despite the odds. Law recalled proudly that “with rapidly thinning ranks, the gray line swept on, until the blue line in front wavered, broke, and seemed to dissolve in the woods and rocks on the mountain-side.” Despite taking on heavy casualties, Hood’s division was doing better than Longstreet, Hood, or Law had expected.⁹⁸

However, at this point a Union shell struck Hood, inflicting a wound that would permanently disable his left arm, and an ambulance took him from the battlefield. Now Law took

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; Kershaw, “The Struggle for Round Top,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 338; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 177.

⁹⁸ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 370; Law, “The Struggle for Round Top,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 324; *The New York Times* quoted in *The Charleston Mercury*, July 10, 1863.

command of the division. He was gradually advancing through Devil's Den, but merciless fire from Union troops on Little Round Top was raking his right flank. To protect it, he extended his line to the right and threw in the rest of his division's brigades to fill the resulting gaps in his line. Along with hard fighting, such tactics allowed Law to take Devil's Den and the area around it in less than an hour. Anxious both to maintain his momentum and continue protecting his right flank, he now made the fateful decision to send the right portion of his line to attack Little Round Top, the importance of which, astoundingly, neither side had yet recognized. Delivering "their dreadful fires from rocks, depressions, and stone fences," in Longstreet's words, the Federals fell back as reinforcements raced to meet Law before he reached Little Round Top's crest. The correspondent from *The Charleston Mercury* reported the Union resistance similarly. "Our pursuit was checked by sudden hills, entrenchments and rifle pits," he contended, "behind which the enemy took refuge and made a determined stand."⁹⁹

At just about that time, around 5:30 PM, Longstreet unleashed McLaws on the Peach Orchard. The Federals responded with a galling fire. Still, while Kershaw's South Carolinians were initially thwarted, Barksdale's Mississippians quickly overran the Union position. Having thoroughly crushed Sickles' salient, part of Barksdale's brigade now wheeled to the north. Finally, something at least akin to an attack "up the Emmitsburg Road" was underway. All the while, in contrast to his usual custom of giving delegating authority to his subordinates once the guns had opened, Longstreet stayed near the front of Barksdale's line, displaying what Sorrel would call a "splendid" and "inspiring" presence. However, while this decision to lead from the

⁹⁹ Law, "The Struggle for Round Top," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 324; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 370; *The Charleston Mercury*, July 17, 1863.

front showcased Longstreet's admirable indifference to his own safety, it would eventually come under heavy scrutiny.¹⁰⁰

Continuing in the fashion of *en echelon*, once Barksdale's attack picked up steam William Wofford's brigade of Georgians charged forward. To its right, Kershaw's brigade, which had taken on a fearful amount of casualties from Federal artillery fire at the outset of its attack, now supported by Paul Semmes' Georgians, was finally making headway through the Wheatfield. Moreover, in the midst of the growing carnage, a shell horribly mangled Sickles' right leg. To prove to his surviving troops that he was still alive, Sickles blew long columns of smoke from a freshly lit cigar. Not long after, Union surgeons would amputate his leg, and Sickles would leave the war for good. So far, Longstreet's ferocious attack had pulverized the entire Union 3rd Corps and a bevy of units sent to support it. Almost all the ground to which Sickles had so proudly advanced only hours before now lay in Confederate hands. At 7 PM, Longstreet signaled to Lee that he was "doing well."¹⁰¹

Alexander would remember the moment wistfully. "When I saw [Sickles'] line broken & in retreat," he wrote, "I thought the battle was ours." Caught up in the moment, the 1st Corps chief artillerist pledged to his men that they would secure Confederate independence before sunset. However, when he got to the crest of the Peach Orchard, Alexander saw that he was dreadfully mistaken. He realized "it was not the enemy's main line we had broken. That loomed up near 1,000 yards beyond us, a ridge giving [Federal troops] good cover behind it & endless fine positions for batteries." Instead of fugitives, he saw seemingly ubiquitous Union reinforcements. Even though it had ended in the rout of his entire corps, Sickles' decision to

¹⁰⁰ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 275-276; Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 168.

¹⁰¹ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 275-276; Sears, *Gettysburg*, 301; Joseph Kershaw, "Kershaw's Brigade at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 335; Arthur James Lyon Fremantle, *Three Months in the Southern States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 131.

advance to the Peach Orchard was paying priceless dividends for the Army of the Potomac as a whole. Much of the force of Longstreet's attack was already spent, and there were still at least two Union corps waiting for him on Cemetery Ridge.¹⁰²

With his keen instincts for the ebb and flow of battle, Longstreet perceived that his advance could not possibly go much further than the eastern edge of the Peach Orchard. Law, on the other hand, did not realize this and implored his men to go forward. They clambered up the sides of Little Round Top and pushed the advanced Federal line further toward the crest despite incurring terrible casualties. Still, with Union forces now manning the entirety of the promontory, by the time they reached the crest these men had finally met their match. They had run roughshod over Sickles' corps, but now they faced fresh, determined reinforcements who shot them down in droves. The *Charleston Mercury* confirmed the heavy Confederate sacrifice, acknowledging "our loss before the position was very great." Several times the Southerners retreated, reformed, and tried again, but eventually, with half or more of their comrades dead or incapacitated, they gave up the fight and fell back to the base of Little Round Top. The extreme Union left, that part of the line that Lee had been so desperate to seek out and crush all day, had been resoundingly delivered.¹⁰³

Things by now were not going much better on McLaws' portion of the line. Kershaw for a moment won the Wheatfield and a good deal of Rose's Woods, but desperate Union counterattacks there made by 2nd Corps reinforcements sent him on a hasty retreat. Barksdale's men advanced over a mile, but as dusk approached, the exhausted Mississippians began to waver. Barksdale begged his men to continue forward, but they stayed put, and soon a Union infantryman mortally wounded him with a shot in the stomach. If Law's contest on the crest of

¹⁰² Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 240.

¹⁰³ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 277; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 199; *The Charleston Mercury*, July 17, 1863.

Little Round Top marked the peak of the progress of Hood's division, Barksdale's fatal injury marked the peak of McLaws'. The 2nd and 5th Union Corps, as well as most of the 6th, were now entirely on the field, with their purpose being the obliteration of Longstreet's two spent divisions. "While Meade's lines were growing my men were dropping," Longstreet recalled ruefully. "We had no others to call to their aid, and the weight against us was too heavy to carry." Or, as he expounded in the *Annals of the Civil War*: "We received no support at all, and there was no evidence of co-operation on any side. To urge my men forward under these circumstances would have been madness, and I withdrew them in good order to the peach orchard." Longstreet's massive thrust at the Union left was over.¹⁰⁴

Actually, although Longstreet did not know it because he was leading his own corps from the front, under orders from Lee Hill's 3rd Corps had charged the center of the Union position in an incompetent continuation of Longstreet's *en echelon* attack pattern. Though at its peak the attack briefly won the crest of Cemetery Ridge near the middle of the line, it was poorly supported and quickly crumbled in the face of a massive Union counterattack. Hill's attack late on July 2, as opposed to Longstreet's, was quintessentially a piecemeal one. Ewell, too, had gone forward at 6:30 PM, but his attack on the Federal right was half-hearted and allowed Meade to shift troops to his embattled left flank. Along with a chorus of other voices, Lee's chief-of-staff Walter Taylor would deplore the lack of coordination between Lee's three corps that characterized the assaults. He observed later that "the whole affair was disjointed. There was an utter absence of accord in the movements of several commands."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Sears, *Gettysburg*, 289-292, 318; Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 325; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 373; James Longstreet, "Lee in Pennsylvania," *The Annals of the Civil War: By Leading Participants North and South*, Ed. by Alexander McClure (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 425.

¹⁰⁵ Sears, *Gettysburg*, 322-323; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 278; Walter Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, ed. by James I. Robertson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962).

For this “utter absence of accord” Sanger partially blames Longstreet, arguing that he should have remained behind the lines to supervise the larger Confederate assault from beginning to end. Sanger claims it “impossible” to justify the chief of such a large contingent of soldiers personally leading the charge of a tiny fraction of it while leaving the rest of his men to fend for themselves. According to Sanger, this is how “Longstreet lost control of the battle as a whole.” It is strange that no other prominent element of the hypercritical historiography attempts to hold Longstreet accountable for this momentous decision, when his choice to personally lead a section of McLaws’ line was his most egregious mistake of the day, if not his only one.¹⁰⁶

However, despite assertions to the contrary, Longstreet’s *en echelon* tactics played out admirably, especially given the terrain and the numerical strength of the enemy the Confederate 1st Corps faced. However misguided Longstreet’s choice to lead from the front might have been, coordinating the entire Confederate assault was *not* his responsibility; instead, it was Lee’s. But besides receiving one message and sending one, the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia remained silent and to a large degree ignorant of how the battle was transpiring on a tactical level. Although Lee partisans like Gordon and Taylor would never admit it, ultimately Lee was to blame for the Southern failure to break the Union line and especially for the lack of coordination between his three corps. On the second day at Gettysburg, Lee launched an attack which had an infinitesimal chance of complete success to begin with and proceeded to squander even the small chance at victory that remained by being a virtual non-participant in the battle.¹⁰⁷

Longstreet wrote after the war that his assault on the Union left “had accomplished little toward victorious results,” and Pfanz terms it “a limited success.” *The New York Herald* judged the day’s fighting a draw, saying “the fighting was desperate; but there was no decisive result.

¹⁰⁶ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 179.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 178; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 278; Piston, *Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant*, 58.

The Union troops... lost some [ground] on one of the wings and the enemy still held Gettysburg.” But while it did not achieve total victory—the Union line, that is, had been jarred but not broken—by any reasonable standard Longstreet’s attack had constituted an unprecedented and monumental, if qualified, accomplishment. The numerical odds Longstreet had faced had been tremendous. While it is difficult to determine the exact number of Federal soldiers involved given how many units Meade shifted to his left throughout the afternoon, Longstreet boasted that his “seventeen thousand” soldiers (although most historians contend he only went in with around 14,000 troops) had grappled with the entire Army of the Potomac. In what is probably a more dispassionate estimate, Pfanz avers that “eleven Confederate brigades fought twenty-two Federal brigades,” not counting the parts of some other brigades Meade siphoned off from other corps. In total, at least 30,000 Union troops saw action on the Union left on July 2.¹⁰⁸

Still, in an anomaly that was almost unheard of in Civil War battles since the assaulting forces were almost always inherently more vulnerable than the defending ones, the exposed, outnumbered Southern attackers had inflicted many more casualties than they had sustained. While Longstreet’s loss was heavy—of the approximately 14,000 men he led into battle, he claimed he lost 6,000, Wert asserts he lost over 4,000, and Pfanz puts the number at 4,400—his soldiers had killed, wounded, or captured between 5,000 and 7,000 Federals. According to Pfanz, this astoundingly high figure was “an indication of the lethal character of the Confederate assault and testimony to the accuracy of Longstreet’s boast” that the 1st Corps’ July 2 assault constituted “the best three hours’ fighting ever done by any troops on any battle-field.” In just two days at

¹⁰⁸ Longstreet, “Lee’s Right Wing at Gettysburg,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 341; *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1863; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 200; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 373; Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 425.

Gettysburg, the Army of the Potomac had lost upwards of 20,000 men, or more than a quarter of its strength.¹⁰⁹

However, defying heavy numerical odds and inflicting a grievous number of casualties did not constitute the extent of Longstreet's July 2 accomplishments. In the ground to its front across the Emmitsburg Road the 1st Corps had confronted a topographical nightmare. It nevertheless had managed to pry Federal defenders from positions even John Bell Hood had deemed "impregnable" and seize prime ground for artillery that would be essential if Lee wished to continue his attacks the next day. Most conspicuous in this regard was the Peach Orchard, which Alexander, Sickles, and especially Lee thought might be the key to the entire Union position on Cemetery Ridge. In capturing it, the Southerners had secured control of the high ground on and around the Emmitsburg Road for the rest of the battle. Moreover, Hood's troops had also taken Devil's Den and now stood at the base of Little Round Top. Were Lee to decide to attack the Union left again on July 3, his possession of Devil's Den would ensure that his infantrymen would start out much closer to Cemetery Ridge than they would have had the right of the Confederate line still stood on Seminary Ridge. The Southern press was usually woefully inaccurate in its portrayal of the battle, but *The Richmond Enquirer* was right when it said that "McLaws and Hood had pushed their line well up the slope on the right."¹¹⁰

The problem with Longstreet's tactical success on July 2 is that it convinced Lee to attack again on July 3. In this way, the Confederate successes of July 1 and July 2 had a sort of self-immolating "domino effect." As Longstreet put it, "our success of the first day had led us into battle on the 2d, and the battle on the 2d was to lead us into the terrible and hopeless slaughter on

¹⁰⁹ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 373; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 278; Pfanzen, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 429, 431. Since casualty estimates are usually for the battle as a whole, as opposed to specific engagements on specific parts as a battlefield, pieces of these estimates are my own, based on a combination of elements from secondary sources.

¹¹⁰ Freeman, *R.E. Lee*, 103-105; Pfanzen, *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, 425; *The Richmond Enquirer*, July 24, 1863.

the 3d”—that is, “Pickett’s Charge.” Lee admitted as much in his official report. He claimed that Longstreet’s progress convinced him that “with proper concert of attack, and with the increased support” from Alexander’s artillery in the Peach Orchard and Devil’s Den, “we should ultimately succeed.” *The Richmond Enquirer* agreed, stating “we now had the key to the enemy stronghold, and, apparently, the victory was already won.” In language that would become infamous, Lee “determined to continue the attack[, and] the general plan of attack was unchanged.” In other words, he would persist in frontal assaults against the entire Army of the Potomac on Cemetery Ridge. *The New York Herald* would accurately describe the next day’s attack as “a last resort [and a] forlorn hope,” and its result would be as horrendous as it is well-known.¹¹¹

Lee’s grand mistake on July 3 still should not detract from Longstreet’s impressive attack on July 2. Longstreet had been able to exert no influence on Lee on the first and second days at Gettysburg, and he would certainly exert no influence on Lee on the third day. It is unfortunate that any one day of a battle, even one as decisive as July 3, should overshadow a performance as masterful as Longstreet’s on July 2. Wert is correct when he argues that “July 2, not July 3, 1863, was the pivotal day at Gettysburg [because] the Army of Northern Virginia almost achieved a victory.” To finally put it in a proper perspective, perhaps it is best to compare Longstreet’s July 2 thrust to another, more famous Confederate assault. Stonewall Jackson’s May 2, 1863, attack on the Union right flank at Chancellorsville seems a good candidate for such a comparison, especially since Longstreet’s July 2 flank march and assault was originally intended to be made in a similar fashion, both began late in the afternoon, and both were successful enough that Lee followed them up with frontal assaults on prepared Union positions the next day.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Longstreet, “Lee’s Right Wing at Gettysburg,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 341-342; Lee, *The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee*, 578-579; *The Richmond Enquirer*, July 24, 1863; *The New York Herald*, July 6, 1863.

¹¹² Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 279.

At Chancellorsville, Jackson attacked with his whole corps and routed one Federal corps, caught completely unaware and resting with arms stacked, and put to flight approximately half of another before nightfall. At Gettysburg on July 2, on the other hand, Longstreet routed the equivalent of approximately two corps against an enemy which was not only totally prepared for his assault, but actually wanted him to attack exactly where he did. Had Lee's subsequent frontal assaults at Chancellorsville failed, and had his subsequent frontal assaults at Gettysburg succeeded, it seems almost certain that Longstreet's assault, and not Jackson's, would be remembered as the Army of Northern Virginia's more ferocious blow. But events dictated otherwise, and Jackson's assault became legendary while Longstreet's became at best, marginalized, and at worst, misrepresented to seem like a failure. Such, however, can be the nature of history. Individuals' accomplishments can be magnified or distorted depending on events completely out of their control. Immediately after the Battle of Gettysburg, the consensus among Northerners was that Longstreet was dead, killed on July 3 in Pickett's Charge. *The New York Times* reported that "the rumor" had been "confirmed by prisoners." However, unfortunately for the Union cause, Longstreet was still very much alive, and in the next year his offensive tactical maturation would culminate spectacularly on two more bloody battlefields.¹¹³

¹¹³ For a thorough narrative of Stonewall Jackson's May 2, 1863, attack at Chancellorsville, see Stephen Sears, *Chancellorsville* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998); *The New York Times* quoted in *The Charleston Mercury*, July 10, 1863.

4 Chapter 3: Chickamauga, September 20, 1863

James Longstreet's "order to advance came at last," Union General Gates B. Thurston wrote years later, and "the deep Confederate lines suddenly appeared. The woods in our front seemed alive. On they came like an angry flood." About eight hours later, the two wings—Longstreet's left and Leonidas K. Polk's right—of the reinforced Army of Tennessee finally converged, having completely swept the field of Union soldiers. Daniel Harvey Hill remembered wistfully that "the cheers that went up when the two wings met were such as I had never heard before, and shall never hear again." The Southerners had achieved their most decisive major victory of the war, and as Hill concluded, "Longstreet was the organizer of the victory on the Confederate side."¹¹⁴

Despite the emphatic nature of the Confederate triumph, the Southern victory at the Battle of Chickamauga, fought from September 18-20, 1863, would ultimately prove pyrrhic. Although the Federals were forced to retreat to the safety of Chattanooga's fortifications after their defeat, soon, due to a combination of Ulysses S. Grant's ingenuity and Braxton Bragg's bungling, they would emerge from their mountain stronghold and put the Confederates to flight. That—and the fact that the battle was fought in Georgia, and not Virginia—almost assuredly explains why even though Chickamauga proved to be the second bloodiest battle of the war, Civil War era historiography pays it relatively little attention in comparison to battles like Gettysburg.¹¹⁵

If the purpose of professional history is to cater to those trying to understand the war in a broad, strategic sense, such a historiographical trend is understandable. Chickamauga is *not* an especially important battle for those only interested in a most basic appreciation of the

¹¹⁴ Gates P. Thurston, "The Crisis at Chickamauga," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 663; Daniel H. Hill, "Chickamauga—The Great Battle of the West," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 661, 665.

¹¹⁵ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 211.

progression of the war because it only briefly slowed but did not reverse Federal momentum in the Western theater. Within a year Sherman would crush most substantial Confederate resistance in the West, conquer Atlanta, and be well on the way to completing his “March to the Sea.”

But if the general historiographical tendency to somewhat neglect Chickamauga is understandable, it is still unfortunate for those seeking to establish Longstreet’s war record and his contemporary reputation in the Confederacy as a subordinate commander who was consistently successful in the employment of offensive tactics. Even more than Second Manassas, on August 30, 1862; Gettysburg on July 2, 1863; and the Wilderness on May 6, 1864, Chickamauga stands as the preeminent example of Longstreet’s superior tactical acumen in action. It was, as Thurston would call it, “a masterpiece of tactics,” for Longstreet proved his capacity for coordinating and executing assaults to be superior to any other commander’s on either side during the war. Relegating the battle and thus Longstreet’s accomplishments in it to secondary importance egregiously distorts the historical record. Outside of their misrepresentation of Longstreet’s performance at Gettysburg, some historians’ complicity in the marginalization of Chickamauga is most responsible for the durability of the historiographical myth which contends Longstreet was either at his best on the defensive or even manifested an aversion toward aggressive tactics in general.¹¹⁶

To rectify this marginalization and distortion as much as possible, in accordance with this thesis’ principle argument that appreciating Longstreet’s role as a wing/corps commander requires a heightened focus on the battles in which he launched his most devastating assaults, this chapter seeks to analyze Chickamauga independently of its ultimate effect or lack of effect on the outcome of the war. Like the other chapters, it will proceed with an eye to Longstreet’s tactical preparations and achievements, ones that in this case precipitated an unprecedented and

¹¹⁶ Thurston, “The Crisis at Chickamauga,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 663.

unduplicated Confederate victory. However, this chapter will be unique in that it will reference the professional historiography less in comparison to the other chapters.

Historians dealing with both theaters simultaneously can often discover it difficult to both navigate the historiographical wealth, often bordering excess, concerning Eastern battles and find a sufficient amount of historiographical material with which to engage on Western ones in order to produce a balanced study. The tide of opinion among works prominent in the relatively sparse historiography that does exist concerning Longstreet's role at Chickamauga varies little. Albeit sometimes only in passing, all of these histories acknowledge that Longstreet's attack proved determinative at Chickamauga. The most prominent differences between these secondary sources concern whether they acknowledge or ignore his innovative tactical scheme that decided the battle in favor of the Confederates. Certainly no prominent works contend that Longstreet's performance proved detrimental to the Southern cause, as at least some do concerning all three other battles featured in this study.¹¹⁷

While this thesis is primarily concerned with tactics and battles as opposed to strategy and campaigns, however, including an outline of the Confederate government's reinforcement of the Army of Tennessee, at least a cursory narrative of the campaign this shift of manpower inspired, and a general summation of the first two days of the Battle of Chickamauga is indispensable to put Longstreet's climactic attack on September 20, 1863, in proper context. Less than a month after his bloody repulse from Gettysburg, Robert E. Lee was already urging Jefferson Davis to allow him to take the fight once again to the Army of the Potomac. However, Longstreet foresaw many promising alternatives for the Confederate cause. He would remember after the war that as the Army of Northern Virginia was inactive in the late summer of

¹¹⁷ See Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet* and Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*.

1863 he thought about “the progressive work of the Union army in Tennessee towards the northern borders of Georgia.”¹¹⁸

This “progressive work” to which Longstreet was referring was the William Rosecrans’ Union Army of the Cumberland’s 1863 advance through Tennessee and conquest of Chattanooga, a key railroad hub and mountain fortress on the Tennessee-Georgia border. Longstreet noted in frustration that “other armies of the South” were watching these “tremendous threatenings” as “spectators,” giving little thought as to how they could help. As Longstreet presciently told Confederate President Jefferson Davis and virtually anyone else who would listen, “the successful march” of any Union army “through Georgia would virtually be the finishing stroke of the war.” With the surrender of Vicksburg, which had fallen to Ulysses S. Grant only hours before Pickett, Pettigrew, and Trimble had launched their ill-fated thrust toward Cemetery Ridge at Gettysburg on Lee’s orders, already having virtually cut the South in half, the fall of Georgia would cut the South into thirds. In Longstreet’s mind, such a calamity would “leave but little time for the dissolution” of the Confederacy.”¹¹⁹

In the aftermath of Gettysburg Longstreet was not giving into despair, as many historians like to portray him. The seriousness of the problem induced him to write Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon to elucidate his concerns, but he believed he had a “remedy,” which if promptly and properly executed could thwart Union plans, put the North on its heels, and quite possibly change the course of the war. This “remedy” “was to order the Army of Northern Virginia to defensive work” and send pieces of other armies to defeat Rosecrans before he could receive reinforcements.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 301; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 433.

¹¹⁹ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 433; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 197.

¹²⁰ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 433-434; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 197.

In the meantime, Bragg, who had retreated from central Kentucky to northern Georgia without ever decisively losing a major battle, had finally taken the initiative against Rosecrans. Reinforced in late July in accordance with Longstreet's plan by the 18,000 troops under Simon Bolivar Buckner defending the Confederate Department of East Tennessee, Bragg could now muster approximately 60,000 men for battle even before Longstreet's 1st Corps arrived. Finally possessing the numerical superiority, the Army of Tennessee now sought to bring the Army of the Cumberland to battle and destroy it.¹²¹

Because after the fall of Chattanooga on September 4 Rosecrans was convinced that the Army of Tennessee was a beaten military entity, the Confederates would not have to wait long for their opportunity. Usually cautious, Rosecrans now boldly divided his army into thirds. Though his entire plan of advance was too complex to relate in its entirety here, basically he sought to keep Bragg in place with two parts of his force in lines that slanted northeast to southwest through the northwest corner of Georgia while he threatened Bragg's left, or southwestern, flank with the third part. Rosecrans reasoned Bragg would fear for his supply line when he realized a substantial Union contingent was lurking off his left flank and fall back into central Georgia. The plan made sense given that Bragg had retreated under even the most mildly precarious circumstances throughout his stint as commander of the Army of Tennessee up to this point.¹²²

Bragg had not only been reinforced, however; the terrain now also played to his advantage. Dominated by precipices, the most protracted of which are two steep and extended crests running northeast to southwest known as Lookout Mountain and Missionary Ridge,

¹²¹ Peter Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 28-29; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 195.

¹²² Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 198; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 31-33; *The Charleston Mercury*, October 3, 1863.

northwest Georgia was decidedly not conducive to offensive operations. Given his plan, Rosecrans' columns would necessarily be spread out, but since only three good roads—one for each detachment—existed on which he could execute his broad maneuver, should one column meet with danger it would be exceedingly difficult to bring the other two to its rescue. Furthermore, should the Confederates attack any Union contingent once it emerged on the southeastern side of the steep ridges, it would inevitably have to fight with its back to the mountains. If defeated, there would be precious few avenues of retreat, and any such detachment might very well be captured whole or destroyed in detail. In addition to being based on the false assumption that the Army of Tennessee was already demoralized to the point where it could not be an effective fighting force, Rosecrans' plan was strategically reckless. Since the ground occupied by the Confederates to his southeast was much flatter than the ground he was currently traversing, it seemed they should have comparatively little trouble in consolidating their forces, attacking and destroying one of the Union columns, and then turning their attention to the remaining two-thirds of Rosecrans' badly dispersed army.¹²³

But destroying the Army of the Cumberland would not prove so easy. A lengthy comedy of errors ensued in which Bragg and his subordinates allowed isolated detachments of Rosecrans' army to escape several times. A frustrated Bragg now resolved to make a frontal assault on his enemy when it had finally reunited just north of Chickamauga Creek. Like Lee on July 2 at Gettysburg, Bragg decided to assault the Union left flank, turn it, and "roll up" the rest of Union line. In the fashion of *en echelon*, each of his brigades would join the fray shortly after the brigade on its right went forward. In this way, he eventually hoped to engage his whole army. The key difference between Lee's plan on July 2 at Gettysburg and Bragg's plan, which would go into effect on September 18, was that Lee had envisioned Longstreet wheeling left and

¹²³ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 29-31; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 200.

pushing the Federals north, while Bragg envisioned the commanders of his right wing wheeling left and pushing the Federals south. His goal was to seize the Lafayette Road, a thoroughfare running north-to-south just to the rear of the Federal position, and interpose the Army of Tennessee between Chattanooga and Rosecrans, thus depriving the Army of the Cumberland of its supply base and forcing its members to either starve, surrender, or fight at an extreme disadvantage.¹²⁴

However, faulty intelligence ruined Bragg's best-laid plans, and the Battle of Chickamauga quickly devolved into a series of piecemeal, extremely sanguinary, and utterly futile frontal assaults by the Confederates. No one could impugn Bragg's determination to break the Union line, but in Longstreet's mind, that determination was part of the problem. He wrote after the war that the location of the Army of the Tennessee's attacks had been so consistent that by the 19th Rosecrans' knew the Confederate plan as well as Bragg did. Finally, however, late on September 19 the Southerners made a dent in the Union line. As *The Atlanta Southern Confederacy* put it, by nightfall the Army of Tennessee had "driven" the Army of the Cumberland "between two and three miles, [but] the stubbornness with which [the Federals] yielded left [the Southerners] no grounds upon which to lay claim to a victory." Still, the costly progress stood poised to pay off. Rosecrans and his subordinate in charge of the Federal left, General George Thomas, now became afraid for their northern flank. Though many more Confederates than Federals had been shot on the first two days of the battle, this fear would yield dividends to the Southerners the next day when Rosecrans dealt with what he now believed to be a crisis on his left.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 222-224; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 201; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 308.

¹²⁵ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 439; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 225; *The Atlanta Southern Confederacy* quoted in *The Richmond Enquirer*, October 9, 1863.

While the troops on Bragg's right were being slaughtered in droves just east of the Lafayette Road, Longstreet finally approached the battlefield. Bragg sent no officer to greet or guide him, and, after narrowly escaping capture near the battlefield, Longstreet's party only managed to find Bragg's headquarters around 11 PM. Though neither general recorded exactly what passed between them, Longstreet's chief-of-staff Moxley Sorrel wrote that the meeting "lasted about an hour, and in that time the plan of battle for the next day was definitely settled." In Sorrel's opinion, "an hour was quite enough to settle the plan and the details, since nothing could be simpler than the operation proposed for Rosecrans' destruction."¹²⁶

To accommodate Longstreet's rank, Bragg now scrapped his previous command structure and divided the Army of Tennessee into two wings. The "Right Wing"—the one menacing the Union left flank—would be commanded by Leonidas K. Polk, while the "Left Wing" would be commanded by Longstreet. At least in theory, corps commanders retained their authority, but they were supposed to report to the lieutenant general in charge of the wing of which they were a part instead of directly to Bragg. But aside from this change, Bragg saw no need to make further adjustments. Ignoring his flawed tactics, Bragg believed a lack of coordination among his subordinates had doomed most of his assaults on September 19 to failure. He would proceed with his *en echelon* attacks.¹²⁷

But if Bragg refused to make tactical adjustments, Longstreet did not. As successful as his July 2 *en echelon* attack at Gettysburg had been given the odds it faced, Longstreet appreciated that it had ultimately failed to break the Union line on Cemetery Ridge. And although he had opposed it from the beginning, at least nominally he had been in charge of coordinating the Pettigrew-Pickett-Trimble assault, or "Pickett's Charge," on July 3. Because

¹²⁶ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 438; Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 193; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 308.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

Lee could only muster approximately 15,000 men for that assault, which covered a wide area, the attacking force had possessed little depth. Although somewhat miraculously small portions of the Confederate attacking force had managed to pierce the Union line, no reinforcements were on hand to exploit the breakthrough, and the attack had been resoundingly repulsed. Longstreet's experience at Gettysburg had convinced him that to successfully break a Union line and exploit that breakthrough an attack needed to be made on a narrower front and with exponentially greater depth. While he recognized that every tactical situation was unique, he now generally preferred an assault column to a broad assault line. If a deep column pierced a Federal line, once the front lines had been decimated or become exhausted (as they inevitably would, given Civil War era firepower), the relatively fresh lines behind them could continue the momentum of the attack.¹²⁸

However, before Longstreet could execute such innovative tactics, he first faced the daunting task of figuring out exactly what forces were under his command, where they were positioned, and how to effectively organize them. The good news was that since Bragg planned for Polk's wing to advance before Longstreet's, according to the dictates of *en echelon*, Longstreet would have a few hours after daylight with which to work. After a brief night's sleep, he rode to the front line. The first division commander he found was Alexander P. Stewart. Although Stewart's division belonged to Buckner's corps, which now belonged to Polk, Bragg had transferred it to Longstreet to increase the Left Wing's strength. Stewart informed Longstreet that he had lost contact with the rest of Buckner's corps, which formed the left flank of the Right Wing. In order to find the Right Wing, protect his right flank, and unite the Army of Tennessee, Longstreet ordered Stewart to march to the north, or right. After the maneuver, when Stewart

¹²⁸ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 311-312; Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 206-207; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 316.

discovered that his line protruded about half a mile west of Polk's line, Longstreet ordered him to refuse his right flank until the Right Wing advanced far enough to protect it. He would make even the most minor tactical adjustments to increase his chances of ultimate success.¹²⁹

After leaving Stewart, Longstreet rode to find his most trusted subordinate, John Bell Hood. Although Hood had sustained a grievous arm wound at Gettysburg, he was already back in the field. The veterans of Hood's division had been the first of Longstreet's troops to arrive at Chickamauga, and although they had not broken the Union center on September 19, they still pushed it back nearly a mile toward the Lafayette Road. To his surprise, the previous night Hood witnessed a lack of confidence on the part of Bragg's ranking subordinates, but when Longstreet joined him shortly after daybreak on September 20, he sensed in the commander of the Left Wing the confidence which had for so long defined the Army of Northern Virginia. Longstreet assured Hood that together, they "would *of course* whip [Rosecrans] and drive him from the field." Hood wrote in his memoirs that Longstreet was "the first general I had met since my arrival [in Georgia] who talked of victory."¹³⁰

More corps and division commanders now joined Longstreet, and he began to finalize his plans. While his line was six hundred yards away from Rosecrans' front, woods covered the gap between his wing and the opposing Union troops. A frontal assault would be much less exposed to artillery than Pickett's Charge had been. A soldier named Tom Brotherton, who had grown up in the area and knew the terrain, now informed Longstreet that his family's farm, at present occupied by Federals, lay aside the Lafayette Road. Upon receiving this intelligence, Longstreet

¹²⁹ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 440; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 310; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 315-317.

¹³⁰ Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 62-63.

designated the Brotherton farm as his objective. If he could capture it, the Union line would be split in two.¹³¹

Eight brigades formed Longstreet's massive attack column. To ensure that it was both narrow and deep, Longstreet decided to make it two brigades wide and four brigades long. Bushrod Johnson's division, with two brigades in front and one in reserve, would provide the assault's spearhead. Hood's division would be close behind it. McLaws' division, which had just reached the front line and was being commanded by Joseph Kershaw, would bring up the rear. If all went according to plan, Thomas Hindman's division on Johnson's left would press the southern half on the cracked Union line with William Preston's division in close support once the larger attack had broken through. Thus, while its success would rely on tactics much different from the tactics he employed on July 2 at Gettysburg, Longstreet's massive thrust at Chickamauga still retained some elements of the *en echelon* philosophy. Such a unique combination of innovation and reliance on textbook methods was unprecedented and unduplicated in the Civil War and demonstrated Longstreet's unmatched ability to learn from past experiences and capacity to think on a tactically sophisticated level.¹³²

But if Longstreet had learned tactical lessons from Gettysburg, he had learned a lesson in leadership as well. Longstreet had always preferred to lead from the front, and, as we have seen, he had ridden far out in front of McLaws' division during its attack on July 2, 1863, to encourage his men forward. As we have also seen, historian D.B. Sanger criticized this decision, arguing that it prevented Longstreet from adequately coordinating the larger Confederate advance. Though he never mentioned it, Longstreet now appreciated his value behind the lines more than he had at Gettysburg. He decided he would not personally lead the grand attack column. He

¹³¹ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 310-311; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 316.

¹³² Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 311-314; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 316; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 206-207.

would instead make sure that Hindman and Preston advanced on the column's left in good order. Putting all his faith in Hood, he ordered him to lead all eight brigades in the initial assault.¹³³

However, as perfect as Longstreet's plan might have been, according to Bragg's orders he could not begin to execute it until Polk's entire Right Wing had become engaged. Bragg had given orders for Polk to attack at daybreak, but the sun rose, hours passed, and Polk did not go forward. At 8 AM an incensed Bragg rode to find Polk and demand an explanation, only to discover the Right Wing commander reading a newspaper. As *The New York Herald* put it, "contrary to the universal expectation on our side, the enemy again allowed the early hours, so well suited to offensive maneuvers, to pass away undisturbed by the sounds of battle." The delay would prove extremely costly.¹³⁴

When Polk finally did go forward at 9:30 AM, his troops entered a maelstrom and sustained awful casualties. Yet as catastrophic as it was to Polk's infantrymen, the assault quickly took a heavy psychological toll on the Union high command. Although Thomas was winning the battle on the left, the sheer fury of the waves upon waves of Confederate attackers, in addition to the severe losses he had sustained the day before, brought an already anxious Thomas close to panic. Oblivious to the deep attack column Longstreet was amassing across from the Union right, Thomas was convinced the battle would be won or lost on his sector. D.H Hill recalled that Thomas "called loudly" for help and that Rosecrans obliged him. In fact, Rosecrans had been sending brigade after brigade all through the morning and would, he assured Thomas via courier, "reinforce him with the whole army if necessary." He now sent an order to

¹³³ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 311, 321; Hood, *Advance and Retreat*, 63.

¹³⁴ Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 228-229; *The New York Herald*, September 26, 1863.

General Tom Wood to move his brigade north from the middle of the Federal right to reinforce the left flank.¹³⁵

What resulted was a first-rate military disaster. By sheer coincidence, Wood's brigade was not only manning the front line, but it was also occupying the Brotherton farm—the very place Longstreet had designated as Hood's target. Having already been upbraided by superior officers twice during the campaign, Wood now faced a nearly impossible decision. He could plainly see Longstreet's skirmishers, who had been edging toward his line throughout the morning. Should he obey Rosecrans' order, he would be opening a brigade-wide gap in the face of what he was confident would be a substantial Confederate attack. Should he disobey it and remain put, he risked a court-martial, and if the Union left collapsed, he might very well be held responsible for losing the battle.¹³⁶

Had the order given Wood any discretion, he almost assuredly would have at least consulted Rosecrans, who, at that time, was only six hundred yards away. But the order was quite clear and peremptory. Wood elected to follow it. Although historian Peter Cozzens contends that Wood's indignation at being previously chastised made him "petty" and that Wood should have stayed where he was until he could "clarify the order," such a scathing indictment seems unduly harsh. Officers are trained to follow orders, even ones with which they disagree. Instead, Rosecrans should bear most of the blame for the colossal mistake. Although he had not, like Bragg, reorganized his command structure mid-battle, he had consistently ignored the chain of command to funnel reinforcements to Thomas as quickly as possible. As such, he became confused about the location of individual units and the broader formation of his line.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 360-367; Hill, "Chickamauga—Great Battle of the West," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 655.

¹³⁶ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 360-367.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

He would pay a heavy price for his confusion. As the Right Wing's assault was fizzling out around 11 AM, Longstreet sent a messenger to Bragg urging him to unleash him at once at the Union right. However, once again Bragg's revamped command structure caused uncertainty, and his proclivity to communicate poorly hampered any general progress along the Confederate line. In this case, Bragg's bungling threatened to jeopardize Longstreet's entire plan of assault. Without informing Longstreet, as he should have done in adherence to the new chain of command, the commander of the Army of Tennessee bypassed him and ordered Stewart's division, which composed Longstreet's right, to advance upon the Union entrenchments. The breakdown in command portended catastrophe. As with most large-scale assaults during the Civil War, Longstreet's attack depended a great deal on timing. If the successive thrusts at the Union line were uncoordinated by a guiding hand, the Left Wing would enter the battle piecemeal and almost surely be bloodily repulsed. It now seemed to Longstreet that Bragg's overnight reorganization was practically obviating the wing commanders it had supposedly been put in place to empower. Stewart was already heavily engaged "before word reached me that the battle had been put in the hands of division commanders," Longstreet remembered years later.¹³⁸

Nevertheless, Longstreet did not display the sullenness or defeatism at Chickamauga that his critics would accuse him of having displayed at Gettysburg when circumstances out of his control but still crucial to his tactical success had gone awry. Stewart had already attacked, but Hood, Hindman, and Preston remained in place, and Longstreet wanted to restrain them, in accordance with the *en echelon* element of his plan, until he was sure the time was right to charge. The problem was that Longstreet had no idea if Bragg had already ignored the chain of command with them as he had with Stewart and directly ordered each of them to attack at once.

¹³⁸ James Longstreet to William Brent, October 1863, in *OR*, XXX: II: 288; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 312; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 447.

Now it was Longstreet's turn to face a momentous choice. He could submit to what seemed to be Bragg's wishes, let responsibility for the Left Wing fall to his division commanders, and attempt later to absolve himself of the responsibility for what almost assuredly what would have been the resulting disaster. Conversely, he could defy Bragg's wishes, whether they had been expressly ordered to his division commanders or only implied, assert his authority, and coordinate the Left Wing's advance in accordance with his own plan.¹³⁹

In a decision that almost assuredly determined the outcome of the battle, Longstreet chose the latter course. While he probably based his decision in part on his contempt for Bragg's judgement and authority, his experiences at Gettysburg also likely influenced him to utilize discretion and assume control of the Left Wing's attack and responsibility for its fate. At Gettysburg, on both July 2 and July 3, he had followed Lee's orders to the letter. His inflexible acquiescence had resulted in unnecessarily high casualties and less than victorious results on July 2 and in the near annihilation of the forces under his command on July 3. The fact that he had not ordered or even supported the order of those assaults provided him little consolation. Adhering to Bragg's new decision to bypass the chain of command, which was, on Bragg's part, more like an admission of his own haplessness at coordinating assaults than a tactical plan, inevitably also meant abandoning most tactical considerations. That, in turn, meant almost a certain repulse for the Left Wing. Longstreet thus immediately sent messengers to Hood, Hindman, and Preston to wait for his signal to attack.¹⁴⁰

For Hood, the signal was not long in coming. Sanger contends that Longstreet "sensed instantly [the] sudden weakening of the enemy line" precipitated by Wood's disastrous withdrawal from the Brotherton Farm, but while it is possible that Longstreet's skirmishers

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 447.

reported Wood's about-face, no one ever mentioned it. Instead, it seems that Longstreet benefitted, at least to some degree, from luck. While if the attack had proceeded according to Bragg's whimsical timing it almost assuredly would have been repulsed, in accordance with the *en echelon* component of his own plan Longstreet was more concerned with preventing an immediate advance by Hindman and Preston than he was with preventing an immediate advance by Hood. Without Hood's column to anchor it Stewart's left flank would be exposed, so Hood needed to move forward fairly quickly. Still, Longstreet's timing was impeccable, no matter how much chance might have favored him. According to *The New York Herald*, "the breaks, temporarily caused by the shiftings of divisions, from one point of the [Union] line to another, were so promptly perceived and turned to advantage by the enemy that they proved fatal, and cost the loss of the day."¹⁴¹

At 11:10 AM Longstreet ordered Hood to charge. Johnson's division took the lead. Despite the fact that the works to their front were unoccupied, Johnson's lead elements immediately took on heavy fire from both sides of the gap in the Union line. As Longstreet had expected, Johnson's "leading brigade was decimated," but the next brigade in line took its place and continued on. Within minutes, Johnson captured over a thousand Union soldiers and twenty-seven cannons. More importantly, he captured the Brotherton Farm and a chunk of the Lafayette Road, the keys to the entire Federal position in Longstreet's mind. The Union line was irreparably broken, and even though Johnson was taking on heavy casualties, he still had two fresh divisions behind him to exploit the breakthrough.¹⁴²

However, now Longstreet faced another crucial choice. As he expected he would do, he had split the Union line in two, but he had not split it in half. While some of it still stood to the

¹⁴¹ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 206; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 368-369; *The New York Herald*, September 26, 1863.

¹⁴² Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 447; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 207.

south, most of it stood to the north, opposite Stewart's embattled division and Polk's beleaguered Right Wing. Bragg's original orders had been for whatever units that eventually broke the Federal line to pivot left, or south, and thus drive the Army of the Cumberland away from Chattanooga. But Bragg's plan had been predicated upon the assumption that the Confederate breakthrough would occur on his right, much further north than it actually did. Longstreet now found himself squarely on the right flank of most of Rosecrans' army. If he wheeled right, or north, instead of south as Bragg's original orders had stipulated, he would be poised to roll up this newly-created flank and disperse the majority of the Federal forces. Even if Longstreet had wished to consult Bragg (which he probably did not) as to the the best course of action, he lacked the time, as Bragg was miles away.¹⁴³

Accordingly, Longstreet ordered Hood to pivot north and transform his massive frontal assault into a massive flank assault. At the same time, he ordered Hindman to attack the Union forces directly in his front, which up until now had made up the Rosecrans' right flank. He would keep Preston in reserve. The decision was unquestionably the right one, as it would take pressure off the Right Wing and put what remained of the Army of the Cumberland in a vice that had the potential to close quite rapidly and capture thousands of Union soldiers if Polk could renew his efforts to the east of the Lafayette Road. However, by pushing the Federals north instead of south, Longstreet's pivot would also drive the Union soldiers back toward, and not away from, Chattanooga. Though the Confederates would still have many opportunities to block the narrow mountain passes north of the battlefield and would indeed cut the Army of the

¹⁴³ Hay and Sanger, *General James Longstreet*, 206-207; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 449; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 234.

Cumberland's line of retreat north on the Lafayette Road, the Federals still retained some hope of an ultimate escape.¹⁴⁴

In a matter of minutes, the right-center of the original Union line had completely dissolved, and the soldiers who had composed it quickly devolved into fugitives fleeing north and west. As *The Atlanta Southern Confederacy* described it, the Federal soldiers "gave up the job and a terrible panic ensued. They retreated pell mell, running wildly through the woods, leaving everything behind, and if they could have found any one to whom they could have surrendered, thousands of them would have given themselves up as prisoners." While *The Atlanta Southern Confederacy* would provide its readers many erroneous contentions concerning the battle, on this point it was largely accurate. However, it is more difficult to substantiate the newspaper's claim that "five hundred [Union soldiers] tried to surrender to a woman."¹⁴⁵

While he might not have been able to capture all the Federals that survived his initial onslaught, Longstreet captured a good deal of them. Then he turned his attention to the new Union right flank north of the Brotherton farm. There, Union division, brigade, and regimental commanders were frantically trying to refuse the main line in order to present a new front, this one perpendicular to the Lafayette Road and facing south, to the jubilant waves of Confederate attackers. In a clearing known as Dyer's field, Federals supported by a large number of cannons made a desperate stand. Hood's division, under the command of Evander Law now that Hood was commanding the entire column, plunged forward into the maelstrom. The brigade on its right, under Henry Benning, charged the reeling Union soldiers and broke them, only to be sent backwards by a Union counterattack on its right flank. Benning panicked and told Longstreet that he was "ruined" with all of his men killed, but Longstreet calmed him down, assuring

¹⁴⁴ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 449; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 313.

¹⁴⁵ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 397; *The Atlanta Southern Confederacy* quoted in *The Richmond Enquirer*, October 9, 1863.

Benning that he could find at least one surviving member of his brigade. Recomposed, Benning relocated his survivors and began blasting away at the Union ranks. Eckenrode and Conrad claim that in such moments of “ruin and death,” Longstreet was at his best.¹⁴⁶

However, the Confederate onslaught was about to sustain its most devastating casualty. At Gettysburg on July 2 a shell had knocked Hood from his horse and out of the fight in the first minutes of his attack. Throughout the early stages of his column’s attack at Chickamauga, Hood had ridden between the various divisions, shouting encouragement and giving instructions. Johnson had seen the Federal cannons hovering over Dyer Field from a thousand yards away and asked him for orders. “Go ahead,” Hood had responded simply, “and keep ahead of everything.”¹⁴⁷

But at 12:30 PM, with those same cannons ripping his infantry to shreds at close range and several impromptu, spirited Union counterattacks thwarting the momentum of his best veterans, Hood sensed that the battle was reaching its climax and decided to lead from the front, as was his custom. With Hood spearheading its advance, Kershaw’s fresh brigade of McLaws’ division plunged into Dyer field. Almost immediately, a musket ball shattered Hood’s right femur just below the hip. Although Longstreet’s best doctors pronounced Hood’s wound a mortal one, they still amputated his leg later in the afternoon, and against all odds, Hood survived. Still, Longstreet needed a replacement with Dyer Field still hanging in the balance. With the 1st Corps commander still some distance behind the lines, Hood’s wounding decimated

¹⁴⁶ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 397; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 448; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 314; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 233.

¹⁴⁷ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 375.

the Confederate command structure for some time and proved highly detrimental to the Southerners' progress.¹⁴⁸

In the end, though, Longstreet's tactical innovation of employing a deep column to sustain his breakthrough proved the difference in Dyer Field. After a brief controversy under a galling Federal fire in which Johnson demanded that Kershaw provide the date of his last promotion to prove that he, Kershaw, outranked him, Kershaw assumed command of the column. To many Union defenders indulging in wishful-thinking, the new uniforms sported by Kershaw's fresh South Carolinians in the front of the Confederate line appeared "dusty blue," and the Federals held their fire as the Confederates approached. Kershaw used the time to extend his line west and flank the Union right lying on the crest of a knoll in the field. Then his entire line opened fire. The Union right hastily collapsed, and the rest of the Federal formation quickly followed suit. Kershaw had emphatically seized Dyer Hill, and the Union survivors raced north toward the nearest high ground behind them, an "open spur" about half a mile away called Snodgrass Hill.¹⁴⁹

Kershaw's victorious column was close in pursuit. However, it was becoming ever more disorganized, especially without the wounded Hood to guide it and Longstreet still behind the lines. Moreover, federal firepower had severely thinned its ranks. Still, believing they only faced a skirmish line of demoralized Union survivors, at 1 PM veterans of Kershaw's own brigade surged up Snodgrass Hill. After some slight initial progress, they came under heavy fire from more rallied Federals occupying a more distant crest two hundred yards to the north. Finding his brigade at least for the moment outnumbered, Kershaw retreated to some nearby woods to await help from the next brigade of McLaws' division closet to the front. This brigade was commanded

¹⁴⁸ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 408-412; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 448; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 314-315; *The Charleston Mercury*, September 24, 1863.

¹⁴⁹ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 412-416.

by Benjamin Humphreys, the Mississippian who had replaced William Barksdale after the latter's death at Gettysburg. Sight of the glint of Federal cannons and Union bayonets in the distance on Snodgrass Hill, however, caused Humphreys to balk, leaving Kershaw, who had by now decided to try again, alone in his second swipe at the new Union position.¹⁵⁰

More of a succession of crests than a single prominence, Snodgrass Hill was proving perfect for a defense in depth by the growing crowd of Union survivors. Though Kershaw's brigade took the first two crests, an avalanche of Northern missiles from the third crest eventually sent it reeling, and Kershaw, at least for the moment, called off his attempt to break what he assumed would be the Army of the Cumberland's last stand. At the same time, Humphreys messaged Longstreet that he had scouted Snodgrass Hill but found it impossible to take, even though he had never tried in the first place, to the disgust of his veterans. Longstreet took his statement at face-value and ordered him to assume the defensive until help could arrive, and the din of battle faded into silence for the time being.¹⁵¹

By that time Rosecrans was long gone from the battlefield. Swept away by the mob of soldiers on the Union right fleeing Hood's irresistible column, he had, at least he claimed, planned to join Thomas on the left end of what remained of his line. However, hearing evidence that the Confederates were pushing further and further north, Rosecrans lost his nerve. He reasoned that his left could very well be on the verge of being annihilated, if it had not been swamped already by the Confederate tide. "I had attempted," he tried to explain in his official report, "to rejoin General Thomas... [but] became doubtful whether the left held its ground." Remarkably, at noon, less than an hour after Longstreet had launched Hood's column from the woods opposite the Brotherton Farm, Rosecrans, by his own admission, left for Rossville, sent

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 424-425; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 315.

¹⁵¹ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 425-430.

word for Thomas to assume command, and otherwise left his entire army to fend for itself. Despite his claims that he departed for Rossville to ensure a clear line of retreat for his army to Chattanooga, in reality the overwhelming number of blue-clad, panicked fugitives he met on the road north convinced Rosecrans that Bragg had crushed Thomas long before he ever reached the small town on the Georgia-Tennessee border. His flight for all practical purposes marked an ignominious end to the career of a man whom before the war Hill had insisted was one of the three most capable Union commanders.¹⁵²

After his confrontation with Kershaw in Dyer Field over who would succeed Hood, Johnson had, somewhat pettily, separated his division from the larger column. While Kershaw continued north, Johnson went west. He soon ran into Hindman, whose division had swept away all the Union resistance west of Dyer Field near the Widow Glenn's house, Rosecrans' former headquarters, with what Longstreet termed "a well-directed front and flank attack." Johnson and Hindman decided to advance north in concert and attack one of the westernmost ridges on Snodgrass Hill. Luckily, considering that Johnson had ceased communicating with Kershaw, when the brigade under Patton Anderson forming his extreme right advanced it made contact with Kershaw's extreme left. His flank secure, just before 2 PM Johnson attacked the Union right flank now anchored on Horseshoe Ridge. Even though Hindman had yet to arrive on his left to support him, he drove the exhausted and outnumbered Union soldiers through the woods and over the last crest of the ridge.¹⁵³

At this point Johnson stopped. His plan was to wait for one more fresh brigade and then wheel right, or east, and drive the now collapsed Federal right into the rear of what remained of

¹⁵² Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 402-404; William S. Rosecrans, "Report of Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans, U.S. Army, commanding the Army of the Cumberland, *OR*, XXX: I: 60; Hill, "Chickamauga—Great Battle of the West," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 638; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 207.

¹⁵³ James Longstreet to William Brent, October 1863, in *OR*, XXX: II: 60; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 388, 433-436.

the Union left still facing Polk's wing east of the Lafayette Road. If Johnson could execute this maneuver—and there certainly seemed to be no force on the field left to stop him—with Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry blocking the Lafayette Road to the north, Bragg would have the principal Union force in the Western theater literally surrounded. The entire Army of the Cumberland, or at least what was left of it, would have no choice but to surrender or be utterly annihilated.¹⁵⁴

However, just as Johnson's triumphant veterans emerged over the edge of Horseshoe Ridge, a fresh Federal battle line came barreling toward them. These were not the troops that had fled just moments before; instead, they were fresh troops, and to the astonishment of Johnson's division, they were attacking. Unfortunately for the Confederates, Rosecrans had given up on the battle so completely that he had failed to tell the commander of his 5,400-man reserve corps, Gordon Granger, to stay put at Rossville. Observing the battle from high ground, on his own initiative Granger had thrown his column into motion toward Chickamauga Creek. Just now emerging from the north, he had originally intended to support Thomas in his fight on the Union left. However, he had marched to the place where the sounds of battle were the loudest, which by 2 PM was the new Union right flank on Snodgrass Hill/Horseshoe Ridge.¹⁵⁵

Crashing unceremoniously into Johnson's line with bayonets fixed, Granger's lead division plowed through the Confederates who had advanced the furthest. To cover their retreat, Kershaw renewed his attack. At the same time, Hindman arrived on Johnson's left to help. With support now on both flanks, Johnson's troops steadied, and for the better part of an hour a mutual mauling ensued amidst the swaying battle lines. Ultimately, however, Johnston's division, which had been fighting consistently for the past four hours since it had spearheaded Hood's assault,

¹⁵⁴ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 438.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 440-443; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 236.

proved too bloodied and exhausted to hold Horseshoe Ridge. Just before 3 PM, the last of its members fell or retreated south behind the corpse-covered crest. “Kershaw,” Longstreet summarized in his official report, had “made a most handsome attack upon the heights at the Snodgrass house simultaneously with Hindman and Johnson, but was not strong enough for the work.”¹⁵⁶

Satisfied with Granger’s progress and still unsure of how many Confederates were swarming to the south, Thomas elected not to pursue. Instead, he reformed his lines on the crest of Horseshoe Ridge. Whatever joy and relief he and his hard-pressed survivors might have felt, however, the scene in woods, farms, and pastures all around them was a somber one. Though over six hundred men of the reserve corps had been killed or otherwise incapacitated in staving off the Confederates’ attempt at a *coup de grace*, Granger’s raw troops had emphatically delivered Thomas’ right flank. In doing so, they had also saved, at least for the time being, what remained of the Army of the Cumberland and left “a thousand of [Longstreet’s] brave men,” in Hill’s words, dead or dying on the field. *The Atlanta Southern Confederacy* certainly betrayed its bias when it contended that “to visit the field and see what strong positions the Yankees held... will impress every one with the fact that Southern heroism is without a parallel,” but the magnitude of the Southerners’ sacrifice was undeniable.¹⁵⁷

It is for his activity, or lack thereof, during this crucial period in the battle—from 1 PM, when Kershaw began his first ascent up Snodgrass Hill, to 3 PM, when Granger plunged down the slope of Horseshoe Ridge, driving elements of Kershaw’s, Johnson’s, and Hindman’s divisions before him—more than any other period in any other battle in which he participated

¹⁵⁶ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 444-450; Hill, “Chickamauga—Great Battle of the West,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 661; James Longstreet to William Brent, October 1863, in *OR*, XXX: II: 289; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 209.

¹⁵⁷ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 450-451; Hill, “Chickamauga—Great Battle of the West,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 661; *The Atlanta Southern Confederacy* quoted in *The Richmond Enquirer*, October 9, 1863.

that Longstreet deserves the most criticism. As we have seen, at 1 PM Longstreet had been at the northern end of Dyer field urging Humphreys to crush what remained of the Federal resistance, so it is documented that he was close to the developing crisis. He could have ridden forward to supervise the assaults of his division commanders, who only recently had been feuding over who should replace Hood as head of the column. Instead, however, Longstreet rode south, away from the fighting and back toward the Brotherton Farm. On the way, he encountered Buckner and together, with their staffs, the two lunched on a “spread of Nassau bacon and Georgia sweet potatoes.” All the while, his soldiers were falling by the hundreds below, on, and beyond the crests of Snodgrass Hill.¹⁵⁸

Two theories could explain Longstreet’s odd behavior. The first is that he had grown complacent, an interpretation which historian Jeffery D. Wert seems to support. Wert describes Longstreet as laughing and joking during lunch, apparently believing that one last thrust, which Kershaw could organize himself, would take the final Union position. Wert writes that “Longstreet underestimated the numerical strength and grit of the blue-coated defenders and knew nothing of the squabbling between” his division commanders. If Wert’s contentions are true, then Longstreet’s dismissive attitude toward the ongoing struggle is inexcusable. All he had to do was ride or send a staff officer to somewhere in the vicinity of Snodgrass Hill to learn that the battle was far from over. It is curious, even to the point of astonishment, that elements of the historiography usually hypercritical of Longstreet do not capitalize upon this golden opportunity to castigate him.¹⁵⁹

Historians H.J. Eckenrode and Bryan Conrad’s *James Longstreet: Lee’s War-Horse*, a book which relentlessly lambastes Longstreet’s actions even in some battles in which he had his

¹⁵⁸ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 316; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 455; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 450-451.

¹⁵⁹ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 316-317.

most success and makes fantastic inferences concerning his character which could never be proven, actually contends Longstreet's decision to eat a leisurely lunch at the height of the battle highlighted his most *commendable* qualities. These historians contend it demonstrated his "imperturbability" amongst "scenes of bloodshed." The only explanation for such an inexplicable absolvment, seemingly universal in the (admittedly limited) historiography concerning Longstreet's role at Chickamauga, is that, as I have mentioned before, historians often neglect the most consequential details and nuances of the battle.¹⁶⁰

The other theory that could explain Longstreet's odd behavior in the early afternoon of September 20 is that he was consciously adhering to Lee's custom of allowing his subordinates to oversee the most intricate details of a battle without getting in their way. This interpretation meshes nicely with the contention that Longstreet had learned from his July 2 experience at Gettysburg that coordinating from behind was sometimes better than leading from the front. However, there are several problems with excusing Longstreet's conduct on these grounds. First of all, between 1 PM and 3 PM while he was not leading from the front, Longstreet was not coordinating from behind either. Instead, he was simply eating lunch.¹⁶¹

Second, given his unparalleled instincts Longstreet should have realized that Hood's wounding decreased the chances of a coordinated, climactic Confederate assault and accordingly should have personally taken charge of the column. Third, Longstreet should have also realized that Lee's custom of delegating authority might be efficient in an army in which the subordinate commanders were used to cooperating and knew their roles, but that the custom could not possibly succeed in the Army of Tennessee given its "schismatic command structure," which Bragg had further confused with his last-minute decision to reorganize the army into wings.

¹⁶⁰ Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 233-235.

¹⁶¹ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 317; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 450-451.

Finally, as we will soon see, immediately after 3 PM Longstreet reassumed direct supervision of his wing. Such a seemingly whimsical about-face suggests that there was little method behind Longstreet's choice of bacon and sweet potatoes over the welfare of his beleaguered soldiers.¹⁶²

Ultimately, however, these two theories are not mutually exclusive, and both probably explain his curious attitude to some extent. The overwhelming and unprecedented nature of his breakthrough at the Brotherton farm and his instant exploitation of that breakthrough probably induced Longstreet to feel overconfident to the point of slight complacency. And even if Longstreet was not consciously mimicking Lee's command style, it seems reasonable that he retained at least some of Lee's influence and that this influence encouraged him to take a more "hands-off" approach. Still, whatever the correct explanation(s) might be, Longstreet's two hours long virtual neglect of his wing stained his otherwise spotless record at Chickamauga and stands at odds with his usually unimpeachable conduct on battlefields in general.

Longstreet recalled in his memoirs that around 3 PM, while Buckner and he were still eating, a messenger from Bragg summoned him to headquarters. The two men had much to discuss. According to Bragg's official report, around 2 PM he had discovered that Longstreet's wing had met with heavy resistance on Snodgrass Hill and been repulsed. Unfortunately, the rest of Bragg's report is somewhat cursory, so historians are forced to rely exclusively on Longstreet's version of the fateful conversation. According to Longstreet, he first explained to Bragg the course of Left Wing's fighting up to that point, of which Bragg was startlingly ignorant. He especially emphasized the essentiality of his tactical decision upon breaking the Union line at the Brotherton farm to wheel north instead of south, in opposition to Bragg's original orders. He then enumerated his accomplishments. The Left Wing, Longstreet told Bragg, had "taken some

¹⁶² Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 317; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 454.

forty or more” cannons and “cut off and put to disorder” the entire right half of the Union line, taking pains at it went to cut off the Federals’ potential lines of retreat.¹⁶³

Then, as he had done at Gettysburg, Longstreet offered his superior officer frank advice. By this point supremely confident in his tactical conception of what was transpiring and what was still possible on the battlefield and having virtually obviated Bragg’s original plan anyway with his northward wheel, Longstreet urged Bragg to “abandon the plan for battle by our right wing.” If Bragg instead ordered Polk to defend his own position and send a large detachment to reinforce the Left Wing as it now stood west of the Lafayette Road and south of Snodgrass Hill and Horseshoe Ridge, Longstreet assured him that he could swamp the troublesome Union position, chase down the surviving fugitives, and prevent the left half of the Union line, being held in position by the reduced Right Wing, from retreating north.¹⁶⁴

However, to Longstreet’s astonishment Bragg was having none of it. Longstreet remembered later that Bragg “was disturbed” by Polk’s failure “and was little prepared to hear suggestions from subordinates” for alternate maneuvers or other attacks. Astoundingly, Bragg actually believed he was *losing* the battle. “There is not one man,” both Longstreet and Hill reported Bragg to have said during his midday conference with his Left Wing commander, “who has any fight left in him.” Still, Bragg did not order or even suggest that Longstreet retreat or stop attacking. Persistent in his perplexing indifference to the affairs of his Left Wing, Bragg said nothing more but simply rode back to his headquarters. By doing so, he was sacrificing what

¹⁶³ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 451-452; Braxton Bragg to Samuel Cooper, October 1863, in *OR*, XXX: II: 23-25.

¹⁶⁴ Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 235; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 452.

was undoubtedly the Confederacy's best opportunity of the entire war to destroy a major Union army, and while historians can speculate as to his motives, they remain unclear to this day.¹⁶⁵

Longstreet wrote in his official report that his men had no choice now but to continue their assaults without reinforcements. Despite Bragg's refusal to support him, the situation still held some promise, for Longstreet realized that if he captured Snodgrass Hill and Horseshoe Ridge, he would "be complete master of the field." With those positions in hand, he could very well capture most of what was left of the Army of the Cumberland without the Right Wing firing another shot. Despite the repulse of the forces which had composed Hood's column, seizing the Union Snodgrass Hill/Horseshoe Ridge position before nightfall still seemed very practicable.¹⁶⁶

Spearheaded by Preston's fresh division, which Longstreet had held in reserve all day for just such a moment, the attack would be renewed. On his right flank near the Lafayette road, close to what was now the apex of the entire Confederate line, Longstreet ordered Buckner to place a large battery on the highest ground he could find. This battery could enfilade the currently idle, entrenched Union left opposing Polk, inflicting severe casualties upon it and perhaps even rendering its position untenable, and at the same time decimate any reinforcements on their way to Snodgrass Hill. Despite the fact that Longstreet would be launching a frontal assault with traditional battle lines, as opposed to a deep column like he had used earlier in the day, he was still not neglecting tactical considerations.¹⁶⁷

At 4 PM Preston's division deployed in a line of battle, marched over and to the right of Kershaw's exhausted brigade, and charged up Snodgrass Hill. Though it made some limited progress, by 5 PM it had sustained severe casualties and been fought to a standstill. To Preston's

¹⁶⁵ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 452; Hill, "Chickamauga—Great Battle of the West," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 659; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 236; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 317.

¹⁶⁶ James Longstreet to William Brent, October 1863, in *OR*, XXX: II: 289; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 471.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

left, refusing to call off his assaults even though many of his troops who had not been shot by this point were too demoralized to come out from the cover of the woods and ravines in which they had been taking refuge, Johnson attacked Granger yet again on the southwestern edge of Horseshoe Ridge. Granger's force also had become too disorganized and demoralized to fight effectively, however, and the Confederates got the best of the pathetic engagement. With Johnson's division emerging victorious to his left, Preston pressed forward once again. By 6 PM only a few Federals held tenuously to the northernmost crest on Snodgrass Hill.¹⁶⁸

In the meantime, to the surprise of many, a little after 3 PM Polk decided to renew the Right Wing's attack against the Federal left. The Federals on the left, as we have seen, were well-entrenched, and Polk's wing again took on heavy casualties. However, this time it made steady progress, and by 6 PM the entire left half of the Union line retreated west of the Lafayette Road. Bragg—or more accurately Longstreet and Polk, since Bragg was now out of communication with his subordinates—had what was now Thomas' Army of the Cumberland in a rapidly-closing vice. It was much like the one into which Lee had put John Pope's Army of Virginia at Second Manassas. But like Pope at Second Manassas, Thomas was managing to squeeze out of the open end, even if it was a tight fit. As early as 4:30 PM, he had decided to retreat. This retreat, by necessity, would be a fighting withdrawal, an extremely dangerous proposition on a Civil War era battlefield, but Thomas felt he had no choice.¹⁶⁹

At 4:45 PM, seeing Joseph Reynolds' division, the force which connected the two halves of the concave Union line, begin to withdraw north up the Lafayette Road under heavy artillery fire, Sorrel hastened to launch a pursuit. He strongly advised Stewart, whose division had stood opposite Reynolds, to attack, but Stewart refused. He would only go forward, Stewart told

¹⁶⁸ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 472-484.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 488-490; Hill, "Chickamauga—Great Battle of the West," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 661; *The Charleston Mercury*, September 23, 1863.

Sorrel, if ordered by Longstreet. Sorrel explained that he was certain that Longstreet would have given the order had he been on the scene, but Stewart still demurred until Longstreet himself, in “thunderous tones,” expressly ordered the attack he felt any reasonable division commander would have undertaken on his own accord a good deal earlier.¹⁷⁰

The delay cost the Army of Tennessee its final chance to capture or destroy the majority of what was left of the Army of the Cumberland. Though Stewart had still managed to make prisoners of hundreds of soldiers composing the tail end of Reynolds’ column, by advancing up the Lafayette Road just minutes before it fell to Polk’s onslaught the column’s head managed to reinforce and extend the extreme end of Thomas’ left flank. Thus stiffened, the Union soldiers who were facing east finally put a stop to Polk’s progress as night began to fall. The two wings of the Army of the Cumberland would not completely collapse upon one another, and the surviving Federals, though they were now massed in a fairly haphazard manner northwest of the Lafayette Road, still retained possession of some narrow mountain passes on which they could retreat to Chattanooga. In the words of *The New York Herald*, “the whole disorganized mass of troops fell back over the road to Rossville.” To Longstreet’s incredulity, the Confederate cavalry had ignored his insistences throughout the afternoon that it block the most obvious Federal escape routes.¹⁷¹

Although in his official report Longstreet “announced [the Confederate] success complete,” he later qualified this conclusion. As he recalled in his memoirs, he thought the checking of Polk’s wing at dusk indicated heavy Union resistance still on the field. Even though by this point the Left Wing had taken all of Snodgrass Hill and Horseshoe Ridge, not to mention thousands more prisoners, Longstreet decided the Army of Tennessee should wait until the next

¹⁷⁰ Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 496.

¹⁷¹ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 453-454; *The New York Herald*, September 26, 1863.

day to deal with the rest of Thomas' army. Under the cover of darkness, the bedraggled survivors of the Army of the Cumberland withdrew, thoroughly defeated but alive and free to fight another day. Thomas had justly won the nickname "the Rock of Chickamauga" by which he is often known even to this day. Still, he had won it only barely. Hill observed wistfully after the war that "an hour more of daylight would have insured his capture."¹⁷²

Though the point is controversial, Longstreet was probably right to call off his attacks. However, this was not because it should have been easy to capture the Federal survivors, exhausted and strung out on the narrow mountain roads leading to Chattanooga, the next day. The comedy of errors that, outside of Longstreet's brilliant tactics and his soldiers' desperate fighting, largely defined the Army of Tennessee's September 20 experience at Chickamauga should have convinced Longstreet that it was possible, if not probable or even inevitable, that what was left of the Army of the Cumberland would indeed make it back to Chattanooga. Instead, Longstreet was probably right to give up the chase because night attacks and pursuits during the Civil War were inherently difficult and most of the few that were attempted ended in failure. The most famous and illustrative example of such a pursuit was Stonewall Jackson's attempt on the night of May 2, 1863, at Chancellorsville to overtake the panicked survivors of the massive surprise attack he had just launched against the Army of the Potomac's exposed right flank. Only minutes after Jackson had ordered that the assault continue, his own soldiers, jumpy in the darkness, had mistaken his party for Federal cavalry and shot him, inflicting what would ultimately prove to be a mortal wound. To argue that the virtually commanderless,

¹⁷² James Longstreet to William Brent, October 1863, in XXX: II: 289; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 454; Hill, "Chickamauga—Great Battle of the West," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 661; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 207.

horribly disorganized, and frightfully bloodied Army of Tennessee, the majority of which had been fighting most of the day, should have continued its attacks after dark is unreasonable.¹⁷³

Though Bragg almost immediately endorsed a bold plan devised by Longstreet to capture the Union survivors in and around Chattanooga, he seems never to have seriously considered ordering the maneuvers upon which the success of the plan depended. Ultimately, Bragg would launch no substantive pursuit on September 21, and what remained of the Army of the Cumberland escaped intact. Bragg concluded in his official report that “any pursuit by our infantry and artillery would have been fruitless, as it was not deemed,” at least in his own mind, “practicable with our weak and exhausted force to assail the enemy.” His decision to leave Thomas alone for the time being would incite insubordination bordering outright mutiny among many of his highest-ranking subordinates. Hill contended that for all the blunders virtually everyone in the Southern high command had made throughout the campaign and the battle, the “great[est] blunder of all was that of not pursuing the enemy on the 21st.” Longstreet agreed with Hill that failing to pursue Thomas on September 21 was Bragg’s greatest mistake. All “the fruits of our labor,” he mourned in his memoirs, “had been lost.” A few pages later he reached a broader conclusion concerning his brief experience in northern Georgia. “In my judgment,” he observed, “[the Confederacy’s] last opportunity was lost when we failed to follow the success at Chickamauga.”¹⁷⁴

But despite these well-taken critiques and the undeniable fact that the commander of the Army of Tennessee had bungled the entire campaign from the beginning, in declining to chase Thomas Bragg probably made the right choice. Though *The Charleston Mercury* might have

¹⁷³ For an excellent narrative of Jackson’s flank assault at Chancellorsville see Sears, *Chancellorsville*.

¹⁷⁴ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 211-212; Braxton Bragg to Samuel Cooper, October 1863, in *OR*, XXX: II: 24; Hill, “Chickamauga—Great Battle of the West,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 661-662; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 461-466.

aptly conjectured that “the spirit of [Bragg’s] army [was] such that the enemy [would] not be allowed to rest and recuperate,” the physical condition of Bragg’s army dictated otherwise. Although the Confederate army had run roughshod over the Army of the Cumberland, inflicted heavy casualties, and taken hordes of supplies, as Bragg told his superiors in Richmond, “two-fifths of [his] gallant troops had fallen.” This was an astounding ratio, even for Civil War standards. Despite routing the Army of the Cumberland and inflicting all the indignities upon it that such a rout entailed, the Army of Tennessee had lost *more* soldiers than the opponent it had so utterly crippled. And this was true even when the compilers of such grim statistics included the thousands of prisoners that Longstreet had captured as night fell and Thomas withdrew.¹⁷⁵

The Charleston Mercury asserted that the Southern loss did “not exceed twelve thousand” and that “the Yankee loss [was] twenty-eight thousand,” but these figures were woefully inaccurate. In total, the Confederates lost approximately 18,000 men, including roughly 2,200 killed outright, while the Federals lost approximately 16,000, of which roughly 1,700 died on the battlefield. The disparity between the number of Confederate and Union troops killed highlights the extreme disadvantage faced by forces attacking entrenched positions, even when these forces ultimately achieved victory. Having already been deprived of a combined 55,000 or more troops in the July catastrophes at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, the South simply could not afford such appalling losses anymore. Especially since Thomas escaped, Chickamauga constituted the ultimate pyrrhic victory: simply by fighting a battle on such a scale the Confederacy was hastening its own demise, regardless of that battle’s outcome. *The Atlanta Southern Confederacy*

¹⁷⁵ *The Charleston Mercury*, September 28, 1863; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 534; Braxton Bragg to Samuel Cooper, October 1863, in *OR*, XXX: II: 24.

was correct when it asserted that Chickamauga would be “one of the most glorious victories [to] be recorded in the histories of this Revolution,” but it would also be one of the last.¹⁷⁶

Among other things, this thesis contends that a full appreciation of Longstreet’s success in the use of aggressive tactics requires a heightened attention to his accomplishments in the battles in which he employed such tactics. But while this heightened attention demonstrates that Longstreet’s accomplishments have often been ignored, distorted, or underemphasized by the most prominent elements in the historiography, it also demonstrates that even Longstreet’s accomplishments were subject to limitations. Documenting Bragg’s inability to finish off the Army of the Cumberland is crucial to the argument of this thesis because it shows the limitations of Longstreet’s accomplishments at Chickamauga. In the sense that he failed to annihilate his opponent, Longstreet’s victory in northern Georgia was more like Lee’s triumphs at the Seven Days, Second Manassas, or Chancellorsville than Grant’s at Vicksburg or Appomattox.

Acknowledging this does not undermine my most fundamental contentions. If anything, acknowledging the limited accomplishments of even Longstreet’s most devastating assaults actually *strengthens* my argument because it draws attention to the heavy odds he faced, unlike many other successful subordinate commanders. And while Confederate attackers generally faced heavy odds throughout the Civil War, this is especially true of Chickamauga, a battle in which Longstreet had to deal not only with a full-sized Union army but also with a chief who was indifferent, if not outright hostile, to his undertaking. Such considerations make it all the more remarkable that Longstreet accomplished more at Chickamauga than any other subordinate commander accomplished at any other battle during the war, bar none.

¹⁷⁶ *The Charleston Mercury*, September 28, 1863; Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, 534; *The Atlanta Southern Confederacy* quoted in *The Richmond Enquirer*, October 9, 1863.

In conclusion, it is sufficient to say that Longstreet's capacity for conceiving and executing broad and complex offensive operations surpassed that of any other general, subordinate or otherwise, who served on either side during the war. Moreover, since they all concur that Longstreet was at his tactical best at Chickamauga, I will also not recount the individual conclusion of every work prominent in the limited historiography concerning Longstreet's performance there. Instead, it is appropriate to close only with the verdict of Eckenrode's and Conrad's *James Longstreet: Lee's Old War-Horse*, the book in the historiography most predisposed to be hypercritical of and even venomous toward the commander of the Lee's 1st Corps and Bragg's Left Wing. "The excellent handling of his troops" reflected Longstreet's "own tactical skill," the authors assert. "He at last showed marked ability as an offensive fighter... Chickamauga was the high-water mark of Longstreet's career." Considering the source, the appraisal is perhaps the greatest testament to the enormity of Longstreet's most conspicuous, if still undervalued, tactical accomplishment.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 238.

5 Chapter 4: The Wilderness, May 6, 1864

Fresh upon its return to the Army of Northern Virginia from the Western theater, on May 6, 1864, James Longstreet's 1st Corps came upon the scene of a catastrophe. Confederate 1st Corps brigade commander Evander Law would conclude that "matters looked very serious for the Confederates," but this was one of the most colossal understatements ever uttered by a high-ranking officer about a battle. William Perry, the commander of Law's old brigade, better conveyed the urgency of the Southerners' plight. He remembered that as the morning wore on 1st Corps soldiers "began to meet the wounded from the field. At first there were few; but soon they came in streams, some borne on litters, some supported by comrades, and others making their way alone." Confederates around him were fleeing in droves, "heedless of their officers, who were riding in every direction shouting to gain their attention."¹⁷⁸

Aside from the Union high command and troops, Robert E. Lee and A.P. Hill were largely to blame for the predicament. They had unrealistically expected Longstreet to arrive on the battlefield the night before and had taken no pains to reorganize the disjointed lines of Hill's scattered, undermanned, and exhausted 3rd Corps. When Winfield Scott Hancock had attacked Hill at 5 AM with his Union contingent, consisting of his own 2nd Corps and pieces of others, the Confederate 3rd Corps had ceased to be an effective fighting force and dissolved in a panic. Suddenly the Army of Northern Virginia found itself facing its largest existential crisis since Antietam. At that battle twenty months earlier, Union troops pierced the Army of Northern Virginia's center, commanded by Longstreet, and only desperate countermeasures, including Longstreet and his staff manually firing a solitary cannon, a Union high command inexplicably

¹⁷⁸ Evander M. Law, "From the Wilderness to Cold Harbor," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4: 124; William F. Perry, "Reminiscences of the Campaign of 1864 in Virginia," *The Southern Historical Society Papers*, 7: 51.

hesitant to exploit the breakthrough, and a late afternoon counterattack by A.P. Hill's freshly-arrived Light Division had prevented the destruction of Lee's army.¹⁷⁹

However, the sight of Longstreet's approach dramatically altered the mindsets of the few still calm and functioning remnants of Hill's once proud corps. As William M. Dame, a Confederate artilleryman, remembered, "the cries resounded on every side, 'Here's Longstreet. The old War Horse is up at last. It's all right now.'" Their confidence was justified. Many of Hill's spent veterans, if they had not seen Longstreet's crushing attacks at Second Manassas on August 30, 1862; at Gettysburg on July 2, 1863; and at Chickamauga on September 20, 1863, had at least heard of them, and it was Longstreet's reputation for line-shattering blows—for being the Confederacy's "hardest hitter," in John Bell Hood's words—that rekindled in them a faith in their ultimate rescue.¹⁸⁰

Longstreet's deliverance of the Army of Northern Virginia from what would have almost certainly been a fatal predicament in the Wilderness would be so complete that even the usually hostile elements among his detractors could find little with which to quibble. In this sense, the historiography's depiction of Longstreet's Wilderness performance mirrors its depiction of his performance at Chickamauga. However, unlike scholarly analyses of his role at Chickamauga, these focused on Longstreet's role at the Wilderness contain echoes of the criticisms contemporaries and historians voiced about his roles at Second Manassas and Gettysburg, especially concerning the timing of his arrival on the battlefield. I contend much of this collective censure stems from the fact that the Wilderness was exponentially better documented than Chickamauga. Despite the fact that Longstreet's performance at the Wilderness was nearly

¹⁷⁹ Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 276-287; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3: 356. For an excellent narrative of the Battle of Antietam, see Stephen W. Sears, *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam* (Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2003).

¹⁸⁰ William M. Dame, *From the Rapidan to Richmond* (Baltimore: Green-Lucas Company, 1920), 84-85; Fitzgerald, *Judge Longstreet*, 19.

flawless, while, as I have argued, his inaction at Chickamauga between 1 PM and 3 PM on September 20, 1863, is virtually indefensible, historians generally adjudge his performance at Chickamauga as the more complete of the two.

I argue that this constitutes a misrepresentation. While Longstreet's attack at Chickamauga *does* stand out as the most decisive assault he ever launched and the pinnacle of his implementation of creative offensive tactics, his attack at the Wilderness was more consequential to protraction of the war. Without Longstreet's assault at the Wilderness, the Army of Northern Virginia would have almost certainly been annihilated eleven months before it eventually surrendered at Appomattox. Moreover, his attack at the Wilderness was quicker, more efficient, and less costly than his one at Chickamauga. Until his wounding, it would grind to a halt only once, and even then it was only for a short time. Unlike at Chickamauga, where his troops were bloodily repulsed for hours on the slopes of Snodgrass Hill, at the Wilderness he would not become bogged down in frontal assaults against a superior position. While it might not have represented the culmination of his experimentation with offensive tactics, Longstreet's Wilderness assault certainly represented the culmination of his combination of tactical prowess with the other essential elements of generalship. Chickamauga had established Longstreet as the premier subordinate commander on either side during the war when it came to coordinating and executing large-scale assaults, and the Wilderness emphatically confirmed that superiority.

Supporting this chapter's argument and the overarching argument of this thesis inevitably requires me to detail Longstreet's attack, but to appreciate why Longstreet's assault proved so determinative also requires some background on the Wilderness campaign and the battle itself. By the end of April 1864, the Army of the Potomac, still nominally under the command of George Meade but practically under the command of General-in-Chief Ulysses S. Grant, faced

Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in a generally north-to-south direction with the Rapidan River between them. Since the Confederates occupied a highly-fortified defensive position directly south of the river at Mine Run, Lee expected Grant to try to march around, or flank, these defenses. On May 2, seeing an unusual amount of smoke north of the river, Lee called together his highest-ranking subordinates and observed that the Federals appeared ready to begin their spring campaign. He correctly surmised they would cross to the east, or right, of his defenses. On May 4, in a message to Jefferson Davis Lee acknowledged the accuracy of his forecast, though he confessed he was "not able to say" in what direction the Union army would head once it emerged south of the river. "But," he concluded, "it is apparent that the long threatened effort to take Richmond has begun."¹⁸¹

But if Lee was "not able to say" whether the Army of the Potomac would pivot west to attack the Confederates in flank or continue southeast toward Fredericksburg once it crossed the Rapidan, he at least knew for certain that Grant would have to pass through the Wilderness, an all-but-impenetrable morass of woods, thickets, and swamps between Mine Run and Fredericksburg and the site of much of the Battle of Chancellorsville the year prior. Lee had already resolved to attack his new Union opponent in the Wilderness for several reasons. For one, the area contained some good roads constituting interior lines that would provide Lee with routes by which he could move troops from one endangered spot to another at a relatively short distance and with relatively little trouble. For another, Grant had approximately 100,000 troops, with vast reinforcements close by, compared to Lee's 63,000, and his cannons heavily outnumbered and mightily outclassed the Confederates'.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3: 344; Robert E. Lee, *Lee's Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A., to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of the Confederate States of America, 1862-1865*, Ed. by Douglas Southall Freeman (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1957), 179-181.

¹⁸² Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3: 258-260; Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 22-27, 83-84.

Fighting in the Wilderness would go a long way to neutralize these odds. The area's topography tended to localize infantry fighting, making it harder for Grant to ensure his fuller ranks had the most telling possible effect, and cannons became practically obsolete on a battlefield where an artillerist could scarcely see five yards in front of his face, much less direct a cannon at a target hundreds or thousands of yards away. As *The Charleston Mercury* would note after the battle, "little artillery was used" during the fighting on either side. On the other hand, on an open battlefield Grant could mercilessly pound away with his superior resources and eventually run roughshod over the Confederates. *The New York Herald* would contend that by avoiding "fighting on equal terms" Lee "tacitly acknowledged the fighting superiority of [the Army of the Potomac]." However, in reality Lee was simply acknowledging the North's advantage in men and materiel, which was growing more pronounced every day.¹⁸³

Finally, attacking Grant in the Wilderness was appealing to Lee because, with the Rapidan River at Grant's back, it gave him another, perhaps final, chance to destroy the Army of the Potomac before it could begin wearing the Army of Northern Virginia out, this time for good, in a war of attrition in open country. If Lee could resoundingly defeat Grant's army just after it crossed the Rapidan, he could force its panicked members to surrender or drown in droves as they madly overcrowded the fords spanning the river. These "fruits of victory," as Stonewall Jackson had called them—the utter destruction of the most famous and crucial Union army after one of Lee's by now familiar tactical masterpieces—could very well result in an unprecedented historical embarrassment for Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans at the polls in November 1864 and even perhaps a negotiated peace which recognized the independence of the Confederacy. These were grand and ultimately perhaps unlikely dreams, for the Army of

¹⁸³ Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 27; *The Charleston Mercury*, May 9, 1864; *The New York Herald*, June 8, 1864.

Northern Virginia had thrashed McClellan at the Seven Days, routed Pope at Second Manassas, embarrassed Burnside at Fredericksburg, and literally run a circle around Hooker at Chancellorsville, all without tasting any “fruits of victory.” Moreover, the Lincoln administration had never once wavered in its commitment to preserving the Union, even in the face of catastrophic defeats. Still, such dreams were infinitely preferable to despair.¹⁸⁴

But if some of Lee’s subordinates were susceptible to hopelessness, in contrast to historians H.J. Eckenrode’s and Bryan Conrad’s contention that Longstreet was “disillusioned” after his ultimately unsuccessful operations in eastern Tennessee over the winter, Longstreet was not one of them. Far from being bitter and sullen in the way so many of his contemporaries and historians portrayed him after the catastrophe at Gettysburg, the ultimately fruitless Confederate victory at Chickamauga, and his legendary feud with Braxton Bragg, in a letter written on April 2 to Lee Longstreet was optimistic to the point of hubris when it came to dealing with Grant. Even though Longstreet loved Grant (he had been Grant’s best friend in the prewar United States Army, had served as best man at Grant’s wedding, and would be a staunch Grant supporter after the war) upon hearing rumors that Grant would be traveling to the Eastern theater, Longstreet apparently did not think much, at least at that time, of Grant as a general. “If Grant goes to Virginia,” Longstreet wrote the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, “I hope that you may be able to destroy him. I do not think that he is any better than [former Army of Virginia commander John] Pope. They [both] won their success[es] in the [Western theater]. If you will out general him you will surely destroy him. His chief strength is in his prestige.”¹⁸⁵

In comparing Grant to Pope, while dangerously underestimating the new Union general-in-chief, Longstreet was also expressing confidence in Lee. More importantly for my purposes,

¹⁸⁴ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 256.

¹⁸⁵ See chapter entitled “Disillusionment” in Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*; James Longstreet to Robert E. Lee, April 2, 1864, in *OR*, XXXII, Pt. III, 737.

he was evincing his predisposition toward *offensive* operations, especially when these operations were guided by Lee, because surely Longstreet was aware that Lee could never “destroy” Grant by fighting solely on the defensive. The fact that the contents of Longstreet’s April 2 letter to Lee contradict two long-accepted, but ultimately highly mythologized narratives—that Longstreet always preferred defensive tactics to offensive ones and that Longstreet no longer trusted Lee’s military judgment after Gettysburg—is probably why this letter is never quoted in histories predisposed to be critical of Longstreet. This fact also goes a long way in supporting my argument that Longstreet appreciated how fundamentally aggressive tactics could yield long-term strategic success. Eckenrode and Conrad are wrong when they claim that even after Chickamauga “Longstreet’s idea of generalship... was [still] that of maneuvering the enemy into a position where he would have to attack at a disadvantage” and that this “was in reality almost Longstreet’s sole conception of generalship.”¹⁸⁶

As glad as Lee might have been to receive Longstreet’s encouragement, he probably needed no such prodding to take the fight to his new enemy. The problem was not what to do but when and how to do it. Grant could realistically hope to push the entire Army of the Potomac through the Wilderness in two days, leaving Lee some, albeit not much, time to intercept him. But even though Lee, as I have shown, told his highest-ranking subordinates present on May 2 that the Union columns would most likely head east to cross the Rapidan, he did not send his first attack column east to meet them until 11 AM on May 4. While the delay is inexplicable to some historians, Lee probably feared for his left, or southwestern, flank and rear, which would be dangerously exposed on the off chance that Grant moved west instead of east.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 256-257; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 297.

¹⁸⁷ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 264.

Lee's hesitation had two critical consequences on the coming battle: first, the veterans of Richard Ewell's 2nd and A.P. Hill's 3rd Corps would barely arrive in time to catch the Army of the Potomac marching through the Wilderness; and second, it would take Longstreet much longer to reach the battlefield. Appreciating the relationship between Lee's hesitancy and Longstreet's "late" arrival ultimately proves essential in absolving Longstreet of charges of being "slow" or "dragging his feet" in route to Hill's front on May 6. However, for now it is important to realize that Lee was in a race against time to collide with the Union army before it could emerge south of the Wilderness.¹⁸⁸

It was a race that Lee, sending his two closest corps under Ewell and Hill, respectively, darting down two parallel narrow country roads piercing the dense brush and undergrowth and perpendicular to the Federals' line of march, won, but only barely. Marching west across the northernmost thoroughfare, the Orange Turnpike, Ewell's 2nd Corps brought Gouvenour Warren's Union 5th Corps, marching north to south, to a halt. Grant ordered Warren to face west, deploy his troops in lines of battle, and attack Ewell. For the next two days, Warren and elements supporting him would on several occasions assault the Confederate 2nd Corps. In between those attacks, Ewell would initiate counterattacks of his own. But despite temporary successes and reverses on both sides and many casualties, by the end of May 6 this fight would end in virtual stalemate.¹⁸⁹

Approximately a mile and a half to the south, Hill's 3rd Corps struck the right flank of another of Grant's columns on the north to south line of march. Pushing west on a road known as the Orange Plank Road that ran parallel to the Orange Turnpike, Hill's veterans made contact with Federal detachments at the Plank Road-Brock Road intersection. Winfield Scott Hancock

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 82, 102-109; *The Charleston Mercury*, May 10, 1864.

soon arrived with his 2nd Corps to reinforce the Union soldiers already engaged there. As he had done with Warren, Grant ordered Hancock to pivot west and attack the Confederates in front of him. Because of the distance between the Orange Turnpike front and the Orange Plank Road front and despite the best efforts of commanders on both sides to bridge the gap, the Battle of the Wilderness would be fought as two separate battles. It would be on Hill's front that Longstreet's 1st Corps was destined to play the decisive role.¹⁹⁰

In the meantime, with Longstreet still on the march and miles away from the Plank Road-Brock Road intersection, Hill would have to deal with Hancock's 2nd Corps and the elements supporting it by himself. By nightfall Hill's Confederates had forced a stalemate on the Orange Plank Road. *The Charleston Mercury* was exaggerating when it contended that Hill's corps "checked and drove back three corps and two divisions of the enemy," but the Southerners' accomplishment was still impressive. However, no one with a bird's eye view could have depicted the situation as anything other than dire for the Southerners. Darkness had saved Hill, but only for the time being. The Confederate 3rd Corps was bloodied, exhausted, and horribly disorganized. Heavily outnumbered, it could only present a relatively narrow front to its enemy, so it stood in danger of being flanked on both sides. Hancock would doubtlessly attack again in the morning, and Hill was totally unprepared to mount a defense. Hill had one last prayer: Longstreet's 1st Corps might materialize, either to his rear to take the place of his worn-out troops or on his right to assault the left flank of Hancock's southern sector of the Union formation. The problem was that Longstreet was still not up.¹⁹¹

Since the timing of his arrival would constitute the main point of contention concerning his performance in the battle, engaging the historiography here is essential. After the war,

¹⁹⁰ Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 129-134, 188-192.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 242-243.

Confederate General Jubal Early blamed the delay entirely on Longstreet. No prominent historians would second this judgment more vehemently than Eckenrode and Conrad. Though the details of Longstreet's march are much too complicated to explain here, Eckenrode and Conrad assert that on May 5, just as Hill's and Hancock's firefight was reaching its crescendo, "we find Longstreet moving in leisurely fashion." They claim that "he was always a slow marcher," but in light of Hill's plight this delay evinced "a disregard for the welfare of the army [that was] almost incredible." According to Eckenrode and Conrad, neither Hill's spent veterans, much less Lee's high command, should have been surprised since "Longstreet usually took his time and would hurry for no crisis." The two historians even suggest that Longstreet disobeyed orders.¹⁹²

With their accusation, Eckenrode and Conrad are quite deliberately reminding readers of July 2, 1863, at Gettysburg, another day on which they contend Longstreet behaved insubordinately. But while on closer inspection we have seen that such an accusation has little merit, this accusation has even less. Of course Lee would have much preferred to have Longstreet on hand at the beginning of the fighting in the Wilderness, but Lee's own hesitation dictated otherwise. According to E.P. Alexander, at sundown on May 4 Longstreet was still thirty miles away from the battlefield. Moreover, both Longstreet and Alexander agree that after the 1st Corps covered twenty-eight miles of that distance by midnight of May 5-6, Lee ordered Longstreet to change his column's direction to link up with Hill's corps on the Plank Road, an adjustment that necessitated at least a partial countermarch. For all their hard marching, Longstreet's men would not be up when dawn cracked on May 6, but this was certainly no fault of Longstreet's.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Gallagher, *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory*, 90; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 303-304.

¹⁹³ Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 354-355; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 557.

Of all the accounts in the historiography concerning Longstreet's role during the Wilderness campaign, historian D.B. Sanger's *James Longstreet* provides the most comprehensive, convincing, and above all exonerating explanation of the 1st Corps' journey from May 4 until the early morning of May 6 when it hit the Wilderness battlefield on the double-quick. While it would be impossible to mention all his salient points on the matter, Sanger notably contends that like with so many other instances in Longstreet's career, the hypercritical elements of the historiography misinterpret Longstreet's actions because they "neglect the logistics" upon which nineteenth century armies' movements depended in addition to being predisposed to criticize him for everything that went wrong in the history of Lee's army. Sanger argues that if Longstreet began his march to the battlefield at 4 PM on May 5, as records suggest, he could not have "delayed" more than an hour. Losing only an hour given all the contingencies and uncertainties inherent in Civil War era marching is evidence, at least in Sanger's mind, of "work of preparation... done with unusual dispatch and efficiency."¹⁹⁴

Still, while entirely justified, the fact that Longstreet did not arrive in the Wilderness on the night of May 5-6 precipitated a break down in the Confederate command structure and ultimately a breakdown in the 3rd Corps itself. Apparently Lee and Hill had indulged in wishful thinking and assumed that Longstreet's troops would be in position to man at dawn on May 6 what should have been the 3rd Corps battle lines, despite all evidence to the contrary. As such, even though his ranks were disjointed from the confusing topography and the general chaos incited by dusky shootout on May 5, Hill did not order his division and brigade commanders to reform their units. In fact, Hill ordered his subordinate officers expressly *not* to reestablish their battle lines because he did not want his men disturbed from their brief overnight respite.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 266-267.

¹⁹⁵ Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6, 1864*, 241-242.

When day broke at 5 AM Hancock promptly attacked the scattered Confederate 3rd Corps and sent it sprawling through the woods. Soon, however, as we have also seen, the tip of this mass of despondent and panicked men collided with the head of Longstreet's column. Since Hancock's contingent was making a spirited pursuit of Hill's survivors and pouring bullets into them and Longstreet's corps indiscriminately, it is hard to determine the exact point at which Longstreet's march toward the fighting became Longstreet's legendary May 6 attack in the Wilderness. According to Longstreet, "Hancock advanced and struck [Hill's] divisions before sunrise, just as my command reported to General Lee... As [my] line deployed, [Hill's corps] came back upon us in disorder." His men broke ranks to let the fugitives pass through. Once the 1st Corps had reformed, he deployed his division under Joseph Kershaw to the right of the Orange Plank Road and his division under Charles Field to the left. E.P. Alexander wrote that "we had arrived, but it was a very close call." Like Law's aforementioned contention that "matters looked very serious for the Confederates," this was a colossal understatement.¹⁹⁶

As John Gregg's brigade of Texans filed off to the left, north of the Orange Plank Road, Lee himself emerged at the head of Longstreet's line from the darkness to the east. In desperation Lee decided to lead the charge himself before Gregg's lines were fully formed, but Confederate soldiers recognized him and refused to go forward unless Lee retired. At the same time, an exasperated colonel from Lee's staff approached Longstreet, believing that the 1st Corps commander was perhaps the only person who could convince Lee to restrain himself. Quickly resolving the crisis, Longstreet promised Lee that "his line would be recovered in an hour if he would permit me to handle the troops." However, "if my services were not needed," he quipped, he "would like to ride to some place of safety, as it was not quite comfortable where we were."

¹⁹⁶ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 560; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 357.

Apparently Longstreet's influence with Lee had not diminished, because Lee came to his senses and withdrew behind the lines.¹⁹⁷

Relieved from Lee's histrionics, Longstreet launched an impromptu, no-holds-barred frontal assault against Hancock's advancing and victorious contingent. However, the fact that the assault developed almost exclusively out of necessity, as opposed to a preconceived plan, does not mean that Longstreet neglected tactics. In fact, Longstreet's handling of his corps that morning further demonstrated the tactical maturation he had shown at Chickamauga. For one thing, earlier in the march Longstreet had arrayed his columns into double lines of battle. The decision reduced considerably the time it took him to deploy. Had he arrayed his men in a single line, only the division at the front of the column would have seen action before noon, and in all likelihood Hancock would have steamrolled a single division.¹⁹⁸

Longstreet's own recollections provide further evidence of the tactical flexibility and creativity he displayed at the beginning of his attack. Since the woods were too thick to render "full lines of battle" effective, Longstreet immediately deployed six brigades in "heavy skirmish lines." These lines were much thinner and less compact than normal battle lines or the column he had engineered at Chickamauga. Longstreet observed that the first volleys from his "fresh and more lively skirmishers" put a stop to the Federal progress. The unconventional employment of a skirmish line as shock troops ensured that Hancock's massed men would become easy targets while Federal volleys could inflict comparatively little damage. Longstreet's formation was a novel and effective innovation, one that the conflation of preparation and necessity made perfect for executing just the type of assault Lee had so desperately needed. It certainly flouted the most basic tactical principles taught at military academies and proved the vapidness of Eckenrode's and

¹⁹⁷ Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 560-561; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3: 358-359; Law, "From the Wilderness to Cold Harbor," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4: 125.

¹⁹⁸ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 271-272.

Conrad's claims that "Longstreet was not a student of war, not a deep thinker on the subject of war, and when placed in positions demanding knowledge and initiative he failed."¹⁹⁹

Still, the fight raging across the Orange Plank Road continued unabated for more than two hours. Longstreet's emergence from the woods might have surprised Hancock's soldiers and knocked them on their heels, but they were still veterans who retained a numerical advantage, a combination difficult to overcome in Civil War battles. The Southerners took position after position only to face vicious counterattacks which pushed back sectors of their line and forced Longstreet to send in reserves. Now with both its divisions on the field fully engaged, the 1st Corps made steady progress, and by 9:30 AM it had pushed Hancock's contingent back to its original jumping off point. By 9:45, however, Federal resistance began to stiffen, and the Confederate advance ground to a halt amidst the fiery slugfest.²⁰⁰

Despite his indisputable success, Longstreet was unsatisfied with a resumption of what the *status quo* had been at dawn. For the first time in the battle, Lee had his entire army on the field, and he hoped that Hancock's half of the Union army on the Orange Plank Road, already beaten back and badly bruised, might prove ripe for a *coup de grace*. In the meantime, Longstreet too had been plotting a knockout blow. To probe for what might turn out to be a fatal weakness in Hancock's line, he sent the army's chief engineer, Martin L. Smith, on a scouting mission while he himself continued to coordinate the ongoing frontal assault. The solution Longstreet would devise with Smith's help to end the brief stalemate constituted a stroke of

¹⁹⁹ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 561; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 385; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 363.

²⁰⁰ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 385; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 561; Conrad and Eckenrode, 311; Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3: 359-360.

tactical genius that rivalled the creativity of his decision to employ the deep attack column at Chickamauga and outperformed it in daring.²⁰¹

Unlike Samuel Johnston, Lee's topographical engineer who at Gettysburg failed miserably in his scouting of the Union position on Cemetery Ridge on July 2, 1863, Smith led a successful reconnaissance. At promptly 10 AM, only fifteen minutes after Hancock had managed to finally stop Longstreet's frontal assault, Smith rendezvoused with the 1st Corps commander. Smith apprised Longstreet that extending only a few hundred yards south of the Orange Plank Road Hancock's left, or southern, flank lay completely exposed in the woods. What he told Longstreet next, however, was even more auspicious for the Confederate cause. The outbreak of hostilities in 1861 had halted construction on the Fredericksburg and Gordonsville Railroad. By a nearly miraculous coincidence, an unfinished railroad bed, originally meant to be part of the Fredericksburg and Gordonsville line and running east to west, provided an ideal, surreptitious means by which Longstreet might place a large contingent of troops on and perpendicular to Hancock's left flank. Lee's original plan had been for Longstreet to come up on Hill's right and strike Hancock's left flank, but Hill's collapse had forced him to bring Longstreet up directly in Hill's rear. Now luck and superb scouting gave Lee a second chance to execute his initial design.²⁰²

The Army of Northern Virginia was perhaps the most successful military entity at launching flank attacks in the history of modern warfare. Longstreet, as we have seen, crushed John Pope's left flank at Second Manassas. Lee, as we have also seen, meant for Longstreet's attack on July 2, 1863, at Gettysburg to roll up the Union left flank, but poor scouting and the

²⁰¹ Robert E. Krick, "Like a Duck on a June Bug: James Longstreet's Flank Attack, May 6, 1864," *The Wilderness Campaign*, Ed. by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 238; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 312.

²⁰² Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 312; *The Charleston Mercury*, May 10, 1864.

timely arrival of Union reinforcements thwarted that plan and Lee dictated that Longstreet launch a frontal assault. Longstreet's opportunity at the Wilderness was most reminiscent of Stonewall Jackson's flank attack a year earlier at Chancellorsville, only about three miles from where Longstreet and Smith stood now. At that battle, Jackson had marched completely around the Union line and smashed Joseph Hooker's exposed right flank in the thickets of the Wilderness. Should Longstreet's assault achieve similar results, it seemed possible that the Army of Northern Virginia could force Grant to retreat behind the Rapidan.²⁰³

Immediately perceiving the magnitude of his opportunity, Longstreet cobbled together four somewhat disjointed brigades and sent them on the double-quick into the unfinished railroad bed. Ignoring the chain of command, Longstreet appointed Sorrel, his chief-of-staff and the man he trusted most, to execute the maneuver and lead the assault. According to Sorrel, Longstreet called him over and said: "Colonel, there is a fine chance of a great attack by our right. If you will get quickly into those woods, some brigades will be found much scattered from the fight. Collect them and take charge." Longstreet would stay in Hancock's front and redouble his efforts once Sorrel's flank attack was underway.²⁰⁴

Even in the midst of the excitement, Longstreet's last words to Sorrel were tactical instructions. "Form a good line and then move," he told his aide, "your right pushed forward and turning as much as possible to the left." His plan was for Sorrel to get in the rear of Hancock's line and drive it directly into his own front. This was a "wheel" maneuver like the one he had tried to execute at Gettysburg and which he had succeeded in executing at Chickamauga. The two Confederate lines, standing at acute angles to one another, would form a vice from which it would be difficult for Hancock to escape. In a matter of minutes, Longstreet had engineered a

²⁰³ Krick, "Like a Duck on a June Bug: James Longstreet's Flank Attack, May 6, 1864," *The Wilderness Campaign*, 236.

²⁰⁴ Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 241-242; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 273.

tactical trap that many generals would have judged impossible to execute in a morass as dense as the Wilderness. The lack of hesitation he manifested in devising and ordering the assault exuded a confidence and familiarity with offensive tactics that most Civil War generals lacked and most of the prominent historiography fails to appreciate.²⁰⁵

Realizing that “no greater opportunity could be given to an aspiring young staff officer,” Sorrel hurried through the woods to organize his new command. At 11:30 AM the Confederates emerged from the unfinished railroad bed and swooped down on the unsuspecting soldiers composing Hancock’s left. According to Law, this “display of tactics changed the face of the field.” Coming as a total surprise to the Federals, Sorrel’s assault initiated one of the most one-sided large-scale engagements of the entire war, and the advance by Longstreet’s flanking contingent met with even less resistance than Hood’s column had encountered when it had charged the unoccupied Brotherton farm at Chickamauga. The flankers instantaneously rolled up Hancock’s left flank, and the brigades that had formed it made a panicked retreat northeast. Hancock desperately tried to reform his men, but panic spread even further down his line. Alexander recalled wryly that the Union soldiers who did try to hold their ground “only fared the worse for it in the end.” In a matter of minutes, four undersized Confederate brigades routed the equivalent of two full-sized Union corps and sent almost half of the Army of the Potomac in headlong flight toward the Plank Road-Brock Road intersection. As Hancock ruefully confessed in a postwar letter to Longstreet: “You rolled me up like a wet blanket.”²⁰⁶

Many contemporaries perceived and some historians detect a parallel between the accomplishments of Longstreet’s flank attack and the accomplishments of Jackson’s a year

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 242. Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 313; Law, 126; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 360; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 273; *The Richmond Enquirer*, May 10, 1864; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 568.

earlier at Chancellorsville. For example, Law adjudged that most Southerners on the southern half of the battlefield “believed that Chancellorsville was about to be repeated,” and certainly, there were similarities between the two attacks. Almost exactly a year earlier approximately three miles away Jackson had also turned the Army of the Potomac’s flank just beyond the Orange Plank Road. In reality, however, Longstreet’s flank assault at the Wilderness had demonstrably outperformed Jackson’s legendary one at Chancellorsville. Whereas it had taken Jackson between two and three hours to rout one and a half Union corps, Longstreet had routed the equivalent of two in less than an hour. Moreover, Longstreet had precipitated for Lee an “opportunity,” in Alexander’s words, “far more favorable than the one presented to Jackson.” Whereas Jackson’s assault really only gained significant momentum with dusk quickly approaching and most of Hooker’s army still unscathed, Longstreet’s had “nearly the whole of Grant’s army... fought to a standstill” an hour before noon. While Alexander’s summation might have been an exaggeration considering Warren’s half of the Army of the Potomac was still in good order, his point is well-taken.²⁰⁷

Sensing that this was his opportunity to drive the Federals into the Rapidan, Longstreet did not pause for lunch as he had done in similar circumstances at Chickamauga. Instead, he supervised an all-out pursuit with his entire corps. He still had Micah Jenkins’ brigade and much of Richard Anderson’s 3rd Corps division, which Lee had put under his command, in reserve, and he rushed them to the front lines. However, Longstreet still faced two significant problems. The first was that Hancock was not one to give up. Rallying every man who would stop running long enough to listen to him, he improvised a frantic construction of breastworks at the Plank Road-Brock Road intersection in anticipation of the next Confederate charge. The second problem was

²⁰⁷ Law, “From the Wilderness to Cold Harbor,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4: 126; Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 3: 362; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 273; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 360.

that the two perpendicular 1st Corps lines had become somewhat jumbled. As the portion of Longstreet's command that had been facing Hancock had lurched forward, it had overlapped somewhat with Sorrel's flanking column. Lacking unit cohesion, launching a coordinated frontal assault against the new Union position at the Plank Road-Brock Road intersection would not be an easy proposition for the Confederates.²⁰⁸

It was fortunate, then, for the Southerners that Longstreet had already decided not to try another frontal assault. He, or at least his ranking subordinates, had tried such an attack against a seemingly beaten enemy up Snodgrass Hill at Chickamauga, and the result had been well over a thousand casualties and hours of frustrating repulse. Instead, resolving to sidestep Hancock's new fortifications at the Plank Road-Brock Road intersection, Longstreet resolved to launch yet another flank assault against Hancock's left. He would need another avenue, however, from which he could get the new flanking column in position. Once again, luck combined with first-rate reconnaissance presented Longstreet with another golden opportunity. Smith found a new way to turn Hancock's left flank, this time by marching troops south of the Union line on the Brock Road, pushing east across it, and wheeling north. The 1st Corps commander instantly approved and appointed Smith to command the flanking force. Once Smith made contact with the Union left, Longstreet would personally lead the remaining members of the 1st Corps still fit for duty in a charge from west to east. If the southern portion of the Army of the Potomac had managed to escape his first vice, heavy casualties, fatigue, and demoralization would make it less likely to escape this second one. Smashing Hancock—this time for good—would knock fully

²⁰⁸ Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3: 362; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 360.

half of Grant's army out of the fight and almost certainly force the Union general-in-chief to retreat back across the Rapidan.²⁰⁹

A determined Longstreet now spurred his horse forward to personally reconnoiter the no man's land between his own front and Hancock's. On the way, a bevy of distinguished officers, including Kershaw, Jenkins, and Sorrel, joined and followed him down the Orange Plank Road. Anticipating the bloody work ahead, the members of the party did not exactly constitute a victory parade, but they all exuded excitement and confidence concerning the assault they were about to execute. What exactly happened next became the subject of bitter controversy, but what is clear is that some troops from William Mahone's brigade, which had led the way in Sorrel's wildly successful flank attack just moments before, took Longstreet's mounted contingent for Federal cavalry and fired a volley into the group. Pandemonium ensued, horses fled in every direction, and those of Longstreet's group who could still move crashed into bushes on the roadside. Troops on the side of the road opposite the side from which the volley had been unleashed now rose up to return fire, but Kershaw, who had gone unhit and was determined to defuse the tragedy, rode into the middle of the road and shouted "Friends!" Now realizing their awful mistake, the Confederates on both sides of the road lowered their weapons and crowded into the road, apologizing profusely in hushed voices. The second most notable casualty of the accident was Jenkins, mortally wounded with a bullet through the head.²¹⁰

The most notable casualty was Longstreet himself. Although the historiography is not unanimous on the point (which is unsurprising, given the chaos which surrounded the accident and the confusion in primary accounts that chaos inspired), it seems likely that Longstreet was

²⁰⁹ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 563; Krick, "Like a Duck on a June Bug: James Longstreet's Flank Attack, May 6, 1864," *The Wilderness Campaign*, 249.

²¹⁰ Krick, "Like a Duck on a June Bug: James Longstreet's Flank Attack, May 6, 1864," *The Wilderness Campaign*, 249-253; Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 369-370.

simply shot in his saddle, and most of those around him were too stunned or preoccupied with saving themselves to provide any further details. All Sorrel knew for sure was that Longstreet “was actually lifted up and came down hard.” With blood pouring from his neck, his staff lifted him from his horse, laid him on the ground, and rested his head against the foot of a tree.²¹¹

The wound initially appeared mortal. “The lead-torn coat [and] the orifice close to the right shoulder,” Sorrel remembered, “pointed to the passage of the heavy bullet.” The 1st Corps commander was almost “choked with blood.” Still, as his doctor examined his wounds, as stunned 1st Corps soldiers gathered around him, and as the survivors of his staff began to quietly weep, Longstreet’s mind was still on the battle. He ordered Sorrel to race to Lee, report the situation, and urge him to let Smith proceed with the new flanking maneuver already underway. According to Sorrel, Longstreet was extremely confident that if Lee executed his plan, the 1st Corps would break the new Union position at the Plank Road-Brock Road intersection and “Grant [would] be driven back across the Rapidan.” Fading fast, Longstreet then ordered Field, the ranking general on the scene, to take command and press Hancock. Although Longstreet would defy early prognostications from his doctors and survive his wound, he would never again administer a similar line-shattering attack against the Federals.²¹²

The problem for his successors was that while most 1st Corps troops were moving east on the Orange Plank Road in pursuit of Hancock, Smith’s flanking brigades were moving north, or directly perpendicular, to them. Coordinating an assault by the two forces would have proved challenging even for the commander who had ordered it, but it might prove impossible for Field, who had only just been apprised of the plan. Unfortunately for the Confederates, the moment Field “grasped the situation” and prepared to press on, Richard Anderson, who ranked him,

²¹¹ Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 3: 365; Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 242.

²¹² *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 244; Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 370-371; Sorrel, Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 564-565.

arrived on the scene and took command. Anderson commanded a division in Hill's Corps and had no conception whatsoever of Longstreet's plan.²¹³

Without Longstreet's tactical genius and gentle guiding hand, the Confederate momentum on the southern half of the Wilderness battlefield quickly dissolved. As Alexander ruefully put it, "Longstreet's fall seemed actually to paralyse our whole corps." Though he wrote in measured language, in his memoirs Longstreet seemed to blame Lee. "General Lee came up," Longstreet recalled, and "the plans, orders, and opportunity were explained to him." However, Lee was uncomfortable with such a maneuver given the limited lines of sight in the Wilderness and preferred traditional battle lines to Longstreet's perpendicular ones. In short order he canceled Longstreet's flanking maneuver and ordered the 1st Corps to reform in parallel lines, a process which would take hours in the overgrown thickets of the Wilderness. In Longstreet's mind this change severely diminished if not completely ruined the chances for continued Confederate progress, giving "Hancock time to collect his men into battle order, post his heavy reinforcements, and improve his intrenchments." Although he would not say it outright, Longstreet strongly implied that Lee's intervention into his best-laid plans proved a death-blow to Southern ambitions in the Wilderness.²¹⁴

The fruits of Lee's intervention proved the magnitude of his mistake. Though the attack was not well-documented, several hours after Longstreet's wounding Lee launched a massive frontal assault with elements of the 1st and 3rd Corps, much in the style of "Pickett's Charge" at Gettysburg. A reporter from *The New York Herald* observed that "the fiercest effort was made by the enemy to drive us back... but the coolness and courage of our men repelled every effort." Alexander wrote in his memoirs that the "attack ought *never, never* to have been made. It was

²¹³ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 564-565; Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 316.

²¹⁴ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 565; Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 275.

sending a boy on a man's errand." These irreplaceable casualties would prove costly as Grant's campaign progressed. Although *The Richmond Sentinel* was being only slightly unfair when it mused that "Lincoln's railroads and steamers cannot bring men to Grant so fast as he can butcher them" and despite incurring approximately 17,000 casualties, the Army of the Potomac would indeed escape the Wilderness, and the days of the Army of Northern Virginia would be numbered. At least on May 6, 1864, Lee proved Longstreet's tactical inferior, and the Confederacy suffered for it.²¹⁵

Despite Lee's blundering and its anticlimactic conclusion, however, Longstreet's attack had, at least for that day, undoubtedly saved the Army of Northern Virginia. Nearly all the prominent elements in the historiography either concede this point or strongly imply it. Only Sanger and Wert, though, fully appreciate the tactical genius it took to make the attack successful. As at Chickamauga, at the Wilderness Longstreet manifested an uncanny instinct for the formation best suited to breaking the Union line. At Chickamauga this formation had been a deep attack column. At the Wilderness it had largely been the opposite—a broad, thinly-manned skirmish line. The result of each, though, was similarly propitious and evinced a tactical versatility unprecedented and unparalleled in the Civil War.

Also like at Chickamauga, at the Wilderness Longstreet demonstrated a superior instinct for detecting the fatal flaw in his opponent's defenses. He had chosen to target the Brotherton Farm—the only unoccupied position in the Federal formation at that time—at Chickamauga, and he had preyed on Hancock's exposed left—by far Grant's weakest point—at the Wilderness. To be sure, Longstreet had benefitted from luck, of which Tom Wood's evacuation of the

²¹⁵ Conrad and Eckenrode, *James Longstreet*, 315; *The New York Herald*, May 11, 1864; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 363; Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 389-395, 435; *The Richmond Sentinel* quoted in *The Charleston Mercury*, June 27, 1864. Casualty estimates are my own, based on estimates from several secondary sources.

Brotherton farm and the existence of the railroad bed running perpendicular to Hancock's left flank are the best examples. Still, at both battles he had managed to exploit this good fortune to the greatest possible lengths. Chickamauga established Longstreet as the greatest subordinate commander at conceiving and executing large-scale assaults, and the Wilderness confirmed this verdict.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ Hay and Sanger, *James Longstreet*, 275; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 389.

6 Conclusion

Daniel Sickles commanded the Union 3rd Corps at Gettysburg. On July 2, 1863, he advanced his troops to the Emmitsburg Road, tangled with the Confederate 1st Corps, and lost a leg in the process. After the Civil War, he and James Longstreet became such great friends that Helen D. Longstreet, the Confederate general's wife, asked Sickles to pen the introduction to her book, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*, a tribute to her husband published in 1904. Sickles obliged. What he wrote was largely a defense of Longstreet's conduct at Gettysburg, but he included a few recollections of some of his postwar experiences with his recently deceased friend. Two in particular stand out.²¹⁷

In the first, Sickles recalled a late night when the generals were walking home from a banquet in Atlanta. Turning to Longstreet, Sickles facetiously remarked, "Old fellow, I hope you are sorry for shooting off my leg at Gettysburg. I suppose I will have to forgive you for it some day." "Forgive me?" Longstreet countered. "You ought to thank me for leaving you one leg to stand on." Sickles had been accused of stretching the truth before, and the story might very well be apocryphal. Still, the response Sickles attributed to Longstreet illustrates two traits fundamental to the Southerner's personality. First, Longstreet loved to quip, and his reply bespoke of his capacity for wit. We have seen this wit firsthand when Longstreet joked to Lee at the Wilderness that if Lee did not need his "services," he "would like to ride to some place of safety, as it was not quite comfortable where we were." This is just one of many examples of his penchant for humor, even in the context of battle.²¹⁸

Second, however, his response revealed a latent intensity that had not totally dissipated, even twenty-seven years after the war's end. Even when jesting with a close and old friend,

²¹⁷ Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*.

²¹⁸ Daniel E. Sickles in Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*, 19; Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 560-561.

Longstreet manifested the aggressive streak that had inspired many attacks unprecedented and unduplicated in their viciousness during the war. The two traits were neither contradictory nor mutually exclusive, but they did reveal a man infinitely more complex than the one Douglas Southall Freeman described as “plain-spoken and cautious.” Largely an enigma, Longstreet defied many attempts by critics, including professional historians, to understand him or explain his character. Perhaps it should be no surprise then that much of the historiography concerning him misrepresents and misinterprets his war record.²¹⁹

The second story Sickles related concerned a trip he and Longstreet took to the Gettysburg battlefield. Deciding to revisit the scene of their July 2 confrontation, the two began to clamber up Round Top. An aging Longstreet found the climb difficult, and Sickles had to help him up. “Sickles,” Longstreet said, “you can well afford to help me up here now, for if you had not kept me away so long from Round Top on the 2d of July, 1863, the war... might have had a different ending.” Once again, Longstreet was quipping, but by making the joke he was acknowledging, if only tacitly, the limitations to his accomplishments at Gettysburg and in the war in general. Longstreet not only failed to take the Round Tops on July 2, 1863, at Gettysburg. As we have seen, he also failed to uncover the Stone Bridge to the rear of Henry Hill at Second Manassas on August 30, 1862; he failed to block the Army of the Cumberland’s escape route to Chattanooga at Chickamauga on September 20, 1863; and he failed to drive Grant’s Army of the Potomac into the Rapidan at the Wilderness on May 6, 1863. As Longstreet observed, history indeed might have been different if he could have capitalized on one of his tactical masterpieces.²²⁰

²¹⁹ Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 2: 480.

²²⁰ Sickles in Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*, 20.

Still, the limitations of Longstreet's wartime accomplishments should not obscure his offensive resume. Robert E. Lee was wrong when he told many Confederate officers just before he surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865, that future generations would "not understand how we [were] overwhelmed with numbers." The superiority of the Union in men and materiel during the war is now widely accepted. Historians should not marginalize Longstreet's accomplishments because he fought on the losing side or because his greatest successes were not without qualifications. Even as a subordinate commander, twice, at Second Manassas and Chickamauga, he came close to inflicting a fatal blow on a major Union army. No other subordinate commander on either side had such a palpable effect on multiple major battles during the war.²²¹

Longstreet's record on the tactical defensive was excellent. By ensuring the integrity of Lee's lines at Antietam and Fredericksburg against massive Federal assaults, he won for himself a reputation as the preeminent wing/corps commander at repulsing large-scale attacks. The reputation was justified. While Longstreet was obviously exaggerating when he boasted to Lee at Fredericksburg that "if you put every man now on the other side of the Potomac on that field to approach me over the same line... I will kill them all," his point is well-taken. Longstreet believed he could hold almost any position against Union attackers, even when he was outnumbered.²²²

But if contemporaries recognized Longstreet's prowess on the defensive, they also recognized his prowess on the offensive. John Bell Hood captured a widely shared sentiment when he deemed Longstreet the Confederacy's "hardest hitter." Unfortunately, the pervasiveness of this perception has eroded throughout the years to the point of extinction. As we have seen,

²²¹ Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide*, 211.

²²² James Longstreet, "The Battle of Fredericksburg," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 81.

Jubal Early and his partisans are largely responsible for this erosion, but professional historians are equally if not more culpable. While many laud his defensive record, they ignore or undermine his offensive one. Such a misrepresentation is inexcusable, especially when, as I have shown, Longstreet's impeccable offensive resume can be reconstructed without too much difficulty.²²³

The goal of this thesis has been to rectify this misrepresentation. By outlining Longstreet's large scale-assaults at Second Manassas on August 30, 1862; at Gettysburg on July 2, 1863; at Chickamauga, on September 20, 1863; and at the Wilderness on May 6, 1864, this project has traced the extent of Longstreet's offensive tactical acumen. Longstreet's performances and accomplishments at these battles reveal a general meticulous in his preparation, uncanny in his timing, and sophisticated in his conception of what was possible on a battlefield. From his largely piecemeal and bungled assault at Second Manassas to his creative employment of a skirmish line to thwart the full Union battle lines at the Wilderness, Longstreet manifested an unrivalled capacity for tactical innovation and experimentation. He also evinced a willingness to evolve in his estimation of what constituted optimal offensive tactics that is completely at odds with many historians' portrayal of his as sullen, stubborn, and tactically one-dimensional.

The preeminence of "Lost Cause" dogma once dictated that historians skew their representations of Confederate military figures. Thankfully, with the passage of time its influence has largely been curtailed. Scholars have long since embarked on the quest of humanizing "marble men" like Lee and Stonewall Jackson and rehabilitating traditional scapegoats like Longstreet. Still, it would be a mistake to believe this work is complete. While they might not have the final word on their subjects, professional histories which take much

²²³ Fitzgerald, *Judge Longstreet*, 19.

“Lost Cause” propaganda at face value still form the foundation of the historiography concerning the most prominent Southern leaders during the Civil War. As long as historians consult historiography, “Lost Cause” dogma will continue to influence even the best-intentioned scholarly analyses.

The historiography concerning ranking Confederates retains its own historical value, has its own lessons to teach, and should be preserved. However, I am suggesting that a new generation of historians should produce fresh representations of these subjects. As much as they have been studied, they are far from exhausted. As new histories proliferate, the bias inherent in the historiography will decrease, and Civil War scholars and hobbyists alike will sharpen their focus on these individuals they have sought to understand for so long. Meanwhile, James Longstreet will remain much like he was when the Federals pierced the Confederate center at Antietam and Longstreet and his staff manned a lone cannon to keep them at bay: a largely solitary, defiant figure.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Secondary Sources:

- Conrad, Bryan and Eckenrode, H.J. *James Longstreet: Lee's War Horse*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936.
- Cozzens, Peter. *This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga*. Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 2016.
- Fitzgerald, O.P. *Judge Longstreet: A Life Sketch*. Nashville: Barber & Smith, 1891.
- Freeman, Douglas Southall. *Lee's Lieutenant's: A Study in Command*, 3 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943.
- Freeman, Douglas Southall. *R.E. Lee: A Biography*, 4 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935.
- Gallagher, Gary W. "How Lee's 'Old War-Horse' Gained a New Following." *Civil War Times*, Vol. 50 (June 2011).
- Gallagher, Gary W. *Lee and His Generals in War and Memory*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998.
- Gallagher, Gary W. *The Wilderness Campaign*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Guelzo, Allen C. *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion*. New York: Knopf, 2013.
- Hay, Thomas R. and Sanger, Donald B. *James Longstreet: I. Soldier, II. Politician, Officeholder, and Writer*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1952.
- Hennessy, John. *Return to Bull Run: The Campaign and Battle of Second Manassas*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.
- Longstreet, Helen D. *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide: Gettysburg in the Light of the Official Records*. Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1989.
- McPherson, James M. *Battle Cry of Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- McPherson, James M. *Ordeal By Fire*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982.
- Patchan, Scott C. *Second Manassas: Longstreet's Attack and the Struggle for Chinn Ridge*. Sterling: Potomac Books, 2011.

Pfanz, Harry W. *Gettysburg: The Second Day*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Piston, William G. *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987.

Rable, George C. *Fredericksburg! Fredericksburg!* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012.

Rhea, Gordon C. *The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6, 1864*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004.

Sears, Stephen W. *Chancellorsville*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996.

Sears, Stephen W. *Landscape Turned Red: The Battle of Antietam*. Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2003.

Sears, Stephen W. *Gettysburg*. Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2004.

Wert, Jeffrey D. *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015.

Primary Sources:

Alexander, Porter E. *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander*, Edited by Gary W. Gallagher. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

The Annals of the War: By Leading Participants North and South. Boston: Da Capo Press, 1994.

The Atlanta Southern Confederacy

Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 4 vols. New York: Thomas Yoseloff Inc., 1956.

The Charleston Mercury

Dame, William M. *From the Rapidan to Richmond*. Baltimore: Green-Lucas Company, 1920.

Early, Jubal Anderson. *Autobiographical Sketch and Narrative of the War Between the States*, Edited by Gary Gallagher. Wilmington: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1989.

Fremantle, Arthur James Lyon. *Three Months in the Southern States*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

Lee, Robert E. *Lee's Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A., to*

Jefferson Davis and the War Department of the Confederate States of America, 1862-1865, Edited by Douglas Southall Freeman. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1957.

Longstreet, James. *From Manassas to Appomattox*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952.

Gordon, John B. *Reminiscences of the Civil War*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903.

Hood, John B. *Advance and Retreat: Personal Experiences in the United States & Confederate States Armies*, Edited by Richard N. Current. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959.

The New York Herald

The New York Times

The New York Tribune

The Richmond Enquirer

Sorrel, G. Moxley. *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, Edited by Bell Irvin Wiley. Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1958.

The Southern Historical Society. *The Southern Historical Society Papers*, Edited by R.A. Brock. Richmond: The Southern Historical Society, 1876-1959.

Taylor, Walter H. *Four Years with General Lee*, Edited by James I. Robertson, Jr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962.

United States. War Department. Department of the Army Department of the Interior Navy Department War Office. *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. Washington: [s.n.], 1894.

The Wartime Papers of R.E. Lee, Edited by Clifford Dowdy and Louis H. Manarin. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1961.