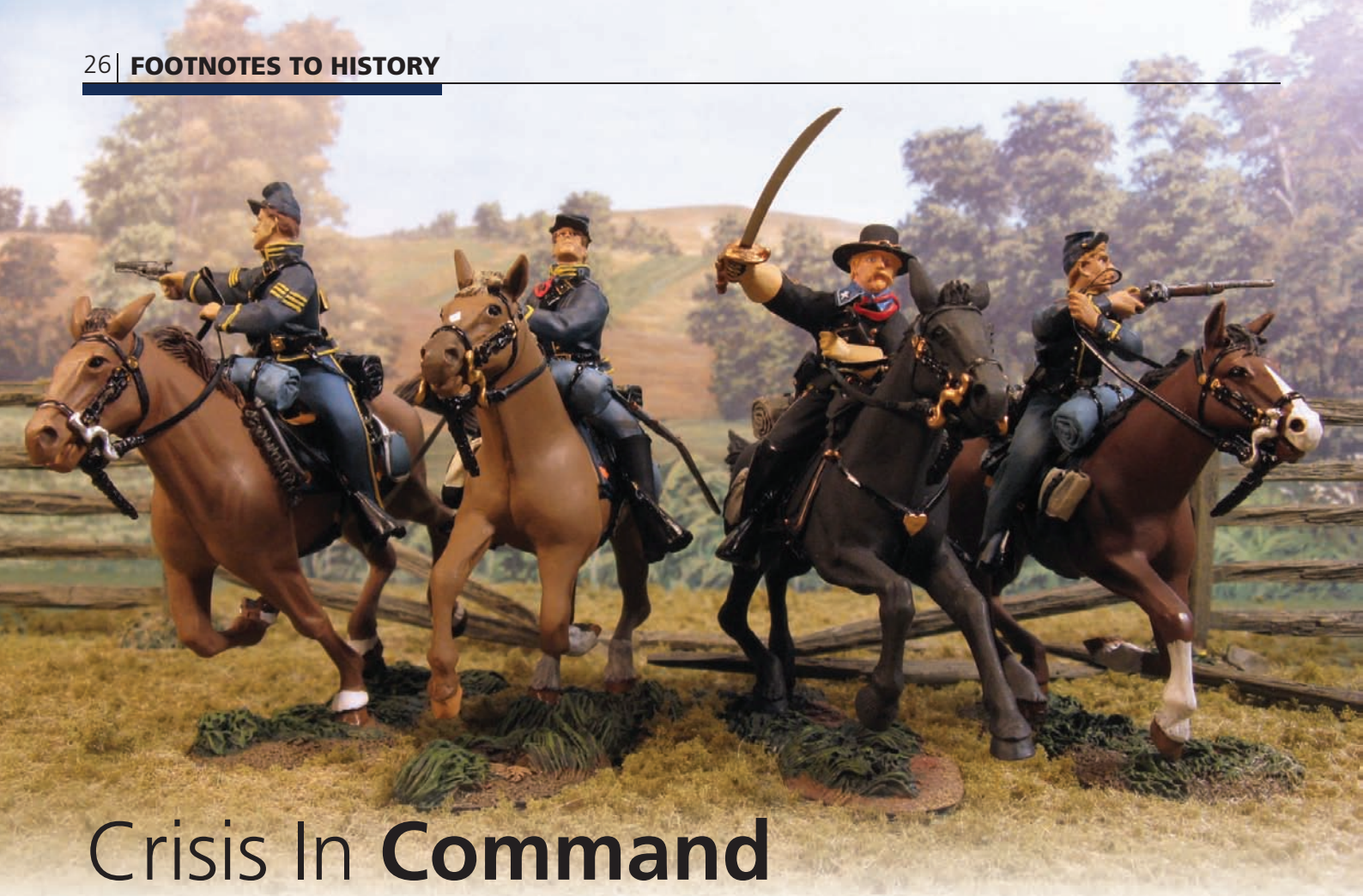




Crisis In Command

Inspired by the W. Britain range of Civil War generals, James H. Hillestad, Member No. 6, looks at the impact of the personalities on the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg.

On Wednesday morning, June 3, 1863, Lee set in motion his 70,000-man Army of Northern Virginia, heading north.

The Objective

Simply stated, Lee's intention was to invade the North, create havoc, feed his troops off the enemy's countryside, and threaten Washington. Such an incursion, it was hoped, would bolster anti-war sentiment in the free states, re-open the possibility of foreign recognition -- and bring about an end to the conflict.

To screen the army from Union eyes and to provide reconnaissance, Lee relied on Gen. "Jeb" Stuart's 4,000-man cavalry division.

Stuart, however, was still smarting from his embarrassing encounter with Union cavalry at Brandy Station. He was eager to restore his tarnished reputation.



Gen. Robert E. Lee
No.17922



Gen. John Buford
No.31068

And, instead of providing mundane, but essential, escort to the Confederate infantry columns, he set off on a "hallelujah" wide end-run around the Union army -- leaving Lee blind to the approaching Federals. It was said that "Stuart the man" had superseded Maj. Gen. Stuart, the cavalry chief. That Lee gave non-specific orders to Stuart (and subsequently to his other commanders at Gettysburg) stemmed from his relationship with Stonewall Jackson. Jackson and Lee were collaborators in every sense of the word. Their concepts of warfare were identical. Jackson operated like an extension of Lee's brain.

Exemplifying this relationship, Lee said, "I had such implicit confidence in Jackson's skill and energy that I never troubled myself to give him detailed instructions."

Jackson died by friendly fire at the battle of Chancellorsville, one month before Gettysburg.

Learning from a scout of impending Union forces, Lee revised his plans with the intention of uniting his army near the village of Cashtown, Pennsylvania, eight miles west of Gettysburg. With his potent forces concentrated, he would then attack and defeat the Federals one piece at a time, as they scrambled to confront him. Instructions were given to his corps commanders (Longstreet, Ewell, and Hill) to avoid major engagements until such time as the entire army was concentrated.

July 1: The Encounter

This plan fell apart on July 1, when the division led by Gen. Heth (pronounced 'heath') stumbled onto a deployed Union cavalry force on the outskirts of Gettysburg. The cavalry were under the command of Gen. John Buford, and were armed with seven-shot repeating rifles and a six-gun battery of three-inch ordnance cannon. Lee's



Gen. A.P. Hill, No.31023

order to avoid a major engagement notwithstanding, and with the concurrence of his corps commander, Gen. A.P. Hill, Heth began a headlong rush to enter Gettysburg.

Buford, though badly out-

numbered, held his ground until elements of the Union First Corps arrived to support him. In command of these troops was one of the most respected generals in the Union army -- Gen. John F. Reynolds, who, tragically, would

ABOVE
Gen. John Reynolds arrives with the Iron Brigade from set No.31051

die in the first hour of battle. The Confederates committed more troops and relentlessly drove the Federals back to Cemetery Ridge. Losses were heavy on both sides. Heth sustained a debilitating concussion when a bullet went through his hat and hit him in the forehead. What saved his life were several layers of newspaper that he had stuffed in his new hat to make it fit properly.

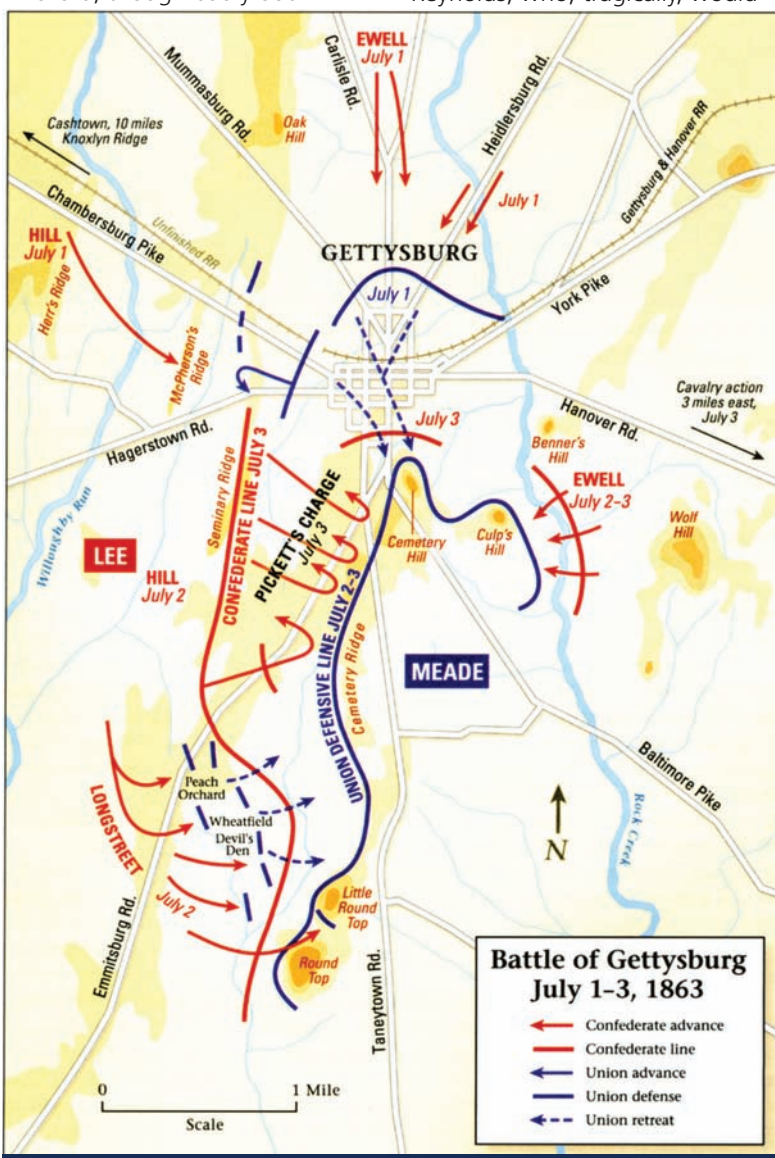
Lee had entered Pennsylvania anticipating that he would choose the battleground. Now, thanks to the unbridled eagerness of Hill and Heth, he found himself facing an enemy that held the invaluable high ground. Heth put the blame on the absence of Stuart's cavalry to alert him to Union dispositions. Heth's self-defense was "Train a giant for an encounter and he can be whipped by a pygmy -- if you put his eyes out."

A measure of blame can be shared by Lt. Gen. Richard Ewell, who commanded the Confederate Second Corps. Ewell had been ordered to attack and dislodge the disorganized Union troops on Cemetery Hill. Lee's orders, however, were couched with the caveat "attack that hill if practicable, but avoid a general engagement until the arrival of other divisions of the army." Ewell chose to follow the instructions to the letter by awaiting additional reinforcements.

This was to have monumental repercussions. Had Ewell attacked and gained Cemetery Hill and nearby Culp's Hill, the South would have established control of the battlefield. Many have



Gen. Henry "Harry" Heth, No.31069



postulated that Stonewall Jackson would not have hesitated to seize the opportunity. At the heart of the matter, Ewell was no Jackson. That being said, ultimate responsibility for the failure of the Confederates to make an all-out assault on Cemetery Hill on July 1 must rest with Lee. If he wanted an attack, as the commanding general, he should have organized it and ordered it.

July 2: The Follow-Through

The following day, Lee and Longstreet, his “Old Warhorse,” surveyed the Union lines from their observation post near the Lutheran Seminary. Longstreet, a master of defensive tactics (at Second Manassas and Fredericksburg), urged Lee to move south around the Union left flank and fight a defensive battle. Such a move would threaten Washington -- and would compel Union Commanding Gen. George Meade to attack Lee on ground of Lee’s choosing.

Lee, however, was eager to renew the attack, believing that momentum and morale were with his army.

Lee’s intent on July 2 was to attack both union flanks. With units of his Second Corps, Ewell was to demonstrate against the Union right flank on Culp’s Hill, while Longstreet, with two of his First Corps divisions plus one division from Hill’s Third Corps, would assault up the Emmitsburg Road to roll up the Union line.

Then fate intervened. Lee envisioned that his troops would advance unhindered through an unoccupied peach orchard. This was not to be, thanks to a brash act by Union Maj. Gen. Daniel Sickles, commander of the Union Third Corps. Sickles was unhappy with his position just north of Little



Gen. James Longstreet, No.31021



Gen. George Meade No.31067



Gen. John Bell Hood No.31022



Col. Joshua Chamberlain, No.17925

round Top, as it was overlooked by the higher ground in the peach orchard. Without any authorization from Meade, he moved his corps out of the Union line and took an advanced position in the orchard, one mile distant.

This action caused Longstreet’s forces to retarget their objective. Instead of going north as ordered by Lee, they headed east to protect their exposed right flank. It is noteworthy that Gen. John Bell Hood, in command of the attacking force, appealed to Longstreet to allow him to skirt the Union defenses by maneuvering to the south and east and attacking them from the rear. This plan was

foreboding Devil’s Den, described as a geological marvel of huge granite boulders devoid of trees or anything green.

When the battle was over, the ground was saturated with the blood of more than 8,000 dead and wounded soldiers, evenly divided between blue and gray. The Confederate advance was blunted at Little Round Top, where Col. Joshua Chamberlain and his 20th Maine regiment launched their celebrated last ditch bayonet charge.

As fighting abated toward the south, the attack at the northern end of the Union line commenced at about dusk. Ewell sent forth



The massive boulders of Devil’s Den

similar to what Longstreet had proposed to Lee and which Lee had rejected.

Somewhat petulantly and citing Lee’s orders, Longstreet refused the request. Later, Hood would say, “General Longstreet is to blame for not reconnoitering the ground and for persisting in ordering the assault...”

What ensued was a fierce, three-hour battle for the Peach Orchard, the Wheatfield a half-mile to the east, and then the

divisions of Maj. Gens. Jubal Early and Edward Johnson. The attack was repulsed. This was largely due to the foresight of Union Gen. George S. Greene. It was Greene who ordered the construction of breastworks on Culp’s Hill, using earth, logs and rocks. This was not standard practice, as it was believed that such protective entrenchments did not contribute to the aggressive qualities of the men.

The battles of the second day resulted in each side’s suffer-

The formidable entrenchments of Culp’s Hill



Did you know?

Meeting the Age Requirement

Early in the Civil War, the first question a recruiter asked a volunteer was, “Are you over eighteen?” Some young men who wanted to join but did not meet the age requirement were conflicted at the prospect of telling a lie. They soon came up with a solution. It was as simple as writing “18” on a piece of paper and placing it in one’s shoe. When the recruiter asked if he was over eighteen, the volunteer could truthfully say, “Yes, sir!”

ing almost 10,000 casualties, in what turned out to be the second bloodiest day of the war (after Antietam, with 23,000 casualties).

For the South it was a day marked by lack of coordination and direction. Lee had followed his by now customary practice of issuing general orders, but letting his corps commanders execute them as they thought best. On the

Ewell on Culp's Hill and an attack on the Union rear by the recently-arrived three cavalry brigades of Gen. Stuart. Again, lack of coordination came to the fore. Ewell's attack was launched independently, at dawn, and died out by 11 a.m. Stuart's cavalry began their advance two hours later. They immediately ran into Brig. Gen. George Armstrong Custer's

After the battle, an examination of a sixteen-foot section of fence revealed that it was perforated with 836 musket balls -- such was the ferocity of the Union fire.

Union side, by contrast, officers from Meade down to regimental colonels moved reinforcements to the right spots, and counterattacked at the right times.

2nd Cavalry Brigade of Michigan "Wolverines," which blunted their advance.

It was not until after 2 p.m. that the Confederate infantry, under



The turnpike fences along the Emmitsburg Road

July 3: The Climax

When dawn broke on July 3, Lee was confident that one more push would break the enemy. He believed that the attacks of the previous day had caused Meade to reinforce his flanks and weaken his center. He would now hit the center with Gen. George Pickett's fresh divisions of Virginians, along with brigades from Hill's corps -- a total of about 12,000 men.

This attack was to be coordinated with a renewed assault by

the overall command of Longstreet, stepped out of the sheltering woods on Seminary Ridge. They would have to advance across almost one mile of open fields, under intense artillery fire every step of the way. When they got across the stout post-and-rail fences lining the Emmitsburg Road, they would come under musket fire from Union infantry, sheltered by a stone wall, commanded by Gen. Winfield Hancock. (After the battle, an



Gen. George Armstrong Custer and the Wolverines



Gen. George Pickett No. 31047



Gen. Winfield Hancock, No. 17923



Gen. Lewis Armistead, No. 31034

examination of a sixteen-foot section of fence revealed that it was perforated with 836 musket balls -- such was the ferocity of the Union fire.)

Only 200 men breached the stone wall, Brig. Gen. Lewis Armistead being one of them, and these were quickly shot down or captured. All 15 regimental commanders in Pickett's division were casualties. Of the 12,500 men who made the fabled charge, 6,500 were killed or wounded -- one out of every two.

On that day, July 3, Lee waited at his headquarters between Hill's and Ewell's corps. He took no proactive steps to ensure that a maximum effort was mounted. Oversight was tragically absent. Pickett was left to "hang out and dry," and sadly, Longstreet seemed to have simply lost interest.

July 4: The Aftermath

The next day, July 4, 1863, the Army of Northern Virginia began the long trek home.

A Confederate survivor of the campaign said, "I hope we will never cross the Potomac again, for I don't believe we ever made anything by crossing it yet." ■

Jim Hillestad operates under the name The Toy Soldier Museum. His museum, containing more than 35,000 figures and a large collection of militaria, is located in the Pocono Mountains of northeastern Pennsylvania. For directions and hours, call him at 570/629-7227, or visit his Website www.the-toy-soldier.com