

THE BUREAU OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE IN THE
CHANCELLORSVILLE CAMPAIGN

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degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Military History

by

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ABSTRACT

THE BUREAU OF MILITARY INFORMATION IN THE CHANCELLORSVILLE CAMPAIGN, by Major Christopher DeLew, 142 pages.

This military historical study investigates the effectiveness of the Bureau of Military Information during the Chancellorsville Campaign. The thesis examines the all-source information provided to the Federal army commander during the planning and operational phases of the battle, while scrutinizing the accuracy, timeliness, and relevance of the intelligence collected by this organization. The effectiveness of Colonel Sharpe's bureau is also analyzed by the modern intelligence doctrine standards of Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield. This paper highlights the history of early Civil War intelligence efforts in the east and west, and the organization of General Hooker's secret service after he took command of the Army of the Potomac. The Battle of Chancellorsville served as the bureau's first test in supporting the Union war effort, and this project studies the information collected by the staff section from mid-February to early May 1863. The analysis of the measures of effectiveness from this period indicates the Bureau of Military Information proved its worth to the Union army. The lessons learned from this staff section were not reinstated until the United States Army established a professional Military Intelligence Corps decades after the Civil War. The bureau established a framework for future intelligence organizations, beginning with the Chancellorsville Campaign.

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ACRONYMS

IPB	Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield
ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The narrow, brown waters of the Rappahannock River split the opposing armies of Major General Joseph Hooker and his Confederate opponent, General Robert E. Lee, as they engaged in a deadly game of chess in 1863. The Fredericksburg Campaign had been a disaster for both the Union war effort and his predecessor's career. Hooker replaced General Ambrose Burnside as the commander of the Army of Potomac on January 25, 1863, and quickly started reorganizing the Army of the Potomac into a coherent fighting machine in preparation for the spring campaigning season. During this restructuring, he instructed his Provost Marshal General Marsena R. Patrick to "organize and perfect a system for collecting information as speedily as possible."¹ Patrick chose Colonel George H. Sharpe to be the army's new chief of intelligence, and a few weeks later the creation of the Bureau of Military Information (BMI) fulfilled this critical requirement. The effectiveness of this experiment would be tested in the coming campaign, known as the Battle of Chancellorsville.

The Bureau of Military Information was the first true all-source intelligence agency in American military history, and the Federal commander used his new section extensively in its first test against the Confederate Army in the spring of 1863. However, historical literature on this critical staff element and its contribution to the Union effort during the Civil War is lacking. This thesis redresses this shortfall by providing a

¹ Edwin C. Fishel, *The Secret War for the Union: The Untold Story of Military Intelligence in the Civil War* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), 287.

historical analysis of the Bureau of Military Information during the Chancellorsville Campaign. The specific question that this research will explore is how effective was the Bureau of Military Information during the Chancellorsville Campaign. This all-source intelligence organization was very effective and gave General Hooker the vital information he needed to be successful during the planning phase and operational phase of the Battle of Chancellorsville. The effectiveness of the department will be measured by the relevance of intelligence given to the commander from February to May 1863. The measure of effectiveness will include operational considerations such as the timeliness, accuracy, and usefulness of the information reported by the bureau during the campaign. Timeliness will be measured by the interval of time from when information was collected to when it was reported to the commander. Accuracy will be determined from a comparison between recorded reports and what the enemy really did at the time. The usefulness of intelligence will be measured from information reported to the commander that was significant to the campaign.² This project will consider the operational considerations that describe the impact of the environment in which the intelligence department functioned in Virginia. The study will consider the all-source intelligence documents, collection, and analysis provided to Hooker during operations in Virginia. The intelligence techniques and procedures of this organization will also be compared to modern Army Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) doctrine and the Intelligence Warfighting Function (WfF) to measure the information provided to the

² Steven D. Culpeper, "Balloons of the Civil War" (master's thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1994).

leader of the Army of the Potomac before and during the battle.³ The idea of a professional intelligence corps implemented in the Army was still years away, but modern doctrine principles can help historians measure the effectiveness of this organization.

The Bureau of Military Information files are collected in the National Archives in Washington, DC, and provide a wealth of information. This collection of microfilm includes hundreds of documents and information reports drafted by the members of this staff section. The collection contains letters, telegrams, reports, lists, orders, circulars, scout maps, picket sketches, troop movements, information on enemy strengths, and intercepted enemy messages from the Army of the Potomac headquarters. Many of the documents are raw information reports, while others include analyzed intelligence collected from numerous sources, including scouts, spies, deserter interrogations, prisoner examinations, balloon reports, and signal accounts. The agency produced several of these reports for the Federal army commander during the Chancellorsville Campaign. However, some documents in the collection are missing and might be lost to history. Professional document thieves raided these files in 1962, and stole over one hundred items from the collection before they were submitted to microfilm. Authorities found many of these documents in subsequent years, but at least seventy-five bulky inventory items remain unrecovered.⁴ The extant documents will be compared to the reports in the

³ U.S. Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 2-01.3: *Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield/Battlespace* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 1-1.

⁴ Fishel, 595.

Official Records of the Civil War to analyze the quality of information given to General Joseph Hooker before and during the Battle of Chancellorsville.⁵

The authoritative source for Civil War historians is *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. This collection of one hundred and twenty-eight volumes of reports and correspondence provides the most comprehensive and authoritative reference on Civil War operations by Union and Confederate armies. These reports, written during the conflict, provide detailed insight into operations. Several of these volumes contain reports issued by the bureau, correspondence from the army chief of staff, and documents from General Hooker during the Chancellorsville Campaign. These documents are critical for measuring the effectiveness of the Bureau of Military Information to see what interaction it was having with the commander of the Army of the Potomac during operations. The evidence provided by the *Official Records* will also be compared and contrasted to modern Army doctrine to measure the intelligence given to the commander during this campaign.⁶

Current Army military intelligence doctrine will be used to analyze the information given to General Hooker. The manual, *Army Training Publication 2-01.3: Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield/Battlespace (IPB)*, is the primary reference for military intelligence officers, and is an updated version of Field Manual 34-130. The book describes all four steps of IPB, and gives soldiers the tactics, techniques, and

⁵ Christopher Y. DeLew, "America's First Intelligence Director: George H. Sharpe and the Bureau of Military Information during the Civil War" (American Military University, May 2012), 12.

⁶ Ibid., 14.

procedures to successfully break down an enemy force for the commander.⁷ This modern view of intelligence collection and analysis will also serve as an important reference to measure the effectiveness of the organization, even though this doctrine was not available during the war. The publication will provide insight into the reports issued by this staff section.

Army doctrine provides intelligence professionals a framework for providing critical information to commanders. IPB is the systematic process of analyzing the mission variables of enemy, terrain, weather, and civil considerations in an area of interest to determine their effect on operations. It is a systematic, continuous process of analyzing the threat and environment in a specific geographic area.⁸ Effective IPB must accurately define the commander's area of interest in order to focus collection assets and analysis of the relevant mission variables. This complex analysis involves the commander and the entire staff working together to determine these effects on the operation. Collection and intelligence products are continually refined as the staff obtains new information and conducts further analysis. This refinement process ensures that the commander's decisions are based on the most current intelligence available at the time.⁹ The IPB process consists of four steps including, defining the operational environment, describing the environmental effects on operations, evaluating the threat, and determining threat courses of action. This doctrine did not exist during the Civil War, but it does

⁷ U.S. Army, ATP 2-01.3, 1-2.

⁸ Ibid., 1-1.

⁹ Ibid., 1-2.

provide a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of the Federal intelligence system in the eastern theater. The techniques and procedures of these wartime organizations shaped the military intelligence staff elements of World War II and the doctrine that intelligence professionals use today. The conception of an army intelligence corps was still years away from being implemented, but these Civil War organizations formed a baseline for future military staff sections.

The first step of the IPB process identifies specific characteristics of the operational environment that might impact a commander's decisions during operations. These factors could influence both friendly and enemy operations during a military campaign, and the intelligence staff details information required to support future decisions. The primary outputs from step one of IPB includes developing several key items. The intelligence section determines the area of operations (AO) and area of interest (AI) related to the friendly and enemy forces. The staff section also examines the area of intelligence responsibility for collection efforts, and identifies the general characteristics of the AO that might influence the mission of the unit. During the collection planning, the intelligence officer identifies information gaps needed for decision-making and translates them into requirements for collection to complete the IPB process.¹⁰ Intelligence sections must identify all of the most vital characteristics of the AO that will impact decisions and courses of action, while not wasting effort on unimportant elements.

The second step of IPB identifies how the operational environment will impact friendly and enemy operations. Step 2 includes terrain analysis of the AO and the effects

¹⁰ U.S. Army, ATP 2-01.3, 3-2.

of weather on combat missions.¹¹ The staff constantly updates intelligence from collection operations during the entire IPB process, and information sharing is fluid between the staff and command. The commander must get the information he needs to quickly make decisions based on terrain, weather, and other considerations to support the mission.¹² The physical environment favors specific courses of action in most combat situations.

Step three of the IPB process determines the enemy force capabilities, doctrinal principles, and tactics that threat military armies prefer to employ on the battlefield. The primary intelligence products produced during the third part of IPB include an enemy order of battle (OB), threat situation template, capabilities, high value targets, and refined collection. Successful intelligence organizations create an accurate OB and picture of enemy forces for the commander. They ensure that the command team has accurate information for planning purposes and the members analyze all adversary forces and capabilities before the operation.¹³ This step is one of the most important factors of the intelligence warfighting function. The intelligence staff “provides the commander with intelligence to plan, prepare, execute, and assess operations.”¹⁴ Detailed intelligence allows a commander to successfully execute mission command in combat scenarios.

¹¹ U.S. Army, ATP 2-01.3, 4-1.

¹² Ibid., 4-1.

¹³ Ibid., 5-1.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6-4.

The fourth step of IPB identifies and describes enemy courses of action for the commander. The intelligence section plots enemy forces and positions on a map with a narrative for each adversary course of action. These products help the friendly force commander determine future enemy actions in combat, and how these movements will influence their operations. This information aids the development of friendly courses of action during planning and refines the information collection plan. The staff attempts to fill gaps in information to determine the specific enemy course of action, so the commander is not surprised during an engagement.¹⁵ Steps 3 and 4 of IPB are the most critical for an intelligence section to get correct before the commencement of a combat mission. The Bureau of Military Information utilized all of these steps to give General Hooker a common operating picture of Confederate forces operating in central Virginia.

Several scholars have studied the role of intelligence during the Civil War, but only a few have mentioned the contributions of the Bureau of Military Information in their work. Several historians have recorded the role of secret spies, the exploits of cavalry reconnaissance, and the operations of Allan Pinkerton. These studies examined the romanticized feats of several spies while ignoring the military intelligence department that most significantly contributed to the Union war effort. Most of the secondary sources that mention this bureau only offer a short history of the organization. The exceptions are Edwin C. Fishel and William B. Feis. Fishel explored Federal intelligence efforts through the first three years of the Civil War in the Eastern Theater. Feis picked up where Fishel left off, and examined Union intelligence operations in the Western Theater and the

¹⁵ U.S. Army, ATP 2-01.3, 6-2.

bureau's contributions during the last year of the conflict. However, only two authors have written about the contributions of this staff section during this specific campaign, Fishel and Jay Luvaas.

Edwin C. Fishel examines the history of the Union intelligence effort during the Civil War from the first operations to the Gettysburg Campaign in his book titled, *The Secret War for the Union: The Untold Story of Military Intelligence in the Civil War*. This book offers the most comprehensive study of Federal intelligence efforts currently available to historical scholars. Fishel was a former intelligence professional employed by the National Security Agency (NSA), and his previous experience was evident in his writing and analysis throughout the study. This book was the first study that delved into this staff department. The author found several hidden boxes of valuable documents in the National Archives tied to the bureau, which were previously untouched by other historians. Fishel offers good insight into his treasure-trove of sources in the bibliography, which were helpful in locating manuscripts for this research. This book offers an objective history of the Bureau of Military Information during its first year of operations. The author found that the Union army's intelligence effort was lacking throughout the first two years of the war until the creation of the Bureau of Military Information in January 1863. General Hooker was revolutionary in establishing an all-source intelligence system that effectively advised its commander. "By having Sharpe's bureau sort out and synthesize this jumble of information, Hooker obtained a picture of the enemy's situation as coherent and complete as the supply of information permitted."¹⁶

¹⁶ Fishel, 298; DeLew, 15.

The author examined the foundation of this organization and offers a detailed history of their early operations, but fails to measure the true effectiveness of the bureau during the Battle of Chancellorsville.¹⁷

The only other author who explores the use of intelligence during this campaign was Jay Luvaas. The author examines the use of intelligence in one of the greatest battles in American military history and the command decisions of the opposing generals in his article titled, “The Role of Intelligence in the Chancellorsville Campaign, April – May 1863.” The author compared and contrasted the intelligence efforts and performance of both armies, but failed to mention any contributions from the Bureau of Military Information. Luvaas committed oversight when he published his article in 1990, because Fishel’s book was not printed until 1996. The bureau was an unknown element to Civil War historians before Fishel’s scholarly work. Luvaas noted that General Robert E. Lee had much better operational and tactical intelligence during the battle, while Hooker had poor information prior to the campaign. “Hooker found himself frequently groping in the dark, unable to penetrate the designs of his enemy, sort out contradictory information, or even get an accurate assessment of enemy numbers.”¹⁸ However, the author fails to mention that Sharpe’s bureau provided Hooker with very detailed information before this campaign. Luvaas notes several similarities between the intelligence systems, but fails to point out that maybe the leadership style of the opposing generals contributed more to the

¹⁷ DeLew, 14.

¹⁸ Jay Luuvas, “The Role of Intelligence in the Chancellorsville Campaign, April-May, 1863,” *Intelligence and National Security* 5, no. 2 (January 2008): 5, accessed September 10, 2016, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fint20>.

outcome of the battle than effective information. This article was a good overview of the historical record of the Confederate intelligence during this campaign, but used limited resources. Historians do not fully understand the complete intelligence collection methods used by Confederate forces, as these records may have been burned in Richmond when Southern forces evacuated their capital in 1865. Luvaas did not have the primary sources necessary to obtain an objective picture of the intelligence situation during this campaign, and his bias was evident towards the strength of southern information.¹⁹ This thesis will fill the void in historical research and contribute to Civil War literature on intelligence operations.

This thesis, divided into five chapters, explores the role of the Bureau of Military Information in the Chancellorsville Campaign. Beyond this introduction, chapter 2 examines the background of early Civil War intelligence efforts and the creation the Bureau of Military Information. Chapter 3 studies the collection efforts of the bureau from mid-February through March 1863 and ties them to step one and two of IPB, define the operational environment, and describe the environmental effects on operations. Chapter 4 examines intelligence operations in April and May, and integrates step three and four of IPB, evaluate the threat and determine threat courses of action. This section also examines the final intelligence products given to Hooker just before and during the battle, and contrasts this information with the official reports found in the records. Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the thesis, and examines Hooker's fateful decisions based on intelligence received during his spring campaign.

¹⁹ DeLew, 19.

CHAPTER 2

Early Intelligence Collection Efforts and the Creation of the Bureau of Military Information

At the beginning of the Civil War, neither army had a centralized intelligence apparatus that could utilize the vast number of intelligence sources. Army commanders did their own analysis instead of professional analysts, and hired spies and scouts to collect information on their opponents. Information was merely raw, undigested news on the enemy that had yet to be analyzed or shaped into a coherent form, whereas intelligence referred to the final product of evaluation and interpretation.²⁰ Reading these raw information reports was a part of the daily workload of every army leader since the days of George Washington, and piecing together all of these reports was challenging for a busy commander. Armies improvised intelligence operations that remained limited in scope, and relied heavily on the analytical skills of the commander.²¹ Neither side had experienced intelligence professionals, nor were personnel formally trained in this specialty. However, the modern nature of the large-scale conflict broadened the importance of the intelligence staff function. Intelligence collection remained decentralized, and Union generals established separate intelligence departments for each army in the field. Federal armies waged an offensive war in the Deep South and operated in enemy territory, so commanders needed critical intelligence to achieve victory. The

²⁰ William B. Feis, *Grant's Secret Service: The Intelligence War from Belmont to Appomattox* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 4.

²¹ Michael E. Bigelow, "A Short History of Army Intelligence," *Military Intelligence Professional Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (September 2012): 12.

war brought many new emerging technologies to the battlefield, and intelligence organizations employed new tactics, techniques, and procedures to collect information about the enemy. Operatives attempted to tap telegraph lines, intercept enemy signal flag messages for signal intelligence, and used balloons for imagery intelligence. These methods of collection led to the employment of codes and ciphers to transmit information. The Union armies employed better codes and cipher breakers throughout the war, and used this factor to their advantage before the Chancellorsville Campaign. The opposing armies used signal stations on high ground to observe signal flags, enemy troop movements, and terrain with powerful telescopes. Civil War combatants also shared the same language and culture, so enemy newspapers and captured correspondence became a method of open source intelligence. Human intelligence included the use of active sources such as scouts, spies, and cavalry reconnaissance, while passive sources included prisoners, deserters, refugees, and slaves. Cavalry forces consistently supplemented intelligence collection on enemy positions and terrain effects. Spymasters employed scouts in no-man's-land between the armies to identify troop and enemy positions, and terrain effects. Spy networks operated behind enemy lines to identify troop movements, locations, and strategic information. Interrogation analysis produced information summaries from prisoners, deserters, escaped slaves, refugees, and civilians.²² This analysis provided detail on the enemy order of battle, troop positions, and movements. The exact effectiveness of the Confederacy's intelligence system might never be confirmed because of the destruction of Southern military records in the burning of

²² Feis, 13.

Richmond.²³ However, it is evident that the Union army dominated the spy game by mid-1863 with the formation of the Bureau of Military Information.

The Union intelligence effort in the East during the first few months of the war severely lacked any semblance of a coherent organization. Lieutenant General Winfield Scott, commander-in-chief of the Union army, needed information on Confederate positions and strength estimates near Manassas Junction in the summer of 1861. He appointed Lafayette Baker as the United States government's chief detective and spymaster just weeks before the first major engagement of the conflict near a small creek in northern Virginia named Bull Run. Baker worked directly for Scott and conducted primarily counterintelligence and security operations for the Federal government throughout the war.²⁴ The spymaster conducted his first mission a week before the Union army marched south in July. Baker traveled under the guise of a photographer, and obtained information of enemy military movements, troop locations, and fortification positions. However, Confederate authorities captured him shortly after he began his journey south and sent him to Richmond for questioning, before enemy forces released him after a few days.²⁵ He grossly overestimated his contribution to the Northern war effort, and his information did not help the Federal forces, as they were defeated at the Battle of Manassas.

²³ DeLew, 29.

²⁴ Fishel, 24.

²⁵ Ibid., 25.



Figure 1. Lafayette Baker

Source: Library of Congress, Prints, and Photography Division.

Baker became the chief of the National Detective Police for the remainder of the war after his early exploits in Virginia. He began his career as a civilian contractor, and left the army as a general. His organization performed human intelligence operations around the capitol, including counterintelligence, counterespionage, and security operations targeting Confederate spy networks, deserters, and Copperheads in Washington, DC. Baker became the official provost marshal for the War Department and had thirty agents on his payroll during the war. He made contact with several other Union Army provost marshal organizations and intelligence departments in the Eastern Theater during the conflict, but only collected information on Confederate couriers around the capitol.²⁶ Furthermore, this department never attempted to fuse all-source information,

²⁶ Fishel, 28.

and was limited in its scope of operations. Baker concentrated on police state functions, and inflated his true contribution during the Civil War in his memoirs.²⁷ General George B. McClellan noticed these early intelligence contributions, and wanted his own secret service department to collect information on enemy forces in southeastern Virginia.

Allan Pinkerton established the Union Army's first, true intelligence organization in the Eastern Theater during the Civil War in 1861. The Bureau of Military Information would not have had any success without Pinkerton's early efforts in information collection. Pinkerton was a Scottish emigrant who had previously worked as an officer for the Chicago Police Department before the war. He left the police force and started his own business in 1850, the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, which primarily operated against gangs that robbed railroads. Pinkerton had several political connections before the war, which helped him secure his future position with the Federal government. Pinkerton provided security assistance to President Abraham Lincoln, and managed counterintelligence operations in Washington, DC, targeting Confederate spies in the first few months of the conflict. General McClellan approached him in 1861 with an offer to establish a secret service department in the Federal Army's Division of the Ohio prior to the Peninsula Campaign.²⁸

Pinkerton served under McClellan during the first two years of the war as a civilian contractor, and made his significant contributions to the Union war effort during

²⁷ DeLew, 28.

²⁸ Thomas Allen, "Intelligence in the Civil War" (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2008), 19, accessed September 14, 2016, <https://fas.org/irp/cia/product/civilwar.pdf>.

the Peninsula Campaign and Antietam Campaign. Pinkerton primarily utilized human intelligence and open source intelligence sources to form a common operating picture of Confederate forces in Virginia. He collected this information from spy reports, interrogations of prisoners, deserters, slaves, refugees, enemy newspapers, and captured correspondence. This type of information provided a strategic and operational picture of the enemy to the Union commander. Pinkerton also enforced operational security measures, and cracked down on Northern newspapers that spilled critical raw information on Union troop movements in this theater of operations. His detective background influenced these early counterintelligence operations as he tried to deny the enemy information while also trying to identify enemy operatives.²⁹ The Bureau of Military Information would never actively participate in any type of counterintelligence operations for the Army of the Potomac. However, Pinkerton's security noose was only partially effective as information continued to spill into local newspapers, and would not be fully operational until the security conscious Joe Hooker took command of the Federal Army in 1863.³⁰

²⁹ Michael Bigelow, 14.

³⁰ Fishel, 153.



Figure 2. Allan Pinkerton

Source: Library of Congress, Prints, and Photography Division.

Pinkerton did not operate a robust scout network during the Civil War. He employed twenty-four agents to collect intelligence, and five of these individuals served behind enemy lines operating as spies to supplement his interrogation summaries from prisoners, deserters, and refugees.³¹ He established these spy networks in the capital of the Confederacy, Richmond, but failed to emplace agents where Confederate forces were

³¹ Allan Pinkerton, *The Spy of the Rebellion* (Chicago: A.G. Nettleton, 1883), 68.

primarily operating. These reports included details on soldier morale, food prices in the capitol, political news, and fortifications outside of the city. These collection circuits therefore provided him with more strategic information, rather than operational or tactical intelligence. He used personal operatives, whom he trusted to collect information. He did not utilize the plethora of Unionists who lived throughout the area of operations, which would have opened up his network for collection operations.³² Pinkerton did not collect all-source information from other assets to integrate into his reports to the commander, especially from cavalry reconnaissance, signal intercepts, balloonist observations, and other sources. Pinkerton's reporting only covered the findings of his own collection activities, and collection from other sources went directly to McClellan.³³ His agency submitted most of this information to General McClellan in the form of raw information instead of analyzed intelligence. The Union commander employed two foreign observers to help him evaluate this data and synthesize the information into finished intelligence to make command decisions. This procedure was the first time in American military history that a commander assigned members of his staff to conduct intelligence analysis as a staff function. Louis Philippe d'Orleans and his brother Robert were French aide-de-camps, filling this void while serving as analysts for McClellan. However, "although the brothers were competent summarizers of sometimes intricate data, their reports with minor exceptions fell considerably short of the sophisticated level of analysis and assessment

³² Fishel, 195.

³³ Ibid., 298.

later achieved by the intelligence bureau that succeeded Pinkerton's."³⁴ McClellan was once again filling the role of several military officers who came before him; he was serving as his own chief of intelligence while also trying to command an army in combat.



Figure 3. Allan Pinkerton seated (right) with William Moore, secretary to Secretary of War Stanton, standing, left to right, George H. Bangs, John Babcock, and Augustus K. Littlefield

Source: Library of Congress, Prints, and Photography Division.

³⁴ Fishel, 289.

The largest infraction committed by Pinkerton's secret service was supporting his commander's practice of overinflating Confederate troop estimates. This deficiency was partly due to poor analysis and a loyal desire to give McClellan the information that he wanted to hear instead of the facts. Pinkerton had developed a detailed enemy order of battle. He had success detailing the composition and organization of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, but chose to give the commander rough calculations of regimental strengths based on full-strength numbers.³⁵ He thought that an accurate determination of the composition of the Confederate Army was "impossible even by the use of every resource at our command to ascertain with certainty the specific number and charter of their forces."³⁶ The detective supported his commander's intent of deliberately providing false estimates of enemy strength to the Federal government. General McClellan exaggerated the size and composition of Confederate forces as a safety net in order to get more supplies and reinforcements for his campaigns. McClellan was relieved of command in November 1862 following the Battle of Antietam, and Pinkerton soon left the service as well.³⁷ Although Pinkerton set the foundation for intelligence operations in the Eastern Theater, the Federal intelligence chief failed to recruit Unionists, employ scouting operations, and give detailed all-source analysis to his commander. The Bureau of Military Information would correct these deficiencies.

³⁵ John Cook, "Military Intelligence during America's Civil War." American Civil War Roundtable of Australia, New South Wales Chapter (August 2011), accessed September 11, 2016, http://www.americancivilwar.asn.au/meet/2011_08_15%20military%20intelligence%20paper%20SydACWRT.pdf.

³⁶ Fishel, 584.

³⁷ DeLew, 33.

The intelligence effort in the Western Theater of the war was little better than collection in the East, although one spymaster was effective at his profession. Brigadier General Grenville M. Dodge was a former infantry officer who had a background in civil engineering. His engineering background enabled him to acquire good maps for his commander, General Ulysses S. Grant. Grant tasked him to get information on enemy forces operating near his army, and he soon became Grant's chief of intelligence in the West. Dodge collected information from open sources and human intelligence.³⁸ He established a large spy network that ranged through the heartland of the Confederacy, and his large payroll supported his agents' clandestine activities. Dodge's extensive network consisted of 130 operatives by late 1863 that spanned from Corinth to Atlanta and into the interiors of Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama.³⁹ He employed many local Unionists in his area of operations to gain knowledge of Southern forces. Dodge kept his "men out in the field to collect information in the countryside with which they were most familiar. Those living in enemy-held territory were paid for their services and expenses, although many of them refused payment because their loyalties lay with the Union."⁴⁰ Dodge also used cavalry scouts to confirm reporting from his spy network and corroborated this information with maps and newspapers. He was security conscious about the work he performed to support his chain of command. He personally read all of

³⁸ DeLew, 36.

³⁹ Feis, 128.

⁴⁰ U.S. Army Intelligence Center and Fort Huachuca, ed., "Grenville M. Dodge and George H. Sharpe: Grant's Intelligence Chiefs in the West and East," in *Masters of the Intelligence Art* (n.p: Department of Defense, 2009), 1-14, accessed September 15, 2016, http://huachuca-www.army.mil/files/History_MDODGE.PDF.

the reports produced by his agents, and refused to disclose the identities of his sources to his superior officers. Dodge provided more raw information to Grant than finished intelligence products, and did not use all-source collection methods during his tenure on the commander's staff. The Union army disbanded this organization when Grant moved east to command all Federal armies. However, Dodge stimulated Grant's appreciation for good intelligence, which paved the way for his future staff section, the Bureau of Military Information.⁴¹

⁴¹ Feis, 221.



Figure 4. Grenville M. Dodge

Source: Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints, and Photographs Division.

One of Pinkerton's operatives, John C. Babcock, remained with the army and served as General Burnside's sole intelligence chief during his short tenure as the commander of the Army of the Potomac for the Fredericksburg Campaign. Babcock was

a former volunteer with the Sturgis Rifles, and had been an accomplished architect in Chicago before the war.⁴² He stayed in the army as a civilian contractor after his term of enlistment had expired, and soon took over Pinkerton's position as Burnside's chief of the secret service. He was acquainted with Burnside before the war, which led to his new position. Babcock was an enemy order of battle expert, experienced interrogator, record keeper, and had extensive practice drawing maps and terrain effects before the disastrous winter campaign.⁴³ He was twenty-six years old, and served as the only scout and mapmaker for Pinkerton. The new commander of the Union army failed to use any element of his shattered intelligence organization to gain information on Lee's army across the Rappahannock River. Babcock had vast knowledge of the organization and composition of the enemy forces, experience conducting collection operations, and served as an excellent source of continuity for the next intelligence chief, George H. Sharpe.⁴⁴

Major General Joseph Hooker replaced Burnside on January 26, 1863, and reorganized the Federal army in preparation for a spring campaign. President Abraham Lincoln liked Hooker's aggressiveness as a commander, and was also personally fond of him.⁴⁵ "Fighting Joe" Hooker was Lincoln's fifth selection in two years to lead the Army

⁴² DeLew, 36.

⁴³ Peter Maslowski, "Military Intelligence Sources During the American Civil War: A Case Study" (Monograph, U.S. Air Force Academy, 1988), 27.

⁴⁴ Fishel, 286.

⁴⁵ Ethan S. Rafuse, ed., *Corps Commanders in Blue: Union Major Generals in the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 223.

of the Potomac. Hooker was a West Point graduate who had served with distinction in the Mexican War. He was an aggressive combat commander and earned a reputation among his peers for being irascible, obstinate, and egomaniacal. Hooker rose through the ranks and commanded one of the Army of the Potomac's Grand Divisions during the Battle of Fredericksburg. He blatantly condemned Burnside's costly assaults against the well-entrenched Confederate positions at Marye's Heights during the campaign, and criticized the leadership of the military. After taking command, Hooker restructured and reinvigorated the Union army through the winter months in Falmouth. The new commander created a highly effective, well-organized army in the early months of the year, and was a very competent administrator. He replaced the Grand Divisions with seven infantry corps and a single cavalry corps totaling over 130,000 men. Hooker also redistributed the artillery batteries to several subordinate units, which gave his field commanders more control over their fire support.⁴⁶ This commander understood the importance of good intelligence in war, and was also conscious of operational security. Hooker knew that Confederate officers consistently read Northern newspapers to gain information on troop movements, so he clamped down on Northern newspaper journalists, making them accountable for their work. Newspaper journalists remained anonymous in their articles before 1863, but Hooker made them account for their work in an effort to decrease operational spillage in the press. In this way, he created the modern newspaper byline. The commander also ordered his troops on the picket lines to stop

⁴⁶ Bradford A. Wineman, "The Chancellorsville Campaign: January–May 1863" (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2013), 10.

trading newspapers and talking to enemy pickets, which was common practice.⁴⁷ The Union general ordered his soldiers to keep local civilians confined to their houses during troop movements, posted road guards, and performed other operations to disrupt information leaking to Confederate sources. He also kept the planning and orders production for future operations close-hold, and only distributed information to a tight circle of trusted officers. These efforts stemmed the tide of open source information going to the enemy, but like Pinkerton, he found it impossible to completely control the spillage of intelligence. Hooker tasked his Provost Marshal General Marsena R. Patrick with reorganizing the Union intelligence service to get a common operating picture of the enemy.⁴⁸ The new organization fell under the Provost Marshal's department. Patrick found Colonel George H. Sharpe to assume the position of Deputy Provost Marshal General for the Army of the Potomac.⁴⁹

Sharpe took the position of chief intelligence officer for the Union army on February 11, 1863, and immediately set to work organizing his new department. The bureau became a permanent staff element that traveled with the army headquarters.⁵⁰ Sharpe reported directly to Hooker, but also answered to Patrick and the chief of staff, General Daniel Butterfield. Patrick was mostly involved with personnel and

⁴⁷ DeLew, 37.

⁴⁸ Fishel, 231.

⁴⁹ George H. Casamajor, "The Secret Service of the Federal Armies," accessed September 11, 2016, <http://www.civilwarsignals.org/pages/spy/fedsecret/fedsecret.html>.

⁵⁰ DeLew, 37.

compensation for the bureau's intelligence funds. The bureau routed all of its intelligence reports directly through the chief of staff. Hooker's spymaster was an intellectual, charismatic leader with a good education and good personality.⁵¹ Sharpe did not look like the chief for the Army of the Potomac's military intelligence department, but looked more like an ordinary businessman. He was from Kingston, New York, and was thirty-five years old at the time of his appointment. He knew several languages, including Latin, and had traveled extensively, serving as a diplomat for a short period of time.⁵² He had a strong passion for books, and graduated from Rutgers University at the age of nineteen before attending Yale Law School. He practiced law before the Civil War, and served as colonel of the 120th New York Infantry Regiment in the Antietam and Fredericksburg campaigns before taking this staff position. Sharpe was an integral component in establishing this highly effective military intelligence all-source organization that would serve the next three Union Army commanders well.⁵³ He went into his profession with all his effort, and transformed the Federal intelligence system in the Eastern Theater of operations.

Sharpe carefully organized his new intelligence department and formed the nucleus of his organization around a few competent agents from Pinkerton's staff, Union soldiers, and civilians.⁵⁴ John Babcock taught him the finer points of information

⁵¹ Fishel, 292.

⁵² Ibid., 235.

⁵³ DeLew, 37.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 38.

collection and analysis, while also providing lessons learned from his past experience with the Secret Service. Babcock served as Sharpe's principal assistant, and helped shape the new department for the spring campaign. He also used his architect experience to draw maps for the bureau. Babcock was Sharpe's most trusted deputy, and had authority to release reports and sign documents that went directly to the commander. Sharpe picked veteran soldiers from the Army with skills that benefitted his department, which included scouts, guides, and agents to fill his ranks. He relied on professionals with experience instead of civilian detectives. He formed a corps of ex-cavalry scouts that penetrated enemy lines, operating in no-man's-land to collect critical information on enemy positions while wearing Union, Confederate, and civilian clothes. Sharpe also sought the services of local Unionist spies who were on the payrolls of several Federal commanders in the area. He formed the nucleus of civilian agents around several locals, including Jackson Harding, Joseph Humphreys, Howard Skinker, Ebenezer McGee, and Ernest Yager. Most of these civilians operated their own sub-source networks behind Confederate lines in the greater Fredericksburg area. The department employed around seventy agents in early 1863 to collect information on the enemy across the river.⁵⁵ The spymaster picked twenty-eight year old Captain John C. McEntee from the Ulster Guard to be his second primary assistant. McEntee was a well-educated businessman before the war, and had served in the Second Bull Run, Antietam, and Fredericksburg Campaigns with his regiment before reporting for duty with the provost marshal. He served the new intelligence bureau as a report writer, interrogator, and collection manager for this staff

⁵⁵ Allen, 15.

section.⁵⁶ McEntee organized most of the scouting expeditions, and established branch offices of the bureau with other Union commands throughout Virginia in 1864. Sharpe, Babcock, and McEntee served as the triumvirate of this organization throughout the conflict. The organization adopted the previous naming convention, and at first called themselves the Secret Service. However, within a few weeks, the name Bureau of Information began to soon appear on Sharpe's reports to headquarters and the organization became known to military history as the Bureau of Military Information.

Sharpe did not structure the Bureau of Military Information exactly like the previous organization, although Pinkerton's Secret Service laid a solid foundation. This department was a more complete intelligence service, although the primary sources of information were the same. The staff element employed all-source collection techniques to produce analyzed finished intelligence reports for their commander.⁵⁷ Sharpe's bureau used some of the collection methods of Pinkerton's organization and merged them with the reports from cavalry reconnaissance, interrogations, scouts, spies, balloonist operations, signal corps observation stations, flag signal interception, reporting from neighboring commands, enemy correspondence, and examination of southern newspapers.⁵⁸ The staff section combined information from human intelligence, signal intelligence, imagery intelligence, and open source intelligence to form an accurate all-source assessment of Confederate forces. The key differences from Pinkerton's

⁵⁶ DeLew, 38.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁸ Fishel, 298.

operations were the incorporation of cavalry reports, integration of signal corps information, balloonist reports, and leveraging a large scouting network. Sharpe and Babcock worked closely with the Union Army's chief signal officer, Captain Benjamin F. Fisher. General Butterfield ensured that his other staff elements shared their information with his intelligence department to form a complete unity of effort. Comprehensive reports from the intelligence department consistently indicated that information from all of the Army's sources went into the finished product. However, the bureau did not conduct counterintelligence operations during the war. The Bureau of Military Information collected, analyzed, and condensed this mass of information from a variety of sources into daily written summaries for Hooker.⁵⁹ Sharpe shaped this massive amount of information into relevant intelligence for the commander to obtain a coherent picture of the enemy forces across the murky river.

The Bureau of Military Information used human intelligence extensively to procure accurate information on Confederate forces operating in Virginia during the winter months from both active and passive sources. Sharpe used his network of scouts to collect information on enemy defenses, troop locations, strength, and the condition of Confederate commands. Sharpe's scouts were highly effective operatives from various Union cavalry regiments. The staff section supplemented this data with information from the department's vast Unionist spy network operating throughout the Eastern Theater. This department became a funnel for captured Confederate currency to pay spies and recruit new sources for the war effort. Spies were an easy means of collection due to the

⁵⁹ Fishel, 197.

common culture, language, and geography that both sides shared during the war. Sharpe accepted the risk of employing Southern civilians to have access to more information, whereas his predecessor only trusted his own vetted agents in rebel territory. The spy network focused collection on troop movements, positions, terrain, and logistics. Sub-source networks forwarded reports through the lines with scouts or their handlers using secret ink and small compartments to hide their correspondence.⁶⁰ Babcock mentioned sending a “small phial of his S.S. flow” to a source operating in eastern Virginia to code these messages.⁶¹ Isaac Silver, referred to as the “Old Man,” was an effective sub-source of Ebenezer McGee. He was a local farmer who also managed his own spy network around the Fredericksburg and Culpeper area, providing key information to Sharpe during the spring of 1863. These multiple lines of intelligence collection provided the bureau with a plethora of information to analyze for General Hooker before his spring campaign.⁶²

Cavalry reconnaissance patrols, reporting from subordinate commands, and interrogation summaries provided supplementary information to vet collection from the bureau’s human intelligence networks. Cavalry forces primarily performed scouting duties during the conflict, and this mission was vital to their respective armies.⁶³ “The

⁶⁰ DeLew, 44.

⁶¹ Thom Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34 National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, 2007, Entry 122.

⁶² DeLew, 45.

⁶³ Ibid.

cavalry's primary role was not fighting, but simply watching the enemy to discern its positions, movements, and numbers."⁶⁴ The intelligence staff corroborated this data with passive sources gathered from the interrogations of deserters, prisoners, refugees, and run-away slaves. The Union army forwarded all of these potential sources to Sharpe's headquarters, where they were questioned for information regarding unit, leadership, numerical strength, terrain, morale, logistics, organization, composition, and where they entered Federal lines. The intelligence collected from these sources varied by rank, placement, and access. Confederate deserters tended to be more reliable and provided the best information to interrogators, whereas prisoners were least cooperative, and sometimes provided false information or camp rumors. Information given by refugees and runaway slaves was sometimes subject to inflated numbers or faulty preconceived notions.⁶⁵ The Bureau of Military Information sometimes utilized enhanced interrogation techniques on prisoners to extract information, including tying soldiers up by their thumbs to the limb of a tree for hours at a time.⁶⁶ The staff section transformed this raw data into actionable intelligence with the supplementation of other sources to obtain an accurate picture of the Confederate Army.

New technology provided the bureau with another means of information collection. Signals intelligence consisted of the collection of communications tied to telegraph interceptions and the observation of flag signal station traffic. Command and

⁶⁴ Maslowski, 34.

⁶⁵ DeLew, 46.

⁶⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 3980.

control nodes for both armies employed the Beardslee magneto-electric telegraph in the field. Federal Army Captain Anson Stager devised a route transposition system to safeguard against wiretapping, and the Confederates never decrypted his code. The Southern forces used the Vigenere polyalphabetic substitution system, which was vulnerable to Union operatives throughout the Civil War. This code was easily deciphered by Federal agents and vulnerable to wiretapping, even though the Confederate Army regularly changed their alphanumeric code.⁶⁷ Federal signal stations and agents collected signal intelligence from Confederate flag stations during the Chancellorsville Campaign. Signal service personnel found high ground or tall, man-made structures, including rooftops, church steeples, and towers to set up their stations. The height of these structures permitted trained soldiers to observe enemy movements, defensive positions, and intercept communications from enemy signal stations.⁶⁸ Atmospheric conditions, topography, or enemy fire obstructed observations from signal stations. Signal personnel collected communications, and decrypted them rapidly to gain information on enemy troop movements, positions, and intentions. The extent of intercepted signal traffic during Hooker's operations was significant, and the enemy never realized that Federal officers had cracked their code.⁶⁹ Sharpe learned from Fisher that the Confederate signal corps officers could also decipher Union messages in late

⁶⁷ Maslowski, 26.

⁶⁸ DeLew, 47.

⁶⁹ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies XIX, Part 1* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880), 403.

February 1863. The Federal Army had several encrypted codes for their messages, and the enemy had cracked one of these codes. Only a few people in the Army of the Potomac knew about this sensitive development, including Fisher, Sharpe, Babcock, Butterfield, and Hooker.⁷⁰ Hooker used flag signal communication as a form of counterintelligence and an early form of information operation to deceive General Lee and launch his offensive across the Rappahannock River.

The Bureau of Military Information used imagery intelligence collected from aeronauts operating on the north side of the Rappahannock River to corroborate other sources regarding troop positions, movements, and the terrain effects from maps. Professor Thaddeus Lowe led the Union balloon corps under Hooker, and had previously served under McClellan. Lowe was a New Hampshire meteorologist who demonstrated the usefulness of gas balloons as aerial surveillance platforms to President Lincoln in 1861. This Civil War drone impressed Lincoln and he authorized the formation of the Army Balloon Corps, composed of seven balloons and nine aeronauts.⁷¹ These platforms used portable hydrogen generators that fit inside wagons for transport, but were still cumbersome to move and deploy, which hindered their capability. Topography, atmospheric conditions, weather, and well-aware enemy forces trying to hide their movements hindered observations. The Federal Army used telegraph systems to send

⁷⁰ Thom Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45 National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC, 2007, Entry 234.

⁷¹ Ben Fanton, "Gas Balloons: View from Above the Civil War Battlefield." *America's Civil War Magazine*, September 12, 2001, 1, accessed September 11, 2016, <http://www.historynet.com/gas-balloons-view-from-above-the-civil-war-battlefield.htm>.

communications from inside of the balloons with cables that ran along the rigging to the ground.⁷² These messages were forwarded to Sharpe, Butterfield, and Hooker by either runner or telegraph during operations. Soldiers towed these aerial platforms up and down the banks of the Rappahannock River during the campaign and provided Hooker with a good form of mobile airborne reconnaissance. Lowe left the service after the Battle of Chancellorsville because of disputes over management and financial compensation. The Federal army did not use balloons again for collection during the war, but other sources did provide useful information.⁷³

Open source intelligence collected from public newspapers, captured mail, and other documents provided critical information to Sharpe's bureau. Southern newspaper correspondents fared little better than their Northern counterparts in spilling data on troop movements, positions, and army strategy. These documents also provided insight into the living conditions of the enemy society and the financial state of the government for strategic intelligence. The staff section sorted through hundreds of Confederate soldier letters to confirm or deny enemy intentions, morale, and unit identification.⁷⁴ The Civil War provided a plethora of open source collection opportunities for both sides, and

⁷² Fanton, 4.

⁷³ DeLew, 49.

⁷⁴ DeLew, 50; Stephen Budiansky, "America's Unknown Intelligence Czar." *American Heritage Magazine* 55, no. 5 (October 2004): 55, accessed September 11, 2016, <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/america%E2%80%99s-unknown-intelligence-czar>.

Sharpe took advantage of every piece of information to form a cohesive picture of the threat.

General Hooker restructured the Federal Army into an organized fighting machine in the winter of 1863 in preparation for spring offensive operations. The creation of the Bureau of Military Information significantly enhanced the intelligence warfighting function of the Army of the Potomac, while building on the previous tactics, techniques, and procedures of other Eastern intelligence departments. Pinkerton's Secret Service laid the foundation for Sharpe's department, and Babcock was the key link to form this new staff function. The bureau collected and analyzed information from all available sources in an effort to produce an accurate common operating picture of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. The staff section gave the new Union commander a significant advantage on the battlefield. This marked the first time in American military history that a staff section conducted intelligence for the commander, and the first time personnel analyzed intelligence from all sources. The Bureau of Military Information was truly revolutionary for its time, but did these officers effectively give their commander the information he needed to conduct successful operations? The upcoming campaign planning gave Hooker's new staff section its first real test as an effective warfighting function in February 1863, as Sharpe's men conducted intelligence preparation of the battlefield.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ DeLew, 46; Fishel, 361.



Figure 5. George H. Sharpe

Source: Library of Congress, Prints, and Photography Division.

CHAPTER 3

Colonel Sharpe Defines the Environment and Environmental Effects Impacting Federal Army Operations: February – March 1863

General Joseph Hooker began initial planning for a spring campaign shortly after taking command and reorganizing the Army of the Potomac. The powerful Union army, numbering over 130,000 men, faced General Robert E. Lee's smaller Confederate Army of Northern Virginia composed of sixty thousand troops. February of 1863 found both Northern and Southern forces searching for a way to defeat the enemy army and end the war on favorable terms after fighting an inconclusive bloody battle on the plains of Fredericksburg. The two armies had recently come out of winter quarters and still squared off across the Rappahannock River in Virginia's Piedmont region.⁷⁶ The Union army camped on the northern side of the river near Falmouth, while Confederate soldiers controlled the southwestern side of the river, including Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania County, and the valuable railroads. Hooker's strategy, like Burnside's, was to defeat the rebel army in order to control the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad, to use it as a line of communication (LOC) for logistical support in an overland campaign against Richmond. Colonel Sharpe quickly assessed the situation, received guidance from General Butterfield, and set the Bureau of Military Information in motion to collect intelligence to support planning and future operations.

Union headquarters in Falmouth was bustling with activity as Hooker's new staff organizations began planning for future operations, and the new intelligence section

⁷⁶ Wineman, 7.

worked around the clock to gain information on enemy forces across the river. Sharpe and Babcock defined the operational environment and terrain effects to support planning efforts, and began collecting all-source information that might impact friendly courses of action and command decisions for the campaign. The Bureau of Military Information effectively identified the limits of Hooker's area of operations and boundaries of the area of interest through initial collection and viewing maps. The area of interest, as defined in ATP 2-01.3, was "the geographical area from which information and intelligence were required to execute successful tactical operations and to plan for future operations. It included any threat forces or characteristics that would significantly influence accomplishing the command's mission."⁷⁷ Sharpe also evaluated the intelligence holdings of Babcock upon taking charge of this staff section. He identified information gaps on Confederate forces to prioritize his collection plan, and began conducting an early form of intelligence preparation of the battlefield. Hooker's support for the bureau was evident as officers immediately forwarded Confederate deserters and prisoners to Babcock's tent for interrogation. "Hooker's active interest in intelligence amounted to a new broom that swept Confederate soldiers from eight regiments and batteries into Babcock's tent on February 1 alone. Bad weather slowed down the influx before long, but not until the divisions with Lee were firmly identified and their positions well established."⁷⁸ Sharpe sent scouts out at night in all cardinal directions and across the river to identify brigades and regiments, while collecting information on the area of

⁷⁷ U.S. Army, ATP 2-01.3, 3-1.

⁷⁸ Fishel, 301.

interest and area of operations. Sharpe also set his Unionist spy network in motion to corroborate the information in the wilderness south and west of Fredericksburg.⁷⁹

The small city of Fredericksburg lay halfway between Richmond and Washington, DC, on the southwestern side of the narrow Rappahannock River. The river originated approximately “forty miles to the northwest near the Bull Run Mountains and emptied eighty miles to the southwest into the Chesapeake Bay.”⁸⁰ The river near Fredericksburg was passable by pontoon bridges or boats, and offered several fording sites to the north and south. The county of Spotsylvania was located to south and west of the town. There were several farms with open land around the city, but most of the terrain controlled by Confederate forces to the south and west featured thick wilderness with isolated narrow dirt roads. The high banks and hills on the northeastern side of the waterway offered an excellent view of the city and terrain controlled by Lee’s Army. This network of hills was twenty-five miles in length and formed the nexus of the Confederate area defensive positions set up in defensive blocking locations, surrounded by obstacles, near the banks of the river.⁸¹ Furthermore, the rolling hills of Marye’s Heights and Lee’s Hill, and woods on the southwest side of the town disrupted the view of Federal signal stations and balloons posted on the northeastern bank of the river. The Union soldiers could see approximately three to six miles behind Confederate lines because of the impact of trees, hills, and weather. The road networks behind the town

⁷⁹ Fishel, 316.

⁸⁰ Culpeper, 79.

⁸¹ Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville* (New York: Mariner Books, 1998), 31.

became the source of several reports from Lowe later during the campaign.⁸² The small hamlets of Chancellorsville, Salem Church, and Culpeper were located directly to the west of the town. The Plank Road connected Fredericksburg, Salem Church, and Chancellorsville, while other road networks, including the River Road, Telegraph Road, Military Road, and Mine Road, offered the Confederate army the advantage of interior lines. The small town of Falmouth was directly across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg on the northeastern bank. Several important railroad networks located to the south and west of the city offered support to Lee's army, but could also sustain a Federal army moving against Richmond if captured by Federal forces. Both armies used the seventy-five mile single track Richmond, Fredericksburg, Potomac Railroad to supply themselves during the campaign since the track crossed the Rappahannock River. This rail line ran north from Richmond to Fredericksburg, where it crossed the river, before connecting Aquia Landing on the Potomac to the northeast. Hamilton's crossing, a depot five miles southeast of Fredericksburg, serviced the Confederate army. The Union army's large supply depot was located at Aquia Landing.⁸³ Lee's other supplies came to his army by route of the Virginia Central Railroad, which connected the Richmond Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad with the Orange and Alexandria Railroad in the western central region of Virginia. Scouts, spies, and sub-source networks employed by the Bureau of

⁸² Culpeper, 83.

⁸³ Sears, 31.

Military Information explored these areas to collect information on enemy forces and terrain effects for their commander.⁸⁴

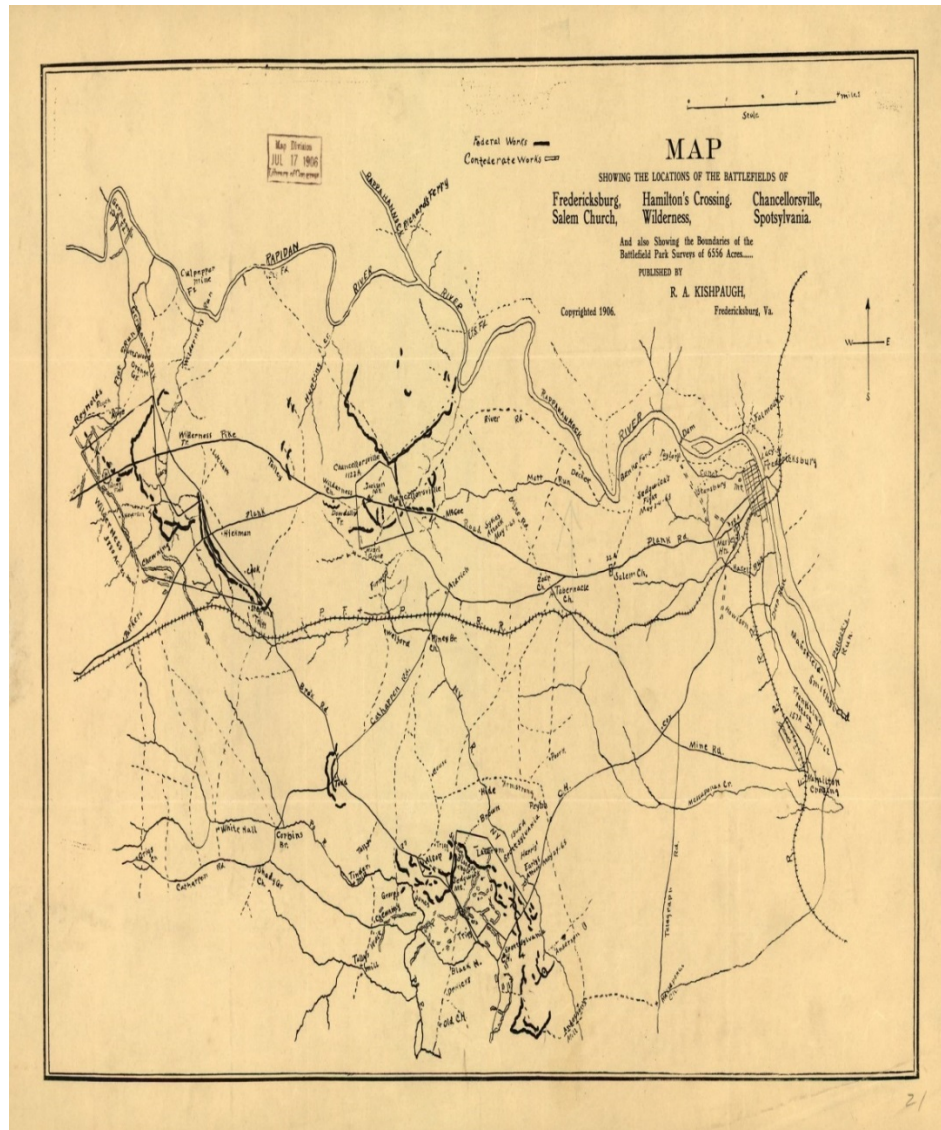


Figure 6. Map of Chancellorsville

Source: Library of Congress, Prints, and Photography Division.

⁸⁴ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

The Federal army shifted forces the second week of February, which triggered an enemy reaction and large movement of Confederate troops to the south. General Henry W. Halleck, chief of all United States armies, sent Hooker orders to transfer his Ninth Corps to the Virginia Peninsula Theater to support General Dix. The Confederate army learned of this movement, and Lee dispatched Lieutenant General James Longstreet, one of his corps commanders, with two of his divisions to support the forces south of the James River near Petersburg.⁸⁵ Rain and snow over the next several days obscured Lee's move. However, on February 19, 1863, Federal signal stations located on the Union left opposite Fredericksburg noticed that several enemy camps were gone. Lieutenant Peter Taylor noted, "No troop movements of any size could be seen, but wagons were observed going toward the enemy's railroad terminal south of town, moving down heavily laden and coming up light. A battery of four guns also moved off; meanwhile the smoke of two locomotives was seen in the gray sky."⁸⁶ Union signal stations and balloonists kept a constant over watch of enemy forces across the river and provided key information to headquarters. Army officers directly distributed all of these reports to General Butterfield and Colonel Sharpe.⁸⁷

Union balloonists and signal officers provided information on camp locations throughout the winter months through the direct observation of campfires, smoke, and troop formations. The Bureau of Military Information did not have direct operational

⁸⁵ Fishel, 302.

⁸⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 237.

⁸⁷ Ibid., Roll 45.

control over the balloons, but every report passed through the staff section. Lowe's aeronauts were usually up collecting imagery intelligence over Confederate lines when the weather was good. Fog in the morning severely restricted observation, as well as wind. If the wind was too gusty, it was almost impossible to hold field glasses with a steady hand or get the balloons aloft.⁸⁸ These balloonists ascended to between 1,200 to 1,500 feet and used powerful telescopes to look down at enemy forces from various locations on the banks of the Rappahannock River. The Federal army positioned their balloons to effectively observe the winter quarters of the Confederate army.⁸⁹

Staff officers assigned these early intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets to Bank's Ford, the Phillips House, and White Oak Church. Bank's Ford lay three and a half miles up-river and northwest of Fredericksburg. The balloon, *Eagle*, was most likely located on high ground one mile north of Bank's Ford where aeronauts could see three miles to the south down the Confederate line along the rolling hills behind the city, including River Road, Plank Road, and areas near the Salem Church. Several civilian contractors controlled these collection assets. Mr. E. S. Allen was in command of the *Eagle* and could fill in gaps of coverage of the balloon located at the Phillips House.⁹⁰ The Federal army positioned the balloon, *Washington*, on high ground at the Phillips House, located five miles east of Bank's Ford. James Allen was in charge of this balloon, and could observe enemy lines and camps "exposed on open ground south of the river as

⁸⁸ Culpeper, 82.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 125.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 82.

far as Bowling Green, twelve miles distant.”⁹¹ The other balloon location at White Oak Church provided a good collection point to observe Confederate troop movements in the vicinity of Fredericksburg. Mr. Allen rotated the *Eagle* between this site and Bank’s Ford during the campaign to observe Confederate troop movement on the road networks south of town. Soldiers positioned near the bottom of the balloons moved them several miles while the aeronauts were airborne to collect better information.⁹² One of Professor Lowe’s first reports during the campaign, written on February 4, described the enemy disposition on the southern banks of the waterway, “From an observation taken this afternoon the enemy appear still in camp three miles west of Fredericksburg; also a large camp south by west, about eight miles. The largest camp noticed appears to be south from the city about fifteen miles; also a smaller camp east by south.”⁹³ In another report three days later, aeronauts described Confederate troop locations on the hills behind the town. Union staff officers exercised command and control of the balloons by using telegraph, courier, and signal flag. Telegraph lines connected several headquarters elements throughout the campaign, which enhanced the speed of communication. General Butterfield directed the balloonists to locate positions on maps, while the Federal intelligence bureau collected deserters from these camps to identify the enemy brigades

⁹¹ Culpeper, 82.

⁹² Ibid., 85.

⁹³ U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Vol. 25 (Part II), (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880), 129.

pinpointed on the map.⁹⁴ Confederate soldiers could also see these ISR assets operating across the river when they were aloft, so the Southern forces used the cover of darkness and poor weather to shift troops to avoid detection.⁹⁵ However, Sharpe did not solely rely on one form of collection, and he sent scouts out to analyze the terrain effects.

The Bureau of Military Information conducted pinpoint terrain analysis for their commander by identifying how the operational environment influenced friendly and enemy forces operating in central Virginia.⁹⁶ Hooker's intelligence section identified key features of the landscape, including obstacles, avenues of approach, key terrain, enemy dispositions, and fortifications. This analysis was important for the command because this information allowed the Union army to choose routes of attack and exploit terrain features to their benefit. The Federal army was at a disadvantage to the Confederates because they were operating in enemy territory with poor maps that had not been updated in years. The army engineer department failed to update their maps before the war, but Babcock had significant experience making maps for Pinkerton's agency. Babcock sketched maps based on the expeditions conducted by the bureau's scouting network, and information received from prisoners, deserters, balloons, signal stations, and other Unionist spies on the Federal payroll. He labeled enemy fortifications and positions after the section's reconnaissance operations so he did not have to rely on poor second-hand information from the army topographical engineers. Babcock's work impressed several

⁹⁴ Culpeper, 86.

⁹⁵ Fishel, 308.

⁹⁶ U.S. Army, ATP 2-01.3, 4-1.

Union officers and his maps became the new standard in the army. Babcock mapped small areas to the army's front, while integrating information from other reporting channels. He compiled all of these smaller maps into a large finished product, and then added these findings to a published map of the area. The bureau distributed these maps to brigade-level commanders throughout the army.⁹⁷ The high degree of Babcock's analysis and detail are evident in the Babcock papers and bureau's files in the National Archives. One photograph in the collection has on the back a pencil drawing of Confederate earthworks and buttresses along the Rappahannock River from April 16, 1862.⁹⁸ This document proves that Babcock was conducting terrain analysis before joining the Bureau of Military Information. Sharpe's scouts collected these important terrain features in the wooded countryside around the Fredericksburg area in long expeditions through hostile territory.

⁹⁷ Fishel, 153.

⁹⁸ John C. Babcock Papers, Library of Congress.

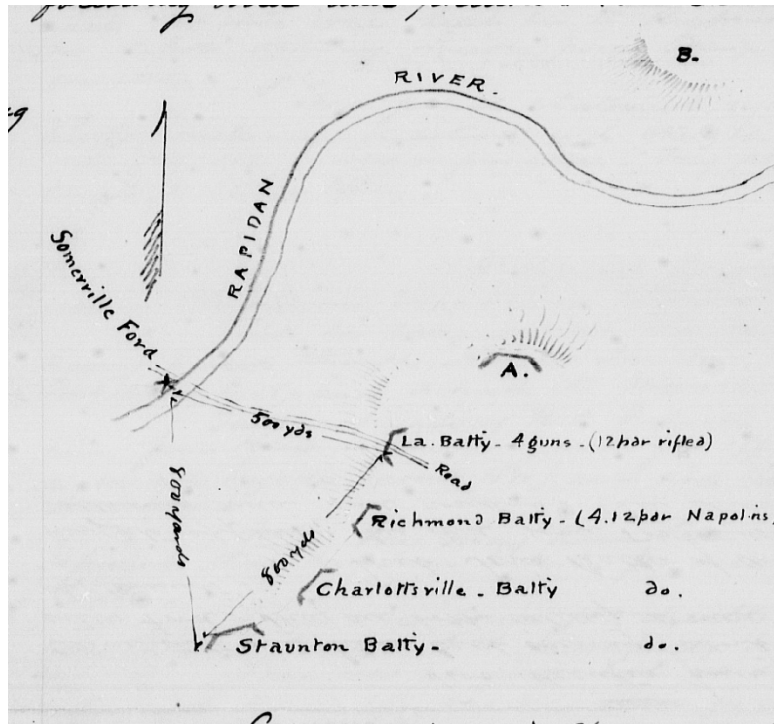


Figure 7. Drawing by John Babcock

Source: National Archives and Records Administration, BMI Files.

The information collected by Hooker's intelligence service was merged with cavalry reports and reconnaissance conducted by the topographical engineers led by Brigadier General Gouverneur K. Warren. Corps, division, and brigade commanders communicated directly with Sharpe and his staff section, which enhanced knowledge of the enemy. Union cavalry officers passed terrain maps to Sharpe and scouted Confederate territory with topographers and bureau agents attached to the units to take surveys of the country. They took notes by pencil, and turned these observations into lithographs within two days. Babcock requested copies of these maps of eastern Virginia to plot enemy

positions, fortifications, and other features identified by other sources.⁹⁹ The topographical maps in the *Official Records* reveal that forests covered over eighty percent of the terrain, while cleared areas predominately followed the river system and road networks to the south.¹⁰⁰ General Warren described the wilderness area as “a region whose characteristics is a dense forest of oak or pine, with occasional clearings, rarely enough to prevent the riflemen concealed in one border from shooting across to the other side; a forest which, with but few exceptions, required the axmen to precede the artillery.”¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the banks and ravines near the Rappahannock River were steep in several areas, which presented a natural barrier to the Union army. These high banks offered commanding ground to either friendly or enemy force depending on their position. The wet winter weather made several of the roads impassable and turned the clay soil into heaps of mud. The engineer department, cavalry, and bureau diligently mapped every part of the country occupied by friendly and enemy forces. The intelligence staff also contributed information from contrabands, slaves, deserters, and captured maps from the enemy to create new maps and an initial situation template of enemy forces. The situational template displayed enemy troop positions of the map.

⁹⁹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 26.

¹⁰⁰ Culpeper, 81.

¹⁰¹ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 193.

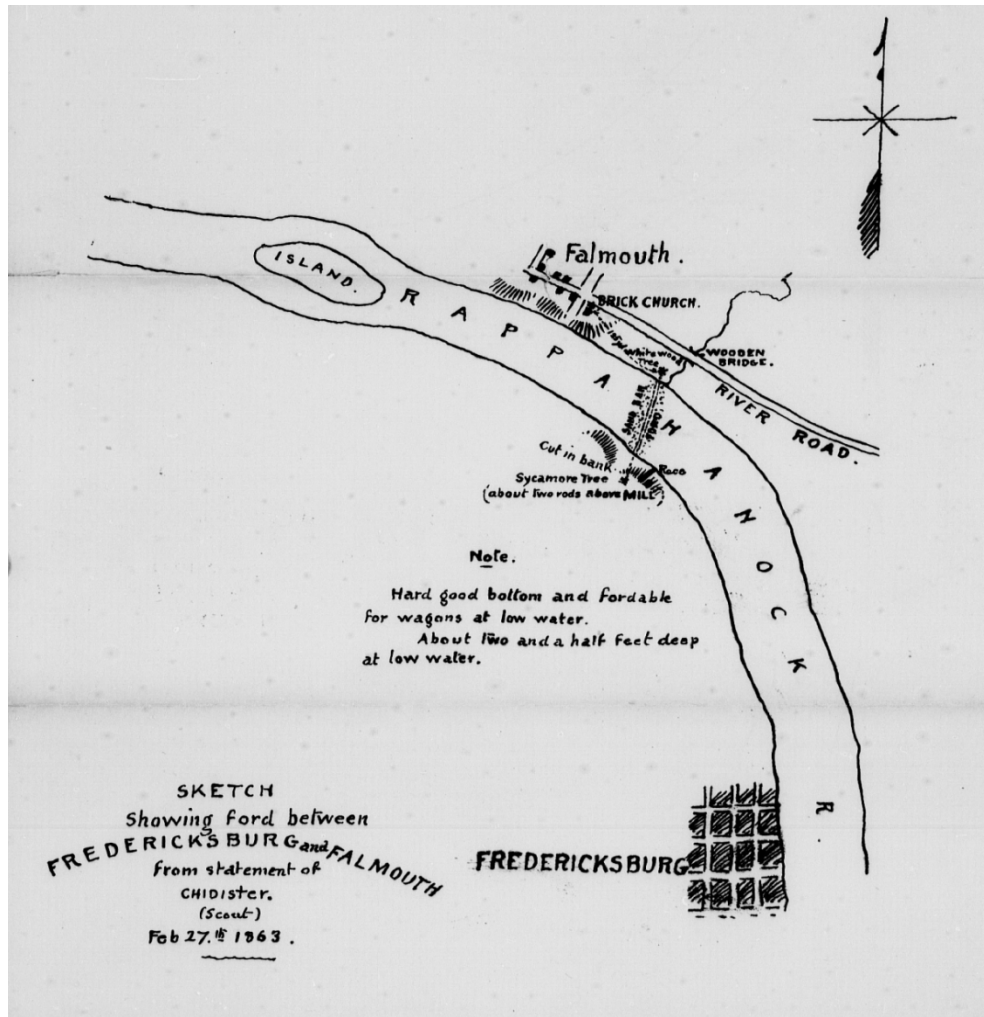


Figure 8. Drawing by John Babcock

Source: National Archives and Records Administration, BMI Files

Sharpe's bureau conducted reconnaissance of several fording sites across the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers to support future offensive operations targeting the Confederate army. They scouted the fords every few weeks with the engineers and cavalry since weather could impact these sites, while creating intelligence summaries of the crossing sites for the command. The bureau's files enclosed one of these ford summaries with precise information for General Butterfield and Hooker. This five-page

document reported the condition of the fords from the Fredericksburg area north to the junction of the Hazel River, where crossings could be conducted by the Union army.¹⁰² The intelligence staff reported on the terrain effects of twenty-nine fords in front of the army, including fifteen Rappahannock River sites and fourteen points on the Rapidan River. The pinpoint analysis provided to Hooker included the crossing site's location, depth, width, soil composition at the bottom of the water, suitability for artillery or wagons, roughness, how the ford needed to be crossed, slope degrees of the banks, height of the banks, approaches to the fords, road networks near the crossings, usage of the site, and other places near known fords where troops might cross the river. Sharpe also tied the topographical engineer's summary of the river to his report for further clarification and understanding.¹⁰³ The specific fords used by the Federal army in the Chancellorsville campaign on the Rappahannock River were Banks, United States, and Kelly's. Ely's and Germanna Fords crossed the Rapidan River farther to the north of Fredericksburg. Sharpe's scouts described Bank's Ford as four miles above Falmouth with steep northern banks, but otherwise a good crossing site. The water level at this ford had an ordinary stage of three feet and width of 250 feet. The Confederate earth parapets had interlocking sectors for fire to sweep Union forces with musketry at every crossing place near this point. The enemy trenches were three ranks deep from the water's edge to the summit of the slope, and protected the defenders from artillery fire. The rising slope allowed the

¹⁰² Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 66.

¹⁰³ Ibid., Entry 68.

troops manning the second line of entrenchments to shoot over the defenders in the first line. The Confederates emplaced obstacles near the ford, and dug a redoubt on top of the southern bank where a large force was constantly on guard.¹⁰⁴ United States Ford, located eight miles “above” or north of Falmouth, was a good point with two-foot deep water, hard bottom, and ran straight across with a width of 200 to 250 feet. The roads that led to this crossing site offered a practicable approach for Union troops. However, the banks to the site were difficult to approach because of the woods and ravines in the area. The chief of engineers noted that near the approaches to this ford the “enemy had created long lines of infantry parapets, with battery emplacements, and an ample force was encamped near to occupy them.”¹⁰⁵ Kelly’s Ford was a “first rate” crossing site about twenty-five miles north of Falmouth. This site was smooth and shallow, and could be crossed “four wagons abreast” at its widest point of 200 feet.¹⁰⁶ However, scouts also reported that a large enemy force defended the ford on the opposite bank in the woods. The Confederates had blocked the ford with “bags,” and constructed other anti-personnel and anti-horse obstacles in the crossing site. Sharpe noted that the enemy forces placed wires between logs under the water to catch horses’ feet, and emplaced wire on the south side of the river where the horses would have to exit the water.¹⁰⁷ Ely’s Ford, located six miles from the mouth of the Rapidan River, was a “first-rate” site with a smooth and shallow bottom

¹⁰⁴ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part I), 196.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹⁰⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 68.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, Entry 173.

and a 250 feet width. Germanna Ford was twenty miles north of Fredericksburg, and described as “very good, rather deep,” and 200 feet wide. The Confederate army did not guard Ely’s or Germanna Fords because they did not think the Federal army could move that far north from its base of operations and cross two rivers without being noticed by pickets or cavalry. Lee considered that the roads leading to the north and his left flank were impassable through the forested terrain.¹⁰⁸ Sharpe wrote in this report that most of these practicable fords could only be crossed by “one wagon at a time, or by two horsemen abreast.” Furthermore, if the information was for the purpose of planning picket operations, he recommended that there were other places not called fords where crossings could be made. Guides could only designate these sites, while scouts conducted other crossings by boat at night.¹⁰⁹ He was probably referring to several crossing points used by his spy network before the campaign. General Warren described in detail the strength of enemy fortifications and parapets that spanned close to twenty miles in his report.

Interspersed along these lines of entrenchments were battery emplacements advantageously located for sweeping the hill slopes and bottom lands, on which our troops would have to march to the assault, and which effectively protected the enemy’s artillery from our own. Abatis formed of fallen timber and impassible . . . from the margin of the river, but this margin was strongly guarded by men sheltered in rifle pits, which guard and its cover were made quite formidable at every available crossing place. In fact, every little rise of ground that could shelter the enemy and enable him to check our advance was entrenched and prepared for us.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part I), 196.

¹⁰⁹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 71.

¹¹⁰ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part I), 194-195.

The Union army staff conducted terrain analysis of the road network behind the fords.

The road network on the southern side of the Rappahannock River, like the crossing sites, favored the Confederate defenders. There were two excellent roads leading from Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville in the west. The roads were both considered paved for operational use, and as forces approached Chancellorsville, the country was clear for several miles along the even surfaced Plank Road. This open terrain afforded “a fine field for the use of all arms.”¹¹¹ Crushed rock layered the River Road and the Plank Road was planked with wooden boards for unhindered travel. The remainder of the roads built behind enemy lines was composed of clay soil with an occasional layer of gravel. Wet weather made these roads impassable unless corduroyed with logs by engineers working out in front of a moving army.¹¹²

In addition to identifying terrain features, the Bureau of Military Information worked to locate the position of enemy forces operating on other side of the Rappahannock River. The Confederate army, initially dispositioned on the heights behind Fredericksburg, from Skinker’s Neck to Bank’s Ford, formed strong continuous interior lines that could support any threatened point.¹¹³ The two remaining divisions of Longstreet’s First Corps were Anderson’s and McLaws,’ located on the north side of town on Lee’s left. Lieutenant General Thomas Jackson, Lee’s Second Corps commander, protected the river crossings to the south of town on Lee’s right wing. The

¹¹¹ Ibid., 197.

¹¹² Culpeper, 81.

¹¹³ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part I), 194.

cavalry, commanded by General J. E. B. Stuart, protected the flanks and rear of the Confederate army. Fitzhugh Lee's brigade picketed the area near the fork of the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers while W. H. F. Lee's brigade scouted south of town near Port Royal. Longstreet positioned two brigades from Anderson's division, Mahone's and Posey's, at U.S. Ford, while General Wilcox's brigade guarded Bank's Ford. General Perry's brigade camped near the Mine Road a few miles west of the city, and Wright's brigade made quarters near Massaponax Church on the Telegraph Road. The majority of McLaws' division held the entrenchments behind Fredericksburg opposite from Falmouth. Kershaw's brigade camped west of Massaponax Church. Semmes split his brigade, with half his soldiers stationed south of Salem Church in reserve, while the other troops performed picket duty on the river across from Falmouth.¹¹⁴ General Jackson positioned his four divisions south of Fredericksburg along the Rappahannock River. General Colston's division quartered near Moss and Skinker's Neck, and Early's division camped in a wooded position west of Hamilton's Crossing. Rhodes's division encamped at Grace Church, approximately six miles southeast of town, and A. P. Hill's division quartered two miles to the northeast of Rhodes's troops.¹¹⁵ Sharpe's section continued to conduct interrogations and used their unionist spy network to collect better information on these enemy dispositions for Hooker to enhance planning for future operations.

¹¹⁴ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part I), 829; John Bigelow, *The Campaign of Chancellorsville* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1910), 43; Culpeper, 85.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 829; John Bigelow, *The Campaign of Chancellorsville* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1910), 43; Culpeper, 86.

Hooker's intelligence service worked to piece this puzzle together for their commander. Two slaves from a North Carolina regiment slipped across the river on the night of February 21 and provided the Union army details about Longstreet's move south and the position of his corps. They reported that their regiment, part of General Early's division, moved to fill a gap in the lines from Longstreet's Second Corps, which departed their positions. This report confirmed the departure of soldiers seen across the river on February 19 were indeed Longstreet's troops. Captured enemy mail provided more information on Confederate dispositions. One letter dated from February 19, written by a rebel soldier near Fredericksburg, stated that his unit was to move towards Richmond the next morning. Another letter, written by a Richmond civilian, stated that 11,000 soldiers moved through city four days before. Other correspondence provided valuable details on several of Jackson's divisions and the state of Lee's army.¹¹⁶ Sharpe did not know where Longstreet shifted his troops, but he knew that not all of Longstreet's corps had left Fredericksburg. Prisoners taken on February 21 from McLaws' and Anderson's divisions from the First Corps confirmed this fact.

Sharpe sent one of his unionist spies, Ernest Yager, from Dumfries, Virginia, into enemy territory on February 17 to collect information on Confederate dispositions near Hooker's right flank and rear. Yager was a German immigrant who previously worked for the Union army in 1862. His writing accent made his reports difficult to transcribe for

¹¹⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 95; Fishel, 312.

bureau members.¹¹⁷ The bureau's spy returned on the evening of February 25 after over a weeklong expedition through no-man's-land, riding along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad towards Culpeper. He made his way through various counties and towns throughout middle Virginia, including Dumfries, Brentsville, Catlett's Station, Warrenton Junction, Culpeper Courthouse, and the Aquia Creek region. Yager reported that Fitzhugh Lee's brigade of cavalry relieved Hampton's troopers, while also providing locations of enemy picket locations along the Rappahannock River, Confederate camps, railroad conditions, and fortifications. The spy stated that Confederate soldiers and newspapers thought that the Union army would abandon its position on the northern banks of the Rappahannock River. General Lee did in fact believe the Federal army would leave after the disastrous Fredericksburg Campaign. Yager questioned several locals for more information and found out from a German couple on their way north from the Confederate capitol that Longstreet recently moved through Richmond. The couple stated that the soldiers went to Charleston, South Carolina, or Suffolk in southeastern Virginia where General Dix operated his Federal forces. Yager also noted that his informants reported Jackson moving 20,000 troops to the Blue Ridge Mountains.¹¹⁸ Sharpe knew that Jackson's corps had not left the opposite bank of the river, and two of Longstreet's divisions were in defensive positions due to collection from prisoners, deserters, and balloon reports. Sharpe and his commander knew that Pickett's and

¹¹⁷ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 776; Fishel, 303.

¹¹⁸ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 777.

Ransom's divisions were missing and traveled south. However, General D. H. Hill replaced Ransom in early January before the staff section was in operation. Lee had sent Longstreet and two of his divisions, Pickett's and Hood's, south of Richmond to observe Federal movements against the capitol.¹¹⁹ Hooker's new spymaster was quite accurate in his early reporting.

The bureau sent scouts across enemy lines to supplement and corroborate the reporting of their unionist spy network operating across the river. Sharpe briefed one of these scouts, Sergeant W. Kline, and prepared to send him south to collect information. Kline was a recruit from the 3rd Indiana Cavalry and was from the Lake Champlain area of New York.¹²⁰ Kline moved into no-man's-land near Northern Neck on February 24 and made his way to the outskirts of the Confederate army before returning to Federal headquarters on March 6. He had a difficult time procuring Confederate clothing, which slightly delayed his trip south, because he was intent on entering the enemy's camps to collect first-hand intelligence.¹²¹ After getting through Confederate lines and speaking with several soldiers and civilians, he somehow attached himself to Captain John W. Hungerford, who commanded a company of the 9th Virginia Cavalry, which was one of W.H.F Lee's units. Kline did not describe the cover he used for his mission, but Hungerford rode around the Confederate lines with him while explaining troop positions

¹¹⁹ Sears, 47.

¹²⁰ Fishel, 306.

¹²¹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 781.

in detail. Kline might have passed himself off as a Confederate partisan ranger, separated from his command or gathering information for Confederate Colonel John S. Mosby, who commanded the 43rd Virginia Battalion of cavalry or rangers operating in northern Virginia.¹²² The amount of information and level of detail that Kline collected in his expedition south was exceptional.

Kline rode around the right flank and left flank of the Confederate army while being accompanied most of the way by Captain Hungerford. Hungerford correctly identified the extreme right of the Confederate army several miles below Fredericksburg near Port Royal. “On the way below Port Royal saw a brigade of infantry in a ravine. Was told by the captain that no infantry were below that point, but three regiments of cavalry in Essex County.”¹²³ This brigade belonged to General Jubal Early’s division, and Sharpe probably figured this out after corroborating Kline’s information with other sources. Kline rode west with Hungerford and a few other Confederate cavalymen to Orange Court House, where he saw several enemy infantry regiments, including a large camp near Bowling Green. This encampment was the winter location of Jackson’s artillery. Kline also noticed a battery and camp near Spotsylvania Court House on his way to Orange County, which would have been part of McLaws’ division. Two infantry regiments from Georgia and Louisiana with two batteries camped near Orange Court House. Hungerford identified some of these infantry regiments correctly, but he did not know all of them. The party returned down the Plank Road, closer to the Rappahannock

¹²² Fishel, 307.

¹²³ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 781; Fishel, 306.

River, and rode through the local area known as the Wilderness and passed the small crossroads near a brick mansion known as Chancellorsville. Kline noted several enemy camps along the road, and a large wagon park, fortifications, and battery of brass howitzers, stating that the Confederates had a considerable force in this area.¹²⁴ The scout detailed the specific locations of several Confederate camps, fortifications, troop locations, regimental identifications, and battery positions between Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg.¹²⁵ “To the left of the road before crossing the hollow between the first and second hills, saw a brigade of infantry from Alabama, troops turned to the left across the hollow on rising the hill, could see the rear of the first and front of the second lines of earthworks.”¹²⁶ These were just a few notes from the detailed report of Sharpe’s scout. The scout then rode south of Fredericksburg with the Confederate party down the Bowling Green Road between the Rappahannock River and the railroad, which took them through Jackson’s entire corps and Lee’s right wing. Kline detailed several of these positions for the bureau as he rode through them, including specific fortification locations tied to geographic terrain features, artillery positions, and the strength of infantry forces. He reported that all Longstreet’s corps was gone, and part of Ewell’s division (now Early’s) had left the area. Kline estimated that the Confederate army across the river could assemble approximately 75,000 soldiers in six hours. Kline noted the condition of

¹²⁴ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 782; Fishel, 307.

¹²⁵ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 783; Fishel, 307.

¹²⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 783.

Lee's army, stating that their provisions were short with the infantry getting a daily ration of a quart of flour and pound of bacon per man, while other soldiers received money instead of rations. Sharpe's scout returned to headquarters to be debriefed after stealing two horses, crossing the river on a skiff, and riding several miles at night. He covered over 250 miles in his ten-day expedition, which was one of the most daring penetrations of enemy lines during the Civil War.¹²⁷

Colonel Sharpe debriefed his scout and asked for further details from Kline's expedition south regarding troop positions, artillery locations, and enemy fortifications. Kline had effectively recorded the main encampments of Lee's left wing and center of his army, excluding the Confederate brigades of Mahone and Posey on the extreme left flank near United States Ford. The Alabama unit mentioned by Kline belonged to Wilcox of Anderson's division near Bank's Ford. The scout reported the location of several different regiments and brigades belonging to McLaws' division. Kline effectively identified sixty-four enemy locations, including camps, batteries, fortifications, and wagon parks.¹²⁸ Sharpe used maps, other interrogation statements, and local guides to plot and detail all of these enemy positions on a map and specifically name units. He most certainly had Kline point out specific locations on one of Babcock's maps and the terrain features helped the bureau pinpoint enemy positions for their commander. The section used all-source collection to confirm these details before the spring campaign.

¹²⁷ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 783; Fishel, 310.

¹²⁸ Fishel, 308.

Reporting from Union General Dix's command the first week of March confirmed that Longstreet was south of Richmond with Pickett's and Hood's divisions.

Sharpe dispatched several more scouts and spies to the south during the first two weeks of March after Kline's successful trip. One of these scouts, Daniel Cole, left before Kline returned to headquarters. Daniel Cole was also from the 3rd Indiana Cavalry and North Madison, Indiana. He had previously scouted for Hooker before reporting to the Bureau of Military Information. Cole unsuccessfully tried to enter the Confederate lines on Lee's right wing near Kline's exact route nine days earlier. He crossed the river by boat and gave himself over to the pickets of the 9th Virginia Cavalry. The Confederate troops took him to W. H. F. Lee's headquarters, then to General Stuart's tent, before finally being sent to Libby Prison in Richmond. However, this crafty scout managed to escape and returned to headquarters from Washington, DC, on March 22 with interesting information. Cole slipped into a stockade of regular Union prisoners that were due for a prisoner exchange back to friendly lines, and was successfully paroled out of Richmond. The bureau did not know that the Confederates had captured him shortly into his expedition, but Cole still managed to collect intelligence while moving to and from Richmond under guard.¹²⁹

The Confederate guard transported Cole to Richmond by way of the railroad from Hamilton's Crossing where he began detailing strategic and operational intelligence pertaining to the enemy's interior lines. He reported that two very large encampments four miles east of Hamilton's Crossing was Jackson's corps and Confederate pickets

¹²⁹ Fishel, 310.

roamed the rail lines visible from the prisoner carts. He saw no strong forces in Richmond, except for a few garrison forts. Cole confirmed that Longstreet was still in Richmond at the end of March, and that his command was five miles south of Richmond along both sides of the railroad running towards Petersburg, Virginia. Cole noticed one brigade of enemy cavalry near Port Royal and two brigades of cavalry at Culpeper Court House that belonged to Fitzhugh Lee. He also gave the location of several Confederate command nodes, stating that General Lee's headquarters was on the Telegraph Road about four miles west of Fredericksburg, General Stuart's headquarters was about five miles from town on the same road, and General Longstreet's headquarters was eight miles south of Richmond on the Petersburg Railroad.¹³⁰ Cole recorded the enemy fortification locations around Richmond, noting the extensive earthworks on the northern and western approaches to the city near Hanover Junction. Smaller earthworks and few heavy guns occupied the area south of the capitol between Petersburg and Richmond.

Furthermore, Cole collected information pertaining to the Confederate army's logistics and transportation system. During his transportation on enemy rail lines, he noticed no large quantity of rolling stock except for at Petersburg, where there was a large number of freight cars mixed with six or seven locomotives. He only noticed one locomotive and a few cars between Fredericksburg and Richmond. Cole saw a massive wagon park at Guinea Station a few miles behind Jackson's lines, containing several hundred wagons, mules, and horses. The scout also mentioned that the enemy did not have a large quantity of rations at their depot near Hamilton's Crossing, where he noted

¹³⁰ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 792.

only thirty barrels of flour and several bales of hay. He reported that the daily ration was three quarters of a pound of flour and a quarter pound of fresh meat. The lack of food brought famine prices to Richmond for the civilian populace, who were angry and disgruntled over the excessive inflation for food items. Cole stated that he overheard a Confederate quartermaster say “there were rations for the army for ninety days in Richmond, but when that was gone,” officials were not sure where they could procure supplies.¹³¹ Cole contributed a significant amount of collection for the Federal army, even though Confederate forces captured him early in his expedition. Cole serves a prime example of the quality of agents recruited by Sharpe who gathered information for Hooker’s new intelligence service.

Sharpe soon set his unionist spy network across the river in motion to supplement the collection from his scout network. Sharpe sent another spy into enemy territory named John Howard Skinker, who was one of General Burnside’s Union agents. He was a planter and slaveholder from Stafford County, Virginia, which was just north of Fredericksburg. Skinker’s brother served in the 9th Virginia Cavalry, but Howard was a known union sympathizer in the area before the Chancellorsville Campaign.¹³² The bureau sent Skinker on a collection mission on March 8, up the north bank of the Rappahannock River, and he was back at headquarters on March 11 with information. His report focused on Confederate cavalry operating in the area, as well as enemy scouting expeditions behind Federal lines. The spy provided detailed fortification

¹³¹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 34, Entry 793.

¹³² Fishel, 260.

locations behind the existing fords. He stated that the Union picket lines on the northern banks of the river were easy to penetrate, and also provided information regarding Lee's troop strength and dispositions. Skinker tended to provide erroneous or hearsay information from his sub-source network on both sides of the river. The inaccurate information he reported to the bureau included Longstreet's Corps being entirely gone, Jackson's corps numbering between twenty-eight thousand to thirty-five thousand, and that Stuart was in the Shenandoah Valley.¹³³ The Bureau of Military Information sifted through these details and corroborated them with other sources to find the accurate pieces of information. Sharpe sent Skinker again upriver to collect information on enemy movements. However, Skinker did not provide much helpful information when he returned to camp. The scout reported descriptions of several enemy scouts operating in the area from the 4th Virginia Cavalry, and that Confederate forces captured one of the bureau's scouts behind their lines. This scout was later identified as Private D. G. Otto.¹³⁴ Skinker was a known unionist in the South, which limited his ability to contribute to the Union army. The best spies were the quiet civilians, who were not suspected by their neighbors as being sympathizers. Sharpe continued to use Skinker for several expeditions before the campaign, but soon received better information from a more reliable source.

Isaac Silver became one of the bureau's most reliable spies behind enemy lines for the duration of the war, and provided critical information to Hooker's intelligence service before the battle. Silver was fifty-two years old, and was from New Jersey. He

¹³³ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 84.

¹³⁴ Fishel, 315.

owned a large farm on the Plank Road, approximately seven miles west of Fredericksburg and three miles east of Chancellorsville behind Lee's left wing. He did not own slaves, but had a farmhand named Richard McGee, who might have been related to Ebenezer. Ebenezer McGee was a previously recruited spy, who worked for Hooker in January, and he was responsible for recruiting Silver in his sub-source network. Silver's homestead occupied the center of Longstreet's Corps, so he had access to excellent information pertaining to Confederate strength and dispositions. He scribbled unsigned notes on a piece of paper, and gave them to Ebenezer McGee, who transported the messages in the night through enemy territory across the river to Sharpe.¹³⁵ McGee brought the first detailed message to the bureau on March 13, which set the standard for future spy collection operations. Sharpe's spy reported that Jackson's corps was near Hamilton's Crossing with A. P. Hill, Early, and Ewell with thirty thousand to forty thousand men. He stated that Wilcox's brigade, positioned near Bank's Ford, had three to five thousand soldiers, while McLaws' and Anderson's divisions had five to six thousand men north of Salem Church. The other two divisions in Longstreet's corps had left towards Petersburg. Silver reported that the Confederate government provided several reinforcements to General Lee's army over the winter; Fitzhugh Lee had three thousand cavalry troops east of Culpeper Court House; and Lee's headquarters was on the Telegraph Road three or four miles from Fredericksburg. He wrote that the enemy army had little forage, and dug entrenchments near "bark mill" across the United States Ford,

¹³⁵ Fishel, 315.

and fortified Ely's Ford.¹³⁶ This report provided the most comprehensive collection to the bureau to this point, besides Sergeant Kline's report a couple of weeks earlier, although there might have been other reports that were not stored in the post-war files. However, Silver's farm location limited his collection capability to the Confederate left, and not every piece of data was accurate. He mistakenly omitted D. H. Hill's old division, and reported that Ewell and Early commanded separate divisions. Early was currently in command of Ewell's old division. Silver failed to mention the brigades between Hamilton's Crossing and Salem Church. The spy's troop estimates were high for Wilcox's and Fitzhugh Lee's troops, and too low for McLaws' and Anderson's divisions.¹³⁷ All of these small errors were correctable from other sources of information that Sharpe collected throughout March.

Colonel Sharpe sent Sergeant Kline on a scouting mission to the Northern Neck on March 17 near King George, Virginia, to collect information on the Confederate supply system. The Confederate forces operating in central Virginia received several items of food and forage from the Northern Neck, where the populace was pro-Confederate. Kline returned a few days later on March 21 with his findings of the area on Hooker's left flank. Kline noted that the enemy valued the Neck as a granary, and conversed with several civilians who were proud of supplying the Confederate army. The scout noted that the enemy stores contained 200,000 bushels of wheat and corn, but Sharpe thought that the barns in the Neck contained at least three years' worth of stock

¹³⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 87.

¹³⁷ Fishel, 318.

for Lee's forces. Civilians transported goods across the Rappahannock River on barges and bateaux when Federal forces were not in the area. Sharpe's report to his commander stated that the sustenance of the Southern army was at a point of total failure, and the Confederate soldier was on limited daily rations of a "patch of bacon" and "tea cup of flour." He reported that the spring crop failed in the South, and the Confederate army's company stores had become deprived over the last few months. Sharpe attached Southern newspaper clippings as further evidence for his commander of the Confederate strategic situation. He mentioned that the rebel government forced people to raise corn instead of cotton or tobacco, and impressed all cereals from the civilian populace. Rebel cavalry also impressed pork near Culpeper Court House, and did not have grain for their horses for over forty-eight hours at a time. Sharpe corroborated the bureau's scouting reports with captured letters and Southern newspapers. He recommended that the Union army exercise vigilance and move against the enemy's granaries in the Northern Neck.¹³⁸

Hooker took his spymaster's advice, and sent several cavalry detachments on raids to the Northern Neck over the next few weeks. However, each mission failed because the civilians were warned before the Union cavalry entered the Neck and hid their precious supplies. Union soldiers noted several Confederate cavalry forces operating in the area may have warned the civilians of the impending Federal raids.¹³⁹

Sharpe continued to collect all-source intelligence for General Hooker during March as his commander planned future operations. The bureau dispatched Skinker

¹³⁸ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 101.

¹³⁹ Fishel, 329.

behind Union lines in Falmouth and to Hooker's right flank near Warrenton to gather more information. The spy returned on March 23 with intelligence related to the specific routes of enemy cavalry expeditions that moved behind Union lines and other untrustworthy characters operating in no-man's-land. Skinker reported, "No movement, not even of pontoon wagons, could be made in this Army, without being immediately reported to the enemy."¹⁴⁰ This intelligence caused Hooker to further his operational security measures in his army, as well as among the civilian populace in the Federal force's area of operations, so Lee did not receive information on Union army movements. Reporting from balloon and signal stations tied to enemy troop movements and dispositions also continued to be routed through the Bureau of Military Information. Aeronauts observed enemy wagon movements, locomotives from the nearby railroads, camps, artillery positions, road networks, and terrain effects. Signal officers and Lowe's balloonists performed telescope reconnaissance from their observation platforms to estimate the enemy number of troops based on camps, fortifications, and infantry drilling in the fields to the south.¹⁴¹ One Federal signal officer noted the extent of the enemy fortifications across the river.

The enemy's fortifications, redoubts, and rifle-pits continue in an unbroken chain from Fredericksburg to Port Royal. Every hill and elevated position, in fact, every piece of ground that could be dug, has been dug, and taken advantage of by the enemy. No guns are visible. The strength of their forces, I could not ascertain.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 116.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Entry 286.

¹⁴² Ibid., Entry 288.

Colonel Sharpe took the raw data gathered over the first month of the bureau's existence to produce a product for his commander. The Bureau of Military Information compiled a comprehensive and detailed intelligence summary for General Hooker on March 15, which set the example for future intelligence organizations. This fifteen-page monthly report summarized the enemy situation and included several appendices breaking down the Confederate order of battle. The evidence collected from the bureau's files indicates that Sharpe issued monthly reports to his commander, as well as situation reports and weekly reports. Sharpe began the report stating that the "Rebel Army of the Potomac," commanded by General Lee, was composed of several units, including two corps commanded by Jackson and Longstreet, General Stuart's cavalry division, and the artillery. General Jackson had four divisions belonging to A. P. Hill, Early, D. H. Hill, and Trimble. General Longstreet had five divisions commanded by Anderson, McLaws, Pickett, Ransom, and Hood.¹⁴³ These ten Confederate divisions consisted of approximately five brigades each, but not all of these forces were positioned in their front. Sharpe reported that Longstreet moved south with the divisions of Ransom, Pickett, and Hood. Generals Lee, Jackson, and Stuart held positions across the Rappahannock River with the divisions of A. P. Hill, D. H. Hill, Early, Trimble, Anderson, McLaws, and the cavalry. The bureau noted the precise locations of the headquarters of Lee, Jackson, and Stuart, and stated that not much Confederate artillery was opposite them in Fredericksburg. Longstreet took several guns with him, while the greater part of Confederate artillery encamped to the south near Hanover Junction, Pole Cat Creek, and

¹⁴³ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 88.

Louisa Court House to forage for the winter. Sharpe and Babcock broke down the composition of Stuart's cavalry division into brigades and regiments in a separate annex, which listed the commanders, number of troops, and precise locations for every unit. However, Sharpe made the note that "it is with difficulty that we locate the cavalry from one week to the next," because they were constantly on the move.¹⁴⁴ The bureau poorly understood the composition of Hampton's brigade, and the staff section failed to list Jones' brigade. Another error included the mistaken identity of two other cavalry brigade commanders.¹⁴⁵ Another "extract" from the intelligence summary displayed every Confederate infantry division, brigade, and regiment. This enemy composition named each unit commander, location, and strength for the entire Southern army. Sharpe believed that "the location of each of the divisions of infantry is fixed with very considerable exactness," and noted that several sources corroborated this information.¹⁴⁶

Sharpe included the math calculations for his enemy troop estimates in his report. Hooker's spymaster took note of Pinkerton's inflated enemy troop estimates, and questioned the specific number of soldiers in each regiment before making a logical assessment of Lee's army. Sharpe noted that each division should consist of five brigades, which have five regiments each, but some divisions had only four brigades, and several of these brigades had less than five regiments. Several Confederate regiments

¹⁴⁴ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 89.

¹⁴⁵ Fishel, 320.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., Entry 93.

were irregularly organized into several battalions and companies, which impacted the total estimate of the enemy force. He reported that General A. P. Hill's division was the strongest in the entire rebel army, and his brigades were at full strength.¹⁴⁷ The intelligence staff believed Lee's army was much smaller than previously estimated by Federal army commanders:

We think the six divisions before mentioned have doubtless twenty five infantry brigades in all. And we have many evidences to show that 1700 men is a liberal estimate of the average of their brigades. By this we should have $25 \times 1700 = 42,500$ men. Again, we have many evidences that 350 men is a liberal average of their regiments. And four and one-half regiments to a brigade is rather over than under the proportion. By this we should have $4\frac{1}{2} \times 350 = 1575 \times 25 = 39,375$ men. On account of the numerous battalions, we think these figures are too large, and believe that a calculation of our own, from several scattered regiments, is nearer the truth, viz- that the brigades will average about 1300 men for duty. By this we should have $1300 \times 25 = 32,500$ men.¹⁴⁸

The Federal intelligence service conducted straightforward logical analysis to estimate the true numbers of enemy forces operating in central Virginia. All of these troop estimates were short of Lee's army actual strength of about fifty thousand soldiers.¹⁴⁹ Sharpe did not account for General William E. Jones in his report on strength. Jones operated in the Shenandoah Valley with a small force, but Sharpe and his commander already knew about this small army. Sharpe only estimated the Confederate troops across the river. The reason for the low estimate was because Sharpe and Babcock accounted for twenty-five enemy brigades, but had only confirmed nineteen by mid-

¹⁴⁷ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 94.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 650.

March. Lee actually had twenty-eight brigades on hand. They also underestimated the troop numbers in each regiment, due to the low number of deserters flowing into the Federal army in the winter months.¹⁵⁰ The warmer spring weather brought an influx of Confederate deserters, which helped the intelligence staff form a complete and accurate order of battle for Hooker before the campaign.¹⁵¹

Sharpe concluded his lengthy monthly report in a “general remarks” section, and gave Hooker more details, including past scouting expeditions, new collection plans, and methods to deceive the enemy. He stated that scouts penetrated enemy lines numerous times, and his spy network across the river was well established and successful. Sharpe also noted at the end of his report that the chief signal officer was “in possession of the full code of signals used by the enemy’s signal corps, with the exception of the numbers, and that their messages are read daily, by his officers, whenever they can be observed from our stations.”¹⁵² General Hooker used this signal knowledge in planning for future operations. Hooker and Sharpe were both confident that the new Federal intelligence organization collected the best information on the enemy, and “rebel spies were now second best.”¹⁵³

The Federal command used the bureau’s intelligence reports for General Averell’s cavalry raid on March 17. The Union cavalry’s target for the raid was Fitzhugh Lee’s

¹⁵⁰ Fishel, 320.

¹⁵¹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

¹⁵² Ibid., Entry 96.

¹⁵³ Fishel, 311.

brigade near Culpeper Court House. The new intelligence staff gave Averell the location of Fitz Lee's cavalry brigade, strength of the unit, maps, and terrain effects at Kelly's Ford, which Averell's troopers crossed in their raid. Sharpe indicated that the enemy cavalry brigade had three thousand horsemen, while other reports placed two hundred and fifty to one thousand soldiers north of the river at Brentsville. This information caused Averell to place a regiment to guard his flank and rear from attack. Averell was overly cautious and did not commit his entire force during the operation, even though his troopers broke several enemy charges. He lost the initiative during the engagement and failed to counterattack Confederate cavalry after Union forces shattered the last enemy cavalry attack.¹⁵⁴ The Union cavalry improved their performance from earlier conflicts with Confederate horsemen, and continued to fight more effectively throughout the Civil War. They inflicted severe losses to Fitz Lee's brigade, including several irreplaceable officers such as Major John Pelham, Stuart's chief of horse artillery. However, the Federal cavalry failed to effectively use good intelligence to decisively win the Battle of Kelly's Ford, one of the first engagements of the Chancellorsville Campaign.¹⁵⁵

General Hooker's staff continued to plan operations for a spring campaign against General Lee's army across the Rappahannock River at the end of March, while Sharpe's section refined the intelligence it had on record. The Bureau of Military Information successfully identified the operational environment and terrain effects that could impact friendly courses of action and command decisions for the campaign. The Federal

¹⁵⁴ Sears, 90.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 84.

intelligence service used several sources of information to form a detailed common operating picture for their commander. The results of a few weeks of collection were extraordinary. Sharpe wrote that an accurate rebel army organization had never been obtained in the Union army “until it was too late to use it, and that no previous time has any attempt been made to locate the enemy forces, that has proved in any way successful, or to estimate them within a reasonable number of men.”¹⁵⁶ Sharpe detailed most of the enemy positions, troop strengths, and fortifications in several reports, providing both strategic and operational intelligence for his commander. Sharpe correctly identified the food, forage, and other vital supply shortages that plagued the Confederate Army in early 1863. Lee faced a logistical crisis from his army’s extended encampment in the Fredericksburg area, which stripped the surrounding countryside of provisions. Desertions in the rebel army increased as conditions worsened on the south side of the river.¹⁵⁷ Sharpe’s section knew that Lee moved two of his divisions south with Longstreet to face the Union threat by General Dix and forage for supplies. The bureau also had information pertaining to Lee’s future plans for an invasion of the north to obtain new supplies, which Skinker provided in March.¹⁵⁸ The intelligence service successfully identified all of Lee’s divisions, and counted all but three of his brigades, while noting Longstreet’s departure and his divisions sent south. The bureau identified most of the

¹⁵⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 95.

¹⁵⁷ Wineman, 13.

¹⁵⁸ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 116.

Confederate artillery near Hanover Junction in winter quarters, and pinpointed several Confederate cavalry locations, even though these estimates were hard to collect. The section also correctly identified D. H. Hill as commanding in North Carolina by the end of the month, while taking no additional soldiers from Lee's army.¹⁵⁹

These analyzed reports from all sources were a true change from the Pinkerton era. Hooker was proud of his new staff section, and openly shared several pieces of intelligence with General Halleck in Washington, DC.¹⁶⁰ Sharpe's organization contributed significantly to the Union war effort in central Virginia in just over a month. The weather became warmer as spring approached, and more Confederate deserters made their way into Union lines throughout April as Lee waited for the Union army's next move. These sources of information helped Sharpe and Babcock refine their intelligence for the future campaign. General Hooker had concrete intelligence to plan his spring offensive in central Virginia.

¹⁵⁹ Sears, 102.

¹⁶⁰ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part I), 305.



Figure 9. Scouts and Guides of the Army of the Potomac

Source: Library of Congress, Prints, and Photographs Division.

CHAPTER 4

The Bureau of Military Information Evaluates the Threat and Determines Lee's Courses of Action: April – May 1863

General Hooker planned offensive operations against the Confederate army on the opposite side of the Rappahannock River during the first two weeks of April 1863. The Federal commander held a grand review of his newly organized army for the visiting President of the United States early in the month near Falmouth. President Lincoln visited the Army of the Potomac on April 8 to prod his new army commander into offensive action. Lincoln wanted an aggressive operation to reinvigorate the civilian and political will of the northern states after the disaster at Fredericksburg the previous year. Furthermore, the enlistments of 35,000 Federal soldiers would expire over the next three months, and the army needed to confront the enemy while at full strength. Hooker did not need prompting for a spring campaign, and soon set his forces in motion.¹⁶¹ Hooker planned to cross the river and strike the Confederate flank and rear, while dispatching his cavalry on a circuitous route behind the enemy forces to cut Lee's supply line to the Confederate capitol, the Richmond, Fredericksburg, Potomac, Railroad. The Federal infantry columns would march after the cavalry departed for their operation. The Union army commander wanted to defeat the Army of Northern Virginia while Longstreet and his two divisions were still south of Richmond. He discussed his next move with Lincoln and General in Chief of the United States Army, Henry Halleck. Hooker thought about flanking Jackson's position downriver to the south, but ultimately picked the option of

¹⁶¹ Wineman, 11.

moving around the Confederate left flank upriver because of the intelligence provided by Colonel Sharpe.¹⁶²

The Bureau of Military Information collected several important pieces of information for their commander throughout April and May. Sharpe successfully conducted steps three and four of intelligence preparation of the battlefield, while updating his intelligence files for Hooker. Sharpe evaluated and refined the Confederate force capabilities, intelligence estimate, and threat tactics that enemy forces preferred to employ. Babcock's prisoner interrogations were invaluable in updating the Confederate order of battle files, and completing the bureau's situation template of units and positions plotted on his map of the area of operations.¹⁶³ Sharpe knew that Lee's army had not budged from its area defense positions on the southern bank of the river. This area defense was the enemy's most likely course of action, but the spymaster also knew that Lee might shift forces if threatened and fight a mobile defense. The Federal army staff used this intelligence to conduct friendly course of action analysis to develop a successful campaign plan.¹⁶⁴ Hooker's campaign plans guided the bureau's all-source collection requirements across the river as Sharpe's agents strived to form an accurate common operating picture of the Confederate army.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

¹⁶³ U.S. Army, ATP 2-01.3, 5-1.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 6-2.

¹⁶⁵ Sears, 110.

Hooker's intelligence service collected information from scouts, spies, interrogations, signal stations, and balloons throughout the weeks leading up to the Battle of Chancellorsville, trying to successfully answer the commander's priority intelligence requirements (PIR). Ebenezer McGee provided Isaac Silver's second collection report to Colonel Sharpe on April 1, which was much less detailed than his first statement. Although the report was short, the information was correct. Silver reported that the Confederate army sent off its baggage, an indication of offensive operations. The enemy forces moved their artillery out of winter quarters, twenty miles below Fredericksburg, to the front lines. The southern army also seemed to prepare new defensive positions along the rivers. Confederate forces fortified several fords, moved stores behind the Rapidan River from Culpeper, and brought reinforcements into the area during the winter months. However, Silver did not think that Lee's army would make a significant move anytime in the near future.¹⁶⁶ Signal reports on April 8 and 9 confirmed enemy troop movements and train departures on the opposite bank of the river as Confederate soldiers moved out of winter quarters and rotated out of battle positions.¹⁶⁷ Skinker also returned to Union headquarters from another short collection mission on April 8. He provided counterintelligence information, and gave several names of Confederate informants operating behind Union lines on the north side of the river. Skinker delivered updated enemy picket locations on the southern banks of the river and updated enemy fortification

¹⁶⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 126; Fishel 343.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., Entry 300.

locations on Lee's right flank.¹⁶⁸ General Marsena Patrick performed security duties for Hooker's army, and investigated enemy collection operations or counterintelligence concerns. He looked into cases of Confederate cross-river signaling, spies, telegraph messaging, or any other concern reported by the Bureau of Military Information. Patrick followed up on any counterintelligence information or leads provided by Sharpe's men.¹⁶⁹

Babcock provided an updated situation on General Longstreet's location on April 10 from the interrogation of a civilian of Scottish decent from Richmond named James Craige. Craige was a baker in the Confederate capitol, and lived in an excellent location to observe troop movements in most any direction leaving or arriving to the city. This passive source furnished accurate details of Longstreet's movement to the Suffolk area in February, and confirmed that no troops returned to Fredericksburg. He accurately claimed that Pickett's division was south of Petersburg and Hood's division camped near Manchester, Virginia. He also gave Babcock more information pertaining to the fortifications surrounding the city, while Babcock sketched these positions on a map.¹⁷⁰ Craige provided strategic details about the recent bread riots in Richmond, and the strain the war caused on the Confederate economy. Babcock learned of the false start of Hood's division on the railroad during the Battle of Kelly's Ford, which also confirmed that Lee

¹⁶⁸ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 130.

¹⁶⁹ Fishel, 330.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 342.

might call back his two divisions when attacked by Hooker.¹⁷¹ The bureau would constantly try to locate Longstreet's two divisions when the Federal army crossed the river to strike the enemy forces on the opposite bank.

In early April, Hooker learned that the Confederate signal stations could intercept and read Federal flag signal messages. Hooker already knew that the Union signal corps could read rebel messages across the river because of Sharpe's report on March 15. Therefore, the Federals knew the enemy code and knew the enemy could decipher their messages. The Confederates knew the Union code, but did not know that the Federal army read their messages on a daily basis. The Federal signalmen quickly changed their code into seven different alphabet ciphers, although they continued to use the old numeric system to deceive the enemy into thinking that they did not know the code had been cracked. The Union signal corps only used the new code for highly sensitive information. The Confederate signalmen now saw enciphered and unencrypted messages, and might suspect an important message of a troop movement that was left unenciphered.¹⁷² General Butterfield thought of a deceptive message to use as a ruse for the upcoming cavalry movement to start the campaign, and trick Robert E. Lee as to the cavalry's true intentions. He also sought to make the signal traffic unsuspecting to enemy signal stations observing the Union headquarters position on the north bank of the Rappahannock River. Butterfield devised the perfect message on April 13.

¹⁷¹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 352.

¹⁷² Fishel, 348.

Our cavalry is going up to give Jones and guerillas in the Shenandoah a smash. They may give Fitz Lee a brush for cover. Keep watch of any movement of infantry that way that might cut them off and post Captain Cushing.¹⁷³

Butterfield avoided the official message format of address, text, and signature in order to make it look more like ordinary signalman traffic to another Federal station. The deception worked, and Federal signal stations soon intercepted enemy flag messages across the river. Lee wired General Jones on April 14, operating in the Shenandoah Valley with a small force that General Stoneman's Federal cavalry force prepared to move against him and also attack Fitz Lee's cavalry along the northern route. Lee and Stuart thought this cavalry movement was a feint, but still shifted their troopers to face the threat. This ruse worked so well that Stuart left a significant gap twenty miles wide on Lee's left flank near Kelly's Ford, as Confederate cavalry moved north, stretching their picket lines very thin.¹⁷⁴ The signal deception positively set the friendly force conditions for Hooker's planned grand maneuver around Lee's left flank.

General Hooker finalized his operational orders by April 12, and briefed his cavalry corps commander, General Stoneman, on his route to cut off the Confederate army's line of communications with Richmond. Federal officers issued rations and ammunition to the infantry soldiers preparing to leave camp and follow the cavalry's movement. However, poor weather set into the area, and significantly disrupted movement for the next two weeks. Driving rainstorms turned the local roads into muddy

¹⁷³ Fishel, 348.

¹⁷⁴ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 721; Fishel, 349.

ruts, and swelled the water level of the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers.¹⁷⁵ This spate of cold wet weather delayed operations and gave Sharpe's intelligence section more time to collect information on Confederate forces. This period proved pivotal for the quality of intelligence received by the Union army commander.¹⁷⁶

Ebenezer McGee crossed the river with another important human intelligence report from Isaac Silver on April 15, which was the third report produced by the "Old Man." Silver reported that General Wilcox defended Bank's Ford with 2,500 rebel soldiers; and General Posey and General Mahone were near United States Ford or Bark Mill with the same number. The enemy had two batteries in place near the fords, but the condition of the battery horses was terrible, probably due to the lack of forage during the winter months. Silver noted that the Confederate picket lines stretched thin from United States Ford to Ely's Ford, and it would take the enemy three or four hours to position their forces to oppose a crossing near these sites. The spy also mentioned some Confederate camps below the ford sites near Grady's farm, and McGee most likely pointed these positions out on a map. The strength of the enemy forces encamped near the farm was 1,000 to 1,200, and General Posey commanded these troops. Silver reported that there were no standing troops in the area from Posey's location to the road leading from Fredericksburg to Spotsylvania Court House. The soldiers assigned to Lee's left wing camped in small squads to find timber on or near the Telegraph Road, and quartered four to six miles from Fredericksburg. Silver reported that Longstreet was below

¹⁷⁵ Sears, 84.

¹⁷⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

Richmond with several troops, and that Confederates recently repaired the Germanna Bridge on the Rapidan River north of Ely's Ford. The spy determined that this bridge construction meant that Lee intended to make a move into the Culpeper area. Silver stated that the Confederate army used the majority of their supplies at the depot at Hamilton Crossing, and the enemy was not as strong as reported before. Silver advised an operation targeting Lee's left wing, and recommended crossing United States Ford with at least twenty thousand troops while sweeping south towards the "old mine road and tabernacle church," and then forcing a crossing at Bank's Ford with another thirty thousand soldiers to envelop the Confederate army. The spy closed his correspondence by saying that he would be available for further collection during future operations, and would stay close to the enemy's forces.¹⁷⁷

Babcock updated the bureau's current enemy situation template on the intelligence section's maps with this key information from the unionist spy. Silver provided an accurate new picture of several Confederate positions north and west of Fredericksburg. Sergeant Kline reported several weeks prior, that the enemy had a considerable infantry and artillery force near Chancellorsville, complete with a wagon park and fortifications. However, now there were no Confederate troops positioned in the vicinity stretching southeastward five miles from Mahone's and Posey's brigades defending the United States Ford.¹⁷⁸ The open area in Lee's rear included Chancellorsville, which consisted of a mansion, outbuildings, and important crossroads.

¹⁷⁷ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 283; Fishel, 360.

¹⁷⁸ Fishel, 361.

Five roads converged at this point, including two roads leading from the upper fords of the river. General Hooker found use for the five-mile gap in the enemy's rear, which lacked the standing troops posted to the area during the winter months. There was a hole in enemy lines that the Union army could exploit during his offensive maneuver. Silver's enemy troop estimates of soldiers defending the fords were fairly accurate, within 75 percent of the mark, as well as his statement that Longstreet was still south of Richmond with several thousand men. The spy's guess that Lee might move into Culpeper was also accurate, because Lee intended to move into the Shenandoah Valley if Hooker's army remained stagnant due to his lack of supplies and forage in the area.¹⁷⁹ The Confederate army foraged the area for months and stripped the land bare. This lack of supplies also increased the number of soldiers deserting Lee's army, significantly benefitting the collection of the Bureau of Military Information.¹⁸⁰

The spring weather brought more Confederate deserters and prisoners to the Federal army headquarters. The influx of passive human intelligence sources coming through the lines soon completed the bureau's enemy order of battle and situation template for their commander. These intelligence products produced a common operating picture for General Hooker's campaign planning. A Confederate deserter corroborated Silver's report pertaining to a weakened enemy left flank on April 15. The Virginia soldier stated that he possessed information on all of General Jackson's divisions and

¹⁷⁹ Fishel, 361; U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 700, 725.

¹⁸⁰ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

could locate all of them on a map. He reported that Jackson's troops held the center and right wing of the Confederate area defensive line, and these troop positions did not shift over the last several weeks.¹⁸¹

Hooker's intelligence service was busy April 18 to April 30, interrogating several prisoners and deserters from Jackson's corps, Longstreet's two divisions, and the cavalry. Prisoners collected on April 18 reported that W. H. F. Lee's cavalry moved from their positions at Port Royal to Culpeper, and the bureau forwarded this information to Stoneman. W. H. F. Lee relieved Fitz Lee's troopers in Culpeper so they could forage north of the Rappahannock River. The Federal cavalry commander now faced Confederate cavalry troops from both Fitz Lee and his cousin's command when he crossed the river.¹⁸² Private D. G. Otto, Sharpe's cavalry scout captured in March as reported previously by Skinker, also returned to camp on April 18, but only provided some strategic information from his journey south. Hooker continued to wait for the weather to clear to launch his offensive operation, and continued to plan an operation to decisively defeat Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.¹⁸³

Activity at Union headquarters stirred near the end of April, as the weather cleared and the Federal army set in motion. Hooker finalized his plans based on staff studies and intelligence collection over the last two months. The Union commander

¹⁸¹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 288; Fishel, 362.

¹⁸² Fishel, 362.

¹⁸³ John Bigelow, 154.

planned to cross the Rappahannock River at Kelly's Ford, twenty-four miles north of Falmouth, cross the Rapidan River, and then move southeast towards Chancellorsville and march through the five-mile gap (reported by Silver) to strike the enemy's left wing. The V, XI, and XII Corps would perform this envelopment around Lee's left flank and strike the Confederate rear.¹⁸⁴ The Union column would use a canvas pontoon bridge to cross Kelly's Ford, due to previous intelligence collection indicating the enemy's use of underwater barriers and obstacles.¹⁸⁵ The Federal columns would split once on the opposite bank of the Rappahannock River with the XI and XII Corps crossing the Rapidan River at Germanna Ford, while the V Corps crossed at Ely's Ford. These corps would then converge together at Chancellorsville. Confederate infantry brigades guarded the shortest axis of advance, the United States and Bank's Fords, and the terrain features complemented the enemy entrenchments at these sites. Kelly's Ford was only defended by cavalry pickets, who were already stretched thin due to Hooker's signal ruse. The three Union corps would also flank the Confederate brigades guarding the United States and Bank's Fords and easily sweep them aside. The United States Ford could then be used to bring Union reinforcements quickly from Fredericksburg by a shorter route if needed to the other side of the river. Hooker positioned the II Corps between the two Union army wings near United States and Bank's Fords, in order to secure these crossing sites after the other three corps pushed enemy resistance to the south.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴ Sears, 129.

¹⁸⁵ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 173; U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 197.

¹⁸⁶ Wineman, 15.

General John Sedgwick would launch a diversionary demonstration with three corps against Lee's right wing at Fredericksburg in conjunction with the main effort to fix enemy forces near the city and deceive the Confederate army. Sedgwick needed to attack the enemy defenses if Lee shifted troops away from the city or retreated from the vicinity. Stoneman's Federal cavalry would move southwest, further distorting the enemy's perception of the Union maneuver, screen the right flank, cut Lee's line of communications, and block the enemy retreat. Some of the Union divisions encamped near the Rappahannock River in the enemy's full view were left in place, so the rebel forces would not be tipped off. Hooker effectively used the pinpoint information from Sharpe's bureau, including Silver's latest report, to finalize his campaign plan, and made himself a beneficiary of one of the best performances of an intelligence service in military history.¹⁸⁷

After weather conditions improved, the Federal army set in motion for the spring campaign with aims to defeat Lee's army in a decisive battle. Deserters from Jackson's corps confirmed to the bureau's interrogators that no infantry units had shifted on Lee's right wing as of April 26.¹⁸⁸ The Union infantry corps began moving on April 27 towards the crossing sites, while Stoneman's cavalry finally crossed Kelly's Ford on April 28. Stoneman moved too late to have much effect on Lee's line of communications during the coming battle, and he was further delayed by poor roads from the incessant rain over the past several days. Hooker kept intricate operational details from his corps

¹⁸⁷ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II); Fishel, 370.

¹⁸⁸ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 184.

commanders, detailed soldiers to over watch routes, and essentially placed Southern citizens along the roads on house arrest to shroud his maneuver in secrecy and deception. The Union regiments farthest from the enemy's line of sight moved first, marching behind other Federal regiments encamped along the river in order to shield the movement from Southern pickets.¹⁸⁹ Hooker continued to demonstrate his proficiency of operational security with these measures, which confused the enemy across the river. Lee did not learn that the Federal army was on the march until after twenty-four hours when he received reports from Stuart upriver to the north. However, Lee still did not know the destination or intentions of Hooker's massive, blue-clad columns moving towards his left and rear. Colonel Sharpe went with General Hooker's headquarters on the flanking movement, while Babcock stayed with Butterfield near Falmouth to manage the collection of information from prisoners, deserters, signal stations, and balloons.¹⁹⁰ McEntee probably went with Sharpe and the right wing of the Union army to interrogate prisoners taken during the flanking movement. Sharpe sent several scouts and spies out on April 26 to collect information while the Federal corps conducted their movement to the north and west. Sharpe sent Skinker to the vicinity of Kelly's Ford to recon the area, and dispatched McGee to get the latest data from Silver. Both of these agents returned to provide information to the bureau on April 28. Skinker reported that Confederate cavalry pickets were still posted behind Kelly's Ford with artillery support, and the enemy did not expect an attack at the crossing site. The spy told Sharpe that the enemy regarded

¹⁸⁹ Wineman, 14; Fishel, 363.

¹⁹⁰ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 276; Fishel, 374.

Stoneman's movement as a feint, and continued to reinforce their existing fortifications at the other fords. Silver reported that the Confederate army was in the same positions as he reported two weeks earlier, and that the enemy did not observe any significant Federal army movements in the vicinity.¹⁹¹ The three Federal infantry corps crossed the Rappahannock River the night of April 28, and moved across the Rapidan River on April 29. The I and VI Corps, under Sedgwick's command, crossed the Rappahannock to gain a foothold near Fredericksburg in the morning, while the III Corps formed the reserve on the north bank of the river. The II Corps began movement towards the United States Ford to support the Union right wing. By the evening of April 29, Lee guessed that Hooker's intention was to turn his left flank, but did not know the location of the enemy forces in his rear.¹⁹²

Sharpe's bureau refined information collected from Confederate deserters during the last two weeks of April to complete the enemy order of battle. Babcock was the mastermind behind this detailed report, which included previously existing data on the composition, organization, and numerical strength of the Army of Northern Virginia. Hooker's subordinate commanders would use these intelligence documents during the upcoming operation to question prisoners taken during battle or update their personal situational understanding of enemy units on the battlefield. Babcock estimated the strength of the enemy forces at 55,300, which was within 2 percent of Lee's actual

¹⁹¹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, Entry 192; Fishel, 375.

¹⁹² Wineman, 15.

strength at the Battle of Chancellorsville.¹⁹³ His identification of individual regiments and brigades was less complete than Pinkerton's Secret Service, because Pinkerton had successfully listed all of Lee's 178 regiments by the end of the Peninsula Campaign. Pinkerton's access to prisoners and deserters also extended over a year with a plethora of captives taken during the fighting in the spring of 1862. Lee now had 152 regiments on hand, formed into thirty brigades. Babcock correctly identified 126 regiments and thirty enemy brigades. Furthermore, he correctly placed 116 regiments in the correct brigades, and all of the brigades into their respective divisions. Babcock slightly over estimated the enemy cavalry forces listing them with a strength of 5,500, even though they only numbered approximately 4,138.¹⁹⁴ Confederate cavalry was always hard to estimate because of its remote locations, lack of prisoners, and the troopers were constantly on the move.

Sharpe's operatives collected this accurate intelligence through refined interrogation techniques, and as the bureau's information increased, the questions during the interrogations became more precise.¹⁹⁵ The bureau developed an extensive list of initial questions for detainees, including name, regiment, brigade, division, where they entered the lines, the position of their unit, recent activity, logistical information, and the

¹⁹³ U.S. Army Intelligence Center and Fort Huachuca, ed. "Grenville M. Dodge and George H. Sharpe: Grant's Intelligence Chiefs in the West and East." In *Masters of the Intelligence Art*, 1-14. N.p.: Department of Defense, 2009, accessed September 11, 2016, http://huachuca-www.army.mil/files/History_MDODGE.PDF; Fishel, 375.

¹⁹⁴ Fishel, 376; John Bigelow, 213.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 376.

reasons they deserted or were captured. The answers to these questions usually spawned more detailed follow-up questions tied to other prisoners from the same regiment or brigade to corroborate information.¹⁹⁶ Pinkerton assumed all of the Confederate regiments were always operating at full strength, which overinflated his numbers, while Sharpe was more careful in assessing the wartime strength of enemy units. Sharpe's bureau had only been in existence for a little over two months, and was already reporting an accurate estimate of Confederate troops across the river.¹⁹⁷ Babcock most likely updated these brigades on a map, or situation template, for his commander with terrain effects. Hooker now had all of the intelligence he needed on the enemy army across the river to launch a successful operation against Confederate forces in the eastern theater.¹⁹⁸

The Bureau of Military Information continued to collect intelligence and make reports throughout the duration of the campaign, while fusing data from scouts, spies, signal officers, and Lowe's balloonists. Sharpe sought to gather information on Longstreet's location during the operation and any movement of Confederate troops. The intelligence section collected information from the interrogations of deserters from D. H. Hill's, A. P. Hill's, and Trimble's divisions on April 26, and reported that no units had moved over the last few days.¹⁹⁹ However, the fastest method of collection came from the Federal Balloon Corps and signal stations operating on the north side of the

¹⁹⁶ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

¹⁹⁷ Fishel, 376.

¹⁹⁸ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

¹⁹⁹ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 276.

Rappahannock River. The officers at these different reconnaissance sites forwarded the data collected by these ISR assets in reports distributed to General Butterfield's headquarters and Babcock. Butterfield then sent key information from these platforms to Hooker's headquarters on the south side of the river through either courier, signal flag, or telegraph. Butterfield cautioned Sharpe, the signal officers, and Lowe to be vigilant during the operations, and to collect as much information as possible.²⁰⁰ Sharpe focused his collection platforms to answer the PIR of when the rebels would shift troops from Fredericksburg to meet the force advancing towards their rear. Many Confederate units would need to march from their winter quarter locations to meet Sedgwick's threat from the north bank of the river, which would make it difficult to discern any general enemy movement towards Chancellorsville when Lee began placing his units on the battlefield. Jackson's corps encamped south of town, and any movement north might also indicate his possible intention to support the Confederate positions in the defense of Fredericksburg.²⁰¹ Lowe's aeronauts scoured the vicinity surrounding the town of Fredericksburg for enemy troop shifts when Hooker began moving his corps on the flanking maneuver. Butterfield had two balloons at his disposal on April 27, while Lowe's other five balloons underwent routine maintenance in Washington, DC. The federal army established one balloon site at White Oak Church and the other at Phillips' house. Union signal officers set up observation stations with telescopes to the southeast and northwest at Buckner's Neck, Seddon's house, Phillips' house, and the England

²⁰⁰ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 276.

²⁰¹ Fishel, 383.

house. The signal corps established two additional sites on Tyler's Hill and Fitzhugh's house on April 29, which enabled the officers to observe the Confederate rail line and depot at Hamilton's Crossing, located four miles to the south of Fredericksburg. These assets offered the Federal army an excellent view of enemy forces positioned on the opposite side of the Rappahannock River, limited only by weather, terrain, and visibility.²⁰²

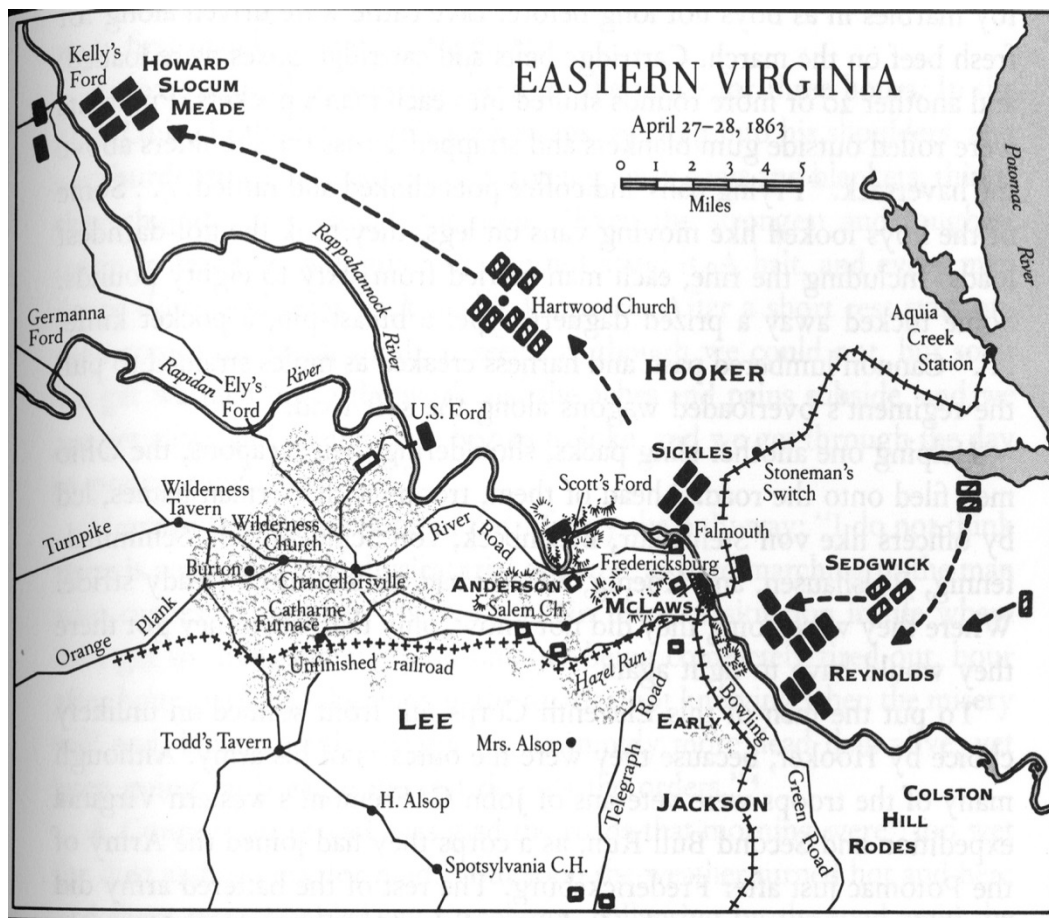


Figure 10. Opening Moves of the Chancellorsville Campaign

Source: United States National Park Service.

²⁰² Culpeper, 90.

The weather hindered Lowe's balloons throughout the day on April 28 and the morning of April 29, as aeronauts waited for the wind and fog to clear before making any significant observations from the north bank of the Rappahannock River. Federal soldiers pulled these mobile aerial reconnaissance assets up and down the banks of the Rappahannock River to observe Confederate positions and defenses. Federal officers ordered Lowe to collect information on the night of April 28 when the weather cleared and observe the locations of the enemy campfires. Lowe reported that the Confederate camps were still in the same locations and did not appear to move.²⁰³ General Sedgwick launched his feint opposite from Fredericksburg in the early morning hours with I, III, and VI Corps in position to cross the river. Lowe sent his first report at 10 a.m. on April 29, and reported that the Confederate lines stretched along the base of the heights behind Fredericksburg, and the enemy lines were thin. He also reported that the Confederate camp sites had not moved from their original positions, the enemy shifted wagon trains to their rear, and about two regiments of Confederate infantry marched forward from the heights to occupy entrenchments opposite the lower crossing. Lowe and E.S. Allen submitted these reports every hour while aloft overlooking enemy positions. Federal signal stations did not report any significant activity on April 29.²⁰⁴ Hooker ordered a balloon to be relocated in order to estimate the strength of the enemy force near Franklin's Crossing, Bank's Ford, and the west of Fredericksburg. The Union army commander wanted the balloons up early in the morning on April 30 to gauge the

²⁰³ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 276, 277.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 288, 289.

numbers, strength, and positions of the Confederate forces. Lowe directed E. S. Allen to reposition the Eagle to Bank's Ford while Lowe's balloon stayed near Phillips's house. These ISR locations allowed the aeronauts to observe some east to west enemy troop movements on the road networks between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville.²⁰⁵

Union staff elements continued to collect intelligence throughout the day on April 30 as Hooker's right wing moved south towards Chancellorsville. Federal signal reports from the morning described enemy positions from Marye's Heights south to Hamilton's Crossing as lightly defended, with only two artillery batteries in view. Lowe's morning report indicated that the visible Confederate troop detachments were small, but the smoke from the campfires behind the heights was more numerous than usual. This information indicates that General Early's Confederate troops might have utilized deception by building more campfires. Sedgwick still believed that a significant enemy force still held the entrenchments behind Fredericksburg, and did not conduct a demonstration. Lowe's afternoon collection described the number of Confederate defenders at his location and Bank's Ford as numerically small, but did not offer an estimate of troop strength. He also reported that the enemy had numerous campfires approximately ten miles southwest of his position, and the enemy did not shift any forces from Bank's Ford throughout the day.²⁰⁶ A Confederate deserter from Jackson's corps captured on April 30 claimed that

²⁰⁵ Culpeper, 97.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 100.

Jackson's divisions were still encamped south of Fredericksburg, which was the truth at the time he left his position, but Lee soon moved his army into action.²⁰⁷

Lee positioned his army to face the emerging Federal threat to his left flank while also expecting a Union attack against his front. Stuart's cavalry discovered the lead elements of the Union XII Corps south of the Rapidan River on the morning of April 30, but this information did not reach Lee until the afternoon. Lee reacted to this intelligence and Sedgwick's inactivity by moving Jackson's corps to the northwest to protect his left flank and ordering his artillery forward. The Confederate commander also ordered Anderson's division to probe the road network near Chancellorsville to the west of Early's left flank. Lee decided to leave approximately nine thousand troops under General Early to hold the entrenchments behind Fredericksburg while the bulk of his forces shifted to face the Union advance south of the Rapidan River.²⁰⁸ Most of these Confederate forces maneuvering to face the Union threat did not march until that night or early the next morning. These enemy movements prove that the balloon and signal reports from April 29-30 were fairly accurate with their limited visibility of Confederate lines near the Fredericksburg vicinity. Early had not moved from his original positions, and Confederate forces were stretched thin across the river from Sedgwick, but the enemy still remained in force during the time observed. At the time of the observation by the balloon corps, five of six Confederate divisions were south or west of Fredericksburg. Lowe reported that, "from all appearances I should judge that a full three-fourths of the

²⁰⁷ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 322.

²⁰⁸ Wineman, 18.

enemy's force is immediately back and below Fredericksburg.”²⁰⁹ Lee did not start shifting troops to face the Federal threat until close to midnight on April 30. However, spring vegetation, weather effects, and darkness impacted the balloons' view of several of Jackson's regiments shifting to the west towards Hooker's right wing. Hooker halted the advance of his lead blue-clad divisions near Chancellorsville by the evening of April 30, and told them to form defensive positions while waiting for his other corps to close the gap between his columns. The II Corps was still crossing the Rappahannock River and the III Corps was beginning its march from Falmouth to support Hooker's offensive maneuver. The Union commander was ecstatic that he succeeded in turning Lee's left flank, while his subordinates became frustrated by the halt when the enemy's flank and rear was vulnerable to the successful operation.²¹⁰

On the morning of May 1 foggy weather delayed Lowe's initial balloon accents over the river, but by 0915 the fog lifted and he was aloft. The aeronaut sent reports to Butterfield every thirty minutes to an hour, disclosing enemy troop movements, entrenchments, gun positions, and dispositions. Most of Jackson's corps shifted northwest during the hours of darkness, but his grey columns stretched for approximately six miles on the roads as his troops moved to block the Union advance. Lowe documented Confederate troops moving to the west with several wagon trains in his first two reports at 0915 and 1000. Lowe observed Jackson's company trains that usually moved behind a large column of troops, which indicated that Lee was in the process of

²⁰⁹ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, III 3, 312.

²¹⁰ Wineman, 18; Culpeper, 102.

shifting a large part of his army to face the threat to his flank.²¹¹ Hooker ordered three Union divisions to continue to push eastward toward Fredericksburg to make contact with Lee's flank. Hooker sent the rest of General Meade's V Corps north along the River Road to secure the crucial river crossing at Bank's Ford, which would serve as the Federal army's line of communications with the north side of the river. General Jackson ordered Anderson and McLaws' divisions to make contact and repulse the oncoming Union army. The two armies made initial contact around 1100 on the Orange Turnpike, just west of the Zoan Church, as opposing leaders fed brigades piecemeal into the action. General Sykes' Federal division battled Anderson's division to stalemate. The Battle of Chancellorsville had begun, and the Union army held the initiative.²¹²

²¹¹ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 336-337.

²¹² Wineman, 20.

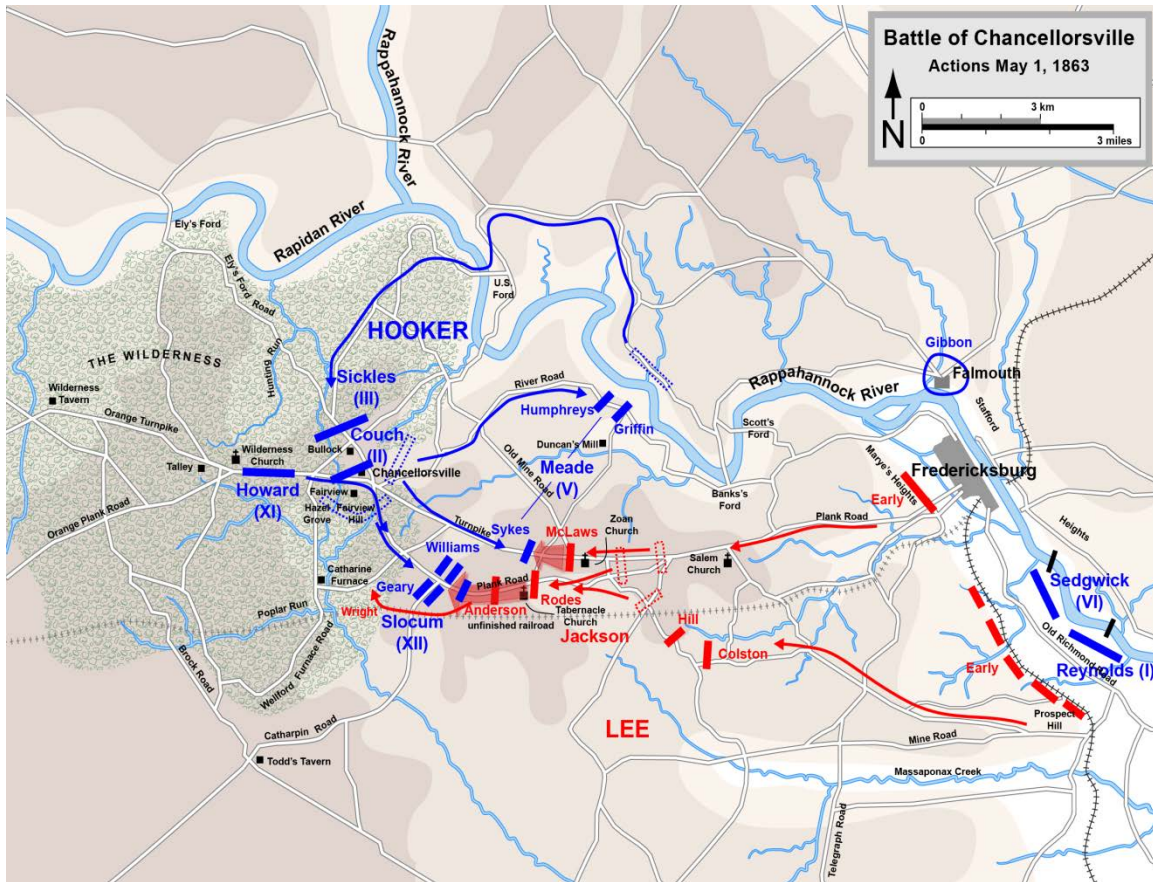


Figure 11. Battle of Chancellorsville on May 1, 1863

Source: Hal Jespersen.

Sharpe and Babcock worked feverishly to piece together reports from Lowe's aeronauts, signal stations, and scouts. Lowe's third report received from 1,000 feet above Fredericksburg at 1100 corroborated a signal station report from the same time with several key data points. Several wagon trains moved northwest, and a signal officer noticed the sun glittering off the bayonets in a large grey troop formation. The report stated that the "largest column of the enemy is moving on the road towards Chancellorsville. The enemy on the opposite heights, I judge, considerably diminished. Can see no change under the heights and in the rifle-pits. I can see no diminution in the

enemy's tents."²¹³ These units were probably the rear of Jackson's last division commanded by A.P. Hill. In the aeronaut's next two reports, Lowe observed the escalating battle twelve miles to the northwest, as he could see heavy smoke and heard artillery fire. Butterfield estimated the Confederate force moving to the northwest as at least 10,000 to 15,000 troops based off balloon collection and signal station reporting. Babcock was at his side as well, probably feeding him numerical information based off aerial observation and his situation templates.²¹⁴ All of these reports from May 1 indicated the movement of most of, if not all, of Jackson's corps towards Chancellorsville. Hooker issued conflicting guidance to Sedgwick throughout the day in regards to him conducting a demonstration at Fredericksburg, but Sedgwick did nothing.²¹⁵ Jackson took Rhodes and McLaws' Confederate divisions west on the Orange Plank Road to maneuver around the Federal left flank, before running into General Slocum's six brigades, which deployed into battle lines in the thick underbrush. The fighting became intense as the fighting raged in the fields and woods southeast of the Chancellor mansion.²¹⁶

Lowe noticed the intensity of the combat at 1415 in his situation report, noting "the enemy opposite here remain the same as last reported. Immense volumes of smoke

²¹³ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 323, 338.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 324-339.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 338.

²¹⁶ Wineman, 20.

are rising where the battle is going on, opposite the United States Ford.²¹⁷ Sykes asked Hooker for reinforcements to drive the Confederates east, but instead Hooker ordered him to withdraw towards the Chancellor house. Meanwhile, Meade with the remaining divisions in the V Corps did not meet any Confederate resistance, and were less than a mile from their destination at the ford when he received the unexpected order to fall back to the Chancellor house. Hooker ordered all of his lead elements back to the vicinity of the crossroads, where he would assume area defensive positions. Hooker thought that if he suspended his offensive operation, Lee would perform like Burnside at the Battle of Fredericksburg and attack him in bloody frontal assaults. The Union army commander's decision was the most crucial action of the battle because he forfeited the initiative to the enemy.²¹⁸ Hooker still wondered if the rest of Longstreet's corps would arrive from southern Virginia to support Lee. The Bureau of Military Information interrogated prisoners during the day who reported that Hood's and Pickett's divisions returned to the front. However, this information proved to be planted intelligence to deceive the Union army. Butterfield received a telegraph from General Peck stationed south of Richmond, confirming that Longstreet was still facing him but had access to railroads near his lines.²¹⁹

Lowe's balloons and the Federal signal stations continued to collect information for the duration of the battle, but were not in a good position to support Hooker's wing

²¹⁷ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 340.

²¹⁸ Wineman, 24.

²¹⁹ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 345.

for the next three days due to their proximity to Fredericksburg. The thick wilderness between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville obstructed the view of the Union main effort, and the aeronaut's reports from May 1 prove this fact as they could only see the smoke of battle rising above the trees.²²⁰ Balloonists could only observe small sections of the isolated roads to the west of the hills behind the town, and possibly small troop formations on these roads over the following days. However, Lowe's balloons and the signal stations continued to contribute intelligence to the supporting effort commanded by Sedgwick. Lee pressed his divisions to within a mile of the Chancellor house as night fell. Lee and Jackson discussed their options for the next day, and planned to maintain the initiative by attacking the vulnerable Union right flank with 30,000 soldiers, while Lee held the Federal army in place with Anderson's and McLaws' divisions. It was a bold plan that immortalized both men as military giants.²²¹

²²⁰ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 340; Culpeper, 107.

²²¹ Wineman, 25.

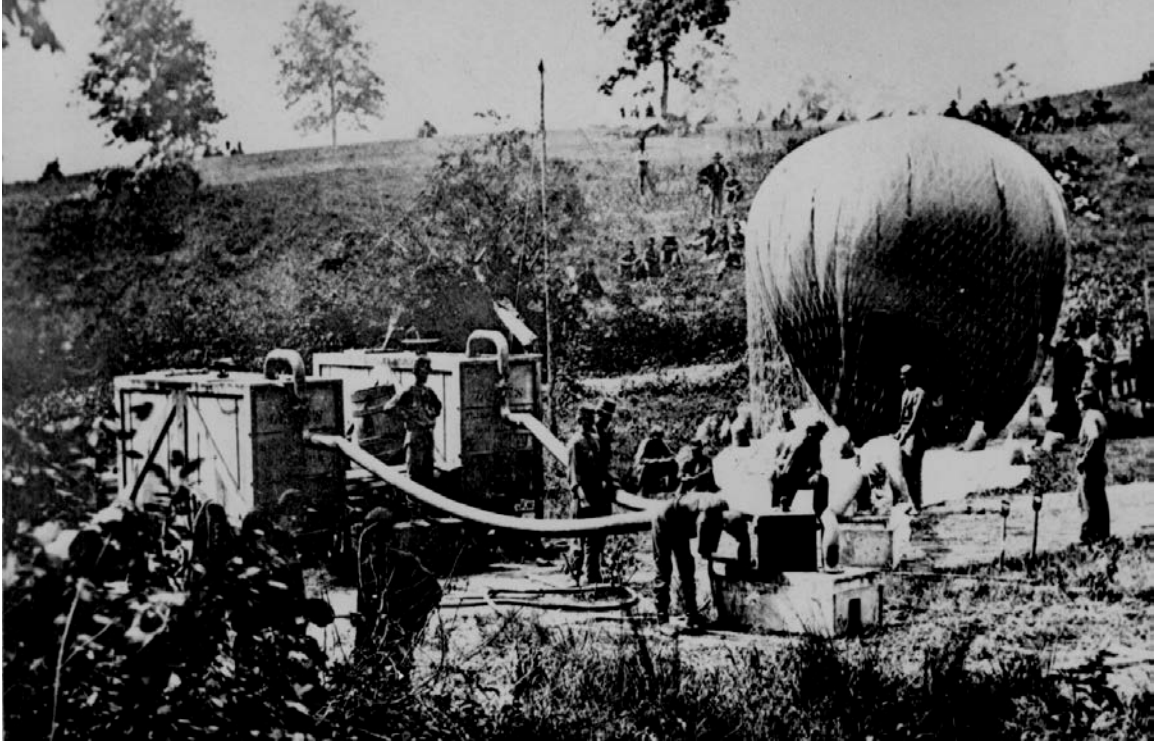


Figure 12. Federal Balloons and Portable Hydrogen Generators

Source: Library of Congress, Prints, and Photographs Division.

Babcock received the first ISR collection report from Lowe's balloons at 0615 on the morning of May 2. Lowe and the Federal signal officers did not see any major changes to the Confederate positions on the opposite bank of the river throughout most of the morning. The collection assets noticed no large movements towards Chancellorsville. This information was accurate because there were no major maneuvers west from Fredericksburg by Lee's army that day.²²² Babcock's recent enemy order of battle significantly helped Union commanders track Confederate troop movements during the

²²² U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 353.

battle as prisoners were captured and interrogated. Sharpe sent a telegram to Babcock that morning stating, “we have evidence that Anderson’s, McLaws’, Rhodes’ and Trimble’s divisions are in front of us. I think only Early and A.P. Hill are left down there.”²²³ The bureau collected this information from the interrogations of prisoners captured during the engagements the previous day. A.P. Hill’s division was the last formation in Jackson’s column as he moved west on May 1, which saved his men from being captured during the day’s combat. However, a few hours later, Hooker wired Butterfield, telling him that Early’s division was the only enemy unit to his front. Sharpe confirmed Hill’s location to Hooker’s front with intelligence from interrogations, and once again formed an accurate situation template of the Confederate army hours after Lee split his forces. The only enemy disposition that the bureau failed to account for was Barksdale’s brigade, attached to Early’s division at Fredericksburg.²²⁴

Jackson’s large Confederate columns marched west and north around Hooker’s right flank the morning of May 2 at 0700 on a grand maneuver. Union scouts reported seeing a large enemy column moving to the west as early as 0800, and the rebel column exposed itself to observation as it passed near the clearing of Hazel Grove south of the Chancellor house. A Confederate officer also noted seeing the Federal balloon at Bank’s Ford as he marched along the top of a hill near Catherine’s Furnace.²²⁵ However, the high

²²³ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45; Fishel, 393.

²²⁴ Fishel, 393.

²²⁵ Culpeper, 109.

winds during the day impacted the line of sight of the aeronauts, and existing records do not mention the aeronauts ever seeing Jackson's movement. Lowe mentioned that he was unable to hold his binoculars steady in his balloon due to the winds.²²⁶ Hooker instinctively guessed that the enemy movement was either a flanking maneuver or a retreat towards the southern depots at Orange and Gordonsville. Hooker dispatched warnings at 0930 to his two corps commanders on his right flank, Howard and Slocum, to make defensive preparations for a possible enemy attack targeting their flank. During the Confederate flanking maneuver, Sickles launched an attack against the rear of the grey column, capturing over 250 Georgians.²²⁷ These prisoners were probably interrogated, but gave little information to the bureau's interrogators besides unit information because of Jackson's secretive nature. The Confederate commander rarely gave any operational information to his subordinates in order to protect the objectives of his movements.²²⁸ Sickles also confirmed Hooker's suspicions when he noticed the southerly direction of Jackson's columns, and reported the enemy forces were withdrawing towards Orange and Gordonsville. Howard's XI Corps did little to prepare for a Confederate attack against his right flank, and Jackson's lead divisions smashed into the unsuspecting Union troops at 1730. Hooker's right flank collapsed under fire as Jackson pressed the attack and routed Federal divisions in the woods. Darkness brought an end to the fighting. Confederate troops mortally wounded Jackson as he scouted Federal positions in the wilderness at

²²⁶ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 353; Culpeper, 111.

²²⁷ Wineman, 27.

²²⁸ Sears, 147; Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

night, and Stuart took command of Jackson's Corps as the senior commander on the field. Hooker compacted his defensive lines into a giant "U" formation while reinforcements arrived from the northern side of river. General Reynold's I Corps arrived at night and brought Hooker's strength at the Chancellor house up to approximately 80,000 soldiers, composed of the I, V, and XI Corps. The Confederate army was in a precarious position and outnumbered by the Federals. Lee's two wings were still separated by a day's march and his available strength numbered only 40,000, yet Hooker remained cautious and did not counterattack the undermanned enemy.²²⁹

Lee issued vague guidance to Early later on the morning of May 2 before Jackson's flanking maneuver. He told Early to leave 2,500 men at Fredericksburg and join him with the rest of his force to help him hold down Hooker at Chancellorsville. Early began this movement, but then received instruction from the Confederate commander to move at his own discretion. The strength of the Union force north of Fredericksburg convinced Early to move his troops back to their original positions behind the town, and his soldiers occupied their positions by 2300.²³⁰ Lowe observed these movements from his balloon, and correctly reported that the enemy forces evacuated the lines behind Fredericksburg. "Nearly all of the enemy's force have been withdrawn from the opposite side. I can only see a small force in the neighborhood of their earthworks. I cannot get a sufficient elevation to tell what road they take, but should judge, by the appearance of army wagons moving toward Chancellorsville road, that the troops are

²²⁹ Wineman, 34.

²³⁰ Culpeper, 112.

moving that way also.”²³¹ Hooker prodded Sedgwick to attack Early as opportunity presented itself, but by late afternoon he commanded his subordinate to attack Fredericksburg at once.²³² Sedgwick moved his four divisions across the Rappahannock River that night and made preparations to attack the Confederate defensive positions the next morning.²³³



Figure 13. Professor Lowe in his Balloon

Source: Library of Congress, Prints, and Photographs Division.

²³¹ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 356; Culpeper, 112.

²³² Fishel, 394.

²³³ Wineman, 30-34.

General Hooker remained cautious on May 3 and constricted his lines further before the Confederates opened their offensive attack on the “U” formation. The Union commander ordered Sickles to abandon the salient at Hazel Grove, which was one of the few elevated locations on the battlefield that offered advantageous artillery support. Sickles gifted this terrain to the Confederate forces just before the enemy forces attacked his rearguard at 0700. The Federal divisions withdrew towards Fairview in the vicinity of the Chancellor house as Confederate brigades pushed forward to attack the Union defensive lines. The battle raged back and forth, consisting of attacks and counterattacks, before Stuart’s corps pressed forward. Federal units at Fairview were eventually beaten back towards the northeast as regiments retreated in the direction of Chancellorsville. Stuart’s grey columns pushed within 500 yards of Hooker’s headquarters at the Chancellor house, and Lee moved his troops against the Union positions to the southeast. Lee’s left flank closed with Stuart’s right flank by 1000 as the attack raged forward, reuniting the two wings of Lee’s army, and the Federal army fell back to the Bullock house just north of the crossroads. Lee drove the Union army, twice the size of his force, from their headquarters and seized the road network. However, the Confederate army commander shortly received news that Sedgwick took Fredericksburg, and approached his right flank from the east.²³⁴

After doing little over the last few days due to conflicting guidance from Hooker, Sedgwick finally attacked the Confederate positions behind Fredericksburg on the morning of May 3. Sedgwick had 24,000 troops at his disposal to attack a rebel force

²³⁴ Sears, 376.

composed of 12,000 soldiers stretched over a five-mile front.²³⁵ Lowe made his initial ascent in his balloon at 0515, and reported that the Confederate troops were back in their original positions from the previous day. He reported that enemy soldiers manned the entrenchments and stonewall at the base of the heights. Sedgwick wanted information on the strong and weak points of the Confederate lines, and the aeronaut responded at 0715.²³⁶ Lowe reported that “the enemy’s infantry is very light along the whole line opposite here, and especially immediately in the rear of Fredericksburg. I see no troops moving this way on any of the roads.”²³⁷ The first two Union assaults targeted the stonewall at the base of Marye’s Heights behind the town, and Confederate defenders repulsed both frontal attacks. During a truce to aid the wounded soldiers, Federal officers noticed how thin the Confederate lines actually were behind the entrenchments. The Union army changed their tactics and advanced in a compact column formation in a third attack that punched through the enemy lines. However, Sedgwick stalled and failed to press his attack towards Chancellorsville, and this critical delay gave Lee precious time to react to the new Union threat to his right. Lee sent McLaws’ division to hold the Federal advance at Salem Church, just west of Fredericksburg. Sedgwick’s lead elements made contact with Confederate forces that afternoon. Fighting swirled around the church as regiments were fed piecemeal into the action and the Union advance ground to a halt as darkness fell on the battlefield. Lee gambled again, and shifted Anderson’s and Early’s

²³⁵ Wineman, 35-39.

²³⁶ Culpeper, 114.

²³⁷ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 365.

divisions eastward that night to support McLaws' units. This maneuver only left 25,000 Confederate soldiers in front of Hooker's 75,000 troops at Chancellorsville.²³⁸ Hooker probably did not learn of how many enemy troops he had in his front until after the battle. An inconclusive telegram from Babcock to Sharpe dated May 5 stated "Early's, Anderson's, McLaws'. Will send you the regiments by Manning" (a lieutenant in the bureau).²³⁹ Sharpe's intelligence section tracked the divisions and regiments in front of the Union army wings, but probably was not able to update this information until at least May 5, due to the time involved with interrogating prisoners and deserters. Furthermore, Federal signal officers counted seven regimental flags from their observation station moving eastward to face Sedgwick's advance, but the exact units and numbers were not confirmed.²⁴⁰ Lee left Chancellorsville to take command of his divisions at Salem Church before the next day's action.²⁴¹

The Bureau of Military Information and Federal commanders continued to be plagued by the question of Longstreet's location during the battle. Hooker and Butterfield wondered if Longstreet returned from southern Virginia with his two divisions to reinforce Lee, especially since they were unaware of the origin of the Confederate divisions in front of Sedgwick. Sharpe and Babcock questioned 824 prisoners over the last three days, but received several mixed reports from gossip to mistaken unit identities.

²³⁸ Wineman, 39.

²³⁹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, entry 176.

²⁴⁰ Fishel, 405.

²⁴¹ Wineman, 39.

Several captured Confederate soldiers told the bureau agents that Longstreet was either on his way or already on the battlefield. However, no troops from Hood's or Pickett's divisions had been captured since the beginning of operations, and reports from the Union command in Suffolk continued to confirm that Longstreet was still south of Richmond. Several prisoners reported that trains brought troops from the Confederate capitol the previous two days on the Richmond-Fredericksburg railroad, which was the target of Stoneman's cavalry raid.²⁴² Babcock did not see any of these reinforcements on the battlefield and speculated it was a rumor.²⁴³ Babcock employed his own resources and sent one of the bureau's scouts, William Chase, to watch the trains at Guiney's Station. This station was eighteen miles south of Fredericksburg and served as Lee's transportation and supply depot, since the other depots closer to the town could be observed by Federal balloons or signal stations. Chase rode to Guiney's Station and remained in a hide sight for over eighteen hours watching train movements. Sharpe's scout only saw two trains, each arrived and departed twice, and did not bring any troops or supplies. The empty trains provided proof that Stoneman's cavalry troopers cut Lee's lines of communication with Richmond. The Federal cavalry cut the railroad in two places, but failed to inflict severe damage to the rail line. Chase collected excellent information, but he did not arrive back to report his findings until Hooker began his retreat.²⁴⁴

²⁴² Fishel, 406.

²⁴³ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45, entry 181.

²⁴⁴ Fishel, 407.

Sedgwick's wing formed a "U" shaped defensive position west of Fredericksburg on the morning of May 4 near Salem Church. Lee formed his divisions to attack the Union position with McLaws to the west, Anderson in the center, and Early to the east. Early moved northeast on the Telegraph Road, recapturing the heights behind Fredericksburg and cutting Sedgwick off from the town.²⁴⁵ All of these reinforcements confused Sedgwick, who thought that Longstreet arrived from Richmond, not knowing that the troops to his front came from the Chancellorsville area. Sedgwick was now outnumbered, and wrote Hooker that he would hold his position until nightfall and then retire to the north side of the Rappahannock River. Babcock wired Sharpe that morning and reported that reinforcements arrived to his front, and that it was Pickett's division from southern Virginia. Babcock retracted this statement by the next morning after examining several prisoners taken during the Confederate attacks on Sedgwick's wing later that day, but it was after Hooker decided to retreat.²⁴⁶ Lowe reported at noon that at least 15,000 enemy soldiers occupied the ground between Sedgwick and the town. This number was approximately 7,000 soldiers short of Lee's true strength east of Chancellorsville.²⁴⁷ Lee's division commanders took most of the day to organize their brigades to attack the Union army wing, and Early launched his first attack at 1700 with two brigades.²⁴⁸ The Federal aeronauts provided early warning of this impending attack

²⁴⁵ Wineman, 42.

²⁴⁶ Fishel, 409.

²⁴⁷ Culpeper, 117.

²⁴⁸ Wineman, 42.

to Sedgwick, and also gave him an update of the attack targeting the troops on his left. Lowe reported that the Confederate division drove Howe's Union division badly, and took control of the ground opposite Falmouth.²⁴⁹ Darkness brought an end to the fighting and Sedgwick's VI Corps slipped back across the river at Scott's Ford. Hooker had a council of war that evening with his corps commanders to decide his next move. Sharpe did not have any further information about the location of Longstreet, or that Lee shifted troops to the east to block Sedgwick's advance. Babcock reported earlier that Pickett's division faced Sedgwick and Chase had not returned from his scouting expedition to Guiney's Station. The bureau could not decisively confirm if Longstreet arrived back to reinforce Lee.²⁵⁰ The bureau did not have a clear picture of the battlefield again until the next morning of May 5, when Chase returned and Babcock knew the true identity of the Confederate units opposing Sedgwick from interrogation summaries, but it was too late. Hooker decided to retreat back across the Rappahannock River the night of May 4, and on May 5 the Federal army began withdrawing over pontoon bridges at United States Ford.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Culpeper, 117.

²⁵⁰ Fishel, 409.

²⁵¹ Wineman, 43.



Figure 14. Members of the Bureau of Military Information
Left to right, Colonel George H. Sharpe, John Babcock,
Lieutenant Frederick L. Manning, and Captain John McEntee

Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Chancellorsville Campaign went down in history as one of Lee's greatest victories and as a disaster for General Hooker. The battle took a heavy toll on both armies with over 30,764 men killed, wounded, or missing in three days of combat in central Virginia. The Confederate army lost fewer men than the Union force, but forfeited a greater percentage of their entire army in the action. Lee also lost several key leaders, including seven brigade commanders, over forty regimental leaders, and the irreplaceable General Jackson. Federal losses were mainly distributed among the III, VI, XI, and XII Corps. The I, II, and V Corps were not decisively engaged throughout the battle because Hooker did not employ his entire available force, letting the other units do the majority of the fighting. Lee smashed Hooker's grand flanking maneuver, and split his forces in the face of the Federal army twice to defeat both wings, while being outnumbered two to one during the entire engagement. The Union forces withdrew across the Rappahannock River to Falmouth while the Confederate army moved back to their original positions behind Fredericksburg with the battle ending in a strategic stalemate. The Confederate victory allowed Lee to take the war to the north with his invasion of Pennsylvania, which resulted in the Battle of Gettysburg.²⁵² Several Federal officers blamed Hooker for the failure of the Union army, and personally pleaded with Lincoln to remove him from command. Hooker remained positive in his own performance, while blaming others for

²⁵² Wineman, 44.

his defeat, including Stoneman, Howard, and Sedgwick.²⁵³ However, Hooker did not blame his intelligence staff section for their performance. The Bureau of Military Information performed remarkably well in providing the Federal army commander the intelligence he needed to be successful during the Chancellorsville Campaign. Sharpe provided relevant information in the months leading up to the battle, as well as during the battle in regards to the timeliness, accuracy, and usefulness of the data. The bureau used systematic techniques and procedures to gather intelligence, similar to the modern military doctrine of IPB.

This campaign was the bureau's first test as an effective staff element during the Civil War. The collection of information had come a long way compared to the early efforts in the eastern and western theaters of the Civil War. Hooker must be given credit for creating the bureau when he reorganized the army. Hooker, Butterfield, and Patrick chose the right officer to establish the first true, all-source intelligence staff section in American military history. Sharpe revolutionized the all-source intelligence capability of the Federal army in the eastern theater in the months before the Battle of Chancellorsville, and continued to refine the organization during the last two years of the war. Hooker's spymaster would not have been successful without Babcock and the intelligence foundation laid by Pinkerton's Secret Service. Sharpe took the lessons learned from his predecessors, including Pinkerton's limited operation, and expanded the relevance of a common operating picture of the enemy. The effectiveness of the Union's intelligence service measurably surpassed the efforts of the Confederacy in the east by

²⁵³ Wineman, 44.

May 1863 with their collection methods and information provided to the commander.²⁵⁴

While no specific records exist of Confederate intelligence collection during the Chancellorsville Campaign, there are enough documents in the *Official Records* that indicate Hooker's superiority in this field.²⁵⁵ The Union intelligence service was dominant in many ways, including the use of handpicked scouts, flag signal intercept, methodical interrogations, enemy order of battle analysis, and having all collection routed through a staff element to analyze the data for the commander. It took all kinds of intelligence collection from various sources to form a complete picture of the enemy threat.

Sharpe's scouting and Unionist spy network collected an extensive amount of pertinent intelligence before Hooker launched his undetected offensive maneuver against Lee's left flank. Sergeant Cline made an extended visit to the south side of the Rappahannock, and rode over 250 miles around Lee's entire position with a Confederate cavalry escort in a ten day expedition. Cline collected intelligence on troop locations, defensive positions, and terrain features, which was corroborated with other sources. The accurate information he collected can be verified by historical records of documented Confederate positions before the battle. Cline's exploit was the deepest and most extensive penetration of enemy lines of a scout in the Civil War, by either side.²⁵⁶ Furthermore, Cole collected a significant amount of information after being captured and

²⁵⁴ Fishel, 567.

²⁵⁵ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II).

²⁵⁶ Fishel, 310.

escaping from Richmond. These men were just a small fraction of the bureau's scouting network, yet display the quality of veteran cavalry soldiers that Sharpe recruited when he established his organization, and the pinpoint intelligence the scouts collected. Sharpe had a keen eye for character and talent in recruiting scouts and spies. He established an effective spy network behind Confederate lines that consistently fed him accurate strategic and operational intelligence before the first day of combat. Silver provided the most relevant information to Sharpe during the campaign, followed by Skinker, McGee, and Yager. Silver pinpointed the five mile gap in the Confederate rear near the crossroads of Chancellorsville, which was critical information for Hooker to plan the route of the army's flanking movement. Sharpe trusted these agents to develop their own sub-source networks, while Sharpe gave them specific collection guidance.²⁵⁷ Scouts and spies were limited in their collection of tactical intelligence once the battle began, so Sharpe filled this void with cavalry. However, Hooker had limited cavalry for reconnaissance during the campaign because he sent most of them on Stoneman's raid, holding back only 1,300 troopers to support infantry operations. Cavalry would have been useful in detecting the true location of Jackson's flank march and the departure of Lee's divisions to Salem Church.²⁵⁸ Time was also a factor in using scouts and spies to collect intelligence as they made their way through enemy lines. The bureau expanded its spy network throughout the war, and Sharpe had several important agents in Richmond by 1864, including Elizabeth Van Lew and Samuel Ruth. Van Lew had several sub-sources including, Mary

²⁵⁷ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

²⁵⁸ Fishel, 389.

Elizabeth Bowser, who was a servant for the president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis. Ruth was the superintendent of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad. He delayed trains, held up railroad construction efforts, and reported enemy movements. These civilian spies were critical to the Union war effort, and contributed to Babcock's enemy estimates.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ David D. Ryan, ed., *A Yankee Spy in Richmond: The Civil War Diary of "Crazy Bet" Van Lew* (Mechanicsville, PA: Stackpole Books, 1996), 73.



Figure 15. An Illustration of a Civil War Scout

Source: Library of Congress, Prints, and Photographs Division.

Another significant measure of the effectiveness, accuracy, and relevance of Sharpe's section was the enemy order of battle, produced by Babcock on April 28, 1863. Babcock updated these charts periodically and distributed them to Hooker's subordinate commanders before the Chancellorsville Campaign. The deputy spymaster's estimate of enemy numbers and units was very accurate before the battle, a figure within two percent

of Lee's actual forces.²⁶⁰ Hooker knew that he outnumbered the enemy before launching his flanking maneuver. Furthermore, Babcock plotted all of these enemy locations on a map, or situation template, for his commander.²⁶¹ This report served as a decisive picture of the disposition and strength of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, and formed the baseline for future interrogations and intelligence efforts that supported several commanders in gaining victories on eastern battlefields.²⁶² Sharpe built upon this baseline product until the end of the war, and stated in late 1863 that he was "entirely familiar with the organization of the rebel forces in Virginia and North Carolina."²⁶³ The intelligence section knew every unit and commander's location in the eastern theater of operations. The bureau became the most sophisticated and efficient intelligence system during the war with their meticulous record keeping and data collection. By the time Grant took command in the east, these orders of battle became a key asset in denying the Army of Northern Virginia strategic mobility and the use of interior lines, which was one of Lee's greatest weapons. Grant stated that Lee "could not send off any large body without my knowing it" by the Petersburg Campaign in 1864. This product would not have been possible without the systematic interrogations and record keeping conducted by Babcock and the other men in Hooker's intelligence section.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Feis, 197.

²⁶¹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

²⁶² Fishel, 537.

²⁶³ Ibid., 198.

²⁶⁴ Feis, 253.

The Bureau of Military Information conducted thorough interrogations of deserters, prisoners, and refugees during the campaign, which significantly contributed to the Federal operations. The intelligence gained from interrogations was one of Sharpe's biggest and most consistent producers of information, especially when the battle began on May 1. Interrogations provided a quick means of tactical intelligence when prisoners were taken during battle. These passive sources also served the staff section well by providing strategic and operational intelligence. Sharpe collected information on activities in different theaters, logistics, and conditions on the southern home front. Interrogations also provided the accurate and timely data necessary to reconstruct the composition and organization of the Army of Northern Virginia before the campaign. The influx of prisoners taken during the first few days of combat helped the bureau and commanders on the ground identify specific Confederate units on the battlefield, and determine the enemy's fighting capability in considerable detail. The bureau knew exactly which Confederate units were in front of Hooker and at Fredericksburg on May 1 and 2.²⁶⁵ However, this source of information was also vulnerable to deception as evidenced on May 3 and May 4 when the Federal intelligence service was trying to locate the whereabouts of Longstreet's two divisions. Time proved to be another factor for this method of collection. Sharpe and Babcock quickly completed another situation template of the enemy after Jackson moved his forces to Chancellorsville, but could not account for the Confederate divisions facing Sedgwick until the early morning hours of May 5. Interrogations provided quick tactical intelligence, but took time to establish an

²⁶⁵ Fishel, 569; Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

operational or strategic picture of the enemy. The bureau refined their questioning techniques and flow of detainees by the Gettysburg Campaign to address the time factor, and through interrogations predicted Pickett's charge by the third day.²⁶⁶

Signal stations and balloons collected relevant information throughout the campaign, and were the largest contributor to quick tactical intelligence. The Federal signal corps intercepted enemy messages and observed Confederate troop movements with telescopes from the north side of the river, setting the stage for the Union army's offensive. The flag signal ruse used by the signal corps dispersed Stuart's cavalry, opening Lee's left flank for Hooker's grand maneuver.²⁶⁷ Furthermore, signal observation stations and aeronauts observed Jackson moving his corps from the south of Fredericksburg to Chancellorsville on the morning of May 1, which provided an accurate picture of the enemy disposition.²⁶⁸ The specific factors that impeded collection from these reconnaissance platforms were light, weather, terrain, and location. Evidence from the records suggests that Sharpe directed the placement of the balloons and signal observation stations for the campaign. The bureau directed Lowe to locate enemy camps on topographical maps and collect enemy strength estimates between Bowling Green, Fredericksburg, and Banks' Ford. Sharpe optimally placed the balloons to observe the open terrain and road networks leading west to Chancellorsville. Lowe's balloons accurately reported ten out of eleven Confederate winter camps across the river by April

²⁶⁶ Fishel, 569; Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45.

²⁶⁷ Fishel, 570.

²⁶⁸ U.S. War Department, *Official Records*, Vol. 25 (Part II), 324-339.

17, and his troop estimates were within sixty-five percent of the actual Confederate strength. The bureau verified this information with other sources, so Hooker knew the enemy's strength was much less than his own throughout the duration of the campaign. The balloons collected information on several enemy movements, but missed Jackson's flank march due to the windy weather and their distant location from the Chancellorsville battlefield. Several Federal officers observed Jackson's movement but chose not to act. Communications with these ISR platforms was also sometimes slow during the battle due to Hooker's long exterior lines. The balloons and signal stations provided Hooker with useful, accurate, and timely intelligence, especially during two critical phases of the campaign. Hooker knew that Lee's army still occupied their defensive positions during his turning movement, and he received intelligence when Jackson's corps moved west on May 1. However, balloons were not used again by the Union army during the Civil War after this campaign due to failed contract negotiations and personality clashes with Lowe.²⁶⁹

The combination of Sharpe's bureau, signal deception, and operational security discipline allowed Hooker to launch one of the greatest flanking maneuvers and intelligence coups of the Civil War.²⁷⁰ The Union army commander marched an army of 70,000 soldiers undetected and unopposed around the enemy's left flank. This operational surprise to the Confederate army was due in large part to the strength of Sharpe's intelligence section, which provided an accurate picture of the terrain and

²⁶⁹ Culpeper, 119-126.

²⁷⁰ Fishel, 568.

enemy forces on the south side of the Rappahannock River. The bureau provided Hooker with effective intelligence throughout the planning phase and operational phase of the Chancellorsville Campaign, but Hooker failed to act. Sharpe provided Hooker with all of the intelligence support that a battlefield commander needed to be successful. Time and communication were detrimental factors for nineteenth century intelligence collection, but did not significantly impact the bureau's efforts during this campaign. Hooker had a complete picture of the Army of Northern Virginia before and during the battle, and should have gained a decisive victory in central Virginia.²⁷¹ However, Hooker surrendered the initiative to Lee on May 1 and remained overly cautious during the campaign. Hooker comprehended the operational picture before the battle, created a good plan, but could not see the plan through once he arrived at Chancellorsville.²⁷² Hooker, Sharpe, and Babcock, never revealed the significant role of intelligence in the Chancellorsville Campaign. None of these soldiers published memoirs of their accomplishments after the war.²⁷³ Historians largely ignored the achievements of Hooker's intelligence staff because the Union army lost the battle, and instead credited Lee's tactical victory in the face of overwhelming numbers. Sharpe's section remained as an integral staff component of the Army of the Potomac, and served its next two commanders well until the end of the war. The Bureau of Military Information led to the development of military intelligence departments during World War II, and was the

²⁷¹ Diep, Bureau of Military Information Files, Record Group 393, Roll 45; Fishel, 456.

²⁷² Fishel, 571.

²⁷³ Fishel, 382.

forerunner to our modern intelligence organization. This department has often been overlooked by intelligence professionals and historians as the proponent of the modern all source intelligence system. The lessons learned from this staff section were not reinstated until the United States Army established a professional Military Intelligence Corps decades after the Civil War. The bureau was truly revolutionary for its time, and established a framework for future intelligence organizations.²⁷⁴ The effective study of military history will greatly enhance the probability of long-term success.

²⁷⁴ DeLew, 57.



Figure 16. Members of the Bureau of Military Information
Left to right, Colonel George H. Sharpe, John Babcock,
Lieutenant Frederick L. Manning, and Captain John McEntee

Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

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