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THE ROADS TO FALLING WATERS A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ROD BURNS, IN

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THE ROADS TO FALLING WATERS
A Critical Analysis

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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U.S. Army War College
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ABSTRACT

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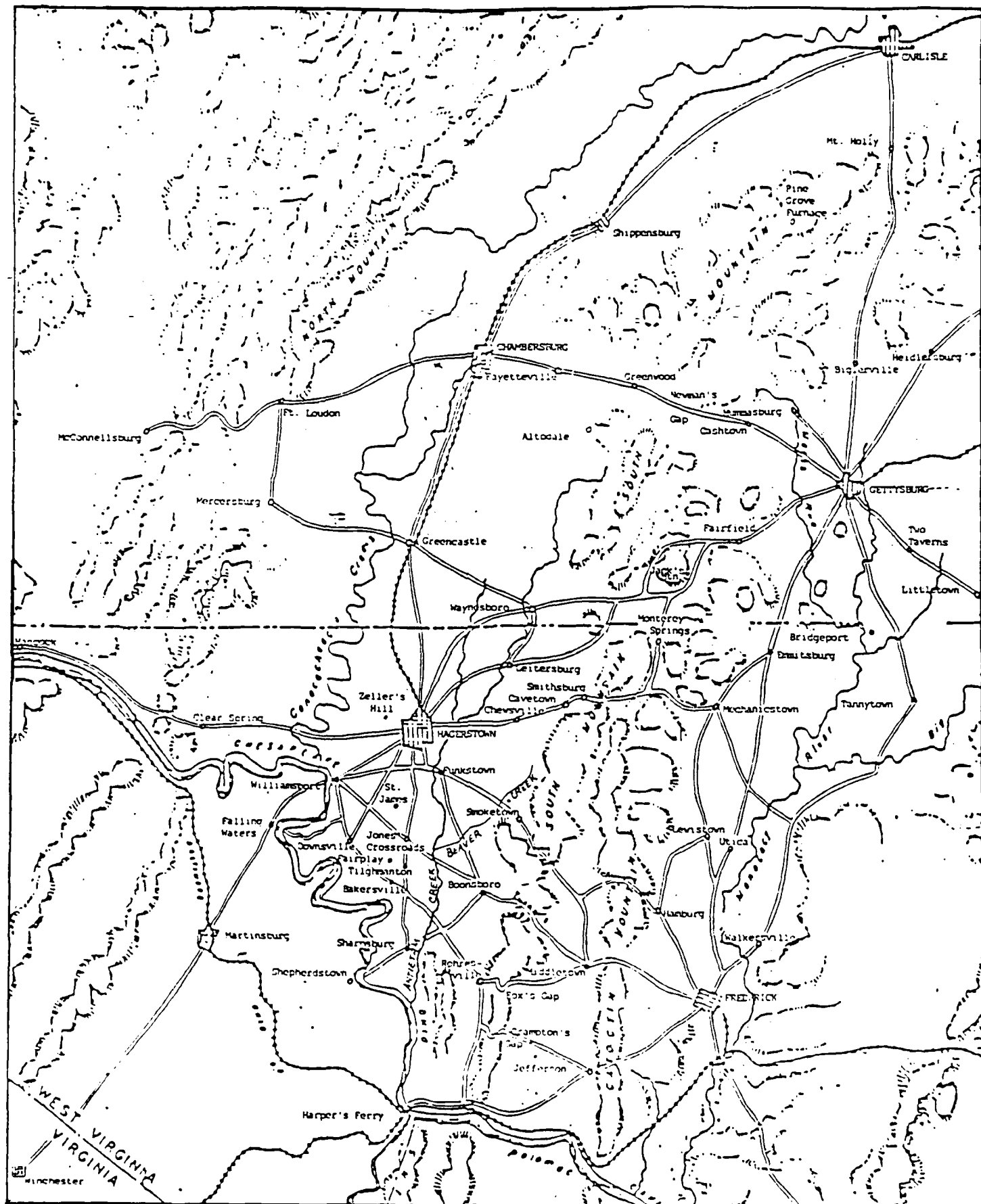
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MAP OF THE CAMPAIGN AREA

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THE ROADS TO FALLING WATERS
A Critical Analysis

CHAPTER I

A PRESIDENT'S ANGUISH

Late in the afternoon of July 14, 1863, Abraham Lincoln composed the following letter to Major General George G. Meade, Commanding the Army of the Potomac.

I have just seen your dispatch to General Halleck asking to be relieved of your command because of a formal censure of mine. I am very, very grateful to you for the magnificent success you gave the cause of the country at Gettysburg; and I am sorry to be the author of the slightest pain to you. But I was in such deep distress of it. I have been oppressed nearly ever since the battle at Gettysburg, by what appeared to be evidences that yourself and General Couch and General Smith were not seeking a collision with the enemy, but were trying to get him across the river without another battle. What these evidences were, if you please, I hope to tell you at some time when we shall both feel better. The case, summarily stated, is this: you fought and beat the enemy at Gettysburg, and, of course, to say the least, his loss was as great as yours. He retreated, and you did not, as it seemed to me, pressingly pursue him; but a flood of the river detained him, till by slow degrees you were again upon him. You had at least twenty thousand veteran troops directly with you, and as many more raw ones within supporting distance, all in addition to those who fought with you at Gettysburg, while it was not possible that he had received a single recruit; and yet you stood and let the flood run down, bridges be built, and the enemy move away at his leisure without attacking him. And Couch and Smith - the latter left Carlisle in time, upon all ordinary calculations, to have aided you in the last battle of Gettysburg, but he did not arrive. At the end of more than ten days, I believe twelve, under constant urging, he reached Hagerstown from Carlisle, which is not an inch over fifty-five miles, if so much, and Couch's movement was very little different.

Again, my dear general, I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape. He was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our

other late successes, have ended the war. As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely. If you could not safely attack Lee last Monday, how can you possibly do so south of the river, when you can take with you very few more than two-thirds of the force you then had in hand? It would be unreasonable to expect, and I do not expect you can now effect much. Your golden opportunity is gone, and I am immeasurably distressed because of it. I beg you will not consider this a prosecution or persecution of yourself. As you have learned that I was dissatisfied I have thought it best to kindly tell you why.¹

The letter was never sent. The President frequently resorted to this method of expressing his inner most thoughts rather than making them public. Fortunately, the letter was preserved, but how sad it is to share the anguish that Mr. Lincoln must have felt as he penned those words. The war would go on, and countless more Americans, blue and grey, would die on battlefields yet unknown.

One cannot read Mr. Lincoln's unsent letter without feeling that events of immense historical significance had taken place. Yet, while most Americans know, in general terms, of Lee's successful withdrawal from Gettysburg, few have ever heard of places like Monterey Springs, Boonsboro, Jones' Crossroads, Funkstown or St. James College, all on roads to a place called Falling Waters. That is not surprising, because those places encompass a battlefield where no battle was fought. The battlefield doesn't even have a name.

Clausewitz said that possible engagements are to be regarded as real ones because of their consequences.² Such was the case at the place where the Army of the Potomac, in Mr. Lincoln's words "stood and let the flood run down, bridges be

built, and the enemy move away at his leisure without attacking him."³ It was decisive, in Mr. Lincoln's mind at any rate, because as a consequence the war continued.

Did General Meade fail his President and his nation? Could he have attacked and won? Many besides Lincoln thought he could have. There are some more recent apologists for Meade, like Edwin B. Coddington, who believe that an attack would have resulted in disaster for the Army of the Potomac. To try to answer the question, I have attempted to reconstruct those ten days following the battle of Gettysburg through the message flow and reports of both armies. I have avoided later reports and investigations like the Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. Later accounts tend to be bias and defensive. Messages and reports written in the heat of battle, while sometimes disjointed and confusing, recreate what probably happened, or at least what principal participants thought was happening.

I have said the battlefield didn't have a name. At the operational level of war, the key terrain in the vicinity of where the two armies closed ten days after the battle of Gettysburg was a crossing site on the Potomac River called Falling waters. General Lee must have thought so, for in his written orders for the withdrawal from Gettysburg, he made a point of adding a postscript to Brigadier General J.D. Imboden, who escorted the trains in advance:

I desire you to turn back everybody you may meet on the road coming to join this army, to Falling Waters.⁴

END NOTES

1. Brevet Lieutenant Colonel George B. Davis, U.S.A., "From Gettysburg to Williamsport", in Campaigns in Virginia, Maryland and Pennsylvania, 1862-1863, Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, pp. 467-469.
2. Carl von Clausewitz, On War, Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, p. 181.
3. Davis, p. 468.
4. The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the Union and Confederate Armies, Washington, 1889, Series I, Volume XXVII, Part 2, p. 967, Hereafter this source will be cited as O.R., XXVII, Parts 1,2 or 3 plus the page information.

CHAPTER II

NO ONE EVER RECEIVED A MORE IMPORTANT COMMAND

An analysis of Falling Waters must begin with Meade's appointment to command of the Army of the Potomac. By 28 June, 1863, Lee's invasion of the north was in progress and the nation's leaders in Washington felt threatened. On that day, Major General H.W. Halleck, General-in-Chief, sent a message to Meade with the order of the President placing Meade in command. Halleck's message began "Considering the circumstances, no one ever received a more important command." He went on to say:

You will however, keep in view the important fact that the Army of the Potomac is the covering army of Washington as well as the army of operations against the invading forces of the rebels. You will therefore, maneuver and fight in such a manner as to cover the capital and also Baltimore, as far as circumstances will admit.¹

Meade would not forget those words. They would govern all of his operational decisions over the next two weeks.

At 12:45 P.M. on the same day, Halleck sent a message to Major General Darius N. Couch, commanding the Department of the Susquehanna, directing him to cooperate with Meade and that Meade would assume command of all troops in the area, including his.² Couch responded the next day that his force consisted of about 16,000 and that "Five thousand regulars will whip them all to pieces in an open field."³

It is interesting that Couch responded, not to Meade, but to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton with a copy furnished to Meade. It was the beginning of a pattern in which Couch would

communicate with political leaders, including the President, instead of Meade. It also began a pattern of reluctant commitment and excuses on Couch's part. The fact that most of Couch's correspondence would go to the War Department was not a significant hindrance to Meade, because the War Department automatically forwarded all important traffic to Meade.⁴ Nonetheless, it would mean that Meade would not receive important information in a timely manner.

What was Couch's reluctance to communicate directly with Meade. There may have been some jealousy involved, but another explanation is possible. Couch commanded an army of untried militia, and as the days went by it became apparent that he was sincerely worried about how they would perform in battle, or even if they would march when ordered. He may have been trying to protect his reputation by getting his doubts registered at the highest levels.

The armies clashed at Gettysburg from 1 to 3 July. During that great struggle, Meade and Halleck continued to urge Couch to come on. Both sent messages to Couch on the 1st, Meade asking that Couch throw a force down the Cumberland Valley in Ewell's rear, but at the same time keep his lines of retreat open.⁵ Twice on 3 July, Halleck again urged Couch to move against Lee's left flank and directed that Meade's call for assistance "should not pass unheeded."⁶ Couch responded on the same day, again to Secretary of War Stanton, that he was moving against Lee's flank. He did have a mixed command of cavalry and infantry under Colonel Lewis B. Pierce, 12th Pennsylvania Cavalry, near McConnellsburg

and Bloody Run, in the Cumberland Valley. On the 3rd, part of Pierce's command under Lieutenant Oliver B. Knowles with 88 of Captain Boyd's New York Cavalry captured 22 men and 33 horses south of Chambersburg.⁷ Pierce's activities were no more than minor irritants. Couch had a division under Brigadier General William F. (Baldy) Smith which had been at Carlisle since 1 July. Smith's division would not move until the 4th.

The most interesting of Meade's appeals to Couch was that sent at 9:57 A.M. on the 3rd. In that message, Meade gave his first indication that he thought Lee would retreat. He said in part:

Should I be satisfied that he is retreating, I shall then move down on this side of the mountain, and wish you (Couch) to pursue him as rapidly as possible down the Valley.⁸

Much criticism has been leveled at Meade because he did not pursue Lee's army directly over the mountains when Lee withdrew. Here, several hours before Pickett's charge would take place, and with the outcome of Gettysburg still very much in doubt, we find that Meade was already planing his next move. Direct pursuit of Lee was not even considered. Why? Probably because Meade was remembering his very explicit instructions that he would "maneuver and fight in such a manner as to cover the capital and also Baltimore."⁹

Another message sent at 7:00 A.M. on the 3rd, to Major General William H. French at Frederick, shows not only that Meade anticipated Lee's withdrawal, but also how Meade felt about protecting the capital. He told French to occupy Harper's Ferry

if Lee retreated, but if Lee were to defeat the Army of the Potomac, to "look to Washington, and throw your forces there for its protection."¹⁰

END NOTES

1. O.R., XXVII, Part 1, p. 61.
2. O.R., XXVII, Part 3, p. 385.
3. Ibid., p. 407.
4. Ibid., p. 566.
5. Ibid., p. 458.
6. Ibid., pp. 507-508.
7. Ibid., p. 508.
8. Ibid., p. 499.
9. Ibid., Part 1, p. 61.
10. Ibid., Part 3, p. 501.

CHAPTER III
TO CAPTURE THE MAN IN THE MOON

On the 4th of July, 1863, it rained. The greatest battle in American history had ended, the fields were covered with dead from north and south, and the two armies backed up, dug in and faced each other, waiting for yet another attack. The invincible Lee had been defeated. It is surprising that even in defeat, Lee did not seem discouraged. That day he wrote to Jefferson Davis that "It is believed that the enemy suffered severely in these operations, but our own loss has not been light."¹

Meade knew that he had won, but he didn't know what Lee would do next. In fact the evening before, Meade had ordered Major General Alfred Pleasonton to have the cavalry gain the rear and lines of communications to harass and annoy Lee as much as possible in his retreat.² Meade's exhausted army was in no shape to attack Lee in dug in positions and Meade knew it. So, both armies buried their dead and prepared for the next move.

Lee knew he had to withdraw to Virginia: his ammunition and supplies were exhausted and his army had stripped the Cumberland Valley of all it had to offer. He doubted "whether a shoe could be found there."³ On the 4th he issued General Order No. 74, ordering the withdrawal for that night. It was a flawless order, and in Lee's style gave general direction and left the details to his subordinates. Hill would move first, on the Fairfield road, followed by Longstreet's Corps and then Ewell as the rear guard. The corps trains would move between the leading and rear corps,

the artillery with their corps, and the cavalry would detach elements to the lead and follow-on corps and protect the flanks with the rest.⁴

Lee also sent written orders to Brigadier General J.D. Imboden. These orders were much more specific. Imboden was to escort the army's trains with a special command made up of cavalry, infantry and artillery. Imboden was to pick up the trains at Cashtown and escort them by a specific route back across the Potomac. After the trains were across and safe on their way to Winchester, he was to return to Maryland and secure the two crossing sites, the ford at Williamsport and the pontoon bridge at Falling Waters. Imboden also carried a letter from Lee to the commanding officer at Winchester directing that several regiments from Ewell's Corps, which had been posted there, be sent to Falling Waters to guard the pontoon bridge and collect all stragglers except sick and wounded.⁵

Lee could not know it when he sent the letter, but the bridge at Falling Waters had already been destroyed. Meade sent a message to French on the morning of the 4th directing him to move and seize the South Mountain passes to prevent Lee from doing so to cover the retreat.⁶ French had anticipated the requirement and had already done so and more. On the night of 3 July, part of French's forces had conducted a raid on Falling Waters and destroyed the pontoon bridge.⁷

It is probably a good thing that French had moved on his own initiative, because on the 4th, Meade began to have second thoughts on what course of action he would take. Soon after

issuing the order for French to occupy the passes, he revoked the order until it was certain Lee was retreating. At 1:30 P.M. he informed Couch that as soon as it was determined that Lee was retreating, Meade would move south, but not before.⁸ Then at 4:15 P.M. Meade published an order to the Army of the Potomac which would come back to haunt him. The order was innocent enough, basically congratulating the soldiers for their victory, but it went on to say that the army would now "drive from our soil every vestige of the presence of the invader."⁹ That statement was interpreted by the President to mean that Meade would not seek battle again or try to destroy Lee's army. When Lincoln saw the order he sent a letter to Halleck expressing his concern, saying in part:

These things all appear to me to be connected with a purpose to cover Baltimore and Washington, and to get the enemy across the river again without a further collision, and they do not appear connected with a purpose to prevent his crossing and to destroy him.¹⁰

In fairness, Lincoln did not send this message until the 6th, two days later, but it is clear that the nation's leaders were beginning to think that strategically the destruction of Lee's army was more important than covering Washington.

At 11:30 A.M. on the 4th, Stanton sent Couch the first of a number of messages expressing anger at Couch's delay in pushing troops to Meade.¹¹ Smith did move his division from Carlisle that day, but rather than push through the mountains to join Meade, or move down the Cumberland Valley to attack Lee's flank, he turned at Mt. Holly and moved southwest in the mountains,

reaching Pine Grove Furnace that night.¹²

At 10:00 P.M. on the 4th, Meade reported to Halleck that his cavalry was moving to the South Mountain passes.¹³ They did, and handed Lee his first major setback during his withdrawal. Lee had ordered Stuart to provide flank security for the withdrawal, which commenced that night. Stuart sent the brigades of Fitz. Lee and Hampton (commanded by Colonel Baker) to Cashtown to guard the left flank. He left Robertson's and Jones' brigades at Fairfield to guard the Jack's Mountain passes and took the brigades of Jenkins and W.H.F. Lee (commanded by Colonel Chambliss) to Emmitsburg to cross the mountains to Cavetown.¹⁴ Between Stuart's south wing and Fairfield, and in the mountains, was a Union cavalry division commanded by Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick, with Huey's brigade attached from Brigadier General Gregg's cavalry division. At 8:00 P.M., Kilpatrick hit the corps trains that had preceeded Longstreet, in contradiction to Lee's orders, at Monterey Springs. The fight lasted most of the night. The trains stretched all the way from Fairfield to Monterey Springs, and Robertson and Jones could not get past them to fight Kilpatrick. Eventually, Jones got one cavalry company, and later, a regiment into the fray.¹⁵ Major Charles E. Capehart, First West Virginia Cavalry, who was with Kilpatrick, reported:

The charge was ordered, and with a whoop and yell, the regiment dashed down upon the train. The night was one of inky darkness; nothing was discernible a half dozen paces ahead. As the advance came up to the train, they received a heavy volley of musketry, which at once showed the exact position of the enemy. Onward they dashed, and a hand-to-hand conflict ensued. The scene was wild and desolating. The road

lay down a mountain side, wild and rugged. On either side of the road was a heavy growth of underbrush, which the enemy had taken as a fit place to conceal themselves and fire from upon us. The road was interspersed with wagons and ambulances for a distance of 8 miles, and the whole train was taken, 300 wagons, 15 ambulances, together with all the horses and mules attached. The number of prisoners taken was 1,300, including 200 commissioned officers.¹⁶

The fight in the rain and the dark stretched over eight miles of muddy road clogged with wagons and troops. It was terribly confusing. Kilpatrick in fact captured about half the train. The men he captured were the drivers and wounded from the battle of Gettysburg. In the confusion, Colonel Jones himself got cut off and had to escape through the forests and mountains.¹⁷ Ewell had directed Rodes to send one brigade, Iverson's, to protect the trains, but it did not reach Monterey Springs until dawn on the 5th. Iverson was too late to help, but he was now in the lead of Lee's withdrawal, and would be critical to another desperate fight a day later.¹⁸

The withdrawal of Lee's army was slower than he would have liked. Ewell's corps did not leave their positions at Gettysburg and march until noon on the 5th, and did not reach Fairfield until 4:00 P.M.¹⁹ Gordon's brigade of Early's division brought up the rear and was attacked by Union artillery at Fairfield.²⁰ Imboden's movement went better, and other than a skirmish with Pierce's cavalry, near Greencastle, he reached Williamsport on the 5th with little trouble. There he found the river unfordable and the bridge destroyed at Falling Waters, but was joined by the 54th North Carolina and 31st Virginia Infantry regiments which

had come up from Winchester.²¹ Stuart, with Jenkins' and Chambliss' brigades crossed the mountains to Cavetown but had to fight through elements of Kilpatrick's cavalry.²² Tough as things were for Lee on 5 July, they became absolutely frustrating for Meade. He still intended to pursue Lee by moving on the flank, and now he knew that Lee was withdrawing. At 8:30 A.M. he sent Halleck a message that Lee had withdrawn and that he would immediately move on the flank. Halleck responded: "Your movements are perfectly satisfactory."²³ There seems no doubt that the General-in-Chief approved Meade's plan to move south keeping between Lee and Washington, rather than conduct a direct pursuit.

Meade even had detailed orders prepared for the movement. General Sedgwick would command the right wing with I, VI, and III Corps and move by way of Emmitsburg through Mechanicstown (Thurmont) to Middletown. General Slocum would command the left wing with XII and II Corps and move by way of Taneytown through Frederick to Middletown. General Howard would command the center with V and XI Corps and follow Sedgwick. Then Meade had second thoughts.²⁴

Meade had sent Sedgwick's VI Corps toward Fairfield to verify Lee's withdrawal. Perhaps some unpublished report from Sedgwick reached him which left doubts as to Lee's intent. At 11:00 A.M. Meade sent a message to Pleasanton in which he said: "Until so ascertained, (Lee's retreat) the general does not feel justified in leaving here and moving down toward you."²⁵

Unfortunately, Major General Butterfield, the Chief of

Staff, had already published the movement order, according to Meade, against Meade's wishes. Butterfield had also sent Sedgwick a message telling him that Meade wanted only a reconnaissance by VI Corps and to avoid battle.²⁶ Meade wanted Sedgwick to reconnoiter, but he also wanted him to be prepared for battle should it be offered. He personally clarified the mission at 12:30 P.M. by telling Sedgwick to push west and fire on the enemy. If he encountered the rear guard, "it will fire back, if not you will find out." Meade also gave V Corps to Sedgwick for support. Unfortunately, Butterfield sent another message to V Corps directing it toward Emmitsburg. It was too much. Meade, who had always been wary of Butterfield, relieved him the next day.²⁷

But why did Meade make such a sudden change to his plans? Perhaps he became convinced that Lee might establish a defense in the mountain passes, and if Meade were to move south, Washington would be open to Lee. There is another possibility. Howard sent a message to headquarters early on the 6th which suggested that Lee might swing around Jack's Mountain to Mechanicstown.²⁸ Meade may have thought of that and its consequences on the 5th. If the Army of the Potomac moved south, Lee could come out of the mountains at Mechanicstown, break their thin flank and then nothing could stop him from closing on Washington.

Whatever Meade's reasons, he determined not to move until he was sure Lee was retreating. It is strange that while Meade was preoccupied with a possible maneuver by Lee toward Washington, at the national level, all thoughts were turning to

the destruction of Lee's army. In a message to Major General Robert C. Schenck, commanding the Middle Department, and the defenses around Baltimore, Halleck said: "Send everything forward to Frederick, excepting the usual garrison of Baltimore. The enemy is in retreat, and Baltimore is in no possible danger."²⁹

Brigadier General B.F. Kelley, Department of West Virginia, was also ordered to move his forces by way of Cumberland and Hancock to close on Lee from the west. When Kelley reported that it would take "some days" to move, Stanton sent a stinging message to stop delaying, concentrate his forces and move.³⁰

Things were not moving much faster in the north with Couch's command. Pierce's cavalry had attacked Imboden's command at Greencastle on the 5th, capturing 90 wagons and 645 men. However, Smith remained at Pine Grove Furnace and recommended that if his division were committed, it should be broken up to regiment level and distributed to the Army of the Potomac.³¹ Smith did send some cavalry toward Newman's Gap on the 5th which captured 8 wagons on the Chambersburg Pike near Bendersville.³²

Lee may have gotten a slow start on his withdrawal, but hesitation and indecision on Meade's part left Lee at no disadvantage. Then another day was lost to Meade on the 6th. Sedgwick was expressing doubts about pressing Lee's forces and Butterfield's message the day before did not help. At 2:00 A.M. on the 6th, Meade clarified the mission, telling Sedgwick to push the reconnaissance but watch his flanks because Meade still had no information from Gregg's cavalry, which was following Imboden. He also gave Sedgwick the I and III Corps for support and went on

to say: "I shall not move the army from its present position until I am better satisfied the enemy are evacuating the Cumberland Valley."³³

More confusion prevailed when Meade found that I and III Corps had moved toward Emmitsburg, supposedly on Sedgwick's orders. Meade was furious and stopped the movement at 7:40 A.M. Sedgwick denied that he ever gave the order, but he was still hesitant to push his reconnaissance, and recommended that VI Corps move to Emmitsburg instead. Meade was fed up, and sent a strong message to Sedgwick to continue the reconnaissance, again saying "Whenever I am satisfied that the main body is retiring from the mountains, I shall continue my flank movement."³⁵

Lee had been withdrawing for two days, and the Army of the Potomac was still sitting at Gettysburg. At 8:20 A.M. Meade got his first inkling that Lee was in trouble. He received a message from French that the Potomac was rising and unfordable, and that Lee's wounded were being ferried across at Williamsport.³⁶

Sedgwick finally got moving and sent Neill's brigade of Howe's division into the passes. By 2:00 P.M. Meade was satisfied that Lee was withdrawing to the Cumberland Valley. He notified Halleck that he would start his flank movement at once. In the same message he expressed his first doubts about support from Couch.³⁷ That morning he had received a message from Couch refusing to give Smith's division to Meade.³⁸ Meade pressed Couch for his strength and dispositions, but did not receive a reply until Halleck sent a direct order to Couch that Meade was in command and "His orders will be obeyed."³⁹ Couch

finally reported to Meade. Smith would join Meade only if Lee did not retreat. If Lee was retreating, Couch wanted Smith at Chambersburg because there were 10,000 men in Smith's division "but one-half are very worthless and 200 cavalry with a battery can capture the whole party in open country." Couch went on to say that he had 2000 men at Harrisburg plus a New York regiment that would not march, 3000 more nearly equipped, 5000 at Reading, and 4000 at Mercersburg, 1500 of which were "utterly worthless", and 1000 more at York who were demoralized.⁴⁰

It is little wonder that Meade never counted on support from Couch after that. Although the War Department, and political leaders would continue to push Couch, Meade did not press any more. Perhaps that was a mistake, because, untrained militia or not, Couch would have over 25,000 men within 20 miles of the Army of the Potomac by 11 July.

At 2:30 P.M. on 6 July, Meade ordered the army to move as directed in the order of 5 July. An exception was that a light division, formed of Neill's brigade, McIntosh's cavalry brigade, and attached artillery would follow Lee over the mountains.⁴¹ Meade still did not even consider a direct pursuit with his army. Apparently Lee did not think Meade would follow either, because Neill's command was able to cross the mountains the next day unopposed. Lee's actions are unexplainable. He must have known by then that the Potomac was unfordable and the bridge destroyed. Imboden had reached the river on the 5th. Why did Lee not leave a covering force in the mountains to delay a direct pursuit? Perhaps he knew his enemy well enough to take the risk. At any

rate, Meade moved south and did not follow, and that gave Lee time to prepare a defense for his army, which was trapped by the rising Potomac. Meade had taken the prudent course of action. He knew that a covering force in the mountains could delay him indefinitely in a direct pursuit. He had also known since 8:20 A.M. on the 6th that he had time, because the river was unfordable.

Meade went on to tell Halleck, at 2:00 P.M. on the 6th that he was going to seek battle, because even if defeated by Lee, he would still have enough force to fall back and defend Washington.⁴² He would change his mind over the next few days. In the same message Meade stated that his cavalry was attacking Lee's flanks to inflict as much damage as possible. His words were certainly prophetic, because, 3 hours later a chaotic cavalry battle did occur at Williamsport and Hagerstown.

Brigadier General Buford's cavalry division had moved to Frederick on the night of the 3rd. On the 6th, Buford crossed the mountains to Boonsboro and started north. He moved through Jones' Crossroads to St. James College where he ran into pickets from Imboden's command. At 5:00 P.M., the cavalry drove in the pickets to within 1/2 mile of Williamsport and Imboden's main defenses.⁴³ Imboden had established a good defense with his small command. He used his attached artillery to good advantage. Major B.F. Eshleman commanded the assortment of artillery and had posted them in a perimeter defense. During the ensuing battle he would reposition artillery to meet every crisis.⁴⁴

Buford's cavalry dismounted and attacked, Gamble's brigade

on the left, Merritt's brigade on the right, and Devin's brigade following Gamble in reserve. Then Imboden counterattacked on the right and Devin was shifted to that side to stop the attack. About that time Buford heard the sounds of battle in Hagerstown.

Kilpatrick's division had come out of the mountains and entered Hagerstown. Iverson's brigade, which had reached Monterey Springs too late the day before, was in the north part of Hagerstown when Kilpatrick attacked. Then Stuart's cavalry, with Chambliss, Jenkins, and Robertson arrived. The fighting was street to street and very bitter. Finally Kilpatrick withdrew on the Sharpsburg road, but Chambliss pursued while Jenkins and Robertson tried to flank him. They caught Kilpatrick and a dismounted attack was met by Kilpatrick's counterattack. The Union cavalry finally broke out in the direction of Williamsport and fled to join Buford with Stuart in hot pursuit. Kilpatrick stopped only long enough to find out that Buford was going to have to withdraw, so he moved south immediately.⁴⁵

Buford now had his hands full. Stuart had followed Kilpatrick to Williamsport with 3 brigades of cavalry, and now Fitz. Lee's and Baker's brigades arrived from the north. Buford was low on ammunition, greatly outnumbered, and it was getting dark, so he had to fall back. He put Devin's brigade forward as a covering force and slowly withdrew back to Jones' Crossroads.⁴⁶ The casualties were heavy. The Union cavalry lost 383 men and the Confederates lost 254 cavalry. Casualties from the artillery, Iverson's brigade and the two regiments which had joined from Winchester were not reported. Lieutenant Colonel

A.W. Preston, First Vermont Cavalry, who was with Kilpatrick, reported:

When the charge was made upon Elder's battery, about 2 miles from Hagerstown, I sent the First Battalion to assist the Fifth New York in support of the battery, while I repulsed a flank attack with the balance of my command. Captain Beeman, with the Third Squadrom, whom I ordered to hold a strong position, being cut off, was ordered to surrender. He coolly replied, "I don't see it", and escaped by leaping a fence upon his extreme right flank. I again endeavored to hold another position near the toll-gate, on the Williamsport road. Captain Grover, with Company K, made a vigorous charge upon the enemy's column in the road, and repulsed them temporarily, but the enemy's sharpshooters told too severely upon him, and he was obliged to fall back. Captain Woodward, Company M, fell here, and many other brave men. About half a mile to the rear of this position I rallied my men again, and, giving three cheers, succeeded in turning back the enemy. At this point we suffered equally from our own as well as rebel batteries.⁴⁷

As the fighting at Williamsport ended on the 6th, Longstreets Corps moved into Hagerstown, and Ewell's Corps with the army's rear guard completed the crossing of the mountains and entered Waynesboro.⁴⁸ The Army of the Potomac was still at Gettysburg.

The 7th of July was a day of rest for Lee's army, but a day of incredible marches for Meade's army. The lead division of Howard's XI Corps reached Middletown, having marched over 34 miles from 3:30 A.M. to 8:00 P.M.⁴⁹ That day VI Corps reached Hamburg; V Corps reached High Knob, near Lewistown; III Corps reached Mechanicstown; XII Corps reached Walkersville; and II Corps reached Tanneytown.⁵⁰

The War Department had been sending a continuous stream of supplies and replacements to Frederick. French was at

Frederick to receive the flow, and he was frustrated. On the 7th, he sent a message to Halleck complaining that troops from Baltimore had arrived without haversacks or ammunition.⁵¹ However, French would no longer just be feeding support to Meade. Special Orders No. 39 gave command of III Corps to French on that day.⁵²

On the other side of the mountains, Lee was letting his army recuperate in the Hagerstown area, but he did not neglect his security. Jenkin's brigade of cavalry accompanied Wofford's brigade, of Longstreet's Corps, to Downsville. Robertson's and Jones' cavalry brigades were posted toward Cavetown, and the Maryland Cavalry was sent north toward Greencastle.⁵³

On the 7th, Lee sent a letter to Jefferson Davis in which he reported the events of the withdrawal and that the river was unfordable, but he gave no indication of his intentions.⁵⁴ Lee also published a curious circular to his army on that day. He was angered that his soldiers had been seizing horses, and ordered that they be returned to their owners or purchased.⁵⁵ The casual tone of his report to Davis, and the circular on the horses, lead one to believe that Lee was not overly concerned about being trapped north of the river.

In Washington, however, the political leaders saw great opportunities. Lincoln sent the following note to Halleck on the 7th:

We have certain information that Vicksburg surrendered to General Grant on the 4th of July. Now, if General Meade can complete his work, so gloriously prosecuted thus far by the literal or substantial destruction of Lee's army, the rebellion will be over.⁵⁶

Halleck sent a message to Meade urging that he attack Lee again before he could get across the Potomac, and then sent a copy of Lincoln's note.⁵⁷ If Meade had had any previous doubts about his mission, this should have made it extremely clear. What it did, however, was make him even more cautious.

Couch was still moving slowly in the north. Smith's division had finally reached Newman's Gap on the 6th, but on the 7th, only moved about 5 miles to Altodale. Meade then revoked the orders for Smith to join him.⁵⁸ If Meade was in fact so doubtful of support from Couch and Smith, it would seem that he would have showed more concern about what was happening on Lee's north flank. In addition to Neill's light division, which reached Waynesboro on the 7th, Gregg's cavalry reached Marion, just below Chambersburg on that day. Then Meade allowed Gregg to come all the way back to Frederick that same day.⁵⁹ It would leave Meade blind to a glaring weakness on Lee's left flank.

On 8 July, Meade had the bulk of his army close on Middletown. The XII and II Corps closed a little to the south near Jefferson. His intent was to rest his army for the day and refit, reman and resupply from Frederick. Early on the 8th he issued orders for the next day's march. VI Corps followed by XI Corps would move through Turner's Gap to Boonsboro, and I Corps would follow to Turner's Gap. V Corps, followed by III Corps, would move through Fox's Gap to Rohresville, and XII and II Corps would move through Crampton's Gap to Rohresville.⁶⁰ This was a strange order considering the President's note of the day before. Why was Meade directing over half of his army south to

Rohresville when he knew Lee was north at Hagerstown? Buford and Kilpatrick were north of Boonsboro and keeping an eye on Lee, so Meade must have known where Lee was. Perhaps he wanted to use multiple routes to get his army across the mountains quickly. But if that were so, why didn't he consider the old Hagerstown/Frederick road which exited the mountains at Smoketown, about 4 miles north of Turner's Gap? The only likely explanation seems to be that Meade did not want to risk a meeting engagement with Lee's army. He would take a slower, safer route to approach Lee.

At 12:30 P.M. on the 8th, Meade received another spur from Halleck. Information had reached Washington that Lee's army was crossing the Potomac. It was probably misinterpreted reports of Lee's crossing of the wounded by boat. Halleck told Meade to move at once to attack Lee's split army and revealed that: "The President is urgent and anxious that your army should move against him be forced marches."⁶¹

Lincoln was also fed up with Couch's slow response, and sent a burning message at 12:30 P.M.

Your dispatch of this morning to the Secretary of War is before me. The forces you speak of will be of no imaginable service if they cannot go forward with a little more expedition. Lee is now passing the Potomac faster than the forces you mentioned are passing Carlisle. Forces now beyond Carlisle to be joined by regiments still at Harrisburg, and the united force again to join Pierce somewhere, and the whole to move down the Cumberland Valley, will in my unprofessional opinion, be quite as likely to capture the "man in the moon" as any part of Lee's army.⁶²

Meade and Couch responded with excuses. Meade replied to Halleck that the President was misinformed: Lee's army was

still north of the Potomac, and preparing defenses. Therefore, he wanted to move slowly and not repeat Lee's mistake at Gettysburg.⁶³

Surprisingly, Halleck responded that if it were true that Lee was entrenching, Meade should take time to concentrate his forces.⁶⁴ However, if Lee were entrenching, it seems that speed would be even more essential in order to close before he could get dug in.

Lee, however, was not yet entrenching. He was thinking about it though, and in a letter to Davis, for the first time, Lee expressed some concern. Although the army was in good condition and confidence unimpaired, he did expect the river to remain unfordable for at least a week, and therefore he would begin arrangements to accept battle. He asked Davis to concentrate forces on the upper Rappahannock to relieve pressure on the army. Lee was "not in the least discouraged", but the facts were that Meade could be "easily re-enforced, while no addition can be made to our numbers."⁶⁵

On the 8th, Lee sent Pickett to Winchester with instructions to escort the wounded, gather stragglers, resuscitate the command and assume command at Winchester. Lee now had an operational reserve. He then ferried some artillery across the river to cover the crossing sites. He also ordered Stuart to conduct a demonstration toward Boonsboro to cover the army.

Stuart commenced his demonstration at 5:00 A.M. on 8 July. He sent Jones' brigade south on the Boonsboro/Hagerstown road

with Fitz. Lee, Baker and Chambliss in support. He brought Jenkins down the Boonsboro/Williamsport road. As Jones crossed Beaver Creek he encountered Buford's cavalry, dismounted and a day long battle ensued.⁶⁶ Gamble's brigade moved north to meet the attack and took position to the east of the Boonsboro/Hagerstown road.

Devins moved out on the Williamsport road to meet Jenkins, and Kilpatrick's division filled in between the two roads. The fighting was all dismounted, and primarily an artillery and sharpshooter duel. At 2:00 P.M., Meade ordered XI Corps forward to Turner's Gap to assist.⁶⁷ The union cavalry held their own until about 5:00 P.M., then Kilpatrick fell back, exposing Gamble's flank and the whole command withdrew to Boonsboro. Stuart pressed the attack, but XI Corps had reached Turner's Gap and brought artillery to bear on his attack. Buford then ordered a dismounted counterattack, and slowly drove Stuart north of Beaver Creek. Kilpatrick joined in with a mounted counterattack, but was stopped and retired.⁶⁸ Union losses during the day long fight were 120. Stuart lost 216. Second Lieutenant John H. Calef, with Buford's horse artillery, described the fighting:

The enemy's batteries had in the meantime, under good cover, worked up very close to our position. The enemy's sharpshooters had also gained possession of a stone barn, from which it was necessary to dislodge them before we could advance. Lieutenant Roder was detached with one piece for this purpose. Scarcely had he fired the first shot, when a rebel battery opened on him about 1,000 yards in front. Their first shot severely wounded 1 man and killed 1 horse. I placed the remainder of the battery in position as soon as possible, and opened. The enemy having obtained accurate range of my position, the fire was extremely warm.⁶⁹

On the night of 8 July, Smith's division finally closed with Neill's light division at Waynesborough, 10 miles northeast of Hagerstown. Schurtz' division of XI Corps moved down from Turner's Gap and joined Buford and Kilpatrick in Boonsboro. In the west, Cambell's and Mulligan's brigades from Kelley's command reached Fairview, about 20 miles from Hagerstown.⁷⁰ The noose was tightening on Lee's army.

END NOTES

1. O.R., XVII, Part 2, p. 298.
2. Ibid., Part 1, p. 916.
3. Ibid., Part 3, p. 987.
4. Ibid., Part 2, p. 311.
5. Ibid., Part 3, pp. 966-967.
6. Ibid., p. 517.
7. Ibid., p. 524.
8. Ibid., p. 515.
9. Ibid., p. 519.
10. Ibid., p. 567.
11. Ibid., p. 525.
12. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 221-223.
13. Ibid., Part 1, p.
14. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 699-705.
15. Ibid., p. 753.
16. Ibid., Part 1, p. 1019.
17. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 699-705.
18. Ibid., p. 557.

19. Ibid., pp. 488-490.
20. Ibid., pp. 471-472.
21. Ibid., pp. 488-490.
22. Ibid., pp. 699-705.
23. Ibid., Part 1, p. 79.
24. Ibid., Part 3, p. 532.
25. Ibid., p. 534.
26. Ibid., p. 530.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p. 556.
29. Ibid., p. 546.
30. Ibid., p. 550.
31. Ibid., Part 2, p. 214.
32. Ibid., p. 221.
33. Ibid., Part 3, p. 554.
34. Ibid., p. 557.
35. Ibid., p. 558.
36. Ibid., p. 564.
37. Ibid., Part 1, p. 80.
38. Ibid., Part 3, p. 577.
39. Ibid., p. 566.
40. Ibid., p. 577.
41. Ibid., p. 561.
42. Ibid., Part 1, p. 80.
43. Ibid., p. 928.
44. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 436-438.
45. Ibid., pp. 699-705.

46. Ibid., Part 1, p. 928.
47. Ibid., p. 1014.
48. Ibid., Part 2, p. 448.
49. Ibid., Part 1, p. 708.
50. Ibid., pp. 145-147.
51. Ibid., Part 3, p. 589.
52. Ibid., p. 584.
53. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 699-705.
54. Ibid., p. 299.
55. Ibid., Part 3, p. 982.
56. Ibid., Part 1, p. 83.
57. Ibid., p. 82.
58. Ibid., Part 3, p. 585.
59. Ibid., Part 1, pp. 145-147.
60. Ibid., Part 3, p. 601.
61. Ibid., p. 605.
62. Ibid., p. 612.
63. Ibid., Part 1, p. 84.
64. Ibid., p. 85.
65. Ibid., Part 2, p. 299.
66. Ibid., p. 699.
67. Ibid., Part 3, p. 602.
68. Ibid., Part 1, pp. 935-936.
69. Ibid., p. 1033.
70. Ibid., pp. 145-147.

CHAPTER IV

THE DECISIVE BATTLE OF THE WAR WILL BE FOUGHT

The Army of the Potomac cautiously crept into the valley on 9 July. VI Corps moved through XI Corps in Turner's Gap and on to Boonsboro. I Corps moved up with XI Corps. V Corps moved through Fox's Gap to Rohresville and then up to Boonsboro. III Corps followed as far as Fox's Gap, and XII and II Corps moved through Crampton's Gap to Rohresville. Buford pushed from Boonsboro, 4 miles toward Hagerstown.¹

In the north, Smith and Neill stayed at Waynesboro, but Smith sent McIntosh's cavalry toward Zeigler's Mill, near Chewsville. In the sharp skirmish that followed, the rebels were driven back and McIntosh reported that all enemy forces were west of the Antietam.²

West of the Antietam, and north of Hagerstown, Meade was still blind. Pierce had cavalry operating in that area, but they were concentrating on Lee's foraging efforts at Clear Spring, about 10 miles west of Hagerstown. On the 8th, Pierce's cavalry had captured 11 wagons in the area, and on the 9th, one more.³

Lee was more concerned with Kelley's forces, which were moving closer from Hancock, than he was with foraging. On the 9th, he sent a message to Stuart expressing regret over the losses the day before at Boonsboro. Then he directed Stuart to look to the northwest where Imboden was. He was irked that Imboden had lost the wagons to Pierce's cavalry and expressed concern that Imboden was "unsteady and inefficient."⁴ He also

sent a message to Imboden telling him to watch for Kelley's movement from the west, although he doubted that any of Kelley's forces would try to push through and link up with Meade.

At 11:00 A.M. on the 9th, Meade reported his movements to Halleck and went on to say:

I think the decisive battle of the war will be fought in a few days. In view of its momentous consequences, I desire to adopt such measures as in my judgement will tend to insure success, even though these may be deemed tardy.⁵

The malleable Halleck agreed and told Meade to collect all the forces he could before attacking. Halleck would continue to send all he could to Frederick, and Kelley was moving from the west. Then he went on to assure Meade that he should use his own judgement and not let dispatches from Washington, which were only suggestions, influence his decisions.⁶

Clearly, Meade now understood the strategic importance of his task. He also knew that the river was showing no signs of going down so he felt he had time to do it right. What he did, though, was to continue to grope blindly toward Lee's army. He had plenty of cavalry. Two divisions were concentrated in the Boonsboro area and Gregg's division was behind him at Middletown. But, instead of pushing the cavalry out to feel for Lee's flanks, he was pushing them directly in front of the army. Nor did Meade push for help from Kelley and Couch. That he left to Washington.

Shortly after he assured Meade of support, Halleck again prodded Kelley telling him that "If Lee gives battle do not be absent."⁷ He also sent a message to Schenck, in Baltimore, asking if he could send more troops to Meade.⁸

On 10 July, Meade pushed closer to Lee. VI, XI, and I Corps moved north to the high ground just north of Beaver Creek. V Corps moved to Delaware Mills on the Antietam. III Corps moved up to Jones' Crossroads, II Corps to Tilghmanton, and XII Corps to Bakersville.⁹

In the north, Couch had finally gotten things moving and on the 10th, he was in Chambersburg himself. He reported to Meade on his dispositions. Smith's 1st Division was at Waynesboro with 7662 men; the 2d Division was at Chambersburg with 11,007 men; 900 cavalry were with the divisions; Pierce's 12th Pennsylvania Cavalry was at Loudon with 2700, and Colonel Hawley with 400 men was also at Loudon. In all Couch had 25,930 men and 30 pieces of artillery within 20 miles of Hagerstown.¹⁰

Incredibly, Meade all but ignored Couch. His only response was a message directing Smith to be prepared to occupy the enemy to best advantage and be prepared to join the Army of the Potomac or Couch as required.¹¹ Raw militia or not, 26,000 men and 30 guns could have increased Meade's combat power significantly had he actively sought the support.

At Hagerstown, Lee was at no disadvantage for intelligence. Lieutenant Norwood, 37th North Carolina, had escaped and he gave Lee an accurate report on the dispositions of both Meade's and Couch's forces.¹² Lee also sent a letter to Davis reporting his situation and the fact that because of the unfordable river, he would have to accept battle. He reported the army in good condition with a good supply of ammunition, although somewhat short of food. It was really quite an optimistic report. Lee

concluded:

I trust that the courage and fortitude of the army will be found sufficient to relieve us from the embarrassment caused by the unlooked-for natural difficulties of our situation, if not to secure far more valuable and substantial results.¹³

It is amazing that even when he was backed up to the swollen river facing an army twice the size of his own, Lee was thinking offensively, and of securing "more valuable and substantial results."

As Meade's army moved forward on the 10th, the cavalry again pushed out to the front. One brigade, Huey's, was sent out to Jones' Crossroads. McIntosh's brigade, which was with Smith and Neill, made a circuit in the Leitersburg area.¹⁴ The rest, Buford and Kilpatrick's divisions, moved north on the Boonsboro/Hagerstown road at 8:00 A.M.

The Union cavalry made first contact with Stuart's cavalry at 8:00 A.M., and drove through Funkstown. Longstreet sent the brigades of Colonel Gordon Bryan, Colonel W.W. White and Brigadier General J.B. Kershaw, to help Stuart. Reinforced, Stuart counterattacked and drove the union cavalry back to the high ground southeast of town.¹⁵ All of the fighting was dismounted and bitter. As the fighting went on in the afternoon, Colonel Gamble, commanding a brigade in Buford's division, noted that Union infantry, probably of the VI Corps, came within supporting distance, but pitched tents rather than relieve the hard pressed cavalry.¹⁶ Colonel W.W. White, commanding Anderson's brigade, reported:

I was met in Funkstown by an aide from General Stuart, who conducted me to General Fitz. Lee, and

was ordered by him (General Lee) to halt in the road until he had opened fire on the enemy with his batteries. After a halt at this point of some ten minutes, I was ordered by General Lee to move forward by the flank through a narrow lane, a la cavalry, to within 150 yards of the enemy, before deploying in line of battle. I protested against this order, wishing to deploy my line before getting under fire of the enemy, but was not allowed to do so.

I was subjected to a raking fire from the enemy, and it was with great difficulty that my line was formed, there being several fences and small houses in the way.

Once formed, we pushed forward to the crest of the hill, driving the enemy's sharpshooters from the barn behind and in which they had advanced in heavy force. Here the right regiment (Fifty-ninth Georgia) halted, owing to the confusion caused in their ranks by the fire of Stuart's Horse Artillery, who threw and exploded several shells in their ranks, killing and wounding 6 men in one company and several in others. The left and center were advancing in splendid order, and would have continued to advance but for orders from General Lee to fall back.¹⁷

White's brigade alone had lost 126 killed and wounded.

Finally the Confederates fell back to the Antietam, but they had accomplished what Lee had sent them to do, to cover his army while it dug in.

By 1:00 A.M. on the 10th, Meade had a good idea of Lee's dispositions. He reported to Halleck that Lee was entrenching from Downsville to Hagerstown, with Ewell's Corps in the north, A.P. Hill's on the right and Longstreet's in the center. He was correct on the location of the line, but he got the positions of Hill and Longstreet reversed, probably because the cavalry was fighting elements of Longstreet's Corps at Funkstown. He went on to tell Halleck that he would continue to advance the army cautiously and develop the situation.¹⁸

Lee took advantage of Meade's caution to strengthen his

defenses on 11 July. He anchored the defense in the south on high ground overlooking the Potomac about 1 1/2 miles south of Downsville. Longstreet's Corps dug in on a ridgeline from there to the Boonsboro/Williamsport road. Except for one small portion of the line near Downsville Church, which was on a reverse slope, Longstreet's line had unobstructed fields of fire of at least 1/2 mile along the entire front.

Hill's Corps had an even stronger position in the center. His line was entrenched between the Boonsboro/Williamsport road and the Funkstown/Williamsport road. Anderson's Division was dug in about 1/2 mile west of St. James College, on a wooded ridge. The trenchlines are still visible today. Then there was a break in the line, and the entrenchments began again about 1 mile north and east of Anderson's left flank. However, behind this gap, and closer to the Downsville/Hagerstown road were more entrenchments. An attack into this gap, behind St. James College, would have been met by enfilading fire from three directions. The remainder of Hill's line was even stronger, entrenched on a ridgeline dominating the entire Antietam valley.

Ewell's Corps entrenched on an extension of the same ridgeline running north to Zeller's Hill. This part of the line was about 1 1/2 miles west of Hagerstown and overlooked the Hagerstown/Chambersburg railroad. This was the weakest part of the line because of the rolling nature of the terrain between it and Hagerstown. In many places, the line could be approached within several hundred yards undetected. But, Meade would never have forces disposed to threaten Ewell's sector.

Lee had his Chief of Artillery, Brigadier General William N. Pendleton, take special care in placement of the artillery for the defense.¹⁹

Although his defenses were formidable, there were weaknesses. One is struck by how thin the defense was. The line was over eight miles long, and Lee's only reserve was Early's division, which he pulled from the left flank on the 12th and placed behind Hill's Corps.²⁰ Another weakness was the left flank. Between Daniel's brigade on Zeller's Hill, and Concocheague Creek was a 4 mile gap open to attack from the north. Lee was fully aware of the weakness, and at 8:30 A.M. on the 11th instructed Stuart to keep his cavalry in front of the army until forced back and then to move to fill the gap on the north flank.²¹ That afternoon Stuart moved Chambliss' and Fitz. Lee's brigades to fill the gap.²² Lee also issued General Order No. 76 to his army on the 11th. It was a pep talk to prepare his soldiers for battle. Acknowledging the defeat at Gettysburg, he praised his soldiers for their gallant attempt and then called on them to fight once more.

Soldiers! Your old enemy is before you! Win from him honors worthy of your righteous cause - worthy of your comrades dead on so many illustrious fields.²³

As Lee reconciled himself and his army to battle, so was Lincoln satisfied that the final decisive battle of the war was about to be fought. In a letter to the Honorable J.K. Dubois on 11 July, Lincoln stated

Meade is close upon him, and preparing to attack him, heavy skirmishing having occurred nearly all day yesterday. I am more than satisfied with what has

happened north of the Potomac so far, and am anxious and hopeful for what is to come.²⁴

The problem was that Meade was not yet ready for battle. Again, he cautiously inched forward. At 9:00 A.M he ordered Neill's light division to rejoin the Army of the Potomac at Funkstown.²⁵ This would bring back the only forces of the Army of the Potomac which were north of Hagerstown. Later the same day, he ordered Smith also to move south to join the army.²⁶ Not only did Meade not explore an attack on Lee's north flank; he was stripping forces from the north which could have been combined with Couch and Kelley to support from the north. On the 11th, Kelley's command reached Indian Springs, 15 miles west of Hagerstown.²⁷ General Dana arrived in Chambersburg to take command of the 2d Division, under Couch.²⁸ The combined strength of forces north and west of Hagerstown, before Meade ordered Neill and Smith south, approached 30,000. These forces were within striking distance of a 4 mile gap on Lee's left flank, but Meade seemed to ignore them.

Meade did, however, finally start his cavalry toward the flanks, and on the 11th, sent Buford to Bakersville, in the south, and Kilpatrick to Hagerstown.²⁹

In the afternoon, Meade began to tighten up his line. At 2:45 P.M. he ordered III Corps to pull back to a reserve position behind V Corps. At 3:00 P.M. Meade ordered Sedgwick to seize the bridges on the Antietam, south of Funkstown, and II and V Corps to press reconnaissance to the west in conjunction with Sedgwick.³⁰ By 4:00 P.M. he was able to report to Halleck that

the army was advancing cautiously, the right on the Smoketown road, 2 miles from Funkstown, and the left near Jones' Crossroads. He also asked Halleck to stop sending troops near the end of their enlistment because he was having trouble with them.³¹

On 12 July, Meade pushed closer to Lee. XI Corps was ordered to assist Kilpatrick in a reconnaissance to Hagerstown. Howard sent Ames' division, and moved through Funkstown with the rest of the corps to a position on the right of VI Corps, about 1 mile south of Hagerstown. I Corps positioned to the rear of XI Corps.

VI Corps crossed the Antietam, and moved west to the second line of ridges, 600-800 yards from Lee's lines, and tied in with XI and V Corps.³³ II Corps tied in with V Corps near Jones' Crossroads, and XII Corps extended southwest toward Fair Play. III Corps took up a reserve position between II and V Corps.

Buford was on the south flank near Bakersville, and probed within 800 yards of Downsville.³⁴

At 2:40 P.M. Meade sent a message to Couch, reporting his dispositions and Lee's position. He then told Couch "The road is open for you to Hagerstown."³⁵ It was a mere suggestion. Couch was available with a significant force, but Meade acted as if he did not understand that he had command of Couch's forces.

Meanwhile Lee was getting impatient. Watching Meade's tentative approach, he began to develop his own plan of attack. At 5:30 P.M. he sent a message to Stuart, who had consolidated all of his forces, except for Fitz. Lee who was with Longstreet,

in the gap on the north. Lee speculated that Meade would attack on Hill's front. Therefore, he ordered Stuart to be prepared to attack on Meade's right flank, but watch toward Greencastle. Lee had not forgotten about Couch, in the north, but he was not overly concerned about him. At 9:00 P.M., Lee again contacted Stuart with a definite order to attack Meade's right flank when Meade attacked, and if the enemy broke, to pursue.³⁶

That was not the only indication of Lee's optimism. On the same day he reported to Davis that he would gladly accept battle, but he was low on subsistence. He went on to say that the river was subsiding, and the bridge being rebuilt at Falling Waters would open communications with the south the next day. Lee had been rebuilding this bridge using lumber from the houses in Williamsport.³⁷

At 5:00 P.M. on the 11th, Meade ordered the artillery reserve to Jones' Crossroads.³⁸ The river was subsiding, but Meade had won the race. His army was poised for the attack, and he reported to Halleck:

It is my intention to attack them to-morrow, unless something intervenes to prevent it, for the reason that delay will strengthen the enemy and will not increase my force.³⁹

1. O.R., XXVII, Part 1, pp. 145-147.
2. Ibid., p. 678.
3. Ibid., Part 3, p. 985.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., Part 1, p. 86.
6. Ibid., p. 88.

7. Ibid., Part 3, p. 623.
8. Ibid., p. 625.
9. Ibid., Part 1, pp. 145-147.
10. Ibid., Part 3, p. 634.
11. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 221-223.
12. Ibid., Part 3, p. 991.
13. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 300-301.
14. Ibid., Part 1, pp. 145-147.
15. Ibid., Part 2, p. 361.
16. Ibid., Part 1, p. 936.
17. Ibid., Part 2, p. 398.
18. Ibid., Part 1, p. 89.
19. Ibid., Part 2, p. 353.
20. Ibid., pp. 471-472.
21. Ibid., Part 3, p. 994.
22. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 699-705.
23. Ibid., p. 301.
24. Ibid., Part 3, p. 645.
25. Ibid., p. 654.
26. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 221-223.
27. Ibid., Part 3, p. 652.
28. Ibid., Part 2, p. 213.
29. Ibid., Part 1, pp. 145-147.
30. Ibid., Part 3, pp. 647-648.
31. Ibid., Part 1, p. 90.
32. Ibid., p. 708.
33. Ibid., p. 677.

34. Ibid., pp. 929.
35. Ibid., Part 3, p. 665.
36. Ibid., p. 998.
37. Ibid., Part 2, pp. 301-302.
38. Ibid., Part 3, p. 666.
39. Ibid., Part 1, p. 91.

CHAPTER V

THE MARYLAND CAMPAIGN IS ENDED

Something intervened. As he had done at Gettysburg on the night of 2 July, Meade called his corps commanders together and counceled with them regarding his intentions and their opinions. It was not until 5:00 P.M. on the 13th that Meade reported the results of that council of the night before. He reported to Halleck:

Upon calling my corps commanders together and submitting the question to them, five out of six were unqualifiedly opposes to it. Under these circumstances, in view of the momentous consequence attendant upon failure to succeed, I did not feel myself authorized to attack until after I had made a more careful examination of the enemy's position, strength, and defensive works...¹

Halleck shot back a burning message in which he showed his disgust:

You are strong enough to attack and defeat the enemy before he can effect a crossing. Act upon your own judgement and make your generals execute your orders. Call no councils of war. It is proverbial that councils of war never fight. Re-enforcements are pushed on as rapidly as possible.²

It was too late; another day was lost. It is interesting that Meade did not inform Halleck of his decision not to attack for almost 24 hours. Perhaps he suspected Halleck's reply would force him to attack if there were still enough daylight on the 13th.

Meade wanted a better appraisal of Lee's defenses, and he got it. Ames and Kilpatrick had entered Hagerstown on the 12th, and on the 13th, Howard personally went there. Howard reported

to Meade at 11:30 A.M., that he could see Lee's positions from a church steeple in Hagerstown. He gave Meade a perfect description of the defenses from Zeller's Hill south to Morlei's estates, which was most of Ewell's front.³ Howard must have sensed the weakness of Lee's left, because after he reported, he sent out scouts to take a better look. By 6:35 P.M., Howard had enough information to report that: "My opinion is that their left, resting on Zeller's Hill, may be turned."⁴

No other information obtained on the 13th was so revealing, but when Meade published his orders for the 14th, only 25 minutes later, he completely ignored it. XII, II, V, and VI Corps would push out at least one division each to develop the situation. III Corps would fill in the line where the divisions went out. XI and I Corps, which were in front of Ewell's position, were not part of the plan.⁵

Why did Meade ignore Howard's report of the weakness of Lee's left flank? Two messages that came in from Couch may have influenced him. At 9:00 A.M., Couch had reported that Dana would not reach Greencastle until the evening of the 14th. Then at 7:25 P.M., Couch sent another message that Dana was still in Chambersburg because wagons could not be found to accompany his division. Halleck, who received a copy of the message, was furious. At 9:00 P.M., he sent Couch a message telling him to move with or without wagons, and: "not stop at trifles at this crisis but prove yourself equal to the emergency."⁶

It was a futile effort, because Lee ordered his army to withdraw the night of 13 July. He ordered Stuart to place the

cavalry in position to relieve the infantry along the entire line at midnight. He instructed Stuart to deceive the enemy and then withdraw at dawn to cross the river, those in Longstreet's sector to cross the bridge at falling waters, and the rest to cross the fords at Williamsport.⁷

Again, Lee's plan for withdrawal was flawless. Commencing at midnight, Longstreet would lead out to cross the bridge at Falling Waters, Hill would follow and provide the rear guard, Heth's division. Ewell would withdraw to Williamsport and ford the Potomac. The artillery would proceed ahead of the infantry and position on the south bank to cover the army.

It rained all night. The storm turned the roads to quagmires and visibility was so bad that details had to build and maintain fires to light the bad spots in the road. Captain J.H. Manning's signal detachment had to light the bridge with signal torches. Even so, one wagon full of wounded men went off the bridge, throwing all the wounded into the river. By miraculous effort all the men were saved, but it took engineers 2 hours to repair the bridge.⁸

Pendleton got the artillery across and positioned Carter's guns and Lane's 20 pounder parrotts below the bridge, and Garnett's guns and Hurt's Whitworths above.⁹ Longstreet's Corps did not finish crossing until after daylight on the 14th, and Hill's Corps was still strung out on the muddy road to Falling Waters.

It was just as bad, or worse, for Ewell's Corps. Ewell had sent his artillery, and Hay's brigade to cross at Falling Waters,

but the rest went to Williamsport to cross two fords, one above and one below the aqueduct over Conococheague Creek.¹⁰ Major General R.E. Rodes reported on the crossing:

It was very dark, raining, and excessively muddy. The men had to wade through the aqueduct, down the steep bank of soft and slippery mud, in which numbers lost their shoes and down which many fell. The water was cold, deep, and rising; the lights on either side of the river were dim, just affording enough light to mark the places of entrance and exit; the cartridge-boxes of the men had to be placed around their necks; some small men had to be carried over by their comrades; the water was up to the armpits of a full-sized man. All the circumstances attending this crossing combined to make it an affair not only involving great hardship, but one of great danger to the men and the company officers; but be it said to the everlasting honor of these brave fellows, they encountered it not only promptly, but actually with cheers and laughter. We crossed without the loss of a single man, but I regret to say with the loss of some 25,000 or 30,000 rounds of ammunition...¹¹

Stuart's cavalry, which now held the entrenchments, kept fires going to deceive the enemy. Fitz. Lee occupied Longstreets sector, Baker in Hill's sector, Jenkins, Chambliss and Robertson in the rest. Jones' brigade had been sent to the south side of the river on the 13th. At dawn, they withdrew. Fitz. Lee was supposed to cross at Falling Waters and close the bridge after the army had crossed, but he left only two squadrons to accomplish that task, and moved with the rest of Stuart's cavalry to cross the fords. The cavalry completed the crossing of the fords at 8:00 A.M. The two squadrons that went to Falling Waters followed Longstreet's Corps across the bridge by mistake. Hill's Corps was still in Maryland.¹²

When daylight came on 14 July, Meade soon discovered that

Lee was gone, and frantically ordered his army to pursue and destroy Lee's army before it crossed the river.¹³ It was too late for the infantry, but the cavalry had an early start.

Kilpatrick had moved from Hagerstown at 3:00 A.M., and he reached Williamsport, with Custer's brigade in the lead, as Stuart's cavalry completed their crossing. Then Kilpatrick turned south and rode toward Falling Waters. He ran into Heth's rear guard about 1 1/2 miles from Falling Waters.¹⁴

Buford's division arrived from the south at the same time and, observing that Heth was occupying entrenched positions, began working his way around the left flank in a attempt to cut off the rear guard from the bridge.¹⁵

Hill's Corps had had a rough time following Longstreet. It had taken 12 hours of marching in ankle deep mud to cover 7 miles, but Heth's division now occupied positions that Lee, with great foresight, had ordered prepared. The positions were on high ground which sloped down to the east with at least 1/2 mile of clear fields of fire toward the enemy. Anderson's division had already crossed the bridge, and Pender's division was approaching it when the union cavalry approached.¹⁶

Custer was in the lead when the cavalry approached. Two Confederate guns had been abandoned in the mud about 1000 yards east of Heth's position. These were seized and than a strange thing happened. When Custer came within sight of the entrenched infantry at Falling Water, one of his regiments charged. Major Weber of the 6th Michigan Cavalry led the classic cavalry charge. The results were predictable. Over thirty men were lost in

minutes, including Weber.¹⁷ Colonel Gamble, with Buford's division, observed the reckless charge:

When near there observed a division of the enemy intrenched on a hill, covering approaches to the ford. While the brigade was moving round to flank and attack the enemy in rear, to cut them off from the ford and capture them all, in connection with the other two brigades of the First Cavalry Division, which we could easily have accomplished, I saw two small squadrons of General Kilpatrick's division gallop up the hill to the right of the rebel infantry, in line of battle behind their earthworks, and as any competent cavalry officer of experience could foretell the result, these two squadrons were instantly scattered and destroyed by the fire of a rebel brigade...¹⁸

Only two men were killed in the rebel lines, but one of them was the brigade commander, Brigadier General J.J. Pettigrew, who was to die of his wounds. As foolish as the cavalry charge was, it caught the brigade off guard. Lieutenant Colonel S.G. Shepard, Seventh Tennessee Regiment reported:

While here, a small squadron of the enemy's cavalry, consisting of 75 or 100 men made their appearance in our front. They were mistaken for our own cavalry until they advanced close upon us. Their first charge was upon the First Tennessee Regiment, which unfortunately, did not have their guns all loaded, and were forced to fight with clubbed guns. The enemy, finding they were making rather slow headway at this point, moved down the line upon the Thirteenth Alabama, Seventh and Fourteenth Tennessee Regiments, who by this time had succeeded in getting many of their guns loaded, and were but a short time in killing and wounding the majority of them. The rest made a desperate effort to escape back to the woods, but most of those were shot from their horses as they fled, so that not over a dozen or twenty made their escape...¹⁹

Kilpatrick had all of his cavalry dismount and begin probes against the rebel lines. Custer moved forward against Brockenbrough's brigade on the left side of the road, and was

driven back. Brockenbrough then extended his line toward the river and Kilpatrick launched another probe against Pettigrew's brigade which was repulsed. Heth's division could have held indefinitely against the cavalry, but then Hill ordered him to withdraw and sent part of Pender's division back to help.²⁰

A withdrawal under pressure is one of the most difficult maneuvers in warfare, and Heth accomplished it about as well as could be expected. Lane's brigade, of Pender's division formed a covering position about 500 yards in the rear. The first brigade to go back formed another line and so on, leapfrogging back to Falling Waters. In the hilly and wooded terrain, the withdrawal became terribly confusing. Kilpatrick kept pushing in the front and Buford began to tell on the south flank.²¹ Colonel William L.J. Lowrance, commanding Scale's brigade, reported on the withdrawal:

I was ordered by General Heth to take the brigade back to the support of those who were acting as rear guard; and having done so, I took a position on the right of the center, which point appeared to be threatened, but was immediately ordered by General Heth to form the brigade on the extreme left; and having formed the brigade, as directed, by moving there in quick time (being informed that that point was threatened), I found the men were quite exhausted from pressure of heat, want of sleep, want of food, and fatigue of marching; and at this very moment I found the troops on our right giving way, whereupon I sent Lieutenant Young, acting aide-de-camp, to rally them, which he did after some time. Then I was ordered to come to the top of the hill on which they were, I rode forward, and saw the whole line in full retreat some 200 or 300 yards to my rear; the enemy were pursuing, and directly between me and the bridge.

The move, I understand since, was made by order, but I received no such orders, in consequence of which I was cut off. But I filed directly to the rear, struck the river some three-quarters of a mile above the bridge, and then marched down the river;

but the enemy had penetrated the woods, and struck the river between us and the bridge, and so cut off many of our men who were unwilling to try to pass, and captured a good many more who failed from mere exhaustion; so in this unfortunate circumstance we lost nearly 200 men...²²

Lane's brigade was the last organized command to cross the bridge.²³ Buford had succeeded in his flanking maneuver to capture 500 prisoners and 300 muskets. However, sharpshooters and artillery from the Virginia side kept him from the bridge until it was cut away and swung to the other side.²⁴

Kilpatrick had captured about 50 more prisoners, and after all the sick, wounded, exhausted and stragglers were picked up between Falling Waters and Hagerstown, the total was 1500 prisoners, 2 guns, and 3 battle flags.²⁵

Lee had escaped. Meade finally reported the fact to Halleck at 11:00 A.M. on the 14th. That brought the response from Halleck of the President's disappointment, and at 2:30 P.M., Meade requested that he be relieved of command.²⁶ The request was not honored, but Meade's reputation was damaged, and he would never again display the effective, decisive leadership which he had shown at Gettysburg.

At 3:00 P.M. on 14 July, the Chief of Staff, Army of the Potomac, Major General Warren, sent a message to the War Department: "The Maryland campaign is ended."²⁷

END NOTES

1. O.R., XXVII, Part 1, p. 91.
2. Ibid., p. 92.

3. Ibid., Part 3, p. 671.
4. Ibid., p. 674.
5. Ibid., p. 675.
6. Ibid., pp. 677-678.
7. Ibid., p. 1001.
8. Ibid., Part 2, p. 361.
9. Ibid., p. 355.
10. Ibid., p. 448.
11. Ibid., p. 558.
12. Ibid., pp. 699-705.
13. Ibid., Part 3, pp. 685-686.
14. Ibid., Part 1, p. 550.
15. Ibid., p. 929.
16. Major General H. Heth, "Report of Major-General Heth of the Affair at Falling Waters", in Southern Historical Society Papers, VOL VII, No. 1, pp. 196-199.
17. O.R., XXVII, Part 1, p. 990.
18. Ibid., p. 936.
19. Ibid., Part 2, p. 648.
20. Heth, pp. 196-199.
21. Ibid.
22. O.R., XXVII, Part 2, p. 672.
23. Ibid., p. 677.
24. Ibid., Part 1, p. 929.
25. Ibid., p. 990.
26. Ibid., pp. 92-93.
27. Ibid., Part 3, p. 691.

CHAPTER VI
WHO WAS FOR FIGHTING

On 14 July, the Honorable Simon Cameron sent a message to Lincoln. He had been with the Army of the Potomac the day before, and told Lincoln about the council of war. Cameron was worried that Meade's decision not to attack would allow Lee to escape. He went on to say:

General Couch has a fine army between Carlisle and Greencastle, but will move no farther south without orders, under the belief that his duty is to guard the Susquehanna. In my opinion, the Susquehanna needs no guard. I have urged him from the beginning to join Meade. I hope in God that you will put forth your authority, and order every man in arms between the Susquehanna and the Potomac to unite with Meade so that he may have no reason for delay in giving battle before the falling of the flood allows Lee to escape.¹

It was ironic that when Lincoln received the message on the same day, Lee had already escaped. Lincoln's reply was brief:

Your dispatch of yesterday received. Lee was already across the river when you sent it. I would give much to be relieved of the impression that Meade, Couch, Smith, and all since the battle of Gettysburg, have striven only to get Lee over the river, without another fight. Please tell me, if you know, who was the only corps commander who was for fighting, in the council of war on Sunday night.²

Should Meade have attacked on the 13th? Could he have defeated Lee and ended the war? Lee had 50,178 men in his army on the 20th of July.³ Meade reported 97,564 men in the Army of the Potomac on the 10th, however, only 73,156 effective.⁴ If Couch's and Kelley's forces, within 20 miles of Hagerstown, were counted, Meade had about 130,000 men to fight Lee. But, Couch did not come, and Meade, if he had attacked on the 13th, would

have had 73,000 effectives against Lee's 50,000.

Lee was dug in on an incredibly good position, and an attack by Meade in the center of Lee's position, as planned, would have been against Lee's strongest point. The outcome of attacks against fortified positions thus far in the war had been disastrous. Meade was at Fredericksburg, and he had seen the results of Lee's attempt at Gettysburg more recently.

Still, Lee's line was dangerously thin, and Meade could have easily concentrated at least a 3 to 1 advantage on a narrow front. One break in Lee's line, and the victory would have been assured for Meade. It was possible, but such a victory would have been costly indeed.

A better way would have been to combine I and XI Corps with Couch's forces and attack the 4 mile gap on Lee's left flank. But, Couch did not come, and, because he did not actively seek to gain the information, Meade did not know of Lee's critical weakness until too late.

Therefore, the question is, should Meade have conducted a frontal attack on fortified positions with what he had on the 13th? The answer is, even though the success of such an attack was doubtful, he should have.

It is not often in war that a commander is faced with a decision where strategic interests are in conflict with operational and tactical interests. Here was such a time. The tactical decision for a frontal attack against fortified positions was doubtful at best. The decision to attack before all forces available to the army were concentrated was

operationally doubtful. Yet, the flood was going down, the Confederacy had just received a stunning blow at Vicksburg, and Lee had tasted defeat at Gettysburg. The strategic consequences of the attack justified the great risk.

Many contributed to the failure at Falling Waters. Couch dragged his feet. Kelley did not move any faster. Even Halleck, malleable and understanding, contributed. However, only one man could accept the responsibility, Major General George G. Meade. He was the one offered the opportunity to end the war with one decisive stroke. He chose not to try.

What have I learned from this critical analysis? Using the technique of reconstructing the events from the same messages and reports received by the participants, I soon found myself caught up in the action. I felt like I was standing one step to the rear and one step to the right of these men as they read the messages and formed their decisions.

It was an exciting journey. For some, I developed an open admiration. Buford was one. Here was a man who knew how to fight. His ability to maneuver his brigades to a single purpose, as at Williamsport, was inspiring. His actions at Falling Waters, the attempt to flank Heth's division and capture the bridge, clearly showed his grasp of operational art. He skillfully used tactical maneuver to accomplish operational ends.

Today there is much more information available to the operational commander. However, it is still fragmented, incomplete, and often inaccurate. The decision making process of operational leaders on the roads to Falling Waters is as

applicable on today's battlefield as it was then. As a student of operational art, this study has been invaluable for me. It has reinforced an understanding that operational and tactical maneuver are meaningless if they do not contribute to the strategic objective. This critical analysis has helped me develop an instinctive ability to quickly analyze battlefield information, often fragmented and incomplete, and consider the alternatives, and how compatible they are to the strategic end.

END NOTES

1. O.R., XXVII, Part 3, p. 700.
2. Ibid., p. 703.
3. Ibid., Part 2, p.292.
4. Ibid., Part 1, pp. 150-154.

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