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OPPORTUNITIES GAINED AND LOST:
J. E. B. STUART'S CAVALRY OPERATIONS
IN THE SEVEN DAYS CAMPAIGN

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

JAMES R. SMITH, MAJOR, USAF
B.S., U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado, 1980
M.A., Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, 1991

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
1994

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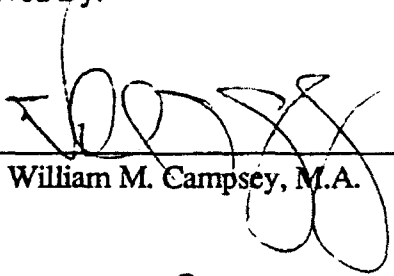
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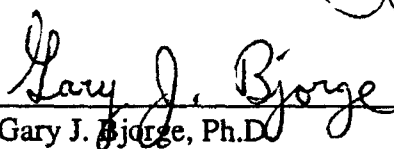
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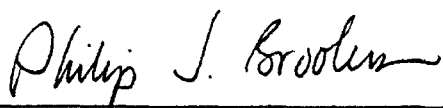
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ABSTRACT

OPPORTUNITIES GAINED AND LOST: J. E. B. STUART'S CAVALRY OPERATIONS IN THE SEVEN DAYS CAMPAIGN by Major James R. Smith, USAF, 143 pages.

This study evaluates Confederate cavalry operations 12 June to 3 July 1862, as a prelude to and as a part of the "Seven Days Campaign." General Robert E. Lee's Seven Days Campaign succeeded in defeating a Union offensive aimed at Richmond, Virginia and served as an important turning point in the American Civil War. The thesis seeks to determine the substantive contributions General J. E. B. Stuart's cavalry brigade made to this Confederate victory, as well as to assess the strengths and shortcomings of his particular style of mounted employment.

Stuart launched an armed reconnaissance 12-15 June 1862 known thereafter as the "Chickahominy Raid" that provided intelligence vital to General Lee's success in the campaign and helped to bolster sagging Confederate morale. This was the first of the Confederate cavalry leader's renowned "raids," a style of operation that would be adopted by other Confederate mounted units and the Union cavalry as well. Stuart also attempted to strike out independently during the Seven Days Campaign itself, but his activities in this regard were not well synchronized with the rest of Lee's army. As a result, Stuart missed opportunities to play a more decisive role in the battles outside Richmond.

*Now each cavalier that loves honor and right,
Let him follow the feather of Stuart tonight.
Come tighten your girth and slacken your rein;
Come buckle your belt and holster again;
Try the click of your trigger and balance your blade,
For he must ride sure that goes Riding a Raid!*

-Excerpt from "Riding a Raid"
by J. W. Randolph

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CHAPTER 1

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF STUART

As the passage from "Riding a Raid" on the preceding page suggests, there was a considerable amount of romance associated with the independent cavalry operations staged by Confederate General James Ewell Brown (J. E. B.) Stuart in the American Civil War. Contemporary accounts of his operations were colorful indeed and the well-informed reader might have noted, at times, there was almost as much fancy as fact in many of the tales recounting Stuart's cavalry raids. Legends about Stuart riding rings around his opposition have persisted to this day, made even more apparent by the titles used to describe some of the operations he launched deep into his opposition's rear, like *"The Ride Around McClellan."* The Stuart legend was born in late June/early July 1862 when he launched the first of his famed cavalry raids. That was a time of heightened drama, as a Federal Army under General George B. McClellan was poised at the outskirts of Richmond, seemingly ready to capture the capital city in pursuit of retreating Confederate forces. That retreat stopped when a new Confederate Commanding General Robert E. Lee entered the scene. General Lee envisioned how the Union Army might be hurled back from the capital gates and decisively defeated. The first of J. E. B. Stuart's independent cavalry operations would herald his new Commanding General's counteroffensive, known afterward as *"The Seven Days Campaign."*

The *"Ride Around McClellan"* was the first of a series of independent cavalry operations staged by General Stuart in 1862 and 1863. These operations were independent in the sense that they were not supported by infantry or massed artillery (although the Confederate cavalry did possess a limited number of light artillery pieces of

their own). Stuart combined unpredictable tactics with the mobility cavalry offered to successfully strike deep into the rear of his Union opposition. He avoided direct contact with a superior foe, bypassed known defensive positions, and penetrated deep to prey upon enemy lines of communication. Employment of large cavalry forces on independent operations was considered something of a novelty when it was first attempted by Stuart in the Seven Days Campaign. Due in part to their novelty, his cavalry raids were considered nothing less than spectacular, although there may have been less substance than spectacle in the results obtained. Stuart's accomplishments resulted in considerable fame for the Confederate cavalry commander. His popularity was largely the result of sensationalism, brought about by admirers who found his methods audacious in their conception and inspirational in their execution. To understand the impact of Stuart's activities on one of the critical campaigns of the war, one must look beyond the *éclat* associated with a man known as "the last cavalier"¹ and perform a more critical, military analysis of his operations.

This thesis will focus on the issue of substance. The objective here will be to determine what tangible contributions Stuart's Seven Days activities made to the outcome of Lee's campaign, as well as to evaluate the strengths and shortcomings of his cavalry employment. Such a survey of this particular episode can be considered worthwhile for two reasons. First, contemporary and more modern accounts of Stuart in the Seven Days Campaign have been more narrative than analytical in nature. While there will be ample narrative in the chapters that follow, a more concerted effort will be made to provide an assessment of the Confederate cavalry leader's influence on the outcome of the Seven Days Campaign.

A second consideration made in formulating this thesis has been that Stuart's Seven Days operations served as a formative influence on his activities later in the war, regardless of the actual contributions he made to Confederate success. The Seven Days

Campaign was a watershed event in Stuart's wartime experience. It ended a year-long period of comparatively mundane outpost service and training and launched his conspicuous career of daring independent operations. Indeed, the example set by Stuart's brigade in the summer of 1862 had a dramatic impact on the future conduct of other Confederate cavalry units and those of the Union as well. Stuart died two years after the Seven Days at Yellow Tavern, defending Richmond from the very type of operation he introduced to the war--a cavalry raid led by General Philip Sheridan. One can gain a better appreciation for the general development of mounted operations in the Civil War, by studying Stuart's employment practices in the Seven Days Campaign.

Stuart dared to innovate. Contemporaries lauded his accomplishments in this regard. Yet, following a critical analysis of his substantive contributions to the Seven Days Campaign, it might also be said that the Confederate cavalry commander fell short of his mark. Was this because Stuart was ahead of his time? Or, did the Confederate Army fail in some way to take full advantage of its cavalry in the Seven Days Campaign? These considerations and other factors may help to explain why Stuart was praised by those he defended, imitated by those he fought, yet ultimately destined to fall short of his true potential.

By the mid-19th century and the opening of the American Civil war, cavalry had become a supporting arm of the infantry--relegated to roles like scouting, screening movements, and exploiting an enemy's retreat once decisive results were achieved by musket and cannon. Its subordinate role was all too apparent in America, where the government allowed its mounted arm to disappear from the U. S. Army's ranks entirely after the Revolutionary War. Within a few decades, however, the potential value of cavalry was recognized in this country again, as it offered mobility to an army challenged with exploring and securing vast new frontier lands west of the Mississippi. Even in this respect, by contemporary definition, the frontier Army employed its troopers more as

mounted infantry or "dragoons" than "cavalry." Prior to the Civil War, little thought had been given to changing the roles and functions of mounted forces beyond dealing with the challenges of the frontier.² For a more conventional "battlefield" than that encountered with Indians, cavalry drill, tactics, and operational employment were still based on a Napoleonic model. The Mexican War provided the U. S. Army with its only opportunity to test the veracity of that model. The differences in terrain, weapon lethality, and force structure between the situations confronted by cavalry in 1846 Mexico and 1862 Virginia cast doubt on the veracity of any conclusions drawn from that prior experience.

Cavalry had lost little of its panache and ability to attract talented, ambitious officers to its ranks, despite its lack of support prior to the opening of the western frontier. One of those who found its ranks appealing in the 1850s was a young West Point cadet from Virginia, J. E. B. Stuart. Stuart's interest in and aptitude for cavalry operations were recognized early in his military academy years. Besides being an able horseman, Stuart demonstrated other abilities of particular value to a cavalry officer, such as adept situation analysis and an eager willingness to take the initiative. Lieutenant Stuart was an experienced frontier cavalryman by the time his home state seceded from the Union. He resigned his U. S. Army commission, accepted a colonelcy from the "Old Dominion," and assumed command of a cavalry regiment.

His regiment figured prominently in July 1861 during the First Manassas Campaign and continued to provide Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston with effective reconnaissance/counter-reconnaissance during the winter standstill that ensued. By the spring of 1862, Stuart had assumed greater responsibilities as a brigade commander. At 29 years of age, he was then responsible for the equivalent of six regiments. His brigade acted as a rear guard for Johnston's retreat from Yorktown to the outskirts of Richmond in the face of the Union's Peninsula Campaign, March to May 1862. During that time, the young cavalry commander was determined to play as

prominent a role as he could and was not content to be used in reserve or as a rear guard. He had his opportunity to assume center stage after the Confederate retreat up the Virginia Peninsula ended at Seven Pines on 1 June 1862.

Robert E. Lee assumed command of the Confederate forces defending Richmond on 1 June 1862, the day after Johnston fell wounded at the Battle of Seven Pines. By then, Stuart had been in command of the Confederate cavalry in Virginia for several months. Lee knew his cavalry chief from his tenure eight years before as West Point Superintendent, when Stuart had been a cadet. Now his former pupil was one of his brigadiers. The experience of the Seven Days Campaign would prove to be formative in its influence on the development of Lee's command relationship with Stuart. Stuart was able to fulfill, indeed exceed, the expectations of his commander. Lee came to highly value Stuart's ability to interpret key terrain, enemy dispositions, and subsequently deliver accurate, incisive battlefield reports.³ The Seven Days Campaign was the first occasion Stuart had to prove his true potential to Lee.

The Union Commanding General George B. McClellan had arrayed his forces to the east of the Confederate capital, with his southern flank "secured" against the flooded White Oak Swamp and his northern flank terminating near Mechanicsville, protected by only a thin screen of cavalry. McClellan's army was split by the rain-swollen Chickahominy River, with roughly one-third of his force situated on the northern side of this obstacle. Hence, his northern flank was not only insecure, it was vulnerable to being cut-off as well. A significant portion of McClellan's primary line of communication with his supply base at White House also lay on the north side of the Chickahominy. That same thin screen of cavalry was all that protected this vital artery of the Union Army.⁴

Lee saw an opportunity to attack McClellan's northern flank, isolate the Union corps positioned north of the Chickahominy, and cut off the entire Union Army from its base of supplies. To do so successfully required detailed reconnaissance to confirm Union

northern flank dispositions and to determine which roads McClellan was using for his lines of supply. Stuart's brigade was already involved in extensive scouting on both flanks and to the rear of the Union Army. A report from one cavalry scout supported Lee's contention that the northern Union flank presented an ideal opportunity for attack. But, the new Confederate commander wanted to be more certain of success. This desire on the part of Lee provided Stuart with an opportunity to use his brigade on a much larger scale than he had thus far in the war. As a result, on 11 June 1862, Stuart received orders to conduct the first of his celebrated cavalry raids deep in the Union Army's rear.⁵

This cavalry operation became known as the "Ride Around McClellan" or alternatively, as the "Chickahominy Raid." The primary objective of Stuart's raid was to gain the critical intelligence necessary to confirm that the northern flank of the Union Army threatening Richmond was vulnerable to assault. The Chickahominy Raid was also designed to probe the Union's main supply routes from its logistics base on the Pamunkey River to further evaluate potential vulnerabilities of General McClellan's northern flank. Stuart sought and gained Lee's approval to disrupt Union logistics, as long as his force was not subjected to the risk of decisive engagement in the process. As a final touch, Stuart determined to pass his force completely around the Union rear from north to south, crossing the Chickahominy River in the process, rather than striking deep and returning in the same direction that he originated from. In this way, the raid also became known as the "Ride Around McClellan."

Brigadier General Stuart kept his plans for the raid strictly confidential. In fact, his brigade received little more than a ten-minute warning order to move in the pre-dawn darkness of 12 June 1862. Stuart seemed obsessed with keeping the details of the raid a secret as long as possible.⁶ His troopers and staff were left to speculate about the nature and purpose of their mission during the first half of the raid and to marvel at what seemed to them to be brilliant examples of inspiration and initiative on the part of their brigade

commander as the operation unfolded.⁷ While Stuart did demonstrate such virtues during the Seven Days Campaign, evidence suggests that his vision of striking deep in McClellan's rear and riding completely around the Union Army was probably formulated two days before the raid was launched.

The groundwork for the Chickahominy Raid was laid by a network of spies and scouts employed by the cavalry commander. He received detailed information regarding the Union Army's strengths and intentions from spies behind McClellan's lines as far as Washington, D. C. itself. In terms of reconnaissance, Stuart's scouts accomplished almost as much by probing Union dispositions north of the Chickahominy as his force of 1200 troopers was able to do during the raid (without calling Federal attention to Confederate designs as the raid itself would do). His scouts also confirmed that an avenue of escape would be open to Stuart south of White Oak Swamp, which provided the basis for his concept of circumnavigating his way completely around McClellan's Army. Stuart wisely included troopers who were local inhabitants in the ranks of his scouts. These individuals were instrumental in guiding the raiders through the backroads of the Peninsula to the targets of Confederate reconnaissance and potential escape routes across the Chickahominy River in the Union rear.⁸ The "Ride Around McClellan" was no mere lark as some accounts of the time might lead one to believe. It was characterized instead by thorough preparation on Stuart's part.

His three-regiment force moved northward from their Richmond camps on the 12th of June. Feinting a move to reinforce Stonewall Jackson's forces in the Shenandoah Valley on the first day of the venture, Stuart's regiments then brushed aside Union cavalry screens protecting McClellan's exposed northern flank on the 13th of June. A running battle ensued between Union and Confederate cavalry resulting in the capture of a number of Federal soldiers and Stuart's only fatality of the raid. Thereafter, Stuart's troopers outpaced Union efforts to engage his force and compel its retreat. Instead, by the

afternoon of the 13th, Stuart reached two of McClellan's major supply routes, including the vital rail line between White House and the Union lines. The ease in which he had reached that point confirmed the vulnerability of McClellan's northern flank and his primary line of communication.⁹ With the foremost objective of the raid accomplished, Stuart set about creating what havoc he could for Union logistics--the secondary goal of the Chickahominy Raid. His men looted what could be carried by horse and wagon and burned what could not along their narrow path of destruction. Stuart then pursued the course of action he had outlined in detail for Lee and for which he had carefully prepared. Instead of returning by the direction he had come, he continued completely around the Union Army and returned to Richmond screened by the White Oak Swamp on the Federal southern flank.

Union pursuers made no attempt to intercept Stuart's force after it crossed the Chickahominy River. In fact, the Union reply to Stuart's blow was at best sporadic, at worst chaotic. Infantry was erroneously reported to be present in the Confederate ranks, which complicated efforts to put together an appropriate response. Stuart's use of multiple routes and the speed of his approach led some Union officers to believe that a number of small raids had been launched instead of the single major effort before them. Panic was evident at the big Union logistics base at White House and along the supply routes to the Union Army. Small groups of Union soldiers surrendered to Stuart's men who believed they had been overrun by the entire Confederate Army. By the time Union cavalry caught up with the Confederate brigade, it had safely crossed the Chickahominy River bound for Richmond.¹⁰

Stuart's move was bold. He penetrated Union cavalry screens on McClellan's northern flank and drove five miles to the rear of the Commanding General's headquarters. Stuart's force was able to prey upon McClellan's supply routes and identify key logistics bases on the Pamunkey River. He succeeded in keeping his Union pursuers guessing as to

the nature of his force and its route around their lines. He returned three days after his departure to deliver his report to Lee and to receive the accolades of Richmond's citizenry. He received the recognition of his Commanding General a week after the raid as well, with Lee's presentation of his first Congratulatory Order to a unit of the Army of Northern Virginia.¹¹

The Chickahominy Raid was conducted by an independent cavalry force in support of a combined arms operational plan. Stuart's detailed report provided information Lee had anxiously anticipated regarding McClellan's dispositions. The day following Stuart's return, Lee summoned "Stonewall" Jackson and requested that his Shenandoah Valley division join the army defending the Confederate capital to weight an attack on the northern Federal lines. But, Lee may have been less impressed with the excitement the cavalry had stirred within Richmond and the Union lines. Stuart's moves served to warn McClellan about the vulnerability of his Pamunkey logistics base, providing him with the time to plan a shift to the James River before the Seven Days battles commenced. Indeed, Lee continued to probe McClellan's northern flank with infantry after Stuart returned from his "Ride Around McClellan"--to confirm his findings and to ensure the Union did not respond to the raid by strengthening their northern flank.¹²

The Chickahominy Raid was a sensation to Richmond's population, frustrated at the seemingly inexorable advance of McClellan's army and unsuccessful moves by the Confederate Army to check the Union offensive in the spring of 1862. On the other side of the lines, the raid was a blow to McClellan's prestige¹³-- it was a headline event in the *New York Times* for nearly a week. Over time, this sensationalism transformed Stuart's raid into a romantic adventure, whose simple purpose was overshadowed by the boldness of Stuart's plan and its execution. However, whether Stuart's "Ride Around McClellan" is viewed in material military terms, in its value in bolstering Confederate morale, or in terms

of the problems it might have caused for Lee's campaign plan if McClellan had strengthened his northern flank, it did establish a pattern for Civil War cavalry operations in both the Confederate and Union armies. Regardless of its concrete contributions to the subsequent Seven Days battles, the cavalry raid came to be recognized as having promising potential applications in military operations by both the Confederate and Union armies.

At the outset of its next phase of operations, Stuart's brigade performed more traditional cavalry functions. Lee's initial operations order for the campaign tasked the cavalry to guide Major General "Stonewall" Jackson's division to the first of the Seven Day's battles (Mechanicsville) on the final leg of its journey from the Shenandoah Valley. Jackson's approach to Mechanicsville on 26 June 1862 took place over roads Stuart had passed during the initial phase of his raid two weeks earlier. Stuart's regiments effectively guided and screened Jackson's movements.¹⁴ But Jackson failed to make contact with the enemy after his infantry encountered a series of delays on the first of the "Seven Days." Consequently, the hero of the Shenandoah Valley failed to arrive prior to the conclusion of the Battle of Mechanicsville.

In the second of the Seven Days battles, Stuart was held in reserve so that his brigade might exploit a breakthrough and conduct a pursuit of retreating Union forces. Stuart found this task unrewarding. Jackson arrived late for this battle as well (not due to any error on the part of the cavalry) and Stuart had but one fleeting opportunity to take advantage of a Confederate breakthrough. His own sense of frustration and desire to take a more prominent role in the Seven Days Campaign encouraged Stuart to formulate plans for another series of deep operations against McClellan's rear.¹⁵

As McClellan's northern wing retired from the field at Gaines' Mill, Lee perceived the Union commander was about to initiate a retreat in one of three directions: back upon his line of communication toward the Pamunkey River, back down the

Peninsula in the direction he had approached during May 1862, or southward toward the James River. With a view toward thwarting the first of these possible Union moves, Lee dispatched Stuart's brigade and a division of infantry on 28 June to seize the railroad connecting the Union Army with the Pamunkey River at a junction known as Dispatch Station. Upon reaching the railroad, Stuart discovered the Federals had abandoned that line of communications. Without waiting for a further clarification of orders, he set out to destroy the main Union supply base at White House on the Pamunkey River.¹⁶ Stuart's attack (another raid essentially) on White House had the appearance of what we might today call "deep operations," influencing future operations by disrupting and destroying Federal forces responsible for sustaining a main battle effort located closer to Richmond. But, because the Union Army had elected to sever itself from the Pamunkey River and establish a new base of operations on the James River to the south, Stuart's deep operation may not have significantly influenced the outcome of the Seven Days battles to come.

Stuart saw to the destruction of the Pamunkey logistics node (with the help of retreating Federal forces), a task he envisioned during his Chickahominy raid, but a move he then prudently determined to be too risky. McClellan had already decided to change his base of operations to Harrison's Landing on the James River by the time Lee put Stuart into motion on the 28th. Even before the first of the Seven Days Battles, he began shifting supplies by water around the Peninsula after Federal gunboats had secured the James past Harrison's Landing. After Gaines' Mill, McClellan adopted the third option Lee had considered—a movement south toward the James. The Union fought a delaying action at the Chickahominy, while their supply trains (wagons) were gathered and pushed southward. At this critical juncture Stuart was not available. Lee realized too late what McClellan's intentions actually were and subsequently had difficulty in reaching his far-flung cavalry at White House. By the time Stuart was contacted and began cooperating with Lee's infantry again, the Union had safely retreated across the Chickahominy.¹⁷

Stuart's forces might have been more effectively used by Lee in closing off some of the Chickahominy bridges, rather than preying upon the abandoned supply base at White House.¹⁸ Stuart dwelled for more than a day at the abandoned Union base, seeing to his brigade's work in destroying Federal supplies. After leaving the Pamunkey, Stuart's efforts to get back into the fight were frustrated. His brigade spent another day, 30 June, forcing crossings at the Chickahominy River more than 10 miles east of the point where the main Confederate and Union armies clashed at the Battle of Glendale. Stuart was unable to prey upon McClellan's supply trains and could barely manage to screen Lee's eastern flank. He missed the culminating battle of the campaign, Malvern Hill, altogether on the 1st of July. As the Union Army established itself at Harrison's Landing, Stuart scouted the periphery of the newly established lines and satisfied himself in mopping-up isolated Federal detachments. The move against White House might have seemed a good initiative at first, but it clearly put the Confederate cavalry out of the picture for the remainder of the Seven Days battles.

Stuart was effectively out of the picture until the day after Malvern Hill. Late on the night of 2 July, his scouts discovered a position known as Evelington Heights while probing the new Union lines around Harrison's Landing. After gaining this prominence the next morning, the Confederate cavalry discovered they overlooked the entire Union Army gathered at the landing. From here, a devastating blow could have been delivered to McClellan's forces by massed artillery fires. While Stuart excelled in initiative and the ability to interpret the value of terrain, in this case he apparently failed to appreciate the value of properly synchronizing his activities with those of the main body of Lee's forces. He notified Lee of the development but did not wait for a more sizable force to exploit the advantage he had gained. Stuart commenced an attack upon the Union Army with a single piece of his horse artillery. The Union responded to this nuisance by driving Stuart's cavalry off the high ground before he could be reinforced.¹⁹

By his own actions, Stuart precluded Confederate forces from taking full advantage of an initiative he had pursued. But, cavalry operations in the second half of the Seven Days Campaign did clearly set mounted forces in a new direction on the battlefield. Instead of probing, screening, and waiting for an infantry-developed opportunity to arise, Stuart created his own opportunities. By doing so, he developed a form of deep operations for the employment the cavalry arm. He was motivated by a desire to take a more prominent role in the campaign, a feeling much supported by his subordinates who were tired of the more mundane traditional roles cavalry assumed once the battle ensued.²⁰ Stuart and his brigade wanted to maintain the high profile they had gained in the aftermath of the Chickahominy Raid. Performing traditional roles would not have allowed them to do so.

Consequently, the development of cavalry deep operations was not founded primarily by a desire to alter employment doctrine. But, its potential value to the operations of the army as a whole was recognized by Lee and his staff. The Commanding General was pleased with the intelligence it provided. His staff also recognized the potential associated with using the cavalry to seize key terrain in advance of the main body of the army. Indeed, it was Lee's staff that was most critical of Stuart's failure to properly exploit the advantage his brigade had gained by seizing Evelington Heights after Malvern Hill. Stuart only saw the prospects he might have created for his own command in this circumstance. His insightfulness allowed him to recognize an opportunity when it was presented to him, but it did not prevent him from taking a better course of action at Evelington Heights from the perspective of Confederate Army as a whole, albeit a less rewarding one from his point of view.

Stuart's activities in the Seven Days Campaign seem to indicate he may have been more of an opportunist, than an innovator. While the intent of this thesis is not to question the loyalty of J. E. B. Stuart to his cause or his Commanding General, his

motivations for launching cavalry strikes independent of the main body of the Army of Northern Virginia were somewhat suspect. This did not appear to be the case before the outset of Lee's counteroffensive. Stuart's Chickahominy Raid proved to be very influential in shaping the future course of the Seven Days Campaign. But, from the time the Confederate cavalry departed Dispatch Station on 28 June, until it withdrew from Evelington Heights five days later, their activities were not properly synchronized with the Confederate Army. Synchronization implies the arrangement of activities in time and space to mass at a decisive point. It must first take place in the mind of a commander and then in the planning and coordinating of movements, fires, and supporting activities.²¹ The events of 28 June to 3 July suggest synchronization was not foremost in J. E. B. Stuart's mind during the Seven Days Campaign.

The notion of synchronization was adopted here from a more modern battlefield framework than the one J. E. B. Stuart worked with, although the concept was founded on principles of war he could have readily identified. Reflecting on this issue for a moment serves to link the lessons of the past with the present. If we set aside the differences in terminology and technology of the 19th century, Stuart's employment seems to share many attributes with our present concepts of the "deep battle," operations designed to influence battlefield events yet to occur. R. E. Lee depended on his cavalry to shape the future operations of the Army of Northern Virginia. Stuart's innovations in the Seven Days Campaign reflected an effort to do so, but his initiatives were limited in their impact due to his failure to fully consider the objective of his actions from a combined arms perspective. Stuart developed his operational schemes from the intent outlined by General Lee. But he also took full advantage of the latitude granted to him by his commander. Hence, when his commander's intent was not clear, such as at Dispatch Station or Evelington Heights, Stuart set his own agenda within the limits established by

his orders. In cases like these, it was clear his agenda was not necessarily the same as his commander's.

Stuart was motivated to take a more prominent role in the war. Properly focused, this desire could have resulted in a decisive edge for Confederate forces. He was armed with accurate, incisive intelligence to base his operations upon. Indeed, his Commanding General came to rely on Stuart's assessments of the enemy, terrain, and situation. The cavalry chief proved to be an effective leader, able to marshal the largest mounted force yet seen on the American continent and maneuver it as a single entity. He put together a cohesive, mobile strike force capable of being assigned objectives independent of the main body of Lee's army. Unfortunately for the Confederacy, Stuart's focus was not necessarily on the total campaign picture, but on the more limited part that his forces played in it. Stuart enjoyed a decided advantage over his Union adversaries for a year or more while they tried to adapt to his tactics. But such an advantage did not necessarily translate into tangible results when his Commanding General's campaign objectives were fully considered.

Confederate cavalry actions following the Seven Days Campaign served to illustrate the pitfall of relying too heavily on the potential of new innovations in tactical employment. Stuart made great claims about his cavalry's ability to disrupt Union designs and force the Federal Army to abandon a particular course of action. He became overly confident in his ability to outpace Union movements. The Union's lethargic response to his movements in the Chickahominy Raid gave him good reason to behave in this manner. While he was able to tie down significant Union resources during the campaigns of 1862 and 1863, his activities did not necessarily have the decisive impact he might have imagined. That is not to say that Stuart's operations were without merit. Rather, they had their limitations, especially considering Stuart's limited focus.

Stuart certainly possessed the virtues of agility and initiative. Imbued with an offensive spirit, he set the terms of battle by action and proved himself consistently able to react faster than his enemy. Where this thesis found him lacking was in his ability to synchronize his activities within the context of the total campaign picture and his commander's intent. Assessments of General Stuart have tended to zero in on the positive impact his agility and initiative had on the battlefield. Yet, his actions have not been without censure from his contemporaries and scholars of this century. Criticism has been leveled at his showmanship, his ambition, and his failure to appreciate the Union's capability to learn from his example. This thesis will attempt to balance J. E. B. Stuart's accomplishment in taking cavalry operations in a new direction, with his failure to consider how his innovations might have better served the Confederate cause. Doing so may cause present and future military leaders to reflect more deeply on their own motivations when one day they are given the opportunity to command.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE OF AMERICAN CAVALRY AND ONE OF ITS CHIEF PROTAGONISTS

Union and Confederate cavalry officers were schooled in European employment practices. Yet, there were a number of factors that served to prompt development of the American mounted arm along different lines than the example set by Europe. On practice grounds, cavalry drill was performed in accordance with translated French instruction manuals very similar to those used by the troopers of Napoleon's army. But the resemblance between American and European cavalry stopped here. In terms of actual employment, the U. S. Army used its mounted arm in a manner unlike its contemporaries overseas. This was due in part to the nature of the geography of the eastern United States, which was not ideally suited to mounted combat. The horse provided a means of transportation, but the close confines of forests frequently forced riders to dismount to fight rather than charge their enemy. In the early 19th century, attempts to institutionalize the cavalry as a branch of the Army were frustrated by the government's insistence on constraining the size of the professional core of the military as much as possible. Cavalry was regarded as an occupation for professionals only. As a result, cavalry was not initially institutionalized in the post-Revolutionary War army. The most formative influence on cavalry officers when the war began had been the frontier experience, where the Indian "enemy" presented tactical problems different than those contained in the Army's translated tactical manuals. The ground west of the Mississippi River was more suitable for a mounted dash, but operations against the Indian were typified by long marches, the occasional chase, and dismounted combat. In short, aside from the manuals used for drill,

there was little to encourage American cavalry employment along European lines prior to the Civil War.

As the impetuous charge of the British Light Brigade in the Crimean Battle of Balaclava aptly demonstrated, European cavalry still adhered to Napoleonic employment concepts in the mid-19th century. Both light and heavy cavalry units were still present in their ranks. Light cavalry performed reconnaissance in front of an advancing army and attempted to establish contact with an enemy. These units avoided decisive engagement and tended to probe no deeper than the front of the enemy facing them. Certainly, reconnaissance included ascertaining where the enemy's flanks might lie, but generally it did not involve a penetration into the enemy's rear in the fashion of J. E. B. Stuart's Chickahominy Raid. Light cavalry also screened an army's movements in an effort to deny the enemy a capability to perform effective reconnaissance of his own. Heavy cavalry units were so named because they rode with body armor and carried heavier weapons than those employed for reconnaissance. Heavy cavalry was to be used as a tactical reserve on the battlefield, although light cavalry was also used for this purpose on occasion (Balaclava serves as one such example). This reserve would be used to exploit success gained by infantry and massed artillery. When the enemy appeared to break or withdraw, the heavy cavalry would charge and attempt a rout. In this capacity, it became a shock weapon. Heavy cavalry might also bolster a weak flank or help prevent a penetration of the infantry's lines due to their battlefield mobility and ability to rapidly shift to a point of need. A renowned military thinker of the time, Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini, summed up the contemporary view of cavalry's role in his treatise *The Art of War* as follows:

Its chief duty is to open the way for gaining a victory, or to render it complete by carrying off prisoners and trophies, pursuing the enemy, rapidly succoring a threatened point, overthrowing disordered infantry, covering retreats of infantry and artillery. An army deficient in cavalry rarely obtains a great victory, and finds its retreats extremely difficult.¹

These European practices were tactical in nature. On an operational level, cavalry was rarely used as an independent arm in Europe, except in what Jomini called "a war of posts," where the object was to attack widely-scattered small enemy units.² There were noteworthy exceptions to this "rule," precedents to the cavalry raids popularized by Stuart and his contemporaries in the American Civil War. In October 1757, the Austrian General Haddick led 4,000 riders against the Prussian capital of Berlin and succeeded in collecting a large ransom from the government of Frederick the Great in exchange for leaving the city intact and withdrawing his force.³ This appeared to be an example of utilizing the mounted arm on an operational level and, one might argue, it served strategic purposes as well--although it did little to alter the outcome of the Seven Years War. It is doubtful that this incident served as any sort of example to J. E. B. Stuart, but it is worthwhile to point out that his concept of a cavalry raid was not unprecedented in 1862. What was unique about American Civil War cavalry employment was that independent activities like Stuart's raids were to become a rule, rather than an exceptional circumstance as was the case with Haddick's operation.

America's experience with cavalry was conducive to the development of independent operations like those employed by Stuart in 1862. The cavalry of America's first army led by George Washington was a meager force in comparison to that fielded by 18th century European armies. There are a number of explanations for this, foremost was the composition of Washington's units, which were largely comprised of militia. A colonial militia unit did not have the resources to procure much of the specialized equipment needed by a cavalry unit (especially heavy cavalry), nor the time to practice the more extensive drills required of mounted warriors. Washington did raise several light cavalry units beginning in 1776 to use as scouts and as a means to harass enemy lines of communication during the New Jersey and Pennsylvania campaigns. But their numbers never exceeded five-percent of Washington's strength.⁴ In comparison, the standard

allocation of cavalry in European armies was 200 troopers for every 1000 infantrymen, or about 18-percent of their total strength.⁵

Light cavalry contributed little to the outcome of Revolutionary War battles in the northern colonies, but it played a more prominent role in the south on both the American and British sides. Camden and Cowpens were examples of battles where cavalry was used in its traditional role of exploiting success initially gained by infantry.⁶ But, American cavalry was more frequently employed in the southern colonies as a mobile, independent partisan force, preying on British and Loyalist outposts in the Carolinas. Their independent operations characterized what Jomini described as a "war of posts," a role the European military theorist saw as ideal for irregular cavalry like that fielded by the Americans.⁷ Robert E. Lee's grandfather "Light Horse Harry" Lee was one of the more renowned light cavalymen of this mold. Lee's riders and light cavalry under William Washington and Francis Marion contributed to the American cause by forcing the British to abandon their system of outposts in the southern colonies.⁸

George Washington's cavalry was disbanded and the partisan riders of the south returned to their farms after independence was won. America's inclination to rely on militia once again stifled cavalry development in the first years of the new nation. Cavalry was regarded as the quintessential professional force and Washington himself advised against raising a mounted arm for the small Federal army. Aside from his concerns about limiting the size of the professional military, the first President's experience had also taught him that the eastern United States was generally poor ground for the employment of cavalry. Hence, for more than 40 years, cavalry did not serve with the U. S. Army, except during the three-year interlude of war between 1812 and 1815. Even in the War of 1812, cavalry was not raised in the strictest sense of the term. American horsemen in this conflict were more accurately described as "dragoons" or mounted infantrymen. Part of this had to do with the hasty manner in which mounted units were thrown together. They

were essentially a gathering of frontiersmen who used their horses as transportation to battle and then dismounted for combat.⁹

In 1832, the 1st Dragoon Regiment became the first mounted unit raised by the peacetime Army. Its purpose was to provide security for the far-flung routes of the frontier west. The extensive distances of the frontier demanded a form of mobility the infantry could not provide. Five regiments of cavalry (the terminology dragoons, mounted rifles, and cavalry were all associated with these units at one time or another) were eventually raised for this purpose by the 1850s. This frontier experience would be the most formative influence on the development of U. S. cavalry up to the Civil War. Different demands were placed upon American cavalry units than those their manuals of drill were designed to meet. Even the most basic textbook concepts like a mounted saber charge were not meaningful on the frontier. The Indian was an uncooperative enemy, who tended to cut and run unless he engaged his white foe with overwhelming odds in his favor. To cope with this threat, the cavalry had to become a self-sufficient force capable of movement over hundreds of miles in a single operation. All of its firepower and logistics had to be self-contained. Independent operations were favored because utilizing infantry support tended to slow the pace of pursuit that could be achieved with horsemen alone.¹⁰

Two themes emerged from the frontier cavalry that would have a significant impact on men like J. E. B. Stuart. The first was that the horse's purpose primarily became one of transportation or mobility, rather than becoming an essential element of a "shock" weapon. Little shock effect could be rendered to an enemy that cut and ran--charges turned into chases. Secondly, men like Stuart were accustomed to operating without external support. They performed their mission as small, independent, combined-arms units. When they dismounted, they became infantry. Frontier cavalry units were provided with their own horse artillery, small six-pounder guns whose crews rode on the

backs of the teams that pulled them. These two factors did not cause the U. S. Army to abandon their European cavalry texts. Cavalry officers realized they would be employed in their customary roles in more conventional forms of warfare, like that seen in the war with Mexico, 1846-48. They were prepared to revert to the roles of providing reconnaissance, screening, and acting as a tactical reserve to exploit success. At the same time, as a result of the frontier experience, American cavalry was more inclined to adapt to changes from traditional forms of European employment of the mounted arm.

Change from the European mold was also reflected in the preference of the firearm over the saber in American cavalry units. In Europe, the debate over utilizing a blade or a revolver during a cavalry charge raged for decades after the American Civil War was over.¹¹ The Mexican War would also see the return of irregular militia light cavalry units, with little time or inclination to drill by the book. This was reflected by Zachary Taylor's charge against Mexican artillery at the Battle of Resaca, a move that horrified the West Point graduates on Taylor's staff who had been schooled to avoid such an impetuous move.¹² The small core of professional officers schooled in the European methods of cavalry employment had only a limited influence on units raised largely from scratch at the outset of the Mexican War or the conflict that followed 15 years later. It became an American tradition to make the form of its cavalry fit the functions that were demanded of it when war broke out. The War of 1812 and the Mexican War were fought largely by volunteer units with limited training. Such soldiers would also fill the ranks of Stuart's regiments in 1862.

J. E. B. Stuart was a stereotypical company-grade cavalry officer serving on the frontier when the Civil War began in 1861. He was the son of a southwestern Virginia lawyer/politician, who ensured that young J. E. B. was properly educated in the area's best private schools. His military career began at West Point in July 1850, where his private school background allowed him to quickly adapt to the monastic type of existence led by

the cadet corps. Stuart was an above average student and he excelled in military training activities, especially artillery and cavalry drill. He was one of only eight members of his class who was designated a cadet "cavalry officer" during his tenure at West Point. His leadership potential was recognized by his appointment as second captain of cadets during his first-class (senior) year. The top graduates of West Point were commissioned in the engineer corps and a Stuart family legend contends cadet J. E. B. intentionally held back academically so that he might enter the cavalry instead (he graduated 13th out of 46).¹³ Stuart's letters do not support this tale, but it was apparent he preferred a "dragoon's commission" over an opportunity to leave the Army upon graduation to follow his father's footsteps in the legal profession.¹⁴

Stuart became well-versed in the 1841 version of *Cavalry Tactics*. This three-volume manual was based on research performed by American cavalry officers in France during the late 1830s. Stuart's letters recount long hours spent on horseback, lopping dummy heads off the top of wooden posts with a saber. *Cavalry Tactics* provided detailed instructions for conducting these drills, as well as unit formations and maneuver. "Tactics" in the 19th century meaning of the word did not include the employment of cavalry in concert with infantry and artillery on the battlefield. Concepts like these and other aspects of military theory were gained from the interpretive writers of Jomini, Captain J. M. O'Connor and Dennis Hart Mahan. Stuart's cadet letters do not reveal what impact these writings might have had on his conduct as a Confederate cavalry leader--his family and friends would have had little interest in such matters. But, there were other indicators later in life that his instruction in military theory was more than a passing curiosity, despite the fact he graduated 10th in his class in "cavalry tactics" (tactics in the sense of drill and formation rather than employment). In a letter to Major General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson written shortly after the Seven Days Campaign, Stuart inquired whether Jackson had received a copy of Napoleon's *Maxims* the cavalry leader

had sent him earlier.¹⁵ His assessment of the first complete English translation of Jomini's *The Art of War* published in 1862, was that it should be the "pocket companion of every officer in the Confederacy."¹⁶ At West Point, Stuart was first introduced to the Napoleonic battlefield framework. Its doctrinal guidelines would form the basis for some of his later actions, although experience and circumstance would encourage him to deviate from its precepts in the Seven Days Campaign.

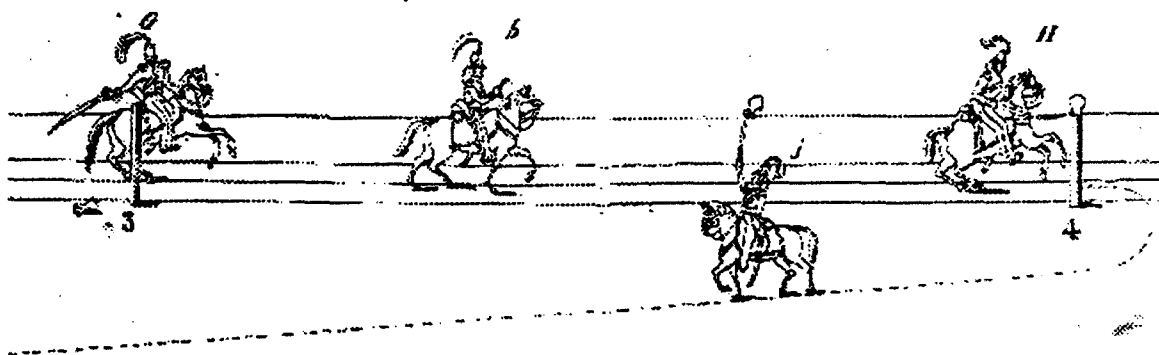


Fig. 1. Depiction of Drill From the 1841 Version of *Cavalry Tactics*.¹⁷

Academy Superintendent Colonel Robert E. Lee came to know Stuart personally during the cadet's final two years at West Point. Lee's son Custis was a close friend and classmate of Stuart. The young cadet socialized frequently with the Lee family and made a point of visiting Mrs. Lee's home at Arlington, Virginia, immediately after graduation. Neither Lee nor Stuart revealed much about their impressions of one another during Stuart's last two years at the academy. Stuart was respectful of Lee's accomplishments, particularly his Mexican War record.¹⁸ He jumped at an opportunity to serve under his former superintendent six years later when Lee was tasked to lead a contingent of Marines to Harper's Ferry, in response to John Brown's infamous insurrection. Stuart was visiting the War Department in Washington at the time, during a brief respite from his frontier service. He was assigned as Lee's aide de camp and

distinguished himself by identifying the insurrection's ringleader Brown during negotiations conducted before the Marines stormed Brown's stronghold (Stuart had encountered the abolitionist previously in Kansas).¹⁹ Hence, the young cavalry brigadier was a familiar face to Robert E. Lee when the two met again in June 1862.

Stuart's trip to Washington was one of the few breaks he enjoyed in a seven-year stretch on the frontier in Texas, Missouri, and Kansas. During this time, he participated in several long patrols to regions as far west as Colorado. His duties included those of regimental quartermaster, which gave him a thorough appreciation of the logistics involved in supporting long-range cavalry operations. Stuart became accustomed to spending days and weeks at a time in the saddle, as part of small independent mounted combined-arms units. From 1855 to 1861, he served with the preeminent mounted unit in the U. S. Army, the 1st Cavalry Regiment, at Forts Leavenworth and Riley, Kansas. "Bleeding Kansas" opened his eyes to the bitter strife that was gripping the nation in the years just prior to Fort Sumter.²⁰ But more importantly, the frontier experience gave him an appreciation of how mounted units could be tasked with a distinct mission of their own, separate from the less mobile infantry or heavy artillery of his time. By 1860, he was given company command and would lead several extended patrols of his own into western Kansas and Nebraska.

Stuart's Kansas duty also provided him with the opportunity to court and marry Flora Cooke, daughter of the 1st Dragoons regimental commander Colonel Phillip St. George Cooke. Colonel Cooke had become one of the Army's leading cavalry officers by the late 1850s. His mounted career began in 1832 as a junior officer in the first dragoon regiment raised by the Army and he had spent more than 23 years on the frontier by the time he met his son-in-law. Cooke was not the only future Civil War figure to work closely with Stuart in the West. Stuart also served with James Longstreet of the Confederacy and John Sedgwick of the Union in various capacities. His contemporaries

found him to be an industrious and innovative junior officer. He was something of a prolific writer and several articles describing his frontier exploits were published in eastern newspapers.²¹ He patented a new device to attach a cavalry saber to a trooper's belt, which prompted the War Department to recall him to Washington temporarily in 1860 (when he participated in the Harper's Ferry incident). By the spring of 1861, he hoped for a promotion to captain. But bigger things were in store for the now seasoned veteran of the western plains.

Virginia's secession brought Stuart rapidly back east, where he determined to throw his lot in with the Confederacy. By May 1861, the young cavalry officer was in Harper's Ferry again, this time as a lieutenant colonel at the head of a quickly-mustered regiment of mounted volunteers. Stuart spent the weeks prior to the First Battle of Manassas training his new unit hard and providing reconnaissance/screening for General Joseph E. Johnston's small Shenandoah army of 12,000 soldiers. His training stratagem required his green troopers to learn to live in the saddle on outposts where the enemy could be continuously observed. One of their first lessons was steadiness and the proper manner in which to withdraw under fire when Union troops began to advance down the Shenandoah Valley. Johnston took an immediate liking to Stuart. Impressed with the rapid results he had gained with his regiment, the Confederate general was heard to remark: "How can I eat, sleep, or rest in peace without you upon the outpost?"²² Stuart would serve Johnston in this capacity for over a year.

The first real baptism of fire for Stuart's regiment came at First Manassas. His cavalry screened the departure of Johnston's infantry from the Shenandoah for the battle and due to their efforts the Federals in the valley were not aware of this movement until the day before the fateful engagement at Bull Run. Stuart and four companies of his troopers caught up with Johnston's army enroute to reinforce General P. G. T. Beauregard at Manassas. His small contingent was assigned as a ready reserve on the 21st of July.

Stuart initially had to satisfy himself with watching the progress of the battle and passing his observations to the brigadiers and division commanders involved in the action. At a crucial moment, General Beauregard called Stuart forward to the hottest part of the battle with half his command (two companies). Stuart's force charged a regiment of New York Zouaves who were withdrawing under fire from Stonewall Jackson's brigade. The Confederate troopers suffered nine dead, but succeeded in accelerating the pace of the Zouaves' retreat.²³ The action was brief, yet illustrative of the traditional role cavalry was expected to serve in the Napoleonic battlefield framework.

The role Stuart's regiment assumed after this first real test of their mettle was more typical of their existence during the war--a return to the outposts. Now a full colonel, Stuart was tasked with keeping a close watch on the enemy who had withdrawn to the shelter of their fortifications in Washington and Alexandria. Throughout the fall and winter of 1861/2 he maintained his vigil, but to do so successfully required a significantly larger command. In September, the Southern War Office responded to the recommendations of General Johnston, now the Confederate field commander in northern Virginia, to further promote Stuart to the rank of brigadier general. A total of six regiments were to be formed under his guiding hand. Four months before, the 28-year old brigadier had been a lieutenant at the head of company of frontier troopers. This did not seem to trouble Stuart in the slightest as he threw himself into the task of keeping a watchful eye on the Union Army and drilling his new regiments on the fields surrounding Fairfax Court House.²⁴

Confederate cavalry was organized along different lines than the mounted arm in the Union Army. Stuart's force centralized all cavalry in Johnston's army under one command. In contrast, Union cavalry was distributed to infantry divisions or corps in regimental-sized or smaller units. Stuart's centralized command of all Confederate horsemen was a prerequisite to staging the large, independent cavalry operations he

initiated in the Seven Days Campaign. Union cavalry would find it difficult to respond adequately to Stuart's moves with its dispersed units until it was reorganized along lines similar to the Confederates in late 1862. However, it was not until the summer of 1863 that this reorganization had any significant effect. It took time and effort to put together a cohesive mounted force like that fielded by Stuart. The Confederates had the opportunity to make this investment during the relatively quiet months of August 1861 to March 1862.²⁵

One of the developments most crucial to Stuart's future success during this period was his establishment of a network of spies, including a small ring in the Federal capital. Stuart's biographers seem to have overlooked this point, but the accounts of spies like Thomas N. Conrad indicate the cavalry commander devoted a considerable amount of energy to this end. Conrad joined Stuart's regiment a few weeks before Manassas, ostensibly as a unit chaplain. The "Reverend" Conrad was employed extensively as a scout in the summer of 1861. His wardrobe included the trappings of both the Confederate and Union clergy, allowing for a quick change in identity between the picket lines. Conrad was engaged as a schoolmaster in Georgetown before the war and he knew his way around the Federal capital. He developed contacts in the War Department who were able to tip him off that Union General George B. McClellan was moving his army to the Peninsula region in southeastern Virginia in March 1862. Conrad's contacts eventually produced a complete unit listing of McClellan's force, permitting an accurate Confederate assessment of the threat facing them in that spring campaign.²⁶

With information such as this, it is easier to understand why Johnston found Stuart's "reconnaissance" so invaluable. The integration of spies into Stuart's organization was an inspired move, one that provided a greater depth to the information cavalry scouts could provide on the outposts. Johnston's cavalry chief consequently assumed the role of a modern "G2" or intelligence officer at the Commanding General's headquarters. His

mission as cavalry commander was broadened, with a majority of the Confederate intelligence gathering capability in northern Virginia at his disposal. Stuart took this responsibility seriously. His deep operations later in the war would be characterized by thorough intelligence preparation. His raids were targeted on information gained by scouts or tips provided by spies operating within the Union Army. Stuart's capabilities in this regard matured during the winter of 1861/62.

One reason why Stuart's biographers may have overlooked this aspect of his reconnaissance activities was that the cavalry chief was very secretive in his dealings with spies. He went so far as to denounce Conrad and other "scouts" as deserters or traitors when they left camp for extended patrols behind enemy lines. As a brigadier, Stuart did not reveal the identity of his spies or the nature of their work to his subordinate regimental commanders or his staff.²⁷ This contributed to the mystique attached to him by his closest associates, who were unaware that his moves were based on a thorough knowledge of the enemy, information that he shared only with his commanding general. Stuart's successful efforts in keeping this important aspect of his operations under wraps stands in sharp contrast with criticism leveled at his desire for fame and recognition. He recognized that operational security was essential if he were to continue to receive such valuable information. Furthermore, spying was considered something of a dubious activity during the Civil War--an accepted practice but one that was rarely discussed in the open. Ultimately, Stuart's successful spying activities did create the conditions necessary for the fame his critics said he sought above all else by providing information upon which he could base his independent operations.

Stuart's command grew gradually during the winter months of 1861-62 from his single regiment after First Manassas, to six regiment equivalents by the time of the Peninsula Campaign. He also acquired a battery of horse artillery that could keep pace with cavalry moving at a trot. This provided added firepower for armed reconnaissance

performed on a regimental scale or larger. Such operations were not launched in the winter of 1861/62, despite the fact Stuart's command represented the advance element of Johnston's army. This was because the Confederate Commanding General had the intention of advancing on the Federal capital. Hence, Stuart contented himself with maintaining his outposts, protecting them from occasional Federal advances, and foraging for the Confederate Army. Regiments not on outpost duty were drilled in the manner Stuart had learned on the practice grounds of West Point. His brigade was composed almost completely of volunteers, who needed months of training to become completely familiar with the formations and maneuver prescribed by the *Cavalry Tactics* manual.²⁸

Stuart commanded a force of 1500 men when his theater of operations shifted to southeastern Virginia in March 1862. That month, Union Commanding General George McClellan moved his army of 105,000 soldiers from Washington to Hampton Roads, Virginia. General McClellan was determined to get a jump on Johnston's army. Instead of confronting him head-on at Manassas, he elected to move on the Confederate capital by marching up the Peninsula. The Peninsula was located in southeastern Virginia, with Hampton Roads at its southern end and Richmond at its northern end (Fig. 2, p. 34). The approach to the Confederate capital from Hampton Roads was a march to the northwest of 70 miles as the crow flies. McClellan's flanks would be secured to the James River on the southwestern side of the Peninsula and the York and Pamunkey Rivers to the northeast. These waterways also provided the Union with the means to move supplies and heavy guns forward to the army as it marched northwestward toward Richmond. The rivers would become crucial to McClellan's plan, since the road network on the Peninsula itself was primitive and no railroad yet existed in the region except in the vicinity of Richmond.²⁹

Stuart's intelligence and the relatively lethargic pace of McClellan's movement northward from Hampton Roads prevented the Federal Army from getting much of a jump

on the Confederates. General John Bankhead Magruder and a force of 10,000 Confederates occupied a line of breastworks running across the Peninsula from Yorktown to northern Newport News, keeping the cautious Union general from advancing more than a few miles north of Hampton Roads until early May. Meanwhile, Johnston's army marched southward toward the Peninsula to prepare for the defense of the capital. Stuart's cavalry acted as a rear guard and was tasked with destroying the large Confederate stockpile of foodstuffs left at Manassas. With this accomplished, Stuart screened Johnston's force and maintained contact with 45,000 Federal soldiers under General Irwin McDowell advancing behind them as far as Fredericksburg. McClellan hoped that this force might join his 105,000 men in the vicinity of Richmond as reinforcements and a means to complicate Johnston's defense.³⁰

McClellan's army assailed Magruder's breastworks on the 3rd of May and found that the Confederates had abandoned their position and moved northward to Williamsburg. Stuart's cavalry provided a rear guard again for a Confederate force that now included not only Magruder's 10,000 men, but a substantial portion of Johnston's army as well. Johnston determined he would make his stand closer to the Confederate capital to ease his logistics problems and improve his opportunities for a counterattack on the Federal Army. A delaying action fought near Williamsburg on 5 May allowed Johnston to move his force safely out of harm's way toward Richmond. Stuart's cavalry screened Johnston's withdrawal toward Richmond over the dark, narrow roads of the Peninsula, harrying the Union advance and maintaining contact with McClellan's advance elements. It took the Federals three weeks to advance from Williamsburg to positions within sight of the capital city. Confederate troopers put in a lot of hard riding during this time, but like the rest of Johnston's army, avoided decisive engagement.

Stuart was anxious to play a more important part on the battlefields of the Peninsula Campaign. His service at Williamsburg and the Battle of Seven Pines fought on

31 May was restricted to offering his view of the proceedings to Johnston's subordinate commanders (as he had done initially at Manassas) and waiting in reserve with his brigade. The ground at both battles was poorly suited to cavalry action and the lack of a decisive breakthrough in either engagement precluded the commitment of Stuart's force. Seven Pines represented Johnston's first concerted effort to deal a blow to McClellan's army. Unfortunately for the Confederate Commanding General, his counterattack was executed piecemeal and even though he managed to isolate half of the Federal army south of the Chickahominy River, the engagement ended in stalemate. The battle did bring the cautious McClellan to a temporary halt seven miles from his ultimate objective, but

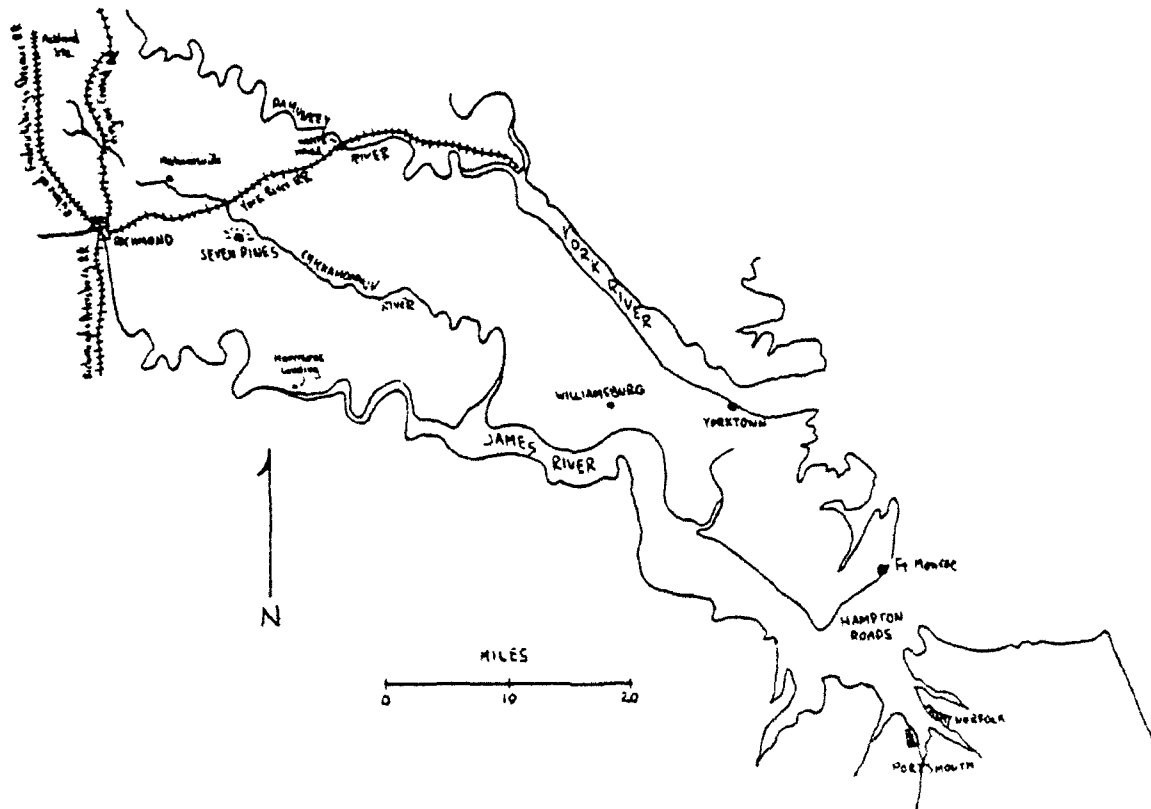


Fig. 2. Southeastern Virginia and the Peninsula Campaign.

Johnston himself suffered a more severe setback when he was seriously wounded by a shell burst. Robert E. Lee assumed command of the Confederate Army outside Richmond the next day, 1 June.

In the aftermath of Seven Pines, McClellan began to take the same slow deliberate approach toward the Confederate capital that he had toward the breastworks at Yorktown two months earlier. He planned to lay siege to Richmond and reduce Lee's defenses by utilizing the heavy artillery pieces that were left behind at Yorktown during the advance up the Peninsula. He planned to do so by moving the big guns up the York and Pamunkey Rivers to his new base of supply at a small landing named White House, where the York River Railroad crossed the Pamunkey River. From White House, McClellan planned to off-load the guns from barges and place them on railroad cars on which they could be moved up to his siege lines near Richmond. The railroad also provided an ideal means to move the Union Army's supplies up the Peninsula from their staging base at Hampton Roads. Hence, White House became McClellan's forward supply point, located about 15 miles to the rear of his headquarters established near the site of the Seven Pines battle.

While the railroad and several parallel wagon trails leading to the Pamunkey River provided McClellan with an effective means to move supplies and armaments to his army, the selection of this line of communication was not without its problems. The Pamunkey River flowed from the northwest to the southeast above White House, while the railroad and wagon trails ran almost due east/west. This meant his line of communication was vulnerable to attack from the north, unless the Federals dedicated a substantial portion of their force to flank security. The James River on the southern side of the Peninsula offered a more secure line of communication for McClellan, but two factors dissuaded him from using it as such until the end of June. First, the banks of the James had to be cleared of Confederate batteries at least as far as Harrison's Landing

below Richmond before a base could be established close enough to the army to be any value to it. Second and more importantly from McClellan's perspective, there was no railroad leading to the James from his position outside Richmond. It would have been extremely difficult to move the heavy artillery so instrumental to his plan forward using the southern waterway. Thus, McClellan accepted the risk posed by his exposed northern flank.

Another geographic feature of the region created problems for McClellan's northern flank: the Chickahominy River which effectively split the Peninsula in two east of Richmond. Under normal circumstances, the Chickahominy hardly deserved to be called a river--it was more of a lazy stream flowing to the southeast. However, the spring of 1862 was an extremely wet season and the small stream had grown to represent a significant obstacle. McClellan repositioned his units after Seven Pines, leaving about one-third of his force on the north side of the river. This portion of the Union Army was primarily comprised of the V Corps under Major General Fitz John Porter. Prior to Seven Pines, Porter had pushed a portion of his corps as far west as Ashland on the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad. His infantry burned the nearby railroad bridge over the South Anna River, before withdrawing to positions near Mechanicsville prior to 31 May. Porter and McClellan realized the V Corps was isolated from the rest of the Union Army. To make matters worse, the country north of Porter's position lay open, defended only by occasional Union cavalry patrols. McClellan was counting on a movement by McDowell south from Fredericksburg with his force of 45,000 men to plug this gap. Unfortunately for the Union commander, his superiors in Washington countermanded his orders for McDowell in light of threatening moves being made by Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley. With the exception of one division sent down the Potomac to reinforce McClellan, McDowell's forces remained in place to check any designs Jackson might have on the Federal capital.³¹

Robert E. Lee recognized McClellan's situation north of the Chickahominy represented a ripening opportunity. But in the immediate aftermath of Seven Pines, he busied his divisions with the task of constructing breastworks to defend the Confederate capital. Lee's plans called for using his defensive works as a means to fix the Union Army south of the Chickahominy, while he launched a counterattack on Porter's corps north of the river with a majority of the Army of Northern Virginia. In order to weight his attack, Lee determined that Stonewall Jackson's division from the Shenandoah Valley would secretly move to join his force outside Richmond. However, Jackson could not make this move until he decisively defeated the Union forces facing him in the valley, something he achieved later in the month of June 1862 (further incentive for President Lincoln to insist that McDowell remain near Fredericksburg). While Jackson marched up the valley, Lee's troops worked to improve their defenses. Meanwhile, McClellan's soldiers began to prepare the positions from which their heavy artillery could open the way to Richmond.³²

Stuart found time to collect his resources and reflect on the current Confederate situation in the first weeks of June 1862. His troopers, weary from weeks of hard riding up the Peninsula, rested, except his scouts who began to probe McClellan's lines east of the capital. Like his scouts, the brigadier was active in this period, working to fully determine the extent of the Union positions for his new Commanding General. Stuart realized these were momentous times for the Confederacy, its very existence was being threatened by McClellan's advance on Richmond. He had been frustrated in his efforts to employ his brigade on a battlefield ill-suited to mounted operations. As he had on the battlefields of Manassas, Williamsburg, and Seven Pines, he offered his advice to his commander on 4 June in a letter to Lee. Stuart's suggestion called for a frontal attack on McClellan's forces south of the Chickahominy.³³ Lee ignored his cavalry chief's letter. Stuart had to content himself with reconnaissance for the time being. But his thoughts also turned to what possibilities might exist for an operation of greater magnitude for his

brigade, an independent operation free of the restrictions imposed on the cavalry by an entrenched enemy at close quarters. Experience on the frontier had taught him that there were alternative methods of employment when the situation was not conducive to cavalry operations of a European mold. His scouts who remained so active after Seven Pines provided him with just the opportunity he hoped for.

Endnotes

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²⁸H. B. McClellan, pp. 45-47.

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CHAPTER 3

THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME

Few residents of the upper Peninsula could remember a more miserable June than the spring of 1862. This was a characteristically wet month in the region, but the rains that year were incessant. In the vicinity of Richmond, a small meandering stream known as the Chickahominy River overflowed its banks, flooded the swampland that surrounded it, and washed away many of the bridges on its upper reaches. McClellan's army struggled with the construction of temporary river crossings and improving the trafficability of the Peninsula's mired roads. They toiled waist-deep in muck in the bottom lands north of White Oak Swamp, digging a network of trenches to face the Confederate Army. A Federal heavy artillery train sat idly near Fort Monroe's wharves 50 miles away, awaiting an abatement to the Virginia "monsoon season" before it could be safely moved up to the army laying siege to Richmond. Summer's heat had arrived on the Peninsula early. Combined with the unusually damp conditions, this brought disease and pestilence to the Union's encampments. The medical corps labored to double their bed capacity over that needed solely for battle injuries. By mid-June, McClellan's staff counted over 27,000 soldiers on the sick list. One in every five men who had marched up the Peninsula was bedridden in camp, hospitalized, or at home on leave as a convalescent.¹

Conditions were little better for Lee's men. They also struggled with the mud and were beginning to learn why their new commander had earned the title "King of Spades" earlier that year in South Carolina. Behind the lines, Richmond seemed to suffocate in the stifling, humid weeks following Seven Pines. It was as if the city were being

strangled by a combination of the elements and McClellan's tightening grip on the capital. Gone were the more hopeful times of the previous summer, when Beauregard had sent Federal forces scurrying back from Manassas to the shelter of their Washington fortifications.

Stuart took note of the appalling road conditions, but he hardly let the prevailing weather dampen his spirits or the pace of his activities. Following Seven Pines, he established his headquarters at the Mordecai farm, located on the northeastern outskirts of Richmond. From there, he immediately set about probing McClellan's lines to the east of the capital, seeking to learn what he could about the extent of McClellan's work and its potential vulnerabilities. As the Confederate and Union infantry toiled with their battlements, Stuart's troopers drilled, conducted daily dress parades, and recovered from the hard weeks of riding up the Peninsula. One of the brigade's select group of scouts, Company E of the 4th Virginia Cavalry Regiment, was particularly active during the ten days between Seven Pines and the Chickahominy Raid. Using the flooded bottom lands as flank protection, Company E dispatched individual soldiers and small groups around White Oak Swamp to probe the Union rear. There, they were able to observe first hand the effects the persistent rains were having on Union morale and McClellan's plans to lay siege to the Confederate capital.²

While the weather may have hampered the work of the infantry, the Confederate cavalry seemed to use it to its advantage in screening its movements. Stuart was also armed with the complete Union order of battle provided by his Washington-based spy "Conrad" a few weeks prior to Seven Pines. Of course, knowledge of which Union regiments were facing the Confederate Army outside Richmond and their relative strength was of little value if he did not possess a more complete knowledge of their dispositions. Stuart understood making this determination was his responsibility and needed no written or verbal instructions from his new commander to busy himself to this end in the first two

weeks of June. By that point in time, his organization had fully matured in its ability to gather information Stuart could distill into useful intelligence for Lee. The Confederate cavalry chief was personally committed to providing the type of intelligence that his commander would be willing to use to determine a campaign plan. He had hand-picked many of his scouts and even reconnoitered himself when he had the opportunity. On one such occasion, he led a Prussian officer recently attached to his staff, Heros von Borcke, on a hair-raising ride through Federal pickets at night to confer with a local informant within earshot of a Union encampment. This was obviously an exceedingly risky affair for a brigadier general to involve himself in, but Stuart was able to obtain the information he needed and after sunrise safely returned to his camp at the Mordecai farm.³

Informants like the one Stuart consulted in Von Borcke's company abounded on the Upper Peninsula. There were local inhabitants in his ranks as well, which greatly simplified the problem of gaining access to the more remote parts of the Tidewater. Union commanders in the Quartermaster and Cavalry Corps tasked with rear area security complained about relative ease at which Confederate scouts seemed to move through their sectors. Their efforts in confronting this threat were ineffectual, including their regular cavalry patrols and posting of small detachments to guard their more critical logistics and communications nodes, like the supply base at White House. These measures were not sufficient to stop Stuart's probes because his troopers were able to penetrate wide gaps left uncovered the Union cavalry screen. In fact, in the area between White Oak Swamp and the James River on the Union southern flank, Confederate cavalry movements were virtually free from any Federal interference. Even ordinary citizens of the region were able to traverse this sector without encountering Union pickets or patrols.⁴ Apparently, the Union felt secure behind the flooded bottom lands of the swamp. But in failing to more effectively screen this flank, they provided an easy access to their rear for Confederate cavalry. Union cavalry commanders assumed instead that Stuart's scouts were infiltrating

their rear from the north by swimming across the Pamunkey River. Consequently, the Federals focused a majority of their cavalry patrols in that area.

McClellan's south flank was not the only potential Union vulnerability that interested Stuart. Within a week of Seven Pines, he had gained more or less complete knowledge of Union dispositions south of the Chickahominy River. On the morning of 9 June, he decided it was time to learn more about Union forces north of the Chickahominy and summoned a private from Company E to join him for breakfast: John Singleton Mosby. Mosby would gain considerable notoriety of his own in little more than a year, but in June 1862 he was a "common" cavalryman, albeit one of Stuart's favorite scouts. Stuart had first encountered Mosby when the Confederate Army withdrew from Centerville two months prior and found the former lawyer both perceptive and resourceful. In a letter of introduction to Major General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson written a month after the Chickahominy Raid, Stuart described the scout as "bold, daring, intelligent, and discreet."⁵ Mosby had resigned a cavalry officer's commission as the 1st Virginia Regiment's adjutant early in the Peninsular Campaign after an apparent dispute with the unit's newly elected colonel (Fitzhugh Lee). Stuart took him under his wing and assigned him to his select band of scouts. Mosby proved remarkably capable in this capacity (a portent of his activities later as a partisan leader) and was entrusted with some of his commander's more important taskings. His assignment on 9 June was no exception.

In Stuart's mind, McClellan's lines north of the Chickahominy logically should have extended to Totopotomoy Creek, where his flank could be secured behind a natural obstacle whose passage would be made more difficult by the recent rains. Until that time, he had not paid much attention to this sector in the Union lines. Stuart had focused instead on the forces directly east of Richmond and their southern flank, as reflected by the letter he wrote to Lee on June 4th. Stuart apparently did not know Lee had been contemplating a move against the opposite end of McClellan's lines at this point. There is

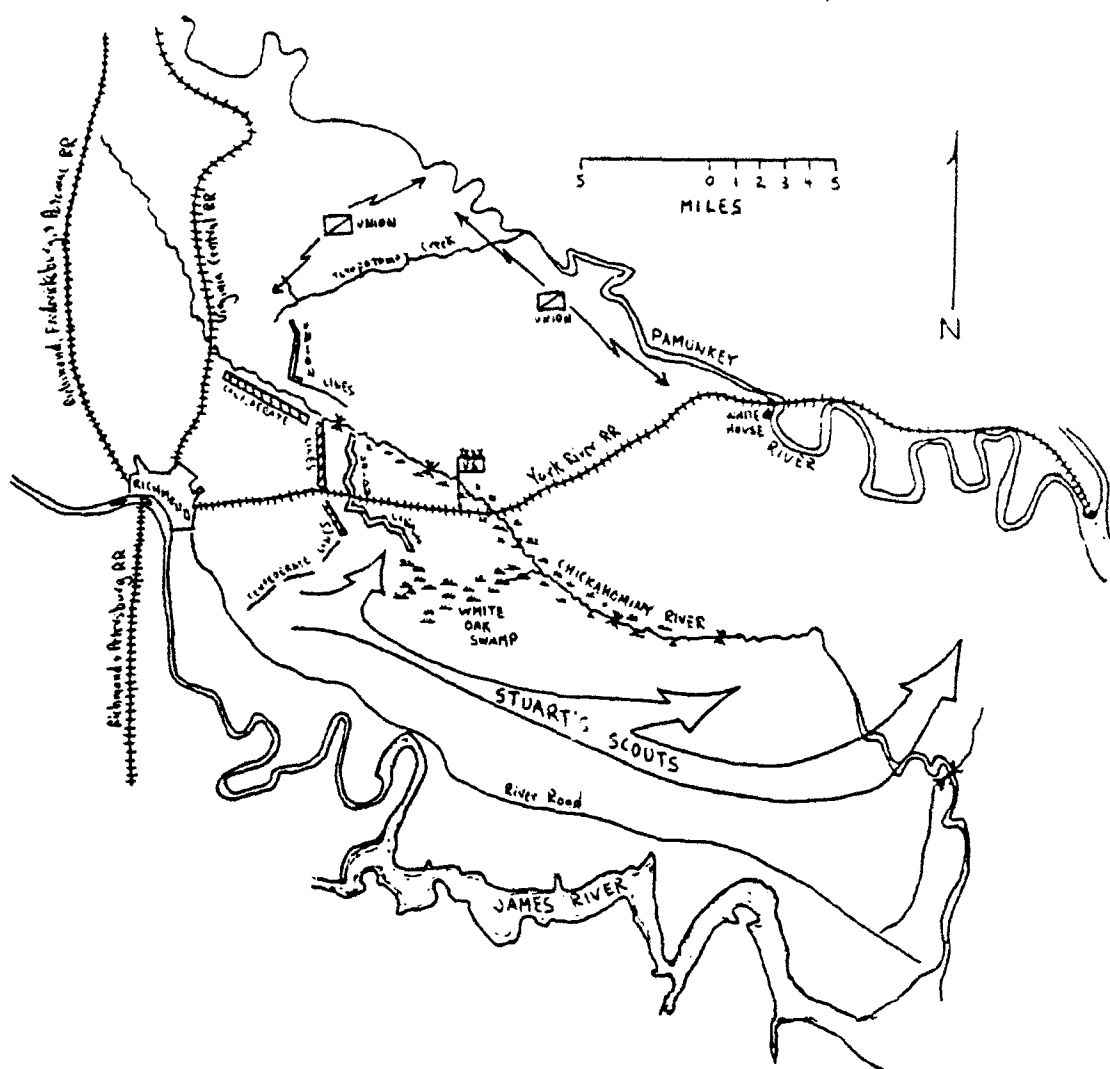


Fig. 3. Situation on 10 June 1862⁶

no evidence they even spoke about Stuart's letter of the 4th, in which the cavalry commander outlined his alternative campaign strategy. Stuart's interest on 9 June was most likely driven by his desire to prepare as thorough a picture of Union dispositions for his commander as possible. With this in mind, he sent Mosby off to scout Totopotomoy Creek and its environs.⁷

Mosby returned the next day with startling news. McClellan had not extended his fortifications to the Totopotomoy, but had stopped considerably short of that point in the vicinity of Mechanicsville on Beaver Dam Creek. This left McClellan's supply lines from the Pamunkey vulnerable to attack. Local inhabitants informed Mosby that roving cavalry patrols were all that protected the Federal flank north of Mechanicsville--forces Stuart would only be too happy to deal with if he were called upon to do so. The brigadier immediately perceived the importance of this information and had Mosby write down the details of his reconnaissance.⁸ With this in hand, Stuart galloped-off to confer with Lee, accompanied by one of his aides.

Lee was intrigued by the intelligence Stuart delivered. Another of the Commanding General's intelligence sources had indicated that McClellan's forces were in greater strength, behind more extensive fortifications than Mosby's reconnaissance implied. The Commanding General had also been concerned about the possibility the Federals might even strike northward to cut Richmond off from the Virginia Central Railroad near Ashland. But, if Stuart's scout was right, Lee's prospects in striking McClellan's northern flank looked very promising indeed. Stuart's commander was particularly interested in the vulnerability of McClellan's lines of communication and the potential to dislocate the Union Army from its logistics base. Mosby's information seemed too good to be true. It was as if the Union general was stepping willingly into the trap Lee planned to set. Hence, Lee insisted on a more complete verification than could be provided by a single scout relying on the impressions of local farmers with untrained eyes.⁹

Stuart had more in mind than confirming the validity of Mosby's intelligence. Given the circumstances, it was as if he was being offered the opportunity of a lifetime. Access to McClellan's rear was apparently readily available on both the Union northern and southern flanks. Stuart was aware of the huge Union supply depot at White House and imagined what havoc his command might wreak there and on the wagon roads and

railroad leading from the depot to the Union lines. Furthermore, if Stuart's calculations were correct, he could easily ride completely around the Union Army and escape by an avenue unexpected by any Union pursuers. Perhaps he even imagined the stirring display this circumnavigation could provide to the beleaguered citizens of Richmond in desperate need of good news from their army. This would be his first chance to use his command on a large scale operation and an independent one at that. It was an opening he had been waiting for since the start of the Peninsular Campaign.¹⁰

Stuart's battle report for the Chickahominy Raid suggests that he presented this idea to Lee, something he called his "favorite scheme, disclosed to you [Lee] before starting, of passing around."¹¹ One can only speculate about the Commanding General's reaction to his cavalry chief's proposal. Stuart hints in his report that Lee was skeptical about this aspect of the operation by stating "the expedition was prosecuted farther than was contemplated in your instructions."¹² These "instructions" presumably meant the orders Lee subsequently issued.

Lee probably had little interest in the potential for good press created by a cavalry raid. No record exists of Stuart's meeting with Lee on the 10th, but subsequent reports and other documentation suggest two main objectives emerged from the conference: confirming Union dispositions north of the Chickahominy and preying upon McClellan's logistics. In fact, the Commanding General was more interested in minimizing Stuart's losses and in not calling attention to his designs for his campaign to break the impending seige on Richmond than in creating some sort of stirring display. This is readily apparent from the orders he issued for the operation to his cavalry commander the day after their conference:

General: You are desired to make a secret movement to the rear of the enemy, now posted on [the] Chickahominy, with a view of gaining intelligence of his operations, communications, &c.; of driving in his foraging parties, and securing such grain, cattle, &c., for ourselves as you can make arrangements to

have driven in. Another object is to destroy his wagon trains, said to be daily passing from the Piping Tree road to his camp on the Chickahominy. The utmost vigilance on your part will be necessary to prevent any surprise to yourself, and the greatest caution must be practiced in keeping well in your front and flanks reliable scouts to give you information.

You will return as soon as the object of your expedition is accomplished, and you must bear constantly in mind, while endeavoring to execute the general purpose of your mission, not to hazard unnecessarily your command or to attempt what your judgment may not approve; but be content to accomplish all the good you can without feeling it necessary to obtain all that might be desired.

I recommend that you only take such men and horses as can stand the expedition, and that you take every means in your power to save and cherish those you do take. You must leave sufficient cavalry here for the service of this army, and remember that one of the chief objects of your expedition is to gain intelligence for the guidance of future operations.

Information received last evening, the points of which I sent you, lead me to infer that there is a stronger force on the enemy's right than was previously reported. A large body of infantry, as well as cavalry, was reported near the Central Railroad. Should you find upon investigation that the enemy is moving to his right, or is so strongly posted as to render your expedition inopportune--as its success in my opinion, depends upon its secrecy--you will, after gaining all the information you can, resume your former position.¹³

Lee's preoccupation with advising caution in his order might lead one to assume he dispatched Stuart on his raid somewhat reluctantly. But, Lee's tone was typical of orders he issued during his first campaign as the Commanding General of the Army of Northern Virginia. His summons to "Stonewall" Jackson to join forces with him, written on the 16th of June, devotes almost 50 percent of its content to issuing precautionary advice,¹⁴ advice Jackson had aptly demonstrated was unnecessary given his performance in the Shenandoah Valley that spring. The order's demeanor did not seem to dissuade Stuart in the slightest. In fact, he was evidently pleased Lee had chosen to elevate the status of the operation to that of an "expedition." In setting out for the raid, Stuart was asked by one of his staff staying behind how long the general would be gone. His spirited response quoted a line in a popular ballad of the time, *Kathleen Mavourneen*: "It may be for years and it may be forever."¹⁵

This reply not only demonstrated the jovial air in which the brigadier set out on the first of his renowned cavalry raids, but it suggests a secretive manner typical of Stuart. Upon receiving Lee's orders on Wednesday the 11th, he issued a directive of his own for the brigade to cook three days rations, draw 60 rounds of ammunition, and prepare for departure on a moment's notice. No mention was made of the purpose behind this move. Before sunrise the next day, he ordered his force into their saddles with a mere 10 minute warning.¹⁶ Of the 1200 troopers on the move, perhaps only Mosby suspected what the object of their ride might be. Stuart did not even tell his staff or regimental commanders what they were up to until the morning of the raid's second day. He was entirely committed to operational security. This had a drawback in that his staff never seemed to possess the complete picture their commander had. He only put together the variety of inputs he received from his scouts for their benefit when it became necessary to do so. Few, of his most trusted companions even knew of the activities of spies like "Conrad" under his employment. Those close to the cavalry commander came to expect the unexpected in him. If they were uncertain what he was up to, it could be certain his enemy at times would be absolutely befuddled.¹⁷

As a ruse, Stuart marched his command up the Brooke Road toward Ashland as if his intent was to ride to the Shenandoah Valley to reinforce Jackson. His cavalrymen had grown bored with camp life and looked forward to an opportunity for some action. The fact they did not know where they were bound concerned them little. Most assumed they were headed for the Shenandoah Valley.¹⁸ Stuart had selected the best in his command to accompany him on his ride: the 1st Virginia (Cavalry Regiment) under Colonel Fitzhugh Lee; the 9th Virginia commanded by Fitzhugh's cousin Colonel W. H. P. "Rooney" Lee; the Jeff Davis Legion (battalion strength) under Lieutenant Colonel William Martin; and a section of horse artillery (two guns) commanded by Lieutenant James Breathed. The 4th Regiment's commander Colonel Williams Wickham was

recuperating from wounds received earlier in the Peninsula Campaign, so three of his squadrons were attached to the 1st and the 9th Regiments. Martin's battalion was reinforced with a South Carolina company, the "Boykin Rangers." The balance of Wickham's unit was left behind in Richmond with a battalion known as Cobb's Legion in accordance with the Commanding General's request to have cavalry at his disposal should the need arise in Stuart's absence. Company E of the 4th Regiment joined Stuart as well, loosely attached to his headquarters so their services as scouts would be readily available during the ride.

After nearly twenty miles of riding northward, Stuart turned his column sharply to the east before reaching the South Anna River and proceeded a few miles further to the Winston farm, four miles north of Ashland Station. Their path now led around the extreme northern flank of McClellan's army and the troopers began to discern that reinforcing Jackson's command was not the object of their ride. In order to avoid alerting Union cavalry patrols, Stuart ordered a "noiseless bivouac" and prohibited camp fires at the Winston farm on the night of the 12th. Still, he did not confide in his regimental commanders or his staff as to what their orders would be for the next day. Instead, he rode with Rooney Lee to the nearby estate of Hickory Hill, where Williams Wickham was recovering from his wounds. Stuart spent the evening socializing with the Wickham family and napped for awhile, before returning to his command before daylight.¹⁹

Signal rockets announced the commencement of the ride on Friday, 13 June, as bugles were not considered an appropriate means to end a "noiseless" encampment. At last Stuart provided some of the details of his plan to the Lees and Martin in issuing his orders for the day. He did not, however, discuss how far he intended to penetrate into the Union rear, nor did he imply that he intended to attempt a ride completely around McClellan's forces.²⁰ It is interesting to speculate whether this reflected Stuart's continued

penchant for security (after all, his subordinate commanders might not have needed to know what their ultimate course of action might be at that point), or whether he was

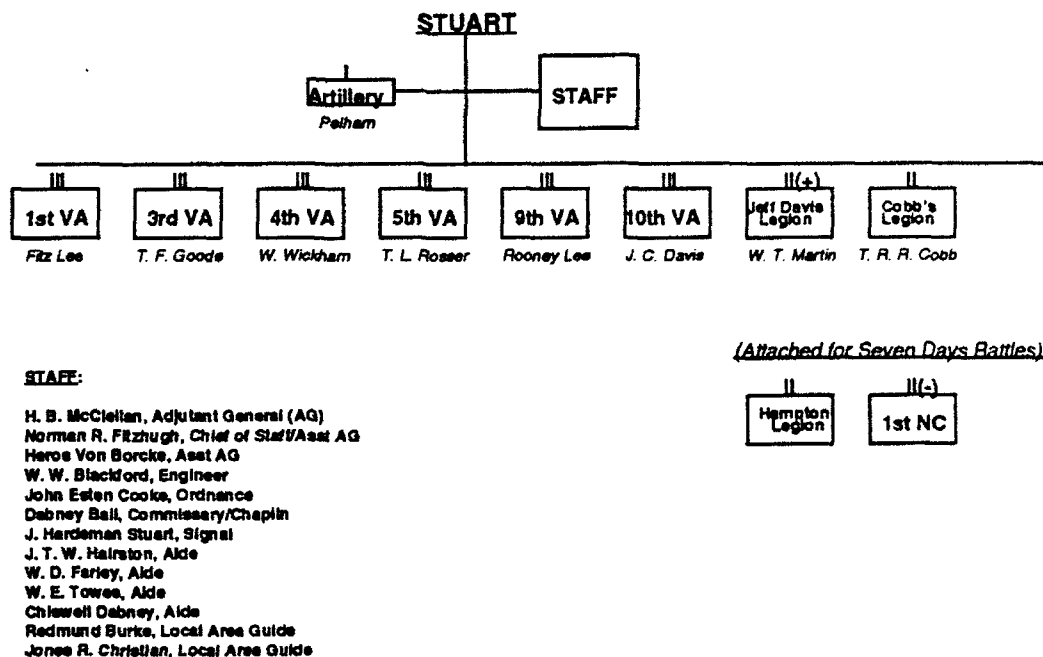


Fig. 4. Stuart's Brigade Organization, Late June 1862

concerned about their potential doubts for the wisdom of his intended enterprise. Stuart was attempting a raid whose scope and audacity was without precedent, at least on the American continent. Yet on that morning, his regiments only saw the tasks that lay immediately before them--making contact with their Union counterparts and probing the extent of their forces on McClellan's northern flank.

While Stuart had socialized and the rest of his command slept in the early morning hours of the 13th, Company E and others had scouted the roads Stuart had intended to use on the second day of his ride and had confirmed Mosby's intelligence that

the Union lines did not extend to the Totopotomoy Creek. The scouts had easily avoided the cavalry McClellan used to screen his northern flank that night and had penetrated southward within a few miles of the center of his line at New Bridge on the Chickahominy.²¹ Without having exposed any more of his command than this band of scouts, Stuart had largely accomplished the primary objective of his ride before he had departed the Winston farm. The approximate extent of the Union northern flank was confirmed. This was not, however, how he viewed the results of Company E's efforts. He saw their scouting as a means to set the stage for the brigade to prey upon the Union rear. Attacking Union logistics was more tangible and visible aspect of Stuart's mission than straight-forward reconnaissance. Company E had confirmed the path ahead was clear of significant opposition and Stuart proceeded even more confidently with his plan.

Mosby and seven of his comrades from Company E were tasked to ride ahead of the long column of troopers as an advance guard. By 11:00 AM, they approached the hamlet of Hanover Court House. As Mosby approached the town across an open field, he noted a company of Federal horsemen had occupied the town. The scouts slowly and deliberately withdrew to make their report to Stuart, tipping the Federals off that a much stronger force could not be far off. The blue troopers withdrew down a road leading to their regiment's camp (5th U.S. Cavalry) at Old Church, about 15 miles southeast, keeping watchful eye on their rear.²² Stuart attempted to cut off their retreat by dispatching the 1st Virginia Regiment around the western side of the road leading to Old Church. Unfortunately for the Confederate cavalry, their flanking force became mired in a swamp and the Federals escaped this potential trap.

But, the 9th Virginia Regiment soon pressed forward on the heels of their enemy. The road from Hanover Court House led through dense forest, which not only hampered efforts to reconnoiter the area, but also provided the Federals with the opportunity to safely monitor the head of Stuart's column. The Confederates stuck to the

road, riding four abreast. They had other observers in addition to the troopers of the 5th U.S. Cavalry. With a lack of effective resistance in front of the Confederate brigade, the sight of the determined column began to drive in Union foragers. This was precisely one of the effects Lee had envisioned in his orders for the expedition. Union commissary private Stephen M. Weld watched all 1200 of Stuart's riders pass by in the vicinity of the crossroads at Hawes Shop, from the concealment of underbrush only 50 feet from the road. Even at a trot, Weld noted the extended column took nearly an hour to pass. Private Weld eventually sought more secure surroundings, but in riding southeast encountered Stuart's force again at Old Church. He spent the rest of the day in hiding, a better fate than one that awaited his colleagues caught on the road by the Confederate cavalry.²³

The Union cavalry company in front of the 9th Virginia Regiment was commanded by First Lieutenant Edward H. Leib. Leib left a small detachment in visual contact with the Confederates and sent riders back to warn his squadron's commanding officer at Old Church, Captain William Royall, of their approach. The Confederates were less than two miles away when Leib's riders arrived to deliver their warning. Royall immediately dispatched a company to support Leib and prepared to follow with another, the balance of forces under his command. These were the only units available to check Stuart's advance on the road to Old Church, as the rest of the Union cavalry regiment was off on patrol. By 2:00 PM, Stuart's column approached Totopotomoy Creek, one mile from the 5th U.S. Cavalry's camp. Here, the road led down a narrow ravine to a bridge crossing the creek, an ideal location for the Union troopers to contest the Confederate advance. Leib offered the first determined resistance of the day, which brought Stuart's force to a temporary pause. Half of the leading squadron of the 9th Virginia dismounted to flush Leib's troopers from the edges of the ravine. The Confederates pressed their attack across the creek and pursued Leib in full retreat down the road to Old Church.²⁴

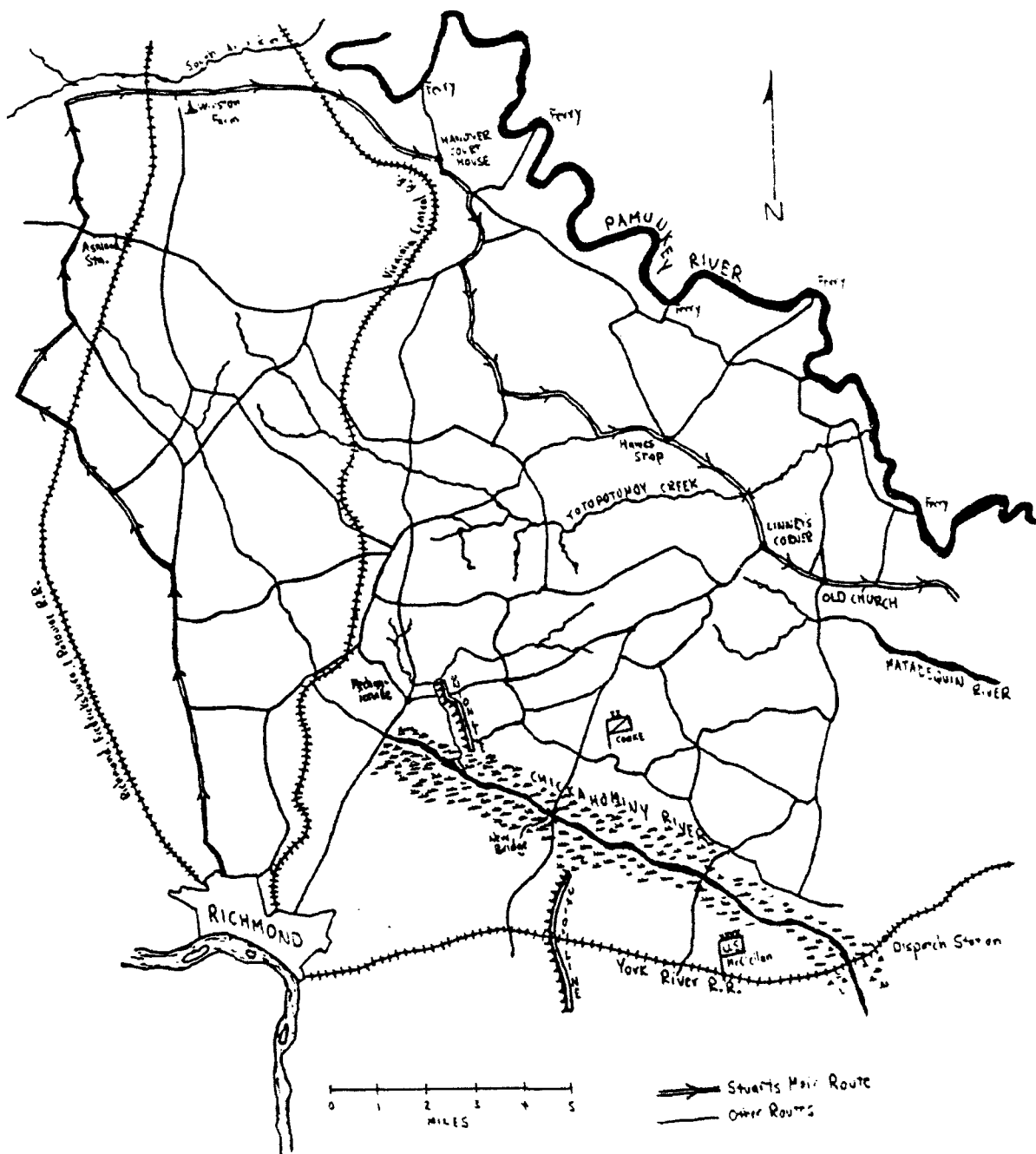


Fig. 5. From the Mordecai Farm to Old Church.²⁵

Royall had not been provided with much of an opportunity to stage an effective defense. He had little more than a company at his disposal at Linney's Corner on the road from Old Church, when he confronted the second squadron of the 9th Virginia on horseback--a force three times the size of his own. Following the troopers on horseback, the dismounted force from the first squadron could also be seen in the distance by one of Royall's officers, Second Lieutenant Richard Byrnes. The Confederates charged and Royall initially stood his ground. In the mounted hand-to-hand combat that followed, Royall was severely wounded by a saber wielded by the squadron commander facing him, Captain William Latane. Royall returned the blow by firing both of his pistols from point blank range at Latane--killing him instantly. Several other Confederates received minor wounds, but Stuart's riders soon overwhelmed Royall's command. Royall retreated, stood his ground for another assault, and retreated again. As the 1st Virginia Regiment appeared, the Federals hastened their withdrawal and left their camp at Old Church to the Confederates.²⁶

Royall dispatched a rider before the clash at Linney's Corner to warn the commander of the Union Cavalry Reserve that the 5th was under attack and in need of reinforcement. This rider was soon joined by Lieutenant Byrnes at the headquarters of that commander, Stuart's father-in-law Brigadier General Phillip St. George Cooke. Byrnes mistook the dismounted troopers of the 9th Virginia Regiment for Confederate infantry, an error that would have a crippling effect on the Union's cavalry's response to Stuart's raid. Cooke believed the lieutenant's report and requested a full brigade of infantry to support his attempt to repulse the Confederates.²⁷ By the time this force could be provided three hours later, Stuart's brigade had left Old Church, some five miles distant from Cooke's camp. Since the Union cavalry commander thought he was pursuing a combined Confederate cavalry and infantry force, he felt he could intercept the rebel

soldiers on foot. Obviously, Stuart's riders easily out-paced this pursuit, despite their pause at Old Church to burn and loot the camp of the 5th U.S. Cavalry.

Stuart evidently felt no small measure of satisfaction at that point in time. If he had any interest in crossing sabers with his father-in-law during the raid, he did not openly express it. Stuart was more content with brushing the Union opposition aside and thus be offered an open avenue to McClellan's rear. The 5th U.S. Cavalry had originally been designated the 2nd U.S. Cavalry before the war--a unit Robert E. Lee had commanded after his West Point superintendency and the regiment Fitz Lee resigned from when Virginia departed the Union. Fitz Lee took the time to question some of his former comrades captured at Linney's Corner and henceforth put their camp to the torch. As Fitz Lee's troopers gathered what useful items the 5th had left behind, Stuart assembled his regimental commanders, staff, and scouts together to discuss the next phase of the operation.²⁸

It was at this time Stuart first revealed his intention to ride completely around McClellan's army to anyone else in his command. He gave no hint that he had been formulating this plan for days. Those joined about him assumed the idea was a brilliant bit of inspiration. The decision Stuart's subordinates assumed they faced at Old Church was whether they should turn back in the same direction that they had come or to select another route back to Richmond. Stuart offered two arguments against a return trip via McClellan's northern flank: the Union would be expecting them to do so and secondly, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to ford or swim the swollen Pamunkey River if it was necessary to attempt an escape even farther to the north. The brigade had penetrated deep into the Union rear--they were six miles northeast of McClellan's headquarters at that point. Everyone agreed it was in their best interest to avoid contact with significant Union forces and that they might well be intercepted by cavalry or worse yet, infantry, if an alerted enemy were to block the road back to Hanover Court House. The region south of

White Oak Swamp had proved to be a relatively safe avenue of approach to the Union rear during the past two weeks. The only problem with Stuart's course of action, in their mind, was that they would have to penetrate deeper into the Union rear before they could escape to the south.²⁹

Penetrating deeper was exactly what Stuart had in mind because he considered his work in disrupting Union logistics to be incomplete. Thus far, his troopers had only succeeded in harassing a few commissary wagons and destroying the 5th U.S. Cavalry's camp. The relative ease in which the brigade had reached Old Church encouraged him to go forward with his ride around the Union Army, gain a more thorough knowledge of McClellan's supply lines, and secure whatever he could of legitimate material value in the process--especially horses. His Commanding General's orders clearly stated this was a purpose of the expedition with the qualification that Stuart did not encounter significant risk. The Federal response thus far hardly troubled him.³⁰ But, how long would his good fortune continue?

This question hardly seemed to trouble the cavalry commander as he issued orders to continue the march to the southeast at a brisk trot. In fact, one of Stuart's closest aides John Esten Cooke remembers the passage from Old Church to Tunstall's Station as "the gayest portion of the ride."³¹ Mosby was tasked again to act as an advance guard. This time, he expressed a concern that he would be scouting in unfamiliar territory--he had not proceeded past the Totopotomoy Creek during his 9 June reconnaissance. Stuart was prepared for this eventuality and summoned two troopers from the 9th Virginia who lived in the area to ride with Mosby.³² With a number of captured horses and Union prisoners in tow, the Confederate column proceeded down the road toward Tunstall's Station on the York River Railroad, behind the small contingent of scouts.

This portion of the march took place over one of McClellan's supply routes, where wagons loaded on the banks of the Pamunkey River traveled to the Union V Corps's lines north of the Chickahominy, near Mechanicsville. Before long, the Confederate cavalry began to encounter sutler's wagons loaded with foodstuffs, delicacies, and "fortified" refreshments bound for the Federal camps. They were only too happy to relieve the horrified peddlers of their goods at pistol or saber point. Yet, even more substantial loot lay ahead. As their route took them nearer to the Pamunkey River, Stuart dispatched scouts to the Piping Tree Ferry to determine if the road there was being used to haul supplies. General Lee had assumed in his orders that the Piping Tree Road was one of McClellan's primary means of transporting food and ammunition. This information proved to be as inaccurate as Lee's impression of the strength of the northern Union flank. There was no activity noted at the ferry, but ship's masts were soon sighted not far away by the advance guard, a few miles down river at Garlick's Landing.³³

Two squadrons, one each from the 9th and 1st Virginia, were tasked to investigate Garlick's Landing (also known as Putney's Ferry), as the rest of the column continued their march toward Tunstall's Station. Their short detour was rewarded by the sight of three schooners unloading at a small wharf on the riverbank and 75 wagons waiting nearby. A company of Union cavalry had been posted to guard the landing, but they soon withdrew without offering a fight to the Virginians. A few of the soldiers working at the wharves resisted the Confederate advance, but they were soon overwhelmed. The Federals did manage to cut one of the schooners loose and it drifted down river safely out of harm's way. The two ships that remained and every wagon present were put to the torch. The rest of Stuart's brigade noted the pall of rising smoke marking the event with evident satisfaction, as they approached Tunstall's Station three miles to the south.³⁴

Tunstall's Station was lightly guarded as well. Mosby and the advance guard noted it was protected by a company of cavalry and a small contingent of infantry. For a moment, Mosby and his men were threatened with capture by this force. But, they stood their ground while the lead squadron of 9th Virginia Regiment rounded a bend in the road behind them. Then, it was the Federals turn to face superior numbers and they quickly decided to beat a hasty retreat. They left the infantry at the station to surrender to Stuart's staff as the brigade swarmed over the train depot. Telegraph wires paralleling the York River Railroad were quickly cut to preclude a warning being sent to McClellan's headquarters eight miles to the west, or to the Union logistics base at White House on the Pamunkey four miles to the east. At that time, Stuart's cavalymen stood astride the main artery that delivered the lifeblood of war to the Union Army preparing to lay siege to Richmond.³⁵

Unfortunately for Stuart, his brigade was ill-prepared to do much damage to the railroad itself. He had not considered the potential need for sappers or the tools for such work and his penchant for secrecy had precluded anybody else from thinking of it for him. His frustrated band struggled with makeshift implements on the rails and attempted to burn a small bridge over a nearby creek. They eventually managed to pry two rails loose, but not before a train approached the station from the west, bound for White House. While one group grappled with the railbed and threw up a makeshift wooden barricade, Stuart's staff stepped out to wave the train to a halt. At first, it appeared to decelerate, but then the engineer recognized a trap was being laid and he poured on the steam. Just at the time when Breathed's section of artillery was needed most on the ride, it was unavailable. One of the gun carriages had become stuck in mud on their way to Tunstall's Station and both pieces consequently missed out on the battle with the train.³⁶

Every available gun was brought to bear on the train loaded with troops bound for White House. Eight Union soldiers on board were wounded, two were killed, and a

few jumped the train in hope of escaping the gauntlet of fire. A Confederate officer galloped-up to the engine and blasted away at the engineer with a shotgun, but the train could not be stopped. In his battle report, Stuart imagined it might have continued headlong to its destination with a dead engineer at the throttle.³⁷ However, the locomotive was brought safely under control by the time it neared the Pamunkey. The depot commander, Lieutenant Colonel Rufus Ingalls, had been warned by a telegram earlier in the afternoon that Confederate cavalry had been sighted in his vicinity.³⁸ The rattled passengers disembarking at White House were able to confirm this information was accurate.

Ingall's force was hardly sufficient to hold off Stuart's brigade, let alone give chase to the Confederates. Pursuit was left to the combined cavalry and infantry force put together by Cooke, a cavalry regiment known as Rush's Lancers, and another infantry brigade assembling 10 miles to the west, at Dispatch Station on the York River Railroad. The infantry marching in support of Cooke left their camp in brigade strength at 5:00 PM, well after Stuart had left Old Church. They were deployed to block the anticipated retreat of the Confederate cavalry back by the route they had come--just as Stuart had assumed they might. Rush's Lancers followed the Confederates's route from Old Church but did not reach Tunstall's Station until 2:00 AM (14 June). Their arrival was preceded by Brigadier General John Reynold's brigade from Dispatch Station by about two hours, but by then the last of the Confederate cavalry had vanished. The Federal response was too little, too late.³⁹

Daylight was fading when the abortive attempt was made to derail the train. Stuart's command hastened thereafter to make quick work of their destruction at Tunstall's Station. While the train tracks had to be left essentially intact, more damage was done to a wagon train discovered nearby. One hundred sixty-five prisoners, 260 horses and mules taken from the road and Garlick's Landing, and a number of wagons from Tunstall's were

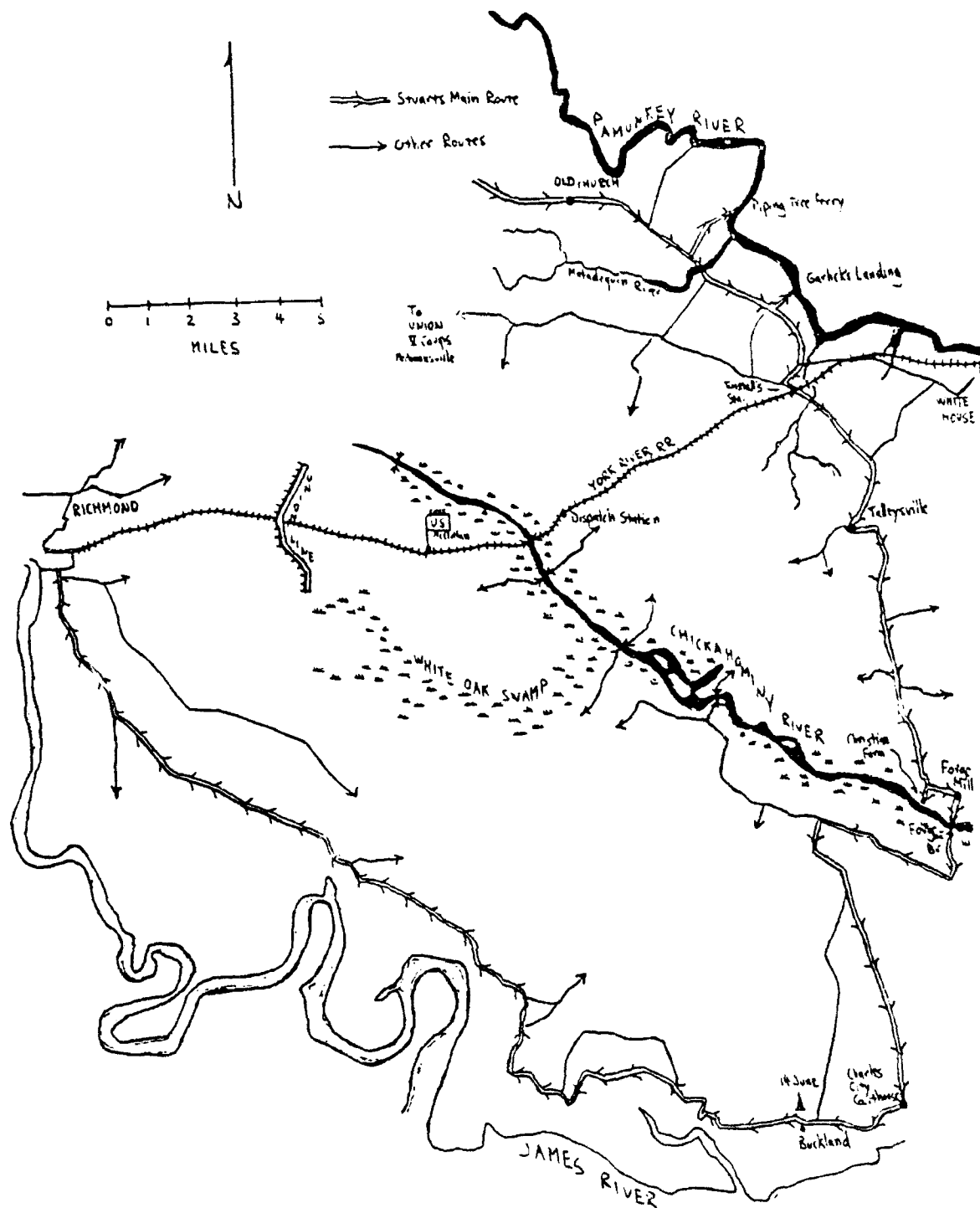


Fig. 6. Old Church Back to Richmond.⁴⁰

assembled for the next leg of the journey south to Talleyville. Some of Stuart's men took time to enjoy the fruits of victory, including some champagne liberated from a commissary wagon on the road from Old Church. One man became so intoxicated that he was left behind for the Federals. This straggler, the deceased Latane, and the handful of men wounded at Linney's Corner were the only Confederate casualties of the raid.⁴¹

Stuart's staff noted their brigadier became concerned after night had fallen and his regiments became separated in the aftermath of the revelry at Tunstall's Station. He called for a stop just before midnight when he reached Talleyville to allow the trailing end of his strung-out column to catch-up.⁴² This was about the time Reynolds's brigade cautiously pulled into Tunstall's Station. None of the Federals gave chase until daybreak, including Rush's Lancers who arrived shortly after the infantry. It is difficult to imagine why, since the straggler who was left behind and several negro workers in the area revealed the direction the Confederates had taken. In his account of the raid, Mosby commented this information could have been easily verified, since the hoof-prints of over 1200 horses were hard to conceal on the muddy roads of the Peninsula.⁴³ Instead of closing the five-mile lead Stuart had developed at that point, the Union forces stayed-put for more than four hours. The Confederate troopers were provided with a brief respite from their long ride at Talleyville. They napped and enjoyed refreshments from the day's pillaging, including the wares taken from a nearby sutler's enterprise known as the "Baltimore Store."

The march was resumed after midnight in the general direction of Forge Mill on the Chickahominy. Stuart realized the river would be an obstacle on the escape route to the south, but he had planned for this particular circumstance. Lieutenant Jones Christian was summoned to the head of the column to act as a guide for this segment of the journey. He was to take the brigade to the site of his father's farm, situated near Sycamore Springs on the Chickahominy River. The Lieutenant was confident the river could be easily forded

there. Unfortunately, Christian had not fully accounted for the effect the recent rains would have on the river level. Upon reaching the proposed site of the crossing, it was immediately evident the Chickahominy could not be forded. Rooney Lee decided to try swimming across. But, he almost lost his horse in the swift current and tangled undergrowth of the flooded riverbank. When this method of crossing proved impractical, a few trees were felled in an attempt to fashion a crossing. The current proved to be too swift for this approach as well and the trees were washed downstream in the torrent.⁴⁴

It appeared as though the Confederate cavalry might be trapped. Stuart had earlier discounted the possibility of crossing the Pamunkey River to the north for the very reason he was stuck now--floodwaters. Those closest to him on his staff noticed he grew somewhat nervous, but those less familiar with his character found him to be in as jovial mood as ever.⁴⁵ His outward appearance was intended to inspire confidence in his men. However, he began to lose a little of his self-assurance and decided to dispatch a courier across the river to Richmond to inform General Lee of his predicament. He also requested Lee stage a demonstration to distract the Federals from his avenue of escape around McClellan's southern flank. The Commanding General who had advised caution in all his orders during his first campaign with the Army of Northern Virginia probably did not receive this information cheerfully.⁴⁶ No distraction would be provided by the Confederate Army, but as it turned out, none was necessary.

Stuart did not delay long at the Christian farm. The brigade quickly moved down river about a mile to the site of Forge Bridge, which unfortunately for Stuart had been destroyed (probably by Confederates) during the Union advance up the Peninsula. However, stone pilings still remained that could be used as the basis for constructing a makeshift span. Two cavalymen stepped forward who had experience in building bridges and the brigade immediately set to work tearing down a nearby wooden framed warehouse for this purpose. Within three hours a span was completed that permitted the passage of

men, horses, and wagons. The two cannon were pulled with ropes through the water across the Chickahominy.⁴⁷ By 1:00 PM, Stuart's entire command was across. The rear guard then set fire to the structure to complicate Union efforts to pursue them. As the first of the burning planks hit the water, Rush's Lancers appeared in the distance to fire a few ineffectual shots at the retiring Confederates. The delay at Forge Mill had been a close call indeed, but the way was now clear to Richmond through the gap between White Oak Swamp and the James River.

The passage back to Richmond from the south side of the Chickahominy was not without hazard. Part of the ride was conducted within sight of Federal gunboats on the James. However, Stuart felt secure enough to order a rest halt just past Charles City Court House at the Buckland Plantation, seven miles beyond Forge Mill. After nearly 36 hours in the saddle, it was a welcome respite to the weary men and horses. Even Stuart napped for a few hours, but he was up again by sundown to issue his next orders. Fitz Lee was given command of the brigade with instructions to resume the march at 11:00 PM. The brigadier selected Captain Richard Frayser, a native of the Peninsula, to act as a guide and in the company of a single courier the two officers rode off toward Richmond ahead of the brigade. Stuart covered the 28 miles to General Lee's Dabb's Farm headquarters before sunrise on 15 June, stopping only once for a cup of strong coffee.⁴⁸

Brigadier General Stuart was given a warmer reception at Dabb's Farm than the courier he had sent across the Chickahominy a day earlier. Lee was genuinely relieved to see Stuart and hear that his command was completely intact. Frayser was sent off to inform Virginia Governor John Letcher of the cavalry's exploits and notify Mrs. Flora Stuart that her husband had safely returned to the capital. Governor Letcher was so impressed with the news that he sent the young captain off with a promise of a new cavalry saber--the pick of the lot at the state arsenal.⁴⁹ Over breakfast, Stuart and Lee sat down for one of their first detailed discussions of reconnaissance that would become so

typical of the campaigns ahead. Later that Sunday afternoon, Fitz Lee led the rest of the command into Richmond. The first and perhaps the most famous of J. E. B. Stuart's grand exploits had come to an end.

One of the most immediate results of the Chickahominy Raid was the sensation it created within Richmond. On Monday, the city's newspapers featured headlines like: "Magnificent Achievement," "Brilliant Reconnaissance," and "Unparalleled Maneuver."⁵⁰ Word quickly spread of the cavalry's achievement. On the afternoon of the 16th, Stuart was thronged by citizens and soldiers while riding near the capital and was asked to deliver a speech from the steps of the Governor's Mansion. He left the scene "amidst the ring of deafening cheers."⁵¹ Correspondents credited the brigadier with a number of feats, some imaginary and some actually performed by somebody else in his command. To citizens weary of bad news in the wake of McClellan's seemingly inexorable advance toward the capital, the raid began to assume almost legendary proportions.

Stuart's cavalry basked in the limelight. They had not even played as much as secondary role in the Peninsula Campaign up until that point, having sat out most of the battles in reserve. They had been taunted by their counterparts in the infantry for this, but they now gained new recognition and enjoyed every minute of it. John Esten Cooke remembered "anyone who had taken part in this famous expedition was besieged with questions, gazed at as a hero, and entreated to relate his own adventures and the story of the ride."⁵² In the view of one of Richmond's citizens, Sallie Putnam, "the time had at last come when [Stuart's cavalry] should redeem their reputation from certain reproaches cast upon it, and loom up into enviable notice upon the Confederate horizon."⁵³ These were intoxicating times indeed for J. E. B. Stuart.

Richmond's papers were not the only media to take note of the "Ride Around McClellan." *The New York Times* described the raid as "a bold movement of the rebels," crediting Stuart with creating "a panic at White House."⁵⁴ Confidence in the North was

shaken by the expedition according to the Comte De Paris, a French observer attached to McClellan's staff.⁵⁵ New York businessman George Templeton Strong noted in his diary that the raid's "successful audacity is a bad sign."⁵⁶ Richmond newspapers made their way into the Union lines, sold by resourceful youths who had ventured out from the city, that provided a more accurate picture of what had transpired in their rear than the *Times* or official military channels could. Federal soldiers began to lose their sense of security behind their fortifications. While Ingalls quickly brought any sort of panic under control at White House, Union cavalry commanders like Colonel Josiah Harlan worried that "[Rooney] Lee and Stuart [made] no secret of their design to retrace their steps at their own convenience."⁵⁷

McClellan might have agreed with these prophetic words, but he did not openly admit it. This seemed characteristic of the Union general. McClellan preferred to downplay embarrassing incidents like the Chickahominy Raid. His telegram to Secretary of War Stanton on the 14th of June concerning the events of the previous day provided a very limited discussion of the damage resulting from the raid and gave the impression Reynold's brigade had run the Confederates off at Tunstall's Station. In a subsequent telegram to Stanton, he added "the stampede of last night has passed away."⁵⁸ This was hardly the vision the Confederate cavalry commander had for the exploits of his brigade. McClellan remarked after the war that Stuart's raid "was a very minor consideration" in his planning at that stage of the campaign.⁵⁹ Yet, his actions spoke louder than these words. On 18 June, he began to move supplies from White House to the James River, ostensibly in support of a scheme to attack Confederate fortifications guarding that water approach to Richmond. But, McClellan also considered the James a more defensible line of communication, a point he had pondered earlier and one now made more clear by the raid. In his mind, there was another issue that outweighed the potential vulnerability of White House. There was no means to deliver the big siege guns McClellan saw as instrumental to

his plan of operations from the James River to his army north of White Oak Swamp. The only way to do so was to continue to use White House and the York River Railroad, as soon as the ground dried enough to permit movement of the heavy artillery from the railhead at Savage's Station to the front lines. McClellan began to shift a part of his logistics base to the James, but the Pamunkey would remain critical to his plan of attack.⁶⁰

Fresh on the heels of success, Stuart forwarded his written narrative of the raid on Tuesday the 17th of June, the day before McClellan began shifting a portion of his base of supplies. The speed in which he delivered this report stands in marked contrast to those composed for some of his less successful operations later in the war, some of which were delivered months after the fact. Some of the prose Stuart utilized was as colorful as that used by the papers. The enemy at Linney's Corner had dispersed "in terror and confusion." At Old Church, his decision to continue penetrating into the Union rear was based on "the hope of striking a serious blow at a boastful and insolent foe." His description of Latane's death indicated the captain had "sealed his devotion to his native soil with his blood."⁶¹ Stuart's language made an impression on his Commanding General, who wrote to his sister "Chass" Lee five days after the report was submitted: "The General [Stuart] deals in the flowering style, as you will perceive if you ever see his report in detail; but he is a good soldier, and speaks highly of the conduct of the two Lees [Rooney and Fithugh], who, as far as I can learn, deserve his encomiums."⁶²

However, the report contained substantive details as well, including a thorough assessment of the damage inflicted to the Union. Two interesting details were left out of the report. Latane was the only casualty described, but there were several troopers wounded during the raid and the drunken straggler left at Tunstall's Station was not mentioned. Stuart focused on the more positive aspects of the raid in his narrative, with one exception. He elected not to provide one of the most important pieces of information gained by the raid--the assessment of McClellan's rear area operations.⁶³ This was

intentional. As Colonel Harlan had predicted, Stuart had interest in returning to the environs of White House. In a later report describing his activities in the Seven Days Battles, he indicated he kept the Union logistics base off the Chickahominy Raid document in the interest of operational security.⁶⁴ Stuart apparently discussed the issue fully with Lee on 15 June, but kept his thoughts about future operations against Union logistics a strictly confidential matter between himself and his commander.

Stuart's reconnaissance proved to be more than a "minor consideration" in Lee's campaign plan. It was precisely the intelligence the Commanding General had hoped for. Unlike the 10 June conference, on 15 June there was no question of the veracity of the evidence. Stuart witnessed the state of the Union northern flank first-hand and his trained eye accurately assessed McClellan's vulnerability. His northern flank was truly exposed to attack and only the most cursory measures had been taken to screen the approaches to his vital lines of communication. The cavalry general provided Lee with a comprehensive view of Union rear area operations during their 15 June meeting and corrected previous misconceptions concerning what the major supply routes actually were. Given such an assessment, Lee not only saw an opportunity to turn the Federal flank, but if a successful assault were pursued vigorously, a third of McClellan's army north of the Chickahominy could be isolated from the elements south of the river. Furthermore, the entire Union force might be cut-off from the Pamunkey and its base of logistics. Stuart's intelligence provided Lee with the impetus to proceed with his plan to deliver a shattering blow to the Union V Corps at Mechanicsville.⁶⁵

Within a day of his meeting with Stuart, Lee forwarded a message to "Stonewall" Jackson directing him to bring his reinforced division down from the Shenandoah Valley to the Peninsula to support the impending counteroffensive against McClellan. The plan for the first in a series of battles known as the "Seven Days Campaign" was put into motion. The divisions of Longstreet, D. H. Hill, and A. P. Hill

reinforced by Jackson would mass on the northern flank of the Union Army and assail their positions at Beaver Dam Creek. Stuart had set the stage for all this and as soon as Stonewall's forces moved down from the Shenandoah, he would witness the results of his expedition around McClellan's army.

Lee demonstrated his gratitude for this by publishing his first congratulatory order in recognition of the raid: General Order No. 74. For some reason, he did not do so until 23 June. There were plenty of accolades for Stuart to enjoy until that time, but several historians have tried to speculate about the reason for this delay. Some have suggested Lee was concerned that the very visible nature of the raid might call McClellan's attention to his plan of attack. Consequently, he wanted to withhold his congratulations until he was certain the V Corps was not reinforced.⁶⁶ Perhaps he did not want to call too much attention to the raid itself by publishing such an order. From the operational security standpoint however, the Richmond press had already torpedoed any effort to downplay the expedition. In all likelihood, Lee simply had more pressing concerns than adding to the hoopla. In the end, the Confederate commander realized Stuart's accomplishment was no ordinary reconnaissance and was deserving of his recognition.

In terms of other substantive contributions to the Confederate cause, Stuart's raid had a relatively minor impact on Union logistics. He had destroyed over 100 wagons and left more than an estimated 3,000,000 dollars worth of supplies in flames.⁶⁷ But, this was a mere irritant to an army whose field trains consisted of more than 3600 wagons.⁶⁸ The equipment and forage Stuart destroyed could easily be replaced. Communications between McClellan's headquarters and White house were quickly restored as was the integrity of the York River Railroad. One hundred and sixty-five prisoners were no great loss to an army that had already suffered a setback of one fifth its fighting strength due to illness and disease. While the Union Army may have lost some of its confidence as a

result of Stuart's foray, from the perspective of actual material damage, McClellan had been on the mark in minimizing the importance of the raid.

But the Confederate cavalry did make noteworthy gains in the material it seized from behind Federal lines. Horses were particularly important to their cause since each trooper was responsible for providing his own mount. This could be an expensive proposition, especially if a cavalryman's horse became exhausted from long months of campaigning or a casualty of battle. Horses taken from the Union could be used as replacements for the Confederates and several of Stuart's later operations were staged with this as one of their primary objectives--including the "Second Ride Around McClellan" in October of that year.⁶⁹ Other valued commodities included weapons, which were in very short supply. Trooper William Royall rode into Old Church armed with a broken Revolutionary War vintage saber.⁷⁰ He and many of his comrades left the 5th U.S. Cavalry camp with new revolvers. While the leadership may have focused on the contributions the raid made to gaining intelligence of their enemy, Stuart's men regarded the expedition as an opportunity to gather legitimate plunder. This was no minor consideration to irregularly-armed lean troopers riding on weary mounts.

Stuart's men regarded the raid as more frolic than frenzy. Few stopped to consider why the operation had been so successful. First and foremost among the reasons for its success was the preparation their commander had undertaken. Stuart conceived the operation based on a thorough knowledge of his enemy. He was aware of the accessibility of the Union rear from the southern flank. His guides and scouts were familiar with the area and although the brigade column got strung-out on occasion, nobody got lost on the backroads of the Peninsula. Once he adopted his concept for riding around McClellan's army, he took deliberate steps to ensure its success: lining up the proper guides, planning a Chickahominy crossing, scouting ahead on the night of 12/13 June, and including his horse artillery as a contingency measure. There were only three significant matters of

oversight on his part--he should have taken along tools to dismantle the railroad if he ever intended to include it as a target of his destruction, the Chickahominy should have been better reconnoitered ahead of time, and he should have anticipated the need to keep a close watch on discipline as his troopers plundered their enemy. When Stuart's planning was found wanting in these circumstances, he had to make up the difference with ingenuity and improvisation. These virtues also contributed to his success.⁷¹

Another matter that escaped the attention of Stuart's command was the positive effects of his penchant for secrecy. Staff officers were not aware of the presence of Stuart's spy "Conrad" in Washington. They knew who their commander's most valued scouts were, but they only infrequently were aware of the more confidential missions they were assigned by their brigadier. Certainly there was a limit to the utility of keeping secrets from Stuart's subordinate commanders. If one of his regiments had become separated from the rest his command on the ride from Taylorsville to Old Church, Stuart would have found it exceedingly more difficult to pursue his concept of circling the Union Army. Given that risk, the close-hold nature of his plan prevented the wrong ears from hearing about it ahead of time. The extensive nature of Stuart's spy/scout network undoubtedly caused him to appreciate the need for operational security. By the time anybody except R. E. Lee and Stuart knew that he intended to continue around McClellan's forces after he reached Old Church, it was too late to do anything about it. Stuart's subordinates could only see an open road ahead of them by that point and his enemy was left wondering where he had disappeared to. His pursuers were left with a feeling best expressed by the words of biographer Emory Thomas: "Stuart was everywhere and nowhere."⁷²

His ability to stay several steps ahead of his opposition was also largely due to the bold and audacious nature of his plan. It was a bold enough for the new Confederate Commanding General to shy away from its execution. This was no small consideration

given the risky nature of Lee's campaign plan for the Seven Days Battles: leaving a small screening force in front of Richmond to deliver a weighted attack on McClellan's northern flank. Lee had initially advised caution and the Union leadership had come to expect it from their opposition. What was expected of Stuart was that he would simply probe the Federal northern flank and quickly withdraw the way he had come. The element of surprise in concert with the security maintained by Stuart provided him with the edge necessary to stay ahead of his enemy. It was a portent of things to come. In a larger sense, the Chickahominy Raid and later, the Seven Days Battles demonstrated the Confederates were not content to merely sit in their trenches to await the inevitable. McClellan was facing a new enemy he was not prepared to deal with.

The Federals did not anticipate the speed at which Stuart's force moved through their rear. This allowed Stuart to stay far enough ahead of his pursuers that he could afford to take operational pauses at Old Church and Tunstall's Station. Even the five to six hour delay at Forge Mill did not allow the Federals to catch up. A considerable portion of their failure to do so must rest with poor decisions made on the part of their leadership--Cooke's insistence on tying his command down with infantry and Rush's failure to push forward from Tunstall's Station until dawn on the 14th. Apparently Lieutenant Leib was one of the only Federal officers who recognized the importance of maintaining some form of contact with the enemy, even when outnumbered by him. Once contact was lost at Old Church, it would not be regained until Rush's Lancers watched the last of the Confederate troopers withdraw across the Chickahominy. The speed of Stuart's movements was something the Union was unaccustomed to dealing with and they could not develop any form of coherent defense against it. McClellan had one final opportunity to set a trap south of White Oak Swamp for the Confederate cavalry as they rested at the Buckland Plantation following 36 hours in the saddle. The fact he failed to do so aptly demonstrated how Stuart easily out-paced his opposition.

Stuart's embarrassment of McClellan's command was not without its problems. As already noted, R. E. Lee was genuinely concerned that his cavalry's audacious movements called attention to his plan to attack the Union northern flank and its lines of communication. Lee might have been horrified if he had read the following excerpt from *The New York Times* on Friday, 20 June 1862:

But there are sundry indications of a disposition on their part to make an attempt upon one of our flanks--most probably at this time, if at all, upon our right, in the hope of destroying our stores at the White house, and cutting off our communications by the Pamunkey and York Rivers, which is now our only line. The bold dash of Stewart's [sic] Cavalry, last Friday, looks very much like a reconnaissance preparatory to a movement of that kind....⁷³

But, McClellan made no move to strengthen his right flank by extending his lines to the Totopotomoy or by reinforcing the V Corps. Lee felt compelled to confirm this for himself and he ordered a brigade-level attack near Mechanicsville, a week after Stuart's return for the purpose. The results of this probe revealed there was no change in the Union dispositions.⁷⁴ McClellan made a fatal error in not correcting the weakness on his right flank. He should have never left that flank exposed, or better yet, should have marched into Richmond after Seven Pines. Lee was fortunate his opposite number did not take effective measures to counter his moves against V Corps.

Part of the reason Lee ordered a brigade forward to probe the Federal lines near Mechanicsville laid in the somewhat incomplete picture Stuart's scouts were able to provide of the precise disposition of the Union V Corps. Their reconnaissance provided more of a picture of where the enemy was not, vice where it was actually located. Scouts could afford little more than momentary contact with V Corps's pickets. Clearly, if Stuart's command had probed in the direction of Mechanicsville, it risked contact with a large infantry force. Lee appreciated the limitations of the intelligence Stuart could provide and took other measures to fill in the gaps created by virtue of necessity.⁷⁵

Given this limitation, was it necessary for Stuart to stage such an extravagant display with his brigade? Could not the same information have been gained by a dedicated scouting program similar to that staged on McClellan's southern flank? Perhaps a commander less concerned with exploiting the full potential of a situation might have thought so. But, Stuart saw much more purpose to the prospects of riding around the Army of the Potomac than simple reconnaissance. It was a chance to prove himself and his command. It was a means to bolster sagging Confederate morale and deliver a lesson to, in his words, "an insolent foe." By the start of the Seven Days Campaign, he had risen above the status of commander of an under employed reserve force to that of a hero on par with "Stonewall" Jackson. In short, the "Ride Around McClellan" had been the opportunity of a lifetime. And it would become the standard against which all his future operations would be measured.

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CHAPTER 4

STUART BECOMES SEDUCED BY OPPORTUNISM

Stuart was still intoxicated by the success of the Chickahominy Raid when his Commanding General Robert E. Lee launched the Seven Days Campaign to end the seemingly inexorable Union advance upon the Confederate capital. Even Lee basked in what the public considered to be the brilliance of the cavalry's achievement. Stuart's commander was consequently less distracted by earlier misgivings Richmond's citizens and his soldiers had regarding his defensive preparations. His thoughts turned instead to preparing for an offensive, a counterattack to deal a blow to McClellan's northern flank, cut the Union line of communication to the Pamunkey River, and compel the Federals to abandon their lines around the eastern approaches to the city. To do so, Lee planned to concentrate as much of his army as he could on the northern side of the Chickahominy, above the northern end of Union General Fitz John Porter's V Corps position at Mechanicsville. He would combine the divisions of Generals Longstreet, D. H. Hill, and A. P. Hill with Stonewall Jackson's from the Shenandoah Valley, forming a force 55,800 strong against Porter's 28,100 Federals. The resultant five-to-three ratio was not ideal for a force faced with a frontal attack against prepared positions. But, Lee planned to improve his odds by combining the element of surprise, with an effort to bring Jackson's division in action on Porter's extreme right flank, effectively in the Union rear. His plan left a mere 28,100 Confederates, commanded by Generals Magruder and Huger, to defend Richmond against the remainder of McClellan's force south of the Chickahominy--more than 76,000 in number.¹

Stuart's initial role in the campaign was hardly as visible as the prominent part he had played in laying the groundwork for Lee's offensive. His brigade was to screen a part of the Confederate advance, maintaining a degree of secrecy for the approach of Stonewall Jackson from the direction of Ashland, 16 miles north of Richmond. More importantly, given the outcome of the first of the Seven Days battles, a large part of Stuart's force (including the brigadier himself) was tasked to guide Jackson's division into action over roads his brigade had traveled on 12 and 13 June during the Chickahominy Raid. For Lee's plan to succeed, an assault on the front and right flank of Porter's position by three divisions (Longstreet and the two Hills) had to be made nearly simultaneously with Jackson's attack upon the Union right flank and rear. Therefore, Jackson needed to be in his appointed place by a specific time when the battle commenced. Stuart's cavalry was the means by which he would be guided there. Lee's instructions for the campaign, General Orders No. 75 dated 24 June 1862, thus included the following assignment for Stuart's brigade:

General Stuart with the 1st, 4th, and 9th Virginia Cavalry, the cavalry of Cobb's Legion, and the Jeff Davis Legion, will cross the Chickahominy tomorrow and take position to the left of General Jackson's line of march. The main body will be held in reserve, with scouts well extended to the front and left. General Stuart will keep General Jackson informed of the movements of the enemy on his left and will cooperate with him in his advance.²

Lee's orders also directed Stuart to post the rest of his command on roads leading to the Confederate southern flank in the vicinity of White Oak Swamp. These regiments were to threaten any Union advance upon Magruder's and Huger's divisions with a small flanking counterattack of their own.

Jackson's foot-sore division left the Shenandoah Valley on 18 June, traveling a majority of the distance over the Virginia Central Railroad in 200-car relays. The Union Army had laid waste to the railroad south of Frederick's Hall, Virginia and Jackson's men were compelled to walk from that point, 50 miles north of Richmond (35 miles from

Ashland), to Mechanicsville. Stuart intercepted Jackson's column as it trudged past Ashland on the 25th of June. Their march had been difficult over confined, winding roads through dense forests. Jackson's troops had no maps to refer to and unlike the area they had left behind, they were unfamiliar with their surroundings. Hence, Stuart was a welcome sight. His acclaim was known to the Valley warriors and a cheer was raised when he reached the vanguard of the infantry column. But this was about all the satisfaction the brigadier would get out of this assignment. Despite Stuart's guiding hand, Jackson could not get his men into action as planned on 26 June.³

Stuart instructed his command to clear the roads ahead of the infantry and insure the Federal cavalry did not observe their movements. As they approached the Totopotomoy Creek, they found a small force of Federal cavalry defending the crossing the Confederates intended to use. The Federals were driven off, but the bridge over the creek had been burned. Stuart's troopers were compelled to repeat their feat of bridge construction from the Chickahominy Raid, something they accomplished in a mere 30 minutes over the much narrower Totopotomoy. Unfortunately, a battalion of Union infantry moved into position while this was being accomplished and Jackson's vanguard approached. A delay of almost two hours was suffered in driving them off.⁴

Another factor contributing to the slow pace of the infantry's advance was that the roads in the vicinity of the Totopotomoy were very narrow, forcing them to march in the same sort of long thin column that Stuart's force was compelled to utilize two weeks earlier. The division was strung-out over a distance of six miles, despite the fact its brigades simultaneously used three separate parallel routes. The pace was slower than Jackson's "foot cavalry" was accustomed to during their Valley campaigns and it took a considerable amount of time for the entire column to close after it reached its destination. Delays on the march caused Jackson's division to fall about six hours behind schedule and

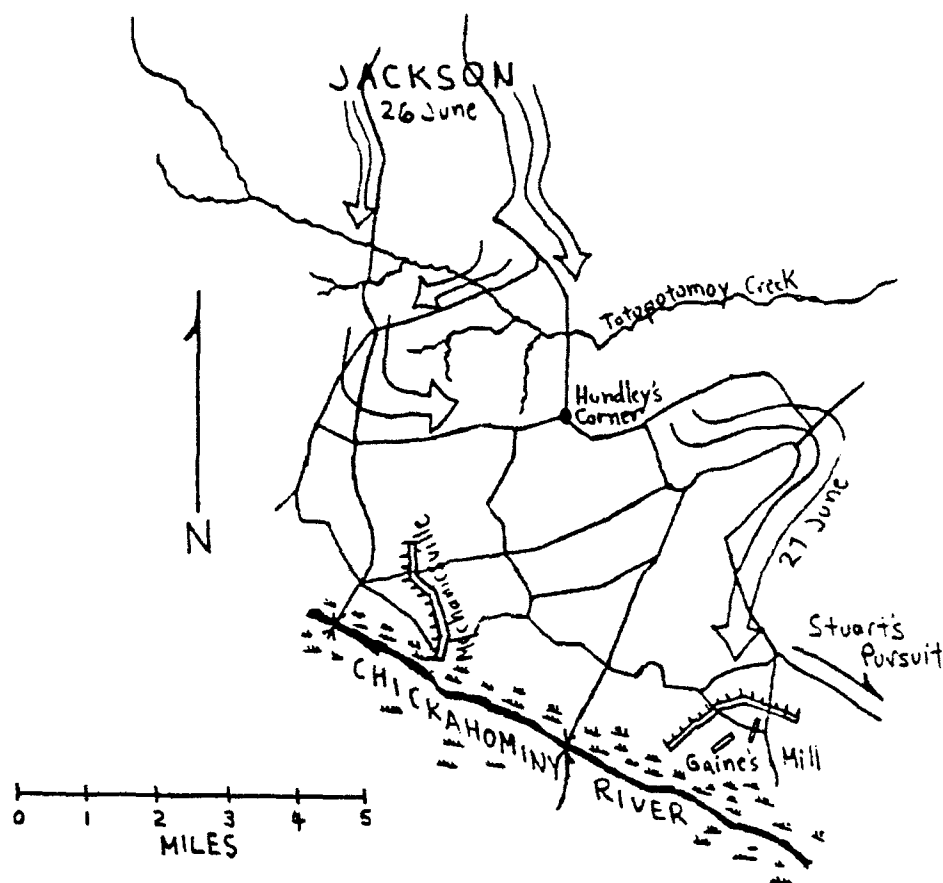


Fig 7. Stuart's Movements from 25 June to 27 June 1862.

unfortunately for Lee, his other division commanders did not wait for Stonewall to launch their attack.⁵

Jackson halted his column at Hundley's Corner at 5:00 PM on 26 June, three miles short of Mechanicsville. Here, he was in an ideal position to advance upon Porter's rear. A. P. Hill's division was already engaged and despite the fact this action was clearly audible to Jackson, he elected to stay put. Eventually, he ordered his division to set up camp for the night. Historians have long since attempted to explain why Jackson failed to come to the support of the rest of Lee's army that day. Some have suggested his judgment was clouded by fatigue, brought on by several days of hard riding with little sleep.⁶ But, it

was clear to those close to Jackson that day that he was confused, because events were unfolding contrary to Lee's battle plan as expressed by General Orders No. 75.⁷ No contact had been made with Confederate units to Jackson's right, where A. P. Hill was supposed to be. Without confirmation as to the position of Lee's other divisions or what the nature of the action Jackson was hearing late that afternoon, the hard-driving hero of the Shenandoah decided, rather uncharacteristically, to do nothing at all.

Stuart may have found the outcome of his endeavors that day particularly frustrating, but he gave no hint of such feelings afterwards. Jackson's division and its cavalry screen had failed to get into action at Mechanicsville. But, Stuart accomplished precisely what Lee had directed him to do in General Orders No. 75 on the 25th and 26th of June. The factors that had delayed Jackson were largely beyond his control. Had it not been for Stuart's guidance and efforts to screen Jackson's movements, the hero of the Shenandoah Valley might not have even approached within earshot of the battle on 26 June. *Stuart has been criticized for not establishing contact with A. P. Hill's forces, to effect the necessary rendezvous between them and Jackson.*⁸ But deciding to do so was hardly his prerogative in this situation, given Lee's directives to support Jackson and to watch Stonewall's flank opposite to where Hill's units were positioned. Since the cavalry was placed in a support relationship, Jackson could have directed Stuart to use one of his regiments for that purpose. Apparently, this did not occur to him.

Stuart's prospects to play a more decisive role in the next of the Seven Days battles were little better. As the Battle of Gaine's Mill opened on the afternoon of 27 June, Jackson's command slowly groped its way to the scene. McClellan had abandoned his lines at Mechanicsville and moved a few miles to the southeast to the vicinity of Cold Harbor, where new Union defenses were established. Stuart continued his efforts to screen Jackson's left flank during most of that day. The battle had been in progress for almost five hours before Stonewall's division got into action at 7:00 PM. The ground at

Gaine's Mill was ill-suited to cavalry employment in Napoleonic sense. In addition to the thick forests and undergrowth surrounding the battlefield, the Federal position was well-prepared on rising terrain. Stuart was quick to realize a head-on attack against the Union position would have been fool-hardy.⁹ Hence, just as he had at Manassas, Williamsburg, and Seven Pines, the cavalry commander again found himself placed in the idleness of reserve, to await developments on the battlefield.

Although his horse artillery played a visible role in supporting the advance of Jackson's infantry, there was only a single opportunity for the rest of Stuart's command to involve itself in the battle. As it became clear the Confederate assault at Gaine's Mill was succeeding, Stuart received word that elements of the Union infantry were in full retreat on a road leading southeast out of Cold Harbor. Off his regiments raced in full pursuit, but all they found for a distance of three miles was empty road. Again, he met with disappointment on the battlefield. Every time he had been involved in a major action, his regiments had been confined to the sidelines due to the nature of the fight, the terrain, or poor timing.

Stuart's diversion in racing down the road out of Cold Harbor caused him to miss witnessing an event he would have found most satisfying both professionally and personally. As the Confederate infantry broke through Union lines on the Federal left, Stuart's father-in-law Brigadier General Cooke took it upon himself to direct a charge of 250 troopers belonging to the 5th U. S. Cavalry in an attempt to blunt the penetration. Cooke's men were unable to do so and in fact, succeeded only in causing confusion in what had already developed into an infantry melee. The 5th Cavalry suffered heavy casualties. Fitz John Porter sternly rebuked Cooke for this impetuous act and following Gaine's Mill, the former frontier cavalry pioneer was relieved of his command and sent off to perform recruiting duty. As anxious as Cooke's son-in-law might have been to lead a bold charge that day, Stuart understood the limitations cavalry suffered in such a setting

against resolute infantry, who were being armed in increasing numbers with rifled muskets by 1862. Exploiting an enemy retreat was one thing, jumping into a determined infantry fray was quite another.¹⁰

Gainey's Mill was a costly Confederate victory and there was little satisfaction in either Lee's or Stuart's headquarters camps the night of 27 June. Lee had not succeeded in trapping the Union V Corps north of the Chickahominy and smashing it as he had hoped he might. Stuart had once again played the role of the observer and advisor, rather than active participant. Despite evidence of a general Union withdrawal from Gainey's Mill when dawn broke on the 28th of June, Lee was uncertain what McClellan's next move would be. While Confederate infantry pickets probed the approaches to the Chickahominy, Lee conferred with his division commanders and Stuart to determine what the next Confederate course of action ought to be. McClellan's intentions were foremost in Lee's mind and the first order of business for the Army of Northern Virginia was to determine what the Union Army was up to.¹¹

As Lee saw it, McClellan had three options. The Confederate commander was counting on his assessment that his Federal counterpart would not advance toward Magruder's and Huger's lines south of the Chickahominy. Instead, Lee felt that by temporarily withdrawing V Corps from the north side of the Chickahominy, the Union General might attempt to hold his line of communications with the Pamunkey River, falling back on the York River Railroad as necessary. The Federals could also try to fall back on a line parallel to the railroad, but south of it, down the Peninsula in the direction they had advanced earlier in May. Finally, McClellan might shift his base of supply from the York/Pamunkey Rivers, to the James River on the south side of the Peninsula. The second and third options required abandoning the large stockpiles of supplies at White House, a move the Confederates initially assumed the Federals would be reluctant to make.¹²

In fact, McClellan was willing to make such a sacrifice. In the aftermath of Gaine's Mill, he decided to withdraw Porter's V Corps from north of the Chickahominy and establish a new base on the James at Harrison's Landing--the third option in Lee's calculations. But, the Confederate commander had no way of knowing this on the morning of 28 June. His enemy had abandoned their positions at Gaine's Mill for parts unknown. Consequently, Lee dispatched about half of Jackson's force (8,000 men) under General Richard Ewell, in conjunction with Stuart's brigade, to make an armed reconnaissance from the Confederate camp at Cold Harbor to Dispatch Station on the York River Railroad. The rest of Lee's force situated near Gaines Mill would press forward to the south and attempt a crossing of the Chickahominy River if indeed McClellan was moving in that direction (which he was). Ewell's and Stuart's mission, according to Lee's battle report, was to seize the railroad and determine if the Federals intended to protect their line of communication north of the Chickahominy.¹³

Stuart interpreted his verbal orders from Lee on the morning of 28 June somewhat differently. His report of the day's activities submitted two weeks later indicated his brigade was to "strike for the York River Railroad at the nearest point, so as to cut the enemy's line of communication with the York and intercept his retreat."¹⁴ Neither commander discussed the command or supporting relationship Stuart had with Ewell that day. The operation began ostensibly as a combined-arms effort, with Stuart's cavalry leading the advance to Dispatch Station. Thereafter, Ewell's infantry and Stuart's cavalry operated independently, as each viewed their mission somewhat differently once the railroad was reached. Despite his seniority, Ewell was powerless to intercede on his own behalf. Lee apparently issued no direction regarding any support relationship for the cavalry relative to Ewell and Stuart was consequently given the opportunity to operate on his own that day.

Stuart and Ewell worked in concert with one another up to the point when they reached Dispatch Station. Stuart's force was somewhat larger than he had at his disposal during the Chickahominy Raid, totaling 1800 troopers and a section (two guns) of his horse artillery. Cobb's Legion led the advance, chasing a squadron of Federal cavalry guarding the railroad junction away before Ewell's vanguard approached the station. The cavalry got to work destroying supplies left behind at the station and tearing up the tracks and nearby telegraph lines. However, Stuart and Ewell soon discovered this effort to disrupt rail service to McClellan was unnecessary. As their reconnaissance probed westward down the rail line from Dispatch Station, it was discovered that the Federals had destroyed the large railroad span over the Chickahominy River and the nearby stage crossing at Bottom's Bridge. Furthermore, a large trainload of munitions had been purposely sent over the open brink by Union soldiers, which had resulted in a spectacular explosion. Couriers were sent back to Lee. There could be little doubt McClellan intended to abandon his line of communication to the Pamunkey River.¹⁵

This intelligence effectively eliminated the first of McClellan's options Lee had to consider, a movement down the York River Railroad toward White House. Ewell was content to await further orders at Dispatch Station, but Stuart was convinced his commander intended for him to do more than sit astride the railroad. Yet, even Stuart's version of Lee's orders for the operation contradicted the action he took next. The Union line of communication had been cut and it was clear the Federals were not retreating in the direction of White House. To someone like Ewell, there seemed to be little purpose in attacking a base the Federals now seemed so willing to abandon. Never-the-less, Stuart seemed intent on denying the Union Army as much of the supplies that it had cut itself off from intentionally. He assembled his brigade and rode off to investigate Federal activities in the direction of White House. Ewell did not approve, but that mattered little. Lee's oversight in not establishing a command and control relationship for the armed

reconnaissance prevented Ewell from intervening. As a result, given the latitude Lee's orders apparently offered Stuart, the Confederate commander lost track of his cavalry for the next 72 hours.¹⁶

One cannot rationalize Stuart's decision to raid White House on the basis of its contribution to the fulfillment of Lee's campaign plan. It was clear McClellan had already abandoned his Pamunkey logistics node. What encouraged Stuart to set off on a mission so far out of touch with the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia? He had been tempted

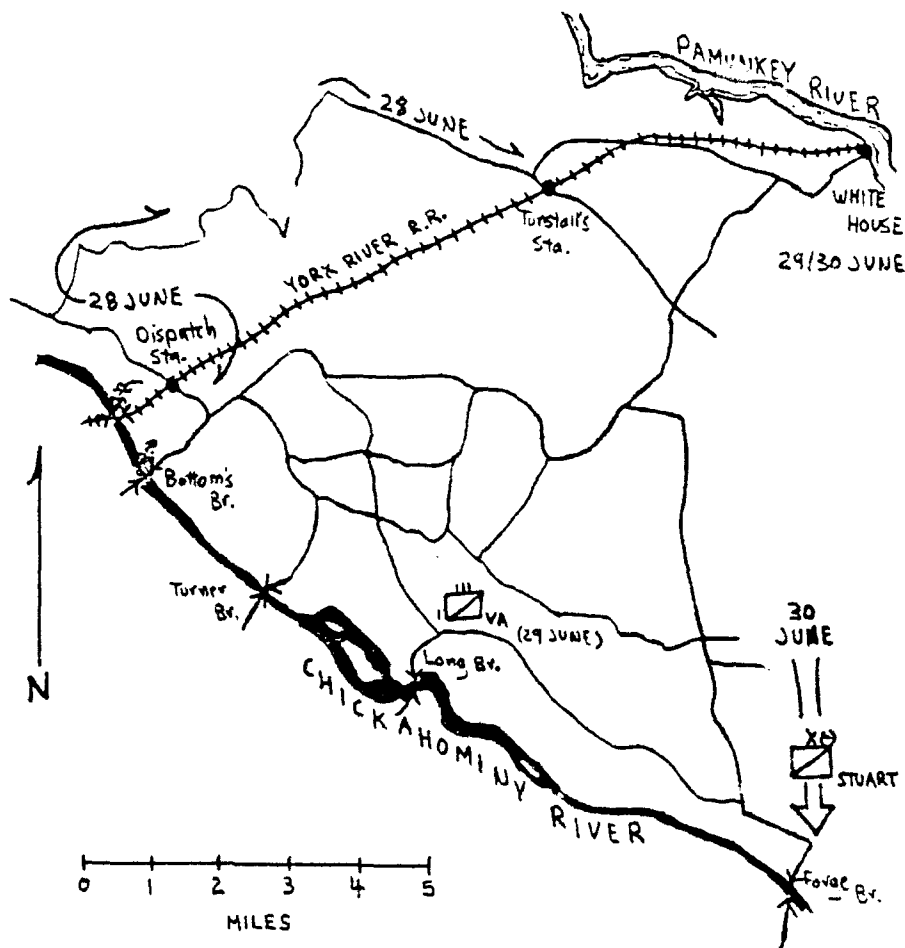


Fig 8. From Dispatch Station to the Chickahominy Crossings.

to prey upon White House during the Chickahominy Raid, but he then prudently decided such a venture would be too risky. Now he had his opportunity. There were risks associated with approaching the logistics base at that time, as Stuart anticipated the Federals would protect their efforts to withdraw their supplies or destroy them in place. But it was not the risk associated with the move that made Stuart's movement eastward from Dispatch Station a questionable decision, it was its lack of any substantive contribution it made to the developments in Lee's campaign plan. Historians have suggested Stuart wanted to revive the glory of two weeks before, striking out independently to deliver a blow on the Union rear.¹⁷ But the central problem associated with the raid that followed was that White House no longer constituted the Union rear.

Here was another example where Stuart, in the words he used for his Chickahominy Raid battle report, led an expedition "prosecuted farther than was contemplated" by Lee's original instructions. But nothing in Lee's verbal orders apparently precluded Stuart from striking out toward White House. Leaving Ewell's infantry behind, the Confederate cavalry trotted off eastward down roads paralleling the line of the York River Railroad. Their approach was monitored by small vedettes of Union cavalry, who were quick to withdraw at the approach of Stuart's column. By late afternoon on the 28th, the cavalry brigade reached Tunstall's Station, where they had clashed with a train two weeks earlier. Stuart noted with evident satisfaction that breastworks had been erected around the station as a result of his previous foray. These works had been abandoned, but a dismounted squadron of Union cavalry contested the Confederate advance just east of Tunstall's Station where the railroad crossed Black Creek. With the support of the section of horse artillery, the Confederates dispersed this relatively small force.¹⁸

Stuart was concerned a much larger force, perhaps 5,000 strong, guarded White House itself. As darkness approached on the evening of 28 June, he determined to wait

until morning to continue his advance. No word was sent back to Ewell or Lee regarding his progress or intentions. During the night of 28/29 June, in Stuart's words a "fearful conflagration raged" at White House.¹⁹ The Federals were laying waste to their vast stockpile of supplies, as evidenced by the brilliantly lit horizon east of Tunstall's Station and the great explosions filling the air. At dawn on the 29th, the brigade cautiously probed its way eastward to determine the extent of the Federals's destruction and what might be salvaged. Stuart advanced with a small party to reconnoiter Union defenses around White House, leaving the bulk of his brigade behind two miles to the west. What he found defending the supply base was not 5,000 soldiers, but a handful of stragglers and a single Union gunboat, the *U. S. S. Marblehead*. The stragglers were rounded up during the subsequent advance of the brigade, while Stuart prepared to deal with the menace in the river.²⁰

The engagement with the *Marblehead* figured prominently in contemporary accounts of Stuart's White House raid due to the comparative novelty of the affair. The cavalry commander's approach to this "naval" problem was relatively simple. He deployed 75 sharpshooters from the 1st Virginia Cavalry along the high banks of the Pamunkey River. When they fired upon the gunboat, the Federals assembled a landing party and prepared to send them ashore in long boats. Stuart called one of his artillery pieces forward and dispersed the small flotilla of armed sailors. The Federals hastened back to the *Marblehead*, weighed anchor, and steamed down the Pamunkey River in retreat. Stuart's artillery pursued the ship until it was obvious it did not intend to return. The brigade's attention then turned to the smoldering supply dump abandoned by McClellan's army.²¹

Huge stockpiles of armaments, foodstuffs, clothing, and a variety of accessories lay charred on the banks of the Pamunkey River. But, despite the best efforts of McClellan's men the night before, there were still enough provisions left for Stuart's

troopers to feast upon and replenish their exhausted rations. G. W. Beale, a trooper in the 9th Virginia Cavalry Regiment, described the scene as follows:

The mass of commissary, quartermaster, medical, and sutler's supplies not yet burned was enormous. Army wagons had been backed over the river bank until they formed an island, the wagon tongues in great numbers protruding out of the water. Muskets and carbines had been cast into the river until one could stand on them dryshod above the current, so large was the pile.²²

The Confederates completed the work of destruction begun (and nearly finished) by the Federals in the event Union forces should return to their former Pamunkey base. Five locomotives were disabled by artillery fire and new bonfires were stoked with materials the Confederates could not carry with them. Looting and burning continued for the rest of the day and into the night of the 29th. With the exception of one regiment, the 1st Virginia Cavalry, Stuart's entire command spent almost 24 hours savoring the fruits of their victory at White House.²³

Into the midst of these proceedings rode a courier from Lee, on the morning of 29 June. It seemed the Confederate Commanding General was keenly interested in what Stuart's observations had been and what his opinion was regarding McClellan's intentions. The cavalry commander had been out of touch with Lee for 24 hours. It is interesting to note at this point Lee had to seek Stuart out. One might expect such communications should have been initiated by Stuart instead. After all, even if it was Lee's desire that the cavalry deny access of White House to the Union, Stuart's basic function was still to provide the reconnaissance essential to the development of a sound Confederate course of action. Stuart's scouts were indeed roving the countryside, but the results of their observations were not being passed to higher headquarters by the cavalry commander. The courier also passed a directive from Lee for Stuart to "watch closely any movement of the enemy in [his] direction."²⁴ Under the circumstances, this almost seemed to be an afterthought.

Without hesitation, Stuart provided his assessment to Lee's courier that McClellan was retreating toward the James. His scouts had reported no activity on the Williamsburg Road, a route McClellan would have taken if he were retreating back down the Peninsula. If this was immediately obvious to the cavalry commander, one has to wonder why Stuart had not made a report of it earlier. By the time this information reached Lee on the 29th, he was already engaged with McClellan at the Battle of Savage's Station. In slow groping movements, the Confederate infantry had regained contact with the Union Army by crossing the Chickahominy in blind pursuit. Stuart's report was old news. McClellan had abandoned his line to the Pamunkey and thus had but two alternatives: a retreat down the Peninsula or a retreat toward the James. Stuart considered the latter move to be more likely, since it provided the Union Army with the quickest means to reestablish its logistics base.²⁵

Although he could hear the sounds of battle, the cavalry commander was unaware that the proceedings unfolding that day nearer to Richmond confirmed his suspicions regarding McClellan's intentions.²⁶ To fulfill Lee's desire to observe Union movements in Stuart's direction, the 1st Virginia Cavalry regiment was dispatched from White House to observe the Chickahominy crossings from Bottoms Bridge near Dispatch Station to Forge Bridge, where his brigade had crossed the river during the Ride Around McClellan. The rest of the brigade at White House completed its work of ravaging McClellan's abandoned supply base. Stuart's assignment to the 1st Virginia Cavalry did not so much provide them with an opportunity to observe Union movements, as it served to confirm his hypothesis the Federals were not retreating down the Peninsula. If McClellan intended to move down the Peninsula, he would have to use one or more of the crossings observed by the regiment.

This effort obviously served little purpose if Lee had already concluded the Federals were not making such a move. Lee realized this because he was continuing to

drive McClellan southward toward the James on the 29th and 30th of June. Although Stuart thought this was the case, he could not be certain because he was so far out of touch with the battles being waged 15-20 miles west of White House. From the time he left Dispatch Station the day before, until the last of the Seven Days battles was concluded at Malvern Hill on 1 July, Stuart was effectively out of the Army of Northern Virginia's fight.

On the morning of 30 June, Stuart endeavored get back into that fight. He left Cobb's Legion to guard what was left of White House and trotted off with four regiments to rendezvous with the 1st Virginia Cavalry. Most of his brigade headed 13 miles south for the Forge Bridge, arriving at the site where he crossed the Chickahominy two weeks before. The Union had re-erected a bridge there in the aftermath of the earlier raid. When Stuart arrived at 11:00 AM, he found the opposite bank of the river guarded by a combined force of infantry, artillery, and cavalry, whose full strength he could not initially determine. Colonel Fitz Lee, observing Long Bridge six miles upstream with a squadron of the 1st Virginia, also reported elements of the enemy on the southeast side of the Chickahominy. Fitz Lee also could not be certain of the Federal strength facing him, the only observation he could pass on to his brigadier was that he was confronted with Union pickets. These developments cast some doubt on Stuart's belief McClellan was retreating toward the James. The Union Army's interest in guarding the crossings seemed to indicate they might be leaving a movement down the Peninsula open as a viable option.²⁷

Stuart decided to press the issue and directed that two howitzers from his horse artillery be brought forward to support a forced crossing at Forge Bridge. He also dispatched a 12-pounder Napoleon along with a number of troopers to Fitz Lee, so the 1st Virginia could make a similar effort at Long Bridge. It took two hours for Capt John Pelham to get his howitzers into position 400 yards from the Federals, but when he did, he succeeded in driving a similar number of Union guns back out of reach to some hills

beyond the far bank. Pelham's attention then turned to the infantry defending the crossing and they too were soon dispersed. Stuart sent a reconnaissance party charging across Forge Bridge. Elements of Union cavalry present were driven off as well following a spirited duel with Stuart's troopers.²⁸

As the rest of Stuart's force began to cross Forge Bridge by late afternoon, the Federal artillery began a harassing fire from the protection of the hills beyond Forge Bridge. Pelham again moved his howitzers forward and forced the Union artillery back out of range again. Unfortunately for the Confederate cavalry, darkness approached before Stuart could dislodge the Federals from the protection of the high wooded terrain where they had retreated to. He was still uncertain as to their actual strength and intentions regarding Forge Bridge. However, he had succeeded in capturing the crossing and could most likely hold it against the Federals now facing him now if McClellan should decide to move his army in that direction. If that did occur, Stuart was in a position to fulfill the role he perceived he was given two days earlier by cutting off the retreat of the Union Army.²⁹

Fitz Lee had little trouble overcoming the Federal pickets on the far side of Long Bridge, despite the fact his Napoleon was disabled after firing a single shot. In questioning prisoners captured after the engagement, the commander of the 1st Virginia learned the Federals in front of him were also in the dark regarding the intentions of their high command. None of them knew what to expect and the purpose of their vigil remained a mystery. It became clearer, however, by mid-afternoon that Stuart's command was missing out on the decisive action of the day farther to the west. As Stuart forced the crossing at Forge Bridge, the sounds of battle echoed down the Chickahominy from Glendale, where the Army of Northern Virginia was attempting to converge on the Union Army in the midst of White Oak Swamp.³⁰

Stuart's action at Forge Bridge was not completed until sunset and he was therefore unable to determine what his next move ought to be before darkness set in. He was now more skeptical about his assessment of McClellan's intentions and decided it was best to continue to hold the bridges over the Chickahominy. However, no courier was sent to Lee to seek the Commanding General's guidance or further clarification of developments involving the rest of the Confederate Army. The cavalry chief elected to get a few hours rest and continue to his probe westward the next morning. He was awake at 3:30 AM, when a courier arrived from Lee's staff with instructions for the brigade. Stuart was to resume cooperation with the main body of the army, which by now had concluded the Battle of Glendale. Lee's orders included a recommendation that Stuart use the Grapevine Bridge, 18 miles up the Chickahominy River by road, to effect this rendezvous.³¹

If the Confederate Commanding General had a clearer picture where his cavalry was, he would not have made this suggestion. Grapevine Bridge was the most direct route one could take from *White House*, the last location of Stuart known to Lee when he wrote his orders on the evening of 30 June. The White House courier Lee had sent was the only contact made with Stuart since the cavalry departed Dispatch Station on 28 June. But, Stuart was now situated 13 miles to the south of the devastated Federal supply depot and he was already across the Chickahominy! From Forge Bridge, it was less than 10 miles by road to the closest elements of the Army of Northern Virginia at the Charles City Crossroads outside Glendale. The circuitous route Lee recommended totaled a distance of over 30 miles, including the distance Stuart would have to ride from the Grapevine Bridge south to Glendale. Based on the sounds of battle he had heard the previous afternoon, Stuart realized he did not have to ride as far northwest as the Grapevine crossing, but he still could not be certain of the precise location of Lee's army. The most prudent thing to do in his mind was to travel as far as Bottoms Bridge, about two thirds

the distance to Grapevine, and then make a move westward to find Lee. This was still twice the distance he actually needed to travel, but without a more accurate fix on Lee's position, Stuart was reluctant to chose any other route.³²

At a gallop, Stuart set out for Bottoms Bridge before dawn on 1 July. The rest of the brigade followed him at a slower pace on the north bank of the Chickahominy. When he reached Bottoms Bridge, Stuart turned westward and then south on the roads leading to White Oak Swamp. He did not find Lee's army in the vicinity of Charles City Crossroads, it had already set off in pursuit of McClellan further south. As it became clearer Stuart had not chosen the best route for his brigade, he retraced his path across Bottoms Bridge and intercepted his regiments enroute from Forge Bridge. He turned his column around and back they trotted to Forge Bridge. The troopers recrossed the Chickahominy, but before they headed westward in search of the Confederate Army, they happened to run into a detachment from the 2nd Virginia Cavalry, a unit directly attached to Jackson's Shenandoah Valley division. Jackson's cavalry provided Stuart with information regarding the position of the army now opening the Battle of Malvern Hill, the last of the major Seven Days engagements.³³

As much as Stuart might have wanted to support Lee and Jackson on the 1st of July, by the time he knew where to ride, it was too late to effectively intervene on their behalf. The battle opened at about 1:00 PM, but the cavalry brigade did not complete its march from Forge Bridge until an hour before sunset. The total distance Stuart had covered in riding to Bottoms Bridge, Charles City Crossroads, back to Forge Bridge, and then to Malvern Hill was 42 miles. Instead of listening to the dying echoes of the battle on the evening of 1 July, Stuart might have witnessed the opening barrage at Malvern Hill if he had stayed in closer contact with the Army of Northern Virginia and realized he was only 10 miles from Lee at the outset of the day. He reached Haxall's Landing on the James River at the extreme left of the Confederate line as the Federal Army withdrew

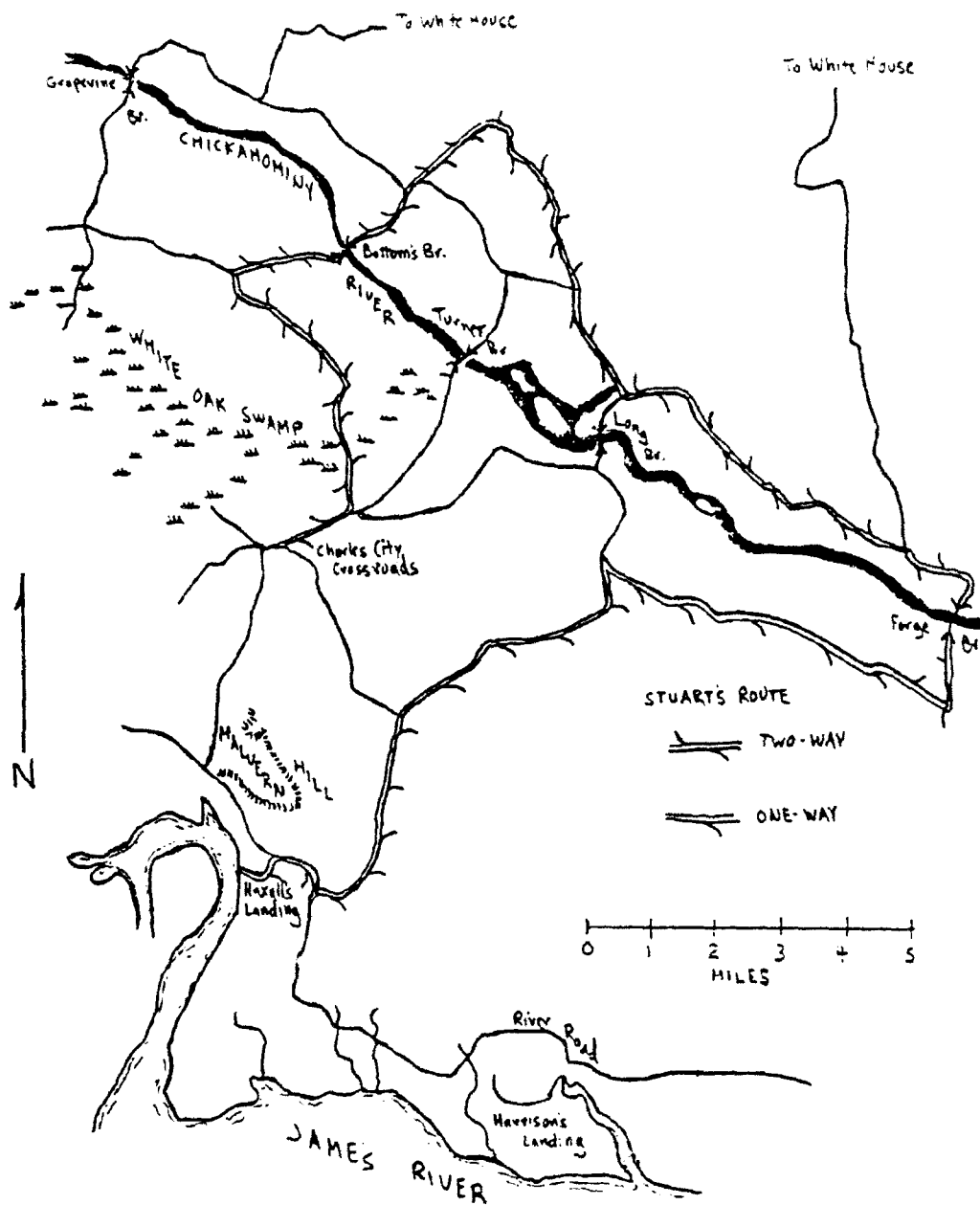


Fig 9. Stuart's Ride on 1 July 1862.

from the battlefield to Harrison's Landing, five miles southeast. By then, Lee's assault at Malvern Hill had been bloodily repulsed by the Union, but the Federals were left with little choice but to fall back upon their new base of operations on the James.³⁴

Stuart probably would have contributed little to the battle's outcome even if he had been there. The ground, defenses, and nature of the action were ill-suited to a cavalry charge in the Napoleonic sense. There was no full-scale retreat to exploit, although Stuart fancied his arrival at Haxall's Landing astride the Union's march from Malvern Hill hastened the Federal withdrawal. Contrary to Stuart's perception, no other Union or Confederate commander seemed to take much notice of his effort to gather-up Federal stragglers and the equipment left behind by McClellan's troops.³⁵ The cavalry commander tried to put the best possible face on his late arrival in his battle report, by recounting his brigade's long ride and the 11th hour activities it did take part in. Stuart's choice of Haxall's Landing as his destination did turn out to be fortuitous, for early the next day, that was precisely where Lee wanted him positioned.³⁶ Stuart was finally operating in concert with the rest of the army again. But, it had been almost four days since the Commanding General and his cavalry chief had shared the same view of their situation.

Stuart spent the 2nd of July reconnoitering the completion of the Union movement to Harrison's Landing. McClellan's intention to establish his army on the James under the shelter of the Union Navy's gunboats was no longer in doubt by that time. However, General Lee could not be certain precisely where the Federals intended to position themselves and establish their lines. As the Confederate infantry recouped from its exhausting series of battles, the cavalry probed the roads leading south, east, and west from Malvern Hill. Stuart's regiments also busied themselves in rounding-up more stragglers and abandoned weapons that day. The Union withdrawal had not been as orderly as General McClellan might have liked. By sunset on 2 July, Stuart was able to estimate the Federal position as lying somewhere south and slightly east of Malvern Hill.

He continued to dispatch scouts into the night to pin-point the Federal position and ascertain its vulnerabilities.³⁷

One of the individuals dispatched the night of 2 July was Stuart's chief of artillery, Capt Pelham. In addition to sharing the task of locating the Union Army with the other scouts Stuart sent off, Pelham's mission was to find a location where artillery fire might be directed against the Federals if they intended to use the River Road paralleling the James as an avenue of escape. During the night, Pelham sent word back to Stuart that he had found the Union Army encamped at Harrison's Landing on the James, near the Westover plantation home of the Byrd family. What was more, Pelham had discovered an ideal location where fire could be directed against the Federal camp and he recommended that a Confederate force be sent immediately to take possession of that ground. Stuart sent word of Pelham's report back to Jackson and Lee and assembled his brigade. The 9th Virginia Cavalry regiment was posted on the River Road to protect Stuart's northern flank from the possibility of Union cavalry intrusions. Every other trooper who was not needed to man an outpost followed the brigadier to Evelington Heights, where John Pelham was keeping a watchful eye on a vast sea of Union campfires below at Harrison's Landing.³⁸

McClellan had chosen to encamp his army on a plain astride the James River two and a half miles long, and a mile wide. Harrison's Landing had been cleared of trees for cultivation and from Evelington Heights, the entire Union Army could be seen in a single glance. The heights Pelham had found were past the eastern end of Harrison's Landing, on the grounds of another plantation home, Evelington, the home of Edmund Ruffin--a staunch Virginia secessionist who had reputedly fired the first shot on Fort Sumter. Ruffin's home stood on rising terrain about 100 feet above the level of Harrison's Landing. Herring Creek, a tributary of the James, formed a moat 100 yards wide between Evelington Heights and Harrison's Landing, making Pelham's location very defensible from a Federal attack. McClellan had recognized the value on this ground and on 2 July

directed that defenses be erected to deny its access from the Confederates.³⁹

Unfortunately for the Union commander, nobody had gotten around to doing so and all that faced Stuart when he arrived after sunrise on the 3rd was a squadron of Federal cavalry.

This force was easily driven-off by Stuart's regiments. The brigade was then put into motion digging shallow breastworks on the banks of Herring Creek to contest any Union advance across the water. As this work was in progress, Stuart surveyed the scene. Pelham's assessment had been accurate. The closest Union camps were a mere 300 yards away. Prisoners captured from the heights and local residents confirmed McClellan's entire army had settled under the protective guns of the Federal Navy at Harrison's

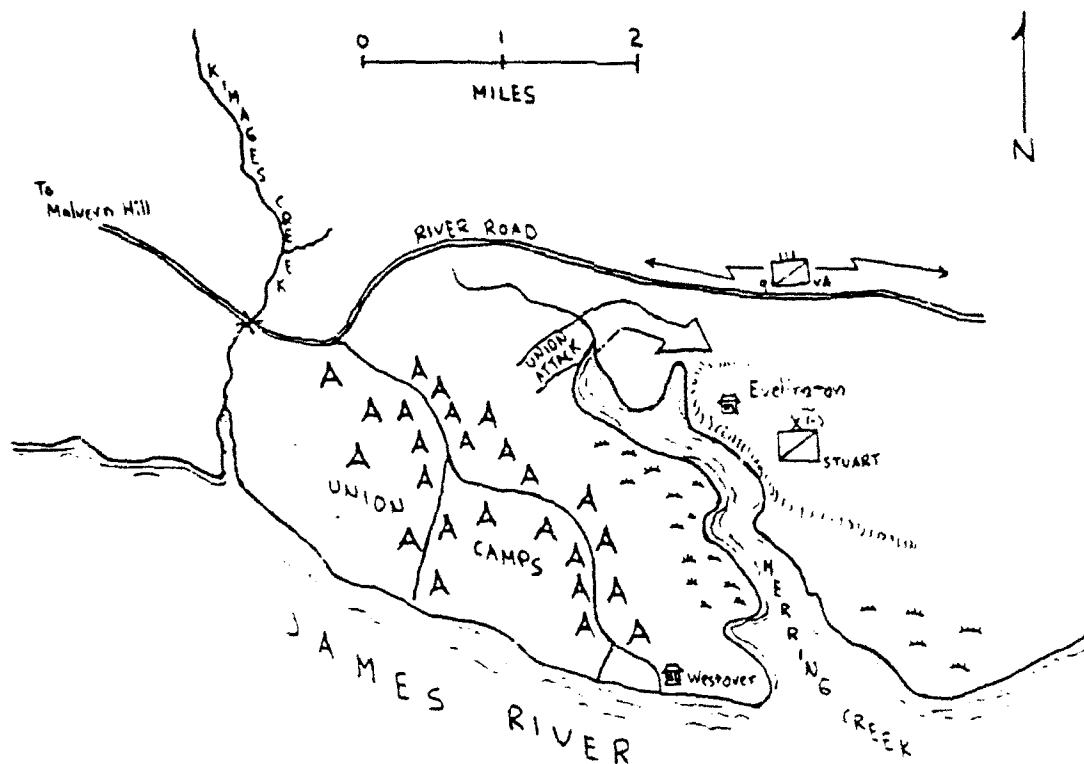


Fig 10. Harrison's Landing and Evelington Heights.

Landing. But the gunboats could not reach Stuart's position, whereas he commanded a clear shot at almost the entire Union Army. The temptation to take immediate advantage of the situation was overwhelming.⁴⁰

Elisha Hunt Rhodes was one of the Union soldiers at the eastern end of Harrison's Landing that morning when the first of Pelham's howitzer rounds fell amidst Federal ranks weary from a week of continuous fighting. He noted most of the Federals were trying to catch a few winks of well-deserved sleep and therefore little notice had been paid to the developments on Evelington Heights up until the point Stuart decided to single-handedly open fire on the Union Army.⁴¹ Pelham's lone howitzer was employed for the bombardment and a new weapon that had been assigned to Stuart's brigade was brought out for its first and last debut in the Army of Northern Virginia--the Congrieve Rocket Battery. The Congrieve Rockets were fired from a gun carriage and delivered in form of incendiary warhead with the colorful description "liquid damnation." When fired, the rockets shrieked in a loud and intimidating manner. But much to the Confederates's dismay, although the rockets seemed initially to fly in the direction they were aimed, once they hit the ground or some other obstacle, their flight path became unpredictable. A few even rebounded back toward Evelington Heights! Pelham delivered far more accurate fire with his gun, yet neither the howitzer nor the rockets succeeded in doing much more than setting some tents on fire and causing panic amongst Federal pack animals.⁴²

The impact of Stuart's bombardment was felt more heavily at McClellan's headquarters than these meager results might have indicated. It was immediately obvious to the Federal commander that his directives from the day prior had not been carried out and he ordered a division forward to recapture the heights. Meanwhile, Stuart had sent word back to Lee to send infantry and artillery forward to Evelington so the ground could be held against an anticipated counterattack. He received notice in return that Jackson's and Longstreet's divisions were enroute, but not until Pelham's bombardment had been

going on for some time and initial efforts were being made by the Federals to challenge Stuart. With the advance of the Federals and a lack of reinforcements, it soon became clear the decision to shell the Union encampment had been impetuous, although nobody in Stuart's command ever admitted so afterward.⁴³

As Pelham switched his attention to thwarting the Union approach, Stuart found he was being flanked on his north side. Union troops had crossed Herring Creek above Stuart's position and he now had to extend his lines across Evelington's northern approaches to meet this new threat. By early afternoon, the Federals succeeded in moving artillery of their own into position across the creek. Stuart held off the Federals for five hours, from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM, when he received word Longstreet's closest units were still seven miles off. Apparently, the Confederate infantry had been led astray during their march to Evelington. Stuart's situation was now desperate. Reinforcements were still hours away and he was running low on ammunition. He held out until Pelham fired his last round and then reluctantly withdrew his command from Evelington Heights.⁴⁴

While this episode has captured little attention from most historians of the Seven Days Campaign, it was potentially the most decisive action the Confederate cavalry took part in during the week of 26 June - 3 July 1862. But, the cavalry was left with little to show for its efforts. Their stand at the heights had been gallant, but the Federals moved into position in force on the night of 3 July and Longstreet's infantry was unable to drive them off the next morning. What could have been a golden opportunity for the Confederate Army was lost when Pelham's howitzer and the Congreve Rockets announced the arrival of J. E. B. Stuart. As Lee's Adjutant-General, Walter H. Taylor, remembered: "Those heights in our possession, the enemy's position was altogether untenable, and he was at our mercy; unless they could be recaptured his capitulation was inevitable. Half a dozen shells from Stuart's battery quickly demonstrated this."⁴⁵ One of McClellan's division commanders at Harrison's Landing, Brigadier General Silas Casey,

agreed with this Confederate assessment of Evelington Heights. In his testimony to the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War a year later, Casey recalled: "On the 3rd of July the heights were taken possession by our troops, and works of defense commenced, and then, and not until then, was our army secure in its position."⁴⁶

Stuart's battle report of his brigade's activities during the Seven Days Campaign is every bit as colorful as the one he produced for the Chickahominy Raid. It was a lengthy narrative in comparison to some of those composed by Lee's other subordinate commanders, Stuart apologizing that "the very extended nature of operations of the cavalry [had] made this report necessarily long."⁴⁷ It was primarily tactical in nature, that is, it dwelled upon the details of various individual and small unit actions, instead of relating his activities to the operational movements of the Army of Northern Virginia. Prominent among the events recounted in Stuart's text were the reconnaissance performed for Jackson on 25/26 June, the White House Raid launched from Dispatch Station on 28 June, the battle at White House with the Federal ironclad, the engagements at the Chickahominy bridges on 30 June, the long ride of 1 July, and Evelington Heights. In recounting the events of 26 June to 10 July, Stuart was not sparing in his praise for a number of individuals in his command.

There were indications in his report that the cavalry commander took considerable pride in the accomplishments of his command as a whole as well. However, his evaluation of its substantive contributions to the outcome of the Seven Days Campaign was limited. His report closed with the assertion: "My command captured several thousand prisoners and arms, the precise number it being impossible to ascertain. The detachment of cavalry left at White House secured much valuable public property...."⁴⁸ This, in summary, was all he had to show for his "extended operations." He alludes to expectations of "great results anticipated from [his] late expedition,"⁴⁹ as if the Chickahominy Raid and White House Raid were inevitably linked somehow. But nowhere

in his report, except in his discussion of his brigade's role during the waning moments of Malvern Hill, does Stuart credit his command with significantly influencing the outcome of the campaign.

Stuart realized his opportunities to play a decisive role on the battlefield were limited. His analysis in this regard focused on the difficulties presented by the Peninsula's geography and the nature of McClellan's movements:

No opportunity occurred, however, for an overwhelming charge; a circumstance resulting first from the nature of the positions successfully taken by the enemy in woods or behind swamps and ditches, he taking care to change position under cover of night, the distance being so short--only fifteen miles--as to be marched in one night. Added to this was the uncertainty of whether the enemy would attempt the passage of the Chickahominy where I awaited him, or under cover of a demonstration.... he would gain the James. The country being obscurely wooded and swampy his facilities for effecting the latter were great.⁵⁰

No argument can be made with the contention that the nature of the ground and Federal defenses implied cavalry action in the Napoleonic sense was ill-suited to the Seven Days battlefields. Stuart's father-in-law provided conclusive proof of this point at Gaine's Mill. But, what of the second of Stuart's concerns, the issue of uncertainty? What can be said of his inability to influence the movements of McClellan's army or provide better intelligence to his commander due to this factor?

In an area where Stuart had excelled most in prior operations, he fell far short of his own expectations during the Seven Days Campaign if one is to read between the lines of his battle report. In the Shenandoah Valley during the previous summer, he had given J. E. Johnston an indispensable view of Union movements and intentions. He had maintained a constant vigil over the approaches to Washington the previous summer, developing a network of outposts and spies that anticipated every Union move. Lee himself felt compelled to write a congratulatory order for his reconnaissance of the Union Army provided by the Chickahominy Raid. While Lee might have appreciated Stuart's

hard riding and gallantry, no such special congratulations were forth-coming for the cavalry after the Seven Days Campaign. The reason for this was simple. What Lee valued most about Stuart was what was most distinctively lacking in his performance that week.

From the time Stuart rendezvoused with Stonewall Jackson near Ashland on 25 June, to the time he left Ewell at Dispatch Station three days later, the cavalry had worked closely in concert with Lee's army. The difficulty Jackson had in negotiating the roads to Mechanicsville could not be attributed to the cavalry, indeed, his infantry would have found it even more difficult without Stuart. Stuart's force might have performed a more valuable service if it could have been used to effect a link-up between Jackson's and A. P. Hill's divisions prior to Mechanicsville. Yet, such a determination was rightfully the domain of Lee or Jackson, not the cavalry commander. Stuart was acquainted with Jackson, but was not as familiar with him as he was with his Commanding General Lee. If Stuart had thought of linking-up with Hill, he did not pursue the matter with Jackson with the sort of vigor he did regarding the impending Chickahominy Raid with Lee on 10 June. No discussion with Jackson about changing the nature of the cavalry's mission is mentioned in any account of 26 June's events.

Stuart's close cooperation with the Army of Northern Virginia ended at Dispatch Station, when he left Ewell behind and headed east for White House. His decision to do so followed three days of inconclusive activities for his brigade. The memory of his Chickahominy Raid success was still fresh in his mind. A desire to play a more prominent part in the campaign significantly influenced Stuart's move. It is difficult to rationalize his decision otherwise. Lee's orders, whether one accepts the Commanding General's version or his cavalry commander's, did not suggest he wanted the cavalry to prey upon Union logistics. If Lee wanted Stuart to cut off the line of retreat of the Union Army, the cavalry's efforts would have been better directed at interdicting the ponderous supply train that was put into motion by McClellan that day in the direction of the James.

Stuart himself had concluded the Federals were abandoning White House. His decision to strike in its direction, instead of more properly determining the true line of McClellan's retreat, was a key element in his failure to play the sort of visible role he really desired in the situation. In other words, his move on White House had a self-defeating purpose behind it.

Stuart's failure to provide any useful intelligence to Lee for the next three days stemmed from his decision to head in a direction perpendicular to the operational movements of the campaign--fifteen miles off the axis of McClellan's retreat. It also resulted from his failure to stay in touch with his Commanding General. The cavalry commander did attempt to determine if McClellan was withdrawing down the Peninsula by putting his scouts out on the regions backroads on 28 and 29 June. But he showed little inclination to share their results of their observations with Lee, perhaps because they were so inconclusive. Stuart postured himself to intercept a move by the Union down the Peninsula after preying upon White House, recalling the directives he thought Lee had given him as he set out for Dispatch Station on 28 June. Yet, he himself had already concluded McClellan was not moving in that direction. If Lee truly wanted Stuart to keep a watchful eye over the Union Army as his courier suggested on 29 June, the cavalry commander needed to send more than one regiment westward that day and whatever force he did dispatch should have probed farther than the Chickahominy crossings.

Clearly, keeping track of McClellan's movements was not foremost on Stuart's mind. He decided to raid White House having witnessed the Federals destroying their supply base from Tunstall's Station on the night of 28 June and then resolved to remain at the shattered depot with the majority of his force the following evening. This put him out of touch with operations to the west for nearly 48 hours. When he finally left White House for the Chickahominy crossings, he then spent another 24 hours attempting to block a retreat that was headed in another direction entirely, some ten miles distant. How

ironic it seems that Lee had a much better idea of what McClellan was up to by the morning of 29 June than Stuart did. When the Commanding General suggested Stuart begin to "cooperate" with the army again on the night of 30 June/1 July, the brigadier's lack of situational awareness was manifest in his circuitous 42 mile ride to Malvern Hill.

Stuart immediately resumed effective cooperation with the Army of Northern Virginia once he caught up with it at the conclusion of the last of the major Seven Days battles. His report recounts:

It is a remarkable fact worthy of the Commanding General's notice that in taking the position that I did in rear of Turkey Creek [in the vicinity of Malvern Hill] I acted entirely from my own judgment, but was much gratified the next day on receiving his note to find that his orders were to the same effect, though failing to reach me till next morning, after its execution.⁵¹

Indeed, Stuart was quite capable of recognizing where he was needed most when operating in conjunction with the army. His activities on 2 July resulted in the discovery of the Union encampment at Harrison's Landing and the vulnerability of their position to fire from Evelington Heights. From the point in time he arrived near Malvern Hill, to the moment he ordered Pelham to open fire from the heights on 3 July, he performed precisely in the manner best suited for the circumstances. For 36 hours, he again put Lee's eyes on the enemy and provided the sort of intelligence that could have worked decisively in the Confederates's favor. Stuart's ability to grasp the importance of local topography and the enemy's dispositions was evident in his seizure of Evelington Heights, although the credit for its discovery rightfully went to his artillery chief Pelham. Imagine what service the cavalry might have performed if it had been around following the battles of Savage's Station or Glendale.

Stuart might have delayed Porter's retreat across the Chickahominy on 28 June if he had turned his attention westward down the York River Railroad, instead of east toward White House.⁵² He had already proved himself to be adept at burning bridges as

well as building them during the Chickahominy Raid and his reconnaissance for Jackson. If such an effort proved to be too risky, he could have raided McClellan's supply train consisting of some 3800 wagons and ambulances and 2500 head of cattle.⁵³ This enormous column took more than two days to close on Harrison's Landing from the vicinity of Union encampments near the Chickahominy. The roads leading south to the James were narrow. Crossings had to be constructed by Union engineers in White Oak Swamp to provide passage. Union efforts to reestablish a base of operations on the James could have been severely hampered by Stuart's regiments. Instead, McClellan's rear area operations were unimpeded by any Confederate designs. His army's survival was a credit to the exertions of his engineers and quartermasters.

Stuart did not prove himself to be consistently capable of perceiving the cavalry's proper role in the operational movements of the Army of Northern Virginia. He understood the limitations imposed by the terrain and enemy defenses. He carried out unambiguous orders skillfully. But, in situations where he lacked clear guidance or an established command relationship with those he supported, Lee's cavalry chief made two fateful errors during the campaign at Dispatch Station and Evelington Heights. In the latter case, it was even clearer what the results might have been if the Union Army had not been tipped off to Stuart's presence. Walter Taylor imagined Lee would have dictated terms of surrender to McClellan if the heights had been secured by the Confederates.⁵⁴ Perhaps this was overstating the issue. In the end, the episode at Evelington Heights faded into obscurity as an opportunity lost in the shadow of the previous week's momentous events. Richmond was freed from the Union's grasp. However, McClellan's army escaped destruction to await future developments in the progress of the war.

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³³Blackford, p. 78.

³⁴Freeman, p. 639

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³⁶O. R., XI, part 2, pp. 518-519.

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³⁸H. B. McClellan, p. 83.

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⁴⁷*O. R.*, XI, part 2, p. 521.

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⁵²General W. W. Averell in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, edited by Underwood Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, 4 vols, (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1956), Vol 2, p. 433.

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CHAPTER 5

OPPORTUNITY AS A MISGUIDED VISION

If R. E. Lee had been disappointed in the decisions Stuart had reached at Dispatch Station and Evelington Heights, he did not openly express it. In fact, a promotion for his brigadier of cavalry to major general was forthcoming within three weeks of Stuart's closing engagement near Harrison's Landing. The young general figured prominently in the reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia undertaken in the aftermath of R. E. Lee's first great offensive. Stuart's promotion coincided with an expansion of Lee's cavalry to divisional strength, initially composed of two brigades under Fitz Lee (promoted himself to brigadier) and Wade Hampton. Jackson's Shenandoah Valley cavalry, the "Laurel Brigade," was added to Stuart's division as well in August 1862, rounding-out his force to a total of three brigades. The resources and manpower at the new major general's disposal more than doubled in the space of six weeks.¹

What were the aspects of the cavalry's performance during the Seven Days Campaign that encouraged Lee to demonstrate such confidence in his mounted arm? Some individuals on Lee's staff, Walter Taylor in particular, had mixed feelings concerning Stuart's operational debut for his new Commanding General. Other commanders, like Ewell, might have doubted the substantive value of Stuart's operations from the time he departed Dispatch Station on 28 June, until 1 July when he belatedly reached the field at Malvern Hill. Lee's actions clearly indicated he felt otherwise. He showed little reluctance to reassign subordinates whose performance was mediocre during the Seven Days, as Generals Huger and Magruder soon discovered. But, those he had grown to trust were

given increasing levels of responsibility, despite the fact 20th century scholars have found their performance during the Seven Days to have been somewhat lackluster. Jackson, like Stuart, has been criticized for failing to measure up to expectations in the campaign and yet he would rise to become one of Lee's two corps commanders during the reorganization of that summer.²

Stuart's rise in the aftermath of the Seven Days came primarily as a result of his success at planning, organizing, and executing operations, regardless of the actual contribution those operations may have made to the campaign. Lee needed effective leaders and was impatient with those he could not trust with independent command, like Huger and Magruder. Stuart was eager and gifted in his ability to inspire those he led. He had risen from company to brigade command in little more than a year. His ability to handle his growing responsibilities was demonstrated by his adept handling of his 1200 man force during the Chickahominy Raid--at that time the largest mounted operation ever conducted on the American continent. He had whipped his regiment of volunteers into shape within weeks the previous summer during Johnston's Shenandoah Valley operations. It was Stuart's vision and leadership that had centralized all of Johnston's cavalry under one command in the winter of 1861/62. He had orchestrated its training regimen and developed its system of outposts outside of Washington D. C. In short, it was Stuart that had molded Lee's cavalry brigade into a cohesive fighting force by the outset of the Peninsula Campaign.³

Years of experience in independent cavalry operations on the frontier had prepared Stuart for the tasks before him during the first year of the war. While he himself had led nothing larger than a company in the field, he was intimately familiar with all the intricacies of putting a full regiment into the saddle for operations that lasted weeks at a time. He was particularly attuned to the logistical needs surrounding long-range mounted expeditions, due to his initial assignment as a regimental quartermaster in Kansas. This

may in part serve to explain his interest in preying upon Union supplies during the Seven Days Campaign. Stuart understood rationing and arming a brigade-level force in the field normally required the accompaniment of cumbersome wagon trains. His own wagons and those he captured from the Federals during the Chickahominy Raid ended up slowing the pace of his regiments during the latter portion of that ride. If he could feed his men and replace some of their outmoded weapons by capturing enemy resources, so much the better. He had set out for his first raid and the return to White House two weeks later with no more than three days rations. Union stockpiles replenished what was carried in his troopers saddlebags when these supplies neared exhaustion.

In making the leap from company to brigade command, Stuart was fortunate to have several very capable subordinates serving under him. His regimental commanders during the Seven Days Campaign proved to be as reliable in handling their formations as their brigadier was in marshaling his cavalry force as a whole. Stuart could be confident that he could assign one of his regiments or legions an independent objective as part of a larger operation. He did so often and was rarely disappointed in their performance during the campaign. His three formation commanders during the Chickahominy Raid, Fitz Lee, Rooney Lee, and William Martin all achieved the rank of major general during the war. Fitz Lee eventually rose to command his uncle's entire cavalry corps by late 1864. Rooney Lee was second in command of R. E. Lee's forces during their retreat to Appomattox in 1865, not a particularly auspicious end to his military career, but one that pointed to the confidence others maintained in his potential. Martin eventually moved west during the war and commanded a division of cavalry under Major General Joseph Wheeler, another brilliant Confederate cavalry leader of Stuart's caliber. Unfortunately, Martin's command relationship with Wheeler was not as smooth as the one he enjoyed with Stuart. The one-time lieutenant colonel of the Jeff Davis Legion ended his forays in the saddle in 1864, after a falling out with his superior in the aftermath of the Atlanta Campaign.

Such able subordinates allowed Stuart to maintain the overall cohesion of his brigade during the Chickahominy and White House raids, even as he assigned separate missions to his individual regiments. His trust in his commanders was such that he could afford to focus his attention instead on the details of planning, preparing, and executing his operations. Stuart based his forays deep into the Union rear on extensive prior knowledge of the enemy forces he would meet, as well as their approximate disposition and potential vulnerabilities. He owed a great deal to the success he achieved in thwarting Union opposition and in locating their major lines of operation to the effectiveness of the spies and scouts he had organized within his brigade. He also took advantage of the local inhabitants in his organization, who ensured Stuart could navigate the bewildering, sometimes uncharted backroads of the Peninsula. His Federal pursuers were not as fortunate in this regard and were compelled to follow the marks Stuart's brigade left behind during the Chickahominy Raid. Hence, he could always stay a few steps ahead of his opposition.

Stuart's keen grasp of the threat before him was based on the information his network of spies and scouts provided, along with his ability to distill their data into intelligence that correctly anticipated Union moves. He protected his intelligence jealously, which ensured that some of his more covert sources would not be revealed and served to establish a sort of mystique with his men. Only Stuart was armed with the complete picture of what confronted his command. If the brigadier had an abiding trust in the ability of his subordinates and troopers, they in turn learned to develop a powerful sense of faith in Stuart's faculties to make crucial, timely decisions when they were in harm's way. It mattered little to them how Stuart developed his intuitions. Their brigadier could be counted on to get them out of tight spots with minimal casualties and tangible rewards to show for their efforts. Certainly, the latter point was no minor consideration with some of the private soldiers under his command, who were not as well equipped or

fed as their Union foes. Stuart satiated their material needs and in the aftermath of his first raid, brought glory to their ranks.

J. E. Johnston and R. E. Lee came to rely on the comprehensive and incisive intelligence their cavalry chief provided. This same information was used as the basis to launch his deep operations. When Stuart departed the Mordecai Farm on 12 June, he did so with a clear picture of the opportunities that were present on the Union flanks to infiltrate into and safely escape from his enemy's rear. His network of spies and scouts enabled him to develop a vision of an operation bold in conception, but perhaps not so audacious in its execution as its participants may have imagined. Stuart knew what to expect from his opposition. His decision to ride around McClellan's army was based on prior knowledge of what to expect south of White Oak Swamp, where his scouts and local inhabitants moved freely, unhindered by Federal forces. The Chickahominy Raid, in turn, provided the basis for his subsequent movement against White House on 28/29 June. Stuart's ability to seize the abandoned Federal supply depot as easily as he did was based on his familiarity with Union rear area operations. Of course, the Army of the Potomac facilitated his efforts in this case by not guarding White House with the sort of force Stuart imagined he might have faced there.

There was no lack of praise for Stuart by many of his contemporaries, some of whom were instrumental in ensuring his actions received good press. His raids had stirred the emotions of Confederate citizens and soldiers alike, bolstering their morale at a time when any good news was welcomed enthusiastically. Certainly there was something to be said for the issue of raising Confederate spirits, when their enemy was initiating parleys to discuss the surrender of Richmond.... when at best, soldiers in the trenches could only look forward to a long, hot siege. Unfortunately, it is now difficult to measure just how significant this might have been to the outcome of the Seven Days Campaign. Indeed, the Chickahominy Raid was not the only sensation to hit Richmond in June 1862, prior to

Lee's offensive. Jackson's Shenandoah Valley victories were even more prominent in newspaper headlines of the time. Yet, Stuart's raid hit a little closer to home for citizens of the capital and served to renew their confidence that the city could be successfully defended by Lee's forces.⁴

Public acclaim for Stuart's Chickahominy Raid relieved some of the pressure on R. E. Lee to take more affirmative action to counter McClellan's advance upon Richmond. The Commanding General probably appreciated this development as it allowed him to focus on the development of his campaign without being as concerned with external influences he might have been otherwise.⁵ Stuart also shaped the future operations of the Army of Northern Virginia in more concrete, tangible terms. He provided his commander with sound, incisive assessments of the Union Army. Stuart provided Lee with an accurate Union order of battle (thanks to his spies), an in-depth view of McClellan's rear army operations--including his depots and lines of supply, the most reliable information either army had regarding navigation of the Peninsula's backroads, and perhaps most importantly, discovery and confirmation of critical weaknesses in Union dispositions. This information was essential to the development of a sound game plan to defeat McClellan's designs on the Confederate capital. Indeed, that Union general might have wished to have as effective an intelligence organization as Lee had in Stuart's brigade. McClellan's Pinkerton Agency spies inflated its count of Confederate soldiers defending Richmond by a factor of two or three to one over the actual number present.⁶

It might be argued Stuart's force provided all of this crucial intelligence to Lee even before the Chickahominy Raid was launched, when the activities of the spy Conrad, scouts infiltrating behind Union lines south of White Oak Swamp, and Mosby's reconnaissance are considered. The raid merely served to confirm what elements of Stuart's command had already reported, although a more complete picture of Union logistics was undoubtedly gained during the expedition. Some of Stuart's more discreet,

unobtrusive activities may have contributed as much if not more to Lee's campaign than the Chickahominy Raid did. Certainly the risks when viewed from the Commanding General's perspective associated with scouting were almost inconsequential, in comparison to dispatching 1200 troopers deep into the rear of enemy territory.

However, there were merits other than intelligence value to Stuart's foray into McClellan's rear area with his brigade. He was provided with his first genuine opportunity to size up his Union adversaries in an operation that would become a trademark for the Confederate cavalryman. Stuart gained a great deal of confidence in his ability to deal with Federal efforts to check his movements. He learned that if he kept moving and used unforeseen routes of march, he could easily out-pace his adversary. Eventually, Stuart became overconfident in his ability to deal with Union cavalry, leading to set-backs like those suffered a year after the Chickahominy Raid at Brandy Station. But in the summer of 1862, Stuart had learned how to literally ride rings around his opposition. It would give him a freedom of maneuver crucial to the success of his future cavalry deep operations.⁷

Stuart's clear superiority in dealing with his opposition during his "lightning strikes" compelled McClellan to commit resources and troops to more effectively protect his vital line of communication to the Pamunkey River. It distracted his attention from planning the details of his advance upon the Confederate capital. The Union general considered establishing his base of operations on the James as a result of the Chickahominy Raid. None-the-less, he elected to continue relying on White House and the York River Railroad as a means to move forward the heavy siege artillery that he deemed essential to his planned method of reducing Richmond's defenses. To protect the line to the Pamunkey base, regiments of cavalry and infantry were committed to rear area security that could have found gainful employment elsewhere. Stuart noted the effects his Chickahominy Raid had on Union rear operations when he returned to White House two

weeks later. Critical nodes like Tunstall's Station were protected by breastworks erected as a result of his activities.⁸

Tunstall's Station's defenses were evidence of another influence his deep operations had on the Union. McClellan felt that he could afford the resources and men he had to commit to improving his security, but his staff noted he became very concerned with the psychological effect the Chickahominy Raid had on the Army of the Potomac and the people of the North.⁹ His concern was justified in part by the reaction of Federal troops that encountered Stuart or were threatened by him. A panic had spread at White House on 14 June when word was received of the Confederate cavalry's imminent approach. During the retreat to the James two weeks later, Union troops warily watched their backs in expectation that Stuart's riders would be upon them at any time. Many Federals demonstrated an eager willingness to lay down their arms in the face of imminent capture by the Confederate cavalry, both during the Ride Around McClellan and the latter portion of the Seven Days Campaign.¹⁰ And far away in New York City, prominent citizens like George Templeton Strong became more concerned with the progress of events on the Peninsula, as a result of the headlines featuring the Chickahominy Raid and Stuart's pillage of the White House depot during the Seven Days battles.¹¹

McClellan found those same headlines embarrassing and worried that his men were unduly influenced by Stuart's raids. Word of Stuart's prowess quickly spread to Union General John Pope's Army of Virginia in the weeks after the Seven Days. An anecdote shared by one of Pope's officers at Catlett's Station, where Stuart launched the next of his major raids in August 1862, illustrates the reputation he had gained with his enemy. The officer concerned was sharing a whiskey with some of his comrades the night Stuart attacked their camp near Pope's headquarters. As he raised his glass and toasted "this is something like comfort, I hope Jeb Stuart won't disturb us tonight," a bugle call and chorus of Rebel yells rang out at Catlett's Station. With that the Federal officer

banged his fist on the table and proclaimed "there he is by God!" Incidents like these only served to reinforce the effect Stuart had on the minds of Union soldiers.¹²

In terms of more material effects, the Confederate cavalry seemed to savor the tangible rewards of their labors more than any other aspect of their operations. Stuart saw his deep operations as an enhancement to Confederate logistics and as a significant encumbrance to the Union's efforts to supply its army. Certainly, his own forces better armed and equipped themselves as a result of their plunder, not an idle consideration given the poor state of affairs in Virginia's state armories. Horses were a more important resource captured during the Chickahominy Raid, since Confederate troopers had to provide their own mounts. If their mounts were wounded or worn-out by long weeks of riding, Stuart's cavalymen replaced their horses themselves or remained behind at camp in dismounted companies while the rest of their regiments rode off to battle. Horses were the major objective of Stuart's "Second Ride Around McClellan," launched after Antietam in October 1862.¹³ The rest of Lee's army felt less of a direct impact from Stuart's material gains, although the White House Raid did result in the capture of a large stockpile of firearms that were eventually refurbished despite Union efforts to destroy them. Wagons, draft animals, and other items useful in supporting Confederate operations were seized on Stuart's raids and in his pursuit of the Federals from Malvern Hill to Harrison's Landing. General Lee put these materials to use during his subsequent campaigns in northern Virginia later that summer.

McClellan's willingness to abandon his White House base was indicative of the comparatively minor impact Stuart's raids had on Union logistics on a macro level. The Union general could easily afford to lose the wagons, horses, and arms Stuart seized during the Chickahominy Raid. Once his supply trains and herd of beef cattle were safely put into motion toward Harrison's Landing on 28 June, McClellan simply turned his back on what remained at White House, confident his stocks could be replenished on the James.

The Union retreat to the James did not occur due to a want for ammunition or foodstuffs. Stuart imagined he had taken a greater toll on the Union Army's logistics, calculating the effects in terms of their monetary value. While the Confederate cavalry's operations might have looked impressive on a balance sheet, their impact on McClellan's logistics was hardly a decisive element in the outcome of the Seven Days Campaign from the Union perspective.¹⁴

Some of Stuart's Seven Days opponents felt he could have had a more decisive impact if his operations against Union logistics had taken a different focus on 28 June. Major General William Averell, who commanded a Union cavalry regiment during the Peninsular Campaign, criticized Stuart after the war for his failure to disrupt the Union retreat to the James and prey upon the vast supply train and cattle herd McClellan was able to move unhindered to Harrison's Landing.¹⁵ If Stuart's true object (as *he* saw it) was to cut Federal lines of communication and hinder the Union Army's retreat, Averell's argument was sound indeed. Stuart was too focused on the prize he perceived awaited him at White House to consider where his efforts might have been better utilized during the Seven Days. If the Confederate cavalry chief regarded Union logistics as his primary objective when he made the decision to proceed eastward at Dispatch Station, he proceeded in the wrong direction. The shattered railroad span over the Chickahominy was ample proof McClellan intended to abandon the White House base.

Averell's comments point to the central problem with Stuart's operations during latter portion of the Seven Days Campaign: The Confederate cavalry had not synchronized with the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia. It had not started out that way with the Chickahominy Raid. Indeed, that armed reconnaissance proved to be a vital first step in Lee's campaign. It allowed the Confederate Commanding General to shape his future operations with a degree of confidence, although he kept a wary eye on Union movements north of the Chickahominy in the aftermath of the Ride Around McClellan.

However, Stuart's decision to strike out toward White House on 28 June suggested the opportunity to pursue independent cavalry operations was less inspired by a grand view of how they fit into Lee's campaign plan, than a desire to play a more conspicuous role on the battlefield. His true motivations were also reflected by his battle report on the Chickahominy Raid, which focused on his brigade's individual accomplishments, rather than the intelligence this operation provided. Certainly, Stuart briefed his Commanding General thoroughly on what he had learned about Federal dispositions after the raid on 15 June. But his real desire lay in "prosecuting his expedition farther than was contemplated by Lee's instructions." His interest in gathering more than good intelligence became even more evident later in the Seven Days Campaign.

It is understandable that a man of Stuart's energy and initiative, who had molded his brigade into an exemplary fighting unit, might be frustrated by the confines of the Peninsula's battlefields. There were more effective uses of Stuart's mounted force than waiting in reserve to exploit a rout on the battlefield. Stuart's role in keeping the Army of Northern Virginia well informed concerning enemy capabilities and intentions was important enough to Lee. He began to develop a reliance on this service of Stuart's cavalry. Yet, the cavalry chief saw the opportunity to do much more with his command than continued service on the "outposts," to use an analogy from his previous winter under Johnston. Here, his vision of an expanded role for the cavalry in the campaign became flawed. Stuart looked for a mission that freed him from the encumbrances cavalry suffered on the battlefield and when he found it, he failed to establish an appropriate objective synchronized with the direction of the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia.

By Stuart's own admission, the White House Raid failed to pass the acid test of synchronization. With the railroad trestle and Bottom's Bridge crossings over the Chickahominy ruined, he had concluded McClellan was heading for the James instead of falling back along his line of communication to the Pamunkey. Stuart's version of Lee's

orders to him on the 28th of June were to cut the Union line of communication and intercept its retreat.¹⁶ Even if some doubt remained in the cavalry chief's mind as to the precise direction McClellan was heading, it was clear he was not retreating toward White House. While he continued to scout the Chickahominy crossings, his main effort was directed toward the abandoned Federal supply dump, a prize Stuart saw within his grasp and his alone.¹⁷ The temptation to proceed was too great to pause for consideration or for a further clarification of his orders from Lee--a move Ewell had recommended.

In pursuing his White House venture, Stuart ceased to provide his Commanding General with the aspect of his operations Lee valued most--incisive intelligence regarding Union movements, dispositions, and intentions. His scouting operations were confined to the north bank of the Chickahominy, until he decided at last to contest the crossings at Forge Bridge and Long Bridge on 30 June. Unlike the period prior to the Seven Days battles, Stuart's scouts did not roam in the midst of the Union Army's rear area. After the Battle of Gaine's Mill, that rear area was situated on the south side of the Chickahominy River, toward White Oak Swamp and beyond to the James River. In failing to probe beyond the Chickahominy crossings, Stuart lost contact with the main elements of the Union Army.

But more significantly, he lost touch with his own army as well. It was Lee that had made the effort to resume communications with Stuart on 29 June. The courier that day was followed by another from the Commanding General after midnight on the 30th, requesting that Stuart to resume cooperation with the Army of Northern Virginia. From the time he left Dispatch Station on 28 June, until he reached Malvern Hill late in evening of 1 July, Stuart had not initiated a single communication with his Commanding General. This behavior seems most peculiar of the individual Lee relied upon most to keep him abreast of enemy movements.

Ironically, of all of R. E. Lee's brigadiers that day, Stuart was probably the one least familiar with the Union Army's location on the 1st of July. After riding more than 30 miles in search of his own army, Stuart had to be led to Malvern Hill by a detachment of Jackson's organic cavalry. He found this situation to be less of an embarrassment in his battle report, than a reason to praise the hard-riding tenacity of his command.¹⁸ The "ride of 1 July" might have been every bit as long and difficult as the Ride Around McClellan had been on 13 June, but it pointed to just how far out of touch Stuart was with the Seven Days Campaign as it neared its conclusion.

Once the cavalry resumed closer cooperation with the Army of Northern Virginia on the 2nd of July, it proved its potential in assuming a more decisive role in the campaign than capturing the smoldering remains of an abandoned supply depot. Again, it was intrepid scouting on the part his brigade that led to the discovery of Evelington Heights, a prominence vital to the security of the Union Army encamped at Harrison's Landing. In this case, Stuart was quick to pass word back to his Commanding General of what he had found. He realized Harrison's Landing could be swept by fire from the heights and quickly seized their surroundings from the meager Federal cavalry force protecting them. Witnesses to the subsequent engagement on Evelington Heights from both the Union and Confederate sides realized in retrospect that several batteries of artillery, protected by a strong force of infantry, could have posed a considerable problem to McClellan.¹⁹ In the same sense as the Chickahominy Raid's results, the seizure of Evelington Heights provided the Confederates with the potential to take advantage of a significant Union vulnerability.

Assuming that help in the form of Longstreet's infantry and artillery was not far away, Stuart decided the cavalry would deliver the first blow against McClellan that day. But, his failure to establish contact with Longstreet and more accurately anticipate his arrival pointed to another example of his lack of synchronization with other combat

elements in Lee's army. His decision to open his one gun barrage on Union positions at Harrison's Landing seemed guided less by a prudent assessment of the situation, than an effort to take advantage of a fleeting opportunity. Yet, it had been opportunity more than any other factor that had guided J. E. B. Stuart's actions during the Seven Days Campaign. The fundamental problem with Confederate cavalry operations was that what Stuart perceived as opportunity, did not always align itself with the purposes and intent of his Commanding General. Sometimes it did, as was the case with the Chickahominy Raid. At other times, Stuart's actions were contrary to the best interests of the Confederate cause.

It is important to understand both the foundations of Stuart's success, as well as the problems associated with his exploitation of opportunities during the Seven Days Campaign, because this episode served as a very formative influence on his later operations. The Chickahominy Raid was a watershed event which separated Stuart's first year of the war, from the last two. His first year had been characterized by comparatively mundane scouting, screening, training, and organizing. After the Seven Days Campaign, Stuart pursued the sort of bold independent cavalry operations epitomized by the Chickahominy and White House raids in earnest.

Like his first raids, the subsequent expeditions of 1862 and 1863 were typically preceded by thorough scouting of enemy vulnerabilities, as well as avenues of approach and escape. This was certainly true of the next major operation Stuart launched after the Seven Day's Campaign. One of Stuart's spies, Frank Stringfellow of Company E, the 4th Virginia Cavalry Regiment, managed to locate the headquarters of Union Major General John Pope in mid-August 1862, near the Orange and Alexandria Railroad junction known as Catlett's Station (about 15 miles southeast of Manassas).²⁰ Armed with Stringfellow's tip, Stuart succeeded in locating Pope's tents in the midnight darkness of 22 August with a little last minute assistance from a local inhabitant. Pope's headquarters camp was taken completely by surprise.

The objectives of Stuart's later operations also resembled those of his Seven Days raids. Like his Ride Around McClellan, the purpose of some his independent expeditions was to gain intelligence of Union dispositions and intentions. Catlett's Station served this purpose, as Stuart captured documents from Pope's tent that provided General Lee with intelligence vital to the success of the Second Manassas Campaign.²¹ Stuart again sought to disrupt Federal logistics in a cooperative movement with Stonewall Jackson's infantry against Manassas in the prelude to that same campaign. His second "Ride Around McClellan," a raid launched into southern Pennsylvania three weeks after the Battle of Antietam, had a logistical agenda as well. The "second ride" did differ somewhat in its specific focus however, which was largely to benefit Confederate sustainment, rather than to injure the Union's.²²

Stuart's subsequent ventures, like his operations during the Seven Days Campaign, were sometimes synchronized well with the other activities of the Army of Northern Virginia. At other times, his expeditions were independent both in the sense that they were unsupported by other elements of Lee's army and in their purpose--which was not necessarily in line with the Commanding General's intentions. As previously established, Stuart's Catlett's Station Raid provided key elements of information regarding Union General John Pope's intentions, intelligence that directly led to the development of Lee's Second Manassas Campaign. The Second Ride Around McClellan was staged during a lull in campaign activities and while it served to harass the Federals and secure needed mounts, it did not significantly influence the conduct of Lee's future operations. This expedition did not, however, work at cross-purposes to the Commanding General's intentions quite like Stuart's ignominious departure to raid Union logistics prior to the Battle of Gettysburg. If one were to imagine a continuum of synchronization, Catlett's Station and the Chickahominy Raid would stand at one end, the Second Ride Around

McClellan would lie in the middle, and raid before Gettysburg would figure prominently at the other extreme.

There was a pattern in Stuart's behavior during the Seven Days Campaign which served to explain how something like his Gettysburg venture could occur. General Lee apparently did not recognize the potential problems associated with Stuart's opportunity seeking, or at least felt he could channel his young cavalry chief's ambitions in the proper direction. However, the very nature of Stuart's operations placed him outside the ability of Lee to influence his actions significantly once his troopers were saddled-up and rode off deep into the Union rear. It was up to the cavalry chief to keep his expeditions properly focused on a mission designed to support the Army of Northern Virginia after they were launched. It was up to the Commanding General to provide that mission and correct Stuart when he deviated from it. We will never possess the complete picture of what may have transpired between Lee and Stuart regarding this issue in the aftermath of the Seven Days Campaign or at other times when he strayed from the intentions of his commander. However, what can be said is this: Whatever did occur between them was not sufficient to keep Stuart from developing a misguided vision of what his independent cavalry operations were really all about.

Endnotes

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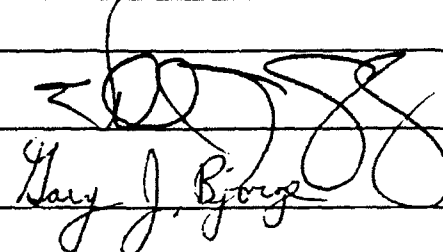
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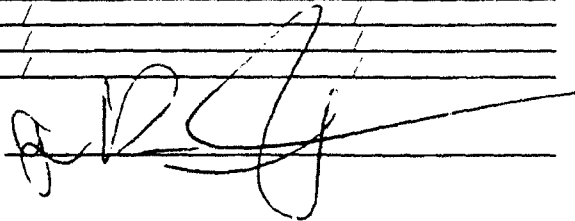
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