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GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE  
CHANCELLORSVILLE, 1863:  
*An Operational Art Analysis*

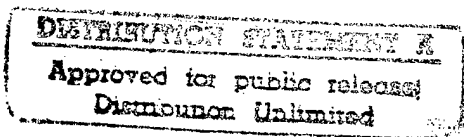
by

Charles M. Tye  
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## ABSTRACT

GENERAL ROBERT E. LEE  
CHANCELLORSVILLE, 1863:  
*An Operational Art Analysis*

On 29 April 1863 Union forces commanded by General Joseph Hooker started crossing the Rappahannock River aimed for Richmond. Hooker's plan was simply. Hold Lee at Fredericksburg, conduct a surprise flank movement to Lee's west, force a decisive battle, then move to capture the Confederate Capitol at Richmond. Spread thin and possessing only half the forces Hooker possessed, Lee was suddenly forced to go on the offense to stop Hooker and save his under strength Army. Lee's subsequent actions at Chancellorsville presented numerous classic examples of the application of the operational art as we know it today. Heralded as his greatest fight, Lee's actions at Chancellorsville not only enhanced his reputation as a warfighter, but also served his countries higher strategic purpose and directly impacted the war in the east.

This paper will review the strategic setting of the war prior to two army's meeting followed by a review of the battle and the key events. Analysis of the battle will demonstrate Lee's ability to correctly balance the operational art in terms of forces, space, and time. Lee's decisions and aggressive action permitted him complete freedom on the battlefield in order to defeat Hooker. Knowing that he incurred great risk by the actions he took, Lee's grasp of the operational art enabled him to defeat a numerically superior force by concentrating his inferior forces at the decisive time and place.

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### INTRODUCTION

*“A swift and vigorous transition to attack the flashing sword of vengeance--is the most brilliant point of the defense”*

*Clausewitz: On War, 1832<sup>1</sup>*

In the early spring of 1863, General Robert E. Lee was at the peak of his mental and physical power. His erect carriage, broad shoulders and great endurance allowed him to ride all day, plan late into the night and awake the next day fully alert and prepared to face whatever challenges the war presented. Firm and decisive, he knew what he wanted and remained loyal to his own judgment. Completely loyal to his subordinates and soldiers, Lee had struggled to keep his army intact despite a year of hard fighting encompassing four major campaigns. In this author's opinion, the 1863 battle for Chancellorsville was not only Lee's greatest fight, but was also his best display and application of what is called today operational art.<sup>2</sup>

“Fighting Joe Hooker's” movement across the Rappahannock into Lee's unprotected flank forced Lee to react throughout the entire ten day battle. Although this was a major engagement by today's standards, Lee's ability to apply operational art denied Hooker the ability to destroy the Confederate operational center of gravity, Lee's army, and also foiled his attempt to capture Richmond, the operational objective. Professor Vego writes that the factors of time, space and forces are critical to the application of operational art, allowing the commander to obtain “freedom of action” essential for success.<sup>3</sup> By decisive movement, speed and skillful employment of his small army, Lee

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<sup>1</sup>Heinl, Jr., Robert D., Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Stackpole, Edward J., Chancellorsville, (Stackpole Books, 1988), pp.80-81.

<sup>3</sup>Milan Vego, “Operational Art,” An Unpublished Paper, U.S. Naval War College,

prevented its destruction and preserved the Confederate cause.<sup>4</sup>

The battle of Chancellorsville was the direct result of Lincoln's desire to end the war. Having fired General Burnside after his disastrous defeat at Fredricksburg the previous December, Lincoln charged General Hooker to give him victory.<sup>5</sup> Lee, defensively positioned on the southern side of the Rappahannock covering a twenty-five mile frontage, was forced to react. In ten decisive days, Lee strung together a series of rapid movements, a surprise flank attack, and complete redirection of his fighting power to defeat an opponent twice his size.<sup>6</sup>

*"The men were absolutely astonished at our move for everyone felt that we had the best of the Rebs and could hold our position as the saying is till Hell froze over.....,"*

*Captain Henry Young, 7th Wisconsin<sup>7</sup>*

This paper analyzes the Chancellorsville battle, Lee's application of operational art and its factors of time, space and forces. By properly balancing elements of operational art, Lee maintained freedom of action required to defeat a superior force. In today's world of complex, joint, and "come as you are" operations, Lee's actions clearly illustrate the importance of operational art in planning and conducting campaigns and major operations.

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Newport, RI: 1996.

<sup>4</sup>Bowen, J.J., The Strategy of Lee, (New York, Neale Publishing Company 1914), p.127.

<sup>5</sup>Hanson, Harry, The Civil War, A History, (New York, The Penguin Group, 1991), p.295.

<sup>6</sup>Henderson, George F.R., Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War, Gloucester, 1968, p.507.

<sup>7</sup>Sears, Stephen W., Chancellorsville, (New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996), p.431.

## CHAPTER TWO

### STRATEGIC SETTING

*“This place should be defended with the spirit which actuated the defenders of Thermopylae, and if left to myself such as my determination”*  
Stonewall Jackson<sup>8</sup>

As the Civil War dragged into a second grueling year, Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia sat in defensive positions on the southern bank of the Rappahannock River. Equally distanced between the two warring capitols, the Rappahannock River served as “no man’s” land between the armies of Lee and Hooker for the majority of the winter of 1862-63. The winter had been unseasonably cold and wet. Both sides struggled to maintain the cohesiveness and morale of their respective armies. Despite the fact that both armies could observe each other daily and remained well within cannon range of each other, the front took on an uncharacteristic peacefulness.

For the Union, the war was not going well. The war in the west had seen minimal gains and victories had been costly in both manpower and supplies. Lincoln wrestled daily with the waning will of the nation as he tried to find Generals who could fight and win. Knowing that constant pressure on all fronts was the only way to win the conflict, Lincoln hoped for victories. The war in the west continued to play a subordinate role to the war in the east, due to its distance from the Union capitol.<sup>9</sup>

On the east coast, the Union naval blockade was taking its toll. Although not completely able to stop the confederate blockade runners, Union efforts drastically hindered Confederate maritime trade. Union forces ashore in Florida, North Carolina and Virginia and were not in danger of being defeated.

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<sup>8</sup>Heinl, p.83.

<sup>9</sup>Bowman, p. 127.

In Northern Virginia, the Union army suffered several costly defeats during 1862 and 1863 at the hands of Robert E. Lee. Union losses on the Peninsula, Second Manassas, Antietam and Fredericksburg had demoralized the fighting spirit of soldier and officer alike. The army lacked the ability to take the fight to the enemy and the national will of the Union was being severely tested.<sup>10</sup>

After the defeat of Burnside at Fredericksburg in mid-December 1862 and the subsequent revolt of the Generals, Lincoln began his search for a General who could take the fight to the Confederates. Not completely satisfied with the number and quality of suitable choices, he settled on General "Fighting Joe Hooker." A West Point graduate, battle tested on the Peninsula, Fredericksburg, and Antietam, Hooker was best known for his organizational and planning skills. Lincoln knew the operational center of gravity was the southern army and pressed Hooker to give him victory. Lincoln also knew that Richmond was a decisive point and that if Lee could be defeated it would strike a critical blow to the southern strategic center of gravity, the Confederate's national will.<sup>11</sup>

Hooker was a capable planner. Upon assuming command, he set in motion the planning for his first campaign as head of the Army of the Potomac. Having fought and commanded with the army during the previous year and condemning Burnside for mismanagement of his forces during the Fredericksburg defeat, Hooker swore not to make the same mistake.<sup>12</sup> His first plan called for the cavalry to lead, cut the Confederate supply lines, and force Lee to retreat to Richmond. The remainder of Hooker's army would pursue and seize Richmond.<sup>13</sup> When Hooker presented his plan to

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<sup>10</sup>Stackpole, Edward J., Chancellorsville; Lee's Greatest Battle, (Harrisburg, Stackpole Books, 1958), p. 80.

<sup>11</sup>McPherson, James M., Battle Cry of Freedom, (New York, Ballantine Books, 1988) p.640.

<sup>12</sup>Hansen, p.296

<sup>13</sup>Williams, Harry T., Lincoln and His Generals, (New York, Vintage Books, 1952) p.235.

Lincoln, Lincoln balked. Hooker's plan did not focus on the operational center of gravity, Lee's army. Hooker changed his plan to march towards Fredericksburg with the bulk of his army after crossing the Rappahannock, and fight Lee in the open space west of the Chancellorsville crossroads. Lincoln approved the plan, but still had reservations about Hooker and his ability to command a large army.<sup>14</sup>

For the Confederacy, Union advances in the west had severely strained both the Confederates national will and its ability to support war on two fronts. The Confederacy also treated the western front as a secondary effort relative to the east. Victories had not been as dramatic and did not enjoy the same praise as those closer to the Confederate capitol. In tandem with the Union naval blockade, the Confederate inability to shift from an agricultural to an industrial system drastically hampered their ability to supply their armies in the field.

As Lee sat and watched the Union army from across the Rappahannock, he knew his employment options were limited. Having only commanded for twelve months, Lee conducted four major campaigns/operations and had been successful despite the high cost. He knew that he could not compete with the Union operational center of gravity and her ability to resupply and reconstitute her forces. Lee also knew that Lincoln was the driving force behind the Union cause, the Union strategic center of gravity. He was certain that the Union would attack again and he would have to win if he was to prolong the war. He anticipated that Hooker would not attack Fredericksburg again because the cost had proven too high for the Union. If Hooker came from the east, he would uncover Washington which Lee knew was a major concern to Lincoln. Lee felt that Hooker's best course of action would be to approach from the west, trying to turn the Confederate's left flank. But Lee was stretched thin on twenty-five miles of riverbank and could only wait

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<sup>14</sup>Bigelow, John., The Campaign of Chancellorsville, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1910), p. 6.

for Hooker's next move. Even more critical, Lee's army had suffered terribly during the winter of 1862-63. Shortages of food, clothing, ammunition and forage for animals had reduced his army's fighting edge even further. Lee had released Longstreet's Corps from defensive duties to forage east of Richmond in hopes of getting the army some relief. Longstreet's departure was compounded by his siege of the Union forces at Suffolk, Virginia. When the attack came, Lee had to fight with what he had on hand as reinforcements would be slow in coming.<sup>15</sup>

Two other significant events occurred in early 1863 that affected both sides of the conflict. On the first of January, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. For the Confederacy the signing served to strengthen the national will against returning to the Union, but it also cost them the support of Great Britain. Grave concerns arose among the southern populace regarding the slaves. Once the slaves knew they were free, would they rebel and cause further chaos in the South? In the north, the Emancipation Proclamation caused dissension since the war was being fought for retention of the Union and not slavery.<sup>16</sup> A second significant event occurred on the fifth of March when Lincoln signed into affect a new Draft Bill.<sup>17</sup> For the Confederacy, it became a source of Union manpower that it could never match. For the Union, it was a sign of continued determination to win reunification.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>McPherson, p. 638.

<sup>16</sup>Fuller, p. 185.

<sup>17</sup>Sears, Stephen, Chancellorsville, (Boston, New York, Houghton Mifflin Co, 1996) p. 70.

<sup>18</sup>Bowman, John S., The Civil War Almanac, (New York, World Almanac Publications 1983), pp. 102-146. Major source for strategic setting as outlined in this chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### CHANCELLORSVILLE 1863 OVERVIEW

*“There is no better way of defending a long line than by moving into the enemy’s territory”*

*R.E. Lee, 21 March 1863<sup>19</sup>*

The above quote is indicative of Lee’s mindset prior to the Chancellorsville battle. The battle lasted a mere ten days and the pace of Confederate operations was both fast and furious when compared to that of their Union opponent. Jackson’s flank attack, heralded as the centerpiece of the battle, is studied to this day as a prime example of a masterfully conducted surprise flanking movement against a larger opponent. However, anticipating this one flanking movement might be for students of the battle, the real centerpiece of Chancellorsville was Lee’s ability to balance the operational factors of forces against time and space.

After assuming command of the army on 26 January 1863, Hooker set into motion several initiatives that completely rejuvenated the army prior to its splashing across the Rappahannock River on 29 April 1863. Lincoln, who visited the army several times prior to Hooker’s first movement, was also impressed by the spirit and high morale the army possessed.<sup>20</sup>

Hooker’s first order of business was to completely overhaul the logistics system. The army had suffered during the winter from lack of food and clothing. Despite the fact that the logistics base was only fifteen miles distant from the army, supplies were not being pushed forward. By streamlining transportation of supplies directly to the front, Hooker quickly brought his army back to fighting strength. He also procured pack mules to enhance mobility of the army on the march.

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<sup>19</sup>Heinl, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup>Stackpole, pp. 13-36.

Hooker formed a cavalry corps of 10,000 riders and placed it under his direct control. This was the first time that a Union general had attempted to unite his cavalry. This reorganization gave Hooker his eyes and ears and a deep strike capability never enjoyed by any other Union commander. Hooker also established operational security throughout the army by controlling movements within his camps and by forcing newspaper reporters to sign their names to the articles they forwarded to their publishers. These two initiatives denied Lee the vital intelligence he needed to engage Hooker once he moved.

Hooker's final major initiative was to establish the Bureau of Military Intelligence. Under the capable command of Colonel Sharpe, the bureau combined all cavalry, observation balloon and picket reports in order to determine Lee's order of battle.<sup>21</sup> Colonel Sharpe also enlisted the support of spies operating within Lee's lines. Colonel Sharpe's effort was so well coordinated that when Hooker crossed the Rappahannock he knew where every Confederate unit was located with the exception of one brigade and twenty three artillery pieces. It was the first time that the Army of the Potomac had an accurate enemy order of battle prior to an engagement.<sup>22</sup>

Hooker's plan called for two corps to cross the Rappahannock below Fredericksburg and hold Lee's army in place (Map 1). Next, his cavalry corps would cross the Rappahannock west of Chancellorsville and move south to cut the Virginia Central and the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac rail lines which supplied Lee's army. Next, with three corps moving by flying columns, they would follow the cavalry to Chancellorsville, turn east, deploy, and flank Lee from behind Fredericksburg. Once the three corps were moving east, a fourth corps would cross mid-way between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville to unite with and add additional weight to Hooker's

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<sup>21</sup>Sears, p. 151.

<sup>22</sup>Bigelow, p. 47.

anticipated fight with Lee. A last minute plan to send one cavalry brigade further west on the Rappahannock was intended to draw Lee's cavalry out of the Chancellorsville area and create a gap in Lee's lines.<sup>23</sup>

Hooker set the date to move for the 27th of April.<sup>24</sup> Prior to this, his cavalry was to commence moving south to cut Lee's supply lines. Several days of heavy rain forced the cavalry to wait. On the 27th, Hooker moved his three infantry corps west using covered and concealed routes. The infantry corps moved as planned and closed in on their river crossing sites ahead of the cavalry. Because of the infantries' success, Hooker changed his plan to let the infantry proceed first. The cavalry would have to wait until the roads were clear before they could move.<sup>25</sup> By the 30th of April, Hooker's three western corps had closed in on Chancellorsville and were prepared to move east. Hooker's flanking movement had worked as planned. Lee was not told of Hooker's presence till the morning of the 30th. His cavalry chief, Jeb Stuart, who had monitored the Union river crossings, had to take a southern detour in order to avoid Hooker's army. Lee was now faced with two Union corps of forty thousand men to his front and three corps of fifty-four thousand men ten miles from his left flank.<sup>26</sup>

Lee's first move was to take Anderson's Division which had been midway between Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville guarding the crossings on the Rappahannock, to fall back on the Orange Turnpike and Orange Plank Road to blunt Hooker's advance (Map 2). Next he ordered McLaw's Division, located behind Fredericksburg, to move west and join with Anderson. Finally, determining that the two corps in front of Fredericksburg were only a diversion, Lee started Jackson's Corps west

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<sup>23</sup>Hansen, p. 297.

<sup>24</sup>Foote, Shelby, The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. II, (New York, Random House, 1963) p. 267.

<sup>25</sup>Williams, p. 237.

<sup>26</sup>Griess, Thomas E., Atlas for the American Civil War, (New Jersey, Avery Publishing Group Inc., 1986), pp. 25-31. Sole source for Union and Confederate unit strenghts.

to fall in behind Anderson and McLaws. By the end of the day on the 30th, Anderson and McLaws were dug in on hasty positions west of the Tabernacle Church and Jackson's Corps continued to move in through the night.<sup>27</sup>

Left behind in Fredericksburg to check the two Union corps, Lee positioned General Early's Division of ten thousand men (Map 3). Early occupied the same defensive line that had held against Burnside's attack the previous December. With Early's artillery on Maryes Heights and Prospect Hill, and reinforced zigzagging trenches tucked into the base of both hills, Lee felt that Sedgwick would not repeat Burnside's mistake. Lee instructed Early to give the appearance that nothing in the Confederate lines had changed. Lee had taken his first risk by dividing his forces to fight in two directions.

By the morning of May 1st, Hooker had four corps in a salient surrounding Chancellorsville. Each of the four commanders had executed their movements to Chancellorsville in accordance with Hooker's plan, but Hooker had failed to provide guidance for actions beyond that point. Hooker then ordered his two center corps down the Orange Plank and Turnpike road to meet Lee. He also sent Meade's Corps down the river road to flank Lee from the north. At the same time Lee started Anderson and McLaws' Divisions, backed by Jackson, west along the Orange Plank and Turnpike roads to meet Hooker. At this point in the battle the Union and Confederate forces engaged on the two roads were almost even in number. Heavy fighting continued throughout the morning and both sides gave as good as they received. Hooker, relying on intelligence reports, pulled his two corps back to their morning starting positions. Lee pressed the attack until the resistance grew to great to continue. By the end of the day the two armies sat facing each other across the Chancellorsville Crossroads.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Henderson, p. 511.

<sup>28</sup>Catton, Bruce, Glory Road, (New York, Fairfax Press, 1984), p. 322

On the morning of May 2nd, Lee sent Jackson on his famous flank march based on intelligence provided by Stuart's active probing of the Union lines the day before. Stuart had determined that Hooker's right flank "hung in the air" and could easily be rolled up. Moving southwest, then northwest, and finally turning due east, Jackson, with the aid of a local guide, attacked into Hooker's flank late in the day (Map 4). This action threw the entire Union position into chaos. Pausing only to realign themselves, the Confederates were finally stopped by a hastily redirected Union line. Hooker never recovered from the flank attack and brought forward a fifth corps to help withdraw from Chancellorsville. Lee had taken his second risk by again dividing his outnumbered army to fight in two directions.<sup>29</sup>

On the morning of May 3rd, Lee continued to press Hooker on all sides in an attempt to reunite his army and tighten the noose around the Union invaders. Hooker ordered Sedgwick, who was still at Fredericksburg, to seize Fredericksburg and then attack down the Plank Road into Lee's rear in hopes of relieving the pressure (Map 5). Sedgwick attacked and forced Early off Maryes Heights and into flight south along Telegraph Road. Having done that, Sedgwick proceeded up the Plank Road cautiously into Lee's rear. Seeing that he was now threatened from a new direction, Lee left Stuart in charge of Jackson's Corps to continue to pressure Hooker while he redirected units to meet Sedgwick. He sent McLaws' Division on the 3rd of May and Anderson's Division on the morning of the 4th and stalled Sedgwick's attack. By bringing Early's division back up the Telegraph road mid-day on the 4th, Lee completely surrounded Sedgwick and forced him up against the southern bank of the Rappahannock. Sedgwick, acting on his own, withdrew across the Rappahannock despite Hooker's order to stay and fight.<sup>30</sup> Lee had again taken a risk and divided his army in order to fight in two directions. By

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<sup>29</sup>Catton, p. 333.

<sup>30</sup>Wood, W.B., Military History of the Civil War, (USA, Global Lithographing, 1959), Chapter XV.

the 7th of May both armies were back in their prebattle positions. The Union had nothing to show for their efforts and the Confederacy would live to fight another day.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONAL FACTORS

*“How can we get at these people?”*  
*Lee to Jackson, 1 May 1863*<sup>31</sup>

Jackson's attack into Hooker's right flank is typically highlighted as the centerpiece during the battle of Chancellorsville. However, Jackson did not make the final decision to attack nor was he on the field when Lee completed the victory. The true mastermind of the Confederate victory at Chancellorsville was Lee. Denied vital intelligence due to Hooker's improvements in operational security, Lee was caught in the middle of Hooker's advancing columns. Lee reacted quickly and decisively by applying the operational factors of space, time, and forces in order to maintain freedom of action to defeat a force twice his size.<sup>32</sup> In order to highlight Lee's understanding of these factors, it is necessary to highlight specific examples of each.<sup>33</sup>

#### Space

The town of Fredericksburg sits on the southern side and almost level with the Rappahannock River. Directly behind the town Maryes Heights and Prospect Hill overlook both the river and town. From the Heights west to Chancellorsville, the terrain is rolling farmland, ideally suited for the movement of large army formations. The area directly west and north of Chancellorsville takes on an entirely different appearance and is locally known as “the Wilderness.” Characterized by low lying, gently rolling terrain with numerous swampy areas, it is extremely overgrown with vegetation consisting of scrub oak, ash, cedar and fir trees laced with vines. There are few roads for movement

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<sup>31</sup>Southhall, Freeman, Douglas. *Lee's Lieutenants*, Vol. II. (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1944) p. 540.

<sup>32</sup>Stackpole, p. 89.

<sup>33</sup>Vego, Milan. “Operational Factors,” An Unpublished Paper, Newport, R.I., September, 1996, Single source for analysis of Operational Art, Time, Force, and Space.

and visibility is drastically limited. Bordered on the north by the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers, the Wilderness forms a natural obstacle to movement and maneuver.<sup>34</sup>

Lee had defended this ground during the previous winter and knew it well. By sending forces west on the Turnpike road, over ground favorable to maneuver, Lee reduced Hooker's ability to maneuver as he tried to untangle himself from the Wilderness. Hooker reacted appropriately on May 1st by advancing his two center corps down the Orange and Orange Plank roads directly into Lee's evenly matched attacking force. Hooker, unsure as to what size force was to his front, withdrew his forces back into the Wilderness. Lee pressing the pursuit, without losing freedom of action, stopped short of the Wilderness because of Stuart's report of four Union corps in the Wilderness.

Simultaneously probing Hooker's lines from the east and the west Lee was able to determine that Hooker's right flank "hung in the air" and could be rolled up. Ordering Jackson to move to the open Union flank while using the Wilderness as cover and concealment, Lee balanced space and forces to exploit a weakness. Hooker, detecting Jackson's movement, pursued and after being repulsed by Jackson's rearguard, determined it to be a Confederate retreat. At 5:10 in the evening Jackson advanced down the Orange Turnpike Road from the west directly into Hooker's unsuspecting flank.<sup>35</sup> The movement had worked. Hooker lacked freedom of action due to the confines of the Wilderness and the rivers to his back. On May 3rd, Hooker decided to withdraw and Lee accommodated him by continuing the pressure as he reunited his army.

On the morning of May 3rd, Hooker ordered Sedgwick to advance to Chancellorsville to strike Lee's rear. Sedgwick successfully forced Early off the high ground behind Fredericksburg and south down Telegraph Road. He then proceeded

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<sup>34</sup>Bowen, p. 110.

<sup>35</sup>Wood, Chapter XV.

cautiously west on the Turnpike Road. Content that Stuart could handle Jackson's Corps, Lee again moved McLaws' and Anderson's divisions east on the Turnpike Road directly into Sedgwick's advance. Expanding his frontage to prevent Sedgwick from gaining space, Lee also ordered Early's Division back up Telegraph Road to complete the encirclement of Sedgwick. Sedgwick hesitated when he found he had no space to maneuver and had been evenly matched by Lee. Limited from moving and his back against the Rappahannock River, Sedgwick withdrew back across the river on the 6th of May.

During all his maneuvering, Lee never gave up space. Using natural obstacles and capitalizing on favorable ground, Lee denied Hooker and Sedgwick the freedom of action required to obtain their objectives.<sup>36</sup>

### Time

Of the three operational factors, time is the most precious. Unlike space and forces, it can never be regained and will always work against a defending or attacking force. Lee knew he had to react quickly because he could not expect reinforcements from Richmond and Longstreet would take time to return from Suffolk, Virginia.

Despite having gained the initiative by moving around Lee's flank, Hooker never expected Lee to react as quickly as he did. When he advanced his two corps early on the 1st of May and encountered stiff resistance, he hesitated and lost the initiative. On the evening of the 2nd of May, as Hooker's right flank collapsed around him, his cohesion was further shattered by both the speed of the attack and the fact that Jackson had moved so quickly to get into position. The surpriser had become the surprised.

Sedgwick found himself in the same position west of Fredericksburg. After having won at Fredericksburg he slowly moved up the Turnpike and Lee met him head on. Expecting that Lee would still be engaged at Chancellorsville, Sedgwick hesitated.

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<sup>36</sup>Fuller, p. 192

Lee's quick expansion of his frontage and the rejoining of Early's division on his right flank exacerbated Sedgwick's inability to act. Encircled, his back to the Rappahannock River, Sedgwick withdrew across the river to safer ground. By reacting quickly, Lee defeated Hooker's superior numbers by applying time to space in order to maintain freedom of action to fight in two directions.

### Forces

Prior to the start of the Chancellorsville battle, Lee's army had been successful in four campaigns/major engagements characterized by hard marching and even harder fighting. Casualties had been high and replacements were slow in coming. To compound matters, the hard winter of 1862-63 had drastically increased the desertion rate. To watch Hooker's one hundred and ten thousand man army, Lee placed the bulk of his fifty three thousand man army on the high ground behind Fredericksburg. Lee used cavalry and small picket detachments to watch the twenty-five miles of Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers to his west. Lee knew that Hooker had the initiative and could cross anywhere along Lee's thin defensive line. Finally, when Hooker did attack, Lee knew he would have to fight with the forces he had on hand.<sup>37</sup>

Buoyed by the army's fighting ability, Lee did not hesitate to leave ten thousand men at Fredericksburg when he took forty-three thousand men up the Turnpike to the Wilderness after Hooker had been located. Using the rolling terrain to his advantage, Lee extended his frontage blunting Hooker's attempt to push out of the Wilderness. Once he had forced Hooker back into the Wilderness, Lee stopped when he determined Hooker's frontage was too strong to attack. To maintain Hooker's focus on him, Lee kept seventeen thousand men opposite the crossroads and sent Jackson on his flank march with twenty-six thousand men to attack Hooker's unsuspecting flank. Knowing that he risked the destruction of his army if Hooker suddenly went on the offense, Lee had

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<sup>37</sup>Henderson, p. 510.

expertly placed the appropriate force at the appropriate time in order to unhinge Hooker. By his actions he had maintain freedom of action and encircled Hooker's force of seventy-three thousand men leaving Hooker no room to maneuver.

When Sedgwick attacked through Fredericksburg on the 3rd, Lee again did not hesitate in leaving Stuart in charge of twenty-three thousand men to pressure Hooker as he raced back east on the Turnpike Road with twenty-one thousand men. Quickly expanding his frontage to hold Sedgwick's nineteen thousand men while ordering Early back up the Telegraph Road into Sedgwick's weak left flank, he had again maintained freedom of action by bringing the appropriate forces to the appropriate place and time.

## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

*Freedom of action is understood as the ability under certain conditions to carry out multiple, substantial, and diverse decisions to accomplish assigned military operations.*

*Milan Vego*<sup>38</sup>

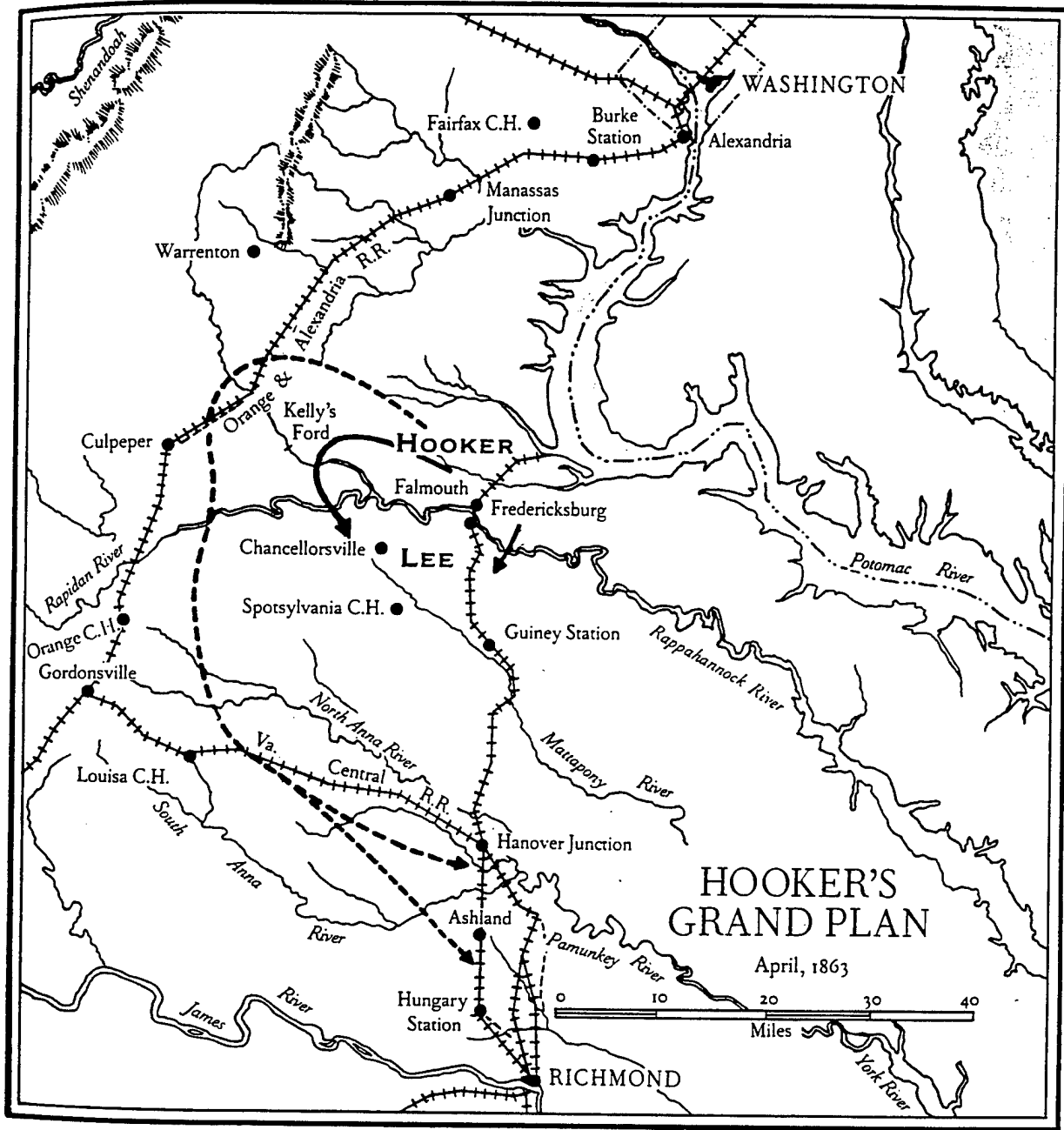
In this author's opinion, Lee's application of operational art, time, space and forces, is the true centerpiece in the battle for Chancellorsville. Defending on a wide frontage with a weaker and outnumbered army, he quickly went on the offense, seized the initiative and retained the freedom of action necessary for victory. Using rapid, decisive movements to critical points on the battlefield, establishing strong effective blocking actions capped by unsuspecting flanking movements, Lee denied Hooker the opportunity to effectively employ seven army corps. The fruits of victory for Lee were not to be measured in number of POW's, nor arms and supplies captured, but by Lee's tenacity to maintain his army intact, block the road to Richmond and prepare his army for future campaigns and major operations.

In today's world of complex, joint and expeditionary operations, the actions taken by Lee during the battle of Chancellorsville provide valuable lessons for the military professional. Freedom of action can only be maintained through rapid decisive movements, using space favorable to the intended operation with forces matched to the threat and acceptable risk. Lee provided this display of operational art during the battle of Chancellorsville. Coupled with his victorious army, Lee convinced Davis that his next campaign had to go north into Pennsylvania in order to continue the war and destroy the Union goal for unification. Sixty days later in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Lee failed in his ability to properly balance the operational art factors of space, forces and time and came

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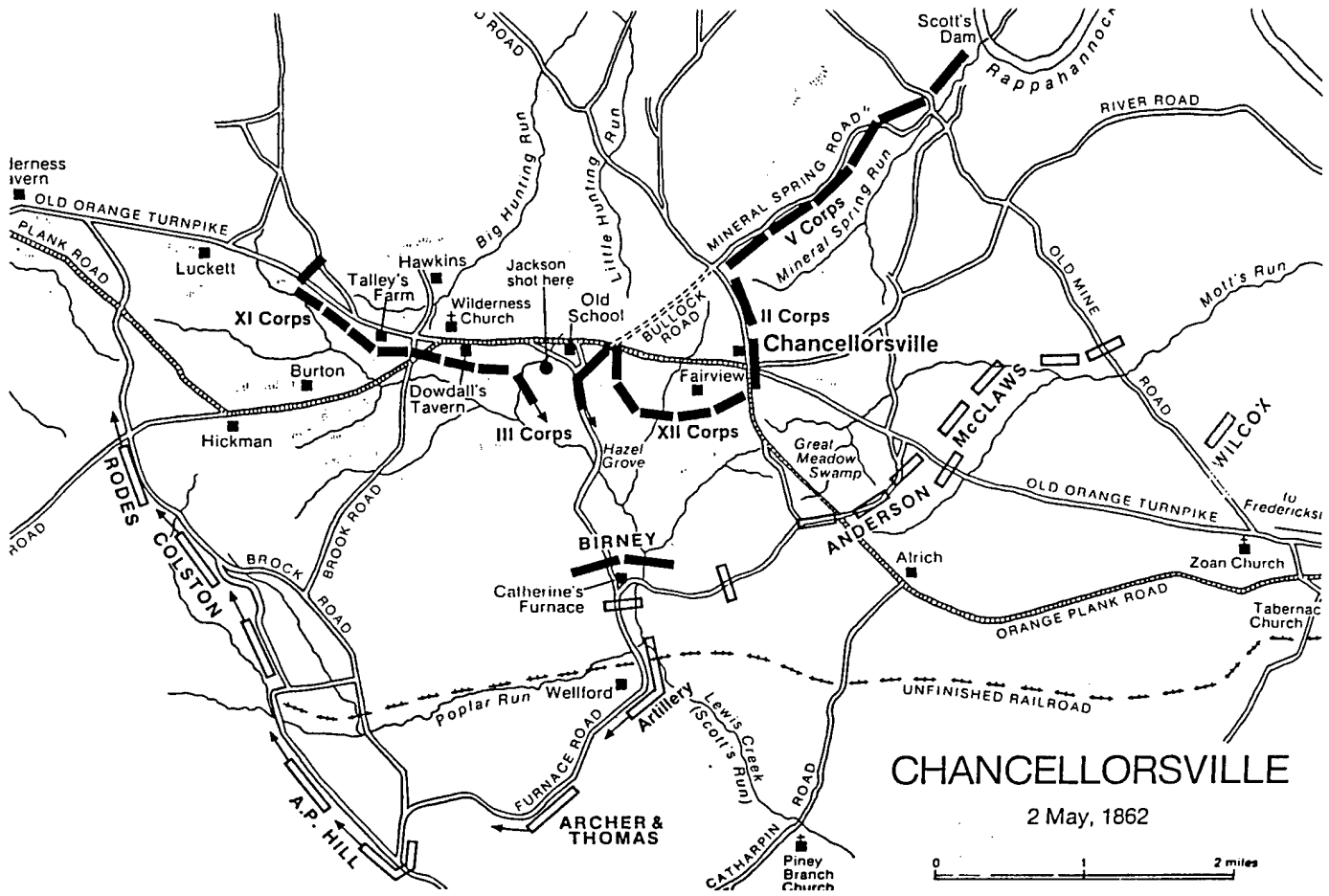
<sup>38</sup>Vego, "Operational Factors"

dangerously close to losing his army. Lee's actions became instrumental in initiating the decline of the Confederate fighting spirit.



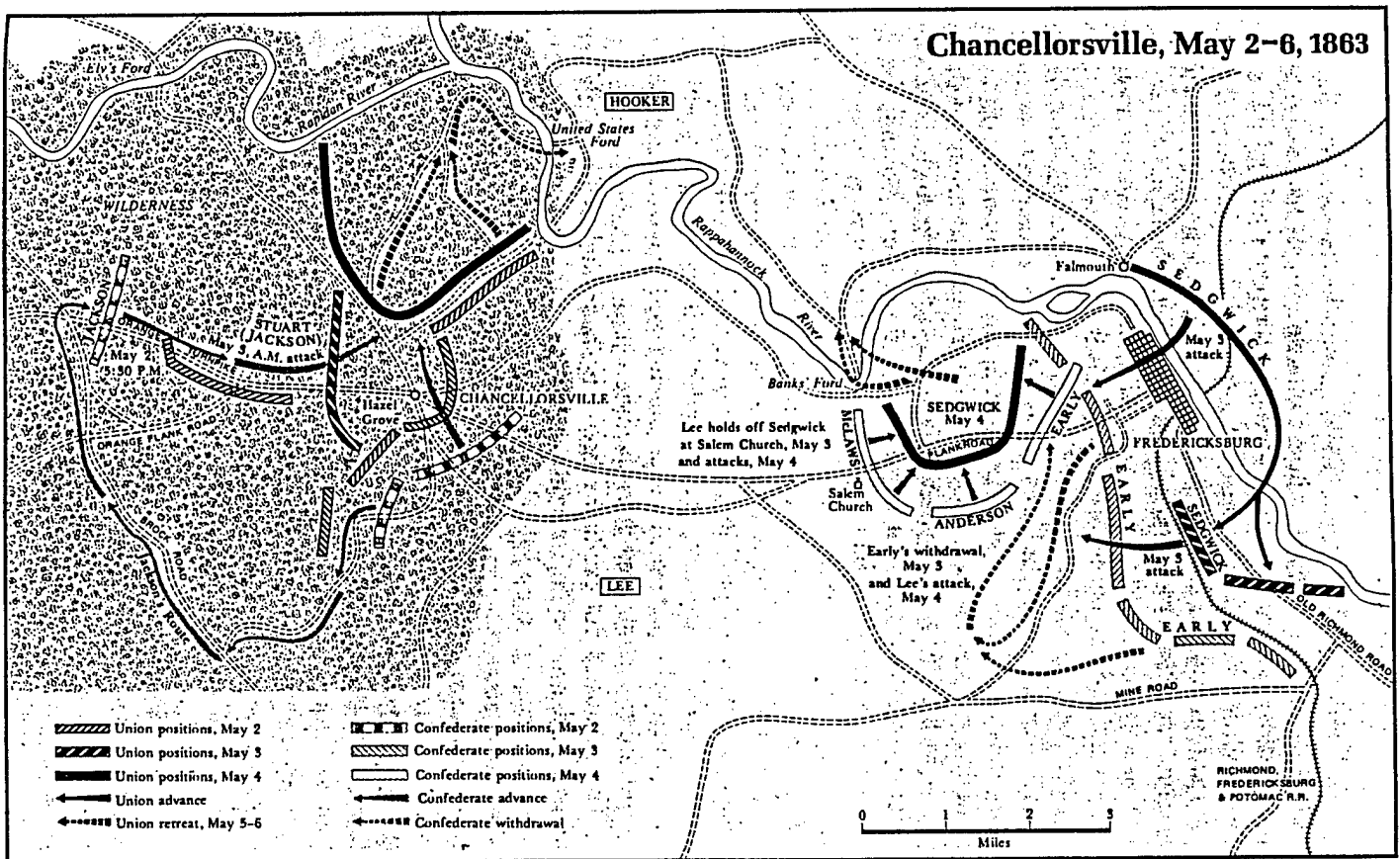
Map 1.

Hooker's Grand Plan



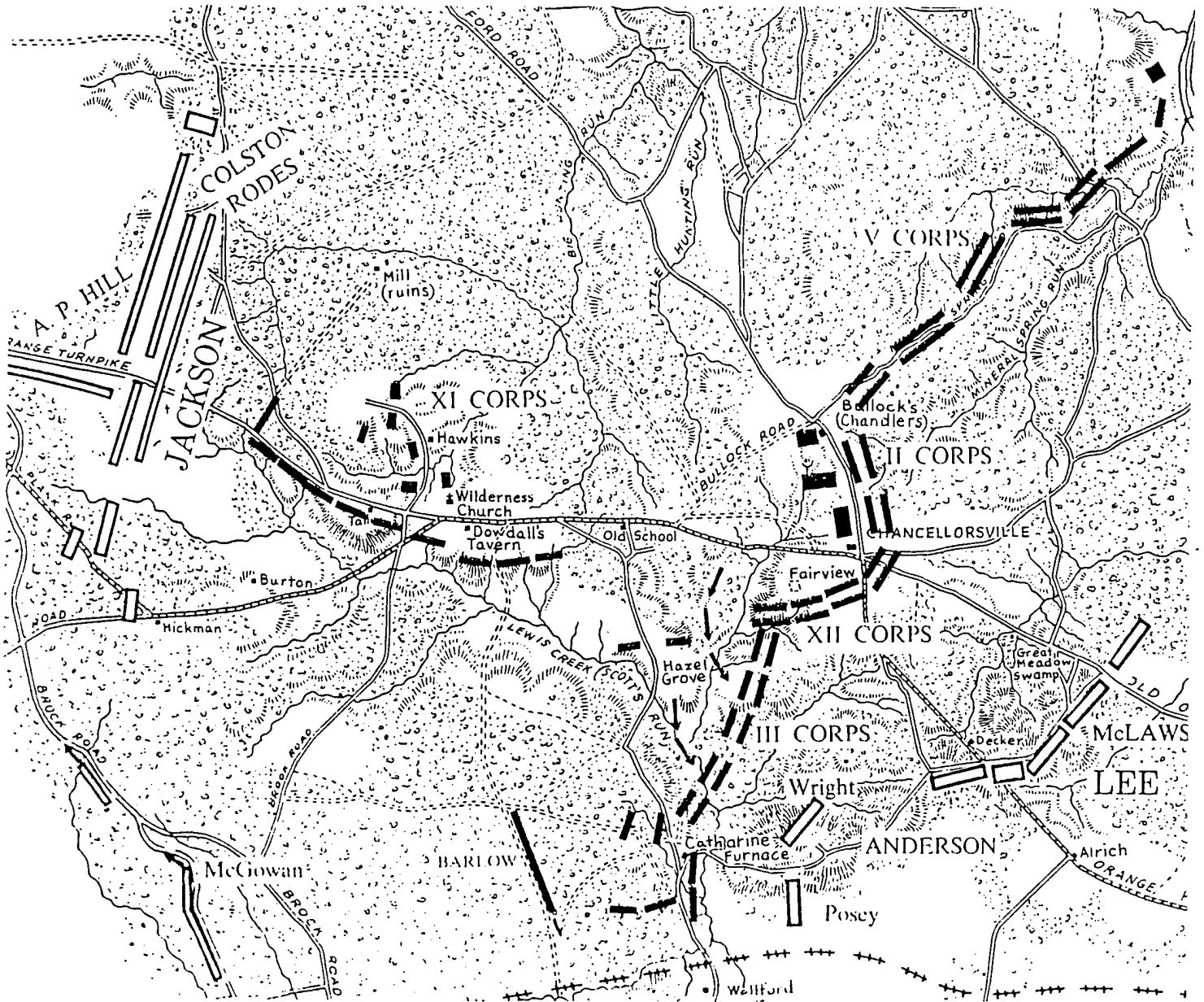
Map 2.

Chancellorsville, Morning of 2 May 1863



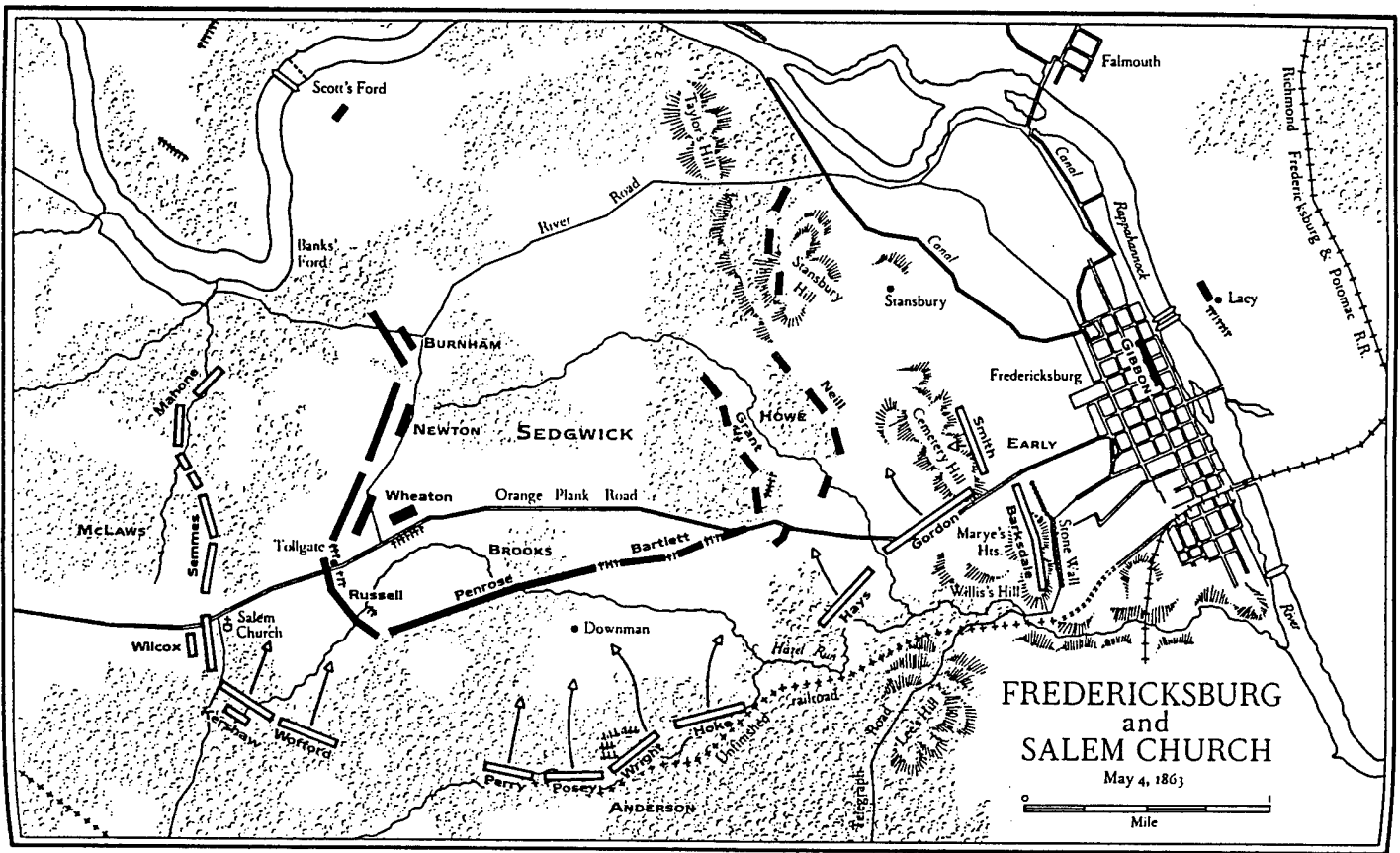
Map 3.

Chancellorsville, 2-6 May 1863



Map 4.

Jackson's Flank Attack.



Map 5.

Lee Attacks Sedgwick.

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