

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 23-10-2006		2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE General Robert E. Lee -- Brightest Star in the South				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Kent B. Dalton, Lt Col, USAF Paper Advisor (if Any): Mackubin Owens				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the faculty of the NWC in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the JMO Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT History is often overlooked for its value in terms of lessons learned. By examining General Robert E. Lee's distinctive application of operational art and leadership as the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, we can discern many lessons which are still pertinent to our commanders at the operational level today. From his selection of Lieutenant General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson as one of his corps commanders during his reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia, his methods to build morale to his strategy and his balancing of Space, Time and Force there are many lessons to be learned.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Robert E. Lee, Operational Art, Operational Leadership, Lessons Learned, Chancellorsville, Commander's Prerogative, Morale, Strategy					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: Unclassified			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 27	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3556

**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, R.I.**

General Robert E. Lee -- Brightest Star in the South

by

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Lt Col., USAF

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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.

Signature: _____

23 Oct 2006

Abstract

History is often overlooked for its value in terms of lessons learned. By examining General Robert E. Lee's distinctive application of operational art and leadership as the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, we can discern many lessons which are still pertinent to our commanders at the operational level today. From his selection of Lieutenant General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson as one of his corps commanders during his reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia, his methods to build morale to his strategy and his balancing of Space, Time and Force there are many lessons to be learned.

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INTRODUCTION

History provides many examples of brilliant combat leaders who have led their forces to victory in the field. Hannibal, Lord Nelson, General George S. Patton Jr., and General Norman Schwarzkopf are only a few. There has been a great deal written about battles, campaigns and wars fought in the past. We enjoy these writings for their historical value but oftentimes these events are overlooked for the value of the lessons we can learn from the action and inaction of the participants. Even when lessons are learned from these past engagements, they are often forgotten or the events themselves are not even examined. For example, during the early 1960s, when America's involvement in Vietnam was on the rise, one American four-star general remarked that there was not much to learn from the French since they had not won a war since Napoleon had been in power.¹ Although some of these leaders lived long ago, and the engagements they fought in took place several years in the past, in some cases, hundreds or even thousands of years ago, they still hold many pertinent lessons for our 21st century operational commanders.

One such leader from who we can learn is General Robert E. Lee, Commanding General of the Army of Northern Virginia during the American Civil War. During the Civil War, Lee's command of operational art and leadership was exemplary and can serve as a model to emulate. More importantly, there are pertinent lessons our 21st century military leaders can learn from Lee's distinctive application of operational art and leadership. In this paper, I will examine Lee's relationship with Lieutenant General Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, and why it mattered to General Lee and the Confederate cause, how General Lee raised morale, his strategy during the war, and how he seemingly bent the factors of space,

¹ Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*. (New York, NY:, Vintage Books, 1991), 235.

time and force at the battle of Chancellorsville to engineer a victory against a much larger Union army. I will also touch on the lessons learned from each area covered and their implications for our operational level commanders of the 21st century. Before delving into these areas, a short background on General Lee is appropriate.

BACKGROUND

General Robert E. Lee was the quintessential operational leader. He spent nearly his entire life in preparation for the time when he would command at the operational level. During the American Civil War he would prove time and again that he was a true master of the operational art.

Robert E. Lee was born January 19, 1807 at “Stratford”, his ancestral family home, in Northern Virginia. He was the fourth child of Ann Hill Carter and Henry “Light-Horse Harry” Lee, Revolutionary War hero and governor of Virginia. Completing his studies at Alexandria Academy, where he excelled in Latin and mathematics, he received an appointment for the United States Military Academy at West Point. Graduating second in his class in 1829, Lee was assigned to the army’s elite Corps of Engineers. After graduating from West Point, General Lee continued a robust self-study program in military matters, paying particular attention to the writings of Baron Antoine Henri Jomini.² In 1831, he married Mary Randolph Custis, daughter of George Washington Parke Custis, step-grandson of George Washington, and Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis. Over the next 15 years, Lee spent most of his time in the army doing engineering work on coastal fortifications and re-directing rivers for navigation.³

² Scott Bowden and Bill Ward, *Last Chance for Victory: Robert E. Lee and the Gettysburg Campaign* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 62-63.

³ Ibid., 65.

In 1847, Lee reported to General Winfield Scott who was preparing to attack Vera Cruz in Mexico. Lee assisted in the planning of this successful operation, which was his first time in combat. It was under Scott's tutelage that Lee first learned how a smaller but better-trained force should deal with a numerically superior force in a stronger position.

Lee participated in more battles, leading troops and conducting critical engineering and scouting duties. During his time in Mexico, Lee learned many valuable lessons. First, he learned that a numerically inferior foe could engage and defeat a larger force, even if that force was on the defensive. To make this happen, four things were required: all information about the adversary and terrain had to be collected and analyzed, the commander of the smaller force had to be willing to take risks, had to make a decision and act on that decision, even in the face of criticism from subordinates, and had to seize the initiative. Lee gained the ability to read terrain over and above that required of a normal engineer and also came to understand the value of maneuver and the advantages of attacking an opponent's flank.⁴ All of these lessons were to serve him well in the future.

Lee served as the superintendent at West Point from 1852-1855, where he conducted an extensive study of the campaigns of Napoleon. His interface with faculty and visitors served to build on his already considerable military knowledge. After his stint at West Point, Lee was transferred to the cavalry as second-in-command of a regiment.

In October 1857, his wife's father died and he went back to Arlington, Virginia to handle affairs surrounding this event.⁵ Lee was still in Virginia in 1861, when southern states started seceding. On April 18, 1861 Lee learned of Virginia's secession. He was

⁴ Ibid., 65-72.

⁵ Gene Smith, *Lee and Grant: A Dual Biography* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1984), 52, 54-55.

offered command of all Union forces but he turned down the opportunity because of the duty he felt towards Virginia. On April 23, 1861, he accepted the post of commander in chief of Virginia's military forces. Three weeks later he became a brigadier general in the Confederate army.⁶ He had some unsuccessful campaigning in western Virginia, spent time in the Carolinas preparing coastal defenses and was appointed military advisor to the South's president, Jefferson Davis.⁷ On June 2, 1862 he became the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, replacing General Joseph Johnston who had been wounded in battle.⁸ One of the first things Lee would do was to reorganize his personnel.

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

Milan Vego believes operational commanders must possess high intelligence. According to Vego, intelligence is made up of imagination, flexibility of mind, and judgment. As part of judgment, Vego believes an operational commander must be a "good judge of other people's character and abilities when choosing his subordinates and in evaluating their work".⁹ When Lee took command of the Army of Northern Virginia he demonstrated tremendous judgment in reorganizing its structure. He removed several high-ranking individuals, to include John Magruder and Benjamin Huger.¹⁰ In the revamping of the organization, both General James Longstreet and General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson became Corps commanders. Longstreet had already demonstrated superior ability to handle

⁶ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1988), 281.

⁷ Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 98-102.

⁸ Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Partners in Command: The Relationships Between Leaders in the Civil War* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994), 32.

⁹ Milan Vego, *Operational Warfare* (Newport, RI: US Naval War College, 2000), 562-563.

¹⁰ Stuart W. Smith, ed., *Douglas Southall Freeman on Leadership* (Newport RI: Naval War College Press, 1990), 86.

troops and had been a member of the team under General Joe Johnston. Although Jackson had serious issues with some of the other officers and had not lived up to Lee's expectations in the Seven Days' battles, Lee saw Jackson as a genius on the battlefield. In Lee's mind, Jackson's strengths more than offset any other issues.¹¹

Lee's relationship with Jackson during the Civil War began when Lee was the military advisor to President Davis and Jackson was a division commander for General Johnston. All correspondence between Johnston and Jackson passed through the headquarters and this gave Lee a chance to read its contents. Lee would then make operational suggestions to Jackson who would decide on the course of action. This arrangement resulted in Jackson's superb Valley Campaign and set in motion the most successful partnership the South would see during the war. This partnership continued after Lee assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee needed Jackson's ability to execute military operations. Jackson, a master of combat, needed Lee's expertise to raise his performance. No other Southern general could evaluate adversarial schemes and develop options to defeat those schemes like General Lee.¹² Lee and Jackson together showed what complete understanding and implementation of the operational art could accomplish. Of Lee, Jackson said he was, "...the only man whom I would follow blindfolded". Lee had tremendous confidence in Jackson. When getting ready to attack Union forces at Fredericksburg, Lee told the officer who was delivering orders, "Say to General Jackson that he knows just as well what to do with the enemy as I do".¹³ Their association continued until Jackson's death at Chancellorsville in May, 1863. Before Jackson died, Lee sent a note

¹¹ Glatthaar, 36.

¹² Ibid., 22-31.

¹³ Edgar F. Puryear Jr., *American Generalship, Character is Everything: The Art of Command* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 2000), 307.

saying, “Tell General Jackson, he has lost his left arm, but I have lost my right.”¹⁴ The relationship between Lee and Jackson speaks to the concept of “commander’s prerogative” and its importance for our operational commanders.

During our introduction to operational planning, the briefer from the Joint Staff explained how the new Joint Operational Planning Process would work. In his lecture he talked about how the new process could pick down to the unit level who would participate in the operations. When he briefed a Combatant Commander on the process, the Combatant Commander remarked how he did not want his commander’s prerogative impinged upon. He went on to say there may be a time when he wants a specific unit involved in an operation. In my mind that makes perfect sense.

I had a similar experience that illustrates commander’s prerogative, although on a much smaller scale. In a previous assignment, I had a small staff of seven enlisted evaluators working for me. Our mission was to ensure the proficiency of our 45 member missile warning crew force. We were at a remote location with only 125 military personnel assigned, so having the right chemistry on our team in order to successfully accomplish our mission was paramount. During the monthly manning meeting, our Operations Officer broached the subject of who would be hired from among three candidates to fill the position of Non-Commissioned Officer in Charge in my section. One of the candidates had issues of getting along with people. On a remote assignment, this makes getting the job done somewhat difficult. One of the other candidates got along well with others, but did not possess the necessary drive to be successful. The candidate I supported got along well with others, possessed superior job knowledge and had a strong drive to succeed. I had been

¹⁴ Glatthaar, 49.

through training with this individual and knew he had what it took to do a superb job. After a candid discussion, our operations officer left the decision to me since I “would have to live with it”. I got who I wanted and our section went on to have a stellar year. It would be hard to imagine how tough waging war would have been for Lee if he had not been able to exercise his commander’s prerogative in hiring Jackson as a corps commander. While the concept of commander’s prerogative is very important to the modern day operational commander, understanding morale is also very important.

According to Vego, operational leadership describes that a commander “should know how men would react in certain situations or conditions. This allows him to properly assess the morale and capabilities of his own forces”.¹⁵ General Lee was superb in raising the morale of his troops. One of Lee’s biographers, Douglas Southall Freeman, believes we should study how General Lee dealt with morale because he was able to “establish, reestablish and maintain morale”.¹⁶

General Lee knew how to deal with morale issues and our 21st century operational leaders can definitely learn from his example. Lee’s first maxim in maintaining morale was to know your resources, both human and physical. Lee knew his army well, in fact he knew every colonel in his army. When in combat, if Lee wanted to gauge the probable actions of his troops, his chance for success or if he could expect proper intelligence from a unit, he would ask who commanded the unit. Based on the response, he knew what to expect.¹⁷ His second rule of morale was, “The morale of an army is never better than the average competence of its command; to create morale in an army, start with your officers”. He

¹⁵ Vego, 563.

¹⁶ Freeman, 104.

¹⁷ Ibid., 105-106.

believed his men's morale rested on the typical proficiency exhibited by his officers. To keep the army's competence as high as he could, Lee would remove the lesser competent commanders. Before a particularly upcoming grueling offensive, he sent two brigadier generals on their way. His third tenet for maintaining morale was to be fair and respect all. He did this by promoting the competent, removing the incompetent and never looking for a scapegoat. When he removed General Jubal Early from command he did it in a way that left Early with his pride. He did not break his morale or destroy him in the eyes of his troops. Lee's fourth and final tenet on maintaining morale dealt with taking care of his men. He took care of his men by giving them discipline. In his eyes, undisciplined troops could not achieve their best in combat. In taking care of his troops, Lee also saw to it that his troops had the best rations available, especially after a tough battle. He ensured his troops were issued new uniforms after a defeat. He believed this raised morale immediately. In taking care of his troops, he never marched them unnecessarily and rested them as often as he could. In implementing these rules for morale, General Lee certainly gained the trust of his command and in turn received their best in battle.¹⁸

All of Lee's principles for raising morale are very important, but I believe the most important one dealt with taking caring of the troops. Lee took care of his troops with rations and new uniforms. We can make similar gestures ensuring our troops have the proper equipment for successful mission accomplishment. We're all very familiar with our troops in Somalia in the early 1990s not having the armor support that was requested.¹⁹ During the initial stages of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, our troops were not equipped with appropriate

¹⁸ Freeman, 105-113.

¹⁹ William R. Hawkins, *Iraq: Heavy Forces and Decisive War*, The U.S. Professional Writing Collection (Parameters, Autumn 2003) http://www.army.mil/professionalwriting/volumes/volume1/september_2003/9_03-6.html (accessed 21 October 2006).

body armor²⁰ or properly armored vehicles.²¹ Some of these decisions were due to political constraints and others may be due to improper analysis of the operational environment or even production capability that falls short. The bottom-line is that every operational commander needs to do their utmost to care for the troops. One motto from one of my previous assignments was, “Mission first, people always”. After all, if we do not care for our people then they can not accomplish the mission. Along with the people to accomplish the mission, there also needs to be strategy.

The grand strategy of the South during the civil war was at times enigmatic. Many critics argue they had no grand strategy.²² The South had no general staff and no civilian coordinating board, but they did have a grand strategy. Its war policy and grand strategy, while at times “piecemeal, frequently disjointed, and sometimes contradictory”, was laid out by Jefferson Davis and General Lee.²³ According to McPherson, Davis at first wanted to wage war with a strategy like George Washington’s during the revolution, where Washington basically retreated from stronger opponents and only attacked small bands of enemy troops when success was almost guaranteed, avoiding all-out battle that could have destroyed his army. Two considerations kept Davis from this strategy. One was the expectation by the people of the south to defend every inch of Confederate soil. This strategy was tried for a time, with small numbers of troops dispersed about the South, but manpower was spread so thinly that Union forces broke through in several areas. The second consideration which kept

²⁰ Jonathan Turley, *U.S. Soldiers Lack Best Protective Gear* (USA Today, 17 Dec 2003) http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/editorials/2003-12-17-turley_x.htm (accessed 21 October 2006).

²¹ Raymond Perry, *How the System Shorted Armored Humvee’s* (10 Dec 2004) <http://www.military.com> (accessed 21 October 2006).

²² Archer Jones, *Confederate Strategy from Shiloh to Vicksburg* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 16-17, 58.

²³ Joseph L. Harsh, *Confederate Tide Rising: Robert E. Lee and the Making of Southern Strategy, 1861-1862* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1998), 11, 17.

Davis from enacting a type of strategy similar to Washington's was pressure from the people. They wanted to attack. The South's strategy eventually evolved into what was referred to as an "offensive-defensive" strategy.²⁴

Davis's and Lee's thinking was influenced greatly by Jomini. Jomini's concept of the "defensive-offensive" showed a belligerent operating primarily in a defensive mode, taking the initiative to defeat the adversary in one of two ways: maneuver and driving them to retreat, or forcing them into combat to destroy them. Davis used a term, "offensive-defensive" to explain what the Confederates did strategically.²⁵ Basically, they used interior lines of communication to concentrate their forces and if chance favored them, they would go on the offensive, even to the point of invading the North.²⁶ In the South's active use of the concept, the offensive weighed much more than the defensive.²⁷

Davis's idea of offensive grand strategy had three parts. First, they had to defeat the North's invasions. Second, they had to mount operations to claim areas they thought belonged to the confederacy; Missouri, Kentucky and Maryland. Third, Davis supported the idea of carrying the war into the North.²⁸ In supporting this grand strategy, Lee knew the South could not ever conquer the North and that they probably would not receive outside help. He had to take risks to beat the North. From reading Northern newspapers, he understood the North did not want a protracted conflict, thus the idea of making the North believe the conflict would be lengthy and expensive with the possibility of still not beating the South. Lee could not yield the initiative to the enemy, it would only invite defeat. Lee

²⁴ McPherson, 337.

²⁵ Harsh, 20.

²⁶ McPherson, 338.

²⁷ Harsh, 20.

²⁸ Ibid.,18.

realized he had to use his strengths in infantry, cavalry, and maneuver to trump the North's strengths in artillery, engineering and the navy. To win, he had to get his adversary into the open, away from his defenses, big guns and passable rivers.²⁹ Time and again he used this strategy to support the South's grand strategy. Lee also recognized the importance of Virginia and its capitol, Richmond, to the South.

Lee recognized the strategic value of Virginia with its men and agricultural and industrial bases. Virginia was strategically located, with the Northern capitol nearby for assault. Lee also recognized the value of Richmond not only as a symbol for morale, but also as a key supplier of his army and a valuable rail connection.³⁰ Some have criticized Lee for focusing exclusively on the Eastern Theater and Virginia in particular, all but forgetting the Western Theater and its strategic implications for the confederacy. Russell Weigley believed Lee discounted what the West meant to the Confederacy agriculturally and industrially. In fact, the only time Lee gave approval for a major reinforcement of the West came after the defeat at Gettysburg.³¹ In Lee's defense, he believed the best chance for decisive Southern victory lay in Virginia and not in the West.³²

There are many valuable lessons to be learned from General Lee's strategy. One lesson is seizing the initiative. Lee realized the value of taking and holding the initiative in combat. To give it up would have meant letting the adversary dictate the time and place of battles.³³ This is still a valuable concept for our forces today. Lee also knew the value of understanding his foe's strengths and when combined with seizing the initiative, he could

²⁹ Ibid., 57, 58, 62, 66, 67.

³⁰ Harsh, 64, 65.

³¹ Weigley, 125.

³² Harsh, 64.

³³ Ibid., 62.

direct the time, place and type of combat to be waged, focusing on his strengths, taking away some of the adversary's advantages. This lesson speaks to our involvement in the Global War on Terror today and the asymmetric struggle our opponents are trying to wage. By knowing our enemy's strengths and weaknesses and seizing the initiative, it is easier to conduct decisive operations. Lee's application of strategy points out the importance of "nesting" strategy with that of the nation's grand strategy. Nested strategy results in a better unity of effort towards accomplishment of national-strategic objectives. According to Vego, national-strategic objectives should always dominate theater-strategic objectives.³⁴ Lee supported the South's grand strategy by attacking Northern forces as often as he could when they came south of the Mason-Dixon line. He supported their claim to Maryland with an invasion in 1862, thereby supporting another aspect of their grand strategy. Finally, his invasions of Maryland and Pennsylvania showed his actions to support the final facet of the South's grand strategy of carrying the war to the North.³⁵ As seen in Iraq, the results of not properly nesting strategy reared its ugly head when it became apparent the U.S. had not planned for protecting and assisting Iraqi civilians in the post-conflict stage of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM.³⁶ One other valuable lesson learned from General Lee's strategy comes from his lack of involvement with the western theater. This points out that when at war, we must consider all aspects of the war, including all theaters of operation and the implications of events in those theaters on the war as a whole. This also reinforces that we have to wage a truly unified campaign on terror with our friends and allies, essentially considering the entire

³⁴ Milan Vego, *Policy, Strategy and Operations*, NWC 1033. (Newport, RI: The United States Naval War College, 2004), 7.

³⁵ McPherson, 338.

³⁶ James K. Bishop, *Combat Role Strains Relations Between America's Military and its NGOs*, NWC 2048 (Newport RI: The United States Naval War College, 2003), 29, 30.

world since we are fighting on a global scale. Now that we've covered Lee's strategy and lessons learned, we'll take a look at how he employed his strategy in a specific battle.

From looking at the numbers on each side involved in the fighting, Chancellorsville was by all means a battle the South should have lost, being outnumbered at least two to one. President Lincoln hoped that the Union commanding general, Major General Joseph Hooker, with 130,000 men, would engage and defeat the Army of Northern Virginia. On the other hand, General Lee's situation was becoming critical. His men were not in great shape due to cold weather and lack of supplies. Scurvy had begun to set in. In an effort to gain more supplies, Lee detached General Longstreet along with Generals Pickett and Hood to go to the area south of the James River to contain the Federals at Newport News and to gather supplies for his army. This left him with approximately 60,000 men.³⁷

Hooker's plan was to cross the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers with at least three corps and attempt to maneuver against Lee's left flank and rear. He would leave two corps in Fredericksburg to hold Confederate forces there and have two remaining corps to send where needed. One key to Hooker's plan was to send General Stoneman's cavalry across the river, two weeks before his own major movement, to cut Lee's lines of communications and interdict supplies.³⁸ On the morning of April 13, 1863 General Stoneman began his march and was on the move for two days. On the evening of the 14th, it began raining and continued to rain continuously for 36 hours. Subsequently, he could not cross the river until the 28th, which essentially negated his contributions to the battle. Hooker crossed the Rappahannock on the evening of the 28th and morning of the 29th with three

³⁷ James M. McPherson, *Battle Chronicles of the Civil War* (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 14, 16.

³⁸ McPherson, 17.

corps. He moved to Chancellor House where he set up headquarters and ordered III Corps to join him there. With this move, he had successfully outflanked Lee at Fredericksburg.³⁹

To meet the threat to his left flank and rear, Lee ordered a division towards Chancellorsville and cavalryman Lieutenant General “Jeb” Stuart to rejoin the main force. Lee basically had two choices; either retreat to the south or attack the Union forces at Chancellorsville with his main force. Retreat, while safer, would also have meant giving up the supplies in the Rappahannock Valley and it also would have been tougher to secure their rail lines. Retreat was also exactly what Lee believed Hooker thought he would do, so he decided to take the risk, as he learned from Scott, and attack with a smaller force.⁴⁰

After some brief skirmishes, Hooker ordered his men back to their original defensive positions, much to the consternation of his men. Hooker told Major General Couch he had Lee, “right where I want him; he must fight me on my own ground.”⁴¹ Major General Doubleday, one of Hooker’s division commanders believed Hooker thought if Lee attacked an enemy behind defenses, he would be beaten and if he did not attack, Lee would be forced to fall back to Richmond for supplies. In either case, Hooker had no plans to attack.⁴²

Lee’s decision to attack was aided by information from Brigadier General Fitzhugh Lee, one of his cavalry officers. He had reconnoitered the Federal right and discovered it was hanging “in the air”, not anchored on any natural obstacle and with no cavalry screen.⁴³ Lee’s abilities in these situations to calculate time and space factors was evident at

³⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 21, 22.

⁴¹ Ibid., 25, 26.

⁴² McPherson, 28.

⁴³ Edward Hagerman, *The American Civil War and the Origins of Modern Warfare: Ideas, Organization, and Field Command* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 133.

Chancellorsville.⁴⁴ Indeed, his capability to impart his ideas or “operational vision”, the ability to understand how to achieve operational objectives through execution of a campaign or major operation, on his subordinates really set him apart from his peers.⁴⁵ He decided to attack by turning Hooker’s right flank and getting troops behind him, while at the same time leaving a force in Hooker’s front to mask his movement. Lee split his forces, sending Jackson to make the risky, 12 mile flanking maneuver across the Federal front with his entire corps of 28,000 men. This left Lee with only two divisions to fix Hooker’s men in place.⁴⁶

Jackson’s movement began on the morning of May 2. They utilized a little-used woodcutter’s road through the woods which led to a better road that would put them well west of the Northern troops. The confederate movement was spotted several times by Union troops and even though requests came to Hooker to attack, he still held off. He believed what he was seeing was the retreat of Lee’s men.⁴⁷ This may be because that is what he expected Lee to do or possibly because it is what he would have done had the positions been reversed; in essence, he was mirror-imaging. Lee, knowing his adversaries as he did most likely realized retreat is what Hooker expected and he used this to his advantage. By 5 p.m. all of Jackson’s troops were ready for the attack. They attacked through heavily forested terrain, where the Northern troops least expected to be engaged.⁴⁸ The results were stupendous, routing the Federal XI Corps. Jackson’s troops were preparing for another attack, but it was getting dark and they were somewhat disorganized and had to halt to regroup. Jackson, while coming back into Confederate lines was shot by his own men, who

⁴⁴ Edward J. Stackpole, *Chancellorsville: Lee’s Greatest Battle* (Harrisburg, PA: The Stackpole Company, 1959), 83.

⁴⁵ Vego, 569.

⁴⁶ McPherson, 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 29, 31.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 21, 30.

mistook him for Federal cavalry. A.P. Hill took command of Jackson's Corps and was also wounded. Jackson's Corps was then led by "Jeb" Stuart. In the lull of the fighting, the Union reorganized with Major General Reynold's I Corps coming to hold the right flank.⁴⁹

Lee was still in a tough position, with his men divided. He ordered Stuart, now in command of Jackson's Corps, to attack with the goal being to unite their forces. Stuart began pressing the attack. The Union troops, under Hooker's orders, gave up high ground in their center line in order to strengthen their shorter defensive line. This was another mistake by the North. Stuart, realizing the ground was paramount to the events at hand, placed 30 pieces of artillery on it and brought them into the fight.⁵⁰ The attack broke the Federal defenses and they retreated to a line north of Chancellorsville. Lee held the field and wanted to continue the attack against Hooker, but his men needed to rest and regroup.⁵¹ There were two more battles between North and South related to Chancellorsville, one at Fredericksburg, where Union troops under Major General Sedgwick defeated troops under General Early. Sedgwick then made a deliberate move to get behind Lee, but by this time, Lee was able to detach troops to fight in and around Salem Church, where they defeated the Union forces. By May 6th, the Union forces had retreated back across the Rappahannock.⁵²

As one might well imagine, there are many lessons to be learned from Lee's actions at Chancellorsville. Of all the lessons we can learn, the most important is probably that of seizing the initiative. When Hooker fell back into a defensive position after flanking Lee, he essentially gave up the initiative and General Lee was smart enough to grab it. Lee's use of

⁴⁹ Ibid.,36.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 37-39.

⁵¹ Ibid.,40.

⁵² Ibid., 41-46.

maneuver to put his forces into position to flank Hooker's troops, show us the value of maneuver to gain advantage in battle. Lee's actions also show us that smaller forces can beat larger, better equipped forces. In relation to our forces in this era of downsizing today, this is an especially important lesson. Lee used the space (woodcutters road, space to maneuver and thick brush on the Union right flank) and time (given to him by Hooker's reluctance to attack) at his disposal to redeploy his forces, bringing the right amount of force to bear on various decisive points. Essentially, he had the proper balance of space, time and force to win. Finally, we are reminded of the dangers of mirror-imaging, believing the enemy thinks and acts like we do. Vego calls this a "perennial problem".⁵³ When faced with the information of Jackson's troops on the move, General Hooker actually believed they were retreating, possibly in part because that's what he expected him to do and possibly because that is what he would have done.⁵⁴ As we see in the Chancellorsville campaign, mirror-imaging can be very destructive.

CONCLUSION

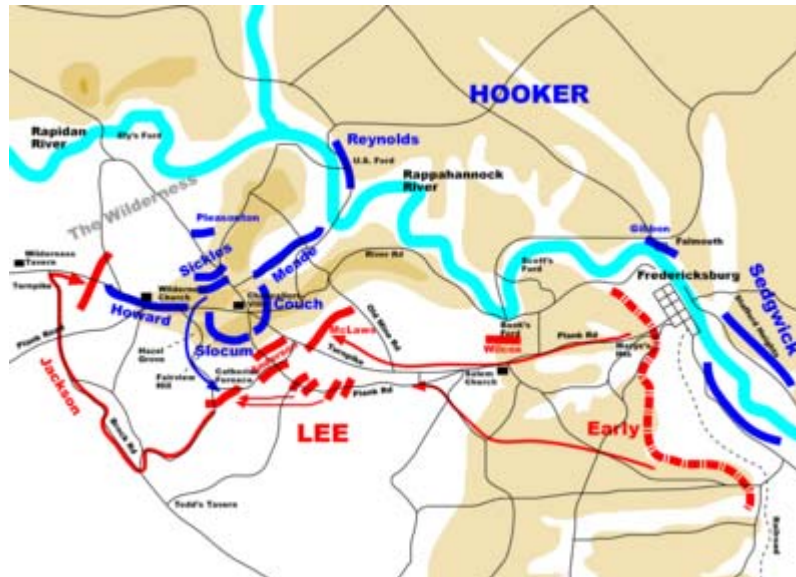
General Robert E. Lee was a superb practitioner of operational art and leadership. Even though he fought many of the greatest battles of his distinguished career over 140 years ago, the lessons we can learn by studying his distinctive application of operational art and leadership and his strategy and utilization of that strategy on the battlefield are still pertinent today. Being able to hire who you want into a key leadership position and using their talents to accomplish the task at hand--exercising your "commander's prerogative", is crucial to success today just as it was in Lee's time. Taking care of your troops and keeping their morale high is critical to operational success in all facets of our duties and translates directly

⁵³ Vego, 438, 439.

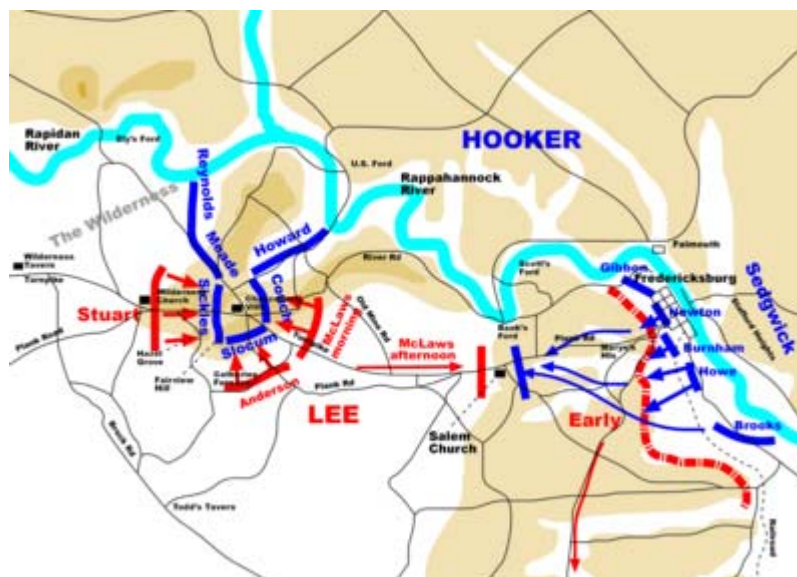
⁵⁴ Ibid., 46.

into success on the battlefield. Nesting strategy to ensure activity consistent on the battlefield with grand strategy is crucial to achieving desired end states. Understanding the nature of time, space and force on the battlefield as well as the value of maneuver is as paramount today as it was during Lee's time. Finally, retaining the initiative, understanding the concept of mirror-imaging and keeping a focus on all theaters of operation is absolutely key to our success today, especially in the Global War on Terror.

These are not the only lessons one could learn from a study of Lee; there are many more. A study of Lee as a commander at the operational level of war provides a brilliant source of information for future operational commanders. He clearly demonstrated that one simply cannot "show up" and turn out to be a great commander. It takes arduous study and sacrifice to learn and synthesize all the applicable lessons and it is our task to ensure we do not fail in this regard for the cost would be unimaginable.

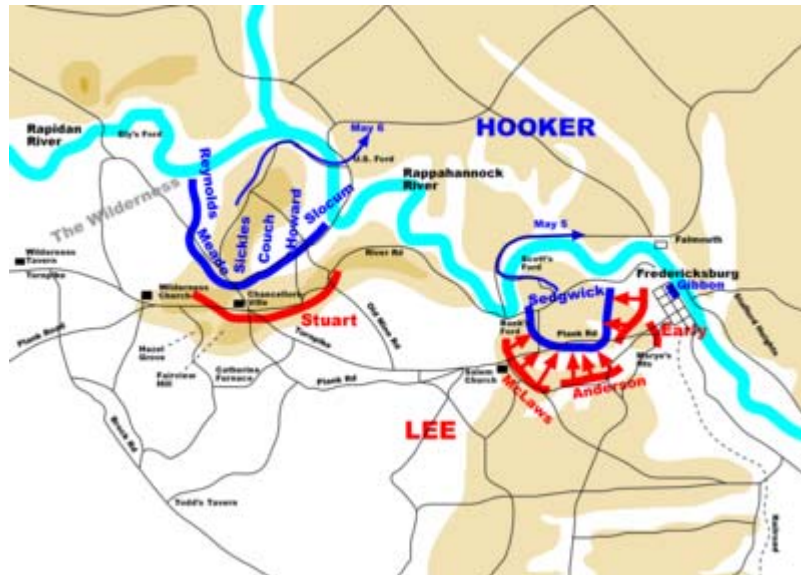


Chancellorsville, 1-2 May 1863⁵⁵



Chancellorsville, 3 May 1863

⁵⁵ All maps from Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. "Battle of Chancellorsville," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/battle_of_chancellorsville (accessed 18 October 2006).



Chancellorsville, 4 May 1863

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