

Taming the Tar Heel Department: D.H. Hill and the Challenges of Operational-Level Command during the American Civil War

**A Monograph
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Abstract

TAMING THE TAR HEEL DEPARTMENT: D.H. HILL AND THE CHALLENGES OF OPERATIONAL-LEVEL COMMAND DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR by MAJ Brit K. Erslev, U.S. Army, 47 pages.

The purpose of this monograph is to identify skills and capabilities required by commanders to excel at the operational level of war and in the practice of operational art. The author evaluated the performance of Confederate Major General Daniel Harvey Hill in his role as a department commander during the American Civil War. Department commanders were responsible for sequencing tactical operations to support the accomplishment of their government's strategic objectives but received little guidance on how to fulfill their missions. The monograph concludes that twenty-first century American military officers in similar command positions must be able to make decisions given ambiguous guidance and a fluid operational environment, be creative and active in developing innovative techniques to better understand the operational environment, and be able to craft holistic campaign plans that go beyond offensive and defensive operations.

An examination of Hill's tenure as commander of the Confederate Department of North Carolina from February to July 1863 found that he was uncomfortable translating discretionary orders into action, he was unable to adequately visualize his operational environment, and he did not construct a coherent campaign plan to accomplish disparate missions and support Confederate strategic aims. Some of Hill's struggles were due to the inability of the Confederate high command to articulate strategic priorities, the actions of the Union forces, and lack of experience in higher-level commands. Previous tactical-level experiences in the war made Hill more cautious about committing force when presented with ambiguous situations and in his capacity as department commander he did not grasp his responsibility to provide recommendations to strategic-level decision makers regarding force disposition and types of combat operations. Today's senior officers must take advantage of a decade's worth experience of war as well as an educational system which did not exist in the nineteenth century to embrace operational-level responsibilities, ask pertinent questions, and be able and willing to act given vague guidance.

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Introduction

History is replete with examples of generals who excelled at brigade and division-level command, only to falter when promoted to positions of higher responsibility. Identifying skills and capabilities that these men lacked or did not develop to full advantage can aid current Army leaders in preparing themselves for the transition from tactical-level command to operational-level command. This ability to adjust is crucial in today's joint and multi-national operational environments where general officers command geographically large areas of responsibility encompassing multiple actors and complex political, military, economic, and social situations.

During the American Civil War, both the Union and the Confederate States of America used a department command system to assist in meeting each side's respective strategic objectives. In early 1863 the Confederacy established four main departments comprising broad swaths of territory commanded by full generals who reported directly to President Jefferson Davis.¹ Davis charged the four generals with overseeing and coordinating operations in their departments to support a defensive-offensive strategy. These generals fulfilled administrative duties and commanded field armies on campaigns. Each of the departments, particularly in the east, consisted of various smaller departments and districts, typically overseen by major generals or brigadier generals, the size of which varied over time according to the enemy threat, subordinate commanders' skill level, and how the four commanding generals envisioned their subordinates' support to Confederate strategic aims. In essence, all of these commanders worked at what we today define as the operational level of war. As U.S. Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0, *Operations*, states, "the operational level links employing tactical forces to achieving the strategic

¹ Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 294-295. See also George B. Davis, Leslie J. Perry, and Joseph W. Kirkley, *The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 2003), 370-389 (Plates 162-171) for depictions of Union and Confederate military departments during the course of the war.

end state,” and that commanders “conduct campaigns and major operations to establish conditions that define that end state.”² The manual also defines operational art as “the application of creative imagination by commanders and staffs—supported by their skill, knowledge, and experience—to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces.”³ In sum, commanders apply tenets of operational art to the operational level of war and beyond in order to successfully execute their mission.

General Robert E. Lee, commanding the Department of Northern Virginia as well as its main army, personally conducted campaigns and major operations, but only in one portion of his area of jurisdiction, for he had also been given command of troops in North Carolina.⁴ He could not adequately oversee both Virginia and North Carolina by himself. He therefore sought competent commanders for the departments and districts within his purview who could carry out operations to support his and Davis’ vision of the Confederate strategic end state. As of January 1863, North Carolina had been threatened by sizable Union forces for over a year, and Confederate authorities constantly feared the seizure of Wilmington, one of the last open ports which ensured a flow of outside supplies for the war effort. Lee relied initially on Lieutenant General James Longstreet, then Major General Daniel Harvey Hill to manage operations south of the James River, assisted by commanders in Wilmington and Richmond.

D. H. Hill, one of Lee’s division commanders in the Army of Northern Virginia, returned to the department command system in early 1863 after a brief spell as officer-in-charge of the

² Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) No. 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, D.C.: Headquarters, Department of the Army, 27 February 2008), 6-3.

³ FM 3-0, *Operations*, 6-1.

⁴ Lee assumed command of all troops in eastern Virginia and North Carolina on the day he took over the Army of Northern Virginia. Even though the name of his department did not change to include North Carolina in the title, and despite constant reorganization of the departments between the James River and South Carolina, he retained command of the entire geographical area until the end of the Civil War: “Special Orders No. 22,” 1 June 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Ser. I, 11 (3): 569 (hereafter cited as *OR*, unless otherwise noted all citations are from Ser. I).

tidewater territory east of Richmond in July 1862. Hill was considered a highly competent and experienced tactical commander, having led troops in most of the major engagements in the Virginia theater of operations through the end of 1862. On 7 February 1863, he assumed responsibility for the defense of North Carolina east of the Appalachian Mountains. On 1 April 1863, he formally became the commander of the Department of North Carolina, which significantly increased his jurisdiction to the previously separate district encompassing Wilmington. Finally, on 28 May 1863 Confederate authorities expanded Hill's department to include what was formerly the Department of Southern Virginia up to Petersburg (see Figure 1).⁵ During this period, Hill encountered difficulties meeting the challenges of an operational-level command. Hill struggled as an operational-level commander in North Carolina and southern Virginia because he was uncomfortable translating discretionary orders into action, he was unable to adequately visualize his operational environment, and he did not construct a coherent campaign plan to accomplish disparate missions and support Confederate strategic aims.

Facing a minimum of 14,000 Union forces scattered among coastal garrisons on Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, Hill with a constantly changing range of 9,000 to 16,000 troops had to figure out how to defend against additional incursions while undertaking limited offensive operations to keep the Federals occupied so that they did not reinforce armies in Virginia or near Charleston. Lee also expected Hill to detail troops to gather much needed forage to send to the Army of Northern Virginia, and Governor Zebulon Vance depended on the general for help with

⁵ "Special Orders, No. 32," 7 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 872; "General Orders, No. 34," 1 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 953; "Special Orders, No. 127," 28 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1077; Mark Mayo Boatner III, *The Civil War Dictionary* (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1959/1988), 599-600. Department names, boundaries, and commanders in North Carolina and southern Virginia changed several times between 1862 and 1864. Special Orders No. 32 did not even give Hill a title, but he took over for MG Samuel French, who moved to the Department of Southern Virginia (also formalized in the 1 April reorganization under General Orders No. 34).

the state militia and rounding up deserters.⁶ In other words, Hill needed to come up with a campaign plan to coordinate his various missions to support Lee's own operational plan and the overall defensive-offensive strategy.

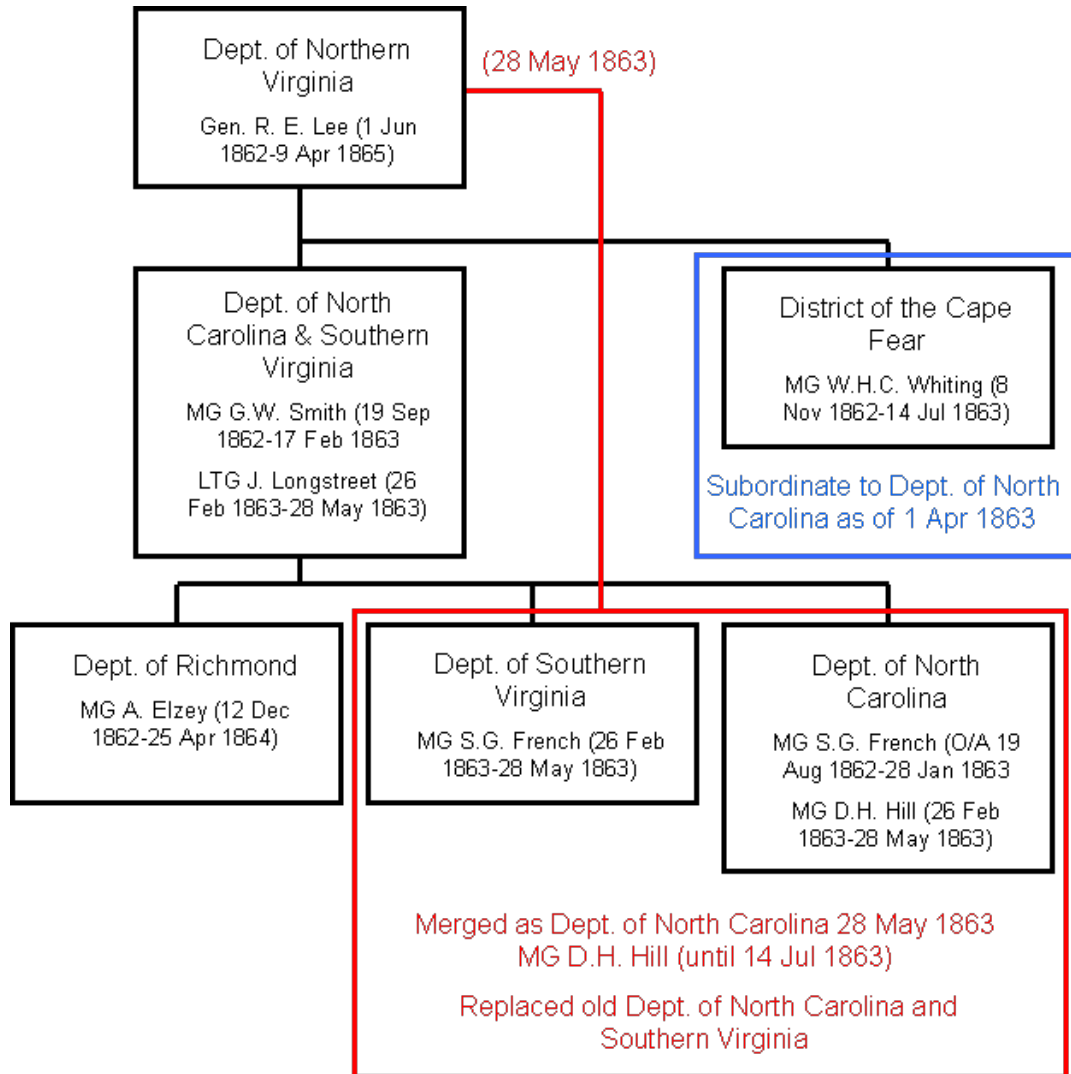


Figure 1. Confederate Departments in the East, January-July 1863

⁶ John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 149-151, 159; Steven E. Woodworth, *Davis and Lee at War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 215-216; Zebulon Vance to D.H. Hill, 23 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 1019.

Being able to successfully perform at the operational level of war requires a commander to have a good understanding of the complexity of his operational environment. He must have some knowledge of his higher headquarters' strategy as well as political guidance, both of which enable him to envision how his actions will affect the broader strategic situation as well as their potential consequences. In addition, he should be able to shape conditions for the tactical success of his subordinates.⁷ Hill lacked much of this knowledge and understanding for reasons that in some instances were not his fault. He and the other Confederate department commanders in 1863 received little clear strategic or policy guidance from higher. The newness of the situation in which senior officers, Union and Confederate, found themselves during the Civil War meant that the most successful were those best able to adapt to particular circumstances. Many senior officers today enjoy the benefit of attending one of the U.S. military's war colleges to study command and the relationships between the levels of war, but Hill learned to command higher-level formations not in school but through on-the-job training during wartime and after a twelve-year hiatus from active military service. In addition, the concept of a department command was new to most generals like Hill who had never served above company or battalion level in the Old Army, and there was no overarching guidance on how to run a department, for each had its own peculiar military, political, and civilian issues. An intelligent man and dedicated tactician and soldier with a good grasp of the Confederate strategic situation mainly gleaned from his continuous observations and discussions with peers over the course of the war, Hill nevertheless faltered when he tried to apply his military knowledge to the conduct of an area defense and other simultaneously occurring missions.

⁷ FM 3-0, *Operations*, 6-3.

Confederate Strategy and the Department System

Jefferson Davis, a USMA graduate who would have preferred to command a field army than be the head politician of the Confederacy, embraced his Constitutional duties as Commander-in-Chief wholeheartedly. Often derided as a micromanager, Davis believed he was fully qualified to manage military affairs; he did not empower his secretaries of war nor utilize a general-in-chief or chief of staff, employing a “military advisor” for brief periods in 1862 and 1864.⁸ He hoped of course for foreign recognition, but in the meantime realized he needed to craft realistic political and military strategies. Davis’s grand strategy entailed defending the borders for the purpose of drawing the war out as long as was needed to convince the Union and President Abraham Lincoln that their goal to reunite the sections was in vain. He was not interested in acquiring Union territory and knew that Lincoln had more manpower and economic resources at his disposal. Civil War historians have debated the semantics for years, but most agree that even though poorly articulated and transmitted to the field, Davis followed an offensive-defensive military strategy. In terms of priority of effort, the strategy was more accurately defensive-offensive. The armies’ decisive operation entailed defending the borders from incursions by Union forces. At the beginning of the war, the concept was that of a cordon defense; as the war continued, Davis consolidated his armies so that they were better able to counter Union offensive thrusts deep into Confederate territory. When opportunity allowed, however, Confederate commanders were to counterattack and/or conduct raids against Federal

⁸ Lee served as Davis’s military advisor in the spring of 1862, but Davis did not replace Lee after he took command of the Army of Northern Virginia. Braxton Bragg served as military advisor to Davis in 1864, returning to field command in North Carolina in 1865. Abraham Lincoln also did not employ a full-time general-in-chief until he appointed Henry Halleck to the post in 1862; Ulysses S. Grant then superseded Halleck in 1864.

forces and into Union territory. The vulnerability of extended Yankee supply and communications lines made raiding a profitable component of Confederate strategy.⁹

To execute the defensive-offensive strategy, Davis split the large Confederacy into geographic military departments, following U.S. pre-war practice. Each department was assigned troops (a de facto field army to be used as detachments in subordinate districts and departments as needed) and a commander who reported directly to the War Department and Davis. This organizational structure allowed Davis to practice decentralized but unified command by placing the onus on the department commanders to manage offensive and defensive operations in their areas as well as coordinate with adjacent departments. He intended the departments to be logistically self-sustaining and protect vital natural resources and industry. Throughout 1862 Davis and his then Secretary of War George Randolph adjusted the department boundaries and sizes, particularly west of the Appalachians, to fit commanders' abilities and missions, settling by 1863 on the aforementioned four main departments.¹⁰

The department system should have allowed Davis to place his trust in four capable individuals to advise him and carry out military operations in concert to keep Union forces at bay. Lee proved the best able to handle his responsibilities mainly because he was the most aggressive

⁹ On discussions of Confederate strategy in Civil War historiography, see T. Harry Williams, "The Military Leadership of North and South," in David Donald, ed., *Why the North Won the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 38 and 46; Archer Jones, *Confederate Strategy: From Shiloh to Vicksburg* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 219; Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), 96-97; Steven E. Woodworth, *Jefferson Davis and His Generals: The Failure of Confederate Command in the West* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 1990), 18-19; Robert G. Tanner, *Retreat to Victory? Confederate Strategy Reconsidered* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 2001), 8-9; and the recent written debate between two historians: Donald Stoker, "There was no Offensive-Defensive Confederate Strategy," and Joseph G. Dawson III, "Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy's 'Offensive-Defensive' Strategy in the U.S. Civil War," and rebuttals, *The Journal of Military History* 73, No. 2 (April, 2009): 571-613.

¹⁰ Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 154-155, 212, 261-262, 277; Thomas L. Connelly and Archer Jones, *The Politics of Command: Factions and Ideas in Confederate Strategy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973/1998), 89-91, 100-101, 108-109, 124; Archer Jones, *Civil War Command and Strategy: The Process of Victory and Defeat* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 78, 114-115.

of the generals. The personalities of the other commanders, Davis's inability to prioritize which department operations were most important, and his sporadic interference with operations at lower echelons hampered the effectiveness of the command structure. The Confederacy's geographic position in theory gave it the advantage of interior lines, i.e. the ability to move troops from quiet zones to more contested areas and to mass against Union forces. In practice, Davis found it difficult to maintain a strategic reserve given the authority he invested in his often parochial department commanders. He did endorse a "pipeline" concept that entailed staging detachments within departments for rapid concentration and tried to set up an East-West conduit for the strategic reserve. He also had to placate eleven governors who naturally did not want to lose territory to the Federal armies. During the first half of 1863, Davis faced simultaneous Union threats to Richmond, central Tennessee, and Vicksburg, the last Confederate bastion on the Mississippi. With Lee's victory at Chancellorsville, the successful general won the president over to his plan to invade the North for the second time vice sending substantial reinforcements west.¹¹ The implied focus on Virginia affected operations in the other departments, even within Lee's own, in D.H. Hill's North Carolina command.

Using Davis's strategic dilemma in mid-1863 as one example, most Civil War historiography discusses the department system in conjunction with critiques of Union and Confederate strategy and general narratives of military operations. Inevitably, Confederate studies focus on Davis's decision to use and maintain the system with its attending advantages and disadvantages. In one of the first modern books on Confederate military leadership, *Rebel Brass* (1956), author Frank Vandiver did not even give credit to Davis for relying on a department

¹¹ Jones, *Confederate Strategy*, 229-231; Connelly and Jones, *The Politics of Command*, 112-115, 124-128; David M. Potter, "Jefferson Davis and the Political Factors in Confederate Defeat," in Donald, ed., *Why the North Won the Civil War*, 108-110.

system until late 1862.¹² Archer Jones, by himself and with other authors, has been the most prolific student of the Confederate department system, beginning with his *Confederate Strategy: From Shiloh to Vicksburg* in 1961 up through *Civil War Command and Strategy* in 1992. In the first book Jones weighed the pros and cons of the system, concluding that it was good and realistic enough to support strategic goals, but that Davis at times did not provide enough guidance to his commanders or insist that they unify their efforts for operations.¹³ With Thomas Connelly in *The Politics of Command* (1973), Jones provided his most comprehensive review of Davis's implementation of strategy through the department system up to the end of 1863, including the successful shuffling of the strategic reserve to Chickamauga. Jones argued that the president invested so much in the concept that the system became de facto Confederate policy.¹⁴ In the most recent academic study of Civil War strategy, Donald Stoker essentially agrees with Jones that the department concept itself did not impede coordination but rather the humans involved did, and he points out that Union commanders also suffered similar problems with their department system.¹⁵ As with Civil War histories in general, however, the discussions of departmental challenges focus on the areas with the most famous commanders, campaigns, and battles, specifically Virginia and the Vicksburg to Chattanooga corridor. There is little mention of the issues of commanders in the departments and districts in other areas of the Confederacy who were affected by the decisions of their superiors and whose operations fit into the broader scheme. One of those commanders affected was D.H. Hill.

¹² Frank E. Vandiver, *Rebel Brass: The Confederate Command System* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1956), 20-21, 34-35.

¹³ Jones, *Confederate Strategy*, 223, 229-231, 239-240.

¹⁴ Connelly and Jones, *The Politics of Command*, 87-88.

¹⁵ Donald Stoker, *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 26-27, 408.

D.H. Hill: Background, Historiography, and Arrival in North Carolina

Born in 1821, Hill grew up in South Carolina as part of a large family that paid homage to its forebears who fought in the American Revolution against the British and Loyalist militias. The youngest of eleven children, Harvey, as he was called, strove to emulate his older brothers and uncles who served in the U.S. Army and frontier militias. Despite a spinal ailment, he won an appointment to the U.S. Military Academy in 1838 and joined a class including such future battlefield luminaries as James Longstreet and William Rosecrans. Hill graduated in the middle of his class in 1842 and was appointed a second lieutenant of artillery. After uneventful frontier and garrison duty, Hill deployed to Texas in 1845 as part of General Zachary Taylor's Army of Occupation. Once the Mexican War started in 1846, he accompanied Taylor's expedition to Monterrey, Mexico, after which he transferred with most of the other Regulars to General Winfield Scott's army in preparation for the Veracruz landing in early 1847. Hill fought in most of the engagements of Scott's campaign up through the capture of Mexico City and after the cease fire took part in occupation duty and counter-guerrilla operations. He recorded his vivid impressions of his baptism by fire in a meticulously detailed diary as well as several anonymous newspaper articles, in which he also revealed his growing antipathy for politicians and a Federal bureaucracy that he believed had failed to adequately support the Army in its mission in Mexico.¹⁶

¹⁶ For background on Hill, see Hal Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General: Daniel Harvey Hill* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991) and Joseph M. Hill, *Biography of Daniel Harvey Hill: Lieutenant General, Confederate States of America, Educator, Author, Editor* (Little Rock, Arkansas: Arkansas Historical Commission, n.d.). Joseph Hill was D.H. Hill's youngest son and the only member of the immediate family who published a biographical sketch of the general. Bridges' book is the closest to a full biography of Hill but concentrates mostly on his Civil War career. Hill's Mexican War diary, which resides in the archives of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, was excellently transcribed in the past decade: see Nathaniel Cheairs Hughes Jr. and Timothy D. Johnson, eds. *A Fighter From Way Back: The Mexican War Diary of Lt. Daniel Harvey Hill, 4th Artillery, USA* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2002).

Hill's disenchantment with the War Department and the wishes of his fiancée prompted him to resign his commission in 1849. In the ensuing decade before the Civil War, he taught mathematics at Washington College in Virginia and Davidson College in North Carolina, and in 1859 became the first superintendent of the North Carolina Military Institute in Charlotte. An active writer who followed national and world affairs with a keen eye, Hill continued to hone his criticism of central authority through his classroom teachings and assorted speeches and publications. When called upon in the spring of 1861, Hill brought his cadets to Raleigh to start training recruits for the First North Carolina Regiment in support of the newly formed Confederate States. He led this regiment at the Battle of Big Bethel near Hampton, Virginia in June 1861. Thereafter he rose quickly to brigade and division command by the spring of 1862, when he returned to the Virginia Peninsula east of Richmond to help block the advance of Union Major General George McClellan and his Army of the Potomac.¹⁷

Hill gained praise for his actions at the Battles of Seven Pines, Gaines's Mill, and Malvern Hill, in the case of the last two working for his brother-in-law, Major General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson. At the same time, however, he started to annoy other Confederate officers, notably Lee, with his sarcasm and biting although truthful comments about fellow commanders' foibles or what he perceived as weaknesses in the tactical and strategic application of combat power. Hill openly criticized Lee's separation of the Army of Northern Virginia into detachments during the Maryland Campaign of September 1862, and perhaps with this in mind Lee acknowledged Hill's prickly personality when contemplating the Carolinian's reassignment in late 1862.¹⁸ Historians ever since have tended to portray Hill as a difficult though talented tactical

¹⁷ Bridges also wrote an article on Hill's prewar educational career: "D.H. Hill's Anti-Yankee Algebra," *Journal of Southern History* 22 (1956): 220-22; see also Marguerite Gilstrap, "Daniel Harvey Hill, Southern Propagandist," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 2 (1943): 43-50.

¹⁸ "Report of Maj. Gen. Daniel H. Hill, C.S. Army, commanding division, of operations July 23-September 17," 1862, *OR*, 19 (1): 1026. On Hill's caustic personality and what Confederate officers and

commander. Douglas Southall Freeman, Virginian author of a comprehensive Lee biography as well as the highly regarded *Lee's Lieutenants*, described Hill as "five feet ten, thin, critical of eye, slightly bent from spinal affection and cursed with an odd humor; he was stiff and sharp when on duty and was wholly unpretending when not in command."¹⁹ In Volume Two of his widely read 1963 *The Civil War: A Narrative*, Shelby Foote called Hill "an accomplished hater, with a sharp tongue he was never slow to use on all who crossed him."²⁰ More recently, Steven Woodworth, in *Davis and Lee at War*, described Hill as having a "tremendous capacity for hating and for fighting."²¹ Hill's only biographer, Hal Bridges, took a more sympathetic approach, but even the title of his book—*Lee's Maverick General*—indicated the popular perception of the man. Lately, academics have studied Hill more for his educational contributions and his influential post-war role as an architect of the South's Lost Cause mythology than for his military career.²²

Hill's defense of South Mountain and the Sunken Road at the Battle of Antietam during the Maryland Campaign showed him at his tactical best, but his concern for his troops often drove him to circumvent the chain of command and contact Richmond directly concerning equipment and personnel issues. After the Battle of Fredericksburg, in which Hill barely saw action, he nearly retired due to his chronic health concerns. Lee, on the other hand, saw an opportunity to move his often difficult division commander out of the Army for the time yet place him in a position where his valuable leadership skills and combat experience would continue to help the

soldiers thought about him, see Jeffrey Wert, "The Soldier Who Could Not Be Understood: 'I Am So Unlike Other Folks'," *Civil War Times Illustrated* 28, Issue 2 (1989): 14-21.

¹⁹ Douglas S. Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command, Volume One: Manassas to Malvern Hill* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 20-21.

²⁰ Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Fredericksburg to Meridian* (New York: Random House, 1963), 817.

²¹ Woodworth, *Davis and Lee at War*, 143.

²² See for example Ray M. Atchinson, "The Land We Love: A Southern Post-Bellum Magazine of Agriculture, Literature, and Military History," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 37, No. 4 (October 1960): 506-15; David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); and Richard D. Starnes, "Forever Faithful: The Southern Historical Society and Confederate Historical Memory," *Southern Cultures* 2, No. 2 (Winter 1996): 177-94.

Confederacy. North Carolina Governor Vance had been asking President Davis for help in defending against Union forces that had established a foothold along the coastal areas; the perfect solution seemed to send an adopted son of the state to coordinate this defense and assist in recruiting new soldiers and rounding up deserters.²³

Based on Hill's performance at Antietam and dissatisfaction with Major General G.W. Smith, current commander of the Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia, Lee felt that Hill would bring a sense of purpose and energy to the job and would work well with the governor and local authorities. Lee made clear to Secretary of War James Seddon that he envisioned operations in North Carolina as being mainly defensive in nature. He saw little point in conducting offensive operations there and would not split up his army to do so, given his belief that most Union reinforcements were headed to his opponent at Fredericksburg, Major General Ambrose Burnside. With the Richmond authorities still concerned about a possible attack on Wilmington, Lee compromised by releasing one division under Brigadier General Robert Ransom to be available in southern Virginia to use where needed.²⁴

Union threats to Suffolk and Charleston in February 1863 coupled with relative inactivity in Virginia prompted Lee to change his mind about reinforcing North Carolina. He put his trusted corps commander James Longstreet in charge of the Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia. Longstreet brought two divisions from Fredericksburg to the Suffolk area in order to be ready to attack or to defend routes to the interior as well as gather forage. At the same time, Hill received orders to take command of troops already stationed in North Carolina, exclusive of the District of Cape Fear, commanded since November 1862 by Brigadier General W.H.C. Whiting. As de-facto commander of the Department of North Carolina, although not clarified in name until

²³ Lee to Seddon, 5 January 1863, *OR*, 18: 819-820.

²⁴ Lee to Seddon, 5 January 1863, *OR*, 18: 819-820; Seddon to Vance, 17 January 1863, *OR*, 18: 851; Lee to Davis, 23 January 1863, *OR*, 18: 856.

1 April, Hill reported to Longstreet, but as time went on he also corresponded directly with Lee and Seddon. Because two infantry brigades had been moved out of the state prior to Hill taking command, he found upon his arrival at headquarters in Goldsboro, North Carolina that on paper he had only two remaining brigades, one cavalry brigade, and assorted artillery and garrison troops for a total of just over 9,000 men present for duty. This number constantly fluctuated over the course of Hill's department command due to troop movements and reporting discrepancies; for example, the next return just over a week later gave Hill 12,537 men present for duty because unlike the previous report it finally accounted for all of the cavalymen in the department.²⁵ Now Hill's job was to figure out how best to use the few troops he had to keep North Carolina from becoming a major theater of operations like Virginia.

Adjusting to Operational-Level Command: Striking the Balance Between Independence and Oversight

Although Hill approached command of troops in North Carolina with his characteristic zeal, he was often uncomfortable translating discretionary orders into decisions for which he was ultimately responsible, preferring to act on positive direction from higher and often blaming others when he could not carry out his plans. This reluctance did not stem from unwillingness to fight or lack of courage or tactical skill. Enlisted men and officers alike commented on Hill's tenacity and seeming indifference to battlefield dangers. His commanding officers between 1861 and 1862 noted in their official reports his success and bravery displayed in various engagements.²⁶ Notwithstanding Hill's proven tactical prowess and courage, he was prone to self-

²⁵ "Special Orders No. 32," 7 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 872; Lee to Longstreet, 18 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 883-884; "Abstract from Field Return of Troops, commanded by Maj. Gen. S.G. French, February 20, 1863," *OR*, 18: 888; "Abstract from Field Return of the Department of North Carolina, commanded by Maj. Gen. D.H. Hill, for March 1, 1863," *OR*, 18: 901. See also correspondence about the movement of the two brigades prior to Hill taking command: Seddon to Lee, 15 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 877 and Seddon to Smith, 15 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 878.

²⁶ For examples of what subordinates and peers said of Hill's actions during the early part of the Civil War, see William Lewis to Millie, 12 June 1861, William Gaston Lewis Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,

doubt and periods of gloominess. After his first battlefield victory, he told his wife Isabella that he felt he could only manage a regiment-size element and that he had never asked for but rather avoided positions of responsibility.²⁷ Often comments like these coincided with periods of uncertainty in family and military matters and times when Hill did not feel well. As a devout Presbyterian, however, he believed that God had a reason for placing him in leadership positions as well as guiding his actions throughout the war. In addition, Hill's Southern upbringing and schooling at West Point fully inculcated in him notions of duty and honor which he could not ignore. Indeed, even if he did not agree with an order or he was in the middle of a rapidly deteriorating situation, he always executed to the best of his ability. At Seven Pines in May 1862, despite the fact that not all of the Confederate forces were in place to carry out the planned attack, Hill went forward with his division and still surprised the opposing Union troops, overrunning a major defensive position and gaining nearly three miles of ground in one afternoon. When Lee, backed by Stonewall Jackson, decided to conduct what turned out to be a disastrous frontal assault on Malvern Hill, Hill voiced his reservations but obeyed orders.²⁸

Despite Hill's courage, devotion to duty, and tactical skill, as the war went on, he did not seek out engagements for the sake of a fight or always show initiative to develop a tactical situation beyond reconnaissance. He became more reserved about sending his troops into unknown situations based on experiences during the Seven Days' Battles in June 1862. For example, following Confederate victory at the Battle of Gaines's Mill, Hill declined to pursue the fleeing enemy army, citing darkness and a lack of knowledge of the local road network; he had

and John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 67-68. For examples of what Hill's superiors wrote about him, see John Magruder to Robert Garnett, 10 June 1861, *OR*, 2: 91; Report of Lee, 6 March 1863, *OR*, 11(2): 493 & 496; and Report of Jackson, 20 February 1863, *OR*, 11(2): 557.

²⁷ D.H. Hill to Isabella Hill, 7 July 1861, D.H. Hill Papers, United States Army Heritage Collection, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.

²⁸ Report of Hill, 1862, *OR*, 11(1): 943-944; Report of Hill, 1862, *OR*, 11(2): 628-629.

already been surprised by Federal forces that day due to an army-wide lack of maps and accurate intelligence.²⁹ As was the case with his peers, Hill was learning how to manage as well as command and control large combined-arms formations. When able to command and control a defined sector at the tactical level with good knowledge of surrounding friendly and enemy units, as at the Battle of Antietam in September 1862, Hill excelled at his job.

Given the adjusted responsibilities of an operational-level command, to include increased geographical scope and a variety of units dispersed in space, Hill was less successful in carrying out his missions. In July 1862, Lee gave Hill his first opportunity at independent command with an assignment to head the Department of North Carolina. Lee wanted Hill to disrupt and delay Union Navy transports on the James River so that they could not quickly reinforce their armies in either northern Virginia or North Carolina. Hill was also responsible for making sure that the remaining Union forces in the area did not try to attack Richmond again. Lee gave Hill his priorities and a lot of latitude in figuring out how best to accomplish his mission. Hill however had trouble getting his artillery and cavalry units to perform up to his standards, and he ended up commanding the department for barely a month. Although he succeeded in building defensive positions around Petersburg, which became crucial in two years time, he failed to stop Union General George McClellan's departure from the Peninsula.³⁰ Lee valued Hill's military skills enough to call him back to division command with the main army, but the episode on the James prompted him to tell President Davis, "This induces me to say what I have had on my mind for some time. I fear General Hill is not entirely equal to his present position" as a department commander.³¹

²⁹ Report of Hill, 1862, *OR*, 11(2): 626.

³⁰ "Special Orders, No. 165," 17 July 1862, *OR*, 9: 476; Lee to Hill, 3 August 1862, *OR*, 11(3): 660-661; Report of Hill, 1862, *OR*, 19(1): 1018-1019. Some of the trouble Hill had with his subordinates stemmed, ironically, from giving them discretionary orders: see BG William Pendleton to Hill, 3 August 1862, *OR*, 11(3): 661.

³¹ Lee to Davis, 17 August 1862, *OR*, 51(2): 1075.

Nevertheless, Lee recommended in January 1863, with Richmond's concurrence, that Hill return to department command in North Carolina. Hill tackled his new job with his characteristic focus and drive, conducting a command reconnaissance of his area of operations, including Whiting's district. From having served briefly in the same area in 1861, Hill did not see much improvement in readiness for a Union attack. He wrote Seddon about the sorry state of Wilmington's defenses and the need for more heavy artillery. Believing that the Union would target Charleston first then Wilmington, he requested another infantry brigade so that he could "threaten" the Federal North Carolina garrisons of New Bern, Washington, and Plymouth to prevent their troops from joining the main expedition.³² Hill, who had a bad opinion of cavalry from previous operations, also tried to swap out what he considered to be an incompetent brigade with a proven one stationed in Virginia. He clearly outlined his priorities as 1) shoring up Wilmington's defenses, 2) conduct harassing attacks against Union garrisons to pin down enemy troops, 3) gathering provisions in the eastern counties while simultaneously protecting the planters there, and 4) enlisting conscripts. Hill hinted at being able to do more if he received troops from the relatively inactive northern Virginia front. Seddon and Davis approved of Hill's assessment although they did not agree to his unit requests beyond what Longstreet could provide out of his corps. The President wrote the Secretary that Hill's views were "generally approved, and he should by all practicable means be aided and encouraged to execute them."³³ They never discouraged Hill from circumventing his chain of command to write directly to the War Department, and in fact Hill was used to doing this already, ever since his former artillery

³² Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to "Washington" mean the town in North Carolina, not Washington, D.C.

³³ Hill to Seddon (including Seddon's and Davis's endorsements), 23 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 890-892. For Hill's opinion of cavalry before and during his 1863 department command, see Davis to Johnston, 6 February 1862, *OR*, 5: 1063, re: Hill's disapproval of J.E.B. Stuart's botched raid on Dranesville, Virginia; Hill's address to troops, 25 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 894-895, in which he implies that Beverly Robertson's cavalry was unfamiliar with the sounds of battle; and Hill to Isabella, 8 March 1863, Daniel Harvey Hill Papers, North Carolina State Archives (hereafter NCSA), where he again accuses his cavalry of being cowardly.

commander at Big Bethel, George Randolph, served as Secretary of War in 1862.³⁴ More significantly, Hill on several occasions used this direct line to Seddon to convince him that North Carolina needed attention or else it would be lost to the Union.

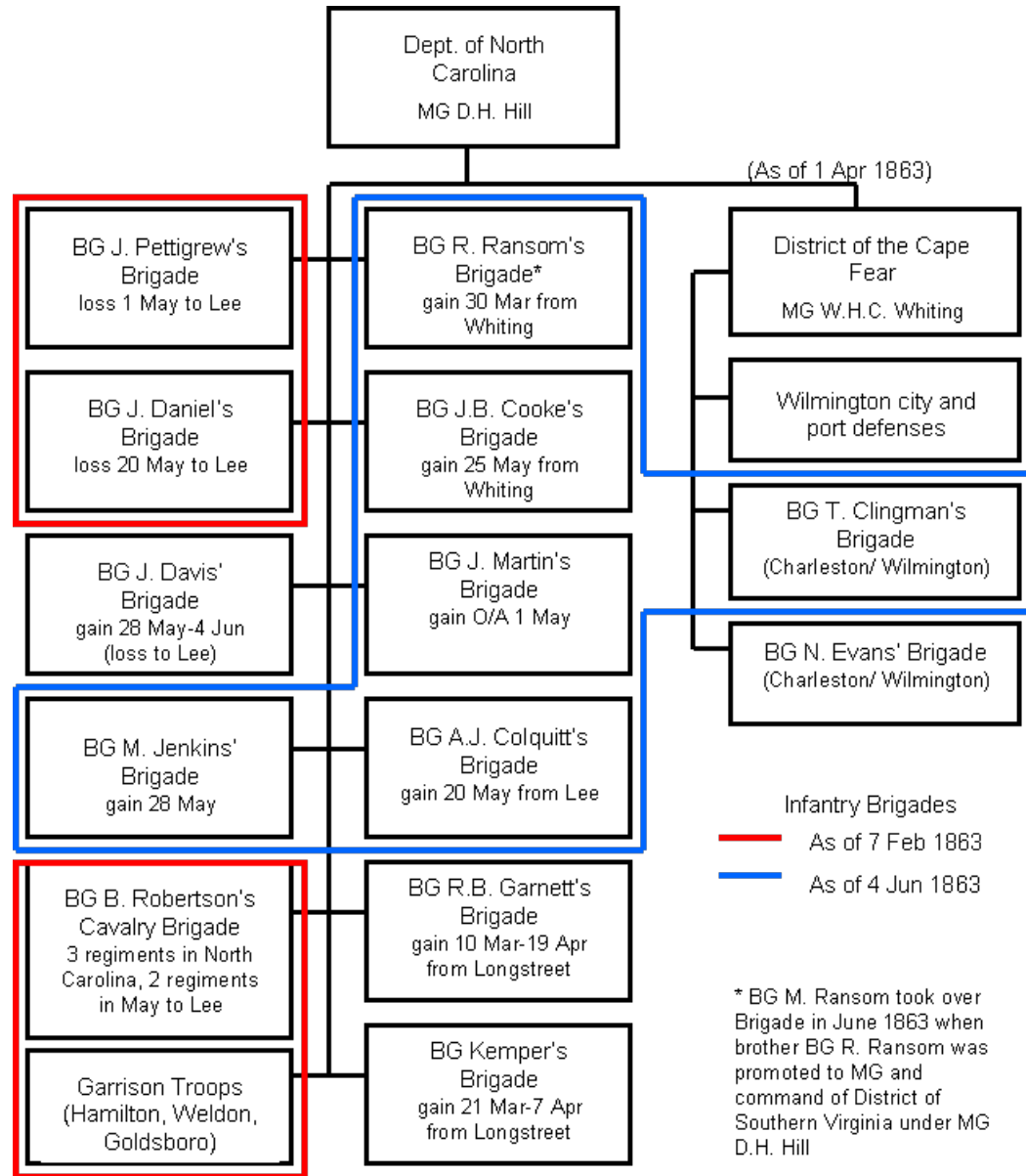


Figure 2. Organization of D.H. Hill's Department, January-July 1863

³⁴ See for example Hill to Randolph, 10 June 1862, *OR*, 11(3): 588.

After his first few weeks of command, however, Hill became frustrated with what he perceived as a lack of quality and quantity in troops to perform all of his missions, and reverted to blaming others for his inability to drive Federal troops out of coastal North Carolina. Longstreet shared Hill's desire to conduct offensive operations against Union Eighteenth Corps commander Major General John Foster, whose troops occupied New Bern and Washington. Longstreet provided Hill guidance throughout the month of March concerning a plan, which he kept secret from Lee, to cut off and destroy the New Bern garrison by massing Confederate troops from Hill's and Whiting's commands and forcing the Federal troops out of the city to fight.³⁵ Whiting however was unwilling to give up Ransom, whose men were helping to shore up the fortifications around Wilmington, to assist Hill. Hill proceeded under Longstreet's instructions anyway and tried to surround New Bern with his two infantry brigades while he sent his cavalry to cut off the railroad line that connected the town to the coast and Union reinforcements. He felt the need to personally supervise the tactical fight, not knowing his commanders very well yet and falling naturally back into his comfort zone. The brigade commander whom Hill accompanied, Brigadier General Junius Daniel, successfully pushed back the outer cordon of Union defenses eight miles from New Bern, but Brigadier General John Pettigrew and his brigade could not keep up a bombardment of the Union garrison from across the Neuse River without being driven off in kind by enemy gunboats. Brigadier General Beverly Robertson's cavalry accomplished little and appeared hesitant to engage any Federal troops. Within three days, Hill withdrew to the west.

Hill reported to Longstreet that if only certain conditions had been in place, he could have captured New Bern or at least seriously scared Foster. First, he blamed the shortage of rifled artillery as well as Pettigrew's faulty guns and ammunition, which had prevented him from damaging Federal gunboats before they could return fire. Then Hill complained about not having Ransom and that Whiting's attitude had ruined everything. Noting that his February orders stated

³⁵ Longstreet to Hill, 28 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 898, and 1 March 1863, *OR*, 18: 902-903.

that he had command of all troops in North Carolina, assuming this meant the District of Cape Fear as well, Hill griped, “If I am to be cut down to two brigades I will not submit to the swindle.”³⁶ Hill further accused the Richmond authorities of treating him badly throughout the war, hoping that the matter of his uncertain command authority was not an example of the same. Longstreet chose not to forward Hill’s report containing the “swindle” comment, telling him he would shortly receive a division’s worth of troops to help with a planned operation against Washington. Longstreet seemed to sympathize with Hill, but reminded him that he should probably remain in Goldsboro to be able to coordinate follow-on operations against the Union forces at New Bern should they decide to threaten the proposed Confederate siege of Washington.³⁷ Goldsboro, on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, the main north-south transportation artery between Virginia and points south, was also centrally located in Hill’s department and was the ideal place from which to direct operations toward threatened points and have access to telegraph lines to Richmond and Wilmington. Nevertheless, having gained authority over Whiting in the general orders issued on 1 April, Hill used Ransom to watch New Bern while he spent most of his time overseeing the siege of Washington. Hill continued to show reluctance to disengage himself from tactical command regarding an operation which he hoped would mitigate the Federal threat in North Carolina.

Unable to capture Washington in a timely manner, and with the Confederate priorities being the gathering of foodstuffs in eastern North Carolina and sending reinforcements to more threatened points in Virginia and South Carolina, Hill started getting requests to reduce his force. Convinced that the failed Union naval attack on Charleston in April meant that Wilmington was next, Hill did whatever he could to keep quality troops in his state. Throughout that spring, he

³⁶ “Report of Maj. Gen. Daniel H. Hill, C.S. Army, commanding Expedition,” 16 March 1863, *OR*, 18: 189.

³⁷ Longstreet to Hill, 20 March 1863, *OR*, 18: 931.

competed against other commanders for units within the context of simultaneous major operations in Virginia, Tennessee, and Mississippi. With Longstreet and his divisions rejoining the Army of Northern Virginia in early May, Hill lost his supporter and buffer between himself and Lee. As the Battle of Chancellorsville raged, Seddon “urged” Hill to send Ransom’s veteran unit to rejoin Lee, who had specifically requested the troops. Hill refused, sending Daniel’s relatively inexperienced brigade instead.³⁸ Facing another Union invasion scare, Hill wrote Seddon a comparison of his brigades against those of Foster, implying that he was outgunned and outmanned. On paper, Hill argued, it looked like there were a lot of troops in the state, but in reality most were in Wilmington, and he did not feel he could prevent Union raids on the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad with the remaining brigades. “I have laid the facts before you in regard to the Confederate strength and that of the Yankees as far as can be ascertained,” Hill told Seddon, “and must leave it to your discretion whether to order off more forces or not.” Instead of offering his opinion as the commander on the ground, which was his implied duty as department commander, Hill pushed the decision off on the Secretary of War far away in Richmond.³⁹

By mid-May, both Longstreet and Lee pressured Hill to return troops to the Army of Northern Virginia in order to exploit the recent victory at Chancellorsville. At the same time, Seddon prepared to transfer troops from Charleston to the Department of the West, meaning he would look to units at nearby Wilmington to fill the void.⁴⁰ Lee left it up to Hill to decide how many men he could give up based on the enemy disposition in the state, but specifically named the brigades (those of Ransom and Brigadier General John Cooke, previously on duty in Charleston) which he considered to be on loan from his army. Lee believed once again that the

³⁸ Seddon to Hill, 6 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1047; Daniel to Hill, 16 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1062.

³⁹ Hill to Seddon, 7 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1050-1051.

⁴⁰ Longstreet to Hill, 12 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1057; Seddon to Hill, 13 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1059.

Federals had no real intent of attacking North Carolina and were instead pulling troops out of the state to reinforce their army at Fredericksburg. He was confident that Hill could hold his area of operations with the combination of local and Confederate troops available to him and that he would not be misled by Foster. “Every man not required for this purpose I desire you to send me and rely upon your good judgment to proportion the means to the object in view,” urged Lee.⁴¹

Hill preferred not to make a decision that had strategic ramifications and requested more specific guidance from Lee. For the second time that month, he refused to provide a recommendation to his commander or civilian supervisors based on his analysis of the operational picture. Hill was right in insisting that he could not make the final decision over troop dispositions in North Carolina, but he was responsible for making suggestions based on his knowledge of his department, which if not perfect was certainly better than Lee’s or Seddon’s. He did not seem to grasp that his unwillingness to take part in the strategic decision-making process itself influenced the overall strategic situation as Lee tried to plan for and justify future campaigns. Because Hill indicated that affairs in North Carolina were pretty quiet for the time being, Lee specifically requested his subordinate commander to send Brigadier General Micah Jenkins’s and Ransom’s brigades and keep Cooke’s. Yet just as Hill worked to comply, on 25 May Ransom and Cooke clashed with a Union brigade attempting to conduct a raid on a Confederate outpost.⁴² The raid, along with rumors of a slave insurrection and captured mail that claimed up to thirty-one Union regiments were in New Bern, changed Hill’s mind about giving up the two brigades. The situation also gave Seddon and Davis pause when they saw that Lee had ordered two of Hill’s brigades north. Due to the convoluted command structure and lag time in telegraph message transmission and delivery, Seddon did not know about Lee’s latest directive to

⁴¹ Lee to Hill, 16 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1063.

⁴² Lee to Hill, 25 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1071; John G. Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 162-163.

Hill. As Hill was in the process of taking over Longstreet's department command and moving his headquarters to Petersburg, Seddon told him to stand by on further troop transfers while the Secretary and President consulted with Lee.⁴³

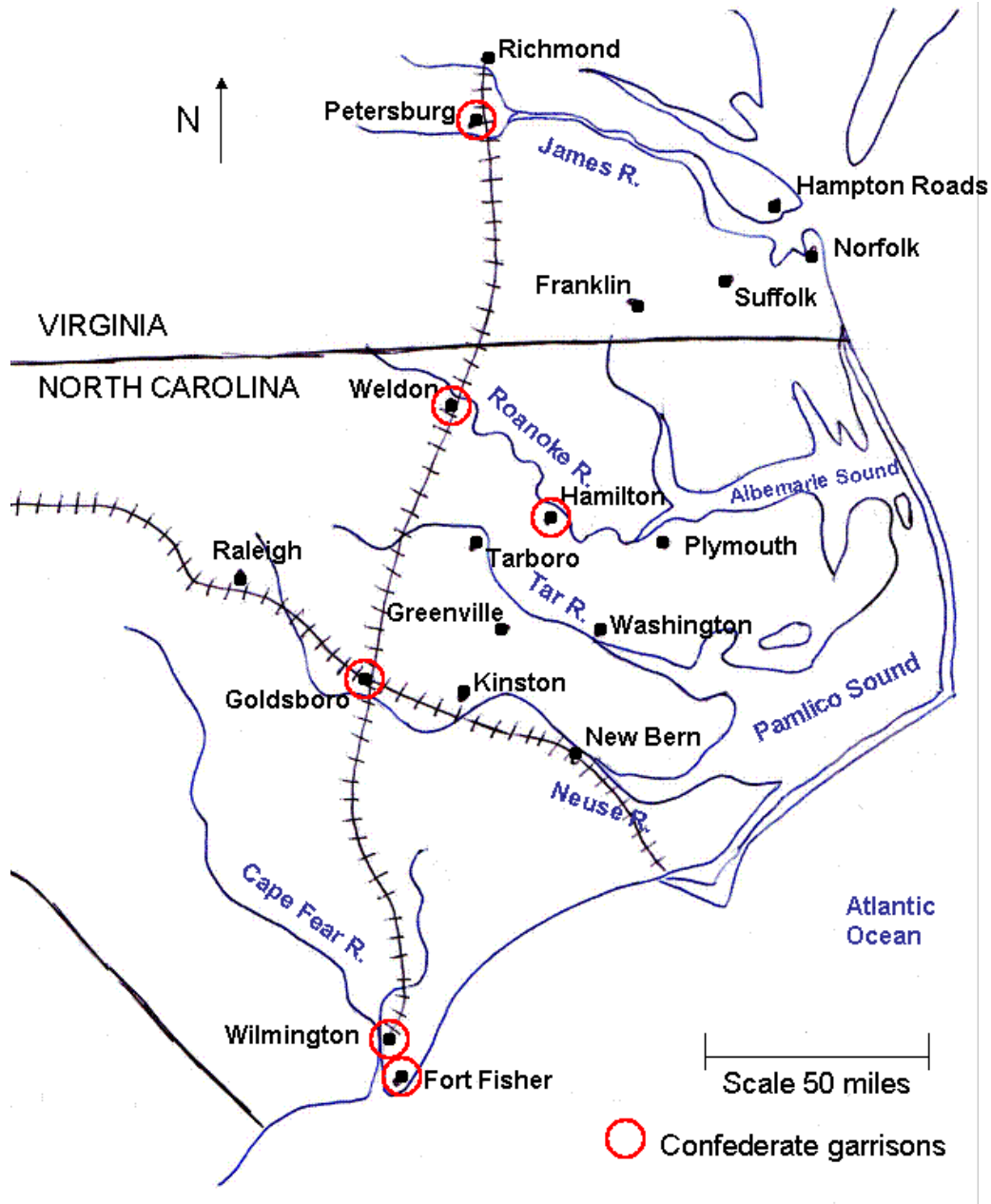


Figure 3. Map of D.H. Hill's area of operations (later Department of North Carolina)

⁴³ Seddon to Hill, 28 May 1863, and "Special Orders, No. 127," 28 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1076-1077.

A frustrated Lee pointed out to Davis that Hill retained six brigades, four of which belonged to the Army of Northern Virginia, along with several artillery batteries and three cavalry regiments, one of which Hill had offered to Lee no less, while the large Federal army in Virginia continued to grow. Lee, following up a terse telegram with a letter, explained to the President how he gave Hill “discretionary instructions” on apportioning his force, but:

He declined to act under those instructions and requested positive instructions. He now offers objections which if previously presented I should not have issued the latter. You will see that I am unable to operate under these circumstances, and request to be relieved from any control of the department from the James to the Cape Fear River.⁴⁴

Focused on his own plans to make a preemptive move against the Army of the Potomac, Lee no longer wanted to oversee what was becoming a distraction in North Carolina. He deferred to Seddon and Davis to make the decision about what to do, writing Hill the same day to ignore his previous order and await instructions from the President, but he was clearly unhappy about the administration taking Hill’s side.⁴⁵

In response, the Executive Branch tried to placate both commanders. Seddon explained Lee’s point of view to Hill but agreed with the junior general that he needed to keep a force on the south side of the James to maneuver where needed. Davis wrote Lee an apologetic note saying he would support his request but with different brigades, for political and operational reasons. He also declined to relieve Lee of responsibility for Hill’s department. Hill received orders from the adjutant general to detach two brigades to Lee and place Ransom in division

⁴⁴ Lee to Davis, 30 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1078; see also Telegram of Lee to Davis, 29 May 1863, Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1961), 495, in which Lee alluded to Hill “objecting” (correspondence not found) to losing Jenkins and Ransom. Hill actually had seven infantry brigades on the books as of the end of the month after receiving reinforcements from South Carolina and including what Longstreet left behind in southern Virginia, but two brigades were already en route north: see “Abstract from Monthly Return of the Department of North Carolina, Maj. Gen. D.H. Hill, commanding, for May 31, 1863,” *OR*, 18: 1086.

⁴⁵ Lee to Hill, 30 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1079.

command in southern Virginia.⁴⁶ Lee accepted Davis's judgment but regretted that he could not get more experienced troops. As for oversight of the country down to Wilmington, he had asked to be relieved of responsibility because he feared to retain it "might be productive of harm." Lee continued, "I could only exercise it beneficially by relying upon the judgment of General D.H. Hill, who declined to act upon discretionary orders, and I thought it best for the service to leave him to his own discretion. The only object of command, in my opinion, is the benefit of the service."⁴⁷ In the eyes of the general who had the most legitimacy in the Confederacy, Hill could not command independently without frequently changing his mind about what he could or could not do.

The Fight for Information: Maintaining Visualization of the Operational Environment

Part of the reason Hill had trouble carrying out discretionary orders was because of the ever-changing intelligence picture in his department. At first, he did a good job of assessing his area of operations and establishing measures to gather intelligence on Union forces, but he lost adequate visualization of his operational environment upon the resumption of active campaigning by both sides in all theaters in the spring of 1863. Hill was not alone in fighting for information; his counterpart Foster attached great importance to figuring out Hill's intentions and worried about how to counter potential Confederate moves after losing forty percent of his Eighteenth Corps to the Union operation at Charleston.⁴⁸ As previously mentioned, Hill conducted a command reconnaissance upon his arrival in North Carolina which allowed him to familiarize

⁴⁶ Seddon to Hill, 30 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1079-1080; Davis to Lee, 31 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1083-1084; Cooper to Hill, 31 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1084-1085. Under Adjutant General Samuel Cooper's order, the brigades of Cooke and Brigadier General Joseph Davis (the President's nephew) went to Lee. Pettigrew's brigade had already joined Lee's army. Davis decided to send only one additional North Carolina unit (Cooke's) to keep Governor Vance happy. Cooke ended up staying just north of Richmond and worked for Hill again when the latter temporarily commanded vicinity Richmond in early July 1863.

⁴⁷ Lee to Davis, 2 June 1863, *OR*, 18: 1088.

⁴⁸ Foster to Halleck, 2 March 1863, *OR*, 18: 549-550.

himself with the geography, enemy dispositions, and his subordinate units. He continued his practice from his days as a division commander of working closely with his subordinate commanders to plan and coordinate operations, including intelligence gathering. Whiting made Hill aware of the underground information networks established by Confederate commanders over several months of Union occupation in North Carolina. One of Whiting's main sources was a man named Sharp, whom he referred to as his "cavalry," and at least one of his brigade commanders had a source in New Bern. Although Whiting tended to raise the alarm at any possibility that Union forces were headed toward Wilmington, his intelligence was generally accurate about the movements of units and commanders, and despite the controversy over the chain of command, he kept Hill informed. In early March, for example, Whiting was the first to confirm that it was Major General Foster, not Major General Burnside, who was in New Bern, a crucial distinction considering that the Confederates would make different assumptions regarding the origin and number of any Federal forces accompanying those commanders.⁴⁹

In support of the planned envelopment of New Bern, Hill tasked one of his brigade commanders with finding out if and where there were Union patrols or outposts between the city and their Atlantic coast garrisons. Brigadier General Daniel accordingly sent out troops from Kinston and could confirm together with some cavalry scouts that there was no Federal activity along the proposed march route or in the country immediately to the southeast. Daniel's civilian sources were a "refugee," likely a white landowner from the coastal area, and a "negro" prisoner, both of whom he deemed reliable.⁵⁰ The intelligence proved accurate as Daniel's forces were not surprised by Federal reinforcements during the attack on New Bern, despite cavalry commander Beverly Robertson's inability to cut the railroad line leading to the coast.

⁴⁹ Whiting to Hill, 27 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 896; Whiting to Longstreet, 4 March 1863, *OR*, 18: 907-908.

⁵⁰ Daniel to Hill, 9 March 1863, *OR*, 18: 914-915.

After the siege of Washington, however, some of Hill's local sources started to disappear. As of 20 April, he was unable to get information out of New Bern for several days, as he told his fellow department commander in Charleston, General P.G.T. Beauregard. "The usual channel of communication is cut off, and I am very much in the dark as to what is going on," Hill wrote Beauregard.⁵¹ A subsequent letter revealed the reason why along with another method Hill used to gather intelligence. One of Hill's most stable and reliable scouts was Major John Whitford, who commanded an outpost at Swift Creek on the overland route between New Bern and Washington. Hill referred to Whitford once as the leader of a guerilla battalion, but judging by existing reports the activities of the major and his men appeared to be more along the lines of what is today called "running sources" as well as conducting eyes-on reconnaissance of Federal positions and troop movements. Hill wrote Whitford in late April that he believed one of his scouts had been compromised and another suspected by Federal commanders, along with Confederate "deserters" who had been planted into Union lines but subsequently put in irons. Nevertheless, Hill wanted Whitford to meet with him to discuss a new plan to chase another group of plausible "deserters" into Union lines, so that Hill could get information enabling him to "stuff Foster to my heart's content." Hill also held Whitford accountable for an erroneous report by his soldiers, lecturing the major, "We must have true information, and the careless and sensational scout deserves punishment." Hill concluded his letter with further instructions to make sure Whitford's men corroborated their sources' reports.⁵²

Despite Whitford's best efforts and those of other scouts, Hill's stream of intelligence continued to dry up. Foster banned one of Hill's sources from his home in New Bern on the accurate suspicion that the man was a Confederate spy. The person in question, a Mr. W.H. Marshall, reported on 8 May that Foster was preparing to evacuate several families out of the city

⁵¹ Hill to Beauregard, 20 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 1007.

⁵² Hill to Whitford, 26 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 1022-1023.

and that Federal troops were denying entry into New Bern from the north. Marshall relayed conflicting reports about Foster's next move, but noted that the Union garrison already knew about the outcome of the Battle of Chancellorsville and that they might leave the city as a result to shift operations elsewhere. Marshall gave Hill hope that he could remain in the vicinity of New Bern and try to gather more information, but for the time being the report did little to clarify the intelligence picture.⁵³ On 9 May Whitford confirmed that he could not slip anyone into New Bern from the north, but thought that his counterpart on the south side of town might be able to send in some scouts. Of more significance, Whitford reported that Federal soldiers told locals that two Union brigades were headed from North Carolina to Virginia to reinforce General Joseph Hooker's army.⁵⁴

Whitford's report, which Hill passed up to Seddon, illustrated the overall Confederate uncertainty about Union intentions in the eastern theater following Hooker's defeat at Chancellorsville and the botched assault on Charleston in early April. Much of the information Hill reported to higher varied over time because of his own unclear situational awareness but also made it difficult for Lee, Seddon, and Davis to decide how many resources to keep or push into North Carolina. Hill's updates to Longstreet during the siege of Washington, North Carolina (30 March-20 April 1863) are an early example of this point. Hill originally estimated that he needed two weeks to reduce the Union garrison, and he asked Longstreet for more long-range rifled guns. Two days later he said only heavy artillery would work, but Longstreet already had the smaller guns en route. Hill's next report was more positive so Longstreet told him to keep an infantry brigade which was on loan, yet within a day Hill was again pessimistic about success at Washington. Longstreet reminded Hill that he gave out orders based upon information received,

⁵³ Marshall to Hill, 8 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1054-1055.

⁵⁴ Whitford to Hill, 9 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1054.

and that if the operation was doomed, to send back the borrowed troops and guns.⁵⁵ In essence, Hill's duty-bound efforts to keep higher continually informed about his and the enemy's situation, along with his inherent pessimism, combined to thwart his ability to justify the need for extra resources in his department.

As the spring wore on, Hill's read on Foster's troops did little to convince Lee that North Carolina was anything but a side show compared to Virginia, South Carolina, and the Western theater. In response to reports from Richmond in early May that Foster's corps was headed to the Chesapeake Bay, Hill told Seddon that his scouts still counted forty-five enemy regiments in the eastern part of the state, and that Union movement likely represented the few regiments whose terms of enlistment had expired.⁵⁶ However, when Hill passed up reports like Whitford's 9 May summary, these combined with other sources up and down the Atlantic coast indicated to Lee that Union troop numbers in North Carolina were declining while they grew in Virginia, and that there was a corollary between the two observations. Hill's suggestion that Foster might evacuate New Bern to better fortify the coast (in Hill's opinion to be able to maneuver up the Tar, Roanoke and Chowan Rivers in North Carolina), as well as the content of his mid-May dispatches to Lee, only strengthened Longstreet's, Lee's, and Seddon's opinion that the Federals were preparing to redistribute regiments to other theaters.⁵⁷ This was the same series of reports that led to Lee's frustration over Hill's changing position concerning the amount of brigades needed to hold North Carolina, for Lee never believed the situation in North Carolina as dire as Hill represented it to be. In hindsight, Hill was more correct about Foster's disposition than was Lee. The *Official*

⁵⁵ Longstreet to Hill, 6 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 964; Longstreet to Hill, 7 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 968-969.

⁵⁶ Hill to Seddon, 6 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1048.

⁵⁷ Hill to Seddon, 7 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1050-1051; Longstreet to Hill, 12 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1057; Seddon to Hill, 13 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1059; Lee to Hill, 16 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1063. Hill's reports between 16 and 30 May which Lee refers to in his correspondence to Davis on 30 May do not appear to have survived.

Records indicate that Foster gained roughly 1,700 troops during the month of May, and that the Union's Suffolk garrison supplied the force that threatened Richmond from the east. Foster's regimental count at New Bern however was far below the thirty-one reported by Confederate spies.⁵⁸ Hill did the best he could to gather intelligence, but Foster was as capable of using deception as were the Confederates. As Hill lamented to Seddon, Foster's simple ability to march troops back and forth between New Bern and the coast was enough to confuse scouts about the true intentions of the Union commander.⁵⁹

The Dilemma of Planning and Executing Multi-Faceted Campaigns

Because of Hill's growing inability to visualize his operational environment, he had a hard time prioritizing his efforts and disposing his forces to formulate a campaign plan to accomplish disparate missions throughout his department. Over time he was forced to become more terrain than enemy focused in his operations, and this condition reduced his ability to maneuver and react to Federal movement at opposite ends of the North Carolina coast. Adding to this confusion was the disconnect between the mission priorities Hill outlined to Seddon, which entailed more limited objectives, and the ensuing decision to attempt more decisive operations against Union strongholds. The desire to force Federal units out of their fortifications to fight culminated in Longstreet's and Hill's plan to conduct the coordinated offensive against Union garrisons in Suffolk, Virginia, and New Bern and Washington, North Carolina. In the department reconnaissance report to Seddon, Hill suggested that more troops besides Longstreet's should be drawn from Lee's army in Virginia to help clear out Union troops from North Carolina while

⁵⁸ "Abstract from Tri-monthly Return of the Eighteenth Army Corps, Maj. Gen. John G. Foster commanding, for April 30, 1863," *OR*, 18: 678; "Abstract from Tri-monthly Return of the Eighteenth Army Corps, Department of North Carolina, Maj. Gen. John G. Foster, U.S. Army, commanding, for May 31, 1863," *OR*, 18: 736; Dix to Halleck, 8 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 707.

⁵⁹ Hill to Seddon, 10 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1053.

Lee's opponent remained idle, but the idea was dismissed.⁶⁰ Hill retained the Confederate garrisons he inherited at Goldsboro, Weldon, and Hamilton, but he took from them guns and some regiments to support the attack on New Bern and the siege of Washington.

When Hill failed to capture and/or defeat Foster's troops in the two cities, and Richmond started withdrawing units to the north and south, Hill pulled his brigades back west and closer to the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. The railroad crossed all of the major North Carolina rivers—the Roanoke, Tar, Neuse, and a branch of the Cape Fear—along its route. Based upon Union control of the waterways, Hill constantly feared that the enemy would destroy the railroad bridges and cut service between Virginia and points south, thereby degrading the ability to move troops and supplies between different theaters of operation. Indeed, Foster had successfully destroyed the bridge at Goldsboro the previous December, although the Confederates were able to quickly repair the structure. Hill felt compelled to keep many separate forces to protect these points, even though he recognized that his command would be weaker as a result. "I have enough force here, if concentrated, to fight Foster successfully, but the troops are necessarily scattered over near 100 miles," Hill wrote Beauregard on 29 April. He continued, "It is an easy matter for the Yankees to make raids into the richest agricultural portion of North Carolina and of the South . . . It is impossible to protect the farmers' interests of this fertile region without a division of force and consequent weakness."⁶¹ Writing Beauregard again the same day, Hill noted more activity on the part of Foster's forces vicinity the Confederate headquarters at Kinston. Asking Beauregard for an additional brigade, Hill lamented that he could not mass his three brigades at Kinston without exposing Greenville and Tarboro to attacks from Washington. "Foster . . . is bold, but ambitious and fanatical," Hill wrote, citing a four-month old intercepted correspondence in which the Union commander boasted about planning to destroy the railroad north of

⁶⁰ Hill to Seddon, 23 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 891.

⁶¹ Hill to Beauregard, 29 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 1030.

Wilmington and then march on the city.⁶² Hill had a healthy respect for Foster, probably heightened by the latter's actions during the siege of Washington when he personally brought in Federal reinforcements by sea by running Hill's coastal batteries.

Longstreet disagreed with the dispersion of Hill's forces. "I very much doubt the policy of holding all the points of your line or of attempting to do so. Two points, with your forces so arranged as to meet an advance against either, I should think your better arrangement," counseled Longstreet. He reminded Hill that Foster was in the same situation the more points he tried to hold, and to let the Union forces, should they advance, travel far out from their base before attacking them, as they would not be able to receive reinforcements.⁶³ Nevertheless, once Hill replaced Longstreet as commander of the enlarged Department of North Carolina, he remained focused on protecting the railroad at multiple points. Hill revealed his real concern in a letter to Seddon in early June when asking to keep Ransom's troops in the state. A faction had been slowly developing within North Carolina over the last several months that advocated making a separate peace with the Federal government. The number of people involved at that point was small, but they hoped to capitalize on the increasing discontent of North Carolina citizens with the war effort, which was in turn fueling high desertion rates among state regiments.⁶⁴ Never one to sympathize with any person subverting the Confederacy, no matter what the reason, Hill feared that if Foster made it to the railroad, the peace faction might gain supporters by pointing to the inability of the Confederate forces to hold North Carolina. Hill warned Seddon that the group was "ready to go to Goldsborough [sic] to meet the Yankees and welcome them to the State."⁶⁵

⁶² Hill to Beauregard, 29 April 1863 (letter 2), *OR*, 19: 1030.

⁶³ Longstreet to Hill, 30 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 1032.

⁶⁴ See Paul D. Escott, *Military Necessity: Civil-Military Relations in the Confederacy* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 2006), 85, for the violence surrounding the North Carolina peace movement in 1863.

⁶⁵ Hill to Seddon, 3 June 1863, *OR*, 18: 1092. Hill also wrote Seddon previously about the dangers of the peace movement: Hill to Seddon, 9 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1052-1053.

Longstreet's advice to Hill, however, made sense within the context of the operational environment in late March and early April. During the first week of the siege of Washington, Foster, concerned that he did not have enough forces, asked General Henry Halleck for authorization to get back some of his corps still in South Carolina because he expected Hill to continue attacking the major Union garrisons in North Carolina.⁶⁶ For about a week's time Hill had Foster physically and psychologically where he wanted him, with help from some of Foster's bumbling subordinates who could not get a relief column to Washington. At this point Hill also had two additional brigades, one of which (Richard Garnett's, from Longstreet's corps) he used to invest the city while Daniel and Pettigrew supported outside. Hill, however, instructed the other brigade (Ransom) to merely watch and when practicable demonstrate against the Federals in New Bern. A coordinated campaign involving a simultaneous offensive movement by all four infantry brigades with assistance from Longstreet in the Suffolk area would have applied pressure to three Union garrisons and severely limited Foster's operational choices. Given that Hill had previously outlined more limited objectives to the Richmond authorities, he (and Longstreet for that matter) needed to make clear to higher that he wanted to pursue a more aggressive course of action. Indeed, Hill had complained in his report of the New Bern attack that his previous suggestion to Seddon to mass forces in North Carolina went "unheeded," but that there was still an opportunity to punish Foster's corps.⁶⁷ A campaign proposal from Hill, forwarded through Longstreet to Lee and Seddon, might have garnered support from higher or at least a window of time within which to try to accomplish the objectives of capturing Washington and New Bern. In fact, Longstreet induced from Hill's report of 5 April that there was such an opportunity to send Ransom against New Bern and encouraged him to do it if possible. Ransom himself was anxious to get into the

⁶⁶ Foster to Halleck, 5 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 211-212.

⁶⁷ "Report of Maj. Gen. Daniel H. Hill, C.S. Army, commanding Expedition," 16 March 1863, *OR*, 18: 189.

fight and stood ready to receive orders from Hill.⁶⁸ Pushing Union troops back to the coast could have had a positive effect on Confederate citizen and troop morale and subdued the peace movement. Instead, the surviving record indicates that Hill was narrowly focused on Washington along with keeping troops garrisoned along the railroad. Ransom made a couple of demonstrations against New Bern but did not attempt an attack without Hill's authorization.⁶⁹ As a former artilleryman who had seen the strong defenses of New Bern (a product of Foster's engineering background) backed up by superior Union guns, Hill was loath to send only Ransom's brigade against that target or to attack the similarly well-defended Washington. Perhaps Hill also had his bloody experience at Malvern Hill in mind and felt that he would waste already precious combat power in attacks which had no guarantee of success.

Once Hill committed to the siege of Washington as his sole major operation, he lost any opportunity to immobilize other Union forces and garrisons in the eastern part of the state. Simultaneously, news arrived that Union forces were en route from Newport News, Virginia to North Carolina and that a separate force was ready to attack Charleston. Longstreet and Lee soon discredited the first piece of information, whereupon Lee ordered Longstreet take advantage of this absence of extra Federal troops in North Carolina to shift the priority of operations to gathering forage in the coastal counties.⁷⁰ Washington became more of a diversionary operation to support Longstreet's efforts than a viable objective in its own right for Hill, especially as he constantly changed his opinion on whether or not he could capture the town. When Foster personally took charge of the relief of Washington in mid-April, Hill realized that he had run out of time to gain any long-term advantage by besieging the town. From then on, the Confederacy's

⁶⁸ Longstreet to Hill, 7 April 1863 and 8 April 1863 (two letters), *OR*, 18: 969, 972-973; Ransom to Hill, 7 April 1863 (two letters), *OR*, 18: 971.

⁶⁹ Ransom to Hill, 14 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 986. There is no existing official report by Hill of the siege of Washington.

⁷⁰ French to Longstreet, 29 March 1863, *OR*, 18: 948; Lee to Longstreet, 2 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 954.

focus in the east shifted back to northern Virginia. By late May, when Hill became department commander of both southern Virginia and North Carolina and the War Department settled the issue of which brigades went where, he could field only three infantry brigades in North Carolina (Martin, Colquitt, and Clingman—see Figure 2), which forced him back into a defensive posture along the railroad. The state remained quiet through June as Hill conducted a more mobile defense against a 20,000 man-strong Union force outside of Richmond while Lee marched his army into Pennsylvania. Overall, North Carolina during the first half of 1863 devolved into a stalemate in which neither Hill nor Foster felt they had the resources to dislodge the other because a shared lack of situational understanding hampered the abilities of both men to construct a viable campaign plan to obtain objectives supporting their respective sides' strategic goals.

Another problem that Hill faced when trying to coordinate operations in his department was the distraction of the rising desertion rate among North Carolina troops along with the efforts to recruit more soldiers for the Confederate armies. Because of his strong sense of duty, he tended to let his emotions get the better of him when talking about deserters and those who in his opinion failed to support the Confederacy. Hill's very first address to the troops in his department on 25 February 1863 labeled deserters as "abortions of humanity" and villainized them as much as the Union soldiers.⁷¹ He corresponded with Governor Vance about the defense of the state and what the latter should do to inspire North Carolinians to rally around the flag. Both were reluctant to call out the militia except as a matter of last resort because of a lack of equipment and the fact that its members were the only able-bodied men left to tend the farms and produce much-needed foodstuffs. Hill called upon Vance's rhetorical skills to shame deserters back into the ranks and also urged him to get more control over the local press, whose stories seemed to be fueling the problem.⁷² Despite the friendship between the two men, over the course of the spring Hill started

⁷¹ Hill's address to his troops, 25 February 1863, *OR*, 18: 894.

⁷² Hill to Vance, 21 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 1011; Vance to Hill, 23 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 1019.

to feel that Vance was not doing enough to help him, prompting the governor to remind the general that he had a lot of issues to balance with his job and was doing the best he could do. As Vance explained, his executive powers for dealing with deserters were limited by legislation and recent judicial rulings, making him dependent on Hill for the manpower to root out recalcitrant soldiers.⁷³ On at least one occasion, one of Hill's brigadiers had to detail troops away from major combat operations to deal with the issue. In this case, Ransom assigned soldiers to process conscripts (some of whom were apparently deserters who had just been arrested) at the same time he was supposed to be demonstrating against New Bern in mid-April.⁷⁴

Hill's zeal for delivering justice to deserters and other enemies of the Confederacy did not always bring about the desired results. He became involved in an exchange of letters with Edward Stanly, Abraham Lincoln's military governor of North Carolina, which the *Raleigh Register* published in late April. The newspaper editor commented that although there was no doubt that Hill was a true Confederate patriot, he had "compromised his own dignity and self-respect" when stooping to Stanly's level.⁷⁵ Concurrently, Hill worked to send conscripts to Lee to refill the depleted ranks of the North Carolina regiments in the Army of Northern Virginia. Lee, however, was naturally suspicious of a group of reinstated deserters whom Hill sent up to Virginia in late April. The commanding general noted that the men would probably desert again and provide valuable information to the enemy, and suggested sending them to units in the interior of the country. Because half of the men were below conscript age Lee sent them back to Hill in order to be tried in their home state.⁷⁶ Hill capped off the month with a rousing address to his troops thanking them for their efforts and congratulating them for earning more respect than

⁷³ Vance to Hill, 4 May 1863 and 10 May 1863, D.H. Hill Papers, Library of Virginia. For more on the Vance-Hill relationship and political issues in North Carolina which limited Vance's authority, see Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 180-181.

⁷⁴ Ransom to Hill, 14 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 986.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Bridges, *Lee's Maverick General*, 178.

⁷⁶ Lee to Seddon, and Lee to Longstreet, 18 April 1863, *OR*, 18: 998-999.

the skulkers and those exempt from the draft. The speech however did little to alleviate the disappointment of the soldiers who thought the siege of Washington a failure.⁷⁷ Finally, Hill took it upon himself to advise Seddon about the same issues of disloyalty that Vance dealt with at the state level. “Unless the Government will boldly take this matter into hand and arrest the editors and speakers who are daily uttering treason,” Hill warned, “the crime of desertion will go on, and I fear that there will be thousands in armed resistance.” Upon seeing Hill’s letter, Davis not so subtly told Seddon to refer the matter back to civilian channels.⁷⁸ Few can fault Hill’s passion, but he expended much time and energy on publicly airing his contempt for deserters without tangibly aiding the conduct of operations in his department.

As commander of the Department of North Carolina in all of its forms during the first half of 1863, Hill inherited problems that would have tried the skill of most nineteenth-century American military officers. Despite the inability to defeat or force the removal of large Union formations from the state, Hill succeeded in denying his opponent the seizure of any additional territory, including the port of Wilmington. He actually met three out of his four original objectives as outlined to the Secretary of War, his plans to heavily fortify Wilmington being the exception. Critically, due to Hill’s efforts, the Army of Northern Virginia received much-needed supplies to be able to resume the offensive that spring. His solid reputation as a keen observer, hard fighter, and dedicated Confederate gained him credibility with senior civilian and military leaders, but his obstinacy and tendency to pass judgment on strategic matters (without necessarily backing up word with deed) frustrated supervisors like General Robert E. Lee. After Hill’s scope of department command increased in June 1863 to include the defense of Richmond, he unsurprisingly performed the best in a more tactical role as he fended off disjointed Union

⁷⁷ “General Orders, No. 8,” 24 April 1863, *OR*, 51(2): 694; Barrett, *The Civil War in North Carolina*, 161-162.

⁷⁸ Hill to Seddon (with Davis endorsement), 9 May 1863, *OR*, 18: 1053.

attempts to attack the capital city. In early July, President Jefferson Davis visited Hill in camp east of the city and rewarded him with conditional promotion to lieutenant general and a corps command in General Joe Johnston's Department of the West, where he could continue to apply his tactical talents.⁷⁹ In the meantime, the stalemate persisted in North Carolina until the Union focused its efforts there in early 1865.

Intelligent and dedicated as Hill was, he nonetheless could have benefited from skills enabling him to better conceptualize his role as a department commander and supporting player within the overall strategic scheme. Historian Douglas Southall Freeman, often critical of Hill in his writings, put his finger on part of the problem when he wrote Hill's youngest son Joseph in 1942, "I think General Hill's devotion to combat was the explanation of his non-success as an administrator."⁸⁰ This statement begs the question of how to prepare both reluctant and enthusiastic military officers for the transition from tactical to operational-level command.

Conclusion

Major General D.H. Hill might have been more successful as a department commander during the Civil War had he had more confidence to act autonomously and take initiative within the bounds of what is today called mission command, been able to improvise and create additional intelligence collection capability and deception operations, and consistently articulate the scope of his operational objectives and better sequence them in time and space to support the

⁷⁹ "Special Orders, No. 165," 15 July 1863, *OR*, 27(3): 1003; Davis to Hill, 16 June 1863, *OR*, 51(2): 724. Hill was on the Confederate Senate's lieutenant general's list, but his nomination was never approved. He requested a command in the Western theater; although his wife was not keen about the idea given his earlier plan to resign his commission, Hill appears to have jumped at the opportunity to work again for Joe Johnston, whom he considered a better army commander than Lee. Unfortunately for Hill, his orders changed and he ended up working directly for General Braxton Bragg and among the discontented officer corps of the Army of Tennessee. After the Battle of Chickamauga, Bragg fired Hill from corps command for very vague reasons, in essence singling Hill out for criticism directed at Bragg for not fully exploiting the Confederate victory. Hill spent the rest of the war looking for vindication, his promotion, and a formal apology from Bragg and Jefferson Davis, and did not command in the field again until the last months of the war.

⁸⁰ Freeman to Joseph Hill, 17 November 1942, Hill Papers, NCSA.

accomplishment of the Confederate strategic end state. In regards to the first issue, ambiguity is always the bane of commanders and staffs. Hill and his previous tactical commands had suffered earlier in the war during situations of uncertainty, and as the war progressed he seemed to lose any inclination to act hastily without positive orders or intelligence. By the spring of 1863, Hill was also very sensitive to negative interpretations of his military reputation, as rumors circulated that he had lost a copy of orders addressed to him (and subsequently discovered by Union troops) during the Maryland Campaign of 1862. In a way, Hill seemed to have lost what Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz called determination—a special combination of intellect and courage that guides a commander to make a tough decision. Clausewitz observed that men who showed much determination as junior officers often lost the ability to do so as they rose in rank. “Conscious of the need to be decisive, they also recognize the risks entailed by a wrong decision,” he wrote. “Since they are unfamiliar with the problems now facing them, their mind loses its former incisiveness.”⁸¹ Modern U.S. military officers are dealing with similar concerns as the debate over perceptions of the “zero defect” mentality continues along with concern over who gets blamed when an operation goes horribly wrong; the controversy over the narrative of the Battle of Wanat, Afghanistan is one example. Nevertheless, to perform well in departmental command during the Civil War, as now in regional command in Afghanistan, required an officer who was more willing than most to put their reputation on the line and make hard decisions about operational priorities even in the absence of clear guidance. By mid-1863, even some of the best military minds of the Confederacy who were serving as department commanders were unable to do this, so Hill was not alone. Hill was one of the few generals whom Lee and Davis could count on to preoccupy enemy troops in a secondary department while they pursued other priorities. Federal commanders respected Hill’s fighting prowess, and his loyalty to the Confederacy was

⁸¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 103.

unquestioned. Unfortunately, Hill's penchant for wanting everything about the disposition and composition of his force to be perfect—and complaining when it was not so—annoyed his superiors and affected his ability to command in a resource-constrained and uncertain environment.

As a department commander, Hill did the best job addressing the second issue of understanding his operational environment through the use of clandestine operations and open source information, but Union control of key terrain (the coastal cities) eventually limited the flow of reliable information. Some of his inability to collect better intelligence stemmed from the lackluster quality and performance of his cavalry. Already inclined to think that cavalymen were too undisciplined to contribute meaningfully to combined-arms operations, Hill resented the fact that he had been sent a commander in Beverly Robinson whom even Lee did not want in his army. Hill basically threw up his hands and discounted the cavalry after the attack on New Bern, making no effort to improve the brigade in any way. There is no question that Hill had a difficult situation on his hands with second-tier subordinates in command of some of his units, and he was forced to directly supervise some of them, coincidentally putting him back in his comfort zone at the tactical level. He needed to develop more officers like Major Whitford to actively scout Union positions, something he would have been better able to do had he not pulled as many troops back west after mid-April to guard the railroad and focus on securing key terrain. Operational-level commanders need to remain as creative and active as possible in applying innovative and varying techniques to gather intelligence and maintain as accurate a picture as possible of their operational environment. Active leader development helps with this task. Hill tended to rely exclusively on his more capable subordinates and did not appear to actively develop brigade and regimental commanders. Once he judged an individual in negative terms he did not usually alter his opinion. He improved his relations with cavalymen by the end of the war by listening more

carefully to his commanders and making an effort to understand their operational limitations.⁸² Had Hill been able to do this better in 1863 he might have clarified the intelligence picture in North Carolina.

Hill's struggle to craft a coherent campaign plan for his department was the result of the first two issues as well as the manner in which campaigns were defined in the nineteenth century. Baron Antoine-Henri Jomini, whose theoretical works culminating in *The Art of War* (translated in the U.S. in 1862) were the basis of nineteenth-century American military doctrine, did not define the term outright. He implied that a good campaign was a military endeavor planned by strategists involving movement of the greatest amount of force possible along a line (or lines) of operations to mass upon a decisive point in the theater of operations.⁸³ Campaigns clearly carried the connotation of offensive maneuvers, as seen in the example of the foremost warrior of the age and subject of Jomini's admiration, Napoleon Bonaparte. Jomini's American disciple, Henry Halleck, talked about campaigns frequently in his *Elements of Military Art and Science* (1846) but he also failed to define the term. Hill's orders to process recruits and chase down deserters were not tasks normally associated with a nineteenth-century campaign plan, yet he needed to do both to support the Confederate strategic end state of national survival. That the tasks were distractions to Hill more than integrated parts of his department campaign plan is demonstrated by his heated rhetoric about deserters and his brigade commanders' complaints about time and manpower taken away from "traditional" military operations.

Today's doctrinal definition does little to dispel this narrow historical impression. Campaign is defined in FM 3-0 as "a series of related major operations aimed at achieving

⁸² See for example Hill's correspondence with two of his cavalry commanders in Georgia in early 1865: Hill to Alfred Iverson, 30 January 1865, *OR*, 47(2): 1064, and Hill to Joseph Wheeler, 4 February 1865, *OR*, 47(2): 1096.

⁸³ Antoine-Henri Jomini, *The Art of War*, trans. G.H. Mendell and W.P. Craighill (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1971), 114.

strategic and operational objectives within a given time and space.”⁸⁴ Despite the growing use of the term in civilian life, campaign remains for many military officers a word associated with conventional military operations and maneuver. The U.S. military’s current intellectual struggle over how to apply the tenets of operational art to the practice of counterinsurgency reflects the problem with terminology, but the institution is making progress. Regional commanders in Afghanistan, who in scope and variety of missions are akin to Civil War-era department commanders, have been learning how to craft campaign plans covering the spectrum of war and which specifically take into account what used to be considered non-military tasks in stability operations, like long-term assistance with civil governance. Necessity, the length of the war, and international political involvement has driven these officers and their staffs to adapt the art and science of campaigning within a unique operational environment. Union officers such as U.S. Grant and William Sherman grasped a similar imperative to adapt their conception of campaigning to a much greater extent than their Union peers or Confederate counterparts, all of whom shared military schooling and/or understanding of modern warfare through authors like Jomini and Halleck. Hill was not any worse at campaign planning than the majority of his peers and in many ways he had a better idea than most of how his operations were linked to Confederate strategic goals. He simply failed to figure out his advisory role in his capacity as department commander.

In fairness to Hill and his efforts to run his department, he did not always receive the best guidance or support from his superiors. He gained tacit approval of his initial mission priorities and seems to have understood that he was expected to take a more defensive stance, hence the secrecy surrounding the planned offensive with James Longstreet. As the spring continued, Hill continued to chafe under perceived and actual operational restrictions while Longstreet turned his attention toward his own corps’ operations and attempted to obey Lee’s guidance to prioritize the

⁸⁴ FM 3-0, *Operations*, 6-3.

collection of foodstuffs for the Army of Northern Virginia. At the strategic level, the Confederate command authority scrambled to figure out how to respond to the sudden success of Chancellorsville while coping with a deteriorating situation in the Western theater. Even when Davis gave Lee permission to invade the North for the second time, he never clearly established which theater had strategic priority and continued to insist that the South hold Vicksburg. Davis and Secretary of War James Seddon were very sympathetic to North Carolina's particular problems, but they fielded similar concerns and requests from multiple department commanders and governors. Hill's issues and complaints reflected the difficulty Davis had in balancing the needs of each department and the difficulty of coordinating operations between departments. What helped the Confederate situation in 1863 was the fact that the Union also suffered from the same problems; Major General John Foster, with half of his corps on loan to another department and operation, was a prime example. A more open and deliberate dialogue between Richmond and the department commanders may have helped solve some of the tension and misunderstandings over strategic priorities, yet would have been difficult to attain because of the lack of a timely communications and a general staff or chief of staff to organize this dialogue at the Confederate "national" level. The U.S. military has since largely solved these organizational and infrastructure problems to better enable shared understanding and unity of command.

Do modern officers receive any more guidance on operational-level command than Hill did, and are they better prepared to take on operational-level responsibilities? No War College existed at the time that Hill and his peers served in the U.S. and Confederate armies, but many senior officers who survived the war recognized the need for a more robust officer education system. The Army, Naval, and National War Colleges were founded in part to help overcome the types of command problems Hill and his peers encountered during the Civil War. Today's Army War College (AWC) prepares colonels and other military and civilian equivalents "for the

responsibilities of strategic leadership and educates them on the development and employment of land power.”⁸⁵ Implied in the course descriptions are the development of skills and understanding to enable success at the operational level of war, but the curriculum is heavily geared toward strategy and policy. Besides the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS), the only other Army course which specifically educates officers about the operational level of war is the Joint Force Land Component Commander (JFLCC) Course. Generals destined for theater/operational-level commands attend this week-long course at Carlisle Barracks.⁸⁶ Mid-grade and senior officers are expected to make the most of these educational opportunities and supplement them with critical thinking and professional reading and discussion in order to understand the linkage between the levels of war and how to translate political and strategic guidance to operational-level plans and execution. Particularly regarding the fuzzy line between civilian and military responsibilities when it comes to strategy and campaigns planned and coordinated across the diplomatic, informational, military and economic realms, officers must understand their role in the given context and calibrate their advice and contributions accordingly.

Today’s senior officers also have the advantage of having served continuously during a conflict of nearly ten years duration. Through experience they are repeatedly exposed to operational-level problems which give them the opportunity to learn and adapt. Guidance received is not necessarily any clearer than what Hill had to work with, but officers are expected to know what questions to ask and when and to take the initiative to seek out answers and come up with creative solutions. Starting with SAMS, field grades are told to start thinking outside of their tactical comfort zone. Unlike one hundred fifty years ago, the U.S. military now has the capacity to continue educating a large number of leaders during an ongoing conflict. Hill’s

⁸⁵ U.S. Army War College, “U.S. Army War College Curriculum,” <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/about/Curriculum.cfm>.

⁸⁶ U.S. Army War College, “Combined/Joint Force Land Component Commander Course,” <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/jflcc/>.

generation of leaders did not have the time (or in many cases the professional inclination) to stop and take a year to think about the nature of command and leadership, strategy and policy. That both sides struggled with these concepts is painfully apparent from any reading of the Civil War. Today's officers must take advantage of the extended military experiences and education unavailable to men like Hill while retaining his sense of duty and fighting spirit.

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