

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Chancellorsville

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Chancellorsville was the first major military campaigns conducted in the Eastern Theater after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863. The Army of the Potomac, the premier Federal army operating in Virginia, was utterly demoralized following the defeat at Fredericksburg at the hands of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia on December 13, 1862. The subsequent attempt to resume a winter offensive (the ill-fated "Mud March") in mid-January 1863 by Federal commander Major General Ambrose Everett Burnside only resulted in continued embarrassment and sapped any remaining confidence the army might have had the previous year.

Major General Joseph Hooker succeeded Burnside in command of the Army of the Potomac on January 26, 1863. In making the appointment, Lincoln took measure of the new commander who he believed had contributed in part to the army's demoralization by undermining his predecessor's authority creating dissension among the senior generals. "Neither you nor Napoleon...could get any good out of an army while such a spirit prevails in it," Lincoln warned Hooker. Moreover, Hooker would later reflect that "a large element of the army had taken sides antagonistic to [the Emancipation Proclamation], declaring that they never would have embarked in the war had they anticipated this action of the government." Before he could prepare his men for the approaching spring campaign Hooker had to combat disaffection in the ranks and restore morale, confidence, and purpose in the army. This he did by improving the soldiers' diet and sanitary conditions in camp, granting furloughs based upon unit performance, conducting frequent drills, inspections, and parades, and instituting corps identification badges (forerunner to present-day unit patches). By late April 1863, Hooker had over 130,000 men organized into seven infantry corps, a reorganized cavalry corps, and a force of reserve artillery ready to face the Confederate juggernaut.¹

In contrast Hooker's adversary, General Robert E. Lee commanding the Army of Northern Virginia, could boast of another victory in Virginia closing out 1862. If Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation held the potential of creating dissension in the North, Lee believed that it could be a unifying factor for the Southern cause. Writing to

¹ Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War: Part I Army of the Potomac*, S.Rep. No. 38-, at 112 (1865) (Major General Joseph Hooker Testimony, March 11, 1865, Washington, D.C.)

Confederate President Jefferson Davis two weeks after the Battle of Antietam (following Lincoln's issuance of a Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and other measures), Lee predicted "the conservative portion of that people [in the North], unless dead to the feelings of liberty, will rise and depose the party now in power." In spite of his battlefield successes, Lee faced shortages in supplies and transportation. Another offensive north of the Potomac River in the spring would require abundant supplies to sustain operations. This forced him to detach two divisions (Hood and Pickett) under Lieutenant General James Longstreet, the First Corps commander, to southeastern Virginia in late February 1863 to forage for supplies and disperse Federal forces occupying key areas in that region. Lee would have available to him a little more than 60,000 troops when the Army of the Potomac began its spring campaign.²

Chancellorsville became the focal point for both armies. It was not a town or village, but a two-and a half-story brick manor house with a 33-year history as home to members of the Chancellor family. It also played a role as a rural tavern. This structure occupied the largest of a handful of clearings in a seventy square-mile tract locally known as "the Wilderness." The Wilderness, characterized by secondary-growth timber of scrub oak and dwarf pine, remained a significant reminder of a minor iron industry that had operated in the region beginning in the eighteenth century and lasting into the early nineteenth century. Much of the mature timber that had occupied the area 150 years earlier had been used to fuel the numerous iron-producing furnaces. Catherine Furnace, owned and operated by the Wellford Family still residing in the vicinity, resumed operations in 1861 to produce iron for the Confederacy after it had closed in the 1840s.

The major road heading west out of Fredericksburg was the Orange Plank Road that eventually reached Orange Court House after 38 miles. This Plank Road split near Tabernacle Church about five miles out of Fredericksburg—the left road continuing in a southwesterly arc as the Orange Plank Road; the right road becoming what was then known as the Orange Turnpike continuing due west. The Orange Plank and Orange Turnpike traversed the Wilderness through the western end of Spotsylvania County, Virginia for an additional five miles. It was at Chancellorsville that these two roads intersected with the Ely's Ford Road, which ran a northwesterly course from Chancellorsville toward the Rappahannock River. An additional road, aptly named River Road, began a half mile east on the Orange Turnpike, heading northeast for about three miles to the Rappahannock before hugging the course of the river in a southeasterly direction toward Banks Ford and Fredericksburg. The Chancellorsville clearing was one of a few open tracts of land in the Wilderness where soldiers with the implements of war could see and maneuver.

Hooker had viewed his spring offensive against the Confederates as one of skillful maneuver; he did not wish to batter his Federal troops in futile assaults against fortified

² R.E. Lee to [Jefferson] Davis, October 2, 1862 in United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, volume 19, part 2, p. 644 (hereafter cited as *O.R.*, I, 19, pt. 2, 644).

positions. Burnside's attacks at Fredericksburg had only reinforced Hooker's resolve to spare the Army of the Potomac from high casualties with few results.

Since the end of 1862, Lee's army occupied a 25-mile defensive front on the south side of the Rappahannock River. Its right flank rested near Port Royal about 20 miles southeast of Fredericksburg. The center of the army occupied a series of high plateaus behind Fredericksburg collectively known as Marye's Heights. The Confederate line continued in a northwesterly direction for 13 miles with the left flank resting near U.S. Ford on the Rappahannock.

Realizing that any movement below Fredericksburg would be made with great difficulty due to the widening of the Rappahannock River, Hooker favored turning Lee's left flank above Fredericksburg. Using his large cavalry force under Major General George Stoneman Jr. to cross at one of the upper fords of the Rappahannock, Hooker could sweep into a position between Lee and Richmond severing his communication and supply lines and checking his retreat. Once this occurred, Federal infantry crossing at various points along the Rappahannock could fall on Lee's rear or continue compelling him to fall back to either Gordonsville or Culpeper along the Orange and Alexandria Railroad and further away from Washington, D.C. Unfortunately for the Federals, weather delays in mid-April forced Hooker to alter his plans.

In the revised operations, Stoneman's cavalry would proceed on cutting the vital railroad links behind enemy lines. An infantry force would cross farther upstream on the Rappahannock and then cross the Rapidan to get directly behind Lee's position in a flanking maneuver. A second infantry force across from Fredericksburg would hold Lee's attention until the flanking force got into position behind him. Hooker would then have Lee trapped in a classic "pincers movement" giving the Confederate commander the choice of being destroyed on two sides by Federal forces or retreating. "My plans are perfect," Hooker told some subordinates, "and when I start to carry them out, may God have mercy on General Lee, for I will have none."³

Hooker's flanking force of 42,000 men composed of the V, XI, and XII Army Corps under the overall command of Major General Henry Warner Slocum was ordered to leave camp on April 27, 1863. After crossing both the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers, Slocum's men arrived at Chancellorsville three days later. The Confederate division under Major General Richard Herron Anderson of Longstreet's Corps posted near Chancellorsville fell back four miles to the east.

Hooker's masterful movement behind the Confederates perplexed their commander Robert E. Lee. Clearly, Hooker had divided his army. Although a sizable Federal force remained in his front making feints and actual crossings below Fredericksburg, he was unsure if the enemy's main threat would fall on his right flank or on the left. Lieutenant General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson, commanding the Second Corps and Lee's top subordinate present with him, suggested attacking the

³ Hooker is quoted in Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 120.

Federal force directly in their front at Fredericksburg. Assuming that this force was the weaker of the two, the Confederates could clear them out the way and then turn their attention to Hooker's flanking force marching from the west. Lee, concerned about the enemy's heavy artillery posted on the heights on the other side of the river, did not want a potential slaughter of his own troops, but allowed Jackson to see if it could be done. Jackson's subsequent reconnaissance and almost demise by a Federal artillery shell striking too close for comfort convinced him of the impracticality of his original suggestion.

After Jackson reported back to Lee for orders, the Confederate commander ordered Jackson to move the bulk of the Second Corps of 28,000 men to confront the Federals approaching from the west. Lee had already ordered the brigades of Anderson's Division that had fallen back from Chancellorsville to dig a line of defensive entrenchments running between the Orange Turnpike and Orange Plank Road. This small force of about 8,000 men would have to slow down the much larger Federal advance until Jackson's arrival.

Federal and Confederate forces in the vicinity Chancellorsville had been skirmishing on April 29 and 30 prompting Hooker to issue discretionary orders for the flanking force to secure strong defensive positions in or near Chancellorsville should the Confederates bring up reinforcements. Given the difficulty Slocum had in maneuvering his troops through the thick tangled Wilderness and skirmishing with pockets of Confederate cavalry, Slocum halted the flanking wing at Chancellorsville. Hooker sent additional reinforcements to Slocum and he arrived in person late on April 30 to take direct command of operations.

Jackson, holding general command of the advancing Confederates from Fredericksburg, reached Anderson's entrenchments near Tabernacle Church just east of Chancellorsville at 8:30 a.m. on May 1. Ordering the Confederates here to dispense with their picks and shovels and abandon their defensive posture, Jackson began making preparations to launch attacks from both the Orange Turnpike and Orange Plank Roads. Lee arrived in this position later that morning having left 13,000 Confederate troops at Fredericksburg.

That same morning Hooker at Chancellorsville advanced his troops east on three roughly parallel roads—from north to south: the River Road, the Orange Turnpike, and the Orange Plank Road. These columns were expected to converge out into open ground by the afternoon. Four miles away, Jackson had placed the Confederate division of Longstreet's Corps under Major General Lafayette McLaws on the Orange Turnpike, while he personally directed the three divisions of his own corps to attack south along the Orange Plank Road.

The Battle of Chancellorsville began in earnest on May 1, 1863 three miles east of Chancellorsville along the Orange Turnpike near the Joseph Alsop Farm when the Federal V Corps division led by Major General George Sykes engaged McLaws' Division approaching from the opposite direction. Sykes and McLaws, 1842 classmates

at West Point, battled it out for two hours. The Confederates held a slight advantage due to their position in more open ground and their ability to provide reinforcements to McLaws' sector. These reinforcements threatened both flanks of Sykes' position. Although reinforcements were sent to Sykes, Hooker ordered his columns to fall back and prepare defensive positions at Chancellorsville fearing that portions of his army could be isolated and vulnerable to attack due to the difficult terrain. In the wake of Hooker's withdrawal, Brigadier General Stephen Dodson Ramseur, commanding a North Carolina brigade as part of the pursuit toward Chancellorsville recalled the Federals "strewing the way with their arms and baggage."⁴

Hooker's withdrawal to Chancellorsville when he still maintained great advantages over Lee has remained one of the great mysteries in the study of the battle. When Major General Darius Nash Couch commanding the II Corps and Hooker's nominal second-in-command, questioned this withdrawal, Hooker replied, "I have got Lee where I want him; he must fight me on my own ground." Couch came away from their conversation with "the belief that my commanding general was a whipped man."⁵

More Federal reinforcements that evening brought Hooker's force at Chancellorsville up to 70,000 men. Hooker's force fortified itself in a five-mile defensive line running east to west resembling a shoestring with a wide circular knot in the middle. Chancellorsville was the "knot." While the left flank of the Federal lines rested near a bend in the Rappahannock River making a natural obstacle to Confederate attack, the right flank running westward along the Orange Turnpike facing south stopped just short of a continuation of the Wilderness. It was believed by Major General Oliver Otis Howard commanding the XI Corps on this particular flank that the undergrowth within the woods would make his position impenetrable to a large-scale attack.

Meanwhile, Lee knowing that Hooker had given up the initiative resolved to take the fighting to the Federals and constantly thought on "how can we get at those people?" Both Lee and Jackson had dispatched reconnaissance details to discover weak points in the Federal lines. Meeting at the intersection of the Orange Plank and Catherine Furnace Roads about a mile southeast of Chancellorsville on the evening of May 1, the two Confederate leaders pondered their next move. Major General James Ewell Brown "JEB" Stuart commanding the Confederate cavalry arrived reporting that Federal right flank (Howard's position) was "up in the air." Lee, satisfied that attacking the Federal right flank was his only option, entrusted Jackson to carry out the operation.⁶

⁴ Stephen D. Ramseur to G. Peyton, May 23, 1863 in *OR*, I, 25, pt. 1, 955.

⁵ Darius N. Couch, "The Chancellorsville Campaign," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Company, 1884, 1888), 3:161.

⁶ A.L. Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee* (New York: J.M. Stoddart, 1886), 254 (Also see Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 231); Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), 2:539 (Also see Ernest B. Furgurson, *Chancellorsville, 1863: The Souls of the Brave* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 139.)

After ascertaining appropriate routes to maneuver Confederate troops on the Federal right flank while maintaining the element of surprise, Lee and Jackson finalized their plans in the early morning hours of May 2. When asked what troops he would need to make the movement, Jackson told Lee that he would take his entire “corps” (28,000 men) and would leave Lee with McLaws’ and Anderson’s Divisions of 15,000 troops to keep Hooker in place at Chancellorsville. They planned to turn the tables on “Fighting Joe” Hooker and deploy their own version of a pincers movement against the Federals.

Jackson’s men moved out along the Catherine Furnace Road at 7:00 a.m. on May 2 on what would be a nine-mile long procession to meet the enemy right flank. About the same time, Hooker began an inspection tour of his lines around Chancellorsville. Already believing his right flank under Howard to be weak, Hooker ordered reinforcements from across the river to eventually bolster his right flank and rear. Reaching Howard’s lines, Hooker and his staff noticed numerous gaps in the defensive positions. Only 700 men faced due west into the Wilderness protecting the right flank of the Army of the Potomac. Howard made some adjustments in his troop dispositions that seemed to satisfy Hooker. Upon returning to his headquarters at Chancellorsville, Hooker received reports of significant Confederate troop movements from spotters in tall trees around the open clearing of Hazel Grove. From their position only three quarters of a mile away, Confederates could be seen crossing their front marching in a southwesterly direction. Federal artillery in the vicinity opened up on the grey-clad column forcing Jackson’s men to double-quick past such openings in the woods.

A quick look at some available maps enabled Hooker to immediately determine that Lee was moving around to attack his right flank. Dispatches were sent from Chancellorsville indicating “we have good reason to suppose that the enemy is moving to our right” to Howard and other Federal commanders who would be affected and urged them to make appropriate preparations. Howard later recalled that he had never received such dispatches, although some of his subordinates claimed that he did but ignored them. There would be several sightings of Confederate movement on the right flank by Federal soldiers throughout the day that continued to go unheeded. Some Federal officers on the right flank taking the initiative began re-facing their troop positions from south to west anticipating an enemy attack from that direction.⁷

When Jackson reached the Catherine Furnace, his columns turned due south to get further away from Federal observation and the potential effects of enemy shelling could cause his men. As reports filtered back to Hooker’s headquarters with this latest information, the belief that Lee might be retreating toward Orange Courthouse or Louisa Courthouse began to take shape. Soon, Hooker grew more confident that the enemy had chosen to “ingloriously fly” and ordered an attack against what he presumed was Lee’s

⁷ J.H. Van Alen to Major Generals Howard and Slocum, May 2, 1863—9:30 a.m. in *OR*, I, 25, pt. 2, 361.

retreating army to be made by Federal troops under Brigadier General David Bell Birney commanding a division in Major General Daniel Edgar Sickles' III Corps.⁸

Confederate troops dispatched from both Jackson's column and troops from Brigadier General Ambrose Ransom Wright's brigade of Anderson's Division blunted Birney's attack. Jackson's men made it past the Catherine Furnace without further harassment by Federals. The Confederates continued in a southerly direction until they reached the north-south Brock Road. Taking a right turn and heading due north, Jackson would march to an intersection of the Orange Plank Road where he would veer to the right reaching the Orange Turnpike two miles west of Chancellorsville. When he reached this intersection at 1:30 p.m., Brigadier General Fitzhugh Lee commanding the lone cavalry brigade with the army screening his movements took Jackson to a clearing near the Burton Farm. From this position, the two generals could see Howard's Federal line. Fitz Lee dissuaded Jackson from launching his attack from this position on the Orange Plank Road as it would be nothing more than a frontal assault. He suggested Jackson continue north on the Brock Road where it terminated on the Orange Turnpike and two miles beyond Howard's right flank.

Between 5:15 and 5:30 p.m., Jackson's lead division under Brigadier General Robert Emmett Rodes formed in the clearing of the Luckett Farm four miles west of Chancellorsville facing due east and began the attack on the Federal right flank and rear. Before Howard's men realized what was happening, Jackson came crashing into their camps quickly decimating the Federal ranks like a steamroller. Howard who had just returned from commanding reinforcements for Birney's earlier attack likened the Confederate assault "to a terrible gale!" Grabbing the national colors under the stump of his missing right arm while holding the reins of his horse in his left hand, Howard attempted to rally his shattered corps. Outflanked by the Confederates, the entire right flank fell back east toward Chancellorsville.⁹

Jackson's men covered two miles before darkness intervened. Although eager to continue his attacks well into the night with hopes of destroying the Army of the Potomac, Jackson ordered a temporary halt to reorganize his jumbled ranks and bring up fresh troops to spearhead his continued assault against the Federals. In the meantime Jackson, unfamiliar with the roads in the area, secured a local guide and with members of his staff reconnoitered along a small road running northeasterly from the Orange Turnpike known locally as the Mountain Road to ascertain how far the enemy had fallen back and to get a sense of the terrain. Passing through the 18th North Carolina Infantry situated perpendicular to the Mountain Road, Jackson's party rode toward the skirmishers of the 33rd North Carolina Infantry. The riders rode as far as they could before they begin hearing the distinct sounds of Federal troops constructing earthworks in the darkness just

⁸ General Orders No. 47, Headquarters Army of the Potomac, April 30, 1863 in *OR*, I, 25, pt. 1, 171.

⁹ Oliver O. Howard, *Autobiography of Oliver Otis Howard* (New York: The Baker and Taylor, 1907), 1:370.

short of the Confederate skirmishers. After a brief pause, Jackson and his party retraced their steps.

Near the Fairview clearing situated about a mile to the southwest of where Jackson's party was returning to their lines, small arms fire erupted in the confusion of trying to distinguish between friend and foe in the darkness of the Wilderness. Members of the 18th North Carolina initially responding to the firing to the south poured a volley to their front. It was at this time that some of Jackson's staff officers called out to "cease fire" as they approached the lines. Suspecting the riders to be "Yankee cavalry," the North Carolinians continued firing when Jackson received two shots shattering his left arm.¹⁰

Major General Ambrose Powell Hill Jr., commanding one of Jackson's divisions and his ranking subordinate on the field, rushed to his superior's assistance and made arrangements to get him safely off the field to prevent his further wounding by pieces of artillery shrapnel striking the ground nearby. For a brief time that evening, Jackson's command was in crisis. Interestingly enough, the next ranking general officer on that portion of the battlefield was the cavalry commander, Major General J.E.B. Stuart. A variety of circumstances had stripped Stuart of about three-fourths of his cavalry troopers at Chancellorsville and he had accompanied Jackson rendering whatever service "Stonewall" might have needed. Although identified with the mounted arm of the service, Stuart was well-known throughout the ranks of the Army of Northern Virginia and would have great shoes to fill.¹¹

Unsure of Jackson's specific plans or orders, Stuart consulted with Jackson's division commanders and took their collective recommendation to resume the attacks on the Federal lines early the following morning. This would give them time to straighten out their lines that had become disorganized and confused. At 5:00 a.m. on May 3, 1863, Stuart backed by Lee's directive to "press on...so as to drive [the enemy] from Chancellorsville" so that the two Confederate wings could unite, launched an all-out attack on the Federal lines that stretched well over a mile. Capturing the all-important clearing at Hazel Grove from Federal troops who had fallen back to the northeast to the Fairview clearing, Stuart's Confederates now had a key location to place the bulk of their artillery that was utilized effectively.¹²

By 7:30 a.m. Stuart ordered in his second line of attack and a third line of attack an hour later forcing Federal troops to give up more of the contested ground. Confederate gunners at Hazel Grove were now taking careful aim at Chancellorsville, the manor

¹⁰ Furgurson, *Chancellorsville, 1863*, 202; Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 294, 296.

¹¹ One cavalry brigade under Brigadier General William Edmondson "Grumble" Jones had been sent to duty in the Shenandoah Valley; a second brigade under Brigadier General Wade Hampton III had been sent south of the James River to gather much-needed recruits and provisions; a third under Brigadier General William Henry Fitzhugh Lee was in pursuit of Stoneman's Federal cavalry; and Fitz Lee's brigade remaining with the main army screening Jackson's Flank March on May 2, 1863.

¹² R.E. Lee to [J.E.B. Stuart], May 3, 1863-3 a.m. in *OR*, I, 25, pt. 2, 769; R.E. Lee to [J.E.B. Stuart], May 3, 1863-3 a.m. in *OR*, I, 25, pt. 2, 769.

house serving as Hooker's headquarters. It had already been struck several times since fighting resumed that morning. A solid shot striking one of the pillars Hooker had been leaning against split in half with pieces falling on the general knocking him unconscious for a period of time. When he regained his senses, Hooker ordered General Couch to prepare a new defensive position.

By 9:30 a.m. Stuart's right wing linked up with Lee's troops thus beginning a general Confederate assault on Chancellorsville. Hooker's new defensive position formed at an apex about a mile to the northwest of Chancellorsville with two lines stretching away from this point in a rough V shape. Riding past Chancellorsville set ablaze by continued Confederate artillery fire, Stuart sang a parodied jingle "Old Joe Hooker Won't You Come Out the Wilderness" set to the tune of the "Old Grey Mare." Lee made his way to Chancellorsville from the recently captured position of Fairview and would later praise Stuart for having "conducted the operations on the left with distinguished capacity and vigor, stimulating and cheering the troops by the example of his own coolness and daring." Although complete victory seemed imminent, Lee's army was not finished just yet.¹³

Since April 29, Major General John Sedgwick commanding the VI Corps with about 23,600 Federal troops had been on the Confederate side of the Rappahannock River attempting to ascertain Confederate strength in Fredericksburg. His role had been to hold the Confederates' attention while Hooker's flanking wing gained the rear of Lee's army. Now with the Battle of Chancellorsville having commenced, orders were issued to Sedgwick to push through the Confederate defenses behind Fredericksburg pushing west along the Orange Turnpike/Plank Road to fall behind Lee as he faced Hooker at Chancellorsville. Jackson had left no more than 13,000 Confederates under Major General Jubal Anderson Early with the task of defending the seven-mile front on the high ground west of Fredericksburg that Lee's entire army had held the previous December. Early's primary job was to keep up the ruse of projecting a much larger force than what he actually had making Sedgwick cautious in his preparations for an attack.¹⁴

The Battle of Second Fredericksburg as a key part of Chancellorsville began at 10:00 a.m. on May 3 when Sedgwick reluctantly launched a direct assault against Confederate defenders at Marye's Heights. In the midst of the initial attack, a temporary flag of truce was called to allow Federal troops to retrieve mounting casualties giving them the opportunity to observe the lightly defended position. Armed by this information, three Federal attack columns converged at Marye's Heights successfully storming the

¹³ R.E. Lee to S. Cooper, September 21, 1863 in *OR*, I, 25, pt. 1, 803.

¹⁴ Sedgwick's force that was across the Rappahannock River in the vicinity of Fredericksburg not only included his own VI Corps, but also a II Corps division under Brigadier General John Gibbon occupying Fredericksburg as a reserve; In addition to Early's Division of Jackson's Corps initially remaining in positions west of Fredericksburg, Brigadier General William Barksdale's Mississippi brigade of McLaws' Division, Longstreet's Corps had occupied Fredericksburg prior to Federal occupation and later fell back to positions along Marye's Heights.

heights by sheer weight of numbers at the cost of 1,100 Federal casualties. The Confederates in this action only lost 475, but withdrew from the heights to reorganize.

By noon, Sedgwick was moving west toward Chancellorsville not as one part of a pincers movement against Lee, but to save Hooker. “But this was the beginning of the disaster of the day, on our part of the line,” wrote a Pennsylvania infantryman. Brigadier General Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox, commanding a Confederate brigade in Anderson’s Division that had occupied a position to the northwest of Fredericksburg guarding Banks Ford on the Rappahannock, perceived the threat that Sedgwick’s column heading west posed to Lee at Chancellorsville. Instead of regrouping with the withdrawing Confederates from Marye’s Heights, Wilcox was able to head off Sedgwick’s approaching troops at Salem Church located three miles west of Fredericksburg and ten miles east of Chancellorsville astride the Orange Plank Road.¹⁵

Wilcox made this two-storied red bricked structure of worship sitting on a raised plateau his citadel for much of the day. Learning of Sedgwick’s approach from the east, Lee quickly dispatched Confederate reinforcements from Chancellorsville to Salem Church. Both sides were locked in combat until darkness forced Sedgwick to withdraw forming his own defensive position into a bulging U shape with his back to the Rappahannock. The next morning, May 4, Lee’s shifting of Confederate forces had effectively isolated Sedgwick from Fredericksburg to the east and blocked his ability to reinforce Hooker at Chancellorsville to the west.

Hooker, now stymied, was either unable or unwilling to attack the much smaller enemy force in his front at Chancellorsville. Nor was he prepared to assist Sedgwick confronting Confederates to the east with his much larger force perhaps aggravated that Sedgwick was supposed to support him at Chancellorsville. Calling his corps commanders together for the first time during the entire operation, Hooker posed to them the options whether to withdraw the army across the river or fight it out. Although the majority recommended staying in position, Hooker overruled them ordering the entire withdrawal of the Army of the Potomac across the river on the evening of May 5-6, 1863.

After a week of campaigning, both sides ended up back where they had started. The Army of the Potomac lost 17,300 men to casualties while the Army of Northern Virginia came away from the clash of arms with 13,000 casualties.

Although Lee won the battle against overwhelming odds in terms of manpower and supplies, he knew his seemingly minimal losses when compared to his adversary sapped 22% of his effective strength. Hooker could at least boast of losing only 13% of his. Moreover, the Federals could replenish this loss and continue to supply their larger army. Lee could not easily replace his lost soldiers, particularly when he hoped to make another attempt to move the war north and out of war-weary Virginia.

¹⁵ G. Norton Galloway, *The Ninety-fifth Pennsylvania Volunteers (“Gosline’s Pennsylvania Zouaves”) in the Sixth Corps: An Historical Paper* (Philadelphia, PA: 1884), 28-29.

The colonel of the 37th North Carolina present at the Chancellorsville clearing remarked that it had been “the bloodiest battle that I had ever witnessed.” Scenes of death and destruction during and in the aftermath of the fighting left stark impressions on the victors and the vanquished alike.¹⁶

When informed of Jackson’s wounding and that his condition was serious enough to require the amputation of his left arm, Lee penned a note to him. “I congratulate you upon the victory, which is due to your skill and energy,” the note read in part. The ever-pious Jackson believed his commanding officer was too kind in his praise of him noting that any victory for the Confederacy was by the grace of God. Lee, reportedly stated to Jackson’s corps chaplain that while Jackson had “lost his left arm...I [lost] my right.”¹⁷

Jackson was taken by ambulance to the Fairfield Plantation, located near Guiney’s Station on the railroad 11 miles south of Fredericksburg in neighboring Caroline County. Jackson arrived at this place on the afternoon of May 4 with hopes that he could recuperate and then be taken by train to Richmond for further convalescence. Situated in a first floor room of the plantation office, Jackson’s condition took a turn for the worse after a few days of marked improvement. At 3:15 p.m. on May 10, 1863, Thomas Jonathan Jackson died of pneumonia exacerbated by his wounding, reportedly uttering “Let us cross over the river and rest under the shade of the trees.” A soldier in the Stonewall Brigade believed that “[a] great many of our boys said then our star of destiny would fade, and that our cause would be lost without Jackson.” Victory had come to the Confederates at a price.¹⁸

Hooker cited four primary reasons that kept him from accomplishing his goals at Chancellorsville. The first was the collapse of Howard’s XI Corps on May 2. The second was Sedgwick’s failure to reach Chancellorsville to reinforce Hooker. The third reason centered on Stoneman’s failure, with the majority of the Federal cavalry, to effectively sever Lee’s communication and supply lines. The fourth and final reason was the Federals’ unfamiliarity with the living morass of tangled undergrowth and scrub known as the Wilderness. Little could anyone predict that exactly a year later this same Wilderness would again figure prominently in the opening battle of the Overland Campaign.

¹⁶ Colonel William Morgan Barbour to George Burgwyn Johnston, May 9, 1863 in *OR*, I, 25, pt. 1, 924.

¹⁷ R.E. Lee to Thomas J. Jackson, May 3, 1863 in *OR*, I, 25, pt. 2, 769; Lee’s quote on Jackson losing his left arm is quoted in Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 371.

¹⁸ Modern treatments of Jackson’s brief recuperation and final demise include Ernest B. Furgurson, *Chancellorsville 1863: Souls of the Brave* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 306-307, 323-329; Sears, *Chancellorsville*, 407-408, 446-448; James I. Robertson, Jr., *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, the Soldier, the Legend* (New York: MacMillan Publishing, 1997), 740-753; and Robert K. Krick, *The Smoothbore Volley that Doomed the Confederacy: The Death of Stonewall Jackson and Other Chapters on the Army of Northern Virginia* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 37-39; John O. Casler, *Four Years in the Stonewall Brigade*, 2nd ed., (Girard, KS: Appeal Publishing, 1906), 153.

Howard's XI Corps has suffered criticism in the immediate aftermath of the battle and later, perhaps unfairly, due to the large number of first-generation immigrants from Germany and Eastern Europe serving in its ranks. Critics of the XI Corps' performance produced racial stereotypes and unflattering caricatures of these immigrants as the cause of its failures at Chancellorsville. A fairer view would be that any troops regardless of ethnic origins might have acted in similar fashion under the same circumstances. Nevertheless, blame can certainly be placed on Howard for having poor judgment in the placement of his troops when it came to his corps' exposed rear and flank that hastened its collapse. But, III Corps commander Dan Sickles and "Fighting Joe" Hooker himself also share the blame for XI Corps' failures by convincing themselves that Jackson's column was retreating when it was in fact preparing to attack his lines as Hooker had earlier recognized.

Stoneman's highly anticipated cavalry expedition ultimately dwindled to no more than a series of smaller raids to the south and west of Lee's army. It did increase Lee's concern about future enemy cavalry operations that "will augment their boldness and increase their means of doing us harm."¹⁹

Sedgwick, lacking the aggressive initiative Hooker had believed he needed to assist him at Chancellorsville, did suffer a failure in technology. Faulty telegraph wires stretched over lengthy distances caused him the not receive his commander's orders or dispatches in a timely manner causing confusion. Ultimately, Sedgwick fell for Early's ruse at Fredericksburg making his Federal opponent believe that he would be going up against a sizable Confederate force should he attack Marye's Heights echoing horrific memories of a similar battle almost five months earlier for this same ground.

If Joseph Hooker failed in his one campaign as commander of the Army of the Potomac, he made up for this by creating a professional army through the reforms he instituted upon assuming command. His predecessor, Major General George Brinton McClellan, arguably created this army in his own image prompting Lincoln to call it "McClellan's bodyguard." Hooker in spite of his own arrogance and penchant for intrigue created a fighting force that could withstand the pain of defeat. And that army would eventually maintain their confidence in the Union cause including the emancipation of slaves as part of the larger goal of preserving the fractured nation.²⁰

Critics have often leveled the charge of overconfidence on Lee in the wake of his Chancellorsville victory leading to his defeat at Gettysburg two months later. Lee held high confidence in the Army of Northern Virginia, but even he acknowledged that Chancellorsville had been a limited victory. The loss of Jackson and other key officers forced Lee to reorganize his army's command structure. Lee had few options but to capitalize on the stunning defeat of Fighting Joe Hooker and the Army of the Potomac as soon as he could by striking north of the Potomac River. Such a move could help relieve

¹⁹ R.E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, May 7, 1863 in *OR*, I, 25, pt. 2, 782.

²⁰ Francis Fisher Browne, *The Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln* (Chicago, IL: Browne and Howell, 1913), 418.

the burdens the war had already placed on the people of Virginia; divert Federal resources fixed on Confederate forces in siege at Vicksburg, Mississippi; and fuel the growing peace movement in the North seeking a negotiated settlement of the war. Lieutenant General James Longstreet, who had been absent at Chancellorsville but a prominent figure at Gettysburg wrote that it was after this May 1863 battle “[t]he dark clouds of the future then began to lower over the Confederates.”²¹

²¹ James Longstreet, “Lee’s Invasion of Pennsylvania,” in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3: 245.