






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by Douglas Southall Freeman

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Chapter II

THE REORGANIZATION THAT EXPLAINS GETTYSBURG

Who was to lead Jackson's corps and to act in his stead? "I know not how to replace him," Lee confessed to his wife.¹ Among the infantry officers of the Army of Northern Virginia there were only four men whom he seems to have considered for corps command — A. P. Hill, R. S. Ewell, R. H. Anderson, and John B. Hood. Of these four, Lee regarded A. P. Hill as the best division commander he had, and from the time of the Maryland expedition had placed him next in line for a corps.² Among the officers who had led Jackson's "foot-cavalry" from Front Royal to the Potomac and back again to triumph at Port Republic and at Cross Keys, the man who had been closest to Jackson in those

operations had been Major General R. S. Ewell, now able for the first time to walk after having lost a leg at Groveton. There was strong sentiment for his appointment as the "logical successor" of Jackson.³ "Dick" Ewell, as he was universally called, was then forty-six. After his graduation from West Point he had served with cavalry until 1861. He always insisted that in fighting Indians on the plains he had "learned all about commanding fifty United States dragoons, and forgotten everything else." Odd in appearance and in speech, he was quick-tempered but generous and kindly, and notoriously profane until he underwent a change of heart during the war.⁴ Professing to have some strange malady, he slept most irregularly and subsisted on a peculiar diet of wheat. An excellent tactician and a rapid marcher, he was fond of personal participation in battle, and more than once, during the Valley campaign, he had temporarily turned over the command to a subordinate in the absence of Jackson, had gone among the skirmishers, had satisfied his appetite for a fight, and then had returned with the fervent hope that "old Jackson would not catch him." His temperamental fondness for desperate adventures had made him an ideal lieutenant to Jackson, whom he much admired but early suspected of being insane. After he had once heard Jackson seriously assert that he never took pepper with his food because it made his left leg weak, Ewell had been satisfied that "Stonewall" was mad. He had confided to one of his friends that he "never saw one of Jackson's couriers approach without expecting an order to assault the north pole." His soldiers idolized him, despite his hard marching, which seems to have been based on his professed maxim that "the road to glory cannot be followed with much baggage. . . . We can get along without everything but food and ammunition."⁵ Few jokes in the army were more cherished than that of Ewell's insistence during the winter of 1861-62 that he could find food where his commissaries affirmed that the country had been swept clear. He went off on a foraging expedition and subsequently returned with one lean cow of leathery flanks. When asked how far this would go in feeding the army, he was nonplussed and admitted that he had forgotten he was heading a brigade! He was thinking in terms of his fifty dragoons on the prairie.⁶

As for R. H. Anderson and John B. Hood, Lee regarded both as "capital officers" who were improving in the field, though neither had so great reputation as either A. P. Hill or Ewell. Lee believed they would make good chiefs of corps, if it was necessary to use them, but he did not prefer either of

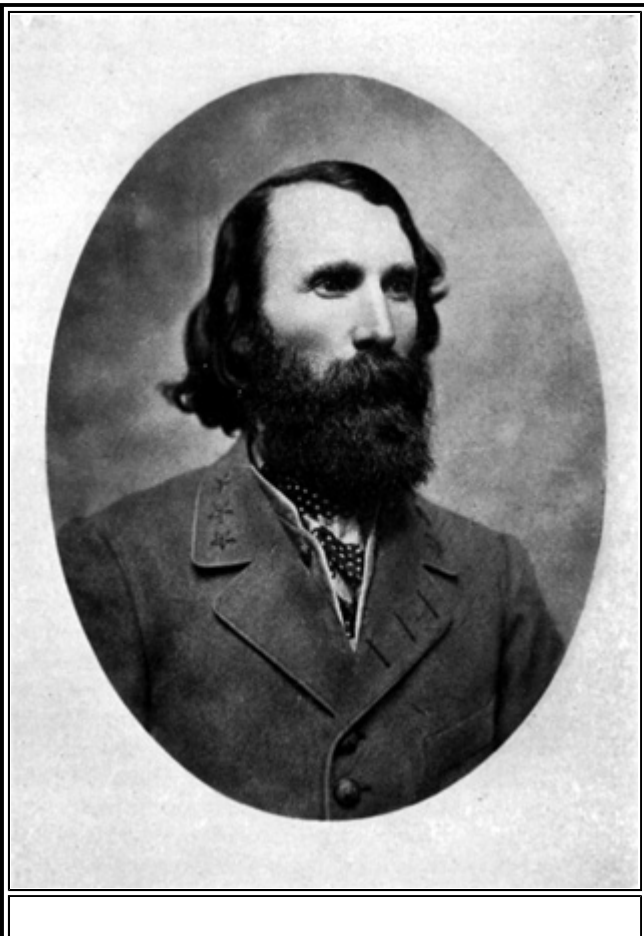
them to their seniors.⁷

Outside the infantry then with the Army of Northern Virginia, only two other men could reasonably have been considered at the time. One was D. H. Hill and the other was "Jeb" Stuart. D. H. Hill was a most tenacious fighter. Few division commanders could get more from a given number of men. That had been demonstrated at South Mountain and at Sharpsburg. But the North Carolinian was critical and outspoken and not the type of lieutenant with whom Lee worked most satisfactorily. Besides, he was in command in North Carolina, where the civil authorities imposed in him a measure of confidence that made them willing p10 to trust him with fewer troops than they would have demanded for defense under almost any one else.⁸ Hill, moreover, was in an odd state of mind at the time, insisting on explicit orders and asking that the district commanders under him report directly to the War Department.⁹

Stuart was held by some to have exhibited qualities on May 3 that marked him as the best man in the army to be retained permanently in the command he had assumed on the night of May 2, after both Jackson and A. P. Hill had been wounded.¹⁰ There is a hint in one of Lee's dispatches indicating that Stuart thought Lee had not been satisfied with his handling of the infantry that day because Lee had not publicly commended him;¹¹ but as Stuart recommended some one else for succession to Jackson's corps,¹² it is hardly probable that he regarded himself as in line of promotion for that post. So far as the evidence shows, Lee did not consider him. This doubtless was because he regarded Stuart as indispensable where he was. Neither Wade Hampton nor Fitz Lee, who were the senior brigadiers in the cavalry, had then shown much of Stuart's extraordinary skill in intelligence service, which was perhaps his most useful contribution to the Army of Northern Virginia. Even had they been ready for promotion, it is hardly probable that Lee would have considered them. He would never willingly have supplanted Stuart, because he believed a general of infantry could more nearly take Jackson's place at the head of the Second Corps than any one else could perform for the army the service that Stuart was rendering. It must, however, remain a tantalizing subject of speculation what the result would have been if Lee's choice had fallen on Stuart, for Stuart would have fought furiously at Gettysburg, and no new commander of the cavalry would have ventured on the raid that deprived Lee of part of his cavalry during that campaign.

A. P. Hill, Ewell, Anderson, Hood, D. H. Hill, Stuart — the choice narrowed down to A. P. Hill and Ewell. In reality, it was hardly a choice, because Lee had long considered the corps too large to be handled by one man in the tangled country through which the army operated. He had long desired to pill increase the number of corps and would have done so earlier had he been able to decide upon suitable commanders.¹³ He determined now to make the best of the dark necessity and to reorganize the army into three corps. Longstreet, of course, was to remain at the head of the First Corps; to Ewell, as Jackson's lieutenant, the Second Corps was to be entrusted, and for A. P. Hill a Third Corps was to be created. On May 20 Lee submitted the proposal to the President, and commended Hill and Ewell to his consideration.¹⁴

In its consequences this was one of the most important resolves of Lee's military career. At the most critical hour of its history it placed two-thirds of the army under new corps leaders. A. P. Hill had never commanded more than one division in action, except for the confused hour after Jackson had been struck down. Hill, however, was devoted, prompt, and energetic, and, though both Longstreet and Jackson had put him under arrest, he deserved promotion. If he did not thereafter display even a spark of the genius of Jackson, he never was guilty of any irremediable blunder. With Ewell, the circumstances of promotion were unusual. Lee took him at the valuation of others, rather than on his own knowledge of the soldier. The



selection was sentimental and therefore inevitable. Ewell had served directly under Lee only for the period from June 26 to July 13, and from August 15 to August 25, 1862 — in all, something less than a month, and then always subject to Jackson's guidance. Lee

LIEUTENANT GENERAL AMBROSE P. HILL,
PROMOTED AFTER CHANCELLORSVILLE TO
COMMAND THE NEWLY CREATED THIRD
CORPS, ARMY OF NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Hill was then 38, of a nervous temperament, quick and impetuous. He was a handsome man of middle height, with hair a reddish brown. °

esteemed him as an "honest, brave soldier who [had] always done his duty well,"¹⁵ but he did not know the full extent of the physical disability resulting from Ewell's loss of a leg, and still less did he know the working of a mind to which he was entrusting the lives of more than 20,000 men. Some of those who had served with Ewell in the Valley were aware that he would not initiate a plan if he could possibly subject it in advance to the criticism of others.¹⁶ Lee had never had an opportunity of discovering this lack of self-confidence in Ewell, nor was he aware that Ewell's experience with Jackson had schooled him to obey the letter of orders and not to exercise discretion. This had made him a better p12 rather than a worse commander under Jackson, whose Army of the Valley had been small enough for "Stonewall" to keep all its operations under his eye; but it was to prove a heavy handicap to Lee, who had become accustomed to march with Longstreet and to leave Jackson to use his own sound judgment in handling the other corps. Lee did not realize how difficult it would be for a man of Ewell's temperament to adjust himself quickly to a system of command that usually placed an immensely greater responsibility on Lee's principal lieutenants than Jackson had even entrusted to his subordinates. Gettysburg was to show the results of A. P. Hill's inexperience and of Ewell's indecision in the face of discretionary orders.¹⁷

The promotion of A. P. Hill and of Ewell being promptly authorized by Mr. Davis,¹⁸ Lee decided to apportion his troops equitably among the three corps he proposed to set up. The army consisted at the time of eight divisions, including the two of Longstreet's that had been sent to Southside Virginia. Jackson had commanded four — A. P. Hill's, D. H. Hill's,¹⁹ Early's, and Trimble's, the last led at Chancellorsville by Colston. Longstreet had McLaws's, Pickett's, Hood's, and R. H. Anderson's. To rearrange these two in three corps of three divisions each, Lee had to take one division from

Longstreet and one from Jackson's old corps, and had to form a new ninth division. He decided to transfer Anderson from Longstreet and A. P. Hill's former division from the Second Corps and to give these two to A. P. Hill for his new Third Corps. As A. P. Hill's division had consisted of six brigades, Lee separated two of these from their former comrades. He made up the ninth division with these two and with the brigades of Pettigrew and Davis which he received from North Carolina in return for brigades he had previously detached.

Lee, it will be recalled, had already promoted Rodes to D. H. Hill's old division, and Edward Johnson he had assigned to the division formerly commanded by Trimble. Colston, temporary p13 commander of that division at Chancellorsville, he now relieved. This arrangement necessitated the selection of two new division commanders, one to succeed A. P. Hill and the other for the new division. After some rather confused correspondence with the War Department and the President, during which Mr. Davis became irritated, Lee named Harry Heth for one of Hill's divisions and W. D. Pender of North Carolina for the other.²⁰ Numerous promotions to succeed brigadier generals killed or disabled at Chancellorsville, or found incompetent, had likewise to be made.

The result was an almost complete reorganization of the army, as follows:

The First Corps was reduced to three divisions — McLaws's, Pickett's, and Hood's, in none of which there was any change.

The Second Corps, now Ewell's, included Early's, Johnson's, and Rodes's divisions. The four brigades of Early were unchanged. Johnson's division was under a commander who had served a very short time with Jackson and had never been with Lee except for some minor co-operation in the West Virginia campaign of 1861. Three of the four major units of this division were under new brigadier commanders — George H. Steuart, James A. Walker, and John M. Jones — and the fourth, Nicholls's, continued under its senior colonel because Lee was unable to find a man to succeed Nicholls.²¹ Here, then, was a different, a revolutionized command for the famous old division that included the Stonewall brigade. It was hardly surprising that all the field officers of that brigade tendered their resignations.²² The third division of the Second Corps, under Rodes, contained one new brigade that had never fought with the Army of Northern Virginia.²³ One of the other brigades was led by a

colonel.²⁴ Taken as a whole, the Second Corps, as reconstituted, was a difficult command for any man and especially for one like Ewell, who p14 had been absent from the Army of Northern Virginia for nine months.

The Third Corps, that of A. P. Hill, comprised Anderson's, Heth's, and Pender's divisions. That of Anderson was in good hands, and its command had not materially changed. But Heth's division was led by a soldier who had joined the Army of Northern Virginia only in February. Two of the four brigades of this division were strangers to the army. The third division of the Third Corps, Pender's, had a new commander, and one of its brigades was under an officer who had just been promoted.

While this reorganization of the infantry was in progress, the battalion formation of the artillery was perfected, and the general reserve artillery was divided among the three corps.²⁵ The officers remained much the same, though there were numerous promotions. The battery personnel was not changed, but new contacts had to be formed with unfamiliar divisional chiefs. There was, inevitably, a temporary lack of complete co-ordination with the infantry.

Weakened by the hard winter, the cavalry, too, had to be enlarged. With the patriotic co-operation of Major General Samuel Jones, commanding in southwest Virginia, Lee procured from that quarter a new and large brigade of horse under Brigadier General A. G. Jenkins, but neither this officer nor his men were accustomed to the type of cavalry fighting in which the rest of Stuart's command was experienced. Another cavalry brigade was also brought from western Virginia under Brigadier General John B. Imboden. This officer had been on irregular, detached duty, and many of his men had recently been recruited, some of them from the infantry service.²⁶

In short, the reorganization affected all three arms of the service. It involved the admixture of new units with old, it broke up many associations of long standing, and it placed the veteran regiments of a large part of the army under men who were unacquainted with the soldiers and with the methods of General Lee. The same magnificent infantry were ready to obey Lee's orders, but many of their superior officers were untried and were nervous under new responsibilities.

Even in Longstreet's corps, which remained intact except for the transfer of Anderson's division to Hill's Third Corps, there was a difference, little observed, perhaps, but exceedingly ominous. Where other troops had undergone a change in the personnel of their commanders, the First Corps was to discover that it had suffered an unhappy change in the outlook of its leader. Longstreet's service in Southside Virginia had been inconspicuous, if not discreditable, but it had given him a taste of independent command, and had greatly increased his opinion of himself as a strategist. On his way back to the army, which he rejoined on May 9, he had stopped in Richmond and had been much flattered by an interview with the Secretary of War, who had asked his advice on the unpromising situation at Vicksburg. Longstreet had proposed that he take two divisions of his corps, reinforce the army under Bragg, and take the offensive against Rosecrans. The secretary had not approved the plan, but Longstreet had returned to the army, secretly swollen with the idea that he was the man to redeem the falling fortunes of the Confederacy.²⁷ Jackson's death increased this feeling of self-importance. The grave "Stonewall" had eclipsed Longstreet in public opinion and had held first place in the esteem of Lee, careful though Lee was never to show favoritism. Now that Jackson was no more, Longstreet seemed to feel that it was his prerogative to devise as well as to execute, to dictate the strategy as well as to direct the tactics, to be the commander's commander and to guide his errant faculties by his superior military judgment. Nothing quite suited him — least of all the appointment of two Virginians to the rank he held. D. H. Hill or McLaws, he grumbled to himself, would have been better than either Ewell or A. P. Hill, but neither was of Lee's own state and consequently both were passed over.²⁸

Two untried corps commanders, three of the nine divisions under new leaders, seven freshly promoted brigadier generals of infantry, six infantry brigades under their senior colonels, a third of the cavalry directed by officers who had not previously served p16 with the Army of Northern Virginia, the artillery redistributed, the most experienced of the corps commanders inflated with self-importance, above all, Jackson's discipline, daring, and speed lost forever to the army — such was Lee's plight when the establishment of the new corps was formally announced on May 30, though the

reorganization was not then complete.²⁹

To explain this reorganization is largely to explain Gettysburg. Nothing happened on that field that could not be read in the roster of the army, the peculiarities and inexperience of the new leaders, the distribution of the units, and the inevitable confusion of a staff that had to be enlarged or extemporized to direct troops with which it was unacquainted. But for the larger experience of the men in the ranks and the broader knowledge of war acquired by Lee and some of the other leaders, the army was back where it was at the beginning of the Seven Days' Battles. If the next general engagement came quickly, it would certainly be the Gaines's Mill of the second period of the war in Virginia. Full co-ordination would be almost impossible.

Lee had made what he considered to be the best selections from the officers available and he realized some if not all of the risks he took in subjecting the reorganized army to the early test of a great battle on alien soil. Even had he been wholly conscious of the danger he faced, the option of delay for the training of his new subordinates was denied him. Was he to upset the enemy's plans for the summer campaign and force him to relax the tightening grip of Grant on Vicksburg? Then he must strike quickly. Perhaps his state of mind was most fully disclosed in a few sentences of a letter he wrote Hood while the reorganization was under way. "I agree with you," he said, "... in believing that our army would be invincible if it could be properly organized and officered. There never were such men in an army before. They will go anywhere and do anything if properly led. But there is the difficulty — proper commanders — where can they be obtained? But they are improving — constantly improving. Rome was not built in a day, nor can we expect miracles in our favor."³⁰ There it is: absolute confidence in the men who shivered and sweltered, endured hunger and tramped p17 cheerfully over hard roads on bare feet, lay wounded and uncomplaining or, like stoics, faced death on strange fields; absolute faith in the ranks, and consciousness of the limitations of the command, but, along with that, the patience and the hope of an intrepid soul.

The Author's Notes:

¹ May 11, 1863; *R. E. Lee, Jr.*, 94; *cf.* Jones, *L. and L.*, 242.



² See *supra*, vol. II, p418.



³ *Mrs. McGuire*, 215; *Pendleton*, 272.



⁴ *Eggleston*, 156.



⁵ *O. R.*, 12, part 3, pp890-91, 892.



⁶ This sketch of Ewell is drawn from R. Taylor, *op. cit.*, 36-38. General Taylor served with Ewell in the Valley and was one of his closest friends.



⁷ *O. R.*, 25, part 2, p811.



⁸ *Alexander*, 367n.



⁹ *O. R.*, 25, part 2, pp811, 832.



¹⁰ *Alexander*, 360.



¹¹ *O. R.*, 25, part 2, p792.



¹² *O. R.*, 25, part 25, p821. This letter does not state whom he mentioned.



¹³ *Hood*, 53; *O. R.*, 25, part 2, p810.



¹⁴ *O. R.*, 25, part 2, pp810-11.



¹⁵ *O. R.*, 25, part 2, p810.



¹⁶ *Cf. R. Taylor*, 37.



¹⁷ Longstreet, who was not friendly to A. P. Hill, thought Ewell that officer's superior. Ewell, he said, was Jackson's equal in execution, but far inferior in independent command, "neither was he as confident and self-reliant" (*Washington Post*, June 11, 1893, p10). In that same article, Longstreet stated that he had recommended to Lee that Jackson, instead of Kirby Smith be sent to the Trans-Mississippi. Lee had admitted the choice would be excellent but said he wanted Jackson with him.



¹⁸ *Cf. O. R., 25, part 2, p824.*



¹⁹ Which had been under Rodes at Chancellorsville; see *supra*, vol. II, pp558-59.



²⁰ *O. R., 25, part 2, pp810-11, 827; O. R., 51, part 2, pp716, 718.*



²¹ *O. R., 25, part 2, p810.* General Nicholls had been badly wounded at Chancellorsville and had been incapacitated for field-duty because of the amputation of a foot.



²² *Pendleton, 273.*



²³ That of Brigadier General Junius Daniel — Second, Thirty-second, Forty-third, Forty-fifth, and Fifty-third N. C., *O. R., 25, part 2, p813.*



²⁴ E. A. O'Neal. This was Rodes's old brigade.



²⁵ *O. R., 25, part 2, pp838, 850; O. R., 27, part 2, p346; Alexander, 370.*



²⁶ *O. R., 25, part 2, p789-90, 795, 805, 819, 837; 3 C. M. H., 610.*



²⁷ For his visit to Seddon, see *The Annals of the War Written by Leading Participants, North and South, Originally Published in the Philadelphia Weekly Times* (cited hereafter as *Annals of the War*), 415-16.



²⁸ *Cf. Longstreet*, 332.



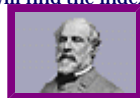
²⁹ *O. R.*, 25, part 2, p840.



³⁰ May 21, 1863; *Hood*, 53.

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