

# “General Lee rode up to where I was standing.” Lee’s Whereabouts at Gettysburg, July 1-3, 1863

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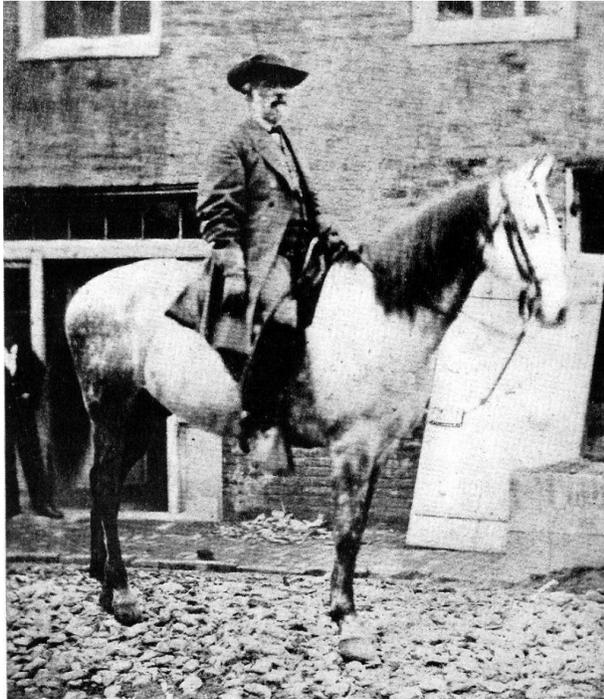
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*“Supervision was hardly the word to have used in describing [Lieutenant General Robert E.] Lee’s activities on the afternoon and evening of July 2.... While the battle raged he sent only one message and received only one report by courier. As soon as the firing began he [Lee] joined Hill and Heth near the seminary, which was equally accessible to Longstreet and Ewell, and stayed there ‘nearly all the time’ during the battle.”*

Thus did Edwin Coddington sum up Robert E. Lee’s activity that particular day in his seminal work, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command*. Coddington’s depiction of Lee as a somewhat stationary, uninvolved commander, detached from his surroundings to which the author added for emphasis, “Now and then he [Lee] would change his position from one stump to another.”<sup>1</sup> Coddington made the commanding general seem aloof, inattentive and even unavailable to his corps commanders who faced unique challenges on the ground with little direction from Lee, in contrast to General George G. Meade who, he argues, supervised much better than Lee in holding several councils of war, by riding the front lines with his staff, and through continual staff officer contact with his field generals. Coddington partly based his judgement of Lee on the account of Sir Arthur Fremantle, the British observer who accompanied the Army of Northern Virginia that summer and remembered the Confederate commanding general fixed at the Seminary on July 2<sup>nd</sup> for several hours, having discussions with confidants, and waiting for reports from the front lines. Lee’s immobility is discussed as a style of command where corps commanders were entrusted to make front line decisions that kept within the commander’s overall strategy, a system that gave greater discretion to those nearest the action to seize opportunities as they presented themselves. This empowered corps commanders to apply their own ingenuity and creativity in the decision making process and gave them a great deal of autonomy. In short, General Lee would provide the secondary and primary objectives of a battle plan to his corps commanders, and trust the particulars to them. Coddington was not convinced this form of generalship helped Lee at Gettysburg and because *The Gettysburg Campaign* has influenced a generation or more of Gettysburg enthusiasts, it has been the standard evaluation of Lee at Gettysburg.

Other authors point to different reasons for Lee’s somewhat distant command style at Gettysburg, citing his failing health as a cause. Dr. Harris D. Riley, Jr’s “General Robert E. Lee: His Medical Profile,” and Drs. Richard D. Mainwaring and C.G. Tribble’s “The Cardiac Illness of General Robert E. Lee,” have offered studies on Lee’s ailing heart to explain the purported immobility, his agitated state, his dim eyesight and his frequent bouts with stomach illness.<sup>2</sup> Another tangent to Coddington’s analysis that historians have followed is how inadequate Lee’s staff was addressing issues during the campaign, an observation Colonel E.P. Alexander made in

his post-war writings that staffing shortages prevented Lee from quickly rectifying communication problems in the field.<sup>3</sup> It may be true that health concerns and staff shortages affected Lee's ability to execute at Gettysburg, but to return to Edwin Coddington's evaluation of Lee, his was the first in modern battle studies to evaluate Lee's somewhat laissez-faire activities during the battle, and to describe it as a failure in supervision.



Lee, the casual horseman on Traveller. (Miller's Photographic History)

attack that afternoon. On July 3, Lee's mobility was evident with the mid-morning conference with General Longstreet where he directed the general to prepare for the attack on the Union center that afternoon- Pickett's Charge. And it is aftermath, it was Lee who visibly rallied the survivors and spoke words of encouragement.

Coddington's evaluation of Lee is somewhat misleading as he did not fully evaluate the numerous field conferences Lee had, or have the opportunity to further interpret primary sources that admittedly may not have been available to him while researching his classic work. Likewise, he passed away before the manuscript was complete, leaving graduate students to complete the manuscript. They may have added emphasis to the Freemantle quote for their own purposes, but nevertheless this provocative history has maligned Lee's physical activity at Gettysburg and focused more on the general's apparently detached style of command.

But exactly what were Lee's activities during the three days at Gettysburg and where was he seen and observed outside of the ground of the seminary and near his headquarters?

Tracing his activities may not be as difficult as we believe and the first example can be found in the early morning hours of July 1 when Federal artillery opened fire around 8:00 AM between Herr's and McPherson's Ridges, west of Gettysburg. General Lee was eight miles west of the scene at Cashtown, having left a brief conversation on the line of march with Lieutenant General James Longstreet and his arrival in the village where he met with General Ambrose P. Hill. The

Lee, in fact, was quite active- and quite mobile- for all during three days of the battle and in more than one instance appeared on the scene of battle at crucial moments such as on July 1 when the general met with Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell during the critical closing hours of the day, to pursue the day's advance on Cemetery Hill before it could be heavily fortified and the Federal troops rallied or reinforced. Later that same evening and early on the morning of July 2, Lee met personally with his three corps commanders in three different locations for extended periods of time and during those hours rode the lines with his staff and corps commanders to examine the ground held not only by the enemy but his own troops as well. Indeed, Lee was present and personally observed the somewhat infamous countermarch by Longstreet's Corps on July 2, and was close to the staging point of these troops prior to the

dull boom of cannon to the east caused immediate concern and the general did not delay in riding to the front. Captain James Power Smith, a staff officer from Ewell's headquarters, remembered it this way:

“On July 1, General Lee and staff rode east from Cashtown and about three miles from Gettysburg. Coming into the open country, he came in sight and hearing of the first day's battle. Turning into a grass field on his left, he sat on his well-bred iron gray, Traveller, and looked across the fields eastward, through the smoke rising in puffs and rolls. He held his glasses in his hand and looked down the long slope by the cemetery, over the town to the rugged heights beyond.”<sup>4</sup>

First and foremost from Smith's account, it's obvious that Lee was in close proximity to the field as the battle developed. In addition to having been in direct company with Longstreet and Hill at Cashtown, Lee was accompanied to the outskirts of the battlefield by Captain Smith who served as a liaison between Lee and Ewell throughout the day, an effort on the part of the commanding general to stay in close contact with his commanders during the objective of concentrating his army near Cashtown. While in the company of Hill at that village, Lee saw the columns of three divisions pass by in the direction of Gettysburg and that he approved of Major General Henry Heth's division advance in that direction earlier that morning. Moreover, Smith's accompaniment with Lee clearly defines an active Lee, eager to arrive on the scene of the opening salvos from a position “three miles from Gettysburg...into a grass field on his left...down the long slope by the cemetery.” There is one match to this description which is Black's Graveyard on Belmont School House Ridge, roughly one mile west of Herr Ridge. Originally a Presbyterian Cemetery along the Upper Marsh Creek and it is to the left or north of the Cashtown Pike, approximately three and one-half miles from Gettysburg. From this location, where there was a measure of safety, Lee was able to see smoke rising from the artillery and infantry duels west of Gettysburg and initiate direct communication on the battlefield.

That evening, Lee met with General Ewell, Major Generals Jubal Early and Robert Rodes, and Brigadier General John B. Gordon in a private home on the Carlisle Road, where they considered further options. The Federal retreat through Gettysburg to the heights south of town appeared to be a victory, yet everyone there knew the Union forces were strengthening the heights and there would be a reckoning the following day. The question at hand was whether to attack Cemetery Hill directly through the town on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, or maneuver Ewell's Corps south of Gettysburg to attack it indirectly by way of Cemetery Ridge. General Early described the meeting:

“I was soon sent for by General Ewell, and on reaching him I found General Lee with him and Rodes in the back porch of a small house north of the town, near the road from Carlisle, when a conference took place, of which I will speak before I am done.... On reaching him (Ewell) I found General Lee, himself and Rodes in the porch, or, rather, I should say arbor, attached to the house already mentioned.... I was soon given to understand that Gen. Lee's purpose was to ascertain our condition, what we knew of the enemy and his position, and what we could probably do next day.... After we had given General Lee all the information we possessed, addressing us conjointly, he asked: ‘Can't you, with your corps, attack on this flank at daylight tomorrow?’ I was the first to speak.... The purport of what I said was, that the ground over which we would have to advance on our flank was very rugged and steep; that the enemy was then evidently concentrating and fortifying in our immediate front, and by morning would probably

have the greater part of his force concentrated on that flank and the position strongly fortified, as ours were the only troops confronting him in close proximity; that we could not move through the town in line of battle, and would therefore have to go on the left of the town right up against Cemetery Hill and the rugged hills on the left of it; and that the result of an attack there might be doubtful, but if successful would inevitably be at very great loss. I then called General Lee's attention to the Round Tops, the outline of which we could see, though dusk was approaching, and suggested that those heights must evidently command the enemy's position and render it untenable; and I also called his attention to the practicable nature of the ascents on that side of town, adding the suggestion that the attack could be made on that side, and from our right flank, with better chances of success. With these views both Ewell and Rodes coincided, and they submitted further considerations in the same direction."<sup>5</sup>

Early's description of the, "back porch of a small house north of the town, near the road from Carlisle," closely matches that of the John Blocher House, situated on the east side of the Carlisle Road at the intersection with Two Taverns Road. A small, modest farmhouse with a back porch and only a few yards from the road side, the rehabilitated house survives today as close as possible to its 1863 appearance. Apart from this location, Lee's purpose was precisely stated by Early, to personally "ascertain our [Ewell's] condition" to see if it was plausible to resume the attack on Ewell's front and make a direct assault against Cemetery Hill the following morning. The information gathered in this conference led Lee to suggest it might be better to move Ewell out of the town and south of it along Seminary Ridge to assault Cemetery Ridge where the slopes were more gradual in nature and gentle in ascent.



The John Blocher House, 2018 (GNMP)

Soon after the meeting with Ewell's officers, General Lee made his way over to the Chambersburg Pike where he established headquarters at the home of a Gettysburg widow, Mary Thompson. There has been much debate about whether Lee stayed in the house or, as was more typical of him, in his tent nearby. Ultimately, when his headquarters was established, Lee did not need to be in the house for it to qualify as headquarters and rather than it being a place where he lodged, the house usually served the purpose of being an easily identifiable place on a map for officers attempting to find

him, even as surrounding farm buildings provided cover and concealment. A commanding general often chose a house next to good roads with necessities such as fire wood for cooking, water for men and horses, and a stable stocked with hay supplied basic needs. Headquarters tended to be centrally located for communication purposes, close to view sheds such as nearby hills or cupolas, and they tended to be directly opposite the decisive point on the battlefield. The Thompson House met all three criteria in that it was about the halfway point along Lee's

concentric lines, it was on Seminary Ridge near the Schmucker Hall cupola for observation, and it faced the key terrain feature of Cemetery Hill.



The Mary Thompson House, General Lee's Headquarters, photographed in 1913 (LOC)

Additionally, Lee's headquarters at the Thompson House served the same purpose as Meade's headquarters at the Leister House, it being unpretentious to officers and enlisted men who passed by. If Lee spent a majority of his time near the Thompson House, then it was for these reasons rather than a laissez-faire command style, or health problems. Another possible caveat to the Thompson House is its location atop Seminary Ridge even though it was in front of Captain Willis Jefferson Dance's guns, posted just north of the buildings along the railroad cut, and squarely in the path of Major Thomas W. Osborn's 11<sup>th</sup> Corps return fire from Cemetery Hill. It was more logical for Lee to cover and conceal his headquarter tents on the reverse slope, that low ground west of Seminary Ridge and behind the imposing Schmucker Hall on the seminary campus. In this location Lee was still in close proximity to the Thompson House, where headquarters associations could easily be made, but he was also in the pale of the Seminary itself, often in conference with Hill, Longstreet and other notables to the point that when one thinks of Lee at Gettysburg, one pictures him in front of Schmucker Hall.

As events developed overnight and into July 2, Lee was never truly fixed to his headquarters. Early that morning, Lee, Longstreet and Major General Lafayette McLaws, having arrived overnight with his division, met with other officers to get their orders for the day. McLaws recalled the meeting that morning, west of town:

“The march was continued at a very early hour, and my command reached the hill overlooking Gettysburg early in the morning. Just after I arrived General Lee sent for me —as the head of my column was halted within a hundred yards of where he was – and I

went at once and reported. General Lee was sitting on a fallen tree with a map beside him. After the usual salutation, General Lee remarked: ‘General, I wish you to place your division across this road,’ pointing on the map to about the place I afterwards went to [near the Peach Orchard], and directing my attention to about the place across the country from where we were, the position being a commanding one; ‘and I wish you to get there if possible without being seen by the enemy.’ The place he pointed out was about the one I afterwards went to, and the line he marked out on the map for me to occupy was one perpendicular to the Emmitsburg road.... ‘Can you get there? Can you do it?’

“I replied that I knew of nothing to prevent me, but would take a party of skirmishers and go in advance and reconnoiter. He said “Major Johnston, of my staff, has been ordered to reconnoiter the ground, and I expect he is about ready.” I then remarked, “I will go with him.”

“Just then General Longstreet, who, when I came up, was walking back and forth some little distance from General Lee, and hearing my...request to reconnoiter, spoke quickly and said: “No sir, I do not wish you to leave your division,” and then, pointing to the map, said: “I wish your division placed so,” running his finger in a direction perpendicular to that pointed out by General Lee. General Lee replied: “No General, I wish it placed...just opposite.” I then reiterated my request to go with Major Johnston, but General Longstreet again forbade it. General Lee said nothing more, and I left them, and, joining my command, put it under cover under a line of woods a short distance off. General Longstreet appeared as if he was irritated and annoyed, but the cause I did not ask.

“When I rejoined my command I sent my engineer officer...to go and join Major Johnston, and gave him instructions what to observe particularly, as he was an officer in whom I had confidence, but was ordered back. I then reconnoitered myself for my own information, and was soon convinced that by crossing the ridge where I then was, my command could reach the point indicated by General Lee, in a half hour, without being seen. I then went back to the head of my column and sat on my horse and saw in the distance the enemy coming, hour after hour, onto the battlefield.<sup>6</sup>

At first glance, it might appear this conference occurred at the Seminary, but a closer look at McLaws’ account places it much further away, at a location approximately one mile due west on Herr’s Ridge, near the juncture of Old Mill and Herr Ridge Roads. As the general wrote, the, “head of my column was halted within a hundred yards of where he [Lee] was – and I went at once and reported.” This is insightful because McLaws more than likely halted his division on the western slope of Herr Ridge along Marsh Creek, based on General Longstreet’s report that, “McLaws’ division... reached Marsh Creek, 4 miles from Gettysburg, a little after dark, and Hood’s division got within nearly the same distance of the town about 12 o’clock at night.”<sup>7</sup> Having left the cooling waters of Marsh Creek, McLaws moved his division accordingly to the fields and woods west of Herr Ridge where it remained hidden from enemy view while Cemetery Hill and ridge was visible from the height to the east, at a safe distance from Union guns and observation- only within “a hundred yards” of the commanding officer.

What confuses the McLaws' account is the recollection of Captain Samuel R. Johnston, the reconnaissance officer who claimed he found Lee close to the Seminary upon return from his morning reconnaissance mission.



The Round Tops from Herr Ridge, south of the juncture with Old Mill Road. (GNMP)

“I found Genl Lee sitting upon a fallen tree near the Seminary, in the same position no doubt where you left him,” Johnston wrote to McLaws in 1892. “He looked up, saw me and at once called me to him, and on the map which he was holding I sketched the route which I had reconnoitered, he was surprised at my getting so far, but showed clearly that I had given him valuable information. I was not interrupted in my narrative and when through stepped back.”<sup>8</sup>

In considering the meeting site on Herr Ridge, having completed his directions with Longstreet and his officers, Lee returned to “near the Seminary,” adjacent to his established headquarters and likely the place where Johnston found the commanding general upon his return around 7:00 AM. It would have taken Lee approximately fifteen minutes to mount and ride to the seminary grounds following Old Mill Road to Fairfield Road and to the Seminary. Somewhat fascinating is Johnston’s reference to Lee, “sitting upon a fallen tree... in the same position no doubt where you left him.” There had to be more than just one fallen tree in Adams County for the general to sit upon, and Johnston’s recollection at such a late date may have been a simple slip of memory, but there is definitive conflict as to Lee’s movements that morning. Despite some discrepancies about precisely where Johnston went on his reconnaissance, it is generally understood that he followed Black Horse Tavern Road to the Emmitsburg Road and eventually to a location at the southern end of the battlefield. His return on the same path would have brought him back to the Fairfield Road and a short ride to where Lee was at that moment- near his headquarters on Seminary Ridge.

His morning conference with Longstreet, McLaws, and Johnston complete, Lee rode over to find General Ewell at his headquarters near the county Alms House complex north of town. Begrudgingly attached to the Second Corps headquarters, Major General Isaac Trimble recalled Lee's arrival:

“This morning all was quiet. General Lee, about 9 A.M., rode over to General Ewell's quarters, who was absent. He first met me and said, ‘he wanted to go to some point which would command a view of the country and of the enemy's position.’ I pointed out the cupola of the Alms House nearby, to which we ascended. From this we had a good view of Cemetery Hill, Round Top, Culp's Hill and adjacent country.

“General Lee said: ‘the enemy have the advantage of us in a shorter and inside line and we are too much extended. We did not, or we could not pursue our advantage of yesterday, and now the enemy are in a good position.’ Returning to General Ewell's quarters and meeting him, he at once made use of the same words. ‘We did not or could not,’ &c. And he repeated them over and over again as he met Early, Rodes and others, and with significance which strongly impressed me, as I thought I could see plainly that his design to fall upon the advance of the enemy and crush it, had not been productive of the results he wished for, and had such good reasons to expect.”<sup>9</sup>

That Trimble was close enough to point “out the cupola of the Alms House nearby, to which we ascended,” indicates Ewell's headquarters were still possibly at the Blocher house, the site of the previous evening's conference with the Second Corps commander. Wherever they met, both men soon found their way to the Alms House along the Harrisburg Road and ascended the cupola.

Trimble's account is fascinating to the discussion of Lee's mobility. The traditional location of Ewell's headquarters at the Lott Farm, located on the Hanover Road at 6<sup>th</sup> Street where his headquarters marker now stands, is actually one of several places occupied by Ewell during the battle. Among the sites described by eyewitnesses and others are the Almshouse, Blocher house, the Crawford Farm on the Harrisburg Road, the Lott Farm, the Daniel Lady farm on the Hanover Road, and even a building on the Pennsylvania (Gettysburg) College campus. Though it matters little where Ewell was that morning, it is Trimble's account that places Lee away from the Seminary campus area though also raises questions about whether Lee had pre-determined the role of Ewell's Corps for the battle that day. If plans were solidified at that hour, between 8 and 9 AM, it would be natural that Ewell would have indeed relocated his headquarters forward to the Lott House and closer to his troops posted along Middle Street to Benner's Hill. That the headquarters was still near the Almshouse suggests that Lee was indeed still surveying the situation, a suggestion supported by James Longstreet in his post-war account written for *Battles and Leaders*:

“On the morning of the 2d I joined General Lee and again proposed the move to Meade's left and rear. He was still unwilling to consider the proposition, but soon left me and rode off to see General Ewell and to examine the ground on our left with a view to making the attack at that point. After making the examination and talking to General Ewell, he determined to make the attack by the right, and, returning to where I was, announced his intention of so doing.”<sup>10</sup>

Longstreet's implication that Lee went to "our left with a view to making the attack at that point," reveals that Lee's main attack plan had not yet been determined, a tantalizing thought that Lee's initial thought was the famous attack "up the Emmitsburg Road," but a flanking maneuver east and south of Gettysburg. Interestingly enough, General Meade was dually concerned about a threat toward the Baltimore Pike, from that direction, the primary reason for Brigadier General Alpheus Williams' 1<sup>st</sup> Division, 12<sup>th</sup> Corps to remain deployed east of Rock Creek and just south of the Hanover Road on the morning of July 2. Further, the cavalry screen under General David Gregg, later bolstered by the Michigan brigade under General George Armstrong Custer, remained vigilant along the Hanover Road through July 3. That, as Longstreet claims, Lee went to "examine the ground on our left" insinuates that Lee was uncertain of the topography on Ewell's front. Examining the ground meant that he and Ewell identified primary and secondary objectives toward dislodging Meade from his position. As a former surveyor and engineer of defenses for Baltimore, Charleston and Savannah, Lee knew how to construct and deconstruct positions on his front.

At some point that morning, Lee found Ewell and the two rode closer to the lines south of Gettysburg to observe the Federal positions. Though the exact location of their next conference is not clear, an interesting source comes from the journal of Dr. J.W.C. O'Neal, a Gettysburg physician who documented Confederate graves on the battlefield. "Gen. Lee was overnight at Greenwood, Franklin Co., on the Tuesday night of June 30, in company with Longstreet," O'Neal noted, "the night of July 1 at Lady's Farm on Hanover road, (and the) 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> at Pitzer's on Willoughby's Run."<sup>11</sup> There is a lot here to unpack, but the specific statement, "the night of July 1 at Lady's Farm on Hanover road" stands out, because the Daniel Lady Farm was located on the eastern slope of Benners Hill, where Major General Edward Alleghany Johnson's Division of Ewell's Corps encamped the night of July 1<sup>st</sup>. That was the Confederate army's left flank, and Benner's Hill was the artillery platform and observation post for that part of Lee's line. Though Dr. O'Neal places Lee there on July 1, and not July 2, he still references the Lady Farm as a place that Lee visited in relation to Ewell's front, either late on July 1, or the morning ride of July 2, or both. Since Benner's Hill was key terrain on the Confederate left flank and provided the best observation position of Ewell's front, it is logical that Lee would have visited the hill with Ewell on the morning of July 2<sup>nd</sup>. With field glasses, a clear look could be had at the recently fortified Federal position on East Cemetery Hill, where artillery lunettes and substantial stone walls protected the hill's defenders. Brigadier General Solomon Meredith's Iron Brigade had further extended this defense to Culp's Hill by building earthworks around Stevens' Knoll. Even as Lee examined the ground around 10:00 AM, he could possibly hear further construction of earthworks on Culp's Hill, weighing further his decision to make the primary assault on the Federal left at the Peach Orchard.

Shortly before 11:00 AM, Lee returned to Seminary Ridge and gave Longstreet peremptory orders for launching the main attack against the Federal left. For the next hour or more it was a waiting game for Lee, waiting for Longstreet's troops to arrive on the southwest side of the field and begin the attack. Colonel Walter H. Taylor recalled:

"I well remember how General Lee was chafed by the non-appearance of the troops, until he finally became restless, and rode back to meet General Longstreet, and urge him forward; but, then, there was considerable delay in putting the troops to work after they reached the field; and much time was spent in discussing what was to be done, which,

perhaps, could not be avoided. At any rate, it would be unreasonable to hold General Longstreet alone accountable for this.”<sup>12</sup>

What we learn from this is that Lee waited for some period of time before he and his staff went in pursuit of his wayward corps commander. Dr. J.W.C. O’Neal’s reference to Lee being at Pitzer’s on Willoughby Run is most notably a reference to the “chafed” Lee having ridden to the Pitzer farm and school house area only to discover that Longstreet delayed the march until 1:00 PM to wait for Brigadier General Evander M. Law’s Alabama brigade to join the column. Likewise, it was along the route that Lee first learned of the delay of Longstreet’s march at Bream’s Hill due to the road being in full view of Union signalmen on the distant Little Round Top. Colonel Armistead Long, Lee’s Military Secretary, shed more light on this episode when he wrote:

“Perceiving the great value of time, General Lee’s impatience became so urgent that he proceeded in person to hasten the movement of Longstreet. He was, however, met on the way with the welcome tidings that Longstreet’s troops were in motion. Finding a convenient point, General Lee waited a reasonable time for Longstreet to reach his destination, and then set out to meet him, but, on arriving at the point of action, it was found that Longstreet was still absent. While waiting a Federal sergeant was captured, who was found, on examination, to belong to a division which had taken position in the peach orchard at the further end of the ridge before mentioned.”<sup>13</sup>

From Long’s account, we learn that Lee stopped to wait for Longstreet’s column to reach the staging area near Pitzer’s and after waiting for some time decided to continue to the site. Once reaching there, there were troops about who produced the captured Federal sergeant who had been taken prisoner during the skirmish near Pitzer’s Woods between Wilcox’s Brigade of Anderson’s Division and United States Sharpshooters. Though the immediate danger was past, the wait near Pitzer’s had to be agonizing for Lee. “It was now apparent that the advantage of position had been lost by delay, and the enemy had been permitted to concentrate a greater part of his forces,” Colonel Long wrote. “It was now after one o’clock, and General Lee’s impatience again urged him to go in quest of Longstreet. After proceeding about a mile, we discovered Hood’s division at a halt; it was said, waiting for McLaws, whose division had taken a wrong direction. It was four o’clock before Longstreet was in position to attack.”<sup>14</sup>

The critical sentence here is, “the advantage of the position had been lost by delay.” Johnston’s sunrise reconnaissance had reported the Federals to be without a military position, using cavalry and not infantry to guard the Emmitsburg Road, and still fewer defenders on Little Round Top where Johnston purportedly gained a commanding view of the area. Johnston wrote that Lee was surprised he got that far.<sup>15</sup> Of course Lee would be surprised, because leaving Round Top undefended was equivalent to giving that position to the Confederates without a fight. Equally startling was that a strong Federal infantry presence- infantry and artillery- did not reside in the Peach Orchard between 4:00 AM and 7:00 AM. Because opposing commanders presume that uncontested ground between the battle-lines is theirs for the taking, Lee was naturally anxious for Longstreet to seize these positions as early as possible.

Johnston was emphatic in his post-war letters that Meade did not have a position on his front, writing that Federal troops showed no signs of being ready to resist or oppose until moments before the Confederate attack began around 3:30 PM. In his estimation, the Federals were not ready to resist until that time. We can cross reference this easily enough from Union accounts that show General Sickles' Third Corps was formed along Plum Run until at least 1:30 PM when Brigadier General David Birney's Division first advanced, his right brigade occupying the Peach Orchard area to support Federal artillery that had just previously unlimbered among the trees. The Corps' Second Division under Brigadier General Andrew A. Humphreys followed after 3:30 PM, extending the line northward along the Emmitsburg Road, the designated guide for Longstreet's direction of attack. So, if Federal infantry did not have a position in the Peach Orchard until late in the afternoon, what did Lee know about the enemy strength on that front? Probably very little other than what he was able to observe from the concealment of Pitzer's Woods, overlooking the field over which Longstreet's Corps would pass, and what little information had been garnered from the captured Federal sergeant. Doubtless, the appearance of artillery and numerous infantry flags meant, "the advantage of the position had been lost by delay," in the decades to come, many former Confederates and southern historians believed the battle was lost solely by Longstreet's delay.

As is turned out, Lee and Long went in search of Longstreet's column only to find McLaws' Division stalled on the road near Bream's Hill and in the process of countermarching to the Fairfield Road at the intersection with Black Horse Tavern. Lee joined the column and came upon Longstreet at the head of Hood's Division where they waited patiently for McLaws' men to tramp by. "I was relieved for the time from the march," Longstreet wrote, as Captain Johnston had been the guide for the column before it halted at Bream's Hill, "[and] I rode near the middle of the line. General Lee rode with me a mile or more."<sup>16</sup> The "middle of the line" was indeed the head of Hood's Division, the men waiting under arms where Herr Ridge intersects with Old Mill Road. Here, Lee waited with Longstreet, Hood, Long, Taylor and briefly Johnston before McLaws' men had cleared the road.

Interestingly enough, General Lee would not be far from this same location as he awaited Pickett's Division to march past him on their way to the front the very next morning. Private John Dooley, 1<sup>st</sup> Virginia Infantry noted in his diary:

"July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Before the day has fully dawned we are on our way to occupy the position assigned to us for the conflict of the third day. As we turn from the main road to the right, Gen. Lee, or better known as Uncle Robert, silent and motionless, awaits our passing by, and anxiously does he gaze upon the only division of his army whose numbers have not been thinned by the terrible fires of Gettysburg. I must confess that the Genl's face does not look as bright as tho' he were certain of success. But yet it is impossible for us to be any otherwise than victorious and we press forward with beating hearts, hundreds of which will throb their last today.

"How long we take to gain our position, what delays, what suspense! We are soon passing over the battlefield of yesterday, and the details of burying parties are digging graves to receive the freshly fallen comrades, and, in many instances, they have only the ghastly and mangled remnants of their gallant friends to deposit in these hastily dug pits. I pass very close to a headless body; the boy's head being torn off by a shell is lying around in bloody fragments on the ground."<sup>17</sup>

As Dooley noted in his diary, the column turned “from the main road to the right,” which places the observant Lee somewhere west of the battlefield and possibly on the other side of Herr Ridge. Unfortunately the exact route of Pickett’s Division to the field is not clearly documented with the exception of famed Gettysburg historian John Bachelder, who’s Hourly Maps for the morning of July 3<sup>rd</sup> shows precisely the march Dooley describes. According to the US War Department tablet in front of Black Horse Tavern, Pickett’s tired troops bivouacked near there the night before. Whether the column followed Old Mill Road to the Fairfield Road or marched directly east on the latter, the most likely location to have seen their commanding general was in the area of the Emmanuel Harman and J. Herbst Farms on either side of Willoughby Run, where Brigadier General James J. Pettigrew’s North Carolinians clashed with Meredith’s Iron Brigade on July 1. Doubtless, the burials Dooley saw taking place had occurred two days prior or were those dragged back from the front line of July 2, scenes witnessed by many who passed through the Emanuel Pitzer farm on the west side of Seminary Ridge and through which Pickett’s troops marched to reach the Henry Spangler farm lane.

Though he had to have spent some of the morning hours of July 3 at his headquarters that day, Lee was spotted near the scene of the previous day’s frustrating wait for Longstreet’s column at Pitzer’s School House. The Confederate line was still advanced from Seminary Ridge that morning. Major G.B. Gerald and his 18<sup>th</sup> Mississippi Infantry regiment had spent a miserable night on the battlefield near the blood-stained Peach Orchard:

“I did not sleep a wink that night as the moon was about the full, and everything around us was nearly as bright as day, and I feared a night attack similar to the one made at Chancellorsville. The next morning General Lee rode up to where I was standing and asked, ‘What troops are these and who commands them?’ I answered, ‘It is what is left of Barksdale’s brigade; he was killed yesterday, and I command them.’ Then turning to our left he pointed to the crest of a hill some two hundred yards distant and slightly to the rear and said he was going to place one hundred pieces of artillery there and for me to take a position so as to prevent the artillery from being harassed by federal infantry, which I did, but no attempt was made. The ground sloped toward the front and the heights. I took position to the front of where the battery was placed and am glad to say that no effort was made by the federal infantry during the artillery duel to disturb the battery.”<sup>18</sup>

Major Gerald’s encounter with Lee was most likely in the northern section of the Peach Orchard within walking distance of the Sherfy farm buildings. Why was Lee there? As Gerald remembered when he wrote his account in 1913, Lee wanted reassurance from his Mississippians they would prevent Federal infantry from advancing to seize Confederate batteries posted to bombard the Federal lines, and possibly concerned that Federal sharpshooters would get close enough to inflict unnecessary casualties among the Confederate gunners. It is also noteworthy that Lee rode to that part of the field after his discussion with Longstreet about the attack on the Union center and in place of Longstreet’s direct command, went there to take advantage of an excellent observation point of Cemetery Ridge.

Just before the great cannonade opened at 1:00 PM, Colonel Arthur Freemantle, accompanied by fellow foreign army observer Captain Justus Sheibert, rode the length of the Confederate line of battle on Seminary Ridge to the grounds of the Seminary where they could view the coming charge. During the cannonade, Freemantle retraced his route south to find Longstreet who’d

posted himself in Spangler's Woods but came upon Lee and his staff in an unexpected location. Fremantle recalled:

“Finding that to see the actual fighting it was absolutely necessary to go into the thick of the thing, I determined to make my way to General Longstreet. It was then about two-thirty. After passing General Lee and his staff, I rode on through the woods in the direction in which I had left Longstreet. I soon began to meet many wounded men returning from the front; many of them asked in piteous tones the way to a doctor or an ambulance. The farther I got, the greater became the number of the wounded. At last I came to a perfect stream of them flocking through the woods in numbers as great as the crowd in Oxford Street in the middle of the day.”<sup>19</sup>

Fremantle's brief encounter with Lee on his way to find Longstreet is notable and places the commanding general with his headquarters group close to the David McMillan farm and most likely within the shady confines of McMillian Woods, just in rear of the point from which Brigadier General J.J. Pettigrew's line had moved to join the charge. Colonel Walter Taylor's account concurs that Lee watched the cannonade and charge close to Pettigrew's position, writing, “General Longstreet proceeded at once to make the dispositions for attack, and General Lee rode along the portion of the line held by A.P. Hill's corps, and finally took position about the Confederate center, on an elevated point, from which he could survey the field and watch the result of the movement.”<sup>20</sup>

The mention of Lee “on an elevated point” reasonably places the general where he could bear eyewitness to the attack from a site close enough to gauge its success or failure. Moreover, the “Confederate center” was Major General A.P. Hill's front, his corps' line representing the middle portion of Lee's line on Seminary Ridge. Unfortunately, the historiography of the battle has misinterpreted Taylor's mention of the “Confederate center” to be the center of the *charge* itself, about where the Virginia Memorial is located today, rather than the army center. In a 1943 letter to Historian Douglass Southall Freeman, who was about to publish his three volume *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, Superintendent J. Walter Coleman of Gettysburg National Military Park confirmed Fremantle's account was reliable:

“Fremantle's description of his meeting with Lee would indicate a location somewhat north of the present Virginia Memorial and we presume that the post of command may be regarded relatively stationary and its distance from Longstreet, therefore, would be about 200 yards while the latter was at the edge of Spangler's Woods. It is not clear how much of the time Longstreet spent at the artillery position some 400 yards in advance of Spangler's Woods but we feel that a statement to the effect that the posts of command were about 200 yards apart is well substantiated. Lee's post was relatively northwest and to the rear of Longstreet.”<sup>21</sup>

The area discussed by Superintendent Coleman is the “elevated point” described by Taylor but we are still obligated to consider “why” Lee would want to watch Longstreet's Assault from that spot. Were there any particular advantages to watching from there? The obvious answer is that it offers the best view of the battlefield from anywhere along the Seminary Ridge line. There is not another “elevated point” on Longstreet's or Hill's front that matches it for surveying the breadth and depth of the intervening ground leading to the Cemetery Ridge position. It indeed offers a

sweeping panorama of two-thirds of the battlefield, but there is one additional reason why he chose this point in particular- a commanding general always places his headquarters opposite the decisive point on the battlefield, so that he ready for the opportune moment when it arrives, which is what the “elevated point” represented. It was close to the Seminary where Lee’s permanent headquarters rested and directly opposite the objective point of Longstreet’s Assault which was Cemetery Ridge and hill.

Conclusively, it is well documented that Lee rode to find Longstreet near the end of the charge and from where the Virginia monument now stands, rode out to meet and rally the survivors of the charge. As Freeman noted in his biography of Lee, “he turned once again to speak to the men from the ranks. Whatever their plight, he had comfort or cheer or exhortation.” A noble trait and one that few generals would ever attempt to emulate, Lee rode quietly and calmly among the men, many near panic and others broken beyond words.<sup>22</sup>

Though the exact route of Lee’s attempt to rally his troops is not known, we assume it was near the Point of Woods and within the boundaries of that area where so many soldiers and officers saw the general and heard his words. After more than an hour of rallying his soldiers and spending a few moments with Colonel Alexander near his artillery pieces, Lee rode slowly northward and to his headquarters to draft the order to begin the retreat to the Potomac River and Virginia.

In summary, Lee was mobile and available during the three days of battle, far more than the evaluation provided by Edwin Coddington in his study of the Gettysburg Campaign. From his bivouac in Chambersburg on June 28, Lee coordinated the operational movements of his army in south central Pennsylvania, was by Longstreet’s side in Cashtown on July 1, was three miles from Gettysburg on Herr Ridge that afternoon, and by 7:00 o’clock that evening had met with Ewell and his commanders. Shortly after 4:00 A.M. on July 2, he met with McLaws and Longstreet near the intersection of Herr Ridge and Old Mill Road, met with Longstreet, Hill, Hood and Johnston at the Seminary between 7:00 and 8:00, rode to see Trimble and Ewell between 9:00 and 10:30 AM at the Almshouse north of Gettysburg, ventured to Benner’s Hill to the examine the ground on his left, and by 11:00 A.M., had returned to Seminary Ridge to give Longstreet peremptory orders to attack the Federal left. From there the impatient general rode to the Pitzer farm and from there to find the missing corps that should have been there much sooner than expected. On the morning of July 3, he waited for Pickett’s Division at the juncture of Old Mill and Fairfield Roads to steady the troops as they passed surrounding carnage and numerous graves of the first day’s field. That same morning, he appeared on Longstreet’s front at the Peach Orchard and subsequently watched Pickett’s Charge from an elevated point in front of Hill’s position, directly opposite Cemetery Hill, the decisive point on the battlefield. He waited there with the reserves in the event an opportunity for decisive action occurred. When it did not, he rode out to meet the returning soldiers, repeatedly voiced responsibility for failure of the charge, and asked for their help against a potential Union counterattack.

What we can take away from Lee’s leadership style at Gettysburg is that he was quite active in supervising the movements of his army even to the point of offending his corps commanders. For example, Lee carefully listened to General Early’s recommendation on July 1<sup>st</sup> that it would be better to maneuver Ewell’s Corps out of the town to attack the gentle slopes south of it. Early proposed his strategy in the presence of Ewell who was against the idea and it must have been awkward for Ewell to be asked twice that evening, by Lee, if he wanted to make such a

maneuver. Also, Lee bypassed Longstreet in the proper chain of command to give direct orders to McLaws on July 2. Such moments did not sit well with Longstreet as evidenced by his negative post-war writings of Lee at Gettysburg. Finally, Lee limited A.P. Hill's command latitude by establishing army headquarters for three days on the Third Corps' front. Was it the ever present, watchful eye of Lee one reason for Hill's after-action report to be so brief?

In the final analysis, Lee personally inspected his army's entire front from July 1<sup>st</sup> through 3<sup>rd</sup> conversing with officers, studying the terrain, planning movements, riding to points of the marches, positioning himself to inspire the troops, troubleshooting the placement of infantry to cover artillery positions, watching decisive attacks from decisive points, and rallying the troops to resist a counterattack after the final assault. At every turn, Lee was there in person directly supervising, questioning, listening, instructing, quietly waiting, and consoling after the final repulse on July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

#### About the Author:

Troy Harman began his National Park Service career in 1984 at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park before moving onto seasonal positions at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, and Valley Forge National Historic Park. Troy's permanent status with the National Park Service began at Independence National Historical Park. He transferred to Gettysburg National Military Park in 1989, where he has studied peripheral events of the campaign and offered detailed battlefield programs to visitors. As a part-time instructor at Harrisburg Area Community College's Gettysburg Campus, Troy taught classes in Civil War history and currently instructs similar evening classes at the Penn State- Mont Alto campus. He is currently enrolled in a doctoral program through Lehigh University.

#### Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Edwin B. Coddington, *Gettysburg Campaign: Study in Command* (New York, New York: Touchstone 1997, Copyright 1968), p. 444.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Harris D. Riley, Jr., "General Robert E. Lee: His Medical Profile" *Va Med*, July 1978, Vol. 105, No. 7, pp. 495-500, and, Drs. Richard D. Mainwaring and C.G. Tribble, "The Cardiac Illness of General Robert E. Lee," *Surg Gynecol Obstet*, March 1992, Vol. 174, No. 3, pp. 237-244. <http://civilwarmed.blogspot.com/2008/06/medical-department-18-lees-health-at.html>

<sup>3</sup> General Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1989), p. 236. Alexander wrote, "Scarcely any of our generals had half of what they needed to keep a *constant & close supervision on the execution of important orders.*"

<sup>4</sup> Reverend James Power Smith, D.D., Formerly A.D.C. to General Ewell, "General Lee at Gettysburg," Read before the Society April 4, 1905, Compiled by Ken Bandy and Florence Freeland, *Gettysburg Papers*, Volume II (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Book Shop, 1978), pp. 385, 1041.

<sup>5</sup> Jubal Early, "A Review by General Early," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. IV, No. 6, (Richmond, Virginia: Reverend J. William Jones, D.D., December, 1877 – Reprint by Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1977), pp. 257, 271.

<sup>6</sup> Lafayette McLaws, "Gettysburg," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. VII, (Richmond, Virginia: Reverend J. William Jones, D.D., 1877 – Reprint by Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1879), pp. 67-69. Jay Luvaas and

Harold W. Nelson, editors, *Guide to the Battle of Gettysburg* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1994), pp. 53-54.

<sup>7</sup> Lieutenant General James Longstreet, "Report of July 27, 1863," *War of the Rebellion, the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1884-1893), Vol. 27, Part 2, p. 358, hereafter cited as *OR*.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Johnston, "Letter to Lafayette McLaws of June 27, 1892," file V-5, Library, Gettysburg NP. R.

<sup>9</sup> Isaac Trimble, *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. 26, (Richmond, Virginia: Reverend J. William Jones, D.D., 1877 – Reprint by Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1879), pp. 116-128.

<sup>10</sup> James Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg," *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Retreat From Gettysburg* (New York, New York: Castle Books, 1956), p. 340.

<sup>11</sup> J.W.C. O'Neal, "Medical Handbook 1863," Gregory A. Coco, *Vast Sea of Misery: History and Guide to the Union and Confederate Field Hospitals at Gettysburg, July 1-November 20, 1863* (Gettysburg, Pennsylvania: Thomas Publications, 1988), p. 116.

<sup>12</sup> Walter H. Taylor, "Campaign in Pennsylvania," *Annals of the War: Leading Participants North and South* (Dayton, Ohio, Morningside Press, 1988 – originally from the *Philadelphia Weekly Times*, 1878), p.311.

<sup>13</sup> A.L. Long, "Letter to General J.A. Early of April 5, 1876," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. IV, (Richmond, Virginia: Reverend J. William Jones, D.D., 1877 – Reprint by Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1977), p. 68.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Samuel R. Johnston, engineer, "Letter to Bishop George Peterkin of December \_\_, 1878," file V-5, Library, Gettysburg NMP.

<sup>16</sup> James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America*, edited by James I. Robertson, Jr. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1960), pp. 365-366.

<sup>17</sup> John Dooley, *John Dooley - Confederate Soldier - His War Journal* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 101-102.

<sup>18</sup> Judge G.B. Gerald (Major, 18<sup>th</sup> Mississippi), "Battle of Gettysburg," *Waco Daily Times-Herald*, p. 9, columns 3-7, July 3, 1913, Brake Collection, USAMHI, Box 7, #545, file V-7, Library, Gettysburg NMP.

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Fremantle, "All This Will Come Right in the End," *Blue and Gray: Story of the Civil War as told by Participants*, edited by Henry Steele Commager (New York, New York: Fairfax Press, 1991 – Copyrighted by Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1950), p. 636.

<sup>20</sup> Walter H. Taylor, "Second Paper by Colonel Walter H. Taylor, of General Lee's Staff," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Vol. IV, p. 133.

<sup>21</sup> J. Walter Coleman, Superintendent of Gettysburg National Military Park, "Letter to Dr. Douglas S. Freeman, March 17, 1943," file V20-FT, Library, Gettysburg NMP.

<sup>22</sup> Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, Vol. II, p. 130.