Rebel Sabres

Confederate Cavalry Leaders In the Gettysburg Campaign



June 8, 1863 found the Cavalry Division of the Army of Northern Virginia camped in the fields about the small village of Brandy Station, some two miles west of the Rappahannock River. The men bedded down early that evening; they had already been advised that their leader, Major General J.E.B. Stuart, would be rousing them up well before dawn.

One of Stuart's horsemen, Private John S. Foster, Company A, Jeff Davis Legion, Hampton's Brigade, after finishing his duties that night, wrote a letter to his family back in Mississippi. In it he briefly described the two cavalry reviews of June 5th and 8th put on by General Stuart near Brandy Station, Culpeper County, Virginia, and how they "thoroughly tired-out the men and horses," for no purpose as far as Foster was concerned, and "were only staged for the enjoyment and amusement of the officers present". After letting his feelings be known about the mock charges and the pomp and circumstances that the mounted arm had to endure in the first days of June, he conceded that when it came to fighting the Yankees, the men who led his branch of the service were the best on the continent and "...would whip the, enemy every time they met."

Foster was, of course, referring to the field commanders of the Cavalry Division of Robert E. Lee's, by now legendary, and apparently unbeatable, Army of Northern Virginia. These officers, under their leader Major General Stuart, had molded the Southern horsemen of Lee's army into a peerless body of troopers, wonderfully mounted, who had proven their superiority over their opponents time after time since 1862. The Confederate cavalry in the East had long enjoyed and benefited from the strategic and tactical independence conferred upon it by the army commander.

Stuart and his riders seemed to routinely accomplish the two most important missions assigned to any mounted arm of the mid-19th century - the security of friendly forces and the gathering of intelligence about the enemy, while denying their bluecoated counterparts the chance to learn about the southern army's positions and movements.² They also out-marched and out-fought the Yankee horse forces on

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almost every occasion, whether the affair in question was a mere skirmish, a raid, or battle. It had been that way since Robert E. Lee assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia in June 1862. As the army prepared for the coming summer campaign the Confederate horse soldiers were confident that their previous advantages, and the long string of victories that derived from them, would continue.

What made the Southern horse branch superior to the Federal cavalry up to 1863 was rooted in a number of factors. First, upper class white Southerners firmly believed that one should be taught to ride and shoot from an early age, and that no self-respecting gentleman should walk when he could ride instead.³ Secondly, the horses that these men rode to war in the first years of the War of the Rebellion were the best in the country. According to the 1860 Census of the United States there were six million horses within the borders of the Republic. The finest examples of these were found in the upper South, notably Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee, where wide spread breeding of these splendid animals had been going on for generations.⁴

Another important reason for the success of the Gray riders was that from the start of the war the number of men qualified by some degree of training and equestrian knowledge was greater, proportionately, in the South than in the North. Not only were pre-war Militia officers available, and U. S. Regular Army officers who went with the South, but there were also hundreds of graduates and students of the nine military schools in the South. The North had but one such school, besides the military academy.⁵

Lastly, the people of the Confederacy seemed to have had a genuine affection and faith in cavalry, and supported its initial raising and subsequent maintenance even in the face of opposition from the government at Richmond.⁶ The Confederate military leadership as a whole also appreciated the value of the mounted arm and as a result handled it with more confidence and imagination then did the Union Army. Treating the Rebel troopers as an vital part of the Army, and not merely as four legged encumbrances best kept out of the way, the Confederate cavalry of the Army of Northern Virginia came to view itself as a needed adjunct of that military organization and as a result was able to maintain both high morale and fighting ability throughout the war.

As part of his plan to invade the North in 1863, General Lee first went about reorganizing his army for the task ahead. Part of his restructuring involved the cavalry. For the coming campaign the Cavalry Division, up to that time containing three brigades, would be reinforced with two more brigades of regular horse. The first of these would come from the Shenandoah Valley and was commanded by Brigadier General William E. Jones. The second, led by Brigadier General Beverley H. Robertson, was transferred from eastern North Carolina to serve under Stuart. Two more mounted units, those of General Albert G. Jenkins and General John D. Imboden (considered respectively to be irregular mounted infantry and poorly trained and armed riders) were also earmarked to accompany the army on its northward march. They would at times be under the cavalry commander's authority during the Gettysburg Campaign, but were essentially independent formations subject to Lee's orders.

After the Battle of Chancellorsville, Lee and Stuart considered creating new brigades of cavalry by moving regiments about in order to promote deserving subordinates and to equalize the strength of the various commands. This idea was soon dropped after it became apparent that the regiments were so undermanned that the proposed scheme would give the cavalry more general officers than it needed. Further, the desperate need for more horses in all the branches of the army and the growing number of dismounted men as a result, made the expansion of Stuart's command impossible.

To support his horsemen in the fights that lay ahead Stuart would also command six batteries of horse artillery (every crewman mounted on a horse instead of on the limbers or caissons). Although he wanted to increase each battery's armament from four to six guns the lack of horses and guns precluded this as well.

So, as the campaign that would take its name from the little south-central Pennsylvania borough began in the summer of 1863, the Cavalry Division of the Army of Northern Virginia boasted a force of between 9,600 and 10,000 troopers in five regular brigades (twenty five regiments and four battalions), aided by six batteries (twenty-four cannon) of artillery, with two additional mounted brigades available (Jenkins and Imboden) if needed. This host of Southern chivalry was better-equipped than ever before,

and confident of success.

The cavalrymen of the Army of Northern Virginia rode north to Gettysburg on fine horses, bred for strength and speed, and compensated by the Confederate government for the animal's use in the amount of \$.40 a day. It was not unusual for one of Stuart's troopers to have along with him a Negro body servant from his family's household, who would groom and generally maintain his mount, help clean the rider's clothes, and aid the company cook in gathering and preparing meals. ¹⁰ Regimental and general officers would go on campaign with two or more horses for their use, as well as one or two Negro servants, or white soldiers, acting as their batmen.

Most of the rebel horsemen in the East used the McClellan saddle, a combination of the pre-Civil War Hope, Campbell and Grimsley saddles (collectively known as the "Texas saddle"), or the Jenifer saddle. The former was accepted by the U.S. War Department in 1859 as the standard cavalry saddle to be used by the forces of the United States. The Jenifer saddle was patented in 1860 and was widely used along with many captured McClellan types throughout the war by the Confederates. ¹¹

The Gray riders of the Cavalry Division, by 1863, were armed with a variety of weapons. Carbines were favored, if they could be had. Usually obtained from captured enemy soldiers, or found abandoned on a battlefield, the Rebel horse soldier might be able to arm himself with a breechloading Sharps or Burnside. They were shorter and handier than rifles (average length was about thirty-eight inches, as compared to fifty-six inches for the rifle-musket) weighed considerably less, and were designed to be fired from the saddle.¹²

A brace of revolvers invariably graced the body of any self-respecting Confederate trooper in Stuart's organization. Colt's Model 1851 and Model 1860 were owned by many Rebs prior to the war, and as the conflict raged over the years, captures of these and others, like the newer Colt patterns and the caliber Remington, went into service, along with a few types of Southern manufacture. Many handguns were also imported from Europe during the war.

Topping off the cavalryman's personal collection of weapons would be either a Model 1840 Heavy Cavalry Sword (dubbed "Old Wrist Breaker") of about forty-one inches long, or, more commonly in 1863, the Light Cavalry Sabre, Model 1860. The latter weapon was thirty-five inches long, with a thirty-inch blade, and despite its designation year did not come into general use until 1862. If a Southern horseman could not capture a new model cavalry sabre from the enemy, he might still be able to obtain a blade from the many foreign imports that got through the Union naval blockade. Numerous sabres from English manufactures, such as the firms of Isaac & Company, and Moles Swords, Limited, came into the hands of the Confederate cavalry in both the East and West as the war progressed. Although scorned by many cavalrymen as a useless relic of the past, the sabre would find significant use



s not totally absent from the inventory of the Confederate y Robertson's newly activated brigade was made up of the y Regiments. They were, in part, armed with Enfield and Albert Jenkins' command, which sported many Enfields. British long arm in service. The version used by the iber weapon with an overall length of four feet seven Carbines for cavalry were also produced. About 70,000 between 1861 and 1865.¹⁴

Ild come from the Cavalry Division's twenty pieces of troopers in the saddle, the horse cannons varied from long lifles, and even some imported English Blakely Rifles. It contempt for the Blue horsemen, the Confederate nia looked forward to any move that would bring them into Interpart. Staunch individualists, restive under any form of Irt's Rebels were grand fighters, if not good soldiers. Their Il-blown fight had always depended on the men who

commanded them, especially the division leader and brigade commanders whose independent judgment and tactical skills served their men well, and usually brought them victory. As in the past, these general officers would guide the movements of their subordinates during the Gettysburg campaign, being ultimately responsible for their performance and the success or failure of the cavalry in that crucial undertaking.

Twenty-eight years old when the war started, James Ewell Brown Stuart, born February 6, 1833 in Patrick County, Virginia, was a graduate of the Class of 1854 at the United States Military Academy. Most of his service in the pre-war army was spent on the frontier. His performance in the Battle of First Manassas earned him promotion to brigadier general in the Confederate Army. He performed superbly as the eyes and ears of Lee's army during the Seven Days Campaign and on July 25, 1862 was promoted to major general and command of the Cavalry Division of the Army of Northern Virginia. ¹⁵ He led the division through the 2nd Manassas, Maryland, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville campaigns, proving on each occasion that the "Beau Saber" (Stuart) and his cavaliers were excellent horse soldiers who never failed to keep Lee informed about the enemy, or to prevent the enemy cavalry from probing the movements and positions of the main arm.

Stuart was a solidly built man with rough-hewn features, a heavy beard, and possessed of great physical strength and endurance, as well as wonderful powers of observation. Loud and inclined to a proclivity for spectacular and gaudy uniforms, the young soldier craved adventure and praise from both his men and superiors. By the time of Gettysburg, Stuart's reputation for boldness and competency was acknowledged by most of his friends and foes alike. He was also dubbed a courtier, but no one doubted that he was also a fighter. His ability to gather and interpret intelligence information was unsurpassed by nearly any other cavalry officer in either army. But the laurels that he had garnered before Gettysburg made him very sensitive to any criticism of his professional performance.

"Jeb", as his men and associates called him, was given a vital role in the second invasion of the North which commenced on June 3,1863. The Army of Northern Virginia was to march into Pennsylvania, perhaps capturing the state capital at Harrisburg, and threatening Philadelphia, Baltimore or Washington D.C. As Lee's infantry columns toiled down the Shenandoah Valley northward, Stuart's command was to advance through Loudoun Valley, just east of the Blue Ridge Mountains, fending off any attempts of the Federal cavalry, or other Union forces, to scout the Southern host or sever its communications with its base in Virginia.¹⁷

The Confederate army's infantry corps started to concentrate in Culpeper County, Virginia in early June; Stuart and his men had been in that locale since May 22nd. The cavalry was to cross the Rappahannock River and begin running interference for their foot slogging comrades on June 9th. Instead of the planned advance across that river on the designated day, Stuart and his command received the rudest shock experienced by them up to that point during the war: the despised, and allegedly hapless cavalry of the Army of the Potomac attacked.

The resultant clash - known as the Battle of Brandy Station (technically, Second Brandy Station, since a brigade-size cavalry action had taken place there on August 20,1862 between George Bayard's Union and Beverly Robertson's rebel commands) consumed fourteen hours of the day and cost the

Major General James E. B. Stuart (Valentine Museum)

Union 866 men killed, wounded and captured. The Confederates lost 485, exclusive of the men lost by the 35thVirginia Battalion. The Southern cavalry retained possession of the field of battle at the end of the day, but it was such a hard fought action that only the most optimistic Confederate could call it a rebel victory. Stuart, humiliated,

surprised, and very nearly beaten by the enemy horsemen, treated the near debacle as a victory. Stung by the almost universal condemnation of the initial dispositions of his division - both in the army and in civilian circles¹⁹ - he chose to declare in his official report of the action that regardless of the surprise occasioned at Beverly Ford, and the frantic rush of reinforcing regiments to Fleetwood Heights (the rear of his line), the entire combat had been a well orchestrated piece of fighting on his part, despite the fact

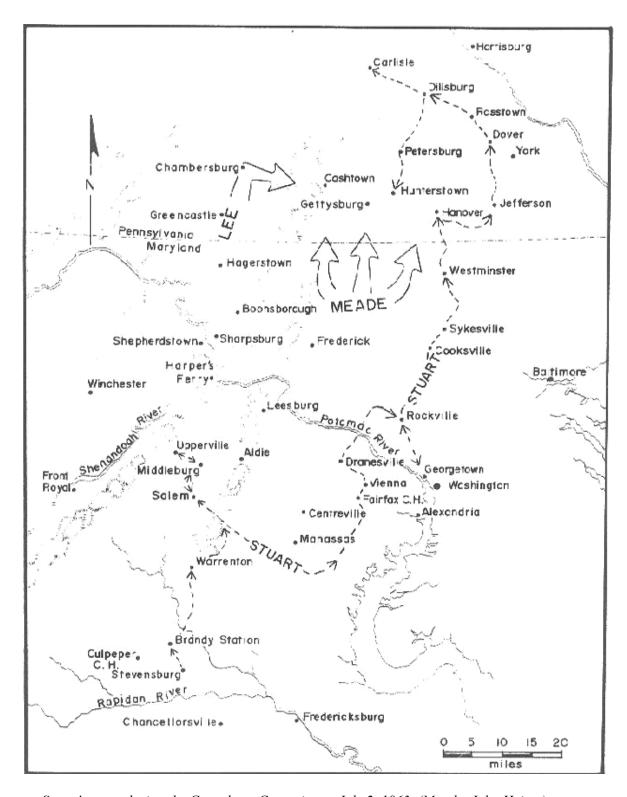
that he had been twice surprised by enemy columns and that the Confederate recovery only came about by desperate fighting. ²⁰

After Brandy Station, Stuart started on his mission to screen the march of Lee's army northward. From June 17th to the 21st Stuart and his troopers were constantly engaged with their antagonists - Major General Alfred Pleasonton's Union Cavalry Corps - in the Loudoun Valley. The unremitting daily skirmishing with the Bluecoated cavalry was punctuated by stiff fights at Aldie, Middleburg and Upperville. Although Stuart skillfully handled his rebel horsemen to hold off the repeated Union probes designed to discover the whereabouts of Lee's advancing infantry, the Southern cavalry, as far as Stuart was concerned, was not up-holding its reputation for bold and unexpected moves. Stuart looked for the opportunity to perform one of his famous maneuvers. Such a dash would offer greater excitement than the inglorious work of screening the army, and it would allow him the opportunity to erase the embarrassment of Brandy Station by conducting his specialty - a bold and enterprising raid against the rear of the Union Army of the Potomac. His fame was rooted in such exploits, and when the opportunity finally presented itself, he seized it at once.

On June 22, Pleasonton withdrew his forces from the area of Upperville, thus relieving the Confederate cavalry of the pressure it had been subjected to since the 17th. As a result of this lull in the operations of the opposing mounted units, Stuart, taking his cue from reports fed to him by partisan leader John S. Mosby, asked and received permission to detach part of his division from the main army and conduct a raid deep in the enemy's rear. Stuart reasoned that such an enterprise would divert Federal attention from Lee's army and threaten Washington - causing enemy forces to be tied down there instead of being employed against the Rebel army, and offer a chance to disrupt Federal communications. It also offered the opportunity for Stuart's horsemen to gather horses and much needed supplies for their own army.²² Stuart was to embark on this expedition and continue with it only if he could safely move completely around the Army of the Potomac and cross the Potomac River east of the Blue Ridge Mountains in order to rejoin the main army in Pennsylvania as quickly as possible.

Stuart started on his ride around the Federal army at midnight, June 24th/25th, leaving the village of Salem, Virginia, and taking with him the brigades of Hampton, the two Lees and one horse artillery battery. He left behind Jones' and Robertson's brigades to act as the cavalry screen for Robert E. Lee's army. Who was selected and who was not showed Stuart's disdain for those who did not meet his standards for command, such as Beverly Robertson, and to exclude subordinates whom he did not get along with - William E. "Grumble" Jones, for instance - from participating in significant operations. It was assumed that he would leave Hampton, his most competent subordinate, in charge of the remaining horse forces to ensure the army's security and communications.²³ He did not do this and compounded

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Stuart's route during the Gettysburg Campaign to July 2, 1863. (Map by John Heiser)

the problem by allowing Robertson, who was senior in rank, to command Jones, who was a superior soldier. These arrangements were Stuart's first mistakes. Combined with ill luck, they would dog the "Knight of the Confederacy's" throughout the Gettysburg saga. For the next eight days Stuart and three of his brigades found themselves not just going around the enemy but into them, east of them, and eventually north of them to Carlisle, Pennsylvania. From this point the column then turned south and marched to Gettysburg, completing a ride of 200 grueling miles. All Stuart had gained by his ride were 125 Union army wagons, captured outside Rockville, Maryland, a skirmish at Westminster, Maryland on June 29th, a hard fought battle with Kilpatrick's Union cavalry division at Hanover, Pennsylvania on June 30, and a spirited affair between Hampton's Brigade and Custer's Michigan brigade of Kilpatrick's division at Hunterstown, Pennsylvania on July 2. In all these episodes Stuart performed well as a tactician and was able to keep his force together and the enemy pursuing him at bay. Unfortunately, on the strategic level, the circuitous route used to return to the Army of Northern Virginia cost Robert E. Lee the intelligence he needed from his cavalry to make the decisions required to meet and defeat the Army of the Potomac, once that army had crossed into Pennsylvania.

Stuart's command did not reach the fighting at Gettysburg until July 2, 1863. On that day, from Brinkershoff Ridge on the northeastern margin of the Confederate line, he spied a chance to redeem himself by launching an attack on the Federal left and occupy the end of the Union front at the the intersection of the Hanover and Low Dutch Roads. The resultant cavalry battle on East Cavalry Field on July 3 was another failure for the Confederate horse. Stymied by smaller numbers of Federal cavalry, the battle ended in a draw. Stuart's tactical handling of the affair was poor, fighting his artillery and troops in piecemeal fashion, until the end of the action when he finally organized a coordinated assault.

With the withdrawal of the Army of the Northern Virginia from Gettysburg back to the Old Dominion State between July 4 and the 15th, Stuart seemed to revive his abilities as a cavalry leader of merit. His command performed efficient rearguard duties during the retreat to the Potomac River. Giving as good as he got during the fights at Hagerstown, Funkstown, Boonsboro, and Williamsport, Maryland, during mid-July, Stuart again exhibited his knack for sizing up the enemy's strength and intentions, and foiling them at the right moment. Under his leadership, at the conclusion of the Gettysburg Campaign Stuart had re-established, at least for the moment the notion that the Gray troopers were still the best saddle soldiers in either army.

The second most prominent leader of cavalry in the Army of Northern Virginia and the acknowledged successor to Stuart, was Wade Hampton. This was surprising to many since the wealthy 45-year-old South Carolina planter had no previous military training or experience before the war. What he did possess was high intellect and a superb physique. Old compared to the other leaders of Stuart's cavalry, and working under the further disadvantage of being a South Carolinian in a branch of the army where many leaders were Virginians, Hampton gained a good reputation as a fighter and leader of horsemen due to his performance in most of Stuart's raids in 1862, as well as in three independent excursions.

Born in Charleston, South Carolina on March 28,1818, Hampton was the son of a distinguished family. His father had been a soldier in the War of 1812 and an aide to Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans.²⁴ At the commencement of the war, at his own expense, Hampton raised six companies of infantry and one each of cavalry and artillery, known as the Hampton Legion. Hampton led his Legion into combat at First Manassas where he received a head wound, the first of numerous wounds he suffered during the course of the war.²⁵

Believed to be a born soldier by his officers and men, Hampton embraced the concept that success in mobile warfare depended upon maneuver and superior numbers.²⁶ Unlike



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Stuart, he did not take great stock in the use of the sword, preferring firepower to the steel blade.

During the Gettysburg campaign Hampton was distinguished by his "plain gray coat, worn, dingy, and faded", and his "great cavalier's gay 'fighting jacket', shining with gold braid."²⁷ Over 6 feet tall, he loomed large in the saddle.²⁸ By the time General Lee moved north to Pennsylvania, Hampton had developed the true merits of a soldier - a cool and collected presence on the battlefield and the ability to comprehensively take in the full features of the battlefield and to recognize the potential for both attack and defense upon it.²⁹

It was a reconnaissance conducted by one of Hampton's units in early June 1863 which convinced General Lee that Hooker's Army of the Potomac appeared to be lacking any aggressive intent, and therefore was the time for Lee to take the initiative and carry the war to the Northern States. 30

At the Battle of Brandy Station Hampton stabilized the Confederate front and led the last attacks on the Federals as they re-crossed Beverly Ford at the end of the day's fight. During the Loudoun Valley battles he led a sabre charge through the streets of Upperville on June 21, temporarily evicting the Federals from the town.³¹

On July 2, Hampton was left in temporary command of the Cavalry Division while Stuart rode ahead to find Lee and the main army. His brigade was tasked with acting as the division rear-guard and escorting the Federal wagon train Stuart had captured near Rockville Brigadier General Wade Hampton (Civil War Library & Museum) General George A. Custer dogged his column and eventually attacke Pennsylvania. Before the general action developed Hampton had a personal encounter with the control of the cont Custer's troopers, which offers an example of the South Carolinian's great personal courage. While his column was halted about a mile south of Hunterstown, Hampton was fired upon from nearby woods about 300 yards from the road. He promptly rode in the direction of the woods to investigate when he spotted a dismounted trooper of the 6th Michigan Cavalry about 125 yards away. The two commenced to trade shots at one another, Hampton firing his pistol while the trooper used his carbine. Both missed their first shots, but the second round from the Michigan trooper grazed Hampton's chest. As the Federal tried to load his weapon again he found it had fouled, and he raised his right hand to Hampton as if to ask for a temporary truce in the personal combat. Hampton was "incapable of taking unfair advantage of his enemy," and he held fire, allowing his opponent to clean the bore of his carbine, load the piece and prepare to fire again. He and Hampton fired a third round. This time Hampton hit the Yankee in the wrist ending the strange duel.³² But Hampton's personal duels with the enemy were not

As Hampton lowered his revolver, he heard the hoof-beats of an approaching horseman. The rider turned-out to be a Union lieutenant from the 6th Michigan Cavalry who having observed the personal combat between the Rebel general and the Union private, intended to finish off the former. The Union officer slashed Hampton on the head with a sabre cut that caused a four-inch gash in his scalp. Perhaps surprised that his sabre blow did not kill Hampton, the Federal turned and retreated. Hampton pursued and caught up with him, leveling his pistol within three feet of the lieutenant's head, but the weapon failed to detonate. Hampton pulled the trigger several more times but the weapon would not discharge. Finally, in disgust, Hampton threw his revolver at the escaping assailant, and hurled, what one recorded, as "some words which did not entirely become his character as a vestryman of the Protestant Episcopal Church," at the fleeing Yankee officer. Hampton then went looking for medical attention for his wounds. Despite his injuries Hampton was present at the fight at East Cavalry Field on July 3. There he led the last, and largest mounted charge of that action. In this conflict he received more wounds from enemy sabres. One blow reopened the gash of July 2, another fractured his skull, and he suffered other cuts to his face and body in the hand-to-hand melee. This ended Hampton's role in the Gettysburg campaign and he would not return to active duty until October.

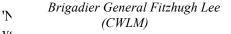
Second in seniority to Wade Hampton, but always first in the heart of "Jeb" Stuart, was Fitzhugh Lee, the nephew of General Robert E. Lee and the son of Sydney Smith Lee (R.E. Lee's brother), a U.S. naval officer for over forty years. ³⁵ "Fitz," as he was called, was born at "Clermont", in Fairfax County, Virginia on November 19, 1835. After graduating from West Point with the Class of 1856, he served on the Indian frontier before returning to the Military Academy as an assistant instructor of tactics. ³⁶

Described by contemporaries as a "compact, muscular" man with a square head, short neck and a "hail-fellow manner," Lee was always ready for a laugh, and of good humor. Almost from the start of the war Lee established himself as a mainstay of the Confederate cavalry in the East. He was promoted to brigadier general in July 1862 and led the second brigade of Stuart's newly created Cavalry Division. Lee was part of every raid conducted by Stuart during 1862, and every major campaign conducted by the Army of Northern Virginia from that time to the end of the war. He led a very successful raid of his own to Hartwood Church, Virginia in February 1863 forcing the Union command into an unsuccessful and chaotic pursuit of him. On March 17, 1863, at Kelly's Ford, Virginia with 800 men he stalemated an attacking Federal cavalry force of 2,100 men under William Woods Averell, in the first significant cavalry vs. cavalry brigade fight in the East.

Lee missed the Battle of Brandy Station due to a serious rheumatoid arthritis condition, and did not return to his command until just prior to Stuart's expedition to circle the Union army during the Gettysburg campaign. Lee proved his value as a courageous and skillful leader of horse troops in the Loudoun Valley battles and in a fierce cavalry clash at Hanover, Pennsylvania on June 30.³⁸

In the East Cavalry Field battle of July 3, Lee led his brigade (minus the 4th Virginia Cavalry) to the support of Wade Hampton's grand cavalry charge. Lee and his troopers became embroiled in the desperate hand-to-hand melee that concluded the fight on that part of the Gettysburg battlefield. Attacked by numerous sabre and pistol armed enemies in the confused fight, Lee and his favorite mount







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During the retreat of the army to the Potomac River Lee continued to do good more processing the army's rear and its trains. His actions throughout the Gettysburg Campaign confirmed his tactical ability and his reliability on the march or in battle.

Another of Stuart's brigadiers was William Henry Fitzhugh Lee. He was also the second son of Robert E. Lee. Born at Arlington, Virginia on May 31, 1837, he was educated at Harvard College, graduating in 1857. In the same year he received an appointment as a second lieutenant in the 6th United States Infantry Regiment. In that capacity he served in the Morman War of 1857- 1858 and in garrison duty in California. Resigning his commission in 1859, he turned to farming his property, known as the White House, situated on the Pamunkey River in Virginia. As the country drifted toward civil war, he organized one of the first cavalry troops raised in that state.³⁹

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Universally called "Rooney" by his friends, the low-key, steady-going Lee was similar to his first cousin Fitzhugh Lee, except in size, where "Rooney" had a distinct edge. He stood 6' 4" tall with big hands and feet. He carried himself like a gentleman and had the air of a born leader. During the 1861 West Virginia Campaign he acted as chief of cavalry for General Loring. By March of the following year he was commissioned colonel of the 13th Virginia Cavalry, which soon became part of Fitzhugh Lee's Brigade. On September 15, 1862 he was promoted to brigadier general and given a brigade to lead in November of that year. His men learned that Lee was an officer who would never expose them to needless danger, but once committed his cool courage could be relied upon to see them through.

During the Battle of Brandy Station, while engaged in the area of Yew Ridge - the left of the Confederate front at the Battle of Brandy Station - "Rooney" was injured in the leg by a bullet while leading one of the last charges of that long day against Union General John Buford's men. While recovering from his wound at Colonel William Wickham's home in Hanover County, Virginia, he was taken prisoner by Union Colonel Samuel Spear. Taken to Fortress Monroe, Lee was not exchanged until March 1864 and missed the remainder of the Gettysburg Campaign. In his absence, the senior colonel of the brigade, Colonel John R. Chambliss, Jr., of the 13th Virginia Cavalry, assumed command.

Chambliss was a West Pointer, from the Class of 1853, with limited service in the Mounted Rifles under his belt. He resigned in 1854 and returned to his home in Hicksford, Virginia, where he earned his living as a planter. At the start of the war Chambliss was appointed colonel of the 41st Virginia Infantry. His pre-war connections with the Virginia State Militia helped secure that posting and his subsequent transfer to the cavalry service. From Brandy Station, through Aldie, Middleburg, Hanover and East Cavalry Field, Chambliss exhibited great bravery. He also played a prominent role in protecting the army trains on the initial leg of the retreat from Gettysburg.

Chambliss' performance in the campaign prompted Stuart to recommend the colonel to General Lee as "a meritorious and most gallant officer who deserved promotion and his own command." In December 1863 Chambliss received his promotion. Less than one year later, on August 16, 1864 he was killed in action at Deep Bottom, Virginia. 44

Brigadier General Beverly Holcombe Robertson did not stand with the favorites of "Jeb" Stuart. Robertson excelled in drill and discipline but he performed poorly in combat. When the cavalry commander learned that Robertson would command the reinforcements being sent from North Carolina before the Gettysburg Campaign, he sent General Lee a letter on May 21, 1863 requesting that Robertson instead be employed as the commander of a proposed cavalry recuperation camp. Lee agreed, but they were unable to place Robertson in this non-combat position and Stuart was stuck with him ⁴⁵

Beverly H. Robertson was born at "The Oaks," in Amelia County, Virginia on June 5, 1827. After finishing West Point (Class of 1849) he spent his entire old army service with the 2nd US Dragoons on the western frontier. Following Ft. Sumter, Robertson threw in his lot with the Confederacy and was appointed colonel of the 4th Virginia Cavalry, with whom he served with 'Stonewall "Jackson during the 1862 Valley Campaign. 46

In June 1862 Robertson was promoted to brigadier general. After serving with Stuart in the Second Manassas Campaign - and not very competently - Robertson was relieved and transferred to North Carolina.⁴⁷ He returned to the Army of Northern Virginia after Chancellorsville with two large and relatively inexperienced regiments the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry. These regiments were organized into a single brigade and Robertson, due to this seniority, was placed in command.⁴⁸

When the Federal cavalry struck Stuart at Brandy Station on the morning of June 9,1863 that portion of the Union infantry (General David Russell's 1,500 man brigade) accompanying General David M. Gregg's cavalry column left the Kelly's Ford Road and marched north, making contact with Robertson's two regiments. They had been put there to guard that route to the Rebel right and rear. Throughout the Battle of Brandy Station, Robertson and his command merely observed Russell's largely static force, neither attacking it or coming to the aid of the hard pressed Confederate battle line in front of Saint James Church.

After Brandy Station Stuart left Robertson and his regiments with the main Confederate army to provide security and intelligence, while Stuart went on his ill-conceived raid around the Union Army of the Potomac. Robertson was engaged in the fights at Upperville, and helped defend the Confederate army on its return to the Potomac River during the combats near Funkstown and Hagerstown, Maryland.

On July 15, 1863, immediately after the army reached the security of the Potomac's south bank, Robertson requested to be relieved of command of his brigade and return to his former post in North Carolina. General Robert E. Lee (and one can only assume Stuart felt the same) was happy to oblige the general, approving his request the same day it was submitted.⁴⁹

Besides the two regiments from North Carolina, commanded by Robertson, General Lee sought



Colonel John R. Chambliss (CWLM)



Brigadier General Beverly H. Robertson (CWLM)

additional cavanty reminereements for the

Gettysburg Campaign. He succeeded in gaining the services of the Laurel Brigade, consisting of the 6th, 7th, 11th and 12th Virginia Cavalry, commanded by Brigadier General William E. Jones. This experienced unit joined the army on June 3.

Born near Glade Spring, Washington County, Virginia, in the Southwestern part of the state, on May 9,1824, William Edmondson Jones was a member of the West Point Class of 1848. He had previously received a degree from Emory and Henry College in 1847. He was assigned to the Regiment of Mounted Rifles and spent most of his service in the United States Army in the Oregon and Washington

Territories and Texas until he resigned from the Army in 1857.



At the outbreak of the Civil War, Jones was farming near Bristol, Virginia. He raised a company of cavalry for the Confederate war effort, and was present at First Manassas as part of J.E.B. Stuart's 1st Virginia Cavalry. Jones and his company saw no action during that battle. He subsequently became colonel of the 1st and then the 7th Virginia Cavalry. Participating in the Second Manassas and Antietam Campaigns, Jones showed that he was an excellent cavalry officer whose self-reliance and energy were the equals of any officer in that branch of the service. "Jeb" Stuart called him the "best outpost officer" in the mounted service.

Joseph Johnston described him as an officer, "skillful, brave and zealous in a very high degree." Bald, bearded, about 5' 8" tall, continually spitting out profanity in his high pitched voice during times of battle, Jones was an officer who commanded the respect of his men. Unfortunately, he possessed an uncompromising nature toward superiors, and a sharp, critical tongue tagged him as a troublemaker and a subordinate who was very hard to control. He first got the sobriquet "Grumble" when he wrote to the Confederate Government that his early war superior officer, General William Wing Loring, who had lost an arm during the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) should have lost his head instead. 52

Stuart did not work well with Jones and in a letter to General Lee, dated October 24,1862, he complained of the lack of discipline and respect Jones exhibited toward his superiors. He strongly opposed his promotion to command of the Laurel Brigade, urging that Colonel Thomas Munford be promoted to that post. Despite Stuart's objection, Jones got the appointment.⁵³

Jones brought his Laurel Brigade east to reinforce the Army of Northern Virginia in May 1863 after carrying out, with John Imboden's command one of the most successful cavalry raids of the entire war into West Virginia, from April to May 1863. His brigade bore the brunt of the first Federal attacks at Brandy Station on June 9. Confusion ensued in the initial stages of the Union attack, but Jones' regiments recovered, and with the help of Hampton's Brigade, stabilized the front and stopped the Federal advance.

On the march north to Pennsylvania Stuart detailed Jones to the inglorious duty of guarding the army's rear and flank. Only on July 3 did his brigade reach the vicinity of Gettysburg. On that day he attacked and almost wiped out the U.S. 6th Cavalry Regiment southwest of Gettysburg at Fairfield. On the following days, Jones found himself continually fending off Federal attacks. At one point Jones himself was separated from his command for a time and reported to be dead or captured. He made his way back however, and led his brigade in the clashes at Boonsboro, Hagerstown and Williamsport. Following the conclusion of the campaign, Jones served Stuart into early October, when he requested a transfer, which the division commander obliged. Jones then went to a command in Southwest Virginia. On June 5, 1864 he was killed in action in a clash at Piedmont, Virginia.

Thirty-two year old Brigadier General Albert Gallatin Jenkins led the advance guard of the Army of Northern Virginia into Pennsylvania. Though hailing from the rough mountains of Cabell County, Virginia (later West Virginia), Jenkins was a graduate of both Jefferson College at Canonsburg, and the Harvard School of Law, and had served two terms as an U.S. Congressman.⁵⁴

Prior to the Gettysburg Campaign Jenkins had gained a reputation as a competent raider who could conduct independent sweeps against enemy communications.

Although mounted, Jenkins Brigade was considered mounted infantry. In the initial sweep into Pennsylvania, they led Ewell's

Second Corps to within five miles of the state capitol at Harrisburg.

Jenkins and his men gained a reputation as thieves and looters while in the Keystone State, rounding up horses, forage, private property and generally instilling fear into the hearts of the Pennsylvanians whom they visited in late June and early July 1863. While abhorring the actions of their commander, the people of Pennsylvania found Jenkins himself to be a perfect gentleman. Solidly built, with dark hair, blue eyes, and a heavy brown beard, the affable southerner sweet-talked the populace with kind words and subtle reasoning, to help compensate for the undisciplined behavior of his men. 56

By July 2 General Lee had summoned Jenkins and his 1,300 men to Gettysburg. The commanding general wanted Jenkins to protect the eastern or left flank, of Ewell's Corps. Jenkins never reached his assigned post. For reasons that are not entirely



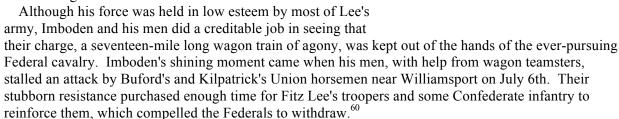
Brigadier General Albert G. Jenkins (CWLM)

clear, Jenkins did not go to the Confederate left, but proceeded to Rock Creek and then ascended the high ground at Blocher's (Barlow's) Knoll. While viewing the Federal positions on Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hills he was struck from his horse by fragments from a Federal artillery shell fired from the latter hill. Jenkins was carried from the field and evacuated to Virginia with the other Confederate wounded on July 4.⁵⁷

Colonel Milton J. Furguson, commanding the 16th Virginia Cavalry, assumed command of Jenkins' Brigade after their leader's wounding. On July 3 Ferguson and the brigade supported Stuart's attempt to push the Union cavalry of Gregg and Custer east of Gettysburg, and participated in sharp skirmishing around the farm of John Rummel.

The last mounted command that accompanied the Army of Northern Virginia into Pennsylvania was Brigadier General John Daniel Imboden's brigade of mounted infantry. The 40 year old Imboden was an avowed secessionist from Staunton, Virginia. He entered the Confederate service in 1861 as captain of the Staunton Light Artillery. Promoted brigadier general, to rank from January 28, 1863, he scored his greatest coup of the war as part of the Jones-Imboden West Virginia Raid (April-May 1863).⁵⁸

Dubbed the "Northwestern Virginia Brigade" Imboden's 2,100 men were irregulars, ill armed and devoid of any real military training or discipline. By July 3 he and his command were in the area of Cashtown, guarding the army's rear, a duty they were more suited for than conventional combat operations. That night, General Lee assigned Imboden with the daunting task of organizing and escorting the thousands of wounded Confederates back to Virginia. 59



Throughout the Gettysburg Campaign the Confederate troopers were for the most part admirably assisted by a group of horse artillery batteries led by Major Robert F. Beckham. Beckham was the first man to lead Stuart's horse artillery battalion after the death of the much-lamented John Pelham, who was killed at the Battle of Kelly's Ford on March 17, 1863.

Robert Franklin Beckham was born in Culpeper County, Virginia on May 6, 1837. He graduated from the U. S. Military Academy in 1859, and entered the Engineer Corps as a lieutenant. Beckham resigned his commission in May 1861 after Virginia left the Union. He received a commission as a lieutenant of artillery in Grove's Culpeper Artillery Battery, which became the nucleus of the Stuart Horse Artillery. After serving as a staff officer from January, 1862 to January, 1863, Beckham was requested by Stuart to be appointed as the new commander of the Stuart Horse Artillery. The request was approved and Stuart assumed his new duties on April 8, 1863. During the Chancellorsville Campaign Beckham accompanied Jackson's



Brigadier General John D

Imboden (CWLM)

flank march around Hooker's army with two guns from Breathed's horse artillery battery and provided artillery support during Jackson's initial attack against the exposed Union 11th Corps.

At the start of the Federal attack across the Rappahannock River at Beverly's Ford on June 9, 1863, four of Beckham's artillery units were stationed between the river and their closest supports, the 6th Virginia Cavalry of Jones' Brigade. The initial Union onslaught came within a whisker of overrunning Beckham's batteries. Only the quick action of the cannoneers combined with the support of Jones' Virginia horsemen, averted such a disaster, and allowed the guns to be relocated to Fleetwood Heights, where they gave important aid to the counterattacks against the Federals.

During the advance into Pennsylvania Beckham rarely exercised authority over all six batteries assigned to the Cavalry Division. This was typical for Beckham's horse batteries were frequently detached to support brigades or regiments, as circumstances demanded. The results of this practice were not all positive. An example of its effects was felt at the Battle of East Cavalry Field on July 3. Beckham's batteries came on the field in piecemeal fashion and were quickly suppressed by the Federal guns already in place covering the Hanover and Low Dutch Roads.

Despite the fact that Beckham had demonstrated excellent leadership qualities and skill as an artillerist requests to have him promoted to lieutenant colonel were unsuccessful.⁶⁴ The Confederate War Department would not grant the young man his two stars until the battalion he commanded received two additional batteries. Robert E. Lee recognized Beckham's abilities but did not push his promotion and Beckham went to Gettysburg as a major of artillery.⁶⁵

In his report of the Battle of Brandy Station, Stuart wrote, "the conduct of the Horse Artillery, under that daring and efficient officer, Major R. F. Beckham, deserves the highest praise." Stuart might have written the same to describe Beckham's conduct throughout the campaign. But this fine performance did not win Beckham promotion. Perhaps Stuart's tarnished image after the campaign effected his chances. Whatever, Beckham did not win promotion to colonel until February 1864, and this required his transfer to the Army of Tennessee.

The Confederate officers who made up the leadership of the Cavalry Division of the Army of Northern Virginia, and who fought with that organization during the Gettysburg Campaign, for the most part were professional soldiers. The division commander and five of his principal subordinates were graduates of the U. S. Military Academy. All except Chambliss had pre-war combat experience, and that officer taught mounted tactics at the cavalry school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Further, although not a soldier by profession or experience before the war, Stuart was most fortunate in having Wade Hampton, a "natural soldier," as his second in command. Even Jenkins and Imboden, practiced more in hit-and-run raids and tactics than conventional tactics, proved themselves capable in their assigned roles during the opening and closing moves of the campaign.

Dedicated to the Southern cause, devoted to and believing in their army commander, Robert E. Lee, used to working together, and confident of the superiority of their men over the enemy's, Stuart and his brigade commanders had every reason to expect success in the great episode that would become known as the Gettysburg Campaign. That they failed to achieve total dominance over the Federal cavalry or the accomplishment of the goals Stuart hoped to obtain was due more to the changing nature of the war and their opponents, than any lack of skill on their part.

Two years of fighting; better officers emerging to lead them; a decline in the quality of horse flesh in the Confederate army, and an inexhaustible supply of good arms and equipment to keep them well appointed in the field, helped the Union troopers change the tempo and nature of mounted warfare in the East. Starting with Brandy Station and continuing through the rest of the conflict, numbers and firepower on the Federal side would balance out the elan and natural horsemanship of the Confederate cavalry, reducing the contest to one of attrition with constant skirmishing and pitched battles between the Blue and Gray riders. All of these indications of what was to be were present during the Gettysburg Campaign and all of them came to pass.

NOTES

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- ¹⁸ OR, 27, pt. 1, pp. 168-170; pt. 2, p.719.

 ¹⁹ Emory M. Thomas, <u>Bold Dragoon: The Life of J.E.B. Stuart</u>, (New York, 1986), pp. 226-229.
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- ²³ OR, 27,pt.3, p.915; James Longstreet, <u>From Manassas to Appomattox</u>, (New York, 1992 reprint), p.343.
- ²⁴ William Snow, Lee and His Generals, (New York, 1996 reprint), p.493
- ²⁵ John E. Cooke, Weaning of the Gray; Being Personal Portraits, Scenes And Adventures of the War, (New York, 1867), p. 58.
- Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, vol.3, p. xxxii.
- ²⁷ Cooke, Wearing of the Gray, p. 61.
- ²⁸ Ibid., p.61.
- ²⁹ Ibid., p. 66.
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- ³² Manly W. Wellman, Giant in Gray: A Biography of Wade Hampton of South Carolina, (Dayton, 1988 reprint), p.115. T. J. Mackey, "Hampton's Duel," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. 22, pp. 122-126. ³³ Wellman, p. 116. Mackey, p. 125.
- ³⁴ Ibid., p. 120-12 1.
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⁴ Ibid., p.213.

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⁶ Thomas H.Thiele, "The Evolution of Cavalry in the American Civil War, 1861-1863." Ph. D. Dissertation (Ann Arbor, 1951), p. 117.

⁷ Edwin B. Coddington, The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command, (Dayton, 1988 reprint), pp. 15-17.

⁸ US War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 128 vols., (Washington, D.C., 1890-1901), series I, vol. 28, pp. 1075,1084, 1088; vol. 25, pt 2, pp. 788-790,804-805, 820-821, 825-828, 836-837; vol. 27, pt 3, pp. 1006-1007. Hereinafter cited as OR. All references are to series I.

¹⁰ Starr, The Union Cavalry in the Civil War, vol. 1, p.217. Unfortunately for any Rebel trooper who lost his horse to disease or battle, he would have to purchase a replacement mount at his own expense. Failing to do so meant a transfer to the infantry.

James L.Nichols, <u>General Fitzhugh Lee: A Biography</u>, (Lynchburg, 1989), p. 54.

³⁹ Evans, Confederate Military History, vol. 3, p. 625. The 6th U.S. Infantry contained the likes of Winfield Hancock, Richard Garnett, Lewis Armistead, and Henry Heth among its officer corps.

⁴⁰ Longacre, The Cavalry at Gettysburg, p.29.

⁴¹ George W. Beal, A Lieutenant of Cavalry in Lee's Army, (Boston, 1918), p.223.

⁴² Warner, Generals In Gray, pp. 46-47.

Evans, Confederate Military History, vol. 3, p. 583.

⁴⁴ Arnold Blumberg, "Shot From the Saddle! The Death of General John Chambliss," Blue and Gray Magazine, vol. xiv, issue # 6, p.33. The Richmond Enquirer, August 19,1864, The University of Maryland Micro-Film Department, College Park.

⁴⁵ OR, 25, pt. 2, pp.820-821.

⁴⁶ Warner, Generals In Gray, p. 259.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.260.

⁴⁸ Evans, Confederate Military History, vol.3, p. 657. The 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry numbered approximately 966 officers and men. See, John Busey and David Martin, Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg, (Hightstown, 1986), p. 194.

OR, 27, pt.3, pp. 1006-1007.

⁵⁰ Evans, Confederate Military History, vol. 3, p. 616. Warner, Generals In Gray, p. 166.

⁵¹ Evans, Confederate Military History, vol. 3, pp. 617-618.

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- ⁵³ James Ewell Brown Stuart to R. E. Lee, October 24, 1862. Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va.

⁵⁴ Warner, Generals In Gray, p. 154.

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⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 60-62.

⁵⁸ Warner, Generals In Gray, p.147.

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- ⁶¹ Robert K. Krick, Lee's Colonels': A Biographical Register of the Field Officers of the Army of Northern Virginia, 3rd Edition, (Dayton, 1991), p.50.
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⁶⁴ J.E.B. Stuart to General Samuel Cooper, May 21, 1863, Robert F.

Beckham Compiled Service Record (Washington, D. C. 1961) microfilm copy 313, Roll 20.

⁶⁵ OR, 25, pt.2, p.820.

⁶⁶ OR, 27, pt.2, p.683.

³⁷ Longacre, The Cavalry at Gettysburg, p.28.

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