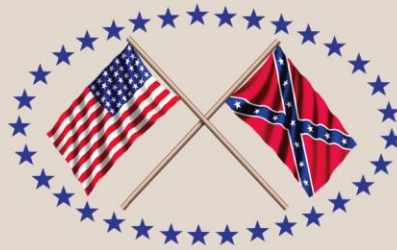


Sumter to Appomattox



American Civil War Round Table of Australia (New South Wales Chapter)
www.americancivilwar.asn.au **Patron: Prof the Hon Bob Carr**

Number 132 Aug – Sept 2025

President's Message

We had a great meeting in August. If you were not there, you missed a treat!

Peter Zacharatos did a fantastic presentation on the Battle of Chancellorsville. He may come to regret doing such a good job of it as he now risks becoming the go-to person for presentations.

Thank you, Peter! Wonderful presentation!

And speaking of presentations, while I will miss it as I am currently in South Australia, our Vice-President and Program Director, John Morrison, gave a presentation at the regular meeting of the Military History Society of NSW on 6 September. Rob Muscat, now a member of our Round Table, is President of the Military History Society of NSW and it is good to see John flying the flag at their meetings. They meet on the first Saturday of each month at 10.30 a.m. at the Anzac Memorial in Hyde Park. Several of our members attend those meetings and they are good presentations. Another organisation keeping history alive!

We now turn our attention to Gettysburg. As I mentioned in the last newsletter, John Morrison would like to hear from anybody who would like to tell us about their experience of Gettysburg. I know that some of our members grew up nearby.

Do not forget a \$5 and a \$10 note for the book raffles.

See you on 20 October.

Ian McIntyre

Our Next Meeting

Monday, 20 October
at the Chatswood Club

Gettysburg - The Battle That Changed America Forever

Booking required by
11.00 p.m. Thursday 16 October
using the following link:

<https://www.trybooking.com/DFKSD>

The Battle of Gettysburg was one of the largest battles of the Civil War. Many people see it as the pivotal event or the turning point of the entire war - although in recent times it has come to be seen as an important, rather than decisive, battle.

In our next meeting, and the one after, we will look at various aspects of the battle including some that are less well known as well as reminisces from some of our members with personal connections to the battle.

Any members wishing to contribute should contact John Morrison on
johnjmorrisson@bigpond.com. or 0411 197 935.

Club Parking

The club offers free parking, with ample space for up to 50 vehicles. The parking lot provides direct access to the club.

How to Access the Parking:

The entrance to the parking lot is located at the back of the club, accessible via McIntosh Street.

For GPS directions, enter '12 McIntosh Street, Chatswood.' This will guide you to the general area. Upon arrival, look for the parking complex with signage that reads 'Club Parking' in black lettering. The following image should assist you:



12 McIntosh St

IMPORTANT: You may need to phone the number on the post outside to get the gate opened. There are internal stairs up to the Club (there's a door on the landing on the top level just down from the gate) or you can catch the lift to G, then exit the glass doors and enter through the adjoining glass doors.

This publication is the official newsletter of the American Civil War Round Table of Australia (NSW Chapter). All enquiries regarding the newsletter should be addressed to the Secretary of the Chapter by phone on 0411 745 707 or email: secretary@americancivilwar.asn.au

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Our Last Meeting

Lee's Finest Hour – the Battle of Chancellorsville



Peter Zacharatos made a first class, scholarly presentation on this fascinating battle. He has kindly provided a copy of his speaking notes. It was such a fine talk that the Newsletter editor considers it appropriate to reproduce it in full, as a record of our proceedings. Not all of Peter's slides have been included and a few photos have been added. Here is Peter's presentation:



General Hooker

In mid-April 1863, General Joseph Hooker was brimming with confidence. So assured was he, by his preparations to crush the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia that he declared to his officers, "*My plans are perfect, and when I*

start to carry them out, may God have mercy on Bobby Lee, for I will have none."

But this is not the story of Joe Hooker's greatest success, but that of the man he faced and his campaign, of Robert E Lee's greatest and perhaps costliest victory.

Following the Union defeat at Fredericksburg in December 1862, and the humiliating mud march in January in the new year, Major General Ambrose Burnside sought to purge several of his subordinates, whom he blamed for the Army of the Potomac's recent failures, but only congress had the power to dismiss anyone, as such this purge went nowhere, in frustration Burnside tendered his resignation to President Abraham Lincoln in early 1863. Lincoln began to consider Joseph Hooker for the role, Hooker had a rather pugnacious reputation.

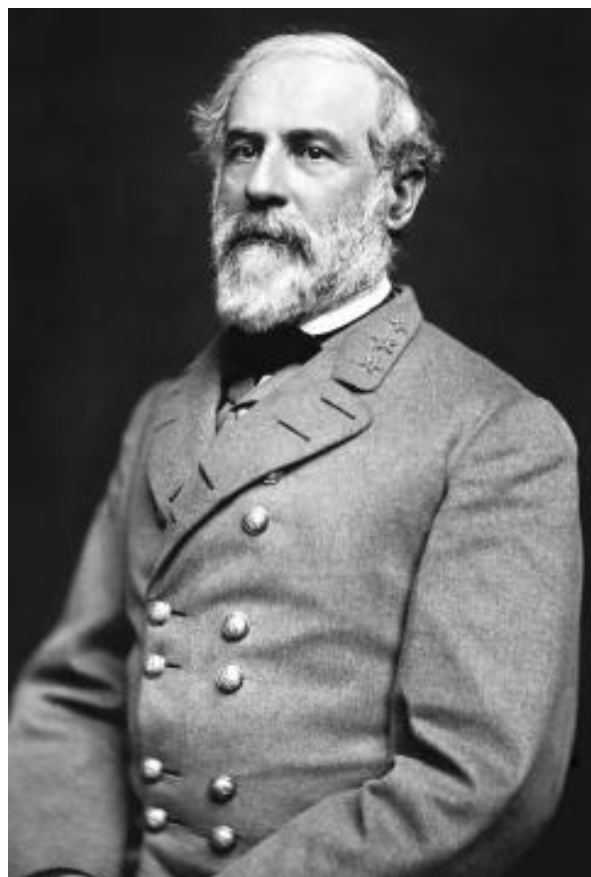
Hooker was a lifelong democrat and anti-abolitionist, he was a bachelor who liked to gamble and in that Victorian age, word had it he didn't hold his liquor well, as such many considered him a 'rogue'. Hooker was a well-known womaniser, who often had prostitutes follow around his camp, and popular etymology often associates often connects the term 'hooker' as a slang-term for a prostitute as derivative of Joe Hooker's personal affection for them, unfortunately this is quirky fact is likely a myth.

Hooker often spoke first and regretted what he said later, once he said *"what the country needed was a good dictator"*. Lincoln still picked him to head the army of the Potomac, in so many words the President said that 'in spite of his big mouth he was given command and would go on to say *"give the nation military victories and let me President Lincoln worry about dictatorships"*.

Physically Joe Hooker was tall, shapely, well dressed, with a healthy complexion, topped with Auburn hair and one who viewed the world through lucid blue eyes, he was a man of action, and a curious twist about action, the New York Times speculated *"Everyone feels the general will do one of two things, and speedily... destroy the rebel army or his own"*. Although the press, the public and his own men held mixed views about him, when Hooker took command, he made many decisive moves, he abolished Burnside's previous organisation of 'grand divisions', he united his cavalry into one Corp, a move that was some 15 months behind the Confederates, another important innovation was his creation of a secret service or Bureau of Military Intelligence. And, there was more, he gave his inspector general's real authority and the end result was cleaned up campsites,

hospitals and improved camp sanitation, paydays were re-established and consistently maintained... one of his most popular orders involved reconfiguring rations, allowing soft bread and vegetables to be given to the common soldier more frequently, each brigade had its own bakery and specific supply lines. All combined with regular drills and training, the common soldier noted and appreciated his reforms. In 2 months, the Army of the Potomac found Hooker to be an efficient administrator, innovative reformer and practised military executive, his confidence was infectious, and he would ask much of his army.

The strategic picture Spring of 1863, was that the Union was on the advance on all over fronts. Major General William Rosencrantz army threatened central Tennessee, Grant was closing in on Vicksburg. The Union had occupied the strategic city of New Orleans. In the Eastern Theatre, Charleston South Carolina was being menaced by the union blockade, North Carolina's coast with the exception of Wilmington was under Union control and so was South Eastern Virginia, both backdoors to Petersburg and to the Confederate capital at Richmond and Joseph Hooker and his massive army was of course, situated on the Rappahannock River.



General R. E. Lee

Confronting Hooker was 56-year-old Robert E Lee. Lee, had fallen ill that March, he described his affliction as a 'violent cold', by April he was on the mend but not without episodes of intense pain in his chest, back and arms. It was probably the first signs of angina pectoris, the heart disease that would take his life 7 years later.

Unlike Hooker's well provisioned army, Lee could not feed his own, the countryside of Virginia was stripped and wasted from the war, the Confederate disaster that was its supply system meant that daily issue was only 110 grams of bacon and half a kilo of flour. The situation was so bad that Union soldiers joked that the Confederacy had a new general, 'General Starvation'.

To help the situation, Lee sent Lt General James Longstreet and over 12,000 men south to Suffolk Virginia, with the dual assignment to both liberate the South East Corner of Virginia from federal strongholds and forage for supplies for the Army of Northern Virginia. With Longstreet over 130 miles away, this meant that if anything broke on the Rappahannock, Longstreet and his men would not be available. With Longstreet gone, Lee depended heavily on Lt General Thomas Jonathan Jackson, more commonly known as 'Stonewall Jackson' whose fame was at its greatest. The eyes and ears of Lee's army were of course General JEB Stuart's cavalry.



'Stonewall' Jackson

Between March and April 1863, Hooker's Bureau of Military Intelligence scoured the area, taking note of all fords in the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers up and downstream, they studied Lee's lifeline the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac railroad, its bridges and crossings, in their reports they also identified all of Lee's divisions...

Having broken the code used by Confederate signallers, they knew that Longstreet was away and also that the Confederacy had broken the Union system of signalling as well.

By the end of March, Hooker had about 140,000 men, yet that number was deceiving, almost 38,000 were 'short-termers', and due to leave the army in the next three months. If Hooker was to move, he needed to do so soon, before they went home.

What about his counterpart in Gray? With Longstreet's departure, Lee had only 61,500 men, outnumbered nearly 2-1, his nearest reinforcements were 130 miles away and his men were subsisting on half rations, all this meant that he could not initiate action. Lee would be forced to await the next federal move. Lee surmised that when Hooker attacked, the Confederacy would be able to defend behind dug in fortifications. He wasn't worried about his numbers, because he believed that Union intelligence would do what they had always done, inflate the size of his army. Lee also believed Hooker would not move until he got rid of his 9 month and 2 year soldiers. Quite honestly, Lee thought Hooker was like all who had come before and also quite honestly... Lee was wrong on every assessment.

On 8 April, President Lincoln visited the Union Army at Falmouth Virginia, Fighting Joe glowed with confidence and that was evident when Mr Lincoln said *"If you get to Richmond, General?"* only to be interrupted when Hooker interjected, *"excuse me Mr President, there is no 'if' in this case, I am going straight to Richmond if I live"*. Bemused, Lincoln impressed on Hooker and his subordinates the need to commit all of his men in his next engagement with Lee. A little while later Lincoln reflected on the exchange and said, *"the hen is the wisest of all the animal creation, because she never cackles until the egg is laid"*.

In Hooker's defence, he had every reason to be confident, his bureau of military intelligence correctly reported to him the dire confederate ration situation and he reasoned that Lee, concerned about feeding his army would need to remain on the defensive and correctly deduced that he, Hooker, held the initiative.



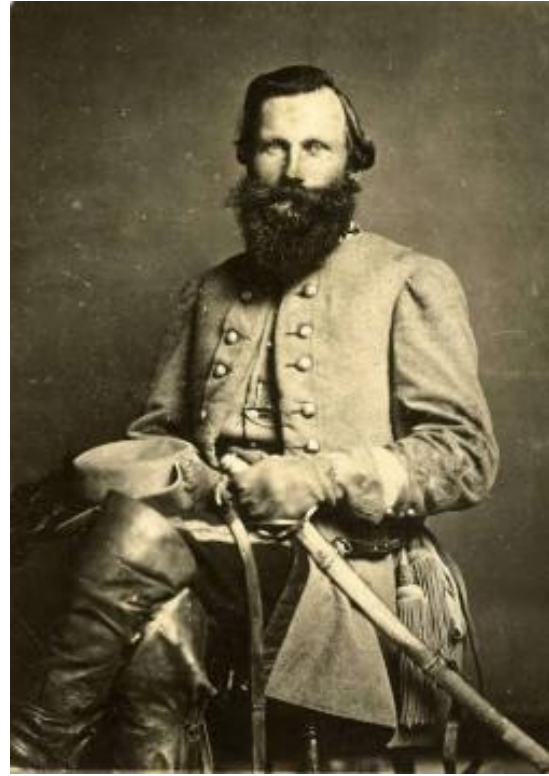
Hooker ordered his cavalry under the command of George Stoneman to move up-stream across the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers then charge deep behind Lee's lines, all the while wrecking depots of provisions, trains, cars lines and telegraphic communication and tear up tracks and bridges of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac railroad, Hooker emphasised that their watchword should be "*fight, fight fight!*". Hooker hoped the raid would force Lee to abandon his lines, after which he would fall upon the disorganised retreating rebels.



General Stoneman

As the date for the raid neared, Hooker's chief of staff remembered that the Confederates had broken the Union signal code and planned a rouse... On 13 April, the Union telegraphed a message that read "*Our cavalry is going to give*

Jones in the Shenandoah a smash". The message was indeed intercepted, and Lee, fearing a cavalry strike to the west took the bait. He sent JEB Stuart, his eyes and ears with two brigades of cavalry to the West and created a 20 mile gap, which opened a door for the Stoneman's cavalry.

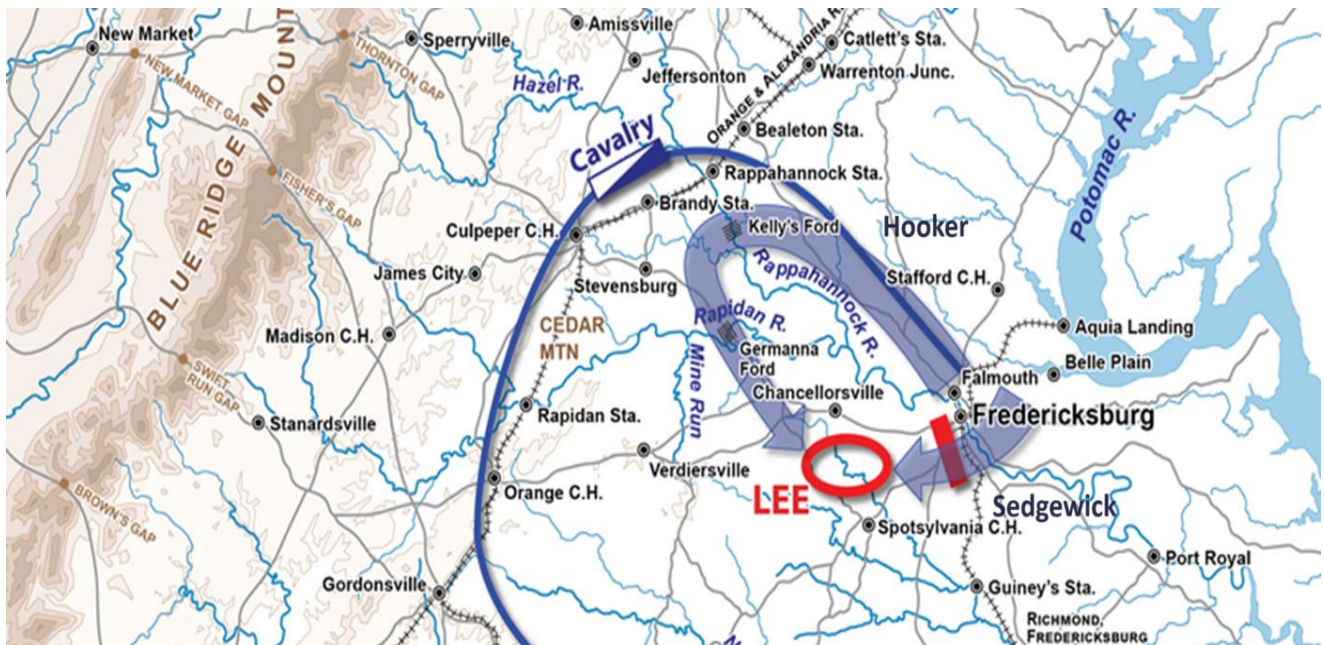


Jeb Stuart

But despite all the intelligence and opportunity, Joe Hooker could not control his lieutenants or the weather... Stoneman wasted a day making elaborate plans to cross the Rappahannock and then at 2am on 15 April, it began to rain... torrentially. In 12 hours, the Rappahannock river rose seven feet, and all roads were turned to quagmires, this would delay the union cavalry crossing for two weeks.

Despite the delay with the cavalry crossing, Hooker was unfazed and he began to fine tune his closely guarded designs, he divided his enormous army into two parts to surround Lee on all sides.

As shown on this slide, one half of his army under command of Sedgwick would launch a diversionary assault on Lee's forces at Fredericksburg, and even cross the Rappahannock just below the city on the old-pontoon bridges left over December, the other half, (known as the flying column) under Hooker's personal command would march to the west, cross the Rapidan upstream at Kelly's Ford's, then press east to Chancellorsville. Hooker rationalised that Lee would retreat to cover his supply lines and or else stuck fighting on multiple fronts. It was a solid plan!



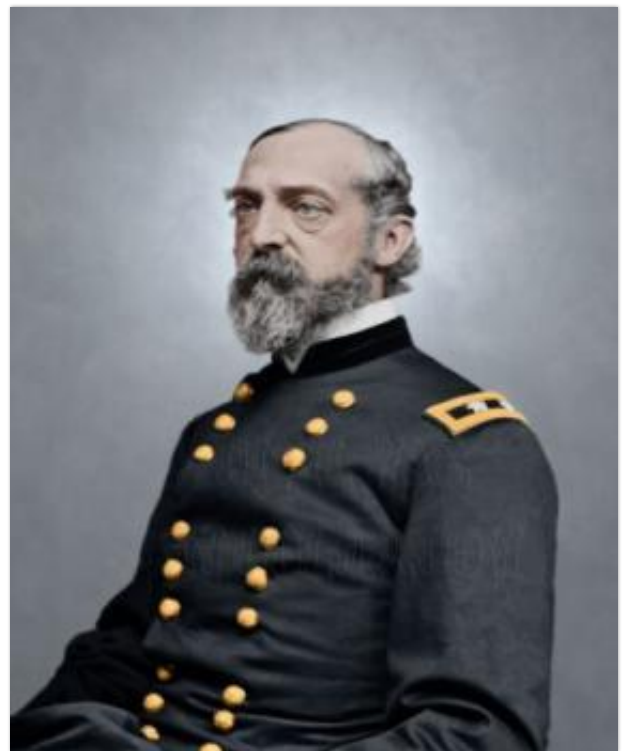
Hooker's Plan (CWMaps.com)

Early on Monday 27 April, Hooker's grand campaign began. Artillery and ambulances were reduced to facilitate speed, only enough wagons to carry forage for animals, before leaving camp there was no trash burning, and on the march there was no music, no bugle, no march calls or cheering. Almost 70,000 men moved towards Kelly's Ford believing, and justifiably so, that they were about to turn Bobby Lee. Years later looking back on the moment, Hooker wrote, 'I felt at the beginning of the campaign, I had 80 chances out of 100 of being successful'.

From Lee's perspective, across the river at Fredericksburg everything seemed routine, as there were no changes in the Union encampment from his viewpoint, meanwhile, Hooker's flying column was on the march, which continued on next day 28th and the next on 29th, all the Union movements went unnoticed, thanks to the absence of Stuart's cavalry.

On the evening of the 29th the crossings on the Rapidan were seized, and Stoneman cavalry that same day finally crossed the Rappahannock as well. Hooker's plan was in motion, and it was working, indeed it was 60 hours into the campaign before Lee issued his first order in response to it all, he learned of Hooker's march upstream from JEB Stuart, who after finding little union activity farther west drifted back east where his cavalry clashed with elements of Hooker's forces. Lee had to discern, which of the Union columns was the main strike, the one upstream or at Fredericksburg.

For the moment, Lee kept Jackson in place on the heights at Fredericksburg to watch over Sedgewick's union forces on the opposite bank, he ordered Richard Anderson's division towards the Chancellorsville area... There Anderson made the wisest decision in his whole career, he found the ground near Chancellor house too exposed, he moved his division back 3 miles to the East and entrenched his forces on high ground.



General Meade



Chancellor House

On 30 April, in the early fog of the new day, the first of the 'flying column' under command of George Meade began arriving at their objective, the Chancellor House... despite receiving a frosty reception from the Chancellor family, Meade's men secured the area without Confederate interference. All had gone so well, that the usual dower Meade was beside himself, Meade wrote to his wife that *"this is splendid hurrah for old Joe, we are on Lee's flank and he does not know it"*. Hooker was informed and that evening and issued a proclamation crowing *"it is with heartfelt satisfaction, that the commanding general announces to the army that the operation of the last three days, has determined that our enemy must fly or give us battle on our ground, where certain destruction awaits him"*.

In fairness, Hooker had every reason to gloat, his main force was across the river and the next day on 1 May, he had scheduled Sedgewick's forces to begin assault on Fredericksburg. His plan was all working!



General John Sedgewick

Still not sure of Hooker's intent, on the same day Lee gave an order for his men to entrench. This was unprecedented, he had never given that order in the 11 months that he had held command. Lee did make one decisive decision though, on his hill just west of Fredericksburg, through his looking glass he studied the passive federal movements on the opposite side of the river and with his trained eye, upon abruptly closing his looking glass and he said to a member of his staff, *"the main attack will come from above"*.

Now... there is a military maxim, never divide your forces in the face of superior numbers, yet, just like at Second Manassas that is exactly what Lee did.

Lee ordered Stonewall Jackson to march west with three-fifths of his army, which was approximately 45,000 men to reinforce Anderson the following morning. Meanwhile, he left just 12,000 troops under Jubal Early to defend Fredericksburg against Sedgewick's large federal force positioned across the river. At around 6pm on 30 April, Hooker and his staff arrived at Chancellor House, he was a glow, exclaiming that *"god almighty could not prevent me from winning a victory"*. Ever confident Hooker revealed the next stage of his plan to his subordinates, his federal flanking force was to fall upon Lee's flank like a hammer and would then crush the confederate armies against Sedgewick's forces which would cross at Fredericksburg, acting as the anvil... reminiscent of Alexander the Great's greatest victories.

To put the plan in motion, Hooker and ordered half of his men at Fredericksburg to reinforce his flying column, swelling his numbers to 100,000 men. All these men were converging on a 70 square mile section known locally as the 'Wilderness'.

In his book on Chancellorsville, Historian Stephen Sears described the wilderness as 'a dark eerie forest' having the features of an *"impenetrable maze...warped and pinched"* with 'overgrown pine and tangled trees, shrubs and roots' and Sears comments that *"men who fought in the wilderness would remember it with fear and hatred"*. The largest of the few clearings in the wilderness was around the Chancellor House. There were only a few narrow dirt roads throughout the whole expanse, the largest being the Orange Turnpike and the Orange Plank Road, which would make manoeuvring a large army very difficult. So... despite being heavily outnumbered Lee was confident he could use this treacherous terrain to his advantage.

For communication, Lee depended on couriers and signalling, the federals did as well, but they also had a telegraphic wire laid all the way back to Fredericksburg. It was a new magnetic telegraph, and however, its reliability was roughly 5 miles and surely enough from the evening of 30 April to 1 May it malfunctioned. Hooker's stretched out forces would have partial to total blackout, that would have consequences.

On the morning of May 1st, as the bulk of Confederate forces began shifting their lines, General Hooker launched his Day 5 plan. He had the ambitious goal to seize all river crossings and achieve what no Union soldier had managed on December 13th, 1862 have Sedgwick's men cross the Rappahannock and take Marye's Heights.

But there was a problem. The telegraph was still acting up and so Hooker was not informed that the energetic Stonewall Jackson had begun his westward march around 8:00am, even though it was seen by Sedgwick and reported.

As you'll see in this clip, at 10:30 AM, unaware of Jackson's movements, Hooker divided his flying column into four parts. He dispatched Meade with 30,000 men along the River Road to open up Bank's Forde... one of the key river crossings. Simultaneously another 30,000 detachment under General Slocum advanced along the Orange Turnpike towards Fredericksburg, while a third column under Sykes pushed southward to outflank Lee.

Meanwhile, Howard's Corp was to secure the crossroads near the Wilderness Church... the only avenue for Union retreat.

Hooker, rightly sceptical of Howard's green and untested troops, wanted to keep them out of combat. Positioned on the Union right, Howard's men, under the illusion they were safe, failed to build proper defences.

On the Confederate side, by this time Jackson and his four divisions were well on their way... marching along both the Orange Turnpike and the Orange Plank Road, by 11am, he met up with Anderson and ordered them to abandon their defensive works and push westward... Jackson understood his army's dilemma, as well as Lee and hoped to give his commander the luxuries of time and space to consider all viable options, even a withdrawal southward. Within half an hour of setting out, Confederate skirmishers opened fire against Meade and Slocum's columns along the Orange Turnpike, then Jackson ordered the bulk of his forces to fall upon the divided union columns. Meade's men continued unimpeded along the river road eventually had their goal of Banks Forde in sight, but Jackson's audacious confrontation in

his army's centre gave Hooker reason to pause as he had not planned for a confrontation with the enemy on Day 5, which caught him off guard.

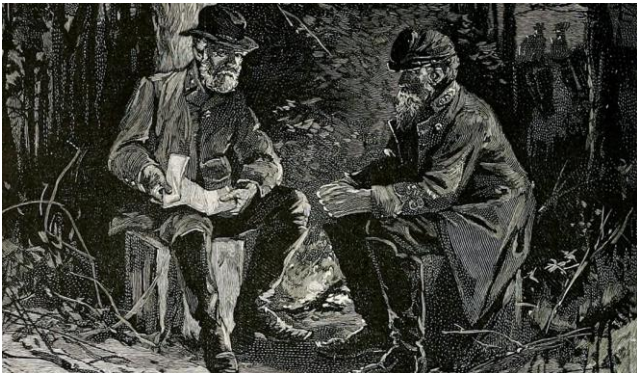
Fearing his divided command would be defeated in detail, Hooker ordered all his Corp commanders, even Meade, who had achieved his objectives and was in a position to strike at Jackson's flank, to counter march back to their original positions, this order left Meade and his subordinates both baffled and enraged. Lee had responded aggressively and boldly confronted his Union foe. Surprised but not shaken, Hooker ordered his men to regroup near the Chancellor House and sent an order to Sedgwick to begin an all-out assault on Fredericksburg, he sent that order at 11:30 am, however due to issues with the telegraph, the order did not reach Sedgwick until 4:55 pm that afternoon. The time lapse of 5 and a half hours meant that Sedgwick never moved. By nightfall Hooker's columns were all gathered west of the Chancellor House. Fighting Joe admitted that he had been 'checked' but 'was not by any stretch of the imagination disheartened'. He had achieved his primary objectives with bulk of his men south of the river and they had succeeded in drawing Lee out of his defensive works near Fredericksburg. Late that night he planned day 6. He had the army of the Potomac assume a defensive posture wanting to let his outnumbered enemy come to him.

In the early hours of the next morning, Hooker sent orders by courier for his exposed right under Howard to be reinforced, yet the courier got lost in the dark foreboding wilderness and did not reach the station to telegraph the message until 5am, which meant that 16,000 reinforcements would spend the entire next day marching instead of digging defensive works around the exposed union right.



Jebadiah Hotchkiss

Oh... by cruel irony, at dusk on May 1, Lee and Jackson gathered around a fire on a fallen log in a little clearing in the woods and held a conference to discuss what to do. When Joe Hooker pulled back and assumed a defensive posture, he had surrendered the initiative to a man who needed no invitation to take it... Stuart provided Jackson and Lee with two critical pieces of information, firstly that Hooker's right 5 miles to the west under Howard was 'in air', meaning that it was overly stretched out and exposed. Secondly, a local resident had reported that there was a little seldom used path that could take the confederates around Union front to attack the vulnerable union right using the dense foliage of the wilderness as a cover. Jackson had his old friend and mapmaker Jedediah Hotchkiss interview the resident and sketch out a map on the back of a cracker box. Lee said, *"I want to turn that flank"* and that was all Jackson needed to hear.



Lee and Jackson discussing their plan of attack. (Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 1887 - archive.org).

Before dawn on 2 May, Lee and Jackson were once again seated by a fire, they discussed the preparations of the flank march. Lee asked of his Lieutenant *"Well General Jackson, what do you propose to do?"*, Jackson answered *"I propose to go right around there"*, using his finger to trace over the map Hotchkiss just sketched, Lee followed up with *"What do you propose to do it with?"*, Jackson answered *"with my whole command"*, Lee asked, *"what will you leave me here to hold the federal army with?"* without hesitation Jackson said *"the two divisions you have here..."* there was a long pause as Lee considered it with fire flickering across his face, and then he turned to Jackson and finally replied *"well... go ahead"*. That meant on 2 May, Lee would face 100,000 federals with less than 14,000 men or barely just over a division. After earlier dividing his army in the face of superior numbers he was about to do it again and was about to take an incredible gamble.

A little later that morning, the two met once more, at the start of the march, Lee stood

quietly by the roadside, both Jackson and Lee spoke quietly, no one knows what was said... but it would be the last time the two men would ever speak to one and other.

According to Hotchkiss's calculations, the trail was about 10-11 miles in length and made use of existing roads. On the morning of 2 May at around 7:00 am, Jackson's 28,000 men set off along the trail, carrying 103 guns, with 3500 cavalry from Stuart's division leading the escort. Dawn had been chilly, but by now, it was now a beautiful May day breezy and pleasant. The roads were soft and damp from the recent rains and there was no dust. Although Jackson's 'foot cavalry made good time, almost 1 mile every 25 minutes Jackson knew it would be a race for daylight.

At one point, the route took them over a stretch of high ground, where there was a gap in the trees, and they were spotted by union observers perched in treetops at Hazel Grove. The observers reported this to Union commander Daniel Sickles.

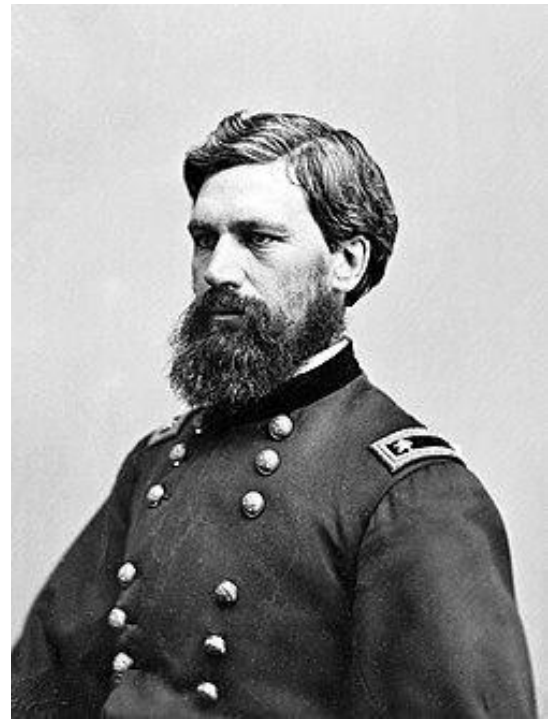
So... Sickles was a politician general and congressman, who once gunned down a prominent lawyer in broad daylight in Lafayette square Washington DC, which many of you will know, is literally outside the White House. Sickles believed the man was having an affair with his wife. Sickles was arrested and charged with murder, but he opted for interesting plea of 'temporary insanity', in that his wife's affair drove him insane, interestingly, the jury bought it and he was acquitted for this crime. Ironically the US public was more concerned with his forgiveness of his wife than by his cold-blooded murder.

Anyway, Sickles asked permission if he could advance and harass the moving Confederates, Hooker agreed, he moved out. Jackson had anticipated this and dispatched a regiment of Georgians to stop, Sickles's push. The Georgians did their job, they held the union long enough for the rest of Jackson's men to march on at the sacrificial cost of 3 dead and 208 captured. Taunted by their captors, one Georgian could stand it no longer and he barked out *"You'll catch hell before night"*, his comrades moved on to make that prediction a reality.

Onwards Jackson's men marched probing for the exposed union flank command under Howard. With Jackson's column spotted, although its intent unknown, Howard was warned about the movements and he personally assured Hooker that he was 'taking measures', this however, was pure fantasy, he did little if anything, Howard privately dismissed these reports as the *"offspring of fears"*.



General Sickles



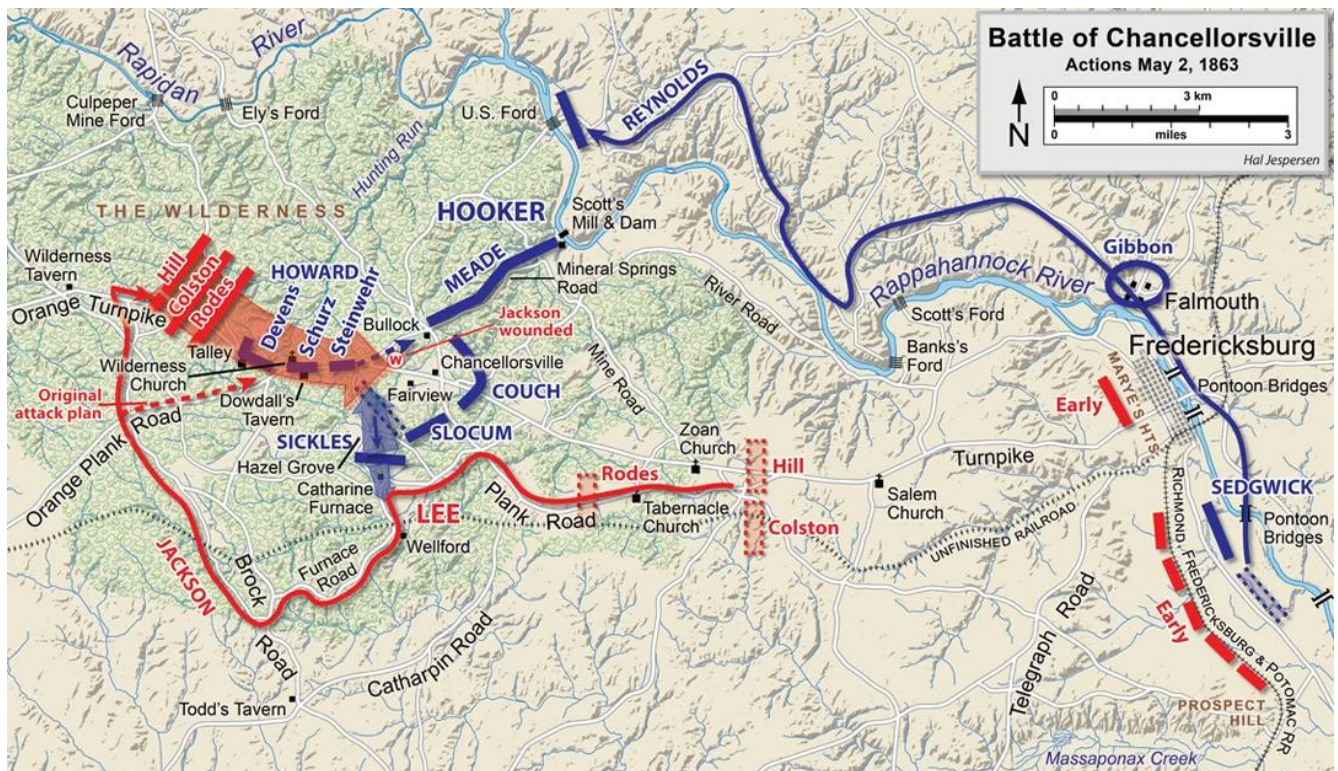
General O. O. Howard

While Jackson marched, Hooker sent a message to Sedgwick to attack if an opportunity presented itself, but decisiveness was not one of Sedgwick's strengths, he did little if anything, another issue that damned Hooker that day was that he had been informed by Sickles that Jackson's column had turned south, indeed it did for a while, before it turned back to the West.

That southward turn was enough to convince Sickles and then Hooker, that Lee was

This map by Hal Jespersen shows the flank attack on the 11th Corps. (CWMaps.com).

retreating. Add to the muddled picture, an earlier report that Jubal Early was leaving his lines at Fredericksburg and heading west, these reports sold to Hooker all the more that Robert E Lee and his army were retreating to the southwest. Believing these reports, Hooker at around 2:30 pm informed his command to be ready to pursue the next morning. With the flanking march, four times Jackson's men were seen and four times the reports reached Howard, the reports were dismissed, misconstrued or ignored and so Jackson's column pressed forward.



Around 3pm, Jackson and his men reached their destination, Historian Stephen Sears wrote that *“Jackson had studied and prayed for what lay before him, every professional soldier from cadet to commander dreams of bringing his troops to the line of departure against an unsuspecting enemy, with the battle and... perhaps the war in the balance”*

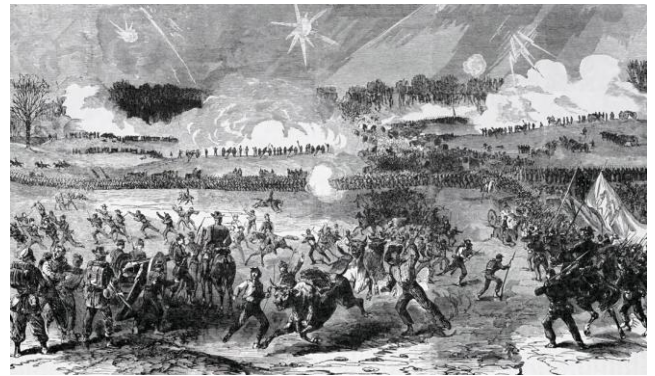
Jackson thoroughly prepared the assault, methodically aligning his troops for battle, as his Confederate juggernaut faced, the exposed flank and rear of the Army of the Potomac.

Finally, at around 5:15 PM, after the tedious process of organising 3 km of battleline's was completed, Jackson turned to his subordinate, and quietly said *“you may go forward, sir”*. At 5:45 PM on Saturday on 2 May, with the sun was low in the West, Howard's unsuspecting Union flank sat exposed, almost 2/3 of the corps were German immigrants, and very few had seen any combat before and for those who had, none had not been on the winning side. The officers showed no concern about the reports of Confederates in the vicinity, the men were cooking, playing cards and otherwise whiling away the time.... Then there was a sudden commotion as quail, frantic deer and rabbits started racing out of the woods to the west...

Then came a thunderclap from a clear blue sky... amusement morphed into sheer terror as they suddenly realised... Jackson's men were upon them... A scene in horror made worse by the blood curdling scream of the rebel yell. Union boys scrambled to grab their rifles and fall into line, but it didn't matter... Within minutes entire Union units were cut to pieces, as the thunderous confederates charged through the panicked union lines, *“like rushing waters from a burst dam”* according to Sears.

Some union men simply dropped their weapons and ran... others tried in vain to resist Jackson's onslaught, but were completely overran, as what was described as 'pandemonium' by a Massachusetts private consumed the Union army. Completely startled General Howard seized the union flag and tried rally his men, but to avail, over the next 1.5 hours Jackson's men drove Howard's Corp down the Orange Turnpike, the chaotic retreating union men crashed into Hooker's front and centre. Jackson's attack only slowed when darkness fell upon the battlefield.

Upon hearing Jackson's guns, Lee passed orders along his lines to *“press them heavily everywhere”*. Suddenly, Lee's men from the Union left began pressing the panicked union army and pushing forward.



Jackson's attack on the right flank of the Union Line.
Image Source: Harper's Pictorial History of the Great Rebellion (archive.org).

For Jackson it was his finest tactical hour, and he wanted more, he wanted his men to continue the attack into the night and cut off the union retreat at the Rappahannock Fords, and maybe, if he was lucky, force a mass surrender.



Jackson is shot by friendly fire (Library of Congress)

Under a full moon Jackson moved eastward to personally conduct reconnaissance, his party included about 12 men. As his party moved forward, they passed by a brigade of North Carolinians.

Unfortunately, the Carolinians had been received warnings all day about union cavalry operations probing their flanks... sadly for Jackson's party... in the twilight in the overgrown wilderness... they sounded a lot like cavalry, and so there was a shot, and that shot spawned more. A member of Jackson's staff, and brother-in-law, rode forward screaming, *“Stop! you are firing into your own men!”*. The Carolinian brigade commander John Barry, expecting trickery, retorted, *“Who gave that order?! Pour it into them boys!”*. The response, though rational and prudent, given the conditions, would haunt Barry for the rest of his days, indeed he died two years after the war ended from what his relatives described as a 'broken heart' believing he ordered the 'shot that cut down the South'.

One bullet hit Jackson in the back of his right hand, another struck his left forearm, a third splintered the bone in his upper left arm near his shoulder, with all the commotion a firefight began and Jackson was carried to the rear. When he reached his surgeon, Jackson said *"I am badly injured doctor, I fear I am dying"*. AP Hill was also injured, in the firefight, and so began a search for JEB Stuart as he was the most highly ranking general to take command. Finally found and informed, Stuart arrived on the scene at midnight and inherited a tactical situation that he knew almost nothing about. The wounded and delirious Jackson could only offer him the advice that 'he must do as he sees fit'.

Although the federals had been pushed back there was still much fighting to be done... First and foremost, for the Confederates... Lee's left and right flanks were dangerously divided by one and a quarter miles. The Battle of Chancellorsville was far from over.

On the Union side, Hooker realised that he was losing and contracted his lines ensure his armies safety. This meant that Sickles had to abandon one of the few high ground clearings at Hazel Grove, this decision proved costly as Confederate artillery immediately took the ground early in the morning and used it to shell directly into Union lines, including Hooker's headquarters at the Chancellor House.

Meanwhile, Lee, wanting to give *"the enemy no time to rally"* ordered a simultaneous assault on the Union from all fronts at first light. Foot soldiers from Lee's wing collided with the union at around 6am. Jackson's men now under command of JEB Stuart continued their assault on Union right. The fighting was as vicious as the ground they fought over, ground would be gained, lost, recaptured then lost again. The casualties on both sides were horrendous, one soldier wrote *"that bullets felt like raindrops in a summer shower"*. Even with the Confederate numbers and their strategic artillery placement on the high ground, Union lines were managing to hold against the Confederate assault... but... fate intervened.

One Confederate shell struck a column at the Chancellor House that Hooker happened to be leaning on. The column collapsed and struck Hooker from head to foot and for a period of time he was rendered helpless. Despite having a concussion, Hooker refused to relinquish command, and the sorely pressed Army of the Potomac was rendered paralysed for the next few hours. The fighting continued, but without any leadership, Union army could not work in cohesion and finally began to break.

By 10 am the federals were driven from every position south of the Orange Plank Road and

they began to frantically retreat. To make matters worse, during the retreat the Chancellor House caught fire, burning many of the Union wounded inside, the screams of agony demoralised the Army of the Potomac.

By about 11 am, after 5 hours of bloody fighting, the ground around Chancellor House was seized... Lee's army, which had split up a day before, was finally reunited. Lee then mounted upon that horse all of us here tonight know so well, and rode from Hazel Grove down Orange Plank Road towards the Chancellor house. This was the emotional highpoint of the battle, as the exhausted confederates became wildly triumphant, cheering their general over what they had all accomplished.

Charles Marshall, one of Lee's staff captured the essence of the moment when he wrote *"Lee's presence was the signal for one of those uncontrollable bursts of enthusiasm, which none can appreciate who has not witnessed them... The fierce soldiers, with their faces blackened with the smoke of battle, the wounded crawling with feeble limbs from the fury of the devouring flames, all seemed possessed with a common impulse. One long unbroken cheer rose high above the roar of battle and hailed the presence of a victorious chief... He sat in the full realization of all that soldiers dream of—triumph; and as I looked at him in the complete fruition of the success which his genius, courage, and confidence in his army had won, I thought that it must have been from some such scene that men in ancient days rose to the dignity of gods."*

Lee was acutely aware that he had been handed the golden opportunity he had long awaited... a fleeting yet critical chance to strike a decisive blow against the Union Army and, perhaps, win the war. Though, it was the greatest moment in his military life and would be the pinnacle of his career, it had come with a heavy price... Just five hours of fighting that morning had cost his divisions between 20-29% of their men... never had the Army of Northern Virginia lost so many in battle in such a short a time.

The Confederate jubilation, however, was short lived, as Hooker had one card left to play. Sedgwick at Fredericksburg managed to accomplish what no Federal could do on 13 December 1862, at the same time as Lee successfully drove the Union forces from Chancellorsville, Sedgwick and his 27,000 men stormed across the river and overran the two Confederate regiments guarding Maryes Heights that morning.

Lee, who at noon was organising another attack on Hooker's retreating army, watched as a frantic courier raced up to him with the news

that 'Fredericksburg had fallen', the road to Chancellorsville was open and the enemy would soon be on his rear.

Sedgewick wasted no time and started pushing westward, but was still 8 miles from Chancellorsville... this gave Lee time. Lee again divided his forces and organised roughly 10,000 men to confront Sedgewick.

Sedgewick only expected a minor skirmish in his westward push, instead he got a full pitched battle at Salem Church. The battle inflicted over 1,600 additional casualties on the union, and this successfully repulsed Sedgewick.

Sedgewick was unsure whether to retreat to Fredericksburg or link up with Hooker's forces, with Hooker out of commission, Sedgewick just paused.

At days end, May 3 became the second bloodiest day of the civil war, 21,357 casualties, second only to Antietam, in the evening Hooker decided to remain on the defensive and that is exactly how Lee wanted him so he could finish off Sedgewick's isolated command. Furthermore, word at spread that Longstreet's reinforcements had arrived from the South, although Hooker's Bureau of Military Intelligence doubted it, Hooker was paranoid by this point.

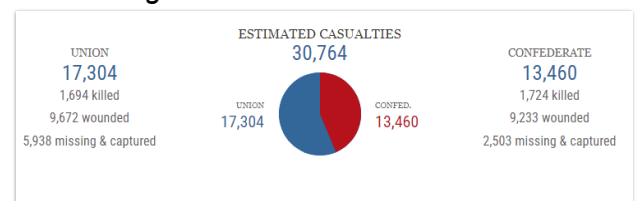
The next day on 4 May, Jubal Early retook Maryes Heights, which prevented Sedgewick from returning to Fredericksburg and Early wanted to attack Sedgewick, at this point, the isolated union command found themselves hemmed in on three fronts, the federals fought for their very lives, and they managed to hold their lines on all fronts. Sedgewick was unsure whether to stay and hold or fall back. Meanwhile, Hooker for his part wanted to go on the offensive on May 5, and planned to cross the US Forde and link up with Sedgewick and strike, to do that Sedgewick needed to hold against the roughly 23,000 confederates facing him. With Lee's attention squarely on Sedgewick, JEB Stuart had only 21,000 men facing Hooker's main force.

Lee was so set on nailing and destroying the isolated federal force that for the first time in his civil career, he wanted for a night attack, but it was ineffective and poorly coordinated, due to both the exhaustion of his men and a significant lack of cooperation between the confederate divisional commanders. By this point with Jackson out of commission and Longstreet away, Lee simply lacked any corps commanders to exploit the golden opportunities before him. He could feel that fleeting moment I described earlier—the chance to deliver a decisive blow—slipping through his fingers, much to his frustration and anger.

Although, Sedgewick had now inflicted more casualties than he had suffered the day before and his lines were holding against the uncoordinated rebel assault... in his mind, he was whipped and communicated such to Hooker.

The message received Hooker at 1 am on 5 May, that Sedgewick was hemmed in and recommended withdrawal. Hooker was stunned, extremely disappointed he returned a message to withdraw north across the river and then a few minutes later another message arrived which read *"I shall hold my position as ordered on the South Bank of the Rappahannock"*. Hooker immediately rescinded his first order to withdraw, but once again... bad luck faced his communications. Hooker's order to withdraw reached Sedgewick at 2 am, but then his order to stay did not reach Sedgewick until 3:20am, by that time Sedgewick's men were crossing the Forde.

Down at the river near Fredericksburg, a conversation between two soldiers epitomised the overall situation. One in blue asked a Confederate picket what time it was, the southerner replied, *"it's time youse Yankees was leaving"*.



On the evening of May 5, Hooker called a council of war with his subordinates to determine what to do, despite a majority wanting to stay and fight, Fighting Joe Hooker ordered all his forces to withdraw. By May 6, the Army of the Potomac was back in its old camps near Fredericksburg, it seemed nothing had changed, but unlike after Fredericksburg there was no demoralisation, no wholesale desertions, some actually thought this was just another one of Hooker's manoeuvrings, the common thread it was one of puzzlement and confusion. Adding to that was Hookers congratulatory address to his troops, when Lincoln learned of the retreat he repeated *"oh what will the country say, oh what will the country say"*. In fact, the country said little, by this point, the public had low expectations of the Army of the Potomac.

The problem was within the officer corps, who had evidently lost faith in Joe Hooker. On 7 May, the President arrived at the Union camp to visit, there was the usual reviews and unfortunately for the Army of the Potomac, the usual politicking took place as some of Hooker's subordinates cornered the president to voice their concern about their commander,

some suggested George Meade as a replacement but Meade wanted nothing to do with it. When Lincoln left the camp, he wondered if Hooker's command had been jeopardised.

Conventional history has often painted Hooker as oaf like, John Pope or incompetent like McDowell. However, these negative portrayals of Joseph Hooker are unfair, his plans were solid, his administration sound and he had near perfect intelligence of his enemy.

Hooker made his share of mistakes in the campaign, from having an overly defensive posture, giving up Hazel Grove on May 3, waiting a day too long to take the offensive, yet none of those mistakes cost him the Battle of Chancellorsville alone. His chief engineer, I think summed it up perfectly as *"our great weakness in my opinion is the incompetency of many of our corps commanders"*. Although I never think much of leaders who blame their subordinates, in this case, it was fair, out of his 8 corps commanders four completely failed him. Stoneman returned from his 'so-called raid', which if you remember had orders to 'fight, fight, fight', well all they could show for their raid was 200 captured confederate stragglers.... there was no significant damage to rebel railroads or infrastructure. It had been an effectual 20 mile leisurely gallop around the lines. Hooker dismissed Stoneman from command weeks later.

Another who bungled the battle was Howard, who ignored all of his warnings of Jackson's flank attack... Howard's Corp understandably took the blame for the disaster on May 2. Throughout German communities across the North support for the war was never the same after Chancellorsville.

Another commander who failed Hooker, was Sickles who incorrectly surmised that Jackson's column was retreating on 2 May.

Finally, there was John Sedgewick, whose inability to independently command at Fredericksburg and lack of common sense meant that the union missed multiple opportunities to exploit Lee's divided forces. For Hooker, not only had four commanders failed him, but he also just had bad luck, three untimely communication errors, to the shot that had incapacitated him on May 3. His campaign had started with great expectations, now with over 17,000 casualties his army was back where it started with officers who had deep concerns about his leader.

To Lincoln's question about *"what next?"*, Hooker wanted to 'wait until the short termers were gone', the comment reinforced Lincoln's belief that Hooker was compromised. According to Hooker's own account of the battle years, he

wrote *"To tell the truth, I just lost confidence in Joe Hooker"*

For the victorious Robert E Lee, the southern press, public and history itself held the victory as his greatest, outnumbered, out gunned and at the outset out manoeuvred, Lee overcame all... and quite honestly, he out-Generaled Joseph Hooker. The combination of bold strategy and even bolder tactics employed by the Confederate leaders at Chancellorsville turned an apparently impossible situation with limited tactical options, into a remarkable triumph... In one fell swoop, the momentum of the entire war swung to the Confederacy, the entire world was now focused on the events in the narrow corridor that was the Eastern Theatre of the war.

Yet... more than after Fredericksburg, Lee was depressed, he had won a great victory yet had failed to capitalise on his success. Yes, he literally resupplied his army from captured union goods, 13 cannon, 19,500 rifles, mountains of ammunition and food, materials, but at what cost... The Army of Northern Virginia had suffered 13,400 casualties or 23% of his infantry, along with many senior officers not least of all, Stonewall Jackson.

On 5 May, Jackson was taken to Guinea Station, who seemed to be recovering well, but in the early hours of 7 May took a turn for the worse, he woke up with a sharp pain in his side and the doctors realised that pneumonia had set in. The disease made rapid inroads on the general's weakened system, and doctors began to hint that he might not recover.

Lee learnt that his lieutenant would not survive Sunday May 10. After attending a service that morning, Lee sought out the reverend heading to Jackson's bedside, and Lee told him *"when a suitable occasion occurs, tell him that I prayed for him last night as I had never prayed for myself."* Overcome by emotion at the impending loss of his old friend, Lee turned away.

The message did reach an ailing Jackson who said, *"General Lee is very kind, but he should give that praise to God"*. The grim news was spreading through the ranks. As surmised by Stephen Sears *"the loss of mighty Stonewall would transform the glorious name of Chancellorsville into the blackest of blots."*

It would seem as if the whole Confederacy was riveted on the scene unfolding in that tiny bedroom in Guinea Station with the ticking clock on the mantle. The same one that if you ever visit... ticks until this very day...

Despite, all the Southern prayers at 3:15 pm that Sunday afternoon Jackson spoke his final words to his wife quietly from his bed *"Let us cross over the river, and rest under the shade*



of the trees". Then, as he so often had done during the year just past... Stonewall Jackson led the way. Chancellorsville had been he and Lee's finest hour, but now he was gone, trauma worthy of Shakespeare.

Well aware, that he had to continue to hold the strategic initiative, Robert E Lee planned a new invasion of the North, hoping it would be the last campaign of the war and finally win the bid for Southern independence, he would make it with many and new levels of command, and without... the man who teamed to give him his greatest victory. One month later, the Army of Northern Virginia would splash across the Rapidan River and march North, driven by fate to a small little town in Southern Central Pennsylvania... *Gettysburg*...



Dear Honest Abe,

I would be interested to know your thoughts on the outcome of the Battle of Chancellorsville.

Yours sincerely,

Herman

New members We are delighted to welcome new members to our Round Table.

Dear Herman,

My reflections on Chancellorsville take me to a dark place indeed!

A newspaper reporter named Noah Brooks, had a recollection that he first published in 1878, that I had said "What will the Country say? Oh, what will the Country say?" upon hearing the news of the disastrous outcome of the battle.

Frankly, I don't recall whether I said that or not, but I may well have, because that was exactly how I felt!

Well, what can I say? I had mixed feelings when I appointed Joe Hooker to command the Army of the Potomac to replace General Burnside's, but we all had great hopes of a fine victory once he'd got his army across the Rappahannock. His forces greatly outnumbered the enemy's. How could this terrible defeat happen?

As soon as I heard of the defeat, I arranged to travel to Falmouth with Commander in Chief General Halleck, and we met with Hooker at his headquarters to discuss the current situation. I was at least relieved to learn that the troops still had reasonable morale.

Nevertheless, there was considerable disgruntlement among other generals about Hooker's performance. Major General Darius Couch, who was Hooker's second in command, told General Halleck at some point that there was "much dissatisfaction among the higher officers at Hooker's incomprehensible bad management."

I had a meeting with General Reynolds who visited me at the White House to say that he had heard rumours that he was possibly being considered as a replacement for Hooker, and that he emphatically did not want the job, and recommended that General Meade should replace Hooker. I had not yet decided that I should replace Hooker, and I told Reynolds "I am not disposed to throw away a gun because it missed fire once."

However, not too long afterwards, Hooker got into a dispute with Army headquarters over the status of defensive forces in Harpers Ferry – he wanted more troops, as a result of which he impulsively offered his resignation in protest. This was quickly accepted by me and General Halleck, and Meade was appointed to replace Hooker on 28 June 1863 – just three days before the Battle of Gettysburg.

I will finish this reflection with a poem written at the time of the Chancellorsville defeat, by a prominent Philadelphia poet named George Boker, which captures how many of us felt at the time to have our high hopes dashed so completely!

Hope Defeated at Chancellorsville

By George H. Boker

May hope be slain that we might cheer it,
When that it is vanquished by the gloom,
For though we've seen it on the field,
We've also seen it in its tomb.

The first day of May, victory's dawn,
At Chancellorsville a bright star shone.
For Hooker's grand design had brought the
foe,
Into the trap that we alone had sown.

But alas,
The grand manoeuvre turned the other way,
Lee's forces proved the greater.
And our troops did not advance, but retreated
in array.

The hope that flew, a proud winged bird,
Is now a ghost upon the field,
A mournful tale in every heard,
And all our future's hopes are sealed.

Yours truly,

Abe

Call for short talks

Our short ten-minute presentations on a particular battle or person have been a great success in revealing the depth of talent within our group.

Remember that we are a group of friends and a friendly audience. I know there are several amongst us who have not yet broken cover but who would be interesting and insightful presenters.

Please do not hesitate to volunteer to myself or John Morrison on a topic of your choice, be it short or long.

Ian McIntyre