

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON MEADE'S ACTIONS FOLLOWING THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

Terrence L. Salada and John D. Wedo

Pursuit and destruction of a defeated army is an often unfulfilled wish of both generals and history. Accounts of battles sometimes offer a postscript similar to this: "But General (or Admiral) So-and-So did not pursue and destroy the enemy thereby losing an opportunity to end the war then and there." In many cases, the battles are tremendous victories, such as Borodino in the Napoleonic wars, Shiloh in the American Civil War (referred to hereafter as simply the Civil War), and Midway and El Alamein in World War II (WW2). This is particularly true for the Battle of Gettysburg in the Civil War and the Union commander, Major General George Meade. For almost no other battle is the criticism of no quick pursuit and destruction more injurious to the reputation of the victorious commander.

This paper first presents a summary of the arguments pro and con for a pursuit after Gettysburg. It then presents the core of the paper, a meta-analysis of five decisive victories without pursuit and the conditions leading to those decisions. These battles span roughly 130 years, occur on land and sea, and include three wars. The objective is to present Meade's decision in a historical context both *in situ* (discussing only that battle) and in comparison with other such decisions. The goal is to ascertain whether historiography has been more critical of Meade than others. The hope is that examination

of the actions of other commanders of great victories will open the door for a different interpretation of Meade's actions.

However, some disclaimers are warranted. None of the points presented herein intends to suggest that any side in that conflict was superior to the other: both North and South were part of the American culture. This paper never questions the incredible and inexhaustible courage and fortitude of the common soldier who suffered, regardless of how their generals chose to fight battles: whether victors or losers, men died.

Finally, this paper correlates actions and persons to those in other conflicts, a technique uncommon in Civil War historiography with the notable exceptions of the works of Fletcher Pratt and John Keegan. However, using such an approach can often help cast new light on relevant topics and serve to explain them better than in isolation. Although many students think that our civil war was fought in a historical vacuum and is unique among world conflicts with *absolutely* no comparison to others, the similarities are there if one is willing to both look for them and accept what they reveal.

MEADE'S DECISION AND ITS HISTORICAL EVALUATIONS

The Gettysburg campaign ran from June 3, 1863, to July 14, 1863, and is considered one of the most controversial of the war. The actual battle occurred from July 1 through July 3 and culminated in the Confederate disaster of Pickett's Charge. The battle's details are well known and need not be recounted here. What is important are the results of the battle. This is true for Gettysburg and for all the battles presented herein. In addition, because numbers about the same battle vary from source to source, all numbers presented in this paper are approximate. As will be seen, exact numbers are not

as important as the actions taken by the winning commanders, which is the focus of the paper.

Approximate numbers for the size of the armies on July 1 are 85,000 for the Army of the Potomac (AOP) and 75,000 for the Army of Northern Virginia (ANV). Casualties for both armies are estimated to be 23,000 for the AOP (27%) and 28,000 for the ANV (38%). (Casualties in this treatment include killed, wounded, and missing.) General Robert E. Lee, ANV commander, knew that his army had lost its offensive punch, but it was still a formidable force. Each of Lee's three corps had its standing commander, although many generals and colonels had been killed or wounded, especially in Pickett's division and part of Heth's division. Most of his artillery was ready for duty although possessing ammunition for only one day's fight. And for the first time since the battle began, all of his cavalry was present, but worn. Although beaten, the common soldiers still had faith in their commander and the determination to fight on. Lee's army prepared for defense all day on July 4 hoping that the Federals would attack. All in all, the ANV was not ready for plucking as some think, but was strong enough to punish severely any careless move made against it.¹

The AOP, with 27 percent casualties, was not as numerically damaged as the ANV, but it had also suffered greatly. The I, II, III, and XI Corps had extensive casualties, but the V, VI, and XII Corps were in better shape. Because of General Winfield Hancock's decision on July 1 to send back all supply trains to clear the roads for infantry and artillery to move quickly to Gettysburg, the army was short on food.² Meade's army had been deployed for defense for three days, which had served it well. Because Meade had shifted units all over the battlefield to effect that winning defense,

the army was scattered. Not all brigades were with their original corps nor could the army be quickly re-deployed for attack.³ In particular, the big VI Corps was in reserve and not assembled for any action whatsoever.⁴ In fact, one of its divisions was south and behind Big Round Top defending the left flank of the AOP. Thousands of soldiers were simply separated from their units: they would eventually return to their units, but at that moment, they were unavailable.⁵

Meade needed reinforcements, but these, numbering around 20,000, were mostly state and emergency militia regiments from Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Comprising volunteers who were largely aged, untrained, inexperienced, or soft, their effectiveness against the ANV was questionable and Meade was disinclined to use them because of their unreliability.⁶

More important, Meade did not know whether or not Lee would attack again. Thus Meade did not consider attacking immediately after Pickett's Charge. Meade too had lost many generals and colonels, but he had also lost three of his seven corps commanders: John Reynolds, Hancock, and Daniel Sickles. The loss of Reynolds and Hancock particularly distressed Meade: they were outstanding commanders and he thought them irreplaceable.⁷ Perhaps the best reason for not attacking the ANV was the stark visual before him: Confederate dead and wounded from two days of attacking the Federal lines lying on the field between the armies. Meade was no fool and would not give the Confederates the satisfaction of inflicting the same injury to the AOP.⁸ Meade had been through a lot in his first week in command, and the sight before him must have been unsettling.

The armies did move. For the ANV, the goal was to cross the Potomac River near Williamsport, Maryland, as quickly as possible. Because of its route of entry, the ANV controlled the major mountain passes at Cashtown and, after defeating Federal cavalry on July 3, Fairfield. The army retired westward on July 4 via those two routes: Cashtown Road for the wounded and the Fairfield Road for the infantry and artillery. It arrived near Williamsport by the 8th and had formidable fortifications constructed by the 12th. By July 14, the army had crossed the Potomac at that place and at Falling Waters, West Virginia.⁹

Meanwhile at Gettysburg, General Meade, having decided to not attack the Confederates across the field between the two armies, would not and could not move until he knew for certain Lee's intent. Doing so would expose Baltimore and Washington, D.C., to possible moves by the ANV and violate his primary mission. The ANV held its positions on Seminary Ridge as the wounded were evacuated to Cashtown on July 4, and was gone by the 5th. Meade then ordered reconnaissance to verify Lee's departure. Confirming this, he started to pursue on July 6 via Frederick and Middletown, both in Maryland. Moving to this area would keep his army between Lee and Washington, conforming to one of his original objectives, and allow him access to supplies stored in Frederick.¹⁰ A series of cavalry skirmishes ensued as Federal cavalry tried to locate elements of the ANV and by the 12th reached Lee's defenses near the Potomac. After studying the Confederate works there, Meade and his generals deemed them too strong to attack without heavy loss. No attack followed and this allowed Lee's escape on July 14.¹¹

In summary, the components of Meade's decision can be divided into three major areas: Conditions of Battle (defense, size of army, casualties), Conditions of Force (disorganization, logistics, repair), and Post-Battle Concerns (enemy intent, objective, preserve force). These are expanded and their use explained in the next section. After the Gettysburg campaign, the war continued for another 22 months, its end commencing in April 1865 with the surrender of the ANV at Appomattox, Virginia.

Criticism of Meade for Lee's escape began almost immediately. President Abraham Lincoln was severely disappointed at Lee's escape and reacted strongly and negatively to Meade's *pro forma* exhortation to his army to "drive from our soil every vestige of the presence of the invader."¹² Rightly or wrongly, Lincoln thus formed an unfavorable impression of Meade, considering him a hesitant commander in a long line of hesitant commanders, all of whom lacked the killer instinct he thought necessary to win the war. Hearing similar disgruntled opinions from General-in-Chief Henry Halleck, the frustrated Meade requested to be relieved of command as his best was not fulfilling their expectations. In a letter Lincoln wrote on July 14 but did not send to Meade, his disappointment is clear:

Again, my dear general, I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape. He was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes, have ended the war. As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely. If you could not safely attack Lee last Monday, how can you possibly do so South of the river, when you can take with you very few more than two thirds of the force you then had in hand? It would be unreasonable to expect, and I do not expect you can now effect much. Your golden opportunity is gone, and I am distressed immeasurably because of it.¹³

On July 28 Halleck sent Meade an unofficial letter to explain his and Lincoln's reactions after the battle. After praising his handling of the army, he continues:

You should not have been surprised or vexed at the President's disappointment at the escape of Lee's army. He had examined into all the details of sending you reinforcements to satisfy himself that every man who could possibly be spared from other places had been sent to your army. He thought that Lee's defeat was so certain that he felt no little impatience at his unexpected escape. I have no doubt, General, that you felt the disappointment as keenly as anyone else. Such things sometimes occur to us without any fault of our own. Take it all together, your short campaign has proved your superior generalship, and you merit, as you will receive, the confidence of the Government and the gratitude of the country. I need not assure you, General, that I have lost none of the confidence which I felt in you when I recommended you for the command.¹⁴

Certainly Lincoln had every right to be disappointed because of the frustrating collective failure of Meade's predecessors to destroy Lee's army, but neither he nor Halleck was near the battlefield and had no personal knowledge of the army's condition. Around July 4, Lincoln was recorded as saying, "Meade would pursue Lee instantly but he has to stop to get food for his men!"¹⁵

Historical evaluations of General Meade vary, to wit:

Fletcher Pratt:

Meade arrived at one in the morning, hollow-eyed and bad-tempered.¹⁶

[General Joseph] Hooker had been trying to manage the complicated attacking maneuver; Meade was not only a better soldier, he also had a simpler problem; he could not help putting in all his men. Lee attacked him at every point in succession; all he had to do was keep a clear head and stand his ground...The Army of the Potomac had developed to such an extent it no longer needed brains; it needed only someone to see that it did not fall over its own feet, which Meade was quite capable of doing.¹⁷

Bruce Catton:

Meade somehow had been persuaded that the Rebel army in this campaign was larger than his own. So he waited where he was, ignoring the clear signs that he was in the presence of a badly beaten enemy, and he moved his patrols forward very carefully. It is true that Meade might have won more decisively by taking the offensive.¹⁸

Meade was on the road with his troops...feeling responsibility as a paralyzing weight. He had been one of the few men who could have lost the war irretrievably in one day, and he had managed to avoid the mistakes that would have lost it. He would continue to avoid mistakes, even if he had to miss opportunity.¹⁹

Glenn Tucker:

It is true that Meade might have won more decisively by taking the offensive. He wisely decided, at an hour when defeat would have meant disaster to the Federal cause, that a victory in hand, even though it did not destroy his adversary, was preferable to risking his own badly battered army further...

Probably the preservation of the union depended a great deal at this hour on Meade's conservatism. He had the sense to recognize that after three days of fighting, he possessed, not striking power, but position.²⁰

James McPherson:

Meade's lack of aggressiveness was caused by his respect for the enemy. He could scarcely believe that he had beaten the victors of Chancellorsville. Meade also explained later that he had not wanted to follow "the bad example [Lee] had set me, in ruining himself attacking a strong position. "We have done well enough."²¹

Stephen Sears:

Meade appeared stunned by the magnitude of what had been accomplished by his army, but personally relieved (and satisfied) that he himself had risen to the occasion.

He was by nature careful and conservative, and from the start he thought defensively...Defense, he believed, was the best posture for this recently twice-beaten army—and certainly the best posture for its new and untried commander.²²

John Keegan:

Gettysburg had been a landmark, if not exactly a decisive battle.²³

From these, one might scarcely infer that George Meade had won one of the greatest victories in American military history. Although all of these assessments recognize Meade's good sense in fighting a defensive battle (Lee offered him little choice,

but Meade did not overthink the solution either), none offers a glowing assessment of George Meade's generalship. Even though he had pursued Lee through Maryland and into Pennsylvania after taking command from the ambitious Hooker and won a great battle against Lee within his first week of command, there is still something missing in their assessments. Understand that Meade's "sin" here is twofold: he failed to attack immediately after Pickett's Charge, *and* he should have pursued more quickly. Although Meade had many critics after the battle, curiously, none of them have offered how or where he should have attacked.²⁴

This criticism does not appear to distinguish between a victory and a defeat or even on a decision such as one that resulted in heavy, pointless loss of life as at Cold Harbor one year later. Instead, it splits hairs on the difference between a great victory and a "little more great" victory, a distinction apparently important to vacuous historiography. It becomes a big asterisk on the record of the battle, but is it too big? Is Meade's record here that bad or are critics splitting hairs?

THE ANALYSIS APPROACH

The normal approach to critique a commander's actions is to discuss them *in situ*, that is, in context of the campaign or battle in question, as shown in the previous example. This paper provides an alternate, comparative approach, which has four steps:

1. Catalog the characteristics of the battle in question, Gettysburg, from standard works.

2. Identify other battles in history where the victor did not pursue. These battles should span different ages and types of warfare, different centuries, land and sea, and so forth.

3. Discuss each battle briefly, but concentrate on the aftermath of the battle, including casualties, the condition of the armies, and the mindset of the commanders as much as can be determined from standard works.

4. Catalog the characteristics of those battles and contrast them to those of Meade's actions at Gettysburg. Use these characteristics and those from Step 1 to contrast the historical opinions of the commanders of those battles with those for Meade.

Eleven characteristics of Meade's case at Gettysburg are listed below, as determined from standard works and summarized in the previous summary of the battle, which the reader can check. They are separated into four groups based on similarities, such as those dealing with the condition of the force. These are listed and contrasted with those of other battles in Table 1 of the Discussion section.

Conditions of Battle

1. Battle posture = Defense
2. Outnumber opponent
3. Large casualties
4. Fewer casualties than opponent

Condition of Force

5. Force disorganized
6. Reinforcements needed
7. Resupply of food, ammunition, etc.

8. Repair of equipment

Post-Battle Concerns

9. Unsure of enemy's intent

10. Primary objective as opposed to pursuit

11. Preserve force

Two “missing” characteristics require explanation. The first missing characteristic is length of command, specifically whether the commander was new to command. The utility of this seemingly obvious parameter disintegrates upon close examination. For instance, Lee commanded the ANV for about six months prior to Fredericksburg; however, his first week of command included the Seven Days Battles outside of Richmond, Virginia in which the Confederates succeeded in pushing the Federals away from their capital. Like Lee, Meade's first week of command occurred during the Gettysburg campaign. General Ulysses Grant had been in command only a few weeks by the time of Shiloh, but Napoleon had experience on numerous campaigns by the time of Borodino. In essence, “new to command” is difficult to quantify: one month, six months, one year? Because of this difficulty, it is excluded as a quantifiable characteristic; however, length of command does have limited utility as a curiosity in contrasting commanders between two specific battles, as appears in the Discussion section below.

The second “missing” characteristic is the remaining duration of the campaign or the war. At first this seems an obvious indicator of the consequence of making an “incorrect” decision to not pursue; indeed, it is often included as an indicator of the sin of non-pursuit. This is another parameter not as useful as one might initially think. For

instance, Grant did not pursue after Shiloh and the Civil War lasted another three years, whereas Meade did not pursue and it lasted another 22 months. Admiral Raymond Spruance did not pursue after the Battle of Midway in June 1942 and WW2 lasted another 40 months. Besides, both the Civil War and WW2 were large enough that one battle in one theater might not be enough to be the deciding factor. The Civil War had independent campaigns in the West and East; the Pacific theater was one of many operational theaters in that war and Allied leaders decided that Europe was to be won first.

Therefore, one is tempted to ask, “So what?” The remaining duration is problematic for three reasons. First, it assumes and implies that a pursuit and further battle with the enemy would have *definitely* shortened the war, and this is something no one can say. Second, as stated above, it ignores the geographic extent of the war and other theaters: this is especially for 20th Century wars. And this leads to the third problem with this characteristic, that it enters the shady world of speculation that hindsight provides. No proper analysis presented herein should enter that arena.

With the analysis approach thus defined, the way is now open to present and review other non-pursuit battles for contrast with Meade's actions at Gettysburg.

NON-PURSUIT CASE 1: THE BATTLE OF BORODINO, 1812

The French invasion of Russia began in June 1812. Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's Grande Armée started with 680,000 soldiers against total Russian forces of 480,000 led by General Mikhail Kutuzov. By September, Napoleon's forces numbered 130,000-140,000 men and Kutuzov's 120,000-130,000. Kutuzov decided it better to

fight a defensive battle against Napoleon, and his forces dug in. Their mission was to prevent the French army from entering Moscow, Russia's capital. It is the last major battle before Napoleon entered Moscow, Russia's capital.

In the battle, which occurred on Sep 7 in a field approximately 80 miles west of Moscow, Napoleon suffered up to 30,000 casualties and the Russians, up to 45,000-50,000. Computing casualty percentages with the maximum complement for each army produces 22 percent for the French and 34 percent for the Russians. Casualties would not exceed this until the first day of the Battle of the Somme in World War I (WW1) in 1916.²⁵

At battle's end, French artillery fired at the Russian lines to keep them from trying to take their original positions. This fire went on for several hours; finally, the Russians stopped trying to retake their lines and started their retreat. One of Napoleon's corps commanders, Marshal Michel Ney, is reported to have asked the Emperor for permission to advance to seal the victory. Napoleon refused the request, stating that he wished to take no chances.²⁶ Both French and Russian soldiers believed that the Russians would attack the following day.²⁷ The Russians retired in good order during the evening, and the French, exhausted, made camp for the night.²⁸ Opinions of Napoleon's inaction follow.

Christopher Duffy (*italics in original text*):

Kutuzov's inactivity is closely paralleled by the somnolence of Napoleon himself. Significantly the Emperor's most important decisions were largely negative ones—*not* to carry out [Corps Commander Louis-Nicolas] Davout's project of the night march around the Russian position, *not* to throw in the Imperial Guard when the Russian centre appeared to have been broken.²⁹

Will and Ariel Durant:

When night fell, the Russians slowly gave ground; the French remained masters of the field, but Napoleon reckoned victory far from certain...The French had lost 30,000 men killed or disabled, the Russians 50,000.³⁰

At 22 percent, French losses were heavy, but they did not feel defeated. Reinforcements were *en route* from Paris, and officer losses were made up by a system of promotion already in place.³¹ Russian losses, at 34 percent, were larger and they were in no condition to give battle, but they did not feel defeated. (The idea of “defeat” did not arise until after the French took Moscow.)³² Kutuzov was in a bind: his army needed weeks of rest and reinforcement and it was in no shape to defend Moscow, but he had to keep his army together long enough to rebuild.

In a stroke of genius, Kutuzov decided to retreat to Moscow as bait for Napoleon with every intention of abandoning Moscow to the French, distasteful as that might be. He deduced that capturing Moscow would be tempting for Napoleon and once he did so, he would not depart. Kutuzov said, “Napoleon is like a torrent which we are still too weak to stem. Moscow is the sponge which will suck him in.” He deduced correctly. The Russians fell back to Moscow and the French followed.³³ The French reached the edge of the capital on Sep 14, but the Russian army was not there.³⁴

The Russians had followed a scorched-earth policy in its retreat through Russia and had burned all supplies in the path of the French. The French arrived in Moscow expecting to find supplies, but instead found almost nothing. They remained in the capital until mid-October when they evacuated and retreated westward to France. Russian weather and army took its toll on the French: by the time they arrived in France in December, and less than 100,000 remained. The retreat from Moscow is one of the notable military disasters in history.

Despite this, Bonaparte is one of the most revered names in military history. His strategy and tactics have been analyzed by military writers ever since, two of the most notable being Antoine Jomini, who had previously served in the French army, and Carl von Clausewitz, who served in the Russian army during this campaign.³⁵ Indeed, Lieutenant Henry Halleck, who would become a general in the Civil War, translated Jomini's work into English in 1846.³⁶ Jomini's work and the Napoleonic tactics contained therein were familiar to all Civil War officers who attended West Point.

NON-PURSUIT CASE 2: THE BATTLE OF SHILOH, 1862

By late March 1862 Federal forces were bearing down on southwestern Tennessee. In early April, the Army of the Tennessee, General Grant commanding, had camped along the west bank of the Tennessee River at a place called Pittsburg Landing; The army numbered about 40,000 men. Nearby was a small church called Shiloh. They awaited the arrival of the 25,000 men of the Army of the Ohio, General Don Carlos Buell commanding, who were marching overland from Nashville and would be transported from the east bank via steam transports. Neither Union general was assigned to overall command and, according to General Henry Halleck, the two were supposed to "act in concert."³⁷ Opposing them were the 40,000 Confederate soldiers of General Albert Sydney Johnston's Army of the Mississippi. Johnston was at Corinth, Mississippi, and knew that his only chance for success was to attack and defeat Grant before the arrival of Buell's army.

On April 6, with Buell within a day of joining Grant, the Confederates attacked the Federals, whose perimeter was not fortified. The battle lasted two days resulting in

13,000 Federal casualties (20%) and 10,000 Confederate casualties (25%), one of whom was Johnston, who was killed on April 6 and replaced by General P.G.T. Beauregard. For the majority of both armies it was their first major battle and inexperience was manifest in the officers and soldiers of both sides. Both armies were exhausted. Skirmishing occurred on April 8, at which time Beauregard retired to Corinth.

Late in the day on April 7, Grant had ordered a small counterattack (two regiments) which proved to break the final Confederate resistance, but the attack was small, and that is all that occurred:

But the Confederates were leaving anyway, and after the most perfunctory of pursuits the Federals let them go with blessings on them. No one in Grant's army wanted to keep in touch with these foes any longer than the law required, Buell was not the man to crowd anybody, and Beauregard got his shattered army off on the muddy roads toward Corinth.

He should have been pressed, but Grant had nothing much with which to make an effective chase. His own army was disorganized and ready to drop in its tracks, and Buell's army was not precisely under Grant's full control.³⁸

Criticism of Grant was not immediate, but occurred shortly thereafter. Halleck arrived within a week to take command and sent Grant a note to prepare his army for another attack, but was not of sharp tone. Once various dispatches arrived at the newspapers, Grant was accused of all manner of sins from drunkenness to stark incompetence. Most narratives of the battle, although praising the victory and heroic resistance, degenerated to stories of bungling and retreat.³⁹ (It should be noted that Beauregard too was accused of throwing away a victory by not ordering a twilight attack on April 6.)⁴⁰ Halleck took up the "pursuit" of the Confederates, moving cautiously with "gelatinous majesty," moving short distances each day, entrenching each night, and taking about four weeks to cover the twenty miles to Corinth.⁴¹

Opinions of Grant at Shiloh vary to this day, and follow.

James Marshall-Cornwall:

And what of Grant's cavalry? We hear nothing about their employment before the battle, when they should have been sent forward to reconnoiter to the southwest, where the Confederate cavalry were patrolling actively...No mention is made of using cavalry to follow up the beaten enemy on the night of 7 April...

The Confederate troops had also been fighting desperately and lying in the mud and rain. A vigorous pursuit by the fresh troops of Lew Wallace and by Buell's comparatively fresh army would have turned the Confederate retreat into a disastrous rout. Buell, like Blücher at Waterloo, could have offered to carry out the pursuit, leaving Grant's exhausted divisions to rest and recuperate. But Buell was no Blücher.⁴²

John Keegan:

The Union troops were too exhausted to pursue the Southerners toward Corinth.⁴³

Grant had done more than fight. Though relatively junior and not involved in Washington's plans for the conduct of the war, he had inadvertently helped to shape its future course. No one on either side seems to have appreciated that the water lines in the Mississippi Valley formed an avenue of military advance into the Deep South.⁴⁴

Timothy B. Smith:

Yet had Grant sent his cavalry after the retreating Confederate army, it is likely that he would have reaped vast benefits. An older and more mature Grant of 1863 or 1864 would have done so, but this was the evolving Grant of 1862, and he let a splendid chance slip through his grasp. Indeed, the Federal cavalry could have done wonders at this point.⁴⁵

Shiloh is a good example of how easy it is to critique a battle with indiscriminate use of subjunctive mood: Confederate attacks *should* have been better coordinated and they *should* not have concentrated on reducing the Hornet's Nest rather than pursue fleeing Federals. And Grant *should* have been more judicious with entrenching and reconnaissance. *Had* Grant sent his cavalry in. Even Marshall-Cornwall states (italics added): "One can find little to criticize in Grant's handling of the battle *when it*

started."⁴⁶ But apparently before and after are a different story. Despite this and the simple fact of a Union victory, Shiloh is a convenient switch to use when one wants to spank Ulysses Grant.

NON-PURSUIT CASE 3: THE BATTLE OF FREDERICKSBURG, 1862

In December 1862, the goal of the AOP was still geographic, i.e., to capture the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, one hundred miles from Washington. General Ambrose Burnside, new commander of the AOP, devised a plan to outflank the ANV by moving his army of 120,000 men to Fredericksburg, crossing the Rappahannock River, and thence marching to Richmond. A delay of two weeks in the delivery of necessary pontoon boats for the crossing allowed General Lee time to move his army of 75,000 men to that place and entrench in the heights west and south of the town. By the time the Federals crossed the river from the north bank on December 11, the Confederates were firmly entrenched with abundant artillery sighted on the plain between the town and their line. Repeated Federal attacks on the thirteenth were a disaster, and the battle cost the Union 12,500 casualties, or 10 percent, to the Confederate 5,500, or 7 percent.

On December 14, thousands of Federal casualties lie on the ground between the town and the Confederate lines. The Federal army on the south side of the river in the town was open to attack, but no attack occurred. By the fifteenth, the AOP had recrossed the river and pulled up its bridges. One might think that Lee had an excellent opportunity to sweep down and destroy the Federal army. Why then was there no attack?

The chance was there, but Lee chose to not take it. Lee knew that his position was almost impregnable; indeed, the Federal debacle on the thirteenth proved that. But, although they were severely shot up, Federals in the town had entrenched and Lee could see the effect before him of attacking entrenched divisions across that field. In addition, General Henry Hunt's artillery lined Stafford Heights on the north side of the river, and it had fired extensively during the battle.⁴⁷ Although the Confederate lines were at the limit of the range of Hunt's artillery, a Confederate attacking force approaching the town from the heights would be well within accurate range of Federal cannon.⁴⁸ Lee had experienced the effect of Federal artillery in previous battles in 1862, notably Malvern Hill in July and Antietam in September so the memory of its effect was fresh.

General Thomas Jackson had formed for a counterattack on the thirteenth, but the artillery fire from across the river was so intense he feared slaughter if he attacked.⁴⁹ By the time he spoke to Lee that evening, any attempt at a counterattack would have been suicidal. According to Douglas Southall Freeman:

Before the final attack on Marye's Heights had been repulsed, any general counterattack would have been dangerous; after that time, it was impossible, even if Jackson's experience had not proved that the commanding Federal artillery would have swept the Southern lines precisely as the Confederate batteries had mowed down the Federals in their front. As far as is known, Lee did not consider such a thrust. No one who studies the ground can justly criticize him for failing to do so.⁵⁰

Jackson came during the morning [of the fifteenth] for a conference, but so far as is known there was no discussion of a counterstroke. How could there be one, when the Federal lines were now well fortified, and the superior artillery was still in position on the plain and across the river to blast the Confederate lines?⁵¹

Fredericksburg is a clear victory for the Confederates, and Lee seems to have accrued no demerits for failing to pursue the defeated Federals.

NON-PURSUIT CASE 4: THE EVACUATION FROM DUNKIRK, 1940

Germany invaded Belgium and France on May 10, 1940. The defenders outnumbered the Germans slightly in men, tanks and artillery, but German operational concepts, armored tactics, and numbers and usage of aircraft overwhelmed them. By May 21, German panzer units had cut across northern France and split the Allied Expeditionary Force with the bulk of the French army south of the German penetration and the British and French north in Belgium. The latter were caught between the Germans and the English Channel: their destruction seemed certain to the local German tactical commanders like General Heinz Guderian, one of the world's premier armored theorists and practitioners.

But the Germans stopped on May 23. When they moved toward the British four days later, effective delaying actions held them off long enough to allow the famous evacuation of over 330,000 British and French soldiers from the beaches at Dunkirk.⁵² How could this happen?

The order came from Army Group A commander, General (later Field Marshal) Gerd von Rundstedt and was backed by Adolf Hitler. Von Rundstedt feared that after two weeks of continuous operations, his panzer forces were dangerously overextended with exhausted men and deteriorating equipment, both from combat losses and mechanical breakdown. He thought it best for men and machines to rest while the infantry caught up.⁵³

Among other reasons offered for the halt was Hitler's worry that the gamble of moving panzers through the Ardennes Forest and northern France was too successful and his tanks, without supporting infantry and supplies, were in danger of flank attacks. Also,

his tanks had proved somewhat unreliable in the past and some units in France reported up to 50 percent mechanical breakdown: a pause would allow them to regroup for the final push. Hitler also feared that the Allies were not yet totally beaten and could recover and effectively attack the extended German panzer columns. Hitler succumbed to the pleas of General Hermann Goering, Commander of the Luftwaffe, that his planes could destroy the Allies instead of the panzers. Finally, Hitler was determined to show army commanders that *he* was the supreme military ruler as well as the political leader at home.⁵⁴

A few generals, however, were furious and did not think that their units needed rest, especially when doing so well, and that they could make one final push to entrap the Allies north of their line. Hitler ignored them. Guderian, commander of the XIX *Armeekorps*, was infuriated, as were his superiors General Walther von Brauchitsch and Field Marshal Franz Halder, but most did not protest. Army group commander Ewald von Kleist tried to ignore the order and advanced his tanks, but he was ordered to withdraw them.⁵⁵

With the tankers rested and the infantry moved up, the Germans started to drive toward Dunkirk on May 26. By then, the British had started planning the evacuation and, more important, British and French rear guard units had time to form an effective defense against German attacks. The evacuation began on May 27 and ended on June 4; it saved over 330,000 British and French soldiers from capture. For the entire campaign, the 3.0 million invading Germans suffered 155,000 casualties (5%).⁵⁶ The 3.3 million Allies suffered an estimated 350,000 casualties (11%). The figure for the Allies excludes hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war, mostly French.⁵⁷

The question remains, however, even if the tanks and tankers were worn out and the columns over extended, why were the infantry and supplies so far behind them as to cause Hitler worry? The answer lies in the readiness of the German army and its logistical transport.

A little known fact about the war is German unpreparedness at its start. A casual observer might think that the German army in 1940 was this magical, highly mechanized army, and much of the world thought this, but this is a myth. The German army was not as mechanized as its generals wanted; for instance, the French had more tanks. Although its ten panzer divisions had full or almost full complements of tanks, they were short of tracked, armored vehicles to keep pace with the tanks.⁵⁸ Infantry divisions were in worse shape. By 1939 only four of 90 infantry divisions were fully mechanized and the other 86 were supplied to different degrees. Most had only one quarter of the required trucks and cars needed for combat and 51 of the 86 were equipped largely with requisitioned civilian vehicles.⁵⁹ The situation had not improved much by May 1940; by contrast, the British Expeditionary Force was completely mechanized.⁶⁰

As a result, most transport in the German army used horses. The best of the ill-equipped infantry divisions required roughly 4,800 horses to supplement about 1,000 trucks and cars; in the worst-equipped, 6,000 horses were required. By 1939, those 86 under-equipped infantry divisions had a total of 445,000 horses. Unlike in the armored divisions, in the infantry the men walked (as they did throughout history) and artillery and supplies were moved by horses. A comparison with the previous war is illustrative: in the four year of WW1 (1914-1918) the German army possessed 1.4 million horses; in the six years of WW2 (1939-1945), it possessed 2.7 million.⁶¹ For all practical purposes,

the “mechanized” German army in 1940 was a WW1 army with better armored and air forces. Insufficient motor transport and the corresponding reliance on equine transport combined to prevent a quicker victory in France.

Although Field Marshal von Rundstedt commanded Army Group A and ordered the halt, the reputation under discussion is not totally his. (It is important to specify here that the reputation under discussion is only his *military* reputation, which is different from his reputation for any involvement in any war crimes and certainly not a topic of this paper. He was not tried at the Nuremberg trials, but this clarification is required nonetheless.) He is considered an excellent tactical commander with a record of achievement, especially in the early years of the war. His failures in Normandy and the Ardennes Offensive (The Battle of the Bulge, to which he objected) occurred when Allied forces were of overwhelming strength and Hitler, who did not always make sound decisions, had tactical command of the armies. According to Matthew Cooper:

Widely respected throughout the German Army, and even by Hitler until the end of the war, he was known as ‘the last knight.’ Born in 1875, von Rundstedt was the Army’s oldest serving general and, in his prime, one of Germany’s most capable commanders.⁶²

Thus, despite the failure of the German army to pursue Allied forces north of the German penetration, von Rundstedt and the German army still enjoy healthy historical and popular reputations.

NON-PURSUIT CASE 5: THE BATTLE OF MIDWAY, 1942

The Battle of Midway ran from June 4-7, 1942. Combatants were the attacking Imperial Japanese Navy, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto commanding, and the United States

Pacific Fleet, Admiral Chester Nimitz commanding. Local tactical commanders were Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, commander of the First Carrier Striking Force, and Admirals Frank Fletcher, commander of Task Force 17, and Raymond Spruance, commander of Task Force 16 (TF 16). Although Spruance had previously commanded the cruiser division of TF 16, he was promoted to task force commander prior to the battle. This occurred after Admiral William Halsey, previous TF 16 commander, recommended him to Nimitz after Halsey acquired a disabling skin condition in late May and could not command TF 16 in the upcoming campaign. Although Fletcher was senior and in overall command, each task force operated semi-independently; Fletcher later assigned command to Spruance during the battle when his (Fletcher's) flagship, the U.S.S. *Yorktown*, was damaged by Japanese bomb hits.

The battle, fought in the mid-Pacific Ocean 2,000 miles from any appreciable land mass, was one of the pivotal battles of the war. It was a complex battle in both time and space. By its end, the Japanese had lost four carriers and two cruisers to one American carrier and one destroyer. The loss of those four carriers included their planes, crews, pilots, and the years of combat experience they carried into the battle, a devastating blow to Japan's naval arm. The Japanese failed to take Midway Island and destroy the American carriers, the latter its primary objective. The battle produced a rough parity in carriers between the two combatants, but more important, blunted Japan's aggression in the Central Pacific and gave the Pacific Fleet valuable breathing room. Although still possessing formidable naval forces, Japan was forced to concentrate on expanding and consolidating its defensive ring of islands to await the inevitable American offensives. This stopped further incursions in the Central Pacific, but caused

the Japanese to strengthen their hold on the eastern Solomon Islands northeast of Australia.

However, on June 4 in late afternoon, his dive bombers having sunk four Japanese carriers with only the *Yorktown* damaged (it was later sunk by a Japanese submarine), Spruance faced a decision: pursue the surviving Japanese ships or return to the initial fleet assembly point northeast of Midway, designated Point Luck in Nimitz's Operation Plan 29-42.⁶³ Not knowing Japanese intentions after their losses, Spruance chose to return to Point Luck.

Spruance's reasons for returning were many. Primary was the mission of the striking forces: to defend Midway. In doing so, he was to inflict maximum damage on the Japanese carriers: his planes had already sunk four carriers, a fine performance by any standard, and those planes needed repair. If he ventured too far west he risked running into the Japanese battleships, which Spruance feared could be close behind the carriers: a surface battle between Japanese battleships and American carriers would almost certainly result in sunken carriers.⁶⁴ (This fear in 1942 was validated in October 1944 in the Battle off Samar in the Philippine Islands when Japanese battleships sank the American escort carrier U.S.S. *Gambier Bay*.)

In addition, Japanese bombers from Wake Island were also a threat.⁶⁵ And Spruance could not discount the possibility that Japanese submarines were nearby, especially because they had been reported in the area.⁶⁶ Aircraft losses had been heavy, especially in his torpedo bombers. His pilots, many of whom had flown up to two missions that day over long stretches of water, were exhausted. Night was falling and

night carrier air operations were prohibitive at this time in the war. His ships needed to assemble, reform, and refuel.⁶⁷

Finally, intelligence reported before the battle that the Japanese might employ five fleet carriers for the Midway operation and that fifth carrier might be still out there, unseen and un-hit by Spruance's pilots.⁶⁸ Even with the loss of the four carriers, the Japanese still outnumbered Spruance heavily in battleships and cruisers. For the moment, TF 16's U.S.S. *Enterprise* and U.S.S. *Hornet* represented two-thirds of American carriers in the Pacific (U.S.S. *Saratoga* was *en route* from San Diego), and Spruance knew that he had to preserve Nimitz's only striking force. This was accordance with Nimitz's "calculated risk" instruction to the task force commanders, which follows.

From: Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet.
To: Commander Striking Forces (Operation Plan 29-42).

Subject: Letter of Instructions.

1. In carrying out the task assigned in Operation Plan 29-42 you will be governed by the principle of calculated risk, which you shall interpret to mean the avoidance of exposure of your force to attack by superior enemy forces without good prospect of inflicting, as a result of such exposure, greater damage to the enemy. This applies to a landing phase as well as during preliminary air attacks.⁶⁹

Exposure of the carriers to the Japanese battleships would violate this special instruction, and Spruance decided that America would end the battle with two carriers intact.

Yamamoto and his commanders wished that the American carriers would pursue them during the night and appear before their battleships in the morning. Indeed, they first steamed toward Midway intending to continue the invasion and possibly destroy the American carriers. Eventually they concluded that the success of the invasion was doubtful without air cover, especially with Midway's runway in operation. Proximity to

the island meant proximity to the American carriers if they returned to their assembly point. Plus, Japanese ships were low on fuel. The loss of four carriers proved too devastating: the operation was cancelled and the fleet withdrawn.⁷⁰

Tabulating casualties for naval battles is somewhat different from that for land battles. For the latter, a convenient, first-order comparison is simply the numbers or the percentage of human casualties, those killed, wounded, or missing, as stated above. If the numbers are close for both sides, then other measures of the severity of casualties is needed, such as destruction of better units or of a certain military arm—cavalry, for example. For naval battles, however, one loses both ships and men, and possibly aircraft depending on the battle. Losing 2,000 men from five ships still afloat is different from losing 2,000 men on a single sunken battleship. For Midway, the number of personnel lost, 300 Americans and 3,000 Japanese, does not tell the entire story. As the battle progressed, the decisions made by Spruance and Yamamoto were based on the aircraft carriers despite the sizes of their fleets; these, and their planes, pilots, and maintenance crews were the pith of the battle's importance. Based on this, American losses were one of three carriers, or 33 percent, and Japanese losses were four carriers, or 100 percent.

Opinions of Spruance's return to Point Luck follow.

Winston Churchill:

The victorious American commanders had other perils to face. The Japanese Admiralissimo with his formidable battle fleet might still assail Midway. The American air forces were sorely depleted, and there were no heavy ships capable of successfully engaging Yamamoto if he chose to continue his advance. Admiral Spruance, who now assumed command of the carrier group, decided against a pursuit to the westward, not knowing what strength the enemy might have, and having no heavy support for his own carriers. In this decision he was unquestionably right...⁷¹

Samuel Eliot Morrison:

Fletcher did well, but Spruance's performance was superb. Calm, collected, decisive, yet receptive to advice; keeping in his mind the picture of widely disparate forces, yet boldly seizing every opening. Raymond A. Spruance emerged from this battle one of the greatest admirals in American history.⁷²

Walter Lord:

Many of Halsey's staff were dismayed. He would never have done it that way, they said. It seemed such a perfect opportunity to polish off the rest of Nagumo's fleet. The Japs' air power was obviously gone—every pilot swore to that. This, then, was the time for all-out pursuit. Perhaps a night torpedo attack; or the dive bombers could deliver the *coup de grâce* at dawn. That was all it would take. Why couldn't Spruance see it?

Spruance could. It was a great temptation, but there were other factors too. He was all Nimitz had, and at this point no one knew what the Japanese might do. Yamamoto still had his great collection of battleships and cruisers, maybe even another carrier somewhere out there. Certainly the enemy had strength enough to blast him out of the ocean ... enough still to take Midway if the cards fell right.⁷³

B.H. Liddell Hart:

The battle of the Fourth of June saw the most extraordinarily quick change of fortune known in naval history...the subsequent news of the loss of *Hiryu*, and Nagumo's gloomy reports, led to a change of mind, and early on the 5th Yamamoto decided to suspend the attack on Midway. He still hoped to draw the Americans into a trap, by withdrawing westward, but was foiled by the fine combination of boldness with caution shown by Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, who commanded the two American carriers *Enterprise* and *Hornet* in this crucial battle.⁷⁴

Gordon Prange (*italics added*):

For a long time after the war, press room admirals and self-appointed critics took Spruance apart for sailing eastward for those few hours. *Actually, to have done otherwise would have been an act of irresponsibility, even of criminal folly.* This was not a matter of "failing to pursue," for the battle was not yet over. Had the Japanese kept their heads and their nerve, it could have lasted much longer and ended very differently.⁷⁵

His turning east on the night of June 4 was exactly the right thing to do to avoid a Japanese night attack. By the same token, going west on June 5 was the correct decision, for it frightened the Japanese badly...

Spruance not only knew when to be aggressive, he knew when to stop. Very few admirals in his position could have resisted the temptation to go whooping after the retreating foe. But Spruance knew the exact point where courage becomes damn-foolishness. Furthermore, he knew his mission—to protect Midway—and stuck with it, despite the alluring will-o’ the wisps to westward. Second only to preserving Midway from invasion was the necessity of saving his carriers to fight again. Therefore, he refused to be lured in reach of Wake Island’s land-based bombers or beyond his own line of communications.⁷⁶

Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully:

Spruance was subsequently criticized for his perceived lack of aggression in following up his victory as promptly as possible. In doing so, the logic goes, he missed opportunities for attacking Yamamoto’s Main Body or [Admiral Nobutake] Kondo’s support forces, both of which he might have been engaged had they been closer the following day. Such criticisms not ignore the fact that the information Spruance had at his disposal was far from perfect, but they also ignore the primary aim of Chester Nimitz’s battle plan—to destroy the Japanese carrier fleet. This Fletcher and Spruance had achieved. At this juncture, the only way Yamamoto or Kondo’s forces could reverse the verdict of the day was if Spruance allowed them to, by blundering under their guns...His movement east guaranteed that he would retain his current advantages. By doing so, he wisely sealed his victory over the Japanese.⁷⁷

There is no doubt from these opinions that their authors both approve Spruance’s decision without hesitation and hold him in high regard.

DISCUSSION

Decisions to not pursue have many similar characteristics. This is illustrated in Table 1, in which the left-most column lists the previously defined characteristics for Meade’s situation at Gettysburg. For each of the other non-pursuit battles, Table 1 indicates which of the Gettysburg characteristics can apply to it. Each such association can be determined from standard works, but should also be evident from the foregoing battle summaries.

TABLE 1. NON-PURSUIT: COMPARISON TO GENERAL MEADE OF VICTORIOUS COMMANDERS WHO DID NOT PURSUE							
CRITERION	MEADE G-BURG 1863	NAPO- LEON BORO- DINO 1812	GRANT SHILOH 1862	LEE F-BURG 1862	VON RUND- STEDT FRANCE 1940	SPRU- ANCE MIDWAY 1942	TOTAL OF X'S IN ROW- EXCLUDE MEADE
CONDITIONS OF BATTLE							
1. Battle posture = Defense ^a	X		X	X		X	3
2. Out-number opponent	X	X	X				2
3. Large casualties (percent)	X (27)	X (22)	X (20)			X (33) ^b	3
4. Fewer casualties than opp.	X	X	X	X	X	X	5
CONDITIONS OF FORCE							
5. Force disorganized	X	X	X		X	X	4
6. Reinforcements needed	X	X			X	X	3
7. Re-supply of food, ammo, etc.	X	X	X		X	X	4
8. Repair of equipment	X				X	X	2
POST-BATTLE CONCERNS							
9. Unsure of	X	X		X		X	3

enemy's intent							
10. Primary objective as opposed to pursuit	X			X		X	2
11. Preserve force	X			X		X	2
TOTAL OF X'S IN COLUMN	11	7	6	5	5	10	Checksum = 33
MISCELLANEOUS							
High historical regard?		X		X	X	X	4

Table 1 Notes. X indicates association. Blank indicates non-association. The Checksum figure indicates that individual row and column totals in the gray-shaded area are the same.

^a Blank = Offense.

^b For Midway, losses are measured in aircraft carriers.

Table 1 shows that decisions to not pursue have common characteristics. The gray-shaded area covering the comparison of the battles based on the characteristics has 55 squares, or 55 possible associations. For four of the five battles, historians have shown high regard for the commander's decision to not pursue. These battles share characteristics with Meade at Gettysburg to varying degrees. Two of them, Napoleon at Borodino and Spruance at Midway, share a majority of, but not all, characteristics. Yet, most of the commanders of these non-pursuits have been viewed favorably by historians, whereas Meade's decision has not.

Two major types of comparisons can be made using this table:

1. Highly conforming characteristics. This is quantified by counting the number of X's in a row for the same characteristic. For instance, "Reinforcements needed" has three X's, meaning that three of the battles share this characteristic with Meade's circumstance at Gettysburg. Only those characteristics with four or five associations are counted as highly conforming, such as "Force disorganized" with four. This strict criterion attempts to ensure the emergence of only the best conforming characteristics. These are shaded in blue on the rightmost column in Table 1. Modification of this table produces Table 2 to find the most common characteristics among these battles.

2. Highly conforming battles. This is quantified by counting the number of X's in a column for the same battle. For instance, "Grant Shiloh" has six X's, meaning that it shares six of the characteristics with Meade's circumstance at Gettysburg. Only those battles with seven or more associations are counted as highly conforming, such as "Napoleon Borodino" with seven. This strict criterion attempts to ensure the emergence of only the best conforming battles. These are shaded in blue on the Total row.

Discussion of Highly Conforming Characteristics. Three (of 11) characteristics that conform strongly with Gettysburg involve casualties (#4), disorganization (#5), and resupply (#7). This conformance should be no surprise: the condition of their force obviously gave them pause. Their units were scattered and their men needed food and munitions.

As for casualties, whether the commanders knew the extent of their opponent's casualties is important only if they knew them at the time of their decision, and this is not certain in all cases. Lee could certainly see the Federal dead and wounded in front of his

lines and Spruance had credible reports that four Japanese carriers were sunk. Historians evaluating their performances are certainly aware of the casualties on both sides. It is then significant that the characteristic with a perfect number of associations (at five) is number 4, “Fewer casualties than opponent.” Each of these commanders chose to not pursue for many reasons, and the most common association with Meade is that each also suffered fewer casualties than his opponent.

Four of five commanders thought their force disorganized from the battle (#5), as did Meade. The only one who did not was Lee at Fredericksburg whose army was behind fortifications on the heights that commanded the field with their organizations and chains of command largely intact. Indeed, of all the commanders covered in this paper, Lee was in the best position to attack from the standpoint of organization and command structure.

Similarly, four of five commanders were concerned with re-supplying their forces (#7). Again, Lee is the only commander unconcerned with supply. At Fredericksburg, his army was located in Virginia and therefore close to his supply lines. In fact, the ANV received ammunition from Richmond during the night of the 14th.⁷⁸ In general, being in Virginia greatly improved its chances of re-supply.

Discussion of Highly Conforming Battles. Based on Table 1, two of five battles conform highly to Meade at Gettysburg: Borodino, with seven associations, and Midway, having the largest number of associations at 10. Borodino and Midway agree with each other on six characteristics, an interesting overlap because one was fought on land and the other on the sea, and they are separated by almost 130 years.

Both Napoleon and Spruance suffered large losses (#3), Bonaparte at 22 percent and Spruance at one aircraft carrier (33%). Each suffered fewer casualties than his opponent (#4), the dominance of this characteristic having been discussed previously. Both were concerned largely with organization (#5) and supply (#7) as their forces, though victorious, had been battered. However, as with Lee, Napoleon and Spruance did not know their opponent's intent (#9). Napoleon's goal was to capture Moscow, and although he knew that the Russians were retreating, he did not know whether Kutuzov intended to defend Moscow or fall back elsewhere. Spruance, whose planes had removed four Japanese carriers from the war, decided that his remaining mission was to defend Midway based upon clear orders from Nimitz (#10). Having decided, he returned to Point Luck to do just that. After first continuing toward the island, the Japanese decided to withdraw.

In a curious contrast, one finds that Napoleon was an experienced general whereas this was the first carrier command of Spruance, who had no aviation background whatsoever. Somehow, each of these commanders, faced with highly similar situations after major battles, arrived at the same conclusion. Napoleon captured Moscow, the goal of his campaign, but ruined his army in the process. He might be criticized for the campaign, but his reputation as a great general is intact. Spruance later commanded naval forces at Truk Lagoon in Micronesia, the Philippine Sea, and Iwo Jima, and he is considered a great admiral.

The comparison between Gettysburg and Midway is a ten-point match. The only characteristic with *no association* in common is number 2, "Outnumber opponent." In total number of ships in the immediate Midway region, the Americans were outnumbered

in most classes of ships but especially in battleships: Japan had seven and the United States, none. In carriers, it was more even, with Nagumo having four and Nimitz, three. (However, Midway, with its airfield, is often considered a “fourth” American carrier, immobile but unsinkable; it is not normally included in the total for carriers.) Events showed that carriers and airpower were more important than surface ships, a strategic template for the rest of the Pacific war.

In addition to the conditions of force (#5-8), covered above, Gettysburg and Midway share the tactical concerns of enemy intent (#9), primary objective (#10), and force preservation (#11). It is easy in hindsight to dismiss these and ascribe them to over-caution, but to the two commanders these were serious concerns. Spruance did not know whether the Japanese would persist in their attack on Midway so he had no choice, based on his orders, but to position himself to defend it. Finally, he had the overriding concern of preserving his fleet. Nimitz’s letter of instruction was clear on this: avoid exposing the fleet to attack unless that exposure offers the chance of inflicting greater damage to the enemy. With the *Yorktown* damaged, his two carriers represented all United States seaborne naval air power within the local theater. He had to preserve them to fight another day.

The comparison of Admiral Spruance with General Meade is enhanced when one finds that both were new to command. Although not applicable generally, this is one case where the similarity in the length of command cannot be ignored. Meade defeated Lee within his first week of command and Spruance defeated Nagumo within his first two weeks of command. Both commanders won epic battles and decided that their first duty was to preserve their forces. Both faced formidable foes who, though defeated,

could still inflict considerable damage. It might be easy in hindsight to call this undue caution from the novelty of command, but such criticism is free of the responsibility they both shared.

As shown above, however, Spruance is lauded for avoiding this “temptation” and doing “exactly the right thing.” Meade was “bad-tempered” and “feeling responsibility as a paralyzing weight.” In fact, the aforementioned quote from Prange includes the line written in italics: “Actually, to have done otherwise would have been an act of irresponsibility, even of criminal folly.” The historian in this case suggests that the choice of pursuit after June 4 would have exceeded the bounds of simple cautious, inept commanding, and entered the realm of legal culpability. That is how important it is considered for Spruance to not pursue. In contrast, Meade was somehow remiss for doing the same thing. For good or ill, this appears to be the judgment of history.

With the highly conforming characteristics and battles identified from Table 1, it is important now to identify the most common characteristics associated with decisions to not pursue. This can be done with a modified version of this table. This new table changes the criterion slightly by eliminating characteristics having one or two associations. For consistency, each remaining characteristic retains its original row number from Table 1. The result appears in Table 2.

TABLE 2. NON-PURSUIT: COMPARISON TO GENERAL MEADE OF VICTORIOUS COMMANDERS WHO DID NOT PURSUE WITH LOW SCORING CHARACTERISTICS REMOVED

CRITERION	MEADE G-BURG 1863	NAPOLEON BORODINO 1812	GRANT SHILOH 1862	LEE F-BURG 1862	VON RUNDSTEDT FRANCE 1940	SPRUANCE MIDWAY 1942	TOTAL OF X'S IN ROW- EXCLUDE MEADE
CONDITIONS OF BATTLE							
1. Battle posture = Defense ^a	X		X	X		X	3
3. Large casualties (percent)	X (27)	X (22)	X (20)			X (33) ^b	3
4. Fewer casualties than opp.	X	X	X	X	X	X	5
CONDITIONS OF FORCE							
5. Force disorganized	X	X	X		X	X	4
6. Reinforcements needed	X	X			X	X	3
7. Re-supply of food, ammo, etc.	X	X	X		X	X	4
POST-BATTLE CONCERNS							
9. Unsure of enemy's intent	X	X		X		X	3
TOTAL OF X'S IN COLUMN	7	6	5	3	4	7	Check-sum = 25

MISCELLANEOUS							
High historical regard?		X		X	X	X	4

Table 2 Notes. X indicates association. Blank indicates non-association. The Checksum figure indicates that individual row and column totals in the gray-shaded area are the same.

^a Blank = Offense.

^b For Midway, losses are measured in aircraft carriers.

Table 2 agrees with Table 1 in that these commanders gave conditions of battle and conditions of force equivalent consideration in their decisions to not pursue. This is understandable as they can observe clearly the condition of their forces. For the most part, however, post-battle concerns do not rank as high because the only characteristic in this group that make the cut involves the enemy's intent. One could argue here that this makes sense because the one thing a commander cannot control after battle is what the enemy intends to do. The two empty cases for enemy intent above illustrate this by the certainty of their commanders: Grant had reports that the Confederates were retreating to Corinth, Mississippi, and the Germans knew that the Allies were retreating to the coast.

At this point, the Battle Posture should be discussed. It represents the most basic of tactical positions: offense or defense. Of the five battles, three are defensive and two are offensive, and of the two with the closest association with Gettysburg, one is offensive (Napoleon), the other, defensive (Spruance). It appears that caution affects offensive-minded commanders on the offensive (Napoleon and von Rundstedt) and on the defensive (Grant, Lee, and Spruance).

Note that the two commanders not recorded as being concerned with reinforcements (#6) were so for good reason. Buell's Army of the Ohio had arrived on the night between the two days of the battle, so Grant's reinforcements were already there when the decision to pursue was required. And at Fredericksburg, Lee had his entire army with him. Despite all his advantages, Lee chose to neither attack nor pursue. One good reason for this is characteristic number 9, "Unsure of enemy's intent," as he did not know whether Burnside would attack again or retreat. Nevertheless, historians seem to not challenge his decision to stay put.

Table 2 indicates why the less conforming battles from Table 1—those with fewer than seven associations—nonetheless deserve mention. The concentration of characteristics in Table 2 shows that, despite not sharing as many characteristics as Midway and Borodino, the other battles are just as worthy of comparison with Gettysburg. Shiloh and France are similar in that the recorded characteristics for non-pursuit are in casualties and supply (#2-5, 7 for Grant, #4-8 for von Rundstedt). As verified in Table 2, these are consistent with Meade, Napoleon, and Spruance, so it appears that the characteristics associated with force conditions are quite common among commanders of all statures in deciding to follow through with attack or pursuit.

Despite Table 2's concentration of conditions, Fredericksburg stands out with no associations concerning conditions of force. Table 1 showed that Lee's characteristics here are concentrated in tactical concerns of enemy intent (#9), primary objective (#10), and force preservation (#11). Malvern Hill in July 1862 cast a long shadow that gave pause even to Robert E. Lee. This departure from the similarity of the other battles to Gettysburg is acceptable because its characteristics were assembled and contrasted with

no expectation of a favorable result: an exception such as this shows that the method is impartial and efficacious.

Finally, Table 2 highlights the similarities between the two highly conforming battles, Borodino and Midway, with Gettysburg. All six characteristics shared by all three battles appear here. The two tables together extract the battles closest in character to Gettysburg (Table 1), the highest-scoring characteristics (Table 1), and the characteristics most common among the five battles (Table 2). This combination meets the goal of this paper, i.e., exhibiting examples of historically tolerated and even praised non-pursuits with sufficient similarities to Meade's decision at Gettysburg to question those historical judgments.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

These discussions suggest these conclusions:

1. Comparison of battles according to shared characteristics provides a novel, structured approach for contrasting judgment of similar tactical decisions. Here, the goal was to identify battles suitable for contrast with Gettysburg, and this has been done. This method might offer different insights and plausible explanations even in cases of weak comparisons: for instance, Shiloh and France above shared only five characteristics with Gettysburg, but the analysis of those shared characteristics might still prove profitable.

2. Throughout his first week of command, George Meade acted smartly and skillfully, and he followed sound military principles, including his decision to not pursue the ANV after the battle. The soundness of his command is substantiated by comparison

with other prominent battles where the victor did not pursue and whose commanders are praised for their caution.

3. The strong resemblance of Meade's situation with those of Bonaparte and Spruance indicates that the same concerns can bedevil the best of commanders and induce them to stay put. Given such a decision, one might either praise a commander for making the correct choice or be tempted to construct imaginary scenarios as to the negative results of non-pursuit: "the war could have ended sooner" or the ever-popular "the war could have ended *much* sooner." Variations of these comments appear often in histories of Gettysburg.

4. The post-battle summaries of Gettysburg and the five contrasting battles reveal that in half of them—Gettysburg, Borodino, and France—the victorious army did pursue, but the pursuit did not occur *immediately after* the battle. For the three who did not pursue, Grant was relieved of command and had no chance to do so, Lee faced a known (and visible) threat of massed Federal artillery, and Spruance followed the mission priority defined by Nimitz in his orders. For the latter three there was little chance of follow-on pursuit even a few days after the battle. Tables 1 and 2 show that the post-battle concerns of the commanders in the five cases were real and similar to Meade's. The difference of historical opinion about Meade suggests an inconsistency in the criteria used in his evaluation. The analysis herein suggests that for Meade, the unstated criterion is simply "did not pursue," but for other commanders it is the imprudent "did not pursue *recklessly* on the heels of the retreating enemy." The latter criterion is, of course, easier to pass than the former.

5. Overall, given the five prominent commanders who stayed put—Napoleon, Grant, Lee, von Rundstedt, and Spruance—George Meade seems to be in very good company. This analysis does not conclude that Meade made the best decision or the worst, only that he did not spoil that victory with a defeat borne out of impatience and rashness. It is important to remember that Meade’s victory at Gettysburg is one of the greatest victories by any general in American history.

In summary, this paper analyzed General George Meade’s decision to not pursue the defeated Confederate army by comparing his decision to those of other victories without pursuit and the historical opinions thereof. It catalogued the characteristics of Meade’s decision and used them to analyze the decisions of the other commanders. Strict criteria for the associations of the most prominent characteristics and most similar battles produced clear results. The number produced in each instance—three of ten characteristics and two battles—is not overwhelming, but the goal of this study was not to produce a large number of perfect correlations. Rather, it was to investigate what were the clear and essential elements of decisions to not pursue, and to determine whether there is any basis for historiography to be more critical of Meade’s decision than of others.

The comparison method presented herein offers a structured method for analyzing battle decisions. By comparing a battle decision in one war with similar decisions in other battles, it can shed some light on explaining why certain actions were taken: in this paper that action was Meade’s decision to not pursue Lee at Gettysburg, one of the most controversial decisions of the war. The analysis herein will certainly not end

debate about General George Meade's decision, but appears to offer evidence to indicate that such a decision was common even among the best commanders in history.

REFERENCES

Much of the historical information in this paper is of a general nature, and can be found in most works on the subject; therefore, no end notes are provided for these data. However, they do appear for quotes and for the more obscure items herein.

¹ Coddington, Edwin B., *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968, pp. 535-7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 324.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 532.

⁴ Sears, Stephen, *Gettysburg*, Boston/New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2003, p. 496.

⁵ Catton, Bruce, *Glory Road*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1952, p. 323.

⁶ Coddington, *op. cit.*, pp. 554-62.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 557-8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 537.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp., 535-70.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 535-70.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 547.

¹³ Letter from President Lincoln to George G. Meade, The History Place, accessed December 20, 2015, <http://www.historyplace.com/civilwar/lett-6.htm>

-
- ¹⁴ Meade, George, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, Vol. II, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913, p. 139, Latin American Studies web site, accessed December 20, 2015, http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/civil-war/The_life_and_letters_of_George_Gordon_Meade-2.pdf
- ¹⁵ Sears, *op. cit.*, pp. 475-6.
- ¹⁶ Pratt, Fletcher, *A Short History of the American Civil War, Ordeal by Fire*, Miniola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998, reprint of 1935 and 1947 editions, p. 212.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 277-8.
- ¹⁸ Catton, *op. cit.*, p. 323.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 327.
- ²⁰ Tucker, Glenn, *High Tide at Gettysburg*, New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1958, pp. 389-90.
- ²¹ McPherson, James, M., *Battle Cry of Freedom, The Civil War Era*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1989, p. 663.
- ²² Sears, *op. cit.*, pp. 474-5.
- ²³ Keegan, *The American Civil War, A Military History*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009, p. 202.
- ²⁴ Coddington, *op. cit.*, p. 533.
- ²⁵ Zamoyski, Adam, *Moscow 1812: Napoleon's Fatal March*, New York: Harper Collins, 2004, p. 287.
- ²⁶ DeFezensac, Raimond, Montesquiou, *The Russian Campaign of 1812*, translated by Lee Kennet, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1970, p. 32.
- ²⁷ Tarle, Eugene, *Napoleon's Invasion of Russia – 1812*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1942, p. 203.
- ²⁸ DeFezensac, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- ²⁹ Duffy, Christopher, *Borodino and the War of 1812*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973, p. 142.

³⁰ Durant, Will and Ariel, *The Story of Civilization XI: The Age of Napoleon*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975, p. 704.

³¹ Zamoyski, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

³² Tarle, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

³³ Zamoyski, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

³⁴ Duffy, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

³⁵ Tarle, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

³⁶ Nosworthy, Brent, *The Bloody Crucible of Courage: Fighting Methods and Combat Experience of the Civil War*, New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003, Kindle Edition, Kindle Location 4716.

³⁷ Catton, Bruce, *Grant Moves South*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1960, p. 245.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 250-3.

⁴⁰ McPherson, *op. cit.*, p. 414.

⁴¹ Catton, *Grant Moves South*, p. 265.

⁴² Marshall-Cornwall, James, *Grant as Military Commander*, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1995, reprint of original 1970 edition by B.T. Batsford, Ltd., pp. 80-81.

⁴³ Keegan, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁵ Smith, Timothy, B., *Shiloh – Conquer or Perish*, Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2014, p. 394.

⁴⁶ Cornwall, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁴⁷ Catton, *Glory Road*, p. 37.

⁴⁸ Freeman, Douglas S., *R.E. Lee: A Biography*, Vol. 2, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963, renewal of original copyright, 1934, p. 444.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 466.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

⁵² Cooper, Matthew, *The German Army, 1933-1945*, Chelsea, Michigan: Scarborough House, 1978, pp. 229-30.

⁵³ Gelb, Norman, *Dunkirk: The Complete Story of the First Step in the Defeat of Hitler*, New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1989, pp. 128-9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-131.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

⁵⁶ Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 242.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 210-1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁶³ Nimitz, Chester W., Operation Plan No. 29-42, May 27, 1942, Battle of Midway Roundtable, n.d., p. 15, accessed December 23, 2015, <http://www.midway42.org/Features/opplan29-42.pdf>

⁶⁴ Prange, Gordon, with Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, *Miracle at Midway*, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982, pp. 302-3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

⁶⁶ Tulega, Thaddeus, V., *Climax at Midway*, London: J.M. Dent & Sons, LTD, 1960, p. 196.

⁶⁷ Lord, Walter, *Incredible Victory*, New York: Harper & Row, 1967, p. 279.

⁶⁸ Parshall, Jonathan, and Tully, Anthony, *Shattered Sword: The Untold Story of the Battle of Midway*, Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005, p. 331.

⁶⁹ Nimitz, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁷⁰ Barker, A.J., Lt. Col., *Midway*, New York, Galahad Books, 1981, p. 99.

⁷¹ Churchill, Winston, S., *The Second World War*, Vol.4, *The Hinge of Fate*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950, p. 252.

⁷² Morison, Samuel Eliot, *The Two Ocean War*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1963, p.162.

⁷³ Lord, Walter, *Incredible Victory*, New York: Harper & Row, 1967, p. 256.

⁷⁴ Liddell Hart, B.H., *History of the Second World War*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1970, pp. 351-2.

⁷⁵ Prange, *op. cit.*, p. 302.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 386-7.

⁷⁷ Parshall and Tully, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

⁷⁸ Alexander, Edward Porter, *Military Memoirs of a Confederate: A Critical Narrative*, New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2014, p. 312.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank graciously those persons who assisted with this paper. Dr. Larry Graves, mathematician and former system engineering colleague of one of the authors at Lockheed Martin, reviewed the logic of this paper's argument and its organization. Steve Hedgpeth, former newspaper writer and editor, reviewed it for content, style, and grammatical correctness. Errors in the final version remain the responsibility of the authors.

February 2016