USING COMMUNICATION THEORY IN THE ANALYSIS OF CONTROVERSIAL GETTYSBURG ORDERS

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Many controversies surrounding historical battles center on orders. The outcome of combat, victory or loss, might be partly due to certain features of commands issued before or during fighting: Were they received on time? Were they obeyed? Were they clear? Did they allow for proper judgment on the part of the receiver? For example, were the instructions sent from Washington, D.C, to commanders in the Pacific before the Pearl Harbor attack explicit enough? Such inquiry is particularly apt for the American Civil War, for which even today historians still parse certain controversial orders: Did Confederate General Robert E. Lee's directives to General James (Jeb) Stuart give him the discretion to ride around the Federal army during the Gettysburg campaign?

This paper analyzes several contentious messages from that campaign employing characteristics of communication theory (CT). The Gettysburg campaign ran from June 3, 1863, to July 14, 1863, and is considered by many to be the most controversial of the war. After reviewing the characteristics relevant to battle orders, the paper then offers examples of other historical orders, often considered successful or unsuccessful from both the Civil War and World War II. Analysis of controversial commands is usually done *in situ*, discussing only the situation, transmitter, message, medium, receiver, and the result without comparison. Alternately, the core of this paper examines five

controversial Gettysburg orders, applying CT precepts and measuring the conclusions against other successful and unsuccessful orders.

Analysis of orders is a critical step in clarifying either why a battle occurred or why it occurred as it did. Specifically, it should try to determine whether transmitters sent correct, i.e., clear and timely, messages, whether the receivers acted properly on them, and, if not, why. Although this is related to assigning blame, it should not be confused as being the ultimate goal of such analysis. Blame (or responsibility) was particularly important to the participants, their peers and superiors, who must use their knowledge of a battle and commanders' actions to determine reassignments, investigations, or courts martial. Historians, long after all participants are dead, must try to understand what occurred based on extant documents and accounts.

All too often, however, some historians tend to analyze battles for one of two reasons: to absolve a favorite general of blame for decisions or actions, or to find someone else to blame. This occurs still regarding the Civil War 150 years after it ended. In fact, on television documentaries and Civil War talk message boards, one can find vapid and pointless references to certain generals, such as "stupid" or "blithering idiot," as if their actions had tangible and personal impact on their modern commentators. (To protect these commentators' dignity, they are not listed in the endnotes.) There should be no place for such prattle in serious Civil War study. Whereas it is admirable to wish to "set the record straight," a manifestly partisan approach might solve the problem only until the next author "sets the record straight" with the opposite view. In respect to orders, another approach might be preferable.

The application of communication theory to these messages does not guarantee solutions to their associated controversies; it offers only another approach to understanding why things happened. However, this methodology offers no explanation for a general's action in response to orders and the lack of conclusion could confirm previous historical opinion about a general's action. In other words, employing this analysis might or might not produce conclusions different from standard ones, which might disappoint some readers, but it offers a consistent methodology rather than a more partisan approach. In short, this paper has neither an agenda nor reputation to defend.

However, some disclaimers are warranted. None of the points presented 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.

BASICS OF COMMUNICATION THEORY

"Communication occurs when one organism (the transmitter) encodes information into a signal which passes to another organism (the receiver) which decodes the signal and is capable of responding appropriately." These basic characteristics hold true for all types of human communication from oral to electronic, meaning that any communication may be analyzed in terms of these three elements: transmitter, transmission, and receiver. Consequently, any shortcoming of relaying information can be understood in terms of a failure of one of these three components.[1] This is true for interpersonal, business, governmental, or military communications.

Eight characteristics of communication are pertinent to this discussion. The first four are:

1. *Each communication is unique*. Words, intonations, movements, and distractions are all specific to a certain situation, or context.

2. *Words are symbols used to express thought, and they are always open to interpretation.* Both transmitter and receiver must assign the same meaning to the symbol. A more homogeneous lexicon should lessen the effort for successful interpretation.

3. *The more persons involved in the transmission, the more complex the situation becomes*. Misinterpretations can occur at every stage of transmission; however, although desirable, minimizing transmission stages in between nodes of communication does not ensure a correct transmission.

4. *Trust is important*. Trust serves as a critical component of successful communications and normally refers to subordinates' confidence in their superiors,

especially in business environments. The idea is that managers must establish atmospheres of trust so that any communication will be interpreted correctly.[2]

This is certainly true in the military but with a slightly different spin from business because it works upward with superiors as well as downward with subordinates, which is important for commanders. This mutual belief has two parts, the first of which is that the subordinate will obey orders. The subordinate must also know how to carry out the order: in most cases, there should be no need for a commander to explain. Omitting "how" to follow an order can result in clarity by emphasizing only important information, with the rest considered superfluous. Whereas this is not a strict rule, as will be seen, successful orders often have this characteristic and unsuccessful ones often do not.

At the time an order is written, trust can exist based on reputation or previous interaction. If not, a commander must deal with it: especially if it is not warranted, he cannot produce it instantaneously. In fact, as will be seen, the text of some orders can tell how much trust a commander had in his subordinate. Trust notwithstanding, the subordinate is obliged to carry out an order as he understands it, regardless of whether he likes the order or not.

The next two characteristics are associated with the transmitter:

5. *People communicate according to their expectations of a situation.* Ideally, everyone should know the anticipated outcome, or plan, prior to an event. However, it usually proves unsafe for the transmitter to assume that everyone thinks as he does.[3]

6. *The message must be clear*. Closely aligned to the characteristics of effective communication is the idea of clarity. It is added to the list because it is difficult to imagine that the transmitter of any order wants to send anything ambiguous to his subordinates, especially on a battlefield. To achieve clarity, grammar offers a classic example of recommended usage in the form of Will Strunk's and E.B. White's Rule Number 17 from *The Elements of Style*: "Omit needless words." It states:

> Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all his sentences short, or that he avoid all detail and treat his subjects only in outline, but that every word tell.[4]

The goal of clarity is to encode the message to avoid misunderstanding. To do this, one must emphasize or include only important matters and play down or exclude those which are not. This requires that the transmitter plans message content and writes it with a clear, direct purpose aimed toward a specific receiver or group; the assumption is that the transmitter understands the receiver and is aware of how the latter might interpret a message.

The selection of words becomes crucial: one must be aware of a word's *denotation* (real meaning) and its *connotation* (implied meaning). For example, depending on the audience, the precise term "handgun" can produce a positive or negative response. Concrete, specific words are better than abstract or general words. "Pistol" is more precise than "firearm," and should be used if that is the topic under discussion.[5]

The last two characteristics are associated with the receiver:

7. *Feedback loop returning to the transmitter*. Some definitions of communication include feedback, defined simply as a response from the receiver to the transmitter.[6] Feedback takes different forms depending on the urgency of the message and the technology. For example, prior to radio, messages sent by flag were acknowledged by a return signal, and a courier returned to the commander and indicated that he delivered the message. Such confirmation could also be transmitted with telegraphy or radio, if required. However, in combat, feedback could result without return signals. A radio or telephonic order to start artillery fire that results in the report of cannon indicates obedience. For all modes of message transmission, if the receiver is unclear about an order and the situation permits, he always has the option to request clarification or confirmation. If truly not understood, the receiver is obligated to request clarification.

8. *Selective perception can distort the message*. Just as different witnesses to a crime present varying versions, a single message can be interpreted differently based upon each individual person selecting a single stimulus from the multitude presented. This is not a willful act of omission; rather, it is an *unconscious selection* of less than the whole of a transmission's content. This occurs because it is often impossible to process all incoming information as it is received. The receiver unconsciously hears what he is inclined to hear.[7]

THE ANALYSIS AND ITS LIMITS

The controversies associated with the five orders studied herein pertain to an expected result that did not occur as planned by the transmitter. The role of analyzing the

order is to determine the extent to which a “bad” order was to blame. To understand where this can be used, it is first necessary to define a successful operation. For an operation to be successful, the following successes must occur:

1. *The order must be compliant*. It meets most or all of the criteria indicated by communication theory as defined above, i.e., the receiver must understand the transmitter’s intentions, as the latter understands them. Both sides have a role in this. The transmitter must convey in terms he knows his receiver will understand. In doing so, it is incumbent that the transmitter provides no more latitude than he deems necessary. The receiver is obligated to understand that attempt, and request clarifying feedback if necessary. This is analogous to electronic communication link closure, where the receiver gets the full signal sent by the transmitter.

2. *The receiver must then attempt to carry out the order*. A competent receiver attempts to fulfill the order as he understands it. Problems arise when receivers are unaware that their actions in response to orders address only part of them or none at all. Such selective perception can account for many misinterpreted or seemingly ignored commands. In these cases, receivers do not consciously or purposefully disobey orders; rather, they believe sincerely that they followed the letter or at least the intent of an order. As will be shown, this might have happened more than has been realized previously.

Therefore, the difference between abject willful "disobedience" and unconscious, selective perception, the lesser deficiency, must be accounted for in cases of orders not followed. This discrepancy is usually based on reports and accounts long after battles have occurred and often stands somewhere between a fine line and a chasm. As will be seen, many competent officers have experienced this condition. Despite appearance,

subsequent action, or effect, some of them actually believe that they complied with the directives given. Misinterpretation can be accidental or a rationalization of an arguable disobedience and it can often be traced to a failure of an order when compared to the aforementioned CT characteristics.

In some cases, the tactical situation might have changed by the time the order is received rendering it partially or totally invalid. The receiver, using his judgment, might decide on a different course or try something different, in effect not following it but not disobeying either. This is not as egregious as willful disobedience, but it is in the same failure category. A famous case here is that of Confederate General James Longstreet, First Corps Commander, before his July 2 attack against the southern part of the Federal line at Gettysburg. In the morning when Lee ordered him to advance along the Emmitsburg Road, no Federal forces were west of Cemetery Ridge. By the time Longstreet was ready, the III Corps had reached that road and occupied the Peach Orchard, right in his line of attack; therefore, he had to attack in directions not originally in the plan.

By contrast, many examples of valid outright disobedience appear throughout history. For example, in WW2, General Erwin Rommel ignored Adolf Hitler's "no retreat" directive to save the Afrika Korps from total destruction by the British after the Second Battle of El Alamein in November 1942. Another German, General Dietrich von Choltitz, was ordered to destroy Paris rather than allow the Allies to capture it intact. He defied Hitler and surrendered the city to the Allies in August 1944. In these cases, there appears no doubt that the receivers completely understood their orders and still chose to

disobey them—one to save his army, the other a priceless city from pointless destruction. This is not always the case with orders that are not followed.

The Civil War offers at least one well-known case of stark disobedience to a direct order, and it incredibly involves General Lee. This occurred after the charge on July 3 when he spotted General George Pickett returning to the Confederate line with his wrecked division. Lee reportedly ordered him to see to his division and form it for defense in case the Federals attacked. Pickett simply told Lee directly that he had no division and walked away. Although he clearly ignored the order, one could ascribe Pickett's response to shock. Lee possibly sensed this as well, because he did not press Pickett nor file charges after the battle.

3. *The intent of the order is obtained*. Even if the first two succeed, something else might undermine the mission, e.g., the plan was flawed or based on bad assumptions; or the enemy force was larger than anticipated because of undetected reinforcements that recently arrived; or anything from the multitude of things that can affect military operations.

The analysis in this paper is largely confined to the first of these three successes, the success of the order based on CT characteristics. The second success, the receiver carries out the order, can be analyzed partly by this method because it contains selective perception. As for the third success, these characteristics *per se* appear to offer nothing in the examination of cases of incompetence or abject disobedience (whether valid or not). Despite this, the result of an action must be considered in an analysis of an order germane to that action.

In the end, however, soldiers are still responsible for understanding and following orders. Those who fail for whatever reason—disobedience, incompetence, or selective perception—are still responsible for their actions and any consequences. The proposal to analyze failed orders using CT does not intend to exonerate those commanders who failed, only to attempt offering an alternate explanation for their interpretation and subsequent actions.

Before analyzing specific Gettysburg orders using CT, it is important to illustrate this analysis using other historical orders. There are two steps to this: first look at messages that succeeded (those that met the requirements of clarity and comprehensiveness necessary for military operations) and then look at those that failed. This not only illustrates the characteristics but offers specimens for comparison. This is done in the next two sections.

EXAMPLES OF ORDERS THAT SUCCEEDED

Two such examples are General Lee's Special Order 191 for the Maryland invasion which led to the Battle of Antietam and Admiral Chester Nimitz's Operation Plan Number 29-42 for the Midway operation. It is not necessary that the side sending the message won the battle: in these examples, Lee lost and Nimitz won. It only matters that their communication was clear and concise. There is a risk in applying a 20th century standard to a 19th century commander—Nimitz would naturally have more exposure to modern concepts than Lee. In fact, part of his training might have been based on lessons learned from previous wars, including the Civil War. However, the

analysis below shows that Lee was fully aware of what constituted a good order regardless of his temporal distance from that standard.

General Lee wrote Special Order 191 on September 9, 1862. It covers a few days of operations, reasonable for the methods of communication available. In its original handwritten form, it covers two pages comprising ten paragraphs, none of which is longer than three sentences. The first two contain administrative instructions for dealing with Fredericksburg's civilians, treating and moving the wounded, and "unsafe' routes to avoid (presumably because of Federal army). Paragraphs three through eight contain orders for a single column including units, routes, timetable, and objectives. The fifth one illustrates this:

> 5. General McLaws, with his own division and that of General R. H. Anderson, will follow General Longstreet. On reaching Middletown will take the route to Harpers Ferry, and by Friday morning possess himself of the Maryland Heights and endeavor to capture the enemy at Harpers Ferry and vicinity.[8]

Paragraph six contains the only conditionals, and they are meant for only one general, John Walker:

> 6. General Walker, with his division, after accomplishing the object in which he is now engages, will cross the Potomac at Cheek's Ford, ascent its right bank to Lovettsville, take possession of Loudoun Heights, if practicable, by Friday morning, Key's Ford on his left, and the road between the end of the mountain and the Potomac on his right. He will, as far as practicable, cooperate with General McLaws and Jackson, and intercept the retreat of the enemy.[9]

Paragraph nine contains orders for where all columns are to meet:

> 9. The commands of Generals Jackson, McLaws, and Walker, after accomplishing the objects for which they have been detached, will join the main body of the army at Boonsborough or Hagerstown.[10]

Paragraph ten contains a curious administrative footnote which would cause no confusion with the major orders in the previous paragraphs:

> 10. Each regiment on the march will habitually carry its axes in the regimental ordnance-wagons, for use of the men at their encampments, to procure wood &c.[11]

Overall, this message is well-conceived, clear, and concise, written so each receiver views the same unfiltered information from a single transmitter, eliminating multiple versions. With only an isolated exception, each sentence speaks straightforwardly. In fact, the only cases where a conditional phrase appears can be found in paragraph six for General Walker: "if practicable" and "as far as practicable." The directness of the individual orders and the overall lack of equivocation indicate that Lee trusted his officers not only with carrying out his commands, but with resolving any problems that might arise during the course of their assigned objectives. In summary, in Special Order 191 Lee sends a message to his officers and he expects them to carry it out.

Two features of this example might require further explanation. As Strunk and White stated, clarity means not necessarily brevity but only that each word count. This order might be long, but still follows Strunk's dictum in that for the most part, it is simple and direct, with each word used in precise denotation.

Second, this Civil War message does have a controversy associated with it, but it is one of intelligence and not of semantics. It was apparently lost by one of Lee's soldiers and found subsequently by enemy soldiers whereupon it provided General George McClellan with unparalleled information on Confederate plans. Lee did not learn of "The Lost Order," as it is known, until weeks after Antietam. That this order was lost by a Confederate and found by a Federal soldier does not diminish its effectiveness as a clear, concise order. After that episode, Lee avoided written campaign orders and used

oral orders where possible. This is notable in that all of the controversial orders around Gettysburg were oral.

Another order that succeeded is Admiral Nimitz's Operation Plan Number 29-42, dated May 27, 1942. Naval intelligence at Pearl Harbor had broken the Japanese navy's radio code and determined that an attack on Midway Island was imminent. Nimitz, whose forces were outnumbered, determined to set a trap for the enemy invasion fleet by reinforcing the garrison there and sending his three carriers to a point northeast where they would be in position to ambush the Japanese. Because they were unaware that the Americans had broken their code, they would not be expecting American carriers so close to their fleet. Nimitz and his commanders knew that the U.S. forces were outnumbered so every move and shot had to count.

Nimitz's message is fourteen pages long, including one annex and two appendices, some of whose length is protocol (the repetition of information at the top of each page) and administration (distribution lists at the end). But its text contains no fat. Each section rolls off as if accompanied by a drumbeat.

The first two pages contain a list of participating forces: the ships in each of three carrier task forces (one of which was in San Diego), air wings, the Midway garrison, and patrols for both support and from Johnston and the Hawaiian Islands. For example, one grouping appears thus (CV = Aircraft Carrier, CA = Attack Cruiser, DD = Destroyer, and Desron = Destroyer Squadron):

Task Force SEVENTEEN - Rear Admiral Fletcher

YORKTOWN	1 CV
ASTORIA, PORTLAND	2 CA
Desron Two, less O'BRIEN, WALKE	6 DD[12]

Pages three and four present a detailed projection of what Nimitz believed would be the Japanese order of operations starting with his estimation of their forces (SS = Submarine):

1. Information

> (a) The enemy is expected to attempt the capture of MIDWAY in the near future. For this purpose it is believed that the enemy will employ approximately the following: 2-4 fast BB; 4-5 CV; 8-9 CA; 16-24 DD; 8-12 SS; a landing force with seaplane tenders. The attack on MIDWAY may be preceded or followed by an attack on OAHU.[13]

Note that although this estimation contains considerable detail, Nimitz prudently gives no hint as to its source.

The fifth page includes a list of reinforcements sent to Midway, and on the sixth starts instructions for each of the fighting units, starting with the carriers. In one paragraph he includes orders to the task force commanders:

(a) Striking Forces.

> (1) Inflict maximum damage on enemy by employing strong attrition tactics. Do not accept such decisive action as would be likely to incur heavy losses in our carriers and cruisers. A letter of instructions is being furnished separately to striking force commanders.[14]

Four short sections following this cover coordination, search arcs, departure dates, and oilers. Orders for other units follow until page eight. Perhaps the best example of directness without qualification, conditionals, or subjunctive mood is this:

(d) Hawaiian Sea Frontier.

MIDWAY Local Defenses.

(1) Hold MIDWAY.[15]

Pages nine through eleven consist of communications information such as radio frequencies, authentication, and distribution lists. Annex A outlines submarine patrol areas, Appendix 1 contains information for oilers, and Appendix 2 defines the location for the striking force, designated here to the fleet (and for posterity) as "Point Luck."[16]

The "letter of instructions" to Nimitz's task force sent on May 28 is also characteristically short and direct. Notice the statement "which you shall interpret to mean," in which he states his supreme principle for managing the battle, and tells his commanders its meaning so that there can be no mistake:

> 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.[17]

In summary, these messages offer many of the qualities of Lee's order. There is one transmitter to many receivers, with unambiguous, concise wording, and clear expectations. They inform everyone of his part in the action and at the same time explain the entire plan. Finally, there are only five instances of the word "if": three are in the projection of Japanese operations and two involve refueling seaplanes and ships. The letter of instructions does contain the phrase "good prospect" and this could be considered a conditional. Nimitz here is defining and emphasizing for his trusted commanders how they should weigh risks versus benefits, most important in an arena where the American fleet was outnumbered and outgunned and facing an enemy with

more combat experience. This is a high-level, governing principle and not an "if-then" construct for a low-level tactical decision. Because the task force commanders would be at sea making important combat decisions *by themselves*, such clarification—even with the conditional "good prospect"—is perfectly valid.

Most important, no instance occurs in statements regarding combat. The brevity of the combat orders to these commanders, the omission of how to attack the Japanese, and the directness and scarcity of conditionals indicate that Nimitz had great confidence in their abilities and judgment. The subsequent victory of sinking four Japanese carriers at a cost of only one carrier validated this trust.

So far this section has discussed only written orders, but many controversial commands have been oral, delivered to the receiver in person or via courier. Because these messages are shorter, their analysis (using two Civil War examples) will be correspondingly easier.

The first is the oral order from General George Meade, commander of the Army of the Potomac (AOP), to General Henry Hunt, AOP artillery commander early in the Battle of Gettysburg. Earlier in the year, Meade's predecessor, General Joseph Hooker, had limited Hunt's authority to that of a staff artillery advisor. In the early morning hours of July 2 shortly after Meade arrived, he ordered Hunt to "see that the artillery was properly posted." This simple, direct, and clear mandate indicated his trust in and essentially restored Hunt's status as artillery *commander*.[18] His actions in managing and directing the guns during the battle more than vindicated Meade's confidence in him.

Another example of a successful oral order comes from brigade commander Colonel Strong Vincent to Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain,

commander 20th Maine Regiment, late in the afternoon of July 2 on Little Round Top. After selecting a defense line on the hillock, Vincent posted his regiments with Chamberlain's to the far left (east) of his line. He told Chamberlain that he was to "hold that ground at all hazards."[19] Once again, a simple, direct order leaves no room for options. Although Vincent was mortally wounded in the subsequent action, his brigade held the hill, when the 20th Maine charged downward after most of its ammunition had run out. Indeed, sometimes following an order means employing creativity not expressly communicated originally.

Finally, from the CT standpoint, a successful order need not have a positive outcome. Day three of Gettysburg offers two examples of this. The first are the instructions given to Lieutenant Colonel Charles Mudge by Colonel Silas Colgrove (which came from the XII Corps commander General Henry Slocum) for his 2nd Massachusetts and the 27th Indiana regiments to attack a superior Confederate force at the foot of Culp's Hill. After confirming that the messenger delivered the order correctly, Mudge said prophetically, "Well it is murder, but it's the order." This ill-conceived attack resulted in half of the two regiments lost, including Mudge himself.[20] And for the most part, Lee's directives to General Longstreet for Pickett's Charge were understood and carried out well but to no avail. These two examples show that any order might be based on a flawed plan, but based on an order alone, one can conclude nothing about the transmitter other than he gave an order based on a flawed plan. Table 1 summarizes these results.

TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF ORDERS THAT SUCCEEDED WITH ASSOCIATED COMMUNICATION THEORY ANALYSIS					
		SUCCESSFUL OPERATION			
		COMMUNICATION THEORY			
ORDER	TYPE OF ORDER	1. ORDER COMPLIANT?	2. ORDER CARRIED OUT?	3. ORDER'S INTENT OBTAINED?	COMMENTS
Lee Order 191	Written	Yes	Yes	Yes	Clear with 1 conditional of small import
Nimitz 29-42	Written	Yes	Yes	Yes	Clear with few conditionals
Nimitz Letter of Instruction	Written	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sole, vague conditional offered as guiding principle and not for detailed tactical decision.
Meade to Hunt	Oral	Yes	Yes	Yes	Clear with no conditionals
Vincent to Chamberlain	Oral	Yes	Yes	Yes	Clear with no conditionals
Colgrove to Mudge	Oral	Yes	Yes	No	Clear with no conditionals
Lee to Longstreet (Pickett's Charge)	Oral	Yes	Yes	No	Clear with no conditionals

This section has presented examples of military orders that conveyed successfully the intentions of the commander. All of these messages, oral and written, possess similar characteristics: they are simple, direct, relevant, and indicate trust in the

receiver. Not all had successful outcomes, but they can serve as models for the discussions of the more controversial ones.

EXAMPLES OF ORDERS THAT FAILED

The second step to correctly judge unsuccessful orders from the CT standpoint is to identify those that failed for this reason. Often explanations for such shortcomings are based upon character flaws in the receivers. Whereas this might be a part of the reason, it does not often reveal the entire story. A humorous but illustrative example about a West Point cadet in 1911 in his plebe (freshman) year illustrates this. He had received orders from two upperclassmen to appear in their room for "special instruction," whatever that meant, "dressed in blouse," meaning the normal army dress uniform (what civilians call a jacket). At the appointed time, he reported to the upperclassmen's room wearing the appropriate top but no trousers. When asked to explain, the cadet replied, "The order didn't say anything about trousers. It said to come 'wearing blouse.' "[21]

The half-clad cadet was twenty-year old Dwight Eisenhower and this episode illustrates two major features of insufficient commands. First, according to the aforementioned CT characteristics, the two upperclassmen were sure that they were using symbols that would be understood. The interpretation was obviously and purposefully different from their intent, but valid nonetheless from a purely literal standpoint as they mentioned no trousers. This illustrates another facet of orders that fail: words fall subject to interpretation that can distort a message. Granted, although young Eisenhower found a loophole for comic effect, his analysis was nonetheless defensible *given the wording of*

the order. Generally, in historical cases, however, such intentionally narrow approaches are not common.

Serious examples of unsuccessful orders are the classic "War Warning" messages sent from Washington, D.C., to Army and Navy commanders in the Pacific on Nov 27, 1941. Having broken the Japanese diplomatic code, military intelligence in Washington had determined that they were planning a major operation somewhere in the Pacific Ocean after negotiations with their ambassadors had stalled. At the time, theaters of operations had no central command, so separate messages were sent to the Army and Navy commanders in the Pacific.

The message from Washington to the Pacific commanders was sent by Secretary of War Henry Stimson. It was signed "Marshall" for Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall, but he was out of town.[22] The message reads thus:

> Negotiations with Japan appear to be terminated to all practical purposes with only the barest possibilities that the Japanese Government might come back and offer to continue. Japanese future action unpredictable but hostile action possible at any moment. If hostilities cannot, repeat cannot, be avoided, United States desires that Japan commit the first overt act. This policy should not, repeat not, be construed as restricting you to a course of action that might jeopardize your defense. Prior to hostile Japanese action you are directed to undertake such reconnaissance and other measures as you deem necessary but these measures should be carried out so as not, repeat not, to alarm the civil population or disclose intent. Report measures taken. Should hostilities occur you will carry out the tasks assigned in Rainbow Five [the Army's basic war plan] as far as they pertain to Japan. Limit dissemination of this highly secret information to minimum essential officers.[23]

The message from Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark to Admiral Husband Kimmel, Commander, Pacific Fleet, reads thus:

> This dispatch is to be considered a war warning. Negotiations with Japan looking toward stabilization of conditions in the Pacific have ceased and an aggressive move by Japan is expected within the next few days. The number and equipment

> of Japanese troops and the organization of the naval task forces indicates [*sic*] an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines Thai or Kra Peninsula or possibly Borneo. Execute an appropriate defensive deployment preparatory to carrying out the tasks assigned in WPL 46 [the Navy's basic war plan]. Inform district and Army authorities. A similar warning is being sent by the War Department.[24]

In Hawaii, upon receiving these messages, which to the casual observer with the benefit of hindsight seem to indicate that war is imminent, Admiral Kimmel and General Walter Short each concentrated on what they were ordered *not to do*. The two commanders conferred with each other about their messages. Avoidance of conflict or an international incident was a major consideration: they concluded that Japan was looking for an excuse to start a war. Because the nearest potential enemy base was 2,100 miles away, they excluded the possibility of an air raid on Oahu and ignored the possibility of a carrier air strike.[25]

The army's mission on Oahu was to protect the fleet, including reconnaissance, although such resources were limited. Short was ordered to "undertake such reconnaissance and other measures as you deem necessary." Again, the distance from Japan to Hawaii convinced him that the only "necessary measures" were to order radar surveillance daily from 0400 through regular working hours, but Short saw this as more training time than any operational asset. He therefore "deemed" that no aerial scouting was necessary; besides, his few long-range planes had been on high alert from previous warnings producing tired crews and overdue maintenance. Based on detailed analysis of the message, he concluded that the biggest danger came from the indigenous Japanese population on Hawaii and he set up to defend against sabotage instead; therefore, he lined up his planes on their airfields in close lines for easier guarding.[26]

Kimmel read the list of other locales the Japanese might attack—"the Philippines Thai or Kra Peninsula or possibly Borneo"—and concluded that the only surprise offensive on Pearl Harbor would come from submarines. Despite naval officials in Washington thinking that the term "war warning" was so clear as to not be misunderstood, because the Army message mentioned aerial reconnaissance, none from the navy was ordered.[27]

General Douglas MacArthur in the Philippine Islands received a similar message from Washington on November 27:

> Negotiations with Japan appear to be terminated to all practical purposes with only barest possibilities that the Japanese Government might come back and offer to continue. Japanese future action unpredictable but hostile action possible at any moment. If hostilities cannot, repeat cannot, be avoided, United States desires that Japan commit the first overt act. This policy should not, repeat not, be construed as restricting you to a course of action that might jeopardize the defense of the Philippines. Prior to hostile Japanese action you are directed to undertake such reconnaissance and other measures as you deem necessary. Report measures taken. Should hostilities occur you will carry out the tasks assigned in revised Rainbow Five which was delivered to you by General Brereton. Chief of Naval Operations concurs and request you notify Hart.[28]

After conferring with Admiral Thomas Hart, Commander, Asiatic Fleet, and his staff, MacArthur concluded that no attack could occur before spring, but Hart felt otherwise. He therefore ordered no aerial reconnaissance and responded the next day that "everything is in readiness for the conduct of a successful defense."[29]

Upon hearing of the attack on Pearl Harbor, MacArthur ordered no offensive action against Japanese bases on Formosa because his orders proscribed any offensive act: "United States desires that Japan commit the first overt act." As it turned out, bad weather on Formosa delayed the Japanese attack until the afternoon: because no morning attack occurred, it appeared as if the Japanese bypassed the Philippines. In addition,

Philippines President Manuel Quezon begged him to keep his country neutral. Thinking they had plenty of time, Philippines Air Commander General Lewis Brereton's reconnaissance was spotty and not well planned. No orders were issued but MacArthur told Washington that U. S. fighters would meet the enemy planes and that "our tails are up in the air." However, despite nine hours between the Hawaiian attack and that on the Philippines, American planes were caught on the ground there (although refueling between reconnaissance missions) just as on Oahu.[30] These attacks were just as devastating as those on Oahu.

These three messages were carefully crafted by their authors, using language they thought would be understood both as to meaning and importance—"war warning, hostile action possible at any moment." Yet for all the thought behind them, they contained conflicting information and this can be detrimental concerning issues of national policy. Whereas they referred to "war warning" and "negotiations with Japan...terminated," they also contained instructions to "not alarm the civil population" or "United States desires that Japan commit the first overt act." The receivers at the two major American bases closest to Japan were highly educated and trained officers. All were in positions of great responsibility and trust. The transmitters of these messages thought that they successfully transmitted their intent. Events showed that they did not especially because all receivers concentrated on the negative, i.e., what not to do, and none performed the acts expected by the authors.

One feature that appears in each account of these Pacific messages is how the receivers interpreted or misinterpreted certain parts of them. All three officers feared starting a war with Japan; thought that the main Japanese strike might occur elsewhere;

and looked at the distances and the situation concluding that they were too far for an air attack. None performed effective aerial reconnaissance. In every case, selective perception triumphed over common vocabulary, clarity, expectations, and trust. Each commander saw in his message what he believed was there and acted accordingly, resulting in an unsuccessful defense with devastating effect. Table 2 summarizes these results.

TABLE 2. EXAMPLES OF ORDERS THAT FAILED WITH ASSOCIATED COMMUNICATION THEORY ANALYSIS

		SUCCESSFUL OPERATION			
		COMMUNICATION THEORY			
ORDER	TYPE OF ORDER	1. ORDER COMPLIANT?	2. ORDER CARRIED OUT?	3. ORDER'S INTENT OBTAINED?	COMMENTS
Senior Cadets to Eisenhower	Oral	No	Yes	No	Incomplete sartorial specification
War Warnings to Kimmel, Short	Written	No	Partly	No	Selective perception produced limited compliance to orders.
War Warning to MacArthur	Written	No	Partly	No	Selective perception produced limited compliance to orders.

With examples of successful and unsuccessful military orders established, the way is now open to examine five controversial orders from the Battle of Gettysburg.

I. LEE'S ORDERS TO STUART

For the Gettysburg campaign, General Lee intended that General Stuart's cavalry division inform him of the location of the AOP. Stuart instead found himself on the east side encircling it and venturing to Carlisle before he contacted the Second Corps. He provided no intelligence to Lee and his arrival on July 2, well into the battle, has been a controversial topic ever since.

An analysis by Scott Bowden and Bill Ward in *Last Chance for Victory* includes close reading of these orders and shows that Lee told Stuart twice to move his brigades east of General Richard Ewell's Second Corps. The initial message on June 22 reads thus (italics added):

> If you find that he [the Federal Army] is moving northward, and that two brigades can guard the Blue Ridge & take care of your rear, you can move with the other three [brigades] into Maryland & *take position on General Ewell's right*, place yourself in communication with him, guard his flank, keep him informed of the enemy's movements, & collect all the supplies you can for the use of the army.[31]

In a message to Ewell also on June 22, which Stuart would not have seen, Lee wrote (italics added):

> I also directed Genl Stuart, should the enemy have so far retired from his front as to permit of the departure of a portion of the cavalry to march with three brigades across the Potomac, *and place himself on your right*, & in communication with you, keep you advised of the movements of the enemy, and assist in collecting supplies for the army.[32]

After a message exchange between Longstreet and Stuart, wherein the former passed on an order from the army commander, Lee offered another directive on June 23 with further clarification (italics added):

> You will however be able to judge *whether you can pass around their army* without hindrance, doing them all the damage you can, & cross the river east of the mountains. *In either case, after crossing the [Potomac] river, you must move on & feel the right of Ewell's troops*, collecting information, provisions, &c...
>
> Be watchful & circumspect in all your movements.[33]

The phrase "whether you can pass around their army" is often mistakenly thought to allow Stuart the option to completely bypass or go around the AOP. Lee's second message offers only one course of action: move to Ewell's right. Assuming that Stuart understood the planned route of the army and could read a map, no other mission or intent makes sense. Lee trusted his cavalry commander to choose his route and where to cross the Potomac, but his intent remains clear: regardless of the route ("In either case"), Stuart "must" move to Ewell's right.[34]

The orders to Stuart are short and appear to indicate a trust in his discretion for tactical matters concerning the route, timing, and the like, but in the end, Lee sums up his intent: move to Ewell's right. If one assumes that this meaning is clear, one might ask how Stuart could have missed this. The misinterpretation can be ascribed to ego, flamboyance, or honor and be partly correct. After all, Lee ends his message with the genteel "be watchful and circumspect in all your movements." This was to rein Stuart in, to tell him politely as a Virginia gentleman to not be rash, heroic, or veer from his mission to find the AOP and protect the army, which he supposedly understood.[35]

Compare Lee's admonition to that of President Abraham Lincoln's letter to General Hooker in January 1863; giving him command of the AOP, he ends with "And now beware of rashness. Beware of rashness, but with energy and sleepless vigilance go forward and give us victories."[36] Although both commanders conveyed the same

message to their subordinates—*don't be rash*—Lincoln's was more direct and Lee's followed the Southern code of gentility. In his after-action report on the campaign, Stuart wrote (italics added):

> *In the exercise of the discretion vested in me by the Commanding-General*, it was deemed practicable to move in the enemy's rear, intercepting his communications with his base — Washington — and inflicting damage upon his rear, to rejoin the army in Pennsylvania in time to participate in its actual conflicts. The result abundantly confirms my judgment as to the practicability as well as utility of the move.[37]

Whatever his reasons or rationalizations, Stuart obviously thought that he had more discretion to move to the rear of the AOP. Contrast this supposition with Lee's reaction to the cavalry's belated arrival at army headquarters on July 2. Although known for rarely criticizing his subordinates, especially in public, Lee first greeted him with silence, then said, "General Stuart, where have you been?" Flustered, Stuart fumbled over his answer to which his commander interjected, "I have not heard a word from you for days, and you were the eyes and ears of my army."[38] Later, Lee's after-action report states euphemistically, "The movements of the army preceding the battle of Gettysburg had been much embarrassed by the absence of the cavalry."[39] These statements do not sound as if they came from someone who thought Stuart had carried out his orders.

Just as did the admirals and generals in late November 1941, Stuart read a message and extracted what he deemed it to mean. Unlike the former case, he actually received a clarification which informed him that "In either case, after crossing the [Potomac] river, you must move on & feel the right of Ewell's troops." Despite this, Stuart's selective perception led him on a course that possibly affected the battle.

Regardless how one interprets the messages today, Stuart's selective reading of his orders rendered his 4,500 troopers inert and useless to Lee prior to the battle.

II. STUART'S ORDERS TO ROBERTSON

Lee's order of June 23 to Stuart included instructions to watch the flank and rear of the army: these were in turn passed to General Beverly Robertson, senior commander of two cavalry brigades, and General William Jones, who led one of them. These three developed into an interesting and non-productive triangle. In selecting these two generals for this mission, Stuart took his three best cavalry brigades and commanders with him for his reconnaissance of the AOP. Worse, he left behind with Lee no senior cavalry commander, such as Wade Hampton, to coordinate cavalry operations during the reconnaissance.

Considered competent but extremely irascible, as reflected in his nickname "Grumble," Jones had been in the cavalry since the start of the war. Although particularly incompatible with Stuart, his immediate commander still regarded him the best outpost officer in the Army of Northern Virginia (ANV).[40] Robertson was considered a good training officer but unreliable and lethargic in the field with a small brigade of two new and untried regiments.[41]

Unfortunately for Stuart, Robertson outranked Jones, so Stuart generally dealt with Robertson by giving detailed instructions that tried to cover every contingency.[42] Just to be sure, Stuart often sent further orders to Jones.[43] He expected him to act as "guardian angel" for the senior Robertson, an awkward, counterproductive, and unworthy solution from a major general.[44] In effect, Lee trusted Stuart, who trusted Jones, but

neither commander had much faith in Robertson, who unfortunately outranked Jones. Lee suffered this deplorable command situation despite its deleterious potential.

In accordance with Lee's order, Stuart sent this message to Robertson on June 24:

> Your own and General Jones' brigades will cover the front of Ashby's and Snicker's Gaps, yourself, as senior officer, being in command.
>
> Your object will be to watch the enemy; deceive him as to our designs, and harass his rear if you find he is retiring. Be always on the alert; let nothing escape your observation, and miss no opportunity which offers to damage the enemy.
>
> After the enemy has moved beyond your reach, leave sufficient pickets in the mountains, withdraw to the west side of the Shenandoah, place a strong and reliable picket to watch the enemy at Harper's Ferry, cross the Potomac, and follow the army, keeping on its right and rear.
>
> As long as the enemy remains in your front in force, unless otherwise ordered by General R. E. Lee, Lieutenant-General Longstreet, or myself, hold the Gaps with a line of pickets reaching across the Shenandoah by Charlestown to the Potomac.
>
> If, in the contingency mentioned, you withdraw, sweep the Valley clear of what pertains to the *army*, and cross the Potomac at the different points crossed by it.
>
> You will instruct General Jones from time to time as the movements progress, or events may require, and report anything of importance to Lieutenant-General Longstreet, with whose position you will communicate by relays through Charlestown.
>
> I send instructions for General Jones, which please read. Avail yourself of every means in your power to increase the efficiency of your command, and keep it up to the highest number possible. Particular attention will be paid to shoeing horses, and to marching off of the turnpike.
>
> In case of an advance of the enemy, you will offer such resistance as will be justifiable to check him and discover his intentions and, if possible, you will prevent him from gaining possession of the Gaps.
>
> In case of a move by the enemy upon Warrenton, you will counteract it as much as you can, compatible with previous instructions.
>
> You will have with the two brigades two batteries of horse artillery.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. E. B. STUART,

Major-General, Commanding.

[P. S.] Do not change your present line of pickets until daylight to-morrow morning, unless compelled to do so.[45]

Some features of this message stand out. First, it is almost as long as General Lee's 1862 Special Order 191, but that directive was for his entire army and Stuart's is for *only two brigades*. Whereas Lee's message contained only one instance of conditional wording, this message boasts no less than four—"if," "in case of," and so forth. It appears as though Stuart is trying to cover every possible contingency because he did not trust Robertson's judgment, for instance, telling Robertson:

> In case of an advance of the enemy, you will offer such resistance as will be justifiable to check him and discover his intentions and, if possible, you will prevent him from gaining possession of the Gaps."

This line informs the general to resist the Federals and learn what the enemy is doing which was already part of his stated mission in the first and second paragraphs.

In particular, unlike Lee's message, which contained only objectives and routing instructions for his commanders, Stuart in this message offered Robertson little bits of advice that one might not expect to appear in orders to an experienced brigadier general who graduated from West Point. For instance, he told him to "Be always on the alert; let nothing escape your observation, and miss no opportunity which offers to damage the enemy" and "Avail yourself of every means in your power to increase the efficiency of your command." Stuart wrote that he had sent Jones, Robertson's subordinate, separate orders and even added a postscript advising Robertson on picket line management. Both

of these are neon signs flashing, "I don't trust you." It is unclear how much effect such condescension had.

Perhaps the most telltale evidence of Stuart's distrust of Robertson is this line, almost an insult: "Particular attention will be paid to shoeing horses." Proper care of horses, including shoes, was integral to cavalry's success on both sides, but a cavalry commander should have known this two years into the war. This is the equivalent of Nimitz condescendingly reminding his task force commanders, "Make sure your planes have gas." In fact, Stuart's orders stand in marked contrast to Nimitz's Plan 29-42, which defines a much larger operation and is devoid of such admonishment. All in all, attempting to cover every possibility, Stuart left a document that attests to his inherent lack of faith in his subordinate.

Was Stuart's initial lack of confidence in Robertson justified? His previous war record was undistinguished with shortcomings, so he was average or below. The record from Gettysburg is this: despite the detail (from attempted clarity) in Stuart's message, Robertson and Jones still missed completely the AOP's crossing of the Potomac, which finished on June 28. It is unclear why, but they remained in place until June 30, a day after receiving Lee's orders to move north and join the army as it concentrated near Gettysburg.[46]

If Stuart left no document or quote stating his distrust of Robertson, it appears that the content of this message would reveal such. This is an excellent example of how the wording of an order can reveal the level of trust involved. However, CT offers little to explain Robertson's lapses in judgment or performance. This message failed because of leadership lapses, first retaining Robertson, an officer holding no trust with his

superiors, and second thinking that an exhaustive, overbearing message could overcome his ineptitude.

III. LEE'S ORDER TO AVOID BATTLE

After the spy Harrison delivered his intelligence to Lee and Longstreet on June 28, orders were sent for the ANV to concentrate near Cashtown and Gettysburg. Two days later, upon hearing that Third Corps commander General Ambrose. P. Hill intended to enter Gettysburg on July 1, Lee was not concerned. However, whereas this move conformed to the location part of his directive, the lack of cavalry screen was still worrisome. He sent an aide, Major Walter Taylor, his assistant adjutant general, to deliver instructions to General Henry Heth, whose division was closest to the town. These orders defined parameters for his movement to Gettysburg: "ascertain what force was at Gettysburg, and, if he found the infantry opposed to him, to report the fact immediately, without forcing an engagement."[47]

Later that day, after the battle had started west of town on Hill's front, Lee sent a messenger from Ewell back with instructions that ended with the order that if the enemy force before him was "very large, he did not want a general engagement brought on till the rest of the army came up."[48] In terms of CT, this order was simple, consistent, directed individually to each general, and delivered by trusted messengers to trusted subordinates. In addition, Lee relied on each commander to understand the importance of waiting until the army was assembled before commencing battle. His orders seem clear enough, yet fighting began anyway when Heth's division of Hill's corps engaged Federal cavalry west of town early on July 1.

One explanation for why it started is that Hill and Heth were eager for a fight *they could easily win*. Previously General James Johnston Pettigrew reported that his brigade sighted Federal cavalry in the town while scouting nearby on June 30. But because Lee told Hill that the AOP was nowhere near them, he and Heth believed that local militia was mistaken for Federal cavalry. Pettigrew had not served with them and was not West Point graduate, so they doubted his reconnaissance even after he offered the testimony of other officers on his staff. Another possibility is that Lee's order offered the conditional (italics added) "if he found the *infantry* opposed to him."[49] Therefore, if Heth determined that it was cavalry or militia, technically the order would be followed.

Heth, with Hill's blessing, sent a large force of two infantry brigades led by an artillery battalion—not infantry, as was the proper procedure—into Gettysburg on the morning of July 1, indicating that he too expected little trouble.[50] Of course, Federal cavalry were in the town, ensuing in a fight which worsened when the Federal I Corps appeared. Ewell's divisions, on the other hand, arrived on the field in late morning from the north after Hill's corps was engaged and felt understandably compelled to assist Hill's brigades. This is a case where the tactical situation changed causing the commander, Ewell, to react in opposition to his orders; he would, however, refer to the "do not engage" directive later in the day.

In summary, despite sending clear orders to his subordinates to avoid battle until the ANV was properly assembled, one general assumed that the premise of the command was true, i.e., that the Federal army was not in the area, and engaged with a large force. The other general understood the directive but was compelled to fight in support the first. As with the Pearl Harbor instructions that offered simple words such as "war warning,"

terms like "without forcing an engagement" and "not want a general engagement" were ignored. Whether Generals Hill and Heth did this deliberately or selectively is open to debate, but the fact remains: they were ordered clearly to *not* start a battle and did so.

IV. LEE'S ORDER TO EWELL

Perhaps no Civil War order provokes discussion and controversy as does that from General Lee to General Richard Ewell on the afternoon of July 1. After the late morning arrival of two of his divisions from the northwest to the northeast of Gettysburg, they were engaged for the rest of the day against the Federal I Corps west of town and XI Corps north of town. Further into the afternoon, the Confederates had pushed the Federals in disarray through town to the hills southeast, where an XI Corps division had been left in reserve. In addition, Federal reinforcements were closing from the south and deploying on Cemetery Hill, Cemetery Ridge, and east of Culp's Hill on the York Pike. With about three hours of daylight remaining, Lee sensed an opportunity to sweep the field. He told an aide, Major Walter Taylor, to ride to Ewell and tell him that it was "only necessary to press 'those people' in order to secure possession of those heights," ending with "if practicable" or "if possible." Ewell chose to not attack the hill.

Historians such as Edwin Coddington, Gary Gallagher, Harry Pfanz, and others have long considered this command to be a "discretionary order," i.e., an *indirect suggestion* giving the receiver latitude for the decision and *not a direct order*. Based on this interpretation, Ewell had the authority to make a choice and he used his discretion to not attack. In their book *Last Chance for Victory*, Scott Bowden and Bill Ward assert that this interpretation is untrue. To counter what they perceive as crass and baseless

accusations of General Lee's performance, they present an exhaustive accounting of his whereabouts and actions during the battle. This includes a curious and somewhat repetitive linguistic *apologia* for General Ewell's "misunderstanding" (per the authors) of the term "if practicable," based on the contemporary concept of honor.[51]

The aristocratic Southern code of gentility forms the basis for an adherence to tradition that dictated the deportment of Lee and his officers. One did not order a Southern gentleman directly, but used carefully worded deferential statements that were supposedly understood as an order. Lee adding a genteel suffix of "if practicable" is one example of this as well as Lee's aforementioned admonition to Stuart "Be watchful & circumspect". Another example such language was the signing of a letter to subordinates with "your obedient servant." Rather than suggesting that the writer was literally subservient, this was an expression of good will between gentlemen. Note that this phrase appears in messages sent to opposing commanders on both sides.[52] In addition, Lee was known to edit his reports to avoid blaming or embarrassing any of his officers, which he felt "is unbecoming in a generous people, and I grieve to see its expression."[53]

Acceptance that Lee and his generals were Southern gentlemen produces a conclusion that gentility and honor colored their actions, writing, and speaking. Based on this, Bowden and Ward propose that his directive was not a "discretionary order," but "an order with discretion," i.e., a respectful *order* whose method of execution was left to the *discretion* of the receiver.[54] As a Virginia gentleman, Ewell was expected to know that this purposefully deferential statement was in fact a direct order and nothing else. Communication theory states that both the transmitter and receiver must assign the same

meaning to the symbols used, and Lee apparently used language he thought Ewell understood. Yet he did not take the hill as entrusted.

The reasons offered for this failure are many. In addition to the "discretionary order" theory, it has been suggested that Lee should have known that Ewell did not possess the resolute qualities of the deceased General Thomas ("Stonewall") Jackson and should have changed his style of command to deal with his supposed indecision. Ewell's long successful service under Jackson, who was known for not tolerating incompetence, belies this theory. Another supposition purports that the messenger, Major Taylor, did not remember Lee's exact words. However, he was regarded as accurate in such matters and other witnesses confirm his account. Ewell contended that A.P Hill's Third Corps could offer no assistance on his right, especially after their long fighting that day. Finally, some argue that Ewell was following Lee's command that "he did not want a general engagement brought on." One might ask here: after five or six hours of fighting, could any general *not* believe that the original avoid-a-battle order was null and void?[55]

According to Bowden and Ward, the most credible explanation is that Ewell was emotionally shocked by his rapid successes of the morning and early afternoon. His soldiers had swept the Federals from the field under his command.[56] In addition, he had received multiple orders from Lee and numerous suggestions for courses of action from his subordinates. But in the end, his decision-making ability froze in a situation not too dissimilar to what happened to MacArthur between hearing of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent Japanese attacks on the Philippines. Both appear to have been overwhelmed by multiple stimuli—success for Ewell, disaster for MacArthur—and both reacted in the

same way. They based their actions on parts of their orders, or they engaged in selective perception.

Ewell's after-action report, in which he states an understanding of the order to avoid battle, offers support for this view. After sending General Jubal Early's division down the Heidlersburg Road (italics added):

> I notified the general commanding of my movements, and was informed by him that, *in case we found the enemy's force very large, he did not want a general engagement brought on till the rest of the army came up.*
>
> By the time this message reached me, General A. P. Hill had already been warmly engaged with a large body of the enemy in his front, and Carter's artillery battalion, of Rodes' division, had opened with fine effect on the flank of the same body, which was rapidly preparing to attack me, while fresh masses were moving into position in my front. *It was too late to avoid an engagement without abandoning the position already taken up, and I determined to push the attack vigorously.*[57]

Ewell knew that the engagement had started, but not why, nor does he seem to have pondered over it very long beyond his awareness of Lee's order. In any case, he described a decision from a major general based on the tactical condition before him, to attack as hard as possible. Later he discusses the situation at the critical point (italics added):

> The enemy had fallen back to a commanding position known as Cemetery Hill, south of Gettysburg, and quickly showed a formidable front there. On entering the town, I received a message from the commanding general to attack this hill, *if I could do so to advantage.* I could not bring artillery to bear on it, and all the troops with me were jaded by twelve hours' marching and fighting, and I was notified that General Johnson's division (the only one of my corps that had not been engaged) was close to the town.
>
> Cemetery Hill was not assailable from the town, and I determined, with Johnson's division, to take possession of a wooded hill to my left...[58]

Ewell took the sole conditional "if practicable" as an intrinsic qualification for attacking only if he "could do so to advantage." Like Stuart, he claimed that he was given discretion from his commander. Unlike Stuart, he might have been more justified in doing so. Admittedly "if practicable" was part of the traditional Virginia gentleman's lexicon. However, the phrase, given the conditions of battle, does seem to offer just enough leeway to allow a choice—and Ewell took it. According to participants testimony and recent analysis, this is not what Lee intended, and history must live with the fact that a traditional phrase had the same wording as a way out.

After listing all the reasons that trying to take Cemetery Hill was not advantageous, he even claimed that it "was not assailable from the town." So Ewell made a command decision and entered the battle based on the tactical situation (an aggressive posture contrary to Lee's original orders), an aggressive posture, then later became hesitant despite several hours of hard fighting, declining to press an enemy in obvious disarray (a conservative choice contrary to his updated directive).

Despite Lee's two subordinates being Virginia gentlemen and supposedly speaking the same language (a condition of successful communication), both generals mentally converted the subtlety of this polite, genteel code to a basic conditional much as a commoner would. They independently exhibited selective perception when interpreting important battle orders from Robert E. Lee, indicating how pervasive and potentially pernicious this behavior can be.

V. MEADE'S ORDER TO SICKLES

Although the Federals won the battle, they too had their share of missteps. Perhaps the most well known is the movement on July 2 by III Corps under General Daniel Sickles, the only Federal corps commander at Gettysburg who did not graduate from West Point. In addition, Sickles was a New York Tammany Hall politician, congressman, lawyer, and political survivor who knew how to parse a phrase to his advantage. Dan Sickles's sole concern was Dan Sickles: his skill at self-preservation was obvious, vulgar, and well known throughout the public, government, and army. He was also unhappy about the departure from command of his friend, Joseph Hooker, on June 28 with General Meade as his replacement.

Around 3 p.m., Sickles ordered an advance westward to the Emmitsburg Road from its original position on the Union line to a final deployment was about three quarters of a mile ahead centered at the Peach Orchard. This decision resulted in an extended salient that was exploited about an hour later in an attack by two of Longstreet's divisions. Some of the fiercest, most desperate fighting in the entire war occurred as the Federals poured in brigade after brigade to stop Confederate attacks. The Union line held, but at a tremendous cost on both sides.

At the core of this episode is whether Meade's order to Sickles gave him the latitude to move his 10,000 men forward. On July 2 at 5 a.m., Meade ordered General John Geary's division of XII Corps to leave its position near and on Little Round Top and progress to Culp's Hill. Later that morning he sent his aide and son, Captain George Meade, to learn where III Corps was deployed. They were not in position because Sickles was in "some doubt as to where he should go." The nature of this exchange

indicates that Meade had sent orders to Sickles earlier, although this message is not recorded.[59] Because of this, it is impossible to determine whether it was terse or detailed, both of which would indicate Meade's level of trust in Sickles.

Upon hearing about Sickles's indecision, Meade told his son sharply to return to tell him that (italics added) "his instructions were to go into position *on the left of the Second Corps; that his right was to connect with the left of the Second Corps; that he was to prolong with his line the line of that corps*, occupying the position that General Geary had held the night before."[60] With this order, it is clear that Meade attempted to lay out clearly for Sickles exactly where he should move his corps. His redundancy here is almost as condescending as Stuart's "shoeing horses" comment: "left...Second Corps, left...Second Corps, occupy same position as Geary."

For some reason Sickles did not understand this, apparently consulted with none of his professional officers, and came personally to confer with Meade who simply repeated his instruction. In response, Sickles bizarrely claimed that John Geary had had no position and asked for a member of Meade's staff to help him place his corps, for which General Henry Hunt, Chief of Artillery, was chosen.[61]

Sickles then asked Meade if he, Sickles, had the authority to place his corps "in such a manner as, in his judgment, he should deem most suitable." Meade replied, "Certainly, *within the limits of the general instructions I have given to you*; any ground within those limits you choose to occupy I leave to you." Hunt, unaware of Meade's original order to Sickles, learned of the decision to cover the Emmitsburg Road only upon arriving at his sector or the field. He offered Sickles advice and suggested that Meade survey the proposed line before III Corps moved out. Sickles ignored Hunt and

moved out without waiting. Riding out later, Meade observed III Corps in its extended position, and he pointed in the direction of Little Round Top to show Sickles where he wanted them; however, once Confederate artillery started, he did not think it wise for those men to move at that time.[62] The III Corps was attacked by two divisions of Longstreet's First Corps and in the next three hours suffered around 4,200 casualties, including Sickles, who lost a leg.

Meade's language is in this exchange appears more prosaic than Lee's in his exchanges—no genteel "if practicable" holding codified hidden connotation. Yet Sickles did not deploy his corps where Meade directed him. Although he received the instructions to deploy in the area previously occupied by Geary, Sickles claimed that this was invalid because it was used simply for assembly and not for battle deployment, a meaningless fine point only a lawyer might devise. In addition, as headquarters did not respond to his legitimate concern about Buford's cavalry departing from his left, Sickles felt as if he had to move out to compensate for this loss of reconnaissance.

A slight digression is required at this point. In the Battle of Chancellorsville two months earlier in May, Sickles's III Corps had occupied a height called Hazel Grove. Army commander Hooker ordered his corps off Hazel Grove to another position after which Confederate artillery occupied the hill and fired on the Federals. Sickles's memory of this incident is often cited as a valid reason for Sickles's westward movement on July 2: the Peach Orchard sits on a higher elevation than the line to which Sickles was ordered. This might be true, but it appears to have not been part of the recorded discussion between him and Meade. An analysis based on CT can evaluate only discourse, not thought: CT cannot evaluate the validity of the Hazel Grove memory.

In the end, Sickles claimed there was no misinterpretation because no orders existed, using the "approval" from General Hunt as validation of his extended position. Sickles never again served with the army and likely only avoided a sullied reputation because no one would court martial a general who lost his leg in action.[63]

The original order to Sickles was clear: connect with II Corps and extend the line. Like Lee, Meade expected his corps commanders to determine how to follow his directives without spending extra time explaining: they were, after all, trusted men in leadership positions. Thus three major elements of communication theory were met: Meade communicated his expectation to Sickles in a common code and relied on him to follow through. Upon request (which Sickles was entitled to make), Meade later clarified the instruction but unfortunately did not inform Hunt of the original order when he sent him to assist Sickles in placing his corps. Despite this, there was nothing in Meade's original message indicating that III Corps should be deployed almost a mile west of the Federal line.

It should be noted here that if Sickles was truly stymied as to where to place his corps, he was entitled to request clarification. This is vital in a military sense and is part of the CT mechanism. As part of the feedback process, Meade did clarify his response. However, in doing so, the message was relayed first by his son and later by Hunt, who was unaware of the original sequence of orders and clarifications. This is an example of the third characteristic above involving multiple persons. In this case, Hunt unwittingly approved a position because he did not know the original position as ordered by Meade. It shows that even trusted messengers can complicate the transmission of a message transmission.

It appears that by his own words, Sickles chose to move his corps where he wanted despite his orders. He continued refusing to accept that he had misinterpreted directions he was given, claiming further that Meade had no plan and exercised no leadership leaving him and him alone. However, he admitted to both acting on his own and not notifying his superiors or neighbor, General Winfield Scott Hancock, commander of II Corps, of his change of position.[64] As with Beverly Robertson, this is an example where communication theory offers little to explain the actions of the receiver.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper outlined aspects of communication theory and investigated its usage in analyzing controversial Civil War messages. Of particular importance was clarifying the difference between the concept of selective perception—wherein a receiver unconsciously follows part of a directive and excludes the rest—contrasted to simple disobedience. The paper then presented examples of orders that succeeded and some that failed, presenting each with corresponding historical context and additional explanations provided by CT.

Five controversial Gettysburg commands were then explored using the characteristics selected for this paper. The results show that whereas such ideas provide an alternate method of studying or parsing the messages to determine their textual efficacy, they offer no guarantee of answering the questions surrounding why an order was not actually followed. A summary of the results of this approach to these five orders follows:

1. *Lee's Orders to Stuart*. Lee was direct with his intent in his first written order to Stuart, but offered still more clarification in his second. Two things were apparent: Stuart was to move to Ewell's right and not be brash. He failed in both. If Stuart should avoid being accused of conscious, premeditated disobedience or of striving for headlines, then CT offers an alternative explanation for his negligence in following the given commands: selective perception. Despite Lee's manifest displeasure with his absence, Stuart apparently still did not recognize the meaning of the order, stating in his report stated that he had exercised the discretion from the commander.

2. *Stuart's Orders to Robertson*. Neither Lee nor Stuart should have tolerated the deplorable situation between him and both Robertson and Jones. Stuart chose to appoint no better cavalry commander over Robertson and avoided dealing with Jones because of personality problems. There appears to be no record of Lee exercising his right as army commander to intervene, informing his three generals that *he* considered this situation intolerable and ordering them to cease discord or answer to him personally. It seems difficult to envision any Confederate general willing to do this. In the end, the hands-off approach allowed a festering environment of distrust to permeate the command structure of the Confederate cavalry.

That said, it appears abundantly clear from Stuart's message to Robertson that he had minimal, if any, trust in him. He offers orders for each situation, instructs him on rotation of his pickets, and even tells him to be observant and shoe his horses. Despite all this handholding, Robertson missed the AOP crossing the Potomac, which caused him to be away from the ANV near the start of the battle. Robertson and Jones even waited a day after receiving Lee's instructions before they joined the army. In this case, no aspect

of CT appears to explain these lapses any better than a verdict of ineptitude on the part of Robertson and Jones.

3. *Lee's Order to Avoid Battle*. Lee gave a simple order to his commanders, in essence "Do not start a fight." They were already in the Gettysburg-Cashtown area, so they met the location stipulation: whatever actually drove Hill and Heth to engage the Federals remains unknown. One might argue that Lee's optimistic statement to Hill about the AOP's distance from the ANV combined with Hill's disbelief of Pettigrew's observations converged to predispose Hill to carelessness. Alternately, it can be asserted that Hill and Heth were anxious for a fight, especially if Gettysburg contained only militia. However, CT could suggest that Hill, who received Lee's order, unconsciously parsed one part of the order (where to meet) from the other (do not start a fight). This is not as obvious as with the Pearl Harbor commanders or Stuart, but remains a plausible alternative.

4. *Lee's Order to Ewell*. For most of July 1 General Ewell performed well. Conscious of the order from Lee to avoid battle, he read the tactical situation correctly and instructed his brigades to assist Hill by attacking the Federal I and XI Corps assembling north of town. However, in front of Cemetery Hill a few hours later, he decided it disadvantageous to press the Union army there despite its disarray. Two straightforward reasons for this could simply be poor decision-making or loss of nerve, although these seem contrary to all of his performance up to that minute. Another more plausible explanation from CT for his decision is that, like MacArthur in the Philippines with bad news hitting him, the days' victories overwhelmed Ewell. Similarly, they both

apparently unconsciously chose to concentrate on only part of their orders as the fulcrum for decisions, in effect selective perception.

5. *Meade's Order to Sickles*. It seems difficult to argue that Meade's commands to Sickles, the original and clarifications, were unclear. Any minimally competent officer could look at the topography and determine the correct sector for placement of III Corps. Because Meade indicated that the battle had started and ordered all units to march quickly to the town, determining what Sickles hoped to gain by parsing and questioning a simple order as "connect with II Corps" remains challenging; he consciously disobeyed it and offered no excuse. Analysis shows that Meade's orders conformed to CT characteristics of and did not offer the leeway that Sickles assumed and claimed. In addition, Sickles's apparent topographical ineptitude and obstinate defiance transcend selective perception. Table 3 summarizes these results.

TABLE 3. COMMUNICATION THEORY ANALYSIS OF FIVE CONTROVERSIAL ORDERS FROM THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

		SUCCESSFUL OPERATION			
		COMMUNICATION THEORY			
ORDER	TYPE OF ORDER	1. ORDER COMPLIANT?	2. ORDER CARRIED OUT?	3. ORDER'S INTENT OBTAINED?	COMMENTS
Lee to Stuart	Written	Yes	No	No	Clear order misread via selective perception.
Stuart to Robertson	Written	No	No	No	- Overly comprehensive message with many conditionals - Stuart's

					distrust is manifest and well-placed owing to Robertson's ineptitude.
Lee to Avoid Battle (Hill)	Oral	Yes	No	No	Selective perception possible
Lee to Ewell	Oral	No	No	No	- Brief message contained 1 conditional which Ewell followed via selective perception. - Input overload
Meade to Sickles	Oral	Yes	No	No	Clear message, but ignored and contorted owing to Sickles's arrogance and ineptitude.

These discussions suggest these conclusions:

1. Communication theory provides a structured approach for examining failed historical orders. As such, it is as equally valid as offering the use of polite Virginia gentleman's language to explain why some of Lee's commands failed. Of course, all such proposals possess a certain amount of conjecture: whereas each one appears possible, some even more plausible, but no one can ever know what happened with certainty.

2. Communication theory also seems to confirm why orders succeeded. Successful commands were clear and concise, both of which are characteristics of

exemplary communication. In addition, they were received by officers who read them correctly and who were inclined to obey them. The benchmark examples of Nimitz and Lee demonstrate these tenets, as do the oral orders of Meade and Vincent.

3. Selective perception might offer different insights and plausible explanations in cases where the failed message contains crucial conditionals or options or strictures against certain actions. In the two examples in Hawaii and the Philippines, orders appeared to permit this wherein commanders all concentrated on what they were *not* to do. In the examples of disobeyed messages—Rommel, von Choltitz, Pickett—receivers consciously ignored direct orders with no selective perception. But as the case studies show, even a simple directive such as "do not start a battle if infantry is in the town" or to take a hill, "if practicable," can be an opening for selective perception to creep in.

Lee's use of the conditional "if practicable" presents a problem for historians. As noted above, it has long been considered a true conditional, often compared to "if possible." Also discussed is the contention of Bowden and Ward that it is not a conditional, but an implicit, but direct, order in the genteel parlance of Virginia gentlemen. Thus, according to this contention, Lee's order to Ewell was a direct order, not a polite suggestion. However, in his Special Order 191, he uses the conditional "practicable' twice in instruction to General Walker, who is from Missouri and not a member of Virginia society. Which is the exception and which is the rule: with Lee's order to Walker or Ewell? In fact, many of Lee's orders presented in this genteel code, subtle but supposedly understood by the receiving Virginia gentlemen, were misunderstood. Care must be taken when offering alternative exegesis of what might be simple English.

4. What is incredible about Gettysburg is that all four of Lee's primary commanders failed in some way: Stuart from absence, Hill from inactivity, Ewell from hesitation, and Longstreet (not a case study herein) from discontent.[65] Although this has been covered from many angles by different historians—"discretionary orders" versus "orders with discretion", illness, offensive versus tactical defensive, and so forth—it is interesting that the analyses based on CT led to the conclusions of historians such as Freeman for the cases of Stuart, Hill, and Ewell.

Of course, such intellectual agreement begs the question of coincidence or cause. i.e., was it just bad luck that these top commanders all misinterpreted their orders, which were written to allow misreading? The analysis indicates that in each case, there was just enough conditional room to permit selective perception by each receiver. This might not appease some readers, but it remains a valid conclusion nonetheless.

5. In analyzing failed orders, the application of CT gets trumped severely by receivers' ineptitude, meant here to include any combination of incompetence, arrogance, or defiance that would cause them to simply disregard a directive. The cases of Robertson and Sickles are good examples of this. The former received instructions with explicit detail for every contingency Stuart could think of and he failed. The latter claimed first to not understand the clear message; offered fine tuned, but pointless, pseudo-legal reasoning for not comprehending it; then ignored it outright. Therefore, if tactical or linguistic reasons and CT all fail to explain a command not followed, then what remains should be incompetence.

In summary, communication theory offers a structured method for analyzing historical orders. It is demonstrably better at confirming why certain commands were

successful and provides a valid option to review others that failed— which especially for Gettysburg often seem the most controversial. The analyses contained in this paper will certainly not end debate about these messages or the battle, but they appear to offer structured supporting evidence to long-standing historical evaluations.

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