

WOULD STONEWALL JACKSON HAVE EVEN BEEN THERE?

John D. Wedo

For some, the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg occurred because of one incident and one only: General Richard Ewell's failure to attack and take Cemetery Hill on the afternoon of July 1, 1863. It is possible that no incident in the battle or even in the entire Civil War causes as much heartache or assertion as this one incident even 150 years after the battle. Statements such as this, expressed often with unaccountable fervor, are common: "If Jackson had been there, *he would have taken that hill!*" Even Douglas Southall Freeman in *Lee's Lieutenants* names the chapter containing his analysis of the battle "Jackson Is Not Here." (In truth, this title is taken from the understandable opinions of frustrated members of General Ewell's staff who once served on General Thomas Jackson's staff. Freeman presents a detailed analysis of the reasons for the Confederate defeat, including the quality of the Federal army.) (1)

The question of General Thomas ("Stonewall") Jackson's potential action at that point in the battle is, however, more complex than one might think. Even had General Jackson lived after his wounding at Chancellorsville, there is no guarantee that he would be there to make that decision. Intervening events beyond General Jackson's control might have affected not only his presence at the battle at that point, but the start of the battle itself.

This paper analyzes possible timelines between the wounding of General Jackson and the start of the Battle of Gettysburg, but it does *not* cover possible results if General Ewell decided to attack Cemetery Hill. It uses contemporary knowledge and hindsight to

estimate the chances of General Jackson's appearance at the point in question. Lest any reader consider this attempt pointless, it is no less valid than asserting with *absolute certainty* the action of someone who was dead over eight weeks before the start of the battle in question.

PRELIMINARIES

Soldiers die in war, as do generals. This is sad, but neither extraordinary nor bad luck. When a competent general dies or is severely wounded, there is a tendency to project what would happen in the battle or in the war "if he had lived" or "if he had been there." This tendency is not limited to the death of generals, but includes also key events, such as the fall of a city or a naval defeat. Collectively, this is the stuff of unsubstantiated "What-ifs." Discussions over "What-ifs" provide interesting conversation, but they change nothing. Most of these seem to exist solely to reclaim victory for the losing side or to make the speaker feel good, but they provide *no substantive insight* as to what actually happened during the battle.

The death or wounding of a competent general, like the death of thousands of soldiers, affects a battle, and it is a normal consequence of battle. The general is removed from the battle, and his influence decreases and finally ends. The rest of the battle is fought by other generals and soldiers, and the result of the battle rests on their shoulders. One cannot validly project the missing person into the rest of the battle and assert an alternate result.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Battle of Gettysburg provides perhaps the best example of inserting someone into a battle and asserting an alternate result. In this case, however, the alternate decision is made by an absent General Jackson who had been dead for almost two months.

Unlike a general killed in a battle who might still influence that battle by his plan or deployment, such as General Albert Sydney Johnston at Shiloh, General Jackson was not even present. The assertive myth continues, however.

Counterarguments about his speculative performance at Gettysburg start with the obvious "It does not matter. He was not there." They continue with the question of Stonewall's marching and attack speed (respectively swift, sluggish in the question): "To which Jackson are you referring--the Jackson of the Shenandoah Valley campaign or the Jackson of the Seven Days Campaign?" Because he was dead, no one will ever know.

What is relevant are the roughly two months between General Jackson's death and the Battle of Gettysburg. During this time, the Army of Northern Virginia (ANV) underwent a major reorganization. This reorganization split the army from two corps into three, and resulted in a number of promotions to handle both the two new corps, and commanders wounded, killed, or transferred after the Battle of Chancellorsville, where General Jackson was wounded. In addition, General Grant's continual pressure on Vicksburg caused Confederate President Jefferson Davis great concern, and he called General Lee to Richmond for a conference. Both of these developments, the reorganization and Vicksburg, provide alternatives that could have affected the location of General Jackson on the afternoon of July 1.

ALTERNATE TIMELINES

One cannot discuss General Jackson's theoretical influence on the Battle of Gettysburg by assuming that the battle started as recorded and somehow he is injected before Cemetery Hill and manages to do what he is "supposed" to do, i.e., take that hill. One must find a suitable point in the timeline where the History can change *reasonably*, and start there. Then the historical environment between that point and the battle must be established. The alternate timelines must exist within the elements of this environment.

Any discussion of alternate timelines must start with General Jackson's wounding on May 2, 1863. (If he is not wounded on that date, then the timeline might change the Battle of Chancellorsville and subsequent events (including the meeting engagement at Gettysburg), and that is a study far beyond the scope of this paper.) Two obvious outcomes are possible: he lives or he dies. General Jackson died on May 10, and that is the recorded history which cannot change. But what if he lives?

The analysis of this temporal branch involves first looking at each major contemporary element, or condition, surrounding General Jackson and the Confederacy to determine the resulting historical environment. Each condition is considered inalterable during the period under discussion, i.e., May 10 to July 1, 1863. After the conditions are defined, each alternative is examined based on General Jackson's health versus the environment.

Long recuperation. As of May 10, General Jackson had undergone an amputation of his left arm at the shoulder, and he had contracted pneumonia, one of many infections possible after an amputation and during a protracted recuperation. Given the state of medicine, either one of these conditions involved a recuperation of many weeks

or even months; however, both together might cause a recuperation of unknown duration. Any discussion of General Jackson surviving must therefore include a lengthy recuperation. This includes whether he would be well enough to conduct an arduous campaign by early June, which is not likely. (Because of the long recuperation, it is possible that the title of Freeman's aforementioned chapter would be the same even if Jackson lived.)

Condition 1 is that General Jackson would probably still be recuperating by early June, although he might be able to travel with the army if the pneumonia has not incapacitated him.

Timing of campaign. President Davis called General Lee to Richmond to discuss Vicksburg in mid-May 1863. Various options were discussed, including sending part of the ANV to Mississippi to assist in the defeat of General Grant's army. General Lee convinced President Davis and Secretary of State James Seddon that the better solution was to keep the ANV together for an invasion into the North into Pennsylvania. Although the reasons for this were many, the main reason was to score a military and psychological victory by defeating decisively the AOP on Northern soil. The timing of this, based on the siege of Vicksburg, an event totally out of anyone's hands, is absolute. Also, to take advantage of the bountiful Northern farms for provisions and forage while concurrently vacating the depleted farm areas of Virginia; the invasion had to start by mid-June regardless of General Jackson's health.

Condition 2 is that General Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania would start near its actual historical start.

ANV reorganization. General Lee thought also that the time had come for the reorganization of the ANV, stating that 30,000 men were too much for one commander to handle, especially in wooded areas. Although he wrote to President Davis that he had thought this for a year, he informed the President of this decision also in May of 1863 shortly after General Jackson died. (2) One might argue that had General Jackson lived, General Lee would not have reorganized the army; however, this argument ignores both the urgency of the Northern invasion (Condition 2) and the state of Jackson's potential health by early June (Condition 1). Given the severity of General Jackson's condition if he lived, it seems likely that General Lee would be forced to make accommodation for his absence for a major operation in early June. This would involve at minimum (with no reorganization) naming an interim commander for the Second Corps. Further, the reorganization would lessen the effect of a wounded General Jackson by producing three corps of less than 30,000 men thus making it easier for the new corps commanders to manage their corps.

Condition 3 is that the split of the ANV into three corps would have occurred as recorded with the final set of corps commanders dependent on the case in question, as will be shown below.

Marching order. The situation where the Second Corps was in position to attack Cemetery Hill is based on its location on July 1. This, in turn, is based on the marching order of the ANV's divisions through Maryland and Pennsylvania. General Lee chose Jackson's old divisions to lead the army through the Shenandoah Valley because of their experience there one year prior; thus, the Second Corps under Jackson or under a new corps commander would be the vanguard. (3)

The position of the Second Corps is not the only critical corps position. General Hill's Third Corps is next in line, and it is units of this corps that actually started the battle. Third Corps officers and the situation that actually start the battle represent a unique set of critical circumstances that would be extremely unlikely to duplicate with other players, as will be shown later in this discussion. In essence, if the Third Corps does not start the battle on July 1, then no one is in position before Cemetery Hill to make any decision.

The First Corps played no part in the first day of the battle: to maintain its historical non-participation, it must be third in line. For completeness, General J. E. B. Stuart's Cavalry Corps is absent on July 1 as recorded historically, and maintains its historical role as a collector of wagons trying to make contact with the Second Corps. No more reference to the First Corps or to the Cavalry Corps appears herein.

Condition 4 is that, given that the start of the invasion North was bound temporally (Condition 2), the marching order through the mountains is (North to South): Second Corps, Third Corps, and First Corps.

There are three possible results for General Jackson's health and presence with the army in early June: he is recuperating and unable to travel with the army; he is recuperating and traveling with the army--in command, but not fully mobile; he is recovered enough to travel independently with the army. What is important about each result is whether all of the players in the historical record wind up near where they actually were on July 1. One general not in his historical command or geographical position offers a high probability for a different result. In particular, the chain of command from General Hill to General Henry Heth, division commander, to General J.

Johnston Pettigrew, brigade commander is extremely critical for reasons explained below.

The cases and their explanations follow.

Case 1: General Jackson is recuperating and unable to travel with the army.

With General Jackson not available, General Lee, in reorganizing the army, would be forced to select at least an interim commander for the Second Corps. This case should follow the recorded history exactly. There is every reason to think that this interim commander would be General Ewell as he was senior, and he was a favorite of General Jackson and General Lee. In addition, he had campaigned with Jackson for about a year, and he knew the Second Corps and its commanders. This knowledge would be invaluable in General Jackson's absence with the Second Corps in the vanguard of the invasion. As for the newly-formed Third Corps, there is also every reason to think that General Lee would assign General A. P. Hill based on the historical record. (What type of accommodation would be made for later assignments for Generals Ewell and Hill after General Jackson's recovery is of no concern here because the duration of the Northern invasion is the only temporal bound in this case.) For this case, therefore, there is no reason to alter the history as recorded.

Case 2: General Jackson is recuperating and traveling with the army--in command, but not fully mobile. If somehow General Jackson were able to travel with the army, although not fully recovered, there is no guarantee that he would be healthy throughout the campaign. General Lee must make accommodation for alternate conveyance for General Jackson, such as an ambulance (which would render him less mobile than riding a horse), and for immediate assumption of command by a senior

subordinate in case General Jackson relapsed or if he must be evacuated back to Virginia. There are two possible command results for July 1 for this case based on General Jackson's health.

Were General Jackson's health precarious enough for a relapse, that senior division commander would be General Ewell for the aforementioned reasons. The command of the Third Corps could go General Hill as recorded, but this would put General Lee in the awkward position of promoting General Hill to Lieutenant General over the senior, capable, and proven General Ewell. The promotion of junior officers over senior officers almost always caused discontent among those passed over. A solution would be for General Lee to promote both Generals Ewell and Hill with brevet commissions until the health of General Jackson was definite either way. This would provide corps commanders with commensurate rank, and it would provide the ability to adjust the command structure based on General Jackson's health.

Case 2A: The first possible command result on July 1 is that General Jackson relapses and General Ewell assumes command of the Second Corps. Because it leads the ANV (Condition 4) within the required timeline (Condition 2), and because General Jackson is absent from the field, this case reverts to Case 1 in which the recorded history is unchanged.

Case 2B: The second possible command result on July 1 is that General Jackson improves and retains command of the Second Corps. General Ewell retains his division command in this case, and General Hill retains his command of the Third Corps. This case puts General Jackson in command of the Second Corps and, more important, General Hill commanding the Third Corps, assuming that their positions are the same as

the historical record based on their marching order (Condition 4). This does not conclude that General Jackson would have taken that hill, just that he might be in position to do so.

Case 3: General Jackson recovers enough to travel independently with the army.

With General Jackson available, General Lee, in reorganizing the army, would not require a new commander for the Second Corps. This leaves only selecting a corps commander for the new Third Corps. There is every reason to think that this new commander would be General Ewell as he was senior and capable. In addition, General Lee thought highly enough of him to place him in command of Second Corps after General Jackson's death. This would give General Lee three capable corps commanders, respectively by corps, Generals Longstreet, Jackson, and Ewell. This removes General Hill from corps command, and he remains a division commander under General Ewell. Assuming that the march occurs per its recorded schedule (Condition 2) and that the marching order would be the same (Condition 4), significant events would change.

In the recorded history, General Pettigrew's brigade approached Gettysburg on June 30 and observed General Buford's cavalry. He reported this to his division commander, General Heth. Because General Pettigrew was recently re-assigned to the ANV and because he was not a West Point graduate, Generals Heth and Hill did not agree with his assessment that he observed Federal Cavalry; they thought that General Pettigrew saw local militia. This interpretation caused General Hill to approve General Heth's suggestion that he would enter the town the next day (July 1) to acquire footwear. General Hill was also sick most of the day, and his bedridden state prevented him from supervising his corps's activities. This allowed the battle to begin counter to General Lee's order to avoid a general engagement.

In Case 3, however, the corps commander is not General A. P. Hill but General Ewell. At this point to start the battle, General Ewell, as Third Corps commander, must mimic exactly all of General Hill's actions: agreeing with General Heth that General Pettigrew saw militia, allowing General Heth to take his division into town, and being bedridden all day thereby allowing the battle to begin without proper command authority. The last point is important and should not be downplayed. General Hill was in bed in Cashtown when General Lee rode up and asked him for a report, and he had to rise from his sickbed to do so. General Hill's illness and absence from the field during the early hours of July 1 are key components of the command vacuum that started the battle. Starting the battle similar to the historical record would require General Ewell, as corps commander, to be functionally inactive most of July 1. Even with one leg, history shows that General Ewell was far from inactive during this period. Finally, with the chain of command ascending from General Pettigrew to General Heth to General Ewell, and with General Hill elsewhere commanding his own division, it would be ludicrous and desperate to try to somehow shoehorn General Hill into their discussion of cavalry versus militia just to force the same historical result.

Therefore, regardless of General Jackson's past performance or projected prowess or his location in the area, the probability that all of this would happen exactly as the recorded history with a different corps commander is exceedingly remote. One is left then with the incongruous result that if General Jackson lives, the chances of the battle even starting on July 1 are slim to non-existent. If the battle does not start on July 1, then the two armies have more time to march toward the town, and any resulting battle would be much different; consequently, if General Jackson lives, there is no guarantee that he

would be near that hill on July 1 or that the battle even starts on July 1. Again, if the battle starts differently, there might be no need for a Confederate general to make a crucial decision before Cemetery Hill, and any attempt to claim such a scene is a desperate and invalid historical conclusion.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A summary of the three cases (which produce four results) shows this:

CASE	DESCRIPTION	STONEWALL AT HILL?
1	Jackson unable to travel with the army.	NO
2A	Jackson, then Ewell commands 2nd Corps	NO
2B	Jackson 2nd Corps, Hill 3rd Corps	MAYBE
3	Jackson 2nd Corps, Ewell 3rd Corps	NO

The result is that for three of the four cases where General Jackson lives, he is either not with the army (1, 2A) or not at Cemetery Hill because the probability is infinitesimal that the battle would even start on July 1 (3). Case 2B is the only one where there is a chance that he could be near Cemetery Hill but that, once again, depends on all historical events occurring with General Jackson just as they had done with General Ewell. Case 2B does not offer the possibility of the fact of or the result of a General Jackson decision, just his *potential proximity* to make a decision.

This discussion has been theoretical, but based on careful analysis of available facts. The *fact* of General Jackson's wounding produced the *fact* of his death: this is the recorded history. The alternate path, assuming that General Jackson survives, produces four possible results based on defined conditions that would have occurred irrespective of his wounding. Because General Jackson's survival is assumed, everything after that

represents "future events" none of which can be proved to be more "correct" than the other. One can, however, make reasonable conclusions from these four results, to wit:

1. Analysis shows that General Jackson is probably not near Cemetery Hill on July 1 regardless of his health. *This means that if he lives, it is highly likely that General Jackson has absolutely no effect on the battle on July 1*

2. The one case (Case 3) where General Jackson lives and actively commands Second Corps produces a result incompatible with the argument of Stonewall adherents, that he would have taken that hill. This is because of the onerous requirement for the battle to start per the historical record but with different set of players in the Third Corps. Analysis shows that *expecting the actions of General Ewell commanding Third Corps to replicate exactly the recorded actions of General Hill is extreme, if not ridiculous.*

3. Yearning for an alternate history or result requires almost no thought; however, the desire for such an alternate outcome should not distort the actual history to the point where the result or the path to get there is historically untenable or meaningless. Case 3 above shows that if General Jackson lives and if both General Jackson and General Ewell are corps commanders, then there is no guarantee that the battle even starts on July 1. Thus, one is left with the old adage, "*Be careful what you wish for.*"

These conclusions might be surprising and, for some, irritating, but at least they are the result of reasonable analysis of available historical facts. They are not the result of speciousness forlorn hope, or ardor, none of which is understandable in the modern speaker, and none of which should be used as the basis for historical arguments. The improvable thesis that General Jackson "would have indeed taken that hill" is great for

casual conversation but it is an unjustified extension of fact for meaningful historical discussion.

The general hope is that if historians argue "What-ifs," those arguments will be based more on proper historical analysis and less on hopeful opinion. As such, deeper analysis beyond that presented herein is welcome. The specific hope is that when discussing the Battle of Gettysburg, no influence is attributed to a man long dead.

REFERENCES

- 1 Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3 volumes (New York: Scribner, 1944), 3: 168-189.
- 2 Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston/New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2003), p. 43.
- 3 Sears, *ibid.*, 74.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank graciously those persons who assisted with this paper. Terry L. Salada, The Pennsylvania State University, reviewed it for historical sense. Dr. Larry Graves, Ph.D, Mathematics, former colleague at Lockheed Martin, reviewed it from a logic standpoint. Errors in the final version remain the responsibility of the author.

October 2012