



2013 HAWAII UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES
ARTS, HUMANITIES, & SOCIAL SCIENCES
JANUARY 6TH TO JANUARY 8TH
ALA MOANA HOTEL
HONOLULU, HAWAII

WITHOUT A PEDESTAL: THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF JAMES LONGSTREET

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**WITHOUT A PEDESTAL:
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SEPTEMBER/2012

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ABSTRACT

Generals Robert E. Lee, Thomas Jackson, and James Longstreet composed the leadership of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia for the majority of the Civil War. Yet Longstreet, unlike Lee and Jackson, was not given appropriate postwar recognition for his military achievements. Throughout American history, critics have argued that Longstreet had a flawed character, and a mediocre military performance which included several failures fatal to the Confederacy, but this is not correct. Analysis of his prewar life, his military career, and his legacy demonstrate that Longstreet's shortcomings were far outweighed by his virtues as a person and his brilliance as a general.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In December of 1860, the senators of the southern state of South Carolina met to discuss their future and, potentially, the future of the other southern slave states. Their consequent decision to secede from the Union culminated a long line of tensions between northern and southern states, and it quickly sparked other southern states into similar actions. These southern states united on February 8, 1861, under the Provisional Constitution of the new Confederacy. Some hoped that the Federal nation and the new Confederacy could peacefully co-exist, but this proved impossible. Fort Sumter became the issue which set the two nations against each other, for while the Confederacy demanded it be turned over to Southern authorities, the president of the Union, Abraham Lincoln, refused to deliver the Federal fort and withdraw the troops. When he sent supply ships to the fort, the Confederates turned hostile, firing first upon the supply ships, then on the fort itself. The American Civil War had begun, one of the most significant events in American history.

Regarding conflict which followed, few historians would deny that the survival of the Confederacy relied heavily upon the performance of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. As long as it endured as a potent military force, the Confederacy had enough diplomatic and military leverage to sustain its independence. Fortunately for the Confederates, their army was commanded almost from the beginning by Robert E. Lee, a brilliant general who proved his value time and again with many victories. The exploits of Lee and his two primary lieutenants, James Longstreet and Thomas Jackson, appear often in history books as their actions directly influenced American history by their effect upon the war. Despite their obvious importance to American history, however, the respective legacies of Lee, Jackson, and Longstreet are quite

unbalanced. Among Southerners, for instance, Lee emerged from the Civil War as a saintly champion of the Southern cause. They posited that Lee had never really been beaten in any battle, virtually deifying the general especially after his death. Jackson, meanwhile, acquired similar fame before the war had even ended. Southerners viewed him as a martyr for his untimely death following his wounds at Chancellorsville, and almost universally they believed that they would have won the war except for that misfortune. Longstreet, the third part of this formidable Confederate triumvirate, endured a postwar career mostly devoid of such honors, the acclaim given to Lee and Jackson marked themselves only by their comparative absence in the case of James Longstreet. Thus emerged the marred legacy of the man once considered Lee's most trusted lieutenant. Understanding this legacy requires a brief review of Longstreet's life.

In the American Civil War, Longstreet proved himself one of the most capable military commanders in the entire conflict. With respect to offensive actions, he demonstrated his effectiveness at the battles of Second Manassas, Chickamauga, and the Wilderness, where his well timed and well planned assaults proved the decisive factors in those victories, almost crushing the opposing armies completely. Concerning defensive actions, his well planned placement of resources at Fredericksburg demonstrated his value as a defensive leader as well. One of the most innovative generals of the Civil War, Longstreet used unique strategies to overcome unique military problems. This ingenuity he demonstrated best at the Battle of the Wilderness, where his attack with an unusual alignment of battle lines turned certain Confederate defeat into a nearly complete disaster for the Federals instead. When his commanding officer, Robert E. Lee, promoted him to lieutenant general, he arranged for his promotion to be one day sooner than that of Thomas Jackson, a move which gave Longstreet seniority over Jackson, and demonstrated Lee's comparatively higher opinion of him than of Jackson. Indeed, when Lee

spoke of Longstreet, he often portrayed him as the picture of reliability, calling him his “war horse,” and “the staff in my right hand.”¹ Many who have studied Longstreet, including Jeffrey D. Wert, in *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy’s Most Controversial Soldier*, contend that Longstreet “was the finest corps commander in the Army of Northern Virginia; in fact, he was arguably the best corps commander in the conflict on either side.”²

After the war, Longstreet accepted defeat without bitterness, and attempted to help mend the wounded country. Some considered him a traitor, and they endeavored to destroy the reputation which he earned. The majority of Longstreet's detractors posited both that the South had not really been beaten, and that the war had been unfairly fought; an unjust ending to Southern independence. Members of this faction continually sought redemption for the beliefs that had driven them to side with the Confederacy, and they chose several figures who they believed exemplified the best of Dixie, anointing them the gods of their cause, the incorruptible and absolute pictures of Southern virtue. Along with Jackson, Lee became the centerpiece of this deification, and although he did not support such an idea, his death in 1870 came too soon to dampen the new generation of Confederate fiction, myth, and legend.

Longstreet’s estrangement from these peers began with his focus on helping the South adjust to its defeat. His acceptance, rather than bitterness concerning Confederate defeat turned many against him, as they preferred to fight their ideological war against Northern opinion rather than submit to defeat. Longstreet’s later conversion to Republicanism and his apparent indifference to the old Confederacy further infuriated these radical Southerners, who branded

¹ James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 262; Langston James Goree, *The Thomas Jewitt Goree Letters, Volume I: The Civil War Correspondence* (Bryan: Family History Foundation, 1981), 164.

² Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy’s Most Controversial Soldier* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1993), 405-406.

him a traitor, criticizing him for alleged failures at Gettysburg and accusing him of insubordinate behavior towards Lee. These criticisms formed the base of all anti-Longstreet sentiment in the history books for generations, as Southern historians continually preferred the work of those who targeted the General. More texts which advocated this history began to emerge over time, all of them providing a marginalized assessment of Longstreet's contributions to the War. Anti-Longstreet sentiment, for instance, found a significant ally in the authoritative and influential work of Douglas Southall Freeman, who targeted Longstreet as Lee's antagonist who impeded victory and spread depression. For historians such as Freeman, Longstreet was insubordinate, perhaps even a usurper, and by the time the centennial anniversary of the Civil War had arrived, Longstreet emerged mostly as a withered and uninviting thorn bush amidst the lush garden of the old South's history. Only in the last several decades has new scholarship begun to look beyond this long standing opinion.

With the advent of studies and biographies devoid of a strong anti-Longstreet bias, a new assessment of Longstreet has begun to emerge which recognizes not only his merits as a military commander, but also examine his legacy with respect to the historical detractors. The real change in historical scholarship on Longstreet began in 1974 with the appearance of *The Killer Angels* by Michael Shaara, which offered a new interpretation of Longstreet at Gettysburg. Shaara's historical novel made little claim to professional scholarship, yet in his narrative he portrayed Longstreet as both an honest and obedient subordinate, propounding the idea that Longstreet did as well as he could have and pointing instead to Lee's impatience as the cause for defeat at Gettysburg.³ For some historians, Shaara's book reawakened the old prejudices, yet the popularity of the book also inspired new studies from other historians, who began to reassess

³ Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels* (New York: Ballentine Books, 2003), 350.

Longstreet's place in Confederate history. Soon, analyses of Longstreet began to focus on his excellent military career rather than his possible failure at Gettysburg. With the advent of this new scholarship, Longstreet's supposed failures at Gettysburg were finally challenged, and some historians began to argue that not only was the legacy ascribed to Longstreet unjust, but the accusations of disobedience were also misplaced.

Thus from the beginning of postwar history, Longstreet's legacy generally failed to gain the attention due his position, and the acclaim due his command skill. Although Longstreet represented the catalyst for many victories and the Army of Northern Virginia's most senior commander apart from Lee, detraction and slander formed the better part of the attention given to Longstreet. In a more agnostic approach to the general, his military skill and many accomplishments readily come to the surface, begging an explanation of Longstreet's historical reputation which, unlike that of Lee and Jackson, lacks its due attention and merit. This paradox requires a careful analysis of Longstreet's pre-war life, his military and postwar career, as well as the historical treatment of these subjects. This study reveals that Longstreet's marginalization is due mostly to the work of an ideological movement which sought to preserve the spirit of the Confederacy at the expense of Longstreet's reputation and legacy. In contrast to mainstream interpretations, this text argues instead that Longstreet's battlefield performances outshone those of many of his peers, and his postwar departure from Southern ideals was the actual reason he was made a target many Southerners. By examining Longstreet's life, career, his motives and those of his detractors, as well as the anti-Longstreet accusations, the traditional treatment of his legacy can be shown to be one of the greatest misunderstandings to emerge from the military assessments of the American Civil War. This text argues for a more positive assessment of General James Longstreet with respect to his wartime contributions and postwar behavior.

CHAPTER 2

THE LITERATURE AND LEGACY

The historical texts present a strange paradox in their treatment of James Longstreet. Excluding special examinations and very early texts on the Civil War, there remains little to mark Longstreet's place as a prominent Southerner, as well as a preeminent commander among Lee's lieutenants and in the Civil War in general. Accusations and a marginalized assessment of the general dominated much of the early work on Longstreet, setting a precedent which obscured the accomplishments of his military career. The crux of the accusations centered on Longstreet's performance at the battle of Gettysburg, where a controversy raged over whether he was responsible for Confederate defeat and therefore responsible for the failure of the Confederacy in general. The subject remained a sensitive one and over the course of time, Longstreet was given a secondary place in Southern history. A careful examination of the historical texts reveals the presence of several dominant themes in the Southern histories of the war which necessarily minimized his place, limited his presence, or even totally excluded Longstreet from their narratives.

First published in 1866, Edward Pollard's *Southern History of the War* represented one of the first texts to appear after the war had ended. In Pollard's book, Longstreet emerged with a favorable image, as the author noted Longstreet's "characteristic vigor and intrepidity" in leading his troops, as well as his excellent use of strategy, and brilliance of independent command. Pollard's assessment of Gettysburg deserves special attention, for quite apart from critiquing Longstreet's performance, he applauded the effort made by the general and his troops, contrasted against "the fatal mistake" of failing "to follow up for a few hours a success" near Culp's Hill,

the blame for which rested on Confederate Generals Richard Ewell and Jubal Early.¹ Pollard credited Longstreet's military performances as a major reason for Confederate successes, perhaps never more so than at the battles of Chickamauga and the Wilderness, where the author noted Longstreet's tactics and leadership as decisive in those Confederate victories.² In addition to his assessment of Longstreet, an analysis of Pollard's text reveals a deeply romantic slant on Confederate history both socially and militarily. In the social respect, Pollard's romanticism often displays itself with such language as "the gallantry of our troops" as compared against the "disastrous" effects of Union gains.³ The significance of this language comes from a strong belief in the "Southern Cause" and the "Spirit of the Confederacy," positing the righteousness and justice of the Confederate cause made plain not only in the body of the text, but especially in a fifty page appendix as well.⁴ Further, Pollard also demonstrated a clear favoritism for the old, Napoleonic theories of warfare, rather than an appreciation for more modern understandings. Nowhere is this clearer than in his treatment of Fredericksburg, a Confederate victory which he considered to give only a "negative advantage" due to the static nature of the battle, and a "vulgar glory" with respect to the massive slaughter of Federal troops.⁵ In this light, Pollard's interpretation represents an important piece of the Southern mind, demonstrating disdain for modern theories on kill zones and trench warfare, instead preferring the glory of gallant charges and courageous assaults. While exhibiting an appreciation for Longstreet's war contributions,

¹ Edward A. Pollard, *Southern History of the War*, 2 vols. (New York: The Fairfax Press, 1977), 1:455 and 633, 2:169-70 and 32-34; Harold M. Knudsen, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Modern General* (Tarentum: Word Associated Publishers, 2007), 19.

² Pollard, *Southern History*, 2:132 and 317.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2: 528-582.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1: 544-546.

and denying any guilt he may have had for Gettysburg, Pollard's texts set a precedent for romantic interpretation of the war by Southerners.

A second example of early contributions to Civil War histories comes from William Swinton's 1867 text, *Decisive Battles of the Civil War*. A Northern interpretation of the Civil War, Swinton's views sometimes irked Southern readers, but his text represented one of the first major works on the Civil War. His analysis, like Pollard's, lacked the insight of the as yet unavailable official war records yet, by coincidence, he met Longstreet while the general was in Washington to ask for a Federal pardon in early 1867. Perhaps as a result, Swinton's text included many of Longstreet's insights, and the General himself received one of the most favorable treatments among all of Swinton's portraits of the Confederate generals. Swinton noted Longstreet's stalwart defense, crushing attacks, and even chronicled an ill-timed accident which denied Longstreet total victory at the Battle of the Wilderness.⁶ More importantly, Swinton portrayed the Confederate failure at Gettysburg not as a failure on the part of Longstreet, but rather as a combination of poor Confederate reconnaissance, and impetuosity on Lee's part.⁷ Further, Swinton credited Longstreet with an alternative plan for battle that might have defeated the Federal army, one which Lee rejected in favor of more aggressive, Napoleonic tactics.⁸ Many received Swinton's analysis as authoritative and impartial, and thus Longstreet enjoyed favorable recognition due to this contribution.

As exemplified by both Pollard's *Southern History* and Swinton's *Decisive Battles*, the earliest histories of the Civil War treated Longstreet with a high degree of esteem. In his 1866

⁶ William Swinton, *Decisive Battles of the Civil War* (New York: Promontory Press, 1992), 377, 378-379, 347, 348.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 335, 341, 353.

⁸ Pollard, *Southern History*, 1: 326, 333.

text, *Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac*, Swinton also recognized Longstreet's brilliance where most other Northern writers ignored him. Pollard's 1867 *Lee and His Lieutenants* echoed the complimentary view of Longstreet shown in his earlier work. Indeed, the vast majority of historians who published texts before or during 1867 regarded Longstreet as an excellent soldier, even if they preferred to focus on other subjects. Notable among these texts are the works of William Parker Snow, James Dabney McCabe Jr., and Robert Lewis Dabney.⁹ Even Pollard's 1867 book, *The Lost Cause*, which eventually gave name to the movement that destroyed Longstreet's legacy, in itself was quite complimentary of Longstreet's performance. Beyond 1867, however, historical treatment of Longstreet changed dramatically. While Northern writers continued to downplay the performance of most Confederate commanders, Southern writers became soured against Longstreet as the general became more active in the Reconstruction. Further, Lee's death in 1870 became an opportunity for his admirers, whose attacks on Longstreet reached a climax in the 1877-1878 Gettysburg series of the *Southern Historical Society Papers*.

In the *Papers*, a distinctly anti-Longstreet tone attacked Longstreet's performance in the Civil War under the guise of professional scholarship, doing great and lasting damage to the general's legacy. United by their desire to purify and enshrine Lee's memory, Jubal Early, William Pendleton, and John Jones capitalized on Southern hatred of Longstreet to shift Lee's war failures upon Longstreet instead. Early spearheaded the attacks, alleging over and over again that Longstreet "delayed" at Gettysburg, first in not obeying an order to attack in the morning on July

⁹ William Garrett Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 96-99; Frank W. Sweet, *The Longstreet Controversy* (Palm Coast: Backintyme, 2000), 3-4; Jeffrey Wert, "James Longstreet and the Lost Cause," in *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, Gary W. Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 128-129.

2, 1861, second in not beginning his march promptly that day, third in not conducting the march properly, and finally delayed again on the morning of the third.¹⁰ Other accusations included Longstreet's unwillingness to send all of his men into battle, as well as insubordination against General Lee. Early even charged: "I think his efficiency on such an occasion as that at Gettysburg was materially impaired by a constitutional inertia, mental and physical, that very often delayed his readiness to fight."¹¹ The severity of these accusations cannot be overstated, for as Gettysburg was seen by Southerners as the pivotal battle in the war, a man accused of losing this battle for the Confederacy stood accused of losing the entire Southern cause. In order to solidify this case amongst the *Paper's* many readers, Early used conclusive language in his attacks over and over again in the series, repeating the charges that Longstreet had not only disobeyed an order to attack on the morning on the second, but had also delayed continuously throughout the battle and withheld troops on the third day of battle.¹² Worst of all, Early forced his readers to choose between Lee and Longstreet: "There is one thing very certain, and that is that either General Lee or General Longstreet was responsible for the remarkable delay that took place in making the attack. I choose to believe that it was not General Lee, for if any one knew the value of promptness and celerity in military movements he did. It is equally certain that the delay which occurred in making the attack lost us the victory."¹³ As the Gettysburg series continued, the tone remained the same. By using the *Papers* as a vehicle for public and professional attacks against Longstreet, the anti-Longstreet tone sowed the seeds for his blemished legacy.

¹⁰ *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 4 no. 2 (August, 1977), 59-60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 62, 64-65.

¹² *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 4 no. 6 (December, 1877), 269, 274, 275, 281.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 282, 293

There are perhaps no more significant attacks on Longstreet than those which appeared in the *Papers*, for its consistent attacks on Longstreet made in a scholarly atmosphere seemingly cemented Longstreet's place in Southern History as a diminished and dishonored Confederate commander. Accusations and antagonism towards Longstreet fueled a campaign against the General's reputation, and with the scholarly backing of the *Papers*, these accusations gained great credibility and attracted wide subscription. When Jefferson Davis published *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* in 1881, he felt so confident in the damage done by the Gettysburg series that his text did not even detail the once heated controversy, saying merely that it "has been so fully discussed in the . . . *Papers* as to relieve me from the necessity of entering into it."¹⁴ Without a doubt, 1872-1878 represented the period of the strongest attacks made against Longstreet, an assault both spearheaded and buttressed by the *Southern Historical Society Papers*, whose influence is strong even today. Deeply hurt by the accusations, Longstreet felt compelled to reply and did so several times.

The first of Longstreet's major contributions to Civil War history, a series of articles written for *Century* magazine, detailed the events well, but also touched on a number of sensitive subjects. Appearing between July 1885 and February 1887, Longstreet eventually wrote five articles, each of them showing a different degree of opinion, bias, and emotion. The first article from Longstreet to appear in *Century* covered the Seven Days's Battles around Richmond in mid-1862. Though Longstreet included positive language towards some of his old comrades, he nevertheless felt compelled to give his negative opinion as well, criticizing Jackson's performance at Frayser's Farm by saying that "Jackson should have done more for me than he

¹⁴ Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (New York: Appleton, 1881), 441-442; Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 143.

did,” and comparing his own stellar performance against that of Jackson.¹⁵ In his narrative of the Second Manassas campaign, Longstreet mentioned little of Jackson, but instead defended his own preference for defense at the Battle of Second Manassas.¹⁶ This selfish tone repeated in Longstreet’s “Invasion of Maryland,” in which he lashed out at his detractors, defended his friends, and again neglected due credit to Jackson.¹⁷ The fourth of Longstreet’s articles, an extrapolation of the battle of Fredericksburg, took on a decidedly more temperate tone. Longstreet praised Lee’s decisions at this battle, while Jackson’s performance and eagerness were also given credit.¹⁸ Considering the affection with which postwar Southerners held both Lee and Jackson, Longstreet’s treatment of these characters in the Fredericksburg article bode well for his future reputation. This tone, however, stood in stark contrast to Longstreet’s final article in which Longstreet gave his account of the battle of Gettysburg. Though he began by recollecting the sorrow of Jackson’s death, Longstreet spent a considerable amount of his text dwelling on the issues of the now heated controversy: he criticized his fellow commanders, compared the intelligence of his plan against that of Lee, and he even deviated from the account of the battle given in his official report, partially out of the corruption of his memory, but also out of a desire to paint a more favorable picture of himself.¹⁹ Most notably, this included his assertion that his troops were farther away from Gettysburg on July 1, 1863 than they actually were, per the evidence in his official battle report. Given the intensity of the Gettysburg

¹⁵ Robert Underwood Johnson, ed., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols (Secaucus: Castle Books, 1990), 2:396, 402-403.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:519.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:664, 674.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:70, 78, 82-83.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:244, 245, 349-354.

controversy, and especially in the wake of the Gettysburg series, Longstreet's articles and especially his account of Gettysburg were seen as another petty attempt to putrefy Lee's memory. Thus, the *Century* articles did little to aid Longstreet's reputation despite what insight he contributed to the history of the Civil War battles.

Begun in 1889, Longstreet wrote his memoirs hoping not only to clear his reputation of the Gettysburg charges, but also to chronicle his career. First published in 1895, *Manassas to Appomattox* even today represents the most valuable source of information for studying Longstreet's career, and one of very few sources of information concerning his prewar years. Still affected by the controversy, however, Longstreet frequently departed from his narrative in order to give his opinions, both negative and positive, thus sometimes influencing his ability to give a fair analysis of the Civil War's events. In many ways, Longstreet's memoirs reflected his most bitter thoughts, his narrative of the Battle of the Wilderness, for instance, included a tangential anecdote: "Bad as was being shot by some of our own troops in the battle of the Wilderness, — that was an honest mistake, one of the accidents of the war, — being shot at, since the war, by many officers, was worse."²⁰ Longstreet also presented a third variation of his Gettysburg account in his memoirs, providing detractors with an opportunity to further question the veracity of his text. While the variations of his Gettysburg narrative did not deviate from each other significantly, the slight changes he made were clearly intended to emphasize his innocence, and therefore suggested selfish and petty behavior. For instance, in his article printed in the *Philadelphia Times* in 1877, Longstreet claimed that his corps was seventeen miles away from Gettysburg on the afternoon of July 1, 1863. In his article appearing in *Century* magazine in 1887, Longstreet claimed that his corps was between fifteen and twenty miles from Gettysburg

²⁰ James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 568.

by the evening of July 1, 1863. In his memoirs published in 1895, Longstreet claimed that his corps marched through the night in order to reach Gettysburg by daybreak on July 2, 1863, and could therefore not have participated in an attack that morning. Each of these narratives stood essentially at variance with his original battle report, in which he noted that his corps encamped four miles from Gettysburg late in the evening of July 1.²¹ In fairness, the inconsistencies may be due in part to Longstreet's inability to access the war records, including his own reports. Nevertheless, these inconsistencies attracted a great deal of negative attention amongst Longstreet's detractors. Most damaging of all, however, Longstreet used some of the most aggressive and insulting language of any of his texts in his memoirs, especially as directed towards Lee: "That he was excited and off his balance was evident . . . and he labored under that oppression until enough blood was shed to appease him."²² Although his memoirs contributed Longstreet's valuable experience to the growing collection of historical texts concerning the Civil War, his inability to suppress an intense frustration greatly impaired the book's ability to positively affect his reputation and legacy. As a whole, however, *Manassas to Appomattox* remains today the most valuable source for studying James Longstreet, for its comprehensive narrative chronicles all of the general's life, and allows the careful historian to extract a great deal of useful information, comparing Longstreet's story against other sources when necessary.

By the time he died in 1904, Longstreet's attempts to defend his reputation and redevelop his legacy had failed utterly. Not only did his efforts lead to greater hatred amongst Southerners

²¹ General James Longstreet, "Lee in Pennsylvania," in *The Annals of the War: Written by Leading Participants North and South*, Alexander Kelly McClure, ed., (Philadelphia: The Times Publishing Company, 1879), 420; James Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 3:352; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 361; "Report of Lieutenant General James Longstreet, C.S. Army, commanding First Army Corps., June 3-August 1, 1863," in *The War of Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, 53 vols (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1899), S1, V.27, pt. 2, 358.

²² Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 384.

due to his criticism of Lee and Jackson, but the General also simply could not be reconciled to many Southerners who abhorred Longstreet's affiliation with the Reconstruction. In both the *Century* articles and his own memoirs, Longstreet succeeded in little more than digging his own grave with respect to his reputation and legacy. Other themes emerged from this period also, including the mostly unfounded idea amongst twentieth-century Civil War historians that Longstreet was adverse to offensive tactics in general, preferring defensive warfare only.²³ Sadly, Longstreet did not live to see some of the texts which presented the strongest defense of his Gettysburg conduct.

One of the most important of these came from the efforts of G. Moxley Sorrel, Longstreet's primary staff member during the war. In *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, first published in 1905, Sorrel described the general carefully, giving him due credit and yet demonstrating a great sensitivity to the Southerners who idealized Lee. Showing a desire to reconcile Longstreet's image and the Lee cult, Sorrel noted of Gettysburg that Longstreet's "plans may have been better than Lee's, but it was too late to alter them with the troops ready to open fire on each other."²⁴ Of Longstreet's performance at Gettysburg, Sorrel opined that the General showed "apparent apathy in his movements. They lacked the fire and point of his usual bearing on the battlefield."²⁵ At the same time, however, he argued that Longstreet bore none of the blame for Confederate defeat, as he "neglected nothing that could help."²⁶ Instead, Sorrel cited

²³ Longstreet's articles written for the *Century* include his opinion, especially in his narratives of Second Manassas and Fredericksburg, on the benefits of defensive warfare. While he coupled this opinion with his brief thoughts on offensive timing, many historians pointed to the *Century* articles as supposed proof of Longstreet's aversion to the offensive and deep preference of defensive warfare.

²⁴ G. Moxley Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet: Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 167.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 173.

the recurring mistakes and weaknesses of the Confederate forces, as well as the overextension of the battle lines. According to Sorrel, the absence of the main cavalry officer, Stuart, and the poor communication between wings of Lee's army formed the primary reasons for defeat at Gettysburg, rather than Longstreet's respectable performance.²⁷ In his *Recollections*, Sorrel emphasized the brilliance of Lee and the superb maneuvers of Jackson and Stuart, but he was careful to note that Longstreet had been Lee's most trusted and senior lieutenant, giving him recurring praise and continuously noting his importance to the movements and actions of the Confederate army.²⁸

A second contribution to texts favorable to Longstreet came from another of Longstreet's staff members, the artillery officer Porter Alexander. His 1907 work, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, similar to Sorrel's *Recollections*, eventually became a classic among Civil War biographies. When written, Alexander merely hoped to defend Longstreet within the context of an unbiased approach towards the General's performance.²⁹ Like Sorrel two years previously, he noted in his text that other histories of the war, notably those written by the anti-Longstreet faction, had twisted history in an effort to develop a more pure memory of Lee and Jackson. Writing of the Seven Days's Battles, for instance, Alexander pointed out that:

Lee's best hopes & plans were upset & miscarried, and . . . [he] was prevented from completely destroying & capturing McClellan's whole army & all its stores & artillery by the incredible slackness, & delay & hanging back, which characterized Gen. Jackson's performance of his part of the work. But little has been said about it in the press. As compared with Longstreet's alleged shortcomings at Gettysburg nothing at all. Gen. Fitzhugh

²⁷ Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 166-168.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 76, 23-5.

²⁹ Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 173.

Lee [a member of the anti-Longstreet faction] devotes pages to the latter, & does not remotely refer to the former.³⁰

Careful not to arouse the hatred of the more idealistic Southerners, Alexander couched his criticism of Jackson in language protective of Lee's legacy, while at the same time noting that history ought not be changed in favor of one party or another, for nearly every commander, even Lee, could be both praised and critiqued for their actions in the war. Hoping to curtail the incessant arguing concerning the defeats of the war and what might have been, Alexander pointed out: "Who can say what would have been the result . . . even of a series of Confederate victories on different lines & in other places [other than what happened at Gettysburg]? So let us all gratefully accept things as they have happened."³¹ For his part, Alexander fully defended Longstreet's conduct at Gettysburg, and also argued that the war records had vindicated many of Longstreet's claims.³² Echoing Sorrel's argument that the battle had been lost by poor communication and reconnaissance, Alexander also added his insight on the use of artillery at the battle, noting how Ewell's corps failed to bombard the Federal lines before Pickett's Charge, a crucial shortcoming that otherwise might have had a significant impact on the engagement's outcome.³³ In his opinion, Longstreet showed great skill and ability as a general, and his performance at Gettysburg had not represented either failure or factor in Confederate defeat at that battle, a conflict representative of many other mistakes by different commanders. While giving Longstreet a favorable review in general, Alexander maintained a respectful view towards other worthy Confederate commanders, attempting to reconcile postwar difference and present a

³⁰ Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personnel Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 96, 110.

³¹ Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 220.

³² *Ibid.*, 237, 245-246, 248, 252, 278.

³³ *Ibid.*, 251.

more fair history of the Confederacy. Like Sorrel's work, however, Alexander's text had little impact on Longstreet's reputation in the wake of over thirty years of unchallenged anti-Longstreet material.

The texts by Sorrel and Alexander, though presenting Longstreet favorably, appeared within the context of a great number of works which continued to condemn the general. As the war's participants slowly died off, the history of the Civil War became more and more rooted in the historical texts. Because Lee remained a popular figure, texts concerning his life dominated much of the consequent works on the Civil War, and because many of these texts had been written by Lee's admirers and the anti-Longstreet faction, Longstreet received a mostly unfavorable image. An unfortunate consequence of this development denied Longstreet his proper place in the Southern schoolbooks, and the anti-Longstreet sentiment began to be passed on to another generation of Southerners. At the same time, the *Southern Historical Society Papers* continued to portray the General in a negative light, at least through the beginning of World War I, and scholarly perceptions of Longstreet retained their harsh assessment of his war performance. By the 1930s, Longstreet's legacy remained as poor as ever, and the negativity was reinforced in a powerful way by both H. J. Eckenrode and Douglas Southall Freeman.

To Eckenrode belongs the distinction of being Longstreet's first biographer, and his 1936 text, *James Longstreet: Lee's War Horse*, took advantage of the opportunity to re-affirm many of the old accusations against the General. To begin, Eckenrode dismissed much of the credibility of pro-Longstreet texts, calling Helen Longstreet's biography of her husband "a curious jumble of biographical matter," and citing James Longstreet's seemingly bitter and egotistical language as having compromised much of the scholarly usefulness of *Manassas to Appomattox*.³⁴ So far

³⁴ H.J. Eckenrode, and Bryan Conrad, *James Longstreet: Lee's War Horse* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 378.

from excusing Longstreet's bitterness amidst the controversy which enveloped him, Eckenrode condemned the General's mode of presentation, noting with biting sarcasm that "Longstreet himself never committed errors. At least he admits none. Always in his book he is impeccable."³⁵ Textual reviews aside, Eckenrode painted a mostly unfavorable image of Longstreet. While he recognized that Longstreet's post war opponents had twisted history to an extent, unfairly blaming Longstreet for disobeying the non-existent order for attack on the second day of Gettysburg, Eckenrode sustained nearly all of the other attacks on Longstreet.³⁶ He portrayed Longstreet as a commander good only on defense, incessantly stubborn and slow, who arrived late to Second Manassas, late to Gettysburg, late to the Wilderness, failed to arrive in time for Chancellorsville, and whose delays cost victory at Gettysburg.³⁷ While recognition of postwar accusations tempered this condemnation, conclusive language permeated the entire text, as Longstreet was labeled "a complete failure when given a chance to show what he could do," as well as an insubordinate lieutenant who "lecture[d] Lee, like a professor condescending to a schoolboy!"³⁸ By showing Longstreet as insubordinate to Lee, Eckenrode harkened back to the old Southerners like Early who attempted to purify Lee's image, and also firmly re-entrenched Longstreet as the Confederate scapegoat.

In fairness, however, the resurrection of this concept of insubordination came first from the work of Douglas Freeman in his 1934-1935 work, *R.E. Lee*. Without a doubt, Freeman's works represented the most damaging assaults on Longstreet's legacy since the Gettysburg series of the *Southern Historical Society Papers*. Freeman himself grew up the son of a Confederate

³⁵ Eckenrode and Conrad, *Lee's War Horse*, 111.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 189-190.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 3, 30, 86-87, 110, 166-167, 302, 190-198.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 202, 208, 377, 245, 361.

veteran, raised in a manner continuously reverent of the old South. He quickly became a strong, second-generation proponent of Southern mythology. Beginning with his Pulitzer Prize-winning work *R.E. Lee*, Freeman painted Longstreet's relationship with Lee as argumentative and competitive, further endorsing the idea that Jackson, and not Longstreet had been Lee's most senior and trusted lieutenant, using the aggressive work of the *Southern Historical Society Papers* and the anti-Longstreet tone to demonstrate Longstreet's culpability for the failure at Gettysburg. Freeman followed up this text with an even more influential work, *Lee's Lieutenants*, published in 1942 through 1944. A three volume narrative, Freeman's first volume gave a favorable impression of Longstreet, one of reliability, especially during the Seven Days's battles.³⁹ The second volume, while similar, portrayed Longstreet as growing increasingly envious of Lee, even to the point of considering himself superior to his commanding general.⁴⁰ Yet in Freeman's third and final volume, the fullness of Freeman's anti-Longstreet sentiment became unveiled. According to Freeman, Longstreet was "beguiled," "disillusioned and embittered," only interested in defensive tactics, and even an "unqualified advocate" to present his own opinions to Lee.⁴¹ Grounding much of his research in the *Southern Historical Society Papers*, Freeman's Longstreet was lethargic, delayed frequently, even sulked and made mistakes during Gettysburg.⁴² That Freeman did not blame Longstreet exclusively for the defeat at Gettysburg seemed inconsequential amidst all of this negativity, and the effect on Longstreet's legacy reflected this. By failing to describe the command structure, Freeman did not

³⁹ Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, 3 vols (New York: Scribner's, 1942), 1:xliv, 169, 663-664.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:xxiv, 480.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3:xxiv, 39-40, 45.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3:173-175, 188.

acknowledge Longstreet's place as the most senior and trusted of Lee's lieutenants, and the body of the text in general clearly showed "the author's bias against Longstreet," the lieutenant who, according to Freeman, "betrayed Lee at his hour of greatest need, thus contributing mightily to the loss [at Gettysburg] and the war."⁴³ William Garret Piston's comments summarize not only Freeman's charges against Longstreet, but also the gravity with which he set them. For Freeman was "not . . . a bad historian, . . . he was, except when writing about Longstreet, a superb one, meticulous and painstaking in his analysis of Civil War personnel. The fact that Freeman was led astray says a great deal about the success of the Anti-Longstreet Faction."⁴⁴ Though Freeman's works represent an indispensable and impressive contribution to the texts which treat the Civil War, his importance to Longstreet's legacy rests in his particularly unfair treatment of the general. Because of the authoritative nature of his work as a whole, Freeman's allegations against Longstreet set the tone for the perception of Longstreet in the ensuing decades. Like the *Southern Historical Society Papers* upon which he based much of his research, Freeman's texts represented the foundation for a great deal of Civil War studies and perceptions, thus injuring Longstreet's legacy still further in probably the strongest anti-Longstreet assault since the *Papers* themselves, and representing the lowest point of Longstreet's reputation. Still, a more positive portrayal of Longstreet came within only a decade of Freeman's attacks.

First published in 1952, Donald Sanger and Thomas Hay's *James Longstreet: Soldier, Politician, Officeholder, and Writer* represented not only a long overdue analysis of Longstreet's life and career in its fullness, but also attempted a positive portrayal of Longstreet's performance

⁴³ Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 177; Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1993), 133-135.

⁴⁴ Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 177; Piston, "Marked in Bronze," in *James Longstreet: The Man, the Soldier, the Controversy*, R.L. DiNardo and Albert A. Nofi eds., (Conshohocken: Combined Publishing, 1998), 217-218.

at Gettysburg. The greatest importance of this work rests with the incredible thoroughness with which Longstreet is treated, his antebellum and postbellum life and career given almost as much attention as his work during the Civil War. As an exhaustive, scholarly, and authoritative work, Sanger and Hay managed to portray Longstreet as a far more important figure to American history than for what most other historians gave him credit. The first half of the text, written by Sanger, examined Longstreet's life up through the end of the Civil War and initially echoed Freeman's assessment that Longstreet did not possess "the strategic brilliancy of either Lee or Jackson."⁴⁵ As he progressed through Longstreet's career, however, Sanger seemed to gain a far greater appreciation for Longstreet. He argued that Longstreet's close relationship with Lee justified the attempts by Longstreet to change his commander's mind at Gettysburg, and any delays that may have occurred in Longstreet's command before and during the battle could easily be repudiated or justified.⁴⁶ According to Sanger, the extent to which Longstreet could be blamed for Gettysburg rested on a mere un-coordination of the attacks on the second day of battle, and even then, "[t]oo much has been made of the incident," for Longstreet's performance as a whole did not impair or impede the Confederates at the battle.⁴⁷ Though Sanger gave Longstreet a very favorable review, one of the reasons for this opinion came from his exclusion of sources generated by the anti-Longstreet faction. The aggressive *Southern Historical Society Papers*, for instance, were generally rejected as an unreliable source of information on Longstreet, with the testaments of Sorrel and Alexander receiving preference instead. The second half of the text, written by Thomas Hay, had a far different approach from Sanger's, as Hay listed the *Papers* as

⁴⁵ Donald Bridgman Sanger and Thomas Robson Hay, *James Longstreet: Soldier, Politician, Officeholder, and Writer* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1968), 3.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 171, 174-177.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 179, 185.

“the most useful” of his sources, accepting without question the allegations put forward by the historical anti-Longstreet tone.⁴⁸ Predictably, Longstreet suffered horribly in Hay’s treatment of the Gettysburg controversy, repeating the charge that Longstreet disobeyed an order by Lee for a morning attack (a claim which even Freeman denied as incredible), and even blamed Longstreet for the controversy in general.⁴⁹ Because Hay’s treatment of Longstreet contrasted sharply with that of Sanger’s, the text carried inherent and irreconcilable contradictions which negated its influence on Longstreet’s legacy. Still, its keen attention to Longstreet, a long ignored historical subject, granted the work a great deal of attention despite its poor construction. Indeed, most historians agreed that the text’s “primary value lies in its facts and citations,” while failing to “bring [Longstreet] out from behind his bushy beard to make him alive or real.”⁵⁰ Where Sanger and Hay failed to make a definitive challenge to Southern mythological interpretation of Longstreet, the works of both Eckenrode and Freeman remained very influential sources on the general up through the 1960s. As a result, the centennial of the Civil War arrived and departed with Longstreet generally seen as a figure of disappointment and antagonism, a character whose mere existence impeded greater glory to Lee, Jackson, and the Confederacy as a whole.

While positive portrayals of Longstreet existed before the 1970s, these were far outweighed by the recurring negativity towards him. Ben Ames Williams’ *House Divided*, for instance, epitomized Southern literature’s portrayal of Longstreet as an inherently flawed general, slow, stubborn, and egotistical. While this remained the predominant historical view of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 450.

⁴⁹ Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 421, 423, 435-436.

⁵⁰ James Rabun, “Review: James Longstreet. Part I, Soldier. Part II, Politician, Officeholder, and Writer by Donald Bridgeman Sanger and Thomas Robson Hay,” in *The American Historical Review*, 58, no. 4 (July, 1953), 951.

Longstreet, works by Glenn Tucker, George Stewart, Ernest and Trevor Dupuy, Nash Burger, John Buttersworth, and Abbott Gibney all sought to absolve Longstreet from the role of scapegoat into which he had been cast. Though these writers failed to gain enough popularity to significantly impact Longstreet's reputation, their mere existence evidenced the ability of contemporary historians to dig through the mire of mythology and uncover its victim. Yet just as fictional literature continued to carry on the anti-Longstreet tradition, a new and original work of fiction would begin the work to restore Longstreet's legacy.

Michael Shaara's 1974 novel *The Killer Angels* not only painted a favorable picture of Longstreet, but its popularity and foundation in historical sources generated a great deal of new interest into Longstreet as a brilliant general, scapegoat, and victim of character assassination, rather than the insubordinate, slow, and defensively minded general which most writers had considered him to that point. Against the long-standing conviction that Longstreet was a defensively-minded general, Shaara suggested instead that Longstreet was "one of the first of the new soldiers, the cold-eyed men who . . . sensed the birth of the new war of machines" which called for innovative tactics.⁵¹ Against the charges that Longstreet had been insubordinate with Lee at Gettysburg, Shaara re-presented a Lee-Longstreet relationship where the two were intimate with one another, and Longstreet's advice was given in the spirit of trust between the two, rather than as insubordination.⁵² Shaara also confronted the tradition of Longstreet as slow by noting the careful preparation and decisiveness with which he moved, especially at Gettysburg. According to Shaara, each of the supposed delays in Longstreet's movements had a reasonable explanation, whether waiting for troops to come up, a mistake by a reconnaissance

⁵¹ Michael Shaara, *The Killer Angels* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), xvii, 10, 133-134, 350.

⁵² *Ibid.*, xvii, 83-84.

officer, or permission from Lee himself to change orders.⁵³ Most impressively of all, Shaara specifically noted that Longstreet's postwar conduct had soured many Southern historians against him, twisting history and painting an unfair image of the general.⁵⁴ Throughout the body of the text, Shaara makes several jabs at Southern mythology, noting how Lee became "untouchable" even during the war itself, and adding that Southerners would "rather lose the war than [their] dignity," alluding to the postwar Southern mythologists who, in defense of Confederate honor, continuously denied that they had been defeated.⁵⁵ In Shaara's view, Longstreet represented a fatally misunderstood character, one who, if given proper credence and respect, could have turned the tide in favor of the Confederates. The problem, according to Shaara, was that Longstreet simply did not appeal to the Southerner's romantic ideals, not only in his mannerisms, but especially in his military theories, where traditional, Napoleonic, "honorable" tactics were condemned by Shaara's Longstreet: "Honor without intelligence is a disaster. Honor could lose the war."⁵⁶ Shaara recognized that Longstreet, brilliant in mind, reserved in speech, and not flamboyant, was doomed to remain in the shadow of more romantic Southerners such as Lee and Jackson.

A Pulitzer Prize-winner, *The Killer Angels* generated a new interest in Longstreet as the Confederacy's forgotten protagonist. Inspired by historical research, Shaara's work gained credence amongst its readers and, being extraordinarily well written, it combated the Southern mythology at its own level of myth and fiction, gaining popularity that no other pro-Longstreet work had gained up to that point. Made into the 1993 movie *Gettysburg* with the help of Ted

⁵³ Ibid., 144, 160, 184, 189, 195.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 350.

⁵⁵ Shaara, *The Killer Angels*, 240, 134.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 133.

Turner, it would be hard to argue that anyone has been more influential in restoring Longstreet's legacy than Michael Shaara. In his view, Longstreet, silent and inventive, was the tragic hero of Gettysburg, the misunderstood champion of the South, and a co-star to Lee which many readers found easy to admire.

In the wake of Shaara's groundbreaking, fictional work, positive biographies of Longstreet began to emerge, one of the most notable coming from William Garrett Piston. Published in 1987, Piston's text included an invaluable historiographical review, making a critical analysis of a great deal of historical texts and their treatments of Longstreet. Ranging from 1866 to the mid 1960s, the scope of this review captures well the essence of Longstreet's legacy and the continued bias with which historical writers held him. Perhaps more importantly, Piston provided one of the first biographies of Longstreet which unequivocally defended the general's performance at Gettysburg, and pointed to the post war mythology as the reason for his poor reputation and legacy. In an authoritative presentation, Piston determined to expose Longstreet's proper place in Southern history: "Of the war's major figures, he remains one of the least understood."⁵⁷ At Gettysburg, Piston argued, "Longstreet brought to the contest all the skill and energy which marked his successes on other fields," and the blame for defeat rested on a combination of Lee's judgment, poor reconnaissance, and bad coordination and communication between the commanders.⁵⁸ Piston continued on to make an analysis of Longstreet's postwar career, and the development of his reputation and legacy during this period. In this analysis, Longstreet's conversion to Republicanism and his criticism of Lee made him the target of the Gettysburg controversy, as the "slander" of anti-Longstreet texts, led by Jubal Early, sought to

⁵⁷ Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 61, 52-61.

pin the blame for defeat entirely on Longstreet.⁵⁹ All of these influences combined to distract immensely from the general's brilliant war record, and thus the stage was set for a sorry, rather than celebrated legacy. For Piston, Longstreet's legacy deserves a dramatic overhaul, making up for the "hundred years of adoration accorded Lee and Jackson" but denied to the equally deserving Longstreet.⁶⁰ Piston's thorough and authoritative treatment of Longstreet and the controversy opened up new doors to other historians to focus more on Longstreet's achievements than on the controversy, an approach taken by Jeffrey D. Wert in his 1993 text.

Wert's book, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier*, focused almost exclusively on Longstreet's military career, drawing out his major accomplishments, defending his actions at Gettysburg, and refuting the claims of the Southern mythology. For Wert, the "myths" had obscured much of Civil War history, and "the most significant . . . victim of [this] interpretation of the conflict was James Longstreet."⁶¹ At Gettysburg, argued Wert, Longstreet earned himself some criticism for his un-energetic performance, but this did not amount to anything close to bearing the blame for defeat, and Longstreet had done all he could to help avoid the Confederate failure at Gettysburg.⁶² Wert, in agreement with Shaara, noted that Longstreet demonstrated keen insight into both tactics and strategy during the Civil War, showing an understanding of warfare far ahead of his time.⁶³ More importantly, Wert noted the prominence of Longstreet's place in the Confederate army as at least equal to that of Jackson, and his skill as a corps commander was "arguably the best . . . in the

⁵⁹ Ibid., 103, 119, 133-135, 171, 185.

⁶⁰ Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 188.

⁶¹ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 14, 15, 18.

⁶² Ibid., 296-297.

⁶³ Ibid., 246-247, 266-267, 243-246, 300-303.

conflict.”⁶⁴ At battles such as Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chickamauga, and the Wilderness, Longstreet’s performance represented brilliance of command which merited high praise and recognition. In his analysis of Longstreet’s postbellum career, Wert gave little attention to the Gettysburg controversy, perhaps hoping to assert the trifling nature of the matter as compared against Longstreet’s military career as a whole. To Wert, Longstreet represented a gem of military history which few had discovered and admired, a piece of Southern culture rejected by its own constituents yet irrepressible for its beauty.

Building upon Wert’s theme of Longstreet’s military accomplishments, Harold Knudsen devoted his entire 2007 text to an extrapolation of Longstreet as a modern and innovative commander. In *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy’s Most Modern General*, Knudsen emphasized not only Longstreet as “pioneering modern tactical and operational methods” and demonstrating himself as “a more enlightened strategic, total war thinker than Lee or Jackson,” but he also quickly established in his text that the failure to recognize Longstreet as “one of the South’s top military performers” came from the ideological influences of the mythological strain of historical interpretation.⁶⁵ Knudsen argued that if analyzed without this bias, and in the context of the development of military tactics and strategy, Longstreet’s career demonstrates a keen understanding of the out-datedness of Napoleonic tactics, and the need for new and different methods to defeat enemy armies.⁶⁶ In this Longstreet was immensely successful, wrote Knudsen, his innovations in tactics demonstrated especially at the battles of Fredericksburg and the Wilderness, while Longstreet could also be credited with the success of a new and clever

⁶⁴ Ibid., 405-406.

⁶⁵ Knudsen, *General James Longstreet*, 7-8.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 100.

strategic vision at the battle of Chickamauga.⁶⁷ Knudsen re-affirmed the steadily emerging opinion that Longstreet had been Lee's primary lieutenant and most trusted subordinate, and a brilliant general who, quite apart from being defensively minded, cleverly awaited the perfect moments and perfect places to strike, delivering punishing and overwhelming attacks.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Knudsen's work does not represent the universal opinion of contemporary Longstreet historians.

Though bolstered by the new wave of pro-Longstreet texts, the legacy of the Confederate general remains a heated subject of debate. Various other historians have come to Longstreet's aid, such as Harry W. Pfanz in *Gettysburg: The Second Day*, Glenn Tucker's several studies of Gettysburg including *High Tide at Gettysburg*, and especially Wilbur Thomas in the biography *General James "Pete" Longstreet, Lee's "Old War Horse": Scapegoat for Gettysburg*. At the same time, other historians continue to sustain many of the old allegations, including Steven E. Woodworth, Emory Thomas, James Robertson Jr., Joseph L. Harsh, and especially Robert K. Krick. Because the crux of the matter rests on Longstreet's Gettysburg performance and the often inconclusive evidence therein, there is little to indicate that the debate, and therefore Longstreet's legacy, will reach a final destination any time in the near future. The developing analysis of Southern mythology, however, could play a vital role in the rehabilitation of Longstreet's legacy. In the last several decades, for instance, historians have quickly grown more and more interested in the history of the South and its influence in creating historical myths. Works such as *The Marble Man* by Thomas Connelly, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History* by Gary Gallagher and Alan Nolan, *The Cause Lost* by William Davis, *Jubal: The Life*

⁶⁷ Ibid., 49-59, 74-89.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 10, 13, 16.

and Times of General Jubal A. Early by Charles Osborne, and *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind*, have all contributed to a growing awareness of Southern mythology and its ability to manipulate Longstreet's legacy and the history of the Civil War in general.

Therefore, one of the most difficult tasks when studying Longstreet's military career is in confronting the amount of biases which has been introduced into the historical texts. While the war records exhibit the least amount of bias, they often lack the detail, insight, and personal judgments which give the narrative color, shape, and significance. The texts written by the participants of the Civil War after the end of the conflict begin to introduce these elements of perspective into their narratives, yet at the same time they have been subjected to a greater degree of prejudices, agendas, and other influences. This is especially the case with texts such as Jubal Early's and James Longstreet's war recollections, which both include retaliatory and defensive language in response to the issues contemporary to their time. Finally, the texts written by non-participants since the War's end have continually become more and more mired with opinions, pattern making, and pigeon-holing, much to the obscurity of original observations. Together, the sum total of information presents the modern historian with a plethora of information, giving the impression that at least some of the material is over analyzed. Faced with the challenge of making some sense out of this complex collection of information, the war records and (to a slightly lesser extent) the war recollections remain the most reliable source of information for simply ascertaining the mere skeleton of events. Secondary sources, meanwhile, remain valuable for their insight and interpretation. Unfortunately, some matters cannot be separated from the scope of opinion, and are thus subject to the judgments of the historical author. Especially with respect to the Gettysburg controversy in which Longstreet became

embroiled, it sometimes becomes necessary to reject the postwar opinions of both the pro-Longstreet and Southern mythological factions, working instead from only pre-controversy material, and especially the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*. Given the intensity of anti-Longstreet material, an analysis of Longstreet's other military actions which tempers historical judgments by the comparative examination of the war records and auto-biographies reveals a fairly clear picture of the historical landscape, and thus presents a fruitful ground for a re-examination of Longstreet's war record.

Though most historical texts outside of the *Official Records* remain biased against Longstreet, his legacy need not rely on the work of those who strove to mar his historical reputation. Retrospective analysis reveals that much of the criticism of Longstreet came in reaction to his postwar Republicanism and criticism of Lee, rather than from any actual failures as a military commander. In light of this fact, it becomes possible, with a sensitive eye to the sources, to retrace Longstreet's life through the historians who may or may not have had a reason to falsify or interpret information against the general's reputation. Sadly, this criteria constricts the array of sources to a mere puddle alongside the oceans of texts written about Lee and Jackson. Furthermore, though recent historians have done much to vindicate Longstreet, their continuing focus merely on the general's actions, rather than his unique character, have suppressed the color of Longstreet's life, and especially the nature of the man who became both the hero and victim of the Confederacy. A reassessment of Longstreet's life satisfactorily answers some of the greatest questions about the Confederate General: Was he stubborn or merely confident and independently minded? Were his military ideas limited to defensive warfare or did he demonstrate flexible and modern techniques? Was he slow or did he simply prepare his troops carefully? Was he insubordinate or was he Lee's most trusted lieutenant? Was

he to blame for the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg or were these allegations generated purely out of postwar issues? Ultimately, re-discovering the general in an analysis of Longstreet's life and career, from his humble beginnings to his anti-climactic end, answers many of the questions which have plagued the legacy of the Confederate general. In dispelling the veil which has shrouded the nature of Longstreet's career and personality, we not only discover the startling contrasts between the general and his peers, but we can begin to understand why historians often misunderstand Longstreet and his place in Southern history.

CHAPTER 3

MAN OF THE SOUTH

There exists a great divide between the information available on the different men of the South. The information available on the youth and childhood of some Southerners is quite plentiful, providing their biographers with ample opportunity to explain great success or tragic failures due to upbringing and formation. The information available on the boyhood of General James Longstreet, however, does not support this sort of treatment. Longstreet's own biography mentions little of his time before entering the Civil War, and even less of his childhood days. The only other biography written by a contemporary of Longstreet, that of his second wife Helen, merely echoes this same minute information. Despite this privation of data, tradition has preserved a limited amount of information on Longstreet's childhood, and most of his other pre-Civil War years emerge from history documented fairly well. Scraping together all of this antebellum information does not provide a thorough description of James Longstreet's familial, scholarly, and military formation, but it does reveal some essential character and personality traits which he carried with him for the rest of his life.

What information historians have on the earliest years of Longstreet's life relies on an incredibly extremely limited amount of evidence. In Longstreet's own memoirs, his childhood is hardly given any attention at all: "I was born in Edgefield District, South Carolina, on the 8th of January, 1821. . . . My earliest recollections were of the Georgia side of the Savannah River, and my school-days were passed there, but the appointment to West Point Academy was from North Alabama."¹ Although Longstreet briefly mentions his father's death and mother's subsequent move to Alabama, there is no other mention of his time before attending West Point. The

¹ James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 13.

biography written by his second wife, Helen, mirrors Longstreet's account almost exactly, though noting that his father was a planter, and that Longstreet's "early years were spent in the country."² She adds also that "all the vigor and fire of that heroic section (the Georgian countryside), and still there was in him a coolness, conservatism, and iron will tempered by justice and fair judgment embracing the best of his Dutch ancestry."³ Unfortunately, no other accounts of Longstreet's childhood exist against which this assessment could be checked. Though it seems likely that the General's own wife would prefer to present an idolized or embellished image of her husband, it may also be true that her time with Longstreet revealed deep rooted traits which she attributed to his earliest upbringing. A logical extrapolation of this minute data reveals some interesting information concerning Longstreet's early home. Longstreet's mother, shortly after Christmas 1820, traveled to South Carolina to visit with her mother-in-law, and there gave birth to James.⁴ His mother returned with him to her farm home near Gainesville, Georgia, sometime afterwards. A final word about Longstreet's earliest years should include that neither of his parents were native to this area: his father, James, was born in New Jersey, and his mother, Mary, was born in Maryland.⁵ Ironically, one of the South's greatest generals had limited ancestral history in that region. Beyond the little information already sketched here, Longstreet's biographers have had to rely on their own imagination and interpretation to fill in the gaps in Longstreet's youth. One of the first and most authoritative

² Helen D. Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet at High Tide: Gettysburg in the Light of the Official Records* (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969), 95

³ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

⁴ Edward Mayes, *Genealogy of the Family of Longstreet* (Jackson: Edward Mayes, n.d.), 24-25; Donald Bridgman Sanger and Thomas Robson Hay, *James Longstreet: Soldier, Politician, Officeholder, and Writer* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1968), 6; Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier* (New York: Siman and Schuster Paperbacks, 1993), 21.

⁵ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 13.

biographies of Longstreet, *James Longstreet: Soldier, Politician, Officeholder, and Writer*, written by Donald Bridgman Sanger and Thomas Robson Hay, even openly admits that “[t]radition remains . . . the sole source of information concerning James Longstreet's boyhood.”⁶ Analysis reveals that most of Longstreet's biographers, including Sanger and Hay, have taken liberties with this lack of information, creating a confusing mass of information about Longstreet's boyhood constructed almost completely from conjecture, imagination, and even agenda, rather than from actual historical evidence.

Fortunately, a brief but thorough examination of Longstreet's boyhood written by Clark T. Thornton has done much to clarify the extent to which Longstreet's boyhood has been artificially constructed in the history books. In “General James Longstreet: In Search of 'Old Pete': Separating Fact from Fiction,” Thornton identifies the most reliable information about Longstreet's childhood, and compares it to the resulting interpretations by Longstreet's biographers. According to Thornton, a mistake occurred in O.B. Fitzgerald's text which chronicles the life of Longstreet's uncle, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet. Through careful re-examination of the records, Thornton determined that Fitzgerald confused James Longstreet, the future general, with his cousin, James Carter Longstreet.⁷ As a result of this confusion, Longstreet's biographers, most of whom base their information on Fitzgerald's text, wrongly assume that General James Longstreet lived with his Uncle Augustus from a very early age and attended the nearby school in Oxford, Georgia. In light of this new information, we know that until his father died in 1833 (when James was just twelve years old), Longstreet lived with his

⁶ Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 6.

⁷ Clark T. Thornton, “General James Longstreet: In Search of 'Old Pete:' Separating Fact from Fiction,” *The Longstreet Society*, <http://www.longstreet.org/childhood.html> (accessed June 18, 2011), under “My brother William.”

parents on their plantation, perhaps attending a nearby school in the country near Gainesville. After his father's death, his mother moved from place to place over the next several years, taking James and his siblings with her.⁸ We now understand that his father and mother “remained the most influential [people] in his life up to the time he left for West Point.”⁹ As Thornton puts it, the General was the “product of his own mother and father's upbringing,” and most examinations of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, his uncle, are unlikely to reveal much about the future General's identity.¹⁰

Thornton also draws attention to how historians's attempts to fill the enormous gaps Longstreet's youth have led to widely divergent views of the man. Though Sanger and Hay admit of only scarce traditional sources of information concerning this period of the general's life, they nevertheless give themselves over to their own imagination of what it might have been like:

The love of the woods and chase and the lure of the stream took early hold on this rough-and-tumble boy, and his chief delight was to uncover some of the mysteries which the dark woods withheld from less skillful eyes. . . . The foundation of James Longstreet's character was laid in those earlier years on the plantation. Often alone with his thoughts, he became reserved in speech; accustomed to decide for himself, he could little brook opposition. His daily wanderings over the forested county quickened his appreciation of topography. The wholesome and simple life developed his splendid physique, his simple, rugged honesty, and his devotion to the soil from which he sprang.¹¹

Though this interpretation of the general's boyhood seems plausible, there exist no means to check its veracity, based as it is on the skeletal information given by Longstreet and his second wife. Others, such as John D. Wade, flesh out the skeleton with a very negative interpretation,

⁸ Thornton, “General James Longstreet,” under “Within a few months.”

⁹ *Ibid.*, under “It is important.”

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 6, 7.

filling in the gaps with dark ambition, incorrigibility, and even insubordination.¹² Significantly, Thornton notes that just as Sanger and Hay broke ground for a positive interpretation of the limited information about Longstreet, Wade laid the foundation for a negative interpretation.¹³

Although reliable evidence is scarce, several extrapolations seem logical in reviewing Longstreet's childhood. First, Longstreet and his second wife both suggest that the general spent a great deal of his childhood roaming the countryside by himself, fishing, swimming, exploring, and so on.¹⁴ Mindful of the general's tendency as an adult to be both stubborn and independent minded, the periods which Longstreet spent in solitude as boy seem to be a likely reason why he developed these traits, for they would have trained him to make daily decisions without the advice or judgment of others. Secondly, most of the other traits ascribed to Longstreet from his boyhood lack even indirect evidence in order to link them to his early years. As noted by Thornton, these conclusions are almost always the result of imagination, conjecture, and even the misunderstanding concerning General Longstreet and his cousin of the same name. Thus, the emergence of a boy who learnt independence at an early age seem to be the only logical extraction that the historian can take without overstressing the limitations of a small body of information.

The remaining information concerning Longstreet's life before entering West Point suggests a non-academic personality, and a southern identity lacking a southern home state. In these days, between 1833 and 1838, he may have attended several different schools as his mother

¹² Thornton, "General James Longstreet," under "Wade cites."

¹³ Thornton, "General James Longstreet," under "Although Wade," and "The use of tradition"; John D. Wade, *Augustus Baldwin Longstreet: A Study of the Development of Culture in the South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1969), 246; Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1977), 70-78.

¹⁴ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 15; Helen Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet*, 98.

moved the family several times, and the only concrete knowledge we have of this time in Longstreet's development is that he did not care for school. Apparently, outdoor exploration continued to appeal “to him more than the school-room; that fishing in the streams around and chasing rabbits over the fields formed his dearest enjoyment. . . . He wanted to do things, not to study about them.”¹⁵ Combined with Longstreet's later time at West Point, where physical drill excited him far more than study, these statements, made by Helen Longstreet, seem quite reliable.

A second point is the apparent lack of stability in Longstreet's life in between 1831 and 1838. During this time period, his mother moved with the family on four occasions: to Augusta, Alabama, in 1831; back to Gainesville, Georgia, in 1833 to attend to her husband's property following his death that year; she returned to Augusta in 1834; and finally moved to Somerville, Alabama, in early 1837.¹⁶ Thus, Longstreet's life had little continuity between when he was ten and seventeen years old, losing his father, and nearly always preparing for difficult relocation which required making new friends and switching to new schools. For Frank W. Sweet in *The Longstreet Controversy*, however, this time period demonstrates the more important point of Longstreet's lack of roots. He notes that Longstreet was something of “a gypsy: born in South Carolina, raised [mostly] in Georgia, appointed to West Point from Alabama. He lacked a hometown or even a home state.”¹⁷ While Longstreet would forever consider himself a man of the South from Georgia, his lack of roots in any area figured greatly in the way other Southerners viewed him. H. J. Eckenrode, in *James Longstreet: Lee's War Horse*, agrees that Longstreet did

¹⁵ Helen Longstreet, *Lee and Longstreet*, 98.

¹⁶ Thornton, “General James Longstreet,” under “This information.”

¹⁷ Frank Sweet, *The Longstreet Controversy* (Palm Coast: Backintyme, 2000), 4.

not carry the same identification with a home state as did other Southerners. As a result, other men of the South thought that “there was something curiously un-Southern about him. He was serious and stolid, not romantic as proper Southerners of the age were, more materialistic than idealistic.”¹⁸ This identity, though forever differentiating him from his fellow Southerners, did not inhibit his ability to lead men as a military commander in the Civil War. Yet when slanderous accusations targeted Longstreet later in life, the lack of a base of support would severely limit his ability to defend himself. So when in 1838 Longstreet entered West Point, he did so not only without an appetite for academic study, but also as a non-native Alabamian.

If Longstreet's days in small country schools illuminated his distaste for scholastics, his time at West Point solidified this reputation but also revealed that he was not a bad student by nature. Rather, Longstreet excelled at many different subjects at West Point, and his later military career demonstrated his keen understanding of many of the military concepts introduced to him at the academy. The disconnect seems to be related either to his distaste for the educational environment, or in his dislike for studying principles he deemed impractical. In his memoirs, he recalls his time at West Point: “As a cadet I had more interest in the school of the soldier, horsemanship, sword exercise, and the outside game of foot-ball than in the academic courses.”¹⁹ Longstreet's biographers concur that his records while at the academy reflect this dichotomy, with excellent grades in nearly all subjects having some degree of physical activity, but passing near the bottom of his class in most scholastic classes.²⁰ Longstreet's story about his mechanics class exemplifies this theme well: “When I came to the problem of the pulleys, it

¹⁸ H.J. Eckenrode and Bryan Conrad, *James Longstreet: Lee's War Horse* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 3.

¹⁹ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 15.

²⁰ H Eckenrode and Conrad, *Lee's War Horse*, 6; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 29-30; Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 8.

seemed to my mind that a soldier could not find use for such appliances, and the pulleys were passed by. At the January examination I was called to the blackboard and given the problem of the pulleys . . . [and my] demonstration failed to satisfy the sages of the Academic Board.”²¹ Despite his failure, Longstreet was allowed the opportunity to redeem himself. Motivated by the fear of expulsion, he “passed easily enough for a maximum mark.”²² Though disinterested in academic study, Longstreet was clearly no dummy, being capable of application, study and understanding when he could see the purpose in it. Even at this early stage in his life, Longstreet exhibited great independence of mind. He refused to be told which military principles were valuable, withholding his respect and attention from many lessons taught by his professors, and instead directed most of his energies towards studies which only he himself had deemed practical. Neglecting to put his full effort into all of his courses, Longstreet graduated fifty-fourth out of a class of fifty-six, but his later military experiences demonstrated that he learned well his studies, even if his examinations did not always reflect it.²³

From his graduation from West Point in 1842 to his resignation from the U.S. military in 1861, Longstreet developed some final traits as a man and as a leader. Following his graduation, he was assigned to Jefferson Barracks in Missouri, where he would stay until May 1844. During this time, Longstreet began to court his future wife, Maria Louisa Garland, and reaffirmed many of his friendships from West Point, including one with Ulysses Grant which would last through the Civil War.²⁴ With much idle time and plenty of his companions about him, Longstreet

²¹ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 15.

²² *Ibid.*, 16.

²³ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 17, 18.

acquired a reputation as a card player and social drinker.²⁵ Though nearly all accounts of Longstreet's character give mention to these traits, very few accuse him of drunkenness or immoderate gambling. G. Moxley Sorrel, one of Longstreet's close adjutants during the Civil War, considered these habits his way of being "gay in disposition with his chums."²⁶ Indeed, Longstreet had such a jovial reputation with his peers that the biographers who write of Longstreet's tendency to be "reserved in speech" from his boyhood seem to forget this period.²⁷ Military duties soon called, however, and Longstreet served honorably throughout the Mexican-American War, leading troops into battle at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, and Monterrey. As the color bearer, he also participated in the battles at San Antonio, Churubusco, El Molino del Rey, and finally at Chapultepec where he suffered a severe wound to his leg while leading a charge. His commanders recognized both the bravery and skill with which he conducted himself during these conflicts, and though he had entered the war as a second lieutenant, he earned several promotions up to brevet major by the time the war had ended.²⁸ All of Longstreet's biographers agree that his experience in the Mexican American War contributed immensely to his later success in the Civil War.²⁹ As a friend and as a soldier, Longstreet emerged from the conflict in high standing.

²⁵ Ibid., 18-21.

²⁶ Moxley G. Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet: Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 37.

²⁷ Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 7; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 21.

²⁸ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 24-28; Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 9-12.

²⁹ William Garrett Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 7-8; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 46; Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 20.

Upon his return to the South, his experience in years and accomplishments in battle impressed the father of Maria Garland, and he blessed Longstreet's marriage to her. Married on March 8, 1848 in Lynchburg, Virginia, the Longstreets would eventually have ten children, though only five would live to be adults.³⁰ Longstreet served in several different posts during these interwar years, eventually acquiring the office of paymaster at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1858.³¹ As war clouds gathered in 1861, he needed little consideration in order to decide which nation he would serve if war finally came, for he had always considered himself a man of the South. Once his resignation from the U.S. Army had been accepted on June 1st, he traveled to Richmond and “asked to be assigned for service in the pay department. . . . I had given up all aspirations of military honor, and thought to settle down into more peaceful pursuits.”³² Longstreet's request resulted instead in his appointment as a brigadier general, with orders to join the Confederate army at Manassas. Longstreet's narrative, however, fails to mention that he did not write his letter of resignation from the U.S. Army until *after* he had already accepted a Confederate commission from Alabama as a lieutenant colonel. Wert, by comparing the dates of Longstreet's letters of resignation and acceptance, found that: “As a U.S. Army officer, he accepted a commission in an enemy army.”³³ Longstreet's comment from his memoirs, that he “had no aspirations of military honor,” is not in the spirit of these findings, for he had not only ignored his commission from Alabama as a lieutenant colonel, but did so in order to accept a commission from Richmond as a brigadier general. Longstreet's March 1864 letter to General

³⁰ Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 12.

³¹ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 29.

³² Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 32.

³³ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 53-54.

D.H. Hill perhaps reveals his true intentions: "I came to the South because I feared that it might not be able to do well without me. I had more experience, or thought that I had, than any other man North or South and was apprehensive that our people could not get along without me. I had no ambition to gratify nor have I any now more than to discharge my duties."³⁴ Honor, it seems, did not appeal to Longstreet, nor did military glory. Longstreet's manner of resignation reveals the former and his letter to Hill reveals the latter. Longstreet simply considered himself one of the best soldiers available to either side at the outset of the Civil War, perhaps even the best soldier of all, and he wanted a military position that reflected this status. Combined with his tendencies to be both stubborn and single-minded, Longstreet's ego later limited his ability to appeal to a more romantic South.

Thus, as Longstreet began his career as a Confederate general in the Civil War, his prewar years had developed him into a complex character. As a boy he learned independence, roaming freely on his parents' plantation and making decisions apart from the advice or judgment of his peers. As a Southerner he lacked a home state with which he could identify, moving from place to place with his mother and family. As a student he lacked the discipline and motivation to apply himself to studies he deemed impractical, but he understood his lessons well and even excelled at the physical practices of the soldier. As a man he was very friendly, enjoying card games and occasional drink. As a soldier he had already distinguished himself in battle several times, though his appointment as brigadier general represented his first experience commanding an entire brigade of men. Finally, in his self-evaluation he considered himself very skilled and experienced as a soldier, so much that he allowed it to affect his ego. Indeed, we find that

³⁴ Randall Bedwell, *May I Quote You, General Longstreet?* (Nashville: Cumberland House Publishing, 1997), 5.

although he brought his strong self-confidence into the Mexican-American War, evidence of a bloated ego did not manifest itself until Longstreet found his services to be in high demand as the Civil War approached. While he failed to appeal to southerners who preferred Lee's humility and Jackson's romanticism, there can be no doubt that Longstreet, a man of the South without roots, proficient, proud, and pragmatic, impressively demonstrated his own effectiveness in the coming conflict.

CHAPTER 4

A CAREER WORTHY OF PRAISE

Nearly all Southern histories of the Civil War reveal a definite bias in favor of two Confederate generals: Robert E. Lee, and Thomas Jackson. To be sure, a great deal of this favoritism is well-merited. Lee, for instance, engineered many victories in the face of an enemy which nearly always outnumbered his own forces, thereby earning an almost god-like respect among the soldiers of his army. Jackson, at the same time, was one of the first Confederate leaders to become famous for his magnificent leadership of men, perhaps never more so than at the battle of First Manassas (or Bull Run), where he began to be called “Stonewall” due to his stalwart defense of Henry House Hill, a major factor in that Confederate victory. Southern historians immortalized these contributions to the Confederacy by portraying Lee and Jackson as heroes of the Confederacy and virtual saints to the Southern Cause. James Longstreet, however, was not given the same treatment, despite both his heavy involvement in nearly all of the battles which Lee fought as well as his significance as Lee’s most senior lieutenant. Analysis of Longstreet’s accomplishments reveal his abilities to train and lead men, coordinate attacks, conduct defensive warfare, organize and prepare for battle, strategize effectively, and even develop modern and innovative tactics successfully. Measured by his military accomplishments, Longstreet’s pragmatic and flexible approach to command demonstrates that he earned a laudable reputation in his own right as a superb general with a modern military mind.

Following his appointment to the Confederate army at Manassas, Longstreet immediately began to establish his ability to lead men with organization, confidence, and willpower. When he arrived to take command of his troops on July 2, 1861, he quickly realized that there was no order, discipline, or military understanding among his green troops. Aware that a Federal army

might approach soon, Longstreet quickly began training his men, ensuring that they had the time “to learn more of the drill and of each other.”¹ Less than two weeks later, the Confederates learned of the Federal army’s plans for advance, and Longstreet prepared his defensive position at Blackburn’s Ford. On the eighteenth of July, only sixteen days after assuming his command, Federal troops advanced against Longstreet’s position, hoping to force a crossing of Bull Run stream. At the first sign of trouble some of his troops broke and ran, but Longstreet had been observing them from behind, and took action: “To stop the alarm I rode with sabre in hand for the leading files, determined to give them all that was in the sword and my horse’s heels, or stop the break. They seemed to see as much danger in their rear as in front, and soon turned and marched back to their places.”² This aggressive reminder of his soldiers’ duty quickly restored his line’s integrity, and Longstreet instantly transformed into a different sort of commander, walking among his men in a demonstration of his soldierly resolve. Now mindful of the fragility of their courage, he provided them with inspiration and confidence, remaining calm and cool despite the enemy fire.³ When he felt his position stressed he called for some reserves, and the arrival of these new troops solidified the position for the Confederates.⁴ When the Federals had retreated for the last time, the number of fallen troops revealed the relatively small nature of this skirmish: eighty-three Union casualties, sixty-eight Confederate from an engagement which involved approximately two-thousand men.⁵ Nevertheless, Longstreet’s peers recognized the

¹ James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 33.

² *Ibid.*, 39.

³ Moxley G. Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet: Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 24.

⁴ “Report of Brig. General James Longstreet,” in *The War of Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, 53 vols (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1899), S1, 2:461-63.

important part he had played in defending the position, as his commander, P.G.T. Beauregard, later stated: “By his presence at the right place at the right moment among his men, by the exhibition of characteristic coolness, and by his words of encouragement to the men of his command, he infused a confidence and spirit that contributed largely to the success of our arms on that day.”⁶ By involving himself closely with his men, he was able to let them know exactly what he expected of them, while at the same time affording them his same confidence and courage by his presence among them. Longstreet would repeat this style of personal leadership in the future, especially during pivotal moments where precise direction was crucial. At Blackburn’s Ford he began to build his reputation as a personal leader who could single-handedly influence the outcome of a contest by his interaction with the troops.

Longstreet also demonstrated a magnificent grasp of offensive tactics about thirteen months later at the Battle of Second Manassas (or Second Bull Run). Longstreet, by now the commander of the First Corps in the Army of Northern Virginia, arrived to the battlefield late in the day on August 29, 1862, as the army’s Second Corps, commanded by Thomas Jackson, had been engaged in fighting throughout the day. General Robert E. Lee, anxious to relieve the pressure on Jackson, his army’s left wing, suggested to Longstreet that he should attack, but “before he could complete his dispositions to attack, the enemy withdrew.”⁷ Positioning his force at right a right angle to that of Jackson’s line, the Confederate line became like large jaws between which the Federals remained ignorant of their peril. Longstreet did advance late in the evening “to make a reconnaissance of the enemy’s ground” as well as to guard against a potential

⁵ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 41.

⁶ “Report of General Beauregard,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 2:445.

⁷ “Lee’s Second Manassas Report,” in Benjamin La Bree, ed., *The Confederate Soldier in the Civil War* (New York: The Fairfax Press, 1977), 108.

enemy flanking maneuver.⁸ The absence of a strong enemy presence in the resulting skirmish, however, served only to make the general better aware of the ground in front of him in preparation for a stronger advance later in the battle.⁹ Longstreet withdrew his troops from the skirmish to their original positions, and the Federal commander, John Pope, prepared to attack Jackson the next day, thinking Longstreet no longer present: he “took [the] reconnaissance for a fight, and [the] withdrawal for a retreat.”¹⁰ The next day, as expected, Jackson again came under attack by the Federal troops. When Lee ordered a portion of Longstreet’s corps to reinforce Jackson’s hard-pressed troops, Longstreet instead turned to his artillery, which he had placed at the apex of the Confederate lines in perfect position to rain enfilade (strafing, angling) fire down upon the attacking Federal lines.¹¹ With each blast, the cannons knocked down great swaths of enemy troops, and “the weight of its fire was very effective in breaking up the enemy’s lines & columns. They endeavored to reform again & again, but were again & again broken & confused by the constantly increasing Confederate fire.”¹² The skillful employment of artillery had not only attained the goal of relieving Jackson quicker than if Longstreet had sent his troops, but also opened the way for a devastating counter-attack. With the Federal troops retreating in disarray, Longstreet sensed the perfect moment for advance, sending his corps forward and thus snapping shut the jaws of the Confederate line. Longstreet had timed his attack beautifully, as his troops

⁸ “Lee’s Second Manassas Report,” *The Confederate Soldier*, 108.

⁹ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 182-4; “Lee’s Second Manassas Report,” *The Confederate Soldier*, 108; “Longstreet’s Second Manassas Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S.1, V.XII, Pt 2, 566.

¹⁰ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 185; “Lee’s Second Manassas Report,” *The Confederate Soldier*, 108.

¹¹ “Lee’s Second Manassas Report,” *The Confederate Soldier*, 108; Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personnel Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 134.

¹² Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 187; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 97; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 134; “Lee’s Second Manassas Report,” *The Confederate Soldier*, 108.

flanked line after line of Federal soldiers, nearly causing the entire organization to fail.¹³ The advance threatened to cut off and destroy the entire Federal army, but premature darkness brought on by rain made further coordination impossible, and the Federals escaped.¹⁴ In their battle reports Lee and Jackson praised Longstreet immensely not only for his effective and immediate use of artillery in place of reinforcements, but also for the brilliant timing of his attack, taking advantage of a disorganized enemy and nearly crushing them totally.¹⁵ Indeed, Lee noted that Longstreet's attack had "anticipat[ed] the order for a general advance."¹⁶ Taking advantage of the previous day's reconnaissance, Longstreet not only made a beautifully timed attack, but also one where his commanders were already familiar with the ground which they were attacking. Therefore, through his emphasis on preparedness, reconnaissance, and proper timing, Longstreet demonstrated that he could direct an effective attack upon his opponents, one so well executed as to threaten the entire body of the enemy army.

As impressive as his actions at Second Manassas had been, Longstreet's defensive performance at the battle of Fredericksburg demonstrated an ability to wreak more destruction upon an enemy army than ever seen before. In December 1862, the Federal army, after long delay, had finally crossed the Rappahannock River at the town of Fredericksburg, Virginia. The delay allowed the Confederate army to prepare its defenses outside of the town, blocking the Federal advance to the west and south. Longstreet's position formed the left wing of the

¹³ "Jackson's Second Manassas Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 111; "Lee's Second Manassas Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 108; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 97-98; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 134.

¹⁴ "Lee's Second Manassas Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 108; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 189.

¹⁵ "Lee's Second Manassas Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 108; "Jackson's Second Manassas Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 111.

¹⁶ "Lee's Second Manassas Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 108.

Confederate army, tasked with defending the heights immediately to the west of the town. Although this was already excellent ground for a defensive position, Longstreet ordered parts of the line to be “further strengthened by rifle trenches and abatis.”¹⁷ By the time Federal assaults began on December 13, Longstreet commanded a formidable position, having placed troops and cannon so as to cover the vast field in front of them with total efficiency while protecting his own soldiers behind excellent defensive works.¹⁸ Porter Alexander, the artillery officer, remarked that “a chicken could not find room to scratch where I could not rake the ground. . . . [It] was so thoroughly covered that I never thought [the Federals] would choose that point for attack.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the Federals did attack Longstreet at this point, where a sunken road partially obscured his troops occupying Marye’s Heights.²⁰ As the Federals advanced towards this position, they soon found that “it was impossible for them to stand before” the constant and furious fire of Longstreet’s troops and cannon.²¹ “Our batteries,” noted Lee, “poured a rapid and destructive fire into the dense lines of the enemy . . . frequently breaking their ranks and forcing them to retreat. . . . Six times did the enemy . . . press on with great determination to within one hundred yards [of Longstreet’s position,] but here encountering the deadly fire of our infantry, his columns were broken and fled in confusion to the town.”²² In all, twenty-two Federal brigades were sent against a position held by only three brigades of Longstreet’s troops, and

¹⁷ “Longstreet’s Fredericksburg Report,” *The Confederate Soldier*, 131.

¹⁸ Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 140; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 309-310; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 168-170, 175-176.

¹⁹ Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 169.

²⁰ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 298, 310.

²¹ Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 141.

²² “Lee’s Fredericksburg Report,” *The Confederate Soldier*, 127.

fifteen of these twenty-two brigades suffered terribly, about eight thousand Federal troops succumbing to the destructive fire of Longstreet's position.²³ Compared to the destruction inflicted upon the Federals, Longstreet lost less than fifteen hundred of his own men.²⁴ The position was so sound that the contest had never really been in doubt, for "perhaps not more than half a dozen . . . [Federal] men had got within sixty yards of our wall and dropped there."²⁵ Longstreet's defensive conduct surpassed that of any other commander, North or South, up to that time, inflicting terrible casualties upon his enemy while suffering very little injury to his own troops in perhaps the greatest example of defensive generalship in the Civil War.

With respect to the exercise of command, Longstreet understood the need to streamline orders and improve efficiency, and he quickly became a master of organization and discipline in his military work. Much of his staff's organization, loyalty, and effectiveness was due to Longstreet's fairness when dealing with his subordinates, often citing bravery, leadership, and other qualities in his subordinate officers in his official reports. Similarly, Longstreet's intolerance for incompetence is also well documented, famously relieving general Lafayette McLaws for his failure to take Fort Sanders during Longstreet's Knoxville campaign, despite reports that McLaws had performed as well as could be expected. Less well known is Longstreet's wisdom in judging his subordinates, a quality evidenced by an episode with one of his officers, Robert Toombs. Prior to the battle of Second Manassas, Toombs ordered several regiments on picket duty away from the position ordered them by Longstreet. Consequently, Federal cavalry rode through the gap in the lines, causing some havoc and confusion. Upon

²³ Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 142-143.

²⁴ Ibid.; Jubal A. Early, *War Memories* (New York: Krause Reprinting Co., 1969), 180.

²⁵ Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 141.

learning of this development, Longstreet quickly ascertained upon whom the blame rested, and ordered Toombs under arrest.²⁶ Toombs initially protested, but eventually admitted to his failure, writing a letter of apology to Longstreet, who consequently promised his eventual reinstatement because his mistake was from “want of experience, and not from intentional breach of authority.”²⁷ Reunited with his troops during Second Manassas, Toombs remained obedient to Longstreet for the duration of the war, and the scenario served to foster quick, thorough, and efficient execution of Longstreet’s orders.²⁸ By first disciplining Toombs, but then rewarding his submission, Longstreet demonstrated a measure of justice and fairness which he would continue to hold throughout the war, inspiring great loyalty in his staff. Sorrel himself noted that “Longstreet was always generous with good support when things were done apparently for the best,” and this positive mode of managing his staff made it easy to both pick and develop his staff members, constantly improving the abilities and values of these officers. Looking to make his staff more flexible, he often employed specialists to inform him on the state of terrain, artillery, and even long distance scouting.²⁹ Most importantly of all, writes Richard DiNardo in “James Longstreet at the Exercise of Command,” Longstreet employed his staff intelligently, picking not “relatives or cronies,” but rather men whom he could trust with leadership, “rank, and responsibility.”³⁰ By picking staff members which had the experience to lead, the intelligence to understand him, and the information on where to find him and communicate with

²⁶ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 161; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 100-101.

²⁷ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 166;

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁹ Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 127.

³⁰ Richard L. DiNardo, “Southern by the Grace of God but Prussian by Common Sense: James Longstreet and the Exercise of Command in the U.S. Civil War,” *The Journal of Military History* 66 no. 4 (2002), 1020-1021, 1027.

him, Longstreet ensured that his orders would not only be accurately delivered across a large battlefield, but also overseen by those who best understood his intentions.³¹ His staff's abilities as identified by Longstreet allowed him to delegate many tasks, giving him more time to plan, prepare, and lead. In his analysis of Longstreet's exercise of command, Richard Dinardo pointed out that "[e]ven Longstreet's most virulent critics have conceded that he put together the best staff employed by any commander."³² At the very least, Longstreet's ability to command his corps demonstrated this fact: Longstreet put such faith in his staff that he frequently sent them across a battlefield with both orders and authority which superseded others, even sending Sorrel himself to lead an entire wing of attack at the Battle of the Wilderness. This not only ensured perfect correlation between Longstreet's orders and the expectations therein, but it also represented his understanding of the need for several men throughout his battlefield command who perfectly understood his wishes and the methods by which he wanted to attain them. Due to his progressive and practical employment of his administration, therefore, Longstreet was capable of exercising command far more efficiently than many of his peers in either the North or the South. Always pragmatic, Longstreet simply looked for the best way to manage and develop his staff, and his abilities to organize and effectively exercise command were not only major element of his command methods, but also a crucial component at his next major conflict at Chickamauga.

Just as Thomas Jackson became famous for his influential work with Lee at the battle of Chancellorsville, Longstreet's military career also boasted a singularly spectacular victory for which he could take a great deal of the credit. He began his planning for such a success shortly

³¹ DiNardo, "Southern by the Grace of God," 1021-1022, 1023, 1031.

³² *Ibid.*, 1014.

after the battle of Gettysburg, where the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia had sustained losses which dramatically impacted its ability to campaign against its Federal counterpart, the Army of the Potomac. Mindful of this condition, Longstreet wrote Lee a letter imploring a new strategy:

I don't know that we can reasonably hope to accomplish much here by offensive operations, unless we are strong enough to cross the Potomac. If we advance to meet the enemy on this side, he will in all probability go into one of his many fortified positions. These we cannot afford to attack. . . . The enemy seems to have settled down upon the plan of holding certain points by fortifying and defending whilst he concentrates upon others. It seems to me that this must succeed unless we concentrate ourselves, and at the same time make occasional show of active operations at all points.³³

At this juncture, Longstreet had given up hope of the Confederacy's victory through conventional means of warfare, and suggested a new strategy, one where the Confederates would seem to be everywhere while they were actually concentrated against a specific target. As part of this plan, Longstreet volunteered to head west with most of his troops in order to join the Confederate army under Braxton Bragg in its struggle against the Federal army arrayed against it and led by William Rosecrans. Although Rosecrans's forces had always outnumbered those of Bragg, Longstreet's reinforcements, along with those of other small commands in the West, bolstered Bragg's army up to about 60,000 men to Rosecrans's 61,000.³⁴ The strategic concentration of forces had been achieved in accordance with Longstreet's strategy. Arriving late in the evening of September 19, 1863, Longstreet made plans with Bragg for an attack the next day where Longstreet would wheel his forces left in conjunction with the right wing of the army.³⁵

³³ "Longstreet to Lee, September 2, 1863," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 41, pt.2, 693-694.

³⁴ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 458.

³⁵ "Bragg's Chickamauga Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 203; "Longstreet's Chickamauga Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 204

Awakening early, he quickly organized his new command, positioned his troops, and even ordered a quick reconnaissance of the area in order to get a better understanding of the terrain and the enemy's position.³⁶ As Longstreet waited impatiently for the order to attack, he finally received word from another commander that an order for a general advance had been sent.³⁷ Without waiting to receive that order, Longstreet sent his troops forward. Discovered by his quick reconnaissance, a gap appeared in the Federal lines, and Longstreet exploited it beautifully, sending the entire right wing of Rosecrans's forces backwards in total and complete disarray.³⁸ The momentum of the charge gained particular strength from Longstreet's ingenuity of troop formations and flexibility of orders. First noting the weakness of the enemy lines, he arranged his troops in a single massive "column of attack" which delivered a rush of troops precisely where Longstreet had identified the hole in the enemy lines.³⁹ Thus, Longstreet achieved his vision of not only regional superiority in numbers, but also localized superiority in the battle itself. Further, Longstreet soon received word that the army's right wing had not nearly been so successful in their attack, and he thus reversed "the order of battle by retaining my right somewhere near the left of the right wing."⁴⁰ Though already engaged in battle, Longstreet successfully flipped the plan for attack from a left-turn to a right-turn. Continuing his attack without reinforcements, Longstreet's forces succeeded in breaking and bending the Federal lines

³⁶ Longstreet's Chickamauga Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 204; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 438-443.

³⁷ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 447.

³⁸ "Longstreet's Chickamauga Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 204-205; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 195; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 290-291.

³⁹ "Longstreet's Chickamauga Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 204; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 448.

⁴⁰ "Longstreet's Chickamauga Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 204; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 449.

into a single rearguard stand which barely saved the Federal army from total destruction. After a long fight, the Confederates overwhelmed this force as well, and though “[t]he enemy had fought every man that he had, . . . every one had been in turn beaten.”⁴¹ In a single day, Longstreet had taken up a new command, effectively organized it, readied it for battle, and directed it to a smashing victory. Further, Longstreet had been allowed temporary control of the Confederate strategy, and he delivered the only major victory for Confederate forces in the western theater of the war. If nothing else, Chickamauga stands as a testament to the brilliance of Longstreet’s pragmatic approach to Civil War strategy, where he merely sought greater focus on one theatre of war at a time.

In a final demonstration of his military skill, Longstreet exhibited profoundly modern and innovative tactics at the Battle of the Wilderness. Pressed hard by the Federal army led by Ulysses Grant, Lee clung desperately to his position inside the tangled forests of the Wilderness near Fredericksburg in the early days of May, 1864. Despite the danger which Grant’s forces posed to Lee’s army, Longstreet’s corps was not yet present, his troops still en route from Gordonsville.⁴² By the time Longstreet and his corps had arrived, a Federal advance led by Winfield Hancock stressed a significant portion of Lee’s troops, and “the divisions of Heth and Wilcox broke and retreated in some confusion.”⁴³ These troops fell back directly through the area where Longstreet began forming his battle lines, and with “considerable difficulty, but with steadiness,” he ordered his troops to open “their ranks to let the retreating divisions through” and

⁴¹ “Longstreet’s Chickamauga Report,” *The Confederate Soldier*, 205; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 450, 452.

⁴² Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 555-560; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 237-239; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 350.

⁴³ “Report of Lieut. Gen. James Longstreet, C.S. Army, Commanding First Army Corps, Of Operations April 14 – May 6,” *War of Rebellion*, S1, V.36, pt.1, 1054-1055; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 560; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 240.

thus avoided a confused mass.⁴⁴ According to Sorrel, these complex maneuvers demonstrated the highest level of Longstreet's troop handling skills: "I have always thought that . . . the simple act of forming line in that dense undergrowth, under heavy fire and with the Third Corps men pushing to the rear through the ranks, was perhaps [the] greatest performance for steadiness and inflexible courage and discipline."⁴⁵ Longstreet later noted that he ordered his troops into "heavy skirmish lines" in order to account for the thick underbrush and retreating troops.⁴⁶ By accident or by design, these multiple lines of loosely packed troops provided not only better cohesiveness in the tangled woods, but the alternating lines also enabled a "steady, rolling fire" which quickly "checked the advance of the enemy."⁴⁷ Sensing an opportunity for a counterstroke, Longstreet quickly ordered a reconnaissance "through the wood" in order "to find a way around the left of the enemy's line, while we engaged his front."⁴⁸ This reconnaissance confirmed "that the heavy woodland concealed the route of the proposed flank march, and that there was no force of the enemy in operation."⁴⁹ Acting quickly, Longstreet turned to Sorrel and gave his orders: "Colonel, there is a fine chance of a great attack by our right. If you will quickly get into those woods, some brigades will be found much scattered from the fight. Collect them and take charge. Form a good line and then move . . . turning as much as possible to the left. Hit hard when you start, but don't start until you have everything ready. I shall be waiting for your gun fire, and be on hand

⁴⁴ "Longstreet's Wilderness Report," *War of Rebellion*, S1, V.36, pt.1, 1055; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 240.

⁴⁵ Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 240.

⁴⁶ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 561.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; "Longstreet's Wilderness Report," *War of Rebellion*, S1, V.36, pt.1, 1055; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 241; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 358.

⁴⁸ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 561.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 562.

with fresh troops for further advance.”⁵⁰ Sorrel quickly jumped to the task, and as soon as he had begun his flank attack, Longstreet “ordered a general advance by [his] line.”⁵¹ Threatened by both Longstreet's left and right wings, Hancock's troops were rolled “up like a wet blanket,” and the entire left wing of the Federal army faced disaster.⁵² At this critical juncture in the battle, however, Longstreet rode with members of his staff to survey the ground for his next move, and was accidentally shot by his own troops.⁵³ A large bullet passed through his throat and right shoulder, forcing him to relinquish his command and be carried from the field. Alexander, the artillery officer, later remarked on the similarity between generals Jackson and Longstreet having fallen while on the brink of leading their men to total victory. To him, Longstreet's fall at the Wilderness represented the loss of a great opportunity, one “more favorable than the one presented to Jackson” at his famous victory at Chancellorsville.⁵⁴ Longstreet's fall caused an interruption of command, spoiled the great momentum which had been built, and thus the Federals were able to recover from the attack.⁵⁵ At the Wilderness, Longstreet's innovative tactic of using multiple sets of heavy skirmish lines not only saved Lee's army from a devastating attack, but also smashed the Federal's entire left wing and opened an opportunity which would be

⁵⁰ Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 241-242.

⁵¹ “Longstreet's Wilderness Report,” *War of Rebellion*, S1, V.36, pt.1, 1055; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 562; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 242; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 359.

⁵² General Winfield Hancock, quoted in *James Longstreet: Soldier, Politician, Officeholder, and Writer*, by Donald Bridgman Sanger and Thomas Robson Hay (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1968), 273-274, 275; “Longstreet's Wilderness Report,” *War of Rebellion*, S1, V.36, pt.1, 1055; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 242; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 562-563; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 360.

⁵³ “Longstreet's Wilderness Report,” *War of Rebellion*, S1, V.36, pt.1, 1055; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 243-244; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 564; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 360.

⁵⁴ Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 360.

⁵⁵ “Report of Brig.-Gen. William N. Pendleton, Chief of Artillery, Campaign from the Rapidan to James River, May 4 to June 12, 1864,” *The Confederate Soldier*, 252, 254; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 566; Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 360-361; Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet*, 245.

lost only when he himself could no longer press the attack. Longstreet survived his wounds, but he lost much of the use of his voice and right arm, making his speech raspy and writing very difficult for the rest of his life.

In summary of his military performance, we find that Longstreet's numerous accomplishments are impressive of themselves, but even more so when analyzed by the forward looking tactics which he employed. At the time of the Civil War, offensive Napoleonic tactics dominated military thinking. Bevin Alexander, in *How the South Could Have Won the Civil War*, explains that the Civil War graduates from West Point, and especially Lee, had been taught to favor offensive warfare: "Commanders believed that troops behind parapets would be reluctant to abandon them and go over to the attack. In this they adhered to old prejudice, for Napoleon had written in a book, *Le Souper de Beaucaire*, in 1793; 'He who remains behind his entrenchments is beaten; experience and theory are one on this point.'"⁵⁶ Further supported by historians such as Paddy Griffith in *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* and Grady McWhiney and Perry Jamieson in *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage*, the Civil War represented a transitory period in warfare where Napoleonic tactics became obsolete. Innovations in military weapons called for a change in military thinking towards the tactical defensive and away from the tactical offensive "except in cases of overwhelming force," given that the killing range of the new rifled muskets allowed the stationary defender an excellent chance of injuring the advancing attacker long before the offensive troops even had a chance to inflict damage upon the defenders.⁵⁷ Further, "the absence of a numerous hostile cavalry trained

⁵⁶ Bevin Alexander, *How the South Could Have Won the Civil War: The Fatal Errors That Led to Confederate Defeat* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2007), 38.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 37-38; Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (University: The University of Alabama Press, 1982), 19-24; Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 15, 27; Richard E. Beringer, et al., *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986), 468.

to charge with the sabre” in most Civil War battles allowed defenders to take cover, kneel down, and even entrench themselves rather than remaining “erect to protect themselves against a sabre attack with a wall of bayonets.”⁵⁸ The combined advantages of the defenders usually meant that the troops involved in frontal attacks “murdered themselves by making reckless charges,” having little chance against the superior firepower of the defenders.⁵⁹ Although the battles of the Civil War repeatedly demonstrated the murderous defensive advantages of the latest military weapons, Civil War commanders learned these lessons slowly, if at all. This seemingly foolish ignorance can perhaps be accounted for in the previous military experience of these commanders in the Mexican-American War during the late 1840s. In that conflict, many who served in the American army gained a strong “conviction of the supremacy of the tactical offensive,” given that the Americans experienced repeated victories in attacking their enemy.⁶⁰ Although this confidence in offensive tactics quickly proved “erroneous” in the Civil War with the introduction of rifled muskets, many Civil War commanders, including Lee, proved reluctant to abandon the lessons learned in the conflict of the 1840s.⁶¹

Put simply, most Civil War commanders preferred strategic and tactical offensives instead, leading to the senseless slaughter of their troops. They “fought by the books, and the books were wrong.”⁶² Thus, by the criteria of the old, Napoleonic theories of warfare, Longstreet’s recurring insistence on perfect preparation and timing of his attacks, such as at Second Manassas, seem overly cautious, perhaps even cowardly. Yet with the understanding of

⁵⁸ Beringer, *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, 468-469.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 472.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 458.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 473, 467.

⁶² Griffith, *Battle Tactics*, 23.

the out-datedness of these theories of warfare, Longstreet's military performance demonstrates a pragmatic, innovative, and flexible use of tactics to overcome a variety of challenges relating to troop morale, offensive actions, defensive actions, war strategy, and even battlefield terrain.

Indeed, Longstreet's accomplishments compare very favorably against both those of Jackson and Lee. In Jackson's case, bold performances at the battles of First Bull Run and Chancellorsville identified his indomitable spirit. Stout defense at Second Bull Run, Fredericksburg, and Antietam demonstrated his fighting resolve. Several brilliant independent commands in 1862 cemented his image as an audacious and fearless commander. Yet Jackson's accomplishments pale in comparison to those of Longstreet, for while attacks engineered by Jackson threatened to destroy an enemy army only once (at Chancellorsville), Longstreet's career boasts at least three occasions where the entire Federal force was threatened, at Second Bull Run, Chickamauga, and the Wilderness. Considering that the destruction of the Federal armies remained the primary goals of the Confederate armies, Longstreet ought to be considered the more effective commander. Further, while Longstreet's supposed failures at Gettysburg remain the only possible mark on his Civil War career, none can excuse Jackson's repeated delays and failures during Lee's Peninsula campaign in June, 1862, forcing the conclusion that Longstreet also represented the more reliable commander of the two. Given Lee's decision to promote Longstreet a day before Jackson, giving the former seniority over the latter, it seems that even Lee considered Longstreet the better commander overall.⁶³

Longstreet's military accomplishment ought to be considered equal, if not superior to those of Lee as well. A brief look at Lee's battles reveals that he inarguably lost only two battles, Gettysburg and Appomattox Court House, and his aggressive style of battlefield tactics nearly

⁶³ "Special Order No. 232, November 6, 1862," *War of the Rebellion* S1, 19, pt. 2, 698.

always caught his opponents off-guard. Yet a closer look reveals that Lee never faced a Federal commander his equal in military competence, with the possible exception of Ulysses Grant. It seems that Lee's counterpart, the commander of the Army of the Potomac, was always under political pressure, and thus the position was refused by several excellent Federal commanders, including John F. Reynolds who specifically asked for political non-interference in order to accept the post (it was refused).⁶⁴ Understood this way, it seems a little excessive to proclaim Lee's brilliance on account of victories over such incompetents as George McClellan, John Pope, Joe Hooker, and Ambrose Burnside. Further, Lee himself remains open to severe criticism in the types of attacks he often demanded. As early as 1862, Lee ordered a massive frontal assault of nearly 60,000 troops at Gaines Mill, and though the attack succeeded, Lee resorted to the slaughter of frontal assault over and over again throughout the war, including Frayser's Farm, Malvern Hill, the Wilderness, and especially with repeated disaster at Gettysburg. Understood this way, Lee appears far less fantastic than traditionally thought, successful more because of the poor quality of his opponents and the leeway he gave to his more imaginative corps commanders, Longstreet and Jackson. Longstreet's career demonstrates much more flexibility of tactics and strategy than does Lee's, and when opposed by his counterparts in the Federal army, such as Winfield Hancock, he emerged almost universally victorious. Though it is beyond the scope of this study to definitively demonstrate Longstreet's superiority over Jackson and Lee, the above information ought to at least evidence the comparatively high respect with which Longstreet's career should be held as opposed to the relative obscurity usually afforded the general.

⁶⁴ George Gordon Meade II, ed., *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade* (New York: 1913), I, 385.

Over and again, Longstreet emerged successful in battle despite a great diversity in the styles with which his battles were fought. His defensive work at Fredericksburg exemplifies his understanding of the superiority of defensive fortifications, breaking wave after wave of enemy troops while his own position was never seriously threatened. Additionally, his attacks at Second Manassas, Chickamauga, and Wilderness demonstrate an understanding of the need for innovative tactics, localized numerical superiority, and careful timing and preparation for his attacks. Finally, the attention given to the construction of his staff also shows an acute appreciation for the exercise of command, employing many different officers to accomplish an array of specialized tasks in order to streamline his corps' efficiency, flexibility, and leadership. While it is true that other commanders may have mastered the principles of Napoleonic warfare, Longstreet understood the need to utilize a flexible range of tactics in order to overcome the outdated elements of that military theory, departing from "the book" when he saw a definite advantage to doing so. Similar to his time at West Point, Longstreet remained stubbornly pragmatic and progressive, but these traits paid dividends in the Civil War, where traditional military theories often led to slaughter. Though a full appreciation for Longstreet's military accomplishments may require a prior understanding of the development of warfare, there can be no doubt that Longstreet's achievements in the Civil War stand as an impressive collection of military successes.

CHAPTER 5

A BATTLE WORTHY OF CONTROVERSY

In July of 1863, Longstreet would be called upon to perform his duties in the Confederacy's most important battle yet, at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Before the campaign into Pennsylvania, Longstreet advocated his temporary transfer to the western theater of the war in order to assist with the desperate Confederate situation at Vicksburg, Mississippi. Lee and other Confederate leaders rejected this course, however, and Longstreet's plan would not bear fruit until after the battle of Gettysburg, at the later battle of Chickamauga. In the meantime, Lee took Longstreet and the rest of his army north. Entering Pennsylvania, Longstreet believed that Lee had promised to use mostly defensive tactics in the campaign. So when the Confederates stumbled into battle, Longstreet became angered when Lee adopted different, more aggressive tactics.¹ Irritated for much of the battle of Gettysburg, Longstreet's mood attracted a great deal of criticism, thus igniting one of the greatest controversies of the Civil War.

The controversy erupted after Lee passed away in 1870, when admirers of the late commander had to contend with Lee's greatest military failure while enshrining his memory, and thus they shifted the blame for Gettysburg onto Longstreet. Accusations emerged which alleged that Longstreet had become sulky during the battle, and was consequently guilty of several critical failures: that he did not make an attack on the morning of July second as ordered, that he delayed both in commencing his march and in getting his troops into position during the day on the second, that his attack on the second should have been revised, and that he withheld some of

¹ Moxley G. Sorrel, *At the Right Hand of Longstreet: Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 167.

his troops from his final attack on July third.² Prejudices and biases from the resulting controversy tainted a great deal of the information generated after Lee's death, both in Longstreet's favor, but especially against him. Thus other historians usually fail to reach any definite conclusion in their examination of the controversy because of their selection of sources generated after Lee's death.

Therefore, the untainted evidence which predates the controversy offers the only real hope of either exonerating or condemning Longstreet. Unfortunately, such sources are few. The most reliable of these remain the *Official Records of the War of Rebellion*. In this collection of war documents some commanders may have included a degree of subjectivity and even opinion, but Lee refused to accept the Gettysburg reports of some officers precisely when they strayed too far from objectivity. The reports of Generals George Pickett and Lafayette McLaws, for instance, do not appear in the *Official Records* for that very reason. Lee wrote Pickett, for example, that "we have the enemy to fight, and must carefully, at this critical moment, guard against dissensions which the reflections in your report would create. I will, therefore, suggest that you destroy both copy and original, substituting one confined to casualties merely."³ Anchored to the objectivity found in the *Records*, and studied strictly from material which predates the controversy, very little information surfaces which suggests either Longstreet's innocence or guilt. However, this material seems to indicate that there were many factors in the Confederate

² Robert Underwood Johnson, ed., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (Secaucus: Castle Books, 1990), 3:351, 355-356; Roger J. Greezicki, "Humbing the Historian: A Reappraisal of Longstreet at Gettysburg," *The Longstreet Society*, http://www.longstreet.org/humbug_historian.html (accessed July 8, 2011), under "Turning to Longstreet," "The march of Longstreet's corps," "By far the most."

³ "Letter of W.H. Taylor to General George E. Pickett, by order of General Lee, no date," in *The War of Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, 53 vols (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1899), S1, 27, pt. 3, 1075.

defeat at Gettysburg, and at least several of them offer more favorable explanations for failure than Longstreet's performance.

In the spring of 1863, Lee directed his army north into Pennsylvania with several goals in mind. He hoped not only to give the South a respite from the presence of troops and their demands on war resources, but also to distract the Federal forces away from their successes in other theaters of the war. While thereby attempting to "break up . . . the enemy's plan of campaign for the summer," Lee's primary goal remained "striking a blow at the army then commanded by General Hooker," crushing the Federal force in its own territory.⁴ Mindful of the continued numerical superiority of the Federal army, Longstreet advised Lee to give battle only when the tactical defensive could be employed, much as it had been at Second Manassas and Fredericksburg.⁵ In the face of Federal strength, Longstreet deemed it unwise to take the offensive. Years after the battle, Longstreet even claimed that Lee had promised him to keep the army on the defensive, rather than risk a battle which destroyed the army through failed attacks.⁶ Lee seems to have generally agreed on this point, noting in his after action report of the campaign that he had not intended to "fight a general battle at such a distance from our base, unless attacked by the enemy."⁷ Thus, both Longstreet and Lee intended to lure the Federal army into an open, disadvantageous location where the Confederates could then maneuver into a strong defensive position nearby. Distracted from their campaigns elsewhere, the Federals would feel obliged to attack the Confederate positions at great cost to themselves, weakening their

⁴ "Report of General Robert E. Lee, June 3-August 1, 1863," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 305.

⁵ General James Longstreet, "Lee in Pennsylvania," in *The Annals of the War: Written by Leading Participants North and South*, Alexander Kelly McClure, ed., (Philadelphia: The Times Publishing Company, 1879), 414-415.

⁶ James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 331.

⁷ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 308.

forces enough to enable Lee to counterattack and destroy them. These plans unraveled, however, when Lee lost contact with his cavalry officer, J.E.B. Stuart.

Stuart and his cavalry accompanied the main force of Lee's army during the early days of the campaign into Pennsylvania, but then ventured far to the east, becoming both distracted from his mission and cut-off from the van of Lee's army. In his own words, Stuart considered the mission of his cavalry during the Gettysburg campaign to: "acquaint the commanding general (Lee) with the nature of the enemy's movements as well as to place with his column my cavalry force."⁸ Stuart, however, "began to look for some . . . point at which to direct an effective blow" against the Federals, and suggested to Lee that he ride east, pass between the Federals' "main body and Washington, and cross into Maryland, joining [the Confederate] army north of the Potomac."⁹ According to Stuart, Lee authorized "this move if I deemed it practicable," and he broke away from the Lee's van at about one in the morning on June twenty-fifth.¹⁰ Almost immediately, however, Stuart's independent venture encountered problems, as Federal troops blocked his intended route near Centreville, forcing him to detour south before he could head east, thus passing behind the Federal columns now heading north.¹¹ Stuart then felt the need to quickly outpace the Federal's northern movement in order to rejoin Lee's army to the west, but he became distracted by the presence of some unguarded Federal supply wagons. While he successfully captured the majority of these wagons, over "one hundred and twenty-five" of them, Stuart spent precious time capturing the wagons rather than focusing on rejoining Lee, and

⁸ "Report of Major General J. E. B. Stuart, C.S. Army, Commanding Cavalry, Army of Northern Virginia, August 20, 1863," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 695.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 692.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 692.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 693.

Stuart's determination to bring all of the wagons with him became a "serious embarrassment" to his efforts at speed.¹² Meanwhile, Lee remained ignorant of the Federals' swift movements to the north: "No report had been received that the Federal Army had crossed the Potomac, and the absence of the cavalry rendered it impossible to obtain accurate information."¹³ Not until the evening of the twenty-eighth of June did Lee learn of Federal movements northwards and across the Potomac River, and this information came not from Stuart but rather from one of Longstreet's scouts.¹⁴ Lee directed his army's scattered columns to rejoin each other at Gettysburg, where a junction of several roads allowed the sections of the Confederate army to approach from several different directions simultaneously. Unfortunately, the scout provided only transitory information of the Federals' movements, and Lee lamented that "[t]he march toward Gettysburg was conducted more slowly than it would have been had" the cavalry been giving him constant updates concerning the area and the enemy army.¹⁵ In the end, Stuart utterly failed to locate Lee, and only reestablished contact with the Confederate army when one of Lee's dispatches finally found him on July first, over twenty miles north of the battlefield.¹⁶ In the meantime, Lee's army came into violent contact with the Federal forces, and without the intelligence which Stuart normally provided, circumstances forced Lee to employ a degree of guesswork concerning the Federals' strength and dispositions, a weakness which affected his battle decisions up until midday on July the second, when Stuart finally arrived.¹⁷ Denied

¹² Stuart's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 694-696.

¹³ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 307.

¹⁴ Ibid.; "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 358.

¹⁵ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 307.

¹⁶ "Stuart's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 697.

Stuart's valuable reconnaissance in the days leading up to the battle, the collision of Confederate and Federal forces came as a surprise to Lee and his officers.

Beginning on the morning of July 1, 1863, the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg saw the two armies collide by accident, denying the Confederate commander the opportunity to plan, prepare, or even strategize. The day began with the troops of Lee's Third Army Corps, led by General A.P. Hill, marching towards Gettysburg from the northwest. Hill's leading division, commanded by Henry Heth, reached the outskirts of town before they encountered much stiffer resistance than the mere "force of cavalry" with some infantry support that they had expected.¹⁸ Working against the delaying tactics of the Federal cavalry, Heth eventually discovered "that there were infantry, cavalry, and artillery in and around the town," and the delay caused by driving the cavalry allowed the Federals enough time to bring up a strong force of infantry.¹⁹ Ignorant of the Federals' current dispositions and strength, Heth's ensuing attacks encountered an "overwhelming force" which threw back his advances in disarray.²⁰ More than a mile away from Gettysburg when this conflict took place, Lee heard the sound of guns, but "[i]ts significance . . . was not fully understood. It might be only a passing skirmish; it might be more serious."²¹ Disconcerted by the lack of information, Lee himself rode forward to obtain a better idea of the situation.²² Unable to determine the enemy strength with any degree of certainty, Lee

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Report of Major General Henry Heth, C.S. Army, commanding division, June 3-August 1, 1863," in *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 637.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Report of Brigadier General William N. Pendleton, C.S. Army, Chief of Artillery, June 3-August 1, 1863," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 348.

²² Ibid.

ordered his commanders to avoid “a general engagement” until “the rest of the army came up.”²³ The lead division of Lee’s second corps, however, had already taken up positions to the north of the Federals, and by the time its commander, General Richard Ewell, received Lee’s order “[i]t was too late to avoid an engagement without abandoning the position already taken up.”²⁴ Instead, Ewell “determined to push the attack vigorously.”²⁵ As evidenced by Ewell’s actions, Lee had little to do with the development of the battle up to this point, and he may have even felt that he had lost a degree of control over the situation. Lacking a proper understanding of the enemy positions, Lee and his commanders had to make quick decisions independent of each other during this first stage of the battle, reacting to developments rather than making plans based off of scouting and intelligence.

Fortunately for the Confederates, their forces arrived on the battlefield in perfect location and timing to sweep the Federals from their initial defensive positions to the north and west of Gettysburg. Just as Ewell’s leading division, led by General R.E. Rodes, became entangled with the right edge of the Federal positions, Hill’s corps also gained strength from the arrival of the second of its three divisions, this one led by General William Pender. With Rodes approaching from the north and Heth and Pender from the west, the Confederates found themselves in prime position to drive the Federals from their positions.²⁶ Although he had not intended to fully engage the Federals at this time, Lee quickly recognized the opportunity with which accident

²³ “Report of Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell, C.S. Army, commanding Second Army Corps., June 3-August 1, 1863,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 444.

²⁴ “Ewell’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 444.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ “Report of Lieutenant General Ambrose Powell Hill, C.S. Army, commanding Third Army Corps., June 3-August 1, 1863,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, V.27, pt.2, 607; “Ewell’s Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 469.

presented him, and he ordered his commanders to attack.²⁷ With the added weight of the divisions of Pender and Rodes, the Federals soon were “steadily driven . . . at all points,” for, as noted by Rodes, “whenever we struck the enemy we could engage him with the advantage in ground,” outflanking and outnumbering their adversaries.²⁸ Adding to their already clear advantage on the battlefield, General Jubal Early’s division of Ewell’s corps arrived at the perfect time and position to support Rodes’ assault from the north. Forming up his division on Rodes’ left, his troops enjoyed the advantage of making their attack almost entirely on the enemy flank, and Early’s attack combined with the others’ to drive the Federals “back into the town in great confusion.”²⁹ The Federals were “thus routed at all points,” and both Heth and Ewell followed their retreat through the town to the hills southeast of Gettysburg.³⁰ At this point, however, the Confederates once again suffered for “want of cavalry,” for they had no idea of the strength of the new Federal positions.³¹ Made cautious by this unknown factor, Hill preferred to rest his “exhausted and necessarily disordered troops” while Ewell awaited the arrival of his third division, commanded by General Edward Johnson, to assault the new Federal line.³² Nothing came of it, owing to the arrival of Johnson “at a late hour.”³³ Having gained victory on July first almost by accident, Lee began to formulate his plans for the next day of battle.

²⁷ “Heth’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 638.

²⁸ “Heth’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 638; “Report of Major General R.E. Rodes, CSA, commanding division, June 3-August 1, 1863,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 552.

²⁹ “Report of Major General Jubal A. Early, C.S. Army, commanding division, June 3-August 1,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 468-469; “Lee’s Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 307.

³⁰ “Rodes’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 555; “Ewell’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, V.27, pt. 2, 469; “Hill’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 606.

³¹ “Hill’s Gettysburg Report,” in *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 607.

³² *Ibid.*; “Ewell’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 445.

³³ “Ewell’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, V.27, pt. 2, 445; “Early’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 470.

The Federals clearly intending to take up defensive positions on the hills and ridges to the southeast of Gettysburg, Lee examined his options. While the *Official Records* do not include all of the communication amongst Lee and his generals, other historical sources unanimously agree that Longstreet advised Lee at this point to move the army around the Federals, farther to the south and then east, thereby interposing itself between the Federal army and Washington D.C.³⁴ As evidenced by Lee's later decisions to stay at Gettysburg and fight a tactically offensive battle, Lee not only rejected Longstreet's advice, but also broke his supposed promise to Longstreet to fight only tactically defensive battles while on the campaign. No doubt this development became the reason for Longstreet's foul mood during the battle. Lee later argued in his official report that "it became a matter of difficulty to withdraw through the mountains with our large trains," and that "the country was unfavorable for collecting supplies while in the presence of the enemy's main body, as he was enabled to restrain our foraging parties by occupying the passes of the mountains with regular and local troops."³⁵ Basically, Lee insisted that the area was a poor one to support his army's presence, with respect to food supplies, and he was thus compelled to either retreat or attack. While historians have since debated whether Longstreet's suggested action (to move south then east, thus interposing themselves between the Federals and Washington) was feasible in the light of Lee's concerns, there is no consensus. Returning to the examination of the *Records*, it seems that while he rejected Longstreet's advice to disengage and move southeast, Lee at the very least favored a fight on the southern edge of the Federal line, as evidenced from Ewell's report: "I received orders soon after dark (on the first of July) to draw my corps to the right, in case it could not be used to advantage where it was; that the

³⁴ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 358-359.

³⁵ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 308.

commanding general thought from the nature of the ground that the position for attack was a good one on that side.”³⁶ Ewell replied that if he could instead attack and occupy Cemetery Hill, the position would force the Federals from their new defenses.³⁷ At the time, Ewell thought that Cemetery Hill was virtually undefended, and so Lee allowed him to remain and make his attack. When Ewell finally turned his attention to Cemetery Hill very late in the evening, he found it instead heavily guarded, and would require a major assault to wrest from Federal control.³⁸ In the meantime, Lee made “every effort . . . to ascertain the numbers and position of the enemy, and find the most favorable point of attack.”³⁹ After receiving the reconnaissance reports of several of his officers in the morning of July second, Lee determined to bring Longstreet alongside the Confederate right wing, and from there continue to launch an assault against the Federal’s left wing.⁴⁰ After waiting for the final elements of his two attacking divisions to arrive on the field, Longstreet began to march his troops into position for the attack.⁴¹ The absence of cavalry reconnaissance, however, again disadvantaged the Confederates, as the duty of leading Longstreet’s march fell to some “[e]ngineers, sent out by the commanding general,” at who’s direction Longstreet’s column was guided “by a road which would have completely disclosed the move” to the Federals.”⁴² After the ensuing delay in which the entire column was rerouted,

³⁶ “Ewell’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 446.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ “Ewell’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 446.

³⁹ “Lee’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 308.

⁴⁰ “Pendleton’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 350; “Longstreet’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 358.

⁴¹ “Longstreet’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 358.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Longstreet finished his preparations for the attack at about four in the afternoon.⁴³ According to Lee's plan, "Longstreet was to attack the left flank of the enemy, and sweep down his line, and [Hill] was ordered to co-operate with him such of [his] brigades from the right as could join in with his troops in the attack."⁴⁴ In the meantime, Ewell understood that: "the commanding general intended the main attack would be made by [Longstreet's] Corps, . . . and wished me, as soon as their guns opened, to make a diversion in their favor, to be converted into a real attack if an opportunity offered."⁴⁵ By making demonstrations, Lee wished to worry the Federals that major attacks would be made all along the line, thereby denying them the opportunity to focus on the main attacks. At the time Lee made this plan, he thought that the Federal line resembled a short fishhook, its right edge resting upon Culp's Hill, curving north then southwest to Cemetery Hill, and straightening out to the south along Cemetery Ridge with its left flank somewhere on the Ridge itself. If all went according to plan, Longstreet's Corps, composing the right and most southern wing of Lee's army, would swing northwards until "his line would be in a direction nearly at right angles" to that of Hill's Corps, and the ensuing flank attack driving north would eventually trap the Federal army against Ewell's Corps even further to the north.⁴⁶

Because the Federal line actually extended farther to the south than Lee had anticipated, the day's battle plan broke down and the contest was decided not by strategy but rather by the fighting spirit of the Confederate and Federal soldiers. One of the first to notice the surprising

⁴³ "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 358; "Report of Brigadier General J.G. Kershaw, C.S. Army, commanding brigade, McLaw's division, June 3-August 3, 1863," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 366-367.

⁴⁴ "Hill's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 608.

⁴⁵ "Ewell's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 446.

⁴⁶ "Report of Major General Richard H. Anderson, C.S. Army, commanding division, June 3-August 1, 1863," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 614.

position of the Federal troops was Brigadier General J.B. Kershaw of General Lafayette McLaw's division in Longstreet's Corps. Kershaw, having received instructions to advance towards the Federals before swinging northwards to "turn his flank," noted that in "examining the position of the enemy, I found him to be in superior force . . . supported by artillery, with a main line of battle entrenched in the rear and extending to and upon the rocky mountain to his left far beyond the point at which his flank had supposed to rest. To carry out my instructions would have been . . . to present my own right and rear to a large portion of his line of battle."⁴⁷ Realizing that the Federals' position made the original battle plans untenable, Longstreet examined the situation and issued new orders, directing his right wing, John Bell Hood's division, to advance directly east before later swinging north upon the Federal flank. Meanwhile, McLaws's division would press its advance directly upon the Federals in front of them as soon as Hood became engaged.⁴⁸ The newly understood Federal position limited Longstreet to put only one of his divisions, Hood's, on a flank attack, while McLaws's division merely pressed directly forward against a Federal position stressed by Hood's advance. Thus, the success of Longstreet's attack relied primarily upon the outcome of Hood's attack, and whether it could effectively gain the Federal flank and press the advantage. Colonel James L. Sheffield, on the cutting edge of Hood's assault, recounted that "[o]n reaching the enemy's lines, where [the Federals] were well and strongly situated, I ordered my regiment forward, which was gallantly obeyed until within about 20 paces of their line. Here the fire of the enemy was severe. Here the men . . . opened fire on the enemy, and for some time continued, until the left [wing of our troops] . . . were forced to fall back."⁴⁹ The contest Sheffield describes, the well chronicled struggle for Little Round Top,

⁴⁷ "Kershaw's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 367.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

decided the day's outcome in many ways, most significantly in that the successful Federal defense of that position denied the Confederates the advantage of attacking the remainder of the Federal army by its flank. Longstreet's other commanders found that "as fast as we would break one line of the enemy, another fresh one would present itself," and the Federals successfully reinforced the weak points in their line, turning back the entirety of Longstreet's attack.⁵⁰

Elsewhere on the battlefield, the lackluster performances of Hill and Ewell may have allowed the Federals to reinforce against Longstreet's attack. Before Longstreet's advance, Hill had been instructed to make demonstrations along his line, with Ewell instructed to make his own attack. Thus, Lee wished to mask from the Federals which of his commanders (Longstreet, Hill, or Ewell) would be delivering a genuine assault.⁵¹ If properly executed, these demonstrations would have forced the Federals to protect each part of their line equally, thereby denying them the opportunity to shift their strength from one area to another in order to defend against the main attack. Sending his troops against the Federals in cooperation with Longstreet's left wing (McLaws's division), Hill's forces "drove the enemy from their entrenchments, inflicting very heavy loss upon them."⁵² Despite his success, Hill's troops eventually met "heavy re-enforcements" by the Federals, and they had to give up their gains.⁵³ An evaluation of Hill's report reveals that Hill only used one of his three divisions in the attack, preferring to rest the divisions of Pender and Heth due to the fighting they had experienced the day before.⁵⁴ While

⁴⁹ "Report of Colonel James L. Sheffield, Forty-eighth Alabama Infantry, June 3-August 1, 1863," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 395-396.

⁵⁰ "Report of Brigadier General J.B. Robertson, C.S. Army, commanding brigade, June 3-August 1, 1863," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 405.

⁵¹ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 308.

⁵² "Hill's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 608.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

the elements of Hill's Corps that cooperated in the attack made a solid effort, the inaction of the rest of his command gave the Federals no reason to believe that Hill might launch his own attack. Meanwhile, Ewell's Corps did not press its attack until "just before sundown," and this advance failed to gain any significant ground, owing to General Rodes's delay in getting his division into position and resulting inability to properly support the rest of Ewell's attack.⁵⁵ Combined with Hill's fragmentary action, the delays in Ewell's attack may have contributed to the failure of the Confederates to make a proper demonstration of feints and coordinated attacks. As a result, the Federals easily deciphered the Confederates' intentions, and they concentrated their efforts on one attack at a time, taking special care to funnel the majority of their reinforcements towards the only advance that seemed genuine, that of Longstreet on their left flank.

In reviewing the results of the conflict on July second, it seems that Confederate plans broke down on several levels. To begin, the route for Longstreet's march had not been properly scouted, and the time necessary to reroute his troops greatly delayed the beginning of his attack. Had this mistake not been made, the Confederates may not only have beaten Federal reinforcements to their point of attack, but they may also have had the time to remedy later mistakes as well. On a related note, reconnaissance failed Lee again when his commanders discovered that the Federal left flank extended farther to the south than anticipated. As a direct result of this revelation, Longstreet had to abandon the instructions Lee had given him, and formulate a new plan for his attack. While his revised attack came close to success, an attack made earlier in the day with better prior knowledge of the Federal position could have better targeted the Federals's weak point. Finally, Lee's commanders demonstrated poor coordination

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "Ewell's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 447; "Rodes's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 556.

and timing in their attacks on the second, allowing the Federals to properly identify the strong points of the attacks and repel each in turn. While Lee had intended for each of his commanders to commence their attacks in quick succession, Hill allowed the bulk of his troops to remain inactive, and Ewell's attack suffered from delays, disjointedness, and was made too late in the day to have any impact on Longstreet's front. In summary, it seems that poor reconnaissance, communication, and coordination hampered Confederate efforts on July second, much to their disadvantage.

Nevertheless, Lee felt that another attack on the following day might yet gain victory for the Confederates. In examining the results of the second, Lee noted that Longstreet had "succeeded in getting possession of and holding . . . desired ground," and Ewell had also "carried some of the strong positions which he assailed."⁵⁶ Therefore, Lee reasoned, a successful assault on one part of the Federal line might enable Longstreet and Ewell to renew their attacks from the ground they had gained, thereby capitalizing on their "partial successes" and sweep the Federals from the field.⁵⁷ Given that Longstreet and Ewell had each made heavy assaults on the Federal left and right wings (respectively) the day before, Lee planned to assault the center of the Federal line on July third.⁵⁸ By the time Lee made this decision, he had to cancel Longstreet's own plans for that morning, for having received the last of his divisions, commanded by General George Pickett, Longstreet had planned and already been prepared for an attack to move around to the left and attack the Federal flank. Given that the troops of Pickett's division were fresh, having not yet been engaged at Gettysburg, these soldiers instead became the centerpiece of Lee's attack

⁵⁶ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 308.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ "Hill's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 608.

on the center, although elements of Hill's Corps (a division plus two brigades) were also placed under Longstreet's command for this assault.⁵⁹ After the "morning was occupied in necessary preparations" for the attack, a massive Confederate cannonade preceded their assault.⁶⁰ Although Longstreet hoped that this barrage would drive off the Federal artillery, "fresh [cannons] were brought up" to replace those which the Confederates damaged.⁶¹ Forced to admit that the situation thus offered no chance of improvement, Longstreet ordered the advance at about two-thirty in the afternoon.⁶² The Confederate troops had to cross between "800 to 1,000 yards" of open field in order to reach the Federal lines, and upon commencing their assault they almost immediately came under artillery fire from Little Round Top.⁶³ This battery rained down enfilade (crossing) fire upon the Confederate advance "with fearful effect, sometimes as many as 10 men being killed and wounded by the bursting of a single shell."⁶⁴ As they advanced closer to the Federal lines, the troops came under an additional, "galling fire both from artillery and infantry" directly in front of them, and though "much shattered" by the Federal defensive fire, the Confederate advance successfully gained a foothold on the Federal center.⁶⁵ By this time, however, the edges of the Confederate advance could no longer stand the murderous enfilade fire, and they "broke their ranks and fell back in great disorder," allowing the Federals to attack

⁵⁹ Ibid.; "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, V.27, pt. 2, 308.

⁶⁰ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 308; "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 359-360.

⁶¹ "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 360.

⁶² Ibid.; "Report of Jamor Charles S. Peyton, Nineteenth Virginia Infantry, commanding Garnett's brigade, Pickett's division, June 3-August 1, 1863," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt.2, 386-387.

⁶³ "Peyton's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 386.

⁶⁴ "Peyton's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 386.

⁶⁵ Ibid.; "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 308.

both “flanks and the front of Pickett’s division,” leaving but a “small remnant [to] . . . continue the desperate struggle.”⁶⁶ One of the few survivors of Pickett’s Charge, Major Charles Peyton recorded that “those who were not killed or wounded were captured, with the exception of about 300 [men of our brigade] who came off slowly. . . . The brigade went into action with 1,287 men, . . . and sustained a loss . . . of 941 killed, wounded, and missing.”⁶⁷ Having supposed this devastation would occur, Longstreet wrote in his battle report: “The order for this attack, which I could not favor under better auspices, would have been revoked had I felt that I had that privilege.”⁶⁸ His last attack having failed catastrophically, Lee had to admit that “a renewal of the engagement could not be hazarded,” and he elected to admit defeat and take his army back to Virginia.⁶⁹

Almost immediately after the Confederate loss, Southerners began to seek an explanation for the defeat of their army. Because of Lee’s determination to eliminate criticisms and bitter language from the battle reports of his commanders, it became difficult to give evidence of blame on any single commander with any degree of certainty. Even today, the total information given in the *Official Records* hint at missed opportunities, delays, and failures, but it remains difficult to identify which Confederate mistakes could have been avoided. Famously, following the disaster of Pickett’s Charge, Lee attempted to take on all the blame for the fight, saying: “*all this has been MY fault--it is I that have lost this fight.*”⁷⁰ Years later, in an attempt to contrast

⁶⁶ “Longstreet’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 360; “Peyton’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, V.27, pt. 2, 386.

⁶⁷ “Peyton’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 386-387.

⁶⁸ “Longstreet’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 360.

⁶⁹ “Lee’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 309.

Lee against Longstreet, the anti-Longstreet faction rallied around these comments of Lee as a symbol of his nobility versus Longstreet's postwar bitterness. Fortunately, there exists evidence that Longstreet both took an equally noble approach to the defeat at Gettysburg, as well as offering a tempered critique of Lee's decisions. In a letter to his Uncle Augustus, predating the controversy, Longstreet had little reason to boast or deceive, especially in the environment of private correspondence. Longstreet wrote the letter in reply to his Uncle's request for an account of the battle:

July 24th, 1863

My Dear Uncle: Your letters of the 13th and 14th were received on yesterday. As to our late battle I cannot say much. I have no right to say anything, in fact, but will venture a little for you, alone. If it goes to aunt and cousins it must be under promise that it will go no further. The battle was not made as I would have made it. My idea was to throw ourselves between the enemy and Washington, select a strong position, and force the enemy to attack us. So far as is given to man the ability to judge, we may say, with confidence, that we should have destroyed the Federal army, marched into Washington and dictated our terms, or, at least, held Washington, and marched over as much of Pennsylvania as we cared to, had we drawn the enemy into attack upon our carefully-chosen position in its rear. General Lee chose the plans adopted; and he is the person appointed to choose and to order. I consider it a part of my duty to express my views to the commanding general. If he approves and adopts them, it is well; if he does not, it is my duty to adopt his views, and to execute his orders as faithfully as if they were my own. I cannot help but think that great result would have been obtained had my views been thought better of; yet I am much inclined to accept the present condition as for the best. I hope and trust that it is so. . . . I fancy that no good ideas upon that campaign will be mentioned at any time, that did not receive their share of consideration by General Lee. The few things that he might have overlooked himself were, I believe, suggested by myself. As we failed, I must take my share of the responsibility. . . . As General Lee is our commander, he should have the support and influence we can give him. If the blame, if there is any, can be shifted from him to me, I shall help him and our cause by taking it. I desire, therefore, that all the responsibility that can be put upon

⁷⁰ Arthur James Lyon Freemantle, *Three Months in the Southern States: April, June, 1863* (Mobile: S. H. Goetzl, 1864), 135.

me shall go there, and shall remain there. The truth will be known in time, and I leave that to show how much of the responsibility of Gettysburg rests on my shoulders.⁷¹

The strength of Longstreet's language here pales in comparison to post 1870 texts written by those embroiled in the controversy, and thus most historians overlook its significance. Yet because it predates the controversy, written just two weeks after the battle itself, Longstreet's letter powerfully demonstrates his own nobility and the consistency with which he defended his actions at Gettysburg. First, Longstreet disagreed with the way Lee directed the battle, but did so respectfully and with an alternative plan in mind. He apparently made his suggestion to move around the Federals's left flank, and Lee declined to take up this course. History shows that this move would probably have given the Confederates the desirable results which Longstreet outlines above, and even the Federal commander, George Meade, later remarked that "Longstreet's advice to Lee was sound military sense; it was the step I feared Lee would take."⁷² Secondly, Longstreet's letter illuminates his desire that his criticism of Lee remain a private matter. Not only did he express reluctance to express his views, but he also emphasized that if his opinion "goes to aunt and cousins it must be under promise that it will go no further." Longstreet's public postwar criticisms of Lee (that Lee should not have fought at Gettysburg) were therefore not only consistent with his original opinion of the battle, but also only expressed with greatest reluctance, only when his own battle performance was called into question years later, and only after Lee had passed away. Finally, Longstreet's letter also shows a keen appreciation for Lee's position of military authority, as well as the need to give the commanding general his full support. For the benefit of the Confederate cause, Longstreet desired "that all the

⁷¹ Longstreet, "Lee in Pennsylvania," 414-415.

⁷² George Meade, in *Philadelphia Press*, August 11, 1888, quoted in Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1993), 267.

responsibility [for the defeat] that can be put upon me shall go there, and shall remain there,” hoping to protect Lee’s reputation and the Confederate confidence in their commander.

Unfortunately for Longstreet, the confidence and idolization of Lee extended far beyond the end of the Civil War, at the expense of Longstreet’s reputation as a general and especially the perception of his performance at Gettysburg. Spearheaded by the *Southern Historical Society Papers*’s series on Gettysburg, anti-Longstreet sentiment generated several strong accusations which greatly influenced Longstreet’s place in Southern history.

Jubal Early himself commenced the most forceful of all accusations made against Longstreet’s conduct at Gettysburg, claiming that the general was both capable of and ordered to make an attack at dawn on July second. Notably, this is the sole charge which can lay claim to pre-controversy evidence, even though it comes from Early’s own battle report. He wrote that in the evening of July second, he was “informed that a large portion of the rest of our army would come up during the night, and that the enemy’s position would be attacked on the right and the left flanks very early next morning.”⁷³ In later years, Early expanded his argument, claiming that Lee concluded at the end of the day on the first that his attacks ought to be renewed in the morning “as early as practicable,” giving orders to all of his commanders, including Longstreet, to prepare.⁷⁴ Interestingly, it seems that Early’s own claims can be reconciled with Longstreet’s supposed failure. The key word in Early’s claim is “practicable,” which leaves it open to interpretation how early the attack could practicably be made. To begin, the *Records* point out that Longstreet was not able to deliver a prompt or full force attack on that day. In his battle report, Longstreet notes that part of his command had to be left behind “to guard our rear:”

⁷³ “Early’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 470.

⁷⁴ *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 4 no. 6 (December, 1877), 275.

Pickett's entire division at Chambersburg, and Law's brigade of Hood's division at New Guilford.⁷⁵ The rest of his command, only a division and two-thirds, was "greatly delayed" in getting to the battlefield "by Johnson's division, of the Second Corps, which came into the road from Shippensburg."⁷⁶ In the morning of July second, Longstreet had barely half of his command at his disposal, so when finally given the order to attack late in the morning, it seems only sensible that he waited about an hour in order to regain Law's brigade, thus bringing his command up to at least two full divisions of strength. Even then, he had to make his attack without Pickett's division, depriving him of a full third of his men. Respective of the confusion with Johnson's division, Longstreet brought his men to Gettysburg as quickly as he could, and the *Records* give no indication whatsoever that Longstreet's troops arrived late to the battlefield. Contrasted against Ewell's report, which bemoans the late arrival of Johnson's division, it seems likely that Longstreet's troops did not arrive or prepare late, and the *Records* simply omit stating that the troops arrived when expected.⁷⁷ Additionally, ample evidence suggests that the ground for Longstreet's attack had not yet been reconnoitered by the morning of July second, thus requiring some of Lee's officers, including Pendleton, to survey "the enemy's position toward some estimate of the ground and the best mode of attack."⁷⁸ As already noted, Lee consequently ordered his officers who had made this reconnaissance to direct Longstreet's advance after all other preparations had been made. Further, both Longstreet's report and Pendleton's report evidence that no preparations had been made for a daybreak assault, and even if ordered, these

⁷⁵ "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 358.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ "Ewell's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 446.

⁷⁸ "Pendleton's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 350.

preparations would have delayed the assault by several hours at least.⁷⁹ Given the necessity and hour of the reconnaissance on the morning of July second, it seems very likely that Lee's order for Longstreet to attack was not given until about eleven in the morning on the second, after Lee had a better understanding of the area due to reconnaissance missions both by his staff members and himself. While it is therefore possible that Lee *desired* a morning attack, as per Early's accusations, he mentioned no timetable for the assault in his battle report, and evidence suggests that a morning attack simply proved impracticable given the hour of Longstreet's arrival, and the lack of reconnaissance, preparation, and available troops up to that point.

A second accusation, also begun by Early, alleges that Longstreet delayed the beginning of his march to position his troops for the attack. Early no doubt intended this allegation to go hand in hand with his previous accusation, arguing both that Longstreet failed to make a morning attack, and also that he began to prepare for an attack that day only after lengthy delay. To this point, the *Records* once again have little to say. Indeed, only Longstreet's report addresses the issue at all: "Fearing that my force was too weak to venture to make an attack I delayed until General Law's brigade joined its division. As soon after his arrival as we could make our preparations the movement was begun."⁸⁰ In retrospect, we understand that this delay may have proved fatal to Longstreet's attack and Confederate fortunes in general, as a quicker, less powerful attack may have beaten the Federals to the point of attack. On the other hand, Longstreet could not have been aware of this need for alacrity, for few if any in the Confederate army had an adequate understanding of the Gettysburg battlefield that morning, as evidenced by

⁷⁹ "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 358; "Pendleton's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 359-50.

⁸⁰ "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," in *The Confederate Soldier in the Civil War*, Benjamin La Bree, ed. (New York: The Fairfax Press, 1977), 168.

the Confederate surprise at finding the Federals out of the position they had expected. Longstreet simply prepared his attack as best as he could, and without proper reconnaissance by cavalry, there was no way to know that an earlier, less powerful attack would be more effective than a later and more powerful one. While historians such as Robert Krick might argue that Longstreet should have begun the march as quickly as possible, Longstreet can hardly be criticized for resorting to his usual form of careful preparation, the sort which he had repeatedly used successfully. Again, the omissions of the *Records* suggest instead that nothing more was expected of Longstreet. Certainly Lee's report did not complain of any delay in the beginning of the march, and it is not mentioned in the reports of any other officers either.

The most prevalent of all Early accusations, and one which gains the most traction to this day, is that Longstreet's march consumed far too much time, and his troops were thus arrayed for battle after too lengthy a delay. Following the start of the march, Longstreet's troops began their journey across the battlefield in order to reach a position from which they could assault the Federal left flank, supposedly somewhere along Cemetery Ridge. The march began sometime around noon and ended sometime around four in the afternoon, too late to beat the Federal troops to the pivotal point of the battlefield near the hill of Little Round Top.⁸¹ Because this march included confusion and countermarching, Longstreet's critics are quick to blame him for the delay, but a closer look reveals that much of the delay may have been due to the honest mistake of Lee's staff officer and engineer, Samuel R. Johnston. The *Records* point out that Johnston, having made the only reconnaissance of the area, had been ordered by Lee to direct Longstreet's march.⁸² Under his direction, the march came to a halt when Confederate commanders realized

⁸¹ "Pendleton's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 359-50.

⁸² "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, V.27, pt. 2, 358.

that the route being taken could be seen by Federal observers, thus necessitating a different route.⁸³ Therefore, Longstreet ought not be blamed for the delay, given that reconnaissance and route planning for the march had been taken out of his hands by General Lee, and given to Captain Johnston instead. That Lee accepted this explanation, and allowed it into the Confederate battle reports, ought to settle this matter.

Robert Krick spearheads a further accusation against Longstreet's Gettysburg performance, pointing to his apparent unwillingness to revise his plans of attack on July second. When his troops had finally been deployed following the time consuming march that afternoon, Longstreet received word from his commanders that they were not on the enemy's flank, as had been expected, but instead they were directly opposed by a Federal corps led by Federal General Dan Sickles.⁸⁴ According to Krick, Longstreet should have directed his commanders, McLaws and Hood, to maneuver around the enemy's left side, rather than attack them directly. This argument, however, fails to appreciate that at four in the afternoon, Longstreet's attack was already late, and further delays would not have left enough daylight for Lee's other commanders (Hill and Ewell) to attack sometime after Longstreet's assault began. In short, Longstreet's attack had to be made immediately or else Lee's battle plan would have broken down anyway. Again, the *Records* make no mention of any error on Longstreet's part.

A final accusation made against Longstreet's conduct at Gettysburg, made by Early, alleges that he withheld troops from his attack on the center of the Federal line on July third. Supposedly, Lee ordered Longstreet to take his entire corps against the Federal line on the third, and the absence of some of Longstreet's troops from this attack led to the failure of this attack.

⁸³ "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report" *The Confederate Soldier*, 168;

⁸⁴ "Kershaw's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 367.

This allegation flies in the face of both Lee and Longstreet's reports which note that the use of the divisions Longstreet had already deployed on the Confederate right (Hood and McLaws) would have left the army open to a sweeping flank attack.⁸⁵ Lee agreed that two other divisions, from A.P. Hill's corps, would supplement Longstreet's attack in place of Longstreet's two divisions already occupied.⁸⁶ The *Records* themselves offer nothing to suggest that Lee, Longstreet, or Hill withheld troops from the assault, and the appalling casualties suffered by those who made this attack suggest that the Federals could have easily repelled even greater numbers of attackers anyway.⁸⁷

In examining reasons for the Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, several factors seem far more likely than any supposed failure on Longstreet's part. To begin, the absence of J.E.B. Stuart and his cavalry deprived the Confederate army of his usually excellent reconnaissance and instincts. This argument fits well alongside the analysis of Confederate blunders, where mistakes in reconnaissance and the routes taken by Confederate troops (such as Longstreet's corps on the second day) might have been avoided had Stuart been on hand.⁸⁸ Additionally, Hill's corps, merely responsible for holding the Federals in place in July 2, fell far short of this goal and allowed their enemies to focus on Longstreet's attack. These and other failures, however, might have been offset except for the appalling performance of Ewell's corps.

⁸⁵ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *Confederate Soldier*, 166; "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *Confederate Soldier*, 168.

⁸⁶ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *Confederate Soldier*, 166; "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *Confederate Soldier*, 168; Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 386-387.

⁸⁷ "Peyton's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 386-387.

⁸⁸ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *The Confederate Soldier*, 163, 166.

Under Ewell's direction, the Confederate Second Corps (comprised of Rode's, Early's, and Johnson's divisions) both caused and committed several errors throughout the battle. Johnson's division began the difficulties when on July first it marched onto the same road which Longstreet's corps was already taking to the battle.⁸⁹ While Longstreet stopped his corps and gave way, both commands lost a great deal of time. Later that same day, Early's and Rode's divisions stood in front of Cemetery Hill awaiting orders from their commander. According to Ewell, the hill presented a daunting challenge, especially considering that his men "were jaded by twelve hours' marching and fighting."⁹⁰ Ewell therefore elected instead to wait for Johnson's division to arrive before assaulting the hill, given that Johnson's division (according to Ewell) was not far off.⁹¹ Given that Johnson arrived quite late that evening, it seems strange that Ewell would mistakenly think Johnson close at hand. Meanwhile both Early and Rodes seemed to understand the need to seize the hill as soon as possible, but fearing that an uncoordinated attack would fail, they waited on Ewell, who later charged that troops were needed to guard against a flank attack, and Johnson arrived far too late for an attack anyway.⁹² While it remains open to debate how much Ewell can be blamed for the failure to take Cemetery Hill on July 1, he at the very least had a very poor awareness of his surroundings: he feared a non-existent flank attack, expected Johnson's division to arrive much earlier than it did, and he thought the enemy presented "a formidable front" on Cemetery Hill, yet later argued that it was "unoccupied by the

⁸⁹ "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 358.

⁹⁰ "Ewell's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 445.

⁹¹ "Ewell's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 445.

⁹² "Early's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 469; "Rodes's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 555; "Ewell's Gettysburg Report," *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 445.

enemy” when Lee suggested an attack elsewhere.⁹³ July 2 saw more failures from Ewell’s corps also. According to Lee, both Longstreet and Ewell were supposed to make assaults, with Hill threatening the center in order to prevent reinforcements.⁹⁴ While Longstreet made his assault, Hill only partially demonstrated with his corps, and Ewell totally failed to construct a meaningful assault. In his report, Ewell admitted that Rodes’s division “did not advance,” and explained that his absence from the attack led to its failure.⁹⁵ While Rodes’s report acknowledges the plans for attack, he did not make any preparations for the assault until both Johnson and Early were nearly engaged. As a result, he wasted valuable time merely getting his troops into position, and before he “drove the enemy’s skirmishers in, General Early had attacked and had been compelled to withdraw.”⁹⁶ Considering that Johnson and Early had successfully gained ground on Cemetery Hill that evening, Rodes’s failure stands not only as an astounding lack of competence, but also draws attention Ewell’s inability to coordinate his three divisions. Although focused primarily on Cemetery Hill, each of the second corps’s failures had respectively poor consequences for the Confederates. By asserting a road already occupied by Longstreet’s corps, Johnson ensured that not only would Longstreet’s men be delayed getting to the battlefield, but his own division would also endure some confusion. By failing to seize Cemetery Hill on July first, Ewell’s Corps missed an excellent opportunity to circumvent the bloody fighting that ensued over the next two days. By failing to coordinate the assault on the hill on the second, the second corps once again failed to take a key part of the battlefield. Had any of these errors been avoided, it is likely that the battle’s outcome would have been different.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ “Lee’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 308.

⁹⁵ “Ewell’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 447.

⁹⁶ “Rodes’s Gettysburg Report,” *War of the Rebellion*, S1, 27, pt. 2, 556.

While each of the Confederate failures are well documented in the *Records*, when contrasted against the great *lack* of evidence indicting Longstreet it seems likely that Stuart, Ewell, and Hill are more to blame for Confederate defeat than Longstreet. From the analysis of the *Records* and other pre-controversy material, it remains possible that Longstreet stands guilty of nearly all of the accusations set against him, simply because the material generally does not speak directly to the issues upon which the allegations hinge. At the same time, however, the *Records* do not give much support to the anti-Longstreet allegations. Even Early's accusations, supposedly based on his first-hand experience of the battle, fail to acknowledge that Early himself was not with Longstreet's corps, but rather on the other side of the battlefield with Ewell's corps. Those who were actually with Longstreet throughout the battle, such as Sorrel and Alexander, unanimously defend the general's performance. Further, for every postwar accusation made against the general by the likes of Early, Jones, Pendleton, Freeman and Krick, a rebuttal can be found in the texts of Longstreet, Sorrell, Alexander, Piston, and Wert. So when these post-controversy materials are removed from the analysis of Gettysburg, and the *Official Records* given prime credence, Longstreet emerges from that conflict with as little criticism as any Confederate commander . . . and much less so when compared against Stuart's absence, Hill's tentativeness, or Ewell's incompetence. This is because while Lee may have desired to eliminate all subjectivity from the battle reports, the exception to this rule seems to be when the commanders failed to meet expectations. The resulting explanations for these failures sometimes offer an adequate excuse or simply admit of a mistake, but in other instances these explanations reveal a commander's incompetence through gross inconsistencies and wordy blustering. Notably, some of these failures are acknowledged by other commanders' reports, including the repeated lamentations of Lee and his officers of the absence of Stuart, his cavalry, and their

ability to scout the enemy strength and position. Any criticism of Longstreet, therefore, must therefore first contend with the running theme of the battle reports approved by Lee which excluded criticism of Longstreet, allowed for some disappointment of Hill, acknowledged Ewell's incompetence, and repeatedly pointed out Stuart's failures. While it is beyond the scope and purpose of this study to conclusively identify the causes for Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, the strength of these other arguments draws out the comparative weakness of the allegations against Longstreet's supposed failures. Given that the *Official Records* do not support a strong criticism of Longstreet's performance at Gettysburg, it therefore seems petty to build a case against the general by both interpreting the *Records* loosely and to prefer one set of secondary sources over another.

The narrative which emerges from the *Records* suggest instead that Longstreet proved a worthy commander during the crucial days in July at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Though there were delays in positioning his corps for advance, he ought not to be censured for the delays in the attacks nor the manner with which they were executed. These delays were either sanctioned by Lee, or caused by the Confederate weakness of reconnaissance at this battle. At the same time, Longstreet had hired a scout who, in lieu of Stuart, reported the surprising position and current movement of the Federal army towards Gettysburg. The information which he brought may have saved the Confederates from a disaster, one different from that which the later battle decided.⁹⁷ As a final point, Longstreet's preferred course of action was not taken at Gettysburg, a move around the Federal left which may have forced a Federal defeat. At battles such as Second Manassas and Chickamauga where Longstreet was allowed the freedom to direct his corps according to his own plan, clear victory ensued. At Gettysburg, neither Lee nor Longstreet knew

⁹⁷ "Lee's Gettysburg Report," *Confederate Soldier*, 163; "Longstreet's Gettysburg Report," *Confederate Soldier*, 168.

the terrain in absence of Stuart, and Lee rejected Longstreet's advice, preferring instead to rein Longstreet into his own plan. While this irritated Longstreet, evidence shows that it did not impede his attempts to follow orders, and the Confederate failure at Gettysburg should not be attributed to Longstreet's temporary disagreement with his commander. His performance should instead be judged in the context in which it occurred, and the analysis above shows that Longstreet's conduct at Gettysburg, while not his best performance, ought not be blamed for the Confederate defeat. Rather, his contributions improved, rather than worsened the Confederate fortunes at the battle, and his advice to Lee during this campaign might have led to a different future for the South and its cause. Instead, the Army of Northern Virginia broke itself against the defenses of its Federal counterpart, and its consequent weakness largely contributed to its eventual defeat and the failure of the Confederacy.

CHAPTER 6

NOT A SOUTHERNER

In early April 1865, the Civil War had all but ended. General Robert E. Lee's army, forced from its fortifications in Petersburg, fled to the southwest in hopes of linking with another Confederate army. Determined to prevent this course, the overwhelming Federal force led by Ulysses Grant pursued Lee relentlessly. Cornered at Appomattox Courthouse and faced with the total and complete destruction of his army, Lee sought the counsel of his remaining lieutenants on the afternoon of April 9, 1865. Longstreet and the other army commanders concurred with the hopelessness of their situation, and Lee mounted his horse to surrender his army to the Federal leader. Before he rode off, Longstreet approached his commander, saying: "General, if he does not give us good terms come back & let us fight it out."¹ Lee made no reply, depressed as the occasion had made him, and soon rode off and arranged for the parole of all of his men.

The surrender of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia signaled the end of the Civil War not only for Longstreet, but for most of the surviving pockets of Confederate resistance as well. When he left Appomattox, Longstreet carried with him an impressive resumé: he had been the most senior of Lee's lieutenants, a valued strategic and tactical advisor, a continuously successful commander, and a flexible and innovative military leader. His accomplishments surpassed those of Thomas Jackson, even if they did not outshine them in Southern society, and he had every right to expect a hero's welcome back among Southern citizens. Yet as he embarked on a new life as civilians, Longstreet's public image failed to shine as brightly as it had in his military career. Always single-minded, Longstreet decided for himself the course he took as a civilian, and when his choices attracted dissension, detraction, and even slander, he

¹ Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personnel Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 538.

proved incompetent in the one quality which could have prevented others from reshaping his reputation as a military commander: modesty. From the end of his military career at Appomattox to the end of his life nearly forty years later, ideologies and controversies combined with his weaknesses planted the seeds of a new, tarnished legacy for James Longstreet.

Between 1865 and 1867, Longstreet's public image rested mostly upon his stellar military career. As he departed Appomattox, Longstreet intended to follow his former staff officer, Thomas Goree, to Texas in order to start a new life there. While traveling he must have decided he liked his prospects better in New Orleans, for instead of pressing on, he decided to remain there with his family. He became a businessman in the cotton industry, having formed a partnership with his wartime friend William Owen and his brother Edward.² While Longstreet began to establish his reputation as a successful entrepreneur, the earliest Civil War historians began to chronicle Longstreet's contributions to the Civil War. Texts by William Swinton, Edward A. Pollard, and James Dabney McCabe gave the general impression of "Longstreet as a commander of great skill and energy, a rapid marcher whose troops were never late, a soldier hard hitting in the attack and resolute in the defense."³ Indeed, this high opinion of Longstreet pervaded nearly all early interpretations of the Civil War, as most considered him the Confederacy's best soldier outside of Thomas Jackson, whose memory had already become enshrined as a sort of martyr. Longstreet's high standing, however, lacked an authoritative literary affirmation to cement its place into Civil War history. Such an affirmation might have been published by either Lee himself or Porter Alexander, the Confederate artillery officer, but Lee failed to finish his historical project, and Alexander's text did not reach completion until

² James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1992), 634-635.

³ William Garrett Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 98-99.

several decades later. Longstreet attracted little attention from journalists and novelists, who sought more exciting characters for their articles and stories. They instead focused on Jackson's romanticism or Lee's piety. Further, the newspapers tended to prefer regional heroes, and since no region, town, or city could realistically claim to be Longstreet's hometown due to the instability of his youth, he did not receive attention generated from any localized interests. Lacking a spiritual, flamboyant, dashing, daring, or even an eccentric quality with which to attract literary attention, Longstreet simply did not garner the sort of popularity and romanticized treatment which other leaders of the Civil War, such as Jackson, had been given. Thus, although Longstreet boasted an excellent reputation both as a former general and also as a businessman, this standing was not yet solidified in either society or in historical and literary texts.

Having accepted the Confederacy's defeat without bitterness, Longstreet urged his countrymen to do the same, but his advocated methods of cooperating with Reconstruction earned him almost universal scorn amongst the former Confederates. The trouble began in 1867, when the *New Orleans Times* requested the opinion of prominent former Confederates on the highly controversial Reconstructions Acts of March second, which had forced both military occupation and the enfranchisement of blacks upon the former rebel states. Longstreet's initial reply, published on March eighteenth, took on a submissive tone, reminding his fellow Southerners that they had truly been defeated and that they all must "accept the terms as we are in duty bound to do, and if there is a lack of good faith, let it be upon others."⁴ These comments

⁴ Longstreet's letter to the *New Orleans Times*, March 18, 1867, quoted in Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 104; Donald Bridgman Sanger and Thomas Robson Hay, *James Longstreet: James Longstreet: Soldier, Politician, Officeholder, and Writer* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1968), 330.

caused little controversy, and they even reflected the opinion of many other former Confederate leaders such as Lee.

Yet Longstreet decided that the Southerners' participation in Reconstruction ought to go a bit further. He soon wrote another letter for the *Times* in which he advocated cooperation with the Republicans, saying that "[t]he war was made upon Republican issues . . . and it seems to me fair and just that the settlement should be made accordingly."⁵ In this letter, published on June eighth, Longstreet made his case by noting the current impotency of the Democratic Party in the South, excluding black voters and also lacking the strength of its many constituents who had been politically hamstrung by their involvement with the Confederacy. For Longstreet, joining the Republicans and thereby influencing the black vote was the best way to protect the South against further subjugation from the North. Primarily, Longstreet argued, the South had to first restore the power of the white Southerners before it could again operate on its own terms, preferably in the Democratic, not Republican Party. A polarizing decision, Longstreet joined the Republicans in mere hopes of restoring Southern power in local governance. Most Southerners, however, either failed to see Longstreet's motives or simply did not care, having been outraged by his suggestions. They did not recognize that Longstreet merely considered the Republican Party a better vehicle for protecting the South, rather than as the institution commonly considered a weapon intended to eliminate Southern civilization, due to its harsh treatment of the South. Just as in his military career, Longstreet's pragmatism, single mindedness, and stubbornness compelled him to choose a unique path, but unlike the Army of Northern Virginia, Southern society did not trust his intentions. Almost overnight, Longstreet's political advice earned him nearly universal hatred amongst the old Southerners, whose antagonism intensified

⁵ Longstreet's letter to the *New Orleans Times*, June 8, 1867, quoted in Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 105.

with Longstreet's coincidental Federal pardon on June nineteenth (only several days after his first controversial letter), and removal of his political disabilities a year later.⁶ Many considered Longstreet a scalawag, worse than a traitor to the South due to the perception that his actions had been motivated only by personal gain. It mattered little that Longstreet had been well off even before his dealings with the Republicans, nor did it matter to most Southerners that he never actively sought a governmental office. As Longstreet became more involved with the Republican Party, even appointed to the post of the New Orleans Surveyor of Customs, he and his family became more and more ostracized from Southern society. In a society of Episcopalians and other more traditional forms of Southern Christianity, his conversion to Catholicism on March 7, 1877 merely distanced him from Southern ideals even further.⁷ Sadly, Longstreet never understood how Southerners failed to recognize his motives. William Richter in "James Longstreet: From Rebel to Scalawag," agrees that his "good intentions" were "swept away by the suspicions, confusions and deceptions of the time."⁸ Southerners never forgave Longstreet's affiliation with the Republicans, and a new but powerful ideology of the former Confederacy, the Lost Cause, soon became soured against him.

This ideology sprung from a romantic and undefeated spirit of the former Confederacy, and its attempt to write an unblemished Confederate legacy targeted Longstreet for Confederate

⁶ New York *Times*, June 21, 1867, quoted in Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 340; *Congressional Globe* (Washington, 1834-1873), 40 Cong., 2 Sess., 3306-3307, 3366-3367, 3444, quoted in Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 342.

⁷ *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 16 vols. (New York: 1934) IX, 354, quoted in Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 380; Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1993), 418; Frank Sweet, *The Longstreet Controversy* (Palm Coast: Backintyme, 2000), 5; Wilbur Thomas, *General James "Pete" Longstreet: Lee's "Old War Horse," Scapegoat for Gettysburg* (Parsons: McClain Printing Co., 1979), 278.

⁸ William L. Richter, "James Longstreet: From Rebel to Scalawag," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, 11 (Summer, 1970), 230.

failures in place of other former Confederate leaders. Advocates of the Lost Cause posited that the Confederate armies had not been defeated by military prowess, but merely overwhelmed by the Union superiority of numbers. While the ideology began as a way to defend the Southern belief that her armies and soldiers had been superior and her cause had been just, the romantic and spiritual aspects of the ideology became more dominant as time went on. Wert notes that “[r]eligion served as the cornerstone of the myth as the cause became righteous, the living became heroes, and the fallen, martyrs.”⁹ The fullest development of the Lost Cause posited that the Southerners were simply better men than their Northern counterparts, and Lee, their spotless and heroic leader, epitomized the ideals of the Southern man.¹⁰ In order to sustain Lee’s purity, however, Lost Cause advocates needed to shift the blame for Gettysburg away from Lee, and thus began to look for a scapegoat. Longstreet attracted their attention not only because of his Republicanism, but also because of his supposed disagreements with Lee at Gettysburg. Lost Cause advocates considered Longstreet a major threat to their ideology, for his quick departure from Southern ideals seemed to question the legitimacy of the Southern cause, and his critiques of Lee ran against the pure image in which they attempted to cast the Confederate leader. Longstreet became both the enemy and sacrificial lamb for the Lost Cause, as he simply did not fit the image of a Confederate history they so wished to immortalize. Through early Civil War texts, newspaper articles, and even public speeches authored by members of the Lost Cause, Longstreet slowly became the object of public slander, and his contributions in the Civil War were marginalized. The Lost Cause sought to twist history in favor of a romantic and idealized

⁹ Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 414; Thomas L. Connelly and Barbara L. Bellows eds., *God and General Longstreet: The Lost Cause and the Southern Mind* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 16, 21, 25; Piston, *Lee’s Tarnished Lieutenant*, 109; Harold M. Knudsen, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy’s Most Modern General* (Tarentum: Word Associated Publishers, 2007), 18.

¹⁰ Connelly and Bellows, *God and General Longstreet*, 28; Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1977), 70-71.

South, but before this could happen, the Lost Cause itself needed greater strength and leadership in order to direct its efforts.

The emergence of this leadership signaled the beginning of official attacks on Longstreet's military career. Prior to Lee's death on October 12, 1870, the Lost Cause favored Jackson as the object of its worship, yet the passing of the Confederate army's great leader drew a great deal of attention to Lee's memory, and two separate societies vied for the privilege of burying and memorializing the general's remains: the Lee Monument Association, led by Jubal Early, one of Lee's lieutenant generals, and the Lee Memorial Association, led by Lee's former chief of artillery the Reverend William Nelson Pendleton. Reverend John William Jones, an assistant of Pendleton, would also play a major role in Lee's enshrinement. Early began to curb the competition between these two associations when he delivered a speech on Lee's birthday on January 19, 1872, at Washington and Lee College. In his speech, Early charged that Longstreet had been ordered to make an attack early in the morning on July second at the battle of Gettysburg, and his subsequent delays and failures had been the sole reason for Confederate defeat at that battle, thereby robbing Lee of victory.¹¹ While Early's Gettysburg report remained the sole piece of evidence to suggest the order for a morning assault on July 2, 1863, it seems that Early so genuinely believed in the existence of the order that others believed him as well. Further, the hatred directed at Longstreet due to his Republicanism and his enemies in the Lost Cause had made him a vulnerable target, and Early's accusations added to Longstreet's already poor reputation. Thus, Early unified the two Lee associations and a distinctly anti-Longstreet faction emerged.

¹¹ Jubal Early, *The Campaigns of Gen. Robert E. Lee, An Address by Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early, Before Washington and Lee University, January 19th, 1872* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1872), 34-36.

Though Early, Pendleton and Jones each hoped to gain respect and honor by championing Lee's Southern canonization, each of these characters invite suspicion of their motives. In Early and Pendleton's cases, the efforts to purify Lee may simply have been an attempt to distract attention from their own military careers. Early, for instance, commanded a Confederate military campaign into the Shenendoah Valley in 1864 which ended in his army's destruction (one of only two Confederate commanders in the War to suffer such a disgrace). Fearing for Early's lack of ability to inspire, Lee relieved him of command, an action he almost never took against his commanders.¹² Pendleton, meanwhile, found himself relegated to administrative duties in the War following his embarrassing performance on September 19, 1862, where he abandoned a strong defensive position with very little provocation from the enemy.¹³ Jones, meanwhile, entered the equation as a "born sycophant" who had become intimate with Lee's family following the war, and his office as the editor of the *Southern Historical Society Papers* put him in prime position to spread anti-Longstreet literature throughout the South.¹⁴ Together, Early, Pendleton, and Jones represented a collection of incompetent and disreputable men with petty agendas, yet their articles, lectures, and public speeches gained traction simply because works which idolized Lee were in such high demand in the postwar South. This anti-Longstreet faction used its influence not only to build up Lee's image, but it also worked hard to destroy Longstreet's reputation.

¹² "Lee's Letter to Early, March 30, 1865," in John Esten Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray; Being Personal Portraits, Scenes, and Adventures of the War* (New York: E.B. Treat & Co., 1867), 109-110.

¹³ "Lee's Antietam Report," in *The War of Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, 53 vols (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1899), S1, 19, pt. 1, 142.

¹⁴ William Garrett Piston, "Marked in Bronze: James Longstreet and Southern History," in *James Longstreet: The Man, the Soldier, the Controversy*, R.L. DiNardo and Albert A. Nofi eds. (Conshohocken: Combined Publishing, 1998), 202-205; Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 121; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 422; Sweet, *The Longstreet Controversy*, 8-10; Charles C. Osborn, *Jubal: The Life and Times of General Jubal A. Early, CSA* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 1992), 440.

Although Longstreet presented many key arguments in his defense, the manner with which he presented them earned him much scorn and hatred rather than vindication and support. Initially, Longstreet ignored his detractors and slanderers, believing his reputation far too strong and too well earned to be called into question by such incompetent soldiers such as Early and Pendleton. Besides, his duties as the new brigadier general in the state militia of Louisiana in New Orleans demanded his attention, especially in September of 1874, when he led the militia against the rebellious White League. When his own troops broke and ran, the league members pulled him from his horse and temporarily took him prisoner.¹⁵ An injury sustained from the skirmish kept him ill and further incapable of replying to the anti-Longstreet faction until the spring of 1875. In response to Pendleton's recent tour of speeches which repeated the Gettysburg charges, Longstreet challenged Pendleton to offer proof of his (Longstreet's) failure. When Pendleton deflected the challenge, instead making a jab at Longstreet's recent misadventure in New Orleans, Longstreet wrote him back with an air of overconfidence and pride which typified his own defense: "School-boys may be misled by you, but even with them I fancy that only the most credulous may be temporarily misled. It is my opinion that your abuse, so far from impairing my interests or my reputation, will be more likely to enhance them in the estimation of honorable men. . . . The impertinent tone and language of your letter are in keeping with your disposition to propagate falsehood."¹⁶ Over the coming months, both Longstreet and his enemies gathered evidence for the controversy, and while Early and his companions failed to discover anything Lee might have said to criticize Longstreet, Longstreet himself managed to garner testimonials from many of Lee's staff officers which attested that Longstreet had never been

¹⁵ Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 122-123; Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 370-371; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 416.

¹⁶ "Longstreet to Pendleton, April 19, 1875," in Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 123-124.

expected to attack early on Gettysburg's second day.¹⁷ Unfortunately, Longstreet accompanied these statements by showing no sensitivity either to his supporters or to Lee's memory, as he both insulted Lee's officers by claiming to have been Lee's main source of advice, and angered Lee's many admirers by criticizing Lee's actions at Gettysburg. Longstreet did not doubt that he would be believed, given his stance as the senior ranking officer among the survivors of the Army of Northern Virginia, but he completely failed to understand the powerful influence of the Lost Cause against which he conducted his defense. When he finally began to understand the failure of his efforts, his ego and confidence led him to far more bitter and angry responses to the slanderous charges. Soon, his angry critiques of Lee cemented the belief among Southerners that Longstreet was more selfish and self-interested than in merely directing a defense of his reputation. Lee, they argued, had never criticized Longstreet even with great reason to do so, but Longstreet had broken with honor by not refraining from criticizing Lee. Thus, Longstreet conducted a mostly self-destructive defense against the anti-Longstreet faction, as he learned that simple force of will proved a fine tool on the battlefield, but inappropriate in a war of words. Given Longstreet's inability to adequately defend his reputation, the anti-Longstreet faction soon capitalized on the opportunity to bury his legacy.

The opportunity came through the Comte de Paris, Louis-Philippe Albert d'Orléans, who had published the first two volumes of a lengthy series on the Civil War in 1875 and 1877. His treatment of Lee elicited criticism from Early and his faction, and in response, Albert sought input for a series on Gettysburg from the Southern Historical Society under Jones's direction. The faction's use of the *Southern Historical Society Papers* proved the perfect vehicle for tearing apart Longstreet's reputation under the guise of a scholarly and fair treatment of Gettysburg.

¹⁷ Longstreet, *Manassas to Appomattox*, 379-381.

Jones carefully selected and ordered the texts in order to have the most significant impact on Longstreet's reputation: "The first article in reply to the count was that of Early, who repeated the now familiar charges that Longstreet had been late on July 2 and had failed to send in Hood's and McLaws's men on July 3. Jones followed . . . with letters from Fitzhugh Lee, William Allan . . . and Walter Taylor, all of whom backed Early's claims."¹⁸ Of note, each of these former officers (Fitzhugh Lee, Allan, and Taylor) originally backed Longstreet's claims, but they shifted their support when forced to choose between protecting Lee's memory or substantiating Longstreet's defense. Having thus set the tone for the analysis of Gettysburg, Jones arrayed several more articles to follow these stronger claims, seemingly giving the anti-Longstreet sentiment more credence and context. Finally, two more articles by Early told readers exactly what to conclude from the series and the controversy in general, cleverly posing a choice to the readers: "Either General Lee or General Longstreet was responsible for the remarkable delay that took place in making the attack [on July second]. I choose to believe that it was not General Lee."¹⁹ Early, Pendleton, and Jones laid an impressive groundwork for Longstreet's marginalization with their work in the *Papers*, as the biased scholarship impacted the history of Gettysburg for many years to come.

The series represented the crown jewel of Early's efforts to destroy Longstreet's reputation. Where Early and his faction were clever in their attacks on Longstreet, Longstreet himself lacked the understanding and guile to properly conduct his defense. Early and his faction clearly triumphed over Longstreet in the battle to place the blame for Gettysburg, and Longstreet's legacy would pay the price.

¹⁸ Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 133.

¹⁹ *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 4 (August, 1877), 293.

Though Longstreet failed to repair his reputation and pave the way for a better legacy, his later years produced some of his best work as a Civil War historian. When *Century* magazine sought to publish a compilation of first-hand accounts of the Civil War, Longstreet's contributions demonstrated a capability to give credit where due, and also narrate the details of battle in an engaging way. Published between 1885 and 1887, his articles on Fredericksburg and Second Manassas, for instance, became an important part of the new text's versatility and credibility. Unfortunately, his narrative of Gettysburg revealed how bitter and frustrated he had become on account of the slanderous attacks by Early and his faction, as he devoted several pages exclusively to the Gettysburg controversy, yet again including the self-destructive tactic of criticizing Lee. While he made several excellent points, the manner with which he presented them injured his reputation still further, as all those who had already been soured against Longstreet pointed to the seemingly selfish and spiteful language with which he argued his case. Deeply hurt by the credence given to his detractors by those who had not participated in the war, Longstreet finally set out to write his memoirs in the late 1880s, focusing intensely on his war-years and especially Gettysburg. Two tragedies interrupted his work, as his house burned down in 1889, and his wife passed away in January 1890.²⁰ By 1894 Longstreet had finished the majority of the work, and he saw his memoirs, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, published in 1896. Because he based his information on what official records were available at that time, Longstreet's memoirs quickly became an important contribution to materials concerning the Civil War, but contemporary reviews of his work noted the same arrogant tone and critiques of Lee that had typified Longstreet's texts for years, and thus his memoirs did little to redeem his reputation, his pettiness having lost him the opportunity at vindication. *Manassas to Appomattox*

²⁰ Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*, 152; Sanger and Hay, *James Longstreet*, 403; Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 421.

represented Longstreet's last major effort to defend his reputation, as his health began to fail him: writing remained difficult and his voice weakened down to a whisper by his war wound, and his hearing deteriorated so that he needed an ear horn. Thus, Longstreet failed to defend his reputation against detraction and slander, as inappropriate and inaccurate accounts of his war conduct dominated the contemporary accounts of the Civil War.

Although Longstreet had only taken up the pen in the first place in order to expose the injustices of those who had misrepresented him, he continued to be judged by his relationship with the hated Republicans. Significantly, criticism of Longstreet's war conduct had not even emerged until after Lee's death, perhaps capitalizing on the absence of the one man who could have authoritatively reinforced Longstreet's reputation and standing as the commanding general's most senior and trusted lieutenant. In the postwar South, Longstreet's ordinary appearance failed to attract the positive attention of writers looking to paint a more romantic picture of the Confederacy, and Longstreet's affiliation with the Republicans attracted a severe hatred amongst the many Southerners who embraced such an idealized history of the Confederacy. With both his social life and military legacy under threat, Longstreet undertook a mostly ineffective defense of his reputation, allowing his ego, pride, bitterness, and frustration to affect the strength of his arguments, criticizing Lee at a time when such critiques only earned further scorn and negative attention. By the time he died, on January 2, 1904, a mostly artificial legacy had been constructed for Longstreet in place of the honor he had won on the field of battle. Although a Southern hero on the battlefield, he became a victim of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. In his final years, the old Confederate veterans had made the old general feel immensely appreciated, and they had demonstrated that those who knew the truth about Longstreet still regarded and loved him as the best fighter in the Army of Northern Virginia. One

said that “all these damnable lies about Longstreet make me want to shoulder a musket and fight another war. . . . I know that Longstreet did not fail Lee at Gettysburg or anywhere else. I’ll defend him as long as I live.”²¹ Unfortunately, much of the positive perception of Longstreet died with these veterans, and thus an artificial legacy of the great general entered the history books. In this new history, bent and twisted by the Lost Cause, Longstreet is seen as a man of the South, but not a Southerner.

²¹ “Survivor of Charge Defends Longstreet,” *Buffalo Evening News*, July 5, 1938, quoted in Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 297.

CHAPTER 7

SUBSIDIARY IMMORTALITY

Today, visitors to the Gettysburg battlefield in Pennsylvania often stare in awe at some of the monuments and the men and actions which they represent. The First Minnesota, Robert E. Lee, Abner Doubleday, and Winfield Scott Hancock each have impressive monuments which dominate the land around them, their large bronze figures perched atop a substantial base. Near a road which rims the battlefield through a forest, however, a solitary statue stands apart from the others, with no pedestal to elevate it above the ground, and a pose which inspires doubt and concern, rather than awe, in the eyes of the beholder. Despite his importance to not only the battle, but to the Confederate army in general, James Longstreet's monument at Gettysburg lacks the elevated status of every other statue at the battlefield. This ignominious uniqueness stands as a lasting testament to the damage done to Longstreet's legacy by his detractors in the Lost Cause, as well as their historical descendents who continued the tradition of labeling Longstreet a scapegoat for Gettysburg and the failure of the Confederacy, rather than as Lee's reliable war horse and one of the most talented generals of the Civil War. One could argue that Longstreet simply failed to appeal to his own Southern people, thus resulting in his expulsion from their idealized history.

Where Southerners preferred romantic leaders who showed eccentric, flamboyant, or virtuous qualities, Longstreet proved to be too ordinary, self-confident, and egotistical for their tastes. The product of an unstable childhood, Longstreet learned independence rather than reliance, and thus as a military leader he gained a reputation for single minded stubbornness, sometimes displaying a bloated ego as well. While Longstreet's personality therefore may have grated on others at times, he also proved himself an effective and inspirational leader as

confirmed by the testaments of his soldiers, and especially the memoirs of both Moxley Sorrel and Porter Alexander. Yet when contrasted against Lee's tact and spirituality and Jackson's eccentricity and aggressive fighting spirit, Longstreet seemed incredibly unromantic and unattractive, a poor object of admiration compared to these other commanders despite the fact that Longstreet deserved at least equal praise alongside these other heroes of the South.

Where Southerners preferred the glory and gallantry of old, Napoleonic styles of warfare, Longstreet's untraditional yet innovative methods and theories earned him little recognition. Most other commanders preferred direct and aggressive assaults, but Longstreet recognized the new killing efficiency of modern weapons, and thus advocated a tactical defense and opportunistic and flexible offense. Employing such techniques with great efficiency at the battles of Second Manassas, Fredericksburg, and the Wilderness, Longstreet also organized his staff carefully in order to better exercise his command in the thick of battle. At the same time, Longstreet developed his own theory of strategy as well, one used to great effect at Chickamauga where Longstreet called for a regional concentration of troops in order to overwhelm and destroy the Federals, the result of his efforts was the only major victory for the Confederate's in the War's western theatre. Longstreet received little credit for these contributions. At Second Manassas, Longstreet's careful preparation was considered stubborn delay. His murderous defensive work at Fredericksburg was considered a "vulgar glory." His brilliant attack at the Wilderness was made incomplete by the accident of his own troops who injured him in the thick of battle. The glory of Chickamauga, also, was marginalized by the failure to recognize the part Longstreet had played in orchestrating the new strategy. Longstreet lived in a time where few appreciated that gallantry stood little chance against modern weapons, and thus he became

known as an inglorious, overly cautious, defensively minded leader, rather than as an insightful, opportunistic and innovative general.

Where Southerners preferred to cling to the idealized South in the postbellum period, Longstreet proved too willing to accept defeat and adapt to the new order forced by the Republicans. Several years after the War had ended, Longstreet began an affiliation with the hated Republicans that continued for the rest of his life. In Longstreet's view, the Southern Democrats lacked the ability to effect change in the postwar South, and cooperation with the Republicans offered the only possible way to help protect the South from radical transformation and humiliating subjugation. To the majority of Southerners however, Longstreet's conversion represented a defection to the very faction which sought to destroy the Southern civilization as a way of life. His seemingly quick desertion from the old ways of the South and choice of alliance to the Republicans both vilified his name and alienated him from his former Confederate brethren. The possibility that Longstreet became a Republican out of genuine interest in protecting the South was lost in the extreme nature of his actions. Abhorred and cast out from Southern society, Longstreet opened up to critique his stellar reputation as a Confederate champion.

Where Southerners cast a pure image of their heroes such as Lee, the now anti-heroic Longstreet proved too willing to critique the saintly general. Longstreet's performance at Gettysburg was not even called into question until he had both been vilified by the South for Republicanism and been denied the privilege of Lee's defense of his reputation by that general's death in 1870. Early, Pendleton and Jones were attracted to Longstreet as a scapegoat for Gettysburg not only because the South now hated him for his Republicanism, but also because Longstreet had famously disagreed with Lee's decisions at that battle. As a social outcast and

threat to Lee's memory, Longstreet became the perfect scapegoat for Lee's failures and the defeat of the Confederacy. Further, Longstreet's continued critiques of Lee in his own defense of his Gettysburg performance proved a self-destructive tactic in the context of a culture which had anathematized him. Despite the obvious manipulations in the Southern history of Gettysburg, when the anti-Longstreet faction forced a choice between the romantic, traditional, and idealistic Lee or the materialistic, modern, and realistic Longstreet, Southerners chose to believe that Longstreet, not Lee had been responsible for defeat at that battle.

Thus, where Southerners wanted to cast an idealized memory of the Confederacy, Longstreet proved too great a threat to the utopian past they sought to romanticize and commemorate. He did not fit the model of a romantic rather than pragmatic leader. He did not fit the model of a general who favored military gallantry rather than military innovations. He did not fit the model of an undefeated rather than realistic postwar Confederate. He did not fit the model of someone who purified, rather than rationalized the memory of Lee and the rest of the Confederacy. Though the Southern cause had been lost, many Southerners continued their fight in the form of an ideological war bent on protecting the glorious history of the Confederacy. Sadly, this Lost Cause almost totally cast Longstreet out of their reinvented past, manipulating texts and slandering the general until he seemed but a hollow and lonely figure amidst a luxurious narrative of the good old days.

There remains hope, however, to restore Longstreet to his proper place in the American heritage. While Michael Shaara began the process of re-casting Longstreet as a figure of admiration and victim of injustice, Longstreet's more recent biographers have laid the groundwork to a more scholarly appreciation of the general. There is still much work to do, however, in order to counteract the decades of preference given to Lee and Jackson. Perhaps

more studies with a critical eye to the Gettysburg controversy and the resulting distortions will help to draw out Longstreet's proper place: Lee's true second-in-command, at least equal in skill and accomplishments to his military peers. Indeed, where Douglas Southall Freeman wrote long volumes about the Army of Northern Virginia with Longstreet's place diminished, there remains room for similar studies which correctively respect Longstreet's equal, if not superior stature alongside Lee and Jackson. These new analyses and narratives of the Civil War ought to describe a Lee-Longstreet-Jackson relationship where Lee, far from simply executing his own masterful plans, often consulted the advice and counsel of his lieutenants, and especially Longstreet. Given that Lee often gave these commanders the flexibility to interpret and execute his orders in the manner they thought best, Jackson and especially Longstreet ought to be given just as much recognition for their efforts as Lee.

While Longstreet's statue at Gettysburg lacks the impressive presentations of other generals at this battlefield, its uniqueness also represents some important differences between Longstreet and the culture which ostracized him. Longstreet, in many ways, deplored the Southern emphasis on honor, pride, and dignity, and many of his life-choices sprang from his independent spirit as a pragmatic, insightful, and untraditional character. In this context, it seems understandable that Longstreet has no place in the Lost Cause's history of the Confederacy, for Longstreet himself had no such idealizations of Lee, Jackson, or any other Confederate commander or element of Southern culture. For him, honor had little place on the battlefield, and devotion to the old Confederacy had no place in politics. In the end, it seems that Longstreet's sense of duty and pragmatism motivated most of his decisions. He frequently departed from traditional methods in favor of accomplishing his goals in the most effective way possible, even risking honor, and the hatred of Southern society in order to help protect them from the

burdensome Reconstruction Acts. In many ways, Longstreet was the Confederacy's most loyal citizen and soldier from Fort Sumter to his deathbed, but his untraditional methods often failed to win him glory, and his tactless comments were usually misunderstood. In a reassessment of James Longstreet, we find that a great deal of the negative attention is unjustified, and the historical portrayal of the general ought to reflect a different image: the reliable commander who led troops with confidence; the superb general who pioneered the use of modern and flexible tactics and strategy; the practical politician who chose clever methods to try and help shape the Reconstruction; the victim of the Lost Cause and its scapegoat for Gettysburg; a misunderstood warrior without a pedestal.



Longstreet's statue at Gettysburg. (Photo by author)

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