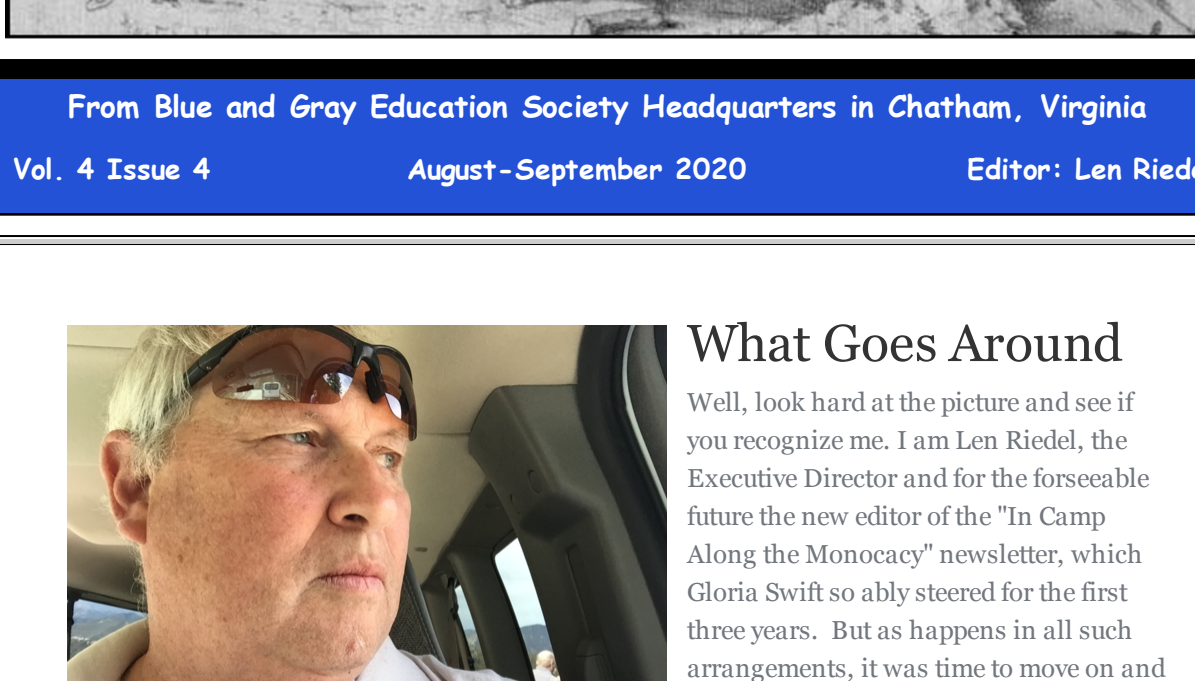




In Camp Along the Monocacy

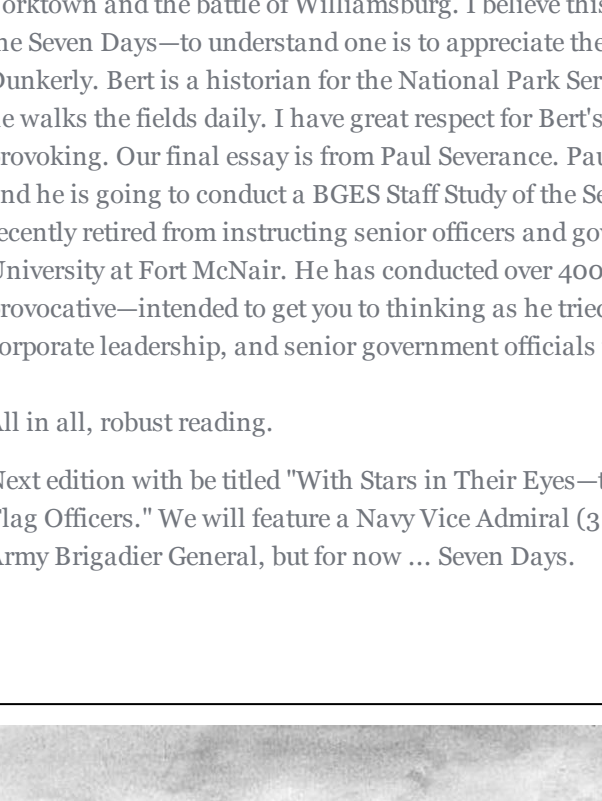


From Blue and Gray Education Society Headquarters in Chatham, Virginia

Vol. 4 Issue 4

August–September 2020

Editor: Len Riedel



Editor and BGES Executive Director Len Riedel

What Goes Around

Well, look hard at the picture and see if you recognize me. I am Len Riedel, the Executive Director and for the foreseeable future the new editor of the "In Camp Along the Monocacy" newsletter, which Gloria Swift so ably steered for the first three years. But as happens in all such arrangements, it was time to move on and so, in the transition, I have taken this over. We owe Gloria a great deal, and her five years was important to us and for that I am very grateful. She has not disappeared completely. If you follow the BGES on Facebook, Gloria continues to

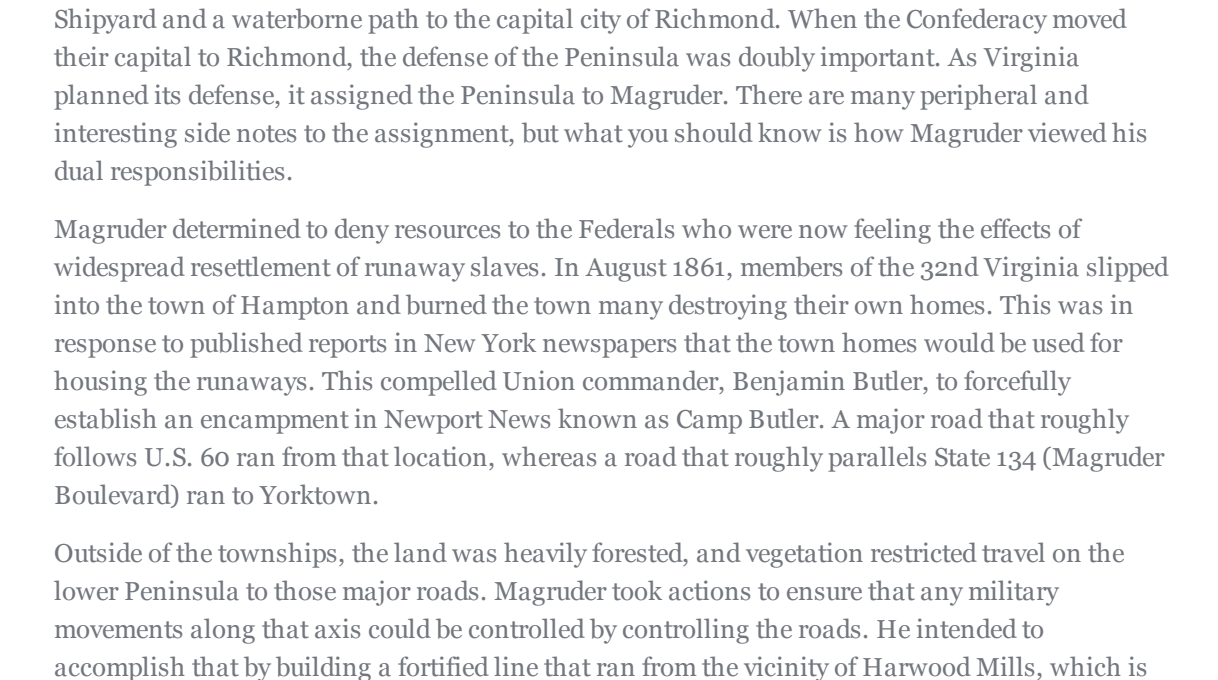
plant nuggets of interesting elements of American history and the Civil War community. If you aren't following us on Facebook, you should.

This bi-monthly newsletter is devoted to historical reflection, and I intend to steer it into reflections upon key aspects of the war. I started out with Campaigns—the last one was Vicksburg with Tim Smith, Parker Hills, and myself. This month we are dealing with the Peninsula and Seven Days Battles. I will follow with my insights into the Peninsula up through the evacuation of Yorktown and the battle of Williamsburg. I believe this is important because it is the entry point to the Seven Days—to understand one is to appreciate the other. The second essay is from Bert Dunkerly. Bert is a historian for the National Park Service at Richmond National Battlefield and he walks the fields daily. I have great respect for Bert's insights and his reflections are thoughtful-provoking. Our final essay is from Paul Severance. Paul is a relatively new member of the BGES, and he is going to conduct a BGES Staff Study of the Seven Days campaign in April 2021. Paul recently retired from instructing senior officers and government officials at the National Defense University at Fort McNair. He has conducted over 400 such staff studies, and his insights are provocative—intended to get you to thinking as he tried to make and help General officers, corporate leadership, and senior government officials to think.

All in all, robust reading.

Next edition with be titled "With Stars in Their Eyes—the Civil War Reflections of General and Flag Officers." We will feature a Navy Vice Admiral (3 Star), two Army Major Generals, and an Army Brigadier General, but for now ... Seven Days.

—Len



CSS Richmond | U.S. Naval Historical Center

Reflections on the Peninsula in 1862

By Len Riedel

I have been interested in the Civil War for more than 57 years. It was the fourth grade social studies class that turned me to a fascination. The Centennial of the war was going on, and I enjoyed the *National Geographic*, *Look*, and *Life* magazine features about the war. Santa Claus brought me the American Heritage pictorial *History of the Civil War* (still have it). I never lost the passion, so when I returned to Langley Air Force Base in 1986 and sought my Master's degree from Old Dominion University, the "Civil War on the Peninsula" was my choice for a thesis.

The central figure of the drama is John Bankhead Magruder, and anyone who has been out with me on tours at some point has been drawn into my commentary and interpretation of the Defense of the Virginia Peninsula. The purpose of this reflection is centered on the Seven Days campaign of Robert E. Lee, but I believe a linkage of the two is important to give context to what Paul and Bert so competently cover.

Today anyone driving to Hampton drives down a widening Interstate 64, and by the time they reach Williamsburg is almost certain to encounter heavy traffic. The Peninsula didn't look that way in 1861. Villages like Hampton and Yorktown were connected by a major road and several smaller connecting roads. The climate was wet and miasmic with mosquitos galore. The old Virginia capital of Williamsburg had lost its glitter and was beginning to deteriorate; two roads fed it from Yorktown and Newport News. At the end of Duke of Gloucester Street sat the Wren Building of the College of William and Mary. At the tip of the Peninsula stood the federal Fort Monroe, with the townships of Phoebus and Hampton surrounding the installation.

What made the Peninsula important were two things in order of importance: The Gosport Naval Shipyard and a waterborne path to the capital city of Richmond. When the Confederacy moved their capital to Richmond, the defense of the Peninsula was doubly important. As Virginia planned its defense, it assigned the Peninsula to Magruder. There are many peripheral and interesting side notes to the assignment, but what you should know is how Magruder viewed his dual responsibilities.

Magruder determined to deny resources to the Federals who were now feeling the effects of widespread resettlement of runaway slaves. In August 1861, members of the 32nd Virginia slipped into the town of Hampton and burned the town many destroying their own homes. This was in response to published reports in New York newspapers that the town homes would be used for housing the runaways. This compelled Union commander, Benjamin Butler, to forcefully establish an encampment in Newport News known as Camp Butler. A major road that roughly follows U.S. 60 ran from that location, whereas a road that roughly parallels State 134 (Magruder Boulevard) ran to Yorktown.

Outside of the townships, the land was heavily forested, and vegetation restricted travel on the lower Peninsula to those major roads. Magruder took actions to ensure that any military movements along that axis could be controlled by controlling the roads. He intended to accomplish that by building a fortified line that ran from the vicinity of Harwood Mills, which is on U.S. 17 (water treatment plant) today, across the Peninsula to the James River. Fortifications were dug by slaves that were impressed from plantations along the James River—the going rate being \$30 for 30 days with the slaves bringing trenching tools with them. Manpower was a constant concern, and Magruder's labor drafts went far beyond his district and earned him a rebuke from the Confederate government. Soldiers were also tasked to dig; however, they did not take kindly to being asked to do work that was also being done by slaves. Nonetheless they dug.

In Norfolk, Magruder constantly coordinated with the superintendent of the shipyard. Sydney Smith Lee was Robert E. Lee's brother and he was overseeing the overhaul of the captured Union frigate U.S.S. *Merrimac*, soon to be commissioned the Virginia. It was this second task that was the most important strategic activity of the Confederacy. Having captured one of the major shipyards in the United States, the Confederacy had acquired the means to build and sustain an ocean-going fleet. Jefferson Davis, at the conclusion of the McClellan Campaign, wrote that his only regret was the loss of the shipyard. From March 1862, Robert E. Lee was convinced that the shipyard was the Federal objective, and after the Federal foothold was established in eastern North Carolina, his troop deployments were all supportive of this belief.

The two rivers, James and York, were daggers sticking deep into the Confederate vitals. The James River was tidal (the disadvantage which would be revealed when Virginia deployed for battle with the *Monitor*) and was navigable to Richmond. The York was a deep-water course, but it stopped short of Richmond at West Point. A railroad ran to Richmond from near West Point. Magruder's responsibilities also included controlling the rivers. He did this by the construction of water batteries at the tip of Jamestown Island and across the river at Fort Boykins and elsewhere. By sinking stone ships he could clog the river and force ascending ships under the fire of the fortifications he had built. You can still see Fort Boykins on the south side of the James River, and when the foliage is down you can see but not access the earthwork fortifications at Jamestown Island. On the York River, the width narrowed to less than a mile, and the Confederates built massive fortifications that you can still see at Gloucester Point and at Yorktown, which dwarf the old British fortifications. Smaller "masked" batteries controlled inlets like Wormley Creek to ensure footholds were not granted about the fortification Magruder was engineering.

The battle between the *Monitor* and *Merrimac* on March 9 revealed the limitations of the Confederate scheme of defense. The *Virginia* was too heavy to operate on the James River by the James River fleet—with sand bars in the James, the *Virginia* could not ascend the river beyond Hampton Roads. When this was realized, the defensive strategy was revised with a second ironclad, *CSS Richmond* being placed on the highest priority for completion. She, with *Virginia*, would fight to pass Fort Monroe and put *Virginia* in the York River at Yorktown. *Richmond* would control Hampton Roads and the James River. The shipyard went to 24-hour operations to complete *Richmond*. Thus, the security of the shipyard was of the highest importance. This was made clear to Gen. Joseph E. Johnston by President Davis, Lee, and new war secretary George Randolph, when he was ordered hold the Peninsula on April 15, 1862.

One last very important point needs to be made and understood. Fearing a coordinated assault on Norfolk and the shipyard from Fort Monroe and through the Dismal Swamp from Burnside's force in North Carolina, Lee created in March a new mobile force of some 10,000 soldiers under the command of George Wythe Randolph near Suffolk on the southside of the James. Magruder was compelled to transfer some 6,000 of his troops to this new force reducing his own to just 4,000. After protesting the action, Magruder accelerated work on a new line anchored on Yorktown. This was created by damming the Warwick River at its headwaters in the current national park, connecting it to the fortifications at Yorktown by rifle pits and trenches behind the flooded river at dams such as Dam #1, where an engagement took place on April 16, 1862. A final line of some 14 redoubts anchored on King and Queen Creeks—the centerpiece being Fort Magruder—was completed and ready for occupation just outside and east of Williamsburg.

You can see all of these works—many have been preserved along Quarterpath Road south of and throughout the Fort Magruder Inn property. A little research will allow you to walk the Federal attack against Fort Magruder, and the American Battlefield Trust is acquiring the area in front of the Fort Magruder Inn where the Confederates counterattacked. The redoubt where Hancock turned the Confederate left and where Jubal Early's counterattack drove him back is about 300 yards off the Colonial Parkway—unmarked but in an excellent state of preservation. It can be found in the winter when the leaves are down.

Johnston's abandonment of the Peninsula without receiving a shot compelled the evacuation of the Gosport Shipyard and the destruction of the *CSS Virginia*. The uncompleted *Richmond* was towed to Rocketts Landing near Richmond. Evacuating Yorktown opened the York River to West Point and would lead to a rearguard action at Eltham's Landing. The use of landmines created by Gabriel Rains slowed Federal pursuit, but Johnston's failure to use his two weeks in command to familiarize himself with the defensive positions Magruder had engineered left the Williamsburg Redoubts to the north of Fort Magruder completely unoccupied. Were it not for Early's march from the grounds of William and Mary and his attack, the Confederates would have been turned out of Fort Magruder and perhaps crushed; as it was, the Confederates withdrew after the May 5 battle of Williamsburg.

Nearly two months of bad weather with constant rain during April and May hampered both sides. However, the Confederates stood to benefit the most. Johnston squandered that advantage at tremendous cost to the Confederacy. Restricted fields of maneuver in the hands of the timid and fearful McClellan had held the Army of the Potomac in front of Magruder's lines for a month. With adequate reinforcements provided by Johnston's force and the completion of the *Richmond* combined with the *Virginia*, the Seven Days campaign might never have been needed or fought. Conversely, Johnston may not ever have been wounded and Lee never taken command. It just bears reflection, and I hope you appreciate the possibilities.

Len Riedel is the Executive Director of the Blue and Gray Education Society.



Ranger Bert Dunkerly gives a presentation at Cold Harbor | NPS

The Seven Days

By Bert Dunkerly

One of the lesser-studied campaigns of the war, the Seven Days campaign offers numerous insights for those interested in the progression of the war. The underlying theme, from any perspective, is a state of flux.

The summer campaign before Richmond occurred at a crucial time in the war, with political, economic, and social changes unfolding that would change the character of the conflict and how it was waged. Perhaps the most important current was the rising tide of emancipation.

As Union troops entered the Peninsula counties and the environs of Richmond, they encountered large numbers of enslaved people who saw them as liberators. While the attitude of Union troops varied from zealous abolitionist to indifference to hostility, the contraband issue became one that military commanders in the field, and policy makers in Washington, had to address.

Although Antietam is usually associated with the Emancipation Proclamation, the groundswell leading to that event occurred in the spring and summer, in large part as the Army of the Potomac found itself entangled in this difficult and controversial issue.

The economies of both nations were also gearing up for a larger war effort. The Union government was wrestling with how to manage uncooperative Southern civilians, guerrillas, and a host of other administrative details that spring. The current conciliatory policy was clearly not working, and it gradually became clear that harsher measures were needed as Union armies operated in the South. The Confiscation Act, for example, is one clear sign that property, including slaves, could be forfeited by those who took up arms against the government. Popular opinion in the North was gradually moving toward accepting that a tougher policy was needed to wage the war.

Changes in policy were also happening in Jefferson Davis's administration. That spring the Confederacy instituted a draft (the first in American history), enacted price controls, muffled the press, and took other steps to manage the uncharted territory to manage its war effort. The groundwork was being laid for the system to manage the war on a scale unimaginable just a few months earlier.

The military actions in Hanover and Henrico Counties that spring and summer reveal that the armies were also in transition. Gen. Robert E. Lee inherited an Army with an awkward command structure. Stonewall Jackson's force, recently arrived from the valley, had little time to properly integrate with the Army of Northern Virginia. Jackson's command, a wing, was not officially a corps, and would not be designated as such until after the campaign. Jackson acted largely independently, and Lee treated his command that way during the campaign.

Gen. John B. Magruder's command, formerly the Army of the Peninsula, had recently been absorbed by the Army of Northern Virginia. Magruder commanded two divisions, as well as his own division directly. It was a pseudo corps arrangement and an awkward one likely to lead to command and control issues (which it did).

Lee himself was new to command on such a scale; in fact, only a handful of officers on either side had any experience coordinating the movements of large forces. For Lee, it was learning on the job, and there would be many bumps in the road.

Staff work was lacking, and communication was poor. The results were challenges in coordination throughout the campaign, hindering Lee's ability to achieve his objectives. While the Union army was driven away from Richmond, it was not destroyed, as Lee intended.

On the Union side, although the army's organizational structure was better there were many close calls and near-disasters, largely due to the inattention of Gen. George B. McClellan to properly communicate with his corps commanders. Only good cooperation among his subordinates averted catastrophe. Cavalry was ineffectively used by nearly all of the Union commanders.

The logistical systems of both armies were learning rapidly, and gearing up for what was quickly escalating into a conflict of scale and duration that neither anticipated (or were ready for). Supply, transport, engineering, medical, and other support services were tested, and performed well for the most part.

The battles themselves reveal learning at the company, regimental, and brigade level. Ineffective frontal assaults, lack of coordination, deficient scouting, poor use of artillery and cavalry, all defined many of the battles at the small-unit level. By the fall of 1862, these armies were professionals at skirmishing, scouting, maneuvering, fortifying, and assaulting. These are not the same armies that would fight at Antietam, Chancellorsville, or Gettysburg. These are armies learning as they go; they are in the process of becoming. Those lessons were learned in the spring and summer along the swampy Chickahominy. Everything that the armies learned of fighting, marching, and maneuvering in the field, they learned, for the most part, in the Seven Days.

Seven Pines was the largest battle in the eastern theater up to that time. Then Gaines' Mill was larger than that. Then came a dizzying pace of engagements, culminating with Malvern Hill, the only battle in which the majority of both armies were on the field.

We see many junior officers who will rise to prominence and reach their full potential later (or displayed the attributes that likely would have flowered had not other events intervened). Meade, Hooker, Kearny, Reynolds, Conder, Birney, Couch, Hancock, Griffin, and Upton all showed promise for the Union. For the Confederates, Gordon, Hood, R.H. Anderson, Gregg, Hampton, Early, and Ewell would soon rise above their lower grades and commands.

The Seven Days extend the war. It could have resulted in a Union victory that summer with Richmond's fall. It changed the character of the war, with the growing push for emancipation and new focus on a harsher policy toward Southern civilians. It demonstrated, brutally and clearly, that the war would be a long one.

Although First Manassas is often seen the battle that broke the "quick war" and "one battle" mentality, soldiers' diaries are filled with expectations of one big battle at Richmond to determine the war. That persistent myth finally died as a hard death in the swamps in the summer of 1862. Private John Faller of the 7th Pennsylvania Reserves wrote home, "If anyone tells you that the rebels will not fight, just tell them to come down to this neck of the country and try them on."

Lastly, each of the Seven Days campaign presents a distinctive opportunity to study a specific engagement. Each had unique topography: open field combat, woods and swamps, or hilly terrain. Road networks—points of access and egress—varied. While the Confederates were generally the aggressor, Union counterattacks played significant roles in each battle. The ebb and flow of combat created fluid situations in these engagements. Studied independently, they each offer insights for both historians and modern military commanders.

A historian, award-winning author, and speaker actively involved in historic preservation and research, Bert Dunkerly currently serves as a Park Ranger at Richmond National Battlefield Park.

Watercolor depiction of the Battle of Melvern Hill | NPS

Spurious Reflections on the Seven Days Campaign

By Paul Severance

The Seven Days campaign outside Richmond in 1862 has always seemed to wallow in the backwaters of American Civil War "interests." Yes, there is a grudging recognition that these serial engagements occurred and McClellan's foray to capture Richmond and quickly end the rebellion were severely blunted, but the "Big Fights" at Shiloh, Antietam, Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Atlanta are so much more interesting and arguments—pro and con—of the strategic significance and import of these battles still rage. Not so fast, Bubba!

If one were to dispassionately sit down and dissect the Seven Days campaign and especially its outcomes and influence on future events, one would come away with a much more compelling appreciation of the campaign outside Richmond in 1862.

For me, my "interest" in the Seven Days campaign was ignited at the Air Command and Staff College (ACSC) during my studies there as an Army officer (albeit a lowly helicopter pilot basking in the radiance of fighter jocks) in residence in 1982-83. To its eternal credit, the college had instituted an innovative "Warrior Studies" research and writing program that focused on military leadership and decision-making and did not discriminate with respect to service, war, or historical epoch. Having had two previous tours at Fort Eustis on the Peninsula, I jumped the opportunity to study Gen. Robert E. Lee in his first (and successful) campaign commanding the Army of Northern Virginia (ANV). My major "staff study" addressed Lee's adherence to the more or less standard Principles of War as adopted by the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps early in the 20th century. Ergo, it was a retrospective analysis, but extremely insightful over the long haul.

So, let me share my very limited reflections on why the Seven Days campaign was arguably more important than many Civil War and military historians seem to credit. In my 25+ years conducting battlefield staff rides primarily for senior military and civilian students and corporate executives focused on largely strategic endeavor and leadership, I'm frequently asked by participants why a battle at the tactical level, per se, is of import. The answers are simple (at least for me): 1) strategies and campaigns designed to achieve decisive outcomes never achieve the desired results in their own right. Rather, tactical battles and engagements—singularly or in sequence—essentially determine the eventual success of strategies and campaigns; and 2) the outcomes of tactical engagements invariably have operational (campaigns) and/or strategic implications. With this as prelude, let's cherry-pick the Seven Days.

As a result of the Lee's assumption of command on June 1 following Joe Johnston's wounds and subsequent occurrence of the Seven Days campaign, among other outcomes and effects generally articulated by scholars and students of the campaign:

- Lee drives McClellan back from Richmond. Richmond is then generally accepted as a strategic objective, the capture of which ("On the Richmond") would ostensibly end the war.
- Lee's reputation, tarnished by largely unsuccessful operations in western Virginia vs. McClellan in late 1861 and his initial insistence on construction of fortifications to defend Richmond (Lee was referred to as the "King of Spades" and "Grannie Lee"), is restored. For the military minds in the audience, Lee's defensive arrangements constituted a classic "economy of force" operation that provided for defense of Richmond by minimal forces while freeing up forces to take the offensive against McClellan.
- In the wake of the battle(s), Northern morale—both military and civilian—plummets while the hopes of the Confederacy rises to new heights.
- Lee reorganizes the Army of Northern Virginia and sends "Prince John" Magruder, Theophilus Holmes, and Benjamin Huger out the door (while retaining William Nelson Pendleton as his Chief of Artillery, whose performance during the campaign was roundly criticized). It is my intent to address this particular dimension in a future Dispatch offering.
- The "myth" of Lee's brilliance is created. Concomitantly, the stars of J.E.B. Stuart, James "Ole Pete," and Thomas Jonathon "Stonewall" Jackson are on the ascendant. More about this shortly.
- In the North, Henry Halleck is installed as General-in-Chief over McClellan on July 23. We can debate whether this is a plus or a minus in the long run.
- According to many observers, the outcome of the Seven Days ostensibly "fueled" Lee's fabled offensive spirit. This is an incredibly interesting assertion with long-term implications when viewed in the afterglow of Lee's stunning December 1862 victory at Fredericksburg and the heated Lee-Longstreet debate with respect to offensive campaign-defensive engagements operational approach for the 1863 Pennsylvania Campaign and especially the Battle of Gettysburg. Expanding on this branch and sequel, as most serious students of the Civil War know, this enculturation of the inherent value of the defense witnessed at Fredericksburg re-emerges at Gettysburg where Lee and Longstreet heatedly disagree on future courses of action after Day 1 ("command dissonance") and Longstreet becomes a treacherous and petulant subordinate for the remainder of the battle that many scholars and observers maintain doomed Lee's offensive operations at Gettysburg to failure.

So, one can reasonably opine that this is a fairly comprehensive array of effects, outcomes, etc., of the Seven Days campaign. Not complete, but certainly enough intellectual grist to grind for now. However, I'd like to offer a couple of different, less-articulated, more esoteric perspectives with respect to the Seven Days to titillate your intellect and hopefully marinate your thinking for the staff ride we will conduct (hopefully) in 2021. These "lines of inquiry" are mine and have been staples of my educational endeavors at National Defense University for well over two decades. Nonetheless, as always, I welcome your gentle critique and especially dialogue.

First, for me, in reflecting on the Seven Days, I see the genesis of what emerges as an incredibly successful and "winning" team for the Army of Northern Virginia: Lee, Holmes, Huger, and Jackson) were literally cobbled together and coalesced sufficiently to defend Richmond in the spring of 1862, through his vision, leadership, personnel management, and guidance and trusting in and relying upon the unique skills and attributes of Jackson, Longstreet, and Stuart, Lee was able to craft a superbly effective team after the Seven Days campaign concluded that went on to win a series of major battles in the wake of the Seven Days, to include Cedar Mountain (aka Cedar Run), Slaughter's Mountain, 2nd Manassas, Chantilly/Ox Hill, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville, when the friendly-fire death of Jackson started the slow dissolution of that amazing command structure. As evidence, we might think to Gettysburg, where Jackson was gone, Stuart was not present until the second day, and Longstreet becomes an arguably reluctant lieutenant when Lee elects to continue the battle after the major successes of July 1.

Secondly, on a much broader scale and perhaps essential to the repeated successes of the Army of Northern Virginia, we might well reflect upon the importance of understanding the strengths and weaknesses of key subordinates and the development of mutual trust and confidence between commanders (and where appropriate, staffs) that emerged after the Seven Days, a condition that Lee's leadership style played well to as the Army of Northern Virginia took the war to the North and across the Potomac. Interestingly, trust and confidence are not included in the venerated principles of war, but a careful study of military history clearly establishes that they are absolutely essential to successful planning and execution of large-scale combat operations, especially when independent operations are required. Today, we call these "distributed operations." Lee had ample opportunity to observe his major lieutenants during the Seven Days and, when the smoke had cleared, emerged from the crucible of battle with a firm sense of who was found wanting and had to be sent packing and who had the skills, intellect, and audacity to command large bodies of troops without close supervision. Jackson, Longstreet, and Stuart passed the test and quickly became the army command team that could bring the war to the North and win.

Col. (Ret.) Paul Severance recently retired as a faculty member at National Defense University. He is an accomplished student of the Seven Days campaign, among other battles and is known for his staff rides of Gettysburg.

Share this email:

Manage your preferences | Opt out using TrueRemove™

Got this as a forward? Sign up to receive our future emails.

View this email online.

P.O. Box 1176
Chatham, VA | 24531 US

This email was sent to .

To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.

emma

Subscribe to our email list.