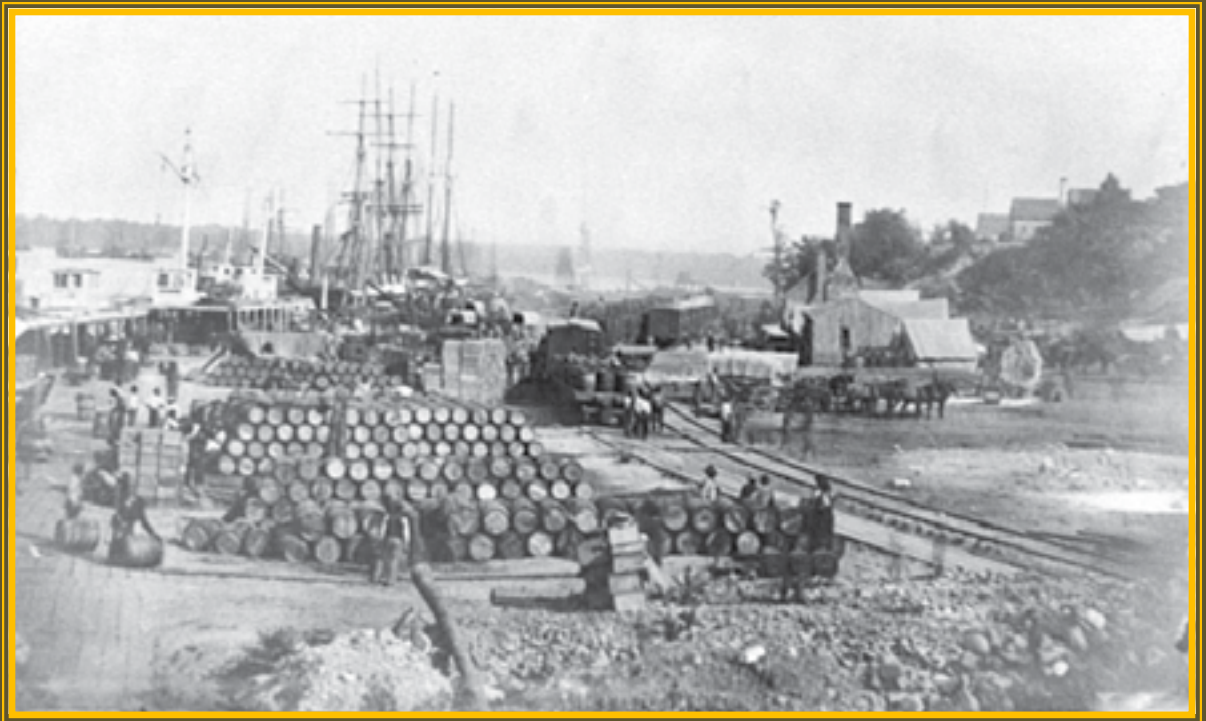

Leavenworth Papers

Number 25

A Talent for Logistics

McClellan and Grant Sustaining the Army of the Potomac in 1862 and 1864

by Curtis S. King, PhD



**Combat Studies Institute Press
US Army Combined Arms Center
Fort Leavenworth, KS**

Cover Image: Federal supplies deposited on the landing at City Point, Virginia, July 1864.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

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Combat Studies Institute Press
An Imprint of Army University Press



Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: King, Curtis S., 1959- author. | Combat Studies Institute (U.S.) Press, issuing body.

Title: A Talent for Logistics : McClellan and Grant Sustaining the Army of the Potomac in 1862 and 1864 | Curtis S. King.

Other titles: McClellan and Grant Sustaining the Army of the Potomac in 1862 and 1864 | Leavenworth Papers ; no. 25

Description: Fort Leavenworth, Kansas : Combat Studies Institute Press, 2022. | Series: Leavenworth Papers ; number 25 | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2022021793 (print) | LCCN 2022021794 (ebook) | ISBN 9781940804859 (paperback) | ISBN 9781940804859 (pdf)

Subjects: LCSH: United States. Army of the Potomac--Combat sustainability. | Peninsular Campaign, 1862. | Overland Campaign, Va., 1864. | United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Logistics.

Classification: LCC E470.2 .K49 2022 (print) | LCC E470.2 (ebook) | DDC 973.7/3--dc23/eng/20220523 | SUDOC D 110.9:25.

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022021793>.

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2022021794>.

Foreword

The Leavenworth Papers is one of the longest-running series of historical monographs in the field of military history. Launched in 1981, the series sought to bring careful historical research to bear on contemporary US Army interests. As the Army's mission has changed over the last four decades, the topics of the Leavenworth Papers also evolved from Cold War concerns to unconventional warfare and contingency operations across the globe.

Curtis S. King's Leavenworth Papers *25 A Talent for Logistics* is the first volume in the series to examine the connection between logistics and maneuver. Dr. King uses the American Civil War as the setting for his examination of how logistics shaped the campaigns of two US Army commanders, George B. McClellan and Ulysses S. Grant. As this study shows in great detail, key decisions made by McClellan and Grant hinged as much on logistical matters as they did operational factors. Moreover, King shows how both commanders made these decisions in a joint-operations environment which, at the same time, offered more resources and greater complexity.

These insights about the paramount importance of logistics in warfare remain relevant today. As seen in the 2022 Russia-Ukraine War and other recent conflicts, new technologies that promise to revolutionize the battlefield often have a muted effect above the tactical level if soldiers are not fed, fueled, armed, and equipped adequately. The experience of McClellan and Grant during the American Civil War so vividly described in this Leavenworth Paper offers today's military professionals the type of enduring lessons that prove invaluable in time of war.

Donald P. Wright
Deputy Director
Army University Press

August 2022



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Publisher's Note on the Use of Civil War Terms

The Army University Press supports the professional military education of Soldiers and leader development. Books are published by our press that describe the historical facts pertaining to the American Civil War and acknowledge that the legacy of that war is still at the forefront of our national conversation. We intend to describe the political and social situation of the Civil War in a neutral manner. For example, the traditional terms to describe the opposing sides, North and South, are only used for grammatical variety, as they ascribe generalities that certainly did not apply to the totality of the “North” or the “South.” Many local citizens who resided in states that openly rebelled against the United States government were not in favor of secession, nor did they believe that preserving slavery warranted such a violent act.

Similarly, citizens in states who remained loyal to the United States did not all feel a strong commitment toward dissolving the institution of slavery, nor did they believe Lincoln's views represented their own. Thus, while the historiography has traditionally referred to the “Union” in the American Civil War as “the northern states loyal to the United States government,” the fact is that the term “Union” always referred to all the states together, which clearly was not the situation at all. In light of this, the reader will discover that the word “Union” will be largely replaced by the more historically accurate “Federal Government” or “United States Government.” “Union forces” or “Union army” will largely be replaced by the terms “United States Army,” “Federals,” or “Federal Army.”

The Reconstruction policy between the Federal Government and the former rebellious states saw an increased effort to control the narrative of how and why the war was fought, which led to an enduring perpetuation of Lost Cause rhetoric. The Lost Cause promotes an interpretation of the Civil War era that legitimates and excuses the secessionist agenda. This narrative has been wholly rejected by academic scholars who rely on rigorous research and an honest interpretation of primary source materials. To rely on bad faith interpretations of history like the Lost Cause in this day and age would be insufficient, inaccurate, and an acknowledgment that the Confederate States of America was a legitimate nation. The fact is that Abraham Lincoln and the United States Congress were very careful not to recognize the government of the states in rebellion as a legitimate government. Nonetheless, those states that formed a political and social alliance, even though not recognized by the Lincoln government, called themselves the “Confederacy” or the “Confederate States of America.” In our works, the Army University Press acknowledges that political alliance, albeit an alliance in rebellion, by allowing the use of the terms “Confederate,” “Confederacy,” “Confederate Army,” for ease of reference and flow of the narrative, in addition to the variations of the term “rebel.”

Acknowledgments

All authors owe a thanks to so many people who supported their efforts, and I truly must thank those who supported my work on this paper. First and foremost, I thank Dr. Glenn Robertson, who made the original suggestion to present a paper to a Society for Military History Conference based on my initial research on logistics in the Peninsula Campaign. Dr. Robertson not only suggested the topic, he was (and is) a mentor to me. He taught me about staff rides and judging these historical figures with humanity. I also want to thank Steve Clay. He helped with the Overland Campaign (he, Glenn, and I wrote a staff ride handbook on this campaign), but even more with the logistical aspects of the Peninsula Campaign—soon to be published as its own staff ride handbook. My thanks to the staff ride team at Army University Press, whose members gave me full support—especially my team chief, Kevin Kennedy. I also appreciate the great work of my text editor, Diane Walker, and graphics editor, Robin Kern. No writer could ask for better expertise and insights than from Diane and Robin. In addition, I would like to thank Kate Dahlstrand, team chief for AUP Research and Publications, who gave me great support and encouragement, as well as Angela Riotto, who gave excellent input on the structure of the paper. Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents, George and Cecelia King. They always supported me in my career and my love of history. God bless them both.

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Introduction

One often-used adage concerning military operations is “amateurs talk about tactics, but professionals study logistics.”¹ While the origin of this phrase is debated, its veracity is often accepted by military professionals, historians, and outside observers alike. Despite this general nod to the importance of sustaining military forces, too few works on military history study logistics and the intrinsic connection between logistics and operations. The ones that do exist usually give brief attention to the American Civil War, often focusing on technological innovations such as the railroad and telegraph rather than the integration of the full range of sustainment and logistical considerations with operational maneuver.² An examination of two major Civil War campaigns in Virginia—Maj. Gen. George Brinton McClellan’s 1862 Peninsula Campaign and Lt. Gen. Ulysses Simpson Grant’s 1864 Overland Campaign—can help fill this void by providing insights into the critical role logistics played in these campaigns.

At its most basic level, successful logistical planning and execution give fighting forces the most freedom to conduct combat operations—extending the geographic range of the commander’s combat forces and increasing his ability to bring the most combat power to bear on his opponents at critical points. United States military joint doctrine refers to this as operational reach: “the distance and duration across which a joint force can successfully employ military capabilities.”³ The United States Army also refers to this term when it defines the sustainment warfighting function as “related tasks and systems that provide support and services to ensure freedom of action, extend operational reach, and prolong endurance. . . . Sustainment is essential to retaining and exploiting the initiative and provides the support necessary to continue operations until mission accomplishment.”⁴ In sum, operational reach is the extent to which the commander can project combat power: in laymen’s terms, the distance he can send his fighting forces before they run out of supplies and combat power, or simply become too exhausted to conduct further combat operations.

The purpose of this book is to show that both McClellan and Grant possessed a broad grasp of sustainment and its impact on operational reach (even if these modern doctrinal terms were not used at the time). Both knew the capabilities and limitations of their logistical support, and both tried to maximize their options. In addition, their staffs and support personnel demonstrated great skill in executing the movement of bases and keeping their armies sustained, thus extending operational reach.⁵ An examination of both commanders’ measures to ensure the sustainment of their forces and the actions of the support apparatus in fulfilling their logistic objectives in both campaigns reveals proficiency in many sustainment principles such as anticipation, responsiveness, improvisation, and continuity.⁶ While some historians cringe at the use of anachronistic expressions, this book will use modern doctrinal terms in moderation to demonstrate that both commanders were skillful logisticians who understood these principles. Today’s commanders can learn from both McClellan and Grant about logistics and sustainment, and how these concepts are crucial to successful combat operations.

Before looking at these campaigns and how both commanders sustained their forces, it is useful to explore the historical assessments of United States Army leaders as operational commanders and logisticians. In the ever-expanding world of American Civil War literature, it is becoming increasingly difficult to speak of a common agreement on any topics of the conflict, particularly when examining two of the nation’s most important military leaders: McClellan

and Grant. Still, there is a popular, if not universal view, of McClellan as a great organizer and Grant as a determined fighter—images that are even reflected in Hollywood film.⁷ This popularized view of the two generals is also present in much of the academic scholarship on these commanders, but it is far too simple of a representation.⁸

McClellan was a controversial figure during the war, and the debate over his generalship has continued for more than 150 years as supporters and detractors have added their views to the body of literature.⁹ McClellan's early defenders focused on politics and the operational obstacles that he faced in his campaigns. His abilities as an administrator and logistician were heavily praised, but the details of his logistical arrangements were rarely articulated.

Early positive works on the Union general include McClellan's 1887 autobiography (edited by William C. Prime) and works by William Swinton as well as

H. J. Eckenrode and Bryan Conrad. Also, Warren W. Hassler penned a favorable analysis of McClellan's generalship in the 1950s. By the 1980s, however, a more negative view of McClellan dominated the field, arguing that he was too cautious and incapable of decisive action on the battlefield.¹⁰ Bruce Catton's popular histories of the war, particularly his trilogy on the Army of the Potomac, shed a negative light on McClellan's generalship. In addition, T. Harry Williams criticized McClellan as an operational commander, but it is Stephen Sears who has been one of the harshest critics of the Union general. Sears saw serious weaknesses in McClellan's character and focused on how the general believed flawed reports of Confederate strength and his psychological inability to commit to decisive battle. Even these negative critiques of McClellan acknowledge his administrative skills in creating the Army of the Potomac, although these works tend to mention little about McClellan's logistical handling of the Peninsula Campaign. Some recent scholars sought to restore the general's reputation.¹¹ Thomas J. Rowland and, in particular, Ethan S. Rafuse strongly defended McClellan's generalship, portraying him as subjected to political machinations and weak subordinate leadership. McClellan remains a controversial figure, particularly concerning his ability to fight and win battles.¹² On the other hand, his skills as an administrator and logistician are generally recognized by scholars, but often with little detail about those skills.¹³ This book will help to provide missing details.

As for Grant, the Federal general in chief emerged from the war as a great hero, and for a time, most works concerning Grant were positive.¹⁴ His own memoir was well-received and helped establish his reputation. Horace Porter's account of his duties as a staff officer with Grant added to this view. With only a few exceptions, writers soon after the war praised Grant as a general and as a president. Early in the twentieth century, however, critics emerged. Winston Churchill even claimed that Grant's performance against Lee "must be regarded as the negation of generalship," and by the 1970s many historians were labeling Grant as unimaginative—a dull plodder who relied on attrition to win.¹⁵ Even so, there still remained staunch defenders of



Figure 0.1. Maj. Gen. George Brinton McClellan. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 0.2. Lt. Gen. Ulysses Simpson Grant. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Grant's abilities. J. F. C. Fuller and T. Harry Williams continued to praise Grant's generalship and disputed the notion that he was a butcher. In more recent years, Grant's reputation has seen a strong revival based largely on accounts of his strategic vision and strong skills in the emerging operational art of war.¹⁶ Brooks D. Simpson and Geoffrey Perret expressed such views in their biographies of the Federal general. Although Grant's reputation as an operational commander has strong support from many historians, his appreciation of logistics is largely overlooked.¹⁷

There is a natural contrast between McClellan, the "administrator," and Grant, the "fighter," which invites further exploration as to the veracity of these claims on the largely ignored logistical side of the accepted views. In addition, these two commanders executed campaigns on some common terrain in Virginia and thus, often faced similar choices in selecting bases and determining the operational reach of their forces. An

examination of McClellan's 1862 Peninsula Campaign and Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign reveals the central roles that sustainment considerations played in both campaigns. Moreover, this analysis will show how much attention both McClellan and Grant paid to logistical matters while planning. Ultimately, the recognition of McClellan's skills as an able administrator and logistician are reinforced by his actions in the Peninsula Campaign, and Grant emerges as a master of logistical matters as well—equal to McClellan in this crucial aspect of war.

To examine both campaigns, it is valuable to understand the term "logistics" and how that influenced the selection of bases. In its broadest sense, the military term logistics means the procurement, distribution, maintenance, and replacement of material in support of military operations.¹⁸ This includes such wide-ranging issues as mobilizing an entire economy for war as well as smaller, but still important, considerations such as the amount of ammunition that each soldier should carry. Although modern United States Army doctrine identifies some differences between logistics and sustainment, these terms will be used interchangeably here. This book will primarily focus on logistics and sustainment concerns—specifically the bases, depots, and lines of supply chosen by an army commander as well as individual skill at shifting between these supply centers.¹⁹

In the course of the Civil War, commanders faced the problem of selecting bases that would best support their forces, and in many cases, the selection of the base determined the line of operations (the direction that the advancing army took when moving against its opponent).²⁰ A commander took great risk if he selected an operational course of action without providing for an adequate base of supplies. When selecting a base, Civil War commanders had to take into account several factors: facilities for storing and offloading supplies, the ability to protect and secure the base location, and perhaps most important of all, the distance of the base from the fighting forces. This latter factor—distance—was shaped by the modes of transportation available to Civil War armies. These factors will be discussed in the next chapter.

Notes

1. This quotation appears to be more modern in its origins than some attributions to Napoleon or Frederick the Great. It is most often attributed to General Robert H. Barrow, Commandant of the Marine Corps. See Brian Straight, “Soldiers Win Battles, Logistics Wins Wars,” *Modern Shipper* (4 March 2022), <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/soldiers-win-battles-logistics-wins-wars>; and “The History Forum,” modified 7 May 2014, <http://www.thehistoryforum.com/forum/viewtopic.php?f=101&t=30481&start=1>.

2. Two of the most well-known works on military logistics are Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), and John A. Lynn, ed., *Feeding Mars: Logistics in Western Warfare from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993). Van Creveld’s “intellectual tour de force” (to borrow Lynn’s words from *Feeding Mars*, 9) gave impetus to a new emphasis on the role of logistics but (again borrowing from Lynn) did not close the debate on its influence. In fact, without diminishing Van Creveld’s contribution (especially in tying logistical support to operational capability), it is fair to point out that he omitted the American Civil War completely in his survey. Thus, his extensive look at 1864–70 European use of railroads, while rightly looking at the failure of European powers to effectively employ railroads after mobilization, ignored the relatively effective operational use of rail lines by Civil War commanders. In addition, he did not address waterborne supplies (perhaps because the European combatants at the time did not make much use of waterways for supply support). Similarly, Lynn’s collection of essays contains only one chapter covering the Civil War (Robert V. Bruce, “The Misfire of Civil War R&D”); this essay was devoted only to the development of new weapons technology. Among books devoted specifically to Civil War logistics, Jonathan K. Rice, *Moving Mountains: A Study in Civil War Logistics* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Corp, 2011) contains excellent detail on the nuts and bolts of tactical logistics (items such as the loading and marking of supply wagons) but does not look at the role of logistics in shaping the operational campaigns. At the strategic level, Christopher R. Gabel’s *Railroad Generalship: Foundations of Civil War Strategy* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 1997) and *Rails to Oblivion: The Decline of Confederate Railroads in the Civil War* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2002) are superb works that argue Union forces managed railroads more effectively than their Confederate counterparts. One of the most recent works concerned with logistics is Earl J. Hess, *Civil War Logistics: A Study of Military Transportation* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2017). Hess does a superb job of explaining the details and differences between rail, river, sea, and wagon transport in the Civil War. However, Hess’s book is focused on the methods of moving supplies to the forces, but not on the selection of bases in individual campaigns. For example, Hess mentioned McClellan in only four pages of his work. Addressing the effects of logistics on specific campaigns was clearly not Hess’s goal.

3. Joint Force Command, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: 2017), GL-14.

4. Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: 2019), Glossary-4.

5. Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 4-0, *Sustainment Operations* (Washington, DC: 2019), Glossary-5. A base is defined as a locality from which operations are projected or supported.

6. FM 4-0, Glossary.

7. “Indecision,” *In Harm’s Way*, YouTube, posted 26 April 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXzNQHNsQHK>.

8. Much of the remainder of the introduction covers the historiography of McClellan and Grant, examining the biases of many works toward both commanders’ abilities as operational and logistical leaders. One more recent work on the Army of the Potomac’s leadership did not perpetuate biases concerning McClellan and Grant: Stephen Sears, *Lincoln’s Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army*

of the Potomac (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017). Sears, while certainly sharp in his criticism of McClellan as a leader in battle, laid out his case with strong evidence and gave the Union commander due credit as a trainer and organizer. The author was certainly even-handed in his treatment of Grant and Meade as operational leaders, pointing out weaknesses in the command structure between the two and their successes and setbacks under those conditions. Sears was also more complimentary than most Civil War authors regarding McClellan and Grant on the issue of logistics, giving both commanders credit due with more detail than other works. Even so, Sears’s broad narrative did not extensively analyze sustainment.

9. When examining McClellan’s ledger of the historiography, the usual starting point is his edited autobiography—George B. McClellan, *McClellan’s Own Story: The War for the Union, the Soldiers who Fought It, the Civilians who Directed It, and his Relations to It and to Them*, ed. William C. Prime (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1887). This presented a positive view of McClellan, as did William Swinton, *Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac* (1882; repr., Secaucus, NJ: The Blue & Grey Press, 1988, originally published in 1882). Another book, H. J. Eckenrode and Bryan Conrad, *George B. McClellan: The Man Who Saved the Union* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1941), portrays McClellan as a great commander who accomplished much in the face of adversity from opponents on the battlefield as well as political adversaries in the North. See also Warren W. Hassler, *General George B. McClellan: Shield of the Union* (Baton Rouge, LA: University of Louisiana Press, 1957), for another favorable analysis of McClellan’s generalship.

10. The historical view of McClellan turned decidedly more negative with the growing popularity of Bruce Catton’s works in the 1950s and 1960s. Catton’s *Mr. Lincoln’s Army* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1951) and *Terrible Swift Sword* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1963) depict McClellan as an ineffective operational commander. Around the same time as Catton, T. Harry Williams published works on Union military leaders that were generally unfavorable to McClellan and positive toward Grant. These included *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952) and *McClellan, Sherman, and Grant* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1962). Later, even more negative works on McClellan appeared; see Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988) and the same author’s *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992). Both of these books depicted McClellan as seriously flawed.

11. After Sears’s works on McClellan, others have defended the general; see Thomas J. Rowland, *George B. McClellan and Civil War History: In the Shadow of Grant and Sherman* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press 1998). Another more positive view is Ethan S. Rafuse, *McClellan’s War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005). These works give great credit to McClellan as an administrator and logistician (but few details). Rafuse is more specific in praising McClellan’s mastery of logistics in the Peninsula and his change of base from White House to Harrison’s Landing in “Fighting for Defeat? George B. McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign and the Change of Base to the James River” in *Civil War Generals in Defeat*, ed. Steven E. Woodworth (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 71-94. Two other works illustrate the continuing fascination with the Army of the Potomac and McClellan. Jeffrey D. Wert, *The Sword of Lincoln: The Army of the Potomac* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005) provides a somewhat balanced account of McClellan. Wert summed up McClellan’s performance in the Peninsula: “Except for the reported Kearny incident, the criticism or discontent simmered beneath the surface. McClellan had many defenders, and whenever he appeared among the troops, they cheered him. The fact remained, however, that the campaign exposed his failings as an army commander” (124). As for Grant, Wert restated the usual view that Grant “saw warfare in unvarnished terms and was a relentless foe who understood and accepted that fighting meant killing” (327) while ignoring Grant as a logistician. At the time of this book, Russel H. Beatie was writing an extensive multi-volume work on the Army of the Potomac. He had completed three volumes: *Army of the Potomac. Birth of Command, No-*

ember 1860–September 1861, vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002); *Army of the Potomac. McClellan Takes Command, September 1861–February 1862*, vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004); *Army of the Potomac. McClellan's First Campaign, March–May 1862*, vol. III (New York: Savas Beatie, 2007). Beatie was a strong defender of McClellan as demonstrated by his summation of the Peninsula Campaign: “And in the first real joint arms operation in American history, the Navy and the president would fail. Contrary to the views of the bashers, McClellan’s complaints to Ellen [his wife], the only person to whom he unburdened himself, were justified, truthful, and fair” (vol. III, xxi). While Beatie may be too accommodating to McClellan’s operational leadership, he presented some good original research into McClellan as an administrator and logistician. Another recent work, Jeffrey W. Green, *McClellan and the Union High Command, 1861–1863* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2017) looked at the strategic level interaction between McClellan and Lincoln and the political nature of the war, but it had little to tell us about staff and logistics.

12. Even though there have been supporters of McClellan in the past fifteen years, he continues to receive scathing criticism. See Edward H. Bonekemper III, *McClellan and Failure: A Study of Civil War Fear, Incompetence, and Worse* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2007) and John T. Hubbell, “The Seven Days of George Brinton McClellan,” in *The Richmond Campaign of 1862*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 28–43.

13. One exception to the lack of focus on logistics in the Peninsula campaign is William J. Miller, “Scarcely Any Parallel in History: Logistics, Friction, and McClellan’s Strategy for the Peninsula Campaign” in *The Peninsula Campaign of 1862*, vol. 2, ed. William J. Miller (Campbell, CA: Savas Woodbury Publishers, 1995), 129–88. In his chapter of the anthology he also edited, Miller discussed the bases selected by McClellan in the campaign and some of the details of supplying the army. However, Miller’s work has some weaknesses. First, his thesis was that McClellan had “too many men” to logistically support: “There is ample evidence, in fact, to indict McClellan’s plan to take Richmond from the Tidewater as logistically naive and therefore strategically unsound.” (132). This thesis was weakened by the lack of evidence that lack of logistics ever limited McClellan’s options. Miller discussed anecdotal evidence of shortages of food (never ammunition) and the bad roads during the siege at Yorktown, 142–44; but he did not mention that McClellan was in a siege because of his own fear of Confederate numbers and entrenchments—not a lack of supplies. This brings up the larger point that McClellan always believed he needed more troops and could supply them, and that he never limited an operation based on a lack of logistical support. In fact, the main limit, in McClellan’s concept, was his lack of troops, and thus the need to use siege artillery to make up the difference in combat power.

14. Gary Gallagher provided an insightful overview of the historiography of Grant in his dual book review of Michael Korda, *Ulysses S. Grant: The Unlikely Hero* (New York: Harper Collins, 2004) and Josiah Bunting III, *Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: Times Books, 2004). The review is titled “The American Ulysses: Rehabilitating U. S. Grant,” *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Summer 2005: 234–41. In addition to reviewing the Korda and Bunting works, Gallagher covered the varying path of literature on Grant, which he described “as a reversed capital J, with the top of the stroke representing his towering reputation throughout the nineteenth century, the shaft tracing a steady decline toward nadir in the 1930s and 1940s, the generally flat bottom indicating a period of slight improvement from the 1950s through the 1980s, and the upward curve denoting the recent upsurge.” The early views of Grant’s generalship began with the Union commander’s own account, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (1885; repr., New York: Charles Webster & Company, 1999). Grant’s crisp writing separated his work from most autobiographies after the war and contributed to an initial positive view of his abilities. Horace Porter’s *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: The Century Company, 1897) also provided an early positive view of the Federal lieutenant general. Swinton, *Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac*, was a clear exception to the initial praise of Grant. Swinton was relatively mild in his criticism but argued that Grant’s choice of an overland line of operations (as opposed to McClellan’s move up the Peninsula) was flawed, 406–10.

15. Even as most Northern writers praised Grant after the Civil War, some writers in the South began to tear at Grant’s reputation. As Gary Gallagher’s historiographic essay explained (see note 4), authors of the “Lost Cause” genre looked to elevate Lee’s stature by portraying Grant as an inferior commander. One of the most vocal of these writers, Jubal Early, depicted Grant as a clumsy commander who only beat Lee because of a huge advantage in numbers. In summing up the height of negative opinion of Grant, Gallagher quoted from Winston Churchill’s *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, which discussed Grant’s “unflinching butchery,” and asserted that “more is expected of the high command than determination in thrusting men to their doom” (Gallagher, “The American Ulysses: Rehabilitating U. S. Grant,” 235). See William McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981) for a more recent but still mostly negative view of Grant. McFeely’s work was more of a psychological probe that found fault in Grant’s psyche, rather than an operational critique. One writer who resisted the allure of Lost Cause literature was the British military theorist, J. F. C. Fuller; see J. F. C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: De Capo Press, 1929, 1956, 1958). Fuller praised Grant’s strategy of simultaneous advances on multiple fronts in 1864, but he only gave passing credit to Grant’s selection of an overland line of advance for the Army of the Potomac. Like Fuller, Bruce Catton generally lauded Grant’s skills. See Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1968) and *A Stillness at Appomattox* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1953). T. Harry Williams in *McClellan, Sherman and Grant* provided another positive view of Grant that touched upon, if only tangentially, Grant’s logistical skills. Williams wrote that early in the war, Grant learned about “such prosaic matters as transportation facilities, ammunition supplies, rations, and maps, and he came to understand that these were the apparently little things that made up the spirit of an army” (87). In one of the few passages from any historian that directly addressed Grant’s logistics in the Overland Campaign, Williams wrote, “His transfer in 1864 of the Army of the Potomac from northwestern Virginia through the Wilderness and across the James to Petersburg, all done without any diminishment of striking power, entitles him to be ranked with Sherman as an artist in logistics” (104). A major purpose of this study is to expand upon Williams’s observation.

16. There is much literature in the last twenty years that seeks to restore Grant’s reputation. Two works stand out as powerful arguments for Grant’s generalship: Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822–1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), and Geoffrey Perret, *Ulysses S. Grant: Soldier and President* (New York: Random House, 1997, 1999). While these two works lead the way in dispelling the myth of Grant as a “butcher,” they do not address Grant’s skills as a logistician. Similarly, Gordon C. Rhea’s multiple works on the Overland Campaign praise Grant but do not go into detail on the general in chief’s logistical acumen; see *The Battle of The Wilderness, May 5–6, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern, May 7–12, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), *To the North Anna River: Grant and Lee, May 13–25, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), and *Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26–June 3, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2002, 2007). Rhea’s *Cold Harbor* provided an excellent discussion of bases and the influence on Grant’s operations, 20–24. However, Rhea cannot devote much detail to logistical issues in just three and a half pages.

17. One recent work on Grant offered an excellent summation of Grant’s career, but lacked details on his grasp of logistics; see Ron Chernow, *Grant* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018).

18. The definition of logistics in this book is simplified so as not to be overly concerned with differences in modern US Army doctrine terminology. According to Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 4-0, *Sustainment*, logistics is planning and executing the movement and support of forces. It includes aspects of military operations that deal with design and development, acquisition, storage, movement, distribution, maintenance, evacuation, and disposition of materiel; acquisition or construction, maintenance, operation, and disposition of facilities; and acquisition or furnishing of services. The

same manual defines sustainment as the provision of logistics, personnel services, and health service support necessary to maintain operations until successful mission completion. Because this study does not discuss personnel or health service issues, it will use sustainment and logistics with the same simplified definition as stated in the text.

19. There was no standard doctrine for use of the terms “base” or “depot” (or advance base and advance depot) in the Civil War, although military supply bases were frequently called depots in various reports. For the purposes of this paper, the term “base” will be used for locations used by commanders to store and stage their supplies. This will alleviate confusion with railroad depots that may or may not have been military supply bases.

20. This paper uses a simplified definition of line of operations derived from ADRP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations*, Glossary-4. The manual indicates line of operations is a line that defines the directional orientation of a force in time and space in relation to the enemy and that links the force with its base of operations and objectives.

Chapter 1

Background: Civil War Logistics

In order to understand McClellan's and Grant's use of bases, it is important to understand some of the details of Civil War logistics. In particular, the means of transporting supplies and the distance that these transportation methods could achieve were major factors for basing. In addition, a look at the Civil War bureau system will show how the bureaus that acquired the supplies interacted with the armies in the field to sustain the forces through their bases.

The two most efficient means of transporting supplies during the Civil War were by water and railroad. Of these two, movement by water was more efficient and more secure for the United States forces, which controlled the waterways with a navy far superior to their Confederate opponents. In terms of tonnage, ships could move more supplies than railroads; rail transport could still move larger amounts of supplies than wagons, however, and railroads could penetrate areas that lacked adequate waterways and ports. As for the security of supply lines, the rebels could raid and disrupt lengthy rail lines with their ground forces, usually cavalry, while Federal waterborne supply lines were relatively immune from interruption by the weak rebel naval forces. While both water and rail transportation were key modes for moving supplies to United States Army forward bases, these supplies eventually had to be offloaded at the bases and brought to the fighting forces at the front by wagon.

Wagon transport presented its own set of challenges to Civil War commanders. A supply wagon carried a load of 2,000 pounds, which could support 500 men for one day. This meant that if the fighting forces were one day's distance from a base (ten to twenty miles depending on the roads), a single wagon could support 250 men—one day for the wagon to bring supplies forward and another day to return, empty, to the base. The quartermaster would need to double the number of wagons to keep 500 men supplied per day in order to have one full wagon coming forward every day, while an empty wagon returned for refilling. Clearly, if the army was two days' distance from its base, the requirement must be doubled, if three days' distance, the number was tripled. This does not even take into account that wagons were required to supply fodder for artillery and cavalry horses. Fodder—farm grains for the horses and mules—was necessary because domesticated animals could not forage on grass for too long before they suffered from illness. Civil War quartermasters also had to account for the fact that the horses and mules that pulled the supply wagons consumed their own fodder, and the drivers ate food. For this reason, an army commander not only wanted to select a large rail or water base to supply his army and make his base secure; he also strove to have the base as close as possible to the front to minimize the wagon haul distance.¹

With these base and transportation considerations in mind, both McClellan and Grant faced some similar logistics questions as they planned their respective campaigns in 1862 and 1864. What were the available water and rail bases in the Virginia Theater? Which of these potential bases could best handle the required quantity of supplies? Which were the most secure? Where were these bases located in relation to potential lines of operation (to minimize wagon haul distance)? How difficult would it be to shift bases as the campaign progressed? Certainly, McClellan and Grant had numerous other critical considerations in determining the line of operations of their campaigns such as enemy forces and geographical objectives, operational and tactical

effects of terrain, and even political factors such as the heightened need to protect Washington, DC, from Confederate attack. Notwithstanding the importance of these operational and political factors, logistical concerns were major influences on the lines of operations chosen by the two United States Army commanders.

Army field army commanders such as McClellan and Grant relied on the War Department to provide sustainment at the national level. Edwin M. Stanton took over the War Department from Simon Cameron on 20 January 1862 and served as President Abraham Lincoln's secretary of war for the remainder of the Civil War. The Army's structure of bureaus and departments, often referred to as "the bureau system," nominally reported to Stanton at the War Department; but in reality, each bureau and department chief retained considerable autonomy. Moreover, the bureau and department heads were not part of a general staff that integrated operational and logistic functions; they had virtually no role in operational planning and did not report to the general in chief (a position that was empty during much of the Peninsula Campaign and held by Grant during the Overland Campaign). This lack of a truly unified command structure at the Army level was not corrected until the reforms of Elihu Root at the turn of the century nearly forty years after the Civil War. Despite its weaknesses, the Civil War era bureau system functioned sufficiently in terms of acquiring and distributing logistics at the national level.²

As noted in Figure 1.1, the bureaus reflected many of today's combat support and combat service support branches.³ The three United States Army departments most concerned with logistics during the Civil War were quartermaster, subsistence (commissary), and ordnance. The engineer bureau had only a small part in logistics at the national level, although engineers at the field army level and below had a much greater logistical role through building bridges, improving roads, and helping to ease the transport of supplies. Of the three main logistics organizations, the quartermaster had the most extensive responsibilities. A report from the era listed these duties:

The quartermaster's department is charged with the duty of providing the means of transportation by land and water for all the troops and all the material of war. It furnishes the horses for artillery and cavalry, and for the trains; supplies tents, camp and garrison equipment [sic], forage, lumber, and all materials for camps; builds barracks, hospitals, wagons, ambulances; provides harness, except for artillery horses; builds or charters ships and steamers, docks and wharves; constructs or repairs roads, bridges, and railroads; clothes the army; and is charged generally with the payment of all expenses attending military operations which are not expressly assigned by law or regulation to some other department.⁴

The success of the quartermaster department in providing logistical support to the Army of the Potomac, as well as all Federal forces, was due in large measure to the efforts of the quartermaster general of the US Army throughout the Civil War, Montgomery C. Meigs. Any discussion of sustainment and the Union War effort should include this integral man's actions. While the army commanders' selection of bases was often predicated on the ability to move supplies from the base to the fighting forces, Meigs was the crucial officer who ensured there were sufficient supplies at the national level to be moved to the bases. Meigs's professionalism and skill ensured that the Federal armies were well sustained throughout the war; McClellan and Grant never had to worry about Meigs and his quartermaster's efforts to provide supplies.

Federal Bureaus and Departments in 1861

Quartermaster Department

Ordnance Department

Subsistence Department (Commissary General of Subsistence)

Engineer Bureau or Corps of Engineers (including the Topographical Engineer Bureau after 1863)

Medical Department

Adjutant General's Department

Inspector General's Department

Pay Department (Paymaster General)

Judge Advocate General's Department

Source: William Glenn Robertson, Lt. Col. Edward P. Shanahan, Lt. Col. John I. Boxberger, and Maj. George E. Knapp, *Staff Ride Handbook for the Battle of Chickamauga, 18–20 September 1863* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1992), 1–2.

Figure 1.1. Federal Departments and Bureaus in 1861. The listings are similar to many of today's combat support and combat service support branches. Created by Army University Press.

While not as wide-ranging as the quartermaster department, the subsistence and ordnance departments also performed essential logistics functions. The subsistence department (sometimes referred to as the commissary or commissary general) provided food for the soldiers, and the ordnance department supplied weapons and ammunition. The commissary general for subsistence attempted to provide each man with a daily ration of "beef, salt and fresh, pork, bacon, flour, pilot or hard bread, cornmeal, coffee, sugar, beans, peas, rice, hominy molasses, vinegar, soap, candles, and desiccated vegetables." According to a contemporary source:

All provisions are purchased by contract, proposals to furnish them having been invited by public advertisement. . . . The quartermaster provides transportation for all subsistence from the place of delivery by the contractors to the army, and the buildings in which to store it. The special duty of the commissary is to keep watch of the amounts on hand, maintain a full supply, and notify the quartermaster to furnish transportation and storehouses when needed.⁵

Thus, the commissary general purchased the food for the soldiers, and the quartermaster office provided transportation of the rations to the armies.

The commissary general of the United States armies when McClellan took command of the Army of the Potomac was Col. George Gibson. However, Gibson died several months later, and Joseph Pannell Taylor, brother of former president Zachary Taylor, assumed the position of commissary general. Joseph Taylor enlisted in the War of 1812 and, after being discharged then reinstated, progressed slowly as a staff officer in the commissary department. He was brevetted colonel for “meritorious conduct particularly in performing his duties in prosecuting the war with Mexico.”⁶ Taylor served as commissary general during the Peninsula Campaign and the Overland Campaign, rising to the rank of brigadier general. He ensured that all United States armies were fed during the war through the contracting and purchase of foodstuffs. He also provided for beef cattle that traveled with the Union armies. He died of natural causes on 29 June 1864, not long after Grant had executed his crossing of the James River. Taylor is less known than Meigs, perhaps partly because the commissary (subsistence) department had less to do with the transportation of materiel to United States bases than the quartermaster department. Even so, Taylor was a competent and effective administrator.

The Union ordnance department, under Col. James Wolfe Ripley from April 1861 to September 1863, was effective in delivering arms and ammunition to the Federal armies, but not without controversy. Ripley, a native of Connecticut, and early graduate of West Point (1814), served with Andrew Jackson in the Seminole War.⁷ He had long assignments as an ordnance officer at the Kennebec Arsenal and the Springfield Arsenal, and then as the Pacific Coast chief of ordnance. Ripley became the chief of ordnance for the United States Army in August 1861. He has been heavily criticized for opposing newer breech-loading and repeating weapons that were superior to the standard muzzle-loading infantry weapon used by the vast majority of infantry in the war. Despite his stubbornness in opposing newer weapons, Ripley expanded the Federal government’s existing system of arsenals and armories and effectively purchased weapons in the United States as well as in Europe to ensure that Federal soldiers had sufficient supplies of weapons and ammunition. George Ramsey replaced Ripley as chief of ordnance in 1863. He continued Ripley’s policies with little change through the 1864 Overland Campaign.

The Washington system of bureaus, whatever its flaws, successfully ensured that Union forces were well-supplied and also provided the model for the logistical support structure at the field army level and lower.

Early in the war, both sides developed staff systems and created models that would last throughout the conflict. Commanders at army and corps level maintained similar staffs (division and brigade commanders had smaller staffs that served more as aides and messengers than fully functional staffs). The higher the level of command, the larger its staff—but the main functions remained the same.

The army commanders’ staffs were divided into two groups. Staff doctrine was imprecise in the Civil War, and thus contemporary sources from the campaigns, as well as modern historians, have used different terms to label these groups.⁸ For the purposes of this book, the two parts of a field commander’s staff will be described as “personal staff” and “special staff.”

The personal staff normally consisted of officers selected by the commander who stayed with their commander if he moved to other positions. This personal staff, while often import-

ant in logistical matters, was primarily concerned with assisting the commander in operational concerns. The personal staff often wrote (as dictated by the commander) and distributed orders, and they acted as the commander’s eyes at the front. Although personal staffs evolved throughout the war, they normally consisted of:

- Chief of Staff
- Aides (sometimes called aides de camp)
- Military Secretaries
- Assistant Adjutant General(s)
- Assistant Inspector General(s)

The titles of the positions on a Civil War personal staff can be misleading to those who are more familiar with the terminology of modern staffs. This is most apparent with the chief of staff position. The chief of staff for a Civil War commander was not actually the chief (in charge) of either the personal staff or the special staff. He did not organize the staff officers to consider operational courses of action for the commander or coordinate the actions of logistical staff personnel. The Civil War commander’s chief of staff was normally a friend of the commander—a person who listened to him and acted as a sounding board for the commander’s ideas. McClellan chose Randolph B. Marcy, his father-in-law, for his chief of staff. This was not mere familial preference; Marcy was a West Point graduate and an experienced and skilled officer. Grant selected a personal friend, John A. Rawlins, an Illinois lawyer with no professional military background, for his chief of staff. Rawlins did have an interest in military affairs and adapted well to his role. Meade inherited a chief of staff (Daniel Butterfield) from his predecessor just before the battle of Gettysburg. He soon transferred Butterfield and brought Andrew A. Humphreys on board as his chief of staff for the Overland Campaign. Humphreys was not a relative or close personal friend, but he was a fellow Pennsylvanian who had earned Meade’s respect with his service through the first two years of the war. The chief of staff often wrote and signed orders dictated by the commander. He could perform other functions such as liaison with the War Department and United States president (a role that McClellan and Marcy preferred), but a Civil War chief of staff had far less power over the field army’s staff than we know today. The chief of staff could have some effect on logistical operations. For example, he might advise the commander on logistical matters and could write or transmit the order for a change of base, but he was not the staff officer who decided on that base. He also was not the staff officer who supervised and executed logistical operations—that was, for the most part, the quartermaster. The Civil War chief of staff was an important asset for the commander, even if his role was much more limited than today’s chief of staff.

Aides and military secretaries were other important staff officers on the personal staff. Aides occasionally helped write an order dictated by the commander but more often than not transmitted the commander’s instructions in writing or verbally. Aides could also act as observers for the commander, providing crucial information to headquarters about events at the front. Military secretaries managed the paperwork of the headquarters. Aides and military secretaries provided essential services to the commander but were not involved in the decision-making process for determining lines of operation and the bases that supported those lines.

Assistant adjutant generals and assistant inspector generals performed some of the functions of their modern namesakes, but those functions were far less extensive than today. These staff officers, unlike aides and secretaries, needed to be approved by the bureau chiefs—but field army commanders usually got the people they requested. The adjutants maintained the manpower roles of the army, but the bureaucratic demands of Civil War armies were so small compared to today that adjutants devoted less time to personnel matters and were more likely to write and deliver orders much like aides. Army-level inspector generals performed functions much in line with their title; they oversaw training and other matters and reported their findings to the commander. In sum, the personal staff was a crucial asset for the commander, but except for transmitting the commander's intent, they had a limited role with the logistical support of the field armies.

Much of the commander's special staff was more directly involved in army logistical operations, as well as some other specialized functions. The special staff usually included:

- Quartermaster
- Subsistence (Commissary)
- Ordnance
- Engineer
- Medical
- Provost Marshal
- Signal
- Pay
- Chief of Artillery
- Chaplain⁹

The special staff at the army and corps level clearly reflected each bureau's primary functions. For the most part, bureau chiefs had final appointment authority over army and corps special staff officers such as the quartermaster and commissary officer (although the bureau chiefs usually consented to recommendations for special staff officers submitted by the field commanders). The army quartermasters (at all levels) dealt with a vast variety of supplies (with the notable exceptions of food, weapons, and ammunition). The quartermaster also oversaw transportation for nearly all of the logistics (including food, weapons, and ammunition) from the depots to the army bases. This gave the army quartermaster a major role in executing a shift in base during the campaigns. In addition to the army level quartermaster, the subsistence officer (chief of commissary), ordnance officer, chief engineer, and medical chief all played a role in executing the base shifts for the army commander.

Some positions missing from Civil War staffs are integral elements of today's staffs: operations, planning, and intelligence officers (in modern terminology, the G3, G5, and G2). Without these staff officers, so crucial to the effectiveness of modern staffs, commanders like McClellan, Meade, and Grant had to evaluate intelligence reports, devise plans and courses of action—and adjust them—while ensuring that their operational plans could be adequately supported logistically with only limited input from their staff. In short, Civil War personal and

special staffs were critical in helping the commander execute his decisions (such as a change of base), but had a far smaller role in helping the commander make decisions.

With bureaus providing logistical support at the national level and small staffs at the army level coordinating the logistical efforts in direct support of operations, McClellan and Grant planned their respective campaigns. Both campaigns relied on waterborne supplies, and both commanders looked to choose bases that gave them the greatest flexibility for their operations.

Notes

1. James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775–1953* (Washington, DC: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1966). Huston covered rail and water transportation (198–214) as well as wagon transportation (215–17), and had specific sections on the Peninsula and Overland Campaigns (220–22 and 224–27). Huston included some technical campaign details (number of wagons, horses, tons of supplies, etc.); like almost all other works, however, he lacked details on the selection of the bases and their effects on campaign. See also Earl J. Hess, *Civil War Logistics: A Study of Military Transportation* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2017). Hess's work covered much of Huston's material with additional details. His structure was thematic, including chapters on the river-based transportation system, rail-based system, wagon transport, and coastal shipping. While a valuable addition to the literature, Hess did not cover specific campaigns or explain the reasons for McClellan's and Grant's selections of bases. Finally, Jonathan K. Rice, *Moving Mountains: A Study in Civil War Logistics* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2011) also contained a large amount of statistical data on the quantity of supplies consumed by the armies and their methods of transport. However, like Hess, Rice had little to say on the selection of bases, and his case study was Gettysburg with no mention of the Peninsula or Overland campaigns.

2. Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 101–7; T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 5–6; and Huston, 168–70. See also R. Steven Jones, *The Right Hand of Command: Use & Disuse of Personal Staffs in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000), 213–19. Jones offered insightful views as to the use of personal staffs, and his last chapter discussed the limitations of Civil War personal staffs and the way in which Root's reforms addressed these limitations. However, his book is limited to personal staffs and did not discuss the logistical role of staffs.

3. William Glenn Robertson, Lt. Col. Edward P. Shanahan, Lt. Col. John I. Boxberger, and Maj. George E. Knapp, *Staff Ride Handbook for the Battle of Chickamauga, 18–20 September 1863* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 1992), 1–2.

4. "US Army Quartermaster History," last modified September 2008, http://www.qmfound.com/quartermaster_1861-63.htm. A website note described the original source: "The following article was supplied by Lt. Col. A. B. Warfield, Q. M. C., and furnishes invaluable information as to the functioning of the Quartermaster Corps during the Civil War period—nothing, however, being discussed that does not apply as well today as it did then, which makes the account all the more worthwhile."

5. "US Army Quartermaster History."

6. Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University Press, 1964), 494–95.

7. Warner, 404–5.

8. Curtis S. King, William Glenn Robertson, and Lt. Col. Steven E. Clay, *Staff Ride Handbook for the Overland Campaign, Virginia, 4 May to 15 June 1864: A Study in Operational Level Command*, 2nd ed. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2009), 7–8; and R. Steven Jones, *The Right Hand of Command: Use & Disuse of Personal Staffs in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000), viii-x. In writing this study, the author used the terminology from Jones's book to label the two parts of Civil War field staffs: personal and special staffs. This avoids confusion of terms like "general staff" and "staff corps," which were the terms that Army General in Chief Winfield Scott sanctioned in 1855; these terms, however, have different modern meanings that might mislead the reader.

9. King, Robertson, and Clay, 8.

Chapter 2

McClellan's Peninsula Campaign: Planning and Initial Movement

George Brinton McClellan's rise to high command in the Civil War was accelerated by his qualifications, his early success in western Virginia, and the need for a new commander after the defeat of the United States forces at the battle of First Bull Run (Manassas). Soon after that 21 July 1861 disaster, McClellan met with Abraham Lincoln in Washington, DC. The president informed the general of his new command: the Military Division of the Potomac. At the time, the command consisted of the Army of Northeastern Virginia, which had been routed at Bull Run just six days earlier, and the forces manning the defenses of Washington. The United States commander defeated at Manassas, Maj. Gen. Irvin McDowell, had done his best to prepare his army for battle—and to plead for more time to ready his green force. Despite McDowell's best intentions, the First Bull Run defeat led Lincoln to replace McDowell as commander of all United States Army forces in Washington, DC, and the surrounding area.

One of the first tasks that McClellan undertook was to build his staff—certainly essential for operational command and control but also a requirement for effective logistical and administrative functioning of the army. McDowell's staff at Bull Run was small; it included several aides, an assistant adjutant-general, an assistant quartermaster (mortally wounded during the battle), a chief of subsistence department (commissary), a chief surgeon, an acting inspector general, a chief engineer, two topographical engineers, a chief of artillery, and a senior ordnance officer. Of these officers, only the chief engineer, Maj. John G. Barnard (later promoted to brigadier general), and the chief of subsistence (commissary), Capt. (later colonel) Henry F. Clark, were retained by McClellan. Besides finding a replacement for the deceased quartermaster and several other members of McDowell's staff who McClellan believed were not up for the task, the new commander needed to expand his staff in order to support a vastly larger army.¹

McClellan began by appointing Brig. Gen. Randolph B. Marcy as his chief of staff (a position that McDowell had not designated). Even before securing approval for Marcy's appointment, McClellan began to fill the remainder Army of the Potomac staff positions. The most important in terms of logistics was the chief quartermaster for the army (sometimes referred to as assistant quartermaster general because he formally worked for Meigs, the War Department's quartermaster general). The man chosen for this position was Maj. (later promoted all the way to brigadier general) Stewart Van Vliet. It is uncertain whether McClellan or Meigs first selected Van Vliet, but both approved of the selection.² Van Vliet had two skillful subordinates who were essential to the quartermaster's efforts in the Peninsula Campaign: Col. Rufus Ingalls and Capt. Charles Greene Sawtelle. Ingalls was so good at moving the trains and executing the change of bases that after Van Vliet's resignation, Ingalls became the Army of the Potomac's quartermaster for the remainder of the war. Additionally, Ingalls praised Sawtelle for his efforts on the Peninsula: "I know of no officer here who has more zeal energy and sound judgment in business affairs."³

McClellan rounded out his logistical staff by retaining Capt. Henry F. Clark as the army's chief of subsistence (commissary) and Maj. John G. Barnard as the chief engineer. McClellan then added Lt. Col. Charles P. Kingsbury as his chief of ordnance. Maj. Charles S. Tripler became the Army of the Potomac's chief surgeon, appointed by the bureau chief in Washington, DC. Lt. Col. Delos B. Sackett assumed duties as the Army's inspector general. One last staff

officer of importance to logistical and administrative matters was the assistant adjutant general (in effect, the Army of the Potomac's senior adjutant general), Maj. Seth Williams. Williams was a favorite of McClellan, he had been a groomsman at McClellan's wedding, and his competence and reliability enabled him to continue to serve multiple Army of the Potomac commanders throughout the rest of the war. Williams was not in a logistical staff position per se, but he often wrote and transmitted orders instrumental in shifting bases and moving the army's supply trains. In sum, McClellan assembled a good, and in some cases exceptional, group of officers to support his sustainment operations.

McClellan became the general in chief of all United States armies in November 1861. Nonetheless, he continued to focus on the drill and preparation of the Army of the Potomac, even as his new duties forced him to address other theaters of the war. As the new general in chief, McClellan did not develop a staff for that position separate from the one he formed for the Army of the Potomac. This was in part due to the unique system of bureaus that controlled administration and logistics at the War Department level. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton had a moderate measure of control over the bureau chiefs, but those chiefs still retained considerable independence. McClellan used Marcy to interact extensively with Stanton and Lincoln, and indirectly with the bureaus, but McClellan's staff remained focused on the Army of the Potomac.

During his time as general in chief, McClellan gave advice and guidance to commanders in all theaters, but he remained clear that the war was to be decided in the east. All other operations were designed to allow the Army of the Potomac to defeat the rebels in Virginia in what McClellan told a reporter would be a decisive Napoleonic-style battle along the lines of Waterloo.⁴ Later, the United States Army commander's desire for decisive battle seemed to fade; but as the New Year (1862) dawned, he focused on an option that he felt would give the Army of the Potomac the best chance of defeating its rebel opponents.

McClellan seemed determined to avoid a direct approach against rebel forces at Manassas. One alternative was to take advantage of United States naval superiority to move large forces by water and land them in Virginia south and east of the rebel army. Assistant Secretary of War John Tucker's report recalled McClellan's inquiry into this possibility: "From him [McClellan] I learned that he desired to know if transportation on smooth water could be obtained to move at one time, for a short distance, about 50,000 troops, 10,000 horses, 1,000 wagons, 13 batteries, and the usual equipment of such an army."⁵ Tucker's report mentioned that McClellan himself thought the movement was feasible, but that two unnamed quartermaster officers had expressed doubts. Nonetheless, a few days later, Tucker reported back to McClellan: "I [Tucker] was entirely confident the transports could be commanded, and stated the mode by which his object could be accomplished."⁶

Perhaps Tucker embellished his role in convincing McClellan that a seaborne movement was possible against the advice of quartermaster officers. McClellan's own reports do not mention any quartermaster officers who counseled against a sea movement, and the army's quartermaster, Van Vliet, did not advise against such a move. Even so, Tucker certainly gave McClellan confidence that significant United States Army forces could be moved by water to flank the rebels in northern Virginia, and Tucker played a large part in making that movement happen.

After examining the alternatives, McClellan developed a plan to transport the Army of the Potomac by water to Urbanna on the Rappahannock River, as he explained on 3 February in

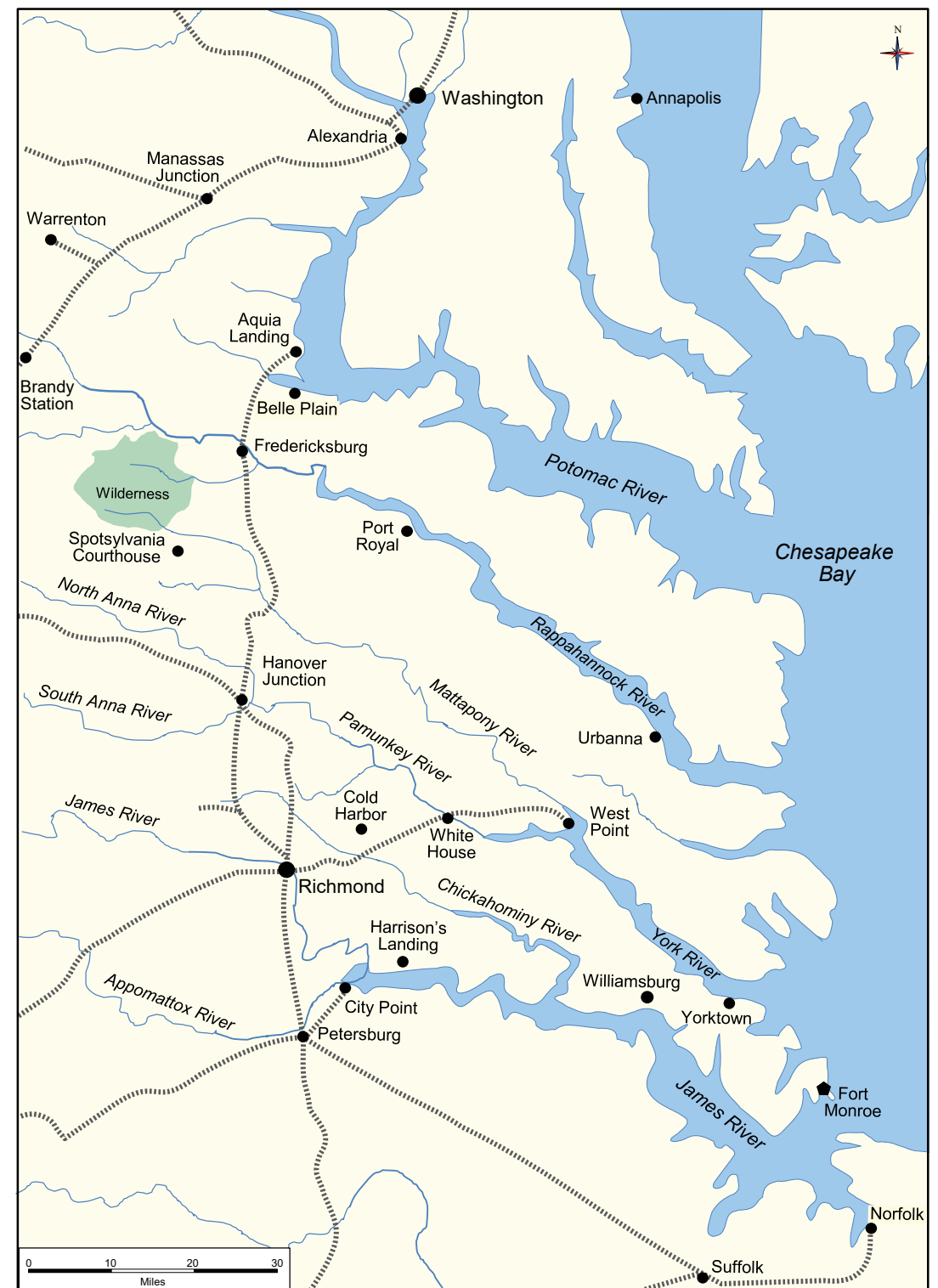


Figure 2.1. Area of Operations. Created by the author and Army University Press.

a twenty-two-page letter to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. The army commander wrote that his forces were to advance from Urbanna to West Point, “the key of that region,” which was on the York River and one day’s march from Urbanna.⁷ This would place the Army of the Potomac closer to Richmond than General Joseph E. Johnston’s Confederate army located at Manassas. The Federals could then advance on Richmond, isolating Maj. Gen. John B. Magruder’s small army on the Virginia Peninsula and forcing Johnston to abandon his Manassas position. Finally, McClellan would take Richmond before reinforcements could reach the city—or the United States Army forces would meet Johnston in open battle, hopefully forcing Johnston to be the attacker.

McClellan went on to outline some other possibilities for the campaign. If his army’s advance to Richmond from Urbanna and West Point was blocked, he could switch his base to the James River (he did not give a specific location), and operate against Richmond from the south. If he could not land at Urbanna at all, McClellan felt an alternative landing could be made on the tip of the Virginia Peninsula.⁸ The Federals could then use Fort Monroe as a base and advance up the Peninsula. McClellan did not specify his intended actions if forced to advance up the Peninsula, but it appears he intended to operate in the same way he had outlined in the Urbana option of his plan—eventually making West Point his base for the final advance on Richmond.⁹

It is clear that supply bases were an essential part of determining McClellan’s line of operations, and West Point was the pivotal supply base in his plan. Although McClellan did not specify the reasons for West Point’s importance in his Urbanna plan, there are several factors that made West Point a favorable option. First, it was an existing, albeit small, port with some facilities for offloading waterborne supplies. Second, it was easily accessible to the United States Navy (later, however, Confederate fortifications constructed at Yorktown made that accessibility more difficult). Finally, the Richmond and York River Railroad ran from West Point to the Pamunkey River at White House and then on to Richmond. If McClellan could hold West Point, he would have the best means of transporting his supplies to a base, by water to West Point, and the next best means for transportation to forward bases, by rail, near his army on the outskirts of Richmond—minimizing the length of his wagon haul.¹⁰

Quartermaster Van Vliet was not extensively involved in moving the fighting forces by water but was crucial in the planning to supply the army once it was moved. Working with the commissary, Van Vliet estimated that the Army of the Potomac would require 500 tons of food and forage daily as well as another 100 tons a day of other materiel such as tents, shoes, uniforms, and other quartermaster equipment. This did not include ammunition, which was the responsibility of the ordnance department.¹¹ Van Vliet knew that McClellan’s initial plan envisioned landing at Urbanna then moving quickly to West Point and making the latter location a major base. However, he had questions about basing and transportation. Was Urbanna to be a base and for how long? How much of the army’s trains (wagons, horses, mules) needed to be landed at Urbanna in order to supply the move to West Point? As it turned out, before the army quartermaster could address these and other questions the rebel army moved out of Manassas, and Van Vliet was forced to look at different bases on the Virginia Peninsula.

Although McClellan had formulated a plan, the Lincoln administration as well as the press and public were becoming dissatisfied with the constant delays in beginning the campaign. In addition, a setback in an attempt to take Harpers Ferry, Virginia, caused some in the North to question McClellan’s leadership.¹² Lincoln and Stanton also clashed with the general

in chief over the promotion of general officers, especially concerning corps commanders for the Army of the Potomac.¹³ Amid this growing discontent, and after a meeting with Lincoln in which the president expressed his concern over the general’s inaction, McClellan held a council of war on 7 March with his brigadier generals to vote on his Urbanna plan.¹⁴ While his subordinates were divided over the issue, McClellan managed to get an eight-to-four majority to support his plan. At the same time, McClellan realized that rebel batteries on the south side of the Potomac blocked movement on the river southeast of Alexandria, and he decided for the moment to embark the bulk of the Army of the Potomac at Annapolis on the Chesapeake instead of on the Potomac.¹⁵

Lincoln acquiesced to the majority vote of the war council and approved the Urbanna plan, but the next day, Lincoln forced McClellan’s hand on another issue—appointing corps commanders for the Army of the Potomac.¹⁶ Both the president and the general agreed on the need for the growing Army of the Potomac to be structured into corps; the number of divisions (eight and increasing) had become too large for the army commander to control, especially in a major tactical engagement. McClellan wanted to appoint his own corps commanders, but he kept delaying and argued that he wanted to see subordinates perform in battle before making his choices. This argument was a bit odd in that McClellan seemed to be planning for only one decisive battle near Richmond (one might ask if the decisive battle was to be fought without the army divided into corps) as well as the fact that any battle fought to “try” his commanders would have to be fought with an unwieldy division structure that McClellan himself admitted was impractical. In any event, Lincoln dictated the organization of the army into five corps and appointed the corps commanders strictly based on seniority. McDowell, the former army commander, took command of I Corps, II Corps was commanded by Brig. Gen. Edwin V. Sumner, Brig. Gen. Samuel P. Heintzelman took command of III Corps, and IV Corps was placed under Brig. Gen. Erasmus D. Keyes. A short-lived V Corps, basically mobile troops protecting Washington, was placed under Brig. Gen. Nathaniel P. Banks, a political appointee. This latter unit was never truly a part of the Army of the Potomac, and lost its corps designation when transferred to the Department of the Shenandoah in early April.

With his plan approved and the army restructured (even if not to his liking), all appeared set for the campaign to begin. Unfortunately for the Army of the Potomac commander, his original target of Urbanna was rendered moot when the rebel commander in northern Virginia, General Joseph E. Johnston, withdrew his forces from their advanced position at Manassas to a new line on the Rappahannock River on 8 and 9 March. The new Confederate location was much closer to Urbanna, and any United States force landing there could potentially be overwhelmed by a rebel attack before McClellan could land and consolidate his army.

In addition to upsetting the commander’s Urbanna plan, Johnston’s withdrawal from Manassas proved to be an embarrassment to McClellan when his army advanced and examined the abandoned Confederate works. The United States Army soldiers, as well as the Northern press and political leaders, discovered that the rebels had numerous decoy “guns” made of wood (so-called Quaker guns) and that the rebel position was not nearly as strong as McClellan had been claiming. On 11 March, Lincoln held a cabinet meeting at which McClellan’s actions, or lack thereof, were discussed. Lincoln decided to relieve McClellan of his duties as general in chief so that the general could focus on commanding the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln remained the commander in chief (civilian head of all of the armed forces of the United States)

as prescribed in the Constitution, but the position of general in chief (military leader of all of the armies) remained empty until after the Peninsula campaign.¹⁷

Despite the setbacks caused by Johnston's withdrawal, McClellan soon switched to his alternative plan to base at Fort Monroe on the Virginia Peninsula, and he continued making arrangements to transfer the Army of the Potomac by sea to the new location. On 12 March, McClellan held his second council of war at Fairfax Court House, Virginia. Those in attendance were the four new corps commanders (McDowell, Sumner, Heintzelman, and Keyes) and the army's engineer, Barnard. McClellan sought buy-in from his subordinates for operations on the Peninsula from the base at Fort Monroe. With some misgivings, McClellan got the support he needed from his corps commanders and chief engineer. Also around this time, the army commander realized that the removal of Confederate batteries from the south side of the Potomac River opened Alexandria as an embarkation port for the Federal army, and he shifted the main effort for embarkation from Annapolis on the Chesapeake back to Alexandria on the Potomac.¹⁸

On 19 March, McClellan wrote another long letter to Stanton outlining his updated plan of operations.¹⁹ After making Fort Monroe his initial base in place of Urbanna, the Army of the Potomac commander again planned to advance to West Point and use that as his forward base in the operations against Richmond. West Point had always loomed large in McClellan's planning, and its importance was magnified in March 1862 because of the presence of the rebel ironclad, CSS *Virginia*, which blocked Union access to the James River. For the time being, the Federals had to rely solely on the York River (and its tributary, the Pamunkey) for a supply line up the Peninsula. In his letter, McClellan explained that establishing the forward base at West Point would require his army to take the rebel stronghold at Yorktown, which blocked United States naval movement farther up the York River.²⁰ He hoped to seize Yorktown by either a direct assault from the river (an option that required extensive naval support—but an unlikely option while United States ships were distracted by the *Virginia*), or by an overland advance from Fort Monroe. With an advance from Fort Monroe, if rapid enough, his troops might take Yorktown with a rapid assault. However, a swift rebel response and strong defenses at Yorktown might force McClellan into a siege. The potential siege meant that the Army of the Potomac's logistical planning needed to include bases that could support heavy siege artillery—a rail or water base as close as possible to the front lines of the siege.

One reason for McClellan's expectations of a siege was his constant over-estimation of Confederate troop strength. Whether the United States commander was a victim of bad intelligence or encouraging estimates that supported his own preconceptions, his planning was clearly shaped by a conviction that he faced an enemy force that was at least equal, and usually superior, in infantry strength to his own army.²¹ To make up for his perceived lack of troop strength, McClellan turned to heavy artillery—a weapon that the Federals possessed in superior quantity and quality. Perhaps influenced by observing siege warfare in the Crimea, McClellan seemed more comfortable in a set-piece siege rather than a fluid battle, and this tendency reinforced the need for supply bases to support bringing heavy artillery close to the front for a siege.²² The requirement for the United States Army to seek out bases that supported siege artillery limited McClellan's options and his operational reach. However, this limitation was based on faulty intelligence assessments that overestimated rebel infantry strength, as well as McClellan's preconceived beliefs that heavy artillery was his best (perhaps only) option to defeat Confederate

numbers and entrenchments. It was McClellan's operational decision that imposed limitations on his logistical apparatus—the need to find bases and supply lines that supported siege artillery—not a decision that was forced on McClellan because of demands from his logisticians. McClellan's logisticians did remarkable work in supporting plans based on facing an enemy purported, incorrectly, to be well stronger than the Army of the Potomac.

While McClellan articulated his operational plan for the advance up the Peninsula to the Secretary of War, the Army of the Potomac had already begun its move to the Virginia Peninsula. In fact, McClellan, his staff, and War Department personnel had initiated the steps for a sea movement in February. Because the Confederates initially blocked access to the Potomac River while they still held their position at Manassas, Federal planners looked for multiple locations to embark McClellan's army. After Johnston's withdrawal from Manassas freed up locations on the Potomac River, the bulk of the Army of the Potomac moved from Alexandria, Virginia; Annapolis, Maryland; and other ports near Washington to Fort Monroe. This movement was a magnificent logistical feat, termed by a British observer as “the stride of a giant.”²³



Figure 2.2. Fort Monroe at the time of the Civil War. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The movement was a complex operation that involved multiple coordinating organizations and personnel. The Navy provided escort ships and protection for the movement but played a smaller role in the logistics of the move. The War Department and McClellan's staff procured and controlled the transport craft, and they determined the locations, schedule, and details for embarkation at Fort Monroe. Meigs, the United States Army quartermaster general, and Van Vliet, chief quartermaster of the Army of the Potomac, were important to the successful trans-

portation of the army. In addition, assistant war secretary Tucker was a crucial player in the move, who according to historian Stephen Sears, “managed a logistical tour de force” in moving the Army of the Potomac to the Peninsula.”²⁴ Tucker reported that he and Van Vliet knew of the decision for a sea movement as early as 27 February. Tucker went on to report:

Directions were given to secure the transportation, and any assistance was tendered. He [Van Vliet] promptly detailed to this duty two most efficient assistants in his department. Col. Rufus Ingalls was stationed at Annapolis, where it was then proposed to embark the troops, and Capt. Henry C. Hodges was directed to meet me in Philadelphia, to attend to chartering the vessels.²⁵

Tucker added a statement from Captain Hodges that listed the vessels chartered and costs:

- 113 steamers, at an average price per day for all vessels of \$215.10.
- 188 schooners, at an average price per day for all vessels of \$24.45.
- 85 barges, at an average price per day for all vessels of \$14.27.²⁶

Finally, the assistant secretary listed the total number of troops and supplies transported to the Peninsula: “121,500 men, 14,592 animals, 1,150 wagons, 44 batteries, 74 ambulances, pontoon bridges, telegraph materials, and an enormous quantity of equipage, & c., required for an army of such magnitude.”²⁷ Tucker concluded: “For economy and celerity of movement, this expedition is without a parallel on record.”²⁸ Not long after the army’s successful move, Tucker faded from the scene. He initially was appointed to one of two temporary assistant secretary of war positions that Congress established at Stanton’s request; when the positions expired in January 1863, the temporary positions were not renewed.²⁹ Tucker departed from the Federal war effort, but his efforts in support of the move to Fort Monroe were essential.

McClellan’s quartermaster, Van Vliet, supported Tucker’s effort and directed his assistant quartermaster, Lt. Col. Rufus Ingalls, to assist Tucker in the embarkation of the Army of the Potomac. Van Vliet also arranged to expand the wharfs at Annapolis and made other improvements to prepare for the movement:

I had previously ordered Captain Sawtelle to break up his depot at Perryville, and to transfer the wagons, ambulances, animals, & c., to Fortress Monroe. Some two or three months previous to this I had ordered a large amount of forage to be purchased and stored in the city of New York. This had been put afloat just before the embarkation of the troops, and the vessels directed to repair to Fortress Monroe and keep their cargoes on board until further orders. In the mean time I had ordered Capt. C. W. Thomas, assistant quartermaster, to Fortress Monroe to take charge of the depot to be established there for the army.³⁰

In his account, McClellan’s quartermaster reflected Tucker’s report on the scale of the effort when he listed the craft utilized in the move to the Peninsula: “71 side-wheel steamers, 29,071 tons; 57 propellers [craft equipped with propellers], 9,824 tons; 187 schooners, brigs, and barks, 36,634 tons; and 90 barges, 10,749 tons, making in all 405 vessels, of a tonnage of 86,278 tons.”³¹

While impressive, the Army of the Potomac’s transfer to the Peninsula could not be done in one movement. McClellan had hoped to ship McDowell’s I Corps to the Peninsula in the initial

lift. The original plan was to move the army as one unit and land behind the Confederates on the lower Peninsula to flank them out of their positions, but there simply were not enough ships to move all of the troops, equipment, animals, and supplies at once. Many vessels had to make multiple trips. Also, it took time to offload a force of this size, even with the good facilities at Fort Monroe. The first troops and their support, Heintzelman’s III Corps, arrived at the fort on 17 March and began establishing Fort Monroe as a base for the Army of the Potomac. After Heintzelman, Keyes’s IV Corps then Sumner’s II Corps followed.³² The Army of the Potomac with its combat forces and logistical support structure was deployed to the Peninsula with its base secure at Fort Monroe and ready for operations by early April. McClellan himself arrived on 2 April. Even before that time, the Confederate commander on the Peninsula, Magruder, had detected the United States Army buildup, but his superiors in Richmond and Johnston along the Rappahannock River were uncertain whether the landings at Fort Monroe were just a feint or a staging of forces that would move elsewhere.³³ Thus, although it took two weeks to transfer the bulk of the army (three infantry corps, cavalry, artillery, and the needed support), the move was fast enough to catch the rebels in a weak position.

From the soldiers’ perspective, the move to the Peninsula was a break from the constant drilling near Washington and a demonstration of the growing logistical might of the United States armed forces. At all of the embarkation sites, rows of watercraft lined up to take on troops, horses, equipment, and supplies. These included barges and other vessels without engines towed by tugs, schooners, and a vast variety of other seacraft. Though the port facilities were packed, all seemed to move smoothly. A soldier from Rhode Island, Elisha Hunt Rhodes, noted that the steamer that carried his regiment was festively decorated as if ready for “a pleasure excursion;” the regimental band played patriotic tunes as the ship passed George Washington’s home at Mount Vernon.³⁴ Sailing aboard the USS *Commodore* on 1 April, McClellan also passed Mount Vernon, with the commander and other passengers observing a more solemn quiet on deck than the Rhode Islanders.³⁵ Maj. George Monteith, a staff officer for Brig. Gen. Fitz John Porter, observed rows of steamships, schooners, and tugs at Alexandria ready to transport Porter’s division. Monteith wrote that the spectacle “exceeds anything in grandeur that I ever beheld.”³⁶

Regardless of the magnitude and success of the movement, McClellan seems to have not always been pleased with Van Vliet’s performance. In a letter to his wife on 2 April, the Union commander lamented that his “great trouble is the want of wagons—a terrible drawback—but I cannot wait for them.”³⁷ He went on to say that the “harbor around here is very crowded—facilities for landing are very bad—Van Vliet (as usual) has not arrived—ever late when most needed. I hope to get possession of Yorktown day after tomorrow [4 April].”³⁸ In fact, Van Vliet’s action officer at Fort Monroe, Captain Sawtelle, had been overseeing the hiring of 1,153 men, including 1,001 teamsters, who were used in “driving government mule teams, hauling fuel, forage, etc.”³⁹ Perhaps Sawtelle’s (and Van Vliet’s) efforts were more effective than McClellan had thought, because one day after complaining to his wife, 3 April, McClellan wrote to the Navy commander supporting his operations, Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough, “I find that I have wagons sufficient to move the greater part of the force now here and have accordingly concluded to advance toward York tomorrow morning.”⁴⁰ Van Vliet could not have been a large problem if McClellan’s wagon shortage was solved in less than a day.

Like the Army of the Potomac's quartermaster, its chief commissary of subsistence, Col. Henry F. Clarke, wrestled with the extraordinary demands of the army's move to the Peninsula. In February 1862, Clarke started stockpiling rations to "be prepared for the probable future movements of the army."⁴¹ This included 600,000 "complete rations" (hardtack and salt pork with some other supplements) at Alexandria, and 2,500,000 complete rations on vessels at Fort Monroe.⁴² Once McClellan determined in mid-March that his line of operations was the Peninsula, Clarke dispatched another "large quantity of subsistence stores . . . from Washington by steamers and barges in tow of steamers to Fort Monroe. . . to supply the additional demands that would be made for rations at that post."⁴³ In addition, beef cattle were sent to Fort Monroe for the upcoming campaign. Clarke showed excellent anticipation of future needs by assigning an officer for a special task: "In the desire to be prepared for any emergency Capt. [later Lt. Col.] George Bell, commissary of subsistence was . . . directed to make arrangements to establish depots on short notice at any points at the terminus of water transportation that might thereafter be designated."⁴⁴

When the embarkation occurred, the soldiers each carried three days of rations with another three days' worth in the unit trains. On 24 March, Captain Bell, with a group of supporting clerks and other officers of the commissary, issued subsistence to the troops as they arrived and were established in camps in the vicinity of that post at Hampton and Newport News "while also discharging vessels laden with subsistence stores."⁴⁵

All in all, the responsiveness of the United States Army supply apparatus to this move was extraordinary, especially given how early this was in the war—a tribute to McClellan's construction of a staff and logistical apparatus for large-scale operations. He had predicated his original plan on a base at Urbanna, yet Fort Monroe was well-supported after the change. McClellan's staff and the Army's Quartermaster Bureau ensured that supplies and troops were transported without hindering the operational plan. The sheer extent of the movement in terms of soldiers, equipment, supplies, and speed may have surpassed what McClellan had witnessed in the Crimean War.

While this great movement was taking place, McClellan ensured that the army was prepared to be supplied by railroad from West Point, his intended main base once he had progressed up the Peninsula. He wrote to Stanton: "Please have McCallum [Brig. Gen. Daniel C. McCallum, military director of United States Railroads] provide engines and cars sufficient to transport supplies only for an army of 130,000 men, including 20,000 horses, over the West Point and Richmond Railway. The road is about twenty-eight miles long."⁴⁶ Thus, even before the advance to Yorktown, McClellan was focused on West Point and the railroad to Richmond. He planned to use the railroad to lay siege to the Confederate capital and support his heavy guns to offset the rebels' perceived advantage in numbers.

With his forces transported to Fort Monroe and a logistical base established there, McClellan was ready to begin the next phase of his campaign. The water transport of his forces had bypassed Johnston's rebels on the Rappahannock, and he only faced a small force on the Peninsula in a line deployed from Yorktown on the York southwest to the James River. If McClellan could push aside this enemy force, his next base might well be White House, the much-coveted location for a siege of Richmond. However, if the rebels held at Yorktown, McClellan faced a possible siege long before nearing the Confederate capital.

Notes

1. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), series I, vol. XI, part I, 322–23; hereafter cited as *OR*. See William J. Miller, "Scarcely Any Parallel in History: Logistics, Friction, and McClellan's Strategy for the Peninsula Campaign," in *The Peninsula Campaign of 1862*, vol. 2, ed. William J. Miller (Campbell, CA: Savas Woodbury Publishers, 1995), 132–35, for a discussion of the unprecedented demands for an American army the size of McClellan's Army of the Potomac.
2. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 157.
3. Miller, "Scarcely Any Parallel in History," 182.
4. Stephen W. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992), 6.
5. *OR*, series I, vol. V, 46.
6. *OR*, series I, vol. V, 46.
7. "McClellan to Stanton, 3 February 1862," in Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860–1865* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 167.
8. Although there are several peninsulas in Virginia that jut into the Chesapeake Bay, "the Peninsula" in this study refers to the Virginia Peninsula between the York, its tributary the Pamunkey, and the James rivers.
9. "McClellan to Stanton, 3 February 1862," in Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 167–70.
10. See Miller, "Scarcely Any Parallel in History," 138–40, for a discussion of McClellan's forces not being able to rely on foraging. Miller indirectly indicated that McClellan would not have considered living off the land on the Peninsula for political reasons—his restrained policy on confiscation of provisions from civilians. Miller claimed that conditions on the Peninsula and limited agricultural production made McClellan's conservative policy "moot," but even if the Peninsula had been more conducive to foraging, it is hard to see McClellan "living off the land" given his policy of protecting civilians.
11. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159 and Miller, 137. Miller quoted Van Vliet's estimate. He posited that an army of 140,000 men and 40,000 horses would require 700 tons of supplies a day; however, McClellan never had more than 120,000 men, so 600 total tons a day seems on target.
12. Russell H. Beatie, *Army of the Potomac: McClellan's First Campaign, March–May 1862*, vol. III (New York: Savas Beatie, 2007), 11–12; and Stephen W. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army of the Potomac* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 152–54.
13. Beatie, 23.
14. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 3–4.
15. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*, 157–59.
16. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 8, and Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988), 160–61.
17. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 17.
18. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*, 165–68.
19. "McClellan to Stanton, 19 March 1862," in Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 215–16.
20. "McClellan to Stanton," 215–16.
21. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 30, 104–7; and Ethan S. Rafuse, *McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 132. Sears probably provided the harshest portrayal of McClellan's penchant for overestimating Confederate numbers. The author viewed McClellan's problem as a psychological weakness, attributing superhuman qualities to his opponents to justify his own inaction. Rafuse, on the other hand, barely

mentioned McClellan's false impression of Confederate strength and indicated that its effect was not a driving factor in his generalship.

22. Sears, 38–43, 112.
23. Sears, 39.
24. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*, 172.
25. *OR*, series I, vol. V, 46.
26. *OR*, series I, vol. V, 46.
27. *OR*, series I, vol. V, 46.
28. *OR*, series I, vol. V, 46.
29. William Marvel, *Lincoln's Autocrat: The Life of Edwin Stanton* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 278–79.
30. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 158.
31. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 158. See also O'Harrow, 152–53.
32. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*, 172.
33. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 25.
34. Sears, 23.
35. Beatie, *McClellan's First Campaign*, 273–74.
36. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 23.
37. Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 225.
38. Sears, 225.
39. As quoted by Miller, "Scarcely Any Parallel in History," 141 (footnote 15). Miller's source was Sawtelle's Report from Record Group 92, National Archives, Washington, DC, File 780.
40. Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 226.
41. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 167.
42. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 167.
43. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 167.
44. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 167.
45. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 167.
46. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 16.

Chapter 3

McClellan's Peninsula Campaign: Yorktown to Richmond

The initial force that McClellan landed on the Peninsula included three infantry corps with some additional infantry, artillery, and cavalry units. The infantry corps were Sumner's II Corps, Heintzelman's III Corps, and Keyes's IV Corps (each corps commander was promoted to major general soon after this campaign began). The army's Reserve Brigade of United States Army Regulars, soldiers who had been in the Regular Army before the start of the war, led by Brig. Gen. George Sykes, also joined the troops arriving on the Peninsula. Other forces available were a small cavalry contingent, commanded by Brig. Gen. George Stoneman, and supporting artillery to include a large complement of heavy, siege artillery. McClellan would have preferred to have McDowell's I Corps with the rest of the army on the Peninsula. Lincoln and Stanton's concerns about protecting Washington, however, kept McDowell's corps near the capital. McClellan initially planned to transfer McDowell's force by sea to the Peninsula when the threat to Washington was minimized.

With his army (minus I Corps) successfully based at Fort Monroe, McClellan began his movement up the Peninsula on 4 April. His initial objective was Yorktown where rebel guns blocked not only his army's movement up the Peninsula, but also prevented him from basing his operations farther up the York and Pamunkey rivers—particularly at West Point. McClellan had also hoped to use the James River, on the other side of the Peninsula, for bases; however, the Confederate ironclad, CSS *Virginia*, prevented the United States Navy from advancing up



Figure 3.1. Map of Yorktown and Williamsburg, 1862. Created by the author and Army University Press.

the James. The Confederate commander on the Peninsula, Brig. Gen. John B. Magruder, had only 15,000 men to face McClellan's initial advance of more than 60,000. Magruder posted most of his men at Yorktown, with the rest spread thinly in a line behind the Warwick River from Yorktown across the Peninsula to the James River (the Warwick Line). Facing this opposition, McClellan developed two options to take Yorktown. First, he ordered Keyes to advance his IV Corps on the road west of Yorktown, where the Army commander expected little resistance. Keyes's corps was to flank the rebel position at Yorktown, which would be pinned inside its fortifications by Heintzelman's III Corps. McClellan expected that Keyes's advance would force Magruder to retreat or move all of his forces into Yorktown where the Federals could isolate and bypass them. McClellan's second option, if his first choice stalled, was to use McDowell's I Corps, when it arrived by sea, to land at Gloucester Point (across the York River from Yorktown) and render Yorktown untenable. This latter option was lost when Lincoln and Stanton decided to keep McDowell in the Washington, DC, area to protect the capital.

Fort Monroe continued to be the main base for the Army of the Potomac's initial attempt to seize Yorktown. Since there were no railroads in the region, the supplies would have to be brought forward from the base by wagon. Van Vliet had 3,600 wagons and 700 ambulances available, an adequate number to supply the troops up to Yorktown.¹ However, if the United States forces were to become stalled at the Warwick Line, Van Vliet would need new bases to shorten the wagon haul distance.

Keyes began his move on 4 April, and his troops quickly brushed aside rebel skirmishers in front of the Warwick River positions. The next day, however, McClellan's plan—and hopes for a quick advance past Yorktown—started to unravel. Keyes faced stronger opposition than expected and found the rebels had built entrenchments behind the Warwick River. In reality, the entrenchments were thinly manned, but Magruder played a brilliant game of deception, marching his small forces back and forth with flags flying and bands playing. Keyes and McClellan believed they faced a substantial force. McClellan also assumed Magruder would not stay on the Warwick River line with just 15,000 men. The condition of Peninsula roads provided another setback for the United States offensive. Contrary to information given to McClellan before the campaign, these roads were abysmal. Rain would quickly go through the topsoil and seep into the marl (a clay-like soil) underneath, turning the road into a morass. In addition, because the roads were not crowned (higher in the middle to allow the rain to drain to the sides), they flooded quicker than usual.²

With these difficulties made clear, McClellan decided to call off the advance and, instead, lay siege to Yorktown. This decision has engendered much argument from historians. Many believe that a more determined advance west of Yorktown might have broken through light Confederate forces and made a siege unnecessary, while other historians maintain that McClellan was justified to halt.³ McClellan claimed he was forced to conduct a siege at Yorktown because of the Lincoln administration's decision to keep McDowell's I Corps near Washington to protect the capital, rather than transporting it by sea to the Peninsula (the new plan was to have the corps move overland to join McClellan as it got closer to Richmond). Not only did McClellan call the withholding of McDowell's Corps a "fatal error" that prevented a swift advance up the Peninsula in his official report, he also wrote to his wife: "It is the most infamous thing that history has recorded."⁴ A message from McClellan to Navy commander Goldsborough on the evening of 5 April, however, gave no indication that holding back McDowell's corps had influenced his

decision. The Army of the Potomac commander listed his problems as strong entrenchments at Yorktown, the surprising obstacle of the Warwick River—with "banks marshy and almost impassable," and the bad roads.⁵ McClellan concluded: "I cannot turn Yorktown without a *battle* [McClellan's italics], in which I must use heavy artillery and go through the preliminary operations of a siege."⁶ Perhaps McClellan hesitated to assault the Warwick line and Yorktown before McDowell's delay and then after hearing of the new plan for McDowell made his final decision for a siege. Whatever the case, the British observer who had called the movement of United States forces to the Peninsula as the stride of a giant termed the halt at Yorktown as a move more like "that of a dwarf."⁷ Regardless of the historical debate, once McClellan decided to conduct a siege, the logistical requirements were straightforward and extensive.

Now committed to a siege, the Army of the Potomac needed advanced bases closer to Yorktown than Fort Monroe to supply the army and bring in the heavy artillery needed to reduce rebel fortifications.⁸ An aide-de-camp, Lt. Col. Daniel P. Woodbury, prepared a report on 19 March that McClellan and Van Vliet found useful in choosing a proper location.⁹ Under orders from the Army's chief engineer, Brig. Gen. John G. Barnard, Woodbury conducted a personal reconnaissance of the York River landings below Yorktown and outlined advantages and disadvantages of each location. Based largely on this report, the Federals established their advanced supply bases at the mouth of Cheeseman's Creek and at Ship Point near the mouth of the Poquoson River on 6 April.¹⁰ They also established an advanced base for offloading heavy artillery at the mouth of Wormley's Creek—as close as possible to the rebel lines at Yorktown. The quartermaster, Van Vliet, described some of the effort involved to establish the forward bases. In his report, Van Vliet pointed out that the poor Peninsula roads "rendered it impossible to haul our supplies by wagons from that point [Fort Monroe]."¹¹ Fortunately for the Union logisticians, the rebel lines were far enough up the Peninsula so as to enable the Federals "to establish our depot at the mouth of Cheesemans Creek and at Ship Point, near the mouth of the Poquoson River, which was done on the 6th of April."¹² The Army quartermaster went on to report: "We have had great difficulties to encounter, but they have been overcome, and the wants of the army have been and are supplied promptly."¹³ Van Vliet elaborated on these obstacles: "During rainy weather the roads are soon rendered impassable, empty wagons even sinking to their beds. Nearly every foot of the roads has been corduroyed. A great many of these roads have been badly made and are exceedingly rough, and the consequence is that the wear and tear of our transportation has been very great. Large working parties are now on them, and if we should have any more good weather they will soon be much improved."¹⁴ Facing these bad roads, Van Vliet requested that only mules, not horses, be sent to work the wagons on the Peninsula: "I find that mules are the only animals fit for this rough service."¹⁵

Van Vliet also outlined the supplies being stored at each base and the quartermaster officers responsible for the base operations. Captain Sawtelle remained at Fort Monroe (also called Old Point Comfort), where some supplies were temporarily stored before moving to the forward bases. Van Vliet retained the bulk of the clothing and tentage at Fort Monroe as these items did not need to be resupplied as quickly as food and forage. Colonel Ingalls was in charge at Cheeseman's Creek, the larger of the forward bases. He had three quartermaster officers supporting him in this major operation. This base handled all of the forage as well as all quartermaster items, less the clothing and tentage at Old Point Comfort. All of the subsistence was moved through the base at Ship Point. The commissary was responsible for rations, so a quartermaster

officer was not in charge of this base, but Van Vliet remained in close contact with the commissary chief to ensure timely movement of rations.¹⁶

At the same time that the quartermaster was establishing the new bases, the Army's chief commissary officer, Clarke, sent his staff officer, Captain Bell, to set up the commissary's base at Ship Point. Bell arrived on the evening of 5 April "with his party and a number of vessels laden with subsistence stores."¹⁷ On the 6th, a wharf was constructed with barges and plank obtained from the platforms left by the enemy in the small work on that point.¹⁸ After receiving assistance from a nearby infantry brigade, on 7 April "a large amount of stores was issued, all commands making application for them being supplied."¹⁹ While the army remained in front of Yorktown it was principally supplied with subsistence stores from this depot.

Clarke also commented on the bad road conditions, which caused some units to send wagons back to Fort Monroe for subsistence for a short time. In addition, because the quartermaster department was having its own problems with the roads and had few low-draft sea vessels to spare, the commissary department had to improvise. Clarke wrote: "Fortunately our foresight had caused us to be prepared in a good degree for the emergency. Three days rations could be issued at one time to each command, which was more than the execrable roads would permit the limited number of wagons to transport."²⁰ Finally, the cattle herd was moved from Fort Monroe to the vicinity of the army. In the end, through hard work and some improvisation, the Army of the Potomac was well supported for its operations at Yorktown.

The siege at Yorktown took about one month, allowing Johnston to transfer his army from the Fredericksburg area to support Magruder's force on the Peninsula, while McClellan's forces dug positions for their heavy artillery. The Army of the Potomac deployed more than seventy heavy rifled siege guns on the front at Yorktown. Among these guns were two 200-pounder Parrotts, each of which weighing eight tons, and twelve 100-pounder Parrotts, which were six tons each. In addition to these massive weapons, McClellan amassed numerous 20- and 30-pounder Parrotts, as well as 4.5-inch Rodmans.²¹ More than forty mortars, ranging in size from eight to thirteen inches and firing shells that weighed as much as 220 pounds, rounded out the Army's heavy artillery. The massive effort needed to position this heavy artillery is illustrated in one journal entry by chief engineer Barnard:

Friday, April 25—About 350 men of the Engineer Brigade are employed in getting out timber for bridges on west branch of Wormley's Creek; 140 men on bridge south of Wormley's, and 112 men are employed on Battery No. 4; 180 men making gabions, and 24 collecting and guarding pontoon property; Colonel Murphy, with 300 men, on detached service; 132 gabions made yesterday and 235 issued; 995 remaining on hand; 223 fascines on hand. The floating bridge on west branch of Wormley's Creek was taken up yesterday and transferred to the crib bridge a few hundred yards below. This crib bridge is progressing rapidly. Some pontoons were taken from the lower pontoon bridge to allow barges to go through.²²

The siege work required many unique items. The gabions were containers (usually made from wicker or other small wood materials like twigs and branches) filled with dirt, stone, or some other filler. These gabions were essential to protecting the besieging forces as they dug closer to the enemy lines and were useful for stabilizing stream banks and slopes. Fascines were similar in purpose to gabions in that they were designed as protection for forces in a siege.

Fascines were purely wooden structures—usually bundles of small branches and logs that were tied together. The crib bridge was built of logs laid crossways for support, with the roadway resting upon the crib supports. Barnard's journal for 25 April continued by reporting that one of his subordinates, Lieutenant McAlester, was employing 1,240 men and 39 officers on a key road that was ready for use. The engineers were also widening a mill-dam road that was going to be ready at the end of the day. Another detail of men was improving branch roads from the main supply route. Barnard then summarized the stat of the siege guns in place, most of which at this stage were the lighter guns.²³

As Barnard's report indicated, the artillery had to be moved manually over roads from Wormley's Creek to the siege lines—an enormous task involving extensive physical labor. Without the forward landing area, the artillery could not have been emplaced, and McClellan's siege would have been impossible. Chiefly based at Wormley's Creek, with additional support from bases at Ship Point and Cheeseman's Creek, the Army of the Potomac engineers and logisticians did prodigious work to improve and build roads needed to emplace McClellan's siege artillery.

After a month, McClellan's heavy guns were in place and he made plans to open a massive bombardment in early May. In the meantime, Johnston realized that his Confederate forces could not withstand the firepower of his opponent's heavy artillery and withdrew from Yorktown on 3 May. The Federals attempted to pursue the rebels as they pulled back through Williamsburg. Stoneman's cavalry led the pursuit, followed by two of Heintzelman's divisions and one division from Keyes's IV Corps. McClellan elected to remain at Yorktown, supervising the embarkation of Brig. Gen. William B. Franklin's division for an amphibious move up the York River. This division belonged to McDowell's I Corps and was sent by sea to McClellan on the Peninsula while the rest of I Corps stayed near Washington. While McClellan supervised



Figure 3.2. Battery No. 4 mounting ten thirteen-inch mortars near Yorktown. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Franklin's movement at Yorktown, elements of the Army of the Potomac fought against the rebel rearguard at Williamsburg. Heavy rains on 4 and 5 May slowed both sides' movements, forcing a Confederate rearguard action. In addition, the Peninsula was only seven miles wide at Williamsburg, creating a bottleneck. Johnston directed Maj. Gen. James Longstreet to take command of the rearguard and buy time for the rebels to continue their retreat toward Richmond. On 5 May, while Stoneman's cavalry skirmished with Longstreet's forces, United States infantry joined the battle in a piecemeal fashion. In McClellan's absence, there was confusion over who was in charge of the tactical fight. By the end of the day, Union forces held the field, but the Confederates had successfully disengaged and continued their withdrawal to Richmond.

The retreat forced McClellan to look for his next base in the campaign even as his army attempted to pursue the rebels. While West Point probably remained the desired location for the base to support the final advance on Richmond, Yorktown became the best immediate location; quartermaster Van Vliet commented: "When the enemy evacuated that place [Yorktown], the supply bases at Cheeseman's Creek and Ship Point were immediately broken up and everything at once transferred to Yorktown."²⁴ Similarly, Clarke reported that on 5 May "the depot at Ship Point was broken up, and a few hours afterwards established at Yorktown, where the issuing immediately commenced."²⁵ As the Federals established the new base at Yorktown, they struggled to cope with other logistical considerations. First, the Virginia Peninsula's abysmal roads continued to slow the movement of McClellan's combat forces, as well as retarding the movement of his supply wagons. In addition, the two roads that ran parallel up the Peninsula met in the narrowed area near Williamsburg, which forced all of the combat forces and trains onto a single route at that point. Because of these conditions, combat units and their supply wagon trains were severely slowed as they attempted to follow the retreating rebel forces after the evacuation of Yorktown. After the fight at Williamsburg on 5 May, the Federals continued to follow the rebels toward Richmond while struggling to push their wagons through the Peninsula mud in support of the pursuit. McClellan himself spoke of the road problems in a telegram to Stanton that explained how one division's supply train took thirty-six hours to move five miles.²⁶

After the action at Williamsburg, the United States Army relied primarily on its base at Yorktown as it moved slowly up the Peninsula. A few days later, an additional location for a base became available. On 7 May, McClellan sent Franklin's division on an amphibious landing to Eltham's Plantation (Landing) in an abortive effort to cut off the Confederate retreat. Although Franklin's move failed to gain an operational advantage, it established a short-lived base at the landing, opposite West Point, which brought some supplies forward of Yorktown by water.²⁷ Commissary officer Clarke reported on the continuing work of the Army's commissary department during this move. On 8 May, his office moved 90,000 rations of meat and bread to the army near Williamsburg from the Yorktown base, and Clarke complimented the quartermaster's department for "promptly furnishing the transportation" for this move.²⁸ After staging some supplies at Queen's Creek and Bigler's Wharf, the Army established a new base at Eltham's Landing on 10 May under the direction of Captain Porter, one of Clarke's commissary officers. Clarke explained some of the subsistence arrangements:

He was joined the next day by Captain Bell with his force and a number of supply vessels from below. Capt. E. W. Coffin, commissary of subsistence, volunteer service, was left in charge of the permanent depot at Yorktown, leaving Capt. B. Granger, commissary of subsistence, volunteer service, in charge of sufficient stores to supply

the rear divisions of the army yet to pass near Eltham.²⁹

McClellan also reorganized his corps structure while moving toward Richmond. Sumner retained command of II Corps. Likewise, Heintzelman stayed in command of III Corps, and Keyes continued to lead IV Corps. A McClellan favorite, Maj. Gen. Fitz John Porter, took over leadership of the newly formed V Corps, which consisted of his own division (formerly in III Corps) and Sykes' reserve division of mostly regulars. Another McClellan protégé, Franklin, moved from division command to command of VI Corps, consisting of his own division (originally in I Corps) and Brig. Gen. William F. "Baldy" Smith's division from IV Corps. After this reorganization, McClellan had five corps in his army on the Peninsula. The United States I Corps (minus Franklin's division, which had joined McClellan earlier), under McDowell, remained near Washington to protect the capital. However, it was still expected that I Corps would join McClellan's forces on the Peninsula at some point. The anticipation of receiving I Corps influenced some of McClellan's decisions as he advanced on Richmond.

While the Federals continued their move up the Peninsula, McClellan had to consider several factors in selecting his base to support the final capture of Richmond. In a message to Stanton on 10 May, McClellan outlined two possibilities: "I have fully established my connection with the troops near West Point, and the dangerous movement has passed. The West Point Railway is not very much injured. Materials for repairs, such as rails, &c., cars, and engines may now be sent to me. Should Norfolk be taken and the *Merrimac* [Virginia] be destroyed, I can change my line to the James River and dispense with the railroad."³⁰ Some historians see this message as an early indication of McClellan's desire to change his base to the James. These scholars go on to argue that this transfer of the Army's base was prevented by Stanton's directive (18 May) to McClellan to support the proposed move of McDowell's Corps by overland route from Fredericksburg to the Army of the Potomac based on the York and Pamunkey Rivers.³¹ Was McClellan, in fact, forced to divert from a preferred base on the James in order to keep open a link on the Pamunkey River while waiting for McDowell's Corps?

It appears McClellan was not sure whether a location on the York and Pamunkey rivers, or the James River, would serve as a better base for his final advance on the Confederate capital until events forced his hand. This choice between two bases reflected his concept in the original Urbanna plan, in which the Federal commander stated that West Point (the York and Pamunkey

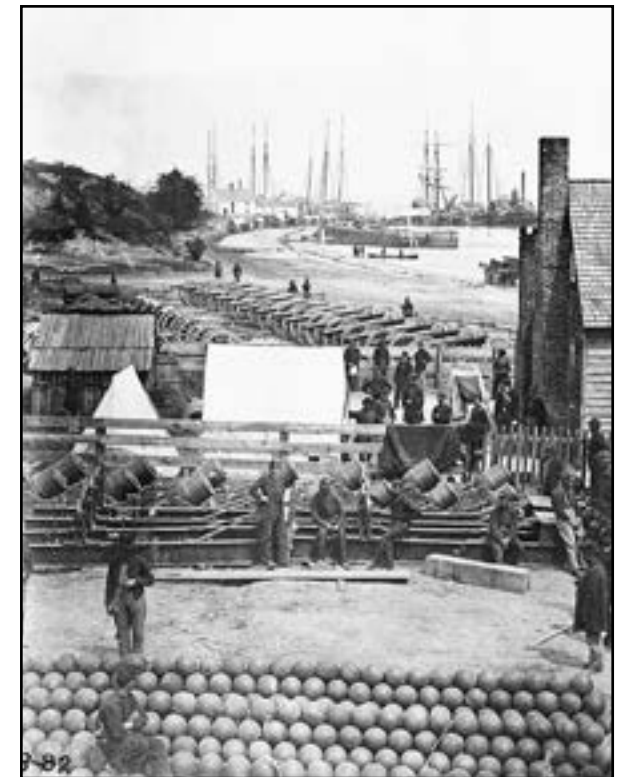


Figure 3.3. Union Supply Base at Yorktown. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

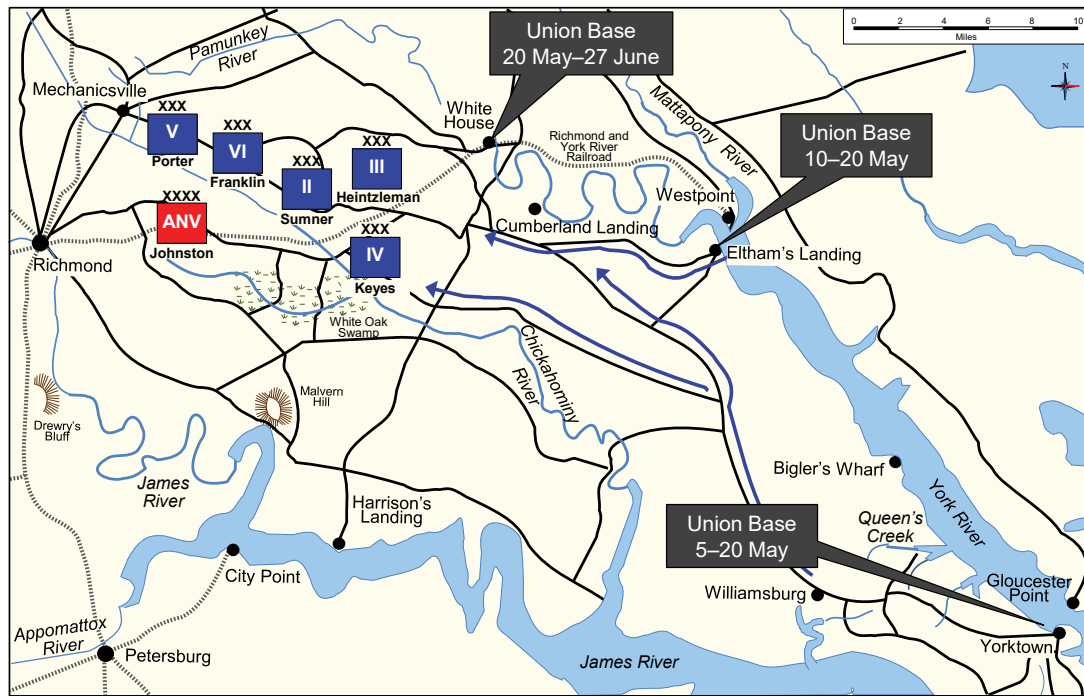


Figure 3.4. Map showing the 6–21 May 1862 route from Williamsburg to the Chickahominy. Created by the author and Army University Press.

river) was the most critical logistic base in the area. At the same time, he kept open the possibility of a base on the James. McClellan's 10 May message to Stanton that mentioned shifting to the James as a new base, also emphasized that the Richmond and York River Railroad was only slightly damaged. Both approaches (York/Pamunkey and James) provided viable bases to support a siege of Richmond. The line from the York (first West Point, then White House) was longer, needed the railroad, and forced the combat forces to cross the Chickahominy River while protecting the base. The James River approach was better, but only if the United States Navy could clear the river up to Richmond itself. However, the rebel position at Drewry's Bluff blocked the ships from getting close to the Confederate capital, and there were no railroads downriver from Drewry's Bluff to take siege guns from bases on the James to Richmond. Although McClellan may have been looking at two potential bases in the first weeks of May, he was clearly focused on one objective, Richmond, and one method, siege.

Events forced McClellan to choose the York and Pamunkey river bases soon after the 10 May message to Stanton. Federal forces, with President Lincoln watching from nearby Fort Monroe, took Norfolk, and on 11 May, the rebels scuttled the *Virginia*. However, four days later the United States Navy was repulsed by Confederate batteries on Drewry's Bluff, ten miles short of Richmond. If McClellan wanted a base on the James River, the rebuff at Drewry's meant that any base short of that location would be too far from the Confederate capital to make effective use of his heavy artillery. After this setback, the Union commander turned his full attention to the York and Pamunkey rivers for bases, to include the important Richmond and York River Railroad, which could bring his heavy guns to the gates of the city. Repeated

correspondence about repairing this railroad and bringing large-caliber gun munitions to West Point demonstrates that McClellan was making plans to use the York and Pamunkey river bases after the repulse at Drewry's Bluff and before being informed that McDowell's Corps would move by land to join the Army of the Potomac.³² McClellan's report misleadingly emphasized that the order to have McDowell move by an overland route forced him to keep forces north of the Chickahominy to protect his base on the Pamunkey.³³ In reality, McClellan was already leaning toward the York and Pamunkey river approach before the 18 May message about McDowell, because the James River approach was not practical after the defeat at Drewry's Bluff.

It is interesting to note that even though McClellan occasionally looked at the James River for a base, he appears to have only considered locations on the north side of the James. There is no mention in his correspondence of moving south of the James to operate against Petersburg as Grant would do in 1864. In addition, McClellan gave virtually no attention to City Point as a potential base (either for a move on Richmond or Petersburg). Perhaps he did not want to divert from Richmond to seize Petersburg, which itself might have required a siege. Although work on the Dimmock Line (fortifications around Petersburg) did not begin until July 1862, McClellan had seen how quickly the rebels were able to entrench when he had approached Yorktown and how they improved positions on the Warwick River. As to City Point as a potential base, McClellan did not have the advantage that Grant possessed in 1864—a fully operating base already in existence. Even so, McClellan took no steps to occupy City Point and perhaps develop this key location into a base for future operations.

Although the York and Pamunkey rivers and railroad retained their major logistical role, McClellan's focus on West Point as his supply base waned. Partly forced by the expediency of supplying Franklin's force, McClellan and his logisticians gradually realized that supply bases on the south bank of the York and Pamunkey rivers provided alternate supply solutions to their advance up the Peninsula instead of West Point on the north side of the rivers. Though the War Department sent heavy railroad equipment to West Point in mid-May, Van Vliet moved the base for the army from Yorktown to Eltham Landing to Cumberland Landing and finally to White House—all on the south bank of the York and Pamunkey rivers.³⁴ The immediate reason for bypassing West Point was that the Confederates had destroyed the railroad bridge on the Pamunkey River. In addition, over time the United States forces improved their ability to construct smaller docking facilities capable of receiving significant supplies, allowing the small landing at White House to be developed into a major base.

Of course, the Army of the Potomac's logisticians did not go into the new base blind. More than a week before establishing a base at White House, on 11 May, Lt. Col. Colonel B. S. Alexander, one of Barnard's engineers, examined the potential new base. Alexander first examined the railroad and was content that it would support the Army of the Potomac in its advance on Richmond. He then reported on the landing at White House and its benefits as a potential base. The port's deep water, the open cove that offered so many locations for mooring boats, and the flat plain for storing materiel all convinced Alexander that "this was the proper spot for our final depot of supplies."³⁵ McClellan and his logisticians soon recognized the validity of the young engineer's assessment and concluded to build the base at White House.

On 20 May, the Federals finished establishing the base at White House, mitigating the need for a base at West Point. They also maintained a smaller base at nearby Cumberland Landing to

help support their supply operations. The speed and skill of the changes of bases was remarkable, and both the quartermaster and commissary officers came up with innovative solutions to the problems in changing bases. One significant solution to help speed the move was to better manage the unloading of supplies; Van Vliet described the process in a message to Meigs: “It is absolutely necessary to keep our supplies afloat, and land them only as they are wanted.”³⁶ This method minimized the time lost to transferring large stocks of supplies from docks back to boats for a change of base. As one historian noted, the barges were used as “floating warehouses.”³⁷ However, the United States Army rented many of their vessels from civilian contractors—some at high costs. To manage the expenses, Ingalls kept the floating stock on smaller boats and barges and offloaded most of the larger, and costlier, ships. This allowed those ships to return to the northern depots and bring large loads of supplies to the army’s bases.³⁸

Van Vliet described some of the measures taken to make White House a major port facility: “Extensive wharves were at once constructed by throwing our barges and canal-boats ashore at high water and bridging them over.”³⁹ Although the engineers eventually worked to repair the railroad bridge on the Pamunkey to open the railroad to West Point, White House remained the major base for the Army of the Potomac until its retreat to Harrison’s Landing on the James in late June. Van Vliet recorded some of the vast requirements for supplies handled at White House: “Of forage and subsistence alone over 500 tons were daily required by the army. Adding to this the other necessary supplies swelled this amount to over 600 tons, which, rain or shine, had to be handled at the depots each day and forwarded to our lines. The difficulties of supplying an army of 100,000 men are not generally comprehended.”⁴⁰ The quartermaster reported that each man consumed three pounds of subsistence a day, while each horse needed twenty-six pounds of forage. These rates of consumption meant that 100,000 men required 150 wagon loads of subsistence each day.⁴¹ It was critical to have bases close to the troops to keep wagon haul length to a minimum.

McClellan’s commissary officer, Clarke, also moved subsistence operations to the forward bases at Cumberland Landing and White House. Clarke’s action officer for basing, Captain Bell, had Cumberland Landing operational for rations on 13 May and White House working the next day. Then on 19 May, Bell broke up most of the base at Cumberland Landing and consolidated the commissary operations at White House; a part of the Cumberland Landing base remained operational for part of the quartermaster stores. Clarke wrote that with “trestles made of lumber obtained at Yorktown besides lumber that we had on hand and barges, a good wharf was immediately constructed at this point [White House].”⁴² Soon after, ships delivered “immense quantities of stores” to that location.⁴³

The Richmond and York River Railroad was not only essential to McClellan’s planned siege operations, it was also hoped that the railroad would help move supplies to forward bases along the line to reduce the reliance on wagons to transport supplies. By 25 May, part of the railroad was in operation, and the next day, a distribution point for issuing rations was established at Dispatch Station, about one mile from the river. Two days later, the Federals established a forward base on the York River Railroad at Savage’s Station about three miles south and west of the Chickahominy River. Savage’s Station also became the location of the main Army of the Potomac field hospital. Meanwhile, at Garlick’s Landing, a few miles upstream from White House, a separate depot was established exclusively for forage to ease the strain on White House.⁴⁴ Other forward bases were established along the railroad north of the Chick-



Figure 3.5. Supply vessels at anchor at White House Landing, Virginia. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

ahominy at Tunstall’s Station and Meadow Station (both small storage locations), and south of the river at Fair Oaks Station, Orchard Station, and Forage Station; but it was Savage’s Station that became the main forward stockpile of supplies.⁴⁵

The main base at White House and various other supporting bases helped to make the wagon-haul somewhat easier. Even so, the road network on the Peninsula near Richmond did not provide simple direct paths from White House as the United States forces advanced. The trains had seven different routes to the units at the front, all of which involved “byways and long, indirect circuits to the camps of the army.”⁴⁶ Damaged further by incessant rain, the bad roads certainly strained the Army of the Potomac’s logistical apparatus. One historian, relying on reports from Ingalls’s second-in-command at White House, Captain Sawtelle, agreed with the Union logistician’s assessment that “the logistical operation on the Peninsula was not working well and might soon stop working at all.”⁴⁷ In fact, thanks to Sawtelle’s and the other logistician’s efforts the army’s supply system did not stop working. The advance on Richmond was painfully slow, but the chief hindrance was not a lack of supplies; it remained McClellan’s

belief in superior enemy numbers, the strength of Richmond's fortifications, and the need to conduct a siege to take the city.

As the engineers worked on the railroad, McClellan conducted his final, though eventually unsuccessful, advance on Richmond. Historians have debated McClellan's operational decisions during this advance, predicated by overestimates of his opponent's strength. From a logistical perspective, the army commander remained guided by the need to get his heavy guns close to the fortifications of Richmond and take advantage of his artillery superiority over the enemy.⁴⁸ As noted earlier, McClellan, a West Point-educated engineer who had seen the siege fortifications at Sevastopol, turned to his advantage in artillery to take the Confederate capital. This meant that he needed the Richmond and York River Railroad to transport siege weapons as well as assist with the army's other supply requirements. McClellan faced a difficult choice because the Chickahominy River cut across the railroad. He needed to get the bulk of his army and artillery south of the Chickahominy River to seize Richmond. However, he needed to protect the rail line north of the Chickahominy that connected to White House in order to keep his supply line intact. To fulfill both goals, his army would have to advance on both sides of the river, and this meant accepting a certain amount of risk. In the meantime, Johnston had gathered Confederate forces from the Peninsula and other rebel troops in the region and assembled them in front of Richmond. McClellan believed that Johnston's superior force (as he saw it) could destroy the Army of the Potomac in detail while it was split by the Chickahominy.

The army's logisticians and engineers worked hard to get the railroad functioning in order to accomplish McClellan's goals for a siege and also to improve routine resupply operations by reducing the need for wagon hauls. Van Vliet noted that the rebels had burned the railroad bridge on the Pamunkey and several smaller bridges on the Peninsula, and they had removed the rolling stock of the railroad before Union forces could capture it. The quartermaster noted: "In anticipation of moving along this [rail]road toward Richmond, rolling stock for the road had been purchased, and a competent force employed to work it. Working parties were immediately put on the road and the engines and cars landed, and in a few days the road was again in running order, and cars loaded with supplies were constantly running to the front."⁴⁹ In a 23 May message to Meigs, Van Vliet described the process of opening the railroad and informed the Army quartermaster general that the base at White House had been established and that he expected to have the railroad functioning in two days. In pursuing this end, Van Vliet had directed all of the rolling stock that he had previously ordered to White House instead of West Point. As of the 23rd, twenty-five cars and two locomotives had arrived. Van Vliet then reported on the bridge repair efforts:

The bridge-builders and carpenters only reached the White House last evening. They are now building the two small bridges between White House and Chickahominy which were burned by the rebels. These will be finished by tomorrow evening, when supplies can be brought on the road to within seven miles of our extreme right wing. Our left will have to haul only about two miles. Only one span of the Chickahominy Bridge has been burned. The bridge across the Pamunkey and one short bridge near West Point will be rebuilt as soon as the road in front is put in running order. When that is done, West Point can be made a depot also.⁵⁰

The largest obstacle to supplying the Army of the Potomac and to bringing forward the heavy siege guns were the "frequent and heavy rains." The almost-constant rain in late May and

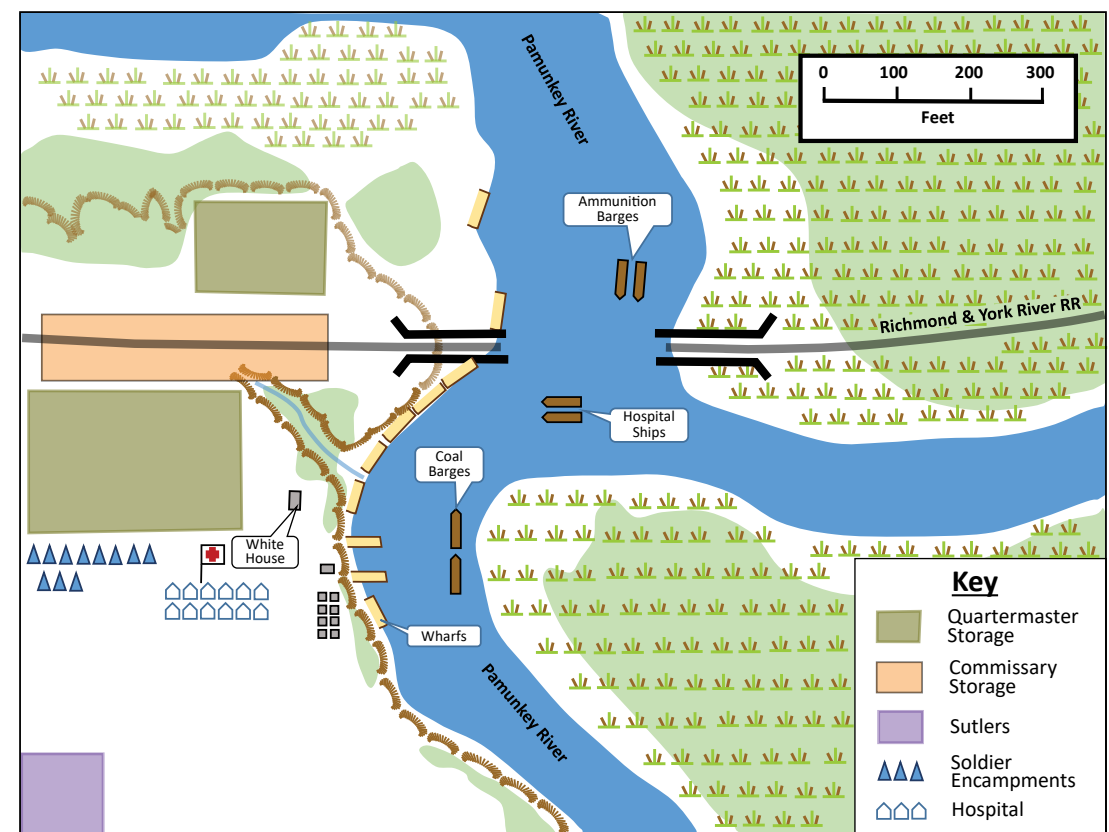


Figure 3.6. Diagram of the Union Base at White House. Created by Steven E. Clay and edited by Army University Press.

June made the already bad wagon roads even worse and disrupted rail operations, but Van Vliet reported: "In no instance, I believe, did our department fail in discharging the duty devolving upon it."⁵¹

From a logistical point of view, McClellan's operational reach was restricted by his own perceptions more than it was by actual logistic considerations. He believed that he was outnumbered and needed heavy artillery to take Richmond. This need forced him to the railroad. Could the logisticians have provided other options? In this case, it appears that McClellan's own beliefs demanded that his logisticians fulfill the task of bringing siege guns to the gates of Richmond, leaving no other options. To their great credit, the officers and soldiers of the army's support apparatus had already demonstrated a great ability to improvise, by expanding the capacity of the docking facilities on the south banks of the Pamunkey and York rivers and maintaining the continuity of supplies flowing to the Army of the Potomac. In addition, they anticipated McClellan's need for siege guns and moved as rapidly as possible (given the enormous task and bad weather) to get them to the front. Col. Robert O. Tyler, commander of the siege train, recorded details about the initial emplacement of McClellan's essential big guns: "Upon the 20th of June I was ordered to bring up a battery of five 4.5-inch Rodman guns and

one of five 30-pounder Parrotts, and to place them in position near New Bridge. The disembarkation of the guns and material at White House commenced on the 21st of June and upon the 24th these guns were in position, with ammunition and material complete.”⁵² The movement of these massive weapons and ammunition was a major achievement in and of itself.

By late May, Heintzelman’s III Corps and Keyes’s IV Corps were south of the Chickahominy. McClellan intended to move both corps upstream to uncover more river crossings and inch closer to Richmond. After this movement, he intended to build more bridges on the Chickahominy to ease his supply situation and facilitate the transfer of reinforcements, while still focusing on using the York River Railroad to help move the siege guns close to Richmond.⁵³ During this advance, McClellan learned that McDowell’s I Corps was to join him by an overland advance from Fredericksburg on 18 May, rather than by water as originally planned. Then one week later, Lincoln and Stanton informed McClellan that McDowell’s corps was being diverted to operations against Maj. Gen. Thomas “Stonewall” J. Jackson’s forces in the Shenandoah Valley.⁵⁴

Although frustrated by the change in McDowell’s mission, McClellan did little to revise his plan for taking Richmond, and he did nothing to change his logistical arrangements. In part to comply with Lincoln and Stanton’s initial instructions to link up with McDowell’s corps (before it was later diverted), the army commander ordered Porter’s V Corps to move toward Hanover Court House, north of the Chickahominy on 27 May and destroy the railroad between Fredericksburg and Richmond. This precipitated a small battle, but this skirmish and the diversion of McDowell’s troops were not major reasons for the Army of the Potomac being split by the Chickahominy. The army lay astride this river primarily because of the need to have the railroad for siege operations, not to extend a hand to McDowell. In any case, with the Army of the Potomac divided by the river, Johnston saw an opportunity to defeat the Federals in detail and launched an attack on the two enemy corps south of the Chickahominy on 31 May.

Johnston’s attack found the Army of the Potomac with V, VI, and II Corps north of the Chickahominy and IV and III Corps south of the river. The Chickahominy was flooded due to heavy rains, which made reinforcement between the two parts of the Federal forces difficult. Johnston minimized his forces north of the river and concentrated the bulk of his army to the south for an attack. In addition, the Federals were particularly vulnerable south of the river near a location known as Seven Pines, because Keyes’s two IV Corps’ divisions were well forward of Heintzelman’s III Corps. Despite the Union vulnerabilities, Johnston was unable to coordinate his attacking forces effectively. The Confederates routed Brig. Gen. Silas Casey’s division but could not follow up the initial success. Reinforcements under Brig. Gen. Philip Kearny (III Corps) helped stabilize the position. Fighting continued on 1 June near the small crossroads of Fair Oaks, but the results were the same—a stalemate. The bloody two-day battle at Seven Pines and Fair Oaks was a tactical draw. During the fighting, Johnston was wounded and Robert E. Lee assumed command of the Confederate forces defending Richmond (those forces were soon formally named the Army of Northern Virginia). Lee took some time to settle into his command, but he proved to be more aggressive than his predecessor.

From McClellan’s perspective, these battles did little to change his line of advance and its logistical basing. He still believed the rebels heavily outnumbered his forces, and an advance up the James River continued to be blocked at Drewry’s Bluff. Thus, the railroad from White

House remained the best way to bring siege guns to the outskirts of Richmond, and the Chickahominy River forced McClellan to split his army to protect the railroad while edging closer to the Confederate capital. In the weeks after Seven Pines, McClellan moved more of the army to the south side of the Chickahominy River—closer to Richmond for the anticipated siege—while continuing to keep part of his army north of the river to protect his base.

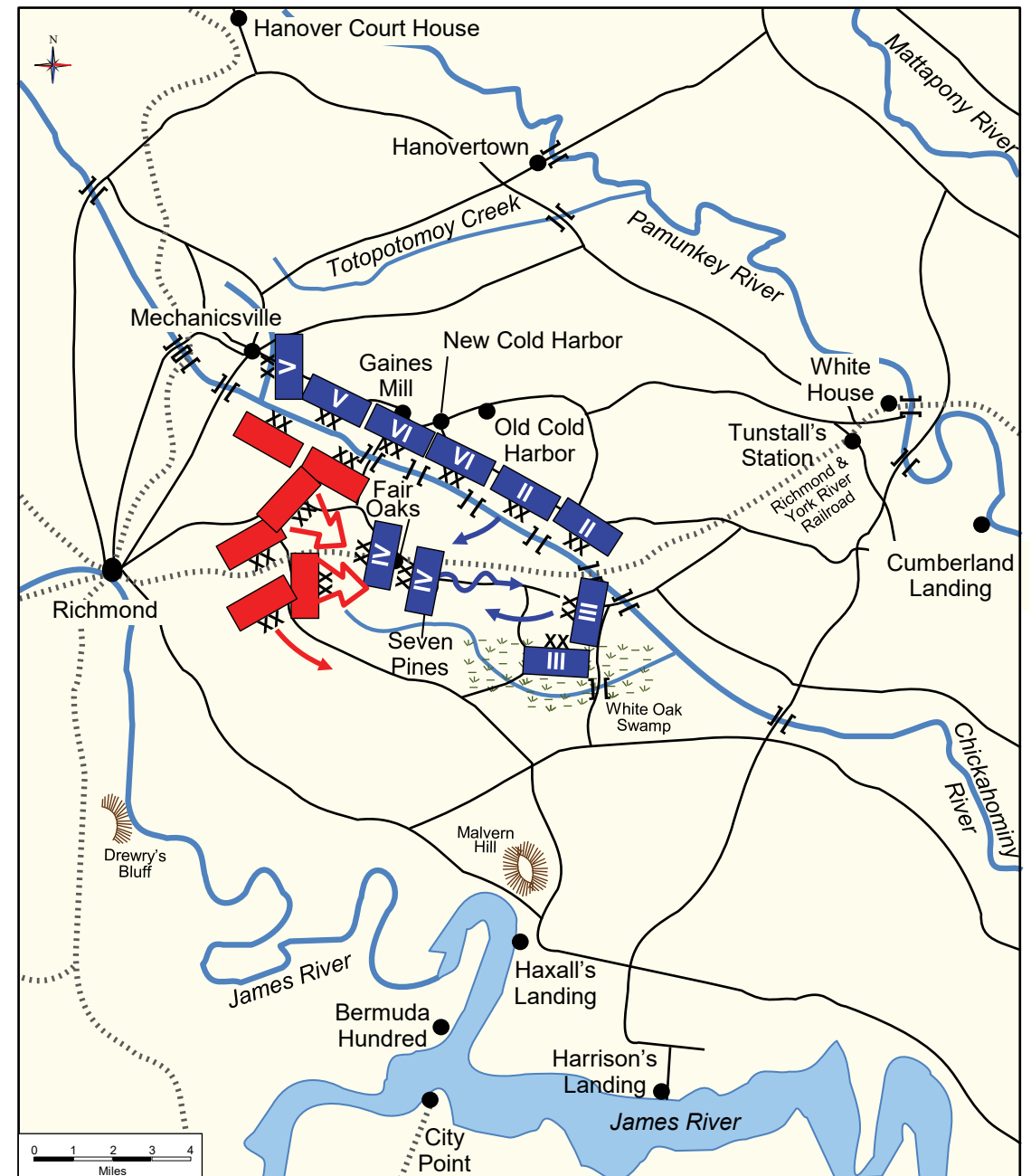


Figure 3.7. Map of Seven Pines and Fair Oaks, 31 May–1 June 1862. Created by the author and Army University Press.

Notes

1. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), series I, vol. XI, part I, 158; hereafter cited as *OR*.

2. Kenneth W. Noe, “I Am Completely Checked by the Weather,” in *Upon the Fields of Battle: Essays on the Military History of America’s Civil War*, ed. Andrew S. Bledsoe and Andrew F. Lang (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2018). This chapter offered excellent views of the weather and how it affected the roads. Certainly, the roads hindered McClellan’s efforts, but questions remain. McClellan initially believed that the Peninsula roads were more than adequate. Did he know how rain might affect them? Despite the rain, the Union forces were able to advance far enough to engage Magruder’s forces with overwhelming numbers on the Warwick line. Rain or no rain, McClellan could have crushed Magruder if he so ordered.

3. For examples of the historical debate, refer to Stephen W. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992), 37–41; and Ethan S. Rafuse, *McClellan’s War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 203–7. Sears argued that McClellan used the withholding of McDowell’s Corps as an excuse for the siege at Yorktown, and that the Union general was completely fooled by Magruder’s charade and inclined by his natural caution to conduct the siege. Rafuse defended McClellan’s decision, arguing that the Navy’s reluctance to attack shore batteries and reliance on McDowell’s troops to take Gloucester Point (opposite Yorktown) meant that McClellan was justified to do a siege. Rafuse also derided Lincoln’s decision to keep McDowell’s force near Washington. See also William J. Miller, “Scarcely Any Parallel in History: Logistics, Friction, and McClellan’s Strategy for the Peninsula Campaign,” in *The Peninsula Campaign of 1862*, vol. 2, ed. William J. Miller (Campbell, CA: Savas Woodbury Publishers, 1995), 144–45, for an account of the bad roads, particularly reports from Maj. William R. Palmer to Brig. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, the army’s chief topographical engineer.

4. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 10; and Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860–1865* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 230.

5. Sears, 229.

6. Sears, 229.

7. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 39.

8. Stephen W. Sears, *Lincoln’s Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army of the Potomac* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 189. Sears pointed out that McClellan was not in a “full-fledged siege” at Yorktown. He did not have Magruder, and later Johnston, surrounded; the Confederate commanders could retreat at will. McClellan used siege techniques to approach the Confederate lines with heavy artillery that would pave the way for an infantry assault, but this would only work if Johnston cooperated.

9. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 22–24.

10. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 158–59; and *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 71–72. See also *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 71–72 for McClellan’s directive to Van Vliet for establishing new bases (written by Adjutant Seth Williams).

11. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 158.

12. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 158–59.

13. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 158–59.

14. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 161. Corduroying the roads meant that engineers and other soldiers were cutting down tree trunks and laying them side by side in the muddy roads to make them passable.

15. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 161.

16. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 161–62.

17. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 167.

18. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 167.

19. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 167–68.

20. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 168.

21. The Parrott was a rifled artillery piece named after its inventor, Robert Parker Parrott. The 100-pounder designation referred to the weight of a solid shot fired from this piece. Rodman guns were named after their inventor, Thomas J. Rodman, and identified by the diameter of the barrel. By the 1860s, both heavy and field artillery consisted of rifled and smoothbore guns—the technology of the day was at the stage where both rifled and smoothbore guns had value. The rifled pieces had better range and accuracy, while the smoothbore guns used in field artillery fired a better anti-personnel round (canister). All of these weapons were muzzle-loaded. The heavy, rifled pieces that McClellan brought to the Peninsula were the most advanced heavy weapons available.

22. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 329–35. Barnard’s entry for the day is even longer than the extracts provided here. This same workload was repeated on many other days. Also see the report of Maj. Alexander Doull, the ordnance officer of the Federal siege train, for a detailed depiction of the guns available in the massive train and the extensive work involved with emplacing the guns (*OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 354–58).

23. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 329–35.

24. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159.

25. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 168.

26. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 175.

27. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159.

28. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 168.

29. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 168.

30. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 160. The term “&c.” is similar to “etc.”

31. Edward H. Bonekemper III, *McClellan and Failure: A Study of Civil War Fear, Incompetence, and Worse* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2007), 70. Bonekemper asserted that McClellan’s subsequent move of two corps south of the Chickahominy River, thus splitting his army, was simply a prelude to an eventual shift of base to the James River (71). Rafuse (in *McClellan’s War*, 213–14) presented a more persuasive argument that McClellan was considering a shift to the James but also willing to use the West Point (and White House) base to accomplish his goal. However, Rafuse probably overemphasized the overland movement of McDowell’s I Corps to join McClellan’s army in forcing McClellan to keep his base on the York and Pamunkey Rivers (214).

32. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 170–71 and 178. This correspondence described obtaining rolling stock and materiel for repairing the railroad, additional ammunition for twenty-pound Parrott guns, locomotives, and additional railroad iron and tie timbers.

33. See *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 26–28, for McClellan’s report and Stanton’s message that clearly directed McClellan to keep forces protecting the York River base that would connect with McDowell’s Corps advancing overland from Fredericksburg. The timing of this evidence showed that while Stanton’s order left little choice, McClellan’s own plans were already based on using the York base—probably a necessity because the United States Navy was not able to open the James all the way to Richmond.

34. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 178; and *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159.

35. Miller, “Scarcely Any Parallel in History,” 149.

36. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 149.

37. Miller, “Scarcely Any Parallel in History,” 146 (footnote 31). Miller’s source was the *Report of the Quartermaster General for 1862* (Washington, DC, 1863), 13.

38. Miller, 146 (footnote 31).

39. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159.

40. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159.

41. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159.

42. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, 168–69.

43. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, 168–69.

44. Miller, “Scarcely Any Parallel in History,” 153.

45. Miller, 160.

46. Miller, 150.

47. Miller, 161. Miller’s source was a letter from Sawtelle to Meigs, 4 June 1862, Office of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File, Record Group 92, National Archives.

48. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 104–6; and Ethan S. Rafuse, “Fighting for Defeat? George B. McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign and the Change of Base to the James River,” in *Civil War Generals in Defeat*, ed. Steven E. Woodworth (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 84–85 (see also Rafuse, *McClellan’s War*, 213–15). While Sears and Rafuse presented different views of the eventual shift to the James River as a new base, Rafuse agreed with Sears on one key point: “Although less preferable to operating from the James, it would still be possible to conduct a campaign that would achieve his [McClellan’s] larger political-strategic objectives from the Chickahominy through a deliberate, controlled operation in which unnecessary bloodshed would be avoided and chance would be neutralized by the forces of science and reason. This would be accomplished through siegecraft, where heavy guns and well-engineered entrenchments would give the Confederates little or no realistic possibility of preventing the fall of Richmond.” Sears—quoting from McClellan’s memoir, *McClellan’s Own Story: The War for the Union, the Soldiers who Fought It, the Civilians who Directed It, and his Relations to It and to Them*, ed. William C. Prime (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1887), 343; McClellan’s *Report on the Organization of the Army of the Potomac, and of Its Campaigns in Virginia and Maryland* (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1864), 77 and 96–97; and Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 168, 261, 270, and 274—emphasized that McClellan believed his only path to victory was a siege in which Federal artillery would be the deciding factor. Under these conditions, the railroad from White House was still more important to the campaign than a base on the James.

49. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159.

50. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 162–63.

51. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159.

52. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 273.

53. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 113.

54. See Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 264–65, and *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 27 for the initial change of McDowell’s move from a waterborne route to an overland route. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 110 (quoting from Lincoln’s papers and McDowell’s Testimony to Congress, as well as a letter from McClellan to his wife) covered the order diverting McDowell to the Shenandoah Valley as well as McClellan’s reaction.

Chapter 4

McClellan's Peninsula Campaign: The Seven Days' Battles and Change of Base to Harrison's Landing

From the battles at Seven Pines and Fair Oaks until the beginning of the Seven Days' Battles (25 June), McClellan continued to inch his way toward Richmond in never-ending rain, using White House as his primary base.¹ Battling against the rains and roads were the engineers and, in many cases, other units pressed into conducting engineer duties. On 2 June, McClellan's army had five bridges available across the Chickahominy, to include the crucial railroad bridge from White House. By 19 June, McClellan had ten bridges on the river.² While the Union commander continued to show a large degree of caution, his methodical construction of these bridges was in consonance with his plan for a siege.³



Figure 4.1. Union pontoon bridge, known as the Grapevine Bridge, across the Chickahominy River, Virginia. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

While McClellan worked on his bridges, Lee tried to counter his opponent's methodical approach. In a 5 June letter to President Jefferson Davis, Lee wrote that McClellan "will make this a battle of posts. He will take position from position, under cover of heavy guns, and we cannot get at him without storming his works, which with our new troops is extremely hazardous."⁴ Hoping to find options to thwart McClellan's approach, Lee sent his best cavalry com-

mander, Brig. Gen. “Jeb” Stuart, on a raid around the Army of the Potomac that searched for any vulnerability in the United States position and attempted to disrupt the main supply line on the Richmond and York River Railroad. As a reconnaissance mission, Stuart’s raid found that the Federal right flank was vulnerable. The raid also attempted to disrupt McClellan’s logistical operations, but it was not so successful in this endeavor.

On 12 June, Stuart’s force of about 1,200 cavalymen set out, initially heading north as if to join Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah Valley. On the morning of 13 June, Stuart informed his officers of the mission to examine enemy positions and possibly disrupt their supplies. The rebel troopers turned east and south and forced their way past a small enemy force on Totopotomoy Creek.⁵ At some point during the raid, the rebel cavalry commander decided to completely circumvent McClellan’s force. Later, on 13 June, his men struck Tunstall’s Station on the rail line from White House, where they burned some supplies but failed to stop a train that was passing through and did only minimal damage to the rail line. Another part of Stuart’s command split off and burned some ships at Garlick’s Landing on the Pamunkey River before rejoining the main column, again inflicting minimal damage. Stuart decided not to follow the railroad from Tunstall’s to White House and threaten McClellan’s main base—perhaps wisely as the Federals could have cut his force off from returning to Lee’s army. Stuart’s command returned to Lee’s lines on 15 June, evading enemy cavalry in pursuit under the command of Brig. Gen. Philip St. George Cooke, who was Stuart’s father-in-law.

Although it gained headlines, Stuart’s raid had little effect on the Union supply situation. Van Vliet’s trusted subordinate, Rufus Ingalls, reported on the reaction to the raid. Ingalls had learned of Stuart’s entry into Tunstall’s Station from McClellan’s chief of staff, Marcy, during the course of the raid but did not panic. The assistant quartermaster gathered local cavalry and artillery to protect White House. Ingalls also gained the support of United States gunboats. In the end, Ingalls explained that Stuart’s raid had minimal impact on logistics; and, as it turned out, the few boats and wagons that the troops destroyed had little impact on future operations.⁶ The day after this event, McClellan dismissed its importance and remarked, “The stampede of the last night has passed away.”⁷ Undeterred from his siege plans, McClellan edged most of his forces to the south side of the Chickahominy toward Richmond, retaining only Porter’s V Corps north of the river to protect the rail line to White House. The army commander also issued instructions for supplies and heavy guns to be moved by boat up the James toward Drewry’s Bluff, but there was no indication that he planned to change his base until the United States Navy could force its way past the rebel defenses on the James.⁸

Although Stuart’s raid did little to harm the Union supply line or deter McClellan’s plans, it was a major reconnaissance success. Stuart gave Lee essential information that most of the Army of the Potomac was now south of the Chickahominy and the army’s V Corps was vulnerable to attack. Lee, using Stuart’s information, planned to strike Porter’s troops—in part to destroy the isolated V Corps, but also to separate McClellan’s entire army from the base at White House and land a decisive blow against the Army of the Potomac. To ensure that he had sufficient forces to attack the Army of the Potomac, Lee had earlier instructed Stonewall Jackson to move from the Shenandoah Valley to the Peninsula.

The stage was set for Lee’s offensive, which was subsequently dubbed the Seven Days’ Battles, and fought from 25 June to 1 July 1862. McClellan’s operational decisions and actions in the Seven Days’ are a subject of controversy. However, the logistical considerations related to the Seven Days’ Battles can be focused on two questions: when did McClellan decide to change his base from the Pamunkey to the James, and how effective was the execution of this transfer of base? Lee hammered the United States forces during this period, with mixed tactical success. His attacks upset McClellan’s carefully laid plans for a siege, forcing the army com-

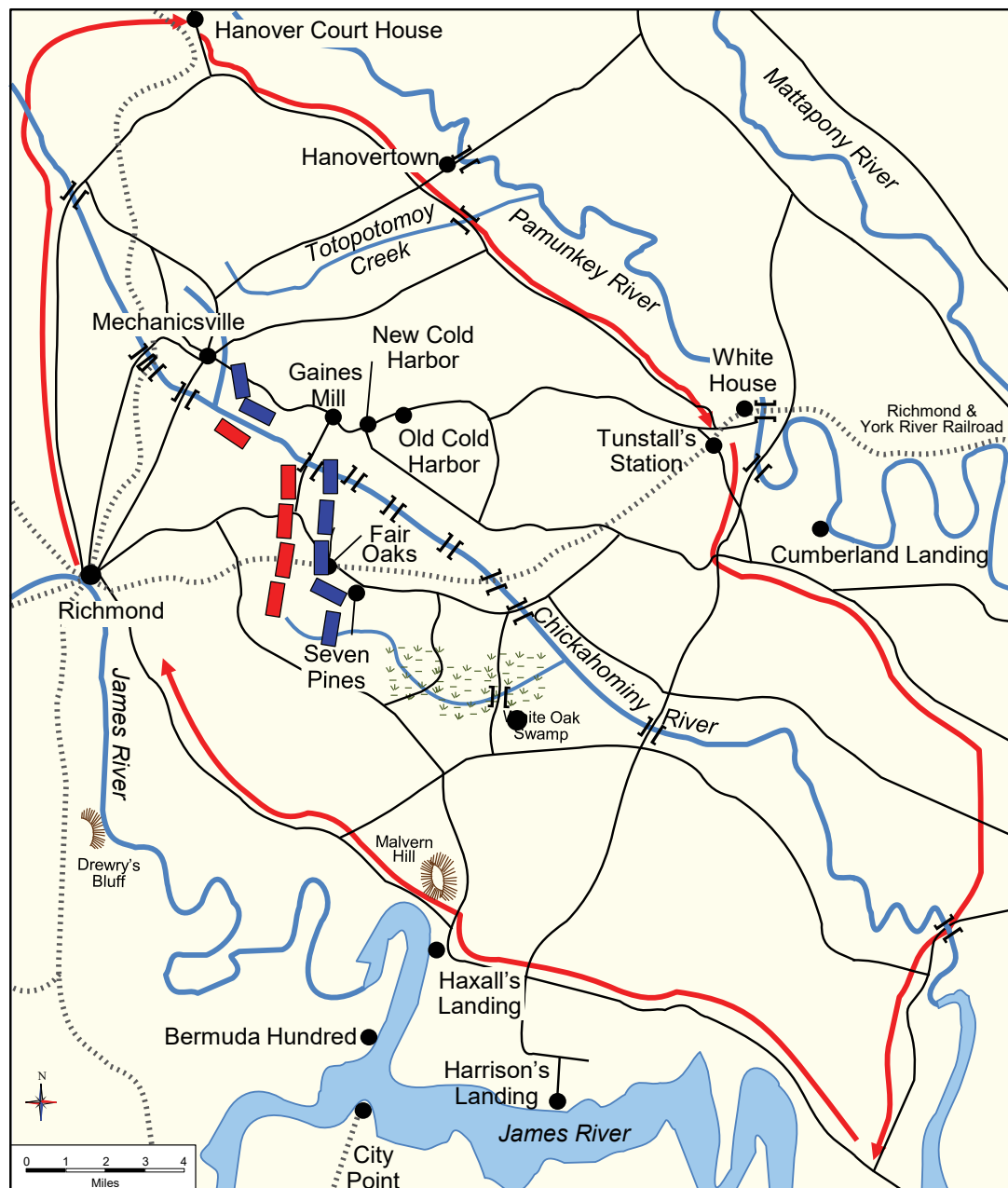


Figure 4.2. Map of Stuart’s Raid, 12 to 15 June 1862. Created by the author and Army University Press.

mander to change the army's base and abandon his offensive. An examination of these battles, McClellan's decisions regarding the base change, and the execution of the logistical move to the James helps to answer these questions.

As to the decision to change his army's base from White House to the James, historical opinion is, not surprisingly, divided. Some believe McClellan was a defeatist looking for any excuse to give up the offensive and thus move to a new and safer base. Others believe that he still hoped to take Richmond until the Union defeat at Gaines Mill convinced him of the need to retreat.⁹ McClellan's messages and other evidence indicate he expected to achieve victory with his methodical siege approach, and he clung as long as possible to the Pamunkey supply base (White House) to try to gain that victory. Beginning on 19 June, McClellan called for more forces to protect his supply line to White House in order to free up McCall's division for combat operations.¹⁰ The Army of the Potomac commander exchanged messages with Stanton on 21 June in the seemingly innocuous desire to limit visitors to White House—however, these missives indicate that McClellan felt the base was still his key supply depot.¹¹ On 23 June, McClellan asked the United States naval commander supporting his operations, Flag Officer Louis M. Goldsborough, to send gunboats to White House to protect his supply depot. That same day, McClellan directed Brig. Gen. Silas Casey to take command at White House and “take charge of that important depot, including the protection of the railway and telegraphic communications between that point and the Army of the Potomac.”¹² None of these messages referred to an anticipated move to a new base on the James.

There was one message from McClellan that did mention the James River. In a 24 June dispatch to Navy Cmdr. John Rodgers, who was in charge of the United States flotilla on the James, McClellan wrote: “I am about to commence decisive measures. Circumstances force me to begin my attack at some distance from the oxide [a code word referring to Richmond]. In a few days I hope to gain such a position as to enable me to place a force above Ball's and Drewry's bluffs, so that we can remove the obstructions and place ourselves in communication with you so that you can cooperate in the final attack.”¹³ A close reading of this message shows that McClellan was not contemplating a shift of base. His “decisive measures” were an attack a considerable distance from Richmond and the James River (i.e., just south of the Chickahominy) that he hoped in a few days would “gain such a position” as to enable the Army of the Potomac to reach the James above Drewry's Bluff, making that position untenable and forcing the rebels to abandon it. Such a move would free United States gunboats to join the final advance on Richmond. This was not a change of base for the army, but rather a way to add the navy's heavy guns to the army's siege artillery.

While McClellan clung to his hope to take Richmond by siege, he did warn Van Vliet to be ready for a potential move to the James. Van Vliet recalled that on 23 June—several days prior to the battle of Gaines Mill—McClellan told his quartermaster to “take the necessary steps to prevent the immense supplies at our depot at White House from falling into the hands of the enemy, and to have a certain amount of forage and supplies transferred to James River for the use of the army should it be found necessary to move it from the Chickahominy to that river.”¹⁴ Note that this plan was to be executed only “should it be found necessary,” showing that McClellan at that time had not decided to move to the James and was waiting on events. Later that day, Van Vliet instructed his able assistant, Colonel Ingalls, “to designate some forage vessels which have on board about 25,000 bushels of oats, and 10,000 bushels of corn, and

400 tons of hay to be sent immediately to James River. Between 500,000 and 600,000 rations now afloat will be designated by Captain Bell to be sent to same place.”¹⁵ The head quartermaster also prudently told Ingalls to send as much of the army's supplies as he could to the front “so as to have a sufficient amount with the army should our lines of communication be cut.”¹⁶ These preparations proved immensely helpful when McClellan made his decision to move his base to the James River after the battle of Gaines Mill on 27 June. One might argue that these preparations indicated that McClellan lacked confidence in his upcoming advance, rather than a prudent anticipation of potential eventualities. Whatever his motivations, the fact remains that the army commander had clearly not decided to change his base before Gaines Mill.

In the meantime, on 24 and 25 June, Lee began massing his forces for the attack north of the Chickahominy against Porter's V Corps. Lee's army was not yet organized into corps, but between Jackson's “command” coming from the Valley (two divisions), two more divisions attached to Jackson, and two large divisions of six brigades each—under Maj. Gen. Ambrose Powell (A. P.) Hill and Maj. Gen. James Longstreet—the large majority of rebel forces were committed north of the Chickahominy. Lee accepted considerable risk by allowing Magruder's “command” with three small divisions (two brigades each) and a separate division under Benjamin Huger to defend south of the river against four full corps of the Army of the Potomac.

On 25 June, McClellan crept slowly forward toward Richmond south of the Chickahominy; his plan was still based on siege artillery and the supply base at White House. The battle of Oak Grove was fought that day, the first of the Seven Days' Battles and the last offensive action conducted by the Army of the Potomac on the Peninsula. McClellan still hoped for victory. In a letter to his wife, he wrote: “If I succeed, I will gain a couple of miles toward Richmond.”¹⁷ He went on to write, “It now looks to me as if operations would resolve themselves into a series of partial attacks, rather than a general battle.”¹⁸ The army commander later added that if he could take Old Tavern (the objective of the Oak Grove advance), “the game is up for Secesh.”¹⁹

McClellan was committed to a siege, but he continued to keep his biggest guns at White House, probably because he wanted his small, piecemeal advances like those aimed at Old Tavern to get as close to Richmond as possible before bringing the heavy guns (100- and 200-pound Parrotts, and 13-inch mortars) to the front. In the meantime, he ordered Col. Robert O. Tyler, commander of the siege train, to bring forward some of his smaller guns. Tyler reported that on 20 June “I was ordered to bring up a battery of five 4.5-inch Rodman guns and one of five 30-pounder Parrotts, and to place them in position near New Bridge. The disembarkation of the guns and material at White House commenced on the 21st of June, and upon the 24th these guns were in position, with ammunition and material complete.”²⁰ This small part of the siege train was all that disembarked before Lee began his offensive, which proved fortunate for the Army of the Potomac. After Lee's attack at Gaines Mill and McClellan's decision to retreat, the heavy guns left by boat; Tyler had a difficult, but somewhat easier, task of taking the lighter guns overland.

McClellan's attack plan, designed to get close enough to Richmond for the big siege guns, was so cautious and methodical that he planned to use only Brig. Gen. Joseph Hooker's single division from Heintzelman's Corps to advance less than two miles to take Oak Grove while three full corps south of the river remained in place. Tyler's guns assisted in the attack when “these batteries opened upon the rebel batteries on the opposite side of the Chickahom-

iny, doing, as reported by the signal officer, much damage, dismounting the enemy's largest gun and compelling him to remove his camps."²¹ After the limited attack resulted in a small advance, McClellan sent multiple telegraphs to Stanton; each successive message claimed a greater success, culminating with the report that the "affair" had been "perfectly successful."²² At this point (25 and 26 June), McClellan clearly remained focused on maintaining the White House base. Far from abandoning this base, the Federal commander was apprehensive of his enemy's advance north of the Chickahominy, especially with newly added forces from Jackson that would threaten White House. On 25 June, McClellan's chief of staff, Marcy, directed the recently appointed commander of the White House base, Casey, to protect against the Confederate threat on the army's communications on the Pamunkey.²³ That same day, Van Vliet telegraphed Ingalls to "have your whole command in readiness to start at any moment. Please consult with Lieutenant Nicholson, of the Navy, to have his vessels placed in such a position that he can protect our depot."²⁴ The army quartermaster seems to have been less sure of holding White House than chief of staff Marcy.

On 26 June, Lee launched his offensive. His initial blow struck Porter's corps arrayed along Beaver Dam Creek near Mechanicsville. Porter had selected a strong position, and Jackson's rebel forces arrived too late to affect the action. In fact, Jackson and his men were so exhausted from campaigning in the Valley and the move to the Peninsula that they struggled to meet time schedules in the ensuing week-long struggle. In any case, Porter recognized by the evening of 26 June that Jackson was in a position to turn the United States right flank at Mechanicsville, and the V Corps commander withdrew his forces east to Gaines's Mill.

After the successful defense at Mechanicsville on 26 June, McClellan hedged his bets in regard to his future base of operations. In a message to Stanton, he praised his troops' performance in the last two days but cautioned that Stanton "must not expect them [US troops] to contest too long against great odds."²⁵ Clearly McClellan's decisions were still driven by a false impression of his enemy's numbers ("against great odds"). McClellan added: "I still keep communications with White House, but it may be cut any moment, and I cannot prevent it."²⁶ Even with the possibility of the rebels cutting the link to White House, McClellan did not change his base at this time. Messages between Meigs, the chief quartermaster in Washington, and the Army of the Potomac quartermaster, Van Vliet, clearly indicated that the Pamunkey River remained the army's base for reinforcements and new supplies on 26 June.²⁷ At the same time, McClellan pulled his smaller group of siege guns and trains to the south side of the Chickahominy in case the line to White House could not be maintained.²⁸ Van Vliet sent another message to Ingalls to ensure that all vessels not required at West Point be moved downriver into the broader waters of the Pamunkey River. In addition, three or four days of forage and rations were all that were to be kept on ships at White House. Van Vliet concluded: "This is a precautionary measure entirely, but must be attended to at once. It will be seen from this that everything had been carefully considered, and every precaution taken to guard against our supplies falling into the hands of the enemy, should it be found necessary for the army to fall back on the James River."²⁹ In the end, 26 June was a day of mixed messages concerning the Union base. Plans were clearly made and preparations conducted for a shift of base to the James, but McClellan and Marcy clung to the hope that the White House base could be retained; they did not issue an actual order to move the base.

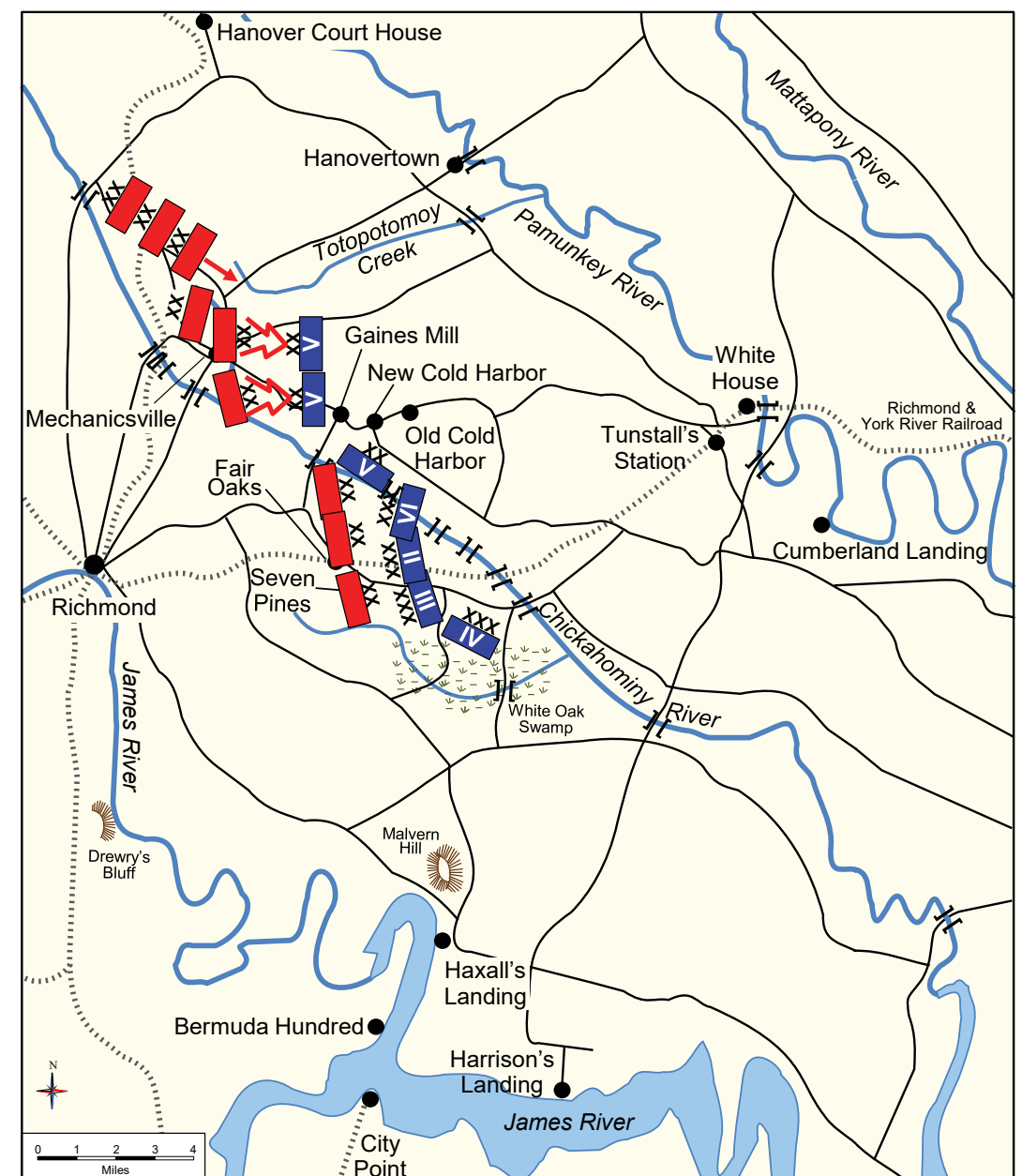


Figure 4.3. Map of the Battle of Mechanicsville, 26 June 1862, part of the Seven Days' Battles. Created by the author and Army University Press.

Contrary to the accounts above, McClellan, in his official report, claimed he was already determined to execute the move to the James on the night of 26 to 27 June. He wrote that the battle at Mechanicsville "convinced me that Jackson was really approaching in large force. The position on Beaver Dam Creek, although so successfully defended, had its right flank too much in the air, and was too far from the main army to make it available to retain it longer."³⁰ McClellan

lan reported that he ordered Porter to the new position at Gaines Mill, a more secure position, and added: "It was not advisable at that time, even had it been practicable, to withdraw the Fifth Corps to the right bank of the Chickahominy."³¹ He worried that pulling south of the Chickahominy would have given the enemy access to the rear of the army "and enabled Jackson's fresh troops to interrupt the movement to James River, by crossing the Chickahominy in the vicinity of Jones's Bridge before we could reach Malvern Hill with our trains. I determined then to resist Jackson with the Fifth Corps . . . to secure the adoption of the James River as our line of supplies in lieu of the Pamunkey."³² This part of the report appears to have been a rationalization done well after the fact. McClellan wrote this report months after the Seven Days' Battles. McClellan also wrote a shorter report, focused on the Seven Days' Battles, less than a month after these battles. While this more contemporaneous report also asserted that McClellan was planning to change the army's base to the James before Lee's offensive, the Union commander wrote: "Such was the state of affairs on the morning of June 26. I was by that time satisfied that I had to deal with at least double my numbers, but so great was my confidence in the conduct of the officers, and the bravery, discipline, and devotion of my men, that I felt contented calmly to await the bursting of the coming storm, ready to profit by any fault of the enemy, and sure that I could extricate the army from any difficulty in which it might become involved."³³ Driven by phantom numbers of the enemy, McClellan was still content to await "the coming storm," hoping "to profit" should Lee make any mistakes. Even if McClellan had his logisticians take precautions for a potential move to the James, he had issued no actual order to execute such a move.

Finally, the logic of McClellan's claims in both of his reports is questionable. Using Porter's V Corps to hold north of the Chickahominy for a planned move to the James only makes sense if McClellan gave orders to close White House and all bases on the Pamunkey before assigning Porter his mission. Why keep the bases open if you already planned to move, and place the bases in peril should V Corps lose its hold north of the river?

One other missive, from United States Army Quartermaster Chief Meigs to Van Vliet, indicated that the final decision to move to the James was not made until after Gaines Mill. On 26 June, while the battle at Mechanicsville raged, Meigs made a request for transportation: "It is proposed to send troops from Alexandria to the Pamunkey. You will please dispatch, with all possible speed, steam vessels, or vessels towed by steam, to move a division of 5,000 men, artillery, infantry, cavalry, and baggage trains from Alexandria."³⁴ Meigs went on to discuss transport details, but the crucial part of the message was that reinforcements were to go to the Pamunkey (White House). Clearly, Meigs still believed on 26 June that White House was going to be McClellan's base for the near future. Later that day, Van Vliet replied to Meigs's message: "I will have an abundance of transportation at Alexandria in the shortest possible time. We have had a very severe battle today, and the result is satisfactory. I presume that it will be renewed in the morning."³⁵ Van Vliet was anticipating the battle to come at Gaines Mill on 27 June, and his message indicated that McClellan was still not committed to moving to the James before the results of that fight.

Although no order had been given to change bases on 26 June, some actions that were taken made the future transfer easier. First, the bulk of V Corps' trains were moved south of the Chickahominy to join the rest of the army trains there. In addition, the contingent of siege artillery that had been disembarked also moved to the south side of the river. The siege train commander, Tyler, reported that on 26 June at 1800: "We moved across the Chickahominy,

where they [the guns] reported to General Smith. Here they were joined by two 10-pounder Whitworths. . . . Upon the following day (June 27) these batteries were placed in position on Goldings Hill, commanding both banks of the Chickahominy, where they were fought during the day under a severe fire."³⁶ Clearly, the lighter siege guns were still being employed in hopes of stopping Lee's attacks and possibly for use in a final approach to Richmond from 25 to 26 June. McClellan could have sent these siege guns back to White House for transport by sea if he had not still believed in the chance of taking Richmond or at least helping Porter hold his lines. These important guns were placed at considerable risk while on the south side of the Chickahominy, and McClellan could have moved them easier by sea rather than overland if he had already determined to change bases prior to Gaines Mill.

In addition, Van Vliet described the prudent preparations from 23 to 26 June, for a potential shift of bases. This was done even before McClellan had made his final decision, and probably based on the possibility that Lee might cut the road to White House. In one message to White House, Van Vliet directed Ingalls to prepare boats loaded with provisions for movement. In a second, he gave this order: "You will have your whole command in readiness to start at any moment. Please consult with Lieutenant Nicholson, of the Navy, to have his vessels placed in such a position that he can protect our depot."³⁷ The army's quartermaster optimistically concluded: "It will be seen from this that everything had been carefully considered, and every precaution taken to guard against our supplies falling into the hands of the enemy, should it be found necessary for the army to fall back on the James River."³⁸ Van Vliet added that the battle of Gaines Mill "rendered the move to the James necessary"—yet another confirmation that the base change was planned after the United States defeat.³⁹ Van Vliet did well to prepare for the move several days in advance and to put supplies on ships ready to move on short notice—an example of anticipating the commander's needs. However, the move was not as seamless as Van Vliet portrayed.

Whatever his hopes, McClellan finally decided to change his base to the James River on 27 June. The decision for a change of base was reached during the day, as the outcome of the Gaines Mill battle became more apparent. A morning message from McClellan to Stanton at 1000 hours (before the Confederates had launched any attacks at Gaines Mill) indicated that White House might yet remain the base:

The night passed quietly. During it we brought all wagons, heavy guns, &c. to this side [south of the Chickahominy], and at daybreak drew in McCall's division about three miles. . . . The whole army [is] so concentrated that it can take advantage of the first mistake made by the enemy. White House yet undisturbed. Success of yesterday complete.⁴⁰

This message was followed by a shorter, less confident transmission at noon that reflected the effects of growing pressure from rebel attacks north of the Chickahominy: "My change of position [the change of battle positions from Mechanicsville to Gaines Mill] on other side just in time. Heavy attack now being made by Jackson and two other divisions. Expect attack also on this side."⁴¹ At 1300, McClellan seemed to still hold out hope of keeping White House as a base, but directed reinforcements to go to Fort Monroe—a staging base where the troops could wait while he decided between the Pamunkey and the James. He wrote:

Thus far we have been successful, but I think the most severe struggle is to come. The enemy neglect White House thus far and bestow his whole attention on us. If I am

forced to concentrate between the Chickahominy and James, I will at once endeavor to open communication with you [in Washington, DC]. All re-enforcements should for the present go to Fort Monroe, to which point I will send orders.⁴²

As reflected in McClellan's reports, the battle at Gaines Mill began well for the Federals but, in the end, Porter was not able to hold his position north of the Chickahominy River. When

the fighting started in the morning, the rebels were surprised to discover that Porter had pulled back from Mechanicsville to a new position at Gaines Mill. As the rebels moved forward, their attack was further delayed as Jackson's force was late in moving into its position on the rebel left flank. While waiting for Jackson, Lee's forces launched piecemeal afternoon attacks that Porter was able to repulse. However, the outnumbered United States forces were pushed to the breaking point, and a mass attack in the early evening finally broke the V Corps line.

At 1500 during this fighting, McClellan's chief of staff, Marcy, notified Stanton that the Army of the Potomac was being pressed hard and might have to shift to a new base on the James:

We have been fighting nearly all day against greatly superior numbers. We shall endeavor to hold our own, and if compelled to fall back, shall do it in good order, upon James River, if possible. Our men fight like veterans, and will do all that men can do. If we have to fall back on James River, supplies should be passed up to us under protection of the Gunboats as rapidly as possible.⁴³

This was a clear indication that any shift to a new base on the James had been imposed on McClellan by Lee's offensive—"if compelled to fall back," the Federals would move their base to the James. Up to this point, the army commander and his chief of staff had hoped to creep closer to Richmond; they clung, even if with trepidation, to the belief that his advantage in artillery could still bring victory. But the defeat at Gaines Mill forced McClellan to a new base on the James and to completely abandon his hopes for taking the Confederate capital. Lee's victory made the base at White House and the railroad from that base untenable, removing any hope that McClellan might be able to use his heavy guns to reduce Richmond's fortifications.

Now that there was no doubt that he must change his base to the James River, McClellan gathered his corps commanders to discuss the move at 2300 on 27 June. Accounts vary regarding the tone and content of the meeting. McClellan may have begun with an appeal to continue the offensive (where and how were not specified). Historian Stephen Sears painted the army commander's actions at this meeting in a negative hue and asserted that McClellan went into the meeting already determined to retreat and change his base. According to Sears, McClellan feigned an aggressive intent to give the appearance of firm leadership while still presenting arguments that would lead his subordinates to urge retreat.⁴⁴ Whatever his motives, McClellan and his commanders eventually agreed to retreat and shift their base of operations to the James River. In a message to Stanton after the meeting, McClellan informed the Secretary of War of the move to the James; he also accused Lincoln and his administration of keeping essential reinforcements from the army on the Peninsula.⁴⁵ The offensive on Richmond was over.

With the decision made to retreat and move its base, the Army of the Potomac had to protect its logistical assets while withdrawing from Lee's aggressive army. Later, after the Seven Days' Battles, McClellan commented that the change of base from White House to the James in the face of a powerful opponent was a brilliant execution of "the most hazardous of military expedients."⁴⁶ Similarly, some historians have praised McClellan's change of base in the course of the Seven Days' Battles.⁴⁷ Much of this praise is focused on the execution of the retreat—the way the fighting forces covered the retreat; the actual shift of the supplies and base facilities is not covered in much detail.

In fact, the logistical component of the move to the James overcame many obstacles, especially considering the short notice of the move and demands related to terrain and the oper-

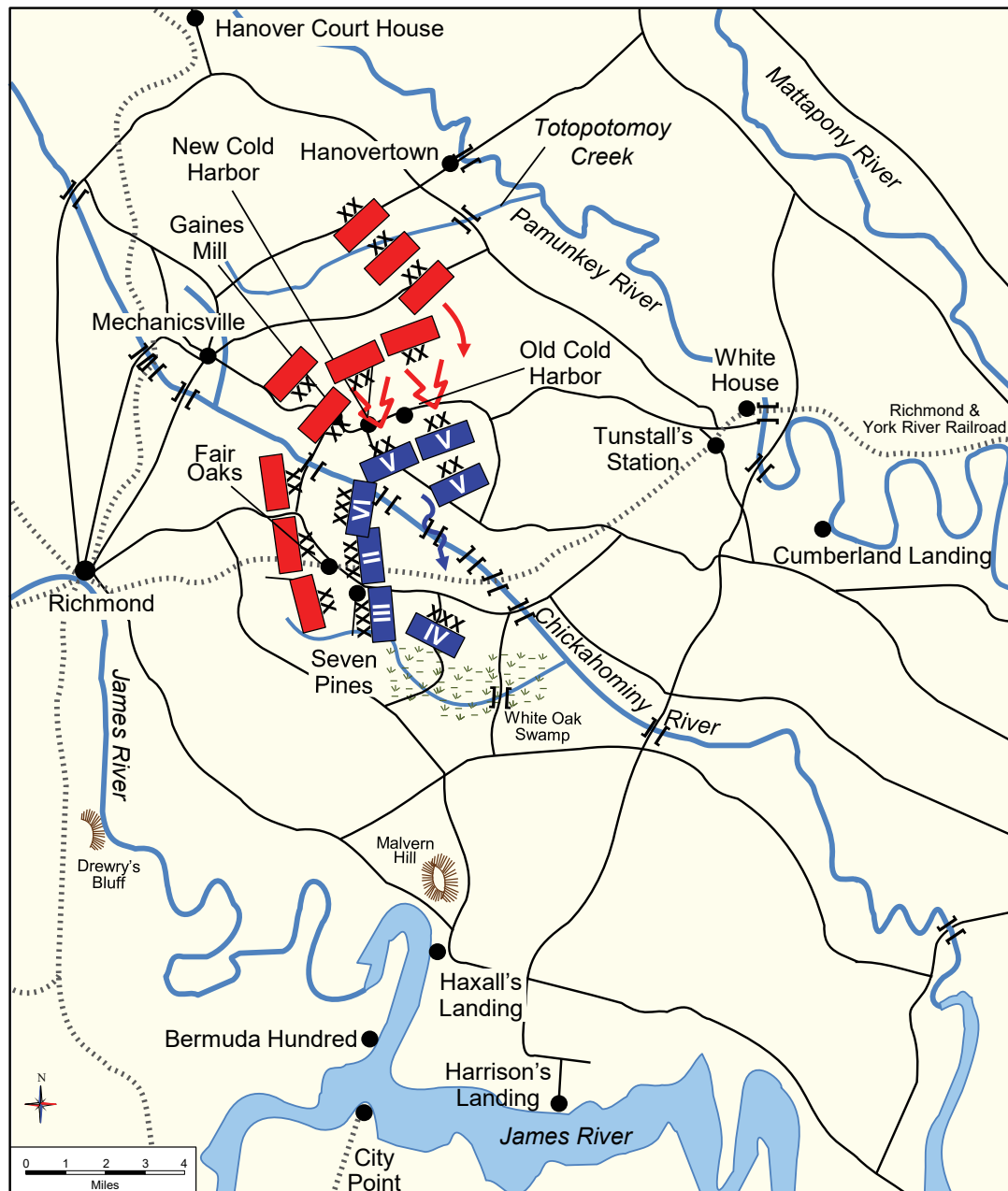


Figure 4.4. Map of the Battle of Gaines Mill, 27 June 1862, part of the Seven Days' Battles. Created by the author and Army University Press.

ational movement of the massive army. The Army of the Potomac's nearly 100,000 men were supported by a ponderous supply train of 3,600 wagons and 700 ambulances, a component of siege guns, and 2,500 head of cattle. Adding to these difficulties, the quartermaster and commissary staff had several forward bases like those at Tunstall and Savage's stations, which had been essential to keeping the army supplied as it moved forward to lay siege to Richmond. Transporting the large stockpiles at these forward bases for the move to White House and other bases on the Pamunkey would be difficult, if not impossible. Also, only limited amounts of these stores could be carried with the army's wagon trains to the new base. In short, the army's logisticians knew they would have to abandon significant amounts of supplies at their forward bases. Aware of these challenges, McClellan's logisticians had taken some actions prior to Gaines Mill to be ready if the army changed bases.

One action Van Vliet took was to move some supplies on floating craft to the James River. This measure not only reduced the ships positioned at White House and Cumberland Landing, making it easier to close the base if necessary; it also positioned supplies near Drewry's Bluff should McClellan's hoped-for advance uncover that position. Interestingly, Van Vliet's request caused some consternation among army and navy leaders on the Peninsula and in Washington. McClellan's quartermaster sent a message to flag officer Goldsborough requesting assistance on 23 June: "Quite a number of vessels loaded with provisions and forage will leave the Pamunkey River within a day or two for James River. The general commanding desires that these vessels be convoyed up the James, and be placed in charge of the gunboats now in that river near City Point or at some secure place near there."⁴⁸ Goldsborough took umbrage at the tone of Van Vliet's message, which the navy commander viewed as a directive rather than an appeal for assistance. At the time of the Civil War, there were no joint army-navy commanders as we know in the modern sense, and thus neither McClellan nor Goldsborough (much less their staff officers) could issue orders that bound the other service's commander. Van Vliet attempted to mollify Goldsborough with a subsequent message that insisted that he was asking for support, not ordering it. He forwarded this to McClellan, who echoed his quartermaster's sentiments in a message to Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles; McClellan complained about Goldsborough's prickly nature and asked Welles to get his flag officer to cooperate.⁴⁹ In response, Welles—agreeing that Van Vliet's tone was inappropriate—urged Goldsborough to "cordially cooperate" with the army.⁵⁰ In the end, the navy commander cooperated but asked McClellan to try to give the navy more lead time for any requests.⁵¹ Despite the bureaucratic infighting, Van Vliet successfully moved some provisions from his Pamunkey bases prior to 26 June.

The army's commissary officer, Clarke, also took measures to prepare for a potential change of base. First, he joined with Van Vliet in moving some provisions afloat on the Pamunkey to the James. Then as Lee opened his offensive on 26 June, Clark directed Captain Bell "to continue sending hard bread and other important articles of the ration to the front during the day and night, and then to reship [place on ships] all he could of the large amount of stores on shore."⁵² Also, now that the battle was in process, Clarke ordered Bell to be prepared, "in the event of the approach of the enemy in considerable force, to destroy all the subsistence stores not reshipped, and then to proceed to Fort Monroe, where he would find further orders."⁵³ Clarke realized that the army's cattle herd was too large and unwieldy to be transported by water; he directed Captain Woodward to move the herd overland from White House to Savage's Station. Finally, the Army's commissary chief, instructed Captain Granger "to break up the depot at Dispatch

Station, and to send the stores as fast as possible to Savage Station. After supplying the hospitals in that vicinity with rations, he succeeded in removing his stores to the place indicated without any loss whatever."⁵⁴

The next day of the Seven Days' Battles (28 June) was the only day with no major fighting. The Army of the Potomac was south of the Chickahominy and for the time being, had broken contact with the rebels. Lee used the day to probe along the river and determine McClellan's next move. By the end of that day, Lee realized that the Army of the Potomac was moving south to the James, rather than east back down the Peninsula. The Confederate commander was determined to strike the Federals as they retreated and destroy McClellan's force. For his part, McClellan deployed more than half of his army (the corps of Sumner, Heintzelman, and Franklin) as a rear guard to cover his retreat. McClellan felt compelled to use such a large force because the army had to withdraw through White Oak Swamp over a limited road network. The difficult terrain slowed the movement of both combat units and the army's trains.

While 28 June saw limited fighting, it was a major day for the Army of the Potomac's logisticians. They needed to close the old base at White House, move the army's trains to include the lighter siege guns and cattle herd, and open the new base on the James. In addition, forward bases such as Savage's Station and Tunstall's Station needed to be evacuated, while the troops destroyed any supplies that could not be moved. Van Vliet's report gives a positive view of the operation: "It was determined to put our transportation in motion for the James River with the view of saving it, and not to destroy it unless it was absolutely necessary to do so to prevent it from falling into the hands of the enemy."⁵⁵ The chief quartermaster then reported that "the trains were immediately started, and on the afternoon of the 29th were all safely across White Oak Swamp."⁵⁶ Van Vliet assigned Ingalls to close the base at White House and establish a new base on the James. The quartermaster's report concluded that these operations were "most satisfactorily accomplished. All our vessels dropped down the river in safety; the rolling stock of the railroad was destroyed, and nothing was left for the enemy except the charred timbers of the White House."⁵⁷

In general, the army's supply services performed their duties well, but the move was much less efficient than Van Vliet described. Historian Stephen Sears claims that the retreat "was in truth managed with much inefficiency."⁵⁸ Sears's criticism focused mostly on operational mistakes, although he did point out errors in the logistical realm. The limited road network in the army's rear presented significant challenges for both operators and logisticians. This difficulty was exacerbated by poor reconnaissance work at multiple levels; staff officers failed to identify two available roads to augment the main retreat route, the Quaker Road. As a result, some of the trains were forced to share the Quaker Road with retreating combat forces. The fault for this error lies mainly with the commanders and their operational staffs, and less so the sustainment apparatus. However, Sears pointed out, the commitment to an overly large cattle herd (a mile long and slow-moving) was a mistake that to a large degree lay with the logisticians.⁵⁹ Sears's observations, even if partially valid, were overly negative just as Van Vliet's report was too positive.

The 28 June evacuation of the Army of the Potomac's base at White House illustrated the difficulties of moving to the James. The commander at White House, Silas Casey, described the evacuation. He wrote that he received a report at 1000 hours from Brig. Gen. George Stoneman, commanding about 2,000 cavalry covering the soon-to-be abandoned York Railroad that rebels

were at “Dispatch Station, on the railroad, with a large force.”⁶⁰ Casey ordered his own garrison troops at Tunstall’s Station to report to Stoneman to delay the enemy. Casey also placed his small garrison at White House under arms to be ready to respond to any rebel advance on the base. He hoped that Stoneman might make a stand at Tunstall’s Station. Casey soon received notice from assistant quartermaster Ingalls that Stoneman wanted to have the infantry of his command, if possible, to be embarked on the transports that had been assigned for Casey’s own garrison. Not long after this message, Casey met Stoneman, “who said that he wished to turn his infantry, about 800 strong, over to me, and that the men were entirely exhausted and should embark at once.”⁶¹ Casey then described the final actions in closing the base:

Seeing that nothing would be done in the way of effectual defense, as General Stoneman reported the enemy advancing in large force, I directed Colonel Harlan, with the cavalry under his command, and Captain Wilson, commanding battery, to report to General Stoneman. At the request of Colonel Ingalls, I made arrangements for firing such Government property as could not be removed. I caused the infantry of General Stoneman to be embarked as soon as it arrived, and a strong guard to be placed to cover the embarkation. The Government property was fired under the immediate direction of Colonel Morris, of the Ninety-third New York Volunteers.⁶²

Casey went on to report that he gave his “personal attention” by remaining on shore superintending the embarkation “until every man was on board and the public property all on fire.”⁶³ After Stoneman informed Casey of the enemy approach, the base commander gave the order for the last United States boats to depart at 1900 hours. He then “caused the empty canal boats lying at the wharf to be fired, and one loaded with ordnance stores to be taken in tow. After I was on board, I observed that the White House [the civilian home at that location] had been set on fire by whom I do not know, and against my express orders.”⁶⁴

In a separate message to Stanton on 29 June (sent from Fort Monroe where Casey had brought his evacuated forces and supplies), Casey emphasized that the “evacuating of White House Station became last evening a military necessity, and agreeably to orders from the Headquarters of the Army of the Potomac I evacuated. Every man was saved, and all public property that could not be saved was destroyed.”⁶⁵ This telegram to Stanton seemed to indicate less disorganization in the evacuation than his larger battle report. The Fort Monroe commander, Maj. Gen. John E. Wool, also provided a more sanguine view of the departure from White House: “The property remaining, which was small, had been fired, so that the enemy took nothing. This is the last intelligence from that point.”⁶⁶ Rufus Ingalls’s report on the evacuation at White House was also positive. He explained that the evacuation was “in compliance with instructions previously given by General McClellan, and directly in consequence of the movements of the enemy the two preceding days.” Ingalls went on to describe the interaction between Stoneman and Casey leading to the evacuation of White House. Ingalls noted that “Stoneman, with the cavalry and artillery, retired toward Williamsburg, in which direction I had already sent all the wagons, animals, &c., not provided for on transports.”⁶⁷ The assistant quartermaster reported:

I perfected arrangements to abandon it [White House] at once, and succeeded in so doing without loss, confusion, or accident, moving out from the narrow and tortuous Pamunkey some four hundred vessels laden with supplies, quite all of which I now have with me, en route to James River by Fort Monroe, if our arms are successful today and

tomorrow at Richmond. The gunboats were still at White House and other important points on the river. Everything not required to be taken away was burned before I left. The White House itself was burned, probably by some unknown hand. The officers of the staff department were one and all wonderfully zealous and energetic.⁶⁸

Ingalls’s glowing report, like Casey’s message to Stanton, overstated the success of the White House evacuation, even if the Federals were able to accomplish a large part of their objectives. Overall, Casey and Ingalls lost no troops and no ships, and they evacuated an extensive amount of supplies—particularly ordnance. However, substantial amounts of other supplies had to be destroyed.

In contrast, Confederate accounts claimed that the supplies destroyed at White House were immense but that they also were able to recover much of the abandoned supplies. W. W. Blackford, a cavalryman with Stuart, recorded that the “conflagration continued and the country for miles around was as light as day, while vast clouds of smoke rose hundreds of yards in the air.”⁶⁹ One of Stuart’s aides, a former Prussian officer and romantic who volunteered for service with Stuart, Heros von Borcke, wrote that the “enemy’s cavalry . . . had, in their rapid retreat, set fire to all of the principal buildings; and from more than a hundred different points, vast volumes of smoke were rising in the air.”⁷⁰ Borcke added that the southern cavalrymen were able to gather “quantities of valuable provisions, there enjoying luxuries of which they had long been deprived, that were scattered in profusion on every hand.”⁷¹ The former Prussian saw Stuart drinking iced lemonade, and observed that “never in my life had I seen such enormous quantities of commissary stores—never had I supposed that an army of invasion would voluntarily encumber itself with such an incalculable amount of useless luxuries.”⁷²

Stuart’s battle report reflected these observations. He recorded that his cavalry force was short on supplies when it reached White House and that his force “relied on the enemy at the White House to supply me with these essentials [and] I was not disappointed, in spite of their efforts to destroy everything.”⁷³ His troops dined on “provisions and delicacies of every description,” and the horses were fed with large quantities of forage.⁷⁴ Stuart also reported on “immense numbers of tents, wagons, cars in long trains loaded and five locomotives, a number of forges, quantities of every species of quartermasters [sic] stores, and property, making a total of many millions of dollars all more or less destroyed.”⁷⁵

The differing views on the White House evacuation probably were less contradictory than they first appear. Though claims that the Army of the Potomac left nothing behind for the Confederates were overstated, the fact that Stuart’s men enjoyed some northern delicacies does not indicate that the United States forces left behind large quantities of supplies. Stuart’s small force gained a day’s worth of food at best—hardly a bounty and nothing to help supply the rest of Lee’s army. On the other hand, the change of base caused the Army of the Potomac to waste considerable amounts of supplies. The Confederate reports have the common component of describing the large bonfires of enemy supplies. While Casey and Ingalls did well to minimize White House stores falling into rebel hands, they destroyed huge quantities of supplies that might have been saved if the retreat had not been so precipitous.

The 28th of June was a crucial day for logistical operations south of the Chickahominy as well as north of the river. As the Army of the Potomac established a rearguard at Savage’s Station, engineers restored bridges across White Oak Swamp to allow the trains and combat units

to move south to the James. The engineers had destroyed the bridges earlier in order to prevent Confederate attacks on the southern flank of the Army of the Potomac. This action had been predicated on McClellan's intent to pursue the campaign with a siege supported by the Richmond and York Railroad. Now that he was shifting his base to the James, White Oak Swamp needed to be bridged. The army's chief engineer, Barnard, commented on the late decision: "That night [27 June] it was understood, I believe, that the army was to march to the James River. General Woodbury received orders from headquarters to proceed immediately to the White Oak Swamp and construct bridges, and I was ordered at an early hour the next morning to send out all the engineers to aid in the same and to explore the roads."⁷⁶ As Barnard reported, the problem of the crossing at White Oak was not the small stream; it was the 200 yards of swamp on both sides that required corduroying of the approach roads.⁷⁷ The engineers were able to establish two bridges on White Oak Swamp by the end of 28 June; one was known as the Upper Bridge (sometimes called White Oak Bridge) and the other called New Bridge (at Brackett's Ford). Heintzelman's III Corps and some of the trains crossed at New Bridge on 29 June, while most of the remaining forces (and bulk of the trains) used the Upper Bridge. Keyes's IV Corps crossed Upper (White Oak) Bridge earlier on the 28th. Although Barnard worried about the durability of the corduroy roads and bridge approaches, the Army of the Potomac successfully crossed on the two bridges.⁷⁸

Lee had planned to strike United States forces at Savage's Station with overwhelming force on 29 June. McClellan's rearguard of three corps protected the rest of the army as it crossed White Oak Swamp. Both commanders, however, had miscalculated. Lee had far fewer men converging on Savage's Station to crush the Federals. In addition, Jackson's command spent most of the day repairing Grapevine Bridge on the Chickahominy, leaving Magruder's command at Savage's Station with a small force facing the United States forces. On the Union side, McClellan did not appoint a commander for the rearguard when his headquarters left Savage's Station on the morning of 29 June to oversee the withdrawal farther south. In the ensuing confusion over command, Heintzelman took his III Corps south without informing Sumner or Franklin. In the end, the fighting that day ended in a stalemate that allowed the Federals to continue their withdrawal and cross White Oak Swamp.

Although the trains and combat units continued to cross south of White Oak Swamp on 29 June, one more sign of the suddenness of the decision to move to the James appeared that day. In the approach to Richmond before the Seven Days' Battles, the Army of the Potomac had established a large hospital at the forward base on the York River Railroad at Savage's Station. The withdrawal to the James did not leave enough time to evacuate the medical station and its patients. Troops were bitter about this inability to remove the wounded. One soldier wrote: "General Heintzelman says 'all who cannot get off by walking must be left behind to the enemy.' Although there are as many as 500 ambulances, these, by General McClellan's orders must go empty! Probably he reserves these ambulances for officers only. . . . Not more than 300 wounded managed to get away, leaving 2,300 to fall into the enemy's hands."⁷⁹ A chaplain also observed these wounded with despair and saw retreating Union soldiers destroy a locomotive and ammunition train.⁸⁰ Although the army's logisticians had taken considerable steps to anticipate moving the base from White House to the James, such as removing essential supplies to the boats and putting them at sea, the last-minute nature of the final decision led to much waste and abandoning wounded soldiers at Savage's Station.

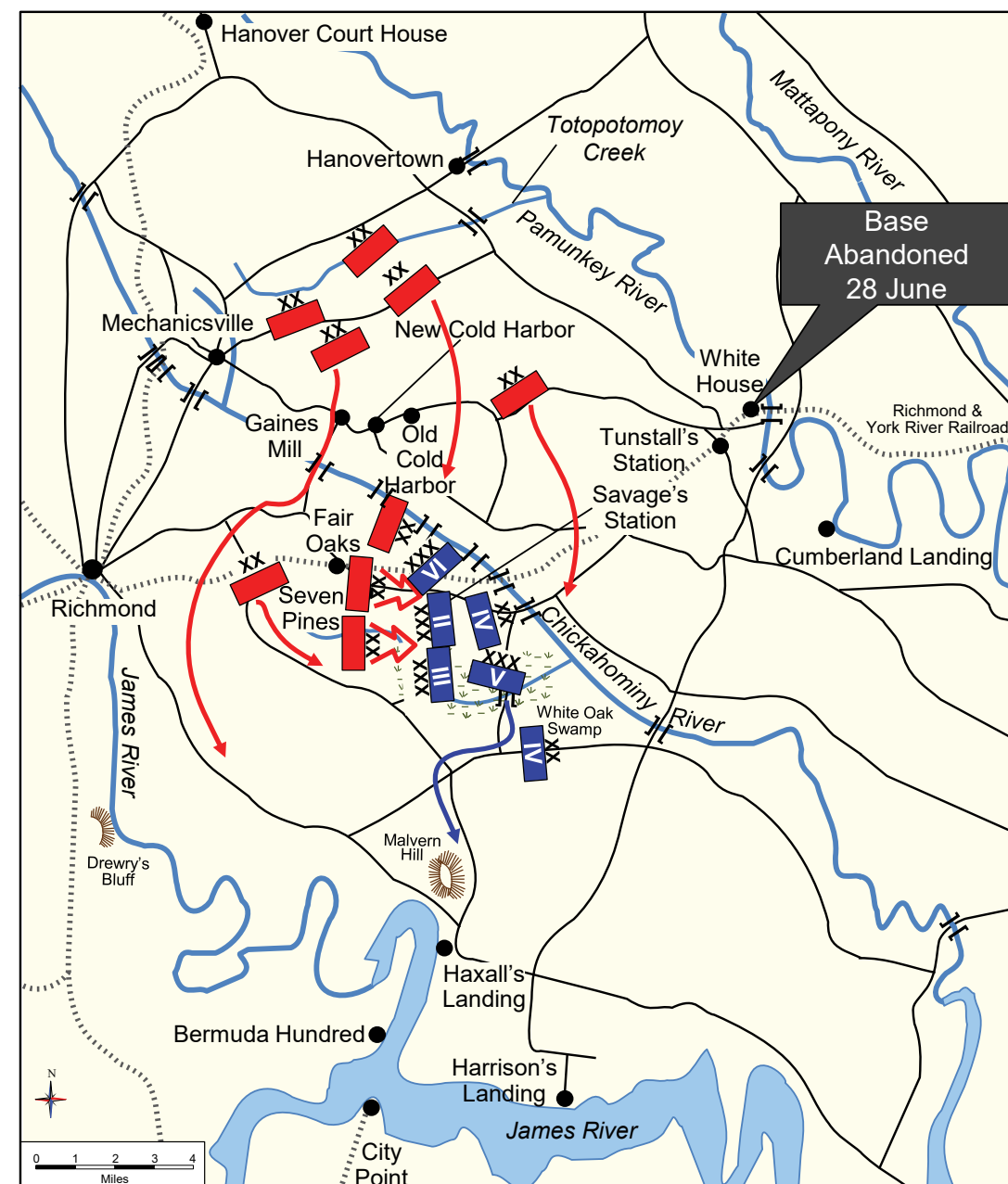


Figure 4.5. Map of the Battle of Savage's Station, 29 June 1862, part of the Seven Days' Battles. Created by the author and Army University Press.

The United States trains and combat units successfully crossed White Oak Swamp throughout the day and into the night of 29 June. The transfer included the army wagons with ammunition, forage, and foodstuffs, as well as the cattle herd and the cumbersome siege train.⁸¹ The last unit across White Oak Bridge was Brig. Gen. Israel Richardson's Division of Sumner's II Corps, which along with one last battery crossed the swamp not long after daylight on the

morning of 30 June. Soon after, the Federals set the bridge on fire. The Army of the Potomac was safely south of White Oak Swamp with much of its trains still in tow. This, despite previously noted flaws, was an important achievement.

On 30 June, the withdrawal continued while Lee attempted to smash the enemy army with an attack at Glendale—about the middle of the retreating columns of the Army of the Potomac. Lee's attack lacked coordination, allowing the Federals to hold their positions. On the other hand, the Union defense was again disorganized. McClellan, who was meeting the United States Navy commander Goldsborough on his flagship in the James River, again left no commander in charge of the rearguard; the corps commanders operated on their own. The Army of the Potomac needed to hold Glendale to keep open its main retreat route—the Quaker Road. While the fighting raged at Glendale, the trains continued their move south toward the James. The goal was to get the trains past Malvern Hill to Haxall's Landing, and eventually to Harrison's Landing on the James River. After Glendale, McClellan planned to have the army conduct one more rearguard action at Malvern Hill. Then the Army of the Potomac would gather at its new base, well protected by United States gunboats. Throughout the 30th, the vast army trains made their way past Malvern Hill to Haxall's Landing. Although the fighting at Glendale had been, to paraphrase Wellington's terminology, a close-run thing, the Army of the Potomac now had its immense logistical apparatus—wagons, ambulances, ammunition, food, forage, cattle, and a siege train—out of harm's way.

The last of the Seven Days' Battles was fought at Malvern Hill on 1 July. McClellan again left tactical control of the fight to his subordinates. In this case, however, he designated Porter



Figure 4.6. Savage's Station, Va., field hospital. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

as the single tactical commander, something he had failed to do in previous engagements. Porter arrayed his forces in a strong position at Malvern Hill with substantial artillery to support the infantry. The V Corps commander was able to take advantage of nearby siege artillery to bolster the defense. The siege train commander, Captain Tyler, reported:

On the 30th of June I received an order to report to you [Major General Porter] with such guns as there was still ammunition remaining for Malvern Hill. [The guns] were

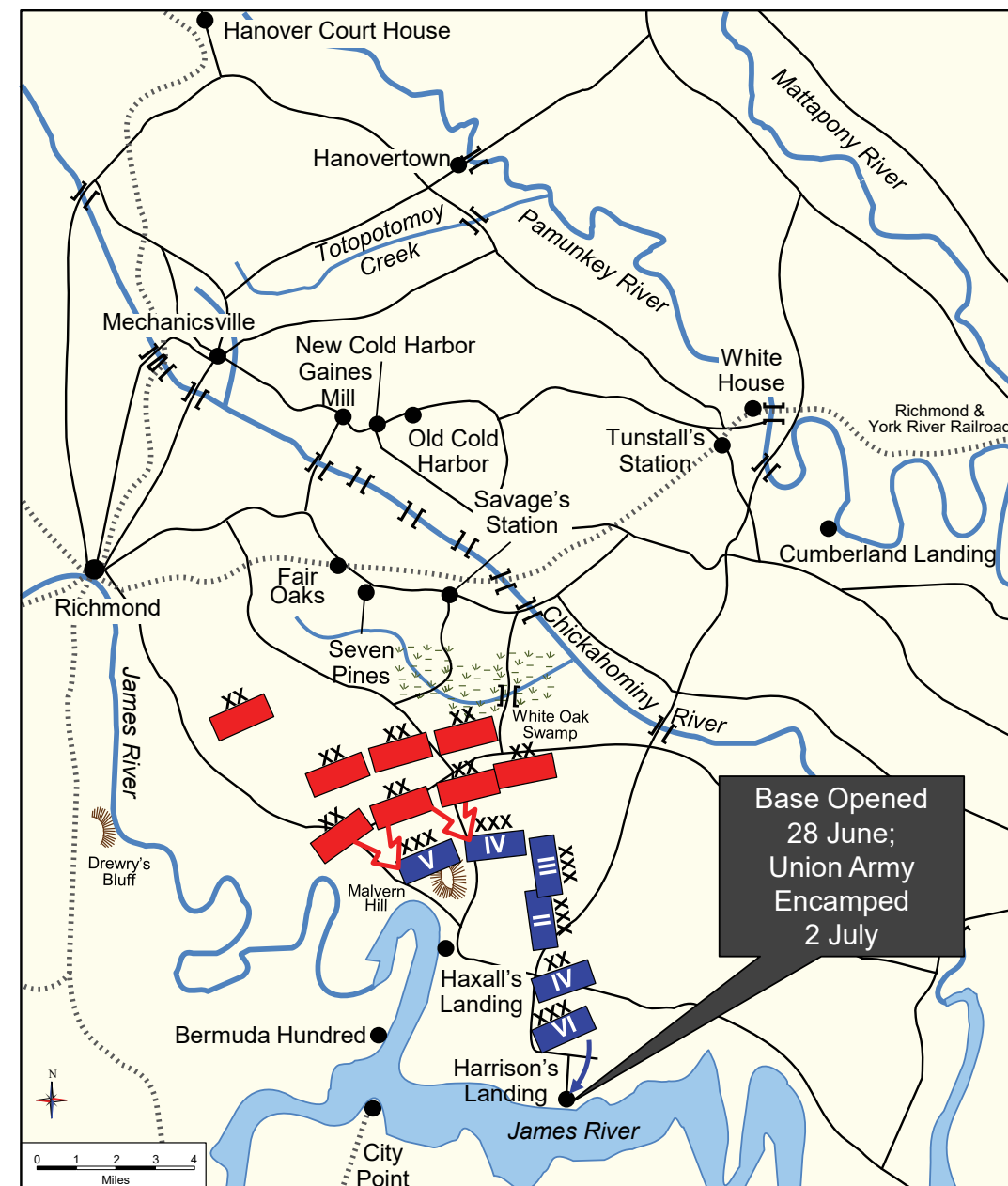


Figure 4.7. Map of the Battle of Malvern Hill, 1 July 1862, part of the Seven Days' Battles. Created by the author and Army University Press.

transported from the camp at Turkey Bend, and under difficulties which you will well understand were taken chiefly by hand up the steep ascent of Malvern Hill, with their ammunition and material, the companies working all night after their previous tedious marches.⁸²

With the help of this artillery, Porter handily repulsed Lee's assaults. During the battle, Van Vliet reported that the "enemy again shelled the rear of the trains at Malvern, but with little effect."⁸³ Despite this victory, McClellan had no intention of stopping the withdrawal to the James. On 1 July, Van Vliet met Ingalls at Haxall's Landing with the ships and stores from White House that were used to resupply the Army of the Potomac. The army conducted a miserable march in a torrential downpour and settled into position around the new base at Harrison's Landing. Van Vliet reported: "After the battle of Malvern Hill, July 1, it was decided to move down the river to Harrison's Bar, which movement was commenced that night, and the next day found the entire army in camp at that point, with the great bulk of its transportation and material, a few wagons being delayed by the muddy roads until the 3rd."⁸⁴ The Army quartermaster also praised Ingalls: "I cannot close this report without calling particular attention to the very valuable assistance which I received on all occasions from Col. Rufus Ingalls, the officer of the Quartermasters Department next to me in rank with the Army of the Potomac."⁸⁵ Ingalls's own report referred to the period from 28 June to 1 July 1862 as "the most important and valuable of my life."⁸⁶ He summed up the transfer of the base from White House to Harrison's Landing:

I succeeded in removing all the transports (over four hundred) from that narrow and tortuous river [Pamunkey] without accident or delay, and conducted them immediately to Fortress Monroe, thence up James River, to meet the army on its arrival. I reached Haxall's on the evening of the 30th, some two hours before the general commanding, to whom I reported my arrival with the supplies. It was decided to take up a position on the left bank of the James a short distance below the mouth of the Appomattox, consequently on the 1st of July I established the depot at Harrison's Landing.⁸⁷

The withdrawal was complete. Van Vliet and Ingalls—as well as all logisticians, engineers, and members of the siege train—had succeeded in transferring to the new base with some pitfalls along the way. Up to the Seven Days' Battles, McClellan had held the initiative, and the Army of the Potomac's logisticians skillfully supported his deliberate plan for a siege. After Gaines Mill, McClellan had lost the initiative, and his retreat forced the logisticians to react to a rapidly changing situation—transferring a base to save the army. In the end, the base change was successful, but with considerable loss of material and the abandonment of the hospital at Savage's Station. Even considering the mistakes of the withdrawal, the army's ability to transfer its base was a significant achievement.

By 3 July, McClellan had a secure base on the James River and his army was safe. Ingalls detailed the large store of material at Harrison's Landing: "There were present with the army about 3,100 wagons for baggage and supplies, 350 ambulances, 7,000 [horses for the] cavalry, 5,000 [horses for the] artillery, and 5,000 team horses and 8,000 mules. Upon the river was a large fleet of transports, having on board an abundance of supplies of all kinds."⁸⁸ By the time of this report, Ingalls had taken over as the Army of the Potomac's quartermaster after Van Vliet resigned on 10 July. Van Vliet clearly requested the move, but it is uncertain whether McClellan pressured him to resign, or if Van Vliet simply believed that the demands of the position

were too much for him. In any case, Ingalls proved to be a superb replacement who would serve as Army of the Potomac quartermaster for the rest of the war.

McClellan's new base at Harrison's Landing was situated primarily to support defensive operations. He had retreated there to save his army from what he perceived as an overwhelming foe. Harrison's Landing gave him security, but did little to give him operational reach. The landing was on the north side of the James River, and any effort to pursue a new line of operations south of the James would require the Army of the Potomac to transfer both its combat forces and base of operations to the other side of the river—with the threat that watching rebel forces that could quickly be reinforced. Harrison's Landing also had limited utility for an advance north of the river to Richmond because McClellan believed the capital could only be taken with heavy artillery, which was too far away (and with no railroad). In addition, the Army of the Potomac's purely defensive stance left Lee's army with better operational freedom, which ultimately allowed the rebels to mass forces against Pope's Federal army at the Battle of Second Manassas. The Army of the Potomac was safe at Harrison's Landing, but limited in its operational choices.

McClellan had failed to seize Richmond, and though there were many reasons for that failure, logistics was not one of them. He had selected rational locations for his bases and, for the most part, his logisticians had skillfully shifted supplies between these bases, anticipating the commander's needs, and maintaining continuity of support. Perhaps the army's movements were somewhat slowed by the logistical requirements of the siege guns; if so, this was caused by McClellan's obsessive belief that he was heavily outnumbered, rather than a fault of the engineers, siege artillerymen, or logisticians. After Lee seized the initiative, McClellan retreated to save his army. While not perfect, his logisticians were largely successful in changing the army's base. Their anticipation and responsiveness, even on short notice, ensured a continuity of supply to the United States Army forces.



Figure 4.8 Harrison's Landing, Va., field hospital. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Notes

1. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), series I, vol. XI, part III, 223, hereafter cited as *OR*.

2. William J. Miller, “I Only Wait for the River,” in *The Richmond Campaign of 1862*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 44–65. Miller’s chapter explored the issue of building bridges across the Chickahominy in depth. He relied heavily on the report of the Army of the Potomac’s chief engineer, Barnard, which was critical of McClellan’s timidity while building the bridges, but contained great detail on the Federal bridge-building efforts.

3. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 229–30. In this message to Stanton, McClellan once again confirmed his plan to rely on his superiority in artillery. It is also interesting to note that McClellan’s obsession with artillery included numerous messages about the problems with his twenty-pound Parrott guns, their fuses, and James guns (*OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 231, 237, and 242).

4. Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of Robert E. Lee* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1961), 184.

5. Totopotomoy Creek is sometimes referred to as a Totopotomoy River.

6. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 1032.

7. A detailed, if romantic, firsthand account of Stuart’s raid was provided by one of its participants: W. T. Robbins, a Confederate cavalry leader in the raid, “Stuart’s Ride Around McClellan,” in Clarence Clough Buel and Robert Underwood Johnson, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. 2 (New York: The Century Company, 1887), 271–74. For McClellan’s reaction, see a message to Stanton in Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860–1865* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 299.

8. Stephen W. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond: The Peninsula Campaign* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992), 162–63; and Ethan S. Rafuse, “Fighting for Defeat? George B. McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign and the Change of Base to the James River,” in *Civil War Generals in Defeat*, ed. Steven E. Woodworth (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1999),” 86. Although the authors presented opposing views of McClellan’s generalship, they agreed that the Federal commander’s probes to the James in late June were in hopes that the Federals might take Drewry’s Bluff; this was just a remote possibility that did not change McClellan’s fundamental plan to use the Pamunkey as his base.

9. As noted earlier in this book, Bonekemper [Edward H. Bonekemper III, *McClellan and Failure: A Study of Civil War Fear, Incompetence, and Worse* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Publishers, 2007)] contended that McClellan was always a defeatist who planned to move to the James as soon as he was given a pretext for the move. Sears (*To the Gates of Richmond*, 210–211) argued that McClellan’s change of base was precipitated by Jackson’s arrival and advance on the Peninsula, which destroyed McClellan’s fragile hopes for offensive action. Sears stated that the Union defeat at Gaines Mill (June 27) made McClellan abandon White House, confirming a change of base that he had considered for a few days but not acted on (Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 250). Interestingly, Rafuse (“Fighting for Defeat?,” 88–89) agreed with Sears to the extent that McClellan was not committed to change his base on June 25 (as McClellan himself later claimed). However, Rafuse depicted McClellan as a victim of orders to hold onto a base at White House that he did not want until after Gaines Mill. Both authors seemed to underestimate how much McClellan wanted to keep his base as the last chance for his methodical victory.

10. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 234–35.

11. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 239–40.

12. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 247 and 248.

13. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 250.

14. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159–60.

15. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159–60.

16. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159–60.

17. Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 301 and 307.

18. Sears, 301 and 307.

19. George B. McClellan, *Report on the Organization of the Army of the Potomac, and of Its Campaigns in Virginia and Maryland* (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1864), 120.

20. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 273.

21. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 273.

22. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 251–52, and 257.

23. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 253.

24. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160.

25. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 259.

26. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 259.

27. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 261.

28. Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 318. See also *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 54–55.

29. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160.

30. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 54–55.

31. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 55.

32. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 55.

33. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part II, 20.

34. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 261.

35. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 261.

36. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 273.

37. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 159–60.

38. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160.

39. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160.

40. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 264. The term “&c.” is similar to “etc.”

41. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 264.

42. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 264–65.

43. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 265.

44. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 250. See Sears’s endnote on page 426. Sears relied on Heintzelman’s accounts to discuss McClellan’s supposed desire to continue the offensive, which Sears believed was disingenuous.

45. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 61; and Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 323. This message is probably most famous for McClellan’s comment in the last paragraph: “If I save this Army now, I tell you plainly that I owe no thanks to you or any other person in Washington—you have done your best to sacrifice the Army.” Because this comment was so shocking (and might have cost McClellan his command), the head of the telegraph office in Washington had it deleted before delivering the message to Stanton.

46. Sears, 339.

47. Rafuse, “Fighting for Defeat?,” 91.

48. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 258.

49. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 258.

50. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 261–62.

51. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 261–62.

52. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 169.

53. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 169.

54. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 169–70.

55. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160.

56. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160.
57. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160.
58. Sears, *To the Gates of Richmond*, 256–57.
59. Sears, 256–57.
60. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part II, 482.
61. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part II, 482–483.
62. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part II, 482–483.
63. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part II, 482–483.
64. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part II, 482–83.
65. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 274.
66. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 274.
67. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 273–74.
68. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 273–74. Regarding the burning of “White House,” Casey, Ingalls, and even Confederates such as Stuart referred to the burning of a particular building associated with the wedding of George and Martha Washington. McClellan had ordered the building protected, and both Casey and Ingalls were concerned about burning the house. Sears concluded that a Union straggler probably set the building on fire. The fact that a building associated with George Washington had been destroyed was a great propaganda victory for the South; however, the Federal leaders’ protests seem to indicate that the destruction of the house was not condoned by the Federals.
69. W. W. Blackford, *War Years with Jeb Stuart* (New York: Scribner’s, 1945), 75.
70. Heros von Borcke, *Memoirs of the Confederate War for Independence*, vol. 1 (New York: Peter Smith, 1938) 65–66.
71. Borcke, 66.
72. Borcke, 66–67.
73. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part II, 517.
74. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part II, 517.
75. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part II, 517.
76. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 119.
77. Corduroying the roads meant that engineers and other soldiers were cutting down tree trunks and laying them side by side in the muddy roads to make them passable.
78. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 119–20.
79. As quoted in Bonekemper, *McClellan and Failure*, 90.
80. The Editors of Time-Life Books, *Lee Takes Command: From Seven Days to Second Bull Run* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1984), 52–53.
81. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 273–74.
82. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part III, 273–74.
83. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160.
84. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160–61.
85. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 160–61.
86. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 165.
87. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 165.
88. *OR*, series I, vol. XI, part I, 165–66.

Chapter 5

Grant's Overland Campaign, 1864: Initial Planning and Battle in the Wilderness

After Ulysses Simpson Grant's 1863 victories at Vicksburg and Chattanooga, President Lincoln made Grant general in chief of the United States Armies. Thus, the new general in chief was in command of all United States Army forces in all theaters for the upcoming campaign in the spring of 1864. Although Grant had several options for locating himself and his staff for future operations, he decided to collocate his headquarters in the field with the Army of the Potomac in the Eastern Theater for the 1864 campaign (referred to as the Overland Campaign). Unlike McClellan, Grant did not directly command the Army of the Potomac; Maj. Gen. George G. Meade commanded this army throughout the Overland Campaign. However, Grant decided to travel with Meade's army, which meant that Grant—sometimes in consultation with Meade and sometimes directing Meade—ultimately determined the path of the army's advance and the bases supporting that effort. In effect, Grant, with input from Meade and staff members, decided the Army of the Potomac's basing and operational reach, much as McClellan had in 1862. In addition, although Grant chose an overland advance for his combat forces, as opposed to McClellan's amphibious move to the Peninsula, the Army of the Potomac in 1864 relied heavily on supply from the sea as did McClellan—a more common approach between the generals than might be inferred from the names of the campaigns.

By his own choice, Grant was in an unusual command position throughout the 1864 campaign. He was general in chief of all Federal armies, which would seem to demand that he command from Washington, DC. However, Grant chose to locate his headquarters with the Army of the Potomac. This arrangement was certainly unusual, often awkward, and sometimes detrimental to the smooth operations of the Army of the Potomac. Despite the potential drawbacks, Grant made the decision to move with Meade's army for several reasons. To avoid the political entanglements of the capital, he rejected the idea of making his headquarters in Washington. Many generals had been forced to testify in front of the Congressional Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, while Army of the Potomac commanders were often required to report to the president or secretary of war while in Washington. Constant media scrutiny added to the political distractions. In addition, leaving Washington meant that Grant could leave administrative matters for the Army in the hands of his predecessor as general in chief, Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, who now acted as the chief of staff of the United States Armies. This was a different position than that of Grant's personal chief of staff, the position held by Brig. Gen. John A. Rawlins. By traveling with Meade, Grant could focus on operational matters while leaving administrative details at the national level to Halleck.

Having decided not to remain in Washington, Grant chose to accompany Meade rather than the forces under Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman or any of his other field army commanders. This decision was based partially on the personalities involved. Grant and Sherman had campaigned together from Donelson to Chattanooga, and Grant had complete trust in his favorite subordinate to command independently. The general in chief had not worked with Meade before, and although Meade had a reputation as a sound tactician, the Army of the Potomac leader also appeared to be cautious. By moving with Meade's army, Grant could ensure that the United States forces maintained constant pressure on Lee's Confederate forces.¹

Grant's location and command relationship with Meade certainly had operational implications for the Overland Campaign. The general in chief's intent was to provide overall direction to Meade, while leaving tactical command of the army in Meade's hands. Despite Grant's intent, his mere presence was bound to affect Meade's own command efforts and have an impact on the operations of the campaign. Adding to the difficulties, Meade's army consisted of three corps (II, V, and VI Corps). One additional corps (Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's IX Corps) was to operate along with the Army of the Potomac without actually being under Meade's command. Burnside outranked Meade (Burnside had commanded the Army of the Potomac at Fredericksburg in 1862 when Meade was a division commander); Grant was reluctant to subordinate the former army commander, Burnside, to his junior, Meade. Thus, Grant directly issued orders to the IX Corps commander. This command anomaly was removed during the North Anna battle in late May when IX Corps was officially subordinated to the Army of the Potomac. But before that change, Burnside's command relationship made the army's hierarchy convoluted and led to some errors.

Aside from operational challenges created by the awkward command structure for the Overland Campaign, it is important to examine the structure's impact on logistics and the staff's supporting sustainment operations. Starting at the highest command level, Grant had a major impact on logistics through his choice of lines of operation for the Army of the Potomac. These lines of operation were predicated on the bases that could support the army and the supply lines connecting the combat forces to the bases. In this way, Grant—more so than Meade—can be directly compared to McClellan in 1862, who also chose the lines of operation and bases for the Army of the Potomac.

In the Overland Campaign, as he had done at Chattanooga, Grant chose to keep only his personal staff with him on the campaign. This meant that the leader of the United States armies had an amazingly small staff of about fourteen men at any given time with which to help him fulfill his duties. Grant did not retain the key logistical components of the special staff—quartermaster, commissary general, and ordnance—preferring to assign those functions to Army of the Potomac logistics officers. Despite giving many of these responsibilities to Meade's staff, Grant remained directly involved in logistical aspects of the campaign. In addition to the critical function of choosing bases for the Army of the Potomac (as well as IX Corps), the general in chief often intervened in directing (or suggesting) routes and locations for the trains, as well as ways to reduce the army's number of wagons to gain more operational flexibility. In addition, Grant's personal chief of staff, Brig. Gen. John A. Rawlins, traveled with the general during the Overland Campaign and was important to Grant in many ways, to include logistics.

Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, who remained in Washington, was another staff officer who greatly aided Grant in the Overland Campaign. Halleck held a position that was truly unique in American military history. He had been the general in chief of the Army, but with Grant's promotion to that position as a lieutenant general, Halleck became the chief of staff of the Army—the chief of staff for Grant in his position as the general in chief. Unlike today's Army chief of staff and other Joint chiefs of staff, Halleck reported more to Grant rather than to the president (the constitutional commander in chief). Halleck proved well-suited to this new position, which allowed him to use his administrative and political talents without the burden of command.

Grant's decision to travel with the Army of the Potomac, but with only a small staff, meant that Meade's chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, as well as other members of Meade's staff, had to play important roles in the logistical aspects of the campaign. Because Grant

did not have a logistical staff with him on this campaign, each time Grant and Meade selected a new base, it was Meade's staff and support apparatus that executed the move. Meade worked professionally to support Grant's plans, even if in private he revealed the frustrations of his position in letters to his wife and with vitriolic attacks on newspapermen. Operationally, Grant made the final decisions on the lines of operation for the Army of the Potomac. The general in chief almost always consulted Meade, and they often agreed, but Grant always made the final call. Likewise, Grant selected the bases to support the operations. In sum, Meade himself was important to Grant in helping to select bases, but Meade's staff was even more critical to executing the change of bases and other sustainment missions of the army.

The Army of the Potomac staff, initially McClellan's creation, was larger than the staffs Grant had seen in the west, and it was well-prepared to execute the orders of the general in chief and the army commander, and to fulfill the campaign's logistical needs. Two key members of this staff were the chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys, and the army's quartermaster, Brig. Gen. Rufus Ingalls. The remainder of Meade's staff included several officers who, like Ingalls, had served under McClellan. The Army of the Potomac's adjutant general, Brig. Gen. Seth Williams, had served in his position the longest—he was one of McClellan's earliest appointments. While not a major player in logistics, Williams wrote many orders and was a thoroughly trusted professional. Another carryover from McClellan's staff was the army's chief engineer, Maj. James C. Duane. Also heavily involved in engineer support for the army was Brig. Gen. Henry W. Benham, commander of the engineer brigade. Three newer members of Meade's staff who were concerned with logistics were Lt. Col. Thomas Wilson, the commissary general; the acting chief of ordnance, 1st Lt. John R. Edie; and the army's medical director, Maj. Thomas A. McParlin. These men rounded out the Army of the Potomac staff that oversaw sustainment functions in the Overland Campaign.

With both Grant's and Meade's staffs set for the campaign, the general in chief laid out the spring 1864 grand strategy for all of the United States armies. Grant tasked two forces for major efforts in May 1864. Meade's Army of the Potomac was to defeat Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, while Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's forces were to defeat General Joseph Johnston's forces in Georgia and take Atlanta. Three other operations were intended to support these main efforts. One, under Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Banks, was to take Mobile, Alabama, the last major port for blockade runners in the Gulf of Mexico. Another supporting effort was in the Shenandoah Valley under Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, who was to defeat any rebel forces there and devastate the farms of the valley, which had been a food source for Lee's army. Finally, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler's Army of the James was to advance to Richmond from the Virginia Peninsula. Even if Butler was not able to take the capital, his forces would prevent reinforcements from going to Lee. While Grant managed all of these efforts throughout 1864, Meade's army absorbed most of his attention.

After the Bristoe Station and Mine Run campaigns in the fall of 1863, the Army of the Potomac faced Lee's Army of Northern Virginia from across the Rapidan and Rappahannock rivers. The Federal Army was camped near Brandy Station, its forward supply base, and its supplies arrived via the Orange and Alexandria Railroad. Meade's army consisted of three corps: II Corps was commanded by Maj. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock, V Corps was led by Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren, and VI Corp's commander was Maj. Gen. John Sedgwick. In

addition, as noted earlier, Ambrose Burnside's IX Corps was to fight with Meade's Army, although initially Burnside reported to Grant and not Meade.

Grant's order to Meade on 9 April 1864, set out the Army of the Potomac's objective and outline of the campaign. This order is noted for targeting the destruction of Lee's army as Meade's goal: "Lee's army will be your objective point. Wherever Lee goes, there you will go also."² However, the remainder of the order shows how much logistics, particularly supply bases, determined the United States line of operations. In this order, Grant wrote about the options for the army's line of operations: "The only point in which I am now in doubt is whether it will be better to cross the Rapidan above or below him."³ Grant then laid out the advantages and disadvantages of each course of action. First, the general in chief examined the line of operations to the west of Lee's force: "By crossing above, Lee is cut off from all chance of ignoring Richmond and going north on a raid; but if we take this route all we do must be done while the rations we start with hold out; we separate from Butler, so that he cannot be directed how to cooperate."⁴ With the upstream approach, Grant was clearly concerned about railroad delivery of rations (and other supplies). "By the other route, Brandy Station can be used as a base of supplies until another is secured on the York or James River. These advantages and objections I will talk over with you more fully than I can write them."⁵ If Grant moved east of Lee's army, the base at Brandy Station would have to be shifted to a waterborne base at some point early in the campaign.

As Grant outlined, the advantages of moving around Lee's left (west) included preventing a potential move by Lee to the north and campaigning on more open terrain, which would avoid the area known as the Wilderness. This location was a particularly difficult area of woods in which to maneuver. Most woods of Virginia in mid-nineteenth century America had little undergrowth because the wood-burning, agricultural society of the day cleared out the small trees and undergrowth and left the older trees untouched. The Wilderness area, however, had been cleared by German settlers in the eighteenth century who then moved away, leaving the region to regrow without the impact of humans and agriculture. Thus, the forest was filled with shrubs, vines, and other entangling undergrowth. Although it would benefit the Federal forces to avoid this ground by going west of Lee, Grant would have to depend on a railroad line that was vulnerable to rebel interdiction. On the other hand, moving around Lee's right flank (east) would mean a move through the Wilderness and the need to cross several rivers closer to their sources where those rivers were broader. Still, by taking this route, the general in chief ensured that Meade's army could be supported by water-supplied bases that were short wagon haul distances from its line of advance.

Grant ultimately chose the option of moving around Lee's right. He considered operational factors when selecting this route, not the least of which was maintaining constant contact with Lee's forces and protecting Washington. But in addition to the operational factors, Grant's line of operations was the best for logistical reasons because it relied on shorter secure wagon hauls from close water-supplied bases. Logistically, Grant's plan was much like McClellan's in its concept—the United States troops would rely on their domination of the sea, using a series of secure and easily accessible bases on the water to sustain the United States army and extend its operational reach.⁶

One possible weakness in Grant's plan to turn Lee's right flank was the general in chief's lack of reference to bases between Brandy Station and the York or James rivers. His order to Meade implied a relatively quick move from the Rapidan to a linkup with Butler on the Virgin-

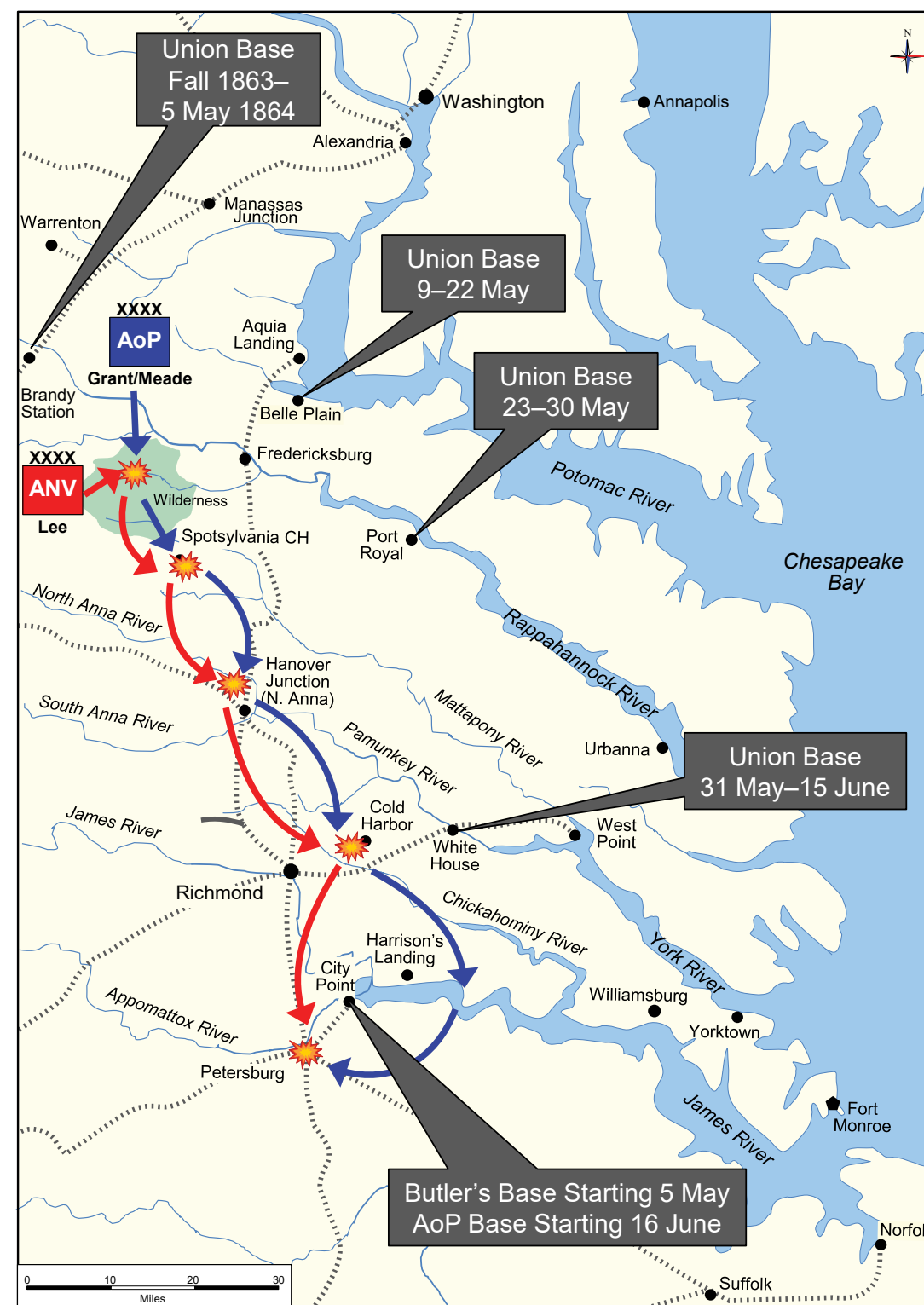


Figure 5.1. Map of Overland Campaign, May–June 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

ia Peninsula. Operationally, Grant underestimated Lee's ability to fight and delay the Federals as they attempted to turn the rebel commander's right flank. In fact, the delays caused by the heavy fighting during the first weeks of the campaign meant that Grant needed several bases between Brandy Station and the Peninsula. However, Grant should not be chastised too much on this issue. While his initial order did not mention intermediate bases before joining Butler on the Peninsula, Grant quickly adapted his logistical support—employing new bases as the situation demanded.

The movement order for the opening of the campaign was issued by the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac on 2 May 1864. The order bore the signature of the army's adjutant, Seth Williams but was developed by Meade's chief of staff, Humphreys.⁷ The plan called for crossing the Rapidan quickly and a rapid march through the Wilderness, so as not to have to fight in the entangled mass of trees, shrubs, and underbrush. In order to speed the army's movement, Humphreys placed the Federal forces on two axes of advance (as opposed to a single line of advance). Warren's V Corps and Sedgwick's VI Corps were to take the western route and cross the Rapidan River at Germanna Ford. Hancock's II Corps was to move on the eastern route and cross the river at Ely's Ford.

Instructions for logistical preparations and the wagon trains were contained in three paragraphs at the end of the order. In the first of these paragraphs, Humphreys (at Grant and Meade's urgings) gave instructions for the reduction of the massive wagon trains of the Army of the Potomac. Each infantryman was to carry fifty rounds of ammunition and three days' full rations, as well as three days' bread and small rations. Additionally, each corps was to cut in half

the amount of infantry ammunition and entrenching tools in its corps wagon trains. Further, each brigade would be limited to one hospital wagon and one medicine wagon. The corps also were required to half the number of ambulance trains as well as light spring wagons and pack animals allowed at the various headquarters. The order went on to specify: "No other train or means of transportation than those just specified will accompany the corps, except such wagons as may be necessary for the forage for immediate use (five days). The artillery will have with them the ammunition of the caissons only."⁸ This effort to reduce the trains was only partially successful. Grant was familiar with the leaner trains used in the Western Theater, and he hoped to parse the Army of the Potomac trains to the same level. However, the sheer mass of the eastern army as well as old habits of providing extensive support meant that the reduction in supplies and wagons left the army with a reduced, but still large, supply train.

The next two paragraphs of the 2 May movement order gave further details on the logistical arrangements. The plan called for the "Subsistence and other trains, loaded with the amount of rations, forage, infantry and artillery ammunition, &c. . . will be assembled under the direction of the chief quartermaster of the army in the vicinity of Richardsville, with a view to crossing the Rapidan by bridges at Elys Ford and Culpeper Mine Ford."⁹ The directive went on to detail a guard force of 1,000 to 1,200 men from each corps for the trains.¹⁰ The order for the initial move across the Rapidan did not designate the next base for the trains, and Grant and Meade were probably not sure where that next base would be. The Federal commanders would have to wait on Lee's reaction to the United States forces advance to determine where the Army would have to stop and fight.

A message dated 3 May 1864 from Meade's quartermaster, Rufus Ingalls, to the chief quartermaster in Washington, Montgomery Meigs, reflected the command's uncertainty as to the next base. Ingalls indicated he had "sent a few of the principal depot quartermasters to the vicinity of Alexandria, with their employes [sic], property, &c., to remain there until it is known where next to establish them. I beg you will not permit them to be interfered with, as it is of vital importance that they are prepared to take posts at new depots at a moment's notice

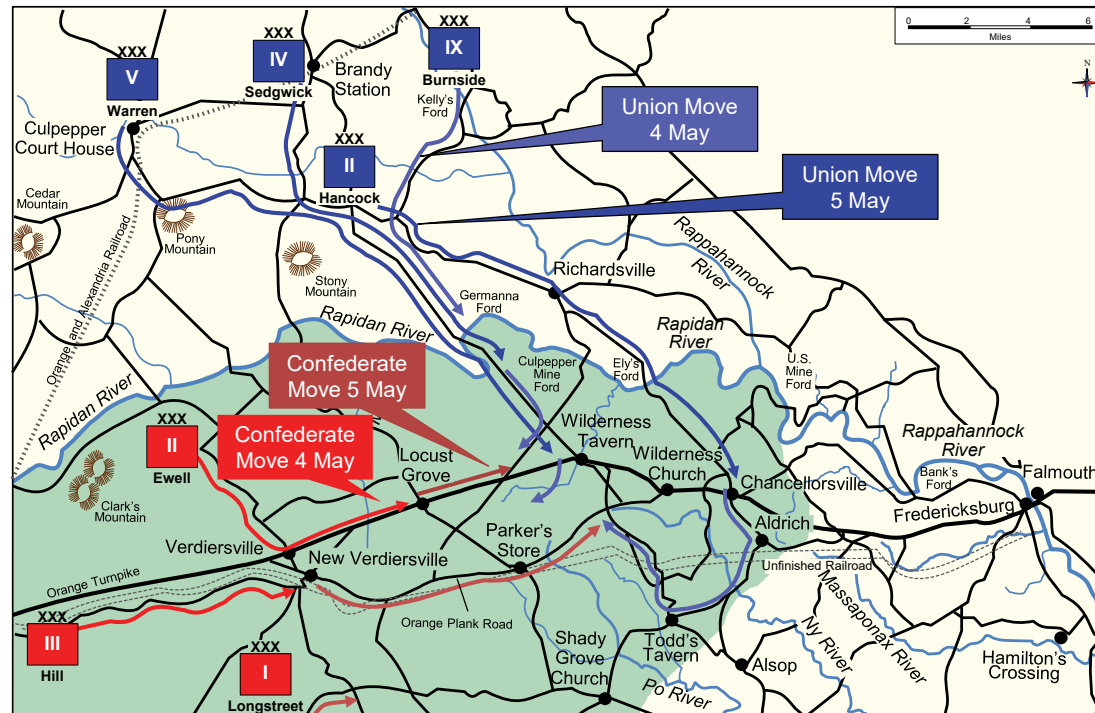


Figure 5.2. Map of Corps Movements and the Battle of the Wilderness, 4–5 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.



Figure 5.3. Union Wagon Train Army of the Potomac. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

from me.”¹¹ Although preparing for any contingency, Ingalls added in his message that he, like Grant, hoped that intermediate bases before the James River might not be needed.

This was an unrealistic hope, but it showed that the army’s fully loaded trains would have to accompany the fighting forces for the moment, supplying the troops as they moved. Only later could the wagons be restocked at a yet-to-be-determined base.¹² Also, Grant, Meade, and Ingalls all knew that the next base would be supplied by water routes, and the rail line to Brandy Station had to be abandoned. Ingalls followed this message with an order to his corps quartermasters that detailed the movement of the trains from Brandy Station toward the Rapidan. The movement attempted to keep the large trains from interfering with troop movements, but the number of vehicles was still immense. Ingalls’s instructions and battle report listed a total of 4,300 wagons, 835 ambulances, 29,945 artillery, cavalry, ambulance, and team horses; 4,046 private horses; and 22,528 mules—for a total of 56,499 animals, including 29,000 horses.¹³

On 4 May, the Army of the Potomac crossed the Rapidan and continued its movement on the routes laid out in Humphrey’s plan. In addition to using multiple routes, Meade’s chief of staff hoped that starting the Army of the Potomac at midnight on 4 May might enable the Federals to get through the Wilderness before Lee could respond. Warren’s V Corps was the first Union unit to reach the Rapidan. It crossed at Germanna Ford and then proceeded south on Germanna Plank Road. Roughly midway through the Wilderness, Warren was to cross from Germanna Plank Road to Brock Road and other smaller trails, which led to open country south of the Wilderness. Behind the V Corps came Sedgwick’s VI Corps, also designated to cross at Germanna Ford. Hancock’s II Corps crossed at Ely’s Ford (east of Germanna Ford) and moved roughly parallel to the V Corps to Chancellorsville. It was then to turn west to Todd’s Tavern and continue on Catharpin Road. This would place II Corps on the army’s far southern (left) flank. Humphreys’ plan was well-crafted but perhaps too ambitious. The problem was not the movement of the Army of the Potomac’s infantry corps; it was the cavalry, artillery, and trains. All three corps made good progress for most of 4 May. However, the massive number of artillery pieces, supply wagons, ambulances, horses, and cattle were simply too much to get across the fords in one day.¹⁴ However, the size of the trains was only part of the reason for stopping short in the Wilderness on 4 May. United States cavalry had examined the roads but failed to leave behind pickets on the Orange Turnpike, thus leaving Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell’s Corps undetected. Based on the apparent lack of rebel activity as well as the assumption that Lee would move as he had done the previous November, Grant and Meade felt they could halt the infantry and allow time for the other elements of the army to catch up.

In fact, Grant and Meade’s assumptions were incorrect in several ways. First, Lee was moving two of his three corps forward into the Wilderness, ready to force a battle although he hoped that his last corps (Lt. Gen. James Longstreet’s I Corps), which was gathering supplies near Gordonsville, would arrive in time for the fight. In addition, the army’s trains were not vulnerable to enemy thrusts even if they were moving slower than hoped. The bulk of the Army of the Potomac was still between the trains and the rebel forces, and the wagons were escorted by a full cavalry division. Finally, the trains, while certainly large and bulky, were able to easily meet Humphrey’s modified schedule for movement and probably could have gone farther.¹⁵ Grant, in his battle report, stated that “the average distance traveled by the troops that day was about twelve miles. This I regarded as a great success, and it removed from my mind the most serious apprehensions I had entertained, that of crossing the river in the face of an active, large,

well-appointed, and ably commanded army, and how so large a train was to be carried through a hostile country and protected.”¹⁶ The trains clearly were not the only reason—perhaps not even the major reason—for the Federal stop in the Wilderness on 4 May.

Ingalls’s report provided additional details on the first day’s logistical operations: “On that day [4 May] the depot at Brandy Station and other points on the railroad, as far as the Rappahannock, were broken up, and all extra and surplus property; with the depot officers and employees were sent in to Alexandria. These officers were directed to await orders.”¹⁷ Ingalls efficiently closed the Brandy Station railroad depot and staged the base personnel in Alexandria pending the opening of the next supply base, knowing that the location of the new base was still to be determined. Like Grant, Ingalls appears to have optimistically believed that the Army of the Potomac would move rapidly toward the southeast, as his report refers to the bases after Brandy Station as “flying depots.” For now, Ingalls had the trains across the Rapidan, while the fighting in the Wilderness determined the next supply depot for the army.

By early afternoon of 4 May, when Hancock and Warren were ordered to halt, Hancock was near the Chancellor House and Warren near Wilderness Tavern at the intersection of Germanna Plank Road and Orange Turnpike. This meant that the Army of the Potomac was not clear of the Wilderness and faced the prospect of spending all of 5 May still moving through the entangled area. Lee, who had correctly anticipated the Union moves, was still not sure if he wanted to bring on a major battle before Longstreet’s corps arrived. He had Ewell’s corps advancing east on Orange Turnpike and Lt. Gen. Ambrose Powell Hill’s corps moving in the same direction on Orange Plank Road (basically parallel to Ewell to the south). Both sides, somewhat unintentionally, were set on a collision course for 5 May, and the outcome of the battle would depend on how they reacted after the initial contact.

On the evening of 4 May, Meade’s headquarters issued movement orders for the next day that continued to reflect Humphreys’ plan for an advance on two axes and the desire to get past the Wilderness. From a logistical perspective, the orders directed the trains to be at Todd’s Tavern on the evening of 5 May.¹⁸ However, events prevented the trains from reaching that position. The Union forces got an early start that morning, and Hancock’s II Corps, unimpeded by the Confederates, made good progress to Todd’s Tavern. Warren was more cautious. He knew that as he advanced south, his right (western) flank could be vulnerable to a rebel attack. Part of the problem for the United States forces was the poor employment of its cavalry. Sheridan and one cavalry division scouted east toward the location of Jeb Stuart’s cavalry, which took them away from Lee’s main forces. Another division escorted the trains. The other division was to clear and screen the roads west of Warren’s V Corps to speed their advance. However, the inexperienced commander of that division moved quickly to the south and failed to leave behind forces to watch for the Confederates on the Orange Turnpike.¹⁹

Unsure of rebel forces on his right flank, Warren deployed a division on the turnpike to block any enemy move while Warren’s other divisions began their passage south. V Corps made contact with Ewell’s troops at about 0700, and Warren quickly reported the situation to Meade. The high command’s reaction was swift. Meade told Warren to attack at once with his entire corps.²⁰ The army commander sent word to Grant, who confirmed Meade’s order to attack. The general in chief urged: “If any opportunity presents itself of pitching into a part of Lee’s army, do so without giving time for dispositions.”²¹ Meade ordered Hancock’s corps to rejoin the main United States forces by marching north on Brock Road from Todd’s Tavern.²²

He also instructed Sedgwick to support Warren's right.²³ At the same time, Grant ordered Burnside to cross the Rapidan and support the Army of the Potomac's offensive.

Despite the difficult terrain, Grant and Meade showed few signs of trying to avoid battle in the Wilderness, and their rapid reaction to the presence of the Confederate army indicated a strong desire to grapple with the Army of Northern Virginia no matter what the terrain. Any delay caused by the trains was less important to the decision to fight in the Wilderness than the Union commanders' desire to engage the rebels and the Federal cavalry's inability to accurately track enemy movements.²⁴ In fact, Grant expressed satisfaction with the trains' movement, and Humphreys also gave his approval: "It was a good day's work in such a country for so large an army with its artillery and fighting trains to march twenty miles, crossing a river on five bridges of its own building, without a single mishap, interruption, or delay."²⁵

Meade and Grant established their respective headquarters (only several hundred yards apart) near the Wilderness Tavern, close to the key crossroads of the Orange Turnpike and Germanna Plank Road. Their forces were going into battle with limited knowledge of the enemy location and strength, even as Warren attempted to comply with Meade's instructions for an offensive. The tangled vegetation took its toll on the Union plan. Unable to see more than several yards in any direction, commanders found it nearly impossible to deploy on line and to maintain contact with neighboring units. The net effect of the slowed movement was that as noon approached, V Corps was still hours away from getting all units on line. Warren decided to attack with his available forces and hope that his other units could join the battle as they arrived. The resulting struggle swayed back and forth with no clear advantage for either side. In the meantime, VI Corps arrived. The corps commander, Sedgwick, sent his lead division south to hold the Brock Road and Orange Plank Road intersection until Hancock's II Corps arrived. The remainder of VI Corps deployed slowly on Warren's right flank. Throughout the day, Warren's V Corps and Ewell's corps fought back and forth around the Orange Turnpike. Neither side gained a decisive advantage, and Sedgwick's arrival was too late to alter the balance. By nightfall, both sides had dug in and awaited the next day.

While the battle between Ewell and Warren raged on the turnpike, Hill's advance up Orange Plank Road produced an equally bitter struggle on 5 May. The day began with Hancock's corps far to the south of the main Union forces, and this meant that the United States forces were vulnerable to defeat in detail. Once Grant and Meade had determined to fight in the Wilderness, they needed to move Hancock's troops back to the north and consolidate the army. Thus, Union forces needed to hold the Brock and Plank Road intersection, and Brig. Gen. George W. Getty's division of VI Corps executed this mission. Later, after Hancock's arrival, the United States forces were able to turn their attention to launching an offensive. However, the II Corps commander faced the same problems as Warren in trying to coordinate an attack in the heavy thickets. The assaults were piecemealed, but the Confederates fell back under the pressure. By late evening, Hancock had all of his own corps available for an attack, along with several other attached units, and the Union leadership planned for a major assault the next day.

The night was horrible for both sides. Fires started in the dry timber, and the flames often crept up to the wounded—many of whom could not move. Soldiers suffocated or burned to death. Some of the wounded suffered even more when their cartridges exploded beside their bodies in the fires. Many soldiers remembered this as one of the worst nights of the war. Despite the almost ceaseless cries for help from the wounded, it was the generals' duty to plan for

the next day. Lee had to remain on the defense and wait for Longstreet's arrival before thinking of any attack. Grant and Meade hoped to crush Lee's right on Orange Plank Road before Longstreet arrived. Toward that purpose, Hancock was given control of a powerful strike force consisting of his own corps, one division from VI Corps, and one division from V Corps.

On the morning of 6 May, Hancock launched the main Federal attack on the Orange Plank Road. Initially, he had great success, and Hill's Confederates were forced to retreat. However, Longstreet's corps arrived as the United States troops moved into the Tapp Farm clearing. After fighting waged back and forth, the rebels halted Hancock's advance. Later in the afternoon, Longstreet launched a new attack that drove the United States forces back to the Brock Road, but this attack was also brought to a halt. During this fighting, Longstreet was severely wounded—nearly at the same location where Stonewall Jackson had been wounded one year earlier at the battle of Chancellorsville. Longstreet would not return for months, and Maj. Gen. Richard H. Anderson took command of the Confederate I Corps. Finally, just before darkness, rebel forces attacked on the other end of the line—against Sedgwick's VI Corps on the Federal right—and achieved some initial success. But like every attack by both sides in the Wilderness, it stalled and did not achieve a decisive result.

After two brutal days of fighting in the Wilderness, neither side had a clear victory. The bloody Wilderness battle forced Grant and Meade to locate a new base under conditions they had not expected. The first logistical response to the heavy fighting in the Wilderness, on 6 May, was to empty half of the ammunition wagons to replenish the troops' heavy expenditure of ammunition caused by the extensive combat.²⁶ While this measure was a precursor to the need for a new base to bring in even more ordnance, the location was still not known. The new base would have to rely on waterborne supplies, but the question was which river and landing would the Federals select for the next line of communications? This decision depended on where Grant and Meade anticipated making their next fight after the Wilderness.

On 7 May, this question was partially answered when Grant and Meade directed the Army of the Potomac to move south, around Lee's right flank, to a small crossroads named Spotsylvania.²⁷ The movement plan called for Hancock's II Corps, which was located on the United States southern flank, to remain in place and act as a screen for the other corps to move. Warren's V Corps was to pull out of the line, march behind IX and II Corps, and then move south on the Brock Road to Spotsylvania Court House. The movement was to be led by Sheridan's cavalry, which was to clear the road all the way to the court house. Wright's VI Corps would move next, pulling back farther to the east before rejoining the route of Warren's men south on the Brock Road. Burnside's IX Corps would move next, and once these three corps were in motion, Hancock's troops would follow. The movement was to start at 2030 on the night of 7 May, with the goal of seizing Spotsylvania the next day. If United States forces could take this vital crossroads, they would be between Lee and Richmond, and the Confederates would be cut off from their advanced base at Hanover Junction.

While the 7 May order clarified the next operational move, it did not provide the precise location for the next base. Once again, much depended on Lee's reaction. If the Federals had to fight for Spotsylvania, the United States forces would need a base close by—perhaps Aquia Landing or Belle Plain, both on the Potomac River. If the Union troops could slip past Lee and move farther south toward Butler's force at Bermuda Hundred, the next Union base might be on the Rappahannock or Pamunkey rivers or even farther south. In a message to Halleck, Grant

indicated he hoped to get to Butler quickly, but he remained flexible: “It is not yet demonstrated what the enemy will do, but the best of feeling prevails in this army, and I feel at present no apprehension for the result. My efforts will be to form a junction with General Butler as early as possible, and be prepared to meet any enemy interposing.”²⁸ In either case, the wagon trains would have to remain with the army, parked just south of Wilderness Run.²⁹ Later, Meade’s headquarters issued the movement order for the shift to Spotsylvania and gave more specific instructions for the trains (but still no location for the next base). The instructions revealed a tremendous focus on the specific movement of the trains:

1. The trains of the Sixth Corps authorized to accompany the troops will be moved at 4 p. m. to Chancellorsville and parked on the left of the road, and held ready to follow the Sixth Corps during the night march.
2. The trains of the Fifth Corps authorized to accompany the troops will be moved at 5 p. m. to Chancellorsville, following the trains of the Sixth Corps and parking with them, and held ready to follow those trains in the movement tonight.
3. The trains of the Second Corps authorized to accompany the troops will be moved at 6 p. m. to Chancellorsville and park on the right of the road, and held ready to move at the same hour with the other trains by way of the Furnaces to Todd’s Tavern, keeping clear of the Brock Road, which will be used by the troops.³⁰

While the Federals could wait to determine the next base for supplies, the large number of wounded from the Wilderness battle needed a more immediate decision for a location for their evacuation. There was some confusion over this issue on 7 May. The army’s surgeon, Thomas A. McParlin, reported that Meade ordered the wounded to be taken to Rappahannock Station using the old line of communications on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad north of the Rapidan River then to Washington.³¹ McParlin added that quartermaster Ingalls was extremely helpful in providing additional transportation for the wounded: “Every facility was afforded by the quartermasters department, and without such aid it would have been utterly impossible to have removed more than one-fourth of the wounded. Three hundred and twenty-five wagons and 488 ambulances were used for the wounded of the infantry corps, and it was found absolutely necessary to leave behind 960 wounded on account of lack of transportation.”³² This was actually a remarkably small number left behind given the heavy casualties. In the end, however, the large train of wounded was redirected. After an exchange of messages, Meade’s staff sent the wounded to Chancellorsville—a clear break from the old supply line on the railroad. McParlin’s report reflected this change: “On the evening of May 7 it was determined to entirely abandon the line of the Rapidan, and the army moved during the night to the vicinity of Spotsylvania Court House. The train containing wounded was, therefore, ordered to accompany the trains of the army to Alrichs, on the Fredericksburg plank road, two miles south of Chancellorsville.” Even so, the wounded could not remain long at this location before further evacuation, and thus a water base on the Potomac was likely to become the new site for removing the wounded, although the selection of a precise new base for supplies was still not yet certain.³³

With the wounded temporarily accommodated and the trains safely moving in support of the army, it still remained to be seen how the army’s move to Spotsylvania would influence the choice of the Federal’s next base.

Notes

1. Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness, May 5–6, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 45–46.
2. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), series I, vol. XXXIII, 828; hereafter cited as *OR*.
3. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXIII, 828.
4. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXIII, 828.
5. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXIII, 827–29.
6. General Andrew A. Humphreys, *The Virginia Campaign 1864 and 1865* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1883, 1995), 9–12. Humphreys described the options for a Union line of advance either to the east or west of Lee’s army.
7. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 52–53. See also Humphreys, 12–13, and *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 331–34.
8. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 333–34.
9. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 333–34. The term “&c.” is similar to “etc.”
10. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 333–34.
11. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 353.
12. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 353.
13. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 354–55; and *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 277.
14. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 52–53.
15. Rhea, 77.
16. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 18.
17. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 277.
18. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 371.
19. Stephen W. Sears, *Lincoln’s Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army of the Potomac* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 631–33.
20. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 404.
21. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 403.
22. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 406–7.
23. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 404.
24. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 403–4. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 69–74. In addition to Grant and Meade being willing to battle Lee in the Wilderness—regardless of the movement of the trains—the United States cavalry under Maj. Gen. James Wilson failed to detect the movement of Ewell’s Confederate corps, which contributed to the need for the Federals to fight in the Wilderness. In *The Virginia Campaign 1864 and 1865* (56), Humphreys addressed the controversial decision to fight in the Wilderness. Large parts of his account refuted Adam Badeau’s *Military History of Ulysses S. Grant*, vol. II (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1882), 101–4. In fact, Humphreys and Badeau presented mutually exclusive arguments that failed to consider the possibility that Grant and Meade may have wanted to get past the Wilderness but were still willing to fight there if the circumstances proved beneficial. Certainly, their numbers would have benefited the Union in the open terrain south of the Wilderness—particular in artillery. On the other hand, Grant had never shown himself to be a great tactician. At Donelson, Shiloh, Port Gibson, Champion Hill, and Chattanooga, Grant brought superior forces to wear down the enemy. The Wilderness presented another situation where Grant might simply bring enough forces to break his opponents’ lines. Though Meade had been more cautious in the past (as in the pursuit after Gettysburg), he seemed willing to do battle in the Wilderness. Part of the reason may have been Lee’s extensive entrenchments on Mine Run. Meade had been thwarted by these

entrenched lines in November and December 1863, and fighting in the wooded Wilderness terrain may have seemed better than dealing with Confederate entrenchments.

25. Grant noted that the trains had met their timetable and indicated in his battle report that the movement was a great success (*OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 18). Similarly, Humphreys felt the trains' movement had been successful, 19–20.

26. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 439.

27. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 481.

28. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 3.

29. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 483.

30. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 483–84.

31. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 220.

32. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 220.

33. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 220, and II, 482 and 483.

Chapter 6

Grant's Overland Campaign, 1864: Spotsylvania through Cold Harbor

After the battle in the Wilderness, Grant and Meade shifted the Army of the Potomac to the south, hoping to cut Lee's army from its supply line to Richmond by taking Spotsylvania Court House. Unfortunately for the Federals, Lee's army won the race to that important crossroads. Sheridan's cavalry had cleared the road to the court house on 7 May, but later that night, the United States cavalry pulled back to Todd's Tavern and went into bivouac, apparently believing that there was plenty of time the next day to finish the mission.¹ Warren's corps, moving that night, ran into the federal troops encamped at Todd's Tavern, causing confusion and delay. After sorting out the mess, V Corps was back on the road in the morning. However, the Confederates were also on the move. Lee had ordered a path cut through the Wilderness that allowed the rebels to move on a route parallel to the United States troops on Brock Road. The rebels also benefited from good luck. Because of heavy fires and smoke in the Wilderness, Anderson decided to march his corps during the night toward Spotsylvania—more designed to ease the discomfiture of his soldiers rather than outmaneuver the enemy. Even so, Anderson arrived at Spotsylvania just moments before Warren's corps. At Laurel Hill, a small elevation northeast of the Court House, Warren launched several attacks that failed to dislodge Anderson's Confederates. Later, Sedgwick's VI Corps arrived on Warren's left, but Ewell's Corps extended Anderson's right flank, and the United States forces were halted. At the end of this initial day of the battle of Spotsylvania, the rebels managed to hold the important road center at the court house, denying Grant a path around Lee's right flank.

While Grant began this day hoping to move quickly beyond his current location and join Butler's army on the James, he instead committed to a major battle at Spotsylvania.² As the fighting raged, Meade informed Stanton (followed by an order to the army) that the army would establish a hospital at Fredericksburg and that this hospital was to be supported by medical supplies and personnel brought to Belle Plain—the first mention of the army's potential new base.³ Then Grant and Meade issued orders for 9 May, giving their troops a day of minor engagements designed to allow for the concentration of their forces while the Union leadership determined its next move.⁴

That same day, Grant sent Sheridan and the bulk of his cavalry on a raid into the Confederate rear. This raid had several operational and logistical effects. Sheridan's move toward Richmond drew a large part of Lee's cavalry, under Stuart, in pursuit. However, Lee kept substantial cavalry forces under his control and for the next weeks had better situational awareness than Grant and Meade, who had sent nearly all of their cavalry with Sheridan. This force, along with its operational goal of defeating Stuart's cavalry, had an additional logistical target, which they accomplished when they destroyed Lee's depot at Beaver Dam Station on the Virginia Central Railroad. However, this achievement's impact was temporary at best. Lee's army suffered reduced rations for a while, but the rebels quickly repaired the rails and resumed full supplies.⁵ In the meantime, Sheridan continued toward Richmond hoping to draw Stuart into battle. Sheridan defeated the rebel cavalry at the battle of Yellow Tavern on 11 May in a fight that brought about Stuart's death. Despite this victory, Sheridan lacked the forces to penetrate Richmond's extensive entrenchments, and thus he took his cavalry toward Butler's forces near Bermuda Hundred.

Eventually, Sheridan stopped at Haxall's Landing on the James River to rest before moving north on 17 May to rejoin the Army of the Potomac. In the end, the raid did little to disrupt Lee's sustinment; much as Stuart's raid in 1862 on the Peninsula had only a minimal effect on United States logistics. In fact, most Civil War cavalry raids accomplished far less than hoped

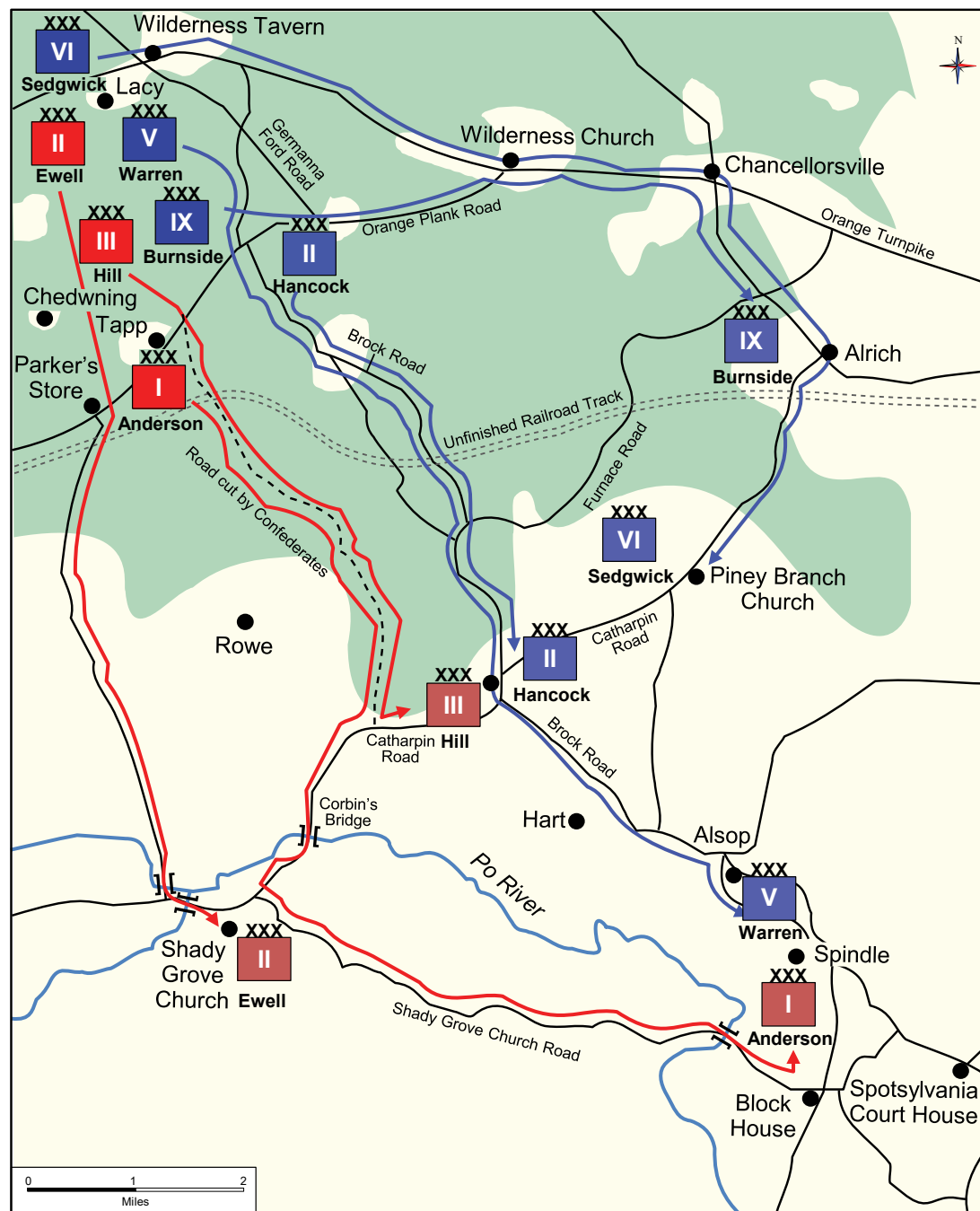


Figure 6.1. Map of movements from the Wilderness to Spotsylvania 7-8 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

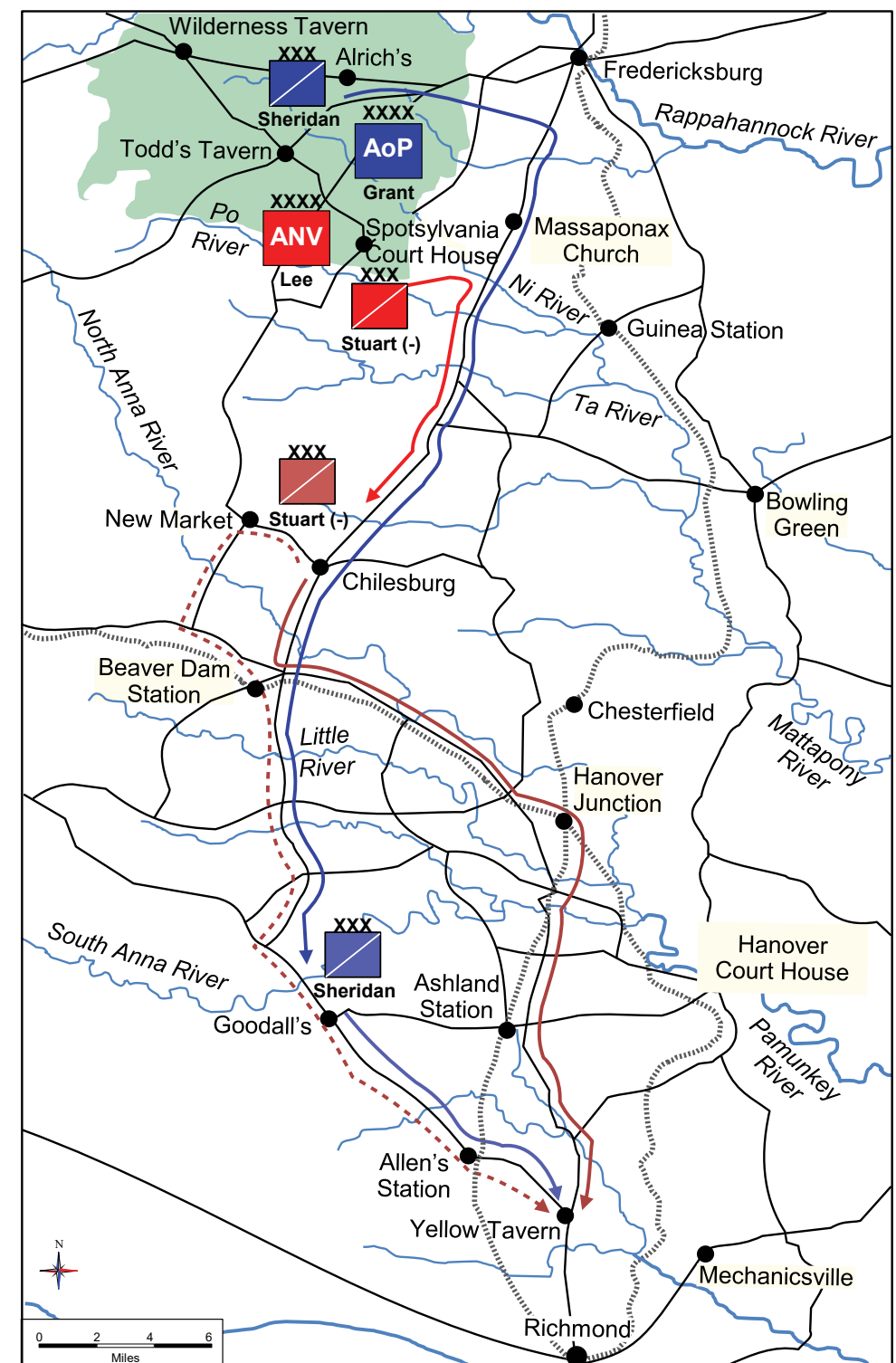


Figure 6.2. Map of movements to Yellow Tavern 8-11 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

for when it came to disrupting logistical operations of their opponent. In particular, the raids of 1862 (Stuart) and 1864 (Sheridan) did nothing to change the selection of bases nor to constrict the operational reach of each side's forces.

A comparison of Stuart's Peninsula Campaign raid with Sheridan's Overland Campaign raid reveals some additional points, especially concerning logistics. Both efforts circled the enemy's main forces, although Sheridan's went farther and lasted longer. In addition, the raids had differing purposes. Stuart was primarily seeking intelligence, and he successfully determined that McClellan's flank was vulnerable. Sheridan was looking for a fight with Stuart—in a way, he wanted to nullify the enemy cavalry to give the Federals greater freedom of action. Sheridan's raid was less successful in gathering intelligence. He was unable to determine the disposition of Lee's forces and had no way to report anything he learned to Grant and Meade. In both raids, hindering the enemy's logistics was a secondary purpose. Even so, the fact that neither raid substantially altered sustenance of their enemy's main forces reflects a major weakness of Civil War cavalry raids: the inability to effectively destroy or interrupt enemy lines of communication.⁶ The difficulty for cavalry in raids was that cavalry forces normally were on the move and could not sit on a railroad long enough to do much damage. They typically only destroyed a few miles of rail and lacked the time (and sometimes the determination) to build the fires needed to bend the rails so that they could not be reused. This contrasts greatly with Sherman's slower-moving infantry force in the march to the sea, which took the time to completely devastate the rail lines it crossed. When cavalry tore up some rails, both sides found that they could repair the damage quickly with little interruption in supplies.

After Sheridan departed, the battle at Spotsylvania continued on 9 May. Stanton informed Grant that he could still remove the wounded via Rappahannock Station or Aquia Landing (vicinity of Belle Plain) as needed.⁷ Apparently, the Secretary of War had not yet received orders to establish a hospital at Fredericksburg and an evacuation point at Belle Plain. Any confusion was removed soon after Stanton sent his message. First, Halleck directed the Army of the Potomac's chief engineer, Brig. Gen. Henry W. Benham, to bridge the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg and support moving supplies from Belle Plain to the army at Spotsylvania. Then, early on 10 May, Grant directed Halleck to send supplies to Belle Plain.⁸ See Figure 5.1. Map of the Overland Campaign, May–June 1864 on page 75 for an overview of the campaign.

The transfer of the base from the Orange and Alexandria Railroad to Belle Plain had not been particularly smooth, but it was not a botched operation either. Several factors hindered the move: the large size of the trains was one, but there was also the leadership's overly optimistic view of the ability to move south without Lee's interference and their desire to engage the rebels at the earliest opportunity whatever the terrain. Despite these difficulties, the United States forces maintained their logistical support throughout the fighting. Grant's 9 May message to Halleck reflected the Army of the Potomac's struggles: "My movements are terribly embarrassed [encumbered] by our immense wagon train. It could not be avoided, however."⁹ Grant recognized the problems with his large trains, but he was not paralyzed by his logistical situation. In fact, Grant probably overstated the difficulties caused by the large trains. To a degree, they slowed the move through the Wilderness; but both Grant and Meade had enthusiastically chosen to fight Lee in the Wilderness, regardless of the trains. In addition, the failure to take Spotsylvania on 8 May had little to do with the transfer of bases and everything to do with mishandling of the cavalry on the road from Todd's Tavern to Spotsylvania.¹⁰

As the fighting at Spotsylvania continued on 10 May, Meade's staff ordered the trains to the left flank of the army, closer to the new base at Belle Plain.¹¹ During the period from 4 to 13 May, Ingalls reported that the trains "occupied the plank road from Chancellorsville via Alrichs to Tabernacle Church, and to the south at Piney Branch Church and Alsops, changing parks [locations] according to movements of our troops and the enemy."¹² Also on 10 May, the fighting intensified. Grant had Burnside's IX Corps positioned on the Union left flank while Hancock's corps, having feinted on the right over the Po River, was to return to the center. The overall plan was for a synchronized assault along the entire line, which in reality fizzled into a disjointed series of individual attacks, most of which were bloody repulses. The single success on 10 May was Col. Emory Upton's attack on the VI Corps front, which initially ripped open the Confederate line of entrenchments then was contained by rebel counterattacks after heavy fighting.

The next day, Grant sent a report to Halleck that declared Grant's intention to continue fighting against Lee's army—a report that has been much quoted by historians. In addition to reporting on recent operations and looking to future plans, Grant was, as always, concerned with logistics:

We have now ended the sixth day of very heavy fighting. The result to this time is much in our favor. But our losses have been heavy, as well as those of the enemy. We have lost to this time 11 general officers, killed, wounded, and missing, and probably 20,000 men. I think the loss of the enemy must be greater, we having taken over 4,000 prisoners in battle, while he has taken but few, except stragglers. I am now sending back to Belle Plain all my wagons for a fresh supply of provisions and ammunition and propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer.¹³

Scholars have pondered the exact meaning of Grant's words "to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer."¹⁴ In a narrow, tactical sense, Grant's "line" may have been the line of operations close to Spotsylvania where the Federals might find a tactical advantage and crush Lee's forces. It might also have referred to fighting based on the supply line from Belle Plain, and hence a willingness to continue the fight at Spotsylvania within the operational reach of that



Figure 6.3. Union Supply Base at Belle Plain. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

base. However, Grant proved more than willing to shift his line of operations and supply base within the next two weeks. Perhaps he meant that the line was any potential line of operations that could be supported by bases tied to the sea between the Potomac and the James. In the end, Grant probably was informing Halleck that he was not afraid to stay in contact with Lee's army in any location that the Federals could sustain logistically.

The severe fighting at Spotsylvania on 10 May was renewed with even more ferocity two days later. Grant and Meade planned for a larger attack with an entire corps to collapse the Confederate lines. After a difficult night march, Hancock's corps launched a massive assault on the salient in Lee's line known as the Mule Shoe. The attack shattered the tip of the salient, but the Union units became mixed and confused while the rebels launched counterattacks to buy time to build a new line. VI Corps also joined in the fighting just south and west of Hancock's troops at a bend in the Confederate entrenchments known as the angle. The struggle on 12 May was some of the most horrific fighting of the war. Grant's aide, Horace Porter, described the aftermath:

Our own killed were scattered over a long space near the angle, while in front of the enemy's captured breastworks, the enemy's dead, vastly more numerous than our own, were piled in upon each other some places four layers deep, exhibiting every ghastly phase of mutilation . . . below the fast-decaying corpses, the convulsive twitching of limbs and the writhing of bodies showed that there [were] wounded men still alive and struggling to extricate themselves from their horrid entombment.¹⁵

Although the breakthrough on the Mule Shoe had not achieved a decisive victory, Grant and Meade continued to look for opportunities to defeat Lee's army at Spotsylvania. On 13 May, Warren's V Corps moved from the right to the left flank of the United States line. Later,

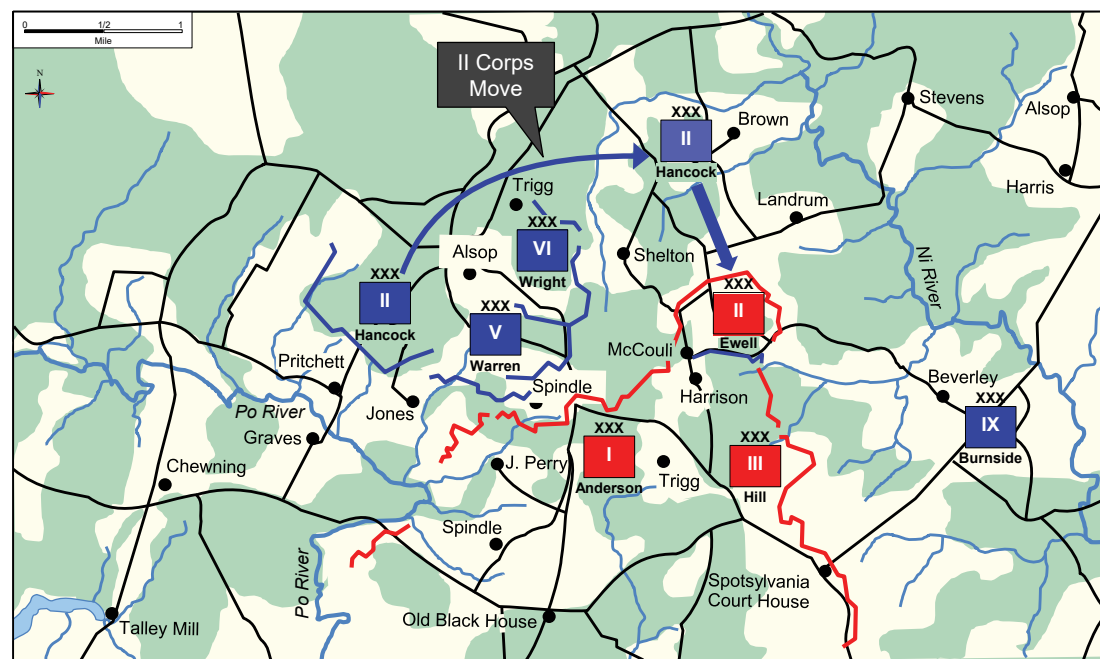


Figure 6.4. Map of Spotsylvania: Positions and Attack on the Mule Shoe 9–12 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

Wright's VI Corps was ordered to move west and extend the line even farther to the left of V Corps. However, forty-eight hours of rain slowed all of these moves. The leadership reasoned that the delays caused by rain had given Lee a chance to respond to the flanking moves, which was at least partially true. Grant and Meade decided to have Wright's VI Corps countermarch to the army's right flank and join II Corps in an attack on the hopefully reduced rebel lines there. On 18 May, II and VI Corps suffered a bloody repulse, partly because even though Lee had shifted some forces to his right, his entrenched lines on the left were more than enough to stop the United States attacks, even with fewer troops.

As the fierce fighting at Spotsylvania persisted through mid-May, the Army of the Potomac continued to draw on the main base at Belle Plain, as well as other supporting bases at Aquia Landing and Fredericksburg.¹⁶ Grant, perhaps still concerned by the Army of the Potomac's large trains, issued instructions on 11 May that bordered on micro-managing the army's logistical affairs:

Send back to Belle Plain every wagon that can be spared, retaining here only sufficient to move what ammunition and other stores that cannot be carried on the person. Two days of the present supply of rations should be unloaded to issue to the men, and ammunition enough to fill all the cartridge-boxes. These wagons can go back with a small escort, relying on re-enforcements expected to give them a strong escort back. All the wagons should start back with a heavy load, say from 2,500 to 3,500 pounds, the amount depending upon the strength of the team.¹⁷

Grant certainly was justified in directing every spare wagon to Belle Plain and the supply of rations and ammunition to the men, but his concern for the weight of the load on the wagon teams seems a bit like the young Grant as a quartermaster in Mexico. Still, though Grant was always concerned with logistics, he rarely ventured into such detail as the campaign continued; perhaps he gained more trust in Meade's staff—particularly his old friend, Rufus Ingalls—to smoothly carry out their duties. In the meantime, an additional message from Rawlins confirmed Grant's desire to keep the trains with the army small after sending the empty wagons to Belle Plain.¹⁸

Ingalls strained his efforts to comply with Grant's directive. On 13 May, he reported: "All empty wagons have been ordered to Belle Plain for supplies, which have arrived there by water from Washington. On the return of the wagons (some have already come back) the command should have as many days forage and subsistence as when we left Brandy." Ingalls went on to inform the command that "Captain Pitkin is in charge at Belle Plain, and has orders to, load the wagons as they were at the commencement of this campaign; but the road to that depot has become excessively heavy."¹⁹ Ingalls recommended that the army's engineer, Benham, improve the roads from Belle Plain to Fredericksburg. He even looked at alternative means to bring supplies to Fredericksburg: "I have sent an officer to see if light-draught vessels cannot ascend the Rappahannock to Fredericksburg with supplies."²⁰ Also at this time, United States Navy Capt. Channing Clapp reported on the effort needed from the navy to expand the capacity of the Belle Plain base. He began construction on "a bridge from the shore, to enable me to run the barges alongside to unload; but I will have to build 300 feet from the shore before I come to water deep enough to float the barges. The steamer cannot come up at all, and I will have to transfer the mules to the barges. By this means I hope to unload all. I will push everything with all possible dispatch."²¹

While the base at Belle Plain was expanded, the Union leadership was free to choose future shifts of base as indicated in a message from Halleck to Grant: “A battery of artillery and some companies of invalids have been ordered to Belle Plain as guards for depot and supplies. When you break off communication with that place, and the wounded are all withdrawn, the depot will be broken up and removed to such place as you may direct.”²² In fact, Halleck deserves much credit for United States logistical success. While he remained flexible in case Grant shifted his base, Halleck also made every effort to make Belle Plain effective. The Army’s chief of staff reported that he was sending “not less than 10,000 men, and I hope to add 3,000 or 4,000 more within the next two days” to reinforce the Army of the Potomac. In addition, Halleck sent 500 railroad operators and General Benham to “Belle Plain to construct wharves and repair roads to Fredericksburg.”²³ This was to improve the weak infrastructure at Belle Plain, which was causing a “delay in landing troops and stores.”²⁴ There was also a need for more transports, which Halleck was already transferring from Butler’s army. He sent dismounted cavalry and more troops from the Invalid Corps to act as guards for the prisoners of war, as well as the depot itself, and the trains.²⁵ Finally, Halleck scoured the theater for more troops and placed a single officer in charge of the base to organize the efforts there: “General Abercrombie has been ordered to proceed in charge of that depot, with orders to push forward the troops and stores with all possible dispatch. . . . You may be assured that no effort will be spared to re-enforce you.”²⁶

Despite the initial confusion with establishing the base at Belle Plain, the Army of the Potomac remained well-supplied, and the wounded were efficiently evacuated. In addition, the intensity of the fight at Spotsylvania required large amounts of ammunition, and sadly, more than the usual casualty evacuation. Even with these heavy demands, the Army of the Potomac was never hindered by a lack of ammunition (or any other supplies), nor did they fail to evacuate their wounded as best as possible under the conditions of the battle.²⁷ The base at Belle Plain was a fully functional supply base throughout the fighting at Spotsylvania.

After almost two weeks of desperate combat, Grant and Meade decided to break contact at Spotsylvania and move around Lee’s right flank once again. Their new plan directed Hancock’s II Corps to Milford Station and Bowling Green on the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad. Hancock’s move may have been intended to draw Lee’s forces out into open terrain.²⁸ Grant and Meade were constantly hoping to fight Lee’s army outside of its entrenchments. However, the II Corps move may have been less a temptation to make Lee vulnerable and more another operational move that threatened Lee’s right flank. Whatever the intent, Hancock’s men began their move late on 20 May. The next day, Warren’s Corps followed II Corps’ path for part of the way before turning south. Burnside’s IX Corps followed Warren while Wright and the VI Corps acted as the Federal rear guard.

Lee looked at his options, and the lack of defensible terrain south of Spotsylvania, and he decided to retreat all the way to the south side of the North Anna River. Grant and Meade had not brought Lee to battle on open ground, but the move around Lee’s flank at Spotsylvania forced Lee to concede a large amount of ground. Both sides raced to the North Anna River. On 22 May, Lee, moving on a shorter route (the Telegraph Road), crossed the river first, but he was unable to prevent his opponent from gaining bridgeheads on the south side of the river. On 23 May, Warren’s V Corps on the right (west) flank of the army and Hancock’s II Corps on the left were able to gain ground south of the North Anna.

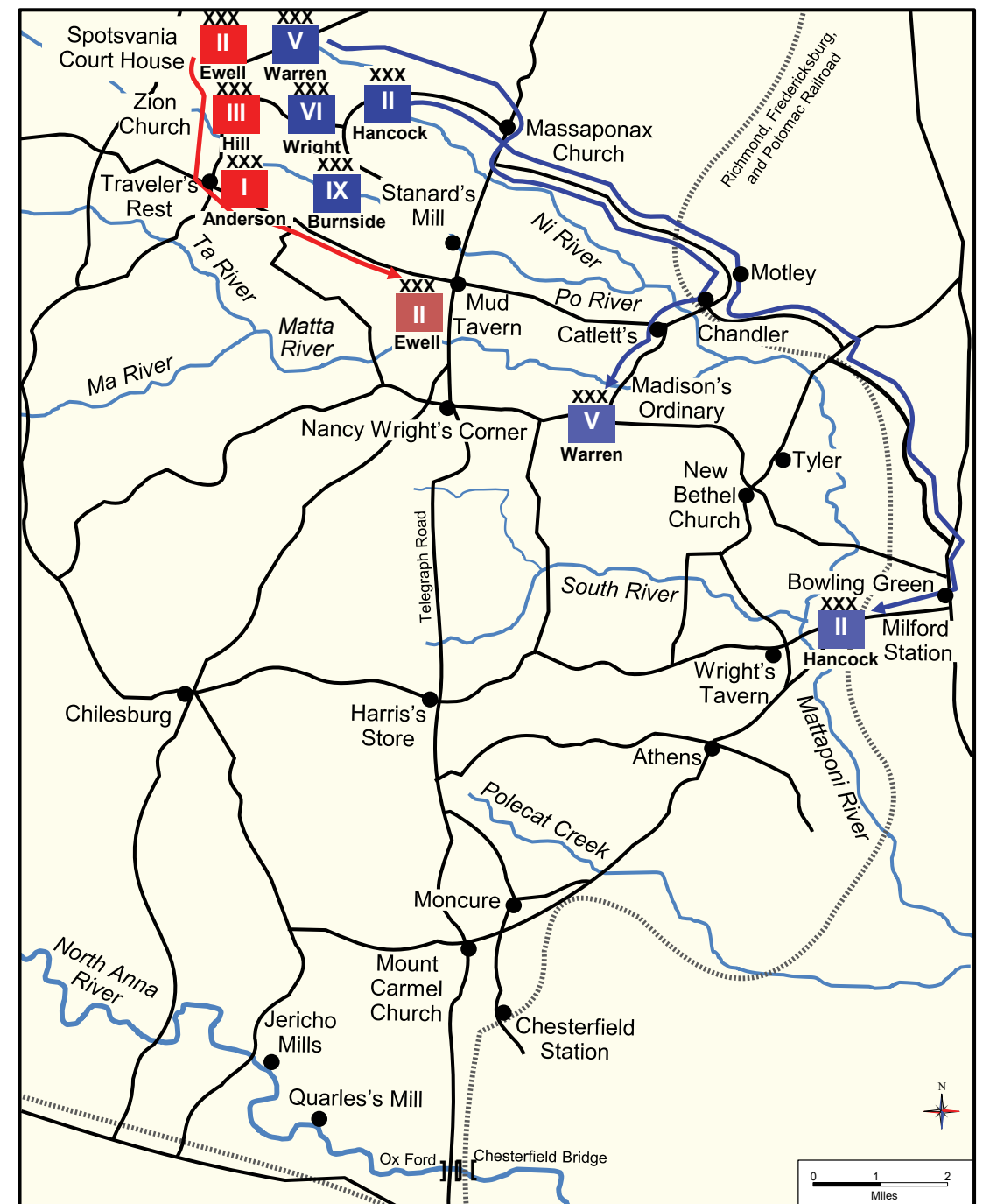


Figure 6.5. Map of movements from Spotsylvania to the North Anna 20–21 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

The United States move to the North Anna required a change of base to Port Royal on the Rappahannock River. The shift to Port Royal extended the army's operational reach farther to the south while still continuing to use waterborne supplies close to the front, secured from

Confederate interference. Additional messages between Capt. W. T. Howell (assistant quartermaster), Ingalls, Meigs, Rawlins, Williams, and the commander at Belle Plain, Abercrombie, reveal incredible proficiency in the shifting of United States army and navy bases.²⁹

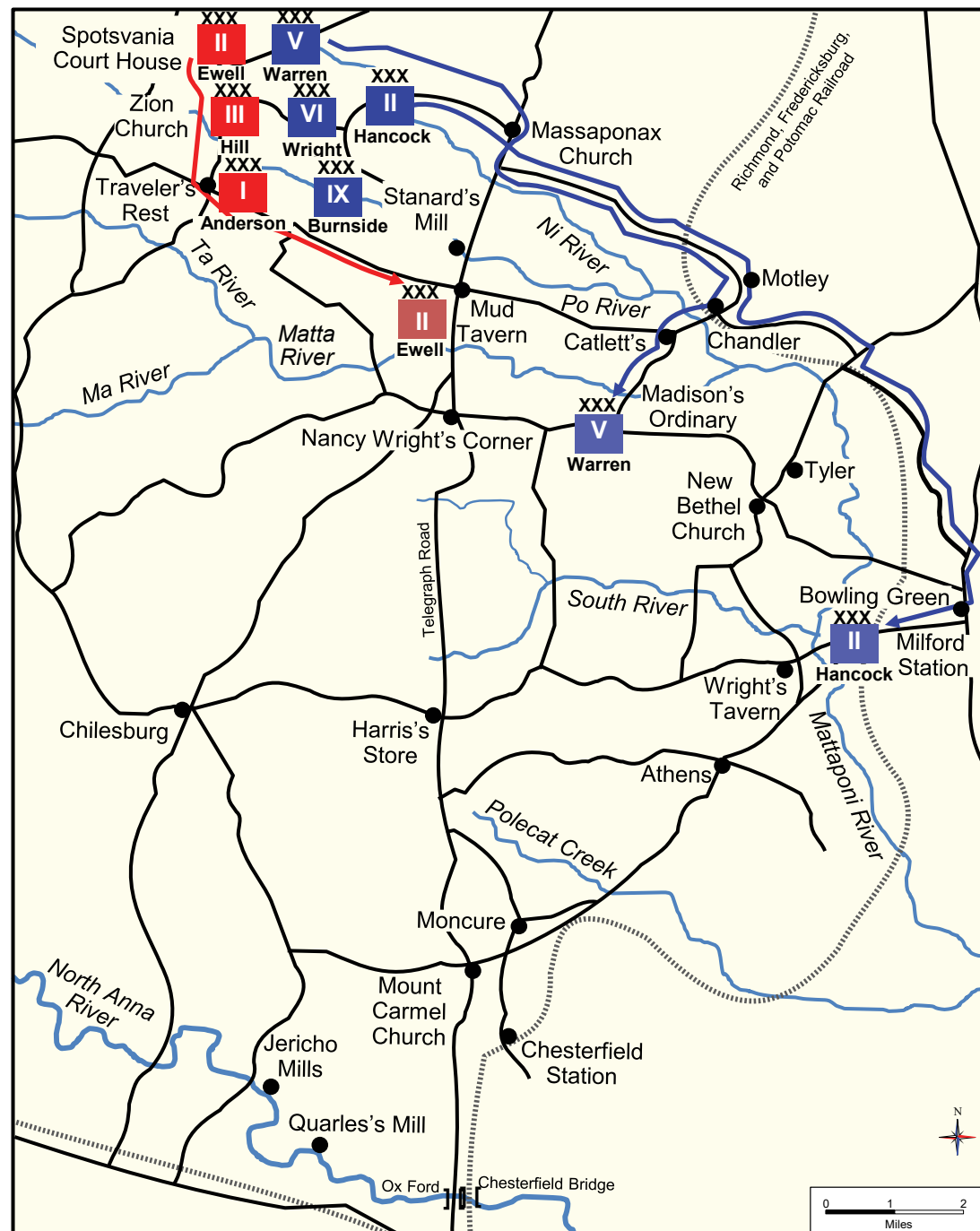


Figure 6.6. Map of movements from Spotsylvania to the North Anna 21–22 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

From Grant to Halleck, 22 May, 08:30 A.M. (Guiney's Station)

We now occupy Milford Station and south of the Mattaponi [today spelled as Mattaponi] on that line. I will now transfer our depot to Port Royal at once. Please direct the transfer of everything there.

Halleck then relayed the necessary instructions: Circular from Halleck to Engineer, Quartermaster's, Commissary, Medical, and Railroad Departments, and also to General Auger, 22 May (Washington)

Lieutenant-General Grant has given notice that his base of supplies will be immediately changed from Fredericksburg to Port Royal. Orders will be given accordingly to remove everything from Fredericksburg, Belle Plain, and Aquia Creek to Port Royal. Repairs of Railroad will cease, and all property not required at Port Royal will be returned to Alexandria. Proper precautions will be taken to have nothing destroyed and nothing left to be captured by rebel guerrilla forces. The proper orders will also be given to all transports of supplies leaving here, and also to all re-enforcements.

From Meade to Brigadier General Seth Williams (Meade's adjutant) — May 22, 0700 A.M.

Direct General Ingalls to move the trains to Bowling Green. Notify corps commanders of this fact and that five days' rations must be drawn to-night from the supply train.

From Meade to Williams — 22 May, 0800 A.M.

Notify the chiefs of staff departments that orders have been given to return all empty wagons now at Fredericksburg and Belle Plain loaded, after which, so soon as the wounded are removed from Fredericksburg, that place and Belle Plain will be abandoned, and the depot will be established at Port Royal on the Rappahannock.

Source: All of the message traffic in the series of quotations concerning the shift of the base to Port Royal can be found in United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 77–81, and 100–1.

Figure 6.7. Message traffic regarding the Army of the Potomac move to the North Anna. Graphic created by Army University Press.

Although the orders showed commendable cooperation and efficiency, the change of base—like virtually all complex military operations—engendered questions from those executing the orders, and none was more vocal than the commander at Belle Plain, Abercrombie. A diligent officer who consistently believed he did not have enough forces or information, Abercrombie complained to Rawlins that his cavalry was overtasked and would have difficulty combating rebel guerrillas while moving the wagons to the new base. Abercrombie followed with a message to Grant that assured that the base commander would “send everything off as fast as possible” to the new base but still posed several questions:

Am I to draw in all guards of Aquia railroad, telegraph, and road to Fredericksburg?
What disposition am I to make of six batteries of Reserve Artillery from Army of the Potomac encamped here? . . . Is it intended by your order the garrison of Belle Plain should march by way of Fredericksburg, or direct from here to Port Royal?³⁰

While his questions were legitimate, Abercrombie would have served Grant better by working out these details at the staff level—with officers such as Ingalls and Williams. He also could have recommended solutions to these issues instead of asking open-ended questions.

Despite Abercrombie’s objections, the orders, circulars, and instructions for the move of the base to Port Royal demonstrate a remarkable level of logistical skill. A simple message from Grant to Halleck set everything in motion. The old base was closed without loss; repair of the railroad to Fredericksburg (never actually needed during the fighting at Spotsylvania) was suspended; rations, ammunition, and other supplies were issued; and the trains were repositioned for the next move. In the process, Abercrombie’s questions were answered: the railroad was no longer important, the reserve artillery was distributed to the Army of the Potomac’s corps, and the garrison at Belle Plain marched to Port Royal.³¹

During this time, the Army of the Potomac’s trains kept pace. Ingalls reported that on 20 May the army’s trains were near Guiney’s Station, under the control of Capt. L. H. Peirce, assistant chief quartermaster. Ingalls went on to report that the trains “were conducted by him [Peirce], under my daily orders, by Bowling Green to Milford Station, where they arrived on the 22nd. On the 23rd, they were crossed over the Mattaponi, and parked in the open ground between the river and Wright’s Tavern.”³² That same day, Union forces reached the North Anna and began probing across the river. Ingalls finished by stating that the “trains remained in park near Wright’s Tavern during the operations on the North Anna. Our wounded were sent to Port Royal, and supplies received from that depot.”³³

Another aspect of the importance of logistics in Grant’s operational decisions was the objective he selected for the army’s next move—Hanover Junction. Grant wanted to seize this location because of its importance for sustaining Lee’s army. This crucial railroad junction was the link between Confederate supply lines of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad and the Virginia Central Railroad. Lee received supplies from the deep south via the Richmond line and supplies (mostly foodstuffs) from the Shenandoah Valley on the Virginia Central route. Clearly Grant’s line of operations for his combat forces—well-supported logistically on his own side—was aimed at debilitating his opponent’s support system.

On 23 May, the Army of the Potomac edged across the North Anna River toward Hanover Junction, and the base at Port Royal came into full operation. Also that day, Halleck sent a telegram to Grant that made several interesting points concerning operations and logistics.³⁴ The

United States Armies’ chief of staff emphasized the need to concentrate forces against Lee. This might entail sending troops from Butler to reinforce Meade, or moving Meade’s army south to link up with Butler (both options were very much a part of Grant’s thinking). After providing his operational views, Halleck advised Grant on logistics. Halleck believed that Grant needed to avoid having too many bases and urged the general in chief to have Butler close down the base at City Point (just north of Petersburg on the south side of the James River where it joined the Appomattox River). Contrary to Halleck’s thoughts, the base at City Point later became an essential part of Grant’s successful crossing of the James in mid-June. However, Halleck did prove prescient when he advised Grant that White House might become the next Army of the Potomac base, and Halleck began to prepare for this eventuality.

The approach to the North Anna brought about some disagreement over the next course of operations for the Army of the Potomac. Meade and several other officers believed there was no need to force a crossing on the North Anna. They urged another sidestep to the southeast without risking battle near the North Anna River. This difference in opinion on the next move, as well as Meade’s own frustrations about being ignored or attacked in the Northern press, reflected the friction between Grant and Meade. However, for the most part, according to staff officer James Biddle, the two Federal commanders “work together very congenially.”³⁵ Historian Stephen Sears presented a strong case that whatever the discussions, the “orders were in fact products of joint discussion and planning by the two generals—framing orders from which subordinates were then issued their individual orders from Meade.”³⁶



Figure 6.8 Union Base at Port Royal. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

The Federals pressed farther across the North Anna on 24 May, but soon found themselves in a vulnerable position. Warren’s V Corps, followed by Wright’s VI Corps, gained ground on the right flank. On the left (east) flank, Hancock also expanded the bridgehead he had on the south side of the river. Grant and Meade thought they had an advantage over the Confederates. However, Lee adroitly deployed his army in an inverted “V” formation with the tip securely positioned on the North Anna River. Lee hoped that he could strike the Union forces while they were awkwardly split by the river on both sides of his inverted V deployment. In the end, Lee became ill and, unable to ensure vigorous prosecution of his plan, could only contain the United States forces. Some serious fighting occurred—but not nearly as heavy as at Spotsylvania—and the United States forces pulled back.³⁷ Instead of risking serious battle, Grant and Meade looked for new alternatives to a fight on the North Anna.

In the meantime, Grant and Halleck exchanged messages instructing Butler to prepare an improvised corps under Maj. Gen. William F. “Baldy” Smith for movement from Bermuda Hundred to join Meade’s army. At this time, the landing point for Smith’s ad hoc XVIII Corps was not fixed, although Port Royal was the logical choice as it was the Army of the Potomac’s main base. Perhaps Grant was already thinking of shifting his base away from Port Royal at this

time, thus leaving the possibility that Smith’s Corps would be transported to another location. Whatever the case, Meade’s adjutant, Williams, issued orders that maintained Port Royal in full operation for the moment.³⁸

On the evening of 25 May, with the Union move at the North Anna blocked in front of Hanover Junction, Grant and Meade met with several of their generals to discuss the next course of action. The Army of the Potomac had consistently moved around Lee’s right flank throughout the campaign so far, but Grant now entertained the possibility of moving west around Lee’s left flank.³⁹ The V Corps commander, Warren, and Brig. Gen. Henry J. Hunt, the Army of the Potomac’s chief of artillery, recommended this change of direction to the west. The major advantage of a move in this direction was surprise—it would be a change from all of the army’s moves up to this point. Also, part of Burnside’s IX Corps, Warren’s V Corps, and Wright’s VI Corps were already on Lee’s left flank, and thus it would be relatively easy to have Hancock’s II Corps pass behind the army and extend farther to the west. On the other hand, an attempted move around Lee’s left flank had the disadvantage of requiring the crossing of three rivers: Little River, New Found River, and the South Anna. Meade and Grant’s aide, Cyrus Comstock, argued that the other alternative of moving around Lee’s right meant crossing only one river, the Pamunkey, which was the confluence of the other three watercourses.

In addition to the operational arguments for both courses of action, there were powerful logistical considerations. A move to the west was fraught with supply difficulties. The Army of the Potomac would have to achieve a tactical victory quickly or be faced with trying to supply its forces with an overextended wagon haul from Port Royal. A move around Lee’s right had the advantage of being easy to support with another shift of base, probably to White House on the Pamunkey River. Grant decided on the safe course—a move around Lee’s right flank and across the Pamunkey River. While we cannot know what ultimately most influenced Grant’s decision, it is clear that logistics and basing were critical factors. Ever mindful of the logistical vulnerabilities of his opponent, Grant ordered United States troops to destroy as much as possible of the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad and the Virginia Central Railroad in the North Anna region before they departed.⁴⁰

The 25th of May brought further clarification to the logistical situation. Grant informed Halleck that he would not order Butler to give up City Point (the general in chief clearly saw the value of keeping this potential base on the south side of the James), but he did want Butler to have his forces take up a defensive posture that would free up soldiers for transfer to the Army of the Potomac. Grant also instructed Meade to move toward Hanover Junction and cross the Pamunkey River.⁴¹ These orders were directing Meade’s army around Lee’s right flank once again and required a new base for the Army of the Potomac. While the high command planned its next move, Quartermaster Ingalls displayed no qualms about supply operations in a message to Meigs: “I see no difficulty in supplying the army, provided our trains are as securely protected in future as they have been to this time.”⁴² He requested 1,000 artillery horses be sent to the army and informed Meigs that the army had a “general park of some 3,000 wagons [which] is now ten miles in our rear. We have had no embarrassment with them.”⁴³ In contrast with early difficulties related to large trains in the Wilderness—once labeled by Grant as an “embarrassment” to the Federal movements—logistical arrangements were clearly so improved by mid-May that they did not hinder forward movements.

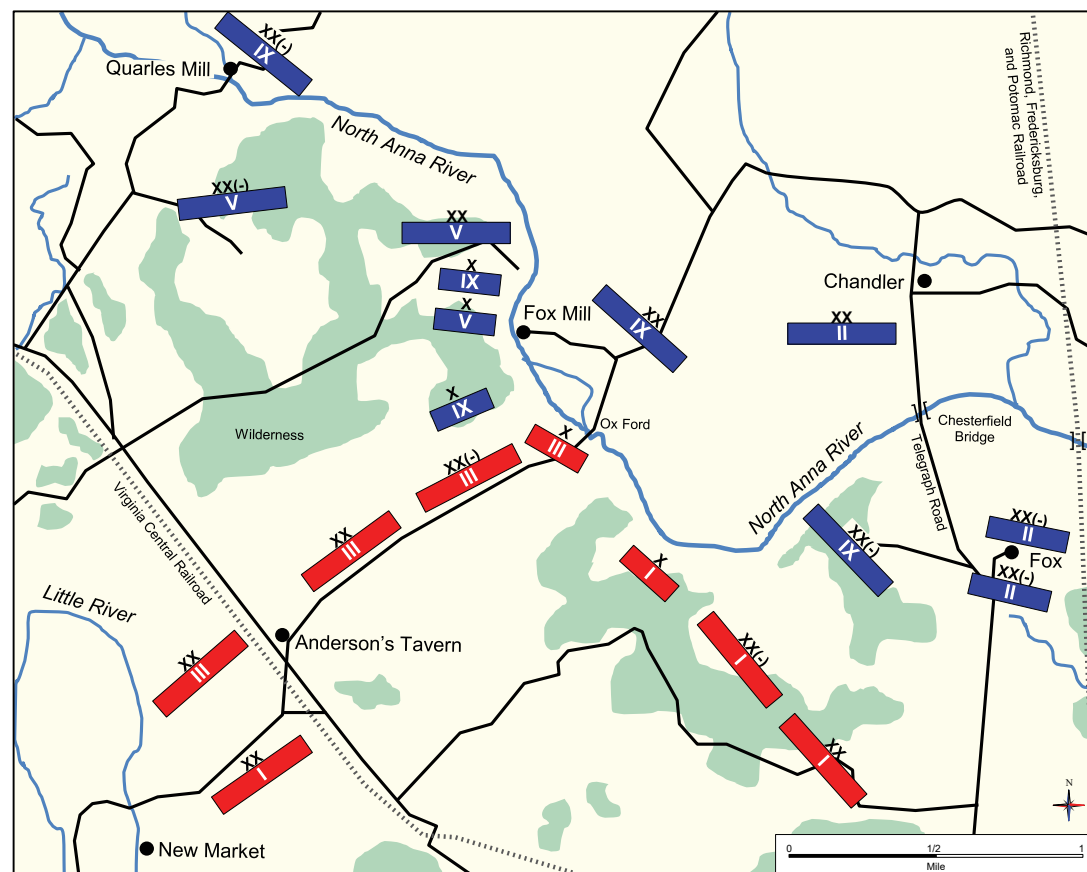


Figure 6.9. Map of Lee’s inverted V formation at North Anna, 24 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

One day later, Grant informed Halleck of the Army of the Potomac's move away from the North Anna River and the plan for crossing the Pamunkey. After informing Halleck of all of the operational details, Grant added that whatever the outcome of the operational move of the Army of the Potomac, there was probably going to be a change of base. He elaborated: "I think it advisable, therefore, to change our base of supplies from Port Royal to the White House. I wish you would direct this change at once, and also direct Smith to put the railroad bridge there in condition for crossing troops and artillery, and leave men to hold it."⁴⁴ This short addition to Grant's long operational message set into motion the efficient mechanism of Federal supply operations and the transfer to another base.

On 27 May, Halleck sent a long message to Grant arguing, once again, for the need to reduce the number of bases committed to United States forces operating against Lee.⁴⁵ Halleck appears to have not received Grant's message of 26 May because the chief of staff reiterated his arguments for Grant to avoid dispersion and not to keep open too many bases. In fact, Grant had no intention of dispersing his forces, but he continued to have Butler keep open the base on the James at City Point. The next day (28 May), Halleck acknowledged receipt of Grant's plan: "Your letter of the 26th is received, and measures taken to immediately carry out your wishes." Several hours later, Halleck informed Grant of the plans for breaking down the Port Royal base and establishing a new supply point at White House.⁴⁶ Like each base for the army in this campaign, White House was a secure waterborne location that extended Grant's operational reach. Coincidentally, this had also been a base for McClellan in 1862. However, White House had one major difference for Grant than it did for McClellan—Grant had no intention of making White House a base for siege artillery or rebuilding a rail line to transport that artillery to the outskirts of Richmond.

From 27 to 30 May, the Army of the Potomac crossed the Pamunkey River and probed to determine Lee's position on the Totopotomoy River on the outskirts of Richmond. A cavalry engagement at Haw's Shop on 28 May was a Union tactical victory, but the Federals did not determine the rebel infantry locations. While the cavalry performed other missions, the next day, Grant and Meade ordered the infantry corps to probe forward—a reconnaissance in force by modern terms. The troops moved carefully and recognized that Lee had established new defensive positions. As the Army of the Potomac continued to slide left (south), the move across the Pamunkey prompted the transfer to the new White House base.

The new base for the Army of the Potomac was established at White House with the usual efficiency. Quartermaster Ingalls's report gives an overview of the switch to the new base. It begins by describing the army's move on 27 May toward Hanover town and Nelsons and Hundleys Ferries on the Pamunkey. He then described the path of the trains, which had to recross the Mattaponi and move well to the rear of the army before coming back to the Pamunkey on the army's left. On the 28th, the infantry corps crossed the Pamunkey, moving toward Cold Harbor. Also on that day, Ingalls "sent a staff officer to White House, distant fifteen miles from Hanover town, to ascertain if Smith had arrived with the Eighteenth Corps, and if Captain Pitkin had arrived from Port Royal with his employees and supplies."⁴⁷ The staff officer returned at midnight and reported that he had not seen Smith's troops or Captain Pitkin. However, the next day, the logistical pieces fell into place: "The [wagon] trains arrived promptly at Hanover town, by way of Dunkirk, crossed the Pamunkey on the 31st, and parked near Mrs. Newton's house.

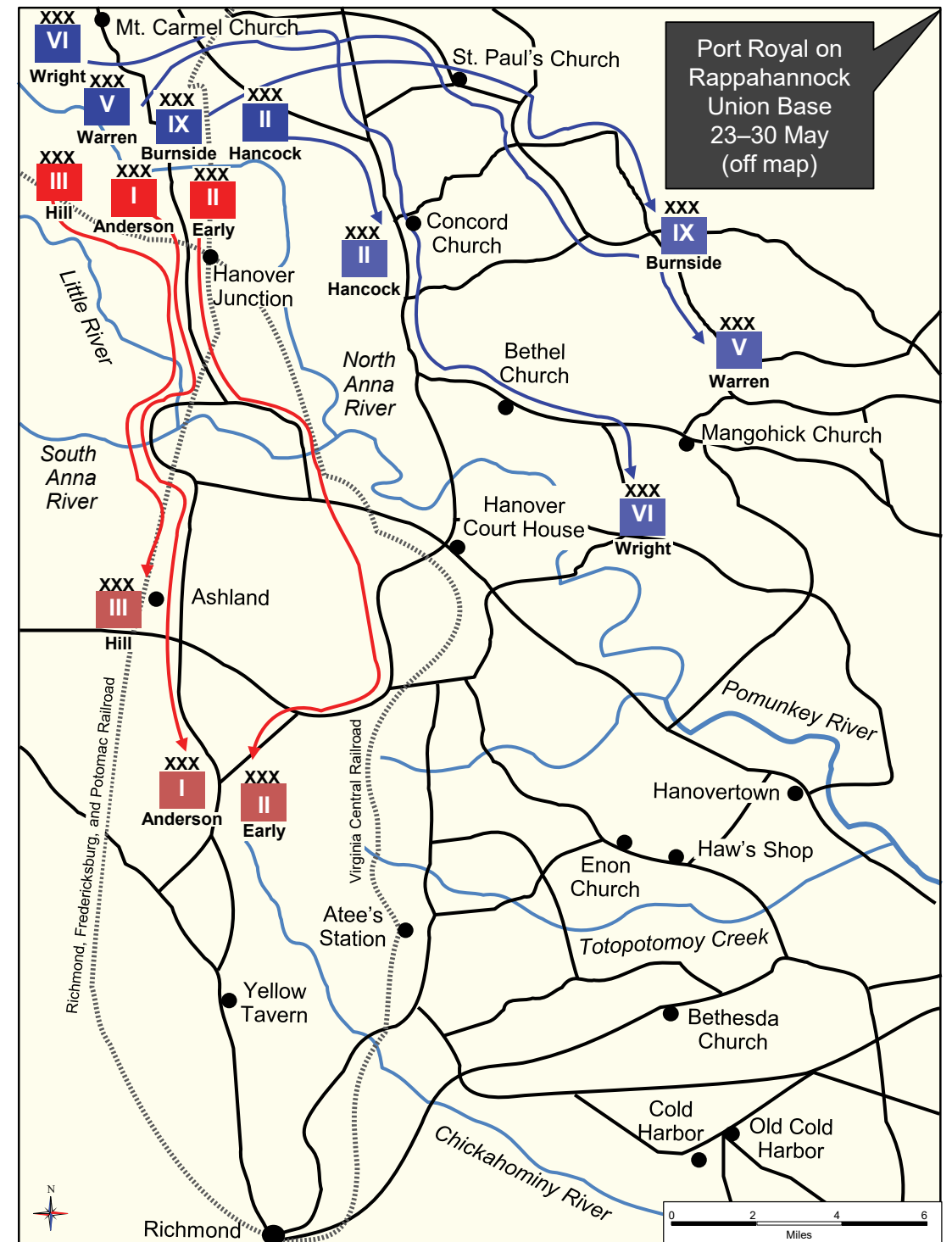


Figure 6.10. Map of movements from the North Anna to Cold Harbor, 27 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

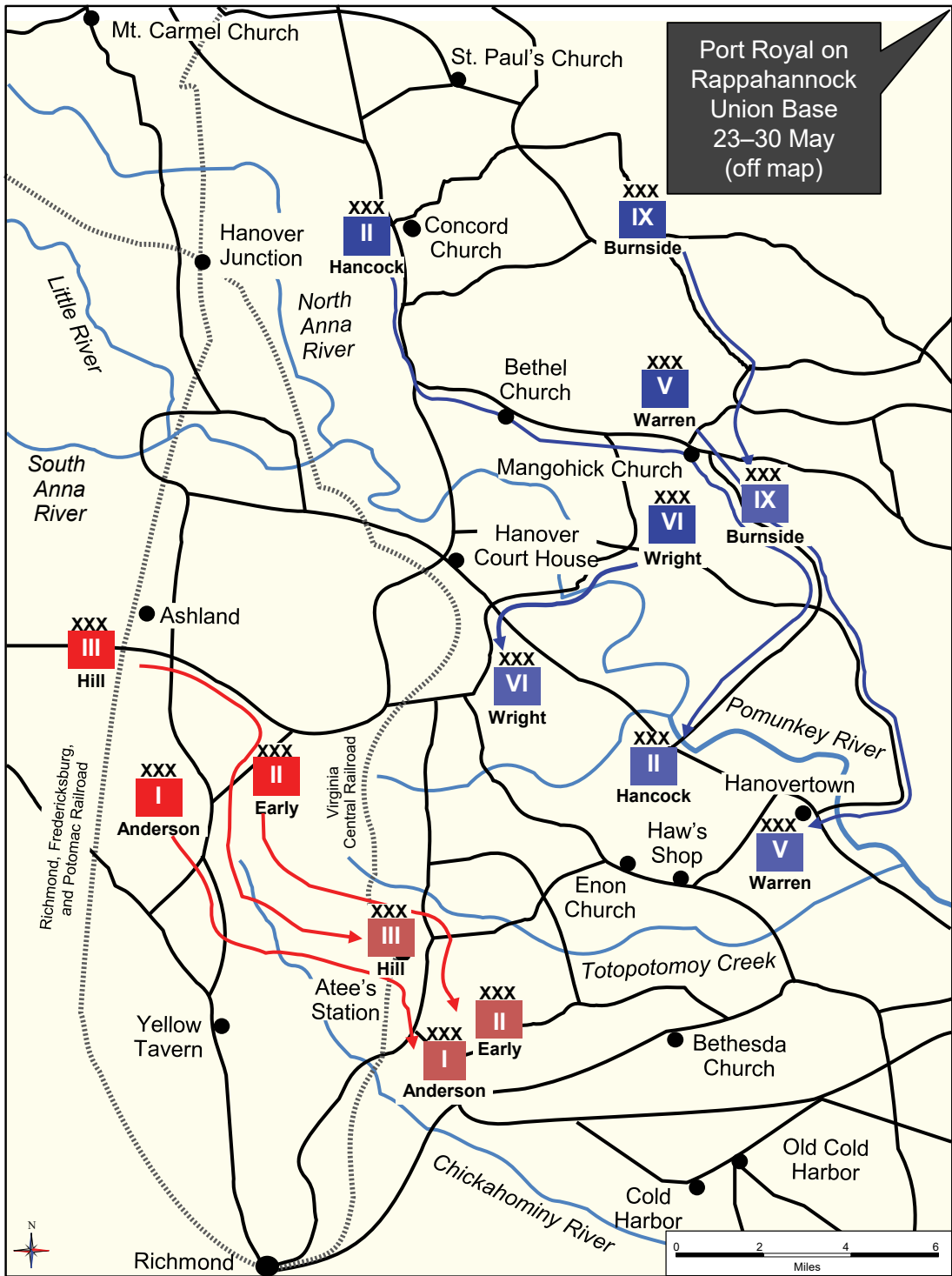


Figure 6.11. Map of movements from the North Anna to Cold Harbor, 28 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

Captain Pitkin arrived at White House the same day and established the depot.”⁴⁸ Correspondence from Ingalls and Seth Williams on 31 May also shows that the new base at White House was fully operational on that date.⁴⁹

Although the transfer to a new base was executed with skill, there was one officer who was not completely satisfied with the move—the base commander at Port Royal, Brigadier General Abercrombie. In a message to Grant on 29 May, Abercrombie stated: “I have received no instructions myself as to abandoning Port Royal,” although he added that from “information derived through the Quartermaster’s Department” he understood that White House was to be the new base.⁵⁰ This phrasing, “information derived,” implied that Abercrombie had to actively seek information on the new move, but this misstated the case. In fact, once Grant had decided on the move to White House, Halleck had sent the following message to the quartermaster of the Washington area, Brig. Gen. Daniel H. Rucker (as well as other officers such as the surgeon-general, commissary-general, and the commander of the Department of Washington): “No further shipments of troops or supplies will be made to Port Royal, Va. General Abercrombie has been directed to send forward to General Grant’s army everything now on the way, and to have everything away and the depot broken up by the 1st of June. The depot will be transferred to the Pamunkey River, and everything hereafter for the Army of the Potomac will be sent to White House.”⁵¹ Perhaps Abercrombie, who

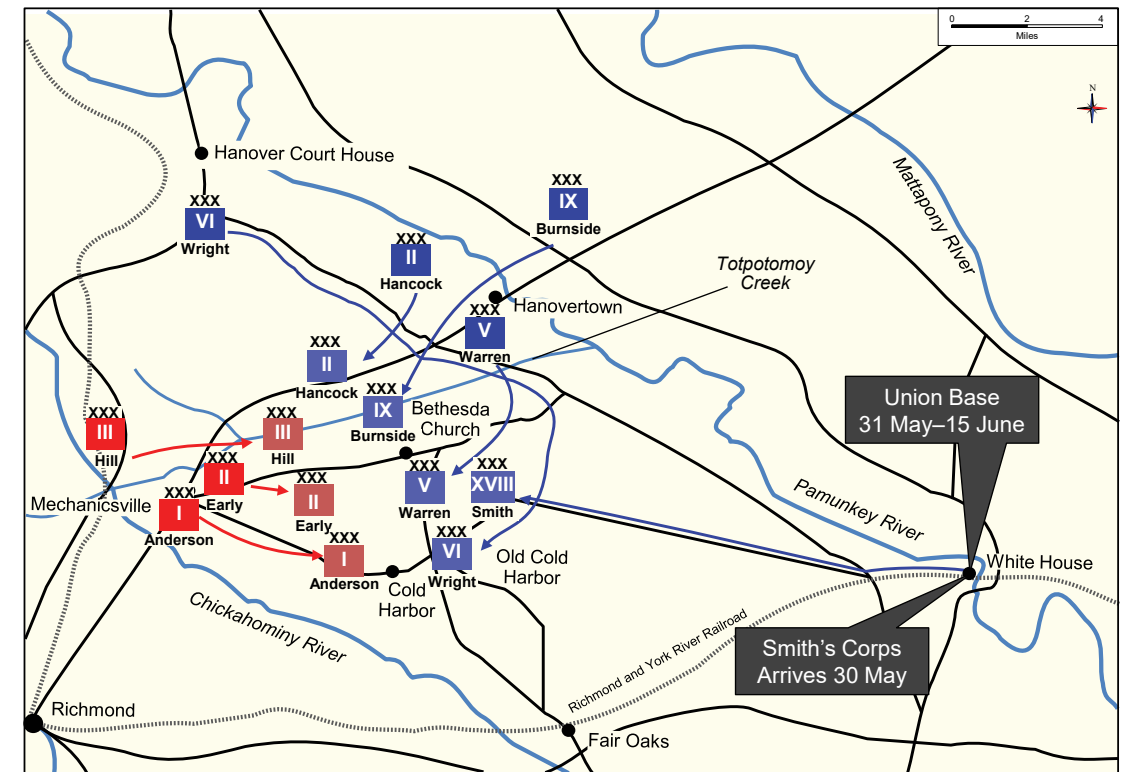


Figure 6.12. Map of movements to Cold Harbor, 29 May-1 June 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

also complained in his message about the difficulties of marching the Invalid Battalion from Belle Plain to Port Royal, was upset at yet another change of base so soon after moving to Port Royal. In any case, the base commander had been kept well-informed (if not directly from Grant's headquarters), and after his usual complaints, Abercrombie dutifully executed his part in the change of base.⁵²

In addition to establishing the base at White House for supplies, Grant was eager to have White House as a place of debarkation for Maj. Gen. William F. "Baldy" Smith's XVIII Corps—the corps that Grant had transferred from Butler's army to Meade's forces as the Army of the Potomac neared Cold Harbor.⁵³ If Smith's Corps, along with Meade's forces, could take "New" Cold Harbor, they would be past Lee's right flank, and control the road network to Richmond. On 31 May, Sheridan's cavalry took "Old" Cold Harbor but could not take the crossroads at "New" Cold Harbor. The possession of Old Cold Harbor was advantageous for the Federals, but they needed to take New Cold Harbor—usually referred to simply as Cold Harbor—to get between Lee and Richmond. Smith's troops arrived at White House and joined the Army of the Potomac's VI Corps in an attack at Cold Harbor on 1 June. Both corps made gains, but the Confederates still held a line in front of Cold Harbor.

Hancock's II Corps was supposed to move south and join with Smith and Wright for a new attack on the evening of 2 June. After a day of delays and mishaps, Grant and Meade launched a new assault at Cold Harbor on 3 June. This attack was a tactical disaster. The Union corps made a frontal assault on the rebels in entrenched positions who inflicted severe casualties on the attackers. Despite the tactical failure, the new base at White House provided sufficient supplies for the fighting forces and effective evacuation for the many wounded.⁵⁴ Grant never lacked for logistical support at this time even though he later admitted his 3 June assault at Cold Harbor was an attack he always regretted.⁵⁵

After this disastrous assault, Grant and Meade paused and assessed their situation. In modern United States Army doctrinal terms, this might be considered a tactical or operational pause. Although there was no shortage of supplies, the Federal forces were exhausted. So far in the Overland Campaign, the Army of the Potomac had suffered staggering losses, and although they had inflicted considerable casualties on Lee's troops, they had not destroyed the rebel army. Grant had retained the initiative and forced Lee back to the outskirts of Richmond; but ironically, the current Union proximity to the Confederate capital and the geography of the region restricted Grant's options. Lee's army was entrenched with its flanks protected by the Pamunkey and Totopotomoy rivers to the north and the Chickahominy River to the south. If Grant wanted to make another short "hook" around Lee's right, the United States forces would need to cross the Chickahominy, but they would not be moving any closer to Richmond. Worse yet, even if they could cross the river without interference from Lee, the Federal forces would be in even more restricted terrain between the Chickahominy and James rivers.

Adding to the operational considerations for his next move, Grant had to consider his next base. White House was a good base for operations near Cold Harbor, but if he moved south of the Chickahominy, the army would be better served with a new base—perhaps Harrison's Landing as McClellan had chosen in 1862. On the other hand, Grant could make a more dra-

matic move, crossing to the south side of the James River. Such a maneuver would entail a different base altogether, possibly City Point, which Butler's army had secured and developed as a logistical base. These were the decisions that Grant and Meade faced as both sides improved their entrenchments at Cold Harbor in the first weeks of June 1864.

Notes

1. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 553; hereafter cited as *OR*.

2. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 526.

3. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 526–27.

4. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 529.

5. Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1969), 245.

6. One notable exception to the normal failures of cavalry raids in the Civil War was Confederate Earl Van Dorn's raid on Holly Springs, Mississippi, during the December 1862 Vicksburg Campaign. Van Dorn's raid devastated Grant's base at Holly Springs and made a major contribution to halting Grant's forces that had been advancing along the railroad line toward Jackson.

7. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 560–61.

8. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 561 and 595–96.

9. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 561.

10. Gordon C. Rhea, *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House and the Road to Yellow Tavern, May 7–12, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 36–37. Rhea emphasized that Sheridan's failure to clear the road from Todd's Tavern to Spotsylvania on 7 May and the withdrawal of his cavalry to Todd's Tavern that evening were the major reasons that the Army of the Potomac failed to take Spotsylvania on 8 May.

11. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 597.

12. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 278

13. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 627.

14. Interestingly, the two most detailed works on Spotsylvania [Rhea, *The Battles for the Spotsylvania Court House*, 213, and William D. Matter, *If It Takes All Summer, The Battle of Spotsylvania* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 170] both mentioned the debate over the precise meaning of Grant's message, but neither author offered an opinion. Bruce Catton, in *A Stillness at Appomattox* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1953), 132–33, argued that the "line" that Grant described was the area around Spotsylvania. Catton wrote that Grant was content to stay at Spotsylvania and bleed Lee white; however, failures by Sigel in the Shenandoah Valley and Butler at Bermuda Hundred enabled Lee to receive reinforcements and forced Grant to change his line of operations. Brooks Simpson, in his biography of Grant [*Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822–1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 307–8], sees the message as a statement of Grant's overall determination to continue to press Lee, rather than as a specific statement on lines of operation or supplies.

15. Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: The Century Company, 1897), 111.

16. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 278.

17. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 628.

18. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 629.

19. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 698–99.

20. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 698–99.

21. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 633.

22. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 653.

23. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 695–96.

24. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 695–96.

25. Invalid Corps soldiers were too wounded to fight in combat but were fit for guard duty.

26. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part II, 695–96.

27. Rhea, *The Battles for Spotsylvania Court House*; and Matter, *If It Takes All Summer*. Both of these authors, the most detailed historians on the subject, did not present any case for Union logistical failures at Spotsylvania. Of course, at the tactical level, regiments might fire all of their immediate ammunition and have to seek resupply, but the army's logisticians always had that resupply on hand. The difficulty was getting the needed ammunition to the unit at the front under combat conditions—in short, the ammunition was available from supply bases and wagons, but transporting it forward under enemy fire was a different problem. Similarly, if some of the heavy casualties of Spotsylvania were left unattended, it was not from a lack of ambulances or effort from the Union medical personnel.

28. Gordon C. Rhea, *To the North Anna River* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 156–57; and Bruce Catton, *Grant Takes Command* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1968), 248–49. Neither book cited a specific source for the idea of dangling II Corps as bait for Lee to come into open battle. See also Stephen W. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army of the Potomac* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 678.

29. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 100–1.

30. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 101.

31. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 278.

32. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 278–79.

33. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 278–79.

34. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 114.

35. Biddle to his wife, 16 May 1864, Biddle Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania as cited by Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*, 679.

36. Sears, 679.

37. Curtis S. King, William Glenn Robertson, and Lt. Col. Steven E. Clay, *Staff Ride Handbook for the Overland Campaign, Virginia, 4 May to 15 June 1864: A Study in Operational Level Command*, 2nd ed. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2009), 253–67.

38. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 144–45; and 146–47.

39. Grant's conference to decide the move after the North Anna is described in Allen Nevins, ed., *Diary of a Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles Wainwright, 1861–1865* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), 388; and Merlin E. Sumner, ed., *The Diary of Cyrus B. Comstock* (Dayton, OH: Morningside, 1987), 268–70.

40. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants*, 683–84.

41. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 183.

42. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 184.

43. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 184.

44. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 207.

45. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 245–46.

46. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 267.

47. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 279.

48. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 279.

49. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 376–77.

50. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 312.

51. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 312.

52. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 312–13. See Bruce Catton, *A Stillness at Appomattox* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1953) for a description of Invalid Corps troops supporting the Union bases at Belle Plain, Port Royal, and White House (143–46). These soldiers were members of the 18th Regiment of the Invalid Corps; while their efforts were heroic, the work was so physically demanding that many invalid soldiers could not keep up with the requirements.

53. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 323.

54. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 479–80.

55. Ulysses Simpson Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (New York: De Capo Press, 1952), 444–45. Grant, to his credit, admitted the extent of the failed 3 June assault at Cold Harbor in his memoirs; at the time, however, he sent a message to Halleck that showed a significant misunderstanding of the day's events: "Our loss was not severe, nor do I suppose the enemy to have lost heavily" (*OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 524). According to Horace Porter, a member of Grant's staff, the Union commander later acknowledged the magnitude of the debacle in a message to his staff—perhaps after he sent the afternoon message to Halleck: "I regret this assault more than any one I have ever ordered" (Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 179). Grant's mixed statements notwithstanding, he did not dwell on his 3 June mistakes; instead, he looked for a new line of operations and a new base.

Chapter 7

Grant's Overland Campaign, 1864: Crossing the James River

After the failed assault at Cold Harbor, Grant was in a situation, both operationally and logistically, strikingly similar to that of McClellan in 1862. Like McClellan, Grant was on the Virginia Peninsula, less than ten miles from Richmond. In fact, Grant's left flank rested on the Chickahominy on the same ground where the 1862 battles of Mechanicsville and Gaines Mill were fought. Although close to Richmond, Grant, like McClellan, faced an entrenched Confederate Army that would be difficult, if not impossible, to dislodge with frontal assaults. Logistically, Grant's supply base at White House was the same as McClellan's base at the start of the Seven Days' Battles. Although that base was fully functional, it could only effectively support an advance on Richmond between the Chickahominy and Pamunkey Rivers. The Army of the Potomac could move south of the Chickahominy while based at White House or perhaps change the base to Harrison's Landing, but the chances were that Lee could easily shift south of the river and block the Federals again. Grant was seemingly plagued by the same limited operational reach that restricted McClellan.

Despite the similarities, there were crucial differences between the logistical situation of both commanders and between both of their visions for continuing the campaigns. As discussed earlier, prior to the Seven Days' Battles, McClellan was convinced (wrongly) that he was heavily outnumbered by the Confederates, and thus he was committed to a slow siege of Richmond that took advantage of his heavy siege guns. The base at White House with its rail line to the Richmond front was essential for this operation. As McClellan crept forward, trying to deal with the Chickahominy River, which split his army on this line of advance, his operational options became more limited by the terrain and his own preconceptions of the need for the big guns. Once Lee began to attack McClellan's army in the Seven Days' Battles, McClellan sought a new base. However, he selected a location at Harrison's Landing that had the single function of the safe supply of his forces in a secure defensive position and did little or nothing to increase his ability to continue an offensive campaign.

Grant had two major advantages that enabled him to formulate a new campaign that enhanced his operational reach and expanded his options. First, Grant had crafted the initial campaign strategy that included Butler's advance on Richmond along with Meade's overland advance. Although Butler did not capture Richmond, he opened the supply base on the James River at City Point. Grant recognized the importance of the base and insisted on keeping it open despite Halleck's recommendation to close it. This already functioning base, on the south side of the James, gave Grant an option for a new line of advance and greater choices for employment of his combat forces. City Point, as opposed to McClellan's selection of Harrison's Landing, gave Grant greater options to open new offensive operations and extend his operational reach. Grant's second advantage was his own operational outlook. He did not overestimate his enemy's forces as McClellan had, and he rejected the concept of tying his forces' movements to employing siege artillery. This attitude assisted his logisticians who were not committed to hauling huge siege guns into place, thus giving them more freedom in shifting the army's bases.

After the failed attacks on 3 June, Grant refused to be discouraged from searching for a solution to the current stalemate. As both sides improved their trenches at Cold Harbor, the general in chief explained his next operational move in a 5 June message to Halleck. This message reveals much of Grant's thought process in the campaign. He began by discarding, for logistical reasons, a line of operations back toward the North Anna based on the railroad from Fredericksburg to Richmond:

It would not be practicable to hold a line northeast of Richmond that would protect the Fredericksburg railroad, to enable us to use it for supplying the army. To do so would give us a long vulnerable line of road to protect, exhausting much of our strength in guarding it, and would leave open to the enemy all of his lines of communication on the south side of the James.¹

Grant admitted that his original plan to destroy Lee's army north of Richmond had failed. The Federal commander attributed Lee's survival to the rebel ability to entrench and repulse Union assaults. Grant concluded: "Without a greater sacrifice of human life than I am willing to make, all cannot be accomplished that I had designed outside of the city [Richmond]."² He laid out his plan along with its new line of operations and base—to hold his current position "until the cavalry can be sent west to destroy the Virginia Central Railroad from about Beaver Dam for some twenty-five or thirty miles west. When this is effected, I will move the army to the south side of James River."³

Grant went on to outline two possible crossing areas: "either by crossing the Chickahominy and marching near to City Point, or by going to the mouth of the Chickahominy on the north side and crossing there."⁴ In the end, most of the crossing was done halfway between these two locations on the James. Grant helped to prepare for any contingency by directing that "six or more ferry-boats of the largest class ought to be immediately provided."⁵ Grant then made clear the objective of his move: "Once on the south side of the James River I can cut off all sources of supply to the enemy, except what is furnished by the canal [the Upper Appomattox Canal]."⁶

Grant's move to the south side of the James was influenced by multiple logistical advantages provided by Butler's base at City Point, the United States enclave at Fort Powhatan, as well as positions at other locations. He could use City Point as a base and the other locations as potential unopposed crossing points on the James. The Federal base at City Point was nearly a perfect fit for Grant's operations: easily accessible from the sea, capable of handling extensive quantities of supply, and safe from rebel interference. In addition to being supportable from the Union perspective, this move was also to result in seizing Petersburg, which would cut the bulk of Confederate supply lines to the capital. Three railroads bringing supplies from the deep south converged at Petersburg and then these supplies moved from Petersburg to Richmond on a single line. Taking Petersburg would effectively strangle the capital as well as Lee's army. Grant understood the importance of logistics both from the need to support his own forces and from the perspective of attacking his opponent's logistical lifeline, and these considerations clearly shaped his move across the James River.

As Grant formulated this operation, United States forces benefitted from the pause at Cold Harbor from 4 to 12 June. The Army of the Potomac had been marching and fighting constantly since it entered the Wilderness, and the strain had taken its toll on the Army's effectiveness. As noted in John Gibbon's account of II Corps, many commanders at all levels had been killed

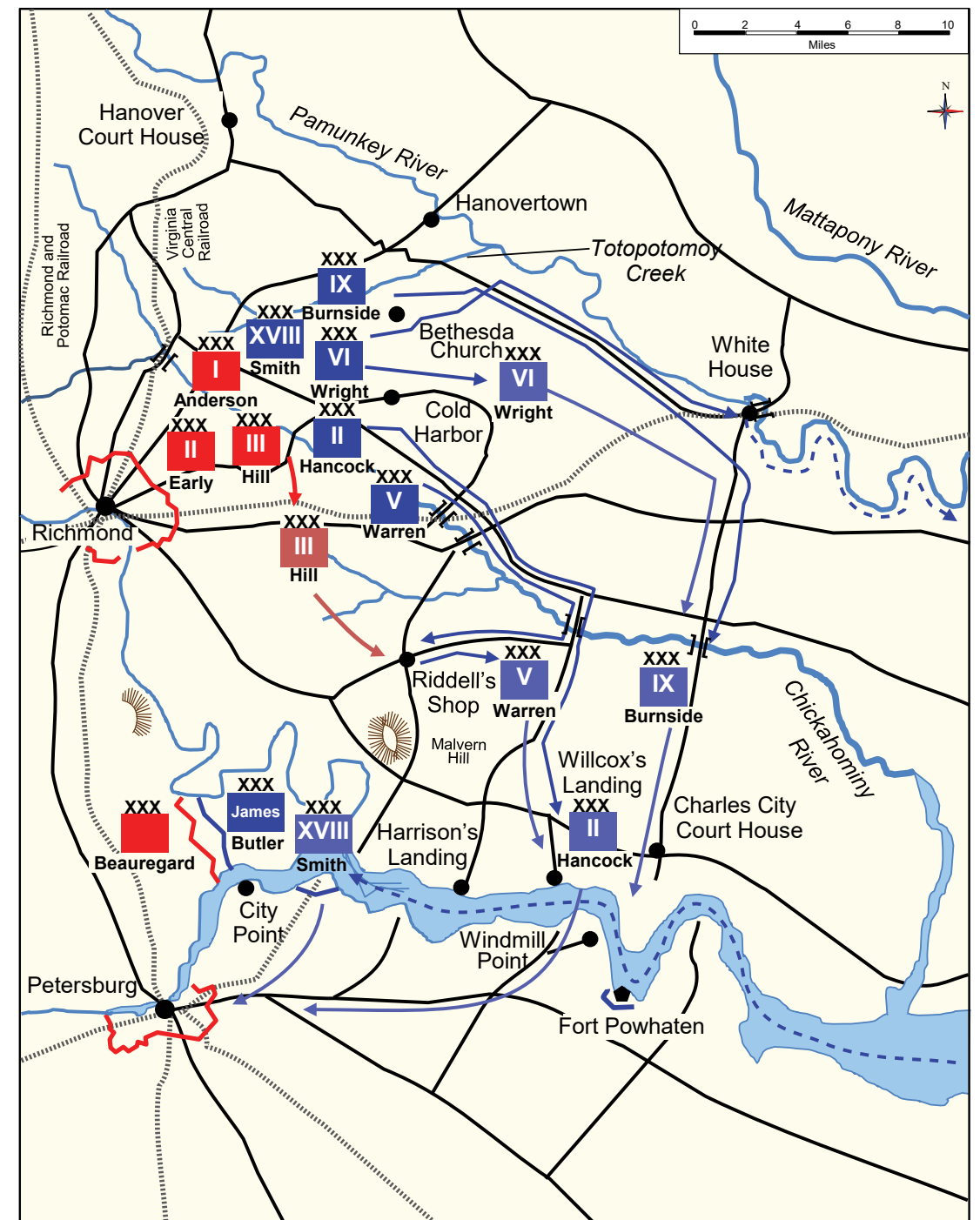


Figure 7.1. Map of movement across the James River 12–15 May 1864. Created by the author and Army University Press.

or wounded.⁷ Their replacements struggled to lead at higher levels of command. At the same time, leaders, staff officers, and the men were fatigued; orders were delivered late, guides took the wrong roads, and mistakes were made at all levels. The pause after the 3 June Cold Harbor debacle helped the United States forces in all areas, to include logistics, as they prepared for one of the most complex and difficult operations of the war: crossing the James River.

Taking advantage of the pause at Cold Harbor, Grant began to implement the plan he had outlined to Halleck for crossing the James. On 5 June, he gave Meade orders for Sheridan's cavalry to conduct a diversion and raid: "The object of the cavalry expedition to Charlottesville and Gordonsville is to effectually break up the railroad connection between Richmond and the Shenandoah Valley and Lynchburg."⁸ Grant added details concerning the destruction of the railroad that showed his focus on disrupting Lee's logistics: "Every rail on the road destroyed should be so bent or twisted as to make it impossible to repair the road without supplying new rails."⁹ Grant clearly intended Sheridan's cavalry to harm Lee's logistics as well as act as a diversion for the Federal move across the James River. Meade's headquarters issued orders on 5 June that implemented the initial steps of Grant's plan.¹⁰

The same day that the Army of the Potomac received its marching orders, Quartermaster Ingalls reported to Adjutant Seth Williams that the United States supply system was functioning efficiently and was ready for the next move:

White House depot is fully established and in most efficient operation. All needful supplies of subsistence, forage, clothing, intrenching [sic] tools, &c., are on hand there for issue. Wharves are built and assigned for the accommodation of different staff departments. . . . Depot is under the immediate charge of Capt. P. P. Pitkin, assistant quartermaster, who has a competent force of officers, employees, and material, and who can transfer the establishment to James River in a few hours' notice.¹¹

Ingalls's confidence in the ability to shut down White House and reestablish a base on the James at City Point was well-placed, and it was a crucial element of Grant's plan.

In addition to shifting the base at White House to City Point, the Federals had to accomplish several other critical tasks for Grant's plan to succeed. These tasks were daunting for both combat leaders and logisticians. The distance from Cold Harbor to crossing points on the James was about twenty miles by the most direct route, but in order to move multiple corps simultaneously, the Army of the Potomac would have to take multiple roads, forcing some units and the trains to move more than fifty miles. The trains needed to take routes that did not interfere with the movement of the combat troops, and all of the United States forces had to cross two rivers—the Chickahominy and the James. The United States forces needed to use these multiple routes and river crossing points as quickly as possible to minimize the chance that Lee could strike the Army of the Potomac while divided by a major river. This meant taking advantage of fords and existing bridges on the Chickahominy, as well as ferry boats on the James, and laying pontoon bridges on both rivers. In addition, delivery of pontoon bridging, ferry boats, and other transportation required coordination between the army and the navy, Meade's and Butler's staffs, and logisticians and engineers, as well as actions at multiple locations to include White House, City Point, Washington, and Fort Monroe. For the next several days, the United States commanders and their staffs set about ensuring this complicated operation would be successful.

Throughout 5 June, the leaders and their staffs worked to move the pontoons to the correct locations. First, Meade's chief engineer, Benham, wrote to Williams asking for clarification on an earlier series of contradictory directives concerning the future task for the pontoon bridge at Fredericksburg. After receiving further guidance, Benham reported understanding he was to send the bridge currently at Port Royal (the one formerly at Fredericksburg, which had been taken up for transport) as well as the one awaiting transport at White House to Butler. Williams replied that the White House bridge was to go to Butler, but the other pontoon bridge was to move with the army's trains. However, there was still confusion as to whether the pontoons for Butler were to go to Bermuda Hundred (City Point) or Fort Monroe—as well as some difficulty tracking down the Port Royal bridge pontoons. The Federal leadership feverishly worked to sort out the problems.¹²

On 6 June, leaders and their staffs plunged into the work necessary for the crossing of the James. Adjutant Williams issued an order that strengthened Ingalls' control of the army's depots and directed all empty wagons to go to White House to be filled with supplies for the troops at Cold Harbor.¹³ Benham, who was at Fort Monroe, got control of the pontoon bridge from Fredericksburg and sent it to Butler at Bermuda Hundred.¹⁴ This was somewhat too proactive on Benham's part as the bridging was needed for the Army of the Potomac on the James, but at least the army's chief engineer had tracked down all of his bridging assets.

Perhaps the most important action of the day was taken by Grant, who directed two trusted staff officers, Lt. Col. Horace Porter and Col. Cyrus B. Comstock, to accomplish a key task: selection of a crossing point on the James River that was narrow enough to allow the laying of a pontoon bridge. The crossing location also needed to be far enough from the front lines so that Lee would have difficulty interfering with the crossing, but close enough to the lines at Cold Harbor to minimize the marching distances for United States troops and supplies. In addition, Porter and Comstock were to go to Bermuda Hundred and inform Butler of the details of the upcoming move.¹⁵ While these important steps were being taken, officers continued the routine, yet still necessary, staff duties that enable an army to function. In an inspection on 6 June, Meigs, the United States Army quartermaster, found the supply base "in a most efficient state," with sufficient supplies and wagons on hand and the wounded being well cared for and transported efficiently.¹⁶

Over the next two days, preparations continued for the move over the James. Halleck arranged for crucial sea transportation for Grant's forces. In a message to the general in chief, Halleck pledged to transfer all available ferry boats to Fort Monroe. He also arranged to position side-wheel transports, as well as barges and tugs, at White House and elsewhere to support the move.¹⁷ Meade's adjutant, Williams, directed commanders to issue two days' rations and send the empty wagons back to White House to be replenished.¹⁸ In addition, an exchange of messages among Grant, Abercrombie, depot commander at White House, and Williams made clear that the York River Railroad was to be taken up all the way back to White House after the Army of the Potomac began its move.¹⁹ On 8 June, Grant directed Meade to have the engineers lay out a line of entrenchments behind the United States front line at Cold Harbor; this line was to be occupied by the rear guard once the Army of the Potomac began its move over the James. Also on this day, Williams dispatched a staff officer to inspect White House for non-logistical reasons—stragglers appeared to be loitering at the depot—while Benham sent part of the pontoon bridging to Bermuda Hundred.²⁰

Before Porter and Comstock had selected a crossing point on the James, Grant decided to begin final preparations for the movement to the river, thus ensuring that the Federals would be ready to move on short notice. On 9 June, Grant instructed Halleck to send all reinforcements for the Army of the Potomac to City Point, the future army base south of the James. Rawlins then ordered Abercrombie to redirect any reinforcements en route to White House to proceed to City Point without disembarking.²¹ While the general in chief redirected reinforcements, Williams tasked the corps commanders to issue rations one more time and then send the wagons back to White House to be loaded before the next move.²² In the meantime, the meticulous—if somewhat officious—Abercrombie informed Grant that removing the York Railroad would take three more days, but the “sick can be got away [from White House] in twenty-four hours.”²³ The next day, an officer in the Inspector General’s Office provided detailed information on the effective operations of the depot at White House, which confirmed that United States supply services were ready for future operations.²⁴

While preparations at White House continued, Federal officers attended to the details and problems that normally arise in such an undertaking. Grant planned for Smith’s Corps to move up the James by water while the rest of the army marched to the river and crossed on bridges or ferries. However, Quartermaster Ingalls informed Williams that the transports that had brought Smith’s XVIII Corps to White House had been released to transport wounded and supplies from White House to Washington and Fort Monroe. Ingalls recommended that Capt. Herman Biggs, quartermaster at Fort Monroe, assemble transports at that location and send them to either White House or Cole’s Ferry (on the Chickahominy) to transport Smith’s troops back to the Army of the James.²⁵ At the same time, White House had to continue to function as a supply base up to the moment of the move, and the quartermaster there, Captain Pitkin, worked diligently to accomplish this mission. This included arranging for the transport of 3 million pounds of grain, evacuating the remaining 2,500 wounded men (as well as 1,000 prisoners), and forwarding the recent reinforcement of 3,000 men to Bermuda Hundred.²⁶

Late in the day on 11 June, Grant had still not received word from Comstock and Porter concerning a bridging location on the James. Even so, the general in chief felt, “It is now getting so late, however, that all preparations may be made for the move tomorrow night, without waiting longer.”²⁷ Grant gave Meade the general plan for the move, which Meade’s staff—particularly Williams (probably with Humphreys’ guidance)—crafted into a clear order with sufficient, but not overwhelming, detail. The first few paragraphs directed Union cavalry and Warren’s V Corps to a position blocking Lee’s Army from observing and interfering with the move of the rest of the United States forces from crossing the James.²⁸ The order went on to instruct Smith’s XVIII Corps to move to White House and then embark by boat to Bermuda Hundred, returning to the control of Butler’s Army. Burnside’s IX Corps and Wright’s VI Corps were to withdraw from the lines at Cold Harbor and move to the James River opposite of Wind-Mill Point in preparation for the crossing there. Hancock’s II Corps was to be the rearguard (briefly assisted by VI Corps). After XVIII, VI, and IX Corps moved, Hancock’s troops would occupy the already prepared second line of entrenchments behind the Cold Harbor front line. Then, once the other corps were successfully on the move, II Corps would pass behind (east of) V Corps and reach the James at Wilcox’s Landing.²⁹

The order also contained logistical instructions. The army’s trains were to “move to the Windsor Shades, and cross the Chickahominy in that vicinity. They will take such routes as not

to interfere with the movements of the troops.”³⁰ Brig. Gen. Edward Ferrero’s division, along with a brigade of cavalry, were to move to White House and cover the trains en route. Each corps was instructed to minimize its trains as part of breaking down the current United States base:

[Take] with them on the march merely those light headquarters wagons, ammunition wagons, ambulances, &c., specified for the march across the Rapidan. All others will be sent at once to the main trains of the army. . . . The depot at White House will be continued for the present with its permanent garrison, but all supplies, &c., for this army will be moved to the James River, leaving 50,000 rations of subsistence and 30,000 rations of forage, in addition to supplies for the garrison. On the arrival of Major-Generals Sheridan and Hunter, the post at White House will be broken up.³¹

As the Army of the Potomac prepared for its move, Grant sent Butler a message that provided details of the Federal plan and outlined the tasks for the Army of the James in the upcoming operation.³² He instructed Butler to assemble the material needed to build the pontoon bridge across the James, even though Grant’s staff officers had not returned yet with an exact location.

To Grant’s relief, Porter and Comstock returned on 12 June with a recommendation for a crossing point on the James. Porter wrote: “We had noted one or two places on the river which might have served the purpose of the crossing; but, all things considered, we reported unhesitatingly in favor of a point familiarly known as Fort Powhatan.”³³ The location at a bend in the James provided a narrow crossing between Weyanoke Neck on the north bank and Wind-Mill Point on the south.³⁴ The bridging site was only twelve miles downriver from City Point and the river was 2,100 feet wide. Although a considerable distance to bridge, the site was one of the narrower areas available without going farther upriver. An additional benefit was that Wilcox’s Landing (sometimes called Wilcox’s Wharf) was nearby and could be used to ferry troops across the river. In fact, the Army of the Potomac leaders knew that they needed multiple methods and sites for transferring their forces to the south side of the river. Several crossing sites meant that multiple combat elements, as well as their logistical support, could cross the river at the same time, thus speeding the overall movement. In addition, they understood that infantry might be able to cross the river quickly on ferries; but artillery, cavalry, and the logistics train (to include a huge cattle herd) could best cross the James on a bridge. Thus, the plan included not only the James River pontoon bridge, but also ferrying sites and the waterborne movement of the XVIII Corps.

The Army of the Potomac army began its movement on the evening of 12 June. This crossing was an operation of extensive complexity. As mentioned earlier, some of the Federals, to include the trains, had to move fifty miles over winding roads to make the crossing. In addition, Union troops and trains had to cross two rivers, the Chickahominy and the James. If Lee discovered the move, he could attack the United States troops and defeat their separated corps in detail, or he could take advantage of the rail net between Richmond and Petersburg to transfer forces below the James and block Grant’s move. The corps’ movements began after dark, when II Corps fell back and occupied the new defensive line in the rear of the Cold Harbor positions to cover the move. Warren’s V Corps left the Cold Harbor lines and crossed the Chickahominy River at Long Bridge moving toward Riddell’s Shop to set up a blocking position at that crossroads and screen the move of the rest of the army. XVIII Corps arrived at White House Landing in preparation

for their waterborne move to Bermuda Hundred. Burnside's IX Corps initially followed Smith's corps and then turned south toward the crossing on the Chickahominy at Jones Bridge.

On 13 June, The Federal units continued their missions. V Corps held its position at Rid-dell's Shop for much of the day and then moved toward Charles City Court House. Smith's XVIII Corps embarked at White House Landing and sailed downriver. IX Corps was delayed for much of the day, but they finally crossed Jones Bridge that evening. Also on 13 June, II Corps evacuated the reserve line at Cold Harbor and moved south. Later on the 13th, VI Corps crossed the Chickahominy at Jones Bridge and then moved toward Charles City Court House. II Corps crossed the Chickahominy at Long Bridge, and its advance units reached Wilcox's Landing at 1700. II Corps was the first Army of the Potomac unit to reach the James River.

While the Army of the Potomac approached the James River, Union logisticians executed a complex change of base that required three major tasks. First was to shut down White House and expand City Point so that it could accommodate the United States forces once they moved to the south side of the river. Second, the trains traveling with the army had to move across the river quickly—without disrupting the troop movements, and they needed to be ready to support the troops as they came into combat. Finally, the pontoon bridge on the James River at Wind-Mill Point (Fort Powhatan) demanded a monumental engineering and logistical effort. All three tasks were conducted with the utmost skill, even if not flawlessly.

The first of these—closing White House and expanding City Point—was eased because Butler's army already had City Point functioning as an effective supply base, secure from Confederate interference. In addition, the United States forces had conducted so many base changes during the campaign that the process was becoming second nature. The commander at White House, Abercrombie, sent a message to Rawlins that outlined how well-prepared the Federals were for the upcoming move:

The railroad iron and stock is now shipped; the road as far as West Point destroyed. The medical director will be prepared to move today by noon, unless more wounded are sent here from the front. Captain Strang, in charge of depot of repairs, will be ready in five hours. Captain Pitkin, in charge of water transportation, will be ready in twenty-four hours after receiving orders to remove. Captain Schaff, ordnance officer, can be ready in two hours. Captain Wiley, assistant commissary of subsistence, will require eight hours.³⁵

While the base at White House closed down, there were some difficulties involving the old base that the United States forces quickly overcame. Some ships that had been sent to Washington to pick up supplies for the move to City Point were needed to move Smith's XVIII Corps. The senior quartermaster officer at White House, Captain Pitkin, telegraphed Meigs in Washington to ask that ships be returned to White House for the movement of XVIII Corps.³⁶ The ships returned in time for Smith's transfer. In addition, Grant wanted the Federals to garrison White House as a safe enclave for Sheridan's cavalry after its raid on the Virginia Central Railroad, and this may have created some confusion over Abercrombie's role at the post. On 12 June, orders from Grant's headquarters relieved Abercrombie and placed Brig. Gen. George W. Getty in command at White House.³⁷ This change of command was almost certainly not prompted by any disappointment with the logistical performance at White House. More likely, Grant wanted a combat commander—Getty, a former infantry division commander, wounded

in the Wilderness and now returning to duty—to hold White House for Sheridan's return rather than the administratively minded Abercrombie. In any event, Getty took longer to arrive than anticipated, and Abercrombie continued in his duties until 20 June. During that time, Abercrombie successfully evacuated major logistical components of the base, repelled rebel raids, and greeted Sheridan's arrival before turning command over to Getty.³⁸

As the old White House base deactivated, the base at City Point began to receive increased supplies and troops. On 14 June, Pitkin wired Brigadier General Rucker in Washington with information concerning the transfer of bases. Smith's XVIII Corps had already embarked, and transportation was ready to transfer the last of the recent reinforcements to the new base on the James. Except for rations and forage for the reduced garrison, all supplies had been forwarded to City Point. The Federals had loaded condemned property and surplus material barges to be shipped back to Washington. Finally, Pitkin with most of his "employés" (civilian contract workers—essential for logistical operations in the Civil War as they are today) were ready to depart for Charles City Landing.³⁹

From 13 to 15 June, the United States forces continued to receive extensive supplies at City Point and other points on the James River, while Ingalls focused on the movement of the Army of the Potomac's trains. Then on 16 June, after being appointed chief quartermaster of both Meade's and Butler's forces, Ingalls took up the task of turning City Point into the largest military base of the Civil War. In his report, Ingalls wrote:

Trains were placed in parks between the depot and those positions convenient to the railroad. Improvements were commenced at once to make the depot efficient and ample. Wharves and storehouses were constructed; the railroad to Petersburg was put in working order up to our lines; and supplies were brought to the depot in the required quantities, and issued. A uniform system of supply was put in force in both armies [the Potomac and the James].⁴⁰

In the end, the initial major logistical task of transferring the base to the south side of the James at City Point, while requiring extensive effort, proved to be the smoothest.

The second task, moving the Army of the Potomac's wagon trains was accomplished effectively, though with some hiccups. Preparation for the movement began with positioning the wagons at Tunstall's Station on 10 and 11 June.⁴¹ As part of Grant's guidance for the move to the James, the general in chief instructed Meade to keep the trains "well east of the troops, and if a crossing can be found or made lower down than Jones's they should take it."⁴² As noted earlier, Meade's staff turned Grant's guidance into a clear and effective order emphasizing that the trains were to cross the Chickahominy west of Jones's Bridge and "take such routes as not to interfere with the movements of the troops."⁴³ The commander of the trains, Capt. L. H. Peirce, endeavored to comply with this directive. He informed his guard force commander, Brig. Gen. Edward Ferrero (commanding Fourth Division of Burnside's IX Corps), of the route of march and the crossing point on the Chickahominy at Cole's Ferry, downstream from Jones's Bridge.⁴⁴ Because of an unanticipated delay in getting bridging equipment to Cole's Ferry, elements of the army's trains and ambulance trains from other corps slowed Burnside's corps in its crossing.⁴⁵ Once across the Chickahominy, the trains proceeded to and across the James with no difficulties. In the end, the movement of the trains did not hinder the operations of the combat forces and the wagons were always in position to resupply the army as needed.

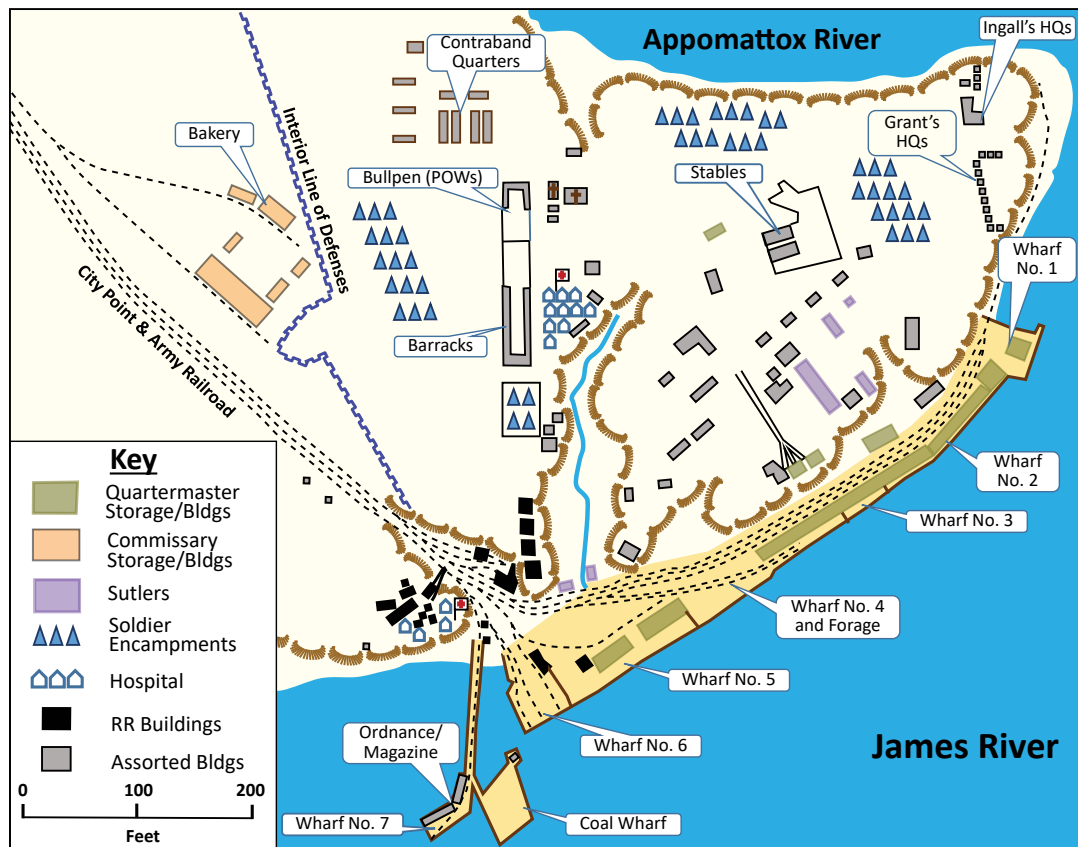


Figure 7.2. Diagram of City Point after expansion to support Army of the James and Army of the Potomac. Created by the author and edited by Army University Press.

Quartermaster Ingalls enthusiastically described the effort: “This movement was very complicated, difficult, and arduous. It was one of the most important on record; but it was conducted with a skill and vigor by Captain Peirce that crowned it with magnificent success.”⁴⁶

Ingalls recorded that a key element to the movement of the trains, as well as the army as a whole, was the construction of the pontoon bridge on the James River—the third major component of the transfer to the south of the James. It bears reiteration that the army needed to cross the river using multiple locations and methods to minimize the time that the United States forces were vulnerable to attack. To this end, Smith’s XVIII Corps moved by boat to Bermuda Hundred, and Hancock’s II Corps ferried across the river from Wilcox’s Landing to Wind-Mill Point.⁴⁷ Although parts of the other infantry corps could use river transports and ferries, it was essential for the army to have a bridge on the James to ensure the move’s success. Also, a bridge was the best possible method for trains to cross. Ferries were adequate for infantry units with light equipment, but a bridge was significantly better for wagons and cattle—as well as cavalry and artillery—to cross the river.

The construction of the bridge, like the movement of the trains, was not without its difficulties, but overall, it remains one of the great engineering and logistical accomplishments

of the war. Even Grant’s opponents recognized the significance of the James River crossing and construction of the essential pontoon bridge. Confederate artillery commander E. Porter Alexander wrote:

Not only was this strategy brilliant in conception, for which all the credit, I believe, belongs to Gen. Grant, but the orders & the details of such a rapid movement of so mighty an army, with all its immense trains & its artillery, across two rivers, on its own pontoon bridges, make it also the most brilliant piece of logistics of the war. For this, of course, the credit is largely due to the large, competent, & well-trained Federal staff & engineers.⁴⁸

While at Cold Harbor, Grant, Meade, and their staffs had prepared for constructing a bridge across the James, as evidenced by Porter and Comstock’s trip to find a crossing site, as well as messages to Butler. However, the Federals initially stumbled when they attempted to gather the bridging equipment. The length of the crossing and the fact that the Army of the Potomac needed to retain some of its pontoons for use on the Chickahominy meant that additional bridging gear, particularly pontoons, would have to come from Washington to Fort Monroe, as well as material from Butler’s Army of the James. Butler had gathered a large part of the Fort Monroe pontoons to augment his own bridging for an attack on Petersburg on 10 June—before Grant’s decision to move the Army of the Potomac south of the James. After Butler’s thrust failed, the Army of the James commander directed that the bridging be returned to Fort Monroe, but this was a wasted effort. The equipment could easily have been moved directly from Bermuda Hundred to the Fort Powhatan crossing site, but it appears that Grant’s headquarters waited too long to inform Butler and the Army of the Potomac’s chief engineer, Benham, of the need to gather all of the bridges for the James River crossing.⁴⁹



Figure 7.3. Union Base at City Point. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

In the meantime, Butler's chief engineer, Brig. Gen. Godfrey Weitzel, directed Lt. Peter S. Michie to make a reconnaissance of the Fort Powhatan crossing area on 12 June. Michie's thorough report identified the best location for the bridge, taking into account the width of the river as well as the marshy approaches on both banks. The next day, he gathered men and equipment in preparation for corduroying the roads on the approaches to the crossing site.⁵⁰

Also on 13 June, the United States leaders centralized bridging assets by directing Benham, who was at Fort Monroe, to bring all engineering and bridging assets involved in the James crossing under the Army of the Potomac's control. That same day, Grant directed Meade to oversee the crossing efforts: "I will direct General Butler to turn over to the engineers and quartermasters you designate all transportation, bridging, &c., to be used under their direction until the army is crossed."⁵¹ Soon after, Meade's chief of staff, Humphreys, ordered Benham to bring the army's bridging material to Fort Powhatan.⁵² Additional messages throughout the day ensured that Benham was sending 155 pontoons and other bridging equipment to the crossing site.⁵³ These messages finally redirected the Fort Monroe assets to Fort Powhatan.

In addition to the bridge, United States forces continued to prepare for additional crossing sites as per Grant's overall plan. An exchange of correspondence between Grant and Butler provided for transports to be ready at Wilcox's Wharf to transport Hancock's II Corps across the James; thus, the first Union troops would move to the south side of the James by ferry, rather than pontoon bridge.⁵⁴ This made sense because the II Corps infantry was much easier to transport by ferry than the United States cavalry, artillery, and large trains, which crossed by bridge.

Amidst this complex employment of river crossing assets and movement of combat troops, there was one more glitch in transporting the pontoons to the Fort Powhatan site. Weitzel and Michie had completed their approach roads to the banks of the James by early morning of 14 June, but the pontoons had yet to arrive for the construction of the bridge. There are several explanations for the delay. First, there was a need for an overhaul of the equipment before shipping it back upriver. Also, the outgoing tide of the James River slowed the pontoon flotilla's progress. Finally, the orders to move the pontoons lacked urgency that might have hurried the pontoon fleet's progress.⁵⁵

Regardless of these delays, the construction of the James River bridge was remarkable. Building on the diligent preparations of Weitzel and Michie on the approaches to the river, the construction of the bridge was begun from both banks of the James at 1600 on 14 June. The Battalion of United States Army Engineers of the Army of the Potomac started work on the bridge in waist-deep water and mud, and soon were joined by several companies of the 15th and 50th New York Volunteer Engineers to complete the project.⁵⁶ Maj. James C. Duane, the chief engineer traveling with the Army of the Potomac, directed much of the bridge's construction, until Benham arrived from Fort Monroe late on the afternoon of 14 June. The bridge was completed in about seven hours. The draw, or moveable opening in the middle of the bridge for river traffic to pass (100 feet wide), initially was left open so the boats carrying Smith's XVII Corps could move upstream and rejoin Butler's Army of the James. Then it was closed so the bridge was ready for crossing. The completed bridge was 2,000 feet long, with an additional 150 feet of trestle piers over the marshes on both banks, and included 101 wooden pontoons. Because the channel was deep (eighty-five feet) and the tidal river placed pressure on the bridge in both directions, the bridge was secured by three anchored schooners both upstream and downstream of the structure.⁵⁷

From 14 to 17 June, a major portion of the Army of the Potomac crossed the bridge. The army's trains, fifty miles in length including cattle, crossed at various times throughout all four days. IX Corps traversed on the evening of 15 June. Getty's division of VI Corps crossed on 16 to 17 June. Finally, Wilson's cavalry division crossed on 17 June. The Federals dismantled the bridge the next day. Using the bridge and various other methods, by the end of 17 June, 100,000 troops, 5,000 wagons, 56,000 horses and mules, and 3,500 cattle crossed the James River safely by the end of 17 June.⁵⁸ This movement of men, animals, and equipment was a striking logistical achievement.

The crossing of the James highlighted the tremendously successful execution of a complex logistical operation in support of the Federal campaign. Horace Porter provided an account of Grant watching United States forces cross the James bridge and the extent of this achievement:

As the general in chief stood upon the bluff on the north bank of the river on the morning of June 15, watching with unusual interest the busy scene spread out before him, it presented a sight which had never been equaled even in his extended experience in all the varied phases of warfare. His cigar had been thrown aside, his hands were clasped behind him, and he seemed lost in the contemplation of the spectacle. The great bridge was the scene of a continuous movement of infantry columns, batteries of artillery, and wagon-trains. The approaches to the river on both banks were covered with masses of troops moving briskly to their positions or waiting patiently their turn to cross. . . . It was a matchless pageant that could not fail to inspire all beholders with the grandeur of achievement and the majesty of military power.⁵⁹

While this logistical feat was being accomplished, the Federals continued their operational moves with considerable success. Lee was slow to detect the United States withdrawal from Cold Harbor. By the time the rebels detected their opponent's departure on 13 June, as historian Gordon Rhea wrote, the "entire Union army seemed to have evaporated into thin air." A rebel artillery officer recounted: "Even Marse Robert [the soldiers' nickname for Lee], who knew everything knowable, did not appear to know what his old enemy proposed to do or where he would be most likely to find him."⁶⁰ Lee eventually realized the Federals were moving south, but was it just across the Chickahominy or a larger move across the James? Throughout 13 June, Warren's corps blocked the Confederates at Riddell's Shop and kept the Army of Northern Virginia's leadership from divining the enemy's destination.⁶¹ On this same day, Lee detached Maj. Gen. Jubal Early's II Corps from his army and sent the corps to the Shenandoah Valley to counter the Union threat to Lynchburg, and perhaps to make some offensive move that would cause consternation in Washington. This was a great risk—Lee was already outnumbered, and the removal of Early's force reduced his army's strength by nearly one-third. The army commander apparently felt the initial moves by United States forces were not enough of a threat to force him to retain Early's Corps with the Army of Northern Virginia.

As Lee considered his options, his opponents took advantage of the James River bridge and other crossing options to move the Army of the Potomac to the south side of the James. On 14 June, II Corps, after some delays, crossed by ferry at Wilcox's Landing. Later that day, Warren's V Corps departed Riddell's Shop, and followed Hancock's Corps to the same landing. V Corps ferried across the river on 16 June. VI and IX Corps, swinging farthest to the east, arrived at the bridging site (Weyanoke Neck) on 15 June, where they set up a defensive perimeter even

though there were no rebels within miles of that location. As mentioned above, IX Corps and a division from VI Corps used the bridge to cross from 15–16 June. The rest of VI Corps was ferried across to Wind-Mill Point on 16 and 17 June.

From 14 to 15 June, Lee continued to react with a limited knowledge of United States moves, but he remained reluctant to commit his forces to the defense of Petersburg. The degree to which Lee was aware of, or fooled by, the Federal move is a subject of debate. Historian Douglas Southall Freeman made a strong defense of Lee, indicating that many historians have relied too much on three 16 June messages from Lee to General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, the Confederate commander at Petersburg and Bermuda Hundred, in order to portray Lee as completely misled by Grant's move across the James. The first message was at 1030 hours and included this line: "I do not know the position of Grant's army, and cannot strip [my troops away from] north bank of James River. Have you not force sufficient?" At 1245 hours, Lee wrote: "Have not heard of Grants crossing James River." Finally, at 1600 hours, Lee asked Beauregard: "Has Grant been seen crossing James River?"⁶² Freeman argued that these messages, taken out of context, only tell part of the story. He posited that Lee always knew Grant might get one day's march on the rebels, but that the Confederate commander was never really fooled.⁶³ Freeman wrote: "Viewed in its true light, the transfer of Grant's army across the river was met as promptly and as forcefully as the weakness of Lee's forces permitted."⁶⁴

Freeman's defense of Lee is persuasive, but it fails to give Grant enough credit for placing Lee into a thorny dilemma without having to deceive the rebel commander completely. This dilemma was revealed even in some of the dispatches Freeman used in Lee's defense. In a message to Jefferson Davis at 1210 on 14 June, Lee wrote: "I think the enemy must be preparing to move South of James River. Our scouts and pickets yesterday stated that General Grant's whole army was in motion for the fords of the Chickahominy from Long Bridge down, from which I inferred that he was making his way to the James River as his new base."⁶⁵ This passage demonstrated that Lee had a good feel for Grant's intent before the first troops crossed the James River. However, having good intuition about Grant's next move and acting on that thought are not the same. In the same dispatch to Davis, Lee wrote, "I cannot however learn positively that more than a small part of his [Grant's] Army has crossed the Chickahominy."⁶⁶ The Confederate commander went on to inform the president that Hill's Corps had skirmished with enemy cavalry and Warren's V Corps the night before. Lee planned to attack this United States force on the morning of 14 June, but it "disappeared from before us during the night, and as far as we can judge from the statements of prisoners, it has gone to Harrison's Landing. The force of cavalry here was pressed forward early this morning, but as yet no satisfactory information has been obtained."⁶⁷ Without hard evidence of Grant's forces crossing the James, Lee was unable to commit to a course of action. In his message to Davis, Lee speculated on some possible Union actions. Grant might be going to Harrison's Landing where he could use the existing fortifications (from McClellan's 1862 campaign) to protect a more deliberate crossing of the river. Also, based on reports of Federal transports leaving White House with troops (Smith's XVIII Corps), Lee conjectured that these could be wounded personnel going to Washington, or combat soldiers intending to take Petersburg. Lee concluded: "We ought therefore to be extremely watchful & guarded. Unless I hear something satisfactory by evening, I shall move Hoke's division back to the vicinity of the Pontoon Bridge across James River in order that he may cross if necessary. The rest of the army can follow should



Figure 7.4. Union Bridge on the James River. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

circumstances require it."⁶⁸ Thus, despite Lee's prescient thoughts about Grant's next move, the Army of Northern Virginia's commander's only concrete reaction on 14 June was to position Maj. Gen. Robert F. Hoke's division to cross the James River if needed at Petersburg. It is important to note that Hoke's troops had originally belonged to Beauregard's forces, and thus, Lee was only ready to return an attached force and not any part of his own Army of Northern Virginia to the Petersburg defenses.

Lee updated Davis with a message at 1545 on 14 June that showed he was still unable to commit to a course of action. Lee wrote: "As far as I can judge from the information I have received, Gen. Grant has moved his army to James River in the vicinity of Westover. A portion of it I am told moved to Wilcox's Landing, a short distance below. I see no indications of his attacking me on this side of the River, though of course I cannot know positively."⁶⁹ While Lee believed Grant would cross the James, the Confederate commander could not act until he had firm intelligence because Grant still could turn back and attack north of the James River. Lee also commented that Grant's "facilities for crossing the River and taking possession of Petersburg are great."⁷⁰ In sum, the Confederate commander recognized that Grant had multiple options, and thus had put the Lee in a difficult position. He continued to rely on repositioning Hoke's Division as his only option at this point, and even after releasing Hoke

to cross the James on 15 June, Lee hesitated to commit any Army of Northern Virginia troops to the Petersburg lines.⁷¹

There should be little doubt that Grant's skillful operational move was at the heart of Lee's problem, and both the move across the James and Lee's resulting dilemma were made possible by Union logistical capabilities. Lee might have a good intuition that Grant was moving south of the James, but he could not effectively act on that intuition. The Federals' "great facilities" for crossing the river, as well as their ability to close old bases and open new ones on short notice, gave Grant the freedom to go south of the James or reverse course and operate north of the river without worrying about his logistical support. Grant's operational reach ranged all the way from Cold Harbor to Petersburg, and Lee had to stay positioned for every eventuality.

Unfortunately for the Federals, despite the skill of their movements and change of base, they were unable to capture Petersburg after crossing the James. Grant believed that Smith's corps, returning by boat to Butler's Army of the James at Bermuda Hundred, would be able to take Petersburg with little support from the Army of the Potomac on 15 June. On the night of 14 June, Grant sent instructions to Butler indicating favorable conditions for the Army of the James' attack on Petersburg. The commander informed Butler that the Army of the Potomac's II Corps was to halt short of Petersburg, ready to help but only "If the force going into Petersburg find re-enforcements necessary." Grant added that II Corps needed to be available "for an emergency," which also indicated that Butler could handle taking the city with his own forces and leave Hancock's corps free for other contingencies.⁷² After sending the written order on 14 June, Grant decided to see Butler face-to-face. Grant stated in his official report: "After the crossing [of the James] had commenced, I proceeded by a steamer to Bermuda Hundred to give the necessary orders for the immediate capture of Petersburg. The instructions to General Butler were verbal and were for him to send General Smith immediately, that night, with all the troops he could give him without sacrificing the position he then held."⁷³ Grant's instructions to Butler seemed clear, but the role of the Army of the Potomac's II Corps on 15 June remained less certain. In the end, Smith's corps, which almost certainly could have taken Petersburg on its own, failed to do so, and Hancock's corps, which would have made the United States advantage at Petersburg overwhelming, arrived late and did not participate in the battle on 15 June.

Smith's problems began with his corps' arrival at Bermuda Hundred and Point of Rocks on the James on the evening of 14 June. His troops landed at dispersed locations, and some transports ran aground in the shallows of the Appomattox River.⁷⁴ These scattered locations meant that it would take additional time to assemble the corps and attached troops for the march to Petersburg. To add to Smith's problems, it appears that he did not receive his orders to attack Petersburg until he met Butler on the evening of 14 June, although Smith's claim that Butler had no plan or guidance is probably an overstatement.⁷⁵ Then Smith's cavalry was delayed—for reasons that have never been determined—and XVIII Corps was further slowed by a stout Confederate defense of forward positions several miles north of the main defenses of Petersburg. Once deployed, Smith's leading troops—a brigade of African Americans—overwhelmed the rebels at the advanced positions, but Smith grew cautious, fearing rebels in Petersburg had a larger contingent than reported if they could afford to man forward locations.⁷⁶

Despite the early confusion and delays, none of which could be attributed to logistics, Smith's force approached the Dimmock Line (Petersburg's main defenses) in the early after-

noon. Although the Federals had a large advantage in numbers, Smith observed the impressive entrenchments and decided to do an extensive reconnaissance before launching any attacks. After experiencing significant casualties at Cold Harbor while attacking the rebels behind entrenched lines, Smith's caution might be understandable. Nonetheless, the reconnaissance took two hours—time that his forces could ill afford.⁷⁷ After finishing his look at the enemy lines, Smith concluded that it was impossible to advance a traditional line of infantry over the open ground in front of the Confederate artillery in their fortified positions. Smith decided to "try a heavy line of skirmishers with my artillery massed upon the salient near General Brooks's centre."⁷⁸ Artillery was crucial to Smith's plan, which was to suppress the rebel guns and help ease the infantry advance. However, as Smith later wrote: "Upon ordering up the artillery it was found that the chief of artillery had, upon his own responsibility, taken everything to the rear and unhitched the horses to water them, and this detained the movement for an hour."⁷⁹ In all, it was five hours between the time that Smith closed on the Dimmock Line and the beginning of his assault.

As Smith's men prepared for the assault, there was another Union force that might have contributed to seizing Petersburg, but II Corps was also experiencing delays in its approach to the city. Hancock's men began the day consolidating on the south bank of the James having crossed the river from Wilcox's Wharf the day and night before. The first problem for Hancock was that he was not informed that he was to assault Petersburg until mid-day on 15 June. As covered earlier, Grant's instructions to Butler clearly placed responsibility for taking the city with the Army of the James' XVIII Corps. In addition, if Grant had intended for the Army of the Potomac to play a crucial role in seizing the city on 15 June, there is no indication that he conveyed that message to Meade or Hancock before the general in chief departed for Fort Monroe after speaking with Butler. Thus, Meade's instructions for Hancock late on 14 June reflected Grant's view of the mission. The Army of the Potomac commander wrote to the II Corps commander: "You will move your corps by the most direct route to Petersburg, taking up a position where the City Point railroad crosses Harrison's Creek at the crossroads indicated on the map at this point, and extend your right toward the mouth of Harrison's Creek."⁸⁰ There was no mention of an imminent battle or an urgent need to take Petersburg. Thus, the II Corps commander began the day unaware of a pressing need to hurry to Petersburg.

The lack of direction from Meade and Grant contributed to Hancock's delay on the morning of 15 June, and confusion over rations for II Corps troops added to the problem. On the evening of the 14th, Hancock had informed Meade that his troops had three days' rations, which was different than an earlier report to the Army of the Potomac commander indicating that II Corps would soon run out of provisions. Grant, apparently unaware of Hancock's message to Meade, directed Butler to "Please direct your commissary to send down by boat to Wind-Mill Point tonight 60,000 rations;" Meade also instructed Hancock to wait for the provisions.⁸¹ Historian A. Wilson Greene wrote that Grant relied on Butler's commissary for these rations, rather than Meade's supply apparatus because the Army of the Potomac's wagons were "stalled on the far side of the Chickahominy" due to congested roads and confusion over use of the pontoon train.⁸² Greene was correct about delays in the movement of the Army of the Potomac's trains. However, given the restricted road network and limited number of river crossings on the Chickahominy, the delay of the trains would seem reasonable. Perhaps more to the point, regardless of the position of the trains, Hancock already had three days' rations thanks to the

Army of the Potomac's logisticians' anticipation of the need for provisions and pre-loading the rations before crossing the James.

Although Hancock's troops had enough rations, the II Corps commander decided to adhere to Meade's orders and wait for the provisions from Butler before moving. This decision reinforces the assumption that Hancock did not have orders for an urgent advance to Petersburg. As he waited, there was even more confusion when the ship carrying the rations could not dock at Wind-Mill Point because the port was too shallow. After more message exchanges and more lost time, Hancock—with Meade's permission—decided to move without the rations.⁸³ However, Hancock's problems did not end with the rations delay. The maps provided by Army headquarters were not accurate; his corps' destination was mislabeled, and the road network was incorrect.⁸⁴ By the time II Corps approached Petersburg, it was beginning to get dark. Even so, Hancock's soldiers were greeted by Smith's men cheering after successfully assaulting part of the Dimmock Line.

In spite of the delays, and even without Hancock's support, Smith's men heavily outnumbered the Confederate defenders. Once Smith finally launched the attack, his corps seized several positions on the north and east sides of the Dimmock Line. With Petersburg within their grasp, the Federals were on the brink of a potentially decisive victory. There was, however, no further advance by either Smith's corps or Hancock's just-arriving troops. In a report to Butler, Smith wrote: "By this time darkness had set in, and having learned sometime before that re-enforcements were rapidly coming from Richmond, and deeming that I held important points of the enemy's line of works, I thought it prudent to make no farther advance, and made my dispositions to hold what I already had."⁸⁵ After deciding not to continue the attack, Smith met with Hancock. Rather than using II Corps to continue the advance into Petersburg, Smith requested that Hancock have his men relieve Smith's troops in the captured lines to allow XVIII Corps to pull back and rest. Hancock, deferring to the commander on the ground, acquiesced to Smith's request.⁸⁶

The failure to take Petersburg was not a logistical failure. Concerning the breakdown in the Union effort, the one issue connected to logistics was the decision to wait for unneeded rations for II Corps—a decision made more out of confusion and miscommunication than insufficient food for II Corps soldiers. Bad maps, bad luck, bad communications, command decisions, and rebel determination were the main reasons that Petersburg remained in rebel hands.

For the next three days, reinforcements arrived for both sides. The Army of the Potomac renewed its attacks, but the Confederates were able to build new entrenchments behind the lost parts of the Dimmock Line and repel the enemy advances. Soon, the bulk of Lee's army filled the lines, and after 18 June, Grant and Meade called off further attacks and turned to siege warfare to defeat the rebels.

Although the Federals were prevented from a quick victory in June 1864, Grant's transfer of his line of operations and change of base left Lee locked in a siege at Petersburg. This siege gave Lee few operational options and made his army logistically vulnerable. Crossing the James had been a major step forward by Grant to end the war. From his new base at City Point, he could slowly cut each Confederate supply line into Petersburg. This was the ultimate path to the Union victory over Lee's army and the end of the war at Appomattox.

Notes

1. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 598; hereafter cited as *OR*.
2. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 598.
3. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 598.
4. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 598.
5. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 598.
6. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 598.
7. John Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of the Civil War* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), 227–30.
8. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 599.
9. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 603. See also 628–29 for Humphreys's follow-up order to Sheridan on the cavalry raid. This order was very specific about the damage to be done to Lee's supply line.
10. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 599 and 603.
11. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 600–1. The term "&c." is similar to "etc."
12. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 632–33.
13. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 640.
14. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 662.
15. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 662; and Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: The Century Company, 1897), 187–88.
16. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 664.
17. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 665.
18. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 669.
19. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 690–91.
20. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 695 and 704.
21. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 709 and 716. Based on Grant's orders, Halleck instructed the Federal commander in Washington to send all new reinforcements to Bermuda Hundred on 10 June, *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 738.
22. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 711 and 729.
23. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 717.
24. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 722–23.
25. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 724. Initially, Grant and Meade hoped Smith's men could embark at Cole's Ferry and thus shorten the route to Bermuda Hundred, *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 725. In the end, the White House facilities were far superior to those at Cole's Ferry, and Grant decided to have XVIII Corps embark at White House, *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 745–746 and 755.
26. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 737.
27. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 745.
28. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 747–48.
29. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 748.
30. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 748–49.
31. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 748–49.
32. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 754–55.
33. Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 188–89.
34. Fort Powhatan was a United States enclave on the south bank near Wind-Mill Point.
35. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 768.
36. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 769.

37. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 768.
38. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 776 and 780; vol. XL, part I, 747.
39. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 46.
40. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part I, 37–38.
41. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 735 and 764–65.
42. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 745.
43. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 748.
44. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part III, 766.
45. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 33.
46. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part I, 37–38.
47. Grant informed Halleck that lead elements of the Federal advance (II Corps) had reached the James at Wilcox’s Landing between 1500 and 1630 on 13 June, *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 3.
48. The vast majority of accounts that cover Grant’s move across the James River praised the Union ability to construct the crucial pontoon bridge in a short time and against considerable obstacles. One Grant biographer, Brooks D. Simpson, called the crossing of the James—with particular emphasis on the bridge—“a military masterpiece,” *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822–1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 337. Perhaps more impressive was Confederate recognition for the Union crossing as evidenced by E. Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 418–20. Despite this general acclaim, one of the better and more detailed accounts of the construction of the James River bridge was critical of the United States effort; see Warren T. Hannum, “The Crossing of the James River in 1864,” *The Military Engineer* XV, no. 81 (1932): 229–37. Hannum, a major in the United States Corps of Engineers writing in the 1930s, was meticulous in his description of the Union bridging effort, and he rightfully pointed out errors in the execution. These included confusion over the shipment of the pontoons and underestimating the need for pontoons at Chickahominy crossing sites, which delayed the construction of the James River bridge. However, his professional engineer’s eye for precision apparently kept him from placing the James River bridge in proper historical perspective. While the Federals certainly lost some time moving their pontoons between Fort Monroe, Bermuda Hundred, and Fort Powhatan, the James River bridge was the longest pontoon bridge of the war and was built in a remarkably short time. Historian A. Wilson Greene—using Hannum as his source—was also critical of the delays and emphasized that there could have been a second bridge on the James, *A Campaign of Giants: The Battle for Petersburg*, vol. 1 (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 73–74. This claim seems far too ambitious. By the time construction on a second bridge could have been completed, the fate of Petersburg would have long been decided by units that already crossed on 15 June by ferry (II Corps) and by City Point (XVIII Corps). See also Gordon C. Rhea, *On to Petersburg: Grant and Lee, June 4–15, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: University of Louisiana Press, 2017), 238–41. Rhea, relying partly on Hannum’s article but adding some other sources, was also somewhat critical of the bridging effort. Rhea quoted from Cyrus Comstock’s diary that Grant was agitated by the delays in constructing the bridge and sent Comstock to the site to prod the engineers. Rhea then added that V Corps’ chief of artillery, Col. Charles Wainright, worried that “the delay with the completion of the bridge will enable Lee to make Petersburg safe.” Despite these concerns, Rhea finished his section on the construction of the bridge by repeating praise for the speed and skill in its construction from Assistant Secretary of War Charles Dana and Meade’s staff officer, Theodore Lyman.
49. Hannum, 233–34.
50. Hannum, 234. Corduroying the roads meant that engineers and other soldiers were cutting down tree trunks and laying them side by side in the muddy roads to make them passable
51. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 3.
52. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 4.
53. Messages from Benham to Butler and Seth Williams at 0900 on 13 June, and a message from Butler to Benham at 1540. Both in *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 5.
54. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 12–13.
55. Hannum, “The Crossing of the James River in 1864,” 235.
56. The engineer support for the Army of the Potomac consisted of several units. One was the United States Army Engineer Battalion. These troops were part of the “Regular” Army—units of the pre-war United States Army, not state volunteers who enlisted after the start of the war. They were commanded by Capt. George H. Mendell. The other engineer elements with the Army of the Potomac were companies of the 15th and 50th New York Volunteer Engineers. Part of the New Yorkers stayed in Washington, but another part traveled with the Army of the Potomac.
57. Hannum, “The Crossing of the James River in 1864,” 235–36.
58. Curtis S. King, William Glenn Robertson, and Lt. Col. Steven E. Clay, *Staff Ride Handbook for the Overland Campaign, Virginia, 4 May to 15 June 1864: A Study in Operational Level Command*, 2nd ed. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2009), 329.
59. Porter, *Campaigning with Grant*, 199–200.
60. Gordon C. Rhea, *On to Petersburg*, 208. The Confederate artilleryman is Maj. Robert Stiles, as quoted by Rhea.
61. Rhea, 212–14.
62. Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee’s Dispatches* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1915), note, 227–31. Lee’s three messages referenced by Freeman are in *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 659.
63. Freeman, note, 228.
64. Freeman, note, 231.
65. Freeman, 227.
66. Freeman, 227–28.
67. Freeman, 229–30.
68. Freeman, 230–32.
69. Freeman, 232–33.
70. Freeman, 233.
71. Freeman, 234–35; and *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 654.
72. *OR*, series I, vol. XL part II, 36.
73. *OR*, series I, vol. XXXVI, part I, 25. Also see Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant* (1885; repr., New York: Charles Webster & Company, 1999), 454. Grant’s post-war account confirmed the meeting with Butler and instructions for Smith to take Petersburg. However, there is a different degree of emphasis on the Army of the Potomac role in the taking of Petersburg between Grant’s report and his memoirs. In his report (25), Grant wrote that he told Butler: “I [Grant] would return at once to the Army of the Potomac, hasten its crossing, and throw it forward to Petersburg by divisions as rapidly as it could be done.” In his memoirs, Grant stated that he would only send forward those parts of the Army of the Potomac “that could be conveniently done” (454).
74. Rhea, *On to Petersburg*, 251–53.
75. Greene, *A Campaign of Giants*, 75–76; and Rhea, 251–53. Greene made a persuasive argument that Smith did not receive his orders until arriving at Bermuda Hundred late on 14 June; though admittedly last minute, Smith did receive instructions that made it clear he was to take Petersburg.
76. Greene, 85–91; and Rhea, 253–61.
77. Greene, 98–99. Greene is sympathetic to Smith’s health issues on 15 June, but less so of the lack of an engineer officer to assist him on the reconnaissance and the influence of the Cold Harbor attacks on Smith’s caution. Looking at multiple sources, Greene concluded that there is little evidence of a “Cold Harbor Syndrome” (fear of assaulting Confederate entrenchments) influencing Smith at Petersburg. See note 45, page 537 of Greene. Greene also interpreted the lack of an engineer to assist Smith

(a West Point-trained engineer himself) as a message from Butler to make the assault on Petersburg as quickly as possible and not waste time on “interminable reconnaissances;” see note 46 of Greene.

78. William F. Smith, “Movement Against Petersburg, June 1864,” in *Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 5 (Boston: Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, 1881–1918), 90.

79. Smith, 90.

80. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 29.

81. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 36. Meade reiterated the need for the rations from Butler; see *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part II, 29.

82. Greene, *A Campaign of Giants*, 67.

83. Greene, 68–71; and Rhea, *On to Petersburg*, 261–64.

84. Rhea, 262.

85. *OR*, series I, vol. XL, part I, 705.

86. Rhea, *On to Petersburg*, 304–5.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

One obvious conclusion that can be drawn from the Virginia campaigns of McClellan and Grant is the powerful degree to which logistics influenced the operational actions of both commanders. McClellan avoided an overland advance from Washington through Manassas to Richmond in large part because of his view of supply considerations. Confident in United States Navy support, he positioned the Army of the Potomac at Fort Monroe with a secure base. More importantly, McClellan knew that the base could be advanced to West Point for operations against Richmond. All of these moves were based on McClellan's assumption that the Army of the Potomac would need its siege artillery advantage to defeat the Confederates. That assumption may have been questionable, but McClellan always made sure his army advanced in a way to obtain bases to support his siege plan.

Grant differed from McClellan on his operational approach by selecting an overland advance for his combat forces rather than transferring them by water. However, like McClellan, he shaped his moves with an eye to logistics based on supply from the United States Navy. For Grant, each Army of the Potomac movement—from the Wilderness to Spotsylvania to the North Anna to Cold Harbor to Petersburg—was shaped by the next base that could supply the move. Neither Grant nor McClellan ever made an operational move without considering logistics. Even though McClellan initially moved his combat forces by water while Grant moved overland, they both relied on the Navy to provide logistical support by water throughout their campaigns.

In addition, both United States commanders were adept in planning their operations based on logistics. It is one thing to understand the importance of supplies, and quite another to take advantage of that knowledge. Both McClellan and Grant forecasted each new base that was needed to support their campaign. Neither commander made an operational move that could not be supplied. Even so, a strong argument could be made that McClellan's overestimation of his opponent's capabilities and strength may have put a self-imposed limit on his base selections. In particular, his last shift of the supply base to Harrison's Landing left him north of the James River in a defensive posture with limited operational options. He could either campaign in the restricted maneuver area between the James and Chickahominy or face the specter of an opposed crossing of the James River if he wanted to shift his base farther south. On the other hand, Grant's bold crossing of the James to Petersburg left him in a better operational position south of the river, with a secure base at City Point. Even so, McClellan's weaker position was determined by many factors, such as bad intelligence and overcaution, but not by a failure of his logistical apparatus.

Beyond critiquing the two commanders' selection of bases, credit should go to McClellan for putting in place a logistical system and staff for the Army of the Potomac that Grant was able to leverage even further. This well-deserved nod to McClellan does not diminish Grant's own considerable logistical talents—nurtured as a quartermaster in the Mexican War and honed in campaigns at Vicksburg and Chattanooga. In the western theater, Grant made brilliant use of rivers and railroads for his logistics, but he started with smaller forces and then gradually refined his understanding of supplying larger armies. McClellan had to develop logistical support for an army totaling more than 100,000 men in early 1862, with little chance for trial and error.

McClellan's genius for administration and logistics was most evident in building this structure. He began by constructing a skilled staff (small by today's standards but large for its day) that could organize and supply such a daunting force. Staff officers such as Rufus Ingalls proved essential to this task and were still with the Army of the Potomac when Grant arrived. McClellan and his staff correctly calculated the supply needs of his forces and the transportation required to move these supplies. Without in any way diminishing Grant's grasp of logistics, McClellan deserves praise for his ability to create a lasting system almost from scratch that would endure throughout the war.

This supply apparatus in both 1862 and 1864 was amazing in anticipation, responsiveness, improvisation, and continuity. Commanders could rely on their logisticians to execute base shifts with speed and efficiency. The United States forces never suffered from a logistical shortfall that restricted their operational plans. Men like Van Vliet and Ingalls anticipated Federal movements and responded with remarkable alacrity and competence. Sometimes these moves required improvisation—for example, the ability to make White House a base in both campaigns with makeshift docks—which the Union logisticians seemed to handle with relative ease. Also, the crossing of the James in 1864 remains one of the great engineering and logistical feats of military operations in the nineteenth century. In the end, these skills ensured continuity in supply that gave the commanders tremendous freedom for their operations.

While historians continue to argue the merits of McClellan and Grant as operational commanders, logistically they both exhibited exceptional skill. For McClellan, this seems to reaffirm his place as a great administrator, trainer, and logistician. If so, it is worth reiterating that McClellan's contribution is not lost in heated criticisms of his operational abilities. On the other hand, it is important to recognize Grant's substantial abilities to comprehend and master the logistical aspects of a campaign. By 1864, Grant clearly had an extensive grasp of sustainment in this war; and in his Overland Campaign, he deftly shifted supply bases in order to support his operational choices with sufficient logistics. While historians may continue to debate McClellan's and Grant's tactical prowess, both commanders were clearly professionals when it came to logistics.

Appendix

Biographies

Ulysses Simpson Grant

Grant was born on 27 April 1822 in Point Pleasant, Ohio, and given the name Hiram Ulysses Grant. He entered West Point in 1839 and, due to an administrative error, was enrolled as Ulysses Simpson.¹ From that point on, his full name became Ulysses Simpson Grant. He was an excellent equestrian and student of mathematics, but otherwise an average student, graduating twenty-first out of thirty-nine in the class of 1843. Grant joined the infantry and served in the Mexican War with the 4th Infantry Regiment. He participated in the campaigns of Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott in which he earned two brevets for valor and also performed well as a regimental quartermaster.



Figure A.1. Ulysses Simpson Grant.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The Mexican War gave Grant an extensive number of diverse experiences. First, he observed the vastly differing leadership styles of Taylor and Scott. Taylor represented the unkempt man who identified with his soldiers. The stuffy and formal Scott, whose style was not appealing to Grant, nonetheless demonstrated a careful understanding of the increasing complexity of modern war and the importance of planning. Second, as Scott set his initial base at Vera Cruz, Grant witnessed this use of waterborne transport to establish a secure and effective base. Later, Scott took the risk of advancing on Mexico City and cutting his supply line from Vera Cruz—but only after accumulating enough supplies to complete the advance. Finally, Grant traveled with Scott's forces, serving as a regimental quartermaster, while still joining in the fighting as the Americans approached Mexico City. Grant managed to bring an artillery piece to a church steeple and then bombarded Mexican positions at the battle of Chapultepec. Aside from his exploits with the artillery, Grant's observation of the landing at Vera Cruz and his service as a quartermaster gave him greater experience in logistics than many other soldiers coming out of the Mexican War.

Soon after the war, Grant married Julia Dent. Julia was a devoted wife and great source of happiness and comfort to Grant. He next served in the Pacific Northwest, where he soon became bored with peacetime garrison duty. This boredom and separation from his family led Grant to excessive drinking, which in part, caused Grant to resign his commission in 1854. For the next seven years, Grant tried several civilian jobs. He farmed, tried real estate, and clerked at his brother's store, all with little success. Prior to the Civil War, Grant clearly had less extensive experience in the Army and in logistics than McClellan, and Grant's civilian experience was of failure. However, Grant's exposure to both Taylor and Scott in the Mexican War, as well as his work as a quartermaster, gave him more logistics experience than most American officers who fought in the Civil War.

When the Civil War broke out, Grant obtained command of the 21st Illinois Infantry Regiment and was given the rank of colonel. As Grant prepared his regiment for combat, he was

commissioned a brigadier general on 7 August 1861, in large part because of his connections with Illinois Congressional Representative Elihu B. Washburne. After a small skirmish at Belmont, Missouri, Grant's forces seized Forts Henry and Donelson in February 1862—his first major combat. These victories brought Grant to the favorable attention of the American public and gave him the nickname “unconditional surrender” for the terms he demanded of the Confederate forces trapped in Donelson. Grant also gained valuable experience in joint operations with the Navy and in logistics—particularly waterborne supply transportation.

After Donelson, Grant was surprised and almost defeated at the Battle of Shiloh. After being reinforced, Grant drove the Confederates from the field, but after the battle, he was given the largely ceremonial position of second in command to Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck, commander of the combined Federal forces in the advance on Corinth, Mississippi. Grant chafed in this position while Halleck crawled toward Corinth. Despite this slow advance, Halleck was named general in chief of the Federal Armies and took up his new position in Washington. Grant again assumed command of the Army of the Tennessee, and focused on the campaign to take Vicksburg.

Grant succeeded in capturing Vicksburg and the Confederate force defending it, thus ensuring that the Union gained control of the Mississippi River. His campaign showed a great understanding of logistics and joint operations. From December 1862 to April 1863, Grant looked for a base on dry ground on the east side of the Mississippi River where his troops could operate against Vicksburg. After several failed attempts along the Mississippi bayous, he staged a new advance from bases at Young's Point and Milliken's Bend, and then set up an advanced base at Grand Gulf after his victory at Port Gibson. Throughout the campaign, Grant remained focused on bases and logistics. Grand Gulf and Snyder's Bluff (sometimes called Hayne's Bluff) were crucial bases in Grant's operations, and the Union commander conducted his maneuvers with a constant eye toward using his bases to extend his operational reach. Also, he relied extensively on waterborne supplies while directing a larger force than the army that he had commanded at Donelson. Regarding Grant's understanding of logistics in this campaign, there have been claims that Grant cut loose from his base at Grand Gulf when he advanced inland toward Jackson, Mississippi, during the campaign; Grant in fact never completely severed logistical ties to his base. He did rely on foraging for the soldiers' food, but he maintained a large system of wagon resupply for ammunition and animal fodder while he moved inland toward central Mississippi.²

After Vicksburg, fighting in the Western Theater shifted to central Tennessee and northern Georgia. In September 1863, Maj. Gen. William Rosecrans's Army of the Cumberland was defeated at Chickamauga and besieged in Chattanooga. Rosecrans was replaced by Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, and Grant became commander of all Federal forces in the Western Theater. At Chattanooga, Grant commanded forces from three different armies. In this new role, the theater commander did not use his own special staff to administer the logistics of these three separate armies.³ Grant brought his personal staff to Chattanooga and left the Army of the Tennessee's quartermaster, Col. J. D. Bingham, and its commissary general, Col. Robert McFeely with the army's new commander, Sherman. Although lacking logistics staff officers during the struggle at Chattanooga, Grant again demonstrated his grasp of sustainment. When Grant arrived at Thomas's headquarters in October, the Army of the Cumberland was suffering from a shortage of supplies because the Confederate siege lines blocked the main river, rail, and wagon routes. Thomas's chief engineer, Maj. Gen. William F. “Baldy” Smith, had already

developed a plan to relieve the supply problem, but it was Grant who carried through with the plan. After taking the position at Brown's Ferry from the Confederates, the Federals opened the “cracker line” and supplies arrived in Chattanooga to sustain the Army of the Cumberland.⁴ With Union supply difficulties alleviated, Grant marshaled his forces and drove General Braxton Bragg's Confederate forces away from the city. The ensuing tactical fighting did not go quite as Grant had planned, but the Federals ultimately succeeded. In the course of the struggle for Chattanooga, Grant also made great improvements to his personal staff, removing several cronies who showed no military aptitude and bringing on board more professional staff officers such as Horace Porter and Cyrus B. Comstock.⁵

Grant's triumphs in the west impressed President Lincoln. After Chattanooga, Grant was promoted to lieutenant general and selected to be general in chief of the Army. By this time, Grant had gained extensive experience in logistical matters. From Donelson to Vicksburg and then to Chattanooga, Grant commanded larger and larger forces, all the while mastering the use of both rail and waterborne supplies. These skills would serve Grant well in the 1864 Overland Campaign.

Henry W. Halleck

Born on a farm in Westernville, Oneida County, New York, Halleck was the third of fourteen children born to Joseph Halleck, a lieutenant who served in the War of 1812, and Catherine Wager Halleck.⁶ Henry detested the thought of an agricultural life and ran away from home at an early age to be raised by an uncle, David Wager of Utica. He attended Hudson Academy and Union College, then the United States Military Academy. He graduated in 1839, third in his class of thirty-one cadets, as a second lieutenant of engineers. After spending several years improving the New York Harbor defenses, he wrote a report for the United States Senate on seacoast defenses, *Report on the Means of National Defence [sic]*. Winfield Scott noticed this work and sent Halleck on a trip to Europe in 1844 to study European fortifications and the French army. Halleck returned as a first lieutenant and gave a series of lectures at the Lowell Institute in Boston that were subsequently published in 1846 as *Elements of Military Art and Science*. His work was well-received by his colleagues and was considered one of the definitive tactical treatises used by officers in the coming Civil War. His scholarly pursuits earned him the (later derogatory) nickname of “Old Brains.” During the Mexican-American War, Halleck was assigned to duty in California. During the seven-month journey to his new assignment around Cape Horn on the transport USS *Lexington*, he translated French military theorist Henri Jomini's *Vie politique et militaire de Napoleon*, which further enhanced Halleck's reputation for scholarship. He then spent several months in California constructing fortifications. He was awarded a brevet promotion to captain in 1847 for his “gallant and meritorious service” in California during the war with Mexico. He later became a lawyer and resigned his commission in 1854. The following year he married Elizabeth Hamilton, granddaughter of Alexander Hamilton and sister of Union General Schuyler Hamilton. Their only child, Henry Wager Halleck Jr., was born in 1856. Halleck remained involved in military affairs and by early 1861 was a California Militia major general.



Figure A.2. Henry W. Halleck. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

At the outbreak of the war, based on Winfield Scott's recommendation, Halleck received an appointment as a major general in the regular army and was one of the senior officers in the Army as the war commenced. Halleck's first command was in Saint Louis, where his considerable administrative talents brought order to the Department of Missouri, which had been an organizational disaster under his predecessor, John C. Fremont. Halleck was Grant's superior officer during the successes at Forts Henry and Donelson, and these successes (as well as the capture of Island Number Ten) brought Halleck's promotion to the command of the Union forces in the Western Theater. Halleck then sought to concentrate his forces, but the Confederates attacked Grant at Shiloh before Halleck could unite his separate armies. Grant fought off the attack, and—with the help of Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell's army, which arrived that night—the Federals forced the Confederates to retreat. Soon after the battle, Halleck arrived to take command of Grant and Buell's combined forces. In his only field command of the war, Halleck was tremendously cautious. He took a month and a half to take Corinth, Mississippi, only about twenty miles from Shiloh, despite a large advantage in numbers over the Southerners. Despite this timid advance, Lincoln promoted Halleck to the position of general in chief. Halleck, however, was never the general in chief that Lincoln desired. The general never presented his own coherent strategy for the war, and he spent more time cajoling and scolding his army commanders, and attending to administrative matters, than acting as a true general in chief. To Halleck's credit, he ensured that Grant received crucial reinforcements during the siege at Vicksburg but still was reluctant to provide overall direction to the Federal armies.

Once Grant assumed the position of general in chief, relegating Halleck to the chief of staff of the Army, Halleck's talents came to the fore. No longer burdened by the responsibility of command, Halleck became Grant's representative in Washington. He received reports from commanders in other theaters and transmitted them to Grant and then forwarded Grant's instructions, often with useful comments of his own, to subordinate commanders. Without this essential function, Grant would have had difficulty fulfilling his duties as a general in chief while traveling with Meade's army. Halleck was a skilled administrator, and his ability to assist others in raising and equipping troops was an asset to the Federals. In addition, he dealt with political issues, whether from Congress or from Lincoln and Stanton, allowing Grant to focus on military matters. Finally, Halleck played a major role in logistics for the Overland Campaign. The chief of staff did not determine bases or lines of operation, but he was a key link in executing these decisions. Whenever Grant decided on a new base, he would inform Halleck, who in turn ensured that bureau chiefs like Meigs and other critical agents such as the Navy received details of the new move. Halleck certainly had a mixed record in the war, but his service to Grant as chief of staff in Washington in 1864–65 was extremely valuable.

Andrew A. Humphreys

Humphreys was born in Philadelphia on 2 November 1810.⁷ Although his family had a tradition of designing ships for the navy, Andrew turned to the army and attended the United States Military Academy. After graduating on 1 July 1831, Humphreys joined the second artillery regiment at Fort Moultrie in South Carolina. At the beginning of the Seminole Wars, he followed his regiment in 1836 to Florida, where he received his first combat experience, while also falling ill. After being reinstated in the engineer corps in 1844, Humphreys was put in charge of the Central Office of the Coast Survey at Washington and promoted to captain in 1848. In 1850, he was directed to commence surveys and investigate the Mississippi River



Figure A.3. Andrew A. Humphreys. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Delta. His mission on the Mississippi River would take ten years of Humphreys' life. From 1853–57, he also worked on the Pacific Railroad Surveys with Secretary of War Jefferson Davis. Humphreys along with 100-plus men (soldiers, scientists, and technicians) went into the western territories to find the most practical route for the First Transcontinental Railroad. Humphreys was a skilled engineer prior to the Civil War, but he would have to learn about operations and logistics through experience in the Civil War.

After the outbreak of the war, Humphreys assumed a position on McClellan's staff as an aide. He later served as the Army's topographical engineer in the Peninsula Campaign. On 12 September 1862, he assumed command of the 3rd Division in V Corps of the Army of the Potomac. His division was mostly in a reserve role in the Battle of Antietam. At the Battle of Fredericksburg, his division was heavily engaged at Marye's Heights, with Humphreys personally commanding from the front of the line on horseback. Although respected by his men for his bravery under fire, Humphreys was not well-liked by them. In his mid-fifties, they considered him an old man, despite his relatively youthful appearance. He was a tough taskmaster and strict disciplinarian. At the Battle of Chancellorsville, Humphreys' division saw little action. On 3 May 1863, he was transferred to the command of the 2nd Division in III Corps. When Meade assumed command of the Army of the Potomac just before the Battle of Gettysburg, he asked Humphreys to be his chief of staff, but Humphreys declined, preferring to stay in field command. His division saw heavy action at Gettysburg. On 2 July 1863, his corps commander, Sickles, had moved his corps—to include Humphreys' Division—to a new position on the Emmitsburg Road. After heavy fighting, Humphreys retreated and eventually was able to reform his division on Cemetery Ridge.

After the battle, III Corps was devastated. Both III Corps and I Corps were disbanded, and their troops were distributed to other units in the Army of the Potomac. Humphreys' decimated division was part of this reorganization. Humphreys finally accepted Meade's offer to be his chief of staff, and he served in this position during the Bristoe and Mine Run campaigns. Humphreys always longed for field command (he eventually was given command of II Corps in the Petersburg Campaign, taking over for an ailing Winfield Hancock), but he was an adept chief of staff for Meade. As a combat commander, Humphreys was irascible and uncompromising, but as chief of staff he showed more patience, and his attention to detail was a great asset to Meade. Humphreys—like all chiefs of staff in the war—was not a decision-maker, but he was far more active in crafting orders and assigning routes for the army's corps than other army-level chiefs of staff such as Marcy and Rawlins. One historian referred to Humphreys as “Meade's humorless chief of staff . . . Everyone agreed that this bowlegged, profane little man was a military genius.”⁸

Rufus Ingalls

The key member of Meade's staff regarding sustainment was his quartermaster, Rufus Ingalls. Like Meigs, Ingalls was a remarkable man and a great logistician. Though little known

today, he was an essential contributor to the Union victory in the Civil War. Ingalls was born on 23 August 1818, in Denmark, Maine. His father, Cyrus, was a prominent local mill owner and politician. Through his father's political connections, Rufus was appointed to the United States Military Academy and graduated in the Class of 1843, which included his friend Ulysses S. Grant. Ingalls was brevetted as a second lieutenant and assigned to garrison duty on the western frontier. In 1845, he joined the 1st United States Dragoons with the rank of first lieutenant. Ingalls served in the Mexican-American War in the New Mexico Territory with the Army of the West under Col. Stephen W. Kearny. Ingalls distinguished himself in action at the skirmish at Eabudo and the conflict at Pueblo de Taos, for which he received the brevet rank of first lieutenant. He later served in California under Kearny. Ingalls became a quartermaster in 1848 and served in that role the rest of his career.



Figure A.4. Rufus Ingalls. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Promoted to the rank of captain, he was assigned to the Oregon Territory in 1849, and then to Fort Vancouver in 1852, along with his friend, Ulysses Grant. In early 1854, while on duty in Washington, DC, Ingalls was ordered to accompany the Steptoe Expedition from Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, across the continent through the Utah Territory to the Pacific Coast. Ingalls did excellent work as a quartermaster, basing the expedition securely in Utah in 1854. He oversaw the construction of two large adobe buildings for quarters and storage of forage and supplies, which saw the expedition's participants through the winter. Ingalls also showed some diplomatic skill, helping to diffuse tensions between the expedition and the Mormons.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Ingalls was stationed in Fort Pickens, Florida, performing quartermaster duties. He was quickly promoted to major then lieutenant colonel in the volunteer army. Shortly after the First Battle of Manassas in July 1861, he moved to the Federal forces in Virginia to serve as aide-de-camp to Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan. He was promoted to the rank of major in the regular army in January 1862. As we have seen earlier in this study, Ingalls acted as the Army of the Potomac's senior assistant quartermaster in the Peninsula Campaign. He rendered outstanding service to the army quartermaster, Van Vliet, before succeeding in that position after Van Vliet resigned. From that time and through the Overland Campaign, Ingalls performed superbly as the Army of the Potomac's quartermaster through every major campaign.

Ingalls was another of those logisticians who are little known today but were crucial to the Union victory. He was a "chunky, oracular-looking man" and one of the best poker players in the army.⁹ The quartermaster showed great attention to detail, and the Army of the Potomac was consistently well-supplied in all of its campaigns. As a measure of his skill, Ingalls served under four different army commanders—each of different temperament and varied campaign plans—all of whom praised their quartermaster.

Randolph B. Marcy

Brig. Gen. Randolph B. Marcy was McClellan's father-in-law, but his appointment as chief of staff was not simply a matter of nepotism. Marcy's background and experience showed him to be a well-qualified and able officer. Born in Greenwich, Massachusetts, on 9 April 1812, he

was the eldest son of Leban and Fanny Marcy. He graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1832, ranking twenty-ninth out of a class of forty-five cadets. Marcy was commissioned a second lieutenant in the 5th United States Infantry, and served with that unit in the Black Hawk War in Illinois and Wisconsin. In 1833, he married Mary A. Mann, the daughter of Jonas Mann of Syracuse, New York. Marcy was promoted to first lieutenant on 22 June 1837 and to captain on 18 May 1846. With the exception of two short tours as a recruiting officer in the eastern United States, he spent his career before the Mexican War on the northwest frontier in Michigan and Wisconsin. In 1846, he fought with the 5th Infantry in the Mexican War at the battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma. After the war, Marcy returned to recruiting duty, which brought him back to Texas in 1847. Two years later, he scouted the route from Fort Smith to Santa Fe, soon dubbed the Marcy Trail. Then in March 1852, Marcy was assigned command of a seventy-man expedition across the Great Plains in search of the source of the Red River. Second in command of the Red River expedition was Capt. George B. McClellan. For the next several years, Marcy continued to explore rivers and other areas in Texas and the southwest. In 1857, Marcy supported Brig. Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston on the expedition against the Mormons in Utah. During this mission, Marcy led his men from Utah to New Mexico on a forced march through the Rocky Mountains in the middle of winter with no loss of life. After this exploit, Marcy returned to Washington to prepare a semiofficial guidebook for the War Department. Published in 1859, *The Prairie Traveler* was an outstanding source of practical hints for travelers about what equipment to carry, methods of organizing a wagon train, and techniques to avoid Indian attacks, as well as detailed notes on the most important overland trails to the west. This work was of immense importance for the settlement of the American West. Marcy was serving as a paymaster in the Pacific Northwest at the beginning of the Civil War. In September 1861, McClellan (by then married to Marcy's daughter) appointed Marcy as his chief of staff. Marcy served in that post through the Peninsula and Antietam campaigns. After McClellan's relief, Marcy performed duties as an inspector general in various departments for the rest of the war. He continued to serve as an inspector general for a variety of Army departments until 1878 when he became the inspector general of the United States Army. Marcy retired in 1881 and died six years later.¹⁰



Figure A.5. Randolph B. Marcy. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

As noted earlier, a Civil War chief of staff performed few of the functions of a chief of staff in a modern army, and Marcy was no exception. McClellan's chief did not act as the head of the staff and did not formulate operational courses of action, and his involvement in logistical matters was limited. Like most other commanders, McClellan relied on Marcy to write many of his orders and be a sounding board for his ideas. In addition, McClellan used Marcy as a liaison with Lincoln and Stanton. Marcy performed valuable service in this liaison role, and in helping McClellan execute his operational plans, as well as being an overall advisor to his commander. Marcy may have had little direct influence on the logistical functions of the army, but he supported McClellan's plans for the Peninsula Campaign to include his choice of bases.¹¹

George Brinton McClellan

McClellan was born in Philadelphia on 3 December 1826. He was the son of a well-known surgeon, Dr. George McClellan, and his mother was Elizabeth Sophia Steinmetz Brinton, daughter of a leading Pennsylvania family.¹² The young George McClellan attended the University of Pennsylvania in 1840 at age thirteen. After two years, he changed his goal to military service. With the assistance of a letter from his father to President John Tyler, George entered the United States Military Academy in 1842. At West Point, he was an energetic, ambitious, and successful cadet. He graduated in 1846, second in his class of fifty-nine cadets, and was commissioned a brevet second lieutenant in the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The Engineer Branch was the most sought-after arm of the Army for academy graduates—partly because of its prestige within the military, and partly because engineering was a valuable skill if one had to leave the army.

McClellan's first assignment was with a company of engineers formed at West Point, but he quickly received orders to join the forces engaged in the Mexican-American War. After arriving in the area of Zachary Taylor's campaign in October 1846, McClellan complained that he had arrived too late to take part in the American victory at Monterrey in September. For a time, he suffered with dysentery and malaria before recovering and then joining Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott's expedition that took Mexico City. In these operations, he was frequently under enemy fire, and he was brevetted a first lieutenant for his actions at Contreras and Churubusco and later brevetted to captain for heroism at Chapultepec.¹³

McClellan returned to West Point to command the company that trained cadets in engineering activities. In June 1851, he was ordered to Fort Delaware to oversee construction of this work on an island in the Delaware River. Less than a year later, he reported to Capt. Randolph B. Marcy at Fort Smith, Arkansas, to serve as second-in-command on an expedition to discover the sources of the Red River. Although he did not know it at the time, McClellan was working for his future father-in-law and Civil War chief of staff. His next assignment was to the Department of Texas, where he completed a survey of Texas rivers and harbors. In 1853, he was transferred north to help survey routes for the planned transcontinental railroad to the Pacific.

McClellan's early experience as an engineer and in the Mexican War was not directly related to logistics, but he may have gained some insights into supply operations. His expeditions and surveys required him to plan for the support of his own small forces, as well as to look for the means of supplying a larger force operating in those areas in the future. In the Mexican War, he was more focused on reconnaissance and operational aspects of the campaign, but as an officer on Scott's staff, he witnessed the logistical operations of the march to Mexico City, as well as the seaborne transfer of Scott's army to Vera Cruz.

In April 1854, McClellan returned east to New York. Inspired by letters from his mother, he traveled to Washington, DC, to begin courting his future wife, Mary Ellen Marcy, daugh-



Figure A.6. George Brinton McClellan. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

ter of his former commander on the Red River expedition. Ellen, known as Nelly, refused McClellan's first proposal of marriage, one of nine she received from a variety of suitors, including McClellan's West Point friend, Ambrose Powell Hill. McClellan was initially disappointed, but he resumed his courtship of Nelly in 1859 and won her hand in May 1860.

In June 1854, Secretary of War Jefferson Davis sent McClellan on a mission to Santo Domingo to assess potential port facilities for use by the United States. Davis appears to have looked at McClellan almost as a protégé, and the young officer's next assignment was to assess the logistical readiness of various railroads in the United States with an eye toward the proposed transcontinental railroad. In March 1855, McClellan was promoted to captain and assigned to the 1st United States Cavalry Regiment.

Because of his strong ties to Davis and knowledge of French, McClellan was selected to join the Delafield Commission and observe the European armies in the Crimean War in 1855.¹⁴ This was a great honor for McClellan who, at 29, was by far the youngest member of the commission. The other two commission members, both first in their class at West Point, were Maj. Richard Delafield and Maj. Alfred Mordecai. The commission was delayed from reaching the Crimea by both the French and Russians, who feared the American observers would reveal military secrets. Nonetheless, McClellan was able to meet with the highest military commands in Europe and observe their military structures. Finally, at the end of his mission, McClellan arrived at Sevastopol and observed the siege works as well as the logistical arrangements of the British and French forces.

When McClellan returned to the United States in 1856, he was assigned to Philadelphia to prepare his report on the trip. Some historians are critical of McClellan's report for its failure to address the issue of high command, particularly the need for staff officers to support the commander, and the absence of the effects of the new rifled musket on tactics.¹⁵ This improved infantry weapon's extended range would have a profound effect on Civil War tactics. Nonetheless, McClellan reported extensively on European military fortifications and tactics. He also wrote a manual on cavalry tactics that was based on Russian cavalry regulations. The Army adopted McClellan's cavalry manual and also his design for a saddle, the "McClellan Saddle," which he saw used by Hussars in Prussia and Hungary. More importantly, he observed several aspects of the Crimean War that influenced his views of fighting the American Civil War. In particular, McClellan understood the details of siege warfare as executed at Sevastopol, and he observed the transportation and logistical support of the British and French armies by sea.

Although a shining star in the United States Army, McClellan was frustrated by his future prospects and resigned his commission on 16 January 1857. He used his experience with railroad assessment to attain the position of chief engineer and vice president of the Illinois Central Railroad. Despite his success as a railroad executive, McClellan was frustrated with his civilian employment and continued to study classical military strategy. Although he often felt unsatisfied in civilian life, McClellan's railroad experience may have given him a better understanding of the role of railroads in military operations and logistics. It certainly added to his credentials as an administrator and logistician.

After several years in the civilian world, made more tolerable by his marriage to Nelly, McClellan rejoined the army as commander of the Department of the Ohio at the opening of the Civil War. On 14 May, he was commissioned a major general in the regular army. McClellan's

first military operation was to occupy the area of western Virginia that wanted to remain in the Union and subsequently became the state of West Virginia. His forces moved rapidly into the area through Grafton and were victorious at a skirmish called the Battle of Philippi. His first personal command in battle was at Rich Mountain, which he also won. These two victories propelled McClellan to the status of a national hero and command of the Union armies.

McClellan proved to be a master administrator and trainer, fully deserving the lion's share of credit for creating the newly named Army of the Potomac and making it an excellent fighting force. After taking command of the forces in Washington, McClellan set about the task of constructing a mass army that would soon dwarf the force that McDowell had taken into battle at Bull Run. The ninety-day volunteers were soon mustered out of service (although a significant number reenlisted into longer-term units). McClellan gathered the new regiments—consisting of soldiers who had enlisted for three years—that were arriving in Washington daily. He ensured that proper camps were constructed, troops were adequately supplied, and the army began a serious program of drill and training.

George Gordon Meade

Meade was born on 31 December 1815 in Cadiz, Spain, where his father was serving as an agent for the United States Navy.¹⁶ The elder Meade returned to the United States and settled in Philadelphia. Young George obtained an appointment to West Point and graduated in 1835, ranking nineteenth in a class of fifty-six. After short service in Florida and Massachusetts, Meade resigned his commission in 1836 to seek a career in civil engineering. Six years later, Meade returned to the army and was appointed a second lieutenant in the Corps of Topographical Engineers. During the Mexican War, he served at Palo Alto, Resaca de la Palma, and Monterey with Taylor's army—receiving a brevet to first lieutenant for his service. After the war, Meade returned to his engineering duties, in part working on surveys of the Great Lakes. He had achieved the rank of captain by the outbreak of the Civil War but was quickly made a brigadier general of volunteers at the request of Pennsylvania Governor Andrew G. Curtin. He took command of one of the three newly organized Pennsylvania brigades and joined the Army of the Potomac during the Peninsula Campaign in June 1862. At Glendale, one of the Seven Days' Battles, Meade received two severe wounds; however, he recovered quickly enough to rejoin his brigade and participate in the 2nd Bull Run Campaign. Promoted to division command, Meade was in some of the heaviest fighting at Antietam, where he received temporary command of the Union I Corps after Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker was wounded. Meade returned to his division command prior to the battle of Fredericksburg and led his troops superbly, making the only significant Federal penetration of the Confederate lines in the battle. For his service, Meade received command of V Corps, which he led at the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863. During this battle, Meade's corps was kept out of the fighting by the army commander, Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker, who cautiously refused to commit many of his units to the battle. Meade complained to his commander, but unlike some other officers,

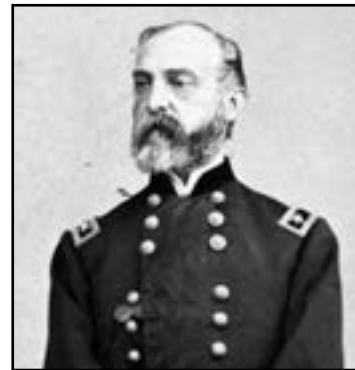


Figure A.7. George Gordon Meade.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

he did not take his case to the press or politicians (although Meade did share his doubts in letters to his wife).

Much to his own surprise, Meade received command of the Army of the Potomac, just prior to the battle of Gettysburg, over several more senior officers. Under these difficult conditions, Meade performed capably and turned back the Confederate invasion in Pennsylvania. Meade also displayed a solid knowledge of logistics at Gettysburg. Aided by the fact that Lee's invasion allowed the Federals to fall back closer to their railroad supply hubs, Meade made Westminister, Maryland, his advanced base for much of the campaign. Westminister was a depot on the Northern Central Railway (part of the Pennsylvania Railroad), and Brig. Gen. Herman Haupt, the Army's chief engineer for railroads, repaired the damaged line and had Westminister in full operation for the battle. Meade then used wagon haul on the Baltimore Pike from Westminister to keep the Army of the Potomac supplied at Gettysburg. In the following campaigns at Bristoe Station and Mine Run (fall 1863), Meade demonstrated a cautious nature and reluctance to force Lee into battle. Meade again relied mainly on rail supply lines and bases, and he kept the bases secure, but he took few operational risks that would have required different bases.

Meade was appreciated as a professional soldier—less politically involved than many other officers and former commanders of the Army of the Potomac. He was also known for his temper and was sometimes called an old snapping turtle for his occasional outbursts. However, these verbal eruptions were most often focused on those who failed to do their duty and not just random tantrums. Meade was never loved by his soldiers or subordinates, but he was always respected. He tended to be cautious in battle but was willing to fight and attack if he felt the conditions were right. The Army of the Potomac commander had an excellent eye for terrain, which was perhaps a result of his engineer training.

Montgomery C. Meigs

Meigs was born in Augusta, Georgia, on 3 May 1816. He was the son of Dr. Charles D. Meigs and Mary M. Meigs. His father was a well-known obstetrician who moved his family from Georgia to Philadelphia in 1817 and opened a practice there. Montgomery enrolled at the University of Pennsylvania at the age of 15. A bright student, he excelled at the university, but after one year, he expressed a desire to go to the United States Military Academy. With strong family connections, Meigs was able to obtain an appointment to the Academy in 1832. He excelled in his studies and graduated fifth out of a class of forty-nine in 1836.¹⁷

After graduation, Meigs received a commission as a second lieutenant in the 1st United States Artillery, but most of his army service was with the Corps of Engineers, working on various engineering projects. This included working with Lt. Robert E. Lee to make navigational improvements on the Mississippi River. Meigs's most extensive prewar engineering project was the Washington Aqueduct, which he supervised

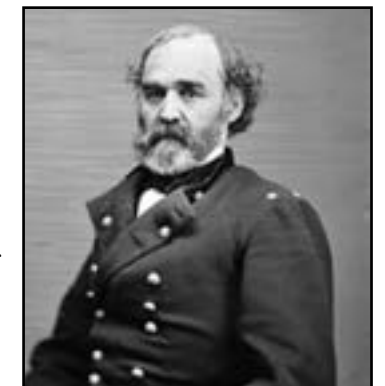


Figure A.8. Montgomery C. Meigs.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

from 1852 to 1860. While working on the aqueduct, he also oversaw construction of the wings and dome of the United States Capitol.

In April 1861, while events unfolded at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, Meigs—with the help of other army and navy officers—carried out an expedition that enabled the Federals to retain control of Fort Pickens, Florida. On 14 May 1861, Meigs was appointed colonel, 11th United States Infantry Regiment. This assignment as the regiment's colonel was merely a formality in the Army's rank system. The next day, he was promoted to brigadier general and quartermaster general of the Army, replacing Joseph Johnston, who had resigned to join the Confederate Army.

Meigs's performance as quartermaster general throughout the Civil War was superb. It is estimated that Meigs disbursed a billion and a half dollars, all of which was "accurately vouched and accounted for to the last cent."¹⁸ Secretary of State William H. Seward commented: "Without the services of this eminent soldier, the national cause must have been lost or deeply imperiled."¹⁹ Although some contractors and speculators made large profits with inflated prices due to the need to expand and supply the army so quickly, Meigs was scrupulously honest. Thus, despite the occasional overpricing, Meigs ensured that all payments were legal and accounted for. The Union supply system, as it supported Federal forces that penetrated deeper into the South, maintained an excellent record of keeping the soldiers supplied. It operated out of sixteen major depots, which formed the basis of the system of procurement and supply throughout the war. As the war continued, operation of these depots became much more complex. The purchase of goods and services, through contracts supervised by the quartermasters under Meigs's guidance, accounted for most Federal military expenditures apart from the wages of the soldiers. Meigs served throughout the war meeting the demands of all Federal field army commanders to include McClellan, Meade, and Grant. In short, Meigs ensured that Union supplies were delivered effectively to the bases selected by the commanders in the field.

John A. Rawlins

Rawlins's family originated in Virginia, moved to Kentucky, and then settled in Illinois.²⁰ John was born on 13 February 1831 in Galena, Illinois. His father, James, supplied charcoal to the lead mines in Galena, but he left his family in 1849 to pursue the gold rush in California and never returned. John saw the ill effects of his father's heavy drinking and pledged to a life of abstinence for himself. He continued the charcoal business to support the family, but he also educated himself, learning to be a skilled debater. In 1853, Rawlins began to study law and one year later was admitted to the bar. Grant probably knew Rawlins as the lawyer representing his father's (Jesse Grant's) leather store in Galena, but it was a patriotic speech by Rawlins soon after the bombardment of Fort Sumter that grabbed Grant's attention. Grant wanted Rawlins for his staff, but the assignment was delayed after Rawlins's wife died, forcing him to attend to this personal tragedy. Eventually, Rawlins joined Grant's staff as an assistant adjutant general but soon rose to the position of Grant's chief of staff.

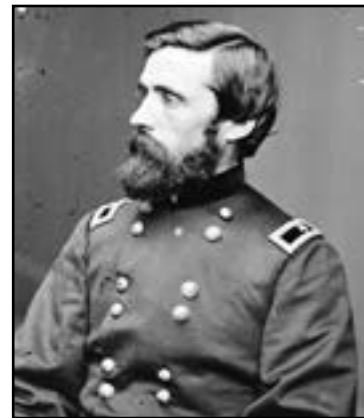


Figure A.9. John A. Rawlins. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Rawlins served Grant well through all of the western campaigns. At Vicksburg, the chief of staff helped Grant craft many of his orders and supported Grant's plans that often involved considerable risk. At Chattanooga, Rawlins helped Grant control three different armies. Although Rawlins started the war with no military education and little military experience, by 1864 he had considerable hands-on experience that made him an equal to many other staff officers at the time. Grant's personal chief of staff also had several qualities that suited Grant well. Rawlins was outgoing—in contrast to Grant's introverted nature—and did not mind making speeches or cursing heavily on occasion (again, very different from Grant). The chief of staff was also well tuned into the political nature of the war, which kept Grant in the good graces of politicians in Washington. Additionally, Rawlins was full of ideas and opinions; he made a great sounding board whenever his boss had his own new ideas.²¹ Finally, there is the question of Grant's drinking and Rawlins's role in controlling the problem.²² Historians have portrayed Grant's drinking in various lights, and there is no doubt that there is some substance to the issue. Grant's problem may have been much less than some detractors have alleged, but he certainly had difficulty holding his liquor on occasion. Rawlins, whose father was probably an alcoholic, took it upon himself to watch over Grant's drinking. While this was a task that the chief of staff took seriously and was generally successful at executing, it should not overshadow the other, more directly military, functions that he performed.

Rawlins, like all Civil War chiefs of staff, did not control the staff or guide them in the sense of a modern chief of staff. However, Rawlins performed essential tasks for Grant. Though never a decision-maker, he listened to Grant's ideas and floated some of his own. He gave Grant a comfort zone to think through his plans. Once the decisions were made, Rawlins often helped draft the orders. He was protective of Grant and, despite his talkative background as a lawyer, seemed glad to serve in a supporting role. In terms of logistics, Rawlins would not have had much influence on choosing the bases of support or lines of operation of the campaign, but often transmitted these decisions to the subordinate commands.

Stewart Van Vliet

Van Vliet was born in Ferrisburg, Vermont, on 21 July 1815, to Rachel Hough and Christian Van Vliet. He was appointed to West Point at the age of twenty-one and graduated in 1840, ranking ninth out of his class of forty-two cadets. Van Vliet served as an artillery officer for the next seven years, including a tour with the 3rd United States Artillery Regiment during the Seminole Wars, in which he saw several engagements before becoming a captain in the quartermaster department. In the Mexican War, Van Vliet continued his quartermaster duties and was present at Monterrey and during Scott's operations at Vera Cruz, where he participated in the logistical aspect of an amphibious operation. He was then in charge of building posts on the Oregon Trail in the late 1840s and 1850s. In 1857, again fulfilling quartermaster duties, he was instrumental in outfitting Albert Sydney Johnston's Utah (or Mormon) Expedition. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Van Vliet was stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. He returned east and was promoted to major in August 1861 as he assumed the duties of chief quartermaster of the Army of the Potomac. He served in that post through the bulk of the Peninsula Campaign until 10 July 1862, when he was relieved at his own request. During this time, Van Vliet was appointed a brigadier general of volunteers on 23 September 1861, but the commission expired on 17 July 1862, a week after his self-requested relief. For the remainder

of the war, Van Vliet served as a quartermaster in New York City, providing transportation and supplies to Union forces. In October 1864, he was brevetted all the way to brigadier general, United States Army, and on 13 March 1865 was brevetted to major general. After the war, he served as deputy quartermaster general and then as chief quartermaster of various military departments and divisions until retiring in 1881. Van Vliet died on 28 March 1901 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery with his wife, Sarah J. Van Vliet. While no quartermaster officer in 1861 had experience in supplying the mass armies that appeared in the Civil War, Van Vliet had as good a resume as any quartermaster thanks to his duties at Vera Cruz in the Mexican War and with equipping Johnston's Mormon Expedition.²³



Figure A.10. Stewart Van Vliet.
Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Notes

1. The broad outline of Grant's biography is from Ezra J. Warner's *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University Press, 1964), 183–86, as well as other biographies covered in the Introduction.
2. Christopher R. Gabel, *Staff Ride Handbook for the Vicksburg Campaign, December 1862–July 1863* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2001), 130. Gabel pointed out that the most convincing claim for Grant completely cutting his supply line while moving inland from Grand Gulf was from Grant's memoirs. Historians sometimes based their accounts on Grant's own comments, confirming the dramatic story of a great gamble based on ignoring the need for traditional logistical support. Gabel, relying heavily on Walter Grabeau's extensive research, showed that Grant did not ignore sustainment considerations. In fact, the Union commander made a carefully calculated decision to rely on requisitioning local supplies for much of the troops' food, but he also ensured that ammunition and forage continued to be supplied by wagon from the base at Grand Gulf.
3. United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), series I, vol. XXXI, part I, 735; hereafter cited as *OR*.
4. James Lee McDonough, *Chattanooga—A Death Grip on the Confederacy* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1984), 54–60.
5. R. Steven Jones, *The Right Hand of Command: Use & Disuse of Personal Staffs in the Civil War* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000), 184–92.
6. Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 195–97. Halleck's information is from three major biographies: John F. Marszalek, *Commander of All Lincoln's Armies: A Life of General Henry W. Halleck* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Curt Anders, *Henry Halleck's War* (Indianapolis, IN: Guild Press of Indiana, 1999); and Stephen E. Ambrose, *Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff* (1962; repr., Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1996).
7. Warner, 240–42.
8. Rhea, *The Battle of the Wilderness*, 52.
9. As quoted by Rhea, 33.
10. Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 310–11.
11. Jones, *The Right Hand of Command*, 30–32.
12. Warner's concise biography of McClellan is in *Generals in Blue*, 290–92. Supplemented by the biographies and works cited in the Introduction, particularly Stephen W. Sears, *Lincoln's Lieutenants: The High Command of the Army of the Potomac* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017); and Ethan S. Rafuse, *McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005).
13. A brevet rank is a temporary rank awarded for exceptional performance. While brevetted, an officer can assume the duties of the brevet rank, but because the rank is not permanent, the officer may lose the brevet rank at a later time.
14. The most authoritative book on the Delafield Commission is Matthew Moten's *The Delafield Commission and the American Military Profession* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000).
15. Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860–1865* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1989), 48–49.
16. The overview of Meade's life is from Curtis S. King, Dr. William Glenn Robertson, and Lt. Col. Steven E. Clay, *Staff Ride Handbook for the Overland Campaign, Virginia, 4 May to 15 June 1864: A Study in Operational Level Command*, 2nd ed. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute, 2009), 418–19. Although Meade commanded the Army of the Potomac in its most famous battle, there are few biographies of the general—reflecting how much Grant, Sherman, and others overshadowed Meade. See Freeman Cleaves, *Meade of Gettysburg* (1960; repr., Norman, OK: Univer-

sity of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Richard Allen Sauer, *Meade: Victor of Gettysburg* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2003); and Ethan Rafuse, *George Gordon Meade and the War in the East* (Abilene, TX: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2003).

17. Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University Press, 1964), 318–19. See also Russell F. Weigley, *Quartermaster General of the Union Army: A Biography of M. C. Meigs*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959) and Robert O'Harrow Jr., *The Quartermaster: Montgomery C. Meigs, Lincoln's General* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016) for full biographies.

18. James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Conflict from Lincoln to Garfield*, vol. II (Norwich, CT: The Henry Bill Publishing Company, 1886), 30.

19. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *University of Pennsylvania: Its History, Influence, Equipment, and Characteristics*, vol. II (Boston: R. Herndon Company, 1902), 45.

20. Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 391–92. See also Jones, *The Right Hand of Command*, 67–69.

21. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant*, 89–90.

22. Simpson, 90; and William McFeely, *Grant: A Biography* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981), 87. McFeely took the psychological view of the Rawlins-Grant relationship to an extreme. Rawlins, whose father was an alcoholic, identified his own role in keeping Grant away from liquor. Rawlins certainly looked after Grant's drinking problems, but he also fulfilled many other functions as chief of staff.

23. Warner, *Generals in Blue*, 524.

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About the Author

Dr. Curtis S. King graduated from the United States Military Academy (USMA) in 1982 with a BS in history and English literature. After graduating from the Armor Officer Basic Course, he served in Berlin until 1985 as a tank platoon leader and company executive officer. He then graduated from the Armor Officer Advanced Course, before serving with the 1st Infantry Division in Fort Riley, Kansas, in various staff positions and then as a company commander. Dr. King received his MA in Russian and Soviet history from the University of Pennsylvania in 1992 and then was a USMA instructor for three years. He served on the staff of the 85th Training Division from 1995 to 1998 and then was an associate professor at the Combat Studies Institute (CSI) of the US Army Command and General Staff College. While at CSI, Dr. King received his PhD in Russian and Soviet history (1998) and spent a six-month tour in Sarajevo, Bosnia, as a NATO historian (1999–2000). Dr. King retired from the Army in May 2002 after twenty years of service. In October 2002, he was hired to the CSI staff ride team as a civilian associate professor. CSI is now part of Army University Press at Fort Leavenworth. Dr. King's publications include a book-length staff ride guide to Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign, several journal articles on the Russian Civil War, multiple chapters in various anthologies, an article on the battle of Five Forks, and several encyclopedia entries on European and American military history.



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