ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Battle of Cedar Mountain

By **Daniel Welch**

"A hard fought battle ensued…."[1]

The guns had grown silent at Malvern Hill. Thousands upon thousands of Confederate youth lay dead or wounded in hospitals from the fighting over the last month. Although the new Confederate commander in the field, General Robert E. Lee, had provided the capital of the Confederacy, Richmond, more breathing room, the threat was far from over. And, it had come at an enormous cost.

The Union forces posed a threat in Virginia on three fronts in the summer of 1862. Major General George Brinton McClellan's massive Army of the Potomac, nearly 90,000 men strong, was still on the Virginia peninsula, albeit farther away from the Confederate capital. Troops under the command of Major General Ambrose Everett Burnside, estimated at 4,000 men, were appearing along the Rappahannock River in the Fredericksburg area. The Army of Virginia, a newly formed Federal army with 50,000 men under the command of the recently-arrived Western theater officer Major General John Pope, was moving southward and eastward from the northern part of the state. Meanwhile, Robert Edward Lee, in command of the Army of Northern Virginia, looked to rebuild his army following terrific losses during the most recent campaign on the Peninsula. Between battlefield casualties and numerous stragglers that had yet to return to the ranks, Lee could only count approximately 56,000 men in his army by mid-July. The Army of Northern Virginia was wholly outnumbered against these three threats and Lee implored Confederate President Jefferson Davis to do whatever he could to help fill the ranks.

As the month of July progressed, Lee came to believe that at least one of those armies no longer posed a serious threat to the Confederate capital. Seeking an opportunity to exploit and regain the strategic initiative, a hallmark of Lee's command style, Lee felt that McClellan's inactivity on the Peninsula demonstrated that this threat to Richmond

[1] United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 vols. in 128 parts (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Series I, volume 12, part 2, p. 6 (hereafter cited as *O.R.*, I, 12, pt. 2, 6).

was over, at least for now. Lee recalled this perception in his April 18, 1863 report. "After the retreat of General McClellan…his army remained inactive for about a month," however, "His front was closely watched…and preparations made to resist a renewal of his attempt upon Richmond."[2] With those preparations in place, and no sign of activity from the Army of the Potomac, Lee began to transfer troops to the Virginia Piedmont to face another threat.

While McClellan's army was silent, Pope's army was on the move. Pope had already crossed the Rappahannock River and was directing operations toward Gordonsville. Lee wanted to meet this advance, which he felt would eventually make its way towards Richmond. Furthermore, Lee needed to protect Gordonsville, a key railroad junction for the Virginia Central Railroad which connected Richmond to the Shenandoah Valley. This railroad was vital for transporting a myriad of necessary goods, including food for the Confederate war effort that came from the Valley. Thus, "General Jackson, with his own and Ewell's division, was ordered to proceed toward Gordonsville on July 13."[3] In all, Major General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson took these two divisions, approximately 12,000 men, with him on the march. Eventually, General Lee would reinforce Jackson until his numbers rose to approximately 25,000 troops.

The column reached Gordonsville on July 19, in time to foil some of the first actions of Pope's army against the Virginia Central. If anything, these setbacks spurred Pope into further action. He ordered numerous reconnaissance missions in the area over the next few days, all from the comfort of his headquarters in Washington, DC. He did not leave his Washington headquarters to take to the field with his army until July 29. As Pope sought further intelligence on the situation around Gordonsville, Jackson too sought to learn more about his new foe.

This marked the beginning of Lee's first campaign that was solely his, and all indications were that it would be offensive in nature. What was Lee's, as well as Confederate President Jefferson Davis' strategy for the Confederacy in the summer of 1862? Jefferson Davis defined Confederate grand strategy to be "offensive-defensive."[4] Of the two concepts, both Davis and Lee preferred the offensive. This is evidenced by the use of the offensive on both the strategic and tactical level from Fort Sumter in April 1861 to the final battles around Richmond. Although there were situations that dictated a defensive posture, Davis believed that it was the use of the strategic and tactical offensive that was the key to gaining Confederate war aims. Davis' belief in the offensive strategy

[2] Ibid., 176.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Jefferson Davis, *The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government,* 2 vols., (New York: D. Appleton, 1881), 2:132-133. A postwar phrase that Davis appropriated and reversed from military theorist Baron Henri Jomini. It was a phrase in which Davis, and thus the Confederacy, used as a way to shift blame of the war starting on Federal authorities and armies. Thus, the best way to fight a defensive war is to go on the offensive. The Confederate armies, by firing on Fort Sumter were simply instituting the best military theory of a strong defense by going on the offensive.

and tactical application is best expressed when he wrote in March 1862, "The advantage of selecting the time and place of attack was too apparent to have been overlooked."[5]

Lee wholeheartedly concurred, particularly once he took to the field following General Joseph Eggleston Johnston's wounding during the Battle of Seven Pines. The only way to relieve Richmond and restore control of Virginia was to go on the strategic offensive. In the aftermath of Malvern Hill, however, Lee was focused on McClellan's 100,000-man army still on the Peninsula more than on John Pope's approaching Army of Virginia.

As Lee kept a wary eye on McClellan and the Army of the Potomac, having them "watched by a brigade of cavalry," it was Pope's advance of a portion of his Army of Virginia that drew Lee's attention away from the Peninsula. [6] Lee now saw the possibility of a new campaign not against McClellan, but against Pope. Pope had not only advanced his army far enough south to be within Lee's theater of operations, but he had sent a probe against the Confederate supply line.

Pope's movement and probe made matters worse for Lee by threatening the Confederate capital from a second direction. By July 25, after already having moved Jackson with two divisions to Gordonsville, Lee began to think of a new strategy. He wrote to Jackson that he was "extremely anxious" to send reinforcements "to suppress Pope."[7] Two days later, July 27, Lee ordered Major General Ambrose Powell Hill's division and Brigadier General William Edwin. Starke's Louisiana brigade to reinforce Jackson. Lee counseled Jackson, "Cache your troops as much as possible till you strike your blow and be prepared to return to me when done….I will endeavor to keep General McClellan quiet till it is over, if rapidly executed."[8] Jackson, with his reinforced force of 25,000 men was to strike at Pope's 50,000 man army quickly, secure the area with the important Confederate supply line, and return to the Army of Northern Virginia before McClellan and the Army of the Potomac could make any movements towards Lee's lessened force.

Lee's hope for a quick offensive action by Jackson against Pope and the Army of Virginia before returning to the Army of Northern Virginia was quickly dashed. Jackson was slow, careful, and cautious during this time. Jackson had received reports of Federal forces concentrating in Fredericksburg. If the reports were correct, these forces could threaten a move on Richmond and could adversely affect lines of communications into the capital. The famed Valley commander was also moving slowly because he could not find a way to turn Pope's position north of the Rapidan River and he had already abandoned any notion of a frontal assault on Pope. Although Lee wrote on July 27 that he was sending Jackson more men, it was not until two days later that Hill arrived. Lee

[5] Jefferson Davis to William M. Brooks, Mar. 15, 1862, *The Papers of Jefferson Davis*, Ed. Lynda Lasswell Crist and Mary Seaton Dix, 14 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971-2015), 8:100.
[6] *O.R.*, I, 12, pt. 2, 176.
[7] *O.R.*, I, 12, pt. 3, 917.
[8] Ibid., 918-9.

responded favorably to Jackson's decisions to operate independently against Pope, noting, "You are right in not attacking them in their strong and chosen positions. They ought always to be turned as you propose, and thus force them on more favorable ground."[9] Both generals had already witnessed the cost to their commands of frontal assaults during the Seven Days battles just weeks earlier.

As the first week of August ended, Jackson received disheartening news. In addition to A. P. Hill's men, Lee had hoped to further reinforce Jackson In the few weeks that had passed since the start of the campaign, McClellan shown no inclination to leave the Virginia peninsula. Because of this, Lee could not further weaken Richmond's defenses. "I cannot promise to send you the re-enforcements I intended and still desire," Lee wrote, therefore, "I must now leave the matter to your reflection and good judgment."[10] Jackson was on his own.

On August 8, Lee received a dispatch from Jackson stating he finally believed he had a way at getting at the "miscreant" Pope.[11] In his letter to Lee, he suggested that he would attack the vanguard of Pope's army as they concentrated at Culpeper. Jackson had learned that only the Army of Virginia's Second Corps, Major General Nathaniel Prentice Banks, was moving toward the destination, offering a potential piecemeal victory like his successes in the Valley of the previous spring. Lee approved of the plan in his response to Jackson and promised to support him the best that he could from Richmond. Lee sent numerous wagons and more artillery towards Jackson, and also moved Brigadier General John Bell Hood's division fifteen miles to Hanover Junction where they could protect Jackson's flank. The stage was set for the next battle in Virginia, but before it could begin, Jackson's column struggled to reach the field of battle.

Jackson, despite his victories in the Valley, had several leadership deficiencies, one of which was communication with his subordinate staff. He had a proclivity for keeping important details of every operation and movement to himself, and this was the case on August 8. Changing the order of march for the day, he sent Major General Richard Stoddert Ewell's division on an alternative route to Culpeper. Jackson's division, under the command of Brigadier General Charles Sidney Winder, took the route that Ewell was supposed to utilize. General Hill's men, waiting at a cross street along Ewell's original route and supposed to fall in behind, quickly realized that it was Winder's men, not Ewell's. Jackson had failed to notify General Hill of this change and Hill's decision to wait for Winder, his men, and their baggage train to pass before falling in behind not

[9] Ibid., 923.
[10] Ibid., 925-6.
[11] Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin, eds., *The Wartime Papers of R.E. Lee*, (New York: 1961), 240. Lee in a letter to his daughter, described his nephew who was an officer in Pope's Army of Virginia. Lee noted that he could forgive his nephew for fighting against the Confederacy if it had not been with Pope's army. It was in this description of his nephew's allegiance that he described Pope as a miscreant. The flustered Lee used this language to describe his new adversary following orders Pope had given to his army for a harsh war against southern, most notably Virginian, citizens.

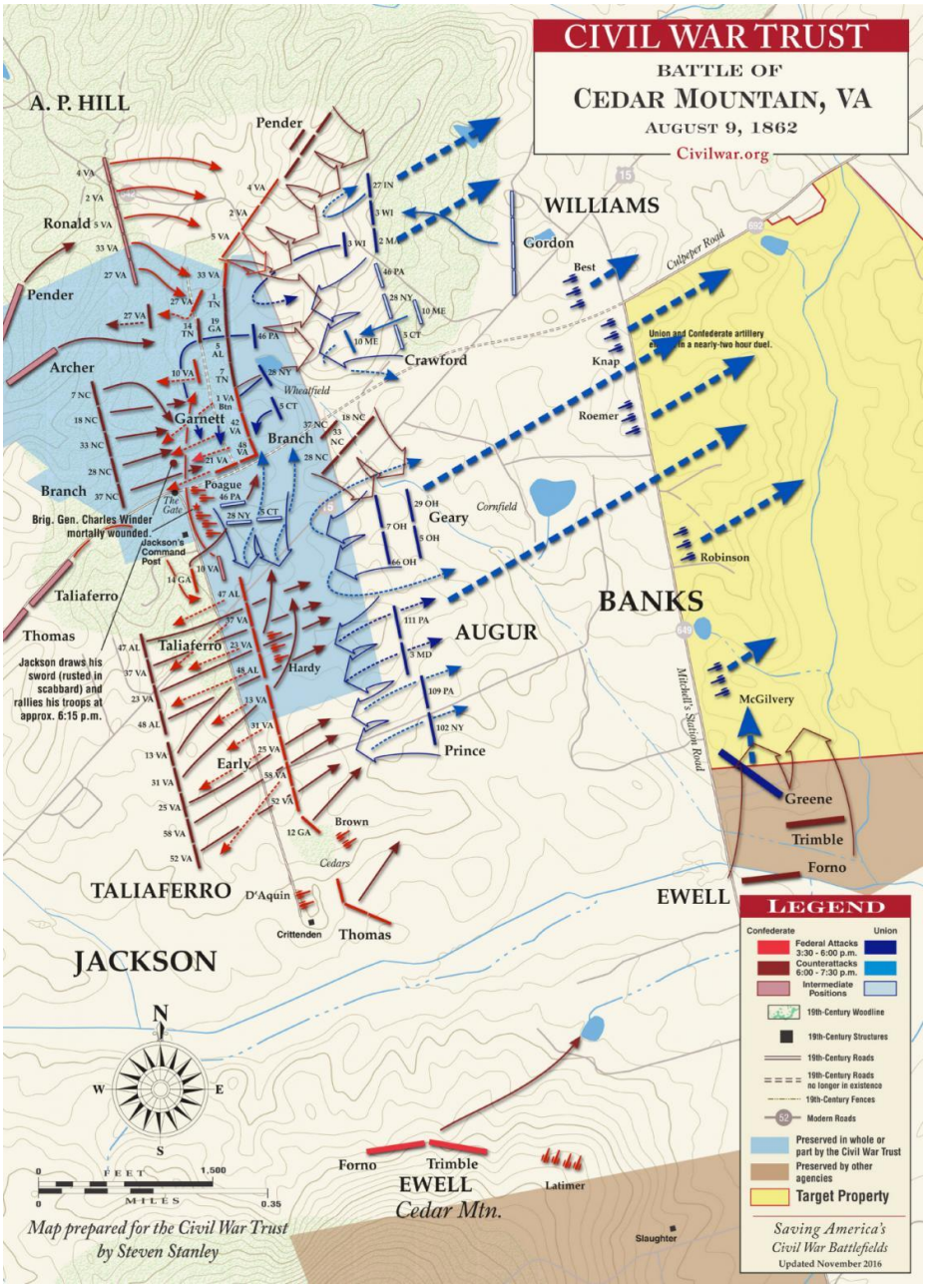
only delayed the rapid movement Jackson desired, it further frustrated and angered him. Later, with his column only having completed one mile of marching, Hill rode towards the front of the Confederate column to discover the slowness of the march. There he saw the two columns of Winder and Ewell that had become log jammed as their two separate routes of march converged at that point. Sorting out the confusion and getting the columns disentangled took hours. By the end of the day, Ewell's column had only marched eight of the twenty miles they were supposed to have covered. It would be an early day back on the road for the men in both columns on August 9.

It was hot. With an early sunrise minutes after 5:00 a.m., just two hours later, and many miles later for Jackson's column, the mercury had already reached an astonishing 84 degrees. These men, in spite of the hot, dry, and dusty Virginia roads, carrying forty pounds of gear, a ten-pound weapon, and wearing wool uniforms, lived up to their reputation as Jackson's foot cavalry this day. Eventually, the head of Jackson's ranks caught up with the Federal Second Corps eight miles from Culpeper at Cedar Mountain.

While Jackson's troops marched during the dawning hours of August 9, the first shots of the battle at Cedar Mountain were fired. Federal cavalry from Maine, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, supported by a brigade of Federal infantry, sparred with a Confederate gun under the command of Major Richard Snowden Andrews, commander of Winder's divisional artillery. The affair did not remain small for long. As the hours ticked by, more reinforcements arrived for both sides. Nearing 1:00 p.m., Brigadier General Jubal Anderson Early, in command of a brigade of Virginians in Ewell's division, sent forward one of his infantry regiments to continue the engagement with the Federal cavalry now supported by additional cavalry troopers from New Jersey and Rhode Island. These Virginians were supported by additional Confederate artillery ordered to a position on what became known as the shelf on Cedar Mountain.

Not far behind Ewell's division on the march toward the growing engagement were the commands of Brigadier General Charles Sidney Winder, commanding Jackson's division, and Major General A. P. Hill's division respectively. Upon reaching Cedar Mountain, and with the Federal cavalry pushed back, Ewell directed his units into position for battle. They took up a position just over a road, Crittenden Lane, and made use of a small rise of ground just east of it. Supporting Ewell's infantry would eventually be a myriad of Rebel artillery, including: six 10-pound Parrott rifles, four 12-pound Howitzers, nine 3-inch rifles, seven 6-pound field guns, and two Napoleons. These guns were placed rom the Cedar Mountain shelf to around his infantry near the lane and house named for the Crittenden family. Opposite Ewell's growing position, Federal artillery had already gone into battery along Mitchell's Station Road. As Federal forces reached the field, they too formed up along Mitchell's Station Road, both north and south of Culpeper Road. Nearing 3:30 p.m., and with strong reinforcements on both sides arriving to the field and going into position, a much larger engagement than the earlier fight that day was set to begin.

It did not take along for the tempo of cannon fire to increase. As Confederate troops moved up towards the Crittenden Gate, the funneled nature of the lane created a bottleneck of men and material. On the scene, General Winder sought to clear it and moved up as much artillery as possible to return fire on the Federal artillery. Winder was later mortally wounded in this area. Over the course of the next ninety minutes, the two sides dueled at long range, however, that was about to change.



Map Courtesy of the American Battlefield Trust

General Banks, the Federal commander whose troops had been moving into position during the cannon fire, believed he had a numerical superiority on the field. Despite direct orders from General Pope to not advance any farther than the position of his lead brigade, and to defend his position if attacked, Banks attacked the Confederates opposite him. Significant debate about this decision rippled through the Union high command in the days after the engagement. General Pope's "view was to gain all possible time," to await the unification of his army and truly have a superior force in which to engage the Confederates. To make sure that there was "no misunderstanding of my order and intention…I sent General B.S. Roberts to report to General Banks, to repeat my orders to him and to remain with him until I arrived in person at the front."[12] What rankled Pope and many others, particularly in the postwar era, was not only the fact that Banks had violated orders so flagrantly, but also that his actions "had the unfortunate sequel of breaking his command so nearly to pieces that it took no foremost part in the campaign afterward."[13] For these officers then, his corps' destruction almost guaranteed a defeat in the next engagement because of inferior numbers Pope would be able to bring to bear on the field of battle. Regardless of the later fallout over the orders, Banks ordered three of his brigades forward across an unforgiving, open landscape. Awaiting the Federal attack were six Confederate brigades of infantry and seven batteries of artillery, with more reinforcements still marching to the field. The Federal attack began with just the skirmishers stepping off towards the front at 5:00 p.m. Thirty minutes later, two of Banks' brigades from Brigadier General Christopher Columbus Augur's division moved forward, following the path of the Federal skirmishers.

The brigade on the left of the Federal attack, commanded by Brigadier General Henry Prince, initially collapsed due to a friendly-fire incident that spooked and routed several of its regiments. They later reformed and returned to the fight. Prince himself was captured before the day was over. The combination of the skirmishers and Prince's attack, however, made an impact on the Confederate line. Jubal Early, on the Confederate right, sought help from Jackson.

Reinforcements were sent and other Confederate units already on the field moved to the right in support. This, however, created another problem in the Confederate line. The shifting of units to their right in support of Early created a large gap on the Confederate left near the Crittenden Gate. As the Confederates shifted their line, the next Federal brigades in line to attack moved forward. Brigadier Generals Samuel Wylie Crawford and John White Geary's men stepped off toward the Confederate position at approximately 6:00 p.m. Crawford's attack slammed into Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Stuart Garnett's Virginians pushing them out of their wooded position. By 6:30 p.m. the remnants of Crawford's attack had reached the hole in the Confederate line around Crittenden Gate.

[12] John Pope, *The Military Memoirs of General John Pope*, Peter Cozzens and Robert I. Girardi, eds., (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 137.
[13] Ibid., 138.

A cacophony of sound stemming from Crawford's attack on the left of the Confederate line caught Jackson's attention. On the right of his position and watching the attack of the other two Federal brigades, Jackson, tilting his head in the direction of the growing tumult on the other end of his line, reportedly yelled above the din of battle, "There is some hard work being done over there."[14] What ensued became one of the more memorable moments of the battle and Jackson's growing legend. Racing to the left, Jackson's hat became a casualty to a branch on his quick ride to that deteriorating section of the line. Upon his arrival to the area of the Crittenden Gate, he ordered the artillery to the rear to avoid capture. Already at the Crittenden Gate attempting to shore up this crumbling sector was Charles Blackford. He witnessed the arrival of Jackson and vividly recalled the moment. "Jackson, with one or two of his staff, came dashing across the road from our right in great haste and excitement. As he got amongst the disordered troops he drew his sword, then reached over and took his battle flag from my man, Bob Isbell, who was carrying it, and dropping his reins, waved it over his head and at the same time cried out in a loud voice, 'Rally men! Remember Winder! Where's my Stonewall Brigade? Forward, men, Forward!'"[15] When Jackson had tried to draw his sword in that moment, he quickly realized it was rusted in its scabbard. Jackson unclipped his scabbard and sword from his belt and continued to rally his troops.

Regiments from Georgia and North Carolina, reinforcements to the field, as well as Virginians and Alabamians rallying to Jackson's cry, surged into the gap, offering stiff resistance to the remnants of Crawford's attack. General Crawford recalled the moment in his official report of the battle, "…the reserves of the enemy were at once brought up and thrown upon their broken ranks [regiments of Crawford's brigade]. Their field officers had all been killed, wounded, or taken prisoners…and my gallant men, broken and decimated by that fearful fire, that unequal contest, fell back again across the space, leaving most of their number upon the field."[16]

Crawford looked in vain for support for his brigade. It was late in arriving. As they advanced to support Crawford, George Gordon's Federal brigade ran into the remainder of Confederate brigades that had been fighting throughout the late afternoon, as well as fresh units from General Hill's division. With Crawford's men in retreat, and Gordon unable to support him and in fact retreating, a general forward movement swept down the Confederate line. Those Federals that were not captured by the sweeping Confederate advance raced back toward Mitchell's Station Road and the Federal artillery. Seeing the collapse of the Federal line and its retreat from their position on the shelf of Cedar Mountain, Confederate infantry that been ordered to support the artillery in that position moved forward at the double-quick.

[14] John Blue, "Reminiscences," from *Stonewall Jackson: The Man, The Soldier, The Legend*, James I. Robertson (New York: Macmillan Library Reference, 1997), 529.
[15] Charles Minor Blackford, *Letters from Lee's Army or Memoirs of Life In and Out of The Army in Virginia During the War Between the States,* Susan Leigh Blackford, comp., Charles Minor Blackford, III, ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947) 104-5.
[16] *O.R.*, 2:151, 153.

The sun was setting, and General Banks worked hard to safely evacuate his artillery and infantry from the battlefield and back towards Culpeper. To buy more time he ordered a battalion of Pennsylvania cavalry to charge towards the advancing Confederate line. By 7:00 p.m. the charge was over. The action had cost the Federal cavalry heavily, but it had bought the precious time Banks needed.

While Banks' men headed toward Culpeper in retreat and defeat, reinforcements, accompanied by General Pope headed toward the battlefield. He did not stay long. Despite the reinforcements and a new line that Banks had established, repeated volleys of rifle fire in the growing darkness fell around Pope's headquarters. The two generals, as well as their staff, mounted and left the area "in short order" but not before Banks' leg was injured in the dark by a collision with another rider.[17] Although the darkness had slowed the Confederate pursuit it had not ended it. Even as late as 10:00 p.m. Confederate artillery and infantry were still pushing toward the Federals and engaging them where possible. Darkness, disorganization in the ranks, loss of field officers, and exhaustion eventually brought the Confederate pursuit to an end. The battle was over.

Although Jackson and his men had won a tactical victory on the battlefield, it had come at a high cost for the limited size of the command. Jackson's command had sustained 1,338 casualties, over 1,100 of whom were wounded and in need of medical attention. His troops had inflicted almost twice the number of casualties on General Banks' men. Union casualties reached 2, 353, with nearly 600 hundred listed as missing, another 300 dead, and the remainder listed as wounded. The Confederates had gone on the offensive against Pope's army as outlined by General Lee's orders, and although they had wounded a corps in that army, Pope had not been "suppressed."[18] In the coming days, Lee ordered Jackson to retreat from the field. Pope retreated as well. The Confederate retreat did not last long. By August 14, 1862, Lee had decided to leave the Richmond front, confident in McClellan's inertness. He took the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia with him as they moved northward against General Pope and the Army of Virginia once more, to meet again at the Battle of Second Manassas.

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[17] John Pope, *The Military Memoirs of General John Pope,* Peter Cozzens and Robert I. Girardi, eds., (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 139.
[18] *O.R.*, I, 12, pt. 3, 919. In a letter to Jackson on July 27, 1862, Lee wrote "I want Pope to be suppressed." Lee was suggesting to Jackson how to utilize the reinforcements he had been sent to accomplish a victory against Pope, and toward the end of letter, reinforced with that statement his desire for a victory against the new Federal army and its commander.