ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Glendale

By **Brian K. Burton**

Brigadier General Edward Porter Alexander, the gunner who rose to command Lieutenant General James Longstreet's artillery in the Army of Northern Virginia, wrote of the day of the Battle of Glendale, "It was, undoubtedly, the opportunity of [General Robert E. Lee's] life, for the Confederacy was then in its prime, with more men available than ever before or after. And at no other period would the moral or the physical effect of a victory have been so great as upon this occasion."[1]

Speaking of Lee, the army's commander and the man who orchestrated the epic victories of Second Manassas and Chancellorsville, and ranking the day of Glendale above the opportunity that might have been at Gettysburg almost exactly one year later, is a large claim. And it begs the question, does June 30, 1862 deserve Alexander's assessment? Was it indeed, as Alexander implies, the best chance of Lee's career to strike the decisive blow he craved?

Lee's plan for June 30 was the logical extension of his plan for June 29; in fact, the June 29 plan almost had to include the June 30 plan, because Lee could not accomplish his objective of destroying the Union's Army of the Potomac on June 29—he could only create the conditions under which that would be possible on June 30. His plan, though not perfectly carried out, had put him in a position to deal a severe blow on June 30. His entire infantry force was ready to be engaged on the same field, on the same (south) bank of the Chickahominy River, for the first time in the campaign. Specifically, they were pointed toward a small area of Virginia countryside from White Oak Swamp Bridge to Willis Church south of the Glendale crossroads. Major General Thomas Jonathan "Stonewall" Jackson's force of four divisions had crossed the river at Grapevine and Alexander's bridges and was marching toward White Oak Swamp Bridge, which would be near the Union right flank. Major General Benjamin Huger's division was on the Charles City Road, which led straight to Glendale from the northwest. The divisions of Major Generals James Longstreet and Ambrose Powell Hill were on the Long Bridge Road, which would take them to Glendale from the southwest. Getting ready to support Longstreet and Hill was Major General John Bankhead Magruder with three small divisions. Magruder would need

[1] E. P. Alexander, *Military Memoirs of a Confederate* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1907), 155.

to move from the Williamsburg Road near Savage's Station to the Long Bridge Road, but the march could be accomplished in time to reach the Glendale area sometime in the afternoon. Thus, about 70,000 Confederates were on the roads to Glendale.

Lee also had brought Major General Theophilus Hunter Holmes with troops from the Department of North Carolina across the James River and down the River Road, which passed Malvern Hill, just in case he could be useful. Holmes did not have many men, but it was better for Lee to have them in a place where they could contribute to the day's events.

Although not all the Army of the Potomac was in the Glendale area, a substantial number of Federals were there. The Union line was essentially a long arc from White Oak Swamp, west of Glendale, to south of the crossroads near Willis Church. The northern force, near White Oak Swamp, was covered by Brigadier General Israel Bush Richardson's II Corps division, Brigadier General William Farrar Smith's VI Corps division, and Brigadier General Henry Morris Naglee's IV Corps brigade. Brigadier General Henry Warner Slocum's VI Corps division covered the Charles City Road, and to Slocum's south was Brigadier General Philip Kearny's III Corps division. The V Corps' Pennsylvania Reserve division, commanded by Brigadier General George Archibald McCall, was on the Long Bridge Road. Brigadier General Joseph Hooker's III Corps division paralleled the Willis Church Road running south from Glendale starting at or near the church itself. Hooker was not where he was supposed to be—the plan was for him to be on Kearny's left—but he was about where he should have been given McCall's position, which apparently was taken without Major General George Brinton McClellan's knowledge. Finally, Brigadier General John Sedgwick's II Corps division was in reserve near the Nelson house on the east side of Willis Church road and south of Glendale.

McClellan thus had all of II Corps, III Corps, and VI Corps, one division of V Corps, and one brigade of IV Corps defending Glendale—more than seven of the army's 11 divisions, representation from every corps, and about 55,000 men. Farther south, the other two V Corps divisions were on or near Malvern Hill; the rest of IV Corps was south of Malvern Hill covering the River Road's bridge over Turkey Island Creek. The Northern supply trains were still moving down the Willis Church Road, although some were using a less-traveled path to the east.

Generally the Union setup was good, with key roads covered and reserves available. Two problems existed, however. First, McClellan himself was not at the key point for his army—instead he left the Glendale area early on June 30 to scout for a final destination and examine what he expected would be his last stand position at Malvern Hill. Whether he should have been at Glendale or not is debatable, but if it was an error he compounded it (and if was not he made one) by leaving no one in overall command at Glendale. He had done the same at Savage's Station the day before, and it had not cost him. This time three corps commanders—Brigadier Generals Edwin Vose Sumner (II Corps), Samuel Peter Heintzelman (III Corps), and William Buel Franklin (VI Corps)—were in the area. Franklin, one of McClellan's favorites, was placed in command of the force (including one of Sumner's divisions) at White Oak Swamp Bridge. McClellan had not named a

commander at Glendale itself, so Sumner, as the ranking officer on the field, would be the de facto commander.

Second, the two divisions most likely to take a Confederate attack were those of McCall and Slocum. Both had been at Gaines's Mill and had suffered severe losses—nearly 2.000 men each, including one regiment in each division captured nearly whole. McCall had defended Beaver Dam Creek as well, meaning his men were on the front line after two days of battle and two days of marching, including at night.

As the day progressed, all over the Virginia countryside Confederates were running into problems. Holmes's small command, marching down the River Road, reached a spot within artillery range of Malvern Hill. A blast of fire from the Southerners started what proved to be a vastly unequal contest between batteries, with Union Navy gunboats adding their shells for good measure. Holmes's infantry broke under the heavy Northern shelling, leaving whatever role Lee might have assigned him impossible for Holmes to carry out.

Huger ran into different problems on the Charles City Road. Union pioneers cut trees across the road, and Brigadier General William Mahone's men lost the "battle of the axes,"[2] slowing them down, as did Federal skirmishers. Huger also was worried about his left flank's exposure to enemy troops that might still be near that part of White Oak Swamp. Finally he found Slocum's men near Brackett's field. He engaged with artillery, but no infantry from Huger's division fought that day, and eventually Slocum became unconcerned with him.

Magruder's move from the Williamsburg Road to the Darbytown Road was accomplished with no problems, but once there someone (the record is unclear) ordered him to support Holmes, a move that made no sense. He had reached the River Road with part of his force when he was ordered to march to Glendale; none of his men fought at all on June 30.

Jackson reached White Oak Swamp by late morning, set up a few batteries, and opened fire. The barrage took the Federals completely by surprise, but they hurriedly set up and returned fire. The engagement was severe enough that Franklin called for Sedgwick's division to support him. But that was unnecessary; again, no Confederate infantry (or very few) would fight at White Oak Swamp. Jackson first tried to repair the bridge on White Oak Road, but the Northerners drove his men off. He then, in response to some information, had a bridge built at a location east of White Oak Road. Also, Brigadier General Ambrose Ransom Wright of Huger's division, still north of White Oak Swamp and who met up with Jackson, backtracked and tried Brackett's ford to the west of Stonewall's position. But Jackson himself made no offensive moves. When told that the bridge east of White Oak Road was ready, Stonewall "sat in silence for some time, then

[2] Clifford Dowdey, *The Seven Days: The Emergence of Robert E. Lee* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964), 292.

rose and walked off in silence."[3] Later he fell asleep, apparently exhausted by the marches and battles of the previous week.

The remaining soldiers in Lee's army, those in Longstreet's and A.P. Hill's divisions, did little sleeping on June 30. With Longstreet leading, they reached their spot on the Long Bridge Road in late morning. In early afternoon they heard artillery firing, probably Jackson's but possibly Huger's. Since artillery fire from Huger was supposed to be the signal that he was in place and the attack was to start, Longstreet (in command on this part of the field) ordered some guns to fire as a return signal. This drew Yankee battery fire, and Longstreet was perturbed enough to order Colonel Micah Jenkins to silence the offending guns. Jenkins charged the battery (Pennsylvanians under Captain James Cooper), and the Battle of Glendale began.

Jenkins' brigade of South Carolinians received fire from artillery and their supporting infantry (cannon on the front line, the foot soldiers behind the guns to allow the artillery a clear field of fire) all along McCall's line. It staggered the Confederates. But a Yankee battery had to retire when it found itself out of ammunition, and the relative respite allowed Jenkins to finally take Cooper's battery. A Union counterattack then forced the Gamecocks away from their prizes, but Alabamans from Brigadier General Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox's brigade retook them in another charge.

To Jenkins' right, Brigadier General James Lawson Kemper's brigade headed east into a thick woods. Forcing their way through and unable to maintain contact with Jenkins, Kemper instead drove back the 12th Pennsylvania Reserves and took two more batteries. Like Jenkins, though, Kemper could not hold the gain, as Colonel Seneca G. Simmons led part of his brigade in a countercharge that forced Kemper back. Brigadier General Lawrence O'Bryan Branch couldn't keep up with Kemper, but when he did reach the field he, along with Colonel Eppa Hunton's brigade moving from Jenkins's left to the southernmost part of McCall's line, broke Simmons' counter attackers and retook the guns. For a third time, however, victorious Southerners were forced back—Branch by men from Sedgwick's division and Hunton by men from Hooker's division hitting their flank.

While some of Wilcox's regiments retook Cooper's battery, others headed to the guns commanded by Lieutenant Alanson Merwin Randol. At first Randol and his infantry support stopped Wilcox. But the Union infantry moved in front of the guns in a countercharge, and when the Confederates came on again Randol couldn't fire without hitting his own infantry. So Wilcox captured the guns. Randol rallied the infantry and retook his battery.

By this time of the battle all three brigade commanders in the Pennsylvania Reserves had been killed or wounded, and almost every regiment in the division had broken at least once. But the next attack came to the Reserves' right, on Brigadier General John Cleveland Robinson's brigade of Kearny's division, by Brigadier General Roger Atkinson

[3] Charles Marshall, *An Aide-de-Camp of Lee* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1927), 112.

Pryor's brigade. Robinson held off Pryor, but a heavy firefight started as Pryor's men kept their forward positions. Brigadier General Winfield Scott Featherston moved his men to Pryor's left, but Featherston saw Union troops on his own flank and asked Longstreet for reinforcements.

Longstreet by that time had committed his entire division, had taken four batteries at one time or another, and had come close to breaking the Union line. He now had to decide whether to send A. P. Hill's division into battle to see if he could deliver the finishing blow, or perhaps to be sure no Union troops could deliver such a blow themselves. Brigadier General Maxcy Gregg moved to support Pryor and Featherston; his 14th South Carolina engaged the 20th Indiana of Robinson's brigade in a fierce firefight that lasted until dark. To Gregg's right, the men of Brigadier General Charles William Field's brigade attacked some of Kearny's infantry, retook both Randol's and Cooper's batteries, and took McCall prisoner as well. Brigadier General James Jay Archer's brigade stopped the counterattack that had forced Branch and Hunton to retreat. Brigadier General William Dorsey Pender came as close as any Confederate unit to Glendale, marching through the field and engaging Sedgwick's men before retiring. Finally, Brigadier General Joseph Reid Anderson's brigade advanced, stopped when the men mistook Federals for their fellow Rebels, took heavy fire from those Federals, and could do nothing more than hold their ground. That ended the battle.

Fewer than 45,000 men had fought at Glendale; of those, more than 6,000 were killed or wounded. Many Civil War battles were fought mostly at musket range, but Glendale was a notable exception. Accounts of the battle almost always mention the hand-to-hand fighting, mostly over the Union batteries that were taken and retaken (in all the Army of the Potomac lost 16 guns at Glendale). Porter Alexander commented in his memoirs, "[N]owhere else, to my knowledge, [occurred] so much actual personal fighting with bayonet and butt of gun."[4]

The three divisions principally engaged at Glendale—Longstreet, A.P. Hill, and McCall—fought in their second (third for some of Hill's and McCall's men) battle in five days. They all suffered heavy casualties again, leaving them essentially impotent as fighting forces. The results did not justify the sacrifice. At the end of the battle the lines were in about the same place as before the battle. The Confederates had come very close to breaking the Union lines, but their lack of punch and Union reinforcements had prevented the decisive rupture. Both these points are deserving of further comment.

It was what happened away from Glendale that made the fighting at the crossroads purposeless. Jackson's inactivity at White Oak Swamp let 10,000 Northerners move from that area to Glendale. Huger's inactivity let another full brigade move from the Charles City Road to Glendale. And confusing orders kept Magruder from adding his men to the fight on the Southern side. In total, 80,000 men were within range of Glendale on June 30 but did not fight there. On the Union side, that was because they were not needed. On the

[4] Alexander, *Military Memoirs*, 154.

Confederate side, however, that was because some commanders did not perform. If they had, Glendale itself and the outcome of the campaign might have been very different.

That night Magruder's men arrived on the battlefield and took over the front line positions. First Franklin, then Heintzelman, then Sumer finally withdrew to Malvern Hill; Hooker's division was the last Northern unit on the field, waiting to see what the morning would bring.

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