

CONFEDERATE BRIG. GEN. B. H. ROBERTSON AND
THE 1863 GETTYSBURG CAMPAIGN

by

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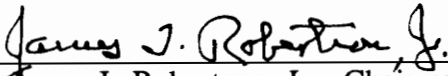
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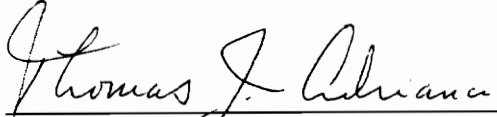
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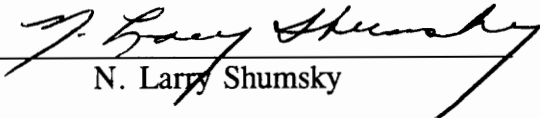
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Beverly Holcombe Robertson was a military commander around whose Civil War career controversy always seemed to swirl. Robertson was born June 5, 1827, to Dr. William H. and Martha (Holcombe) Robertson at the family plantation, "The Oaks," in Amelia County, Virginia. With the exception of the fact that he was educated locally, nothing is known of young Robertson's life during the period between his birth and his appointment as a cadet to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Based upon his later performance at "the Point," it can be assumed that this education was solid.¹

On June 9, 1845, Robertson reported to the academy. In January, 1846, the academy tested Robertson and seventy-two other recently appointed cadets who had passed medical examinations in order to ensure that they possessed a basic knowledge of mathematics and English language. Robertson was one of sixty who were not "held

¹Forty-Second Annual Reunion of the Association of the Graduates of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, June 12th, 1911 (Saginaw, Mich., 1911), 91; U. S. War Dept. (comp.), "Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers and Nonregimental Enlisted Men," National Archives Microfilm Collection, Reel 214; George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, N. Y. from its Establishment, in 1802 to 1890 with the Early History of the United States Military Academy, (Boston and New York, 1891), 389.

to be deficient" in either area. He therefore received his warrant as a cadet and began his studies.²

During his first year he studied mathematics, French and English grammar, and finished a strong twenty-second in the "order of general merit" of his class. On the "conduct roll," in which he was ranked against all cadets at the academy, he stood twenty-ninth, which placed him in the top sixteenth percentile. (A cadet's place on the conduct roll measured his ability to avoid being awarded demerits for breach of academy regulations.) In 1847, Robertson studied mathematics, French, and drawing. He finished twenty-third in the order of general merit. By year's end, his place on the conduct roll had slipped dramatically to fifty-sixth. In 1848, he was occupied with philosophy (the equivalent of modern day physics, mechanics, and astronomy,) chemistry, and drawing. He finished the year ranked twenty-sixth in his class. His place on the 1848 conduct role was a very poor one hundred and fourteenth.³

It was while Robertson was a second classman that his name ceased appearing as "Beverly H." Robertson and began to appear as "B. H." Robertson. The explanation behind this name change is not known. One possible reason might involve Robertson's first name. In England, the name Beverly has always been accepted as a masculine as

²Descriptive List of New Cadets 1838 to 1868 No. 1, Records of the U. S. Military Academy, Record Group 404, U. S. Military Academy, Post Orders No. 2 June 1, 1842 to June 22, 1846, Records of the U. S. Military Academy, Record Group 404; Register of Merit 1836 to 1853 No. 2, Records of the U. S. Military Academy, Record Group 404.

³Ibid., Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the U. S. Military Academy, West Point (n.p., n.d.).

well as a feminine name, while in the United States the name has always been solely a woman's name. The fact that Robertson was given what Americans consider a woman's name might have subjected him to teasing by his fellow cadets. (The hazing that underclassmen received at antebellum West Point was at times vicious.) From the time of his graduation, Robertson's name, with few exceptions, would appear as "B. H. Robertson." Some evidence suggests, however, that Robertson's friends and acquaintances knew him simply as "Bev" or "Beve."⁴

During his last year at the academy, Robertson studied engineering, ethics, artillery, infantry tactics, and mineralogy and geology. He finished the year twenty-fifth in his class but slipped even further down on the conduct roll to a pitiful one hundred and sixty-fourth.⁵

At the conclusion of his fourth year of study "Beverly H. Robertson" became the 1,431st cadet graduated from the Military Academy. He stood twenty-fifth in a class of forty-three cadets. Considering the high expulsion rate of those who received

⁴Register of Merit 1836 to 1853 No. 2, Records of the U. S. Military Academy, Record Group 404, U. S. Military Academy; James L. Morrison, Jr. (ed.), The Memoirs of Henry Heth (Westport, CT, 1974), 210, 228; Bingham Duncan, (ed.), "Letters of General J. E. B. Stuart to his wife, 1861," Emory University Publications, I, No. 1 (1943), 6-30; U. S. War Department (comp.), War of the Rebellion: A compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, (Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. I, LI, pt. 1, 724. Hereafter cited as the O.R.; all references are to Series I; James H. Brooks to George W. Randolph, Sept. 23, 1862, Letters Received by the Confederate Secretary of War, Record Group 109, National Archives.

⁵Register of Merit 1836 to 1853 No. 2, Records of the U. S. Military Academy, Record Group 404, U. S. Military Academy; Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the U. S. Military Academy, West Point, New York, (n.p., n.d.).

appointments to the academy and the grueling four years of instruction at the school, this represented a proud accomplishment.⁶

Robertson's place in his graduating class destined him for a commission in one of the three mounted regiments of the service, the 1st and 2nd Dragoons, and the Mounted Riflemen regiment. Robertson himself requested a commission in the 1st Dragoons. It is likely that he was just as happy to receive a commission as a Brevet Second Lieutenant in the 2nd Dragoons. On July 13, 1849, he signed an oath of allegiance: "I B. H. Robertson of Amelia County, Virginia appointed a Brvt. 2 Lt., 2d Regt. of Dragoons, in the Army of the United States, do solemnly swear, or affirm, that I will bear true allegiance to the United States of America, and that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies or opposers whatsoever; and observe and obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the Officers appointed over me, according to the Rules and Articles for the government of the Armies of the United States."⁷ It was an oath that he would break twelve years later.

In September, 1849, Robertson reported to his first post at the Cavalry School for practice at Carlisle, PA. Among his more important duties was the instruction of recruits for the three mounted regiments. One private drilled by Robertson in 1849 was Percival

⁶Cullum, Biographical Register, 389; Official Register of the Officers and Cadets of the U. S. Military Academy, West Point, New York, (n.p., n.d.); U. S. Military Staff Records Vol. 4 1845 to 1850, Records of the U. S. Military Academy, Record Group 404, U. S. Military Academy.

⁷B. H. Robertson to R. Jones, July 13, 1849, Letters Received by the Adjutant General's Office, 1812-1861, Record Group 393, National Archives.

G. Lowe of the 1st Dragoons. In his memoirs, Lowe commented that Robertson "was, to my fancy, a splendid man; gentle, firm, persistent, never seeming to lose patience, yet never yielding to anything short of the most perfect performance possible of the movement undertaken." Robertson would eventually develop a reputation as one of the foremost drillmasters in the service.⁸

In command of the post at the time was Maj. Philip St. George Cooke. He not only served as a field officer of the 2nd Dragoons during Robertson's entire "Old Army" career but was also the man who would become, by the middle of the decade, the most respected officer in the mounted arm of the service. Robertson's posting at Carlisle Barracks represented one of three times between 1849 and 1861 in which he would share a station with Cooke.⁹

The two Virginians became good friends. Robertson came to be romantically involved with Cooke's daughter Flora, the woman who, in 1855, married future Confederate cavalry general J. E. B. Stuart. This relationship, as suggested in an 1864 letter from Robertson to Mrs. Stuart, was rather intense. According to Stuart's most recent biographer, it was also a source of the friction that developed between Robertson and Stuart when the former served under the latter in the Civil War. Cooke apparently thought highly of Robertson, as there exists no evidence to suggest he did not give his

⁸Percival G. Lowe, Five Years a Dragoon ('49 to '54) And Other Adventures on The Great Plains (Norman, OK, 1965), 5-6; Raleigh Spirit of the Age, Jan. 5, 1863.

⁹Theo. F. Rodenbough, From Everglade to Canon with the Second Dragoons, (Second United States Cavalry) (New York, 1875), 437, 460-61.

full blessing to the relationship.¹⁰

Furthermore, it is known that on at least one occasion Cooke commended Robertson and his company in an official report of a significant military engagement. More importantly, Cooke selected Robertson for an appointment as acting assistant adjutant general of the Department of Utah and the adjutant of the 2nd Dragoons the very day (August 20, 1860) Cooke was assigned to head the department. At the time, these positions were of great importance and prestige in the army.¹¹

Robertson might well have received Cooke as his mentor. Cooke, a firm believer in the mounted cavalry charge, adopted as his motto "sharp sabers and sharp spurs." Robertson's service during the Indian wars suggests that he took Cooke's motto to heart. There exists a record of Robertson's once joining another officer in recommending that a dragoon private be transferred to the infantry as result of his inability to ride proficiently and perform the saber exercise, i.e. participate in an effective saber charge.¹²

In April, 1850, Robertson was ordered to join his company at Socorro in New Mexico Territory. This assignment represented his first taste of frontier duty. Such

¹⁰Thomas, Bold Dragoon, 91-92; Emory M. Thomas to writer, Apr. 27, 1994, B. H. Robertson to Flora Stuart, June 7, 1864, original in the possession of Polly Bessette, Roanoke, VA.

¹¹Rodenbough, From Everglade, 182, 437, 460-61; Annual Reunion, 91-92.

¹²Thomas, Bold Dragoon, 91-92; Wesley Merritt, "The Life and Services of General Philip St. George Cooke, U. S. Army," Journal of the United States Cavalry Association, VIII, No. 29 (June 1895), 79-92; W. B. Johns and B. H. Robertson to B. E. Bee, Aug. 11, 1852, Department of New Mexico, Various Orders Received from Post Donna Anna and Fort Fillmore New Mexico, Record Group 393, National Archives.

service involved keeping the pioneers safe from the frontier tribes, keeping the frontier tribes safe from the pioneers, and keeping the frontier tribes safe from one another. It was on the frontier that Robertson would spend over two-thirds of his twelve-year service career in the present day states of New Mexico, Texas, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Utah.¹³

At Socorro, Robertson first became acquainted with a significant number of other men of the "Old 2nd Dragoons," a regiment which according to one of its distinguished alumni, held a reputation for "that 'epitome of military impudence' whether in the parlor, in the tavern, or on the field of battle."¹⁴

Robertson's regiment also was known during the period for a proclivity toward the overindulgence in alcohol. Henry Heth, who began a friendship with Robertson when both were at West Point, recalled: "Lieutenant [Thomas] Bingham had just been graduated from West Point [the year after Robertson] and assigned to the Second Dragoons. Bingham had been informed that the second Dragoons were hard drinkers, and that he would not be favorably received in the regiment until he could drink a gallon of whiskey each day. He devoted most of his time to the accomplishment of this very undesirable feat. He succeeded, and died early." How Robertson's personality might

¹³B. H. Robertson to G. W. Cullum, Sept. 24, 1859, George W. Cullum Papers, U. S. Military Academy; Cullum, Biographical Register, 389-90; Annual Reunion, 91-92.

¹⁴Theo. F. Rodenbough (ed.), The Army of the United States: Historical Sketches of Staff and Line with Portraits of Generals-In-Chief (New York, 1966), 173.

have fit in with such a regiment can only be surmised.¹⁵

It was in New Mexico Territory that Robertson had his first combat with members of various frontier tribes. One such encounter occurred February 19, 1852, on the Jornada del Muerto. This skirmish was the culmination of a scout against the Apaches in which 2nd Lt. Robertson participated.¹⁶

In 1855 Robertson married Virginia Neville Johnston, a cousin of then U. S. Army Lieutenant Colonel and future Confederate general Joseph E. Johnston. Virginia Johnston was said to be "a famous southern beauty." The year 1855 also saw the first genuine highlight of Robertson's army career. This was his participation in the 1855 Sioux Expedition, which culminated in what was essentially the first major engagement of the Indian wars. Depredations committed by two Sioux bands from August, 1854, to August, 1855, resulted in a force of about 600 men under the command of Col. William S. Harney of the 2nd Dragoons being sent in pursuit. The mounted element of Harney's command consisted of Companies E and K of the 2nd Dragoons, a company of mounted infantry, and a company of mounted artillerymen, all under the command of Lt. Col. Cooke. First Lt. Robertson commanded Company E of the 2nd Dragoons.¹⁷

On September 4, Harney caught up with one of the offending bands. Some 250 Brule Sioux, under Chief Little Thunder, had camped on the Blue Water Creek, six miles

¹⁵Morrison, The Memoirs of Henry Heth, 82, 210, 228.

¹⁶Annual Reunion, 91-92; Cullum, Biographical Register, 389-90.

¹⁷U. S. War Dept. (comp.), "Compiled Service Records," Reel 214; Annual Reunion, 91-92; Rodenbough, Everglade, 180-81, 526-27.

northwest of Ash Hollow in Nebraska Territory. Harney's battle plan was simple. His infantry would attack from below the camp and his mounted men would charge the camp from above.

During the fight, which came to be known as the Battle of Blue Water or Ash Hollow, Robertson distinguished himself. In his official report of the action Cooke related that Robertson was "signally prompt" in bringing his company "among the foremost" of those elements engaged with the Sioux. Harney likewise gave Robertson a similar commendation in his own report of the action.¹⁸

The second highlight of Robertson's army career was the 1859 Pawnee Expedition. That summer, several bands of Pawnees committed depredations against settlers in Nebraska Territory. In July, the governor of the territory requested troops from the commander of Fort Kearny. Robertson was ordered to collect all available men of Company K and ride to the aid of the affected settlers. Robertson could muster only nine men. It is both a tribute to his courage and to his sense of duty that on Independence Day, he set out after the Pawnees with this miniscule force. On July 6, twenty volunteers joined Robertson's command. By the 8th, another fifty had done the same. On the night of the 8th, Robertson's men united with a militia force of about 100 individuals and an artillery piece. The next morning the joint command unanimously

¹⁸Rodenbough, Everglade, 182, 528.

elected Robertson its colonel.¹⁹

At sunrise on the 13th, Robertson caught up with some 5,000 Pawnee men, women, and children on the Elk Horn River in Nebraska Territory. Soon after spying the Pawnees, Robertson ordered the mounted portion of his command (about fifty men) to charge the camp. The shock of the attack demoralized the Pawnees, who quickly threw down their weapons and surrendered. Robertson was able to secure the warriors responsible for the depredations and much stolen property. He also convinced the Pawnee chiefs to sign an agreement that called for a dollar amount to be set for the cost of the depredations and for the chiefs to consent to the Federal government's deducting this amount from the offending band's annuity. Not many other such expeditions during the Indian Wars could claim such smashing success with little or no bloodshed.

In his report of the expedition Robertson showed himself to have a rather contemporary attitude toward the aboriginal tribes of the North American continent. Twice he mentioned that the Pawnees were starving. In doing so, he implied that their condition was the cause of livestock thefts committed by the bands. At one point, he stated: "The Indians were in absolute want of food and in an attack made upon them at De Witt [by settlers and or territorial militia] lost five of their finest young men."²⁰

¹⁹For Robertson's report of the expedition, see B. H. Robertson to A. V. Colburn, July 20, 1859, Letters Received by the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 393, National Archives; Special Orders No. 61, Head Quarters Fort Kearny N. T., July 5, 1859, *ibid*.

²⁰B. H. Robertson to A. V. Colburn, July 20, 1859, Letters Received by the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 393, National Archives.

In the summer of 1860, the War Department ordered Robertson to Camp Floyd in Utah Territory. On June 6, he and his wife were among a party of some 200 military personnel and their families who left Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, on the Oregon trail to Camp Floyd. About a month and a half into the journey, the Robertsons almost died. When descending a steep hill, Robertson lost control of his mule team. The ambulance in which he and his wife were riding swerved off the trail and came to a halt lodged in a gully near the edge of a deep chasm.²¹

The third highlight of Robertson's army career came just two days after he arrived at Camp Floyd. On August 20, he received an appointment as adjutant of his regiment and acting assistant adjutant-general of the Department of Utah. Robertson owed these appointments to Col. Philip St. George Cooke. As previously stated, on the very day he received his appointment as commander of the department, Cooke selected Robertson for the positions. When he was promoted to captain, on March 3, 1861, Robertson's role as adjutant of the 2nd Dragoons went to another officer. On the last day of the month, his position as acting assistant adjutant-general of the department also

²¹Cullum, Biographical Register, 390; Annual Reunion, 92; Allan and Maureen Gaff (eds.), Adventures on the Western Frontier (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994), 1, 8, 29.

went to someone else. The reasons why Robertson lost these positions are not known.²²

On April 17, 1861 Robertson's native state of Virginia passed an ordinance of secession. Nine days before the scheduled May 23 referendum on the ordinance, Robertson mailed a letter to his brother William in Virginia. He expressed his feelings on the crisis that had triggered the Civil War. In doing so, he showed that he possessed the high intelligence of a free thinker and a person able to foresee the ultimate outcome of the war.²³

Robertson wrote that the coming of the war and events surrounding it made his heart "full of sadness." He criticized "those who, under the influence of temporary excitement occasioned by the Fort Sumpter affair would precipitate Virginia into utter hopeless ruin by linking her destiny with South Carolina, Florida and Texas!!" Robertson argued that South Carolina was responsible for starting the war. The state and the rest of the Deep South had no just cause for passing ordinances of secession. If

²²Allan and Maureen Gaff, *Adventures*, 8; Dennis Sherman Lavery, "John Gibbon and the Old Army: Portrait of an American Professional Soldier, 1827-1896" (Thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1974), 30; *Annual Reunion*, 92; Rodenbough, *Everglade*, 437, 461. Philip St. George Cooke represents one of the more famous examples of a Southern-born officer who remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War. It is tempting to speculate that Robertson lost his positions as adjutant of his regiment and of the department because of a rift with Cooke over the secession issue. Yet in a June, 1861, secret report sent to the Secretary of War, which labeled several officers serving with the army in Utah Territory as harboring pro-Confederate sympathies, it was alleged that Cooke's intention was to leave the army and fight for the Confederacy if his adopted home state Missouri left the Union. F. E. Hunt, R. E. Clary, and J. B. Porter to S. Cameron, June 15, 1861, Letters Received by the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 393, National Archives.

²³B. H. Robertson to W. H. Robertson, May 14, 1861, *ibid.*

Virginia did secede, Robertson hoped that the Old Dominion would join the border states in forming a third political entity which would remain neutral in a North-South conflict. Although he did raise the possibility that he might retire from military life to avoid fighting in a civil war, Robertson made clear in his letter that he would resign his commission with the U.S. Army if Virginia were to leave the Union. Robertson also mentioned the birth of his first child, a son.

On June 15, 1861, three Army officers sent a secret report to the Secretary of War. It charged several officers who either were currently or had formerly served at Camp Floyd (which by that time had had its name changed to Fort Crittenden) with harboring pro-Confederate sentiments. Among the officers named in the report was B. H. Robertson. Although he had been reassigned to Fort Kearny in Nebraska Territory since June 1, the report labeled Robertson "one of the hottest secessionists in Camp." The letter suggested that sometime after Virginia left the Union, Robertson developed strongly pro-Confederate sympathies. A letter written by Robertson and published in the Richmond Dispatch thirty years after the war indicated as much. Robertson wrote of the people of the South having "fought for their rights, and to secure for them the commercial independence the Confederate government was organized to assert and maintain."²⁴

²⁴F. E. Hunt, R. E. Clary, and J. B. Porter to S. Cameron, June 15, 1861, Letters Received by the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 393; Richmond Dispatch, May 10, 1894.

The report also charged that Robertson, while still serving as acting assistant adjutant-general of the Department of Utah, had informed Cooke that if Virginia left the Union he would resign from the United States Army when he felt the time was right to do so and that he would let nothing stop him from pursuing his chosen course of action. The report also charged that Robertson used his authority as acting assistant-general to order the band of the 2nd Dragoons to play "Dixie" almost every day for months, and that on Washington's birthday this was the only tune he had the band play. These last charges implied that Robertson held anti-Union sentiments. Owing to the fact that Robertson does not seem to have developed pro-Confederate sympathies until after Virginia's secession, it appears that he ordered the tune to be played simply because he enjoyed hearing it.

On July 15, after seeing a copy of the report, Robertson responded with a letter to the Secretary of War. He contested all of the charges that had been made against him and asserted his loyalty to the U. S. Government.²⁵

By August, Robertson was at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. On the 8th, he concluded that the time was right for him to resign his commission. His letter of resignation read simply: "Having just arrived here from the remote West and being on special duty as Judge Advocate of a General Court Martial, I respectfully tender my resignation as an officer of the United States Army."²⁶

²⁵B. H. Robertson to S. Cameron, July 15, 1863, Letters Received by the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 393, National Archives.

²⁶B. H. Robertson to L. Thomas, Aug. 8, 1861, ibid.

In what can only be called a curious action, (considering the fact that he seemed to have developed strong pro-Confederate sympathies in the aftermath of Virginia's secession), Robertson enclosed a copy of his May 14 letter to his brother William along with his letter of resignation. After mailing his letter, Robertson and his family left for Virginia. On August 18, they arrived in Richmond.²⁷

Three days later, Robertson received an appointment as colonel of cavalry in the volunteer forces of Virginia. He thereafter helped organize the 4th Virginia Cavalry, a unit constituted from existing militia companies based in central and northern Virginia. Robertson began serving as colonel of the regiment in an unofficial capacity in September and received his commission as colonel of the regiment two months later. In September, Robertson also obtained a commission in the regular army of the Confederacy. This commission would have ensured him a position in the "peacetime" army of the Confederacy should the South establish its independence as a nation. His first Confederate regular army commission was as a captain in the corps of artillery. Because official confirmation of this commission was for some reason delayed, Robertson accepted another captain's commission in the Confederate adjutant-general's department in December. After his earlier commission in the artillery was confirmed in autumn, 1862, Robertson resigned his position in the adjutant-general's department.²⁸

²⁷Richmond Dispatch, Aug. 19 and 29, 1861.

²⁸B. H. Robertson to Marcus J. Wright, Apr. 8, 1881, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA; Annual Reunion, 92; U. S. War Dept. (comp.), "Compiled Service Records," Reel 214.

One would expect that a person such as Robertson, who had earned such a fine reputation in the mounted arm of the United States service, would have been given a commission in the cavalry of the Confederate regular army. The fact that he was not might have been a reflection of the comparatively late date at which he entered the Confederate service. By September, 1861, there simply might not have been vacancies for captain in the cavalry. It would have been illogical for Robertson to have accepted anything less than the rank he had held in the "Old Army" simply for the sake of continuing in his familiar branch of the military.

Robertson's service with the 4th Virginia Cavalry lasted until the following April. While in command of the unit, his insistence on strict discipline caused his men to develop a strong dislike for him. As a result, in the April 25 reorganization of the army, Robertson failed to win re-election as colonel of the regiment. When Robertson parted ways with the 4th Virginia Cavalry, he did so as a Civil War commander whose abilities had not been tested to any significant extent. During his tenure in command of the regiment, however, Robertson did make enough of an impression for his immediate superior, Brig. Gen. J. E. B. Stuart, to become convinced that he lacked the qualities necessary for a competent colonel of cavalry. Furthermore, in an October 21, 1861, letter to his wife, Stuart labeled Robertson "by far the most troublesome man I have to deal with."²⁹

²⁹James Ewell Brown Stuart to Robert E. Lee, August 13, 1862, James Ewell Brown Stuart Papers, Virginia Historical Society; Adele M. Mitchell (ed.), The Letters of Major General James E. B. Stuart (n.p., 1990), 221.

On June 9, 1862, Robertson received appointment as a brigadier general. It is clear that this commission came solely from the reputation he had earned in the "Old Army." In his twelve years with the U. S. Army, he displayed unblemished conduct, was commended for gallantry on several occasions, and developed a reputation as one of the best drillmasters in the army. Furthermore, during his service Robertson had seen as much as three times the combat that the average officer of the period could expect.³⁰

On June 18, Robertson assumed command of a brigade consisting of 2nd, 6th, 7th, and 12th Virginia Cavalry regiments, the 17th Virginia Cavalry Battalion, and Robert Preston Chew's battery of horse artillery. With the exception of the men of the 2nd and 6th, the troopers of Robertson's brigade had all previously served under Brig. Gen. Turner Ashby. Although they had done credible service under Ashby, the men were a wholly undisciplined lot strongly in need of Robertson's stern brand of "Old Army" discipline.

Robertson began drilling his men relentlessly. Under his tutelage, his brigade became a well-disciplined fighting outfit. In accomplishing this feat, Robertson certainly proved himself a drillmaster of the highest order--a fact that was not lost on his superiors. Yet the conversion of his brigade into a well-disciplined command did not

³⁰B. H. Robertson to Marcus J. Wright, Apr. 8, 1881, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Huntington Library; W. W. Blackford, War Years with Jeb Stuart (New York, 1945), 229; Annual Reunion, 91-92; B. H. Robertson to G. W. Cullum, Sept. 24, 1859, George W. Cullum Papers, U. S. Military Academy; Cullum, Biographical Register, 389-90; B. H. Robertson to A. V. Colburn, July 20, 1859, Letters Received by the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 393, National Archives; Robert M. Utley to writer, Feb. 1, 1995.

come without high cost. Just as had happened with the men of the 4th Virginia Cavalry, Robertson's insistence on strict discipline caused resentment among his men.³¹

Robertson's brigade initially was under the authority of Maj. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson. It was with Jackson that Robertson served through the opening phases of the Second Manassas Campaign. Early in August, elements of Robertson's brigade saw limited action against Federal forces. In none of these fights did Robertson make what can be considered poor command decisions. He nonetheless did not perform well enough to win Jackson's confidence as a commander. In two instances, Jackson asked Gen. Robert E. Lee to transfer Robertson elsewhere. In both cases, Lee responded to Jackson's concerns by cautioning him not to rush to an unfair judgment on Robertson's case. However, Lee did take Jackson's worries seriously enough to order an inspection of Robertson's brigade by Stuart. Although he praised him for having whipped his brigade into a well-disciplined unit in his report, Stuart backed Jackson's assessment of Robertson as an incompetent field commander. He also asserted that Robertson did not possess the confidence of his own men and should be removed from brigade command. Stuart even went as far as to assert that he considered Robertson's "transfer to another command as an important measure for the public good" and that his remaining in

³¹James Ewell Brown Stuart to Robert E. Lee, Aug. 13, 1862, Stuart Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Mitchell, Letters of Stuart, 320; O.R., XXV, pt. 2, 821, 848.

command "might entail disaster."³²

On the 10th, Robertson and his brigade received assignment to Stuart's cavalry command. In middle and late August, elements of Robertson's brigade saw more limited action with Union forces. His men also saw significant action in the August 20 first battle of Brandy Station and the August 30 second battle of Manassas. In commenting on the action of the 20th, Stuart wrote: "General Robertson had cause to be proud of the command which his superior discipline, organization, and drill had brought to the stability of veterans." In commenting on the action of the 30th, Stuart noted: "Nothing could have equaled the splendor which Robertson's regiments swept down upon a force greatly outnumbering them, thus successfully indicating a claim for courage and discipline equal to any cavalry in the world."³³

Lee was also moved to commend Robertson for his conduct during the second battle of Manassas. "Toward the close of the action on the 30th General Robertson, with the Second Virginia Regiment, under Colonel Munford, supported by the Seventh and Twelfth, made a brilliant charge upon a brigade of the enemy's cavalry, Colonel Munford leading with great gallantry, and completely routed it."³⁴

³²Douglas Southall Freeman (ed.), Lee's Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C. S. A. to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of The Confederate States of America 1862-1865 (New York, 1957), 42-43; O.R., XII, pt. 3, 926; James Ewell Brown Stuart to Robert E. Lee, Aug. 13, 1862, Stuart Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

³³O.R., XII, pt. 2, 727, 737.

³⁴O.R., XII pt. 2, 558-59; Mitchell, Letters of Stuart, 266.

Robertson also commanded his brigade during Stuart's Catlett's Station raid. While Robertson committed no obvious command blunders while serving under Stuart, Stuart--like Jackson--never came to believe in Robertson's abilities as a commander.

On September 5, Robertson was removed from the command of his brigade and ordered to North Carolina to organize and instruct cavalry in the state. The timing of the move, which came on the eve of the Antietam campaign, was probably a reflection of Stuart's dissatisfaction with his subordinate. A week later, Stuart told his wife: "Robertson has been relieved and sent to North Carolina. 'Joy's mine.' My command is now okay."³⁵

The brigade which Robertson left behind in Virginia would form the nucleus of a unit that would earn the sobriquet, "The Laurel Brigade," and finish the war with a combat record arguably as good as any comparable unit. The brigade owed at least a portion of its success during the last three years of the war to the discipline that Robertson had instilled in the men while he commanded the outfit.³⁶

In October, Robertson took command of a camp established for cavalry instruction at Garysburg, North Carolina. Assigned to his brigade were the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry, the 7th Confederate Cavalry (a unit made up of Georgians and North Carolinians), and the 62nd Georgia Partisan Rangers. In April 1863, the 3rd North Carolina Cavalry was briefly posted at Robertson's camp. The regiments assigned

³⁵O.R., XVIII, 900; XIX pt. 2, 595; Mitchell, Letters of Stuart, 266.

³⁶See William N. McDonald, A History of the Laurel Brigade (Baltimore, 1907).

to Robertson's camp of instruction were only intended to remain under his command until such a time as they were deemed fit for field service. Robertson eventually became the brigade field commander of the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry regiments by default, as these units were never assigned to another commander.³⁷

The North Carolinians and Georgians entrusted to Robertson's care at Garysburg represented an odd assortment of partisan rangers, army veterans, and raw recruits. An attempt to discipline such men represented an even more formidable task than did Robertson's handling of Ashby's men some five months earlier.

Robertson had learned from his failures in Virginia and had been sure to attempt to instill discipline in his North Carolina brigade in a way that would not cause his men to be resentful. Daniel Branson Coltrane, a private in the 5th North Carolina, may have spoken for the majority of the men in his brigade when he wrote in his reminiscences: "General Robertson was a great drillmaster, a West Pointer. It was our good fortune to be under his direction, for we were green country boys and it was necessary for us to have very strenuous drilling."³⁸

In November, authorities deemed the 7th Confederate Cavalry and the 62nd Georgia partisan rangers fit for field service as they were detached from Robertson's

³⁷O.R., XVIII, 755, 900, XXV pt. 2, 823, 825.

³⁸Daniel Branson Coltrane, The Memoirs of Daniel Branson Coltrane (Raleigh, 1956), 7.

brigade; but the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry remained under Robertson's command.³⁹

Only on one occasion in North Carolina did Robertson see combat worthy of note. In December, 1862, Union Maj. Gen. John G. Foster led a force of about 11,000 men in a raid against Kinston and Goldsboro. While on the march to Goldsboro, Foster encountered at Whitehall a Confederate force which had been sent to burn a bridge across the Neuse River and prevent a river crossing at that point. In order to confuse the Confederates as to his intentions, Foster decided to give the Confederates battle. What resulted was a December 16 engagement at White Hall.

As the senior Confederate commander on the field, Robertson retained command of the 11th North Carolina Infantry, the 31st North Carolina Infantry, detachments of his own 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry, and a section of artillery from the 3rd North Carolina Artillery Battalion. Although he commanded a force of about 1,500 men, disadvantageous terrain prevented Robertson from bringing more than a single regiment to bear against his Union opponents during the fight. The Union force included five infantry regiments and thirty-two pieces of artillery. An unfordable river prevented Robertson's men from being overrun and allowed them to inflict comparatively heavy casualties on the Federals during several hours of fairly heavy fighting.

Per the pattern he had set during his Civil War career to this point, Robertson did not command his men in North Carolina in an incompetent manner. His first immediate

³⁹O.R., XXV pt. 2, 823, 825.

superior, Maj. Gen. G. W. Smith, never expressed any disapproval with him. However, Robertson failed to perform well enough to win the confidence of Smith's replacement, Maj. Gen. D. H. Hill. Like Jackson and Stuart, Hill on several occasions informed Confederate authorities that Robertson was an incompetent commander and asked for his removal from command. Hill also labeled Robertson's cavalry brigade as "wonderfully inefficient."⁴⁰

⁴⁰O.R., XVIII, 891.

CHAPTER TWO

BRANDY STATION

By April 20, 1863, Gen. Robert E. Lee had determined that his army needed cavalry reinforcements for the upcoming summer campaign. Consequently, Lee appealed for help to Maj. Gen. D. H. Hill in North Carolina. In response, Hill sent Lee two regiments from Robertson's North Carolina brigade. Robertson volunteered to accompany this force to Virginia rather than remain in North Carolina. Hill accepted Robertson's offer. In what was seemingly an effort to ensure that Robertson would never again serve under his command, Hill subsequently disbanded Robertson's brigade by assigning his other three regiments to other commands.

After Maj. Gen. Stuart learned that Robertson was to command the reinforcements being sent to his cavalry command, he made an attempt to rid himself of the general. In a May 21, 1863 letter to Lee, Stuart wrote: "I think it indispensable to have for this Cavalry Command, a Reserve Camp for recuperation and remounting and to have in charge of it an experienced and capable Cavalry Officer of rank. I desire to call the attention of the Commanding General to this subject as early as practicable in order that it may get into full operation before the active operations, likely to ensue, begin. For such duty I consider Brigadier General Beverly H. Robertson eminently fitted. He is a good disciplinarian, an excellent Instructor and Organizer of Cavalry, and

could in no way render as efficient service as in the capacity proposed."¹

Similarly, Lee also became unhappy when he learned that Robertson had accompanied the cavalry force Hill sent from North Carolina. In a May 23 letter to Stuart, Lee wrote: "I wished to leave Robertson in North Carolina, but learned from the President that General Hill had attached each of the three regiments there to the divisions of Generals French, Whiting, and himself, and consequently he had no command but the regiments he brought out [from North Carolina]. I shall endeavor, if possible, to get another regiment from North Carolina, but think it doubtful. I wish we had a camp of instruction and refreshment for cavalry. Robertson would be an excellent person to put in charge of it, but, as far as I can see, he would now have but little to do."²

Two days later, in a letter to Hill, Lee also made what seems to have been an attempt to be rid of Robertson. "If you require General Robertson to command or organize the cavalry in your department I will return him to you." Yet Hill, who was happy to be rid of Robertson, made no request for his return. On the 27th, Hill offered Lee his final word on the matter. "I am much obliged to you for the offer of Brigadier-General Robertson, but he has been once in this department."³

¹Mitchell, Letters of Stuart, 319-20. Two days after Robertson reported to Stuart for duty, the question of whether he would remain with Lee's army for the upcoming campaign was still unsettled. Ibid., 321.

²O.R., XXV, pt. 2, 820-21.

³O.R., XVIII, 1071, 1075.

Lee gave a further indication of his feelings toward Robertson in a June 2 letter to Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Lee wrote: "I think it would be better if General Robertson were in command of the cavalry within the State [of North Carolina] as he is a good organizer and instructor, but General Hill does not appear to require him."⁴

While it is clear that Lee would have preferred that Robertson not take an active part in the upcoming campaign, Lee did not share Stuart's belief that Robertson was incompetent. In a May 30, 1863 letter to Stuart, Lee discussed the possibilities for the reorganization of Stuart's cavalry command. Lee wrote: "By taking the First North Carolina from [the brigade of Brig. Gen. Wade] Hampton and the Second North Carolina from [the brigade of Brig. Gen.] W.H.F. Lee, and joining with them Robertson's two regiments, you can form a new brigade...For the North Carolina brigade which would be formed by the above changes, I think that Robertson would do, perhaps, as well as [Col. Laurence Simmons] Baker, though some objection might be made to him because he [Robertson] is not a North Carolinian."⁵

Robertson initially marched his two regiments to Richmond, where he arrived in mid-May. The 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry regiments received new uniforms, saddles, bridles, and other equipment. About May 21, Robertson left Richmond with his command, rode to Culpeper County, and on May 25 reported to General Stuart with

⁴O.R., XXV, pt. 2, 848.

⁵Ibid., 836-37.

what a Stuart staff officer on the scene at the time referred to as "Robertson's splendid brigade."⁶

According to Stuart's assistant adjutant-general, Maj. Heros von Borcke, Stuart's entire command (including Robertson's two regiments) "were in the highest spirits, and were kept in constant and salutary activity by incessant drilling and other preparations for the impending campaign."⁷ After settling in with Lee's army, Robertson received word that Stuart wished to have a June 5 review of his entire cavalry corps. Robertson ordered his North Carolinians to work arduously in preparing for the upcoming review.

On the eve of the review, Stuart held a ball at the Culpeper Town Hall. It is safe to assume Robertson and his staff attended the affair. Robertson, a splendid dancer and widely known to be a lady's man, probably danced away what must have been for him a thoroughly enjoyable evening. The next morning, Robertson's troopers were among the 8,000 soldiers who paraded on the open plain between the towns of Culpeper and Brandy Station. In memoirs written in the twilight of his years, Daniel Branson Coltrane of the 5th North Carolina Cavalry commented that the spectators "saw a magnificent sight: well-groomed horses mounted by the finest riders to be found on earth. Eight thousand cavalry including our own newly arrived North Carolina brigade, passed in review first at a walk and then at a thundering gallop. The massed horse artillery fired

⁶Heros Von Borcke, Memoirs of the Confederate War for Independence (Dayton, 1985), II, 263.

⁷Ibid.

salutes. It was a tremendous show."⁸

The stark contrast that day between the appearance of Robertson's recently re-outfitted command and the rest of Stuart's troopers made a mark on the memory of at least two of Robertson's men. One of the men, Maj. John M. Galloway, of the 5th North Carolina Cavalry, stated in his war reminiscences: "Our regiments were in full strength, our men and horses fresh, and on the field of review we made a much better appearance than the rusty clad squadrons of Stuart."⁹ The day's activity ended with another ball.

Although many distinguished ladies and gentlemen of Virginia, including former Secretary of War George Wythe Randolph, attended the June 5 review, one who was notably absent was Gen. Robert E. Lee. His attendance to military matters prevented his coming. When word reached Stuart on June 7 that Lee would be free to review Stuart's command on the following day, Stuart issued orders to prepare for another review. Coltrane probably accurately captured the general attitude of Robertson's men toward this news when he wrote: "It was with mixed feelings we learned the next day that we had to polish and clean equipment for a second review, this time for the great Lee."¹⁰

⁸Alexander Hunter, Johnny Reb and Billy Yank (New York, 1905), 385; J. S. Johnston to Miss Mary, Nov. 24, 1862, Mecer Green Johnston Papers, Library of Congress; Mary Eliza Dulany Diary, June 27, and 28, 1863, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Virginia Historical Society; Coltrane, Memoirs, 11.

⁹Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 531.

¹⁰Coltrane, Memoirs, 11.

Nonetheless, the next morning Robertson and his men were ready to parade in front of Lee with the rest of Stuart's cavalry. Coltrane noted: "It was another big occasion: good riders, good horses and bright flags. These were people who had tasted victory and knew they were the finest soldiers in the world. This time no salutes were fired, nor did the regiments gallop their horses, for they were being saved for hardships to come."¹¹

It appears that Robertson and his North Carolinians performed their function in the display well enough, for Lee told his wife the next day: "I reviewed the cavalry in this section yesterday. It was a splendid sight. The men and horses looked well. They have recuperated since last fall. Stuart was in all his glory."¹²

On the night of June 8, the 9,500-man cavalry command of Stuart retired for much-needed rest. According to Lee's orders, Stuart was to cross the Rappahannock River soon after sunrise the next day and march his command toward Gaines' Crossroads and the western area of the Loudoun Valley. This move would screen the right flank of Lee's infantry as it moved north in the opening phases of what was to be the second invasion of the North.

In preparation for the advance, Stuart's five cavalry brigades all moved to camps on good roads near the Rappahannock River in Culpeper County. While this disposition of Stuart's cavalry corps was ideal for a smooth exodus from camp the next morning, it

¹¹Ibid., 11-12.

¹²Clifford Dowdey and Louis H. Manarin (eds.), The Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee (Boston, 1961), 507.

was disadvantageous in the event of an enemy attack.

As Stuart's cavalymen slept on the south side of the Rappahannock, a Union force did likewise about a half mile from Beverly's and Kelly's fords on the northern side of the same river. This body was 11,000 men strong. It had, through skillful leadership and the absence of Confederate pickets on the north side of the river, been able to march to the Rappahannock undetected. Not anticipating the possibility of a Union attack, Stuart had concentrated his entire cavalry command south of the river. Without any pickets on the north bank, the Confederates had no chance of discovering the presence of the Union forces.

The presence of this large Union force resulted from Union Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker's desire to destroy Stuart's large force. By early June, Hooker had become uneasy about the possible threat posed by such a concentration of enemy cavalry. Consequently, he determined to attempt to cripple this force before it could act against his Union army. On June 7, Hooker ordered his cavalry chief, Maj. Gen. Alfred Pleasonton, to lead a large contingent against Stuart's cavalry. This force contained not only Gen. Pleasonton's cavalry corps but also the Reserve Cavalry Brigade and the infantry commands of Brig. Gens. Adelbert Ames and David A. Russell.

Pleasanton's command was to cross the Rappahannock river at two different fords. The two detachments of the strike force would proceed to Brandy Station, where Stuart's cavalry command was reported to be. The Federal right wing, consisting of the First Cavalry Division of Brig. Gen. John Buford, the Reserve Cavalry Brigade of Maj. Charles J. Whiting, the infantry command of Brig. Gen. Ames, and two batteries of

horse artillery, would cross at Beverly's Ford. The left wing of Pleasonton's force, which was to cross the Rappahannock some six miles downstream at Kelly's Ford, consisted of the Second and Third Cavalry divisions under Col. Alfred N. Duffie and Brig. Gen. David McMurtree Gregg, respectively, as well as the infantry command of Russell, and three other batteries of horse artillery.

About 5 a.m. on June 9, the vanguard of Pleasonton's right wing thundered across Beverly's Ford and completely surprised their Southern antagonists. The sound of the picket firing threw the Confederate camp immediately into a panic. In the midst of what must have been frenzied chaos, Stuart received word of the attack as he was enjoying his morning coffee in his tent on Fleetwood Heights some three and a half miles to the southwest. Stuart sent a flurry of dispatches in reaction to the Union threat. Among the orders Stuart dispatched was a directive to Robertson to lead his regiments to the sound of the firing at Beverly's Ford.

Pleasonton's left wing, under Gregg, did not cross the Rappahannock at Kelly's Ford until about 6 a.m. Although the attacks of Pleasonton's two wings were supposed to have occurred simultaneously at dawn, Col. Duffie got a late start from camp and was misled by a guide on his way to Kelly's Ford. He reached the position an hour late.

Once the second and third cavalry divisions were able to concentrate on the north side of the Rappahannock, Gregg ordered the attack launched across Kelly's Ford. The Federal advance guard (a squadron of the 1st New Jersey Cavalry) quickly captured those sentinels of Robertson's command who were charged with guarding the ford. It was when the Jerseyites first reached the position held by Robertson's outposts, that the Union

troopers met with their first real resistance and had their presence reported. Those members of the outposts who attempted to make a stand were only able to offer feeble resistance to the Federal advance.

Shortly after the first picket firing, Capt. William White, who commanded the outposts at Kelly's Ford, advised Robertson of the Federal advance. Robertson received this message while still in camp on the farm of John Minor Botts, some two and a half miles southwest of the southern edge of Fleetwood Heights. The general immediately dispatched a courier to inform Stuart that three regiments of enemy infantry and a detachment of enemy cavalry had crossed Kelly's Ford.¹³

Soon afterward, Robertson received a directive from Stuart countermanding his earlier orders. These new orders directed him to lead his command to Kelly's Ford along the Kelly's Mills road. He was to halt any enemy advance in that direction and protect the right flank of that portion of the Southern cavalry then fighting the right wing of Pleasonton's strike force. Before leaving camp, Robertson received another report from White, informing him that five regiments of Union infantry and several regiments of Union cavalry supported by horse artillery had by that time forded the river and were moving slowly upstream. He dispatched another courier to Stuart with this information and thereafter left camp and led his men toward Kelly's Ford.

When Robertson and his Tarheels reached the Brown house, about a mile and a half from the ford, they met White then retiring from the enemy. White informed

¹³For Robertson's Brandy Station reports and related endorsements of Stuart, see O.R., XXV, pt. 2, 733-36.

Robertson that Union forces were advancing and had occupied a woodline in the general's immediate front. At approximately the same moment that Robertson received White's report, Union skirmishers appeared from the woods in front of his two regiments. Robertson responded by dismounting a large portion of his command and sending them forward as skirmishers. He then dispatched scouts to his right and rode forward to make a personal reconnaissance of the enemy in his front.

Robertson next determined that another enemy force (Gregg's Third Division) had passed around his right flank and was heading toward Brandy Station and the Confederate rear. Robertson's staff officer, Capt. W. N. Worthington, rode off to report this intelligence to Stuart.

A short while later, Robertson learned from his scouts that a second Union force (Col. Duffie's Second Division) had also skirted his right and was en route to Stevensburg. The general then sent this intelligence to Stuart and thereafter ordered his command to retire. After withdrawing a short distance down the Kelly's Mills road, Robertson assumed a new position.

After passing around Robertson's right, Gregg's column had an unopposed route to the Confederate rear at Fleetwood Heights. If Gregg could gain possession of Fleetwood Heights, he could place his artillery on the key to the entire position. Artillery posted on this highest point of elevation on the battlefield would be able to wreak havoc on Confederate forces, and Gregg could use Fleetwood Heights as a base from which to launch a concentrated attack on Confederate forces to the northeast of Gregg's own men. Such a northerly attack, in conjunction with the southerly strike of Pleasonton's right

wing, could easily smash Stuart's forces in a pincer-like movement.

Robertson was aware that with Gregg's movement the fate of Stuart's entire cavalry corps potentially hung in the balance. Sometime after first learning of this advance, he considered making an attack on Gregg's column. He asked Stuart if such an attack should be made and, if not, what other action he should take. In response, Stuart ordered Robertson to hold his ground. In essence, Robertson decided to stand still in the face of Gregg's advance.

Robertson's decision to hold his ground and ask for further orders rather than act decisively on his own initiative after learning of the movement of Gregg's column around his right flank and toward the Confederate rear proved to be controversial. Three days after the battle, on June 12, Robertson submitted a preliminary report of his part in the battle and promised that he would later make "a detailed report." In this preliminary report he made no mention of Gregg's flanking column. Not surprisingly, this report clearly left Stuart dissatisfied. In the text of his own Brandy Station report written the next day, Stuart stated: "Brigadier-General Robertson kept the enemy in check on the Kelly's ford road, [in actuality the Kelly's Mills road] but did not conform to the movement of the enemy to the right, [General Gregg's advance to Brandy Station] of which he was cognizant, so as to hold him in check or thwart him by a corresponding move of a portion of his command in the same direction. He was too far off for me to give him orders to do so in time. His detailed report will I hope, account for this."¹⁴

¹⁴Ibid., 683, 733-36.

Robertson was sensitive to both the criticism leveled at him by Stuart and Stuart's request (made on the very same day Stuart completed his report) for the detailed report which Robertson had promised. Robertson felt it necessary to complete and submit this more detailed battle report by the close of the same day the request was made. What is even more telling of Robertson's sensitivity is the closing paragraph of this report. "I came to this army resolved that my official conduct should meet the approbation of my military superiors, and whenever in their opinion I deserve censure, I shall most cheerfully submit to official investigation."¹⁵

In his text, Robertson did address Gregg's flanking movement during the battle. He successfully defended himself for not opposing Gregg's force immediately at Kelly's Ford by pointing out that before he reached the ford, Union forces had already completed their river crossing and "turned off to the points [roads] upon which they intended to march."¹⁶

In the same report, Robertson also offered his reasons for not making a move with his own force to attempt to counter Gregg's advance after he learned Gregg had forded the river. "I consider it extremely fortunate that my command was not withdrawn from the position it occupied (which was a very strong one), as the enemy's force consisting of infantry, artillery, and cavalry, were marching directly upon the right flank

¹⁵Ibid., 735; McClellan, "The Battle of Fleetwood," 401.

¹⁶O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 734.

of our troops engaged in front of Rappahannock Station."¹⁷

While Robertson was incorrect in his assumption that Gen. Russell intended to march north after crossing the river, he was correct to be concerned about the possibility of such an occurrence. If Russell had marched north, he could have easily rolled up the right wing of the Confederate forces engaged on that section of the field. In fact, the orders directing Robertson to Kelly's Ford specifically stated that the prevention of this occurrence was to be the objective of the deployment of his two regiments.

As shown in his report, Robertson also realized that there was a more important reason for not leaving Russell alone. He pointed to another potential disaster that could have resulted from the decision. "Had I pursued the flanking party, the road I was ordered to defend would have been left utterly exposed" to a possible Federal advance by Russell upon the Confederate rear at Brandy Station.¹⁸

In his second Brandy Station report, Robertson did not give an acceptable reason for not dividing his forces during the fight in order to deal with the dual threats of both Russell and Gregg. He wrote: "I had not sufficient force to hold this body in check (and

¹⁷Ibid., 734.

¹⁸O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 734-35.

it was vitally important to do so), and at the same time follow the flanking party" of Gregg.¹⁹

While Robertson was correct to hold that he did not have enough men to hold both Gregg and Russell, he did have a large enough force to fight a delaying action against Russell and, at the same time, chase down Gregg and offer meaningful resistance to the Federal flanking column.

To Robertson's second Brandy Station report, Stuart attached an endorsement. He began with the comment: "It is very clear that General Robertson intended to do what was right"--a lukewarm endorsement of Robertson's conduct, to say the least. He also presented his view that by the time he received Robertson's question of whether or not to attack Gregg's column, it was too late to order the attack. Stuart believed that if he had ordered Robertson to initiate such an attack, "it would have been extremely hazardous for him to have interspersed his command between the enemy's infantry and artillery and the column of cavalry [Gregg's] that had already passed on his [Robertson's] right flank."

On the other hand, Stuart correctly criticized Robertson for not attacking Gregg's column on his own initiative while he still had the chance. In his concluding remarks, Stuart expressed his belief that if Robertson had decided to take action when he first learned of Gregg's movement, "he could have made the detachment to get to the front

¹⁹Ibid., 734.

of the flanking column and delay its progress."²⁰

This second report also failed to satisfy Stuart. Robertson submitted a third report two days later. He made no further mention of Gregg's flanking force in this third report. Stuart seemed content to drop the matter thereafter. In the endorsement that Stuart attached to this report, he made one significant remark: "General Robertson's report appears satisfactory."²¹

While Stuart might have ultimately been satisfied with Robertson's conduct during the battle of Brandy Station, at least four of Stuart's staff members who participated in the battle expressed dissatisfaction at Robertson's conduct during the fight. Stuart's assistant-adjutant general at the time of the fight, the able Maj. H. B. McClellan, commented in an article published in the Philadelphia Weekly Times in the late 1880s that Robertson "allowed himself to be occupied in an almost useless observation of the enemy, who had thrown a small force into his front, after crossing at Kelly's ford."²²

Maj. Heros von Borcke commented in his book about the fight: "Robertson's brigade did not arrive [at the scene of the decisive fight for Fleetwood Heights] until everything was all over. Robertson was just not a proper cavalry officer."²³

²⁰Ibid., 735.

²¹Ibid., 735-36.

²²McClellan, "The Battle of Fleetwood," 402.

²³Heros von Borcke and Justus Scheibert, The Great Cavalry Battle of Brandy Station 9 June 1863, (Gaithersburg, MD, 1976), 105.

Stuart's gifted engineer officer, Lt. Col. W. W. Blackford, went even further in his own criticism. Blackford wrote: "If General Robertson had done his duty we would have had ample notice of any advance" on the Confederate rear at Brandy Station and Fleetwood Heights. Blackford also commented that "General Robertson, most unaccountably, did not attack either of these forces but allowed Gregg to go on towards our main army and Sir Percy Wyndham to pass him and go on towards Stuart's exposed flank and rear." Blackford concluded: "If Robertson had not been a West Pointer he would have been deprived of his command for his inactivity in letting General Wyndham's [in actuality General Gregg's] command pass him as he did at the Fleetwood fight on the 9th of June."²⁴

A third member of Stuart's staff, Capt. Frank S. Robertson, expressed a similar view. He commented in a published version of his memoirs that Gregg's skirting of the Confederate right flank, was "an incident deep in mystery." In an unpublished version of his memoirs, Robertson was much more outspoken about B. H. Robertson's conduct. "Some outrageous negligence allowed Gregg's great column to cross at Kelly's ford and advance unhindered upon the rear of Stuart's Cavalry on the firing line, and I've always wondered that nothing was ever done about it."²⁵

²⁴W. W. Blackford, War Years with J. E. B. Stuart (New York, 1945), 214-15, 229.

²⁵Frank S. Robertson, Reminiscence of the Years 1861-1865, (Abingdon, VA, 1986), 21; Frank Robertson Reade, "In the Saddle with Stuart: The Story of Frank Robertson of Jeb Stuart's Staff," Miscellaneous Manuscripts, University of Virginia, 80.

The only Confederate officer of note on the field that day to support Robertson's conduct in the battle was Gen. Wade Hampton. In private correspondence to Robertson, published in 1887 in the Memphis Weekly Appeal Hampton stated: "It gives me great pleasure to say that you carried out the orders you received, that these orders placed your command where it ran great risk of being sacrificed, that in the progress of the fight I took the responsibility of changing your position, and that you did make the necessary change in a soldierly manner. For a time your brigade was under my command, and the men and officers behaved well."²⁶

In another 1878 letter to Maj. McClellan, Hampton wrote: "I do not think that Robertson was responsible for the passage of the enemy behind us and he was left where his command would have been sacrificed but for its withdrawal by myself." In the same letter, Hampton blamed Stuart for Gregg's passage. "Stuart managed badly that day."²⁷

Hampton's comments may have been tainted. The personal animosity between Hampton and Stuart during the war might have moved the former to praise Robertson in order to focus attention on Stuart's failures in the battle. Furthermore, in the postwar years Hampton and Robertson maintained a close relationship. This acquaintance may have been formed during the war and may have grown out of the shared problems the

²⁶Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877.

²⁷Wade Hampton to H. B. McClellan, Jan. 14, 1878, Henry Brainerd McClellan Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

two men had with Stuart.²⁸

When Robertson first learned that Union forces had turned his right flank, he should have realized that the fate of the entire Confederate cavalry corps hung in the balance and that "sharp sabers and sharp spurs" were the order of the day. Such was not the time for requesting further orders from a superior. With Gregg quickly advancing toward the Confederate rear, the desperate situation facing Robertson should have moved him to divide his forces at once and hope for the best.

One detachment should have been left to watch Russell. This force could have fought a delaying action against Russell and slowed his advance whether it would have been directed toward the Confederate rear or toward the fight then raging on the sector of the battlefield to the north. Such a delaying action could have bought the precious seconds necessary for the redeployment of Confederate forces to meet the threat posed by Russell's uniting with Gregg in the Confederate rear. Such a delaying action also could have slowed Russell if he attempted to turn the right flank of Confederate forces then fighting to the north against Pleasonton's right wing.

With a larger detachment, Robertson could have pursued Gregg's column. With Gregg on his way to Fleetwood Heights, every second mattered. Any delay Robertson could have caused Gregg's advance toward the Confederate rear might have had a significant effect on the outcome of the battle. While such a division of his forces risked

²⁸Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877; Heros von Borcke, Colonel Heros von Borcke's Journal, 26 April - 8 October 1862: A German Narrative of the First Four Parts of "Memoirs of the Confederate War for Independence," (n.p., 1986), 43-44.

the destruction of his entire command, Robertson should have realized the necessity of the risk. The sacrifice of a two-regiment command would have been a small price to pay for the preservation of an entire cavalry corps.

After reaching Stuart's headquarters on Fleetwood Heights, where Stuart had directed all communications during the fight, Capt. Worthington reported to Maj. McClellan. The latter, who had been left in charge of the position and of all intervening communications after Stuart left his headquarters for the fighting near Saint James church, recalled in his postwar memoir what occurred next. "An individual scout [Capt. Worthington] from one of Robertson's North Carolina regiments reported to me that the enemy was advancing from Kelly's ford, in force and unopposed, upon Brandy Station, and was now directly in our rear. Not having personal acquaintance with the man, and deeming it impossible that such a move could be made without opposition from Robertson's brigade, I ordered the scout to return and satisfy himself by a closer inspection that he had not mistaken some of our troops for the enemy. In less than five minutes the man reported that I could see for myself. And so it was! Within cannon shot of the hill a long column of the enemy filled the road, which here skirted the woods. They were pressing steadily forward upon the railroad station, which must in a few moments be in their possession. How could they be prevented from also occupying the Fleetwood Hill, the key to the whole position? Matters looked serious."²⁹

²⁹McClellan, I Rode with Stuart, 269-70.

The confrontation between Robertson's regiments and the Union force in his front was a stalemate from the outset. It was also a fight in which neither side forced the issue to any significant length. Robertson's command did not suffer a single casualty in the confrontation.

Initially, Gregg ordered Russell, who retained a force of infantry well under 1,000 men reinforced by horse artillery and a detachment cavalry, to march to Brandy Station by the most direct route while Gregg himself marched to the same location by a less direct route with a more southerly approach. After encountering Robertson's 1,130-man cavalry command on Kelly's Mills road, Russell halted his column. Thereafter he contented himself with allowing his forward skirmishers to trade shots with Robertson's forward skirmishers for the majority of the day. Russell apparently believed that after running into Robertson's command, it was more prudent to remain close to Kelly's Ford to help guard a possible line of retreat for Gregg's and Duffie's columns than try to force a passage to Brandy Station through Robertson.³⁰

³⁰The total infantry force accompanying Gregg's left wing across Kelly's ford on the morning of the battle consisted of Russell's command of 1,500 men. This command was made up of all or part of the 2nd Wisconsin Infantry, the 7th Wisconsin Infantry, the 56th Pennsylvania Infantry, the 62nd Pennsylvania Infantry, and the 1st Michigan Infantry. Longacre, Cavalry at Gettysburg, 62, 74, 285n; O.R., XXVII, pt. 1, 608-9. It is also known that after crossing at the ford Russell's command was split into three detachments. One detachment of at least 500 men marched with Col. Duffie to Stevensburg. O.R., XXVII, pt. 3, 41-42. A second detachment of an unknown number, which was made up of all or part of the 62nd Pennsylvania and the 1st Michigan, marched with Gregg himself. Consequently, the best estimate of the number of men who made up the third detachment who marched down the Kelly's Mills road after crossing the river and met Robertson's command near the Brown house is well under 1,000 men. The number of cavalymen who accompanied the Federal force who met Robertson near the Brown house is unknown but was probably very small. Starr, Union Cavalry, I, 380.

Like Russell, Robertson was also content to hold his ground after he encountered the strong enemy force on the Kelly's Mills road. Robertson believed that his most important duty was to watch Russell's force with an eye to preventing this force from marching some six miles upstream and turning the right flank of the Confederate forces battling Pleasonton's right wing.

Toward the end of the day, Russell brought up a battery of horse artillery, which had apparently been left behind to help defend Kelly's Ford. When the Union guns opened up on Robertson's Tarheels, the general deployed his skirmishers behind the cover of an embankment to protect them from the shelling. Robertson then received a dispatch from Brig. Gen. Wade Hampton. Because of Hampton's movement from Saint James Church to Fleetwood Heights, Robertson's left flank was "in the air." Robertson withdrew.

When Robertson retired to the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, he discovered a sizable detachment of Federal infantry on his right. This force represented the extreme left flank of Pleasonton's right wing, which, by this point in the battle, had advanced to this position from Beverly's Ford. At approximately the same moment, he received an order from Stuart directing him to send his two regiments to Fleetwood Heights to reinforce the Confederate forces fighting on the hill. By this point in the battle, all those

O.R. XXVII, pt. 3, 30. According to two sources, Robertson commanded horse artillery during the battle of Brandy Station. John S. Mosby, Stuart's Cavalry in the Gettysburg Campaign (Gaithersburg, Maryland, 1908), 33; Jennings Cropper Wise, The Long Arm of Lee, (Lynchburg, VA, 1915), II, 590. While horse artillery was ordered to report to Robertson's command at some point during the fight, this artillery was recalled before it actually reached Robertson. Robert J. Trout to writer, Dec. 2, 1994.

Southerners who had been sent by Stuart to oppose the early morning advance of Pleasonton's right wing at Beverly's Ford had been pulled back to Fleetwood Heights or were on their way to the position.

Stuart ordered one of Robertson's two regiments sent to the position occupied by Hampton in the Confederate line then facing east of Fleetwood Heights in order to guard that general's right and rear. With his other regiment, Robertson was ordered to report to Stuart himself, who was then in the vicinity of his headquarters. Robertson ordered the 4th North Carolina Cavalry to fight a rear guard action and withdraw down Kelly's Mills road toward Fleetwood Heights.

He then reported in all haste to Stuart's headquarters with the 5th North Carolina Cavalry and discovered that Union forces were withdrawing from the fight on that section of the field. Sometime after reaching Stuart, Robertson and the 5th were ordered to join the 4th North Carolina Cavalry in support of Hampton and a Confederate battery of horse artillery. Robertson's command thereafter came under fire from a Federal battery across the field. Stuart witnessed this enemy fire and later commented in his Brandy Station report: "General Robertson's command, though not engaged, was exposed to the enemy's artillery fire, and behaved well."³¹

Sometime after reaching Hampton's position, Robertson noticed enemy forces deploying on his front in an attack mode. In response to this move, he formed his two regiments in a line of battle. At about 2:00 P.M., when the Federal line did begin an

³¹O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 683.

advance, it did so only to the left of Robertson's command. To help meet this advance, Robertson was ordered to lead one of his regiments to the threatened sector. He left the 4th North Carolina Cavalry under the command of Hampton and proceeded with the 5th to the Confederate left. After he reached the far end of the line, Robertson, dismounted his men and sent skirmishers forward to oppose any enemy movement on that sector of the field.³²

Although the Federal forces on Robertson's front did not advance far enough to engage his skirmishers, an engagement did occur farther down the Confederate line to Robertson's right. On that sector of the field, Gen. W. H. F. "Rooney" Lee led a series of charges against Gen. Buford's Union forces in an attempt to stem the advancing lines of Pleasonton's right wing. In the last of these charges, which succeeded in stopping the Union advance, Lee received a severe thigh wound that prevented him from continuing in command of the Confederate left wing. Although Robertson was ordered to take command of the left wing in Lee's stead, he had no opportunity to command in this position. By the time Robertson received the order, the battle had virtually ended. Federal forces were withdrawing across the Rappahannock.

Although Robertson's men had faced the enemy during almost the entire fourteen hour battle, the general's command was never actively engaged in the fight.

³²When Robertson reached the Orange and Alexandria Railroad his command was in a perilous position. With Union Gen. Buford on his right, Robertson was then between the two commands of Buford and Gregg, who was to Robertson's left, with Russell still on his front although some distance away. Fortunately for Robertson, while in this position his command was not attacked as he slid away to the safety of Confederate lines on Fleetwood Heights.

Consequently, in what one prominent historian called "the greatest cavalry battle ever fought in the Western world," Robertson's command suffered no losses save four horses.³³ In spite of this fact, his North Carolinians somehow managed to capture two Sharps carbines and seven horses from their Union opponents.

It is clear that Robertson's conduct of his command during the Battle of Brandy Station was not the most prudent. The fact that Confederate forces were able to avert disaster during the fight by winning the desperate conflict for Fleetwood Heights does not in any way make Robertson's conduct on the day excusable. His failure to divide his command during what was potentially the turning point of Brandy Station represented a marked shortsightedness in his military vision. It also served to confirm the suspicions Confederate authorities had concerning his participation in the campaign.

³³von Borcke, The Great Cavalry Battle, 13.

CHAPTER THREE

IN THE VALLEY

The period June 17-22 saw an active effort by the cavalry corps of the Army of the Potomac to penetrate the Confederate cavalry screen in the Loudoun Valley in Virginia in order to gather intelligence about the disposition of Lee's army. Opposition of this effort by Stuart's cavalry brought fighting between blue and gray horsemen. The fact that many times during the six-day period Union Gen. Pleasonton seemed more intent upon punishing Stuart in combat than gathering intelligence as duty required made the conflicts between the two sides all the more fierce.

Robertson and his Tarheels were involved in three of the engagements. Late on the afternoon of June 17, the 275-man 1st Rhode Island Cavalry made its way to the outskirts of Middleburg, Virginia. The unit's leader, Col. Alfred Duffie, who had been recently demoted to command of his old regiment, had been ordered to secure the town. On reaching the outskirts, the Rhode Islanders quickly overwhelmed the few posted Confederate pickets and pressed forward into the town itself. Duffie's men had a clash with a squadron of the 4th Virginia Cavalry; within a half-hour, the Federals had driven the Virginians from Middleburg.

Headquartered in the town at the time of the Union advance, Stuart and his staff fled for safety. After securing the town, Duffie thereafter ordered all entrances

barricaded and issued orders "to hold the town at all hazards."¹

After being driven from Middleburg, Stuart rode eight miles west to Rector's Crossroads. There he knew he would find Robertson's command, which he had ordered into the position earlier in the day. After reaching the crossroads, Stuart led Robertson and his command back to Middleburg.

At 7 p.m. Stuart reached the outskirts of Middleburg. He came upon the squadron of the 4th Virginia Cavalry which had remained behind to observe and skirmish with Duffie's force. Seeing Stuart, the commander of the escort requested permission to charge Duffie's men defending the barricades at the entrance to town. After permission was granted Capt. William Woolridge's squadron spurred forward through the darkness with a cheer.

The Rhode Islanders repulsed the Virginians. A portion of them thereafter withdrew from the barricades. After seeing the men of the 4th Virginia on their way, Stuart turned his attention to Robertson's North Carolinians. Two squadrons of Tarheels were sent to circle the town to the right and attack from the Hopewell road approach. Stuart next turned to the 5th North Carolina Cavalry and ordered it to follow in the Virginian's wake. With Robertson and Maj. Heros von Borcke in the lead, the Carolinians galloped forward in a saber charge each giving the Rebel Yell. Confederate troopers jumped the barricades and overpowered a handful of Federal defenders. Those Rhode Islanders who were not killed or captured in the initial melee at the barricades fled

¹O.R., XXVII, pt. 1, 963.

in two different directions. Robertson, with one detachment of his command, chased those who raced through the town and down the Aldie Road to the east. Von Borcke, with several squadrons of North Carolinians followed those Rhode Islanders who sought safety down the Hopewell Road to the south. Another detachment of Robertson's command rode off in search of Union men to the north of town.

The lead squadron of von Borcke's detachment reached a point about 250 yards south of Middleburg where a felled tree halted their progress. They received a galling fire in their right flank from a range of six feet. This fire came from two dismounted companies of the 1st Rhode Island under the command of Maj. Preston M. Farrington. They had been deployed in a farmyard fronted by woods and surrounded by stone walls.

Sometime after von Borcke first engaged the Federals, Robertson arrived on the scene with his own detachment. His men made three mounted charges at Farrington's dismounted force ensconced behind the stone wall. The grossly outnumbered Federals repulsed all three charges. Among those who were lost in these attacks was Maj. James H. McNeill of the 5th North Carolina Cavalry. He received a severe wound in the hip while at the head of his men. After the third failure, Stuart dismounted a large portion of Robertson's Tarheels and sent them into the surrounding fields to flank and envelop the Rhode Islanders. With Confederate troopers on the verge of carrying out the maneuver, Farrington mounted his men and withdrew. He headed south and hid many of his troopers in a secluded wood. The next morning he led the remnants of his two-company detachment back to the safety of Union lines.

Duffie's main force, which also attempted to make its escape to the south, was not so lucky. His column eventually rode into W. H. F. Lee's brigade, Col. John R. Chambliss in command. Chambliss was heading in the opposite direction on the same road. Most of Duffie's men surrendered, but a surprising number scattered, hid in the surrounding area, and later made their way back to Federal lines. All told, Federal killed, wounded, and missing in the engagement numbered 225 men. By contrast, losses of the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry were one and twenty-two, respectfully.

While the numerical superiority of the 1,130-man Confederate force made the outcome of the conflict a foregone conclusion, the behavior of Robertson's men during the fight was nonetheless deserving of praise and reflected well upon their leader. The Carolinians were aggressive in their opening charge of the fight. They were likewise aggressive in all but one of their four attacks against Duffie's main force in spite of the fact that they saw a significant number of their comrades brought down by Union fire.

Of Confederate generalship that day, one cannot be praiseworthy. The first futile mounted charge against Duffie's men behind the stone wall south of Middleburg, and the casualties resulting from it, can be excused. A repeat of the charge a second time, and the losses that resulted from it, was difficult to excuse. The third such charge, with attendant losses, was unforgivable. Why it should have taken three mounted assaults for the wisdom of an envelopment of Duffie's force by dismounted troopers to be realized is a mystery. Yet it is unclear whether Robertson deserves the blame for ordering the charges. It is possible that Stuart, as ranking officer on the field, might have been in command during this part of the fight. As previously mentioned, it was Stuart who

ordered the dismounted attack of envelopment.

Two days later, Robertson and his men again engaged Union forces at Middleburg. This fight came to be known as the battle of Middleburg. Around 7 a.m., Col. J. Irvin Gregg arrived with a column of horse on the outskirts of town. Gregg later drove through the town, scattered pickets from Robertson's command, and soon faced off against Stuart about a mile west of Middleburg. Stuart's men were deployed along a crest called Mount Defiance. It ran roughly northeast to southwest. Robertson's men held the southern end of the line, which also happened to be the highest point of elevation on the field. Part of his command manned the front of a small wood line with the majority of his men holding a stone wall farther behind. Near 10 a.m., Gregg's men advanced against the entire line. The 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry and half of the 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry, both dismounted, plus two mounted companies of the 1st Maine Cavalry, attacked Robertson's part of the line.

Initially Robertson's skirmishers brought the Union advance to a halt. These North Carolinians were strongly posted in a small family cemetery plot enclosed by a stone wall. After being held at bay for quite some time, a concerted effort by the Federals eventually cleared the cemetery and forced the North Carolinians to fall back upon Robertson's first line of defense. When the Federals reformed their lines and charged again, they reached Robertson's wood line. His troopers were gradually pushed back. As they retired, they took cover behind trees farther to the rear. When recall was sounded, the Federals withdrew from woods, and reformed for a second charge. This attack completely cleared the woods of North Carolinians and pushed them back to the

stone wall. A third charge assailed Robertson's position from the front and both flanks. It caught him while he and his men were in the middle of remounting and presumably preparing to pull back from the stone wall. Robertson's men broke in the face of this Union onslaught. The rout of Robertson's command was potentially disastrous to Confederate forces on the field. With Robertson's men out of the way, the Federals had a grand opportunity to roll up the Confederate right. Only Stuart's timely withdrawal north of the pike saved a Confederate disaster that day. After Stuart successfully completed his withdrawal and deployed on another ridge farther west, both sides ended the engagement.

The rout of Robertson's command during the fight reflected poorly on both the general and his men. Assuming that the Federals who charged the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry came from average-strength companies, the probable number of Federals involved was about 400 men. On the other hand, Robertson's force numbered around 1,100 troopers. The overwhelming manpower advantage, combined with the added advantage of fighting on the defense and behind cover, should have made Robertson's position impossible to take under the circumstances. Yet Gregg did more than just drive Robertson's men. He also inflicted fifty-seven casualties on the command. Lieutenant Col. Edward Cantwell of the 4th North Carolina Cavalry was among those captured.

Two days later, Robertson and his men battled Federal forces in a running fight that lasted a large portion of the day. This engagement is known as the battle of Upperville. At about 8 a.m. on the 21st, Union gunners positioned on the Ashby's Gap

Turnpike west of Middleburg fired on Confederate forces. These artillerymen were part of Capt. William Fuller's battery of the 3rd U. S. Artillery. The unit, along with Col. Strong Vincent's Infantry brigade, was part of Brig. Gen. David M. Gregg's cavalry division that day. At the onset of the fight, the force opposing Gregg included Robertson's two regiments, four regiments of Hampton's brigade, and a battery of Confederate horse artillery. Stuart deployed his men on the crest of a ridge two miles from town and fronted by a diminutive stream.

Federal forces were on the verge of overrunning Confederate lines when the Southerners withdrew. Stuart eventually reformed his lines farther west of Middleburg along high ground west of Crummey's (or Cromwell's) Run. Stuart retired west from this position when Union pressure again became too hot. The next line occupied by Confederate forces was along high ground west of Goose Creek. The Southerners later abandoned this position under the same circumstances. Stuart's purpose that day was solely to fight delaying actions.

Stuart next deployed his forces along Vineyard Hill and flat ground a short distance east of Upperville. Robertson's men took a position on ground north of the Ashby's Gap Turnpike. Around four o'clock in the afternoon, the Union pursuit made contact. Soon after arriving on the scene, Brig. Gen. H. Judson Kilpatrick, who led Gregg's advance, ordered an attack. While other regiments charged Hampton south of the pike, the 6th Ohio Cavalry assaulted Robertson's command.

At approximately the same moment Kilpatrick arrived on the scene, so did the column of Brig. Gen. John Buford. Early on the morning of the 21st, he had been

ordered to turn the Confederate left wing while Gregg's command pinned Stuart's forces down from the front. After arriving on the scene, Buford ordered Col. William Gamble's brigade to advance in the direction of Robertson's left flank at about the same moment the 6th Ohio Cavalry attacked Robertson's front. The anticipation of the coming combined assault was enough to cause the majority of Robertson's men to lose their nerve and flee through the town of Upperville. The Union advance broke the now-thin line of the Carolinians. These Confederates followed their comrades through the town. As was the case two days earlier, the failure of Robertson's men to hold a position jeopardized Stuart's entire line.

Once Robertson's men had broke, Kilpatrick ordered the 6th Ohio Cavalry into Upperville. At a full gallop, a company-sized detachment swept forward into town. The shock of the attack scattered the rearmost element of Robertson's retreating mass (a portion of the 5th North Carolina Cavalry) and scattered them in confusion. Buckeyes and Tarheels did battle in back alleys and side streets. In response to this Union attack, Robertson rallied a portion of his retreating men and led a detachment of the 4th North Carolina Cavalry in a countercharge against the Ohioans. A sharp fight developed. The Southerners eventually cleared the Northerners from town.

By the time the majority of Robertson's command had rallied on a knoll to the northwest, Stuart had ordered Hampton, still engaged with Union forces east of Upperville, to withdraw through town. Stuart ordered Robertson to cover the movement.

With Hampton's men on the verge of completing the maneuver, the 1st Maine Cavalry charged through the town and broke the rearmost element of Hampton's

command. After passing through the town, the Maine troopers gained a view of Robertson's men on the knoll. The regiment left the Ashby's Gap Turnpike and formed a battle line in a field slightly northwest of town. The 1st Maine Cavalry then charged the Carolinians on foot.

Robertson's men, who were posted behind stone walls on two ridges, fled in the face of the Federal advance. Yet a relatively short time later, the North Carolinians rallied and drove the Maine horsemen back in the direction of Upperville. When Robertson's men gained the outskirts of town, they met two fresh Union regiments and elements of a third. What ensued next was a heated close-quarter conflict in the streets of Upperville. Hand-to-hand combat was commonplace. In the fight, Robertson's men dealt with both mounted Federals on their front and dismounted carbineers who made use of cover off the turnpike. After suffering numerous casualties, the North Carolinians retreated down the pike. The Federals did not pursue.

A detachment of the 5th North Carolina Cavalry under Col. Peter Evans made one last charge on the day. Evans apparently decided to make a show on the field in order to atone for the disgraceful performance of his regiment during the fight. He subsequently found a detachment composed of the 5th squadron and other elements of his regiment some 200 yards from the turnpike. Evans informed the men that they were the only organized body of the unit that he could find and he wished to lead them back to the turnpike. He further informed them that after massing on the pike they would charge Union cavalry forming on the pike west of town in preparation for a charge of

their own. He then led the men to the pike and had them formed up in a column of fours.

Before the charge could be ordered, Stuart appeared on the scene. He ordered some of Evans' men forward in a dismounted action in order to gain possession of a stone wall on the Confederate's front. With the remaining portion of his force, Evans asked Stuart's permission to charge the Union cavalry which at that point had begun an advance down the pike toward the Southerners. Stuart first refused; but after some persistence from Evans, he consented to the colonel's request.

Evans rode to the head of his column, drew his saber, pointed it in the direction of the Federals advancing toward them on the pike and bellowed: "Now, men, I want you to understand that I am going through!"²

He then gave the order to charge. By this time Robertson had arrived. At about the same instant Evans ordered his men forward Robertson gave an order for his Troopers not to charge. Unfortunately for the Confederates, only a portion of Evans' men heard Robertson's order. The remainder surged forward with Evans at their head and with a full Rebel Yell.

When the two columns met eye-to-eye, it was the Northerners who blinked. They parted ranks and allowed the Carolinians to pass through. A carbine volley in their front from another Union regiment thereafter brought Evans' men to a halt. At the same moment, the rear of Evans' column received a volley on its left flank from yet another

²McClellan, I Rode with Jeb Stuart, 312.

Union regiment. Realizing that he was "caught between two fires," Evans tried to extricate his men from the situation. He turned his command around and began to head down the pike away from the Federals. Evans was mortally wounded in the breast and captured. Witnessing the event, a portion of Evans' men attempted to recapture their colonel but failed. It was sundown when the Confederates withdrew. They left behind as casualties the majority of the men who had charged with Evans. Robertson's command had suffered about 100 casualties in the fight. Among these losses was Maj. J. M. Mayo of the 4th North Carolina Cavalry. He was captured after leading a squadron of his regiment in a charge through Upperville.

Robertson himself came close to being one of the casualties. At some point during the fight, he had a horse shot out from under him. The fact that he was among the foremost elements of Confederates engaged with Federal forces during the battle of Upperville and the June 17 Middleburg fight is probably indicative of the fact that Robertson understood one of the fundamentals of Civil War command--the necessity of a commander occasionally placing himself directly "in harm's way" in order to maintain the devotion of his men. Such exposure was even more necessary in the cavalry than in any other branch of the service. As one historian has written: "More than any other arm of the nineteenth-century army, cavalry was an extension of the abilities and the personalities of the generals who led."³

³Longacre, Cavalry at Gettysburg, 271.

Like the day's fighting on the 19th, the battle of the 21st, reflected poorly upon Robertson and his men. The performance of his command near Vineyard Hill was inexcusable. The fact that the majority of his troopers panicked and ran at the mere anticipation of an enemy attack betrayed a serious lack of confidence and security. As commanding general of the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry, Robertson deserves a large part of the blame for these qualities not having been instilled in his men. Even those members of his command who held the line in the face of the Union assault were routed by a single regiment. The fact that the men of the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry had the advantage of fighting on the defensive makes their behavior in the situation less acceptable.

Like his conduct in the battle of Brandy Station, the performance of Robertson's men in the Loudoun Valley cavalry fights confirmed the doubts his superiors had of his participation in the 1863 summer campaign. Although one cannot find fault with Robertson's handling of his command during the June 17 fight at Middleburg, the performance of his men during the June 19 battle of Middleburg and the June 21 battle of Upperville was decidedly poor.⁴ When it came to disciplining the men of the 4th and

⁴In defense of Robertson's men, it should be noted that the re-outfitting Robertson's command received in late May, 1863, did not include the issuance of revolvers and cavalry carbines. According to Stuart's assistant-adjutant, Maj. H. B. McClellan, Robertson's command reported to Stuart on May 25 armed only with Enfield rifles and sabers. McClellan, *I Rode with Stuart*, 260-61. Without revolvers, Robertson's men were at a huge disadvantage when engaged in mounted melees with Union cavalry who were armed to a man with handguns of the highest quality. The civilian shotguns which many Southern cavalymen carried to war were poor substitutes for the "virtues" of the "semi-automatic" six-shooters of the day. Similarly, the lack of the comparatively "quick-load" cavalry carbines also put Robertson's men at a huge

5th North Carolina Cavalry regiments, Robertson's talents as a drillmaster of the highest order seem to have alluded him.

More importantly for the Confederate cause, Robertson's performance during the first half of the Gettysburg campaign was an omen for larger failures to come during the second half of the campaign. These failures would be a prime factor in the Confederate loss of the campaign and, consequently, the entire war.

disadvantage when fighting dismounting actions against Federal cavalry who were all issued the small arm. The longer effective range that the cumbersomely slow-loading Enfield rifles enjoyed over the cavalry carbines were hardly a compensation for the inferior rate of fire of the weapons. Engagements fought by Civil War cavalry were rarely not against other cavalry, and the mobility of cavalry meant that the usual cavalry versus cavalry engagements were at ranges too close for the longer effective ranges of rifles to be a significant factor.

CHAPTER FOUR

GETTYSBURG

By May, 1863, the American Civil War was in its twenty-sixth month. Yet no end to the conflict seemed in sight. In an attempt to shift the tide of war decidedly in the direction of the Southern States, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia prepared to invade the North. The invasion might force the Federal government to divert troops threatening the Confederate strongholds of Vicksburg, Mississippi, and Chattanooga, Tennessee, to the eastern theater of the war in order to meet the threat posed by the invaders. Furthermore, the invasion might thwart the Army of the Potomac's own campaign plans and force the Federal army to pursue the Confederates from Virginia, thereby relieving the state from the toll the two armies had long taken on the land. It might also obtain much needed supplies from the northern countryside and bolster the opposition to the war in the North. Most importantly, the invasion might result in a Confederate victory over the Army of the Potomac on Northern soil. Such a victory might very well end the war in favor of the South by gaining foreign recognition of the Confederacy as an independent nation and possibly even foreign intervention in the war itself. Ultimately, the campaign, which came to be known as Gettysburg concluded with the South failing on every front.

Many historians view the Gettysburg campaign as the turning point of the war. After the sound defeat suffered during the first three days of July, 1863, the Southern states lost all hope of foreign intervention and recognition and were never again able to

fight an offensive war. From July 4, 1863, until its surrender in April and May, 1865, the South fought what was, in essence, a losing battle against time and dwindling resources.

Traditionally, many historians have blamed the Southern defeat at the battle on a failure of intelligence that caused Lee to stumble blindly into an unwanted engagement with Union forces. The man held principally responsible for this failure of intelligence is the commander of the cavalry corps of the Army of Northern Virginia, Maj. Gen. J. E. B. Stuart. His critics have charged him both with failing to follow his orders and with a general failure to conduct his command prudently during the most important phases of the Gettysburg campaign.

It is Stuart's subordinate, Brig. Gen. B. H. Robertson, and not Stuart, who is far more deserving of those charges. Robertson's mistakes were the prime elements in the Confederate failure of intelligence during the campaign.¹

¹For a clear concise summary of the historical case which has been made against Stuart, see Paul R. Gorman, "J.E.B. Stuart and Gettysburg," Gettysburg: Historical Articles of Lasting Interest, I, No. 1 (July, 1989), 87-91. The only person ever to strongly argue Robertson as the culprit in the Confederate failure of intelligence in the Gettysburg campaign was Confederate Col. John S. Mosby. See his Mosby's War Reminiscences, Stuart's Cavalry Campaigns (New York, 1898), 173-205. In several pieces cited elsewhere in the text, Robertson defended himself from Mosby's attacks by misrepresenting the duties Stuart assigned him for the campaign. In the 1900s, any further defenses of his conduct became unnecessary. It was then that Mosby completely reversed himself in his opinion of Robertson's conduct during the campaign. It is important to note, however, that Mosby based his flip-flop on a string of inferences and assumptions involving the campaign, none of which have been upheld by contemporary scholars. See John S. Mosby, Stuart's Cavalry in the Gettysburg Campaign (Gaithersburg, MD, 1987).

On June 23, 1863, the Army of Northern Virginia was twenty days into its northern invasion. With its leading elements in Pennsylvania, cavalry commander J. E. B. Stuart received his final orders for the summer campaign. In essence, these orders directed Stuart to use his own judgment in making two crucial decisions involving how Stuart's command was to be employed.

First, Stuart had to choose between two possible routes north from Virginia into Northern territory with his ultimate goal being to link up with Lee's infantry north of the Potomac River. One of the two involved Stuart passing around his own army's rear. If Stuart chose this route, he would, on the night of June 24, first have to move his command from its position near Ashby's and Snicker's gaps in Virginia and cross from the east side to the west side of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Stuart would then head north the next morning, cross the Potomac River at Shepherdstown, and move east toward Frederick, Maryland. The alternative route involved Stuart leading his men east from Ashby's and Snicker's gaps and crossing the Bull Run Mountains. He would then cross the Potomac at some point between the Bull Run Mountains and Washington, D.C. Stuart would pass around the rear of the Union army and thereafter re-establish communication with Lee's army on Northern soil.

Stuart's other decision involved how he was to divide his five cavalry brigades into two separate detachments. According to Lee's instructions, Stuart was to take three of his brigades with him when he left on his ride. The other two would remain behind on detached duty at Ashby's and Snicker's gaps. They would later rejoin the army on Northern soil.

By June 24, Stuart had decided on reaching Northern soil by way of the Union rear and the two brigades he would leave behind in the mountains when he left the next morning. The brigades of Brig. Gens. W. E. "Grumble" Jones and B. H. "Bev" Robertson would remain in the Blue Ridge.²

Stuart choose to leave Robertson and Jones behind for a number of reasons. In terms of manpower, this disposition made the most sense of all. Jones commanded Stuart's largest brigade and Robertson his smallest. Leaving the two behind would leave in communication with and in direct control of the Confederate army a force of cavalry numerically superior to the cavalry force Stuart would retain under his direct command as he rode north. He would have enough men to fulfill his own role in the campaign. With the brigades of Robertson and Jones, Capt. Marcellus N. Moorman's battery of horse artillery, the brigade of Brig. Gen. Albert Jenkins, Lt. Col. Eligah V. White's 35th Virginia Battalion, and Maj. Harry Gilmor's 1st Maryland Battalion, Lee would have some 5,100 mounted men directly under his control after Stuart separated from the Confederate army. (By contrast, the number of troopers Stuart took with him on his ride around the Union rear has been estimated at between 4,000-4,500 troopers.³

Another factor involved in Stuart's decision was his belief that Jones was "the best outpost officer" in his command. This was significant because the most important duty

²Although the command Robertson brought from Virginia to North Carolina in May, 1863, consisted of only two regiments, official correspondence of the campaign referred to it as a brigade.

³McClellan, I Rode with Stuart, 318-19; J. J. Shoemaker, Shoemaker's Battery, (Gaithersburg, MD), 1983, 43; Robert J. Trout to writer, Sept. 30, 1994.

Stuart would assign to the two brigades he left in the Blue Ridge Gaps would be to observe and report the movements of the Union army on their front. Because of Jones's reputation, this was a duty for which he was uniquely qualified. However, the most important factor in Stuart's deciding not to take Robertson and Jones on his ride around the Union rear was probably the simple fact that Robertson and Jones were the two brigadiers Stuart personally disliked most, and in whom he had the least confidence. Stuart's ride around the Union rear was an audacious and potentially disastrous undertaking; he therefore likely reasoned that he could not afford to leave any of his three most trusted brigade commanders behind.⁴

On June 24, Stuart sent Robertson his orders for the upcoming campaign. "Your own and General Jones' brigades will cover the front of Ashby's and Snicker's Gaps, yourself, as senior officer, being in command [of the cavalry division]." In holding these positions, Robertson was told that his "object will be to watch the enemy" and that he should "be always on the alert; let nothing escape your observation." Stuart also directed

⁴McClellan, I Rode with Stuart, 319-320, 335-336; Jones's reputation as a top outpost officer was widespread in the Confederate Army. For example, see John S. Mosby to Lunsford Lindsay Lomax, Feb. 19, 1896, John S. Mosby Papers, U. S. Army Military History Institute. By contrast, Stuart wrote of Robertson in an August, 1863, inspection report to Lee: "Frankly and fairly he does not possess some of the indispensable qualities of a Cavalry commander particularly, on outpost duty." James Ewell Brown Stuart to Robert E. Lee, Aug. 13, 1862, Stuart Papers, Virginia Historical Society. When pondering this point two things should be remembered. First, Jones's brigade constituted about seventy percent of the manpower of Robertson's division, which meant that Stuart had every right to believe that Jones's views would have to be given strong consideration by Robertson in leading the command. Secondly, the distance between Ashby's and Snicker's gaps would allow Jones to see to the outpost duties assigned to him by Stuart on June 24, independently of Robertson's supervision until the combined command moved north to rejoin Lee's army.

Robertson to "report anything of importance to Lieutenant-General Longstreet, with whose position you will communicate by relays through Charlestown." Robertson was also to "harass his [the Federal Army of the Potomac's] rear if you find he is retiring," and that "after the enemy has moved beyond your reach...cross the Potomac and follow [up] the [Confederate] army, keeping on its right and rear."⁵

The most significant stipulations in Stuart's orders to Robertson involved Robertson's reconnaissance of the Union army during the campaign. This reconnaissance involved more than Robertson simply reporting Federal movements while his command remained in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Stuart also seemed to have intended for Robertson's command to provide intelligence to Lee after it began the march north to join the Confederate army. Stuart's orders to Robertson specifically required him to march north on Lee's right once his command left the mountains. Marching north, while

⁵O.R., XXVII, pt. 3, 927-28. Robertson's command also included Capt. Marcellus N. Moorman's battery of horse artillery and most of the ambulances in Stuart's cavalry corps. Shoemaker, Shoemaker's Battery, 43; Robert J. Trout to writer, Sept. 30, 1994. Although this command was about 400 men short of what would have been a standard two-brigade division of Stuart's cavalry, the term "division" is used in this text for convenience sake. It should be noted, however, that Robertson himself referred to the command as a division in a postwar letter. See B. H. Robertson to Marcus J. Wright, Apr. 8, 1881, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Huntington Library. It is noteworthy that Stuart sent written instructions for Jones through Robertson. Such a practice was contrary to military protocol of the time, since normally a commanding officer would address orders to a command's senior officer (in this case Robertson), and in turn, instruct that officer as to what orders should be given by him to his subordinate. Stuart's decision to send written instructions to Jones through Robertson might well have been an expression of the lack of confidence Stuart had in Robertson's command abilities. Mosby, Stuart's Cavalry, 216. Stuart's June 24 orders to Jones have been lost; but from existing evidence, it is clear that these orders could not have differed in any substantial way from Stuart's orders to Robertson of the same day.

keeping on Lee's right, would enable Robertson to place his division between the two opposing armies and in position to perform reconnaissance duties for Lee in the middle and late phases of the campaign.

The rationale behind these directives was probably Stuart's decision to reach Lee's army in Northern territory by riding around the Union army's rear. Stuart had to be aware that, in the words of his staff officer Maj. H. B. McClellan, his chosen route north would mean that "under the most favorable circumstances," his command would "be separated from the [Confederate] army for at least three or four days" after Stuart left the mountains.⁶

This separation would make it impossible for Stuart to send any intelligence reports concerning the movements of the Union army to Lee until June 28 at the earliest. Simply put, it would be impossible for any courier sent from Stuart to reach Lee until after Stuart had completed his ride around the Union rear. Until that time, the Union army would be interspersed between his cavalry and Lee, making communication between the cavalry chief and commanding general impossible. Realizing the difficulty his own detachment of three brigades might encounter in providing Lee with intelligence during the campaign, Stuart endeavored to ensure that Robertson would provide

⁶McClellan, I Rode with Stuart, 335-36.

intelligence to Lee during the invasion.⁷

Around 1 a.m. on June 25, Stuart departed with the brigades of Wade Hampton, Fitz Lee, and W. H. F. "Rooney" Lee (the latter temporarily under the command of Col. John R. Chambliss). That same morning, the Union army gave indication of pursuing Lee by moving toward Maryland and away from Robertson's division. The main portion of the Federal army marched east from Leesburg to two pontoon bridges across the Potomac River at Edward's Ferry, Maryland. How both Robertson and Jones could have failed to notice such a massive troop movement seems beyond comprehension. Yet the only action taken by Robertson's command on the 25th involved Jones ordering the 12th Virginia Cavalry to picket duty at Harper's Ferry. This reduced the effective strength of Robertson's division by a regiment for the duration of the campaign. Even after Robertson led the rest of his force north on June 29, the 12th Virginia Cavalry remained at Harper's Ferry.⁸

On the morning of the following day, the Union army's rear guard near Aldie, began to withdraw from Robertson's front. In the movement, the cavalry of Brig. Gens.

⁷Ibid., Robert Underwood Johnson and C. C. Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, (New York, 1884-1887), III, 251-52. (Hereafter cited as B&L). Unfortunately for the Confederates, circumstances prevented Stuart from reaching Lee's army in Pennsylvania until the second day of the battle of Gettysburg. This long separation of Stuart from Lee's army prevented him from acting as Lee's "eyes and ears" during the campaign and placed profound importance on Robertson's performance during the invasion. For the best description of Stuart's ride between June 25 and July 2, see Longacre, Cavalry at Gettysburg, 152-59, 193-202.

⁸O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 752, 766; George Baylor, Bull Run to Bull Run: Four Years in the Army of Northern Virginia (Richmond, 1900), 150.

John Buford and David M. Gregg moved toward Leesburg. In spite of the fact that Robertson's orders from Stuart required him to harass the Federal rear when Union forces began to retire from his front, Robertson's command did no such thing. He allowed the Union Army to retire unmolested because his command was unaware of the Union movement.⁹

During the afternoon, the Union rear guard reached Leesburg. It was then beyond the reach of Robertson's division. Robertson's orders of June 24 required him to then bring his command north at once. Yet Robertson's division would remain in the Blue Ridge Gaps for the next five days.¹⁰

On the morning of June 28th, Robertson took his second meal in as many days at "Oakley," the manor house owned by the Dulany family a mile east of Upperville. Mrs. Dulany confided in her diary that she found Robertson to be "very handsome, gentle, manly, and attractive."¹¹

Later that night, while Robertson's division still held Ashby's and Snicker's gaps, Lee at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, received an intelligence report from one of Lt. Gen. James Longstreet's spies. This was the first indication Lee had that the Union army had left Robertson's front in Virginia and was approaching South Mountain in Maryland. In

⁹Mosby, War Reminiscences, 198.

¹⁰Ibid., O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 751-52; George M. Neese, Three Years in the Confederate Horse Artillery (New York and Washington, 1911), 184.

¹¹Mary Eliza Dulany Diary, June 27 and 28, 1863, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Virginia Historical Society.

the wake of this news, Lee sent a courier south from Chambersburg with orders for Robertson and Jones.¹²

On the morning of June 29, Robertson became satisfied that Union forces had withdrawn from his front. He therefore determined to start his command northward and join Lee's army. Robertson ordered his division concentrated near Berryville, in Clarke County. With his own 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry regiments and Mooreman's Battery, he left his position at Ashby's Gap, forded the Shenandoah River, and headed north to Berryville via Millwood. On the same morning, Jones's 6th, 7th, and 11th Virginia Cavalry regiments and Chew's Battery of horse artillery left Snickers' Gap. Jones's horsemen struck the Berryville Road, crossed to the west side of the Blue Ridge Mountains under the cover of a thick fog, and eventually met Robertson near Berryville. That night, Robertson's Division camped about four miles north of Berryville.¹³

The next morning, Robertson's command struck camp and marched northward along the Charlestown Pike. The division crossed into Jefferson County, and marched as far as Rippon. At that point, it left the Charlestown Pike and continued cross-country in a northwest direction.¹⁴

¹²O.R., 27, pt. 2, 316, 321.

¹³Baylor, Bull Run, 150; O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 751-52; Neese, Three Years, 184-85; Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877; Richmond Whig, July 30, 1863; Shoemaker, Shoemaker's Battery, 43; Robert J. Trout to writer, Sept. 30, 1994.

¹⁴Neese, Three Years, 185.

Robertson's decision to leave the pike is an interesting one. Robertson could have continued to push north along the pike and crossed the Potomac River at Shepherdstown. Instead he moved his command to Williamsport, Maryland, some ten miles upriver. At the time Robertson made this decision, he was still under Stuart's June 24 orders. They required him to march north on Lee's right once he left the Blue Ridge. Yet in advancing to the Williamsport Ford, Robertson moved in the direction of Lee's left and rear in Pennsylvania.

Writing a quarter-century later, Robertson defended his decision by pointing to two stipulations in his orders. He argued that "the only road by which the orders (which particularly specified the avoidance of 'Turnpikes' on account of the difficulty and delay of shoeing horses) could be complied with, carried my command to Martinsburg, [and consequently to the Potomac River ford some seventeen miles north of Martinsburg, at Williamsport, Maryland]."¹⁵

In actuality, the extent that leading his command to the Williamsport Ford, allowed Robertson's command to avoid turnpike travel was negligible. Furthermore, Robertson must have realized at the time he decided to head for Williamsport that he was leading his command north to join Lee's army from one to four days later than his orders required. When Robertson moved north on June 29, the last day he could be absolutely sure Union forces remained on his front was the day he received his orders from Stuart. This realization should have led him to recognize that his first priority was to bring his

¹⁵B&L, III, 253.

command north to join Lee by the shortest route possible. In a follow-up article, Robertson offered a further defense of his decision. He wrote that Stuart's orders of June 24 "directed me to 'cross the Potomac at the different points crossed by it [the army of Gen. Lee].' It was left to my discretion where I was to cross, according to the circumstances that might arise in the future."¹⁶

Although the left wing of Lee's army did cross the Potomac at Williamsport, this defense of his decision also does not stand up to scrutiny. Again the realization that he was leading his command north from one to four days later than his orders directed should have spurred Robertson to proceed by the shortest route possible. This could only have entailed crossing the Potomac River at Shepherdstown, where the right wing of Lee's army had forded during the early phases of the campaign.

After leaving the Charlestown Pike, Robertson's division passed Summit Point, crossed the Limestone Ridge, entered Berkeley County, and finally struck the Winchester and Martinsburg Pike at Bunker's Hill. Robertson's troopers rode another seven miles north and camped for the night about two miles from Martinsburg. The entire day's march covered only nineteen miles.¹⁷

On July 1, most likely before sunrise, a courier from Lee reached Robertson. The messenger carried June 28 orders sent from Chambersburg. The only direct

¹⁶B. H. Robertson, "General Robertson in the Gettysburg campaign: A Re-rejoinder to Colonel Mosby," The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine, XXXVII (1888), 150.

¹⁷Neese, Three Years, 185.

evidence of the content of the orders is found in Lee's second Gettysburg campaign report. In this report, Lee indicated that after he received the report from Longstreet's spy, he ordered Robertson and Jones "to rejoin the army without delay."¹⁸

A high probability exists that these orders also included a directive for Robertson's command to march north on the Army of Northern Virginia's left and head directly for the army's rear in Pennsylvania. On June 30, Lee had ordered a brigade in Maj. Gen. John B. Hood's Division to New Guilford Court House in Pennsylvania to hold said position until relieved by Robertson's cavalry command. Because of New Guilford Court House's geographical location on the extreme left wing of the Confederate army, Lee would have had no reason to believe Robertson would be passing through New Guilford after June 30 unless Lee himself had ordered him to do so. If Lee's orders to Robertson's command of the 28th did not contain a directive for

¹⁸Conflicting evidence has led to confusion among historians as to when and where Robertson received Lee's orders of June 28. In a letter to Maj. Gen. Henry Heth, originally published in the Philadelphia Weekly Times in 1877, Robertson stated that he received these orders on June 29 while his command still held the Blue Ridge Mountain gaps. Mosby, Stuart's Cavalry, 200-1. In an article published ten years later, Robertson stated that he received Lee's orders near the vicinity of Martinsburg, without giving the date the orders reached him. B&L, III, 253. An 1877 letter from Jones's assistant adjutant-general Walter K. Martin to Stuart staff officer, H. B. McClellan further confuses the issue. Although this letter made no mention of place, it did state that Lee's orders reached Robertson's division on July 1. Walter K. Martin to H. B. McClellan, October 28[?], 1877, Henry Brainerd McClellan papers, Virginia Historical Society. Sense can be made of this evidence when it is realized that Robertson's command was indeed in the vicinity of Martinsburg on July 1. Neese, Three Years, 185-86. This fact, when considered with both Robertson's 1887 article and Walter K. Martin's letter establishes Martinsburg and July 1 as the place and time where Robertson received Lee's orders. O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 321.

Robertson to march for the army's left and rear in Pennsylvania, Robertson would never have found himself anywhere near New Guilford in late June and early July.¹⁹

The importance of Lee's directive ordering Robertson to march for the Confederate left and rear cannot be overemphasized. The establishment of the existence of such a directive solves a longstanding mystery which involves why Robertson did not march north on Lee's right after he left the Blue Ridge Mountains. Even more important is what "might have been" if Robertson had marched north on Lee's right. In 1891, Confederate Gen. James Longstreet, wrote Thomas T. Munford: "Robertson made a slow ride behind us instead of on our [right] flank, which was another source of our trouble, for want of cavalry." Some historians have speculated that if Robertson had marched north on Lee's right, Lee would have had a cavalry force in position to provide

¹⁹In his Military Memoirs of a Confederate, artillery officer E. P. Alexander commented that on June 30 "Law's brigade was detached from Hood's division and sent to New Guilford C.H., a few miles south of Fayetteville, until Robertson's cavalry [italics mine] should relieve it." E. P. Alexander, Military Memoirs of a Confederate (Bloomington, IN, 1962), 380. The index to Alexander's memoir incorrectly labels the "Robertson" referred to in the above-quoted passage as Brig. Gen. Jerome Bonaparte Robertson. This incorrect entry is the only logical reason why this profoundly important piece of historical evidence has remained obscure. Although making no mention of Robertson's cavalry, Lt. Gen. Longstreet's Gettysburg report confirmed the fact that on the 30th, Lee ordered a brigade in Hood's division to New Guilford. O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 358. On July 1, this brigade, Brig. Gen. Evander Law's, arrived at New Guilford Court House. Upon arriving at said place, Law's brigade relieved two South Carolina infantry regiments, one of which had been ordered to New Guilford at 9 p.m. the previous night. O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 371. However, Law's brigade was ordered away from New Guilford Court House and sent to Gettysburg before Robertson's division passed through the vicinity. O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 358. To gain an understanding of the location of the right and left wings of the Confederate army and their relative position to New Guilford Court House during the campaign, see O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 305-8, 315-18.

intelligence concerning the movements and disposition of the Union Army before the battle of Gettysburg. It was this "absence of cavalry" from a position which would have been conducive to intelligence gathering that Lee would emphasize as a major cause of the Confederate failure during the campaign. Therefore, it seems that Lee himself deserves part of the blame for the "absence of cavalry" he suffered during the campaign.²⁰

After sunrise on the morning of the 1st, Robertson's command renewed its march and rode through Martinsburg. Continuing down the Williamsport Pike, the division crossed the Potomac River at Williamsport. Once on the Maryland shore, Robertson's horse soldiers struck the Greencastle Road and headed north through Washington County. Camp that night was made near the Pennsylvania state line and some thirty miles southwest of Gettysburg.²¹

The next morning, Robertson's division entered Franklin County, Pennsylvania, still holding to the Greencastle Road. The command camped that evening alongside the Baltimore Pike about a mile south of Chambersburg and twenty-five miles west of Gettysburg. It is likely that soon after reaching the vicinity of Chambersburg, Robertson sent a detachment from his command to report to New Guilford Court House.²²

²⁰James Longstreet to Thomas T. Munford, Nov. 8, 1891, Munford-Ellis Family papers, Duke University. See, for example, Coddington, Gettysburg Campaign, 184-85; O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 307, 316, 321.

²¹Neese, Three Years, 186-87.

²²Ibid.

About 1 a.m. on July 3, Robertson rudely awakened his men and gave them marching orders sending the division east toward South Mountain. Robertson had received a report that Brig. Gen. John D. Imboden's brigade, camped ten miles away was about to be attacked. However, after marching the ten miles east down the Baltimore Pike, Robertson reached Imboden's command encamped at the foot of South Mountain, and thereafter, learned that Imboden's command was in fact in no danger.²³

Although his division had had little rest, Robertson decided to keep his men in the saddle and press westward toward Gettysburg. The command passed into Adams County, and crossed South Mountain. Riding in advance of his command, Robertson continued east on the pike and around 9 a.m. reported his presence to Lee near Gettysburg. The division itself reached Cashtown an hour later and halted. At Cashtown, Robertson's command prepared and ate breakfast to the sights and sounds of the raging battle then being fought at Culp's Hill southeast of Gettysburg.²⁴

At about 1:00 that afternoon a courier arrived at Cashtown. A regiment of Federal cavalry was heading toward Lee's right and rear. If unimpeded, it would prove

²³Ibid., 187; Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877.

²⁴Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877; Walter K. Martin to H. B. McClellan, Oct. 28[?], 1877, McClellan Papers; B&L, III, 253. It is assumed that the fighting both George Neese of Chew's Battery and Jasper Hawse of the 11th Virginia Cavalry described in their Civil War diaries while their division remained at Cashtown was the Culp's Hill fighting. Neese, Three Years, 187-88; Patrick A. Bowmaster (ed.), "A Confederate Cavalryman at War: The Diary of Sergeant Jasper Hawse of the 14th Regiment Virginia Militia, the 7th Virginia Cavalry, the 17th Virginia Cavalry Battalion, and the 11th Virginia Cavalry" (unpublished manuscript), Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia, 31.

a serious threat to Confederate supply trains. To counter this threat, Lee ordered a cavalry force sent to a position seven miles south of Cashtown, to the vicinity of the town of Fairfield.

For unknown reasons, Robertson was absent from camp when Lee's order arrived. In his absence, "Grumble" Jones took it upon himself to make preparations for his own brigade to start toward Fairfield. Before Jones left, Robertson returned and, after being informed of Lee's order, gave Jones his approval and sent him on his way south. Sometime thereafter, Robertson ordered the rest of his division to Fairfield.²⁵

About two miles outside of town, Jones and his brigade met the men of the 6th U. S. Cavalry under Maj. Samuel H. "Paddy" Starr, an officer who had served with Robertson in the pre-Civil War years.²⁶

A hotly contested fight resulted in the rout of the 6th U.S. Cavalry. Thereafter, all that was left was for the Confederates to gather up Union prisoners from Starr's regiment. In this effort, which kept the Southerners busy until nearly sundown, Jones' men were aided by the men of the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry regiments who along with Robertson had had no part in the fight. Among those Federals captured by Robertson's division was Starr himself. He had been sabered in the head and shot in the arm, but he lived following the amputation of his wounded limb. Whether or not

²⁵Neese, Three Years, 187-88; O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 752; Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877; B&L, III, 253; Richmond Whig, July 30, 1863; Shoemaker, Shoemaker's Battery, 44.

²⁶Rodenbough, Everglade, 456, 460-61.

Robertson and Starr, former comrades turned adversaries, were reunited following the fight is unknown.

In the battle, in which disparity of numbers made the outcome a foregone conclusion, Jones' brigade suffered fifty-eight casualties. (The number of casualties Robertson's Carolinians suffered in the fight are not known but must have been few if any.) The toll the conflict took on the 6th U. S. Cavalry was much more severe. The 6th U. S. Cavalry had six men killed, twenty-eight men wounded, and 208 taken prisoner.

After the conclusion of the fight at Fairfield, Robertson's division assumed a defensive position, guarding the right of the Confederate army, and remained inactive for the remainder of the day. The command camped near the Fairfield battlefield that night.²⁷

To Robertson's credit, and unlike many other Civil War commanders, he was willing to swallow his pride and allow Jones to command Jones's own men at Fairfield. At a time when many took questions of honor to absurd extremes, Robertson was willing to hand over command to Jones, who was his junior as a brigadier general, "for the good of the service." Many Civil War commanders, as senior officer of the division, would have chosen to ignore the advantages of allowing Jones to command his own Virginians and instead personally taken command of Jones's three cavalry regiments and battery of horse artillery (Robertson's old brigade) as a point of honor. Such a move would have

²⁷O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 322; Neese, Three Years, 189; Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877.

ignored the benefits of having Jones command troops he was much more familiar with and had much more experience leading in battle. Rather than handle Virginians who he had only commanded for a third of the time that Jones had, Robertson admirably chose to remain on the sidelines and allow Jones to win victory for the division at Fairfield.²⁸

Although seemingly insignificant when compared to the momentous three-day battle fought at Gettysburg, the Fairfield engagement was an important victory for Robertson's command. This success allowed Confederate forces to gain--and for a period of time successfully hold--the mountain pass through Jack Mountain at Fairfield. It was through this pass that Lee sent most of his army on the retreat from Pennsylvania. This was the shortest possible route to Hagerstown, Maryland, and the Potomac River ford at Williamsport. The battle of Fairfield also represented what was really the only bright spot in an otherwise poorly conducted campaign by Robertson.

²⁸An examination of Jones's Gettysburg report makes it clear that Jones commanded at Fairfield without any supervision from Robertson. O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 752. For his part, if Robertson did submit a report concerning the conduct of his command from June 24, 1863, until the close of the Gettysburg campaign, it has not survived. When writing in the postwar years, three sources who took part in the Fairfield fight (one Confederate and two Federal) maintained that Robertson's men had a more much active part in the conflict than just the simple participation in the mop-up operation that took place after the route of the 6th United States Cavalry. See Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 463; William H. Carter, "The Sixth Regiment of Cavalry," The Maine Bugle, III (1896), 300; William Harding Carter, The Life of Lieutenant General Chaffee, (Chicago, 1917), 30-31; William H. Carter, From Yorktown to Santiago with the Sixth U.S. Cavalry, (Baltimore, 1900), 96, 98; James W. Milgram, "The Libby Prison Correspondence of Tattnell Paulding," The American Philatelist, LXXXIX (1975), 1115. When the total of evidence concerning the Fairfield fight is considered, it becomes apparent that these three aforementioned sources must be apocryphal.

During the critical period of the Gettysburg campaign, June 25-July 2, Robertson failed to act in accordance with his orders in several important respects. In commanding his division, he did not "watch the enemy," stay "always on the alert," and "let nothing escape...[his] observation," as Stuart on June 24 ordered him to do. This failure prevented Robertson from noticing the Union withdrawal from his front in Virginia. His failure to observe the Federal movement prevented him from fulfilling three other directives of the same orders. The first stipulation involved his "report[ing] anything of importance" to his military superiors. Another was the stipulation in Robertson's orders from Stuart requiring him to "harass...[the Union army's] rear" as the Federal forces withdrew from Robertson's front. Robertson could not carry out this directive because he was unaware of the movement as it developed. The third involved Stuart's directive to "cross the Potomac and follow the [Confederate] army" after Union forces withdrew from Robertson's front in Virginia.

A final failure of Robertson involved his not bringing his division quickly north to join Lee's army in Pennsylvania.

The strategic importance of bringing his command north as quickly as possible should have been obvious to a man such as B. H. Robertson, who by 1863, had some fourteen years' military experience. While serving in the army Robertson had seen the advent of modern warfare in which rifled cannons and rifled muskets had reduced the function of the mounted arm to little more than that of light cavalry. As such, the cavalry's primary role involved that of pre-battle reconnaissance.

Furthermore, the realization that he was leaving the Blue Ridge Mountains from one to four days later than he should have should have given Robertson an even extra impetus to make all haste in bringing his command north to join Lee. But, in spite of these considerations, Robertson led his command north at a pace which was so slow it was both incomprehensible and unforgivable from a military standpoint. In fact, the pace Robertson set on his trip north was so slow that it more closely resembled that of an infantry command than a cavalry column.²⁹ Not even after Robertson received Lee's orders of June 28, on July 1, which directed him to "rejoin the army without delay", did he quicken his pace.

In several aspects, the consequences of Robertson's failures were profound.

In the first two years of the Civil War, Lee owed a large degree of the credit for his battlefield successes to the superb intelligence-gathering of his cavalry. This intelligence allowed Lee time and time again to offer battle to Union forces in positions, and at particular points in time, when Confederate forces would have the best chances of success. During the Gettysburg campaign, however, Lee was not privy to the kind of military intelligence to which he had become accustomed.

The failure of Confederate intelligence during the campaign began with Lee not being informed of the movement of Union forces from Virginia into Maryland between June 25 and June 27. Before Lee received the report of Longstreet's spy late on the

²⁹The 3rd South Carolina Infantry left its camp near Ashby's gap on June 24 and marched to Chambersburg over almost the exact same route later followed by Robertson's command. O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 371.

night on June 28, he commanded under the assumption that the Federal army was then still south of the Potomac River. Lee stated as much when he wrote in his first Gettysburg report that until the final moments of June 28, "no report had been received that the Federal Army had crossed the Potomac, and the absence of cavalry rendered it impossible to obtain accurate information."³⁰

Consequently, when Lee received the report of Longstreet's spy, his army was then in the middle of complying with his orders for a general advance toward Harrisburg. Believing the Union army to be still south of the Potomac, Lee had ordered an advance upon Harrisburg in order to draw Union forces north of the Potomac. Lee presumably, hoped to counter-march in a southerly direction from Harrisburg after Federal forces left Virginia, in order to meet the Union army on ground of Lee's choosing. The report of Longstreet's spy late on the night of June 28 completely upset Lee's campaign plans. As a result of the position of the Federal army on the night of June 28, Lee was forced to order a concentration of his army near the vicinity of Gettysburg. In commenting on this concentration Lee wrote in his second Gettysburg campaign report: "It had not been intended to deliver a general battle so far from our base unless attacked, but coming unexpectedly upon the whole Federal Army, to withdraw through the mountains with our extensive trains would have been difficult and dangerous. At the same time we were unable to await an attack, as the country was unfavorable for collecting supplies in the presence of the enemy, who could restrain our foraging parties by holding the mountain

³⁰Ibid., 307.

passes with local and other troops. A battle had, therefore, become in a measure unavoidable."³¹

Because Robertson's June 24 orders directed him to observe and report on the Union Army in his front near the Blue Ridge mountains, he deserves the blame for Lee not being informed of the Union movement from Virginia into Maryland. Therefore, it is also Robertson who deserves the blame for the disadvantageous position the Confederate army was put in by, in Lee's words "coming unexpectedly upon the whole Federal Army" north of the Potomac.³²

Even after Lee learned of the advance of the Union army into Maryland and ordered his forces concentrated near Gettysburg, he still continued to suffer from a lack of military intelligence. In his first Gettysburg report Lee commented: "The march toward Gettysburg was conducted more slowly than it would have been had the movements of the Federal Army been known." Since Lee had no cavalry in position to provide intelligence at this time, he instead "conducted [the march of his army toward the vicinity of Gettysburg] with a view to the comfort of the troops" as "the weather...[was] inclement" and "the advance of the enemy to the latter place was unknown."³³

³¹Ibid., 316-18.

³²Ibid., pt. 3, 927.

³³Ibid., pt. 2. 307, 317.

Robertson also deserves a very large part of the blame for the "absence of cavalry" and consequent lack of intelligence during the period of time after Lee received the report of Longstreet's spy late on the night of June 28 and before Stuart reported to Lee on July 2 at Gettysburg. Historians have traditionally blamed Stuart for this "absence of cavalry" and for all intents and purposes, ignored Robertson's role in the same. These historians have reasoned that Stuart could have done much more to see that his command joined Lee in Pennsylvania earlier than the afternoon of July 2. While it is true that Stuart also should have made more haste in bringing his command north to rejoin Lee's army, the pace Stuart set on his ride north was nowhere near as slow as that set by Robertson. Furthermore, on his ride around the Union rear Stuart encountered delays such as the bringing off of an eight-mile-long captured Federal wagon train, the paroling of 400 Union prisoners, the cutting of numerous telegraph lines, the destruction of railroad track, and several skirmishes with Union cavalry. On the other hand, Robertson's delay in bringing his command north between June 29 and July 3 cannot be explained beyond incompetence.

If Robertson had brought his command north at a reasonably brisk pace, he would have easily reached Lee in Pennsylvania by June 28 at the latest. Robertson's command would have thereafter been able to act as an intelligence-gathering arm for Lee.

If Robertson had followed his orders and conducted his command prudently between June 25 and July 2, the Gettysburg campaign might have had a very different outcome. Robertson might well have made the difference between the crushing defeat

Lee's army suffered another victory in the long string of triumphs that the South had previously gained.

On the afternoon of July 4, the Army of Northern Virginia commenced its retreat from Gettysburg. In addition to seeing his army cross the Potomac River and into the safety of Virginia, Lee also had to see his extensive trains safely into the Confederacy. He assigned his largest train to Gen. Imboden and ordered him to leave Cashtown late in the afternoon. Imboden was to cross South Mountain at the Cashtown Gap and march for the Potomac River ford at Williamsport. A second, much smaller train, would travel with the main army and cross to the west side of the mountains farther south through the mountain passes at both South Mountain and Jack Mountain. After crossing to the west side of the mountains, this train would reach the Williamsport Ford by way of Hagerstown. Presumably because of its geographical location at the conclusion of Gettysburg, Robertson's division was to protect this second train.

Robertson and his men spent much of July 4 waiting at Fairfield to take their assigned position in the retreat. At one point on the march, Robertson had an interesting exchange with Lee. Robertson related the incident in a newspaper interview fourteen years later. "I was sitting on a fence, surrounded by my staff, waiting for the army to pass so that I could take position in rear of it. As he [Lee] passed along the lines he was greeted with hearty cheers which, taken up by my own men, were repeated with warmth. As he neared me I got down, walked over to him, and saluting, shook hands with him and said something to this effect: 'General, I am glad to see that, though you are going in the wrong direction, your troops have not lost confidence in you, and that they have

an undiminished respect for you.' To this he replied: 'Yes: this grieves me more than all else. I assume all the responsibility.'"³⁴

During the next ten days, Robertson and his men saw almost constant action with Union cavalry attempting to inflict damage upon the wagon train. The majority of encounters consisted of only light skirmishing. However, on three occasions Robertson and his men saw significant action with Union troopers.³⁵

Around 10 p.m. on the 4th a six-regiment cavalry command under Brig. Gen. H. Judson Kilpatrick reached a road junction southwest of Fairfield. This junction was key to the safety of Robertson's train. Soon after the Federal column overran a small picket force that Robertson had posted at the junction earlier in the day. Considering both the importance of the position to the safety of the train and the likelihood of a Union advance on the position, this picket force was much smaller than that which should have been posted. The fact that Lee himself had specifically ordered Stuart to remind Robertson of the importance of holding the two avenues of approach to the mountain passes early on the retreat made Robertson's failure to post a proper picket even less understandable.

After brushing aside Robertson's small picket, Kilpatrick sent one of his regiments up the northwest fork of the junction to attack the rear of the train. With the

³⁴Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877. While Robertson's account undoubtedly captured the spirit of his encounter with Lee, no soldier of the Army of Northern Virginia would have dared tell Lee on July 4 that he was "going in the wrong direction."

³⁵Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 463-64, 535-36, 569-71; Coltrane, Memoirs, 15-19; Richmond Whig, July 30, 1863.

rest of his men, he advanced along the southwest fork. Kilpatrick hoped to gain Monterey Pass with his main force so that he could head off the wagon train.

A detachment of Jones's brigade easily dealt with the single regiment Kilpatrick had sent against the rear of the train and prevented it from doing any significant damage. For his part, Kilpatrick reached Monterey Pass and thereafter ran up against a brick wall - Capt. G. M. Emack's twenty man company of the 1st Maryland Cavalry Battalion and an artillery piece with just two rounds.³⁶

After learning of Kilpatrick's threat to the train, "Grumble" Jones requested Robertson's permission to advance to Monterey Pass with his three regiments and battery of horse artillery. Robertson sent Jones forward with the 4th North Carolina Cavalry, the 6th Virginia Cavalry, and Chew's Battery. Unfortunately for the Confederates the combination of a narrow rough road, virtually impassable by torrential rain from a thunderstorm, pitch darkness, and the wagons themselves, prevented Jones from moving his force quickly to the front. He eventually became disgusted with the progress of his column and left it behind. With his staff and as many stragglers as he could gather, Jones pushed forward and eventually reached Emack's force. A detachment of the 4th North Carolina Cavalry, the only element of the force Jones initially attempted to lead against Kilpatrick which was able to arrive while Emack still held, arrived on the scene some time after.³⁷

³⁶McClellan, I Rode with Stuart, 352-55; O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 699-700.

³⁷O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 752-53; McClellan, I Rode with Stuart, 352-55; Richmond Whig, July 3, 1863; Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 463.

According to Emack's postwar recollection, the Carolinians did not immediately deploy to reinforce his men after coming up. The captain claimed that after much coercion by himself, Jones, and the staff, only about ten members of the sixty or seventy man detachment were moved to join the fight. If Emack's memory can be trusted, and the men of the 4th did refuse to fight when the safety of a portion of the train was at stake, the Carolinian;s conduct reflected poorly upon Robertson. The fact that the men simply refused orders to fight, if this was what happened, would indicate that some eleven months after the organization of the regiment, Robertson still had not turned the men into a first-class fighting unit.³⁸

On the other hand, Jones's Gettysburg report related a different account of the conduct of the Carolinians that night. According to Jones, the troopers did deploy in accordance with orders and did their best to help hold back Kilpatrick. It should be noted that while the Jones account was penned less than a month after the incident, Emack's wrote his recollections years after the war.³⁹

In what had to be one of the most inspired stands by a small detachment of men in the entire Civil War, Emack and less than 100 men held off Kilpatrick's entire six-regiment command for more than five hours. It was not until 3 a.m. that Kilpatrick

³⁸O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 753; McClellan, I Rode with Stuart, 353-55.

³⁹O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 753. A newspaper account, apparently written by one of Robertson's men and published twenty-six days after the fight, claimed that the men of the 4th did their duty and suffered losses at Monterey Pass. See Richmond Whig, July 30, 1863. When writing of the fight in the postwar years, a member of the 4th North Carolina similarly maintained that the Tarheels fought well and suffered losses. Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 463.

finally broke the Confederate opposition.⁴⁰

From existing evidence it is difficult to determine just how much harm was inflicted upon the train before Kilpatrick either withdrew or was driven off around dawn. The best estimate of the total number of wagons captured and or disabled was somewhere between forty and one hundred and fifty. The number of prisoners captured by Kilpatrick was about 1,360 men. Most of them were wounded and captured in their ambulances. Kilpatrick's men also carried off a significant number of contrabands, mules, and horses.⁴¹

Lee wrote of the incident: "In passing through the mountains...the great length of the train exposed them to attack by the enemy's cavalry, which captured a number of wagons and ambulances, but they succeeded in reaching Williamsport without serious loss."⁴²

Stuart echoed Lee's view in his own Gettysburg report when he stated the Federal claims of great success for Kilpatrick's attack were "far overrated."⁴³

It appears that Stuart did consider the damage done to the train significant enough to warrant an explanation in his report of why he himself had done nothing to counter Kilpatrick's move against the train. In doing so, he offered implied censure against

⁴⁰McClellan, I Rode with Stuart, 352-55; O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 753.

⁴¹McClellan, I Rode with Stuart, 353; O.R., 27, pt. 1, 970-71.

⁴²Ibid., pt. 2, 309.

⁴³Ibid., 700.

Robertson. Stuart related that after learning of Kilpatrick's advance upon the train, he "did not consider that this force could seriously annoy any other portion of the command under the order of march prescribed, particularly as it was believed that those gaps [through Jack and South Mountain] would be held by General Robertson till he could be re-enforced by the main body."⁴⁴

Stuart also considered the damage done to the train significant enough to bring up the matter at a court of inquiry's investigation at Culpeper Court House in Virginia about a month after the campaign. Although Stuart summoned Robertson to give testimony in relation to the incident, it is unlikely that he gave any such testimony. At the time he received Stuart's summons to appear before the court, Robertson had been declared medically unfit for command. A bout of bilious diarrhea incapacitated the general and caused him to seek recovery in Botetourt County. It is unlikely that he would have made the journey to Culpeper, 130 miles away, in such a poor state of health. Unfortunately no evidence exists to indicate what the court may or may not have found and how its findings reflected upon Robertson.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Ibid., 700-701.

⁴⁵Letters Received Confederate Adjutant and Inspector General's Office, Records Group 109, National Archives; Letters and Telegrams Sent by the Confederate Adjutant and Inspector General, Record Group 109, ibid., B. H. Robertson, "General Robertson in the Gettysburg Campaign: A Re-rejoinder to Colonel Mosby," The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine, XXXVII (1888), 150; O.R., XXVII, pt. 3, 1007, 1075. There was only one known instance during the retreat that involved both Robertson and the loss of a part of the Confederate trains. Stuart's request of Robertson's presence at a court called to examine the loss of wagons during the retreat concerned the July 4 encounter with Kilpatrick.

Robertson's command also saw action during the retreat at a July 5 fight near Hagerstown. The engagement opened when Kilpatrick arrived with his brigade early in the day and drove Confederate forces consisting of Robertson's two North Carolina cavalry regiments and the cavalry brigade commanded by Col. John R. Chambliss from the town. In early evening, with the conflict several hours old, Confederate infantry arrived and forced Kilpatrick to withdraw. With Confederate forces in pursuit, the Federals attacked in order to gain breathing room for their retreat. A charge of a detachment of the 5th North Carolina Cavalry thereafter repulsed Kilpatrick's men. A charge of the 11th Virginia Cavalry thereafter routed the Union rearguard and caused Kilpatrick's entire force to lose all unit cohesion. This counterattack closed the engagement. All that was left was the pursuit of Kilpatrick's men in which a detachment of Robertson's Tarheels was in the advance and heavily engaged until nightfall. The seventy-one casualties suffered in the fight by the 4th North Carolina Cavalry represented a severe loss when compared to casualties in the other cavalry regiments engaged.⁴⁶

July 9-11 saw more action between Union and Confederate forces in the vicinity of Funkstown, Maryland. Robertson and his men saw action in these clashes, but few details of their part in the fights are known. The 5th North Carolina Cavalry suffered

⁴⁶O.R., XXVII, pt, 2, 715; Richmond Whig, July 30, 1863, Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 463-64, 570. Based upon available evidence, it seems Robertson exercised little if any actual authority over any units of his "division" other than the 4th and 5th North Carolina after July 4. It should be noted however, that Robertson asserted that he continued in command of his "division" until after the close of the Gettysburg campaign in a postwar letter describing his role in the war. See B. H. Robertson to Marcus J. Wright, Apr. 8, 1881, Miscellaneous Manuscripts, Huntington Library.

fifty casualties in the Funkstown conflicts. This total represented a loss of more than twice that of any other Confederate cavalry regiment engaged.⁴⁷

On July 13, the Army of Northern Virginia began fording the Potomac River and completed the movement the next day. Considering their performance during the campaign, it was fitting that Robertson and his two North Carolina regiments served as the army's rearguard. As a result of holding this position, they were the very last Confederates to leave Northern soil.⁴⁸

Two days after retiring to Virginia, Robertson officially requested to be relieved of command of what was left of the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry regiments. He related that "casualties, detached service, sickness, &c.," had taken a devastating toll on his command and that it currently numbered fewer than 300 men. As a consequence, he felt that it would be an "injustice to myself and the service to remain longer in my present position." He asked to be either allowed to rejoin the three regiments of his former North Carolina cavalry brigade or be reassigned to another command suitably large enough for a brigadier general.⁴⁹

Stuart, most likely thrilled to learn of Robertson's request, endorsed Robertson's letter with the following remark: "Respectfully forwarded, and recommended that he be

⁴⁷Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877; B&L, III, 253; O.R., XXVII, pt. 2, 716, Richmond Whig, July 30, 1865.

⁴⁸Coltrane, Memoirs, 18; Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 535, 570-71.

⁴⁹O.R., XXV, pt. 3, 1006.

relieved from duty with this command accordingly."⁵⁰

Less than three weeks after the request Robertson fell ill with bilious diarrhea. Under his surgeon's orders, Robertson requested and received leave to obtain the medical attention and environment he needed for recovery.⁵¹

Lee granted Robertson's request to be relieved of command of what remained of the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry regiments while Robertson was still ill. On August 5, Lee informed authorities that Robertson had been relieved from command of his two regiments. He cited both Robertson's request for a larger command and his illness as reasons for the move. Lee also placed on record his view of how Robertson could best serve the Confederate cause in the future. "I think it very important to establish a camp at some point in the rear where our cavalry can be recruited, and I know of no one so well qualified for the post as Brigadier-General Robertson."⁵² Robertson was never again to serve in Lee's army or for that matter in his native state of Virginia.

The victory of Robertson's division at Fairfield aside, his performance during the second half of Lee's 1863 summer campaign can only be termed miserable. Robertson's failure to post a large enough picket force to ensure the safety of his assigned train on

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Letters Received Confederate Adjutant and Inspector General's Office, Record Group 109, National Archives; B. H. Robertson, "General Robertson in the Gettysburg Campaign: A Re-rejoinder to Colonel Mosby," The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine, XXXVII (1888), 150; O.R., XXVII, pt. 3, 1007, 1075.

⁵²Ibid., 1006.

the night of July 4 was a minor sin when compared to his failure to follow his orders from Stuart of June 24 and Lee's directive of June 28 which called on him to immediately come north and join the army. These failures proved the truth of Stuart's August 9, 1862, prophecy that Robertson's continuing as a cavalry commander "might entail disaster."

CHAPTER FIVE

AFTER GETTYSBURG

After Robertson was relieved of command of the 4th and 5th North Carolina Cavalry regiments, the two regiments were permanently assigned to another brigadier. Consequently, when Robertson informed Confederate authorities on September 8, that he had regained his health and was eager to return to active duty, he did so as a commander without a command. In his letter he expressed his preference for being assigned to command of a Virginia brigade, but he also mentioned his interest in not yet brigaded cavalry regiments in Tennessee, South Carolina, and Georgia.

On September 21, he was ordered to report to Lt. Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard, then commander of the Department of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, in Charleston, South Carolina, "for assignment to temporary duty." Nine days earlier Confederate Secretary of War James A. Seddon had informed Beauregard: "Brig. Genl. B. H. Robertson who has been relieved at his own request from the command of a Brigade in Genl. Lee's Army has desired permission to report to you to assign him to some appropriate command. I am not aware that any such exists in your department and in according the permission I would not have you to understand that it is expected by the Department that you will find for him a command [word illegible] to his rank. Please leave to your own discretion his retention and the bestowal of fitting employment. As you doubtless know he is an officer of the old army and has the repute of being an able

organizer of Cavalry forces."¹

On October 15, 1863, Beauregard assigned Robertson command of the 2nd Military District of his department. This "temporary" appointment became permanent. As of January 31, 1864, those troops who fell under Robertson's jurisdiction in the district included a brigade composed of the 5th Georgia Cavalry, three companies of the 46th Virginia Infantry, one company of the 5th South Carolina Cavalry, seven companies of the 6th South Carolina Cavalry, Capt. William E. Earle's South Carolina Light Battery, Capt. J. Raven Mathewes' South Carolina Artillery, Capt. F. L. Villepigue's Florida Light Battery, and Capt. George H. Walter's Washington South Carolina Artillery.

As of April 30, the character of Robertson's brigade had changed drastically. He had been stripped of his cavalry and infantry and had been left commander of coastal artillery. Furthermore, the place of Villepigue's Florida Light Battery in his brigade had been taken by a company of the South Carolina Siege Train.

On May 5, 1864, Robertson assumed the added responsibilities of command of the 6th Military district of the department. As of January 31, 1864, those troops assigned to the 6th Military District included the 26th Virginia Infantry, the 59th Virginia Infantry, seven companies of the 46th Virginia Infantry, one company from the 3rd South Carolina Cavalry, two companies each of the 5th and 6th South Carolina Cavalry, the

¹War Dept., "Compiled Service Records," Reel 214, National Archives; James A. Seddon to G. T. Beauregard, Sept. 12, 1863, Letters Sent by the Confederate Secretary of War, 1861-1865, Record Group 109, Ibid.

4th Virginia Heavy Artillery, the Marion South Carolina Light Artillery, two companies of the Palmetto South Carolina Artillery Battalion, one company of the 2nd South Carolina Artillery, and the Stono South Carolina Scouts.

With joint command of the 2nd and 6th Military Districts, it is likely that Robertson's command in terms of manpower was enlarged five times over. It was as large as any Robertson would have during the war.

In July, Robertson saw his first combat worthy of note in South Carolina. On the 7th, as part of an effort toward the eventual capture of Charleston, a Federal force of about 5,000 men under the command of Brig. Gen. John P. Hatch occupied John's Island. That day Robertson was ordered to assume command of all Confederate forces in the area and drive Union forces from the position they had occupied.

At daybreak on the 9th, Robertson, as the senior Confederate officer on the field that day, ordered his force of about 1,700 men forward in an attack on Hatch. Before the morning concluded, the Confederates had inflicted fairly heavy losses on the Federals and had driven the Union men from their breastworks. After suffering 128 casualties, Robertson decided not to attack this second Union position for fear of heavier losses. That night a Federal withdrawal made further combat to clear the island of Union forces unnecessary. Robertson received official commendation for his conduct on the day from his immediate superior, Maj. Gen. Samuel Jones.

By July 31, Robertson's brigade had been greatly reduced. It then consisted of the 2nd South Carolina Cavalry, the Stono South Carolina Scouts, the Marion South Carolina Artillery, the Washington South Carolina Light Artillery, three companies of

the Palmetto South Carolina Battalion Light Artillery, and one company of the South Carolina Siege Train.

By October 31, Robertson's command had been renamed the Fourth Sub-District of the Department of South Carolina. This brought yet another change in the character of his brigade. It then included nine companies of the 2nd South Carolina Cavalry, the Marion South Carolina Artillery, Mathewes' South Carolina battery, the Washington South Carolina Artillery, three companies of the Palmetto South Carolina Battalion Light Artillery, one company of the 2nd South Carolina Artillery, and one company of the South Carolina Siege Train.

A month later, Robertson's brigade underwent more personnel changes. Mathewes' South Carolina Heavy Artillery and two companies of the 2nd South Carolina Artillery were transferred back into Robertson's brigade. At the same time, the 2nd South Carolina Cavalry was transferred elsewhere and one company of the 3rd South Carolina Cavalry was assigned to Robertson's command.

On November 30, Robertson again saw significant action in an engagement at Honey Hill. While serving as volunteer chief of staff to Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler, he was one of 1,400 Confederates who thwarted an attempt by 5,000 Federals under Hatch to cut the Charleston and Savannah Railroad.

While involved in a charge against Union forces, Robertson had one of his elbows severely shattered. Because postwar photographs show both limbs in what appears to be healthy condition, it is likely that the injury resulted from a clubbed musket, sword, saber or a fall. The arm would have been amputated had the wound been caused by shot

or shell. Although the injury was described as one which would cause him to "be long disabled" it appears that Robertson felt that duty required him to immediately return to the field after receiving proper medical attention.²

In his official report of the action, Wheeler thanked Robertson for his services. Furthermore, in official correspondence regarding the engagement, he dubbed him "the gallant General Robertson."³

Just ten days after receiving his wound at Honey Hill, Robertson again saw combat. Union forces made another attempt to cut the Charleston and Savannah Railroad. A force of about 1,200 men supported by artillery met Robertson who led six infantry regiments and a battery of his own. In a fight that lasted over eight hours, Robertson defended the railroad against numerous assaults and finished the day with a counterattack of his own. Jones again officially commended Robertson's conduct on the day.

As of January 20, 1865, Robertson led a brigade in the division of Maj. Gen. Ambrose R. Wright. His command included the 2nd, 3rd and 4th South Carolina Militia, the Beaufort Artillery, the Chesnut Light Artillery, the German Artillery, Mathewes' Battery, the Stono South Carolina Scouts, the Wagner Artillery, the Washington Artillery, and an independent cavalry company of South Carolina Reserves.

When Confederate forces evacuated Charleston on February 17, Robertson was among the cavalry commanders who covered the movement. After fulfilling this duty

²O.R., XLIV, 911.

³Ibid., 910.

Robertson reported to Gen. Joseph E. Johnston at Smithfield, North Carolina, and was thereafter ordered back to South Carolina. He was still in South Carolina when Johnston surrendered his army on April 26 to Union Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman. Although he and his men were included among those surrendered by Johnston, it was not until May 19 that Robertson actually surrendered at Augusta, Georgia.

When the war finally ended for Robertson he had reason to look back on his final two years of service in the Confederate army with pride. He had received no censure of his conduct from a superior and had been commended on several occasions. Robertson had learned from his failures during the first two years of the war and developed into a competent general. In a conflict that featured an enormous number of incompetent commanders, this was an achievement not to be sneered at.

Yet in spite of his triumphs in South Carolina, Robertson must be viewed as an unsuccessful Civil War commander. The consequences of his failures in the Gettysburg campaign were simply far too profound for anything he could have accomplished in the last two years of the war to have made amends for them.

As of mid-September, Robertson was residing in Richmond. On the 15th, he asked President Andrew Johnson to be relieved of those restrictions of his parole that prevented extensive traveling. Robertson lamented: "I am thirty-eight years old and without any occupation whatsoever."⁴

⁴B. H. Robertson to Andrew Johnson. Sept. 15, 1865, Amnesty Papers, Record Group 94, National Archives.

Sometime thereafter, he moved to Chicago and began selling insurance. On September 23, 1869, his wife died. She was buried in the Robertson family cemetery plot at "The Oaks." Robertson never remarried.

By 1872 he had moved to Memphis, where he continued to sell insurance. For a time his office was across the street from one where Jefferson Davis and Wade Hampton also sold insurance.

A newspaper interview of Robertson published in a city paper on December 26, 1877, contained this introduction: "No man who has ever lived in Memphis is better known than General Robertson and few have more friends. A gallant soldier, he is equally a gallant gentlemen, as at home in the parlor as at the head of his company, brigade, or division. Anything in reference to him will, for these reasons, have interest for the readers of the Appeal." The article also described Robertson as being "highly respected and esteemed by the people of the city."⁵

By 1881, Robertson had moved to Washington D. C. A yellow fever epidemic that swept Memphis in 1878-1879 might have been responsible for his leaving a locale that seemed to have suited him so perfectly.

In D. C., Robertson sold real estate in addition to insurance. It was in "the district" that he would live out the rest of his life.

At five a.m., on Saturday, November 12, 1910, at his home at 1635 L Street Northwest, Robertson died. He was then eighty-three. After a funeral service at St.

⁵Memphis Weekly Appeal, Dec. 26, 1877.

John's Episcopal Church in Washington, he was buried next to his wife at "The Oaks." Marking his grave is a four-foot marble shaft with the unpretentious inscription: "Beverly Holcombe Robertson, Born June 5, 1827, Died November 12, 1910."⁶

⁶Beverly Holcombe Robertson File, Ezra J. Warner Collection, Chicago Historical Society.

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VITA

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**CONFEDERATE BRIG. GEN. B. H. ROBERTSON AND
THE 1863 GETTYSBURG CAMPAIGN**

by

Patrick A. Bowmaster

(ABSTRACT)

In the spring of 1863, B. H. Robertson volunteered to accompany a two regiment detachment of his brigade that was being sent to reinforce Gen. Robert E. Lee's army for the upcoming summer campaign. During the June 9, 1863 battle of Brandy Station, his failure to act during what was potentially the turning point of the battle almost led to the destruction of the entire cavalry corps of the Army of Northern Virginia. After learning that a Union cavalry division had skirted his right and was heading directly for the Confederate rear and Fleetwood Heights (the key to the entire position), Robertson simply held his ground and requested further orders. If this Union column had been able to seize Fleetwood Heights, Federal artillery placed on the heights would have been able to wreak havoc on Confederate forces.

Furthermore, the heights could have been used as a base from which to launch a concentrated attack on Confederate forces fighting another Union force to the north. Such an attack might easily have crushed the cavalry corps of the Army of Northern Virginia in a pincer-like movement.

During the June 19 engagement at Middleburg and the June 21 battle of Upperville, Robertson's men broke under inexcusable circumstances. This behavior

reflected poorly upon the commander. On both occasions, the failure of Robertson's men to hold in the face of Union attacks jeopardized Stuart's entire position. Only timely withdrawals saved Confederate forces from disaster.

On June 24, 1863, Robertson's command was ordered to observe and report on Federal forces in his front in Virginia. After these Federals left his front, he was to bring his command north and join Lee's army to provide intelligence for Lee in the middle and late phases of the campaign. Between June 25 and June 27, Robertson's command failed to report the Federal movement from Virginia into Maryland. When he did finally begin the journey north on June 29, he set a pace which was so slow that it more closely resembled an infantry command than a cavalry command.

Robertson's failure to observe the Federal movement from Virginia into Maryland and his subsequent failure to bring his command north to join Lee's army were the prime elements of the Confederate failure of intelligence during the campaign. This failure of intelligence caused Lee to stumble blindly into an unwanted collision with Federal forces at Gettysburg. The loss of the battle cost Lee the campaign and consequently the entire war.