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The United State Cavalry Association
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preserve the history, traditions, uniforms, and
equipment of the United States Cavalry units,
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General Joseph Wheeler is best known for his battlefield exploits as a Confederate cavalryman during the Civil War. His prowess during the Civil War is only a piece of the legacy he left on the pages of American history. His accomplishments after the Civil War as a congressman and regular Army soldier served as a symbol of unity during the reconstruction era.

Born Sept. 10, 1836, in Augusta, Ga., Wheeler spent most of his youth in Connecticut living with relatives after his mother died and his father encountered financial difficulties. Wheeler graduated from West Point in 1859, ranked 19th in a class of 22. He fought as a lieutenant in the Southwest, where he earned the nickname “Fightin’ Joe.” However, he chose to resign his commission in 1861 to become a member of the Confederate forces.

At the age of 26, he was commanding all the cavalry in the Army of Tennessee. He was promoted quickly through Confederate ranks, and achieved the rank of major general on Jan. 20, 1863. Constantly engaged in battle, he was wounded three times, saw 36 staff officers die next to him, and had 16 horses shot from under him. Wheeler was captured in May 1865 in Georgia, and released the following June. Wheeler was only 30 years old when the Civil War ended, and in 1881, he was
elected to Congress, serving eight terms. It was here, in Congress, that Wheeler’s path to battle began again. In the late 1800s, a debate raged in American political and social circles about possible intervention in Cuba. Since the 1860s, unrest in the Spanish colony of Cuba had grown. Spain sought to control rebels in Cuba by concentrating them into guarded areas, but General Valeriano Weyler’s brutality made American newspaper headlines and stirred discussion regarding possible mistreatment of American citizens in Cuba, damage to American business interests in Cuba and constant portrayal of inhumanities carried out by the Spanish military on the Cubans. At this point in time, Wheeler was a member of the House Committee of Ways and Means, and proposed monetary support for Americans in Cuba and diplomatic recognition of the rebels. Wheeler became a strong advocate of intervention in Cuba. During a speech in May 1897 on the House floor, Wheeler said: “I for one proclaim on this floor that war, cruel, brutal, murderous war, does exist in that gem of the ocean – that beautiful Queen of the Antilles – and I assert that it is our duty as the Representatives of the greatest people on earth to so declare in the highest councils that exist under the canopy of heaven.”

When America’s part in the Cuban conflict began in 1898, Wheeler offered his services as a Soldier. Wheeler had filed an application with the War Department the same day he introduced a resolution for intervention in Congress. After a discussion with President McKinley, Wheeler was
assured of a commission as a Major General, and so it came to be that at 60 years of age, the experienced veteran once again donned a uniform.

Wheeler fought in Cuba between May and August of 1898 and then in the Philippines for seven more months into 1899. In Cuba, Wheeler commanded all the cavalry attached to the V Corps and on June 24, 1898, he and his troops won the first major clash of the war at Las Guasimas, by ordering the troopers of Leonard Wood and Theodore Roosevelt into dismounted action and driving the Spanish off in confusion. It is during this engagement that Wheeler is credited with yelling out, “We’ve got the damn Yankees on the run!”

Wheeler would later fight in the Battle of San Juan Hill and in the final phases of the Santiago campaign. In the Philippines, he commanded a brigade, but saw no true battle action.

He retired as a brigadier general of the regular Army on September 10, 1900 and wrote history books until his death on January 25, 1906 in Brooklyn, New York. Wheeler is one of the few former Confederates to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Sources
IT IS contended by many that Comanche, the sole survivor of all the forces in Custer's last stand at the Battle of Little Big Horn, June 25, 1876, is the most famous horse in our military history. He was the mount of Captain Miles W. Keogh who was killed with Custer. It has been told that he was captured from the Comanche Indians. However, the preponderance of evidence shows that he was purchased at the age of five by the Army Supply Depot at St. Louis, in 1867, and joined the 7th cavalry at Ellis, Kansas, the same year.

Comanche was a gelding 15.5 hands high, had a 73-inch girth, and weighed 940 pounds. In color he was a yellowish bay, sometimes called a claybank, with a dark stripe down his back. The official descriptive list carried him as a buckskin. He was very well suited to the hardships of campaigning against the Indians, being substantial and hardy, a good walker, a good feeder, and capable of living off the plains when grain was not available.

Interest attaches to the manner in which Captain Keogh came to ride the horse and the incident which led to his being name Comanche. In 1867 Captain Keogh was a member of a scouting force which engaged in a brief skirmish. Keogh's horse was killed under him. Lieutenant Brewster, in command of Troop I, dismounted one of his men. The horse turned over to Captain Keogh was Comanche, who was at the time without a name.

Some days later Captain Keogh was fired upon by Comanche Indians hiding in the brush. His new mount received a long, raking, flesh wound in the rump, caused by either a bullet or an arrow. On account of the animal's splendid behavior under fire after being wounded by the Comanche's, Captain Keogh at once named him Comanche.

There appear to have been no unusual adventures in the life of Comanche from the day he received his name until the fateful day in June, 1876.

When he started out from Fort Abraham Lincoln (on the Missouri River opposite Bismark, Dakota Territory), against the Sioux and their allies in 1876, Comanche was already a veteran with a battle scar on his rump. Nothing definite has been learned about the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Deductions as to what actually happened have been reached by the positions of the dead. Comanche's wounds were principally on one side, showing a possibility that Captain Keogh had fired in a standing position from the side of the animal, Comanche protecting his master at any cost.

The Indians took Comanche's saddle and bridle but considered him too badly wounded to be of any service. Of his seven wounds, three were severe, including one passing through the neck, near the left shoulder, one in the front part of the neck, and another in the flank. When he was found after the battle it was at first thought advisable to destroy him, but friends of Captain Keogh recognized the animal and decided to make an attempt to save him. General Hugh L. Scott (then lieutenant just out of West Point), who joined Troop I the day after the battle, nursed him back to health with the assistance of Blacksmith Korn.

In recognition of Comanche's service, Colonel D. Sturgis, Commanding the 7th Cavalry at Fort Abraham Lincoln, issued his famous General Orders No. 7, on April 10, 1878, directing that "a special and comfortable stall" be fitted for Comanche, that he "not be ridden by any person whatsoever under any circumstances" and that he not be "put to any kind of work," "to the end that his life may be prolonged to the utmost limit." The order further directed that on all occasions of mounted regimental ceremonies Comanche be saddled, bridled, draped in mourning and, led by a mounted trooper of Troop I, be paraded with the regiment.

In 1879, Comanche moved with the 7th Cavalry to the Dakota Black Hills, and in 1888 accompanied the regiment to Fort Riley, Kansas, where he died November 7, 1891. Since the 7th Cavalry had no means of caring for the remains they were presented to Professor Lewis L. Dyche, expert taxidermist, and they may now be seen in the life-like shape at the Dyche Museum, University of Kansas, at Lawrence, a reminder of "the desperate struggle against overwhelming numbers of the hopeless conflict and of the heroic manner in which all went down on that fatal day."
Wesley Merritt, one of eleven children of an impecunious attorney, was born in New York City on June 16, 1834. (411) The family moved to a farm in St. Clair County, Illinois, when he was seven, and his father subsequently was a farmer, newspaper editor, and member of legislature. Wesley pointed toward a legal career, but in 1855 accepted an appointment to West Point. He graduated in the class of 1860, ranking twenty-second out of forty-one members in what was the most distinguished of classes to pass into the regular service immediately before succession. (412) After some routine frontier service in Utah as a lieutenant of dragoons, Merritt was recalled to Washington, and in February, 1862, became aide-de-camp first to General Philip Cooke, who was then commanding the cavalry of the Army of the Potomac, and later to his successor, General George Stoneman. His first important service was as commander of the reserve cavalry brigade during Stoneman's abortive raid in the Chancellorsville campaign, although he ranked as only a captain of the 2nd (Regular) Cavalry. On June 29, 1863, he was promoted brigadier general of volunteers and led his brigade, mostly Regulars, in John Buford's division during the Gettysburg campaign. From then until the end of the war General Merritt was with the Army of the Potomac, commanding a brigade and then a division in the campaigns which followed Gettysburg. He was brevetted repeatedly in both the regular volunteer services, and as of April 1, 1865, was made a full rank major general of volunteers. During the Appomattox campaign Merritt was second in command to Philip Sheridan and acted as one of the three Federal commissioners to receive the Confederates' formal capitulation. After the war he became lieutenant colonel of the 9th Cavalry, colonel of the 5th Cavalry in 1876, brigadier general, U.S. Army, in 1887 and in 1895 major general. During these thirty years he discharged much duty on the Indian frontier, was superintendent at West Point, and commanded various military departments. At the outbreak of the war with Spain, he was in command of the Department of the East, with headquarters at Governors Island, New York. Although now past his sixty-fourth birthday (he was carried on the rolls as sixty-two), he was given command of the first Philippine expedition. Upon his arrival there he assumed command of the United States forces investing Manila, and in the weeks that followed, he performed, in cooperation with Admiral George Dewey, the unprecedented feat of forcing the surrender of the defending Spaniards, while at the same time preventing the entrance of the Philippine insurgents under Emilio Aguinaldo, who were also besieging the city. With the islands under American control, General Merritt was ordered to Paris to confer with the peace commission there. After his return to the states, he reassumed command of the Department of the east and was retired by operation of law on what was supposedly his sixty-fourth birthday, June 16, 1900. During his last years General Merritt divided his time between his residences in Washington and Natural Bridge, Virginia, where he died, December 3, 1910. His remains were taken to West Point for burial.

(411) Most sources reflect that Merritt was born in 1836, the birth year of his younger brother Edward, whose appointment to West Point was declined by Edward and accepted by Wesley. Once recorded in the army records, such an error becomes immutable.

(412) Six became general officers and ten gave up their lives for either the Union or the Confederacy. Of the remaining twenty-six, only one failed to achieve substantial recognition during the war.
Wade Hampton was born in Charleston, South Carolina, March 28, 1818, and was graduated from South Carolina College in 1836. He later served in both houses of the South Carolina legislature (1852-61). In 1861 he was reputed to be the largest landowner in the South. Organizing the Hampton Legion, of which he became colonel, and equipping it at his own expense, he took it to Virginia on time to participate in the battle of First Manassas, where he was wounded. He commanded an infantry brigade in the Peninsular campaign, and was appointed brigadier general on May 23, 1862. In July he assumed command of a brigade of J.E.B. Stuart’s Cavalry Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia and participated in most of Stuart’s operations from 1862 to 1864. He was again severely wounded at Gettysburg, and was promoted major general to rank from August 3, 1863. After the death of Stuart at Yellow Tavern, Hampton succeeded to command of the Corps. Though his resources were steadily diminishing, he performed keeping Federal cavalry around Richmond and Petersburg at bay until winter. In January 1865 he was ordered, with part of his force, to J.E. Johnston in the Carolinas, where he remained until the surrender to Sherman. Hampton was promoted to lieutenant general on February 15, 1865 to rank from February 14. After the war he was instrumental in reclaiming his state from the Reconstruction regime. He was elected governor in 1876 over the carpetbagger D.H. Chamberlain, then in office. He was re-elected in 1878, and served as United States Senator from 1879 to 1891, in which year he finally yielded his domination of South Carolina politics to “Pitchfork Ben” Tillman. Subsequently he was for five years commissioner of Pacific Railways (1893-1899). He died at Columbia, South Carolina, April 11, 1902, and is buried there. General Hampton was one of the three civilians without formal military training to attain the rank of lieutenant general in Confederate service; the other two were Richard Taylor and Bedford Forrest.
Lunch at Cu Chi
By
Trooper Niven Baird

In our last thrilling adventure with the intrepid Senior Advisor (SA) to the South Vietnamese 1st Armored Cavalry Squadron, we read of his “daring exploits” on the Saigon River, and his gastronomic education concerning Asian curry (June 2013 U.S. Cavalry Association Journal).

Now, a couple months later, late summer 1964, we find him and the squadron at Trung Lap, the Ranger Training Center about 20 kilometers northwest of Saigon, where the cavalry (M-113 armored personnel carriers) troops have been conducting forays into the lower part of the infamous Iron Triangle, known as the Ho Bo Woods. The Vietnamese infantry division, with responsibility for the Ho Bo refuse to conduct operations in that area. It seems almost as if the Viet Cong know exactly what the Army of Vietnam (ARVN) infantry units are planning to do, and as losses mount, they cease to venture into the area.

Trung Lap lays along National Highway 1, which goes northwest from Saigon to Tay Ninh Province and then westward into Cambodia. To the west of Highway 1 is Cu Chi District and the Army of Vietnam’s 25th Infantry Division. Since the cavalry troops frequently operate in the district, liaison with the Vietnamese district headquarters is needed to prevent accidental contacts between the armed Regional Forces (wearing the black pajamas usually attributed to the Viet Cong), and the M-113 troops operating in the rice fields east of the Cambodian border.

The Advisory Headquarters for the 25th (ARVN) Infantry Division is just outside the village of Cu Chi, with the G-3 operations facility located immediately adjacent to a small pond. The district headquarters, commanded by an ARVN captain, is nearby.

On this day, our SA major has decided to travel to the district headquarters, a distance of approximately 10 kilometers, to discuss with the district chief a future operation involving one of the cavalry troops and some of the chief’s regional forces. Following the planning session (no one could dream that every word probably is being monitored by the enemy, and for further information on this topic, read “The Tunnels of Cu Chi,” by Tom Mangold and John Penycote), the Chief has invited the SA to remain for lunch, an offer immediately accepted. It is a light lunch, and includes a green salad. American advisors are cautioned against eating uncooked vegetables, but it would be a gross insult if the SA refuses to eat the food. The salad, consisting largely of beautiful leafy lettuce, is excellent! Showing his appreciation, the SA asks the Chief where he was able to find such wonderful lettuce, and is rewarded by a beaming smile and the promise that he, the Chief, would show Thieu Ta (the major) where he was able to find the lovely vegetable.

Following lunch, they saddle-up in the Chief’s 1/4 ton vehicle and drive rapidly to the advisory compound, stopping near the small pond. Extending from the advisory G-3 operations shack out over the pond is a four-foot wide catwalk, terminating in a small enclosure, the door to which is adorned by a crescent moon. Very pleased with himself, the District Chief excitedly points out to the major the lettuce growing along the edge of the pond, and suggests that the major should pick all he wished. Our brave officer assures the Chief that the lunch had been perfect and that he could not possibly partake further. Thus continues the gastronomic education of the squadron senior advisor!

And as one of the Vietnamese troop commanders would frequently say with an ironic smile if things were not going quite as planned, C’est la guerre en la Indochin!
Editor's note: This is the third and final installment in the Wounded Knee Series.

Looking back from this distance in time, it only seems curious that so little apprehension of danger was felt by the troops. Most of Whitside's officers spend the evening of December 28 in a Sibley tent, listening to Lt. Garlington's narrative of the Arctic relief expedition of which he had been a member. Had there been any thought of danger, each would have been with his men.

Assistant Surgeon, Charles B. Ewing, from Pine Ridge Agency, was with the group near Col. Forsythe, and had got in his wagon to return when the first shot was fired. The hospital steward and the regimental sergeant major, certain to be men of intelligence and common sense, had wandered into the camp during the search and were both killed.

The troops were at a strength of about 50 men. For the formation the cooks and a few others would normally have been left in camp, but it would seem that some, at least, of the troop commanders did not consider it necessary to turn out all available men. Capt. Jackson had 34 and Capt. Godfrey 14 men in their fight with the Brule; each troop had had one casualty and Godfrey had detached Lt. Tompkins with 12 men. So, the actual numbers of men present in ranks were 35 and 27. Definite figures cannot be had, but apparently A and I, the two guard troops were the only ones in near full strength.

Father Craft, with ten years' experience among these Indians and well acquainted with this particular band, did not believe a break would come until it actually did.

The formation was one well designed to impress the Indians, but not at all suited for fighting them--would an old and experienced soldier like Forsythe have ordered it, had he even dreamed of armed resistance?

Not since the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876 had anything comparable happened. Then, most of the 7th Cavalry was killed, including its colonel; at Wounded Knee most of a band of Indians was killed, including its chief--and by the 7th Cavalry.

No newspapermen witnessed the fight, but they soon began arriving, and photographers as well. In their accounts, the drama of the affair overshadowed the cold and simple facts that made up the true story. Hastily collected stories and “color” could not present a true picture. The writers could not be blamed; any reporter who sat down to analyze and weigh the “evidence” he collected would have been hopelessly late in getting the “story” to his paper and soon be seeking a job elsewhere.

It is highly improbable that any of these young men were motivated by a desire to do an injury to the Army in general or the troops in this fight in particular, but the idea did creep into the press that the 7th Cavalry had at last got its revenge for the “Custer Massacre” of fourteen years before. Many writers toyed with this idea in the years following, and many military men made ignorant denials and defended the honor of the Army in the public press. Sometimes official records were drawn upon, but more often, only personal recollections.

Four days after the fight at Wounded Knee, President Harrison, shocked by the reports, directed “immediate inquiry into the killing of women and children.” A Board of Investigators began its work on January 7, on the spot. Its records are on file in the War Department and it is from them that this article is written.

No tale compiled in the excitement of the days following the fight could possibly be as accurate as one compiled from the sworn evidence of eye-witnesses, obtained on the spot by a tribunal following the cool and impartial procedure prescribed by law and regulation.
Wounded Knee and controversies arising therefrom long ago lost all news value, but there was something of a flurry in 1931 when a book entitled, *Massacre*, by Robert Gessner, appeared. It is a general attack on the Government’s policies toward the Indians throughout our history. The part relating to Wounded Knee is a sob story containing more misinformation, misrepresentation, ignorance, and falsehood, than probably any story ever written. In proof of this, let us analyze a bit:

To begin with, he “drove very hard” and arrived at the scene “very tired.” One gets the idea he is talking of December, 1890, and the idea persists until far on in the narrative: “As I sat in the Wounded Knee store, an old soldier came in who was present…During the past forty years he had never returned to the scene, but he had come on that day.” So the reader at last learns that his visit was forty years after the battle. He gives the man’s name as D.E. Babb – but the rolls of the troops at Wounded Knee, on file in the War Department, bear no such name.

He “sat by the fire and recalled the events of that day.” But he knew the average reader is not critical, so he did not trouble to look up a map, inform himself as to the military dispositions prior to the battle, or the organization and equipment of the troops.

Big Foot led his band down through the Bad Lands, with the four battalions of the 7th Cavalry in “full pursuit.” No cavalry regiment had four battalions; two of the 7th were at Pine Ridge Agency from November 27 until about December 26, when one of them was sent to Wounded Knee; Big Foot was somewhere far to the east of the Bad Lands and it was a mission of the military to prevent his reaching them.

But he gets a bit mixed and has the four battalions of the 7th in camp at Wounded Knee. And speaking of the Indians, “…they managed to worm themselves through a pass, leaving the desolate, barren Bad Lands, and came to camp at Wounded Knee.”

Again he gets mixed up, as witness, “In the meantime General Forsythe and Major White (sic), with all of the battalions of the 7th Cavalry surrounded Big Foot’s camp. …the old chief willingly surrendered. He was not seeking a battle; he was only trying to find some forgotten corner of the earth where his band might worship unmolested.”

Big Foot surrendered to Whitside nine miles northeast of Wounded Knee and was taken there by him.

“The troops got drunk at Christmas and were still in that condition December 29.” That would have required a lot of whiskey, and it was many miles to any source of supply! And it hardly seems consistent with the “full pursuit” through the Bad Lands that terminated with the “surrounding” of Big Foot’s camp on December 28.

“On the morning of the 19th, a dozen drunken soldiers dragged Big Foot from his tent and killed him.” This is perhaps the most atrocious of the many lies in the narrative. The proof is absolute as to the events preceding the fighting, and described herein. He gives a thrilling picture of the fight, the troops firing indiscriminately at Indians of any age or sex: “Gatling guns poured in their fire,” etc.

There were no Gatling guns with the troops. General Miles had declined the offer of some in a telegram to the War Department on November 23, in which he stated Gatlings were useless in fighting Indians.

“Two officers were wounded, twenty-five privates were killed and thirty-three wounded.” Actually, one officer and twenty-six enlisted men and one Indian scout were killed, four officers and thirty enlisted men wounded.

But inaccuracy is nothing to Gessner. After giving the officer casualties as two wounded, he later describes Capt. Wallace as being dead “with a tomahawk sprouting from his forehead.” He also assigns him to the 9th Cavalry – no mistake in the figure, he
spells it out, “ninth.”

Actually, Wallace was shot twice and had a bruise on the head, which might have been inflicted by a stone war club that lay near.

“Only one soldier was killed at the hands of an Indian.”

But why continue? Not a statement of Gessner’s that cannot be refuted by sworn testimony given forty years before Massacre was written. The pity is that such a foul libel on the Army of our country should be permitted in circulation.

Seven years after the appearance of Massacre, Wounded Knee again made the front pages. Two Indians, alleged survivors of that battle, appeared before a Committee of the Congress and under the guidance of a Washington lawyer, told their stories. This was in support of a bill to reimburse the survivors and the descendants of Indians in that fight, in the sum of $1,000 each, the estimated total being $280,000.

The Indians at Wounded Knee brought on their own destruction as surely as any people ever did. Their attack on the troops was as treacherous as any in the history of Indian warfare, and that they were under a strange religious hallucination is only an explanation, not an excuse. They do not come into court with clean hands, though they may believe their recollections of what happened forty-seven years ago are accurate.

One officer and twenty-six enlisted men and one Indian scout died on the field doing their duty. Three more enlisted men died the next day. Four officers and thirty enlisted men were wounded on the field. Has anyone thought of compensation for twenty-nine bereaved white families and an Ogallala one? Or for the families of the wounded soldiers? Or for those killed and wounded the next day on White Clay Creek, the direct aftermath of Wounded Knee? Or for the descendants of all these and the four hundred-odd soldiers and the hundred loyal Indians who risked their lives on that field?

Not that anyone has heard!
Editor’s note: This is the third installment of the “Little Phil” series.

He started early on the morning of May 6, in two columns, just at the flank of Longstreet, toward Todd’s Tavern, at which point the columns were to pivot north. Ambling easily along, the rebel horsemen reached the pivot points without difficulty, but there found log breastworks from which they were received with so lusty a fire of musketry that they reported the presence of Union infantry. Stuart weighted his column heads and tried to drive through. He was violently repulsed while the ground shook with Hancock’s struggle farther north, could not win an inch, and in the evening reported that Grant must have extended his infantry lines down that far.

But it was not Grant, it was Sheridan. Though the fact has been lost to sight in the flare of the giant duel of the infantry, he would not have been there at all had Meade’s orders been carried out as that general wrote them. After crossing the Rapidan, the two cavalry divisions under Sheridan in person had been shunted aside to the left rear of the Army, behind Hancock, and linking up with the third, Torbert’s division, which was seeing the trains through at United States Ford and Fredericksburg. This was a perfectly normal cavalry arrangement for the Army of the Potomac; with the exception that the men were somewhat more concentrated than under earlier leaders, and apparently it was the disposition Lee counted on in making his grand attack.

But the night orders Sheridan received on May 5 were to “protect the trains” without specification of method, and the new general took the bit in his teeth. Instead of drawing all his divisions back toward Fredericksburg, he shoved everything up; even bringing two brigades of Torbert’s command ten miles forward from Fredericksburg to Todd’s Tavern. One of the men in that division has left record of the astonishment that ran through the ranks that night when the order came down, “Unsaddle and go to camp,” with an order to build breastworks immediately following. It was never so done in Israel before. Always in the presence of the enemy, the Union horse had kept their mounts packed and saddled, sleeping with bridles over their arms, ready for a quick getaway. This time they had reached position, the horses were out of it and they were there to fight.

They did fight; and the report of how and where they fought on the morning of the 6th reached Meade simultaneously with the news of Longstreet’s blow at Hancock. Remembering other Lee offensives – Chancellorsville, the Seven Days – Meade could visualize the next step as a Confederate cavalry movement around his rear, between the army and its trains at the Rappahannock crossings. He ordered Sheridan to “draw in and protect the trains” and that night the Union cavalry were going back.

Stuart’s men followed them in, and on the morning of the 7th, taking this retrograde as part of a general retreat, injudiciously tried a vigorous pursuit of Custer’s brigade, the one nearest Hancock. Custer turned on them, counterattacking savagely. Sheridan learned of this almost immediately. At the same time he heard that more rebel cavalry formations had been located farther east and got some information from prisoners. The aggregated information brought into focus in his mind a full picture of Stuart’s movement – a cavalry advance across a front that grew ever wider as the Confederate formations moved down the radii of a fan.

Once again he ran away with his orders, spun the division of Gregg and
Wilson sharp round in their tracks, and attacked with all his strength. His closer concentration gave him numerical superiority at all contact points, and the repeating carbines in Wilson’s division turned this into something like a two-to-one advantage of fire-power. Beside, he was counting on battle and ready for it, his men were nearly all dismounted, operating as infantry against Confederates on tall, vulnerable horses. The Union troopers hustled Stuart’s men back along every road, carried Todd’s Tavern, and beyond it, coming on several lines of field fortifications constructed by the rebels during their repulse the day before, stormed them one after another (Map 2). By twilight of the 7th, Stuart was knocked out for a good twenty-four hours, Longstreet’s right was in air and Sheridan on its rear at the head of ten thousand men.

Meade and Grant missed a chance, here, or rather, never realized they had one. Both were still permeated with the view of cavalry as something fluid, a force which slept with bridles over their arms. Even the fact that Sheridan’s men had fought on foot seems at this time to have made no impression. The special geographical conditions of the Wilderness made dismounted action almost a necessity; it was impossible for an observer to discover that the step had been taken from choice.

Moreover, on the 7th, the move to Spottsylvania toward Lee’s right flank by the main army, had already been decided upon; and Grant, who was beginning to grasp some concept of the use of a mobile fighting force, the motorized infantry into which Sheridan had turned his corps, had already ordered the cavalry to lead the flanking maneuver. Once again Meade played the marplot. Wilson’s division, not the farthest to the left, and hence to the front of the new movement, went on to Spottsylvania, with somewhere near 3,000 men. But Meade in person reached the headquarters of the other two divisions before Sheridan’s orders did, and he instantly used both for purposes sharply different from those the Chief of Cavalry intended. Gregg was pulled out of the advance to protect trains (from what? – the whole Federal army was now between those trains and the nearest of Lee’s men).

Merritt, who had taken over Torbert’s division, was held back to accompany and protect the movement of Warren’s V Corps, guarding infantry on the roads according to the best muddled tradition of the Army of the Potomac. It was night, of course, Merritt’s division became mixed with Warren’s infantry and wagons on the wood roads. There was a wild traffic jam that stalled both horse and foot. Whenever Meade appeared, the cavalry had to yield precedence to Warren, and Merritt emerged from the tangle well behind the infantry he was supposed to lead.

Wilson’s single division was of course no match for the entire Confederate corps that presently arrived at Spottsylvania. After some hard defensive fighting it was driven out, and the whole desperate business of the Bloody Angle, with ten days and fourteen thousand men lost, had to be gone through with.
But Bloody Angle was still in the future when, on the night of the 8th, Sheridan came tearing into headquarters, red, angry, and swearing, not mincing the words he shouted as he demanded to know whether he were truly Chief of Cavalry, or only a rubber stamp for others’ good ideas. Meade snapped back the wearisome old arguments about the safety of trains and columns. Grant listened, impassive as an ox, till both men began to repeat themselves, then turning to Sheridan, asked him briefly if, being allowed to write his own orders, he could guarantee the elimination of Stuart.

“Yes,” flashed Sheridan.

“All right,” said Grant.

Next morning, Sheridan began concentrating back on the long lateral road that runs from Fredericksburg to Orange, behind the Union right rear. Men and horses had a good night’s rest, then started early on the 9th of May, riding south and east at a sober walk in a single column, thirteen miles long, to get right around the rebel army.

The men, impressed with the leadership of their little Phil during the hard fighting of the past week, were more impressed now. Under Stoneman, Pleasonton, Kilpatrick, they had moved out on such expeditions at the trot, on parallel roads in tight bunches. When the enemy showed up for a fight, their horses were blown, themselves tired, and the nearest support, also on tired mounts would be distant across miles of country. Or as we should put it in modern phrases, Sheridan realized that mobility is an evanescent quality, one that can be used for either strategic or tactical purposes, but not both. He was aiming to arrive at the scene of any action with full gas tanks.

Perhaps this is reading more into Sheridan’s doctrine than he himself put there. Yet the proof that he had thought the matter through better than any man of his time lies in that single long column moving slowly on. “I preferred this to the combinations arising from using several roads,” he himself said. “Combinations rarely work.” With horses at a walk that...
To fend off a stroke at Richmond, he had to expend his own mobility in a long, hard ride, round the Union head of column, leaving uncovered for some length the two vertical railroads out of Richmond, along which Lee was drawing supplies.

That night, the Union riders had another surprise. Instead of the all night “stand to” in separate little picket camps, which had been the custom during raids in their army, they found themselves in one big camp astride the North Anna, with artillery placed and unlimbered, soldiers getting full bellies and a good night’s rest, horses unsaddled. One who was there noted that next morning they began to sing. They were content with their Little Phil and he was everywhere among them. “We saw him daily, whether we were in the advance, at the rear or the center of the column, and he would as soon borrow a light from the pipe of an enlisted man as from the cigar of an officer. The common soldier’s uniform was good enough for him.”

That morning, the 10th of May, he sent a brigade of them out east under Custer to Beaver Dam Station on one of Lee’s railroad lines. A big supply magazine was burned out; it had held the whole of Lee’s medical stores, doubly precious in that army which had to use medicines run in through the blockade. A batch of Union prisoners was released; the trackage ripped up for some distance.

Down in Richmond they had news of Sheridan now the bells were tolling alarm, home guards were being called out and troops summoned all the way from the Carolinas. The Union column plodded steadily on, slanting toward Richmond. They crossed the South Anna in the afternoon and shot out another brigade, Davies’, which just at twilight touched the second vertical rail line out of Richmond. Wires were torn down and tracks up; a second depot of stores went. Before midnight both forces had fallen in on the main body, bringing some prisoners.

Sheridan, now as ever his own G-2, extracted from them the information that Stuart had arrived before Richmond and was waiting in a prepared position at Yellow Tavern, just north of the Chickahominy. Gordon’s brigade had been haunting the Union rear all day. Evidently some measure had been concerted to bring that also into the impending battle. Sheridan had no objections; the whole purpose of his raid was not to seize any particular point, but to bring all Stuart’s men to action, and to handle them so roughly that they would never again dare one of their great sweeps – as Grant’s purpose on the whole campaign was similarly to impose the defensive on Lee.

Merritt’s division had the advance in the morning. He found the Confederate line holding a crossroads at Yellow Tavern, facing west across his front; dismounted, and punched through. It was a trap, of course. There was a second line behind the first. As soon as Merritt was involved against it, a battery of artillery opened an enfilading fire from cover, and down from a grove of trees came Jeb Stuart at the gallop into Merritt’s flank.

But Sheridan had met trap with counter-trap. As Merritt’s line crumpled, his men firing as they scattered to cover, George Custer, yelling, “Come on, Wolverines!” flung himself into Stuart’s flank. There was a violent shock, a tangle, Custer was driven off for a moment, but came on again with the whole weight of Wilson’s division behind, and the Confederates went tumbling back, their great leader out of mischief forever, shot through the lungs. Wilson’s men swarmed all over the rebel line, shot down the artillery’s support, captured the guns, drove what was left of Stuart’s cavalry right away before them.

“Combinations rarely work.” Now, when Stuart was down and the defensive line gone, Gordon arrived on Sheridan’s left rear in a mounted attack. The Union leader had foreseen that, too. Gordon ran into a breastwork of interlaced branches with Gregg’s men firing from behind it, was shot dead from the saddle and his brigade driven off northeast. Sheridan moved on round the defenses of Richmond, got supplies from the
fleet in the James, and shuttled back up across the rivers to the main army, which he rejoined on May 24th. It tells the whole story to say that the Confederate cavalry never molested him again. Infantry tried to stop him once, where the fixed defenses of Richmond reached the banks of the Chickahominy near Mechanicsville. These unconventional cavalymen rebuilt a broken bridge under fire, crossed it, and drove the infantry off in a combat of which not enough details have survived to permit an intelligent account.

It does not matter. Nothing in the story of this operation matters after the battle of Yellow Tavern, which, hidden from the sight of northern eyes by the red glare rising round Bloody Angle, inflicted upon Southern morale a heavier blow than the loss of Stonewall Jackson. For Jackson fell in a moment of victory; at Yellow Tavern the Confederacy lost not only Stuart and Gordon, but also the legend of its own invincibility in the arm that was the pride of every Southerner. Says Grant: “This raid had the effect of ...thenceforth making it easy to guard our trains.”

No other praise is necessary.

Yellow Tavern thus established Sheridan within the army. To the country he remained merely a corps commander who was doing well, a name among the others that appeared among the others in dispatches from the Virginia scrub-lands where the fighting was going forward with such bloody indecision. Lee seems fully to have realized the political effect of this indecisiveness on the North, and clutched though he was in Grant's embrace, found means to win minor but morally impressive triumphs in the one field where geography practically guaranteed Southern victory. Or was Early's move to the Shenandoah Valley dictated by the more narrowly military hope of forcing Grant to make large detachments from the forces around Richmond?

No matter. Early was in the valley with a large corps, Early shuttled to and fro, defeating Federal local guards, breaking up the important supply line of the Baltimore & Ohio. Early crossed the Potomac, smashed a hastily gathered force at the Monocacy, and marched to the gates of Washington, where President Lincoln was under fire. Something would have to be done about Early.

General Wright was pulled out of the Petersburg trenches with his VI Corps and sent to Washington. His operations were sound enough, but futile. The Confederate leader, moving up that fertile and friendly region where he could keep his trains to a minimum, danced away from Wright's lumbering legions. The moment Wright went back to Petersburg Early came back down the Valley. Once more he broke the Baltimore & Ohio and lanced into Pennsylvania, where he laid the town of Chambersburg under $300,000 ransom. There was not that much money in the place, so Early turned the inhabitants out into the summer fields and burned it, every stick.

Throughout the North the papers went wild. A year after Gettysburg the rebels were burning towns in Pennsylvania! In parallel columns came the news from Chicago--the Democrats had finished their convention; they were going before the electors on a platform declaring "Lincoln's war" a failure, a repetitious bloody agony. Washington telegraphed feverishly to Grant, another in the series of such telegrams that had been flashing along the wires since Early began his raids. Something would have to be done and Grant would have to decide what it was.

Already, some time before, Grant had pointed out that the trouble in the Valley was not one of forces but of commands. As things stood the Shenandoah and its neighborhood formed the boundary lines of four separate military departments, each with its own troops and officers. Washington agreed with Grant that the whole thing should be under a single head, with a concentrated army "big enough to follow Early to the death," an army particularly strong in cavalry to offset the mobility the friendly country gave to the Confederates, an army that should burn out the Valley granary to an extent where it would no more harbor rats.
But there had been a tug-of-war over leadership. Grant again wanted Franklin, a suggestion which was coldly received. Meade was offered, but the idea was politically all wrong, it would look like the demotion of the commander of the Army of the Potomac, which would be a confession of that very failure the Democrats claimed. Hunter, already in the Valley, was too old and slow; Hancock, too good a corps leader.

This was the situation when the Chambersburg raid caused Grant to react with the speed of a steel trap, as he always did when irritated. "I am sending General Sheridan," he wrote. "I want him put in command of all the troops in the field."

It was a tour de force in both directions on Grant's part, for Sheridan himself, approached on the project of taking over what had suddenly become the critical command of the war, was dubious about his own capacity. He would prefer, he said to command a corps, perhaps the cavalry, under some other leader. Grant listened and smoked, his mind probing for the reason behind this unexpected diffidence on the part of an officer who had not hesitated to stand up to his testy Meade. Finally he hit it—the Valley commands were full of old, senior, respected officers—Hunter, Averell of the cavalry, "Fight mit Franz" Sigel, Wright—some of them twice Sheridan's age.

Grant remarked that his was a campaign in which seniority did not count. If the older officers objected to serving under Sheridan he was to relieve them—"Do not hesitate to give command to officers in whom you repose confidence, without regard to claims of others on account of rank." Hunter did object to serving under the junior Sheridan. He was given his walking papers, and on August 7, at Harper's Ferry, the new leader took over his army, with everything in it to do and the political campaign hurrying on.

It is important to any estimate of Sheridan to realize that his new "army" was a motley collection of units, that required to be united, magnetized, stamped with the impress of a single personality, before they were fit for anything. The VI Corps, under General H.G. Wright, had a long, honorable history in the Army of the Potomac, but like its general, was distinguished for solidity rather than speed, a unit better in defense than on attack. The XIX Corps, Emory's had been doing garrison duty and police work in Louisiana. It had never been assembled as a unit, was unfamiliar with any but guerilla operations, and could hardly be called a fighting corps. Crook's VII Corps, the former Army of West Virginia, had seen a great deal of fighting, all of the wrong kind. The men had the hangdog, careless attitude of troops that had never known victory, were spiritless, and were no more than Emory's men used to working in big formations. Two of the four divisions of cavalry, Averell's and Duffie's were from this same army, with the same drawbacks. They had moreover, been trained in the prehistoric tradition of "living in the saddle"; regarded dismounted action as something no decent cavalryman would take if he could help it. In the whole army only the other two cavalry divisions, those commanded by Merritt and Wilson, knew Sheridan and his methods. They were a small leaven in a mass of nearly 50,000 men.

This then was the force Sheridan had to make into a fighting machine. It had some other peculiarities, of which the most striking was the cavalry-infantry ratio of 1:4, higher than any before seen on the American continent. Another was that Sheridan assigned no less than nine batteries of artillery to this cavalry, or four and a half times as many guns as he had in the Wilderness for the same number of horsemen; and this artillery was the best he had, United States Regulars.

Early discovered the significance of this in the first and perhaps the most important operation of the Army of the Shenandoah, though it was one crowned by no battle, yielding no newspaper results. When Lee learned that the VI Corps and two divisions of cavalry had been sent to
the Valley, he accepted the transfer of major operations thither with evident relief. He reinforced Early with the major portion of Longstreet's Corps and Fitz Lee's cavalry division, which brought the Confederate Valley army up to a strength beyond the powers of Sheridan's rag-tag host, at least in the opinion of Grant, who warned his young subordinate to be careful.

Sheridan, who had been well forward toward Winchester, accordingly retired to a position near Halltown, where he could cover both Harper's Ferry and the northbound roads that lead past it on the west, and dug himself in. There was a river on either wing, when Early came up, he inspected the place, and decided it was too strong to be forced, too good to be flanked.

There is more than one way to handle such a situation, and Early worked out an excellent method. He left a division on Sheridan's front, strongly fortified; moved the main body of this infantry up to Shepherdstown, and flung Fitz Lee out ahead to see what he could do about passing the Potomac. If Sheridan advanced against the fortified division Early would come back and fight the Union leader on ground of his own choosing, but he considered it more likely Fitz Lee's threat would force the Army of the Shenandoah to retreat.

Nothing of the kind happened. Sheridan remained coolly within his lines. Wilson's cavalry division held the South Mountain passes; Merritt's knifed in between the detached division and Early's rear, feeling for his communications; and Fitz Lee reported that Averell was holding the Potomac crossings in trenches, so well supplied with artillery that crossing would be a bloody business, probably could not be achieved at all without infantry support.

In short, Sheridan had used the mobility of his cavalry as he proposed before the Wilderness—to seize and fortify a series of positions that severely constricted the scope of Confederate operations. Adventures beyond the Potomac had been rendered impossible to Early. But unless his army could adventure there, it had no purpose; could not affect the main campaign physically or morally. It could only go home; and when Grant started the Deep Bottom offensive, Lee called in Longstreet's Corps. It was September when they crossed the mountains through the ripe crops, and the northern elections rushing on apace. The day Longstreet reached Richmond Grant sent his commander in the Shenandoah the famous two-word telegram:

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