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### Chancellorsville

The American Civil War was a war between peoples with two different conceptions about the direction which the country should head. On the one hand you got the north, egalitarian and industrial, and on the other the south, oppressive and agrarian. The Union had greater manpower and industrial might, while the South had cheap labor and better generals. The North also had to carry out an invasion. The difference between merely a raid and an invasion is the sheer force and time it takes to carry out an invasion. To carry out a successful invasion you need to both capture the territory, but also keep it. That means policing and more often than not setting up martial rule. The North was faced with the difficulty that they had to subdue a territory that is about the size of Russia west of Moscow and with a population of 9 million people, who would not just roll over. The very lifeblood of the South was at stake, if they lost the war they would lose their entire way of life.

Chancellorsville was a battle in that great conflict. The two armies that clashed were the victorious Army of Northern Virginia, commanded by Robert E. Lee, and the Army of the Potomac, headed by Joseph Hooker. Lee was the son of a revolutionary war hero and scion of the first families of Virginia. A gentleman in every sense of the word, with a quality of restraint. Educated at West Point, he was an exemplary Southern gentleman. Lee had spent his entire career, up until the war, serving in the army, including fighting in the Mexican-American war and putting down John Brown's raid. Winfield Scott had considered Lee to be the best officer in the army. Ironically enough, it had been Lee who was first asked to command the Union's armed forces, which he declined and proceeded to resign. Lee

considered slavery a moral and political evil, and had never talked of secession up until Virginia had linked fate her fate with the Confederacy. Lee was quite an aggressive general, and though he achieved many victories his casualty count was quite high.

Joseph Hooker was quite different from his Confederate counterpart. Hooker had gained command of the army after Burnside and the disastrous defeat at Fredricksburg. He was not exactly an exemplary character, quite cocky as well. When he took over command of the army he took steps to cashier corrupt quartermasters, improve the food, clean the camps, and various other practical changes. This brought up the morale in the army, which was badly needed. Sickness declined, desertion rates dropped, and grants of amnesty brought back many deserters. Hooker played tough, but when the cards were down he lost his nerve.

The morale of the Army of the Potomac, despite Hooker's improvements was not ideal. Coming off Fredricksburg and the mud march it is not hard to see why. Coming off a chain of defeats in the eastern theater, many were losing their confidence that subduing the South was possible. Also, with military success came increasing odds for the Confederacy to be recognize by the European powers. Though in the western theater the Union was having more luck, Chancellorsville occurred right after Grant's siege against Vicksburg. The eastern front though was always more in the public mind, events in the west largely playing second fiddle. Success in the North was in large part what brought success in the East.

The rebels had dug an elaborate network of drenches 25 miles along the Rappanhannock, near Fredricksburg. Longstreet had taken two divisions to confront Federal threats, which left Lee with only 60,000 men, against twice that number. The rebels in spite of their numerical disadvantage because of the strength of their position. Hooker thought it unwise to assault the trenches straight on, so decided to attempt to bring Lee's army out in the open. He split the army in to three parts, 10,000 horsemen to cut

Lee's supply line, 70,000 to cross upriver several miles beyond Lee's left flank, and 40,000 men feigned an advance to hold Lee in place. Hooker had expected Lee to retreat, seeing the hopelessness of the situation. When Lee showed fight though, the general started to balk. This was a large gamble on Lee's part because it could either result in smashing success or disastrous defeat. If the battle had gone a little differently, and Hooker had made sufficient use of his reserves, the outcome could have been quite different.

Lee saw the threat, so he left behind 10,000 men to defend the trenches and put the rest on the march. On May 1, 1863 the portion of the army which was put on the march clashed with Union forces, where the Yankees largely got the upper hand. Though Hooker made a mistake here by not following up this success. When Lee found that the Federal forces were on the move he devised a daring and ingenious move which has gained much acclaim from military historians. He put "Stonewall" Jackson, his trusted general, on the march on a flanking maneuver. This was yet another large risk because the march was right up against the union front and left him vulnerable to attack. If the movements had been detected, and Hooker had acted, the consequences would have been quite bad for Lee. Hooker though, as usual, did nothing because he believed the army to be retreating.

Coming out of the woods, taking the Army of the Potomac completely by surprise, this led to a mass retreat of regiments heading to the rear. Lee then joined in on the assault while Hooker attempted to regain control of the situation. The fighting going largely in the rebels favor. The news was not all good, Jackson had been fatally wounded, shot on accident by his own men.

The next day Hooker ordered an assault against the vulnerable defenses along the river. They were sent back twice, but on the third carried the heights and set the rebels flying. This allowed Lee to reunite the two wings of the army and mass the artillery. Then pressing an all-out assault on the troops holding the area around Chancellorsville, which came to a stop when hundreds of wounded were

threatened by bush fires caused by the artillery. That was when Lee found out about the breakthrough at the trenches and led an assault. He failed to recapture the heights, but was repulsed. Again Union success came to nothing and Segwick, commander of the forces which captured the trenches, was called back. That night his subordinate commanders still advised to counter-attack, but Hooker dismissed them and commenced the retreat. Bringing an end to the battle.

The rebel casualties amounted to 13,000, 22% of their fighting force, Yankee loses at 17,000 and 15%. Given that Lee fought an army twice his size and managed to repulse the army, Chancellorsville is considered Lee's masterpiece. He made efficient use of the resources at his disposal and committed his troops at key points to offset the Union's superior numbers. The victory, like all other military victories, increased morale in the victors army and gave yet more ammunition to the peace faction in the North. Hooker was also replaced with Grant shortly after the defeat. The victory didn't do all good for the Confederacy because it killed Jackson and bred contempt against the army that they had continually "whipped."

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