THE GEOGRAPHY OF CIVIL WAR: CONFLICT AND LEGACY

IN UPPER EAST TENNESSEE, 1861-1865

By

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A Dissertation Presented to the Graduate Faculty

of Middle Tennessee State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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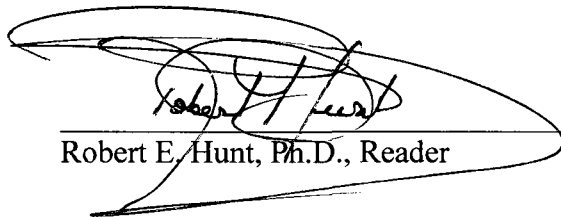
THE GEOGRAPHY OF CIVIL WAR:

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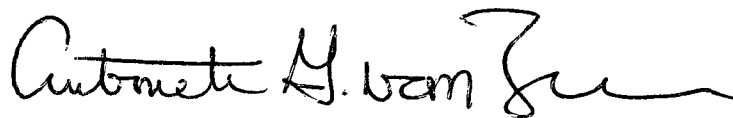
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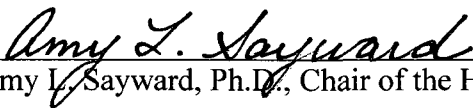Carroll Van West, Ph.D., Major Professor

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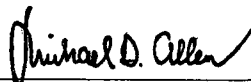
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, "The Geography of Civil War: Conflict and Legacy in Upper

East Tennessee, 1861-1865," documents how geography shaped warfare in Upper East

Tennessee during the American Civil War, and how contemporary terrain holds

significant instructive potential for modern observers. East Tennessee's topography,

which features a long valley with low ridges surrounded by high mountains, suggested

logical points of attack and defense to Civil War commanders, depending on strategic and

logistical requirements of each occupying army. Heavily forested terrain facilitated

partisan and guerilla warfare, with nearby states providing sanctuary for irregular

combatants. The region's single railroad, the East Tennessee and Virginia, assumed

enormous logistical importance as the major means of supply for both armies, North and

South. This dissertation shows how each side used the unique geography of East

Tennessee under changing operational circumstances to pursue strategic ends, and

suggests that natural terrain features influencing military decisions during the Civil War

embody potential to inform contemporary observation today.

East Tennessee's geography helped determine both strategy and tactics. The Great

Valley, actually a series of smaller valleys separated by low ridges, is oriented along a

northeast axis from Alabama all the way up to Virginia. Surrounded on all sides by high

mountains, the Great Valley is accessed through mountain passes, which assumed major

strategic importance for defense, particularly during the period of Confederate occupation from 1861 to 1863. When the Union army finally captured Knoxville in 1863 and fighting erupted throughout the region, mountain valleys became convenient avenues for flanking movements, while interior gaps in the ridges became points which cavalry could exploit to appear behind an enemy. Rivers, natural impediments to transportation, also fueled fertile farmlands filled with food and forage, sparking battles for possession of these vital resources. The Great Valley's most valuable strategic asset east of Knoxville, however, remained the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, which wound its way through the lesser valleys up to Bristol, and thence into Virginia. Throughout the war, much military activity revolved around defending or targeting the vital railroad lifeline.

Geography stands not only as a legacy to the natural world, but to the workings of humankind, as well. And if geography shapes human actions at a defined period of time such as the Civil War, then it stands to reason that later generations can better understand past events through observation of the setting where those events occurred. By standing on the mountain at Bull's Gap, Tennessee, for example, one gets a sense of what it was like to charge up the mountainside, or, conversely, to defend against such a charge. Through an examination of terrain, one can better understand why commanders chose to locate railroad facilities north of the Gap, and how they orchestrated what came to be known as the first "railroad" war in history. Bull's Gap, which is featured in a separate appendix, is thus a good representative example of the military uses of geography, suggesting how a contemporary examination of topography can lead to a better understanding of Upper East Tennessee's civil war past.

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines how geography shaped warfare in Upper East Tennessee

during the American Civil War, and how contemporary terrain continues to influence

remembrance of the war. As military historian John Keegan famously noted, "Rivers,

mountains, forest, swamp and plain, desert and plough, valley and plateau: these are the

primary raw materials with which the military historian works. In constructing a

narrative, in charting the movements of armies, the facts of geography stand first."[1]

Nowhere is this maxim truer than in Upper East Tennessee, where geography helped

determine how war evolved in the region. The area's topography, which featured a long

valley with low ridges surrounded by high mountains, suggested logical points of attack

and defense depending on the strategic needs of each occupying army. Remote, heavily

forested terrain, particularly in eastern counties, offered fertile ground for irregular

warfare throughout four years of conflict.[2] And the region's single railroad, continuing to

wind its way through the region today, assumed enormous logistical importance as the

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[1] John Keegan, *Fields of Battle: The Wars for North America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 8.

[2] I use the general term "irregular" to denote both partisan, or officially sanctioned, warfare, and guerilla warfare, which was mostly unsanctioned. Where appropriate, "partisan" and "guerilla" denote specific types of sanctioned or unsanctioned military activity. "Upper" East Tennessee refers to counties generally east of Knoxville, while "East Tennessee" defines the entire Great Valley region east of the Cumberland Plateau from Chattanooga northeast to Bristol.

major means of supply for both armies, North and South.

John Keegan further defined geography in terms of "permanently operating" and "contingent" factors, with "weather, climate, seasons, terrain, [and] vegetation," belonging in the first category, and "supply, provisioning, quartering, and equipment," in the second.[3] In the case of East Tennessee's civil war, one might add railroads to the contingent category. According to Keegan, these factors "have clearly limited the scope, intensity and duration of warmaking in many periods of human history."[4] But permanent and contingent geography alone is not the only determinant of a successful military operation. According to an American General Staff officer writing during World War II, good commanders understand "the relationship between terrain and operations" and make necessary adjustments so that men, weapons and supplies can deploy at peak efficiency.[5] Commanders in East Tennessee were often unable to properly adjust human capabilities to terrain conditions, and their military operations suffered accordingly.

During the Civil War, rugged terrain and extreme weather greatly impeded logistics and provisioning in Upper East Tennessee, particularly in border areas without rail access, a situation placing additional burdens on the area's single railroad running from Knoxville northeast up to the Virginia state line. Problems associated with supplying vast numbers of men and animals preyed on the minds of military planners responsible for sustaining armies in the field, with wary Union commanders resisting

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[3] John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 63.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Sidman P. Poole, "The Training of Military Geographers," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 34 (December 1944): 202.

calls in 1861 from President Abraham Lincoln for an early invasion of Upper East

Tennessee through Cumberland Gap. Although certain portions of its upper valleys were

denuded of food and forage during Confederate occupation, the mountain region escaped

widespread devastation until 1863 when Union forces finally invaded unopposed from

Kentucky. Why the war evolved in Upper East Tennessee in this way is a complex

combination of how Keegan's permanently operating and contingent factors influenced

strategic decisions by each side in the conflict. These factors can be given some

coherence through an examination of current research on civil war, since modern

historians have developed a geographic paradigm for predicting just how widespread

civil wars might become, a framework readily adaptable to the war in Upper East

Tennessee.

In their study of geography and modern civil war, Halvard Buhaug and Scott

Gates of the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, Norway, identify five

permanent and contingent factors affecting the magnitude of civil war, including conflict

duration, nearness to borders, types of natural resources, nature of terrain, and extent of

vegetation.[6] Buhaug and Gates found that scope of war increases the longer war

continues, and that cross border proximity to friendly forces sustains irregular combatants

with personnel, supplies, and weapons. In modern insurgency parlance, "cross border

proximity" refers to the use of friendly territory as an "active sanctuary" where insurgents

draw sustenance and reinforcements to sustain irregular operations in an adjacent conflict

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[6] Halvard Buhaug and Scott Gates, "The Geography of Civil War," *Journal of Peace Research* 39, no. 4 (2002): 422.

zone.[7] During the Civil War, Kentucky served as an active sanctuary for itinerant Unionists from Upper East Tennessee, with North Carolina providing succor for Confederate irregulars.

According to the Buhaug-Gates paradigm, irregular conflict flourished in Upper East Tennessee precisely because the larger war dragged on, the border with Union-controlled Kentucky remained porous, and guerillas thrived in mountainous terrain and forest cover favoring unconventional warfare. In a land where Unionist sentiment predominated, divided loyalty provided political justification for insurgent and extralegal activity throughout the war. Unionists chafed under Confederate occupation, and then had to deal with southern insurrectionists after Union occupation became a reality in 1863. Inadequate Confederate and Union troop levels further encouraged partisan and guerilla warfare, which correspondingly expanded regardless of which side served as occupying power. Col. John W. Foster, a Union commander who visited Greeneville, Tennessee, in September, 1863, confirmed the brutal nature of the guerilla war when he commented to his wife in a letter that "such cruelty, such oppression, and heartless wrong [in East Tennessee] has no parallel at least on this continent. It may have been equaled by the barbarians of Europe."[8]

Contrary to the opinion of some historians that methodical and pervasive violence did not occur until 1863 and afterwards, this study argues that Unionist resistance during

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[7] Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1967), 375.

[8] John W. Foster, *War Stories for my Grandchildren* (Washington, DC: printed for private circulation by The Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1918), 132.

the first two years of war was just as organized and lethal when directed at Confederate targets. Although historian Daniel E. Sutherland contends that "systematic and systemic" guerilla violence did not occur until 1863 when Confederate partisan operations became widespread and deserters more common following passage of the Confederate Conscription Act in 1862, a careful reading of Confederate correspondence during the period of southern occupation reveals that Unionist guerillas were also arguably quite systematic in their approach to irregular warfare.[9] While it is true that Confederate authorities officially encouraged irregular operations in Upper East Tennessee, partisan activity by Unionists was well-organized in many counties and quite as worrisome to southern commanders. Many Confederate commanders reported on the nature of this warfare, concluding that Unionist irregular tactics were uniform, methodical, and greatly assisted by terrain factors. Regardless of arguments over relative levels of organization and violence, however, there is little doubt that irregular warfare in upper East Tennessee fomented a remarkable degree of brutality during both periods of occupation as community institutions broke under the strains of war, instigating what historians John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney called "an internal war driven by vengeance and desperation."[10]

In addition to providing fertile ground for irregular warfare, East Tennessee's military geography helped shape the war both strategically and tactically. The Great

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[9] Daniel E. Sutherland, ed. *Guerillas, Unionists, and Violence on the Confederate Home Front*. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 10.

[10] John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, *The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 284.

Valley, actually a series of smaller valleys separated by low ridges, is oriented along a

northeast axis from Alabama all the way up to Virginia. Surrounded on all sides by high

mountains, the Great Valley is accessed through mountain passes, which assumed major

strategic importance for defense, particularly during the period of Confederate occupation

from 1861 to 1863. When the Union army finally captured Knoxville in 1863 and

fighting erupted throughout the region, interior mountain valleys provided cover for

flanking movements, with cavalry debouching behind an enemy through gaps in the

ridges. Rivers, natural impediments to transportation, also fueled fertile farmlands filled

with food and forage, sparking battles for possession of these vital resources. The Great

Valley's most valuable strategic asset east of Knoxville, however, remained the East

Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, which wound its way through the lesser valleys up to

Bristol, and thence into Virginia. Throughout the war years, much military activity

revolved around defending or targeting the vital railroad lifeline.

The challenge of supplying large quantities of troops plus a captive civilian

population further influenced Union strategic calculations. At the level of grand strategy,

Union military leaders hesitated to send large numbers of troops into East Tennessee

because of logistical concerns and a desire to develop operations in general accordance

with Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan.[11] Scott advocated strangling the Confederacy

economically by blockading southern ports and taking control of the Mississippi River

valley. Lincoln and his commanders later adopted the essentials of Scott's plan,

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[11] Bruce Catton, *This Hallowed Ground*, ed. Lewis Gannett, Mainstream of America Series (New York: Doubleday, 1956): 52-53.

exploiting strategic openings on land as they occurred.[12] Operations centered along the Mississippi opened Tennessee and Kentucky to invasion from the west early in the war, with the struggle for West and Middle Tennessee delaying liberation of East Tennessee for two years.

To instill narrative clarity into such a complex story, this study follows events in the struggle for Upper East Tennessee chronologically. Chapter One is an introduction to Upper East Tennessee's civil war experience through a geographic lens, while Chapter Two discusses war mobilization, how East Tennessee reacted as the rest of the state prepared for war, and military events preceding Confederate operations in southern Kentucky in November, 1861. Chapter Three examines the Kentucky campaigns and events in Upper East Tennessee until the successful Union invasion of September, 1863. Chapter Four discusses the early months of Union occupation in 1863 and Confederate Lieut. Gen. James Longstreet's siege of Knoxville. Chapter Five recounts Longstreet's campaign in East Tennessee after Knoxville from December, 1863 to April, 1864, and the inexorable Confederate decline thereafter until the Union operations of late 1864 that effectively ended southern influence in East Tennessee for good. Chapter Six sums up the effects of geography on the war in Upper East Tennessee, and the Appendix examines public history interpretive opportunities for Bull's Gap in lower Hawkins County, Tennessee, a much contested and representative railroad junction during the Civil War.

During the early period of Confederate occupation in 1861, Union strategists attempted to foment a "people's war" that unfortunately ended in catastrophe when

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[12] Ibid.

regular army intervention failed to materialize from Kentucky, an invasion strongly urged, but not ordered, by President Lincoln, who was still feeling his way as Commander-in-Chief. The uprising confirmed Confederate fears of rebellion, and southern leaders in Richmond approved martial law measures to quell incipient violence and restore stability. Even with civilian support, an invasion of East Tennessee made sense to Union military strategists only when the Federal army secured a base of supply in Chattanooga, an event that did not occur until late 1863. In the meantime, Union forces in Kentucky faced a scare when Braxton Bragg and Kirby Smith joined forces to invade the state in 1862, an operation ending in failure for the Confederates. Union occupation from 1863 to 1865 similarly witnessed the clash of sizable regular armies when General James Longstreet's detached First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia entered the area in late 1863 and unsuccessfully invested Knoxville. Civilian resistance and bushwhacker activities led to largely ineffectual counterinsurgency measures by both sides, with retaliatory cavalry raids occurring throughout the war.[13] During all these operations, Union and Confederate forces operating in remote mountain areas had to contend with rough terrain, poor logistics, and irregular combatants.

While Union strategic objectives to prevent invasion, pacify the population, and protect the railroad continued to mirror the concerns of their Confederate predecessors, Union control after 1863 denied to the Confederacy a direct railroad link between resources in western states and the eastern seaboard. The Confederacy's declining

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[13] Noel C. Fisher, *War at Every Door: Partisan Politics and Guerilla Violence in East Tennessee, 1869-1869* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 94-95.

fortunes following major battlefield reversals in 1863 reduced its strategic options to long

range raids from bases in southwestern Virginia that accomplished very little except to

stave off invasion. The most spectacular of these actions occurred in late 1864 when

Confederate Gen. John Breckinridge penetrated from Virginia all the way to Strawberry

Plains, and then Gen. George Stoneman and his Union cavalry brigade pushed the upstart

southerners back to their bases in the Old Dominion. Since military authorities on both

sides preferred to rule from strongholds such as Knoxville, Greeneville, Cumberland

Gap, or Bristol, small punitive raids into the countryside also became commonplace.

Lawless areas outside these bastions, which one historian characterized in more modern

parlance as "no man's land," encouraged irregular activities throughout the war, which

were often more about settling old scores or engaging in wanton theft and destruction

than coordinated partisan combat.[14]

When regular forces in Upper East Tennessee finally clashed during sustained

operations in 1863, serious logistical difficulties did arise for both Confederate and Union

armies due to poor transportation and a denuded countryside. The East Tennessee and

Virginia Railroad thus assumed enormous logistical importance for whichever army

controlled its route. Railroad bridges in East Tennessee remained targets of sabotage by

both sides throughout the war, with military commanders committing much of their

manpower to protect bridges and mountain gaps along the railroad's route. Strategically,

the railroad was more vital to Confederate logistics, since Union forces controlled

railroads and rivers elsewhere in Tennessee. Northern control of Knoxville and

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[14] Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 77.

Chattanooga effectively diminished supply shipments intended for southern armies in the

Shenandoah Valley and eastern Virginia.

Although Upper East Tennessee remained a minor theatre throughout the war,

strong presidential pressure for invasion and worries within the Union high command that

the region posed a threat to western supply lines led to plans for an assault through

Kentucky in 1863.[15] Union commanders pondering invasion strategies during the first

two years of war quickly appreciated the importance of mountain gaps as regional

gateways, with the most likely invasion route for Union forces in Kentucky through gaps

in the Cumberland Mountains. The largest of the mountain passes was Cumberland Gap

on the Virginia/Tennessee border near the southeastern corner of Kentucky, a position

occupied by Confederate forces early in the war. Lack of a railroad between southern

Kentucky and East Tennessee complicated supply matters even further for Union

planners, who consistently resisted the idea of invasion primarily because of logistical

concerns. After the fall of Nashville in 1862, Union forces pushed southeast through

Murfreesboro and finally took Chattanooga in late 1863, a development easing the

logistical situation and allowing the long-awaited invasion of Upper East Tennessee from

Kentucky by units of the Army of the Ohio. But since subsequent manpower shortages

led Union commanders to rule from fortified towns, Confederate partisans and guerillas

emerged in strength to harass the new occupying army, just as a southern invasion force

led by Lieut. Gen. James Longstreet moved up the railroad from Chattanooga to threaten

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[15] Roy P. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 4:544.

Knoxville shortly after the battle of Chickamauga.[16]

When Robert Tracy McKenzie observed that academic colleagues in the history profession simply did not "know what to do" with East Tennessee's Civil War experience, he deliberately excluded Longstreet's invasion of the area in late 1863, a campaign attracting strong scholarly interest due to the general's notoriety in "Lost Cause" debates.[17] In fact, McKenzie says a great deal about Longstreet in his study of Knoxville, presenting an unflattering account of the southern general at Knoxville and recounting how a post-war federal judge in East Tennessee indicted Longstreet and many other Confederates for treason.[18] In addition to these troubles, Longstreet invited criticism following the war by supporting Reconstruction measures in New Orleans and accepting various government posts from Republican acquaintances. Many southerners like Jubal Early considered his actions treasonous and, when Longstreet criticized Robert E. Lee during an interview with newspaperman William Swinton in November, 1865, his apostasy spurred hatred from many former comrades who judiciously waited until Lee's passing in 1870 to commence the war of words in earnest.[19] This literary dust-up, which comprised part of the "Lost Cause" controversy, gave rise to numerous memoirs and articles, some of which addressed the campaign in East Tennessee. In his own memoir,

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[16] Fisher, *War at Every Door*. 90.

[17] Robert Tracy McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

[18] Ibid., 200.

[19] Jeffrey D. Wert, *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier-A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 422.

Longstreet devoted two chapters to the subject, while his artillery commander, E. Porter

Alexander, ended a three-chapter section on the First Corps in Tennessee with a lengthy

discussion of the Knoxville siege and its aftermath.[20]

Some contemporaries and later historians alike depicted Longstreet as stubborn

and indecisive, qualities in leaders that lost battles and ruined reputations of fellow

officers like Robert E. Lee.[21] Even E. Porter Alexander accuses his old boss of vacillation

during the siege of Knoxville.[22] William Garrett Piston in *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant:*

James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History offers a fine analysis of "Lost

Cause" historiography but does not critically examine Longstreet's generalship.[23] Perhaps

the most even-handed recent treatment of Longstreet as a commander is Jeffrey D. Wert's

General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier-A Biography.

While acknowledging Longstreet's military failures among which he counted East

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[20] James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960; reprint, New York: Kraus Reprint Company, 1969), 480-550; *Edward Porter Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander,* ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 311-344.

[21] For somewhat contradictory views of Longstreet, see Donald B. Sanger and Thomas R. Hay, *James Longstreet* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1952). Sanger and Hays wrote separate sections on Longstreet that did not always mesh. For a decidedly negative view of Longstreet, see H.J. Eckinrode and Bryan Conrad, *James Longstreet: Lee's War Horse* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986; orig. pub. 1936).

[22] Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 323-330.

[23] William Garrett Piston, *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant: James Longstreet and His Place in Southern History* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1987), see particularly 171-185.

Tennessee, Wert boldly asserts that "Longstreet, not Jackson [Stonewall], was the finest corps commander in the Army of Northern Virginia; in fact, he was arguably the best corps commander in the conflict on either side."[24] Alexander Mendoza's more recent *Confederate Struggle for Command: General James Longstreet and the First Corp in the West* offers a judicious account of Longstreet's East Tennessee campaigns, warts and all, and does a good job of presenting the rank-and-file perspective.[25]

Many recent scholars have concerned themselves with themes of sectionalism, divided political loyalty, and community upheaval as a result of war. Historian Charles F. Bryan, Jr., presented the most compelling case for geographic isolation as a determinant of East Tennessee's political attitudes, while Noel C. Fisher and Robert Tracey McKenzie concluded that partisan politics, rather than isolationism, played a major role in the region's Unionist stance.[26] Todd W. Groce, examining southern loyalism in East Tennessee, found that economic prosperity fueled by the railroad created farming and merchant classes that identified with southern business networks, a bond of common interest that translated into support for the Confederate war effort.[27] John C. Inscoe and Gordon McKinney have tackled the guerilla war, examining the breakdown of

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[24] Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 405-406.

[25] Alexander Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command: General James Longstreet and the First Corps in the West* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008).

[26] See Charles F. Bryan, Jr. "The Civil War in East Tennessee" (Ph.D. diss., University of Tennessee, 1978); Fisher, *War at Every Door*; and McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels*.

[27] Groce, Mountain Rebels, 50-51.

community institutions as a determining factor in exacerbating guerilla warfare, and how

the experiences of women, deserters, escaped prisoners, and slaves shaped home front

experience in East Tennessee.[28]

Although Upper East Tennessee remained somewhat remote to outsiders prior to

the Civil War, the region actively participated in trade with the outside world.[29] In

commenting on the efforts of East Tennesseans to connect with their neighbors, historian

David Hsiung stated that "…no basis exists in the area's early history for modern

depictions of Appalachian residents as a people isolated from the time of first

settlement."[30] In the same vein, Noel Fisher concluded that "residents of the antebellum

Smokies…were, in fact, probably little different than rural residents all across the

South."[31] Violence did not permeate the Appalachian culture any more than it did other

regions of the country, yet was unleashed through "personal hatreds exacerbated by the

nihilistic freedom of war."[32] While Unionist sentiment presaged some level of

fragmented resistance in East Tennessee in 1861, the region's experience of war prior to

the invasions of 1863 increasingly rested on its ability to nurture more organized irregular

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[28] See John C. Inscoe, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008.

[29] Todd W. Groce,. *Mountain Rebels: East Tennessee Confederates and the Civil War, 1860-1870* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 5.

[30] David C. Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 56.

[31] Noel Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies* (Gatlinburg, TN: Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2005), 28.

[32] Kenneth W. Noe and Shannon H. Wilson, eds., *The Civil War in Appalachia: Collected Essays* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), xxiv.

conflict, which constantly expanded in scope as the larger war dragged on.

While seeking to link guerilla violence with the breakdown of civil authority, most analysts have generally ignored the influence of strategic imperatives on how each side waged irregular warfare. As Buhaug and Gates concluded, "Clearly, different objectives will alter the way a civil war is fought."[33] Although irregulars on both sides exhibited similarities in disrupting enemy communications, Unionist partisans had different goals and expectations than their Confederate counterparts. During the years of Confederate occupation, Unionists acted to support anticipated invasion forces, funnel men over the Kentucky border to enlist in the Union army, gather intelligence, and sabotage the railroad. The relative strength of the Unionists and their ability to harness community support allowed an impressive degree of organization, a fact not lost on Confederate authorities. Unionist irregulars organized sanctuaries beforehand, and practiced uniform hit-and-run tactics when endangered by enemy raiders. Because of such organized resistance, Confederate expeditions into Unionist counties resembled invasions of foreign territory where it was probable that the force might be surrounded and cut off. In addition to routine sabotage and intelligence operations, Unionists did what they could to support invasion with organized cadres of home troops ready to march at a moment's notice, and by providing scouts to escort prospective regular army enlistees into Kentucky.

Commanders of regular forces in upper East Tennessee certainly took note of guerilla activities, especially when they threatened routine military operations.

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[33] Buhaug and Gates, "The Geography of Civil War," 418.

Confederate Brig. General John Breckinridge only slightly exaggerated the bushwhacker problem when he mused to a confidante in November 1864 that if his army lost many more soldiers, "he would not have enough men to meet the deserters and bushwhackers in battle, much less the enemy."[34] Adept at harassing attacks aimed at disrupting enemy columns, guerillas also impeded regular army movements by targeting couriers in remote areas without telegraph lines. In late September 1864, southern bushwhackers delayed messengers attempting to deliver a recall order to Union forces advancing into Virginia from Kentucky, resulting in a continuation of operations against Saltville, Virginia, when the forces were needed elsewhere.[35] In addition, both Union and Confederate commanders dispatched regular army units to quell disturbances in various parts of upper East Tennessee, thus placing additional strain on limited military resources.

After Longstreet and his detached corps left Upper East Tennessee for Virginia in April, 1864, southern guerilla fighters lost hope for another regular army invasion, turning instead to harassment of the northern enemy's communications. Although adopting many of the tactics of their Unionist irregular counterparts, such as using the countryside for hit-and-run tactics, Confederate guerillas became increasingly desperate to simply survive in an unforgiving mountain environment. The Great Smoky Mountains did not offer quite the support that Kentucky had provided for Unionists, and mountain dwellers had little food or forage left over to help sustain partisans or guerillas. Although

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[34] William C. Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), 470.

[35] Frank J. Welcher, *The Union Army, 1861-1865: Organization and Operations*, vol. 2, *The Western Theater* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 767.

regular Confederate army authorities continued to sanction and support irregular operations, they never exercised total control of partisans and guerillas in East Tennessee, particularly toward war's end in 1865 as southern military fortunes waned.

For irregulars of both sides, the mountainous, heavily forested border areas provided cover and relatively easy access to sanctuaries in other states. The nature of the irregular conflict and lack of regular army troops precluded traditional notions of the civil conflict as a war of annihilation, with irregulars adopting localized hit-and-run tactics and regular forces pursuing a war of limited goals, with geography operating as a prime mitigating factor on how armies moved.[36]

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[36] Brian M. Linn, "The American Way of War, Revisited," *The Journal of Military History* 66 (April 2002): 501-533. Linn offers a good critique of Russell F. Weigley's thesis in "The American Way of War" that the primary American strategic aim during the Civil War and afterward could be characterized as annihilationist. While the war was hard in East Tennessee, strategic objectives remained limited on both sides.

CHAPTER II

"STILL ALL WILL FALL ON ME..."

Nestled among Appalachian mountain peaks, Upper East Tennessee is a land militarily defined by its mountain borders. Extending from Claiborne, Union, Knox and Blount Counties in the west to Johnson County on the Virginia and North Carolina lines, the region contains that portion of the Great Valley of East Tennessee situated between the Cumberland Plateau to the west and Unaka Mountains to the east. While much of the area is interspersed with mountain ridges, the Great Valley itself consists of fertile valleys running generally from northeastern Tennessee down to northern Georgia. Supplied by an abundant but shallow river system east of Knoxville, the limestone soil of the lower valleys is particularly fertile. Just like their antebellum forebears, farmers still raise pigs in abundance and grow staple crops like wheat and corn. Winters can be extremely cold with snow and ice storms, conditions that offered challenges to nineteenth century military forces moving by hoof, foot, or rail. Traffic still flows through breaks in the ridgelines, with mountain gaps assuming enormous military importance as gateways of invasion and avenues for tactical flanking maneuvers. But to characterize the entire area as remote mountain land, as some writers do, is misleading, since much of the Great Valley is pleasant, undulating countryside amenable to combat operations once armies penetrate the mountain barriers.

The Cumberland mountain chain rises to over 2,000 feet in many locations where it traverses the contiguous borders of Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia, and ridges in the Great Valley of East Tennessee often top 1600 feet. Clingman's Dome below the Great Valley ascends to over 6500 feet, with the entire Unaka mountain chain providing an effective barrier to invasion southeast of Knoxville. Many peaks on the Cumberland Plateau to the west of the Great Valley are over 3,000 feet in height and, at the beginning of the Civil War, effectively blocked direct railroad access from Nashville to East Tennessee. Chattanooga to the south is protected by mountains carved from the earth by the mighty Tennessee River as it turns northeast towards Knoxville, joining such lesser rivers as the Holston, French Broad, Nolichucky, and Hiwassee that snake throughout Upper East Tennessee.[1] During the nineteenth century, this rugged landscape resisted human efforts to carve out transportation routes, efforts also hampered by reluctant lawmakers unwilling to fund such improvements during a period when governments hotly debated the efficacy and, indeed, the very constitutionality of state-supported internal improvements.

Although terrain difficulties and legislative bickering slowed progress, the region by 1860 had a fairly extensive, publicly supported road system, with narrow toll lanes connecting major towns. Railroads did not appear in East Tennessee until the 1850s, rather late as internal improvements went in the nineteenth century. This was not for lack of trying, however, as East Tennessee boosters had been peppering their state legislature since the early 1830s with demands for waterway improvements and a railroad that

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[1] Carroll Van West, ed., *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (Nashville: Rutledge Hill Press, 1998), s.v. "Geologic Zones," by Edward T. Luther.

would run the length of the Great Valley. When the State of Tennessee finally authorized incorporation of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad Company, it provided no funding, and railroad supporters, mostly wealthy men in Washington County, formed a joint stock venture to finance the project.[2] Completed in 1858, the railroad greatly enhanced East Tennessee's economic prospects and, during the Civil War, became a hotly contested strategic prize.

John Keegan perceptively observed that railroads "revolutionized warmaking on land, and the American Civil War was the first to demonstrate that trend."[3] Although the military importance of railroads during the Civil War reflected growth of the rail system over several decades, it is doubtful, as one writer perceptively put it, that large scale troop movements could have taken place had the war started in the early 1850s.[4] A war begun in 1851 would have assumed a quite different strategic and tactical character in East Tennessee which, before completion of the railroad in 1858, lacked strategic military importance. But, during the 1850s, national track mileage more than tripled as railroad officials developed new management techniques to haul ever growing amounts of goods and products, and East Tennessee benefited from the trend.[5] As it was, lack of railroad access away from the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad during the Civil War greatly

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[2] David C. Hsiung, *Two Worlds in the Tennessee Mountains: Exploring the Origins of Appalachian Stereotypes* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 135-137.

[3] John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

[4] Roger Pickenpaugh, *Rescue By Rail: Troop Transfer and the Civil War in the West, 1863* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 9.

[5] Ibid., 9-26.

complicated movement of supplies and men in areas contiguous to the northern borders

with Kentucky and Virginia, with campaigns in remote areas like the Big Sandy in

eastern Kentucky remaining localized affairs. In upper East Tennessee, however, military

authorities generally located supply depots along the railroad, which supported extended

operations throughout the region.

Due to its perceived strategic value as an impregnable border fortress,

Cumberland Gap proved an exception to the rule of locating major supply hubs along the

railway, since the nearest depot supplied by rail was initially at Morristown, over forty

miles away. Supplies could reach Morristown easily enough, but then had to be

transported by wagon across Powell Valley up to the mountain passes. As the war

progressed, Unionist guerilla bands harassed supply columns as they made their way

along established routes through Powell Valley and regularly disabled the railroad around

Morristown by burning bridges and tearing up track, a process that would keep

Confederate troops and military engineers active along the railroad's entire route through

upper East Tennessee. Mountainous terrain and the existence of a single railroad bed

greatly favored guerilla activities by limiting interdiction efforts and providing cover for

saboteurs targeting bridges and track in remote areas, a situation that did not go unnoticed

by exasperated railroad officials, whose irritation did not always originate with sabotage.[6]

Because Confederate authorities in Richmond never officially commandeered

railways in East Tennessee, relations between railroad and military officials became

strained, particularly in the war's early stages before a working relationship became fully

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[6] Robert C. Black, III, *The Railroads of the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 68-70.

established. Local military commanders simply ordered available trains to move without first consulting company officials, a situation eliciting a sharp response on 2 December, 1861, from John R. Branner, president of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, who tersely stated, "If we are permitted to manage and control our road, I think I can do so better than any other parties."[7] And, according to a company official writing to Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin almost a week later, the railroad itself often provided security and assumed responsibility for repairing bridges and broken equipment early in the war.[8] Confederate quartermasters in Richmond sometimes delayed payment for services rendered and, as an added annoyance, repudiated contracts made by local officers, while Unionist stockholders balked at using the railroad for any military purpose whatsoever. Later in the war, Confederate commanders complained that Unionist telegraph operators sometimes did all they could to delay requisition requests for flatcars, a problem most famously reported by Gen. Humphrey Marshall following the Sanders Raid of 1863, when a column of Union cavalry rode into East Tennessee and departed unscathed after burning several bridges. Between sabotage and internal operating problems, the Confederacy never really exercised complete control of the East Tennessee railroads, a failure that inevitably hindered military operations in a land where political divisions ran deep and a majority of citizens did not favor secession.

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[7] United States Army, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, Vol. VII (Washington, DC, Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 733. (hereinafter cited as *OR*).

[8] Ibid., 768.

Following Abraham Lincoln's presidential victory in 1860, many Deep South

states hurriedly convened secession conventions that promptly voted to sever ties with the

United States. Tennessee followed a slightly different path, one that acknowledged the

high level of Unionist support within its borders. Secessionist Governor Isham G. Harris

carefully guided Tennessee to its break with the North by first seeking legislative

approval for a popular referendum on whether or not to hold a secession convention.

Legislators duly scheduled the convention referendum for February 9, which voters

resoundingly defeated with determined opposition from East Tennessee.[9] Biding his time,

Governor Harris awaited events on the national scene. When President Lincoln called for

75,000 troops following the bombardment of Fort Sumter on 12 April 1861, the governor

refused the Tennessee quota in no uncertain terms, declaring that "Tennessee will not

furnish a single man for purposes of coercion," and then shrewdly called the legislature

into special session to declare independence from the United States.[10] On May 6, the

legislature granted the governor's wish by voting for independence, conditioning its

approval on a public referendum scheduled for June 8. With war passions running high,

Tennessee citizens overwhelmingly approved independence without resorting to a

convention.

But even before the vote, Governor Harris had begun unilaterally cooperating

with Confederate authorities by signing a military pact and raising troops. The Tennessee

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[9] Paul H. Bergeron, Stephen V. Ash, and Jeanette Keith, *Tennesseans and Their History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 132-136. Bergeron and his co-authors offer a concise analysis of events in Tennessee leading up to the vote for secession.

[10] Quoted in ibid., 136.

legislature authorized a Provisional Army and, at the same time, established a Military and Financial Board controlled by the governor to supervise the state's war effort. By October 1, this Board had expended almost five million dollars before assigning all contracts for the Provisional Army over to the Confederacy.[11] As a major supply depot and armory during this period, Knoxville became the acknowledged military entrepôt of East Tennessee where, as Robert Tracy McKenzie points out, the war "created new opportunities for both workers and entrepreneurs."[12]

Shortly after the independence referendum on June 8, Unionist leaders in Knoxville held a convention of their own to discuss secession and debate East Tennessee's role in an expanding civil war. Meeting in Greeneville from June 17-20, convention delegates decided to oppose secession and petition the Tennessee legislature to form an independent state of East Tennessee. Governor Harris and his legislative colleagues never acted on the request but, as some historians have pointed out, the meeting (and a similar one held before the referendum), "encouraged continued resistance against secession there, at a time when most unionists elsewhere in the Confederacy found themselves leaderless, disorganized, and impotent."[13] Scott County citizens were anything but disorganized as they voted to secede from the State of Tennessee, declaring themselves an independent state in a largely symbolic action.

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[11] *OR*, 1, LII (2): 158-162.

[12] Robert Tracy McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels: A Divided Town in the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 137.

[13] Bergeron, et.al., *Tennesseans and Their History*, 140.

But this seemingly united front against secession did not discourage Unionist leaders from participating in the wartime economic boom in Knoxville, where Confederate officials liberally doled out money to farmers, hotel proprietors, restaurateurs, hardware store owners, meatpackers, and various other essential service vendors and laborers.[14] And it was to this booming town of divided loyalty that Samuel Cooper, Adjutant and Inspector General of the Confederate States of America, sent Brig. Gen. Felix Zollicoffer as the newly appointed commander of southern forces in East Tennessee.[15]

The command directive arrived on July 26, 1861, and Zollicoffer, a politician-turned-soldier highly recommended by Leonidas Polk, wasted no time wiring back his terse acceptance, "Your order received. Will go to Knoxville tomorrow."[16] In fact, Zollicoffer rushed through Knoxville and arrived in Bristol on July 31, where he found many army regiments leaving East Tennessee bound for Virginia, a situation echoed in the general's plaintive wire to Richmond on July 31, "Which regiments shall I assume command of for East Tennessee service?"[17] On August 1, Cooper directed Zollicoffer to stop troops headed for Virginia by rail and bring them under his command and, on August 13, the Adjutant General dispatched the 14th and 15th regiments of Mississippi

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[14] McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels*, 137-138.

[15] *OR*, 1, IV: 374.

[16] Ibid.; Also see West, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Tennessee History and Culture*, s.v. "Zollicoffer, Felix Kirk," by Larry Whitaker.

[17] Ibid., 377.

Volunteers and the Alabama regiment of Col. W. B. Wood to East Tennessee.[18] Cooper also exhorted Zollicoffer to protect the East Tennessee and Virginia railroad against destruction and prevent arms from being shipped into the region, a tall order even for a fully manned and equipped force.[19] Manpower shortages in East Tennessee unfortunately persisted throughout the period of Confederate occupation, with department commanders simply having to make do with meager resources until the Union invasion of 1863 forced outnumbered Confederate forces under Gen. Simon Buckner to retreat south towards Chattanooga.

Confederate authorities thus began the Civil War in East Tennessee in a state of confusion. Military units passing through the area all seemed headed to Virginia, and no one seemed to know which commands should stay in East Tennessee. Once the situation was sorted out, East Tennessee continued to suffer from a chronic lack of Confederate troops to watch the northern, southern, and western invasion routes, police the populace, and protect the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad. Raw and, in many cases, unarmed troops added to Confederate weakness in the theater, which did not seem of transcendent urgency since most people expected a short, victorious war.

In addition to troop shortages, terrain factors strongly influenced both operational strategy and tactics, with mountain gaps assuming crucial importance as access points requiring active defense. Reacting to what intelligence they could gather, ill-equipped and undermanned Confederate units spent much time dashing from one mountain pass to

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[18] Ibid., 378, 387.

[19] Ibid., 377.

the next in an effort to intercept rumored Union invasion forces from Kentucky. Poor roads, heavily forested mountains, and often impassable streams greatly hampered regular army tactical movements while supplying abundant shelter for insurgents. Although East Tennessee's rich farmland provided adequate food and forage early in the war, the region's agricultural resources quickly dwindled as conflict raged on, creating extended military supply lines subject to attack by partisan or guerilla forces.

Strategically, the Confederacy attempted to establish a defensive line in southern Kentucky running from Columbus in the southwest to Cumberland Gap in the east. Albert Sydney Johnston, commanding the Confederacy's Western Department, established his headquarters in Bowling Green, about halfway between Cumberland Gap and the Mississippi River. Confederate commanders in East Tennessee initially fortified the region's mountain gaps in the north, particularly Cumberland and other lesser defiles along Powell Valley, and forayed into southern Kentucky to keep Union forces at bay and protect Johnston's right flank at Bowling Green. This strategy backfired when Union troops under Gen. George Thomas converged at Logan's Cross Roads in January, 1862, soundly defeating a southern army advancing north of Cumberland River, an event quickly followed in February by the fall of Forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, respectively, in West Tennessee. These developments relieved some of the pressure for invasion of East Tennessee from Kentucky, since the opening of West and Middle Tennessee extended Union operations into northern Mississippi and Alabama, and eventually towards the rail and river junction at Chattanooga.

Union commanders initially sought to take advantage of southern weakness in East Tennessee through irregular warfare operations. The wooded, mountainous terrain

and vulnerability of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad encouraged such a strategy. On the political front, Abraham Lincoln embraced the relief of East Tennessee as something of a personal crusade, becoming a thorn in the side of his generals by continuously pleading with them to send an invasion force into the area. Early in the war, Lincoln stayed up until early morning reading military texts and digesting reports from commanders in the field.[20] Seemingly oblivious to transportation and logistical difficulties, he finally succeeded in his quest for liberation only when Gen. Ambrose Burnside's Army of the Ohio marched into Knoxville in September, 1863. Along the way, the President supported efforts to supply Union loyalists with weapons, help them enter Kentucky to enlist as soldiers, foment a popular uprising, and build a railroad connecting Kentucky with East Tennessee and western North Carolina. He even offered advice on cavalry tactics.[21] Lincoln made no attempt to hide his desire for the liberation of East Tennessee, and his persistent meddling played an important role in the region's eventual occupation by Federal troops.[22]

From the beginning of war, Kentucky was an active sanctuary for Union operations in East Tennessee. Once major Confederate forces were cleared from the state following the Battle of Perryville in 1862, Federal posts such as Camp Dick Robinson in Garrard County continued to offer crucial support for fugitives streaming out of East

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[20] John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, 10 vols. (New York: The Century Co., 1890), 5:155-56.

[21] Ibid., 189.

[22] James M. McPherson, *Tried By War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander In Chief* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 190. Lincoln had Henry Halleck pester Rosecrans until he moved on Tullahoma and thence to Chattanooga in 1863.

Tennessee while simultaneously serving as staging areas for military expeditions back across the border. As irregular Unionist activity increased in East Tennessee, Confederate authorities responded at various times with draconian martial law measures such as drumhead courts-martial, hangings, loyalty oaths, and internal passports. In addition, authorities mounted small-scale, quick-hitting military operations designed to smash resistance by main force and capture dissidents. Although their force levels were never sufficient to subdue the entire region, Confederate counterinsurgency tactics, martial law, and the Conscription Act of 1862 drove huge numbers of Unionists across the border to Kentucky where many enlisted in the federal army.

Because the troop shortage gave Confederate commanders no chance of defending East Tennessee at its borders, authorities chose to establish strongholds in various transportation hubs like Knoxville, Greeneville, and Morristown, from which troops conducted sweeps of the countryside in search of escaping Union sympathizers. Confederate cavalry also attempted to catch partisans and guerillas napping in their mountain hideaways with quick hitting raids. In late 1862, emboldened Union forces began long range cavalry raids into East Tennessee that local forces failed to stop. In the end, however, inability of Confederate authorities to maintain troop levels doomed the region to eventual Union occupation and loss of an important railroad lifeline.

In addition to chaotic southern troop dispositions, East Tennessee began to witness the flight of great numbers of northern sympathizers to Camp Dick Robinson and other military posts near the border with Tennessee. Gen. Zollicoffer harbored no illusions about the military threat from Kentucky when he acknowledged to authorities in Richmond that gathering Union forces in Kentucky "are threatening to force a passage

through the mountains in East Tennessee," and that disloyal East Tennesseans eagerly awaited the incursion.[23] In the same vein, Tennessee Governor Isham G. Harris complained to Richmond that "every day our relations with the people of Kentucky are becoming more complicated and threatening, especially that part of Kentucky adjoining East Tennessee."[24] Zollicoffer planned to fortify major mountain passes with infantry companies, and use his limited cavalry solely in a scouting role at this early stage of the war.[25] In September, 1861, Confederate engineers began fortifying Cumberland Gap as Zollicoffer advanced three regiments of troops into supposedly neutral Kentucky, halting them near Cumberland Ford on September 19 and assuming tactical command.[26]

When Lincoln issued his call for troops in April 1861, Kentucky's governor, Beriah Magoffin, refused the President's request because of his state's official policy of neutrality, with both Confederate and Union forces delaying invasion for fear of driving the Bluegrass state into the arms of the enemy. Although small numbers of northern and southern troops regularly visited Kentucky as recruiters and trainers, the fiction of neutrality only lasted until September 3, when Confederate Gen. Leonidas Polk boldly, and without waiting for authorization from Richmond, occupied Columbus on the banks of the Mississippi River. Polk's move encouraged many Kentuckians to declare for the Union and provided an excuse for Federal forces under Gen. Ulysses S. Grant to occupy

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[23] *OR*, 1, IV: 382.

[24] Ibid., 379.

[25] Ibid., 382.

[26] Ibid., 404.

Paducah.[27] Historian Lowell Harrison maintains that efforts "to keep the state (Kentucky) as a neutral buffer that would protect the Confederacy from attack" were derailed by Polk's action.[28] And Albert Castel caustically observed that Polk's decision to occupy Columbus was "the first and greatest of his numerous contributions to southern defeat."[29]

In fairness, Polk's biographer, Joseph H. Parks, points out that Polk believed Confederate action was needed to forestall an inevitable Union move on Columbus and, following the Confederate occupation, President Jefferson Davis refused to condemn Polk's decision.[30] Whatever Polk's justification, the game was on in the West as both sides openly jockeyed for position in Kentucky. As part of the South's response to Union occupation of northern portions of the state, Johnston ordered Zollicoffer into southern Kentucky from East Tennessee. Unfortunately, Zollicoffer took a large proportion of available Confederate forces with him into Kentucky, and Col. William B. Wood, who assumed command at Knoxville in Zollicoffer's absence, could do little more than protect the town and railroad bridges in East Tennessee.[31]

As Confederate strategists in the western theater focused on operations in

[27] Albert Castel, "The War Moves West," in *The Civil War, The Compact Edition: Fort Sumter to Gettysburg*, ed. William C. Davis and Bell I. Wiley (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal, 1998), 265.

[28] Lowell H. Harrison, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 192.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Joseph H. Parks, *General Leonidas Polk, C.S.A.: Fighting Bishop* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), 181-184.

[31] *OR*, 1, IV: 412.

Kentucky, Union commanders planned an assault on East Tennessee, something

Abraham Lincoln and regional loyalists had advocated for months. Union control of

Kentucky allowed the state to become a sanctuary for irregulars and a convenient base for

operations across the border in Tennessee. On July 1, 1861, the Lincoln administration

sent Navy Lt. William Nelson to Kentucky to recruit volunteers from Kentucky and

Tennessee, and distribute arms and supplies to Unionists in East Tennessee.[32] Navy Lt.

Samuel P. Carter joined Nelson later in July for the express purpose of recruiting East

Tennesseans into the Union army. When the Rev. William B. Carter of East Tennessee

arrived in Washington in September with a scheme to create a mass popular uprising by

sabotaging railroad bridges, President Lincoln enthusiastically embraced Carter's ideas.[33]

Lincoln also agreed with Carter that regular Union forces should coordinate with the

local insurgency by simultaneously mounting an invasion. In an undated memorandum

written toward the end of September or early October 1861, the president called for an

attack "on the Railroad connecting Virginia and Tennesse[e], near the mountain pass

called Cumberland Gap"[34] Carter returned to Kentucky with $2500 probably given to him

by Secretary of State William H. Seward to plot the uprising while Lincoln continued to

prod his military commanders to support the East Tennessee insurgents.[35]

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[32] Ibid., 251-252.

[33] Oliver P. Temple, *East Tennessee's Civil War* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke Company, 1899), 371. Brig. Gen. George H. Thomas's endorsement of the plan in a message to Maj. Gen. George McClellan on Sep. 30, 1861, preceded Carter to Washington. See *OR*, 1, IV: 281.

[34] Basler, *Collected Works* IV, 544.

William Carter daringly proposed what Carl von Clausewitz termed "people's war."[36] East Tennessee Unionists were to gather in camps in anticipation of the bridge burnings and invasion by regular Federal forces, then use their collective strength to take over each county in the region. Since Zollicoffer had moved almost all of his effective troops to the Cumberland Mountain gaps to guard against rumored invasion, Col. Wood in Knoxville had only about 200 infantry and one company of cavalry to protect Knoxville.[37] Zollicoffer acknowledged the importance of mountain gaps in his defensive strategy in an assessment to Albert Sydney Johnston's headquarters in Bowling Green, Kentucky, dated October 29, 1861:

> There are three main roads by which, if an invasion of East Tennessee is contemplated, an enemy might approach. On this, by Cumberland Gap, we have heretofore concentrated nearly our whole force, and we now have seven guns in position at Cumberland Gap. The most westerly road is by Monticello, in Kentucky, and Jamestown, in Tennessee...Should a force select that route of invasion I could meet them at the mountain passes near Clinton and between Kingston and Morgan Court-House, and keep them on that broad, sterile region until it would be practicable for General Buckner to throw a force in their rear and cut them off.[38]

Since Confederate forces were scattered around the theater, a concerted Union blow in concert with popular resistance might well have succeeded if Brig. Gen. William T.

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[35] Temple, *East Tennessee's Civil War*, 371. Noel Fisher claims that Secretary of War Stanton handed over the money, but I find no documentary basis for this. See Noel P. Fisher, *The Civil War in the Smokies* (Gatlinburg: Great Smoky Mountains Association, 2005), 52.

[36] Robert R. Mackey, *The Uncivil War: Irregular Warfare in the Upper South, 1861-1865*, vol. 5, *Campaigns & Commanders* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004), 9-10.

[37] *OR*, 1, IV: 515-516.

[38] Ibid., 486-487.

Sherman, commander of the Department of the Cumberland, had not erred on the side of caution when he halted and then recalled General Thomas's troops, thus abandoning the East Tennessee insurgency to its fate.

Although Sherman was criticized at the time for making seemingly wild estimates about Confederate troop concentrations, it is hard to fault his judgment to stay out of East Tennessee given the state of the Union army in Kentucky during the latter months of 1861. Funding, supply and manpower shortages plagued Sherman's short tenure as commander-in-chief, a position he did not willingly assume. On 8 October, 1861, the day he took command, Sherman told Garrett Davis of Paris, Kentucky, that "I am forced into command of this department against my will, and it would take 300,000 men to fill half the calls for troops."[39] On the same day, he rushed off a telegram to Colonel Jackson in Owensborough, stating that, "I am forced to organize and operate with insufficient means and materials."[40] To General Ward in Greensburg, Sherman lamented, "We are moving heaven and earth to get the arms, clothing, and money necessary in Kentucky, but McClellan and Frémont have made such heavy drafts that the supply is scant."[41] In addition, the Quartermaster Department in Washington did not have enough personnel at this time, its supply distribution system was faulty, and it could not procure enough good quality material

[39] Ibid., 297.

[40] Ibid., 298.

[41] Ibid., 299.

to make decent uniforms.[42] Sherman had stepped into a tumultuous theater of war

amid great political uncertainty where money, supplies, and weapons were scarce. It

is no wonder that pessimism crept into his correspondence and, during the second

week of October, a command crisis engineered by U.S. Representative Horace

Maynard and Senator Andrew Johnson, who wanted to aid the loyalists in East

Tennessee, added an additional worry to Sherman's already overburdened mind.[43]

On October 10, Brig. General Ormsby M. Mitchel of the Department of the

Ohio, headquartered in Cincinnati, informed General Thomas that he was coming to

Camp Dick Robinson on orders from the War Department "to take possession of

Cumberland Ford and Cumberland Gap, and ultimately seize the East Tennessee and

Virginia Railroad."[44] Maynard and Johnson evidently had discussed the reassignment

of General Thomas with Secretary of War Simon Cameron, who lent a sympathetic

ear to the scheme and set wheels in motion to relieve Thomas with Mitchel.[45] General

Thomas, commander of forces at Camp Dick Robinson, did not appreciate the new

arrangement and asked to be relieved of command.[46] Sherman, replying on October

13, assured Thomas that "General Mitchel is subject to my orders, and I will, if

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[42] Russell F. Weigley, *Quartermaster General of the Army* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 203.

[43] Gerald J. Prokopowicz, *All For the Regiment: The Army of the Ohio, 1861-1862*, Civil War America, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 65-66.

[44] *OR*, 1, IV: 301-302.

[45] Prokopowicz, *All for the Regiment*, 65-66.

[46] *OR*, 1, IV: 303.

possible, give you the opportunity of completing what you have begun."[47] Sherman

told Thomas that he wished to visit him at Camp Dick Robinson, but first had to meet

Secretary of War Cameron in Louisville, who subsequently wired President Lincoln

on the 16th, "A large number of troops needed here immediately."[48] In addition to the

troop situation, Sherman must also have discussed command arrangements with

Cameron, since by October 20 he had heard that the Secretary of War, by now back in

Washington, told Mitchel to stay put at Cincinnati.[49]

Following Cameron's visit and the command dust-up, Sherman visited Camp

Dick Robinson where he found that Thomas had begun moving into the Rockcastle

Hills on reports that Zollicoffer was near London, Kentucky. Sherman's great

strategic fear that any thrust southwards could not be supported now came to the fore

when he reported to the war department:

> This leaves the line of Thomas' operations exposed, but I cannot help it. I
> explained so fully to yourself and the Secretary of War the condition of things,
> that I can add nothing now until further developments. You know my views-that
> this great center of our field was too weak, far too weak, and I have begged and
> implored till I dare not say more.[50]

As winter came on, Sherman worried that supplies might not get through to Thomas as he

moved towards Zollicoffer in southeastern Kentucky. On October 25, he wired Thomas,

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[47] Ibid., 306.

[48] Ibid., 308.

[49] Ibid., 312.

[50] Ibid. 315-317.

"Don't push too far. Your line is already long and weak. I cannot now reinforce you…An interruption of the railroad, by an incursion from Prestonburg, would cut you off from that source of supply."[51] Colonel Theophilus Garrard of the 3rd Kentucky Volunteers confirmed the effects of poor logistics when he commented on the lack of proper clothing for his men to Gen. Thomas following a skirmish with Zollicoffer at Wildcat, Kentucky, on October 21, "I do not attach blame to anyone, but my men are actually suffering."[52]

The idea that Confederate forces might rush up from Nashville to Bowling Green never left Sherman's strategic thought. Indeed, this was the desired scenario laid out by Zollicoffer, who envisioned cutting off a federal invasion force at the end of its supply line. The creaking Union supply situation in Kentucky was already affecting operations above the border, and on November 3, the commander of Thomas' advanced unit at London, Brig. Gen. Albin Schoepf, candidly wired him:

> In considering the future movements of my command, we must not lose sight of the fact that the Rockcastle River is liable at any time now to present an impassable barrier between us and cut off my means of procuring subsistence, first by freshets, and next by ice. We cannot subsist from the adjacent country.[53]

On November 5, Sherman reiterated that Thomas hold his position and, bowing to the inevitable dictates of logistics, ordered him a week later back to the vicinity of Danville to meet an expected Confederate thrust into central Kentucky, an attack that

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[51] Ibid., 318.

[52] Ibid., 319.

[53] Ibid., 331.

never materialized in 1861.[54] Sherman's obvious unhappiness with the situation in

Kentucky and his strident predictions of doom finally led to his reassignment as part

of a sweeping army reorganization that split the Kentucky theater, joining the eastern

sections of the bluegrass state and Tennessee under the jurisdiction of the Department

of the Ohio.

The war department finally relieved the despondent Sherman with Don Carlos

Buell on November 15, but Buell was no less cautious than his predecessor who, on

Dec. 11, 1861, was accused by the *Cincinnati Commercial* newspaper of being

"insane."[55] Whatever the merits of that charge, it is hard to see how Sherman erred by

keeping Thomas out of East Tennessee. In a letter to his brother, John, on 9 January,

1862, Sherman explained his fears that Zollicoffer, advancing from Somerset,

intended to link up with General Hardee advancing east from Bowling Green to the

Green River.[56] Thus joined, the combined Confederate army might bull its way up to

Lexington, or even capture the Ohio River bridges at Louisville. Meager Union

forces, beset by strategic uncertainty, supply shortages, poor transportation, untrained

men, lack of funds, and inflated estimates of enemy strength were simply not prepared

for an assault on Cumberland Gap and extended operations in enemy territory. In fact,

a much later battle at Richmond, Kentucky, on August 30, 1862, ended in disaster for

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[54] Ibid., 318, 353-354.

[55] *Cincinnati Commercial*, 11 December 1861.

[56] William T. Sherman to John Sherman, 9 January, 1862. *Sherman's Civil War: Selected Correspondence of William T. Sherman, 1860-1865*, Brooks D. Simpson and Jean V. Berlin, eds. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 181.

Union forces primarily due to troop inexperience. Sherman's caution in late 1861 about the capabilities of his own troops and logistics thus made sense in terms of military strategy, but effectively doomed the popular uprising in East Tennessee. As a chastened Sherman confided to his wife, "Still all will fall on me, and I will be held responsible that a brave people did not receive the succor they had reason to expect."[57] Insane or not, it is clear that he understood the consequences of canceling Thomas' movement into East Tennessee, where planning for the bridge burnings proceeded accordingly.

Following his meeting with Lincoln in Washington, William Blount Carter returned to Kentucky to activate his plan to organize a "people's war" around bridge burnings and invasion by regular Union forces from Kentucky. On October 22, he informed General Thomas from near Montgomery, Tennessee, that the loyalists of Scott and Morgan counties were ready to "open the way for you by routing...small bodies of marauding [rebel] cavalry."[58] Writing to Thomas from Roane County on October 27, Carter seemed less certain about his course of action. He evidently believed that a strong uprising might overpower weak Confederate forces and keep the railroad intact. If strong leaders did not materialize, then the Unionists would "make a desperate attempt to burn all the bridges," the course eventually adopted.[59] In any event, Carter proceeded with his plans either completely ignorant of Sherman's

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[57] William T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing Sherman, 11 January, 1862, *Sherman's Civil War*, 186.

[58] *OR*, 1, IV:317.

[59] Ibid., 320.

halting of Thomas' advance units at London, Kentucky, or in the hope that open rebellion might present such a golden opportunity for invasion that Sherman would change his mind.[60] Without regular military support, bridge burning was little more than a gesture of defiance. Although Carter skillfully organized the bridge burnings, he seems to have neglected a failsafe plan in case the military opted out.

W. B. Carter and his principal henchmen, Captains William Cross and David Fry, targeted nine bridges for destruction along the railroad line from Bridgeport, Alabama, up to Union Depot (now Bluff City) in Sullivan County, Tennessee, and then chose ringleaders in each targeted locale who, in turn, picked trusted henchmen to carry out the burnings.[61] Although rumors flew wildly about the countryside of suspected attempts at sabotage and invasion by Union forces, Carter planned the operation well, managing to keep the scheme secret from suspicious Confederate authorities. On the evening of November 8, saboteurs stealthily approached their intended targets and, before night had faded, managed to destroy five of the nine spans, including two near Bridgeport, and others near Charleston, Greeneville, and Union Depot, respectively. Unfortunately, bridges with large contingents of Confederate sentries posed too great a risk of failure and, after assessing the situation, would-be saboteurs at those locations simply went home and called it a night. The plotters achieved greater success at lightly held bridges, except at Strawberry Plains where someone dropped the group's only matches during a melee with the guard, who

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[60] Fisher, *War at Every Door*, 54.

[61] Ibid., 379.

escaped to spread the alarm and send the attackers into hasty retreat without firing the bridge.

As an exercise in military strategy, the original plan for a people's war had great merit. Popular uprising coupled with invasion by regular military forces stood a great chance of success, particularly when poor intelligence as to where the invasion might strike kept Confederate forces dashing among various mountain passes around Cumberland and Big Creek Gaps. In fact, Gen. Zollicoffer accused one informant who reported 30,000 Union troops approaching the Tennessee line from Kentucky of being a "Lincolnite," who "ought to have been arrested."[62] But the insurrection plan had a major flaw. Although the ringleaders successfully planned the actual bridge burnings, they seemed not to have gauged consequences of failure, or the speed with which Confederate authorities might quell the popular uprising and rebuild the bridges. Most people still assumed the war would be short, and perhaps the bridge burners felt conflict would end before retribution caught up with them. Following the events of November 8, however, Southern commanders reacted swiftly to restore order with more troops, martial law, and summary justice for apprehended saboteurs.

By November 11, Knoxville was under martial law, and on November 20, Zollicoffer wired his superiors in Bowling Green that "those who are yet hostile can only be cured of their folly by severity."[63] Within two weeks of the bridge burnings, most Unionist encampments in East Tennessee were abandoned. One of the last

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[62] *OR*, 1, IV: 521.

[63] *OR*, 1, VII: 686-687.

known Unionist camps was at Doe River Cove, a few miles south of Elizabethton, Tennessee, which Confederate forces dispersed around the end of November.[64] On November 25, Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin telegraphed Col. Wood at Knoxville to summarily hang all bridge burners, leave their bodies dangling near the bridges, and send all other traitors to a military prison in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, as prisoners of war.[65]

The number of people arrested in the weeks following the bridge burnings may have been well over a thousand, with Confederate authorities eventually catching and hanging five bridge burners.[66] As Oliver Temple observed many years later, "The attempt to burn these bridges…was, in my opinion…most unwise and unfortunate."[67] Of course, the outcome might have been different had regular Union forces in Kentucky been more well-organized and operationally ready to assist the uprising in East Tennessee.

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[64] Temple, *East Tennessee and the Civil War*, 385-386.

[65] *OR*, 1, VII: 701.

[66] McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels*, 103.

[67] Temple, *East Tennessee and the Civil War*, 387.

CHAPTER III

"A THOUSAND THANKS FOR THE LATE
SUCCESS YOU HAVE GIVEN US."

Martial law, a crackdown on dissidents, and rising Confederate troop levels

stabilized the military situation in East Tennessee to such an extent that southern

commanders resumed plans for taking the offensive. Buell's continued timidity

invited a Confederate move against Kentucky, and Zollicoffer accordingly advanced

into southern Kentucky in late November, 1861. On November 11, the Confederate

command underwent reorganization when Maj. Gen. George B. Crittenden assumed

command of Middle and East Tennessee, with Zollicoffer in Kentucky and Brig. Gen.

William H. Carroll in Knoxville as his subordinates, while Col. Danville Leadbetter

assumed command of troops detailed to protect the railroad between Chattanooga and

Bristol.

At this stage of the war, supplies flowed to Knoxville up the railroad from

depots near Chattanooga in north Georgia, or down from central Virginia, and East

Tennessee itself was not yet denuded of food and forage. Improved logistics and more

troops enabled Confederate commanders to cast their eyes northward towards

Kentucky for a limited offensive designed to interdict Union invasion routes into

Tennessee and secure the right flank of southern forces based in Bowling Green. With

these objectives in mind, Zollicoffer moved his little army to Mill Creek on the south

bank of the Cumberland River in Kentucky where he could receive supplies from Nashville by steamboat.[1] As Zollicoffer set up camp in Mill Springs and sent units across the river to Beech Grove, Brig. Gen. Carroll reported to Maj. Gen. Crittenden on Dec. 9 that, according to his best estimates, 11,000 southern troops remained in East Tennessee, with another four to five thousand available from companies just then organizing in counties surrounding Knoxville.[2]

Col. Danville Leadbetter, in charge of railroad security, moved his command to Greeneville, Tennessee, and stationed a cavalry company in Elizabethton. Exhibiting commendable zeal shortly after his arrival in Greeneville, the colonel marched several companies of troops and cavalry to the northern part of Greene County in pursuit of 200-300 armed insurrectionists reported encamped there. Demonstrating just how difficult it was to catch them, the guerillas retreated on the night of Nov. 24 in the direction of Cooke and Sevier Counties, disappearing along wispy mountain paths to safety in the hills. Leadbetter's pursuing artillerymen managed to capture two insurgents, including a captain of the guerilla force.[3] On December 8, Leadbetter reported the capture of three bridge burners, Henry Fry, Jacob Henshaw, and Hugh Self, who had helped burn Lick Creek Bridge. Fry and Henshaw had been summarily hanged on Nov. 30, and Self, a sixteen-year-old lad, received a prison sentence. Such summary justice seemed instrumental in temporarily

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[1] *OR*, 1, VII: 734.

[2] Ibid., 751-752.

[3] Ibid., 712-713.

pacifying the Unionists, with Leadbetter somewhat chattily informing the Adjutant General in Richmond that "the execution of the bridge-burners is producing the happiest effect. This, coupled with great kindness towards the inhabitants generally, inclines them to quietude."[4] Leadbetter conceded that insurgents would "continue for yet awhile in the mountains," but that most people seemed outwardly inclined to obedience.[5]

Gen. Buell in Kentucky continued to strengthen his Union forces during the winter of 1861-1862 with better training and equipment. Unfortunately, disease decimated his encampments as measles, typhoid fever, dysentery and other maladies ravaged the men. The situation deteriorated so badly that restless Union troops preferred marching to sitting idly by and waiting for sickness to strike. Col. Thomas Bramlette, commander of the post at Columbia, Kentucky, expressed this sentiment when he wrote to General Thomas, "Safety to human life, aside from the defense of the country, demands our moving."[6] With his own troops calling for action, Buell also heard from Lincoln, Gen. George B. McClellan and Secretary of War Simon Cameron to move into East Tennessee. Horace Maynard and Andrew Johnson continued to berate government and military officials with their views on invasion, while S. P. Carter and his brigade of East Tennesseans awaited events at their camp near Somerset. Buell finally relented and gave Gen. Thomas the green light to attack

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[4] Ibid., 748.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 513.

Zollicoffer on the Cumberland River in southern Kentucky, but balked at an East

Tennessee expedition. Thomas, unleashed at last, began a movement toward Somerset

to link up with Schoepf's and Carter's brigades to attack Zollicoffer's advanced units

at Beech Grove on the north side of Cumberland River, less than a day's march south

of the town.

In early January 1862, Confederate commanders Crittenden and Carroll joined

Gen. Zollicoffer at Mill Springs, Kentucky, with Gen. Crittenden in overall command.

Crittenden thought it best to attack the converging enemy forces instead of waiting for

them at Beech Grove. On the foggy and wet morning of Jan. 19, Confederate forces

attacked the Union Second Brigade at Logan's Cross Roads. Gen. Thomas, arriving

on the battlefield shortly after Confederate infantry plowed into Lt. Col. William

Kise's Tenth Indiana regiment, quickly assessed unfolding events and intervened at

the tactical level, sending troops where they were needed.[7] Thickly wooded terrain

inhibited the use of artillery and cavalry, with the battle pitting infantry against

infantry. In all the confusion, a Union officer shot and killed Gen. Zollicoffer, whose

death momentarily stalled the Confederate thrust, giving northern troops time to

reorganize and launch a series of attacks that finally broke the Confederates, who,

hotly pursued by the Federals, fled back to their defensive works at Beech Grove.

After dark, Gen. Crittenden, worried that the single available steamboat might be

destroyed by artillery fire the following morning, slipped his army across the river to

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[7] Prokopowicz, *All for the Regiment*, 81.

Mill Springs, and thence southwards into Tennessee on a long and dismal 80-mile march to Gainesborough.[8]

Crittenden's defeat during the Mill Springs campaign and U.S. Grant's advance on Forts Henry and Donelson in February caused a Confederate retreat from Kentucky all the way to Murfreesboro, in Middle Tennessee, thirty miles below Nashville, and thence to Decatur, Alabama and the Mississippi Valley.[9] On February 1, Zollicoffer's body arrived in Nashville, where it lay in state at the Capitol and, following funeral rites the next day, a newspaper reported that "the concourse of military and citizens that attended the remains to the grave was the largest ever seen in Nashville."[10]

But what did all this mean for East Tennessee? Crittenden's defeat at Logan's Cross Roads laid Upper East Tennessee wide open to invasion, with attacking Union forces potentially bypassing Cumberland Gap and starving its Confederate defenders into submission. This, in fact, did happen in reverse later in 1862 when Union forces temporarily occupied the Gap, and Gen. Kirby Smith bypassed it on his way into Kentucky to join up with Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee. Smith's advance disrupted the Union supply line, necessitating abandonment of the Gap by Gen. George W. Morgan, who retreated back into Kentucky. In any event, the ever-cautious Buell sent only S. P. Carter's brigade toward the Gap, fully realizing that Carter had too few men to

[8] *OR*, 1, VII:110.

[9] Ibid., 905.

[10] *Clarksville Chronicle*, February 7, 1862.

invade East Tennessee.[11] When Buell learned that Bowling Green was abandoned, he immediately set out for Nashville, arriving there in early March. Grant's capture of Fort Donelson and the subsequent occupation of Nashville by Buell shifted strategic impetus away from East Tennessee, which languished under Confederate control for another eighteen months as Union forces fought to secure the Mississippi corridor and capture the important rail and river junction at Chattanooga.

Following Maj. Gen. Crittenden's retreat into Middle Tennessee after Logan's Cross Roads, his depleted army linked up with Gen. A. S. Johnston's forces in Murfreesboro, where Johnston gave Crittenden a division command in the newly constituted Central Army of the Western Department. Command of East Tennessee went to Maj. Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith who, in February, 1862, was a division commander in Virginia. Kirby Smith received his orders on February 25, assuming command in Knoxville on March 9. The new commander quickly detected organizational deficiencies in his undermanned department, complaining to A. S. Johnston that "this whole command is composed of twelve month's volunteers. I find it in a state of great disorganization, detachments acting separately and independently, and with little or no military restraint."[12] There were only 8,000 effectives throughout East Tennessee, with 4,000 of those guarding Cumberland Gap, 2,000 stationed in and around Knoxville, and the remainder guarding bridges along the railroad.[13]

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[11] *OR*, 1, VII:567.

[12] *OR*, 1, X(2):307-308.

[13] Ibid.

The dire manpower shortage left few troops to defend Upper East Tennessee from the direction of Chattanooga, a city increasingly menaced by Union armies probing deeper into Tennessee. Chattanooga's importance as a transportation hub forced Kirby Smith to sometimes choose between defending that area or Cumberland Gap, a situation resulting in the temporary abandonment of the Gap in June, 1862, when Union forces threatened Chattanooga from Huntsville, Alabama. Confederate forces also had trouble defending Big Creek Gap, as evidenced by a skirmish on March 14 when Union forces commanded by Col. James P. T. Carter surprised and completely routed two companies of the First East Tennessee Cavalry of Lt. Col. John F. White. As Union pressure mounted against Cumberland Gap, skirmishing in the vicinity of the Gap became commonplace.

Tactically, Col. Carter's raid on Big Creek Gap and Jacksborough illustrated the difficulty of military operations in East Tennessee's mountainous terrain. On March 8, Brig. Gen. Samuel P. Carter ordered Col. Carter to "proceed to Big Creek Gap and Jacksborough…and capture or rout the rebel forces which were reported to be in that vicinity blockading roads and molesting the persons and property of Union citizens."[14] Col. Carter got started on March 10, and upon learning that two companies of rebel cavalry occupied Big Creek Gap, decided to send his own cavalry around the mountain between him and the pass, with Union infantry ascending the peak to meet the detached cavalry unit on the other side. The infantry's nine mile march was so difficult "that it was only by the superhuman exertions…of the men that

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[14] *OR*, 1, X (1): 19.

the march was made."[15] The column trudged single file along narrow paths in pitch black darkness, with some men getting so lost that they missed the next morning's skirmish at Big Creek Gap, where the Confederates were completely surprised and routed, suffering 45 casualties and losing horses, wagons, and supplies of every description.[16] Unfortunately, Carter's cavalry arrived late and most of the Confederates escaped to fight another day.

The reunited Union force marched on to Jacksborough, about five miles from Big Creek Gap, arriving just in time to skirmish briefly with the Confederate rear guard. From there, Carter marched his men to Fincastle, and then another three miles to Woodson's Gap, where he destroyed a saltpeter manufactory and stored foodstuffs, including "11,000 lbs. of bacon and 20 sacks of flour."[17] Col. Carter appreciated the zeal and loyalty of Unionists in the countryside, noting that "everything they had was freely tendered to us."[18] On March 19, the colonel received orders to return to Kentucky, and four days later he and his men were back at their headquarters in Flat Lick, Kentucky, about 40 miles north of Cumberland Gap.

In contrast to Col. Carter's favorable comments about the citizens of East Tennessee, Maj. Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith offered a different view of the raid. Expressing dissatisfaction with the loyalty of East Tennessee's citizens to the

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[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 19-20.

[17] Ibid., 20.

[18] Ibid.

southern cause, the general attributed Union success to treason by his East Tennessee troops, observing caustically that "pickets detailed from them cannot be relied on, and even officers are not free from suspicion of more fidelity to the Federal than to our service."[19] Kirby Smith used the occasion to renew his plea to Confederate authorities in Richmond to remove disloyal troops to another department where "they cannot be tampered with by the enemy" in close proximity to a hostile border.[20]

Dreams of invasion by regular Union forces never died in Upper East Tennessee, a factor that kept Unionist resistance at fever pitch. Col. Carter's raid proved the inclinations of Union loyalists to lend a hand to Federal forces operating in the region and, strategically, that Cumberland Gap might be bypassed altogether, no matter which side controlled the pass. In fact, Brig. Gen. George W. Morgan, commanding Seventh Division of the Army of the Ohio at Cumberland Ford, was busily making plans to enter East Tennessee to threaten both Jacksborough and the Gap. In April, Morgan said he "should not be surprised if the enemy abandons Cumberland Gap," which the Confederates eventually did some two months later when Kirby Smith moved all his available troops towards Chattanooga, leaving the Gap open to occupation by Federal forces.[21]

Kirby Smith had few strategic options for defending East Tennessee. Upon assuming command in March, the general candidly informed President Jefferson

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[19] Ibid., 21.

[20] Ibid.

[21] *OR*, 1, X (2): 142.

Davis of difficulties in the department, starting with the fact that no one had been in

command since Crittenden left for Kentucky. As a result, "regiments and detachments

were everywhere acting independently, and without military restraints of any kind."[22]

Kirby Smith alluded to the difficulties of keeping the railroad open when he

mentioned to the president that he had "been detained by obstructions on the Virginia

and Tennessee Railroad" when traveling to the theater from Virginia.[23] The

department had two experienced and fully equipped Alabama regiments, but most of

the men in these units were sick. Kirby Smith then concluded his letter to the

president by lamenting that even if new men could be mustered in, the ordnance

department had nothing but antiquated shotguns with which to arm them.[24] At least

when the main Union threat materialized towards Chattanooga, Kirby Smith could

send reinforcements by rail, a situation that became more urgent when Federal troops

occupied northern Alabama in late April, 1862.

Although his department seemed ripe for large-scale Union incursions, threats

against Cumberland Gap and Chattanooga remained tepid, and Kirby Smith realized

that the fate of East Tennessee hinged on operations along the Mississippi River

valley.[25] He brought his wife to Knoxville and kept an eye on Union movements in

the northern and southern sections of his department. On March 31, the East

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[22] Ibid., 308-309.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Joseph Howard Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith, C.S.A.* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1954), 163-164.

Tennessee commander wrote candidly to President Davis about the troop shortage, general hostility of the citizens, and the need for martial law.[26] Replying for the president, Gen. Robert E. Lee told Kirby Smith to define those areas in East Tennessee where martial law was required, and generally agreed that current force levels were inadequate for offensive operations by offering advice on withdrawal, if that became necessary:

> Your line of retreat must in some measure be determined by circumstances, but unless you should be called upon by General A. S. Johnston to re-enforce some command in your advance, the disposition of your forces should be made with a view to the protection of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, and a withdrawal by that route if necessary.[27]

Lee later approved Kirby Smith's request for martial law throughout East Tennessee and replacement of disloyal troops with more reliable units from outside the department.[28] In General Orders No. 21, President Davis officially sanctioned suspension of civil law and habeas corpus, and directed Kirby Smith to "establish an efficient military police" and halt the distillation of "spirituous liquors."[29] The Conscription Act passed by the Confederate Senate on April 9 and approved by Davis on April 16 further encouraged male Union loyalists to escape from East Tennessee. Draconian martial law only strengthened the will of East Tennessee's Unionists to

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[26] *OR*, 1, X (2): 376-377.

[27] Ibid., 377.

[28] Ibid., 397-398.

[29] Ibid., 402.

resist military authoritarianism through voluntary enlistment in the Federal army and participation in guerilla warfare.

As Kirby Smith in Knoxville fretted over how to defend the extremities of his department, irregular warfare continued unabated in spite of Confederate measures to pacify the population of East Tennessee. Marauding parties of irregulars took refuge in high mountains along the Tennessee-North Carolina border, and the only way to neutralize these elusive fighters was to catch them in camp before they melted back into generally impenetrable forest cover. On April 6, Kirby Smith sent out three companies of the Forty-Third Tennessee Volunteer Regiment under Lieut. Col. David M. Key from Greenville to Bald Mountain, just across the border into North Carolina, where a band of outlaws maintained a hideout. After arriving on the 7th, Lieut. Col. Key and his men discovered that the outlaws, probably forewarned, had abandoned their camp. Key then headed for Laurel Valley, a known launching point south of Bald Mountain for guerilla raids into counties along the border. In his report on the action, Kirby Smith candidly described how the guerillas used forested terrain to cover their movements:

> Directing his march through this valley, Colonel Key met no regularly organized force, but his command was repeatedly fired on by parties of from 4 to 10 men, who would then immediately retreat beyond his reach, the country being favorable to this mode of warfare. A portion of the force was deployed on either side of the line of march, the column being thus protected in a measure, and the enemy driven from their hiding places. Owing, however, to the impenetrability of the thickets, few of them could be killed and none captured.[30]

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[30] *OR*, 1, X (1): 628.

The regiment kept this up for three days, losing two men and killing at least 15

outlaws before returning to Greeneville on April 11. On a more ominous note, Lieut.

Col. Key reported that most of the population consisted of well-organized and armed

Unionists keen for a fight.[31] This type of motivated irregular combatant, fighting in

favorable terrain, was hard to suppress, and the raid only reinforced that point.

On April 19, Kirby Smith ordered Brig. Gen. Danville Leadbetter to send his

Third Regiment of Tennessee Volunteer Infantry, commanded by Col. John C.

Vaughn, and a squadron of cavalry into Morgan and Scott counties to suppress

Unionists and destroy their supplies.[32] Vaughn and his men got as far as Huntsville, in

Scott County, with Unionist guerillas sniping at the column all along the way. After

turning around, the Confederate raiders ran into trouble near Montgomery, in Morgan

County, when a Unionist band attacked them in a small village. Vaughn repulsed his

attackers, suffering 5 killed and 12 wounded, while inflicting a loss on the Unionists

of 15 killed, with substantially more than that number wounded, and taking 7

prisoners.[33] Again, Kirby Smith reiterated in his report of the action that "the entire

population of these counties is hostile to us, those able to bear arms being regularly

organized as Home Guards."[34] Mountainous and forested terrain enhanced the

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., 50.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

guerilla's ability to mount effective hit-and-run tactics from deep cover against a foe largely confined to roadways.

In addition to chasing guerillas, Kirby Smith and his meager forces remained ever vigilant against Union invasion. Following the Confederate defeat at the Battle of Shiloh on April 6-7, Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard, who took command after Albert Sydney Johnston died during the battle, ordered the southern army back towards Corinth, Mississippi. On April 10, Kirby Smith immediately sent Gen. Maxey with three regiments from Chattanooga towards Corinth to help Beauregard, leaving Chattanooga virtually undefended. On the 11th, Union forces under Brig. Gen. Ormsby M. Mitchel moved into Huntsville, Alabama, capturing the Memphis and Charleston Railroad along with a great number of locomotives and rail cars. Kirby Smith, since he could no longer reinforce Beauregard, was forced to mount small cavalry raids to destroy bridges along the route of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad to prevent Union troops from bypassing Chattanooga via Stephenson, Alabama, to link up with the Memphis and Charleston. He also considered invading Middle Tennessee, but never could muster enough forces to defend East Tennessee and move against Nashville at the same time.[35]

On April 30, Kirby Smith rushed to the Cumberland Gap area to repel a rumored invasion by Gen. Morgan's small army marching from Cumberland Ford, but the attack never materialized, and the somewhat weary southern general returned to Knoxville. But Union forces continued to pressure his units in the south, so much

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[35] Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith, C.S.A.*, 170-171.

so that in early June, Kirby Smith sped down to Chattanooga by train where, on June 7, Union artillery began bombarding the town. Fortunately for the Confederates, Gen. Negley decided not to attack Chattanooga, and withdrew his Union troops on May 8. Kirby Smith, ill with typhoid fever and worried about Cumberland Gap, dashed back up to Upper East Tennessee, where he established a command post at Bean's Station, southeast of the Gap and north of Morristown's railroad depot.[36] Concentrating his available forces in and around Tazewell, he awaited word on another rumored attempt by Morgan's forces to move beyond Powell's Valley.

While passing through Morristown, the Confederate commander received unwelcome news that Chattanooga was again under threat, this time from Ormsby Mitchel's forces moving by rail to Stephenson below the Tennessee River.[37] With simultaneous threats at both ends of his department, Kirby Smith faced a difficult strategic choice over where to concentrate his meager forces. Knowing that Richmond authorities supported any retreat from East Tennessee over the railroad into Georgia, he decided to abandon Cumberland Gap and rush all available troops to Chattanooga by rail to protect the Georgia supply lines and secure his potential line of retreat.[38] On June 18, Morgan's Union troops marched unopposed into Cumberland Gap as Confederate units hurried away to the south, burning bridges along the Clinch River as they went.

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[36] Ibid., 191.

[37] *OR*, 1, XVI (2): 682-683.

[38] Ibid., 679, 683.

To counter the threat at Chattanooga, Richmond authorities ordered up more reinforcements, including Nathan Bedford Forrest's cavalry brigade. Braxton Bragg, who replaced Beauregard as Army of Tennessee commander, sent Maj. Gen. John P. McCown and 3,000 men to the beleaguered town. In the north, Gen. Morgan remained quiescent at Cumberland Gap, occasionally sending out small columns to forage and keep the Confederates off-balance as Federal forces slowly built up around Chattanooga. With the military situation thus stabilized, Kirby Smith retired to Montvale Springs near Maryville to rest and recover from his illness.[39] After returning to Knoxville, the general reported to Braxton Bragg on July 24 that he had almost 18,000 men under arms in East Tennessee and suggested that the time was ripe for "a brilliant summer campaign" with Bragg in overall command.[40] On July 31, the two Confederate generals met in Chattanooga to formulate plans for further operations in Middle Tennessee and Kentucky. After the conference, Gen. Smith returned to Knoxville, where he convinced himself that a move into Kentucky might be the proper strategy.

On August 9, Kirby Smith wired Bragg in Chattanooga his preference for a Kentucky campaign and, the next day, received the western commander's approval for a move towards Lexington.[41] Leaving Gen. Stevenson to mask Cumberland Gap, Kirby Smith entered Kentucky on Aug. 16 with Churchill's and Cleburne's divisions

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[39] Parks, *General Edmund Kirby Smith, C.S.A.*, 196.

[40] *OR*, 1, XVI (2): 734-735.

[41] Ibid., 748-749.

through Roger's Gap, and by August 18 was in Barboursville, Kentucky, where he determined to move on to Lexington due to scarcity of supplies and lack of popular support in the mountain region.[42] On Aug. 30, the Confederate general and his army from East Tennessee, rechristened the "Army of Kentucky," attacked an inexperienced Union force at Richmond, which they promptly defeated in a lopsided victory. Confederate casualties numbered just 451 against Union losses of 206 killed, 844 wounded, and 5,303 captured or missing out of almost 7,000 engaged. As historian Gerald J. Prokopowicz succinctly put it, "No other Civil War battle of comparable size had such one-sided results, which were universally ascribed to the inexperience of the northern soldiers."[43] The battle's results boosted Kirby Smith's confidence in the superiority of southern troops and also served to hurry Braxton Bragg towards Kentucky.

By this time, Bragg and his army had been moving northward for two days, having left Chattanooga on August 28, using the Sequatchie Valley to bypass Buell's troops at Pikeville and Sparta. Hearing about Kirby Smith's victory at Richmond, Bragg hastened forward to Glasgow, Kentucky, to occupy a position that would threaten Buell's army as it raced toward Louisville to protect its supply base. But Bragg, who held operational initiative, dithered in Glasgow, allowing Buell to continue his move towards Louisville. Kirby Smith, meanwhile, learned that Gen. Morgan, low on supplies, had evacuated Cumberland Gap and was marching towards

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[42] Ibid., 777-778.

[43] Prokopowicz, *All for the Regiment*, 143.

Mt. Sterling with Gen. Stevenson in leisurely pursuit. Gen. Smith decided to join Gen. Humphrey Marshall at Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, to intercept Morgan while rerouting Stevenson's force to Bragg. Although hard pressed by Col. John Morgan's Confederate cavalry, George Morgan's Union troops avoided the Confederates at Mt. Sterling by moving around them on the right and escaping towards the Ohio River. Bragg followed Buell's army to Louisville and set up camp in Bardstown.

Increasingly frustrated at Bragg's inability to bring on a fight with Buell at this stage of the campaign and the escape of Morgan at Mt. Sterling, Kirby Smith did derive some satisfaction from Cumberland Gap's evacuation and continuing potential for defeating Buell's inexperienced Union army. But Bragg, preoccupied with installing a Confederate governor in Kentucky, allowed Buell time to refit in Louisville with two additional regiments from Grant, enough to challenge the southern army. Buell, for once wasting no time, masked the movement of his main force towards Bragg at Bryantsville by sending a corps of 20,000 men to threaten Frankfort. This detached corps kept Kirby Smith from uniting with Bragg at Perryville, where the decisive battle of the Kentucky campaign took place on October 8. Although a limited tactical success for the Confederates, the Battle of Perryville assumed grim proportions of defeat when Bragg decided not to renew the engagement and, instead, started a retreat towards Cumberland Gap. Bragg justified this course of action by citing lack of popular support, dwindling supplies, and concern for losing the army.[44]

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[44] *OR*, 1, XVI (1):1092-1094.

But if armies don't fight, their value dwindles accordingly, and the rough countryside through which the Confederates were to retreat was stripped bare of food and forage, a situation guaranteed to erode unit cohesion and discipline. If Bragg had concentrated his armies, turned first and defeated the weaker corps descending on Frankfort, and then hit Buell with all he had, the outcome in Kentucky might have been far different. But Bragg was no Napoleon, and the strategy of the central position was beyond him as he let the tactical and strategic initiative slip away. During the retreat, Kirby Smith told members of Humphrey Marshall's staff that Bragg's great error was not bringing Buell to battle before the Union army reached Louisville, but Bragg's inability to concentrate his army when battle actually took place may arguably have been the larger blunder.[45] The Confederate armies not only suffered from Bragg's military incompetence, but hunger and hardship along the line of retreat exacerbated low morale, leading to high rates of desertion as the armies of Bragg and Kirby Smith converged towards Cumberland Gap. According to one account, Union cavalrymen captured almost 900 stragglers between Perryville and Harrodsburg on October 11 alone.[46] During the retreat through the Kentucky mountains, however, the very barren terrain characteristics that impelled Kirby Smith towards the fertile bluegrass country on his way to join up with Bragg now further shattered his army.

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[45] Edward O. Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate: The Headquarters Diary of Edward O. Guerrant*, eds. William C. Davis and Meredith L Swentor (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 160.

[46] John W. Rowell, *Yankee Cavalrymen: Through the Civil War With The Ninth Pennsylvania Cavalry* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 92-93.

On October 12, Gen. Smith, then in Bryantsville, sent orders to Maj. D. S. Printup at Richmond, Kentucky, to "collect as many wagons as possible and load them with breadstuffs and send them in the direction of London by Big Hill," along with any cattle he might round up.[47] By October 14, Kirby Smith had reached Lancaster, Kentucky, where he informed Gen. Bragg that his command was strung out, and it would take two or three days for his doubled wagon teams to get up Big Hill (just east of present-day Berea, Kentucky).[48] To make matters worse, Bragg's wagon train intermingled with Smith's at Big Hill, thus delaying the Army of Kentucky even longer as its weary men pulled both wagon trains up the hill. Acting with good intentions to avoid even more confusion, Kirby Smith inadvertently redirected his own wagons "along a circuitous route...that is almost impassable," and feared their ultimate abandonment.[49]

But even in the midst of confusion, the southern general knew the enemy was not pressing hard. Sensing an opportunity to strike a blow, Kirby Smith pointedly asked Leonidas Polk, commander of the Army of the Mississippi, "Cannot we unite and end this disastrous retreat by a glorious victory?"[50] Unfortunately, retreat was in the air, and the dismal retrograde movement ground on as Polk's troops raced ahead to Cumberland Gap, where they quickly ate all the stockpiled goods. Polk showed

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[47] *OR*, 1, XVI(2):936.

[48] Ibid., 943.

[49] Ibid., 959.

[50] Ibid.

little concern for his fellow general's difficulties by blithely declaring to Braxton Bragg, "General Smith's army has suffered some inconvenience from being separated from its trains, but has had sufficient amount of forage and plenty of beef."[51] In the end, Kirby Smith complained bitterly that the Army of the Mississippi consumed supplies he had ordered stockpiled at the Gap, and that his troops were "scattered through the countryside trying to find something upon which to live."[52] Foraging soldiers further antagonized Union supporters around Cumberland Gap.

Fortunately for the dispirited Confederates, terrain characteristics greatly affected Union pursuit of the retreating southern armies. Col. William B. Hazen's Nineteenth Brigade, Fourth Division, Army of the Ohio, chased the Confederate rear guard from Perryville to London, fighting numerous skirmishes and capturing many stragglers along the way. Hazen, an 1855 graduate of West Point who later served with distinction at Shiloh, Stone's River, and Chickamauga-Chattanooga, marched with Sherman through Georgia and the Carolinas. His characterization of the terrain summarizes why it was so difficult to come to grips with retreating Confederates:

> I was an eye-witness to all that occurred on the entire march. The course of the road over which we passed after leaving Mount Vernon was through narrow gorges, occasionally debouching into narrow valleys, and of such a character as to render our movements necessarily cautious and affording opportunities for an energetic foe to have stopped our progress at almost any point. It is doubtful if the rear of the army proper was ever reached, but merely a light force of from 1,500 to 3,000 held back against our advance to feel our progress. It always yielded when closely pressed.[53]

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[51] Ibid., 963-964.

[52] Ibid., 975.

[53] *OR*, I, XVI (1): 1139

Once on the retreat, the Confederates were anything but energetic in inflicting

damage on pursuing Federals, who seemed content to let the southerners go without

another major battle. Confederate cavalry pickets in the rear guard kept the Union

infantry busy, causing one soldier in the pursuing Ninth Kentucky Infantry to remark

that "when we afterwards learned that they were only cavalry and not very numerous

at that we did not wonder at their passing so many points that would have been

favorable to a large force of them to give us battle."[54] Kirby Smith, at least, had

argued for giving battle after Perryville, but Braxton Bragg demurred, and the

campaign ground on to its ignominious conclusion.

With Kirby Smith in Kentucky, command of the East Tennessee Department

devolved on Major General John P. McCown, a native of Sevier County. But

McCown quickly lost the confidence of his superiors in Richmond, who replaced him

with Major General Sam Jones on September 19. Authorities in Richmond pretty

much left administration of martial law to individual commanders acting according to

local circumstances, and Jones continued to demand loyalty from East Tennesseans

while launching raids against insurgents. On October 20, he directed Col. D. R.

Hundley to take his Thirty-First Alabama infantry to the Newport area and "scour the

country in that vicinity and break up or destroy all parties banded together in

opposition to the laws of the Confederate Government and in defiance of its

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[54] Kenneth W. Noe, ed., *A Southern Boy in Blue, The Memoir of Marcus Woodcock, 9th Kentucky Infantry (U.S.A)*, Voices of the Civil War, ed. Frank L. Byrne (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 107.

authority."[55] And yet in the same directive, Jones cautioned Hundley to respect the property of civilians and pay a fair price for all supplies purchased from them.[56] Jones also asked permission from President Jefferson Davis to suspend the Conscription Act so that white workers hiding in the hills might return to farms and mines left untended as a result of their fleeing the draft. Commanders in the field constantly requested men, supplies, horses, and ordnance, and when Kirby Smith once again resumed command in East Tennessee on October 24, he found a chaotic situation in the quartermaster department. The supply problem stabilized somewhat with Bragg's departure for Middle Tennessee on November 11, but, in December, the Union unleashed another of its tricks of irregular warfare-the long range cavalry raid.

At this stage of the war, cavalry raids by both sides in the West had become commonplace. In East Tennessee, Confederate cavalry roamed through the mountains in pursuit of Unionists while John H. Morgan and Nathan Bedford Forrest, among others, built reputations as effective cavalry leaders. But Federal commanders had little opportunity to unleash cavalry on long range raids into East Tennessee. This situation changed in December, 1862 when Gen. Samuel P. Carter swooped down on East Tennessee from Kentucky to burn railroad bridges, and then escaped into Virginia. Because southern forces reacted sluggishly, Carter's raid caused a stir within the Confederate high command, with Maj. Gen. Humphrey Marshall alleging that foot-dragging Unionist telegraph operators delayed dispatches to move railroad cars,

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[55] *OR*, 1, XVI (2): 970.

[56] Ibid.

thus delaying troop movements.[57] In January 1863, Union Maj. John M. Brown, ordered into East Tennessee on a similar mission to burn the bridge at Strawberry Plains, elected to remain near the Kentucky border and support other detached units upon receiving intelligence that Confederate forces were more numerous in Powell's Valley than anticipated. Before returning to their camp at Danville, Kentucky, Maj. Brown and his troopers masked the retreat of another detached force under Maj. James M. Foley that fought a successful skirmish at Perkin's Mill on Elk Fork in Campbell County, Tennessee, before a nearby detachment of Confederates chased them back into Kentucky.[58]

On January 14, 1863, the Confederate War Department sent the recently promoted Lieut. Gen. Kirby Smith to the Trans-Mississippi Department. After a succession of short-term commanders including Henry Heth, Daniel S. Donelson, and Dabney H. Maury, the department finally acquired a commander of at least several months duration in Simon B. Buckner, who arrived in East Tennessee on May 11. Buckner found the region around Cumberland Gap denuded of food and forage after almost two years of warfare, with ill-trained defense forces scattered throughout the theater.[59] Leaving aside garrisons for protecting railroad bridges and Cumberland Gap, Buckner estimated he could not concentrate "more than about 4,000 infantry, 2,000 cavalry, and the requisite artillery; most of them troops who have not been in

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[57] *OR*, 1, XX (1): 98-99.

[58] Ibid., 159-163.

[59] *OR*, 1, XXIII (2): 842-843.

action."[60] Presaging what would, in fact, occur later that summer during Burnside's invasion, he recommended to Gen. Bragg a retreat towards Loudon, a county seat on the Tennessee River, should Union forces move on Clinton, northwest of Knoxville, "making the Tennessee River a common line for your army and mine, should my failure here cause you to withdraw behind the Tennessee."[61] Buckner did not need to mention that the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad also ran through Loudon. In the meantime, he found it necessary to keep his cavalry near the East Tennessee and Virginia line while he built up forward bases at Cumberland Gap, Pound Gap, and Clinton, from which the Cumberland Mountains could be held.[62] The railroads thus affected both defensive and retrograde strategies for a numerically inferior Confederate army increasingly hard-pressed to keep the peace, protect the railroad, and repel invaders.

During the summer of 1863, emboldened Union attackers probed through the mountain passes to destroy railroad bridges and track. The largest of these raids occurred in June, when Col. William P. Sanders entered East Tennessee from Kentucky on June 14 with 1500 men. The Sanders force moved down from Williamsburg, Kentucky, into Tennessee, traveled to the vicinity of Huntsville, and then tore up railroad track between Lenoir's Station and Knoxville, where many citizens turned out to man barricades. Sanders moved on up the Great Valley to burn

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 844-846.

railroad bridges at Strawberry Plains and Mossy Creek before beating a hasty retreat back to Kentucky through Smith Gap in Hawkins County, Tennessee, where he abandoned his artillery trains while barely avoiding capture.[63] Although Confederate engineers rebuilt the destroyed bridges within two weeks, the raid again demonstrated that widely dispersed Confederate forces could not effectively concentrate against fast-moving cavalry exploiting the large number of mountain passes available as escape routes.

The wider strategic situation for the Confederacy darkened considerably during the second half of 1863. Fortunately for Confederate commanders in East Tennessee, William S. Rosecrans dithered below Murfreesboro following the Battle of Stone's River in early 1863, but during June and July, the Union general finally maneuvered Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee to a position below Chattanooga. While Rosecrans and Bragg sparred, Union forces elsewhere inflicted crushing defeats on the Confederacy at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, which meant that Union troops of the Ninth Corps from Ambrose Burnside's Army of the Ohio loaned to Gen. Grant could return to Kentucky. John Morgan's cavalry raid into Kentucky, Indiana and Ohio also delayed the East Tennessee invasion. With Morgan finally captured and Ninth Corps still somewhere south of Kentucky, Burnside reorganized his Twenty-Third Corps and made plans to move on Knoxville.[64]

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[63] *OR*, 1, XXIII (1):386-389.

[64] Welcher, *The Union Army, 1861-1865*, 568.

To make matters worse, Confederate authorities in Richmond decided to reorganize the East Tennessee Department, with Bragg in overall command and Simon Buckner retaining administrative control. Before this dual arrangement had much time to malfunction, Burnside began his move into East Tennessee in August, forcing Bragg, who was threatened at Chattanooga by Rosecrans, to order Buckner out of Knoxville and down to the line of the Hiwassee River where he could support the Army of Tennessee. Buckner, who had contemplated this eventuality back in May, hastily abandoned Knoxville and fled southwards toward Bragg. On 3 September 1863, Burnside entered the city unopposed, having bypassed Cumberland Gap by marching his main column from Somerset, Kentucky, down to Kingston.[65]

Union invasion of East Tennessee illustrated the difficulties involved in defending immovable mountains pierced by numerous gaps. In any event, Confederate force levels never approached sufficient numbers to cover all the passes, and when southern commanders sent most of their troops to Chattanooga in August, they signaled an end to a defensive strategy that had basically worked because no serious Union assault against Upper East Tennessee had been attempted before 1863. Although Confederate forces would threaten and partially occupy portions of the region until late 1864, formal southern occupation ended with Burnside's triumph. After receiving the general's victory telegram, a grateful President Lincoln wired back on Sept 11, "Yours received. A thousand thanks for the late success you have given

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[65] Ibid., 569. Advance elements of the Union army may have entered Knoxville as early as September 1, 1863. Burnside rode in on September 3.

us."[66] Burnside could never really expunge his staggering defeat at Fredericksburg in 1862, but he could, and did, make Lincoln a happy man by bringing relief to the Unionists of East Tennessee in 1863.

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[66] Basler, *Collected Works*, 439.

CHAPTER IV

IN "THE MIDST OF FRIENDS"

Following his successful invasion of East Tennessee in August and September, 1863, Ambrose Burnside understood his main strategic objectives as securing the northern border by capturing Cumberland Gap, protecting the southern approaches up the Great Valley by extending his right flank to meet the left of Maj. Gen. William Rosecrans, who had reached Chattanooga, and defeating any Confederate forces left in upper East Tennessee. To accomplish these objectives, Burnside began to augment his original force of 12,000, which by October 20 had grown to about 25,000 men, including 2,000-3,000 home guards, 2,000 new enlistees, and almost 5,000 troops of the depleted Ninth Corps that had come back up to Kentucky from detached duty in Mississippi "under orders for Kingston."[1] Of course, as Burnside's biographer William Marvel observed, sickness and the need to guard "various strategic bastions" diluted his effective strength, while men in the Ninth Corps suffered exhaustion after their exertions at Vicksburg.[2] Even so, the Union army in East Tennessee retained sufficient manpower to muster around 5,000 troops as a mobile reserve which could be augmented by drawing men from other duties.[3]

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[1] *OR*, 1, XXXI(1): 680, 681.

[2] Marvel, *Burnside*, 295.

As his army increased in size, Burnside's always uncertain supply situation deteriorated. With Confederates controlling both ends of the railroad, his army received supplies slowly by wagon from Kentucky down through Cumberland Gap. Union supplies thus did not keep pace with the army's build-up in manpower, and troops experienced severe clothing and food shortages. As Burnside noted in a letter to Grant on October 20, "We experienced great difficulty in getting supplies across the mountains, and many of the men were suffering for clothing."[4] Fortunately, loyal citizens supplied material goods, food, and enlistees as Unionists came out from hiding, with many joining the army. Burnside was grateful that his troops in East Tennessee were in the "midst of friends," loyalists who seemed more than happy to assist the Union cause.[5] But this did not solve the enormous supply demands of thousands of men and animals, even though Captain H. W. Chester recalled after the war that the campaign got off to a promising start when loyal mountaineers along the Kentucky-Tennessee border greeted their liberators with offers of pies at "ten cents a one."[6] During cavalry operations further up the Great Valley, Captain Chester again remarked on the general loyalty of most Upper East Tennessee citizens, observing that, "As we fell back they did not dare to stay at home and enlisted instead of hiding

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[3] Ibid.

[4] *OR*, 1, XXX (2): 551.

[5] Ibid., 549.

[6] H. W. Chester, *Recollections of the War of the Rebellion: A Story of the 2nd Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, 1861-1865*, ed. Alberta R. Adamson (Wheaton, Illinois: Wheaton History Center, 1996), 64.

in the woods."[7] Foraging became a much pursued daily activity as soldiers attempted to stave off starvation for themselves and their animals.

Burnside next turned to securing the northern border of his new department, with Captain Chester and his Second Ohio Volunteer Cavalry participating in a rapid movement against Cumberland Gap.[8] Due to confusion over orders in the Confederate high command, Brig. Gen. John Frazer still occupied the Gap with about 2500 southern troops. Frazer's cavalry brigade under Col. Carter, which had been sent into Powell Valley on a scouting mission, escaped down the Abingdon Road to safety after encountering stiff resistance as it attempted to return to the Gap.[9] Union forces under Gen. J. M. Shackelford and Col. John F. DeCourcy surrounded the Gap on September 7, with each commander sending separate surrender demands to the Confederate garrison. Col. DeCourcy, believing his was an independent command, refused to take orders from Shackelford, his superior in rank. Frazer spurned all requests for surrender and prepared for battle, even though many of his units were reluctant to fight, a fact noted by Union soldiers shortly after the Confederate surrender.[10]

When Burnside reached the Gap from Knoxville on September 9 after force marching an infantry brigade sixty miles in two days, he stopped the equivocation by

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[7] Ibid., 66.

[8] Ibid., 64-65.

[9] *OR*, 1, XXX(II): 632-634.

[10] Ibid., 611-614; Luman Harris Tenney, *War Diary*, ed. Frances Andrews Tenney (Cleveland: Evangelical Publishing House, 1914), 88. Tenney, of the 2nd Ohio Volunteer Cavalry, was at Cumberland Gap when Frazer surrendered on September 9, remarking a day later that, "Gen. Frazier (sic) afraid boys wouldn't fight."

disavowing his subordinates' surrender demands and assuming control of negotiations. He then convinced Frazer into that the entire Army of the Ohio was outside the Gap, waiting to attack. Sensing a hopeless situation and believing himself outnumbered, the southern commander surrendered his 2500 men along with large quantities of stores and ammunition. Had Confederate commanders not prevaricated and evacuated sooner, the Cumberland Gap garrison might have escaped to join other brigades further up the Great Valley.

By concentrating his forces in Upper East Tennessee, Gen. Burnside experienced more success challenging remnants of Confederate forces supplied along the railroad from southwest Virginia. The Confederates, who occupied points in and around Bristol down to Jonesborough, retained sufficient offensive strength to challenge detached Federal units. Burnside directed his cavalry and infantry brigades up the valley, retaining only enough troops around Knoxville and other strong points to ensure order which, at this point, was not difficult in a predominantly Union population. After receiving directives from Washington to send reinforcements to Chattanooga, Burnside ordered his forces back down the Valley, which he concentrated in and around Knoxville, with some cavalry units deployed south of the Holston River.

Even after positioning his troops for a quick run down the railroad to Chattanooga, Burnside appeared less than eager to support Maj. Gen. William Rosecrans in the lower end of Tennessee Valley. President Abraham Lincoln questioned why his East Tennessee commander wasted time chasing Confederates towards Virginia rather than assisting Rosecrans, who was seriously threatened at Chattanooga by Braxton

Bragg's Army of Tennessee.[11] But the situation around Chattanooga remained murky as Bragg, rather than retreating into Georgia, instead maneuvered to defeat detached elements of Rosecrans' army.[12] Bragg began his operations on September 10, and it took Rosecrans several days to realize the peril. By the seventeenth, he had managed to concentrate the Union army sufficiently to meet the Army of Tennessee in battle.

Bragg, failing in his bid to destroy the Federals in piecemeal fashion, attacked Rosecrans on September 19 at Chickamauga Creek, south of Chattanooga, a key rail junction. By the evening of the twentieth, Bragg had pushed Rosecrans north into town. As the Union high command cast frantically about for reinforcements to keep Bragg at bay, they ordered Burnside to rush troops down the tracks to Rosecrans. Instead, Burnside doggedly continued his move towards Jonesborough in Upper East Tennessee, thus setting off an angry outburst by Lincoln, who was heard to curse for one of the few times in the war.[13] The President later relented when he realized that Burnside could not march off to Chattanooga without relinquishing Knoxville.[14] Since the situation developed so rapidly around Chattanooga, Burnside later correctly pointed out that his troops could not get to Chattanooga in time to affect the battle's outcome, and he did not wish to expose the Upper Valley to counterattack by leaving the area undefended.[15]

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[11] James M. McPherson, *Tried By War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander In Chief* (New York: Penguin Press, 2008), 194.

[12] David J. Eicher, *The Longest Night: A Military History of the Civil War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 578-580.

[13] McPherson, *Tried By War*, 194.

[14] Ibid., 195.

On September 30, the Ninth Corps, commanded by Brig. Gen. Robert B. Potter,

finally arrived to augment Burnside's army by 5,000 men, allowing the general to again

contemplate a movement up the Great Valley. An additional four regiments of Indiana

troops under Brig. Gen. Orlando B. Willcox arrived on October 5, and Burnside wasted

no time directing them through Morristown to the rail junction at Bull's Gap, where

Union troops were concentrating to attack Confederate forces under Brig. Gen. John S.

Williams, whose men were encamped near Greeneville to contest Union moves up the

Great Valley. As Captain Chester of the Second Ohio Volunteer Cavalry observed upon

arriving at Bull's Gap in early October:

> The country of upper East Tennessee is very favorable for flanking movements, in
> that there are several valleys that run parallel up and down the valley. We were in
> the larger one but had to keep scouting parties out all the time to be sure we were
> not being flanked by the enemy going down some other valley. At intervals there
> were gaps through the mountains that separated the valleys, which had to be
> guarded. Such a one was Bull's Gap while we were watching the enemy toward
> Henderson, having a little skirmish on the second [October] and another on the
> third, after which we camped in front of the Gap.[16]

On October 1, Maj. Gen. Robert Ransom arrived in Jonesborough and, taking

command, directed Williams to demonstrate towards Bull's Gap to mask a thrust at

Cumberland Gap.[17] In response, Maj. Gen. Burnside sent cavalry to Bull's Gap to

reconnoiter and hold the Confederates in check until infantry could arrive and concentrate

for attack. Many Union troops arrived by rail at Bull's Gap, including several brigades

from the First Division of Ninth Corps to complement Twenty-Third Corps units,

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[15] *OR*, 1, XXX (2): 547-552.

[16] Chester, *Recollections of the War of the Rebellion*, 66.

[17] *OR*, 1, XXX (2): 640.

primarily cavalry, already in the vicinity. To counter this threat, Brig. Gen. Williams deployed about 1700 men in heavy woods "between the wagon road and railroad to Greeneville."[18] Rolling farmland opened a short distance behind the tree line, and the rear of the Confederate position was covered by artillery, a circumstance that probably saved the small southern army from total annihilation when the Battle of Blue Springs commenced on 10 October 1863.

Seriously outnumbered, the Confederates had no hope of victory. Brig. Gen. Williams spread his troops along a wooded ridgeline near Blue Springs (now Mosheim, Tennessee) and awaited Burnside's assault. Col. James E. Carter and his First Tennessee Cavalry anchored the Confederate right flank, while Col. Henry L. Giltner's Fourth Kentucky Cavalry held the left. Burnside used part of his cavalry to pin the Confederates on his front while he sent Col. John W. Foster on a wide flanking movement to get behind their line. While waiting for Foster to find a suitable ambush position, Burnside extended his line incrementally as reinforcements arrived on the field, resulting in a front more than two miles long. Williams was forced to stretch his already thin defenses in response to the Federal maneuvers, until his front "became nothing but a line of skirmishers."[19] Burnside then ordered his engineer officer, Capt. Orlando M. Poe, to suggest a point of assault, and Poe determined that infantry could be brought up in column from the Greeneville Turnpike behind a low screening ridge where, by simply turning towards the Confederate line, they would be in position for attack.[20]

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[18] Ibid., 551.

[19] Ibid., 641.

After moving up as planned at about 5:00 P.M., the First Brigade of the First Division, Ninth Corps, attacked the center of William's position, splitting his line in two and threatening the Confederate rear. As Union soldiers flowed triumphantly towards the rear, Williams' artillery drove them back between the two wings of the southern army, where rifle fire made them seek cover in the woods. After learning during the night that Foster's cavalry force was attempting to get around his flank and the Cumberland Gap expedition had been abandoned, Williams reluctantly ordered a retreat.[21]

During the early morning of October 11, advance elements of Col. John Foster's cavalry ambushed the Confederates several miles to the east of Greeneville at Henderson's Mill. Foster's main force was farther on at Rheatown, where the Union colonel emplaced artillery and deployed troops in readiness for another ambush when Williams approached the town, which he soon did after routing the Union cavalry at Henderson's Mill. Arriving in Rheatown at about 10:00 A.M., Williams immediately began to set up camp when Col. Foster greeted him with an artillery barrage from a gap in the ridge opposite the town.[22] Since Confederate artillery had been ordered to the railroad and could not return fire, exhausted southern soldiers of Carter's brigade broke and ran to the rear, initiating what Edward Guerrant described as "the terrible military

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[20] *OR*, 1, XXX (2): 570.

[21] Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate*, 342. Guerrant states that "The General did not altogether approve of the move but did not countermand it." His subordinates, Giltner and Carter, organized the retreat and then sought Williams' approval to implement the retrograde movement during the night.

[22] Ibid., 345.

phenomenon of a panic resulting in a stampede."[23] The Confederates rallied at nearby

Pugh's Hill only to stampede again toward Leesburg. While steadier elements of the

Confederate army, primarily artillery units, stemmed the tide of Union pursuit, the shaken

southerners miraculously made it to Jonesborough without further serious incident.

Stopping only long enough to reorganize the ranks, Williams marched his small infantry

force northeast along the railroad while sending his cavalry overland toward

Blountsville.[24]

Over the next few days, the Confederate army retreated through Bristol to

Abingdon, Virginia, where reinforcements awaited to augment Williams' depleted force.

Burnside's pursuing cavalry under Brig. Gen. James M. Shackelford did not have enough

firepower to attack Abingdon, and wisely broke off pursuit. Williams, furious at being

left out on a limb below Greeneville and lucky to have escaped, requested a transfer

while his superiors decided on whether or not to make him a scapegoat and bring him up

on charges of drunkenness at Rheatown. Cooler heads eventually prevailed as

Confederate authorities declined to bring charges and, instead, transferred the unhappy

general to Joseph Wheeler's cavalry. Regardless of recriminations on the southern side,

Burnside had effectively concentrated his forces and, utilizing valley terrain effectively,

temporarily propelled the Confederates from East Tennessee.

In this Upper East Tennessee campaign, Maj. Gen. Burnside advantageously

utilized his superiority in troop numbers to pin Confederate troops in place while sending

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[23] Ibid.

[24] *OR*, 1, XXX (2): 642.

Col. Foster's cavalry on a wide flanking movement masked by a chain of ridges running northeast above Greeneville. Foster took his horsemen up a parallel valley before finding a turnpike connecting with the Jonesborough Pike beyond Greeneville. At Rheatown, where the turnpike to Jonesborough paralleled a high ridge, Foster emplaced artillery in one of the passes to shell Williams' men racing up from Henderson's Mill. Burnside drove the troops hard as he adroitly used terrain to mask his turning force in a successful bid for total victory. But all the back and forth maneuvering around Blue Springs and Greeneville took a tremendous toll on men and animals, with many units having marched hundreds of miles during their service in East Tennessee.

Although the railroad offered some relief from seemingly endless marches, there were simply not enough trains to accommodate thousands of troops and their supplies moving towards a common destination. Since starting for East Tennessee from Kentucky in August, many units marched hundreds of miles during the autumn campaigns. Battery D of the First Rhode Island Light Artillery, for example, marched 230 miles from Cincinnati to Loudon, where it arrived on September 4 after a long, hard march over Cumberland Mountain. During the next month, Battery D marched about 130 miles to various locations until, on October 6, it joined the Ninth Army Corps back at Loudon. Between October 7 and October 10, the battery marched 97 miles from Loudon to Blue Springs, where it unlimbered and shelled the Confederates for a time. When the southerners retreated 20 miles to Rheatown, Battery D followed in pursuit. After the headlong Confederate retreat to Jonesborough, Battery D marched 85 miles back to Knoxville, with its commander complaining that while infantry went by rail, his unit was "forced along at the rate of 30 miles a day in order to arrive as soon after the infantry as

possible."[25] Whether in retreat or advance, intense campaigning broke men and horses alike, and East Tennessee during late 1863 and throughout 1864 witnessed rapid maneuvering up and down the Great Valley.

Following the Blue Springs campaign, Burnside faced a familiar strategic dilemma of his Confederate counterparts during 1861-1863, the old problem of how to defend the upper East Tennessee borders from enemies utilizing two major routes of invasion. Since he held Cumberland Gap, the northern general did not fear military action from Union-held Kentucky, but Confederate forces operating below the Hiwassee River toward Chattanooga or from camps in Virginia and across the mountains in North Carolina posed serious challenges. As Burnside journeyed back to Knoxville following the victory at Blue Springs, he began receiving disturbing reports from Loudon about a strong Confederate incursion below Philadelphia.

In October, Braxton Bragg detached Maj. Gen. Carter L. Stevenson's Confederate cavalry division up the Tennessee valley to block any attempt by Burnside to link up with Rosecrans. On October 20, two regiments of Stevenson's force commanded by Col.'s Morrison and Dibrell, respectively, attacked Col. Frank Wolford's Union cavalry brigade at Philadelphia. In a wild melee, Wolford sent two regiments to protect the brigade's wagon train. Finding themselves behind enemy lines and surrounded, some troopers of the detached Union regiments cut their way back out to Wolford, leaving behind dozens of their comrades as Confederate prisoners. The northern commander, short on ammunition, gathered the survivors and frantically dashed to the safety of Loudon,

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[25] Ibid., 601.

leaving behind most of his supplies and artillery.[26] By any measure a resounding military

setback for his brigade, Col. Wolford valiantly attempted to pluck victory from defeat by

later reporting, "We had several men killed and wounded, and several taken prisoners. I

am confident we killed more of them, and took more prisoners, than they did of us."[27]

Wolford lost nearly 500 men, certainly more than the "several" he later claimed. This

action caused Burnside to dash down to Loudon on the rumor that Bragg had arrived with

his entire army, but the fear proved groundless, and he returned to Knoxville on October

30 after sensibly ordering his forces to concentrate north of the Tennessee River at

Lenoir's Station.[28]

Burnside was right to interpret Confederate movements below the Tennessee

River as presaging a larger movement by Bragg. Following the tactical victory at

Chickamauga which failed to dislodge the Federals from Chattanooga, Confederate corps

commanders in the Army of Tennessee bitterly criticized Bragg for letting Rosecrans

escape. The evolving command crisis in the Army of Tennessee originated with Bragg's

leadership as early as the Kentucky campaign when he opted for retreat following a

similar tactical victory at Perryville in 1862. After fighting the Union army to a standstill

at Murfreesborough from 31 December 1862 to 2 January 1863, Bragg ordered yet

another retreat to Tullahoma following a disastrous attack by Maj. Gen. John

Breckinridge against the Union left on January 2. As historian Alexander Mendoza points

out in his study of the command crisis, "Like the aftermath of Perryville, the retreat

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[26] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 6-7.

[27] Ibid., 6.

[28] Ibid., 778.

following Stones River created dissension among Bragg's subordinates and disappointed the Southern populace."[29] For many of his subordinates, Bragg's inability to destroy Rosecrans at Chickamauga meant that the southern army commander had to go. And one of those subordinates was none other than Lieut. Gen. James Longstreet, one of Lee's most trusted corps commanders, who had led the attack on Rosecrans' right flank that started the Union army's rout at Chickamauga.

After receiving disturbing reports about the command situation in the Army of Tennessee, President Jefferson Davis journeyed to the Confederate position below Chattanooga to confer with Bragg and his subordinates. While stopping over in Atlanta, Davis lifted charges brought against Maj. Gen. Leonidas Polk, one of Bragg's corps commanders, for supposedly delaying the opening attack at Chickamauga. On 9 October 1863, the President arrived at Confederate headquarters in Marietta, Georgia, and expressed unwavering confidence in his friend Bragg, a decision that did nothing to infuse the command structure with new vigor or solve existing problems.[30] Given a new lease on life, Bragg almost immediately relieved Maj. Gen. D. H. Hill, one of his antagonistic division commanders and, with Davis's approval, detached Longstreet's First Corps from the Army of Tennessee and sent it north to challenge Burnside at Knoxville. Bragg thus allowed personal animus towards mutinous subordinates to

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[29] Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command*, 58-59. Mendoza contends that Breckinridge "allegedly" challenged Bragg to a duel when Bragg attempted to shift blame for Stones River to Breckinridge. William C. Davis, *Breckinridge: Statesman, Soldier, Symbol*, 354, says the supposed duel was only "rumored" in Richmond. The "duel" claim remains unsubstantiated.

[30] Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command*, 66.

weaken the Army of Tennessee at Chattanooga just when the Union army was adding reinforcements and a new commander in Maj. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. The move on Knoxville was a catastrophic strategic blunder by Davis and Bragg that lost Tennessee and any chance the Confederacy had of winning in the West.

Unaware of command problems on the Confederate side, Burnside had a small crisis of his own at Rogersville in upper East Tennessee, where a Confederate force under Brig. Gen. "Grumble" Jones routed some Kentucky and Ohio regiments commanded by Col. Israel Garrard, capturing about 800 prisoners. Learning that Garrard and his regiments were encamped near Big Creek, about four miles from Rogersville, Maj. Gen. Robert Ransom on November 3 ordered Jones to attack. With an eye on the weather, Ransom worried that the Holston River might rise, as he made clear to Jones, "It looks as though it would rain, and we may be prevented from making the movement ."[31] Ransom further instructed Jones that "After starting directly for Rogersville[,] rapidity will be required both in the execution of your march and attack, and in your return to your present position."[32] Jones sallied forth from Kingsport and drove straight at Garrard on Big Creek, where he succeeded in surrounding the Union force and stampeding the Seventh Ohio Cavalry. Caught in a vise between Col. Henry Giltner's Second Cavalry Brigade and the Second East Tennessee, the Union rear guard of mounted infantry promptly surrendered. With the action at Rogersville opening Bull's Gap to Confederate exploitation, Burnside ordered Union forces at Greeneville to fall back and protect the

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[31] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 560.

[32] Ibid., 561.

Gap. Fortunately for the Federals, "Grumble" Jones elected to stay put in Rogersville to avoid any chance of entrapment on the railroad between Rogersville and Bull's Gap.

On November 3, Bragg ordered Longstreet up the railroad in what was supposed to be a quick strike on Burnside at Knoxville. When First Corps left Tyner's Station near Chattanooga to attack Knoxville, it rode the East Tennessee and Georgia line up to Sweetwater, and then marched overland to Loudon, where federal troops had burned the Holston River railroad bridge. Although Burnside had experienced good weather during his march into East Tennessee during August and September, Longstreet and his men encountered a wet spell in November that caused extensive flooding and muddy roads. Retreating Union forces added to southern woes by tearing up railroad track and burning trestles as they went back towards Knoxville. By November 14, Longstreet managed to concentrate his corps on the south bank of the Tennessee River across from Loudon, pushed across a pontoon bridge at nearby Huff's Ferry, and started his 15,000 infantry and artillerymen across the river the next morning. Huff's Ferry was not his first choice as a crossing point, but lack of transport for the pontoons eliminated an initial plan to force march the army to Knoxville. As Longstreet later remarked in his operations report:

> Had the means been at hand for making the proper moves I should have marched for the rear of Knoxville via Morganton and Maryville, and gained possession of the heights there by forced marches. My transportation was so limited, however, that I could not spare a wagon to haul the pontoons for our bridge. The only move that I could make under the circumstances was by crossing the river where the [railroad] cars delivered the bridge--Loudon.[33]

Much of the blame for lack of transportation can be laid at Bragg's feet. After assuring Longstreet that supplies and transportation, both rail and wagon, would be made

[33] Ibid., 456.

available for operations in East Tennessee, Bragg then reneged on his promises, thus

delaying the movement and altering Longstreet's entire operational strategy. And to make

matters even worse, Bragg never notified Maj. Gen. Carter Stevenson at Sweetwater

about the Knoxville plan, instead requesting that Stevenson send all excess provisions to

the Confederate army below Chattanooga.[34] When Longstreet's army reached the

Hiwassee River railroad bridge, it found that almost half the available flour supply had

been sent back to the Army of Tennessee.[35] With the weather turning foul, Longstreet's

men began to suffer from shortages of adequate clothing and shoes.

If Bragg was to blame for logistical shortages, then Longstreet also deserves

criticism for underestimating climate and terrain factors. During its movement on

Knoxville, the southern army began to feel the full effects of East Tennessee's wet

weather, muddy clay roads, and swollen streams. During the last half of November, 1863,

incessant rain turned roads into quagmires, soaked men and weapons, and raised rivers to

forbidding levels. Such severe conditions strained Longstreet's already tenuous supply

situation and, as his army marched away from the railhead at Sweetwater, the paucity of

wagons and animals meant more breakdowns and chaos in supplying the troops, many of

whom were barefooted. Horseshoes were in such short supply that Confederate

scavengers took them from dead Union horses.[36] As Longstreet's Chief Commissary

Officer, Maj. R. J. Moses, later reported, "when we left Tyner's Station for Sweet Water

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 477.

[36] Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Porter Alexander*, ed. Gary W. Alexander (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1989), 322.

we were without meat rations," and "the country within our lines was completely exhausted of beef cattle."[37] Defective artillery ammunition often blew up prematurely in the guns or never exploded at all.[38] Although Col. E. Porter Alexander, Longstreet's artillery chief, blamed the depot of the Army of Tennessee, some of these gunpowder problems may have been attributable to the wet weather.[39] And while it is true that Burnside experienced many of the same difficulties, it should be pointed out that he was operating on interior lines of communication and, as Longstreet marched further away from his railhead, Burnside was moving closer to his base at Knoxville.

Following skirmishes with Confederate advance units across the river from Loudon on November 14, Burnside directed his troops in the vicinity to fall back and draw Longstreet on towards Knoxville, a course of action previously suggested by the East Tennessee commander on November 13 and approved by Maj. Gen. U. S. Grant the next day.[40] At this stage of operations, Burnside did not know if a decisive battle would take place before he reached Knoxville, but by November 15, he did not think so, wiring Maj. Gen. John G. Parke at Knoxville, "It now seems to be too late to do more than concentrate at Knoxville and fight them."[41] Burnside then ordered Brig. Gen. William H. Hoskins' brigade from Bull's Gap to Knoxville and sent Brig. Gen. Orlando B. Willcox

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[37] Ibid., 476-477.

[38] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 478.

[39] Ibid.

[40] *OR*, 1, XXXI (3): 138, 145.

[41] Ibid., 158.

and the remainder of his command to Cumberland Gap.[42] If the Union army met a reversal at Knoxville, it could fall back on the mountain passes and retreat to the safety of Kentucky.

After sending Maj. Gen. Joseph Wheeler's cavalry on a largely ineffectual diversionary raid to Marysville, Longstreet's infantry began pursuit of Burnside's army on November 13. Although deep mud hampered his advance, Longstreet caught up with the encamped Federals on November 15 at Lenoir's Station. Unsuccessfully probing for a road leading around the Union position, the Confederate commander prepared for a frontal assault to occur the next day, only to find that Burnside had abandoned Lenoir's during the night.[43] E. Porter Alexander blamed Burnside's escape on the lack of adequate maps, which Bragg had also neglected to supply, "Had we had good maps of the country, we had it in our power to have cut off & captured a part of his troops, by pushing directly to Campbell's Station from our crossing; but, instead, we turned in towards Lenoir."[44]

Accurate maps are, of course, crucial to a battlefield commander. Napoleon relied heavily on his mapmaker, Count Bacler D'Albe, and Stonewall Jackson on the skills of his engineer officer, Major Jedediah Hotchkiss. Longstreet's engineers had inadequate maps, and unreliable local scouts had a tendency to get lost. Most of his Confederate troops hailed from Texas, Georgia, and Virginia, having never before stepped foot in Tennessee. This left matters largely up to the cavalry, which kept the commanding

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[42] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 272.

[43] Ibid., 457-458. Longstreet asserted that "the guides had failed to put the troops on the right road."

[44] Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 315-316.

general adequately abreast of events in the field, thus Alexander probably assigned too much importance to the map issue. And, in addition to the map problem, other factors such as the "fog" of war, skill of his opponents, recalcitrant subordinates, and muddy conditions also influenced Longstreet's movements, as Alexander readily acknowledged.

The rainy weather was also a problem, with Alexander recalling that on the night of November 13, a thunderstorm "came up just as we were going to sleep & blew the tent clear away from over us, & drenched everything we had."[45] It was no help that retreating Federal troops churned the roads into muddy swamps capable of pulling boots from sore feet, immobilizing supply wagons, and incapacitating horses. Longstreet also complained about how the weather affected his movements at Lenoir's Station, where his troops had caught the Federals by surprise on November 15, "The ground was so muddy and the hills so high (almost mountains) that we were not able to get one division up and in position till (sic) after night." With Confederate forces probing his position, Burnside hastily retreated, leaving much of his wagon train behind. The race for Campbell's Station was on, with Burnside backpedaling furiously as Longstreet tried to outflank his fleeing Union adversary.

The road from Loudon to Knoxville, which generally followed the East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad, jogged about two miles north from the railroad junction at Concord to Campbell's Station before merging with the highway from Kingston. The road east from Campbell's Station to Knoxville became the single available alternative route for Burnside's retreating forces, which also utilized the railroad line. If Longstreet

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[45] Ibid., 315.

could take Campbell's Station before Burnside reached it, he would effectively force the

Federal army into a bottleneck at the railroad. On 16 November 1863, he ordered Maj.

Gen. Lafayette McLaws to swing over to the Kingston Road from Lenoir's Station and

advance to Campbell's Station, moving "as quickly as possible."[46] The commanding

general gave McLaws control over Col. John R. Hart's company of Sixth Georgia

Cavalry, which had been scouting towards Kingston, but was now ordered to race for

Campbell's Station. Unfortunately, two advanced Federal brigades with a cavalry screen

under Col. John F. Hartranft arrived minutes before Hart, who could only skirmish with

the cavalry and watch as the bluecoat infantry deployed for battle.[47] If Wheeler's cavalry

had been available to block Hartranft's men, the outcome might have been different, with

Burnside's entire army caught in a trap. As it was, Wheeler accomplished very little on

his foray to Marysville.

When McLaws came up, Longstreet was already to his right, closely engaged

with Union rear guard troops retreating up the railroad. The Confederate commander

ordered McLaws to deploy for battle on the Confederate left wing while Brig. Gen.

Micah Jenkins' division attempted a flanking movement on the right. McLaws was not to

attack until two of Jenkins' brigades under overall command of Brig. Gen. Evander Law

turned the Union left. Anticipating Law's successful turning of the Union flank,

Longstreet instructed Brig. Gen. George Anderson, commanding the brigade following

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[46] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 482. Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command*, 124. Mendoza contends that Longstreet's orders to McLaw imparted no urgency to the movement, but the directive clearly stated, "You should move as quickly as possible."

[47] Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command*, 119.

Law, to frontally attack the Union troops as Law pitched into their flank. Longstreet

deployed his artillery under E. Porter Alexander to occupy the enemy while the army

maneuvered into position. Unfortunately, Law began his turning movement too soon and

was detected by the Federals, who promptly began withdrawing to a second position

about a thousand yards behind the first line of defense.[48]

Although Law had turned early, he was still in position to attack elements of Brig.

Gen. Robert Potter's Ninth Corps, but the Confederate commander botched the assault by

overcorrecting his brigade to the left and colliding with Anderson's brigade. The delay

caused by this mishap, along with approaching darkness and the "enemy's movements in

retreat," frustrated plans for attack.[49] Col. G. Moxley Sorrel, Longstreet's adjutant,

acknowledged that "the roads were deep in mud and caused hard travel and labor, but

they were no better for the Union force."[50] Sorrel also blamed a command feud between

Brig. Gen.'s E. M. Law and Micah Jenkins on the poor performance of the infantry, and

Longstreet later had Law arrested when that officer resigned and made trouble for his

former commander after traveling to Richmond.[51]

As soon as the Federals occupied their new defensive line, McLaws managed to

launch an attack from the Confederate left that was repulsed.[52] Skillfully conducting the

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[48] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 458.

[49] Ibid., 527.

[50] G. Moxley Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer* (New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1905), 211.

[51] Ibid., 212, 220.

[52] Ibid., 274.

retreat and with good fortune squarely on his side, Burnside got his men safely within the defenses of Knoxville. Longstreet, smarting from his failure to bag the Union army, acidly remarked in a later report, "If General Jenkins could have made his attack during this movement, or if he could have made it after the enemy had taken his second position, we must have destroyed this force, recovered East Tennessee, and in all probability captured the greater portion of the enemy's forces."[53] Longstreet may have exaggerated here, since Burnside knew the first position was susceptible to flank attacks and had already chosen a strong second position on a hill not far behind the first line in case the Confederates extended their line of attack which, in the event, they did. Using the high ground to advantage, the Union commander never seemed overly concerned about Confederate attempts to dislodge his army. As it was, Longstreet could only skirmish with Burnside's cavalry as he followed the Federals up to Knoxville, where they filed into positions prepared by Capt. Orlando M. Poe, Chief Engineer. Poe had been astute enough to bring entrenching tools across the Cumberland Mountains, which he distributed to the men as they arrived during the morning of November 17.[54] By digging continuously throughout the afternoon and night, the troops were sheltered in deep rifle pits by the morning of the eighteenth.[55]

Longstreet arguably may have missed a great chance for victory by not attacking immediately as his force came up before the defenses of Knoxville. Col. G. Moxley

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[53] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 458.

[54] Ibid., 275. Many engineering tools had been lost as a result of the hasty Union retreat at Lenoir's Station. Ironically, these tools later benefited the Confederates, who advanced without a great quantity of picks and shovels.

[55] Ibid., 296.

Sorrel certainly thought so, concluding that "an energetic movement, without the slightest

delay, would have carried us into the town and brought Burnside to terms."[56] Historian

Steven Woodworth stated that Longstreet's "actions...gave ominous signs that as on

other occasions in the war when he had held independent command or allowed too much

discretion, he was at an almost complete loss to know what to do."[57] Longstreet's

generally favorable biographer, Jeffrey D. Wert, asserted that "The compelling

characteristic of the man—his self-confidence—had deserted him."[58] But historian

Alexander Mendoza offers a different conclusion, "To Longstreet's credit...he did not

panic and order a hasty assault against the Federal defenses."[59] It is also apparent that

circumstances beyond Longstreet's control such as Bragg's defeat at Chattanooga,

impending arrival of Union reinforcements, and Burnside's well-prepared Knoxville

defenses helped rob him of victory, as well.

Unfortunately, steady downpours continued as Longstreet's army pressed against

Knoxville's outer works, with Confederate soldiers suffering greatly from wetness and

exhaustion. Following their retreat from Loudon, the Federals now confronted their

benumbed antagonists from a natural position of strength on a plateau above the Holston

River. As Longstreet's assistant adjutant, Capt. Osmun Latrobe observed in his diary,

"Skirmishing all the way to within two miles of Knoxville, when finding the Yankees in

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[56] Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 212-213.

[57] Steven E. Woodworth, *Six Armies in Tennessee: The Chickamauga and Chattanooga Campaigns*, Great Campaigns of the Civil War, eds. Anne J. Bailey and Brooks D. Simpson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 206.

[58] Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 357.

[59] Mendoza, *Confederate Crisis of Command*, 124.

[a] very strong fortified position on College Hill, moved Jenkins and part of McLaws [brigade] round on the left to flank the town," where strong defenses also confronted the southerners.[60] Capt. Poe had created mutually supporting positions centered on Fort Sanders in the west, Temperance Hill in the north, Mabry Hill in the east, and Flint Hill behind the extreme right anchored by the Holston River. Federal control of three hills across the river to the south allowed Poe to site artillery atop them that, after November 19, prevented a Confederate assault "upon either of our flanks without having his lines enfiladed by our fire from the south side of the river."[61] In addition, the Federals dammed First and Second Creeks in the east to provide water obstacles while creating a second line of defense running from Mabry Hill down to Flint Hill. Poe also selected advantageous artillery sites to sweep any penetrations of the line, and constructed a boom to discourage rafts set adrift to destroy the Federal pontoon bridge across the river.

In the west, the Federals strengthened the old Confederate Fort Loudon, renaming the earthen redoubt "Fort Sanders," after one of their cavalry generals who had fallen on November 18 during defense of an outer position in front of the fort. Poe described Fort Sanders as "a bastioned earth-work, built upon an irregular quadrilateral, the sides of which are, respectively, 125 yards southern front, 95 yards western front, 125 yards northern front, and 85 yards eastern front." [62] Workers, including troops, conscripted citizens and contrabands, had, by the end of November, almost completed the western

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[60] Osmun Latrobe, *Diaries and Letters, 1862-1865*, typescript copy, Virginia Historical Society, 27.

[61] *OR*, XXXI (1): 307. One of these sites, Fort Higley, is extant.

[62] Ibid., 309.

and northern sides, with the south side nearly half finished, while the east side remained open.[63] A wide ditch generally eight-feet deep surrounded the twelve-foot high walls to create a twenty-foot high obstacle for attackers who made it to the base of the wall. Cannon emplaced in the corner bastions provided enfilading fire along the front of the ditch. The northwestern salient of the fort actually shielded attackers from supporting fire and, catching the attention of Confederate observers, became the major point of assault on the morning of November 29. In addition, the Confederate lines had inched so close to the fort that Union gunners in the hills across the river dared not fire for fear of hitting their own men.

Burnside, arriving in Knoxville during the early hours of November 17, "directed General Shackelford to dismount the cavalry command under General Sanders and send it out on the Kingston road" to hold "the enemy in check until our men were able to take up their positions on the line and fortify."[64] Union cavalry galloped up the Clinton Road to block Confederate units threatening from that direction.[65] Sanders, with less than a thousand men, marched several miles out of Knoxville to begin skirmishing with Longstreet's advance guard, falling back to a hill about 1400 yards west of Fort Sanders which he fortified with fence rails.[66] Longstreet, operating without maps and unfamiliar with Knoxville's topography, stopped in front of Sanders' breastwork and spread his men

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[63] Ibid., 306, 309.

[64] Ibid., 275.

[65] Ibid., 316.

[66] Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 318.

out to probe the main Union line "to determine...the most favorable point to attack it."[67]

As soon as the Confederates appeared, Lieutenant Samuel N. Benjamin's battery began

lobbing shells out from Fort Sanders. Longstreet's own artillerymen did not come up

until around noon, when they assumed positions during the afternoon to exploit any

assault that might be made.[68] Rather than deliver piecemeal attacks, Longstreet opted to

wait until all his units deployed and, during the interval, reconnoitered the ground. With

daylight fading, Confederate troops rested and steeled themselves for battle the following

day.

On the morning of November 18, Brig. Gen. McLaws' division moved forward

towards Fort Sanders, encountering Brig. Gen. Sanders' dismounted cavalrymen

positioned behind their fence rails on a small hill. Col. E. Porter Alexander managed to

move a battery up into the yard of an abandoned house about 300 yards from the Federal

line where he also concealed two regiments of South Carolina infantry behind a slight

ridge.[69] Using solid shot from his 12-pounder Napoleons, Alexander opened up on the

breastwork, dislodging some of the fence rails and scattering the Federals while a battery

of howitzers to the north shelled the Union rear to discomfit any defenders who decided

to run. When many Union troopers did begin to skedaddle, Alexander signaled the

concealed South Carolinians to rise up and charge, which they did "with a yell."[70] As the

artillery colonel later described it, "Our men advanced handsomely until they were within

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 317.

[69] Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 319.

[70] Ibid.

40 yards of the breast work, when, to my surprise & disgust, they halted, laid down in the line of battle & began firing. We had just had to stop firing our guns on account of their proximity."[71]

At this critical juncture, Capt. Stephen Winthrop, an English soldier of fortune attached to Alexander's staff during the Gettysburg campaign, rode out from the shelter of the battery and charged the Union line. At the same time, the pinned down soldiers finally rose up and successfully overran the fence rail line. Although Alexander stated in his memoirs that the infantry "was [again] moving forward before Winthrop reached it," witnesses credited the Englishman with reviving the stalled charge.[72] When Capt. Winthrop reached the breastwork, an unfazed Union soldier shot him through the neck, shattering the collar bone. Although incapacitated for several weeks, Winthrop lived to fight another day.

Longstreet had too few troops to entirely surround the city. He kept the bulk of his infantry to the west and northwest, while assigning Wheeler's cavalry to the northeast side. Although rations initially dwindled inside the city, Knoxville remained open to the east, and Orlando Poe asserted that "failure of the enemy to close the Sevierville road and French Broad River enabled us to accumulate a quantity of commissary stores," with provisions actually increasing substantially during the siege.[73] The Confederates enjoyed

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 320. On Winthrop's role, Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 497, states, "Captain Winthrop of Alexander's staff, appreciating the crisis, dashed forward on his horse and led the halting lines successfully over the works."

[73] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 311-312.

food and supplies captured from abandoned Union wagons and, although many troops were ill-clad and shoeless, they were not starving. In addition to probing for weakness in Burnside's defenses and cutting communications between Cumberland Gap and Knoxville, Longstreet's immediate tactical problem involved where best to site his meager and undersupplied artillery force.

Longstreet's artillery consisted of Alexander's and Major Leyden's battalions, a total of thirty-five guns. At the start of the campaign, Alexander noted that each of his 20-pound Parrott guns had 75 rounds of ammunition each, with deficient explosive shells.[74] In addition to deficient ammunition, Leyden's batteries had few horses to draw the guns.[75] The supply situation worsened as the army deployed before Knoxville, rendering the artillery incapable of prolonged bombardment. Longstreet, after correctly surmising that high ground south of the Holston River offered favorable fields of fire for the artillery on portions of the Federal position below Fort Sanders, sent Alexander over the river to set up a battery.[76] After working all day and all night, Alexander's men were ready to commence shelling the Union lines on November 24.

But Longstreet refused to order an attack until Brig. Gen. Bushrod Johnson came up on November 25 with reinforcements from the Army of Tennessee, a force with which he could finally encircle the town. Although Johnson's advance guard arrived on time,

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[74] Ibid., 477-478.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., 459. Longstreet appears to dismiss the importance of this position by stating "the range from the hill to the fort was too great for our limited supply of ammunition." Alexander, in *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 323, seems to believe the battery emplaced there was fully capable of supporting an attack.

Alexander dryly noted that "our luck had turned now, & along with it came old Gen. [Danville] Leadbetter," who was Chief Engineer for the Army of Tennessee.[77] Leadbetter came armed with orders from Gen. Bragg urging immediate attack, and Longstreet duly invited his surprise guest to reconnoiter the Union position.[78] Alexander's battery on the south bank of the Holston River thus remained silent as his superior officers looked for a weak point in the Knoxville defenses, delaying an attack against Knoxville for a further three days. As Alexander acidly noted, "All this time the enemy were working, working, working, day & night."[79]

While the enemy kept digging, an aura of unreality seemed to settle upon the Confederate high command, and it is during this period of vacillation that Longstreet deserves censure. Up to this point, he had not attacked rashly, and seemed determined to mount a prompt operation against Fort Sanders. But the geographic riddle presented by Knoxville's defenses seemed to befuddle him. On November 26, Longstreet supported Leadbetter's decision that Mabry's Hill in the east might be overrun. After assembling his officers on November 27 for a reconnaissance of the intended point of attack, Longstreet again changed his mind, agreeing that Fort Sanders was, indeed, the key to Knoxville's defenses. These peregrinations mystified Alexander who, after earlier reconnoitering the ground around Mabry's Hill, found "there was no such place" for a successful assault, and mused that Longstreet "had been misled in some way I have never [been] able to

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[77] Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 323.

[78] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 501.

[79] Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 323.

understand."[80] Alexander suffered further exasperation as Longstreet ordered the artillery

battery on the south side of the Holston back across the river in anticipation of an attack

on Mabry's Hill, and then sent it back when he shifted the assault to Fort Sanders for the

morning of November 28. To make matters worse, rain pelted down in the early hours of

November 28, causing Longstreet to postpone the assault until afternoon. This change

was fortunate for Alexander, who did not have the battery repositioned south of the river

until noon on November 28. Longstreet again postponed the action against Fort Sanders

until the morning of November 29 "to get our troops nearer the works."[81] As events

around Chattanooga would show, all of the indecision, bad weather, and constant shifting

of troops and artillery added up to a three-day delay that the Confederates before

Knoxville could ill afford.

On November 25, just as Brig. Gen. Leadbetter arrived in Knoxville, Union forces

rushed up Missionary Ridge below Chattanooga, attacked Confederate positions at the

summit, and sent Bragg's army reeling southward into Georgia. On November 27, Gen.

Grant dispatched William T. Sherman to augment Burnside's forces in Knoxville.

Longstreet heard rumors of these events, but had not received definitive confirmation by

the early morning hours of November 29. When his subordinate in charge of the Fort

Sanders operation, Maj. Gen. Lafayette McLaws, suggested further postponing the attack

to await word from Chattanooga, Longstreet indicated he was through with dithering and

ordered the assault to proceed as scheduled on the morning of the twenty-ninth. The

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[80] Ibid., 324,

[81] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 460.

Confederate commander knew he could not relieve Bragg if the latter had suffered defeat and, if disaster was at hand, the First Corps would go down fighting. As he brusquely replied to McLaws, "There is neither safety nor honor in any other course than the one I have chosen and ordered."[82] Bragg's defeat at Chattanooga, however, sealed the fate of Longstreet's campaign, whether he took Fort Sanders or not.

After Confederate infantry infiltrated and occupied Union skirmish lines in front of Fort Sanders, the main attack by Mississippi and Georgia regiments went in as planned at daybreak on the morning of November 29. Confederate artillery began peppering the fort and its rearward approaches to signal the assault.[83] Lieut. Samuel N. Benjamin, who commanded the Second United States Artillery inside Fort Sanders, related that "The whole affair lasted full three-quarters of an hour, and the actual fight at the ditch and on the parapet over twenty minutes."[84] Benjamin had about 220 men inside the fort with "four 20-pounder Parrotts, four light 12-pounders, and two three-inch guns."[85] Although the lieutenant admitted that the fort "was very weak, and should have fallen by the ordinary chances of warfare," he had planned well for its defense by positioning guns to

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[82] Ibid., 494.

[83] Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 327. Alexander claimed that Longstreet shortened the bombardment time to allow for a "surprise" attack in which the artillery would fire some shots as signals to begin the attack. This seems to be a stretch since Orlando Poe admitted the attack on the skirmish lines meant that Fort Sanders "was the real point of attack." *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 308. Even so, it appears that some on the Union side remain unconvinced, as Lieut. Benjamin dryly observed, "In spite of the opposite opinion held by most, I prepared for an attack at daybreak." *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 343.

[84] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 343.

[85] Ibid.

sweep the ditch, stringing wire along stumps in front of the ditch, throwing up reverses to protect his men from enemy fire, and providing fused shells for use as grenades.[86] Since the night was cold, Benjamin even had his men soak the outer parapet walls with water to create a frozen surface. All of these precautions proved effective during the Confederate assault, particularly the canister-filled guns sweeping the ditch.

As sharpshooters swept the fort's embrasures with a deadly fire, McLaws' men dashed across bare ground towards the ditch, which was deeper than they had been led to believe. Wire strung between broken tree stumps amidst a network of wooden obstacles in front of the ditch sent many men sprawling and broke up the attacking lines of troops.[87] And a gun emplaced at the top of the fort's parapet sprayed the southerners with canister before they entered the ditch. Without ladders of any kind, Confederate troops attempted to claw their way up the frozen sides of the dirt wall as Union riflemen opened fire and other defenders lobbed fused shells over the parapet. Confederates who actually scaled the wall either surrendered or died on the spot. After twenty minutes of carnage, the southerners scurried away to the safety of their own lines in one of the most lopsided defeats of the war, having lost over eight hundred killed, wounded and captured against reported Union losses of eight killed and five wounded. Following the disaster at Fort Sanders, Longstreet received a further blow about thirty minutes later when he received a telegram from President Jefferson Davis ordering him to immediately abandon the siege

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[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid., 344.

and rush to Braxton Bragg's assistance below Chattanooga.[88] Whatever else Longstreet might have accomplished against Burnside, Bragg's defeat on Missionary Ridge and subsequent retreat deep into north Georgia left First Corps isolated at Knoxville and ultimately unable to comply with President Davis's order to join the Army of Tennessee.

But, during the morning of November 29, Longstreet, with a direct order from President Davis, had no choice but to begin routing his wagon train towards Chattanooga. As a precaution, he sent William Martin's cavalry up toward Powell's Valley to assist "Grumble" Jones in delaying Union troops advancing from Cumberland Gap.[89] After receiving reports that strong Union forces occupied Cleveland, Tennessee, Longstreet consulted his officers and decided to stay put at Knoxville until Burnside's reinforcements came up from Chattanooga. Messengers from the Army of Tennessee informed Longstreet of Bragg's retreat to Dalton, and that, administratively, the First Corps was on its own.[90] On November 30, Brig. Gen.'s William Martin and "Grumble" Jones rejoined the main army at Knoxville, and Longstreet began drawing other available forces to his position, including Maj. Gen. Robert Ransom's troops from Rogersville and Brig. Gen. John C. Vaughn's from Loudon. Because of his perilous situation, Longstreet retained Bragg's cavalry units serving with First Corps and, on December 1, learned from

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[88] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 507.

[89] Ibid., 507-508.

[90] Ibid., 509.

an intercepted letter that Union forces were indeed on the way to relieve Burnside.[91] As

Longstreet explained in his memoirs:

> Under the circumstances there seemed but one move left for us,--to march around
> Knoxville to the north side, up the Holston, and try to find the column reported to
> be marching down from Cumberland Gap, the mountain ranges and valleys of that
> part of the state offering beautiful fields for the manoeuvre (sic) of small armies.
> The order was issued December 2. Trains were put in motion on the 3rd, and
> ordered up the railroad route...On the night of the 4th the troops were marched
> from the southwest to the north side of the city, and took up the march along the
> west bank of the Holston.[92]

Although Longstreet deserves criticism for his dilatory actions around Knoxville,

his quick recovery following the repulse at Fort Sanders deserves high praise. Sorting

through the confusion of Bragg's reverse at Chattanooga, Longstreet decided in fairly

rapid order to stay at Knoxville, retain Bragg's cavalry, repel northern forces coming at

him from Cumberland Gap, contract his army, draw northern reinforcements on to his

position and, when the Federals were close, prudently retreat up the railroad towards

Virginia. Even though he was sluggish at times, Longstreet still showed an inclination for

offensive action as circumstances warranted. While First Corps slogged up the Great

Valley towards Rogersville shielded by a strong cavalry screen, a much more relaxed

Longstreet linked up with Maj. Gen. Robert Ransom and his small army at Blaine's

Crossroads on December 5.

Arriving at Rogersville on December 9, Longstreet learned next day that President

Jefferson Davis had given him "discretionary power with regards to the troops and their

movement," a timely development allowing the new departmental commander to retain

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[91] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 462.

[92] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 510-511.

Brig. Gen. William Martin's cavalry, which he had ordered back to Bragg on December 8.[93] By this time, Union pursuit forces under Maj. Gen. John G. Parke had moved up beyond Rutledge, with three cavalry brigades and one infantry brigade under John Shackelford advancing ahead to Bean's Station. When he heard this news on December 12, Longstreet determined to attack the detached force at once, turning his men back on December 14 towards Bean's Station, a major turnpike crossroads, where he envisioned trapping the Federals in front of the mountain gap north of town.

Bean's Station Gap was a narrow pass running between moderately sized mountains of almost two thousand feet in height. The valley, which was relatively flat, narrowed west of Bean's Station between two ridges. If Longstreet could plug the Gap and the western bottleneck, he might surround and capture the major portion of the enemy force encamped at the station. As Alexander Mendoza points out, "Longstreet decided to use the terrain to his own advantage..." by sending "Grumble" Jones and two brigades of cavalry behind the Union position to prevent an enemy escape attempt through Bean's Station Gap toward Tazewell while Brig. Gen. Martin with four brigades of cavalry crossed the Holston below Bean's Station to block the road leading west to Rutledge. Longstreet accompanied his infantry as it pushed west down a turnpike winding through the shallow Holston River Valley towards Bean's Station. With the all-too-familiar cold rain pelting the troops as they slogged sixteen miles along the muddy road from Cloud's Creek below Rogersville, Bushrod Johnson's division met Gen. Shackelford's cavalry pickets on the afternoon of the fourteenth about three miles east of

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[93] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 463.

the station.[94] Johnson's men steadily pushed the Federals back to the town where they

took shelter in a brick tavern and other adjacent buildings situated at a crossroads.

Approaching the crossroads, Brig. Gen. Archibald Gracie's and Maj. Gen.

Bushrod Johnson's brigades encountered a withering rifle fire from the tavern that

slammed into their leading ranks just as Federal artillery on hills behind the station

opened up to further discomfit the southerners. Longstreet sent Brig. Gen. Joseph

Kershaw's brigade in a flanking movement around the Union left, but artillery fire pinned

Kershaw's troops behind a slight rise in the ground. Maj. Gen. Shackelford, finally

realizing his peril, ordered a fighting retreat down the valley turnpike towards Rutledge.

Longstreet then ordered Johnson to take the tavern, which he did about sundown after

ordering it shelled by artillery.[95] When Confederates finally stormed the tavern, their

Union antagonists had already escaped through the rear of the building. Unfortunately,

Martin's cavalry, delayed in a skirmish below the Holston River, had not yet gotten

behind the fleeing Federals, and Shackelford's men escaped back to a fortified position

several miles towards Rutledge. Although "Grumble" Jones succeeded in cutting off

Bean's Station Gap, he failed to closely pursue Federals trapped in the gap.[96] During the

early morning hours of December 15, these men simply melted into the forest and headed

west towards Rutledge along the ridgeline until they rejoined the Union army.[97] Martin's

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[94] Ibid., 465.

[95] Ibid., 535.

[96] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 513.

[97] Ibid.

failure to come up behind Shackelford in the west and Jones' dilatory pursuit at Bean's Station Gap cost Longstreet a considerable victory.

At daylight on December 15, Longstreet ordered a pursuit of the fleeing Union forces. And here it seemed that he overreached himself in considering the wishes of both commanders and soldiers alike. Harsh weather, mud, heavily forested terrain, and shortages of food, clothing, and shoes led to a malaise that affected both officers and men alike. There are limits to human endurance, and Longstreet, in his zeal to defeat the Federals, appears to have forgotten that low morale can defeat armies just as surely as a strong foe. When ordered to mount a close pursuit, his commanders balked, citing lack of supplies and need for rest. The nonplussed commander, still smarting two weeks later, tersely wrote in his report:

> As I rode to the front General Law preferred a complaint of hardships, etc. General McLaws was not yet fed, and there seemed so strong a desire for rest rather than to destroy the enemy, that I was obliged to abandon the pursuit, although the enemy were (sic) greatly demoralized and in some confusion. This was the second time during the campaign when the enemy was completely in our power and we allowed him to escape us.[98]

After sending the cavalry to harass the Federals, Longstreet called it quits at Bean's Station and, crossing the Holston River, went into winter quarters around the railroad junctions of Russellville and Morristown to rest and refit his army.[99] Robert Ransom settled in at Rogersville north of the Holston with "Grumble" Jones nearby, who posted pickets as far down as Mooresburg.[100] Longstreet and his staff took up quarters at

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[98] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 464.

[99] Latrobe, "Diaries and Letters," 30.

Russellville in the home of Mrs. Nenney, an occurrence Maj. Latrobe described tellingly in a single word, "Warm."[101] The men built log shelters and, aside from the lack of shoes, fared reasonably well, with many taking extended furloughs. Longstreet occupied himself with ridding the army of general officers who had openly criticized him or been slow to implement orders. These included Lafayette McLaws, Evander Law, and Jerome Robertson. With an eye on future operations, the commanding general also recognized a need to "repair railroads and bridges, to open our way back towards Richmond." As for the sheltering army, which probably emitted a collective sigh of relief after the recent campaign exertions, there was still a war on with occasional calls to arms and several major actions yet to fight.

The grueling fall campaigns had taxed troops on both sides of the conflict. Although Maj. Gen. Burnside was glad to be on President Lincoln's better side for once as a result of the successful invasion, he really wanted to quit the army and go home to Rhode Island for some much-needed rest and relaxation. But the general reluctantly acquiesced when Lincoln asked him to stay on for awhile and further consolidate the Union position in upper East Tennessee.[102] Once Confederate forces penetrated the southern approaches at Chickamauga and moved around Chattanooga towards Knoxville, federal strategy shifted as Burnside conducted a fighting retreat designed to draw Gen. James Longstreet and his detached Confederate corps on to Knoxville while Union forces

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid.

[102] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 668.

assaulted Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee below Chattanooga. The immediate operational strategy of divide and conquer worked brilliantly as U. S. Grant overwhelmed Bragg, forcing Longstreet to abandon his siege of Knoxville and retreat further up the Great Valley towards Virginia. Considering all the difficulties of the southern strategic position, it is a wonder that Longstreet kept his army intact and ready for new operational challenges in 1864.

CHAPTER V

"I HAD THE SATISFACTION TO FIND
WE WERE UNEXPECTED GUESTS."

In mid-December, 1863, the Union army received two new commanders and

some pointed advice from its commanding general in the west, Maj. Gen. Ulysses S.

Grant. On December 12, Maj. Gen. John G. Foster took over the Army of the Ohio from

Ambrose Burnside, who had stayed on after September at President Lincoln's request.[1]

Brig. Gen. Samuel Sturgis relieved Brig. Gen. James M. Shackelford as commander of

Federal cavalry in East Tennessee on December 15 during the action at Bean's Station.[2]

On December 20, Maj. Gen. Grant, who had traveled up to Nashville from Chattanooga,

prodded Foster to take the offensive.[3] Foster, suffering from an old leg wound

exacerbated by a fall from a horse, put Maj. Gen. John G. Parke in command of the field

army. By Christmas day, Sturgis had moved his headquarters from Strawberry Plains up

to New Market, a railroad town, and assembled six thousand cavalry to attack

Longstreet.[4] With so many horses to feed, Sturgis decided to advance through the fertile

French Broad River valley in an attempt to lure the Confederate First Corps into battle.

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[1] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 281, 668.

[2] Welcher, *The Union Army, 1861-1865*, 651. Sturgis received the appointment on December 12, but did not take command until the fifteenth, when Shackelford went on leave. *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 394, 420.

[3] *OR*, 1, XXXI (3): 452-453.

[4] Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command*, 174.

As events would prove, Union commanders got more than their nerves could handle.

Strategically, the war in East Tennessee entered a new phase as the largest armies yet seen in the region maneuvered and fought in the Great Valley. Military commanders used geography effectively in attempts to outflank their opponents and isolate them in untenable positions, a tactic Longstreet attempted at Bean's Station and yearned to try again. As he waited for the Federals to make a move, the southern general kept busy trying to feed and shelter his men and animals. Fortunately, the Confederate army's position around Russellville provided ready access to abundant farmland in the French Broad River valley, and southern cavalry used a low ridge running between New Market and Dandridge to shield their movements down to the foraging area. With so many cavalry in the Great Valley, prime grazing land became almost as important as the railroad. In fact, the necessity for feeding vast numbers of horses was one thing that forced strategic moves away from the railroad, and Union maneuvers towards Dandridge were primarily about control of the rich grazing areas of the French Broad River.

As Sturgis began moving out of New Market, he received news of a Confederate cavalry brigade at Dandridge, sent there to forestall a potential raid around Longstreet's left flank.[5] During the early morning hours of December 24, the Union commander ordered two brigades of cavalry under Col.'s Israel Garrard and Archibald Campbell, respectively, to attack the Confederates at Dandridge, sending along a section of Capt. Eli Lilly's Eighteenth Indiana artillery to support Campbell. With Garrard preceding him along a parallel road, Campbell marched through Flat Gap, and then a further ten miles to

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[5] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 626.

Dandridge, which he reached at 9:00 A.M.[6] Finding no Confederates, Campbell rested his

men and, upon receipt of a message from Garrard stating the presence of enemy soldiers

in his front, moved four miles east of Dandridge to Hay's Ferry, where he deployed for

battle and began shelling Confederates in his front. After advancing half a mile,

Campbell received a recall order from Gen. Sturgis and, while moving back towards the

road to New Market, discovered that a Confederate cavalry brigade had gotten behind his

troops. Using a path through the woods, Campbell led his hard-pressed men to safety, but

not after pouring an artillery barrage into his pursuers and ordering a saber attack. When

a further burst of concentrated rifle fire hit them, the southerners broke off pursuit and

retired.[7] Campbell then made his way to New Market while Garrard, rather than

supporting his fellow officer during the action, fell back towards Mossy Creek,

supposedly to prevent Confederate reinforcements from moving up. Sturgis never

censured Garrard for this decision, even though his subordinate failed to coordinate

effectively with Campbell, who lost sixty-one men killed, wounded, or missing.[8]

Over the next several days, Union and Confederate forces skirmished as they

probed each other's positions. The Federals established a defensive line east of Mossy

Creek, advancing as far as Talbot's Station. On December 29, Brig. Gen. Sturgis, upon

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[6] Ibid., 636-638. I have relied on Campbell's report of the affair.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 638; David C. Smith, *Campaign To Nowhere: The Results of General Longstreet's Move into Upper East Tennessee* (Strawberry Plains: Strawberry Plains Press, 1999), 43, points out that "Campbell's immediate superior officers from the Army of the Cumberland were not so generous or complimentary on Garrard's behalf, and doubtless felt he should have supported Campbell at the scene of the conflict."

hearing that another Confederate cavalry brigade might have occupied Dandridge, detached four infantry regiments to investigate the Mossy Creek Road while another division pressed down the New Market Road. Col. Oscar La Grange and his Second Cavalry Brigade cantered down to watch the Dumpling Valley above Dandridge.[9] At about 11:00 A.M., Longstreet's cavalry divisions, under overall command of Brig. Gen. William Martin, debouched from their camp at Panther Springs and, moving along the railroad track, pushed hard against the Federal line near Mossy Creek. Sturgis immediately recalled the forces sent to Dandridge, and hung on as best he could until their arrival.

Capt. Eli Lilly and his Eighteenth Indiana battery anchored the center as Confederate attacks battered the Union flanks. After Lilly's artillerymen retreated to another hill at about 2:00 P.M., Confederate Brig. Gen. Frank Armstrong attempted to roll up the Federal left flank. Sensing danger, Col. Archibald Campbell ordered a desperate cavalry charge into the Confederate line that stopped Armstrong's advance.[10] In the meantime, Col. La Grange's Second Brigade reached the battlefield on the Union right flank, convincing Brig. Gen. Martin that retreat might be a prudent course of action.[11] The Confederates, low on ammunition, withdrew back to Panther Springs, and the Federals reoccupied their old lines. Union losses totaled one hundred and nine, while

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[9] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 648.

[10] Ibid., 649.

[11] Ibid. Gen. Sturgis stated that Col. La Grange reached the field and was sent forward to harass the Confederate retreat already underway. David C. Smith, citing no sources, attributes La Grange's arrival as a factor that influenced Gen. Martin's decision to halt the fight. Smith, *Campaign To Nowhere*, 76.

Confederate losses may have been well over four hundred.[12] As Samuel D. Sturgis reported, "this disparity in casualties is easily accounted for, since the enemy advanced over open ground, where he was literally mowed down, while our troops were, in a great measure, sheltered.[13]

As part of the movement against Sturgis, Longstreet sent "Grumble" Jones and his cavalry brigade to threaten or even capture, if possible, Cumberland Gap, hoping to draw off Union cavalry from the French Broad River area.[14] Crossing the Clinch River on January 2, 1864, Jones learned that a raiding party had come out from Cumberland Gap to threaten outposts on the extreme Confederate right flank commanded by Lieut. Col. Auburn L. Pridemore of the Sixty-fourth Virginia Cavalry.[15] Pridemore had retreated back up the Powell Valley, a narrow but flat defile, to Jonesville, Virginia, where he captured the town from about fifty Federals.[16] Jones, who had marched through the night in freezing weather to reach Jonesville on the morning of the third, ordered Pridemore to turn west and attack the raiding party under Maj. Charles H. Beeres, thus catching the Federal force in a vise. As Jones wryly noted in his report, "I had the satisfaction to find we were unexpected guests."[17] Finding no pickets, the Confederates charged the Union

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[12] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 651; Smith, *Campaign To Nowhere*, 76.

[13] *OR*, 1, XXXI (1): 650.

[14] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 522; *OR*, 1, XXXI (3): 875.

[15] *OR*, 1, XXXII (1): 59-60.

[16] Ibid., 64.

[17] *OR*, 1, XXXII (1): 59.

camp just as Pridemore enveloped both flanks of the Federal line. After a brisk fight, Beeres surrendered his force of almost four hundred men. Supply shortages kept the Union garrison at Cumberland Gap from making any more sorties, and Jones continued to monitor their movements.[18]

During the first two weeks of January, 1864, both armies hunkered down in cold weather that sent the thermometer below zero. Longstreet's cavalry remained on alert and, on January 14, apprised the commanding general that Union forces were moving towards Dandridge, a crossroads town on the north side of the French Broad River. Gen. Sturgis, in command of the cavalry, moved three divisions down from Mossy Creek, located on the railroad, to forage. After skirmishing with Confederate pickets east of town, he spent the fifteenth issuing clothing and boots to his men.[19] Under overall command of Maj. Gen. John G. Parke, a large Federal force consisting of Fourth and Twenty-Third Corps units left Strawberry Plains on January 15 and headed for Dandridge. Maj. Gen. Foster cited supply problems to explain the move, telling Maj. Gen. Grant that "I am forced to abandon all idea of active operations for the present, and to place the army where it can live by foraging."[20] On the same day, Longstreet, suspecting a flanking movement, sent two infantry divisions and the main body of cavalry down to Dandridge while directing his two remaining infantry divisions towards

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[18] Ibid., 58.

[19] Ibid., 80.

[20] *OR*, 1, XXXII (2): 101.

Mossy Creek in case the Federal move on Dandridge was a feint.[21] Rolling countryside east of town provided excellent terrain for maneuver and battle, but frozen roads cut the feet of men who had no shoes, and Longstreet kept many barefoot soldiers back as camp guards.[22]

On January 16, Gen. Sturgis sent out two columns of cavalry, one down Bend of Chucky Road and the other over to Kimbrough's Crossroads about nine miles east of Dandridge. Although Sturgis later called the move a "reconnaissance," it seems clear by the size of his deployed force that the Union general wanted to surround Gen. Martin's Confederate horsemen in a double envelopment.[23] The column under Col. Israel Garrard moving up the Bull's Gap Road to Kimbrough's unexpectedly slammed into Gen. Micah Jenkins' infantry about five miles from Dandridge and, after receiving massed musketry fire, retreated in disarray back towards Dandridge. Over on Bend of Chucky Road, Brig. Gen. Martin roughly handled Federal cavalry under Col. Frank Wolford, sending it reeling back to Dandridge in similar fashion. In light of these setbacks, Sturgis ordered Federal units within supporting distance to concentrate at Dandridge, as well. When Longstreet, who was traveling with Martin, reached the outskirts of the town and saw the large Union force from Strawberry Plains deployed before him across a creek, he issued orders for his infantry divisions to hasten forward.[24] It seemed the Confederate general

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[21] Ibid., 93.

[22] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 526.

[23] Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command*, 175.

[24] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 527.

might get his big battle, after all.

During the night, army commanders on both sides reacted cautiously since neither knew his opponent's strength. As Longstreet said of Dandridge's terrain, "Its topographical features are bold and inviting of military work."[25] But if the hilly country was favorable for offensive action, it also provided ample cover for defense, with Union troops later offering stout resistance among the ridges and depressions. The Federals concentrated at Dandridge for defensive possibilities and proximity to the French Broad River, which they unsuccessfully tried to bridge in case of precipitate retreat.[26] Longstreet planned a jab against the Federal center down Bend of Chucky Road with Bushrod Johnson's infantry and William Martin's cavalry divisions through wooded terrain to the east of Dandridge while holding Jenkins' infantry division in reserve up the Morristown Road. The southern corps commander decided to delay the assault until noon on the seventeenth to give his sharpshooters time to assume positions in the hills and, if the Union force proved stronger than his own, give his army only a few hours to hold back the enemy until nightfall. Hearing rumors that Confederate reinforcements might be approaching, Federal commanders in Dandridge decided to keep their infantry close to town while cavalry probed Longstreet's forces to determine their strength.

Longstreet began his movements shortly after noon on the seventeenth against forward Federal positions in wooded country fronting the creek. Encountering strong resistance that included hand-to-hand fighting, Longstreet's men contented themselves

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[25] Ibid., 528.

[26] *OR*, 1, XXXII (1): 79.

during the afternoon with trying to dislodge advanced Union troops from the woods.[27] By

late afternoon, Union generals had an idea of Longstreet's strength and his determination

to give battle. Although their forces numbered about twenty-six thousand competent

fighting men, the Federal commander, Maj. Gen. John G. Parke, seemed to lack resolve,

and during early evening discussed retreat with his subordinates. At 6:30 P.M., Parke

notified Maj. Gen. Foster in Knoxville that Lonstreet's entire force was in his front, no

means existed to cross the French Broad River, and that he was moving the army back to

Strawberry Plains.[28] Longstreet, with the exception of slowing his attack on the

seventeenth, continued to show great energy and determination, and Parke, aware of

Longstreet's fighting reputation, may have sensed that his opponent would not duck a

slogging match.[29] By the time Brig. Gen. Sturgis returned after dark from the battlefield,

he "found the infantry and trains already moving in the direction of Strawberry Plains."[30]

Parke, unsure of what the morrow might bring and probably aware that Longstreet was

trying to cut off his escape route north of the river, had ordered a general retreat.[31]

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[27] Ibid., 85.

[28] *OR*, 1, XXXII (2): 116.

[29] Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command*, 176. Mendoza cites some good reasons for caution on Longstreet's part including unfamiliarity with the ground, not knowing his opponent's strength, brutal weather, and lack of shoes for the troops.

[30] *OR*, 1, XXXII (1): 81.

[31] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 528-529. Longstreet asserts, "A narrow unused road, practicable for artillery, was found, that opened a way for us to reach the enemy's rearward line of march." When the turning force ran into some pickets who escaped, Longstreet felt sure they had spread the alarm, thus influencing Gen. Parke's decision to retire before the main body of Confederates trapped his army.

Lieut. Gen. Longstreet rode into Dandridge before sunrise and, noting the muddy road conditions, half-heartedly sent his cavalry in pursuit of Parke. As his aide, Lieut. Col. G. Moxley Sorrel, noted later in his memoirs, "Pursuit was made impractical by the condition of roads and want of a bridge train."[32] Longstreet also cited lack of shoes for his infantry, shortage of clothing for the cavalry, and scarce horseshoes as reasons for not conducting a full scale pursuit.[33] In a letter to his mother, another member of Longstreet's staff, Major Thomas J. Goree, aptly summed up Confederate feelings about the Dandridge affair:

> Recently they [the Federals] came up near here with all their forces, bragging as they came that they intended to drive Longstreet out of East Tennessee. But Longstreet (instead of retreating as they expected) marched down to meet them, and after a very light skirmish he got them on the run, and they did not stop till they got near Knoxville. Had our cavalry pursued vigorously, it is thought they might have captured half the enemy's force.[34]

As Longstreet headed back to winter quarters in snow squalls, his cavalry continued its pursuit, with Gen. Armstrong crossing the Holston on flatboats and moving close to Knoxville where he "at last made a grand haul of a herd of eight hundred beef cattle and thirty-one wagons."[35] The apparent threat to Knoxville caused great consternation in the Union high command. General-in-Chief Henry Halleck wrote Grant that "Your last telegram in regard to General Foster has caused new anxiety here in

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[32] Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 223.

[33] *OR*, 1, XXXII (1): 93-94.

[34] Thomas J. Goree, *Longstreet's Aide: The Civil War Letters of Thomas J. Goree*, ed. Thomas W. Cutrer, A Nation Divided, New Studies in Civil War History (Charlottsville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 117.

[35] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 530.

regard to our position in East Tennessee."[36] President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton were two who felt the "new anxiety." Strategically, East Tennessee was like a wedge encroaching on Union lines of communication and preventing Federal exploitation of its favorable position to launch attacks where they were most desired. Halleck acknowledged the wider strategic options made possible by control of the region, admitting that "we cannot do this unless we have the control of East Tennessee."[37] Fortunately, the southern army moved back to the Morristown line for much needed rest and recovery.

On January 21, Longstreet asked the quartermasters in Richmond for more shoes and to hurry along a pontoon bridge. On the same day, he alerted Micah Jenkins to prepare for a move towards Strawberry Plains and the Holston River.[38] After all the problems of winter campaigning, the southern general never gave up on vigorous action against the Federals and, this time, fully intended to redeem his reputation at Knoxville. By January 26, Longstreet noted that the railroad was up and running and a train carrying the pontoon bridge headed his way. He ordered Jenkins to move down towards Strawberry Plains, the cavalry to begin raids and reconnaissance, and Brig. Gen. Vaughn to concentrate at Rogersville and watch Cumberland Gap.[39] On January 27, Brig. Gen. Martin got into a cavalry scrape at Fair Garden south of the French Broad River, losing

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[36] *OR*, 1, XXXII (2): 127.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 531.

[39] Ibid., 533.

over two hundred men as Federal cavalry under Gen. Sturgis chased him back towards Dandridge. When Sturgis arrived below Dandridge, he found three brigades of Johnson's infantry crossing the French Broad, and immediately determined to evacuate the area south of the river.[40] Although Longstreet chafed over the Fair Garden defeat, he gained a strategic success when Union troops withdrew from the prime foraging area around Dandridge.

Unfortunately, events in the wider war prevented Longstreet from threatening Knoxville a second time. As he prepared Jenkins' infantry division to cross the Holston at Strawberry Plains during mid-February, the Confederate commander learned that requested reinforcement from Virginia was not coming and, worse, that he was to send Martin's cavalry immediately to Gen. Joseph Johnston, Bragg's replacement, in Georgia.[41] Without cavalry, Longstreet could not operate against Knoxville, and he accordingly issued orders to withdraw up the Great Valley to Bull's Gap and Greeneville. Assistant Adjutant Maj. Osmun Latrobe's diary entries for February 18 and 20 recorded the dramatic effect of President Davis's telegram of February 19 ordering Martin's cavalry to Georgia: "February 18. Very busy. Slight snow. Moved Hdqrs down to Strawberry Plains, Jenkins on the alert" and "February 20. Cold & clear. Recd dispatches from Presdt ordering all Martin's cavalry to report to Johnston, necessitating our falling back."[42]

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[40] *OR*, 1, XXXII (1): 134.

[41] Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox*, 538-539; *OR*, XXXII (2): 772.

[42] Latrobe, "Diaries and Letters," 31.

On February 25, First Corps reached strong positions around Bull's Gap, with its right flank resting on the Holston River to the north and left on the Nolichucky to the south. As Longstreet later explained to President Jefferson Davis, "The general disposition of the troops was made more with a view to gathering supplies than for active military operations."[43] The commanding general and his staff occupied comfortable quarters in Greeneville to await decisions from Richmond on strategy in the west. In early March, newly promoted Brig. Gen. E. Porter Alexander, Longstreet's artillery chief, arrived from Richmond with a verbal message from President Davis to confer with Gen. Joseph E. Johnston about a combined move of their two armies into Middle Tennessee to cut Union lines of communication.[44] In discussing a move to Madisonville, Tennessee, to meet Johnston's army, Longstreet cited the fact that he would have to cross six rivers if he chose to pass south of Knoxville, and that he could expect little in the way of supplies from the countryside.[45] As messages sped back and forth among the generals in East Tennessee, Georgia, and Virginia, one thing seemed clear-Gen. Joseph E. Johnston in Atlanta thought the move logistically impracticable, and he so informed Longstreet.[46]

There matters stood until the East Tennessee commander traveled to Richmond in mid-March to press his strategic ideas for an offensive in the West, views that received a chilly reception from President Jefferson Davis and his military advisor, Longstreet's old

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[43] *OR*, 1, XXXII (3): 638.

[44] Ibid., 586-587.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 619.

enemy, Braxton Bragg.[47] On March 19, Richmond directed Longstreet to send his

remaining cavalry commanded by Col. George Dibrell to Johnston, and the cavalrymen

departed on the twentieth.[48] On March 28, the army began falling back towards Bristol

where, on April 11, orders from the War Department directed them on to Charlottesville

and the Army of Northern Virginia.[49] The military operation after Knoxville that author

David C. Smith called Longstreet's "campaign to nowhere" was over.[50]

But the idea that Longstreet's military operations in East Tennessee constituted a

pointless progression is misleading. After his repulse at Knoxville and Bragg's defeat at

Chattanooga, Longstreet recognized that keeping the army intact under trying

circumstances constituted his major strategic concern. Authorities in Richmond kept the

corps in place while debating future operations, an acknowledgment that its position in

East Tennessee allowed continued exploitation of the region's resources while shielding

vital salt and lead works in southwestern Virginia. Longstreet stayed alert to any

opportunity for offensive action, and handled tactics skillfully during operations.

Strategically, he argued for further offensives in the west and, it must be remembered,

was marching on Knoxville when Richmond ordered his cavalry away. Longstreet was

well aware of strategic possibilities within the department and also outside its boundaries.

As Alexander Mendoza points out, Longstreet's East Tennessee situation "reflected a

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[47] Wert, *General James Longstreet*, 369-372.

[48] Latrobe, "Diary and Letters," 33.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Supra.

general state of affairs on the Union-Confederate front lines from northern Georgia to Virginia."[51] Although resulting from unforeseen fortunes of war, the presence of First Corps in East Tennessee in early 1864 did offer wider strategic possibilities while shielding important industrial and agricultural assets considered vital to the Confederate war effort. In the end, Longstreet preserved his corps intact and took it back to Virginia, a not inconsequential feat of arms.

When First Corps departed East Tennessee in April, command of the department devolved once again on Maj. Gen. Simon B. Buckner.[52] The department was much reduced as units transferred east to the Army of Northern Virginia to participate in the spring campaigns against Grant. Buckner made his headquarters in Bristol, with not much of a force under his command and supplies virtually nonexistent "beyond the actual wants of citizens."[53] The East Tennessee commander had two full infantry brigades under Johnson and Gracie, part of one infantry brigade under Wharton belonging to the Department of Southwestern Virginia, and four cavalry brigades. As Buckner acknowledged, the region around Saltville, Virginia, what Edward O. Guerrant called "the greatest salt manufacturing [site] in the S.C. (southern Confederacy)," was the most important point to defend.[54] Wytheville, further up the valley, contained lead mines also considered vital to the war effort.

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[51] Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command*, 209.

[52] *OR*, 1, XXXII (3): 774.

[53] Ibid., 803.

[54] Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate*, 82; *OR*, 1, XXXII (3): 803.

In order to protect Saltville against Union incursions from Kentucky, Buckner needed corn for the cavalry mounts, which the countryside could no longer supply. His total effective strength, including mixed units, was about 7,500 troops.[55] The horses of his four cavalry brigades were "unfit for any hard service" and dispersed from Kentucky to North Carolina in search of forage.[56] As the East Tennessee commander explained to authorities in Richmond, "Discipline cannot be restored or maintained if the commands are straggling for supplies."[57] Buckner saw no way to adequately defend the department without proper sustenance, particularly corn, so that he could concentrate his cavalry. He also questioned the mixing of forces between the Department of East Tennessee and those of the Department of Southwestern Virginia, reflecting a need to tighten administrative control due to the loss of most of East Tennessee. In fact, Richmond did appoint a single commander for both departments a month after Buckner left East Tennessee for good.[58]

On May 2, 1864, Brig. Gen. W. E. "Grumble" Jones relieved Buckner, and the only infantry left in East Tennessee at that time was a small force under Brig. Gen. A. E. "Mudwall" Jackson at Carter's Station.[59] On May 23, "Grumble" Jones also assumed command of the Department of Southwestern Virginia in Maj. Gen. John Breckinridge's

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[55] *OR*, 1, XXXII (3): 803.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Richmond officially merged the two departments when Gen. John Breckinridge assumed command in September, 1864.

[59] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (2): 565.

absence, effectively merging the two departments.[60] On June 22, Brig. Gen. John H. Morgan replaced Jones as commander of the Department of Southwestern Virginia and East Tennessee with headquarters in Abingdon, Virginia. The appointment of Morgan, a cavalry commander, seemed appropriate, since the war in East Tennessee by that time was mostly a cavalry contest as Union commanders mounted raids up the Great Valley or across from Kentucky to threaten Saltville and Confederate depots at Bristol, which subsequently were emptied and abandoned in early May. Morgan, famous for long range cavalry raids deep into northern territory, chafed at his defensive role in protecting Saltville. The southern cavalry leader was no administrator, and he longed to strike a decisive blow against a foe also adjusting to new strategic realities.

As Confederate troops streamed eastward to Virginia, Union troops in East Tennessee also received orders to move out of the department. Maj. Gen. Sherman, commander of the Military Division of the Mississippi, headquartered in Nashville, planned to move south into Georgia and execute Grant's plan, in Sherman's words, "to knock Joe Johnston, and do as much damage to the resources of the enemy as possible."[61] Maj. Gen. John Schofield, who had replaced John G. Foster as commander of the Department of the Ohio on February 3, assumed command of Twenty-Third Corps by War Department General Orders 144 of April 4, 1864, in preparation for movement of the Corps into Georgia in early May.[62] Brig. Gen. George Stoneman exercised command

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[60] Ibid., 617.

[61] OR, 1, XXXII (3): 313.

[62] Ibid., 246-247.

of the Department of the Ohio from Louisville, Kentucky, during Schofield's absence.

On April 10, 1864, Union authorities created the District of East Tennessee under Brig.

Gen. Jacob Ammen, who commanded Fourth Division, Twenty-Third Corps, left behind

in East Tennessee when Schofield moved south to join Sherman's advance towards

Atlanta.

On the partisan and guerilla fronts, East Tennessee under Union control became a

safe haven for Unionists and deserters from across the border in North Carolina, while

southern guerillas remained active throughout the department. Organizing the North

Carolinians into volunteer companies, Union authorities sent them on raids into their

native state. The lesson of Kentucky as a sanctuary was effectively applied in East

Tennessee. The raiders performed useful service, as illustrated by one mission led by

Capt. G. W. Kirk of the Third North Carolina Volunteer Infantry. Starting out in

Morristown on June 13 with about 130 men, Capt. Kirk traveled by rail up to Greeneville,

marched across the border where he attacked Camp Vance, near Morganton, and

destroyed railroad property, ammunition, and supplies. Kirk failed to accomplish his

principal mission of burning the Yadkin River railroad bridge, but returned safely with

captured prisoners, horses and mules, and many new recruits.[63] While he was gone,

Champ Ferguson, the southern outlaw guerilla leader, stole about 500 cavalry mounts

near Kingston, west of Knoxville, sparking a Federal retaliatory raid toward Sparta,

Ferguson's home base in Middle Tennessee that recaptured some of the horses.[64]

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[63] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 234.

[64] Ibid., 234, 353.

Union commanders at this time continued their plans to invade southwestern Virginia. When Federal forces finally set out from Kentucky in late May, 1864, to capture Saltville, an impatient John Hunt Morgan was ready with a countermove to blunt the offensive. On May 31, 1864, Morgan and about 2,200 men brushed aside a few hundred Federals in Pound Gap and made for Lexington and Frankfort to destroy railroads and interdict an intended Union attack against Saltville and the lead mines at Wytheville.[65] Taking only three day's rations, the Confederate columns encountered rain in the mountains on June 4, a torrential downpour that slowed travel and "broke down dozens of horses."[66] As Edward Guerrant observed, "Morgan's strategy is splendid, but death on horses, 250 lost out of our brigade in 3 days."[67] Guerrant's attenuated praise of Morgan's strategy was somewhat premature as the expedition deteriorated into a quest for plunder, with Morgan's men robbing banks and private citizens alike.

After entering Lexington and capturing a large quantity of much-needed horses and supplies, Morgan met a large Union force at Cynthiana, which proceeded to maul his twelve hundred remaining men and chase them out of Kentucky. Although Morgan claimed in his report that the action halted the Union drive on Saltville, remounted many of his men with stolen horses, destroyed vast quantities of enemy property, and delayed recruiting efforts, the raid was really a disaster, with the Confederate government later investigating the conduct of Morgan's troops upon request of Col. Henry Giltner,

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[65] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 65.

[66] Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate*, 456-457.

[67] Ibid., 459.

commander of First Cavalry Brigade.[68] Morgan delayed the inquiry as best he could, and then died at Greeneville in September before any further action could be taken (see below for more details on Morgan's death). Edward Guerrant, on a visit to Abingdon following the raid, bitterly recorded his feelings, "Many big officers sporting the laurels of the K'y campaign around in the shape of fine watches, & chains, gold & silver, splendid suits of doeskin, etc. They should wear 'fig leaves' for shame."[69]

In August, Brig. Gen. Alvan C. Gillem arrived in East Tennessee at the head of the Tennessee Governor's Guard, considering himself under the authority of Andrew Johnson, the state's military governor.[70] Brig. Gen. Ammen in Knoxville intended to use the Tennessee troops as an expeditionary force into upper East Tennessee to support Union strategic goals, which included repairing the railroad at least to Bull's Gap, maintaining civil order, protecting the upper Great Valley, and mounting raids against Saltville, also accessible through mountain gaps from Kentucky and West Virginia. The gaps continued their role as access points for offensives, with Confederate and Union cavalry constantly contesting each break in the mountains. Although part of a disastrous rout at Russellville, the Governor's Guard under Gillem generally fought well against their Confederate adversaries in advancing Union strategic aims, including successful

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[68] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 69-70. Morgan was also unavailable to assist Breckinridge towards Staunton. *OR*, 1, XXXVIIII (2): 638-639.

[69] Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate*, 493.

[70] Hans L. Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1989): 162. For an account of Tennessee's State Guard during Reconstruction, see Ben H. Severance, *Tennessee's Radical Army: The State Guard and Its Role in Reconstruction, 1867-1869* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005).

participation in a strike against southwestern Virginia late in the war.

Also in early August, 1864, Confederate forces under Morgan reentered East Tennessee and occupied strategically important Bull's Gap on August 11. On August 19, Union forces commanded by Brig. Gen. Gillem arrived in Mossy Creek to drive the Confederates back up the Great Valley. Lacking hard intelligence, Gillem spent some time chasing rumored southern forces at Morristown and Russellville before finally acting on confirmed reports of enemy activity near Greeneville. Well-informed Confederate cavalry were hard to find among heavily forested hills and valleys around Morristown and Russellville and, worse yet, may only have existed in the minds of Union officers relying on rumors. Gillem, who had no way of verifying local intelligence unless he searched the countryside, must have been visibly relieved when reliable reports of Confederate activity near Greeneville reached his headquarters.

On the morning of August 23, he swept through Bull's Gap, met Confederate pickets at Blue Springs and, after moving another two miles, encountered the Fourth Kentucky Cavalry and Tenth Kentucky Mounted Infantry brigades commanded by Col. Henry L. Giltner "occupying the old Confederate position on a wooded ridge south of the Greeneville road."[71] After outflanking Giltner's line with overwhelming numbers in almost a reprise of the first Battle of Blue Springs in 1863, Union troops swarmed into relatively level farmland in the Confederate rear and sent the southerners stampeding down the turnpike through Greeneville towards Jonesborough, when night halted

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[71] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 485.

pursuit.[72] From Jonesborough, the Confederates retreated to Carter's Station where Giltner received an order from Morgan in Abingdon to return to Jonesborough. Giltner ignored the order, thus illustrating the low state of Confederate command in East Tennessee and distrust of Morgan among the officers.[73]

On August 25, Morgan journeyed to Carter's Station and personally ordered the troops to move below Jonesborough. With the commanding general present, Giltner got his men marching towards Rheatown and Greeneville. On August 30, the War Department suspended Morgan from command pending an official court of inquiry concerning the Kentucky raid, a directive ignored by the general as he rode to Greeneville on September 3.[74] Gillem, alerted that night in Bull's Gap of Morgan's presence, marched the Tenth Michigan and Ninth Tennessee Cavalry to Greeneville during a rainstorm.[75] He prudently sent the Thirteenth Tennessee Cavalry under Lieut. Col. Ingerton into the Confederate rear to cut off any escape attempt. Confederate troops at Park's Gap put up a stiff fight until artillery sent them flying back towards Greeneville in a confused retreat that fortunately eluded Ingerton's blocking force. Pursuing Union troops found Brig. Gen. Morgan at the Williams House in Greeneville and killed him, supposedly while attempting to escape. Confederate troops retreated to Jonesborough once again, where Col. Basil W. Duke assumed command of Morgan's brigade, ordering

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[72] Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate*, 507.

[73] Ibid., 508.

[74] Matthews, *Basil Wilson Duke, CSA*, 173.

[75] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 489.

a further retrograde movement to Carter's Depot. Citing the bad condition of his horses, Gillem did not pursue the fleeing Confederates, returning instead to Bull's Gap where railroad communications had been restored.[76]

As Union commanders planned their next moves, Confederate forces in East Tennessee settled in between Jonesborough and the Virginia state line. Brig. Gen. John C. Vaughn assumed leadership of field forces in East Tennessee, with departmental command exercised by Brig. Gen. John Echols in Abingdon. In addition to Morgan's death and subsequent command adjustments, September also brought news of Atlanta's fall. Despite bad tidings of the larger war, Confederate troops in upper East Tennessee continued to watch Union troop movements towards Saltville and to defend their territory as best they could. With Morgan gone, Union commanders resumed planning for a new raid on Saltville with forces converging from Kentucky and East Tennessee. During the middle of September, Union cavalry and mounted infantry under overall command of Brig. Gen. Stephen Burbridge rode out from Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, towards the Eastern Kentucky mountains, while Brig. Gen.'s Jacob Ammen and Alvan Gillem moved up the Great Valley towards Saltville. With a combined force of over 7500 men, the Federals meant to destroy Saltville, Wytheville, and Abingdon. As October approached, Richmond authorities appointed Maj. Gen. John Breckinridge to command the now officially combined Departments of Southwestern Virginia and East Tennessee, and Breckinridge hastened towards Saltville from the Shenandoah Valley.

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[76] Ibid., 490.

By October 1, Burbridge had reached Laurel Gap, only four miles from

Saltville.[77] Unbeknownst to the Union commander, Maj. Gen. Sherman had sent orders

on September 28 redirecting Burbridge's small army to Nashville to chase Nathan

Bedford Forrest, who was on the loose in Middle Tennessee. Unfortunately for

Burbridge, bushwhackers kept couriers carrying the orders from reaching him until

October 3, a day after the Battle of Saltville. Blissfully unaware of the recall, Burbridge

compounded his bad luck by delaying an attack until the morning of October 2, giving

Brig. Gen. Echols time to deploy newly arrived troops commanded by Brig. Gen. John S.

Williams. Down in East Tennessee, Vaughn and his 600 cavalrymen delayed Ammen and

Gillem so effectively that those two Union generals never reached the battlefield. When

Burbridge attacked on October 2, he found almost 3,000 defenders in his way. After a

bitter fight, the Union commander retreated back into Kentucky when his troops

supposedly ran short of ammunition.[78] Mountainous terrain also affected the outcome, as

Edward Guerrant pointed out, "We gained a victory because our troops fought bravely, &

because Saltville is surrounded with innumerable hills."[79]

Breckinridge arrived on the battlefield with Gen. Echols and newly appointed

Brig. Gen. Basil Duke late on October 2, just in time to witness what historian William C.

Davis called "one of the most disgraceful episodes of the war," the murder of wounded

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[77] Davis, *Breckinridge*, 457; Gary Robert Matthews, *Basil Wilson Duke, CSA: The Right Man in the Right Place* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 177-179.

[78] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 552-553. Burbridge claimed victory in his report even though he failed to accomplish the overall strategic mission to destroy Saltville, Wytheville, and Abingdon.

[79] Guerrant, *Bluegrass Confederate*, 545.

and captured African-American troops on the field of battle.[80] Breckinridge did not

condone the massacre, and later attempted to bring guilty parties to justice.[81] Next day,

the new departmental commander ordered a pursuit of Burbridge by Duke and Williams,

but they failed to stop the beaten Federal force from reentering Kentucky. This time, the

hilly terrain worked against them and their tired horses as they tried to get in front of the

fleeing blue columns. By any measure, the hard-fought southern victory at Saltville

preserved an important industrial asset while providing a period of respite for the

exhausted defenders.

Bushwhackers continued to pose major problems for Union troops operating

during this period in Upper East Tennessee. Confederate Home Guards roamed the

eastern counties along with rogue bands associated with unscrupulous leaders like Champ

Ferguson. Harsh Union occupation policies encouraged many Confederates to desert and

wage private wars against the invaders.[82] As chances for Confederate victory grew more

remote, increasing numbers of southern soldiers campaigning close to home called it

quits and hid out in the mountains. Violence in the region often originated in conflict

between kin networks, resulting in numerous bushwhacking episodes as clans fought over

supposed slights to honor.[83] With husbands away, many mountain women became more

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[80] Davis, *Breckinridge*, 458.

[81] Ibid., 459-461.

[82] Matthews, *Basil Wilson Duke, CSA*, 176.

[83] See John C. Inscoe and Gordon B. McKinney, "Highland Households Divided: Familial Deceptions, Diversions, and Divisions in Southern Appalachia's Inner Civil

independent, exhibiting a hard streak when misfortune touched their lives. G. Moxley

Sorrel related an incident during his service in East Tennessee when he was visited by an

elderly woman who wished her husband's murderers caught and punished.[84] As she made

the request to Sorrel, the woman exhibited "not a word of sorrow, not a tear of regret, but

only vengeance, and that instantly."[85] Unfortunately, the perpetrators escaped to the

mountains, which were "quite inaccessible to ordinary attack, and were safe there with

numbers of others."[86] Couriers of either army passing through the lawless mountains

risked encounters with these itinerant bushwhackers, and the threat of interception often

delayed vital intelligence.

On September 28, Maj. Gen. Sherman in Atlanta wired Assistant Adjutant

General J. Bates Dickson in Lexington, Kentucky, to recall Burbridge from his Saltville

raid and redirect him to Middle Tennessee.[87] Dickson replied on September 29, "I have

forwarded the order to General Burbridge, but doubt if it reaches him. His rear is infested

with bushwhackers."[88] With the telegraph down between Knoxville and Bull's Gap,

Sherman's message had to be hand-delivered by courier from Strawberry Plains up to

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War," in John C. Inscoe, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the American South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 124-143.

[84] Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 221.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid.

[87] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (2): 524.

[88] Ibid., 525.

Burbridge in Virginia.[89] The message also went by telegraph to Cumberland Gap, where

the commanding officer thought a "citizen scout" might be able to deliver it.[90] Union

forces advancing from Bull's Gap up the Great Valley had no news of Burbridge, who

might as well have been on the moon.[91] After several days, a courier finally got through

all the bushwhackers and delivered Sherman's recall order to Burbridge on October 3

during the retreat from Saltville. The Union general must have been dismayed to learn the

battle was fought because bushwhackers held up the recall order, but such were the

fortunes of war.

As Breckinridge settled into his new headquarters in Virginia, active operations

shifted across the border into East Tennessee where control of the railroad dictated

strategy. Since neither force could be expelled from its main base of operations, the war

entered a new phase as cavalry raided up and down the railroad between Knoxville and

Bristol. When raiders got too close to important strongholds, larger mixed forces sallied

forth to drive them away. If railroad bridges and track were destroyed behind an enemy

stronghold, the garrison might have to evacuate for lack of supplies. In October,

Confederate Brig. Gen. John Vaughn and his cavalry had several skirmishes with Union

troops at Kingsport and Rogersville before the Federals took refuge at their Bull's Gap

railroad stronghold.[92] When Vaughn arrived in Greeneville, also a railroad town, on the

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid., 541.

[92] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 564.

morning of October 12, he attacked Federal cavalry units there, driving them back to Bull's Gap.[93] On October 16, twenty of Vaughn's men burned the fort and railroad bridge at Mossy Creek between Bull's Gap and Strawberry Plains, thus forcing the Federals to evacuate the gap and fall back to Bean's Station.[94] Vaughn's cavalry then ranged down the valley as far as Strawberry Plains, tearing up railroad track as they went. Confederate control down to Bull's Gap gave Breckinridge another source of supply that could be transported by rail, a fact not lost on Vaughn, who commented to headquarters, "Commissaries should look well to the supplies in this department."[95]

Union commanders in Knoxville, mindful of the strategic importance of Bull's Gap as a staging area for raids up the Great Valley, reacted quickly to the Confederate threat by sending Alvan C. Gillem to retake the stronghold and push Vaughn out of East Tennessee. By October 23, Vaughn had fallen back to Morristown, where he had access to Bull's Gap if pressed hard by Gillem coming up the Clinch Valley. Unfortunately for Vaughn, Gillem's attack at Morristown on October 28 utterly stampeded the southern cavalry back towards Russellville and beyond. Col. John B. Palmer, commanding North Carolina infantry marching to Russellville from Bull's Gap, reported that "Vaughn's retreating cavalry swept by my men in the wildest disorder."[96] The North Carolinians were trying to stem the tide of retreat when Gillem's pursuing cavalry entered

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[93] Ibid., 565.

[94] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 849. Davis, *Breckinridge*, 464.

[95] Ibid.

[96] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 852-854.

Russellville from the west. Palmer's artillery halted the Union advance while Vaughn

finally rallied some of his fleeing cavalry to back up Palmer's line. The Federals,

evidently believing they faced a stronger force, retired temporarily back to Morristown

while Vaughn retreated up the valley to Carter's Station and Palmer returned to North

Carolina with much-needed supplies his troops commandeered in East Tennessee.[97]

When Federal cavalry began roaming up the Watauga Valley, Maj. Gen.

Breckinridge in Virginia decided they were too close to Bristol, and resolved to push

them back. [98] Gathering up a hodgepodge of troops, including the ever-reliable Palmer

and 600 men from North Carolina, Breckinridge moved down the railroad line to

Greeneville, which he reached on November 10. Basil Duke pushed the Federal rear

guard out of Lick Creek and chased them to Bull's Gap, which the Union commander

barricaded as best he could with the few axes available.[99] Gillem, showing some

feistiness, sortied several times from the Gap, but Duke pushed him back. When

Breckinridge arrived, he determined to attack the next morning, even though John Palmer

and his North Carolinians had not yet arrived. Gillem occupied a strong defensive

position on a ridge running northeast from the gap, and Duke thought Breckinridge's plan

reckless in the extreme. Strategically, a frontal assault did not make much sense and, in

some ways, is reminiscent of Marshal Massena's defeat at Bussaco, Portugal, on 27

September 1810, during the Napoleonic Wars. Massena, following closely behind the

Duke of Wellington's retreating Allied force, found the Duke ensconced on a high ridge

[97] Ibid.

[98] Ibid., 892.

[99] Ibid., 888; Matthews, *Basil Wilson Duke, CSA*, 181.

and, instead of flanking the position, ordered an unsuccessful frontal assault. Breckinridge, whose cavalry had access to the enemy rear through various gaps to the southwest or northeast, also ordered a frontal attack up the ridge at Bull's Gap which similarly failed.

Although Basil Duke thought the movement reckless, both he and Breckinridge were in the thick of the fighting on the morning of November 12.[100] Breckinridge had devised a coordinated assault on the Union front, flank, and rear and, during the event, his commanders managed to hit all three points at the same time. The flanking force on the Union left, consisting of dismounted cavalry led by Breckinridge in person, carried a line of trenches in hand-to-hand fighting. But this was not Missionary Ridge where attackers from below overwhelmed defenders at the top. Unable to capture two forts at either end of the Union line, exhausted Confederate troops stumbled back down the steep mountainside to lick their wounds, victims of steep terrain that was well-defended.[101] As Brig. Gen. Gillem related in his after-action report, "Some of their (the Confederate) dead were inside of our breastworks."[102] He also reported "27 dead (Confederates) and many wounded in front of our lines."[103] Breckinridge's soldiers paid a high price for their commander's senseless attack.[104]

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[100] Ibid., 182.

[101] Davis, *Breckinridge*, 465-466.

[102] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 889.

[103] Ibid.

The day after the failed assault, Col. Palmer and his 600 North Carolina infantrymen arrived to bolster Breckinridge's little army. Gillem observed the reinforcements arriving and, low on food and ammunition, determined to evacuate the Gap that night. Alert Confederate scouts noticed when Union troops abandoned Taylor's Gap southwest of Gillem's position, a fact they immediately reported to Breckinridge and Duke. Breckinridge, hoping to find Gillem strung out on the road to Russellville, pushed his troops through Taylor's Gap and rushed to Russellville on the Warrensburg/Arnott Rd. Gillem, moving up to Whitesburg on a parallel turnpike and hearing that Union reinforcements had arrived at Morristown, sent word for the new troops to meet him in Russellville. Unfortunately, when Gillem reached Russellville, he learned that his reinforcements had stayed put in Morristown and, worse, Breckinridge was at hand. The Union commander hurriedly placed two battalions of the Eighth Tennessee Cavalry under Col. Samuel K. N. Patton at the crossroads in Russellville and another cavalry regiment, the Ninth Tennessee under Col. Joseph Parsons, beyond it towards Morristown to halt a Confederate advance in case Patton was overrun.[105]

At 1:00 A. M. on November 14, Breckinridge attacked Col. Patton's Union battalions in Russellville and sent them reeling west towards Morristown, capturing many prisoners in the woods.[106] Col. Parsons, at the second line, held the charging

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[104] Davis, *Breckinridge*, 465; Matthews, *Basil Wilson Duke*, CSA, 182. Both Davis and Matthews noted Duke's objections to the attack, but neither censured Breckinridge for a reckless and unnecessary action.

[105] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 890-891.

[106] Ibid., 893.

Confederates until his ammunition ran out. At this point, the entire Union force streamed back to Morristown, where it rallied behind the new regiment sent to reinforce them. After capturing a single artillery piece on a knoll, charging Confederates broke the Federal line once more.[107] This time, pursuing cavalrymen chased Union survivors all the way back to Strawberry Plains, a distance of twenty-five miles. Gillem, separated from his troops during the charge, made his way to the Plains by a side road and rejoined his shattered command, minus several hundred men lost mostly to capture. When Breckinridge rode up to Strawberry Plains, he found "strong works on the opposite side of the river, manned and furnished with artillery."[108] Lacking strength to assault such a well-defended position, the Confederate general harassed the Federals with artillery fire and cavalry probes for a few days before deciding that further Union attacks up the valley that winter were unlikely. Breckinridge then returned to southwestern Virginia, leaving Brig. Gen. Vaughn in command at Strawberry Plains.[109]

Unfortunately, Breckinridge greatly underestimated the resolve of his opponents. Maj. Gen. George Stoneman was no Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel, the timid commander Breckinridge had defeated at New Market in May, 1864. Although prone to exaggeration in his reports, Stoneman proved effective in helping his beaten commanders reorganize their respective commands for an immediate two-pronged offensive back up the Great Valley to destroy Saltville and the lead works near Wytheville. Under Breckinridge's

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[107] Davis, *Breckinridge*, 467.

[108] *OR*, 1, XXXIX (1): 893.

[109] Ibid.

capable administration, these two industrial sites were continuing to supply the

Confederacy with vital salt and lead.[110] Rather than have the Kentucky troops move

across more difficult terrain in eastern Kentucky and southwestern Virginia where the

gaps might be hotly contested, Stoneman proposed to bring them through Cumberland

Gap into the Great Valley nearer the railroad to combine with other troops coming from

Knoxville.

On December 6, Maj. Gen. Schofield, then confronting Maj. Gen. John Bell

Hood's Army of Tennessee at Nashville, approved Stoneman's plan "to push the enemy

as far back as practicable into Virginia and destroy the saltworks and railroad."[111]

Schofield made clear, however, that any further operations on Stoneman's part would

have to await developments at Nashville. [112] Taking no chances, Stoneman traveled to

Knoxville to take personal command of the proposed expedition, ordering Maj. Gen.

Burbridge to bring his Kentucky troops down through Cumberland Gap into Powell

Valley. Stoneman, no doubt mindful of Burbridge's failure to unite his converging forces

during the last attempt on Saltville, this time brought Burbridge into East Tennessee for

tighter administrative control and coordination with other Federal troops marching from

Knoxville along the railroad. In fact, Stoneman's plan made maximum use of the

railroad, which he could repair as his army moved forward.

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[110] Davis, *Breckinridge*, 470.

[111] *OR*, 1, XLV (1): 810.

[112] Ibid.

When Burbridge began advancing into East Tennessee towards Bean's Station from Cumberland Gap in late November to join Brig. Gen. Gillem's force coming up from Knoxville, Brig. Gen. Vaughn's Confederate scouts detected the movement. On December 1, Vaughn notified Breckinridge of the situation, and moved back up the railroad towards Greeneville in supporting distance of Basil Duke's brigade, which had shifted to Rogersville.[113] Brig. Gen. Gillem, advancing up the north side of the Holston River where hills ands valleys shielded his troops from detection, promptly attacked Rogersville, capturing Duke's brother-in-law, Col. Richard C. Morgan, who had been left commanding the brigade when Duke departed for Abingdon early on December 13. Vaughn, realizing that he might be cut off, quickly fell back up the railroad to Virginia while Duke, then in Bristol, rejoined his men.

After learning of events in East Tennessee, Breckinridge ordered Vaughn and Duke to delay the Federals as best they could while he concentrated his meager forces among the hills of Saltville. This tactic had worked during the first battle of Saltville in early October, but this time, Stoneman ignored Saltville and contented himself with destroying everything around the town, including the lead works at Wytheville. Breckinridge, outnumbered five-to-one, bravely sallied forth with his troops and, on December 18, fought Stoneman to a standstill about a mile east of Marion, Virginia. Fearing encirclement, Breckinridge retreated during the night and, on the following day, Stoneman entered Saltville, which he thoroughly destroyed. On the morning of December 22, Federal troops left Saltville and, moving north, split up at Hyter's Gap, with

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[113] *OR*, 1, XLV (2): 632, 646.

Burbridge returning to Kentucky and Stoneman to Knoxville. Burbridge's force took most of the slaves from the salt works to Kentucky.[114]

Although heavily criticized in Richmond for the defeat, Breckinridge fought well against overwhelming odds at Marion, keeping his force intact and avoiding encirclement by a superior force. With his advantage in numbers, Stoneman seized the strategic initiative and forced Breckinridge out of Saltville, only failing to destroy the Confederate army when Breckinridge prudently retreated during the night of December 18. The Union commander thought the Confederate force had retreated to North Carolina, and he triumphantly turned his army towards Saltville. By any measure, the raid achieved success because Stoneman exercised tight tactical control, used the railroad efficiently, ensured that the forces from Kentucky and Knoxville converged properly, and never lost sight of the strategic mission to destroy Confederate industrial resources. This action marked the end of serious Confederate resistance in southwestern Virginia and Upper East Tennessee during the Civil War.

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[114] Davis, *Breckinridge*, 476-477.

CHAPTER VI

"ON ACCOUNT OF THE BURNING OF THE RR
BRIDGES IN EAST TENNESSEE ALL THE FREIGHT HAS TO BE CARRIED
AROUND THROUGH GEORGIA AND SOUTH CAROLINA."

After the guns fell silent at war's end, surviving soldiers returned to their homes

in East Tennessee to repair the shattered landscape and get on with their lives. The

ravages of war had brutalized the region, as historian Robert Tracey McKenzie remarked

about Knoxville following Longstreet's siege, "All the timber on the surrounding hills

had been cut down, and numerous forts and innumerable trenches now encircled the

community."[1] When Dr. J. G. M. Ramsay, an East Tennessean who had served the

Confederacy as a banker, returned in 1867 to his farm at the confluence of the Holston

and French Broad Rivers, he found all the buildings destroyed and, in his words, "The

sight was mournful."[2] Similar scenes of devastation marred East Tennessee's landscape

after four years of continuous warfare. In addition to buildings, perhaps the most telling

destruction was that of foliage and fencing to provide clear fields of fire, fuel for warmth

and cooking, and boards for shelter. War thus created large swathes of denuded

countryside that slowly rebounded as vegetation came back and people rebuilt their

towns, homes, and farms.

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[1] McKenzie, *Lincolnites and Rebels*, 175.

[2] Dr. J. G. M. Ramsey, *Autobiography and Letters*, ed. William B. Hesseltine (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002): 252.

But even though foliage and buildings were destroyed, the natural landscape in Upper East Tennessee was remarkably unchanged, and remains so. To be sure, there are competing landscapes associated with industry, mining, power generation, tourism, recreation, transportation, and expansion of population centers that have altered the countryside. Tennessee Valley Authority reservoirs, particularly Norris, Cherokee and Douglas lakes, have obscured some portions of the land, but overall terrain characteristics are generally intact. And where modern urban development has destroyed some features such as Fort Sanders in Knoxville, others, like Fort Higley, have survived. Basic terrain characteristics such as mountains, mountain passes, valleys, and ridges that shaped the Civil War in Upper East Tennessee likewise remain in the modern environment, as do a good number of buildings, structures, and objects. Perhaps most importantly, the railroad, which was the area's most sought strategic asset, still winds through East Tennessee along its traditional path.

This enduring geographic landscape offers a fascinating glimpse into a past where military decisions affected the lives of many people, both soldiers and civilians, living in Upper East Tennessee. Geography affected many of these decisions, and the Civil War in East Tennessee cannot be properly understood without a grasp of how geographic factors, both permanent and contingent, affected larger strategic calculations. How the war evolved strategically and tactically in this region differed from its development in Middle or West Tennessee, with geography, to a large extent, shaping the course of war in each section. Existence of the Great Valley and its surrounding mountain chains and the location of the railroad and its depots determined points of attack and defense where much military activity occurred. Heavily forested ridges provided cover for irregular

activity, and the fact that mountains knew no borders meant that contiguous states with similar border terrain offered sanctuaries and staging grounds for military operations.

But if geography determines how warfare evolves in certain ways, it also limits the capacity of humans to wage war. As John Keegan put it, "War is always limited, not because man chooses to make it so, but because nature determines that it shall be."[3] Nature surrounded East Tennessee with mountains, created the Great Valley with its lesser ridges, and applied various types of vegetation to hold it all in place. Human ingenuity molded the railroad along the Valley's relatively level floor and through gaps in the ridges, often where turnpikes already existed. These natural and man-made features shaped military strategy by channeling men and supplies through gaps in the mountains and along the railroad, ultimately limiting much military activity to attacking or defending sites along the railway. While geography remained static, its features assumed different military purposes as armies advanced or retreated. These different uses of geographic factors are most evident during the periods of Confederate occupation from 1861 to 1863, and Union occupation from 1863 to 1865.

During Confederate occupation, the civil war in East Tennessee evolved into a border war largely influenced by geographic factors. The Unaka Mountains to the east, Cumberland Plateau to the west, and Cumberland Mountain chain to the north were natural points of defense, particularly the gaps where roads provided access to interior plains and valleys. In the southern part of the Great Valley, the rail and river junction of Chattanooga was the most important point to defend and, in the north, Cumberland Gap

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[3] Keegan, *A History of Warfare*, 75.

assumed a primary strategic role in holding back Union incursions from Kentucky.

Confederate forces in southwestern Virginia buffered the northeastern border, and troops

in Chattanooga defended mountains west and south of the city. The East Tennessee

Railroad provided access to Chattanooga and Bristol, but fell about forty miles short of

Cumberland Gap. Because troop levels were never adequate, Confederate commanders

like Brig. Gen. Felix Zollicoffer and Maj. Gen. Edmund Kirby Smith spent a lot of time

dashing from one end of the department to the other as threats, imagined and real,

beckoned. Both Zollicoffer and Kirby Smith decided that preemptive stikes into

Kentucky might relieve Union pressure on the northern border. This meant movement

into mountainous territory with no rail service, and no way to prepare supply depots in

advance.

In 1861, Kentucky's allegiance was in doubt, with Union commanders reluctant

to send regular forces across the border primarily because of logistical concerns

exacerbated by lack of railroads along the border with East Tennessee. Federal weakness

led to an attempt to foment a people's war, which had potential to develop among the

high hills and dense thickets of Upper East Tennessee. Union commanders very early in

the war realized that geography favored irregular warfare, and planned their initial

offensive to coincide with a general uprising. When Brig. Gen. William T. Sherman

called off the regular army invasion timed to support an uprising, the people's war

collapsed and Union resistance thereafter relied on irregular activity facilitated by

favorable covering terrain. Partisans and guerillas received aid and sanctuary from Union

camps in Kentucky, which posed a big headache for Confederates across the border in

East Tennessee, since the mountainous countryside shielded irregular activity and made

interdiction extremely difficult. Southern commanders thus seized on the idea of invasion

to quell the Kentucky problem, with Brig. Gen. Felix Zollicoffer moving north of the

Cumberland River in 1861 and Maj. Gen. Kirby Smith pushing up into central Kentucky

in 1862 as part of a larger invasion led by Maj. Gen. Braxton Bragg. Except for a single

steamboat, Zollicoffer's retreating forces might have been trapped up against the

Cumberland River, and the denuded mountains of Eastern Kentucky almost proved Kirby

Smith's undoing as his hungry troops streamed back into Tennessee following the Battle

of Perryville. Tactically, Smith's cavalry made good use of the narrow mountain defiles

to keep pursuing Union troops at bay.

Following the South's unsuccessful operations across the mountain barrier, both

Union and Confederate forces made no more serious invasion attempts in either direction

until Union troops under Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside marched into Knoxville in

September, 1863. Because undermanned Confederate units simply did not have enough

troops to cover all the mountain passes in the northern border, Burnside simply marched

around Cumberland Gap and entered East Tennessee west of the Gap. Kirby Smith had

done the same in 1862 on his way into Kentucky when Union forces temporarily

controlled the Gap. Both these actions illustrated the Gap's vulnerability to flanking

maneuvers and the importance of multiple mountain passes as avenues for invasion.

Burnside's invasion in 1863 again proved the porousness of the mountain barrier

between Kentucky and Upper East Tennessee, and the arrival of contending forces in the

Great Valley heralded a change in operational imperatives, negating the old strategy of

defending static mountain barriers and initiating new fluid tactics based on control of the

railroad. In this new phase of the war in Upper East Tennessee, the gentler defiles and

ridges of the Great Valley facilitated fast-moving cavalry raids designed to get behind an

enemy, cut off its supplies and reinforcements via railroad, and capture the entire force.

Such attacks threatened fortified depots along the entire length of the railroad from

Knoxville to Bristol, with many changing hands on a regular basis as opposing troops cut

off their sources of supply. Partisans and bushwhackers also made use of the heavily

forested countryside and low mountains for concealment, concentrating much of their

activity on destroying rail and telegraph facilities.

In fact, the conflict in Upper East Tennessee reflected the national military

reliance on railroads, which functioned as major logistical avenues for both North and

South in all theaters of war, including Upper East Tennessee. Railroads carried army

supplies into conflict zones, and food and industrial goods out to other contested regions.

Troops traveling by rail arrived at battle zones more fit to fight than after coming off a

thirty-mile forced march. Some observers have called the Civil War "a purely railway

war," with severance of railroad lines between western and eastern sections of the

Confederacy the main reason for southern defeat.[4] As John Keegan persuasively argues,

however, "logistic supremacy on its own rarely wins a campaign against a determined

enemy."[5]

The weaker Confederates, particularly after 1863, simply went around Union

positions to tear up track and burn railroad bridges, a tactic also utilized by their

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[4] Ibid., 306. See also Robert C. Black, III, *The Railroads of the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952; reprint, 1998): 282; John E. Clark, Jr., *Railroads in the Civil War: The Impact of Management on Victory and Defeat* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002): 1-6.

[5] Ibid.

opponents. The most spectacular example of a wide flanking movement occurred in October at the "Rheatown Races," a series of battles in which Union cavalry, utilizing a parallel valley, outflanked Confederate forces retreating up the railroad, shelling them from a pass at Rheatown, in Greene County. And when Lieut. Gen. James Longstreet moved into Upper East Tennessee in late 1863, his small detached army corps stayed close to the railroad lifeline for almost five months before leaving in April, 1864. For Longstreet, the war in East Tennessee was all about railroad logistics.

Longstreet's First Corps moved up to Sweetwater from Chattanooga by rail. The railroad, in ill-repair and lacking sufficient rolling stock, limited his move by causing delays. His inability to spare wagons to haul his pontoon bridge meant that he had to cross the Tennessee River where the railroad deposited the bridging equipment, which was near Loudon. Rather than attack Knoxville from the south, he had to follow Burnside into Knoxville from the west along the railroad. Conceived as a rapid move against Knoxville, Longstreet's advance slowed, defeated as much by creaky transportation and muddy roads as it was by the skill of the Union army and questionable decisions by subordinate commanders. Stiff resistance by retreating Union troops bought time for engineers to strengthen Knoxville's defenses, particularly earthen forts around the town's perimeter and on heights across the river to the south. The manmade geography of defense seemingly confused Longstreet and his advisors, who wasted even more time trying to decide where to attack. And when the attack finally went in against Fort Sanders, the Confederate commander misjudged the height of the wall and did not provide his men with scaling ladders. Once strategic events beyond Longstreet's control compelled retreat, First Corps followed the railroad into Upper East Tennessee. Another

attack against Knoxville's defenses might have succeeded, but Bragg's defeat at Chattanooga and close proximity of Union reinforcements prevented that possibility.

As First Corps retreated along the railroad through Strawberry Plains and thence north to Rogersville, operations never strayed far from the rails. When Longstreet turned on Burnside at Bean's Station, the railroad spur at Rogersville was to his rear and Morristown, a railroad depot, to the south. At Bean's Station, Longstreet understood the terrain very well as he attempted to shove the Union cavalry up against the ridge behind the Station and trap it there. Unfortunately, his subordinate, Brig. Gen. William "Grumble" Jones, failed to seal the mountain pass properly, and Union troopers escaped into the hills. To the south, Confederate cavalry also failed to get around Bean's Station to the west, and Federal forces successfully evaded encirclement and escaped to Rutledge. In this instance, Longstreet used terrain brilliantly to plan his movements, but subordinate commanders dashed his ambitious designs to surround and capture Union forces arrayed against him.

In addition to the railroad as a geographical determinant for engagements, the location of foraging grounds led military forces into conflict. As army picket lines settled along Mossy Creek, each side sent its cavalry down to Dandridge and the French Broad River valley to forage. In late January, 1864, Union field commander Maj. Gen. John Parke attempted to bring on a general engagement with Longstreet, who used a low ridge to mask his movements towards Dandridge. Union infantry built breastworks behind a creek on Dandridge's periphery while Longstreet's forces filed into assaulting positions in the low hills east of town. Union forces deployed east of the creek used undulations in the hills to effectively block Confederate probes, but Longstreet's scouts found a road

around Dandridge. Before the southern commander deployed sufficient force to encircle the Union army, Parke started his retreat, a move protested by several subordinates who wanted to stay and fight. Muddy roads, as they had all through Longstreet's presence in Upper East Tennessee, hindered effective pursuit.

When Longstreet retreated back up the Great Valley in late February, 1864, he centered his defensive line on Bull's Gap, an easily defensible railroad junction located in hills behind a long ridge. First Corps stayed in this position until late March, when Confederate authorities ordered Longstreet's return to the Army of Northern Virginia. Following Longstreet's departure, both Union and Confederate force levels dropped in Upper East Tennessee as the War Department siphoned off troops into other more strategically significant departments across the south. Strategic focus in East Tennessee shifted away from Longstreet's departed army to defense of Saltville and Wytheville, in southwestern Virginia. East Tennessee became, for the Confederates, a military buffer protecting the Saltville/Wytheville industrial axis, with undermanned southern forces, primarily cavalry, attempting to forestall any Union moves up the Great Valley. During this phase of operations, fast-moving cavalry exploited concealment offered by long ridges in the Valley to get behind their Union foes through mountain passes and tear up railroad track, an occurrence that might cause a Federal retreat. Union cavalry also engaged in the cat-and-mouse tactics of wide flanking movements, with both sides executing long-range cavalry raids.

In June 1864, the Confederate commander in southwestern Virginia, Brig. Gen. John H. Morgan, took a page from the playbook of earlier Confederate commanders and launched a preemptive cavalry raid into Kentucky to halt a move on Saltville through

Pound Gap. The preemptive strike strategy to halt threats across the mountain barrier worked no better in 1864 than it had in 1861 and 1862. Union forces chased the Confederates back into Virginia, and resumed plans for another attack on Saltville. After a series of operations in the Great Valley, Union Brig. Gen. Alvan C. Gillem managed to defeat Confederate forces commanded by Brig. Gen. John C. Vaughn at Morristown at the end of October and push them back to Carter's Station.

Confederate Maj. Gen. John Breckinridge decided to retaliate and, gathering up a polyglot assortment of troops, headed back down the railroad, confronting Gillem at Bull's Gap. The action at Bull's Gap from November 11-13, 1864, illustrated the Gap's strength against frontal assaults but also its weakness against flanking movements. On November 12, Breckinridge led his men up the mountain at Bull's Gap where Gillem's dug-in troops handily repulsed them. But Gillem, low on supplies and fearing encirclement, decided to abandon Bull's Gap and retreat towards Russellville. Breckinridge, indeed, discovered a gap to the west and set off in pursuit of the strung-out Union army, soundly defeating it at Russellville and Morristown. When pursuing Confederates reached Strawberry Plains, well-placed Federal troops across the Holston River checked their progress. Breckinridge, leaving Vaughn in position at the river, returned up the railroad to Virginia.

Defeat did not deter the Federal commanders from more winter campaigning. Maj. Gen. George Stoneman devised a two-pronged attack from East Tennessee on Saltville to first outflank Vaughn and, with the combined firepower of two forces, overpower Breckinridge and destroy the saltworks. As his forces moved up the Great Valley within supporting distance of the railroad, Stoneman sent Vaughn reeling back to

Virginia. Maintaining tight control of his forces, the Union general made sure they reached Saltville together, where he attacked Wytheville and drew Breckinridge out of Saltville's hills to stem the tide of Union destruction. With Breckinridge out of Saltville, Stoneman fought the Confederates to a draw at Marion before destroying the saltworks. Utilizing opportunities to outflank his opponents and with the railroad providing logistical assistance as he moved up the Great Valley, Stoneman cleared Upper East Tennessee of Confederate resistance before accomplishing his primary strategic goal of destroying Saltville and Wytheville in southwestern Virginia..

The Civil War transformed Upper East Tennessee into an active combat zone affecting events far beyond its borders. James Longstreet's aide, Thomas Goree, noted in 1861 before he had ever set foot in the Great Valley that, "On account of the burning of the RR bridges in East Tennessee all the freight has to be carried around through Georgia and South Carolina."[6] When Union forces retreated from Dandridge in January, 1864, General-in-Chief Henry Halleck expressed concern for the North's strategic position if Longstreet captured Knoxville. Southern leaders, including President Jefferson Davis and Gen. Robert E. Lee, seriously considered plans to use Upper East Tennessee as a staging area for movements against Union supply lines, the very scenario feared by Union officials in Washington. How war evolved in the region's mountains and valleys not only affected local operations, but the wider war as well.

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[6] Goree, *Longstreet's Aide*, 57.

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APPENDIX

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE:
THE GEOGRAPHIC LEGACY OF BULL'S GAP, TENNESSEE

In its ultimate expression, geography stands not only as a testament to the natural world, but to the workings of humankind, as well. If geography shapes human actions at a particular, finite period of time such as the Civil War, then it stands to reason that later generations can better understand past events through observation of the setting where those events occurred. By standing on the mountain at Bull's Gap, for example, one gets a sense of what it was like to charge up the mountainside, or, conversely, to defend against such a charge. Through an examination of terrain maps, one can also better understand why commanders might choose to locate railroad facilities north of the Gap, and how they chose to fight what came to be known as the first "railroad" war in history. The natural landscape of Bull's Gap differs considerably from Morristown, Greeneville, Rogersville, or other points along the railroad in Upper East Tennessee, offering a unique setting that can provide a usable foundation for interpreting the area's civil war experience.

The name "Bull's Gap" denotes two related locations, an actual mountain gap and a town slightly north of the gap. Both sites are just inside the Hawkins County border next to Greene County. A railroad and turnpike penetrate the mountain gap, while the town is both a railroad junction and turnpike intersection located between Greeneville to

the southeast and Russellville/Morristown to the southwest. The gap penetrates Bay's Mountain, which runs southwest to northeast. A modern highway and railroad track traverse the Gap's relatively flat floor. The ridge averages about 1600 feet in height. North of the continuous ridge is a series of lesser, broken ridges with heights approaching 1200 feet. The town of Bull's Gap, with just over 700 residents, lies nestled among the smaller ridges. The railroad junction is located within the town, which contains low density brick and frame buildings that mostly post-date the Civil War. Physical contours of the natural landscape remain generally as they were during the war, and the railroad still snakes its way through the countryside. The Gap and adjoining ridges are heavily forested, although the town contains open spaces and meadows. Shallow civil war-era trenches remain extant on the tops of ridges adjacent to the Gap.

Figure 1. Approaching Bull's Gap, Hawkins County. Photo by author.

Local and Regional Context

The Civil War was the worst domestic conflict in United States history. But when the war began, recruits rushed to fill the ranks of Union and Confederate armies, believing the fight would be over in a matter of months. The presence of regular armies in Upper East Tennessee depended on the East Tennessee & Virginia Railroad's ability to logistically support thousands of troops operating in the region. Strategically, both Union and Confederate armies occupied strongholds along the railroad, and Bull's Gap, Tennessee, in lower Hawkins County developed into an important rail depot between Knoxville and Bristol. During the war, the site changed hands several times as troops fought for control of the Great Valley of Tennessee, a control that could only come with dominance of the railroad. The Gap's natural landscape of ridges and hills was easy to defend, making it a logical choice for depot warehouses and railroad repair facilities. Although well-protected within a strong defensive position, troops in the Gap suffered when raids on the railroad disrupted supplies.

During the years of Confederate occupation, southern troops occupied the Gap almost continuously, and Bull's Gap functioned as a garrison town along the railroad. Engineers billeted in the Gap repaired the railroad and its bridges on a regular basis. When Confederate forces under Maj. Gen. Simon B. Buckner evacuated Upper East Tennessee in 1863, the Gap's defense fell under jurisdiction of the Department of Southwestern Virginia. When Confederate Lieut. Gen. James Longstreet retreated up the Valley in December, 1863 after failing to take Knoxville, he assumed control of the East Tennessee Department and billeted troops at Bull's Gap on a regular basis. In March,

1864, when First Corps was poised to retreat from the Great Valley for good, the position formed the fulcrum of its defensive position for over a month. After Longstreet's departure in April, 1864, the Gap changed hands several times as reduced forces of both sides continued to contest Upper East Tennessee.

Following Union occupation in September, 1863, Bull's Gap figured more prominently in active military operations as Union and Confederate forces constantly moved up and down the Great Valley in large scale cavalry actions. Interior valleys, ridges, and mountain gaps influenced strategy designed to get behind an enemy and interdict the railroad. The railroad constituted the Gap's primary reason for existence, and also its military Achilles heel, as contending forces tore up the rails on a regular basis to starve defenders out of the Gap. One side did not establish full control of Bull's Gap until the Stoneman raid in December, 1864, cleared Confederate resistance from East Tennessee in retaliation for a Confederate incursion earlier in November. The largest action of the war at Bull's Gap occurred on November, 1864, when Confederate Maj. General John Breckinridge unsuccessfully attacked Union Gen. Alvan C. Gillem up the mountain east of the Gap. Gillem withdrew shortly thereafter when he thought Confederates had cut the railroad between Bull's Gap and Russellville. Breckinridge caught and defeated Gillem's small army in the relatively open countryside around Russellville and Morristown.

Bull's Gap is part of a larger network of depots that existed on the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad. Events at the Gap significantly affected how conflict played out along the entire length of the railroad. The physical location of Bull's Gap between Morristown and Greeneville meant that operations from Morristown to dislodge soldiers

encamped at Greeneville always passed through the Gap, and vice versa. Bull's Gap

differs from other typical railway towns because of its geographical location and unique

topography that shaped its military role as a defensible rail junction. The railroad is a

significant transportation landscape in Upper East Tennessee, and its influence on Civil

War operations was substantial.

Bull's Gap exemplifies major Civil War military themes such as transportation

(both rail and turnpike), logistics, engineering, fortification, and active combat

operations. The railway, roads, ridges, mountains, and gaps offer a glimpse into the

experiences of soldiers waging war under difficult conditions during the 1860s. Although

diesel power has replaced steam, the trains that today traverse the Gap evoke a sense of

time when the railroad assumed enormous military importance as a vital lifeline of war.

Figure 2. Rail Junction at Bull's Gap, Tennessee. Photo by author.

Cultural Resource Planning

To better understand its educational and economic potential, Bull's Gap would

benefit from a cultural resource study to provide a basis for identification, protection, and

interpretation of significant resources. In recent years, cultural resource management has

shifted from an emphasis on historic buildings, structures, and objects to landforms and

how they are spatially organized.[1] Because they are generally privately owned, cultural

landscapes must include a community-based element allowing property owners to come

together with a common interest in protecting the landscape. Recognition of a commonly

shared cultural landscape can generate community pride and interest in forming

partnerships for regional planning and development.

Identification

The best way to identify important landscape resources and historical themes is

through a cultural resource study based on data from historical research, field inventory,

existing conditions survey, documentary research, site analysis, and recommendations for

treatment, management, and periodic maintenance.[2] The report provides a blueprint for

further action by identifying significant cultural resources and contextual themes, and

providing suggestions for further action to preserve and maintain the landscape.

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[1] Susan Buggey and Nora Mitchell, "Cultural Landscapes: Venues for Community-based Conservation," in *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice*, ed. Richard Longstreth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 166.

[2] Charles A. Birnbaum, "Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning, Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes (Preservation Brief #36)," in Department of the Interior, *The Preservation of Historic Architecture* (Guilford, Connecticut: The Lyons Press, 2004), 435.

There are four basic types of cultural landscapes including historic sites, historic designed landscapes, historic vernacular landscapes, and ethnographic landscapes.[3] As a major Civil War-era railroad depot, Bull's Gap appears to satisfy criteria as a historic site and historic vernacular landscape. A historic site is important for associations with important historic events (such as a battlefield) or persons, and historic vernacular landscapes reflect activities of ordinary persons and functions (such as the railroad and turnpikes) that have shaped the landscape. These types of cultural landscapes also contain natural elements including land, air, water, vegetation, and wildlife "with dynamic qualities that differentiate cultural landscapes form other cultural resources, such as historic structures."[4] Natural elements should be part of any cultural management plan for historic landscapes, and are now routinely included in national park resource assessments.[5]

Protection

Battlefield protection has gained momentum in the last two decades due to a realization that development has obscured many important sites. In 1993, the Civil War Sites Advisory Commission (CWSAC) rated Bull's Gap and other Upper East Tennessee battlefields as "D" sites that offered "limited influence on outcomes of campaigns [while] achieving or affecting important local objectives."[6] The CWSAC report formed the basis

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[3] Ibid., 433.

[4] Ibid., 434.

[5] See Center for State of the Parks®, *Tennessee's Civil War National Parks: A Resource Assessment* (Washington: National Parks Conservation Association, 2009).

of the National Park Service American Battlefield Protection Program analysis of important battlefield sites, which basically left it up to the states to protect "D" class sites To date, there have been minimal efforts to promote Bull's Gap as an educational and economic resource exhibiting substantial interpretive potential to leverage heritage tourism in Upper East Tennessee.

In Tennessee, Tennessee State Parks works closely with agencies of the Department of Environment and Conservation such as the Tennessee Historical Commission, Division of Archaeology, and Tennessee Wars Commission to inventory and preserve Civil War battlefield sites. The Wars Commission, under direction of the Tennessee Historical Commission, facilitates activities concerned with preserving Tennessee's significant battlefields. In 2008, the Wars Commission received grants totaling over three million dollars to help preserve Fort Donelson Battlefield, Shiloh National Military Park, Davis Bridge Battlefield, and Parker's Crossroads Battlefield.[7] With appropriate action by local East Tennessee governmental and nongovernmental groups, the same types of assistance might be available for battlefields in Upper East Tennessee. The approaching Civil War sesquicentennial celebration in 2011 offers a good opportunity to highlight battlefields in Upper East Tennessee and make a case for their preservation.

The State of Tennessee is also a member of the Civil War Trails Program, a multi-

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[6] Civil War Sites Advisory Commission, "Civil War Sites Advisory Commission Report on the Nation's Civil War Battlefields, (Washington, 1993).

[7] Fred M. Prouty, "Report of Activities," Tennessee Wars Commission, 17 October 2008.

state program that installs driving tour markers to identify both well-known and lesser campaigns of the Civil War. Other state participants include Virginia, North Carolina, West Virginia, and Maryland. The program is administered through the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, and the first marker in Tennessee was unveiled in Franklin in 2008.

A successful model for local battlefield preservation is Davis Bridge Battlefield in McNairy County, where a combination of federal, state, and private funding and matching grants allowed purchase of most of the battlefield. Partners in the acquisition included the Tennessee Wars Commission, Civil War Preservation Trust, National Park Service, and Tennessee Heritage Conservation Trust Fund. The battlefield site has now been donated to the State of Tennessee, with the Wars Commission playing a major stewardship role.

Listing on the National Register of Historic Places offers a limited amount of protection for resources affected by federally funded or licensed projects, particularly highway development. On 29 September 1998, a portion of the Bull's Gap Fortification was listed on the National Register as part of a multiple property submission entitled, "Archaeological Resources of the American Civil War in Tennessee." In 1999, Congress authorized funding for battlefield acquisition grants through the American Battlefield Protection Program of the National Park Service. Partners in this effort included the Association for the Preservation of Civil War Sites and The Civil War Trust.

Other similar regional sites that have recently achieved National Register recognition include Strawberry Plains Fortifications (placed on the register) and Loudon Fortifications (declared eligible for listing). A third site in Williamson County, the Triune

Fortifications, was also listed on the National Register. According to the Battlefield Update Newsletter of the American Battlefield Protection Program, "All three sites have local significance for their role in the military history of the Civil War, and are especially good examples of fortifications built by both Union and Confederate armies to protect strategic transportation routes."[8] That is also a good description of Bull's Gap.

Interpretation

Considering the strategic importance of the gap and great amount of military activity there, it is surprising the area's history has been so little recognized. A solitary "Bull's Gap" state historical marker on Route 11 just across the Greene County line describes the area's Civil War significance in one sentence, "The gap was the scene of several heavy skirmishes during the War Between the States and traces of fortifications can still be found." There are two other Civil War-related historical markers in Hawkins County near Rogersville, one for the action at Big Creek near Rogersville and the other for Confederate Brig. Gen. Alexander Peter Stewart. Signage recognizing the various significant historic themes exemplified by Bull's Gap is sadly lacking, and no monuments have been constructed in the immediate area, with the exception of the bridge burner monument and cemetery next door in Greene County.

There are local and regional partners near Bull's Gap with expertise in cultural resource management and heritage tourism. Perhaps the largest and most significant of these is the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site in Greeneville, Greene County. Another is the Battle of Blue Springs annual reenactment by the Town of Mosheim

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[8] Ginger Carter, "Tennessee Sites Make National Register," *Battlefield Update, Newsletter of the American Battlefield Protection Program* (Spring 1999): 5.

(which did not hold the event in 2009). In Russellville, the Lakeway Civil War Preservation Association holds an annual reenactment at Bethesda Cemetery and Chapel, and, with assistance from the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area (TCWNHA), is preserving the General James Longstreet Headquarters in Russellville, Hamblen County.

In Knoxville, the Knoxville Civil War Roundtable, the East Tennessee Historical Society, and other interested groups partnered with the TCWNHA to save Fort Higley, one of the few remaining Civil War-era forts around Knoxville. TCWNHA partnered with the East Tennessee Historical Society on a new permanent exhibit, "Voices in the Land: The People of East Tennessee," and, with Tusculum College and the Andrew Johnson National Historic Site, sponsored an Andrew Johnson Symposium in 2008. Also in 2008, the TCWNHA provided assistance to the Southeast Tennessee Development District for a Civil War driving tour brochure entitled, "Fighting for the Rails."

The Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area has been particularly effective in leveraging partnerships to accomplish interpretive objectives. In 1999, it assisted in the nomination of the Johnsonville State Historic Area to the National Register of Historic Places. Local governmental officials, the chamber of commerce, and the Tennessee Historical Commission partnered with the TCWNHA to produce the nomination in the hope that recognition would bring attention to the site.[9] The nomination provided the basis for further interpretive exhibits, lectures and driving tours. The TCWNHA provides

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[9] Carroll Van West, "Revisiting Our Civil War Legacies: Tennessee State Parks and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area," *The Tennessee Conservationist* (November/December 2003).

technical assistance through its Technical Assistance and matching grant programs.

With the approaching sesquicentennial celebration of the beginning of the Civil War, great interest exists on the part of heritage stakeholders to better understand the war and its origins. The Tennessee Sesquicentennial Commission has gone beyond traditional interpretations of battles and leaders to include ordinary citizens and communities whose individual or collectives experiences were shaped by war. Hawkins and contiguous counties with civil war battlefield sites have an excellent opportunity to preserve and interpret their civil war legacies while promoting heritage tourism with trail markers, brochures, films, tours, and perhaps an area visitor's center. But before these types of interpretive tools can be implemented, appropriate resource and environmental assessments should be undertaken to provide a foundation for planning future action.

<u>Summary: A Vision of the Future for Bull's Gap</u>

Bull's Gap is #TN033 of Tennessee's 38 major battlefields as listed by the Civil War Sites Advisory Committee. At present, there is no public access, and much of the current site is threatened by development. As a significant Civil War site constructed to protect an important transportation route, the Gap witnessed a tremendous amount of military activity. The Gap's unique and intact geography offers a rare opportunity to view its military potentialities through the eyes of participants who assessed the same topography when building fortifications or planning attacks against formidable defensive works. By gathering information through cultural resource surveys, forming partnerships for interpretation, and implementing planning objectives, local officials in Hawkins and Greene Counties have much to offer members of the public interested in a better understanding of East Tennessee's Civil War experience.