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Warren C. Robinson. *Jeb Stuart and the Confederate Defeat at Gettysburg*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007. xii + 198 pp. $24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-1101-8.

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The Contention That Followed Conflict

Beyond his expertise in population studies, Warren C. Robinson, professor emeritus of economics at Penn State, reveals in his recent book a sideline fascination of one of the enduring controversies of the Civil War. To what extent did General James Ewell Brown (Jeb) Stuart contribute to Robert E. Lee's stunning loss in the Battle of Gettysburg? As Robinson explains, the issue has been "debated endlessly, and the literature itself is a battleground" (p. ix). He shows a comfortable familiarity with not only contemporaneous accounts but also the assessment of historians. Reading his book gives the reader the desire to join him in furthering this lively debate.

Before grappling with tactical issues, Robinson contrasts the temperaments of the army commander and his cavalry commander, who effectively worked together prior to the Gettysburg campaign. He notes that this lieutenant of Lee proudly held two identities, Stuart "the cavalry general" and Stuart "the raider." Not appreciating that in this campaign the second role had to be subordinate would become a failing for the famed cavalier.

Robinson goes beyond the typical analysis by putting Lee's orders in context and offering valuable perspectives. In June 1863, both Lee and Stuart erred: "Lee did not give precise, to-the-point orders and was wrong to trust Stuart, but Stuart knowingly stretched his orders to the limit" (p. xi). The consequences were enormous as Lee's trusted lieutenant departed with the finest three cavalry brigades, leaving behind a brigadier of "dubious reliability" to oversee the remaining troopers (p. 149). The bulk of the study considers the extended ride Stuart took that separated him for over one week from the rest of the army. Robinson notes that the exhausting ride amazingly "covered a total of 210 miles in eight days, for an average of twenty-six miles a day" (p. 109). The horses were utterly fagged, and the troopers so fatigued that some fell out of the saddle still asleep. Stuart did not arrive at Gettysburg until late in the second day of battle, and thereafter attempted a strenuous yet disappointing attack. For generations, the accusation has been bandied about that Stuart acted vaingloriously and beyond the scope of his orders, thus frustrating Lee's intention to win a decisive battle. For example, Major Charles Marshall, an aide-de-camp for Lee, argued that Stuart should have been court-martialed.[1] In marked contrast, famed Confederate raider Major John Singleton Mosby responded with a spirited defense of his champion.[2] So much passion was poured into the ongoing dispute that it has made for what Robinson aptly calls "jumbled history" (p. 63).

Stuart's bold gambit in riding around the enemy army created a dilemma for Lee. Robinson is on point quoting Baron Antoine-Henri de Jomini, "'How can any man decide what he should do himself, if he is ignorant of what his enemy is about?"' (p. 118). Lee lost his eyes in approaching what he hoped would be the decisive battle of the war. As a consequence, Lee hesitated. "'The loss of time is irreparable in war,"' Napoleon is quoted as saying, "'space we can recover, time never"' (p. 94). But who was to blame here? That is the fundamental question Robinson tackles.

Robinson wisely devotes a significant amount of text explaining the terrain in the operational theater. He includes a helpful map identifying key gaps in the mountains (though it would have been even better to specify possible river crossings and federal corps positions at critical moments, for these also framed the options available to Stuart). What appears to be a breakthrough of analysis–that Lee really contemplated sending Stuart northward along the eastern side of the Blue Ridge Mountains, not, as is commonly assumed, east of the Bull Run Mountains–falters because the author ignores a major piece of evidence (one that he cites in another context). Robinson concludes that Lieutenant James Longstreet erred when he said that Lee spoke of Stuart leaving via Hopewell Gap and passing the rear of the enemy farther east. The author declares that Longstreet

"was the only one who mentioned Hopewell Gap" (p. 88). That is not true. Stuart's after action report reveals that he "submitted to the commanding general the plan of … passing through Hopewell or some other gap in the Bull Run Mountains, attain the enemy's rear."[3] Lee would not have accepted this report had it been inaccurate. Longstreet and Stuart thus both acknowledged that Lee had envisioned Stuart maneuvering east of the Bull Run Mountains.

Another important assertion in the book is that "nothing" in Lee's orders to Stuart suggested that he had permission to repeat what he had done twice before in undertaking a disrupting ride around the Yankee army (p. 77). Yet, there was something. Lee explicitly gave discretion to Stuart to "pass around their army without hindrance, doing them all the damage you can."[4] Robinson rightly concludes that this operation did not envision a raid on Washington, but then asserts that "this is what Stuart undertook" (p. 75). Actually, what happened was a race toward the city limits in which Stuart sought to capture fleeing federal wagons. Washington was never within the scope of any intended raid. And, Robinson overlooks the significant fact that this supply train contained desperately needed feed and fodder for Stuart's horses.

As the campaign then developed, Robinson makes several other assertions that seem unsupported by evidence. "By June 22," he declares, "all [federal] doubt about Lee's movements had been removed" (p. 26). Yet, uncertainty was certainly evident the next day in Washington in the mind of General H. W. Halleck, who sent identical warnings to diverse locations: Harrisburg, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, and Cumberland, Maryland.[5] As late as June 25, Major General George Gordon Meade frankly acknowledged his sense that Lee's object "is not yet clearly developed."[6] Robinson also declares that on June 28, "Meade was shadowing Lee, but he was not thinking offensively" (p. 31). Yet, Meade wrote to his wife that he was moving at once against Lee, going "straight at" the Army of Northern Virginia to "settle this thing one way or the other."[7] Meade was contemplating all options, offensive and defensive. And, Robinson does not give Meade the credit for promoting the "boy brigadiers" of cavalry, implying that it was his predecessor in command, Major General Joseph Hooker (pp. 144-45). Then, there is the author's assertion that "the Union commanders (Hooker and then Meade) … expected a battle to take place roughly when and where it did and made their dispositions accordingly" (p. 32). That statement ignores Hooker's plan to cut Lee off in the Cumberland Valley and Meade's hopes that Pipe Creek in Maryland would become the field of battle.

Once Robinson explains Stuart's tardy arrival at Gettysburg, the controversial assertions in the book multiply. He describes Hunterstown as "a completely accidental cavalry skirmish," though Brigadier General George Armstrong Custer was acting under orders to disrupt the movement of rebel cavalry (p. 130). That Stuart's cavalry the following morning "left camp and began moving" in the "early afternoon" on July 3 is incorrect; it was earlier that morning (p. 135).[8] To declare that the Yankees had three brigades of Union cavalry positioned in just the right place to intercept Stuart is misleading, for most of Irvin Gregg's Brigade had just left its position for the Baltimore Pike and Taneytown Road. A more careful and extensive consideration of Stuart's actions once he did reach Gettysburg would have been beneficial.

Other errors have crept into the text. For example, Robinson begins his analysis of the campaign with two surprising assertions. First, he states that the rebel army "had never been so strong … a total of some 75,000 men," yet when Lee initially took command of the army during the Peninsula campaign it was some ninety thousand strong (p. 15). He declares that Lee began his movement toward the Shenandoah Valley on June 9, though Lee explained that the initial move in the campaign began June 3.[9] Furthermore, Martinsburg was not a river crossing. It was the Bureau of Military Information, not of "Intelligence" (pp. 25, 124). Jenkins did not move with Early into York. And, his brigade while at East Cavalry Field was actually under the tactical control of Lieutenant Colonel Vincent Witcher. More of an issue is the author's description of Farnsworth's Charge as "pointless," when there was an expressed purpose–"futile" is perhaps what he means (p. 132). And, in like fashion, Stuart's firing the shots that preceded the cavalry action on July 3, however foolish, was not "pointless"–though arguments rage as to which of several possibilities he intended (p. 135).

Robinson is on target in crediting David Gregg for superb command against Stuart, a role other historians have not often addressed. The book's major conclusions are solid as to why Lee undertook the campaign and the results he expected: "He was seeking not just a victory but a climactic triumph" (p. 13). Both Lee and Stuart shared in the responsibility that made Gettysburg such a huge disappointment for their cause. Despite a surprising number of inaccurate details, this is an engrossing and insightful book for those desiring to better appreciate this great battle.

Notes

[1]. Major Charles Marshall, February 24,

1887, quoted in David Gregg McIntosh, unpublished manuscript, David Gregg McIntosh Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

[2]. Major John Singleton Mosby, "The Confederate Cavalry in the Gettysburg Campaign," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: Century, 1887), 3:251-252.

[3]. Major General J. E. B. Stuart, August 20, 1863, *War of the Rebellion Official Reports*, vol. 27, pt. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1889), 692.

[4]. General Robert E. Lee, June 23, 1863, Message to Major General James Ewell Brown Stuart, *War of the Rebellion Official Reports*, vol. 27, pt. 3, 923.

[5]. Major General H. W. Halleck, June 23, 1863, messages to Major General Robert C. Schenk, Major General Darius N. Couch, Major General W.T.H. Brooks, and Brigadier General Benjamin F. Kelley, *War of the Rebellion Official Reports*, vol. 27, pt. 3, 275-276.

[6]. Major General George Gordon Meade, June 25, 1863, to his wife in George Gordon Meade, ed., *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 1:387.

[7]. Major General George Gordon Meade, June 29, 1863, to his wife, George Gordon Meade, *With Meade at Gettysburg*, (Philadelphia: MOLLUS War Library and Museum, 1930), 32-36.

[8]. Stuart said it was in the "morning." Major General James Ewell Brown Stuart, August 20, 1863, *War of the Rebellion Official Reports*, vol. 27, pt. 2, 697. His statement was confirmed in the report of Brigadier-General Wade Hampton, August 6, 1863, Ibid., 724.

[9]. General Robert E. Lee, July 31, 1863, *War of the Rebellion Official Reports*, vol. 27, pt. 2, 305.

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