

# BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 1 ★ Issue 7

American Civil War:

## Chancellorsville

DATE:

May 1-5, 1863

LOCATION:

Chancellorsville, Virginia

### OPPOSING FORCES

**Union Army of the Potomac:** 134,000 infantry, cavalry, and artillery under the command of Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker. Corps commanders were Maj. Gens. John Reynolds (I Corps), Darius Couch (II Corps), Daniel Sickles (III Corps), George Meade (V Corps), John Sedgwick (VI Corps), Oliver O. Howard (XI Corps), Henry Slocum (XII Corps), and George Stoneman (Cavalry Corps).

**Confederate Army of Northern Virginia:** 60,000 infantry, cavalry, and artillery under the command of Gen. Robert E. Lee. Corps commanders were Lt. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson (II Corps) and Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart (Cavalry Corps). Major Gen. Jubal Early also played a key role. Lt. Gen. James Longstreet and most of his I Corps would not participate in the battle.

### HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

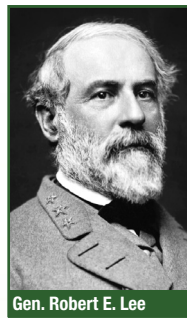
The Confederate victory at the Battle of Chancellorsville is considered the crowning military achievement of Gen. Robert E. Lee. Against the numerically superior Union Army of the Potomac, Lee took a calculated risk by dividing his Army of Northern Virginia in what would become the largest flanking maneuver of the Civil War. The risk paid off with a stunning victory.

Chancellorsville remains a classic example of battlefield audacity and innovation and offers a study in contrasting commands. While Lee was bold and offensive, trusting key subordinates like Lt. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson to carry out his plan, Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker was timid, forcing his subordinates into defensive postures. Yet, the Confederate victory was costly. Lee suffered losses that were becoming harder to replace. He also lost Jackson, his most capable commander, who was fatally wounded by friendly fire. Nevertheless, with his victory, Lee gained sufficient confidence to plan an invasion north toward Gettysburg two months later.

### STRATEGY & MANEUVER

**Actions by the Union** – By early 1863, President Abraham Lincoln was frustrated with the Army of the Potomac's lack of success. Not only had a succession of commanding generals failed to achieve a decisive victory, but the reputation of Confederate invincibility and the superior generalship of Robert E. Lee cast a long shadow across

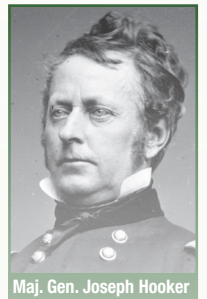
improvements to the army. He also vowed to defeat Lee and capture the Confederate capital at Richmond.



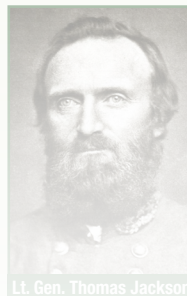
Gen. Robert E. Lee

Two previous offensive campaigns, under Gens. George B. McClellan and Ambrose Burnside, had failed to seize Richmond from the east or north. Burnside's recent frontal assault at Fredericksburg had been especially costly. Hooker's plan was different. He would fix Lee's force at Fredericksburg with two corps (I, VI), while he moved three corps (V, XI, XII) northwest across the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers to envelop Lee's rear. Meanwhile, II and III Corps would support the Union right

flank, shorten the lines of communication between the two wings, and create diversions. All the while, Maj. Gen. George Stoneman's cavalry corps would threaten Lee's lines of communication toward Richmond. (Map 1) Hooker was convinced that once the Confederate army was surrounded, Lee would either flee south or be forced to turn and fight from an unfavorable position. The confident Hooker boasted, "May God have mercy on General Lee, for I will have none."<sup>1</sup>



Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker



Lt. Gen. Thomas Jackson

On 27 April, three Union corps (V, XI, XII) moved northwest up the Rappahannock, while Maj. Gens. John Sedgwick (VI) and John Reynolds (I) — with 40,000 troops — moved south of Fredericksburg to demonstrate against the Confederate right flank. Maj. Gen. Daniel Sickles' III Corps remained in place, in full view of the defenders, to hold their attention. Stoneman, meanwhile, led the cavalry south.

Two days later, on the 29th, 54,000 Union soldiers crossed the Rapidan and began closing in on Lee's rear. As they converged on the Chancellor mansion later that day, an additional two divisions from Maj. Gen. Couch's II Corps also closed in from the east. Hooker's bold plan was working — a large portion of his army had just maneuvered behind Lee. But Hooker became cautious. Deciding to