

CT F

History 225  
Re: Notes on Lee Invasion of the North  
Source: E. Thomas, Lee(1995)  
Chpt. "We Cannot Afford to Be Idle"

Note: Personal losses,

By 1862 The Lee estates at White House, "Romancoke," and a third house and grounds were all behind Union lines.

Mary Custis Lee, Lee's wife, for a time was caught up in the Union advance and was a "guest" of Union forces until McDowell gave her passage through Union lines to the city of Richmond where she sat out the war. For more than a year while Lee was commanding the Army of Northern Virginia in the Peninsula and at Second Manassas he did not see her or his daughters. He would run across "Rooney" Lee on the field of battle. "Rooney" was an artillery officer under Alexander and he ran into the old man at Antietam.

While the war raged a grandchild of Lee's died. Later a daughter, Anne, died as well. So Lee lost family and the family estates during the war. He expected, if he survived the war (he was grazed by a bullet by a Union sniper at 2nd Manassas; thrown from his horse at Chancellorsville and sprained one arm and broke bones in the other. So that when he invaded Maryland in September 1862 he could not sit a horse. He was carried into the Union in an ambulance. He was also beginning to show the first symptoms of heart disease. Lee was 57 when he took the Army of Northern Virginia into Maryland.

Add here that Jefferson Davis's young son died during the war years. He fell from the balcony of the Davis home in Richmond.

Lincoln lost a son as well. Death of Willie to typhoid fever in February 1862.

Mary Lincoln lost brothers and step-brothers who served with the Confederacy.

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1. In the invasion of Maryland you get an insight into Lee's killer instinct. Lee's intention was to annihilate the Army of the Potomac. He had driven McClellan out of the Peninsula, defeated Pope at 2nd Manassas, but would not be satisfied until he obliterated the main eastern Federal force. He came north to do just that and other things in the fall of 1862.

Lee intuited that he had out-psyched McClellan and his superior force. He understood that the morale of the Army of the Potomac was now very fragile and possibly near cracking. Another decisive defeat and Lincoln's eastern army might crack down the middle and be ruined for any future combat.

Lee had a soul mate in this in General Stonewall Jackson. Jackson himself was a killer and believed in destructive war. If Jackson had had his way at the beginning of the conflict he would have made the "Black Flag" the conditions under which to fight this war. (You get a sense from the Burns film that Jackson was a war-lover).

Note: Charles Royster's Destructive War has a good chapter on Jackson and his views about war.

Lee believed that time was as formidable an enemy of the Confederacy as the Union military arm. The longer the war went on the greater the chances of the North with its superior production and greater pool of manpower. That's why after 2nd Manassas Lee felt that he could not repair back to Richmond to rest and refit his army. As he said "We cannot afford to be idle."

So Lee took his army of 55,000 across the Potomac in fall of 1862 despite the fact that he knew his army was ill-prepared for the invasion and his and Jackson's plans for taking the war into the enemy camp. He admitted that his army was not prepared to Davis.

2. What did he expect to accomplish in this invasion:

Remember here from the Gallagher essay what Lee's present-day critics have said about him. Especially, the chastisement aimed at him for "wasting his army" by futile large-scale raids into the

North when he should have been husbanding his forces in a defensive mode and letting the enemy come to him.

--he hoped to draw Federal troops out of Virginia by coming North. Virginia civilians, and especially the farmers,

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needed a respite from the war. Farmers needed relief to get in the fall crops.

--Let his ragged and starved army feed off the resources of the previously undisturbed Maryland farm lands; replenish his army with Maryland horses,

--drawing Federal forces out of Virginia was essential in reducing the impact they had on the slave populations that fell across the routes of the invading Yankees.

--most important was to confront the Army of the Potomac once again and whoop them in a decisive major battle. Thereby destroying the morale of the Union forces in the East.

--a major victory could be parlayed into political gains with the 1862 elections approaching. If Northerners believed that Lee was invincible they might vote Democratic and make Lincoln's hold on the popular will slip significantly. Even the possibility of forcing the Union to allow the South to go in peace and enjoy her independence.

--another resounding defeat of Union forces would leave the North open to all kinds of possibilities to wage a destructive war on the enemy's home front: See Kegel on this.

--always an outside chance that Whitehall and Paris might move from recognition of belligerency to offer mediation in the war. this would be the first step toward recognition of the Confederacy. (develop how it might go).

In his modest way, Lee in coming North was staking a claim to become the Father of a new country. More than Jefferson Davis, Lee was acutely aware that the war could be lost in either the east or the west; but it could only be won in the East. And it was up to Lee to make it happen. Davis never understood this completely.

When Lee established his headquarters in Frederick he heard from Davis that the president intended to join Lee and the army in Maryland. Lee diplomatically persuaded him not to come as he could not guarantee Davis' security. He knew that Davis would most likely not agree to Lee and Jackson's plans to range freely throughout Maryland and Pennsylvania after destroying the Federal army.

Lee wanted to restore the Lee family name that his father Light Horse Harry Lee had stained during the American Revolution. {Spent time on this because these same motives were behind Lee's second invasion of the North in 1863 which ended at Gettysburg}.

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Add another factor that was not sheer fantasy in the minds of those southerners who ready to risk all to make their revolution:

The strong possibility that Lincoln would attempt to play upon the ever increasing weak hold that slavery had on the Border State populations to use patronage and other presidential and Congressional favors to create a southern wing of the Republican party. Move these critical southern states into the Republican and at some future date pass an amendment ending slavery.

Or simply by the very act of expanding the number of the free states in the Union convince slaveholders (and /or their children) that there was no future in this institution and initiate a great sell-off or gradual emancipation movement to end slavery by peaceful means over a 20, 50, 100 year period.

As an aside: [Point: Of all the countries in the Western Hemisphere where slavery was still practiced by 1860 (Brazil & Cuba) this was how emnacipation finally came about. Over a long period of erosion and ultimate negotiation. Only in the American republic did it take a war to end chattel slavery.]

When the secession movement started in the Deep South aftyer Lincoln's election there was great trepidation about whther the minority slaveholders could carry the rest of the nonslaveholding South.

One of the major reasons why So. Carolina led in this.

But the votes in some of the other states like Georgia and Alabama for delegates to a secession convention were troubling:

Georgia(the more powerful of the Deep Southern states)  
was only 166 to 130

Alabama it was 61 to 39.

In only two states did the vote for seccession also include a referendum by the general citizenry: Texas(?) and in Tennessee.