

## BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF THE FILM GODS AND GENERALS

*J. David Rogers*

The film ***Gods and Generals*** (1996) is based on the book of the same name by Jeff Shaara, which is a historical novel about the opening days of the American Civil War, leading up to the titanic collision that occurred at Gettysburg. It is the first of a trilogy on the Civil War, written by Jeff and his late father, Mike Shaara. The other two volumes were titled ***Killer Angels*** (1974), which describes the Battle of Gettysburg and ***The Last Full Measure*** (1999), which profiles three of the key engagements that occurred after Gettysburg, during the balance of the Civil War. The trilogy focuses on a few of the key military figures that shaped our nation's history during the American Civil War.

❖ **Gods and Generals** – This volume concentrates on the lives of several prominent generals during the first two years of the Civil War, including: Confederate Generals **Lewis Armistead** (1817-1863); **Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson** (1824-1863), **Robert E. Lee** (1807-1870), **James Longstreet** (1821-1904); and Union Generals **Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain** (1828-1914) and **Winfield Scott Hancock** (1824-1886).

Shaara's story originally began with these men as West Point classmates serving together in the Mexican War in 1846-48, but 400 pages were eliminated to shorten the length, so the story begins in 1858, when Lt Colonel **Robert E. Lee** takes extended leave from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry in west Texas to return to Arlington, VA (across the Potomac River from Washington, DC) to put the affairs of his late father-in-law's estate into order, which he has inherited. His father-in-law was George Washington Parke Custis, the grandson of George and Martha Washington, who raised him as their own son. While engaged in setting up his new household, **Lee** is ordered to take command of a detachment of US Marines and proceed in haste to the Federal Armory at Harper's Ferry in October 1859 and quash *John Brown's Raid*. These are the opening salvos in what soon erupts as the Nation's bloodiest war.

The film version opens with **Lee** meeting Secretary of War Francis Blair in April 1861, when he is offered command of the Union Army. In the movie he turns Blair down straight-away; in actuality he returned to Arlington and discussed Blair's proposal with his wife Mary before deciding, then writing a formal letter of resignation from the Army, then proceeding to Richmond, where he observes the secession vote of the State legislature and accepts command of all Virginia military units. The remainder of the film focuses on **Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson** and **Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain**, with less emphasis on **Lee** and **Hancock**. Both **Jackson** and **Chamberlain** are serving as college professors prior to the onset of hostilities. **Jackson** graduated from West Point in 1846, just as the Mexican American War was erupting. He displayed courage and gallantry under fire and the young lieutenant of artillery and was soon brevetted to captain, and then major, before the conflict ended with the conquest of Mexico City in 1848. In 1851 he left the Army to teach artillery at the Virginia Military Academy in Lexington, Virginia, which is where we meet him in the opening half hour of the film. Somewhat later, we are introduced to **Chamberlain**, as he is teaching philosophy at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. Chamberlain volunteers for duty in August 1862, 16 months after the war erupts, and is appointed Lt. Colonel and executive officer of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Regiment.

In the book **Jackson** and **Chamberlain** appear as reluctant soldiers who emerge as gifted tacticians, with **Chamberlain** emerging later, after **Jackson** is killed. Both men were devout Presbyterians with an active prayer life and both radiated a sense of honor and fair play that inspired the men that served under them. The Union officers believe their cause is to combat secession and possible destruction of the Union, while the Confederate officers felt that they were simply defending their homeland from a foreign invasion. The Southern view was that the

nation's founding fathers established a Republican form of government, with states having ultimate authority over their own territories, without federal intervention.

The first engagement profiled is the ***First Battle of Bull Run*** (Manassas) in mid-July 1861. The Confederate forces were under the command of Major General **P.G.T. Beauregard** (1818-1893), recently detached as Superintendent of West Point, while the Union troops were commanded by his old West Point classmate, Major General **Irvin McDowell** (1818-1885). The clash occurred on the fields overlooking Bull Run near Manassas Junction, about 30 miles from the nation's capital. Their ranks were filled with enthusiastic young volunteers in colorful new uniforms, gathered together from every part of the country. Confident that their foes would run at the first shot, the raw recruits were thankful that they would not miss the only battle of what surely would be a short war.

On the morning of July 21st, **McDowell** sent his attack columns in a long march north toward Sudley Springs Ford. This route took the Federals around the Confederate left. To distract the Southerners, **McDowell** ordered a diversionary attack where the Warrenton Turnpike crossed Bull Run at the Stone Bridge. At 5:30 AM the deep-throated roar of a Union 30-pounder Parrott rifle shattered the morning calm, and signaled the start of battle.

**McDowell's** plan depended on speed and surprise, both difficult with inexperienced troops. Valuable time was lost as the men stumbled through the darkness along narrow roads. Confederate Colonel **Nathan Evans** (1824-1868), commanding at the Stone Bridge, soon realized that the attack on his front was only a diversion. Leaving a small force to hold the bridge, **Evans** rushed the remainder of his command to Matthews Hill in time to check **McDowell's** unit leading the main attack. But, **Evans'** force was too small to hold the Federals for long.

Soon Confederate brigades under **Barnard Bee** (1824-1861) and **Francis Bartow** (1816 -1861) marched to **Evans'** assistance. Even with these reinforcements, the thin gray line collapsed and Southerners fled in disorder toward Henry Hill. Attempting to rally his men, **Bee** used Brigadier General **Thomas J. Jackson's** newly arrived brigade as an anchor. Pointing to **Jackson**, **Bee** shouted, "*There stands Jackson like a stone wall! Rally behind the Virginians!*" The sobriquet "**Stonewall**" was thereafter applied to **Jackson's** name and that of the brigade he was commanding that day. Confederate Generals **Joseph Johnston** (1807-1891) and **Beauregard** soon arrived on Henry Hill, where they assisted in rallying shattered brigades and redeploying fresh units that were marching to the point of attack. Both **Bee** and **Bartow** were killed leading their troops that afternoon, but their quick thinking prevented what had begun as a Union rout.

About noon, the Federals stopped their advance to reorganize for a new attack. The lull lasted for about an hour, giving the Confederates enough time to reform their lines. Then the fighting resumed, each side trying to force the other off Henry Hill. The battle continued until just after 4 PM, when fresh Southern units crashed into the Union right flank on Chinn Ridge, causing **McDowell's** tired and discouraged soldiers to withdraw.

At first the Union withdrawal was orderly. Screened by the regulars, the "three-month volunteers" retired across Bull Run, where they found the road to Washington jammed with the carriages of congressmen and others who had driven out to Centreville to watch the fight, assuming it would be an orderly Napoleonic spectacle. Panic now seized many of the defeated Union soldiers and the retreat soon developed into a full-fledged rout. The Confederates, though bolstered by the arrival of President **Jefferson Davis** on the field just at the battle was ending, were too disorganized to follow up their success. Daybreak on July 22nd found the defeated Union army back behind the bristling defenses of Washington, DC.

Pre-war thoughts of colorful pageantry were lost in the smoke, din, dirt, and death of battle. Soldiers on both sides were stunned by the violence and destruction they encountered. At day's

end nearly 900 young men lay lifeless on the fields of Matthews Hill, Henry Hill, and Chinn Ridge. Ten hours of heavy fighting swept away any notion the war's outcome would be decided quickly.

Another Confederate division commander who distinguished himself at First Bull Run was **James Longstreet** (1821-1904). **Jackson** and **Longstreet** were both promoted to major general on October 7, 1861. After commanding an impressive string of independent victories, **Jackson** and **Longstreet** were again promoted simultaneously, to Lieutenant General grade, in early October 1862, during **Robert E. Lee's** reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia.

The **Battle of Fredericksburg** is the next conflict portrayed in the film. It occurred in December 1862 when Confederate forces under **Robert E. Lee** were attacked by Federal forces commanded by General **Ambrose E. Burnside** (1824-1881). On November 7, 1862 **Burnside** was given command of the Union's Army of the Potomac, following the unsuccessful Peninsula Campaign east of Richmond, which had been commanded by Major General **George McClellan** (1826-1885). **Burnside** decided to launch a winter campaign against the Confederate capital, Richmond, by way of Fredericksburg, a strategically important town on the Rappahannock River. 115,000 Union troops arrived at Fredericksburg on November 17th, when there were only a few thousand Confederates on hand to challenge them, but the Federal advance ground to a halt on the eastern bank of the Rappahannock, while they waited for pontoon bridges to arrive. **Lee** took advantage of the stalled Federal drive to concentrate and entrench his Army of Northern Virginia, some 78,000-strong, on the high ground behind Fredericksburg.

With the eventual arrival of the pontoons, **Burnside's** forces crossed the river on December 11th, despite fierce fire from Confederate snipers concealed in buildings along the city's river front. By December 13th, **Burnside** was prepared to launch a two-pronged attack to drive **Lee's** forces from an imposing set of hills just outside Fredericksburg. Here **Stonewall Jackson** commanded the Confederate's Army's Second Corps, forming the Confederate's right wing, while **James Longstreet** commanded the Confederate's First Corps, occupying Marye's Heights.

The main Union assault struck south of the city, but misunderstandings and bungled leadership limited the attacking force to two small divisions under the command of Major General **George G. Meade** (1815-1872) leading, with Major General **John Gibbon** (1827-1896) in support. **Meade's** troops broke through an unguarded gap in the Confederate lines, but **Stonewall Jackson's** men expelled the unsupported Federals, inflicting heavy losses on them.

**Burnside** launched his second attack from Fredericksburg against the Confederate left on Marye's Heights, where **Longstreet's** men were entrenched. Wave after wave of Federal attackers were mowed down by Confederate troops firing from an unassailable position in a sunken road protected by a stone wall. Over the course of the afternoon, no fewer than fourteen successive Federal brigades charged the wall of Confederate fire. Not a single Federal soldier reached **Longstreet's** line.

On December 15th, **Burnside** ordered his beaten army back across the Rappahannock. The Union lost 13,000 soldiers in a battle in which the dreadful carnage was matched only by its futility. Federal morale plummeted as a consequence and **Burnside** was swiftly relieved of his command. By contrast, the morale of the Confederacy reached a peak. Their casualties (killed and wounded) totaling only 5,000. **Lee's** substantial victory at Fredericksburg, won with relative ease, increased the already buoyant confidence of the Army of Northern Virginia.

The last conflict profiled in this first volume is the **Battle of Chancellorsville** in May 1863. I think it was the most interesting battle of the entire war, tactically speaking, so I will take more room here to describe what happened, because it was rather complicated. It involved forces commanded by **Robert E. Lee** against those of **Joseph Hooker** (1814-1879).

By mid-1863 **Stonewall Jackson** had emerged as an almost legendary figure, renowned as the quintessential grim warrior. He revealed his gentler nature on April 20, 1863, at Guinea Station,

12 miles south of Fredericksburg, when he greeted his beloved wife and saw his infant daughter for the first time. The blissful family repaired to a nearby house and passed the next nine days enjoying the only domestic contentment they would ever share. In less than three weeks, at a small frame building near Guinea, **Jackson** would be dead, after being mistakenly shot by his own troops.

The campaign that resulted in **Jackson's** demise is paradoxically remembered as "**Lee's greatest victory**," emerged from the backwash of the Battle of Fredericksburg. The awful defeat at Fredericksburg prompted a change in command of the Army of the Potomac. In January 1863 Lincoln appointed Major General **Joseph Hooker** commander of his army. **Hooker** was a career officer with high courage and low moral standards. The term "hooker" as an acronym for prostitute emanated from his practice of allowing such women to trail his camp wherever he went. It was said about his headquarters that "*no gentleman cared to go and no lady could go*". Despite these failings, Hooker's able administrative skills restored the health and morale of his troops, whom he proudly proclaimed "*the finest army on the planet*."

The new commander crafted a brilliant plan for a spring offensive that he expected would compel **Robert E. Lee** to abandon his Fredericksburg entrenchments, and, possibly, prove fatal to the Army of Northern Virginia. **Hooker** began by detaching his cavalry, 10,000 strong, on a flying raid toward Richmond to sever **Lee's** communications with the Confederate capital. Then, he planned to send most of his infantry 40 miles upstream to cross the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers *beyond* the Confederate defenses, and sweep east against Lee's left flank. The rest of his army would cross the river at Fredericksburg and menace the Confederate front as the second blade of two great pincers. He boasted "*My plans are perfect, and when I start to carry them out may God have mercy on General Lee, for I will have none.*" It made nice newspaper copy.

The condition of the Confederate army lent credence to **Hooker's** confidence. In February, **Lee** had detached **James Longstreet** with two strong divisions to gather food and supplies in southeastern Virginia. Lee could not hope to go on the offensive without **Longstreet**. In the meantime, **Lee's** 60,000 veterans at Fredericksburg would guard their long river line against 130,000 well-equipped Yankees.

**Hooker** began the campaign on April 27th and within three days some 40,000 Federals had splashed through the upriver fords, their presence detected by Confederate cavalry. On April 29, a sizable Union force led by Major General **John Sedgwick's** (1813-1864) Sixth Corps erected pontoon bridges below Fredericksburg and also moved to Lee's side of the river.

With both wings of the Union forces now across the Rappahannock, **Lee** faced a serious dilemma. Conventional military wisdom dictated that the under-strength Army of Northern Virginia retreat south and escape **Hooker's** pincer trap. Instead, **Lee** opted to meet the Federal challenge head-on. Correctly deducing that **Hooker's** primary threat lay to the west, **Lee** assigned 10,000 troops under Maj. Gen. **Jubal A. Early** to man the old Fredericksburg entrenchments. The balance of the army would turn west toward the tangled Wilderness to confront **Hooker's** flanking column.

By mid-afternoon of April 30, that column, now containing 50,000 Union soldiers and 108 artillery pieces, rendezvoused at the most important road junction in the Wilderness. A large brick tavern named Chancellorsville dominated this intersection of the Orange Turnpike with the Orange Plank, Ely's Ford, and River roads. It seemed everything was going according to **Hooker's** plan; the Federals had encountered virtually no opposition to this point. Moreover, they could now press eastward, break clear of the Wilderness, and uncover Banks Ford downstream, thus significantly shortening the distance between their two wings. **Hooker**, however, decided to halt at Chancellorsville and await the arrival of additional Union troops. This fateful decision disheartened the Federal officers on the scene, who recognized the urgency of maintaining the momentum they had thus far sustained.

**Stonewall Jackson** gladly seized the initiative that **Hooker** needlessly surrendered. He left the Fredericksburg lines at 3:00 AM on May 1st and arrived at Zoan Church five hours later. There he found two divisions of Confederate infantry fortifying a prominent ridge covering the Turnpike and Plank Road. Although his Corps had not yet appeared, Jackson ordered these men to drop their shovels, pick up their rifles, and advance with him to the attack. Known for swift and decisive action, the makeshift maneuver was a classic **Jackson** trait.

**Jackson's** audacity dictated the shape of the Battle of Chancellorsville. When **Hooker** at last authorized an eastward movement late in the morning of May 1st, his troops on the Turnpike and Plank Road ran flush against "**Stonewall's**" outgunned, but aggressive brigades. Union front-line commanders had not expected anything close to this kind of resistance. They sent anxious messages to **Hooker**, who quickly ordered his generals to fall back to the Wilderness and assume a defensive posture. They returned to Chancellorsville fuming, fully realizing the opportunity that had slipped through their fingers.

**Hooker's** confidence suddenly faded to caution. **Lee** and **Jackson** reined up along the Plank Road at its intersection with a byway call the Furnace Road on the evening of May 1st. Transforming discarded Federal cracker boxes into camp stools, the two generals examined their options: Confederate scouts verified the Federals' strong positions extending from the Rappahannock River, around Chancellorsville, to the high, open ground at Hazel Grove. This was the bad news. The Southern army could not afford a costly frontal attack against prepared fortifications.

Then, about midnight, **Lee's** cavalry chief "**Jeb**" **Stuart** galloped into their midst with thrilling intelligence. The Union right flank was "in the air" -- that is, resting on no natural or artificial obstacle! From that moment on, the generals thought of nothing but how to gain access to **Hooker's** vulnerable right flank. **Jackson** consulted with staff officers familiar with the area, dispatched his topographical engineer to explore the roads to the west, and then tried to snatch a few hours rest at the chilly bivouac.

Before dawn, **Lee** and **Jackson** studied a hastily drawn map and decided to undertake one of the biggest gambles in American military history. **Jackson's** Second Corps, some 30,000 troops, would follow a series of country roads and paths through the woods that led to the Union right. **Lee**, with the remaining 14,000 Confederate infantry, would occupy a position more than three miles long, hoping to divert **Hooker's** attention during **Jackson's** dangerous dash. Once in his flanking position, **Jackson** would smash the Federals with his full strength while **Lee** cooperated as best he could. The Army of Northern Virginia would thus be fractured into three pieces, counting **Early's** contingent at Fredericksburg, any one of which might be subject to rout or annihilation if the Yankees resumed the offensive.

**Jackson** led his column past the bivouac early on the morning of May 2nd. He conferred briefly with **Lee**, and then trotted down the Furnace Road with the fire of battle kindled in his eyes. After about one mile, as the Confederates traversed a small clearing, Union scouts perched in treetops at Hazel Grove spotted the marchers. The Federals lobbed artillery shells at **Jackson's** men and notified **Hooker** of the enemy movement.

**Hooker** correctly identified **Jackson's** maneuver as an effort to reach his right flank. He advised the area commander, Major General **Oliver O. Howard** (1830-1909), to be on the lookout for an attack from the west. As the morning progressed, however, **Hooker** started to think that **Lee** was actually withdrawing - the course of events **Hooker** most preferred. Worries about his right disappeared. Instead, he ordered his Third Corps, under Major General **Dan Sickles** (1819-1914) to harass the tail end of **Lee's** "retreating" army. **Sickles** probed cautiously from Hazel Grove toward a local iron manufactory called Catharine Furnace. In mid-afternoon the Federals overwhelmed **Jackson's** rearguard beyond the furnace along the cut of an unfinished railroad grade, capturing nearly an entire Georgia regiment. The action at Catharine Furnace, however,

eventually attracted some 20,000 Bluecoats onto the scene, effectively isolating **Howard's** Eleventh Corps on the right with no nearby support!

Meanwhile, the bulk of **Jackson's** column snaked its way along uncharted trails barely wide enough to accommodate four men abreast. Acting upon a personal reconnaissance recommended by cavalry general **Fitzhugh Lee**, **Jackson** kept his column northbound on the Brock Road to the Orange Turnpike where the Confederates would at last be beyond the Union force's right flank. The exhausting march, which altogether traversed more than 12 miles, ended about 3 PM when **Jackson's** troops began deploying into battle lines astride the Turnpike. **Jackson** allowed another two hours for 11 of his 15 brigades to silently take position in the forest. The massed Confederate front measured nearly two miles across!

Just after 5 PM Confederate bugles rang out throughout the two mile line in the afternoon shadows. Waves of sweat-soaked soldiers rolled forward, their Rebel Yell piercing the gloomy woods. **Jackson's** Second Corps erupted from the trees and sent the astonished Eleventh Corps reeling. Most of **Howard's** men fought bravely, drawing three additional battle lines across **Jackson's** path. But, the overmatched Federals occupied an untenable position. The screaming gray legions overwhelmed each Union stand and quickly drove the Eleventh Corps completely from the field.

Sunset and the inevitable intermingling of his attacking brigades compelled **Jackson** to call a reluctant halt to the advance about 7:15 PM. He summoned Major General **A.P. Hill's** (1825-1865) division to the front and, typically, determined to renew his attack despite the darkness. **Jackson** saw a chance to annihilate the Army of the Potomac by using the cover of darkness to maneuver between **Hooker** and his escape routes across the rivers and then, with **Lee's** help, grind the remnants of the Union forces into oblivion. It was an audacious plan, which almost succeeded.

While **A. P. Hill** brought his brigades forward, **Jackson** rode ahead of his men to reconnoiter the situation in front of them. When he attempted to return, a North Carolina regiment mistook his small mounted party for Union cavalry. Two volleys burst forth in the blackness and **Jackson** tottered in his saddle, suffering three wounds. Shortly thereafter a Federal shell struck **A.P. Hill**, incapacitating him, and direction of the corps devolved upon Confederate Cavalryman **Jeb Stuart** (1833-1863). **Stuart** wisely cancelled Stonewall's plans for a night attack.

Despite his misfortune on May 2nd, **Hooker** still held the advantage at Chancellorsville. He received reinforcements during the night and his Third Corps moved back from Catharine Furnace to reoccupy Hazel Grove. **Sickles'** troops thus divided the Confederates into separate wings, now controlled by **Stuart** and **Lee**. **Hooker**, if he chose, could defeat each fraction of his outmanned enemy by concentrating his forces.

The Confederate commanders understood the need to reconnect their divisions, and **Stuart** prepared an all-out assault against Hazel Grove at dawn. **Hooker** made it easy for him. As the Southerners approached the far crest of Hazel Grove they witnessed **Sickles'** men retiring in an orderly fashion. **Hooker** had directed that his troops surrender the key ground and fall back to Fairview, an elevated clearing closer to Chancellorsville.

**Stuart** immediately exploited the opportunity by placing 31 cannon on Hazel Grove, where they could pound Fairview with a spectacular bombardment. The Federals responded with 34 pieces of their own and soon the Wilderness trembled with a discordant symphony of canon fire.

The bloodiest fighting of the battle occurred between 6:30 and 9:30 AM on May 3rd. **Stuart** launched brigade after brigade against entrenched Union lines on both sides of the Turnpike. The troops lost their way in the tangled underbrush and the woods caught fire, confronting the

wounded with a horrible fate. The see-saw fighting began to favor the Southerners as, one by one, Union artillery pieces dropped out of the contest. **Hooker** failed to re-supply his cannoneers with ammunition or shift sufficient infantry reserves to critical areas.

A Confederate projectile abetted this mental paralysis when it struck a pillar at Chancellorsville, throwing **Hooker** violently to the ground. The impact stunned **Hooker**, physically removing him from a battle in which he had not materially been engaged for nearly 48 hours. Before relinquishing partial authority to Major General **Darius Couch** (1822-1897), **Hooker** instructed the army to assume a prepared position in the rear, protecting the bridgehead across the Rappahannock.

**Stuart** pressed forward, first to Fairview, and then against the remaining Union units at Chancellorsville. **Lee's** wing advanced simultaneously from the south and east. The Bluecoats receded at last and thousands of powder-smearing Confederates poured into the clearing, illuminated by flames from the burning Chancellorsville mansion.

**Lee** emerged from the smoke and elicited a long, unbroken cheer from the gray multitudes who recognized him as the architect of their improbable victory. A Confederate staff officer, watching the unbridled expression of so much admiration, reverence, and love, thought that, "*it must have been from such a scene that men in ancient times [that men] rose to the dignity of gods.*" This is where the title of the book was drawn from.

**Lee** wasted little time on reflection. He prepared to pursue **Hooker** and seal the success achieved since dawn. A courier bearing news from Fredericksburg shattered **Lee's** plans. **Sedgwick** had driven **Early's** contingent from Marye's Heights and now threatened the Confederate rear. This changed everything. **Lee** assigned **Stuart** to watch **Hooker's** rear and sent Major General **Lafayette McLaws** (1821-1897) eastward to deal with the Sixth Corps menace.

**Sedgwick** was slowed by Brigadier General **Cadmus Wilcox's** (1824-1890) single Alabama Brigade, retreating stubbornly from Fredericksburg. He came to grips with the Confederates four miles west of town, at Salem Church. The Federals swept into the churchyard, but a powerful counterattack drove them back and ended the day's combat. The next day **Lee** shoved **Sedgwick** across the Rappahannock at Banks Ford and once again focused on the main Union army in the Wilderness.

By this time **Hooker** had seen enough. Despite the objections of most of his corps commanders, he ordered a withdrawal across the river. The Federals conducted their retreat under cover of darkness and arrived back in Stafford County on May 6th. Ironically, this decision may have been **Hooker's** most serious blunder of the campaign because **Lee's** impending assault on May 6th might have failed and completely reversed the outcome of the battle.

The Army of the Potomac was not thoroughly defeated - some 40,000 Federals had done no fighting whatsoever. Although **Hooker** suffered more than 17,000 casualties, those losses accounted for only 13% of his total strength. **Lee's** 13,000 casualties amounted to 22% of his army, men that were difficult to replace. **Jackson's** death on May 10<sup>th</sup> created a void that could never be filled. **Lee's** triumph at Chancellorsville may have imbued him with the belief that his army was invincible. A few weeks later he convinced the Confederate government in Richmond to endorse his proposed offensive into Pennsylvania, where he hoped to flush out the entire Army of the Potomac and force a decisive victory that would bring about a negotiated end to the war. Within six weeks, the Army of Northern Virginia confidently embarked on a journey northward to keep an appointment with destiny at a strategic crossroads named Gettysburg.

❖ **Gettysburg** was the film name given to the book *Killer Angels*, which was written by Michael Shaara, an English professor at Florida State University. It appeared in 1974 and received the Pulitzer Prize. It describes the cataclysmic struggle at Gettysburg in early July 1863, where the principal players all knew one another from their cadet days at West Point and Army duty thereafter. Mike Shaara died in 1988, five years before the film version of his novel appeared in 1993. His son Jeff took possession of his father's research materials and completed the prequel and postscript volumes on the Civil War, completing the trilogy envisioned by his father.

This time **Robert E. Lee** was opposed by a timid newcomer, **George Meade**, whom Lee does not believe will take any unnecessary chances. After **Stonewall Jackson's** untimely death, **James Longstreet** becomes Lee's "right arm". It is **Longstreet's** personal scout who seeks out the Federal forces and discovers them strung out southeast of Gettysburg, moving northwesterly trying to keep pace with Lee's invasion. After the war, **Longstreet** was blamed by many southerners for losing the Battle of Gettysburg because his forces failed to attack the Federal southern flank at dawn on the second day, before the defending forces occupied Little Round Top. This unwarranted charge plagued him till the end of his life. **Longstreet** actually disagreed with several of **Lee's** major decisions on the second and third days of the battle, but he carried out his orders faithfully.

The battle commences with an accidental encounter at the Gettysburg crossroads between the Union's First Cavalry Division under Brigadier General **John Buford** (1826-1863) and Confederate infantry marching into the crossroads from the opposing direction, in search of a rumored shoe factory. Buford takes unprecedented initiative and decides to hold the high ground for the Federals, fighting a delaying action against a 5000-man Confederate force three times his size, commanded by **Jubal Early**.

In the prequel we were introduced to **Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain**, a seminary graduate from Maine who is teaching at Bowdoin College when the Civil War erupts. In August 1862 he and his two younger brothers join the newly formed 20<sup>th</sup> Maine Volunteer Regiment. He hones his skills as a military leader at Shepherdstown Ford and Fredericksburg, where the regiment takes an awful beating on Marye's Heights. He took command of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine in May 1863, shortly before Gettysburg. On the second day of Gettysburg, his battered regiment, down to 308 men, is hurriedly placed along the southern spur of Little Round Top, the last unit at the end of the Federal line. For 1-1/2 hours 500 soldiers of the 15<sup>th</sup> Alabama Regiment from **Longstreet's** First Corps tried to outflank the Federal line, charging the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine five times, and depleting all their ammunition. Down to 200 men and out of ammunition, **Chamberlain** ordered his men to fix bayonets and charged down into the regrouping Confederates. Surprised by this sudden change in tactics, the Confederates thought they were being counterattacked by two Union regiments (because the middle portion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine was gone), so promptly retreated to regroup. It was near the end of the day, so they returned to the Confederate lines. **Longstreet's** attempt to turn the Union's left flank failed by a whisker. **Chamberlain** and the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine saved the Union line and he was awarded the Medal of Honor, promoted to Brigadier General, and given command of an entire brigade. He would be wounded six times during the Civil War, promoted to Major General and come within a hair of losing his life to a sniper's bullet at Petersburg. He went on to become President of Bowdoin College, Governor of Maine and lived to attend the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion at Gettysburg in 1913.

On the third and concluding day, **Lee** decides to attack the middle of the federal line, because his flanking actions on the north end failed the first day and on the south end the second day. **George Pickett's** (1825-1875) Virginia division was chosen for this momentous task, with two other brigades detached to him, along with help from **Longstreet's** Third Corps. The film does a good job of portraying the Virginian personalities, especially **Longstreet**, **Pickett** and **Lewis Armistead** (1817-1863). The previous evening **George Pickett** explains the Confederate view to an English army officer attached to the Army of Northern Virginia as an observer. He also introduces the viewer to the lineage of some of the Virginian generals, many of whom were sons

and grandson of Revolutionary War leaders. The Confederacy was hoping to gain legitimacy for their cause by being recognized diplomatically by the European powers, from whom they purchased many of their weapons.

During Picket's Charge, the Confederate forces were exposed to a withering fire while marching uphill across a mile of bare fields against a heavily defended line supported by artillery. Every general in the assault save one was killed, including **Lewis Armistead**, who was felled at the apex of the Confederate advance, within the Union line. This position has since been termed the "*high water mark of the Confederacy*". **Armistead's** West Point classmate and former best friend, **Winfield Scott Hancock**, was severely wounded in the same assault, sitting upon his horse directing the defense offered by his Federal Second Corps, which repulsed the attack.

All in all 172,000 men participated in the Battle of Gettysburg, and in just three days, 51,000 were killed or wounded. Over five million rounds of ammunition were expended. That's about the same number of men that were killed in the entirety of the Vietnam War, over a 12 year period.

❖ The **Last Full Measure** is the concluding volume of the Shaara's trilogy. It continues the profiles of **Robert E. Lee**, **James Longstreet** and **Joshua Chamberlain** and introduces a new character in **Ulysses S. Grant** (1822-1885), who Lincoln appoints as Commander of all federal forces early in 1864. The book describes the decisive clashes between **Lee** and **Grant** up through the end of the war, in April 1865. Three principal battles are profiled in the book, which are described here.

The **Battle of the Wilderness** (May 5-7, 1864) occurred in rural Virginia just after the Federals crossed the Rappahannock River and not far from the Raritan River. Once again, some of the key figures commanding the opposing forces are **James Longstreet** for the Confederates (who is wounded) and **Winfield Hancock** for the Union. The Federals lost an estimated 17,666 (2246 killed/12,073 wounded) out of 101,895 (exclusive of cavalry) engaged. The Confederates lost an estimated 7,750 of 61,025 deployed.

Next is the **Battle of Cold Harbor** (June 1-3, 1864) in the area lying between the Pamunkey and Chickahominy Rivers, in Eastern Virginia. The Confederates were given ample time to assume new positions and take on either offensive or defensive roles. **Lee** was in a position to pick the line on which he willed the enemy attack to take place. **Grant** brought 105,000 men onto the field while **Lee's** forces numbered only 59,000. But, the disparity in numbers was no longer what it had been, because **Grant's** reinforcements were mostly green recruits, while most of **Lee's** were veterans moved from inactive fronts. **Grant** ordered 31,000 soldiers of his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Corps to attack the right flank of the Confederate line on the morning of June 3<sup>rd</sup>. They were slaughtered by the Confederates, so **Grant** threw in his 7<sup>th</sup> Corps, his best unit. Grant lost 7,000 men in less than an hour, and the only reason he didn't lose more was that his corps commanders ignored his orders to advance again. **Cold Harbor** was the final victory won by **Robert E. Lee** and his most decisive in terms of casualties. The Union army lost 13,000 men against a loss of only 2,600 for the Confederates. The battle brought the toll in Union casualties since the beginning of May to a total of more than 52,000, as compared to 23,000 for the Confederates.

The final Civil War engagement that is described in this series is the **Siege of Petersburg**, which lasted from June 15, 1864 until April 2, 1865. As foolish as **Grant's** attack at Cold Harbor was, it served his purposes because **Lee** was now trapped. He barely beat **Grant** to Petersburg and spent the remainder of the war defending Richmond behind a fortified trench line. The end of the Confederacy was just a matter of time, unless European allies came to the Confederacy's rescue or a new President was elected in place of Abraham Lincoln. Many southerners pinned their faith on these possibilities.

Petersburg was situated on the south side of the Appomattox River, about 23 miles south of Richmond. The military importance of this small town was due entirely to railroads: of the three

railroads that led to Richmond from outside Virginia, two went through Petersburg and the remaining one passed nearby. Federal occupation of Petersburg would isolate Richmond and eventually force the evacuation of the Confederate capital. **Grant** dug in, waited, and used his roving cavalry to tighten the noose around Petersburg. The entrenchments stretched out over a distance of 50 miles. Federal forces outnumbered the Confederates by 1.05 to 2.25 to 1 throughout the campaign and the Union enjoyed decided advantages in logistical support. The siege using trench warfare was eerily predictive of what subsequently transpired during the First World War; with troops occupying heavily fortified positions against artillery barrages and occasional, but costly, frontal assaults.

On March 29, 1865 **Grant** finally got an opportunity to get behind **Lee's** right flank and cut the two railroads serving Petersburg, using **Phil Sheridan's** (1831-1888) fast moving cavalry. **Lee** dispatched **George Pickett** (1825-1875) and his nephew **Fitzhugh Lee** (1835-1905) westward with their forces, parallel to the Federals, which resulted in the Civil War's last land confrontation of any consequence, the Battle of Five Forks. **Sheridan's** cavalry and the 5<sup>th</sup> Corps under Union General **Gouverneur Warren** (1830-1882) succeeded in defeating the Confederates and opening up an enormous gap in their lines, which was exploited by the Union forces over the succeeding hours, causing **Lee** to abandon the defense of Petersburg on April 2nd. **Lee's** path of retreat was cut by Federal Cavalry and he was forced to surrender 75 miles away, at tiny Appomattox Courthouse on April 12, 1865. The Civil War was finally over.

### **The opposing generals were like brothers, they knew one another intimately**

The American Civil War was unique in that the great majority of the commanding generals were intimately acquainted with one another for most of their adult lives. Most of these men matriculated through the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York; about 50 miles up the Hudson River from New York City. In those days, the West Point classes were quite small, usually between 25 and 60 men graduating each year. The cadets got to know one another like brothers during the four years they spent at West Point because they were not granted any leave during their four years at the academy. They were required to attend church together and study philosophy and Christian religion under the same tutors. After graduation, they usually served together, often for years at a time, at lonely and isolated outposts on the frontier. They were essentially, an "Army family".

At the first Battle of Bull Run, 1838 classmates **Irvin McDowell** and **P.G.T. Beauregard** commanded the opposing armies. The Class of 1846 produced 24 generals for the Union and Confederate armies during the Civil War, more than any other. **Robert E. Lee** served as West Point's superintendent between 1851-54 and, thereby, enjoyed a critical advantage in knowing many of the younger officers who later played pivotal roles in the Civil War, such as **Jeb Stuart** (Class of 1854) who commanded the Confederate cavalry forces and his counterpart **Phil Sheridan** (Class of 1853), who ended up commanding all the Union cavalry. Lee also witnessed the matriculation of his eldest son **George Washington Custis Lee** (1832-1913) through West Point, graduating #1 in the Class of 1854. Custis Lee served as Aide-de-Camp to Confederate President **Jefferson Davis** during the war and rose to the rank of major general.

I have compiled a list of the graduation dates of just those generals mentioned above, to give the reader an idea of the age spread.

**Jefferson Davis** (Class of 1828)

**Robert E. Lee** (graduated #2 in Class of 1829, without any demerits; returned as Superintendent of West Point in 1852-54)

**Joseph E. Johnston** (Class of 1829)

**George Gordon Meade** (Class of 1835)

**Lewis Armistead** (attended West Point 1834-36 as part of Class of 1837, but dismissed for cracking plate over head of classmate **Jubal Early**. He was subsequently awarded a officer's commission in the regular army)

**Jubal A. Early** (Class of 1837)

**Joseph Hooker** (Class of 1837)

**John Sedgwick** (Class of 1837)

**P.G. T. Beauregard** (Class of 1838; Superintendant of West Point 1861)

**Irvin McDowell** (Class of 1838)

**James Longstreet** (Class of 1842)

**Lafayette McLaws** (Class of 1842)

**Ulysses S. Grant** (Class of 1843)

**Winfield Scott Hancock** (Class of 1844)

**Bernard E. Bee** (Class of 1845)

**George McClellan** (#2 in Class of 1846)

**Thomas J. Jackson** (Class of 1846)

**George E. Pickett** (Class of 1846)

**Darius N. Couch** (Class of 1846)

**Cadmus M. Wilcoz** (Class of 1846)

**Ambrose E. Burnside** (Class of 1847)

**John Gibbon** (Class of 1847)

**Ambrose P. Hill** (Class of 1847)

**John Buford** (Class of 1848)

**Nathan G. "Shanks" Evans** (Class of 1848)

**Gouverneur K. Warren** (Class of 1850)

**Philip H. Sheridan** (Class of 1853)

**George Washington Custis Lee** (#1 in Class of 1854)

**Oliver O. Howard** (#4 Class of 1854)

**James E. B. "Jeb" Stuart** (Class of 1854)

**Oliver Howard** was also a graduate of Bowdoin College Class of 1850 (before going on to West Point), where **Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain** graduated in the Class of 1852.



*J. David Rogers holds the Karl F. Hasselmann Chair in Geological Engineering at the University of Missouri-Rolla. From 1994-2001 he was on the faculty of the Department of Civil & Environmental Engineering at the University of California, Berkeley and prior to this (1991-93) taught at the Naval Postgraduate School at Monterey. He had a distinguished career as a reserve intelligence officer between 1976-95. Over the years he has been a frequent contributor to the Naval Institute Proceedings, Naval War College Review and the National Defense University/National War College journals.*