

Through maneuver in the Shenandoah Valley, Lieut. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson deceived, surprised, and confounded the United States Army, disrupting their local and theater operations by diverting forces that would have otherwise engaged Confederates elsewhere. Lieut. Gen. Jackson's legendary spring 1862 campaign stands as a clear example of effectively using maneuver in the operational field. Jackson achieved his cunning movement through harsh discipline and conditioning of his men, by taking advantage of familiar terrain, and with technology that was new to war. With his operational skill, "Stonewall" perfectly applied Lee's "offensive-defensive" strategy, by which the Confederate armies would maintain the tactical offensive and keep the initiative while fighting on home ground to repel the invader. The efforts of Jackson's brigade ultimately prevented McDowell's force from reinforcing McClellan's Army of the Potomac, which was engaged in the Peninsula Campaign. This contributed to the campaign's failure.

In May 1862 Jackson commanded Confederate forces in the Shenandoah Valley¹. Early that month, he marched nine thousand men of his army east across the Blue Ridge, making

¹ James McPherson, ed., Battle Cry of Freedom (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 454.

Union scouts believe he was going to reinforce Johnston outside of Richmond². Then Jackson's brigade loaded onto trains at Charlottesville and headed back into the valley to Staunton. On the eighth of May they attacked and defeated an inferior Union force at McDowell commanded by John C. Frémont³. From there Stonewall's brigade moved northward in the valley to defeat a small Union outpost at Front Royal, flanking Banks' division in nearby Strasburg. Banks retreated north to Winchester where Jackson followed and defeated him, sending him back to the Potomac⁴. After the battle, Stonewall marched north towards Harper's Ferry to give the impression that he intended to cross the Potomac⁵.

On the thirtieth of May, as Union troops under Frémont and Shields converged like pincers into the valley just north of Strasburg, Jackson's men raced southward in between them. They cleared Strasburg two days later. Jackson beat the northern divisions south to the only usable bridge on the Shenandoah River at Port Republic. After a difficult victory there against Shields on the ninth of June, Jackson withdrew to Brown's Gap in the Blue

² Ibid, 455.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, 457.

⁵ Ibid, 458.

Ridge⁶. His army of seventeen thousand men had thwarted a combined Union force of thirty-three thousand in the valley, marched over three hundred and fifty miles, and diverted sixty thousand Yankees from tasks in east Tennessee and the Richmond front.

Lieut. Gen. Jackson made his army extremely mobile by hard conditioning and trained them to cover vast distances in short periods of time. He strove to make the discipline of his men the tightest in the rebel army⁷. Jackson would not tolerate insubordination. He wrote, "It will not be said that your men cannot be induced to perform their duty. They must be *made to do it*⁸." This strict discipline is what allowed Jackson to train his men hard and to march them fast and long when it became necessary. His men were typically on their feet drilling and practicing for seventeen hours a day⁹. According to Tanner:

[Jackson] saw that each man got a musket and drilled them until they could barely hobble. Extraordinary attention to every paragraph in the manual of arms won him the respect of his soldiers and Johnston's greater confidence.

This patient respect allowed Jackson to move his men with amazing speed after he trained them. With patient attention to discipline, Jackson transformed his troops

⁶ Ibid, 460.

⁷ Robert G. Tanner, Stonewall in the Valley, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1976), 52.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, 32.

into a well-trained force with a lot of physical and psychological endurance. One officer said, "[Jackson] classed all who were weak and weary, who fainted by the wayside, as men wanting in patriotism¹⁰." He was a disciplinarian to say the least.

This disciplined speed yielded large dividends in the Shenandoah Valley. Jackson's men had resented his discipline at first, but their resultant reputation for being swift eventually gave them a sense of pride. Union soldiers even dubbed them, "foot cavalry¹¹." The best example of Jackson's speed is the thirtieth of May, when his tired brigade returned to the Shenandoah Valley from the north near Harper's Ferry. That day two Union divisions were entering the valley just north of Strasburg to confront Jackson: Frémont from the west and Shields from the east. Brig. Gen. Saxton, who commanded Harper's Ferry, reports in a telegram to Washington that Jackson headed south from Winchester, "My scouts, who have just come in from Charlestown, bring in a rumor that Jackson is falling back from Winchester before the advance of our forces. There has been heavy firing there. I shall send out a

¹⁰ McPherson, 456.

¹¹ Tanner, 54.

strong reconnaissance¹²." He was returning to the valley. Stonewall simply raced his troops down through both divisions before they were even completely in the valley and had a chance to converge, passing Strasburg on the first¹³. Maj. Gen. Frémont records his advance attacking the Confederate rear in a telegraph on the second, "...my advance had driven the rear guard of the rebels into their main camp at a place called Round Hill, some 4 miles from Strasburg¹⁴." If Frémont's advance was attacking Jackson's rear guard, that means that Jackson was ahead of him by the time of the telegraph. Stonewall had covered nearly twice as much ground than the Yankees in the same amount of time¹⁵. Because Jackson had trained his men so well, they moved with dazzling speed that contributed to Jackson's maneuver in the valley.

Jackson and his men used their knowledge of the Shenandoah Valley to their advantage with scouts, spies, and elusive terrain masking¹⁶. Jackson himself was from the valley, like many of his troops¹⁷. His local scouts and

¹² Robert N. Scott, ed., War of the Rebellion: Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series 1, Vol. XII, (Washington: Government Printing office, 1885), 637.

¹³ McPherson, 458.

¹⁴ Scott, 650.

¹⁵ McPherson, 458.

¹⁶ Walter P. Lang, J. Frank Hennessee, and William E. Bush, Jr., "Jackson's Valley Campaign and the Operational Level of War," Parameters, Vol. XV, No. 4, (Carlisle, PA: U. S. Army War College, 1994), 50.

¹⁷ Tanner, 33.

spies knew "every foot of the country"¹⁸ and locals often aided him with information about the Union army and its soldiers¹⁹. Jackson's brilliant topographical engineer, Jedediah Hotchkiss, drew up accurate maps of the valley that allowed him to effectively plan operations²⁰.

Jackson used the terrain to his advantage during the campaign, which shows the benefit of his superior familiarity. Upon his return to the Shenandoah Valley after his victory at McDowell, Jackson moved northward on the eastern side of Massanutten Mountain, which masked his columns from Banks, who was on the western side in Strasburg. On the twenty-second of May, Banks sent a telegraph describing his thoughts:

The return of the rebel forces of General Jackson into the valley, ...increases my anxiety for the safety of the position I occupy and that of the troops under my command. That he has returned there can be no doubt. From all the information I can gather—and I do not wish to excite alarm unnecessarily—I am compelled to believe that he meditates attack here²¹.

Maj. Gen. Banks apparently does not know where Jackson is, but only that he has returned to the valley and Banks can only speculate on his intentions. He thinks that Jackson will attack on the western side at Strasburg. In fact, Jackson emerged from the eastern side of Massanutten

¹⁸ McPherson, 456.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Scott, 524.

Mountain on the twenty-third and attacked at Front Royal, as Banks recounts:

Our troops were attacked at Front Royal this afternoon, and, though making a vigorous resistance, were compelled by superiority of numbers to retire toward Middletown. ...The force had been gathering in the mountains, it is said, since Wednesday²².

Stonewall had surprised the Union forces in the Valley by attacking Front Royal, which sent Banks' force in Strasburg in a retreat north to Winchester. Jackson surprised the Yankees because he used the mountains as a cover, which stands as a brilliant example of terrain masking.

Another shining example of using familiar terrain to elude is Jackson's final retreat into Brown's Gap. After confounding the Union Army up and down the Shenandoah Valley he finally holed up in a hidden defensive position on the night of June the ninth²³. Maj. Gen. Shields wired Frémont about "the escape of Jackson²⁴" after engagement at Port Republic and Jackson himself sent a telegraph to an Adjutant assistant from Brown's Gap on the eleventh²⁵. Here Stonewall's superior knowledge of the terrain provided for him a secure avenue of escape in the Blue Ridge: Brown's

²² Ibid, 525.

²³ Lang, 56.

²⁴ Scott, 24.

²⁵ Ibid, 710.

Gap. From there he marched to join Lee's force in Richmond²⁶.

Jackson brilliantly used new technology, the railroad, to maneuver his army from Charlottesville to Staunton. After marching them eastward out of the southern valley he quickly loaded his men up on trains and sent them back over the Blue Ridge to Staunton²⁷. Tanner says of the trip, "The destination proved to be Staunton, whose population was as amazed as the Army²⁸." The speed with which Jackson redirected and relocated his forces amazed and surprised civilians and Yankees alike, which proved itself when he attacked unprepared McDowell on the eighth of May. In this case the railroad's speed clearly enhanced Jackson's maneuver and thereby allowed him to deceive the enemy.

Jackson moved deceptively throughout the campaign, primarily using misdirection and diversions. He moved out of his way on more than one occasion to mislead the enemy. Prime examples are his initial movement towards Richmond on the outset of the campaign, the way he used Turner Ashby's cavalry before attacking Port Republic, and a short jaunt towards Harper's Ferry.

²⁶ McPherson, 459.

²⁷ Lang, 53.

²⁸ Tanner, 164.

When Jackson left the Shenandoah in early May, Washington and even Stonewall's troops believed he was on his way to support Johnston outside of Richmond as McClellan waged the Peninsula Campaign. The article, "Jackson's Valley Campaign" states:

Jackson ...turned east through Brown's Gap in the Blue Ridge, thus leaving watchful Union eyes to draw the obvious conclusion. Once out of range of Federal observation..., Jackson turned his columns... and entrained heading west²⁹.

Stonewall knew just what moves to make to appear to the Union as if he intended to join the front in eastern Virginia. When Jackson returned to Staunton and marched towards McDowell the union forces were not properly prepared for an engagement there. Maj. Gen. Frémont reports to Washington:

General Banks had been withdrawn from his advanced position near Staunton, and my left became dangerously exposed. Seeing his advantage, the enemy was not slow to profit from it³⁰.

The northern troops were prematurely unprepared for battle in and near the valley, which is a tribute to Jackson's deception and how effective it was.

When heading back up the valley after victory at McDowell, Jackson sent Turner Ashby's cavalry up the western side as he advanced on the eastern side of

²⁹ Lang, 53.

³⁰ Scott, 9.

Massanutten Mountain. This was for a diversion, to make Banks think that Jackson would attack on the western side at Strasburg. "Jackson's Valley Campaign" puts it this way:

With his cavalry screening to his front, Jackson created the impression of a headlong thrust at Bank's position... Stonewall continued north and fell upon the unsuspecting Union garrison at Front Royal³¹.

In this case Ashby's cavalry was the key to the deception, which worked perfectly, clearly deceiving Banks about where Jackson would attack. Banks says in a telegraph, "I am compelled to believe that he meditates attack here [at Strasburg]³²". This mistakenness was just what Jackson was looking for when he attacked Front Royal. The move outflanked Strasburg and caused Banks to retreat from there.

A short leg to Harper's Ferry as he pursued Banks after victory at Winchester lead Union forces to believe Jackson was on his way north to Washington³³. A Union soldier recounts, "Not a man of us but swore that the Rebel general should not get to Massachusetts before we did, that the foul invader should not set foot on the frontier of our

³¹ Lang, 54.

³² Scott, 524.

³³ Krick, 396.

native state³⁴." This statement underscores the widely held misconception that Jackson was on his way north to Washington or beyond. Stonewall caused a lot of anxiety in Washington with his proximity because it looked as though it was his goal. Maj. Gen. McDowell was occupying the Fredericksburg area with a force of about sixty thousand men and had orders to support McClellan outside of Richmond. His orders were abruptly changed due to Jackson's efforts. He says:

On Sunday, the 24th, I received the order of the President—To lay aside for the present the movement on Richmond, and put 20,000 men in motion at once for the Shenandoah³⁵.

Lincoln made this change to orders because he was afraid Stonewall would threaten the capital. Clearly Jackson's move north before speeding back down the valley deceived the Union by making them think his goal was Washington, as their reactions indicate.

Perhaps the most influential result of Jackson's maneuver was the actual changes that Union commanders made on their operations, which diverted resources from other fields of conflict. The first major impediment Jackson caused to Lincoln's plans was at McDowell where Jackson attacked forces under the command of John C. Frémont,

³⁴ "Stonewall in the Shenandoah Valley", The Confederate Veteran Magazine, Vol. VI, (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Company, Jan 1898-Dec 1898), 149.

³⁵ Scott, 282.

disrupting their orders to move to the western theater and liberate east Tennessee³⁶. When Jackson ventured as far north as Harper's Ferry, it scared Lincoln into diverting McDowell's division to the valley theater instead of having him reinforce McClellan outside of Richmond³⁷. "Stonewall" Jackson's famed Shenandoah Valley campaign is a perfect example of exploiting the enemy through the use of maneuver to confound their operations.

Stonewall executed his ingenious disruption by defeating the Union in five battles in the Shenandoah campaign³⁸. Because he maneuvered so competently, Jackson brought superior numbers to the field in every confrontation with the exception of Cross Keys³⁹. This was despite the fact that theater Union forces added up to nearly twice his numbers.

The idea of a diversion in the valley to preoccupy Union troops was first thought up by Robert E. Lee to support his offensive-defensive strategy. Jackson's operational prowess perfectly complemented this southern strategy and was a huge reason for its success that spring in Virginia. With maneuver, he thwarted Union plans, frustrated their attacks, and generally rendered them

³⁶ McPherson, 455, 456.

³⁷ Ibid, 460.

³⁸ Krick, 481.

³⁹ Ibid.

impotent. Jackson displayed true operational genius at a time when this level between tactical and strategic doctrine was often misunderstood or overlooked⁴⁰ and his Shenandoah campaign will remain a subject of military study for all foreseeable generations.

⁴⁰ Lang, 48.

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