

THE MAPS OF
SPOTSYLVANIA
THROUGH COLD HARBOR

An Atlas of the Fighting at Spotsylvania Court House
Through Cold Harbor, Including all Cavalry Operations,
May 7 - June 3, 1864

Bradley M. Gottfried



Savas Beatie
California

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The Maps of Spotsylvania Through Cold Harbor: An Atlas of the Fighting at Spotsylvania Court House Through Cold Harbor, Including Cavalry Operations, May 5 - June 3, 1864

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Savas Beatie LLC
989 Governor Drive, Suite 102
El Dorado Hills, CA 95762
916-941-6896
sales@savasbeatie.com

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The ninth volume of
The Savas Beatie Military Atlas™ Series

To My Wife, Linda,
who after all these years remains my
staunchest supporter and the love of my life.

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Preface

The *Maps of Spotsylvania Through Cold Harbor* is the ninth book in the Savas Beale Military Atlas Series. Several more are in development. It has been a long but rewarding publishing journey now in its fifteenth year.

I began the overall project with *The Maps of Gettysburg* in 2007. It continued in 2009 with two more installments: *The Maps of Chickamauga* (by David Powell and David Friedrichs) and my own *The Maps of First Bull Run* (2009). I continued the series with *The Maps of Antietam* (2012), *The Maps of Bristoe Station and Mine Run* (2013), *The Maps of the Wilderness* (2016), *The Maps of Fredericksburg* (2018) and, most recently, *The Maps of the Cavalry in the Gettysburg Campaign* (2020). All of these titles have been reprinted at least once (and several many times) and all of them remain in print today.

This series uses maps and precise facing-page text to visualize the action and thus better explain and understand a military campaign. There is no better way to understand military actions and no book can contain enough maps. Coverage herein is intended to be neutral. As anyone who is familiar with this series will attest, its purpose is to offer a broad and full understanding of the subject matter rather than a micro-history of a particular event or day.

I began the Overland Campaign with the Wilderness volume mentioned above, and this new installment concludes it. *The Maps of Spotsylvania Through Cold Harbor* begins where the battle of the Wilderness ends, moves through the long and horrific fighting at Spotsylvania, and ends with Cold Harbor. There are very worthy studies of Spotsylvania, North Anna, Bethesda Church, Cold Harbor, and the many cavalry fights, but none have enough maps to adequately explain the complex actions. This series in general, and this book in particular, rectifies this shortcoming.

This study is not the last word or definitive treatment of these topics, the various engagements, or any part thereof—nor did I intend it to be. Given space and time considerations, I covered the major events of these campaigns and combats, with smaller transition sections to flesh out the full story of those bloody and critical weeks. As a result, many aspects have not been as deeply mined as possible. Gordon Rhea, for example, covers the Overland Campaign in three large volumes.

Original research was intentionally kept to a minimum. My primary reliance was on readily accessible firsthand accounts and battle reports, followed by quality secondary scholarship. There are no new theories or evaluations within these pages of why the campaign or battles unfolded as they did. I am very familiar with the battlefields described in this study and have visited them many times and am familiar with the terrain. Whenever a book uses short chapters or sections, as this one does, there will inevitably be some narrative redundancy. I have tried to minimize this as much as possible.

Sources can and often do conflict on many points, including numbers engaged, who moved when and where and why, what time a specific event unfolded, and of course, casualties.

No one knows the exact location of every unit at all times, and in many cases I have pieced the evidence together to come to a educated conclusion. Much of this will be found in the lengthy endnotes. I am sure some of my conclusions are subject to debate, but they represent my best effort to get them right. It is also important to realize that the time a particular action occurred is always approximate. Not only did various participants disagree, but watches were not synchronized and memories are rarely reliable. It is common to be confronted with multiple recollections of when events occurred, even by those who were present making the history we so enjoy reading about today.

Inevitably, a study like this makes it likely that mistakes of one variety or another end up in the final text or on a map, despite endless hours of proofreading. I apologize in advance for any errors and I assume full responsibility for them. Pass along any mistakes you find and they will be fixed in subsequent printings.

* * *

This book could not have come to fruition without the help of others. Theodore P. “Ted” Savas has always been a strong proponent of the series and a font of inspiration and support. He again did a masterful job of editing this complex book. These volumes could never be completed without him. Ted assigned Joel Manuel to help finalize the text, and Joel did a great job copy editing the manuscript and caught many errors in the maps along the way.

The staff of the Fredericksburg National Military Park allowed frequent access to their bound volumes brimming with primary and secondary sources. Frank O’Reilly’s outstanding map set of the Battle of Spotsylvania was an indispensable resource.

John Cummings and Robert E. L. Krick read portions of the manuscript and provided useful perspectives and suggestions.

Researcher and author Bryce Suderow was always available to provide information and connection to other historians.

Finally, my wife, Linda, continues to support my endeavors with love, grace, and patience.

Bradley M. Gottfried
Fayetteville, Pennsylvania

Introduction

Planning for the Overland Campaign

The opposing armies approached the Overland Campaign on two different trajectories. After their decisive victory at Gettysburg, the men comprising Maj. Gen. George Meade's Army of the Potomac finally realized they could whip Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Whatever advantage Meade earned in Pennsylvania was lost that fall of 1863 during complex series of marches, posturing, and fighting during the Bristoe and Mine Run campaigns. Meade was content to allow his army the time he thought it needed after Gettysburg to rest and refit, but President Abraham Lincoln and his senior leadership would have none of it. Unlike Meade, Lee was always seeking an aggressive avenue through which to strike. He spent the fall trying to maneuver his men into a decisive battle in an effort to restore some of the luster lost by his army in Pennsylvania. His inability to coax his adversary into a decisive pitched battle, coupled with the failures of some of his chief lieutenants, frustrated Lee.

The fall of 1863 ushered in major changes to the command structure of the Army of the Potomac. When Meade demurred after Lincoln asked him whether he intended to fight Lee, the War Department that September stripped away the XI Corps and XII Corps and shipped them west to Tennessee to reinforce William S. Rosecrans's Army of the Cumberland against Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee. In March of 1864, the five corps left with the eastern army (I, II, III, V, and VI) were reorganized into three larger units: the II Corps, V Corps, and VI Corps, ending the existence of I Corps and III Corps. Some in the army believed these changes were intended to rid the army of men like John Newton, William French, and Daniel Sickles.

The biggest change was not directly tied to the Army of the Potomac but to President Lincoln's senior command structure. Tired of the mediocre performance of his general in chief, Maj. Gen. Henry Halleck, Lincoln promoted Ulysses S. Grant to lieutenant general on March 2, 1864, and gave him command of all the Union armies. Grant, by far the North's most successful field general, decided to move to Washington, D.C., and oversee the war effort from the Eastern Theater. The politics and intrigue within the capital, among other reasons, prompted Grant take the field with Meade's Army of the Potomac. He arrived in there on March 10 to a decidedly cool reception. Grant was smart enough to know a delicate situation when he saw one and determined to take a hands-off approach. As he later explained it, he tried to make "general Meade's position as nearly as possible what it would have been if I had been in Washington or any other place away from his command. My instructions for that army," continued Grant, "were all through him, and were all general in their nature, leaving all the details and the execution to him." As events will demonstrate, that observation was not quite accurate. Grant make a habit of pitching his tent close to Meade's.¹

To bulk up the Army of the Potomac, Grant called for the 19,331-man IX Corps under Maj. Gen. Ambrose Burnside to join Meade's command. Burnside's corps swelled the army's

numbers to nearly 120,000 men but created a dilemma: Burnside outranked Meade. Grant solved the problem by ordering Burnside to report directly to him, which made his corps an independent command. As events would bear out, this arrangement made it hard for Meade to easily integrate the large corps into his battle plans.²

Robert E. Lee's 64,000-man Army of Northern Virginia (about half the size of Meade's) experienced much less drama during the winter of 1863-64. Lee, however, had his challenges. Feeding the army was always a problem and the winter months were particularly hard. Lee was also acutely aware of the losses suffered within his officer corps. The mortal wounding of Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson at Chancellorsville convinced Lee to reorganize his army from two corps into three. The reliable James Longstreet continued to command the First Corps, but two officers new to corps command, Richard S. Ewell and Ambrose Powell Hill, were selected to lead the Second and Third Corps, respectively. The three corps system broke down at Gettysburg, where none of Lee's three corps commanders turned in a strong performance.

That September, Longstreet and much of his First Corps were sent to Georgia to reinforce Bragg, leaving Lee with two unsteady corps commanders. Ewell was often ill that autumn and Hill turned in a disastrous performance at Bristoe Station in October. The armies went into winter quarters after the close of the inconclusive Mine Run Campaign in early December. Longstreet and his men rejoined the Virginia army in March of 1864, a happy reunion for all concerned. Lee's dependable War Horse was back. The army commander remained hopeful Ewell and Hill would grow into their important posts once the new campaign season opened.³

Meade's new drive on Richmond in early May 1864 was but one of three major offensive prongs launched in the Eastern Theater. The first and primary effort was the Army of the Potomac's strike across the Rapidan River against Lee's army, followed by an advance by Maj. Gen. Benjamin Butler's Army of the James up the James River to attack Richmond from the southeast. A final force under Maj. Gen. Franz Sigel was tasked with marching south up the Shenandoah Valley to disrupt the vital supply line feeding Lee's army. In the Western Theater, meanwhile, Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman led his army group south out of northern Georgia in early May against the Army of the Tennessee and its new commander, Gen. Joseph E. Johnston. Sherman's goal was to defeat Johnston in the field and capture the vital logistical hub of Atlanta. An ancillary amphibious effort was planned against Mobile, Alabama, with troops originating from Louisiana.⁴

The Two Armies Battle in the Wilderness (May 3 - 6, 1864)

The Overland Campaign officially began just before midnight on May 3, 1864, when Maj. Gen. Winfield Hancock's II Corps broke camp between Stevensburg and Brandy Station and headed toward Ely's Ford on the Rapidan River. The remainder of the army marched to Germanna Ford. By late afternoon on May 4, Meade's men were settling into their camps after a long but uneventful march. The plan was to march through the tangled terrain of the Wilderness as rapidly as possible and press into the more open terrain below, but most of the troops spent the night within the gloomy thickets. Lee received word of the move and had his men on the road by noon of May 4. The Rebels maintained a fast pace east toward Mine Run

Creek. Meade had effectively stolen a march on Lee, who was doing his best to intercept the Union army.⁵

The heads of Lee's two columns moved east on two separate roads, with Ewell's Second Corps moving along the Orange Turnpike and Hill's Third Corps about a mile to the south marching along the Orange Plank Road. Their advance struck the Union army on the morning of May 5, which was marching south to get out of the Wilderness. The area was aptly named because the dense thickets limited visibility. Logging had removed the mature trees and left behind a proliferation of second-growth timber. The manner in which the armies met triggered one of the battle's unique aspects with two separate large-scale actions: Ewell's men battling the Federal V and VI corps along the Orange Turnpike, and Hancock's II Corps (with some help from Burnside's IX Corps) fighting Hill's command on the Orange Plank Road. James Longstreet's First Corps had camped near Gordonsville, positioned to either move into the Shenandoah or by train to Richmond as needed. It was thus unable to reach the front on May 5. Lee began the fight with "one boot off."

The battle began on the Orange Turnpike front when Maj. Gen. Gouverneur Warren launched his V Corps across Saunders Field against Maj. Gen. Edward ("Allegheny") Johnson's division, which had thrown up crude earthworks on the opposite site. Although initially successful in rousting some of Johnson's men from their works, a counterattack knocked the Union troops back across the open field to their original positions. Reinforcements arrived for both sides and fighting continued in the Orange Turnpike sector through the day and into May 6. Ewell turned in an effective performance not seen since Second Winchester in the Shenandoah Valley in June 1863.

Father south, two divisions of A. P. Hill's Third Corps waged a heroic fight along the Orange Plank Road against overwhelming odds. The limited visibility, rolling terrain, and small meandering creeks helped neutralize the Army of the Potomac's superiority. By the end of the day Hill's exhausted men fell to the ground and were permitted to rest without first building some form of earthworks. Lee informed his staff and Third Corps officers that there was no need to wake the men: Longstreet's powerful First Corps would be up prior to dawn to reinforce the embattled line. Anxiety increased by the minute as dawn approached without the arrival of the First Corps.

A powerful force was indeed approaching Hill's position before daybreak, but from the opposite direction. Maj. Gen. Winfield Hancock's massive attack struck and collapsed Hill's unprepared front within minutes. The rout began just as the head of Longstreet's column was arriving on the Widow Tapp farm. Longstreet formed his men for battle and his divisions advanced to blunt the Union attack. Once this direct threat ended, Longstreet sought to turn Hancock's exposed left flank. His subsequent hammering attack caught the unsuspecting Union troops by surprise and rolled up the line. Longstreet was preparing to follow up on his victory when a volley of friendly fire severely wounded him and killed Brig. Gen. Micah Jenkins, ending the hope of a follow-up to the decisive counterstroke. A series of ineffective charges against Union works lining the Brock Road ended the day's fighting on that front.

Darkness was settling on the battlefield on May 6 when Brig. Gen. John Gordon of Ewell's Corps maneuvered his brigade onto the flank of the Union VI Corps well north of the Orange Turnpike. Gordon's Georgians roared into the Union right flank and rear like an avalanche,

sending thousands of men in blue scampering for the rear while capturing hundreds more, including two general officers. Expected Rebel reinforcements failed to materialize, and darkness and disorganization forced Gordon to break off his attack, ending the Wilderness fighting.

The two sides had waged a titanic struggle the likes of which the continent had never seen. By the time it ended about 10:00 p.m. on May 6, their relative positions had barely changed, but nearly 29,000 men had been killed, wounded, or were missing or in enemy hands.

The battle was particularly difficult for U. S. Grant, who spent most of it smoking cigars and whittling in deep concentration. He was accustomed to being in sole command and waging a more aggressive tactical approach. Despite his urge to do otherwise, Grant issued only a handful of orders to Meade, allowing him the opportunity to conduct his own operation.⁶

Historian Gordon Rhea summed up Grant's intentions during the Overland Campaign: "He planned to flank Lee, not to attack him head on. . . . [O]nce battle was joined in the Wilderness, Grant strove to apply irresistible pressure against Lee's weakest point. When that failed, he shifted toward Spotsylvania to compel Lee to fight on ground more favorable to the Federals."⁷

The Armies Face Each Other in the Wilderness (May 7, 1864)

Grant spent some of May 7 sorting out his perceptions of how the Army of the Potomac had conducted itself in battle. He was not overly impressed. Winfield Hancock, Meade's finest corps commander, appeared dazed as the battle unfolded. He had expected to push through the enemy front but was eventually rebuffed on both days. Worse, Hancock allowed his left flank to remain exposed. Longstreet took full advantage of that mistake and came close to ending the campaign almost as soon as it began.

Two other corps commanders, John Sedgwick and Gouverneur Warren, demonstrated rather lethargic generalship during the fighting and proved personally uninspiring to both their men and to their superiors. Grant's greatest disappointment may have been the performance turned in by the army's newly minted cavalry commander, Maj. Gen. Philip Sheridan—the only addition to the Army of the Potomac requested by Grant. Sheridan performed poorly, drawn off on a wild goose chase on May 5 that left the army essentially blind. Grant probably realized he needed to play a more direct role in guiding the army if he was going to destroy Lee, take Richmond, and end the war.⁸

Lee, meanwhile, spent much of May 7 fretting about his losses and wondering how he was going to fill major holes in his command structure. The 11,000 men wiped from the rolls in just two days were not going to be replaced anytime soon. His corps structure was a mess. Longstreet, his best commander, was gone and could possibly follow Stonewall Jackson to the grave. A. P. Hill was once again ill. Richard Ewell, who turned in a much better performance than he had at Gettysburg or during the fall 1863 fighting, continued to show an aversion to aggressive offensive actions Lee so prized.

Lee's first order of business was replacing Longstreet. His options were few. He finally settled on Maj. Gen. Richard Anderson, a solid division commander who had yet to do anything noteworthy. Brig. Gen. William Mahone was given Anderson's division. Neither man

had performed well at Gettysburg, but at least Anderson was considered a “sturdy and reliable fighter.” As one First Corps staff officer told Lee, “We know him and shall be satisfied with him.”⁹

While Grant evaluated, George Meade organized. The army commander spent the night of May 6 - 7 reforming and strengthening his lines to rebuff any attacks Lee might attempt. Meade pulled back Sedgwick’s VI Corps and Warren’s V Corps to consolidate his front by forming the commands perpendicular to the Orange Turnpike (Sedgwick north of the turnpike and Warren’s below it). The right of Burnside’s IX Corps linked with the left of Warren’s corps. About a mile east, Hancock’s II Corps—with units from the other three infantry corps—maintained its position along Brock Road. Concerned about the continued vulnerability of his left flank, Hancock ensured that Brig. Gen. Francis Barlow’s division was dug in and ready for action. Brig. Gen. Thomas Stevenson’s IX Corps division held Hancock’s right flank and extended the line all the way to the Germanna Plank Road.

Unlike the Union line, the Confederate front was continuous and stretched from Brig. Gen. Joseph Kershaw’s division (Hill’s Corps) below the unfinished railroad on the army’s right north all the way to Maj. Gen. Jubal Early’s division (Ewell’s Corps) more than a mile above the Orange Turnpike.¹⁰

Both Lee and Meade threw out reconnaissance parties throughout May 7 to gather information on what the other was up to. Some involved little more than a skirmish line, but in several instances entire regiments advanced. Warren, holding the middle of Meade’s line, and Hancock on the left were worried about another Confederate attack. Warren ordered his artillery to fire down Orange Turnpike while several of his units carefully made their way toward the enemy lines, which they found firmly in place on the opposite side of Saunders Field. Warren did little to help his cause when he sent a series of alarmed dispatches to Meade about an imminent Confederate advance against his position. Hancock’s concerns were understandable given how roughly he had been handled on May 6. One of his reconnaissances by Brig. Gen. Alexander Hays’ entire brigade (now under Col. John Crocker) ventured out along the Orange Plank Road in search of the enemy.

Lee’s largest probe involved pressing Brig. Gen. John Jones’ brigade (now under Col. William Witcher) ahead to determine whether Meade had abandoned his supply line across the Rapidan River at Germanna Ford.¹¹

THE MAPS OF
SPOTSYLVANIA
THROUGH COLD HARBOR

An Atlas of the Fighting at Spotsylvania Court House
Through Cold Harbor, Including all Cavalry Operations,
May 7 - June 3, 1864

PART 1: TO SPOTSYLVANIA

Map Set 1: Anticipation

Map 1.1: The Leaders Plan (May 7, 1864)

Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's objective was always the destruction of the Army of Northern Virginia. He had hoped to press through the Wilderness unscathed and engage Gen. E. Lee in the open, where the Army of the Potomac's superior numbers had a better chance of defeating Lee. His worst nightmare was realized during the deadly two-day fight in the heavy Wilderness. When he realized Lee was not going to attack on May 7, Grant began formulating another strategy. He entertained three options.

He could withdraw to Fredericksburg and use the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad as a dagger straight toward Richmond, forcing Lee to fight in the open. This option required the army to pull back in the face of Lee's veterans and risk an attack. Even a minor withdrawal for strategic reasons risked demoralizing the army, which was tired of retreats after tactical defeats. A second option was to drive south toward Richmond, possibly through Spotsylvania Court House and draw Lee into the open. The last option—a retreat across the Rapidan River—Grant quickly discarded.¹²

As far as Grant was concerned, he may not have beaten Lee in the Wilderness, but he surely had hurt his opponent "materially and morally." After an early breakfast on May 7, Grant summarized the outcome of the battle to an aide:

While it is in one sense a drawn battle, as neither side has gained or lost ground substantially since the fighting began, yet we remain in possession of the field, and the forces opposed to us have withdrawn to a distance from our front and taken up a defensive position. We cannot call the engagement a positive victory, but the enemy have only twice reached our lines in their many attacks, and have not gained a single advantage. This will enable me to carry out my intention of moving to the left, and

compelling the enemy to fight in a more open country and outside of their breastworks.¹³

Grant issued written orders to army commander Maj. Gen. George Meade at 6:30 a.m. for a march to Spotsylvania. He directed Meade to leave Hancock in place, should the enemy decide to attack again. Warren's V Corps would slide around Hancock and then march south toward the courthouse. Hancock would follow if Lee showed no inclination to attack him. Sedgwick's VI Corps would march to Chancellorsville and then on to Spotsylvania. Burnside, meanwhile, was ordered to head for Piney Branch Church and follow Sedgwick to his destination. Meade refined the orders and issued his own at 3:00 p.m. that day. Unlike the march to the Wilderness, these moving columns would be within proximity, and each could be easily reinforced if the need arose.¹⁴

Meade knew he would not remain still much longer, so he organized a large detail to remove the wounded to Washington for treatment. The array of wheeled vehicles included 488 ambulances and 325 wagons secured from the infantry units. Despite this impressive collection, almost 1,000 of the wounded could not be transported on May 7.¹⁵

The stakes were higher for Lee. If he miscalculated, Grant could slip past and head for Richmond, forcing him to fight under unfavorable conditions. It was imperative to collect as much information as possible to discern Grant's next move. Fighting in the Wilderness was difficult, and it was almost impossible to gather reliable news there. Bits and pieces of intelligence about troop movements were somewhat informative, but inconclusive. Most telling was the complete abandonment of Germanna Road, which served as the enemy's supply line. This strongly suggested that Grant was not going to retreat. Would he pull back to Fredericksburg or slide around Lee's flank and head south? To be safe, Lee ordered Brig. Gen. William Pendleton to construct a crude road through the thickets from the right side of Joseph Kershaw's line all the way to Catharpin Road.¹⁶

Unable to wait longer, Lee issued orders to Richard Anderson: "As soon after dark as you can effect it, withdraw Longstreet's Corps from the lines as quietly as possible. . . . When you have done this, march the troops a little way to the rear and let them have some sleep. . . . At 3 o'clock punctually, march toward Spotsylvania Court House."¹⁷

Map Set 2: Cavalry Actions on May 7, 1864

Map 2.1: The Opposing Forces Slide into Position (7:30 – 10:00 a.m.)

The new commander of the Army of the Potomac's cavalry, Philip Sheridan, was an aggressive leader. When he heard reports of a Rebel cavalry buildup around Fredericksburg, he convinced Maj. Gen. George G. Meade to allow him to ride in that direction with two of his divisions. Sheridan left Brig. Gen. James Wilson's division behind to screen the army as it marched through the Wilderness. Wilson, who had spent much of the war as a staff officer, had never led anything as large as a division. These factors contributed to a poor showing by the Union horse, allowing Gen. Robert E. Lee's army to close on Meade's without much advance warning. Meade later learned Sheridan's mission was a wild goose chase, for the enemy cavalry had already vacated the Fredericksburg area.¹

Sheridan returned to the army by the afternoon of May 5 and was dispatched by Meade to locate Wilson and his division. The latter was skirmishing with Confederate horsemen near Todd's Tavern. Sheridan arrived just in time, for Wilson's command was being pursued by an enemy hell-bent on destroying it. Sheridan's troopers then spent the night of May 5-6 protecting the army's rear and left flank. Reports of the approach of Lt. Gen. James Longstreet's First Corps from Gordonsville were plentiful, and Meade wanted to make sure his army was not caught by surprise. Sheridan failed in this mission as well. Longstreet's long column approached on Orange Plank Road, just in time to halt the Federal onslaught against the Confederate right. The cavalry on both sides had also battled earlier in the day.²

Meade reunited the three cavalry divisions near Chancellorsville where they spent the night guarding the army's trains in the rear. He then received reports that some of Lee's infantry had slipped between Sheridan and the Union left flank near Todd's Tavern on May 7. These reports were, however, erroneous. Glancing at maps, Grant, Meade, and Sheridan knew the army's most direct route to Spotsylvania Court

House was along Brock Road. Rebel cavalry held Todd's Tavern at the vital intersection of Brock Road and Catharpin Road, but the Union high command did not know just how many of them operated in that sector. It was held by Maj. Gen. Fitzhugh Lee's division, supported by Maj. Gen. Wade Hampton's division near Corbin's Bridge, where Catharpin Road crossed the Po River. Later that morning, Maj. Gen. William Henry Fitzhugh "Rooney" Lee's division joined Hampton's men.³

Sheridan was well aware that Todd's Tavern was a critical point in the Federal army's march to Spotsylvania, so he dispatched Brig. Gen. Alfred Torbert's division, under Brig. Gen. Wesley Merritt, to occupy it. Sheridan wanted to send more troops, but they were stuck guarding the wagons. Merritt's men could either ride down Furnace Road and then turn south (left) onto Brock Road to reach Todd's Tavern, or move straight west to the small hamlet along Catharpin Road. Sheridan chose the former route, which was more direct. Merritt started along Catharpin Road at 7:30 a.m. with Brig. Gen. George Custer's Wolverines in the van, followed by Col. Thomas Devin's mixed brigade of New York and Pennsylvania regiments. Merritt's own Reserve Brigade, under Col. Alfred Gibbs, stayed behind to guard the wagons. Brig. Gen. David Gregg's division remained between the Alrich plantation house and Piney Branch Church; Wilson's division was refitting near Chancellorsville.⁴

Merritt's column turned left when it reached Brock Road and immediately met Confederate pickets. Custer dismounted troopers from the 1st Michigan Cavalry and pushed forward on both sides of Brock Road, driving the enemy before him. Fitz Lee fed additional Confederate troops in front of Todd's Tavern, stiffening the resistance. The scrappy Rebels, fighting behind makeshift barricades and anything else that could stop a bullet, halted Merritt's advance. Col. Devin arrived and added weight to the effort by sending a portion of the 6th New York Cavalry galloping toward the Confederate line. The charge was repulsed with "some loss, the enemy being dismounted and fighting behind barricades." Merritt's cavalrymen complained that Meade's infantry had built and manned the barricades before being forced to relinquish the line in order to protect Maj. Gen. Winfield Hancock's collapsing left flank the previous day.⁵

Map 2.2: Gregg's Division Joins the Fray (10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.)

While Merritt's division was confronting Fitz Lee's men just north of Todd's Tavern (No. 1), Sheridan received news that Brig. Gen. Edward Ferrero's division of black troops had arrived to guard the wagons. "Little Phil" received orders about 10:00 a.m. to undertake "offensive operations, cutting the enemy's communications, etc." It was time to strike back.

Sheridan directed Gibbs's Reserve Brigade to rejoin Merritt's division at noon. Gregg's division would ride toward Todd's Tavern using two routes (inset) a short time later. Brig. Gen. Henry Davies rode along Catharpin Road to Piney Church Road before heading south to Brock Road, where his troopers could hit Fitz Lee's men from the rear. Col. J. Irvin Gregg's brigade rode directly toward Todd's Tavern on Catharpin Road to strike Lee's right flank. If properly executed, Sheridan's 8,000 horsemen in two divisions would smash into Lee's front, rear, and right and lock him in a vise-like grip. Wilson's division had been manhandled by the enemy during the two-day Wilderness fighting, so Sheridan left it behind to perform other duties: Col. John McIntosh's brigade was sent on a reconnaissance on the army's right flank near Germanna Ford, while Col. George Chapman's brigade was ordered to scout toward Spotsylvania Court House to determine if any enemy units occupied that sector.⁶

Sheridan's plan was a good one, but Fitz Lee refused to cooperate. With Devin's dismounted troopers lapping around his flanks and getting in his rear, and dust clouds rising in the distance beyond his right flank suggesting more enemy horsemen, Lee ordered his division back through Todd's Tavern to reassemble at the Hart house at about 1:00 p.m. The heavy timber there favored a defensive stand (No. 2). The men immediately set to work building barricades for the coming fight. By the time Sheridan's pincers enveloped Todd's Tavern at 3:00 p.m.—Merritt's on Brock Road and Gregg's on Catharpin Road—Lee's troopers were nowhere in sight. Sheridan knew a large force of enemy cavalry was at Corbin's Bridge, so he split his force in two to take on both. Merritt's men continued south along Brock Road toward Fitz Lee's troopers near the Hart

house while Gregg's troops continued west on Catharpin Road to confront Wade Hampton's division. The move was in keeping with Sheridan's aggressive disposition. Why take on and possibly destroy one enemy division, when he could put two out of action?⁷

Pushing west along Catharpin Road, Col. Gregg's brigade entered Todd's Tavern at noon and continued west. Fitz Lee's men had already retreated by this time, so Gregg's men passed through the town unmolested. West of the hamlet they encountered a strong picket line composed of troopers from Brig. Gen. Thomas Rosser's brigade behind a makeshift barrier (No. 3). After putting up token resistance the isolated Confederate troopers hopped onto their horses, galloped back across a small stream, and were gobbled up by the woods on either side of the road. Leaving the 1st Maine Cavalry and 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry in town, Gregg continued west on Catharpin Road toward Corbin's Bridge with his remaining four regiments.

Gregg's cavalrymen immediately went to work, tearing down fences to construct a crude breastwork across the road while every fourth trooper held the reins of horses of three of his comrades (No. 4). Two Napoleons from Lt. Rufus King's Battery A, 4th U.S. Regular Artillery, rolled up to the works. According to one trooper, the guns were placed "clear up to the breastworks, their muzzles running out through embrasures left for that purpose—the only time the boys saw the artillery on the skirmish line close to the front."⁸

Gregg's men faced an impressive array of enemy cavalry along Catharpin Road (No. 5). Wade Hampton's two brigades were in position on high ground on the opposite side of Corbin's Bridge spanning the Po River, and Rooney Lee's division pulled up behind him in support. Hampton sent several unidentified units forward to confront Gregg's brigade south of a small creek.

Merritt's men, meanwhile, rode into Todd's Tavern at 3:00 p.m. with Gibbs's brigade in the van, followed by Devin's brigade. While the horsemen rested, the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry cautiously felt its way south along Brock Road in an attempt to find the enemy (No. 6). It encountered Fitz Lee's skirmish line only a mile down the road. The Rebels opened fire and emptied several saddles.⁹

Map 2.3: The Cavalry Fight Along Brock Road Heats Up (3:00 – 7:00 p.m.)

Merritt sent Gibbs's Reserve Brigade south along Brock Road toward the barricades erected by Fitz Lee's troopers (inset). Brig. Gen. William Wickham's Confederate cavalry brigade occupied the first obstruction near the Hart house, with Brig. Gen. Lunsford Lomax's brigade in reserve behind another set of barricades about half a mile behind Wickham. Maj. James Breathed's Horse Artillery provided long-arm support.

Gibbs dismounted several of his regiments and sent them toward the barricades to assist the 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry in driving away the Rebels. The 1st U.S. Cavalry and the 1st New York Cavalry formed on the left of the 6th Pennsylvania and the 5th U.S. Cavalry deployed on its right. The 2nd U.S. Cavalry remained mounted in reserve. Lt. Edward Williston's Union battery dropped trail on high ground in the rear and opened fire. According to Gibbs, Williston's artillery "did excellent service, silencing the enemy's [Breathed] battery and killing and wounding several of their men and horses." Gibbs's report of the subsequent action is sketchy, as are Confederate accounts. He referred to it as a "sharp engagement, lasting until dark," and admitted his losses were heavy, with 155 men killed, wounded, and missing.¹⁰

Confederate troopers did not care for going into action dismounted and "grumbled and cursed the luck which compelled them" to fight in this manner, noted Alexander Hunter of the 4th Virginia Cavalry. "The fighting on foot was making infantrymen of them . . . it was very dangerous, much more deadly in fact, than a rattling charge or dashing rush." The Virginians opened fire as Gibbs's men advanced, and the "air seemed filled with leaden missiles from either side." With losses mounting, Gibbs brought up the rest of his brigade.¹¹

Both sides were having a tough time of it and by 4:00 p.m. the fight for the barricade was a stalemate. The Union troopers were running out of ammunition. Gibbs (No. 1) requested reinforcements and Devin's brigade took his place (No. 2).¹²

Wickham's barricades caught fire during the fighting and the flames quickly spread, forcing

his men to retreat to Lomax's position (No. 3). Cool and firmly in control, Fitz Lee ordered Wickham's troopers to occupy the right side of the road while Lomax held the left. "Hold your fire until the enemy reach thirty yards," yelled Lee. "Then take good aim and let them have it and then I want you to go over after them." Breathed's guns, meanwhile spit canister at those Federal horsemen unlucky enough to be in range.¹³

Davies's Union brigade finally arrived from Piney Branch Church and added its carbines to the stalemated fight on the left side of Brock Road. Lee's men quickly felt the weight of the Federal reinforcements (No. 4). "Men were struck every second and a perfect torrent of lead seemed to pour from the muzzles of the repeating rifles," recalled Hunter. Sensing victory, Merritt pushed several of his regiments forward to break the stalemate. The Union horsemen overwhelmed the 15th Virginia Cavalry on the Rebel left, but the rest of the line held fast. The 9th New York (Devin's brigade) "went in big on a charge dismounted," but had to hit the ground because of Breathed's raking canister fire. The 6th New York Cavalry of the same brigade also tried its luck but suffered the same fate. "The head of our column was literally smashed in," reported one of the New Yorkers.¹⁴

Heavy skirmishing also broke out along Catharpin Road, where Brig. Gen. James Gordon's and Col. Pierce Young's Rebel brigades charged the barricade protecting Gregg's troopers (No. 5). Federal artillery helped blunt some of the attacks. "Out of the woods the enemy came, yelling as only they could yell," recorded the historian of the 1st Maine Cavalry. The Confederates had "fairly got into the field when cannon and carbines opened a terrific fire, and the rebel yell was turned into a whine as they quickly disappeared in the woods."¹⁵

Darkness ended the fighting. Gregg pulled back to Todd's Tavern. Gibbs's and Devin's brigades were about a mile east of the tavern on Brock Road, while Custer's men bedded down where Brock Road intersected with Furnace Road. Fitz Lee's men held their position about two miles from the tavern, while Hampton's Division was dispersed, with Young's Brigade near Shady Grove Corner and Rosser's men just north of Corbin's Bridge near the Rowe house.¹⁶

