Spring 2017

Form over function: How the Confederate oligarchy's pretense of conventional military legitimacy abandoned the legitimate American military spirit

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Form Over Function: How the Confederate Oligarchy’s Pretense of Conventional Military Legitimacy Abandoned the Legitimate American Military Spirit

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A thesis project submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

May 2017

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Dedication

To my wife, Emily, and to my son, Liam, who both gracefully endured my endless research, burgeoning stacks of old history tomes, and repeated trips to apparently obscure battlefields, archives, and libraries. And to my parents, who always encouraged my endeavors.
Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank Dr. P. David Dillard for his patience, wisdom, and open-mindedness. Dr. Dillard provided me with excellent direction on irregular warfare’s relevance, the key sources, and the most effective writing and analytical techniques. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Rebecca Brannon, who graciously stepped out of the social history realm to provide me with thoughtful advice on making South Carolina history interesting, relevant, and accurate. I also want to thank Dr. Steve Guerrier for his useful and sound political and military theoretical expertise and guidance. Lastly, I would like to thank the entire James Madison University History Department Faculty for granting me the golden opportunity to pursue my true academic calling, US history.
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Abstract

In the Summer of 1864, Confederate General Robert E. Lee tasked Major General Jubal Early to protect the Army of Northern Virginia’s rear by defending the strategically vital Shenandoah Valley from Union conquest. By the Fall, Early was losing decisively, hopelessly outnumbered, and making no strategic refinements. He never seriously attempted to synchronize his Valley operations with Colonel John S. Mosby’s nearby 43rd Ranger Battalion, despite ominous reversals and Mosby’s attempts to cooperate.

Mosby was a gifted tactician who patterned his actions after his revolutionary hero, Brigadier General Francis Marion. He achieved his dream of being a “partisan” like Marion by organizing and leading Virginians behind enemy lines in hit-and-run raids against the Bluecoats. Like Early, the Patriot Major General Nathanael Greene had been significantly outmatched in the Carolinas in 1780. He had turned the tables on the British with a plan that combined European-style pitched battles with guerilla raids.

Greene strategically defeated Major General Charles Cornwallis’ Redcoats in 1781 by providing partisans like Marion with clear direction and a sense of purpose. He recognized Marion’s skill and provided him with written orders to provide intelligence, attack supply lines, and suppress Loyalists. By contrast, Early never nested Mosby’s Rangers into his operations, even when defeat appeared obvious. Greene had created opportunities with a spirit of humility and cooperation in 1780; in 1864, Early denied Mosby’s nearby Rangers any real opportunities to effectively influence his forlorn conventional strategy against Major General Phillip Sheridan’s vastly larger army.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

“Guerilla warfare” is integral to world and US military history. Military theorist Max Boot describes “guerilla,” or “irregular” warfare as “hit-and-run tactics by an armed group directed primarily against a government and its security forces for political or religious reasons.” The term “guerilla” originated from Spain’s “petite guerre,” or small war (1808-1814) against Napoleon’s army. Patriot Brigadier General Francis Marion and Confederate Colonel John S. Mosby perfected guerilla warfare during the American Revolution (1775-1783) and Civil War (1861-1865). They were “partisans”—officially-sanctioned officers who assisted regular armies by organizing and leading local inhabitants in attacks against the flanks and rear of enemy armies. As “partisans” they optimized “asymmetric tactics”—attacks calculated for maximum “political and informational impact” with the lowest possible risk for the insurgents. Their vastly outmatched rebel governments adopted “hybrid strategies” that combined conventional and asymmetric warfare to compensate for material inferiority. Their political and military leaders, however, reflected different societies and national goals. Most historians agree that the Confederacy’s unbending dedication to the status quo was fundamentally less democratic than the Patriots’ “Whig” ideology.¹ A divergence of ideological goals

partially explains why Patriot Major General Nathanael Greene embraced partisan warfare during his 1780 Southern Campaign, while Confederate Major General Jubal Early avoided unconventional tactics in Northern Virginia in 1864. Greene and Early both lacked experience as independent commanders, but Early’s choices clearly reflected more conservative ideals. Greene was more willing to pursue a hybrid strategy and proactively coordinate his efforts with available partisans. Was Greene more realistic than Early? Might Greene’s example have been instructive to Early? Could Early have succeeded by using every available option, including Mosby’s command?

Primary accounts from prominent Whig participants of the Southern Campaign elucidate Marion’s importance to the success of Greene’s hybrid strategy. There are a number of excellent primary accounts concerning the guerrilla war in the South. Greene’s Papers are a compilation of his letters, reports, and war correspondence that cover his leadership and cooperation with Marion and other partisans. William Dobein James’ A Sketch of the Life of Brig. Gen. Francis Marion and a History of His Brigade (1821) is the only complete primary account of Marion’s Brigade from a partisan who joined Marion at the age of fifteen. While James’ timeline is occasionally confused, his narrative combines his own eyewitness accounts and fellow soldiers’ reminiscences. General Henry “Lighthorse Harry” Lee’s Memoirs provide an account of Marion’s operations from one of the war’s most competent leaders. Lee describes his cooperation with Marion, including raids, strategic choices, tactics, and his own assessment of Marion. The Papers of South Carolina Governor John Rutledge, Henry Laurens, William Davie, and

with “Patriot,” while “Tory” became synonymous with “Loyalism,” or loyalty to Great Britain.
James Iredell contextualize the southern war and the impact of Marion’s actions. General Peter Horry, Marion’s cavalier commander, wrote “transcripts” for the novelist Mason Locke “Parson” Weems for an early-nineteenth-century biography of Marion. Although Weems’ subsequent work is of little historical value, Horry’s transcripts provide detailed accounts of Marion’s guerilla raids. *The Documentary History of the American Revolution*, William Gibbes, ed., also provides much of Marion’s war correspondence. *Unwearied Patience and Fortitude: Francis Marion’s Orderly Book*, Patrick O’Kelley, ed., provides invaluable information and commentaries on Marion’s command philosophy, discipline, and operations. General William Moultrie and the Whig politician Dr. David Ramsay’s American Revolutionary narratives additionally provide excellent background that highlight Marion’s major contributions.

Primary British actors provide a contrastingly negative account of Marion’s Brigade. *The Cornwallis Papers: The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in The Southern Theatre of the American Revolutionary War*, Ian Saberton ed., is a compilation of the correspondence of British General Lord Charles Cornwallis, who commanded British forces during the entire Southern Campaign. Cornwallis’ *Papers* span from the opening of the Siege of Charleston on April 1, 1780, to his surrender at Yorktown on October 19, 1781. His military correspondence dramatically recounts how Marion’s attacks on Loyalists, outposts, and supply lines ground British operations to a halt. Other key British sources include post-war histories authored by General Banastre Tarleton, Cornwallis’ cavalry commander; General Henry Clinton, the overall North American British commander and architect of the Southern Campaign; and Charles Stedman, Cornwallis’ commissary general. *The Memoirs* of southern Loyalists like Alexander Chesney and
Roger Lamb describe how Revolutionary irregular militia gained the upper hand in the partisan war. Loyalist articles and editorials in the *Royal Gazette* (Charleston, S.C.), *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, and the *South Carolina Gazette and American Journal*, demonstrate crown supporters’ use of print media as counterpropaganda to the political impact of Marion’s raids. British newspapers like the *London Gazette*, as well as the *Memoirs* and *Correspondence* of Royal officials illuminate the partisans’ influence on domestic war support.²

Mosby’s success created a similar polarity of primary supporters and detractors. Confederate sources generally herald Mosby as a southern hero and symbol of defiance. *The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (OR) contains the most important correspondence between General Robert E. Lee and his subordinate commanders, including Mosby. The OR details the extent of Mosby’s cooperation with Generals Lee and James Ewell Brown (JEB) Stuart, the impact of his raids, and the strategic relevance of guerilla warfare. Major Generals Jubal Early and John B. Gordon’s *Memoirs* provide useful information on Confederate strategic decisions and developments during the Shenandoah Valley Campaigns of 1864, as well as Early’s strategic thinking and decision not to utilize asymmetric warfare. Mosby’s *Papers* are at several locations, including the University of Virginia, the Virginia Historical Society, and the Library of Congress. They contain Mosby’s personal and military correspondence before, during, and after the war. *The Letters of John S. Mosby*, edited by Adele H.

Mitchell, provides important details on the creation of Mosby’s command, Lee and Stuart’s perception of partisans, and the Berryville Wagon Raid. *Mosby’s War Reminiscences and Stuart’s Cavalry Campaigns* (1887), *Stuart’s Cavalry in the Gettysburg Campaign* (1908), and *The Memoirs of Colonel John S. Mosby* (1917) are Mosby’s essential reflections and reminiscences of his contribution to the war. *Reminiscences* focuses on his guerilla raids until June 1863; *Stuart’s Cavalry* covers his reconnaissance for Stuart prior to the battle of Gettysburg; *Memoirs* recounts his early life, enlistment, and details about his Valley exploits against Sheridan. Former Rangers including John Scott, John M. Crawford, John W. Munson, and John Alexander also wrote important *Memoirs* and *Reminiscences* that describe the aggressive operations and proliferation of Mosby’s 43rd Ranger Battalion throughout 1864. The *Diaries* of the war clerk JB Jones and the aristocrat Mary Boykin Chesnutt provide essential Confederate political commentaries regarding major strategic developments.

Northern sources underscore Mosby’s destructive impact on Union war aims. General Ulysses S. Grant and Major General Phillip Sheridan’s *OR* correspondence reveal how Mosby’s raids disrupted Sheridan’s Valley strategy, and what counter-guerilla operations he ultimately implemented. Grant and Sheridan’s *Memoirs* additionally provide general, if somewhat whitewashed accounts of Federal counterinsurgency efforts throughout Northern Virginia that omit details about their controversial retaliatory summary executions of guerillas. Hundreds of newspapers on both sides of the divide, but especially in New York and Richmond, amplify the political and informational impact of Mosby’s raids in the North and South. Eyewitness Union accounts that testify to the tactical élan and psychological dominance of Mosby’s Rangers include Frederic
Denison’s *Sabres and Spurs: The First Regiment Rhode Island Cavalry in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (1876), and Thomas W. Smith’s *The Story of a Cavalry Regiment: “Scott’s 900,” Eleventh New York Cavalry* (1897). The *Diaries* of Union Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and the attorney George Templeton Strong provide excellent insight into the war’s political impact on northern voters, as well as how the newspapers’ coverage of Union failures negatively affected Union morale. Like Marion, Mosby’s asymmetric raids exploited sensational press coverage and enemy hysteria to build an aura of invincibility that inspired and symbolized rebel resistance, while creating irrational fear and hatred among enemies. Their success in using their regional talents, resources, tactical skills, and surprise and fear as force multipliers, all originate from ancient guerilla warfare principles.

Classic and modern military treatises, guerilla histories, and counterinsurgency manuals help to explain why Marion and Mosby’s campaigns were so effective. Carl Von Clausewitz’s *On War* (1832) provides excellent information on guerilla warfare theory. John Ellis’ *A Short History of Guerilla Warfare* (1976) provides a useful overview of irregular warfare from ancient to modern times. Walter Laqueur’s *Guerilla Warfare: A Historical and Critical Study* (1998) is an international narrative of guerilla warfare and insurgent theory throughout history with irregular warfare case studies, leaders, and their theories from ancient to modern times. Max Boot’s *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present* (2013) is another global history that provides vignettes of asymmetric warfare from biblical times to the present. Ian Beckett’s *Encyclopedia of Guerilla Warfare* (1999) is a reference work that provides encyclopedic summaries of guerilla leaders, techniques, and campaigns. Andrew J. Birtle’s *U.S. Army

Francis Marion (1732-1795) was no terrorist. As a Continental officer, he led a guerilla force varying between sixteen and 1000 men in a campaign against enemy supply lines that upended British control of eastern South Carolina between August 1780 and September 1781. Tradition has it that he became known as the “Swamp Fox” when British Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton allegedly said “as for this damned old fox, the Devil himself could not catch him.” General Peter Horry unwittingly enabled the novelist Mason Locke “Parson” Weems to produce a mythologized neoclassical-style biography that portrayed him as the knightly “Washington of the South” in the early-nineteenth-century. William Gilmore Simms’ subsequent biography only perpetuated Marion’s “knight in shining armor” legend spawned by Weems. Military historian Don Higginbotham points out that US military history of the later “Progressive-era” was

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3 The “Low Country” describes the coastal wetland region of swamps, marshes, and interlocking creeks and rivers that roughly spans from Wilmington, N.C. in the north, to the Georgia sea-islands in the south, and inland roughly sixty miles; Hugh F. Rankin, Francis Marion: The Swamp Fox (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1973), 113.
dominated by soldier-historians who disparaged militia as unruly farmers. Post-World War II Revolutionary War monographs, however, provided increasingly objective analyses of partisan exploits, and in 1973 historian Hugh F. Rankin’s *Francis Marion: The Swamp Fox* became Marion’s first professional biography. Rankin argued that Marion’s life was “like a sandwich—a highly spiced center between two slabs of rather dry bread,” and that he was “a natural partisan leader and was able to utilize a relatively small striking force to its greatest potential—his primary weapon was the element of surprise.” His overall positive account conceded that the ruthless Swamp Fox was no “knight in shining armor.” Rankin and other post-World War II historians acknowledge irregular militia’s importance. While historians like Wayne Lee blame the militia’s poor organizational structure for the South’s violent war of reprisals, none deny that Continental military success was enabled by cooperative partisans.  

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John Singleton Mosby (1833-1916) was deeply influenced early by Weems’ literature and successfully applied the Swamp Fox’s principles during the Civil War. Despite the praise of Generals Robert E. Lee, Ulysses S. Grant, and Phillip Sheridan, Mosby’s military genius was overshadowed by defeat. He was engulfed by a volatile mixture of northern novels and films that portrayed him as a villain and “Lost Cause” entertainment that glorified his exploits. Historians Paul Ashdown and Edward Caudill explain that his myth arose because he “inspire[d]…interest in the press and, later, in film, novels, television, and even among scholars.”

The second-order effect of the terror that Rangers created in Union soldiers’ minds was that Mosby became a bogeyman among many northerners. The dime novel *Jack Mosby, the Guerilla* (1864) portrays Mosby as a nefarious pirate who tortures prisoners and tries to burn New York City by setting a phosphorous-soaked bed ablaze in the Astor House Hotel. Subsequent novels like *Surry of Eagle’s Nest* (1866) and *Mosby’s Night Hawk* (1931) conversely portray Mosby as a noble and heroic partisan. Mosby and several former Rangers wrote *Memoirs* to attempt to set the record straight. The journalist Virgil Carrington Jones finally wrote his first professional biography, *Ranger Mosby* (1944), which emphasized Civil War

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actions and was based on family and soldier interviews and correspondence. Jones’s biography and subsequent broader monograph on guerillas are considered credible by modern historians. Historian Bruce Catton asserted that Civil War histories prior to Jones had portrayed guerilla warfare as a “colorful, annoying, but largely unimportant side issue.” More professional analyses of guerilla warfare emerged in the 1980s, despite the continued insistence by historians like Gerald Linderman that all Confederate guerillas, including Mosby, were simply considered vermin by regular soldiers. 8

Kevin H. Siepel’s professional biography Rebel: The Life and Times of John Singleton Mosby (1983) argues that had Mosby “fought on the winning side, he would undoubtedly be remembered as a national hero.” Jeffry D. Wert’s Mosby’s Rangers: The True Adventures of the Most Famous Command of the Civil War (1990), is a 43rd Ranger Battalion military history that asserts that Mosby’s Rangers were effective but did not alter the course of the war. James A. Ramage’s subsequent biography, Gray Ghost: The Life of Col. John Singleton Mosby (1999), argues that his personality and talent for ruthless tactics made him the ultimate partisan leader. Paul Ashdown and Edward Caudill’s The Mosby Myth: A Confederate Hero in Life and Legend (2002) academically assesses Mosby’s complex legacy by asserting that the “Mosby Myth continues to intrigue us because it represents something grandly irrepressible and yet paradoxical in the American spirit.” 9

While these historians refuse to admit that Mosby strategically

altered the war, historian James McPherson argues that “guerillas forced Sheridan to
detach a third of his front-line force and prevented him from carrying out Grant’s original
orders to move east across the Blue Ridge and come up on Lee’s rear at Petersburg.” Per
Donald Sutherland’s A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerillas in the American
Civil War (2009), “guerillas…changed the nature of the war” by increasing the violence
and length of the conflict, which convinced Union policymakers to adopt a “hard war”
policy against civilians. The current academic rub is between historians like Siepel, who
contend that guerillas benefited southern war aims; and those like Sutherland, who
counter that partisans exacerbated southern defeat by provoking reprisals. More than
revolutionary partisans, the emotional debate over the legitimacy of Confederate
partisans continues amid the expansion of guerilla scholarship.10

Was Mosby irreconcilable with southern strategy, or did the Confederacy fail to
recognize a good thing when they saw it? Mosby’s greatest strength as a partisan was his
lack of West Point training, which his mentor Stuart, and eventually Lee seemed to
recognize. Both the British and the Union naturally overreacted to partisan raids by
abusing and alienating that very same population on whose support the British, but not so
much Union success relied. Cornwallis’ overuse of blunt force effectively strengthened
Marion, who enabled Greene to clear the Carolinas. Mosby defied great odds with
remarkable talent, but was excluded from the West Point elite’s losing team.

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Famous Command of the Civil War, 22; James A. Ramage, Gray Ghost: The Life of Col.
John Singleton Mosby, 2nd ed. (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 2010), 2-6.
10 James McPherson, Ordeal By Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction. 4th ed. (New
York: McGraw Hill, 2010), 479; Ramage, Gray Ghost, xxxii-xxxiii; Daniel E.
Sutherland, A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerillas in the American Civil War
Furthermore, the scope of his raids was ultimately too limited to weaken the Union Army sufficiently to change the war’s outcome. Like Marion, Mosby went asymmetric because he fought from a position of weakness. Both leaders excelled at taking small tactical bites with lightning raids at places of their time and choosing to politically and militarily weaken their foes. Their victories sparked fear in their enemies, increased popular operational support for their cause, and expanded their territorial control among the disaffected. Mosby’s rise by unconventional means was perceived as a threat by jealous elements within the elitist Confederate power structure and was a bad omen for the South. Both Marion and Mosby brilliantly destabilized enemy occupation forces, but Marion’s success was leveraged by Greene; Mosby’s triumphs were ignored by Early. The contrast between Patriot and Confederate war aims becomes clearer when one compares Greene, the resourceful blacksmith’s son who deliberately leveraged guerilla warfare as an effective tool; and Early, a haughty West Pointer and attorney who arrogantly refused to deploy guerillas. Greene deliberately enabled Marion to create the conditions to reverse the balance of power. Mosby’s skill and potential was ignored, yet among Confederate commanders, he alone retained the tactical initiative amid southern defeat. Why did the Confederacy and General Early disregard Mosby’s strategic potential at such a critical juncture of the war?

I propose to compare Marion’s ambush of Major Robert McLeroth at Halfway Swamp on December 12, 1780 with Mosby’s ambush of Sheridan’s wagon train at Berryville on August 13, 1864, to prove that the Confederate elitist mindset, as manifested by Early’s unwise refusal to embrace hybrid warfare, contributed to the Confederate loss of the Valley and ultimate defeat. By first contextualizing eighteenth
and nineteenth-century U.S. notions of virtuous warfare, and then comparing Greene’s humble incorporation of Marion into his hybrid strategy with Early’s refusal to fully utilize Mosby’s talents, I will reveal that the Confederate establishment valued form over strategic function. The first chapter will establish that Marion and Mosby were similar high-caliber partisans by chronicling their efficient and practical application of guerilla principles within the context of unique historical, regional, socioeconomic, technological, political, and strategic conditions. The second chapter will explain how Marion’s historically misunderstood ambush of Major Robert McLeroth on December 12, 1780 at Halfway Swamp tipped the scales to create a regional power shift which enabled his unit’s transition into the conventional regional power, and thereby facilitated Greene’s successful campaign. This chapter will explain why Marion’s small raid within Greene’s well-defined and unified strategy added to the cumulative effect of previous raids to trigger the critical mass necessary to shift the southern balance of power. The third chapter will explain why Mosby’s brilliant Berryville supply train ambush on August 13, 1864, represented a strategic windfall that was squandered by a besieged war department whose dedication to the status quo was reflected by Early’s determined refusal to embrace hybrid warfare. The humble Greene would never have understood Early’s over-inflated elitist pride which influenced his decision to remain inflexible in the face of certain defeat.
CHAPTER 2

The Underdogs of War: How the Southern Partisans Francis Marion And John S. Mosby Offset Weakness by Leveraging Their Strengths

United States military history was once characterized by practical solutions. Successful commanders who adopted courses of action based on their armies’ capabilities and limitations compensated for material disadvantages with hybrid combinations of regular and partisan forces. Modern insurgencies seem unique, but guerilla warfare by regional inhabitants against the flanks and rear areas of occupation armies predominates world military history. Major Generals Charles Cornwallis and Phillip Sheridan’s guerilla woes confirmed the integral nature of unconventional warfare to the US. The historian John Ellis points out that “guerilla warfare is usually the struggle of a weak people against superior numbers and technology…[and] has to mesh with the most basic aspirations of the people and…paying attention to the social, economic, and political configurations of a particular society.” Patriot Brigadier General Francis Marion and Confederate Colonel John Singleton Mosby were optimally efficient partisans whose gravitas allowed them to offset material disadvantages by leveraging available resources asymmetrically. They immobilized stronger armies with ancient guerilla principles and mounted tactics tailored to their political and geographical terrain, manpower, technology, and strategic goals.\footnote{Andrew J. Birtle, \textit{U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860-1941} (Washington: Center of Military History, 1998), 23; In \textit{Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerilla Warfare From Ancient Times to the Present} (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013), Max Boot describes the American Revolution as an example of “hybrid warfare” because the Patriots used a “one-two punch…with the irregulars weakening the army of occupation until a conventional force could administer a coup de grace, 78;” Lord Charles Cornwallis to Sir Henry Clinton, May 26, 1781, and June 30, 1781, \textit{The Cornwallis Papers: The Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in The}
influenced conservative Confederate officials to limit the scope of his operations compared to Marion’s more essential revolutionary role. Marion and Mosby were nevertheless alike as underdogs who became the partisan masters of their times.

**The Southern People’s War**

The American Revolution was radical by eighteenth-century standards. The historian Gordon Wood argues that the Revolution was “a momentous upheaval that…altered the character of American society [and] decisively affected the course of subsequent history.” The movement obliterated the social stratification of the European “great chain of being” to create the most democratically minded people in the world. The upheaval meant different things to different people, however. Massachusetts citizens were more opposed to arbitrary revenue acts than Virginians, who were alarmed by their increasing indebtedness to British merchants after the Proclamation line of 1763 halted their land speculation and arbitrarily enforced Navigation Acts cut into their profits. Southerners like Thomas Jefferson sided with Massachusetts radicals to counter economic and political domination from British authorities who allied with merchants, slaves, and Indians to undermine planter autonomy. The 1774 Nonimportation Act’s unintended consequences enabled slaves and farmers to threaten gentry authority, which galvanized men like George Washington to fight for independence to protect the social

order. The historian Sylvia Frey argues that the southern war was a literal revolution for slaves, who exploited wartime chaos to gain their freedom. She argues that the southern war “became a war about slavery, if not a war over slavery.” Notwithstanding, South Carolina elites like Henry Laurens and Christopher Gadsden were certainly radical in the context of an eighteenth-century world in which free societies were the exception to the rule. They exemplified the colony-wide “well-bred, well-wed, well-fed, and well-read” elites who were opposed to British economic and political dominance. Laurens was radicalized by the Admiralty Courts’ attempts to make him dependent by seizing his ships in 1765. Carolina gentry like Laurens threw their support behind the Patriot government during the 1776 independence movement to escape arbitrary British domination.¹²

Great Britain’s southern invasion ignited a true “people’s war.” The Patriot David Ramsay described the significance of South Carolina’s militia which had existed since 1670:

All forms of government, hitherto of force in Carolina, agreed in this particular: that every subject or citizen should also be a soldier…The laws required every free man of suitable age, with a few necessary exemptions, to be enrolled as a member of some militia company and to be equipped and trained for public service…The people could not brook a standing army in time of peace, but were required to be always ready to defend themselves.¹³

¹³ David Ramsay, History of South Carolina, from Its First Settlement in 1670 to the Year 1808, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Newberry: WJ Duffie, 1858), 70-71.
Many southerners had been reluctant revolutionaries until the Battles of Lexington and Concord (April 19, 1775) and Breed’s Hill (June 18, 1775) spurred South Carolina’s Provincial Congress to raise three militia regiments and adopt a constitution on March 26, 1776. Royal governors theoretically controlled militia, but the tradition of colonists who elected their own officers allowed the Whigs to mobilize the militias as instruments of revolution. South Carolina’s Committee of Safety directed the newly appointed militia commanders to crack down on internal resistance to the Patriot cause. The Whig government suppressed Tories in 1776, but only managed to maintain subsequent civil control by ignoring neutral civilians.\textsuperscript{14} Most South Carolinians lacked the depth of conviction to take sides until the British invasion in June 1780 forced the issue. British General Henry Clinton’s southern plan was to “Americanize” the war by using Redcoats to empower subdued Loyalists to re-establish civil governance friendly to the crown. By forcing inhabitants to either join him or fight, however, his no-neutrality policy failed to re-establish security by effectively pitting pre-existing Whig and Tory citizen militias against each other.\textsuperscript{15} The outcome of the militias’ civil war shaped the course of the southern conflict.


British Major General Charles Cornwallis and Patriot Major General Nathanael Greene’s strategies were both militia-reliant. The Patriot victory at Saratoga in 1777 had expanded Britain’s limited North American war into a vast global conflict against France, Spain, and Holland. The American Secretary, Lord George Germain, was faced with a stalemate in the mid-Atlantic states between 1777 and 1779, as well as the necessity for home defense and Caribbean operations. He therefore shifted from a northern conquest strategy to a southern invasion plan reliant upon enabling provincial militia to re-assert themselves. Redcoats would back Loyalists who would reestablish the Empire in America by restoring the civil government and security. After Cornwallis, Clinton’s subordinate, failed to accomplish his civil-military goals by, with, and through the militia, he effectively shifted to almost purely conventional operations. Greene conversely set the conditions for Patriot victory by “never los[ing] sight of the fact that he was fighting a political war.” Despite Britain’s decreased manpower after Saratoga, Greene was cognizant of his inferiority in numbers, training, and equipment. He explained the necessity of mobilizing the militia to General George Washington:

How to employ our little force if we are attacked both in Virginia and N. Carolina at the same time is difficult to determine…This force with the occasional aid of the militia will serve to confine the enemy in their limits and render it difficult for them to subsist in the interior country…I see but little prospect of getting a force to contend with the enemy upon equal grounds and therefore must make the most of a kind of partisan war until we can levy and equip a larger force.

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16 Clinton, American Rebellion, 85-89, 110, 159-161; Pancake, Destructive War, 24-25.
17 Pancake, Destructive War, xiii, 244.
The South, however, was different from the world that Greene had known. Southern operations would be complicated by the climate, geography, and society.

An eighteenth-century southern campaign required local knowledge. Slave-based rice plantation agriculture made South Carolina the wealthiest colony and created a class divide between the politically powerful Low Country planter elite and Scotch-Irish and German Piedmont inhabitants. The Low Country coastal wetland region was laced with major and estuarial river systems, swamps, sea islands, and marshes, and extended from Georgia’s St. Lawrence River, north to North Carolina’s Cape Fear River, and sixty miles inland (See Figure 2a). The elites’ power was built on staple crop production and a slave labor force that comprised sixty-one percent of the population. Frey breaks down the demographics:

In 1775 South Carolina’s white population was an estimated 70,000, the slave population approximately 100,000. Of these, 14,302 whites and 72,743 blacks clustered in the three Low Country districts of Beaufort, Charleston, and Georgetown; 55,689 whites and 27,253 blacks lived in the backcountry districts of Camden, Cheraw, Ninety Six, and Georgetown.19

The Scottish surveyor James Whitelaw observed that southern coastal rivers made travel difficult, and that “the good land lies mostly in narrow strips along the water sides.” The Savannah, Salkehatchie, Edisto, Wateree, and Pee Dee Rivers were major commercial, communication, and military arteries. Along those rivers were the large-scale plantations of planter-elites like John Rutledge and William Drayton, who sent commodities by boat to Charleston for export. Charleston factors like Laurens and Gadsden exported rice, indigo, and lumber; and imported slaves and manufactured goods which they sold at their

19 Frey, Water from the Rock, 10.
stores located near ferries within the river complex. The Charleston elite monopolized politics and society.\textsuperscript{20} Such were the socioeconomic and physical obstacles for a republican-based military uprising.

Greene’s success hinged on the assistance of knowledgeable local leaders. Control of river planter communities was strategically vital. When Cornwallis invaded with 4,000 Redcoats in June 1780, he attempted to pacify the interior by establishing a chain of river-supported combat outposts. Georgetown was accessible by sea; Cheraw Hill was connected to Georgetown by the Pee Dee River; Camden, which became his principle outpost and supply node, was located on the Wateree, tributary to the Santee. Rocky Mount was located further along the Wateree; Ninety Six was close to the Saluda; and Augusta was located on the Savannah. Essential supplies like ammunition, gunpowder, salt, rum, and clothing were shipped from Charleston up the Ashley River to Friday’s Ferry, transshipped by land to the Santee, and then sent by flatboat to Camden. Cornwallis relied on Royal Militia and slaves to procure crops and livestock from the countryside, but counterinsurgency and offensive operations required the functionality of his supply “magazines” and “chain of communications.” He established a line of posts at Biggen’s, Nelson’s, and Scott’s Lake to provide a military presence and facilitate the supply flow from Charleston to Camden.\textsuperscript{21} The interior outposts’ vitality depended upon the healthy social climate and goodwill of nearby planter communities.


Marion owned Northeastern South Carolina because he knew local conditions. The vitality of Greene’s combat power depended on Marion’s cooperation, who he tasked to “harass the enemies’ communications, and provid[e] intelligence in cooperation with the [new] strategic planning of the Southern Department.” Greene and his Continentals provided the strategic vision and direction for the southern war waged primarily by irregulars. He offered leadership and a core of professionals around which the irregulars steadily coalesced as circumstances improved. His operational momentum required the buy-in of Brigadier Generals Marion, Andrew Pickens, and Thomas Sumter to mobilize the resistance necessary for victory. In contrast to Major General Horatio Gates, who effectively ignored partisans, Greene tactfully recruited Marion:

I have not the honor of your acquaintance but am no stranger to your...merit. Your services...in aiding the forces and preventing the enemy from extending their limits have been very important and it is my earnest desire that you continue...Until a more permanent army can be collected in the field at present we must endeavor to keep up a Partizan War and preserve the tide of sentiment among the people as much as possible in our favor.

Cornwallis conversely sought decisive battles with what he believed was the Patriot center of gravity, Greene’s Continental core. Like a hydra, Greene broke up his army to garner strength from the countryside. He remained east of the Pee Dee River, sent Brigadier General Daniel Morgan’s 120 miles west of the Catawba River to assist partisans in western South Carolina, and eventually detached Colonel Lighthorse Harry Lee’s mounted “Legion” to assist Marion. The strategy emboldened partisans who augmented Greene and undermined Cornwallis’ offensive by suppressing Loyalists.

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22 Greene to Washington, October 31, 1780, Greene Papers, vol. 6, 447-449; Pancake, Destructive War, 54, 244.
23 Greene to Colonel Francis Marion, December 4, 1780, Greene Papers, vol. 6, 519-520.
Greene stoked the southern people’s war to such a conflagration that 2,200 militia and 400 riflemen enthusiastically joined his 1,600 Continentals at Guilford Courthouse, giving him more than two-to-one numerical superiority over Cornwallis’ 1,900 Redcoats.\textsuperscript{24} The Southern Campaign was a truly hybrid people’s war fueled by an armed citizenry.

**A Civil War by “Professionals”**

The Confederate government created a professional army to fight conventionally. One reason was Richmond’s comparatively elitist political and military establishment. Unlike the Patriots, Confederates seceded expressly to preserve slavery and protect the social order.\textsuperscript{25} Southern war-induced internal socioeconomic upheaval was ultimately suppressed by an oligarchy that established and retained political control after secession. President Jefferson Davis strove to insulate slave-based society from external and internal turmoil by maintaining a unified, harmonious, paternalistic, deferential social order. Confederate Nationalism built on republican pro-slavery ideals anti-democratically empowered elites like Davis to control the political discourse, protect planter interests, and shield society from democratic excesses. Richmond’s top-down consensus effectively scotched the interpretation, resolution, and control of revolutionary “frictions”


garnered by Confederate nationalism and independence.\textsuperscript{26} Furthermore, Davis’ suppression of political parties and dissent produced toxic factionalism that strengthened his hand by allowing him to centralize military authority and create a “levee en masse” with the first Conscription Act (April 16, 1862). In contrast to the nucleic militia-augmented Continental Army, the Confederate army was composed of all southern white men between eighteen and thirty-five, conscripted for three year enlistments. Revolutionary style irregulars who once joined and left the army at will became the minority as the war department technically embraced military theorist Baron De Jomini’s concept of a permanent, professional army of Napoleonic-style heavy battalions and “grand tactics.”\textsuperscript{27} Richmond’s ruling class redefined warfare.

Confederate and Union Armies conventionalized similarly. President Abraham Lincoln used a combination of martial law and slave emancipation (September 22, 1862) in states under rebellion to firmly secure Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri for the Union. Unlike the eighteenth-century American Secretary George Germain, Lincoln became free to devote the North’s full resources to crush the rebellion without international interference. He first appealed to southern unionists, but four-to-one numerical superiority, control of the seas, and proximity to the rebellious states meant that Federal generals, unlike Cornwallis, were never required to back local militia in


southern-occupied territory to accomplish war aims. Northern and southern state militias that supported initial manpower requirements were incorporated into regular armies by 1863. In the North, about 2,100,000 men, or half of the military aged population served; in the South three-fourths, or 850,000 men served—roughly 10,000 or less of them were ever partisans. By comparison, 56,000 British forces served in North America throughout the American Revolution; an estimated 100,000 Patriots served at some point or another, many were temporary militia. General Robert E. Lee’s largest mobile army totaled 77,000; General Washington’s army never exceeded 19,000. The Patriot Southern Campaign and Confederate Shenandoah Valley operations were ancillary to the main theaters. Variance between Patriot and Confederate unconventional reliance is clarified through quantitative comparisons of Marion and Mosby’s irregular commands with their respective regular forces. Marion’s fluid 700-to-1,000-man force was between fifteen-and-twenty-three percent the size of Greene’s fully augmented army at Guilford Courthouse. In contrast, Mosby’s 700-to-800-man 43rd Ranger Battalion was only three-to-four percent of the size of Early’s purely conventional 21,000-man army at Cedar Creek. Confederate conscription measures and the smaller role of partisans corroborates arguments that the elite slave-centric Confederate mindset precluded a real “people’s war.”

Mosby was a talented innovator enabled by his mentor, Major General James Ewell Brown (JEB) Stuart. Unlike Marion, who began guerilla operations as a Lieutenant Colonel, Mosby began as Stuart’s scout. He later reflected “that Stuart was the only [officer]…who expected that [he] would accomplish anything.” After his superior performance convinced Stuart to allow him to operate behind enemy lines in late 1862, his raids escalated from tactical pinpricks to major Union embarrassments. Whereas Marion had taken charge of a spontaneous resistance movement against occupiers, Mosby was granted an independent command for pioneering sustained irregular warfare behind a well-defined salient of enemy picket lines. Just as Greene leaned on Marion, Stuart and Lee increasingly utilized partisans like Mosby and Captain Hanse McNeill. As attrition subtracted leadership, however, less gifted leaders like Major General Jubal Early never embraced the concept of clandestine small unit operations. The predominant strategic obsession with largescale linear battles was reflected by General John B. Hood’s adjutant:

The crisis is upon us…I hold it to be the paramount duty of every patriot in the land to put his shoulder to the wheel, and make one grand unanimous effort to defeat the enemy and drive him back at every point…

Confederate creativity diminished as Grant’s 1864 coordinated offensive shrank Lee’s manpower and resources, freedom of maneuver, and leadership pool. Guerilla warfare had almost amounted to a lost art until a few independent-minded officers demonstrated that avoiding enemy strong points and attacking weak points behind enemy lines was feasible. While Generals Nathan B. Forrest and John H. Morgan conducted the largest partisan raids in the Mississippi River Valley, Virginia produced its own unique variant.\textsuperscript{32}

Virginia was the most powerful southern state. Colonial Virginia had resembled South Carolina, but slave-based antebellum transportation and industrial advancements facilitated the Old Dominion’s unparalleled state-wide economic diversification and growth. The historian Aaron Sheehan-Dean argues that slavery’s widespread application socioeconomically fused formerly disparate regions:

Farmers used slaves in all types of agricultural production in the state, from the tobacco plantations of the central and southern Piedmont to the wheat and cornfields of the Valley. Slaveowners also used their slaves in a growing number of industrial pursuits, from the Kanawha salt works to the Shenandoah ironworks to the forges of Richmond.\textsuperscript{33}

Unlike divided revolutionary South Carolina, and excepting West Virginia, slavery’s profitability coupled with internal improvements to mitigate previous “intra-state” divisions and facilitate a fundamental “unity of purpose” among Confederate Virginians. Comprehensive antebellum transportation developments established the connectivity of once separate regions into an integrated society with shared political, social, and


\textsuperscript{33} Aaron Sheehan-Dean, “It Is Old Virginia and We Must Have It,” \textit{Crucible of the Civil War: Virginia from Secession to Commemoration} (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 58-62.
economic interests. Large rivers like the Potomac and Rappahannock remained vital commercial and military arteries and served as successive natural defensive barriers against Union invasion. By 1861, Virginia’s internal improvements included expanded sea ports, canals, turnpikes, large urban factories, and more combined railroad mileage than all states except for New York and Pennsylvania. The Confederate government made Richmond the capital and Virginia the main theater and line of defense to protect southern infrastructure, manufacturing, and the slave base-of-support that supported the conventional war. In 1863 Mosby’s asymmetric raids behind enemy lines became a practical solution for problems which conventional tactics were ill-suited.

As Union forces repeatedly menaced Richmond, the irregular war predominated west of Washington D.C., Virginia’s northern Piedmont, throughout the Shenandoah and Bull Run Valleys, and throughout West Virginia’s northern Allegheny Mountains. Mosby’s Confederacy (See Figure 2b) consisted of Loudon, Fauquier, Fairfax, and Prince William Counties. The limitless tactical cover and concealment within the forested Bull Run and Blue Ridge Mountains, valleys, plantations, and farms made Rangers virtually impossible to apprehend or eradicate. The Piedmont was Virginia’s wealthiest region with the largest slave percentages; many counties consisted of fifty percent or more slaves. Loudoun and Fauquier County residents owned the most slaves in the state, stood

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to lose the most in the war, produced the highest enlistment rates, and were usually behind enemy lines.\textsuperscript{37} The area was traversed by strategically important railroads, along which spanned telegraph lines that provided instantaneous communication. The Baltimore and Ohio (B & O) Railroad was Washington’s key communication and sustainment line to the Old Northwest, and extended through Harper’s Ferry, a hotly contested region just north of Mosby’s Confederacy. The hub of the vital Manassas Gap (MGR) and Orange and Alexandria (O & A) Railroads was Manassas, in the heart of Mosby’s Confederacy. The Union and Confederate armies both used railroads, telegraphs, and turnpikes like the Berryville and Valley Roads to coordinate their operations and mass troops. While Grant depended on the O & A to supply his army during his 1864 Overland Campaign, Sheridan attempted to refurbish the MGR, which traversed Mosby’s territory, to clear the Shenandoah Valley.\textsuperscript{38} Mosby wrought havoc on Union operations by menacing and attacking Northern Virginia’s key military infrastructure aggressively, frequently, and at will.

Stuart and Lee integrated Mosby. The Confederate Partisan Ranger Act on April 21, 1862 was an admission that regular forces alone were insufficient for handling larger and encroaching Union armies. Richmond awarded Mosby command of the Ranger Battalion in January 1863 because he demonstrated an uncanny ability to frustrate Union operations by disrupting sustainment.\textsuperscript{39} Mosby described his tangential role:

\begin{quote}
I conducted war on the theory that the end of it is to secure peace by the destruction of the resources of the enemy, with as small a loss as possible.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} Sheehan-Dean, “Confederate Enlistment,” 186-188; Mosby, \textit{Reminiscences}, 41.
\textsuperscript{39} Sherman, \textit{Memoirs}, vol. 1, 334; Mosby, \textit{Memoirs}, 146-165.
to my own side…I was directly under the orders of Stuart up to the time of his death, in May, 1864, and after that time, of Gen. Robert E. Lee, until the end of the war…In a letter received from Stuart about this, he said, ‘I heartily wish you great and increasing success in the glorious career on which you have entered.’

He functioned like Marion—scouted and performed reconnaissance for Stuart, attacked supply lines in the form of railroads and wagon trains, and ambushed isolated enemy detachments, pickets, and couriers. He also cooperated with leaders like Major General John Breckinridge and Early when they campaigned in the Shenandoah Valley. His Rangers reached peak strength and efficiency when Major General Phillip Sheridan’s Army of the Shenandoah faced Early’s outnumbered Army of the Valley. Unlike Greene, who sent Marion written communication, Early never sent Mosby any written directives or attempted serious coordination.

His unwillingness to utilize Mosby reflected his incompetence and antebellum elitism.

**The Bygone Era**

Conventional military wisdom and attitudes had changed considerably. Historian Wayne Lee asserts that Whig revolutionaries and leaders who turned to the militia to build the Continental Army had originally valued moral virtue as the key military attribute and perceived standing armies as a threat to their personal liberties. Whig ideology rooted in the English Civil War (1642-1651) and the Glorious Revolution (1688) articulated the necessity of maintaining vigilance to safeguard liberty from two

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threats—an immoral population that invites tyrannical rule; or a monarch who dominates a representative legislative body. Patriots who were denied Parliamentary representation, taxed without consent, and forced into compliance by the British Admiralty Courts and military, cited Enlightenment documents like John Locke’s “Second Treatise” to justify their “appeal to heaven” and armed resistance against British tyranny. They compromised their values to allow for the creation of a disciplined army to oppose the British, and swallowed bitter apprehensions of standing armies as corrupt instruments of tyranny.\textsuperscript{42}

Washington based his army on the European model. Most Continentals carried standard smoothbore muskets equipped with bayonets with effective ranges of about seventy-five meters. Continental armies faced British and Hessian forces in fields in which both sides massed combat power by organizing into tightly formed units that fired volleys at thirty paces before delivering bayonet charges. Revolutionary cavalrmen generally carried a saber, and either a shortened musket or a blunderbuss (muzzle-loaded shotgun). In Europe and the mid-Atlantic states, cavalry theoretically performed reconnaissance by ascertaining enemy size, composition, location, activity, and intent; counter-reconnaissance, by preventing the enemy from performing reconnaissance; shock tactics, by surprising and striking a confused enemy, or an enemy’s flanks or rear without allowing them reaction time; and pursuit, attacking retreating forces to destroy or prevent

their reorganization. The historian Charles Royster chronicles the Patriots’ revolutionary zeal, and argues that despite the Continentals’ initial poor discipline, mass desertions, and crisis of confidence following 1776 military reversals, Patriots ultimately performed commensurate with their ideals. Yet, professionalization was never universal.

The southern militia was shaped by unique conditions and attributes. Brigadier Generals Marion, Pickens, and Sumter’s men were self-reliant, skilled horsemen tempered by the Regulator Movement, five years of sporadic guerilla war, and numerous campaigns against the Cherokee. European-style shock cavalry tactics were ineffective in America’s less-developed and populated landscape. Southerners, however, were almost always mounted to negotiate their more wretched roads and restrictive terrain.

“Light-horse” Henry Lee explained the importance of horsemanship to southern society:

No country in the world affords better riders...especially the States south of Pennsylvania. The boys from seven years of age begin to mount...[and] become so completely versed...as to equal the most expert horseman anywhere.

45 Pancake, Destructive War, 53-54.
Southerners mainly abandoned European tactics in favor of their own frontier-style of fighting after the Battle of Camden on August 18, 1780. They sometimes fought from horseback, but usually rode to battle and fought dismounted. They used whatever weapons were available, including “firelock” rifles, Brown Bess and Queen Anne muskets, pistols, hatchets, crude swords, and occasionally sabers. The historian Jac Weller calls Marion “the great master of partisan surprise.” His men would typically ride up to sixty miles through the swamps to infiltrate, surround, surprise, and inflict maximum casualties at close quarters on enemies at night or at dawn. Marion’s one rifle-equipped company would typically remain beyond the grasp of enemy units and deliver deadly harassing fire; another tactic was to bait enemy units with small cavalry detachments into numerous successive ambushes. With the help of partisans, Greene officially adopted the same tactics by instructing Morgan to avoid pitched battles in favor of raids wherein “success would not greatly depend upon the numbers but on the secrecy and spirit of the attack.” Greene’s practical mindset became a foreign concept to subsequent Confederate elites.

**Suppression of a National War**

The Confederate oligarchy defined political and military protocol. Only one third of southerners owned slaves by 1861, and many valued the traditional concept of a

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citizen militia. Some Confederates, like Mosby, agreed with Lincoln that the issue of slavery had caused the war; others were compelled by honor, resented invasion, or believed that the Constitution was a compact between sovereign states. Numerous citizens and politicians like Kentucky Senator Henry C. Burnett favored a revolutionary style people’s war, or what Jomini termed a “national war.” The Richmond Enquirer even stated that “A People in Arms’ cannot be conquered.”

Nevertheless, Davis’ West Point clique dominated the military, disliked guerillas, and comprised 36.7 percent of the Officer Corps. The historian William Skelton argues that the West Point establishment “shaped in myriad ways the conduct of the war: strategy, tactics, logistics, staff operations, and civil military operations.”

Civil War tactics therefore became characterized by close-order regimental formations whereby successive two-deep lines of soldiers fired massed volleys, typically with Enfield or Springfield rifled muskets. Their weapons’ Minie balls and rifling increased maximum effective ranges to 400 yards. The historian Grady McWhiney argues that the doctrine influenced by Jomini and Dennis Hart Mahan advocating “tactical offensives,” frontal assaults, and bayonet charges, coupled with deadly new weaponry, produced the war’s horrendous casualties.

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51 Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1982), xiv-xv, 40-43; Dennis Hart Mahan, An Elementary Treatise on Advanced-Guard, Out-Post, and
improved accuracy and rates of fire meant that cavalry no longer attacked infantry lines head-on. Mounted units like Stuart’s screened for the army, performed reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance, and attempted to neutralize enemy cavalry. Nevertheless, no organization defied convention and military theory like the individualistic “young bloods” of the Confederate Cavalry.

The distinction between regular and irregular southern cavalry was blurry. Many of Forrest and Morgan’s men, for example, were temporary civilian-clad troopers who melted back into the population after raids. Like Stuart’s cavalry, everyone in Mosby’s unit was an expert rider with two “indispensable” items, pistols and horses. Their tactical proficiency supports historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s assertion that a southern “code of honor” required youth “to prove early virility” by willingness to fight, shoot, play sports, and “a duty to ride [a horse] with expertise.” General William T. Sherman described them colorfully:

War suits them and the rascals are bold to rashness and dangerous subjects in every sense…This is a larger class than most men suppose and they are the most dangerous set of men that this war has turned loose upon the world. They are splendid riders, first-rate shots, and utterly reckless. Stewart, John Morgan, Forrest, and Jackson are the types and leaders of this class.

Wyatt-Brown believed that southern society was warlike because vigilantism, lynch law, dueling, and slave patrols became “expressions of community will,” and white males’

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obligation to manage chattel slavery perpetuated southern social institutions. The Rangers built a ferocious reputation that epitomized Sherman’s observations and Wyatt-Brown’s theories.

The historian Jeffry Wert emphasizes that “the Rangers took excellent care of their mounts,” and “rode some of the finest horses in the Old Dominion.” Their weapon of choice was the six-shot, single action, .44 caliber Army Colt revolver. Rangers typically carried two revolvers and occasionally carbines or shotguns. They almost never used sabers. As they moved to enemy areas Mosby sent ahead small reconnaissance parties to scout objectives, assembled men at nearby rally points, identified concealed attack positions and arrayed the men, and then signaled the Rangers to approach the engagement areas in columns of four. After final halts in which he identified the target, he directed the Rangers forward in “helter-skelter” races in which his men swarmed and rode through their enemies in brief, intense, close-quarter engagements with pistols. Rangers familiar with the terrain often dominated comparably sized Union cavalry detachments, not only by exploiting the element of surprise, but because pistols simply outperformed sabers in close-quarter engagements. Mosby occasionally initiated attacks by directing his small, mobile artillery battery to fire shots into the surprised enemy. After lightning attacks on pickets, troop detachments, couriers, outposts, headquarters, trains, and wagon convoys, Rangers quickly dispersed into the surrounding mountains and farms. The historian Bruce Catton points out that since Confederate cavalry “could have taught circus riders tricks, the Yankees were hopelessly outclassed.” Mosby took a

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page from Marion’s playbook by sending small detachments to bait enemy units through gauntlets of successive ambushes.\textsuperscript{55} Surprise cavalry raids were a southern specialty that transcended technology.

**Irregular Solutions Across Time**

Marion and Mosby tailored partisan warfare to societal conditions and approached “people’s war[s]” economically in response to superior numbers and technology. Clausewitz asserts that in a “people’s war,” a weak army can overcome a stronger one by directing and cooperating with “militia and bands of armed civilians,” or partisans. Partisans, he said, should avoid direct confrontation with superior forces, harass enemy outposts and detachments in rear and flank areas with hit-and-run tactics calculated to inflict maximum damage with minimal risk, suppress civilian support for the enemy, and augment the professional army in conventional battles under favorable circumstances.\textsuperscript{25}

Both achieved what Jomini and Clausewitz considered the partisans’ primary goals. The “feeling of uneasiness and dread” that they created increased “a thousandfold the difficulties” of their enemies by creating hostile environments that engulfed invading units. Cornwallis described the effects of Marion’s raids in 1781:

Colonel Marion has so wrought on the minds of the people, partly by the terror of his threats and cruelty of his punishments and partly by the promise of plunder, that there was scarce an inhabitant between the Santee and the Pedee that was not in arms against us. Some parties even carried terror to the gates of Charleston.\textsuperscript{56}


\textsuperscript{56} Cornwallis to Clinton, *Cornwallis Papers*, vol. 3, 24.
In 1864, a Unionist newspaper reported that “the timid ones” are “afraid [that] Mosby will dash across the river…and burn Hagerstown,” and that “Mosby has attacked our troops at different points between Winchester and Harper’s Ferry…and has gobbled up some prisoners.” They accomplished what modern strategists refer to as the three principles of irregular warfare: the “logistical principle,” disruption of supply and communication lines to slow an enemy invasion; the “corrosion principle,” attenuation of enemy morale and civilian war support with raids that discredit, delegitimize, and destabilize the enemy occupation; and the “diversion principle,” compelling the enemy to weaken his line of battle strength by diverting troops to protect weak points such as outposts, detachments, and convoys.\(^57\) Despite their policy makers’ different decisions about irregular warfare, both were optimally efficient.

When the revolutionary government vanished as the British captured Charleston, the pre-1780 militia system “conferred upon…partisan leaders the authority” to operate. Marion’s ragged force of planters and farmers, often refugees, varied in size based on military circumstances and crop cycles.\(^27\) These “people in arms” rallied to Marion, Pickens, and Sumter in response to brazen Redcoats and Tories who often abused them and burned them out of their homes. Ramsay explained the essence of Marion’s strength:

Revenge and despair cooperated with patriotism to make these ruined men keep the field. The devouring flames sent on defenseless habitations by blind rage and brutal policy, increased not only the zeal but the number of his followers. For several months he and his party were obliged to sleep in the open air, and to shelter themselves in the thick recesses of the deep swamps.\(^58\)


As arbitrary violence swelled the militia surrounding British garrisons like storm clouds, partisans remained just beyond the grasp of the superior forces which they corroded by striking isolated detachments and supply convoys before melting into the swamps. Marion’s other major objectives were the Wateree, Congaree, Santee, and Pee Dee Rivers, which critically disrupted interior sustainment and communication. He logistically snarled Cornwallis by disrupting river and road supply and communication; corroded British strength by creating Loyalist fear and British doubt among civilians and politicians who demanded a quick victory; and diverted large numbers of Redcoats who were tasked to escort supply convoys and perform counter-guerilla operations. He gained dominance of the Low Country by December 1780, which enabled Greene’s Continentals to achieve the strategic victories that rendered Cornwallis incapable of further offensive operations. Mosby put Marion’s principles to work in Virginia.

Lincoln’s conciliatory strategy failed partly because occupied areas remained hostile. One of Mosby’s officers explained how Northern Virginia provided an enthusiastic manpower pool and ample civilian support:

Robin Hood concealed his men in the solitudes of Sherwood Forrest; Marion took refuge in the inaccessible swamps of Carolina…but Mosby in an open country finds security and dispersion among a friendly and chivalrous people…But in some instances, in order to insure greater security, the men have built themselves huts in the mountains.


Rangers validated Jomini’s concept that “[i]n mountainous countries the people are always most formidable.” They applied “classic techniques of stealth, surprise, speed, and deception….sought out weak points, [struck] their targets quickly” and disappeared. Their operations at times tied down roughly one-third of the Union Army and rendered it too weak to destroy the Army of Northern Virginia. Lincoln complained that “in no other way…does the enemy give us so much trouble, at so little expense to himself.” They also accomplished the logistical, disruption, and corrosion principles of irregular warfare.  

Sheridan’s Valley Campaign was a case in point. Mosby’s sensational kidnapping of generals, destruction of wagon convoys, and elimination of the MGR as a supply line convinced Sheridan not to use the Valley as an avenue of advance against Charlottesville in 1864. Mosby’s attacks were sensationalized by newspapers, which aided his creation and full exploitation of fear in the minds of Union soldiers. After the war, Sheridan confessed that Mosby was the “most redoubtable” guerilla leader because he “depleted [Sheridan’s] line-of-battle strength [by] necessitating…large escorts for…[his] supply-trains.”

Marion and Mosby discovered the formula for success by using limited resources to the greatest effect. Just as Shun Tzu and Genghis Khan applied guerilla tactics to cope with bigger armies, Marion and Mosby similarly achieved asymmetric mastery. They targeted vulnerable units and unsympathetic civilians, but their success relied on a

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63 Jack Weatherford’s *Genghis Khan and the Making of the Modern World* (New York: Random House, 2004), 61, describes how Temujin (Genghis Khan) successfully used guerilla tactics to overcome a larger army.
sympathetic populace. Under their enemies’ noses they cooperated with civilians who enthusiastically supported them from the swamps and mountains. Slave uprisings never significantly affected revolutionary partisans, but Sheridan’s Valley devastation and slave emancipation significantly undermined Mosby’s civilian support. Their greatest asset was the horse, which expanded their tactical capabilities by allowing freedom of movement. Their skills and regional familiarity made them efficient partisans. While Marion enabled Greene’s Continentals to defeat Cornwallis and clear the South, Mosby’s Rangers retained a hollow tactical initiative as the Confederate strategy disintegrated under the Union military. Yet both proved that guerilla principles transcend time.

Two underdogs became archetypal partisans. It is difficult to measure the success of a counterinsurgency and, likewise, to quantify the strategic impact of guerillas. The similar nature and effectiveness of their raids are clear, however. That their psychological impact and legends grew out of proportion with their exploits signifies success: they penetrated their enemies’ psyches and captured Americans’ imaginations. While historians have acknowledged their skill, Mosby’s paradoxical image is tainted by the “slave power” defeat, and associated with the garden variety of guerillas that remain a touchstone of academic debate. Many historians insist, however, that neither revolutionary nor Civil War partisans should be ignored. The common observation that armies are reflections of their societies applies to Marion and Mosby. While guerilla warfare never produced a Confederate victory, neither did conventional operations. Partisan warfare was a phenomenon that devastated the Low Country and Valley alike. Revolutionary victory provided hope and glory to survivors of the mayhem, but for Valley residents the partisan war stoked the flames of defeat. Outcomes aside, Marion
and Mosby were underdogs who used their strengths and limited resources to cope with impossible odds and, ironically, neither the British nor the Union armies ever effectively coped with them.
Figure 2a. The Carolina Low Country

Figure 2b. Mosby’s Confederacy

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CHAPTER 3

Out-Politicked: How Francis Marion’s Ambush of Major Robert McLeroth Helped to Shift the Southern Balance of Power and Shape the War

Francis Marion personified South Carolina’s Low Country military establishment. The Low Country is a wetland region of major and estuarial river systems that spans from the Georgia Sea Islands to Wilmington, North Carolina, and roughly sixty miles inland (See Figure 3a). Marion was born at Goatfield Plantation, and grew up around the Santee, Black, and Pee Dee Rivers. He gained tactical experience during the Cherokee War (1760-1761) as a young lieutenant when his platoon cleared a Cherokee war party from a dangerous pass near Etchoe, North Carolina. His supervisor called him a “hardy soldier, and an excellent partisan officer.” When the American Revolution began in 1775, Marion was a high-value individual—a seasoned and connected leader in sync with local political and geographic terrain. He owned a Santee River plantation by 1773, and represented St. John’s Parish in the first Provincial Congress in 1775. He joined South Carolina’s Second Continental Regiment as a captain and rose to lieutenant-colonel for his firm combat and garrison leadership. Marion countered Lord Charles Cornwallis’ invasion and occupation of South Carolina in the summer of 1780 by leading his constituents in a year-long hit-and-run campaign that critically weakened British control. Major General Nathanael Greene needed serious help when he took over a shattered Continental Army in Charlotte, North Carolina on December 2, 1780. Greene integrated Marion’s command into his strategy. He succeeded by fully leveraging Marion’s guerillas against British

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supply lines and manpower. Marion wrested northeastern South Carolina from Cornwallis’ grip as Greene drew him into North Carolina. Marion’s campaign culminated on December 12th at Halfway Swamp, when he shifted the regional balance of power by crippling Cornwallis’ sustainment and civilian support network sufficiently to facilitate Greene’s successful Southern Campaign.

Nathanael Greene was faced with a raw southern deal when he first reached Charlotte. He could do little more than menace Cornwallis’ vastly superior army at Winnsboro, South Carolina. British General Henry Clinton’s capture of Charleston (May 12, 1780) and the entire southern army of 5,600 men had been the most significant British victory of the American Revolution. The pro-war Whitehall politicians were reinvigorated, and the Patriot war effort received a devastating blow that preceded Major General Benedict Arnold’s treason, Ethan Allen’s Vermont separatist movement, and Continental Army officer mutinies. Cornwallis, Clinton’s second-in-command, had invaded the Carolina interior in early June and established combat outposts in Augusta, Ninety-Six, Camden, Rocky Mount, Cheraw, and Georgetown (See Figure 3b). The outposts formed an arc from Georgetown to Augusta, discouraged resistance, and projected British power. Between Charleston and the interior posts were smaller subsidiary depots along the major river systems that were occupied by Redcoats,

Cornwallis’ destruction of a second Continental Army under Major General Horatio Gates at Camden (August 16, 1780) destroyed the last Patriot conventional force in the South. What Greene inherited when he took command of Gates’ “army” were approximately 950 Continentals and 1500 militiamen who were disorganized, malnourished, and half naked. The military situation had looked much more promising after the Patriot victory in Saratoga (1777), as France, Spain, and Holland all declared war on Britain, challenged British naval supremacy, and siphoned away British North American troops. Despite decreased manpower in 1780, Clinton commanded 33,893 North American soldiers; in the South, Cornwallis commanded a combined 6,700-man Loyalist and Regular force. Greene’s recognition of his meager resources and prescient grasp of an asymmetric situation on the ground influenced his deliberate choice of an unconventional strategy.

There was no going back to a Gates-style confrontation with Cornwallis’ world-class army in a narrow field whereby tightly formed armies exchanged massed musket volleys at 100 yards before delivering bayonet charges. Charles Stedman, Cornwallis’ commissary general, commented after the war that Greene was “sensible that his present force was too weak to attempt any direct operation against…Cornwallis…but

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might…spirit up the militia, without whose assistance and cooperation he saw that he
could do nothing effectual.” Greene’s strategy reflected reality. He ironically
demonstrated a better understanding of Saratoga’s strategic lessons than Gates. In 1777,
Gates’ New England subordinates had executed a Fabian-style fighting withdrawal
southward up the forested Champlain Valley in which small militia bands obstructed,
harassed, sniped, and attacked the flanks and rear of British Major General John
Burgoyne’s superior army. Patriots thus corroded Burgoyne’s army as it penetrated New
York by cutting his long supply lines and destroying foraging parties through lightning
attacks acknowledged by modern theorists as guerilla raids. The overwhelming and
concerted turnout of guerillas under leaders like Brigadier General John Stark helped
produce a Patriot victory by augmenting Gates’ army and engulfing Burgoyne’s. Greene
adapted the Saratoga strategic blueprint to the South by incorporating available and well-
established local guerillas—Marion, Thomas Sumter, and Andrew Pickens—into a
genuinely hybrid strategy that combined conventional and guerilla operations. Military
theorist Max Boot characterizes Marion’s raids as asymmetric because they politically
delegitimized and weakened the British with minimal insurgent casualties. Marion clearly
fit Carl Von Clausewitz and Mao Tse-tung’s model of a partisan as an officially
sanctioned Continental officer who assisted the regular army by organizing and leading
local inhabitants in asymmetric raids.70 Greene embraced a hybrid strategy because he
had to use available resources and a plan that might actually work.

70 Major General Nathanael Greene to General George Washington, October 31, 1780,
Greene to Colonel Francis Marion, December 4, 1780, The Papers of General Nathanael
Greene, vol. 6, Richard K. Showman and others, eds. (Chapel Hill: The University of
Greene to Brigadier General Thomas Polk, April 3, 1781, The William Richardson Davie
Partisans would constrict British operations to facilitate Continental operations. As Greene entered South Carolina from Charlotte, he sent written orders to Marion, Sumter, and Pickens that articulated a clear plan of cooperation. Marion, however, possessed the key to Greene’s success. He was geographically poised to threaten the major Santee and Pee Dee River systems that were the vital supply conduits between British-occupied Charleston and Georgetown, and Cornwallis’ strategic outposts and army in the interior. To that end, Greene deliberately tasked Marion to disrupt British supply lines, subdue Loyalists, and provide intelligence. To cope with Cornwallis’ superior 4000-man mobile army and his own acute supply challenges, Greene divided his army and executed a strategic withdrawal as a means to prolong Britain’s increasingly unpopular war and achieve the material parity necessary to fight decisive battles. The distance between two smaller Continental armies, Greene in the East, and Brigadier General Daniel Morgan in the West, enabled ease of supply from the devastated countryside; emboldened state-wide partisan operations; and attenuated Cornwallis by baiting him to divide his own army and extend his increasingly vulnerable supply lines deep into hostile territory.71 Marion would attack Cornwallis’ sustainment vitals to enable


Greene and Brigadier General Daniel Morgan to fight on more equal terms in Cornwallis’
front, and eventually win strategic victories at Cowpens (January 17, 1781) and Guilford
Courthouse (March 15, 1781).72

Greene’s plan exploited a situation that had ripened prior to his arrival. The
British southern strategy was collapsing. Clinton’s altruistic intent had been for “loyal
subjects” to be “assist[ed] in the restoration of civil government and peace” when the
situation permitted. His strategy, however, lacked clear terms for Loyalist re-
empowerment, which amounted to murky military objectives for the officers tasked to
pacify the province. Clinton’s combined policies of conquest as a pre-condition for civil
government and racial manipulation were detrimental to his goal of “Americanizing” the
war.73 Clinton had issued the Phillipsburg proclamation on June 30, 1779, which
promised security to all slaves who escaped to the British army, but threatened to auction
those caught aiding the rebels. South Carolina’s overwhelming fugitive slave turnout in
response to the initial British invasion convinced Clinton to modify his original policy.
He tenuously retained the social order and Loyalist allies by directing Charleston’s Board
of Police to return slaves to Loyalists; Whigs’ escaped slaves served in army support
roles; and captured slaves were impressed into labor gangs.74 Clinton’s surrender terms at

72 Cornwallis to Clinton, May 26, 1781, and June 30, 1781, The Cornwallis Papers: The
Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in The Southern Theatre of the American Revolutionary
War, vol. 5, Ian Saberton, ed. (Uckfield: The Naval and Military Press, 2010); Moultrie
states in his Memoirs that “Whilst Lord Cornwallis and General Greene were opposed to
each other in North Carolina, General Marion was not idle in the lower parts of South
73 Clinton, American Rebellion, 85-89, 110, 159-161; Pancake, Destructive War, 24-25;
David R. Higgins, The Swamp Fox: Francis Marion’s Campaign in the Carolinas
74 Sylvia R. Frey, Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age
Charleston stipulated that captured Continental soldiers would become prisoners, while the 2,500 militia were “permitted to return to their homes on parole” if they remained neutral. Clinton then made another crucial policy modification before he relinquished departmental command to Cornwallis and sailed to New York. He declared his original parole terms void, and issued a new proclamation on June 3rd that required previously neutral parolees to either take a new oath to actively support “His Majesty’s government,” or be treated as enemies. British Admiral Mariot Arbuthnot, Clinton’s co-peace commissioner at Charleston, observed that “we seem to be so wedded to our military power that it will not be parted with until it cannot be avoided.” The toxicity of Clinton’s policy adjustments became clearer as Cornwallis wholeheartedly attempted to enforce them.

Loyalist re-empowerment catastrophically collapsed. In June 1780, Cornwallis organized a “Royal Militia” to serve as a provincial police for the maintenance of “peace and good order.” He reported his efforts to Clinton:

As the different districts submitted, I, with all the dispatch in my power, formed them into militia, and appointed field officers according to the old divisions of the province. I invested these field officers with civil as well as military power…This militia, both officers and soldiers, is composed of men, either of undoubted attachment in the cause of Great Britain, or whose behavior has always been moderate.

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76 Henry Clinton and Mariot Arbuthnot, “South Carolina” (Charleston: Robertson, MacDonald, and Cameron, 1780); Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 181; Arbuthnot to Germain, *Stopford-Sackville*, vol. 2, 166-167.
Major Patrick Ferguson oversaw the militia by visiting the districts to “procure [muster] lists” and to ensure that Cornwallis’ “orders [were] carried into execution.” Cornwallis’ delusion that his Camden victory had pacified the province crumbled as sudden partisan raids coincided with the alarming deterioration of his militia. He therefore decided that only North Carolina’s pacification could protect his South Carolina posts. Numerous Royal militiamen deserted in the wake of Camden, and British regulars typically perceived those who remained as unreliable pillagers, abusers, and scoundrels. Major John Harrison, for example, proposed to Cornwallis to raise a 500-man “provincial corps” between the Pee Dee and Wateree Rivers, which he never accomplished. After Cornwallis unsuccessfully discouraged desertion with terror tactics, he conceded to Ferguson’s observation that Royal Militia were “less warlike than the rebels,” and placed heavier reliance upon regular units for essential tasks. His intended plan to empower Loyalists effectively resulted in the relegation of the “King’s friends” to garrison duty, British unit augmentation, and minor government positions. Notwithstanding, shoddy civilian support partly reflected the adage that “loyalty is a two-way street.”

Cornwallis’ idea of the “King’s Peace” effectively pushed inhabitants to their limits. Had Clinton never actually intended to brook neutrality, paroled Whig militiamen like Pickens and Peter Horry, who had marched to Charleston to accept surrender terms before returning home, fully expected to remain neutral in accordance with his original terms. The policy shifts unleashed the fury of Cornwallis’ army on thousands of civilians.

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in early June. The Philipsburg proclamation also alienated a significant portion of the population who feared loss of “life and fortunes” in a slave uprising. Slave-based rice plantation agriculture amounted to a stratified social hierarchy in which slaves represented sixty-one percent of the state population and a potentially fatal revolutionary flaw. Cornwallis’ racial manipulation negated his efforts to pit the hardscrabble “Upcountry” Scotch-Irish and German settlers against the Low Country planter elite by unexpectedly galvanizing the entire white population against a perceived British attempt to incite servile insurrection. Cornwallis awakened sleeping giants like Marion and Pickens by forcing them to either fight former comrades, flee the province, or face destruction of life and property. Sadistic British-backed Loyalist reprisals on Whigs and neutrals alike characterized a failure to re-establish civil governance, which boiled into a civil war in June 1780.\textsuperscript{80} Redcoats’ reliance on military solutions to delicate political problems eroded the civilian support central to Cornwallis’ strategy. As the military theorist David Galula explains:

\begin{quote}
Military action remains the principal instrument of a conventional war…, [but] the picture is different in the revolutionary war. The objective being the population itself, the operations designed to win it over (for the insurgent) or to keep it at least submissive (for the counterinsurgent) are essentially of a political nature.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{80} For an excellent overview of the socioeconomic divide between the Low Country elite and the Upcountry hardscrabble farmers, see George C. Rogers, Jr.’s \textit{Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys}. Rogers argues that wealthy planter and merchant families like the Rutledges, Manigaults, Draytons, and particularly the Pinckneys, comprised the Low Country elite which wielded significant economic and political power form Charleston. Charleston was the southern social, cultural, political, and economic center, and the wealthiest colonial city between 1720 and 1820; John Rutledge to the Continental Congress, December 8, 1780, in Moultrie, \textit{Memoirs}, vol. 2, 239-240; Moultrie, \textit{Memoirs}, vol. 2, 210-217, 239-245; Frey, \textit{Water from the Rock}, 141.

By marginalizing the militia, alienating the population, and focusing on battlefield victories, Cornwallis forsook his key objective: the population. His invasion destabilized South Carolina by forcing desperate civilians to organize and resist. He thus failed to fight a political war, which gave rise to politically savvy partisans like Marion.

Marion emerged in response to the popular demand of civilians who rallied to established Whig political and military leaders to resist persecution. “Lighthorse Harry” Lee, who cooperated with Marion, described him in his Memoirs:

[He] was in stature the smallest size…, enter[ed] into conversation only when necessary..., [and] possessed a strong mind…He was sedulous and constant in his attention to the duties of his station, to which every other consideration yielded…The procurement of subsistence for his men, and the contrivance of annoyance to his enemy…Beloved by his friends and respected by his enemies, he exhibited a luminous example of the beneficial effects to be produced by an individual, who, with only small means at his command, possesses a virtuous heart, a strong head, and a mind devoted to the common good.82

Marion’s solid military and political ties made him “an integral part…of his community.” Other primary accounts of Marion corroborate Parson Weems’ lofty claim that “Marion wished his officers to be gentlemen…[and] the officers of the regiment grew fond of him.”83 He had escaped capture at Charleston when he fractured his ankle and was ordered to convalesce in the backcountry (April 12). He briefly joined Gates’ Continental Army in North Carolina when Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, Cornwallis’ cavalry commander, conducted a scorched-earth campaign through his home Williamsburg.

district. He returned with sixteen men at the request of the militia, who abstained from loyalty oaths in response to Tarleton and Lieutenant Colonel Francis Rawdon’s Black River-area devastation, plantation and Calvinist church burnings, slave kidnappings, and reputed no-quarter policy. Marion was with Gates’ command when he was summoned by Major John James, who represented the militia, to return to South Carolina. By avoiding the Camden debacle, Marion could resist on his own terms. Like other partisans, he abandoned conventional warfare in favor of Cherokee-style night or dawn raids, ambushes, and harassing tactics.\(^4\) Williamsburg’s residents willingly entrusted Marion with their lives because they knew he was unwilling to squander them.

Marion’s partisans attacked the foundation of British control by disrupting supply lines, silencing Tories, attacking patrols, and provoking overreactions. The dense swamps aided Marion and hampered the British. Marion leveraged surprise attacks, captured and

homemade weapons and swords, and temporary militiamen with expert equestrian and boatmanship skills, to offset material inferiority. His partisans fully exploited the rivers, creeks, trails, and natural cover to move constantly, control river and road communication, avoid unnecessary risks, and strike under favorable circumstances. They dressed like Royal Militia, easily infiltrated enemy-occupied areas, and struck like thunder in night raids that shocked and destroyed isolated units before they melted back into the swamps. The cumulative effect of Marion’s victories between the Pee Dee and Cooper Rivers increased his organizational strength and weakened local British influence. His cost-efficient raids at Nelson’s Ferry (August 20), Kingstree (August 27), Blue Savannah (September 4), and Georgetown (October 8) bolstered his political influence at the expense of the British opponents, whom he embarrassed and discredited. He provoked the overreaction of Cornwallis, who sent a punitive expedition under Major James Wemyss to destroy his guerilla support network. Wemyss burned the Indiantown Presbyterian Church, plundered and burned “50 houses and plantations,” hung suspected traitors, slaughtered livestock, seized slaves, and completely alienated the population. Wemyss’ subsequent prediction that regulars would be required to reestablish local control over the enraged inhabitants proved correct.85 Marion’s provocation of British

violence increased revolutionary recruitment by stoking anti-British sentiment. He accumulated political and military capital at the expense of the British, who he attenuated through Low Country-style asymmetric warfare.

Marion’s men rivaled British regional control by October 1780. His victories reinvigorated Whigs who provided the necessary support for his partisans to fight on more equal terms. He was promoted to colonel by Governor John Rutledge in recognition of his Black Mingo Creek (September 28) victory, and tasked to enforce martial law and continue suppression of Loyalists. He established a remote supply base at Snow’s Island and his 200-to-300-man force dominated the territory surrounding the British outposts. His influence coincided with massive state-wide militia attacks that enveloped Cornwallis’ strategic flanks.\(^{86}\) The partisan war reached a crescendo atop King’s Mountain, South Carolina on October 7, 1780, when Ferguson’s 1,100 Loyalists were utterly destroyed by a mounted partisan army of backcountry and “over-mountain” militiamen. This stunning defeat cost Cornwallis one-quarter of his army and prevented his immediate invasion of North Carolina. The British forces retreated to Winnsboro to refit and protect the western outposts exposed by Ferguson’s defeat.\(^{87}\) The destruction of Marion’s force became Cornwallis’ “first priority” as its presence disrupted the vital

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Santee River supply line to Camden that the British “totally depend[ed]” upon. Charleston’s garrison commander was “astonished” at the extent to which Marion frustrated British goals by “prevent[ing]” Loyalists from “com[ing] in [to] become British subjects.” Cornwallis’ belief that the entirety of the residents between the Santee and Pee Dee Rivers were “in arms against” him was confirmed by Marion’s subsequent raids on Loyalist units at Tearcoat Swamp (October 26), Allston’s Plantation (November 8), and Georgetown (November 17). Marion was fundamental to the massive statewide resistance that immobilized Cornwallis and sparked doubts about the conflict in military circles and among civilians in the British Isles.\footnote{Marion to Harrington, November 17, 1780, in \textit{History of the Old Cheraws}, 343-344; James, \textit{Swamp Fox}, 54-55; Cornwallis to Lt. Colonel Moses Kirkland, November 2, 1780, \textit{Cornwallis Papers}, vol. 3, 378; Colonel Nisbet Balfour to Cornwallis, November 15, 1780, \textit{Cornwallis Papers}, vol. 3, 76; Cornwallis to Clinton, December 3, 1780, \textit{Cornwallis Papers}, vol. 5, 24; Cornwallis to Tarleton, November 10, 1780, \textit{Cornwallis Papers}, vol. 3, 334; “Extract of a Letter from North Carolina, November 27,” printed in the \textit{Pennsylvania Journal}, January 3, 1781; Tarleton, \textit{Campaigns}, 174.} Cornwallis’ military correspondence describing his strategic stalemate was circulated and exploited by Whitehall’s peace party and printed in \textit{The London Gazette}.\footnote{\textit{The London Gazette}, September 26-30, 1780, microfilm; Sir Edmund Burke to Sir John Noble, October 5, 1780, \textit{The Correspondence of Edmund Burke, July 1778-June 1782}, vol. 4, John A. Woods, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 312-313.} Many British civilians who had expected a quick victory after Charleston’s capitulation grew increasingly disappointed and disheartened by what they perceived as a costly war in a colonial backwater with no apparent end in sight.

The turbulent southern war hung in the balance when Greene took command. As he refitted and reorganized his army in Charlotte, Cornwallis replaced his King’s Mountain losses with a division of Major General Alexander Leslie’s regulars from
Virginia and concentrated a 4,000-man strike force. After an unsuccessful attempt to eliminate Marion in early November, he decided to move north into North Carolina, destroy Greene’s army, and thereby crush the last remaining conventional military force. Cornwallis’ dilemma was that he had to disperse his units in order to “check the guerillas,” protect supply lines, and control the population; but by concentrating he completely relinquished control of the backcountry and his supply lines to partisans.\textsuperscript{90}

Cornwallis desperately needed to secure his vital rear-area sustainment network that extended from Charleston through the Low Country to his army before resuming the offensive (January 7, 1781). To regain freedom of action, he ordered Major Robert McLeroth’s 300-man 64\textsuperscript{th} Regiment from Charleston to Kingstree, the seat of Marion’s district, to pacify the area between Nelson’s Ferry and the High Hills of the Santee (See Figures 3a and 3b). McLeroth briefly occupied Kingstree and reestablished the Santee River and Road communication between Charleston and Camden, which would serve as Cornwallis’ main supply and communication hub during his campaign. In early December, Rawdon ordered McLeroth to escort 200 fresh recruits of the 7\textsuperscript{th} Regiment (Royal Fusiliers) from Sumter’s Great Savannah plantation, north along the Santee River Road (present-day Highway 76) to the High Hills of the Santee, where Major John Coffin’s 140 New York Volunteers would then escort them to Camden.\textsuperscript{91} Scouts who covered the northeastern Low Country circulated through Marion’s position at Shepherd’s Ferry to apprise him of McLeroth’s situation and whereabouts. He patiently

\textsuperscript{90} Clinton, \textit{American Rebellion}, 233-240, 245; Mackesy, \textit{War for America}, 404-405.

\textsuperscript{91} Balfour to Cornwallis, November 15 and 27, and December 11, 1780, \textit{Cornwallis Papers}, vol. 3, 76-78, 91-93, 111-112; Tarleton, \textit{Campaigns}, 187.
awaited the return of his partisans from their crop harvests and for an opportunity to strike.

Marion’s ambush of McLeroth’s column at Halfway Swamp signified his importance to Greene’s efforts and heralded his brigade’s successful transition from a partisan unit into the dominant regional conventional power. McLeroth’s Kingstree presence threatened to re-establish British control in northeastern South Carolina. His potential cooperation with Major James Cassells’ nearby 200-man Royal Militia at Great Savannah, and Major John Coffin’s 140 provincials at the High Hills might reverse Patriot success in the region.92 As McLeroth’s soldiers “leisurely” marched north along the Santee River Road through Halfway Swamp on December 12, at approximately 12 p.m. a portion of Marion’s 700 partisans emerged from the dense surrounding wetlands and assaulted the rear of his column. After driving in the rear pickets, Marion deployed Captain William McCottry’s rifle company to suppress the rear guard with sustained fire as he directed two mounted assault elements to strike McLeroth’s flank and front. This well-coordinated ambush drove the 64th and the panicked Fusiliers northwestward into a field adjacent to the road, where McLeroth took cover and arrayed his men into a defensive posture behind a fence (See Figure 3c). Marion’s militia pursued, delivered sustained sniping fire on McLeroth’s pickets, and settled into a concealed position in the woodlands opposite the road from the British. As the fight began to develop, McLeroth sent Marion an officer with a flag of truce, protested the attack on his pickets, and challenged Marion to bring his men out of the woods and into the field for a fair fight. Marion replied that house burning was a worse crime than assaulting pickets, which he

planned to continue unabated in retaliation for British terror tactics. Marion hot-bloodedly called McLeroth’s proposal an act of desperation, but accepted the challenge nonetheless. Both leaders agreed to select twenty of their best men to fight a pitched battle just south of an old oak tree in McLeroth’s field in order to minimize bloodshed.93

The contest was a ruse. Marion chose Major John Vanderhorst to lead twenty of his best partisans and delivered a motivational speech to the detachment before they moved onto the field. Vanderhorst’s team deployed into line of battle and closed to within 100 yards of McLeroth’s Redcoats, who then suddenly shouldered their arms and marched from the field. The confused partisans celebrated with loud shouts of “HUZZAH” as they occupied the field around sundown. McLeroth’s ploy was calculated to gain time and reinforcements. When Marion had begun the attack, McLeroth sent couriers to Coffin for assistance. Coffin received the couriers, but denied reinforcements in order to assume a strong defensive position behind nearby Swift Creek for fear of being ambushed himself. That evening, a detachment of McLeroth’s men built large bonfires and made noise as a diversion so that the main column could withdraw northward toward nearby Singleton’s Mill. The next morning Marion realized that he had been tricked, and sent Majors John James and Hugh Horry with 100 cavalry to intercept and hold McLeroth until his main force could catch up. James interdicted McLeroth by positioning his partisans among the Singleton Family’s houses on a high hill that covered the British escape route. After James’ snipers hit a British captain, they suddenly

93 Marion to Greene, December 22, 1780, Greene Papers, vol. 6, 605-606; James, Swamp Fox, 53-56; Rawdon to Cornwallis, December 13, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, vol. 3, 210; Major John Coffin to Rawdon, December 13, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, vol. 3, 211; Cornwallis to Balfour, December 14, 1780, Cornwallis Papers, vol. 3, 110.
discovered that the Singleton family had smallpox, and abandoned their position and the pursuit of the British. McLeroth subsequently escaped to Camden with six killed or wounded, including Captain George Kelly of the 64th Regiment; he reported that Marion lost “ten or a dozen” killed and wounded in the affair.  

Halfway Swamp was pivotal because Marion won control of northeastern South Carolina’s key supply lines and civilian population as Cornwallis mobilized for his thrust into North Carolina in early January. Former Marine Scott Aiken diverges from historians who have trivialized Halfway Swamp. He points out that the ambush was Marion’s first engagement after Greene entered the fight, and that Marion’s 700 partisans won control of the Low Country between Georgetown and the High Hills of the Santee. Marion gained the ability to hold the Santee River and Road—he no longer had to retreat after attacking. He definitively denied Cornwallis his sustainment network at the critical juncture when he was compelled to completely abandon counterinsurgency operations and pursue Greene. Marion’s success also underscored to the 2000-to-3000 British residual forces remaining in South Carolina the danger of leaving their outposts undefended. William Dobein James, who was fifteen when he joined Marion, provides the only detailed primary account of Halfway Swamp. William James had close ties with Marion’s key officers and soldiers as a partisan and the son of Major John James. William gleaned the details of the Halfway Swamp action from his father and Captain Gavin Witherspoon, who was one of the twenty picked men under Vanderhorst.  


95 Patrick O’Kelley classifies Halfway Swamp as a British victory, *Nothing but Blood and Slaughter: The Revolutionary War in the Carolinas*, vol. 2 (Lillington: Blue House
the scale of the ambush was irrelevant, some historians persist that James exaggerated the action.

Historian Richard K. Showman suggests that James fabricated the Halfway Swamp story because Marion simply reported to Greene in his official correspondence that he had “skirmaged” with McLeroth, and did not mention the contest. Showman misses the point. “Skirmishes” were highly relevant to the southern revolutionary war. Skirmish was the partisans’ term for the kind of fluid, Indian-style raiding and harassing tactics that defined irregular warfare. Marion also described his November Georgetown raid as a “scrummage,” and his partisans refer to a wide range of their well-known actions as skirmishes in their pension applications. William Kendle, for example, was a soldier under Majors Horry and James at Singleton’s Mill, and described the entire action as “a skirmish in which [the partisans] totally routed the British and Tories.”

Unconventional warrior Mao Tse-tung significantly asserts that guerilla warfare has no “decisive battle[s],” but that “[t]he total effect of many local successes will be to change the relative strengths of the opposing forces.” At some juncture, he argues, guerillas “develop into orthodox forces” that cooperate with regular army units. Halfway Swamp anticlimactically added to the sum-total of Marion’s previous actions to tip the scales and shift the regional balance of power. 96 Halfway Swamp was an asymmetric skirmish that broke the back of British regional dominance in a hybrid war where every action counted.

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96 Scott Aiken, The Swamp Fox: Lessons in Leadership from the Partisan Campaigns of Francis Marion (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), chapter 5; James, Swamp Fox, 4-5.
Lord Rawdon, who commanded the residual British force behind Cornwallis’ mobile army, clearly recognized the writing on the wall. Rawdon may not have known the details of the “contest,” but he painfully understood that McLeroth’s retreat amounted to partisan regional dominance. He angrily replaced McLeroth with Major John Campbell on December 17th, and reported to Cornwallis that:

I must immediately dislodge Marion…so as to give our new party time to recollect themselves and to form, I think our interest would take a very different complexion from what it has hitherto borne…I think the scale would be decidedly in our favor, not perhaps from attachment to us, but from weariness of a long disquiet in which a contrary conduct has kept the district.97

Marion’s presence prevented supply boats from ascending the Santee River to reach Camden, and forced British wagon trains to embark on the long, circuitous route from Monck’s Corner to Friday’s Ferry on the Congaree River. In short, Marion disrupted Rawdon’s ability to sustain Cornwallis, who was therefore compelled to forage widely and blindly grope his way into North Carolina in pursuit of Greene’s army (See Figure 4-5; Marion to Harrington, November 17, 1780, in Old Cheraws, 343; William Dobein James’ reputation as a biographer was unquestioned by contemporaries. Dr. David Ramsay, the well-known historian, physician, and Continental Congressional delegate, relied on James for much of his information on Marion. Ramsay specifically “acknowledge[d] the obligations he [was] under…to the Honorable William James, Esq., for interesting information respecting that distinguished officer [Marion] and his brigade,” David Ramsay, History of South Carolina, from Its First Settlement in 1670 to the Year 1808, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Newberry: WJ Duffie, 1858), 228; James had close personal ties with Marion’s officers, including Captain Gavin Witherspoon; and was a South Carolina judge after the war. Modern historians Hugh Rankin and Scott Aiken also cite James’ Halfway Swamp account, which parallels British and Patriot correspondence. In contrast, historian Richard K. Showman dismisses James’ account and “much of what has been written about the skirmish,” Greene Papers, vol. 6, 606n; Tse-tung, On Guerilla Warfare, 42, 52, 98; Pension Records of William Kendle (W7978), David Witherspoon (W1685), and James Armstrong (S2926), trans. William Graves, www.revwarapps.org; Lee, Crowds and Soldiers, 202-203.

3d). Greene was thrilled, and encouraged Marion to continue to “frighten the Tories…to desert the British.” The victory facilitated Greene’s strategy by enabling Whigs to join Greene and by denying Cornwallis Loyalist support. Furthermore, Halfway Swamp helped convince Cornwallis to keep the 300-man 64th Regiment at Camden to suppress partisans instead of using them for the invasion.98

Halfway Swamp allowed Marion’s partisans to consolidate their regional dominance. The well-timed mortal blow to British forces established the conditions necessary for Marion to effectively transition from guerilla to conventional warfare. Governor Rutledge rewarded Marion with an official promotion to brigadier general and command of all militia east of the Santee, Wateree, and Catawba Rivers—he now owned the entire Low Country in a bona fide capacity.99 In late December, Marion organized his volunteers into what became known as “Marion’s Brigade,” and appointed Colonel Peter Horry to command the cavalry. In conjunction with Greene’s campaign, Marion directed his adjutant, Captain John Postell, to seize anything of use to the British between Black Mingo and the mouth of the Pee Dee River, including slaves, boats, arms and ammunition, grains, and “provisions of any sort.” He further drained the swamp of ambient British support by ordering the arrest of able-bodied men who refused to provide assistance to the Patriot cause. William James referred to the period after December 1780 as “the most interesting part” of Marion’s campaign because he “brought into action all


the energies of his officers and men.” For the first time since the British invasion, Marion cooperated with Lighthorse Harry Lee’s mounted Continental Legion, and together they nearly captured Georgetown, the eastern anchor of the British outposts.\(^{100}\) When Lee temporarily left the Low Country to help counter Cornwallis’ North Carolina invasion, Marion easily overwhelmed Lieutenant Colonel John Watson’s 500-man hunter-killer expedition of regulars and Tories, and chased them out of the Low Country and back into Camden (March 1781). Marion leveraged his success at Halfway Swamp like an experienced grappler who locks in a chokehold on his opponent; his skillfully measured application of force gave him the dominant position that ensured his success and doomed his enemy’s prospects.\(^{101}\) This regional power shift significantly undergirded Greene’s campaign.

Marion helped create the conditions for Greene’s strategic victory. Halfway Swamp taught the raw 7th Fusiliers their peril and established their future tactical pattern. At Cowpens, the same Fusiliers contributed to Tarleton’s defeat by losing their nerve, firing prematurely, and charging in a loose formation at the decisive point of the battle. While not solely culpable, the Fusiliers’ performance helped precipitate the catastrophe that cost Cornwallis 120 dead and 900 captured soldiers.\(^{102}\) Furthermore, Marion’s efforts coupled with other Patriot raids in South Carolina to effectively vanquish the Royal

\(^{100}\) Marion to Captain John Postell, December 30, 1780, in James’ Swamp Fox, 109; General Isaac Huger to Marion, January 28, 1781, Documentary History, vol. 3, 18; James, Swamp Fox, 55-56; Greene to Marion, January 25, 1781, Horry Transcripts, 32-33; Lee, Memoirs, 223-225.

\(^{101}\) Colonel John Watson to Marion, March 9, 1781, Horry Transcripts, 61-62; James, Swamp Fox, 55-60; Ramsay, History of South Carolina, vol. 1, 235-237.

\(^{102}\) Lawrence E. Babits, A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 105-118; Clinton to Cornwallis, March 5, 1781, Cornwallis Papers, vol. 5, 85-86; Tarleton, Campaigns, 222-224, 227-228.
Militia who gathered provisions and cattle for Cornwallis. Stedman was compelled to force captured slaves to procure the Redcoats’ food from “abandoned” plantations around Winnsboro and Camden. When Cornwallis moved permanently into North Carolina, however, he burned his supply train and the 50,000 pounds of meal requisitioned by Stedman to more effectively surmount the poor roads, deep rivers, and partisan bands between his army and Greene’s. Marion’s Loyalist suppression and stranglehold on the Santee and Pee Dee Rivers helped to ensure that Cornwallis was neither able to re-establish supply lines, or to recruit significant militia volunteers as he entered North Carolina.\footnote{Stedman, \textit{American War}, vol. 2, 224-226, 318-320; Cornwallis to Rawdon, January 25, 1781, vol. 3, 252.} Greene’s hybrid strategy had visibly turned the tables. Marion’s dominance in South Carolina enabled North and South Carolinians to swell Greene’s army at Guilford Courthouse to 4,400 men; and helped limit Cornwallis to 1,900 exhausted regulars. After Cornwallis “[w]on the sort of victory which ruins an army,” he limped with his 1,400 remaining Redcoats into Wilmington, North Carolina, and subsequently reported to Clinton that his catastrophic losses were mainly inflicted by skillfully deployed militia.\footnote{Major General William Phillips to Clinton, April 19, 1781, and Clinton to Cornwallis, April 30, 1781, vol. 5, 49-50, 92-93; Cornwallis to Clinton, May 26, 1781, and June 30, 1781, \textit{Cornwallis Papers}, vol. 5, 86, 105, Cornwallis told Clinton in two letters that his army’s “weakness at Guilford was not owing to any detachment,” but to attrition during the previous winter campaign, and that “the list of British officers and soldiers killed and wounded [by militia] since last June proves but too fatally that they [militia] are not wholly contemptable.”} Greene expelled Cornwallis from the Carolinas by executing a hybrid strategy that fully leveraged Marion’s asymmetric raids.

Greene and Marion’s cooperation sealed the British fate in the South. From Wilmington, Cornwallis wrote to Clinton that Virginia was his last prospect for success...
because his control of Carolina’s backcountry had been nonexistent for several months
due to a complete lack of river communication and friendly inhabitants. His choice to
stake everything on Virginia and abandon the Carolinas was strongly influenced by the
prospect of Greene and Marion’s consolidation in partisan-controlled northeastern South
Carolina.\textsuperscript{105} From Wilmington, Cornwallis explained the danger of re-entering South
Carolina to American Secretary of State Lord George Germain:

\begin{quote}
The distance from hence to Camden…and the difficulty of passing the Pedee when opposed by an enemy render it utterly impossible for me to give…assistance, and I apprehend the possibility of the utmost hazard to this little corps…This might enable General Greene to hem me in among the great rivers and by cutting off our assistance render our arms useless…I have therefore under so many embarrassing circumstances…resolved to…march immediately into [Virginia]…to attempt a junction with General Phillips.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

Marion produced the friction that stopped Cornwallis’ progress, sapped British war
support, and energized the opposition. Despite Loyalist newspaper propaganda in British-
controlled coastal cities, Cornwallis, Whitehall, and the British public were aware that the
Carolinas were lost. Max Boot explains that the democratic British Parliament
necessitated unprecedented public war support. Powerful politicians like Sir Edmund
Burke and Sir Jeffry Amherst articulated a strong public anti-war undercurrent and
exploited Cornwallis’ difficulties. Burke and \textit{London Gazette} readers who were tired of
the war interpreted Cornwallis’ October, 1780 problems as evidence of failure. Before
receiving news of Yorktown (October 19, 1781), Burke implied that Cornwallis had been
compelled to “escape” the Carolinas. He even colluded with Henry Laurens, the former

Continental Congressional President who was imprisoned in the Tower of London, and distributed Laurens’ subversive essays among Parliament members. The salient second and third order effects of Greene’s successful hybrid strategy had significant geostrategic ramifications.

Cornwallis’ retreat into Virginia allowed Greene to retake the Carolinas. As Greene entered South Carolina, he incorporated Marion’s Brigade into a more conventional army that captured Georgetown, cleared the remaining British from the interior, and re-established Patriot civil governance. Marion had started with only sixteen men, but regained the Low Country by leveraging warfare politically to weaken and break British control, which collapsed with a whimper at Halfway Swamp. He was careful never to tactically bite off more than he could chew, and gradually weakened the enemy politically and militarily with lightning raids at places of his time and choosing. Cornwallis’ impatient commanders naturally overreacted to Marion’s raids by abusing and alienating that very same population on whose support their success relied. While Clinton’s strategy looked good on paper and was embraced by the King and Whitehall, his operational lines of effort within South Carolina were poorly defined, arbitrarily


executed, and inconsistent with the desired end state of “Americanizing” the war. Cornwallis never seriously attempted to restore civil government, and his failure to re-establish security corroded his efforts, strengthened Marion, and undermined domestic support. Greene’s only realistic option to beat the British was a strategy reliant upon politically-charged asymmetric raids because he began from a position of weakness. Marion facilitated Greene’s long-term goals by gaining the Low Country peoples’ hearts and minds, and control of its major river systems. Marion’s victories garnered the essential popular support that sustained Greene’s operations. Furthermore, Greene succeeded because he designed and directed a salient hybrid strategy that channeled the full potential of partisans like Marion. Cornwallis’ consistent overuse of blunt force wore out his army and played to the strengths of Greene and Marion, who cooperatively waged political warfare to overpower their British overlords.
Figure 3a.\textsuperscript{109}

Figure 3b.\textsuperscript{110}

\textsuperscript{109} Rankin, Francis Marion, 62-63.

\textsuperscript{110} O’Kelley, Nothing but Blood and Slaughter, vol. 2, 287.
Figure 3c.\textsuperscript{111} Marion's men attacked and drove in McLeroth's rear pickets; Marion deployed Captain William McCotry's Rifle Company to maintain a sustained fire on McLeroth's rear guard (12-12:30 pm).

2) Marion's two mounted units struck McLeroth's flank and front, driving the 64\textsuperscript{th} and the 7\textsuperscript{th} Regiments from the Santee River Road (12:30-1 pm).

3) McLeroth conducted a fighting withdrawal in order to protect the 7\textsuperscript{th} Regiment, seize the field, and assume a defensive posture behind a fence (1-3 pm).

4) The fight began to develop, when Marion and McLeroth agreed to a ceasefire and arranged a contest between twenty picked men from each side (3-4:30 pm).

Figure 3d.\textsuperscript{112} British Southern Campaigns

\textsuperscript{111} Google Earth Pro.

\textsuperscript{112} Lee, \textit{Crowds and Soldiers}, 178.
CHAPTER 4

Mind Over Matter: How John S. Mosby Overcame Political and Military Adversity to Achieve Perfect Asymmetry

John Singleton Mosby represented the best of the Army of Northern Virginia. He was born in Powhatan County to middling tobacco farmers. He grew up on a small Albemarle County farm, where he hunted, read classics, and attended school. When reading Parson Weems’ *The Life of Marion* as a boy, he “shouted aloud” as Marion outwitted the British. He developed into a small, ruthless, and resourceful man by facing bullies throughout his youth. Mosby moved to Bristol to practice law after he passed the bar and married Pauline Clarke in 1857. He was a “constitutional unionist” who supported the Confederate cause in 1861. His career skyrocketed after he became Colonel James Ewell Brown (JEB) Stuart’s scout in the 1st Virginia Cavalry. Mosby rose to colonel and command of the elite 43rd Partisan Ranger Battalion by 1864. His Rangers’ raids and ambushes of Union troop detachments behind enemy lines between 1863 and 1865 arguably delayed Union victory for several months. Despite his remarkable contributions, narrow-minded Confederate War Department elites were unwilling to fully incorporate his Rangers into their strategic plans. Unlike Stuart, Confederate Major General Jubal Early largely ignored the potential of Mosby’s hit-and-run attacks. In the fall of 1864, Early failed to recognize the opportunity to employ Mosby as a strategic enabler against Union Major General Philip Sheridan’s detachments and supply lines. The Shenandoah Valley spans roughly 165 miles from Lexington, in the south, to the Potomac River in the north, and is bound by the Allegany

Mountains to the West, and the Blue Ridge in the East (see Figure 4a). The Valley was a strategically vital invasion corridor and the Confederacy’s “breadbasket.” Early’s unwillingness to integrate Mosby’s Partisan Rangers into his Valley defensive plan contributed to his own strategic irrelevance and Cedar Creek defeat on October 19, 1864.

The Valley situation was bleak for Early prior to Cedar Creek. The Union victory at Antietam (September 17, 1862) had allowed President Abraham Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862, which uprooted Confederate society by turning hundreds of thousands of former slaves against their masters in the wake of invading armies. Antietam, and the Union victories at Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863) and Vicksburg (July 4, 1863), strengthened Union resolve and prevented the chance of a European-brokered cease fire. Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s Gettysburg casualties limited him to a mainly defensive strategy; and Major General Ulysses S. Grant’s Vicksburg victory had split the Confederacy, which denied the South vital western manpower, stock, and international communication. Lincoln made Grant the Union General-in-Chief in March 1864. Grant subsequently planned and executed a coordinated offensive of five Union armies across the South in May that inhibited the Confederate ability to shift soldiers between threatened areas.

Slowing Grant’s Overland Campaign through Virginia had cost the Army of Northern Virginia Major General Edward Johnston’s division and three corps commanders: Major Generals James Ewell Brown (JEB) Stuart, A.P. Hill, and James Longstreet. By June 1864, Major General George G. Meade’s Army of the Potomac had driven Lee’s army to the outskirts of Richmond and Petersburg, and Sherman was

Previous Confederate generals had successfully used unconventional Valley strategies. Confederate Major General John C. Breckinridge had demonstrated the effectiveness of an unconventional strategy against Major General Franz Sigel the previous May. With only 5,600 men, Breckinridge had evened the odds against Sigel’s 9,500-man army with a hybrid combination of regular and irregular operations.
Breckinridge leveraged Mosby, Elijah (“Lige”) White, Harry Gilmore, and Hanse McNeill’s irregulars to swarm the flanks and rear of Sigel’s army with guerilla attacks. These irregulars turned the Valley into a gauntlet of constant guerilla hit-and-run attacks on Union supply lines, couriers, pickets, and cavalry detachments. As officially sanctioned officers who cooperated with Breckinridge’s regular army by leading locals in guerilla attacks against Sigel’s incursion, Mosby, Gilmore, White, and McNeill were partisans in the revolutionary mold of Brigadier General Francis Marion. Northerners dismissively called them “bushwhackers,” whereas southerners called these unconventional warriors “Partisan Rangers.” The Rangers’ asymmetric raids became southern legends and northern horror stories. They eliminated Sigel’s supply lines, demoralized his army, and decreased his line-of-battle strength by compelling him to detach large units to protect his wagon supply convoys, railroads, and couriers.

Breckinridge’s coordinated hybrid strategy offset material inferiority by weakening and denying crucial intelligence to Sigel’s army. Before even closing with Breckinridge, Sigel reported that his “forces were insufficient for offensive operations in this country [the Valley], where the enemy is continuously on my flank and rear.”


116 *OR*, series 1, vol. 37, part 1, 446-447.
Partisan Rangers thus enabled Breckinridge to concentrate 5,000 effectives to defeat Sigel’s significantly reduced 6,500-man mobile army at the Battle of New Market on May 15, 1864.\textsuperscript{117}

Early took a different approach. Lee had sent Early’s 14,000-man Army of the Valley from Richmond into the Valley to defeat Major General David Hunter’s larger 18,000-man force. After replacing Sigel, Hunter’s regenerated army had invaded the Valley; defeated a smaller Confederate army at Piedmont on June 5; damaged Staunton’s infrastructure; and burned the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) and Governor John Letcher’s home in Lexington. Hunter menaced Lee’s rear when he reached the outskirts of Lynchburg and threatened the vital Orange and Alexandria Railroad. Luckily for Early, Partisan Rangers had crippled Hunter’s army by compelling him to completely abandon his supply lines. Early therefore attacked and drove away a weakened Union army at Lynchburg on June 18\textsuperscript{th} that was plagued by guerillas; had foraged to meet supply requirements; lacked shoes in some units; and was critically low on ammunition. Notwithstanding, Early was unable or unwilling to acknowledge that Mosby and other partisans had facilitated the corrosive atmosphere that enabled his victory over Hunter from the Valley.\textsuperscript{118} After the war, Lee’s “bad old man” expressed


skepticism of Grant’s report that Hunter withdrew from Lynchburg because of a lack of ammunition:

This is a little remarkable…Can it be believed that Hunter set out on so important an expedition with an insufficient supply of ammunition?...[He] tarried on the way for purposes which will hereafter appear, and when he reached there, his heart failed him and he was afraid to fight an inferior force…\textsuperscript{119}

Early was a West Pointer, a North Carolina attorney, and an inexperienced corps commander who had replaced A.P. Hill at the Battle of the Wilderness (May 5-7).\textsuperscript{120} He was no knight in shining armor, but his decisions as an independent commander demonstrated his preference for a conventional military strategy.

Early demonstrated indifference to Mosby’s painstaking efforts to facilitate his army’s raids on Washington, D.C., Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and subsequent Valley operations. He instead adhered to doctrinally accepted Napoleonic-style tactics, as exemplified by his actions at the Battle of Monocacy (July 9, 1864), in which he maneuvered tightly massed regiments like chess pieces on open battlefields. Mosby’s late mentor, JEB Stuart, had previously tasked Mosby to function as the Army of Northern Virginia’s eyes and ears, and to destroy railroads and supply lines behind Union lines in conjunction with Lee’s operations. In contrast, Early excluded Mosby from planning; sent him no written orders; and expressed apathy toward present and former Partisan Rangers mustered into his command.\textsuperscript{121} After Stuart was mortally

\textsuperscript{119} Jubal A. Early, \textit{A Memoir of the Last Year of the War of Independence in the Confederate States of America}, Gary Gallagher, ed., 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 49n-51n.

\textsuperscript{120} George Walsh, “\textit{Damage then All You Can}”: \textit{Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia} (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2002), 188-189.

\textsuperscript{121} Colonel John S. Mosby to Frederick Fillison Bowen, June 12 [no year], The Frederick Fillison Bowen Papers (Cited hereafter as Bowen Papers), The Virginia
wounded at Yellow Tavern on May 11, Mosby reported directly to Lee. When Lee became preoccupied with Grant at Petersburg in the autumn of 1864, Mosby logically expected to cooperate with Early as he had with Stuart. Mosby later contrasted Lee and Stuart’s professionalism with Early’s unresponsiveness:

Gen. Lee and Stuart always sent me written instructions, even by my own most trusted Lieutenants…[D]uring the time that Early was in the Valley I never at any time directly or indirectly received any message from him, oral or written…[h]e never communicated with me.122

Early instead played to Union strengths by fighting conventionally without the proven advantage of partisan assistance. He was in no position to be persnickety, but squandered a key strategic enabler against superior forces. Although Mosby was sidelined in September by a combat wound during Winchester and Fisher’s Hill, his cooperation at Cedar Creek in October could have created greater opportunities for southern success.123 His Rangers had a well-deserved reputation as one of the elite Confederate units.124 Their tactical élan and psychological dominance over the invaders

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122 Mosby to Bowen, June 12 [no year] and July 25, 1898, Bowen Papers.
123 Mosby was injured by a bullet to the groin on September 13, but returned to command on September 29, OR, series 1, vol. 43, part 2, 132, 146, 876-877; Mosby to Captain Bob Walker, December 12, 1899, The Letters of John S. Mosby, Adele H. Mitchell, ed., 2nd ed. (Stuart-Mosby Historical Society, 1986), 96-98; Mosby, Memoirs, 298, 307; Scott, Partisan Life, 321.
124 Confederate scout Berry Benson commented that “[t]hese men of Mosby’s were of better material than the average of soldiers, and had they been in the main army many of them would have been chosen as officers, Berry Benson’s Civil War Book: Memoirs of a Confederate Scout and Sharpshooter, Susan Williams Benson, ed. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 121; Sheridan, Memoirs, vol. 1, 338; James E.B. Stuart, Endorsement, January 18, 1864, Official Records, series 1, vol. 33, 1081; Robert E. Lee, Endorsement, September 19, 1864, J.B. Jones, Diary, vol. 2, 293-294.
was well established. One of Sheridan’s best cavalry commanders admitted that “[t]he guerrillas, being few in numbers, mounted on fleet horses and thoroughly conversant with the country, had every advantage over my men.”

Early’s unwillingness to leverage the Rangers is explainable by his lack of experience in independent command and the political climate.

Early reflected prevailing politics. The Confederate Government chose a conventional strategy in 1864 in the hope that a strategic defensive was sufficient to maintain military stalemates in Richmond and Atlanta. Continued stalemate would theoretically increase northern war weariness, and thereby influence northern voters to elect the Democratic Presidential Candidate George B. McClellan, who accepted his party’s “peace” platform in September. President Davis and other West Pointers had originally envisioned a strategy defined by conventional battles in the hope of gaining Confederate international legitimacy. However, the reality of Union-occupied territory, vast material inferiority, and the desire to control an alarming number of unauthorized guerilla bands compelled the Confederate adoption of a hybrid strategy in 1862. The War Department passed the Partisan Ranger Act on April 21, 1862, which authorized officers to independently raise Partisan Ranger commands from volunteers who lived among family and friends; operate behind enemy lines; and to arm and equip themselves with captured supplies. Despite the Partisan Act’s passage, Confederate Secretary of War James Randolph remained unified with the West Point-dominated establishment in

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125 OR, series 1, vol. 43, part 1, 672.
opposition to partisan warfare. The establishment basically perceived partisans as pirates who undermined conventional forces by encouraging regulars to desert to more attractive undisciplined guerilla units who plundered. Davis and Randolph therefore deliberately implemented the first Confederate Conscription Act on April 16, 1862, five days prior to the Partisan Ranger Act, to promote conventional warfare over guerilla warfare. Randolph also restricted guerilla recruitment by including the provision in the Partisan Act that Partisan Ranger unit creation required departmental commander approval; and General Orders no. 53, which prohibited further Partisan Ranger recruitment after July 31, 1862. Lee occasionally circumvented Confederate red tape by allowing the formation of legitimate guerilla units like Mosby’s, with the understanding that Rangers would remain under his control.127

American Revolutionary armies augmented by irregular militia had become unpopular with the West Point antebellum officer corps schooled in Napoleon Bonaparte and Henri Jomini. Historian William B. Skelton asserts that the Confederate War Department’s conventional mindset reflected the officer corps’ antebellum professionalization. Stuart had valued the Ranger’s contributions as Mosby’s mentor and ally. However, he was also a West Pointer who was fully cognizant that his cohorts

would negatively perceive Mosby’s unit. When Mosby was promoted to Captain and awarded with an independent command in March 1863, Stuart cautioned him to:

[B]y all means ignore the term “Partizan Ranger.” It is in bad repute. Call your command “Mosby’s Regulars,” and it will give it a tone of meaning and solid worth…You will have to be very much on your guard against incorporating in your command deserters from other branches of the service.  

Mosby idolized Stuart, but realized that “spoils” were a prime recruitment incentive, and defiantly referred to his unit as Partisan Rangers. He was authorized to operate asymmetrically on detached duty but required to wear regular uniforms and follow Stuart and Lee’s orders and army regulations. Previous units had given Partisan Rangers a bad image. Throughout 1862, the Confederate Government received complaints of regular soldier desertion to irregular units, as well as angry complaints from civilians in Missouri, Tennessee, and North Carolina who had allegedly been terrorized and plundered by Confederate “bushwhackers” like William Quantrill and Bill Anderson. “Bushwhackers” were home-grown, civilian-clad, self-constituted guerillas known for their atrocities. Historian James McPherson points out that Quantrill’s raid on Lawrence, Kansas, in which Missouri “Rangers” killed 150 people and destroyed an abolitionist stronghold in August 1863, created a public uproar that “gave all guerillas a

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bushwhacker image.” Mosby and McNeill’s units maintained excellent reputations in spite of the bad press. Lee and Stuart had always coordinated with Mosby and had given him clear instructions because they recognized that he was a combat multiplier. Early was altogether different. Mosby was compelled to “guess” at Early’s intentions to facilitate his army’s strategy without any clear guidance. Early therefore failed to fully utilize a powerful asset against a superior foe.

Sheridan meant business. Early’s Washington and Chambersburg raids had created the public furor necessary for Grant to formulate an aggressive Valley strategy. Halleck consolidated the formerly disparate military departments of Washington, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia into the Middle Military Division at Grant’s suggestion. Grant put Sheridan in command of the Middle Military Division, who immediately organized the mobile 45,000-man Army of the Shenandoah to accomplish the task of clearing the Valley of all enemy forces and “forage and subsistence” to render it “untenable.” Grant was confident in Sheridan’s ability to execute a “hard war” strategy that denied Lee the Valley’s resources, and to follow Early “to the death.”

Historian Mark Grimsley points out that over the course of the war, Lincoln effectively shifted from a “conciliatory” policy (1861) that respected southern Constitutional rights, to a “hard war” policy meant “to demoralize southern civilians” and destroy the Confederate economy. Former Union General-in-Chief Henry W. Halleck had vacillated on counterinsurgency policy by allowing department commanders to handle guerillas

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131 *OR*, series 1, vol. 37, part 1, 4-5; Mosby to Bowen, June 15 [no year], Bowen Papers.
with varied severity. Grant finally refined and incorporated those existing policies into his overall strategy. Sheridan took command on August 6th and began planning the Army of the Valley’s destruction, but he never formulated an effective solution to the guerilla problem. Mosby’s Berryville Wagon Raid on August 13 inaugurated sustained Ranger operations against Sheridan’s supply lines and detachments that continued indefinitely. After Berryville, Sheridan set the tone by following orders to hang Rangers without trial, arrest their families, and “destroy and carry off the crops, animals, negroes, and all men under fifty years of age capable of bearing arms.” Not until Sheridan decisively defeated Early, however, did he make a concerted effort against the guerillas. Early would have benefited from acknowledging that despite Sheridan’s best counter-guerilla measures, the 43rd Ranger Battalion continued to grow and maintain the tactical initiative. He instead effectively ignored Mosby’s locally rooted, thriving, well-organized, and available guerilla force that literally surrounded him.

Mosby’s 43rd Virginia Cavalry Battalion consisted of roughly 800 hand-picked cavalrmen who dominated the area of Northern Virginia known as “Mosby’s Confederacy.” Mosby’s Confederacy (see Figure 4b) was the region around Loudon, Fauquier, Fairfax, and Prince William Counties, which included the Bull Run and Blue

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134 *OR*, series 1, vol. 43, part 1, 811.

135 Mosby’s numerous recruits allowed him to create “Company F” on September 13, bringing his command to a total of seven companies around the time of Early’s Winchester engagement, James Joseph Williamson, *Mosby’s Rangers: A Record of the Operations of the Forty-Third Battalion Virginia Cavalry, from Its Organization to the Surrender, from the Diary of a Private* (New York: R.B. Kenyon, 1896), 231; *OR*, series 1, vol. 43, part 2, 304.
Ridge Mountains, and the adjacent lower Shenandoah Valley. His Rangers’ sustained raids on enemy outposts, pickets, couriers, detachments, supply lines, and patrols created a corrosive environment that destabilized the Union occupation. Historian James Ramage asserts that “the night belonged to Mosby” in Northern Virginia because his raids created fear in soldiers’ minds as a force multiplier, and compelled Union commanders to inordinately detail soldiers from front-line service to logistical and rear area security, as well as counter-guerilla operations.\textsuperscript{136} Mosby defined his own operational concept:

> My purpose was to weaken the armies invading Northern Virginia, by harassing their rear. As a line is only as strong as its weakest point, it was necessary for it to be stronger than I was at every point, in order to resist my attacks…To destroy supply trains, to break up the means of conveying intelligence, and thus isolating an army from its base, as well as its different corps from each other, to confuse their plans by capturing despatches, are the objects of partisan war…My men had no camps. If they had gone into camp, they would soon have all been captured. They would scatter for safety, and gather at my call, like the Children of the Mist.\textsuperscript{137}

Herman Melville rode with the Union cavalry at Aldie in April 1863. His description of the Rangers’ terrible presence among the hostile population corroborates Mao’s assertion that the civilian population is “the sea in which the insurgent swims:”

> Unarmed none cared to stir abroad  
> For berries beyond their forest-fence:  
> As glides in seas the shark,  
> Rides Mosby through Green dark\textsuperscript{138}


Southerners contrastingly lauded Rangers as heroic symbols of defiance as Federal incursions forged Confederate identity and nationalism. Union scorched earth tactics alienated civilians, who in turn sheltered, fed, equipped, informed, and augmented the Ranger Battalion. Mosby’s Rangers leveraged equestrian and marksmanship expertise, intimate knowledge of the mountains, night attacks, and the element of surprise to offset numerical inferiority. Civilians among the hills and dales constituted the shadow support network from which the Rangers harassed, attacked, and gobbled up isolated detachments and stragglers before eluding superior forces.139 Rangers infested the Bull Run and Blue Ridge Mountains like sharks who emerged from a hostile abyss to strike and quickly carry away terrified victims without a trace.

The Rangers’ reputation for invincibility added to their mystique. Mosby had gained renown as Stuart’s scout in 1862. However, his thirty-man raid at Fairfax Courthouse on March 9, 1863 that bagged Brigadier General Edwin H. Stoughton established his partisan career.140 After being rewarded with an independent command, his Rangers became famous for destroying larger Federal Cavalry detachments who brought sabers to gun fights. Mosby reflected that he “was the first cavalry commander who discarded the saber as useless…my command reached the highest point of

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efficiency as cavalry because they were well armed with two six-shooters and their charges combined the effect of fire and shock.” The Rangers proved more than a match for Federal Cavalry man-for-man. At Chantilly in March 1863, for example, Mosby’s fifty-man detachment rode through and destroyed a 200-man Federal Cavalry column with a rapid and high volume of six-shot, single action, .44 caliber Army Colt revolver fire (see Figure 4c) with no loss of Ranger life. Mosby’s engagement at Miskel’s Farm on April 2, 1863 further established his tactical dominance. Union observers from across the Potomac were shocked when they witnessed Mosby’s force of seventy surrounded guerillas gain fire superiority, empty two dozen saddles, and capture eighty prisoners and 100 fully equipped horses from the “elite” 150-man First Vermont cavalry troop.

Mosby’s aggressive combination of covert raids and small pitched battles like Chantilly and Miskel’s Farm elicited the *Staunton Speculator*’s report that Mosby “had lately been stirring up the Yankees with a sharp stick,” and earned Mosby the respect of Stuart, Lee, and the Confederate people. Lee increasingly realized Mosby’s potential, and enthusiastically authorized his creation of the 43rd Cavalry Battalion when he derailed an Orange and Alexandria (O & A) Railroad train on May 30, 1863. If Early never acknowledged Mosby’s talent, Sheridan certainly did.141

Early “lacked [both] the courage of his [own] convictions” and any appreciation for the Ranger’s potential. Mosby wrote after the war that “I had always to guess at what

he [Early] wanted me to do—that he never once ordered or requested me to do anything.”¹⁴² Like any good officer, in 1864 Mosby took initiative in the absence of Early’s clear guidance or coordination. After “moving his command “east of the Blue Ridge for the purpose of cooperating” with Early, Mosby created a diversion at Point of Rocks on the Potomac River with 250 Rangers that allowed Early to invade Maryland downstream without incident on July 4, 1864. He then severed the Federal Railroad and telegraph lines between Washington and Harper’s Ferry to facilitate Early’s subsequent investment of Maryland Heights. Because Mosby was physically unable to reach Early in Maryland to receive oral instructions, he temporarily resumed operations in Virginia as the Army of the Valley raided toward Washington.

Mosby’s victory over Major William H. Forbes’ elite 150-man Federal cavalry detachment at Mount Zion Church in a pitched battle reinforced the superiority of the pistol over the saber, ended Federal patrols around Aldie for several weeks, and temporarily restricted Federal columns to the main roads within Mosby’s Confederacy.¹⁴³ Without any commendations or clear instructions, Mosby continued to attempt to cooperate with Early before and after Sheridan’s Valley offensive began on August 10, 1864.¹⁴⁴ Detached and denied strategic integration, Mosby waged a private war against Sheridan:

> The main object of my campaign was to vex and embarrass Sheridan and, if possible, to prevent his advance into the interior of the state. But my exclusive attention was not given to Sheridan, for alarm was kept up

¹⁴² Gordon, Reminiscences, 317; Mosby to Bowen, July 25, 1898, Bowen Papers.
¹⁴³ OR, series 1, vol. 37, part 1; Mosby, Memoirs, 278-282.
¹⁴⁴ Mosby to Bowen, July 25, 1898, and June 12 [no date], Bowen Papers; OR, series 1, vol. 43, part 1, 3-5.
continuously by threatening Washington and occasionally crossing the Potomac.\textsuperscript{145}

Mosby certainly vexed Sheridan, but his admission that his “exclusive attention was not given to Sheridan” indicates the extent to which his operations lacked coordination with conventional military leaders. Sheridan confessed that Mosby was the “most redoubtable” guerilla leader because he “depleted [Sheridan’s] line-of-battle strength [by] necessitating…large escorts for…[his] supply-trains,” but imagine if the raids had been coordinated.\textsuperscript{146} Although Mosby was absent from a combat wound between September 13\textsuperscript{th} and 29\textsuperscript{th}, his subordinate commanders were proven leaders who routinely conducted raids independently. In Mosby’s absence, Early could have easily cooperated with Captain Sam Chapman, who was a skilled tactician and Mosby’s second-in-command. The fact that the Rangers momentarily floundered without Mosby was no reason for Early to write them off.\textsuperscript{147} Early or one of his subordinate commanders could certainly have taken charge of the Rangers without Mosby, and focused their unconventional combat power on Sheridan’s rear at either Winchester or Fisher’s Hill.

The Rangers demonstrated their destructive potential in no uncertain terms at Berryville. The Berryville Wagon Raid was Mosby’s signature asymmetric ambush. Sheridan began maneuvering a 35,000-man army from Harper’s Ferry to destroy Early’s Confederate Army located near Winchester on August 10. Mosby’s scouts under John Russell apprised him of Sheridan’s disposition and long supply train that stretched from Washington through Berryville to his army. With fresh intelligence, Mosby initiated the

\textsuperscript{145} Mosby, \textit{Memoirs}, 278-282.
\textsuperscript{146} Sheridan, \textit{Memoirs}, 238, 256.
movement of three cavalry squadrons (troops in today’s language) to a temporary secret rendezvous position near Berryville. Mosby then personally scouted the Berryville Pike (modern-day Highway 7) just north of Berryville to select his ambush site and the “knoll” that became the assault position. He retrieved his Rangers in the early morning hours, led them on a concealed route toward the ambush site, and arrayed them undetected in their assault positions. He assigned Captain Adolphus (“Dolly”) Richards’ squadron to attack the convoy where it entered Berryville; while Captains Sam Chapman and Alfred Glasscock’s squadrons were tasked to attack the rear. As the soldiers, teamsters, and sutlers rested, made coffee, and slowly rose to the dawn twilight around their wagons, Mosby personally scouted and surmised the vulnerability of the strung-out and unsecured rear of the convoy along the pike.

Mosby and his subordinate commanders positively identified their targets and confirmed the feasibility of the attack. Satisfied, and with his squadrons set in their assault positions, Mosby personally initiated the ambush with the signal of three howitzer shots into the convoy. His Rangers were shrouded by mist and therefore completely surprised the enemy (See Figure 4d). In characteristic fashion, Mosby’s 250-to-300 Rangers “dashed forward ‘as reapers descend to the harvest of death’ with pistols and ‘demonic yells.’” Union Brigadier General John R. Kenley, who commanded the 3,000-man escort brigade and convoy, recognized the danger too late to deploy, and a large portion of his terrified men were routed as Rangers rode through the clustered wagons as the sun rose. Kenly’s men panicked and fled as the Rangers quickly “unhitch[ed] mules, burn[ed] wagons, and hurl[ed] prisoners and spoils to the rear.” Then, as quickly as they had appeared, Mosby’s skirmishers executed a rear-guard
action to cover the Rangers’ retreat across the Shenandoah River. With the loss of only
“two dead and three wounded,” Mosby’s men killed six and wounded nine men, and
escaped through Snicker’s Gap with 200 prisoners, 420 mules, 200 cattle, and 36
horses.148 Mosby was the guerilla par excellence, and Berryville was his asymmetric
masterpiece.

Mosby dealt Sheridan a political bloody nose at Berryville that reinvigorated
Confederate morale. Although his raid was comparatively small, Sheridan could ill-
afford embarrassments in the politically hostile context of the upcoming presidential
election. Momentum had been with the North when Grant began the Overland
Campaign, but Democratic Presidential Candidate George McClellan increasingly
appealed to northerners disheartened by Grant’s failure to destroy Lee outside
Richmond, and Sherman’s apparent stalemate at Atlanta. As Lincoln’s arch-nemesis,
McClellan grudgingly took charge of both “War Democrats” and “Peace Democrats”
known as “copperheads.” Copperhead politicians and editorialists who routinely made
capital of Union failures had a field day with Berryville.149 Major newspapers
embellished reports of the panic-stricken guards who threw down their weapons, and
even falsely claimed that the Rangers had caused Sheridan’s subsequent retrograde
movement north to Halltown.150 Harper’s Weekly inaccurately reported that:

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148 Mosby to John Russell, August 28, 1899, Letters of John S. Mosby, 94-96; OR, series
1, vol. 43, 483-484, 620-9; Jones, Ranger Mosby, 188-198; Mosby, Memoirs, 290-292;
149 Gideon Welles, The Civil War Diary of Gideon Welles, Lincoln’s Secretary of the
Navy, William E. Gienapp and Erica L. Gienapp, eds. (Chicago: The Knox College
Lincoln Studies Center and the University of Illinois Press), 308-309, 406; Unknown,
150 OR, series 1, vol. 43, 483-484, 620-9.
In the Valley Early has been quite heavily reinforced by General Longstreet, and has taken a strong position south of Strasburg. This, together with a partial defeat at Berryville on the 14th, in which Sheridan’s wagon train was as completely destroyed as to embarrass his operations, has led the latter to fall back upon Winchester.  

*The New York Times* played into Mosby’s hands by calling him “the only aggressive enemy in the Military Division.” Mosby’s sensationalized cost-efficient raid embarrassed and frustrated Sheridan’s efforts, demoralized his army, and encouraged northern political opposition. Gideon Welles, Lincoln’s Secretary of the Navy, lamented in late August that the “fault finding which has disgraced the presses ostensibly of the administration party, particularly the press of New York has given strength to their opponents.” The Rangers’ spectacularly lop-sided success was conversely a boon to southern morale that was sensationalized by the southern press. The humiliated Sheridan reacted with severity.

Although economical, Mosby’s attacks provoked the Army of the Shenandoah’s wrath. His Rangers at Berryville had temporarily discredited Sheridan and tied down three times their number of Union soldiers. Sheridan permanently tasked an 1,800-man brigade to perform convoy security, and required that couriers be escorted by eight-to-ten cavalrymen. He later described the challenge posed by guerillas:

> During the entire campaign, I had been annoyed by guerilla bands…and this had considerably depleted my line-of-battle strength, necessitating as it did large escorts…The most redoubtable of these leaders was Mosby…”

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153 Jones, *Diary*, 265; Welles, *Civil War Diary*, 491.
Mosby had penetrated Sheridan’s psyche and germinated apprehension about his supply lines’ vulnerability within the Valley. Sheridan responded with more aggressive counter-guerilla measures than any previous commander. He dedicated a company of scouts under the Indian fighter Captain Richard Blazer to conduct hunter-killer patrols exclusively for Rangers. His large cavalry corps also allowed him to task a large force to screen his army, with special instructions to surveille the Blue Ridge gaps and the Shenandoah River fords that were known Ranger ratlines. He additionally ordered the arrest of Rangers’ family members, and condoned his subordinates’ summary execution of captured guerillas.\(^{155}\) Sheridan’s counter-guerilla operations damaged the 43\(^{rd}\) Battalion and kept Mosby on his toes, but ultimately neither prevented raids, or eliminated the guerilla menace. Mosby’s Rangers under Captain Chapman sustained operations as Mosby convalesced, and by October Mosby was again leading the battalion in aggressive operations against Sheridan’s rear.\(^{156}\)

Sheridan no longer perceived Early as a major threat after his Winchester and Fisher’s Hill victories virtually destroyed the Army of the Valley. His guerilla woes continued, however. The Rangers’ renewed railroad destruction was the only bright spot in the Valley campaign for Lee. Mosby’s spectacular raids on the Manassas Gap (October 6) and Baltimore and Ohio (October 13) Railroads were stark reminders to Grant and Sheridan that the Valley had yet to be conquered. Despite Sheridan’s best efforts, the Rangers ensured that the Manassas Gap Railroad would never be utilized by


the Army of the Shenandoah for any offensive. Sheridan therefore remained obstinately opposed to Grant’s suggestion that he ascend the Valley, destroy the Virginia Central Railroad, attack Charlottesville, and threaten Lee’s rear. Grant believed that such an offensive would break the Richmond stalemate and shorten the war. Sheridan was not opposed to Grant’s suggestion because of Early’s army, but the threat of guerillas to his supply lines! Sheridan reported to Grant that although “Early’s army was completely broken up and dispirited…, [i]t [would] be exceedingly difficult for [him] to carry the infantry column over the mountains and strike at the Central road. [He] [could not] accumulate sufficient stores to do so…” In Sheridan’s mind, his own victories on the heels of Sherman’s Atlanta conquest (September 2) were sufficient to ensure Lincoln’s reelection. Averse to further risks, he therefore determined that his two victories and scorched-earth campaign from Staunton to Winchester were good enough for government work. He furthermore wanted no part of a renewed campaign in which guerillas might prevent the success of an assault on Charlottesville by weakening his army. Sheridan thus remained stubbornly determined to let well enough alone by remaining in the lower Valley and returning part of his army to Grant.158

Major General Early meanwhile typified the adage that “you cannot expect a tiger to change his stripes.” Lee again reinforced Early to 21,000 men after he had nearly lost his entire army. He had faced such odds before, and was not about to change tactics.

158 OR, series 1, vol. 43, part 1, 28-32, 50; OR, series 1, vol. 43, part 2, 151, 209, 272, 290, 314; Sheridan, Memoirs, 337-351; Mosby, Memoirs, 303-311.
Mosby was back in the saddle, aggressively campaigning, and willing “to follow orders” as Early prepared to attack Sheridan in October. Early predictably told Mosby nothing of his plans. The Army of the Valley’s well-executed Cedar Creek attack unfolded without a hitch on October 19 as Major General John Brown Gordon’s strike force completely surprised, flanked, and routed two of Sheridan’s corps around 5:30 am. When Early halted the Confederate pursuit of Sheridan’s apparently defeated army, few could have predicted what would happen next. There were no significant guerilla detachments in the Valley between Sheridan’s routed army and Winchester. After all, nobody had informed Mosby, the last significant Partisan Ranger commander, of Early’s plans. If any Rangers were in the vicinity, they obviously failed to notice a splendidly mounted two-star general who was riding furiously toward the battlefield and cursing a blue streak—ordering his panicked Bluecoats to face about, fall in, and pursue the enemy. Sheridan’s leadership electrified his army, which subsequently counterattacked and destroyed Early’s army that afternoon once and for all. The Confederate government’s conventional mindset and Early’s inability or unwillingness to embrace hybrid warfare ensured that Mosby’s elite Rangers were everywhere but in the rear of Sheridan’s army at one of the Civil War’s most critical junctures. Early refused to focus the Ranger’s combat power on Sheridan’s Achilles heel, because “By God, [he] wasn’t going to do all the fighting while Mosby did the plundering.” The Rangers never gobbled up Sheridan. Instead they were all over Northern Virginia because an inept, conventionally minded general refused to coordinate with them or to lead them.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Scott, Partisan Life, 298-305, 381-390; Mosby to Bowen, July 25, 1898, and July 12 [no year], Bowen Papers; Gordon, Reminiscences, 352-372; Sheridan, Memoirs, 328-336; Unknown, “From Hagerstown,” Evening Star, November 19, 1864, Historic
Mosby had always waged a political war to simply justify his existence. He and McNeill were the lone exceptions to President Davis’ euphemistic reflection that Partisan Rangers who he initially commissioned were “subsequently confined to cavalry alone.”\footnote{Davis, \textit{The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government}, vol. 1, 439.} West Pointer Brigadier General Thomas L. Rosser was Early’s brave and dull cavalry commander. He disliked guerillas because Ranger Hanse McNeill and former Ranger Colonel Lige White had both refused to comply with some of his petulant demands and unreasonable orders.\footnote{Virgil C. Jones, \textit{Gray Ghosts and Rebel Raiders} (McLean, Virginia: EPM Publications, 1984), 213; Ramage, \textit{Gray Ghost}, 134-135.} Rosser had sent Lee an angry letter in January 1864 calling “Partisan Rangers” inefficient, detrimental to good order and discipline, and a menace to civilians that provoked Union wrath. Apart from Mosby and McNeill, Lee and Secretary of War Seddon agreed, and pressured Congress to repeal the Partisan Ranger Act in February 1864. Lee appreciated Mosby and McNeill, but was himself a proponent of Napoleon-style heavy battalions, and never acknowledged the value of Ranger small unit operations characterized by 20-to-100 men for purposes of speed, stealth, secrecy, infiltration, and surprise. Stuart praised Mosby’s exploits and vouched for the Rangers’ “efficiency” to shield Mosby’s command, but he was also unsympathetic to small unit operations, and had even attempted to muster Mosby’s command into regular service at Lee’s request. Lee and Stuart had believed that they were doing Mosby and McNeill favors; as West Pointers they were oblivious to the importance of spoils and small unit operations to Ranger cohesion and efficiency. Lee
had sent a letter to Stuart in response to rumors of Mosby’s men profiteering from plunder. He professed knowledge of Mosby’s large command, but could not fathom why Mosby “under[took] his expeditions with so few men, whether it is from policy or the difficulty of collecting them.” Mosby and McNeill ultimately protected their commands by traveling to Richmond to secure policy exemptions. In the wake of the political bloodbath and repeated invasions, Mosby’s “battalion of six companies was the only authorized [guerilla] force operating in the rear of Sheridan’s army in the Shenandoah Valley” by the fall of 1864.

Ranger operations the week after Cedar Creek bore testimony to Mosby’s deferred dream and capability to influence Early’s campaign. After the battle, Mosby approached one of Early’s staff members in Charlottesville to ask why Early had not notified him of his plans to attack Sheridan at Cedar Creek. Mosby told the staff officer that he “could have struck him [Sheridan] in the rear-destroyed his trains in the rout & confusion-& probably created such a [ferment?] that they could not-have reformed…” He was not exaggerating. After Cedar Creek, Mosby and 400 Rangers infiltrated the Valley on the night of October 24th, and successfully attacked another wagon train six miles north of Winchester on the 25th. The Rangers captured Union General Alfred N.A. Duffie during the ambush. While Sheridan downplayed the incident, continued battalion-sized Ranger raids in the Bull Run and Shenandoah Valleys only reinforced his refusal to shorten the war by attacking Charlottesville. In addition to numerous

162 OR, series 1, vol. 29, part 2, 652; Thomas Rosser to Robert E. Lee, January 11, 1864, OR, series 1, vol. 33, 1081; OR, series 1, vol. 33, 1082-1083; Rebellion Record, vol. 8, 422; Jones, Gray Ghosts and Rebel Raiders, 213; McPherson, Ordeal by Fire, 210-211.

163 Mosby, Memoirs, 283.

164 Mosby to Bowen, July 25, 1898, Bowen Papers.
unauthorized guerilla units throughout the Valley, by December 1864 the 43rd Battalion grew to eight companies. Mosby demonstrated that Early’s refusal to coordinate with the Rangers and enlist their help to influence the Cedar Creek battle was a grievous error.\textsuperscript{165} His failure to follow Stuart and Breckinridge’s example of employing the full spectrum of available forces might have cost him the most decisive battle of the Valley Campaign. Mosby intentionally understated the case when he reflected that Early “preferred for Sheridan to keep his wagon trains.”\textsuperscript{166}

Mosby defied political and military odds with remarkable success. He transcended conventional tactics and re-discovered guerilla principles as old as warfare itself by striving for excellence. As an outsider to the West Point clique, his unconventional rise as a partisan chieftain was perceived as a threat by the jealous and small-minded elements of the elitist Confederate power structure who were dedicated to maintaining the status quo. Stuart was a true ally who recognized Mosby’s potential and enabled his success. By running with opportunities, Mosby’s Rangers became a force multiplier that ultimately earned the respect and admiration of Stuart, Lee, and the Confederate people. Mosby and McNeill managed to save their commands from jealous elites through proven good conduct and efficiency. Following Stuart’s death and Lee’s increasingly desperate situation between the summer to the winter of 1864, Mosby’s operational lines of effort became largely detached from the strategic situation. As Union offensives ground down the Confederate Army, less experienced commanders


\textsuperscript{166} Mosby to Bowen, July 25, 1898, Bowen Papers.
lacked the imagination and strategic acumen of men like Stuart. Early’s monolithic devotion to conventional warfare ensured that Mosby’s command would become disengaged as a strategic enabler. Early imprudently dealt the Rangers out of his crucial Valley operations. He thereby quickened his defeat at Cedar Creek by ignoring available unconventional forces capable of creating military opportunities. Sheridan’s victory over Early and brutal Valley suppression paradoxically stoked the flames of Mosby’s command, which eluded occupiers and executed raids indefinitely. Following the Army of the Valley’s destruction, only the Rangers prevented Sheridan from taking Charlottesville from the Valley. Mosby mastered asymmetric warfare and delayed Union victory, but his efforts were in vain “without a good army to take advantage of [his] success.”

Figure 4a.\textsuperscript{168} The Shenandoah Valley and Mosby’s Confederacy

Figure 4b.\textsuperscript{169} Mosby’s Confederacy Proper

\textsuperscript{168} Gallagher, ed., Struggle for the Shenandoah: Essays on the 1864 Valley Campaign, cover page.
\textsuperscript{169} Ashdown and Caudill, The Mosby Myth, 40.
Figure 4c: Colt .44 Six-shot Revolver

Figure 4d: Berryville Wagon Raid (August 13, 1864)

Conclusion

Marion and Mosby’s combat power stemmed from their ability to adapt guerilla principles to regional cultural, political, and socioeconomic conditions. As material underdogs, they achieved asymmetric mastery by leveraging local resources and mounted guerilla tactics against larger, better-equipped adversaries. Civilian communities who viewed them as resistance symbols provided the essential support structure for their success as enemy occupations forged nationalism. Their fluid forces thrived among the swamps, mountains, and sympathetic populace who provided them refuge, food, supplies, intelligence, and manpower. They won popular support with dedication, political savvy, tactical skill, and economy of force. Marion and Mosby adhered to ancient principles used by Genghis Khan and Shun Tzu. They avoided superior forces and enemy strongpoints in favor of isolated units and weak points. They targeted military infrastructure, supply convoys, isolated troop detachments, pickets, couriers, and elements of the population who supported the enemy. Their attacks weakened larger armies bylogistically disrupting supply and communication; corroding enemy troop morale and domestic war support; and diverting enemies’ line-of-battle strength by compelling them to protect supply lines, outposts, and detachments. As efficient partisans, their political and informational impacts created irrational fear in their enemies’ minds, and were sensationalized by soldiers, politicians, and the print media. They became exponentially more effective than comparably sized regular units by exploiting their own legends and psychologically dominating their enemies by using fear as a force multiplier. While objective historians acknowledge their proficiency, Mosby’s legend was tainted by the slave power defeat and association with Confederate
bushwhackers. Marion became a hero as his militia was incorporated into a winning strategy. Mosby’s 1864 operations contrastingly remained a bright spot in Virginia’s dismal war effort, partly because his Rangers’ spirit represented something more American than Richmond’s elite establishment.

The divergence of Confederate ideology and goals from original American republican-based values shaped Richmond’s political and military policies. The Southern Campaign of the American Revolution had been part of a radical movement with a democratic groundswell of citizen-militia support for the Patriot cause. Greene achieved victory in the South not from his Continentals’ strength, but by designing and directing a salient hybrid strategy that channeled the power of a people’s war. He overcame superior numbers by incorporating partisans like Marion, who knew the terrain and had earned the people’s loyalty, into a hybrid strategy that systematically incorporated guerilla tactics. President Davis’ Confederate War Department had a different political philosophy and strategic vision. The Richmond elite sought to preserve slavery and the social order by promoting a deferential society that suppressed political parties, and protected southern institutions and infrastructure with a conventional army. Elite-driven conscription created a grand professional army and tactics that limited guerilla warfare’s potential to create anarchy. In the balance, Confederate tactics were never grand enough to cope with Union advantages, so partisans like Mosby and McNeill coped by irregular means.

Mosby, like Marion, was an underdog who became Virginia’s master of partisan warfare. Yet Marion had more significantly influenced the Southern Campaign. Greene integrated him into the overall strategy by providing written orders, a sense of purpose,
and by nesting his partisan raids into overall strategy. Coordinated actions allowed Marion’s ambush of Major Robert McLeroth at Halfway Swamp on December 12, 1780 to create a power shift which denied Cornwallis his military base-of-support, reinvigorated Greene’s, and thereby facilitated Continental victory. In 1863, Mosby was rewarded with a command after proving guerilla warfare’s feasibility, despite technological advancements and military professionalization. Lee and Stuart utilized his Rangers much like Greene had Marion. As the Spring 1864 Union offensive removed competent southern leaders, commanders like Early steeped in West Point doctrine were loath to embrace hybrid warfare, even when all other options were exhausted. As Northern Virginia’s last officially sanctioned partisan leader, Mosby not only proved his capability to cooperate at Berryville on August 13, 1864, but even prolonged the war by influencing Sheridan not to advance through the Shenandoah Valley to attack the strategically vital Charlottesville rail hub behind Lee’s army. Unlike Greene, Early chose not to coordinate with Mosby and avoided hybrid warfare, apparently because of his overinflated elitist sense of pride, as well as inexperience and incompetence. Early’s irrational refusal to employ Mosby indicates that oligarchic Confederate elitism under the stress of war created strategic inflexibility that resulted in catastrophes like Cedar Creek, a factor in southern defeat.

Marion was a revolutionary hero in a war that democratically embraced grassroots support; Mosby was an indominable American who became a controversial figure in a slave society’s failed independence movement. While Stuart lived and the Army of Northern Virginia maneuvered, Mosby made important strategic contributions. The peak strength and efficiency of the Rangers tragically coincided with Stuart’s death and Lee’
hopeless defense of Richmond. In contrast to Greene, Early’s Army of the Valley command team substituted arrogance for inferiority. Early foolishly shuffled the Rangers, his last ace, out of his deck. Like Marion, Mosby only needed broad guidance and written orders delivered by a trusted courier to coordinate his actions, which Early obviously knew. Mosby was on the losing side, and defeat shaped his contentious historiography. Recent scholarship, however, testifies to his legacy as a high-caliber guerilla like Marion. Both demonstrated that the ancient art of guerilla warfare will always remain a viable strategic option for weaker nations under the right circumstances, terrain, conditions, and with the right people. Mosby was a true partisan whose impact was limited by the constraints of oligarchic leadership whose narrow interests set the political agenda and defined a bridle, inflexible strategy. As Marion demonstrated, however, no military on earth is sufficiently powerful to suppress a truly democratic movement and a real people’s war.
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