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"Impracticable, inhospitable, and dismal country": An examination of the environmental impact on Civil War military operations in West Virginia

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“IMPRACTICABLE, INHOSPITABLE, AND DISMAL COUNTRY”: AN EXAMINATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ON CIVIL WAR MILITARY OPERATIONS IN WEST VIRGINIA

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APPROVAL OF THESIS

We, the faculty supervising the work of John Martin McMillan, affirm that the thesis, *"Impracticable, Inhospitable, and Dismal Country": An Examination of the Environmental Impact on Civil War Military Operations in West Virginia* meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by the Department of History and the College of Liberal Arts. This work also conforms to the editorial standards of our discipline and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With our signatures, we approve the manuscript for publication.

Dr. Michael E. Woods, Department of History	Committee Chairperson	3/1/18 Date
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DEDICATION

To
Big

For trips in the “Gray Van” to Shiloh and Lookout Mountain, I am continually thankful.

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ABSTRACT

"Impracticable, Inhospitable, and Dismal Country" examines the role of the natural environment in the campaign fought along Tygart's Valley River in West Virginia during the summer and early fall of 1861. In the weeks following the capitulation of Fort Sumter, it became clear that hostilities would break out in present-day West Virginia. Divided political sentiments between secessionists and Unionists, combined with vital transportation avenues including turnpikes, the Ohio River, and the critical Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, forced the region into the crosshairs of regular military operations. As soldiers from both Union and Confederate armies mobilized in West Virginia, they soon began to understand the natural environment would play a critical role in determining the fight there. More than an arena of combat, the natural environment was a third participant in the fight for the Mountain State. This thesis contributes to the subfield of environmental Civil War studies by analyzing the intersection of environment and war in a unique theater of the Civil War. As the role of the natural environment on military operations in West Virginia has not received thorough scholarly attention, this thesis also helps to push forward the historiography of the Civil War in Appalachia. Topography, weather, and disease were all environmental factors that affected command decisions and impacted the common soldier experience. Both sides could alter the landscape into a natural ally, but the Federals were more proficient in adapting to and overcoming the natural environment. Union victories enabled the unimpeded progress of the Reorganized Government of Virginia and the eventual formation of the state of West Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

The natural and built environment was a deciding factor in the Civil War military operations conducted in West Virginia. Veterans of campaigning in West Virginia recognized this. Writing in his memoirs more than a decade after Appomattox, the efficient and indispensable staff officer Walter Taylor discussed his experiences serving under Robert E. Lee in West Virginia during the late summer and fall of 1861. Surprising to some people today is Lee's service in this theater; even more startling is his defeat there. "Judged from its results," Taylor believed, "it must be confessed that this series of operations was a failure."[1] This misstep in West Virginia raised flags for some Confederate citizenry when Lee was appointed commander of the Rebel forces pinned against Richmond in June 1862. *Richmond Examiner* editor Richard Pollard believed Lee had "blindly lost" the chance at a decisive battle in western Virginia. North Carolinian Catherine Edmondston provided the oft repeated nickname, "old-stick-in-the-mud." "He failed in Western Va owning, it was said, to the weather…his nick name last summer was 'old-stick-in-the-mud'" Edmondston quipped. Continuing, she worried "there is mud enough in and abut our lines, but pray God he may not fulfill the whole of his name."[2] Taylor, who "was first to last the closest of all staff officers to Lee," saw it differently.[3] Discussing the Confederate failure in West Virginia, Taylor believed Lee was not to blame. The disaster for Confederates in the region was in motion before he had arrived, and now the Alleghenies served as the dividing line between Confederate Virginia and the Unionist portion of the state. "In this network of mountains" Taylor believed, "Nature had provided an insurmountable barrier to operations in the transmontane country."[4]

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[1] Walter Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee* (1877; reprint, New York: Bonanza Books, 1962), 35.
[2] Quoted in Gary Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 130.
[3] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, introduction, v.
[4] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 35.

West Virginia was an exceptional theater of the Civil War for several reasons. First were the divided sentiments between eastern and western Virginia and the swift and determined action of Unionists in the northwest portion that eventually led to West Virginia statehood. Second, is the guerrilla and irregular warfare the region witnessed. A region with such divided loyalties, it naturally provoked harsh guerrilla warfare. Third, the first land campaigns of the war occurred in West Virginia and were often led by officers who would go on to notoriety for their actions on battlefields far from the Alleghenies. Lastly, and mostly importantly, I argue, was the natural environment. The Mountain State is a vast, isolated, and rugged place. This thesis will focus on the intersection of the military campaigns and the region's environment, and how the interplay between the two affected the strategic planning of commanders and the experiences of both commanders and common soldiers.

The Civil War raged across environments as diverse as those doing the soldiering and fighting. In most Civil War scholarship, particularly traditional military history, the environment serves merely as a background, dressing the set for the greater action that is to come. When examined more closely, however, the environment can reveal much more about battles and campaigns. Understanding the environment in which military activities were conducted helps to more fully answer the when, where, and significance of the action. Examining military campaigns through an environmental lens provides a clearer understanding of the context surrounding the action. Whether it was drought and water sources surrounding the Battle of Perryville, the Army of Northern Virginia's subsistence off untouched northern soil during the Gettysburg campaign, or William Sherman and Phil Sheridan's assault on the Confederacy's natural resources, an environmental context illuminates the war's military actions. West Virginia serves as a valuable case study to understand this interplay between the environment and Civil

War military operations. Focusing on West Virginia, this thesis moves the environment from the background to a central role in the Civil War.

Even though West Virginia was an exceptional and unique theater of the Civil War, the relevant scholarship remains limited. Many debates revolve around the politics of the statehood movement, while other studies provide a narrative of the interplay between military and statehood actions. Not until recent years has the scholarship begun to pivot and develop, with historians providing a more complex and comprehensive analysis of the war in the region. To fully understand the Civil War, the political, civilian, and military activities must be examined together. West Virginia's war experience was no different and recent scholarship has effectively shown this relationship. The door opened by current scholars provides students of the war not only a greater sense of the political, social, and military dynamic in the Alleghenies, but a healthier understanding of just how complex the Civil War was.

Literature on West Virginia's Civil War experience first appeared before the turn of the twentieth-century with Granville Parker's 1875 and Theodore F. Lang's 1895 publications. Only briefly mentioning the war, Parker's book focuses solely on the formation of West Virginia and the politics behind it. Beginning with the reaction to John Brown's 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry and ending with the death of ex-President Andrew Johnson, Parker labors to present facts about West Virginia's formation not commonly known to others and overall the piece seems an exercise of Parker's political intellect.[5] Lang's publication is a veteran's reminiscence and fits the literature published on the war during the late nineteenth century.[6] A major in the 6th West

[5] Granville Parker, *The Formation of the State of West Virginia, and other Incidents of the Civil War; with Remarks on Subjects of Public Interest, Arising Since the War Closed* (Wellsburg, WV: Glass & Son, 1875).
[6] Theodore F. Lang, *Loyal West Virginia from 1861 to 1865* (Baltimore, MD: The Deutsch Publishing Company, 1895). For other veterans who published their accounts of the war, whether entirely or in-part in West Virginia, see,

Virginia Cavalry, Lang believed "A great neglect exists at this time, and has existed for many years, in relation to the history of the part taken in the late war by the loyal West Virginians, both civil and military, who stood so firmly for the preservation of the Union."[7] The work includes an examination of the antebellum relations between eastern and western Virginia, military mobilization and campaigns, the organization of the loyal Virginia government, and the author's personal reminiscences. Even with the issues of writing with thirty years of hindsight, Lang's work cannot be ignored and serves as a valuable point of departure in understanding the war in West Virginia.

The first academic piece on the war in West Virginia was the 1910 publication of Charles Ambler's *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861*.[8] Setting the table for understanding sectionalism in Virginia, Ambler argues separation between eastern and western Virginia was destined to happen and rooted in economics rather than slavery and abolition. Although Ambler does not examine the war years, his interpretation of the beginning of the statehood movement remains valuable. Sectionalism was the root of West Virginia's statehood movement and Ambler's publication opened the conversation for truly understanding the division between eastern and western Virginia. Challenging local color writers, Ambler refuted the romantic, non-industrial depiction of nineteenth-century life in western Virginia, and his work remained unchallenged until the 1960s.

Walter Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee* (1877; repr., New York: Bonanza Books, 1962); Sam Watkins, *Co. Aytch: A Confederate Memoir of the Civil War* (1882; repr., New York: Touchstone, 2003); Jacob D. Cox, *Military Reminiscences of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900); Thomas H. Barton, *Autobiography of Dr. Thomas H. Barton* (Charleston: West Virginia Printing Company,1890); Charles Richard Williams ed., *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes, Volume II: 1861-1865* (The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1922); and James I. Robertson, ed., *Soldier of Southwestern Virginia: The Civil War Letters of Captain John Preston Sheffey* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004). Besides these works, a large amount of regimental histories, from both Union and Confederate units, are available that include their experiences in West Virginia.

[7] Lang, *Loyal West Virginia*, preface, iii.

[8] Charles Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910).

Parker, Lang, and Ambler's publications, the most noteworthy early works on the war in West Virginia, emphasize the main topics of later research: sectionalism, the statehood movement, and a distant third, the military campaigns. Any involvement with West Virginia's environment, however, is missing. This hole in the literature, examining the interplay between the environment and war activities, left the door open for the next generation of writers.

The 1960s brought the centennial of the Civil War and West Virginia statehood. Three works from that decade offer an important cornerstone in West Virginia's Civil War historiography: those of George Ellis Moore, Richard Orr Curry, and Boyd Stutler.[9] Moore examined secession, war, and statehood, covering the years 1860 to 1863. Looking only at military and political events, Moore argues that western Virginia was solidly pro-Unionist and favored the formation of a new state. His examination of the interplay between military events and their effect on the statehood conventions is perhaps his greatest contribution. Moore was one of the first to argue the Confederate defeat at Philippi and at Rich Mountain enabled the Second Wheeling Convention and allowed the reorganized government to function unimpeded.

Richard Orr Curry's 1964 publication directly refuted Moore's assessment of the numbers of Unionists and popular support for the statehood movement. He claimed Unionist sentiment was not as common, and argued that loyal citizens who supported a new state resided in the areas along the Ohio River, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and the Pennsylvania border. The other areas that would comprise West Virginia, however, were against the statehood movement. Until the publications by Moore and Curry, the only question concerning West Virginia statehood was

[9] George Ellis Moore, *A Banner in the Hills: West Virginia's Statehood* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963); Richard Orr Curry, *A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964); Boyd B. Stutler, *West Virginia in the Civil War* (Charleston, WV: Education Foundation, 1963). For other book length works published in the centennial years, see Charles Shetler, *West Virginia Civil War Literature: An Annotated Bibliography* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Library, 1963); and Charles Ambler's *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776 to 1861* was reprinted in 1964.

its legality as determined by the United States Constitution. The argument between Moore and Curry proved fruitful and was a solid step forward in the scholarship by examining the popularity, rather than just its constitutionality, of the statehood movement.

Lastly, Boyd Stutler challenged the idea that Union soldiers from West Virginia were merely a home guard. He argues these men were true soldiers who pulled their weight in the fight against the Confederacy. From major battlefields, such as the Virginia Peninsula, Gettysburg, and Vicksburg to small engagements in their home region, the loyal men of West Virginia shed their blood and helped protect the formation of their new state. Stutler helped develop the understanding of West Virginia's role in the Civil War by recounting the service of loyal West Virginia regiments. Telling only one side of the fighting men from West Virginia, however, Stutler leaves absent men from the region who fought to defend the Southern Confederacy and their homeland's place in it.

All three pieces helped to develop the scholarship by challenging common notions of the time. Moore and Curry's debate opened the door for future scholars to examine the region more locally to explore how popular statehood was in specific places, why it was popular there, and when it became popular. Stutler shows loyal men from the region served in greater capacities than simple home guard soldiers and were as dedicated as men from other regions of the North to the Union cause. Each was also more scholarly in its methods and approach, laying the foundation for future scholarly interest in West Virginia's unique Civil War history.

The 1960s continued to advance the historiography of West Virginia in the Civil War with the publication of several scholarly articles. The most innovative of these was by Richard Orr Curry and F. Gerald Ham. In an article published in 1964 by *Civil War History*, Curry and Ham argue that Union officials believed they were in complete control of the state after the Confederate

defeat at Cheat Mountain in September, 1861. Guerrillas, however, made use of West Virginia's unique environment by using the mountain paths, rivers, streams, valleys, and ridges as their allies to make themselves as efficient as possible. Effectively operating in the state's interior, Confederate guerrilla bands formed a resistance movement that prevented Union control of the interior of the state, posing a serious threat to the loyal government and statehood movement in the region's northwest portion. In an interesting conclusion to the article, Curry and Ham argue that the character of a Mountaineer made "bushwhacking" a natural type of warfare, and this guerilla warfare intensified the lawlessness, violence, and partisan difference in West Virginia during the Reconstruction period. The article brings many aspects of the war in West Virginia together to show how the war there was more than political activism and regular military campaigns. Guerillas and irregular warfare, the culture of the local people, and environmental factors all converge in this innovative study.[10]

Other articles published during this time examined generals, a political leader, and the Jones-Imboden raid into West Virginia during the spring of 1863. In 1964, University of Virginia master's student James L. Morrison, Jr., edited the memoirs of Confederate General Henry Heth. Perhaps most famous for opening the battle of Gettysburg, Heth was a native Virginian and served in West Virginia in 1861 and 1862. Valuable for its insights into the war in the Mountain State, Morrison's edited piece adds a twofold dimension to the scholarship. First, it provides a commander's view of the war in the region. Second, it shows there were commanders besides Robert E. Lee and George McClellan who began their Civil War service in West Virginia. Also published in 1964 was Robert R. Boehm's article on the spring 1863 Jones-Imboden raid into West Virginia. Confederate Generals William E. Jones and John D. Imboden led a spring raid

[10] Richard Orr Curry and F. Gerald Ham, "The Bushwhackers' War: Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in West Virginia," *Civil War History* 10, no. 4 (December 1964): 416-433.

into the region to secure livestock for Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Boehm was ahead of his time in showing how environmental needs can influence military strategy and campaigns.[11]

John Letcher, governor of Virginia during secession, the early years of the war, and West Virginia statehood, was the subject of Ronald Lee Sevy's 1965 article. In this innovative piece, Sevy studies sectional differences between eastern and western Virginia to begin an examination of John Letcher's relationship with West Virginia. Any comprehension of West Virginia statehood and the region's role in the Civil War is incomplete without a grasp of Confederate Virginia's take on the western Unionist movement. This perspective places the military operations in the region into greater context and allows a better understanding of how exceptional the region's statehood movement and war experience were. By no means is Sevy's article the complete authority, but it is a valuable contribution to the historiography and a starting point to grasping Confederate Virginia's standpoint. John M. Belohlavek's 1968 article offered an interesting defense of former Virginia governor and Confederate General John B. Floyd. Belohlavek examines Floyd's 1861 service in West Virginia as a defense against the "harsh judgment" that he had received from scholars up to that point. The article leaves the reader somewhat bewildered by the author's reasoning and defense of Floyd, but the piece does serve as

[11] James L. Morrison, Jr., ed., "The Memoirs of Henry Heth," *Civil War History* 8, no. 1 (March 1964): 5-24; Robert R. Boehm, "Mountains and Mud Were Chief Obstacles of Jones-Imboden Raid in West Virginia," *Civil War Times* 3, no. 2 (1962): 14-21. Northern Virginia's natural environment was suffering by the spring of 1863, and is often a periphery argument of Robert E. Lee's summer invasion of the North into Pennsylvania. Livestock and forage was lacking, and Lee hoped to give northern Virginia an opportunity to recover from the previous two years of war. For a contemporary account that places Lee's invasion of the North as an environmental strategy, see, Mark Fiege, "Gettysburg and the Organic Nature of the American Civil War," in *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of Warfare*, ed. Richard P. Tucker and Edmund Russell (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004), 65-92.

a good point of departure in understanding Floyd's generalship in the region and includes sources that help to illuminate his experience there.[12]

These articles take the first steps needed to unravel West Virginia's complicated and unique Civil War experience. Biographical studies underscore the complications and challenges leaders in Virginia and West Virginia faced, but these do not help to further understand West Virginia's war exceptionalism. Governors and generals, North and South, faced severe challenges no matter their theater. Curry and Ham's publication, as well as Boehm's article, all push the scholarship forward. By incorporating the environment of West Virginia into the interpretation of irregular warfare and raiding parties, a better sense of the region's war experience is gained. Not only is West Virginia better understood, but in each of these publications the environment is working its way from the background to a central actor in the story.

In the decades following the 1960s, a new thread emerged in the historiography of the Civil War in West Virginia, as works by local historians examining various campaigns, battles, or leaders became common. Books studying the 1861 campaign culminating with Union victory at Rich Mountain, operations in the Kanawha Valley in 1861 and 1862, Robert E. Lee's actions at Cheat and Sewell Mountain, the battles at Carnifex Ferry and Droop Mountain, and Confederate General Albert Gallatin Jenkins all received attention. These works, although local in nature, provide greater depth and substance to the literature. As we have seen up until the 1970s works on the Civil War in West Virginia focused mainly on the big picture and the interplay between statehood and military actions. Few scholars had examined the fighting with a battle by battle approach. Although these battles were small in scale, the understanding that local histories

[12] Ronald Lee Sevy, "John Letcher and West Virginia," *West Virginia History* 27, no. 1 (October 1965): 10-55; John M. Belohlavek, "John B. Floyd and the West Virginia Campaign of 1861," *West Virginia History* 29, no. 4 (July 1968): 283-291.

provide is fulfilling by producing a traditional military history narrative to the war in the Alleghenies. Extremely focused and thoroughly researched, these books are helpful for scholars and students of the war who wish to conduct a modern military history study or simply want a battlefield view of the Civil War in West Virginia.[13]

Even though numerous battle studies on the war in West Virginia have been written, they are limited in their evaluation of the wider context in which the war took place. Historian Kenneth Noe has contributed three pioneering pieces on the Civil War in West Virginia, opening the door for a shift in the historiography to more innovative studies. In 1991, Noe first examined three groups to understand the perceptions of West Virginia in the decades before and during the war years. First were travelers who came through the region in a broader tour of the South. Second, those who traveled to the region's Sulphur Springs and stayed for longer periods of time. Finally, Union soldiers who came to the region during the war. Through these accounts, Noe reached the conclusion that the region was not an area of continuity and homogeneity, but rather a society of discontinuity moving away from isolation. The second work by Noe expanded on the 1964 article by Curry and Ham concerning guerillas and bushwhackers. Appearing in a 1997

[13] Local histories on the war in West Virginia are numerous; however, for thorough studies of campaigns, battles, and leaders, see, Jack Zinn, *R.E. Lee's Cheat Mountain Campaign* (McClain Print Company, 1974); Fritz Hasselberger, *Yanks From the South: The First Land Campaign of the Civil War, Rich Mountain, West Virginia* (Baltimore, MD: Past Glories Publishing, 1987); Jack L. Dickinson, *Jenkins of Greenbottom: A Civil War Saga* (Charleston, WV: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1988); Tim McKinney, *Robert E. Lee at Sewell Mountain: The West Virginia Campaign* (Charleston, WV: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1990) and *Robert E. Lee and the 35th Star* (Charleston, WV: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1990); Hunter Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2004); Michael B. Graham, *The Coal River Valley in the Civil War: West Virginia Mountains* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2014); and Kevin R. Pawlak, *Shepherdstown in the Civil War* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2015). Terry Lowry, an archivist at the West Virginia State Archives and History, has published numerous books on West Virginia in the Civil War, including, *The Battle of Scary Creek: Military Operations in the Kanawha Valley, April-July 1861* (Charleston, WV: Quarrier Press, 1982); *September Blood: The Battle of Carnifex Ferry* (Charleston, WV: Quarrier Press, 1985); *Last Sleep: The Battle of Droop Mountain, November 6, 1863* (Charleston, WV: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1996); and *The Battle of Charleston and the 1862 Kanawha Valley Campaign* (Charleston, WV: 35th Star Publishing, 2016). For a local history of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad during the war, which was a key strategic objective for both Union and Confederate forces in West Virginia, see, Festus P. Summers, *The Baltimore and Ohio in the Civil War* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons,1939).

edited volume, Noe's article examined the Union army's hard war strategy to fight secessionist guerrillas in West Virginia. Initially fighting a limited war, believing pure military rule and tactics would defeat guerillas, Union commanders moved to a more destructive strategy to combat their irregular opponents. Scouts or scouting became the answer as the war progressed. In the end, the Union anti-guerilla efforts never eliminated the bushwhacking threat in West Virginia, supporting the conclusion reached by Curry and Ham. Lastly, Noe's third publication incorporates a cultural study of West Virginia's Confederate guerrillas. The 2003 article examines the class, age, and kinship ties of those who participated as irregulars. By citing evidence that refutes the common notion that bushwhackers were young, landless men, Noe's article reshapes the understanding of divided sentiment within West Virginia. Guerrillas in the region did not act as a class uprising or to quench a thirst for violence, but rather because of a complex dynamic of the community, ideology, and economic structures. [14]

Noe's work does an excellent job of developing West Virginia's Civil War literature. He refines and expands work from the 1960s, examines the culture of Mountaineers to understand their motivations, and seeks to understand the perception of outsiders to mountaineer culture. By looking forward to the works of more recent years, Noe pivots the scholarship into innovative approaches enabling students to understand the vast complexities of the war in West Virginia and how those provide a better understanding of the region's place in the overall historiography of the Civil War.

[14] Kenneth Noe, "Appalachia's Civil War Genesis: Southwest Virginia as Depicted by Northern and European Writers, 1825-1865" *West Virginia History* 50, no. 1 (March 1991): 91-108; "Exterminating Savages: The Union Army and Mountain Guerrillas in Southern West Virginia, 1861-1862," in *The Civil War in Appalachia*, ed. Kenneth Noe and Shannon Wilson, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 104-130; and "Who Were the Bushwhackers? Age, Class, Kin, and Western Virginia's Confederate Guerrillas, 1861-1862," *Civil War History* 49, no. 1 (March 2003): 5-32.

In recent years, the scholarship concerning West Virginia in the Civil War has been greatly advanced. Led by Noe's scholarship on perception and guerrillas, scholars are examining the war in West Virginia with more nuanced approaches. Key topics include fortifications and troop deployment in a mountain environment, a pre-war West Virginia exceptionalism mentality that eventually led to statehood, class formation, emancipation with the new state movement, and loyalty and virtue during the war. Clarence R. Geier's 2003 archeological study of the war in West Virginia, for example, examines Confederate troop deployments and fortifications in the spring of 1862. The study revealed the extent to which Confederates fortified the western approaches into the valuable Shenandoah Valley, and the chaos in trying to control land where the inhabitants were divided politically by factors they could not control. By examining the environment armies in West Virginia operated in, Geier provides another lens to examine the war in the region and only scrapes the surface of environmental studies to conduct on this theater.[15]

William Link's 2009 article surveys the region's exceptionalism to inform our understanding of West Virginia in the secession crisis. Link revives an older debate started by Charles Ambler and carried forward by George Ellis Moore and Richard O. Curry, which focused on support for statehood. Link contends that West Virginia exceptionalism developed during the 1850s, and that the state struggled over the meaning of republicanism and the power of slaveholders. A thorough study of West Virginia's exceptionalism and its struggle with eastern Virginia, Link believes, shows a "complicated dynamic" and a far more complicated picture than historians have previously acknowledged. The argument over West Virginian's sentiments was continued by Scott MacKenzie in 2015. Understanding the region was not a monolith, MacKenzie

[15] Clarence R. Geier, "Confederate Fortification and Troop Deployment in a Mountain Landscape: Fort Edward Johnson and Camp Shenandoah, April 1862*," Historical Archaeology* 37, no. 3, (2003): 31-45.

examines the change in sentiments over the course of the war. Looking specifically at Kanawha County, an area of rich and poor whites, as well as an enslaved population, he concludes that by the end of the conflict, a Unionist middle class had formed. This piece continues adding complexities to the region's war years, and pushes the scholarship forward by examining change over time rather than simply looking at an area only during the secession crisis.[16]

The trend of recent, more innovative and nuanced studies continued with Michael Woods' 2015 publication that examined emancipation and statehood in West Virginia. Exempt from the Emancipation Proclamation, West Virginia offers valuable insight on slavery, war, and liberation. By tying together emancipation, statehood, and regional identity, Woods argues that West Virginia was a unique place during the war, even amongst other contested border states. This argument develops the historiography by highlighting the region's exceptionalism and sets up future comparative studies with other border areas. In 2016, Charles Welsko worked to garner a better understanding of loyalty and virtue, and how individuals developed the meaning of the two. Studying western Virginia, Welsko contends, allows a focus on the personal side of loyalty and the investigation of its cultural construction. His argument, like others published in

[16] William A. Link, "'This Bastard New Virginia': Slavery, West Virginia Exceptionalism, and the Secession Crisis," *West Virginia History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 37-56; Scott A. MacKenzie, "Forming a Middle Class: The Civil War in Kanawha County, West(ern) Virginia 1861-1865," *West Virginia History* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 23-46. A previous work by MacKenzie examines secession in Kanawha County, "The Slaveholders War: The Secession Crisis in Kanawha County, Western Virginia, 1860-1861," *West Virginia History* 4, no. 1(Spring 2010): 33-57. For more works that examine the question of sentiments within western Virginia during the secession crisis not already mentioned, see, Charles Ambler and Festus P. Summers, *West Virginia: The Mountain State* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1958); John A. Williams, "The New Dominion and the Old: Antebellum and Statehood Politics as the Background for West Virginia's 'Bourbon Democracy'," *West Virginia History* 33, no.4 (July 1972): 317-407; John W. Shaffer, *Clash of Loyalties: A Border County in the Civil War* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2003); and Ken Fones-Wolf, "'Traitors in Wheeling': Secessionism in an Appalachian Unionist City," *Journal of Appalachian Studies* 13, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 75-93.

the last decade, illustrates both the complexity and exceptionalism of West Virginia's Civil War experience.[17]

Two publications, one by Mark Snell and the second by Ryan Bixby, round out the literature of the last decade. Written in the first year of the Civil War sesquicentennial, Mark Snell's 2011 publication is a general survey of the Civil War in West Virginia. Beginning with John Brown's 1859 raid on Harper's Ferry, Snell examines West Virginia statehood and the interplay of the enabling military events throughout the region. Ryan Bixby's 2012 essay examines the environment and African Americans in Jefferson County, West Virginia, to understand how to incorporate both into the larger narrative of the Civil War in West Virginia. Both works are innovative in their separate ways. Snell incorporates the actions that occurred in the eastern panhandle of West Virginia (Romney, Harper's Ferry, Shepherdstown). Even though these areas are part of the state, their examination occurs within the context of pre-war studies or studies of Robert E. Lee's 1862 Maryland campaign. Bixby's piece raises the important question of how the environment and African-Americans impacted the war in West Virginia.[18]

Scholars in the past decade have pushed the literature forward and brought into focus the complexities of the Civil War in West Virginia. The state was a region of divided sentiments and political affiliations, with citizens who acted on those divisions, one with a wonderfully diverse and rugged natural environment, and an area that witnessed both regular and irregular warfare. It is quite remarkable that a region with this uniqueness has remained so obscure for as long as it has. Although the region only saw small-scale military actions, its place, both

[17] Michael E. Woods, "Mountaineers Becoming Free: Emancipation and Statehood in West Virginia," *West Virginia History* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 37-71; Charles R. Welsko, "'Like a Dark Cloud': Loyalty, Virtue, and War in Western Virginia, 1861-1863," *West Virginia History* 10, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 45-68.
[18] Mark A. Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War: Mountaineers Are Always Free* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011); Ryan C. Bixby, "A More Inclusive Civil War: Neglected Themes in West Virginia's Civil War Historiography," in *Lesser Civil Wars: Civilians Defining War and the Memory of War*, ed. Marsha R. Robinson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 79-105.

politically and militarily, should be central in the study of the Civil War. The growing field of environmental Civil War studies is one avenue through which West Virginia's unique war experience can be incorporated into the larger scope of Civil War historiography. Although environmental Civil War studies are now just emerging, its own historiography is open and far from a well-trodden sub-field of Civil War history.

Civil War environmental studies were called to the mat in 2001 when Jack Temple Kirby illuminated the lack of environmental Civil War studies with his article, "The American Civil War, An Environmental View," written for the National Humanities Center. Kirby offers two reasons for environmental Civil War studies. First is the environmental awareness Americans have taken on since the end of World War II, and more so since the environmental movement, including the development of "Earth Day" in the 1970s. Secondly, Kirby points to how environmentally damaging war is, and to gain a full understanding of America's greatest conflict, its impact on the American environment must be understood. Kirby goes on to provide a list of topics scholars might consider in an environmental study of the Civil War, including disease, death, trees and forest, and animals.[19] After the call by Kirby to bring together environmental and Civil War studies, Lisa Brady began laying its foundation. Brady's 2012 article in *Civil War History* is an excellent overview of the scholarship that examines the interplay between the environment and geography and Civil War military actions. The article also serves as the earliest historiographical examination of the environmental sub-field of Civil War scholarship. [20]

[19] Jack Temple Kirby, "The American Civil War: An Environmental View," *Nature Transformed: The Environment in American History* (Durham, N.C.: National Humanities Center, 2001), http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nattrans/ntuseland/essays/amcwar.htm.
[20]Lisa Brady, "From Battlefield to Fertile Ground: The Development of Civil War Environmental History," *Civil War History* 58, no. 3 (Sep. 2012): 305- 321.

2012 was an important year for environmental Civil War studies. In that year, Brady also published the first book-length environmental Civil War study.[21] Brady looks at three separate campaigns from the Union perspective – Ulysses S. Grant's 1862-1863 campaign for Vicksburg, Phillip Sheridan's 1864 Shenandoah Valley campaign, and William T. Sherman's campaigns through Georgia and the Carolinas in 1864-1865 – and argues that the Union strategy to attack the southern agroecosystem by confiscating and destroying the fruits of Southerners' agriculture labor was successful. By taking harvested crops, appropriating or killing livestock, and destroying farms, Brady argues, the Union strategy accomplished two main goals. First, it deprived the Confederacy of vital war material that its armies needed. Second, it turned the Southern landscape into a "wilderness," effectively providing a psychological victory for Union forces over the Southern populace.[22] In taking her contribution a step further, Brady argues that the destruction of the southern landscape during the Civil War gave Americans a greater appreciation for land and environment, leading to better care and preservation of the nation's landscapes after the war.

A second work engaging environmental Civil War studies is Kathryn Shively Meier's 2013 publication.[23] It is known that disease was the main killer of Civil War soldiers, but Meier asks a simple, yet important question: how did common soldiers stay healthy? Examining the 1862 Shenandoah Valley and Peninsula campaigns, Meier argues that "self-care" gave common soldiers the greatest opportunity to beat diseases, stay alive, and be more mentally stable. Challenging a common argument against soldier desertion and straggling, Meier contends that

[21] Lisa M. Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes During the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).
[22] Brady defines "wilderness" when used in Civil War sources as, "devastated landscapes, areas where positive human influence gave way to human-made disaster." Brady, *War Upon the Land*, 13.
[23] Kathryn Shively Meier, *Nature's Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

soldier straggling, an essential aspect of self-care, needs to be separated from desertion.[24] Examining the average middle-nineteenth century American's relationship with healthcare, the type of diseases common for the period, and developing military medical departments, Meier persuasively argues that straggling and self-care benefitted the common soldier. Straggling and the resulting self-care made them stronger and more efficient fighters, in turn helping their respective armies succeed.

A third work, one that could be considered the final cornerstone of the environmental Civil War studies foundation, is Brian Drake's 2015 edited volume.[25] Born out of a 2011 conference at the University of Georgia, the volume is filled with essays from both Civil War and environmental historians. The essays included examine both the environment and the human understanding and cultural values of it. A wide variety of backdrops is seen, as essays range from the mountains of western North Carolina to the deserts of New Mexico to the Columbian Exchange. Achieving its goal of helping progress environmental Civil War studies, this publication is important in understanding the dynamic between environmental and Civil War history.

Besides the works of Lisa Brady, Kathryn Shively Meier, and Brian Drake, other book length works have addressed the role environment played in the Civil War. Megan Kate Nelson examines how destruction from the Civil War changed the American narrative.[26] By focusing on the destruction of cities, homes, forests, and bodies, Nelson contends that America's fascination

[24] Meier argues straggling, more specifically strategic straggling, was a necessary component of self-care. To execute many of the self-care techniques soldiers had discovered or developed, they would have to fall out of military ranks (particularly camp duties or marching formations) to perform self-care. Once a soldier had restored themselves, they would return to the ranks physically and mentally healthier.
[25] Brian Drake, ed., *The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward an Environmental History of the Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015).
[26] Megan Kate Nelson, *Ruin Nation: Destruction and the American Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

with nostalgic ruins dissipated with the Civil War's devastation. Because of this destruction, Americans came together to rebuild after the war. This rebuilding, however, changed America's memory of the Civil War. An environmental and cultural approach to the Civil War, Nelson's work is a solid multidisciplinary approach and an important addition to the historiography of environmental Civil War studies. Andrew McIlwaine Bell's 2010 publication contends that there was a third army fighting during the war: mosquitos.[27] Bell argues that mosquito borne illness impacted both the bodies and minds of soldiers and commanders. Mosquitos and their diseases reduced the number of effective soldiers, and the impact of this third army was often acknowledged by commanders. Union commanders refused to be influenced by mosquitos, but Confederate leadership believed Union armies would not campaign during the "sickly season." Although a short and tightly focused study, Bell contends that removing the barriers between medical science and military studies could provide more depth to reasons why campaigns and battles turned out how they did.

Most recent is Matthew M. Stith's 2016 study of how nature and guerrilla fighting impacted civilians in the Trans-Mississippi region.[28] Residents of the Trans-Mississippi, including women, children, whites, African Americans, and Native Americans, were forced to the middle ground between the environment and irregular warfare. Suffering greatly, the citizens Stith examines show how a region's environment can be as difficult and harsh an enemy as enemy soldiers. Besides analyzing how citizens, soldiers, and the environment intersect, Stith uses a mostly forgotten region to conduct his study. West Virginia is another forgotten theater of the

[27] Andrew McIlwaine Bell, *Mosquito Soldiers: Malaria, Yellow Fever, and the Course of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).
[28] Matthew M. Stith, *Extreme Civil War: Guerrilla Warfare, Environment, and Race on the Trans-Mississippi Frontier* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016).

Civil War, and Stith's findings are an example of what can be gained from a detailed study of the war's margins.

Articles and essays help comprise environmental Civil War historiography, but do not frequent academic journals or collected volumes. Mark Fiege discusses how environmental factors were a key piece of Robert E. Lee's June, 1863 invasion of the North.[29] As livestock and forage were lacking, and hoping to give northern Virginia an opportunity to recover from the previous two years of war, Lee took his army north, showing how environmental factors dictated military strategy and logistics. Adam Petty's 2017 article, in another examination of a forgotten campaign, explores the environment's effect on the Mine Run campaign in late 1863.[30] Owing to the weather and cold temperatures, a serious engagement between the Army of Potomac and the Army of Northern Virginia did not happen. Although a battle was elusive due to the environment, the campaign did help participants understand the geography of the area and lines of the Confederate army when the Federals came back the following spring to open the horrific Overland Campaign. An interesting and superb geographic and environmental Civil War study is James F. Gentsch's 1994 master's thesis.[31] Gentsch examines geographic features on the battlefield at Shiloh to determine their effect on the April 1862 battle. Studying the fight on a brigade level, Gentsch maps geographic factors such as thick vegetation, ravines, and water courses and shows how each positively or negatively affected brigade movements. Overall the Confederates were less adept in dealing with the environment and geography of the battlefield, causing their defeat. Innovative for its methodological approach, the study provides a direct

[29] Mark Fiege, "Gettysburg and the Organic Nature of the American Civil War," in *Natural Enemy, Natural Ally: Toward an Environmental History of Warfare*, ed. Richard P. Tucker and Edmund Russell (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2004), 65-92.
[30] Adam H. Petty, "Wilderness, Weather, and Waging War in the Mine Run Campaign," *Civil War History* 63, no. 1 (March 2017): 7-35.
[31] James F. Gentsch, "A Geographic Analysis of the Battle of Shiloh" (master's thesis, University of Memphis, 1994).

environmental causation for a battle's outcome. Besides these pieces, scholars previously mentioned have published other publications in academic journals or as book chapters.[32]

Older generations of historians have also published on environmental factors and their impact on the Civil War. The two most noteworthy are Ella Lonn and Paul E. Steiner. Lonn's 1930s looks at salt's impact on the Confederacy.[33] Hoping to offer the final word on salt and how it factored into Confederate strategy, Lonn examines all aspects of salt: from why it was a necessity to where it could be found in the Confederacy to battles and campaigns fought to control salt, the book is a thorough and valuable resource to understanding how the natural and built environment can influence and dictate military strategy. Steiner examines closely how disease affected the Civil War.[34] The book begins with a general understanding of diseases and how it could hamper Civil War armies. The remainder of the book examines eight different campaigns where disease influenced the armies. Steiner's work is nearly a precursor to Meier's *Nature's Civil War*. Steiner reveals the impact of disease, while Meier shows how soldiers could remain healthy.

Overall, the historiography of Civil War environmental studies has grown exceptionally in the past five years. Conversations are beginning to develop on how the environment affected the Civil War and how significant that impact was. Most of the environmental Civil War scholarship provides a focused study of military actions. This tight lens allows for a more detailed understanding of a military action, but more importantly allows the environment to

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[32] Kathryn Shively Meier, "War and Environment," in *A Companion to the Civil War: Wiley Blackwell Companions to American History*, ed. Aaron Sheehan-Dean (New York: Wiley, 2014), 561-572, "'No Place for the Sick': Nature's War on Civil War Soldier Mental and Physical Health in the 1862 Peninsula and Shenandoah Valley Campaigns," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 2 (June 2011): 176-206; Matthew M. Stith, "'The Deplorable Condition of the Country': Nature, Society, and War on the Trans-Mississippi Frontier," *Civil War History* 53, no. 3 (September 2012): 322–347

[33] Ella Lonn, *Salt as a Factor in the Confederacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965).

[34] Paul E. Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War: Natural Biological Warfare in 1861-1865* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1968).

become a central historical actor, rather than simply a backdrop. By understanding the environment as an actor rather than a setting, the Civil War can be more fully understood. Not only were armies fighting each other, they were contending, both on the battlefield and home front, with the natural and built environment to win the war. The scholarship is still very open. This subfield, however, must continue to push the understanding of the environment and geography of a region, battle, or theater to fully comprehend the environment's role and bring it fully to the center stage.

Focusing purely on the regular military actions in the state, this study does not address irregular and guerrilla activities. Guerrillas played a significant role in West Virginia's war experience, but for the scope of this thesis a focus on regular military actions is most pertinent. The thesis is broken into three chapters. Chapter one focuses on the perspective of West Virginia as commanders eyed the region as a theater of war and soldiers began entering the area. The earliest offensive and subsequent battle are examined to understand the natural environment's role from the first operations. The second and third chapters examine the continued military operations. The second will analyze the fighting at Rich Mountain, Laurel Hill, and Corrick's Ford. The campaign for Cheat Mountain appears in the third chapter. Both the second and third chapters examine how the natural environment was used to enhance defensive lines, had to be overcome to conduct offensive movements, and how the environment's reach went past topography in the form of rain and disease.

Defining certain terms in this study is vital to any understanding of its findings. The terms western Virginia, West(ern) Virginia, and West Virginia have all been used in the literature discussing the state's Civil War experience. This study simply uses "West Virginia," while

period accounts will be left as they were written. When "northwestern Virginia" is used, that is designating the area in the northwestern portion of present day West Virginia; including areas such as Wheeling, Parkersburg, Clarksburg, and Grafton. Two other terms that are crucial to define are environment and built environment. Historian Kathryn Shively Meier defined environment, and its synonym nature, as "non-human, non-manmade ecological, meteorological, and topographical phenomena, including the related set of weather, seasons, and climate, as well as air, water, terrain, insects, animals, and plant life."[35] This study borrows Meier's interchangeable use of environment and nature. An important addition, however, to environment is the *built environment*. The built environment is defined as any human improvement of the environment or nature. Examples of this could be turnpikes, secondary roads, or bridges, all of which have an important role in West Virginia's war story.

This thesis advances Civil War environmental studies and the scholarship on West Virginia. The Civil War in West Virginia has traditionally been a backwater, but by positioning it in an environmental frame this study incorporates the state's war experience more fully within the overall context of the conflict, particularly in the war's growing environmental subfield. Natural and built environmental factors dictated the strategy, operations, and experience of Civil War commanders and common soldiers in West Virginia. These factors ultimately brought the environment of the region into play in a way that could not be ignored. More than strongly divided political sentiments, statehood, or irregular warfare, West Virginia's Civil War experience was unique and exceptional because of the environment it was fought in. The natural environment surrounding West Virginia's 1861 campaigns was more than an arena for fighting.

[35] Meier, *Nature's Civil War*, 12.

The environment was a historical actor and a third participant, having as much influence on an army as the enemy did. This exceptionalism helps to bring the state's involvement out of the margins of Civil War scholarship, while at the same time pushing environmental Civil War studies forward. This analysis shows how an environmental examination of the war can provide a much fuller and complete understanding of the conflict.

Returning to Walter Taylor's assessment that nature provided an insurmountable barrier to military operations in the Alleghenies, it seems Taylor was only half right. Both Union and Confederate regular armies operated in the vast and harsh mountainous environment of West Virginia. In trying to protect the loyalty of their own state, Confederate Virginia failed in keeping the Commonwealth fully in the Confederacy. No matter the destiny of western Virginia in the spring of 1861, the environment it provided for the first land campaigns of the war was no easy climb for either army. Taylor believed West Virginia was the "most impracticable, inhospitable, and dismal country; only those who participated in that campaign can ever properly estimate the disadvantages under which commanders and troops operated."[36] These impracticable, inhospitable, and dismal characteristics, however, push West Virginia's unique war experience down from the mountains and into a proper place in the story of America's greatest conflict.

[36] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 16-17.

CHAPTER ONE

"ALONG THE BORDERS OF THE OHIO RIVER AND VIRGINIA": WAR COMES TO WEST VIRGINIA, MAY – JUNE 1861[37]

In early 1861, Howell Cobb, president of the Confederacy's Provisional Congress, reassured the people of the Deep South that war would not come to their doorsteps. "The people of the Gulf States need have no apprehensions; they might go on with their planting and their other business as usual; the war would not come to their sections; it's theatre would be along the borders of the Ohio River and Virginia," Cobb predicted.[38] On May 3, 1861, in the wake of President Abraham Lincoln's proclamation calling for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the Southern rebellion and his decree to blockade Southern ports, the Provisional Confederate Congress passed a declaration of war against the United States.[39] Cobb was not alone in his judgement that war would first break out along the Ohio River. George B. McClellan, the newly minted general in command of Ohio volunteers, offered the same view in a correspondence to General-in-Chief of United States forces, Winfield Scott. In speaking of the region north of the Ohio River and between the Mississippi River and Alleghany Mountains, McClellan assumed "that hostilities will break out along the line of the Ohio." [40]

Cobb and McClellan both proved to be correct, for in the weeks following the U.S. surrender of Fort Sumter in April 1861, the earliest land campaigns of the Civil War occurred along the Ohio River line in West Virginia. Raw and untrained armies collided in the most difficult of

[37] Frank Moore, *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events, Volume II, Documents* (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1862), 432.
[38] Moore, *The Rebellion Record*, 432.
[39] Willian C. Davis, *Look Away! A History of the Confederate States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), 117.
[40] George McClellan correspondence, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the War of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), ser. 1, vol. 51, pt. 1, p. 338. (Hereafter cited as OR.)

natural environments. Topography and weather influenced commanders' decisions and affected common soldiers' experiences. The mobilization of troops, gathering of arms and equipment, and inaugural fighting were all shaped by the natural environment. The built environment of railroads, turnpikes, and country roads were extremely crucial to the early political and military activity in West Virginia. Although Union and Confederate forces were equally unprepared for war in West Virginia, the early mobilization and initial combat would prove crucial on two fronts. First, the presence of Union forces in West Virginia allowed the developing Unionist movement in the northwest portion of the state to continue unimpeded. Secondly, these early actions showed commanders and common soldiers on both sides the beauty and ruggedness of West Virginia's natural environment.

Even though heavy fighting would not break out in West Virginia until July 1861, the activities in the weeks following the capitulation of Fort Sumter cannot be ignored. The early weeks provide a significant window into the role the natural and built environment will play once hard campaigning and fighting starts. Commanders and common soldiers both began to learn the difficulties that lay ahead. Not only would the enemy have to be contended with, but the environment would become more than the arena of campaigns and combat.

On April 17, 1861, Virginia passed an ordinance of secession and left the United States. Although the ordinance had to be approved by public referendum on May 23, the April vote by the state's secession convention effectively removed the Old Dominion from the Union. The public vote was only a technicality and held no importance in the eyes of the government in Richmond. Strong opposition to the ordinance, however, had come from convention delegates

from the western portion of the state. Following the news of the passed ordinance, public meetings opposed to secession were held across northwest Virginia.

John Carlisle, a western delegate to the convention, organized one such public meeting in Clarksburg, West Virginia, on April 22. In the first steps taken to form any kind of loyal Union government, attendees resolved to hold a convention in Wheeling, West Virginia, on May 13 to "consult and determine upon such action as the people of Northwestern Virginia should take in the present fearful emergency."[41] A political movement had been set in motion and physical protection would be crucial to its success.

With the outbreak of war an almost certainty, military preparedness became even more urgent. The northwestern portion of Virginia had two important qualities for sufficient military occupation. First, with many pro-Union citizens, the region was the heart of support for the Union and opposition to secession. Second, the region had strategic military importance. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal were vital supply lines for the Union war effort. These transportation avenues could ferry men and supplies from east to west and vice versa. Also, bordering the region was the Ohio River. The river helped to divide north from south and flowed to Kentucky, the doorway to the Tennessee Valley and the deep South.[42] The geography of northwestern Virginia, and its growing political movement, made the military occupation of the region a priority for both sides early in the war.

Ten days after Virginia's secession convention passed its Ordinance of Secession, George McClellan was conceiving his own plan to put down the newly formed and growing Confederate

[41] "Great Movement in Harrison County for a Separate Organization of the Northwest from the Seceders," *Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, April 25, 1861.
[42] Shelby Foote, *The Civil War, A Narrative*, vol. 1, *Fort Sumter to Perryville* (New York: Random House, 1958), 128.

States of America. Offered command of Ohio troops by Governor William Dennison on April 23, 1861, McClellan wasted little time outlining a plan of operations to relieve Washington and quickly end the war. Writing to General-in-Chief Winfield Scott in Washington on April 27, McClellan assumed hostilities would break out first along the line of the Ohio River. Campaigns and fighting there had to be avoided for two reasons, McClellan argued. First, the Northwest region of the United States was not prepared for war and needed time to take the appropriate measures to be organized and ready for the fighting. Second, McClellan contended a "strong diversion may be made in the aid of the defense of Washington and the eastern line of operations." A movement by U.S. forces into secessionist territory would divert the Confederates immediate attention from Washington, relieving the pressure on the city and prolonging the time until campaigns began along the Ohio River. With Union army forces stationed at strategically important areas throughout the Ohio River Valley, McClellan proposed a diversion to relieve Washington.[43]

Hoping to stay out of Kentucky to avoid pushing the Bluegrass State out of the Union, McClellan preferred a campaign against Richmond via West Virginia's Kanawha Valley. "With the active army of operations it is proposed to cross the Ohio at or in the vicinity of Gallipolis [Ohio] and move up the valley of the Great Kanawha on Richmond." Familiar with the region, McClellan knew a campaign through the Kanawha Valley and across the Alleghenies would be no easy task. "I know that there would be difficulties in crossing the mountains," McClellan wrote to Scott, but believed he could go "prepared to meet them." Scott, however, was not in favor of a march through the Kanawha, over the mountains, and on to Richmond. "The general [McClellan] eschews water transportation by the Ohio and Mississippi in favor of long tedious,

[43] George McClellan correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 51, pt. 1, p. 338; Ethan Rafuse, *McClellan's War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for Union* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 93-94.

and break down (of men, horses, and wagons) marches." Scott was not only concerned with difficulties of the geographical features of West Virginia, but the fragile political situation there as well. Scott believed "A march upon Richmond from the Ohio would probably insure the revolt of Western Virginia, which if left alone will soon be five out of seven [border states] for the Union."[44]

Historian Ethan Rafuse believes the general's plan did have issues because of the political climate in the region. "Although there were flaws in McClellan's plan" Rafuse writes, "they were more attributable to the complex political circumstances that limited his options than to any failure of reason or underappreciation of military realities."[45] Even though Winfield Scott was justified in his questioning of a military operation through the mountains, during the Mexican-American War he led a military campaign in the mountainous region of Mexico and understood the difficulties associated with such an operation, Rafuse is logical in his assessment that McClellan grasped the realities of military movements through difficult terrain.

The route from the Ohio River to Richmond would not be an easy one for McClellan's green army, but there was an established avenue through the Kanawha Valley. The James River and Kanawha Turnpike was the main thoroughfare between a southern Virginia Ohio River crossing and Richmond. Built by the James River and Kanawha Company, the turnpike connected the James and Kanawha Rivers and thus established commercial transportation and communication between eastern Virginia and the Mississippi River. In a history of the James River and Kanawha Company, historian Wayland Fuller Dunaway contends, "It appeared eminently desirable to unite the James River, the main commercial artery of the state east of the Alleghenies, with the Great Kanawha, the main commercial artery of the state west of the

[44] Winfield Scott correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 51, pt. 1, p. 339.
[45] Rafuse, *McClellan's War*, 97.

Alleghenies, by a turnpike road, thereby affording a through line of communication to the Ohio, and down the Ohio, to the Mississippi."[46] Crossing the Kanawha River at Charleston, West Virginia, the twenty-two-foot-wide turnpike was completed by 1829, allowing mail to travel from Richmond to Guyandotte, on the Ohio River, in four and a half days. Used for stagecoach travel, commercial interests, communication, and emigration it was "a busy thoroughfare of travel and traffic" in the first decades of its existence. By the Civil War, however, the turnpike's traffic had diminished due to the development of other roads in the region and the tolls gained were insufficient to support the road.[47]

Even though the Kanawha Turnpike had lessened in importance by the time McClellan eyed it as an avenue to divert pressure from Washington, it still provided an avenue for his army to move across the rugged Alleghenies and on to Richmond. In West Virginia roads were at a premium at the start of the war, and even a road that had fallen into disrepair over the past decade would be a welcome route through the state's mountains. The turnpike had experienced heavy traffic of "hundreds of wagons and other conveyances."[48] Although the natural environment of the Mountain State is rugged, the built environment, like the Kanawha Turnpike, would naturally play a crucial role in military operations and occupation. Despite Scott's doubts, McClellan was sensible in considering the Kanawha Valley as an early option to strike at the Confederacy. McClellan's plan for operations in the Kanawha Valley also reveals that there were important commanders who believed, early in the war, that West Virginia could be a decisive area of operations. No matter, the "Kanawha Plan" was disregarded and McClellan

[46]Wayland Fuller Dunaway, *History of the James River and Kanawha Company* (New York: Columbia University, 1922), 49.
[47] Dunaway, *James River and Kanawha Company*, 81-84.
[48] Dunaway, *James River and Kanawha Company*, 84.

went about preparing Ohio volunteers for the coming storm of war he hoped would stay out of the Ohio River region.

Late April also proved a critical time east of the Alleghenies, as Virginia Governor John Letcher was formulating his own plan for West Virginia. Authorized and directed by Virginia's ordinance of secession to order out state militia to defend Virginia from potential invasion, Letcher wasted little time to act and control the western portions of the state. He recognized the Confederate States and called upon Virginia's military volunteers to "hold themselves in readiness for immediate orders, and to prepare for efficient service." On April 18, Letcher ordered Virginia militia to capture the Federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. Although the arsenal was burned and the town evacuated before they could reach it, the action provided two early victories for the secessionists in Virginia. First, the Virginia militia was able to salvage 4,000 guns and the gun-making machinery before the arsenal succumbed to fire. Second, by occupying Harpers Ferry, Virginia secessionists had a valuable control point on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. On the same day he ordered troops to occupy the arsenal, Letcher notified B&O President John W. Garrett that his railroad, or at least the portion through Virginia, would not be used in the transport of United States soldiers. "Your road, located within slave territory" Letcher wrote, "shall not be used to the prejudice of the slaveholding states, and especially the State of Virginia."[49]

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, the key strategic thoroughfare through West Virginia, received most of Letcher's attention in the weeks after his state seceded. The total control of the B&O in Virginia remained crucial. The road could be used for the transportation of United

[49] Ronald Lee Sevy, "John Letcher and West Virginia," *West Virginia History* 27, no. 1 (1965): 36.

States war materiel and soldiers and undoubtedly would be crucial in the defense of Washington. Most importantly, the line went squarely through the northwestern portion of Virginia. Controlling this region, an area historically at odds with the eastern portion of the state and unreceptive to secession, would be most important in controlling Virginia and the war projected to erupt there.

Ironically, Letcher had the same concern about sentiment in West Virginia that Winfield Scott had. While Scott believed a Union invasion of West Virginia would cause it to revolt against the United States, Letcher worried that Confederate occupation would turn West Virginia solidly Union. As Unionist meetings were held in the region, Letcher began to receive messages and pleas from local secessionists.[50] Many secessionists feared invasion by Federal troops from Ohio and Pennsylvania and requested the governor to send arms for the defense of the area's secessionist population. Thomas Haymond of Fairmont felt more than guns were needed to protect the Northwest, and hoped for the authority to arm and equip at least 1,000 men to be used around Wheeling for the protection of the B&O. Not all, however, believed the immediate arming and stationing of secessionists at strategically important points was appropriate. This course of action would "bring upon our people the bitterness of intestine feud and the military occupation of the northwest by the forces of the surrounding States under the authority of the Union," wrote Judge George W. Thompson. He continued, "if resistance is made it will make us

[50] Unionist meetings were held in several counties across northwestern Virginia in late April 1861. The most significant was led by John S. Carlile on April 22 in Clarksburg. Carlile was a delegate to the Virginia Secession Convention and had left Richmond, with other anti-secession delegates, in the days following the vote for secession. At the Clarksburg Convention, roughly 1,200 people adopted a set of resolutions, one of which called for the "wisest, best, and discreetest" men to meet at Wheeling on May 13 to decide the fate of the pro-Union northwest portion of Virginia. For more on the pro-Unionist meetings and the Frist Wheeling Convention, see: George Ellis Moore, *A Banner in the Hills: West Virginia's Statehood* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963); Richard Orr Curry, *A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964); Otis K. Rice and Stephen W. Brown, *West Virginia, A History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993); and Mark A. Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War: Mountaineers Are Always Free* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011).

the theater of civil war and predatory warfare, with the inability of the State or of the entire South to protect us."[51] Actions in Virginia continued to intensify in late April and early May of 1861. On April 23, Robert E. Lee was appointed commander of Virginia's military and naval forces and commissioned a Major General. On April 27, the same day McClellan was laying out his Kanawha Plan to Winfield Scott, the Virginia Secession Convention offered the Confederate government to make its home in Richmond, an offer accepted in late May.[52] Throughout late April and May 1861, West Virginia was shaping up to be a key battleground. Tensions between secessionists and Unionists in the region continually escalated, priming the region for possible hostilities.

In the weeks following the bombardment of Fort Sumter, West Virginia was shaping up to be a major theater of the coming war. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad would be crucial to control the region. Besides the main line, there was a spur that ran from Grafton to Parkersburg on the Ohio River. Additionally, two main turnpikes traversed West Virginia. The first turnpike was the James River and Kanawha Turnpike through the Kanawha Valley and farther north was the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, the most direct route between Richmond and northwest Virginia and provided access to the Shenandoah Valley. These were the four-principal avenues of transportation in West Virginia. If an army wanted to operate in West Virginia, it would not be able to stray far from any of these roads. The topography and ruggedness of the terrain in the region would not allow it.

[51] Sevy, "John Letcher and West Virginia," 39.
[52] James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 280-81.

West Virginia encompasses nearly 25,000 square miles, while the outline of the state is most uneven due to its borders following natural features such as river courses and mountain crestlines. Roughly 237 miles north to south and 266 miles east to west, the Mountain State is a vast expanse and extremely rugged. The highest point comes in at 4,860 feet, with the lowest being a mere 247 feet above sea level. A rough and rugged landscape persists throughout the region, even though the relief between the highest and lowest points is not severe. Complex patterns of long and narrow ranges, ridges, and hills with steep sides rising from narrow valley floors are common. Flat land, that most prized by armies for camps, drilling, and fighting, is at a premium. The only flat lands available are those at the tops of some mountain ranges and along principal rivers.[53] Green, untrained, and undisciplined armies would have serious difficulty operating in West Virginia, and they would rely on the four main transportation avenues for successful movement.

Throughout the first weeks of mobilization and occupation in West Virginia, both United States and Confederate armies vied for control of these avenues. Even though these networks allowed armies to operate in the rugged West Virginia terrain, other elements of the natural environment proved detrimental to those efforts. The side that would be successful in gaining control of West Virginia and earning a victory in the first campaign of the war would be the one who could improvise, adapt, or simply overcome the other elements of the Mountain State's natural environment.

Grafton, West Virginia, served as the earliest point of interest for Confederates mobilizing in the region. Grafton was home to a vital rail intersection. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad

[53] Raymond E. Janssen, *Earth Science - A Handbook on the Geology of West Virginia* (Clarksburg, WV: Educational Marketers, Inc., 1973), 3-6.

passed through the town and it was Grafton where the B&O spur line to Parkersburg branched off. This would be a crucial point to defend. Whichever side controlled it would command the rail lines and keep the other from setting up a supply base in the area that would allow for a campaign away from the railroads and into the interior of the region. The secessionist government in Richmond acted quickly to control the important rail town. Writing from Richmond on April 30, 1861, Robert E. Lee, commander of all Virginia forces, ordered Major Francis M. Boykin to "take measure to muster into the service of the State such volunteer companies as may offer their services for the protection of the northwestern portion of the State. Take post at or near Grafton, unless some other point should offer greater facilities for the command of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and the branch to Parkersburg." In wanting to control the B&O for military purposes only, Lee further ordered Boykin not "to interrupt peaceful travel on the road…but to hold the road for the benefit of Maryland and Virginia, and to prevent its being used against them." In closing Lee advised Major Boykin to work in partnership with the officer of the railroad and promised that old flintlock rifles were being sent from Harpers Ferry for any shortage in arms.[54]

Major Boykin, however, had a difficult time raising volunteers to defend the northwest portion of Virginia. On May 7 and 10, only a little more than a week since he was ordered to Grafton, Boykin wrote Robert E. Lee he believed it "absolutely necessary to hold this point [Grafton] immediately," but with such a small force he believed it unrealistic to hold the important junction.[55] Even before he could hear of Boykin's troubles in the Grafton vicinity, Lee sent word on May 4 to George Porterfield that he was to report to Grafton. Lee gave him the same instructions: raise volunteers, control the B&O and the line to Parkersburg, and do not

[54] Robert E. Lee order, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 790-791.
[55] Francis Boykin correspondence, *OR*, vol. 1, ser. 2, p. 827-828.

interfere with its peaceful travel and operations.[56] The Confederates knew the B&O and spur branch to Parkersburg had to be held. Holding it would ensure secessionist sentiment in the politically hostile northwest portion of the state, give the Rebels an early strategic victory against the Yankees, and make it even more difficult for the eastern and western portions of the United States to exchange communications, men, and materials.

George Porterfield was typical of men who served as an officer during the Civil War. A professionally trained soldier and veteran of the war with Mexico, Porterfield was a logical choice to organize the Confederate efforts at Grafton. A native Virginian living in Jefferson County when his state seceded, Porterfield graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1844 and assisted in raising the first company of Virginia soldiers who would serve in the Mexican-American War, himself being elected first lieutenant. After his arrival in Mexico, Porterfield was appointed Adjutant of the Virginia regiment and soon was appointed assistant adjutant general to the division stationed near Buena Vista.[57]

Despite this experience, Porterfield had as difficult a time in mobilizing troops and securing the Confederate position at Grafton as Francis Boykin. The unforeseen issue at Grafton was the sentiment of the locals. "I have found great diversity of opinion and much bitterness of feeling among the people of this region" Porterfield wrote to Colonel Robert Garnett, Adjutant General for Virginia forces, on May 16. The force that was raised, Porterfield believed, for some time could not "be more effective than undisciplined militia."[58] To compound the fact that the troops raised were lacking in both quantity and quality, decent arms and munitions were not to be had.

[56] Robert E. Lee order, *OR*, vol. 1, ser. 2, p. 802-803.
[57] George Wesley Atkinson and Alvaro Franklin Gibbens, *Prominent Men of West Virginia* (Wheeling, WV: W.L. Callin, 1890), 485.
[58] George Porterfield correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 855.

Writing after the war, Porterfield put the situation he was ordered into at Grafton bluntly. "Upon my arrival I found myself alone in a country hostile to the South, without an officer of any experience to help me, then or afterwards; without money or supplies of any kind, or the means of getting anything to aid in organizing a military force."[59]

Concerned with the deficiency, both in quantity and quality, in men being mustered into service at Grafton, Porterfield was also keenly aware of the environmental factors of the area. Continuing to write to Garnett, he requested arms best suited for the topographical and geographic features of the region. Grafton and the country surrounding was not the ideal battleground. Sitting between a bend in the Tygart Valley River and where Three Fork Creek empties into the river at an elevation of roughly 1,000 feet, Grafton had developed around the railroad. The main Baltimore and Ohio Railroad line followed the river and the branch line to Parkersburg crossed the river at Grafton near the mouth of Three Fork Creek. Although Grafton was only 1,000 feet in elevation, the hills surrounding the town within Taylor County reached over 2,000 feet and included steep hillsides and rugged terrain.[60] This change in elevation is significant. The movements in the region "should be of light infantry and rifle," Porterfield believed. Field artillery would have a difficult time deploying in this type of terrain. Even if it could get deployed, a line of fire would have to be cleared for the guns to be effective, a labor intensive and more importantly, a slow process. Infantry, too, would have problems maneuvering in a textbook fashion. Porterfield contended "The force in this section will need

[59] Mark E. Bell, "A Day at the Races: The First Virginia (U.S.) Infantry at the Battle of Philippi," *Civil War Regiments: A Journal of the American Civil War* 5, no. 4 (1996): 6.
[60] U.S. Geological Survey, *Grafton quadrangle, West Virginia* [map], 1:24,000, 7.5 Minute Series, Washington, D.C.: USGS, 2014.

the best rifles" and the rifles from Harpers Ferry, "if fitted up, will do very well, as there will not be the same use for the bayonet in these hills as elsewhere."[61]

Although the elevation change and ruggedness of the Grafton area makes it an unsuitable battleground, there was one element that might lend to easier military operations. The county's early economy had relied partially on timbering the area's dense forests.[62] The portions of the landscape that had fallen to the timber industry's saws would provide an open area more suitable for a Civil War army to operate in, and if necessary, to fight in. Still, what Porterfield recognized from the time of his arrival in West Virginia was critical. The geography and topography surrounding the important junction at Grafton would not easily allow for the military tactics of the time.

Tactics, when used in a Civil War context, are the movements that form and maneuver a body of troops on a battlefield. Linear tactics are "shoulder-to-shoulder lines, columns, and a range of complicated maneuvers to take a unit from one formation to another," and had been developed in Europe during the late 1600s and early 1700s. The tactics were established around the capabilities of the single shot musket and to provide officers the avenue to mass their men for both maneuverability and to control their fire.[63] By the time of the American Civil War, the idea of linear tactics had held firm. The United States Military Academy at West Point was an important reason for this carry over. Dennis Hart Mahan, a professor at West Point, fully

[61] George Porterfield correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 855.
[62] Ella Belling, "Taylor County," e-WV: The West Virginia Encyclopedia, June 3, 2013, accessed August 18, 2017, https://www.wvencyclopedia.org/articles/692.
[63] Earl Hess, *Civil War Infantry Tactics: Training, Combat, and Small-Unit Effectiveness* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2015), xi. Hess's work on Civil War military tactics is the most recent and thorough treatment on the topic. Other works produced on the topic include Grady McWhiney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1982) and Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987). For a work on the European origins of Civil War battle tactics, see Brent Nosworthy, *The Anatomy of Victory: Battle Tactics, 1689-1763* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1991).

supported the French idea of tactics and supported two man deep, shoulder-to-shoulder battle lines and columns to move and attack.[64] And, as many officers in both armies during the Civil War were educated at West Point, tactics made a natural transition from Europe to Mahan and his pupils to execution on battlefields in the United States.

By the start of the Civil War, a line of troops had become the most common formation used by U.S. trained officers.[65] The terrain, however, needed to successfully execute these tactics should be open and relatively flat. A group of hundreds or thousands of soldiers would need open space to operate shoulder-to-shoulder and be able to maintain unit cohesion. West Virginia's topography and geography made textbook tactics difficult no matter if the unit was operating in a line or a column. Steep and rugged mountains and forests with thick vegetation would not allow commanders to easily or effectively deploy their troops in a line of battle.

With difficult terrain, as was more commonly experienced in West Virginia, a column of troops would be used. A column was only four men wide with each group of four falling in behind the other, creating a long, snake like body of troops. Not only used in difficult terrain, a column would be used with a small number of soldiers. In the Mexican-American War a column of attack was used at Molino del Rey and Chapultepec, each consisting of 500 men and 250 men respectively. The ability to use a column formation in difficult terrain with a small number of troops appears to be the most efficient tactic to use in West Virginia's mountains. Even with the

[64] Hess, *Civil War Infantry Tactics*, 29.

[65] A "line" of troops would consist of a body of soldiers forming in two ranks with an equal number of men in both the front and rear rank. The line would form from right to left in order of height; the tallest being on the right, the shortest falling in line to left. It can be seen how a regiment, which on paper was to consist of ten companies each consisting of 100 men, would need a large amount of open space to maneuver and keep their formations intact. For more on forming and maneuvering a regiment, see William J. Hardee's manual, *Hardee's Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics*, originally produced in 1855. In fact, the first tactic described in Hardee's Rifle and Light Infantry Tactics is "Formation of a Regiment in order of battle, or a line." Also, see Winfield Scott's *Infantry Tactics, Or, Rules for the Exercise and Maneuvres of the United States Infantry*, produced in 1833. Hardee's manual was produced to replace the twenty-year old manual Scott had developed. Finally, Silas Casey produced *System for Infantry Tactics* in 1862. Casey also produced a third volume, *Infantry Tactics for Colored Troops*, in 1863.

column formation, however, commanders would still try to form a line of battle to complete an attack. To do this in West Virginia would prove ineffective for attacking troops who were assaulting a fortified mountain pass or town nestled tightly along a river.[66]

West Virginia's natural environment struck early in impacting and shaping the strategy of commanders. Porterfield's call for light infantry and riflemen is telling. No matter what the manual articulated or how an officer had been trained, combat in West Virginia would not feature blocks of infantry supported by artillery. Rugged, steep, and heavily vegetated terrain would not allow it. Unit cohesion would fall apart, men and fire could not be massed, ultimately ending in a failed attempt on the enemy. The adjustment to this type of warfare would be crucial for success on either side.

Virginia officially seceded from the United States on May 23, 1861, when the state's ordinance of secession passed public referendum. Although no exact election results have survived history or can be determined, one can imagine the atmosphere surrounding such a vote. Troubled and alarmed by such an atmosphere, Francis H. Pierpont, the future governor of the Reorganized Government of Virginia, quipped on the afternoon of the election, "The time for voting is past – the election is a farce. The time for fighting has come." Putting thought into action, John Carlile was sent to Washington to ask for military assistance. Going directly to the White House, Carlile presented his card and was shown to the President and his Cabinet. Asked of the situation in West Virginia, Carlile replied, "By sir, we want to fight, and if the Federal

[66] Hess, *Civil War Infantry Tactics*, 29-30.

Government is going to assist us we want Union troops immediately." Told he would receive the assistance he desired, Carlile left and returned to West Virginia.[67]

As could be imagined, the organization of Confederate forces at Grafton *before* the referendum on secession began a chain of events that brought war to West Virginia quickly. On May 24, 1861, Winfield Scott wired George McClellan of Virginia troops in Grafton "evidently with the purpose of overawing the friends of the Union in Western Virginia. Can you counteract the influence of that detachment? Act promptly." McClellan's response was a confident and to the point, "Will do what you want. Make it a clean sweep if you say so." Before McClellan could assemble his invasion force, however, the Confederates under Porterfield's orders struck first. Receiving information of a potential move of U.S. forces across the Ohio River into West Virginia, Porterfield acted and ordered "bridges of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad northwest of Fairmont to be destroyed."[68]

News of the burnt bridges combined with Carlile's plea for Union troops resulted in quick action. On May 26, George McClellan ordered the 16th Ohio under the command of Colonel James Irvine to cross the Ohio River at Wheeling, West Virginia, and support Colonel Benjamin Kelley's 1st Virginia Infantry (U.S.) Regiment's move down the B&O to Fairmont. Kelley and his loyal Virginians had been ordered to proceed down the railroad, repair any burnt bridges, and wait outside Grafton until Federal forces could be properly concentrated. The burning of bridges, however, proved to be ineffective for Porterfield and his rebels. All the bridges were

[67] Francis H. Pierpont writings, A&M No. 9 Pierpont, Francis Harrison (1814-1899). Papers, West Virginia Regional and History Center, Morgantown, WV.
[68] Winfield Scott correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 648; George Porterfield report, *OR*, ser.1, vol. 2, p. 51-52; Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan: Selected Correspondence, 1860-1865*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1989), 24.

made of iron with wooden sills and crossties.[69] After quickly repairing them, the Federals had an open track to Grafton.

At the same time, the 14th and 18th Ohio regiments were ordered to cross the Ohio River at Parkersburg, West Virginia, and secure the spur railroad running from there to Grafton.[70] The last piece of McClellan's concentration and invasion of West Virginia was with Brigadier General Thomas A. Morris and his Indiana brigade, who were ordered to be prepared to cross the Ohio at either Wheeling or Parkersburg and to keep their movement secret. "When you do move, give out Pittsburgh, or some other point, as your destination" McClellan ordered. George Porterfield did not wait long to abandon Grafton after he learned the Federals had crossed the Ohio. Lacking confidence in his assembled force and believing the topography of Grafton inadequate for a defense, he removed his command to Philippi. Once his force was better organized, Porterfield would "return to some more eligible point in the neighborhood of Grafton."[71]

Philippi, Barbour County, West Virginia, was nestled along the Tygart Valley River and astride the Beverly-Fairmont Road, and was a day's march, a mere fifteen miles, south of the important railroad junction at Grafton.[72] "The town is the neatest we have seen in the Old Dominion and contains about 100 houses," wrote one Union soldier during his unit's occupation of the town.[73] The area was originally known as Booth's Ferry due to an important crossing named after local land owner, Daniel Booth. The county courthouse was located there and by

[69] George McClellan order, *OR*, ser. 1. vol. 2, p. 45-46; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 58.
[70] George McClellan order, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 44-48.
[71] George McClellan order, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 48; Porterfield report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 51-52.
[72] Hunter Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate: Lee and McClellan on the Front Line of a Nation Divided* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2004), 61; Bell, "A Day at the Races," 8.
[73] Channing Richard Diary, July 6, 1861, The Channing Richards Papers (Mss. A R14), The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

the early 1840s, the county court decided to name the town growing around the courthouse and in February 1844, Philippi was given legal existence by the Virginia State Legislature and the town officially formed.[74] By 1852, the ferry had been replaced by a three-hundred-foot bridge. Consisting of two spans, each supported by four wooden arches, the bridge was "a fine specimen of architecture of a peculiar order and of an old fashion." The "fine specimen" of a bridge was designed by Lemuel Chenoweth. Chenoweth, a bridge architect and wood worker, was awarded the bridge contract after he rested his model on two chairs and then stood on it to show its strength, all while prodding other bidders with, "Gentleman, this is all I have to say to you."[75] The Philippi Bridge was an important element of the wartime built environment. Allowing for an easier crossing of the Tygart Valley River via the Beverly-Fairmont Road, the bridge made Philippi a strategically important position. Soldiers and arms could be organized there and an advance could be launched for an attack on the B&O junction at Grafton. If an advance could not be made, Philippi provided an effective position from which to launch an operation in an eastwardly direction to protect the vital Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike and the way to eastern Virginia.

As Porterfield's command arrived and began organizing in Philippi in late May 1861, he remained steadfast in raising Confederate troops to match the invasion of McClellan's forces. Issuing a spirited proclamation to the people of northwestern Virginia, Porterfield used the ideals of liberty to call on Virginians to step up against a foreign foe.

> I am in your section of Virginia in obedience to the legally-constituted authorities thereof, with the view of protecting this section of the State from invasion by foreign force, and to protect the people in the full enjoyment of their rights -- civil, religious and political…Virginians! allow me to appeal to you, in the name of our common mother, to stand by the voice of your State, and to defend her

[74] H.U. Maxwell, *The History of Barbour County, West Virginia, From its Earliest Exploration and Settlement to the Present Time* (Morgantown, WV: The Acme Publishing Company, 1899), 279-80.
[75] Maxwell, *History of Barbour County, West Virginia*, 277-278; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 61-62.

> against all enemies, and especially to repel invasion from any and every quarter…Already many of you have rallied to the support of the honor of your State and the maintenance of your liberties. Will you continue to be freemen, or will you submit to be slaves? Are you capable of governing yourselves? Will you allow the people of other States to govern you? Have you forgotten the precepts of MADISON and JEFFERSON? Remember that the price of liberty is "eternal vigilance!"[76]

No matter how vigorous his appeal, Porterfield remained concerned over the caliber of the soldiers and officers being raised around Philippi. Writing on June 9, only six days after the engagement at Philippi, Porterfield conveyed to Robert E. Lee, "This force is not only deficient in drill, but ignorant, both officers and men, of the most ordinary duties of the soldier."[77] No matter the number of men that could be raised, both enlisted men and officers were not soldiers. As most armies being raised in the first year of the war, these men lacked any understanding of what it truly meant to be a soldier. Help, in the terms of more enlisted men and officers who were hopefully better trained and prepared for war, was needed from eastern Virginia. With this aid from the eastern portion of the state, an offensive could be conducted against the Federals who had pushed into West Virginia from the Ohio River. Philippi, Porterfield believed, was the place where that help, and the time necessary to get it, could be achieved.

Philippi was a town of Confederate sympathies. In support of South Carolina's secession from the Union, a Palmetto flag had been raised over the court house in January 1861.[78] Despite Confederate sympathies, the Rebel soldiers organizing there were having a difficult time. The weapons and ammunition were subpar; old flintlock and converted muskets were issued and each man only had about five rounds for the rusty weapons. An ordnance officer hunted the surrounding areas for gunpowder, lead pipes were molded into bullets, and soldiers rolled their

[76] George Porterfield, "Proclamation to the People of Northwestern Virginia," *New York Times*, June 13, 1861.
[77] George Porterfield correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 70.
[78] Maxwell, *The History of Barbour County, West Virginia*, 245; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 61-62.

own cartridges. The roughly 775 infantry and cavalry Porterfield was organizing had limited tents and lodged in the county courthouse or in other buildings and homes around the town. One Confederate believed Philippi was "pandemonium." There was "No order, our drill foolishness…[Philippi was] full of disorder, uproar, speeches and intense excitement."[79]

Regardless of the pandemonium going on amongst Confederates in Philippi, the Federal presence in West Virginia was continuing to grow. On the evening of June 1, 1861, Brigadier General Thomas A. Morris, following the orders of General McClellan in late May, arrived with his Indiana brigade at Grafton. Thomas Morris was a West Pointer, class of 1834, and had been a railroad president before the war.[80] When he arrived at Grafton, he found Colonel Benjamin Kelley of the 1st Virginia (U.S.) and nine companies of the 9th Indiana preparing for an expedition that night against the Confederates at Philippi. Morris, however, was hesitant about an immediate offensive against Philippi and after a conference with Kelley, an attack against the Rebels was postponed until the following night. Attesting to the deeply divided sentiment that plagued West Virginia throughout the war, spies from both sides were a concern for commanders making strategic and tactical decisions. Morris experienced these circumstances early on, as Confederate spies kept an eye on the Federals at Grafton. "Having satisfied myself during the evening that we were in the midst of spies," Morris decided to "arrange the expedition so as to give a false impression, and thereby secure the advantage of a surprise of the enemy." [81]

The plan he developed was simple on a map, but more difficult in its execution. It called for a divided force and a night march with one column attacking the Confederates in their front and the other blocking their rear, aiming for the capture of the Rebel forces. The rendezvous of the

[79] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 63.
[80] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 64.
[81] Thomas A. Morris report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 66.

Federal columns would be at Philippi and the attack and resulting entrapment of the Confederates was set to begin 4:00 AM on June 3.[82] For green soldiers and officers this would prove difficult. "The plan seemed simple in theory, but for raw troops even the simplest task could be daunting," wrote one historian of the battle.[83] Night marches were not common during the Civil War. Ordering one in the first months of the war seems unrealistic and ambitious at the least. Adding West Virginia's natural and built environment - the unpredictable summer weather, rough and strenuous terrain, and poor road network - the march can be seriously questioned. Even with a questionable plan and harsh environmental conditions, the determination of the Union soldiers and officers prevailed and the march was completed.

At nine o'clock on the morning of June 2, Colonel Benjamin Kelley's command, the eastern column in Morris' two-pronged attack, moved out from Grafton via train on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and began the first Federal land offensive of the war. Kelley's command consisted of six companies of the 1st Virginia (US), nine companies of the 9th Indiana, and six companies of the 16th Ohio. In following orders to keep the movement a secret from secessionists spies and the Confederates at Philippi, Kelley advertised Harpers Ferry as the destination for his column. The train ride, however, was short for Kelley's troops. The roughly 1,500 men disembarked at the village of Thornton, only six miles east of Grafton, and began a twenty-five mile march "on a road but little travelled" to Philippi. Morris had ordered him to "regulate your march according to your own discretion, and your bivouac or rest at night in such a manner that you are sure of coming before the town of Philippi as near 4 o'clock to-morrow morning as possible."[84] The route Kelley's men travelled, however, was a poor excuse for a

[82] Thomas A. Morris order, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 66; Bell, "A Day at the Races," 8; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 64-65; Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War*, 32-33.
[83] Bell, "A Day at the Races," 9.
[84] Thomas Morris order, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 66.

road. Rough, twisting, unimproved, and more like an oversized trail, the Federals in this wing of the attack struggled over the rugged West Virginia topography and landscape. To make things more difficult, the weather added its wrath to the situation. The "drenching rain" or "this unforeseen misfortune," as Morris called it, began when the troops left Grafton and would last the entire night.[85]

By the time the Kelley's men disembarked and were moving on foot towards Philippi, their route had become a bog. "We marched all night in a heavy rain," wrote Thomas S.H. Carr of the 1st Virginia (U.S.), "our fine shoes had pulled off in the mud. The only way we could keep our powder dry was to keep it in our guns, for one load was all we had when it began to rain."[86] As the rain continued, Colonel Kelley's column continued to press forward. The timeline had been set by Morris and there would be little time to waste on the wet and winding mountain road. Overcoming the natural and built environmental conditions of stormy weather and poor roads, Kelley's men did not arrive to their designated point south of Philippi on time. A local man was enlisted as a guide to help the column through the difficult environmental conditions, but this was not enough. In the end, Kelley's column arrived about fifteen minutes after its designated time, which considering it was the green army's first major offensive and was conducted in difficult environmental conditions is quite remarkable.[87]

The western column of General Morris' two-pronged plan was under the control of Colonel Ebenezer Dumont. His 7th Indiana regiment combined with five companies of the 14th Ohio, six companies for the 6th Indiana, and two pieces of the 1st Ohio Light Artillery. This force of 1,900

[85] Thomas A. Morris report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 65 and 67; Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War*, 33; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 65; Bell, "A Day at the Races," 10; Ruth Woods Dayton, "The Beginning – Philippi, 1861," *West Virginia History* 13, no. 4 (July 1952): 254-266.
[86] Quoted in Bell, "A Day at the Races," 10.
[87] Thomas A. Morris report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 67. Some speculation remains for the late arrival of Kelley's column at Philippi. For more on the speculation as to why Colonel Kelley's force did not arrive on time at Philippi, see, Dayton, "The Beginning – Philippi, 1861," 254-266.

men would move twelve miles over the Beverly-Fairmont Pike to Philippi and be in position to coordinate with Colonel Kelley's command.[88]

Dumont's route was more direct, shorter, and over a macadamized road, which allowed for the later departure time and an easier march than Kelley's force. Built with two layers of "well-compacted, broken, angular pieces of small stone," macadamized roads were nearly ten inches thick and became common in the United States in the decades before the Civil War. Invented by Scottish engineer John Loudon MacAdam, these roads proved more suitable for travel during the winter season or in wet weather.[89] Dumont's force could not have hoped for a more appropriate road on the night of June 2-3 as they moved towards Philippi. Despite having to contend with green troops and rain, however, it was the march on the Beverly-Fairmont Pike where Dumont's Federals significantly overcame the natural environment. The night was darker than normal with the cloud cover and ran. To counteract the darkness and to stop the column from wandering on and off the road, Colonel Dumont ordered Lieutenant Benjamin Ricketts to take a red lantern and guide the troops down the turnpike. Although Lieutenant Ricketts did not "want a record as the first man killed" in the war, his red light guided the force without incident.[90] The rainy environmental conditions could have slowed or stopped the progress of the column. With the

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[88] Thomas Morris order, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 67; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 64; Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War*, 33.

[89] M.G. Lay, *Ways of the World: A History of the Worlds Roads and of the Vehicles That Used Them* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 75-78. For the bottom layer of rocks, the maximum thickness was roughly three inches; for the upper level, it was limited to roughly three-quarters of an inch. The small size of the top layer of rocks was an important piece of the road's success, as the three-quarters of an inch size rock was much smaller than the common width of the carriage/coach iron wheel, which measured nearly four inches in width. To be sure the top layer's rock were at the correct size, workers were told the rocks should be able to fit in their mouths. Supervisors and foreman also carried scales and a stone of the correct size for a more accurate measurement. Over time the road's traffic would compact the stones allowing for "structural interlock" between individual pieces of stone. The interlocked stone would act as one solid mass, allowing for stronger surface. More importantly, this surface proved impervious and could be built much flatter with little rise from the sides to the middle of the road. An impervious top with a slight rise allowed for greater drainage ability and in turn, made the roads much more effective in winter season and wet travel. The first macadamized road in the United States was built in 1823 to connect Boonsboro and Hagerstown, Maryland, on the Boonsborough Turnpike.

[90] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 65; Bell, "A Day at the Races," 10.

simple improvisation of a red lantern the Federal soldiers overcame the natural environment to press on through the night to be in position to attack the Confederate force at Philippi.

As the Federal columns adapted and overcame the environment to snake their way through the West Virginia countryside towards Philippi, Confederate Colonel Porterfield was not ignorant of their plans. Although General Morris had taken precautions to hide his intention to attack the Confederates at Philippi, two young ladies of Rebel sympathies alerted Porterfield to the Union movement. Abbie Kerr and Mollie McCloud learned of the Federal movement to surprise and capture the Confederates and on the afternoon of June 2 gave Porterfield full information of the enemy's plan.[91] The Confederate force in Philippi at this point consisted of roughly 700 to 800 infantry and cavalry.[92] The roads leading to Philippi that the Federals might be using were scouted and with no enemy seen, a council of war was held. Although the council determined to retreat, there was confusion as to when. "After a council held in the evening there was a general understanding that we would retreat, but no time was fixed at which it should begin," Porterfield remembered after the war.[93] Major Stewart believed it was decided to retreat early in the morning of June 3, but was told by his commander the Confederates would stay and give the Federals "a little brush in the morning."[94] One reason for the confusion, and Porterfield's allowing such confusion, was his gamble with the natural environment. "A drenching rain began around midnight and lasted several hours," Porterfield wrote.[95] With such a storm, the Confederates would have the same issue in a retreat that the oncoming Federals were confronting. Beverly, West Virginia, was the most reasonable spot for the Confederates to

[91] Major D.B. Stewart, "Battle of Philippi," *Confederate Veteran* 17 (1910): 116-118.
[92] General Orders, No. 30, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 72; Stewart, "Battle of Philippi," 116-118; Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War*, 32.
[93] Letter from George Porterfield to H.U. Maxwell dated August 12, 1899 in Maxwell, *The History of Barbour County, West Virginia*, 250.
[94] Stewart, "Battle of Philippi," 116-118.
[95] Porterfield letter in Maxwell, *The History of Barbour County, West Virginia*, 250.

retreat to. Located on the important Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, Beverly was an important link between eastern and western Virginia and was a thirty-mile march from Philippi. A march of that distance on a dark and stormy night could have spelt disaster for the green Confederates.

Porterfield, however, did make two mistakes in his decision making on June 2. First, he believed the "drenching rain" would stop the Federals' approach to Philippi until the weather had improved.[96] The hard rain that fell on the night of June 2-3 would make any travel difficult and slow. Porterfield, believing the rain would completely halt the Federal advance until the weather cleared, was surprised when his enemy appeared in his front at Philippi. The rain was a third party in the West Virginia mountains. The Federal columns were able through the built environment and sheer determination to combat this natural enemy. The Confederates, believing the weather would be a natural ally, failed to take the necessary precautions to defend themselves and paid a costly price.

Porterfield's second mistake was not ensuring Confederate pickets were observing the roads leading to Philippi to raise the alert of a Federal approach. The poorly equipped and supplied Confederates had no cartridge boxes to protect their ammunition. Instead, the Rebel soldiers had to put their cartridges in their pockets, and as the rain grew heavier and lasted into the night, their rounds became unserviceable and useless. As the night wore on, so did the Confederates' vulnerability. Pickets left their posts and by the time Kelley's and Dumont's Federal columns were near Philippi, there was no one to alert the Confederates of the threat.

By 4:00 AM on June 3, Colonel Ebenezer Dumont's Federals were ready to capitalize on their hard march through the rough West Virginia environment. The two guns of the 1st Ohio Light Artillery were placed on a hill that overlooked the Confederates. Finally, the Federal

[96] General Orders, No. 30, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 73.

artillery opened as Confederate Major D.B. Stewart remembered, "Just as day was breaking next morning [3 June] we heard the cannon go off on top of the hill across the river from town."[97] The fire was aimed at the Confederate cavalry camped on the north end of town and caused horses to stampede south through town. The Federal infantry attacked soon after the barrage, crossing the wooden arch bridge and racing into town. As the Confederate infantry saw the hasty exit of their cavalry, they were not far behind and on their way to Beverly. Colonel Kelley's late arriving Federal column could only harass the retreating elements of Porterfield's force, Kelley falling himself with a severe chest wound.[98] The Confederates were forced to leave their meager supplies and were happy just to get away, reaching Beverly on the night of June 2 and finishing their retreat the next day when they arrived in Huttonsville, West Virginia.[99] Federal soldiers were unable to pursue the retreating Rebels due to their exhausted condition from a night march through the difficult environment. The battle of Philippi was over, and Federal forces had scored a victory in this "decisive engagement" as McClellan termed it. [100]

The small battle at Philippi is a good example of how environmental factors can play a decisive role in a military engagement, no matter its size. The Federal columns were able to overcome the natural and built environment enough to half-way execute their battle plan. The Confederates, specifically Porterfield, gambled with the natural environment and lost. Believing no army would conduct an offensive in the hard rain and storm of June 2-3, 1861, he was surprised when a Federal force was in his front in the pre-dawn hours of June 3. Blamed for the Confederate loss, Porterfield requested a court of inquiry into his actions at Philippi. The court,

[97] Stewart, "Battle of Philippi," 116-118.
[98] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 68-71; Porterfield letter in Maxwell, *The History of Barbour County, West Virginia*, 250.
[99] Stewart, "Battle of Philippi," 116-118.
[100] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 65.

reporting its findings on June 20, 1861, specifically faulted Porterfield for his gamble with the weather. "That the commanding officer, having received information, deemed by him sufficient to prepare for an early retreat, erred in permitting himself to be influenced by the weather, so far as to delay the execution of his plan."[101] Porterfield was chided for the lack of pickets and allowing the Confederate force to be surprised. In the end, however, the findings were more a matter of pride as Porterfield had been replaced on June 8, 1861 by Brigadier General Robert S. Garnett.[102]

Although the Confederates retreated to Beverly and then to Huttonsville, the Federal victory at Philippi did have two important results. First, it gave Federal forces full control of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in northwestern Virginia. Secondly, it allowed the Second Wheeling Convention to convene later that same month.[103] In West Virginia the fight between Union and Confederate was as much about political sentiments as military occupation and victories. The fight at Philippi, however, would not give the United States complete control in West Virginia. A more capable Confederate force would soon be organized to occupy mountain passes that controlled the road linking western and eastern Virginia.

In the weeks following the surrender of Fort Sumter, West Virginia had become ground zero for the coming land actions of the Civil War. Commanders were learning a valuable lesson in how the natural environment would affect military actions. George Porterfield, perhaps more than any other commander in the early days of mobilization and occupation in West Virginia, understood the natural environment was more than an arena. The natural environment had a

[101] Robert E. Lee General Orders, No. 30, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 73.
[102] Robert E. Lee General Orders, No. 30, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 72-74; LeRoy Pope Walker Special Orders, No. 67, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 915.
[103] Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War*, 34.

determining factor. His decision to request light infantry, muskets with no bayonets, and to leave Grafton for Philippi all show his understanding of the natural environment his army confronted. Consequently, his choice to stay in Philippi until the rain stopped rather than to retreat immediately, was hazardous. The Confederate court of inquiry made him aware that the natural environment can be as detrimental as the enemy. The combination of quality turnpike roads and poor country roads had given common soldiers a different soldiering experience in their first march of the war.

The natural and built environment of West Virginia was a definite factor of Union success in May and June 1861. The Union columns under Kelley and Morris were able to overcome the natural and built environment, move on Philippi, and drive Confederate forces from there. For the time being, the Unionist conventions in Wheeling could continue uninterrupted. But as June went on, more soldiers from both sides organized in West Virginia. More serious fighting was on the horizon. If northwestern Virginia was going to form a loyal Union state, Federal armies needed a victory. Confederates needed to defeat Union troops to end Unionists' hopes for a loyal government and to control the strategically important Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and turnpikes leading to the Shenandoah Valley and Richmond.

Less than three months removed from the surrender of Fort Sumter, stakes for both governments were high in West Virginia. A third party loomed, however: the natural and built environment. It could be a natural enemy or ally. Those commanders and soldiers who had been on the ground in West Virginia during May and June 1861 were quickly learning the natural environment's importance. The others coming to the West Virginia front would have to catch up. A decisive battle and a more harsh and rugged natural environment loomed.

CHAPTER TWO

"HERE OUR HOLIDAY SOLDIERING ENDED": RICH MOUNTAIN AND CORRICK'S FORD, JULY 1861[104]

Thomas D. Phillip, a musician in the Union army, wrote poetically of his experience moving up the Ohio River to the seat of war in West Virginia. "Have had a good sleep of three hours and feel quite refreshed[,] have not slept for two night[s] before excepting as the cat sleeps that is with one eye open and the other shut," he wrote in his diary. "Now all is still…the men of arms who [were] so boisterous a little time before are now laying all over the boat in [odd] shapes and prostrate forms some in dark blue some in blanket brown[.] [B]e [careful] how you step…for fear that thread upon some sleeping form of liberty & of right pick well your steps and with me go to the outer deck and look upon the Rivers silent sentinels clothed in the somber shadow of night all is still [over there] except the light & shade of the passing hills & gullies and the dancing flickering, twinkling moon beams on the Ohio River."[105]

In the weeks following the Confederate defeat at Philippi in early June 1861, new commanders and common soldiers from both sides flowed into the Mountain State. They would have to learn their appropriate roles quickly, as green troops and leaders were soon put to the test. Not only did they have to develop as soldiers while confronting the enemy's army, but they also had to understand the region's natural environment. Vast, rugged, and isolated, West Virginia's natural environment had to be contended with. If either army regarded the natural

[104] Quoted in George Winston Martin, *"I Will Give Them One More Shot": Ramsey's 1st Regiment Georgia Volunteers* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 80.
[105] Thomas D. Phillip Diary, September 1861 – May 1862 (Mss. A P557), The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

environment simply as the arena of a campaign or battle, it would cause setbacks as easily as the enemy could.

West Virginia's rough and rugged topography influenced commanders' and private soldiers' war experiences. Strategic and tactical decisions, soldiers' outlook on army life, and the nature of fighting were all shaped by the natural environment. Both sides had to adapt to and overcome the environment to be successful there. Although Union and Confederate forces were on the same environmental footing, U.S. forces better adapted to West Virginia's natural environment and earned an early strategic victory in the region. This victory would effectively end regular army fighting in the Mountain State, ensure the formation of West Virginia as a new state, and propel army leaders into new positions.

An analysis of the fighting in West Virginia in July 1861 shows how the natural environment surrounding a Civil War campaign can become a historical actor. Historian Lisa Brady suggests nature does have agency and the ability to shape human decisions.[106] West Virginia in the summer and early fall of 1861 demonstrates this agency. By October 1861, Confederate and Union armies had been beaten up by the environment. The ability to overcome and adapt to the environment, however, would prove to be a determining factor for Union success.

A few days after George Porterfield's command ended their retreat from Philippi and established themselves at Huttsonville, West Virginia, Virginia forces were transferred to the Confederate States of America. On June 8, 1861, Governor John Letcher issued a proclamation to the people of Virginia in which he "hereby transfer[ed] to the authorities of the Confederate States, by regiments, all the volunteer forces which have been mustered into the service of

[106] Lisa Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategy and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes During the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 6.

Virginia."[107] Becoming soldiers in the Confederate States Army was not all that happened to Porterfield's ragtag army in the immediate days after Philippi. To try and improve the situation in West Virginia, Robert S. Garnett was placed in command of the Rebel forces there.[108] Much like Porterfield, Garnett had the elements of a good soldier and it was hopeful he could change Confederate fortunes in West Virginia. A member of the West Point class of 1841, Garnett had served in the Mexican War under General Zachary Taylor. Brevetted twice for gallantry in Mexico, Garnett also served as Commandant of Cadets under Robert E. Lee at West Point in the 1850s. At the time of his promotion to Brigadier General, he was serving as the adjutant-general to Lee, who commanded the Virginia state forces.[109]

When Robert Garnett reached Huttonsville on June 14, 1861, he saw the poor conditions of the troops that Porterfield, and Francis Boykin before him, had struggled to organize into a military unit. The soldiers there were "in a miserable condition as to arms, clothing, equipments, instruction, and discipline…wholly incapable, in my judgment, of rendering anything like efficient service," Garnett reported.[110] Garnett, however, wasted no time to try and improve the Rebels' position there. Huttsonville sat astride the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, six miles south of Beverly. Beverly was an important junction in the region's road network. The Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike turned in a westerly direction towards Buckhannon. One could also continue north out of Beverly on a different road, the Beverly-Fairmont Road. This road ran through Philippi and on to the important railroad junction at Grafton. It was also the road Thomas Morris' Federal column had marched on to attack Philippi and the one Porterfield's Rebels had retreated down. Not far out of Beverly, both roads went through critical mountain

[107] John Letcher General Orders, No. 25, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 911-912.
[108] LeRoy Pope Walker Special Orders, No. 67, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 915.
[109] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 84; Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 15.
[110] Richard Garnett report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 236.

passes. The Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike crossed Rich Mountain and the Beverly-Fairmont Road the Laurel Mountain. Garnett eyed these two passes and, the day after his arrival, moved his command to occupy both.[111]

West Virginia's rugged landscape features complex patterns of long and narrow ranges, ridges, and hills with steep sides rising from narrow valley floors. Garnett knew an army could not maneuver within such an environment and these passes were a key piece of the strategic and tactical puzzle in the region.[112] "I regard these two passes as the gates to the northwestern country," Garnett believed, "and, had they been occupied by the enemy, my command would have been effectually paralyzed." By June 16, Garnett had occupied both mountain passes and established a depot for his force at Beverly.[113]

As Richard Garnett was working to establish his position in the Rich and Laurel Mountain passes, Union commander George McClellan arrived in West Virginia. On June 21, 1861, he reached Parkersburg on the Ohio River with the intention of continuing to Grafton. At Grafton, McClellan appraised the situation and in a dispatch to Colonel Edward D. Townsend, Assistant Adjutant-General, laid out his plan of operations. "There is certainly a force of some kind near Huttonsville, with a strong advanced party intrenched near the Laurel Mountain, between Philippi and Beverly," McClellan wrote. Wanting to get his command well in hand, McClellan proposed to move his force from Clarksburg to Buckhannon and finally to Beverly, arriving in the rear of Garnett's force at Laurel Mountain. General Thomas Morris' Federal force, still at

[111] Richard Garnett report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 236-237; information and map of the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, see, "The History of a Key Road," The Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, accessed July 24, 2017, http://www.spturnpike.org/history/default.html.
[112] Janssen, *Earth Science: A Handbook*, 3-6.
[113] Richard Garnett report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 236-237.

Philippi after the Confederate debacle there, would press the Rebels in their front and pursue their retreat. After occupying Beverly, he hoped to move on Huttonsville and drive the Confederates into the mountains, establishing solid Federal control of northwestern Virginia and allowing McClellan to turn his attention to the Kanawha Valley.[114]

Two things are clear regarding McClellan's plan to finish the Rebels in northwestern Virginia. First, his intelligence was not entirely accurate as he did not account for the Confederate force Garnett had placed at Rich Mountain. With the natural and built environment surrounding Buckhannon, Beverly, and Huttsonville it seems a miscalculation on McClellan's part that Rebels would not occupy the pass at Rich Mountain. The main road, the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, that led from western to eastern Virginia was going to be McClellan's avenue to Beverly and Garnett's rear. From the difficulties of Colonel Benjamin Kelley's column moving towards Philippi on small mountain roads, it seems logical that McClellan would expect the Confederates to defend the main thoroughfare through the region.

The second point garnered from McClellan's strategy was his use of the mountains as a natural ally. Once he could occupy Huttonsville, McClellan wanted "to drive them [Confederates] into the mountains, whither I do not propose to follow them, unless under such circumstances as to make success certain." Driving the bulk of Confederate troops into the mountains and occupying the passes in which they could return, McClellan would move small Federal columns "through the country to reassure the Union men and break up any scattered parties of armed rebels."[115] McClellan's plan to push the Rebels into the mountains and scatter them was an effective way to use the natural environment, the mountains, as a strategic ally. Changes in elevation, generally higher elevations, and sporadically changing weather all made

[114] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 194-195.
[115] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 195.

the mountains in the eastern portion of West Virginia an asset for whichever army could bottle up their enemy in them. McClellan looked to take advantage of these natural environmental factors.

Huttonsville was the last establishment before entering the vast and isolated Alleghenies. Nestled along the Tygart Valley River, it sat at roughly 2,000 feet in elevation. At this place, the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike turned from a general north-south direction to a northwest-southeast direction, where it crossed the Shaver's Fork of the Cheat River, the Greenbrier River, and continued through the mountains into Virginia. It is this area between Huttonsville and the West Virginia-Virginia border where the Alleghany Mountains come to their highest peaks in the Mountain State. Following the turnpike from Huttonsville, the mountains quickly reach 3,000 feet elevation and continue to heights of over 4,000 feet. At Shaver's Fork the elevation is 3,500 feet and at the Greenbrier River it dips back to 3,000 feet before again rising to at least 4,000 feet.[116] At these elevations isolation was common, as there was little in regards to civilization and settlements. Traveler's Repose, an inn and post office near Bartow, West Virginia was the only significant establishment in the vast expanse between Huttsonville and Monterey, Virginia.[117] Farming and timbering was not commonly practiced in the area. Mountain land was not suitable for farming and no easy, cost effective way yet existed to remove cut timber.

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[116] U.S. Geological Survey, *Mill Creek quadrangle, West Virginia* [map], 1:24,000, 7.5 Minute Series, Washington, D.C.: USGS, 2014.

[117] Traveler's Repose was a two-story frame structure owned and operated by Andrew Yeager. The establishment of the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike enabled Yeager's business to develop. The small skirmish was fought in and around Traveler's Repose on October 3, 1861. Noted writer and Civil War solider Ambrose Bierce wrote of Traveler's Repose and the battle fought there in a 1903 *New York American* column entitled "A Bivouac of the Dead." For more on Traveler's Repose and the Battle of Greenbrier River, see, Carl E. Feather, "Sweet Repose in Bartow," West Virginia Division of Culture and History, accessed September 7, 2017, http://www.wvculture.org/goldenseal/winter12/Repose.html; David M. Owens, "Visiting a 'Bivouac of the Dead,'" The Ambrose Bierce Project Journal, accessed September 7, 2017, http://www.ambrose bierce.org/journal1owens.html; Greenbrier River, CWSAC Battle Summaries, accessed September 7, 2017, https://www.nps.gov/abpp/Battles/wv007.htm; and Greenbrier River Battlefield, The Civil War Trust, accessed September 7, 2017, https://www.civilwar.org/visit/battlefields/greenbrier-river-battlefield.

The unseasonable weather conditions in the mountains also served to make life difficult there, particularly for those trying to concentrate or organize an army. Weather would be much more unpredictable in the mountains as compared to lower elevations in other, less mountainous parts of the state. In a dispatch from Robert E. Lee to Colonel Myers, Chief Quartermaster, dated June 24, 1861, Lee requested blankets and tents for Garnett's Army of the Northwest, as "the nights being cold and there being much rain in the mountainous region where he now is."[118] McClellan also noted the cold summer weather in the mountainous region of West Virginia. "We nearly froze to death last night…finally however he [the colonel reporting] left, & I alternately slept & froze until seven o'clock…I sent Bates on an expedition & rake up a couple of horse blankets, by the aid of which, I hope hereafter to be reasonably comfortable," he wrote to his wife on July 3, 1861.[119]

Late June and early July saw George McClellan and Richard Garnett continuing to develop their plans of action and organize their armies around the Buckhannon-Beverly line. Troops from both sides continued to deploy in the area. Owing to the difficulties of organizing an army in the rugged and steep mountainous region of West Virginia, these regiments and brigades had a problematic time even with the simplest of army duties: establishing a camping ground.

Colonel James N. Ramsey's 1st Georgia Volunteer Infantry Regiment experienced this struggle. Arriving in Beverly on June 21, 1861, Colonel Ramsey wanted his regiment to join General Garnett's force the next day at the Laurel Mountain fortification. A storm of "howling winds and pounding rains," however, made the night miserable and delayed the regiment's departure from Beverly. By daybreak the following morning it was apparent the Georgia

[118] Robert E. Lee correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 947-948.
[119] George McClellan letter to Mary Ellen McClellan in Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 43.

soldiers were becoming more seasoned to army life and their environment. Lieutenant William O. Fleming, in a letter to his wife, noted that after his tent had fallen that he "actually slept soundly in the wet bed clothing." He continued, "it is surprising what men can stand when they are put to the test. Ordinarily it would be considered death to go through what we are now." Arriving outside the Laurel Hill fortification on June 24, the 1st Georgia jeered at the men of the 37th Virginia for their poor choice of a camping ground. "Why did we not go on and seek better ground?" a Virginia lieutenant recalled the Georgia troops asking. "If they went to sleep there," the Georgians believed, "they would roll off their pallets down the hill and break their necks." Besides jeering the Virginians, the arrival of Ramsey's men caused some excitement in the Confederate camp. "They were beautifully equipped…composed of young and active men, handsomely uniformed…The regiment was proceeded by a full drum corps, and the clangor of their kettle-drums and screams of their fifes were unsubdued by the shouts and loud cries of welcome with which they were saluted." [120]

Even though the campground proved dangerous in the Georgians' eyes, it did not stop them from enjoying themselves. The 1st Georgia "had left their homes apparently rather for a gay holiday than for real war. All the paraphernalia of a volunteer summer encampment accompanied them. Cards, wine, liquors, and potted luxuries…abounded," remembered Colonel William B. Taliaferro of the 23rd Virginia after the war. Discipline was their only want and "they abandoned themselves to all manners of deviltry, more, however from the life of excitement than from any really evil intent," Taliaferro believed.[121]

As the men of Ramsey's regiment established themselves with Garnett's army, more United States soldiers began entering West Virginia. To concentrate his Federal forces closer to

[120] Quoted in Martin, *"I Will Give Them One More Shot,"* 78-79.
[121] Martin, *"I Will Give Them One More Shot,"* 79.

Buckhannon, General McClellan ordered Union Brigadier General William S. Rosecrans' force to encamp south of Clarksburg. For Rosecrans and his brigade of Ohio and Indiana soldiers, finding a suitable camp ground proved difficult. Writing in his report to McClellan on June 29, Rosecrans expressed the harsh topography and terrain armies in West Virginia had to deal with when trying to organize.

> I found it about ten miles below Clarksburg, in the woods, in the bend of the Elk…Spending two or three hours in reducing things to order and reconnoitering the locality, I found there was no room for any one of the regiments, and some had not even room for a company roll-call…the troops assembled from the woods, fields, and ravines, where they were roaming…I then went forward to examine the country for a suitable camp. The valley in which is the Buckhannon turnpike is narrow, winding along through the high hills, covered with timothy and clover, and offers no sufficient space for an encampment.[122]

The mountainous environment of West Virginia was proving difficult in all aspects of the armies' operations. The examples provided by Rosecrans' brigade and James Ramsey's 1st Georgia show how steep, jagged, and rough terrain made even the most basic functions of an army problematic. These examples also provide a glimpse of the issues commanders and soldiers would have in fighting a battle. The hard and treacherous effort to establish a camp ground brings the problems of fighting an engagement using the line and column tactics of the period easily into focus. No matter the difficulties of the natural environment, soldiers from both sides continued to come into the region, and as the summer continued, the most noteworthy fighting for West Virginia loomed overhead like an angry mountain thunderstorm. Both sides would soon have to engage with the other, all while combating the natural environment. Adaptation to and the pure will to overcome the rugged terrain, the mountains' vastness, poor roads, and unpredictable weather would prove the difference between victory and defeat and for

[122] William Rosecrans report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 212.

some, life and death. Private Simeon Speer of Ramsey's 1st Georgia put it candidly, "Here our holiday soldiering ended. Now the stern realities of a soldier's life was entered upon."[123]

Garnett, however, was still concerned over the size of his Confederate force. "I feel constrained to call for an addition to my present force," he wrote on July 1, 1861, to Lieutenant Colonel George Deas, the Assistant Adjutant and Inspector General in Richmond. "I have become satisfied that I cannot operate beyond my present position with any reasonable expectation of substantial success, with the present force under my command, and I deem it my duty to state the fact." Wanting to hold the Rich Mountain and Laurel Hill passes, Garnett also wanted to conduct offensive operations against the Federals. His limited number of soldiers, however, made an offensive impracticable; there were too few men to hold the passes if the appropriate force was taken to engage the Yankees. If these passes were properly defended, as Garnett believed was of the utmost importance, a force moving to operate against the enemy would be too small.[124]

In the bind of lacking numbers, but understanding the importance of the mountain passes protecting the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, Garnett ordered his men at Laurel Hill and Rich Mountain to dig in and develop significant fortifications. At Camp Laurel Hill, trees were cleared for a field of fire, two lines of entrenchments were dug, and two batteries of artillery were placed "on hills commanding the road from Philippi."[125] "Our camp is now strongly fortified, and would defy an attack from any save an overwhelming force," wrote a member of the Greenbrier Cavalry stationed at Laurel Hill.[126]

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[123] Quoted in Martin, *"I Will Give Them One More Shot,"* 80.
[124] Richard Garnett report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 239.
[125] Martin, *"I Will Give Them One More Shot,"* 81.
[126] Greenbrier Cavalry to Mr. Mauzy, June 29, 1861, *Staunton Spectator and General Advertiser*, July 9, 1861.

The pass at Rich Mountain was "naturally much stronger, and the regiment there will be able to hold five times their number in check for a sufficient time…if they will stand to their work," Garnett reported to Confederate high command at Richmond.[127] The Augusta Lee Rifles who were "encamped in a dense forest" at the Rich Mountain pass, believed their position was "an admirable location for defense; rendered so both by nature and our unceasing labor since our arrival."[128] Although lacking in numbers, Richard Garnett had gained the admiration of his men. The position on Rich Mountain was named in his honor. "General Garnett has the confidence of everybody," wrote Lieutenant Colonel J.M. Heck, commander at Camp Garnett. The Greenbrier Cavalry felt Garnett was "a cool, clear-headed, cautious man – one in whose sagacity his men can confide."[129]

In choosing the "gateways to the Northwest" to establish defensive positions, Richard Garnett had used the natural environment of the region between Buckhannon and Huttonsville effectively. Due to the topography, vegetation, and sheer ruggedness of the mountains in this area, the Rich Mountain and Laurel Hill passes proved the only two locations where the Federal army could push east from their locations at Buckhannon and Philippi. Not only choosing naturally defensible positions, Garnett effectively manipulated the natural environment to enhance those positions. Even small country roads had been defended by the region's dense forest and the Confederates use of it. "I have caused all the country roads…to be blocked up by cutting large trees across them. I have done this to prevent the enemy from getting in my rear," wrote Garnett.[130]

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[127] Richard Garnett report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 238.
[128] Augusta Lee Rifles to the Editor, June 21, 1861, *Staunton Spectator and General Advertiser*, July 2, 1861.
[129] *Staunton Spectator and General Advertiser*, July 9, 1861.
[130] Richard Garnett report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 237.

Felled trees, earthworks, breastworks, and a cleared field of fire all enabled the Confederates defending the road to eastern Virginia to use the environment as an ally. George McClellan and his Federal army would have to overcome the Rebels' use of the natural environment. A frontal assault on either position would be futile, but by early July, 1861, McClellan was devising his own plan to get at the Confederates. Just as at Philippi, the Federal army's determination and grit to overcome the natural elements and give battle to the Rebels would prove advantageous to Union hopes in West Virginia.

As the defensive positions at Camp Garnett and Laurel Hill where being strengthened by the region's natural environment and the hard work of the common Confederate soldier, George McClellan was growing anxious to move forward against the Rebels. His army was positioned at Buckhannon and Philippi. McClellan himself was commanding at Buckhannon and Brigadier Thomas Morris, the commander of the victory at Philippi, was in command of the force now occupying that place. On July 5, 1861, McClellan reported the strength of his army. Between the two commanders a large Federal force had been assembled in West Virginia. Morris' command consisted of 51 companies of infantry and one artillery battery. McClellan's force, the larger of the two, contained six full regiments of infantry, six detached companies of infantry, two artillery batteries, and two companies of cavalry. Besides these units with him at Buckhannon, McClellan expected two more infantry regiments and a handful of detached infantry companies to reach his position. The soldiers were in high spirits. "The morale of our men is excellent – could not be better," McClellan wrote to Assistant Adjutant-General Townsend. Besides reporting on the numbers and morale of his army, McClellan also

acknowledged the possible Confederate presence at Rich Mountain. "I expect to find the enemy in position on Rich Mountain," McClellan wrote.[131]

With the Rebels in position at Rich Mountain, McClellan hoped to turn the enemy and take the turnpike road to Beverly. If possible, McClellan wanted to "turn the position [of the enemy] to the south, and thus occupy the Beverly road in his rear."[132] This maneuver was a lesson he had learned fourteen years earlier in the war with Mexico at the Battle of Cerro Gordo. "If possible I will repeat the maneuver of Cerro Gordo," McClellan quipped. Historian Ethan Rafuse notes that Winfield Scott in his campaign to capture Mexico City "avoided frontal assaults whenever possible in favor of carefully prepared and controlled turning maneuvers."[133] It seems McClellan had applied this lesson to his first campaign of leading his own army. The rugged, steep, and heavily forested terrain surrounding the Rebel position at Rich Mountain, however, would make applying this lesson of maneuver difficult. Nonetheless, when the time came, McClellan would put his Mexican-American war experience to use in the mountains of West Virginia. The time for movement and maneuver, however, was coming slow for McClellan and his army.

Although George McClellan felt the area surrounding Buckhannon was "a beautiful country…a lovely valley surrounded by mountains," he was anxious to move on from there.[134] On the same day, July 5, 1861, he wrote of the picturesque landscape to his wife, he wired headquarters in Washington his regret of remaining in that place. "You will probably feel as much regret as I do in finding that I am still here," McClellan said. The cause of the delay in moving from Buckhannon on the Confederates entrenched at Rich Mountain and Laurel Hill was

[131] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 198.
[132] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 198.
[133] Rafuse, *McClellan's War*, 47.
[134] Quoted in Sears, *Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 46.

"the difficulty of getting up supplies and arranging transportation."[135] Common soldiers on the ground shared McClellan's frustrations. Channing Richards, a member of the 6th Ohio Infantry, writing in his diary from Belington, West Virginia, griped, "Our rations have been very short for two or three days we have been on half rations only two crackers a day and salt pork with a short allowance of coffee."[136] The Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike and the Beverly-Fairmont Road were the two main avenues to move men and supplies into position around the Buckhannon-Beverly line. Besides these two routes, there were only small mountain roads and those were no alternatives for wagon trains and columns of men. The ruggedness of the natural environment and lacking built environment was slowing McClellan and his Federal army.

Buckhannon, however, did offer significant positives for McClellan in West Virginia. Considering it the "important strategical position in this region," McClellan felt it covered his base of operations and supplies at Grafton, Webster, Clarksburg, and Parkersburg. Secondly, the Federal occupation of the area had cut off the Confederates supplies from western Virginia. Now the Rebels had to rely on Staunton, Virginia, for provisions, which was "a long haul, over a rough mountain road," McClellan believed.[137] The ruggedness and isolation of the natural environment around Buckhannon and the area's lacking built environment was a double-edged sword for McClellan. His supplies and advance were slow, but the Confederates were in an even worse position to supply their men. No matter, he expected to push forward, engage the Rebels, and occupy Beverly soon. With the Federals in control of Beverly and the "gateways to the Northwest," the Rebels would be forced to contend with the third actor in the region; the vast rugged Alleghany mountains that loomed between Beverly and Confederate help in Staunton.

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[135] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 198.
[136] Channing Richards Diary, July 10, 1861, The Channing Richards Papers (Mss. A R514) The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.
[137] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 198-199.

The climactic battle for West Virginia would occur, McClellan hoped, sometime between July 5, when he was regretting still being in Buckhannon, and July 8 or 9, when he hoped to have occupied Beverly.[138] The country around the Confederates at Rich Mountain, however, was "exceedingly difficult to operate in" and the Federals were not in sight of the Rebel lines until July 10. Much like George Porterfield, who had requested light infantry to engage the Federals back in May, McClellan was beginning to understand the combat difficulties the mountain environment offered. He requested "mountain guns at once" and had his belief that a flanking movement around the Rebel position at Rich Mountain was necessary. This notion had been confirmed by "the dense thickets with which their [the Confederates] works were surrounded," as those thickets had "prevented the attainment of much positive or satisfactory information" of the enemy's entrenchments.[139] McClellan had discovered what the Confederates had been working hard on in the past weeks; a naturally defensible position made stronger by earthworks, entrenchments, and abatis in front of them. Dense laurel thickets anchored the breastworks. The Rebel works commanded the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, the only road leading to their position. First Lieutenant Orlando Poe of the U.S. Topographical Engineers attached to McClellan's command, commented in his report of the battle "that we [the Federal army] could probably carry the works by storm, but it would be with heavy loss, as the enemy's position was naturally a strong one."[140] The natural and built environment had allied the Confederates in creating a strong defensive position at one of the most strategically important points in West Virginia.

[138] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 199.
[139] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 202-205.
[140] Orlando M. Poe report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 51, par. 1, p. 13.

With a frontal assault considered too risky and costly because of the naturally strong position of the enemy, the Federals worked to overcome the position and the natural environment that aided it. Brigadier General William S. Rosecrans had arrived with McClellan near Rich Mountain on July 7, 1861. After his arrival, Rosecrans learned of David Hart, a young Union man whose family lived on top of Rich Mountain. Hart had what the Yankees needed to overcome the Rebel's position and the rugged natural environment surrounding it. Having tended cattle in the area surrounding Rich Mountain, he possessed an intimate knowledge of the country surrounding the Confederate works. Rosecrans sent for Hart and he turned up at the General's headquarters on the evening McClellan was learning of the likely cost a frontal assault would bring. After meeting with Hart, Rosecrans took a plan for flanking the Rebel works to McClellan. Making a small sketch of the purposed action and after the approval of the Chief of Staff, McClellan ordered it carried out.[141]

The 8th, 10th, and 13th Indiana and the 19th Ohio were given to Rosecrans to work around the Confederate left flank and attack the homestead and tavern on top of Rich Mountain. Once McClellan heard the firing from that attack, he would commence a frontal assault on the Confederate works. Rosecrans would support by attacking from the rear and blocking the Confederates avenue for retreat. By 3 A.M. on July 11, 1861, the U.S. soldiers under Rosecrans command were preparing to move into the rugged terrain of Rich Mountain with full canteens, one day rations in their haversacks, and their arms and accoutrements. At 5 A.M. the Federals, led by David Hart, "turned from the road in the edge of the woods fronting our encampment" and were off to flank the Rebels and drive them into the vast and rugged Alleghany Mountains.

[141] William S. Rosecrans, "Rich Mountain: Western Virginia Cleared of Confederate Troops," *The National Tribune*, February 22, 1883.

Ironically, as in the Federal approach to Philippi and as to foreshadow the difficulties that lay ahead for Rosecrans' men, a drenching rain was falling on the Yankee column. [142]

The local Union guide David Hart remembered the morning of July 11: "We started east on the Staunton turnpike and soon turned into the woods." He continued, "We pushed along through the brush, rocks, and laurel, followed by the whole division in perfect silence. The rain drops from the bushes wet us thoroughly, and it was very cold."[143] Rosecrans remembered the march "through a pathless forest, over rocks and ravines…and using no ax…the column pushed cautiously and steadily forward, and arrived at last and halted in rear of the crest on top of Rich Mountain."[144] Hart's and Rosecrans' recollection of "pushing along" and "pushed steadily and cautiously forward" recalls what seems a much easier experience than one would expect. Both Confederate and Federal officers and soldiers had commented on the naturally defensible position of Rich Mountain. McClellan had complained in correspondence on how difficult the country was to operate in. Although Rosecrans had told McClellan he believed he would be in position to attack by 10:30 A.M., it was after 2 P.M. before Rosecrans' column engaged the Confederates on top of Rich Mountain.[145] The report of Colonel Jeremiah Sullivan of the 13th Indiana Infantry paints a different picture of the march around the enemy's work. Written only four days after the march and ensuing fight, it emphasizes that the natural environment had to be contended with. Sullivan recounts an experience that attests to the late arrival of Rosecrans' column, the difficulty of the rugged terrain the column encountered, and that the natural environment was more than the arena the march took place in:

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[142] William Rosecrans report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 215; Mahlon D. Manson report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 51, par. 1, p. 8; Rosecrans, "Rich Mountain," *The National Tribune*, February 22, 1883.
[143] David Hart, "The Battle at Rich Mountain," *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*, July 22, 1861.
[144] William Rosecrans report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 215.
[145] Rosecrans, "Rich Mountain," *The National Tribune*, February 22, 1883; William Rosecrans report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 215.

> After a very tedious march, following a path which led us through thickets so dense and woods so filled with undergrowth that it was impossible to see fifty feet on either side, now following the bed of a mountain stream for our path and then using the compass for our only guide, we climbed and scrambled to the top of the mountain in their rear. Just as we reached the summit of the mountain we were overtaken by a terrific storm, which raged with great fury, making it seem as if our duty led us to encounter nature, the elements, and man.[146]

Rosecrans' column encountered the natural environment around Rich Mountain and with much effort and tenacity, overcame it. Their determination had landed them on the summit of Rich Mountain, close to the Hart home, and in the rear of the Confederates at Camp Garnett.

The Hart home sat on the summit of Rich Mountain along the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, two miles in the rear of Camp Garnett. In the morning hours of July 11, a courier sent from McClellan's headquarters to Rosecrans' flanking column was intercepted by enemy pickets. In questioning the courier, the Rebels learned a Federal column was on a flanking movement. Although Lieutenant Colonel John Pegram, commander of the Confederate force on Rich Mountain, believed "the intricacies of the surrounding country" protected his flanks, a detachment of 310 Confederate soldiers were sent to the summit and positioned around the Hart home. Simple breastworks were erected and instructions were given to hold the position at all costs.[147]

The fight at Rich Mountain lasted more than two hours. The outnumbered Confederates who met Rosecrans' column fought hard but were overpowered and dispersed. McClellan never attacked the fortifications in his front and left Rosecrans alone on top of Rich Mountain. Fatigued and unable to move on Camp Garnett, Rosecrans braced himself for a Rebel counterattack. The attack never came and Rosecrans marched unchecked into Camp Garnett on

[146] Jeremiah C. Sullivan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 51, par. 1, p. 10.
[147] John Pegram report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 264; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 101-102.

the morning of July 12. The Rebels who had built and occupied the position were gone. Rosecrans and McClellan finally made contact and moved immediately on Beverly. With no resistance, Federal troops occupied Beverly and cut Garnett's avenue of retreat from Laurel Hill.[148]

The rugged terrain and dense vegetation that had strengthened the Confederate position at Rich Mountain caused great confusion and havoc for the Rebels once the fight began. Hearing the firing on the summit intensify, Pegram sent reinforcements to the summit. Unable to use the turnpike, the reinforcing column "marched in a single file through laurel thickets and other almost impassable brushwood up a ridge to the top of the mountain." Already becoming discouraged, the harsh terrain and prospect of battle did nothing to improve the Confederates' morale. A scared and demoralized man in the front company accidentally shot a sergeant, causing many soldiers to scatter. By the time Pegram's disheartened column reached a point in which it could attack Rosecrans' force, he believed it futile to use them for any attack. The column was ordered to connect with Garnett at Laurel Hill or a smaller Confederate force between the Rich Mountain summit and Beverly.[149]

After sending the column on, Pegram returned to the remainder of his force at Camp Garnett. The difficult terrain caused him much difficulty and to lose his way several times before he reached the camp. He arrived there after 11:00 P.M. on July 11 and, after a brief council of war, the decision was made for the remaining Confederates to attempt to link up with Garnett's force still at Laurel Hill. Jed Hotchkiss, a topographical engineer who had surveyed the Rebel position in early July, led the column. Pegram saw each company out of Camp Garnett before he joined

[148] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 203; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 104-106.
[149] John Pegram report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 264-265.

the march. Traveling cross-country, the men in the nearly one mile long line struggled to keep up. The rain and darkness of the night, combined with downed trees and dense thickets, broke the column. By the time Pegram reached the front of the column, Hotchkiss and the very front of the line had disappeared. It was daylight before Hotchkiss realized he had lost a majority of the line, but he continued and safely reached Beverly around 11:00 A.M. on July 12.[150]

Pegram's column was less fortunate. Eighteen hours were spent slogging through the rough, jagged, dense terrain between Camp Garnett and the Beverly-Fairmont Road leading to Garnett's position on Laurel Hill. When Pegram reached the Beverly-Fairmont Road, he learned from local secessionists that Garnett had retreated from Laurel Hill and was being pursued by another Federal force. Hungry, tired, worn out, and demoralized, Pegram called a second council of war and the decision to surrender was made. "Owing to the reduced and almost famished condition of the force now here under my command," Pegram wrote in his communication to the Federals at Beverly, "I am compelled to offer to surrender them to you as prisoners of war."[151] The Confederates had been defeated at Rich Mountain. Writing from Beverly on the night of July 12, McClellan informed Washington that he "had the honor to inform you that the army under my command has gained a decisive victory."[152]

On the same day that McClellan's command left Buckhannon to move on Rich Mountain, Brigadier General Thomas Morris advanced from Philippi on Garnett at Laurel Hill. Ordered to proceed with a strong advanced guard and to conduct extended reconnaissance, Morris' objective was "to hold the enemy in check in their present position, and to induce them to believe that you

[150] Jedediah Hotchkiss report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 262; John Pegram report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 265.
[151] Jedediah Hotchkiss report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 262; John Pegram report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 265-267.
[152] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 203.

will make the main attack."[153] That McClellan would make the main Federal attack appeared to be no secret. "We are patiently awaiting the arrival of Gen McClellan who is advancing in their rear and who intends making the principal attack," wrote Channing Richards in his diary on July 10 from his position in front of the Rebel lines at Laurel Hill. "When he will be here is an important question to us."[154] As Rosecrans' brigade under McClellan's command was attacking Rich Mountain on July 11, Garnett was held in position by Morris' Federals. In the days between Morris' arrival in the Rebel front and the fight at Rich Mountain, heavy skirmishing and Federal artillery shelling had kept Garnett believing the main assault would be against his position.

Robert Garnett and his command on Laurel Hill learned of the Confederate defeat at Rich Mountain late in the evening of July 11, 1861. Knowing his position was now indefensible, as his rear was open to Union attack, Garnett decided to retreat towards Beverly. As expected, there was a great sense of urgency to Garnett's retreat. "On returning to camp at night, we packed up, and prepared to leave, not having time to eat supper, and notwithstanding many of us had nothing to eat during the day," wrote Nathan Pugh of Ramsey's 1st Georgia of his return to the Confederate camp from being on picket duty.[155] To fool Morris' command and leave the illusion the Confederates were still holding their Laurel Hill position, Garnett ordered tents to be left up and fires burning.[156]

The Confederate ruse worked, as it was not until the next morning that the Federals positioned in front of Laurel Hill learned of the Rebel retreat. "On Friday July 12th word was

[153] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 210.
[154] Channing Richards Diary, July 10, 1861, The Channing Richards Papers (Mss. A R514), The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.
[155] Quoted in Martin, *"I Will Give Them One More Shot,"* 94-95.
[156] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 109; Martin, *"I Will Give Them One More Shot,"* 95.

brought in that the enemy had deserted their camp and were retreating," wrote Channing Richards of the 6th Ohio. "We advanced into their camp and found it a scene of confusion. Tents, baggage and provisions were scattered in every direction."[157] The *Cincinnati Commercial* provided a similar assessment of the Rebels retreat. Valuable camp equipment and food stores were left behind; items that were difficult to procure and sure to be missed by the Confederates. "It was a scene of indescribable confusion when I visited it – a miscellany of tents thrown down and torn in pieces, tent poles, some half burned," the correspondent wrote. He continued, "They had packed off in a desperate hurry. Many valuable camp equipages had been tied up, but they could not load them or had no time. Fifty barrels of flour, as many of had biscuit and a quantity of corn in the ear…and in a pasture close by were seventy-five or hundred sheep which they had 'impressed'."[158]

Beverly, the Confederate supply depot there, and access to the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike and Virginia, were Garnett's objectives. Reaching Beverly was a must for Garnett's force. If he could not make Beverly, he would be forced to make his way back to Virginia via small country roads through the vast, rugged Alleghany Mountains of eastern West Virginia. This option, the one George McClellan planned for in his strategy for pushing the Confederates out of this portion of West Virginia, would spell disaster for Garnett and the remaining Rebel force. Garnett's hasty retreat and encamped illusion, however, did more than fool Morris' force. It allowed him the opportunity to get his force to Beverly before McClellan or Rosecrans could capture the strategically important town.

[157] Channing Richards Diary, July 14, 1861, The Channing Richards Papers (Mss. A R514), The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.
[158] Quoted in Martin, *"I Will Give Them One More Shot,"* 96-97.

According to dispatches sent from George McClellan to Union headquarters in Washington at 9 A.M. on July 12, he was "up to a point in sight of Beverly" and "now pushing on Beverly, a part of Rosecrans' troops being now within three miles of it."[159] Although there was no Federal force in Beverly on the night of July 11, as indicated by McClellan's dispatches, Garnett never made it there. Rebel scouts had mistakenly reported a Confederate force in Beverly for a Federal one. The only option for the confused Garnett to save his Confederate force from surrender, was a small country road that led to the Northwestern Turnpike. "Morning found us near the cross road west of Beverly where we found to our surprise that the enemy had forced his way through, blocking the road and completely cutting off our retreat in that direction. But one way was left us and that a most dangerous and difficult one," wrote Confederate soldier George P. Morgan in his diary.[160] That turnpike could then be used to cross the Alleghany Mountains and land the Rebels at Monterey, Virginia on the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike.[161] The Confederates and pursing Federals would soon find themselves an unforgiving march through the relentless, unforgiving natural environment of the Alleghany Mountains.

A running battle around Corrick's Ford, West Virginia, on a tributary of the Cheat River was the climax of the retreat from Laurel Hill. The march to get there, however, was grueling and is a great example of the natural environment's effect on military operations. Garnett's ruse encampment had given the Rebels a fifteen-hour head start on Morris' pursuing Federals. By the morning of July 13, however, the advance of the Federal column, led by Captain Henry W. Benham, U.S. Corp of Engineers, had closed the gap to four or five miles.[162]

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[159] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 202.
[160] George P. Morgan diary entry, July 12, 1861, in "A Confederate Journal," edited by George E. Moore, *West Virginia History* 22, no. 4 (July 1961): 201-216.
[161] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 109-110.
[162] Henry W. Benham report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 222.

They pursued the Confederates over a "narrow and difficult road." Whitelaw Reid of the *Cincinnati Gazette* reported the road was "so narrow that a horseman could not pass on either side of the wagon train."[163] The "road that defies description" was made even more arduous by heavy rains. "A drizzling rain commenced about 6 o'clock, which by 9 became quite heavy…by 11 o'clock the rain became a drenching storm, and continued for several hours, the roads in the mountains becoming nearly impassable," wrote Brigadier General Thomas Morris in his report of the action.[164] Channing Richards wrote of the pursuit the following day in his diary that, "It was raining and the roads were in a terrible condition. Wet to the skin we waded through the mud several inches deep and worse than all had nothing to eat and no covering at night. It was a terrible march and several broke down under it."[165] Even with the poor environmental conditions, Captain Benham noted the Federal soldiers' high morale. Knowing the gap was closing "encouraged our efforts, and though for nearly the whole time the rain was pouring in torrents and the clayey roads almost impassable in many places, the spirit of the troops…was such as to bear them most rapidly onward."[166]

Although both Federals and Confederates had to deal with the rain and thick mud, the Confederates worked to use the natural environment as an ally by cutting large trees to slow the Federal pursuit. "This passage was found to be obstructed by large trees, recently felled, in about twelve to fifteen places, and in nearly every defile for three or four miles," Captain Benham commented.[167] Still the Federals pressed on while the Confederates hoped to somehow shake their followers. The hunters and hunted finally came together around noon on July 13 at

[163] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 111.
[164] Thomas Morris report, *OR*, ser. 1., vol. 2, p. 220.
[165] Channing Richards Diary, July 14, 1861, The Channing Richards Papers (Mss. A R514), The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.
[166] Henry W. Benham report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 222.
[167] Henry W. Benham report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 222.

Kaler's Ford on the Cheat River. The pursuit developed into a running fight as the Confederates tried to escape downstream on the opposite side of the river as the Federals. At Corrick's Ford, downstream from Kaler's, the Confederates decided to make their stand. A sharp skirmish broke out and, on returning to the site of the firing, General Robert Garnett was killed. The skirmishing and death of Garnett ended the Federal pursuit. Benham believed his advance force was too fatigued and exhausted to continue any farther and halted the column at 2 P.M. for food and rest. [168]

The Rebels continued, still in hopes of reaching the Northwestern Turnpike and an escape valve to Virginia. Unimpeded, they marched all night on July 13-14 to arrive at Red House, Maryland, on the turnpike. After "seven days arduous march" the Confederates finally reached safety at Monterey, Virginia, a small-town west of Staunton on the Staunton Parkersburg-Turnpike.[169] But not all Confederates were fortunate enough to experience the arduous march back to Virginia. A detachment of James Ramsey's 1st Georgia regiment had been ordered to set up an ambush on the Federals as they crossed Kaler's Ford. The ambush was never executed and soon the Georgians found themselves cut off from the rest of their regiment and the Confederate column. Deciding not to surrender themselves, the only option available was to try and link up with the Confederate column by going cross county through the vast and rugged Alleghany mountains. Hungry, cold, and tired from their exhausting retreat from Laurel Hill, the men became lost and struggled greatly. With no roads to follow and in an unknown environment, the Georgians resolved to chewing tree bark and shoe leather to get by. Parts of the cutoff detachment itself became separated. The Georgians spent four nights in the mountains before they found a local man to help them. Frank Farror, a member of the lost company, recalled,

[168] Henry W. Benham report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 222-223; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 112-115.
[169] William Taliaferro report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 287.

"This was the first time that starvation stared me in the face. Oh! God, what a thought!" [170] After receiving aid from locals living in the mountains, the soldiers were set on the right course and slowly made their way back to Confederate lines.[171]

The engagement at Rich Mountain and the retreat to Corrick's Ford provide excellent examples of how the natural and built environment can affect a military campaign and battle. The Confederates were aided by the natural environment in defending strategically important passes. Already naturally strong positions, they were able to enhance them to a point where frontal assaults would be considered futile. Federal forces were forced to encounter the natural environment head on to make tactical progress against the Rebels. The Federals' determination and ability to do this, however, explains their success. Rosecrans' flank march around the Confederate position at Rich Mountain occurred, as George McClellan reported, "with great difficulty and almost superhuman efforts" as the column overcame "the formidable obstacles which impeded his progress." [172] This determination and grit to overcome the natural environment, just as the Federal columns had done at Philippi the month before, allowed for Union victory at the Rich Mountain pass, and ultimately, control of the strategically important Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike from Parkersburg as far east as Beverly. Without the will and determination to overcome the obstacles of the natural environment, the Union success in West Virginia would have not been as swift. More importantly, however, the battle for Rich Mountain

[170] Martin, *"I Will Give Them One More Shot,"* 115 and 119.
[171] For a more detailed account of the Georgians trial in West Virginia's Alleghany Mountains, see George Winston Martin, "Lost in the Wilderness," in *"I Will Give Them One More Shot": Ramsey's 1st Regiment Georgia Volunteers* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2010), 115-126.
[172] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 206.

shows the natural environment is much more than an arena and does indeed have the capability to shape command decisions and the course of an engagement.

The retreat of Robert Garnett's force and the subsequent pursuit by Morris' Federal force shows the effect of the natural environment on the experience of common soldiers. Not only did the retreat test the limits of military organization, particularly for green armies, it is an example of the natural environment's role in the daily life of soldiers. The march was an extremely difficult one with few tactical or strategic implications, other than the death of a Brigadier General. Historian Kathryn Shively Meier argues the natural environment can have both positive and negative affects not only on common soldiers' physical health, but mental health as well.[173] The retreat and pursuit from Laurel Hill is an experience that negatively affected both physical and mental health. A poorly built environment of narrow roads and insufficient river crossings, combined with rain, mud, and hunger made the experience grueling. This experience of "a terrible march [that] several [soldiers] broke down under," as Channing Richards referred to it, in the early weeks of the war made many on both sides question their existence as a soldier.[174]

To make matters worse, each side had their difficulties in returning to their respective lines. The Confederates spent a week marching through the Alleghany Mountains to make it to safety at Monterey, Virginia. The cut-off Georgians had the most difficult time, and were fortunate to make Monterey in one piece. The Federal column was no better off. Only a day's march from their starting point at Belington, the Yankees had a "fatiguing march of twenty-three miles" in which many preferred to do without food. "The command were getting sick from the use of fresh beef only," Brigadier General Morris wrote in his report. "Many of them preferred doing

[173] Meier, *Nature's Civil War*, 2.
[174] Channing Richards Diary, July 14, 1861, The Channing Richards Papers (Mss. A R514), The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

without beef rather than increase the disease (diarrhea) brought on by its use without bread or salt."[175]

Even with the difficulties and the soldiers' experience in the days surrounding the fight at Corrick's Ford, the natural environment could still shape a soldier's outlook and give him a positive view. Confederate George Morgan, who had taken part in the retreat to Corrick's Ford and on to Monterey, wrote in his diary a little over a week after he had left Laurel Hill. He alludes to the better environmental conditions and the subsequent higher morale of the soldiers. "We are all comfortably encamped near Monterey by the side of a little mountain brook with plenty of pure water, pure air, and all seem cheerful and happy. A soldier may be worn down and almost starved by long marches and in a few days forget all and be ready and willing to go through the same again. This seems the case with our Co. more than any other. Here we cook, eat, and rest. All enjoy themselves finely."[176]

West Virginia's natural environment was far more than an arena in July 1861. Command decisions, tactical and strategic outcomes, and the experience of common soldiers were all shaped by it. George McClellan experienced success and gained firm control of northwestern Virginia. "But the really important result of these operations are the complete rout and annihilation of the rebel forces," he told Washington. "This portion of Western Virginia is entirely freed from their presence, and that there is now not one single organized band of rebels on this side of the mountain."[177] Channing Richards agreed, "The victory is a splendid one, it

[175] Thomas Morris report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p 221.
[176] George P. Morgan diary entry, July 23, 1861, in Moore, "A Confederate Journal," 201-216.
[177] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 208.

breaks up a fine army and probably rids Western Virginia of secessionists."[178] The engagement at Rich Mountain and the subsequent retreat to and skirmish at Corrick's Ford enabled McClellan's Federal army to control the northwest portions of Virginia and its crucial road and railroad network.

Great success, both military and political, had been achieved by the United States in West Virginia by late July 1861. The Confederate army in the northwestern portion of the state that threatened the Unionist political movement had been pushed east and the Union army was in firm control of the area. This control allowed the convention meeting in Wheeling to issue a separate statehood ordinance and begin to build the foundation for the formation of West Virginia.[179] McClellan's success landed him with a new command. After the Confederate victory at Manassas on July 21, 1861, George McClellan was summoned to Washington and placed in command of the newly formed army of three-years volunteers that would eventually become the Army of the Potomac.[180] Brigadier General William Rosecrans would now take control of Union forces in West Virginia. The Confederates, however, were not ready to give up West Virginia, and soon, they too would have a new commander. Rebel hopes were placed on Robert E. Lee, who came to improve the Confederate position and chances in West Virginia. Although each side received new commanders, the natural environment still lurked and would have to be adapted to or overcome to achieve victory.

Army commanders were not the only new personnel to enter West Virginia. New troops and reinforcements began pouring into the region. Ohio and Indiana produced a majority of these

[178] Channing Richards Diary, July 14, 1861, The Channing Richards Papers (Mss. A R514), The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.
[179] McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 300.
[180] McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 348.

new Federal soldiers. The Confederates, however, would begin to see young soldiers from across the South enter West Virginia. Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee men would all come to the Mountain State to fight. These troops would encounter a natural environment like many had never experienced before. The Confederates especially dealt with difficult environmental conditions. Walter Taylor, an aide-de-camp for Robert E. Lee in West Virginia and a member of his staff until Appomattox, believed he never experienced the same "heart-sinking emotions" with Lee's army as he did in West Virginia.[181] As the Federal army enjoyed its success and the Confederate army reeled, both sides knew another fight loomed. The natural environment loomed as well, and for the commanders and soldiers on both sides, it would provide a trying experience that would test the mettle and grit of all involved.

[181] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 17.

CHAPTER THREE

"IN A MOST ROMANTIC PLACE AMONG THE LOFT RANGES OF THE GREAT ALLEGHANY": CHEAT MOUNTAIN, JULY – SEPTEMBER 1861[182]

"It seemed that every mountain was piled upon mountain. No sooner would we arrive at a place that seemed to be to top than another view of a higher, and yet higher mountain would rise before us," wrote Sam Watkins of the 1st Tennessee infantry as his regiment made the journey from Staunton, Virginia into West Virginia. "From the foot to the top of the mountain the soldiers line the road, broken down and exhausted. First one blanket was thrown away, and then another…pants, old boots and shoes, Sunday hats, pistols, and Bowie knives strewed the roads. Old bottles and jugs and various sundry articles were lying pell-mell everywhere." Even though Sam Watkins could not remember "ever experiencing a harder or more fatiguing march," the natural environment had an extreme effect on Watkins' and his fellow Tennesseans' experience. "Up and up, and onward and upward we pulled and toiled, until we reached the very top, when there burst upon our view one of the grandest and most beautiful landscapes we ever beheld."[183]

The Federals' victory at Rich Mountain and Corrick's Ford gave them firm control of northwestern Virginia. Ridding the area of Rebels allowed the reorganized Virginia government to function uninterrupted. Still, even though this control had been established, another fight between the Union and Confederate armies loomed. If the Confederates wanted to keep any presence or control in West Virginia and to protect the Shenandoah Valley, they knew they needed to check the Federal advance. The Federals knew their new position would soon enough be assaulted and worked quickly to establish a significant defensive line. The natural

[182] George P. Morgan diary entry, July 25, 1861, in Moore, "A Confederate Journal," 201-216.
[183] Sam Watkins, *Co. Aytch: A Confederate Memoir of the Civil War* (1882; repr., New York: Touchstone, 2003), 9.

environment would again play a decisive role in this new campaign in the Alleghany Mountain region of West Virginia.

The rough and rugged nature of West Virginia's topography had been an influential factor in the fights at Rich Mountain and Corrick's Ford. Not only would topography be a significant factor in this new fight for West Virginia, but weather and disease became a determining factor in how the campaign would play out. Rain and epidemic diseases became crucial factors that ended the Confederate attempt to regain a foothold in northwestern Virginia in the late summer and early fall of 1861. An examination of those actions therefore shows that the natural environment's impact on military operations goes far past topography, geography, or terrain.

For Civil War armies, it was difficult to overcome or adapt to weather and diseases. Historian Kathryn Shively Meier contends that self-care was a soldier's best defense against weather and disease. This "unofficial network of care" was more effective than the developing Medical Departments in the armies.[184] In the Cheat Mountain campaign, for Confederate soldiers who found themselves in an alien land of vast, rugged, and isolated mountains, the weather and disease had the upper hand. Commanders did their best to adapt or overcome these elements, but in the end, weather and disease proved too much for success. The natural environment, as much as Federal soldiers, defeated the Confederates at Cheat Mountain, ending any Rebel threat to the Unionist reorganized government and enabled the formation of West Virginia.

After the Confederates had been routed at the Rich Mountain pass and retreated from Laurel Mountain, permanent defense of the area south and east of Huttonsville became the Federal army's main objective. The naturally strong positions on Cheat Mountain and around the

[184] Meier, *Nature's Civil War*, 2.

community of Elkwater would be the anchors of this defensive line. As the war in West Virginia progressed into its next phase, Federal and Confederate commanders and common soldiers would have new environmental factors to contend with. Although some environmental factors would be the same as those encountered earlier in the summer, in the area around Cheat Mountain both sides would have to deal with weather and disease like they never had before. Weather, particularly rain, and disease combined with a rugged topography and vast, isolated wilderness would make this next step in the fight for West Virginia unique. With much riding on the looming action as July turned to August, 1861, the natural and built environment would again become more than the arena of the campaign. It would become a historical actor, shaping the decisions and experiences of the commanders and common soldiers deployed there.

George McClellan hoped to anchor his defensive line at two locations. One would be on the Cheat Mountain summit and the second would be along the road from Huttonsville to Huntersville near Elkwater.[185] This defensive position was hazardous to the Confederates in two ways. First, it would keep Confederates from pushing back into the northwestern region of Virginia. Second, if ordered, it could serve as a launching point for Federal invasion into eastern Virginia.

The Federal defensive positions on the Cheat Mountain summit and Elkwater were strategically significant as well. The Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike passed over the Cheat Mountain summit and would open the way through the vast and rugged Alleghanies all the way to Monterey and Staunton, Virginia. The Virginia Central Railroad ran through Staunton, as did the Valley Turnpike. Federal control or influence on either would cause havoc and be disastrous to Rebel operations all over Virginia and West Virginia. Elkwater sat astride a road that led from

[185] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 5, p. 5-6.

Huttonsville to Huntersville in West Virginia and on to Warm Springs and Millboro in Virginia. The Virginia Central Railroad also ran through Millboro, and Federal access to the railroad there would be as costly as at Staunton.[186] To complete the strategic map in the region, at Huntersville a country road ran roughly 30 miles to intersect the Staunton-Parkersburg at the Greenbrier River east of the Cheat Mountain pass.[187] This road is a significant piece of West Virginia's built environment. For a Confederate offensive in the area, this road would have to be a consideration. If they only attacked one position or the other, a Federal force could use this road to get in the Rebel rear. The Confederates would have to act quickly and effectively to challenge the Federal defensive positions. If the Rebels did not, they would lose any presence and foothold in West Virginia outside of the Kanawha Valley, an unthinkable situation only two months into the war.

The Confederates knew of the need to advance upon Cheat Mountain, and wasted little time communicating it. Major Michael Harman, the Confederate quartermaster at Staunton, wrote frantically to Richmond concerning the control of Cheat Mountain in the days after the Rebel defeat at Rich Mountain. He wrote to Confederate President Jefferson Davis on July 15, "We should hold Cheat Mountain, or be as near it as possible, so as to threaten his [Federal army] rear and flank in any movement he makes, besides checking his advance in this direction, and keep command of several roads for the advance of our troops."[188] Harmon made the same suggestion to Robert E. Lee. "I would earnestly suggest for your consideration and prompt action the great importance of fortifying Cheat Mountain," he wrote on July 15. "By marching at once upon Cheat Mountain and taking possession of it and fortifying it, so that we can hold them in check

[186] Michael Harman correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 245.
[187] William Scott report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 284-285.
[188] Michael Harman correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 245.

in front," he concluded.[189] Lee wrote to Brigadier General Henry Jackson, the Confederate general tasked with reorganizing the forces in northwestern Virginia after the death of Robert Garnett, of the importance of Cheat Mountain. On July 16 he wired Jackson, "It is important that the passes of Cheat Mountain, or at least those of the Alleghany, should, if practicable, be defended."[190]

Even with the quick realization of the importance of the Cheat Mountain line, the Confederates had already missed an opportunity to occupy the Cheat Mountain summit. In the late afternoon of July 12, Colonel William Scott's 44th Virginia Infantry passed over the top of Cheat Mountain. Believing he was being heavily pursued by McClellan's Federals, not having the time nor the tools to fortify the pass, and knowing an open road entered the turnpike in the rear of his potential position, Scott continued past Cheat Mountain to the Greenbrier River.[191] With the pass left open, a worn out and disorganized Confederate force would not be able to occupy it before a Federal force could. It would be up to Henry Jackson to try and organize what was left of the Confederate force in West Virginia to check the Federal defensive positions.

Unaware of the difficulties that Confederates from both Rich Mountain and Laurel Mountain were having in their respective retreats, George McClellan hoped he could occupy the Cheat Mountain pass before the retreating Rebels did. Writing from Beverly on July 12, McClellan notified officials in Washington that he planned to occupy the pass the following day. "I shall move on Huttonsville to-morrow morning, and endeavor to seize the Cheat Mountain pass before the enemy can occupy it in strength."[192] Two days later, McClellan and an advance guard moved

[189] Michael Harman correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 246
[190] Robert E. Lee order, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 245 and 254.
[191] William Scott report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 281-285.
[192] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 203.

forward up the mountain to ascertain if the Rebels were positioned there. "Started this morning with a strong advanced guard, supported by 2 rgts to test the question as to whether the rebels were really fortified in the Cheat Mtn pass," McClellan wrote to his wife, Mary Ellen, on July 14. The Confederates, however, were nowhere to be found. "I went prepared for another fight – but found that they had scampered…The pass was considerably strong & they might have given us an immense deal of trouble," McClellan quipped.[193] Federal troops would soon be dispatched to the summit to fortify and hold the strategically important pass.

Cheat Mountain was as beautiful as it was exotic. The Cheat Mountain summit reached just over 4,000 feet in elevation, compared to roughly 2,000 feet at Huttonsville and 2,800 where the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike crossed the Greenbrier River south and east of the summit.[194] It was nine miles from the western base of the mountain to the summit. The route to the top was not an easy one as it snaked up the mountain. "You may travel for miles without gaining in actual distance more than a few hundred yards," one Federal soldier wrote.[195]

This elevation, however, afforded tremendous mountain views and in turn, helped to shape commanders' and common soldiers' experiences. George McClellan was enthralled by the beauty of Cheat Mountain and hated the thought of combat coming to it. He wrote to Mary Ellen after his initial reconnaissance of the mountain, "Our ride today was truly magnificent, some of the most splendid Mt. views I ever beheld…the long ranges of Mountain in the distance all made a varied scene that I cannot describe to you…it is sad that war should visit even such sequestered

[193] George McClellan letter to Mary Ellen McClellan, in Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 54.
[194] U.S. Geological Survey, *Mill Creek quadrangle, West Virginia* [map], 1:24,000, 7.5 Minute Series, Washington, D.C.: USGS, 2014.
[195] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 135.

spots as that."[196] Although not stationed on Cheat Mountain, Joseph Henry Schmidt of the 37th Ohio wrote of an experience similar to those who were positioned there. Writing to his sweetheart from near Rowlesburg, West Virginia, in June, 1861 he said, "I was put on Picket Guard last Saturday noon about ¾ of a mile high on a hill…while I was on the hill I just eat [ate] at memia [many?] strawberrys I could swallow. On that hill I can see at lest twenty miles around and see clear to the Rockey Mountains…and God nows [knows] what all."[197] The natural environment, and its beauty, was affecting both commanders and common soldiers' experiences by providing the most grand and indescribable view. More than an arena, the exquisiteness of the mountain's beauty influenced the war experience in West Virginia. Although combat lurked, the natural environment and its beauty could momentarily take a soldier's mind elsewhere, significantly shaping the thought of fighting in a mountain environment.

Despite providing beautiful views, Cheat Mountain was an "authentic wilderness." The area was isolated and rugged. It had been little explored before the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike was built through the area in the 1840s. Asa Gray, a botanist from Harvard, visited after the turnpike was built and found "the choicest botanical treasures which the country affords." In 1861, a traveler described it "as savage as the wilds of Oregon." Bear, panther, and wolf were still heard and the "sea" of laurel brakes with interlaced branches made off road travel nearly impossible. It was this environment the 14th Indiana under Colonel Nathan Kimball was ordered into on July 16.[198] They would be the first to occupy the Cheat Mountain summit, and would waste little time in fortifying it. McClellan had quickly began establishing his permanent

[196] George McClellan letter to Mary Ellen McClellan, in Sears, *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan*, 54.
[197] Joseph Henry Schmidt letter to Mary Katherine Nye, June 24, 1861, Schmidt Family Papers (Mss. A S349), The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.
[198] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 136-137.

defensive line, only strengthening the Federal position in West Virginia and making it more difficult for the Confederates to gain any traction in the region.

As Garnett had done at the Rich and Laurel Mountain passes, Kimball's Indianans used the environment as a natural ally to strengthen the Cheat Mountain summit and turn it into a formidable position. Trees were felled to block the turnpike leading east and clear a line of fire for artillery, breastworks were built, and a log fort and block house were erected. One veteran remembered it "surpassed anything he had since seen."[199] Colonel Walter Taylor of Robert E. Lee's staff wrote of the Federal position on Cheat Mountain summit:

> Just where the road crossed the mountain-top heavy defensive works had been constructed. Nature assisted in no small degree to render the position impregnable: the descent on both sides was very precipitous, and the surface of the earth was covered with a most remarkable undergrowth of laurel, so dense and interlocked as to be almost impenetrable. The Federals had cleared a considerable space around their entrenched position, constructed abatis and fosses around their entire work, and, having a garrison of three thousand men, might well have deemed themselves impregnable.[200]

Taylor's description of the Federal defensive works is significant by relating how the natural environment can be used and manipulated to greatly improve a defensive position. McClellan had placed Kimball and his 14th Indiana in an effective position to defend Huttsonville and the roads leading from eastern to western Virginia, and nature had been a great ally to ensure the position would be a formidable one. George McClellan, however, would not see how the fortifications at Cheat Mountain would fare against a Rebel offensive.

On July 22, George McClellan received a simple and direct order from the Adjutant-General in Washington. "Circumstances make your presence here necessary. Charge Rosecrans or some other general with your present department and come hither without delay," it read.[201]

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[199] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 139.
[200] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 20-21.
[201] Lorenzo Thomas order, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 753.

McClellan would leave for Washington on July 23, leaving William Rosecrans in command of Federal forces in West Virginia.[202] Rosecrans, in the first days of command, did the usual for a new commanding general. He issued general orders notifying the army of McClellan's departure to Washington, his taking command, and reorganized the army.[203] Rosecrans also placed Brigadier General Joseph Reynolds in charge of holding the vital Cheat Mountain summit pass and the surrounding area. Reynolds made his headquarters just south of Huttsonville on the western foot of Cheat Mountain summit.[204] William Rosecrans, however, was not the only new commanding general in West Virginia. Two Confederate generals were heading to the Alleghany Mountains to organize the Rebel effort to regain control over West Virginia.

William Loring was tapped as the new commander of Confederate forces in West Virginia. On July 20, 1861, Loring was ordered to command the Army of the Northwest and to proceed to Monterey, Virginia.[205] A hard fighter with vast military experience, Loring had fought Seminoles in Florida, and in the Mexican War he lost an arm at the Battle of Chapultepec.[206] He would replace Brigadier General Henry Jackson. Jackson, who had been charged to hold the Confederates in West Virginia together after the death of Robert Garnett at Corrick's Ford, had taken the initial steps to oppose the Federal defensive line. A detachment had been sent in the direction of Elkwater via Huntersville and a detachment had been placed on Alleghany Mountain, a summit west of Monterrey on the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike. More importantly, this summit and mountain pass was between the Confederates in Monterrey and the

[202] George McClellan report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 759.
[203] William Rosecrans General Orders, No. 1, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 762-763.
[204] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 134; Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War*, 48.
[205] Robert E. Lee Special Orders, Number 227, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 51, pa. 2, p. 180.
[206] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 143.

Federals on Cheat Mountain. In his direct communication with Loring, Robert E. Lee echoed what the Confederate commanders in West Virginia were beginning to understand: defend the Alleghany Mountain pass west of Monterrey and defend the turnpike road leading from Huttsonville through Huntersville and to Millboro. This road would be crucial for the Confederates to defend; keep it out of Federal control and the railroad at Millboro could operate unmolested in Confederate service. Loring understood the situation and quickly reinforced the force along the road and the one atop Alleghany Mountain.[207]

On July 21, 1861 as Confederates were reeling in West Virginia, they won the first major battle of the war at Manassas, Virginia. In the days following the victory, attention turned back to the situation in the mountainous region of the state and Robert E. Lee left his desk in Richmond for the mountains of West Virginia. Riding with only his two aides-de-camp, Colonels John A. Washington and Walter Taylor, Lee headed into West Virginia. The main purpose of Lee's visit to West Virginia was to aid William Loring in the reorganization of Confederate forces there. It was hoped with reorganization and recruitment the Confederate force would be in a stronger fighting condition. "General Lee has gone to Western Virginia, and I hope may be able to strike a decisive blow at the enemy in that quarter, or, failing in that, will be able to organize and post our troops so as to check the enemy, after which he will return to this place," Confederate President Jefferson Davis wrote to General Joseph Johnston on August 1.[208] Walter Taylor of Lee's staff echoed the President's sentiment and hoped the army in West Virginia "might be put in such a condition as to prevent any aggressive movement of the enemy, and, if circumstances justified it, to take the offensive."[209] Davis, however, hoped the expedition

[207] William Loring report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 999.
[208] Jefferson Davis correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 5, p. 766-767.
[209] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 16.

to West Virginia would be a short one, and became anxious with Lee's long stay. "He [Jefferson Davis] has not ceased to feel an anxious desire for your return to this city," wrote Inspector General Samuel Cooper to Lee on September 4. Even with the President's anxiety, the decision as to when to return to Richmond was still Lee's. "Whenever, in your judgement, circumstance will justify it, you will consider yourself authorized to return," Cooper wrote.[210]

Robert E. Lee's arrival in Huntersville, West Virginia on August 3, 1861, did not agree with William Loring, who was headquartered there and a mere two weeks into his new command in the region. Loring, who had more field experience than Lee, questioned his arrival in the field.[211] Although Loring was not pleased with Lee's appearance, the two were soon able to work together enough to mount a Confederate offensive against the newly forming Federal defensive line. A quick strike against the Federals, Lee believed, would allow the Confederates to push them back before their defensive line was fully established. Loring, however, was concerned with logistical and supply issues for the army.[212]

A long, strenuous, multiple day march separated the Confederate army at Huntersville to its supply base on the railroad at Millboro, Virginia. William Loring, hoping to alleviate the strain of a long supply line, wanted to establish a supply base at Huntersville. An offensive against the Federals would have to wait until that could be accomplished. "I am satisfied, if we can be furnished [supplies] in a few days, that a successful movement can be made," Loring wrote to Richmond.[213] Loring, however, would have to deal with more than requisitioning supplies and a long, difficult supply route from the railhead to the army in field. The natural environment in the form of rain would act severely against both armies in the Cheat Mountain region. The natural

[210] Samuel Cooper correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 5, p. 828-829.
[211] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 161, Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War*, 47.
[212] William Loring report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 1009; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 161.
[213] William Loring report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 2, p. 1009.

environment was more than the arena in which military operations took place, and as July turned to August 1861, new commanders and common soldiers in West Virginia would learn this lesson in a difficult and wet way.

Rain affected both the Confederate and Federal armies in West Virginia during the late summer and early fall of 1861. Beginning on July 22, 1861, a cold rain fell for 20 consecutive days and sporadically for almost six weeks.[214] The rain, while making the Federals uncomfortable, was much less a factor for their operations. Operating on a shorter supply line and working to establish a defensive line, the rain was less of a factor. Both can be effectively conducted in a rainy season. Nonetheless, the rains served to negatively affect the morale of Union soldiers stationed on Cheat Mountain and around Camp Elkwater. The Tygart Valley River water level rose, flooding Camp Elkwater. To make the rains worse, cold temperatures set in. A soldier in the 14th Indiana quipped, "We are shriving in an almost winter atmosphere. The scarcity of overcoats render it still more disagreeable." Clothing and tents fell apart because of the heavy rains, mud was ankle deep, and soldiers would have to brace themselves with rocks to keep from sliding down the mountain while they slept. Cheat Mountain, as one U.S. soldier wrote, was an "infernal mountain which is the meanest camping ground that I have ever seen."[215] The natural environment was killing Federal morale.

Rugged and steep terrain, accompanied with rain and cold temperatures, was providing a natural enemy to the Federal hopes of establishing a significant defensive line in the Cheat Mountain region to protect the northwest portions of the state. Even as the weather affected

[214] Paul E. Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War: Natural Biological Warfare in 1861-1865* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), 52.
[215] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 169-170.

Federal morale, however, it was a doubled-edged sword. Not only was the rain affecting Federal morale, the Rebels still had to operate and eventually launch an offensive in it. Conducting an offensive with raw and untrained officers and soldiers in a rainy season on poor, mud bogged roads with little option to go cross-country, would be a difficult task for the Confederates. The longer the poor weather conditions continued, the more difficult it would be for the Confederates to mount an offensive and the longer it took the Rebels to act, the longer the Federals would have to build and improve their defensive works. Even with the low morale of the men, the rain served as a natural ally to the Federals. It provided the luxury of time.

The rain was causing the Confederates a difficult time in trying to concentrate their forces and establishing an efficient supply, let alone conduct an offensive against the enemy. The long road from Huntersville to the railroad was being turned into a bog due to the incessant amounts of rain. Walter Taylor of Lee's staff wrote, "For weeks it rained daily and in torrents. The condition of the roads was frightful; they were barely passable…the wagons were hub-deep in mud, and could only be move step by step, and then with the greatest difficulty." The Confederate commanders, "debated whether the army could be fed where it was, and it was feared that it would have to retire to some point nearer the railroad."[216] Conducting an offensive in the miserable weather only added to the difficulties of operating in a region with a limited built environment of roads and a harsh and unforgiving landscape. The natural environment was acting as a significant enemy to the Confederates.

Historian Kenneth Noe, in an essay examining the role of weather in the Civil War, reminds us that the war was mostly fought outside. This obvious statement concerning the war's combat, however, cannot be overlooked because of the affect that weather can have on military

[216] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 17.

operations. As Noe points out, "it is not only climate, but human interactions with it, that shape historical events, and sometimes decisively."[217] The military operations around Cheat Mountain in July – September 1861 are no exception. According to Noe's study, the Cheat Mountain campaign had a "maximum effect" from the weather and climate, pointing to the weather as the most significant factor in shaping the operations.[218] New commanders and common soldiers in West Virginia were having to adapt to and overcome the rainy weather. Command decisions and soldier experiences would all be shaped by the weather. Although the rain and cold was a miserable existence, Confederate soldier George Morgan eloquently put how soldiers could handle the reality of cold, rainy weather. "The day a rainy gloomy one, only adding to the suffring of the soldiers, particularly those who lost their clothing, tents, and other comforts. Soldiers will be cheerful, however, sometimes under any circumstances. While I write this a party near here are playing cards merrily though nothing but a poor supper, rainy night, and wet blankets is in store for them."[219]

Joseph Reynolds and his Federal command knew, however, regardless of the weather, the Confederate army in West Virginia would try to break his defensive line to reclaim a foothold in the region. Robert E. Lee grew impatient over William Loring's desire to wait on a more efficient and reliable supply line and on August 6, moved from Huntersville to Valley Mountain. At Valley Mountain Lee found the 21st Virginia and 6th North Carolina regiments, which had been dispatched there by Henry Jackson in July. At Valley Mountain Lee could survey the entire

[217] Kenneth Noe, "Fateful Lighting: The Significance of Weather and Climate to Civil War History," in *The Blue, the Gray, and the Green: Toward an Environmental History of the Civil War*, ed. Brian Allen Drake (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 16 and 19.
[218] Noe, "Fateful Lighting," 23 and 29.
[219] George P. Morgan diary entry, July 12, 1861, in Moore, "A Confederate Journal," 201-216.

strategic scene. "We are on the dividing ridge. In the valley north of us lies Huttonsville & Beverly, occupied by our invaders, & the Rich Mountains west, the scene of our former disaster, & Cheat Mountains east, their present stronghold, are in full view," Lee wrote in a letter to his wife.[220] Upon arriving at the Confederate position on Valley Mountain, Lee reconnoitered the Federal position and discovered two important details. First, he learned the opportunity for a surprise attack on the Federals was slipping away. Second, not wanting to conduct an offensive directly into the front of the Federal, a secondary and obscure route needed to be located in order to attack the Cheat Mountain position.[221] If the position on Cheat Mountain could be broken, the way to the Federals rear, Huttsonville, and farther penetration into northwest Virginia could be achieved. Lee was ready to find such an avenue of advance and to move upon it.

The Federals, however, were not ignorant of the Rebel intentions along the Cheat Mountain – Valley Mountain line. "It is said that Lee intends attacking Cheat Mountain Pass," wired Winfield Scott to William Rosecrans on August 6. "It is advisable for you to push forward rapidly the fortifications ordered by General McClellan on that mountain and near Huttonsville," Scott concluded.[222] Rosecrans ordered more Federals to the vicinity of the Cheat Mountain line. Indiana men were sent to both Beverly and Buckhannon. From those locations, the Federal positions at Elkwater and Cheat Mountain could be supported. If the Cheat line was to break, the Confederates would run into the newly ordered up Yankees. Besides dispatching troops closer to the front, Rosecrans also ordered, "a vigorous prosecution of the work in Cheat Mountain, on the Huntersville road."[223] The Federals knew an attack was imminent and were bracing for it.

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[220] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 161-162.
[221] Richard Harwell, *Lee: An Abridgement in One Volume of the Four-volume R.E. Lee by Douglass Southall Freeman* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1991), 140.
[222] Winfield Scott correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 5, p. 554.
[223] William Rosecrans report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 5, p. 555.

By mid-August 1861, the presence of Confederates along the Cheat Mountain – Valley Mountain line was concerning more than the Federal commanders. John Carlile, a leader of Virginia's reorganized government and a strong proponent of creating a new Union state out of western Virginia, wrote to Secretary of War, Simon Cameron. Seemingly panicked, Carlile was concerned over Rebel troop locations and hoped for more Federal soldiers, both common and commanders. "Lee has one body of 8,000 men near Monterey…another force of equal if not greater strength this side of Huntersville. For God's sake send us more troops and a general to command, or else we are whipped in less than ten days," Carlile cried.[224] McClellan, writing from Washington, urged Rosecrans to act. "Attack the enemy on Cranberry or wherever he debouches, always having intrenchments in your rear," McClellan told Rosecrans. Not only was the Federal line in the Cheat Mountain area allied by the natural environment with the rainy weather and its topography, but tactically the line was strong. "You have the position of a central position within the mountains," McClellan commented. A central position would enable Rosecrans to move troops more easily to points believed to be the most threatened. McClellan concluded, "You have the most brilliant opportunity."[225]

William Loring finally joined Robert E. Lee and the other Confederates at Valley Mountain on August 12. Although the rains were still falling, the Confederates had at least successfully protected the vital roads leading to Staunton and the railhead at Millboro. A body of Confederate troops had been placed on Valley Mountain opposing the Federal force at Elkwater. On the other side of the mountain, the Rebels had established Camp Bartow and opposed the Federals fortified on Cheat Mountain. For the time, the strategically important towns of Staunton and Millboro, Virginia, were secure.

[224] John Carlile correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 5, p. 561-562.
[225] George McClellan correspondence, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 5, p. 563-564.

The Rebels, however, had to remain patient before they could mount any offensive against the entrenched Federals. Rain still harassed those soldiers in the region. "It is raining now. Has been all day, last night, day before & day before that," Robert E. Lee wrote. The misery of a continual rain was made worse by a biting cold. "The wind blows like winter," a Tennessee soldier moaned on August 16. Abundant amounts of ice and thick morning frosts assaulted the soldiers along the Cheat Mountain line. Lee admitted the cold was worse than he could have imagined. He wrote, "In my winter clothing and buttoned up in my overcoat, I have still been cold."[226] The natural environment and its rainy, cold weather was winning the fight for West Virginia as August turned to September 1861. All the Confederates could do was wait and hope for drier, warmer weather, while the Federals could only wait on the Rebel onslaught. George Morgan, a Confederate stationed at Camp Bartow, put the waiting aptly, "The monotony of camp life scarcely justifies writing every day, because every day is alike, and unless something worthy occurs, I shall not write."[227]

Rain, however, was not the only environmental factor dampening the Rebel hopes for an offensive. Disease among Confederate soldiers had become a significant issue within the ranks. Robert E. Lee learned of the rampant amount of sickness in the army soon after he arrived in West Virginia. "The soldiers everywhere are sick," he wrote to his wife on August 4.[228] As the August days passed and the rain continued to fall, the numbers of sick grew. The natural environment was attacking the Confederates at Cheat Mountain. A rugged and isolated landscape, combined with rain and mud was aggravating supply and logistical operations and

[226] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 168-169.
[227] George P. Morgan diary entry, August 25, 1861, in Moore, "A Confederate Journal," 201-216.
[228] Quoted in Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War*, 54.

delaying the offensive. Disease only made the matters worse. Not only was the Confederate offensive being slowed, but the number of effective soldiers began to dwindle.

Measles, diarrhea, dysentery, and eventually typhoid fever and pneumonia were the main diseases affecting the soldiers in West Virginia. Paul Steiner, an academically trained historian and medical doctor, in a 1968 publication examining the role disease played in Civil War campaigns and engagements, argues that disease "eroded troops from the day of enlistment to discharge, interfering with efficiency at nearly every step." Infectious diseases were erratic, unknown in their origins, difficult to control, and caused great alarm for both armies. "The result," Steiner contends, "was rampant disease – natural biological warfare – on a large scale."[229]

Several factors caused widespread disease for soldiers in West Virginia. Regiments were new to the service, unseasoned, and mostly rural in origins. Medical facilities and supplies were lacking, medical personnel lacked knowledge and experience, and camp sanitation practices were poor.[230] The incessant rain and unseasonably cold weather, however, was an obvious factor of disease. "The constant rains, with no shelter but tents, have aggravated it [sickness]," wrote Robert E Lee.[231] "Doubtless as a result of the excessive rains, the troops were sorely afflicted with the measles and a malignant type of fever, which prostrated hundreds of each command," commented Walter Taylor of Lee's staff.[232] Colonel Robert Hatton of the 7th Tennessee likewise

[229] Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War*, preface, vii. In Steiner's work, he argues "disease was a tremendous force in some military problems and their outcome." Examining various campaigns and battles from each theater of the war, Steiner provides an excellent analysis of the "natural biological warfare" both Union and Confederate armies had to contend with.
[230] Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War*, 58. For a detailed analysis of the lacking military medical departments and soldier seasoning, see Kathryn Meier, "Soldiers and Official Military Health Care" and "Becoming a Seasoned Soldier" in *Nature's Civil War: Common Soldiers and the Environment in 1862 Virginia* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2013), 65-125.
[231] Quoted in Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War*, 55.
[232] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 17.

believed rain was the main cause of the sickness and disease. "It is caused by the excessive, continued rains, flooding our camp, wetting the men and everything in their tents," he wrote.[233] Constant rain in significant amounts was becoming the deciding factor in the renewed fight for West Virginia.

Common soldiers, both Federal and Confederate, suffered from disease. The Federal Department of West Virginia reported over 20,000 cases of disease between July and October 1861. In August, as Confederate forces began establishing a more significant line opposing the Cheat Mountain – Elkwater line, the Federal force had been cut to roughly 4,000 effective soldiers. For the 8th Ohio Infantry, disease forced them to be removed from the front when military action became imminent.[234] The Federal force, however, did all they could to combat disease and the low morale it caused. Joseph Reynolds ordered more disciplined camps. Tents were moved into appropriate company streets and stones were used to pave company streets to help combat the mud.[235]

On the Confederate side, Alexander Smith of the 50th Virginia Infantry wrote of the stress disease could cause a healthy soldier in a letter home. "They send them [the sick] to Lewisburg, the White Sulphur Springs and the Blue Sulphur Springs by wagon loads. I believe that some die every day. It is truly distressing to see them coming in, over these rough roads, on wagons. Three men died the other day on the road." Understanding the possibility of sickness, Smith mused, "If I get sick in camp, I think I will take stage fare to Lewisburg."[236] Confederate George Morgan wrote in his diary on July 31, "This morning we received orders to advanced three miles

[233] Quoted in Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War*, 54.
[234] Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War*, 56.
[235] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 171.
[236] William Alexander Smith letter to his brother, September 18, 1861, Smith Family Letters, Ms1996-018 - Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

further west on about the highest summit of the Alleghany Mountain. The day after our arrival here (at Camp Alleghany) I was taken down with measles, and though I date this 31st, I am writing on the 15th day of August, not having felt able to write any for the last half month." A week later he commented, "Between the measles and the worst climate ever seen I am still dragging out a kind of miserable existence unable to do military duty or anything else."[237]

The Confederate force in the Cheat Mountain area was significantly reduced, if not cut in half, by disease in August and September 1861. Walter Taylor believed, "it is no exaggeration to say that one-half of the army was ineffective" during the Cheat Mountain campaign.[238] Robert E. Lee, in a September letter to his wife, wrote, "We have a great deal of sickness among the soldiers, and now those on the sick-list would form an army."[239] The timing could not be worse. Hoping to launch an offensive to establish a foothold back in northwestern Virginia, the Rebel force diminished due to disease.

Death was an unfortunate result of the extensive diseases. Most of those familiar with Civil War literature know the statistic that disease killed two soldiers for every one killed in combat. The 1861 campaigns in West Virginia are an excellent example of disease caused deaths in the Civil War. The Federal Department of West Virginia reported 150 Federal soldiers died of disease during the summer and early fall of 1861.[240] Although an exact number is unknown, death by disease was common in the Confederate ranks. A Tennessee officer stationed on Cheat Mountain believed, "To die, away from all the comforts and endearments of home, on the ground, in a wilderness, and be buried alone, without a stone to mark our resting-place, is

[237]George P. Morgan diary entry, July 31, 1861 and August 20, 1861, in Moore, "A Confederate Journal," 201-216.
[238] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 17.
[239] Quoted in Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War*, 55.
[240] Steiner, *Disease in the Civil War*, 56.

pitiable."[241] William Alexander Smith of the 50th Virginia Infantry, in a letter to his brother, comments on the death of a member of his company. "I have written two letters to Uncle Stephen since he died giving him as nearly as I could the circumstances of his death…I can deeply sympathize with all his folks…but tell them to sorrow not as those who have no hope. I feel assured that he is now far better off than any of us," he wrote. Crocket, the comrade who had died, had been infected with a disease and succumbed suddenly.[242]

Disease played a significant role in the Cheat Mountain campaign. High numbers of sick and dead meaningfully cut down the effective force for Federals and Confederates. Diseases, combined with rain and rugged terrain made military operations exceedingly difficult. A battle, however, was still evident. As both sides were fighting the natural environment, the Federals were working to improve their defensive lines, while the Confederates were anxious to move forward. The next engagement for control of West Virginia would be decisive, but for now, the natural environment was defeating the combatants.

"A battle must come off, and I am anxious to begin it," Robert E. Lee wrote in early September 1861.[243] The beginning of September brought a few days of sunshine and the Confederates were ready to push the offensive in West Virginia. On September 8, William Loring issued General Orders, Number Ten, organizing the men at Valley Mountain and Camp Bartow. A unique aspect of the early fighting in West Virginia was the diversity of the Confederate units. Men from Arkansas, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia were

[241] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 169.
[242] William Alexander Smith letter to his brother, September 18, 1861, Smith Family Letters, Ms1996-018 - Special Collections, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.
[243] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 183.

divided into six brigades. Artillery and cavalry were attached to each brigade.[244] Loring himself would command the brigades at Valley Mountain, while Henry Jackson would lead those men at Camp Bartow. The six brigades of Confederates numbered roughly 6,000 effective men, compared to between 8,000 and 10,000 effective Federals at Elkwater and Cheat Mountain under Joseph Reynolds command.[245]

The contest for the Cheat Mountain summit would be crucial. The summit and fortifications atop it controlled the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike. For the Confederates, the turnpike was the route to northwestern Virginia, the B&O Railroad, and the Ohio River. For the Federals the road led to Staunton, the vital supply region of the Shenandoah Valley, and was the back door to Richmond. By early September, the Confederates were able and ready to push forward an attack. The only question that remained was how to best attack the Yankee fortifications. Well-fortified by their own hard work and by the natural environment, the Federals' position at Cheat Mountain summit would be a costly and improbable frontal attack. A Georgia soldier remarked, "The enemy holds Cheat Mountain and to undertake to drive them off by attacking the front, we might as well try to take Gibraltar."[246] No maps of the area were available and the Rebels had to rely on their own map makers, scouts, and locals to find a way to dislodge the Federals.

An answer to the Rebels question about how to attack came from a local, civilian surveyor. John Yeager discovered a route the Confederates could use to scout the Federal fortifications on Cheat Mountain and could launch an assault from.[247] Walter Taylor, in his post-war writings, remembered the route. Attesting to the difficulty and ruggedness of the terrain in the Cheat Mountain area, Taylor left an account of the natural environment in West Virginia that speaks to

[244] William Loring General Orders, No. 10, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 51, pa. 2, p. 283-284.
[245] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 21-22.
[246] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 184.
[247] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 184; Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 22.

the urgency the Rebels were under to attack that such a course was considered and used. "The only route other than the turnpike by which this point [Cheat Mountain summit] of the range of mountain could be reached was by pursuing a course along and up the precipitous and ragged sides of the mountains, through undergrowth and trees, over rocks and chasms," Taylor wrote. This would be an arduous avenue of attack and, "with nothing save the compass or the stars to indicate the direction of the summit," the route would be even more difficult.[248] To ensure that Yeager was accurate in his reconnaissance, Colonel Albert Rust of the 3rd Arkansas accompanied the local surveyor on a second ascent. Rust confirmed the route was feasible and reported "the works were of such a character as to justify the hope of being carried." The only difficulty was being able to traverse the rough and jagged course without being noticed by the enemy. The natural environment again was working against Confederates' hopes. A way to penetrate the mountains had been obtained, but could it be done without notice of the enemy? Albert Rust believed it could be done and Robert E. Lee, who was anxious for action and an attack, ordered the assault.[249]

Albert Rust was a political officer. Broad in stature and over six feet tall, he was born in Virginia and moved to Arkansas as a child. Rust served as a Congressman from Arkansas when the war began and was an acquaintance of Confederate President Jefferson Davis.[250] It was Rust, with the intimate knowledge of how to get at the Federals on Cheat Mountain, who would lead the Rebel offensive. On September 8, 1861, Special Orders Number 28 was issued and the Confederate offensive to try and regain control in northwest Virginia commenced. Albert Rust and his column were ordered to attack the Federal fortifications on Cheat Mountain summit via

[248] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 22.
[249] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 23.
[250] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 184-185.

the route he had scouted and reported to Lee. Two other Confederate columns would be positioned on the east and west of the Cheat Mountain summit along the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike. The Rebels east of the summit, led by Brigadier General Henry Jackson, would serve as a diversion for Rust's attack. Jackson's column would support Rust and once the fort was carried, continue on the turnpike to Huttonsville. The column west of the summit would keep any reinforcements for aiding the fortified Federals, assault and capture any who tried to escape, and then join the push towards Huttonsville. A third column would be positioned in the mountains between Loring's force and those on the west side of Cheat Mountain summit. Loring's force would work their way up each side of the Tygart's Valley River upon the enemy at Elkwater. Artillery would be able to support the movement of Loring's and Henry Jackson's columns via the turnpike roads. The other columns would be on their own.[251] With success, all the columns would be able to carry the respective Federal works and converge at Huttonsville.

The orders called for Rust's attack to commence at sunrise on September 12, forcing all Confederate columns to be in the proper position by day-break on the twelfth. Not only Rust's column, but two other bodies of Rebel troops were maneuvering cross-country. The crucial element to the plan was the attack of Albert Rust's column. The sound of his attack would signal the columns east and west of the summit to begin carrying out their assigned orders. Once the sounds of the general engagement on Cheat Mountain summit could be heard at Valley Mountain, the Confederates there would begin the advance down the Tygart's Valley River valley. As the columns from Cheat Mountain performed their duty and closed in on Huttonsville,

[251] William Loring Special Orders, Number 28 in Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 24-26; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 185.

the Federals at Elkwater would be trapped.[252] The Confederates would again have a significant foothold in West Virginia.

Like the Federal advance on Philippi in June, the Confederates had developed a plan that included night marches and a strict time schedule. With green troops and officers, operating in a rough and rugged natural landscape that had received copious amounts of rain in the preceding weeks, the plan was a difficult one to execute. It is clear the natural environment was more than the arena and was a legitimate third participant in the Cheat Mountain campaign. The mountainous landscape aided the Federal positions in the region and left the Confederates limited options for an offensive. To add to the environment's tough landscape, rain thoroughly soaked the area, making any movement more difficult. Thus, the Confederate high command in West Virginia was forced by natural environmental factors to take a challenging route to meet the Yankees.

The marches for the Confederate columns to be in the proper position by sunrise on September 12 were tedious. Three of the five Confederate columns were moving cross-country. Brigadier Generals Samuel Anderson and Daniel Donelson led the other two overland columns. Georgia and Tennessee soldiers made up each body of troops. Anderson's column was to position itself on the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike, west of the Cheat Mountain fort, while Donelson's men were to the east of Elkwater in a supporting role for William Loring's movement down the Tygart's Valley River. The remaining two Confederate columns, under Henry Jackson and Loring, had much easier movements. They were maneuvering down the Staunton-Parkersburg Turnpike and Tygart's Valley River valley.

[252] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 27; Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 185.

The rain and cold that had let up in the early part of September returned to torment the Rebels as they began their offensive. Lee's aide-de-camp, Walter Taylor, remembered "The night had been a very rainy, disagreeable one, and the men were consequently quite uncomfortable."[253] "We lay there all night, without fire, in a drenching rain…many of our men chilled almost to insensibility," wrote one Confederate in Albert Rust's column.[254] Sam Watkins, a member of the 1st Tennessee and organized into Anderson's column, wrote of the trials experienced by the soldiers. "We were soon on the march, and we marched on and on and on. About night it began to rain. All our blankets were back in camp, but we were expected every minute to be ordered into action…The rain still poured. We had no rations to eat and nowhere to sleep. Some of us got some fence rails and piled them together and worried through the night as best we could," Watkins remembered.[255] The movement of Anderson's troops was over "the roughest and wildest country that I ever beheld," wrote another member of the 1st Tennessee. Other Rebels commented on the difficulty of the march and the misery of those involved. "It was the most awful night I ever spent," griped one Confederate. Another commented on the rain. "The rain poured so, and the torrents ran down the mountain such as flood of water that we would have been drowned had we lain on the ground."[256] The natural environment was throwing all it had at the Confederates and working to be a natural enemy. Even though the Confederates were being attacked by the natural environment, they overcame the onslaught and all the columns were in their designated positions by dawn on September 12. Walter Taylor quipped, "Morning found everything just as the most confident could have hoped."[257]

[253] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 27.
[254] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 187.
[255] Watkins, *Co. Aytch*, 13.
[256] Quoted in Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 190.
[257] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 27.

The confidence in a successful Confederate attack did not last long. Albert Rust, the lynchpin of the Confederate offensive against the Cheat Mountain, opened his report on the movement succinctly. "The expedition against Cheat Mountain failed," he wrote. Believing the Federal position on Cheat Mountain summit to be obtainable, Rust was surprised, when he arrived with his column, to find the works more formidable than when he had made his initial reconnaissance with John Yeager. Captured Yankee pickets boasted of the number of Federals occupying the fort and the strong fortifications that had been developed. After making a reconnaissance of his own, Rust decided an attack against the Federal position would be futile. "Upon reconnaissance their [captured Federal pickets] representations were fully corroborated…Colonel Barton, my lieutenant-colonel, and all the field officers declared it would be madness to make an attack." [258] Although Rust never commenced his attack, both Donelson's and Anderson's columns did engage in small skirmishes with Federal pickets. Confused as to why his officers had removed their insignia, Sam Watkins believed bullets had no eyes and did not discriminate between officers and common soldiers. Watkins, "always shot at privates. It was they that did the shooting and killing, and If I could kill or wound a private, why, my chances were so much the better. I have always looked upon officers as harmless personages."[259]

Walter Taylor was unsure if the Federal position had been improved or if Rust was not thorough in his original reconnaissance of Cheat Mountain summit. Taylor even believed that "had he [Rust] discharged his guns and vigorously engaged the enemy, without attempting to carry the works, it is not unreasonable to believe that the combined efforts of the other columns would have been attended with success."[260] Either way, the Confederate attack against the Cheat

[258] Albert Rust report, *OR*, ser. 1, vol. 5, p. 191.
[259] Watkins, *Co. Aytch*, 13-14.
[260] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 28.

Mountain line and the offensive to regain a foothold in northwestern Virginia was over. Overall, the Federal army suffered less than one hundred killed, wounded, or missing, while the Confederates losses were not officially reported, but considered to be small. "Our loss was small," Lee wrote to Virginia governor John Letcher.[261] The Federal army controlled the valuable roads leading east from Huttonsville, and northwestern Virginia remained firmly in Union hands.

Following the failed attempt on Cheat Mountain, Robert E. Lee remained in West Virginia and moved south to the Kanawha Valley theater of operations. Federal columns were pressing the Rebels in that area and Lee believed it important to check that advance. A small force was ordered to remain in the Cheat Mountain region and the rest of that army to come to the Kanawha Valley. By late September, the Confederate and Federal armies were in a standoff on separate spurs of the same mountain, divided by a deep gorge. Other than light skirmishing, however, no organized battle took place and by early October, the Federals had retreated.[262] Lee's time in West Virginia was over. On October 30, Lee and Walter Taylor, his only surviving aide, left the West Virginia mountains to return to Richmond.[263]

Robert E. Lee had come to West Virginia with the hopes of organizing the Confederates and striking a decisive blow against the Federals. He left the Rebel troops better organized than he found them, but did not garner a Confederate battlefield victory. In the eyes of some Confederate soldiers and citizens, Lee had failed. A Confederate soldier wrote home, "You home folks cannot be more disappointed at the defeat of Gen Lee's plans than we soldiers

[261] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 203; Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 31.
[262] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 205, 213-214.
[263] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 215; Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 37.

are."[264] Edward Pollard, editor of the *Richmond Examiner*, believed that an "opportunity of a decisive battle in western Virginia was blindly lost, Gen. Lee making no attempt to follow up the enemy who had so skillfully eluded him."[265] In June 1862, after Lee had been placed in command of the Rebel troops around Richmond, North Carolinian Catherine Edmondston told her diary "I do not much like him [Lee], he 'falls back' too much. He failed in Western Va owing, it was said, to the weather."[266] Even Walter Taylor believed the expedition had been a disappointment. "Judged from its results, it must be confessed that this series of operations was a failure," he wrote.[267]

The assault on Robert E. Lee's generalship during his service in West Virginia is, perhaps, a bit severe. Although a decisive battlefield victory was not earned, that setback cannot be squarely placed on Lee's ability as a commander. Elements of the natural environment greatly retarded Rebel efforts and were a decisive factor in their loss. One scholar of the actions at Cheat Mountain contends that Robert E. Lee and his Confederate army were cheated out of victory by rain and mud.[268] Reports from commanders and common soldiers in both armies helps to confirm that a steady rain fell for the greater part of August and into September. The rain served to muddy roads, hampered the logistical efforts of the Rebels, and provided common soldiers with a miserable existence. Cold temperatures that accompanied the rain only made conditions worse. Adding to the list of natural environmental enemies, and showing environmental impact goes past topography and weather, rampant disease assaulted both armies.

[264] Quoted in Snell, *West Virginia in the Civil War*, 48.
[265] Quoted in Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 130.
[266] Quoted in Gallagher, *The Confederate War*, 130.
[267] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 35.
[268] Lesser, *Rebels at the Gate*, 203.

The natural environment could not be ignored and had to be coped with in the fight for West Virginia in August – October 1861.

In a September 17 letter to Virginia governor John Letcher, Robert E. Lee placed the blame on the constant rain. "But for the rain-storm, I have no doubt it [assault on Cheat Mountain] would have succeeded." He continued, "Our greatest difficulty is the roads. It has been raining in these mountain about six weeks. It is impossible to get along."[269] The combination of a steep, rugged, and isolated landscape, torrents of rain, and a greatly reduced force due to disease ruined the Confederates' effort at Cheat Mountain. Disease would have been a likely enemy regardless of the rain, and become more devastating with it. Rain only confused and slowed an offensive movement and turned the built environment into a nearly impassable bog. The topography of the area made an assault difficult from the beginning. The Federals could use the topography and landscape as a natural ally, while the Confederates struggled to find an avenue of attack besides a costly frontal assault.

In the Cheat Mountain campaign during August and September of 1861, the natural environment was far more than the arena in which the operation took place. The natural elements of topography, weather, and disease hammered away at Yankees and Rebels alike from the day they entered the region. No one element was *the* decisive factor, but rather the combination of the three was conclusive. The Federal army used the natural environment to build a significant defensive line and appreciated the time continual rain allowed them to improve these works. Still, however, they suffered a miserable soldiering reality with the rain, cold, and disease. Struggling to overcome the natural environment, the Confederates executed grueling marches that overcame weather and terrain to put them in position to attack Federal

[269] Quoted in Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 31.

defensive works. They failed, however, to follow-up this victory against the environment with an attack against the Federals, ending hope for Confederate occupation or influence in northwestern Virginia. The region's Unionist movement and reorganized government continued and would soon begin the process of forming what became the state of West Virginia.

CONCLUSION

Writing to his mother on October 31, 1861, John Marshall Pearl of the 1st Tennessee provided the common soldier's view of the situation in West Virginia. "I am well clad (all but my feet) & never was in better health in my life. I have got a pretty good pair of shoes & I think they will last me to Millboro," he started. "The weather is bitter cold – water freezing in buckets over night &c – The most of our company & Regt. Are very ragged – pants out behind. Jackets worn through at the elbows & shoulders, no drawers for some & many without suitable shoes. Charley Stockell – for instance is so badly shod that I dare not put him on guard duty at night for fear his feet will be injured." The preceding months had been difficult for the men of the 1st Tennessee. They experienced their first campaign and combat, all within an exceedingly difficult mountainous terrain, but were excited in the thought of leaving the region and moving closer to home. "But we are all in good spirits at the prospects of getting out of these mountains & perhaps going through Nashville." He continued, "All our Nashville boys that have kept out of the Hospitals & been all through the campaign with us are fat & hearty." Finally, Pearl alludes to his thought that the fighting is over for the winter. "Their intention was to winter at Huntersville but if they knew as much about the place as we do they would have no such foolish aspirations – They cant stay down here because they cannot get provisions from the country around & must therefore bring them from the Balt & Ohio RR over a hundred miles – That can hardly be done in good weather & is utterly impossible in the winter."[270]

John Marshall Pearl's letter is penetrating. He described the difficulties of armies operating in the vast, rugged, and isolated Alleghany Mountains of West Virginia. "Bitter cold" weather in the end of October, disease, and poor, unmanageable roads all plagued men on both sides. The

[270] John Marshall Pearl Letter, October 31, 1861, John Marshall Pearl To "Dear Mother" (Mss. C P), The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky.

natural environment in West Virginia was a pivotal piece of the campaign. Whichever side could best adapt and overcome nature would have better success, and in the end, victory; a victory with both military and political repercussions.

The Confederate war effort to control and occupy northwest Virginia during the summer and fall of 1861 failed, in part, due to elements of the natural environment. Chief among those elements were topography, weather, and disease. More than an arena of combat, the natural environment was a third actor or "army" in the West Virginia mountains during the campaign fought along the Tygart's Valley River front. The natural environment proved as harmful as the enemy army. Topography, weather, and disease could be as devastating as musket volleys and cannon blasts. All could block an offensive, demoralize an army, and reduce the number of effective men. Commanders and common soldiers alike experienced a trying and miserable time as they campaigned, fought battles, and tangled with the natural environment in West Virginia.

The campaign, fought along the line from Philippi to Beverly to Huttonsville and Cheat Mountain, was plagued with a difficult landscape, rain, and several endemic diseases. Commanders had to adapt and overcome these pieces of the environment. To be successful, however, commanders had to act once they had adapted or overcame the environment. In West Virginia, during the first land campaign of the war, Federal commanders acted by executing marching orders and battle plans. In the end, they were rewarded with victories, securing northwestern Virginia in Federal control and enabling the political movement leading to the formation of the state of West Virginia.

Fighting in the mountains of West Virginia during the summer of 1861 had great significance. The military lines established because of that fighting remained comparatively unchanged for the

next two years. From Cheat Mountain south to Big Sewell Mountain and on to Flat Top Mountain ran the front. Generally, Confederates occupied east of the line, while the Federals controlled the west side. From this front, the Confederates could check a Federal advance on the Shenandoah Valley and the Union army could control a great majority of the strategically vital Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. More importantly, however, the fighting in West Virginia during the summer of 1861 enabled the formation of the state.[271] Occupation by United States' forces assured the Reorganized Government of Virginia and the new state supporters that a majority of the region to be included in a potential new state was in Union control.

Two Unionist conventions met in Wheeling, West Virginia between May and August 1861. John Letcher, governor of Virginia, considered the actions of the Unionists "disloyal and revolutionary…without justification or excuse."[272] In the first convention, delegates decided to wait and see Virginia's decision on secession. Once the secession ordinance was passed, a second convention was scheduled for early June. The engagement at Philippi, although small, was significant regarding the second convention. The Union victory routed the only organized Confederate force in the region. This victory gave protection and legitimacy to the second convention meeting roughly a week later.

Through the actions of the Second Wheeling Convention, the Reorganized Government of Virginia was formed and its officials elected. Adjourned in late June, the convention reconvened in August. The defeat of Richard Garnett's Confederate army at Rich Mountain and Corrick's Ford undoubtedly gave the extra session immense legitimacy for the actions it would undertake.[273] During the August extra session, the convention adopted a resolution for the

[271] Otis K. Rice and Stephen W. Brown, *West Virginia: A History* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1993), 131.
[272] Quoted in Sevy, "John Letcher and West Virginia," 48.
[273] Rice and Brown, *West Virginia*, 118-122.

separation of the western portion of Virginia into the formation of their own state. It would be put to voters within the proposed new state on October 24, 1861. The new state resolution passed by the overwhelming vote of 18,408 to 781. A constitutional convention was convened on November 26, a constitution developed, and a constitutional referendum was set for April 3, 1862. Passing with another overwhelming majority, the Reorganized Government of Virginia gave its consent for the formation of a new state, to be called, per its newly adopted constitution, West Virginia.[274]

To be sure, the debate for the formation and admission of a new, Union state was not over. On May 29, 1862, Senator Waitman T. Willey petitioned the Senate for the admission of West Virginia without conditions. The petition began a nearly yearlong debate on the questions of constitutionality, slavery, and boundaries. After amendments to the original proposed statehood bill, a second state constitutional convention, and another astoundingly pro-West Virginia state referendum, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation on April 20, 1863 that in sixty days West Virginia would come into the Union as the thirty-fifth state.[275]

The campaigns and fighting in West Virginia during the summer of 1861, and subsequent Union victory, were decisive in the effort to form the Mountain State. The fighting in the vast and rugged Alleghany Mountains during the summer of 1861 provided protection, validity, and momentum for the Unionist movement in the northwestern portion of Virginia. Without military victory and occupation, West Virginia's route to statehood would have been even more difficult.

[274] Rice and Brown, *West Virginia*, 140-146; Sevy, "John Letcher and West Virginia," 48.
[275] Rice and Brown, *West Virginia*, 146-151. For a more detailed analysis and political history of the formation of West Virginia, see, Charles Ambler and Festus Summers, *West Virginia, the Mountain State* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1958); George Ellis Moore, *A Banner in the Hills: West Virginia's Statehood* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963); Richard Orr Curry, *A House Divided: A Study of Statehood Politics and the Copperhead Movement in West Virginia* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1964).

Confederate control of northwest Virginia would have made holding conventions hazardous and crippled the pro-Union political movement.

The war in West Virginia did not end with the fighting along the Tygart's Valley River and the movement towards the formation of the state. West Virginia saw other significant action. Southern West Virginia, particularly along the Kanawha River, saw fighting in 1861, when Union Brigadier General Jacob Cox battled Confederate Generals Henry Wise and John Floyd. The actions themselves were limited, mostly maneuvering with small skirmishes and Confederates retreating for fear of facing superior numbers. These actions were significant, however, and gave the Federal army control of two vital river positions, one at Gauley Bridge, at the confluence of the New and Gauley Rivers, and the second at Carinfax Ferry on the Gauley River. These positions enabled Union forces to control the Kanawha River Valley and closed the gap between those in the Kanawha region and in the northern part of the state.[276]

Only sporadic fighting occurred in West Virginia during 1862 and 1863. In January 1862 Stonewall Jackson conducted his campaign to destroy the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and drive the Federal army out of the mountain and regain control of northwest Virginia. The campaign climaxed with the Confederate occupation of Romney, West Virginia. Also in 1862, John C. Fremont was placed in overall command of the Union effort in West Virginia. The main objective of Union forces in West Virginia was to protect the B&O Railroad and work towards disrupting and destroying the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, the main connection between Richmond and Knoxville, Tennessee. Those Union efforts proved unsuccessful, but did produce action in southern West Virginia at Pearisburg, Princeton, and Lewisburg.[277]

[276] Rice and Brown, *West Virginia*, 126-129; Snell, *West Virginia and the Civil War*, 36-40 and 48-49.
[277] Rice and Brown, *West Virginia*, 132-133

By 1863, both Union and Confederate commanders had changed their strategic eye for West Virginia. Federal leadership focused more on protection of the reorganized government and the new state movement. Confederates gave up trying to occupy territory and focused on disrupting the B&O and the reorganized government. The shift in Confederate strategy changed the operations on the ground from regular military campaigning to raiding. Confederates William Jones and John Imboden raided into West Virginia during April and May of 1863. Like Jackson the year before, they hoped to damage the B&O Railroad and to disrupt the Reorganized Government of Virginia. They also acquired thousands of heads of cattle and horses, which certainly were invaluable to the Confederate war effort in Virginia during the spring and summer of that year. In November 1863, Confederate and Federal troops engaged in the most significant fighting since 1861. Hoping to drive the Rebels out of the Greenbrier Valley, Federal forces attacked Droop Mountain. The result sent Confederates retreating and ended noteworthy fighting in West Virginia.[278]

One military operation did occur during this period that directly incorporated the natural environment of West Virginia. Outside of the scope of this project, however, it does merit acknowledgement of their relationship with the environment. In the fall of 1862, Confederates captured the salt works along the Kanawha River outside of Charleston. With many Union soldiers being sent to the eastern theater of operations and preceded by a Confederate raid, William Loring led a Confederate column down the Kanawha Valley to occupy the salt works around Charleston, West Virginia. After a small engagement at Fayetteville, the Federal army retreated, opening the salt works to Confederate control. For the second half of September and

[278] Rice and Brown, *West Virginia*, 136-139.

most of October, Confederates sent the valuable commodity east to support the war effort there.[279]

The Kanawha salt works were priceless to the Confederate war effort. Salt was an indispensable part of the soldier's ration, both on its own and in preserved meat. For every one-thousand pounds of pork, two bushels of salt were needed to preserve it. Draft animals also needed salt in their diets and it was used to preserve the hides of animals used in making leather items such as harnesses and shoes.[280] The salt works along the Kanawha River had been worked since the earliest settlement of the area and at the time of the war, produced 2.5 million bushels of salt per year. Historian Ella Lonn contends that salt from the Kanawha Valley works was enough to supply the whole of the Confederacy.[281] Clearly it became an obvious military target. As Confederates had lost control of the vital works early in 1861, Loring's campaign to recapture them is another example of the far-reaching effect of the natural environment on military operations.

The campaign along the Tygart's Valley River in West Virginia during the summer of 1861 provides a great case study to explore the effect of the natural environment on the Civil War. Topography, weather, and disease were all deciding factors on the outcome of the campaign. Commanders had to contend with those elements of the natural environment to fight the enemy. Nature made defensive lines were more formidable, hampered avenues of attack or retreat, made supply and logistical efforts more difficult, and reduced effective fighting forces. Common soldiers also had to fight nature. Poor camp grounds, rugged marches and approaches to an

[279] Rice and Brown, *West Virginia*, 134-135.
[280] Ella Lonn, *Salt as A Factor in the Confederacy* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965), 14-17.
[281] Lonn, *Salt as A Factor in the Confederacy*, 190.

enemy position, exposure to rain and cold, and the transmission of diseases were all part of their fight against the natural environment. Then, they too, had to fight the enemy. To "get at" each other, both sides had to first fight West Virginia's natural environment. Whichever side could best adapt to and overcome nature and then act to execute their marching orders and battle plans would be the most successful against their enemy army. The Federal army acted against the Confederates once they had adapted to or overcame the environment, leading to success on the battlefield and overall victory in the campaign for West Virginia.

By understanding that each army had to fight the natural environment before they could fight each other, one sees how the environment moves from the arena of the campaign to a participant. The natural environment was a central actor, a third army during the campaign, not simply the stage where campaigning and fighting occurred. Understanding nature as a participant rather than an arena, the context in which the campaign was conducted and fought becomes clearer. The natural environment had to be confronted first. For green armies, this was no easy task and proved trying. What the intersection of the natural environment and military operations in West Virginia does is make that theater a unique and exceptional chapter of the Civil War.

Walter Taylor was correct in his assumption that West Virginia was an impracticable, inhospitable, and dismal country to conduct military operations in.[282] The natural environment there was a third "army" and proved formidable to both sides. This uniqueness and exceptionalism effectively shows the intersection of environment and war. The natural environment and its varying elements affects military operations. The campaign in West Virginia during the summer of 1861 along the Tygart's Valley River is a great example of the natural environment's influence on military operations. Equally important, however, the

[282] Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*, 16-17.

campaign brings the story of the Civil War in West Virginia out of the shadows of the scholarship on the war, showcasing another layer of complexities to America's greatest conflict.

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APPENDIX A: OFFICE OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY APPROVAL LETTER

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Office of Research Integrity

February 9, 2018

John Martin McMillan
1137 11th Avenue
Huntington, WV 25701

Dear Mr. McMillan:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled *"Impracticable, Inhospitable, and Dismal Country: An Examination of the Environmental Impact on Civil War Military Operations in West Virginia."* After assessing the abstract, it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction, it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,

Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director