

The exciting answer to the Civil War's most enduring question: What if Stonewall Jackson had survived Chancellorsville? In this alternate history, Jackson survives Chancellorsville and leads his Second Corps in an invasion of the North to end the war.

Throw Away The Scabbard

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THROW AWAY THE SCABBARD

The Chancellorsville Chronicles

Volume One

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www.chancellorsvillechronicles.blogspot.com
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Chapter One

Virginia Wilderness
Near Chancellor's Crossing
May 2, 1863 – Night

Lieutenant General Thomas Jackson, commanding the Second Corps of the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, raised his hand. His party of eight staff members halted on the Mountain Road, a half-mile in front of the corps' skirmishers. Jackson was inching his way down the heavily-rutted path, cut through an impenetrable terrain of pines, shrubs, and hardwood trees, trying to spy out whether the Union army was going to run all the way back to Washington or make a stand in the wilderness. Since he heard nothing but tree limbs rasping in the cool evening breeze, Jackson nudged Little Sorrel, his small red horse, and continued down the road.

The moon escaped from its cloudy shroud and illuminated the thickets on both sides of the road. Jackson scanned them; they were empty. A flurry of activity, 200, no, maybe 300 yards in front of him, caught his attention. He flung up his hand. His aides pulled up, not making a sound. Jackson leaned forward in his saddle, listening. The sounds were recognizable: the sharp ring of axes on trees, shovels scraping against the rocky ground, shouts, and commands. All the sounds associated with the hasty construction of breastworks.

Jackson took out his watch and tilted it until he could read the thin black hands in the faint moonlight. It was nine o'clock. Four hours ago, the Second Corps came screaming out of the woods and smashed into the Union's right flank. The surprised and overwhelmed Yankees ran. Jackson ordered his men to give chase until fatigue, darkness, and the thick undergrowth unraveled his assault. He instructed his three division commanders to reorganize the men as quickly as possible. Not satisfied with routing the Yankees, Jackson was determined to cut them off from the fords along the Rapidan and Rappahannock Rivers. While his men hastened into formation, he pressed ahead to see if he could determine what the Yankees planned to do. A tree crashed to the ground. Jackson had his answer. They were going to fight.

“Let’s go,” he said, turning Little Sorrel around and heading back toward the Confederate line, back to the battle, and back to the two-year war for Southern Independence.

He followed his aides onto the Bullock Road where he had left the 18th North Carolina Infantry Regiment holding the Confederate forward position. Suddenly, the woods exploded with the thunder of hundreds of guns. Musket flashes pierced the darkness, lighting up the blooming dogwoods. Bullets ricocheted off trees, whistled through the underbrush, and slammed into the dirt. A branch crashed to the ground on Jackson’s left. His aides stampeded to avoid the deadly fire.

Before Jackson could flee, someone knocked him out of his saddle. He flew through the air and landed on an exposed tree root. He stifled a groan. A body fell on top of him and pinned him down. Bullets smashed into the tree above his head.

“Lie still, General!”

Jackson recognized the terrified voice of his brother-in-law, Joseph Morrison.

Another volley pierced the night. Jackson tried to get up, but Morrison shoved him back down to the ground. The root dug into his ribs. Overhead, his men yelled for the Tarheels to cease firing. Slowly, the gunfire abated like the end of a rainstorm.

Jackson shifted impatiently. “You can get off me now, Lieutenant. The shooting has stopped.”

Morrison released his grip and rose to his knees. Jackson sat up, leaned against the tree, and felt his ribs. He winced in pain.

“Are you bad hurt?” Morrison asked.

“It’s nothing. Providence has been kind to us this evening.”

More horses poured down the road, this time from the direction of the Confederate line. In the moonlight, Jackson saw the red-shirted Ambrose Powell Hill, commander of the Light Division, jump off his horse.

“General, are you hurt?” Hill asked.

“Just a couple of bruised ribs,” Jackson replied after completing a very thorough search of his person. He stood and plucked his weather-stained kepi from the ground. He shook the dust from it. “Tell me, Hill, have you managed to find your way to the Rappahannock?” Jackson drew the kepi down over his blue-gray eyes.

“Yes, sir, but the men are exhausted. I think we should hold off the attack until morning.”

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“No, sir. No! Press them!” Jackson stabbed his finger into Hill’s chest. “Don’t let them escape. Cut them off from the United States Ford.”

Hill remounted and disappeared into the night.

“Lieutenant Morrison, I want you to return to General Lee. Tell him to press forward immediately.” Jackson swung up on Little Sorrel and rode in the direction of the army. His aides scrambled to catch up.

Chapter Five

*The Susquehanna River
Near Duncannon, Pennsylvania
June 1863*

Major General John Buford, recently promoted to head the Army of the Potomac's cavalry corps, tipped his canteen and took a long drink of water. He poured the rest of the canteen's contents over his head in an attempt to cool off. The temperature had to be close to 100 degrees, and the stifling humidity made it feel 20 degrees hotter. Behind him, his men were cooling off in the Susquehanna. Jackets, vests, shirts, and boots littered the riverbank. Horses waded into the shallows to drink, unmindful of the boisterous soldiers splashing about them.

Buford secured his canteen and retrieved his portfolio from his saddlebag. He squinted into the late afternoon sun. Last night, his scouts had reported that Lee was on the New Bloomfield Road, a three-day hard march from the Susquehanna. So this morning, Buford had his men up and on the road before dawn, scouting the countryside for good ground to prevent the Rebs from crossing the river and capturing Harrisburg. The day long search had produced no substantial results until his scouting party had burst from the tree lined road into this large clearing.

Buford mopped his forehead with his sleeve then quickly sketched the area. Satisfied with his effort, he closed the leather folder and called for his horse. He wanted to get the information back to Hancock as quickly as possible.

Ten miles south of the Susquehanna, at a spot where the woods swallowed up the road in a canopy of green leaves, a sharp report of musketry punctured the quiet. Up ahead, Buford saw white puffs of smoke and the silver flash of muzzle barrels. His troopers wasted little time. They jumped off their horses, pulled their rifles from their saddle boots, and dove behind the remains of a crumbling cobblestone fence.

Buford slid behind the fence. He raised his field glasses and peered into the lengthening shadows. A blue flag emblazoned with a white palmetto tree unfurled for a brief moment. He cursed in irritation. Up ahead wasn't some Reb scouting party but Wade Hampton's cavalry brigade.

Captain Norris dropped down next to him. "General."

Buford raised his hand to silence his aide. The rapidity of the Rebs' gunfire had caught his attention. He listened intently then slammed an angry fist into his palm. Hampton had repeaters!

At the opening of the spring campaign, Buford had noticed a weakening in the South's cavalry. A weakness that didn't come from a lack of skill, but rather from a lack of supplies: fodder for the animals and replacement horses for the men. With new technology, like the repeater, the Union cavalry had finally begun to gain the upper hand on their formidable opponent. But now, equally armed, thanks to Jackson's successful raid on the Allegheny Arsenal, and riding the best horseflesh in Pennsylvania, the South's strength had been resurrected.

Colonel Devin collapsed beside him.

"How are the boys?" Buford asked.

"It's not the Rebs that's doing the damage, but this infernal heat," Devin complained.

Buford peered over the wall. Neither side had gained an advantage in the hour long skirmish. "Okay, enough! Mount up and return to the ford. We'll cross the river and make our way back to the army."

Devin hurried to obey. Buford looked through his glasses at Hampton's line. He shook his head in frustration. Every last Reb was armed with a repeater.

By time Stuart reached the field, the sun was low on the horizon. Hampton's men stood in small groups, whispering back and forth, death in their faces. Despite the oppressive heat, Stuart shivered. He waited for someone to greet him, but the men ignored him.

Hampton's adjutant walked over. His eyes shone with unshed tears. He tried to speak but couldn't find his voice. Stuart shivered again. "General Stuart." The adjutant's voice broke, increasing Stuart's fears. "General Hampton has been wounded. Sir, it's a mortal blow."

For a moment, Stuart stood rooted in place. He heard the words but was unable to grasp what the man had said. Hampton dying? "Where is he?" Stuart questioned, his own voice no more than a murmur.

"A mile back. Doc's with him now."

Stuart followed the adjutant to a bend in the road. A circle of men, gray silhouettes against the dusk sky, worked feverishly over a stretcher. Stuart stumbled forward. He peered into the dim light and saw Wade Hampton

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lying on the stretcher. Blood drenched his shirt front, and his sweat-streaked face was deathly pale behind the fierce dark beard. His eyes were closed.

Stuart knelt down. "General Hampton," he whispered, afraid that he was too late and Hampton was dead.

To his relief, Hampton opened his eyes and smiled. "I'm glad you're here with me at the last." Stuart bent low to hear the fading voice. "I prayed you'd come. There have been times I haven't treated you with the respect your abilities and talents deserve."

"That's not true," Stuart protested, even though he knew it was. Hampton believed Stuart not serious enough for the responsibility of command.

"It is, and you must forgive me."

"You've served the Cause with honor, fought with valor, and now die with glory. I'll have Sweeney write songs extolling your virtues. We'll teach them to our children, so your memory may live and never fade away."

"Will you look after my men?" He asked, his breath labored.

"Of course, I will. They'll forever be known as Hampton's Brigade."

That seemed to satisfy him. He stopped his struggles and lay still for a long moment. "Tell my men..." The doctor stooped over him, but Hampton waved him away. "Tell them...I loved them like they were my own sons." He closed his eyes. One long breath eased from him.

Stuart backed away from the stretcher. He gulped once, but couldn't prevent his tears from falling. He took out his handkerchief, wiped his eyes, and blew his nose. "Major McClellan," he called to his adjutant. "I want you to ride to General Hampton's headquarters and take temporary command. If the men need anything, let me know immediately. I need to report to General Lee."

But Stuart didn't go to Lee. Once he passed the army's pickets, he dismissed his aides and rode to East Waterford where the Second Corps was bivouacked. He barged into Jackson's tent. "Wade Hampton's dead," he announced. Then he began to weep.

Dawn was more than four hours away when Jackson rode into Lee's darkened headquarters. He roused the sentry and sent him to wake the general. Underneath the ash and half-burnt logs, embers in the campfire still glowed orange with heat. An owl hooted at him from the branches of a tall sycamore tree. Lee hurried into the light, tying the belt of his black silk robe around his waist.

“Is there trouble?” Lee asked.

“I’ve come about the Union cavalry Hampton ran into this afternoon.”

Lee sighed. “Hampton!” He shook his head in regret. “His death’s a blow.” He picked up a stick and stoked the fire until it blazed to life. “Have you seen General Stuart?”

“I left him asleep in my tent. He took Hampton’s death hard.”

“So I’ve heard. I’m surprised it would affect him so deeply, considering the state of their relationship.”

Jackson stared into the fire. “I believe we live our lives as empty vessels, designed to collect all the joy and sorrow destined to come to a man throughout his life. Unfortunately, it seems that life hands out more grief than joy. No man is immune to loss. When my first wife and child died, I thought I would shatter into pieces. Only the mercy of Almighty God kept me in those black months.

“If the war hadn’t come, perhaps our cup would have never known the devastating fullness of death and grief. But war fills the cup rapidly. Who knows what death will be the drop the overflows it, or when it’ll happen. The death of his darling daughter did much to fill General Stuart’s cup. So did the death of Major Pelham. Hampton’s death was only the drop that overflowed it.”

Jackson stepped aside so a corpsman could set a coffee pot on the fire. When the corpsman departed, he continued.

“When Turner Ashby died, his death was that drop for me. I wept for him, for my young students dead on Henry House Hill, even for my mother who died when I was seven. It’s an anguish we can’t deny, no more than we can hold back the sun from rising. So strong men weep like children because we’re not as strong as we think we are. Then grace comes to us, and we can go on because we know our Lord is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

“The Lord will keep General Stuart in His strength, and he will once more be consumed with finding thigh high boots and riding happily into battle. That’s how we’ll bear this war. Knowing that weeping endures for the night, but joy comes in the morning.”

Jackson drained his cup of the last vestiges of the rich coffee and turned to the pressing matter that had brought him to Lee. “I believe General Hancock means to seize the Duncannon fords. Sir, we can’t give away the

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ground just because the Yankees are closer to the river. We must get there first.”

Lee, now dressed, took a piece of toast from a basket. “It is a race we can’t win. And in this heat and humidity – Jackson saw him frown – you’ll end up with miles of stragglers.”

Jackson would not be put off. “Sir, I wouldn’t ask if I wasn’t sure that I could arrive at the fords with my men intact.”

Lee scraped creamy Pennsylvania butter across his toast “How many men will you need?” He took a bite.

“Early is at the head of my column. And I believe Hood is at the head of the First Corps’ column.” Lee nodded in confirmation. “I’ll take them and the Stonewall Brigade. Plus two brigades of cavalry.”

Lee wiped his hands on a napkin. “Go on!”

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