THE ERROR OF ASSERTIVE SPECULATION IN DISCUSSING THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

John D. Wedo

"When discussing an 'if' in history experts can always marshal convincing arguments."

This footnote by Edwin B. Coddington is much more than that: it is a commentary on a non-analytical approach to studying history. (He left to the reader to decide where to put the quotes or stress in his sentence: on "experts" or on "always" or on "convincing.") (1)

Even after 150 years, the Battle of Gettysburg remains a major Civil War interest and a major Civil War controversy. This is not from a dearth of facts, which abound, but from opinion and interpretation. This paper analyzes some of the unsupported assertions made about the battle. It uses contemporary knowledge, hindsight, and comparisons to non-Civil War fields. Its goal is to offer bounds for speculation and consequences of battle actions.

WARNING: This paper compares Civil War actions and persons to those in other wars. This technique is uncommon in Civil War historiography. Notable exceptions are Fletcher Pratt and John Keegan. But it can often help cast new light on Civil War topics and serve to explain them better than in solitude. Although many aficionados think that our civil war was fought in a historical vacuum and is unique among world conflicts with *absolutely* no comparison, the similarities are there if one is both willing to look and accept what they reveal.

In particular, this paper discusses impartially both the victors and vanquished. In discovering or discussing facts about a battle, it is pointless and self-defeating to use those facts to denigrate any general or extol one over another. Discussing the Duke of Wellington's victory at Waterloo does not detract one iota from Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte's historical status as a great general; one is advised against making such negative comparisons, and this paper follows suit.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Speculation—conjecture, "if," "What-if"—is common in the study of history, and in other areas such as politics and sports. It is normally harmless and passes time nicely. Other than in casual conversation though, it serves almost no purpose, mainly because one cannot change what has already occurred. However, the difference between a simple, conversational "What-if" and one claiming a definite conclusion is vast. Simple speculation, the "What-if," is the stuff of imagination, conversation, and television sports shows. It can be relaxing or thoughtful, and sometimes expose new avenues for study. But comprising primarily unsubstantiated and unverifiable contentions, most of which seem to exist solely to reclaim victory for the losing side, simple speculation provides *no substantive insight* as to what actually happened.

In the extreme, speculation is often presented with unaccountable fervor, especially in modern speakers—*"Stonewall would have taken that hill!"*—and conclusions (opinions) derived from them are often not subject to debate. The *unsupported conclusive opinion of speculation* is the subject of this paper and shall be henceforth referred to as *Assertive Speculation* (AS).

Jumping across the canyon to assert an unverifiable conclusion from a "What-if" into Assertive Speculation is where conversations cross into arguments, often heated. When Assertive Speculation persists and becomes rooted, it then becomes "conventional wisdom." Rooting unverifiable opinions still does not make them right. It is important, therefore, to counter and disprove AS before it becomes enshrined as conventional wisdom. This involves an unbiased study of the facts and *reasonable, deductive* conclusions derived from those facts. Speculation or Assertive Speculation can never change what happened. Never.

History's participants and History itself deserve better than Assertive Speculation. This is not always obvious from print or filmed documentaries. The Battle of Gettysburg in particular is subject to this. Laymen are welcome to assert or conclude whatever they wish, but historians are,

or should be, bound to a higher standard, i.e., they must confine opinions to analysis of facts surrounding an event. Conversely, they should not present their opinion of non-events as fact.

One good example of correcting inaccuracies is Garry Adelman's monograph *The Myth of Little Round Top*. Adelman analyzes how the importance of Little Round Top "increased" through the years as different participants wrote their stories, and how these tales became exaggerated over the years, moving from fact to legend to myth. For instance, he shows that even had the Confederates succeeded, they still must contend with roughly 10,000 fresh Federal soldiers with full ammunition pouches within a quarter mile of the hill, whereas they themselves had no obvious source of immediate resupply in any form. In particular, he refutes convincingly the argument that Little Round Top would have provided an excellent artillery platform to rake the Federal Line. He does this with a map of the hillock's apex showing various firing angles, concluding that it was so narrow that of the entire battery, only the rightmost (northernmost) cannon would be able to fire near the Federal line. (2) More research and works such as this are required for the entire Civil War.

WHERE ASSERTIVE SPECULATION APPEARS

Everywhere. Sometimes it is obvious; sometimes as subtle as a simple adjective. About General James Longstreet's proposal to General Robert E. Lee to disengage at Gettysburg and maneuver southward, Harry W. Pfanz in *Gettysburg: The Second Day* writes that it "made a lot of sense in the abstract." (3) Glenn Tucker writes that "Longstreet should not have been discredited for holding a contrary—and, as it developed, a superior—view." (4) It is unclear what are the criteria for "making sense" or "superior" because the authors offer none.

In particular, the multitude of historical shows on various cable channels present especial trials for credulity. In many cases, they try to create phony suspense in the build-up before a commercial, where they might ask something such as: "Up next, did Pickett's Charge break through the Union line and almost win the war?" In other cases, historians and professors make

incredible and unsubstantiated statements such as, "The battle was Lee's to lose." This paper looks at these examples and more. In all cases, the facts are there if one is willing to look at them with no bias.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSERTIVE SPECULATION

It presents opinion as fact. Standing before Cemetery Hill on July 1, 1863 and realizing that Confederate General Richard Ewell would order no attack, members of General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's remaining staff are reported to have said, "Old Jack is not here." This statement reveals their frustrations during that crucial part of the battle, especially because they had witnessed General Jackson's outstanding performance in the Shenandoah Valley. Conversely, atop the hill around the same time, Federal General Winfield Scott Hancock was organizing the Union defense from the remnants of the I Corps and the XI Corps. Opinions of some Federal officers, including General Hancock, indicate that there was a small window of time where they thought that Cemetery Hill could have been taken by a concerted Confederate attack. These opinions need to be taken seriously. In fact, one might argue that their views are the only ones that matter because they were there, and they indeed had a stake in the battle and the war. Their opinions, however authoritative and honest, are still opinions, and they do not change the result one whit. Neither do opinions of anyone else, professional historian or not.

Similarly, concerning the battle itself, there is an opinion that the Army of Northern Virginia (ANV) somehow had an edge over the Army of the Potomac (AOP), that "the battle was Lee's to lose" as in the aforementioned TV voiceover. To be fair, it is possible that such a statement results from editing: the historian might have qualified his comment as opinion but the viewer does not hear or see that. Nevertheless, this statement suggests two ideas: that the ANV was the better army and somehow had a right to win because of that superiority. Because of these implied assertions, this statement must be addressed, and since it sounds as if one had placed odds on the battle, sports seems a good counterpoint for comparison.

In the 2007 season of the National Football League, the New England Patriots had achieved a perfect 18-0 record on the way to the Super Bowl. Their opponent, the New York Giants, entered the big game at 13-6. The Patriots, with Tom Brady as quarterback, had in fact defeated the Giants 38-35 in the last game of the regular season, and the Patriots were favored by professional odds makers. Most fans and the press agreed. Yet, the "lowly" Giants won the championship by a score of 17-14. Why? They played better, obviously, but the analogy reveals more.

Unlike the claim of Stonewall being dead or General Dorsey Pender being wounded at Gettysburg and out of the battle, the Patriots had no injuries, and all of their starting players were healthy. Examination of the trend in the Patriots' season shows that up to and including Game 11 with the Buffalo Bills, New England won by an average point spread of about 20 points. Starting with Game 12 against the Philadelphia Eagles and continuing to the end of the regular season, the average point spread was down to about 6 points. After Game 12, therefore, the Patriots were able to beat their remaining opponents, but not overwhelm them. However, few commentators noted this relative improvement in the other teams: the Patriots were still good, but the other teams were catching on to their game. They might have looked like "the better team," but it did not matter on game day. In fact, the Patriots' loss with a complete, uninjured, and favored team offers a parallel with Gettysburg in that there was no guarantee that the ANV would win the battle even with General Jackson present. (And one can even imagine that if any starting Patriot player was injured and if the Patriots lost, that injury would be offered as *the reason* for the loss.)

In World War II, before the Second Battle of El Alamein in Egypt, the famous German Afrika Korps under General Erwin Rommel had continually outmaneuvered the British armored forces in the desert. The Germans developed fast mobile armored maneuver tactics, and the British did not. Under Rommel, who was aided tremendously by intelligence on the disposition of British units from decrypted American messages sent from Cairo, they had used these tactics

brilliantly in North Africa for almost two years. British armored forces were neither trained nor equipped to fight the German tactics, and it showed in late 1942 when Rommel pushed the British back to Egypt.

Then the British 8th Army received a new commander, General Bernard Montgomery. In addition to being a tough trainer and taskmaster, he made a decision that eluded his predecessors and changed the course of the war in that theater: as John Keegan describes it, he decided that the British Army could not "out-German the Germans." (5) This means that General Montgomery not only recognized the limitations of the British armored forces, *but he also recognized its strengths*, two great revelations.

By the fall of 1942, the British in North Africa were benefitting from the tremendous output of American factories. In the desert, the German Afrika Korps excelled at fast-moving armored war; General Montgomery's response was to avoid such combat entirely. Instead, he intended to fight a "set-piece" battle in which the British Army would attack along planned routes, forcing the Germans to remain in place and respond to each British move. This tactic was more attuned to British training and equipment, using British numerical strength in all aspects of comparison: their men, planes, artillery, armor, and supplies would eventually wear down the Afrika Korps. It took almost three weeks to do this, but when the British finally broke through the German lines, they were rewarded with a straight road to Tunisia against a fatigued and numerically depleted Afrika Korps. Did the Afrika Korps "deserve" to win because it was more "dashing" or because it was "the better army?" No, and neither did the 8th Army, and so they fought.

Similarly, the Confederates were extremely confident on the march north in June of 1863. They had thrown the Federals back from Richmond and defeated them in numerous other battles with only one setback at Antietam. Although outnumbered, poorly equipped and fed (compared to the Federal armies), they believed fervently in their cause and in their commander. The ANV's

"stats" against the AOP and the confidence of its soldiers do not make it a "better army" that deserved to win or "should have won." Nor is it a "shame" that it lost. It is *the* history.

The Federal Army, while perhaps not as ebullient about success as the Confederates, was not totally dispirited. A dispirited army could not have marched for almost a week as it did in the late June heat and dust, especially after a defeat such as Chancellorsville less than two months prior. Its commanders, especially at the corps and division levels, had been improving all along. In aggregate, its artillery had been always superior to the Confederate artillery. Its ever-improving cavalry was then on a par with its Confederate counterpart. And, more importantly, its new commander of only three days, General George Meade, while relatively unknown and untested as army commander, was considered a good choice by the other corps commanders. Even General Lee gave a nod to the new Union appointment when he said that General Meade would commit no blunder on his front. Yet, the TV historian says "the battle was Lee's to lose," which is AS at its best, or worst, depending on one's viewpoint. The listener might believe this, but it is as unsupportable and as pointless as stating that New England was "the better team" even though it did not win.

Finally, an egregious example, although unrelated to Gettysburg, of propagating opinion as fact is the reputation of Confederate General Albert Sydney Johnston. Numerous books state that Confederate President Jefferson Davis, and others north and south, considered him the finest general on the continent at the start of hostilities in 1861. President Davis is entitled to his opinion, but it is difficult to determine its basis. Although he was personally and physically impressive, his antebellum combat experience and army career were little different from other leading officers in the Old Army. In his few months in command at the start of the war he lost two states and the Upper Mississippi River, and yet his death at Shiloh is considered a horrific loss for the South. Mark Boatner, quoting Stanley F. Horn, writes, "Through a perspective of eighty

years, however, it is hard to find the basis for this almost unchallenged opinion that he was the supremely qualified soldier, that his death was an irremediable catastrophe." (6)

It is unclear how the perpetuation of these or similar opinions advances an understanding of Gettysburg or of any battle.

It ignores other facts. A result of this is to exaggerate the speculative effect of an action.

For example, this is the template of Assertive Speculation relative to Gettysburg:

If (pick any confederate action), then "*the Confederates would march right into Washington!*"

Some examples:

If General Ewell had taken Cemetery Hill on July 1, then...

If General Ambrose Wright had broken through the Federal line on July 2, then...

If General Ewell had taken Culp's Hill on July 2, then...

If General Lewis Armistead had broken through in Pickett's charge on July 3, then...

...and so on.

Assertive Speculation ignores many facts to reach this conclusion, as with the following example.

The success of the Allied invasion of Normandy on D-Day, June 6, 1944, was not a foregone conclusion as hindsight might indicate. Whereas it is true that the Allies presented overwhelming naval, ground, and air forces against the Germans, the invasion might not have been fully successful. Indeed, by mid-morning, American General Omar Bradley actually considered the evacuation of Omaha Beach because of the reported lack of progress and the number of casualties. The men on the beach endured with the help of close fire support from naval destroyers and from their training, initiative, and courage. By mid-afternoon, all beaches were secure enough to start offloading larger transport vessels. Had all or part of the invasion failed, the war would have been much more difficult to win. This is not speculation, but a simple

result of not having a beachhead in Europe. But would it have taken uncountable years for an Allied victory? Probably not.

Even with a failure in Normandy, the Americans and British still fought the Germans in Italy, their strategic bombing campaign continued to devastate German cities and industries, and the Russian army was steadily pushing the Germans westward. In addition, the United States was still developing the atomic bomb in the Manhattan Project. The first atomic bomb test would occur on July 16, 1945, a little over a year after D-Day. Given that no action in Europe would affect this project, the test would be successful as history records. The original mission of the 509th Composite Wing was to drop atomic bombs on Japan *and Germany*. This is why *two* bombs were made. Had the war in Europe not been resolved by July, 1945, it is easy to see a different strategic bombing campaign over Germany which might have included B-29s and an atomic bomb. Even without a successful invasion in June, 1944, the combined weight of force against Germany in 1944, including the atomic bomb, must be considered in any discussion on how long the war in Europe would last.

Similarly, the contention is made often—with curious, incredible ardor—that had the Confederates pushed the Federals from Cemetery Hill and Culp's Hill on July 1, the Confederates would have had an "open road to Washington." The only conclusion that one can deduce reasonably from the capture of those hills is that the Confederates would have possessed some of the high ground south of Gettysburg. Only two Federal Corps (out of seven) fought the first day, a total of perhaps 20,000 men. Per the recorded history, the Federals held the high ground at the end of July 1, after having suffered about 10,000 casualties. Had a battle occurred for those hills, it would have increased the number of Federal wounded, but the AOP still had over 80,000 men. In addition, the AOP was moving north on the Baltimore Pike, Taneytown Road, and the Emmitsburg Road, and these are the exact roads that the ANV needed to march straight into Washington without a time-consuming move to the west and then south. There is other high

ground along these roads, like Wolf Hill, Powers Hill, and the Round Tops, that the Federals could occupy to impede the Confederates. Southward, in Maryland, the Pipe Creek Line, planned by General Meade when he took command, is another potential impediment to a Confederate advance. And the "open road to Washington" assumes that the 80,000-strong Federal Army would simply evaporate, which is also unsupportable. In addition, the forts around Washington had upwards of 40,000 men and plenty of artillery. So where is this open road?

Then there is Pickett's Charge, another excellent example of ignoring facts. The Confederates had suffered two setbacks on July 3: Federal infantry attacked and occupied fully Culp's Hill, and Federal cavalry repulsed the Confederate cavalry's attack east of town. If the afternoon infantry charge depended on the success of these two actions, it was at a disadvantage before it started. In addition, the artillery bombardment failed to dislodge the Federals from Cemetery Ridge. Those surviving soldiers who breached the Federal line on Cemetery Ridge with General Lewis Armistead numbered no more than 300 men, another fact well documented. With no brigades behind them to exploit the breach, they were marooned almost one mile from Seminary Ridge amidst thousands of Federal soldiers. Three hundred soldiers could make no breach of any import against such odds; yet, Pickett's Charge is presented on TV historical documentaries as a charge that almost succeeded rather than the dent that it was. Often blame is spread among a multitude of Confederate sins, such as the aforementioned Culp's Hill and cavalry setbacks, the inaccurate Confederate bombardment, the placement of brigades especially on the Confederate left, the lateness of the attack, and so forth. Equally downplayed are the simple facts that the Federals held the ridge because they were led well, they stayed, and they fought well, in all making fewer mistakes than did the Confederates. Even Freeman admits this in his post-mortem analysis of the battle, so why all the drama and phony suspense? (7)

In addition, Assertive Speculation often underestimates or overlooks the realities of logistics, time, and what modern armies call "command, control, and communications," or "C3."

On Civil War battlefields, C3 was limited to regimental colors, signal flags, bugles, and messengers on foot or horse; smoke, movement, or weather could degrade them easily. A day's fighting left both winner and loser disorganized at best or unorganized at worst, with C3 worse than at the start of the battle. This is true in any historical period, even today. Commanders are killed or wounded, units are not where they are supposed to be, some units are lost, and some have no officers. For example, on July 2, brigade commander General Evander Law was unaware for almost two hours that his division commander, General John Bell Hood, was wounded and out of the battle, making Law the division commander. Most soldiers do not know where they are, and the enemy's location is unknown.

Yet somehow, according to AS, the ANV will collect itself after a fight on Cemetery and Culp's Hills and pursue a vigorous, coordinated march straight down pikes crammed with five fresh Federal corps that have not fought. Without radios, this would be impossible to accomplish for a day or more. Yet one still hears that the Confederates would march into Washington.

There is no doubt that Stonewall's envelopment of the Federal right at Chancellorsville was masterful, but it was tactical and not strategic. For that attack, he had to quickly move his men 12 miles before sunset, a brilliant tactical move. Pursuing the Federal army on the "open road to Washington" or disengaging the ANV from Gettysburg and swinging south, as General Longstreet suggested on July 1 and 2, are turning movements, which are strategic. They involve not only moving the infantry and artillery, but also wagons, ambulances, extra animals, and so forth, the *impedimenta* as the Romans called it. On the open road to Washington, men and animals still must eat, and eventually, sleep—even in the Army of Northern Virginia—not to mention that the wounded must be collected and treated, and that columns of wagons must be re-routed.

One might read about a thousand-bomber raid in World War II, but it is something else to consider the immense logistical and technical support trail behind such an endeavor, not to

mention the hard work required to repair, arm, and fuel aircraft. Few persons have any idea what it takes to mount military operations, either with 1,000 bombers or 1,000 horses, but the historian is remiss who ignores it while lamenting or fawning over "missed opportunities." It is no accident that General Dwight Eisenhower in his memoirs lists these pieces of equipment as most important to the Allied victory over Germany: landing craft, bulldozer, jeep, 2-1/2 ton truck, and the C-47 airplane. He adds, "Curiously enough, none of these is designed for combat." (8) Good logistics does not happen at the snap of a finger, which leads this discussion to Time.

Time rules everything from daily life to war. Poor C3 and the need for logistical concerns affects the *time* it takes to accomplish maneuvers. Time in 1863 meant regiments moving everywhere on foot or hoof. It meant minutes or hours to deliver messages before, during, and after a battle. It meant transporting cannon, supplies, and wounded with horses. It is easy to look at terrain today and wonder, for instance, why General Meade did not pursue more vigorously after the battle because the limitations of 1863 C3, logistics, and time are not often obvious to the modern observer. But ignoring them can force a conclusion of omniscience and hyper-competence on the part of some participants—General Lee "should have known" that a move southward was better, General Meade "should have attacked" after the third day—, and many of these positions might be unsupportable by the facts. The lack of facts seems to not inhibit these opinions, however.

It argues that what is improvable must be true. In logic, this is known as an Argument from Ignorance or an Appeal to Ignorance. (This is the *name of the fallacy*: it does *not* imply that proponents of a historical result are ignorant.) This logical fallacy assumes that a fact is true (or false) because it cannot be proven otherwise. (9) For instance, proponents of the "open road to Washington" might say something like, "Well, can you prove that the Union army would have stayed and fought?" No one can prove this; ergo, the original proposition *must be true*. Unfortunately, most who argue along this line do not realize it: it seems perfectly logical to them.

General Longstreet's suggestion to General Lee to disengage from Gettysburg after July 1 and to maneuver southeast toward Washington is another example of Argument from Ignorance. Proponents of the move think that it might have resulted in a Confederate victory and even ended the war. Critics argue that the move was a bad idea for a number of reasons, and that General Lee's decision against the move was sound militarily. Curiously, although each side is adamant about its position, few offer analysis of the proposed move to explain why it was good or bad. Worse, proponents offer no details on how the move would have happened or how it would have been successful: its objective, route, and timetable, for instance. In more desperate cases, such as the Tucker quote above, details are not important because the Confederate defeat "proves" that General Longstreet's maneuver was "superior" to General Lee's decision to stay and fight. Proponents of General Longstreet's proposed maneuver argue that the ANV lost because it stayed and General Lee's strategy failed; therefore, *any other* strategy must be superior, not just the Longstreet proposal. Such a grand and ridiculous conclusion should never be allowed to distort the facts or discourage analysis.

In this realm, History suffers from the same drawback as Astronomy, i.e., it can set up no controlled experiments. All astronomical facts are based on (extremely) remote observation of nature and interpretation of those observations versus hypotheses using existing scientific facts: the astronomer cannot restore a star or a planet or a solar flare to its original condition and re-start an experiment. Similarly, the historian cannot repeat a battle to test hypotheses about the battle. The best one can do is to extrapolate from available historical facts. As indicated above, such extrapolation must be measured and controlled in time, space, and capability for reasonable historical analysis. This should preclude fantasy, but it often does not.

Examples of this logic flaw are many. TV shows proposing that ancient humans were visited or assisted by space aliens operate under the proposition that if science cannot explain a phenomenon, such as an ancient structure, then it *must be* aliens. There is also the infamous 1959

camp science fiction film, Ed Wood's *Plan 9 From Outer Space*. The movie, which appears often on Worst Film lists, features "psychic" The Amazing Criswell as narrator. At the film's end, he asks the audience, "My friend, you have seen this incident based on sworn testimony. Can you prove that it didn't happen?" If the historical argument sounds no better than this, it probably isn't. History deserves better.

It blames "bad luck" or "good luck," as needed. When logic and facts fail, this is Assertive Speculation's last resort. Its fault is twofold: it ascribes normal characteristics of a conflict to karma, and it can be applied universally. These render it useless as a reason for a defeat. This is particularly true for Gettysburg where perhaps the main argument for the Confederate defeat is the absence of General Jackson, especially at the crucial point in the battle before Cemetery Hill on July 1. This absence is blamed on the "bad luck" of his death from wounds received at the Battle of Chancellorsville, but this is false. The example of another "missing general" should help to understand this.

Normal game actions over a number of sports include errors, infractions, penalties, fumbles, injuries, interceptions, turnovers, and so forth. None of these is bad luck, even if they occur with two minutes on the clock, despite claim to the contrary; rather, they are the normal consequence of appearing on the field to play within the rules of the game. True bad luck would be a bad call affecting a game-winning score or lightning striking a quarterback five minutes into the game. The comparison to history should be obvious.

In World War II, it appears really "lucky" for the Allies that General Erwin Rommel is absent from Normandy on June 6, 1944, D-Day. In addition, many German corps and division commanders were inland convening for a map exercise covering the Allied invasion. General Rommel himself was in Berlin to confer with Hitler and to celebrate his wife's 50th birthday, coincidently on June 6. History has shown that Allied military power that day was so great as to defeat the efforts of any German commander, including General Rommel, but the absence from

the beach defenses of so many commanders certainly did not aid the German defense. Is this, however, "luck?"

Examination shows that the Allies mounted an elaborate, meticulous deception campaign (Operation Fortitude) to convince German intelligence that the invasion would land elsewhere. Fortitude pandered to German beliefs as to where and under what conditions the invasion would occur, one of which was that it would happen during a new moon when the night sky is darkest. The Allies had actually picked a full moon, when the night sky is brightest, to assist the nighttime airborne assaults. Good weather would also be important. The weather over the North Atlantic, England, and Normandy was unusually stormy during the first week of June, and German forecasters told General Rommel that they could see no foreseeable break in the weather. Given that the moon's phase was two weeks offset from the German presupposition and that their weather forecast expected continued poor weather, General Rommel and his generals felt comfortable leaving Normandy. The invasion of course occurred within a 36-hour break in the weather offering minimally acceptable operating conditions between two low pressure systems that Allied forecasters could see but that the German forecasters could not. Why?

Closer examination shows that the reason for the German forecast was a lack of weather observations from the West. Weather systems move generally from West to East. The North Atlantic was under total Allied control, the result of winning what is called The Battle of the Atlantic. In the years prior, Allied navies and air forces applied superior numbers, tactics, and technology to defeat the German U-boats and clear the sea lanes for the invasion. This superiority was the result of trial and error, planning, intensive scientific research and development, innovative tactics, intensive naval combat, and most of all, the courage of the crews of the transports and their escort ships. A result of this effort was to deny to German forecasters access to any western weather data for immediate, tactical use. The Allied monopoly of weather observations was *a natural consequence* of winning control of the North Atlantic, rendering

General Rommel's absence at Normandy the result of a bad decision, a *normal consequence of war, and not "bad luck."* One must couple General Rommel's decision here with General Eisenhower's boldness in ordering the invasion to occur with only 36 hours of acceptable operating weather, a boldness normally attributed to General Rommel. The facts are there: they just require extraction and attention.

Similarly, Stonewall Jackson's absence from Gettysburg is a natural consequence of war and not "bad luck." Soldiers and generals die in war. As a historical fact, this is neither extraordinary nor bad luck. At Chancellorsville, General Jackson decided to reconnoiter the Federal line at night, knowing well the associated danger. He was shot by his own men, and he subsequently died on May 10, 1863. The meeting engagement at Gettysburg thus occurred without him. Confederate bullets, not lightning, struck General Jackson who *knowingly put himself in a dangerous position where he should not have been*. Two months later, in southern Pennsylvania, a battle started without the long-dead Stonewall. Just as with General Rommel at Normandy, this is another bad decision, a natural consequence of the war, and not bad luck. Any historian that claims otherwise does a gross disservice to his audience.

EXAMPLES OF CONTROLLED, THOUGHTFUL HISTORICAL SPECULATION

Author Bruce Catton provides many examples of a historian offering contained, thoughtful, historically relevant speculation, to wit:

At the start of the war, Ulysses Grant traveled to Ohio to visit General George McClellan to offer his services for the Union. McClellan was away and did not see Grant, and Grant returned to Illinois. Had McClellan offered Grant a commission to serve on his staff, what would have happened to Grant and the war in general? (10)

Had the AOP won the Battle of Antietam and had the South surrendered as a result, the war could have ended with General McClellan as the hero and without the Emancipation Proclamation, which preliminary version had not yet been published. The shorter, less extensive

and destructive war might have resulted in an easier Reconstruction, but one without the 13th Amendment and consequently with slavery. (11)

In *Lee's Lieutenants*, Douglas Southall Freeman presents an accounting and an analysis of the ANV commanders prior to the Federal offensive of May 1864. He summarizes the situation thus:

"Had he [Grant] been in Hooker's place a year previously, he would have faced Jackson and Pender, the old Second Corps in its glory, and the first Corps before the frustrated Longstreet had shaken its command. Now Longstreet was changed, Ewell enfeebled, Early arrogant and Hill, after eleven months, still not established in reputation as a corps commander." (12) Freeman offers this as food for thought, and not as a whiny excuse. It is reasonable to assume that had Grant faced the ANV commanders listed from earlier times, the campaign would have been different, but Freeman does not go there. He makes no claims of large Confederate victories had such a matchup occurred, but he leaves the projection to the reader, and he says no more. More authors and commentators should be so restrained.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Speculation is a natural result of human curiosity, and tends to enliven casual conversation; however, when it ventures beyond that to start making demands on credulity, it has almost no place in competent historical discussion. This paper has highlighted many of the characteristics and pitfalls of a type of conjecture that overflows those bounds, Assertive Speculation. It has offered numerous examples from history and non-history topics to illustrate them relative to the Battle of Gettysburg. Readers of history and viewers of TV history shows must be aware of what they are reading and hearing, and they should be critical of what appears to be opinion, assertion, hope, or myth presented as fact. This paper does not mean to discourage or inhibit speculation in casual exchanges, but rather to suggest ways to direct professional historical

speculation away from grand and specious assertions and more toward measured, restrained extrapolation of available facts and meaningful deduction from those facts.

In other words, no matter how many alternatives are presented, the Army of Northern Virginia still lost the Battle of Gettysburg.

Science fiction writer Poul Anderson should have the last word here. In his non-fiction work on intelligent life in space, he wrote:

"And when scientific imagination does not go too far beyond scientific fact, its conclusions are more or less right." (13)

Substituting "historical" for "scientific" produces an alternate statement of the theme of this paper.

REFERENCES

Most of the historical information in this paper can be found in most general works on the particular historical subject; therefore, no footnotes are provided for these data. Footnotes do appear for quotes, specific citations, and for the more obscure items herein.

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