



Union Intelligence: From Antietam to Chancellorsville

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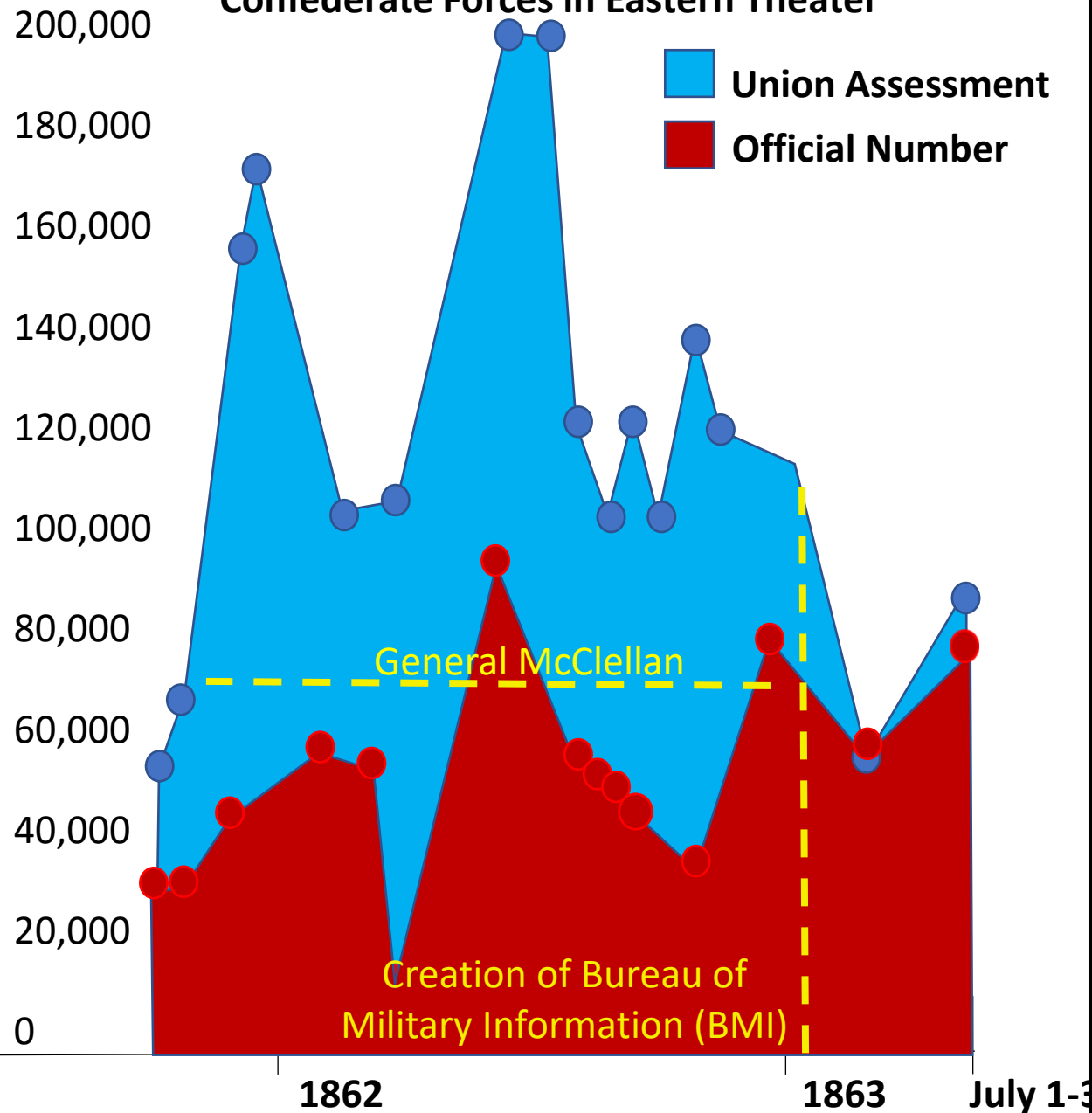
“Yet, it would behoove this mighty structure an occasional look backward, to consider those who came before and put that sharp sword of military intelligence into Meade’s hand at Gettysburg and into Grant’s thereafter. It is a standard of intelligence excellence that may be equaled but never surpassed.”

- Peter G. Tsouras, Major General George H. Sharpe and the Creation of American Military Intelligence in the Civil War





Union Intelligence Estimates vs. Actual
Confederate Forces in Eastern Theater



Union Intelligence

- Union was at an enormous disadvantage from 61'-63'
- Poor leadership, little attention to intelligence
- Intelligence was heavily politicized
- Typically, 100+% wrong



McClellan and the Influence of Bias

“Minds are like parachutes. They only function when they are open.” Richard J. Heuer Jr.



General George B. McClellan's chief biases:

Cassandra complex (worst-case perspective)

Lack of empathy

Wishful disregard for new evidence

Defense avoidance (avoiding painful choices)

McClellan in the Department of the Ohio



While winning small engagements, his subordinates, including General William S. Rosecrans, noted two different McClellan's

McClellan organized his units and prepared them for combat in an effective manner – energetic, he developed the campaign with gusto

But...[A]s he approached the field of operations he became slow and timid. He magnified every obstacle; in particular, the size of the enemy army increased in his mind the closer he got to it. In battle he tended to interpret sights and sounds in his front as unfavorable to him; he hesitated to throw in his whole force at the supreme moment; and he withdrew when bolder men would have attacked.

A Pinkerton Issue?



McClellan chose a successful detective, Allan Pinkerton, as his intelligence chief

Pinkerton has often been blamed for McClellan's exaggerated estimates, but:

- On November 15, 1861, Pinkerton developed an order of battle for Confederate forces in the state of Virginia

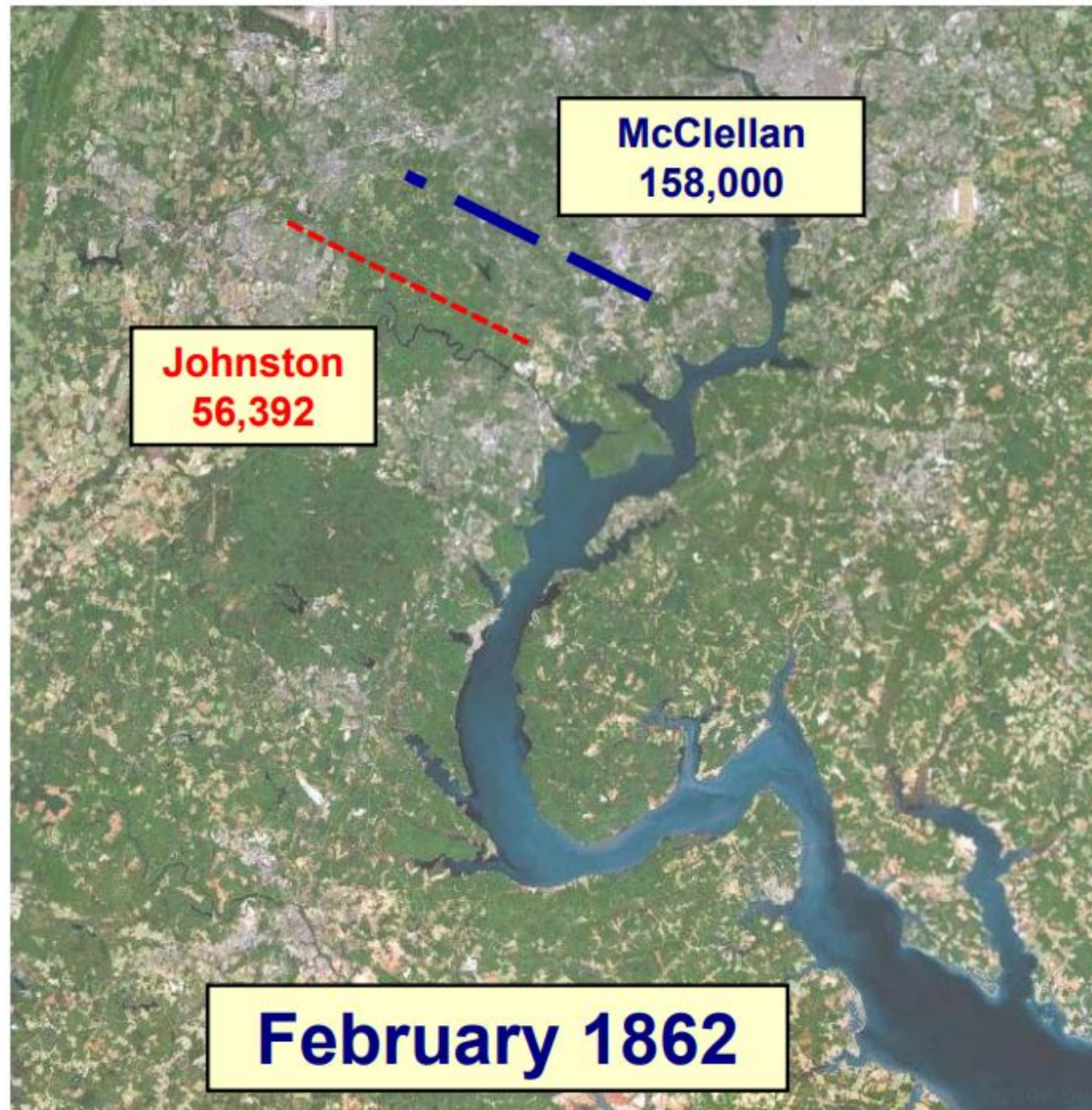
Pinkerton: 117,100

Actual: 118,306

98.98% Accurate

In 1861, Pinkerton gave low and high estimates, but this changed as he saw McClellan's proclivity toward higher numbers





McClellan:

- Sep 61: 130,000
- Oct 61: 150-170,000
- Feb 62: 102,500
- Mar 62: 175,000

Union Aides/Operatives:

- Oct 61: 76,600-77,000
- Mar 62: 87,180

Union Press:

- Sep 61: 60,000
- Feb 62: 60,000

Pinkerton:

- Oct 61: 150,000
- Feb 62: 80,000
- Mar 62: 115,500

Johnston's Actual Forces:

- Oct 61: 40-45,000
- Feb 62: 56,392



McClellan: Conclusion



In Edwin Fishel's "The Secret War for the Union", what is striking is not that McClellan's fantastic assessments were made up, or presented to senior Union leadership without credible, verifiable sources, but that McClellan actually believed them; i.e., they were a subconscious means of dealing with his biases.

"At least this new puzzle makes the earlier one easier to accept; our impression that McClellan was eccentric, quite able to believe the unbelievable, is confirmed. We can give up trying to understand him. But we can make a judgment of how sincere he was in those unreasonable estimates of enemy strength: McClellan did not invent those figures in order to gain more men or more time or for any other purpose. He really believed them."

"Among Civil War generals McClellan had many companions in believing himself outnumbered. With no other army commander, however, did this belief so firmly condemn his campaigns to failure, as on the Peninsula, or deny him a decisive victory, as on the Antietam."



McClellan: Alternative Conclusion

Historian William Styple uncovered information that suggests McClellan intentionally inflated enemy figures to achieve a political end

- In 1861, McClellan provided patently false information about DC being in “imminent danger” to President Lincoln to make it appear General Scott was not adequately defending the Capital
 - McClellan to his wife: “I have to fight my way against him and have thrown a bombshell that has created a perfect stampede in the cabinet – tomorrow the question will probably be decided by giving me absolute control independently of him.”
- McClellan’s confidential aide, Colonel Thomas Key, recommended setting Scott up so that McClellan could achieve more power
- After Antietam, Key was heard saying that McClellan intentionally let Lee’s army escape so that McClellan would have a better chance to run against Lincoln on a peace platform
 - Lincoln was told of this conversation and fired Key

Did McClellan fabricate numbers to 1) place himself in a political advantage and 2) do so without having to lose battles or justify lack of action?



McClellan's Overestimates Continue, 1862

With heavy losses on the Peninsula, the Union held a decisive advantage

Lack of adequate investment and use of intelligence, combined with McClellan's biases eliminated the advantage

	<u>Estimate</u>	<u>Actual</u>
• Feb	102,500	48,000
• Apr 7	100,000+	11,000
• June	200,000	92,000
• Aug 28	120,000	~55,000
• Sept 9	110,000	~55,000 ▼
• Sept 11	120,000	50,000
• Sept 16	100,000	45,000
• Sept 19	140,000	~35,000

Antietam Campaign: Union Intelligence



Allan Pinkerton had a staff of only seven – half as many as on the Peninsula

Pinkerton placed no emphasis on scouting enemy positions, putting emphasis on interrogations and record-keeping – collection was led by other entities on their own initiative

Local citizen networks, small contingent of PA cavalry, associations with PA Central Railroad, and PA Governor Curtin formed the backbone of Union collection and dissemination

William J. Palmer with a handful of cavalry moved into MD with William Wilson, a PA Cent. RR telegrapher, on 10 Sept – provided intell throughout the campaign via telegraph through Gov. Curtin

Local citizens passed information throughout campaign, but with wide variance of accuracy

Confederate misinformation played important role

Lee's Lost Order 191



Lee's campaign plan from Frederick was to split his army into several pieces to simultaneously advance into PA while capturing Harpers Ferry in his rear

Two Union soldiers discovered a mislaid copy of Lee's orders on 13 Sept

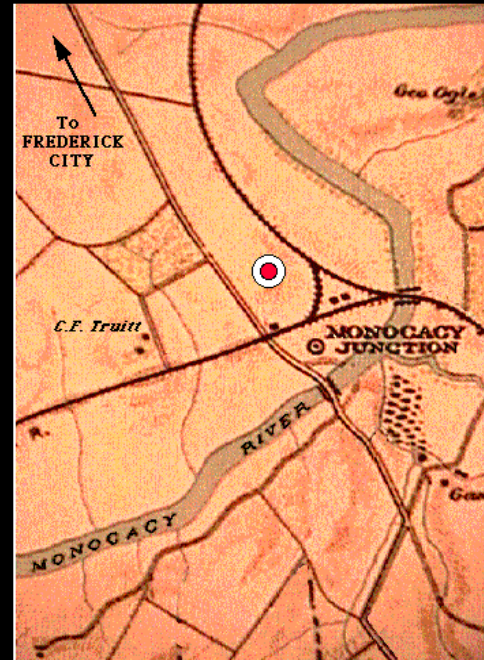


McClellan was provided the Order and immediately announced to a large audience in Frederick that he knew what Lee was doing

Though Lee wouldn't find out about the missing order until Spring 63', a scout reported to Jeb Stuart that McClellan knew Lee's intent and was moving forward

- New York Herald printed a story on the Order on 15 Sept (poor Union OPSEC) about McClellan's having Lee's orders

While assuring Lincoln he would move quickly, McClellan delayed for 18 hours



McClellan and S O 191



McClellan believed the S O 191 to be rigid, and was intolerant of intelligence that showed Rebel movements that did not conform

LEE'S ORDERS WERE NEVER RIGID

Order was ambiguous about whether Martinsburg or Harpers Ferry was Jackson's objective; it ordered the capture of Federal troops at/escaping Harpers Ferry and Martinsburg but did not specify that the purpose was actually to seize those locations.

- S O 191 "WAS NOT A WELL WRITTEN ORDER"



Longstreet deviated in his movement to Boonsboro and how he segmented his forces

Jackson deviated by crossing the Potomac at Williamsport rather than Sharpsburg

Union Intelligence Disconnects



Twenty-nine reports detailed changes in Lee's movements, which went beyond Boonsboro – McClellan refused to believe them

No reports supported that the Rebels were adhering to S O 191, many conflicted and were inaccurate

William Palmer and William Wilson, with a team of scouts, were effective in collecting intelligence carrying a portable telegraph - passed interviews with locals, interrogations, scouting reports

Alexander K. McClure and Governor Andrew G. Curtin were less effective in sending information - abbreviated Wilson's reports but expanded on alarming single source reports from locals

- Confederates had ~440,000 men for an invasion into PA....they in fact had only 45,000

McClure and Curtin did not source the information they passed to senior leadership, putting no more emphasis on a Jackson deserter from New York than a rumor from a young boy

Battle of Antietam



Neither side had solid tactical intelligence to use in planning operations

Lee's plan: block the lower two of the three bridges crossing Antietam Creek, concentrate forces below the north bridge, and fight a defensive battle

McClellan's true plan is unknown, but possibly to commit half of the AoP to drive south from the north bridge, launch a simultaneous diversionary attack against the Confederate right, and strike the center with his reserves if either attack succeeded

A skirmish in the East Woods on 16 Sept served to signal McClellan's intentions to Lee, who prepared his defenses accordingly

McClellan's plan was based on directing his forces against the only visible landmark on the battlefield, the Dunker Church

Battle of Antietam



Significance was not Lee's withdrawal, but McClellan's lack of pursuit

- On Sept 18, the armies remained in their positions – Lee was highly vulnerable
- A quarter of Lee's force was lost in the battle, he had no reserves
- McClellan welcomed an additional 12,000 fresh troops on September 18, combined with 24,000 that saw little or no action the day before

Although outnumbering Lee almost three-to-one, McClellan did not pursue

- McClellan to Lincoln, 18 Sept: "Lee has 140,000 men"
- From Sept 17 to Oct 26, cited shortages of equipment and the fear of overextending his forces
- Relieved of his command on November 7, 1862



12,401
2,108 killed
9,540 wounded
753 captured/missing



10,316
1,546 killed
7,752 wounded
1,108
captured/missing



Union Intelligence to Antietam

Driven by personalities, not requirements

Few resources devoted to intelligence – passive intelligence collection

Shoddy tradecraft

Susceptible to denial and deception



Burnsides in Command

Lincoln promoted Major General Burnside to command, lasted three months

- Asked for a plan to reform intelligence, but took no action
 - It was this plan, developed by John C. Babcock, that was used to create the BMI
- Battle at Fredericksburg, Burnside squandered a 122,000-to-78,000 advantage with thirteen frontal assaults
- Union suffered 12,653 casualties to 5,377

Burnside replaced by General Joseph Hooker

Hooker and Intelligence



- Hooker was a believer in intelligence
- In early 1863, established the Bureau of Military Information (BMI), the first modern all-source intelligence unit in history
 - *“Hooker invented a process and product now called all-source intelligence”* Edwin Fishel
 - Integrated information from: interrogations, released Union prisoners, enslaved and freed African Americans, scouts/spies, cavalry, balloons (GEOINT), captured documents and mail, probing the reconnaissance, OSINT, other commands and outposts, SIGINT, quid pro quo with enemy.....in addition to the general knowledge that the Union already had on the Confederates and their commanders
- Hooker also instituted rigorous OPSEC, banning reporters and civilians from the Army and bolstering picket activities



BMI

Small staff, but highly motivated and effective

- Permanent staff of only 18



Led by Colonel George Sharpe with John Babcock and John McEntee as senior assistants

Immediately established core group of scouts, several from 3rd Indiana Cavalry

Direct authority over interrogations, document exploitation, and spies

Sharpe initiated effort to increase the number of enemy desertions

Developed a professional interrogation program that saw immediate success



Lee believed Union interrogations to be so damaging he issued a circular to his army

BMI Order of Battle Analysis

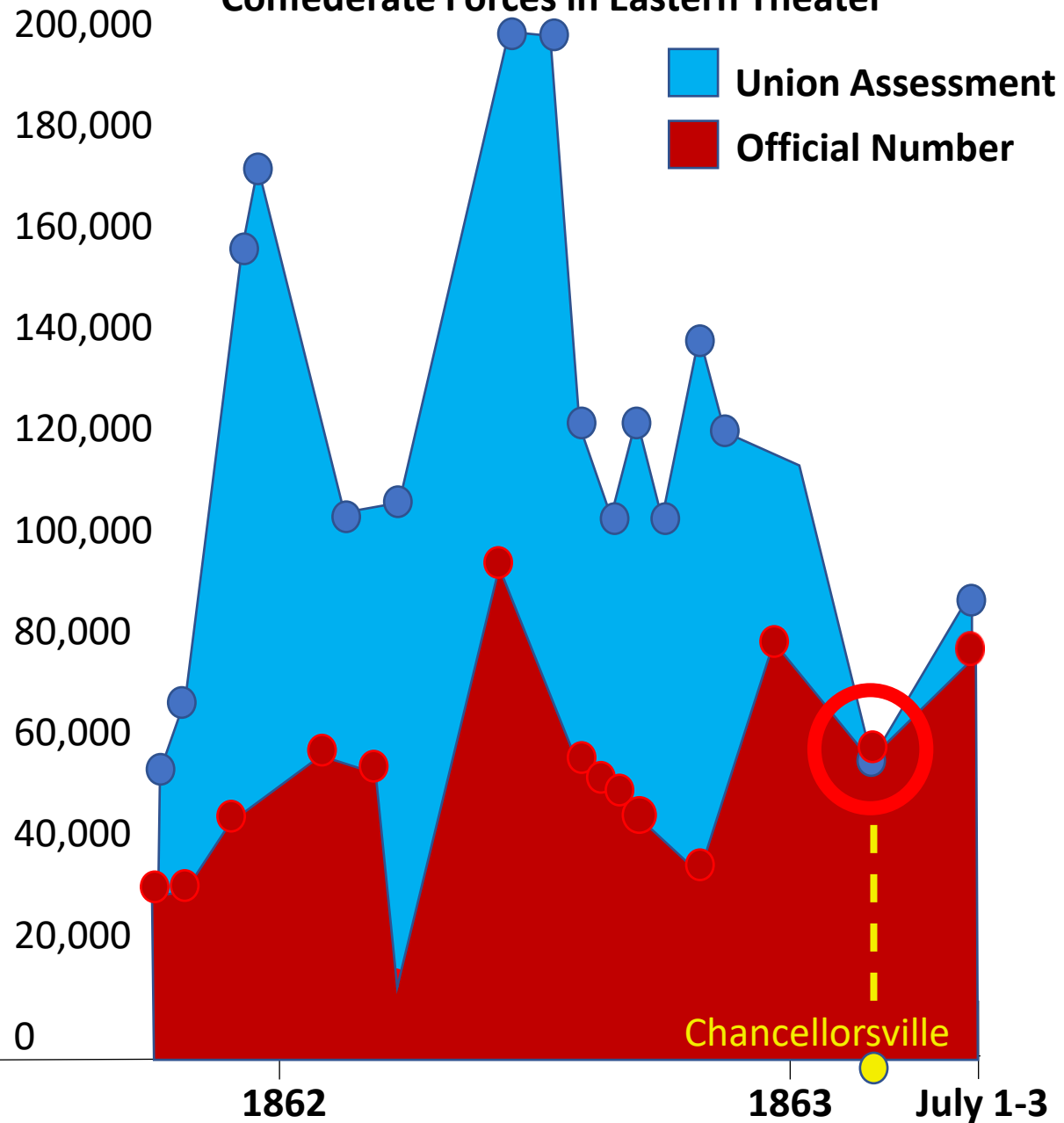


28 April BMI Red Force Analysis

	Official Numbers	BMI	% Error
I CORPS (LONGSTREET)			
Anderson's Div.	8,050	8,200	+2
McLaws' Div.	8,345	6,500	-22
II CORPS (JACKSON)			
A.P. Hill's Div.	11,351	11,600	+2
Rode's Div.	9,663	8,300	-14
Early's Div.	8,297	8,400	+1
Trimble's Div.	6,669	6,800	+2
CAVALRY			
Stuart's Div.	4,138	5,500	+33
TOTAL	56,492	55,300	-2



Union Intelligence Estimates vs. Actual
Confederate Forces in Eastern Theater



CHANCELLORSVILLE CAMPAIGN

Chancellorsville Plan

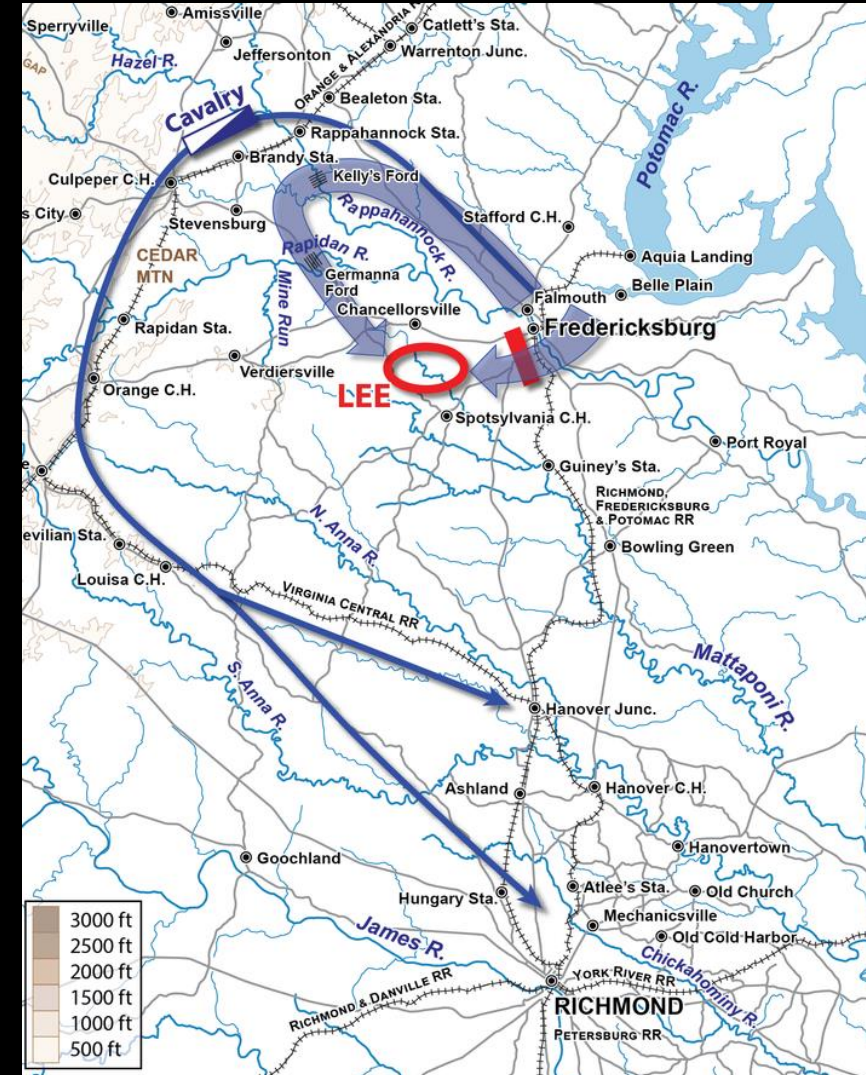


After Burnside's failure to attack Lee in a frontal assault, Hooker sought to flank Lee

- Hold Lee's forces in place with a large force at Fredericksburg
- Send the main body of the Army around Lee's left flank by crossing the Rappahannock and Rapidan rivers
- Send cavalry to attack Lee's line of supply and threaten Richmond

Plan would compel Lee to fight a battle at a disadvantage or retreat from defensive positions

Required clear picture of Confederate order of battle, dispositions, and movements



Misinformation Informed by Intelligence



Confederate cavalry guarded Rapidan and Rappahannock river crossings

BMI was aware Confederates had broken the Union signal codes

Union sent fictitious message in the form of 'casual signalman-to-signalman talk':

- “Our cavalry is going to give Jones & guerrillas in the Shenandoah a smash. They may give Fitz Lee a brush for cover. Keep watch of any movement of infantry that way that might cut them off & post - Capt. C.”

Allusion to a movement into the Shenandoah Valley was designed to draw Lee's attention away from Federal's true intention

- Message was intercepted and sent to Lee, who took it at face value
- April 14, Lee began shifting his entire cavalry to the north and west as a precaution against anticipated Union cavalry movement into the valley
- As a result, Lee created a 20-mile gap in his line along the Rappahannock





Intelligence: Gap in the Line

Interrogations

- Mar (early): Deserter corroborates reinforcement of cavalry to the Valley
- 15 Apr: Deserter corroborates weakness of the enemy left
- 26 Apr: Deserters from three divisions showed no indications that they knew of the impending Union offensive

Scouts and Spies

- Apr (end): Several spies corroborated Confederates did not know of the planned Union offensive

Document Exploitation

- Mar (early): Captured mail en-route to MD suggesting the reinforcement of cavalry to the Valley
- 22 Apr: Captured mail detailed movement of rebel cavalry moving west to Culpeper, and regimental dispositions

Cavalry Forays

- 15 Apr: Reports the arrival of a brigade of cavalry at Culpeper (in addition to a second known brigade)

OSINT / Press

- 18 Apr: Richmond Enquirer identified the lack of Confederate pickets west of Fredericksburg



Intelligence: Gap in the Line

GEOINT / Balloons

- Apr (end): Enemy camps were quiet, no signs they were aware of impending Union offensive

SIGINT / Communications Intercepts

- Mar: Capt. Fisher (Chief, Signal Corps) possessed the full code of rebel signals and was reading all observed enemy communications
- 22 Apr: Signal officers found that the rebels were concerned about Union reinforcements via ship down the Potomac threatening their right, not their left
- Apr (end): No intercepts indicating rebels were aware of impending Union offensive

Citizens / Refugees

- 23 Apr: Citizen of Maine returning from NC via Shenandoah identified Confederate cavalry forces in the Valley

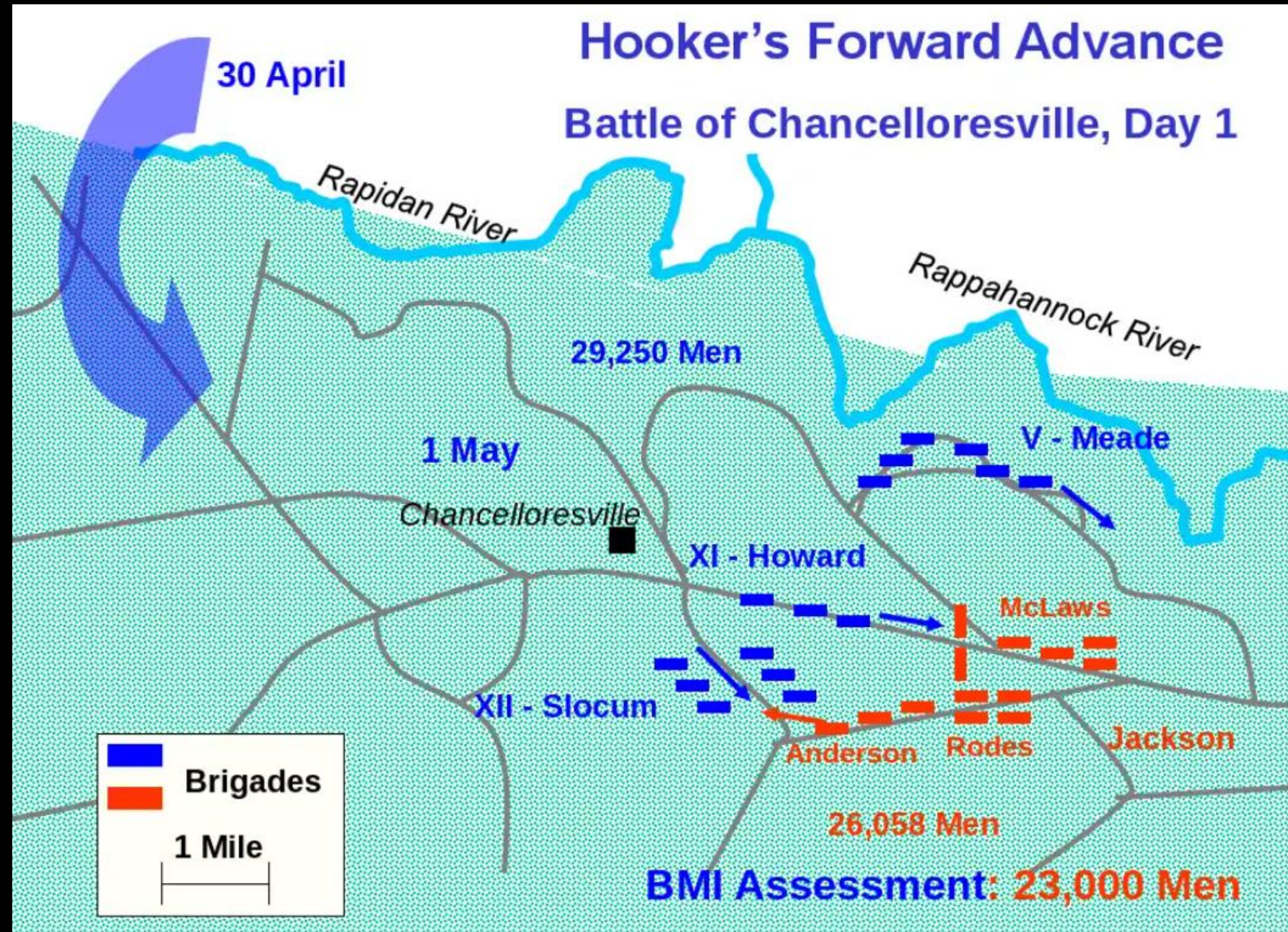
Escaped Slaves

- Husband wife team passed precise information from Fredericksburg across the river to Union positions using a “clothesline code” (different color cloths on the line represented different Confederate units, and would be moved according to their location)

As three Union corps made their way through the Confederate gap on Lee's left, the BMI accurately assessed the forces moving against them

Hooker halted his forces in the dense woods of Chancellorsville, ceding the advantage to Lee

Intelligence got the Union to the right point, but from here on it would be Hooker vs Lee



During the Battle



Union cavalry failed to cripple the Confederate railway – Longstreet's two divisions further south could be en-rout

- HQ received telegraph from Suffolk that deserters from Longstreet's divisions verified Longstreet hadn't moved

BMI spent night of 1 May interrogating prisoners and had a near perfect picture of the AoNV

- “Anderson, McLaws, Rhodes & Trimble are in front of us. I think only Early & A.P. Hill are left down there”
- By morning, confirmed that Hill's division was also in their front
- Spy from Richmond learned that daily rations indicated Lee had a strength of 59,000
- Only shortfall was that one brigade of McLaws division (~1,500) was with Early's division

Hooker had virtually perfect intelligence about the whereabouts of the enemy, which drove his planning for the 2nd

Jackson's March



JEB Stuart identified the Union left flank was in the air – Jackson took 26,000 men on a 12-mile march to attack it

Union forces identified the march, but

- Hooker misinterpreted the movement, believing Lee was retreating west
- Nevertheless, issued orders for Reynolds corp to reinforce the right flank
- Issued multiple orders to Howard on the right to realign for possible attack
- Reynolds orders were delayed, Howard disobeyed order

Maj. Gen. Oliver Howard: “The woods are thick and entangled, will anybody come through there?”

Colonel Comstock: “Oh, they may!”



Intelligence in Later Stages

Union Balloons provided information on the abandonment of Fredericksburg, then warned of Lee's forces returning east to confront Sedgewick

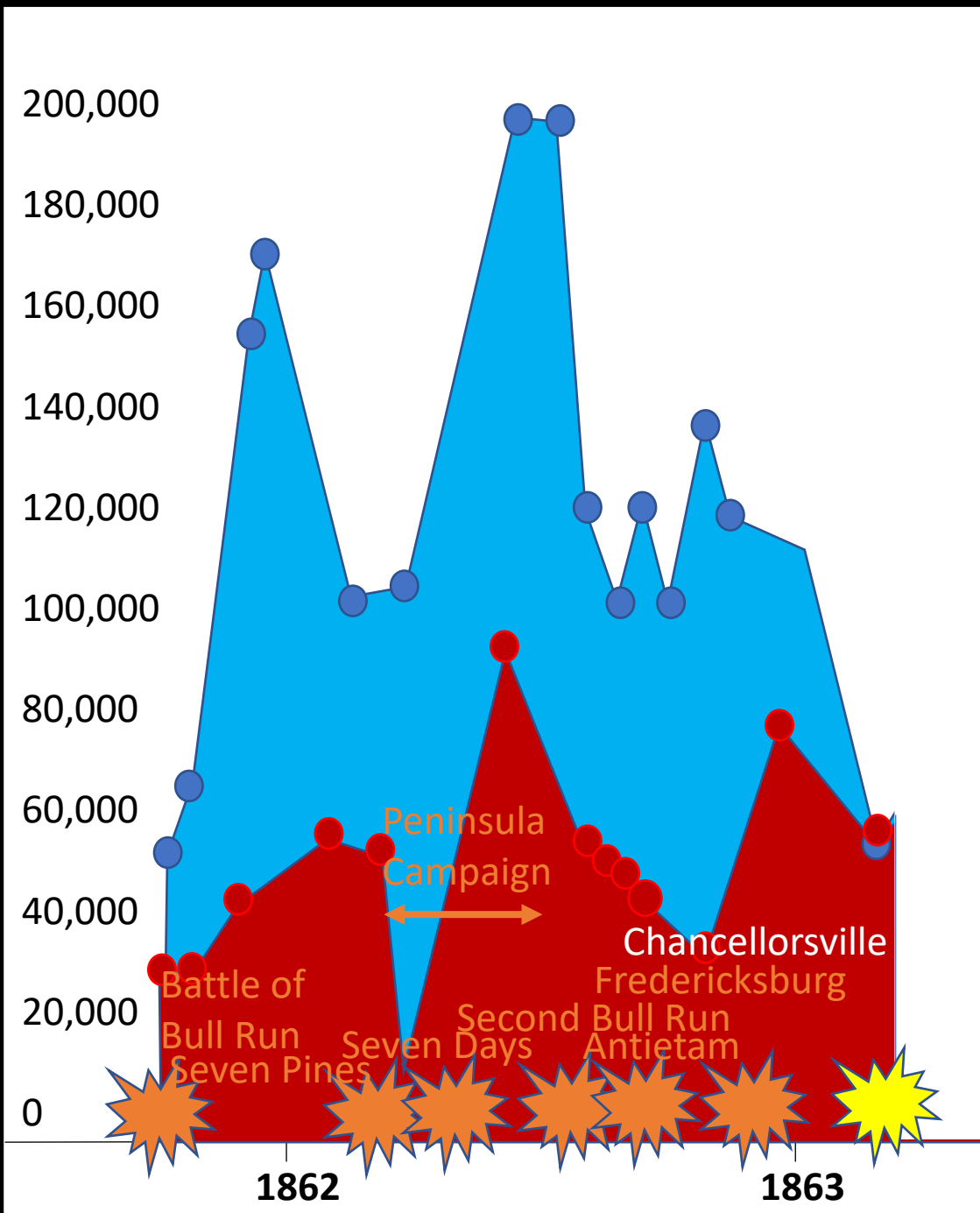
BMI interrogated 824 prisoners from 2-5 May, but information was sometimes clouded by gossip and mistaken unit identifications

- No prisoners from Richmond units or Longstreet's corps indicating Lee received no reinforcements
- Scouts rode to nearest Confederate railway and corroborated no reinforcements

Within two weeks of the conclusion of the battle, BMI provided accurate figure of Confederate casualties: 14,348 vs. actual of 13,460

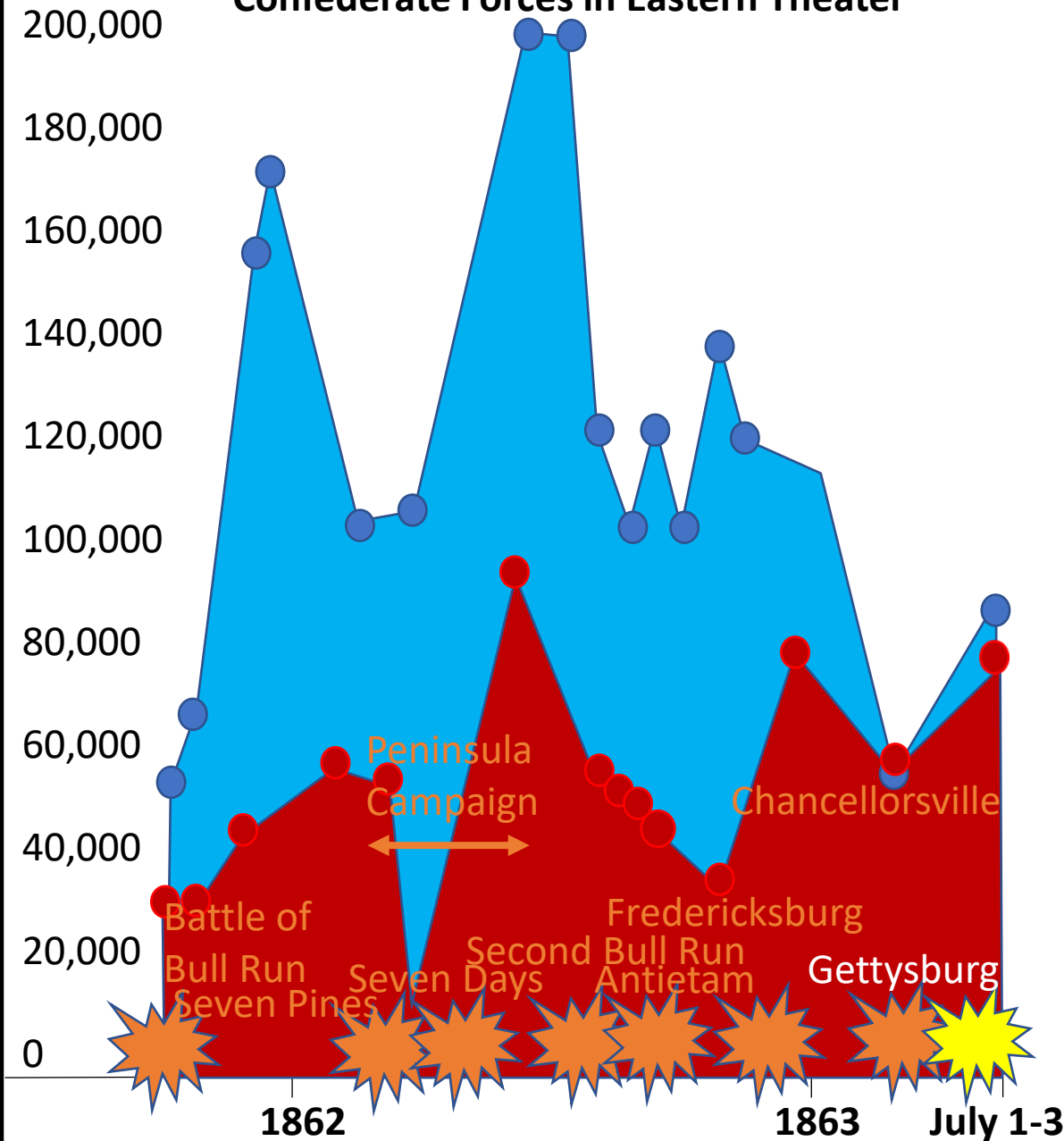
BMI continued order-of-battle analysis setting the groundwork for Gettysburg

POSITIVE Intelligence: Chancellorsville



- Precise order-of-battle and topographic information
- Eliminated uncertainty and enabled audacious planning
- Informed use of misinformation against Lee
- 93% accurate assessment of Lee's losses (14,348 vs. 13,460)

Union Intelligence Estimates vs. Actual Confederate Forces in Eastern Theater



POSITIVE Intelligence: Gettysburg



- Confident decision-making, including determination to fight at Gettysburg
- Held Union forces at Gettysburg at the end of 2 July
- Informed where Pickett's Charge would occur, where to place Union reinforcements
- Lee had no reinforcements

Conclusions



While intelligence is only one factor in warfare, it enables informed decision-making: cautious vs. audacious, where to deploy forces, strategic vs. operational vs. tactical

The Union failed dramatically in 1861-62 to exploit advantages, not the least of which was Antietam, due to poor intelligence capabilities – can be laid at the hands of MG McClellan

Creation of the BMI enabled the Union to wield the full might of its sword...unfortunately, the sword was in the wrong hand at Chancellorsville

“A dozen reasons have been adduced for the outcome of the Battle of Gettysburg...Now comes Union intelligence to take its place beside these other nominees for the credit of victory – its case is a strong one.” Edwin Fishel, *Secret War for the Union*