Colonel James D. Nance South Carolina's Civil Wars 'Proper Commander'

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Colonel James Drayton Nance was born in Newberry, South Carolina on October 10, 1837. He was a graduate of the Citadel and a practicing attorney at the outbreak of the Civil War. He was also instrumental in the training of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina Infantry. Most of the young men who went to war were wholly unprepared. Many on both sides felt the war would be short and never contemplated the horrors they would encounter. These young men had no military training, and what military knowledge they did possess came from ramshackle militia units whose real purpose was to patrol for runaway slaves. These militia units were described as worthless. They had no uniforms and no weapons of impact. They joined the militia units for fun and frolic, never realizing that war was a serious business. All students of the Civil War are familiar with the Lee’s, Stuarts, Jacksons, and Hamptons, but what about the colonels? It was men like James D. Nance in the fog of battle that would make the crucial decisions about life and death. Historians have devoted little attention to these men. Although there are excellent unit histories, little has been written about the men who trained and led these units. It has been stated that Nance showed an outstanding ability to lead, and that his command
followed him never questioning his skill. His ability to advance under the pressure of combat and his ability to extract his command from destruction never faltered. His mental capacity was always sharp and his decisions toward his command sound. Nance was a strict disciplinarian who had a demanding nature. His devotion to duty never wavered and he expected the same from his men. This is an excellent opportunity to study and analyze a part of the command structure of the Civil War that has been neglected by historians.

I have relied upon Colonel Nance’s letters to his sister Laura more than any other source to tell Nance’s story in his own words. It is not only an opportunity for Nance to speak for himself; it is also an addition to Civil War historiography. Nance had a close relationship with his sister, and his letters to her reveal a man devoted to his cause, his ideology, his family, and his God. These letters have provided a window into another time.
DEDICATION

To my Family: Tammy, Brandon, Leigh, Jesse, and Jessica. All of you have contributed to this project more than you know.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many contributors to a project such as this. And I feel it my duty to take a moment and mention some of them. I would like to thank my parents and grandparents who sat on the front porch after a long hot summer day and reflected upon a past that to me will forever make my childhood special. It was on these occasions that I developed a love for history. These front porch gatherings are a tradition that is sadly fading away.

I would like to thank my wife Tammy who gave up her Saturday’s to walk cemeteries, which she felt was “creepy,” and to browse libraries and archives, which she felt was “boring.” When walking through cemeteries she was usually the first to find our objective, and when looking through archives she never complained about the dust that played havoc with her sinuses. One could not ask for more devotion.

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Paul Anderson, who gave me sound advice and went above and beyond his duty to help a student. I would also like to thank Dr. Rod Andrew for his help and the classes in southern history that I enjoyed being a part of. There is also Dr. Alan Grubb, whose lunch I was forever interrupting but was still gracious enough to read my thesis and give me helpful suggestions. I will always be in their debt. I thank all of you for your support.
I would also like to mention the Liberians at Clemson’s Cooper Library and Anderson County’s Liberians in The South Carolina Room. I could never remember your names but I will never forget your kindness. Thanks to all of you.
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PREFACE

As a child of the 1960’s I remember sitting on my grandparent’s front porch after dinner and listening to the stories the “old folks” would share. These front porch gatherings during the hot days of summer were a long tradition in the South until air-conditioning became affordable for everyone.

This is how I first learned about Colonel James D. Nance of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry. As I grew older and researched my family history, I found that I had ancestors in the 3rd South Carolina. The literature on General Lee and his lieutenants is extensive. But few studies exist about men such as Colonel Nance who made crucial life and death decisions. James D. Nance wrote dozens of letters to his sister Laura, who he confided in about his battle field actions, his political standings, and his religious convictions. Using these letters and other material gathered I have tried to piece together the life of a man who often showed more competence than the generals above him. In 1864 General Lee stated that his army would “go anywhere and do anything if properly led. But there is the difficulty—proper commanders—where can they be obtained?” Lee was writing a response to a statement made by General Hood in which he was devastated by the death of General “Stonewall” Jackson. How could Lee replace such men? I am not trying to argue that Colonel James D. Nance was another
“Stonewall” Jackson, but he was that “proper commander” who took young men with no training in the art of war, and in most cases had never been more than fifty miles from home, and molded them into one of the best all around units in General Lee’s army.
Illustration 1. Colonel James Drayton Nance of the 3rd South Carolina Volunteers
INTRODUCTION
Colonel James D. Nance
South Carolina’s Civil War’s
“Proper Commander”

Colonel James D. Nance, commander of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, was killed at The Battle of the Wilderness in May of 1864. This unfortunate incident occurred when General Robert E. Lee attacked General Ulysses S. Grant (the newly appointed General in Chief of the Union army) soon after Grant’s army had crossed the Rapidan River at Germanna Ford and was marching toward a thick growth of forest known as the Wilderness. Lee chose to attack Grant in this position, which has been described as a tangled mass of brush and briars that was “unnerving,”\(^1\) to neutralize Grant’s vast supply of troops and superior artillery. The confrontation on the 5\(^{th}\) was certainly spirited, but Lee did not want to bring on a full engagement with Grant without his First Corps and its commander General James Longstreet, whom Lee called his “Old War Horse” and was a day’s march behind. Because of the delay in Longstreet’s movement, Lee had not committed fully his Second and Third Corps to battle. General Ewell, commanding the Second Corps, had kept the Union forces at bay and had

prevented any break in his lines\textsuperscript{2} and, according to his latest biographer, “was at his best” during this crucial period.\textsuperscript{3} However, historian J. Tracy Power points out that the attacks against the Third Corps, commanded by General Ambrose Powel Hill, were “more effective.” This is not to say, however, that General Hill had not stood his ground; he had, but his troops were “disorganized” from the continuous influx of troops on his front, and as night fell, and the firing from both sides abated, Hills troops, exhausted and needing rest badly, laid on their arms where they fell. Because of the terrain of the wilderness and the “natural obstacles” within it, Ewell and Hill had allowed a gap to emerge between their corps. This error would cost Hill’s soldiers dearly with the coming of sunrise.\textsuperscript{4}

On the morning of May 6, 1864 the Federals attacked, causing General Hill’s troops to fall back in confusion. With General Wadsworth’s Union soldiers exerting pressure on Hill’s left, and General Hancock’s troops turning Hill’s right, both flanks begin to break and, according to General Porter Alexander, the

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{4} J. Tracy Power. Lee’s Miserables, p. 17.
\end{itemize}
center was being “rapidly rolled up.” A participant in the battle stated that “The pressure was irresistible,” and Hill’s troops, realizing the precarious situation they were in, began to fall back down the Plank Road. As General Longstreet’s men reached the field, a Confederate officer in Longstreet’s corps stated that Hill’s men “were utterly panic-stricken, and...it looked as if there was bound to be a headlong stampede.” Leading Longstreet’s corps was General Kershaw’s 2nd and 3rd South Carolina infantry. If not for General Longstreet plugging the gap in the lines at such a crucial moment, Union soldiers in General Hancock’s command would have most certainly broken through. A soldier in the ranks remembered that it looked as if the “whole Federal Army was upon us.” General Hancock believed that if he could have delivered the blow he had intended to deliver, victory would have been “assured.”

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7 John Haskell. *The Haskell Memoirs*, ed. by Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1960), p. 63. J.F.J. Caldwell, author of “A History of A Brigade of South Carolinians” stated that “There was no panic and no great haste; the men seemed to fall back from a deliberate conviction that it was impossible to hold the ground, and, of course, foolish to attempt it.” P.133. However, the evidence of panic among Hill’s troops is overwhelming.


to stop the flow of Union soldiers they met seven of General Hancock’s twelve
brigades, and at the same time had to make a gap in their own lines to allow
Hill’s panic stricken troops to pass through, no easy task. General Longstreet,
watching the movement take place, “admired the steadiness of his troops”
perform such a difficult maneuver in the heat of battle. An officer in
Longstreet’s corps also watched the troops advance with “confusion on every
side” and he too remarked how “steady” the men were coming “onward like a
river in the sea of confused and troubled human waves around them.”10 In this
mass of “human waves,” of death and confusion, was Colonel James D. Nance,
leading his South Carolinians in an effort to halt and reverse what could have
been one of the most dangerous misfortunes that Lee’s army had ever faced. In
this effort, Colonel Nance, who has been described as one of the most “gallant”
and “accomplished” officers in the Confederate army,11 fell around 9:00 a.m.
“cheering on his men.”12 He was characterized as one of “the best all round
soldiers in Kershaw’s Brigade” and considered one of the most efficient officers

10 Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, Vol. IV, p. 124.
11 The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate
O.R.Mac Wyckoff,A History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry:1861-1865, (Fredericksburg, Virginia
“never before had [such] a large portion of Lee’s army faced such an imminent possibility of
destruction."

12 Wyckoff, A History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, p. 175.
in the performance of his duties as a tactician and disciplinarian in the Confederate army. In battle he was “vigilant” and “aggressive” and never panicked. A soldier who witnessed Colonel Nance and his abilities on the field of battle stated that Nance never lost his head in any emergency and that all who witnessed him under fire admired and respected his calm demeanor. Colonel Nance was known under some of the deadliest fire to “change direction” and bring his command safely back—unsupported—by column of fours. At Knoxville, Tennessee, Nance’s regiment was “selected” to attack and force back a brigade of Federal troops whose position General James Longstreet wished to occupy. Colonel Nance took his regiment and advanced into one of the most deadly hails of bullets ever witnessed. The fire was so intense that Nance’s men were forced to stop their advance. Knowing that the eyes of his commanding officer were upon him and his troops, he seized the flag, rallied his men, and broke through the enemy’s works, taking the “coveted” field. Colonel William Wallace of the second regiment of South Carolina Volunteers remembered that when Nance spoke of the ordeal it was to praise his troops, and not one word did he utter in praise of his own heroic deeds. Wallace, a witness to the event at Knoxville, wrote that he “was struck with Col. Nance’s coolness on that trying occasion (a

\[13\]Dickert, A History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p. 353, 357.
quality so essential to a commanding officer) which commanded the confidence and admiration of the Brigade.”¹⁴

Major General J. B. Kershaw would write of Nance that he had “highly distinguished [himself] in the field.”¹⁵ Historian Douglas Southall Freeman, author of Lee’s Lieutenants, believed that “Few were more lamented by a brigade” than Colonel Nance.¹⁶ A monument would be placed on the battlefield where he fell, which is certainly a testimony to the high regard his men felt toward him.¹⁷ And, according to one historian, his competence was clearly visible from all who witnessed his performance.¹⁸

There is probably no Colonel in the Confederate army from South Carolina who has received any higher praise from his commander, troops, and historians as Colonel James D. Nance. He was an 1856 graduate of The Citadel Military Academy in Charleston, South Carolina, and was admitted to the Bar in 1859. All who knew him stated that he was a righteous person who put God first

¹⁷ Wyckoff, History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, p. 177. Wyckoff writes that “Little is known about the Nance Monument.”
in all “considerations,” and even when given an order on Sunday he reminded his men to never forget their devotion to God and remember that it was still the Sabbath day. Colonel Nance commanded his regiment in the battles of Seven Pines, Savage Station, Malvern Hill, Maryland Heights, Sharpsburg, Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, Knoxville, and the Wilderness. At his death he was to have received his commission as Brigadier General. The direction and purpose of this thesis is to not only redeem from obscurity a soldier who was clearly qualified for his position, but also to try to comprehend the meaning of Lee’s famous statement that the Confederate army would be “invincible” if the “proper commanders” could be found. There, Lee said, lay the “difficulty—proper commanders—where can they be obtained?” Colonel Nance was certainly one of these commanders. He illustrates both Lee’s ideal and the difficulty of obtaining it. None performed on Nance’s level with more extraordinary tactical ingenuity and imagination. But how did he accomplish this, and how did he manage not only to train unruly soldiers, but to have them react to his authority in the dense, smoke filled heat of battle with death and destruction all around? Before we can begin to answer some of these questions, we need to understand what kind of a commander he was and the obstacles he

19 Carwile, Reminiscences of Newberry, p. 251.
faced. To do this we must first start at the beginning when South Carolina was in the process of ending its long and strained union with the Federal government.

In December of 1860 South Carolina, faced with the election of Abraham Lincoln, immediately began to discuss the discrepancies in interests between the two sections that had long existed, and the Palmetto state believed that the animosity felt among South Carolinians was strong enough for the likelihood of secession. Decades of assertions and threats had finally become a reality. Along with the realization of secession was the immediate problem of military preparedness. The governor and legislature believed it was crucial that South Carolina prepare for an invasion, and without the military might it coveted, was forced to create an army overnight.21

South Carolina was deficient in arms and trained men and, according to a report issued by The 1860 Association (a propaganda organization with the intent to react against any Northern efforts “to soothe and conciliate the South”), South Carolina had in its possession only 17,000 pounds of powder, mostly for the use in cannons, 1,000 shot and shell, 311 serviceable rifled muskets (those had been given to the state by the U.S. government), 5,252 muskets, 321 rifles and 457 pistols of the old pattern but would certainly serve

the immediate need. Separate from this total were the 636 percussion muskets housed at the Citadel. In 1851 South Carolina had purchased forty-nine pieces of heavy ordnance and about sixty field guns, but “the most serious deficiency was in small arms and powder.” The 1860 Association also issued a report of what it would cost to equip 87 companies of infantry, 9 companies of artillery, and 20 troops of cavalry. The total price would be $384,510. In 1860 this was a huge sum for any state. 22 General Clement A. Evans reported that by seizing Forts Moultrie and Pinckney and the arsenal in Charleston, the state added to its military stores sixteen 24 pounders, nineteen 32 pounders, ten 8 inch columbiads, one 10 inch seacoast mortar, four 6 pounders, two 12 pounders and four 24 pounders howitzers and a large supply of ammunition. Evans stated that “At Castle Pinckney the armament was nearly complete and the magazine well filled with powder.” He also reported that the Charleston arsenal held a huge supply of “military stores, heavy ordnance and small-arms.” 23

Regardless of the capture of the many military stores, South Carolina was not prepared for an invasion. However, as one historian has stated, it was not “as irrational” as one might think that such a small state as South Carolina

could contemplate freedom from a much larger entity as the United States.

“History was replete with [such] examples...by better organization and greater élan.” South Carolinians remembered the American Revolution as “not a distant myth but a living memory,” and the Mexican War as “short” and “decisive.” Few on either side believed that “total mobilization” would take place. And South Carolina believed that even the North, regardless of how it felt about secession, would never approve of coercion by the federal government. Thus, “secession was a risk but not a preposterous one.”

At the time of secession, South Carolina was operating under a militia system that had been enacted in 1841. The system was “inefficient,” “decrepit” and, according to one historian, “well-nigh worthless.” By 1860 the militia had developed into nothing more than “social clubs” lacking authority and esprit de corps. Many of the volunteer companies were without appropriate

24 Clyde N. Wilson, *Carolina Cavalier*, p. 135.
26 Steven A. Channing. *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), p. 270. According to Channing, the militia system was in such disarray that “The Constitution of the Minute Men for the defense of southern rights” was enacted in Columbia South Carolina “to promote the formation of volunteer infantry and cavalry companies throughout the state.” The Minute Men duties were to see that no “destruction” came to southern property, they were to “assist” the vigilante committees and, according to one Minute man, were “to prepare the minds, arms, and estates of the people of South Carolina for a defense against the domination of a mongrel tyrants who mean...to reduce [southerners] on a level with the slaves you buy and sell.” Channing also gives evidence that these Minute Men were being trained “to march at a minute’s notice to Washington for the purpose of preventing Lincoln’s inauguration in case of his election.” P. 269 (note 33), 270.
27 Cauthen, *South Carolina Goes to War*, p.110.
uniforms and weapons essential for proper drilling. In many communities around South Carolina these men drilled by substituting wooden slabs for the old smooth bore rifles. In short, the military was deficient in strength and force and contributed little to the defense of the state. This was partially due to the officers, who joined in hopes of a political career or advancing in politics. When the militia did meet, it was nothing more than a “picnic” for officers more interested in campaigning and electioneering than serious, systematic instruction and drill.  

These militia “muster fields,” as one historian so succinctly stated, was “every rural man’s political hall.” Politics was not the only problem that plagued the South Carolina militia. The units were scattered across the state and never brought together to drill. This presented a serious problem when state troops began training to maneuver in regimental and brigade form. It would be imperative for these undertrained militia units to acquire the knowledge needed to perform highly intricate movements in order to advance from a marching column to battle formation without any indecision.

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28 Ibid, p.110.
Regardless of how “useless” some believed the militia was, southerners looked upon it as an honor to be affiliated with the military. Historian Wiley Sword states in his book, *Southern Invincibility: a History of the Confederate Heart*, “that Soldiering [was] the opportunity of a life time—fascinating to many, and almost a compulsion to some.” Because of the enthusiasm for military life, white southerners lined up by the thousands to volunteer. After South Carolina succeeded from the Union, a mother wrote her son, then a university student, that he could not “sit idly by,” you must be “up and doing.”31 As historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown has so skillfully argued in his book, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, white southerners could have taken no other path and still maintain the code of honor they felt was so essential to their way of life. Wyatt-Brown has argued that “primal honor,” or simply put “personal bravery,” was a code of honor that the South held to and would die defending.

Southerners “boasted that they stood next to no other people” in courage. J.J McKilla from Sumterville, South Carolina, gave a typical toast at an Independence Day militia banquet that gives evidence to Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s statement when, with glass raised, he boasted that South Carolinians were “bold and chivalrous in war, mild and persuasive in peace, their spirits

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flush[ed] with the resentment for wrong.” To many southerners the Civil War was nothing more than a “simple test of manhood.”32 The road to honor that southerners subscribed to was evident throughout the war. After the Battle of Second Manassas a Confederate officer, flushed with “primal honor,” spoke in a defiant tone (and with some exaggeration) that “such men could never be whipped upon any fair field...no matter what odds were against them. To kill them was the only way to conquer them.” A Confederate lieutenant reiterated what his war time colleague had said when he stated that “I will fight them [the enemy] as long as I can crawl...We will fight...as long as there is a man [remaining]...For I had [just as soon] die as [to] become a [Yankee] subject.” The angry and boastful rebel went on to fulminate that “we who fight for our wives and children, our homes, and property cannot be whipped....” A Georgia volunteer echoed the sentiment by saying “To conquer us is to kill us.”33

Although southerners would soon learn that boasting and action were two different things, James Cooper Nisbet, a former confederate soldier, who wrote *4 Years on the Firing Line*, probably gave the southern soldier the best epitaph when he stated that “in a well-organized regiment he (the southerner) soon

became imbued with *esprit du corps* and is now conceded that a better fighter than the southern (soldier) the world never saw.” He had to be, explained Nisbet (with a hint of bias in his words), for if he “Had...been lacking in intelligence, bravery, endurance or patriotism, [the southern army] could not have resisted, for four years the strongest government, financially and numerically, in the world.”

Knowing that the patriotic spirit felt by South Carolinians ran high, the South Carolina convention, which had been called into session because of the likelihood of secession, passed an act to provide an armed military force if the Governor of South Carolina felt that an invasion threatened the sovereignty of the State. Three days later the Ordinance of Secession was passed. During the same session, the convention also passed a provision for the raising of one or more corps of regular volunteers and for the raising of a regiment of six month volunteers. Both resolutions were to be implemented immediately. South Carolina responded to the call with alacrity. From this band of militia misfits, the state legislature authorized and directed the governor to engraft a system of volunteers. This system would include a “volunteer company of infantry from

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each militia infantry battalion, two rifle companies from each militia infantry
brigade, one or more cavalry companies from each militia cavalry regiment, and
one regiment of artillery from Charleston.” The governor also called one
company of artillery each from Columbia, Georgetown, and Beaufort. This act
also gave the governor the authority to allow into service any volunteer
organization that did not have a full number of officers and men and to draft
men from any militia battalion that did not supply its full quota within thirty
days. These volunteer units were to be organized into battalions, regiments, and
brigades under the command of a major general, all to be appointed by the
governor. The convention also gave the governor discretion as to when these
forces were to be called up for duty. A provision was attached to the bill stating
that the volunteer units were not to exceed twelve months. This law was
designed to raise ten thousand men.³⁶

Except for the old militia units, many of these young men had no military
training, and what training they did have come from patrolling for runaway
slaves and scaring the slaves into submission. These men were youngsters, and
joined these volunteer units for the spirit of fun and frolic, never realizing a

³⁶ Cauthen, South Carolina Goes to War, p.113, 114. See also Robert S. Seigler. South Carolina’s
Military Organizations During the War Between the States Vol. III (Charleston: The History Press,
soldier’s life. When the call for war did come, these men came from all over
the state and most assembled at Charleston. It has been estimated that as
many as 60,000 South Carolinians (and possibly more) joined the Confederate
Army. The exact number will probably never be known because of multiple
enlistments and South Carolinians enlisting in North Carolina units due to
bonuses. Historian Walter Edgar has written that “In 1860 there were only
60,000 white males of military age (eighteen to forty-five) in the state. In
January 1864 a report from the Confederate conscription office said that 60,127
had responded to their country’s call. There can be no question that
participation was extraordinary high.” South Carolina’s determination and
willpower was evident in the early draft laws that permitted the hiring of
substitutes. For example, Georgia hired 7,050 substitutes and Virginia 15,000,
while South Carolina only hired 791. Davis Harris, a South Carolinian, probably
evoked South Carolina’s willingness to join volunteer units when he wrote in
1862, “The time has come for all such men as me to go to the field & do our part
for the defense(sic) of our country...Every-one should do their part.” Passions

37 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.16.
38 J.F.J Caldwell. The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, Known First As “Greggs,” and
Subsequently As “McGowan’s Brigade.”(Marietta, Georgia: Continental Book Company 1951),
p.10.
39 Walter Edgar. South Carolina A History, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina
were running high in South Carolina and, according to one contemporary, “All are for action now.” South Carolinians were “exasperated and heated,” and had worked themselves into such a “fever” that “only bloodletting” could ever release the pent-up emotions that the Palmetto State felt toward the North. Mary Chesnut, ever the close observer, remembered that South Carolina could not work fast enough to leave the Union. You’re “too slow...hurry up” she wrote. It seemed to the famous diarist that “There was a fire in the rear of the hottest.”

Henry William Ravenel, a South Carolina botanist of international fame, reiterated his fellow South Carolinian when he confided in his diary that “I have never seen such excitement” and “the same feeling exists among all classes of the citizens.” This type of rhetoric, displayed in many letters and diaries across South Carolina, probably played a huge part in the low number of substitutes.

D. August Dickert, a farm boy whose parents worked the Dutch Fork section of Lexington, near the Newberry County line, remembered that while walking to school all he could think of was that Fort Sumter must be taken. He was so enamored with war that he could not concentrate on anything else, and

tossing his books aside he forgot about school and boarded a train whose cars were full of excited volunteers chanting “war war.” Dickert, like so many others who were eager to prove their manhood, and who saw the war as an exciting experience full of adventure and daring feats, found a place among the glee-full South Carolinians and joined in the celebration. Morale and excitement knew no heights as the train rolled down the tracks toward Charleston, South Carolina, and all anyone on board could think of was that the Palmetto State was finally going to have its revenge against the North. One established historian of the Civil War who has analyzed this kind of emotion claims it stemmed from a dull, “often-humdrum existence” of life in rural communities where nothing exciting ever happened. The drums of war elated young men like Dickert and his companions to the point of frenzy, and it was “exhilarating” to be instilled with such a fighting spirit. However, such emotions are common in all wars, until the horrors of the battlefield abated such notions.

When these excited young men arrived at their destination and disembarked from the train, they were nothing more than an “organized mob actuated more by enthusiasm than by experience.” The men that would make up the fighting force of both North and South at the beginning of the war were a


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massed collection of distinct units, “each with its own degree of importance, pride, proficiency, and jealousy.” Never before had America seen such armies in the field. The magnitude of the Civil War was beyond comprehension in 1861. By the time the northern army marched toward the wilderness and the carnage that awaited North and South, Sylvanus Cadwallader stated that the Union army was an “awesome” sight to behold. Grant marched 120,000 soldiers, 274 artillery pieces, 835 ambulance wagons, 4,300 supply wagons, 56,000 horses and mules, thousands of cattle, tons of food, medicine, ammunition and whatever else an army of that size would need. Cadwallader would write that if the “wagons alone could have been arranged in a single file, the line would have...stretched from the Rapidan River to Petersburg—a distance of seventy-five miles.” James I. Robertson, Jr. has written that “In spite of such size, the Civil War from first to last was an infantryman’s contest.” On the Union’s side 80% of the fighting men were foot soldiers, 14% served in the cavalry and the remaining 6% commanded the artillery. The infantry formed 75% of the Confederate army, 20% were cavalry, and the remaining 5% were in the artillery.43

43 James I. Robertson, Jr. Soldiers Blue and Gray, (Columbia: South Carolina: University Of South Carolina Press, 1988), p. 19. George Cary Eggleston would write after the war that “The Southern army...was simply a vast mob of rather ill-armed young gentleman from the country.” Eggleston
As these citizens soldiers were brought together for training, discipline had to be instilled. “Civil War soldiers were the worst troops and the best fighters that America ever produced,” states historian James I. Robertson, Jr. Robertson believes that the volunteers who came forward for service “tended to remain more citizen than soldier.”44 A South Carolina volunteer remembered that it “took great patience, determination, and toil” from the Citadel cadets who were brought forward as drill masters to bring military discipline to shop and field workers. These men were accustomed to home life, and despite the fever of patriotism that swept through South Carolina, it would take time to command the free spirit and personal freedom these men believed was a God-given right. D. Augustus Dickert referred to these raw soldiers as “wild colts” who would have to be harnessed gently. These South Carolinians “dreaded discipline and restraint,” confessed Dickert, and would only concede it once they realized that discipline was a “necessity” for staying alive.45 Lee would say of his army that it was “composed” of “the best [men] in the world, and if properly disciplined and instructed,” could “resist any force...brought against it.”46

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44 Ibid. p.122.
45 Dickert, A History of Kershaw’s Brigade, P.33, 34, 106.
General Lee would continue to “urge” his officers “to inspire” their men to observe a better state of discipline in order to acquire superior mobility and to imbue a feeling of superiority into the army to oppose “the many advantages” the federals hold “over us, both in numbers and material, which the enemy possess.” As Lee’s soldiers surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse, the general held firm to his belief that “he could always rely on his army for fighting, but its discipline was poor.” Although the Army of Northern Virginia would never equal the Army of the Potomac in discipline, General E. Porter Alexander stated that in “fire and élan” the southern army was more than a match for its antagonist, even going so far as to state the southern army was “superior.” Regardless of how intractable the southern army may have been in its obedience to discipline, southern troops never flinched in their duty and were “willing and anxious to fight and serve…, and needed no pushing up to their duty.” They were those who regarded assignments in a safer position in the rear as “a deliberate insult” to their manhood. However, as the war dragged on and the

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death toll disproportionate numbers, many would “learn the sweetness of a day’s repose in the rear!”

One of the problems of discipline was the fact that these local men all knew each other and in most instances liked each other. To that effect, all were on familiar terms with their captains and regimental commanders. Everyone was acquainted, and friendship superseded military protocol. At the end of hostilities these men expected to go back to being neighbors. They resented the fact that they had to obey commands from those they considered their equals, and in some cases from those they felt were beneath them. General Thomas Harris of Missouri knew first-hand the problem of proper respect from men who had once been his neighbors; they could never bring themselves to call him General Harris. To his men he would always be the telegraph operator who worked for a modest salary back in Hannibal, Missouri.

The most common problem of discipline stemmed from soldiers who, regardless of how hard they tried, could never become accustomed to army

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49 Robertson, Soldiers Blue and Gray, P.123, 124. Private Carlton McCarthy, Second Company Richmond Howitzers of Cutshaw’s Battalion remembered that years passed before soldiers learned “to give unquestioning obedience” to those “who were awhile ago their playmates and associates in business.” Southern Historical Society Papers, (Broadfoot Publishing Company: Morning side BookShop, 1990), Vol. 2, P. 226. E.B. Long has also written that these “men were from the same area, and they often had known each other in civilian life.” E.B. Long. The Civil War Day By Day: An Almanac 1861-1865, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), P. 716.
regimentation. They found fault with the officers placed above them, and the notion of “blind obedience” was fool-hardy. “A soldier is nothing more than a slave,” wrote one angry private, “and is often treated worse.” His anger still prevalent, he continued to write, “I have during the past six months gone through more hardships then anyone of ours or Grandma’s negroes; (sic) their life is a luxury to what mine is sometimes.”

Other problems with discipline arose from officers being appointed due to their political standing or their popularity. Soldiers were reluctant to take commands from inexperienced officers they felt was not competent to lead, and if a battle was imminent, they wished that the officer would stay behind. Although “he is full of fun and makes a great deal of noise going into battle,” stated one soldier, “I should rather he stay behind for he is no military man at all.” At the beginning of the Civil War, regiments and their officers were ill prepared for the rapid events that were taking place. Regiments were considered lucky to have officers who had received military training either in the Mexican War or the Seminole War. “Often the colonel was the only one with such experience and sometimes even the regimental commander might be as green as any of his recruits.”

50 Robertson. Soldiers Blue and Gray, P. 124,125.
certainly not lost on a Mississippi captain who—admitting ignorance in all things military—confessed to his wife, “No one can imagine the amt. of work required of an officer as green as I am in Tactics.” He was not alone. Lieutenant Walter Lenoir was horrified at being called upon to drill men he considered more knowledgeable than himself. Those who assumed that former soldiers chosen for command because of their prior military service and experience would make better officers were not always correct. Although soldiers did not know how they would react in battle until the time came, Ulysses S. Grant’s aide Horace Porter believed that “courage was never assured until it had been put to trial.” Porter believed that “Critical to the soldier’s Civil War was his willingness to expose himself in a direct test of his mettle against that of the enemy.” To many, this type of courage was shown without the knowledge of the person exhibiting it. An example of this type of personal bravery was shown when a Union artillery barrage sent Confederate soldiers running for the safety of their lines at Harper’s Ferry in 1861. When the smoke cleared, General Turner Ashby was still sitting on his horse waving his men on. A Confederate, watching the gallant scene from the protection of his lines, remembered that he was “as

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53 Woodworth, The Loyal, True, and Brave, P. 46, 47
moved as the general was unmoved.” This type of bravery inspired soldiers to go beyond the capacity they believed they had. And according to one soldier, the “most daring” received fewer wounds. Sometimes it was foolish to follow such men; but sometimes victory was snatched from defeat because of such bravery.

The majority of southerners met their counterparts with a firm resolution to do their duty. However, there were those on both sides who could not meet the standard of courage that was needed and gave way to their emotions. One officer observed firsthand how fear could overtake men. After the battle of Malvern Hill, Captain Winn of the southern army wrote his wife, I saw “thousands of dastardly cowards…running…I cannot respect such men.”

In a more lighthearted account of cowardice, an officer told of a soldier throwing his weapon on the ground and running to the rear from absolute fear. “Halt!

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what are you running for,” the officer shouted. “Bekase I kaint fly,” the reb yelled back.  

As difficult as it was for the enlisted men to prove valor on the battlefield, the “burden on officers were far heavier.” The quality of courage and sagacity, which soldiers believed all officers must have, carried a “brand of approval or disapproval” from their men. Many officers went to great lengths to prove their mettle, not just on the battlefield, but also in the training of their men. It should also be noted that most of the young men elevated to a position of authority were no older or wiser than the men they commanded. As a result, the officers were as green as the volunteer soldier they attempted to train. An Iowa soldier, writing to his brother, remarked how much “fun” it was to watch an officer try to teach his troops “what he don’t know himself.” Another Iowa soldier did not find it amusing that his colonel did “not know the difference between file right and file left and is as ignorant of military maneuvers as a child.”

Many officers took steps to improve their “shortcomings.” One officer, slipping off into the woods, would practice shouting commands from the manual

57 Nisbet, 4 Years on the Firing Line, P. 180. Nisbet’s lively account of his war time years is full of humor. He relates this incident as fact.
58 Woodworth, The Loyal, True, and Brave, p. 47.
59 Robertson, Soldiers Blue and Gray, P. 127.
of arms in order to present himself as more experienced than he actually was. Of course most soldiers were not fooled by such methods and realized that many of their officers were wholly unprepared for battlefield maneuvers, as was the case when the horse of a Wisconsin colonel reared and the notes the colonel had relied on to train his men “floated in the wind.” The embarrassed officer marched his men back to camp, for “without his notes, he was helpless.” Colonel William C. Scott of the 44th Virginia suffered even greater embarrassment when, on a patrol, he learned that Federal cavalry were advancing on his front. He quickly lined his men on both sides of the road in order to surprise the Federal cavalry. He instructed his men “to fix bayonets,” but cautioned his troops “not to fire until the enemy [had] passed.” The colonel’s men, realizing the “folly” of the command, broke up in such a roar of laughter that if not for the colonel “command[ing] silence,” the unit would have been discovered by the enemy.\textsuperscript{60}

It was common knowledge in both the northern and southern armies that officers “were expected to lead by example.” It was also common knowledge that soldiers lived with the fear of death on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{61} One officer wrote that no one could imagine “the feelings of a soldier” awaiting battle and “not

\textsuperscript{60}ibid, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{61}ibid, p. 128.
knowing who will fall.”62 Death “was Civil War America’s most fundamental and most demanding undertaking,” and it was “all but unavoidable.” The heroics and glory that many soldiers believed awaited them were quickly shattered by loss and suffering. Still, this did not deter soldiers from performing their moral obligation. Men “would die for God and country,” and some felt it was their Christian duty. “I came into this war to lay down my life,” wrote a resolute soldier, not to “escape” it. Many soldiers believed that death would “help the cause of the right to triumph.” A Confederate chaplain reminded his troops that it was their “business…to die.”63 Even with the knowledge that death was a constant companion, soldiers were still willing to do their duty. But they would not be sacrificed by an officer ill-suited for command. If an officer exposed his men to danger needlessly, or squandered troops haphazardly, and if he “did not measure up to expectations” of “courage, fairness, and inspiration, “he was criticized harshly, and cowardice was not tolerated at all. An officer who was condemned by his men would quickly resign, and in more serious cases was court-martialed.64

64Robertson, Soldiers Blue and Gray, p. 128.
One enlistee in the Confederate army stated that “soldiers treated officers with respect—if they deserved it—but they never thought of giving a military salute, nor would they have known how to make one if they had.” Although the former soldier stated that he was not painting the entire Confederate army with a single stroke of the brush, he did admit, however, that southerners lifted their hats when General Lee passed, and raised their voice in praise when Stonewall Jackson rode by, “but few officers ever knew the ceremonies of turning out the guard for the commanding officer.”

Although there were many officers cashiered by their troops, there were many beloved by them. Many of these officers who “possessed genuine concern for their men almost without exception received obedience and respect.” Among these officers were the colonels, who exercised a high degree of capacity in life and death decisions over their troops. Confederate colonels were commissioned by the Confederate government and their rank was recognized from the date the unit was mustered into Confederate service. Most of these officers were elected by the volunteers of their states, and if the same colonel was “Reelected,” he was to “retain” his “seniority based on the original date of 

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66 Ibid, p. 130.
commission.” Of the many jobs the colonels were responsible for included instruction of drill and artillery practice, “encourage useful occupations and manly exercise,” correct any “diversions among the men, and to repress dissipation and immorality—a tall order for any officer!” A colonel also had the capacity to exercise his power to appoint the regimental adjutant and the noncommissioned staff of the regiment. He could nominate for appointment the regimental quartermaster (supply officer) and, with the approval of the company commanders, appoint the sergeants and corporals of the companies. Colonels were also, upon the absence of their superiors, asked to take command of the brigade, which usually consisted of two to five regiments, and could also be asked to take command of the entire division. The influence a colonel had over his men could be felt throughout the entire army. One diarist praised his colonel by commenting that a more “dangerous man in a ground scuffle” (sic) could not be found and that he was “fit to occupy tight places.”

67 Bruce S. Allardice. Confederate Colonels: A Biographical Register, (2008), p. 2. This type of promotion to command was not always the most adequate or successful. Allardice states in his footnote 2, page 2 that it was American tradition for volunteer troops to elect their own officers. He also states that “The antebellum state militia laws generally provided for such election, in which the politicking could become intense.” William H. Russell, an English reporter, wrote “the system of electing officers by ballot has made the camp as thoroughly a political arena as the poll districts in New Orleans.”
Most colonels were well respected, and of the 1,583 Confederate officers that began their careers as colonels, 324 received promotion to brigadier general and above. Because the southern army had seven hundred regiments, most regiments had two full colonels. Bruce S. Allardice, in his book *Confederate Colonels*, states that Virginia raised more colonels than any other state simply because “all Virginia regiments served in the Army of Northern Virginia,” and because of this Virginia had the highest casualty rate. Allardice also writes that the Civil War “was a young man’s army and a young man’s officer corps.” The average Confederate colonel was just over thirty-two years of age,” and according to the casualty rate, he was not destined to become much older. 252 colonels (16%) were killed or mortally wounded in battle, 8% died as prisoners of war, and Gettysburg claimed nineteen colonels, the most in any one battle. Allardice also breaks down in years the casualty rate. Five were killed in 1861, seventy three in 1862, sixty in 1863, ninety-nine in 1864, and fifteen in 1865, and “eighty died during the war of natural or noncombat causes.” The casualty rate for Lee’s army reflects the bloody fighting in Virginia. Virginia had “fewer than half the Confederate regiments,” which “accounted for 58 percent of the
casualties, with the Western armies accounting for 33 percent, and the Trans-Mississippi Department 9 percent.⁷⁰

The casualty rate among officers in general was due to the aggressiveness of the southern people. The South honored bravery, and officers were expected to be in front of their commands leading their men to victory at any cost.⁷¹ These men led with an intense fervor, and “embraced the cause” with great devotion. Officers and enlisted men became hostile at the thought of defending their homeland against the Yankee “devils.” This attitude toward the North became so intense that in battle it was perceived as being of “inestimable value.” The southerners’ fighting spirit was characterized by such enmity that a story circulated in Richmond, “most likely apocryphal but ringing with truth,” that a Yankee prisoner stated that “southern soldiers would charge into hell if there was a battery before them—and they would take it from a legion of devils!” Nothing inspired boldness and courage more than a line of men charging into cannons and muskets.⁷² The reckless disregard for life that southerners exhibited in charging breastworks, and the dense fighting that characterized most battles tested men’s will, often to the point of uncommon

⁷⁰Allardice, Confederate Colonels, P.12, 13, 14, 15. The author also breaks down how many colonels each state in the Confederacy raised. For a complete list see page p. 13.
valor. Walter Taylor, Lee’s most prominent adjutant, in a letter to his sister, stated that even with the “constant marching & fighting” and living on “short rations” the fighting spirit of the South was so great, and their determination so intense, they could “resist three times their own number.”

To achieve such exceptional outcomes, officers had to drill their men constantly and remind them that without the high regard needed from both officer and soldier, companies and regiments would never achieve the unity required to bring victory. The respect, drill, and what discipline that could be instilled into the troops, made them firm and unyielding to the battlefield horrors that awaited them. These men would experience the tragedy of defeat and the exhilarating enthusiasm of victory that would “create an élan within companies, regiments, and even brigades” that instilled into them an assertion of being a part of a harmonious whole distinct from all others. This identification would lead men to have the attributes and qualities needed to execute the actions that were essential in producing such results.

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73 Joseph T. Glatthaar, General Lee’s Army, p. 128, 145.
James I Robertson, Jr., in his *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, states that the coming of spring and the melting of the snows brought on the “ultimate task” of fighting. Robertson writes that regardless of the “deficiencies” Johnny Rebs and Billy Yanks asserted in camp and on the march, their fighting qualities made up the “foundation of American military glory.” However, Robertson admits that the harmonious units that both North and South endeavored to create did not come about overnight.\(^76\) At the beginning of the Civil War, soldiers, and many of the officers below the rank of general, were amateurs. The same was true for South Carolina, which would call forth and rely upon volunteers from its militia, whose officers had to “depend upon spontaneous morale rather than the regulated organization and discipline.”\(^77\) One of the first to join as a commissioned officer was James D. Nance. Nance was born in Newberry, South Carolina on the 10\(^{th}\) of October, 1837. Always strong in his convictions and always ready to defend his rights, he had early in life revealed his passion for fairness and justice that he upheld until his death. At the age of seventeen he joined the Baptist Church in Newberry and always stood firm to his Christian principles. On the night before Colonel Nance and his regiment was to storm Maryland Heights, Nance lay sleepless in his bed, filled with anxiety for “the

\(^{76}\) Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Gray*, p. 214.  
\(^{77}\) Wilson, *Carolina Cavalier*, p. 129.
desperate character of the work before them on the morrow.” In the still and silent night when all phantoms and ghosts can haunt the bravest of souls, the tension Nance was experiencing a bated when he heard someone in deep and earnest prayer. Nance was mesmerized by the soldier praying, and “After listening intently for some time,” he felt the impact of the prayer on him. Immediately the Colonel was calmed and his mind was free from turmoil and strife. As Nance recalled a burden was lifted from his shoulders from hearing the prayer and that he “was enabled under its sacred influence to resign myself to sleep.”78

Nance has been described as having the manners of a woman; he was “quiet, unassuming, tender of heart, and of refined feelings.” But when it came to his duties as an officer he could be stern, regardless if it was on the march or in battle. He was “cool” and “collected, vigilant, aggressive, and brave,” and one who knew him well wrote that “Never for a moment was he thrown off his base or lost his head under the most trying of emergencies.” Colonel Nance always put the interest of his troops before himself and in return demanded their loyalty. 79

78 Carwile, Reminiscences of Newberry, p.251.
Nance graduated from the Citadel and was practicing law in Newberry with promising results until secession cut short his law career. When South Carolina called for volunteers, Nance was unanimously elected Captain of the Quitman Rifles, formed in Newberry and later incorporated into the Third Regiment South Carolina Volunteers. Colonel James H. Williams, the first commander of the 3rd South Carolina, had served in the Seminole and Mexican War, and won distinction for his bravery on the field. Lieutenant Colonel Foster, in Williams’s absence, commanded the regiment, but as already been established, the young soldiers did not always trust the one with the most experience, and in the reorganization of the regiment the men “desired new blood” and elected Nance their commander. Colonel Williams would continue to command troops, and ended his career as lieutenant colonel of the 4th Battalion, South Carolina Reserves. Many of the southern military schools like the Citadel in South Carolina had educated young men like Nance who had established strong roots with the citizenry of their respective states. According to historian John Hope Franklin, southerners put much dependency on these schools as “a measure of military and political independence.” In 1859, Governor William Henry Gist of South Carolina spoke highly of the Citadel cadet’s

81 Seigler, South Carolina’s Military Organizations During the War Between the States, Vol. III,
ability and competence to train the citizens of the state in “any emergency that may arise.” The South in the decade before the Civil War believed even more strongly than at any other time that its way of life might have to be defended by military force. The confidence the citizens had in the cadets, and the belief that the southern way of life might have to be defended, had bonded the citizens of the south with “the West Points of the South.” These cadets had “succeeded in inculcating among a considerable portion of the population an appreciation for their role in serving and protecting the community.”

Military schools in the South enjoyed a higher degree of enrollment than did the military schools of the North. Two of the earliest and most productive of military schools in the South were the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) and the Citadel in South Carolina. The Citadel alone furnished 240 graduates and incorporated 167 of these young men as line officers; 4 became generals and 19 became colonels. Thousands of Confederate troops were trained by these cadets who, according to one historian, “performed their task well.”

By the outbreak of the Civil War there was a long standing belief that soldiers trained at West Point would be better able to “handle complex military

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matters” and that “scientific education was...necessary in the art of war....”\textsuperscript{84} However, the first three years of West Point was taken up with routine mechanics, which one historian has described as “of the most numbing sort.” West Point cadets focused on French, mathematics, drawing, and engineering, while “the serious study of military history and leadership” was lacking.\textsuperscript{85} What is essential to remember about West Point is that in the early days of its establishment the United States was expanding. Thomas Jefferson had doubled the size of the nation. The logistical demands placed upon the growing nation took precedence over military matters, and West Point, being concerned with engineering and mathematics, would mean that cadets were not being trained so much for battle as they were for building frontier garrisons, bridges, and roads.\textsuperscript{86}

The similarities and differences of the U.S. Military Academy and state established military schools like the Citadel made little difference with the coming of the Civil War. It could be argued, as one historian has, that the academics taught at both West Point and state military schools was not as

transformative as one would believe, and that the military science taught did not produce a better army.\textsuperscript{87} One of the most remarkable historians of the twentieth century wrote that “There was something intangibly different about the Civil War,” and that “The war made its own innovations, and the men responsible for directing it on both sides had to evolve new methods of leadership and new ideas of command.” Neither the North nor the South understood this in 1861 and both sections went about preparing for war in the “traditional manner,” never understanding the war they were about to enter into was “a changed business.”\textsuperscript{88} Although many would agree that the South did have an impressive array of West Point talent, it would be fair to say that both North and South seen the tactics and logistics of war through the same lens. With that assumption, it would be fair to assume that the southern military academies produced men like James D. Nance with their knowledge of drill, familiarity with military life, and a basic understanding of tactics could compete with those from West Point.\textsuperscript{89}

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87 Waugh, \textit{The Class of 1846}, p.510.
89 Russel H. Beatie. \textit{Army of the Potomac: McClellan Takes Command September 1861-February 1862}, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004), p.192. Beatie states that the Union militia was just as qualified “for regimental command as their West Point counterparts.” “The experience of commanding a body of troops rendered them valuable as leaders; and because many of them had been members of their militia units over a span of years, they had acquired military capacity.” “In some cases the facets of military command had become second nature to them. If peacetime militia officers would not produce a large number of high-ranking commanders, they could certainly be expected to provide stable, dependable regimental and brigade commanders.”
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With the news of General Anderson’s surrender and Fort Sumter’s fall, the South was galvanized and South Carolina was wild with enthusiasm. On April 14th, a Sabbath, Company A of the 3rd South Carolina was given orders to rendezvous at Columbia immediately. As the troops marched through the city of Laurens, South Carolina, amid cheers of joy and inspiration from bystanders as they made their way to the train depot, James S. Hollingsworth, former editor of the Laurensville Herald, reported the good-byes were affectionate and there “were no words of regret…no persuasion to remain at home.” No—none—he stated. Instead, mothers, wives, and brides-to-be urged their men to be courageous and reminded them of their country’s honor and that it must be defended. As the train left Laurens its next stop would be Clinton, South Carolina, so Company I could board and then on to Newberry, “where it seemed everybody…had assembled to hear the latest news from Charleston.” When the crowd learned that Fort Sumter had fallen there was such a roar of enthusiasm that the former editor of the Laurensville Herald wrote that it “baffles all description.” Companies B, E, and C boarded the train at Newberry and arrived in Columbia before dark. Later the next day the 3rd South Carolina was joined
by five other companies, making the total of men 958. On June 15th, the regiment departed for Virginia and reached Richmond on the 17th.90

Before leaving Columbia for Richmond, Captain James D. Nance had written on the 8th of June that the 3rd South Carolina had “been sadly afflicted” by Colonel William’s inefficiency and from “a number of disgustingly disaffected company officers in our regiment.” Nance believed that all of the above had worked against the regiment and that they would “probably be the last...to leave the State.” Nance was concerned about the regiment and how “strong men” had been “bowed low by the tender influence of distressed wives.” The men had been in camp for a short period, and already were receiving mail that told of destitution on the home front. Nance wrote, the “love and affection” these women are expressing “for their patriot husbands has absorbed or overridden all other feelings.” Nance had a soldier to leave his company and return home. The female “influence over the sterner sex is well known,” wrote Nance, and although he is “a true man,” he “was compelled to ground his arms and return to the bosom of his family.” Nance believed women should “encourage” not “discourage men in their duty...” “Women must be women, wrote the concerned Captain, “if they expect men to be men.” Nance was seeing firsthand

90 Wyckoff, History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, p.9, 10, 15.
what happens when soldiers worry about their families and the disturbing “influence” women had over their husbands. He admitted that he knew not the “connubial bliss” of matrimony, but stated that it was “the duty of all...to endure” the hardships of war “with fortitude and heroism.” Although Captain Nance did not have a wife he did have “attachments” to home, and these “attachments” were “sad and painful” to remember. But maybe it was because he did not have a wife and children that he was able to write that all must put “duty and patriotism” first and be “reconcile[d]...to the present condition of our disturbed country.”

One historian has written that while Captain Nance “had great confidence in the South’s eventual triumph, [he] did not have a high opinion of his regiment.” Nance does not allude to this. Yes, he was disgruntled with Colonel Williams and some of the lesser officers, but wrote with pride how “Col. Bee, the Confederate officer who mustered us in, said that it was the crack company in an unusual fine Regiment, and indeed the finest Company he ever mustered in.” The captain could not stop himself from the boastful language he was using and continued to write, “Such high testimony of merit and proficiency

92 Wycoff, History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, p.17.
is of course very gratifying to me, as I have taken pains with my company and feel a just and natural pride in my command.” Nance was not the kind of officer to make overt or covert statements that would attribute a lack of confidence in his men or his regiment. Although he criticized the officers, Nance believed that he should “acquiesce in the condition of things as...quietly as may be” and “exercise patience and forbearance in these matters.” He was speaking strictly about the officers above him, not the regiment as a whole.  

Captain Nance was not the only one dissatisfied with the commanding officer. Tally Simpson of the 3rd Regiment wrote that “Col Williams is not the man he was cracked up to be.” Tally did believe that Colonel Williams was “firm and decisive,” but also believed that he was “entirely too slow and...The regiment is not satisfied with him.” Tally never alluded to what he meant by describing the colonel as “slow”, but Nance may have spoken for both men when he wrote that their “departure [to Virginia] has been much delayed,” and we should “have been out of the state before now.” Nance went on to elaborate that“ It is uncertain when we leave. We have been mustered in, and all that

93 James Drayton Nance Letter, June 8th, 1861. South Caroliniana Library.  
95 Wyckoff A History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, Wyckoff wrote that “Both Nance and Simpson described Williams as slow without elaborating upon what they meant.” Note 20, p. 18.
remains to be done is to equip the regiment and give them marching orders,” but sadly reflected that we may “be the last regiment to leave the state.”

Captain Nance, like many in South Carolina eager to leave for Virginia and war, believed that the regiment’s chance for military glory might not become a reality because of the “slow” progress of Colonel Williams. “I hope,” wrote a concerned Nance, “that the 3rd regiment may be permitted to bear a part in the sanguinary struggle.” It is certainly possible to make the argument that if Nance and Tally Simpson felt this way, then possibly the regiment did also.96 Captain Nance was not eager for war because he harbored any romanticized view of battlefield glory in the traditional sense. He had seen his way of life being threatened—a life that was tied to the ruling elite—and believed it his Christian duty to go forward and support not only his patriotic views and devotion to nationalism, but also to defend the South’s individualism and the all-powerful Southern distinctiveness.97

96 James Drayton Nance Letter, June 8th, 1861. South Caroliniana Library. See also D. August Dickert, Kershaw’s Brigade. Dickert alludes to this when he wrote that “as many rumors were now afloat as there were men in the army” that there “was the generally conceded opinion of all that the war was at an end.” Dickert asserts that the boasting of how the southerners could easily whip the North put all in the mind-set that the Yankees would not stand and fight and that the war would be over before the 3rd regiment could arrive to take their part. P.31.

All was in jubilation when the 3rd South Carolina received orders to pack and board the train headed for Virginia. D. August Dickert spoke of the trip as one of the most exciting adventures ever experienced by these men, “especially those reared in the back districts…who…had never been farther from their homes than their county seat, the trip to the old Mother of Presidents, the grand old common wealth, was quite a journey indeed.” Private Dickert elaborated:

The Third South Carolina was transported by way of Wilmington and Weldon, N.C. Had there ever existed any doubts in the country as to the feelings of the people of the South before this in regard to Secession, it was entirely dispelled by the enthusiastic cheers and good will of the people along the road. The conduct of the men and women through South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, showed one long and continued ovation along the line of travel, looking like a general holiday. As the cars sped along through the fields, the little hamlets and towns, people of every kind, size, and complexion rushed to the railroad and gave us welcome and Godspeed. Hats went into the air as we passed, handkerchiefs fluttered, flags waved in the gentle summer breeze from almost every house top. The ladies and old men pressed to the side of the cars when we halted, to shake the hands of the brave soldier boys, and gave them blessings, hope and encouragement. The ladies vied with the men in doing homage to the soldiers of the Palmetto State. Telegrams had been sent on
asking of our coming, the hour of our passage through the little towns, and
inviting us to stop and enjoy their hospitality and partake of refreshments. In
those places where a stop was permitted, long tables were spread in some
neighboring grove or park, bending under the weight of their bounties, laden
down with everything tempting to the soldier’s appetite. The purest and best of
the women mingled freely with the troops, and by every device known to the fair
sex showed their sympathy and encouragement in the cause we had espoused.98
Dickert stated that there could not have been any turning back from war, and
that “The men of the South had risked their all upon the cast, and were willing to
abide by the hazard of the die.”99

There is no doubt that James D. Nance felt the same way.

98Dickert, A History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.41, 42. See also Everson, Far, far from Home, p.15,
16. Tally Simpson relates pretty much the same story as Dickert.
99Dickert, A History of Kershaw’s brigade, p. 43.
CHAPTER ONE
“With such Circumstances and Surroundings”
26 April 1861 through 12 July 1861

Brigadier General M.L. Bonham with five hundred troops from South Carolina arrived in Virginia on April 25th 1861. The Richmond Enquirer wrote that the Palmetto State was met with “Cheer after cheer” from the Virginia troops and citizens there to meet them. The Virginians “were struck with their bold and manly appearance.” “Every man of them looked a hero...their fine countenances lighted up with martial ardor; their fine physique...all denoted an invincible and heroic race of men.” “The Virginians cheered South Carolina, and South Carolina cheered the Old Dominion.”

James D. Nance’s fears about missing out on any part of a great battle ended when Colonel Williams’s regiment arrived at Manassas Junction on June 18th. As Captain Nance’s company waited for orders, the South Carolinians raised their voices in “three hearty cheers” when President Davis rode past, accompanied by Colonel Louis T. Wigfall and another unidentified dignitary. According to one member of the company, “it would not do to allow the

President of the Confederacy to pass without making a demonstration of some kind.” The President acknowledged the enthusiastic crowd by removing his hat and bowing.\textsuperscript{102} When the cheering and hand shaking abated, the South Carolina troops marched about five miles to Mitchell’s Ford on Bull Run. The men were initiated to life on the march, “choking dust several inches deep.” When they arrived they found that measures had already been taken to defend the area. Units who had preceded them had already built entrenchments before being ordered on to Fairfax Court House.\textsuperscript{103} Nance and his company remained at Mitchell’s Ford for a week before receiving orders to march to an outpost just beyond Fairfax Court House. Once there pickets were sent out every twenty-four hours.\textsuperscript{104} General Beauregard had taken the precaution of defending the crossing from Union Mills on the south to the Stone Bridge on the north, a distance of about 8 miles.\textsuperscript{105} Nance and the 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina began their advance on June 30\textsuperscript{th}, marching ten miles to the outpost. The last mile was marched in a pouring rain, leaving the men “wet” and “disagreeable.”\textsuperscript{106} The situation was made worse when the men were forced to make camp “in a

\textsuperscript{102}Buzhardt Diary, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{103}Wyckoff, A History of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina Infantry, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{104}Dickert, Kershaw’s Brigade, p. 44. Buzhardt Diary, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{105}Battles and Leaders, Vol. 1, p. 177.
\textsuperscript{106}Buzhardt Diary, p. 9.
muddy clover patch.”¹⁰⁷ Not yet toughened to army life, and impatient that he had not received a timely letter from home, Nance complained in a letter to his sister. “You are enjoying ease, quiet and every opportunity of writing; while I am engaged with varied duties that absorb nearly all my time.” Nance added that he was “surrounded by every circumstance unfavorable to letter writing: at one time plodding my way on the march, through rain and mud, at another spending the night on picket duty, in the dark woods near a hostile enemy’s lines, among the owls, with chilling cold and pelting rains to make up my sweet comforts.”¹⁰⁸

Fairfax Court House “was the extreme limit at which the infantry was posted on that side of the Blue Ridge;” the 3rd South Carolina camped a mile north of there. D. August Dickert remembered that the regiment drilled regularly and picketed the “highways” and blocked all the roads by clearing trees “for more than a hundred yards” on both sides of the road. “For miles out,” wrote Dickert, “in all directions...large trees...were cut pellmell, creating a perfect abattis across the road.” Dickert was amused that the “verdant” southerners believed that the tree choked roads would take weeks to clear, and that the Federal army would be delayed in their progress. It did not cause “one

hour’s halt,” wrote Dickert in astonishment, “the Federal Army cleared it away as fast as the army marched....”

Picket duty was routine but intense. Regiments were sent out in rotation, usually in twenty-four hour intervals. The pickets would travel two miles in the direction of Washington Falls Church or Annandale. The young southerners could hear the drums of their enemies preparing for the “on to Richmond move.” The constant duty of picketing and the harshness of military life were beginning to take its toll on the men. Historian Mac Wyckoff has written that “for the first time” soldiers “experienced fear[s] of being killed.” John Craig of the 3rd South Carolina wrote that “Every letter I write may be the last one. The destiny of a soldier is unknown.” Men were not yet accustomed to the callousness of death. A tragic incident that occurred only days before may have help create an obsession of death among the men. A 16 year old on picket duty challenged a group of southern scouts who had become disoriented and reentered the lines. The scouting party mistook the young man for a Yankee and fired, killing him instantly. The young soldier was carried to a farm house and gently laid on the front porch, where it was reported that he had “almost [a]

109 Dickert, Kershaw’s Brigade, p. 46.
110 Ibid, p. 46, 47.
111 Wyckoff, A History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, p. 20.
womanly beauty” about him. As friends gathered around his body, a Virginia Regimental band—heedless of the misfortune that had occurred—was playing “Do they miss me at home, do they miss me?”

If Captain Nance had thoughts of death he nursed the fear alone. However, he did write of the physical exertion of picket duty as “fatigue[ing],” and how at times he was soaked from the rain and so tired of his “rough tour of duty,” once back in camp, he wrote, it was lights out and he was “left in the dark” with his exhaustion.113 A soldier in the 3rd South Carolina commented that picket duty was “the first features of our army life that looked …like war.”114 At times the firing between the pickets would continue for hours, until darkness abated the intensity of the action. Soldiers would search for a “lurking foe” for hours on end, expecting any minute to take a bullet in the back. Men could be pushed to the limits of their bravery while picketing and others could become careless. Either way, soldiers were acting on nerve alone, and at time these nerves became so raw that soldiers would fire at anything that moved, even friends. Pickets sometimes fired on their own men because of the confusion of night that indiscriminately inflicted all that stood guard, and because orders for

113 James Drayton Nance Letters, July 12th, 1861, South Caroliniana Library.
114 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p. 47.
where the picket lines were supposed to be were either misunderstood or not known. After the accidental wounding of Dr. Thomas C. Brown in Nance’s company by his own men, Nance approached the enemy pickets one evening stating that “it was wrong” for either side to shoot needlessly. The enemy pickets “agreed with him that it was wrong.” Captain Nance negotiated a type of truce that had a positive effect, and the aura of camp life took on a new quality. Private Beaufort Buzhardt wrote in his diary that “Yankees can now be seen walking up and down their lines...and can be seen standing in the road. The distance between us, I suppose, is 500 yards.” It is not certain how long the truce lasted, although Private Buzhardt did state that “when the Yankees wanted to go from one point to another they would bend and run as fast as they could, but now since we have ceased firing at them they walk at their leisure.” The tension of picketing had been eased, at least for a while.  

Nance’s spirits perked up when he was made “officer of the day” and was told by Colonel Williams that General Milledge Luke Bonham, who commanded the forces around Manassas, had ordered him to send his best officer five miles down the Alexandria road to meet an expected attack. Nance was pleased that he had been chosen for the duty and was excited at the

115 Buzhardt Diary, 20, 21.
116 James Dryton Nance Letters, July 12th, 1861. The South Caroliniana Library.
thought of giving battle to the “Hessians,” but “regretted” that he would not be able to receive the attack with his own men. His company had been incorporated with other companies and sent off on other duties. Nance was told to take sixty or seventy men from companies that he was familiar with. Although he would have liked to have the men he helped train, he did not hesitate to accept an assignment that his commanding officer “declared...was a post of honor and danger.” Colonel Williams made it clear to Nance that he was given the assignment because of the “confidence in him as an officer.” The next morning Nance marched with his men and reached their destination at sunrise, where he immediately positioned his command “to the best of my ability” and waited in silence for the “Yankee onslaught.” Nance stated that his men had complete trust in him as a leader and that they “were vigilant [and] confident.” Still, the pressure of war had made its mark upon the troops, and the naiveté on both sides could create a sudden reaction to any perceived movement that might bring on an unwarranted action. “There was,” wrote a soldier, “an uncanny feeling in standing alone in the still hours of the night, in a strange country, watching, waiting for an enemy to crawl up and shoot you unawares.” There was also a “great deal of squeamishness” about being taken

prisoner. It was so with two men who already learned how panicked troops could react in any given situation.\textsuperscript{118}

On the day before captain Nance began his advance down the Alexandria road, an amusing incident occurred. With the pickets alert for any peculiar incident, and with the cavalry patrolling throughout the countryside, and the roads blocked with trees, the men behind the pickets “felt a perfect security.” All were lounging about never expecting any danger, when suddenly “a hail of bullets came whizzing over our heads.” “What a scramble! What an excitement! What terror depicted on the men’s faces!” One participant remembered that “Had a shower of meteors fallen..., had a volcano burst..., or...a thunder bolt fell at our feet..., the consternation could not have been greater.” Everyone felt “Excitement, demoralization, and panic....” Soldiers were grabbing for rifles, haversacks, and canteens, with no one reaching for their own but for whatever was near at hand. No one knew the right direction to run; some went up the road and others down the road. Officers were panicked, with some giving one order and some another, and no one pulling together. “Pandemonium reigned supreme,” and “The whole Yankee army was thought to be over the hills.” The culprits were not the entire Federal army but three Yankee scouts who had

\textsuperscript{118}Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p. 48.
passed the pickets without being seen, and wanting a little excitement, fired the shots in amusement. One would have to admit that the three Yankee scouts showed courage in getting so close to the southern camp, but when they fired the shots and saw the pandemonium break loose, the prank frightened them as well. Back to their camp they ran, only to find that the Federals were as excited as the southerners. Men who believed they were being fired upon by real live Yankees were soon writing home about the event, and like all green recruits exaggerated their part in it. If the Battle of Bull Run had not come when it did, noted one participant, the incident would have remained by those involved “as one of the battles of the war,” even though the only casualty was a hat that someone shot a hole through.119

After this incident picket duty was much more rigid, and regulations more adhered to. Troops were given strict orders that if they heard anyone approach they were to give the command to halt three times. Upon the third command to halt, and if the intruder failed to stop, the pickets were to fire. But some of the troops were still nervous about being left alone on picket duty, as the men that Nance had positioned were about to find out. “Everything was quiet as a grave,” wrote a soldier, when suddenly the troops heard a twig break in the forest, and

assuming it was the enemy in their front, they gave the command to halt. It was ignored. They shouted halt a second time, and still the men heard something coming toward them. When the third halt was given, and the sounds of footsteps were still heard, the troops fired.\textsuperscript{120} Nance stated that his men “were confident” they had shot a Yankee, but upon a closer investigation he was positive that his men had mistaken “a huge hog” for the enemy. The incident, though amusing, proved how green and frightened troops could react in the presence of danger. As the excitement drew down, and a pouring rain set in, Nance waited for the sun to rise and marched his wet men back to camp. After Captain Nance made his report to Colonel Williams he went to bed and slept. But it was clear that Nance was not happy with the way his “first skirmish” with the enemy turned out. Still, Nance was not one to dwell on past events and set about in helping with the preparations for his regiment, which had the “advance position—the position of honor, yet of danger.” Nance confided to his sister that “when the ball begins, it is reasonable to expect that we will have a place in the picture.”\textsuperscript{121}

While Nance had been in camp he had become very bitter about the war and believed the North was responsible for injustices done to the South. “The

\textsuperscript{120}\textit{Ibid}, p. 49, 50.  
\textsuperscript{121}\textit{James Drayton Nance letters, July 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1861. The South Caroliniana Library.}
more I reflect upon this wicked war,” he wrote, “the more I am convinced of the justice of our cause and of the mean, infamous character of the Northern people.” But the real hate he carried was more for the politicians than for the people. He felt that the northern population had been “deceived and mislead by [the] sophistries and hateful doctrines” espoused by President Lincoln. He believed that Lincoln’s intention to subjugate the South was an “unholy cause.” These “Goths and Vandals” who “overrun” our country, wrote Nance, were “enough to sicken the heart of a lover of humanity and human liberty;” and he added, “may the ruler of the Universe administer a withering and lasting rebuke to that people, who have grown so fat and proud off of those whom they are seeking to subjugate and destroy.” Nance’s animosity for northern politicians would continue to grow. And despite what some historians have suggested was a waning Confederate will to resist an all-powerful North, James D. Nance would die in 1864 with the same stout desire for victory that drove him when he entered the war in 1861.122

South Carolina troops were among the first to be assigned to duty in and around Manassas.123 On July 11th, General Beauregard sent President Jefferson Davis a message that the enemy was in his front in force with an estimated

122 Ibid.
35,000 men. Beauregard only had half that number to oppose General McDowell of the Union army. On July 16th, rumors abounded throughout the South Carolina regiments that a battle was imminent. These rumors created tension and uncertainty through the camp, and tension persisted through the night and into the next morning. Captain Pitts of the 3rd South Carolina wrote home, stating the anxiety he felt was overwhelming, “I shall write to you this morning, wether you will receive it I cannot say…. ” He added, “Excitement still prevails to such an extent that it amounts to suspense, and such intolerable suspense.” The Captain believed “that a battle before the dawn of day was beyond all kind of doubt.” On the morning of July 17th rumors were still floating around the camp, and Captain Thomas Pitts of the 3rd South Carolina continued to write, “How long will this excitement continue?” Events were unfolding fast. “Orders have now just been received for each officer to have his trunk packed and be ready at once for any emergency,” wrote Pitts. “What the object of this order is I can only surmise.” The captain was still writing when a lieutenant came by with a message that firing had been heard on the picket line and to be ready for an engagement. The officer ignored the events taking place around him and continued to write, “Another report has just reached my ears that the Yankees are encamped by the tens of thousands only a few miles away, and will pour down upon us like an earthquake in a few hours. I am satisfied we will have
a fight in less than twenty four hours.” The captain had faith in victory, and stated that he should “consult God in the hours ahead.” He closed his letter by stating that “Possibly and probably I shall never write you again, God only knows. I must close without ceremony, as I have important business to look after before a battle.”

Untested soldiers already anxious about their own uncertain courage needed someone with the capacity to lead them through the confusion of battle, where the ability to grasp the significance of the situation would be imperative. One soldier noted the enemy “produces a good deal of excitement in a brigade.” Nance was of the opinion that “experience is the wisest teacher of all.” Nance was learning not to be surprised or even afraid of unknown events, but to try and control the events to the best of his ability. That was the reasoning behind the importance of the task he felt was entrusted upon him.

General Bonham’s brigade met McDowell’s army in full force at Fairfax Court House. As the sun came up and everyone could see for themselves the situation in their front, a member of the 3rd South Carolina regiment reported that “we could see the sun’s rays reflected from thousands of Federal bayonets


\[ \text{(125 Tom Pitts Letters, September 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1861.} \]

\[ \text{(126 James D. Nance Letters, April 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1860, The South Caroliniana Library.} \]
across the fields....” Another South Carolina soldier recalled that “we could see from the bristling bayonets that there were thousands of them.”

One soldier, who let fear magnify the danger in his front, recalled that “we heard the firing of our pickets, and very soon afterwards they (the enemy) came in...sight about 2 miles distant. Their approach was from two sides, and when I saw them it almost seemed as if there were 500,000 of them.”

The firing the soldier heard was from two companies on picket duty from the 3rd South Carolina, who were positioned three miles out behind a barricade across the Alexandria turnpike road, and in danger of being cut off by McDowell’s army. These two companies were immediately called in.

There is no direct evidence of Nance’s movements during this crucial period. He did write about the events during Bull Run to his sister, but it is unclear what happened to the letter. It is clear, however, from the reports above, that the troops were uneasy. It is feasible to surmise, too, that Nance’s company could certainly have been one of those picketing across the Alexandria turnpike road and was called in for fear of being cut off from the regiment.

127 Tom Pitts Letters, July 20, 1861.
131 Ibid.
“Even though the 3rd South Carolina had not played a major role” at Bull Run,\textsuperscript{132} Nance was certainly under the eyes of his commanders. Colonel Williams wrote of the regiment that he appreciated “the soldierly qualities and bearing of the troops” and the courage they “exhibited in the march from Fairfax, which was certainly a dangerous and trying one...under fire.” He also praised the officers under his command, stating that he had “received [their] active cooperation.”\textsuperscript{133}

Nance’s performance had attracted the notice of General Bonham, who had selected him to act as Adj. General, a post which Nance thought a “highly responsible and honorable” one. The dilemma that Nance faced, however, was the attachment he felt toward his company and them to him. They “respect...me,” he wrote. They had also put their “confidence” in him and he “struggle[d]” with leaving his company. He also believed that his “present position [was] a more desirable one....” Nance certainly must have been thinking about promotion, and he knew that the battlefield was the quickest way to obtain it. He had taken personal responsibility in the training of his men, and “now it is by general consent the best company in the regiment,” he asserted. However, General Bonham had made his choice, and all Nance could do was wait for a response from a letter he had written Bonham stating.

\textsuperscript{132} Wyckoff, \textit{A History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry}, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{133} O.R. Series 1, VOL. II, p. 454.
how much he would like to stay with his company.\textsuperscript{134} After the Battle of Bull Run the 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina regiment marched to Centerville and then on to Vienna. All was quiet with the regiment with nothing to do but “regular camp and picket duty.”\textsuperscript{135} The brigade had moved back a couple of miles to the vicinity of Flint Hill Church, “a high dry place, where it is hoped the health of the Regiment, as also that of the entire brigade, will begin to improve.” Disease and sickness had struck the brigade and the measles were running rampant. It was heart breaking for Nance to see his regiment in such a way, and wrote that “the number of deaths are mournfully increasing.” “Nothing”, wrote Nance, “impedes the progress or wastes the energies...of an army [more] than disease.” Nance believed that the horrors of the battle field were not as moving to the heart as “ill-provided and ill-cared for...soldiers dying without his wants” tended to. “There are so many to provide for,” Nance wrote, and our “means” are “limited.” He also believed that the “ravages of death from disease are greater than from battle.” His heart was heavy from the thought that the sick cannot be “ameliorated,” and even if the situation could be rectified, he believed the help was “mournfully slow” in coming.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{135} James Drayton Nance Letter, August 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1861, The South Caroliniana Library.
The sick were “not sufficiently cared for.” He was not pointing blame to anyone or any organization, and he was not blaming the medical staff; he was merely stating a fact of how inefficient the system was. The apprehension he felt in his responsibility to provide for the sick was a greater pressure to overcome than providing for the everyday comforts and wellbeing of soldiers. He believed that “competent” and “experienced” officers should be placed over the medical department, and that friend and officer alike should “bestow every attention and care in their power” to the sick and wounded.\textsuperscript{136}

Nance was hit hard by the deaths in his company and he sought remedies to a situation he felt was unfair to the sick and dying. He felt that no one should die if assistance could prevent it. He had other members of his company in the hospital and “endeavored to dispatch aid through nurses,” but was unsuccessful. Nance was learning from experience what it took to be a soldier and an officer. He was trying to keep his company healthy, and did not have as many added to the sick list as other officers, “but my number is increasing”, he wrote. He felt that soldiers should be supplied with their needs, and emphasized that “The soldier can carry but little and really does not need

\textsuperscript{136}Ibid. Nance had the unpleasant duty to announce to his company the untimely death of one of its members. He believed the cause of his death was due to the fact that the fallen comrade was not allowed the “care and attention” of his friends. Nance stated that his entire company mourned for their companion and all eyes “were…moistened” as he spoke of his death.
much, but whatever is wanted by him is indispensable. A soldier wants one
exchange of clothes of stout material, one hat and at least one pair of shoes."
Nance was advocating simplicity, and that soldiers should not be overindulged
with items from home “he cannot transport.” The “consequence” of such
over indulgence, continued Nance, is that “they are thrown away.” He believed
that if clothes or money were being raised for companies, who were usually from
the same area, that such items should “be placed in the hands of a
committee...or some officer,” to be drawn upon “as the necessities of the
men...arise.” It is doubtful that as the war dragged on and transportation
became a problem, whether such a scheme could have been implemented. But
it certainly speaks highly of Nance, who not only felt concern for his men but was
also trying to solve a complex problem that he knew would become worse as the
war continued. He would turn 24 on October 10th, 1861. He was already
meeting problems head-on and trying to resolve difficult issues, which is
certainly the mark of a good officer. He was confiding to his sister his
“shortcomings, disappointments, and tribulations,” and that he was finding “the
world harder” than he “anticipated” it would be. He was thinking about the war
and how things had changed for him. But he would continue to meet the
difficulties with the same “ambition” he had always deemed “beneficial” to life.
He summed it up by stating that “Many lessons are to be learned by such exercises.”

James D. Nance had entered the war thinking of defeating Yankees in battle, but what he had thus far seen was not the vision of war he imagined. He had found nothing but routine military duty, and the aftermath of battle had left him disillusioned. He was finding that complaints brought no substantial amelioration to the problem of sickness and disease, and even though he was trying hard not to judge anyone or any department, it none the less seemed to him that all he could see was incompetence and obstinacy. Nothing had prepared him for what he was witnessing or especially what he was about to witness.

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137 James Drayton Nance Letters, August 14th, 1861 and October 13th, 1861, The South Caroliniana Library. Nance’s idea of taking men from the ranks as nurses was not an original idea by him, but it did show his concern. As the war dragged on, “medical Regulations required one nurse for every ten patients,” but this would not solve the problem, “getting and keeping enough nurses...was one of the major problems confronted by the medical department.” There were very few women nurses, and the men nurses often proved to be inadequate for the job, but there were some who “became quite skilled” at it. The more serious problem was that when proper training was given, the men “were subject to recall for field service.” Glenna R. Schroeder-Lein. Confederate Hospitals on the Move, (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), p. 76.
138 James Drayton Nance Letters, August 14, 1861. The South Caroliniana Library.
CHAPTER TWO
“Every Moment We Expect To Receive Orders to Move”
6 December 1861 through 17 July 1862

On or about November 6th, 1861, James D. Nance had become ill with a prolonged and severe attack of bronchitis and jaundice. By December 13th his condition had worsened and he received a fifteen day furlough, which he spent in Richmond. His illness continued and he was admitted into the hospital with a violent chill. With a recommendation from the surgeon, Nance applied and received a thirty day furlough. Before he could take his leave for home, he contracted pneumonia and typhoid fever and had to remain in Richmond. It is not certain when Nance reached Newberry. Being very ill, and having no army surgeon to speak for him, Nance wrote directly to Samuel Cooper, Adjutant and Inspector General of the Confederate army, explaining his situation and that he was not well enough to return to his company. “I herewith transmit my own certificate on honor as to my condition and a full statement of my case,” wrote Nance, “as required by Art[icle] 180. Army Regulations.” Being at home and nursed by his family was certainly what the captain needed. By the early part of April, Nance had made a full recovery and was headed back to his company, “in
very good condition.” The captain arrived in Richmond and was surprised to find some of his company there who were in the hospital. He also learned that one of his troops, the son of Colonel Renwick, had died. Nance stayed a few days in Richmond before heading to the Peninsula, where he stated, “I expect to enter upon the most severe service I have yet seen.”

Before Nance became ill he had written to his sister regarding the issue of re-enlistment. He confided to Laura that the men who had volunteered for twelve months had a right to go home, but he worried “what the situation of affairs will then be, none can tell.” He did, however, believe that a “temporary withdrawal from the army” could impair the regiment and cause a great loss of morale. “In such an event, wrote Nance, “I should be in favor of re-enlistment immediately.” He also felt that those who had not seen their families since they enlisted should be able to return to their friends and loved ones “for a short season.” The captain made it clear where he stood, but he believed that “with others, I am inclined to think the call of duty will be homeward.”

139 James D. Nance Letter, January 24, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
140 Ibid, April 12, 1862.
141 James D. Nance Letter, December 6, 1861. The South Caroliniana Library.
The situation had become serious, and according to one historian, “The re-enlistment issue caused more problems in April than McClellan’s army.”

Soldiers of the 3rd South Carolina who had volunteered for one year were to see their enlistment expire on April 14, 1862, and according to Tally Simpson, many of these men would “march away to the music of the enemy’s cannon.” Tally believed that the “stain” now upon the men who had refused to stay and fight it out with the enemy could never be “blotted” away from the Palmetto State. The men had so “degraded” themselves “in principle,” wrote Tally, that they are “unworthy of the liberties which patriots are determined to maintain.” Tally held such a poor opinion of the men that he called them “a set of low-down thieving vagabonds.”

Nance’s brother-in-law, Adjutant William D. Rutherford, had the same “low opinion” of the troops as Tally Simpson, and in a letter to Nance reveled the “gloomy facts upon which to feed our patriotic hopes.” Rutherford believed that Nance could make a difference if only he could “speedily recover” from his sickness. Rutherford believed that the company needed the captain’s guiding hand and commanding presence. Nance’s men

143 Everson, Far, far from home, p. 105, 114, 115.
respected him and his judgment, and the issue would probably have not become as troublesome as it did if Nance had been present.\textsuperscript{144}

The issue reached its height when the Conscription Act was passed in Congress in April. All men of military age were now under the authority of the Confederate government, and “the act was, in the main, bravely accepted.”\textsuperscript{145} Only a small number of companies actually took their leave, and had traveled only a few miles from camp when they received orders to return. A sergeant of the 3rd South Carolina wrote that “The men took their sudden return in good humor, receiving yells like Hello, boys, when did you get back? What’s the news at home? And how did you find all?” Everyone settled down after a few days “of good-natured badgering,” and it did not take the regiment long to forget an unpleasant experience, especially with McClellan nipping at their heels.\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{144} Wyckoff, A History of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina Infantry, p.39.
\textsuperscript{145} Douglas Southall Freeman. Lee’s Lieutenants: A Study in Command, Vol. 1. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1942), p.172. Freeman writes that The Conscription Act did not do away with regiments electing their officers, but in most cases “good men were promoted and incompetents were displaced.”
\textsuperscript{146} Dickert, History of Kerskaw’s Brigade, p.104, 105. Dickert wrote that it was mainly “the married men, who had left their families so unprepared twelve months before, who cared to return home; for some of the young men, who were under the conscript age, refused to leave.” Nance wrote to his sister before the re-enlistment issue about “connubial bliss” and the “evil” it contains. Nance was referring to the strong “attachments” of “home” that married men feel toward their families. And while all men felt the same way, married men seemed to have a stronger conviction that “absorbed...all other feelings.” James Drayton Nance Letter, June 8, 1861. The South Caroliniana Library.
By early May of 1862 the major concern of the Confederate President in Richmond centered on keeping General George B. McClellan from entering the city. General Magruder had sufficiently checked McClellan’s forces until General Joe Johnston could assemble a sufficient force to defend Richmond. Johnston, fearing that the position at Yorktown on the Peninsula could not be held, abandoned its position and fell back to Williamsburg with the intention of retreating closer to Richmond. The Battle of Williamsburg was the first effort to check McClellan’s forces. McLaws knew the area well, and he also knew where to concentrate his fire on the Federal units. Without hesitation, he ordered the 3rd South Carolina Infantry and General Paul J. Semmes Brigade to attack the Union forces.\(^\text{147}\) Although the battle was small compared to future battles, the 3rd regiment “received the notice and commendation of General McLaws,” who stated that the 3rd South Carolina “obeyed” their “commands with...alacrity and skill....” Tally Simpson wrote that when the regiment came under the enemy’s cannon fire “We ...immediately...loaded our guns” and “went [in] double quick.” Tally later wrote that the regiment was “anxious to prove themselves.”\(^\text{148}\)

\(^{148}\) Everson, *Far, far from Home*, p.122, 123.
After the battle of Williamsburg the men settled into camp and “all
companies were allowed to elect their officers, both company and regimental,
and enter the service for two more years.” Troops in the beginning had wanted
men who had past military experience and who would be “gentle” and “kind.”
Courage was never considered, for all southerners were imbued with that
qualification from birth. However, with an entire year of military service behind
them, including the Battle of Williamsburg, those who had once looked upon
discipline as something disagreeable now looked for officers who could best
bring it out. Discipline was now viewed as a “necessity.” They wanted “young
blood...their own age,” men who possessed courage, who could instill military
discipline, and who had an understanding of tactics and drill. They wanted
someone who had the best interest of the regiment as a whole in mind, and who
could inspire them. It was only natural, then, that men who inspired confidence
in their troops be elected to lead them. With this in mind, the 3rd South Carolina
Infantry chose James D. Nance as their colonel.149

The newly elected colonel opened up to his sister about his new position
and stated, “I feel its responsibilities very sensibly, but they weigh less heavily as
I grow more accustomed to its duties.” “I never sought the place,” he wrote, but

“I will endeavor to do my duty....”  He apologized to her for his slow letters, but stated, “they are written under such circumstances as would prevent a man of ordinary or limited experience from writing at all.” The best “I hope to do, is to let you know where and how I am....” Nance wrote that the regiment had “moved farther down the Chickahominy near New Bridge,” where “we are in plain view of the enemy, and opposite this point, they have a long line of batteries.” Nance commented on how the enemy would fire their batteries more in spite than for any damage they could do. But he did give them credit for their “excellent” gunnery and how “their shells burst beautifully.”

As McClellan slowly made his advance up the Peninsula, General Johnston again made efforts to stop him in what would be known as the Battle of Seven Pines. Through the last part of May Colonel Nance was kept busy with reconnaissance. In one scouting mission he was to advance closer to the battlefield for an expected attack. Once there, he remained in the position, “sleeping on our arms,” he wrote. Kershaw was certainly relying on Nance’s abilities in his new position. Nance had exhibited the tenacity and aggressiveness that instilled confidence in his superior officers. When Kershaw received orders for two regiments to return to their original position and two to

remain, Nance was one of the regiments ordered to remain in position and “in battle array.” Colonel Nance, along with Colonel Kennedy, was to represent Kershaw’s brigade in the coming attack. Nance stated that he and Colonel Kennedy were ordered to Kershaw’s headquarters where they were given instructions and “some encouraging words.” The expected battle, “and the fate of the following day,” was in the hands of Nance and Kennedy. Around midnight the rain fell in torrents and the banks of the river overflowed, washing away bridges and anything else in its path. In a matter of minutes the water was several feet high.\textsuperscript{151} Colonel Nance was ordered back to his former position, but he was convinced that a “final struggle...cannot be far ahead.”\textsuperscript{152}

On June 18, General Kershaw ordered a reconnaissance down the Nine Mile road. His objective was to move forward and “feel the enemy in our front.” He took with him the Second and the 3rd South Carolina, commanded by Colonels Nance and Kennedy.\textsuperscript{153} Kershaw had chosen his officers well and, according to historian Clifford Dowdey, they were “high caliber...field officers...distinguished by gallant personal qualities.”\textsuperscript{154} Kershaw placed these

\textsuperscript{151}Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.117, 118.
\textsuperscript{152}James Drayton Nance Letters, June 2, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
\textsuperscript{153}O.R. 1.Vol.11, p.1064.
“gallant” officers and their commands on opposite sides of the road, with the 2nd on the left and the 3rd on the right. He deployed his skirmishers, commanded by Major W.D. Rutherford, to feel ahead until they made contact with the enemy and drive them back upon their supports. To obtain their objective, Nance and Kennedy advanced to within seventy yards of the Federal line, whereupon it was reported that the enemy was in great force to the left of the Nine Mile road and their artillery positioned to the right.¹⁵⁵ It was the first time the regiment had come under such a severe fire from the enemy. Other reconnaissance had been mild compared to this one. Nance’s regiment was under grape and canister fire from two batteries. One battery was positioned diagonally, in order that the fire from the battery would hit the regiment in an enfilade fire. The battery in front of the regiment was aimed at the skirmishers in the woods in front of Nance’s troops, but the fire went directly over their heads and landed in front and rear of Nance’s regiment. Nance immediately ordered his regiment to lie on the ground and for his officers to dismount. Nance wrote that the “only thing which protected the men was the thick woods in [our] front and the complete prostration on the ground.” The men became anxious, and their anxiety grew as they witnessed their colonel escape death by

mere seconds. Nance was nearly killed, when, dismounted and standing directly in rear and to one side, he ordered his staff to follow him to the other side of the road, out of the range of the batteries. “We had scarcely moved when a shell struck...where we were standing,” Nance later wrote. The shell killed one in the party. Unshaken, Nance kept his command steady and in position while it was penned down under fire. Nance stated that “it was remarkable [more] of us were not hit.”

A soldier, lying prostrate on the ground agreed, stating that the “fire was furious indeed and [would have] proved rather destructive to...our men had we been standing. I have no doubt but that nine tenths of the command would have either been killed or wounded.” Nance noted that the shelling “reminded [him] of a hail storm,” with the grape and canister “striking in the trees and all around....” The troops were penned down from this “hail storm” without the least possibility of returning the fire upon the enemy. Nance remarked that it was one of the “severest trial[s] of a soldier...to be fired at without the ability to return it....”

Robert Stiles of Lee’s army was of the same opinion, stating that “nothing” could be “more soldierly” and “trying” as that of

157 Wyckoff, Historyofthe3rdSouthCarolina Infantry, p. 44.
“receiving fire without replying to it.”159 Officers were compelled to restrain motions of fear.160 The slightest mistake on the colonel’s part could have resulted in disaster, but he maintained his position and made his regiment ready for a hard fight until he was ordered to move across an open field to his right and clear the enemy’s fire. In his report, Nance stated that “It was impossible to form anything like an accurate view of the enemy’s force or position,” because the underbrush was so thick it excluded the enemy “almost entirely from our view.” However, his perception of the intelligence he was able to gather reinforced his belief that the enemy was in his front and in full force. Nance also reported that he was pleased with the way his command had conducted themselves under such an extreme and difficult situation.161

Nance, too, had passed a “strict standard” adhered to early in the war that of fighting “man fashion.” Simply put, Nance conducted himself under fire as the rank-and-file expected him to. He was unaffected by the steady fire being poured into the regiment and he resisted “all urges to quicken [the] pace” of his command. He did not “dodge or duck shells, or...seek cover.” Instead his

steadfastness under fire had stamped the “brand of approval” upon him that all officers desired, that of firmly impressing upon the mind of his men his influence.\textsuperscript{162}

When the regiment returned to camp, Nance was ordered to move his troops to the south side of the York River railroad, “and for the first time in our history,” wrote the colonel, “in reserve.” Except for his sickness and the thirty day furlough, Nance had been kept on picket duty and skirmishing with the enemy since he arrived in Virginia. He was certainly gaining valuable knowledge in handling men and in campaigning. Nance was confident of himself and his regiment, commenting that he was certain that when his regiment was needed it was “in a position in which we will likely get a place in the...next fight.” Military affairs were still unsettled, he confided in a letter to his sister Laura, and “a battle may occur any time.” But for the time being he was exhausted and hoped that the coming battle “may not [be] for a long time.”\textsuperscript{163}

D. Augustus Dickert wrote that “On the 25\textsuperscript{th} of June orders came to be prepared to move at a moment’s notice.”\textsuperscript{164} By this time, McClellan’s Peninsula

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\textsuperscript{163} James Drayton Nance Letters. The South Caroliniana Library.
\textsuperscript{164} Dickert, \textit{History of Kershaw’s Brigade}, p.123.
\end{flushright}
Campaign was three months old. On June 26, guns were heard and men began to scramble, “gathering their effects, expecting...to be ordered away.”

This would begin a succession of uncoordinated battles that would last from June 25 through July 1, 1862. The firing Dickert heard was that of A.P. Hill’s troops attacking north of the Chickahominy River. The next day, June 27th, Lee attacked the Federal troops in their new position near Gaines’ Mill. While this engagement was under way, Lee ordered General Magruder to make a demonstration against McClellan on the south side of the Chickahominy.

Magruder began “shift[ing] his troops here and there and back and forth,” fooling the Union commanders. Tally Simpson remembered that “Various demonstrations have been made on our part to keep the enemy in their present position....”

On June 29th, a Sunday, Marguder felt his force in its present position was in a “Critical and Perilous” situation. That morning Lee had gone in

168 Everson, *Far, far from home*, p.131.
pursuit of Magruder and explained to him “what he wanted done.” “Despite this personal conference,” historian Brian K. Burton in his work *Extraordinary Circumstances: The Seven Days Battles*, believed that Magruder “seemed to throw caution to the wind,” or else “he was so frustrated with the day’s problems” that he was at a loss as to what course to follow, and he ordered his commanders to advance and attack the enemy wherever they could be found. Magruder ordered Kershaw to advance first in the direction of Savage Station. Battle lines were formed and skirmishers were sent out to feel the enemy. General Kershaw gave the order for a great siege cannon to be brought forward that had been mounted on a platform car protected by a slanted roof made of iron. The 32-pounder was shelling the woods, helping push back the enemy. With the help of the siege gun, the 2nd and 3rd South Carolina made a difficult approach close enough to the enemy’s fortifications to discover they were “gone.” They continued their advance until they found what they were looking for. In front of Magruder was General Sumner’s corps, General Smith’s division of Franklin’s corps, and General Heintzelman’s corps, which had been ordered to

stay close by Sumner until nightfall.\textsuperscript{174} The Federal soldiers sent a wave of fire into the southern troops that was so deadly a participant remembered years later how “The balls whistled over our heads and through the tops of the scrubby oaks, like a fall of hail. It put chills to creeping up our backs....” General Sumner of the Union army was trying to hold Magruder in place while the Federals could pass in his rear to White Oak Swamp.\textsuperscript{175}

In front of Kershaw was a thick growth of briars and bushes with some heavy timber. Kershaw’s ordered the brigade to charge and “the troops bounded to the front with a yell, and made for the forest in front.”\textsuperscript{176} Kershaw’s troops advanced upon the enemy “with great fury.”\textsuperscript{177} As the South Carolinians advanced, the enemy redoubts, which held field batteries, were pouring a deadly fire into Kershaw’s troops. These batteries were shelling the troops with deadly effect as the Union soldiers retreated. Colonel Nance’s men charged the enemy with “alacrity and great enthusiasm,” yelling as loudly as they could and striking the enemy until they became “woefully tangled and disorganized, and in some

\textsuperscript{174} Allen, \textit{The Army of Northern Virginia in 1862}, p.102.
\textsuperscript{175} Dickert, \textit{History of Kershaw’s Brigade}, p.127, 128.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid, 128.
\textsuperscript{177} Battles and Leaders, Vol. II, p. 373.
places losing the organizations entirely.” But under the eye of their colonel, the troops continued to press forward until they “lost all semblance of a line.”

Colonel Nance blamed this on the “thick underbrush in which it was impossible to discover either friend or foe over 20 yards.” A soldier membered that “it was the thickest undergrowth of bushes you ever saw…. “[Y]ou could not see a man ten paces ahead of you and it was utterly impossible to keep anything like a line of battle.” The South Carolinians continued to press forward, however, until they were no more than “thirty steps away from the Federals.” The troops were ordered to “fire at will.” The clash was bloody and intense, and the South Carolinians advanced to within fifteen feet of the Federals. A soldier remembered the battle as “dreadful,” but they pressed on, pushing the Federals back, piercing their line and causing some confusion. Corporal Joseph R. C. Ward of the 106th Pennsylvania stated that the southerners advanced “rapidly” and “occupied “our deserted works,” but were attacked by the 71st Pennsylvania, who had been ordered away earlier in the day and was now coming back to the camp of the 106th to find it “deserted” and “occupied by the enemy.” As the 71st Pennsylvania attacked, another Yankee column was

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178 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, 129.
179 Burton, Extraordinary Circumstances, p.216, 217. D. August Dickert who was in the fight remembered that he was hit in the chest and fell to the ground. Trying to regain his composure he was hit in the leg from fire he believes may have come from his own comrades, a testament to the close fighting. Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.129.
threatening the southerners’ left flank.\textsuperscript{180} With their center pierced, and the
Federals bringing up reinforcements, a deadly fire was unleashed upon the
southerners.\textsuperscript{181} Nance stated that the fire from the Union troops checked them
momentarily, “but we pressed on slowly, returning the enemy’s fire.” When he
saw that the Federals were beginning to yield, he ordered a charge, pushing the
Union soldiers back into an open field.\textsuperscript{182} The fighting, in places, became hand-
to-hand, and confusion indiscriminately took hold of the troops. The soldiers
became stalled, more because of the confusion than anything else, and because
they were fighting in dense woods. One Federal soldier remarked that the
Confederates were firing at such a rapid pace they were making “the lead fly
thick and fast.”\textsuperscript{183} Corporal Ward of the Union army stated that the Federals had
“been furiously assaulted” while trying to hold their ground, “losing nearly one
hundred killed and wounded.” The 106th Pennsylvania believed they were
holding their ground against heavy odds, and that the southerners in their front
were being reinforced.\textsuperscript{184} Kershaw had not been reinforced. He began the attack

\textsuperscript{180} Joseph R.C. Ward. \textit{History of the One Hundred and Sixth Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers: 2d
\textsuperscript{181} Allen, \textit{The Army of Northern Virigina in 1862}, p.103.
\textsuperscript{182} O.R. 1, Vol. 11, part 2, 735.
\textsuperscript{183} Dickert, \textit{History of Kershaw’s Brigade}, p.128,129.
\textsuperscript{184} Ward, \textit{History of the One Hundred and Sixth Pennsylvania}, p.64.
with four regiments, and he ordered up Kemper’s Battery to shell the enemy.\textsuperscript{185} The Richmond newspapers reported that Kemper “had a penchant for getting into the thick of combat with his men,” hitting the enemy hard.\textsuperscript{186} The Union troops, with no one directing their movements, found themselves in a desperate struggle to hold their ground. General Burns was ordered up to take command of the disconcerted troops. Corporal Ward stated that the general immediately took charge, positioning the men and ordering batteries brought up to fire into the rebels. Burns also sent for reinforcements, and while waiting for this fresh body of troops the Union batteries opened up “with such good effect” it compelled the rebels to “retire,” but only momentarily. The southerners regrouped and attacked again, making “several attempts to dislodge” the Union soldiers.\textsuperscript{187}

The two sides continued the struggle until someone heard an order to “halt and cease firing.” Colonel Nance, hearing the order, found the officer responsible and asked “by what authority” had the officer “given it.” The colonel learned that the order came from the line to his right, and that the southerners were firing on their own men. Upon inspection, Nance was

\textsuperscript{187} Ward, \textit{History of the One Hundred and Sixth Pennsylvania}, p.64. O.R. Vol. 11, pt 2, p.91.
suspicious of the order, but with Kershaw out of reach, and out of hearing distance, he immediately took action and repeated the command. There were two reasons for this: first, the smoke of battle was so thick that the colonel had no knowledge whether the troops approaching from the right were friend or foe, and second, orders had been given earlier for all “line officers to repeat” any commands in order that officers down the line would be appraised of what was taking place in their front.\textsuperscript{188}

As Nance and his men fell back, the enemy, seeing what was taking place, began to advance and “poured a deadly and incessant fire into my line.” Nance wrote that he “met them again, pushing my line almost to the edge of the undergrowth, when, besides the fire in my front, I was subjected to a threatening fire upon my right flank.” Without supports either on his right or left, Nance fell back, stating that he carried the men back to their “original position.”\textsuperscript{189} Sergeant Dickert wrote that the men became “scattered” and confused and began to retreat back to where the troops had made the charge, and all who survived were “collecting around General Kershaw and Colonel Nance.” He also remembered that it was “here I first learned of the repulse.” But not all was lost; some of the southerners managed to place some batteries in

\textsuperscript{188} O.R. 1, Vol. 11, pt. 2, p. 735
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid, p. 735.
position and began to give the enemy a “raking fire.” The troops “reformed,”
and with the help of Jackson’s men, advanced all along the lines. The
Confederates pressed the attack until night, when General Sumner retreated
across White Oak Swamp.\textsuperscript{190} The South Carolinians had put up such a fight that
two Union generals remarked that only with “great difficulty” were they able to
ride “away with the dignity and deliberation due to a Brigadier.”\textsuperscript{191} Although
Nance inquired about the command to cease firing, he never found out where
the order originated, and believed that if not for the command the enemy would
have been completely routed. He was, however, relieved that it had not
originated from his command, and believed that the order was so offensive to
the brave men who had tried desperately to push forward that if the person
responsible could be found he should be court martialed. Colonel Nance had
more to do with drilling and training these troops that any one and a reflection
on them would certainly mean that his reputation as a soldier would suffer. This
he would have never tolerated. The colonel was certainly aware that the
reactions of his men on the field could hamper or advance his progress as a

\textsuperscript{190} Dickert, \textit{History of Kershaw’s Brigade}, p.128, 129.
\textsuperscript{191} Wyckoff, \textit{AHistoryoftheThirdSouthCarolina Infantry}, p.51.
soldier. He would certainly have gone to whatever lengths it would have taken to have the officer cashiered.\textsuperscript{192}

As day light approached the men could see the enemy had retreated, and they began burying their dead. With this finished, the men had hopes of resting for the night, but they were ordered forward to support General Longstreet at Frazier’s farm. Before they reached their destination, they were ordered to halt and rest until 11 p.m. Before midnight they continued their march and on the morning of July 1 at 8 a.m. they had advanced as far as the Willis Church road, whereupon General Jackson’s forces passed to their right. \textsuperscript{193}

“During the night,” writes General Magruder’s biographer, “McClellan had withdrawn his last units through White Oak Swamp and arranged them along the crest of Malvern Hill,” which he explains was a “natural platform for McClellan to defend against the pursuing Confederates....” Two very steep gorges on the eastern and western flanks of Malvern Hill revealed the deadly realization that General Lee, to attack McClellan, would have to do it in an upward motion on the northern slope. In one of the many ironic reverses of the Civil War, McClellan’s artillery chief, Colonel Henry J. Hunt, “had been schooled by Magruder at Fort Leavenworth.” Hunt had arranged his batteries on Malvern

\textsuperscript{192} O. R. 1, Vol. 11, pt. 2, p.736.

\textsuperscript{193} Ibid, p.728.
Hill to cover every conceivable approach by Lee’s men.\textsuperscript{194} The ground immediately in his front was open, its width varying in size from a quarter to half a mile. He had concentrated his powerful artillery and was supported by a large number of infantry, which was protected by earthworks. The entire front could be swept by Hunt’s artillery and infantry fire.\textsuperscript{195} Even before Hunt positioned his batteries on Malvern Hill, he was already acquainted with its features and its advantageous location. He began to place his artillery on June 30th in anticipation of the coming struggle, putting in motion what would become a “tremendous disaster,” and making what would become a prophetic statement espoused by General D. H. Hill that “if Gen. McClellan is there in force, we had better let him alone.”\textsuperscript{196} The aggressive and bold Robert E. Lee had pursued McClellan for six days, pushing him away from Richmond with every encounter. Lee’s goal was to finish off his adversary before he could reach the safety of his navy. This meant that Lee’s soldiers would have to cross open fields into Hunt’s murderous crossfire.\textsuperscript{197}

Lee’s plan at Malvern Hill called for “Stonewall” Jackson to step off first, followed by General Magruder. Two of Huger’s brigades were up and moving

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  \item \textsuperscript{194}Casdorph, \textit{Prince John Magruder}, p.183.
  \item \textsuperscript{195}Allen, \textit{The Army of Northern Virigina in 1862}, p.126.
  \item \textsuperscript{197}Casdorph, \textit{Prince John magruder}, p.183.
\end{itemize}
west into the Carter Farm. Longstreet was with Lee and along with A.P. Hill would be in reserve. Douglas S. Freeman wrote that “These orders were simple enough,” but from the time of “execution co-ordinated effort virtually ended.”

Instead, disjointed attacks were set off by the sound of McClellan’s guns knocking out of action what few pieces the southerners had managed to get on the field. One participant in the battle described the Confederate artillery’s “efforts as almost farcical....” Sergeant Dickert stated that brigade commanders, hearing the sound of the artillery, and believing it was a “signal” to attack, charged into Hunt’s guns. The fire from the Union batteries, along with McClellan’s gunboats, unleashed a fire that shook the earth like a volcano.

One participant remembered the projectiles coming from McClellan’s gunboats as large as “Lamp-posts.” Another stated they were the size of “nail kegs.” Dickert stated that he could not see the bluff because of the white smoke belching from the cannons. The troops were immobilized from the fire, and the

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201 Dickert, *History of Kershaw’s Brigade*, p.137.
smoke was so thick that the men could not fire with accuracy or charge with any deliberate movement of action. They were simply mowed down like the snow melts “before the sun’s warm rays,” wrote the sergeant.  

Nance and his men were ordered in line of battle along the Long Bridge road, where they remained for a couple of hours until ordered to form “a new line of battle to the left of a deserted dwelling, situated in an open field, and fronting the road...to the east of the house.” Nance and his regiment came under artillery fire and advanced with General Kershaw in order to capture the batteries, which were supported by infantry beyond the Willis Church road. Nance stated that his troops advanced as shells from the enemy’s batteries rained down upon them “with a steadiness...worthy of older troops.” It wasn’t long until the fire grew so heavy that Nance and his men were “directed to lie down for protection...in rear...of troops which had preceded us,” who were also seeking protection from the artillery. Kershaw reported the he had no knowledge of the area, but advanced his men through some woods “toward...the enemy’s fire,” all the while being shelled in flank by the enemy’s batteries, “which could not be avoided.” Advancing steady on, the men were met by

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204 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p. 137.
troops who were retreating from the deadly fire. With some assistance, Kershaw and his men found a ravine, which led them to the Willis Church road. There the enemy occupied an open field and could flank any force foolish enough to attack them. Seeing how well the enemy was placed, including his artillery, and “with a galling fire” opening in his “rear,” which Kershaw reported produced “a general feeling of uneasiness up the whole command,” volunteers were sent to arrest the fire, but the mission was unsuccessful. The shelling from the rear was doing more damage than the enemy in the front, and Kershaw ordered the command to retire down the same road in which they made the advance.205

In his report Nance made no apologizes for not being able to accomplish more, only that his command had suffered a “series of accidents [that had] prevented [them] from” doing all that was expected. One of these accidents was

205 O. R. Vol. XI, part II, p.728, 736, 737, 738. Mac Wyckoff. A History of the 2nd South Carolina Infantry: 1861-1865, (Fredericksburg, Virginia: Sergeant Kirkland’s Museum and Historical Society, Inc., 1994), 234, 236. Wyckoff states that the Second South Carolina was “within 100 yards of the enemy,” and though they wanted to attack, they were in “fear of shooting friends” in their front. “To add to their woes, the 26th Georgia” were firing on them and “inflicting more casualties than the Federals. Caught between friend and foe, Kershaw proposed to...General Toombs in his front that if Toombs’ charged the enemy Kershaw would support him. Toombs refused. Kershaw then proposed for his brigade to charge if Toombs’...would support” him. “Toombs...declined....” When Kershaw seen how fast the lead was flying (15 bullets had struck a tree he was behind) he decided to retire. There were some ambiguity later, writes Wyckoff, of who “retired” first, Colonel Nance or the Second South Carolina. “No matter which unit held its position the longest, both joined in the retreat and retired along with Kreshaw, expecting to find the rest of the brigade.”
friendly fire that had opened up on Colonel Nance’s right and rear, which produced some anxiety throughout the command. Major Rutherford volunteered to go back and deliver a message that the regiment was firing on friends. The firing came from the Twenty-sixth Georgia, which immediately changed its direction of fire. To Colonel Nance’s immediate left was the Second South Carolina, which withdrew, leaving his command exposed to the enemy. With his men subjected to such a deadly fire, Nance ordered his regiment back at the same time that Kershaw gave a command for the entire brigade to retire. Nance was “gratified” that he and Kershaw were of the same opinion in the judgment to withdraw under such a severe fire, but admitted that the order to advance was carried out under better composure than the order to withdraw. However, with organization breaking down, Nance kept as many men as he could together under the galling fire of the artillery and skillfully passed back “through the thick wood and the ravines, halting and reforming” his lines “at different points,” until he safely gathered his men back to the second point from which they had made their advance in the early afternoon.206

From this point, Nance took what troops he had gathered and deployed them as skirmishers in order to gather up the rest of his command before they

206 Ibid.
became scattered over too wide an area and he would not be able to hold the enemy in check “should [they] advance at this point.” Nance was certainly learning the advantages of concentration and the danger of dispersal on the battlefield. With as many forces as he could gather, he sent word to his commander “the condition of things” as they now stood and awaited for further orders. The colonel was ordered to hold his position, which he did, all the while “collecting and giving directions” to as many troops as he could concentrate under his command. Before long he was ordered to march back in the direction of the Long Bridge road, where he found the rest of his command had been collected under Major Rutherford. Needing rest badly, the regiment bivouacked for the night.207

Colonel Nance spent the next day resting his men. On July 3, he was ordered to scour the battlefield for arms of all kinds. He took with him his regiment, two companies from the Second South Carolina, and two from the Seventh South Carolina, along with 100 men from General Hill’s division. He was to drive off any enemy that still occupied the battlefield. Nance asked for, and received, cavalry to act as scouts to sweep any enemy that might be in his front so he could focus on the job at hand. With no enemy to be found, he collected

207 Ibid.
925 arms of all kinds to be delivered to the Ordnance Department. With this done, he wrote his report, and as always it was full of praise for his men and the gallantry they exhibited on the field. When he wrote of the losses his men endured, he attributed it to their bravery and aggressiveness, not to any fault they exhibited on the field of battle. He claimed that the heavy loss he sustained only proved the bravery of his command, and that under heavy fire there was not a regiment that showed any finer qualities than his.

Kershaw’s Brigade was “the most aggressive unit on the field,” and “suffered a whopping eighty-one percent of the Southern casualties at Savage Station.” A participant in the battle wrote that he “never again [wanted] to be...in such a terrible” conflict. As McClellan’s troops continued to fight rearguard actions, the Richmond newspapers admitted that the Union troops had conducted themselves “with unusual courage and determination,” and that the “fire from their artillery and small arms had been deadly.” The loss in men was extremely heavy in Nance’s unit. After the Seven Day’s battles he was concerned about the strength of his regiment, writing that he hoped the “authorities will...supply us with our proportion of [men that] we may once more

209 Ibid, 736.
be raised to something like the proportions of a regiment.” He was concerned that the new troops be trained in order that others would not suffer from the inability of green troops. “I am exceedingly anxious to have them,” he wrote, “as I have now such a fine opportunity of drilling them and having them well prepared for the service.” Nance’s regiment had certainly improved with the constant drilling and battlefield experience, so much so he considered his regiment “marked” with improvement. He was not about to let green troops interfere with the ability of his command. The South Carolinians had carved out a place in history that Nance was not about to let untrained troops tarnish.212 Sergeant Dickert was in agreement, for he wrote that what they had accomplished so far was “unparalleled in history.” 213

Colonel Nance must have certainly been in touch with General Kershaw and General McLaws about the subject of discipline. His concern was so great that he felt a letter to General Lee was appropriate. Nance must have been given permission to write the general because he was not one to go against military protocol. General Lee did receive a letter from Colonel Nance, although the letter has never been found. Judging from Lee’s response, Nance spoke about “the evils resulting from the laxity of discipline in the army, which it will

212 James D, Nance Letters, July 24th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
require the united efforts of all to remedy.” Nance must have either wanted to publish something he had written about the necessity of well disciplined troops, or he wanted more flexibility in the punishment of those who did not take discipline seriously. Nance was not only a graduate of the Citadel, he was also an attorney and the editor of a weekly journal that was published throughout South Carolina before the war. Lee did not agree with Nance and wrote that he could “not see what can be accomplished by the publication of an order on this subject.” Nor did Lee think that “the enlargement of the power of any regimental or brigade commander [would be] required.” Lee was just as concerned about discipline as Colonel Nance, and he ended his response by stating that “examples will be made of the offenders” and that he hoped the “measures” taken by those in command would be “found effectual” in breaking up what he believed a “great evil” in the Army of Northern Virginia.  

CHAPTER THREE
“It is Hazardous to Risk Prediction or Indulge in Hopes of an Early Peace.”
9 August 1862 through 26th of June

After Nance went into camp, he wrote his sister that he “had hardly
made himself comfortable before I was ordered off with my regiment.”215 On
August 4th, 1862 General McClellan ordered General Hooker to “advance in a
threatening move against General Lee.”216 On the 5th Hooker marched his
command back to Malvern Hill “as if to press Lee back.” Lee ordered General
Longstreet to meet them. Longstreet took with him the divisions of McLaws and
D. R. Jones. By night fall Kershaw had his brigade in place. His men were
ordered to sleep on their arms to guard against a night attack. Dickert stated
that the ranks were “badly worn by the desperate” struggles of the Seven Days
battles. “Still,” wrote Dickert, the men “showed a bold front for the coming
day.” The next morning preparations for battle were made, “but to the surprise
and relief of all, the bird had flown.” There was nothing but deserted camps.217
Nance wrote “for two days and nights we saw very hard service, but noted that
the enemy had fallen “back along the whole of [the] line.” Dickert stated that

215 James D. Nance Letter, August 9th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
216 Longstreet, From Manassas to Appomattox, p. 154.
217 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p. 138, 139.
there was evidence of a “hasty flight.” Elisha Hunt Rhodes of the Union army wrote in his diary that “the movement is said to have been a feint to draw troops from Richmond and give our General Pope a chance to operate north of Richmond.” Rhodes makes no mention of a “hasty flight,” only that they captured “several prisoners” and he “rode down to the James River for a bath and enjoyed it much.” As Rhodes enjoyed his swim, Longstreet marched his division back toward Richmond.

There was “nearly a whole month of quiet after the Seven days,” wrote Edward Porter Alexander, and during this time “The three separate armies which the Federals...had” were now consolidated under General John Pope. During this lull, Colonel Nance penned a letter to his sister, stating that during a reconnaissance he had led discovered the enemy had evacuated their strong positions at Berkley and Westover. He informed his sister Laura that the enemy’s forces had “been sent to re-enforce Pope, and we are expecting to go in the same direction to augment our forces now opposed to this General. We will leave our camp this afternoon for the vicinity of Richmond,” and then on to

218 James D. Nance Letter, August 9th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
220 Dickert, History of Kershaw's brigade, p. 139.
Gordonsville. Nance reminded his sister that “two attempts” had already been made to take Richmond, and “the third is now pending.” The colonel believed that God had so far “blessed us and our arms” and had given “us again the victory” one would think the “mind might be inclined to peace; but human calculations have been so sadly disappointed and all foresight so often failed in this strangely eventful war that it is hazardous to risk prediction or indulge in hopes of an early peace.” Colonel Nance was not hopeful of an early success over the enemy, and wrote that we must not “allow ourselves to be carried away by over-sanguine and pleasing anticipations of that future which no human eye can see.”

The two armies would meet again on the plains of Manassas, leaving behind 23,000 casualties. Colonel Nance and his regiment took no part in the Second Battle of Bull Run. After Longstreet pulled back the divisions of McLaws and Jones, Kershaw placed his men on higher ground a few miles from Richmond, where Nance’s regiment could “better guard against the ravages of disease.” There only duty was that of “guard and advance picket every ten or twelve days.” Tally Simpson wrote, “I can’t complain of my living, for if the army lived half as well as my mess does at times, no complaint could be offered

222 James D, Nance Letters, August 19th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
223 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p. 139.
about hard times.” “...we buy what little delicacies we need and generally make out to do very well indeed.” The only complaint Nance had was “I write, while I sit on the ground, by a flickering and very unsatisfactory light.” Nance stated to Laura that he had a “stupendous” duty of “equipping and drilling 215 conscripts assigned to my regiment and now in my camp.” I am glad to have them however, since it gives me a command of between 800 and 900 men.”

After a reconnaissance on August 17, Hill and McLaws moved north, marching for Richmond and boarding trains that would take them only as far as Hanover Junction. They spent several days “guarding this key junction and watching for a possible move by McClellan to attack Lee’s strategic flank,” and “left on August 26 or 27 to join the main body of the army.” As they reached Manassas they learned of the battle, “meeting the wounded” as they approached the field. They saw sights that were “too sickening to admit...description.”

Lee, flushed with victory after the Seven Days Battle and at Second Manassas, hoped to retain the initiative and crossed the Potomac River into Maryland. The “enthusiasm knew no bounds,” wrote Sergeant Dickert, and as

224 Simpson, Far, far from home, p.140, 141.
225 James D. Nance Letters, August 9th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
226 Wyckoff, History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, 64.
227 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p. 143, 144.
the men crossed the river the band began to play “Maryland, My Maryland.”

Colonel Nance and his regiment crossed the river opposite Leesburg and marched to Frederick, where they camped for a few days and then headed on to Middleton. They then crossed the first range of the Blue Ridge opposite Brownsville. The southerners believed that Maryland and her sympathies lay with the South, and that her young men would rush to their ranks if only the yoke of the North could be broken. Maryland’s lack of empathy for their fellow southerners would stun the rebel soldiers. Nance spoke of the several “opinion[s]” that were circulating about Maryland and her lack of enthusiasm for joining the South. Of the many speculations that permeated the army, the one most popular in the ranks, was that the people were “divided on the question of disunion.” Maryland was not fully assured either that the southerners were earnest in their endeavor to free the state from tyranny, or that Maryland was strongly in favor of the Union. The colonel believed that Maryland was “more union (sic) now than last year and the longer she remains under the thralldom of the North the more acquiescent she will become and therefore the more

228 Ibid, p.144.
alienated she will grow to the South.” Nance was correct in his opinion; Maryland would remain attached to the Union. 230

Lee’s plan was to capture Harpers Ferry, which now lay directly in his rear. To accomplish this he divided his army into four parts, with one portion headed toward Hagerstown while the other three moved to surround and capture Harpers Ferry. 231 Lee assigned Lafayette McLaws the leading part in his plan to capture Harpers Ferry. McLaws was assigned a precarious position because his rear was vulnerable to attack. The enemy could easily assail him through the mountain gaps from the east. He had to be vigilant and he had to work fast. McLaws was under no illusion as to what his job was, “so long as Maryland Heights was occupied by the enemy,” he wrote, “Harpers Ferry could never be occupied by us.” He went on to conclude that “If we gained possession of the heights, the town was no longer tenable to them.” 232

On September 12th, Kershaw, along with General Barksdale, was ordered up the southern portion of the 1,400-foot Elk Ridge. 233 Kershaw reported that he had his command advance down the road by Solomon’s Gap and then onto the

231 Wyckoff, History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, p. 67.
summit of Elk Ridge, which overlooks and commands Harpers Ferry. It was not long until the pickets of the enemy were discovered five miles from the heights, separating into two columns and scattering to the left and right of the road. Kershaw put skirmishers to his right and left, firing at the enemy until they began to withdraw. The Yankees went running back to their defenses shouting the alarm, “unnerved” by “smoke [rolling] up from the woods” and with the southerners shouting the rebel yell. Someone in the 126th New York gave the command to fall back and the Yankee troops evacuated their breastworks and withdrew.

Colonel Nance, being on the right and in reserve, camped in line of battle for the night. The next morning the front line attacked and forced the enemy to withdraw from behind an abatis to more “formidable breastworks built of large chestnut logs with rocks to shoot through.” The enemy put up a strong fight, firing into Colonel Aiken’s Seventh regiment with deadly accuracy until the ground was strewn with dead. General Kershaw then ordered Colonel Nance to engage the enemy. Nance passed over Colonel Aiken’s regiment (who had taken the blunt of the enemy’s force) and tried to carry the enemy’s works, but was

234 O.R. Vol. XIX, part 1, p. 862.
met by a deadly volley from the enemy. Without faltering, Nance and his regiment met the volley and sent one of their own, firing until Nance could “discover more of their (the enemy’s) position and force.” At one point Colonel Nance thought of charging the enemy and giving them the bayonet, but thought it “unadvisable to attempt” until more rifle fire could be poured into them. It was not long until Nance sent word back to Kershaw that he believed the enemy could be flanked by Colonel Henagan’s regiment, who then occupied the right of Nance’s regiment. Suddenly a yell went up from the ranks, which made Nance think that the enemy had been repulsed. What had actually taken place was that when Colonel Nance sent word back to Kershaw that he wanted to flank the enemy, Kershaw was in the process of sending a second regiment to demonstrate on the enemy’s right flank. Sending back Nance’s messenger, Kershaw ordered the colonel to cease fire. Kershaw did not want the fire from Nance’s regiment to interfere with the movement. Before Barksdale’s regiment could get into position, however, a company from his regiment fired into a whole body of sharpshooters lodged in the rocks, killing a good portion of them and causing the entire line to collapse and fallback. This was the cheering from the ranks that Colonel Nance heard. Nance had already advanced close enough to
the enemy’s works to see them evacuating and immediately moved in to occupy
the enemy’s position, capturing prisoners and artillery.\textsuperscript{237}

The troops of the 126\textsuperscript{th} New York were completely routed, \textsuperscript{238} and
Colonel Nance received three cheers from the 7th regiment, “to whose relief I
had come.” As soon as General Kershaw came up he shook the colonel’s hand
and congratulated him on his success, stating that Nance’s “Regiment was an
honor to its commander and State.” This “filled me with a proper pride,” wrote
the colonel, who knew he was in “possession” of an “important point.” Again,
Nance had conceived the same battlefield strategy that his superior had.
Regardless of which flank the southerners attacked, the outcome would have
been the same, and Nance knew it as he looked out over the mountain and
down on the “scenery” below, which he stated was “the finest I ever saw.”
Nance was feeling the importance of his post and the part he was playing in it, so
much so that he was compelled to write that “neither” his “Regiment nor the
world (if indeed it ever will) have learned how much our Brigade and Regiment

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\textsuperscript{237} O. R. Vol. XIX, pt I, p. 862-864, 867, 868.  \\
\textsuperscript{238} Sears, \textit{Landscape Turned Red}, p.123.
\end{flushright}
contributed to the victory.” For “without the [victory] of the Heights,” wrote the pretentious young colonel, “the Ferry would not have been taken.”

Colonel Nance was expecting to witness the surrender of Harpers Ferry the next morning, but was ordered back up the valley to intercept the enemy who had gained the rear of General Cobb’s Brigade. With the arrest of the enemy’s progress, Nance crossed the Potomac the next day and marched for Sharpsburg. As Nance’s regiment reached the vicinity of Lee’s headquarters, he took note of the stragglers and a large number of sick who fell out in the open field. They numbered in the “thousands,” he wrote, and believed that “Our division as a whole was never in a poorer plight to go into battle.” Nance was concerned that the many miles of marching the men had been subjected to might diminish their fighting ability, but he need not have worried.

Around 9 o’clock on the morning of September 17th the regiment was ordered to assist General Jackson, then engaged with the enemy on the left. As the men “marched some distance in front of Robert E. Lee” he “shouted” to

240 James Drayton Nance Letters, September 24th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
one of his officers and “pointed” toward the men, making it known that he was
glad of their arrival. Immediately McLaws begin to give orders, pointing in the
direction he wished his officers to advance. With General Cobb stalled at the
Dunkard Church, Kershaw’s brigade charged into the flank of the 125th
Pennsylvania and the 34th New York243 with “piercing rebel yells.”244 The
Confederates hit with such fury that General Sedgwick’s entire division was in
peril of being “virtually isolate[d].” A Union officer remembered that “the attack
of the enemy on the flank was so sudden and in such overwhelming force that I
had no time to lose for my command could have been completely enveloped and
probably captured……”245 Kershaw hurried to cut off the enemy’s advance toward
some abandoned artillery, ordering Colonel Kennedy’s 2nd South Carolina to
march by “flank to the extreme point of the wood[s]…..” Before the order could
be carried out, the 2nd South Carolina became entangled in some rail fencing and
the enemy opened fire. The 2nd South Carolina immediately extracted
themselves from the fencing and “promptly faced to the front,” returning fire
and forcing the enemy back. Kershaw then advanced the 8th, the 7th, and the

243 Joseph L. Harsh. Taken at the Flood” Robert E. Lee & Confederate Strategy in the Maryland
Campaign of 1862, (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1999), p.390, 391. General
Walker of the Confederate army states that he seen “General Lee standing erect and calm,” and
that he had never seen a more “noble figure.” Battles and Leaders 2, p.676, 677.
244 Richard Moe. The Last Full Measure: The Life and Death of the First Minnesota Volunteers,
3rd South Carolina. The Yankees, their ranks depleted, managed to reach high ground and the abandoned artillery, unleashing grape and canister into the Confederates. Colonel Nance’s regiment advanced “steadily, with spirit, under a heavy fire,” which was so concentrated on Nance’s regiment that to escape a blood bath the colonel changed direction and shifted his troops “slightly” to the left and closer to the forest with some distance between his troops. As soon as he reached the outer skirt of the woods he concentrated his men “to a greater compactness,” cleared the woods, and brought his men into an open field, where the fire from his men made the enemy withdraw “with considerable disorder.” However, the enemy to the right of Nance’s regiment was more determined to make a stand, and with the support of their batteries, “was more steadfast....” As the 3rd advanced further in the open field, Nance realized that his rear was venerable to the enemy’s batteries, which made his position hazardous. Recognizing the potential danger, and seeing no enemy in his front, he changed direction and led his men into a hollow, which gave him protection from the artillery fire. Nance sent his adjutant, Y.J. Pope, to explain to General Kershaw what had happened. Kershaw immediately had the 2nd South Carolina’s

247 Richard Moe. The Last Full Measure, p.185.
left to connect with Nance’s regiment, and both advanced across the Hagerstown Pike to the crest of a small ridge and opened fire on the Federals. But the Federals had the advantage of infantry and artillery, forcing the right of Nance’s regiment to give way. A soldier “later recalled that there was not another Confederate regiment in sight to right, left, or rear.”

Many of the Confederate units engaged in the battle had been “scattered by detachments and disoriented by rapid deployment over unfamiliar ground,” and “all had been disorganized by the nature of the complicated fighting....” Nance’s regiment was no different. All present had been subjected to a “massive” artillery bombardment from the enemy. Nance’s adjutant, Y. J. Pope, remembered thirty-three years later that “cannonballs” were “dancing over the ground” in every direction. Nance reported that he “kept a strict watch on his front,” and advanced as soon as he saw an opportunity to do so, pushing the enemy back until their artillery and reinforcements forced him to withdraw to the hollow he had advanced from earlier. He continued to meet heavy opposition from the “cross artillery fire,” forcing him back to within a

249 Wyckoff, A History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, p.76, 78.
251 Wyckoff, A History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry p.76.
quarter of a mile from where he had gone into action that morning.\textsuperscript{252} A portion of the fire that pushed Nance and his regiment back probably came from Lieutenant George A. Woodruff’s Battery I, 1\textsuperscript{st} U.S., which had unlimbered in the middle of a field (Nance spoke of this field in his report as a “plowed field”) “to challenge the Confederate pursuit.”\textsuperscript{253} The Federals had disputed “every foot of ground,” and had been “driven from rock to rock, from tree to tree...in great disorder,” suffering heavy losses.\textsuperscript{254} However, the fire from these guns, plus the support of the 7\textsuperscript{th} Michigan and 34\textsuperscript{th} New York regiments,\textsuperscript{255} and the fact that the southern flanks were vulnerable to attack, halted Kershaw’s pursuit.\textsuperscript{256}

Colonel Nance took up position where the woods joined a corn field and remained there until the night of the 18\textsuperscript{th}. The artillery Nance and his fellow southerners had been subjected to was horrific. They had “pounded us left and right...east and west,” wrote General Longstreet, and “there [was no] limit to physical endurance.”\textsuperscript{257} Nance would write that “It was the grandest fight I have ever been in,” but so much confusion was the order of the day that “There are

\textsuperscript{252} O. R., Series 1, Vol. XIX, pt 1, p. 869.
\textsuperscript{254} John G. Walker. \textit{Battles and Leaders}, Vol. II.P. 678.
\textsuperscript{255}Sears, \textit{Landscape Turned Red}, p.226.
\textsuperscript{256} O. R., Series 1, Vol. XIX, pt 1, p. 858.
some things I could explain; others I could not.” After the battle Lee is said to have stated, “I believe I got out of them all they could do or all any men could do.” These words of boast are uncharacteristic of Lee, but the gist of the statement is certainly true.

Colonel Nance believed that his regiment had been “victorious,” and only the enemy’s artillery had saved them. Echoing the colonel’s sentiments was a Georgia private, who remarked that the “industrious Yankee gunners must have a contract to turn the woodlot into stove wood.” The South Carolinians had sustained heavy losses, but Nance would not give an inch, only admitting that there were “slightly varying fortunes at different points on the line,” but “the advantage was really with us.” The 106th Pennsylvania would have agreed. Joseph Ward of the 106th stated that these Confederate regiments came onto

258 James Drayton Nance letters, September 24, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
259 Harsh, *Taken at the Flood*, p. 496. Harsh states that this statement of Lee’s was “one of the few boasts about himself ever attributed to Lee.” Kershaw states that when his brigade reached the field “all were worn and jaded.” O. R., Series 1, Vol. 19, pt 1, p. 865. Colonel Nance admitted that he was suffering from a fever and had diarrhea. James D. Nance letters, September 24th, 1862. One participant in the battle states that it was “remarkable” the men accomplished what they did. All were “want of food and clothing” and “The army was literally in rags...suffering from actual hunger, more that can now be realized.” James Lide Coker. *History of Company G, Ninth S.C. Regiment Infantry, S.C. Army and of Company E, Sixth S.C. Regiment Infantry, S.C. Army*, (Greenwood, S. C.: The Attic Press, Inc., 1979), p.114.
the field and “immediately turned the fortunes of the day.” Major General Jacob D. Cox of the Union army was under the same impression, stating that Union soldiers were thrown in confusion and panic and suffered “terrible losses.” Nance was so elated with what he thought was victory that the fever and diarrhea he had suffered from had been relieved by the battle. It has “acted like a charm on me,” confessed Nance, and I am now “up and about.” Nance had every reason to be elated about the turn of events. His regiment, along with others of Kershaw’s Brigade, had been exposed to enemy fire in their “first advance more than any other.” Nance had moved his regiment “over a large, open space” while attacking. None had pursued the enemy with more “enthusiasm,” driving them to the protection of their batteries. General McLaws wrote of Nance that “he brought his regiment from the [battlefield] in perfect order….with the precision of a parade.” McLaws also stated that Nance had “perfect control of his men.” And attributed this control “to the high state of discipline and good drill for which his regiment is distinguished.” Nance emerged from the Battle of Antietam an ideal officer. Although his men were fatigued from battle, they were not pursued. They were still determined to do their duty

264 James Drayton Nance Letters, September 24th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
whenever ordered. Nance went into The Battle of Antietam with 345 men. He lost 14 killed and 35 wounded, a causality rate of 14%. Nance went into camp with his command badly in need of rest, “but how much longer we will remain quiet,” wrote Nance, “I can’t say.”

As the Army of Northern Virginia crossed back over the Potomac and made ready for winter, Nance remarked how heavy the first snow was and that his men lacked shoes. The weather was cold and many men left tracks of bare feet in the snow, but Nance felt that the suffering that the newspapers reported were more “imaginative” than real. He and his regiment were camped around Fredericksburg and were busy with picket duty. His lines were along the south bank of the Rappahannock River; the enemy picketed along the opposite bank. “There we stood,” wrote Nance, “walked and talked—enjoying each other, but nothing more.” Nance stated to his sister that no conversing was allowed between the pickets, but that the Yankees always try to strike up a conversation, although “I believe, seldom succeed.” The colonel believed that the regulation of no talking with the enemy was a wise one, and that the enemy should “be treated with the greatest contempt.” Nance’s views about the Yankees had not

266 James Drayton Nance Letters, September 24th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
267 James Drayton Nance Letters, November 8th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
softened. If anything his animosity was greater, and he remarked to his sister that “civilities” should not be shown to them. However, he did seem to feel that a lieutenant of his had shown gallantry by escorting the wife of a Yankee sergeant across the river and into enemy lines. The job of escorting the lady would have fallen on Nance, who always conducted himself in the ways of a gentleman, but he was busy at another point in the line and “missed” the “opportunity.”

Nance was also concerned with the women inside the city of Fredericksburg, writing that “there are...many cases of suffering and trial with these good women. Although I have not seen it, I understand many of these ladies have camped in the woods and crowded together in mean houses in the vicinity of the city—to escape the danger which threatens the city and its inhabitants.” Nance was of the opinion that the city would not “suffer,” and if it did “only incidentally.” He told his sister Laura that there would “be no direct attack upon the city,” but confessed that “if there be a fight in the vicinity of it, it may suffer as did the little village of Sharpsburg, Maryland, at Antietam. I should be sorry to see Fredericksburg suffer,” he wrote. “No more loyal town honors Virginia, and in time of peace, I imagine no people in her borders are more

268 James Drayton Nance Letters, November 30th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
hospitable and virtuous.” The colonel believed that even though things are “silent and settled...now,” it would not last. “The condition of thing must change,” and elaborated something was astir. The “situation” in a few days will “lead to [new] developments,” he told Laura. “Till then, we must wait patiently and faithfully.” 

Major General Ambrose E. Burnside was now in command of the Union army. His plan called for placing the Union army between Richmond and Lee’s army. Burnside’s dilemma, however, was how to cross his 120,000 man juggernaut over the Rappahannock River. All the bridges around Fredericksburg had been destroyed. The pontoon bridges he ordered had not come up in time for him to cross before Lee took up a strong position on the opposite bank. On the morning of December 11th, using a hundred and fifty artillery pieces for cover, Burnside’s engineers laid their pontoons across the Rappahannock River. Longstreet and Jackson positioned their troops to contest the crossing. General Kershaw’s Brigade was at the foot of Lee’s Hill ready for action. When the guns belched forth their missiles of destruction the sound reverberated up and down the river. “Fall in” was the order heard. General Kershaw rode up and

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269 Ibid.
271 Everson, *Far, far from home*, p.190.
down the lines steadying the men, and encouraging them to “stand steadfast.”
The men lay and waited to the sounds of “rumbling wagons, artillery, and cavalry
crossing the pontoon bridges above and below.”

On the morning of the 12th, close and heavy skirmishing was kept up by both sides, and “whole divisions” were kept busy fortifying their lines. Colonel Nance had accompanied General Kershaw, along with other officers, in studying the topography of the lines. Nothing was left for want. It had been decided beforehand what details would be needed for supplying the troops with ammunition, water, taking care of the wounded, and any other arrangements that needed attending to. There would not be a repeat of Maryland Heights, where the men spent an “uncomfortable night” without water and food.

Between 9 and 10 o’clock the heavy fog that had consumed the area began to lift, and Lee’s army could see a “field of blue” with their “Great lines of infantry waving banners, guns…glistening in the sunlight, all marching double-quick down the steep inclines...to join their comrades of the night before.” Sergeant Dickert

273 Harsh, Taken at the Flood, p.203.
remarked how the long lines of men, “surging in and out among the jutting of the hillsides beyond...resembled some monster serpent dragging its weary length along.” All could not wait, according to Dickert, to “meet the death...awaiting them.”275 On the morning of the 13th a Federal shell landed among Nance’s men, wounding at least one. The men held steady, with the colonel reporting that this was nothing more than a nuisance. It only proved how battle-hardened the regiment had become. Around 2 p.m. Colonel Nance was ordered to move out of his breastworks, which he had thrown up the night before, and move down the Telegraph Road 500 to 600 yards to the left of the road and cross a branch into an open field behind the Marye’s house “with his right resting at the house.” Nance was then ordered to advance and occupy the crest of the hill at Marye’s house in support of General T. R. Cobb. He immediately ordered his men to close ranks and march parallel with the road.276 Colonel Nance was at the head of his regiment leading his men down the Telegraph Road followed by the 2nd South Carolina “under one of the heaviest shelling of artillery fire the troops ever experienced.” For two hundred yards the men were in full view and range of the enemy’s artillery on Stafford Heights.

275 Battles and Leaders, p.90. Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.181. Dickert stated that the fog was so thick a man could not see 20 feet in front of him, but could hear Union officers giving commands to their troops. P.182, 183.
Sergeant Dickert remembered the running of this gauntlet as horrific. “The men scattered out along and down the road,” remembered Dickert, “[with] shells...plowing in the road, bursting overhead, or striking the earth and ricocheting to the hills far in the rear.” Firmly fixed in their devotion to duty, the troops advanced until they reached a ravine, where Colonel Nance then turned his regiment to the left and up a by-road to the plateau in the rear of the Marye Mansion. As Nance reached the top of the plateau, his regiment was in columns of fours and under a rapid and continuous fire. The colonel changed from column of fours to front forward on first company.277 This was usually done in columns of twos and was a difficult maneuver to do under fire. But Nance had drilled his company so well that they could do these difficult movements with precision. Officers and men had to spend hours in drill and staging reviews for these maneuvers, and others like them, to be executed on the field of battle. It was essential for soldiers and officers to commit to memory these maneuvers if they were “to be of value in formal fighting.” One volunteer stated that tactics in the beginning of the war“conveyed no ideas to my mind, and the movements described were utterly beyond my comprehension; but now the whole thing comes almost without study.” This statement could certainly have been made

277Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.184, 185.
by one of Nance’s men, for “thousands shared the [same] attitude.”

Henderson of Aiken, South Carolina, remembered, with a little humor, that “We spent most of our time drilling. We hardly had time to cook our rations. In the morning we had the squad drill, company drill, skirmish drill, battalion drill, regiment drill, and brigade drill. In the afternoon we had the brigade drill, regiment drill, battalion drill, skirmish drill, and company drill. If there were any other kinds of drills, we had em.” According to Henderson it had all paid off, for the men could do a “double-quick for two miles.”

As Colonel Nance engaged the enemy, he could see the importance of occupying the ground around the Marye House with its commanding position. Not all of Nance’s men had yet formed, but the “fear” for the “safety” of the position had so “excited” the audacious young colonel, that he took what well-drilled men he had and went forward, leaving orders with his adjutant, Lieutenant Y. J. Pope, to bring the rest of the command forward when they came up. Nance led his men forward, taking fire from the enemy all the way to the crest of the hill. He then ordered his men to lie prostrate on the ground and return the enemy’s fire. As other companies of the colonel’s regiment entered

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the fray, he began to direct their movements. The Union soldiers, seeing Nance’s men coming up, “directed” their fire “against us.” The fire became so intense that Colonel Nance moved to the right of the regiment to better position his men, oblivious to the danger around him.  

As the colonel was shouting orders, he was hit by a minie ball that entered his left thigh to the right and above the knee. Nance’s troops came to his assistance without delay, and insisted that he be taken to the Marye Mansion for safety, but he refused to leave the field. He did not immediately turn over his command, but continued to direct it movements. After the colonel was pulled back some distance, he could see that his regiment was “too much exposed” to the enemy’s superior artillery. He then gave orders that the regiment be pulled back behind the crest of the hill, just enough to be out of sight of the enemy’s artillery but still able to concentrate their fire upon the Union infantry. With the loss of blood the colonel began to grow weak. He first turned command over to Lieutenant William Rutherford, but Rutherford fell from a wound to his side. Command then went to Major Robert C. Maffet who was hit in the arm. It then fell to Captain Rutherford P. Todd, but he too was hit. Captain William W. Hance then assumed command but fell victim to a Yankee

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bullet while trying to execute an order from Colonel Nance, who still refused to be taken to the hospital. With Captain Hance down authority then fell to Captain John C. Summer, but the fire was so heavy that he was killed “instantly when a canister round passed through his head.” Captain John K. G. Nance, Colonel Nance’s brother, who was suffering from a wound himself, became the seventh and final commander of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry. At 6 p.m. Colonel Nance ordered his brother to withdraw his troops from Marye’s Heights down the hill and to connect with the Phillips Legion behind the stone wall. The last order Nance would give before being taken to the hospital was for a detail to be sent to replenish the ammunition boxes. In a brief period of time Nance had witnessed six commanders die or receive severe wounds. He also witnessed one hundred and sixty-seven men fall out of four hundred who had followed him to the crest of the hill. The regiment had received such a deadly fire from the enemy that the brigade historian wrote with pity that “the dead of the Third Regiment lay in heaps, like hogs in a slaughter pen.” Some relief did come for the 3rd South Carolina through the 7th South Carolina and the 15th North Carolina, who advanced to the Marye house and held the enemy by lying on the ground to load and standing to fire.282 General John Bratton from Winnsboro South

282 Francis Augustin O ’Reilly. The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock,
Carolina, commanding the 6th South Carolina Regiment, was also ordered to support the South Carolinians and to “prevent the enemy from flanking” their “position.” In a letter to his wife Bratton stated that his fellow Carolinians needed no help. They “did all the work” and “covered” themselves in “glory.” 283 Tally Simpson wrote that the “company suffered severely,” but we have “thrashed” the enemy. “All the firing seemed directed at our brigade,” wrote Tally, and “The battle was...awful....” The balls came as thick as hail, and it is wonderful every man was not either killed or wounded.” Thank God “for his merciful protection of my life!” 284

After Colonel Nance was taken to a hospital and his wounds were dressed, he was still concerned for his regiment and the honors due them. He was in very “poor” condition, both “mentally and physically,” and had to be “propped” up in bed to write General Kershaw. He believed it imperative that his regiment receive the full measure of their worth. “I believe there is no officer in the Regiment, except myself, who is fully acquainted with the operations of the whole command...up to this time.” He also believed that the officer commanding his “unfortunate Regiment” did not know enough about the battle

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284 Everson, Far, far from home, p.166, 167.
to write an “intelligent or satisfactory report of the whole day’s transactions.” “I was in constant communication with them,” wrote Nance, “sending two or three orders to the officer commanding after I was moved behind the [Marye] house.” Nance was adamant that the part his regiment engaged in for Marye’s Heights was put in its “proper light.” He also wrote to Kershaw that though his command was “greatly weakened,” those “who are still able to keep the field will follow...you in any contact you may have with the enemy.” Well aware of the intense struggle his regiment had come through, he believed them to be indefatigable and that they could overcome any contest with the enemy. He was confident of his regiment and its valor and trusted no one but himself to write the official report. He also wanted to make sure that if any blame was forthcoming, it should rest with him.  

Nance had great respect and devotion for his men, and those that knew him testified to his strong attachment and affection. He never sought his own comforts; stated Lieutenant Dickert, “his ruling aim and ambition” was his men.  

This statement is evident from his letter to Kershaw. Writing from his hospital bed “propped up” and exhausted, his only thought was that his men be given proper respect. He was even apologetic for his own wounding, dismissing

286 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.353.
it as not “very serious,” but he eventually admitted to Kershaw that the wound above the knee is “painful and dangerous.” Others also described Nance’s wound as “severe” and “painful.” Nance was fortunate that his leg was not amputated. Most wounds of that sort called for the removal of the limb simply because vaccinating for smallpox, providing quinine for malaria, and curing scurvy was the limit of the medical knowledge doctors possessed. After the war, armed with the understanding of germs and antiseptics, doctors were horrified at the archaic methods of medical knowledge then known. Although some doctors did exhibit skill, the majority was unprepared to take proper care of the serious wounds that were inflicted. A doctor visiting one hospital wrote of having to “tiptoe” around filth, excrement, and urine. Even though remedies were taken as the war continued to correct such horrible conditions, good sanitation remained a problem throughout the war.

After he regained his strength, Colonel Nance did write his report and gave the respect and admiration due his regiment. He acknowledged that “the duty devolves upon me to detail the operations of the...recent engagement at Fredericksburg, Va.” His report was full of praise for his men’s actions on the

287 James D. Nance Letters, December 17th, 1862. The South Caroliniana Library.
field; he wrote that the regiment acted “manfully,” and that it was a “pleasure to testify to the courage and fortitude with which the dangers were met and...fiery trials were endured.” He ended his report by stating that he could not “refrain...from complimenting” the command and “the dauntless spirit and bravery displayed throughout by the officers and men.” Nance admitted that his command had suffered severe casualties, and stated that although the record of the 3rd South Carolina on the field of Fredericksburg was a bloody one, he wrote with satisfaction that “we trust it is a highly honorable one.”

Historian George C. Rable wrote of the Battle of Fredericksburg that “the placement of so many troops in such a vulnerable place had caused unnecessary casualties.” The reason for this, writes Rable, was due to McLaws and Longstreet believing that if General Kershaw needed help in keeping the Yankees away from the stone wall, troops should be in position to come to his aid. Rable considered Fredericksburg a “one-sided fight,” but even in a “one-sided fight the victorious army makes mistakes.” And in doing so, Rable writes, “some regiments,” such as Colonel Nance’s, “paid a high price.”

And for the Union things were no better. One Union soldier wrote that the rebels threw everything at us “from a 24-pounder to a pocket pistol.” “The air seemed to be full of hissing shot and bursting shells. The roar was terrific and it required men of nerve to stand it.” Tally Simpson wrote, the Yankees suffered a “terrible slaughter,[and] I feel rather low-spirited.” He hoped that the war would soon end “and that peace” would cover the land. Tally was so melancholy from the death and wounds of so many friends that he wrote, “Camp is sad and quiet, at times the blues nearly kill me. I have no heart for anything.” Spirits would soon rise, however, and troops were back at picket duty, but the atmosphere between the pickets after Fredericksburg was not the same. A newspaper reporter witnessed and wrote about the profanity and “abusive expressions” of troops on both sides, with “threats of shooting” that, according to the reporter, only lead “to skirmishing and bloodshed,” which resulted in no gains to either side. But spring was on its way, and “Time passes swiftly by,” wrote Tally Simpson, and “The earth revolves regularly upon

293 Everson, Far, far from home, p.167.
its axis and continues its natural course.” The skirmishing would end, and death and destruction would resume with even more fervor than before.\footnote{Everson, \textit{Far, far from home}, p.170.}
CHAPTER FOUR

“I Did not feel Like Bidding Farewell...May God Bless You! Your Affectionate Brother, J”

26\textsuperscript{th} of June 1863 through 6\textsuperscript{th} of April 1864

During Colonel Nance’s absence the 3rd Regiment continued to see service in the Battle of Chancellorsville. But, according to one participant who “summed up the Carolinians’ role in the campaign,” the men “had very little active fighting.”

Still, the reputation of the Carolinians had not been diminished. General Lee “recognized” Kershaw’s brigade “as one of the best fighting units in the army.”

Tally Simpson noted in a letter home that General Lee “says his infantry can never be whipped,” and that “He (General Lee) gave Genl Kershaw and his command a very high compliment.” Tally went on to relate to his family how General Lee had given McLaws an order “to send a brigade to a certain point,” and that McLaws stated that “he would send Semmes.” “Lee told him, No, send Kershaw...One of our boys heard this from Lee’s own lips,” wrote a proud Tally.

Kershaw reported that the conduct of his men had never been better.

After convalescing at his home in Newberry, South Carolina, Colonel Nance was back in Richmond on the 6\textsuperscript{th} of June making arrangements to rejoin

\begin{footnotes}
\item[296] Wyckoff, A History of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina Infantry, p.111.
\item[297] Everson, Far, far from home, p.226.
\item[298] Wyckoff, A History of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina Infantry, p.112.
\end{footnotes}
his regiment. The only problem was that he was not sure where it was located. He would take the railroad to Staunton and the stage to Winchester, “in the neighborhood of which town I hope to find my Regiment,” he wrote. However, he was still uncertain as to their whereabouts, adding, “It depends upon the movement of the army, and these movements depend, in a great measure, upon circumstances.” Nance had made inquiries as to what General Lee intended to do but was not successful. “No one here seems to know what General Lee intends doing,” stated Nance. “As for myself I see, nor hear, no reason for changing the opinion expressed at home, that he does not intend a general advance into the enemy’s country. Circumstances may determine a different course from what now seems probable. If he can make anything like a formidable invasion—one that could inflict substantial damage and strike terror into the hearts of the Northern people—it would be advisable, it seems to me, to make it; but if it is to end in an invasion merely, then it is not advisable; for it will raise for them an army and bring us no corresponding advantage.” But I am “perfectly willing to leave the matter and all of its consequences to Gen, Lee....” Nance seemed to be thinking what General Lee and some of his lieutenants were thinking of the advantages that an invasion into the enemy’s country might bring
to the beleaguered city.\textsuperscript{299} Nance must have been feeling melancholy as he left home and headed back to the army. His sister reprimanded him for not saying some final goodbyes to friends. “I regret not seeing them, “he wrote, “but I hadn’t the time, and besides, to speak the truth, I did not feel like bidding friends farewell....”\textsuperscript{300}

Nance did not arrive in camp until July 3\textsuperscript{rd}. “I got to the battlefield,” wrote the colonel, “just as Pickett was returning from his assault.” Nance was horrified at the repulse, stating that “I saw enough...to convince me of the great strength of Meade’s position....” He went on to respond, “I have never regretted a personal condition more than I did mine on the 3\textsuperscript{rd}.” “After all my fatigues, perils and hopes, I only over took the army to find it engaged in the bloody struggle at Gettysburg.” Colonel Nance regretted that he had not been at Gettysburg for the battle, and remarked, “I was too late, and could not repress” the feeling of guilt I had for not being “with my command.” Nance felt that it was “unnatural” not to have been with his men at such a time, and believed that only a soldier would be able to feel the emotion he was feeling for his absence. However, he was soon made aware of how important his presence was and that there was still enough fighting left to be done. This soon calmed his emotions to

\textsuperscript{299} James Drayton Nance Letters, June 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1863. The South Caroliniana Library.
\textsuperscript{300} Ibid.
the point that he felt of “use to [his] command and of...service to his
country...”  

Dickert, promoted to First Lieutenant after the Battle of Fredericksburg, remembered that “At daylight on the morning of the 5th the...grand army turned its face southward...in rather ill condition” from the losses it had sustained at Gettysburg. As the army made its way back to Virginia, orders were given that no private property was to be “molested.” The fields that the army passed through in the Blue Ridge were fenced in by rails, and it was “strictly” forbidden to disturb any of them. One night as the 3rd South Carolina was camped around one of these fields it began to rain. As the troops “lay in the open air,” with no protection, one of the men eyed “a shambling, tumble-down rail fence.” With help from his comrades, the soldier took the rails and made a “hurried bivouac,” others did the same, and the men spent a comfortable night that otherwise would have been unpleasant. The next morning, as the troops formed a line and made ready for the days march ahead, company commanders were met by Colonel Nance. Dickert remembered that no one thought much about being approached by the colonel. They expected to receive instructions as to the line of march, when suddenly they were “met by those cold, penetrating, steel-gray

301 James Drayton Nance Letters, August 16th, 1863. The South Caroliniana Library.
302 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.xiv, 255.
eyes of Colonel Nance.” “Then all began to wonder what was up.” He first walked up to Captain Richardson and asked, “whose men [have] taken the rails.”

Colonel Nance had a dominating appearance. “Physically, he was a very fine looking man and officer.” He was taller than most men of the era and had a large frame. When he spoke his voice had a deep bass to it that had a resonating effect. Towering over the captain he asked, “Did your men take any rails?” “Yes, Sir,” came the reply. “Did you have them put back?” “Yes, sir.” He then turned toward Captain Gary, “Did your men use any rails?” “Yes, sir.” “Did you have them replaced?” “No, sir.” And on down the line it went. “All admitted” to taking rails and not putting them back except Captain Richardson, who had avoided punishment by ordering his men to return the rails they had taken. The colonel began to “lecture” the nine company officers in such a way that the “disobedience to orders” was made to sound as if the officers “had deserted [their] colors in the face of the enemy, or lost a battle through his cowardice.” Colonel Nance was not one to easily dismiss disobedience of orders on or off the battlefield without punishment, and told the nine disconcerted officers that “for the present you will deliver your swords to Adjutant Pope, turn your companies over to your next officer in command, and march in rear of the

regiment until further orders.” “Now, gentleman, let this never happen again.” The officers were thunderstruck. “Had a thunder bolt fallen, or a three hundred-pound Columbiad exploded in our midst,” wrote the astonished Dickert, “no greater consternation would they have caused.” The officers took their place in rear of their command and were subjected “to jeers and ridicule” until Lee once again met the enemy and they were released and ordered to rejoin their units.305

As the men marched out of Gettysburg and closer to Virginia, there were some who had doubts about the Confederacy and its chances of winning the war. Tally Simpson was of the opinion that “the picture is...dark,” and that the South had “fallen...victim to a merciless foe.”306 However, Colonel Nance thought the situation at Gettysburg and Vicksburg had been “magnified.” “I do not think there is any cause for despondency,” he wrote. “Our army is in good condition, and is constantly improving and increasing. There is more reason to expect now a victory at the next onset between Gen. Lee and Meade than there has been on other occasions....” Nance believed that Gettysburg was nothing more than a “repulse,” and “we do not apprehend a defeat, or a reverse.” He did not believe that Gettysburg had “destroy[ed] the confidence of this army in its valor and prestige.” He simply believed that the “position” the army was

306 Everson, Far, far from home, p. 256, 257.
“thrown was well nigh impregnable,” and that the “people” had to “exhibit” more “fortitude.” 307

Regardless of “the waning Confederate will to resist” that many historians have argued, Colonel Nance, like many officers in the South of his age, including William “Willy” J. Pegram, John “Hap” Chamberlayne, Greenlee Davidson, William Gordon McCabe, William Dorsey Pender, and Stephen Dodson Ramseur, were determined that the idea of southern independence would never falter. To lose faith in the Confederacy would be the equivalent of forsaking God, “family and community….” These young zealots could never imagine “defeat at the hands of Ungodly Northerners: setbacks may occur...but only as temporary aberrations in God’s plan.” 308 Colonel Nance also believed that a

307 James Drayton Nance Letters, August 16th, 1863. The South Caroliniana Library. Wyckoff, A History of the 3rd South Carolina Infantry, p.129. Gary W. Gallagher. Lee & His Army in Confederate History, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), p.86, 91. According to Gallagher there may be evidence to suggest that “tremors” were sent through the South after Gettysburg but no “substantial body of testimony” exists to classify Gettysburg “as a debacle equivalent to Vicksburg,” or that the men “lost confidence in Lee, or believed that his army incurred irretrievable damage during the campaign.” The Army of Northern Virginia “stressed their tactical victory in the first day, the supreme gallantry of their assaults against powerful Federal positions, and the inability of the enemy to drive them from the field or administer a killing blow during the retreat.” Gallagher also writes that “Numerous diaries and letters of Confederates outside Virginia described Lee as unbeaten and unbeatable in early 1864—a telling indication that they did not consider Gettysburg a serious defeat.” Sounds much like what Colonel Nance believed. As for as historians who have incorrectly analyzed Gettysburg and Confederate moral see Gary W. Gallagher, The Confederate War How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997),p.17, 20, 21, 24.

“more hopeful spirit” cast by the army “is [not] to be found” anywhere. The colonel was far more correct in his analysis of Gettysburg and Vicksburg than the historians since the battle have been.309

As the 3rd South Carolina made camp, Nance was kept busy with the demands of the 3rd South Carolina. It was in these times that officers “showed their best qualities.” Nance had not only to make himself comfortable, “but a whole regiment of men.” Old tents had to be discarded, new dwellings built, shoes and blankets had to be requisitioned and the camp kept in good order. Pay rolls had to be addressed. Monthly and quarterly returns had to be accurately accounted for. A correct count of deceased soldiers had to be provided to the proper authorities. Men continued to “drill, inspections were made, reviews were staged and “many other things too numerous to mention.” All of these demands Nance managed well. Attending to the comforts of his men led to better organization, it lowered the number of the sick, and brought about a better élan among the regiment.310

Nance also began to reflect upon his religious convictions. He had been marching and fighting since the war began, and had won not only the admiration

309 James Drayton Nance Letters, August 16th, 1863. The South Caroliniana Library.
310 Bell Irvin Wiley, Embattled Confederates, P. 74, 75.
of his troops, but his superiors also. He had been “entrusted...with the command of Kershaw’s brigade,” and had been “a member of a board, appointed by Gen. Lee, to examine officers of this division.” Nance stated that two years of war was enough “to turn a man’s mind away from religious thought and reflection.” The battles he had come through branded an image of death and destruction upon the colonel’s mind that would haunt the best of soldiers. Nance understood that the enemy would stand and fight unless they were forced to realize that to subjugate the South would take more blood than they were willing to bleed. War had occupied his mind, and these actions do not offer “opportunities...favorable for improving one’s spiritual condition,” he wrote. He continued his thoughts by adding that, “approaching God in acts of prayer and praise; and the scenes, through which we have to pass, do not often foster a favorable spirit for religious service.” Nance had fallen in to the earthly traps that “harden” the heart, instead of the heavenly “habits” that soften it. He was aware of his religious soul, and the punishment for disobeying God’s will, and he had “great reason to fear” God’s judgment, “lest he fall.” I am “constantly aware of this danger,” he wrote, and he realized that he could not “escape it.” He
believed that this was a good thing. “I ought, perhaps, to feel thankful,” he
confided, “for without it I would not be so apt to seek safety and salvation....”

Colonel Nance was not having a premonition of his death; on the
contrary, he felt that to die for his righteous belief that the South should be an
independent nation was an honor. Nance did not fear death. He believed he
was fighting a holy war, and to be killed by a Yankee infidel in battle only meant
that the doors to God’s kingdom would open wider to such a righteous soldier.

“How earnestly ought we to strive to unite to the virtues of the patriot soldier,”
he wrote. To Nance none stood higher in patriotism than “Stonewall” Jackson.

Nance believed that Jackson stood at the “head of the heroes of this
revolution...more than any of our Captains,” and Jackson’s death, stated Nance,
had raised him to the very pinnacle of honor. Honor and righteousness was the
same creed of principles that Nance held tightly. No greater eulogy could be
given to Jackson, or anyone fighting for honor and righteousness, than that “he
died fearing God.”

Nance had seen the horrors of war, and they had so
affected him emotionally and in spirit that he had the perception that he had

311 James Drayton Nance Letters, August 16th, 1863. The South Caroliniana Library.
312 Carmichael, Lee’s Young Artillerist, p.58.
313 James Drayton Nance, August 18th, 1863. The South Caroliniana Library
strayed from his own salvation. “My sins”, he confessed, “have been more than enough to damn me over and over again,” but he wished for nothing more than “the powerful influences of the Spirit” to light upon him so that he would “be made more diligent in [his] search after the truth of the Gospel, and that I might possess more fully its peaceable fruits of righteousness.” He was eager and “anxious” for religious support to assist him in his effort to walk in God’s path, and his desire “to cut loose from the world” and repent from his sins was a constant reminder for him to be forever observant of his desire to know “eternal peace,” the same peace that the great “Stonewall” Jackson had known. Nance was confident of God’s forgiving grace and of His “liberal” measure of pity and mercy. He was also confident that God will “forgive me of my sins, and adopt me into His holy (sic) family, forever and ever.” With a feeling of absolution and remission from his sins, the colonel turned his mind back to his family and the pressing matters of war.  

Soon Nance wrote home again. “My dear Laura: Your letter...reached me just as were leaving our camp on the Rapidanriver (sic)....” “This is the first camp we have had since we left the Rapidan. When we broke camp there, we expected to have gone on to Fredericksburg before stopping; but for some good

314 James Drayton Nance Letters, August 9th, 1863. The South Caroliniana Library.
reason, we were halted here, about ten or twelve miles from Chancellorsville and on the Fredericksburg turnpike, leading from Orange. How long we remain here, or what our next movement will be, depends upon the enemy: for theirs regulate ours, for the present. And from this circumstance, I judge that they have been very much in doubt what to do, for two or three weeks; for we have been very fidgety (sic) and uncertain in our movements. I rather suspect it will all end in the two armies confronting each other again near Fredericksburg.”

The colonel was correct about two armies clashing; but the designation was wrong.315

While Nance and his men were busy with picket duty, General Longstreet was busy writing the Secretary of War about his desire to go west and help General Bragg turn back General Rosecrans of the Union army.316 Both President Davis and General Lee agreed that Bragg should be reinforced, and if a crushing blow could be delivered to Rosecrans army the pressure on the western front would be relieved. If such a blow could be delivered swiftly, Longstreet could then return to Lee’s army before any danger to the Confederate capital could be realized. With preparations made, Longstreet began the arduous journey of

315 Ibid.
moving his entire corps by rail. It was a daunting task, considering the railroad was worn-out and the cars wobbled. It was not the best way “for hauling good soldiers,” remembered Longstreet’s Chief of Staff, “But we got there nevertheless.” The “rickety train,” with all its “jerks and bangs,” pulled up at Catoosa Georgia on September 19, 1863. With horses waiting, Longstreet and his staff mounted and headed to find General Bragg.  

Longstreet brought with him eight brigades and six batteries. The most advantageous route for the trip would have been through Southwest Virginia and East Tennessee, but the enemy controlled Knoxville, forcing Longstreet’s army to make its way through the two Carolinas and Georgia. With Hood’s division already departed, Kershaw’s men boarded the trains at White Oak Station for their long ride to North Georgia. The soldiers were loaded onto boxcars inside and out. There were as many riding on top of the cars as inside them. Because of the warm weather, the troops tore away the sides of the cars with knives and axes so they too could see and “yell” at the “pretty women” who crowded together to see the soldiers pass, and to see the old men and boys toss their hats in the air and shout. Lieutenant Dickert wrote that “The news of our

coming had preceded us,” and people of all “sex [and] age...gave us their blessing and God speed as we swept by with lightning speed” toward the river of death.319

On September 18th, General Rosecrans concentrated his army at Chickamauga Creek in Cotoosa and Walker Counties, Georgia. General Braxton Bragg, who was considered “a grim old fellow, but a true soldier,” put in place his plan of crossing the creek and attacking the Federal left, which would put his army between Rosecrans’s and Chattanooga. On September 19th, Hood’s division, which had arrived early, attacked the Federals along the north-south Lafayette to Chattanooga road and had “managed some headway,” but by night fall it had suffered heavy casualties without breaking the Federal lines or interrupting their line of communications.321 That night the two armies slept on their arms, “hardly a hair-breadth apart.” General Bragg would try again on the 20th, and this time Longstreet would be on the left and the two armies would confront each other on a five-mile front. The plan was “simple.” Leonidas Polk,

319Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, P. 263, 264. There is some ambiguity as to the translation of the name of Chickamauga. For the “loosely translated” name of Chickamauga River see Peter Cozzens. This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 90. Historians R.L. DiNardo and Albert A. Nofi translate it as two Creek Indian words that mean the “dwelling place of the war Chief.” James Longstreet: The Man, the Soldier, the Controversy, P. 153.
who commanded the right wing of Bragg’s army would attack, pushing the Federals into McLemore’s Cove, and at the same time “Turn their flank and move them back in a swinging-door fashion” that would continue “right down the line.” The next day, as the battle raged, Rosecrans received a report that a gap had opened in his lines. Instead of verifying the report, Rosecrans ordered two brigades pulled from his center to fill a hole that did not exist. Before Rosecrans realized his mistake, General Longstreet, with eleven brigades, and seeing the opportunity that lay before him, attacked with 16,000 men through an opening of a half mile and nearly divided Rosecrans’s army in two.322

Around 11 p.m. on the 20th, General Kershaw was ordered forward to place himself and his brigade under the command of General Hood. Under a heavy fire, Kershaw was ordered by Hood to form a line in his rear with his center resting on Hood’s center. As Kershaw put in motion the movements that had been ordered, General Longstreet sent Kershaw a message to advance even further than Hood’s order had intended. As Kershaw advanced across the LaFayette road, he came into open ground. From there he continued on until he approached some woods toward what he believed to be the Cove road. Longstreet reported to Kershaw to be aware of the enemy to his right. Unknown

to Kershaw at the time, the Federals that had repulsed Hood’s men were still holding their position to his right. Kershaw had placed Colonel Henagan’s 8th South Carolina on his right to cover him from any danger arising in that sector. With the pressure on Hood’s front increasing, Colonel Nance observed a portion of Hood’s division falling back on Kershaw’s line. Kershaw, also seeing the incident take place, directed his men to wheel to the right, perpendicular to their original position. With this accomplished, Kershaw was made aware of the wounding of General Hood. Since General McLaws had not yet arrived on the field, command fell upon General Kershaw, who immediately took charge and ordered Colonel Nance to keep advancing. As Nance made his way across the battlefield he could see the enemy’s position was an advantageous one. The Federal line rested on the summit of a hill, which gave the enemy a commanding view of Nance’s regiment on which they released a devastating fire.323 Nance’s men suffered greatly from this fire delivered from Snodgrass Hill, and men were shot down “unexpectedly,” throwing the regiment into confusion.324 But the men managed to push the enemy back and capture several pieces of artillery as they pressed forward, crossing over a fence and advancing a hundred yards into

324 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.279.
enemy territory before being halted until they could be supported. It was not long until Nance heard firing on his right, which he took to be that of General Humphrey’s troops. “We pressed on,” wrote Nance, “under a severe infantry and artillery fire...posted on a strong and elevated position.”  

As the Colonel advanced, he found himself in a precarious situation. The regiment to his right, the 7th South Carolina, had veered too far to the right and had let a gap of at least 300 yards come between the two regiments. With his right flank exposed, and the enemy fire thinning his ranks, and “no signs of a continued advance on my left,” Nance could see no alternative but to stop his advance and return fire as “effectively” as he could. At this point in the battle a strange incident took place. Colonel Oates, according to historian Peter Cozzens, who wrote that “no other regiment saw more of the battle field or caused more problems than the Fifteenth Alabama advanced his Alabamians into the...gap between the Third and Seventh South Carolina regiments.” “Once there,” writes Cozzens, “Oates began to throw his weight around,” ordering Colonel Nance “to close up on the Fifteenth” and advance with him in attacking the enemy. Cozzens stated that Colonel Nance refused, but Oates, “claiming to be the senior colonel present, even though his commission had not yet come

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325 O.R. Series 1, Vol.XXX, pt. 2. p. 508
through,” still proceeded to order Nance to attack with him, and again Nance refused. He then went to the 7th South Carolina and demanded the same thing, and again he was refused.\textsuperscript{327} Oates stated that he “bestowed upon” Colonel Nance “a few encomiums and returned to my regiment.” \textsuperscript{328} Cozzens stated that Kershaw was “oblivious to Oates meddling on the right.” \textsuperscript{329} Oates stated that the 7th would not follow him because Kershaw had put them where they were.\textsuperscript{330} Colonel Nance probably felt the same way; he was not one to disobey orders, nor was he one to let the fog of war get the best of him. He had also been engaged with the enemy and knew what was in his front, which was probably the reason he paid no mind to Oates’s orders.

Nance had been on the field since before noon. He knew the thousands of troops that had advanced through the fire of the enemy was exhausted and needed rest. Officers had been shot down, and in the “pell-mell rush of attack, regiments and brigades had intermingled.” He knew that this all had to be corrected and ammunition boxes refilled.\textsuperscript{331} But Oates was blind to his

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Peter Cozzens. \textit{This Terrible Sound: The Battle of Chickamauga}, (Chicago: University Of Illinois Press, 1992), 426, 427, 429.}
\footnote{William C. Oates. \textit{The War between the Union and the Confederacy and its Lost Opportunities}, (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Bookshop, 1985), p. 260, 261.}
\footnote{Cozzens. \textit{This Terriable Sound}, P. 427.}
\footnote{Oates, \textit{The War Between The Union and the Confederacy}, P. 260.}
\end{footnotes}
surrounding and was still trying to convince someone to advance forward with him. After some speech making he managed to persuade one company from the 7th South Carolina to make the attack with him, but once they met the enemy's fire, the company “ingloriously fled.” He tried to rally them but to no avail; he then turned to see his own men following the 7th down the hill.  Although Nance never mentioned the incident in his report, he probably felt vindicated in his actions when he saw Oates and the company from the Seventh South Carolina make their way back. Kershaw, however, was furious with Oates, stating that the Colonel and his regiment advanced with Law’s brigade and the 7th South Carolina and “pushed his way into the affairs of the South Carolina regiments,” initiating an attack “without orders.”

After the incident with Oates, Colonel Nance sent a courier to advise Kershaw of his surroundings. Nance was ordered to pull back to a low ridge in front of the fence they had crossed earlier in the day, which he ordered his men to dismantle and build into breastworks. The enemy, seeing Nance retire,

332 Oates, The War Between The Union and the Confederacy, p. 261. Oates states in his memoir that he did “justice” to the South Carolinians who followed him in the attack, but blamed his commander, General Laws, for not sending on the report. Oates states that Laws was notorious for not making “reports beyond the casualties of battle.” He apologized to the Captain of the South Carolinians in his memoir for forgetting his name, and wrote, “I am sorry that I do not remember the name of that Captain, which prevents me from doing justice to him and his brave company in this connection.”

attacked his thinned ranks, but the troops were “cool and deliberate,”
remembered Nance, and although the firing from his ranks were “irregular,” it
kept the enemy from advancing further until General Gracie’s brigade came up,
passed over Nance’s lines, and attacked the enemy. Nance, taking heavy loses,
could advance his regiment no further, and went on the defensive in case
Gracie’s attack was not successful. The decision for Nance to act on the
defensive proved a wise one when Gracie’s regiment, failing to dislodge the
enemy back from their strong position, “retired with other troops that had been
unsuccessfully thrown against the same point.” With night approaching, the
firing on Nance’s front abated. Although Nance was not successful in putting the
enemy to flight, he had driven them back a half a mile into their own lines and
delivered as much punishment as he took, causing the enemy to retreat as soon
as darkness fell.  

General Kershaw had been on foot directing the battle in his front.
Historian Peter Cozzens has determined that Kershaw could not “coordinate” the
attack because his regiments were spread out on a “front far too wide to control
on foot.” The attack that has been made on Kershaw is that he “advanced at
different speeds through the dense woods and attacked in piecemeal

This certainly doesn’t give due credit to General Kershaw or Colonel Nance in their effort to force back an enemy in a battle “that was raging furiously all day long... for five or six miles up and down the Chickamauga.” And it certainly doesn’t give Kershaw credit for being thrown in command under extraordinary circumstances. Major William M. Owen, Chief of Artillery for General Buckner’s Corps, stated that “the position held by the enemy is a very Gibraltar, its sides precipitous and difficult to climb....” B. L. Ridley of General A. P. Stewart’s staff reiterated his fellow colleague by stating that Snodgrass Hill was a “fortress almost impregnable to attack.” Captain Isaac H. Bailey remembered that southern troops attacked fortifications “the full length of the field and about twenty-five yards from the river bank.” Also, the southerners attacked portions of the Union army that was using Spencer repeating rifles. Colonel Nance’s 3rd South Carolina, which occupied higher ground than the immediate units around them, “suffered...severely” from these repeating rifles, which probably played a huge part in Nance pulling his men back. A soldier of the 3rd South Carolina was thankful that Colonel Nance was leading them

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335 Cozzens, This Terrible Sound, p.424. Wyckoff, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.139.
338 Baumgartner and Strayer, Echoes of Battle, p.86, 87.
through such a harrowing experience.\textsuperscript{339} These repeating rifles would certainly make their mark at Chickamauga. The 21\textsuperscript{st} Ohio “was armed entirely with Colt’s revolving rifles” and gave the “opposing Confederates the impression that they were fighting an entire Union division.” This weapon made it very difficult “to cope” with an enemy armed with such a “destructive power.”\textsuperscript{340} The 21\textsuperscript{st} was one of the regiments that opposed Colonel Nance at Chickamauga.\textsuperscript{341} Still, the Union army was becoming anxious that the ground they were holding might have to be evacuated. B. L. Ridley of General A. P. Stewart’s staff stated that the two days of fighting had become a “war to the knife and a fight to the finish.” He also stated that seventeen charges were made against Snodgrass Hill until all divisions on the field “acting in conjunction attacked.”\textsuperscript{342}

Colonel Nance’s troops were simply played out. They had been fighting a well entrenched army for hours.\textsuperscript{343} Nance and his troops had out distanced

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\textsuperscript{339} Confederate Veteran, Vol. XXX, P. 294.
\textsuperscript{341} O.R. Series 1, Vol. XXX pt 2, P. 432.
\end{flushright}
other commands on the field, but this only proved their aggressiveness, which they had shown on other battlefields. One of the earlier historians of the war pointed out that “Chickamauga was a soldier’s battle,” and fought “with a minimum of direction from the high command.”  

The piecemeal attacks that were made stemmed from the overall confusion of the battlefield, the “fury” in which the Confederates made their assaults, and the “complicated fight” that ensued. As for as Kershaw not being able to coordinate the attacks, he did what he was ordered to do by General Hood. When Hood broke the enemy’s line, the troops understood what this meant, and with a zeal pressed the enemy. When Hood was wounded and taken from the field, the absence of his “guiding hand” caused the assault to become “disorganized.” Kershaw’s South Carolinians were “eager to fight,” and they did just that. Kershaw was pressing the assault and was unaware of a movement to his right. General Longstreet, in his report, stated that Kershaw had “received no definite orders himself (being

analysis of the Chickamauga campaign, stated that Thomas “did not hold his ground until nightfall, as has been so widely claimed, and then retire at his leisure.” Horn discerns that Thomas fell back around 5:30 P.M., “which was a long time before night.” Stanley F. Horn. **Tennessee’s War 1861-1865: Described by Participants**, (Nashville: Tennessee Civil War Centennial Commission, 1965), p.212.

344Robert Self Henry. **The Story of the Confederacy**, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1931.) 309. Peter Cozzens also admits that “it was... a soldiers fight.” 429.

under the command of General Hood), was not advised of the wheel to the right, and gained more ground to the front than was intended in the movement of his two brigades.”

Kershaw and Humphrey both attacked the enemy and were driven back. Cozzens states that General Benjamin Humphreys “was not the man for the moment.” But there is no evidence to assume that he was not as aggressive in his attacks as Kershaw, who admitted that the “contest for Thomas’s position was “one of the most gallant struggles he had ever witnessed.”

As far as Kershaw not being able to control his troops, Cozzens admits that “It was...a soldier’s fight. No orders were needed—the enemy was on the hill and had to be pushed off; that was clear to the lowest private.” He states that the struggle was so close and fierce that the mere “appearance” of the Yankees was enough to make the rebels break and “trickle back down the slope.”

This type of hyperbole makes for good reading, but does not give credit to the men on both sides who fought courageously. Another is the charge of Kershaw’s inability to control the men in his front. If indeed that was the case, it can be attributed to his unfamiliarity with the terrain in his front, which was


347 Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound* p.425.

348 Mendoza, *Confederate Struggle for Command*, p.45.

349 Cozzens, *This Terrible Sound*, p.429.
covered in thick woods and brush. Historians have blamed Longstreet for the same issues. If Longstreet “should not be faulted,” neither should Kershaw, for given the circumstances of the battle, there was probably no one who could have done any better than Kershaw and only a few who could have done as well.

As to the area that Colonel Nance and his troops advanced through, historian Earl J. Hess points out that fighting in such terrain “severely limited [the] visibility” of soldiers and reduced “the range of rifle fire.” Hess also states that thick vegetation “broke up formations, nullified the power of shock on the battlefield, and allowed firepower to dominate the action.” This only led to more difficulty in controlling the movements of regiments, brigades, and divisions. And the harmonious action of troops once broke left units “unsupported on their flanks” and “commanders frustrated over the lack of control they could exercise over their own men.” He also states that such vegetation had an enormous impact on success or failure in Civil War tactics. The region in which soldiers were locked in a life and death struggle was “awe-inspiring,” and soldiers could be as astonished by the terrain as they were

by the dead bodies that surrounded them. One Confederate officer described a portion of the area that Kershaw’s men advanced over as “bastion-like.” General Longstreet believed that Rosecrans’s position “was more favorable” to his men and artillery than that of the confederates because of having to “advance from the valley [through] more densely timbered forests.” Thomas B. Van Horne, in his classic Army of the Cumberland, published in 1875 and using the private military journal of George H. Thomas (Rock of Chickamauga) as his main source, stated that with the exception of a few fields of little importance, “the whole region between the Lafayette road and the Chickamauga was thickly wooded.” Van Horne states that divisions and brigades became locked in deadly battle “in complete isolation in the densest woods; for when armies meet unexpectedly on such a field, methodical movements are impracticable, as also continuous lines, until there has been an immense waste of strength.” Could an all out attack across the lines with such fighting men as Colonel Nance had under his command have produced a better result? Probably not. Van Horne

points out that both sides were ignorant of the other’s intention, “and a tentative advance became the initiative” of both sides.\(^{356}\) A more accurate reason for failure at Chickamauga is that General Bragg was not the man of the hour and General Rosecrans, “with his erratic temperament,” failed to rise to the emergency.\(^{357}\)

Colonel Nance wrote that at “times [the] battle was terrific” and his losses heavy. But he believed that the result of the campaign was “attributable to the performances of our corps,” and that his brigade had added “new laurels” to their battlefield prowess. He was also proud of the thirty eight pieces of cannons captured by the brigade, his regiment had captured twenty seven of them. After the battlefield spoils were gathered, Nance’s regiment formed part of the force that moved out in the direction of Chattanooga. Nance wrote that “It is hard to divine (sic) the plans of the enemy ”and just as equally“difficult to fathom the purpose of Gen. Bragg.” Nance was echoing what was being asserted by the higher command about General Bragg and his abilities to deal effectively with the enemy. “Many have been expecting the enemy to evacuate every day,” he wrote, but it is “My opinion...that Rosecrans’s main army is some

\(^{356}\) Ibid, p.254.
distance from here and that he has only a small force to...hold us in check....”

“Chattanooga is strongly fortified and a small force there can keep back a much heavier one.” Nance felt that valuable time was being lost in not forcing Rosecrans out of Chattanooga, but he was not convinced that a direct attack was “advisable.” “I hope,” wrote the colonel, “that Bragg is adequate, in Generalship, to the crisis.”358 Nance had certainly grasped the military situation facing a victorious army and a timid general. The victory, so hard fought for, was slipping away by the minute. Bragg’s army had suffered 18,000 causalities and, according to one historian, was “spent.” The controversy still lingers as to whether Bragg lost valuable time in not following up on his initial victory. But what was apparent was the tension between Bragg and Longstreet that led to jealousies and frustrations that became bitter. Bragg suggested to President Davis that Longstreet, with his seventeen thousand men and five thousand cavalry, be sent to East Tennessee to operate against Union General Ambrose Burnside. This, he wrote, “would be great relief to me.”359

Burnside, former commander of the Army of the Potomac, who was now in command of a twenty-three thousand man army stretched out on an eight

358 James Drayton Nance Letters, September 26th, 1863. The South Caroliniana Library
359 Mendoza, Confederate Struggle for Command, p.54, 75, 105, 106. For an insightful analyses on Longstreet and Bragg see chapter three in Alexander Mandoza’s book Confederate Struggle for Command.
mile front from Cumberland Gap northeast of Knoxville to Loudon, southwest of the city, had received orders from Major General Ulysses S. Grant to stop Longstreet from occupying Knoxville. Longstreet decided to cross his army at Loudon and pursue the Federals. Burnside’s intention was to oppose Longstreet’s advance until forced to withdraw inside Knoxville defenses, pulling the southerners farther away from Chattanooga. Longstreet and Burnside skirmished with each other until they reached Campbell’s Station. Here, Longstreet hoped to engage Burnside’s army before he could reach the safety of the fortifications inside Knoxville, but he was unsuccessful. As Burnside withdrew his army “with skill” into the city of Knoxville, Longstreet’s men followed in rain and mud and managed to post infantry and artillery on the western outskirts of the city.360

The city of Knoxville was a very good defensive position to hold. The city was placed on a half-mile wide plateau that rose 150 feet above the Holston River. It was encircled with a “series of earthworks, redoubts, battery positions, and forts.”361 As Longstreet approached Knoxville, with McLaws leading the advance guard, he ordered McLaws’s Division to anchor on the right side of

361 Ibid.
Holston River. General Jenkins was ordered to anchor the left. A line of Federal infantry was positioned on the hill directly in their front. To the left of the hill was Fort Saunders, “frowning with cannon,” which was said to be the key to the city. The Federals had positioned themselves behind breastworks made of fence rails. Longstreet ordered a brass howitzer to fire on the breastworks and push the Federals back, but according to a participant, the “Federals tenaciously held their position.” As the brass howitzer tore away the fence railings and “mangled” the Federals, the seasoned troops defending the hill immediately repaired the fence, brought out their wounded, and continued to hold their position. Longstreet, with his patience wearing thin, “decided to carry the hill by assault.” On the 17th, he ordered General McLaws to make an attack and “open the way” to Knoxville. General McLaws chose the “reliable brigade of Carolinians” for this tough assignment. That afternoon General Kershaw ordered Colonel James D. Nance’s regiment “to dislodge” the Yankees from the hill.

Colonel Nance and his regiment were to be in the lead, with the Second on his left for support. Both regiments would be in full view of the enemy. Colonel Nance stood in rear of his command with sword drawn. When the

362 Mendoza, Confederate Struggle for Command, p.126.
command to advance was given, the colonel raised his sword high in the air and in that “great bass voice” of his he shouted “forward.” Nance had not advanced far when he decided that it would be best to send scouts on a reconnaissance mission to feel out the enemy. As Nance crossed his regiment over Second Creek, he stayed close to the woods to cover his movements. He had not gone for when his scouts returned with information that to advance further would put his regiment in harm’s way. Nance had already apprehended the danger in his front from his own observations as he advanced. This was one trait that characterized Nance early on in the war. The observation of his surroundings and trying to understand the movements of the enemy helped him in his decisions to avert the dangers of defeat or the loss of men haphazardly. Nance decided to halt his command because he was too far away for his fire to be effective. He then proceeded to take a few scouts and make a reconnaissance. He discovered he could not “push farther to the north” and come up on the enemy’s rear without being detected by their vedettes. Nance decided to make his way along the edge of the woods next to the railroad and charge their flank. Nance ordered his brother, Captain John K. Nance, to put his company on the left side of the regiment to act as skirmishers and report any movement of a

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flank attack. Nance then moved out of the woods “unperceived by the enemy.”366

As they came upon a cornfield, Union cavalryman opened fire, but their short-range carbines did nothing more than scatter a few of the colonel’s men. Privates Dalrymple and Longshore both took cover behind a tree and the three cavalymen ran. Warren Peterson, sergeant of company B, rushed his men to the aid of Longshore and Dalrymple. Peterson later remarked that “We had more fun this day than any other day in the army.” Peterson stated that he “saw a minie ball come wobbling toward him.” “Since it had lost most of its power,” the sergeant simply stood to one side and watched the ball pass. Before the 3rd regiment continued its advance, an argument broke out between a company commander, Lieutenant William P. Hunter, and a Private, Martin H. Gary. Hunter called Gary a coward for taking cover behind a tree. The private stated that he would match his courage against that of the commander any time. As the two men exchanged barbs about who was more courageous, the Federals unleashed a volley from their carbines. When the excitement abated, the astonished

private looked to see that he had company. With the lead flying all around, Lieutenant Hunter had joined Private Gary behind the tree.\textsuperscript{367}

Nance ordered a charge and opened fire on the enemy’s right flank.” The enemy “broke and retired beyond the hill on which they were posted....”\textsuperscript{368} As they continued the advance, the colonel noticed a “considerable body of troops...about 5oo yards to our left.” When the regiment reached a railroad embankment Nance halted his regiment and took cover. The Union troops immediately took precautions against Nance’s regiment.\textsuperscript{369} As both sides engaged in the fire fight, a Union soldier was hit in the leg. The Union soldier called for his companion, Eli Morton, to come to his aid. ‘Oh, Eli Morton, for God’s sake come and help me.’” When the Third regiment heard the wounded Yankee call for help, one of Nance’s men remarked, ‘I glory in human misery in some other mortal, look out for Eli Morton, boys.’” It was not long before Eli Morton came “creeping...behind rocks and trees” to the aid of his friend and one of Nance’s men shot Morton in the leg, too. As Nance’s men charged forward the men cried out ‘Look out for Eli Morton!’” The 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina regiment went forward and captured the two Union soldiers. The regiment had such a

\textsuperscript{367} Wyckoff, \textit{History of Kershaw’s Brigade}, p.150, 151.
\textsuperscript{368} O.R. Series 1, Vol. XXXI, pt 1, p. 510.
\textsuperscript{369} O. R. Series 1, Vol. XXXI, pt, 2, p. 510.
good laugh at the expense of the two Yankees that whenever skirmishers were sent out their war cry was, ‘Look out for Eli Morton boys!’”

As the 3rd South Carolina became pinned down, Captain Nance sent word to the colonel that a large body of cavalry was on the left and rear of the regiment. At the same time Nance discovered that a detachment of troops had opened up on his left further up the railroad. Colonel Nance had no other alternative but to fall back upon the woods he had just emerged from. He sent an officer back to Kershaw for orders. Dickert wrote that Colonel Nance was “forced to sacrifice one of his most gallant officers, Lieutenant Allen” by sending him back across the field they had come for orders from Kershaw. Lead fell all around the brave officer as he made his way back until he was wounded and taken prisoner. Nance, seeing it would be suicide to advance further, ordered his men to fall back. The regiment had no alternative but to run the same gauntlet as Lieutenant Allen. It was “pellmell” and “every man for himself,” wrote Dickert, as the regiment made its way back through a hail of lead. As he led his troops back to the woods, he received an order from Kershaw to rejoin the brigade, which he did immediately. Nance reported that he did not know

“the exact purpose” of his orders or “how for the design was executed, but if not fully carried out it was as much so as circumstances would allow.”

One historian has speculated that the cavalry Colonel Nance’s brother reported in his rear were only a few “loose horses.” He also states that Colonel Nance sent Sergeant Warren Peterson with several men to “verify the report.” Nance makes no mention of this in his official report, which was written January 6, 1864, less than two months after the event. Warren Peterson wrote his account forty years later. It would have been odd for Colonel Nance to question his brother’s abilities. He certainly relied on them at Fredericksburg. Either Nance did not mention this event in his report for fear of the embarrassment it might cause his brother, or the events Sergeant Peterson remembered forty years later were a little hazy. Either way, the firing Nance reported had “opened on my left from up the railroad” was enough to determine that he was in danger of being flanked or overwhelmed by superior numbers. Colonel Nance would not have sent to Kershaw for further orders unless his regiment had done all it could, or he felt the danger to them was too great to proceed.

373 Wyckoff, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.151. O.R. Series 1, Vol. XXXI, pt 2, p. 510. Mac Wyckoff states that the brave Lieutenant Allen was rescued by the regiment as they withdrew back to the woods, only to be left behind when the southerners abandoned Knoxville. “Allen went to a prison camp and died the following May.” 151.
On the 18<sup>th</sup> Colonel Nance was ordered to attack the same position and push the sharpshooters off the hill in order that General McLaws could advance his “lines to a more favorable position.”<sup>374</sup> Nance immediately took position in line of battle. He advanced his men, and with the help of some batteries that fired in advance of his regiment, tried to take position of a “high hill to the left of the road and...to the south of [the] Armstrong house.”<sup>375</sup> Nance charged down the hill and across a creek and proceeded up the slope, but was forced to halt in a ravine to the left of the road because of the rapid fire of the Spencer rifles and Union batteries firing from Knoxville. The Union soldiers were behind rail fencing on the hill, which they utilized effectively for cover. Nance stated that he remained in that position until late afternoon, skirmishing with the enemy. It was not long until General Porter Alexander managed to fire on the rails the Yankees were using for cover and send them “flying in the air.” Around 4 p.m. Nance received another order to move upon the enemy’s defenses on the hill, “but not to advance beyond them.” The defensive line of the enemy was indicted by two cedar trees. Nance put his regiment forward and told his men not to stop until the defenses were taken. Colonel Nance reported that his men “advanced in excellent condition under heavy fire until we reached the cedars,”

<sup>374</sup>Dickert, *History of Kershaw’s Brigade*, p.305.
<sup>375</sup>Ibid. p. 305.
where the fire became so heavy that the regiment halted and hesitated to advance further. This “hesitation,” reported Nance, was caused by heavy casualties in the regiment and because the regiment on the colonel’s right failed “to come up in time on account of natural obstacles encountered in their advance.”

The slow movement of the 2nd South Carolina, and the repeating rifles that “blasted the 3rd as from a furnace of death,” caused the 3rd South Carolina to become lethargic. Although Nance made no report of it, there is evidence to believe that his regiment and other regiments attacking Burnside’s forces were slowed in their advancements by wire entanglements, which stretched from tree stump to tree stump to impede rebel forces. Both Confederate and Union cavalry had used such tactics earlier in the war, but it became apparent after the war that Burnside’s forces around Knoxville “introduced” this type of warfare against Longstreet’s men. A Captain of the 51st New York Volunteers remembered how the southerners charged “with that

well-known war yell; the stumps that the wires were attached to are reached, and down they fall, amid charges of grape and canister.”

As Nance’s men were “mowed...down like grain before the reaper,” it took every ounce of energy the colonel could produce to prod his forces forward under fire so intense the regiment froze. Alexander was furious and “digust[ed]” with Nance’s men for halting the advance. His guns were concentrated on the enemy in front of the 3rd, which he had to silence because of the “proximity” of the colonel’s troops. “My Lord!” shouted the general, “what did they do that for? They had it if they had gone on!” The colonel stated that his command was in the open and that “the whole affair was witnessed by all, including Gens. Longstreet, McLaws, Law (General Law was a classmate of Colonel Nance at the Citadel), Humphreys and Kershaw.” It is not unusual for even the most hardened of troops to magnify the intensity and horrors of the battlefield once they stopped and had time to concentrate on the waves of smoke billowing around them and the roar of guns that deafened the

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381 Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, p.319.
ears and numbed the mind. Many in Nance’s regiment hunkered down, covered with the fear of death.

Nance reacted promptly to the crisis. Soldiers and superiors who witnessed the calm demeanor of the colonel on the field stated that he seized the regimental flag and gave a command to follow him, reassuring his men that safety from the enemy’s fire lay ahead of them, not behind them. Nance had a commanding presence on the field, and did not tolerate disobedience. With a rush of effort, the troops charged for the third time, reaching the Federal breastworks. Colonel Nance reported that once his men had reached the enemy’s fortifications the Federal troops began to cry out “we surrender.” Nance ordered his command to stop firing and went forward to receive the surrender when suddenly he was fired on. As he made his way back to his command, dodging the fire of the enemy, a Yankee officer took aim at the colonel but was killed by one of Nance’s men before he could pull the trigger. This occurrence had an adverse effect on Nance’s command. He reported the affair was then “sharp and decisive” and that the Federals “were killed in six paces of each other,” and even after “their works had been carried [they]

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continued to fight as if their success was probable.” Nance believed that the Yankees “behaved badly in pretending to surrender,” but he stated that he hoped it was a misunderstanding on their part and not something done intentionally “to deceive us.”

The colonel reported that the affair was one of the most “desperate” struggles his command had ever been engaged in and one of the most “brilliant charges of the war.” The colonel gave all the praise to his command and to Major William Wallace of the 2nd South Carolina Regiment, who joined his men in their charge upon the enemy’s breastworks. Colonel Nance ordered his command to dig trenches and make themselves as comfortable as they could under the circumstances. He reported that they remained in the trenches for several days until they retired to Knoxville on December the 3rd.

On December 9th, the 3rd was in the neighborhood of Rogersville and made camp until ordered back as far as Bean’s Station, where they became engaged, along with a portion of the Corps, with mounted infantry. That night, Nance was ordered by Kershaw to march his command through a field and on to

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the road, where he was to halt and report. He was then ordered “to connect”
his picket line with the pickets on his right and go into camp with the rest of the
brigade. Nance scouted the area and captured several horses, saddles, and
bridles, along with enough bacon and crackers to last several days. On the
morning of the 18th, General Kershaw, expecting a furlough, turned over
command of the brigade to Colonel Nance.388

The Knoxville campaign was over. But not all was well. As Nance
reflected on the reverses in the last year, he expressed the view that all should
believe in the true designs of God, that “independence should be upon
ourselves, aided and supported by that all wise being who determines alike the
destinies of men and nations.” The colonel was distressed that many were not
as sanguine as he was about the success of the Confederacy. “I feel that we have
only to do our duty and leave the consequences to Him. If we, as individuals and
as a people, could always feel so, we would battle against our enemies more
successfully.” Nance believed that the reverses of the Confederacy were due to
the complaints of the people. Instead of complaining, Confederates, he insisted,
should hold steadfast in their principles of freedom and duty to God. “May we

Library.
learn wisdom, and esteem it according to its price,” he wrote, and “then we shall enter the new year (sic) with healthier hopes for the future.”

Nance feared the loss of morale of the people more than he feared the force the North could bring against the South. “If I entertain any fear for the success of our course, it would be rather from the apprehension of the decay of the spirit of the people, than that of the army. I have always observed that there was more hope, cheerfulness and spirit here, than at home.” He also added that “God often tries our faith and patience, in withdrawing His Spirit from us, and happy is he who can endure hardness as a faithful soldier of Christ.” Colonel Nance believed, as did other southerners, that “Defeats were temporary setbacks.” God was only testing “the resolve and morale courage” of the South. Dodson Ramseur, in a letter to a friend, was of the same opinion. “[I]n a time of great trial,” wrote Ramseur, “Southerners must show that we are made of true metal. Let us then be brave cheerful and trustful.” Ramseur believed that “A just God would order all things for the good of his people.” Willie Pegram trusted God with an impeccable fortitude and never questioned His intent.

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never once crossed his mind that the Confederacy was not God’s favored nation. His “faith” would never have allowed him to acknowledge such heresy.\textsuperscript{391}

Desertion was also on Nance’s mind, as the letters soldiers received from loved ones were full of desperation on the home front. “Home influence [should be] imparting a healthy tone to the army,” he wrote, and “Only let the army and people, the soldier and citizen, stand shoulder to shoulder, mutually supporting and encouraging each other and I trust with God’s blessing, that the year on which we have today entered, will witness our struggle for the liberty, if not successful, by far more prosperous than it now seems.” Nance felt that if the South could only outlast the will of the North, success would come. “This is the last year of Lincoln’s term of office, and...criminations and recriminations...will likely accompany their approaching elections, I hope something of consequence may come to their disadvantage and our assistance.” Nance, like others in the South, believed that if Lincoln were defeated in his bid for reelection, the South could bargain with the new president for peace. He was also encouraged by the politics of the Confederate Congress, which he believed was influenced by a “patriotic and energetic spirit.” “I do not know exactly what has passed into law,” he wrote, “but I suppose every one able to bear arms will be conscripted;

\textsuperscript{391}Carmichael, \textit{Lee’s Young Artillerist}, p.142.
there will be no mustering out of service of troops now in the field, and no re-
organizations and re-elections. I read the bill on some of these points...with
delight.” He lashed out in anger at politicians like Governor Brown of Georgia,
who he believed had been arousing the prejudices and passions of the people to
the point that the governor had become dangerous to the Confederate cause.
“Now is no time to temporize;” wrote the angry colonel, “no half way measures
will answer; the dangers of our situation should be seen and dealt with
vigorously and resolutely.” He felt that the military would only become
“disorganized and demoralized” by the rhetoric of Governor Brown and those
like him, and that the fall of the Confederacy would only mean that the “pillar”
of democracy will stand no longer when the “Temple of our liberties crumbles to
the earth.” James Drayton Nance was a Confederate firebrand and made no
apologies for it.\textsuperscript{392}

Colonel Nance defended his commanders and his troops in their part in
the campaign at Knoxville, stating that “our success depended...entirely upon
Gen. Bragg’s ability to prevent reinforcements from being sent to Burnside, that
his failure ensured ours.” He failed to do his work, and there was no other resort
for us, but to raise the siege of Knoxville.” Colonel Nance would never concede

\textsuperscript{392} James Drayton Nance Letters, January 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1864. The South Caroliniana Library.Pope, 109.
victory to an army that he was convinced did not have the élan of Lee’s army. He continued his analysis by stating that “In a week or ten days more, I believe we would have had Knoxville and the most or all of Burnside’s force. If Bragg’s men had fought with their usual heroism, they would have defeated Grant at Chattanooga; Burnside would have been discomfited; and we would have regained nearly all of Tennessee. How different would have been the Spirit of the people, if this [had been] the result…” Colonel Nance was convinced that the people of the Confederacy would rebound, and stated that “it is well, no doubt, that things are as they are. The manner in which Congress seems to be addressing itself to the duties before it, show an earnest Spirit, and gives evidence that the country is thoroughly aroused to the dangers that envision and to the glories that lie before us.” Nance continued to elaborate upon the fortunes of the Confederacy and stated that “This year is to be fraught (sic) with fruitful events; and if we do our duty, with the blessing of Heaven, we will begin to see the end of our sufferings and the beginning of our independence. But our people and our soldiers will be called upon to illustrate their fortitude in the present year; a virtue much rarer than heroism, of which we have given so many proofs.” “My trust is in God,” wrote Nance, “and the valor and fortitude of our armies.” “The Lord of Hosts, I trust and pray will not deliver us over to our
enemies. May we be a people, “whose God is the Lord” and secure those rich blessings which belong to a God fearing and God loving people!”

Nance also reflected on his regiment. He constantly thought of its well-being. Since winter had set in, he was working to make sure his men had clothing to brave the cold weather. He was expecting a supply of shoes from the government, but he knew from experience not to rely exclusively on politicians. Nance had scouted the area around his headquarters and discovered several tanning yards near his location well stocked with leather. He intended to impress, or either buy with worthless Confederate money, these “shoemakins and set up shop on our own account.” He also concerned himself in making sure that the men who more eligible received furloughs.

Nance also thought of home and his sister Laura, who hoped for a visit from her brother. “You asked me what I thought of my getting home,” he wrote. “I had hoped to have been there by now, but circumstances have placed me where I am, and I am told that I cannot be spared just now; so I don’t know what to expect, at present.” He went on to elaborate to his sister how “circumstances” had put him where he was and that he could not relieve himself

393 James Drayton Nance Letters, January 12th, 1864. The South Caroliniana Library.
395 Ibid.
“of the responsibilities of the position in time to make my visit within the intended limits.” “I [had] hoped to obtain a leave of absence about the first of next month,” he wrote, “but today Gen. Kershaw unexpectedly left for home on a thirty day leave, and begged me to remain in command until he returned.”

Colonel Nance ended his letter with the “hope” that in “time {he would} be permitted to enjoy, even for a brief time, the pleasure of meeting you all in that sanctuary of the most high.”

After General Kershaw returned to the army, Colonel Nance finally received a ninety day furlough home. When he returned to Bristol, Tennessee, from his furlough he made his headquarters in the Snead house where, it seems, Mr. Snead’s daughter, Katie, became quite smitten with the young colonel. On his return, Colonel Nance was also faced with the court martial of General McLaws. Longstreet had brought charges against the general due to the Knoxville campaign. Nance believed that McLaws would either be restored to command or that General Kershaw would take command of the division. Nance was eager to rejoin Lee’s army. “We would be very glad to

396 James Drayton Nance Letters, January 12th, 1864. The South Caroliniana Library
397 James Drayton Nance Letters, April 6th, 1864. The South Caroliniana Library
398 Recollections and Reminiscences 1861-1865 through World War I, p.410, 411.
399 Alexander Mendoza, Confederate Struggle for command, p.150-159.
rejoin the army of Virginia, after a long and painful separation." On April 7th, 1864, Longstreet was ordered by the War Department to rejoin the Army of Northern Virginia. On the 22nd he arrived in Mechanicsville, Virginia, and made camp.

On May 4th, 1864, General Lee received a message that Grant’s army was positioned to cross the two fords, Ely and Germanna, in the Wilderness. General Lee immediately sent orders to General Longstreet at Gordonsville to move out with his two divisions. Longstreet would take the Catharpin Road, which would put him parallel to Hill’s line of march on the Plank Road. Two day later when the armies of the North and South clashed, “Scarcely a commander of a regiment or brigade remained” in Kershaw’s division. As the troops marched to their destiny, men “floundered and fell as they marched” to help their comrades. The men were worn out from the forced marching of the day before, and were working on nothing but pure adrenalin. As the brigade reached the front and heard the firing its gait became rapid, until finally Colonel Nance ordered his regiment to form on the right of the road and began to position his men as best

400 James Drayton Nance Letters, April 6th, 1864. The South Caroliniana Library
401 Mendoza, ConfederateStruggleforCommand, p.197, 198.
he could in the tangled madness of the Wilderness. 403 A participant in the battle, who witnessed Colonel Nance and the 3rd South Carolina, stated that the troops had “to force their way through crowds of flying men, and re-establish their line.” With this done, Nance ordered his men to “open a cool and murderous fire” into Grant’s legions. 404 John Cheves Haskell, a native of Abbeville, South Carolina, and a colonel of artillery in Longstreet’s corps, remembered after the war that “such a stubborn struggle” to push back the Union soldiers “war has hardly ever seen.” Haskell stated that Grant’s men were tenacious, but they “slowly” began to give way until “they left the field routed.” 405 After the war, J.F.J. Caldwell would write that “Here, I honestly believe, the Army of Northern Virginia was saved!” 406

Dr. Spencer G. Welch, a Confederate surgeon, late in the day, made his way among the wounded of the 3rd South Carolina. “As usual,” remembered the surgeon, “on such occasions groans and cries met me from every side. I found Colonel James Nance, my old schoolmate, and Colonel Gaillard…lying side by side in death.” 407

403 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade p.345, 346.
404 J. F. J. Caldwell, The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, p.34.
405 Haskell, The Haskel Memoirs, p.3, 64,
Colonel James D. Nance was loved by his men and his death was felt by all. As some of the 3rd regiment fell back to re-form and advance they came across the body of the young colonel lying in some wild flowers, which “looked so beautiful and sweet” that some of the men plucked the blossoms and sent them to his sister Laura. Captain Dickert also lay wounded on the field, and he remarked that he was only a few feet from Colonel Nance and everywhere lay the dead, more so than at Fredericksburg. General Kershaw stated that Colonel Nance had highly distinguished himself in the field and was a “gentleman of education, position, and usefulness in civil life.” Colonel Nance had long been under the eyes of his commanders. He had behaved well on the field of battle and had carried out his orders as well as any officer at his command level. He was observant on the field for any opportunities to either advance his command to victory or bring them back from disaster. He was, according to D. Augustus Dickert, “the best all round soldier in Kershaw’s Brigade, none accepted (sic).” He was a tactician and disciplinarian that perhaps some on his level equaled, but never surpassed. He was stern but fair, and he never asked his men to go where he was not willing to lead them. He always made the well-

409 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.352, 357.
being of his command his highest priority, so much so that one of his soldiers remarked that it was his “aim and ambition” to see that his command came first. At all times he kept his men ready for action, and they followed his lead on the battlefield, never once refusing to obey a command. Although General G. Moxley Sorrel was not speaking directly about Colonel Nance’s regiment, he certainly could have been when he remarked about the First Corps that “None but seasoned soldiers” could have done the work that lay ahead of them in the Wilderness. Historian Edward Steere stated that “only the superb troop leadership of Kershaw’s regimental officers,” and their “steady confidence…averted a complete catastrophe.”

It was said of Colonel Nance that “He led his men with outstanding ability” and that after his death the men in his regiment so missed their beloved colonel that the mere mention of his name brought on a feeling of melancholy and despair. As the 3rd South Carolina Regiment headed for Spotsylvania and clashed with the Union army there, a South Carolinian viewing

411 Dickert, History of Kershaw’s Brigade, p.353.
412 Sorrel, Recollections of a Staff Officer, 2p.30.
415 Dowdey, Lee’s Last campaign, p.175.
the ground covered with dead Union soldiers yelled, “Nance’s death is avenged.”

Nance never backed off of any frontal assault against rifled weapons, nor did he panic when he broke through the enemy’s fortifications. And as most Civil War historians know, when an assaulting force did pierce the enemy’s lines, the attacker typically lost so many men that the assault stalled or was too weak to go forward. Nance always tried to concentrate his men on the field of battle and push forward, never allowing them to disperse over the field. Even when it was futile to go on, his mental faculties never deserted him, and he was always successful in either extracting his men from further danger or he continued with success.

Colonel Nance’s southern roots, his sense of honor, his actions as a soldier, and his patriotic zeal for the South are testimony to his courage and to his resoluteness in battle. He always went forward as a soldier and never fell back until all offensive measures had been pushed to the limit. His command never became disorganized to the point that he could not reassemble his soldiers regardless of the numbers lost, and he always persuaded his soldiers to resist the fear of battle, to advance and never flee. He was an effective and bold

officer who was loyal to his superiors, and he paid the ultimate price for his knowledge and leadership. His ability to handle men was recognized at the beginning of the war, and it progressed as the war continued. General Kershaw relied on Nance more than any other colonel in the brigade, which only confirmed that a young man from Newberry, South Carolina and a graduate of the Citadel, was a natural leader of men.

He was without doubt one of those “proper commanders” who could “go anywhere and do anything....”\textsuperscript{417} The statement that Lee made about Colonel John Pelham could just as easily have been made about Colonel Nance: he was young, courageous, and he deserved the honor that was his.\textsuperscript{418} The 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina Infantry’s ability to function as a fighting unit, in fact, would decline after the death of the young colonel. And his ability on the field of battle would certainly be missed, for his strong arm of discipline was a key factor in making the regiment into one of Lee’s “first-rate combat unit[s].”\textsuperscript{419}

Colonel James D. Nance did not fear death; what he feared was dishonor, and worked tirelessly to see that it did not happen to him directly or indirectly. He felt secession was a God-given right, and that the Constitution, as he believed

\textsuperscript{417} Hood, Advance and Retreat, p.53. 
\textsuperscript{419} Wyckoff, History of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} South Carolina Infantry, p.17.
it, had been violated. He wore the States Rights stamp and was of the “soundest political faith.” Simply put, he was a southerner to the core, and believed that the North was a “cohesive power” set on “public plunder” to the point that he felt the bonds of union were “no longer a policy founded on the principles of right and justice.” At the time of his death he was one of the Confederacy’s most prominent soldiers. And if Colonel Nance had lived he would certainly have made the rank of Brigadier General, a rank he had been recommended for in October of 1863. A.C. Garlington, Adjutant and Inspector General, was one of those who recommended him and gave this statement to Nance’s qualities: “His well balanced mind, decision of character, and courage, fit him eminently for command...”

J. F. J. Caldwell published a poem in memory of Colonel James D. Nance in the *Columbia Guardian* newspaper in 1864. A few lines of the poem reveal the passion conferred upon a soldier who symbolized Confederate honor.

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420 *The Anderson Intelligencer*, January 3, 1861.
421 A.C. Garlington Letter, October 21st, 1863. The South Caroliniana Library.
And all agreed that thou hast fallen, death-smitten in the wood, when first the foe was turned and driven, in terror and with blood...Sleep on! And may kind providence grant us an end like thine, To fall at duty’s post and pass into the life divine!\textsuperscript{422}

\textsuperscript{422}Carwile, Reminiscences of Newberry, p.255-257.
Illustration 2. The Nance Monument marks the spot where Colonel James D. Nance fell in the Wilderness. It is also a tribute to the young colonel.
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