

JOHN BANKHEAD MAGRUDER  
AND  
THE DEFENSE OF THE VIRGINIA PENINSULA 1861-1862

by  
Leonard W. Riedel, Jr.  
B.S. May 1975, Virginia Military Institute

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS  
HISTORY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
August, 1991

Approved by:

Harold S. Wilson, (Director)

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ABSTRACT

JOHN BANKHEAD MAGRUDER AND THE DEFENSE OF  
THE VIRGINIA PENINSULA 1861-1862

Leonard W. Riedel, Jr.  
Old Dominion University  
Director: Dr. Harold Wilson

The viability of the Confederacy depended on its ability to organize a government and military defense force. Two early concerns were the operation of Gosport Naval Shipyard and protection of the Confederate capital at Richmond. Poised between them was Fortress Monroe.

With undisputed Union mastery of the Chesapeake Bay, Fortress Monroe was a constant reminder of the tentative security of these critical points. The man chosen to protect the Peninsula was Virginian, John Bankhead Magruder. Less than one year later, his efforts were denigrated by Commanding General Joseph E. Johnston who wanted to pursue his own strategic plan.

Under constant stress, Magruder performed with alacrity. Although the Peninsula was evacuated in May 1862, Magruder did an admirable job of defense. Magruder's place in history has been discolored by perceived battlefield failures at Savage's Station and Malvern Hill. These are an unfortunate footnote to an otherwise solid military career.

**DEDICATION**

To Pamela without whom I would not have had the strength.  
Deo Gratias.

To my parents, Janet and Bill Riedel, who believed enough and sacrificed to send me to one of the nation's best undergraduate schools, Virginia Military Institute.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This paper culminates over four years of graduate study and would not have been possible without the help of some special people. First, I would like to thank my Chairperson, Dr. Harold Wilson for his valuable counsel and constructive criticism. I also appreciate the intellectual challenges from my other two committee members, Dr. Will Frank and Dr. Peter Stewart. The classes I took with them were invaluable to my preparations.

I would also like to thank my Air Force colleagues for their support and encouragement. When the chips were down, they gave me the latitude to do what needed to be done, so to Colonel Rader, Charles Grube, Gerald Garrett, Rick Aiken, Wayne Smith, Joe Schwartzott and Tommy Fulfer my heartfelt thanks.

I am indebted to Mary Dix of the Jefferson Davis Papers project at Rice University, for leads on Magruder's correspondence at the University of Texas and University of Miami in Ohio. Thanks are also due to Mike Meir at the National Archives for his assistance in locating the Chilton Court of Inquiry. I would also like to thank the following people for opening their resources to me: Guy Swanson at the Museum of the Confederacy, Mike Cobb at the Hampton Fine Arts Society, David Johnson at Fort Monroe, Jim Haskett at Yorktown National Park, and Arthur LaBonte at the War Memorial Museum. To countless other staffers at various locations, thanks.

In the end it boiled down to pen and paper, lots of late nights, and many weekends. I gratefully acknowledge my wife Dr. Pamela Buckner Riedel for her critical eye and constructive comments. We've done it!

For Nancy Ransome, my friend and typist, words are inadequate. Nan slugged through horrid penmanship and countless revisions to make this the best it could be. Nan responded to panicky phone calls and unreasonable deadlines with evangelical zeal and got it right the first time! Any imperfections in this document are due to my own inadequacies. Nan--thanks so very much.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES . . . . .	v
Chapter	
1. SETTING THE STAGE . . . . .	1
2. BASKING IN THE LIMELIGHT . . . . .	25
3. THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM . . . . .	67
4. CENTER STAGE . . . . .	99
5. DEPORTED? . . . . .	130
6. SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT . . . . .	149
WORKS CITED . . . . .	163

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1. Map of Vicinity of Big Bethel from <u>The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War</u> Map 2, Plate 18 . . .	19
2. Map of the Battlefield of Big Bethel from <u>The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War</u> Map 4, Plate 61 . . . . .	22
3. Map of Virginia Peninsula from <u>The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War</u> , Plate 16 . . . . .	29
4. James River Environment Adapted from <u>Mulberry Island During the Civil War</u> . . . . .	31
5. Map of Lower Peninsula from "Civil War Times Illustrated" Magazine, Feb 79, page 8 . . . . .	64
6. Map of Northeastern North Carolina from "Blue and Gray" Magazine, May 88, pp 12-13 . . . . .	101
7. Map of Yorktown Fortifications from <u>The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War</u> , Map 1, plate 15 . . .	156

CHAPTER 1  
SETTING THE STAGE

The American Civil War helped establish a national identity uniquely American. The internal struggle had international ramifications and when it was over the American way of life was enhanced.

Some populists have presented the war as a good versus bad confrontation with heroes and villains. The war is frequently represented as having been fought by amateurs; this was a misleading representation.

The leaders and senior officers in the Civil War were generally graduates of military institutions. Many officers had fought in the Mexican War and some had over 30 years military service. When the country began to fragment the old Union army was in turmoil. One of the "career" officers caught in limbo was Virginian, Lieutenant Colonel John Bankhead Magruder.

Magruder was born in 1807 in Front Royal, Virginia and was one of eight children. He pursued a college education for one year as a member of the first class to attend the University of Virginia but transferred to the United States Military Academy at West Point.<sup>1</sup>

Cadet Magruder achieved academic success in the class of 1830. A

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas M. Settles, "The Military Career of John Bankhead Magruder" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Christian University, 1972), 2-5.



cadet captain, he ranked 15th in academics but near the bottom in discipline. It may have been this later distinction which raised his visibility with some prominent members of the class of 1829, like Robert E. Lee, who graduated 2d without a demerit and Joseph E. Johnston, who graduated 13th. Two years senior to Magruder in the class of 1828 was Jefferson F. Davis.

One year after graduation in 1831, Magruder married a prominent Baltimore socialite, Henrietta Von Kapff. He fathered three children but frequent remote assignments estranged him from his family and in 1850 Henrietta moved to Europe with their children. Magruder visited infrequently, once going five years without seeing them; consequently, he lived his own life and many people believed he was unmarried.<sup>2</sup>

Magruder's military career was a progression of unmemorable assignments with a single promotion to first lieutenant in 1836. At the start of the Mexican War in 1846, he was the senior lieutenant in the army.

Since he lived alone, he frequently courted society and earned a reputation as a bon vivant. Regular attendance at parties, flashy dress, and an engaging personality earned him the flattering sobriquet "Prince John."

Magruder was a typical member of the southern gentry; he entertained frequently and often drank to excess. Many people told exaggerated stories concerning Magruder's supposed bouts with alcohol. Some stories originated with Magruder himself and seemed to feed a

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 22.

legend that he was not adverse to accepting.<sup>3</sup> Magruder had a pronounced lisp and his fractured speech could have easily been mistaken as a sign of intoxication.<sup>4</sup>

Magruder's strong performance as an artillery officer in the Mexican War earned him two brevet promotions beyond the captaincy which he received in 1846. He rose to major at Cerro Gordo and attained a lieutenant colonelcy after the capture of Mexico City. His sparkling performance resulted in the State of Virginia presenting him a gold sword.<sup>5</sup>

Magruder's career remained positive until the start of the Civil War and he occupied numerous command positions from San Diego, California to Newport, Rhode Island. His social grace and flamboyant dress earned him entrance to high social circles. The start of the Civil War found him in Washington, D.C., debriefing the results of a sabbatical to Italy where he studied Garibaldi's siege of Naples.

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<sup>3</sup>Magruder's reputation as a drinker is adequately documented and will not be repeated here. However, the issue of alcohol followed him throughout the Civil War. It is unreasonable to believe Magruder practiced abstinence during the war as there were a number of social opportunities to drink, but there is only one, hearsay, declaration of Magruder taking a drink during the war and it is related by Colonel Benjamin Ewell in a post-war reminiscence. Benjamin S. Ewell, "Reminiscences of John Bankhead Magruder and the War," D, Benjamin S. Ewell Papers, Special Collections, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg.

<sup>4</sup>The classic lisp, "thir" for sir could easily be mistaken as the slurred speech which characterizes intoxication. Mary B. Chesnut, A Diary From Dixie, ed. Ben Ames Williams (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 230; Settles, 5.

<sup>5</sup>Settles, 140.

On 20 April, he resigned his Federal commission<sup>6</sup> and on 25 April was commissioned a colonel of Virginia forces ranking third behind Robert E. Lee and Joseph E. Johnston. The same day he joined Johnston, Richard S. Ewell, Samuel Barron, and Sydney Smith Lee, all prominent Virginians, in a joint commission of army and naval officers to recommend "efficient and worthy" citizens for commissions in the state forces.<sup>7</sup>

General Lee faced immediate problems. Union held Fortress Monroe at the tip of the Virginia Peninsula was less than 100 miles from Richmond. It was a strong position even when inadequately manned. A moat surrounded casemates which bristled with guns. Lee had worked on the construction of the fort and understood that it could not be overrun by the Virginia militia.

The Union command structure also understood Fortress Monroe's importance and before rebels seized Gosport Naval Yard, Union general-in-chief Winfield Scott warned Colonel Justin Dimick to take covert actions to protect the fort from seizure.<sup>8</sup> Fortress Monroe's location at Old Point Comfort meant it could easily be supplied and reinforced by sea, especially in the absence of a rebel naval challenge. Thus, Lee's

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<sup>6</sup>After the war, Northern newspapers published reports that Magruder promised Lincoln that he would not leave the U.S. Army. However, Magruder refuted the statement. Magruder said he attempted to visit Lincoln to render his resignation in person but was unable to see him. Settles, 174-75.

<sup>7</sup>U.S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies 128 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880-1901; reprint, Harrisburg: Historical Times, Inc., 1985), series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 36. Hereafter referred to as OR.

<sup>8</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 1, 326.

challenges in eastern Virginia were:

1. To hold Norfolk and the shipyard for the use of Confederate Navy,

2. Protect Richmond from a land or sea assault by the Federals.

Lee understood that Virginia was at a material disadvantage and needed to husband as much manufacturing capability as possible. He also understood the political and military significance of Virginia. Confederate envoys throughout Richmond were visible confirmation of that reality.<sup>9</sup> Thus, fortifications were under construction around Norfolk before the survey of the James River was initiated. This action inspired a contemporary historian's assertion that "Norfolk was the most important point in the state."<sup>10</sup>

State military officials emphasized the point. Lee's adjutant, Richard Garnett, asked General Gwynn to devise ways to prevent a rear door attack on Norfolk.<sup>11</sup> Three days later Richmond officials told Gwynn that due to the threat to Norfolk, strategic materials such as copper, lead, and zinc had been evacuated to a place of safety.<sup>12</sup> Letcher wrote Lee from Norfolk on both 4 and 5 May and asked him to

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<sup>9</sup>Virginia was not yet a member of the Confederacy and did not become so until a statewide referendum on 23 May 1861. Still, there were numerous envoys in Richmond reporting every action the state took. The most prominent of these men was Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens of Georgia. These representatives had only one purpose, ensure Virginia joined the Confederacy.

<sup>10</sup>Louis H. Manarin, "Lee in Command: Strategical and Tactical Policies" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1964), 66.

<sup>11</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 2, part 2, 791.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 795.

divert newly arriving Georgia and Alabama troops to Norfolk.<sup>13</sup>

Richmond's vulnerability was manifest on 21 April when the Yankee gunboat Pawnee was allegedly discovered sailing up the James River to shell the city. The trauma of that event created a demand in Richmond to secure Virginia's waterways immediately.<sup>14</sup> Talcott was again dispatched this time to survey the James River.<sup>15</sup> A coalition of engineers and naval officers accompanied him to complete his recommendations without delay.<sup>16</sup>

The James River was not the only threat to Richmond via water routes. As early as January 1861, Virginia engineer Andrew Talcott surveyed vulnerable positions in the state and identified the York River. Talcott followed this up with a trip on 18-20 April in which he determined Gloucester Point could mount up to 34 guns and was a suitable position for a land defense.<sup>17</sup>

The disorganization of the Peninsula militia and the sophistication

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<sup>13</sup>OR, series 1, 2:801, 804.

<sup>14</sup>John B. Jones, A Rebel War Clerk's Diary, ed. Howard Swiggett, 2 vols. (New York: Old Hickory Bookshop, 1935), 10; Clement A. Evans, ed., Confederate Military History (Confederate Publishing Co., 1899; reprint, Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot, 1987), vol. IV, Virginia, by Jed. Hotchkiss, 126.

<sup>15</sup>OR, series 1, 2:788-89.

<sup>16</sup>During the initial preparations on the James River, Lieutenant Catesby ap R. Jones was placed in command of Jamestown Island. Major James Patton was tasked to provide infantry support. U. S. War Department, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion (31 vols., Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1894-1927; reprint, Harrisburg: Historical Times, Inc., 1987), series 1, 6:697-702. Hereafter referred to as ORN; OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 70.

<sup>17</sup>OR, series 1, 2:781-82.

of the naval armament captured from Gosport Shipyard led Governor Letcher and General Lee to conclude as a matter of practicality, Virginia naval officers should build and manage river defense batteries. Assignments were made quickly and by the end of April prominent naval officers were in command at Jamestown Island, Gloucester Point and West Point. Naval captains received complete command of the James and York River defenses.<sup>18</sup> Those officers not only had to mount the Gosport guns, but establish control of the rivers by determining the status of the vessels operating on them. A few vessels such as the Jamestown, Yorktown, Teaser and Logan later became part of the Peninsula transportation network.

The need to harness initial war enthusiasm was critical to Lee's plan to organize a viable force. Initial commissions issued to men like Major Harrison Ball Tomlin, Professor Benjamin Stoddard Ewell, Major John Baytop Cary, Major Edgar Burwell Montague and Colonel William Booth Taliaferro were little more than recruiting commissions and early reports from them focused on the status of recruiting.

Many counties had prewar militias; in Gloucester five companies regularly assembled for drill. In Hampton Cary formed four companies, one artillery, one cavalry and two infantry.<sup>19</sup> Ewell was able to raise six companies; however, none of the volunteers could be considered an

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<sup>18</sup>The following naval officers commanded as indicated: Captain H. Cocke, Commander of James River Defenses; Lieutenant Catesby Jones, Jamestown Island; Captain William Whittle, Commander of York River Defenses; Commander P. R. Page, Gloucester Point.

<sup>19</sup>Donald Ransone Taylor, Out of the Past--The Future, A History of Hampton, Virginia (Hampton: Prestige Press, 1960), 23. Ludwell Lee Montague, Gloucester County in the Civil War (Gloucester, VA: The Dehardt Press, 1965), 5.

effective military fighting force.

In fact, the state of discipline was so poor and the equipage so limited that Ewell was unable to support Catesby Jones's request for infantry protection. Cary wrote after the war, "[I] had 4 volunteer companies, 200 men, 1 artillery [battery] had no guns, [I was] poorly equipped, almost without ammunition . . . My orders were to avoid hostilities."<sup>20</sup>

Not every area of Virginia was imbued with martial spirit and some areas such as Poquoson were reluctant to support the Virginia government. In Gloucester General Lee was compelled to send Thomas Lewis Preston as a personal envoy to assist in recruitment.<sup>21</sup>

Considering the volume and complexity of his organizational problems, Lee did not contemplate offensive actions; however, some artillery exchanges in the York River did occur. On 7 May, a battery under command of Captain J. Thompson Brown of the Richmond Howitzers arrived from West Point on the steamer Logan and at approximately 2:00 P.M. opened fire on the Federal steamer Yankee. After a short exchange of shots in which none hit, the Yankee retired back to the vicinity of Old Point Comfort.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Benjamin F. Butler, Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major General Benjamin Butler, Butler's Book (Boston: A. M. Thayer and Co., 1892), 262-63.

<sup>21</sup>OR, series 1, 2:876-77.

<sup>22</sup>Many of the first encounters of the war were dramatically documented, far in excess of their military importance. The incident with the Union vessel Yankee is an excellent example. Defenses at Gloucester Point were in the earliest stages of development with little artillery or support personnel. A detachment of the Richmond Howitzers were enroute on the transport steamer Logan to man it. The best eyewitness description of the encounter is by Private James Peter

Brown's fire created concern in the naval hierarchy and resulted in accusations that he violated Lee's orders to act only on the defensive. The report of Colonel Taliaferro stated that Brown, acting under authority from Captain Whittle, opened fire; a charge Whittle vehemently denied.<sup>23</sup> Faced with these paralytic reactions, Lee provided guidance for future engagements. Lee advised that the defenders should first shoot across the bow of the approaching ship, then over the ship's head and finally into the ship.<sup>24</sup>

Many well to do and patriotic citizens recognized the state's needs and they either commenced building their own fortifications with their own slaves or they generously offered their advice. On 22 April, A. Bisbee wrote a letter to chief engineer, Andrew Talcott, and suggested they immediately organize a workforce to build earthworks in Norfolk. The workforce would consist of white men willing to protect their homes, slaves volunteered by their masters, organized laborers, such as those constructing the Covington and Ohio railroad, criminals secured by ball and chain and free Negroes impressed from their peacetime pursuits. Bisbee suggested that 20,000 laborers could be delivered within a week.<sup>25</sup> C. M. Hubbard in James City County recommended to Governor

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Williams, Gloucester Point, to his sister, 8 May 1861, TMs in the James Peter Williams Papers, Archives, Virginia State Library, Richmond.

<sup>23</sup>This note is only of interest in demonstrating the rigidity of the existing military structure. Colonel Taliferro's seemingly innocent report of the action threatened the Navy hierarchy commanding the York River. Instead of working to protect a point the Federals coveted, there was a rush to apportion the blame. ORN, series 1, 4:374-82.

<sup>24</sup>OR, series 1, 2:815-16.

<sup>25</sup>A. Bisbee, Norfolk, to Andrew Talcott, Norfolk, 22 April 1861, ALS in Andrew Talcott Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.



Letcher in a letter of 26 April the use of free Negroes to build entrenchments and complete other public projects. Hubbard strongly believed the slaves should stay on the farms to help raise food. This way they would be less likely to be involved in insurrections.<sup>26</sup>

Hubbard's attitude was particularly instructive in view of subsequent challenges to the impressment of slave labor for military purposes.

The progress on the defensive works was remarkable considering the organizational problems that the various rebel commanders faced. The shortage of laborers, tools and transportation all caused significant problems. The experiences of Catesby Jones at Jamestown Island were typical.

Jones took over the protection of Jamestown Island from William Allen a local resident. Allen had begun construction of a private gun battery before Andrew Talcott decided to place a military position there. When Jones took command, Allen coordinated slave labor support; however, Jones soon found himself confounded by his superior officer, Captain H. H. Cocke. Cocke aggressively pursued the development of Fort Powhatan which was much farther up the James River and far less important. Cocke refused to send materials to Jones and even seized critical block and tackles needed to lift guns into place at Jamestown.<sup>27</sup>

The heavy responsibilities of command pressed on General Lee; the militia and volunteers were little better than mobs. Camps of

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<sup>26</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 47.

<sup>27</sup>ORN, series 1, 6:700-703.

instruction needed to be established. Commanders from all points sent requests and inquiries directly to Richmond. Lee knew chaos had to be replaced by organization. Naval and land force commanders had to be harmonized. Lee needed professional soldiers to guide men like Ewell, recently president of William and Mary, and Cary, who had run Hampton Male and Female Academy.<sup>28</sup> Into this cauldron Lee inserted Bankhead Magruder.

Colonel Magruder had been busy since his 25 April commission and on 29 April, he was placed in command of all the artillery in and about Richmond. Just a week later, he dispatched a portion of a local artillery organization, organized by George Wythe Randolph called the Richmond Howitzers, to Gloucester Point to support militia Colonel William Taliferro, who was constructing a defensive battery. This detachment immediately engaged the U.S.S. Yankee on both 7 and 9 May. Captain Henry Coalter Cabell wrote to Magruder and explained the nature of the engagements and the terrain. No apparent damage had been done and the position seemed to be well suited for defensive purposes. Cabell also noted the fragmented command relationships and asked Magruder for reporting instructions.<sup>29</sup> However, Magruder had been elevated on 8 May to command all forces in and around Richmond.<sup>30</sup>

Command of forces in and around Richmond was one of the most significant posts in state service and was certainly an appropriate job

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<sup>28</sup>Les Jensen, 32d Virginia Infantry (Lynchburg, Virginia: H.E. Howard, Inc., 1990), 1, 13.

<sup>29</sup>Cabell's correspondence is in ORN, series 1, 4:406-7; OR, series 1, 2:830-81; OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 79-81, 83.

<sup>30</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 817.

for the state's third ranking officer. Therefore, the significance of Magruder's 21 May assignment to the new Department of the Peninsula at Yorktown reflected the state's view of the position and was a clear statement of Richmond's defensive strategy.

Lee understood that Federal forces could not be permitted to operate on the upper Peninsula. Such a concession would render both Norfolk and the shipyard untenable since Union forces could cross to the south side of the James River and cut railroad lines between Norfolk and the rest of the South. Penetration by a Federal fleet towards Richmond on either the York or James River would stretch Lee's ground forces to a breaking point. Since the York River was constricted to three quarters of a mile at Yorktown it was a logical place to defend.

Magruder was assigned to the Peninsula by Special Orders number 95, dated 21 May 1861. He was placed in command of a line from Yorktown to Hampton. His headquarters were at Yorktown. Detailed orders required him to provide manpower to protect the workers constructing batteries under Catesby Jones at Jamestown Island, on the York River presumably at Gloucester Point and Yorktown. He was expected to expedite completion of a short defensive line between College and Queen Creeks in front of Williamsburg. When combined with the James and York River batteries, Richmond would be secure from land or water attack. Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Ewell and Major John Cary were placed under his command. Three regiments of infantry, Colonel L. G. DeRussy's Louisiana volunteers, Colonel Daniel H. Hill's 800 North Carolinians and Colonel Thomas P. August's Virginians, were also placed under Magruder's charge. Finally, General Lee tasked the commanding officer to send "authentic information

of what occurs at Fort Monroe, and the operations of U. S. Forces, if important . . . to headquarters."<sup>31</sup> These orders modified as circumstances changed, were the essence of Magruder's command charter and he immediately pursued their implementation.

Colonel Magruder arrived in a command that was active with intrigue. His forward outpost commanded by Major Cary was actively conversing with General Butler at Fort Monroe. On 23 May, Butler sent a force of approximately 800 men into Hampton. This created an indignant controversy. Cary viewed the action as an invasion of Virginia soil and he sought to clarify Butler's intentions. Of greater consequence in the meeting scheduled for 3:30 P.M. between Butler and Cary on 24 May, was the status of several slaves belonging to Colonel Mallory that escaped while working on the fortifications at Sewell's Point and presented themselves at Fort Monroe. Cary sought but failed to win custody of the slaves. Butler advised that since the slaves were materially aiding the Virginians' treasonous efforts, they represented a tangible asset and were "contraband" of war.<sup>32</sup>

The commanding officer immediately oriented himself with the geography by hiring the local sheriff as a guide.<sup>33</sup> He was not impressed by what he saw. He advised Richmond on 25 May that the work

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<sup>31</sup>OR, series 1, 2:865.

<sup>32</sup>The contraband issue was one of General Butler's best moments. He recognized the material value of slave labor and lobbied the Washington government for guidance which permitted retention and employment of defecting slaves. Butler, 256-59, 262-63; Tinsley Spraggins, "Mobilization of Negro Labor for the Department of Virginia and North Carolina, 1861-1865," North Carolina Historical Review 24 (April 1947): 160.

<sup>33</sup>OR, series 1, 9:38.

on the Yorktown battery was slow. He planned to select the interior Yorktown defensive positions on the 26th. He then planned a meeting with Ewell to discuss the Williamsburg works. Magruder also advised of another problem that would hamper his efforts to construct fortifications and build a fighting force. Negro workers having completed their agreed upon time of service had been returned to their masters; to prevent a lapse in the work, Magruder tasked 400 soldiers in their place.<sup>34</sup>

Even as Magruder was completing his first day on the line, Lee wrote him several letters, one of which emphasized the importance of the Williamsburg line. Lee sent Magruder two 12 pound Napoleons and two 8 inch Columbiads to use as Magruder saw fit. The anxious Lee also assigned two engineers, Captains Alfred Rives and Richard K. Meade.<sup>35</sup>

Less than a week after receiving command on 21 May, Magruder encountered the first movement of the enemy. A force of 2,500 Federal troops marched from Hampton to Newport News on 26 May to establish Camp Butler. This generated a flood of refugees moving toward Confederate lines at Yorktown and Williamsburg and the advance guard under Cary fell back in disorder. Although Cary had nearly 200 men on his roster, about 65 moved as an organized military force; the rest helped refugees. Cary's troops abandoned their artillery and Magruder had to retrieve it. Magruder candidly advised Richmond that he had less than 1,000 men in and about Williamsburg and breastworks which were far from complete. He

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<sup>34</sup>OR, series 1, 2:878.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 876.

advised he could attack the Yankees on their flank and then fall back while burning wharves to hamper Union amphibious operations. He wrote, "I know troops are needed on every line, but I believe I cannot overrate the importance of preserving a numerical superiority."<sup>36</sup> Since Magruder believed the Federals had 5,000 men and his defenses were inadequate, he asked for 8,000 to 10,000 men.<sup>37</sup>

Magruder faced a direct challenge. The movement of Union troops to Newport News and their subsequent forays into the countryside suggested contempt for Magruder's force. Even worse, Magruder believed failure to stand up to the invaders would demoralize the civilian community. If he were to execute his mission, then he needed the support of the populace; therefore, he decided to move toward Hampton to stop the marauding. He believed that a check to the Federals combined with modest reinforcements would permit him to hold his line.

I am satisfied that it [Yorktown] cannot be taken by any number of men that can be brought against it, if it is properly entrenched and defended by a sufficient number of men; that is, as long as the mouth of the river is secured by batteries on this side and on Gloucester Point.<sup>38</sup>

Magruder had inherited a rudimentary defensive scheme. Although he believed Yorktown could be made a citadel, he noted that the positioning of the Williamsburg and Jamestown defenses were such that a Federal force could cut off Yorktown from the interior by landing on the James

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 886-87.

<sup>37</sup>This perspective reflected the maturity of Magruder's thinking. He understood the need to maintain a superior force in an open field fight. His request for another 4,000 to 6,000 troops was a modest request, and it was couched with acceptance of Lee's overall manpower demands.

<sup>38</sup>OR, series 1, 2:893.

River at Grove Wharf, without crossing either the Williamsburg or Jamestown lines. If Yorktown were captured, the York River would be open and the Peninsula would become untenable.<sup>39</sup>

As the commanding officer worked through the initial challenges of his command, his authority was challenged by one of his chief subordinates. Colonel Daniel Harvey Hill, Commanding the First Regiment, North Carolina volunteers near Yorktown, was in a unique situation. North Carolina had agreed to a military alliance with Virginia preparatory to both states' formal alliance with the Confederacy. Magruder held a Virginia commission and although General Lee was dual-hatted as Commander of Virginia forces and Chief of Confederate Operations in Virginia, Hill was not convinced of the legitimacy of his subordination to Magruder.

D. H. Hill vented his dissatisfaction in a letter of 30 May to his wife, Isabella, "Colonel Magruder in command is always drunk and giving foolish and absurd orders."<sup>40</sup> Three days later, Magruder advised Richmond that he believed Hill had problems with their dates of rank, "I think I rank him, but am of the impression that it is a subject of some feeling on his part."<sup>41</sup>

Despite Hill's dissatisfaction Magruder moved decisively to control his command. On 31 May, he issued seven General Orders of which five

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<sup>39</sup>After Yorktown was evacuated on 3 May 1862, McClellan attempted to organize an amphibious expedition up the York River to get ahead of the retreating General Johnston.

<sup>40</sup>Hal Bridges, Lee's Maverick General Daniel Harvey Hill (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 28.

<sup>41</sup>OR, series 1, 2:900-901.

are mentioned here: unnumbered, 4, 5, 6, and 9. The first three established controls around Yorktown, Stafford Cook became chief of the civil police; civilian movements were restricted within military areas and civilians were ordered to destroy spirituous liquors. General Orders number 6 placed Major John Bell Hood in command of the Department's cavalry. General Orders number 9 established a mandatory four drill a day schedule for everyone; skulkers were to be arrested.<sup>42</sup>

After Magruder was named commander, he discovered that no formal staff had been provided. Between 24 May and 1 June, he accomplished what he could with volunteers. He formed a staff during the first week of June and issued another nine general orders. In General Orders number 10, Major Hood was ordered to establish permanent picket posts to watch for Federal movements at Wormley's Creek, Upper Grafton Court House, McCauley's Creek, Warwick Road, Lebanon Church, and Williamsburg. General Orders number 14 delegated limited authority to commanders to grant furloughs and authorized the impressment of slaves, free Negroes and horses. General Orders number 15 established a quarantine hospital for measles; General Orders number 16 placed Captain J. Thompson Brown in charge of the artillery; and General Orders number 18 established furlough procedures for the army.<sup>43</sup> The pace of organization in just two weeks by any reasonable standard was outstanding.

Magruder had advised Richmond that he intended to strike the Federals when he could. He performed personal reconnaissances to survey

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<sup>42</sup>U.S. War Department, Rebel Records, "Correspondence of the Department of the Peninsula," Record Group (RG) 109, chapter 2, vol. 229, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.



the country and his intent was clear. Refugee Benjamin West wrote of an encounter with Magruder in early June:

He stopped and inquired as to the number and position of the Yankees, whether they had thrown up entrenchments, and intimating he would attack them. He seemed to feel very sorry for father and told him to go to Yorktown, and he would supply all our wants as long as he had anything to eat himself . . . In fact, he was kind to all the refugees and did all in his power to help them.<sup>44</sup>

On 3 June, Magruder wrote Richmond that he had built an integrated line of defense from Grove Landing to Yorktown. At Yorktown Magruder reported a small, enclosed work nearly completed with three guns mounted in the naval battery. He declared his intent to strengthen the fort so to make it impassible by water. "When once strongly fortified, I shall always be able to defend this work at least until an army from the interior can raise the siege by beating the besiegers."<sup>45</sup> Magruder further cemented the defensive scheme by obstructing and closing all roads with abatis to the lower Peninsula except two public use roads. In pressing his requirement for an additional 4,000 troops to support his 3,400, he noted the small militia (no more than 150) and the lack of enthusiasm for the Confederacy in Elizabeth City County and in lower York County.<sup>46</sup> He was now ready to strike.

Magruder had previously decided to anchor his forward defenses near Bethel Church. Its location behind a branch of the Back River made it defensible. On 6 June, he ordered D. H. Hill and his 800 North

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<sup>44</sup>George Benjamin West, When the Yankees Came, Civil War and Reconstruction on the Virginia Peninsula, ed. Parke Rouse, Jr. (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1977), 64.

<sup>45</sup>OR, series 1, 2:902-3.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

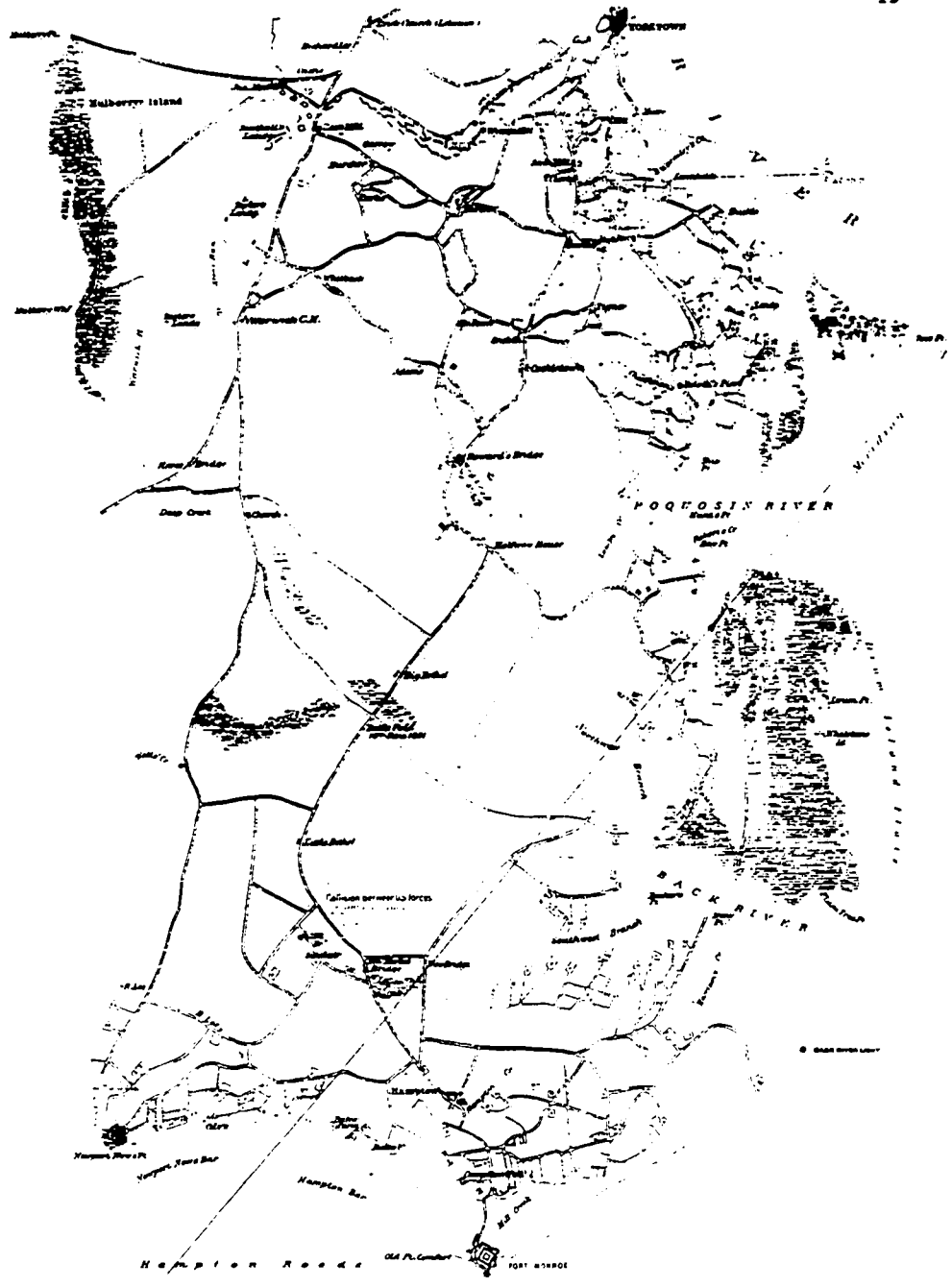


Fig. 1. Map of Vicinity of Big Bethel from The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War Map 2, Plate 18.

Carolínians to move with Major George Wythe Randolph's Richmond Howitzers to Bethel and fortify it. To prevent a turning movement on his right from Newport News, he sent a cavalry unit to destroy bridges and block roads.

Magruder had deployed with 1,200 of his 3,400 men. A shortage of wagons forced him to delegate the entrenchment of Bethel to D. H. Hill while he sought to establish a supply line from the Poquoson River to Bethel.

After two days of work, Hill sent word to the commander that the Federal army was moving. Magruder immediately proceeded to Bethel to take command in person.<sup>47</sup> When the Federals did not appear, Magruder decided to seek them and he moved toward Little Bethel three miles distant. Late in the evening of 9 June, Magruder and Hill were blindly moving forward unaware that Union forces were also seeking to attack. A local resident arrived to advise them that the Yankees were near and in large force.<sup>48</sup> Based on that intelligence, Magruder instructed his 1,200 man force to return to Big Bethel and await their appearance. They did not have to wait long.

Despite bold intentions, the Federal force under the command of Brigadier General Ebenezer Pierce moved tentatively. They did not know

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<sup>47</sup>Major Edward J. Hale, "The Bethel Regiment, The First North Carolina Volunteers," Histories of Several Regiments and Battalion from North Carolina in the Great War 1861-65, ed. Walter Clark, vol. 1 (Raleigh: E. M. Uzzell, 1901; reprint, Wendell, NC: Broadfoot, 1982), 1:83-87.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 86. The lady who warned Magruder and Hill of the presence of the enemy force was Hannah Tunnell, a local resident. After the battle, the officers and men of the Bethel Regiment collected a \$225 reward to thank her for her gallantry.

where the Confederates were or with what force they would be opposed. To make matters worse, two Federal columns had inadvertently stumbled into each other and opened fire killing several comrades. This caused leading elements of the bluecoats to rush back to their supporting columns. When the Union columns did arrive at 9:00 A.M. on 10 June and emerged from a tree line, they were ripped by fire from Major Randolph's howitzers.

Magruder was a useful commander, making decisions when they were required and moving units from one sector of the works to the other. A contemporary biographer of D. H. Hill said disparagingly that Magruder gave few overall orders and allowed Hill to control the battle.<sup>49</sup> However, testimony to the contrary was presented by a participant, Major Edward Hale of the North Carolina "Bethel" Regiment in his 1901 history of the North Carolinians.

Major Hale described three instances where Magruder observed conditions deteriorating and where he made dispositions to check the danger. The first occurred when forces of 5th New York and 1st Vermont approached a picket of 40 men on Hill's left. Magruder dispatched Captain William H. Werth's company of Montague's Battalion to support them. Werth drove the Yankees back with one shot. The second instance occurred when Lieutenant Colonel William D. Stuart reported the threat of a flanking movement on his right; Magruder immediately ordered Stuart to withdraw to Montague's position behind the church. Finally, in response to a serious move on Magruder's left led by Major Theodore

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<sup>49</sup>Bridges, 29.



Winthrop, commanding a column of Vermont and Massachusetts troops, Magruder ordered three companies of the North Carolinians to support the two companies facing the assault. The combined forces promptly checked Winthrop's assault and Winthrop was killed. Hale claimed that this last effort was a key to the battle.<sup>50</sup>

The encounter lasted approximately four hours and ended at one o'clock in the afternoon of 10 June. The Confederate losses were one dead and several wounded, the Yankees had 18 dead and 53 wounded. The Union retreat was disorganized.

The Confederates handled themselves well under fire. Just 400 of Magruder's force of 1,200 actually got to fight and they fought well for their first time under fire. Hill justifiably lavished praise on his North Carolinians and the supporting troops. Magruder was no less laudatory,

I cannot omit to again bring to the notice of the general commanding the valuable services and gallant conduct of the First North Carolina Regiment and Major Randolph of the howitzer batteries. These officers were not only prompt and daring in the execution of their duties, but most industrious and energetic in the preparations for the conflict."<sup>51</sup>

In Richmond, diarist Sallie Putnam recorded, "Colonel Magruder occasionally excited and impetuous as is his custom to be, calmly smoked his cigar and gave orders with coolness and deliberation."<sup>52</sup>

Just 17 days before on 24 May, Magruder had arrived to take command

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<sup>50</sup>Hale, 93, 94, 96, 98.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>52</sup>Sallie Putnam, Richmond During the War, Four Years of Personal Observation by a Richmond Lady (New York: G. W. Carleton and Co., 1867; reprint, Time-Life Book, Inc., 1983), 53.

of a newly created department. He had formed a staff, promulgated organizational directives and thrashed the Federals who lost nearly nine killed, wounded, or captured for every one the Confederates lost. A new Southern folk hero was born.

CHAPTER 2  
BASKING IN THE LIMELIGHT

The 13 June 1861 Richmond Dispatch proclaimed Big Bethel, "The greatest victory in the annals of modern warfare." The New York Times harshly criticized the ineptitude of the Union generals.<sup>1</sup> The small skirmish at Bethel seemed to prove conclusively that one southerner could beat twenty Yankees. Jubilation in the South sharply contrasted to anger and despondency in the North.

Magruder was placed center stage to receive the accolades due a conquering hero. A battlefield correspondent called him a "brave and daring officer."<sup>2</sup> Richmond diarist, Mary Chesnut wrote from Camden, South Carolina, "Colonel Magruder has done something splendid on the Peninsula."<sup>3</sup> His laurel was to be a general's wreath.<sup>4</sup> However,

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<sup>1</sup>As might be expected the earlier encounters received extensive coverage. The Southern papers were exultant, representative articles are referenced in Douglas S. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, A Study in Command, 3 vols. (New York: Scribners, 1943), 1:18-19 and are fully presented in the "The First North Carolina Volunteers and the Battle of Bethel," Southern Historical Society Papers (Richmond: William Ellis Jones, 1891), 19:212-46. Hereafter referred to as SHSP. Union accounts are represented by extended criticism of General Butler and the administration in The New York Times between 13 June and 20 June 1861.

<sup>2</sup>SHSP, 19:228.

<sup>3</sup>Chesnut, 58.

<sup>4</sup>Magruder was commissioned Brigadier General on 17 June 1861. Joseph H. Crute, Jr., Confederate Staff Officers, 1861-1865 (Powhatan, VA: Derwent Books, 1982), 128.



Magruder's actions after the battle reflected his concern with issues more significant than this skirmish. While General Butler apologized for General Pierce's mismanagement of the expedition, Magruder wrote a short, incomplete summary of the battle. He did not overstate its value, nor did he claim credit for the victory. Instead, he strongly praised the performance of Colonel Hill, the First North Carolina and Major Randolph of the Richmond Howitzers.<sup>5</sup> Without the summaries of Union Colonel Carr in Battles and Leaders and Confederate Major Hale in North Carolina Regiments 1861-65, there would not be a detailed account of the action.

The Commanding General had successfully met his first challenge. He had perceived a deteriorating condition on the lower Peninsula. In response, he acted decisively to check the Federal army and stabilize the morale of the civilian populace.

Consequently Magruder's legend began to grow. The few combined casualties, 19 killed and 60 wounded, allowed Magruder to clear the field before Butler's 11 June request for a truce.<sup>6</sup> In response, Magruder criticized Butler for imprisoning civilians who defended their homes and the Union troops whom he accused of looting.<sup>7</sup>

Butler retreated before this moral assault. He defended the actions of his troops, agreed to exchange one soldier, advised he would

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<sup>5</sup>The sum of Federal and Confederate reports is contained in OR, series 1, 2:77-104.

<sup>6</sup>War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, Military Departments and Command 1861-65, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: War Department Printing Office, 1877), 8.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 9-11.

punish marauders and assured Magruder that "loyal citizens" rights would be protected. Magruder refused to accept Butler's assurances and he closed the correspondence calling the Federal troops "bushwhackers," praising the civilians who defended their homes and ridiculing the Yankees' capture of a sleeping vidette saying that he was one of four men opposing the advance of 5,000 Federals, "Had Private Carter been awake perhaps a retreat would not have been necessary."<sup>8</sup>

Richmond papers gleefully reported Magruder's and Butler's correspondence<sup>9</sup> and rumors spread that Magruder had challenged Butler to a duel.<sup>10</sup> These reports built Magruder's legend; one newspaper said he looked "every inch a king."<sup>11</sup>

The greatest impact of Magruder's high principled response was reflected by Private J. M. Drake of Company A, Fourth Massachusetts Volunteers. Private Drake participated in a truce to recover personal effects of the Union dead. A 25 June letter to his father said in part,

It is a fact that much injury and wrong has been committed by our soldiers. Just contrast our course with theirs. Our wounded that were left in that murderous and disgraceful affair at Bethel were by the enemy sent to Yorktown and well cared for. Our dead they decently buried not even so much as taking from their persons the least thing, I know this to be true because we went there with a flag of truce . . . we dug them up. One man had in his pocket quite a sum of gold.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>9</sup>Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 1:19.

<sup>10</sup>Henry Carter, Denbigh, to William Carter, 3 July 1861, TD in Carter Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

<sup>11</sup>Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 1:19.

<sup>12</sup>J.M. Drake, Camp Butler, Newport News, to his father, 25 June 1861, ALS in Federal Soldiers Letters in the Southern Historical Collection of the Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina,

Drake continued by reporting his personal encounter with Magruder,

Colonel Magruder, the Secession Commander of Bethel Forces gave us a good dinner, the best I have seen since I left Boston and sent by us word to our Commander that he was ready for us if we desired to attack him and that he should send as many of us to bloody graves as he was able to do.<sup>13</sup>

The high profile aftermath of Bethel obscured Magruder's continuing actions to consolidate and organize his department. On 10 June Richmond ordered Lieutenant Colonel George A. G. Coppens's Louisiana Zouave battalion and eight more companies of Alabama volunteers to Yorktown.<sup>14</sup> These Deep South volunteers established disreputable records enroute and caused disciplinary problems almost immediately after arrival.<sup>15</sup>

Lee responded to Magruder's request for central control and by the end of June expanded his command to include Gloucester Point, Jamestown, and West Point, in effect the entire Peninsula.<sup>16</sup> Hill continued to bicker over his rank and Magruder again addressed the problem to General Samuel Cooper, the Adjutant General, in Richmond,<sup>17</sup> but more important

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Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 137.

<sup>15</sup>Activities of the Louisiana Zouaves are detailed in Terry L. Jones, Lee's Tigers, The Louisiana Infantry in the Army of Northern Virginia (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1987), 18-19. The train rides from Louisiana were wild, raucous, and violent. It was not surprising that these ruffians were some of the toughest fighters in the Confederacy.

<sup>16</sup>Manarin, 87.

<sup>17</sup>Hill had argued that his rank in the North Carolina Volunteers was 24 April while Magruder's in the Virginia Volunteers was 27 April. Magruder noted that he understood his provisional army rank was of higher precedence than volunteer ranks. Magruder asked Richmond to clearly state the seniorities. However, Hill remained disaffected during the entire period of his subordination to Magruder. War Department, Rebel Records, "Letters Sent Confederate Army of the

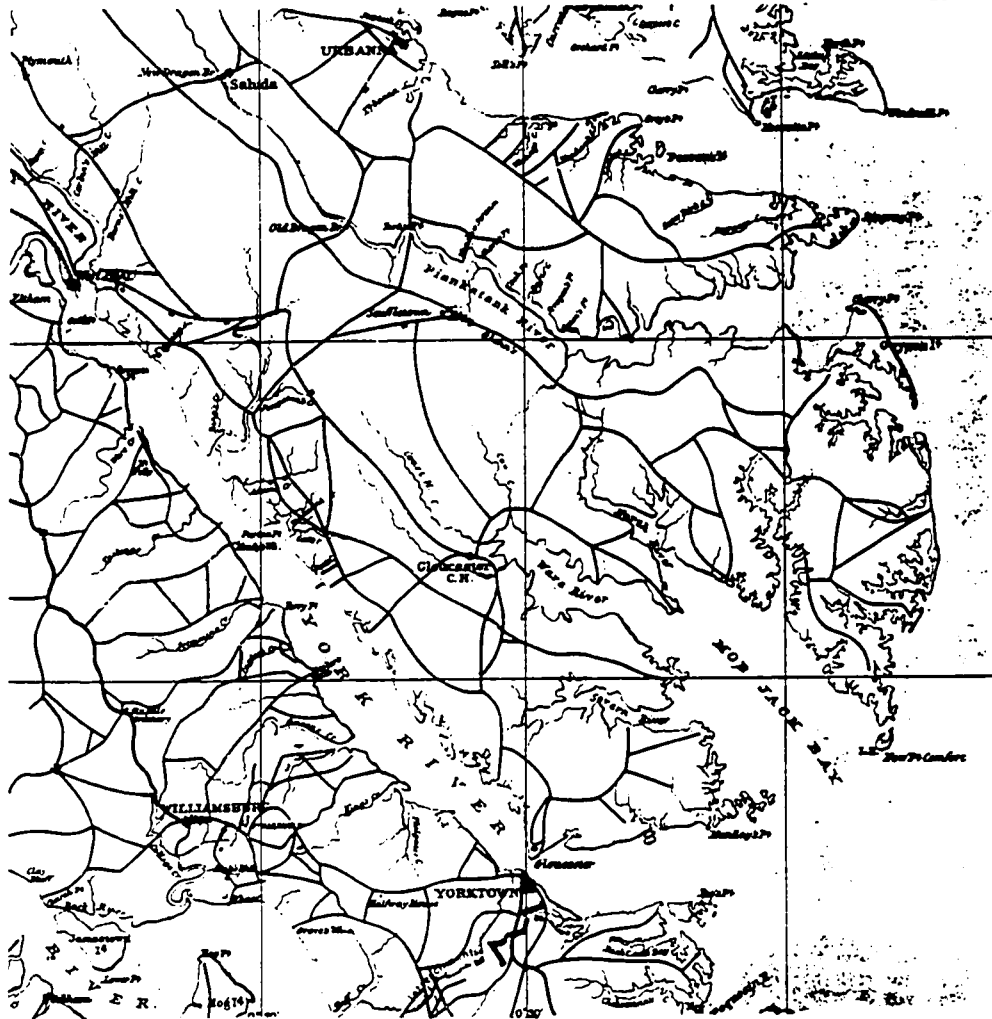


Fig. 3. Map of Virginia Peninsula from The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War, Plate 16.

issues pressed the commanding general.

The Virginia Peninsula was bordered on the north by the York River and Chesapeake Bay and the south by the James River and Hampton Roads. The coastal areas were cut by numerous estuaries and finger rivers. Dense underbrush was occasionally blazed by a main dirt road and numerous secondary lanes. Bethel Church, site of the 10 June skirmish, was on the road from Hampton to Yorktown approximately 8 miles from Hampton and 16 miles from Yorktown.

Magruder had previously ordered Major John Cary to retire to the vicinity of Bethel Church. The commander knew that the northwest branch of the Back River was navigable and he feared a Union amphibious movement would cut off his troops from Yorktown. After the success at Bethel Church, he selected it as his forward entrenched position and on 13 June instructed Major Cary to strengthen the existing fortifications. Cary's task included building traverses to protect entrenched troops from enfilading fire, a dam to control the water flow and a flood ravine to enhance the defensive character of the ground. Magruder instructed Lieutenant Colonel Coppens's newly arrived Louisiana troops to provide manpower. He encouraged Cary to establish outposts at New Market Bridge, Poquoson and any other place where his position might be turned.<sup>18</sup>

Magruder's concern over a passing movement caused him on 14 June to

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Peninsula," Record Group (RG) 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, 13 June 1861, National Archives, Washington, D.C..

<sup>18</sup>John B. Magruder to Major John Cary at Bethel, 13 June 1861, John Cary Letterbook, Eleanor S. Brockenbough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, Virginia.

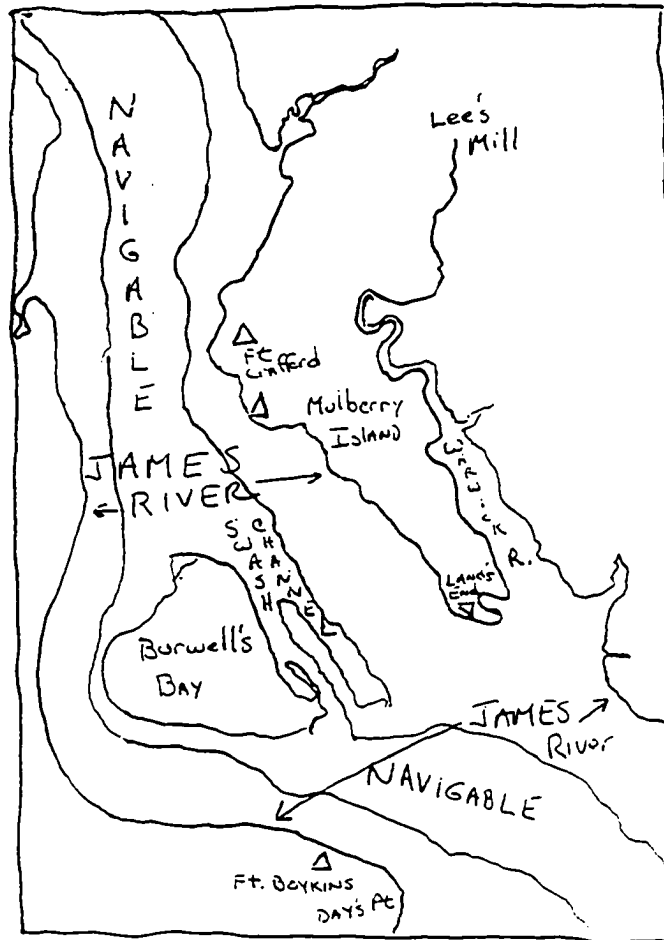


Fig. 4. James River Environment Adapted from Mulberry Island During the Civil War.

△ Confederate Battery

recommend establishment of a water battery at Day's Point on the south bank of the James River south of Land's End. Magruder claimed this action would prevent Union ships from passing up the James River.<sup>19</sup> Although not stated, Magruder implied such an action would prevent Federal operations on the south bank of the James River. Lee quickly grasped the essence of Magruder's suggestion and within two days advised him that the battery, later to be known as Fort Boykins, would be built.<sup>20</sup>

The encounter at Bethel convinced Magruder that he needed more men. Meager reinforcements brought the Army of the Peninsula up to 5,500 men or 55 percent of the force he thought necessary.<sup>21</sup> To augment his force Magruder decided to "mobilize" the local militia.

Magruder's 15 June proclamation invoked the Governor's authority and called Colonel Charles Mallory's 68th and 115th regiments to assemble at Yorktown on 24 June.<sup>22</sup> This action, which would be repeated several times over the next year, was apparently sensitive to the Governor and gentry of the Tidewater region because it infringed on the state government's prerogatives and the landowners' freedom of choice concerning military service.

Although Letcher legitimized Magruder's de facto action, he

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<sup>19</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 139.

<sup>20</sup>OR, series 1, 2:930.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 927.

<sup>22</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 140.

criticized it.<sup>23</sup> Still the action appeared justified since recruitment on the lower Peninsula was languishing. Some men answered the call and volunteered to serve in organized, mustered in units; however, Colonel Ewell claimed others seemed unwilling to serve. Just three weeks prior on 25 May, Lee had sent agents to Gloucester Point to help recruit.<sup>24</sup> Magruder's action represented the first formal military training many of these men received and provided a roster of available manpower. Magruder's concern was obvious in his 16 June letter to General Cooper,

I cannot too urgently impress upon the consideration of the headquarters the immediate necessity of having heavy guns from Norfolk or elsewhere at this place. The defense of Richmond is here at Williamsburg and Jamestown, and the men and guns are necessary to that defense.<sup>25</sup>

As Lee wrestled with Magruder's problems, the Peninsula commander faced more immediate problems bordering on insurrection. Coppens's Louisiana troops continued their undisciplined approach to army life, looting and slaughtering unprotected cattle. At a unit parade on 17 June, Magruder publicly denounced them and promised to shoot every guilty person.<sup>26</sup> On 18 June, Coppens's subordinates said he had no capacity for command and requested that Magruder replace him as their colonel.<sup>27</sup> At Yorktown, Hill found that the Alabama troops, under former Governor, now Colonel, John A. Winston, did not want to help

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<sup>23</sup>Magruder's action and Letcher's reaction are described in F.N. Boney, John Letcher of Virginia, The Story of Virginia's Civil War Governor, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1966), 150-51.

<sup>24</sup>OR, series 1, 2:876-77.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 931-32.

<sup>26</sup>Jones, Tigers, 32.

<sup>27</sup>OR, series 1, 2:938.



unload the ships at the wharf. Winston likened it to slave labor. In response, Hill insisted that if his North Carolina troops could unload ships, the Alabamians would do likewise or face the consequences of disobedience of Magruder's orders.<sup>28</sup>

The commanding general's departmental organization was enhanced by the publication of General Orders number 25 on 20 June. This document established the organizational structure of the Army of the Peninsula and prescribed disciplinary procedures needed to command. A short review is necessary to appreciate the order.

Magruder initially established four subordinate commands: Colonel D. H. Hill, Yorktown; Colonel T. P. August, Williamsburg; Colonel C. A. Crump, Gloucester Point; and Colonel J. G. Hodges, Jamestown. He ordered each of them to complete their assigned defensive works and provide progress reports every three days. Ewell's lack of progress on the Williamsburg defenses caused him to be subordinated to August. Perhaps in an attempt to mollify Hill, he was authorized a separate headquarters at Yorktown. Commanders were instructed to drill the soldiers three times daily if they were not at work on fortifications. Soldiers were ordered to carry two days' rations constantly. This distribution problem was caused by a shortage of wagons. Wagon usage was limited to essential food stuffs and supplies; no tents were permitted on the wagons if wood was available to build huts. Finally, Magruder instructed officers to limit personal baggage to that which

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<sup>28</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, 19 June 1861.

could be carried in carpetbags.<sup>29</sup>

Shortages continued to surface. The day after Magruder issued General Orders number 25 he authorized Hill to purchase scythes and other reapers to gather forage. Although the Peninsula commander did not have specific authorization from Richmond, he instructed Hill to issue Confederate vouchers in payment for the materials.<sup>30</sup>

Not all southern men readily adapted to the requirements of military discipline, nor did all accept Magruder's authority. Three examples in two days represent Magruder's acceptance of this reality and his flexibility in tailoring a response. On 22 June, Magruder dealt with the case of Captain Welles of the Wythe Rifles, 32d Virginia Infantry. Welles refused to report for duty and belligerently boasted of his "inherent rights." After declaring he would not be treated in an ungentlemanly manner, he deserted to Richmond. Magruder recommended dropping Welles from the roles and appointing a subordinate in his place.<sup>31</sup> Yet on the very same day, Magruder faced a mutiny in Company F of the 15th Virginia.

Captain William Lloyd reported that on 20 June subordinates had circulated a petition to deprive him of his command. The result was refusal to march under Lloyd's orders. Lloyd was unable to find a senior officer to support him and he subsequently relinquished command to a subordinate. Magruder's response was prompt and decisive. He ordered Lieutenant Colonel William Stewart of the 15th Virginia to take

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<sup>29</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 144-45.

<sup>30</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, 21 June 1861.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

troops from the Georgia ranks if necessary, disarm the mutinous company and bring them back under guard. He then harshly criticized Stewart for failing to take prompt action to maintain order. He also ordered Stewart to send a guard to Richmond to return four deserters to camp. Magruder insisted on court-martials for all.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, Magruder decided to assuage Lieutenant Colonel Ben Ewell who had been superseded in command at Williamsburg by his General Orders number 25. Progress on the defensive line in front of Williamsburg was unsatisfactory. The position was regarded by both Lee and Magruder as a critical defensive point. Ewell had failed and as he correctly believed had been demoted. Magruder tactfully explained to Ewell that he had placed him on special duty to complete the defenses of Williamsburg. He also told Ewell that he was to be the colonel of the 32d Virginia, Peninsula Guards who were soon to be formed. Magruder declared to Ewell, "Of your competency, I never entertained a doubt."<sup>33</sup> Magruder then authorized Ewell to urge requisitions forward using Magruder's name.<sup>34</sup> Magruder's tactful handling of Ewell earned him a loyal subordinate.<sup>35</sup>

The enlisted men had great confidence in their commander. Despite the disciplinary problems just described, common soldiers praised

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<sup>32</sup>War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 11-13.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ewell wrote a lengthy and warm memorial to Magruder some years after the war. There was no hint of criticism. Benjamin Stoddard Ewell, "Reminiscences of John Magruder," AMs, Ewell Papers, Special Collections, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg.

Magruder in correspondence home. Private James Williams of the Richmond Howitzers wrote his Aunt Mary on 24 June,

Captain Brown's and Stanard's companies went down from here to Bethel Church yesterday week. After staying there a day or two with a small force of infantry, the enemy were advancing on them in large numbers trying to cut them off from Yorktown and surround them, but old [McGruder] was too keen for them and ordered his force back to Yorktown.

Williams continued,

This place [Yorktown] is very strongly fortified and we are receiving reinforcements from R everyday. I myself do wish they would attack us right now . . . all the fortifications are about finished and I understand that [McGruder] has received orders from headquarters not to carry his forces to Bethel again, but to hold them where they are and to defend this place to the last extremity.<sup>36</sup>

Magruder's influence and command presence resulted in a successful militia muster and nearly 1,000 men were mobilized. To minimize the new troops' disaffection, Magruder used most of them to defend advanced positions near their homes by the Poquoson River at Harrod's Mill and Young's Mill.<sup>37</sup>

Although Magruder was expanding his picket, he chose to remain beyond the view of the Yankees for the time being. Lee's orders had been to act on the defensive. At this stage with insufficient manpower and underdeveloped defensive positions, Magruder did not want to provoke another large scale Union expedition. On 26 June, he advised Major John Bell Hood of his intention to fortify Harrod's Mill and Young's Mill when he received sufficient digging spades. He told Hood not to

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<sup>36</sup>[ ] Represents apparent word. Williams, Yorktown, to Aunt Mary, 24 June 1861, Williams Papers.

<sup>37</sup>OR, series 1, 2:957-58.

overexpose his troops or lose his artillery because he had no plans to attack Hampton.<sup>38</sup>

Magruder appreciated Hood but believed he needed someone more experienced to lead his cavalry. So he sought a cavalry appointment for Lieutenant Colonel Robert Johnston from Alabama. The appointment was soon made, but Johnston did not immediately command the cavalry.<sup>39</sup>

Despite Magruder's efforts the Williamsburg defensive positions still were not progressing. Both Lee and Magruder recognized the utility of a defensive line across the three or four mile neck of the Peninsula between College and Queen's Creek. The shorter line would be easier to defend with Magruder's small force of less than 10,000. Magruder hoped that by relieving Ewell of administrative command of Williamsburg, he could devote full attention to the earthworks. Ewell, the college professor, was unable to work together with his engineer, Captain Alfred Rives; thus Magruder was forced to make another change. General Orders number 33 dated 27 June ordered Georgia Colonel Lafayette McLaws to assume command at Williamsburg and "See that the defenses in that neighborhood are prosecuted with vigor."<sup>40</sup> Magruder also tasked McLaws to supervise proficiency training on artillery. Magruder

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<sup>38</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 147-48.

<sup>39</sup>RG 109, chapter 8, volume 236, 27 June 1861.

<sup>40</sup>A frequent criticism of Magruder is that he wanted or attempted to do all his staff work alone. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 1:XXXIV. However, he personally invited men to join his staff as volunteers. The absence of other experienced army officers may have compelled him to stay active in all aspects of his command. The military inclinations of many cavalier officers were less than disciplined. Magruder, Hill, and other commanders were forced to insist that these officers live in camp and field conditions. OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 149-50.

challenged the lax attitude of field grade officers by demanding they live with their troops instead of in private homes.<sup>41</sup>

McLaws's first letter from the Peninsula to his wife on 2 July provided insight into the types of problems Magruder had been trying to solve,

My duties here are exceedingly onerous as my command is never more than three regiments and all kinds of troops, irregular and organized . . . [the headquarters of the Tenth Georgia are in an] immense redoubt now in the course of erection under my control. . . . The Virginia Regt [regiment] here are very sociable, cleaver gentlemen and [frequently] go to their camp and enjoy society. A good many have invited me to their houses, but I have no time to think of going.<sup>42</sup>

Magruder realized that the Federals had many offensive options and that the viability of his defense was based on reducing those options.

McLaws's initial assessment agreed with his commander's; there was no way to prevent the Federals from landing between Yorktown and Williamsburg. McLaws exclaimed,

Parties of the enemy are constantly making in roads around Newport News and from Hampton stealing Negroes and all kinds of property and committing so many depredations that the inhabitants have fled leaving their houses and fields and left all their worldly goods behind.<sup>43</sup>

As July arrived Magruder encountered further medical and organizational problems. The weather and terrain were hostile. One soldier exclaimed, "This is the hottest place I ever saw, we are right down in the sand and there is not a shade tree on the place, the water

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>[ ] Represents apparent word. Lafayette McLaws, Williamsburg, to his wife, 2 July 1861, LS in Lafayette McLaws Papers in the Southern Historical Collection of the Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

is also very mean."<sup>44</sup> Another soldier said, "The country reminds me of the descriptions I have read of the jungles of India. The Yankees will have a day here crawling through the swamps."<sup>45</sup> McLaws described the dramatic impact of communicative diseases on country boys writing his wife on one occasion that he was going to the hospital to visit "over 200 sick with measles, diarrhea, etc." and on another that "The measles and mumps are prevalent to be sure but they are of a very mild type and men [tolerate] them and walk about from morning to night without caring an iota for their very disagreeable appearance or thought of risk to their health."<sup>46</sup>

Magruder was a proactive commander. Private Henry C. Carter of the Richmond Howitzers writing from Denbigh to his brother William claimed,

General Magruder has his headquarters at this place, he is constantly riding day and night sending out scouts and videttes if the [Yankees] can catch him napping, they will have to be smarter than I give them credit for being.<sup>47</sup>

Part of the reason Magruder was so active was because of the slow adjustments of his officers and soldiers to military discipline.

Despite Magruder's repeated and specific orders concerning soldiers' laboring on the earthworks, subordinate commanders continued to bypass him and attempted to appeal to General Lee. Colonel Hodges's

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<sup>44</sup>James P. Williams, Yorktown, to Aunt Mary, 24 June 1861, Williams Papers.

<sup>45</sup>Henry Carter, Denbigh, to William Carter, 3 July 1861, Carter Family Papers.

<sup>46</sup>[ ] Represents apparent word. McLaws, Williamsburg, to his wife, 8 July 1861 and 18 July 1861, McLaws Papers.

<sup>47</sup>[ ] Represents apparent word. Henry Carter, Denbigh, to William Carter, 3 July 1861, Carter Family Papers.

14th Virginia was suffering terribly in the Jamestown swamps and he petitioned Lee to provide Negroes to work in the ditches. Fortunately, Lee sustained Magruder as he would in future correspondence.<sup>48</sup> Lee referred the issue back to Magruder with an indorsement recommending the use of Negroes, whenever possible, but reminding him of his responsibility for completing the earthworks.<sup>49</sup>

As Magruder was clearly in control, his orders are informative. The twenty general orders issued in July reflected his view of the proper discipline of army life. General Orders number 35 prohibited officers from skipping court-martial duty and General Orders number 36 forbid officers and soldiers from revealing the details of military affairs to newspaper reporters. The later order was so effective that articles from and about the Department of the Peninsula rarely appeared in Richmond newspapers after July 1861.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Before July 1861, officials in Richmond were inclined to respond directly to inquiries from field commanders and their subordinates. In July, Lee successfully attempted to impose discipline on subordinate officers. He referred correspondence which bypassed Magruder back to him without taking action, thus he strengthened Magruder's command presence.

<sup>49</sup>RG 109, chapter 8, vol. 236, 2 July 1861.

<sup>50</sup>Operations security was a constant problem throughout the war. The security of operations was frequently compromised by ambitious reporters who lived with the army and filed stories under pseudonyms. Lee frequently complained of the negative impact on operations. In General Orders No. 36, Magruder ordered his men not to speculate on operations to reporters. The following example illustrates the problem. A 29 June 1861 article by "Howitzer" in the Richmond Examiner said, "The colonel in command here [Magruder] made a requisition this morning for two detachments of howitzers to proceed as early as practicable down the Hampton Roads at a given point...The other will be stationed at the junction of Hampton and Warwick Roads." The Virginia Gazette in Williamsburg was either forced to or voluntarily ceased operations until after the Yankees took over the town. Magruder's censorship seemed to be very effective.



Magruder acknowledged the increasing impact of illness on his overtasked force and established a new hospital at Bigler's Mill on the south bank of the York River. He insisted on assigning Negro women as nurses and cooks since male Negroes were working on the trenches. The Department Medical Director received guidelines in General Orders number 45. Magruder acted to further limit officer abuses of rank by forbidding wooden floors in officers quarters until the enlisted quarters were completed.<sup>51</sup>

General Orders numbers 41, 44, and 48 granted commanders greater latitude to ease the movement of supplies, personnel and projects. In General Orders number 41, Magruder lifted the ban on soldiers on the wharves. He apparently believed the prospect of rotting food and materials in the hot July sun represented a greater waste than the threat of pilferage. General Orders number 44 delegated commanders the authority to grant passes and number 48 authorized members of the cavalry to pull fatigue details whenever they were in camp.

The dichotomy of democracy and military discipline began to surface. In June, two of the colonels of the Louisiana regiments resigned.<sup>52</sup> General Orders number 49 announced the election of Colonel

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<sup>51</sup>All the General Orders of the Department of the Peninsula are located in RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 229. This specific citation was General Order number 39, 7 July 1861. All future references to general orders will cite, General Orders number \_\_\_\_, date [if known].

<sup>52</sup>The Louisiana officers were in constant turmoil. Previously Coppens' subordinates had requested he be replaced. Colonel Louis DeRussy, 2d LA, discovered his brother was stationed at Fort Monroe. Rather than risk fighting him, he resigned and ended up on Leonidas Polk's staff out West. Colonel Marigny resigned when he perceived favoritism in Richmond. Later, Colonel Valerie Sulakowski of the 14th LA resigned Feb 62 when Howell Cobb was appointed a general before him. Jones, Tigers, 42.

William Mallory Levy as the new commander of the 2d Louisiana. Levy received 23 of 38 votes cast.<sup>53</sup> Conversely, on 18 July, General Orders numbers 50 and 51 reported the results of two court-martials. For desertion Magruder approved a sentence of hard labor with a ball and chain for the duration of war, suspended to two months, and a drumming out of the service. Sleeping on post resulted in 14 days solitary confinement on bread and water. Magruder turned down a sentence of dismissal from the service in the 15th Virginia's mutiny trial as "too light." In general, Magruder exhorted officers to treat problems that undermined the discipline of the army with the gravity they deserved, despite any personal revulsion they felt.<sup>54</sup>

The last Magruder order in July concerned sanitation. He instructed commanders to let men bathe and cleanup. Soldiers were forbidden to excrete body wastes anywhere other than latrines and he recommended commanders establish latrine details. Later to assist in decomposition of fecal material, Magruder ordered the use of lime from oyster shells.<sup>55</sup>

Magruder strove to detect any Federal troop movements and discourage them. This was not a difficult task in light of the recent Federal fiasco at Big Bethel. Union movements were small and tentative with the major objective of encouraging Negro defection to Hampton where

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<sup>53</sup>General Orders number 49, 19 July 1861.

<sup>54</sup>General Orders numbers 50 and 51, 18 July 1861.

<sup>55</sup>General Orders number 54, 29 July 1861.

they could be used to support Butler's labor requirements.<sup>56</sup> The infrequent Union forays seemed to make them quarry like a fox in a southern hunt.

One of the units seeking glory was Dreux's Louisiana Battalion led by a brash young officer, Lieutenant Colonel Charles D. Dreux. Dreux had accompanied Magruder on an unsuccessful reconnaissance on 28-29 June. The mission revealed more instances of Yankee pillaging and resulted in a sternly worded letter from Magruder to Union Colonel Phelps commanding at Newport News.<sup>57</sup> Dreux seemed to take this as a personal challenge and he sought an opportunity to strike a blow for Southern honor.

The match that lit the powder keg was a rowdy 4 July barbecue celebration at Dreux's camp. The visit of Magruder, who stayed only a short while, and McLaws combined with the bravado of patriotic speeches led the apparently liquor impaired Dreux to decide to ambush the Yankees' daily patrol.

Dreux, accompanied by approximately 125 men, a piece of the

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<sup>56</sup>Fort Monroe offered a safe haven for slaves wishing to escape bondage. As the slaves left the Confederate workforce, they joined the Union workforce. Both sides took actions to encourage/counter this situation. Confederate cavalry patrols swept the countryside and sent recaptured slaves back under escort to Williamsburg and Yorktown. In Matthews County slaves were picked up by Union landing parties. Slaves also cast themselves adrift in boats. Navy Captain O. S. Glisson reported, on 18 July 1861, that he picked up nine slaves who were adrift in the Rappahannock River. Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, authorized them to be employed rather than returned to slavery. ORN, series 1, 6:8-10. By July 1861, Butler encouraged slaves to seek refuge in the fort. This increased the Negro population to 900 of which about 72 percent were employable. The figure grew to 1,500 by March 1862. These defecting slaves brought not only labor but military intelligence. Tinsley Spraggins, 160-197.

<sup>57</sup>OR, series 1, 2:960-61.

Richmond Howitzer artillery and some cavalry, moved toward Newport News. Just after dawn on 5 July, Dreux, frustrated by the enemy's failure to appear, led a scout of five men forward. In the restricted visibility cavalry Captain William Collins lined up his men and prepared to charge. Sporadic fire broke out from the rear stampeding the still limbered howitzer and the cavalry. Within five minutes the affair was over, but Dreux and one other man were killed; they were the only casualties of the unlucky adventure. Magruder tersely demanded reports from the concerned parties and reported to Richmond that Dreux had exceeded his orders.<sup>58</sup>

Despite Dreux's misadventure, Magruder worked with an energy that revealed a dedicated understanding of his purpose. On 5 July, he instructed the brilliant Captain J. Thompson Brown<sup>59</sup> to take charge of the artillery and entrench it as he saw fit with a caution to complete the works without delay as the spades were required elsewhere by 10:00

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<sup>58</sup>The activities at the barbecue are covered by McLaws letter to his wife, 8 July 1861, McLaws Papers, and Jones, Tigers, 45-48. Numerous reports exist in QR, series 1, 2:188-92. Magruder's official report is in QR, series 1, 2:964-67. A Union newspaper account, New York World, appeared in Frank Moore, The Rebellion Record, vol. 2, (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1862; reprint, New York: Arno, 1977), Document 70 1/2, 251. Hereafter referred to as RR.

<sup>59</sup>Captain J. Thompson Brown was a well connected 26 year old University of Virginia graduate. He initially commanded a company of the Richmond Howitzers and was involved in the 7 May exchange of fire with the Union vessel Yankee at Gloucester Point. He was entrusted with a lot of responsibility and would eventually rise to the rank of colonel in charge of Longstreet's artillery reserve. He was killed at the Battle of the Wilderness. Robert Krick, Lee's Colonels (Dayton: Morningside Press, 1979), 62.

A.M. on 6 July.<sup>60</sup>

Douglas S. Freeman criticized Magruder for his voluminous letters.<sup>61</sup> On closer examination they were full of well developed strategic insight that seemed to meet Lee's original tasking for information. The level of detail reveals Magruder was often seeking approval to reach beyond or change his guidance from Richmond. Often Magruder carried his point. The best example of this was his 7 July 1861 letter to the Adjutant General in Richmond, Colonel George Deas. The letter is lengthy but it efficiently addressed five issues: The Dreux skirmish; Negro intelligence reports; the situation at Williamsburg and Yorktown, with a recommendation to build new batteries that would protect Grove Landing; the movement of heavy guns at Yorktown, to reflect his perceived priority to cover the land approaches; and the establishment of forward defensive points along the Poquoson River. He concluded by advising of his plans to survey the progress of defensive works at Gloucester Point and Williamsburg.

On 9 July, Magruder finished his survey and reported Gloucester Point would be weak against land assault and that the Williamsburg works, originally misengineered, were progressing. Magruder then pressed for a decision on a new battery at Mulberry Point and closed with an apology for increasing the demands on an overtaxed Richmond. Lee accepted Magruder's reports and provided the materials and authorization needed to implement the recommendations for Gloucester

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<sup>60</sup>John Magruder to J. Thompson Brown, 5 July 1861, ALS in J. Thompson Brown Papers, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond.

<sup>61</sup>Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 1:16.

Point and Williamsburg. Although four days later, Lee refused to allow Magruder to relocate guns from Jamestown Island to an advanced work protecting Grove Landing; Magruder argued his point to Richmond. Eventually, he satisfied Lee's concerns and was permitted to proceed as he desired.<sup>62</sup>

It is easy to be critical of Magruder's maverick actions. Issues such as slave impressment and militia muster appeared to have exceeded his command authority. Although he showed little patience with bureaucracy, he would eventually coordinate his activities with the appropriate political and military structure. Several events in July are illustrative.

On 24 July, one month after calling up Letcher's militia, Magruder formally advised Letcher of his action and asked for approval. Yet, in the time before he contacted Letcher, Magruder forced the militia to assemble three times a week and stationed them near their homes. By all measures these men had been impressed into Confederate service.<sup>63</sup>

Simultaneously Magruder took on the government's commissary and financiers. Earlier in the month, Magruder had issued specific

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<sup>62</sup>The following references taken as a group illustrate a point. Magruder, as so many other commanders, specifically reported activity in his department. However, Magruder was close enough to Richmond to occasionally visit or be visited. Lee made trips to the Peninsula to review the progress of the works. Conversely as Magruder became better acquainted with his command, he discovered nuances which he felt compelled to pursue. The most marked example was the development of works at Spratley's Farm to support naval efforts on the newly initiated works at Mulberry Island. Magruder was aware of the possibility of flanking maneuvers and he sought to counter them. The sources cited are representative of the strategic debate between Lee and Magruder. OR, series 1, 2:964-67, 970-71, 975, 977-79, QR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 185-86.

<sup>63</sup>OR, series 1, 2:988.

instructions governing the procurement, issuance, and storage of food stuffs. He was particularly concerned with Richmond's inability to establish a predictable supply line. Colonel Lucius Northrup, Confederate Commissary General, heard of Magruder's orders and on 18 July forbid Captain J. H. Hope, the commissary representative in Williamsburg, from obeying them. Magruder was furious and within a day wrote a scathing personal attack on Northrup and the distribution system. He rationalized the need for his action on the impending malnutrition of his army. He advised Cooper of interim actions he had taken to become self-sufficient, including the letting of contracts with price fixing. Magruder's justification was on target when he advised that:

1. the enemy would not get the cattle and corn;
2. he now had an emergency food source;
3. the total cost was cheaper than Richmond could get the goods;
4. the people in the region profited from government money; and
5. the ground wheat would provide food for the horses.

Magruder closed by warning of the consequences if Cooper did not sustain him.<sup>64</sup>

In another instance, Magruder browbeat the venerable Edmund Ruffin into paying for contracts Magruder had let without prior authority. An inadequate land transport system forced Magruder to rely on commercial shipping. The few boats that routinely supported him were insufficient for his needs so he impressed schooners. In asking Ruffin to support him, he warned that a commander in the field must be permitted the

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<sup>64</sup>War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 21-23.

latitude to make contractual obligations to support his force or he would be hampered in the execution of his duties.<sup>65</sup> Although bureaucrats may not have gone out of their way to support him after he had usurped their authority, direct logical appeals usually convinced people in Richmond that Magruder should be sustained.

Magruder enhanced his reputation as a compassionate provider by his actions concerning the welfare of the slaves. After establishing the hospital at Bigler's Mill, he sought to employ Negro women to do hospital duty. Unfortunately, he lacked sufficient funds to pay them so he decided to use the hospital's general operations and maintenance funds.<sup>66</sup> A few weeks later, he implored Richmond for funds to pay the free Negroes, "Many of them are free Negroes, who have families who must starve if they are not paid, and to all I promised prompt payment."<sup>67</sup>

Magruder's frustration with Richmond was understandable when Colonel Deas advised that he was unable to provide Magruder with a copy of army regulations. Deas told Magruder there were not any [copies of the] regulations.<sup>68</sup> This confession helped explain Magruder's unilateral actions in the Department of the Peninsula.

Chaotic conditions continued to hamper Magruder's effectiveness. Petty bickering seemed to consume some of Magruder's key subordinates. Now Colonel Ewell and his engineer engaged in charges and countercharges over the shortfalls of the Williamsburg defensive line. Although McLaws

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>66</sup>RG 109, chapter 8, vol. 236, 24 July 1861.

<sup>67</sup>OR, series 1, 4:573.

<sup>68</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 236, 15 July 1861.



was now in charge of the defenses, Ewell wrote to Lee and claimed that engineer A. L. Rives was responsible for the poor site selection. A short investigation by Chief Engineer, Andrew Talcott, sustained Rives in his response that Ewell as the commander of the line for the past six weeks should have corrected the deficiencies. Rives noted optimistically that since Magruder had temporarily relocated his headquarters to Williamsburg, he expected the works to progress rapidly.<sup>69</sup> Seventeen days later on 30 July, McLaws reported to his wife,

Our coast is well guarded so that any advance would be immediately reported and our fortifications are fast assuming proportions that will make them exceedingly formidable. The main work here called Fort Magruder is fast approaching completion and on the left and right redoubts of formidable strength are either already finished or will be within a week.<sup>70</sup>

Despite apparent progress there were setbacks. Following a severe storm on 24 July, McLaws reported heavy water damage to earthworks and pools of water everywhere. Fields of fire had to be cleared and some work had to be redone, McLaws stated

[I was] obliged to have and go off about a mile to put a working party with axes to cutting down a grove of trees that obstructed our field of fire from one of the batteries and to entangle a ravine that led up to within a few hundred yards of our redoubts. . . . [I] took a ride along our left flank to examine into the work on our mill dam we are building over again in order to raise the water over a part of the country where we have to fear the approach of the enemy. Found the dam nearly completed but the water does not raise as much as I want it.<sup>71</sup>

The soldiers continued to suffer profoundly. The unsanitary

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<sup>69</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 174-75.

<sup>70</sup>McLaws to his wife, 30 July 1861, McLaws Papers.

<sup>71</sup>McLaws to his children, 25 July 1861, McLaws Papers.

conditions, exposure and cramped living quarters caused disease and illness. Some of the illnesses were mumps, measles, typhoid, dysentery, malaria, pneumonia and occasionally consumption [tuberculosis]. The effects were dramatic; the 7th Louisiana reported 645 of 920 ill, Coppens's Louisiana Battalion 500 of 600, at Gloucester Point 1,250 of 1,500 and the 5th North Carolina 960 of 1,150. Typhoid at Jamestown forced evacuation of the island.<sup>72</sup> William Corson of the 3rd Virginia cavalry wrote, "We cannot remain long in one place now on account of the flies which collect in such myriads at the camp as almost to eat our horses alive."<sup>73</sup> James Williams reported a local remedy to cure diarrhea, "I try to eat as little and as light food as I can and am drinking Bakers Bitters, two bottles of which I wrote to Uncle George for, and a bottle of blackberry brandy."<sup>74</sup>

As commander, Magruder took several steps to relieve the suffering. First he dispersed sick troops to private homes in counties from West Point, to Gloucester and Williamsburg. He established an ambulatory system to get troops back to their units when they were again healthy. He also made impassioned pleas to Richmond for medicines like quinine. He scoured newspapers and sent his surgeons to Richmond with

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<sup>72</sup>The misery endured by the soldiers was beyond comprehension, and anyone who wrote of or from the Peninsula mentioned it. Steamy hot conditions, hard manual labor, stagnant water, mosquitoes, flies, inadequate sanitation, inadequate medicine, and exposure all contributed to the epidemic spread of diseases. Physically exhausted men living in close quarters spread disease as rapidly as the pests did. Typical references are OR, series 1, 4:569-73; OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 246; Montague, 6; Jones, Tigers, 25.

<sup>73</sup>William Clark Corson, My Dear Jennie, ed., Blake W. Corson (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1982), 28-29.

<sup>74</sup>Williams, Yorktown, to his sister, 31 July 1861, Williams Papers.

clipped ads and instructions to purchase whatever was available, whether it was 10,000 ounces in New Orleans or 100 ounces in Richmond.<sup>75</sup>

Spot shortages of clothing left the troubled 15th Virginia in an awful state. Over 100 men were barefoot, others needed blankets, overcoats and underclothes. Colonel Robert Johnston, acting Inspector General, wrote Magruder and advised him that he had sent one officer from each company to Richmond to purchase anything which was available. As Confederate authorities might not be able to meet all the requirements, Johnston advised the officers to execute private contracts with civilian merchants.<sup>76</sup>

Despite these shortages the men made the best of the situation. Some soldiers reported great success in foraging; Corson reported to his beloved Jennie, "Our boys amuse themselves at leisure hours bathing and fishing. A foraging party goes out nearly everyday and brings in a load of watermelons and roasting ears. We can buy plenty of nice fish and vegetables."<sup>77</sup> On another occasion, Corson advised that Confederate pickets had killed a "Yankee steer," and that camp wagons had vegetables, butter, milk, eggs, chickens, shoats, watermelons, sweet potatoes, and fresh fish. Fixed prices, such as eggs 9 cents a dozen, butter 25 cents per pound, chickens 9 cents each, and watermelons 10 cents each prevented price gouging. Corson noted that all anxiously awaited the start of the oyster season.<sup>78</sup> Generous food parcels from

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<sup>75</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 246.

<sup>76</sup>War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 37-38.

<sup>77</sup>Corson, 29.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 33-35.

home helped keep spirits high. James Williams told his sister, "The boys get fried chicken in boxes right often."<sup>79</sup>

The free spirits of the soldiers corresponded to the disciplinary problems that continued into August. Hill criticized his officers for a lack of leadership. He carped that while soldiers seemed to realize the need for entrenchments, officers did not. He promised to arrest any officer who was caught seeking personal comfort while the troops were working.<sup>80</sup> Magruder continued to have problems with subordinates. He reprimanded Colonel Hodges of the 14th Virginia for sending him a report via an ignorant staffer who could not answer questions. Magruder told Hodges to put his messages in writing.<sup>81</sup>

Magruder's men continued to wreck havoc. Foraging deteriorated into lawlessness. During a short twelve hour deployment to Jamestown Island, the 10th Louisiana killed and ate all the livestock except two horses.<sup>82</sup> Colonel McLaws told his wife of an instance where a homeowner caught some Louisiana Zouaves stealing boards from his house. The owner asked what unit they were in, one soldier glibly replied, "Ve belongs to the first Georgy. Nonsense, Georgians do not have that accent the owner replied. Vera well shrugged the soldier, bon jour and the soldiers ran away."<sup>83</sup> Near West Point, Lieutenant Colonel Tomlin

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<sup>79</sup>Williams, Yorktown, to his sister, 31 July 1861, Williams Papers.

<sup>80</sup>D. H. Hill to the officers of his command, Cary Letterbook, 30 July 1861.

<sup>81</sup>War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 39-40.

<sup>82</sup>Jones, Tigers, 31.

<sup>83</sup>McLaws to his wife, 18 August 1861, McLaws Papers.

sent twenty-two members of the Barhamsville Greys and four Taylor Greys, both of Tomlin's Battalion, to Yorktown to face charges of insubordination.<sup>84</sup>

In the midst of these problems, Magruder expressed his concern to the troops in General Orders number 57. He said the recent moves of the army provided temptations to the troops, and unfortunately a small number had committed depredations such as looting homes stealing corn and poultry. The entire army was shamed by these actions and he hoped everyone would work to stop it. Sentinels were to be posted at private homes, and he exhorted all officers and men to bring the culprits to summary justice.<sup>85</sup>

Magruder tried on many occasions to bait Butler into a battle beyond the range of Fortress Monroe's guns, but the Union forces showed no inclination to accept the challenge. The primary theater was Northern Virginia and after the rebels' victory at Manassas Butler contracted his lines and burned a part of Hampton.

On 2 August, Butler confided to Washington that he feared a rebel attack was imminent; indeed on 3 August Magruder departed the Williamsburg, Yorktown area with 4,400 troops and made camp at Bethel. On 6 August, Union cavalry reported Magruder in force at Whitney's Farm near the New Market Bridge just 2 1/2 miles from Hampton.<sup>86</sup> Private Williams reported to his Aunt Mary,

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<sup>84</sup>Lieutenant Colonel H. B. Tomlin, West Point, to General Magruder, Yorktown, 13 August 1861, Tomlin's Battalion Letterbook, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond.

<sup>85</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 222-23.

<sup>86</sup>OR, series 1, 4:567-68.

We started at daybreak, marched by Hampton, halted within two miles of Newport News, drew our army up in line of battle and just dared the cowardly rascals out of their den . . . There we were with only about half our whole army down here in a great big field right between Fortress Monroe and Newport News with no fortification or masked batteries.<sup>87</sup>

The next day Magruder demonstrated near Newport News. Williams reported,

We had about three hundred cavalry and the whole number galloped round right under the guns at Newport News daring them out, without even being fired at. We stayed there about two hours waiting for the enemy to advance, and then went around and drew up the line again on the outskirts of Hampton, but the cowards had actually left the place although strongly fortified and retired to the fortress.<sup>88</sup>

Magruder commented,

This [demonstration] was kept up the entire day but no attack was made, and with the exception of occasionally a horseman seen at a distance speeding away as if to carry information to Old Point or Newport News none of them were visible.<sup>89</sup>

At this point while meeting at Major George Wray's house on Back River Road, he received a copy of The Tribune, a northern newspaper. It contained a letter from Butler to the Secretary of War in which he declared an intention to colonize Negroes for the winter in the deserted homes in Hampton. Magruder was furious. Since Hampton was in range of Fort Monroe's guns, he could not hold the city if he captured it. So he decided to destroy the town instead of letting the Federals use it. Magruder assigned the mission to the Old Dominion Dragoons, who were from Hampton, the Mecklenburg Cavalry, the Warwick Beauregards and the

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<sup>87</sup>Williams, Bethel Church, to Aunt Mary, 9 August 1861, Williams Papers.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>OR, series 1, 4:570.

York Rangers. The 14th Virginia provided the covering force.<sup>90</sup>

The evening of 7 August, Captain Jefferson C. Phillips led the force across a rebuilt New Market bridge into Hampton to St. John's Church. Phillips sent Lieutenant George Booker Jones to inform the few remaining citizens that the town was about to be burned. Twenty men were stationed at Hampton bridge to prevent Federal interference and each company was given a quadrant of the town to torch.

Just after midnight the flames began to crackle and Phillips reported, "Flames were seen bursting from the buildings on all sides till it appeared the town was one mass of flames from one end to the other."<sup>91</sup> Robert Hudgins, a member of Phillips' company recalled, "As the smoke and flames ascended to heaven. I was reminded of the ancient sacrifices on the altar to many deities and I thought of how our little town was being made sacrifice to the grim God of war."<sup>92</sup> Williams recounted,

About one o'clock, it was the grandest sight I ever beheld, though I could hardly drive back the tears when I looked round at the officers and privates right there on the ground who had been born and raised in the place and were now seeing the very homes of their childhood, the very houses which had so long sheltered and protected them burnt to the ground. To them the scene must have been heartrending indeed.<sup>93</sup>

Phillips's men reassembled at the church and left with an elderly

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<sup>90</sup>Colonel J. C. Phillips, "How I Destroyed the Town of Hampton in [1862]," Daily Press, date unknown, Hampton Fine Arts Society, Hampton.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Robert S. Hudgins, "Burning of Hampton During the War Between the States August 1861," TMs, p. 32, Hampton Fine Arts Society, Hampton.

<sup>93</sup>Williams, Bethel Church, to Aunt Mary, 9 August 1861, Williams Papers.

resident via the Sawyer Swamp road to Colonel Mallory's Farm. Most of the town was destroyed.

Butler in his report alleged the residents got only 15 minutes notice and that he had to care for "The old and infirm, who by this wanton act of destruction are now left houseless and homeless."<sup>94</sup> Butler justified not defending the town by not wishing to be a part of this "heathenish outrage." He admitted that a few of his troops had been guilty of minimal looting "less than a hundred dollars and all [stolen] property has been stored in the seminary."<sup>95</sup> Butler evaded answering the Negro question that provoked Magruder's action by denying that he intended to winter Federal troops in Hampton. While no mention was made of Magruder's action in official Richmond, he apparently pleased his troops and embarrassed the Yankees and Butler again.

By the end of August Magruder had made great progress unifying his command. Lee had cooperated fully and Magruder repaid him with a cogent, integrated defense that bottled up the Federal force at the tip of the Peninsula. Magruder had so mastered the byroads and water passages of the lower Peninsula that he was able to provide his subordinates with detailed warnings of possible traps. He disposed his forces so that most positions supported each other and every navigable waterway was defended. Artillery batteries, rifle pits and breastworks dotted the landscape along the Newport News and Hampton roads. After Hampton was burned Williams wrote from Bethel,

I think old [McGruder] intends fortifying this place and

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<sup>94</sup>OR, series 1, 4:567-68.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.



make it a strong point to fall back upon in case he should be able to provoke an attack from the enemy in any of these expeditions through the country and it is probable we will stay here until the works are finished.<sup>96</sup>

Although only a private, Williams understood his commander. The very same day, 9 August, Magruder wrote Richmond and explained that his movements had been designed to distract the Federal government.<sup>97</sup>

Magruder was suspicious of all possible Yankee moves; perhaps his own military intuition told him that an enemy which made regular aerial reconnaissances and received regular intelligence reports from defecting Negroes had to know of his weak force and incomplete fortifications. To prepare for a Federal movement against his lines which he considered inevitable, the commanding general refused to allow his troops to become complacent. McLaws's 18 July letter to his wife typifies Magruder's proactive posture,

I was awakened at three o'clock by a dispatch from Magruder to move the Second Louisiana at once without breakfast to a point seven miles away. Also sent two six pounders with them. Also moved two other cannon to another of his works four miles away. All took until eight thirty.<sup>98</sup>

McLaws praised Magruder in saying,

Every commanding officer has been put on alert by the alertness of the commanding general. It is meant that he has taken all possible precautions to prevent the enemy from landing at any place on the coast or approaching from any

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<sup>96</sup>[ ] Represents apparent word. Williams, Bethel Church, to Aunt Mary, 9 August 1861, Williams Papers.

<sup>97</sup>OR, series 1, 4:570.

<sup>98</sup>Magruder was proactive in orienting troops to their possible field of combat. He frequently ordered troops be taken to their entrenchments to orient them to the route of march and the strengths/weaknesses of the position. This citation reflects the practical application of Magruder's philosophy. McLaws to wife, 18 July 1861, McLaws Papers.

direction without being informed beforehand in sufficient time to make the best possible use of his means of defense.<sup>99</sup>

But clearly McLaws expressed the thoughts of all when he said,

The enemy have been extraordinarily quiet and no doubt are in contemplation of some grand movement . . . However, I am in rapid preparation for his coming and if allowed another week will be in a very strong position.<sup>100</sup>

Magruder clearly articulated Colonel Johnston's role as the cavalry eyes of his shield. Johnston was tasked to repress marauding parties of the enemy, sweep the lower Peninsula of Negroes, return them to work and destroy Yankee outposts. As time permitted Magruder told him to strengthen the works at Bethel, Young's Mill and Harrod's Mill.<sup>101</sup>

Magruder was severely undermanned for the amount of work which needed to be done. While soldiers did admirable work, Magruder depended on agents to comb the countryside and provide him large numbers of Negroes. While the slaves constituted a security risk, they did free the soldiers for the multiple drills they needed to learn the art of soldiering.

Magruder sought as many workers as he could get. Proclamations tasked counties to release as many as half, but usually a third of their total black male population. A typical call was sent to Colonel Crump at Gloucester Point. Crump was told to direct citizens in Gloucester, Middlesex and Matthews counties to turn out 50 percent of all male slaves. Agents were instructed to hire or impress the free blacks. Pay was 50 cents per day plus rations. To appreciate the scope of

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>OR, series 1, 2:990-92.

Magruder's expectations he told Crump that a similar call netted 800 Negroes at Williamsburg. Magruder suggested that 600 Negroes could make Gloucester Point impregnable in ten days by deeping ditches, thickening parapets and constructing traverses.<sup>102</sup>

Activities like these were bound to cause hard feelings between Magruder and the slave owners. A letter on 26 August from former President John Tyler and Hill Carter, Robert E. Lee's cousin, followed up a personal interview with Secretary of War, Leroy Walker. They reported disaffection with Magruder's 15 July call to Charles City and New Kent County for 50 percent of their slaves to work on breastworks in Williamsburg. Since the call interfered with the wheat harvesting, they questioned Magruder's legal authority to requisition the Negroes. Walker quickly affirmed Magruder's authority to call the slaves out, but noted he expected Magruder to issue property receipts.<sup>103</sup> Magruder did as he was told and in September his impressments were fully sanctioned. Magruder's only restriction was not to impress Indians.<sup>104</sup>

Magruder's great work on land was being matched along the state's

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 1007.

<sup>103</sup>The issue of slave impressment was controversial throughout the war. The issues frequently boiled down the requisitioning agents' inability to guarantee the safe return of the slave property on demand, and the interference impressment had on the operation of the owner's business. Tyler's and Carter's letters did not appear to originate from a lack of patriotism. OR, series 1, 4:636; OR, series 1, 51:252. Two articles provide more insight into this vexing problem, Harrison A. Trexler, "The Opposition of Planters to the Employment of Slaves as Laborers by the Confederacy," Mississippi Valley Historical Review 27 (Sep 1940): 211, and Bernard Nelson, "Confederate Slave Impressment Legislation, 1861-1865," Journal of Negro History 31 (Oct 1946): 392.

<sup>104</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 306.

rivers. Although Magruder did not correspond frequently with the naval officers commanding the James River and York River, he was aware of their activities and he frequently requested their support, usually through Richmond. In mid-June at Magruder's request, Lee directed the steamer Teaser to support the batteries at Jamestown and Grove Wharf and not venture beyond the range of the Jamestown cannons.<sup>105</sup> Lee also asked naval officers to facilitate getting naval ordinance to Magruder to cover land approaches.<sup>106</sup>

Magruder was an artilleryist and he understood the complexities of the big naval guns. Colonel George W. Randolph, his chief artilleryist, managed the placement and transfer of the big guns. Magruder sought but never received an adequate training cadery or sufficient manpower to service the guns he had.<sup>107</sup>

Apart from requesting untested artilleryists who were training in Richmond, Magruder embarked on a vigorous program of cross-training. Infantry companies were detailed to learn about servicing artillery pieces. Some units were told to split their drills between infantry and artillery. In addition to the army artilleryists naval gunners helped train the soldiers.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>QRN, series 1, 5:808-9; QR, series 1, 2:935-36.

<sup>106</sup>QRN, series 1, 5:808-9.

<sup>107</sup>Magruder and Randolph made several requests to secure any type of instructor cadery. In the absence of any support from Richmond, men such as Randolph, a former naval officer, J. Thompson Brown, and naval Lieutenant Catesby Jones frequently crisscrossed the Peninsula to provide on-the-job training. War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 11, 29, 34; Williams, Yorktown, to sister, 31 July 1861, Williams Papers.

<sup>108</sup>QR, series 1, 4:634-35.

Magruder did not control the activities of the Navy, but he was heavily dependent on them. Their roles were complementary; both sought to prevent the Yankees' from reaching Richmond. Naval schemes to close the rivers served the dual purpose of covering Magruder's flanks. Consequently, Magruder began to show great interest in encouraging the Navy to take actions which would be compatible with his plans.

The York River did not penetrate completely to Richmond and it was initially protected at several points, the most prominent being the Yorktown/Gloucester Point defensive complex. The James River on the other hand was wide, long and it passed Richmond. Efforts to constrict the James River would force Union vessels to cross narrow channels under the fire of Magruder's guns at Mulberry Island and Jamestown. The Fort Boykins battery on the south side of the river would help steer Union vessels into the trap.

In early July, chief engineer Andrew Talcott tasked naval Lieutenant P. R. Page to develop a hydrographic chart and recommend areas of the James River for obstruction. Just over a week later on 10 July, Lee assigned Captain George Hollins the command of the James River defenses with a task to close the Swash Channel and, if suitable, develop a Mulberry Island site.<sup>109</sup> Magruder completely concurred and he pressed Lee for a decision.<sup>110</sup> Once the Mulberry Island battery was approved Magruder worked hard to support it. Magruder sought to make his right flank on the James secure by closing the mouth of the

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<sup>109</sup>ORN, series 1, 5:811; Andrew Talcott, Richmond, to Lieutenant P. R. Carter, 1 July 1861, Andrew Talcott Papers.

<sup>110</sup>OR, series 1, 2:970-71.

Warwick River, while Talcott and Hollins tried to close the Swash Channel.<sup>111</sup> Eventually, the Navy completely supported Magruder's plan on the James.

Magruder's meddling disturbed Captain William C. Whittle commander of the York River defenses. Magruder had established control of the land forces on either side of the York. He also presumed to control the placement of all ordinance. When he removed two 14 inch guns from Whittle's battery at Gloucester Point and relocated them to his land battery at Yorktown, Whittle exploded. Whittle tersely asked Captain D. N. Ingraham in Richmond for Magruder's authority, closing with a declaration that if Magruder could move weapons without consulting Whittle then Whittle's authority was false!<sup>112</sup> The guns were not returned.

Magruder appreciated the Navy's need for support and he provided manpower as he could. In mid-August, Magruder advised Captain Thomas J. Peyton commanding Peyton's Battery in Yorktown, that artillery companies supporting the naval batteries would answer to the naval officer commanding the battery. They were subject to naval drill and fatigue duty on fortifications; but retained the right to drill as an artillery company on their own time.<sup>113</sup>

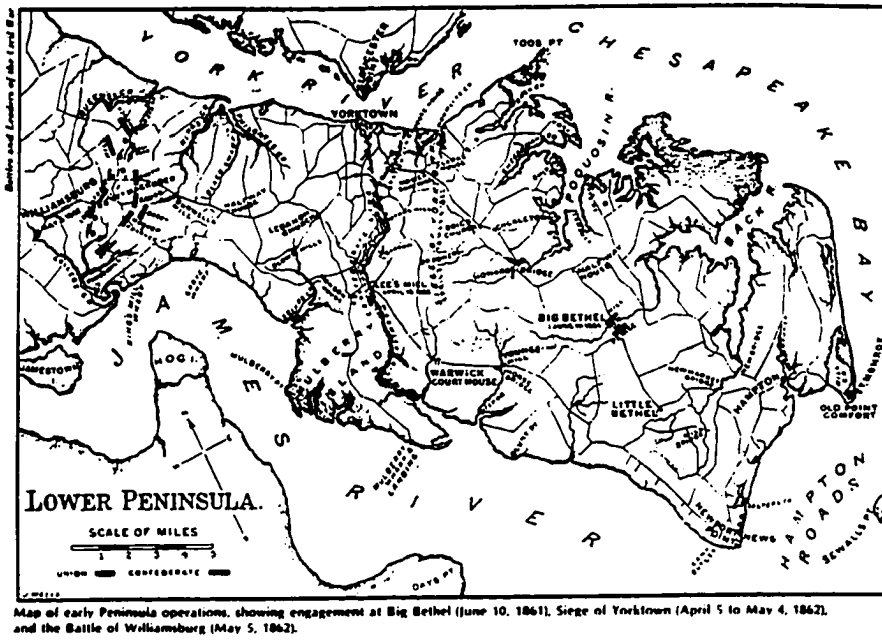
As August began to wain Magruder spread his authority further. Reports of undisciplined militia and Yankee raids for Negroes in

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<sup>111</sup>OR, series 1, 4:634; ORN, series 1, 6:717; Andrew Talcott, Richmond, to T. M. R. Talcott, 26 August 1861, 3 September 1861, Andrew Talcott Papers.

<sup>112</sup>ORN, series 1, 5:812.

<sup>113</sup>OR, series 1, 4:634-35.



Map of early Peninsula operations, showing engagement at Big Bethel (June 10, 1861), Siege of Yorktown (April 5 to May 4, 1862), and the Battle of Williamsburg (May 5, 1862).

Fig. 5. Map of Lower Peninsula from "Civil War times Illustrated" Magazine, Feb 79, page 8.

Matthews County north of the York brought a request for help from concerned citizens. Magruder sought from Richmond and received command of Gloucester, Middlesex, and Matthews counties. He immediately ordered Colonel Crump to extend his authority to the Piankitank River in Matthews County and to take command of the militia there. After a site survey, Crump was ordered to provide Magruder with recommendations for fortifications to protect his left flank.<sup>114</sup>

As Crump wrestled with his new responsibilities, Magruder contemplated forward basing near Bethel. Because of his pathetic shortage of wagons, he lobbied Northrup for forward commissaries stocked with 20 days rations of pork, bacon, flour, beans, peas, rice, coffee, sugar, candles, soap, salt and whiskey for 6,000 men. Three days later, Magruder amended his request to 60,000 rations at both Warwick Court House and Harrod's Mill, 100,000 at Yorktown and 50,000 at Williamsburg. He added the requirement for 60,000 more rations every five days, 50,000 going to Yorktown and 10,000 to Williamsburg.<sup>115</sup> The reason for all this activity was a suspected Yankee advance. On 26 August, McLaws wrote,

There is a rumor that the enemy have landed about 300 horses at Fortress Monroe and it is believed that it is their intention to attempt forays along the coast, stealing Negroes, and chickens, killing cattle, and burning houses as seems to be their practice now whenever an opportunity offers.<sup>116</sup>

One day later, Magruder reported that a naval expedition was afloat at

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 634, 636, 649.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 635.

<sup>116</sup>McLaws to his wife, 26 August 1861, McLaws Papers.



Fort Monroe.<sup>117</sup>

Despite the demanding pace of the summer, Magruder was unaware that he was fighting his greatest enemy sight unseen. Even as ugly rumors spread about Magruder's drunkenness, allies were rallying support in Richmond as September arrived.

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<sup>117</sup>QRN, series 1, 6:717.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

The end of the summer inaugurated a lengthy period that was devoid of military action. The new federal general-in-chief, George McClellan, had no thoughts of testing the Confederacy via the Peninsula and with the main Confederate army behind entrenchments in northern Virginia, President Lincoln seemed to favor action there. This shift in emphasis created difficulties for Magruder.

In the absence of military activity, Magruder and his diminutive force moved to the back rank of Richmond's priorities. General Lee left his advisory position in Richmond to assume command in western Virginia and later South Carolina. When he left Magruder lost a supportive ally. Lee understood the complexities of the Peninsula and when he departed, myopic national leadership lost sight of Magruder's needs. Magruder had been in the spotlight, but the success at Manassas focused attention on others.

Although Magruder was not receiving the supplies he needed, he was highly visible within Richmond's "official circle." Social cliques were a fact in the Confederate Capitol and various regions maintained considerable political power bases. Magruder ran afoul of Governor Letcher, a resident of Lexington, over the militia issue. He also crossed swords with the powerful gentry of the Tidewater region over slave impressments. In Richmond he faced vicious rumors concerning his

drinking. It seemed Magruder's antebellum reputation with old West Point contemporaries such as Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee may have carried over. Surely, D. H. Hill had specific, negative feelings about Magruder. Nonetheless, formal society spoke frequently about members of their clique and Magruder was "fair game."

Magruder was from Albemarle, near Charlottesville, and he circulated in a preeminent social circle which included George Wythe Randolph, his chief artillery officer. Randolph was an unsuccessful candidate for the Confederate Congress and a future Secretary of War. In late August Randolph, following a visit to Richmond, wrote Albert T. Bledsoe, another Charlottesville native and undersecretary in the War Department,

He [Magruder] is currently represented as being very dissipated. . . . Upon my own knowledge, Genl Magruder since his appointment as a Brigadier General, has not used intoxicating liquors of any sort and has been as rigid a temperance man as Father Matthew himself.<sup>1</sup>

Randolph encouraged Bledsoe to speak out against any rumors he might hear concerning Magruder's sobriety. Still rumors persisted and in late November a member of Magruder's medical staff wrote to the editor of the Richmond Examiner,

Interrogatories put to me have insinuated that he [Magruder] is generally under the influence of intoxicating draughts . . . I saw General Magruder at the Battle of Bethel. I have probably seen him twenty times since at different places within his command. I have seen him in his headquarters and partaken of his hospitality when he was unreserved in his manners and I declare I have never seen him intoxicated.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 251.

<sup>2</sup>"Letter to the Editor," The Richmond Examiner, 27 November 1861.

The author challenged Magruder's detractors and questioned their motives,

If it is a fact that he is addicted to this vice, why not court martial him? Why attack a generous and gallant soldier at night with the stiletto? . . . I am aware of officers who would like to have his position; I know there are parties who would rejoice to have him superseded.<sup>3</sup>

It is not likely Magruder abstained from alcohol completely, but evidence suggests he acted responsibly. Two incidents emphasize the point. Lafayette McLaws described a dinner party held for Magruder and the commanders of McLaws's Second Division: "The dinner was magnificent and would have graced a New Orleans' restaurant. A great many toasts were given and speeches made in reply."<sup>4</sup> The other incident described his participation in a Louisiana Mardi Gras celebration in Williamsburg. Some of the enlisted men set Magruder up to meet a feminine looking soldier who was dressed in lady's clothes,

The gallant Magruder quickly took the "lady's" [Campbell] hand and began entertaining Campbell with food, drink, and lively conversation. During this interlude other battalion members entered the room above Magruder, ripped apart a feather mattress and shoveled the feathers through cracks in the floor. Magruder was covered with feathers, but the Tigers simply laughed and yelled that it was a Louisiana snowstorm.<sup>5</sup>

Although these incidents imply alcohol might be involved, no one

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>McLaws, Young's Mill, to his wife, 7 February 1862, McLaws Papers.

<sup>5</sup>Jones, *Tigers*, 33-34. While this incident certainly suggests alcohol may have been involved, the event was a festive one which Magruder was apparently willing to share with the enlisted personnel. On another occasion, cited in chapter 2 (see note 58), McLaws was unable to catch up with Magruder, who made an appearance at a barbecue banquet but continued on to examine his defensive works. McLaws to his wife, 8 July 1861, McLaws Papers.

documented any consumption or excess on Magruder's part.

The longer the Yankees ignored the Peninsula, the more Magruder's priority for supplies and manpower decreased. The period from September 1861 until February 1862 severely tested the morale and discipline of the department. Magruder refused to compromise with flagging spirits who were unwilling to endure the months of tedium. As early as September, some officers in the 3d Virginia Cavalry contemplated drafting a petition to spend the winter at home. In compensation, they proposed to extend their enlistment by three months the following summer.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, Magruder faced a formidable challenge. Discipline was of the first order. Over 50 court-martials were reported and Magruder sought to clarify the status of prisoners held at Yorktown.<sup>7</sup> The rigid camp schedule of 10th Louisiana regiment shows how he ran his department,

Reveille at 5:00 A.M., roll call, then we cook our breakfast which of course we are supposed to eat. Half past eight, guard mounting, which is equal to a small parade as it each day consists of forty men, one lieutenant, one sergeant, and three corporals. At 9:00 A.M. company drill until 10:00 A.M., after which we are free until 12:00 P.M. when we have dinner call, after which comes what is called fatigue duty which means spades, and when there is no digging to be done, we have to clean up quarters. After which we are again free until 6:00 P.M. Then dress parade and dismiss to cook our supper, eat, loaf, and spin yarns till 9:00 P.M. when tattoo beats and all are sent to bed like a parcel of school boys.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Richard H. Watkins to his home, 26 September 1861 and 2 October 1861, TD in Watkins Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

<sup>7</sup>General Orders numbers 70, 72, 73, 78, and 79; War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 57.

<sup>8</sup>Jones, Tigers, 22.

Freeman criticized Magruder for attempting to do all staff work himself.<sup>9</sup> Basic army management was still foreign to many of Magruder's officers. In General Orders number 71, Magruder emphasized the necessity of forwarding all communications into and out of the department through department headquarters. This order later needed to be reissued. On another occasion, he chastised Colonel Levy for abandoning 4,000 rounds of ammunition and entrenching tools when he relocated his camp.<sup>10</sup>

As Commanding Officer Magruder faced an endless multitude of tasks. The existing slave labor force was inadequate to meet the manual labor requirements. He used all his resources to uncover sufficient labor; soldiers did double duty as ditch diggers. The primary labor source was the black man. The commander employed civilian agents to contact civic leaders in counties within and beyond his command. After the Secretary of War overruled John Tyler's challenge,<sup>11</sup> Magruder embarked on an aggressive recruitment campaign that lasted the duration of his command. He constantly called for tools and slaves. On 2 September, he asked

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<sup>9</sup>Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 1:XXXIV. There are many instances when Magruder could have reasonably expected officers to execute their assigned tasks, but reality was different. One September letter was particularly illustrative, Magruder wrote to his engineer, a Captain Myers at Hardin's Bluff. He expressed concern that work was not starting on Mulberry Island defenses until after 9:00 A.M. Magruder insisted it start at sunrise. Unfortunately, Myers was commuting from the southside of the James River. Magruder told Myers that he should stay in accommodations near Mulberry Island. RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, Magruder to Myers, 2 September 1861.

<sup>10</sup>General Orders number 71; RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, Magruder to Colonel Levy, 7 September 1861.

<sup>11</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 252.

Confederate Quartermaster Abraham C. Meyers for 500 digging spades.<sup>12</sup> These supplies were supplemented, sometimes reluctantly, by local farmers.<sup>13</sup> Slaves that had been impressed usually had to bring tools from their farm.

Magruder's relentless pursuit of the black labor force created disciplinary and security problems. Many slaves used the opportunity to escape to Union lines. This forced Magruder to place armed guards in the slave camps, remove slaves from details that provided temptations to escape and establish cavalry details to sweep the countryside for runaways.<sup>14</sup> Fear of runaways increased owners' reluctance to release slaves for army service. When the Confederate government temporarily withdrew liability for slave property resistance to impressment increased.<sup>15</sup> Deterrent measures for slaves included "a whip and fifty lashes."<sup>16</sup>

Magruder knew that the slave owners in York County, James City County and others within his jurisdiction would complain about regular levies for slaves. Such actions would impact various plantation activities and crop harvests. So he sought to employ free Negroes to the maximum extent possible. He offered 50 cents per day plus meals. Later he initiated a scheme to hire free Negroes and slaves for 100

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<sup>12</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, Magruder to Colonel A. C. Meyers, 2 September 1861.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 23 September 1861.

<sup>14</sup>General Orders number 79.

<sup>15</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 458.

<sup>16</sup>(RG) 109, chapter 2, vol. 68, Special Orders number 698, 25 March 1862.

dollars per year; monthly rates varied from 10 dollars to 40 dollars per month.<sup>17</sup>

When these labor bids failed, Magruder was forced to impress the number needed. A. T. Bledsoe, Assistant Secretary of War, wrote "Your course in impressing labor for work upon fortifications in cases of absolute necessity and for a fair price is fully approved."<sup>18</sup> Magruder followed by reaching out to King William, King and Queen, Gloucester, Mathews, Surry, Lancaster, Sussex, Chesterfield, Dinwittie and Petersburg. Whenever individual owners refused to support him, he sent dragoons to guarantee slave owners' "support" for Negro musters. Assembly points were usually Yorktown, Williamsburg or Gloucester Point. Slaves were examined and unhealthy candidates returned to their masters.<sup>19</sup> Suitable workers were retained to complete specific tasks or were kept for a period of time and returned to their masters.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Magruder worked a number of schemes to raise sufficient Negro workers. A sample proclamation was "Workers needed--send them with spades, shovels, picks, hoes, axes. Pay is fifty cents per day and food. Will pay free Negroes and masters of slaves the same rate. Send to the nearest wharf and thence via Williamsburg." OR, series 1, 4:654. Magruder believed direct hire of Negroes would work better and in December 1861, and January 1862 he sought approximately 600 employees. When the direct hire schemes failed to produce sufficient laborers, he finally received authority to again impress slaves. OR, series 1, 4:715-16; OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 472-73.

<sup>18</sup>OR, series 1, 4:654; OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 310.

<sup>19</sup>There is plentiful documentation of this point. The following citations are representative. RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, 29 October 1861; OR, series 1, 4:654.

<sup>20</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, Magruder to I. M. St. John, 25 November 1861. Later Magruder was compelled to convince Richmond that the impressed slaves were being properly treated; OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 475.



Magruder's aggressiveness earned him several rebukes from Richmond. Indians claimed an exemption from the work force and Governor Letcher supported them. He advised Magruder that the Indians would volunteer to work on boats, if solicited.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately many Indians were unable to produce proof of race and Magruder impressed them as colored labor. On another occasion, Secretary of War, Judah Benjamin, denied Magruder's request to draft 500 slaves to work on the defensive works. Benjamin cited both their responsibility to produce food and the low probability of attack in Magruder's front.<sup>22</sup> Political meddling got so bad Magruder ordered the release of Negroes belonging to Turner Curtis and the Chief Justice of King William County.<sup>23</sup>

Secretary Benjamin earned Magruder's lasting distain when he ordered him to rescind an order impressing slaves from Chesterfield. Despite an impassioned plea and a documented shortfall of nearly 600 hands, Benjamin told Magruder he was wrong to cross district boundaries. Benjamin sharply admonished Magruder to, "Confine the exercise of your power of impressment to the geographical limits of your own command."<sup>24</sup> Undaunted, Magruder unsuccessfully solicited Richmond's authority to impress 600 Negroes from Mecklenburg, Lunenburg and Brunswick counties.

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<sup>21</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 306.

<sup>22</sup>OR, series 1, 4:697.

<sup>23</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, Magruder to St. John, 16 November 1861.

<sup>24</sup>An obviously bitter Magruder on sick leave before the Seven Days campaign, openly criticized Judah Benjamin. Rebel war clerk Jones wrote on 23 Jun 1862, "He is too open in his censures of the late Secretary of War." Jones, Diary, 135. This chapter will document other clashes between Benjamin and Magruder. The citation herein is OR, series 1, 9:33-34, 36.

He argued slave owners would prefer impressment with government liability to direct hire schemes.<sup>25</sup> One week later, Colonel Ewell advised his friend Professor Joynes, working in the War Department, that while 1,500 Negroes could finish the fortifications in 6 weeks; work was at a standstill because of Richmond's intransigence.<sup>26</sup> A week after Ewell's letter, Richmond authorized Magruder to impress slaves at ten dollars per month to complete the Peninsula defenses.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly Magruder did not make any political friends over the slave impressment issue. Additionally, he began to alienate some of his politically connected subordinates. He curtly advised the former governor of Alabama, now colonel of the 8th Alabama, John Winston, to stop whining about being displaced from his camp. He advised Colonel T. R. Cobb of the influential Georgia clique that Georgians could be detailed as carpenters or any other task that needed to be done.<sup>28</sup>

Just as Magruder was unburdened by the reassignment of D. H. Hill on 24 September, he inherited other problems. The Cobb brothers would be good fighters, but they were politically influential. Howell was president of the Confederate Congress and he frequently clashed with Magruder, who did not believe Cobb could do justice to his command and direct the legislature. Although he initially supported Magruder,

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<sup>25</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 456-57.

<sup>26</sup>OR, series 1, 9:42-43.

<sup>27</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 472-73.

<sup>28</sup>War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 61-62.

Howell Cobb later came to believe Magruder was an alarmist.<sup>29</sup>

Lafayette McLaws of Georgia testified to their influence when he wrote,

The Cobbs are coming over to the Peninsula and I suppose their worships must be provided for before the claims of any others can be considered. Thomas R. R. Cobb with his Legion has already arrived and reports say that Howell is to follow and will come as a Brigadier General. I do not wish to be under any politician.<sup>30</sup>

Although the Cobbs did exert influence Magruder's team had been previously established. McLaws's loyalty resulted in his promotion to Brigadier General with a divisional command,

I am indebted to General Magruder particularly for the honorable position I am now occupying. To his favor alone, I owe the fortune of being in command all the time since my arrival.<sup>31</sup>

Magruder also solicited authority to reorganize his artillery into two regiments under a brigade with his friend, Randolph, in command as a brigadier. Magruder asked Letcher to intervene on Randolph's behalf with President Davis.<sup>32</sup> Although some people considered this appeal to be blatantly political, Randolph's considerable experience in naval

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<sup>29</sup>Hill was reassigned to command in North Carolina on 24 September 1861. The North Carolina, "Bethel Regiment" were six month volunteers and would leave within six weeks. Magruder and Hill exchanged curt correspondence before Hill departed. War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 44-45, 48; RG 109, vol. 2, chapter 227, Magruder to Hill, 17 September 1861; OR, series 1, 4:656; John Eddins Simpson, Howell Cobb, The Politics of Ambition (Chicago: Adams Press, 1973), 153-54.

<sup>30</sup>McLaws, Young's Farm, to his wife, 29 September 1861, McLaws Papers.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid. Previous McLaws correspondence revealed his unbridled ambition for promotion to general officer. In late July, Magruder promised McLaws a promotion. Magruder was true to his word and he actively solicited/procured McLaws' commission.

<sup>32</sup>War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 48-49.

weaponry allowed him to make repeated and specific recommendations for employment of Magruder's artillery.<sup>33</sup>

By early October Magruder decided to reorganize his forces into brigades. General Orders number 89 created eight brigades under the commands of McLaws, Hunt, August, Colquitt, Winston, McKinney, Sulakowski and Ewell. Command posts were established at Young's Mill, Harrod's Mill, Land's End, Ship's Point, Mulberry Point, Spratley's Farm, Lee's Mill, Williamsburg and Yorktown. A cavalry outpost was created at Bethel, under Colonel Robert Johnston.<sup>34</sup> When the reorganization did not produce promotions for many colonels, now Major General Magruder,<sup>35</sup> superseded General Orders number 89 with General Orders number 105. The First Division was headquartered at Yorktown under Brigadier General Gabriel Rains and the Second Division at Young's Mill under Brigadier General McLaws. This organization remained in effect for the duration of the Department of the Peninsula's life.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Randolph was not a political ornament. Although he did not particularly care for field service, having expressed his feelings to J. Thompson Brown, he was active in the management of heavy ordinance. He frequently sought permission to relocate heavy artillery when he thought it was misused. Magruder relied on Randolph and obviously preferred his company. Randolph was rewarded with a brigadier general's wreath and command of the Suffolk expedition in March 1862. Soon after, he became the Secretary of War. Biographical information is contained in Ezra Warner, Generals in Gray, (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1959), 252-53.

<sup>34</sup>OR, series 1, 4:668-70.

<sup>35</sup>Magruder was promoted to Major General 7 October 1861.

<sup>36</sup>OR, series 1, 4:697-98.

Magruder's conflicts with Richmond continued and at times were acidic. In early July, Magruder identified a problem with the pine construction of the naval gun carriages. After seeking details about the durability of the carriages he solicited replacements, "[They] will not stand ten discharges of the gun."<sup>37</sup> When replacement carriages were not immediately sent, he badgered the Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Mallory. Responding on behalf of Mallory, George Minor, Director of the Bureau of Ordnance and Hydrography, advised Magruder that he would get replacements after other requisitions were filled. Magruder was outraged and sharply endorsed the letter to President Davis with a request that Davis determine the priorities.<sup>38</sup>

By 25 October Magruder was again at Richmond's throat. He bluntly complained to General Cooper that three of his agents had been unable to draw \$179,000 to pay his troops. He noted the lack of pay since 30 June was "inexcusable." He continued by saying his "cannons are drawn by miserable horses and the carts by miserable mules,"<sup>39</sup> 100 artillery horses and harnesses were needed immediately. Magruder continued by alleging the friction primers from the Ordnance Department for the guns were worthless and his transportation shortage remained acute. He

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<sup>37</sup>The seizure of unmounted naval guns was a windfall for the Confederacy, but Richmond was immediately pressured to provide the mounts. Use of soft pine wood limited the size of the charge which could be used in the guns. The recoil would demolish the gun mounts. Magruder invested two months in the problem and he finally, in frustration, elevated the problem to President Davis. The audit trail of correspondence was OR, series 1, 2:1008-9; OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 209; OR, series 1, 4:646-47; Ibid., 653; OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 306-7; OR, series 1, 4:656.

<sup>38</sup>OR, series 1, 4:656.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 691.

completed his circuit of blame by noting his need for reinforcements, blasting the procurement system and expressing contempt for Richmond's policy that required him to get his own forage, while agents from Richmond worked his district for other commands. He concluded by saying, "I was willing to submit to these things at the commencement after a reasonable time, but further neglect is criminal."<sup>40</sup>

When Magruder experienced troubles with his telegraph line to Richmond he asked William Morris, President of the Telegraph Company, to act swiftly to repair it. A week later after Morris had not fixed the line, he asked General Cooper to force Morris to cooperate. Eventually, Magruder hired a man to ride constantly along the telegraph route and report its status.<sup>41</sup>

Magruder also felt compelled to remotivate Captain Hope at Williamsburg. Northrop's previous orders to Hope to disobey Magruder had been overridden and Magruder continued to coerce Hope's support. A requisition for 100 beeves and other rations for Cockletown was accompanied by a threat of strict disciplinary action if Hope did not execute Magruder's orders.<sup>42</sup> In the absence of military action, Magruder's demands seemed presumptuous and made few friends. His "mailed fist" handling of hapless and harried bureaucrats most likely fed the rumors of his drinking problem.

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, Magruder to William Morris, Richmond, 9 November 1861; Ibid., Magruder to Captain Archer, West Point, 16 November 1861; QR, series 1, 4:701.

<sup>42</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, Magruder, Bethel, to Quartermaster Hudgins, Williamsburg, 11 November 1861.

Despite the problems with Richmond, Magruder continued to work on a river defense scheme. The James River defenses improved with the strengthening of Fort Boykins and fortification of Mulberry Island. Magruder believed the river would be effectively closed if Yankee vessels could be forced to pass the fire of the forts.

Once the navy commenced actions to close the Swash Channel of the James River, Magruder lobbied Richmond to authorize the use of 25 stone vessels to simultaneously close the mouth of the Warwick River. During a visit to Richmond on 1 September, Magruder advised President Davis of his plans concerning Mulberry Island. He further advised Davis that both Jamestown and Gloucester Point were vulnerable to land assault. To counteract the shortfall, he proposed to build strong earthworks that when properly manned would protect the river batteries.<sup>43</sup>

As the engineers and navy moved to sink more boats and drive pilings into the river, Magruder revealed his James River strategy. On 7 September at Magruder's request, Captain Tucker moved the James River Squadron consisting of the Patrick Henry, Jamestown and Teaser to a point near Mulberry Island.<sup>44</sup> Almost simultaneously, Colonel Hodges, 14th Virginia on Mulberry Island, received detailed instructions to

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<sup>43</sup>OR, series 1, 4:644-45.

<sup>44</sup>The James River Squadron was established to protect the James River from ascent by Union vessels. None of the three were legitimate ships of war, the Jamestown and Patrick Henry were seized at the start of the war. The Teaser was purchased. The commanders were Patrick Henry [flagship], Commander J. R. Tucker, Jamestown, Lieutenant J. N. Barney, and Teaser, Lieutenant J. H. Rochelle. The Patrick Henry had 10 guns, 1 10", 1 64 pounder, 6 8", and 2 32 pounders. The other two vessels had two small guns each. Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships, vol. 2 (Washington: GPO, 1963), 538, 555, 573.

defend it. Hodges was told to keep McLaws informed and not get isolated by an enemy movement. He comforted Hodges by advising him that 2,500 men would be stationed in supporting distance at both Warwick Courthouse and Cockletown. Magruder then ordered Colonel Henry Forno, Fifth Louisiana, to support Hodges from the vicinity of Denbigh Church.<sup>45</sup>

Now that the ground and naval forces were positioned on the James River, Magruder bombarded Richmond with determined requests for stone boats and rations. He also requested an allocation of four canal boats to use as quarters for the Mulberry Island troops.<sup>46</sup>

While the James River defenses rightfully attracted attention because of the implications for Norfolk and Richmond, the York River was potentially more troublesome. Consequently, Magruder attacked the problem of its defense with equal enthusiasm.

The York River, unlike the James River, was deep in its main channel and was not as likely to develop shoals or sandbars. By natural design, it had a forward choke point. The distance between Yorktown and Gloucester Point across the York was barely three-quarters of a mile and was easily within range of Magruder's armament. Elevated terrain rendered well placed batteries nearly immune to counterbattery fire. Assaulting vessels faced the unenviable prospect of hostile fire from two or more positions. Yet, if either Yorktown or Gloucester Point were captured the task would not be as daunting. The terminus of the York

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<sup>45</sup>OR, series 1, 4:640-41, 646; ORN, series 1, 6:712, 715-17, 723-24; Andrew Talcott, Richmond, to T.M.R. Talcott, 3 September 1861, Andrew Talcott Papers.

<sup>46</sup>War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 60-61.



River was West Point [Eltham] described by James Williams:

The river and everything together was the prettiest sight I ever beheld. As you approach West Point, the Mattaponi comes down on your left and on the right the Pamunkey and just at the end of the railroad, they both unite and form the York River, the prettiest and grandest looking thing I ever saw.<sup>47</sup>

The Pamunkey River led to the vicinity of Richmond, but since it was not navigable by deep water vessels, a railroad ran from Richmond to the wharf.

Magruder had previously seen his Department extended into Matthews County on the middle Peninsula, but with insufficient manpower to cover even the Peninsula lines, he sought the most economical means of defending Gloucester Point. Sufficient guns were placed in the seaside batteries but artillery companies did not have enough manpower to defend the overland approaches. Early in September, Magruder advised General Cooper that Colonel Crump had enough guns, but he needed five companies of artillerists. In addition, Colonel Randolph in Yorktown had 21 guns without manpower. The only three companies available, Peyton's, Bouton's, and DeGournay's were assigned to the naval batteries. Randolph was particularly concerned about the artillery serving redoubts four and five between the main Yorktown line and the Warwick River. If those positions were captured, the Union forces would be within 800 yards of the main Yorktown works. Normally 10 men served one gun, but because of the high percentage of illness Randolph sought 15 per gun.<sup>48</sup>

In less than a week, Crump's needs were satisfied by the addition

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<sup>47</sup>James P. Williams, Gloucester Point, to his sister, 8 May 1861, Williams Papers.

<sup>48</sup>OR, series 1, 4:638-40.

of units from Richmond and Staunton. Magruder was advised that five regiments were being sent to him and that four companies of artillery were being detached from Colonel Ewell's command to be replaced by militia.<sup>49</sup>

To prevent Yankee operations on the rivers, tributaries and creeks in front of Yorktown, Magruder instructed Randolph to place three 32 pounders on barbette carriages at Ship's Point between the Poquoson River and Cheesman's Creek. Magruder believed this forward position could delay any Yankee movement long enough to permit relocation of some cannons from the river batteries; thus, he told Randolph to delay his work on the approaches to Yorktown until a Yankee movement was confirmed.<sup>50</sup> He then instructed Colonel Mallory of the militia at Ship's Point to report all enemy movements.<sup>51</sup>

Now that Magruder had his flank positions in order, he devoted himself to extending his sensors beyond Gloucester toward Matthews County. The Rappahannock River had proven to be a profitable pickup point for Federal vessels seeking Negro refugees.<sup>52</sup> Magruder was unable to spare any manpower from his main works so he again looked to mobilize the county militia.

This time Magruder did not receive enthusiastic support. The colonel of 21st Virginia militia in Gloucester County, Werner Jones,

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<sup>49</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 287-90.

<sup>50</sup>War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 51; OR, series 1, 4:652-53.

<sup>51</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, Magruder to Colonel Mallory, Ships Point, 12 October 1861.

<sup>52</sup>ORN, series 1, 6:8-10.

told Colonel Crump that he did not believe he was subject to Magruder's authority and that he would disband the militia instead of allowing them to be conscripted.

Magruder attempted to keep the militia from melting away. He immediately wrote to Jones and promised to relay Jones's concerns to Richmond, but Magruder also appealed to Jones's ego and patriotism. He said the best contribution of the militia was its willingness to defend their county and their familiarity with the features of the area. He pleaded with Jones not to discharge the militia over a difference of opinion and closed with a request for Jones's valuable insights should he choose to resign his commission.<sup>53</sup>

Less than two days later, Lee advised that Governor Letcher had confirmed Magruder's authority over Jones.<sup>54</sup> Two weeks later Magruder successfully pursued Letcher's permission to organize and enroll the militia.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, Crump did not use Magruder's authority and when questioned a month later on the status of the militia, admitted that they had not yet been formed into a regiment.<sup>56</sup>

Now that Magruder had established control on the York River and its surrounding areas, he determined it was safe to build a wharf at Gloucester Point. He also advised Colonel Valerie Sulakowski at Ship's Point of his impending reinforcement by Colonel Tomlin's 53d Virginia

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<sup>53</sup>OR, series 1, 4:652.

<sup>54</sup>RG 109, chapter 8, vol. 236, Lee to Magruder, 21 September 1861.

<sup>55</sup>OR, series 1, 4:675.

<sup>56</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, T. J. Page [Magruder] to Colonel Crump, Gloucester Point, 8 November 1861.

infantry and ordered him to defend his position to the last man.<sup>57</sup> It seemed certain that a 9 September Richmond Examiner article had been accurate when it reported, "The whole of the York River has riverside batteries . . . you will never hear of Magruder's capitulation there."<sup>58</sup>

Magruder worked hard to maintain a veil of secrecy over his operations. Refugee civilians and local residents were particularly troublesome. Fishermen and oystermen moved into and through the shallow waters to make their living. Their daily activities enabled them to track the progress of various rebel projects. Refugees desiring to go north were often granted passes to proceed to the Union lines via Fort Monroe. Spies with forged passes also sought passage between the lines. Yet, Magruder and his commanders achieved reasonable success.

Circulars identified specific persons for arrest and provosts kept busy escorting prisoners to Richmond under charges. Magruder encouraged Richmond to send emigrants via Kentucky or other routes north. He instructed Tomlin at West Point to prevent people from proceeding on the

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., Magruder to Captain Page, CSN, 12 October 1861; Magruder to Colonel Sulakowski, Ship's Point, 22 October 1861.

<sup>58</sup>Although this citation is early in Magruder's command, it is useful in two ways; first, it reflects the manifestation of Magruder's industrious pursuit of the challenge of fortifications. Early in his command, he promised to build fortifications which could be held until supporting troops could reach his position. The second point is the level of expectation which was building throughout the south [and north as well]. Magruder was ready for a Union assault, the navy was ready, his men were ready, and the public was ready. When Union challenges failed to materialize, Magruder saw a marked deterioration in his command morale. Unknown author, reprint of a Louisiana newspaper, Richmond Examiner, 9 September 1861. Navy Captain Whittle reported a full complement of armament under his command at Gloucester Point, West Point, and Yorktown. ORN, series 1, 6:734-45.

Logan. Some people refused to be denied and were intercepted on private vessels. In order to cut down on these incidents, Magruder at numerous times directed the impoundment of all private vessels.<sup>59</sup> On the whole, Magruder's efforts were successful as no Union movements were attempted and many slaves were intercepted and returned to camp. General Orders number 114 praised the vigilance of the cavalry for the "entire security within which we have been able so far, to prosecute our works of defense."<sup>60</sup>

Progress had a price and the 54 year old Magruder would pay it for the duration of his tenure as commander. McLaws commented, "General Magruder was over to my camp today and gave me a long talk. He appears worn and sick, indeed he has a great many things to try him and many arrangements to deal with and contend against."<sup>61</sup> Special Orders number 516, signed by Magruder, provided explicit instructions concerning the conduct of men on picket duty. Some soldiers were

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<sup>59</sup>Magruder advised Colonel Hodges of the 14th Virginia to arrest a man named White who was enroute to Newport News and had information about a Confederate steamer. War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 42. Magruder arrested a seaman Clark trying to escape down the York River with his family and detained him at Gloucester Point. Another 10-12 people presented passes authorized by Richmond authorities. War Department, Confederate Correspondence and Orders, 46. A Frances Dennis was arrested three times. Magruder recommended his confinement. RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, Magruder to Cooper, 7 November 1861. McLaws questioned the loyalty of local residents several times. McLaws to wife, 23 December 1861, McLaws Papers. This vigilance was not relaxed as shown by a 6 March 1862 tasking to arrest suspicious characters and place them in close confinement at Gloucester Point. RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 67.

<sup>60</sup>General Orders number 114, 24 November 1861.

<sup>61</sup>McLaws, Youngs Mill, Willie, 18 October 1861, McLaws Papers.

sleeping on duty and others deserting their posts for the seductions of private homes and pretty girls. Management of sentinels needed standardization to maintain the security of the department.<sup>62</sup>

Lee reported to Letcher in June 1861 on the state of Virginia defenses and praised the responsiveness of citizen soldiers who were awakened from the slumber of peacetime pursuits. For Magruder and other commanders, the transition of recruits to soldier life was a continuous challenge. When not foraging to rectify shortfalls in government provisions, Magruder was seeking the right people to help manage the various activities. Several men volunteered to serve with Magruder with no formal rank and Magruder sought commissions for them. Yet, Richmond was slow to respond and some volunteers were tested to the limits of their gentlemanly respectability.

One group that was particularly abused were the engineers. In late November, Magruder bitterly complained that they were not getting rank equal to their responsibilities and that some could not even get a commission. One man had been lost to Confederate service, because the commission would have made him junior to two subordinates. Magruder viewed the situation with deep concern.<sup>63</sup>

Magruder's professional demeanor was matched by compassion for his subordinates. A number of the activities that he pursued improved the

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<sup>62</sup>Special Orders number 516 in Cary Letterbook, 18 November 1861.

<sup>63</sup>Men such as Joseph L. Brent and George Noland among others came to Magruder as civilians. He did his best for them, but when Richmond failed to commission Noland, he left his post and had to be enticed back. Noland was eventually commissioned. The background can be followed in RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, 6 November 1861 and 25 November 1861.

quality life for his soldiers. Initially, morale was very good. McLaws reported, "The Louisiana regiment is in Williamsburg giving parties, singing, and serenading."<sup>64</sup> Corson wrote Jennie, "We get plenty of oysters to eat with fresh beef and baker's bread fresh. Some of the boys brought a big lot of chickens."<sup>65</sup> On another occasion Corson wrote,

I have a delightful time on the bay fishing. The last time I was there, I went out in a canoe about a half a mile and caught a fine string of fish.<sup>66</sup>

Henry Carter wrote to his brother,

We had a regular old breakdown dance, our captain performs splendidly on the banjo and one of the men on the violin. We have the best band on the Peninsula.<sup>67</sup>

Captain Richard Watkins of the Third Virginia Cavalry wrote,

Saw the Pecoson [sic] river, an arm of the sea quite broad. Saw lots of fish, schools and schools of them . . . Many offers for dinner with men and officers serving fish, oysters, chickens, potatoes, tomatoes, corn, and peas in abundance.<sup>68</sup>

Yet, there was cause for discontent. Soldier life was not all parties and relaxation. In October, after a "pitiless rainstorm," Carter informed his brother,

By the middle of the night water was three or four inches in my tent, and to complete our discomfort the tent gave way and caught us in a trap. . . . The ground was so saturated the

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<sup>64</sup>McLaws, Young's Mill, to Willie, 18 October 1861, McLaws Papers.

<sup>65</sup>Corson, 50-51.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>67</sup>Carter, Deep Creek, to brother, William, 30 November 1861, Carter Family Papers.

<sup>68</sup>Watkins, to his family, 23 September 1861, Watkins Family Papers.

pegs would not hold and the tent fell several more times.<sup>69</sup>

As correspondence accumulated from lonesome homes many soldiers sought furloughs. Magruder believing himself in imminent danger of Yankee attack made a morale crushing decision that would erode his support; he decided to cancel all furloughs until at least January.

The soldiers did not see things the same way Magruder did and comments were freely offered from Magruder's Division commanders down through the lowest private. Corson wrote:

I expect to come home soon but General Magruder has issues that no one shall leave the Peninsula on furloughs till the first of January. Our boys are well and amuse themselves squirrel hunting, playing cards, marbles, pitching quoits, etc. We have big Brunswick stews very often.<sup>70</sup>

Watkins added:

Captain Thornton was denied a two day furlough by General Magruder on the death of his brother--may indicate a forthcoming battle.<sup>71</sup>

Carter reflected the discontent in the ranks:

[Its being debated if] this high sounding order really means anything or is intended to stop the increasing demand for furloughs. . . . If this kind of program is persisted in, it will throw a damper on the volunteer service for the next twelve months.<sup>72</sup>

Even general officers were not exempted, McLaws advised his wife:

I have never been anywhere it rains so much . . . The General still places great confidence in me and I try to

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<sup>69</sup>Carter, Deep Creek, to brother William, 4 October 1861, Carter Family Papers.

<sup>70</sup>Corson, 47-48.

<sup>71</sup>Watkins, to his family, 15 October 1861, Watkins Family Papers.

<sup>72</sup>Carter, Deep Creek, to his brother, William, 16 October 1861, Carter Family Papers.



deserve it . . . I asked General Magruder for a leave . . . and he said no, he would give no leaves to anyone now.<sup>73</sup>

Seven weeks later on 11 December, Carter commented:

I cannot think we are on the eve of an important battle but the General thinks so and that is enough to kill the furlough system dead as a hammer.<sup>74</sup>

Even General McLaws began to sour on Magruder:

I confess that the idea of going to see you all a short leave is repugnant to me in the extreme, when I may be recalled at any moment by the vanity of a commanding officer who is a sensationalist because he is constantly afraid he will be forgotten unless by startling paragraphs he keeps himself in front of the country. . . . If I can get away, I will ask to be put on duty in Georgia as the Peninsula is not a place to long for.<sup>75</sup>

The somewhat jaded opinions just expressed may have resulted from boredom and impatience with an enemy who for its own reasons refused the joust. Magruder had met the original challenge and built a labyrinth in which one admiring subordinate proudly wrote, "Every road is being fortified and before long the Peninsula will be one masked battery."<sup>76</sup>

Howell Cobb wrote Secretary of State, R. M. T. Hunter,

You may rest assured that there should be reinforcements sent here . . . I have conversed fully and freely with General Magruder . . . You could not have a better man here. Rely fully upon his judgment.<sup>77</sup>

Although Magruder was unyielding on the furlough issue, he worked

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<sup>73</sup>McLaws, Youngs Mill, to his wife, 23 October 1861, McLaws Papers.

<sup>74</sup>Carter, Deep Creek, to his brother, William, 11 December 1861, Carter Family Papers.

<sup>75</sup>McLaws, Youngs Mill, to wife, 20 December 1861, McLaws Papers.

<sup>76</sup>Carter, Deep Creek, to his brother, William, 4 October 1861, Carter Family Papers.

<sup>77</sup>QR, series 1, 4:685.

hard to support his troops. In October, he requested Postmaster Regan establish a new post office at Young's Mill. He sought to consolidate as many hospitals as possible at Williamsburg to assure a full range of supplies were available in sufficient quantities. Supply depots were fully stocked and he urged quartermasters to keep rations coming. Forage wagons ventured into the countryside and returned with provisions for the animals and he sought permission to sell excess beeves to civilians. Commanders were instructed to build huts for the troops without delay. When it was rumored that the men were suffering from exposure at the forward outposts, he dispatched a brickmason to make the necessary repairs.<sup>78</sup>

By October 1861, Magruder and his men had accomplished herculean tasks. A framework for defense had been crafted; all it lacked was an enemy. It was that very deficiency which chipped away at Magruder's command and credibility. After countless hours in the saddle surveying, directing and planning defenses, Magruder knew every nuance of his scheme. The multiple scenarios that could unfold caused Magruder to move his forces from place to place. These marches helped condition his officers and men for the upcoming rigors of campaigns. Unfortunately, all was for naught.

Magruder received regular intelligence of possible Yankee

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<sup>78</sup>Less than a month later, General Orders number 113 authorized the establishment of company morale funds to purchase various necessities and niceties. General Orders number 114 moderated the furlough policy but Union activities in early December prevented widespread implementation of a furlough system. Review of RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 227, provides a regular diet of "people" actions. The examples cited here are between mid-September and mid-November.

movements. Deserters reported plans to move with large numbers of troops by land and or sea against Yorktown. Magruder dutifully reported them in accordance with General Orders number 95. On 7 October, Magruder advised the new Secretary of War Judah Benjamin of the following Yankee plans which were provided by deserters.

1. The Yankees will attack Yorktown by water and if unsuccessful by land and water.
2. Reinforcements of 30,000 are coming, 5,000 having already arrived.
3. Seventy brass field pieces were at Fort Monroe.
4. Yankees at Newport News had been told they will winter in Yorktown.
5. General Wool told his troops they will march on Yorktown.
6. Yankees are being ferried each night to Camp Butler at Newport News.

Of course in the face of the upcoming engagement, the commanding general did not hesitate to list several items which he needed to successfully defend his position.<sup>79</sup> Simultaneously, Magruder in General Orders number 96 advised his troops that an attack was imminent, "Let us, therefore, stand ready to welcome these strangers to hospitable graves."<sup>80</sup> He also announced the infamous furlough policy. Subordinates received detailed instructions in correspondence that clearly showed a skittish commander.<sup>81</sup> Eleven days later on 22 October

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<sup>79</sup>OR, series 1, 4:672-73.

<sup>80</sup>OR, series 1, 4:677.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 678-79.

his troops were still on war footing and Magruder issued a circular praising the victory at Ball's Bluff and exhorting his troops saying, "There is the enemy, destroy him."<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately, nothing happened and Richmond advised him that no reinforcements were coming.<sup>83</sup> One soldier commented, "Something has got ole Magruder stirred up, probably whiskey."<sup>84</sup>

The failure of Union forces to advance after Magruder's repeated warnings severely hurt his credibility with Richmond, his commanders and his men. When Magruder resumed his panicky calls in early December, Benjamin responded on 9 December with another tart reply, "It is not believed that any such force as represented by you can possibly be within the enemy line . . . but are glad to find you are vigilant and hopeful."<sup>85</sup> McLaws wrote his wife,

Of course we are on the alert and General Magruder favors us with stampedes very generally, but we have become so much accustomed to his cry of wolf that it will be very difficult to arouse us from our apathy even when the enemy does come. I have more to fear from that than from anything else.<sup>86</sup>

Soldiers in the ranks commented as well, Carter confided in his brother that,

General Magruder is in daily expectation of a general battle on the Peninsula. I don't know what reason he has for

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<sup>82</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 353.

<sup>83</sup>OR, series 1, 4:687-88.

<sup>84</sup>Watkins, to his family, 25 October 1861, Watkins Family Papers.

<sup>85</sup>OR, series 1, 4:706.

<sup>86</sup>McLaws, Youngs Mill, to his wife, 4 January 1862, McLaws Papers.

supposing that there will be an advance of the enemy.<sup>87</sup>

Williams complained that,

Old McGruder [sic] expected the attack within that time, but no advance was made by enemy. . . . We are stationed on the outposts all the time and are continually being pulled and hauled about from one place to another.<sup>88</sup>

and William Corson wrote Jennie that,

Gen Magruder certainly expects a fight. He is constantly in the saddle inspecting the batteries. I believe the old fellow is scared out of his wits.<sup>89</sup>

Magruder was not responding irrationally. He reacted to direct intelligence from his forward outposts. On 4 December, Colonel Johnston with the cavalry reported nine Yankee ships passing up the bay.<sup>90</sup> Many people from generals to common soldier agreed with Magruder's preparations. From Young's Mill on 8 December, McLaws wrote his wife,

I believe that within the next two days or twenty at the furthest, the enemy will put further their greatest strength, but whenever it is done, it will be done very cautiously and with great preponderance of strength.<sup>91</sup>

William Corson confided to Jennie,

I found here considerable excitement in consequence of an appearance of a large Federal fleet in the mouth of the York River. Active preparations were being made for a warm reception and everything assumed the air of hurry and

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<sup>87</sup>Carter, Lands End, to his brother, William, 11 December 1861, Carter Family Papers.

<sup>88</sup>James Williams, Broken Bridge, to his Aunt Mary, 27 December 1861, Williams Papers.

<sup>89</sup>Corson, 54-55.

<sup>90</sup>QR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 404-5.

<sup>91</sup>McLaws, Youngs Mill, to his wife, 8 December 1861, McLaws Papers.

confusion.<sup>92</sup>

Magruder ignored Benjamin's rebuff regarding imminent danger and continued to prepare for the expected attack, "the commanding general will station himself in the midst of his troops, and having the greatest confidence in their gallantry, congratulates them on their approaching triumph."<sup>93</sup>

When the attack did not come the men could scarcely confine their disappointment. The first Christmas of the war provided a welcomed interlude. Private Williams wrote his Aunt Mary, "You never saw men eat like we did in your life, I declare I liked to have killed myself."<sup>94</sup> Corson described his holiday,

I have had quite a merry time during the last ten days. The excitement, warlike, prevailing when I got back entirely subsided about the evening of the twenty-fourth and Christmas was duly celebrated in the different encampments. Eggnog was the order of the day . . . We danced all night and went home with the girls in the morning.<sup>95</sup>

But frustration crept into Corson's missive,

The enemy thinking Magruder and all hands were tight, I suppose, sent up a scouting party a few days ago and set fire to Bethel Church. . . . I think Magruder is greatly to blame for taking his forces from Bethel as one regiment could easily whip 5,000 of the enemy there.<sup>96</sup>

Corson was not alone in commenting; others expressed combinations of frustration and wishful thinking. When Carter's company was ordered

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<sup>92</sup>Corson, 52-53.

<sup>93</sup>OR, series 1, 4:712-13.

<sup>94</sup>Williams, Broken Bridge, to his Aunt Mary, 27 December 1861, Williams Papers.

<sup>95</sup>Corson, 56-57.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

to march from comfortable quarters in Yorktown to field conditions he noted the mood, "Magruder is consequently d-m'd to fearful extent."<sup>97</sup> In Watkins company it was rumored, "General Magruder with War Department approval will send men home for the balance of winter for lack of horse forage and to recruit for the regiment generally."<sup>98</sup>

The forces Magruder feared were the initial assembly of General Ambrose Burnside's force that would ultimately assault the North Carolina Outer Banks. Magruder's proximity to Fortress Monroe demanded a higher state of readiness than may have been required elsewhere; however, the absence of a military confrontation discredited Magruder further. Unfortunately, the positive actions Magruder took to offset Benjamin's refusal to reinforce him placed him in difficulty with President Davis.

On 24 December, Magruder issued a circular advising of the impending Union threat and tasking all militia units to muster in and report their numbers of Colonel Ewell. Internal documents in Richmond questioned Magruder's authority and Davis ordered him to cancel the order.<sup>99</sup> Although Burnside's fleet was reported to be 150 to 200 sails, about 50 vessels; Benjamin refused to believe Magruder would be attacked.<sup>100</sup> On 10 January, Magruder wrote a letter to Davis

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<sup>97</sup>Carter, Deep Creek, to his brother William, 16 December 1861, Carter Family Papers.

<sup>98</sup>Watkins, to his family, 28 December 1861, Watkins Family Papers.

<sup>99</sup>QR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 430-31.

<sup>100</sup>ORN, series 1, 6:753-54. Benjamin was criticized for failing to take positive actions to prevent the capture of Roanoke Island. The resulting furor may have led to Benjamin's departure

explaining his actions and requesting a delay in discussions of his efforts until he could provide a full report.<sup>101</sup> With Lee assigned to South Carolina, Magruder was clearly at the nadir of his command. Benjamin challenged his credibility by refusing to provide either reinforcements or slave labor.

Magruder responded on 1 February with a lucid, cogent document that most likely saved his command. In it he described his "grand strategy." He said that from the beginning he had a river based defense and since the possible points of contact were so extensive, he needed both fixed and mobile batteries. The weakness of his force and lack of preparation demanded he mask his efforts; thus, he established Bethel as his forward outpost. After securing Bethel, he decided the Warwick River line anchored on Mulberry Island and Yorktown was the best true line of defense since the original position at Jamestown would permit a landing below it and the encirclement of Yorktown. Unfortunately, tremendous manual labor was required. If Magruder could keep the Yankees beyond Bethel, he could work without restriction; however, the more Magruder learned about the lower Peninsula, the more he concluded a point defense for the Poquoson and Back Rivers was required. Because of logistical problems, Magruder had established forward supply points to allow himself to operate forward and defend forward. Blocking the entrance to the Warwick River protected his advanced positions. Magruder thus had three lines of defense, a forward position anchored on Young's Mill and

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from the War Department. After Benjamin's resignation, Magruder's sponsor, George Randolph, was named Secretary of War.

<sup>101</sup>OR, series 1, 4:720.



Harrod's Mill; a second line beyond the Warwick River between Mulberry Island and Yorktown; and a final line before Williamsburg anchored on Fort Magruder.

Magruder concluded his explanatory remarks by describing the work which remained to be done and commenting on Burnside's expedition. Magruder concluded that Burnside's movement was a diversion, while McClellan moved via the Rappahannock River. Magruder suggested Theophilis Holmes from Fredricksburg and he could attack McClellan's flank or rear and if pursued retreat to Gloucester Point drawing McClellan into a siege. Conversely, if Suffolk was Burnside's ultimate destination, then Magruder could cross the James River to support Norfolk. The success of either plan was contingent on completion of the fortifications; hence, the need for Negroes, and sufficient manpower, hence, the muster of militia.<sup>102</sup> The end of January found Magruder with 14,801 men and 125 pieces of artillery.<sup>103</sup> Within weeks, the great Yankee spring campaign began to unfold and Magruder faced his toughest challenge.

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<sup>102</sup>OR, series 1, 9:38-42.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 36-37.

## CHAPTER 4

### CENTER STAGE

It is impossible to portray the transition from antebellum attitudes to a war mentality. Southerners expected the results to be quick, bloodless and decisive. Since no one expected the war to last longer than one battle, the cream of Southern society flocked to the ranks for service of up to 12 months or the duration of the war-- whichever was shorter. There were certainly no illusions left when the initial terms of enlistment began to expire in March and April 1862. A string of Confederate reverses in the West, both Fort Henry and Fort Donaldson in Tennessee, began to create the first shadows of uncertainty for rebel arms. However, nothing prepared them for the shock that accompanied the loss of Roanoke Island and subsequent Federal operations in the North Carolina coastal area.

Burnside's expedition assembled at Fort Monroe and after creating great consternation in Tidewater sailed out of Chesapeake Bay on 11 January. When the fleet reappeared off Hatteras Island and moved into the Pamlico Sound between 13 and 25 January, the Carolinians were unable to offer effective resistance. On 8 February, Burnside quickly defeated former Virginia Governor, General Henry Wise's small force capturing 2,500. Since Wise had asked for and been denied adequate reinforcements, Secretary Benjamin was further embroiled in a controversy that would lead to his resignation before the end of March.

The strategic implications of Burnside's success completely skewed Magruder's defensive scheme and impacted every decision Richmond made until McClellan moved against Magruder's lines two months later. Officials in Richmond logically concluded Burnside's maneuver was undertaken to provide a southern approach to Norfolk. Burnside's subsequent advance to New Bern and Washington positioned him to move towards Suffolk. When the move was executed, Norfolk would be isolated and ripe for capture.

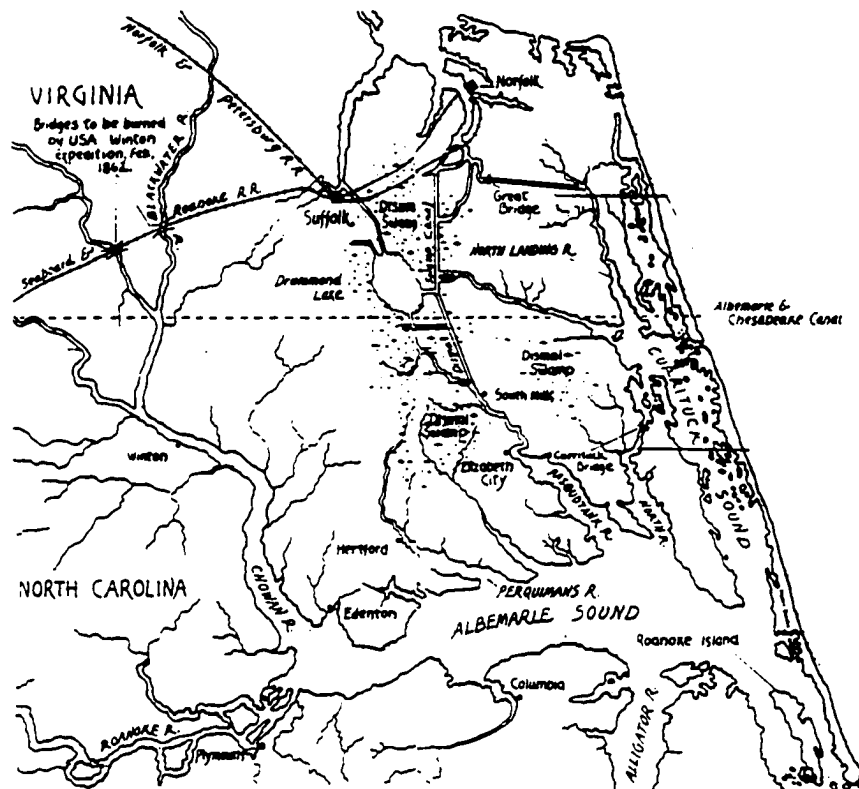
Loss of Norfolk and the shipyard would severely damage the Confederacy's warfighting capability. The construction of the revolutionary ironclad C.S.S. Virginia [Merrimack] and a sister ship C.S.S. Richmond was a poorly kept secret. Although these ships' capabilities were unknown, officials hoped they might break the blockade and open southern ports for European commerce. The potential rewards of this technology justified all decisions relating to Norfolk.

Early in February intelligence reached Richmond that confirmed both Richmond's and Magruder's fears. Edward Moore, a pilot on the James River, wrote Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Mallory, advising of a conversation with a Yankee friend. Moore reported that his friend said the attack at Roanoke Island was preparatory for a subsequent attack on Jamestown Island. The move would have the dual purpose of flushing the rebels out of both Norfolk and Yorktown.<sup>1</sup>

Confederate officials in Richmond logically reacted to meet the Burnside threat by dispatching troops to North Carolina and the vicinity

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<sup>1</sup>ORN, series 1, 6:767. Normally, correspondence which says, "a reliable source" is by nature unreliable. However, this intelligence so paralleled what Richmond expected that it may have been credited.



**Northeastern  
North Carolina**  
From Roanoke Island  
to Norfolk

Fig. 6. Map of Northeastern North Carolina from "Blue and Gray" Magazine, May 88, pp 12-13.

of Suffolk. In doing so, Magruder lost his flexibility to operate on any limited offensive basis.

The Merrimack was commissioned on 17 February 1862 but she, like her sister ships, was plagued by a shortage of gunpowder. Anxious officials suggested that she come out at night and ram the Federals' wooden vessels. For whatever reasons, she was prudently kept unemployed in the Elizabeth River. Subsequent experiences with her deep draught and limited maneuverability validated this decision.<sup>2</sup>

On 25 February, Special Orders number 45 alerted Magruder to prepare troops for deployment to counter Burnside's threat to Suffolk.<sup>3</sup> The rapidity of this decision superseded previous plans to which Magruder had responded earlier in the day. In those plans, Richmond suggested Magruder move against Newport News in coordination with the emergence of the Merrimack. Magruder noted the exceptionally poor condition of the roads and the paucity of his force. He concluded by suggesting that since Newport News had been reinforced, it might be prudent to pull back to his secondary line on the Warwick River.<sup>4</sup>

Magruder's force remained relatively static throughout February. While reports showed an increase of about 800 men to 15,664, they were

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 771-80.

<sup>3</sup>OR, series 1, 9:44-45.

<sup>4</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 479-80. There was general knowledge of the proposed action against Newport News and Magruder certainly knew of the options. Corson noted on 18 February 1862 that "General Magruder is in Richmond on business," Corson, 65-66. Henry Carter wrote, "We will certainly make a move in the direction of Newport News . . . everything forces me to the conclusion that we will attack Newport News and that we will be aided in the attack by the Merrimac, Patrick Henry, and Thomas Jefferson." Henry Carter, Deep Creek, to his brother, William, 25 February 1862, Carter Family Papers.

dispersed at 19 locations and over half, 7,837, were at the Yorktown/Gloucester Point complex and Wynne's or Young's Mill.<sup>5</sup>

Richmond officials did not share Magruder's concerns. Magruder's old friend, George Wythe Randolph was appointed Brigadier General and placed in command of forces that were to be assembled at Suffolk. Magruder warned Richmond officials that intelligence reports indicated a Yankee move against him. Consequently, Magruder requested the deployment of the Merrimack to a point above Newport News to close the James and the Warwick Rivers.<sup>6</sup>

Benjamin's response was direct. Despite a personal plea from the anxious commander, Benjamin curtly replied, on 25 February, "We do not believe you are in the slightest danger of an attack at present, either in front or by being outflanked by naval forces . . . Suffolk is the aim of the enemy."<sup>7</sup> In the wake of this latest disagreement it seems remarkable that Magruder did not offer to resign. Magruder's convictions would not permit him to leave in the face of the enemy.

The pace of activity quickened during the first week of March. Burnside's movement against the North Carolina mainland seemed to confirm a pending move towards Suffolk. Although Magruder complied with orders to prepare a large number of his troops for deployment, on 4 March he attempted to stay the execution of the order by writing to General Cooper. He detailed the implications for his command and reminded him of his inability to cooperate with the Merrimack or act

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<sup>5</sup>OR, series 1, 9:49.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 52-53.

offensively. Magruder noted that the deployment of 5,000 troops to Suffolk would leave him with barely 4,000 troops to cover the twelve mile Warwick River line, exclusive of the Yorktown/Gloucester Point garrisons. He advised that he might have to withdraw to Williamsburg.<sup>8</sup>

Although disappointed, Magruder did not retreat from his defensive engineering efforts. He immediately sought to compensate for his pending manpower loss by soliciting the recruitment of 1,000 militia which he offered to arm. In response, Benjamin promised to send him a combat regiment in lieu of the militia.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Benjamin advised General Huger in Norfolk that he would send 5,000 of Magruder's men and 2,000 North Carolinians to Suffolk when Burnside moved.<sup>10</sup> On 6 March, Magruder conceded the inevitability of the deployment and while cautioning that he would now be a strictly defensive force, promised to

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>9</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 484-85. It is important to understand the diversity of tasks Magruder faced. He was attempting to construct a bastion out of the swampy morass of the Peninsula. Every cubic foot of earth which had to be moved was done by slaves and soldiers. He was not digging ditches; these were fortifications of considerable presence. He was responsible for managing a variable workforce impressed from many sources. Operations in Gloucester and Matthews counties were woefully inadequate due to insufficient manpower. The Navy was commencing shipbuilding operations on the York River at Glass Island, and Magruder was requisitioned to provide manpower for those operations. Some of Magruder's troops volunteered for service upon the C.S.S. Virginia and many were detailed to serve the naval ordinance mounted along the rivers. The open hostility between Benjamin and Magruder frustrated the later's efforts to articulate a Union strategy that turned out to be precisely what McClellan had been planning since January. Information on naval efforts at Glass Island are detailed in RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 69, in multiple correspondence between mid-February and late March.

<sup>10</sup>OR, series 1, 9:56.

obey orders.<sup>11</sup> On 7 March, T. R. R. Cobb's Legion embarked from Kings Mill Wharf for Suffolk via City Point and the Petersburg railroad.<sup>12</sup>

Magruder must have been frustrated by the contradictory signals he was receiving from Richmond. He was finally getting Negro labor in adequate numbers to prosecute the numerous tasks still remaining; however, Richmond officials repeatedly told him that he did not face any threat. Still Magruder continued to attack his departmental problems with an evangelical fervor. No detail was too insignificant to merit attention. A quick summary of administrative actions provided evidence documenting Magruder's personal involvement. In January, Magruder withheld approval of a Major Ned Richtor's leave application until he could submit his monthly reports correctly and on time; commanders were chastised to report soldiers' disabilities on the proper forms; suspicious deaths were investigated and death certificates issued; reports of survey for lost or damaged equipment were ordered; strict controls were placed on the importation of liquor; hospital staffing practices were challenged; and discipline meted when appropriate. There were forty-six court martials in February, including two that tried officers.<sup>13</sup>

Tasks with direct military implications were pressing the commander and he ordered his Provost Marshall in Yorktown, Stafford Cook, to use all the Negroes between Yorktown and the Poquoson River to fix the main

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>12</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 69, 7 March 1862.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 4, 9, 13 January; 16, 22, 23, 27 February 1862; General Orders numbers 143, 146, 150, and 153.



road. William Smith and Thomas Whitaker received similar orders for the roads around Williamsburg.<sup>14</sup> Work continued on the earthworks at Lee's Mill and Minor's farm.<sup>15</sup>

The net result of Magruder's industry can be seen from a candid assessment from Union General J. K. F. Mansfield in command at Fort Butler, Newport News. He reported that the rebels had 14 large columbiad naval guns at Gloucester Point; 3 separate batteries of columbiads on the water at Yorktown; 2 masked batteries of Dahlgren guns, two miles below Yorktown; 10 columbiads at Ship's Point; and on the land side of Yorktown 10 other guns. Mansfield further reported the rebels had cotton and tar on the wharves to use aboard fire ships.<sup>16</sup> This report undoubtedly influenced General McClellan's planning for the upcoming campaign and perhaps persuaded him of the need for siege ordinance as a backup plan.

The emergence of the Merrimack and the subsequent confrontations between her, her consorts and the Federal fleet polarized both Union and Confederate planning. On the Union's side, the Navy devoted herself without exception to the containment and neutralization of the Merrimack. This perverted McClellan's plans for a combined land and sea action to reduce and bypass Yorktown. The few gunboats Admiral Louis Goldsborough eventually provided were timidly managed and of no use to McClellan.

In Confederate circles, the limitations of the Merrimack were

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 24 February 1862.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 28 February 1862.

<sup>16</sup>ORN, series 1, 6:666-68.

obvious; she was slow, had bad engines, and was confined to the deep waters of the central channels of Hampton Roads. She had been damaged in the struggle with the Monitor and had lost her ram prow and sprung a forward leak. Confederate officials also realized that she drafted over 20 feet and could not ascend the James River. While she returned to drydock, engineers doubled their efforts to modify and float her sister ship, C.S.S. Richmond.

As the threat on the lower Peninsula grew, General Lee returned to Richmond on 13 March as President Davis's advisor. Magruder reassessed his capability to manage the Peninsula and realized that civil authority had lost control and for the first time determined that martial law was necessary to suppress lawlessness and punish murderers, thieves and bootleggers. General Huger had received similar authority on 6 March.<sup>17</sup> Davis agreed and authorized the declaration in the counties of Elizabeth City, York, Warwick, Gloucester and Mathews. Through administrative oversight, James City County was omitted and when Magruder requested that county be added to the list, he received approval with yet another stinging barb, "It is a matter of regret that any want of particularity in specifying, what was required should now render a change necessary."<sup>18</sup>

Despite the rebuke, Magruder was fully cognizant of the enemy's

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<sup>17</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 497.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 502, 505, 518. Martial law provided Magruder the ability to suspend normal civil liberties. The military was now the law. A military police force was established, stills for spirituous liquors were ordered destroyed, sale of liquor was controlled, Habeas Corpus was suspended, and confinement of civilians for up to one month at hard labor was authorized.

possibilities. He told Cooper that he did not believe the Yankees would assault Norfolk directly. He believed they would move up the James River and cut Norfolk off by attacking the weaker defenses at Hardin's Bluff and Mulberry Island. To prevent this, Magruder requested the redeployment of the Patrick Henry, Jamestown and Teaser from Norfolk.<sup>19</sup>

Other authorities also perceived the threat and made recommendations. The Confederacy's chief engineer, Alfred Rives concluded that the Monitor rendered the existing water batteries ineffective and that Yorktown and Gloucester Point batteries should be reengineered to elevate them above the trajectory of the Monitor's guns. Conversely, all river batteries were deemed capable of demolishing wooden ships, an opinion that was shared by Yankee ship captains supporting McClellan. Rives advised Magruder that he believed the Confederates' water communication with Richmond would be disrupted if the Monitor operated on the York River. Confederate counterforce options included development of armor piercing shells, water obstructions, and torpedoes.<sup>20</sup>

Magruder responded by increasing the readiness of his reduced department. General Orders number 159, issued on 13 March, instructed his commanders to be aggressive,

When any body of our troops, large or small meets with any body of the enemy's troops, however large, the commanding officer of the troops will cause the enemy to be immediately attacked, and the men will attack at once and furiously.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>OR, series 1, 9:13-14; ORN, series 1, 7:754.

<sup>20</sup>OR, series 1, 9:62-64; OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 499-501.

<sup>21</sup>OR, series 1, 9:65.

Later the same day, he advised Colonel Alfred Cummings commanding his advance guard to hold Young's Mill without bringing on a fight. He also revealed for the first time his plans for tactical deception, "I am maneuvering to give the enemy the idea that we are in great force. . . . I have ordered artillery and other troops there [Bethel] to show that we are in great strength."<sup>22</sup>

The next day Magruder gave Lee his departmental perspective. Once again the logic of his argument does him credit, regardless of the philosophic disagreement which appeared in Lee's response. Magruder said that while he was reduced to a defensive posture by the deployment of 5,000 soldiers to Suffolk, he had been actively demonstrating in the enemy's presence to discourage movements against him. He remarked that his Warwick River line was too long for his reduced force and with the militia picked over he would like his men returned from Suffolk. He also noted the pending expiration of the volunteers' initial tour of service in April and suggested guidelines to prevent chaos when the units reenlisted.<sup>23</sup> Lee immediately suggested Magruder shorten his defensive lines by building additional dams to flood the lands surrounding the Warwick River.<sup>24</sup> He said the threat to Suffolk was still too real to return Magruder's detachment.<sup>25</sup> On 18 March, Lee told Magruder that there was no evidence McClellan would move on the

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<sup>22</sup>J. B. Magruder, Bartlett's to Colonel Cummings, Young's Mill, 13 March 1862, ALS in John B. Magruder Papers, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond.

<sup>23</sup>OR, series 1, 9:65-67.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 70-71.

Peninsula and he encouraged Magruder to "maneuver as to deceive and thwart him."<sup>26</sup> The next day, 19 March, Magruder directed Colonel Johnston, chief of his cavalry, and Brigadier General McLaws to show themselves prominently.<sup>27</sup> This increased activity helped convince McClellan that Magruder was stronger than he really was.

Uncomfortable politicians pressed the Davis administration for reports on the security arrangements of Richmond. Engineer Alfred Rives provided President Davis with a satisfactory report that lauded the effectiveness of Magruder's efforts to advance the James River defensive line from Jamestown to Mulberry Island. Davis's report to Congress said,

The next position above [the mouth of the James River] defended by the work at Hardy's [Hardin's] Bluff and Mulberry Island possesses great importance from being the right flank of Magruder's chosen defensive line . . . The guns at Jamestown Island will probably be removed to the position [Mulberry] just referred to as soon as it is fully prepared for them.<sup>28</sup>

Magruder was still uncomfortable with his arrangements and he again pressed Lee with a new strategy. Magruder was convinced the Monitor would move up the shallow northern bank of the James River with 20,000 troops landing behind Randolph in Suffolk. He suggested the James River be completely blocked at Jamestown and the Merrimack be deployed near Fort Monroe. Under such an arrangement Magruder believed he could defend Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately before

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<sup>26</sup>Clifford Dowdey and Louis Manarin, eds., The Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee (New York: Bramhall House, 1961), 132.

<sup>27</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 68. Special Orders numbers 688 and 691.

<sup>28</sup>ORN, series 2, 2:170.

<sup>29</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 386-88.

any action could be implemented, McClellan began to move his force towards Fort Monroe.

Magruder recoiled when the presence of Heintzelman's III Corps became known at Fortress Monroe. Except for the 10th Georgia regiment and some 500 cavalry, all Magruder's troops retreated immediately to the Warwick River line. He advised Lee that his advanced line was still the best line of defense and with 30,000 he could both defend his position and capture the Yankee garrison at Newport News. He implored Lee for a timely decision,

If heavy reinforcements are sent here, I would like to know at once, that I may throw up fortifications at points which, if we should not want them ourselves, it is extremely important that the enemy should not hold, such as from Langhorne's Mill to Bethel, and from Young's to Harwood's Mill, which are almost entirely impregnable if held by a sufficient number of troops but entirely untenable unless so manned.<sup>30</sup>

Magruder's alacrity demonstrated his awareness of the enemy. Updates concerning Yankee reinforcements were reported accurately. Hospitals were expanded and extra surgeons designated to detect skulkers.<sup>31</sup> Special Orders number 697 sealed off water transport and restricted transport movements at Gloucester Point and Yorktown to those

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 389-91. Magruder was earnest in his plea, a number of sources will be cited later, but the testimony of one Yankee is appropriate here, "As we came out the woods at one point, we could see a deserted rebel fort in the middle of a swamp to the right of the road. It was built square and in a substantial manner with barracks inside of it, a ditch nine feet deep all around it, filled with water and an abatis, bushes, and stumps of trees. Near it was an inferior work partially masked; the place could not have been stormed." Alfred Davenport, Camp and Field Life of the Fifth New York Volunteer Infantry (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, 1879; reprint, Gaithersburg, MD: Butternut Press, 1984), 163.

<sup>31</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 69, Magruder to B. S. Ewell, 24 March 1862.

personally authorized by Magruder.<sup>32</sup>

Magruder's task was made easier by the exceptionally difficult terrain. Corson observed, "The mud around our quarters is knee deep and is very offensive."<sup>33</sup> General McLaws wrote,

This country is so much cut up by these areas of the sea and inland rivers, with their accompanying marshes and boggy water tributaries, that it is impossible to move through except along the main roads. Thus, it is impossible to make use of a large force and the tremendous odds against us cannot be as formidable as elsewhere.<sup>34</sup>

Regardless, Magruder would soon need help for his little army of 11,000 and on 25 March he advised his friend Secretary George Randolph, that a council of war determined that 10,000 additional troops were needed to make his line tenable. He wrote,

We yield the best line for Richmond and that if the Peninsula is lost, Norfolk must necessarily fall and the Virginia must be captured.<sup>35</sup>

Lee responded by asking General Joseph E. Johnston, whose army was pulling back from Manassas, if he could reinforce the Peninsula.<sup>36</sup> While awaiting an answer, Lee told Magruder to prepare for the worst case, a withdrawal behind the Chickahominy River, if McClellan were to pass his position by the river. Lee also refused to commit to the defense of the Peninsula until he was sure of McClellan's intentions,

It will no doubt be the policy of the enemy to disguise his intention by threatening one point while preparing to attack

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<sup>32</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 68. S.O. 697.

<sup>33</sup>Corson, 71.

<sup>34</sup>McLaws, Curtis Farm, to his wife, 31 March 1862, McLaws Papers.

<sup>35</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 395.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 397.

the other . . . use every means in your power to obtain information on this point.<sup>37</sup>

Magruder increased his vigilance by dispatching Captain Jefferson C. Phillips and twenty of the Old Dominion Dragoons to Ship's Point on the Poquoson River. He instructed commanders to remove resources to previously prepared bombproofs and develop retreat routes. He instructed engineers to build a military road to expedite troop movements between points on the Warwick River line. All troops were to keep three days cooked rations.<sup>38</sup> Yet he also instructed his men to maintain their front "as it is very important for us for the enemy to suppose that Harwood Mills is occupied."<sup>39</sup> Magruder's General Orders number 168 advised the army that it would fight on the Warwick River line. Infantry were reminded to support the artillery, and troops were exhorted to be prepared to move whenever necessary.<sup>40</sup>

Although Lee was not yet ready to commit to the Peninsula; Magruder was prepared. Lafayette McLaws, in command of 13 regiments, summarized Magruder's considerable accomplishments,

This Peninsula presents a very unfavorable field for the operations of a large force, it is bounded as you know on one side by the York River and the other by the James River . . . Yorktown is very completely fortified, to resist both an attack by land and by water. . . . [Mulberry Point] Battery is protected by land attack by a heavy work around an elevated point a half mile distant. When everything is completed, the place will be stronger than Yorktown. . . . We have dammed up that river [Warwick River] at various points so that most of the country is flooded from a point under the guns at Yorktown

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<sup>37</sup>Dowdey, 137.

<sup>38</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 68, Special Orders numbers 700 and 702.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., Magruder to Colonel Winston, 27 March 1862.

<sup>40</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 410-11.



to the head of the tidewater of James River, so that when the works defending the dams are completed our direct front will be really strong. . . . Our line of defense will run from Yorktown down Warwick River with its dams to Lee's Mill, thence across to Skiff Creek. Our troops being concentrated behind that line any part can reinforce any other.<sup>41</sup>

The next two weeks marked the apogee of Magruder's military career. Lee was completely convinced that McClellan would attack Norfolk despite evidence to the contrary.<sup>42</sup> William Corson on picket duty at Young's Mill wrote, "The enemy have been more annoying than ever, running in our pickets nearly every day . . . our regiment evacuates and reoccupies this place upon an average, about three times a week."<sup>43</sup> Magruder's cavalry reported the enemy in force near Bethel.<sup>44</sup> Magruder asked Commodore Josiah Tattnall, Commander of the Merrimack, to attack troop transports near the James River and if successful, maneuver to the York River and attack there as well. He had previously criticized the delay in returning the Merrimack to action and provoked an angry defensive response from Sydney Lee, commanding the Gosport Naval Shipyard. Magruder appealed to Tattnall, "We have a country to save and no time for individual duels."<sup>45</sup>

Magruder was convinced of his vulnerability and he appealed directly to Randolph to bring both Johnston and Huger to the Peninsula. He insisted that McClellan would win if he were allowed to join up with

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<sup>41</sup>McLaws, Curtis Farm, to his wife, 31 March 1862, McLaws Papers.

<sup>42</sup>OR, series 1, 9:455.

<sup>43</sup>Corson, 73-74.

<sup>44</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 275, Colonel Johnston to Magruder, 2 April 1862.

<sup>45</sup>ORN, series 1, 7:755.

other forces in front of Richmond.<sup>46</sup>

When McClellan moved on 4 April, he believed he could bypass Yorktown and move rapidly towards Richmond, however, Magruder was as prepared as McClellan was misinformed. After encountering unexpected sporadic fire from a Confederate redoubt of unknown strength at Lee's Mill, Union General Erasmus Keyes was discouraged and he abandoned his march to the Halfway House between Yorktown and Williamsburg. Magruder's security was so tight that Federal engineers had been unable to determine the true course of the Warwick River or the Confederates' line.<sup>47</sup>

Once McClellan moved, Lee was under intense pressure to help Magruder. Until the help arrived, the Commander of the Peninsula was equal to the challenge and he acted to deceive McClellan and his intelligence chief, Allan Pinkerton. Of many commentaries, four typify the illusions created. Jubal Early wrote,

The assuming and maintaining of the line by Magruder with his small force in the face of such overwhelming odds [seven to one] was one of the boldest exploits ever performed by a military commander, and he had so maneuvered his troops by displaying them rapidly at different points as to produce the impression on his opponent that he had a large army.<sup>48</sup>

An English visitor, Colonel Arthur Freemantle spoke with Magruder later

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<sup>46</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 422.

<sup>47</sup>General McClellan claimed the map provided him, which was prepared by Engineer Cram, misled him. In fact, the famous map did not accurately portray the course of the Warwick River. Consequently, McClellan's plans to seize a point across the rebels' line of retreat were impractical and the resistance McClellan encountered forced him to recoil and reevaluate his offensive strategy.

<sup>48</sup>Jubal Early, War Memoirs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960), 59.

and described Magruder's artistry,

Officers shouted commands to imaginary units, a few carts were paraded past openings to simulate a long wagon train, soldiers marched continuously.<sup>49</sup>

Colonel Jesse Gove of the 22d Massachusetts noted "A large body of infantry was observed in their works apparently at evening parade, their band playing Dixie."<sup>50</sup> On McClellan's own staff the French Prince de Joinville wrote,

General McClellan . . . deceived by appearances did . . . not dare to thrust his sword through the slight curtain which his able adversary had spread before his vision.<sup>51</sup>

Although Magruder succeeded in checking McClellan's early advance, because of previous shortfalls in the labor force, he had a lot of work yet to finish on the earthworks. It was ironic that his predictions had proved correct. With limited resources and very little government support, he crafted the lower Peninsula into a defensible Gibraltar. He had tertiary defensive lines and multiple plans. Now that McClellan and his army were at hand, he was finally able to get the support he needed to turn dreams into tangible contingencies. Soldiers poured into his ranks, nearly 20,000 in the first week.<sup>52</sup> An 8 April appeal from Magruder to General Lee asked for 1,000 or more Negro workers to construct earthworks along his possible line of retreat.<sup>53</sup> Magruder's

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<sup>49</sup>Arthur J. L. Freemantle, The Freemantle Diary, ed. Walter Lord (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1954), 258-59.

<sup>50</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 1, 297.

<sup>51</sup>Richard Wheeler, Sword Over Richmond, An Eyewitness History of McClellan's Peninsula Campaign (New York: Fairfax Press, 1986), 119.

<sup>52</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 436.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid, 430-431.

appeal to the local citizenry, that "without the most liberal assistance in axes, spades, and hands to work, we cannot hope to succeed"<sup>54</sup> received generous support.

Unfortunately, Magruder was soon going to lose his command. General Joseph E. Johnston was commander of the primary Confederate army in Virginia.<sup>55</sup> During nearly eight months as he fronted McClellan, Johnston created schemes of grand strategy but took no combat action other than to withdraw from his positions near Centerville, Virginia, to a line behind the Rappahannock River.

On 25 March, when Lee asked Johnston if he could help Magruder or Huger, Johnston had balked. He believed the best way to handle McClellan and get him off the Peninsula was to attack countervalue targets in the North. Lee believed the destruction of the Union army should be their objective and Johnston was ordered to Richmond. Part of Johnston's army under D. H. Hill continued on to Yorktown and was soon established in Magruder's line on 11 April.

Hill was not what Magruder needed. Hill reported something entirely different than what McClellan saw,

The defenses [Warwick Line] were of the weakest character and the radical mistake had been made of leaving the dense timber standing almost within a stones throw of the redoubts . . . . Yorktown itself was surrounded by the most defective system of fortifications. The magazines were of the flimsiest

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 437.

<sup>55</sup>Johnston was one the senior generals in the South, but he proved to be vain and petty. When President Davis named full generals, Johnston was made subordinate to Robert E. Lee and others. Since Johnston had been second ranking officer in the old army and Lee was a Colonel, Johnston felt slighted. He protested in a vigorous and mean manner. President Davis was so infuriated that he dressed Johnston down in a very curt letter which did not start "My Dear General."

character and the gun which enfiladed one face would give a reverse fire on another. Heavy details were kept at work day and night to remedy the defects.<sup>56</sup>

Unfortunately for Magruder, Johnston was en route and he was senior to Magruder. War Department Special Orders number 6, dated 12 April 1862, ended the life of Magruder's department. Johnston visited the Peninsula on 12 April and he did not like what he saw. After a one day survey, Johnston returned to advise President Davis that the entire area was unsuited for "offensive operations." While he conceded the Warwick River line would be strong against a frontal assault, Johnston believed it could be easily turned on either river. From Yorktown on 13 April, Hill continued his tirade and wrote to Randolph,

I find this place totally unprepared for a siege. . . .  
There can be no doubt that he is bringing up heavy siege guns  
. . . The light guns in redoubts numbers four and five will be  
knocked out in half hour.<sup>57</sup>

As Magruder's command staggered toward its termination, the interaction necessary to hold the Peninsula continued. After two weeks of debate in which Lee and others considered sending the Merrimack to the York River to relieve Yorktown, Commodore Tattnall advised Secretary Mallory that while the York River passage appeared impractical,

I shall act with proper prudence for with the Virginia at the mouth of the James River, the enemy's operations in that direction may be checked which will aid the plans of General Magruder as I understand them.<sup>58</sup>

Magruder was still working hard and staffer Joseph L. Brent recorded the progress of defensive works,

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<sup>56</sup>QR, series 1, vol. 11, part 1, 601.

<sup>57</sup>QR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 439.

<sup>58</sup>ORN, series 1, 7:223.

Up the slopes of the bank, the engineers dug small ditches above and below the dams throwing out the earth to serve as breastworks on the river side and at the dams were thrown up large earthworks for artillery.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time on 14 April, in Richmond, Johnston and his lieutenants Gustavus Smith and James Longstreet were arguing against a move to the Peninsula. Unfortunately, Magruder was not invited to the conference. Why? One can only speculate that he was not part of the Confederacy's primary fighting team; therefore, he was excluded from inner circles. While Lee and Randolph specified the strategic implications of Magruder's lines, only Magruder could provide the detailed knowledge of the defensive character of the country. Magruder's exclusion was another slap and a judgmental error.

Smith detailed the specifics of the Richmond meeting in his Confederate War Papers. Johnston and Smith agreed the Peninsula would confine the movements of their army, a fact which McClellan had already discovered. At Johnston's behest, Smith proposed a defensive force be assembled in front of Richmond, drawing all the available troops from the coastal defenses in Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina. Smith argued that Magruder and Huger had sufficient forces for a defense of the lower Peninsula. If they were bypassed they would fall back to Richmond. Smith continued with Johnston's preferred strategy--an invasion of the North. Such a move would disrupt Union morale and cause the Lincoln administration to recall McClellan from the Peninsula.

Both Secretary Randolph and General Lee disagreed with Johnston's strategy. The maintenance of the Gosport shipyard was indispensable to

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<sup>59</sup>Joseph L. Brent, Memoirs of the War Between the States (New Orleans: Fontana Printing Co., 1940), 101.

Confederate strategy. Any disruption in production, no matter how temporary, would hamper the Confederacy's plans. Temporary Union possession of the Gosport would result in unacceptable damage to the infrastructure of the shipyard. Lee continued by denying Johnston's proposal to withdraw troops from other states. He believed such action would cripple morale by permitting Federal occupation of Confederate territory at little cost.<sup>60</sup> The 14 April meeting lasted well into the evening and after hearing all the arguments President Davis overruled Johnston and ordered him to defend Magruder's line. While Johnston left the meeting secretly pledged to his own agenda,<sup>61</sup> the Government's strategic concerns were clearly expressed in a letter Randolph wrote to D. H. Hill on 25 April,

If the Peninsula were merely at stake, we should not hesitate to evacuate it. . . . But Norfolk would go, almost our entire Navy would be lost, an immense amount of material would be captured and we should gain no better position nearer to Richmond for the defense of the city. There is much that can't be trusted to paper and I must request you destroy this.<sup>62</sup>

The actions Randolph referred to were the completion of the C.S.S. Richmond and a series of gunboats which, with the Merrimack, would master Hampton Roads and break the blockade. Workers at Gosport were working day and night to complete her.<sup>63</sup> Johnston must have been told

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<sup>60</sup>Gustavus Smith, Confederate War Papers (New York: Crawford Printers, 1884), 42-44.

<sup>61</sup>General Johnston bluntly stated he was able to accept the results of the meeting because of his conviction that circumstances would compel adoption of his strategy later. Joseph E. Johnston, Narrative of Military Operations (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1874), 116.

<sup>62</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 464.

<sup>63</sup>ORN, series 1, vol. 7, 772-774, 779-80, 783-84.

this when he went to Richmond.

Randolph later testified to the Confederate Congress about Magruder's splendid preparations,

By availing himself of the Warwick River, a small stream which runs through a low, marshy country from near Yorktown to the James River, General Magruder constructed an entrenched line across the [13 mile] Peninsula, and with equal skill and intrepidity had thus far successfully checked every attempt to break it, though the enemy was vastly superior in numbers to the troops under his command. . . . As a second line of defense, a system of detached works had been constructed by General Magruder near Williamsburg, about twelve miles in rear of the first line, where the width of the Peninsula available for the passage of troops was only three or four miles. The advantage thus secured to our forces, if they should be compelled to retreat, will be readily appreciated.<sup>64</sup>

It was readily apparent from the commencement of Johnston's command that he did not intend to defend Magruder's line. He stayed on the Peninsula only long enough to create an audit trail. On 22 April Johnston wrote to Lee,

Labor enough has been expended here to make a very strong position, but it has been wretchedly misapplied by the young engineer officers.<sup>65</sup>

Not everyone shared Johnston's views. 18th Virginia Captain Henry T. Owens wrote his wife, "Magruder is a capital general and has made the strongest defenses here I ever saw."<sup>66</sup>

After Johnston arrived, staff cooperation seemed to breakdown. Magruder was placed in command of the right wing, the largest in the army, but he could not get D. H. Hill to agree to swap some field

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<sup>64</sup>Smith, Confederate War Papers, 52-53.

<sup>65</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 455.

<sup>66</sup>Captain H. T. Owens to Harriet Owens, 24 April 1862, ALS in Henry T. Owens Papers, Archives, Virginia State Library, Richmond.



artillery that he had left at Yorktown.<sup>67</sup>

Johnston apparently did not seek Magruder's opinion as former commander; consequently, he was left the embarrassing option of communicating his insights by mail. On 24 April Magruder encouraged the commanding general to draw the Federals into a controlled advance which could be attacked.<sup>68</sup> Johnston's plan was entirely different and on 30 April, he repeated his 14 April plan in a letter to Lee,

We must, therefore, change our course, take the offensive, collect all the troops we have in the east and cross the Potomac with them, while Beauregard, with all we have in the west, invades Ohio. Our troops have always wished for the offensive, and so does the country.<sup>69</sup>

When Johnston left the Warwick River line on 3 May, he left a frustrated and embittered group of Peninsula veterans. In the 32d Virginia, a locally recruited regiment, about 80 men deserted.<sup>70</sup> Terry Jones noted in Lee's Tigers that the Tigers were so well entrenched that in one 24 hour period, 11 April, they had taken over 300 shells in camp at a cost of only three wounded.<sup>71</sup> At Wynne's Mill James Williams wrote to his aunt,

We are not allowed to return fire and it is the most provoking thing in the world. We so strongly fortified that they can't hurt us at all, and we haven't ammunition enough to be wasting any, we are reserving our fire till they make a

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<sup>67</sup>QR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 451.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 462-63.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 477.

<sup>70</sup>Jensen, 61-62.

<sup>71</sup>Jones, Tigers, 57.

general attack.<sup>72</sup>

The siege of Yorktown was basically devoid of significant military activity. The only noteworthy action occurred at Dam #1 on 16 April. Here the Second Brigade of General William French Smith and five Vermont regiments, 2d, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th, surprised Colonel Robert McKinney's 15th North Carolina. They crossed the Warwick River and temporarily held the Confederate works; however, a counterattack under General Howell Cobb drove the Federals back and the action ended. The 3d Vermont suffered fifty percent of the 165 Union casualties and the Confederates lost 43 killed and wounded.<sup>73</sup>

Magruder did not make the retreat with his command. He had been sick and Johnston granted him a furlough to recover his health. General D. R. Jones directed the right wing on its retreat.

The subsequent battle of Williamsburg, a rear guard action on 5 May, provided another example of Johnston's misuse of the bounteous resources provided by Magruder. While Johnston and Davis exchanged written jabs after the war concerning Johnston's mismanagement of the Peninsula campaign and the battle of Williamsburg,<sup>74</sup> two other credible sources tilted the scale of blame to Johnston. Colonel Richard Maury,

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<sup>72</sup>Williams, Wynne's Mill to his Aunt Mary, 27 April 1862, Williams Papers.

<sup>73</sup>Battle reports are contained in OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 1, 364-380, 415-22.

<sup>74</sup>Jefferson Davis, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government (New York: Appleton and Company, 1881), 2:94. Joseph E. Johnston, "Manassas to Seven Pines," in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, eds. Clarence Buel and Robert Johnson, (New York: Century, 1888; reprint, Secaucus NJ: Blue and Grey Press, nd) 2:205.

24th Virginia, wrote,

The prudent forethought of General Magruder had fortified a line just below Williamsburg across the narrow Peninsula . . . the right and center which Longstreet occupied, but through an oversight or carelessness the left remained open.<sup>75</sup>

It remained for Maury, Early and the 24th Virginia to reclaim it from General Winfield Hancock with a dramatic charge during the Battle of Williamsburg. A concurring opinion was inadvertently written independently by Gustavus Smith, Johnston's friend and second in command,

His [General Magruder's] absence at this moment was the more to be regretted as it appears that the positions of the redoubts he had constructed were not all known to the commanding general [Johnston] and some of them being unoccupied were seized by the enemy and held subsequently to our disadvantage.<sup>76</sup>

After 30 difficult days of seige operations, Magruder wrote a descriptive and heartfelt postscript for his department that was submitted the day of the Yorktown evacuation. His credibility was enhanced by his modest claims which were soon confirmed in enemy reports. Magruder noted,

I had prepared as my real line of defense positions in advance at Harwood's and Young's Mills. Both flanks of this line were defended by boggy and difficult streams and swamps . . . . The left flank was defended by an elaborate fortification at Ship's Point connected by a broken line of redoubts crossing the heads of various creeks . . . In my opinion, this advanced line with its flank defenses might have been held by twenty thousand. With twenty-five thousand, I did not believe it could have been broken.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Colonel Richard L. Maury, "The Battle of Williamsburg", *SHSP*, 22:111.

<sup>76</sup>Smith, 53-54.

<sup>77</sup>RR, 12:483.

Magruder then wrote about the Warwick line,

The line was incomplete in its preparations, owing to the fact that a thousand negro laborers, whom I had engaged in fortifying were taken from me and discharged by superior orders in December last and a delay of nine weeks consequently occurred before I could reorganize the laborers for the engineers. . . . Every preparation was made in anticipation of another attack by the enemy. The men slept in the trenches under arms.<sup>78</sup>

Magruder and his immediate staff departed the Army before the battle at Williamsburg and proceeded via steamer to Westover Plantation. Magruder was exhausted by the strain of the previous months.<sup>79</sup> He did not believe it was necessary to evacuate the line in front of Williamsburg and his engineer Lieutenant Henry T. Douglas reported that he was very emotional.<sup>80</sup>

Unfortunately, Magruder's convalescent leave was too short. The action at Williamsburg stirred his blood and he wrote several letters to Richmond offering his views on an appropriate strategy. Unable to remain inactive, Magruder rejoined his command at Bottom's Bridge on 9 May.<sup>81</sup>

Apparently, Magruder was not respected by Johnston's staff so it is not surprising that he was not given a combat role in the main Confederate army. He appeared to be frozen out of discussions of policy and despite considerable expertise on the Peninsula was forced to resort

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<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Brent, 114.

<sup>80</sup>H. T. Douglas to Mr. Bryan, 25 February 1909, TLS, Eleanor S. Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond.

<sup>81</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 51, part 2, 532, 554; OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 494-95.

to correspondence to convey ideas to the commanding general. The contrast between Magruder and Johnston helps explain Magruder's difficulties. Both men were 55 years old, as was General Lee, Johnston had risen to Brigadier General, Lee to Colonel, and Magruder to Lieutenant Colonel in the old army. General McLaws wrote,

There is a very great contrast between the two commanders, . . . General Magruder is fond of dress and parade and of company, conceals nothing and delights to have a crowd about him to whom he converses freely upon any and all subjects. He never moves from his headquarters without having five or six aides and a dozen or more orderlies. . . . can talk twenty-four hours incessantly.<sup>82</sup>

Of Johnston, McLaws claims,

Our commander-in-chief, General Johnston who is a very quiet, stern man, letting his plans to no one . . . will never speak on official matters but to the person interested, dislikes to have a crowd about him, never mentions military matters when away from his office--often rides off alone . . . Dresses neat, but not pompous--interviews are yes/no with no detailed discussion of the matter.<sup>83</sup>

When Magruder returned to active command on 9 May, he discovered his troops had been placed under overall command of Major General Gustavus Smith, Johnston's second-in-command and a personal friend of Johnston. Magruder understood that the arrangement was temporary to facilitate command and control during the retreat; however, sparks flew when Smith disregarded Magruder's advice and told him to limit his correspondence to business hours unless a battle was imminent. Magruder's temper flared and he retorted in a letter dripping with sarcasm. Magruder wrote to Smith that he led his command without regard

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<sup>82</sup>McLaws to his wife, 25 April 1862, McLaws Papers.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

for duty hours, but he would comply with Smith's request.<sup>84</sup> It is ironic that two men with health problems would compare and contrast command techniques; however, neither seemed to be effective.<sup>85</sup>

There is little doubt that Magruder had outlived his usefulness in Virginia. The absorption of his department into Johnston's command and Johnston's unwillingness to entrust him with combat actions must have marked him for reassignment.

Magruder's friend Randolph believed the Confederacy lacked a cogent Trans-Mississippi policy and he worked hard to solicit President Davis's support for a new department. When General Mansfield Lovell lost the port of New Orleans in April, a great cry went out for competent leadership. Richmond diarist, Mary Chesnut, whose husband James was a government insider wrote, "Magruder is to supersede Lovell, . . . On our side, Yankees are unlucky to say the least."<sup>86</sup> Clearly, there was no hostility towards Magruder in that declaration and apparently, he was well regarded. In fact, Magruder received a much greater plum--command of the newly created Trans-Mississippi Department.<sup>87</sup>

On 26 May, three days after the orders were given, Lee wrote to General P. O. Herbert, commanding in Texas, and advised him of the formation of the new district comprised of Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana

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<sup>84</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 528-29.

<sup>85</sup>Magruder's health problems persisted. Two weeks later, Smith suffered a nervous breakdown one day after Johnston's wounding at Seven Pines. This paved the way for Lee's elevation to command of the Army of Northern Virginia.

<sup>86</sup>Chesnut, 228.

<sup>87</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 528-29.

(west of the Mississippi) and Texas, "Major General Magruder will be assigned to the command as soon as he is relieved from his present position."<sup>88</sup> For Johnston, the news was a gift, and he relieved Magruder before the ink was dry on the orders. One of Johnston's aides, Major A. P. Mason advised General McLaws that there was no need to send a copy of recent orders to Magruder as he had been relieved of command with the army.<sup>89</sup> In the presence of the enemy, Magruder was not willing to leave yet, and he successfully appealed to Randolph to stay the orders. Johnston, who had placed McLaws in command, was furious and refused to take Magruder back. When Johnston refused to rescind the orders, Randolph issued Special Orders number 120, reassigning Magruder to Johnston.<sup>90</sup> A few days later, the issue lapsed when both Johnston and Smith left the army after the Battle of Seven Pines on 31 May and 1 June. Johnston was wounded and Smith had a nervous breakdown. General Lee followed them in command.

Lee's command was like a breath of fresh air for Magruder. Lee not only understood Magruder, but he appreciated the fine job he had done on the Peninsula. Magruder did not hesitate to offer his expertise and insight.<sup>91</sup>

Lee realized that army reorganization was needed. The Peninsula campaign had drawn together every significant Major General in Virginia

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<sup>88</sup>QR, series 1, 9:713.

<sup>89</sup>War Department, Rebel Records, "Correspondence of Confederate General and Staff Officers," Lafayette McLaws Papers, RG 109, A. P. Mason to McLaws, 25 May 1862, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>90</sup>QR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 551.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 593.

and North Carolina. There was so much need across the Confederacy; he undoubtedly planned to reassign many of the generals once McClellan was turned back.

Magruder's stock was very high with Lee. Since Lee had developed the defensive scheme for the South Carolina coast and had just departed South Carolina in March, he had a personal stake in her security. When General John C. Pemberton lost the confidence of the politically significant South Carolina clique, a replacement was needed. Governor Pickens advised President Davis that Generals Huger, Longstreet, or Magruder would be acceptable. On 21 June, General Cooper recommended Magruder for the job; although he had pending orders to the Trans-Mississippi Department, Lee's 25 June indorsement to Davis said, "I hardly see how the removal of Pemberton can be avoided, Magruder is the best person [better than Longstreet or Huger?] who is available to relieve him."<sup>92</sup>

Why was Magruder so respected? Maybe it was his complete devotion to the cause; an 18 June letter to McLaws said, "Take command until I arrive . . . Though quite sick I will be on the ground if anything of importance takes place."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>OR, series 1, 14:560.

<sup>93</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 608.



## CHAPTER 5

### DEPORTED?

Magruder requested a delay in the execution of his orders to command the Trans-Mississippi Department from 23 May through 2 July. One might be surprised if any general commanding 13,000 men in his home state facing an enemy force in excess of 100,000 men, 10 miles from his country's capital would volunteer to leave before the current campaign was over. It is a mistake to conclude that Lee "deported" Magruder to Texas following the "Seven Days" battles. Still, events that occurred during the campaign may have expedited Magruder's desire to depart Lee's army.

After Johnston and McClellan fought to a standstill at the battle of Seven Pines on 31 May and 1 June, McClellan settled down to await reinforcements, specifically Irvin McDowell's Corps. McDowell had been withheld by Lincoln to provide a covering force for Washington. With McClellan in the vicinity of Richmond, Lincoln decided on 8 June to permit McDowell to "cooperate" with him. This conditional support required McDowell to maneuver while remaining between Richmond and Washington. If McClellan wanted to use McDowell, he would have to extend his right flank towards the north near Mechanicsville. This maneuver forced McClellan's army to straddle the Chickahominy River.

McClellan chose the Corps of his friend Fitz John Porter to make the linkup. This divided the Union army with 36,000 men north of the

Chickahominy, over 80,000 men south of the river and left Lee with an attractive target. At Lee's behest, Major General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson had engaged in a series of brilliant tactical marches and battles during late May and early June popularly known as the Valley Campaign of 1862. Jackson's success preyed on the Lincoln administration's insecurities concerning Washington. When Jackson fought at Cross Keys and Port Republic on 9 June, Lincoln ordered McDowell to regroup in the vicinity of Fredericksburg.

McClellan was unaware of the administration's decision and he continued to hold Porter's Corps "in the air" on his right wing awaiting McDowell. After receiving valuable intelligence from cavalry commander J. E. B. Stuart, Lee secretly recalled Jackson from the Valley and determined to mass his army north of the Chickahominy River to strike Porter. The planned maneuver would not only destroy 30 percent of McClellan's force, but it would sever McClellan's supply depot at White House Landing. Speed was essential since Stuart, by riding around McClellan's army between 12 and 15 June, had alerted McClellan to his supply line's vulnerability.

Lee contemplated McClellan's lethargy and deliberately decided to create an imbalance where the majority of his army would face Porter north of the Chickahominy River. Conversely, Lee bet that an entrenched minority of his troops could delude and defend against nearly 80,000 bluecoats south of the Chickahominy River. Lee believed that he would be able to rapidly shift forces if McClellan became active. The man Lee selected to hold McClellan's attention was Bankhead Magruder.

On 24 June 1862, Lee's Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Robert

Chilton, sent confidential orders to Magruder to take charge of both Huger's and his own troops for the purpose of maintaining an active defensive posture to deceive McClellan as to Lee's activities. Magruder was initially ordered to attack if the opportunity presented itself and to pursue the Federals if they withdrew.<sup>1</sup>

After the war a mellow D. H. Hill wrote, "No one ever lived who could play off the Grand Seignior with a more lordly air than Prince John."<sup>2</sup> Magruder was more than an actor; he was a professional soldier. He immediately consulted with his colleague, General Huger, and "devised many methods of exhibiting an aggressive strength that might deceive McClellan."<sup>3</sup> Brent reported that Magruder examined his entire line, "He had a restless energy in preparation that provided for every contingency."<sup>4</sup> Magruder and his men did not perceive any slight against themselves for being excluded from the fighting at Mechanicsville and Gaines Mill on 26-27 June. On the contrary, "We all considered it [their assignment] the post of danger and honor."<sup>5</sup>

In fact, it was a post of danger and high risk since Magruder and his 25,000 men were all that stood between McClellan and Richmond. They

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<sup>1</sup>War Department, Rebel Records, "Correspondence of Confederate General and Staff Officers," John Bankhead Magruder Papers, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Chilton to Magruder, 24 June 1862, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>2</sup>D. H. Hill, "Lee Attacks North of the Chickahominy," in Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, ed. Robert Johnson and Clarence Buel (reprint, Secaucus, NJ: Castle, nd), 2:362.

<sup>3</sup>Brent, 159.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

performed splendidly,

Officers shouted commands to imaginary units, buglers sounded meaningless calls, wagons rumbled back and forth over the same screened area to give the impression of an endless train, soldiers were marched in circles by clearings in sight of the enemy and returned to the same scene again and again, campfires were built for non-existent soldiers and sound effects were utilized.<sup>6</sup>

Magruder's tactics proved completely effective. Alexander Webb, a staff officer who would later win a general's wreath and a Congressional Medal of Honor at Gettysburg, wrote in a postwar analysis,

While the Battle of Gaines Mill was in progress, the enemy's force--25,000 strong under Magruder, by a succession of feints, advanced along different portions of the Union line, south of the Chickahominy. Furious outbursts of artillery fire and a resort to every device known which could lead to the belief that an attack in force was imminent.<sup>7</sup>

McClellan's escape from the lines fronting Magruder was the first of three incidents cited by critics which led to Magruder's "banishment." In compliance with Lee's orders of 24 June, Magruder ordered an active reconnaissance. Lafayette McLaws reported,

The troops were under arms by daylight. The lookouts posted in trees overlooking the enemy's camp near the railroad, reported that the works of the enemy were being strengthened.<sup>8</sup>

On 29 June, the Yankees had slipped away and Magruder was blamed. Of course, other stolen marches occurred during the war, most notably when General Grant shifted his entire army from Lee's front at Cold Harbor in June 1864 to the south side of the James River. General

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<sup>6</sup>Jeffrey L. Rhoades, Scapegoat General - The Story of Major General Benjamin Huger, C. S. A. (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1985), 69.

<sup>7</sup>Alexander S. Webb, The Peninsula, Campaigns of the Civil War Series (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1881; reprint, Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot, 1989), 135.

<sup>8</sup>RR, 9:340.

McClellan was running and Lee was trying to slow him, disrupt his retreat, and destroy him between the rivers. After the war when Sir Fredrick Maurice edited Colonel Charles Marshall's diary, he defended Magruder saying troops are easily drawn out of hidden trenches.<sup>9</sup>

As Lee plotted to trap McClellan by assigning parallel and intersecting lines of march, he ordered Magruder to move ahead and attack McClellan's rear guard. This set the stage for Magruder's second alleged failure. The 29 June Battle of Savage's Station was bravely but inconclusively fought.

Magruder's force was 13,000 or slightly more than half the size of a Union Corps. Although Magruder had commanded both Huger's and his own troops for the past few days, Huger was marching on a parallel track with a separate objective. On Magruder's left, but north of the Chickahominy were Jackson's troops.

While Jackson was under orders to cross the Chickahominy River and cooperate with Magruder, there apparently was no general order for battle and Jackson spent a leisurely 29 June, a Sunday, reconstructing a bridge. Jackson made no effort to find anywhere to ford the river. When queried, he replied laconically that he had more important tasks to attend to and would be unable to support Magruder.

What Magruder faced at Savage's Station was more than a rear guard. General Edwin V. Sumner led two Corps, with a third in the vicinity. His roughly 40,000 men outnumbered the attacking Magruder over three to

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<sup>9</sup>Sir Fredrick Maurice, ed., An Aide-de-Camp of Lee, Being the Papers of Colonel Charles Marshall Sometimes Aide-de-Camp, Military Secretary and Assistant Adjutant General on the Staff of Robert E. Lee, 1862-1865. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1927), 105.

one. Rather than risk an unsupported frontal assault, Magruder sought and received a temporary diversion of two divisions from Huger's command. Magruder's lead division under the command of D. R. Jones reported the enemy was in strength in his front and that Jackson was not coming.<sup>10</sup> According to Magruder, this intelligence foiled his plans because he had hoped to place Jackson and Huger on both of Sumner's flanks.<sup>11</sup>

When it became apparent that Magruder would not assault Sumner, Huger's divisions were returned to their line of march and Magruder was left with his original force of 13,000 men. Magruder did not believe himself strong enough to launch a coup de main and so he fought a feeling engagement. Fearing the consequences if he were destroyed, he committed only Generals Kershaw's and Semmes's brigades. Despite the late hour, the fight was fierce. Augustus Dickert described it in Kershaw's brigade history,

The troops bounded to the front with a yell and made for the forest in front, while the batteries graped us as we rushed through the tangled morass. The topography of the country was such that our artillery could get no position to reply. . . . Semmes and Barksdale put in on our right; Cobb remaining as

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<sup>10</sup>RG 109, Magruder Papers, General D. R. Jones to Magruder, 29 June 1862.

<sup>11</sup>Magruder apparently believed that both Huger and Jackson were to cooperate with him. He did not know what force he faced, but he did not intend to engage in a frontal assault. Lee hoped that Magruder would attack furiously enough to slow McClellan's retreat and permit Lee's other troops to trap McClellan between the rivers where he could be destroyed. If Magruder's attack was aggressive enough, Lee believed McClellan would send reinforcements. Lee obviously did not know that Sumner, Franklin, and Heintzelman were facing Magruder. A postwar analysis by Joseph Cullen noted, "It was increasingly apparent that Lee's staff work left much to be desired." Joseph P. Cullen, The Peninsula Campaign of 1862, McClellan and Lee Struggle for Richmond (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1973), 138-40; RR, 9:358.

reserve, while the division of D. R. Jones which had been moving down on the left side of the railroad soon became engaged. The enemy fought with great energy and vigor while the Confederates pressed them hard. . . . The graping was simply dreadful, cutting, and breaking through the trees.<sup>12</sup>

The historical perspective of the Battle of Savage's Station is one of Confederate failure. McClellan continued his precipitous retreat leaving the station with its supplies and wounded to Magruder's troops. In retrospect, Lee clearly did not plan to fight a major engagement at Savage's Station or else he would have developed a battle plan. If he intended for Magruder to force Sumner back into McClellan's retreating column, it was an unrealistic expectation. Magruder could not have brought sufficient force to bear on Sumner unless he was able to roll up a flank; therefore, Lee's implied criticism, not received until the battle was over, seems to be inappropriate.<sup>13</sup>

Magruder had been ill several times during the past few months and was driving himself to exhaustion. He had felt tremendous pressure for the past week. When left in charge of the ruse de guerre for Gaines Mill, he executed brilliantly. He strained himself to remain vigilant and to detect any movements. He feared not only an undetected retreat,

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<sup>12</sup>D. Augustus Dickert, History of Kershaw's Brigade with Complete Roll of Companies, Biographical Sketches, Incidents, Anecdotes, etc. (Newberry, SC: Elbert H. Hull Co., 1899), 128-29.

<sup>13</sup>Lee wrote Magruder after the battle, "I regret that you have made so little progress today in the pursuit of the enemy. In order to reap the fruits of our victory, the pursuit should be most vigorous. I must urge you then again to press on his rear rapidly and steadily." OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 2, 687. Since Savage's Station was Magruder's first legitimate test of arms, he no doubt perceived this as criticism and vowed to redouble his efforts. Considering he could not have carried the field in Sumner's presence, he had done the best he could. While Sumner did not want to quit the field, he was ordered to and thousands of Yankee wounded were left for prisoners.

but expected a rapid counterpunch through his unsupported and undermanned line. Having carried the shadow of Richmond on his back for a year, he grimly dug in his heels to prevent any fatal tactical or strategic errors.<sup>14</sup>

Magruder did not sleep at all the night of 28-29 June and no sooner did he go to bed than "Stonewall" Jackson arrived at his command tent at 3:30 A.M. on 30 June. Jackson failed to execute his orders to support Magruder and the opportunity had passed. McClellan was now crossing White Oak Swamp. Lee reacted to the situation and sought to get Magruder in front of McClellan near Malvern Hill.

Magruder's march on 30 June took him to the support of General Longstreet at Frayser's farm but was so long in completion that they were not engaged. It was on this march that Lieutenant Colonel Chilton and Magruder first crossed swords over the positioning of his force. Magruder was concerned that he would be unable to join up with General Holmes, whom he was ordered to support. Finally, late in day, Magruder was ordered into the line to relieve Longstreet who had fought at Frayser's farm.<sup>15</sup>

McClellan had retreated masterfully and found himself under the protection of Union gunboats near Turkey Bend. Now he was able to concentrate a massive artillery park at Malvern Hill, near the Crew Farm. Thus far, Lee had been frustrated in his efforts to bag and

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<sup>14</sup>Magruder was a student of war and he made several references to Napoleon's victory at Austerlitz. He feared a similar tactic where McClellan would allow him to overextend himself and then counterattack his strung out force beating it in detail.

<sup>15</sup>RR, 9:342.



destroy McClellan. He was a skilled and aggressive officer who had pressed the youthful, inexperienced McClellan. Now he made one of the great judgmental mistakes of his military career. He decided to "crush" McClellan. This battle was supposedly Magruder's third and fatal failure.

The attack at Malvern Hill was an utter fiasco. The attack was premised on an effective Confederate counter battery fire. Yet, very little artillery was able to get to the battlefield, the chief of Confederate artillery was not even aware of the plan.<sup>16</sup> Coordinated attacks were to begin with "a yell," but officers acted independently.<sup>17</sup>

Magruder, worn out, excitable and anxious had a major role in this his first full scale battle. He got lost marching to the battlefield--having been ordered to march by the Quaker Road. He followed the advice of local guides and took a road that was locally known as the Quaker Road, but was not the one Lee intended. Following a countermarch, he arrived late on the field. Duplicates of orders and delays in transmission caused Magruder to receive several orders to attack. The urgency fostered by their nearly simultaneous arrival generated the ill-fated attack order.<sup>18</sup> Magruder, weary to the point of incoherence and

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<sup>16</sup>Jennings C. Wise, The Long Arm of Lee, with an Introduction by Gary Gallagher (Richmond: Owens Publishing, 1988), 226.

<sup>17</sup>There are countless versions of the assault at Malvern Hill. One thing that is certain is that an order to initiate a battle with a yell is an invitation to disaster. There are numerous incidents of acoustic shadow. However, in this battle, the problem was getting to the battlefield and in line of battle.

<sup>18</sup>Freeman, Lee's Lieutenant, 1:599; OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 2, 670-71.

ill from medication relating to stomach maladies, appeared incompetent and out of control. Both shortcomings were surely aberrations of his dynamic, interactive personality.<sup>19</sup> Fortunately nightfall ended the carnage. When queried by Lee as to why he had attacked the impregnable Malvern Hill, Magruder responded tersely, "In response to your orders twice repeated." Lee had no response.<sup>20</sup>

McClellan's proclivity to continue retreating caused him to abandon Malvern Hill during the night of 1-2 July. This led Magruder and others to conclude the battle was won. The Seven Days Campaign was over.

Magruder suffered a bad night. Brent described him on the morning of 2 July,

General Magruder said there was no change in the situation and he believed the enemy to be in retreat. . . . He looked badly and he told me he had hardly slept. Some of the veins in his face seemed swollen and were absolutely purple and he evidently suffered from the chilly weather.<sup>21</sup>

Having seen the end of the campaign and perhaps miffed at Lee, Magruder wrote to Secretary Randolph on 2 July,

I consider the period has arrived when I cannot . . . ask the longer indulgence of the government in respect to the order assigning me to the command of the Trans-Mississippi Department.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>We know of Magruder's devotion to duty and have seen his willingness to offer strategic advice. This was the greatest crisis of his career and he was keyed up for it. However, the constant strain of the past fourteen months had exacted a toll. Magruder's staffer Brent adequately documented Magruder's illnesses. Magruder was not the only Confederate leader who suffered with an illness. Lee is believed to have demonstrated the initial stages of heart disease in 1863.

<sup>20</sup>Douglas S. Freeman, R. E. Lee, A Biography, 4 vols., (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1934), 2:218.

<sup>21</sup>Brent, 231.

<sup>22</sup>QR, series 1, vol. 11, part 3, 630.

In response, Magruder was relieved and ordered to Richmond.

Magruder had been assigned to the command of the Trans-Mississippi Department on 23 May. Anticipating the needs of his new command, he sought support in men and supplies even before the Seven Days battles. A letter of 26 June 1862 to Lee and Davis begged for a commitment of adequate resources for his department. He also noted that politically important Missouri General Sterling Price had agreed to serve under him.<sup>23</sup>

The Trans-Mississippi region was the frontier of the Confederacy. Although the region had been ignored to this point, Secretary Randolph had impressed upon President Davis its importance. Davis had agreed to the new department and named Magruder to head it. Independently, Confederate leaders in the Trans-Mississippi region contemplated the same action. On 9 June 1862, General Van Dorn suggested the establishment of a separate department with popular Missouri General Sterling Price in command.<sup>24</sup>

When Price was told that Magruder was detailed for the command, he was incensed and in mid-June made a trip to Richmond to confront Davis in person. A stormy meeting resulted in Price's resignation and Davis's acceptance of it. Davis was a politician and egos were salvaged when Price was offered the second-in-command.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>OR, series 1, 13:845.

<sup>24</sup>J. R. Perkins, "Jefferson Davis and General Sterling Price," in Confederate Veteran Magazine, vol. 19 (reprint, Harrisburg, PA: National Historical Society, 1989), 473-74.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., Steven E. Woodworth, Jefferson Davis and His Generals, The Failure of Confederate Command in the West (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1990), 150.

Although the Seven Days battles had successfully driven McClellan from the gates of Richmond, the casualties were ghastly. The army's proximity to Richmond permitted thousands of versions of the action to leak into the city. Everyone had a hero and a villain. Rebel war clerk Jones recorded, "Magruder is said to have led a division into action at Malvern Hill, it is said contrary to the opinions of other commanders."<sup>26</sup> Sally Putnam wrote, "In this fight [Malvern Hill], General Magruder was accused of rashness and many declared he was under the intoxicating influence of ardent spirits,"<sup>27</sup> and a day or two later Putnam noted, "Public opinion reflected rather severely on General Magruder and General Huger. It was said if Magruder had been less rash . . . The Federal army would have never reached the security of their gunboats."<sup>28</sup> On 10 July, Mary Chesnut observed, "Public opinion is hot against Huger and Magruder for McClellan's escape."<sup>29</sup>

Staff officers also formed opinions that found their way to print. Howell Cobb's biographer noted that one Georgia source, most likely a newspaper, claimed heavy Georgia casualties were caused by Toombs's, Cobb's and Magruder's drunken behavior on the battlefield.<sup>30</sup> Charles Marshall recorded his disappointment believing the Federal army should have been destroyed but was not due to a lack of coordinated leadership. He blamed Magruder who he believed should have known the roads well as

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<sup>26</sup>Jones, *Diary*, 140.

<sup>27</sup>Putnam, 148.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>29</sup>Chesnut, 266.

<sup>30</sup>Simpson, 157-58.

it was his department.<sup>31</sup> Robert E. Lee's daughter Charlotte wrote her sisters a day after a visit from her father, "Poor McGuder [sic] the Dept [sic] people say he is to be court martialed for being drunk at the time he ordered the charge [Malvern Hill]."<sup>32</sup>

This disappointment was not seriously credited by President Davis who was more upset over the loss of the shipyard at Norfolk.<sup>33</sup> Magruder was oblivious to the gossip and he prepared to depart for his new command via train. On 11 July before he was to leave, Lieutenant Colonel Chilton was constructing a letter which cast a shadow on his career. Chilton understood Lee's distress over McClellan's escape, as did Marshall. Chilton was personally convinced of Magruder's incompetence and he expressed his concerns in writing to General Cooper, in Richmond,

The more I have thought upon the subject of Magruder's mission, the more strongly convinced am I of the sad justice to be inflicted upon the people of the Southwest by sending someone so utterly incompetent and deficient as is Magruder . . . since matters appear to be progressing successfully there [Texas], it is a hazardous operation to send a marplot there to reduce us to disgrace. . . . D. R. Jones charges him with something worse than incompetency. . . . General Lee concurs in my belief of his incompetency, but will not act

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<sup>31</sup>Maurice, 96.

<sup>32</sup>Charlotte Lee, Richmond to her sisters, 19 July 1862, ALS in Lee Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

<sup>33</sup>On 6 July, Davis wrote his wife, "My great grief at the loss of the Virginia is renewed and redoubled by our want of her now in the James River. The timber for the completion of the Richmond was burned at Norfolk and the work on her has thus been greatly delayed. It is uncertain when she will be finished." Jefferson Davis, Jefferson Davis, Constitutionalist, His Letters, Papers, and Speeches, ed. Dunbar Rowland, 10 vols. (Jackson, MS: Department of Archives and History, 1923), 5:291.

unless directly asked by the President.<sup>34</sup>

This scathing attack was immediately relayed to President Davis who promptly recalled Magruder to Richmond.<sup>35</sup> Upon Magruder's return, Chilton immediately forwarded to him a copy of his letter to Cooper. Magruder seethed at the charges of an inferior military officer and the military inequality may have been the only reason he did not challenge Chilton to a duel.

Even before Magruder began to assemble his rebuttal, Chilton was qualifying his comments. A 20 July letter to President Davis clarified his position; Chilton had sent the letter without Lee's knowledge because of Lee's caution about expressing opinions involving others. Chilton continued, "This opinion of mine is not based upon what I have heard General Lee state but my observation of facts which I knew must be within the knowledge of General Lee."<sup>36</sup> Chilton then postulated in his letter to Magruder that "I will state General Lee had no knowledge whatsoever of this letter and my impression with regard to his concurrence in my views was and is conjectural."<sup>37</sup>

Magruder's pride was hurt by Chilton's charges and he refused to credit them. A letter of 24 July to Davis advised that he was acting

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<sup>34</sup>War Department, "Compiled Service Records of Confederate General and Staff Officers," Robert Chilton File, RG 109, Robert Chilton to General Samuel Cooper, Richmond, 11 July 1862. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>35</sup>Davis, 5:294.

<sup>36</sup>Compiled Service Records, Chilton File, Chilton to Jefferson Davis, Richmond, 20 July 1862.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., Chilton to General Magruder, Richmond, 20 July 1862. Chilton Records.

rapidly to secure official reports which he hoped to have the next day. He asked Davis not to assign anyone else to his command,<sup>38</sup> but the political pressures to assign someone to the command were extreme and Davis superseded Magruder with General Theophilis Holmes.<sup>39</sup>

Chilton hoped his charges would result in a Court of Inquiry, but neither Magruder nor the President required it. If Davis had wanted to cashier Magruder this was his opportunity. Instead he permitted Magruder to submit his official report in response. Davis's postwar writings tend to discredit any vendetta against Magruder.<sup>40</sup>

Magruder's subordinates rallied to his defense. Personal letters and official reports from T. R. R. Cobb, Lafayette McLaws and D. R. Jones confirmed Magruder's beliefs.<sup>41</sup> Although Freeman criticized Magruder's report as self-serving and fanciful, he did concede that Magruder had maturely and methodically refuted the allegations.<sup>42</sup>

Magruder's report dated 12 August 1862 was privately published in an effort to counter vicious rumors surrounding his recall. It was a comprehensive and credible document. Magruder received full cooperation

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<sup>38</sup>RG 109, Magruder Papers, Magruder to Jefferson Davis, Richmond, 24 July 1862.

<sup>39</sup>Davis, 5:301.

<sup>40</sup>Davis heaped lavish praise on Magruder in the Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government. Specific examples are cited later in the chapter.

<sup>41</sup>RG 109, Magruder Papers, General T. R. R. Cobb to General Magruder, Richmond, 23 July 1862.

<sup>42</sup>Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 1:608.

from Lee and Lee's subordinates.<sup>43</sup> Magruder even presented sworn affidavits and medical reports.<sup>44</sup>

On 13 August, Magruder formally submitted his report simultaneously to Davis and Lee. Magruder asked Davis, if the report was satisfactory, to consider restoring him to his command to smother the slander that was circulating.<sup>45</sup> Lee hurriedly reviewed Magruder's report and provided specific rebuttals. He did not criticize Magruder and even offered a lukewarm endorsement,

General Magruder appears to have greatly exerted himself to accomplish the duty devolved on him, and I can bear testimony to the alacrity he displayed in its execution. He had many difficulties to contend with I know. I regretted at the time and still regret that they could not have been more rapidly overcome. I feel assured, however, that General Magruder intentionally omitted nothing he could do to ensure success.<sup>46</sup>

Magruder had weathered the storm. The army was away from Richmond on the Second Manassas Campaign. Magruder was now ready to resume a command position, but the question was where? Randolph believed a return to Lee's army could be awkward and he recommended that Magruder become the deputy commander of the Trans-Mississippi, "I think his energy in conjunction with General Holmes's prudence could produce good

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<sup>43</sup>RG 109, Magruder Papers, General Magruder, Spottswood Hotel, to General Lee, in the field, 2 August 1862.

<sup>44</sup>J. Bankhead Magruder, Report of His Operations on the Peninsula and of the Battles of Savage Station and Malvern Hill near Richmond (Richmond: Charles H. Wynne, 1862), 34.

<sup>45</sup>RG 109, chapter 2, vol. 232 1/2, Magruder, Richmond, to Jefferson Davis, Richmond, 13 August 1862.

<sup>46</sup>RR, 9:364.



results."<sup>47</sup> Davis having finally calmed the Sterling Price beehive, remarked, "I doubt the propriety of disturbing the unity of the Trans-Mississippi department under existing circumstances."<sup>48</sup>

Over the next six weeks, Magruder lobbied for the vindication which reassignment would produce. The decision process was undoubtedly delayed by the dramatic moves of the Confederate armies in the field, but it gave him the opportunity to marshal additional support. On 5 September, an anonymous letter to the Editor of the Richmond Whig made a strong defense against the slanderous rumors, "Some so base as to prohibit a gentleman from answering them."<sup>49</sup> The letter pleaded for patience,

That report has been made and when submitted will, I am confident, prove a complete refutation . . . It is certainly rather remarkable that General Magruder's incompetency for command should only be discovered after more than a year's service in a very important position during which he had won the first victory gained over the enemy, had secured the Confederate capital against attack, and Southeastern Virginia against invasion . . . and had finally been assigned by the President who knew his services and appreciated his merits to an exceedingly responsible and important command in a distant portion of the Confederacy.<sup>50</sup>

In late September, Magruder's name was included with Lee, Johnston, Jackson and other general officers in a series of Congressional resolutions praising the army's achievements from the Seven Days

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<sup>47</sup>George W. Randolph, War Department, to Jefferson Davis, Richmond, 26 August 1862, ALS in Pritchard Von David Collection, Eugene C. Barker Texas History Center, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>"Letter to Editor of Whig," Richmond Enquirer, 5 September 1862, page 1.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

battles.<sup>51</sup> Thus encouraged, Magruder wrote Davis on 29 September suggesting a separate command in Texas and the New Mexico territories subject to General Holmes overall command. Magruder pleaded that his continued inactivity after his vindication was a source of personal embarrassment.<sup>52</sup> Two weeks later, Magruder was assigned to the command he requested.<sup>53</sup>

Magruder thrived in Texas and earned the praise of the country for his stunning success in recapturing Galveston and the Yankee gunboat Harriet Lane. Clerk Jones wrote a fitting tribute when he recorded,

Brilliant achievement at Galveston and it was Magruder's work . . . he has always had a penchant for desperate work. So we shall expect to hear of more gallant exploits in that section.<sup>54</sup>

In mid-January, President Davis wrote Magruder a congratulatory letter and wished him continued success in the future.<sup>55</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Chilton experienced difficulties from Magruder's Congressional supporters. George Randolph told Magruder in a personal letter of 21 February 1863 that vindication was forthcoming.<sup>56</sup> A month later, Chilton was denied promotion to colonel and brigadier general

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<sup>51</sup>"Resolutions of Congress," Richmond Examiner, 20 September 1862.

<sup>52</sup>John B. Magruder, Richmond, to Jefferson Davis, Executive Office, 29 September 1862, ALS from Samuel Richey Collection of the Southern Confederacy, the Walter Havighurst Special Collections Library, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio.

<sup>53</sup>Jones, Diary, 194.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 235.

<sup>55</sup>Davis, 5:424.

<sup>56</sup>RG 109, Magruder Papers, George W. Randolph, Richmond, to General Magruder, Texas, 21 February 1863.

because of his "slanders" against Magruder. A May 1863 Court of Inquiry investigated the propriety and integrity of Chilton's actions in writing to General Cooper. They refused to permit testimony concerning Magruder's performance at the Seven Days; but, Chilton was exonerated and no judgment was rendered on his accusations.<sup>57</sup>

When the war ended, Magruder refused to seek a pardon or parole and he escaped to the Confederate colony in Carlotta, Mexico. After serving the Emperor Maximilian as a Major General, he returned to Texas. It was rumored he returned to his drinking habits and he died alone in February, 1871.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Chilton Court of Inquiry, Chilton Records, National Archives.

<sup>58</sup>Warner, Generals in Gray, 207-8.

CHAPTER 6  
SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

John Bankhead Magruder served the United States Army for 30 years before the Civil War. Perspectives change and the activities of a fun loving young lieutenant in a peacetime army should not be judged harshly. Promotions were slow and many people must have enjoyed the animated Magruder. When the Mexican War came, Magruder was aggressive and dynamic. The 24 year old lieutenant was now a serious experienced 42 year old graduate of the United States Military Academy. In recognition of his performance, he received three promotions and a series of challenging leadership roles between 1848 and 1861.

When the secession issue was joined, he honorably left the United States Army and accepted a leadership role in his home state. Magruder was not only commissioned a full colonel, but he was named to a council of prominent Virginians to select other qualified citizens for leadership positions.

John Bankhead Magruder's record is clearly presented in postwar analyses. His historically negative image as "Prince John" emerged in Douglas Southall Freeman's monumental analysis of southern leadership R.E. Lee and the companion, but distinctly different series Lee's Lieutenants. Of Magruder, Freeman writes without a citation:

He held that bombardment of the enemy might be infrequent but that bombardment of the Secretary of War should be incessant. His early dispatches doubtless were read with

eagerness. Soon the sight of one of them was to evoke groans.

If this was Magruder's epitaph, one would conclude he was bombastic and frivolous, but fortunately the record was rich in contradictory evidence. Freeman's own meticulous notes left in the archives of the Virginia State Library reveal a shallowness of sources that did a disservice to this prominent son of Virginia. Magruder was not inept as some historians suggested<sup>2</sup> nor was he as significant as others proposed.<sup>3</sup> Instead, Magruder emerges as an important secondary leader, a conscientious man and meticulous soldier.

Current historiography has produced credible efforts to vindicate "scapegoats." Revisionist historians are reducing "demigods" to great generals and raising underated leaders to levels of public acceptance. The late Dr. Thomas Connelly authored Lee, The Marble Man, while Charles Schackleford recently penned George Wythe Randolph and the Confederate Elite, William Piston's published doctoral dissertation examined James Longstreet, Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant and Jeffery Rhoades wrote Scapegoat General, The Story of Major General Benjamin Huger, C.S.A. These works are useful to an understanding of the real war within the

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<sup>1</sup>Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 1:16.

<sup>2</sup>There are numerous instances of casual slanderous commentary concerning Magruder. Evan Robert Corn; "Daniel Harvey Hill and the Peninsula, Maryland, and Chickamauga Campaigns," (M. A. Thesis, University of North Carolina, 1961) 57. Referring to Savage's Station "The clash failed to produce any tactical results, except for revealing another case in which Macgruder's [sic] ineptness allowed McClellan to break away unscathed."

<sup>3</sup>Edward A. Pollard, Lee and His Lieutenants (New York: E.B. Treat and Co., 1867), 847; Eulogy of John B. Magruder delivered by John B. Cary to Lee Camp #1, Grand Camp of Confederate Veterans, Department of Virginia, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

Civil War. Then, as now, politics and social cliques played a significant role.

Unfortunately for Magruder no full length biography exists.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Settles examined Magruder's military career in his 1972 doctoral dissertation at Texas Christian University. Dr. Settles's topic was so broad he was unable to present a detailed analysis of Magruder's principal contribution to the Confederate cause, the early defense of the Virginia Peninsula. Settles also misinterpreted some sources and was unable to uncover others that are now available. In 1989, Penn State Professor Gary Gallagher penned a short article for "Civil War" that accurately summarized Magruder's career through the Seven Days battles.<sup>5</sup> He only used the Official Records and he restated Freeman's and Settles's themes.

"Prince John" has a regal, almost comical air reminiscent of medieval times. It certainly does not mix with the martial sounding, "Stonewall," "My Old War Horse," "The Rock of Chickamauga", or "Fighting Joe." Many casual students of the war routinely accept the summary judgments of literary legends such as Bruce Catton, Shelby Foote and Douglas S. Freeman. These early treatises provided stereotypes that are frequently perpetuated in disciples' books.

This thesis examined Bankhead Magruder in the context of his

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<sup>4</sup>T. R. Hay, Locust Valley, New York, to Virginia Historical Society, 23 July 1961, TLS in the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. Mr. Hay wrote of his intention to publish a manuscript on Magruder's life. However, Settles 1972 dissertation expresses thanks to Mr. Hay for the data which he shared during interviews. Mr. Hay apparently never published the book.

<sup>5</sup>Gary Gallagher, "The Fall of Prince John Magruder," Civil War, XIX, 8-15.

environment. There was little contemporary analysis of the drudgery of command in the quiet Peninsula sector. This resulted in an understatement of Magruder's contributions in Virginia. Yet, Magruder clearly met the terms of his commission.<sup>6</sup> Nothing happened in the Federal camp that was not analyzed and reported. The inactivity of the Federal army was not his fault. To the extent possible, he held the Yankees at the tip of the Peninsula and prevented adequate intelligence from reaching McClellan for his 1862 Peninsula campaign. As commander of the Department, he meticulously completed a basic defensive network and greatly expanded it to the extent manpower and supplies permitted. He worked tirelessly to train his staff and subordinates. Accusations of micromanagement appeared overstated, since subordinates at all levels proved to be inexperienced in military matters.

Magruder willingly took on the Richmond bureaucracy and forced support for his command. While it appeared he exceeded his authority in impressing slaves and activating the militia, he properly viewed them as resources to accomplish his mission.

Limited military encounters prevent a full and impartial evaluation of his military skills. Magruder was not the only Civil War general who bungled his early combat assignments. Such a list included Lee, Grant and Sherman. Subsequent successes in Texas were small in scale and are not a proper measure of his combat leadership capacity.

Magruder found himself embroiled in controversy, but basically excluded from strategic decisions. Men such as Joseph E. Johnston and George McClellan overshadowed him. An argument could be made that

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<sup>6</sup>CR, series 1, 2:865.

Johnston could have been cashiered for treason. If Davis expected a fight on the lower Peninsula, he certainly erred in permitting Johnston to retain his command. In consideration of Johnston's preferred strategy to invade the North and Lee's clear understanding of Confederate goals on the Peninsula, Lee should have received command.

Postwar analyses of contemporaries, combined with reports of professional soldiers, placed Magruder and his efforts in perspective. The following are representative of the hundreds of laudatory comments uncovered in the research: Federal Navy commander John Missroon commenting on the York River batteries, "The works of the enemy are excessively strong and powerfully armed. Their cannon are managed and served with surprising accuracy."<sup>7</sup> Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Gustavus Fox testified to Congress, "Wooden vessels could not have attacked the batteries with any degree of success. The forts at Yorktown were situated too high; were beyond the reach of naval guns."<sup>8</sup> Federal engineer Lieutenant Cyrus B. Comstock on the quality of the Gloucester Point battery, "The finished portion of the work was well and carefully done. . . . The strength of the work is nearly the same as that of the work enclosing Yorktown."<sup>9</sup>

Magruder boasted of his forward line of defense. Chief Union engineer General John G. Barnard told Congress, "The works prepared by the enemy to resist any landing south of Yorktown . . . such as that at

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<sup>7</sup>Webb, 67.

<sup>8</sup>Congress, Joint Committee, The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, Part I, Army of the Potomac, 37th Congress, 3d Session, 31 March 1863, 630.

<sup>9</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 11, part 1, 338.



Ship's Point and others near the mouth of Wormley Creek were of considerable magnitude."<sup>10</sup> Major Albert J. Myer, Federal signal officer wrote,

Reports were received of reconnaissances made along the lines in front. Earthworks seemed to be found everywhere, and everywhere bodies of the enemy vigilant and of unknown numbers resisted and threatened assault. . . . To pass from the right to the left of our lines, following the narrow and winding earth roads and the miles of corduroyed ways through the woods was a journey of several hours. . . . bearing often upon an enemy whose lines and forces hidden by other trees and shrubs were invisible.<sup>11</sup>

The Warwick River line was considered the least defensible of the three, but it was also intimidating. General Erasmus Keyes reported, "The works at Lee's Mill were apparently very strong. The force of the enemy was entirely unknown owing to the difficulty of the approach."<sup>12</sup> Barnard summarized the line as "far more extensive than may be supposed . . . every kind of obstruction which the country affords such as abatis, marsh, inundation, etc., was skillfully used. The line was certainly one of the most extensive known to modern times."<sup>13</sup>

The most impressive of Magruder's works was Yorktown. McClellan's aide-de-camp wrote,

They are strong but not neat. They might have been taken by storm with terrible loss . . . that immense connected fortification with its numerous salient angles, on which their heaviest guns were mounted is at once a beautiful and a wonderful work. The ditch is deep, but dry, the parapet is difficult to scale . . . Trees which were standing a year ago have been cut down to give free range to their artillery. Deep

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<sup>10</sup>Committee on Conduct of War, 397.

<sup>11</sup>QR, series 1, vol. 11, part 1, 228.

<sup>12</sup>Committee on Conduct of War, 598.

<sup>13</sup>RR, 12:558.

gorges and ravines are inside and about these fortifications. This natural advantage furnished good cover for their troops against artillery fire and rendered the position difficult to assault.<sup>14</sup>

Barnard added, "It will be seen therefore, that our approaches were swept by the fire of at least forty-nine guns."<sup>15</sup>

Johnston's determination to evacuate the Peninsula, based on the pending bombardment and a desire to spare the useless loss of Confederate life, moved Robert E. Lee's military secretary A. L. Long to astutely comment, "Since Magruder's position was never put to the test, the difference of opinion respecting it must be reconciled by speculative criticism."<sup>16</sup> However, Jefferson Davis praised the work writing,

By availing himself of the Warwick River . . . [Magruder] constructed an entrenched line across the Peninsula and with equal skill and intrepidity had thus far successfully checked every attempt to break it. . . . Magruder had constructed batteries at both places [Yorktown and Gloucester Point] which by their crossfire presented a formidable obstacle to the ascent of ordinary vessels.<sup>17</sup>

Union newspaper editor, William Swinton, who wrote a history of the Army of the Potomac, commented on the Union Chief of Artillery's claim that the Confederate batteries would have been silenced in 12 hours,

This opinion is not justified by subsequent experience in the war, for the rude improvised earthworks of the Confederates showed an ability to sustain an indefinite pounding. General Johnston's evacuation of Yorktown seems to have been prompted

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 5:7.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 12:558.

<sup>16</sup>A. L. Long, Memoirs of Robert E. Lee (Secaucus, NJ: Blue and Grey Press, 1983), 154.

<sup>17</sup>Davis, 2:83-84.

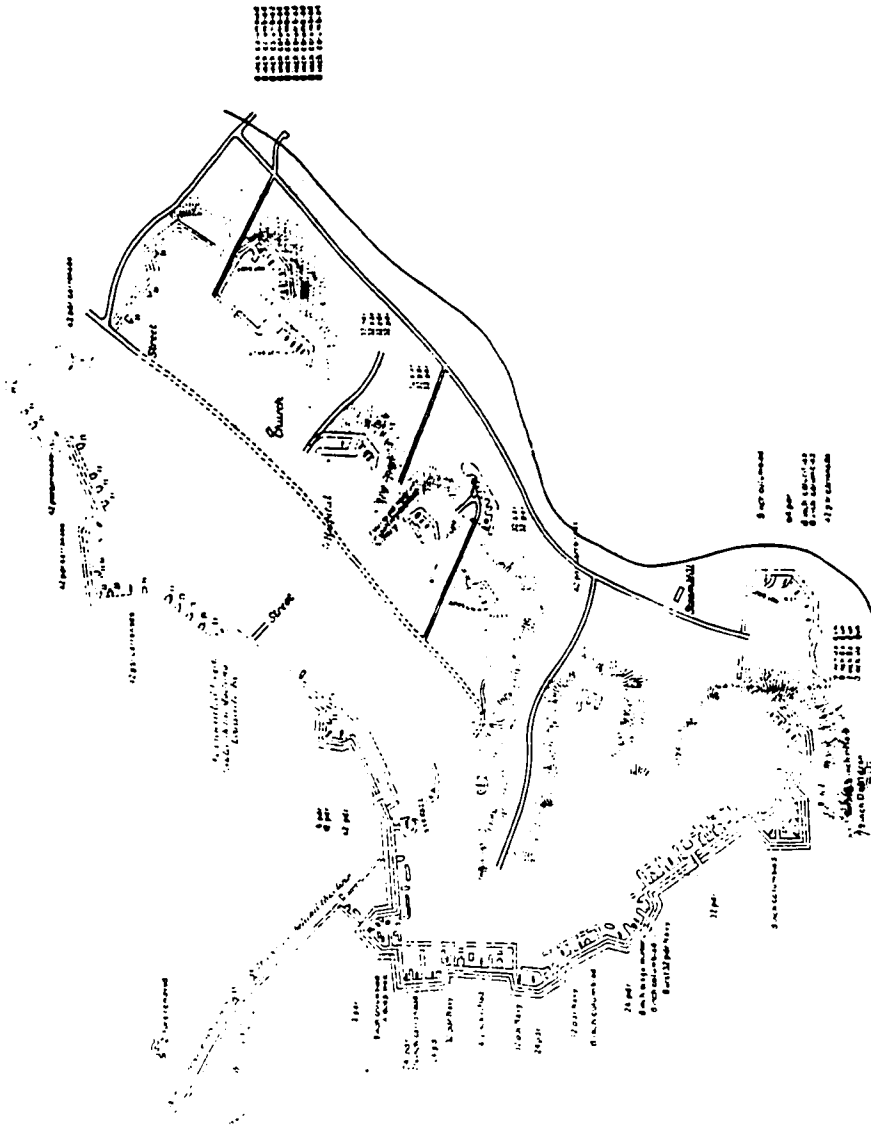


Fig. 7. Map of Yorktown Fortifications from the Official Military Atlas of the Civil War, Map 1, Plate 15.

by a like exaggeration of the probable effect of a bombardment.<sup>18</sup>

Elsewhere in his volume, Swinton concluded after interviewing Johnston that,

Had General Johnston in place of becoming alarmed at the preparations against him determined to fight it out on the line of the Warwick, there is little doubt he might have prolonged the siege indefinitely.<sup>19</sup>

President Davis in February 1865 drafted a letter detailing why he would not give Johnston another independent command. He said Johnston had failed on numerous occasions. Concerning Yorktown he wrote, "General Johnston soon announced the position untenable and made another hasty retreat and with a heavy loss of munitions and armament."<sup>20</sup>

The last of Magruder's defensive works was the Williamsburg line which Lee had fretted about the previous year. While Freeman called Fort Magruder "feeble,"<sup>21</sup> E. Porter Alexander and Alexander Webb disagreed. Webb wrote,

Fort Magruder stood in his [McClellan] immediate front commanding the junction of the left on Hampton road . . . and

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<sup>18</sup>William Swinton, Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, A Critical History of Operations in Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania from the Commencement of the Close of the War, 1861-5 (Secaucus, NJ: Blue and Grey Press, 1982), 107n.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 111-12. In 1878, Brevet Brigadier General John C. Palfrey estimated Yorktown might have held out another month. He speculated on what results might have been occurred had Johnston decided to hold the position. John C. Palfrey, "The Siege of Yorktown," in Campaigns in Virginia, 1861-62, Papers read before the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts in 1876, 1877, 1878, and 1880, ed. Theodore F. White (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1881; reprint, Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing, 1989), 151-52.

<sup>20</sup>OR, series 1, vol. 47, part 2, 1304-11.

<sup>21</sup>Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, 1:175.

the main Yorktown road. . . . To the right and left the smaller redoubts, twelve in all, formed an irregular line nearly across the Peninsula. Resting on creeks and marshes, with a belt of clearing in their front, they could have proved, if properly manned and supported, a formidable barrier. The approaches to the line were singularly disadvantageous for the attacking party.<sup>22</sup>

It seems obvious that the Confederacy may have had the capability to delay and prolong the Union advance indefinitely. Johnston's ego, cowardice, or misunderstanding of the Confederacy's strategic needs seemed to be the only reasons Norfolk and Gosport were prematurely lost. It remained for President Davis to write a fitting epitaph,

Late in 1862, General John B. Magruder, a skillful and knightly soldier, who had at an earlier period of the year rendered distinguished service by his defense of the Peninsula between the James and York Rivers, Virginia was assigned to the command of the Department of Texas.<sup>23</sup>

What of the controversies involving Magruder in the Peninsula campaign and the Seven Days battles? Current historiography clearly leans toward vindicating most of the officers involved; however, Johnston was indicted by his own writings and those of his contemporaries. He is certainly a candidate for a revisionist study and reduction in stature. Gustavus Smith does not merit serious consideration as a commander. It seems he was the thorn in Magruder's side rather than vice versa. Jackson proved he was human and has received just criticism for his failures at Mechanicsville, Savage's Station and White Oak Swamp.

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<sup>22</sup>Webb, 74-75; E. P. Alexander, "A Sketch of Longstreet's Division," *SHSP*, 10:40.

<sup>23</sup>Davis, 2:233.

Lee was clearly to blame for the debacle at Malvern Hill.<sup>24</sup> Lee had a brilliant plan, but it was far too complicated for the terrain or the experience of his staff.<sup>25</sup> Still Seven Days was a clear strategic victory. The threat to Richmond was removed and the Union army leadership so intimidated that McClellan's army was effectively destroyed. It did not reconstitute itself for ten weeks, returning to action only in the Maryland campaign.

The Seven Days battles did not cause Magruder to be "deported" to the Trans-Mississippi Department. The assignment was a calculated move of a qualified officer to support the Secretary of War's strategic vision. Texas A & M University President, Frank Vandiver, effectively challenged the assumption that the Trans-Mississippi was a dumping ground for failed officers or that Magruder had been fired. He contended that Magruder adequately demonstrated his competence in Texas and that he was ill and exhausted during the Seven Days campaign.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Lee is uniformly criticized by analysts of Malvern Hill. Webb said, "In truth, there seems to have been few orders issued on the first by the rebel general-in-chief," 164. Webb notes Lee failed to take advice not to attack and was ignorant of the roads needed to maneuver, 157. E. P. Alexander believes Lee should have rescinded the orders, E. P. Alexander, Military Memoirs of a Confederate (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1907), 161-64.

<sup>25</sup>Cullen's criticism is concise, "What was needed even more than good maps was competent staff work . . . and simple rather than complicated maneuvers, . . . In this battle Lee's strategy was poor and his tactics unsound." Cullen, 166, 168.

<sup>26</sup>The western theaters were often considered a dumping ground for inept officers. However, many highly regarded officers ended up there to include Kirby Smith and Richard Taylor. This too may be an appropriate topic for a more detailed study. Vandiver's arguments are persuasive. Frank E. Vandiver, Rebel Brass, The Confederate Command System (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1956), 31, 59-64.

Why did Magruder request to leave the army the day after Malvern Hill? Perhaps he was exhausted and fed up with everyone, including Lee. Brent noted in his memoirs,

[Magruder sent information to Richmond but was] disbelieved and disregarded. [However, he] exhibited the greatest care in providing for all emergencies and devoted himself to a careful study how he could strengthen his position. . . . He fully realized that he was defending one of the passes to Richmond with very inadequate forces for the purposes.<sup>27</sup>

Magruder went to Texas as an honored man. He was not disgraced and he received tributes. General A. L. Long wrote,

Shortly after the retreat of General McClellan, General Magruder was appointed to command of the Department of Texas, which from its remoteness and extent was of great importance. This exhibition of confidence on the part of the Confederate government furnishes undeniable proof of the high estimation in which Magruder was held and the able manner in which he performed his duties shows that his ability was correctly estimated.<sup>28</sup>

O. M. Roberts wrote for Evan's volume on Texas for Confederate Military History,

The new commanding general had acquired fame for the skill with which on the Peninsula of Virginia he checked for weeks McClellan's invading army before miles of entrenchments, armed in part with Quaker guns.<sup>29</sup>

Was the sobriquet "Prince John" fair? Was he a bon vivant? Lee's Colonel Walter Taylor wrote,

He was a typical soldier, the most picturesque that I ever saw. It was a real treat to see General Magruder in full military costume. . . . There was in his manner and deportment

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<sup>27</sup>Brent, 100-101.

<sup>28</sup>A. L. Long, "Memoir of General John Bankhead Magruder," SHSP, 12:110.

<sup>29</sup>Evans, Confederate Military History, Texas by O. M. Roberts, 79.

a great fascination for those about him.<sup>30</sup>

Colonel R. G. Lowe of the Louisiana Battalion wrote,

Prince John was equal to any emergency. A soldier by nature, he had the dash and bearing of a Rupert and a Crichton combined. . . . Events subsequent to this time so overshadowed the defense made on the Warwick that Magruder's work has been lost sight of.<sup>31</sup>

English Colonel Freemantle met Magruder in Texas and described a party thrown at Magruder's mess,

Magruder wears a red woolen cap and fills the president's chair with great aptitude. It was 11:30 P.M. before I could tear away from this agreeable party.<sup>32</sup>

Magruder, the man and the soldier, was noble and elite. Lowe wrote, "Prince John knew no such words as retreat."<sup>33</sup> Hampton secessionist, Baker Lee claimed,

[Referring to the Peninsula] It truly required a man not in the common role of men to suit the situation. Magruder proved himself to be such a man. . . . With Magruder it was not a question of strength in arms but of strength in skill, in audacity, in military diplomacy. He was equal to it all.<sup>34</sup>

General Dabney Maury, a founder of the Southern Historical society, paid fit tribute when he wrote,

Magruder was so brilliant and gallant in social life that his remarkable talents were not appreciated. He received less credit for his remarkable genius for war than he deserved. I

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<sup>30</sup>Walter H. Taylor, General Lee, His Campaigns in Virginia 1861-65 with Personal Reminiscences (Norfolk: Nusbaum Book and News Company, 1906), 51.

<sup>31</sup>Colonel R. G. Lowe, "Magruder's Defense of the Peninsula," vol. 8, Confederate Veteran Magazine (reprint, Harrisburg, PA: The National Historical Society, 1988), 108.

<sup>32</sup>Freemantle, 29.

<sup>33</sup>Confederate Veteran, 8:105.

<sup>34</sup>Baker Lee, "Magruder's Peninsula Campaign in 1862," 19:63.



wish I could do justice to a man so brilliant, so brave, and so devoted to Virginia.<sup>35</sup>

It seems unnecessary to add more words but it says much about the nature of the subordinate leaders and men of this great Civil War. Colonel Benjamin Ewell was Magruder's predecessor in command on the Peninsula; a resident of Williamsburg; President, and savior of postwar William and Mary; and Joseph E. Johnston's Chief of Staff. Of Magruder he wrote,

He was a humane, honorable man, above intrigue. A brave, judicious--although easily excited--and on the whole a successful soldier.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Confederate Veteran Magazine, 5:171.

<sup>36</sup>Benjamin S. Ewell, "Reminiscences," p. 12.

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