



Encircling the Union Army: Jeb Stuart's Controversial Ride Around McClellan During the Peninsula Campaign, June 1862

Edwin C. Bearrs

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Jeb Stuart's bold and unauthorized ride around the enemy in June 1862 is still studied and celebrated as one of history's most daring intelligence raids. By late May 1862, Gen. George B. McClellan had moved his massive Army of the Potomac to the outskirts of the Confederate capital at Richmond. When Confederate Gen. Joseph Johnston fell wounded at Seven Pines on May 31, Gen. Robert E. Lee assumed command of the Army of Northern Virginia and turned the tide of war in the Eastern Theater.

Lee ordered his dashing cavalry leader Jeb Stuart and 1,200 troopers to find the position of McClellan's right flank. The cavalryman easily discovered the Union flank but continued riding around the enemy in a daring display far exceeding Lee's intention. The gray-clad mounted troops harassed supply lines and captured enemy troops while covering some 100 miles pursued by Union cavalry led by Stuart's father-in-law, Gen. Philip St. George Cooke. Stuart's expedition ended when he returned to Richmond on June 15 with invaluable information that helped General Lee finalize plans for a major offensive operation that triggered the Seven Days' Battles and eventually defeated and drove McClellan and his army away from Richmond. Original photos, illustrations, and maps

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