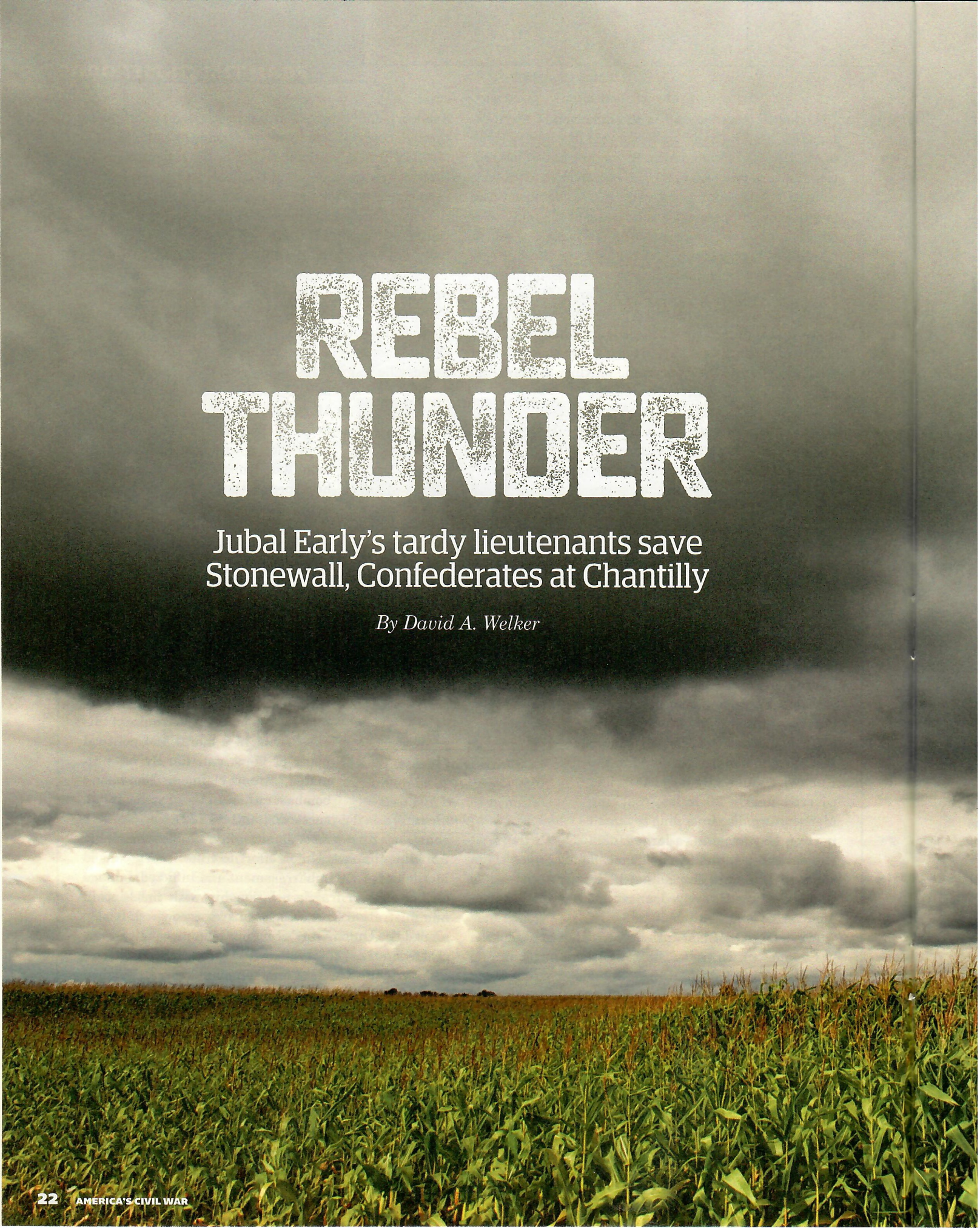

REBEL THUNDER

Jubal Early's tardy lieutenants save Stonewall, Confederates at Chantilly

By David A. Welker

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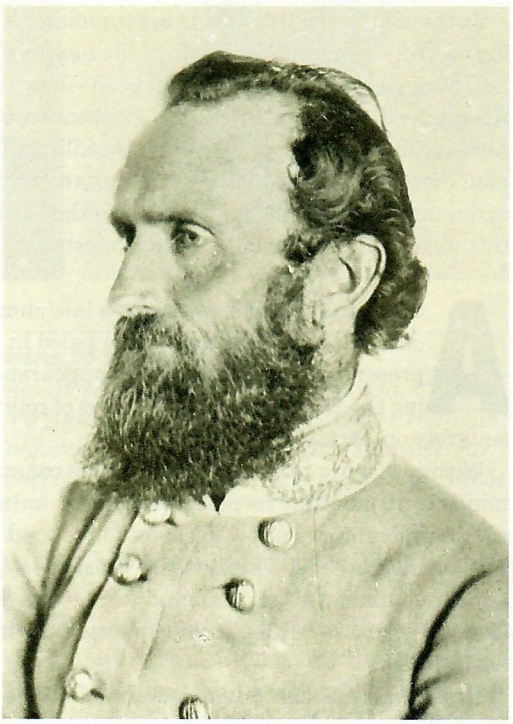
Southern fortunes turned on a dime in mid-1862. The first full year of the war had begun badly with several setbacks out West, and by June the Confederates faced a double threat in the Eastern Theater, with Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan's Army of the Potomac threatening Richmond and Maj. Gen. John Pope's newly formed Army of Virginia taking the field. The situation would change in August, however, when Confederate General Robert E. Lee seized the offensive with his daring Virginia Campaign. Sending Maj. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's command—nearly half his army—north, Lee determined to interpose between Pope's army and Washington, forcing a decisive battle to advance Southern independence by pressuring Abraham Lincoln to negotiate a separation or inducing Britain and France to intervene.

The Confederates' August 9 victory at Cedar Mountain, near Culpeper, enabled Jackson to push east and strike the rich Federal supply depot at Manassas Junction. Resupplied, Jackson then moved north to await the arrival of Maj. Gen. James Longstreet's half of the army, only to be drawn into battle before that could occur. The ensuing Second Battle of Manassas on August 28-30 would yield another victory that Lee wasted no time trying to exploit.

On August 31, a dawn cavalry probe by Confederate Maj. Gen. J.E.B. Stuart revealed that Pope's retreating army had stopped behind works at Centreville, Va., and was beginning to receive reinforcements from McClellan's fresh 2nd and 4th Corps. Although Lee knew a direct attack was ill advised, he was determined to provoke another major fight by again trying to place Jackson's command between Pope and Washington, to be joined in the effort by Longstreet. By midday that Sunday, Lee had Jackson moving north from Manassas along a thoroughfare known as Gum Springs Road before turning east and heading down the Little River Turnpike toward the intersection of Jermantown.

Though shaken, Pope remained committed to attacking Lee's army from his position in Centreville until Union cavalry revealed witnessing a large Rebel infantry column already in the army's rear—Jackson's command. Now resigned to a general retreat, Pope knew he needed to find and block that force, assigning the small 9th Corps to the task. The 9th Corps was commanded by Maj. Gen. Jesse Reno, but Reno's illness had left Brig. Gen. Isaac I. Stevens in charge.



Close Call

August 1862 had been a triumphant month for Stonewall Jackson and his men, beginning with victory at Cedar Mountain on the 9th. The winning streak nearly ended September 1.

In the afternoon September 1, Jackson halted his column at Ox Hill, just southeast of the prestigious Chantilly Plantation, before sending the Stonewall Brigade and 5th Virginia Cavalry down Little River Turnpike to probe the Union position at Jermantown. That probe determined that Jermantown was strongly held by two Union brigades and cavalry commanded by Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker.

Jackson, however, faced a bigger problem than Hooker's force. Isolated and deep behind the enemy's position, with Longstreet's promised reinforcements not yet in sight, Jackson's entire position was vulnerable—his right par-

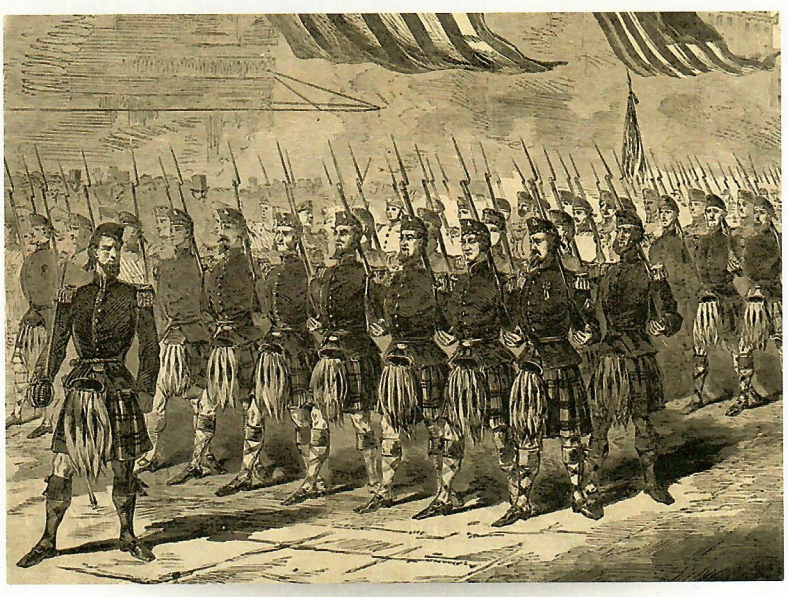
ticularly so now that Federals operating on the nearby Warrenton Pike, paralleling Jackson's route, had uncovered the Confederate advance. To secure that flank, Maj. Gen. A.P. Hill pushed Field's Brigade—Colonel James M. Brockenbrough commanding—and Brig. Gen. Lawrence O'Bryan Branch's North Carolina brigade south 100 yards from the Little River Turnpike.

Jackson followed by shifting his command into a defensive arc, building on Hill's two brigades north of the nearby Reid farmhouse. On Hill's left, Maj. Gen. Robert Ewell's Division—now commanded by Brig. Gen. Alexander Lawton, after Ewell's grievous wounding at Second Manassas—comprised Jackson's center, straddling the Ox Road. Jackson's former division, under Brig. Gen. William E. Starke, formed the left, extending through the thick woods to the Little River Turnpike. From this alignment, they would await Longstreet's expected arrival.

Adding to Jackson's woes was a late summer sky that had turned ominous, but even that storm paled in comparison to the threat presented by the unexpected appearance of Isaac Stevens, leading the 9th Corps across a series of rolling fields south of Ox Hill, squarely on Jackson's right flank.

With just more than 2,000 men in his command, Stevens was determined to strike while he possessed the advantage, realizing that to wait would undoubtedly allow Jackson to respond with his full force, some 15,000 men strong. There was a brief delay, as Reno, still quite ill, appeared and deferred command to Stevens. Reno, however, agreed to lead the corps' 2nd Division in support of the main attack, which began about 5 p.m.

Union skirmishers advanced ahead of the main column. Pressing through the marshy swale surrounding the Reid house, the Irishmen of the 28th Massachusetts and the 79th New York "Highlanders"—comprising the 1st Division's 3rd Brigade—could see the wood line ahead. "Not a sight nor sound betrayed the presence of the enemy," recalled Major Hazard Stevens, the general's son, an assistant adjutant of the 79th. "[T]here was nothing to be seen but the open field, extending two hundred yards in front and closed by the wall of woods, with the old zigzag rail fence at its edge."



Restored Reputation

In August 1862, morale problems compelled the 79th New York to mutiny. Isaac Stevens was brought in, and under his leadership the Highlanders had become a reputable fighting force by Ox Hill.

As they advanced, Highlander William Lusk exclaimed to the younger Stevens, "There is no enemy there! [T]hey have fallen back; we shall find nothing there." But within yards of the woods, Lusk's hopeful words were mocked by a deadly volley that staggered Stevens' line.

Four Confederate brigades steadily concentrated their fire on the Union attackers. Particularly effective was Harry Hays' Brigade of Louisianians, commanded by Colonel Henry B. Strong, holding Lawton's right flank. To their right, Brig. Gen. Maxcy Gregg's Brigade, also part of A.P. Hill's Division, had joined Field's and Branch's brigades. Although the Southerners were no longer concealed, the trees and fence solidified and reinforced their position.

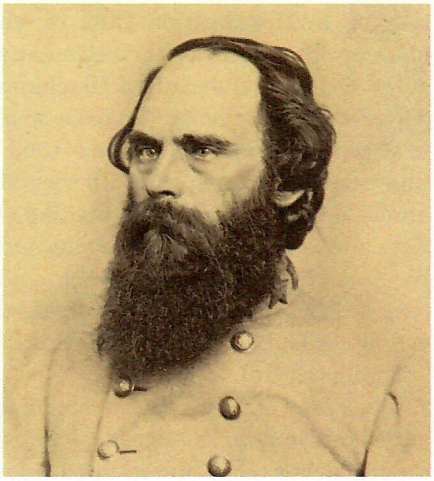
Isaac Stevens was not done yet, however. As his men returned fire, the general shifted his line left 40 yards by pushing the 50th Pennsylvania beyond the 28th Massachusetts. Stevens then grabbed the 79th's national flag and personally renewed the attack, only to be killed moments later. Spurred by his heroics, however, the attack rolled on.

The troops in Jackson's center were in no position to repel this strike. Hays' Louisianans had borne the brunt of the assault, taking fire from both the 79th New York and the 28th Massachusetts. Colonel Strong knew his thinning brigade was nearing collapse and asked Lawton to be replaced. Told Georgians under Colonel Edward L. Thomas would do so, Strong ordered his men back without waiting for those replacements to appear. In no need of persuasion, Hays' men began streaming rearward.

Strong's hasty action invited disaster, for at that moment the Federals entered the woods. Advancing with a fury, the Highlanders and Irishmen opened a melee worthy of their Celtic forebears. Thrusting bayonets and swinging muskets like clubs, they shattered what remained of Hays' Brigade. As Dennis Ford of the 28th Massachusetts recalled, "When we got into the woods, we ran through what we did not shoot. We bayonetted them. One man begged for mercy, a yankee ran him through." The ferocious attack Stevens had ordered before his death now threatened to tear asunder Jackson's line.

Jubal Early's Brigade—long positioned in

HARPER'S WEEKLY



Rising to the Occasion

Left to right: Colonel James Alexander Walker, 13th Virginia, Captain Robert Doak Lilley, 25th Virginia, and Colonel John Stringer Hoffman, 31st Virginia, led the Confederates' timely response at Chantilly. All three would survive the war, but Hoffman lost a foot in February 1865.

Jackson's center precisely for such an emergency—was suddenly unavailable, however. Shortly before, General Starke had appeared in person and frantically appealed to Early for help against Reno's 51st New York, advancing on Jackson's far left. With little choice, Early began moving his brigade away. In the confusion of storm and battle, however, the 13th, 25th, and 31st Virginia regiments were inadvertently left behind.

Amid the downpour, those lonely regiments were suddenly swept up in a torrent of men as Hays' shattered brigade raced for the rear, followed by the Union 3rd Brigade, now commanded by Lt. Col. David Morrison. What they did not see was General Early. But at this moment of chaos and uncertainty, three Virginian leaders would emerge to avert pending defeat.

Best known of the three was 13th Virginia Colonel James Alexander Walker. Born August 27, 1832, near Mount Meridian, Va., Walker was an exceptionally bright and headstrong boy. Frequently truant from school, he once vowed to someday return a teacher's beating. He was provided that opportunity in 1852 as a cadet at the Virginia Military Institute, although to a different strict instructor—Major Thomas J. Jackson. Once, after Walker successfully completed a blackboard math problem, he watched as Jackson erased the blackboard and directed Walker to repeat his work. When Walker demanded to know why he should do so, Jackson had him arrested. Walker promptly challenged the major to a duel, to which Jackson replied by expelling Walker—preventing the cadet from graduating third in his class.

Walker then studied law at the University of Virginia and passed the bar in 1856, opening a practice in Newbern, Va. In 1858, he married Sarah A. Poage, who would bear him six children; in 1860, he was serving as a Virginia state attorney.

With the outbreak in war, Walker raised the Pulaski Guards, which became Company C, 4th Virginia Infantry. After leading the unit during its baptism of fire at the Battle of Falling Waters (Hoke's Run) on July 2, 1861, Walker garnered a commendation from now-Maj. Gen. Thomas Jackson and promotion for gallantry. Accepting his promotion from Jackson in person uncharacteristically unsettled Walker—they had not met since his VMI challenge—but Jackson received the new lieutenant colonel warmly, as if no tension between them had ever existed.

Serving briefly as Colonel A.P. Hill's deputy with the 13th Virginia, Walker on February 26, 1862, was promoted to colonel and given command of the regiment upon Hill's rise to brigade chief. He led the 13th throughout Jackson's 1862 Shenandoah Valley Campaign, including fighting at Cross Keys and Port Republic. Joining Jackson's force for the Seven Days Battles, Walker led the 13th through fighting at Gaines' Mill—assuming brigade command when Brig. Gen. Arnold Elzey was wounded—and then at White Oak Swamp and Malvern Hill. Although Early assumed formal command of the brigade on July 1—which restored Walker to regimental command—both Lee and Jackson had noticed the fiery colonel's skill. The 13th Virginia certainly benefited from Walker's leadership at Cedar Mountain and then Second Manassas, where the 13th and Early's Brigade turned back repeated Union assaults on Jackson's left in the Unfinished Railroad Cut.

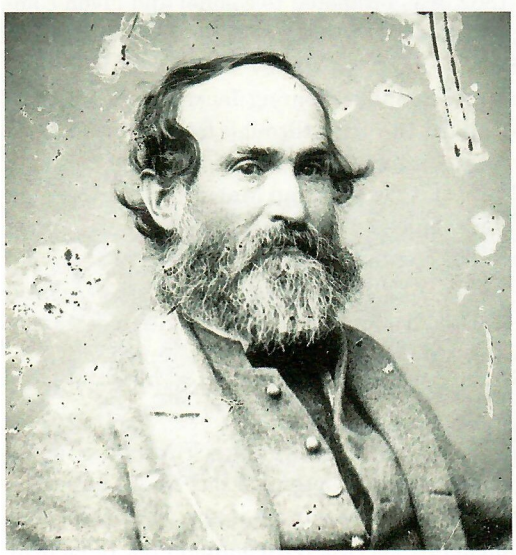
That Captain Robert Doak Lilley of the 25th Virginia acted as decisively as he did that stormy September day might have surprised many who knew him as a survey instrument salesman before entering Confederate service. Born January 28, 1836, near Greeneville, Va., Lilley graduated from Washington College and was in Charleston, S.C.—presumably on business—when the firing on Fort Sumter occurred. Back in Virginia, he recruited the Augusta Lee Rifles, which in May became the 25th Virginia's Company C, Lilley its captain. Although their first significant combat experience, at the July 1861 Bat-

READING ROOM 2020/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; HERITAGE AUCTIONS, DALLAS; LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

tle of Rich Mountain on June 15, ended in disaster when most of the regiment surrendered, Lilley and Jedediah Hotchkiss (later Jackson's noted mapmaker) led a small band in escaping. Joining Jackson's 1862 Valley Campaign, Lilley and the 25th Virginia were attached to Elzey's Brigade, fighting at Cross Keys and Port Republic and joining Jackson in the Seven Days. Lilley served here under Colonel Walker, commanding the brigade through actions at Gaines' Mill, White Oak Swamp, and Malvern Hill.

When the 25th Virginia wavered and broke at Cedar Mountain on August 9, Lilley grabbed the regiment's colors and restored order, earning Early's commendation for gallantry. Early again noted his leadership after Second Manassas, when in command of the brigade's skirmishers, Lilley repulsed an advancing Federal column—probably Stevens' 79th New York, ironically. Little did Lilley know just how soon he would again see the Highlanders.

The third Virginian seizing the moment at Chantilly was Colonel John Stringer Hoffman of the 31st Virginia, the oldest and least experienced of the three. Born June 25, 1821, in Weston, Va., Hoffman hailed from a "Unionist-leaning" western Virginia county that seceded from the Confederacy and joined the state of West Virginia in 1863. By 1841, he was studying law with his uncle, a judge in nearby Clarksburg. Hoffman was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates' 1859-60 session, serving also in the April 1861 Special Session that approved secession. Lacking personal interest in preserving slavery, Hoffman supported secession only after being promised that future tax income on slaves would reach his county.



Star in the Making

Jubal Early wasted no time making a name for himself, earning a brigadier's star for his showing at Blackburn's Ford in July 1861.

On May 13, 1861, he enlisted in the Harrison State Guards, which in July became Company C, 31st Virginia Infantry. Although appointed sergeant major—the regiment's top enlisted man—Hoffman missed its first battle at Rich Mountain. Politics' pull remained strong because Hoffman spent much of 1861 in Richmond, advising the Judge Advocate General and Inspector General's offices on property law and other legal matters. Although being in Richmond kept him from the 31st's first victory—the December 13 Battle of Alleghany Mountain—it likely explains how the very next day Hoffman vaulted over more experienced officers to become the regiment's major. Despite others' consternation at his elevation, John Hoffman quickly proved a skilled field grade officer and on May 1, 1862, was given command of the 31st.

Chaos at Chantilly

The 13th, 25th, and 31st Virginia succeeded in blunting the 5 p.m. attack by Stevens, in charge of Reno's 9th Corps. Kearny was killed during his subsequent attack on A.P. Hill's position in the Cornfield.

Illness, however, kept Hoffman from active service for much of 1862. Though present at the May 8 Battle of McDowell, Hoffman missed the fighting "violently ill" and then spent months convalescing in a Richmond home that kept him from leading the 31st in Jackson's Valley Campaign and the Seven Days fighting at Gaines' Mill and Malvern Hill. Only by August 25 had he recovered enough to rejoin the regiment, having missed its critical Cedar Mountain victory.

Hoffman led his regiment into battle for the first time on August 29 at Second Manassas, joining Walker's 13th Virginia guarding Jackson's extreme right flank. Serving later that day as the brigade's skirmishers earned Early's notice that "the Thirty-first Regiment by skirmishing kept the body of the enemy's infantry...in check until the head of General Longstreet's corps made its appearance..." Although some standing amid the thunderous storm and advancing enemy at Chantilly might have questioned Hoffman's abilities, he quickly dispelled any doubts.

Acting intuitively, with coordination born of natural leadership, Walker, Lilley, and Hoffman instantly pushed their regiments forward. A fresh line of veteran troops pressed south like a tidal wave, sweeping away in an instant Stevens' attackers and with them Union hopes for breaking Jackson's line and victory in this fight. As Morrison's brigade fled in disorder, the 13th, 25th, and 31st Virginia restored Jackson's position along the wood line. Walker, Lilley, and Hoffman's initiative had literally saved Stonewall Jackson and the Confederacy from disaster.

Early's thorough official report on the Virginia Campaign, which details the Ox Hill fight, barely mentions this action, however: "On reaching the position General Starke wished me to occupy, I found that three of my regiments (the Thirteenth, Twenty-fifth, and Thirty-first Virginia Regiments) had not followed the rest of the brigade, and I immediately sent my aide, Lieutenant [S.H.] Early, to see what was the cause of it. He found these regiments engaged with the enemy in their front, Hays' brigade, under Colonel Strong, of the 6th Louisiana Regiment, having fallen back in confusion and passed through these regiments, followed by the enemy, just as my orders were being carried out."

Neither in this report nor in his 1912 memoir did Early note the importance of his three regiments' action or list Walker, Lilley, or Hoffman by name.

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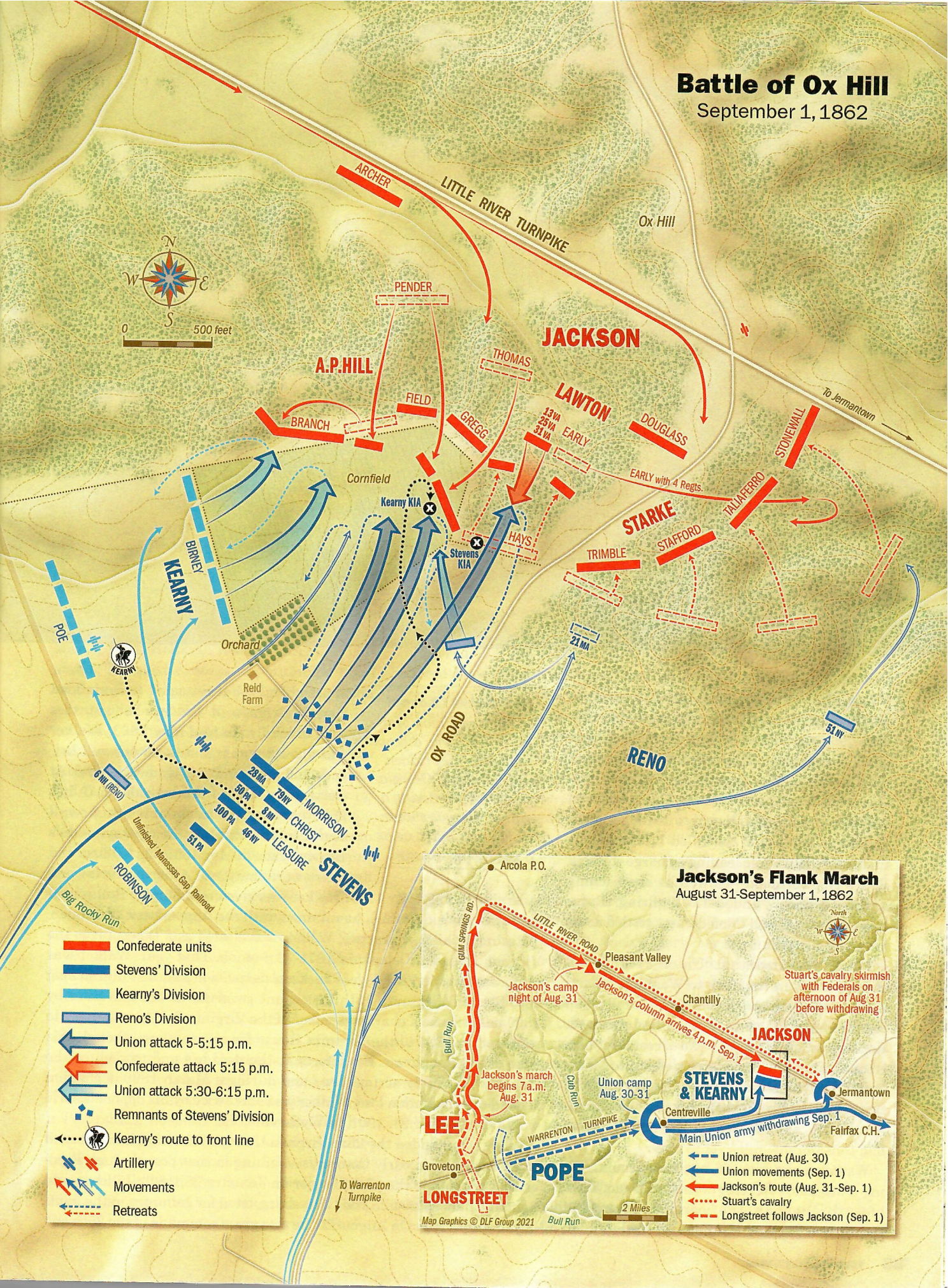
Battle of Ox Hill
September 1, 1862
ARCHER
LITTLE RIVER TURNPIKE
Ox Hill
PENDER
JACKSON
A.P.HILL
THOMAS
LAWTON
FIELD
BRANCH
GREGG
13 VA
25 VA
31 VA
EARLY
DOUGLASS
STONEWALL
To Jermantown
EARLY with 4 Regts.
TALIAFERRO
STARKE
STAFFORD
TRIMBLE
HAYS
Cornfield
Kearny KIA
Stevens KIA
BIRNEY
KEARNY
POE
Orchard
Reid Farm
21 MA
OX ROAD
RENO
51 NY
6 NH (RENO)
28 MA
50 PA
79 NY
8 MI
100 PA
46 NY
MORRISON
CHRIST
LEASURE
51 PA
STEVENS
ROBINSON
Unfinished Manassas Gap Railroad
Big Rocky Run
Confederate units
Stevens' Division
Kearny's Division
Reno's Division
Union attack 5-5:15 p.m.
Confederate attack 5:15 p.m.
Union attack 5:30-6:15 p.m.
Remnants of Stevens' Division
Kearny's route to front line
Artillery
Movements
Retreats
To Warrenton Turnpike
Jackson's Flank March
August 31-September 1, 1862
Arcola P.O.
GUM SPRINGS RD.
LITTLE RIVER ROAD
Pleasant Valley
Jackson's camp night of Aug. 31
Jackson's column arrives 4 p.m. Sep. 1
Chantilly
Stuart's cavalry skirmish with Federals on afternoon of Aug 31 before withdrawing
JACKSON
Bull Run
Jackson's march begins 7 a.m. Aug. 31
Cub Run
Union camp Aug. 30-31
STEVENS & KEARNY
Jermantown
Centreville
LEE
WARRENTON TURNPIKE
Main Union army withdrawing Sep. 1
Fairfax C.H.
Groveton
POPE
LONGSTREET
2 Miles
Map Graphics © DLF Group 2021
Bull Run
Union retreat (Aug. 30)
Union movements (Sep. 1)
Jackson's route (Aug. 31-Sep. 1)
Stuart's cavalry
Longstreet follows Jackson (Sep. 1)

Regardless, the Virginians' decisive response and the loss of Union leadership caused by Stevens' death brought a lull in the fighting that enabled Jackson to straighten and strengthen his line. When Maj. Gen. Philip Kearny's division attempted to restart the fight, Jackson was more than ready. Kearny's death amid the gloaming—he would be killed by Georgians under A.P. Hill while leading a charge through Reid's ripe cornfield—as well as encroaching darkness finally ended the fighting. Rain-soaked Federals and Confederates settled down for an unpleasant night.

Dawn revealed that Union troops had slipped away in the dark to Washington and safety, signaling that Lee's effort to follow up the Second Manassas victory had faltered. Regardless, after a day or two of rest Southern troops began the long march north into Maryland. Many miles and battles lay ahead of the two armies before Appomattox Court House in April 1865, and Walker, Lilley, and Hoffman had considerable roles yet to play.

Walker found himself once more commanding a brigade, replacing wounded Isaac Trimble, throughout the coming Maryland Campaign. He was wounded at Antietam on September 17, but returned to again lead Early's Brigade at Fredericksburg, this time officially. In mid-May 1863, Walker was given command of the Stonewall Brigade and promoted to brigadier general. At Gettysburg, he led the brigade on Culp's Hill, earning the nickname "Stonewall Jim." In the fighting at Spotsylvania's Bloody Angle in May 1865, his left arm and elbow were shattered. After recovering and returning in February 1865, Walker was given command of Ramseur's/Pegram's Division, which he retained until the Appomattox surrender.

'A Gallant Charge'

One-armed Union Maj. Gen. Phil Kearny did not realize he had ridden into a group of Georgia troops after ordering a charge. He was shot in the hip and killed as he tried to ride away.

Resuming his law practice, Walker was elected as a Democrat to the Virginia House of Delegates' 1871-72 Session. That year, Walker was also awarded the VMI degree Jackson's expulsion had cost him so long ago. Elected Virginia's 13th lieutenant governor in 1878, Walker by 1890 had become a charter member of the Virginia Bar Association. He returned in 1895 to the Virginia House for two sessions, though this time as a Republican. His efforts at the decade's end to reenter the House were highly acrimonious and during a March 1899 deposition related to one election loss, Walker was shot twice by his opponents. He would die October 21, 1901, in Wytheville, Va.

Lilley commanded the 25th Virginia through Antietam but returned to his company in early October, remaining in that post through Fredericksburg. Made the 25th's major on January 28, 1863, Lilley would fight at Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, cited for gallantry in the fighting on Culp's Hill. On August 20, he was given command of the 25th and

PHOTO 12/GETTY IMAGES

made a lieutenant colonel, leading the regiment in the Mine Run Campaign and at the Wilderness and Spotsylvania—fighting so costly that the 25th and 48th Virginia were merged on May 21, 1864. Ten days later, Lilley was temporarily elevated to brigadier general and given command of Pegram's Brigade before being joining Early's Valley Army. At Stephenson's Depot, on July 20, 1864, Lilley rallied his troops but was thrice wounded and left on the field to be captured. Then left behind by retreating Federals, he eventually recovered to command reserve forces in the Valley until the war's end. Postwar, Lilley became financial officer at Washington College, where Robert E. Lee was president. Never married, he died on November 12, 1886, and buried in Staunton, Va.

Hoffman would lead the 31st Virginia through Antietam and Fredericksburg. Ever the politician, he requested leave on March 15, 1863, to attend the Virginia House session in Richmond, a request Early quickly denied. Regardless, Hoffman led the 31st through Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, and assumed brigade command on July 10 until replaced by Brig. Gen. John Pegram in October. When Pegram was wounded at the Wilderness on May 5, 1864, Hoffman resumed brigade command. The next evening, he stumbled upon unidentified troops in the darkness. Upon learning he faced New Yorkers, he was able to get away. Hoffman led the brigade at Spotsylvania—slightly wounded in helping to recapture the Mule Shoe—as well as North Anna and Cold Harbor until replaced by Lilley on June 4, which returned Hoffman to the 31st.

Joining Early's Army of the Valley, Hoffman led the 31st at Monocacy, Md., Early's assault on Washington, D.C., and in the Shenandoah Valley fighting. On September 21, Hoffman resumed brigade command—Pegram assuming command of Maj. Gen. Robert Rodes' Division following Rodes' death at Third Winchester—leading it through battle at Fisher's Hill and Cedar Creek.

During the Siege of Petersburg, Hoffman was gravely wounded leading the brigade's probe of Union lines at Hatcher's Run on February 6, 1865. Struck in the left leg and carried from the field, Hoffman wavered near death in a Petersburg hospital until summoning his friend, Surgeon Archibald Atkinson, who reported finding "two inches of the tibia bone protruding beyond the flesh." Saving Hoffman's life required removing his left foot. Given a medical furlough to recover in Richmond, Hoffman was paroled there on May 9.

PHOTO BY MELISSA A. WINN

History Was Made Here

Chantilly was a relatively small-scale battle, but the enormity of its Civil War legacy cannot be overlooked. A grassroots effort in the mid-1980s to establish what is now 4.9-acre Ox Hill Battlefield Park, featuring stone monuments to slain Union generals Phil Kearny and Isaac Stevens (above), marked the genesis of the modern Civil War battlefield preservation movement, now carried on by organizations such as the American Battlefield Trust. It also is home to the nation's first bilingual Civil War Trails sign, with text in Spanish and Korean.

Returning home was harder for Hoffman than his fellow Chantilly counterparts. Time spent in Baltimore being fitted for a prosthetic leg offered hope "that with time I can walk again," but his Clarksburg hometown had for two years been in pro-Union West Virginia, which barred former Confederates from practicing law. Hoffman, in response, traveled frequently between Clarksburg, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and elsewhere, selling parcels from his considerable land holdings. In 1872, with most anti-Confederate laws by then repealed, Hoffman was elected to the state's Supreme Court of Appeals, serving until the effects of his never-healed wound forced his resignation. Never married, Hoffman died on November 18, 1877. He is buried in the Clarksburg Odd Fellows Cemetery.

The three officers, who crossed paths frequently during the war, had much in common. Respected at home, though none was a soldier by profession, each eagerly served Virginia's secession cause from early on. All rose quickly to brigade or division command and two became brigadier generals. Each played a vital role in the war's most significant battles, two at Gettysburg and another at Spotsylvania. Although all three were wounded, they would survive to see the war end and the nation reunited. Even so, what the three achieved amid a thunderous downpour at Chantilly would be perhaps their finest moment. By demonstrating remarkable leadership at such a critical moment of the battle, Walker, Lilley, and Hoffman helped save Stonewall and prevent a disastrous Confederate defeat.

David A. Welker, a professional historian and military analyst for the federal government, is the author of Tempest at Ox Hill *(Da Capo, 2002) and* The Cornfield: Antietam's Bloody Turning Point *(Casemate Press, 2020). He lives in Centreville, Va.*