

Wade Hampton III: Combat - Part 5

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by Bob Dill - Publisher of The Times Examiner

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General Wade Hampton III stands alone as one of the greatest warriors of all time. General Hampton was wounded more than five times in the service of his country. He raised troops, arms and money for the service of the Confederacy. He lost his fortune, home and a son as a result of his unselfish devotion to his countrymen. He did not however lose a major engagement in the face of the enemy while in command of a group of fighting men. Confederate History is American History and Wade Hampton III is truly one of the greatest Americans of all time.

Wade Hampton entered the Confederate States service shortly after the bombardment of Fort

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Summer in Charleston, South Carolina April 12, 1861. Hampton traveled to Charleston to personally recruit men for his Legion and the Confederacy. He paid for newspapers to publish calls for volunteers around the State. He was concerned that he was too late to recruit as calls went out after secession for volunteers to enter service in the South Carolina Militia. Hampton interviewed men from the Army, Navy, the Citadel Cadets and civilian life for his recruitment. In seven days he had more men than he could use.

Hampton recruited men for infantry, artillery and cavalry. He equipped and clothed them with family money raised from the sale of cotton. Hampton also equipped troops from the 16th South Carolina Volunteers, The Greenville Regiment, Companies A, E and I. Hampton offered to donate money and cotton to the Confederate Government but it was decided that Hampton had been more than generous and he was refused.

Hampton drilled his men on a portion of his plantation and on the grounds of South Carolina College, now the University of South Carolina. He selected officers with leadership skills rather than the usual military experience. This would prove to be a wise decision in the battles that were yet to come. The men responded well were satisfied with Camp Hampton because it was large enough, wooded and had a natural spring on the property.

Hampton was not a young man when he entered military service. He was forty-three years old but he was in excellent shape. He was a skilled rider and marksman due to hunting on his family property. He was just over six feet in height and weighed over two hundred pounds. He had red flowing hair and would enter service with sideburns attached to his moustache. For feats of strength in camp, he would place a bear cub on the back of a donkey. Hampton wielded a cavalry saber that was custom made for him by The Palmetto Armory of Columbia. It weighed over six pounds with full hand cover and a stabilizer and ring to place his little finger in for more cutting force.

The First Battle of Manasses on July 21, 1861 would give Colonel Hampton and his men their first experience of the horrors of war. Hampton was leading the Legion of infantry into battle in Virginia about thirty miles from Washington, DC. The Legion was positioned just beyond the Warrenton Turnpike to the East of the field. At the Robinson House he and his men awaited their orders. When Henry Slocum of the 27th New York crushed Bernard Bee's (South Carolina) left flank the men were pressed into the battle. Hampton's men and the 7th Georgia troops under Colonel Lucius J. Gartrell moved into position to cover Bee's retreat. This part of the battle is known as Young's Branch.

The fighting was strong and fierce as the Yankees became enraged at the sight of their casualties. Canister fire from artillery was poured into the advancing Federals and volleys were exchanged. Colonel Hampton had his horse shot from under him. Not to be repelled he picked up an Enfield rifle and directed his men to follow him and do what he does. His men formed to the left of the Robinson House and the Federals were repulsed for the moment. Stonewall Jackson's men were forming battle lines to reinforce Confederate positions on Henry Hill. Hampton and his men were

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power engaged with William T. Sherman's men, the tenth assault of the day. Hampton's men stopped the 79th New York in their tracks

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Hampton and his men were driven back by the 69th New York the only fresh Sherman regiment. When the 39th New York joined them the Confederates held briefly but then fell back. PGT Beauregard ordered Hampton's men forward from their position. As Hampton moved forward canister fire from enemy artillery struck Hampton in the head, below his eye and his ankle. He would not finish the battle but Jackson's and Hampton's men put the Yankees on the run toward Washington. Jefferson Davis the President of the Confederacy commended Hampton and his men for their outstanding part in the victory. Hampton would require almost two months to heal and a piece of lead had to be removed from below his eye.

After the Federal loss at Manassas, Abraham Lincoln fired the Commanding General Irvin McDowell and replaced him with George McClellan. Hampton and his men were pressed into service in the Chesapeake Bay area of Virginia near the York and James Rivers to attack Union Gunboats with artillery. McClellan was hoping to secure Richmond, the capitol of the Confederacy. The men performed brilliantly against the Union gunboats.

McClellan was attempting to cross the Chickahominy River, engage the Confederates and capture Richmond. Hampton was ordered to protect the flank of General Joe Johnston's army. After crossing with six guns and troops the fighting began. The fighting became so fierce and so close that Hampton encouraged his men "Do not fire until you can feel the enemy on your bayonets!" The 16th North Carolina under Hampton, newly appointed to Brigadier General clashed with the Yankees. The two groups shot each other to pieces sometimes only twenty-five yards apart. As Hampton was riding the lines, a bullet tore through his foot. Blood was pouring but the General would not dismount for fear that he would not be able to remount. A surgeon was summoned and removed the boot and bullet with Hampton still mounted. He continued his command and the fight.

Because of the injury and swelling the foot became infected. The boot had to be cut from his foot and he went home to heal. General Smith praised Hampton and Smith claimed that "Hampton has no other equal in battle." Hampton would return to battle serving in no particular role until his transfer to the cavalry.

As Jeb Stuart's Senior Brigadier the two worked together well but Hampton felt that the South Carolina cavalry bore the greater part of the fighting while the Virginia cavalry basked in glory and minor roles. The first skirmish Hampton would participate in happened in Frederick, Maryland against the Ohio cavalry. The Ohio troopers charged the Confederates and were soundly defeated. A bullet narrowly missed Hampton's head during this fight.

At Burkittsville General Alfred Pleasonton attacked Hampton and the South Carolinians held from daybreak until two in the afternoon. Both armies withdrew and Hampton headed to Harpers Ferry to support Stonewall Jackson and Jeb Stuart in attacking the Federal Arsenal there. The Confederates horses and men were famished and in need of food. The Confederates overtook the

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personal and captured 12,000 men and supplies. Sharpsburg was next but the Confederate cavalry saw little or no action in one of the bloodiest battle of the war.
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The battle of Brandy Station saw more cavalry concentrated in one place than any other battle of the war. Historians wrongly refer to this battle as the largest cavalry battle of the war. Infantry and artillery was also in action at Brandy Station. A small Virginia town with a railroad depot was where the 11th Union cavalry fired on the 6th Confederate cavalry commanded by Grumble Jones. The fighting was fierce and Fleetwood Hill became the major portion of the battlefield for cavalry action. The enemy took the hill three times but Hampton drove the enemy from the field on the forth charge. Hampton was again the hero.

Jeb Stuart's raid into the North would account for a large number of Union supplies and weapons captured. Even though he rode around the Union army, Lee was upset at Stuart for arriving at Gettysburg on the afternoon of the second day. Lee was forced into battle on July 1, 1863 and did not have Stuart with him to screen and spy on the Union army. Some historians feel that the Confederate loss at Gettysburg was Stuart's fault. Actually Stuart was following Lee's orders to the letter. Hampton and his cavalry were also with Stuart. After a short, hard rebuke by Lee, Stuart was given orders for the next day.

Earlier in the afternoon when the cavalry arrived at Gettysburg Hampton encountered a young sniper from the Michigan cavalry. The trooper from Michigan was hiding behind

A stump and fired his carbine at Hampton. Hampton heard the bullet in the air as the trooper leveled his weapon to fire again. Hampton pulled his pistol and fired hitting the stump, spraying some wood in the trooper's face. The trooper fired again and grazed Hampton's chest and cavalry cape. As the trooper was loading his powder fouled and he held up his hand as to call a momentary halt to the action. Hampton held his pistol barrel up in duel like fashion to give the young trooper a chance to load and fire. The trooper swabbed and loaded his carbine while Hampton patiently waited. On the third exchange Hampton struck the trooper's wrist, an excellent shot by any standards and the trooper fled into the woods.

As the trooper was fleeing, a Michigan cavalry Lieutenant rode up behind Hampton and struck the General in the head with his saber opening a four-inch gash. Any other man would have fell from the saddle but Hampton turned and fired his pistol at point blank range at the Lieutenant's stomach. The pistol misfired and Hampton reeled off two more shots all misfiring. Hampton pursued and flung the pistol at the attacker before retiring to the surgeon to plaster his wound. Hampton suffered from a headache but remained at his post and would fight again the next day.

East Cavalry Battlefield lies three miles Northeast of the main battlefield of Gettysburg. Hampton, Stuart, Fitzhugh Lee and others were in position at the Northwest corner of the field on Dutch Road near the Trostle, Rummel and Lott farms. In the afternoon Hampton collided with the cavalry of George Armstrong Custer. The fight inspired a modern day painting called "Hampton's Duel." The

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fighting became so intense that the Federals were firing cannon into their own men. The Federals would try to leave the field only to be attacked and cut off by the Confederates. Hampton was knocked off of his horse and he drew both pistol and saber. He remounted and two Union troopers were raising their sabers and two others struck Hampton in the head. One opened the gash from the day before and the other opened a new one. With blood half blinding him, Hampton wheeled and shot one and struck the other in the top of the head. The blow was so hard that it cut the trooper's head in half to the chin. North Carolina troopers helped Hampton out of the fray. As Hampton was galloping away on his favorite horse "Butler" he jumped a fence. As he was going over, a cannon ball exploded and struck Hampton with shrapnel in his side. As he was carried to safety he encouraged his men to continue the fight. Hampton had a fractured skull and a badly injured side. The Confederate cavalry failed to reach the rear of the Union infantry that day and Pickett's Charge was a failure as a result. However Hampton fought gallantly that day.

After Jeb Stuart was mortally wounded at Yellow Tavern, Robert E. Lee appointed Hampton in command of the cavalry for The Army of Northern Virginia. Lee could have appointed his son or nephew as commander but Hampton had proved his worth more than once. He would later prove Lee's decision a wise one but he would suffer the loss of his son in the process.

Hampton and his men converged on Trevilian Station on June 11, 1864. Hampton was sure that Phillip Sheridan and George Custer's Union cavalry would be trying to stop the flow of supplies into Richmond via the Virginia Central Railroad. The railroad stopped at the station and continued past Louisa Court House toward Richmond. The battle lasted for two days with both sides gaining advantages at times. Hampton and The Citadel Cadets made a gallant charge late evening on July 12. The charge drove the Federals from the field where Hampton and his men captured most of the Federal's supply trains and weapons. Sheridan retired from the field and Richmond was able to gain much needed supplies.

At Gravelly Run in 1864, Hampton's son Preston was mortally wounded and his son Wade the forth sprang off of his horse to attend to Preston only to receive a severe bullet wound to the back. Hampton had lost his brother earlier in the war. Hampton was a man that had given his all and would still fight to preserve his nation's honor.

Hampton would pursue William T. Sherman throughout his march in South Carolina. Sherman hated South Carolina and Hampton in particular because at Manasses Hampton's men repelled his and Sherman could never defeat the gallant Hampton. When Sherman came through Columbia, South Carolina he stopped by Hampton's mansion at Millwood. He burned it to the ground. Hampton had now lost all he had worked for including a brother and a son.

Wade Hampton of South Carolina is the true embodiment of a gentleman, honorable soldier and role model. There are not many left like him and his statue stands at the state House and Congressional Hall as a man that gave all he had to his fellow man. South Carolina citizens need to know more about this honorable man. He is truly a legend that deserves and demands our respect.

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