

**Volume 18**

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**A House Divided: HD 87 Bloody Civil  
War Tactics – II**

**Lead: One hundred and fifty years ago the Republic was facing its greatest crisis. This continuing series examines the American Civil War. It is "A House Divided."**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: In later years, General Daniel Harvey Hill remembered the Confederate dead stacked like cordwood before Yankee lines at Gaines Mill east of Richmond during the Seven Days Battles in 1862. He said, "It was thought to be a great**

**thing to charge a battery of artillery or an earthwork lined with infantry....We were very lavish of blood in those days.” But, in fact, it was the tactics of Hill and his fellow leaders as much as the gallantry of their men that caused such a surfeit of gore. Union and Confederate leaders alike threw men into horrendously fatal charges against breastworks filled with vigilant enemy soldiers armed to the teeth over and over and over again. It was calculated that a charging enemy had to have a 3-1 advantage if it was to overcome troops dug and ready.**

**One of the main reasons for such tactical blood-letting was the rifle. In contrast to the smooth-bore musket, a**

rifle has a helical groove cut into the interior surface of the barrel which causes the bullet to spin and gives it much longer range and greater accuracy – 80 yards to 300 yards. By 1863, most soldiers on both sides had rifled muskets. The result: enormous casualties and an eventual shift toward the tactical defense, tempting the enemy into a fool-hardy offensive charge.

Such tactics only rarely worked anymore. Generals, on both sides, steeped in the traditional approach of the close-ordered attack characteristic of the Napoleonic era, regularly sent their men charging into the face of an entrenched enemy using long-range rifles and dug-in artillery and watched

**the casualties mount with horrific consequences. No one seemed to learn. Confederates paid the price at first, but even in 1864 in the Wilderness, Grant tried the same tactics and his men suffered accordingly, with the resulting carnage - 7000 Union casualties at Cold Harbor. Learning from painful experience, both armies in Virginia swapped spades for heroic charges and settled in around Petersburg for the longest siege, at 292 days, in American history.**

**At the School of Professional and Continuing Studies, University of Richmond, I'm Dan Roberts.**

## Resources

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