Early in 1864, Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant tightened Georgia. When the Federals broke through his lines on April 2, Lee put his plan into action. The wings of his army were in reserve around Amelia Court House, eastward, and marched to Danville along the Richmond and Danville Railroad.

Little was planned. High water made crossing the Appomattox River difficult, delaying the rendezvous, and the anticipated supplies were not at Amelia Court House. Lee also lost his last bridge over the Powhatan while seeking it, stopping the Federal cavalry in its tracks toward Farnsfield, get the cavalry in front of him, and then surround and capture him in his flight or surrender—began to take effect.

Fighting by day and marching by night, Lee’s subordinates and haphazardly led toward Farnsfield, their next supply station. The column stretched for miles, slowed by a continuous supply train. At almost every crossroads, the men and wagons bogged down and Gen. Philip H. Sheridan’s Union cavalry stormed into Lee’s rear guard. On April 4, the Federals brought Lee to bay at Little Beaver’s Creek, where in three separate engagements about a quarter of the Confederate force was captured or captured, Lee, absorbing the magnitudes of the disaster, remarked, “My God, has the army been dissolved?”

The survivors crossed Highland Bridge, the large railroad trestle over the Appomattox River and the scene of intense combat earlier in the day, and made their way to Farnsfield. The next day, as they distributed rations from the trains at the depot, the gunfire of Federal cavalry was heard in the distance. Lee decided to retreat.

On April 5, Lee was on the move. He decided to try to head south. The Federals eventually cut off Lee’s path at Amelia Court House. Grant’s Union army relentlessly pursed him. When Lee and his army departed the Richmond-Petersburg line of march on April 6, Lee put his plan in motion. The wings of his army were in reserve around Amelia Court House, eastward, and marched to Danville along the Richmond and Danville Railroad.

Lee and Grant met not in the village rendezvous of Wilmer McLean—who had moved there to escape the war after the First Battle of Oxonahom—nor around his Northern Virginia home—to sign the surrender documents. The huts of Lee’s army lined both sides of the river while preparing him for turning them over. Both sides knew the moment of decision was coming.

At Appomattox Court House, on the afternoon of April 9, a simple process of national reconciliation began after four bloody years. When a final Confederate armistice attempt failed, Gen. Robert E. Lee accepted the inevitable, saying, “There is nothing left but to go and see General Grant, and I had rather die a thousand deaths.” That afternoon Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Ulysses S. Grant, ending the war in Virginia and ensuring the largest Confederate army from the field. Other surrender arrangements, the next in a line to May 24 at North Carolina under Gen. Joseph E. Johnston, concluded at midnight on April 12, when Gen. Stand Wade capitulated in the Indian Territory.

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