Lee and Gordon's Mills is located on the west side of West Chickamauga Creek approximately two miles to the northeast of the town of Chickamauga, Georgia. It is at the site of Red Belt Road off Gordon's Mill Terrace. The area appears on the Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia/Tennessee quadrangle of the U.S. Geological Survey maps.

Wartime view of Lee and Gordon's Mills

James Gordon, one of the largest landowners in the area, developed the site of an earlier mill about two miles to the northeast of Crawfish Springs, on the west bank of West Chickamauga Creek, in 1857. This corn mill was a large two-story white frame structure. He also erected a water-powered saw mill nearby. This was an ideal location, being at the point where the LaFayette Road crossed West Chickamauga Creek. Gordon also established a general store at the mills for the use of farmers in the surrounding area. There was a nearby blacksmith shop, and the stage and mail passed each week. The mills became a gathering place and social center for the community. Gordon entered into a partnership with his son-in-law, James Morgan Lee, who, by 1860, saw to the actual running of the mills. James Lee’s house stood on top of a rise of ground to the west of the mill.

When the Confederate Army of Tennessee withdrew from Chattanooga on September 6, 1863, most of the men marched through this area on the LaFayette Road. The division in Polk's Corps that was commanded by General Thomas Hindman camped for some time around the mill. General Braxton Bragg also made his headquarters in the area. Since most of his dispatches are headed "Snow Hill," it can be assumed that he occupied Clarissa Hunt's house. It was here that he formulated his plans for the northwest. "At about 1 p.m.,” General Wood stated “a force, apparently about a brigade of four regiments, emerged from the wood on the southern side of the creek, nearly opposite the center of my position, apparently with the intention of forcing a passage at the ford near the mills. A few well directed shots by infantry soon forced him to relinquish this design and seek the shelter of the woods. The enemy continued to hover in my front all afternoon.”

"September 18, our last day at the mill, was full of excitement," Lieutenant-Colonel Wilbur F. Hindman, in Wood’s Division, noted. "In the morning a rebel battery opened upon our pickets but were soon silenced by a few well directed shots... The brigade formed in line at the breastworks and remained all day, the men being permitted to retire a short distance to the rear, one third at a time, for their meals. Firing at the front was almost without cessation. As darkness came on we were ordered to spend the night in the entrenchments."

"The right wing went into an open field," John J. Hight, 58th Indiana Infantry Regiment, later wrote, "near the bank of the mill pond. The left wing took up a position in the edge of the timber as flankers. The enemy was reported to be approaching in force."

The Confederate force moving on Lee and Gordon's Mills was General Thomas Hindman's Division that had reached the Henderson House plantation on the LaFayette Road. General Leonidas Polk, the corps commander, was also present, and established his headquarters in the Henderson house. To enable General Polk to communicate with the rest of the army, a courier station was established his headquarters in the Henderson House. The 4th Alabama Cavalry Regiment wrote, "we moved along the easterly bank of the creek north of the mill... As we began the advance our regiment was on the extreme left of our line, and when we struck the Chickamauga we waded the stream just below the Lee and Gordon mill dam. Hoping to get over dry, a number of us started to run across the dam; but an officer shouted: 'Get off! They're going to rake you with grapeshot,' and we leaped into the water like so many bull frogs. When waded it was not quite waist deep. We learned in a few minutes that we could have gone over the dam dry-shod and in perfect safety. Down near the water's edge we reformed our line, and as we climbed the bank to the crest of the ridge in our front everyone was alert and at great tension."

The Confederate cavalymen who crossed the creek north of the mill had a more difficult time. "Having dismounted," a member of the 4th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment wrote, "we moved down the road to the Chickamauga in column. Fording the stream near the mill, we formed a line of battle on the opposite bank in the edge of a low, level beech wood, and placing our skirmishers a short distance in front, advanced through the woods. The enemy knew we were coming, and kept up an incessant shelling of the woods, some of the men being injured by limbs of trees torn off by the cannon balls. We had advanced but a short distance before the skirmishers became hotly engaged, which was the signal for a rapid movement, and we swept through the woods driving the enemy before us. They rallied at a fence in the edge of the woods and delivered an effective volley and fell back across a little field to a new line behind a fence and on the edge of another woods and delivered an effective volley and fell back across a little field to a new line behind a fence and on the edge of another woodland along an eminence where their artillery was planted. As our line was formed along from the woods into the open Chickamauga, and, although we ran our horses all the way, we lost valuable time before we dismounted to advance on foot at Lee & Gordon's Mill... As we began the advance..."

Throughout the morning and early afternoon of September 20, in spite of the major battle raging a short distance to the north, the area around Lee and Gordon's Mills remained relatively quiet. The Confederate General Joseph Wheeler's cavalry began advancing toward the mills. Facing the Confederates were two Federal cavalry brigades from the command of General Robert Mitchell. General Mitchell had been ordered to protect “at all hazards” the Federal hospitals and wagon trains at Crawfish Springs, less than two miles west of Lee and Gordon's Mills. Most of Wheeler's cavalrymen, dismounted, forded the creek north of the mill. The 4th Alabama Cavalry Regiment, on the extreme left of Wheeler's line, waded the waist-deep stream just below the mill dam.

John A. Wyeth, a member of the 4th Alabama CAValiary Regiment, described the crossing. "We early discovered the whole line of the Chickamauga, and, although we ran our horses all the way, we lost valuable time before we dismounted to advance on foot at Lee & Gordon's Mill... As we began the advance..."

The 8th Indiana Battery, stated, "I ordered one section to commence firing. I could not, in consequence, forward the column when the enemy discovered the effect of the fire... He was compelled to file his troops to the right and move off the road."

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order bringing our right nearer to General Deas' left, whose brigade extended beyond me to the right."

"Here line of battle was formed," reported Colonel J. G. Collart, commander of the 50th Alabama Infantry Regiment, "and the Fiftieth Alabama Infantry Regiment ... fighting the enemy. I retired 150 yards from the Twenty-eighth Regiment in rear slightly protected by the brow of the hill. After exchanging a few rounds with our battery the enemy retired. I had 1 man slightly wounded in the hand by a fragment of a shell. The charge was now advanced to the Chickamauga Creek, where I rejoined it with my regiment."

"We formed our line of battle, facing the creek, a few hundred yards from the right bank," Colonel John C. Reid, commanding the 18th Alabama Infantry Regiment in Manigault's Brigade, reported, "the enemy occupying the right bank and playing on us heavily with his batteries; but, owing to the configuration of the ground, did us little damage, wounding only 1 man.""

I formed the regiment in line of battle south of Chickamauga Creek. Company E and H ... I ordered to conform to the movements of the Twenty-eighth Alabama Regiment on my right. My command remained in this position for three hours mounted and then marched by the right flank and formed line of battle; [and] retired 150 yards from the Twenty-eighth Alabama Regiment to avoid the fire of the enemy's skirmishers in our front. In this position it rested upon arms for the night."

On the afternoon of September 18, General James A. Garfield, Rosecrans' Chief of Staff, visited the mill. A member of his cavalry escort, Charles H. Kirk, of the 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment, later wrote: "In the afternoon I went with General Garfield, Chief of Staff, to Lee & Gordon's Mills on the Chickamauga River. While there were dismounted and the General was talking to General Sheridan [this may have actually been General Wood] I was looking around to see what the place was like. The rebel sharpshooters were lying around and not very far above the ground. Opposite there was a field about 500 yards long and 300 yards wide. On the farther end and two sides were thick woods, the ground being covered with underbrush so dense that you could not see men in it. There was a pile of rifles about 100 yards from the end of the field next to the woods and about centrally located from the sides. While standing there I noticed a man run out of the woods to the rail pile, then another, and another, until six or seven of them reached it, and then opened up pretty lively on the battery. The Captain trained a gun on the rails. The first shot went over; the next struck the pile fairly in the center, the end being next to us. It threw the rails in every direction and our boys cheered lustily. Out of the six or seven men, I only saw two run away."

Throughout the afternoon artillery duel, Manigault had his men lying on the ground; Deas undoubtedly took the same precautions. But, owing to the undulating nature of the terrain on the west side of West Chickamauga Creek, the Federal artillery shells did little damage to the Confederates. Many of the Federal shells, one Confederate officer, observed, passed over the heads of the prone infantrymen and burst in the rear."

By dawn on September 19, Confederate officer. He was on horseback, and, with drawn saber, was attempting to hold his men to their position. He was killed and his body fell into our hands. Papers upon his person indicated that he was a colonel of a Pennsylvania regiment. We pursued a mile further, and ... drove them beyond Crawfish Springs. They captured a horse and captured a number of prisoners and a quantity of ordnance carriages."

After several hours of sustained skirmishing, Wheelers men pushed on the edge of Crawfish Springs. There they were engaged by a large number of Federal prisoners and a number of ordnance wagons. "After detailing a guard to look after the captured," the 4th Tennessee Cavalryman continued, "the balance of the command formed a line and were marched back to our horses. As we passed back to re-cross the Chickamauga the road was full of ambulances and litter bearing off the wounded and dead. The conditions of the other phase of the grim-visaged war, sickening to think about; friends and comrades dead and dying who a few hours before were full of life and energy. The blank faces of the dead cenotaphs turned toward the skies. Such scenes dissipate the excitement the advance creates. A friend who was mortally wounded and whom I had to leave with our courier, died that night, and his body still rests somewhere on the field his valor helped to win. We have seen paintings depicting the horrors of the battlefield, and which have been based on reality, but we have never imagined and countenanced the reality."

Although the fighting around Lee and Gordon's Mills was over, soldiers continued to occupy the area for some time. Following the Confederate defeat on Missionary Ridge, the area around the mills became the winter quarters camp for the Federal troops under Colonel Daniel McCook. The 4th Tennessee Cavalryman's command operated there, protecting the 50th and 4th Tennessee Infantry Regiments. McCook's men left their camp on May 3, 1864, joining Sherman for the Georgia campaign. On May 12, the next several days saw the Federal commands near the mill on their way to join Sherman. The 9th Indiana Infantry Regiment passed on May 12. John J. High, the regimental chaplain, later wrote: "We bivouacked just before reaching the mill. The residuals [after two hours rest] and the Chickamauga is crossed, just below the mill dam. The mill is running for the citizens, but they have little to be ground."

James Morgan Lee, Gordon's son-in-law, continued to operate the mill after the war. When it burned in 1867, Lee rebuilt the mill as the structure that currently stands on the site. Many veterans, from both armies, were present at the mill in later years. One of these was the cavalryman from the 4th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment who was quoted above, who visited in 1867. "We have been here [at the mill] many times and always remembered it as the place where the war closed," he stated. Soldiers are rushed upon fields of battle, and hurried away without knowing anything about it, always leaving a desire to see it again. I have often been here at the mill, and I always feel at the time to take in the situation really as it is, and sometimes many exaggerated impressions are left. It was just twenty-four years ago, [and]
Lee and Gordon's Mills to attack Crittenden's corps isolated at this point. The attack, however, was not made." Otho F. Strahl's Brigade was sent forward that same morning on the La Fayette Road toward the mill.

"Our army corps was in line of battle at 4 o'clock this a.m.,” Lieutenant W. J. Colburn, with the 3rd Wisconsin Artillery, wrote in his diary on the 13th. "There had been some skirmishing this forenoon. This afternoon our Div. was ordered forward. I went with Capt. Drury as Aide de Camp. He sent me back to bring up Swallow's battery which I did & then Capt. Drury who I found in the advance line of skirmishers with our battery. He was about half way up a little hill & eighty rods from a strip of timber. He did not go more than 15 paces before he was shot through the breast. The ball lodging about inch under the skin in the back. I returned with Capt. D & remained with him the rest of the day & until he was placed in the ambulance to go to Chattanooga. The ball passed straight through his body & though he bled but very little his wound is dangerous if not mortal. I tried to find where our battery was encamped but could not."

"On the 13th," John H. Renick, 44th Indiana Infantry Regiment, stated, "Van Cleve's division crossed the Chickamauga at the Mills and advanced on the LaFayette Road to John Henderson's plantation, where a sharp skirmish ensued, the rebels shelling the whole line." Van Cleve's advance brigade passed through the advance Federal pickets and made contact with another of Strahl's Confederate brigade. The Federal skirmishers, supported by an artillery battery, pushed up to the front line and pushed the Confederates back for a considerable distance, before receiving orders to withdraw. Confederate losses are not known, and the Federals suffered 5 men killed or wounded.

General Horatio P. Van Cleve, commanding the Third Division in the 21st Federal Army Corps, also reported: "On the 13th ... I made a reconnaissance with my division 3 miles toward La Fayette. We met the rebel cavalry immediately after passing our picket line and with sharp skirmishing, drove them back."

Except for a brief reconnaissance conducted by General Harker with two regiments on the 14th, there was no indication of consequence until September 18. General Wood made his headquarters in James Lee's house, west of the mill, and his men remained in their fortified positions on the grounds. Between 11 a.m. and noon on the 18th Wood reported the advance of Confederate skirmishers against his right front. Confederate artillery drove Wood's pickets back to the bend of West Chickamauga Creek, but made no effort at that time to follow the Federals across the stream.*

*I perceived a column of dust approaching my front on the main Lafayette Road," General Harker observed. The ground in that direction from Gordon's Mills is comparatively level for a space of a half mile square, wide, and free of timber; beyond that space the timber is quite large and dense. As the head of the column debouched from the skirt of timber, I perceived something white, which I mistook for a flag of truce. I therefore sent immediate word to the pickets not to fire. I soon perceived my mistake, and as the column approached it deployed. When in effective range of my artillery, I directed the battery to open upon the enemy, and he at once gave way and sought refuge in the timber.

skirmishers had worked their way almost to the banks of West Chickamauga Creek. "Bivouacking near the road that night," General Manigault reported, "we again occupied a position near the same place, but with the lines advanced and the left thrown forward three hundred or four hundred yards on the following morning, the enemy's artillery occasionally throwing a few shots over our neighborhood, but without effect, our skirmishers keeping up a steady fire with those of the enemy opposing them, suffering a small loss on their own part."

"Early on the morning of the 19th," Colonel John C. Reid, 28th Alabama Infantry Regiment, noted, "by orders from the brigadier general commanding, the regiment moved closer to the enemy, and formed a new line a short distance from the creek and well up to their batteries, which at intervals, kept up a vigorous fire, but with little effect, Companies B and G engaging those of the enemy on the opposite shore."

"The regiment moved to the front in line of battle," Major John N. Slaughter, 34th Alabama Infantry Regiment, stated, "through [an] open field between the creek and meadow, then across the left flank into a woods, and formed line in support of Captain Garrity's battery, which moved up to our front."

Around 3:00 p.m. on the afternoon of September 19th, General Hindman received orders to break off the engagement at Lee and Gordon's Mills and advance Federal pickets and made contact with a column of dust approaching my front. His position was briefly occupied by General Patton Anderson's Division and then by General John C. Breckinridge. This division, including elements of the famed Kentucky "Orphan" Brigade, took up positions along the creek. "Soon after taking up the new position, I was ordered to relieve Brig. Gen. Patton Anderson's division, which was facing the enemy opposite Lee and Gordon's Mills. The troops marched rapidly, yet it was late in the afternoon before this movement was completed. The division was hardly in position, when I received an order from the general commanding the army to move to the right, cross the Chickamauga to a point farther down, and occupy a position indicated."

About the same time as Hindman was ordered to cross the area, 3:00 p.m. In the afternoon, the Federal high command ordered General Wood to vacate the position and march his division north to the main battle area. Concerned that the position was untenable, General Breckinridge was able to cross the creek after he left, Wood requested that at least a brigade be supplied to guard the crossing. General Alexander McCook, commander of the 20th Federal Army Corps, was given the responsibility for the safety of Lee and Gordon's Mills. General McCook assigned General Sheridan's Division to the site. Sheridan's men briefly skirmished with Breckinridge's Confederates across the creek before also being ordered to the north. Sheridan left General Lytle's Brigade, with a section of artillery, to guard the area.

Lytle placed the artillery at the ford and his men behind the log breastworks that Wood had constructed earlier. Fortunately for Lytle's men, Breckinridge had been withdrawn soon after their arrival. Nevertheless, the Federals had a restless night. "We lay on our arms," a member of one of the Illinois regiments wrote, "expecting to be called in any emergency, for we could plainly hear the enemy busy in preparations." Lytle's Brigade remained in the vicinity of the mill until around 3:30 a.m. on the morning of September 20th, when they moved westward beyond Crawfish Springs.

at the same hour of the day, when we last saw this portion of the field, where Harrison's brigade made their fight, yet many things were true to the impression left, and what a rush of buried memories it resurrected! The old mill, where we crossed the Chickamauga, is still there, though very much dilapidated. The woodman's axe has leveled the dense beech grove on the north side, through which we moved to the attack. A few scattering trees are still standing to indicate the character of the timber that stood upon the ground. Now it is an enclosed field, upon which is growing in a rich luxuriance 'the tall yellow corn.' We tried to follow the line of our advance and suppose we did so, from the fact that the timber cleared away, the high ground beyond; upon which the enemy's battery was located, is plainly to be seen. We imagined that we found the little hillock on the far edge of the wood land where, when we were ordered to lie down, the enemy's shot sprinkled us with gravel. We cut a cornstalk as a memento from the spot where so many of our men were shot down."

James T. Holmes, who had been at the mill as a member of the 44th Ohio Infantry Regiment with Wood's Division in 1863, came back in 1897, after the National Military Park had been established. While visiting the southern end of the battlefield, he noted: "The monuments and tablets continue on up to Lee and Gordon's Mill -- still standing -- still running, for that matter, and still owned by the Lee estate. We passed our [wattime] camp which was across the road, a little to the northwest of the mill and stopped on top of the rise of ground immediately west of the mill where the Lee house stood during the war and still stands. It was General Wood's headquarters on the night of September 18, and the General with his wife and daughter, or the latter, was there quite recently. The road ran around the hill to the left, nearer the mill, in that 'older day.'"

Lee and Gordon Mill as it appears today.

After the death of James Lee in 1889, the mill became part of the Lee estate. For a time Tom Lee was its general manager, and then it stood idle for several years until it was purchased by the Wallace brothers in 1929. The mill was operated by the Wallace brothers until May, 1968. Once more it stood idle and neglected for several years. It was recently purchased by Frank Pierce, who rebuilt the dam and restored the mill to full operating condition. Until his recent death, Mr. Adair Brotherton, a descendant of one of the families living on the battlefield in 1863, was the general manager. The site is now controlled by the city of Chickamauga and the mill is open to the public.