

Gettysburg

War



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Located 50 miles northwest of Baltimore, the small town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania was the site of the largest battle ever waged during the American Civil War. Fought in the first three days of July 1863, the Battle of Gettysburg resulted in a hallmark victory for the Union " Army of the Potomac" and successfully ended the second invasion of the North by General Robert E. Lee's " Army of Northern Virginia".

Historians have referred to the battle as a major turning point in the war, the " High Water Mark of the Confederacy". It was also the bloodiest single battle of the war, resulting in over 51, 000 soldiers killed, wounded, captured or missing(Coddington 21). On July 1, Confederate forces converged on the town from west and north, driving Union defenders back through the streets to Cemetery Hill. During the night, reinforcements arrived for both sides. On July 2, Lee attempted to envelop the Federals, first striking the Union left flank at the Peach Orchard, Wheatfield, Devil's Den, and the Round Tops with Longstreet's and Hill's divisions, and then attacking the Union right at Culp's and East Cemetery Hills with Ewell's divisions. By evening, the Federals retained Little Round Top and had repulsed most of Ewell's men. During the morning of July 3, the Confederate infantry were driven from their last toe-hold on Culp's Hill.

In the afternoon, after a preliminary artillery bombardment, Lee attacked the Union center on Cemetery Ridge. | | The Pickett-Pettigrew assault momentarily pierced the Union line but was driven back with severe casualties(Bachelder 47) . Stuart's cavalry attempted to gain the Union rear but was repulsed. On July 4, Lee began withdrawing his army toward

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Williamsport on the Potomac River. His train of wounded stretched more than fourteen miles. | Gettysburg Campaign (June-August 1863) Battle: July 1-3, 1863 Principal Commanders: Maj. Gen.

George G. Meade, US; Gen. Robert E. Lee, CS Forces Engaged: 158, 300 total (US 83, 289; CS 75, 054) Estimated Casualties: 51, 000 total (US 23, 000; CS 28, 000) The Battle of Gettysburg began on July 1, 1863, when a Confederate brigade searching for a badly needed supply of shoes in the small town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, ran into Union cavalry(Nielsen 12). After the three days of battle were over, Union forces claimed victory, although both sides suffered heavy casualties. | | While Grant slowly strangled Vicksburg and Rosecrans feinted Bragg halfway across Tennessee, Lee decided to march his troops north toward Pennsylvania. There were several reasons for this bold move.

The Confederate government hoped that a decisive victory on Northern soil would win foreign recognition of the Confederacy. In addition, Lee argued that an invasion of the wealthiest urban area of the North would probably lessen the pressure on Confederate forces in Tennessee and at Vicksburg. Perhaps most important, the lush Cumberland Valley would yield food and clothing for Lee's ragged and hungry army(Fransanito 6). On June 3, 1863, Lee began to move his Army of Northern Virginia across the Rappahannock. Hooker, who was aware of Lee's movements, shifted the Army of the Potomac northward, using it as a shield between Lee and the capital at Washington. Late in June, Hooker resigned his command, convinced that he had lost the confidence of the administration. On June 28, General George G.

Meade replaced Hooker. Meade had been one of Hooker's corps commanders. On July 1 advance units of the two armies stumbled into each other near the little town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 16 km (10 mi) north of the Maryland border. Both Lee and Meade realized that a battle was unavoidable. Fighting began that day. Union troops, after early reverses, managed to hold a strategic position on Cemetery Hill. The second day, July 2, saw confused fighting on both Union flanks.

Generals Longstreet and John B. Hood assaulted high ground at the Peach Orchard and Little Round Top, but by night the Federals held key positions. The most dramatic action of the battle came on the third day, when General George E. Pickett led a gallant but hopeless charge against the Union center, "the bloody angle." (Nielsen 184) Pickett's drive tried to charge across an open field at Cemetery Ridge, but concentrated Union fire stopped him. The battle was a decisive Union victory, but both armies suffered very heavy losses. Meade's casualties numbered 23,000 and Lee's about 25,000.

Lee began his retreat on July 4. | To the great disappointment of President Lincoln, Meade did not pursue the Confederate army and make Lee stand and fight (Coddington 12). By July 14 the Confederate commander had brought the remnant of his army back to the safety of Virginia. Gettysburg had been a severe defeat for the South, both in terms of men lost and the army's morale. In November 1863 President Lincoln dedicated a national cemetery to those who had died in the Battle of Gettysburg. His speech, known as the Gettysburg Address, became famous as an expression of the democratic spirit and reconfirmed Lincoln's intention to reunite the country.