

# The battle of gettysburg essay sample



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The Battle of Gettysburg occurred in the period between July 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> July, 1863 in the town of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania, it was part of the American Civil War that occurred in the U. S. A. In this war the 97, 000 men of the Union army of the Potomac under General George Meade had defeated attacks of more than 75, 000 men of the Army of Northern Virginia under General Robert Lee in ending his invasion of the North. This war led to many deaths in the history of the American Civil War (<http://www.americancivilwar.com/getty.html>).

### Background

After the battle of Chancellorsville, the confederate victory troops under General Robert E. Lee troops which were about 75, 000 in numbers made attempts to invade the North States in America. The chancellorville battle took place in the period between 30<sup>th</sup> April to 6<sup>th</sup> May 1863. Robert E. Lee had earlier attempted to invade together with his army the Northern states for example, the 1862 Maryland campaign in which his attempts were futile.

Lee had lead his army to invade the northern states hoping to influence the political leaders in the North to give up in their prosecution of the war attempts. He intended to take his mission to Harrisburg Pennsylvania and Philadelphia so as to enhance growth of strength of the peace movement in the North (Graig and Symonds, 2001).

The Lee's army hoped to be more efficient in their commands. To achieve this the army was to be divided into different groups each commanded by Generals. The U. S president at that time, Abraham Lincoln had appointed General George Meade to lead the army after the defeat of Major General

Hooker in the Chancellorsville battle. Robert Lee's Army had defeated Federal garrisons in Winchester and Martinsburg. The Army of Northern Virginia was directed by Robert Lee to reduce any activities that could affect civilians in a negative way. The town of Gettysburg was seized and taken in June 26, 1863 by Ewell's Corps. Lee's army was able to occupy areas from Chambersburg, (28 miles N. W. of Gettysburg), Carlisle (30 miles) North of Gettysburg and areas in Harrisburg and Wrightsville on the River Susquehanna.

The army of Northern Virginia was concentrated in Cashtown (13 km) west of Gettysburg after the Army of the Potomac had crossed the Potomac River in June 29. Brig. Gen. Johnston Pettigrew moved toward Gettysburg on June 30, here they encountered Gen. John Buford's Union Cavalry in the south. Pettigrew moved back to Cashtown and informed Generals Hill and Heintz of the Union Cavalry. General Hill mounted reconnaissance in his force the following day. This was intended to gauge the size and strength of the enemy army in Hill's front.

### First day

This was 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1863 when the Union Cavalry force under Brig. Gen. John Buford opted to use the three ridges west of Gettysburg in their military operations. The Herr Ridge, McPherson Ridge and Seminary Ridge. This would help in high ground direct movements towards south of Gettysburg. The ridges would provide an opportunity to delay an action and wait the Union infantrymen to arrive so as to take the positions which were regarded as defensively strong (Jacob H., 1959).

Brig. Gens. Joseph R. Davis and James Acher commanded the Heith division to advance. They encountered light opposition from the Union Cavalry by 7. 30 a. m. As they advanced they met Cavalry brigade commanded by Col. William Gamble where they received stiff resistance. Others Generals had attained some bit of success by 10. 20 a. m. General Reyholds was hit by a bullet and died, he was replaced by Gen. Abher Doubleday who led the troop into fighting.

Ewell's second corps moved towards cashtown in two groups, one division moved south on the Carlisle and Harnsburg road towards Gettysburg. The other division union XI corps advanced to the north of the Baltimore pike and Taney town Road. Federal line ran in semi-circles west, north and north east of Gettysburg's, at early after noon however, the federals lacked sufficient troops.

The fall of federal position in the Northern and Western town of Gen led to Gen Howard ordering for a retreat of cementry Hill where Brig. Gen. Adolph von Stein troop had been kept as a reserve. Gen. Meade had replaced Reyholds after he was killed with Maj. Gen. Winfield Hancock. Hancock was to assume this position and he was to determine if Gettysburg was the suitable ground for a major battle. Eventually he agreed with Howard that it was an appropriate battlefield. The fifth day saw 22, 000 men of the Meade army fighting against 27, 000 men of Lee's army (Pfanzen & Harry, 1993).

### Second day

- Plans and movements

This was in July the 2<sup>nd</sup> 1863 where the troops forces of remaining infantry of both sides joined in. The long streets' first corps of the Lee's troops had taken position to attack the Union army which was positioned of Emmitsburg road. The attacks were to be launched in stage starting with Maj. Gen John Hoods and Mc law's group, Maj. Gen. Richard Anderson's Hills third corps was to follow later. This was meant to prevent Gen. Meade from changing his troops to the left from the center. Also the move would prevent the federal troops from shifting as Maj. Gen Edward Johnson and Juba Early's second corps were to demonstrate at cemetery Hills and launch a massive attack incase a chance came on their way.

Gen. lee's based his troops organization on faulty intelligence by Stuart. The forces were moved without any order, them prone to attacks from both sides. Spreading them over a longer front also made it difficult to defend themselves in an effective way. Hood's and Mclaws division did not launch their attacks until after 4. pm. they had wasted a lot of time in countermarches.

### 3. 2 Attacks on the Union left flank:

The union III corps was faced with Longstreets divisions and it had to be strengthened by sending 20, 000 more troops in from of V corps. The Hood troop had to the East, more than it was required making them lose their direction in the Emmitsburg road this made attacks on Devils Den and little Round Top. Mclaw's attacks reached at the Plum Run Valley where it was pushed back by the V Corps of the Pennsylvania reserves forces. The combat unit of the III corps was destroyed as it was thinly stretched in the

wheat field. The mclaw's left was assaulted at around 6 pm. after they had arrived at the crest of cemetery Ridge where they were unable to hold counter attacks. From the II corps (Storrick, 1993).

- Attacks on the Union right flank

Johnson's division was somewhat late on their attack on second corps at the Culp's Hill. This was due to the fact that most of the union XII corps was protecting the longstreets attacks in the hill as it was the only corps that had remained under Brig. General George Greene. However, his troops were able to hold the confederates who were launching attacks as his troops were reinforced by corps 1 and XI.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> division under the command of Col. Andrew Harris had lost almost half of troops. Early did not support his brigade to attack while Maj. Gen. Robert Rodes didn't not move to the western part of the cemetery hill to counter Early's attacks. The federal troops was able to maintain possession of East Cemetery Hill and Early's brigades were withdrawn.

### Third day:

The day three started with union XII corps troops attacking the white confederates on culp's Hill this was ment to weaken them, 150 -170 confederates guns began an autillery bombardment of around 1 pm. The Meade's army of the Potomac's autillary did not respond to the attacks. The army of Northern Virginia had low ammunitions. The 12, 500 southern soldiers advanced to 1200m to cemetery ridge where fierce fighting was experienced leading to a lengthy mounted battle of 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Cavalry.

- The aftermath
  - The confederate retreat

On July 4, both armies positioned itself waiting for an attack from either side. Lee had taken a defensive position as he waited attacks from Union Army of the Potomac. Meade ordered a series of small probing actions, he asked the sending of US Regular in the confederations lines. The fighting of Gettysburg had ceased by mid afternoon. On July 5, Meade army left Gettysburg while the confederates went back to Virginia. The rear guard at falling water on July 14 ending the Gettysburg campaign.

- What were the reaction to the news of the Union Victory:

Many views arose from different people. The northerners had a lot of jubilation while in the south many were disappointed. For example, in Philadelphia viewed as being victorious for the northern while the south had lost in their attempt to continue with slavery.

### 5.3 Impacts on the confederacy:

The battle of Gettysburg led to devastating effects on the confederates. They had lost the battle military and also politically. Confederate president Jefferson Davis failed to raise enough money to fight the American civil war. He had hoped that even in 1865 the Southern would achieve their own independence but later acknowledged that his vice president Stephen Alexander would arrive at Washington from the south and Robert Lees army approach if from the north. But, the United States president Abraham Lincoln could not allow them pass through the lines. The confederacy also

failed to get recognition from European countries (Symonds and Graig, 2001).

- The Casualties of the battle

Both the army of Northern Virginia and Union army of the Potomac lost many of their troops. They lost between 46, 000 and 50, 000 casualties whereby many were killed, wounded and some disappeared in a mysterious way. The confederate's loss was such that it was difficult to accurately estimate. It is believed that about 28, 000 casualties occurred. Some scholars had documented that about 4, 708 of the confederate army were killed, 12, 693 wounded, while about 5, 830 were captured or went missing. The dead bodies lying in the battlefield estimated to be 8, 000. On that day tens of horse carcasses were destroyed by fire.

- The Historical assessment

- Lee's leadership style

General Robert Lee was believed to have great experiences with his army especially after becoming victorious at Chancellorsville and the union of his troops at Gettysburg in July 1. The army of Northern Virginia had many new and inexperienced commanders (Storrick, 1993). The general method of giving orders also contributed to Lee's defeat as he left the orders to his sub-commander. This method was inadequate though it proved to be successful with Stonewall Jackson. Lee was also unable to coordinate well his attacks especially after July 1<sup>st</sup>.

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