

**Confederate Invasions – The Union in Peril  
The Antietam and Gettysburg Campaigns  
Class Notes**

**Lecture 7 – Battle of Gettysburg Day Three – The Issue Decided  
Aftermath: High Water Mark of the Confederacy?**

**A. Day Two Review; Planning for Day Three**

- Despite Ewell's failure to attack on time, the Confederate attacks almost succeeded.
- Lee is convinced that, with better coordination, his plan of flank attacks can succeed.
- Lee does not call a war council but visits each corps commander individually.
- Lee's orders aren't clear or forceful; and he doesn't visit his commanders until dawn.
- Lee orders Stuart's cavalry to get into the Union rear and disrupt operations, resupply.
- Meade calls together his 11 key officers at 9:00pm in Leister House for a war council.
- Col. Sharpe (BMI) explains that Lee has only one fresh division – Pickett's.
- Meade's officers are unanimous in support of staying put in defensive positions.
- Meade knows it was a near thing, but gains confidence his troops can hold.

**B. Fighting Erupts on Culp's Hill; Continues for Almost Seven Hours**

- Lee's plan for Day 3 is foiled by early morning Union attack on Culp's Hill
- Ewell cannot disengage. After 7 hours of intense fighting, the Confederates withdraw.
- Lee realizes it is too late to implement his plan of coordinated flank attacks

**C. Confederate Leadership Is in Disarray; Lee Develops a New Plan**

- Longstreet & Lee meet and continue to argue over wisdom of frontal assaults.
- Lee refocuses on the Union center; reasoning that it must be weakened.
- Lee directs an artillery barrage followed by an infantry frontal assault.
- Longstreet objects strenuously; but Lee believes his army can do anything.
- Pickett's division is reinforced with Pettigrew's division and Trimble's 2 brigades
- Longstreet is in overall command of the attack. General George Pickett will lead the combined 9 brigades, 42 regiments – a total of 12,500 men assembled for the assault.

**D. Battlefield Calm Broken By Confederate Artillery Barrage**

- At noon, an eerie calm falls over battlefield. The temperature is 90 degrees.
- At precisely 1:07pm, E. Porter Alexander's 150 guns open the artillery barrage.
- Union response is limited (86 guns) as Generals Hunt and Hancock argue tactics
- Confederate bombardment is largely ineffective.
- Hunt orders Union artillery to cease fire gradually; misleading the Confederates.
- Longstreet attempts to shift to Alexander the decision to order the attack. Alexander refuses, rightly stating the responsibility is Longstreet's.
- After 2 hours, Alexander warns Pickett that he is running low on ammunition.

### **E. Pickett, Pettigrew, Trimble Infantry Attack – Climax of the Battle**

- At 3:00pm, Longstreet reluctantly orders Pickett to begin the attack.
- Along a 1300 yard front, Confederate infantry moves out of the trees to the attack.
- Pickett's Virginians are on the right. Pettigrew's and Trimble's brigades on the left.
- The aiming point of the charge is a clump of trees at center of Union line at the "Angle" in the stone wall.
- Union Center is held by Hancock's II Corps; Gibbon's division; Cushing's battery
- The Union suffers 1,500 casualties, including Hancock, Gibbon & Cushing.
- Pickett's Charge is over in less than an hour.
- About 300 Confederates led by General Armistead, breach the stone wall at Angle.
- Confederates suffer almost 50% casualties 6,500 of 12,600. All of Pickett's 18 brigade & regimental commanders are killed or wounded.

### **F. Cavalry Actions: JEB Stuart Meets George Armstrong Custer**

- On the Rummel Farm, 5 miles east of the main battlefield, Stuart's 6,000 cavalymen are intercepted by Gregg's Union cavalry division.
- Brigadier General Custer leads spectacular charges that halt Confederate advances.
- The fight is a tactical draw, but Stuart is prevented from attacking the Union rear.

### **G. Taking Stock: Lee and Meade Consider Options**

- Meade considers an immediate counterattack; but wisely decides against it.
- Confederates still have artillery and infantry in strong defensive positions
- On 4 July, both armies hold positions; collect the wounded; bury the dead.
- Lee hopes Meade will attack. He consolidates, strengthens his lines.
- Meade decides not to attack. Rests, feeds, resupplies troops. Stragglers rounded up.
- Lee has only 45,000 effectives. He reluctantly realizes that the invasion cannot be continued.

### **H. Counting the Cost**

- Casualties total almost 51,000 – 32% of the 151,000 troops engaged on both sides. (approximately 23,000 Union and 28,000 Confederate)
- This is the highest battlefield toll of any engagement in the entire Civil War.
- Battlefield is littered with casualties, including over 12,000 killed or mortally wounded and 28,000 wounded. Another 10,000 are captured or missing. Also 5,000 horses & mules are dead.
- Camp Letterman is established a mile east of town. Lee must leave behind 7,000 severely wounded Confederates.
- Most churches, schools, large homes, barns are used as hospitals. Wounded remain in Gettysburg for months.

## **I. Gettysburg Aftermath: Confederate Retreat; Union Pursuit from 4-26 July**

- Lee orders retreat during the night of 4-5 July in a driving rainstorm.
- Meade sends VI Corps under Warren and Union cavalry in pursuit.
- Lee's army is trapped against the Potomac River swollen by a week of rain.
- Confederates establish strong 7-mile defensive position at Williamsport, Md.
- Meade hesitates to attack, fearing high casualties.
- After reconnaissance, debates, he orders an attack for 14 July
- That night Lee's army escapes across the river on hastily constructed pontoon bridges.
- By 26 July the two armies are 5 miles apart, separated by the Rappahannock River – back where they started 6 weeks earlier.

## **J. Gettysburg Significance: Was It the “High Water Mark” of the Confederacy?**

- Gettysburg has become encrusted in mythology & hyperbole (largest battle; most casualties, turning point, High Water Mark of the Confederacy)
- Antietam arguably was a better opportunity for the Union to end the war quickly.
- Meade, Army of Potomac win a major victory. Lee's second invasion is repulsed.
- Lincoln is extremely frustrated and disappointed that, once again, Lee's army is allowed to escape destruction.
- Vicksburg surrenders on July 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Twin victories (temporarily) increase Northern popular support for Lincoln and the war effort. Union soldiers, commanders gain self-confidence.
- Republicans win 1863 off-year elections in Pennsylvania and Ohio – considered referendum on war & emancipation.
- Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address in November. Rallies popular support for Union and Emancipation. Over 180,000 African Americans enlist.
- South is not defeated, however. Lee retreats to refit over winter of 1863-64. War continues for another 22 months with huge casualties.
- Johnston wins only major Confederate victory in West at Chickamauga in Sept. 1863.
- Grant replaces Halleck as General-in-Chief in Spring of 1864; orders Union offensives on all fronts: Overland Campaign to Richmond/Petersburg; Sherman to Atlanta, Savanna, Columbia; and Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley
- By August 1864, soaring casualties, lack of military progress cause Lincoln to despair of reelection
- Lincoln is reelected in Nov. 1864 on strength of soldier votes (75% support) and victories at Atlanta and in the Shenandoah Valley
- Confederate armies surrender in April, May of 1865. America is once again united
- Lincoln is assassinated by John Wilkes Booth on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1865 (Good Friday)
- The 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution (abolishing slavery) is ratified on December 6, 1865.
- Two more amendments, the 14<sup>th</sup> (extending citizenship) in 1868; and the 15<sup>th</sup> (affirming the right to vote) in 1870, consolidate African American legal rights.
- We continue to deal with the issues of states rights and personal freedoms to this day.