

Tradecraft and Technology – Intelligence in the Civil War

Lecture Five: Gettysburg - The BMI's "High Water Mark"

A. Gettysburg Campaign Background: May 1863

- It was the third summer of the war. Confederate morale/hopes were high. Union morale/support for the war was eroding.
- Lee persuaded Davis/Cabinet that a second invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania could achieve strategic goals, including: further erosion of Northern electorate's support for the war, pressuring Lincoln to reach political settlement and Confederate independence.
- "Home court advantage" shifted to the Union: The Confederate invasion yielded the moral "high ground" to the Union. Also, Lee was operating among a hostile populace.

B. BMI Reporting Alerted Hooker to Lee's Impending Move

- BMI expanded its capabilities & impact: Sharpe had gained two deputies and over 70 agents - 21 civilians and over 50 soldiers.
- 27 May: Sharpe produced a comprehensive (9-part) report - with a detailed Order of Battle of Lee's army & its locations. It also reported that "the Confederate Army is under marching orders."
- 30 May: Lee reorganized his army into 3 Corps. The BMI identified all changes within a week.

C. The Gettysburg Campaign: 9-30 June 1863

- The BMI assets followed closely Lee's 150 mile trip into Pennsylvania.
- 10 June: Lee's army began to move with Ewell's Corps in the lead.
- 12 June: Sharpe received two key reports from a contraband that Lee's entire army was moving north, headed for the Shenandoah Valley.
- 13 June: BMI reports prompted Hooker to move his army rapidly north to shield Washington and intercept Lee.
- 15-25 June: Both armies moved north, separated by Blue Ridge Mountains.
- 24 June: Lee authorized Stuart to take the cavalry east to scout the Union army. Lee lost his primary intelligence capability for a critical week.
- 25-26 June: Both armies crossed the Potomac River into Maryland. Now, Hooker had better intelligence about Lee's movements.
- 28 June: Hooker was relieved of command and replaced by General George Meade.
- 28 June: Lee was shocked by news from scout Henry Harrison that Union army was 40 miles away. Lee ordered his dispersed army to concentrate toward Gettysburg.
- 30 June: Buford's cavalry (with two BMI agents) reached Gettysburg; reported Confederate locations, movements to General Meade

D. Battle of Gettysburg: Day One – Intelligence Helps Determine the Battlefield

- Morning Phase: Cavalry Officer Buford's decision determined battlefield. Lee's strategic intent was compromised by tactical intelligence.
- Afternoon Phase: Intelligence impact on Union, Confederate decisions
 - Ewell's lack of intelligence on Union deployments, contributed to his critical decision not to attack.
 - Union Gen. Hancock provided Gen. Meade with written assessments of the tactical situation, which prompted Meade's decision to stay, fight.

E. Battle of Gettysburg: Day Two - Lee's Battle Plans Hampered by Lack of Intelligence

- Due to cavalry's continued absence, Lee lacked critical tactical intelligence about the location, strength of Union forces.
- 2:00pm: Sickles disobeyed orders, moved the III Corps forward, exposing its flanks.
- 3:00pm: Union Gen. Warren's warning, avoided surprise and enabled Union reinforcements to seize and hold Little Round Top.
- 4:00pm-9:00pm: Longstreet's offensive was repulsed after heavy fighting.

F. Battle of Gettysburg - Intelligence Role in Day Three

- Meade Council of War: BMI's Sharpe reported that Lee lacked fresh reserves to sustain another attack. Critical intelligence assessment determined the decision to stay and fight.
- Gen. Hunt deceived the Confederates into thinking his artillery had been destroyed.
- Pickett, Pettigrew, Trimble attack on Union center was repulsed with heavy losses.

G. What Happened to Them – The Rest of the Story

- Confederate Spy Harrison
- Detective Allen Pinkerton
- Col. George Sharpe