



Civil War Battles 2

Chancellorsville

The new Union commander, “Fighting Joe” Hooker, was popular with his troops and eager to meet the Confederates in battle. In May 1863, he attacked the 60,000-man Confederate army at Chancellorsville, Virginia, with his 130,000 troops. Hooker was repeatedly outmaneuvered by Generals Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, who positioned their men so that they always had equal or superior numbers at the point of attack. After three days of fighting, Hooker’s troops were beaten, and he was forced to retreat. Despite his brilliant military maneuvers, Lee lost 13,000 men and his best commander. Jackson was wounded in battle and died a week later.

Vicksburg

Vicksburg was the last Southern stronghold on the Mississippi River. General Ulysses S. Grant was determined to take the city and cut the Confederacy in half. Despite the destruction of much of his supply line by Confederate forces, Grant marched his men over 180 miles in 17 days, fought five major battles, and surrounded the city. His artillery pounded the city until July 4, 1863, when Vicksburg finally surrendered. By this time, its weary citizens and defending army were both starving. Control of this city gave the Union forces control of the Mississippi River.

Gettysburg

Hoping to bring the war to an end, General Lee decided to invade the North again and take advantage of the war weariness of Union citizens. Confederate and Union forces clashed by accident at Gettysburg, a small town in Pennsylvania.



During three days of brutal warfare, Lee tried to destroy the Union armies and convince the North to accept the division of the country. Fighting with fewer men, less supplies, and unable to secure a military advantage on the ground, Lee’s army was halted and defeated by Union forces.

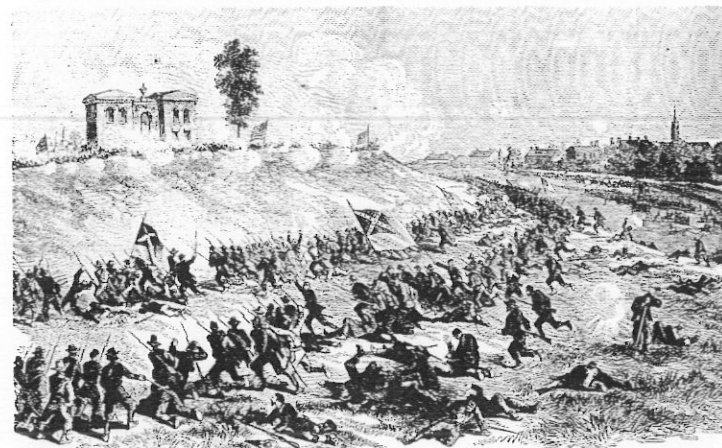
The final effort—an attack by Confederate General George Pickett’s troops—failed. Lee was forced to retreat back to Virginia, having suffered over 28,000 casualties. Union dead and wounded numbered over 23,000.

Gettysburg

GETTYSBURG IS A SMALL TOWN in south-central Pennsylvania, just a few miles north of the Maryland state line. In the summer of 1863, Confederate General Robert E. Lee marched 75,000 men north to invade Union territory. They wandered into the Gettysburg area on July 1, looking for supplies. A small force of Union cavalry met and fought them there until thousands of Union army reinforcements arrived later. The commander of the federal forces, General George Meade, did not arrive until after dark. He led more than 88,000 troops. The next day, Meade's and Lee's men fought over important spots that bordered the town: a hill called Little Round Top, a grove of fruit trees called the Peach Orchard, farmland called the Wheat Field, and a rise near a burial ground called Cemetery Hill. These combats were so large that each was like a separate battle. On the morning of July 3, there was a fight around a spot called Culp's Hill. Then Lee ordered a division led by Major General George Pickett to attack the center of



MAJOR GENERAL MEADE
President Lincoln appointed George Meade commander of the Union's Army of the Potomac just two days before the Battle of Gettysburg. Meade was a native of Pennsylvania. He replaced General Joseph Hooker, who led the army when it was defeated in May, 1863, at the Battle of Chancellorsville, Virginia.

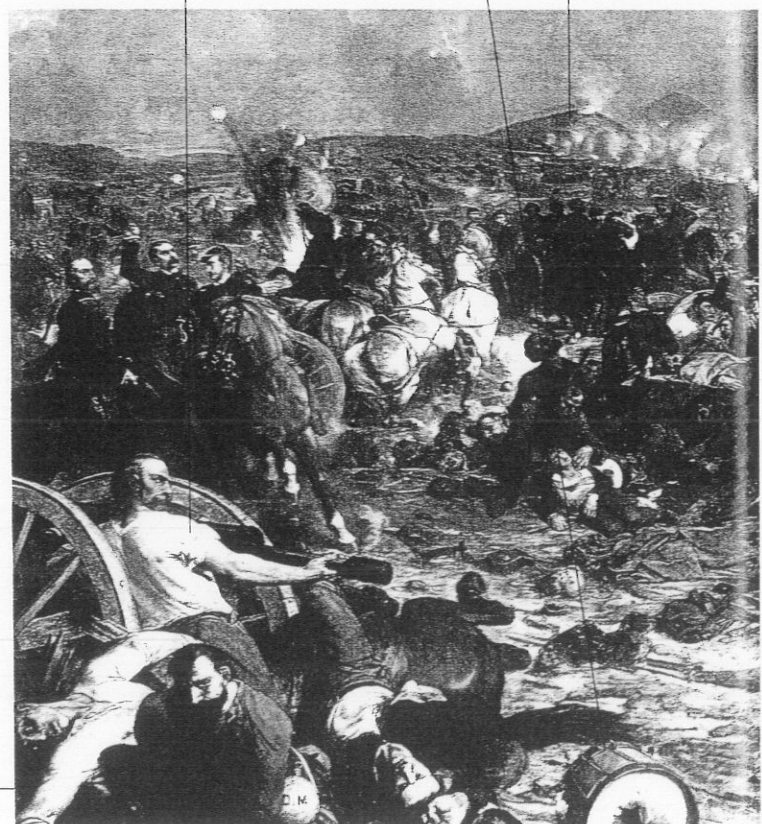


Meade's battle line. That afternoon attack is remembered as Pickett's Charge. Thousands of Confederates ran directly at Union cannons and rows of riflemen. A huge number of these Southerners were killed, wounded, or captured. This disaster forced Lee to accept defeat. He ordered his army to retreat south on July 4. His fight with Meade was the largest battle ever fought in North America.

Gunner ramming in a canister round

Drum modeled on the instrument shown on the opposite page

Little Round Top



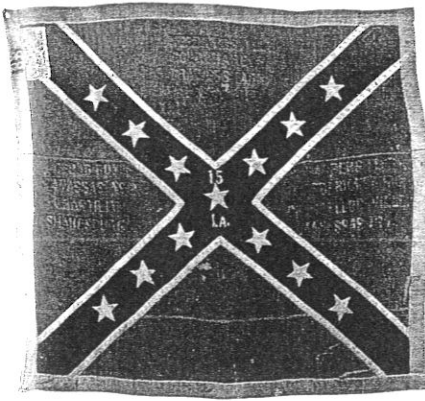
BATTLE VETERAN HARRY HAYS
Confederate General Harry Hays led troops in the desperate dusk attack on the Union army's position around the cemetery on July 2. He was defeated, but survived the battle. Later in the war, he was seriously wounded. He recovered and years later served as sheriff of New Orleans.

DUSK ATTACK

As the sun was setting on Thursday, July 2, two brigades from Confederate General Jubal Early's division rushed Union troops gathered around the gatehouse of Gettysburg's cemetery. They nearly succeeded in getting Meade's men off the hill. Then Union reinforcements pushed them back down, with many casualties. Newspaper artist Arthur Berghaus witnessed the fight and sketched this scene on the battlefield.

PICKETT'S CHARGE

Southerners in Pickett's Charge actually reached the Union battle lines. In this painting of the charge, Confederate General Lewis Armistead is seen in the background with his upraised sword beside a Union cannon. He was mortally wounded on the spot. Armistead was the highest-ranking Southerner to reach the Union line.



GETTYSBURG BATTLE HONORS

When a Union or Confederate regiment served honorably in a battle, it was permitted to stitch the name of that fight onto its battle flag. Here is the flag of the 15th Louisiana Regiment. Just below the center of its blue Saint Andrew's cross is stitched its Gettysburg battle honor. The men of the regiment carried this banner in that Pennsylvania fight.



GETTYSBURG DEAD

Photographers showed up at Gettysburg immediately after the battle. One used a stereo camera to take a picture of these dead Georgia and South Carolina soldiers. This photograph is one of a pair of pictures viewed with a stereopticon, a nineteenth-century 3-D viewer.

Main Union line in the valley below

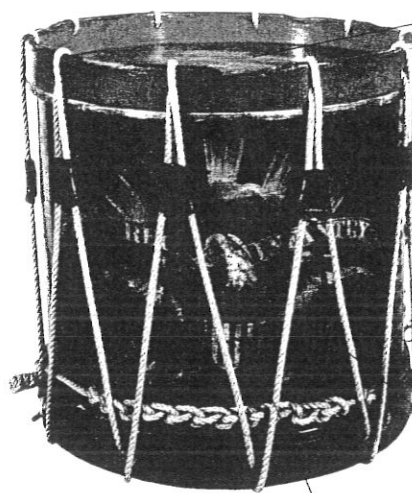


LITTLE ROUND TOP

This hill gave soldiers a view of most of the Gettysburg battlefield. Both armies knew they needed to seize it if they wanted to win the fight. Georgia and Alabama troops charged it several times and were defeated by men of the 20th Maine Regiment. The Maine troops ran out of bullets, but they beat the Southerners by surprising them with a bayonet charge.

Small grove of trees that marked the center of Meade's lines

General Lewis Armistead



Animal hide drum head

A BATTLE DRUM

This drum was found on the battlefield. It was used as a model for a drum that is seen in a famous painting of the fight by artist Peter Rothermel. Drummers were often young boys who went into combat. They beat out signals on the drum that directed the troops to move one way or another.

Strapping to keep the drum head taut

Hand-painted eagle and crest



Jubilant after Chancellorsville, Confederate commanders pushed northward. Lee decided to cross the Potomac into Maryland and invade Pennsylvania. During the invasion, Southern soldiers went looking for food and supplies. Confederate Commander A. P. Hill sent his men off to find clothing and shoes rumored to be stored in the nearby town of Gettysburg. These soldiers stumbled onto Union forces, setting off a chain reaction. Some believe that what followed was the most decisive encounter between North and South in the entire war. Almost one out of every three soldiers in the battle was killed, wounded, or missing in action.

Early in the morning of July 1, both General Lee (unsure about the size of the force he faced) and Union General George Meade concentrated on getting their men into a good fighting position. Most of the men in both armies were still marching toward Gettysburg. The soldiers fought vigorously, moving along the Chambersburg Road, closer and closer to the center of Gettysburg.

More than 3,000 federal soldiers were captured on the first day. The Confederates lost 6,500 men and the Union an additional 6,000. Although Confederates had control of Gettysburg, commanders on both sides knew the fight was undecided and would continue the next day.

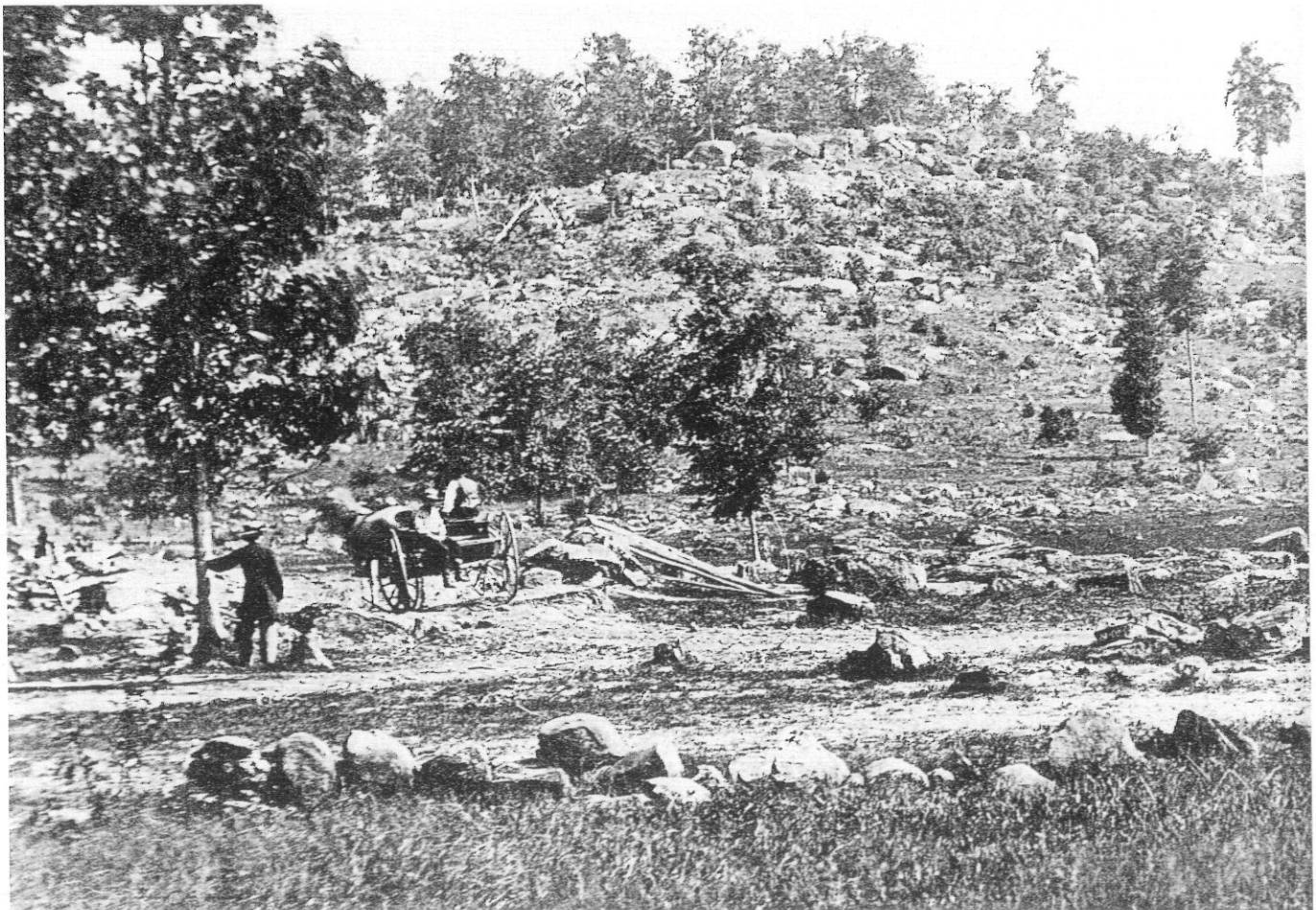
BATTLE AT-A-GLANCE

BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July 1-3

Union troops: 85,000
Confederate troops: 75,000

Union casualties: 23,000
Confederate casualties: 28,000
UNION VICTORY

One of Mathew Brady's photographers captured this view of Little Round Top, the scene of fierce fighting. Brady, standing with his arm against a tree at left in the picture, surveys the scene.



POINT OF VIEW

AT LITTLE ROUND TOP

NORTH

"The edge of the conflict swayed to and fro, with wild whirlpools and eddies. At times I saw around me more of the enemy than of my own men; gaps opening, swallowing, closing again; squads of stalwart men who had cut their way through us, disappearing as if translated. All around a strange, mingled roar. . . . An officer fired his pistol at my head with one hand, while he handed me his sword with the other. . . ."

COLONEL JOSHUA LAWRENCE CHAMBERLAIN,
Commander, 20th Maine Regiment

SOUTH

"I again ordered the advance . . . waving my sword, shouting, 'Forward men, to the ledge!' and was promptly followed by the command in splendid style. [The 20th Maine] charged my line, coming right up in a hand to hand encounter. . . . We ran like a herd of wild cattle. As we ran, a man . . . to my right and rear had his throat cut by a bullet. . . . My dead and wounded were then nearly as great in number as those still on duty. They literally covered the ground. . . ."

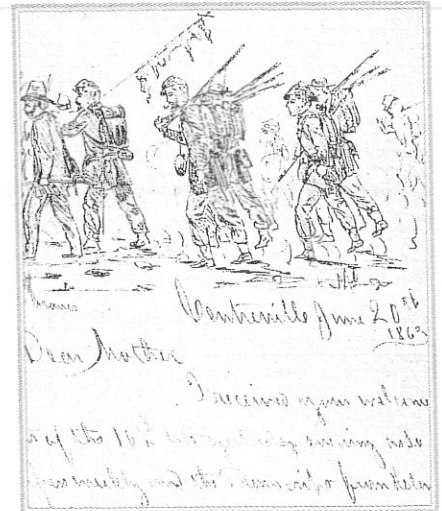
COLONEL WILLIAM C. OATES,
Commander, 15th Alabama Regiment

LITTLE ROUND TOP, JULY 2

On the second day of battle, the three Chamberlain brothers from Maine galloped toward a rise overlooking the battlefield that came to be known as Little Round Top. A federal officer had reported that Confederate troops had taken Big Round Top and sent for reinforcements to protect the Union position overlooking the entire battlefield. When a Confederate shell barely missed the Chamberlains riding alongside one another, Joshua, the colonel in command of the 20th Maine, sent one of his brothers to the rear and the other to the front to be his eyes and ears. What they saw was incredible, a force of Alabama Rebels twice their number! The three hundred fifty Maine men rapidly took cover on the south slope of Little Round Top.

Five times the Johnny Rebs (Southern soldiers) charged up the hill, and five times the Billy Yanks (Northern soldiers) held off their advance. An incredible forty thousand rounds of ammunition were fired on the slope in an hour and a half of intense combat. Chamberlain knew that the Union troops were running out of bullets. In desperation, he ordered his men to fix their bayonets on the end of their rifles and led a brave charge down the hill. His courage saved the day, because the Alabama troops retreated and the Union held this valuable stronghold. Although Little Round Top was only a small part of the battle, it proved a crucial and symbolic encounter. Chamberlain was later awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his valor during this key battle.

General Lee attacked all along the Union line, but the Yankees managed to hold on. By the end of the second day of combat, the fields were littered with more than thirty-five thousand casualties, and both sides refused to retreat. A midnight council of Union commanders ended with Meade's prediction that Lee would attack front and center early the next day.



Men sometimes sent home sketches with their letters to better reveal the harsh nature of life at the front. Too many times these letters were the last communications between soldiers and their loved ones—especially after bloodbaths like Gettysburg.

PICKETT'S CHARGE, JULY 3

The wall of gray seemed to appear from nowhere on the third day of battle at Gettysburg. The Union soldiers saw the Rebels in formation half a mile wide. The federal soldiers held their fire, and perhaps even their breath, at the spectacle of nine Confederate brigades marching proudly forward.

Confederate General James Longstreet had advised a march around the Yankee army, but Lee insisted upon one last attempt to break through the federal line. The Union front stretched several miles—from a southern flank at Little

Round Top, along a stretch called Cemetery Ridge, and northeastward, to Culp's Hill. Although General Longstreet was in command of this most famous Confederate assault, it became known as Pickett's Charge.

George Pickett and two other generals led their divisions to the attack. Despite Southern bravery, despite the pride and precision with which the men marched, the Confederates were slaughtered. More than fifty-six hundred men perished during this charge. The bloodbath washed away Confederate dreams, even as stories of Southern military glory spread. General Lewis Armistead had crossed over a stone wall into the Yankee lines with his hat on his sword, only to be fatally wounded moments later.

The majority of the Rebel casualties were mowed down even before they reached the Union line. All three divisions lost heavily. Pickett's division was cut to ribbons: Two-thirds of his men perished, and all thirteen of his colonels were killed or wounded. When Lee asked Pickett to prepare his division to fight off a counterattack, he replied: "General Lee, I have no division now."

The Confederates retreated southward to try to recover. Lee was so depressed that he offered his resignation to President Davis, maintaining that "a younger and abler man than myself can readily be obtained." Davis refused the offer, and Lee soldiered on.

After the war, Pickett's Charge remained perhaps the most powerful symbol of Confederate bravery, of courage in the face of death. Only some of the Southern soldiers who watched the blood of comrades being washed away during their retreat in the rain on July 4 realized that Gettysburg was the beginning of the end of the war. But most were determined to keep fighting. This battle has been characterized as the supreme moment of sacrifice for soldiers on both sides. The Confederacy lost 28,000 men (killed, wounded, captured, or missing), while the Union lost 23,000 at this little Pennsylvania crossroads called Gettysburg.



GENERAL GEORGE PICKETT

POINT OF VIEW

NORTH

"Valuable as New Orleans will be to us, Vicksburg will be even more so. We may take all the northern ports of the Confederacy, and they can still defy us from Vicksburg. It means hog and hominy without limit, fresh troops from all the states of the far South, and a cotton country where they can raise the staple without interference."

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

SOUTH

"Vicksburg . . . the nailhead that held the South's two halves together."

JEFFERSON DAVIS

EYEWITNESS

"On returning [to the cave], an explosion sounded near her—one wild scream and she ran into her mother's presence, sinking like a wounded dove, the life blood flowing over the light summer dress in crimson ripples from a death wound in her side caused by the shell fragment."

MARY ANN LOUGHBOROUGH,
recalling "cave life" in Vicksburg