

BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 1 ★ Issue 1

American Civil War:

Gettysburg

DATE:

July 1-3, 1863

LOCATION:

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

OPPOSING FORCES

Union Army of the Potomac: Approx. 90,000, commanded by Gen. George Meade. Corps Commanders: Reynolds, Hancock, Sickles, Sykes, Sedgwick, Howard, Slocum, Pleasonton (Cavalry).

Confederate Army of Northern Virginia: Approx. 75,000, commanded by Gen. Robert E. Lee. Corps Commanders: Longstreet, Ewell, A.P. Hill, J.E.B. Stuart (Cavalry).

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Battle of Gettysburg was the largest battle ever fought on North American soil, with over 160,000 soldiers fighting for three days in and around this small Pennsylvania town. The toll was high on both sides including 23,055 Union casualties (3,155 killed) and 28,063 Confederate casualties (3,903 killed).¹

Although Antietam holds the dubious honor of the deadliest single day of fighting, more men fell on the fields of Gettysburg in three days than on any other North American battlefield before or since. More importantly, this battle represented a strategic turning point in the American Civil War, and has thus been referred to as the “high-water mark” of the Confederacy. While tactically a draw, strategically it was a major victory for the Union. After the battle, the Army of Northern Virginia limped home, never to regain their former strength and confidence. And although the fighting would continue for another two years, Gettysburg instilled new confidence in the Union army. They had proven to themselves, and to the world, that they could fight and win against the remarkable Robert E. Lee.

STRATEGY & MANEUVER

Actions in the Southern Camp – Prior to Gettysburg, the Confederacy faced the growing dilemma of Union pressure in both the western and eastern theaters. While Confederate leaders debated where to weight their efforts, Lee argued for another invasion north. With his recent stunning victory at Chancellorsville, a confident Lee wanted to press his advantage. After some debate, it was agreed that Lee would move north.

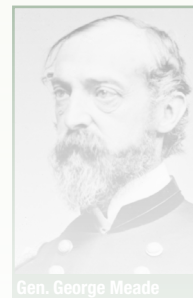
Confederate leaders had several goals for the campaign. They hoped to lift the constant threat to Richmond by forcing General Joseph Hooker

President Lincoln to reallocate forces from the west. They also wanted to relieve Virginia from the stress of war and allow Lee to feed his army off the plentiful resources of the Cumberland Valley. They also hoped an invasion would shorten the war by delivering a decisive battle, or at least delivering another blow to the political will of the North. And finally, there was still hope that the invasion would lead to European support for the Confederacy.²

On 3 June, Lee sent two corps (Longstreet and Ewell) west to the Shenandoah Valley, then north toward Pennsylvania using the Blue Ridge Mountains to screen their advance. (*Map 1, next page*)

Actions in the Northern Camp - After Chancellorsville, Lincoln not only feared for his Army's morale, but he was also keenly aware of a growing movement to end the war – even if it meant a divided nation. He stressed to Hooker the need for action. But before Hooker could take the offense, Lee's army began to move. Perhaps haunted by the specter of Chancellorsville, Hooker was overly cautious. Convinced that he was heavily outnumbered, he pressed Lincoln for reinforcements. When Lincoln refused, Hooker resigned.

On 28 June, General George Meade awoke to a message from Lincoln. He was now in command of the Army of the Potomac. An 1835 graduate of West Point, Meade had a solid military record and a welcome down-to-earth leadership style. He took charge, and began moving his army north in supporting columns to meet the threat. Meade had little knowledge of the size or intent of the invading force as he began his movement-to-contact operation.



Gen. George Meade

On 30 June, as members of Buford's Union cavalry division (Pleasonton's cavalry corps) performed duty as the forward left screen of the Union advance, they encountered forward elements of Hill's Confederate III Corps on the outskirts of Gettysburg. The Confederates had come into town for some shoes and other supplies. After a brief skirmish, the Confederates withdrew to the west. Buford, assuming the soldiers in gray would return the following day, dismounted his cavalry on McPherson's Ridge just northwest of town and prepared his defensive plan. Sure enough, early the following morning, on 1 July, Confederate skirmishers moved forward toward town. The Union cavalry picked up the fight and captured 27th Cavalry