

History 225

Re: Notes w/ Gettysburg Lecture  
Source: Stewart, Pickett's Charge

In terms of battle readiness G'Burg was the climax of the war.

By 1863 the armies of the North and South were no longer sort of armed mobs. Nor were the battle-savvy but weary combat veterans and half-hearted conscripts of the last year of the war.

The armies that clashed at the cross-roads town of Gettysburg were the best armies in the planet at that time. With few exceptions the men on both sides were there by their own decision.

[In this lecture I want to play off of McPherson's thesis in "American victories, American defeats."]

Lee came North again to wreck on the Eastern Union foreces--the Army of the Potomac--a destructive and humiliating defeat. CSA victories at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville were not decisive. The old problem of the stalemated war. Defeated at these battles the Army of the Potomac was able to reconstitute itself and was still very much in the field.

But Lee was confident(over-confident)that he could whip the Yankees and turn the fortunes of the Confederacy around. Gettysburg and Pickett's charge was Lee at his most characteristically aggressive. The costs in CSA manpower at F and C left Lee with the impression that he might victory the Confederacy to death. At GB he was not looking for another victory, he was looking for a DISASTER.

In the first two days of GB Lee had hurt the Union Army. His plan was to fix the Feds. (at Cemetery Hill) break their morale with a devastating artillery attack(soften them up)and then break them apart with a devastating ground assault. Route Meade and send the remains of his army straggling along the road to Baltimore and with one great war-ending stroke. . . .leaving the way open to Washington.

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The planning was all Lee. And the disaster of the third day was all Lee's responsibility. GB was the price the CSA paid for having Lee.

Lee's reasoning--after the defeats of Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville and the battering of the first two days that Meade's Army needed only one solid punch for a knockout.

Disposition/Union strength on Day Three:

Union along 1/2 mile front on Cemetery Ridge

Not too dug in. The walls were rather shallow--2 to 3 feet high at most.

Union manpower--6 brigades, no more than 6,000 men. But they were well commanded, well positioned, and well supported with artillery (Union artillery men were generally better disciplined and more effective than Confederates. If Lee was counting on Union low morale he was mistaken. The men were not demoralized. They received some rough handling during the first two days but they had held at Little Round Top and had repulsed a frontal assault on the Union center on July 2nd. Many of the Pennsylvanians in the ranks were fighting on their own soil. A factor that is hard to calculate and also equally hard to dismiss. Also a feeling among the Feds that Gettysburg was a turning point--last chance for the Army of the Potomac to defeat Lee or to hang it up. Had it lost at GB the army might have dissolved.

Case of General Dan Sickles on July 2 leaving the battlefield with a leg gone but a cigar squarely stuck in his gob as they were carrying him off the field.

Conditions: July 3. Weather was typical--high humidity and temperatures would climb to about 87 degrees.

Field along the 1/2 Union lines littered with dead horses from the Con. assault on July 2. And at the center of the Union line were still bodies of dead Georgians from General Wright's assault forces on that day.

This was one battle in which the Feds were short of food and the Rebs well fed.

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The CSA assault force totalled about 10,500 men. Pickett's Virginians made up the main body joined by North Carolinians and Mississippians. Pickett's division was not an elite corps but its morale was high and it had not been in heavy fighting for a year so it was very fresh.

Union guns--103 from Little Round Top to the Fishhook. The CSA guns totalled about 142 all along Seminary Ridge. The Rebs placed 102 guns at the center of their lines and trained these on the center of the Union line for the cannonade. This artt illary assasult was the most concentrated in the entire Civil War. It began about 1;10 and lasted a little before 3:00 p.m. All toll about 1 hour and 45 minutes,

The problem was not that the cannonade was not effective. It chased General Meade and his staff out of his Hqers and out of a second backup HQers. Destroyed some Union batteries. . . so it was not ineffective. The problem was that most of the ordinance went over the heads of the infantry crouched behind the stone wall. It did not break the morale of the Union infantry.

The Assault: It came about 10/15 minutes after the guns grew silent.

Longstreet and the assault: Longstreet never approved of the Lee plan. He believed it was impossible. To ask men to cover a distance of about one mile in totally open country against dug-in infantry and artillery was an open invitation to ruin. Longstreet did not resign nor did Lee ask him to after Ole Pete protested his Commander's orders.

When Pickett asked Longstreet "General, shall I advance?" Longstreet simply bowed his head in assent. He dared not give the order verbally.

~~At about 3:10 the order went down the line: Advance slowly, with arms at will. No sheering, no firing, no breaking from common to quick step. Dress on the center.~~

With that 10,500 men stepped out in route march--about 100 yards a minute--to cross a open field that would take them into the jaws of Hell. It would take them about 18/20 minutes to reach the Union lines.

After the bombardment there were about 23 workable guns at the point of attack--the Union center of the original 33.

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Assault force made up of Virginians, Mississippians, North Carolinians, Tennesseans, and Alabamans. The supporting troops made up of So. Carolinians, Floridians, and Louisiana men.

Virtually the entire Confederacy was represented except for Texas and Arkansas.

At 3:10 the order went all along the line: Forward! Guide Center! March!

*High watermark of the CSA*

For Southerners of a romantic bent this moment lives in their hearts as the high water-mark of the Confederacy. Every good Southerner dreams of this day: July 3, 1864, 3:10 in the afternoon. For after this the war for the South was a "long walking backwards slowly."

Confederate breakthrough at the Angle. . . . At least 300 Rebs breached the Union lines. Had there been a secondary wave or sufficient supporting troops to take advantage of the opening the CSA could have rolled up the Union lines.

The Confederacy lost 54% of the attacking force--some 5675 men killed or wounded in about 45 minutes of battle.

What was left. It was clear to the Confederate military leadership (including Lee) that all hope of a CSA victory by aggressive military action was now gone. All Lee could do was drag out the war and hope that in doing so that Northern will would collapse and favorable peace terms would be the result.

For Lincoln it was another grave battlefield disappointment because Meade failed to launch a counterattack all across the Confederate front and destroy the remainder of Lee's army before it retreated.

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Source: Harry Pfanz, Gettysburg: The Second Day (1987)

Frederick was in direct line of march for Army of the Potomac forces who were on their way to confront Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. As Federals from the Fifth Corps passed through Frederick many left their bivouac areas and went into the town for a "big drunk." These stragglers were reported to General Meade. He sent cavalry elements into Frederick to "bring them up." But word got back that cavalry elements joined with Fifth Corps stragglers in enjoying the watering holes of the town. There were drunken brawls in the streets and stragglers were looting and making a general nuisance of themselves. The saloons were going full blast (like any Saturday night in our fair city). Other stragglers lined the streets and the roads leading outside of Frederick, loafing around the farm houses (on 15 North). Whatever the reason for the stragglers they brought no credit to the Army of the Potomac. Finally troops under General Freese coming in from Harpers Ferry brought order in the town. But none of these stragglers made it to the Gettysburg battlefield. Perhaps it was just as well. The great majority of the Army of the Potomac who did come to fight. There was to be a showdown in Pennsylvania some where.

[Use the above notes w/ Union morale]

The CSA whooped the Union on July 1. The Army of the Potomac took a thrashing on the First Day. But Meade decided to dig in at Gettysburg and not retreat from the town.

By July 2nd the arrival of the Sixth Corps might have proved decisive. The 6th made a forced march of thirty miles to get to the battlefield by July 2nd. Its arrival on the battlefield may have made the difference for the fighting on the 2nd and the on the 3rd. It may have made Lee's plans all but impossible.

The slow preparation by the CSA to get the right wing for the assault on Union positions resulted in a very late start for the battle of the 2nd day. Longstreet's divisions were waiting for orders to go forward for almost 11 hours. Waiting for Anderson's forces to get into position. The Confederate plans were flawed by poor intelligence and slow movement.

Key here was that the assault did not start until 4:00 p.m. Key was whether Hood's division could take Round Top and Little Round Top. If they could the entire Union line could have been rolled up and Lee would have had his "disaster."

The Confederate assault began at about 4:30, some 12 hours after day break. The assault had been characterized by delay, indecision, vexation, a fatiguing day that must have dulled the fighting edge of the officers and men of the veteran CSA regiments. Then hardly into the assault General Hood was wounded and had to leave the field.

Confederate assault on Devil's Den was one of the fiercest struggles of the war. The Rebs won at Devil's Den but the day was not over and CSA success would depend on other battles that were raging across the Union front.

#### Little Round Top:

Other battles raging at the Peach Orchard and the Wheatfield. But the key to the day was Little Round Top. With the assault on Round Top was progressing it was discovered that Little Round Top was unmanned by Federals. A division of blue coats was rushed to the spot. This was the hour for the 20th Maine and Joshua Chamberlain.

Colonel Chamberlain's order were to hold the hill "at all costs." That was exactly what Chamberlain did. For his actions he would receive the Congressional Medal of Honor. Chamberlain repulses Colonel Oates and his 4th Alabamians and wins the day. Little Round Top remained in Union hands. Had the Rebs taken the hill the Union position at Gettysburg would have been irreparably compromised.

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Colonel Joshua Chamberlain's prophetic words after the three days of Gettysburg:

In great deeds something abides. On great fields something stays. Forms change and pass; bodies disappear; but spirits linger, to consecrate ground for the vision-place of souls. And reverent men and women from afar, and the generations that know us not and that we know not of, heart-drawn to see where and by whom great things were suffered and done for them, still come to this deathless field, to ponder and dream; and lo! the shadow of a mighty presence shall wrap them in its bosom, and the power of the vision pass into their souls.

Chamberlain had <sup>e</sup>sen about all there was to see of the fighting in the East. The 5th Corps (20 Maine) battleflags carried ribbons from Antietam, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, the Wilderness, Petersburg, White Oak Road, Gravelly Run, Five Forks, and Appomatox.

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Backdrop: (Using Chpt. 18)

Chpt. 18 as a backdrop to Gettysburg. Winter of Union Discontent:

1. Disaster at Fredericksburg (Dec. 1862)

Precipitated a political crisis in the North. Collapse of confidence/ search for scapegoats. A Republican senatorial caucus (with promptings from Chase) sought Seward's scalp.

2. Lincoln defuses the crisis.

II. Vicksburg (Dec. '62 to July '63)

Campaign bogs down into siege

III. Chancellorsville (May 1863)

Unmitigated disaster for Army of Potomac because of Hooker's breathtaking incompetency.

Alert to McPherson's treatment of the battle and how it reflects his view of the Civil War/AND history--the contingency approach.

1. Day One--Ewell's failure to move against Union position on Cemetery Hill. He could have taken it.

2. Day Two--Delay in CSA getting the assault underway. The repulse of Hood's division at Little Round Top.

3. The Final Day and Ultimate Folly of Pickett's Charge