

**G E T T Y S B U R G** | **The Third Day** [PART III of III]

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*Edited and revised for the 150<sup>th</sup> commemoration of The Battle of Gettysburg—July 1-3, 2013—  
as well as the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the trip that led to this narrative documentary.*

*The original preface:*

*Thursday July 1—Saturday July 3, 1993, marked the 130<sup>th</sup> commemoration of the Battle of  
Gettysburg. I spent these three days out in the fields, valleys, woods, along the creeks and runs  
and atop the ridges and hills where this battle took place. I mapped my movements, based on  
location and time, to coincide with the flow of battle. The following writings are the result ~*

## **THE THIRD DAY**

*The early morning on Culp's Hill .*

After a quick fill up of coffee early on the morning of July 3, 1993, I made my way back out to the studded inclines of Culp's Hill, where I had left off the previous night. I continued around the deserted auto touring road to where Culp's Hill slopes down to countryside, stopping at Spangler's Spring. It was 7 a.m., and it was at this location in the grey dawn of July 3, 1863, that a minor, yet livid fight occurred—the opening act of the final day at Gettysburg.

As mentioned, troops of the U.S. XII Corps, having built up an array of breastworks and defensive trenches along the southeastern base of Culp's Hill the previous day, had been called to reinforce their embattled III Corps comrades then facing the fury of Longstreet's assault. They were ordered to return to their previous positions on the night of the 2<sup>nd</sup> with the arrival of Sedgewick's VI Corps in its totality. It was around midnight when the XII Corps detachment discovered their defenses occupied by the Confederates of Steuart and Walkers' brigades.

When Steuart and Walkers' troops settled into these positions post-sunset on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, they were unaware that their front was unopposed. They had taken up positions just beyond the

extreme right flank of the “barb” of the “fish-hook”—aimed for the immediate rear of the Union army. Instead, the Confederates settled into the ready-made trenches with the idea of moving forward against Union defenders, surely in their front, at first light ... A golden opportunity was lost when the U.S. XII Corps detachment filtered back into the area in the late-night / early-morning hours.

Slocum ordered a general bombardment of the entire Confederate line opposing the Union right flank at first light. A majority of Union batteries were located on Power’s Hill, a hill due south of Culp’s. This position held a deadly tactical advantage for the gunners, their cannon they would realize holding a good portion of the C.S. line along the front slopes of Culp’s Hill in enfilade ... The artillery dispersed the calm of daybreak. The forest itself seemed to be raining down iron on the Confederate positions: trees, brush, makeshift breastworks and the men within them all caught in the destructive fire. The bombardment’s effectiveness was no doubt dampened by the thick forested surroundings; but it no doubt played on Confederate morale. These troops knew that they could not stay where they were, being showered by falling limbs and deadly shells. But neither would they retreat without a fight.

The round peak of Culp’s Hill was defended by men of the mentioned Brigadier General George Greene, an aged distinguished military man who again had built a reputation as a civil engineer. Along with Brigadier General John Geary’s U.S. division, the two forces held a solid well-constructed wall of reinforced breastworks along the hill’s apex. It was here where the thrust of Johnson’s Confederate force was concentrated in the early morning attack on July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

To the Confederates’ dismay, Greene’s men, having been perfecting their position since the night of the 1<sup>st</sup> and having already held off the attacks on the 2<sup>nd</sup> were in complete control. The C.S. brigades of Daniel’s North Carolinians and Nicholl’s Louisianians (Colonel J. M. Williams commanding) again swept up on the Union lines. The Confederates pressed hard, a morning haze intermingling with the fog of battle-smoke. Johnson’s troops were initially repulsed. They worked their way back up through the maze of shattered forest only to be repulsed again. Again they tried and again were pushed back. It became a replay of the

preceding night's failed bloody assaults. Each time the attacking Confederates advanced, they were shredded. Deafening volleys of musketry were leveled at the attackers with deadly effect from the New Yorkers sheltered behind log breastworks atop the hill. Still, Johnson continued to press on, despite mounting losses. He ordered his troops to continue their assault on the formidable summit.

### *Spangler's Spring .*

The Union troops that had filtered back in the dark night to find their trenches occupied, had not taken well to the Confederate intruders. Near 7 a.m., the 2<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts and 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana of Colonel Silas Colgrove's brigade stepped off a small rise overlooking Spangler's Spring and crossed a small tributary. They were aimed directly at the Confederate's left-most flank: Steuart's brigade of Confederate Marylanders and the famed "Stonewall Brigade," then under the command of Brigadier General James Walker.

Colgrove's men moved through the open swampy meadows determined to take back their former positions and solidify the south-end of the Culp's Hill line—in turn, the extreme right of the U.S. line. Their determination led to a bloodbath. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> went forward on a suicide mission. They were fully exposed before a strong position, something that should have been obvious since they had built the defenses they were now storming. Just as Johnson's troops were being massacred before the well-entrenched U.S. troops on the northern rise of Culp's Hill, so were Colgrove's men meeting a similar fate at the hands of C.S. troops near the hill's southern slope. Lt. Colonel Charles Mudge, ranking officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts, had once proudly declared his commitment to the Union:

*I fully made up my mind to fight, and when I say fight, I mean win or die.*

Mudge would be one of the full-third of his regiment sacrificed in the attempt to take back their original positions. Surveying the impossibility of the task before them, he relayed to his men: “*it is murder, but it’s the order. Up men, over the works. Forward, double quick.*” They charged and were mauled. Due to the angle of attack, the “Stonewall Brigade” was able to inflict terrible damage on the advancing Union lines. The ill-advised attack was summarily repulsed. Surviving elements of Colgrove’s brigade immediately fell into defensive positions to stave off a developing threat moving on them from the north.

### *Steuart’s Brigade .*

As Walker’s men were throwing back the Union advance across the area of Spangler’s Spring, Steuart’s men advanced in force through the wooded inclines behind Walker and Spangler’s Spring. They pushed south up the tailing south-slope of Culp’s Hill in the direction of the Baltimore Pike, the main road of reinforcement for the *Army of the Potomac*. Brigadier General Thomas Kane’s U.S. brigade stood before them on Culp’s Hill, while Colonel Archibald McDougall stepped up from the Baltimore Pike, facing north at a near 90° angle to Kane—barring any designs Steuart had on advancing into the Union rear. McDougall brought a brigade of loyal Marylanders with him into the fight, pitting loyal against rebel state soldiers—brother against brother—the determined C.S. Marylanders of Steuart advancing.

The Confederates came on hard through the wooded terrain, but were repulsed. They would mount several assaults, all of which would meet the same withering end. Battle-smoke shrouded the steaming morning around Culp’s Hill, the temperature already near 90°. Steuart again regrouped and set his men forward to break the stubborn flank. The sharp short fight had already incurred heavy losses, but Steuart continued to press the attack. He was so very close to the Union rear; a breakthrough would make the summit of Culp’s Hill untenable. If he could break the line here, then he could combine with the battered forces of Johnson and swarm the

crumbling right flank of the Union “fish-hook.” It was a big “if.” For the makeshift Union line on the far-right were equally determined to stand and were only tightening their lines, Confederate casualties beginning to mount.

### *Conclusion on Culp’s Hill .*

The position of Geary’s U.S. division atop the hill was still solid, no hint of wavering. All the attempts to dislodge them on the north face had proved fruitless, thinning the Confederate ranks even further on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Johnson realized that there would be no change of ownership on the hill, but only the annihilation of his men if the assaults continued. By 10 o’clock the Confederate attacks were halted, the woods—enclosed in the humid vapor of the day—fell still ... The dead and wounded littered what are today peaceful woods. It is said that the tattered and riddled trees here took decades to recover. Once again, the land has healed.

As the rest of Johnson’s division began to withdraw to the previous day’s positions just south of the town, Stuart massed for one last attack. His ranks, already badly mauled, dressed their lines and crashed into McDougall’s troops—now the extreme flank of the Union line. It was a final desperate charge, their mascot, a small black dog, leading the way. Stuart wanted to bring about a conclusion. He did, but not the one he wished—U.S. XII Corps reinforcements proving up to the challenge. Randolph McKim recalls Stuart as he gave the command: “*Charge, Bayonets! ... and moved forward on foot with his men, into the jaws of death.*” Those who viewed it, called it a heroic charge: moving across low rolling (you could say idyllic) land around the branching tributaries of Rock Creek. With the “Rebel Yell” ripping through the valley, the Maryland grey and butternut swept up on a Union counter-attack moving out to meet them. The U.S. line, protected by the edge of a forest, halted the C.S. drive in its tracks with a crushing succession of volleys. Stuart’s assault faltered. The Confederates, already having suffered terribly, were thrown into confusion. They pulled together, closed ranks and pressed on; but

volley after volley decimated Steuart's brigade. The survivors fell back, leaving the field to their fallen comrades—their dog one of the dead. George Steuart was devastated by the destruction of his brigade. He strode wearily from the field, driven to tears and repeating over and over: “*my poor boys, my poor boys.*”

The Marylanders joined the bitter retreat from Culp's Hill. The Confederates had assaulted the hill with a fury, but had gained nothing. Johnson's division limped back to the southern outskirts of town, linking with the rest of the C.S. II Corps where they would retire for the duration of the battle ... A silence then fell across the fields of Gettysburg, as the humid summer air settled in.

The assaults on Culp's Hill serve up a story that, if true, stands up as one of the more sad / dark ironic moments of the battle. Wesley Culp had grown up in the area of Culp's Hill, the Culp family having owned an extensive part of the land that made up the north-side of the “fish-hook” line. But when the South seceded, a young and eager Wesley Culp's sentiments fell towards secession. He went south and enlisted in the Confederate cause. Wesley Culp arrived with Ewell's II Corps to his hometown of Gettysburg and is said to have not only taken part in the Confederate assaults on the lands where he had grown—but been killed charging the slopes of the hill named for his family. And though the accuracy of the story has been brought into question, even as myth it serves up a perfect metaphor for those who actually held conflicted, or unsure loyalties during the Civil War—a side of the story of that era rarely considered; and challenging the more popular myth of lockstep loyalty, North and South.

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> day takes shape .*

July 3, 1863, had started as the previous day had ended: bloody stalemate, little gain for a horrible loss of life. Culp's Hill: “the barb,” and Little Round Top: “the eyelet,” had held. All assaults on the Union flanks had been checked, allowing for a strong and even defense of the

entire line. Devil's Den, the Peach Orchard, the Wheatfield, the Valley of Death, Cemetery Hill, these areas had been hotly contested. But Lee had little to show outside the gruesome—and irreplaceable—casualties his proud army had taken. They had come close to breaking the Union line, but there it stood. And now—consolidated and compact—it was stronger than ever.

The U.S. *Army of the Potomac* had come under some of the heaviest attacks they would see during the war—but for one sector, whose defenders, aside from readily crushing the stand-alone advance of Wright's Georgians the preceding day, had seen little of the contest. Meade had to be pleased with the hard determined fighting of his army. He also had to be sure it was not yet over. For it can't be said enough: from its commander all the way down to the privates, the C.S. *Army of Northern Virginia* believed it was irresistible when it hit with all its strength. This overconfidence would shape the 3<sup>rd</sup> day at Gettysburg and the course of American history.

The Union army was at full strength on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. It would muster over 90,000 effectives at Gettysburg. The Confederates, still that morning without one very important division—including that division, then en route—muster 75,000 (both totals reflecting pre-battle counts, not the searing casualties to that point accrued). Yet despite the numerical disparity, Lee had made up his mind. His strategy was simple: he would stage a massive Napoleonic charge aimed at the very centre of the Union line. Lee was intent on breaking the “fish-hook” in two. *Nothing* could stand before the full fury of his men. Lee had hoped to coordinate this main assault with a deceptive attack, or “feint” to be provided by Johnson's men at the north-end of the line on the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Again, by occupying the northern flank—and more importantly, potential reinforcements—the massive Confederate blow would fall full-force on just those troops now occupying the Union centre. Slocum's unexpected attack on the stubborn Confederate positions of Steuart and Walker at the base of Culp's Hill had erased this possibility. Lee was forced to revise his plan. He decided on—only—the one grand charge to deliver the desired result.

At the heart of the plan was the mentioned division, who had broken camp at first light only two miles down the Cashtown-Chambersburg Pike. Throughout the morning of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, they filtered onto Seminary Ridge beneath the screen of forest. This was the all-Virginia division of

Major General George Pickett, 6,000 fresh troops. They massed within Spangler's Woods, roughly the position from which Wright and Posey had begun their fated assault across the same ground these men would traverse on the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Pickett's men had served as the army's rear guard during the Pennsylvania campaign and remained the only Confederate infantry command that had not yet seen action. They would make up for it on this day. Lee would storm the Union centre. Lee would order Pickett's Charge.

*The wait .*

The day grew hot. Temperatures soared, an uncomfortable humidity draping itself over an otherwise peaceful summer day. Aside from scattered reinforcing movements, the Union line sat virtually still and—more importantly—stood confident. Many no doubt thought the day could pass to inaction. But few thought that the end of the battle had come. Both sides had been hard marched and hard fought, yet no one figured Lee would simply withdraw after having come so close ... It was as evident that the *Army of the Potomac* had come here—under competent leadership, for a change—to fight and would entertain no ideas of retreat after having successfully held the field through the furious fighting of the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The air was filled with an anxious solitude, a great suspense. This alert skittish and hyper-sensitive mood led to a brief sharp fight between advanced pickets in the vicinity of a country barnyard just over halfway between Seminary Ridge and Cemetery Hill. Union snipers had been picking off Confederate soldiers at will from the elevated floor of the Bliss barn, named for the area farmer who tended the land. Southern skirmishers moved in to silence the deadly sharpshooters and a firefight ensued—one which hardly caught the field's attention, aside from the barn being set aflame shooting up into a dramatic fireball. The pickets pulled back and settled in. The field soon fell back into silent anxious brooding.

One Union officer stated: “*time was heavy.*” A spectacular moment was coming, one few could imagine. But for right then, it was too hot to think of anything but a little rest and some shade. As noon approached, the men along the Union line began to take advantage of a rare break.

One soldier was not so at ease with the situation; luckily it was the one soldier whose opinion mattered most ... Through the whole campaign, George Meade had been one step ahead of Lee, mending many situations just before they spiraled out of control. This can be attributed to both his fighting skill and the good bit of luck that accompanies any successful venture. Many factors led to his army’s success on this campaign. Still, as the summer heat soared past noon, Meade thought not of the agreeable past, but of the next challenge; one he figured must lay at the centre of his line. Lee had been unsuccessful on either flank, but had tasted victory—and this was enough to entice “Bobby” Lee into taking one more shot. Meade had an foreboding feeling that the Confederates would come at his line dead-centre ... Across the way, Lee and his men moved that very assault into position.

### *Sitting in the Angle .*

Well into my third full day of meandering about the auto roads, wandering the fields, forests, hills, ridges and lowlands, I finally returned to “the Angle.” It is hallowed ground like few other plots on the North American continent ... Sitting there—on any Civil War field, really—you can’t help but wonder what went through the mind of the Civil War soldier prior to a charge or assault; waiting through what was for many the last moments of their lives; knowing that you were to face the unrelenting fury of an enemy whose line of muskets were aimed purposefully at your knees so that the discharge of the musket would kick the trajectory of their balls into your upper torso—the desired kill zone. Union soldiers ordered to charge a near impregnable stretch of Confederate positions at Cold Harbor, Virginia, in 1864, went so far as write their names and

hometowns on slips of paper, stitching them to the inside of their uniforms so as to assure that their mangled corpses could be identified and sent home for proper burial. That is an amazing, truly horrific kind of “fated” that no one but those soldiers could know; to realize that death is imminent, yet to maintain a sense of duty and pride, regardless. And to consider that even the hardest soldiers did not fear? Well, I don’t believe it. War drops the human mind to its most base level, sure. The instinct of survival can override emotion. But still, these were men of feeling, with ideas and notions. These men would set off on an assault, deep breaths and prayers steeping what can only be called raw courage. Staring mortality in the face? Only the automaton could not feel something; be it fear, hate, or both. And remembering that the vast majority of these men were volunteers, not professional soldiers—and young, some very young ... A lot goes through your mind when on the lands where these battles were fought, where citizens were turned into merchants of deaths and themselves “did the dying.”

The mid-19<sup>th</sup> century in America was a romantic era, filled with tales of flowery prose, chivalrous glory, honor, pride and the magnificent battlefield colors. But at least in the ranks, the fiction of all that romance had faded rapidly (if it had ever taken root there in the first place) —replaced by a savage devotion to victory and simple survival. Shelby Foote stated that of all wars, civil wars are notorious for being the most bloody, the most savage—conflict never being more violent than that within family. America was still very young, created out of the inspiration of an untested—even undefined—moral creed. The Civil War provided the definition. Everything this country has been since, good and bad, can trace roots back to the results of our Civil War. The country was forced to lay ideals alongside reality and ask itself: *what is America?* -- and more importantly: *what is America going to be?* A fight erupting out of sectional grievances over economics (i.e. the “right” to classify humans as chattel), having infected politics, policy and society itself—and having resolved into an ugly slug-fest between, chiefly, the common men whose rights and future were at stake. The leaders set the course and then the ranks of citizen soldiers fought it out ... This field saw the brutal maturity of America. Everything that has come

since is in part derived from the results of a single afternoon at Gettysburg. This is what I thought about while sitting in the Angle: mid-day July 3, 1993. I was surely not alone.

### *Confederate preparation .*

Seminary Ridge was swarming with action as the massive assault reached its start-point. Noontime had come and gone. Longstreet had become outwardly despondent about the charge. His continual requests for a defensive posture were duly noted, yet repeatedly dismissed. Lee's staunch old warhorse was fervently against the attack, but—as soldiers do—followed orders.

As 1 o'clock neared, Colonel E. P. Alexander was finishing the alignment of what was virtually all of Lee's artillery on-hand. They were set to precede the charge with a cannonade the likes of which had not been equaled during the war. Alexander excelled as a young master of his trade and had served the Southern cause with distinction at Gettysburg. The aim of his orders were to dislodge the defenders at the Union centre, and their supporting artillery. Alexander's I Corps batteries, with the C.S. III Corps and portions of the C.S. II Corps artillery would bring over 130 pieces to bear on the position. Confederate artillery stretched from batteries south of the Peach Orchard all the way north to a battery of the new breech-loading Whitworth Rifles positioned atop Oak Hill: a line of cannon over two miles long.

It was at this time that Longstreet addressed the youthful Alexander with a note that read: *"if this artillery barrage does not have the desired effect, advise Pickett not to advance."* Alexander, taken back by Longstreet's perceived delegation of judgment, quickly responded that he didn't feel he had the authority to make such a decision. Alexander subsequently stated that due to the duration and intensity of the barrage, a lengthy and costly expenditure of ammunition should take place only with the solid understanding that it would precede an advance on the enemy. Being as far as they were from supply routes, to demonstrate—only—with such a barrage would be ill-advised. An exchange of letters ensued and continued for some time, each confusing

Alexander that much more and clearly expressing that Longstreet was looking for a way out of Lee's plan. But the decision had long since been made to charge. The word was given to open the barrage. Still perplexed, Alexander nonetheless gave the order with pride. Nothing could stop the assault now.

It was at this time, about 1:30 (again, times are approximate in most accounts), with the fields still silent, that “*an immense flock of wild pigeons flew overhead, darkening the sky. No one has recorded in what direction the pigeons were flying, or what seemed to be their purpose.*”

*The great cannonade .*

This tremendous line of Confederate firepower sat awaiting the two quick-succession signal shots that would open the barrage. The honor of firing the signal was given to a colorful unit known as the “Washington Artillery,” named for the country's first president. Originating from New Orleans the unit had a rich heritage and had fought with a reputation since the First Battle of Manassas. The motto emblazoned across their crest said “*Try us.*” On this day, they were bestowed the privilege to open the greatest artillery display of the war.

Miller's battery of the Washington Artillery, positioned on Seminary Ridge near the embarkation point of Barksdale on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, was given the order to fire the first warning shot. The first lanyard was pulled taught and a sharp blast pierced the lazy afternoon. The second shot followed quickly, rousing all those who may have thought the first to be isolated. A great silence overtook the field for a few seconds, as the reverberant recoil echoed. Then the C.S. artillery let loose, fire roaring through great clouds of smoke up the entire line. The very ground rocked. Union Major Mulholland recalled:

*The whole hundred and thirty seven guns which now began to play upon us seemed to be discharged simultaneously, as though by electricity. Streams of screaming projectiles poured through the hot air falling and bursting everywhere. Men and horses were torn limb from limb, caissons exploded one after another in rapid succession blowing the gunners to pieces. No spot within our lines was free from this frightful iron rain. It was literally a storm of shot and shell that the oldest soldiers there, those who had taken part in almost every battle of the war, had not yet witnessed. That awful rushing sound of the flying missiles which causes the firmest of hearts to quail, was everywhere.*

A news correspondent with the New York World positioned in the area of Cemetery Hill, described the moment in detail:

*The storm broke upon us so suddenly that soldiers and officers who leaped from their tents, and from lazy siestas on the grass were stricken in their rising with mortal wounds, and died, some with cigars between their teeth, some with pieces of food in their fingers, and one at least, a pale, young German from Pennsylvania, with a miniature of his sister in his hands. The boards of fences, scattered by explosion, flew in splinters through the air. The earth, torn up in clods, blinded the eyes of hurrying men—and through the branches of the trees and among the gravestones in the cemetery, a shower of destruction crashed ceaselessly. As, with hundreds of others, I groped through this tempest of death for the shelter of a bluff. An old man, a private in a company belonging to the 24<sup>th</sup> Michigan, was struck scarcely ten feet away by a cannonball, which tore through him extorting such a low, intense cry of mortal pain as I pray to God I may never again hear.*

The stunned Union line attempted to gather itself under this deadly storm of iron. Union artillery, from Cemetery Hill to the batteries on Little Round Top, replied to the enemy with a “spirited” barrage in response. The Union artillery brought about 80 cannon to bear against the Confederates, bringing the numbers of the barrage to well over two hundred pieces. It was without equal.

The fields were instantly blanketed in a sulfurous cloud that became thicker with each missile fired. Ears rang with the deafening roar. Again, at the very centre of the Union line lay Gibbon’s division of Hancock’s U.S. II Corps. They would face the brunt of the coming assault. But for right then his men huddled helplessly under the fire. It was said that “*clods of earth and shards of stone were hurled over the waiting infantrymen from the short rounds, while air bursts rained down shell from above.*” The Union artillery chief Henry Hunt remembered it as only an artillery chief could, calling it: “*indescribably grand.*”

Brigadier General William Harrow, second in command to Gibbon, stood behind his rugged brigade to the right of the divisional line near the “Copse of Trees.” He was seen “*with folded arms, and in cool dignity walking up and down in front of the line, apparently indifferent to the rain of shot and shell.*” Brigadier General Alexander Webb, whose II Corps Pennsylvanians would also receive the main thrust from the coming assault, was seen “*standing in the most conspicuous and exposed place, leaning on his sword and smoking a cigar.*” To the right of Gibbon’s division was the II Corps division of Brigadier General Alexander Hays, Hays being a colorful character who, as it was said, reveled like a child in the heat of battle. During the barrage the general was seen on horseback riding up and down his line offering encouragement to the besieged troops. At one point he stopped his mount, laughed and yelled: “*hurrah boys, we’re giving them hell!*” He then spurred his mount forward out into the fields before Cemetery Ridge to where his line of skirmishers were positioned, cheering on his advanced pickets.

John Gibbon gave this description of the barrage:

*... the whole valley, two miles from north to south, and half a mile or more in width, was brim full of boiling, eddying smoke—black smoke rising from the ground like a sluggish cloud, white smoke above it, the whole, shot through incessantly by stabbing flashes of flame from guns that could not be seen. The uproar was so heavy, and continuous that Union gunners on Cemetery Ridge, opening fire in reply, could not hear the reports of their own guns.*

Gibbon summed it up, stating: *“the air was full of murderous iron.”*

Confederate Captain W. W. Wood describes similar conditions along the Confederate line, stating that *“the firing was so rapid and continuous that the report of a single gun could not be distinguished.”* An impenetrable shroud of smoke covered the fields and the artilleryists’ targets, causing a serious problem for aiming and directing fire. Cannoneers on either side fired into a blind cloud. Confederate gunners had to estimate their ranges from their first few shots, which had for the most part overshot their target: the infantry at the Union centre. Their range was pure guesstimate. Subsequently, most of the C.S. projectiles screamed into the rear of the Union line, creating considerable panic and disorder amongst field hospitals and reserve units of artillery and infantry around Meade’s headquarters—located in the Leister House, but a few hundred feet behind Gibbon’s front line. Meade and his aides were forced to evacuate. Shells whistled in and riddled the house with shrapnel, a direct hit tearing through the porch.

As they were evacuating the house, Meade coolly related a story from the Mexican War. Under similar conditions, his then commanding general—the revered Zachary Taylor—had found a wagoneer crouching behind a small cart as flimsy shelter from the bombardment. Taylor called out: *“You damned fool, don’t you know you are no safer there than anywhere else!?”* to which the wagoneer replied: *“don’t suppose I am general, but it kinda feels so”* ... Soon after, one of Meade’s staff was savagely killed by a direct hit from a solid round.

Abner Doubleday had been positioned with his command south of Gibbon on Cemetery Ridge. He endured the barrage while calmly eating a sandwich. A shell struck the ground nearby

showering Doubleday, and more importantly his sandwich, with earth. Looking down at his lunch, now covered with bits of black dirt, he turned to an aide and reportedly said: “*that sandwich will need no pepper.*”

Havoc reigned. Caissons erupted in fiery explosions from direct hits, bringing great cheers from the Confederate line, the crimson-orange explosions and the Union discharge of cannon the only thing they could sight along the Union line. Regardless, the Union infantrymen positioned in the centre began to ease a bit, realizing that the Confederate gunners were cutting their fuses too long. Their aim was too high and a majority of their shells were sailing over and beyond their targets. A Union infantryman stated of the barrage, incredibly: “*this soon became monotonous.*”

Despite this major oversight on the part of the C.S. artillery, the scene was still anything but safe. Well into the barrage, U.S. II Corps troops were amazed to see Hancock slowly sauntering along on horseback behind their lines. Aides pleaded with the stone-faced general to get to safety. The thunderous storm gripped the field and continued unabated, as many alarmed troops called out to Hancock to seek cover. But Hancock would not listen, walking his skittish horse slowly down his lines. Major Mulholland recalls (re: the romance of the era):

*At this tumultuous moment we witnessed a deed of heroism such as we are apt to attribute to the knights of olden time. Hancock, mounted and accompanied by his staff, with the corps flag flying in the hands of a brave Irishman, started at the right of his line where it joined the Taneytown Road, and slowly rode along the terrible crest to the extreme left of his position, while shot and shell roared and crashed around him, and every moment tore great gaps in the ranks. It was a gallant deed, and withal not a reckless exposure of life, for the presence and calm demeanor of the commander, as he passed through the lines of his men, set them an example which bore good fruit and nerved their hearts.*

An aide continued to badger the commander to find safety. Hancock answered him: “*there are times when a corp commander’s life does not count.*” Hancock was with his troops as one of them during this dreadful moment, bolstering their anxious spirit.

No doubt one of the most telling eyewitness accounts of the action on July 3<sup>rd</sup> comes from the hand of Lieutenant Frank Haskell, an aide-de-camp to Gibbon. Haskell, a native of Wisconsin, had started his Civil War career in the ranks, having been promoted after securing a fierce reputation for bravery in battle. Haskell had a gift for descriptive writing, as well. (He would be killed in battle the following year.) Haskell had watched his division crush the advance of Wright’s Georgians the previous day, but nothing could have prepared him or the U.S. II Corps for the advance they would soon meet. Haskell recalls the guns at the height of the cannonade:

*... great infuriate demons, not of the earth, whose mouths blaze with smoky tongues of living fire, and whose murky breath, sulphur-laden, rolls around them and along the ground, the smoke of Hades. These grimy men, rushing, shouting, their souls in frenzy, plying the dusky globes and the igniting spark, are in their league, and but their willing ministers. Besides the great ceaseless roar of the guns, which was but the background of the others, a million various minor sounds engaged the ear. The projectiles shriek long and sharp. They hiss, they growl, they sputter, all sounds of life and rage, and each has it’s different note, and all are discordant. Was ever a chorus heard before?*

*We watched the shells bursting in the air, as they came hissing in all directions. Their flash was a bright gleam of lightning radiating from a point, giving place in the thousandth part of a second to a small, white puffy cloud, like a fleece of the lightest, whitest wool. These clouds were very numerous. We could not often see the shell before it burst—but sometimes, as we faced the enemy, and looked above our heads, the approach would be heralded by a prolonged hiss, which always seemed to me to be a*

*line of something tangible, terminating in a black globe, distinct to the eye, as the sound had been to the ear. The shell would seem to stop, and hang suspended in the air for an instant, and then vanish in fire and smoke and noise. We saw the missiles tear and plow the ground. All in rear of the crest for a thousand yards, as well as among the batteries, was the field of their blind fury.*

*The percussion would strike, and thunder, and scatter the earth and their whistling fragments, the Whitworth bolts (the breech loading rifles atop Oak Hill, noted for a unique whistling which accompanied their shells to the target) would pound and ricochet, and bowl far away sputtering, with the sound of a mass of hot iron plunged into water—and the great solid shot would smite the unresisting ground with a sounding ‘thud,’ as the strong boxer crashes his iron fists into the jaws of his unguarded adversary.*

*Our artillerymen upon the crest budged not an inch, nor intermitted, but though caisson and limber were smashed, and the guns dismantled, and men and horses killed, there amidst the smoke and sweat, they gave back, without grudge, or loss of time in the sending, in kind whatever the enemy sent, globe, and cone, and bolt, hollow or solid, an iron greeting to the Confederates, the compliments of the wrathful Republic.*

On and on, the cannon roared. An efficient crew fired two or three rounds per minute. The barrage continued at this frenzied pace for over an hour, without a hint of slowing. The Confederate lines, massed in their respective positions within Spangler’s Woods, endured the Union artillery reply of less firepower, but greater effect. The Union cannoners were firing blind, as well, but their initial ranges were more on the mark. The Southern ranks sunk into the ground, more a result of imagined safety than any real security; something, anything to help ease the strain of the whistling projectiles. The Union cannon had a devastating effect, as shot

after shot careened into Lee's waiting troops. The cannonade, being of such magnitude, had a significant effect on the hearts and spirit of the Confederates who knew that this was just the opening of a long afternoon. They waited out the barrage with courage, knowing their chance for reprisal was coming. It is said that Robert E. Lee was seen riding the same slow, steady path behind his troops—as had Hancock—during the barrage. Lee was revered like few other men in his time by those who served with him and those who fought against him. Lee's always cool presence during the most trying moments would have had an incalculable effect upon the courage of his men.

2:30 p.m. drew near as the cannonade neared its end. Round after round, missile after missile had ripped these ridges full of smoking craters. This great orchestration of artillery made talking impossible, its echo bounding far beyond the limits of the battlefield, as well. In various reports the thunder of the barrage was heard anywhere between 20 miles away, to over 100 miles away in Pittsburgh, depending on atmospheric conditions—and no doubt some exaggerated claims.

On the field, the fumes poisoned the stifling hot air. Men on both sides yearned for water to soothe parched throats, the heat and sulfur causing many men to pass out beneath the day's unforgiving humidity. The time was near and no doubt many could sense it was so. Few, if any, Civil War battles were ever decided by cannonade alone. Infantry was almost always the deciding factor.

Again, exact times are sporadic as to the length of the barrage. Some say an hour, some claim two. But the most common length has it lasting for about an hour-and-a-half, until shortly before 3 o'clock. Seconds are decades on the battlefield; especially when withstanding that kind of barrage. For many, it had to seem like an eternity beneath the furious fire ... Yet in the end, the barrage—nearly 220 cannon strong—had caused little damage to the solidity of either line. The fire slowly began to wane.

The U.S. XI Corps artillery, still positioned atop Cemetery Hill, had been issuing and receiving the brunt of the barrage. Near this time, their chief of artillery, Major Thomas Osborn,

took a look down what he could see of the Union line and immediately called on his chief, Henry Hunt. Noting the replaceable damage inflicted on the Union artillery along the line up to this point, he suggested that they purposefully slow their fire to a halt. This might in turn deceive the Confederates into thinking that they had actually silenced the Union batteries (again, the field completely smothered in smoke). More importantly, the plan would provide vital time to refit those areas hardest hit and allow for the cooling of the big guns before the infantry charge that was sure to follow. Meade was consulted and agreed. The order to halt their firing reached down the entire Union line. Battery-by-battery, as word moved down Cemetery Ridge, the Union artillery gunners silenced their red hot guns ... It had the desired effect.

Across the field, Alexander noted the slack-fire of the Union guns at once. He sent off an urgent request to George Pickett to “*come quick, or I won’t have enough ammunition to properly support the advance.*” This lack of reinforcing ammunition would, in fact, hamper the advance of the assault—for the Confederate ammunition trains had been moved far to the rear to avoid the Union fire. Yet, the frantic Alexander was not as concerned with this at the moment as he was with the slow halt of the Union guns across the way. Whether he believed that their fire had effectively pounded the Union centre into submission, or not, it was time to set the thing in motion. The time had come for Pickett’s Charge.

*The lines are dressed .*

The Confederate artillery began to halt its fire. The air grew tight and electric with the silence and anxiety of the moment. Spangler’s Woods came alive. It was as if each tree, each branch, each shrub and leaf had suddenly transformed into a human form. It was a rippling sea of movement, uncoiling and stretching and standing—line-by-line—the many thousands formed in units and moved out into the open. Pickett approached Longstreet, who stood solemn looking down at the ground, and asked his commander: “*shall I advance?*” Longstreet raised his hand in

a half-hearted gesture of approval. Pickett, the very model of southern chivalry, saluted proudly and made off for his force.

The main thrust behind the charge was Pickett's Virginians and an assembled force of greater strength under the split command of James Pettigrew, having taken command of Heth's division (the same troops who'd started the conflict two days earlier) and Major General Isaac Trimble, a "reserve commander" who'd been put in command of the wounded Pender's division. Pettigrew and Trimble's combined force would advance from the area that Pender's division was supposed to have advanced from on the 2<sup>nd</sup> (the middle stretch of Seminary Ridge)—the left side of the attacking force. In line from left-to-right were the brigades of Brockenbrough's Virginians (then commanded by Colonel Robert Mayo), Davis's Mississippians, Pettigrew's own brigade of North Carolinians and Archer's patched-up Alabamians. The brigades of Scale and Lane under Trimble, would follow in support of Pettigrew's force. 1000 feet to the south along Seminary Ridge, Pickett's men assembled—the right-side of the attacking force. Pickett aligned Brigadier General Richard Garnett's brigade on the left, with Brigadier General James Kemper to his right. Following in close support was the brigade of Brigadier General Lewis Armistead, a very close personal friend of Winfield Scott Hancock. Both had served in the "old army" together and had established a tight friendship. When the war broke out, both were serving in California and split to follow their conscience and their states. Neither had seen the other since. Armistead and Hancock would be reunited this day.

To their right and in conjunction with Pickett's division, Cadmus Wilcox would advance forward with his battered brigade of Alabamians from a start-point just north of the Peach Orchard. This put Wilcox's troops at the extreme right of the advance: the most exposed position on the field. All told, it was a force of nearly 13,000 men that would advance—a frontal assault across nearly a mile of wide-open fields, on a strong elevated Union position.

The force's great successive lines were now out in the open, stretching across a front nearly a mile long itself. As mentioned, the Confederate officers were told to advance on a

particular grove of trees, the famed “Copse,” which stood out as a visible island on the otherwise open crest of Cemetery Ridge at the very centre of the Union line.

Smoke still lingered across the rolling fields, no doubt obscuring the immense size of the assaulting force to the Union line. But there couldn’t have been any question at this point, as the snap rudiments of drumrolls sounded the order to advance and great cheers exploded up from the Confederate lines. Bruce Catton described the scene: *“when the Confederates reached the open, they paused and dressed their lines with parade ground formality, as if they proposed to go about this business of crushing the Yankee host with a flourish in high style—pride and courage blending into arrogance, and dauntless confidence.”* Pettigrew rode up to an officer of his own brigade and within range of his men yelled out: *“Now Colonel, for the honor of the good old North state, Forward!”* George Pickett was quite simply in his glory, riding with child-like energy before his force from the Old Dominion. In an excited voice, he called out: *“Forward men, and do not forget today that you are from Old Virginia!”* Cheering rolled like thunder down the line and through the valley. Pickett’s Charge was underway. Private Randolph Shotwell of the 8th Virginia would later describe,

*... the flags flutter and snap—the sunlight flashes from the officer’s swords—low words of command are heard—and thus, in perfect order, this gallant array of gallant men marches down, into the valley of death.*

As the regiments set behind their colors and the drummers inspired the columns to march, Cadmus Wilcox rode up to George Pickett. He took a drink from a flask and offered it to Pickett. Pickett, who had pledged abstinence to a young sweetheart back in Virginia, thankfully denied. Wilcox turned to leave, offering the Major General some parting words: *“In and hour, you’ll either be in hell, or glory.”*

## *Pickett's Charge .*

There was a sloping fence that pushed eastward into the fields between the two wings. This created a sizable gap between Pettigrew's and Pickett's columns as they advanced. To swing the force together and make the assault one unbroken front aimed at the Copse, Pickett's men would be required to perform a series of angled movements to their left, the military term: a "left oblique." They would be required to perform these 45° turns to their left, in mid-stride. Two or three of these movements could make up the lengthy gap between the forces without losing any time. The two wings would eventually join near the Emmitsburg Road, nearly two-thirds of the way across. This would be a tough maneuver under heavy fire. But these were well-disciplined experienced veterans. The move would even be performed with some flair, under a murderous fire. The swagger of the *Army of Northern Virginia* was to be tested here, on these fields ... Yet on these fields, there was one officer who felt he already knew the results—Longstreet later confessing: "*there exist no fifteen thousand men who could've ever taken that position.*"

The Confederates moved off quickly, the first lines passing the advanced artillery to great cheers from the cannoneers. And across the field, the Union line began to slowly make out the amazing scene then filtering from the dense smoke. Jesse Bowman Young recalled,

*... as we look with bated breath, and quivering nerves on the landscape, we behold the shimmer of steel along the distant ridge, and then the flutter of banners, and then an advancing line of men.*

Frank Haskell described the scene with vicious eloquence:

*To say that none grew pale and held their breath at what we and they there saw would not be true. None on that crest need be told that the enemy is advancing. Every eye could see his legions, an overwhelming, resistless tide of an ocean of armed men*

*sweeping upon us! Regiment after regiment, and brigade after brigade, move from the woods and rapidly take their places in the lines forming the assault.*

An officer of the 126<sup>th</sup> New York, positioned on the western slope of Cemetery Hill, stated in a letter to his wife: “*beautiful, gloriously beautiful, did that vast array appear in the lovely little valley.*” The smoke slowly gave way to a lowlands full of Confederates shoulder-to-shoulder in their respective commands and advancing—as if irresistible. All along the Union lines, soldiers echoed: “*here they come, here come the Johnnies!*” The hot July sun began to glare off the bayonet steel of nearly thirteen thousand rifles, the final lines of the long procession moving out from the woods on Seminary Ridge, past the artillery and on their way towards the Union centre ... The scene was admired across the way, many awestruck before the might of the assault heading right for them. But this breather of respect was fleeting. The Union guns—those that had gone suddenly silent—opened up.

The Union batteries in and around the Union centre had been exhausted of ammunition and were hit worse by the preceding cannonade than anywhere else. So, the initial artillery that opened on the advancing grey tide came from the south-end of the field. Partly a result of the “left oblique” movements that Pickett’s men were performing so proficiently, as well as their position on the field, these batteries held nearly the entire Confederate charge in an enfilading fire. McGilvery’s Massachusetts cannoneers, who had performed fearlessly the preceding day, fired from the southern reaches of Cemetery Ridge. Lieutenant Benjamin Rittenhouse, who had ascended to take Hazlett’s place on Little Round Top, immediately took advantage of his guns’ elevated position and sent a deadly barrage of fire plummeting into the fully exposed C.S. ranks. The Union gunners would later talk with a boastful attitude about how “*every shot hit.*” Some batteries were firing straight down the columns of Pickett’s men. They would take out whole lines, decimating whole companies with a single shot: 15-20 men at a time. These guns had not been silenced; they were instead rejuvenated by the helpless targets before them—the gunners firing with rapid, blood-thirsty determination.

### *Walking the route of Pickett's Charge .*

Walking the path that the Confederate soldiers marched cannot tie you to the horrid anxiety that these men experienced; but you do see first-hand the impossibility of the task, how completely exposed and how very far they had to go. The charge itself got underway anywhere between 3 o'clock and 3:30 on July 3, 1863. I ventured off from Seminary Ridge about the same time, 130 years later. I walked off the well-traveled trail at points, out in the fields of grass and high weeds, figuring it a close approximation to how the fields met the grey and butternut tide that stifling July afternoon. The land bobs slightly, long rolling stretches, Cemetery Ridge and the Angle falling out of view every so often. For the most part you would be at the mercy of any weapon in your front. You come to an rise just before the Emmitsburg Road, heading up to make your way across the road. The road itself is lined with wooden fences, as it was in 1863. As you cross over it (congested that day with a traffic jam heading south to a re-enactment of the battle for McPherson's Ridge, south of the battlefield), you realize that if it had been 1863 you'd already be within distant range of a musket positioned within the Angle.

Across the road and over another fence, the scene takes on a heavy mood; not for anything you see in the modern day, but for what you realize was the view and experience 130 years earlier. It took me about fifteen minutes to make the entire walk (moving at a good clip), but the distance is negligible. It would have seemed like an eon under rain of artillery and musket fire. Within a few hundred feet of the Copse of Trees, you come to the awful realization that this stand—this view of the ridge—was the final thing many a Confederate soldier in the advance would see. Directly before the crest of the ridge, the position still looks like a strong one ... On the afternoon of July 3, 1993, I finished the trek on a course consistent with that of Pettigrew's left-wing. My knees felt weak. It is terrifying, emotionally-moving and flat out repugnant to think about the death and destruction that occurred here—what humans did to

each other, right here. It is impossible to even comprehend, let alone imagine. Actual combat would be the only way to gain such bitter knowledge. The ground resonates as if electric. I encourage every American to walk this route, if they get the chance. It is devastating.

*Forward boys! Forward! .*

All along the Union line, artillery erupted in the face of the advancing Confederates. Great bloody gaps were torn from the front ranks, shells dropping into the middle of the long thick columns. The Confederates reacted to each blast with a simple numb instinct: gather up their depleted lines, close the gaps. *“Close up! Close up!”* was the command. Commanders from generals to captains to company sergeants were summoning the courage of their men, steadying the advance, yelling over the destructive fire: *“Not too fast on the left! Save your strength boys! Steady boys! Steady boys! Forward now! Major take command, the Colonel is down.”*

As mentioned, the U.S. XI artillery had begun their work, operating on the advance with frightening results; the cannoneers all along the south-end of the field adding to the deadly fire. In the Union centre, the exhausted batteries had recovered from the cannonade and were right then pouring a withering fire into the front of the Confederate advance. To the left (south) of the Copse of Trees, the U.S. II Corps batteries of Captain James Rorty and Captain Andrew Cowan were back in action. In and around the area of the Angle was the battery of Lieutenant Alonzo Cushing, Cushing himself suffering through a horrible wound to the groin he'd received during the cannonade. Cushing refused to leave his command in spite of his severe pain and would be there to greet the Southern tide as they swarmed over his guns. Positioned behind the stone wall as cuts out of it's angle to run up Cemetery Hill, was the Rhode Island artillery of Captain William Arnold, with Lt. George Woodruff's battery at the far-right of Gibbon's divisional line. These batteries worked with fervor against the assault aimed right at them. I had read before my trip: *“an axiom of war, is that a man is much affected by what happens in his own vicinity.”*

Regardless of what the other batteries were doing, these artillery units were wholly invested in what was occurring before them at that moment—intent on greeting the Confederate charge with a deadly pounding. It was their lives, their vicinity; and their fire grew in intensity: crashing into and cutting down whole squads of Southerners as they drew closer to the ridge and their final run at the Union centre.

All this time, the Confederate batteries under the field supervision of Alexander—Dearing’s and Cabell’s guns to south, Poague, Lane and Pegram’s to the north—had moved up behind the advancing infantry to provide support to the last minute practicable; a diversion against the Union batteries now thundering into the face of the assault, if nothing else. But again, there had been no time to fill the near exhausted ammunition chests, the Confederate army’s ammunition train having been moved far to the rear during the intense response to the cannonade. The gunners were running out of shells as the advance moved farther and farther away from Seminary Ridge. Their salvos, which had been mainly ineffective in support of the advancing troops, began to slow. The fear of sputtering misfired shells into their own ranks eventually turned to the fear of dropping aimed shots among them, as the infantry approached the Emmitsburg Road. The Confederate artillery soon halted all supporting fire. The infantry was on their own.

Pickett’s men began to turn the last of their “left oblique” movements, coming more so in line with the right side of Pettigrew’s advance just as the columns neared the Emmitsburg Road—the southern-most troops of Pickett’s wing having already crossed the diagonal country route. Southerners fell like pawns in this slaughter, ripped limb from limb, heads taken clean off, ribcages torn open by the direct impact of screaming solid shot. Men were thrown high into the air by projectiles exploding in the ground nearby. George Stewart described the moment:

*... the time was past for that parade ground march with dressed lines, and the mounted officers riding gayly back and forth, and the flags advancing steadily. Many of the mounted officers were down, and the flags were dropping and coming up again, and*

*the lines were ragged—but still they came on! Now many of the soldiers marched ‘in a half stoop,’ with their heads bowed, as if walking into a storm.*

It was a storm: a hurricane of shot and shell.

At this point, the first major setback hit the Confederate advance. As Mayo advanced Brockenbrough’s brigade on the extreme left, his command was given the same brutal treatment from Woodruff’s guns and the U.S. XI Corps in their front that Pickett’s men were being handed by the U.S. reserves to the south. Mayo described: “*everything was a kaleidoscopic whirl.*” Still shaken from the beating they had suffered two days earlier at the hands of the “Iron Brigade,” Mayo’s men began to falter and drift, some streaming for the rear. Most of the brigade pressed on and drew near to the Emmitsburg Road, passing the still smoldering Bliss barn. It was here that an unexpected confrontation took place. The 8<sup>th</sup> Ohio had been serving as an advanced picket of regimental strength along this part of the road. Their orders had been to protect this position in front of the main line, keeping skirmishers and sharpshooters to a minimum. Lt. Colonel Franklin Sawyer interpreted this order in a zealous way. As the brigade of Virginians advanced on their position, Sawyer did not pull his men back to be absorbed by the main line, as was common practice for a skirmish line. Instead, he meant meant to keep to his position. And so, he ordered a charge. This very vocal regiment of Ohioans sprinted down the Emmitsburg Road, straight for Mayo’s C.S. brigade—which held a vast numerical superiority. The whole Union line within eyesight was at once drawn to the screaming charge of the 8<sup>th</sup>. Many would say that they thought Sawyer to be drunk in ordering such an absurd charge, but the rumors quickly faded away in lieu of its effect. Mayo’s skittish Virginians were quickly overwhelmed with the situation. This intrepid move was the last straw for the battered brigade. They sputtered to a halt, the majority breaking and retreating in rout towards Seminary Ridge. Sawyer’s men halted in the face of this small unlikely victory—as if amazed themselves—and trained their muskets on the men within Davis’s ranks: the next in line of advance, having come up to the immediate right of Mayo’s line. Some of the Mississippians followed suit, the extreme left of the charge breaking

under brittle nerves. It had been a suicidal order, but the Ohioans had prevailed ... Still, despite the collapse of the far-left, the rest of the Confederate advance continued.

The Union infantry of Gibbon watched as the artillery-induced murder performed its task. To the very left of Gibbon's division, positioned not even a thousand feet south of the Angle, were three Vermont regiments and two other regiments of the U.S. I Corps, all under the command of Abner Doubleday. Gibbon's left most units were that of William Harrow's brigade, including the patchwork remnants of the 1<sup>st</sup> Minnesota and the brigade of Colonel Norman Hall. Directly before the Copse of Trees where the stone wall starts and runs due north before cutting its angle, were the Union troops of Webb, with reinforcing regiments close at hand near the area of the present auto tour road. From the position of Arnold's artillery where the angle of the stone wall cuts back up to Woodruff's batteries, not even a thousand feet north of the Angle, was the position of Hay's division. These were the opponents of Pickett's Charge. It's been estimated that approximately 6,000 Union troops lay before the direct strike of the charge. But by that point in the advance, it was obvious to those troops directly in its path that the overwhelming superiority of the Confederate numbers was growing thinner and less significant with each report of U.S. artillery ... Still, they knew they were in for a fight.

The Union officers began to bolster the men who would face the brunt of the assault. Colonel Dennis O'Kane, whose 69<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania lay behind the stone wall and in front of the Copse of Trees, proclaimed to his men above the clatter: "*let your work this day be for victory, or death.*" Forever the out-sized personality, Hays galloped ceaselessly along his line chanting in a frenzied tone: "*now boys! Look out, and you will see some fun!*" The Union troops all along this line gathered themselves, took hold of nerves, tried to calm the anxiety, hearts-pounding—Bruce Catton stating: "*when the final showdown came, the foot soldier carrying a rifle was the important figure*" ... The "great blow" that J. F. J. Caldwell had predicted during the final days of June, 1863, was about to land.

## *Into the Angle .*

As the Confederates combined to make the final leg of their push on the crest, they came under the accurate range of small arms and the dreaded canister charge of artillery. The Union line roared, raining down a catastrophe on the advancing columns. The Confederates crossed over the Emmitsburg Road, company-by-shrinking-company. Cushing's and Arnold's batteries raked the centre of the advance with a hailstorm of canister, leveling the front lines as the slow steady charge continued towards its objective. The rest of the advance would be made moving up the rising slope of Cemetery Ridge. Armistead's brigade had stepped up to take its place in line between Kemper and Garnett and drove on with intensity towards the Angle, the advance now converging / concentrating on this spot: the heart of the Union line.

On the very left of the Union centre, the mentioned Vermont regiments of Doubleday's division, under the command of Brigadier General George Stannard, pounced on Kemper's withered ranks. This was a larger version of Sawyer's assault on the right, Stannard's men stepping out in front of the main line and swinging north to fall with ferocity on Kemper's right flank. Doubleday shouted with excitement as he watched his men deliver the improvised blow: *"glory to God, glory to God, see the Vermonters go it."*

Kemper's men began to break up and push to their left into Armistead's ranks, creating a jumbled mess of Pickett's Division. The Confederates continued on, as if on simple inertia. The "charge" was now in complete disarray, Armistead's troops moving further to their left and mixing with Garnett's ranks. By the time Pickett's Division prepared to lock horns with the Union line, unit structure was non-existent. They were more so a fanatic horde, following the closest officer. The Union line continued to roar: a scorching succession of volleys and salvos. The Confederates, having been ordered not to fire their weapons while en route, were finally allowed to reply. Also, having been denied their renowned "Rebel Yell," they now let loose a pent-up maniacal call and charged the stone wall.

It was here that a Union hero was made. Alonzo Cushing stood fast by a single gun which had been wheeled down to the stone wall. The 71<sup>st</sup> Pennsylvania began to break around him before the tide of Pickett's men. With most of his gunners down, Cushing straightened up at his piece, still suffering immense pain, and fired one last devastating charge of canister into the front of Armistead's jumbled command. The blast created a hole in the front ranks of the Confederate mass, but only checked their advance for a moment. Pickett's troops soon broke into a sprint. Armistead, having made the advance on foot with his hat stuck onto the end of his sword, turned to his men and yelled: "*give them cold steel boys!*" Hundreds of Virginians, badly thinned and shaken, poured in desperation over the stonewall, rolling over Cushing's guns as they fell into the Angle. Pickett's division had reached their objective, bayonets front, and here it would fight for its life. Bruce Catton wrote: "*the angle became the bloody cockpit of the whole war, the place where men on foot with guns in their hands would arrive at a verdict.*"

To the left of the Angle, Pettigrew and Trimble's cluttered force approached. They had been badly mauled, stunned at the beating they were continuing to receive. The left flank of the column had already foundered and broke, while the rest of the force plodded forward into a maelstrom. Arnold's batteries were brutally effective in the delivery of canister. It was said,

*... when these guns fired, men who saw it all said that the advancing Confederates disappeared in a boiling cloud of dust and smoke, in which knapsacks, and muskets, and horrible fragments of human bodies were tossed high in the air. One Union soldier remembered that there came from this part of the field, a strange sound that was like an agonized gasp of pain coming from hundreds of throats. No one seems to have remembered hearing any cheers from either side. One soldier recalled only 'a vast mournful roar' that seemed to rise from the entire field.*

In many instances, awaiting Union batteries delivered double charges of canister. It was said that "*whole companies were mowed down like ripened wheat.*"

All down Hay's line, an eclectic mix of northeastern Union troops were blasting away with deadly effect. From the protection of the stonewall, Hay's men chose their targets among the crumbling grey advance and dropped them at close-range. The artillery continued to pour forth devastation as Pettigrew's command stumbled forward, charging through the whistling lead storm raging about them like an upset hornets' nest. The left-half of the advance somehow continued to push for the wall, no doubt bolstered by the energized hordes of Confederates who were now in the Angle to their right—and making a fight of it. But the open fields proved to be too much. They came up on Hay's division, fully exposed before the full might of Union guns. It was said that one of Pettigrew's North Carolinians actually made it to the stone wall, a Union soldier yelling: "*come on over to the other side of the war,*" helping the man over and taking in the dubious overachiever as a prisoner-of-war ... Having walked the route myself, I remain highly skeptical that any living being could have made it to that wall alive.

### *The repulse .*

"The Angle" was the keystone. If the Union could hold at the centre-most portion of their line, their entire position would hold and the contest would be theirs. The force attempting to dislodge them, having begun as a magnificent display worthy of a parade-ground, had been winnowed down to a mutilated bloody mass. It was now a fight for survival.

The confused Confederates, only a few hundred of Pickett's men, were holding on by their fingernails. Lewis Armistead's command pitched into Hancock's line. A hand-to-hand struggle ensued. The grey and butternut gained momentum as they poured over the stonewall, driving back the Pennsylvanians in Gibbon's centre. For a moment, Pickett's men had pierced the Union line and fought with new-found strength. One of Pickett's officers went so far as to say that the road now lay open all the way to Baltimore. The savage beating they had endured during the advance, could be paid off with a rout of the Union centre. And the Confederates defiantly

waved their banners as they punched home their attack. The entire position fell into chaos. But the Confederate success was to be short-lived. Frank Haskell wrote: *“at this point little could be seen of the enemy by reason of his cover and the smoke, except the flash of muskets, and his wavering flags. Those red flags were accumulating at the wall every moment, and they maddened us as the same color does the bull.”*

Webb pulled together a counterstrike, which fell on Pickett’s jumbled force then piling into the rocky Angle. A Union colorbearer sprinted forward to inspire his comrades, but was shot down. This seemed to spawn the courage and valor associated with Gibbon’s reputable force, the 19<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts and 42<sup>nd</sup> New York of Hall and Webb’s own 106<sup>th</sup> and 72<sup>nd</sup> Pennsylvania regiments rushing forth to the lodgment centre and inciting a massive deadly brawl. Colonel Devareaux of the 19<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts:

*Two lines come together with a shock which stops them both and causes a slight rebound. Foot to foot, body to body, and man to man they struggled, pushed and strived and killed. The mass of wounded, and heaps of dead entangled the feet of the contestants, and underneath the trampling mass, wounded men who could no longer stand, struggled, fought, shouted, and killed. Hatless, coatless, drowned in sweat, black with powder, red with blood, with fiendish yells and strange oaths they blindly plied the work of slaughter.*

Armistead went down instantly. A marker now marks the spot. Kemper was already down and Garnett was dead. Leaderless, the struggle had literally become the foot soldier’s own. A deafening roar enveloped the scene, the Angle a cacophony of mortal destruction. Haskell—at the head of the Pennsylvanians as they rushed the Angle—exhibited the agility of his prose skill in this description:

*The jostling, swaying lines on either side boil, and roar, and dash their flamy spray—two hostile billows of a fiery ocean. Thick flashes stream from the wall, thick volleys answer from the crest. No threats or expostulation now, only example and encouragement. All depths of passion are stirred, and all combative fire, down to their deep foundations. Individuality is drowned in a sea of clamor, and timid men, breathing the breath of the magnitude, are brave. The frequent dead and wounded lie where they stagger and fall—there is no humanity for them now, and none can be spared to care for them. The men do not cheer or shout, they growl—and over that uneasy sea, heard with the roar of musketry, sweeps the muttered thunder of a storm of growls.*

The relentless summer heat and poisoned sulfuric air created a surreal scene. It rocked back-and-forth with intense ferocity. It was said that “*this battle was fought in a blinding fog—a choking, reeking, impenetrable mist of powder smoke—smoke from cannon and the infantry rifles lying close to the ground, and drifting up towards the sky until some breeze might carry it away.*” The battle seethed, as the Union hammer fell to crush this final hope of Southern victory on Northern soil. Union newsman Charles Coffin described,

*... pandemonium was everywhere the rule, men fire into each other’s faces, not five feet apart. There are bayonet thrusts, saber strokes, pistol shots. Cool, deliberate movements on the part of some, hot, passionate, desperate efforts with others—hand to hand contests, recklessness of life, tenacity of purpose, fiery determination, oaths, yells, curses, hurrahs, shoutings, men going down on their hands and knees, spinning around like tops, throwing out their arms, gulping up blood, falling legless, armless, headless. There are ghastly heaps of dead men. Seconds are centuries, minutes—ages.*

The Angle became the brutal altar of decision, as the Union strength overwhelmed the exhausted Confederates. The *Army of the Potomac* had been on the receiving end of beatings and embarrassing defeat for the duration of the war. On this afternoon it held these fresh bitter memories forefront: their bloody repulse in a similar charge at Fredericksburg, the degrading rout at Chancellorsville. It was here that they gained back their lost honor and fought like they never had. Past imprints of failure fueled inspired fighting. The U.S. II Corps lowered its head and smashed the wavering life out of Pickett's Charge. The Union infantry swept down the length of the embattled Angle. Unlike many lost battles past, they had mended the situation at the first sign of trouble. This was due to the courageous leadership of officers; but more so to the infantrymen who rose to the occasion. Their line had wavered, but had been patched; and was right then pitching forward into those few Confederates still able to keep up the fight.

Stannard's Vermont troops attacked northward in a flanking swivel on the far left side of the Union's centre. The 108<sup>th</sup> and 126<sup>th</sup> New York had moved out likewise on the far right, meeting up with Sawyer's intrepid Ohioans—who were still wreaking havoc on Pettigrew's men. They were rolling up both flanks, the Union defense having created a “double envelopment.” They now held the men of Pickett and Pettigrew in enfilade. The Confederates still standing now faced annihilation. Hancock would refer to it as an “infantryman's dream.” Having just taken a painful wound to the groin (a musket ball having struck his saddle and carried a constructive nail into his upper thigh), Hancock refused to leave the field.

All route of escape began to close on the advanced Confederates. Their only choice was a direct retreat over the smoldering writhing ground that they had just traveled. Pickett's beaten troops, stunned with the ferocity of the preceding half-hour, disintegrated. Pickett's Charge had run its course, as the pincer movements of the Union line began to crush it. Trimble, a tough old Confederate from Maryland, had fallen and given command to Lane. When an aide came to his side and asked if the assault should be renewed, Trimble, weak from an immense loss of blood, stated: “*no, the best thing the men can do is get out of this. Let them go.*” His and Pettigrew's men got no closer as a whole than 10-20 paces of the Angle's stonewall. A marble monument

now commemorates the North Carolinians who were slaughtered there. Pickett's men streamed for the rear, the Union troops chased them down off the ridge, capturing droves of those who'd been caught in the envelopment—killing those who fought to the last. Small groups of Union troops pursued the broken remnants out into the fields beyond Cemetery Ridge, but for the most part the Union line stood fast atop the ground they had successfully defended. Great triumphant cheers were soon thundering down from the ridge-crest. Charles Coffin continued:

*How inspiring the moment! How thrilling the hour! It is the highwater mark of the Confederacy, a turning point of history, and of human destiny!*

All this time Wilcox had been bringing across his sole brigade (some of Lang's Floridians amidst his ranks) to the right of Kemper's men—the extreme right of the assault. For some reason, tactical or mistake, Wilcox had started a full ten minutes later than Pickett's advance. As a result, they were entirely exposed and simply devastated by Union artillery along the south-end of the field. Still, they pressed on in brigade strength, closing on Cemetery Ridge at roughly the same location they had pressed the preceding day. It was here that Stannard's Vermonters gained legendary status within their army, as they turned from the now retreating envelopment of Pickett's men, swinging south 180° to beat back the battered advance of Wilcox. Their adrenalized enthusiasm fell on the exposed Confederates. A Vermont historian called it: "*the pivot of the pivotal movement of the pivotal battle of the war.*" These U.S. I Corps troops crushed Wilcox's nominal support of Kemper's flank, knocking the Alabamians back and sending them reeling for Seminary Ridge.

The great charge had moved across the open fields to settle the Gettysburg fight and had crested, falling in a bloody crescendo. The C.S. *Army of Northern Virginia's* earned sense of invincibility had been dealt a crushing blow. The advance had taken about twenty minutes, the fight in-and-around the Angle about another twenty minutes. In under an hour, the pride and reputation of Lee's men had been delivered an unimaginable defeat. Pickett, who had been

surveying the fight from the fields of the Codori house about halfway across, slowly made his way back to Seminary Ridge a broken man—driven to tears.

The survivors of Pickett's Charge stumbled back under the harassing fire of artillery. Many of these men walked backwards until out of musket range, facing the area they had just charged. If they were shot during their tattered disorganized retreat, they knew it would have happened while facing their enemy. These were proud men and those who had taken part knew the significance of what had just happened. Confederate Lieutenant John T. James would later state: "*we gained nothing but glory, and lost our bravest men.*" The war had just changed, irrevocably, for the *Army of Northern Virginia* and the Confederacy itself.

Given the appointment of Ulysses S. Grant to chief of the eastern Union forces in 1864, the superior numbers of the various Union armies would take victory on the fields of Gettysburg and turn the war into one of attrition between their largely confident, well-supplied might and Lee's rapidly thinning, undernourished and undersupplied troops. (For his part, Grant on July 3rd, 1863, was one day away from accepting the surrender of the besieged Confederate river stronghold at Vicksburg, Mississippi, which would give control of the Mississippi River, and for that matter, control over a majority of the western theatre, to Union military forces.) The Confederates in the east and out west would not give in easily, would continue to fight with deadly determination and continue, on occasion, to score victories. But it would be a different fight from here out. With 1864, the war would move swiftly from one grinding conflict to the next, wearing away the South's ability to wage war. 1864 would be the bloodiest, most savage year of the Civil War. It would be "total war," one that U. S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman and other storied Union generals would make sure was felt in every corner of the Confederacy ... But that was still to come. Right then, it was 4 o'clock on the afternoon of July 3, 1863.

Robert E. Lee rode out to the area where the advance had begun to meet the broken ranks of Pickett, Pettigrew and Trimble, as they filtered back into the woods atop Seminary Ridge. Beaten, Lee was still a near deity to his troops. This had to be a bitter reality for Lee. But

he sat high and proud in his saddle, consoling his weary men, attempting to pull some unknown rally cry from their parched throats. “*It is my fault, this is all my fault,*” was what Lee said to the passing soldiers. For the most part, his men would not allow Lee’s blame in their presence, some even asking to have another shot at a second assault. But as the tired bloodied remnants of the great charge returned it became apparent that the *Army of Northern Virginia* had received a substantial blow to morale and general strength. Of the approximately 13,000 Confederates who had made this assault, about two-thirds had fallen dead, wounded, or were now prisoners-of-war—about 7,500 men, in less than an hour. Of the generals who advanced with the columns of the assault, Trimble was wounded and captured, Kemper, Scales, and Pettigrew were wounded and Garnett was dead. Armistead, also captured, was at that point in a Union field hospital. He would die that night. This massive loss in numerical strength alone could have collapsed a whole corps within most armies. But the *Army of Northern Virginia* held a fierce honorable spirit—one that was very real. This army would survive this day and continue to fight hard and long for the better part of two more years. But for right then it had to deal with something it was not accustomed to: losing.

Lee was troubled that in the face of such a powerful victory Meade may try to exploit it and order a counterattack. Lee set to mending his broken troops, aligning a defensive posture that could repel any reciprocal Union attack ... It was about this time that Pickett strode wearily back up to Seminary Ridge, walking alone; his mount having thrown him after being frightened by an exploding round. Pickett’s eyes were streaming tears and he was no doubt having difficulty with speech. Lee, sighting the general whose name would be associated with one of the most dramatic moments in American military history, rode up to him and implored: “*General, you must attend to your division.*” Pickett replied: “*but General Lee, I have no division*” ... The momentous loss that George Pickett endured on this day would shape the rest of his life. Pickett would continue to serve until Lee’s surrender at Appomattox Court House. But his heart had died along with many of his men on July 3, 1863. Until his death, Pickett would never forgive Robert E. Lee for sending his division to their doom.

Meanwhile, back on Cemetery Ridge, the Union troops were delirious—reveling in their substantial victory. Heart-felt choruses, cheering, hurrahs punctured the scene of destruction. Hays was so enthralled that he grabbed a lieutenant on his staff, the young Davis Shields and kissed him, joyously pleading: “*Boys, get me a flag!*” (one of the near thirty regimental flags captured during the assault). Hays went on, yelling to the aide: “*get a flag, get a flag Dave, and come on,*” going off to parade the captured trophy in haughty celebration.

Prisoners were being sent to the rear, the Union troops finally given a moment to survey the sullen carnage carpeting this once peaceful Pennsylvania countryside. The Union loss was roughly one-third of the Confederate casualties for the afternoon. They had been sacrificed in the dutiful repulse of “Bobby” Lee, the Union loss viewed as minimal in comparison to what had been gained ... Yet amidst the celebration, it was also a hallowed reflective moment. Frank Haskell wrote:

*Near me, saddest sight of the many of such a field, and not in keeping with all this noise, were mingled alone the thick dead of Maine, and Minnesota, and Michigan, and Massachusetts, and the Empire and the Keystone states, who, not yet cold, with the blood still oozing from their death wounds, had given their lives to the country upon that stormy field. So mingled upon that crest let their honored graves be.*

Meade rode up to view the scene, no doubt breathing a little easier. Meade would allow his troops to savor this victory. There would be no counterattack. Aside from the possibility of ruining a decisive win, Meade knew that any counterstrike would meet heavy resistance. He was not afraid of Lee and his force, but he knew that they still had plenty of fight left in them. George Gordon Meade would be remembered with honor for his men’s achievements at Gettysburg, to which he would modestly add: “*I claim no extraordinary merit for this last battle. I did and shall continue to do my duty.*” It was, indeed, the beginning of a different era for the *Army of the Potomac*. There would be defeats; but none would seem like they had before Gettysburg.

Meade, the stone-faced warrior, would be chided for inaction in concluding the Pennsylvania campaign—allowing Lee’s army to retreat back into Virginia with little more than a rearguard fight. But for the moment, his bruised bloodied force stood victorious atop the ridge. Meade’s statement at this point was forthright and in character: “*Thank God*” ...

Silence soon settled across these fields, a deep overwhelming silence that can still be heard—and felt—today.

## CONCLUSION

Cavalry provided the last dramatic scenario of conflict at Gettysburg. Though relatively unimportant to the overall outcome, the sharpest of these two engagements occurred about two-and-a-half miles east of the main battlefield, within a collection of fields and forest off the Hanover Road. J. E. B. Stuart had moved to this position in an attempt to exploit the possible success of Pickett's Charge against the Union centre. While waiting, concealed from Union cavalry detachments by thick stands-of-woods, the Confederates were in position to pounce upon the main body of Union cavalry in the vicinity and then drive on to wreak havoc in the U.S. *Army of the Potomac's* rear. But Stuart was subsequently confronted by Major General David Gregg's Union horsemen. The surprise gone, the two forces locked horns in a large cavalry battle. None other than Brigadier General George Custer, his blond locks flowing pretentiously as he led forward his reinforcing brigade of Michigan "Wolverines," rode into the fight, leveling off the initial Confederate advantage in numbers and driving home a sharp Union counter. This, coupled with a heavy Union advantage in artillery, eventually forced Stuart's attack to halt in its tracks and move back to the cover of the nearby woods. When word reached Stuart of the repulse of Pickett's Charge, he solemnly massed his men and withdrew.

Much less dramatic, and more unimportant, was a foolish charge initiated by Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick to the south of the intact “fish-hook” line before Big Round Top. In the late afternoon, Kilpatrick, thinking that Meade would jump to the offensive in lieu of their repulse of the Confederate charge, ordered forward two regiments of Brigadier General Elon Farnsworth’s cavalry brigade. Farnsworth saw the insanity of the order, questioning Kilpatrick, who in turn received Farnsworth’s inquiry with a deaf ear. Farnsworth, known for great bravery, went forward at the head of the attack and to his death, along with a good portion of the Vermont and West Virginia cavalymen he lead into the Plum Run Valley. The assault ran head-on into the vengeful men of Law’s and Robertson’s Texans, who emptied the saddles of the approaching Unionists with ease, penning in a great many more and taking them prisoner. The U.S infantry atop Little Round Top looked on in amazement at the absurd assault. Kilpatrick, seeing his overzealous plan disintegrate, turned a blind eye to its results, just as he had to Farnsworth’s objections ... The fighting at Gettysburg was over.

Night came on quickly, the fields wreaking of sulfur and smoke and death. The voices of thousands of wounded men could be heard crying for care and water. Napier Bartlett, a gunner in the “Washington Artillery,” talked of the dejection along the Confederate lines. Napier went on: *“when we were permitted at length to lie down under the caissons, or in the fence corners, and realized that we had escaped the death that had snatched away so many others, we felt too well satisfied at our good fortune, in spite of the enemy still near us, not to sleep the soundest sleep it is permitted on earth for mortals to enjoy.”*

The two armies stood on opposite ridges. Both were mauled after three days of relentless conflict. All told, both armies suffered nearly 50,000 casualties. It was the bloodiest single battle of our Civil War (the whole campaign would see more than 53,000 casualties). New York and Pennsylvania men alone accounted for nearly 12,000 of the dead, wounded, or missing. The Union army had suffered a 27% loss of just over 23,000 men. The Southerners were repelled

with a 30% loss, almost 20,700 men. The battle had procured massive execution. The men who escaped unharmed were left to reflect on their own mortality and the fights to come.

The next day was July 4<sup>th</sup>, Independence Day. (Remember, these were men reared on the same myths, who celebrated the same state holidays, believed in the honorable spirit of George Washington and prayed to the same God.) But there was little celebration on either side, the opposing forces just trying to catch their breath. None knew at the time that U. S. Grant was right then accepting the “unconditional surrender” of the Confederate bastion of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Within twenty-four hours, two very large nails had been driven into the Confederate coffin. And in hindsight, these were probably the two most significant military losses the Confederacy would—or could—endure.

Lee, seeing his situation extremely precarious as a defeated army a long way from home, set to initiating his retreat from Pennsylvania. Storm clouds moved in and began weeks worth of wet weather that would hamper the C.S. retreat. For the time, the Union force was content to rest, as the endless work of ambulances, field doctors and graves-registration began its sombre work. Major General Carl Schurz, who had been mostly out of the fight since the XI Corps was overwhelmed on the first day, later described the scene at a makeshift field hospital:

*There stood the surgeons, their sleeves rolled up to the elbows, their bare arms as well as their linen aprons smeared with blood, their knives not seldom held between their teeth, while they were helping a patient on or off the table, or had their hands otherwise occupied—around them pools of blood, and amputated arms or legs in heaps, sometimes more than man high. Antiseptic methods were still unknown at that time. As a wounded man was lifted on the table, often shrieking with pain as the attendants handled him, the surgeon quickly examined the wound, and resolved upon cutting off the injured limb. Some ether was administered, and the body put in position in a moment. The surgeon snatched his knife from his teeth, wiped it rapidly once or twice*

*across the blood-stained apron, and the cutting began. The operation accomplished, the surgeon would look around with a deep sigh, and then—‘Next.’*

*And so it went on, hour after hour, while the number of expectant patients seemed hardly to diminish. Now and then one of the wounded men would call attention to the fact that his neighbor lying on the ground had given up the ghost while waiting for his turn, and the dead body was quietly removed. Or a surgeon, having been long at work, would put down his knife, exclaiming that his hand had grown unsteady, and that this was too much for human endurance, not seldom, hysterical tears streaming down his face. Many of the wounded men suffered with silent fortitude, fierce determination in the knitting of their brows, and the steady gaze of their bloodshot eyes. Some would even force themselves to a grim jest about their situation, or about the ‘skedaddling of the Confederates.’ But there were too, heart-rending groans, and shrill cries of pain piercing the air, and despairing exclamations, ‘Oh Lord! Oh Lord!’ or ‘Let me die!’ or softer murmurings in which the words ‘mother’ or ‘father’ or ‘home’ were often heard.*

On the morning of July 5, 1863, Lee sent the *Army of Northern Virginia’s* massive supply train west, then south, via the Cashtown Pass, to be guarded by the cavalry of Brigadier General J. D. Imboden. Taking a route more southwesterly, Lee set his troops to the march, keeping them between their bulky awkward wagons and any answering movement on the part of the *Army of the Potomac*. It was a fantastic effort as rain poured on Lee’s retreat, slogging the supply train in the thick mud of the backcountry roads that led past South Mountain and into the Blue Ridge foothills. Napier Bartlett wrote: *“the whole army was dozing while marching, and moved as if under enchantment, or a spell—they were asleep, and at the same time walking.”*

While Lee’s retreat progressed, hampered in an almost mocking way by the elements, Meade kept his distance, following a more southern route through Maryland—shadowing Lee,

but that was all. Abraham Lincoln was beside himself, infuriated by Meade's unwillingness to fight the defeated fleeing Confederates and destroy them once and for all. He demanded that Meade engage. But Meade knew his army to be in a bad state despite the victory and was weary of fighting the *Army of Northern Virginia* who now had nothing to lose. This C.S. army would never lose its fierce reputation.

Lee linked the army with its supply train in Hagerstown, Maryland. From there, they headed for Williamsport to ford the Potomac River in the area of Falling Waters and cross back into Virginia. Meade cautiously watched as Lee pinned his army against the Potomac, the water well over flood stage due to the recent rains. Setting up a wide arc of defense, Lee threw up makeshift pontoon bridges to replace those which had been damaged due to the floods and Union cavalry raids.

Meade finally took to the offensive, but it was too late. Lee had crossed the predominant portion of his army. All that occurred was a rearguard fight at Williamsport of little substantial value—except, of course, to those who lost their lives there; including the same James Pettigrew that had advanced with Pickett. The rest of Lee's force crossed following this minor fight and the *Army of Northern Virginia* was again on friendly soil. For the time being, they were safe from any Union threat.

Lincoln was outraged; and though Meade would stay on as the commander of the U.S. *Army of Potomac* through the duration of the war, he would be subservient in the theatre-of-operations to a man who never had to be told twice to go on the offensive and stay there. Ulysses S. Grant would be Lincoln's choice to put an end to Robert E. Lee's remarkable effectiveness in prolonging this war ... But again, that was yet to come. Right then, Lee's audacious campaign into Northern territory was ending in defeat.

I left the battlefield under a sweltering late-afternoon sky, much the way it was 130 years before, to the hour on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. I took the Taneytown Road south, the same route I had attached myself to on the way to Gettysburg after realizing my error in navigation. The small blue metal

signs marking the sites of field hospitals following the battle seemed even more prevalent on the way out than on the way in. I took in some of the names: Peter Frey farm, W. Patterson farm, Sarah Patterson farm. I recalled a remarkable, almost ridiculous statistic I'd read stating that *“the aggregate amount of lead and iron discharged by weaponry over the three days, was about five hundred and sixty tons.”*

I got to thinking about my trip through the National Cemetery on the night of the 1<sup>st</sup>. You think about Abraham Lincoln and the words he spoke while dedicating the plot, words so succinctly, so robustly—and so honorably—reinterpreting the American ideal; as did the war itself. More so I remembered some of the names embossed onto the endless rows of gravestones. Patrick O’Keefe and John Shehan, an orderly for John Gibbon. Last names stuck in my memory: Goodspeed, Charrity, Swackhammer, Irons. There were thousands and thousands of unknown. There were a number of poems displayed on metal plates around the cemetery grounds. My favorite read:

*On fames eternal camping ground  
Their silent tents are spread  
And glory guards with solemn, ‘round  
The bivouac of the dead*

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