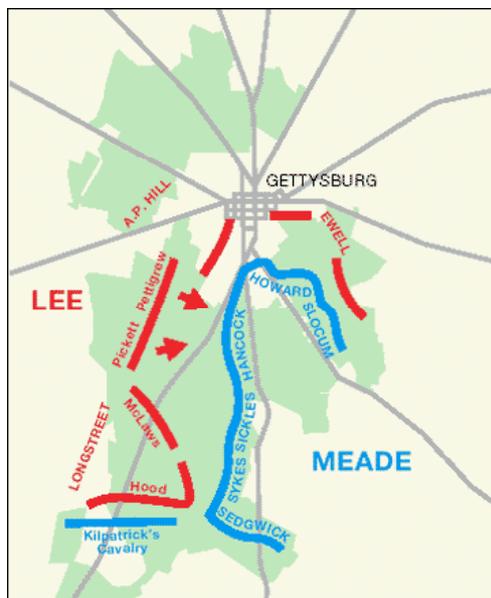


Battle of Gettysburg July 1-3 1863

First Day



In early June 1863, Lee cut across northern Maryland into southern Pennsylvania. His forces gathered west of a small town called Gettysburg. Lee was unaware that Union soldiers were encamped closer to town. He had been suffering from lack of enemy information for three days because his cavalry chief "Jeb" Stuart was not performing his duties. Stuart and his cavalry had gone off on their own raiding party, disobeying Lee's orders.

Another Confederate raiding party went to Gettysburg for boots and other supplies. There, Lee's troops ran right into Union general George G. Meade's cavalry, triggering the Battle of Gettysburg, a key battle that finally turned the tide against the Confederates.

The battle began on July 1, 1863, when the Confederate raiding party and the Union forces began exchanging fire. The larger Confederate forces began to push the Union troops back through the town of Gettysburg to Cemetery Ridge. The Union soldiers regrouped along the high ground of Cemetery Ridge and Culp's Hill. General Lee wanted to prevent the Union forces from entrenching (digging in) themselves. He therefore ordered General Ewell to attack immediately. However, Ewell hesitated and thereby gave the Federals (Union) time to establish an excellent defensive position. The Confederates might have enjoyed a tremendous victory had they engaged in one last assault upon the Union forces in Gettysburg, but Confederate general Richard Ewell decided not to attempt another attack because nightfall was approaching.

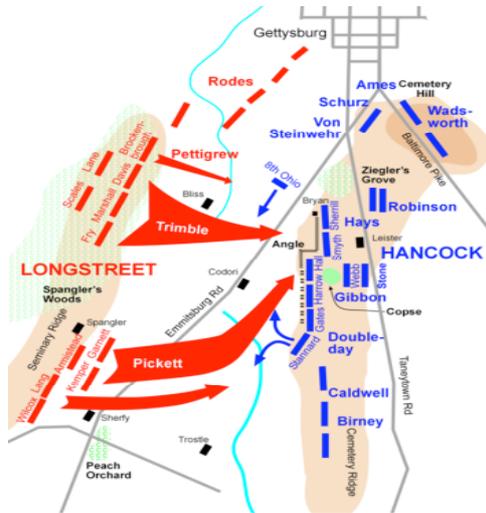
The Confederates camped at Cemetery Ridge, which ran parallel to the Union forces. Both camps called for their main forces to reinforce them and prepare for combat the next day.

Second Day

On July 2, Lee ordered an attack on the left side of the Union line. Lee knew that he could win the battle if his troops captured Little Round Top from the Union forces. From this hill, Lee's troops could easily fire down on the line of Union forces. Union forces and Confederate troops fought viciously for control of Little Round Top. The fighting was particularly fierce on the south side of the hill. There the 20th Maine led by Colonel Joshua Chamberlain battled the 15th Alabama led by Colonel William Oates. Later, when describing the conflict, Oates said, "The blood stood in puddles in some places in the rocks." Eventually, the Union forced the Confederates to pull back from Little Round Top.

Then the Confederates attacked Cemetery Hill and Culp's Hill. The fighting lasted until nightfall. The assault on Cemetery Hill was unsuccessful. The Confederates did manage to take a few trenches on Culp's Hill. Even so, the Union forces still held a strong defensive position by the days end.

Pickett's Charge



On the third day of battle, Longstreet again tried to convince Lee not to attack, but Lee nixed the idea. In his mind, the Confederate forces had only two options: They must retreat or try one last big attack. Because of this, he planned to attack the center of the Union line with 15,000 fresh soldiers under the command of Major General George Pickett and others. He felt the attack would not be expected. Indeed, General Meade had left only about 5,750 troops to defend the Union's center.

The last battle of the vicious, bloody engagement started at 1 P.M. with a deafening canon artillery duel. The cannons roared until both sides were nearly out of

ammunition, and at 3:30 P.M., the Union cannon fire backed off. The Confederates assumed that they had seriously damaged the Union artillery but in reality, the Confederate barrage had done little damage.

For one mile, Pickett's men marched across an open field up toward Cemetery Ridge. The charge was pure suicide. Union cannon and rifle fire showered them the entire way resulting in severe Confederate losses. A handful of men made the crossing successfully and managed to capture a short stretch of the Union line, but they were unable to hold it. By the end of the day, Lee knew he had been defeated and decided to pull his army back into Virginia. Unable to carry his wounded, Lee left nearly 7,000 injured soldiers in Union care. Distressed by this defeat, General Lee rode among the retreating survivors of his defeated army and told them, "It is all my fault."

Had Union forces pursued Lee in his retreat the following day, they might have been able to completely disable the Confederate war machine and bring the conflict to a quick close. However, Meade and his Union troops were exhausted, and he opted to let Lee go. As a result, the war would endure for another two years. A month after his defeat at Gettysburg, Lee offered his resignation to Confederate president Jefferson Davis. Davis refused to accept it.

Aftermath of Gettysburg

Gettysburg was a turning point in the war. Lee's troops would never again launch an attack in the North. The Union victory at Gettysburg also took place on the day before Grant's capture of Vicksburg, Mississippi. These victories made northerners believe that the war could be won.

In addition, the Union win at Gettysburg helped to end the South's search for foreign influence in the war. After Gettysburg, Great Britain and France refused to provide aid to the Confederacy. The South's attempt at cotton diplomacy failed.