

# The Battle of Gettysburg

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Period 7

Shamokin Area High School

February 26, 2019

### **Introduction**

The Battle of Gettysburg is known by many to be the bloodiest battle in the Civil War. Along with that, it was also a major turning point in the war. For three days, the battle ravaged around in and around the town of Gettysburg, causing the loss of many lives. Along with loss of life, it would cost the United States money, needed to repair the demolished town. With all this being said, the Battle of Gettysburg had impacts that were immensely significant in the outcome of the war, and were indirectly significant in the feeling of the Industrial Era.

### **Origins of the Battle**

On the evening of July 1st, 1863, the Union (U.S.A.) and the Confederacy (C.S.A.) met in Gettysburg by chance. The C.S.A. had a army of 75,000 strong advancing north from Maryland. A small division of that army approached Gettysburg, a small town southwest of Harrisburg, in search of supplies.<sup>1</sup> When they reached Gettysburg, they found that a small Union troop had beat them to it. The C.S.A. were able to push the small, outnumbered Union troop back to Cemetery Hill. From here, what would be the bloodiest battle on the Western Hemisphere, would ensue.

### **Synopsis of Days 1-3**

Seeking to press advantage before more Union troops could arrive, Confederate general Robert E. Lee gives direct orders to attack Cemetery Hill.<sup>2</sup> After the evening of fighting to push the Union back, Confederate general Richard Ewell decided it was not the right time, and disobeyed his orders. Given the break, the Union brought four corps overnight to strengthen the

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<sup>1</sup> History.com Editors, "Battle of Gettysburg," HISTORY, last modified September 13, 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/battle-of-gettysburg>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

Union defense. By the morning of the second day, Union defenses were strong, covering land from Culp's Hill to Cemetery Ridge. General Lee assessed the defense, and ordered an attack on the left and right sides of the defenses. By the end of the fight, the Union held Little Round Top, but lost Devil's Den and an orchard field which they had previously held.<sup>3</sup> The combined casualties after two days of fighting is estimated to be around 35,000.<sup>4</sup> At the dawn of the third day, the Union is able to take back their strong position near Culp's Hill. Despite this, Lee believed the Confederacy were going to win the battle. He ordered three divisions, led by general George Pickett to march in the direction of dug in Union troops.<sup>5</sup> This move would be known as "Pickett's Charge." The charge proved fatal for the Confederates, as they lost almost half their men. Lee kept the surviving troops in Gettysburg an extra day, waiting for a counter-attack that never came. On July 4th, Lee withdrew his army to Virginia, and the battle was over, with the U.S.A. getting a crucial victory over the C.S.A..<sup>6</sup>

### **Significance of the Battle**

The Battle of Gettysburg was a very important win for the Union. It became the turning point of the war, shifting the odds more in the U.S.A.'s favor. The battle also helped the Union in the sense that it demoralized Confederate general Robert E. Lee, so much so that after the battle, he attempted to resign, but was refused resignation by then C.S.A. president Jefferson Davis.<sup>7</sup> Lee's demeanor would be tarnished for the rest of the war, which may have indirectly caused the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

C.S.A. to lose the war. Not to mention, the win at Gettysburg surely gave Union general Ulysses S. Grant and his men much confidence for the rest of the war.

### **Reflection**

The C.S.A. had the U.S.A. outnumbered at the beginning of the battle. With that being said, some “what-if-history” can be put in play. Had the Confederates maybe played more offensive, Union troops may not have arrived in time, and the Battle of Gettysburg would be known as nothing more than a small skirmish. Of course, however, that did not happen, and instead, we know Gettysburg as “the bloodiest battle on the Western Hemisphere.” Nearly 28,000 C.S.A. soldiers were wounded, killed, or went M.I.A (Missing in Action), compared to the Union’s 23,000. Most of the dead were either not buried properly, or not buried at all. The government would eventually purchase land to better tend to the dead, which would become a National Cemetery. I feel that while the Battle of Gettysburg was an interesting one, it definitely could have been prevented, and lives could have been saved. I also feel that the Confederacy could have been more disciplined, and along with that, they could have pushed the Union harder at the very start of the battle. Had they done so, I feel like the Confederacy would have secured a quick win in Gettysburg.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Battle of Gettysburg, a battle that happened purely by accident, would end up being one of the most important and significant battles of the Civil War. Had the battle not happened, maybe the Union would have still won, but the war after that point would have been completely different. It is marvelous to think that one of the most impactful battles of the

war, was merely an accident. For years to come, schools around the nation will teach about the battle that shouldn't have been.

***Bibliography***

Editors, History.com. "Battle of Gettysburg." HISTORY. Last modified September 13, 2018. <https://www.history.com/topics/american-civil-war/battle-of-gettysburg>.