

## CW3.4.8 – Civil War Battle Stations

### Gettysburg (July 3, 1863)



Gettysburg, Pa. Confederate dead gathered for burial at the edge of the Rose woods, July 5, 1863. Source: Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2003000202/PP/>

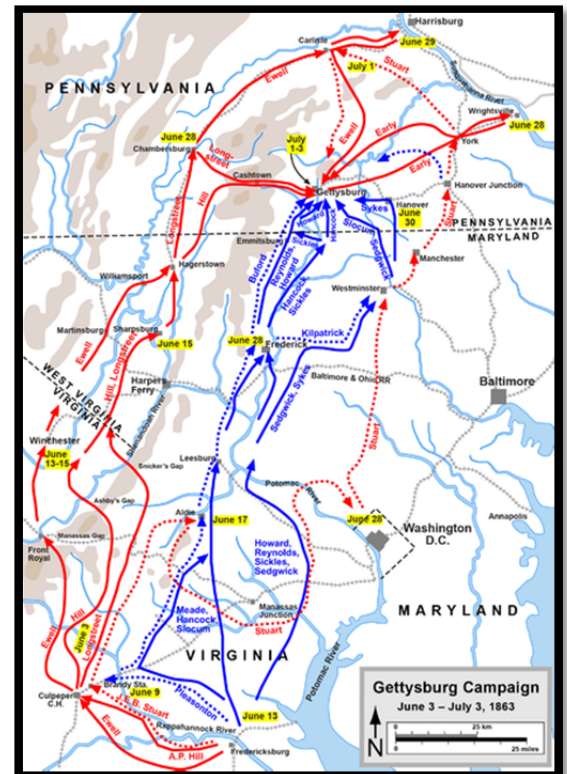
In May 1863, the Union suffered [had] an important loss at Chancellorsville. The Confederacy, under the leadership of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, defeated a larger Union force in a bloody and horrific battle. The Confederacy lost 13,000 men at Chancellorsville, including Stonewall Jackson, and the Union lost 11,000. The South's win at Chancellorsville likely led to overconfidence among the Confederates – they believed that they couldn't lose.

Confederate General Robert E. Lee then directed [led] his troops north, in order to take advantage of the momentum [progress] they'd built from Chancellorsville. He brought together 75,000 men who were well-fed and had high morale. Lee planned to follow Grant's practice of living off the land [taking food and what the troops needed from the farms and houses along the way]

and demoralize [discourage] the Union by defeat in their own territory. At the same time, President Lincoln directed his latest General, George Gordon Meade, to find and destroy Lee's army.

As the Confederate troops marched north, a division [a group of 17,000 to 21,000 soldiers commanded by General A.P. Hill heard that there was a supply of shoes in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. When they arrived, they did find shoes, as well as two Union brigades [a group of 2,500 to 4,000 soldiers] under the leadership of John Buford. Buford quickly sent for reinforcements [more troops], as he had fewer men and weapons than the Confederate division. For two hours, Buford's troops held off the larger southern force, until they were reinforced by men from John Reynolds' tough brigade. By the afternoon of July 1, there were 24,000 Confederate soldiers fighting 20,000 Union troops. Reinforcements continued to arrive from both the Northern and Southern armies.

The battle was at first a stalemate [tie], since the Confederacy had



Map of the Gettysburg Campaign of the American Civil War. Drawn by Hal Jespersen at <http://www.posix.com/CWmaps/> This file is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.

## CW3.4.8 – Civil War Battle Stations (continued)

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more men, but the Union had the better position – the high ground from which they could defend and not have to attack. Lee’s trusted subordinate, General Longstreet, argued that the higher ground advantage was simply too much for the Confederate troops to overcome, but Lee continued on and even put Longstreet in charge of attacking Cemetery Ridge. Although they suffered horrendous [terrible] losses, the Union troops continued to use the high ground, pushing back Confederate attacks at the two Round Top hills. Of particular note was the courage of the 20<sup>th</sup> Maine regiment, commanded by a former professor at Bowdoin College, Joshua Chamberlain. After one-third of his troops were killed, Chamberlain found himself without any ammunition. Instead of surrendering, Chamberlain ordered his troops to fix bayonets and charge against the advancing Confederate troops, who were overwhelmed by Chamberlain and his men, maintaining Union control of Little Round Top.

On July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 15,000 Confederate troops launched a massive attack across open ground toward the Union defenses. It was a courageous and ultimately doomed effort, as the Union’s territorial advantage [holding the high ground] made the southerners easy targets. Almost half of the southern force was killed in this advance and retreat.

Lee took the loss hard, blaming himself and offering his resignation to the Confederate President Jefferson Davis (Davis refused to accept it). George Meade continued the Union tradition of not taking advantage of southern retreat. What was left of the Confederate forces retreated south without chase from Union troops.



Gettysburg, Pa. The center of the Federal position viewed from Little Round Top. 1863.  
Source: Library of Congress <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2003000195/PP/>.

More than 23,000 Union troops died at Gettysburg. The South lost 28,000 men, more than a third of Lee’s army. In addition, the South lost the confidence they had gained at Chancellorsville. Gettysburg, along with Vicksburg, is often seen as the turning point of the war – the beginning of the end for the South.