

# Battle of Gettysburg

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## Introduction

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The Battle of Gettysburg, fought from July 1 to July 3, 1863, was a critical engagement in the American Civil War. This battle took place in and around the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and is often described as the war's turning point. The Union Army of the Potomac, under the command of Major General George G. Meade, clashed with the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, led by General Robert E. Lee. The battle resulted in one of the highest casualties in the war and ended Lee's invasion of the North.

## Context and Prelude

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### The Civil War Background

The American Civil War began in 1861, stemming primarily from longstanding sectional differences over issues such as states' rights and slavery. The conflict pitted the northern states (Union) against the southern states that seceded to form the Confederacy.

### Lee's Invasion of the North

In the summer of 1863, General Robert E. Lee sought to capitalize on his recent victories by launching a second invasion of the northern states. Lee hoped to relieve pressure on Virginia's farmlands during the growing season, threaten Northern cities such as Philadelphia, and weaken Northern morale with a decisive blow on Union territory.

### Day 1: Initial Engagements (July 1, 1863)

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The battle began on July 1, 1863, when Confederate forces encountered Union cavalry west of Gettysburg. Initial skirmishes escalated into a full-scale battle as reinforcements arrived from both sides. By late afternoon, the Confederates had pushed Union troops back through the town to Cemetery Hill to the south.

### Day 2: The Battle Intensifies (July 2, 1863)

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On the second day, combat spread to additional locations, including Little Round Top, the Wheatfield, Devil's Den, and the Peach Orchard. Lee aimed to envelop the Union flanks, with attacks centered on the Union left and right. Despite initial successes, Confederate forces failed to break the Union lines, largely due to the resilience of Union defensive positions and timely reinforcements.

### Day 3: Pickett's Charge (July 3, 1863)

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On the third and final day, Lee orchestrated a massive assault on the Union center at Cemetery Ridge, famously known as Pickett's Charge. Approximately 12,500 Confederate soldiers marched across open fields but were met with devastating Union artillery and rifle fire. The charge failed disastrously, resulting in severe Confederate casualties.

# Aftermath and Significance

## Casualties

The Battle of Gettysburg was one of the bloodiest battles of the American Civil War, resulting in an estimated 51,000 soldiers dead, wounded, or missing.

## Military Impact

The Union victory at Gettysburg halted Lee's invasion of the North and boosted Union morale. It marked a significant turning point, diminishing the offensive capability of the Confederate forces and bolstering the strategic position of the Union.

## Gettysburg Address

In November 1863, President Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery. His brief but profound speech emphasized the principles of human equality and rededicated the nation to the preservation of the Union and the principles of liberty and democracy.

## Legacy

The Battle of Gettysburg remains one of the most studied and commemorated battles in American history. Gettysburg National Military Park preserves the battlefield and serves as a reminder of the sacrifice made by those who fought there. The battle and Lincoln's address continue to be emblematic of national unity and resolve in the face of division.

## Conclusion

The Battle of Gettysburg stands as a pivotal event in the American Civil War, demonstrating the high stakes, strategic decisions, and human cost of the conflict. Its legacy endures as a symbol of national perseverance and the ongoing struggle for freedom and equality.

Table 1: Key Figures at the Battle of Gettysburg

Role	Name	Side
Union Commander	Major General George G. Meade	Union
Confederate Commander	General Robert E. Lee	Confederacy
Key Union Leaders	Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, Major General John F. Reynolds	Union
Key Confederate Leaders	Lieutenant General James Longstreet, Major General George Pickett	Confederacy

Table 2: Casualties

	Union	Confederacy	Total
Killed	~3,155	~4,708	~7,863
Wounded	~14,529	~12,693	~27,222
Missing/Captured	~5,365	~5,830	~11,195
Total	~23,049	~23,231	~46,280

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The tables above offer a snapshot of the leadership and human cost of this pivotal battle.