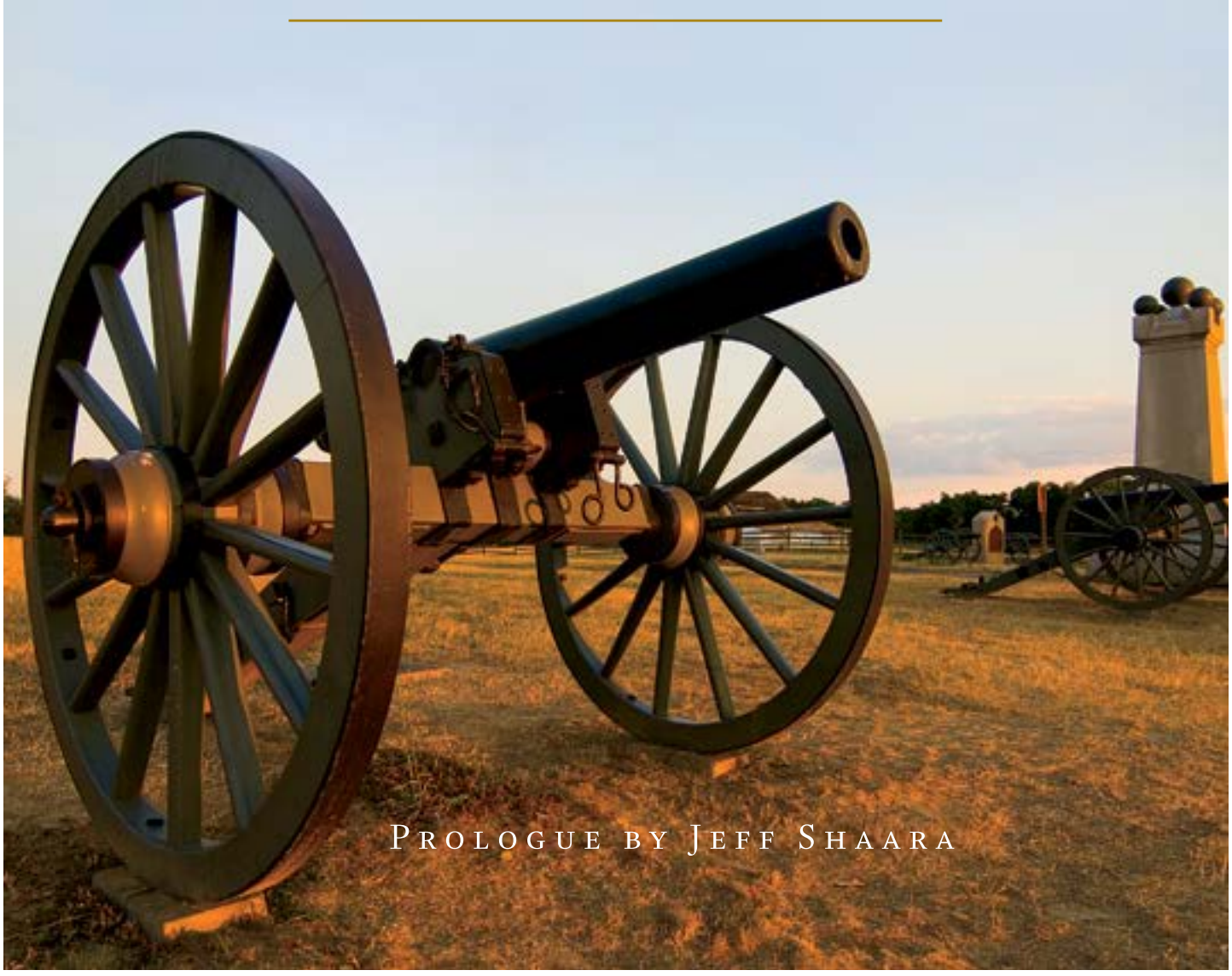
150TH ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE

TIME

Gettysburg

TURNING POINT
OF THE CIVIL WAR



PROLOGUE BY JEFF SHAARA

TIME

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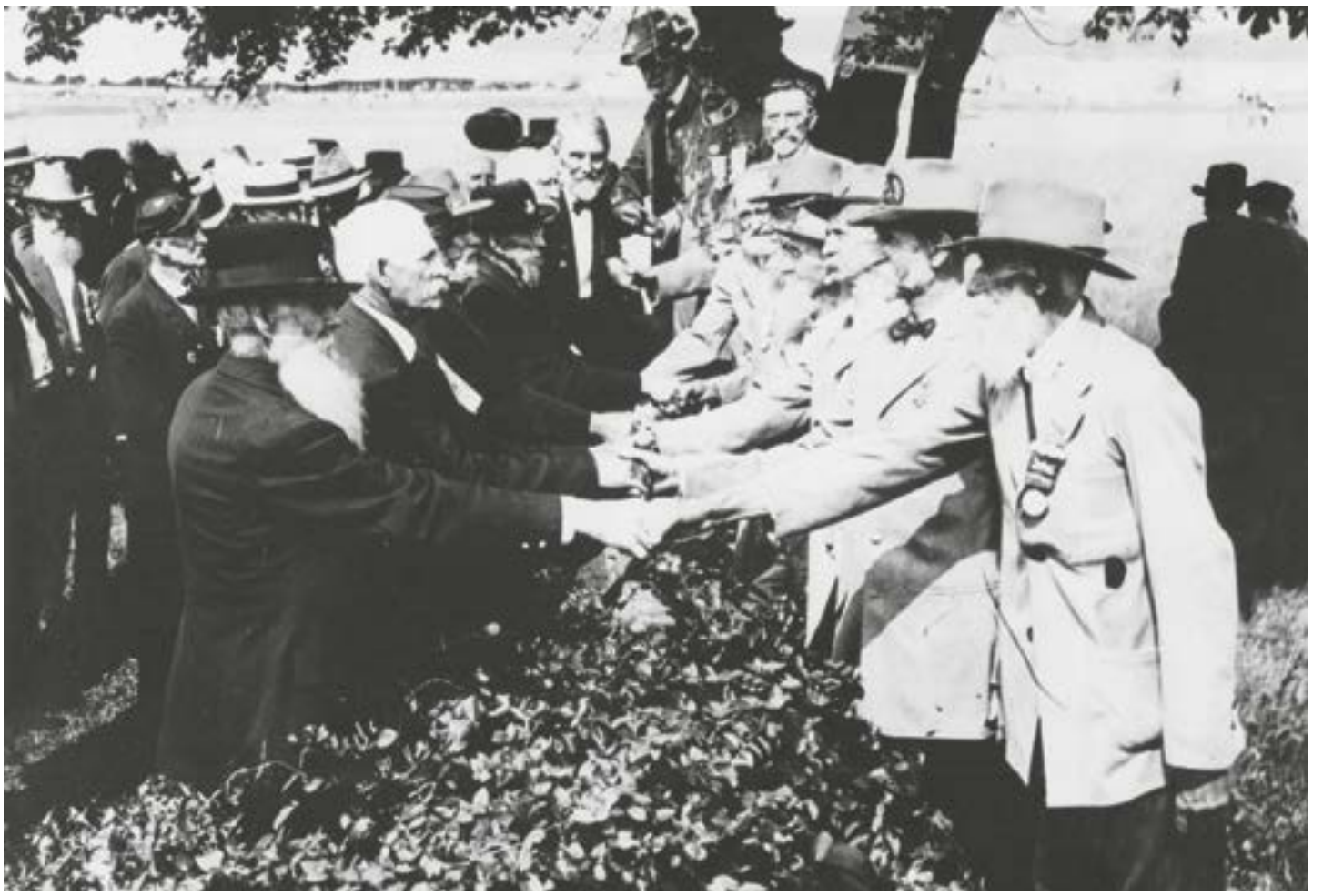
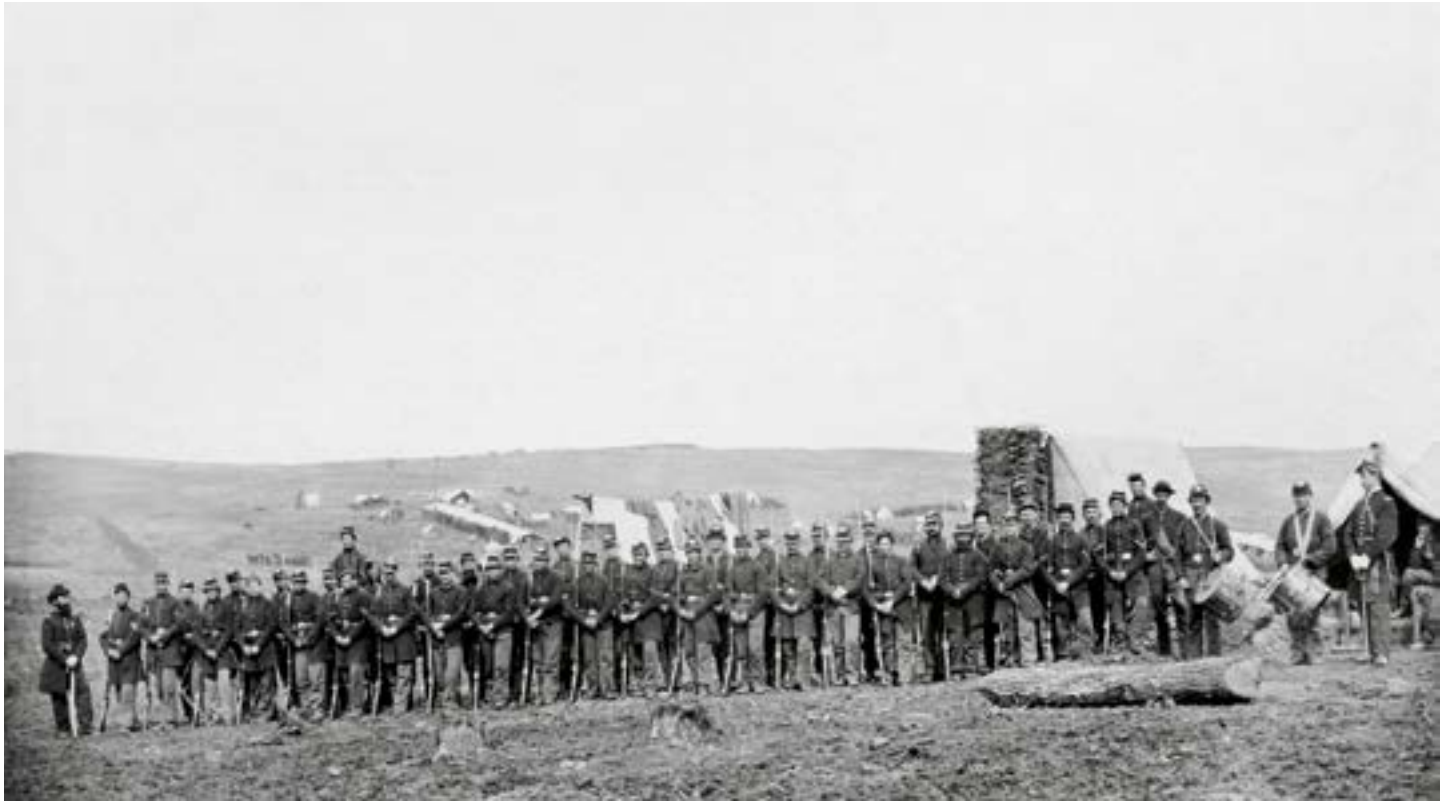


REUNITED *Veterans of Gettysburg, Confederates on the right, shake hands in 1913, on the 50th anniversary of the battle, at the "Angle" where Pickett's Charge failed on July 3, 1863*



Ready for posterity's gaze *Members of the 139th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Regiment pose for the camera circa 1863. Two memorials on the battlefield commemorate their service on the left flank of the Army of the Potomac on July 3*

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INTRODUCTION

Why Gettysburg Matters

By James M. McPherson

WHEN CONGRESS CREATED GETTYSBURG National Military Park in 1895, the Gettysburg Electric Railway Co. owned part of the land on which the battle had been fought. The company was building a trolley line to carry tourists to Devil's Den and Little Round Top. When the owners refused to sell their property to the park, the government began proceedings to seize it under the power of eminent domain. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled unanimously in 1896 that Gettysburg was vested with such importance to the fate of the nation that the government had a right to "take possession of the field of battle, in the name and for the benefit of all the citizens of the country … Such a use seems …so closely connected with the welfare of the republic itself as to be within the powers granted Congress by the Constitution for the purpose of protecting and preserving the whole country."

The court in effect followed the lead of President Abraham Lincoln, who had spoken 33 years earlier at the dedication of the cemetery at Gettysburg that would receive the bodies of most of the 5,000 Union soldiers who were killed or mortally wounded in the battle. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was a prose poem of 272 words that

evoked the meaning of their sacrifice. The war that he described as a "testing" of whether the nation founded in 1776 would "long endure" or "perish from the earth" still raged over a front of 1,000 miles on that November day in 1863 when Lincoln rose to speak. He looked out over the graves of those who "gave their lives that the nation might live." He told the crowd of 10,000 people that it was the task of the living to take up the "unfinished work … for which they gave the last full measure of devotion." That unfinished work included the abolition of slavery. Having issued the Emancipation Proclamation almost a year earlier, and eager to pass a constitutional amendment outlawing slavery in the U.S., Lincoln was determined that "this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom."

With these words, the President called forth the historic consequences of the Civil War, of which the Battle of Gettysburg was a crucial linchpin. The war's outcome ensured the survival of the U.S. as one nation, indivisible, and freed from the incubus of slavery that had made a mockery of that nation's professions of liberty. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address has become a classic because no one before or since has so eloquently and succinctly defined the meaning of the war.

The Union cause in the Civil War had been at a low ebb in the early summer of 1863. Humiliating defeats of the Army of the Potomac at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville during the previous seven months had caused Northern morale to plummet. The failure of the Union Navy's attack on the Charleston, S.C., forts in April intensified a sense of defeatism that boosted the antiwar Copperhead movement

in the North. In the West, after months of frustration in his efforts to capture the Confederate bastion of Vicksburg on the Mississippi River, General Ulysses S. Grant finally seemed to be making progress, but Confederates remained confident that they would defeat him.

General Robert E. Lee believed that June 1863 was the time to strike a blow for final victory in the war. He persuaded President Jefferson Davis to endorse an invasion of Pennsylvania with the goal of winning another major Confederate victory, this time on Northern soil. Lee maintained that such an invasion would force Grant to loosen his hold on Vicksburg and would so demoralize the Northern people as to force the Lincoln Administration to sue for peace or be thrown out of office. “If successful this year,” Lee wrote in April 1863, “next fall there will be a great change in public opinion at the North. The Republicans will be destroyed & I think the friends of peace will become so strong as that the next administration will go in on that basis.” Lee’s principal lieutenant, General James Longstreet, believed that the invasion of Pennsylvania offered the best opportunity “either to destroy the Yankees or bring them to terms.”

As Lee prepared to lead the 75,000 men of his Army of Northern Virginia into Pennsylvania, he expressed confidence in these “invincible” troops. “There never were such men in an army before. They will go anywhere and do anything if properly led.” At the same time, the Army of the Potomac was disorganized by its defeat at Chancellorsville and disillusioned with its commander, General Joseph Hooker. Bickering between the general and the Lincoln

Administration led to Hooker's removal and the appointment of General George G. Meade to command the army on June 28.

Three days later and three miles west of Gettysburg, a Union officer in charge of cavalry pickets spotted Confederate infantry marching toward him out of the early-morning mist. He rested a carbine on a fence rail and fired. It was the first shot in what became the largest battle in the history of the western hemisphere. But instead of winning Confederate independence, the Battle of Gettysburg became a crucial turning point toward completion of "the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced"—the survival of the United States as one nation, indivisible, with liberty for all. ■

McPherson, an emeritus professor of U.S. history at Princeton University, is the author of the Pulitzer-prizewinning Civil War study Battle Cry of Freedom *(1988). His most recent work is* War on the Waters: The Union and Confederate Navies, 1861-1865 (2012)

PROLOGUE

The Sergeant

The noted chronicler of U.S. military history explores the thoughts of a fictional Confederate fighter as he prepares his troops for Pickett's Charge

By Jeff Shaara

JULY 3, 1863 They had marched most of the night, the early morning spent in whatever sleep the men could find. As the noonday sun slid overhead, they were moved forward, ordered to gather close within a thicket of tall trees. The sergeant did as he always did, cursed his way through the men in his squad, keeping them in tight quarters, with an eye on those few who might slip away to scrounge for something to eat. Through the trees, he could see the other squads of G Company and, beyond them, the entire 9th Virginia. He had no pocket watch, knew only it was early afternoon, knew that very soon the orders would come from the captain that the great plan was to begin, the strategy plotted by generals to be carried forward on the backs of the men with the muskets. The captain had told them all it was to be a glorious day, repeating words passed down from George Pickett himself. The sergeant could feel an odd sense of presence: far beyond where he could see, a great many more men were spread all through this wide tree line, perhaps the entire division, perhaps the entire army, an enormous force

ordered into stillness, waiting, knowing that when the bugles sounded, the command was simple: Rise, fall into line, and move forward. One more glorious fight.

Colonel Owens had spent much of the morning farther back in the woods with his company commanders, a cluster of brass that the sergeant avoided. Too many of those men were younger than he was, some of them yet to face the enemy at all. But there were the others, the good ones, the men you wanted to follow, his own lieutenant for one. There was no friendship between them, just that unspoken obedience that had to be earned, no matter what the manuals said, what had been taught back in the training camps. But the lieutenant had been unflinching, had led them straight into the worst hell the sergeant had ever seen, a fight on the Virginia Peninsula at a place called Seven Pines. Those who survived that were more than just veterans. They were the iron in this regiment, and whether or not those men wore the stripes on their sleeves, the sergeant knew they were just as capable as he was of pulling the shirkers into line. This morning, as they reached the camps near this Pennsylvania town, it was the veterans who carried the grim enthusiasm, the talk flowing through the column so that when the bugles sounded, it would be serious and deadly and would give them victory.

The sergeant had been through the fights since the peninsula, the second brawl at Manassas Junction, the gut-churning slaughter of the Yankees at Fredericksburg. All the men who had marched out of those fights were prepared for this one, and when the captain told them what they were to do, there was no confusion. The enemy they would face was