

## Gettysburg: Key Vocabulary

### **Military Terms**

**Artillery** – A branch of the military armed with cannons or other large caliber firearms.

**Barrage** – A large artillery attack.

**Brigade** – A large group of soldiers, commanded by a brigadier general. Brigades consisted of 4 – 6 regiments.

**Caliber** – The distance around the inside of a gun barrel. Bullets are labeled by what caliber gun they fit.

**Cavalry** – A branch of the military which was mounted on horseback. Cavalry could move quickly from place to place and gather intelligence on enemy army movements. Until 1863, Confederate cavalry often proved superior to their northern enemies. During the Battle of Gettysburg, Lee was unaware of his cavalry's location and thus made many military decisions at a slight disadvantage. Confederate cavalry arrived on the night on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and partook in fighting behind Union lines on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Their goal was to disrupt Union communication lines and meet up with Pickett's infantry as they broke through the Union center. Union cavalry under the command of General George Armstrong Custer repulsed Confederate efforts.

**Company** – Small groups of soldiers within regiments which numbered 50 -100 men. Ten companies comprised each regiment.

**Corp** – A term adopted by the American military from the French after the Napoleonic Wars, Corps provided a means by which to organize large bodies of soldiers. Corps were comprised of 2 or more divisions. Corps existed in both Union and Confederate Armies and were designated by a Roman numeral to provide further structure and organization to the army.

**Division** – Another means by which the Union and Confederate armies provided structure and organization to large bodies of troops. Divisions consisted of 2 – 5 brigades.

**“Fish-Hook” Formation** – The Union army's battlefield formation from July 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> resembled a fish-hook in shape, hence the name. The barb, or the hook, wound around Culp's Hill to the North and ran along Cemetery Ridge, to Little Round Top to the south. This formation allowed Meade to transfer his troops from one area of battle to another, unscathed.

**Flank** – A flank is the end (or side) of an army's position. Used as a verb, "to flank" is to move around and attack the side of an enemy's position, to avoid a frontal attack.

**Infantry** – A branch of the military in which the soldier travels and fights on foot.

**Musket** – Principle firearm during the American Civil War. Could be rifled or smooth bore and was loaded from the muzzle or front of the barrel. Smooth bore muskets fired lead balls while rifled muskets fired conical (cone) shaped minié balls – named after Claude Minié, the French officer responsible for the bullet's creation.

**Reconnoiter** – The act by which one army inspects, observes, or surveys an enemy's position to gain information for military purposes.

**Regiment** – Comprised of 10 companies and made up of 1,000 – 1,500 men. Four to five regiments often made up a brigade.

**Repulsed** – Forced to retreat.

**Theaters** – Regions in which armies operate. During the Civil War, the Eastern Theater encompassed military operations in the states of Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania, while operations conducted in the deep south occurred in the Western Theater.

**Topography** – Study, surveying or mapping of the features and characteristics of a specific area of land.

### **Battle of Gettysburg Terms**

**Army of Northern Virginia (ANV)** – The principle Confederate Army of the Eastern Theater during the Civil War. Southerners often named their armies and the battles in which they fought after geographical landmarks (i.e. Army of Northern Virginia and Battle of Sharpsburg).

**Army of the Potomac (AOP)** – The principle Union Army of the Eastern Theater during the Civil War. As opposed to their southern enemies, northerners tended to name their armies and the battles in which they fought, after bodies of water. (i.e. Army of the Potomac and Battle of Antietam).

**Cemetery Ridge** – Ridgeline south of Gettysburg, opposite to Seminary Ridge. Cemetery Ridge served as the position along which the Army of the Potomac formed their line and subsequently held from the evening of July 1 to the conclusion of the battle on July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Culp's Hill** – Rocky hill located to the north along Cemetery Ridge. Culp's Hill constituted the barb in General Meade's "fish hook" formation. The peak was occupied by Union troops on July 1<sup>st</sup> and they held the position until the conclusion of the battle. During the evening of July 2<sup>nd</sup> and in the early morning of July 3<sup>rd</sup>, elements of Richard Ewell's Corp tried desperately to take the hill but their efforts proved ineffective. The successful defense of Culp's Hill prevented the

Confederate Army from maneuvering the Army of the Potomac into a position from which the Army of Northern Virginia could situate itself between Meade's army and Washington D.C.

**Federal** – Another name for a Union soldier.

**Gettysburg** – Town which sits in Adams County located in south-central Pennsylvania. From July 1<sup>st</sup> – July 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Battle of Gettysburg raged in and around the town.

**Little Round Top** – The smaller of two rocky hills which sits south along Cemetery Ridge. On July 2<sup>nd</sup> General Meade ordered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corp, under the command of General Dan Sickles to occupy the high ground south of Cemetery Hill (which included Little Round Top). Sickles, disobeying direct orders, moved his Corp forward and took position at the base of the bluff. Around 4pm, with Longstreet's assault underway, Meade learned of Sickles' insubordination and quickly called on elements of the fifth Corp to occupy Little Round Top, which they did just as the Confederates approached. Despite the strong Confederate onslaught on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, the elements of the 5<sup>th</sup> Corp successfully defended the hill.

**McPherson's Ridge** – Ridgeline west of Gettysburg along which Cavalry General John Buford positioned his dismounted cavalry in an attempt to prevent the Confederates from taking the town of Gettysburg and advantageous topography which surrounded it.

**"Pickett's Charge"** – Likely the most infamous episode during the Battle of Gettysburg, "Pickett's Charge" provided General George Pickett with his first real opportunity to prove himself as a division commander. Commanding the freshest division - totaling roughly 13,000 men - within the Army of Northern Virginia, General Robert E. Lee entrusted him with spearheading the assault against the Union center along Cemetery Ridge. The aftermath of the failed assault left Pickett's division devastated. Pickett's division suffered over 50% casualties and lost most of its brigadier generals and regimental commanders, in addition to countless other officers. From the impact and magnitude of this episode, Pickett would never recover.

**Seminary Ridge** – Ridgeline southwest of the town of Gettysburg along which the Army of Northern Virginia positioned itself after July 1<sup>st</sup>. Seminary Ridge served as the point from which all Confederate attacks were launched on July 2<sup>nd</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## **People**

**Lewis Armistead** – Virginia-born brigadier general in Pickett's division. Armistead is the only officer in Pickett's division to have successfully broken through the Union lines on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. Leading the 9<sup>th</sup> Virginia Regiment over the wall, Armistead and his men were able to briefly capture an artillery piece, before he was mortally wounded.

**John Buford** – Kentucky-born cavalry officer who successfully held-off early Confederate assaults on July 1<sup>st</sup>. His stalwart defense of Gettysburg allowed elements of the Union 1<sup>st</sup> Corp to arrive to prevent the Army of Northern Virginia from gaining the high ground in the vicinity of Gettysburg.

**Richard S. Ewell** – Promoted to Corp commander before the Battle of Gettysburg, the Virginia-born Ewell, in addition to Longstreet, also faced criticism following the battle. In the aftermath of the engagements on July 1<sup>st</sup>, Ewell missed an opportunity to order his troops to the peak of Culp's Hill. Earlier in the day, Lee had ordered his lieutenant to take the hill, "if practicable." As a result of Ewell's lack of initiative, the Federals occupied the Hill and Ewell was later unable to reclaim it on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**Winfield Scott Hancock** – Pennsylvania-born commander of the Army of the Potomac's II Corp. during the Battle of Gettysburg. Hancock's II Corp was positioned along Cemetery Ridge and thus bore the brunt of Pickett's Charge on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. During the evening of July 1<sup>st</sup>, Hancock arrived to the battlefield and acted as commanding officer in General Meade's absence. Hancock deemed the terrain around Gettysburg strong and immediately began entrenching the high ground. Though wounded during the battle with a bullet struck him in his thigh, he would recover and later win accolades from his soldiers and Congress for his noteworthy performance at Gettysburg.

**Robert E. Lee** – Virginia-born commander of the Army of Northern Virginia during the Battle of Gettysburg. Having experienced a string of military victories prior to the battle, Lee's actions at Gettysburg proved inspired by the notion that his army was invincible and if properly led, could achieve anything. Lee's strategic successes on July 1<sup>st</sup> met with strategic failure in the two days thereafter. Despite pleas from Longstreet on July 2<sup>nd</sup> not to attack Little Round Top, but to swing around to the bigger round top further south, Lee had made up his mind and would not change his strategy as scouts had told him earlier in the day that Little Round Top was undefended. Additionally, Longstreet's plea that Lee's army reposition itself between the Army of the Potomac and Washington on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, met with similar results. Many have speculated the reasons behind Lee's decisions during the battle of Gettysburg; some have cited health problems such as angina while others have cited the dominance of a superiority complex. Regardless, his strategic decisions proved grave for the Army of Northern Virginia.

**James Longstreet** – South Carolina-born Corp commander in the Army of Northern Virginia. Memoirs from the war suggest that Gettysburg proved one of the darkest moments in Longstreet's career as an officer. Lee conducted the assaults on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> almost entirely with troops from Longstreet's corp. Longstreet continued his faithful service following the battle and participated in engagements such as Chattanooga and Chickamauga in the Western Theatre. Following the war, Southerners fiercely chastised Longstreet when he dared to criticize Lee's decisions at Gettysburg.

**George G. Meade** – Pennsylvania-born commander of the Army of the Potomac during the Battle of Gettysburg. Following the resignation of "Fighting" Joe Hooker in June, Meade assumed command of the Army of the Potomac and continued following Lee's army northward into Pennsylvania. A generally quick-tempered man, Meade's name was unknown to most throughout the army, despite his high rank and reputation as a gentleman soldier. Meade's first order of business upon taking command was to consolidate his army around Frederick, Maryland. From Frederick, on June 30<sup>th</sup> Meade ordered his army northward, in a fanning motion toward Pennsylvania as he believed it provided the best potential defense of Baltimore and Washington D.C. During much of the early action on July 1<sup>st</sup>, Meade was not present. In his

stead, he gave temporary command to Winfield Scott Hancock who began developing the defensive position upon Cemetery Ridge in the evening of July 1<sup>st</sup>. When Meade finally arrived on the battlefield, his continued amassing of forces along Cemetery Ridge coalesced into a “fish hook” formation which allowed him to successfully move troops from one front to another. Following the battle, President Abraham Lincoln asked General Meade to pursue Lee’s retreating army, but Gettysburg also left the Army of the Potomac with high casualties.

**George Pickett** – Virginia-born division commander within General James Longstreet’s Corp. Arrived during the night of July 2, thus having the freshest division in the entire Army of Northern Virginia. Lee entrusted Pickett with spearheading the attack on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, which would later bear his name.

**John F. Reynolds** – Pennsylvania-born Corp commander in the Army of the Potomac. After the Battle of Chancellorsville in May of 1863 and the resignation of General Joseph Hooker as overall commander of the Army of the Potomac, President Abraham Lincoln supposedly offered Reynolds the position of overall commander. Reynolds respectfully declined as he believed Washington would second-guess his military decisions. Reynolds’ supreme moment came on July 1<sup>st</sup> when contingents of his I Corp arrived on the battlefield to reinforce the exhausted dismounted Cavalry under the command of John Buford. Shortly after Reynolds’ arrival on the battlefield, he was mortally wounded when a bullet from a Confederate sharpshooter struck him in the back of the head.

**Dan Sickles** – New York-born commander of the Army of the Potomac’s III Corp. during the Battle of Gettysburg. Disobeying direct orders, Sickles ordered his III Corp., positioned next to the II Corp. along Cemetery Ridge, to advance to a slightly higher piece of land on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. When Meade learned of Sickles’ insubordination, he confronted him, asking why he had advanced so far ahead. Sickles responded by saying that he had found the area to which had advanced slightly more elevated, but that he would withdrawal to his original position. Meade responded that it was too late, a Confederate attack was imminent and that a retreat would put the III Corp. in even greater danger. During the fighting on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, Sickle’s received a wound when a Confederate cannon ball tore his leg off. Some historians, such as Stephen W. Sears have argued that Sickle’s decision meant near disaster for the Army of the Potomac, while others such as John Keegan and James McPherson have argued otherwise.