



## Did Meade Begin a Counteroffensive after Pickett's Charge?

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When examining the strategy of Union Major General George Gordon Meade at the battle of Gettysburg, one discovers lingering doubts about his leadership and will to fight. His rivals viewed him as a timid commander who would not have engaged at Gettysburg had not his peers corralled him into it. On the first day of the battle, for instance, it was Major General John Fulton Reynolds who entangled the left wing of the federal army thirty miles north of its original defensive position at Westminster, Maryland. Under the circumstances, Meade scrambled to rush the rest of his army to the developing battlefield. And on the second day, Major General Daniel Sickles advanced part of his Union 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps several hundred yards ahead of the designated position on the army's left, and forced Meade to over-commit forces there to save the situation. In both instances the Union army prevailed, while the Confederate high command struggled to adjust to uncharacteristically aggressive Union moves. However, it would appear that both outcomes were the result of actions initiated by someone other than Meade, who seemed to react well enough.

Frustrating to Meade must have been that these same two outcomes could have been viewed in a way more favorable to the commanding general. For example, both Reynolds and Sickles were dependent on Meade to follow through with their bold moves. Though Reynolds committed 25,000 Union infantry to fight at Gettysburg, it was Meade who authorized his advance into south-central Pennsylvania. While Brigadier General John Buford's cavalry division provided the spark that began the battle, it was Meade who sent Buford's troops ahead to reconnoiter Gettysburg two days prior. The commanding general even dispatched his staff officer, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Dickinson, to meet with Buford in Gettysburg the night before the clash.<sup>1</sup> When it is also considered that Meade maintained contact with planted informants in the Susquehanna valley through the Bureau of Military Intelligence, and monitored telegraph chatter out of Harrisburg after June 28, it becomes clear that the commanding general's eyes were wide open to the possibility of a battle at Gettysburg.

Likewise on the battle's second day, Sickles could not have defended his advanced position at the Emmitsburg road ridge without Meade's pledge to reinforce with elements of several corps. Though caught off guard by Sickles' forward move, and alarmed that Confederate battle lines

were prepared to attack at any moment, Meade still had the option of withdrawing from the battlefield, if that is what he wanted to do. Offense and defense are merely two sides of the same coin. One either maneuvers to attack, or one attacks to maneuver. In this respect, the option to pull out remained for Meade throughout the day. That he chose to defend the advanced position should have settled the issue of whether he desired to leave Gettysburg.

So how did the negative impression of Meade win out, when the more approving image of him was equally viable? Where did this persona of being weak and indecisive germinate? If one traces it back, the seeds of discontent toward Meade's generalship at Gettysburg began with professional jealousies and bruised egos lying dormant within the Army of the Potomac. His rivals simply needed a spark and the right circumstances to reveal their true feelings. It is not widely known today, except among professional historians, that Meade's opponents were numerous among the higher levels of command in the army. The commanding general had to remain on guard during and after battle. In particular, there were five senior officers with grievances against Meade even before the first shots were fired.

The trouble began when President Abraham Lincoln cajoled Major General Joseph Hooker into resigning army command, then gave it to Meade. In doing so, Lincoln set off reverberations that were felt politically, professionally, and personally. Politically, Lincoln had offended the Democrats by removing one of their own in Hooker. Northern Democrats had made a great sacrifice to remain loyal to the Union, enduring a split in their party that cost both houses of the federal Congress and the presidency. Lincoln and the Republicans were eventually compelled to do damage control by awarding Hooker partial credit for winning the Gettysburg campaign. The award was a stretch, but necessary for Lincoln to avoid another political rift.

Professionally, Lincoln set the stage for disharmony by giving army command to Meade when several others were ahead of him in time and grade. Major General Darius Couch ranked first in line for the promotion, but he left the army to oversee Pennsylvania emergency defenses out of Harrisburg. The army's 12<sup>th</sup> Corps commander, Major General Henry Slocum, graded second for the appointment, had informed the War Department in advance that he did not want the job. Major General John Sedgwick of the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps landed third on the list, but politely declined to be considered. Reynolds, fourth in the order of advancement, turned down the direct offer after Hooker's resignation.<sup>2</sup> That left Meade, who was not given a choice but was ordered to take command on June 28, 1863.

Once Meade stepped into command, Lincoln's decision became a personal matter with several army officers, starting with Sickles. To contemporaries then and professional historians today, the Tammany Hall Democrat and Union 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps' commander became Meade's most obvious antagonist. The fracture in their relationship directly related to Meade taking over for Hooker, who was responsible for Sickles' lofty rise in army rank-and-file. The feud between them remained in check during the Gettysburg campaign, but surfaced when Sickles directly criticized the commanding general to Lincoln while convalescing in Washington after the battle. The essence of his complaint was that Meade wanted to retreat on the battle's second day but was forced to fight by Sickles' bold advance. The real breakdown in their relationship became noticeable later in October 1863, when Sickles' recovery from an amputation had progressed enough that he asked for his 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps back. Meade denied the appeal with a polite expression of concern for Sickles' health. Within six months, anonymous criticisms of Meade appeared in the *New York Herald* under the pseudonym *Historicus*, a likely code name for the scorned Sickles.<sup>3</sup>

Major General Henry Slocum, who was the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps commander at Gettysburg, can also be added to the fold of Meade's challengers. As Meade's senior, Slocum could have had the position had he pursued it. Meade watched him carefully at Gettysburg, knowing that Slocum's criticism of Hooker had contributed to Hooker's downfall. Though most of their differences at Gettysburg remained professional and hidden from the public eye, a general uneasiness pervaded when Slocum attended staff meetings or war councils. The dynamics were such that Meade had to couch his orders in the form of suggestions, hoping the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps' commander would buy into

them.<sup>4</sup> In each instance, Meade appeared a weak leader, fostering the impression that he governed by committee rather than legitimate authority. It is hard to calculate the damage done to his image in these settings, because the pressures and impressions were held in check just beneath the surface.

Slocum revealed a general friction several months later when he submitted a laundry list of complaints to Meade for not recognizing his temporary promotion of Brigadier General Alpheus Williams to 12<sup>th</sup> Corps command.<sup>5</sup> The result, he complained, was that Meade did not read Williams' report in congruence with that of promoted division commander Brigadier General Thomas H. Ruger, nor did he incorporate either one into the final overall report. For Slocum, the indirect insult was that his own temporary promotion to right wing commander was not acknowledged. Fortunately for Meade, Slocum and his corps had transferred to another theater of the war by the time the complaint was registered, thus relieving some tension. However, the complaint added to a gathering storm of grievances expressed against the commanding general by the winter of 1863-64.

Even Major General Winfield Scott Hancock, who was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps commander and one of Meade's trusted generals, turned on him after the battle. It is unfortunate that a junior officer, to whom so much latitude and authority was entrusted at Gettysburg, made comments until his death in 1886 that the commanding general should have counterattacked after Pickett's Charge. As late as 1880, Hancock confided to the sculptor James Kelly that Meade had wanted to retreat before the third day of battle.<sup>6</sup> When Kelly forwarded this information to former Major General Abner Doubleday that same year, Hancock denied he had said it. Kelly later learned that Hancock, in his 1880 Democratic bid for president of the United States, had changed his story to gain the vote of Meade and his followers at the Democratic convention.<sup>7</sup> One may wonder, with friends like that, who needs enemies.

Doubleday, a major general at Gettysburg, caused trouble for Meade as well. On the battle's first day, he acted as temporary 1<sup>st</sup> Corps commander, but was returned to division command after being implicated in a premature retreat. Meade believed the accusation and transferred Brigadier General John Newton from the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps to replace and oversee him. Doubleday became Meade's adversary after the war. Joining him in discontent was Major General Daniel Butterfield, the commanding general's chief of staff.<sup>8</sup> Butterfield's loyalties were tied to Hooker, but Meade decided to keep him because there was little time for transition in the middle of a Confederate invasion. That decision would come back to haunt him.

With these rivalries and jealousies lying just below the surface and waiting for a window of opportunity, it is not surprising that the right forum would do much damage to Meade's reputation. This leads to the second circumstance that left lingering doubts about Meade's leadership and will to fight. The contingency that permitted so many suppressed feelings to emerge was an investigation conducted by the Joint Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War (CCW). The panel to conduct the hearings was an oversight committee that tried to keep its finger on the pulse of the war and make commanding generals accountable to Congress. It was the panel's custom to summon major participants after significant battles and interrogate them, with the purpose of placing blame and targeting particular generals. After the December 13, 1862, battle at Fredericksburg, for instance, the panel went after Major General William B. Franklin, seeking to label him the villain and scapegoat. Francis O'Reilly has shown that the overall intent of such investigations was to train commanding generals to scrutinize their real-time decisions in battle and to understand that their decisions would later pass under the committee's microscope.<sup>9</sup>

Hearings on Gettysburg were held in March, April, and May of 1864 with a similar purpose. Questions were not random, but geared toward a particular design. Testimonies given by Meade's generals bear out four consistent queries from the panel. There were many follow-up questions and various rephrasings of the original queries, and a few unique inquiries altogether, but everything centered on: "Did Meade intend to fight at Gettysburg?" "Did Meade indicate

that he wanted to retreat in a council of war held the night before the third and final day of the battle?" "Why didn't Meade counterattack after the grand assault (Pickett's Charge) on the battle's final day?" "Why did Meade permit the Confederate Army to escape across the Potomac into Virginia?" Careful analysis by the historian uncovers motive here, though Meade did not have to reflect long to figure it out. In a personal letter to his wife, he remarked that others wanted to see Hooker returned to command, and that the cross-examination was filled with potential pitfalls. Notably disturbed, he divulged, "When I reached Washington I was greatly surprised to find the whole town talking of certain grave charges of General Sickles and Doubleday that had been made against me...."<sup>10</sup> Then with some aggravation he added, "The only evil that will result is the spreading over the country certain mysterious whisperings of dreadful deficiencies on my part, the truth concerning which will never reach the thousandth part of those who hear the lies."<sup>11</sup>

Meade had good cause for concern. The overall implications of the CCW hearings diminished the general's stature enough that he was never able to shake the image of not being fully committed to engagement with General Robert E. Lee at Gettysburg. The questions raised in this formal legal setting made it easier for Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant to come East after his decisive victory at Vicksburg. Though Meade maintained his title and status as army commander, doubts raised about his aggressiveness enabled Grant to provide oversight, direction, and final say in army matters the last year of the war. The lasting result of the hearings is still with us. That is, modern visitors to the battlefield question daily why Meade did not counterattack Lee after Pickett's Charge. Either they do so instinctively or have heard somewhere that Meade lost an opportunity. Each time the question arises, it is an echo from long ago, a reverberation from the subcommittee investigation.

Asking questions is not a bad exercise though. It was the normal thing for the wartime oversight committee to do, and Meade fared surprisingly well in its permanent record, if not in the public eye. The committee findings, when read apart from the political turmoil of 1863-64, are not an overall poor reflection on the commanding general. Instead, there were multiple witnesses who corroborated on one of the main issues – in some cases unintentionally – that a counteroffensive was discussed and, in fact, partially implemented after Pickett's Charge. This revelation ran counter to the accusations of retreat posited against Meade. Comments and testimony by friend and foe alike revealed that an actual plan was advanced, if only partially and by degrees. In other words, Meade had a counteroffensive plan that was partially implemented after Pickett's Charge. The issue of counterattack, and even of Meade's prowess at Gettysburg, is more complex than critics at the time or historians since have appreciated.

The idea of a counteroffensive could only begin with the arrival of Major General John Sedgwick's Union 6<sup>th</sup> Corps, which had staggered onto the battlefield on July 2, in successive parts, between the hours of 2 P.M. and 8 P.M., after a thirty-two-mile march. Though the corps arrived in accordion manner, the promise of its presence permitted Meade to move the entire Union 5<sup>th</sup> Corps, under Major General George Sykes, out to the front lines. Having the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps as a reserve accomplished more though, as it provided Meade the option to go on the offense if the opportunity presented itself.

A general rule in analyzing a historical battle is that if one wants to know the commander's intent, one looks behind the main line to see where the reserves are stationed, otherwise known as the *point d'appui*.<sup>12</sup> The front lines may be where the excitement is, but the location of reserves reveals the position of concern. Lee kept his reserves, as well as his headquarters, directly opposite the apex or center of the Union salient at Cemetery Hill. Likewise, Meade's reserves and headquarters were concentrated in defense behind the same salient point. Lee's general plan called for taking Cemetery Hill by assigning two-thirds of his army to drive the Union flanks in on it or in turn draw Union reserves to the flanks, which would give Confederate reserves facing Cemetery Hill an opportunity to seize the central point directly.<sup>13</sup> Cemetery Hill remained the goal for the second and third day of the battle. However, the drawback to applying so much

pressure against the apex of a triangle line of battle is that over-commitment to it sets up the attacker to be taken in reverse by one or both wings of the defender's line.<sup>14</sup>

This is a crucial explanation toward understanding Meade's counteroffensive after Pickett's Charge. The famous charge, along with its complimentary pincer by Confederate forces at Culp's Hill, represented a Confederate over-commitment against the apex. That is why Meade tried to concentrate numbers on his left wing within an hour after the repulse. As a compass pivots on a point to draw a circle on paper, so Meade tried to quickly mass Union 6<sup>th</sup> Corps troops along his left wing to encircle Lee's weakened forces. One of the reasons the counteroffensive had trouble taking off was the amount of time required to relocate several thousand men to one flank from behind the apex positions of Cemetery Hill, Cemetery Ridge, and Culp's Hill. The time taken for maneuvering and shifting them across two miles of fields and back roads required thirty to forty-five minutes, which in itself proved to be too long for a successful follow up to the failed Pickett's Charge. Windows of opportunity can open and close quickly on the field of battle, leading to the question of why Meade did not have his reserves on the left earlier and ready to go. Of course, Meade did not have luxury of knowing the future. Although he might have read the indicators and felt confident that the main attack would hit his left-center and center, as it already had his right-center along Culp's Hill, he understood that certainties are rare in a combat environment. Even if the assault targeted the point as anticipated, there were no guarantees that Meade's front line would hold. Reserves needed to be there for added security. It was only after they held that Meade could safely move the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps to either flank.

This raises the question of why Meade did not shift all reserves to his right flank to pivot that wing around for envelopment of the Confederate divisions belonging to major generals Edward Johnson and Jubal Early. Their deployment was to either side of Benner's Hill, a position that, if seized by federal infantry, would split Confederate forces east of Gettysburg. Between 7 A.M. and perhaps as late as 12 P.M. on July 3, an hour before the cannonade that announced Pickett's Charge, Meade inquired of Colonel George Sharpe from the Bureau of Military Information the status of those two Southern divisions on his right.<sup>15</sup> He could see from observation points they were isolated from the remaining two-thirds of Lee's army by the town, which formed an extended wedge from the apex of the federal battle line. Lee had tried to bridge his army's two halves by stringing a heavy line of sharpshooters through the town's second-story buildings and barricaded streets, all of them aimed at Cemetery Hill. Because forming lines of battle within the labyrinth of narrow, grid-patterned streets was difficult at best, the linkage there was never strong enough to secure the secluded Confederate divisions east of town at Benner's Hill. Meade had also contemplated seizing that isolated position on July 2, both for added buffer to his right and to gain artillery crossfire on the town in convergence with his Cemetery Hill guns to the south. This was Meade's offensive plan on July 2, and it had occupied his mind throughout the morning until Slocum pulled Union columns from the staging area without consulting the commanding general.

So why did Meade not revive this plan on July 3 when the scenario seemed to present itself again? There were two primary reasons: First, it would be mid-day before Confederate assaults against his right-center were beaten back from Culp's Hill. Only then could he contemplate offense there. But before the idea could develop, the artillery phase of Pickett's Charge opened against his left-center. His reserves, which might be used for an attack on the right, had to shift left to the new threat. The second reason for not pursuing envelopment there on July 3 was the presence of Major General J.E.B. Stuart's Confederate cavalry, which was hovering only three miles above the federal right flank and supply line. Because of Stuart's late arrival on July 2, that problem had not existed for Meade for most of the battle's second day. To maximize the psychological affect on Meade, who had orders from Lincoln to cover the most direct route to Washington, Lee had disproportionably placed his cavalry on Meade's right above the Baltimore pike. One adverse consequence of this for Lee was that he left his other flank near the Round Tops without even a full regiment of cavalry, which enticed Meade to investigate it for counteroffensive.

Meade's critics have speculated as to whether he anticipated his enemy's final grand assault against the left-center and positioned a counterattack force within striking distance. The investigative committee wanted to know if Meade had shown forethought by building in contingencies for counteroffensive. The congressional committee was surprised perhaps to learn that Meade had indeed done so. As the questions unfolded during the hearings, a picture began to emerge of the commanding general warning others of where Pickett's Charge would likely hit, and of preparing other commanders where to follow up their success. Testimonies bore out in-depth conversations on likely scenarios Meade offered his subordinates, and of arrangements to strike back. In the center of the planning was Hancock, who was given operational charge of the army's entire left wing for such a purpose. Hancock informed Congress that Meade told him "before the fight that if the enemy attacked me he intended to put the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> corps on the enemy's flank" to take the Confederates from behind.<sup>16</sup> Elaborating a bit, Hancock said that a "gap" of "one mile" opened up in Lee's line after the destruction of Pickett's division, and that while lying wounded he scribbled a note urging Meade to follow through.<sup>17</sup> Regrettably, his testimony digressed from there as it criticized Meade for defying the basic military principle of never letting a beaten army rally.

Hearing proceedings offered other insights about a proposed counterattack before Pickett's Charge. Brigadier General Gouverneur K. Warren, the army's chief engineer, stated before the committee that "General Meade had so arranged his troops on our left during the third day that nearly one-half of the army was in reserve in that position." He added that, "it was a good sheltered position, and a convenient one from which to re-enforce other parts of the line."<sup>18</sup> Warren's statement affirmed to the panel that he was not anti-Meade. More than that, the account was largely correct with only some hyperbole. A comprehensive claim that "nearly one-half of the army was in reserve" on the left, without clarification, was misleading. For example, his testimony implied that half of the reserves were fixed on the left throughout the day. Had someone asked a follow-up question on this, it would have become apparent that the Union 6<sup>th</sup> Corps was divided much of the morning between the right-center at Culp's Hill, the center at Cemetery Hill, the left-center of Cemetery Ridge and the far left near the Round Tops. It is true that there were reserves on the left all day, but these were remnants of two Union corps, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>. Warren was aware of the particulars, recording that when the repulse of the enemy took place on that day, General Meade intended to move forward all the forces he could get in line and assault the enemy in turn. He ordered an advance of the 5<sup>th</sup> corps, but it was carried on so slowly that it did not amount to much, if anything.<sup>19</sup>

Hancock also testified that Meade confided to him later that he had "ordered the movement but the troops were slow in collecting and moved so slowly that nothing was done before night, except that some of the Pennsylvania reserves went out and met Hood's division...."<sup>20</sup>

Warren's response contained another revealing nugget on the nature of the proposed counteroffensive on the left. That is, his claim of the left being "a good sheltered position" is most important in several respects. First is the obvious benefit of cover and concealment offered by the extended line of hills south of Cemetery Ridge and down to the Round Tops. The story of Gettysburg that is reproduced for mass consumption does not acknowledge several of these hills by name, perhaps because they could not resonate with the same importance as Little Round Top. However, to engage in a precise discussion of Meade's counterattack, the hills need to be given names. Because local farmers William Patterson, George Weikert, and J. Munshower owned parcels of them from north to south, respectively, the string of rocky knolls might correctly be called the Patterson-Weikert-Munshower (PWM) hills.<sup>21</sup> The reason designation has never been officially assigned stems from historians choosing to remain fuzzy on the Meade-Sickles controversy of July 2.<sup>22</sup> Being specific with nomenclature on this part of the battlefield requires precision regarding exactly where Meade ordered Sickles' line to form on the battle's second day, before he advanced to the Peach Orchard. There are many inconsistencies in the orders regarding

where his original line was to lie, which frustrates the impulses of many who would rather bash the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps' commander for advancing.<sup>23</sup>

One inconsistency involved the 3<sup>rd</sup> Corps adhering to a ridgeline, which can only be the PWM hills. One look at them brings to light their deficiencies for a line of battle, since rocks and trees cover three quarters of their frontage. Brigades of wood choppers would be needed there to open sight lines for infantry, with no small force of teamsters also needed to haul artillery and ordnance to the top of rocky outcroppings. There were other impracticable particulars with Meade's orders in this area on July 2, but they are beyond the focus of this paper. The relevance to Meade's counteroffensive is that the same hills that frustrated Sickles in finding fields-of-fire for infantry columns and artillery on July 2 were ideal for cover and concealment of army reserves on July 3. The PWM hills, coupled with the adjacent Little Round Top, Big Round Top, and Bushman hill to the south, presented a half-mile screen for deploying Union infantry, artillery, and cavalry in secrecy.

Discussions held within the Confederate inner circle of high command acknowledged the danger posed there. Specifically, the protest offered by Confederate Lieutenant General James Longstreet against Lee's general plan revolved on his worry that the rocky hills made a natural hiding place for thousands who might "attack in reverse" (from behind) if Lee concentrated too many on Cemetery Hill.<sup>24</sup> Traditional stories of the battle exclusively obsess on Little Round Top as supreme terrain there, when actually it was negligible terrain in for both armies' planning for the pivotal second day.<sup>25</sup> It did not have an official name until months after the battle, and probably was not referred to as Little Round Top during the battle.<sup>26</sup> The greater point is that Little Round Top was one hill in a string that covered Meade's left flank, adding uneasiness for Confederate corps and division commanders who had to operate on that end of the battlefield.

Longstreet's solution was to either extend his right behind those hills and assault them flank and rear, or convince Lee to change his plan by circling thirty miles south around the Union left with the whole army to cut off Meade's line of communications, supply, and retreat.<sup>27</sup> Knowing the federal army would attack to open and preserve their supply lines, Longstreet tried to convince Lee to maneuver and fight defensively. Lee had many reservations regarding this plan, including the difficulty of relocating around that flank 100,000 captured hogs, sheep, and cattle, as well as 20,000 horses pulling ordnance, artillery, ambulances, and forage for the men and animals.<sup>28</sup> In reality Lee had Noah's ark behind his front lines, and Longstreet's plan called for a time-consuming detour, where Meade had a shorter distance from the base to attack any part of the elliptical route. A pincer of Lee's army wings against Cemetery Hill squared his strength in front of his own supply lines along the Fairfield road, making them short, direct, and fully covered.

The larger point here is that the PWM hills, along with the Round Tops and Bushman hill, created the dilemma of unknown Union strength resting on their flank. Moreover, this series of hills would naturally divide an attacking Confederate force. One of Napoleon Bonaparte's preferred moves was to maneuver his army until his opponent straddled a natural geographic break such as a mountain or river. Once the enemy was divided from itself visually and strained communicatively, Napoleon would assault the secluded halves from a central position with his whole force defeating the stranded halves in detail.<sup>29</sup> This was the precise concern in lengthening Confederate lines further than the hills. No less than a division of 5,000 would be required to sustain itself on the opposite side of the hill range, as it advanced into the heart of the Union reserve. With a smaller army, over-extended already on an eight-mile exterior front (compared to the Union interior line of only three miles), such a move would require that Lee change his general plan. Still, Longstreet's fear remained legitimate: The Confederate army's right could be taken in reverse, especially with Lee assigning all available cavalry to threaten the Baltimore pike on the other end of line. In light of this, Longstreet argued successfully that the right division of his corps, belonging to Major General John B. Hood, should be withheld from supporting Pickett's Charge. In turn, Major General Lafayette McLaws' division, on Hood's left, did not

support Pickett either. Lee remarked in his report with a bit of admonishment that Longstreet, “deemed it necessary to defend his flank and rear with the divisions of Hood and McLaws.”<sup>30</sup>

So we know from Hancock’s and Warren’s testimony that Meade correctly anticipated the point of assault for Lee’s main attack on July 3, and that he had laid a framework for counteroffensive on his left. To begin with, the hills were a natural place for concealment and were fortified already with elements of two Union corps in position from the previous day. Additionally, Lee had virtually stripped that flank of Confederate cavalry, making his right susceptible to a reverse maneuver. Union avenues of approach running behind and through the PWM hills were suited for such a movement too, with the Taneytown road as the primary north-south corridor to access Trostle Lane, Bushman Lane, and Ridge Road, all of which carved east-west through the hills. With the threat ending at Culp’s Hill around noon, reserves there could safely be released to incline toward the left-center, which is what Brigadier General Alpheus Williams’ division, 12<sup>th</sup> Corps, did. When Pickett’s Charge was resoundingly repulsed around 4 P.M., Hancock wrote that “I have never seen a more formidable attack, and if the Sixth and Fifth Corps have pressed up, the enemy will be destroyed.”<sup>31</sup> With Hancock wounded and his acting 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps commander Brigadier General John Gibbon also injured, Meade needed to take a more hands-on approach if the counteroffensive would proceed.

Foreshadowing later challenges to his integrity during the committee hearings, the cavalry chief Alfred Pleasonton rode alongside Meade, as thousands cheered the repulse, and offered congratulations “on the splendid conduct of the army,” but added the caveat, “General, I will give you half an hour to show yourself a great general. Order the army to advance, while I will take the cavalry, get in Lee’s rear, and we will finish the campaign in a week.”<sup>32</sup> If he said precisely this, it was both a warning to Meade to carefully guard his words and a reminder that life is often a run-on sentence without periods. In other words, the commanding general could not be satisfied with completing one task while another still loomed. To the ring of cheers and lines of raised hats Meade and Pleasonton rode their recently secured line south from the scene of the charge to a hill later to be named Little Round Top. Finding a culvert of rocks for shelter along the northern slope, Meade and his staff assembled with several generals to begin a preliminary phase for counterattack.

The “rocky pen,” as members of the 146<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry remembered it, provided the party with a buttress from Confederate sharpshooter fire emanating from lower Devil’s Den.<sup>33</sup> Lieutenant A. P. Case of the 146<sup>th</sup> also remembered, “As the hill made an excellent outlook over the field of the third day’s fight, General Meade and his staff, with the Signal Corps, were there...occupying a rocky pen directly in line held by the One hundred and forty-sixth.”<sup>34</sup> What is so appealing about this staff meeting, which was sheltered behind a protective U-shaped rock pen, is that though it holds the secrets to Meade’s counterattack plan, it is not noted in any official visitor service medium, including National Park Service orientation films, park hand-outs, wayside exhibits, or handbook literature. It is certainly not depicted as a council of war by current scholarship, though it possessed all of the same qualities of one held in Meade’s headquarters the night before. Major generals Sykes, Pleasonton, Warren, and Sedgwick, along with Brigadier General Samuel Wiley Crawford were all present to join Meade and staff in discussion of the situation. While Sickles and Hancock were absent due to their serious wounds, and Slocum was conducting a security sweep on the army’s other flank, the rest of the Union army’s major players were present. It had all the ingredients of an official council of war.

Today, there is only one tangible piece of evidence designating the event. An inscription on one side of the 146<sup>th</sup> New York monument, near the partial remains of the rocky pen, states, “From this position General Meade observed the battle for a time on July 3.”<sup>35</sup> It is clear evidence that Meade did begin a counterattack and watched it from this spot. At first glance the quotation could pertain to Pickett’s Charge, except that Meade did not observe the charge from Little Round Top. Instead he monitored it from behind Cemetery Ridge, then Power’s Hill, Cemetery Hill, and back again to Cemetery Ridge.<sup>36</sup> Meade did visit Little Round Top around 12



P.M. to seek a bird's-eye view of distant Confederate battery lines, but that was several hours prior to the main assault.

Crawford recounted the specifics of the impromptu council of war years later, describing Meade's irritability as enemy bullets whizzed around. The threat to his safety, Crawford recalled, made him even more determined to drive the Confederates from his immediate front. Following strict protocol, Meade began the meeting by talking directly past Crawford to his superior George Sykes regarding the disposition and availability of Crawford's troops. The commanding general, as Crawford remembered, pointed down from the precipice to the edge of a wheat field only 200 yards to the west to ask Sykes, "whose troops they were?"<sup>37</sup> Sykes replied that they belonged to Crawford. Adhering strictly to chain of command, Meade continued to acknowledge only Sykes.

The 1,100-man brigade in question, marked by dark blue coats and light blue Maltese crosses, belonged to Colonel William McCandless of Crawford's division.<sup>38</sup> They were Pennsylvania reserves, and it must have given Meade a strange feeling to call attention to them,



A Brady photograph showing the north slope of Little Round Top. LC

because he had led the reserves seven months earlier at Fredericksburg. Some were his old boys with whom he held a lingering affection. Moreover, he was their corps' commander as recently as June 27, 1863, prior to his promotion. If any corps should spearhead a counteroffensive, it should, for the sake of sensitivity to other commands, probably be his 5<sup>th</sup> Corps.

Continuing to instruct, Meade ordered Sykes to send Crawford's reserves forward on an "armed reconnaissance," to be supported by a brigade from Sedgwick's 6<sup>th</sup> Corps.<sup>39</sup> Per Meade's orders, Sedgwick assigned Colonel David J. Nevin's brigade to the task. Already posted in an advanced position from the day before, Nevin's New York and Pennsylvania infantry regiments were situated in right rear echelon to McCandless's reserves. Elements of both brigades were to sweep through the ground to their front, while evaluating the enemy's strength, morale, and location. The real question at hand involved whether McLaws's Confederate division maintained a substantial presence beyond Stony Hill Woods, along the western border of the Wheatfield, and its northern finger extension of Trostle Woods. Though equipped with field glasses and an elevated view from Little Round Top, Meade could not see beyond this timber. Confederate sharpshooters had perched in the trees there throughout the morning to harass and pin down Federal troops in the vicinity of the southern end of Cemetery Ridge, the Wheatfield, and the Round Tops. Meade's reconnaissance would ascertain their strength and morale, and determine the location of the forces they were screening. Offering his opinion on the outcome of the

reconnaissance, the commanding general said to Sykes, “Tell Crawford to take his command and clear those woods, he will find nothing but stragglers.”<sup>40</sup> Sykes then turned to Crawford and repeated the orders, and Crawford then carried them to McCandless. Sedgwick’s staff officers did the same concerning Nevin and informed him to support. The council of war thus concluded, except for the important matter of defining Pleasonton’s role during the armed reconnaissance. To assess his role properly, it is necessary to revisit his ride with Meade from the location of Pickett’s Charge to Little Round Top.

Returning to these critical moments, one may recall that the cavalry chief goaded the commanding general to launch a counterattack and consequently “show yourself [to be] a great general.”<sup>41</sup> Besides the mocking nature of the words themselves, they are even more remarkable to have been published in Meade’s hometown newspaper, the *Philadelphia Weekly Times*, in a city where he had enjoyed popularity. Meade certainly could not posit a rebuttal because the article appeared several years after his death. It was in this context that Pleasonton strained to have the last word on Meade’s perceived indecision after Pickett’s Charge. Specifically he alleged to have advised Meade, “Order the army to advance, while I will take the cavalry, get in Lee’s rear, and we will finish the campaign in a week.”<sup>42</sup> In keeping with his view that Meade was apprehensive at the critical moment, Pleasonton said the army commander had asked, “How do you know Lee will not attack me again; we have done well enough.”<sup>43</sup> Pleasonton in turn alleged to have made the case, “that Lee had exhausted all his available men; that the cannonade of the last two days had exhausted his ammunition; he was far from his base of supplies; and, by compelling him to keep his army together, they must soon surrender, for he was living off the country.”<sup>44</sup> Meade, who was in contemplative thought, “did not reply,” as Pleasonton recalled, “but asked me to ride up to the Round Top with him; and as we rode along the ridge for nearly a mile, the troops cheered him in a manner that plainly showed they expected the advance.”<sup>45</sup>

Lest Pleasonton’s recollection be viewed as merely a cheap shot made after Meade’s death, there are amazing similarities between his post-war article and his original testimony given before the CCW on March 7, 1864. Speaking just as boldly on the subject he testified, “The rebel army was finally repulsed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July. Immediately after that repulse, I rode out with General Meade on the field, and up to the top of the mountain, and I urged him to order a general advance of his whole army in pursuit of the enemy....”<sup>46</sup> Pleasonton’s deposition concurs with the later newspaper account when it reads, “I was satisfied that the rebel army was not only demoralized, but that they must be nearly, if not quite, out of ammunition; and that our army, being in fine spirits with this last repulse, could have easily defeated and routed the enemy.”<sup>47</sup> Though Pleasonton’s claims to have exhorted Meade on to counterattack were credible from a consistency standpoint, they may be suspect from a motive standpoint. Bill Hyde points out, as have other Meade supporters over the years, that the cavalry chief lacked honesty, personal courage, and a sense of overall fairness, and should not be trusted in his claims about Meade.<sup>48</sup> Hyde directs other criticisms against Pleasonton as well, with perhaps his strongest being the close friendship Pleasonton shared with Hooker and Sickles, a matter not to take lightly.<sup>49</sup> Pleasonton’s association with these men should be factored into his assessment of Meade as a hesitant, even fearful, leader.

The larger point is that if there is validity to Pleasonton’s claims, then a major cavalry battle after Pickett’s Charge can be redefined as another dimension to Meade’s counterattack. That is, the senseless cavalry assault directed by Brigadier General Judson Kilpatrick could have resulted from Meade’s decision to have the cavalry act in concert with a general advance of army reserves. The conventional view is that Kilpatrick ordered a pointless, suicidal cavalry assault into the right and rear of the Confederate flank after Pickett’s Charge.<sup>50</sup> That Hood’s Confederate division received the attack and repulsed it decisively is true enough, but the portrayal of Farnsworth’s Charge – as it is popularly called – as the work of one man acting alone may not be correct. If his attack held a broader purpose, then the explanation is found in the exchange between Meade and Pleasonton once they reached Little Round Top.

Starting with the first account, written at the time of the event, and working forward to the circa-1879 article, one finds that Pleasonton's earliest version favors Meade giving the cavalry a role in the counterattack. Crediting Meade with taking action, the cavalry chief recorded, "The grand attack [Pickett's Charge] of General Lee's army on July 3, on the left of our line at Gettysburg, having been successfully repulsed and defeated, orders were given for the cavalry to gain his rear and line of communication, and harass and annoy him as much as possible in his retreat."<sup>51</sup> Meade appears less sure of himself in Pleasonton's testimony given eight months after the battle that reads, "But General Meade ordered me to send my cavalry to the rear of the rebels to find out whether they were really falling back. This took some time."<sup>52</sup> By 1879, Pleasonton describes Meade's actions as those of a commander who has lost touch with reality. The former cavalry chief wrote, "When we reached the Round Top everything was still in Lee's position with the exception of a single battery which was firing upon some of our skirmishers to prevent their advancing. I was so impressed with the idea that Lee was retreating that I again earnestly urged General Meade to advance the army; but instead of doing so he ordered me to send some cavalry to ascertain the fact."<sup>53</sup>

In the two later accounts, Pleasonton expressed disappointment that Meade was content to merely send cavalry on a lengthy fact-finding mission behind enemy lines. Both of these later versions reveal frustration that Meade employed cavalry only for a broader operational pursuit back to Virginia, while the immediate tactical advantage was squandered. In contrast, the after-action report, written closer to the event, is not imbued with political disputes from congressional hearings, and seems to allow for Meade's original order to include immediate cavalry action in the area of the Round Tops. Corroborating with this was Meade's compliment to Kilpatrick on the attack of July 3, noting that he did good service along the Emmitsburg road.<sup>54</sup> It is revealing to note what is not found in a report, notably in this case, that Meade did not scold Kilpatrick or Pleasonton for Farnsworth's Charge. Neither did Pleasonton criticize Kilpatrick for making it.<sup>55</sup> Lack of criticism is evidence of acquiescence, approval, or an order to make the attack. Each of these interpretations would have enabled Kilpatrick to attack.

Indeed Kilpatrick received definite orders from Pleasonton to attack the Confederate right flank, but they were given at 8 A.M. Kilpatrick recorded that his troops were not in position until 1 P.M., when they began skirmishing. They continued to do so throughout the afternoon and entangled Hood's Confederate infantry division, diverting enemy strength away from assisting the main attack a mile north along Cemetery Ridge. Kilpatrick conveyed a sense of pride that he had assisted in this broader mission. After the repulse he pulled everyone together for an all-out cavalry assault at 5:30 P.M., which is close to the time Crawford and Nevin pushed the armed reconnaissance forward. Lest there be any doubt in Kilpatrick's mind that he knew he was assisting a counteroffensive on some level, he wrote,

I am of the opinion that had our infantry on my right advanced at once when relieved from the enemy's attack [Pickett's Charge] in their front, the enemy could not have recovered from the confusion in which Generals Farnsworth and Merritt had thrown them, but would have rushed back one division on another, until, instead of a defeat, a total rout would have ensued.<sup>56</sup>

In as many words he subtly charged that an unfulfilled infantry counteroffensive robbed the cavalry and army of decisive victory.

What is so remarkable about this prediction is Kilpatrick's awareness of a broader cooperative infantry and cavalry counteroffensive intended to follow on the heels of Pickett's Charge. Moreover, it reveals knowledge of an army-level consideration, one where multiple Confederate divisions are depicted in "total rout," a concern usually beyond the scope of someone at the division level, like Kilpatrick.<sup>57</sup> His concern here is more in keeping with the responsibilities of the cavalry chief, which raises the probability that Pleasonton communicated with Kilpatrick after

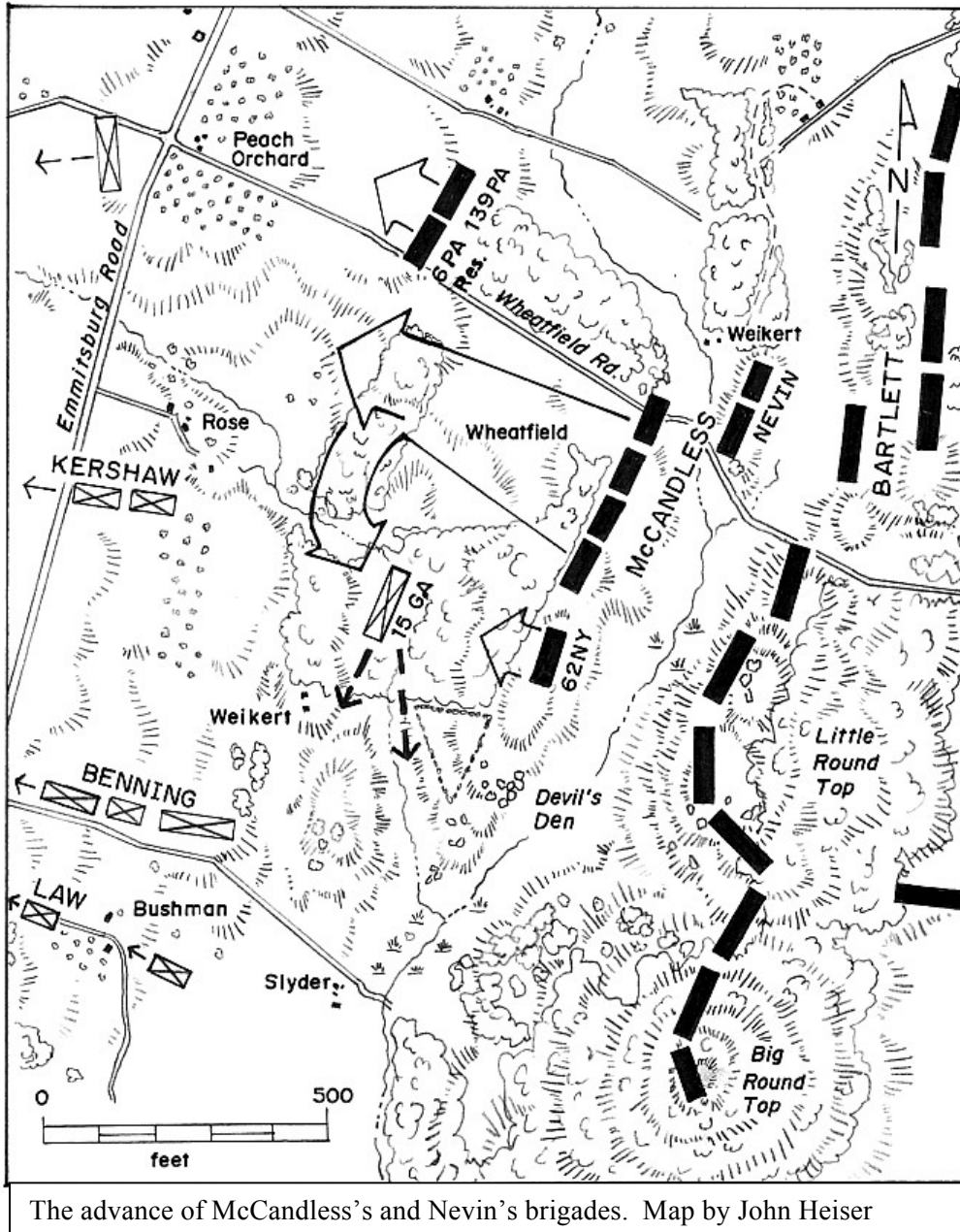
the council of war on Little Round Top. It is either that or the less-likely proposition that Kilpatrick made an impulsive, yet well-timed, army-level decision that involved coordination with an armed reconnaissance that he was not supposed to know about.

As Kilpatrick was gathering up his forces for a fierce attack into the flank and rear of Confederate defenses around 5:30 P.M., Crawford reached McCandless to convey orders from Meade and Sykes to advance an armed reconnaissance through the Wheatfield. Writing from the battlefield Crawford recounted, "About 5 o'clock I was ordered to take my command and clear the woods on the right, then swing around and clear the woods towards the point on the left...."<sup>58</sup> Twenty-three years later he added, "I left the Little Round Top and joining my command communicated the order to the brigade commander in person."<sup>59</sup> From this one can imagine Crawford picking his way down a concealed portion of the rugged slope to a stone wall along the eastern border of the Wheatfield. Whether he traveled on foot or horse he did not say, but with sharpshooter bullets flying around, the journey had to be treacherous and time-consuming. If his orders were indeed given at 5 P.M., then it is fair to assume he reached McCandless about 5:30 P.M., or the same time Kilpatrick gathered his troops for a grand cavalry assault. Fingerprints of a coordinated counteroffensive of cavalry and infantry are visible. Only the commanding general could have arranged this.

More evidence of cooperation is found in the movements and direction of McCandless's brigade. Using an east-west spine in the Wheatfield for concealment, the Pennsylvania reserves advanced their left along the north side of the spine, while their right guided on the Wheatfield road. Jogging and crouching at trail arms they pushed into the curtain of woods on their front, still unsure of what awaited on the other side. As they rushed through the trees, there was an immediate sense of relief that enemy combatants were gone and only four cannons opposed them at 400 yards with canister.<sup>60</sup> Meade was correct: They found only stragglers. They also noticed piles of Confederate weapons smoldering, recently gathered from their dead to be burned before evacuation.

Wasting little time, McCandless turned his brigade ninety degrees to the left to sweep the woods in a southerly direction in search of opposition. The sharp turn required the reserves to abandon their spread-wing battle formation in favor of a card-stack arrangement, where four regiments were massed and compressed one behind the other.<sup>61</sup> Usually the purpose behind massing in compact ranks is speed, mobility, and easy control. All of these were needed to reconnoiter quickly before conditions changed unfavorably against counteroffensive. With the passage of time comes change, a critical consideration in a combat situation where opportunities present themselves for only a few minutes. Reconnaissance largely involves a fact-finding mission, where the operation is to ascertain the enemy's strength, morale, location, and any other particulars to help in decision making. An infantry reconnaissance usually avoids entanglement, thus the need to dress together in a tight mass. But there was an exception here, where the actual orders from Meade called for an armed reconnaissance. The difference permits a combative engagement to evolve if circumstances require. Because there were questions about Confederate resistance, especially where lines of sight were broken by a partition of woods, the contingency to fire back had to be built into the orders.

Another contingency permitted the 6<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania reserves and Nevin's 139<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry to stay on course with the Wheatfield road and charge the Confederate battery to silence



the canister. As they neared, the battery withdrew, but Southern infantry emerged from behind the Emmitsburg road ridge to contest, an important moment for Meade, who from afar could view enemy strength and willingness to fight. The Confederates showed an eagerness and readiness that had remained in doubt up until that point. All during the infantry phase of Pickett's Charge, three to four dozen cannons had remained inactive on this ridge, raising questions with Meade as to whether they were unsupported. Many of these guns fell silent because of ammunition depletion, but the armed reconnaissance revealed that the numerous pieces were not abandoned. In many ways, this was a defining moment in the contemplated counteroffensive, an explanation that will be returned to in the conclusion.

The advance of the 6<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania reserves and 139<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania served a dual purpose that afternoon: to also cover the right flank and rear of the main body of Pennsylvania reserves as they turned south in mass formation. Nevin detached the 62<sup>nd</sup> New York Infantry far to the left, as well, to cover the left rear of the reconnaissance.<sup>62</sup> Racing and tracing the western border of woods, the men of McCandless's brigade dropped into a hollow clearing in view of the Rose farm and spotted Confederate troops at the top of another ridge that connected with Rose Hill. Accelerating while simultaneously evolving into a single line battle, the reserves quickly closed distance and engulfed the 15<sup>th</sup> Georgia Infantry of Brigadier General Henry L. Benning's brigade, taking "eighty or ninety prisoners, one colonel & asst., the colors of the 15<sup>th</sup> Georgia...."<sup>63</sup>

An intriguing component to the pursuit of the 15<sup>th</sup> Georgia is that the chase led to the Snyder lane, which ran east to west and was the main avenue of escape for Hood's division – the same point pressured on the other side by Farnsworth's Charge. Walking McCandless's route today, through the Wheatfield and up to the Snyder lane, requires about thirty minutes. Factoring this in with the time needed to confront, fight, and pursue the Georgia regiment, the whole affair lasted thirty to forty-five minutes, placing the reserves within shooting and shouting range of the cavalry charge about 6 P.M. This time frame concurs with the one given by Brigadier General Wesley Merritt in his report. Merritt's reserve cavalry brigade was ordered by Pleasonton to ride due north from Emmitsburg at 12 P.M. to assist Kilpatrick in harassing Hood's right flank. For Merritt, the four-mile trot up the Emmitsburg road required thirty minutes or more, and linked him with his own pickets and southern outposts one mile south of Hood's flank and rear. From there he claimed "about" another four hours were needed to drive the outpost in.<sup>64</sup>

A cursory look at Merritt's report indicates that he fought until 4:30 P.M., an hour too early to directly coordinate with Kilpatrick on his right. However, a closer investigation indicates that Merritt's battle concluded later than that. For instance, he documents that the fight lasted for "(some time after the cannonading had ceased on the right), and was finally brought to a close by a heavy rain."<sup>65</sup> A sentence earlier, Merritt identifies the "right" to be the Union army's position along Cemetery Hill and Ridge, where the sporadic cannonading had continued until at least 4:30 P.M. Moreover, the heavy rain did not begin until after 6 P.M., an important factor in Meade's decision whether to continue the counterattack.

Merritt's involvement is a key in revealing Pleasonton's coordination with Meade's counteroffensive. Merritt detached Major Samuel H. Starr's 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry to get into Lee's line of retreat, communication, and supply between Fairfield and Cashtown. Though eight miles to the left of Merritt's main position along the Emmitsburg road, Starr's threat to the Fairfield road represented an extended strike at Lee's flank and rear. This, incidentally, was the essence of Meade's orders to Pleasonton on Little Round Top.

Though pinched by Kilpatrick and Merritt's cavalry on one side and McCandless's infantry on the other, Hood's division managed to maintain the Snyder lane escape route long enough to reach the cover of its original July 2 battle line at Warfield Ridge. Meade observed this from the current location of the 146<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry monument. Armed with visual evidence and a steady trail of raw data, Meade quickly learned that the Confederate location had changed. Longstreet, watching the developing crisis from the Southern side, had wasted no time withdrawing the remainder of his corps immediately after Pickett's Charge. Reflecting on the situation twenty years later, he noted, "The Federals were advancing a line of skirmishers which I thought was the advance of their charge. As soon as the line of skirmishers came within reach of our guns, the batteries opened again and their fire seemed to check at once the threatened advance."<sup>66</sup> With a sense of reprieve, he added, "After keeping it up a few minutes the line of skirmishers disappeared, and my mind was relieved of the apprehension that Meade was going to follow us."<sup>67</sup>

Thus, a third of the Confederate army in peril was permitted to break contact and escape. Meade's critics wanted to know how this could happen. Longstreet's left was crushed by the defeat of Pickett's division, leaving his middle division, under McLaws, unsupported for nearly a

mile. Without Confederate cavalry to cover Hood's right, and with the Union cavalry threatening to encircle and ensnare, one might conclude that both of Longstreet's flanks were unanchored, normally a desperate situation. Meade's critics believed he had a lot to answer for, yet he did not evade the issue with the CCW, boldly claiming: "I went immediately to the extreme left of my line, with the determination of advancing my left, and [of] making an assault on the enemy's lines."<sup>68</sup> Then, with some detail he explained, "So soon as I arrived at the left [Little Round Top] I gave the necessary orders for pickets and skirmishers in front to be thrown forward to feel the enemy, and all preparations to be made for the assault."<sup>69</sup>

As shown earlier in this work, Meade did initiate early stages toward counteroffensive, just as he claimed in his testimony. Crawford was ordered to conduct an armed reconnaissance, and Pleasonton was ordered to get in the enemy's flank and rear with cavalry. Moreover, Sedgwick received orders to support Crawford.<sup>70</sup> Reports from the 6<sup>th</sup> Corps show a concentration of those troops toward the left-center and left after Pickett's Charge.<sup>71</sup> The facts are clear that preliminary steps were taken for a counteroffensive, yet the plan was dropped in mid-stride. Why?

Meade offered the CCW the rationalization that, "The great length of the line, and the time required to carry these orders out to the front," led in part to abandoning the offensive. There is little doubt that shifting 6<sup>th</sup> Corps reserves from other parts of a three-mile battle line and issuing orders to units already in place required a half-hour or more. The retreat of Confederates after Pickett's Charge, the counter-battery fire that continued afterwards, and the gathering up of prisoners in front of Cemetery Ridge occupied Meade's attention until 4:30 P.M. Meade then rode a mile to Little Round Top, reached the summit before 5 P.M., and issued orders through Sykes to Crawford on the hour. Crawford reached McCandless closer to 5:30 P.M., and the armed reconnaissance was underway. There is nothing in this time sequence to suggest that Meade wasted time.

The commanding general offered further commentary on why he abandoned the counterattack, explaining that "the report given...of the condition of the forces in the front and left" held sway on the final decision. Here, he was addressing the intelligence gained from the probing mission of McCandless's brigade, along with the ascertaining operation conducted by his cavalry into Lee's flank and rear. These preliminary offensive thrusts disclosed that Confederate morale was sufficient to defend, and that McLaws's division had vacated with Hood's brigades not far behind. Had the reconnaissance proved the Confederate location to be fixed closer to the Wheatfield, then Meade's reserves would have been poised to push out behind McCandless and overwhelm. But with the relocation of Longstreet's corps to the Emmitsburg road ridge and finally Warfield Ridge, the Army of the Potomac faced the daunting assignment of charging uphill into enemy guns secure and armed with canister. Union artillery chief Brigadier General Henry J. Hunt was emphatic on this point, arguing, "An advance of 20,000 men from Cemetery Ridge in the face of 140 guns then in position would have been stark madness; an immediate advance from any point, in force, was simply impracticable...."<sup>72</sup>

Meade mentioned one more dynamic in his decision: that the time consumed in the early stages of counteroffensive "caused it to be so late in the evening..." it became necessary to "abandon the assault."<sup>73</sup> There is credibility to such a claim when it is realized that, in those days before daylight savings time, sunset on July 3, 1863, would have occurred shortly before 7:30 P.M., about two hours after Kilpatrick and Crawford began their advance. If the combative movements of McCandless's brigade finished at 6:30 P.M., then the armed reconnaissance would have had to contend with the increasing shadows of dusk. Adding to the darkness and the aura of a late hour was a growing cloud cover from a developing storm. Thunder showers began just after 6 P.M. and carried well into the next day. Indeed, the full counterattack, had Meade permitted it, would have proceeded into the twilight and a steady rain.

Once Longstreet had withdrawn everyone to Warfield Ridge, his corps constructed breastworks all along their front. Meade confided to his wife on July 5 that, "They [the Confederates] waited one day [the 4<sup>th</sup>] expecting, that flushed with success, I would attack them, when they would play

their old game of shooting us from behind breastworks.”<sup>74</sup> He went on to declare that he gave them the satisfaction of waiting, but that was all. A fair-minded historian can see his point. It was not advisable to charge two fortified ridges, crowned either with artillery or earthen works, in limited daylight. As if the conditions were not bad enough, there was the rugged nature of Plum Run Valley directly in the path of the ascent. General Longstreet described the landscape as a “rocky fastness” and noted that “preparing to get through the rough grounds consumed time.”<sup>75</sup> Sickles had complained about it a day earlier, calling it a “morass” and even advanced to the Emmitsburg road without orders, on July 2, to put the bad terrain to his back.<sup>76</sup> For Meade at 6 P.M. on July 2, traversing the Plum Run Valley with 10,000 infantry was not something that could be done quickly.

Pleasanton, Butterfield, Sickles, Doubleday, and even Hancock thought differently. A chorus of second-guessers and jealous rivals voiced to the CCW or through post-war interviews and articles that Meade had fought reluctantly at Gettysburg. Even Lincoln expressed frustration that Meade let Lee escape across the Potomac on July 13, with a tentative pursuit at best. The president constructed a letter that scolded Meade on this issue, but decided to sleep on it, and thought differently the next morning. The now-famous letter was discovered in the Lincoln papers after his death.<sup>77</sup> For Lincoln, the clock was ticking on the next election, and he needed to show that an increasingly unpopular war could be prosecuted successfully. He knew opportunities to bring it to a close were few and far between. The pressures were intense, yet impatience could destroy Meade’s confidence. Lincoln chose to be patient.

A door for other possibilities was opened after Grant’s great victory at Vicksburg. Grant’s success made it easier for Lincoln to bring him East to ride with the Army of the Potomac, providing oversight to Meade, who maintained his command, though had not the stature of Grant. The questions that were raised before the CCW about Meade’s aggressiveness and imagination on the battlefield would remain with him throughout the remainder of the war, and would establish his place firmly in Grant’s shadow. Though he was the first to defeat Lee, Meade’s legacy then and now is tempered by the question of why he did not counterattack after Pickett’s Charge, either tactically at Gettysburg or on the operational level during the retreat. The answer is that he did counterattack, but in measured degrees, with offensive measures developing in percentages toward full implementation. Meade permitted the circumstances to play out, and continued to nurture the option of counterattack until the risk finally outweighed the reward. That was Meade’s answer before the CCW.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Arlington National Cemetery, <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/joseph-dickinson.html>. “Brevetted Brigadier General of U.S. Volunteers, 13 March 1865 for gallant and meritorious service at the battle of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.”

<sup>2</sup> It is not known whether Reynolds failed the administration’s litmus test that included questions on how the commander felt about emancipation, occupation of the South, and destruction of Southern property. As a Northern Democrat, Reynolds likely had a different view on how the war should be conducted. Though emancipation was unarguably the right policy from a human rights standpoint; as a war aim it required long-term commitment to social and political integration, along with repair to Southern infrastructure and a lengthy occupation of the South. “Yes” to emancipation meant “no” to a political solution to end the war. Because of his tragic death at Gettysburg, Reynolds did not have an opportunity to elaborate on the details in testimony or memoirs.

<sup>3</sup> Historicus, “Battle of Gettysburg,” *New York Herald*, April 4, 1864; George Gordon Meade, *Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, vol. 2, ed. George Gordon Meade (1913; reprint, Baltimore: Butternut & Blue, 1994), 337-340.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Government Printing Office, *Report of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, at the Second Session Thirty-Eighth Congress*, part 2 (1865; reprint, Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Reprint Company, 1977), 349 [Hereafter cited as *CCW*.]; U.S. War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1889), Series 1, 27(3):486. [Hereafter cited as *OR*.]; *OR*, Series 1, 27(3):487. Slocum did not comply with the commanding general’s wishes on the battle’s second day when he pulled elements of two corps, or 10,000 soldiers, away from a staging area for attack. Having the offensive option snatched away, without consultation, must have been disconcerting for Meade, but tempers were kept in check and the problem disappeared with later victory.

<sup>5</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):763-765.

<sup>6</sup> James Kelly, “Hancock interview of September 2, 1880,” in *Generals in Bronze: Interviewing the Commanders of the Civil War*, ed. William B. Styple (Kearny: N.J.: Belle Grove Publishing Company, 2005), 66.

<sup>7</sup> Kelly, “Last Meeting with General Hancock on April 6, 1885,” in *Generals in Bronze*, 68. [I’m assuming this article appears in this book.]

<sup>8</sup> Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), 62. Butterfield invested two days in preparing Meade’s Pipe Creek Circular that stipulated the particulars of defending Washington, D.C. around Westminster, Maryland. He was angry that the battle developed thirty miles north at Gettysburg. He reunited with Hooker in the Western army in October 1863.

<sup>9</sup> Francis Augustin O’Reilly, *Fredericksburg Campaign* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 47, 48, 460, 467, 469.

<sup>10</sup> Meade, *Life and Letters*, 169.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>12</sup> Free Dictionary by Farlex, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Point+d'appui> “*Point d’ appui* - (Mil.) It is a given point or body, upon which troops are formed, or by which they are marched in line or column. An advantageous defensive support, as a castle, morass, wood, declivity, etc. any point of support or basis of operations, as a rallying point;” Mark Mayo Boatner III, *Civil War Dictionary*, (N.Y.: David McKay, 1959), 657. “*Point d’ appui* – meaning literally a support or fulcrum...It might also be defined as a tactical or strategic base.”

<sup>13</sup> At the time of the battle, Cemetery Hill and Ridge were seamlessly connected and identified together as the central point. With construction of the Cyclorama Center in 1962, the terrain there became subdivided, and lines of sight were broken. Soon after the grand opening of the center, the Steinwehr Avenue business district developed in front of Cemetery Hill to service it, and in turn opened the way for a 1960s housing development. Eventually trees were allowed to grow to cover the houses, motels, restaurants, and gas stations, until they collectively cropped Cemetery Hill from view. Original battle accounts that labeled Cemetery Hill as Lee’s primary objective have not made sense in fifty years. The Gettysburg National Military Park is now trying to restore the hill to its 1863 appearance by removing trees, the Cyclorama building, and the main visitor center.

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<sup>14</sup>Antoine Henri de Jomini, *Art of War*, trans. G.H. Mendell and W.P. Craighill (1804; reprint, Mechanicsburg, Penna.: Stackpole Books, 1992), 191. The model example of this was the battle of Cannae, 216 B.C., where Hannibal lured the Roman legions onto one central point before his Carthaginians wrapped both of their outstretched wings around the singular mass from behind. Hannibal executed this maneuver on open ground, whereas Meade's proposed counterattack had to contend in part with rough, rocky terrain. However, the geometrical principle was the same in both battles.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Ryan, "Intelligence Factor at Gettysburg," in *Gettysburg Magazine: Historical Articles of Lasting Interest* 32 (2005):35-36. Ryan obtained this transmission from the Bureau of Military Intelligence files at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. It is not marked with a specific time, but Ryan believes the first message from Meade, through Butterfield, to Sharpe was closer to 7 A.M. The precise time of Sharpe's reply is unknown. Because the Confederates were not in retreat on Meade's right until noon, the opportune moment to contemplate counteroffensive there fell between 12 and 1 P.M. Edwin C. Fishel, *Secret War for the Union: Untold Story of Military Intelligence in the Civil War* (N.Y.: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 530. John C. Babcock, who extracted information from Confederate prisoners for the Bureau, replied to Butterfield and estimated the Confederate strength there to be 21,200. Sharpe appended a separate note to indicate his opinion that the numbers were high.

<sup>16</sup> *CCW*, 408.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*; *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):366.

<sup>18</sup> *CCW*, 378; Bill Hyde, ed., *Union Generals Speak: Meade Hearings on the Battle of Gettysburg* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2003), 169.

<sup>19</sup> *CCW*, 378; Hyde, 169.

<sup>20</sup> *CCW*, 408.

<sup>21</sup> National Park Service, "Global Information System, Fig. 15: 1863 Farm Boundaries and Property Owners," *Cultural Landscape Report Base, General Management Plan*, (Gettysburg, Penna.: Gettysburg National Military Park, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Richard A. Sauers, *Gettysburg: Meade-Sickles Controversy* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2003). Sauers offers a good explanation of the political intrigue involving Meade and Sickles, but is vague in describing where specific artillery placements and infantry deployments should be. He did not identify the Patterson-Weikert-Munshower (PWM) hills nor suggest how Sickles was to share frontage on his right with an artillery battalion and infantry division from the Union 2<sup>nd</sup> Corps. Space was at a premium there, but Sauers relies on his audience to ignore the particulars.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Keneally, *American Scoundrel: Life of the Notorious Civil War General Dan Sickles* (N.Y.: Random House, 2002), 277-280.

<sup>24</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(2):320.

<sup>25</sup> *CCW*, 337. Meade ordered Sickles to occupy Round Top Mountain (Little Round Top) only if "practicable," on July 2. *OR*, Series 1, 27(2):308. Lee recorded the Peach Orchard to be the "desired ground," on that part of battlefield.

<sup>26</sup> I have found several names given to Little Round Top by participants during or within a few months after the battle including: Bald Top, Granite Spur, Rocky Heights, Sugarloaf Mountain, Wolf Hill, Weed's Hill, Mountain Top, Round Top Mountain, yonder hill, and hill to the right. If the term Little Round Top was uttered during the battle, it was not common language.

<sup>27</sup> James Longstreet, "Lee in Pennsylvania, Campaign of Gettysburg, Annals of War," *Philadelphia Weekly Times* (circa 1879; reprint, Dayton, Oh.: Morningside Bookshop, 1988), 429.

<sup>28</sup> Kent Masterson Brown, *Retreat from Gettysburg: Lee, Logistics, and the Pennsylvania Campaign* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). See pages 12-40 for details on how much forage and livestock was requisitioned by Lee's army from Pennsylvania. The daily equivalent of 6,000 pounds of hay and oats was needed to feed 100,000 livestock and the 20,000 horses pulling wheeled vehicles. Lee's eventual retreat line, with supplies, wounded train, and infantry, was more than fifty miles long.

<sup>29</sup> G.C. D'Aguiar, C.B., trans., General Burnod, *Napoleon's Maxims of War* (Philadelphia: David McKay Publishers, 1902), 1; <http://www.military-info.com/freebies/maximn.htm>

<sup>30</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(2):320.

<sup>31</sup> *OR*, Series 1 27(1):366.

<sup>32</sup> Alfred Pleasonton, "The Campaign of Gettysburg, Annals of War," *Philadelphia Weekly Times* (circa 1879; reprint, Dayton, Oh.: Morningside Bookshop, 1988), 455.

- <sup>33</sup> A. P. Case, "The Taking and Holding of Little Round Top," *New York Monuments Commission for the Battlefields of Gettysburg and Chattanooga: Final Report on the Battle of Gettysburg*, vol. 3 (Albany, N.Y.: J.B. Lyon Company, Printers, 1902), 971.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Don McLaughlin, "Gettysburg Monuments: Locations & Inscriptions" (April 1986), 132.
- <sup>36</sup> George Gordon Meade, *With Meade at Gettysburg* (Philadelphia: Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, 1930), 140-152. Meade's son wrote and compiled this work, providing details about Meade's whereabouts on July 3.
- <sup>37</sup> Samuel W. Crawford, "Pennsylvania Reserves at the Battle of Gettysburg, July 2- 3, 1863," *Philadelphia Weekly Press*, September 8, 1886.
- <sup>38</sup> John W. Busey and David G. Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg* (Hightstown, N.J.: Longstreet House, 1986), 249.
- <sup>39</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):74-75; *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):671.
- <sup>40</sup> Crawford, "Pennsylvania Reserves," *Philadelphia Weekly Press*.
- <sup>41</sup> Pleasonton, "The Campaign of Gettysburg," 455.
- <sup>42</sup> Pleasonton, 455.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Pleasonton, 455-456.
- <sup>45</sup> Pleasonton, 456.
- <sup>46</sup> *CCW*, 360.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>48</sup> Hyde, 132-136.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Captain H.C. Parsons, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War: Tide Shifts*, vol. 3 (1884; reprint, Secaucus, N.J.: Castle, 1987), 393. Parsons, who was in the charge, was the first to paint Kilpatrick's cavalry assault as somewhat rash and marked by an eagerness for glory. Though in fairness, he credited Kilpatrick with having received orders to, "press the enemy, to threaten him at every point, and to strike at the first opportunity." Parsons added that after Pickett's Charge, "His opportunity had now come. If he could bring on a battle...and break the lines on the mountain, Meade's infantry on Round Top would surely drive them into the valley, and then the five thousand cavalry in reserve could strike the decisive blow;" Eric J. Wittenberg, *Gettysburg's Forgotten Cavalry Actions* (Gettysburg, Penna.: Thomas Publications, 1998), 21. In recent years, Wittenberg has taken up the mantle for criticism of Pleasonton and Kilpatrick at Gettysburg and elsewhere. Regarding their role in Farnsworth's Charge, Wittenberg writes, "Perhaps the White House would await Judson Kilpatrick after all, if he could only pull off his scheme."
- <sup>51</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):916.
- <sup>52</sup> *CCW*, 360.
- <sup>53</sup> Pleasonton, "The Campaign of Gettysburg," 456.
- <sup>54</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):117. Meade documented that, "Kilpatrick's division...was on the 3d sent on our extreme left, on the Emmitsburg road, where good service was rendered in assaulting the enemy's line and occupying his attention."
- <sup>55</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 29(1):916. Pleasonton stated, "orders were given for the cavalry to gain his [Lee's] rear...."
- <sup>56</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):993.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Crawford, "Pennsylvania Reserves."
- <sup>59</sup> Samuel Crawford, "Taken on the Field, Friday, July 3, 1863," Gettysburg National Military Park, Vertical File 5, Participant Accounts: Samuel Crawford.
- <sup>60</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(2):384; *OR*, Series 1, 27(2):432. Process of elimination leaves Motes's and Taylor's artillery as the likely suspects to have fired canister upon the armed reconnaissance.
- <sup>61</sup> *CCW*, 471. The 11<sup>th</sup> PA reserve of Colonel Joseph W. Fisher's brigade joined the reconnaissance to bring the total number of regiments in McCandless's advance to five. Four turned in mass formation, while one advanced straight to cover flank and rear.
- <sup>62</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):685.
- <sup>63</sup> Crawford, "Taken on the Field."
- <sup>64</sup> *OR*, Series 1, 27(1):943.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>66</sup>James Longstreet, "Lee's Right Wing at Gettysburg," *Battles & Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: The Century Company, 1888), vol. 3, 347.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>*CCW*, 333.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>*OR*, Series 1, 27(1):671.

<sup>71</sup>*OR*, Series 1, 27(1):663-696.

<sup>72</sup>Henry J. Hunt, "Third Day at Gettysburg," *Battles & Leaders*, vol. 3, 376.

<sup>73</sup>*CCW*, 333.

<sup>74</sup>Meade, *Life and Letters*, 118.

<sup>75</sup>James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox: Memoirs of the Civil War in America* (1912; reprint, Secaucus, N.J.: Blue and Gray Press, 1988), 396.

<sup>76</sup>Daniel Sickles, "Absurd in His Tactics," *Philadelphia Weekly Times*, August 16, 1886.

<sup>77</sup>Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1936), 207. Carnegie used Lincoln's draft letter of July 14, 1863 to Meade, as an example of how a leader ought to control his anger.