Battles Of Gettysburg Essay, Research Paper

The Civil War, much like a roller coaster, had several ups and downs that changed the course of events. However, one dramatic turning point in the war stands out above all others, The Battle of Gettysburg. From the beginning, the Union was destined to become victorious through superior military tactics and a more industrialization. However, several things must first happen to lead up to this dramatic battle.

The Civil War began at Ft. Sumter on April 12, of 1861(Military). Negotiations for peace had ended that day and CSA Brigadier General P.G.T. Beauregard gave the orders for the Southern troupes to fire on the North-occupied Fort. The bombardment continued for 33 hours before Ft.Sumter surrendered (Military). The Civil War of the United States had begun. This was only the beginning of a war that would drag out for years to come.

Immediately after these shots were fired on Ft.Sumter, the recently elected President of the Union, Abraham Lincoln, responded with determination (Nash 502). On April 15, Lincoln issued a proclamation that called up a total of 75,000 militia from the states (Military). At the same time, calls for troops were sent to the governors of all states that had remained in the Union. On April 19 a second proclamation announced that Southern ports would be blockaded. A third proclamation, dated May 3, called for 42,000 three-year volunteers for the regular army and for 18,000 volunteers to serve one to three years in the navy (Military).

The South responded with equal determination. Virginia and the rest of the upper South seceded. The Congress of the Confederacy authorized President Davis to wage the war now beginning (Nash 499). The border slave states of Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, and Delaware never seceded. However, thousands of men in Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland volunteered for service in the Confederate armies (Military).

Both the North and South raised troops as quickly as possible and struggled with the problem of equipping and training them(Chamberlin 18). The states recruited volunteers and organized them into regiments. Officers were elected by the men and commissioned by the governors(19). In the beginning the length of service was usually short, but as soon as it became apparent that the war was not going to come to an end anytime soon, they changed the term on enlistment to three years(Military).

As the troupes were trained, they were sent to various parts of the country. The Northern troupes were sent to either Washington D.C. or stationed along the Ohio River(Military). In the South, the troupes were mainly concentrated in Tennessee or Virginia where they could threaten the Capital.

Men flooded into armies in both the North and the South. Both sides discussed strategies that they believed would help them to achieve victory (Nash 508). The strategies that each side developed were much different from each other because their goals in the war varied considerably. The South had seceded and desired to create a news nation. Therefore, they had only to defend themselves and wait until the North had tired itself out (Nash 515). The North, on the other hand, had to attempt to restore the Union. This meant that they had to convince the Confederates that they had no hopes in seceding from the Union and forming a new nation. Northern armies would have to invade the Confederacy, destroy it’s capacity to wage war, and destroy the will of the Confederates to resist the Union (Military). The Confederacy could win the war by merely prolonging the war until the point that the Union would find the war too costly in lives and money to continue fighting. This was much like the way that the colonists in the Revolutionary War defeated a seemingly much stronger power by dragging the war out and exhausting the British will to win (Military). The stage was set for war, and it looked as though it would favor the South.

Lincoln and the Northerners however had no intention of letting the South split apart a country that so many had worked so hard to build. A prominent American military figure, Winfield Scott, developed a long-term plan that he believed would help the Northerners achieve victory. His plan, subsequently named the “Anaconda Plan” would apply pressure, through military actions, to different parts of the South and “constrict” them into surrendering (Military). A combined force of naval and army units would sweep down the Mississippi River, dividing the Confederacy’s eastern and western states. At the same time, the Union Navy would institute a blockade to deny the Confederacy the badly needed manufactured goods from Europe. If the South continued to fight, even after the loss of the Mississippi and the closing of its ports; Scott envisioned a major invasion into the heart of the Confederacy (Military). He estimated that it would take two to three years and 300,000 men to carry out this strategy. Aside from underestimating, by about half, the length of time and the number of men it would take to bring success, Scott had sketched the broad strategy the North would implement to defeat the South over the next four years (Military). The U.S. Navy applied increasing pressure along the Confederate coasts, Northern forces took control of the Mississippi River by the Middle of 1863, and large armies marched into Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, and the Carolinas (Military).

By spring of 1863, the war had waged for two years and a turning point in the fight for succession or unity was about to occur.

The Battle of Gettysburg was a decisive engagement in that it arrested the Confederates’ second and last major invasion of the North, destroyed their offensive strategy, and pushed them into a war that they could not win with their lack of manufacturing capacities.

The Army of the Potomac, under the Union general George Gordon Meade (Golay 150), numbered about 85,000; the Confederate army, under General Robert E. Lee, numbered about 75,000(Essay). After the Battle of Chancellorsville on May 2 to 4, an important victory for the Confederates, Lee divided his army into three corps (Golay 155), commanded by three lieutenant generals: James Longstreet, Richard Stoddert Ewell, and Ambrose Powell Hill(Lee 289). Lee then formulated a plan for invading Pennsylvania, hoping to avert another federal offensive in Virginia and planning to fight if he could get the federal army into the right position(Military). In pursuit of this plan, Lee crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains, up the Shenandoah Valley, and, through Maryland, entered Pennsylvania. After learning federal troops were north of the Potomac(Essay), Lee decided to concentrate his whole army at Gettysburg(Military).

On June 30, Confederate troops from General Hill’s corps, on their way to Gettysburg, discovered federal troops that Meade had moved down to intercept the Confederate army. The battle began on July 1 outside of Gettysburg with a fight between Hill’s advance brigades and the federal cavalry division commanded by Major General John Buford. Hill encountered tough resistance (Essay), and the fighting was inconclusive until Ewell arrived from the north in the afternoon. The Confederates pushed against General Oliver Howard’s corps and forced the federal troops to give up their forward positions to Culp’s Hill and Cemetery Ridge, southeast of Gettysburg. The fighting had been heavy on both sides, but the Union troops suffered more losses. More than 4000 men were taken prisoner by the Confederates (Military), and Federal General John Reynolds was killed in battle. The Northerners did manage to capture Confederate General Archer. He was the first Confederate officer to be taken prisoner after Lee assumed command of the Confederate army(Military). The corps, led by Ewell, did not move in to attack the Union troops but waited for General Longstreet to bring in his corps to reinforce the outnumbered Confederate troops.

The next day, July 2, Meade formed his forces in the shape of a horseshoe, moving westward from Culp’s Hill and southward along Cemetery Ridge to the hills of Little Round Top and Round Top. The Confederates, on the other hand, were deployed in a long, thin, concave line, with Longstreet and Ewell on the flanks and Hill in the center(Lee 300).

Lee, against the advice of Longstreet and despite the fact that he had no cavalry, resolved to attack the federal positions(Elson 31). Longstreet was unable to advance until late afternoon, allowing the federal troops to make preparations for the expected assault. General Abner Doubleday of the federal army strengthened his hold on Cemetery Hill(Kundhardt 12). The federals held Cemetery Ridge and Little Round Top, but Longstreet moved Confederate troops along Peach Orchard, driving the federals from their positions there. Although Ewell won part of Culp’s Hill(Overview), he was unable to break the federal line there or on the eastern part of Cemetery Ridge(Elson 29). On the night of July 2, Meade held a council of war in which the decision was made not to retreat. On the third day of battle, the federals were secure in their positions and the Confederates had lost their offensive stance(Military). General Lee decided to mount an attack despite opposition from other Confederate generals. The offensive did not begin until after noon(Lee 304). Groups from three Confederate divisions (Overview), including the division led by Major General George E. Pickett, totaling fewer than 15,000 men (Elson 30), took part in a memorable charge on Cemetery Ridge (Three) against a withering barrage of federal artillery and musket fire. The attack is known as Pickett’s Charge. Although the Confederate troops breached Meade’s first line of defense, the strain on the Confederates proved too great, and they fell back, having lost over three-fourths of their force (Military). This single maneuver would prove to be the turning point in the war.

With the repulse of Pickett’s Charge, the Battle of Gettysburg was virtually over. On the night of July 4, Lee began his retreat to Virginia, expecting a counterattack from the federal army. Meade, however, did not attack, probably because of heavy rains that hampered the pursuit of the retreating Confederates(Three). During the three days of battle, the Union Army had about 23,000 casualties, and the Confederates had at least 25,000(Military).

This battle alone shows a crucial mistake on the behalf of the Confederacy. General Lee had hoped that in winning a major battle on the eastern coast (Three), he would gain some international recognition from such countries as Great Britain (Military). Though Virginia had been controlled by the Confederacy for most of the war, The Union had achieved large successes in the West (especially Tennessee and Kentucky). General Lee reasoned that a decisive victory by his army on the eastern front would lead to possible international recognition and or union capitulation. As Lee reasoned, two options were available: an invasion of the North or defeat by attrition (Military). He had hoped that, by taking this war North, he would relieve the offensives against Richmond (from which originated the battles of Fredricksburg and Chancellorsville)(Military). He never could have known just how great his mistake would effect the war.

Gettysburg was a key example of some of the mistakes that the South made during the Civil war. The battle had cost the confederates a total of 33%(Lee 308) of their troops to wounds or death. I will end this assignment by showing you just how disastrous this was through a letter that General Pickett wrote to his wife shortly after his charge on Round Top.

“On the Fourth—far from a glorious Fourth to us or to any with love for his fellowmen—I wrote you just a line of heart-break. The sacrifice of life on that blood-soaked field on the fatal third was too awful for the heralding of victory, even for our victorious foe, who, I think, believe as we do, that it decided the fate of our cause. No words can picture the anguish of that roll-call—the breathless waits between the responses. The “Here” of those who, by God’s mercy, had miraculously escaped the awful rain of shot and shell was a sob—a gasp—a knell—for the unanswered name of his comrade called before his. There was no tone of thankfulness for having been spared to answer to their names, but rather a toll, and an unvoiced wish that they, too, had been among the missing.

Even now I can hear them cheering as I gave the order, “Forward”! I can feel their faith and trust in me and their love for our cause. I can feel the thrill of their joyous voices as they called out all along the line, “We’ll follow you, Marse George. We’ll follow you—we’ll follow you.” Oh, how faithfully they kept their word—following me on—on—to their death, and I, believing in the promised support, led them on—on—on— Oh, God!

I can’t write you a love letter to-day, my Sallie, for, with my great love for you and my gratitude to God for sparing my life to devote to you, comes the overpowering thought of those whose lives were sacrificed—of the broken-hearted widows and mothers and orphans. The moans of my wounded boys, the sight of the dead, upturned faces, flood my soul with grief—and here am I, whom they trusted, whom they followed, leaving them on that field of carnage—leaving them to the mercy of —— and guarding 4,000 prisoners across the river back to Winchester. Such a duty for men who a few hours ago covered themselves with glory eternal.

This is too gloomy and too poor a letter for so beautiful a sweetheart, but it seems sacrilegious, almost, to say I love you, with the hearts that are stilled to love on the field of battle.

Sincerely,

George E. Pickett “(Military)

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