

Endurance in the Face of Tragedy, Pickett's Charge the Battle of Gettysburg

Kash Calvin

Senior Division

Historical Paper

Paper Length: 1556 words

Endurance in the face of Tragedy, Pickett's Charge the Battle of Gettysburg.

A shivering sound echoes through my ear, a sound of tragedy, a sound of battle. The battle upon Cemetery Ridge. I look up from my view of the ground to see the blood-soaked grass before me. Cold. I am cold, a lead bullet embedded into my body. I should be concerned for, if, if it is fatal, I shall not see my loved ones again. I'm trying to move, but all that I can manage is but a twitch. It's not looking good. I try to lift my body, it hurts so badly with the pain amassing, ever growing. With my left arm I try to make progress, to my success I manage to set my hand upon the ground and lift part of my arm. This shimmer of hope quickly fades as I collapse to the ground once again, the cruelty almost laughable. "Damn it, damn it all, this wretched Gettysburg, why must humans be so cruel? We bicker, we fight, we are made to stand true to what we believe even if those ideals were forced upon us. What amount of freedom do we truly have in the grand scheme of our true fate? Why can't we stand for our beliefs and rise, rise up against the oppression! Yet, we are struck down made to conform made to grovel to the lies forced upon us.

As I lay upon the ground bleeding out, I recall my life all the wrongs, all the misdeeds of my past. But I also recall the pleasant parts, the good that I did, the people I have helped, the fight I gave. Yet, it all seems for nothing. One part seems to tyrannize all my fond memories. It deprives me of the small glimmering shard of happiness I may feel before the vast unknown that comes with death. Not only is this memory of a malignant caliber, but I am made to remember it so clearly, for if I were to forget the faces of the men I have killed, I would most certainly earn

the title of a monster. Like the fox that hunts the rabbit in order to see another day, I must kill to trudge on. Yet, I can't tell if I am the fox any longer, for I now I think I am the rabbit, unable to free myself from the jaws of death. Or is it the jaws of my servitude? This memory so oppressive as it be the true colors shine with the crimson red of sins. Sins of greed, gluttony, wrath, pride, and envy all of which contribute to my ever-growing misery (Helm; Alexander).

Not only do I suffer through the parts that make all of us human. I meet them to the extreme for this is war, this is expected. Death, it creeps upon you and finds you when you are at your weakest. I, I am dying for I had realized this earlier, I only took the full impact of it now. I understood what it really meant, what it meant to die. For what, this silly war? Me, a Confederate soldier fighting for my superiors, fighting for the satisfaction of the ones torturing me. I no longer feel like a brave soldier, I now feel like an abused slave whipped, battered, and bruised. Such an ignorant child I was, hiding behind a false persona in order to not stick out against the society I know. Death, it has not only opened my eyes, it has opened my understanding of how this twisted world truly is, and the ugliness of us humans. Yet a mere pawn in the matter really has no governance in this situation.

I recount my time as a soldier, serving under General Pickett in this horrid battle, a puppet in the works. July 3, 1863, the day I fought bravely, the day I gave up everything for a belief not my own, the day my stupidity finally got the best of me, the day, the day, the day! It was the day of my death. The happy, sorrowful, beautiful, morbid, and wondrous dream of which was life was finally drawing near to the darkness of death. Memories, memories of my past playing through my mind, the truth it showed me. Like a moth to a flame I was drawn closer to my impending doom, one part continuing on an endless loop replaying constantly, like a broken clock unable to get to the next minute. "Tick, tick, tick." the sound driving me insane, the

insanity consuming me. To think that all of this started with the Gettysburg campaign. Throughout the length of my time served as a soldier I experienced horrid nightmares. Dreams of death, hunger, pain, sorrow, and countless others all custom tailored to a man being forced to harden his soul, as a means to change us, to make us something we aren't, a monster.

The Gettysburg campaign began on June 3, 1863, which was when General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia began leaving their positions close to Fredericksburg and headed for the Shenandoah Valley. After a series of battles, Lee decided to head to Gettysburg. Lee planned a raid into Pennsylvania to relieve the Virginia countryside, disrupt Union economic security east of the Susquehanna River, and bring recognition to the Confederacy. After Stonewall Jackson's death in May 1863, Lee reorganized his 80000 man army into three infantry corps with each having three divisions commanded by a lieutenant general. James Longstreet led 1 corps, Richard S. Ewell 2 corps, and Ambrose P. Hill 3 Corps (Heidler David Vol. 2; Battlefields Gettysburg Campaign Map).

Fighting against the Union was hard especially since it caused us to be in a short of supplies, in fact that is one of the reasons Gen. Lee had decided to go to Gettysburg. We hoped to find shoes, food, and clothing, such commodities that are taken so much advantage of. We trudged on, onwards to Gettysburg, a tough battle ahead of us but that was only realized when we arrived. We were only met with more misery and pain. For two days, two long, grueling, harsh, malignant days of battle we fought (Heidler).

July 1, 1863, the first day of the battle, the Union army started the battle with a few shots of artillery and 2 brigades of cavalry. We shelled Union soldiers causing them to retreat to the town once their infantry had moved closer. They captured 500 of our men. Several of our men

lost their lives but several of their men did too. What a tragic loss it was. July 2, 1863, the fight began early today. Blood from the men that were slaughtered in this battle seems to just pile up, the ground ever thirsty for the crimson red of my fellow soldiers (Inglis).

On the third day, July 3, 1863, we began our attack against the Union Center. Led by Gen. Pickett with me in Gen. Garnett's division leading under Pickett, we attacked the Union soldiers stationed upon Cemetery Ridge with Armistead's, Garnett's, and Kemper's divisions (HistoryNet Pickett's Charge Maps; History.com). How terrible it was, running towards the enemy, guns going off all around me. What an utterly terrifying experience, such a memory one could never hope to erase from their memories. A sense of shakiness settling amongst the men, like a weight weighting them down. Once we came upon the federal lines we knew that we would undoubtedly lose (George Pickett *Heart of A Soldier*; Bradford Ned pg. 391-400). Menacing screams of my fellow comrades, the obvious sound of pain coursing through the air like a bullet. But triumphing over all was the complete and utter tension building through the air, how thick and heavy it felt. Fear, pulsing fear, it ran through my body and preyed upon the ounce of reassurance I had (Strouss, *Battlefield*; Strouss, *At Gettysburg*).

Battle, what a horrid thing it rids you of your humanity, family, sanity, and life. I tried to be brave, I tried to fight the fight. But in the end it proved to be not enough, not enough for me to come back to my family. "Bang!" It only took but a few moments for that fateful bullet to claim my life. If only I were a tad to the left or right, I could have been saved. I could have survived, how insane it seems those fatal inches, such a short distance could inflict such a devastatingly fatal impact. Here I lie, bleeding out with a bullet embedded in my chest. Cold, I feel cold. My

heart embraced by the sorrowful hands of death, showing no pity, totally unphased as I draw my final breath.

The Gettysburg campaign, an ambition of General Lee, a hope for the Confederacy. We have lost, for if we had won at the charge, there would be almost no telling what the true outcome of the Civil War would be. Though the Confederacy did not prevail in the end. The tragedy that we Confederate soldiers experienced will allow for the Union forces to triumph in battle. A hard battle for the Union indeed, but it has ended up giving them the glorious spoils of victory. Spoils of life, liberty, and freedom. The battle of Gettysburg, the turning point in this war it killed, injured, and left men to be missing in action, a collective 23,000 Union men suffered this fate. We Confederates have it worse, with some 25,000 casualties. What a grave fate this war truly was for those consumed by the fight. (History.com).

Primary

Bradford, Ned, editor. *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*. Gramercy Books, 2001.

This written account by General Porter detailed the entirety of the charge taking place on July 3 1863 the last day of the Battle of Gettysburg.

Inglis, John. Sergeant, 9th New York Cavalry, Co. D. Diary 1 July 1863 Papers (1862-1911). 1 box (0.25 cu. ft.). New York State Library

This was a firsthand perspective of the multiple days of the Battle of Gettysburg and furthered my understanding of the negative relations of the opposing Confederate and Union soldiers.

Pickett, George E. 1825-1875. *Heart of a Soldier: as Revealed in the Intimate Letters of Genl.*

George e. Pickett. S. Moyle New York, 1913, archive.org/details/heartofsoldieraspick/.

“General Longstreet ordered forward the column of attack, consisting of Pickett’s and Heth’s divisions, in two lines, Pickett on the right. Wilcox’s brigade marched in rear of Pickett’s right, to guard that flank, and Heth’s was supported by Lane’s and Scales’ brigades, under General Trimble.”-General Lee

General Longstreet was watching Pickett’s charge and described an action of shakiness among the soldiers supporting Pickett’s men and knew once they got to federal lines that they would undoubtedly lose. The book describes that Pickett mentioned his charge only once and stated that if he had only had his two brigades left in Virginia, he would have broken through the lines.

“Ellis Strouss.” Received by Mother, 6 July 1863, Gettysburg, PA.

The Union soldier writes home to his mother speaking of the battle scene of Gettysburg and of their confidence after the fight due to crushing Lee’s army.

“E.C. Strouss.” Received by Mother, Battle Field Near Gettysburg, 4 July 1863,

Battle Field Near Gettysburg.

This letter from a Union soldier who fought in a battle near Gettysburg PA at the time of the fight. Strouss recounted his fallen, and injured friends giving what the scene of battle looked like in that time period.

Secondary

Alexander, Edward. "... And Then We Kill." Life of the Civil War Soldier in Battle, American Battlefield Trust, 7 July 2017, www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/life-civil-war-soldier-battle.

The article told of the hardships endured by soldiers in the heat and deadly embrace of battle. It shed light on the tragedies of battle, necessary for a understanding of the severity in a conflict.

Battlefields.org. "Gettysburg Campaign Map." American Battlefield Trust, American Battlefield Trust, 16 Oct. 2018, www.battlefields.org/learn/maps/gettysburg-campaign-map.

This map of the Gettysburg Campaign helped me to better understand the events that transpired before that of the Battle of Gettysburg.

Editors, History.com. "Pickett Leads His Infamous Charge at Gettysburg." History.com, A&E

Television Networks, 13 Nov. 2009, www.history.com/this-day-in-history/pickett-leads-his-infamous-charge-at-gettysburg.

On July 03, 1863, troops of Confederate Gen George Pickett began an attack against the Union lines on the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg. Lee could not break through the Union line for two days of battle. On the third of July, Lee attacked the Union center at Cemetery Ridge the majority of the Confederate attackers consisted of Pickett's division along with other units among the attackers. After a Confederate artillery bombardment the Confederates continued their advance into an open field where the Confederates were split into small units and failed to penetrate Union lines. On July 4, Lee withdrew his forces to Virginia. Lee lost 28000 of his 75000 soldiers. Union losses were over 22000.

"Facts, Information and Articles about George Pickett, a Confederate General during The Civil War." George Pickett, HistoryNet, 2019, www.historynet.com/george-pickett.

The website provided information on previous battles fought before Gettysburg, including Peninsular Campaign, Battle of Fredericksburg, Battle of Petersburg, and Appomattox Court House battle. This furthered my knowledge on previous events before the charge allowing me to create the story of a soldier.

“Gettysburg - Pickett's Charge, July 3, 1863 - 2:00 - 2:30PM.” Gettysburg - Pickett's Charge, July 3, 1863 - 2:00 - 2:30PM, American Battlefield Trust, 3 July 2018, www.battlefields.org/learn/maps/gettysburg-picketts-charge-july-3-1863-200-230pm.

This gave a complete map of the battle of Picketts Charge giving me a rough idea of how the battle played out and the amount of pressure they were put under.

Heidler, David S., et al. *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War. a Political, Social, and Military History*. Vol. 2, ABC-CLIO, 2000.

The Battle of Gettysburg was considered by many historians to be the turning point of the Civil war according to the book. Gettysburg campaign began on June 3, 1863, which was when General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia began leaving their positions close to Fredericksburg and headed for the Shenandoah Valley. After a series of battles, Lee decided to head to Gettysburg. Lee planned a raid into Pennsylvania to relieve the Virginia countryside, disrupt Union economic security east of the Susquehanna River, and bring recognition to the Confederacy. After Stonewall Jackson's death in May 1863, Lee reorganized his 80000 man army into three infantry corps with each having three divisions commanded by a lieutenant general. James Longstreet led 1 corps, Richard S. Ewell 2 corps, and Ambrose P. Hill 3 Corps.

Helm, Gary. "Disease, Hunger, Death, and Boredom." Life of the Civil War Soldier in Camp, American Battlefield Trust, 19 Oct. 2017, www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/life-civil-war-soldier-camp.

This website gave me the information needed to realize the condition soldiers were forced to endure in their camp life, such as cold, hunger, pain, fear, and filth.

HistoryNet. "Pickett's Charge Maps." Picketts Charge Maps, HistoryNet, www.historynet.com/picketts-charge-maps-2.

This source gave me another map to further my knowledge on positions of troops, the strategy involved in the battle, and it provided a comparison between the start of the battle and an hour later.