



Gettysburg:

Fought over the first three days of July 1863, the Battle of Gettysburg was one of the most critical battles of the Civil War having occurred at a time when the fate of the nation hung in the balance- the summer of 1863. Often referred to as the "High Water Mark of the Confederacy", it was the culmination of the second invasion of the North by General Robert E. Lee and the "Army of Northern Virginia". The "Army of the Potomac", the Union army that had long been

the nemesis of Lee, met the Confederate invasion at the crossroads town of Gettysburg and though it was under a new commander, General George Gordon Meade, the northerners fought with a desperation born of defending their home territory. The Union victory at the Battle of Gettysburg resulted in Lee's retreat to Virginia and an end to the hopes of the Confederacy for independence.

In the aftermath of the battle, every farm field was a graveyard and every church, public building and even private homes were hospitals. Medical staff were strained to treat so many wounded scattered about the county. To meet the demand, Camp Letterman General Hospital was established east of Gettysburg where all of the wounded were eventually taken to before transport to permanent hospitals in Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington. Union surgeons worked with members of the U.S Sanitary Commission and Christian Commission to treat and care for the over 20,000 injured Union and Confederate soldiers that passed through the hospital's wards, housed under large tents. By January 1864, the last few remaining patients were gone and so were the surgeons, guards, nurses, tents and cookhouses. Only a temporary cemetery on the hillside remained as a testament to the courageous battle to save lives that took place at Camp Letterman.

Prominent Gettysburg residents became concerned with the poor conditions of soldiers' graves scattered over the battlefield and at hospital sites, and pleaded with Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin for state support to purchase a portion of the battlefield to be set aside as a final resting place for the defenders of

the Union cause. Gettysburg lawyer David Wills was appointed the state agent to coordinate the establishment of the new "Soldiers' National Cemetery", which was designed by noted landscape architect William Saunders. Removal of the



July 1-3, 1863

Union dead to the cemetery began in the fall of 1863, but would not be completed until long after the cemetery grounds were dedicated on November 19, 1863. The dedication ceremony featured orator Edward Everett and included solemn prayers, songs, dirges to honor the men who died at Gettysburg. Yet, it was President Abraham Lincoln who provided the most notable words in his two-minute long address, eulogizing the Union soldiers buried at



Gettysburg and reminding those in attendance of their sacrifice for the Union cause, that they should renew their devotion "to the cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion.."

Established by concerned citizens in 1864, the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association set out to preserve portions of the battlefield as a memorial to the Union troops that fought the battle. In 1895, the lands were transferred to the Federal government and Gettysburg National Military Park was established. Administered by a commission of Civil War veterans, the park's primary purpose was to be a memorial to the two armies that fought this pivotal battle, and to mark and preserve the battle lines of each army. Administration of the park was transferred to the Department of the Interior- National Park Service in 1933, which continues in its mission to protect, preserve and interpret the Battle of Gettysburg and the Gettysburg Address to park visitors.

[<http://www.nps.gov/gett/historyculture/index.htm>]

