

Gettysburg Timeline

Note: This timeline is posted with some regret that it is not more illuminating. Some specific times can be found, especially when the events are fairly static, such as conferences with one or the other of the commanders, but specific or exact times are almost entirely impossible to find in the Civil War literature once battleground advances or engagements begin. There are volumes and volumes of books about the Battle of Gettysburg, including individual books about each of the three separate days of the battle, and while most of these books offer an overwhelming amount of detailed information about units and their commanders, and locations of the engagements, very little of this information includes specific times of the flow of the battles or troop movements within the battlefield. The explanation is simple: Once commanders made battlefield decisions, once and troops started moving and engaging and guns were being fired, nobody had the time to be checking their watches.

Day One

Wednesday, July 1, 1863

Predawn Situation -- George Meade's headquarters are at Taneytown, Maryland, 14 miles south of Gettysburg. John Reynolds has been sent to go north by northwest toward Gettysburg in command of the army's left wing consisting of the 1st Corps (Reynolds), the 3rd Corps (Dan Sickles), and 11th Corps (O. O. Howard). John Buford, with two of his cavalry brigades, is on patrol west of Gettysburg. Other Union corps are scattered south and southeast of Gettysburg with the closest corps being Slocum's near Littlestown, approximately eleven miles from Gettysburg.

Robert E. Lee is headquartered a little east of Chambersburg, approximately 25 miles west of Gettysburg. James Longstreet's corps is also at or near Chambersburg; Henry Heth's division of A. P. Hill's Corps is at Cashtown, seven or eight miles west of Gettysburg while two of Ewell's divisions, Rodes and Early, have advanced to within ten miles north of Gettysburg. Jeb Stuart, whose location is still unknown to Lee, is at Dover, Pennsylvania, east by northeast of Gettysburg.

0500 -- Heth's division, led by an artillery battalion, gets underway on the Chambersburg Pike headed toward Gettysburg, possibly looking for shoes. Heth was under orders from Lee to not force an engagement.

0600 -- Sentries from one of Buford's vedette posts observe a sizable cloud of dust from the west.

0700 -- A Union Signal Corps officer in the cupola of the Lutheran Seminary, west of Gettysburg, notifies Buford that he has spotted the lead of Heth's column.

0730 -- Borrowing a sergeant's carbine, a Union officer fires a single shot at the Confederates, still a half mile away.

0800 -- Although Meade has not determined where he intends to meet Lee, Union divisions continue marching in an unhurried manner toward Gettysburg. Meanwhile after Ewell receives word from Hill about marching to Gettysburg Ewell directs his two of division to meet Hill at Gettysburg. Ewell's third division heads toward Chambersburg with the large train of captured booty.

West of Gettysburg Buford is deploying one of his regiments along McPherson's Ridge to meet Heth's advancing column.

0850 -- Heth's line of battle pushes the two cavalry brigades back to Herr's Ridge, two miles west of Gettysburg.

0915 -- Reynolds' 1st Corps advances along Emmitsburg Road to within two miles of Gettysburg.

0930 -- Without reconnoitering the situation, Heth orders two of his regiments to advance from Herr's Ridge.

1010 -- Buford sends a hurried message to Meade that Hill is advancing and that Reynolds is within three miles of Gettysburg.

1030 -- Reynolds begins to deploy his divisions west of Gettysburg astride the Chambersburg Pike and an unfinished railroad cut that runs parallel to and north of the Pike.

1045 -- Reynolds is instantly killed while positioning his regiments in Herbst Woods west of Gettysburg. Abner Doubleday succeeds Reynolds in command of the 1st Corps. Howard becomes the senior Union general in the field and posts his 11th Corps to the right of the 1st Corps.

1055 -- Confederates begin to outflank Union defenders north of the Pike, causing the Union line to collapse. However, the Confederates stumble into the unfinished railroad cut where they are trapped and unable to maneuver. In less than an hour two of Heth's brigades lose approximately 1,200 men.

1100 -- Lee and his staff arrive at Cashtown where he meets with A.P. Hill, commander of the 3rd Corps in Lee's army. Lee wonders about Stuart's whereabouts. A courier from Ewell tells Lee that Ewell has ordered two of his divisions to move to join Hill at Gettysburg.

Hancock's 2nd Corps goes into bivouac at Taneytown. After a leisurely six mile march Slocum's 12th Corps stops at Two Taverns, five miles away from Gettysburg.

1120 -- The messenger sent by Reynolds reaches Meade at Taneytown. Meade exclaims, "Good God! If the enemy get Gettysburg we are lost." Meade sends messages to all other corps commanders to hurry along.

~Noon -- The first of Stuart's cavalry arrives at Carlisle, which the Rebels learned was occupied by Union militia commanded by Baldy Smith.

1300 -- Lee arrives at the crest of Herr's Ridge where he can observe the extensive damage done to two of Heth's brigades.

Meade receives news that Reynolds has been wounded, possibly dead. Meade orders Hancock to turn command of the 2nd Corps over to Gibbon, go to Gettysburg immediately, and take overall command.

1330 -- One of Ewell's divisions is repulsed as it attempts to take Oak Hill north of Gettysburg.

1400 -- The last of Howard's 11th Corps arrives on the battlefield.

1430 -- Hill launches an unsupported, uncoordinated frontal attack from Herr's Ridge toward McPherson's Ridge. Eventually Doubleday breaks off the action to retreat back to Seminary Ridge.

Artillery fire is exchanged between one of Ewell's batteries and a battery attached to Barlow's division in the 11th Corps. The Rebel artillery fire allows Early to attack exposed forward elements of Howard's 11th Corps north of Gettysburg. A Federal counterattack collapses.

Upon receiving word of Reynolds' death and that help is needed, Sickles sends most of the 3rd Corps to march "toward Gettysburg immediately." Slocum begins to leave his position at Two Taverns.

1515 -- Pursuant to Lee's orders Hill's divisions begin to attack and then advance toward Seminary Ridge. After offering stubborn and heroic resistance, the 1st Corps is eviscerated and a retreating wreck.

1600 --- Early's second attack collapses Howard's 11th Corps north of Gettysburg.

1620 -- Hancock arrives; Howard is miffed.

Remnants from the 1st and 11th Corps stream eastward and southward through Gettysburg toward Cemetery Hill.

1700 -- Riding ahead of his corps, Longstreet reaches Lee's headquarters on Seminary Ridge. Longstreet almost immediately begins to suggest the best tactic is to file around to get between the Federal army and the capital. Lee disagrees.

1725 -- Hancock sends a message to Meade that the 12th Corps under Slocum is approaching and will protect the Federal right.

1800 -- Hancock sends a report to Meade that the Federal army can maintain itself until dark. Meade sends a dispatch to Hancock and Doubleday that "we have so concentrated that a battle at Gettysburg is now forced upon us."

~1800 -- After being informed that Hill cannot assist in taking Cemetery Hill, and after being advised by two of his division commanders that their troops were too

exhausted, Ewell decides to delay any attempts to take either Cemetery Hill or Culp's Hill until the next day.

1900 -- Immediately after reading an update from Hancock that "the ground appears not unfavorable with good troops," Meade issues an order that all units not already moving toward Gettysburg get on the move.

Slocum, who had ridden ahead, sends orders back to this corps to join the rest of the Union army on Cemetery Hill.

2000 -- Two of Slocum's divisions have taken positions on the battlefield as have one of Sickles'. The Union's 2nd Corps is en route on Taneytown Pike approximately 12 miles from Gettysburg while the 5th Corps (Hancock) is approximately five mile away. Howard's 11th Corps has taken a position south of Gettysburg on Cemetery Hill at the junction of the Baltimore Pike and the Taneytown Pike. Cemetery Hill will become the barb or tip of the fishhook configuring the Union defensive position.

On the Confederate side, Hill's corps has established a line along Seminary Ridge while two of Ewell's divisions are aligned north of Gettysburg. Longstreet's corps is still advancing along the Chambersburg Pike toward Gettysburg.

2200 -- Leaving Slocum in charge at the battlefield, Hancock returns back to Taneytown to brief Meade. Meade, accompanied by Warren, his chief engineer, and Henry Hunt, his artillery chief, leave Taneytown.

2230 -- Lee has a second meeting with Ewell who argues for maintaining his corps for an attack on Culp's Hill, which Ewell believes is uncovered. At the same time a three man picket post ambushes and drives off Rebel troops trying to take their positions of Culp's Hill.

2400 -- Meade's party arrives at Gettysburg.

Day One casualties: Approximately 23,500 Union soldiers engaged, almost 9,000 (38%) were casualties. Approximately 28,300 Confederate soldiers engaged, slightly more than 6,000 (22%) were killed, wounded, or captured.

Day Two

Thursday, July 2, 1863

0015 -- Sykes' 5th Corps stops its march just west of Hanover.

0100 -- Meade arrives at Cemetery Hill.

Stuart learns the location of Lee's army.

0200 -- Departing from Carlisle, Stuart starts for Gettysburg.

The rest of Sickles' corps arrives on the battlefield. However, Sickles has not bothered to bring his ammunition train to Gettysburg.

Dawn-0340 -- Three brigades from the Federal 12th Corps begin climbing to the crest of Culp's Hill.

~0430 -- Meade decides upon his defensive alignment.

~0500 -- While conferring with Lee, Longstreet restates his "views against making an attack," but argues instead the Confederates should move around the Union left. Lee dispatches an engineering captain with others to "reconnoiter along the enemy's left."

0515 -- Lee meets with Longstreet and Hill on Seminary Ridge

0600 --The 2nd Corps, under Gibbon replacing Hancock, begins to reach the battlefield. An hour later Meade positions the 2nd Corps along the northern portion of Cemetery Ridge.

~0800 -- Perhaps as a result of Hancock's earlier negative report about the 1st Corps retreat, Meade decides to replace Doubleday with John Newton as commander of the 1st Corps.

Lee's recon team returns; the engineer assures Lee that the group had gotten to Little Round Top.

0830 -- Lee outlines his plans to attack the Federal left by moving Longstreet up along Emmitsburg Road while Hill advances forward from Seminary Ridge.

0900 -- Lee sets out for Ewell's headquarters. Longstreet's artillery begins to arrive on the battlefield.

Meade's signal officers have established observation points and are linked to Meade's nerve center by flag communications. Warren returns from Taneytown. Meade's son, a staff aide, learns that Sickles has not deployed his corps along Cemetery Ridge as directed by Meade.

1000 -- Sykes' 5th Corps is marched into a central reserve position behind Cemetery Ridge.

1100 -- Confederate forces seize control of the Bliss farm, located west of the Emmitsburg Road.

1145 -- Longstreet begins to march toward his attack's launching point against the Federal left. This march soon becomes a comedy of errors involving a turn around to avoid possible detection from Union signal posts.

1200 -- John Sedgwick's 6th Corps, consisting of almost one-sixth of Meade's army, begins crossing the Pennsylvania state line, six miles south of Gettysburg.

Alfred Pleasonton, Meade's cavalry chief, gives Buford permission to withdraw from Gettysburg for refitting. Pleasant has falsely advised Meade that a replacement unit had been called up to replace Buford.

1300 -- Two of Longstreet's divisions continue marching behind Confederate positions in order to be in position to launch an attack against the Federal left.

In a case of rank insubordination Sickles orders one entire division (Birney's) into a line touching along Emmitsburg Road.

1330 -- Union signalmen report a column of 10,000 moving toward Herr's Tavern, apparently Longstreet's countermarch.

1500 -- Longstreet's column reaches its launching point but its officers are surprised by the appearance of Federal units along Emmitsburg Road.

1515 -- Meade summons his corps commanders to his headquarters but Sickles is absent. Warren reports that the sector assigned to Sickles "was not occupied." When Sickles at last appears he was instructed to "retire to the position to which he had been instructed to take." As Sickles and Meade begin to ride off to Sickles' new position the 5th Corps is ordered to move from its reserve position to deploy to the gap where the 3rd Corps should have been. Warren, with Meade's assent, rides off to check the left end of the Cemetery Ridge line.

1530 -- The enemies' batteries begin exchanging fire with additional Confederate batteries being brought forward to support the assault against the Federal 3rd Corps. A team of Hood's pioneers reports that Little Round Top was unoccupied other than signal corps personnel and that they had discovered a way through an "open woodland pasture" to seize unprotected Union wagon trains to the rear of the Big Tops.

Warren discovers that Little Round Top, at the extreme left of the Federal position, is uncovered.

Lee changes his plans to that of an attack *en echelon* or attack by progression with Hood starting the attack toward Devil's Den below Little Round Top.

1540 -- The Confederates begin their full pre-assault artillery barrage from 54 guns. Federal artillery quickly return effective counterfire.

1600 -- During the final leg of its long journey Stuart's cavalry is passing through Hunterstown, seven miles north of Gettysburg.

After being told by Longstreet that Lee's orders would have to be obeyed, Hood decides to obey only the spirit, not the letter of the order by directing some of his brigades around the Union left flank.

The forward files of the Federal's 6th Corps reach Rock Creek, two miles from the Union left flank.

Upon hearing Longstreet's artillery open up, Ewell also commences an artillery bombardment against Culp's Hill.

1610 -- Hood launches his assault but shortly thereafter is severely wounded in his left arm.

1645 -- Despite confusion and lack of coordination Rebel infantry had begun to reach Union positions in front of Cemetery Ridge as well as the base of Little Round Top.

1700 -- Meade orders Pleasonton to gather up whatever spare cavalry he can find to prepare to cover any possible retreat.

1710 -- Confederate artillery located in Benner's Hill, astride on Hanover Road east of Gettysburg, begins to take destructive incoming from Federal gunners dispersed between Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill

1730 -- Sickles' salient along the Emmitsburg Road, where it has been taking the brunt of the Confederate attack, begins to crumble.

After charging part way up the slopes of Big Round Top, Chamberlain's Maine soldiers return to Little Round Top.

1800 -- All but a few Rebel guns have either been destroyed or withdrawn from Benner's Hill.

1915 -- At the left flank of the Federal line the two sides have fought to the point of exhaustion, thus ending the fighting at the Peach Orchard and in the Wheatfield.

1930 -- Ewell's troops will soon drive the relatively small Federal unit from the southern slopes of Culp's Hill.

The Confederates have gained considerable ground with its right flank resting at the base of Big Round Top. Another Federal corps, Sickles' 3rd, has been rendered virtually incapable of further combat. Lee, although disappointed that victory was not accomplished on Day Two, feels confident that his army can finish the job the next day, perhaps because he was misinformed about the extent of damage also suffered by Longstreet's two divisions.

2300 -- Stuart reports to a furious Lee.

Day Two Casualties: The Federals suffered approximately another 10,000 dead, wounded or captured while the Confederates' toll was estimated at 6,800.

Day Three

Friday, July 3, 1863

0300 -- A Federal line of infantry and 26 guns of artillery is established facing the southwestward slope of Culp's Hill. The purpose is to drive the Rebels out of the entrenchments previously seized from the 12th Corps. On the other side, the Confederates want to seize complete control of Culp's Hill as well as the Baltimore Pike.

Pre-dawn -- Along Chambersburg Pike, Pickett's 15 regiments fall into a column for their march toward Gettysburg.

Dawn -- The Federal artillery open massive fire on Culp's Hill just as one of Ewell's divisions begins its attack.

0500 -- A half hour after the Rebel attack on Culp's Hill begins, Ewell receives word that Longstreet's assault has been delayed.

Lee meets with several subordinates, including Hill and Longstreet who once again urges passing around south of Big Round Top. Lee responds by pointing his fist toward Cemetery Ridge and saying that, "The enemy is there, and I am going to strike him." Longstreet that his two divisions on the field are too battered to do any further fighting. Lee decides the charge will be led by Pickett's division with help from Heth's division. Stuart is directed to take his cavalry around Ewell's rear to be able to attack the Federal rear and to cut off the anticipated Federal retreat.

0730 -- Once again the Federals try to take the Bliss farm where Confederate sharpshooters are targeting Federal positions. Shortly after the bluecoats succeed the Rebels retake the farm.

0800 -- Meade directs Sedgwick to deploy his corps to be in better position to support Hancock in the center where Meade thinks Lee will attack.

Lee and several of his subordinates meet again to review the terrain and to decide "the mode of the attack and the troops to make it." The Rebel line is supposed to converge at the copse of trees in the center of Meade's line. Longstreet is placed in operational control of the attack.

~0830 -- The Confederates try again to take Culp's Hill from the Federals.

0900 -- The van of Pickett's division begins arriving at Spangler's Woods on the southern end of Seminary Ridge.

Alexander begins his preparations for the bombardment.

1000 -- Henry Hunt starts an inspection of his batteries along the ridge. Observing the Confederate artillery being massed, Hunt suspected the Rebels wanted the Federals to expend all their ammunition before the assault began.

George Custer's brigade arrives to screen the important Hanover Road/Low Dutch Road intersection.

1030 -- The Confederates make one last ditch and bloody attempt to retake Culp's Hill.

~1045 -- Shortly after recapturing the Bliss farm the Federals once again realize they cannot retain possession of this prize. Thus rather than allowing the Confederates to seize these buildings for their sharpshooters the Federals burn the buildings.

1100 -- E.P. Alexander, Longstreet's chief artillery officer, informs Longstreet that the Confederates' 164 artillery pieces were in position and the gunners had been given instructions for the cannonade to follow.

After six hours of bloody, back-and-forth fighting, the Confederate attempt to take Culp's Hill thus turning the Federal right was over.

1300 -- Longstreet sends a message directing his artillery to commence its bombardment.

1307 - 1440 -- Following Hunt's plan to save his artillery by not responding on kind to the Confederate shelling, most, but not all, Federal artillery holds its fire and does not immediately retaliate. Indeed some Federal batteries limber up and appear to leave the battlefield.

1430 -- It is becoming obvious to Federal gunners that the clump of trees is the Rebels' primary target.

1440 -- Alexander sends a frantic message to Pickett to begin his charge since Alexander was afraid his ammunition would not let Alexander support Pickett properly. Pickett notifies Longstreet that he was about ready to begin his infantry attack.

1500 -- The firing of cannon seems to cease.

1455-1530 -- As the Confederate line of 13,000 moves forward Union artillery begins its onslaught while the Confederate commanders frantically try to find enough ammo to give support to the infantry.

The Rebel line begins to have problems maintaining its alignment. Furthermore some of the more exposed Rebel soldiers already begin to turn around toward the rear.

1515-1540 -- Some Rebel regiments begin to cross the Emmitsburg Road.

An aide to Pickett is sent back to ask for Longstreet who advises that that the charge is over. However some other Southern regiment continue to move forward. Federal reinforcements are moved to reinforce weakened and/or threatened lines, especially in the center.

Hancock is badly wounded.

In a last gasp measure, one Rebel brigade, led by Lewis Armistead briefly breaches the Union line to the right of the copse of trees before being repelled by Union reinforcements. Armistead is mortally wounded.

1540-Midnight -- Upon being advised that the Rebel attack has been turned back Meade orders that the troops are to be reformed in case the Confederates should try another attack.

1735 -- East of Gettysburg near the intersection of Hanover Road and Low Dutch Road the single largest cavalry-to-cavalry fight of the three day battle was concluding with Stuart's cavalry being repelled.

1755 -- Judson "Kil-Cavalry" Kilpatrick orders a suicidal cavalry charge.

Meeting with some of his top subordinates, Lee abandons all thought of further offensive actions at Gettysburg and orders that Longstreet and Hill corps be withdrawn to their positions of early Day Two.

For Day Three Union casualties were estimated at 3,000 while the Confederates lost at least 8,000. For the entire three days Meade's army suffered in excess of 23,000 casualties while Lee's army had more than 21,000 losses.