



# 47th Annual POCI Convention - July 26-21, 2019 Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

previews by Cary Schuck

**H**istorians generally agree that the three-day clash between Union and Confederate forces at Gettysburg in 1863 marked the turning point of the Civil War, but a quick review may help explain the significance of this battle.

## The Battle of Gettysburg

By the 1850s the United States was deeply divided on the issue of slavery, which provided essential labor for the agrarian economy of the South but was morally reprehensible to most in the industrialized North. The 1860 election of Republican President Abraham Lincoln on a strong anti-slavery platform was the catalyst for 11 southern states to secede from the Union to form the Confederate States of America. Neither the United States nor any other country recognized the Confederacy as a sovereign nation and attempts to quell what was considered a rebellion resulted in armed

conflict beginning in April of 1861.

During the first two years of the Civil War, virtually all the battles and skirmishes were fought in southern territory, but in June of 1863, the legendary Confederate General Robert E. Lee invaded the northern state of Pennsylvania with his 75,000-man Army of Northern Virginia. The move was intended to obtain fresh supplies for his army and to apply pressure to the state capital of Harrisburg and even the city of Philadelphia in hopes of obtaining a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

Union General George Meade moved his 104,000-man Army of the Potomac to counter the threat and the initial encounter happened at the crossroads town of

Gettysburg which had a population of about 2,700 and was home to a Lutheran theological seminary.

For three long days, from July 1 through July 3, Union and Confederate troops attacked and defended positions in and around Gettysburg in the largest and most costly land battle ever fought in North America. The toll for three days of fighting was over 50,000 casualties with more than 7,000 killed on both sides.

On July 4, having failed to penetrate Union defenses despite heroic



efforts including an infantry advance known as “Pickett’s Charge,” Lee withdrew his battered army back to Virginia. The war would continue for two more tragic years, but the fate of the Confederacy was sealed on the hallowed ground of Gettysburg in July of 1863.

Four months later, President Lincoln spoke briefly at the dedication of a cemetery for Union soldiers, and what came to be called his “Gettysburg Address” — barely 272 words long and delivered in less than two minutes — stands as one of the greatest pieces of oratory in our history.

## Gettysburg Battlefield Today

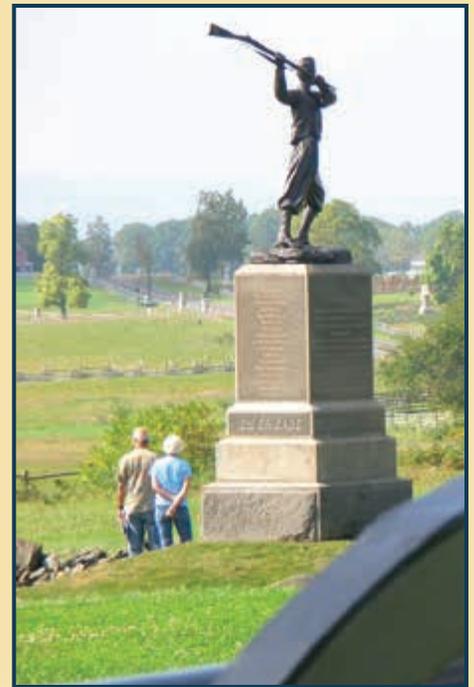
Much of the area where the fighting took place in 1863 has been preserved as the 6,000-acre Gettysburg National Military Park with 1,328 monuments marking significant locations. Visitors can follow in the footsteps of the soldiers who fought

for positions on Culp’s Hill, Cemetery Ridge, Little Round Top, and Devil’s Den. Some of the fighting took place in Gettysburg itself, and more than 200 buildings in this historic town date to the Civil War or before.

The Museum and Visitors Center offers an excellent orientation program including a 30-minute film narrated by Morgan Freeman that places the battle into context within the Civil War and American history. The “Cyclorama” is a 360-degree painting that stands two stories high and a hundred yards long, placing the viewer in the middle of the Confederate attack commonly known as “Pickett’s Charge.”

Options for viewing the battlefield today include self-guided tours in your own car as well as tours on horseback, horse-drawn carriage, bicycle, and even via Segway.

Various walking tours in town focus on civilian life during the conflict. A candlelight “Ghost Tour” for those wishing to connect with the spirit world is also available.



For those interested in doing further research, a wealth of information regarding the many opportunities for Gettysburg visitors can be found online — all too numerous to include in these brief articles.

## POCI Convention Offerings

As part of our official slate of options for POCI convention attendees, two guided bus tours of the historic battlefields will be available on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons. And, on Wednesday evening, POCI will host an exclusive Welcome Night at the Museum and Visitors Center. Watch for details in future issues of *Smoke Signals*.

It is not for us, in the 21st century, to pass judgment on the complex causes of the Civil War, but simply to honor the courage and sacrifice of all who fought for causes they held dear. There is no better way to do this than to walk the hallowed ground of the Gettysburg battlefield. There is no better time to do this than in the company of friends and fellow enthusiasts at the 2019 POCI Convention.

Make Gettysburg *your* address in July of 2019! **SSN**

