



The Victor of Gettysburg: The Life and Career of General George Meade

Charles River Editors

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*Includes pictures of Meade and important people, places, and events in his life.

*Includes excerpts of Meade's Civil War letters to his wife.

*Includes a Bibliography for further reading.

"Meade has more than met my most sanguine expectations. He and Sherman are the fittest officers for large commands I have come in contact with." – Ulysses S. Grant, 1864

Ironically, one of the generals who often escapes the attention of Civil War fans who compile the lists of best generals is the man who won the war's most famous battle, George G. Meade (1815-1872). In fact, Meade has become a perfect example of how the generals who did not self-promote themselves and write memoirs after the war had their reputations suffer in the ensuing decades. When people think of Appomattox Court House, they think of Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee. Few remember that the commander of the Army of the Potomac at the end of the Civil War was not Grant but Meade.

Meade exemplified modesty and competence, serving as a career United States Army officer and civil engineer who fought with distinction in the eastern theater of the Civil War. During the first half of the war, Meade rose from command of a brigade to command of a division and finally command of the entire Army of the Potomac just days before the Battle of Gettysburg. Naturally, he is best known for defeating Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Gettysburg in July 1863, although he's not nearly as well remembered as his Confederate counterpart, and he has even been eclipsed in popularity by some of the men he commanded at Gettysburg, like Joshua Chamberlain.

If Meade distinguished himself at places like Antietam and Gettysburg, why is he frequently left out of the historical narrative of the war? Meade had a notoriously short temper that hurt his popularity with the press, his men and contemporaries during the war, despite how well he commanded. Perhaps more importantly, Meade's relatively early death in the decade after the war prevented him from defending his record and his decisions during and after Gettysburg. Lincoln mistakenly thought Meade blundered by not being more aggressive in pursuit of Lee after Gettysburg, when in fact Lee's men constructed strong defenses and invited attack on a number of occasions during their retreat. Just as significantly, Meade came under attack by generals like Daniel Sickles, who sought to shield themselves from scrutiny by blaming Meade for poor decisions. On Day 2 of the Battle of Gettysburg, Sickles disobeyed Meade and moved his III Corps out in front of the rest of the army. Although he would constantly defend his maneuver, the move destroyed his corps and nearly ruined the Army of the Potomac's left flank, creating a salient that led to the near annihilation of the corps. Sickles and Meade would feud over the actions on Day 2 in the years after the war, with Meade explaining his actions, and Sickles taking credit for the victory by disrupting Lee's attack plans. While historians have taken Meade's side since, Sickles outlived Meade and helped tarnish the commanding general's reputation after the war, helping cast a shadow over Meade's record for nearly a century. Today historians credit Meade with doing a solid job at Gettysburg, but no self-effusive praise was forthcoming from the man himself.

The Victor of Gettysburg: The Life and Career of General George Meade chronicles the life and career of the commanding general at Gettysburg, but it also humanizes the man who somehow managed to be both modest and short-tempered at the same time. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events in his life, you will learn about General Meade like you never have before, in no time at all.

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