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The Killer Angels

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8 August 2008

Summary

The Day before the battle of Gettysburg a Confederate spy reports to Generals Lee and Longstreet that the Union Army is under the new command of General Meade and that it is moving quickly Northward toward the Confederates and that there is Union Cavalry nearby. As a result of this intelligence Lee orders the Confederate army to the small town of Gettysburg the next morning. Meanwhile in the Union Army Colonel Chamberlain of the 20th Maine Regiment receive men from the former 2nd Maine Regiment. As the advance Confederate party under the command of General Heth marches into Gettysburg they find the Union Cavalry under the command of Gen Buford and the Confederates retreat, Buford sends a request for reinforcements and prepares to hold Gettysburg.

On the first day of the battle of Gettysburg the Confederate Army moves on Gettysburg believing the men they saw were militia. General Heth begins his attack on Buford's position, Buford is able to hold until Gen Reynolds arrives with reinforcements, Reynolds is shot and killed but his men hold the town. Gen Doubleday takes Reynolds' command and the Confederate Army begins a full fledged attack, they drive the Union troops back to Cemetery Ridge, but against Lee's wishes stopped the attack. In the Union camp Gen Longstreet wishes to battle in a defensive position but all the other Generals wish to do a full frontal attack for honor believing the army is capable of charging to a victory. The Confederate Army begins to have problems due to a lack of information due to a lack of cavalry, which is under the command of Gen Stuart, Lee attempts to contact Stuart. At the end of the first day the Union Army has occupied Culp's Hill, Cemetery Hill, and Cemetery Ridge; and the Confederate Army has occupied Seminary Ridge and Gettysburg.

At the beginning of the second day the Confederate command plans an attack for noon. The Confederates prepare for an echelon attack with Longstreet commanding Hood and McLaws, Hood requests permission to attack from the Union's unprotected rear a plan which Longstreet supports, however under Lee's orders Longstreet denies the request. Longstreet's attack is delayed until 4:00 PM. Chamberlain's 20th Maine moves to the Union Army's far left flank at little round top. The 20th Maine is heavily attacked by Confederates, after having exhausted their ammo Chamberlain orders his men to fix their bayonets and charge; the charge drives off the rebels and the 20th Maine takes a few hundred prisoners but suffers 50% casualties. They are resupplied and move up to big round top. Gen Rhodes never attacks, and Gen Early doesn't attack until sunset. Longstreet suffers almost 50% casualties. Pickett arrives and reinforces Longstreet's battered forces. Jeb Stuart also arrives, court martial papers are written up for Stuart but Lee refuses to sign them. At the end of the second day Lee begins planning an attack up the center of the Union line, with flanking cavalry.

Early on the third day Gen Ewell's men are attacked. Confederates make preparations to bombard the center of the Union line, and then charge it. At about 1:00 the Confederate artillery began to fire. The Union forces return fire. The Confederate forces cease firing and all the force under Longstreet's command charges the Union Line, they are killed as they go. The confederate soldiers make it over the Union line but are quickly killed; the few remaining Confederate soldiers go into a full retreat, completely defeated. Seeing the failure of the attack which he was so confident in General Lee orders the full retreat of the Confederate Army, having sustained considerable losses and having been totally defeated.

Reaction

I learned a great deal about the battle of *Gettysburg* from *The Killer Angels*. I learned of the tactics of both armies and what drove those tactics. You have on the Confederate side Lee who is over confident in his army, as a result he orders near impossible charges. Also on the Confederate side you have Longstreet who is a military genius and sees how to win battles even though his method disagrees with Lee's attack mentality, Longstreet invents defensive trench tactics that will not be use for some time. On the Union side you have Meade who is slow to exercise power and wishes to retreat even in a position of complete control, he seems to leave a lot up to his Corps commanders. On the Confederate side there is a developing leader in Chamberlain who successfully drives off a large part of a Confederate attack.

I also found it interesting that a number of mistakes on the Confederate Army's behalf seemed to be because of disobedient *Generals*; such as Stuart not aiding the Army but rather joyriding out in the countryside, or the attack which was halted on the first day by *Gen Ewell*. Then on the Second day the timing of the *Generals* attacks were off and one attack never happened.

I was also unaware going into this book about the illness which Lee had, in fact I knew nothing of him, and from the book I learned not only that he was weak during this period but also that he was a vastly overconfident man which led to his army's downfall. I had also not realized how close the battle was, how with one order from Lee, an order for Hood to go right around the Union line and exploit a mistake which the book says was common among Union commanders, with one simple maneuver the battle could have gone to the Confederate Army, but Lee refused to give that order.

The battle of *Gettysburg* was a turning point in the Civil War. The Confederate Army had been very successful in its campaign up until that point. The Confederate Army's morale was

considerably higher than that of the Union Army's moral going into the battle; however coming out the morale had shifted. Gettysburg was also a loss of men, equipment and commanders. In the end the Confederate Army would as Gen Longstreet predicted, never fully recover, and end up losing the war. The war itself was a massively important object in American history, it was the most deadly American War, it determined that the Union should stay together and while it ended slavery it was the beginning of Jim Crow. After the Civil War the south was severely damaged and it took quite some time to recover. Now America stands proud and strong as one country.

Evaluation

I truly enjoyed this book. *The Killer Angels* gives insight into every aspect of a Civil War battle from the attitudes of the men to tactics on both sides. The book requires no supporting literature to be entertained or understood. I believe *The Killer Angels* should be required for summer reading; it effectively portrays the men who fought during Gettysburg, the way in which they fought, and the reasons why they fought. It also portrays the ever important fact that there were wonderful friends even brothers on separate sides of the battle, and that this fact applied to the infantry at the bottom as well as the Generals at the top. The book also illustrates that it was not all that uncommon for two brothers to be fighting side by side. Overall this is an incredibly entertaining and informative book which all should read.