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Gettysburg



By MacKinlay Kantor

Suddenly Warren was tense.


He bent forward, planting binoculars against his eye sockets. The haze drifted aside. Here was a new piece of luck for the Yankees, a new piece of bad luck for their foe. If Warren had not happened to observe properly, if the smoke had not been twisted by the July wind, there might have been a different story to tell at Gettysburg.

A force of Confederates was sweeping east from the gaunt rocks of Devil's Den, heading directly toward the hill on which Warren stood. In another few minutes this high position would be in the grip of valiant men from Texas and Alabama who had swept over the Yankee resistance. Nothing stood in their way except the rugged slopes of the hills themselves.

Gettysburg

By MacKinlay Kantor

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JA, THE REBELS EAT BABIES!

Before the battle swept Gettysburg there happened a number of exciting things, and some frightening things and funny things as well. War is not wholly serious; not everything which occurs in battle is tragic. Somehow the sad matters and fearful matters and exciting matters are mingled like clover and weeds in Pennsylvania hay.

There was clover at Gettysburg and wheat, too, gleaming in summer afternoons. There were fruit orchards where fat cherries had already been picked, where later peaches and apples would ripen and grow tender, waiting for days when children would climb on homemade ladders to fill their baskets with good fruit.

At least that is what people of the Gettysburg region and of all Adams County thought would

happen, in June of 1863. The soil had always been harvested according to Nature's plan and man's. No one could imagine a future wherein masses of still-green peaches were torn from boughs before the proper season, split and ruined by a billion bits of lead and steel—the terrible sleet of the greatest battle ever fought in America.

Gettysburg was a contented town, long settled, well built with solid houses. Perhaps fifteen hundred people lived there at the time of the Civil War. The town has grown, but even nowadays it could not be called a city.

Gettysburg folks prided themselves on the fact that they had sent noted sons into public life. Thaddeus Stevens was a former resident, a busy statesman whose name was famous. Other young folks of Gettysburg might grow up to be famous, too, for they had every opportunity for a good education. A Lutheran seminary rose in proud brick state on a long ridge west or slightly northwest of the village, and you could see the cupola of that tall building for miles around.

From far down the Emmitsburg Road where Maryland lay a few miles distant, you could see the cupola. You could see it from Round Top, a bulging, tree-covered hill, and from Little Round Top, a shaggy, rocky hill nearby. From all the way up the pleasant farm-clad ridge to the north you could see it too. This elevation was called

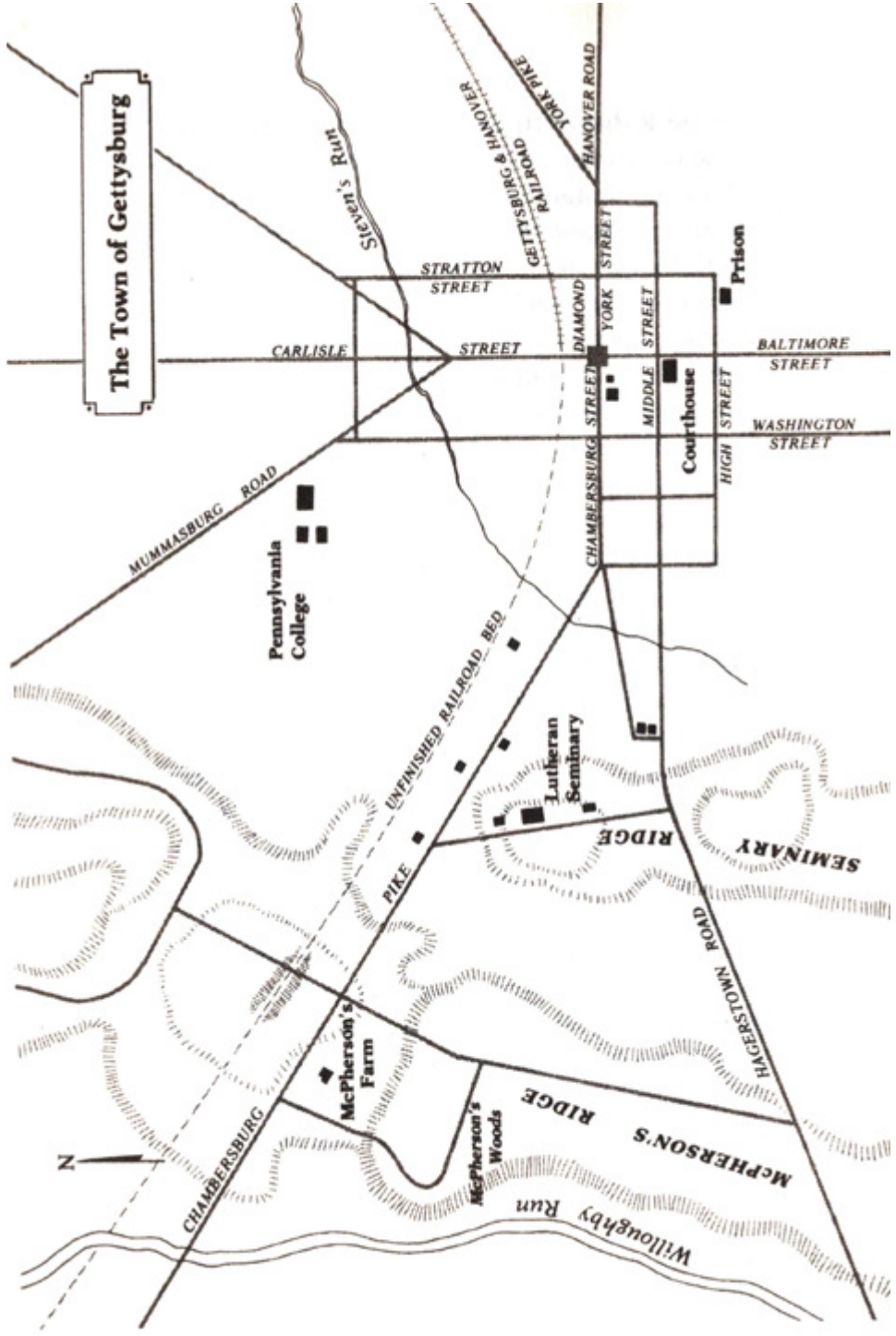
Granite Ridge in those days. Now people call it Cemetery Ridge.

You could stand in Ever Green Cemetery, at the end of Granite Ridge—you could stand amid old-fashioned tombstones and look out through bushes where warblers chattered about their summer business, and you could see the eggshell of the seminary cupola, away over beyond the town. If you had been a boy or a girl in the middle of June 1863, it would never have occurred to you that that queer structure above the distant roof could serve as a watchtower for strained and angry soldiers.

Out north of town there was another school, called Penn College or State College; there were schools for children in the village. The townspeople had a fine level of intelligence and lived their lives in decency and pride. So did the well-fed Pennsylvania German farm families who occupied most of the nearby region. They were hardworking people who were interested chiefly in their calves or colts or fattening pigs, and in the best use of their pastures.

The war was far to the south; folks could not believe that a conflict would ever roll through upper Virginia, through low mountains of Maryland, and into their own fair county to disturb them. Most of the healthy young men of the community had already gone to the war, now in its

The Town of Gettysburg



third year. Some had been killed; a few bodies of unfortunate youths who perished had been shipped home. It was strange to look at the fresh-turned earth above their graves after they were put to rest on the cemetery hill.

Sometimes wayward boys had gone up to Ever Green Cemetery—perhaps they sneaked off with an elder brother's rifle or shotgun. There were chipmunks and rabbits to stalk, but the explosion of hunters' weapons was far different from the vast stammer of muskets in a battle, different from the ear-ringing roar of artillery fire. Gettysburg officials did not approve of such antics in a sacred place where their dead lay quiet. A sign had been put up at the gate:

ALL PERSONS FOUND USING FIREARMS IN
THESE GROUNDS WILL BE PROSECUTED WITH
THE UTMOST VIGOR OF THE LAW.

There! said the officials. That should serve as proper warning to anyone who dared think of carrying a weapon into such a place.

Until the last week of June, the youth of Gettysburg had been busy with ordinary chores and play: helping their mothers in the garden, gathering eggs, going on errands to an uncle's house or a grandparent's. In warm, flowery dusk they played I Spy, and Toss the Wicket, and Run, Sheep, Run. . . .

But a strange, dark threat built itself like sudden rain clouds beyond Oak Ridge, where the seminary stood. Danger dwelt where the Chambersburg Pike (some people called it the Cashtown Road) cut across McPherson's Ridge and ambled northwest to the village of Cashtown and the larger town of Chambersburg—a distant place, to be sure. Few of the inhabitants of this small town had ever been so far from home.

A menace was assembling, away over where South Mountain raised its blue-green shoulder. A war. An army. Worse than that, an *enemy* army.

Bodies of troops were divided according to the military plan of the time, first into corps, then into divisions. The divisions were divided into brigades, the brigades into regiments, the regiments into companies; thus it went. Down in Virginia, General Robert E. Lee had decided to invade the North and had sent one of his army corps ahead. Lee was following along behind the shelter of South Mountain. His entire Army of Northern Virginia numbered somewhere between sixty-five and seventy-five thousand men.

Historians differ about the numbers; there is no way to tell accurately now how many soldiers Lee had. Southern records were destroyed at the end of the war, along with much of the city of Richmond, in a huge fire when the Confederate capital surrendered to the North.

It was the Second Corps of Lee's Rebel force, commanded by General Richard S. Ewell, which moved in advance toward Pennsylvania. Ewell was a capable and colorful general. Lee was very fond of him and called him "Dear Dick." Ewell was also brave and had lost a leg in an earlier battle. His admiring soldiers stole a shiny carriage from a Yankee stable, just as the Northerners stole things later on in the South when General William T. Sherman marched through Georgia. In this carriage they installed their respected general, and Ewell rode proudly, one hand resting on his wooden leg. Later, when the battle developed at Gettysburg, Ewell could not very well travel into the fray in this carriage. It was safer and wiser for him to go on horseback, and so he did.

A tale is told: Ewell rode with his staff officers along a Gettysburg highway. They were coming in under the Yankee fire; the bullets squeaked above. Suddenly there was the telltale thud, the awful sound of a bullet ripping into solid substance.

The officers turned in alarm toward their commander. "The general's been hit!" someone cried.

"Gentlemen," piped Ewell in his thin, nervous voice, "it don't hurt a mite to get shot in your wooden leg!"

But this lucky hit would occur in the following

For a while Burns served as a teamster, driving wagons for the Federal forces. Then someone in command decided that John was too old for even such service and sent him home. The shiny badge of a constable brought little comfort to the old man's warlike spirit. What was there for a constable to do in a sleepy town like this? Nothing much, except to wear his badge.

But now, with an enemy force roaring through the very next county, John Burns's eyes glinted and his jaw was set. His muscles strained as he sent the brazen clamor of the fire alarm echoing from the cemetery to Oak Ridge and out to the Poor Farm on the north.

Others felt the challenge of the hour. Many of them were boys—gawky students whose ink-smudged noses were usually buried in copybooks at Penn College. Militia companies had been organized some time before, as a gesture toward the National defense. Squads had been drilling after school hours in vacant lots and on wider lawns of the town.

Among them were thin-necked youngsters—boys with wrists too long for their jacket sleeves and not a scrap of beard yet formed on their round chins. There were the lame or the partially lame, and some older fellows . . . this one had heart trouble, perhaps; that one had a tubercular cough; the next might have a hernia or a club-

foot. Such ailments or weaknesses had prevented these people from taking the bold place they longed to take, when the first troops went marching off to war. But this was different. They thought of heroes of the past and wanted to be like them.

They stood in their ranks as they had stood in early disordered drills. A man named Major Haller came to swear them into service. Smaller children gaped open-mouthed as their cousins or brothers trooped away to assemble with other raw recruits at Harrisburg. They would become Company A of a strange organization which would be known as the 26th Pennsylvania Emergency Regiment.

Rumors raced from yard to yard. They were wild and frightening and—often—extremely silly tales. Every war breeds its crazy falsehoods, and this summer campaign was no exception.

Ja, said breathless old men and women from neighboring houses, speaking in their dialect; the Rebels were not men. *Nein*, they were beasts. They butchered the calves, they stole the pigs; they had long hair like frontiersmen, and all talked an outlandish language. They would murder anyone, man or woman or child, who got in their way. Worse than that, they would cut off people's ears; they would take their scalps like savages of a century before.

Ja, they would torture even children! Wild and ferocious were the Rebels. *Ach*. Everyone prayed they would not come to Gettysburg.

Today a medium-sized town in Montana has a main street very like that of a medium-sized town in Texas. The eighth grade in a Vermont school is very like the eighth grade in a North Carolina school. In these days of constant communication it is difficult to believe how ignorant many Americans were of the ways of other Americans little more than one hundred twenty years ago. These people had no radios, no movies, no television; even the newspapers were few and far between, and only two or three magazines circulated largely over the country.

The cotton farmer of Alabama lived a life remote from that of the woodsman of Michigan. Neither knew much about the other, not what he ate nor how he did his work.

It is ignorance which breeds our lies; and so it was in 1863. Terrified Pennsylvanians told and believed queer tales about the oncoming Rebels, not only because they were afraid, but also because few of them had ever seen a Southerner or even bothered to guess what one was like.

When Rebel troops reached the North and saw the awe with which people regarded them, they were quick to take advantage of it. Most of the Southern soldiers were young, they were hearty, and they liked to joke.

There is a story that a trooper in Confederate gray, with his tattered hat and dusty boots and big revolver holsters, stood at the door of a Pennsylvania Dutch kitchen and requested food. The women glowered. "Go away," they said. They had no food for Rebels.

The Southerner sighed and gazed across at the cradle where a contented pink-faced baby lay taking its nap. Too bad, said the Rebel—he was mighty hungry. And if they didn't have any other food— Well, he hadn't ever eaten any *baby* meat—not lately at least. But if he had to, why—

Shrieks of the women rang through the room. They tumbled all over each other as they hastened to set out the best from their pantry: head-cheese and doughnuts and pickles and pies and jellies and everything else they could lay their hands on. The young Confederate had never eaten such a meal. He ate it with a twinkle in his eye.

Nevertheless, that soldier had his share in building up such alarms among the inhabitants. Who can say, when one is terribly frightened, where the truth leaves off and the lie begins?

People were fleeing like mad. They dumped themselves and their children and their cats and dogs and chickens and silver spoons into any cart handy, and went rocking away to the north and east.

Gettysburg citizens stared wildly at queer caravans of dusty refugees, and many began to think

of running away themselves. Their local militia, weak and ill-shaped as it was, had been the only thing around to protect them from barbaric foes. Now the militia was gone away to Harrisburg. Left to guard the town was no one of much consequence except John Burns, the constable with his ancient musket. No one thought that he could do very much.

Over on Baltimore Street two young women peeped from the window of a brick double-house. Perhaps they wondered if they too should flee, yet they could not. They were the Wade sisters. The elder was married to a chap named McClellan, who was off somewhere with the Federal Army. Young Mrs. John McClellan could not go anywhere; she was about to have a baby; of course her sister would stay with her.

Their names, strangely enough, were Georgia and Virginia—the names of two of the States from which had come whole brigades of this menacing army tramping and rumbling closer along roads from the west.

GRAY MEN IN TOWN

Rain threatened in the early evening of Thursday, June 25; the moon was small behind clouds. Gettysburg people crept forth in surprise as they heard the mutter of drums and the thin music of a fife approaching from the direction of the York Pike.

What was this martial music? It could not be the Rebels. The Secessionist army was toward the west, and this approach came from the east. People saw a column of men with guns and knapsacks; they began to recognize familiar shapes and figures. This was Company A of the 26th Emergency Regiment, come home to Gettysburg again.

When the company halted in the town's square, called the Diamond, folks learned that the muster of men at Harrisburg had been completed the

previous Monday. On Wednesday the regiment had set out under orders to fend off any Confederate advance in this direction.

It would have been ridiculous had it not been so sad. There were about seven hundred fifty youths and invalids in that regiment, many of them with only two days of training. They were being sent to attack a seasoned, bitter, veteran army of thousands. Those enemies thronging beyond the hills were the same men who had whipped the Northern Army of the Potomac less than two months before, at Chancellorsville.

The majority of the Confederates had seen at least two years of service. They were rangy, powerful men who knew every trick of campaigning amid woods and waters. They could sleep comfortably through rainstorms while rolled in a single tattered blanket. They could creep silently or race in a wild charge with equal ease.

Some Confederate units had been described by foreign observers (professional military men who came over here to watch this war) as the most capable troops ever to go into action. They were better, some said, than French Dragoons or Prussian Guards. Now a bunch of skinny clerks and students were preparing to fight such an enemy!

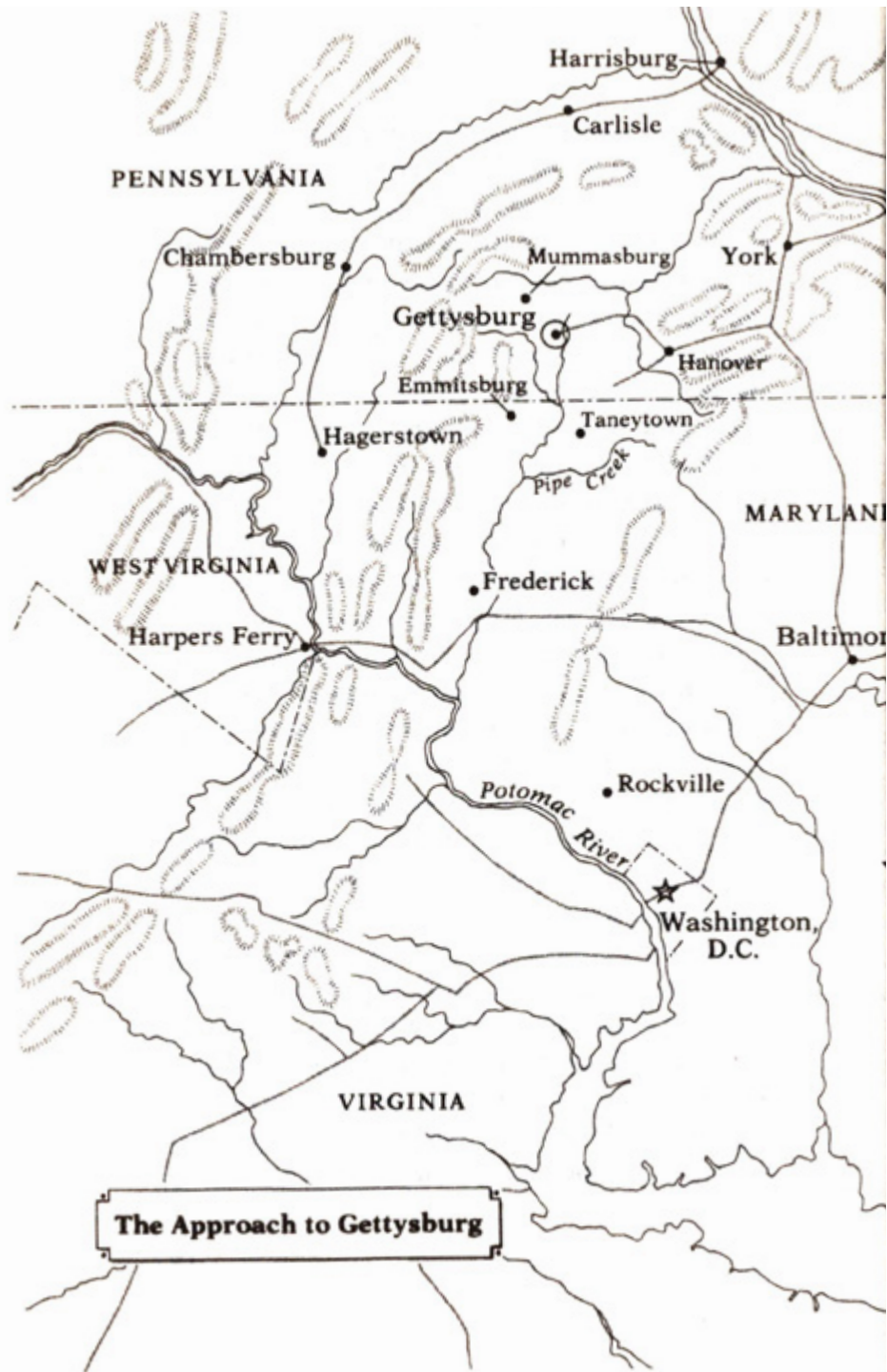
The Emergency Militia had traveled from Harrisburg on the train. Its cars ran on a railroad that connected Gettysburg with Hanover Junc-

tion a few miles to the east, and thus with Baltimore and Philadelphia and the big world outside. As yet the track had not been built west of the town, but a deep cut had been made through Oak Ridge, northwest of Gettysburg beside the Chambersburg Pike. People had grown accustomed to seeing brawny laborers laying ties and bolting iron rails into place.

The new grade was still unsteady and the cars carrying the militia ran off the track when they reached Swift Run, a creek near Gettysburg. Most of the militia camped at the spot. Company A was allowed to proceed on into town for the night, for Gettysburg was home to most of Company A.

It seemed strange to see muskets stacked in front of the stores, to watch gangs of boys, uncertain in their fresh blue uniforms but glad to be wearing them, strolling about the Diamond. They talked largely of punishment they would give the Confederates when they met them. (Such a meeting was only a few hours away, but as yet they didn't know it.)

The next morning the regiment was in column and stumbling west and north along the Chambersburg Pike. Mothers and girlfriends kissed the Gettysburg boys good-bye; children danced beside the armed files until parents called them back. At last the militia moved over the ridge by the Seminary and disappeared in a



The Approach to Gettysburg

valley beyond. Clouds thickened and came lower; a drizzle began to fall.

It was hours later when, faint and frightening, sounded faraway reports of rifles. The encounter had taken place. It might be called the firing of the first shot at Gettysburg, though this was a mere skirmish compared to later battles.

Secessionist regiments were indeed moving closer, and the little squads of would-be Pennsylvania soldiers had met them at Marsh Creek. The tough Rebel companies swatted them off as if they were mere mosquitoes or fleas.

The 26th Emergency Regiment became, within a matter of minutes, a disorganized mob. Most boys of Company B were captured on the spot; others scattered for their lives. The untrained ranks fired a few shots as they retreated, but many of them had thrown away their guns in terror at the Confederate onslaught. They hid in chicken houses and cob bins. They went scrambling pell-mell through orchards, sobbing for breath as they ran away from Whitmer's farm toward the village of Mummasburg.

Rebels shrugged, wiped scraps of cartridge paper off their lips, slid the slings of their rifles over their shoulders, and went marching on. Shoes—everybody wanted shoes. They had heard that there were some shoe factories in Gettysburg, but the generals and other officers had bigger plans.

Harrisburg, the state capital, waited beyond. And there were York and Columbia and other good-sized towns full of money and manufactured articles so sorely needed by the rural South.

A hundred and fifty Rebel wagons came lurching over the brow of Oak Ridge (during and after the battle it was called Seminary Ridge). The cavalry rode ahead of other units. General J. B. Gordon's brigade of General Jubal A. Early's division hustled along with seeming carelessness. Townspeople peeped warily from behind their shutters and thought of the awful stories they had heard. Would these wild, tanned men kidnap their daughters? Would they actually boil a baby for breakfast? Villagers feared that they should see such horrors occurring before their very eyes.

The week had been hot and, even though it was cooler and rainy today, men can grow very thirsty while marching. Every now and again the Rebels were allowed to break ranks. They poured into the yards and began to work the pump handles. Petunias and larkspurs and nasturtiums were trampled flat as these ragged, hard-faced soldiers clustered around the wells.

General Jubal Early placed a requisition on the town soon after the long gray columns halted in the Diamond. A requisition was an official demand for goods to be supplied to the troops. It seems a little like the act of pirates or bandits to

demand food, clothing, and money from unarmed civilians who have no power to resist. Yet that happened on both sides through the entire War Between the States whenever quiet places were invaded.

The demand on this date of Friday, June 26, caused the tight-fisted storekeepers to shudder. Sixty barrels of flour, General Early asked. Seven thousand pounds of pork or bacon, twelve hundred pounds of sugar, six hundred of coffee. Half a ton of salt. Ten bushels of onions; a thousand pairs of shoes, five hundred hats. That was the Confederates' request—all these things to be furnished by the borough of Gettysburg and the county, or else ten thousand dollars in good Federal cash.

Did the Confederates get all these things or the money? They did not. The authorities met and, after a frightened conference, wailed that they did not have such quantities of goods.

There have been different theories about why these first invaders did not enforce their demand with the sword. Captain R. K. Beecham, who fought at Gettysburg and later wrote a book about the battle, insists that the businessmen of Gettysburg had some influence with the enemy. Beecham hints that certain of the small local factories had sold goods to Southern firms before the war. He suggests that many people of this

section were heartily in sympathy with the Confederate cause although they pretended to support the North.

Maybe this is true, maybe not. Gettysburg sent many of its sons out to fight for the Union long before the 26th Emergency Regiment was thought of. On the other hand, many Northern communities, especially those near the Mason-Dixon line, had their share of Southern sympathizers. (Just as in remote highlands of the South there were little groups who called themselves "The Right Sort of People" and who supported the Federal government—sometimes at the point of a gun!)

Men of secret Confederate belief in Northern states belonged to an organization called The Knights of the Golden Circle, though their angry Yankee neighbors called them Copperheads. Perhaps this was because the secret badge of the society, concealed somewhere on their persons, was in the shape of an old-fashioned copper cent.

The Knights of the Golden Circle had promised that they would rise in force and assist the Rebels whenever they came charging through the North. But during the several raids that actually occurred the Knights were suspected of hiding under their beds instead.

If persons of concealed Secesh belief did exist in Gettysburg, there was at least one citizen who

took violent issue with the Rebels the moment they appeared: old John Burns. He appeared in the Diamond and announced boldly to the leaders that he was going to arrest them for trespassing on United States property.

The confident invaders were amused, but John made them a little angry, too. Promptly they locked him up in the local jail—the very place where John had locked drunkards or thieves on the few occasions when that was necessary. The warlike cobbler languished behind bars until the Rebel force moved on to possess York and other towns to the east; then some citizen came and let him out. Burns was not subdued by his experience; he got hold of a lantern and a horse pistol and set out to arrest any stragglers he found.

Every marching army has stragglers: a few unfortunates, weaker or less spirited than the rest, who leave the ranks to sit exhausted by the roadside and then are unable to catch up with the main force. Sometimes they are deserters who have no desire to face the fighting to come.

Such stragglers as there were, John Burns found. He went prowling behind fences and through empty cellars, and had the satisfaction of locking a few woebegone Rebels in the jail where he had been confined earlier.

But Constable John Burns, cobbler and wagon driver, and the 26th Emergency Regiment were

not to be the only uniformed forces to oppose the gray columns approaching Gettysburg. While the Rebel force was spreading and seeking in Pennsylvania, the Northern army was busy far to the south. The Union force in the eastern part of the United States was called the Army of the Potomac and was commanded by General Joseph Hooker. He was a brave soldier, a veteran of long experience—but Hooker was quick-tempered and did not get along well with other military men.

Nearly two months earlier, the Yankees, led by Hooker, had met disaster before a Confederate force, which they outnumbered, at Chancellorsville in Virginia. The general had not been in any condition to direct his officers during important hours of the battle. His friends said that he had been dazed when a shell struck the porch column against which he was leaning. Other people in the army, who didn't like Hooker, declared that he was drunk. Drunk or sober, he was not the world's greatest commander, nor the Nation's. His forces were routed.

Mere bravery is not the only thing needed in order for a man to be a fine military leader. He must have wisdom and patience and imagination, and it does not appear that Joe Hooker was endowed with any lion's share of these qualities.

On the same day that Gordon's brigade pressed through Gettysburg, Hooker's army crossed the Potomac River from Virginia into Maryland. A

portion of his troops had already crossed on the day before.

Hooker was in a rage. He had asked General Henry W. Halleck (who was his superior officer as Chief of Staff of the army) for permission to withdraw some troops that served as a garrison at Harpers Ferry, far up the Potomac. Hooker wanted to use these troops to attack Lee's lines of communication stretching down through western Maryland. Halleck, who must go down in history as one of the most obstinate men who ever lived, refused to let General Hooker use the Harpers Ferry soldiers. The two generals quarreled vigorously back and forth at long range. The fuss ended only when Hooker wrote out his resignation as commander.

The new general who followed Hooker was not widely known among Unionists. His name was George Gordon Meade, and he had been born in Spain. He was an American, however—not a Spaniard, as was rumored among the soldiers.

Halleck must have thought that he could get along with Meade better than he had with General Hooker. Promptly he gave orders that the Harpers Ferry garrison could be subject to Meade's orders if Meade wanted them. But the new general decided that he had more important concerns. His main worry was the safety of Washington, the capital of the disunited states.

People in Pennsylvania might very well believe

that Lee sought to capture Harrisburg and Philadelphia. There were even wild notions in some quarters to the effect that the Rebel commander was aiming at New York City. Down in Maryland the loyal citizens feared for the safety of Baltimore. Meade was determined to make sure, first of all, that the Rebel general could not bring his long columns speeding down from the north to seize Washington. He felt that Lee was capable of such a move, once he heard that the Army of the Potomac had crossed the river whose name it bore.

Meade began to spread his army in the shape of a great protective fan between Washington and a possible dangerous advance. He put the First Corps here, the Eleventh Corps there, the Second Corps far to the southeast, and so on. He sent a cavalry division poking out ahead, working its way up through Maryland. The clash would come when the two armies met.

Meade even tried to pick out a proper position on ground of his own choosing. He sent engineers galloping along Pipe Creek, near a place called Taneytown. They reported that the hills in that region would be favorable to the Union defense, if only they could draw the Confederates down to give battle at Pipe Creek. Every general would like to select the ground where he deploys his men for battle. Usually only one of the two op-

posing commanders is able to do so; sometimes neither of them can.

That is exactly why there was a battle at Gettysburg. Imagine a star with ten or a dozen points. The star is the village of Gettysburg. The points are roads shooting out in all directions: the Fairfield Road, the Chambersburg Pike, the Mummasburg Road, the Carlisle Road, the Harrisburg Road, the York Pike, the Hanover Road, the Baltimore Pike, the Emmitsburg Road, the Taneytown Road. Several of these many highways split themselves into other roads only a few miles beyond Gettysburg.

The Civil War armies, dependent on horses and cumbersome cannon, had to advance to an assembly point by means of established roads. So, when Lee felt the need to concentrate his army, he brought it down from the northeast and north and northwest. At the same time, the Federal army came up from the southeast and south and southwest. All roads seemed to have their ending at Gettysburg. Gettysburg would indeed be the end of the road for thousands of men and boys.

On Friday, June 26, a thin rain was coming down. The damp gray columns had thudded away toward York. Other divisions of Ewell's Second Corps were progressing along other roads, away in the north and the west. The muddy streets of Gettysburg had never looked like this before: the

ruts, the marks of horses, the scraps of clothing and equipment lost by gray soldiers or deliberately thrown away in order to lighten their packs.

The wet night was empty, frightening. *Ja*, who knew? Maybe the Rebels would return tomorrow. Earth around the wells was trampled into mush, the pansies and hollyhock plants had been stamped, a gate had been knocked off a fence here and there. An empty wagon stood abandoned, sagging on its broken axle.

In earliest morning eager little boys would venture along the streets, hunting for stray buckles and pistol caps. People gathered to see the wreckage of a railroad bridge which the Rebels had broken to pieces east of town. Freight cars standing along a side track had been burned.

Old ladies shuddered through the evening in their beds, watching the dying flames reflected on clean walls. This must be war in its most dreadful aspect. Still, no babies had been eaten.

But one had arrived in the world. Young Mrs. John McClellan, the former Georgia Wade, had a son born to her in the brick double-house on Baltimore Street, even while Rebel wagons rattled on roads nearby.

Gettysburg people considered themselves lucky and were glad to believe that the enemy had gone—perhaps forever. Little did they know!

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