

# The Gettysburg Campaign

*A Study in Command*



EDWIN B. CODDINGTON

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## **The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command** Edwin B. Coddington

The Battle of Gettysburg remains one of the most controversial military actions in America's history, and one of the most studied.

Professor Coddington's is an analysis not only of the battle proper, but of the actions of both Union and Confederate armies for the six months prior to the battle and the factors affecting General Meade's decision not to pursue the retreating Confederate forces. This book contends that Gettysburg was a crucial Union victory, primarily because of the effective leadership of Union forces—not, as has often been said, only because the North was the beneficiary of Lee's mistakes.

## **The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command Details**

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## From Reader Review The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command for online ebook

### Serjeant Wildgoose says

This a superb, perhaps the best, single-volume account of the pivotal battle of America's civil war. Drawing upon the stunning primary resource that is contained within the vast Official Records and thus speaking to the reader through the very words of those who fought, Coddington takes you seamlessly from the grand strategic to the tactical.

I have been on the battlefield at Gettysburg many times - beyond doubt, the best time is 5 o'clock in the morning, when the sun is just coming up and the tour-buses are 3 or 4 hours away. My only companion in these hours was Coddington's book and if you want to get more from your visit to this superb piece of heritage than is offered by the massed-tourist industry, get there early; and get there with Coddington.

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### Sweetwilliam says

Coddington's A Study in Command is the only book that is required reading for the guides at Gettysburg national park. It was recommended to me by a guide that I had hired during my visit to the park back in 2011. He explained that the park guides are given a list of books about the battle and the war but Coddington's book is the only one that is required reading. The maps are good and the detailed account of the battle and analysis can be riveting at times.

Caution: This book was written for the aficionado and not the dabbler. It is deep, packed with detail, and it can be dry. After every significant event at Gettysburg there is a critical analysis of the commanders on both sides. The analysis can go on for several pages. There are 215 pages of notes.

In this piece, Coddington dispels the myth that there was a single southern mistake that cost the confederates the battle. Coddington also argues that Mead did a good job and that there was really little opportunity for the Army of the Potomac to follow up with a decisive victory that would have ended the war.

If you are not a Gettysburg aficionado you may have more fun with something like Bruce Catton's Glory Road or Stephen W. Sears' Gettysburg. I also read a very user friendly brigade history by Scott Mingus about The Louisiana Tigers in the Gettysburg Campaign. Next, take a trip to Gettysburg and hire a good guide for a minimum of four hours. Somewhere along the way you will be ready for A Study in Command. It is certainly worth the read.

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### Steven Peterson says

This is one of the gold standard histories of the Gettysburg Campaign. Although written decades ago, it holds up well. Coddington's mastery of detail is compelling. Recommended for those wanting to know in detail about Gettysburg.

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### **Tim says**

A very good book. It describes the armies' organization and movements from the beginning of the campaign in Virginia. It also deals in less detail with the retreat of Lee after the battle. The battle is covered in detail. Well-written and complete; it anticipates and answers questions about the campaign, relates information from many sources, points out contradictions and supports in contemporary accounts and traces changing details in some participants' stories. Scholarly approach includes extensive information in the footnotes.

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### **Joyce Lagow says**

This is an excellent book that in my opinion ranks right up there with Shelby Foote's 3 volume history of the Civil War.[return][return]Coddington opens with an assessment of the reasons for Lee's PA campaign. He stresses more than others the military situation in the West, specifically Vicksburg. By April, 1863 Grant's armies were on the eastern side of the Mississippi and in May he was laying siege to Vicksburg. Because so much attention and romanticism has been attached to the fighting in the East, too little appreciation is given to the danger the fall of Vicksburg posed for the South. Stretched too thin to send any help, one of Lee's aims was to so frighten the Lincoln government that it would withdraw forces from the Vicksburg campaign to defend Washington.[return][return]Coddington's style of writing is dynamic and immediately interesting. Of all the books I've read so far on the Civil War, Coddington seems to have made the most extensive use of original sources. His research was truly impressive. In order to make a reasoned speculation about different accounts of the movements of one Union unit, Coddington and a friend (Gettysburg resident) drove and personally explored the area to see if connecting roads actually existed that would help clarify the issue. They do and their existence adds weight to his views on the controversy.[return][return]Political considerations on both sides are extensively assessed.[return][return]Since the book is a study of the Gettysburg campaign, Coddington does a very detailed study of Lee's and Hooker's movements from the beginning--June 2 when Lee started to withdraw his army from Fredericksburg. Most books summarize this aspect but Coddington is pretty thorough.[return][return]Most importantly, the books is what it set out to be--a study in command. Some major figures come to life: Buford, Reynolds, Longstreet and in particular, Meade.[return][return]Meade has always had a bad press. Coddington, who clearly favors Meade, makes convincing arguments that it was undeserved--that Meade was an excellent commander who has been wrongfully blamed for Lee's escape after Gettysburg.[return][return]Most Civil War accounts of Gettysburg focus on the obviously dramatic; this has been especially true of the film "Gettysburg". Everybody "knows" about Little Round top and especially Pickett's Charge. More now undoubtedly have an idea of Buford's stand west of Gettysburg until the arrival of Reynolds and the First Corps.[return][return]What Coddington does is go into the 2nd day battle for Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill, for example. I had no idea of the seriousness of that particular engagement until I read Coddington. Most books treat it sort of as an afterthought, which it most certainly wasn't.[return][return]Unlike most books on the Civil War, the maps are almost adequate. I particularly dislike maps that have these little dots, dashes and otherwise near-identical symbols showing routes of armies, and several of the maps are so cursed. However, their usefulness is immensely enhanced by being so detailed that one can follow, through the text, the actual course of the armies. I scan maps and reproduce them in order to be able to refer to them easily while reading the text. Coddington's maps of upper VA, MD, and southern PA are excellent--detailed locations of towns, gaps, rivers, runs, etc.[return][return]Another joy of Coddington's maps, those of the actual battle. To my delight, the three critical ones are topographical maps, that actually show the layout of the land especially at the

Round Tops. One, however, is maddening in that the text talks about the movements of some units that simply are not listed on the map or may be subsumed under a particular command. When I reread this book, I intend to go over carefully the Order of Battle and see if that indeed is the case.[return][return]Coddington has the complete Order of Battle for both armies, which I found indispensable.[return][return]Finally, the chapter notes are excellent. I'm one of those who reads them until they interfere too much in the narrative. But they are well worth reading, since many times they include information as to why Coddington has come down on one side of speculation about movements, for example, rather than another. The tidbit about he and his friend reconnoitering Wolf's Hill is one such example.[return][return]One of the best books I have ever read.

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### **Keith says**

When my wife and I first visited Gettysburg National Park we came as a) Canadians and b) neophytes. We had seen the movie, read the book the movie was based on (The Killer Angels) and taken a community college night course on the Civil War. We checked in at the visitors centre and decided to hire one of the official guides to show us around the battlefield. This was a great investment as he directed us to the proper stops and filled in the events as they unfolded. (I recommend it, there's a context that solidifies one's understanding). Without his help we probably would have been just one more pair of bewildered tourists, looking at markers and staring at statues and empty fields.

The next day we did the same tour by ourselves remembering what the guide had said. So, about the book, just before we left town we returned to the visitors centre where I cornered a group of guides (this was November) and asked them to recommend the single best book on the Gettysburg Campaign. There was a quick conference and Coddington was recommended. One of the guides even escorted me into the gift store to help me find it. When it was revealed that they were out of stock, he suggested the clerk call a local bookstore, which he did and they did and with directions in hand off we went to get the book.

There have been newer studies since Coddington's book was published - Stephen Sears, Noah Trudeau and Alan Guelzo) but Coddington provided a comprehensive introduction for me. It's detailed but elegantly readable.

For some reason this book never made it into Goodreads so a new review for an old book.

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### **Robin Friedman says**

#### **Still The Essential Account Of The Gettysburg Campaign**

Edwin Coddington's (1905-1963) "The Gettysburg Campaign" (1963) remains not only the seminal account of the Battle of Gettysburg but also a model of Civil War and historical writing. The book is an inspiring example of scholarship at its best. Coddington writes in a clear, eloquent, yet non-polemical style as he explores his subject. He does not back away from offering opinions and conclusions, which flow clearly from his narrative account. The reader can understand the basis of the judgments which Coddington offers. The account is detailed and yet selective. Coddington focuses on the broad picture of the Gettysburg story without getting bogged down in the minutiae and legends that mar some otherwise excellent treatments of this battle. Coddington focuses on "why" things happened as well as "what" happened. The reader is given a

context for the Gettysburg campaign and is seldom at a loss over the reason the author is discussing and devoting time to an issue. The book is thoroughly documented and the footnotes include much essential material.

Coddington begins with a lengthy consideration of the factors that led Robert E. Lee to propose an invasion of the North following the Battle of Chancellorsville. He concludes with a discussion of the Confederate retreat from Gettysburg, culminating in the return to Virginia on July 14, 1863. He discusses well the Union pursuit and considers judiciously whether Meade should have been more aggressive in trying to cut off the fleeing foe.

I found the factual account comprehensive on the major points of the Battle and careful and circumspect in its conclusions. Coddington allows the reader to see the deficiencies in the Confederate command structure (lack of coordination) and the overconfidence of the Southern forces at virtually every level as contributing factors to the defeat at Gettysburg. He is more critical of General Longstreet's role in the Battle than are many more recent accounts. On the Union side of the line, Coddington is highly critical of Third Corps General Sickles and his salient on July 2, which came close to costing the Union the Battle. The longest critical section of the book consists of an examination of the dispute between Meade and Sickles and his supporters following the battle regarding the wisdom, or lack of it, in Sickles's movement of the Third Corps.

Coddington has high, but careful praise for Commanding General Meade, for Hancock, Reynolds, Buford, Howard, and Slocum. He shows how the Army of the Potomac, for all its awkward structure (seven Corps at Gettysburg compared to the Confederate three) and for all the rivalries between its leaders was able to function as a coordinated unit when it needed to do so and hold the Union position at Gettysburg. Coddington has high praise for the valor of the fighting troops on both sides of the line.

Sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, Coddington's book comes to grips with many competing accounts of the Battle of Gettysburg. He points to the tendency of many students to view the battle as a series of speculative "ifs" -- if General Early, Longstreet, what have you had done this at the time, the result would have been different. Most such analyses, Coddington argues, are fruitless. Furthermore, they tend to ignore, or downplay, the mistakes that, hindsight suggests, occurred in the Battle of the other side of the line. Coddington shows the reader what happened, marshalls the evidence about why it happened, and allows the reader to think the matter through.

This is a detailed, close and thorough account of the Battle of Gettysburg that is probably best approached by a reader who has a basic familiarity with the Civil War and a general understanding of the action at Gettysburg. It is not the only account of this endlessly fascinating battle, but it remains the standard work which needs to be considered in understanding the events of the Gettysburg campaign.

Robin Friedman

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### **Carl Wade says**

Pg 848: Bliss Farm is mentioned several times in the index.

Pg 420: Bliss farm was 1200 feet west of the Emmitsburg Road. Brig. Gen Garnet Posey CSA gets this far. Where were the Bliss Family? I believe this was the second day and they were long gone. Posey attacked Hay's Div. of the USA, on July 2nd.

Pg 429: A sunken road runs between Bliss Farm and Gettysburg. This was not the Emmitsburg Road however.

Pg 484: Hay's USA and Hill CSA quarreled over the Bliss Farm with a barn that was fortress like. Midway between lines after changing hands several times Hays decided to burn the Bliss Farm anticipating a major CSA assault.

Pg 784: The barn had loop-holed windows like others in PA. Sergt. Charles A. Hitchcock (relative to the Bliss?) USA started the fire in the hay. But Fremantle (think Englishman visiting Longstreet) says it was an exploding shell. Col Alexander CSA (Tom's look alike in the DVD Gettysburg) also takes credit for starting the fire.

Pg 840: Anderson, Brig. Gen George T. appears only a couple times in the index.

Pg 402: Hood was wounded and a request for G.T. Anderson was sent up to Longstreet, to go into reserve for the Little Round Top. Rushing in, pushed over Devil's Den and the south end of the Wheat field. But a counter thrust pushed them back.

Map 8: Little Round Top 4:00-7:00 pm July 2nd; Anderson between Rose House and Devils Den, Law & Robertson on their right were pushed back. Anderson held their advance and push back DeTrobriand USA. Rose House on the east side of the Emmitsburg Road, about 1 1/2 Miles from the Bliss Farm as the crow flies. 20 minutes quick time. Oats came up south of Hood to Little Round Top.

Pg 841 Anderson Brigade is mentioned several times in the index.

Pg 404: Anderson Brigade got into trouble from Barnes' Division USA of the 5th Corp. Kershaw came up to give relief.

Pg 408: Kershaw and Anderson then pushed Sweitzer USA across Plum Run Valley with hand to hand fighting.

Pg. 524: Chap. xix How many Regiments did Anderson have? 5 Regiments. Which 3 were taken out of line: They were put south from Little Round Top to Emmitsburg Road. The others that were left in line were where they were the day before (July 2nd).

Map 7, July 2nd to 4:00 PM: Anderson under Hood and Longstreet march west of Seminary Ridge within one mile of the Bliss Farm, on down to where the Emmitsburg Road crosses the Warfield ridge. Lining up to take Cemetery ridge by way of Devil's en and the Wheat Field through Ward and Detrobriand.

Pg 456: Chap 17, The night of July 2nd Col L A Grant Vermont Brigade of the 2nd Div 6th Army Corp moved into the area just east of Little Round Top. Russell of the 6th also came up during the night but Longstreet never came their way.

Pg 481: Chap 18, Sedgwick's 6th Army Corp was sent several places to plug holes. Only a few orderlies were left with him. Wright had under him Russell and Grant. What of the Surgeons? Where did they go?

Pg 675: Grant was not engaged.

Pg 4776: Chap 18, Eustis was sent to help Newton and was placed left of Caldwell, near Wiekert farm. He was not engaged on July 3rd the third day of the battle.

Pg 65: Chap 3, Ames's 2nd Brigade was right up there with Bufford on the first day. (review the DVD of Gettysburg) How big is a Brigade: Bufford's 1st Div Cavalry of 2,100 men was with Ames's Brigade on the left.

Map 3 Movement July 1st: Shows the 11th Corps just south of Gettysburg.

Map 5 July 1st afternoon: 11th Corps north of Gettysburg with Schurz in command. Where is O O Howard? Ames was in the middle facing Doles under Early.

Pg 288: Chap 12, Hardly over 6,000 men going into battle being next to an out numbered 1st Corp the 11th saw threat on 2 sides. Rodes & Early pulled a move and put the 11th into retreat all the way through town on up the Cemetery Hill.

Pg 696: 2nd Brigade of the 1st Div had 1,465.

Pg 436: Chap 16, Confederates came up the north east face of Cemetery Hill and broke the ranks. Ames rushed in himself and stopped some of his infantryman from running. Saved by Carroll of the 2nd Corp just before dark until 10:30 PM.

Map 9: Shows Ames on an angle of dog leg behind a stone wall, hit by Hays & Hoke 7:30 to 11:00 PM on July 2nd. This was behind Cemetery hill northeast and out of view of the Bliss farm.

Pg 765n: There was mixed impression of the fight of Ames. Low on shots; Fired a volley; Put up a good fight; Enemy broke through quickly. Division numbered about 1,150 muskets.

Pg 858: McPherson's farm; was this where the Bliss family went with the McMillan girl. Seems like they west east over Cemetery ridge.

Pg 843: The Iron Brigade was 1st Brigade 1st Div, 1st Corp.

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### **Captain Sir Roddy, R.N. (Ret.) says**

I first read Coddington's brilliant analysis of the Battle of Gettysburg back in the early 1980s, and remember being completely blown away by the detail and the quality of scholarship. It almost seemed as though I was reading not only an eyewitness account, but that of an observer that also had been peering over the shoulders of the commanders--on both sides--who were leading the troops in this titanic struggle. This seminal book, first published in 1963, is probably still among the very best one-volume accounts of the Battle of Gettysburg, and that's not too bad after fifty years! Lets put it another way--if you are a serious student of the American Civil War, Edwin B. Coddington's *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* simply must be on your bookshelf, right next to the Gettysburg books of Harry Pfanz, David Martin, Stephen Sears, and Noah Andre Trudeau.

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### **Scott L. says**

A fantastic review of the campaign and battle of Gettysburg. Very balanced in its praise and criticism of both Union and Confederate leaders and units. Detailed, but not overly so as to make the book unreadable. I would highly recommend this book to just about anyone - although I would not recommend it as a first read of the battle, but certainly a definite read for the serious student of the battle.

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### **David says**

Coddington brought a really fresh perspective to the battle and the commanders involved in it. As a scholarly work its really unequaled but the prose is, surprisingly, quite good as well. A must read for Civil War buffs.

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### **Jackie says**

This is the book most recommended for getting the TOTAL picture of the major (and some minor) events on the Battle of Gettysburg, the campaigns leading up to & the aftermath of the battle until Lee escaped back into Virginia. Well researched & documented, I found it very even handed in presenting evidence to support any of the author's opinions. It helped me to understand the conflicting points of view of different events & what was most likely the reason/cause of certain results. Highly recommended for the serious history student of the battle as well as anyone wanting an in-depth view as well as the big picture view of this pivotal moment in our country's history. Scholarly but not overly so.

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### **Dimitri says**

Coddington's reputation for writing the best account of Gettysburg is well-deserved. It goes above and beyond a standard battle narrative. The context of the campaign alone accounts for a hundred pages, explaining a basic oddity of the battle as displayed on the opening screen of the movie: the Southern Army approaches from the North & the Northern Army approaches from the South.

There is appropriate focus on the strategic dispute & how the tactical outcome of the 1st & 2nd day influenced it, with a strong emphasis on Longstreet & Lee. Which brings me to the dustjacket claim of the book: to be among the first to stress less the Confederate mistakes & more on the Union ability. I cannot make comparisons with pre-1968 Civil War studies other than Douglas Freeman, but I would say Coddington comes close to 50/50, with a good balance on the tactical level and a re-evaluation of supreme commander Meade. In short, making good use of interior lines in the Fishhook, keeping an eye on all things at all times & an adequate artillery train saved the day (s).

Three parts pleased me particularly: the first contact with Buford, the predicament of the 15th Alabama at Little Round Top as opposed to the mythologised heroics of the 20th Maine\* and the battle for Culp's Hill on July 3rd. They are too often crammed or overlooked.

A very strong point are the maps & order of battle, utterly indispensable when 14 corps devolved into regiments manoeuvre over a good dozen landmarks.

I don't think I need to delve further into Gettysburg (Harry Pfanz' day-by-day accounts etc.\*\*) until I've walked the field. For the passing student, all you need is Coddington, the Osprey booklet\*\*\* and all the maps you can find.

on a related note, a nice detail study on the aftermath free for download at <http://generalmeadesociety.org> :  
**"The Effects of Logistical Factors On The Union Pursuit of the Confederate Army During the Final Phase of the Gettysburg Campaign."**

\* Storming Little Round Top: The 15th Alabama And Their Fight For The High Ground, July 2, 1863

\*\* Gettysburg--The First Day

Gettysburg--The Second Day

Gettysburg--Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill

\*\*\* Gettysburg 1863: High tide of the Confederacy

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### **Jessika says**

Not for the faint of heart, this is a fantastic study for anyone interested in an in-depth look at the Battle of Gettysburg.

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### **JZ Temple says**

This isn't a book for the faint of heart. The author goes into incredible detail over the few weeks covering Lee's 1863 invasion of the north. This is not a Stephen Ambrose or Shelby Foote narrative of the events as

seen through the soldiers eyes or the generals who commanded them. It's an exhaustive examination of the commanders' activities, actions and as available thoughts and musings over exactly what the other guy was doing. An American Civil War era general in command of an independent force often blundered about, trying to decipher conflicting reports, rumors and intelligence regarding the location and intent of enemy forces. Add to that the inevitable influence of politicians, the practical limitations of logistics and terrain, and the abilities (or lack thereof) of the individual generals and it's not hard to understand that both sides were to a great degree surprised so often when they bumped into the opposing force. The author does a credible job relating this, but often bogs down into page long character profiles which at times grow tedious. Not a book for the beach, certainly, but if you really, \*really\* want to learn every thing you can about Gettysburg, it's a valuable addition to your library.

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