

Echoes of Freedom Gettysburg Tour

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLynsJLsO1V0D9aNg9toTiGwmiwigSdXMH

Gettysburg Overview - Pennsylvania Monument

We're here now at Gettysburg National Battlefield, one of the most famous and consequential battlefields in American history.

Between July 1st and 3rd, 1863, over 165,000 soldiers clashed here in a massive struggle that marked the high tide of the Confederacy. General Robert E. Lee brought his Army of Northern Virginia north into Pennsylvania, hoping a victory on Union soil might force peace or foreign recognition of the Confederacy.

But Union forces under General George Meade met Lee's army here and fought a desperate, three-day battle. From chaotic fighting on the first day to brutal assaults on the Union flanks on the second, and culminating in the tragic Pickett's Charge on the third day, Gettysburg saw more than 50,000 casualties in just three days — the bloodiest battle ever fought on North American soil.

After being driven back, Lee was forced to retreat to Virginia, ending the Confederate invasion of the North. This battle shifted the momentum of the war and gave the Union a badly needed morale boost.

Today, as you walk these fields, think of the courage, the sacrifice, and the human cost paid here, in the fight to preserve a nation torn apart by civil war.

Little Round Top - Little Round Top

https://youtu.be/OfFwN2fb9Jw

We're standing near Little Round Top, one of the most critical defensive positions during the Battle of Gettysburg.

On the afternoon of July 2nd, 1863, Confederate forces launched a fierce attack on the Union left flank, trying to roll up the entire line. Little Round Top, a rocky hill with a sweeping view of the surrounding ground, became the anchor point for the Union defense.

Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain and the 20th Maine held the extreme left of the Union line. They faced repeated, determined Confederate assaults, even as they ran low on ammunition. In one of the most dramatic moments of the battle, Chamberlain ordered a bayonet charge, driving the Confederates down the slope and saving the Union flank.

The defense of Little Round Top prevented Lee's army from breaking through and gaining a decisive victory. If this hill had fallen, the entire Union position might have been lost, changing the course of the battle — and maybe even the war itself.

Today, Little Round Top stands as a monument to leadership, determination, and the bravery of ordinary soldiers under extraordinary pressure.

Pickett’s Charge - Gettysburg Field on Union or Confederate Lines

Echoes of Freedom with Smith McNeill: Pickett's Charge (S1.5)

July 3, 1863. The final day of Gettysburg. Confederate commander Robert E. Lee decided to strike the center of the Union line in what would become known as Pickett’s Charge.

About 12,500 Confederate soldiers, led by George Pickett and other commanders, formed up across nearly a mile of open farmland. As they advanced, they were met by intense artillery and rifle fire from Union positions along Cemetery Ridge. The fields were deadly, and men fell by the hundreds.

Some Confederates reached the stone wall, known as the Angle, and a fierce close-quarters fight erupted. But Union reinforcements poured in and drove them back, leaving thousands of Confederate dead and wounded on the field.

Pickett’s Charge is often called the ‘high-water mark of the Confederacy,’ symbolizing the closest Lee’s army ever came to victory on Northern soil. Its failure marked a turning point — from that day forward, the Confederate cause would be on the defensive.

Standing here, you can still see the distance those men had to cross, and imagine the courage it took — and the terrible price they paid — in that desperate, doomed assault.

The Civilian Experience - Gettysburg Downtown

Echoes of Freedom with Smith McNeill: The Gettysburg Witness Tree (S1.13)

It’s easy to focus on the soldiers when you think of Gettysburg, but what about the people who called this town home?

In 1863, Gettysburg was a town of about 2,400 residents. When battle broke out on July 1st, civilians found themselves caught in the middle of one of the largest battles ever fought in North America. Many hid in their basements as bullets and artillery shells struck their homes.

When the battle ended, the people of Gettysburg faced a new nightmare — caring for the thousands of wounded left behind. Homes, churches, barns, and public buildings were turned into makeshift hospitals. The town’s citizens helped feed, nurse, and comfort the soldiers, and worked to bury the dead in the stifling July heat.

Families who lived here saw their farms destroyed, their crops ruined, and their fields littered with the terrible aftermath of war. Yet many stepped forward to help, showing incredible compassion and resilience.

The story of Gettysburg’s civilians is an important reminder: war doesn’t just happen to armies — it happens to entire communities.

The Gettysburg Address

Echoes of Freedom with Smith McNeill: The Train Station at Gettysburg (S1.14)

Just four months after the guns fell silent, President Abraham Lincoln came to Gettysburg to dedicate a new national cemetery for the Union dead.

On November 19, 1863, Lincoln delivered one of the most powerful and enduring speeches in American history. In just 272 words, the Gettysburg Address reframed the meaning of the war. Lincoln reminded the nation of its founding principles — liberty and equality — and challenged Americans to ensure that ‘government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.’

At a time when the war’s outcome was still uncertain, Lincoln’s words gave new purpose to the struggle and honored the sacrifice of those who had fought and died here.

Standing at Gettysburg, it’s easy to see why Lincoln was so moved by this place — a battlefield transformed into a sacred ground of remembrance. His brief speech continues to inspire generations, reminding us that the cost of freedom is high, but its value is beyond measure.

Devil's Den

https://youtu.be/pwsxhhLQKwQ

Welcome to Devil's Den, one of Gettysburg's most dramatic and haunting landmarks.

On July 2nd, 1863 — the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg — this rocky, boulder-strewn area became the scene of fierce and chaotic fighting. Confederate forces, attacking the Union left flank, swarmed through these massive stones in an attempt to seize the high ground. The Union defenders — mostly sharpshooters and artillerymen — fought back from among the rocks, determined to hold the position.

The name 'Devil's Den' actually predates the battle, coming from local legends about snakes, superstitions, and ghostly stories. But after the battle, the name took on a darker meaning, because the rocks were left littered with the dead and wounded, making it one of the most photographed and remembered places on the battlefield.

Confederate soldiers eventually captured Devil's Den, using it as a base to fire on Union positions on Little Round Top, just across the valley. The fighting here was up-close and brutal — soldiers described smoke so thick they could barely see, and bullets ricocheting off the rocks.

Today, Devil's Den still carries an eerie feel. These rocks witnessed moments of incredible bravery and terrible tragedy. As you explore this area, think about the men who fought, hid, and died among these boulders.

It’s a place that reminds us how rugged terrain and determined soldiers combined to shape the fierce struggle for Gettysburg — and the future of the nation.

The Gettysburg Address and the National Cemetery

Echoes of Freedom with Smith McNeill: The Train Station at Gettysburg (S1.14)

“**That these dead shall not have died in vain -- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.**”

With these words, President Abraham Lincoln closed one of the most powerful speeches in American history — the Gettysburg Address.

Lincoln spoke here on November 19, 1863, just four months after the guns fell silent on this battlefield. He had come to dedicate the new Soldiers’ National Cemetery, created to bury the thousands of Union soldiers who fell during the three days of fighting. Before this cemetery was established, many of the dead lay in shallow, makeshift graves across the fields.

Local citizens, overwhelmed by the scale of death, pushed for a proper burial ground to honor these men. Led by David Wills, a prominent Gettysburg attorney, plans for the National Cemetery moved quickly. The cemetery would not only bury the dead respectfully but also stand as a symbol of the Union’s resolve.

Lincoln was invited almost as an afterthought, asked only to deliver ‘a few appropriate remarks.’ Yet in just 272 words, he forever redefined the meaning of the war and what America stood for. He reminded the nation that this struggle was about preserving the ideals of liberty and equality,

and that those who died at Gettysburg had given their last full measure of devotion for a higher cause.

Today, the Gettysburg National Cemetery is the final resting place for over 3,500 Union soldiers, their graves marked by simple headstones. It remains a place of quiet reflection and remembrance — and Lincoln's words continue to echo here, challenging every generation to live up to the promise of a nation truly dedicated to freedom for all."

The Wheatfield at Gettysburg

https://youtu.be/28MnUEcc5K8

Welcome to the Wheatfield — one of the most fiercely contested and tragic locations of the Battle of Gettysburg.

On July 2nd, 1863, this seemingly peaceful field of golden wheat turned into a deadly killing ground. Throughout the afternoon and into the evening, waves of Union and Confederate soldiers clashed here in chaotic, back-and-forth fighting.

At least six separate charges and countercharges took place, with control of the Wheatfield changing hands multiple times. Union troops under generals like Daniel Sickles and later George Sykes struggled to hold their ground against determined Confederate attacks led by generals such as Joseph Kershaw and William Barksdale.

By nightfall, more than 4,000 soldiers lay killed, wounded, or missing in and around this small patch of farmland. Survivors described the Wheatfield as a place where you could hardly walk without stepping on the fallen, and where blood stained the wheat stalks red.

This savage struggle was part of Lee's plan to break the Union left flank and roll up the line. While the Confederates gained temporary control of the field, they were ultimately unable to push through to Cemetery Ridge, keeping the Union army's defensive position intact.

Today, standing here, it’s hard to imagine the horror of those hours, with bullets flying through the wheat, smoke filling the air, and men fighting hand-to-hand among the tall stalks.

The Wheatfield reminds us of the tremendous human cost of the Civil War — and of the courage and determination shown by ordinary soldiers on both sides.