

THE GETTYSBURG SEMESTER



CWES 425 FIELD EXPERIENCES IN CIVIL WAR STUDIES

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What battles have in common is human: the behaviour of men struggling to reconcile their instinct for self-preservation, their sense of honour and the achievement of some aim over which other men are ready to kill them. The study of battle is therefore always a study of fear and usually of courage; always of leadership, usually of obedience; always of compulsion, sometimes of insubordination; always of anxiety, sometimes of elation or catharsis; always of uncertainty and doubt, misinformation and misapprehension, usually also of faith and sometimes of vision; always of violence, sometimes also of cruelty, self-sacrifice and compassion; above all, it is always a study of solidarity and usually also of disintegration – for it is towards the disintegration of human groups that battle is directed.

John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (1976), 297-298

INTRODUCTION:

CWES 425 serves a vital purpose in the overall outline of your Gettysburg Semester by focusing on the great battlefields of the Civil War which lie within easy visiting distance of Gettysburg College. Books, lectures, maps, and videos can convey substantial amounts of information about the battles of the Civil War – often, precisely the information the combatants of 1861-65 wish they had had – but there is no real substitute for a direct and personal encounter with the physical landscape they fought over. For one thing, the passage of almost a century-and-a-half has left many of these battlefields remarkably undisturbed, and it is possible to stand at various places on them and experience a sudden shock of recognition over what before might have only been a memorized fact. (This was my experience at Gettysburg more than thirty years ago, when I stood on the overlook at the old Cyclorama Center and experienced one of those great *Aha!* moments). For another thing, experiencing the physical dimensions of these battlefields will instruct us in what John Shy has called “the culture of war.” The ways battles are fought are constrained by a complicated intersection of terrain, technology, and training, and this changes over time as one or more of those components are revolutionized or revised. Above all, we focus on these battlefields because, in the era of the Civil War, these were the locations where the greatest and most lethal changes in the personal and political future of the nation were concentrated.

The study of battle does not – and perhaps should not – give us comfort. And for that reason a course like this often finds itself spending more than the usual amount of time defending its very existence. History taught by battles distorts perspective, sometimes promotes hero-worship, and frequently conveys the notion that history can be changed by the decision of a single supremely wise (or supremely idiotic) individual, in spite of the wishes, efforts or resources of entire peoples or entire eras. “The subject of history is the life of peoples and of humanity,” Tolstoy protested in *War and Peace*, “The movement of nations is caused not by power...but by the activity of *all* the people who participate in the events.” Battles, in other words, seem to have about the same relation to the rest of history as a traffic accident might have to the shifting of the earth’s tectonic plates. Almost the same thing was said by Karl Marx (and at about the same time as Tolstoy): the real meaning of history of the long-term struggle of great forces, not who won what skirmish at what crossroads.

But if Marx and Tolstoy are right in their distaste for seeing history as an unpredictable series of pitch-and-toss events, managed by all-seeing kings and emperors, they were wrong to ignore some plain facts: that if Blucher had not made it to Waterloo, the entire world of 19th century Europe would have been very different, or that if John Wilkes Booth had not shot Lincoln, the course of American history over the resulting century would have been very different. History is neither a series of isolated dots, nor a long-distance railroad – it is often like an accordion, with long stretches of perfectly predictable length, and moments of incredibly compressed action when all bets really are off. Battles are among those compressed places. The battlefields we will visit are the compressed points of American history.

TEXTS:

1. Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (Yale University Press, 1984)
2. William C. Davis, *Battle at Bull Run: A History of the First Major Campaign of the Civil War* (1977; Louisiana State University Press, 1981)
3. James V. Murfin, *The Gleam of Bayonets: The Battle of Antietam and Robert E. Lee's Maryland Campaign, September 1862* (Louisiana State University Press, September 2004)
4. Daniel E. Sutherland, *Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville: The Dare Mark Campaign* (University of Nebraska Press, 1998)
5. Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (orig. pub. 1968; Simon and Schuster, 1997)
6. Mark Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On: The Virginia Campaign, May-June 1864* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002)
7. William Marvel, *Lee's Last Retreat: The Flight to Appomattox* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002)
8. Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (Knopf, 1977)

CLASS SCHEDULE:

CWES 425 has two basic components. First, during the semester, we will have a weekly in-class session on Thursday afternoons, in which we will concentrate on honing our understanding of the soldiers, weapons, technology, strategy/tactics and battles of the American Civil War. Second, on Fridays (although not all Fridays) we will making day-tours to the major Civil War battlefields within easy travel distance of Gettysburg.

THE FRIDAY BATTLEFIELD TOURS are the heart of the course, so here are the basic ground-rules:

① It is your responsibility to make sure that you have no scheduling conflicts, personal or otherwise, with these trips. More than one un-excused absence from them drops your grade one letter (for each absence).

② We leave from the Appleford at the time specified in the class schedule and return between 5.00 and 7.00 pm, except for the extended trip to Richmond.

③ We will use College transportation and will be provided with College meals (pre-packed) or general foraging opportunities; please see Cathy Bain if you have dietary needs or restrictions. The use or consumption of alcohol or other illegal or prohibited substances is, as it was for Civil War armies on the march, strictly banned. Lodgings for the trip to Richmond trip will be provided by the College and will be overseen by the same rules.

④ These tours will, for the most part, be guided and on foot. You will be expected to cover a lot of ground, and should equip yourselves with the following:

① **GOOD WALKING GEAR** [solid shoes or boots, tall socks], *no* sandals, flip-flops, shorts – you will want to protect yourselves from sunburn, ticks, insect bites, and the like

② **RAIN GEAR** (poncho, raincoat, umbrella) – these tours go forward irrespective of meteorological conditions

③SMALL NOTEBOOK and ‘haversack’ for on-the-spot note-taking, map-book, and other handouts

THE THURSDAY IN-CLASS SESSIONS will have three aspects:

The first of these aspects comprises your reading assignments. The reading expectations for this course are significant, and involve the very best in the campaign literature of the soldiers and battles of the Civil War. Since distance limits the field-trip portion of this course to the battlefields of the Virginia/Maryland/Pennsylvania region (the so-called “Eastern theater”), our readings will necessarily concentrate on the East as well.

The second concerns the keeping a journal-notebook for the course (this is distinct from the small notebook you should bring on the trips). Creating this journal-notebook, which you will turn in on December 11th, will have two elements.

First, for every book assigned in the course, you will create a working outline of approximately three-to-five pages. These reading outlines will be handed in at the end of the in-class session devoted to the discussion of that book. When these are returned to you, insert them into your journal-notebook.

Second, interleave with your week-by-week outlines a single-spaced page of observations, notes, and impressions you gather on the field-trips (you can take these down in long-hand on the spot and then convert them into whatever word-processing format you adopt for your outlines; save these observations on your computer, though). The object is to try to see the ground as the soldiers saw it, and with that in view, it will be helpful if you get into the habit of posing questions like these to our field guides: *Was this good ground on which to fight? For which side? How did terrain affect the battle? What would have provided the most difficulty in overseeing or participating in combat on this site? How did either side best employ the Nine Principles?* Every field observation MUST include the Nine Principles.

The final requirement is intended to give some added point to the first two: during the first weeks of class, select a unit which fought in the Army of the Potomac or the Army of Northern Virginia (see the “approved” list at the conclusion). Bring a 3x5 card on EACH battlefield visit with a brief record of what your unit did on the each battlefield so that, with each visit, we can hear from each of you about what happened to “your” unit. Create a bibliography of sources on this unit (starting with the published sources in Dornbusch) and prepare for the end of the semester a 5000-word summary of your unit’s history. It is *imperative* that you consult *each* source listed in Dornbusch for your unit.

GRADING:

Participation in class and on field	20%
Journal	30%
Short paper on unit of your adoption (5000 words max)	50%

<i>Schedule</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>READING for Thursdays</i>	<i>Friday</i>
1-September 3/4	COURSE INTRODUCTION – THE CIVIL WAR LEXICON		FREE DAY
2-September 10/11	THE AMERICAN WAY OF BATTLE	Griffith, <i>Battle Tactics of the Civil War</i> , pp. 15-27, 53-163, 189-192	Harper's Ferry /7 am
3-September 17/18	FREE DAY		Introduction to Musselman Library/Special Collections
4-September 24/25	BULL RUN	Davis, <i>Battle at Bull Run</i> , pp. 1-89, 132-242	Manassas/7.30 am
5- October 1/2	FREE DAY		FREE DAY
6- October 8/9	ANTIETAM	Murfin, <i>The Gleam of Bayonets</i> , chapters 2, 4, 7-11	Antietam/7 am
7- October 15/16	FREDERICKSBURG & CHANCELLORSVILLE	Sutherland, <i>Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville: The Dare Mark Campaign</i> , pp. 5-194	7 am Fredericksburg - am Chancellorsville -pm
8- October 22/23	GETTYSBURG/FIRST DAY	Coddington, <i>The Gettysburg Campaign</i> , pp. 3-25, 134-152, 209-322	Gettysburg - The First Day/9 am
9- October 29/30	GETTYSBURG/SECOND DAY	Coddington, <i>The Gettysburg Campaign</i> , pp. 323-464	Gettysburg- The Second Day/9 am
10- November 6/7	GETTYSBURG/THIRD DAY	Coddington, <i>The Gettysburg Campaign</i> , pp. 465-574 – DOCUMENTS: "Someone Had Blundered"	Gettysburg: The Boro & Pickett's Charge/8 am
11-November 12	WILDERNESS, SPOTSYLVANIA & PETERSBURG	Mark Grimsley, <i>And Keep Moving On</i> , pp. 1-160, 196-239	RICHMOND TRIP NOV 13-15/7 AM
12-November 19	APPOMATTOX & THE END	Marvel, <i>Lee's Last Retreat</i> , pp. 3-199	FREE DAY
	<i>Evening:</i> FORTENBAUGH LECTURE – MICHAEL BURLINGAME		
November 24-30	THANKSGIVING BREAK		

12-December 3/4	THE SOLDIERS IN PEACE	Connelly, <i>The Marble Man</i> , pp. 11-61, 83-98, 102-122, 130-219 – DEBATE DOCUMENTS: “Robert E. Lee: Hero or Rebel?”	Washington/7.30 am
13- December 11/12	final student presentations on their units and submission of unit papers – notebooks are due in for review by 3.00 pm on December 11 th		Mustering-out: Group Portrait @ & Final Party @ Cashtown Inn

THE APPROVED LIST:

8 th Louisiana	19 th Massachusetts
24 th Michigan	1 st Minnesota
13 th Mississippi	5 th New Hampshire
5 th New York	84 th New York (14 th Brooklyn)
143 rd Pennsylvania	16 th Maine
2 nd North Carolina	26 th North Carolina
69 th Pennsylvania	83 rd Pennsylvania
116 th Pennsylvania	2 nd South Carolina
19 th Virginia	33 rd Virginia
6 th Wisconsin	140 th New York
11 th Pennsylvania	8 th Illinois Cavalry
14 th Connecticut	17 th Connecticut
26 th Wisconsin	8 th Ohio
4 th Texas	

HONOR CODE:

The Gettysburg College Honor Code specifies that the student has neither given nor received unauthorized aid and that he or she has witnessed no such violation. This is understood to include incidents of plagiarism in written work; consequently, it is assumed that all written work turned in for this course is the product of your own labor, that materials it cites from other sources are competently identified as such. The Honor Code, with your signature, must appear on each piece of written work submitted for this class.

