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Gettysburg: The Last Invasion

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Gettysburg: The Last Invasion

Description
From the acclaimed Civil War historian, a brilliant new history—the most intimate and richly readable account we have had—of the climactic three-day battle of Gettysburg (July 1–3, 1863), which draws the reader into the heat, smoke, and grime of Gettysburg alongside the ordinary soldier, and depicts the combination of personalities and circumstances that produced the greatest battle of the Civil War, and one of the greatest in human history.

Of the half-dozen full-length histories of the battle of Gettysburg written over the last century, none dives down so closely to the experience of the individual soldier, or looks so closely at the sway of politics over military decisions, or places the battle so firmly in the context of nineteenth-century military practice. Allen C. Guelzo shows us the face, the sights, and the sounds of nineteenth-century combat: the lay of the land, the fences and the stone walls, the gunpowder clouds that hampered movement and vision; the armies that caroused, foraged, kidnapped, sang, and were so filthy they could be smelled before they could be seen; the head-swimming difficulties of marshaling massive numbers of poorly trained soldiers, plus thousands of animals and wagons, with no better means of communication than those of Caesar and Alexander.

What emerges is an untold story, from the trapped and terrified civilians in Gettysburg's cellars to the insolent attitude of artillerymen, from the taste of gunpowder cartridges torn with the teeth to the sounds of marching columns, their tin cups clanking like an anvil chorus. Guelzo depicts the battle with unprecedented clarity, evoking a world where disoriented soldiers and officers wheel nearly blindly through woods and fields toward their clash, even as poetry and hymns spring to their minds with ease in the midst of carnage. Rebel soldiers look to march on Philadelphia and even New York, while the Union struggles to repel what will be the final invasion of the North. One hundred and fifty years later, the cornerstone battle of the Civil War comes vividly to life as a national epic, inspiring both horror and admiration. [*From the Publisher*]

Keywords
Gettysburg, Civil War, civilian account, Battle of Gettysburg, Confederate army, military history, Guelzo

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Comments
Attached is the prologue of Dr. Allen C. Guelzo's book, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion.*

Click here to see the trailer video for Dr. Allen C. Guelzo's book, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion.*

This book is available at The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College: https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/books/4

Dr. Allen C. Guelzo's *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* has received many awards of excellence including the 2014 Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize and the 2014 inaugural Guggenheim-Lehrman Prize in Military History.

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Prologue

ANYONE WHO TOOK THE TROUBLE on one of the few fair days in late June of the year 1863 to climb the winding forest trail to the old Indian lookout on South Mountain would have enjoyed a sweet reward for his trouble. Looking to the east and north, across central Maryland and south-central Pennsylvania, a watcher at the lookout stood high above a plain, full of pleats and tucks, rolling effortlessly eastward to the Susquehanna River. Only a last chain of hills in the blue distance hid the vista that led southeast, down to Washington, or northeast, to Harrisburg. Laid across this expanse were spinneys of forest—white and red oak, black walnut, sycamore, chestnut, hickory, alder, elm—whose tree crowns would have shimmered in the humid, golden sunlight. Between the fingers of forest lay green and gold patches of grassy farmland, irregularly dotted with small white barns and houses.

If the watcher shifted and looked to the west, the slopes of South Mountain fell away into the lengthening shadows of the Cumberland Valley, before pitching sharply upward again to the ranges of the Tuscarora and Blue mountain and the vast, pine-covered spines of the Appalachians, now turning cobalt in the late afternoon haze.

South Mountain is the first outlier of the Appalachians, and it runs on an axis that tilts northeast from the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia (another outlier chain of the Appalachians) to the west bank of the Susquehanna near Harrisburg. On the western side of South Mountain, the fertile Shenandoah and Cumberland valleys could take a traveler without too much difficulty from Lexington, Virginia, down to the Potomac and across into the Cumberland Valley and to Carlisle or Harrisburg—some 220 miles. But on South

Mountain's eastern face, the ground drops sharply to the rich green farmlands of the plain. This plain itself subsides into a series of low-lying ridges that parallel South Mountain itself as though they were undulations from the mountain's upthrust, until one by one they gradually expend their height and their force sixty miles away at the Susquehanna. The roadways which cut across the plain conformed themselves to the undulations, and ran mostly north to south. Only two major east–west roads bored their way horizontally through South Mountain, one stretching from Philadelphia, through Lancaster and York, to the Cashtown Gap, and the other reaching up from Washington, across Maryland to Turner's and Fox's gaps, and thence to Harpers Ferry.

Those upfolded north–south ridges were really the jammed-together lips of great cracks in an enormous underlying sill of granitelike rock. In places, the jamming had been so violent that ungainly masses of stone, gray and coarse-grained, pushed up through the soils, sometimes forming cone-shaped hills that punctuated the ridgelines. But the soils themselves were soft, thick loam, and in 1863 a farming family could support itself on as little as 150 acres. A long time before, the heirs of William Penn, the original feudal proprietor of Pennsylvania, struggled to prevent the dissipation of this rich, wrinkled plain into a sprawl of small farms, and even tried to set aside a 43,500-acre tract as a manor. But as so often happened to the Penn family's plans for Pennsylvania, the German Lutherans and Scots-Irish Presbyterians who overleaped the Susquehanna simply dismissed the proprietors' restrictions. The Penns had neither sufficient interest nor sufficient power to curb the demand for cutting up their "manor" into disposable farmland, and by the 1760s the broad plain between the Susquehanna and South Mountain had passed into the hands of the farmers and speculators. In 1797, the new Pennsylvania state government dissolved all title to the "manor" in favor of those who had squatted on it.[1]

One of these farmers' sons, James Gettys, turned speculator himself. Sizing up the growth of the region and the prospects for trade between the mountains and the Susquehanna, Gettys shrewdly bought 116 acres from his father at the point where the principal north–south road to Harrisburg crossed the east–west road heading toward South Mountain and the Cashtown Gap. There were already two taverns there, doing a roaring business, and it seemed to James Gettys that a good deal more could be made out of this intersection. He laid out 210 lots for a town, built around a central square (or "diamond"), and without any excess of modesty named it for himself.[2]

From the vantage point of the watcher on South Mountain, Gettysburg lay at the north edge of the horizon, although a good brass naval telescope could bring it pretty easily into view. But on that late June afternoon, the watcher's attention would be captured, not by James Gettys' distant town, or by the newly cut mounds of grass and hay, or by the fields of full-grown wheat

and the knee-high cornstalks, spread out like yellow aprons on the plain below. Instead, if the watcher looked to the west in the oncoming twilight, the darkening shadows over the Cumberland Valley quickly became pinpricked with a carpet of fire lights. Or, if the watcher looked east, what caught the eye was an interminably long snake of traffic—white canvas-topped wagons, horses, men on foot, ambulances, more and more men on foot with the sun glinting sharply off the rifle barrels perched on their shoulders, big-wheeled cannon, flags (some huge and square, some small and swallow-tailed, the Stars and Stripes, state flags, headquarters flags)—all stopping and starting, and stopping again, and then sluggishly moving again, and all of it headed north, toward Gettysburg. The watcher was beholding something never seen before from this spot, and never seen again—two great armies, bound for the greatest and most violent collision the North American continent had ever seen.