

# THE MILITARY RECORD OF GENERAL JOHN F. REYNOLDS

Any record that General John F. Reynolds made would have to be military. He put on his cadet grey in 1837 and stayed in the army until he fell at Gettysburg twenty-six years later. Grant got to be president of the United States. McClellan tried, then settled for a governorship in New Jersey. Hancock and Burnside got into politics. Among Confederate West Pointers Lee and his son Custis became college presidents. Longstreet and the Union General Rosecrans went into diplomatic service, and Oliver O. Howard into writing and lecturing. William T. Sherman, who refused to serve if elected, made an exciting career out of being simply a "personality."

For Reynolds there was only soldiering. No wife, no family, no home except for the round of army posts and camps. When he died, his brothers and sisters were surprised to find he even had a girl. From 1820 to 1837 Lancaster had been home to Reynolds. Then it was gone. In 1856 he wrote one of his saddest letters to a sister in Philadelphia: "I am sorry Sam [his oldest brother] cannot get up a gathering at Christmas and if no one is to be at L [Lancaster] I do not think it worth my while to come."<sup>1</sup> The big house on King Street, the only one he really ever knew, had long been sold, and the newer place on North Duke would soon go too. The army would have to serve as "home" from now on.

A year before Reynolds entered West Point 117 officers had resigned. And they kept on leaving in discouraging numbers right up to the Civil War. Young officers like 'Cump' Sherman, Albert Sidney Johnston, and

Jefferson Davis gave up trying to make peacetime careers in the army. Reynolds often got restless about the slow promotion too, but lack of family ties and needs made it easier for him to stay in. And staying in helped. At least there would be no break in his seniority.

Still, a military reputation is more than seniority alone. A man could die a captain after forty years if merely hanging on was a virtue. To get ahead, an ambitious officer had to distinguish himself. At West Point Reynolds did well enough, graduating in the middle of his class. He also managed to escape the rash of demerits that kept Sherman only a jump ahead of trouble. But other than showing competence, especially in drawing and artillery, Reynolds set no fires.

Of course nothing helps the career officer like a war — that is, if he stays alive. The Mexican War broke just in time to keep Reynolds interested. He went in under Braxton Bragg, who commanded a battery of light artillery — four 6-pounders, mounted. This was a good break for Reynolds. Bragg was already hated for his bad temper and mad worship of minutia. For him spit and polish was understatement. But any officer who could survive his tantrums and his petty discipline would learn how to handle this promising military arm. Light horse artillery was new to the American army. So if Bragg's battery got off to a good start, Reynolds was sure to be discovered.

As things turned out, it was a painfully slow start. Brigadier General Zachary Taylor led the first army into Mexico — Reynolds with it. In May of 1846 Taylor fought and won two small battles that fanned the home papers into frantic praise. It began the presidential boom for Old Zach. And the light artillery did wonders. All except Bragg's. Both Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma were fought without any help from Captain Bragg or Lieutenant Reynolds. Instead they spent five days holed up in a makeshift fort that took a heavy bombardment but made only one hero. And Major Jacob Brown, the fort's commander, died in achieving that. Two killed, fourteen wounded. Meanwhile Bragg's battery had lost four horses without firing an effective shot across the Rio Grande at Matamoros.

The men in Fort Brown failed to win any brevets. These honors went to men who had stood out in the two battles Reynolds missed.

General Taylor fought his next battle at Monterey, some two hundred miles south (by road) of his first successes. This time Reynolds did win a brevet, though it was mostly an "A" for effort. For all of Bragg's nagging and the endless drill, the 6-pounders were largely wasted in streets too narrow for maneuver and walled by houses too thick to harm. Taylor won his battle, but once again Reynolds found little chance to improve his record.

What Reynolds wanted was the opportunity to work those guns in the open. Not that he ached to kill Mexicans. He had visited their wounded in the hospital at Matamoros, and felt only pity for them. Like other Americans Reynolds saved his contempt for Mexican leadership—mostly generals, who exploited both their soldiery and their country. But Reynolds was a



Major General John Fulton Reynolds

professional, and professionals improved themselves by practising their skills. So he wanted to work those guns.

At last, in the battle of Buena Vista, Reynolds' luck was good. Taylor had moved southwest from Monterey in the fall of 1846. He occupied Saltillo, a city controlling the road down through desert country to Mexico City. Up that same road, in February of '47, came Santa Anna with 20,000 troops. They were the best Mexico had, especially the cavalry. To stop them Taylor had under 5,000, all but 500 of them volunteers, mostly untested. By Washington's birthday this little army had taken position at a narrow defile in the mountains six miles below Saltillo. And on the 23rd Reynolds got his chance.

The Mexican Cavalry outflanked Taylor and got up between him and Saltillo. Reynolds had two guns all to himself, and in several miles of maneuvering made good use of them. He not only helped handsomely in driving off the cavalry, but got back to Taylor's center in time to join in breaking Santa Anna's final all-out push. Every gun the Americans had won fame at Buena Vista. Taylor was enthusiastic about the work of his artillery.<sup>2</sup> His second in command, General Ellis Wool, wrote that "without our artillery we could not have maintained our position a single hour." Wool had special praise for Reynolds too: "Reynolds played an important part in checking and dispersing the enemy in the rear to our left. They retired before him whenever he approached them."<sup>3</sup>

There was other praise for John Reynolds and another brevet — this one truly earned. But Buena Vista ended his fighting in the Mexican War. The action now switched south to the new army brought together under General Winfield Scott. More battles fought without Reynolds. In fact, of the dozen major engagements in the war the young lieutenant had managed to get in exactly two. His two brevets were equalled by many other officers: Grant, Thomas, McClellan, Beauregard, Jackson, John Sedgwick, D. H. Hill, William J. Hardee, and John Pope. Bragg and Lee earned three brevets, Joe Hooker four.<sup>4</sup> Brevets seemed to have an important relation to worth because all of these officers held responsible commands in the greater conflict to come.

The Mexican War over, Reynolds headed for Lancaster at the end of 1848. He had won promotion to captain in actual rank, and was breveted major. Without the war he might have gone on for years longer at a lieutenant's grade. Now, by remaining in service, Reynolds would hold on to his seniority. When the big war came, rank was going to help.

More important, peacetime years in the army made for patient schooling. The dull, day-by-day routine in camps, barracks, on marches, maneuvers and drill gave instruction a chance to take hold. Reynolds got all of it, and he got it from everywhere: Maine, Louisiana, Utah, Washington, Kansas, Virginia, New York. He made two tough treks across the country. He fought Indians in Oregon and hated Mormons in Salt Lake City. He served as judge advocate on courts martial and even did a turn as quartermaster.

What did Reynolds learn? By 1860 he knew how to care for both men and animals under all conditions — from what *not* to feed raw recruits on a march to cures for saddle sores. He judged how much men could be taught, and how to teach it. He had the time — such slow-second time — to study the effects of rewards and punishments. The knowledge was vital in making better soldiers. After all, good soldiers won battles, and battles made military reputations. How else could an officer hope to rise?

News of Fort Sumter's guns reached Reynolds at West Point. The Civil War had begun, and it caught him teaching student soldiers. He was restless in his assignment as soon as he knew. But as commandant of cadets his post was important. It took a good man to get there. When a friend had been appointed years earlier, Reynolds called it the highest honor for a captain that the army could offer.<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, for Reynolds it meant a promotion to major. Commandants at the academy were selected by rigid standards: 1) distinguished service in the field, 2) character, 3) the ability to get along with men at all military levels, 4) physical presence. Cadets would respect a man who looked like the soldier they hoped to become.

John Reynolds fulfilled the requirements, including the all-essential fourth one. All six feet of him showed the ideal officer — straight, square-soldiered, good-featured. His eyes spoke authority; they would draw respectful "yes sirs" from the cadets. Reynolds also was one of the best horsemen in the service. Looking good on a horse was a must in proper military bearing.

Other than meeting these ideals, all Reynolds had to do as commandant was teach artillery, cavalry, and infantry tactics; riding, outpost duty, strategy, army organization and administration (he did have assistants). He led all corps formations, parades, and reviews. If this left him with time on his hands, he was the chief disciplinary officer at the Point. He was, in fact, its second highest officer. Obviously then, the war department did not pick its commandants from slips dumped in a hat.

But with a war beginning Reynolds represented a much too-valued property to be kept at the academy. By September of 1861 he found himself a brigadier general of volunteers, 1st Brigade Pennsylvania Reserves. Two generals had competed for his talents, but old General Wool, who remembered the young artilleryman of Buena Vista, lost out to McClellan. So the Pennsylvania Reserves, along with Reynolds, went into the newly organized Army of the Potomac.

The first battle of Bull Run had been lost before Reynolds got into the war. Missing it was hardly a handicap, though, judging from newspaper reaction to Union leadership. What worried Reynolds more was that he missed too much later action. In the fall of '61 the Pennsylvania Reserves got into a small but over-praised tussle with Jeb Stuart's cavalry at Dranesville, Virginia. Reynolds' brigade was called up too late to take part. Shortly afterwards he was ordered away from the area where only hours later the battle of Ball's Bluff took place. Then in the spring of

1862 McClellan began moving the army south to take Richmond. But not Reynolds. His corps was held back to guard railroads and protect Washington. Reynolds was having his usual luck.

As the summer wore along, the Army of the Potomac inched up the Yorktown Peninsula, making heroes like Winfield Scott Hancock and Joe Hooker. Stonewall Jackson was fashioning heroes over in the Shenandoah Valley — mostly Confederate heroes. Meanwhile the best Reynolds could manage in the way of soldiering was to serve for two weeks as military governor of Fredericksburg. He slapped an eight o'clock curfew on the city, cut off most of the liquor and smuggling, laid a hand on his own soldiers, the sutlers and traders as he did on the citizens.

This impartiality was something new in enemy occupation, and it so impressed the leading members of Fredericksburg that they made their attitude known more than a month later. When they learned that Reynolds was in Libby Prison, they petitioned for his release: “. . . Gen. Reynolds exhibited in a marked and efficient manner a desire and a determination to conduct his military command here so as to conserve and protect . . . the personal rights . . . of the citizens . . .”<sup>6</sup> This appeal is probably unique in the history of warfare.”

At last Stonewall Jackson marched his heroes out of the Shenandoah. At last the frantic McClellan got his 1st Corps — or most of it — back to help storm Richmond. And at last Brigadier General John F. Reynolds got into a battle. It was fought near Mechanicsville, five or so miles north of Richmond and across the Chickahominy River. It began the famous “Seven Days” that ended with McClellan’s retreat down the James Peninsula.

But the first battle was a victory, and the chief credit went to Reynolds. He placed the troops and guns in position. As senior brigadier he commanded the two brigades in line (General Meade’s brigade was held in reserve). Lee hit this line with the divisions of A. P. Hill, D. H. Hill, and Longstreet. These were rising names in Confederate ranks. Lee himself was on the field, and even his chief, President Jefferson Davis. Three divisions to one, yet their afternoon’s work on June 26 cost them 1,400 casualties against Reynolds’ tight defense. Losses for the Pennsylvania Reserves fell under 200.

A good beginning for Reynolds — really good. But the next day was different. At Gaines’ Mill Lee could add Jackson to his attack, and he beat back the whole of the Union corps north of the river. Reynolds got trapped at dark while trying to set up an artillery post. He was captured next morning. He would miss the rest of the fighting in the “Seven Days.” Frustration again.

By now Reynolds’ luck could only improve, and it did. General George McCall, who commanded the Pennsylvania Reserves, had been captured too. The month or so in prison went hard for the old general, so when he was exchanged in August, along with Reynolds, the War Department decided his health and age made him unfit for field command. That left the post open for the senior brigadier. After Mechanicsville,

there was no doubt about who would lead the division next.

For less than a year of war and only two battles, one of them a defeat, Reynolds was doing very well. He began in September of 1861 with a brigade; now he had a division. It was time to put his men to work again. And work they got. In a day and a half Reynolds pushed them 70 miles from near Fredericksburg to Warrenton, Virginia. They staggered into camp, but their general knew their limits and they made the best march of the fall campaigns.

Reynolds' Pennsylvania Reserves were now attached to General John Pope's new Army of Virginia. Washington thought victorious leaders from the west might be the answer to reverses in the east. But at Second Bull Run, Pope failed too. Three days of fighting pushed his army, along with troops taken from McClellan, back to the Washington defenses. Only a desperate last stand saved Pope from destruction. Henry House Hill guarded the approaches to Stone Bridge over Bull Run. Late on August 30, Reynolds got two of his brigades into position on the hill, with men from other scattered units. Like a good professional, Reynolds was scornful of sword-brandishing gallops along the lines — usually accompanied by chesty oratory. But for once he played the role, and it helped. The Pennsylvania Reserves and their supports leaped screaming down the hill to drive off Longstreet in the gathering dusk. Pope's army could now retire across Stone Bridge in some kind of order.

"Sykes with his disciplined brigades [they were regulars, not volunteers] and Reynolds, with his gallant Pennsylvania Reserves, seized the commanding ground in rear, and, like a rock, withstood the advance of the victorious army and saved the union from rout."<sup>7</sup> An army court said this in 1879, but Reynolds knew at the time how much his "glory treatment" had counted. He also needed those two hours. They topped two days of fruitless maneuvers, mixed orders, lack of coordination — and too many determined Confederates.

General Lee, encouraged by his success against Pope, now moved up along the Potomac into Maryland. He would invade the North. This threat alerted Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin of Pennsylvania. He was an easy man to alert. He was the staunchest of the state governors in supporting the war, and had created the Pennsylvania Reserves almost at the start. When Washington asked for them after First Bull Run, Curtin patriotically released them for national service. In return he demanded help when his state was in peril. At most, he wanted troops from McClellan, who had reorganized all the forces about the capital after Pope's defeat. The least Curtin would settle for was an able commander for the militia he had just called up to defend Pennsylvania.

More specifically Curtin wanted Reynolds. But Reynolds was in Hooker's corps now, and Hooker opposed the move: ". . . A scared Governor," he wrote McClellan, "ought not to be permitted to destroy the usefulness of an entire division." Hooker added that he had no other officer who could handle Reynolds' tough veterans. McClellan agreed that Reynolds could not be spared.<sup>8</sup>

Curtin got his man just the same. Lincoln and the administration owed the Pennsylvania Governor all it could offer. Meanwhile the subject of this argument was not consulted. The order of September 13 lifting Reynolds from his division to join Curtin came as a shock. Dreams of more battles and a major generalship would have to wait. Reynolds left for Harrisburg at once, and Meade stepped gladly into his place. One day later he led Reynolds' division at South Mountain on a drive against D. H. Hill. The Reserves performed brilliantly.

Three days later still, the great battle of Antietam was fought at Sharpsburg, Maryland. Again Meade took the division in. In fact, after Hooker was wounded, Meade ended the day in temporary corps command. For their work Reynolds' division and its acting commander gathered strong praise. Reynolds himself had to hear this news, first from a desk in Harrisburg, then from one in Chambersburg. By the time he reached the Maryland border with his reluctant militia, he had missed two more battles. It was getting to be an old Reynolds custom. Naturally he was relieved that Lee had been turned back. A career was one thing, with battles needed to shape it, but like any good officer Reynolds put first things first. He cared most for what he was fighting for — the Union.

Reynolds also was relieved to discharge his militia and get back to the army. High praise from his Governor did not kill his distaste for citizen soldiers who refused to cross a state boundary, or even to defend their own. But what about his status in the reorganization made necessary by Antietam's losses?

General George Gordon Meade still had temporary command of the 1st Corps. He also had two solid performances behind him — leading Reynolds' division. What he did *not* have was more important, and that was rank. Meade had graduated from West Point in 1835, six years ahead of Reynolds. A year later he became one of those 117 officers to leave the service. In the six years he was out Reynolds passed him. This in itself was enough to give the 1st Corps to Reynolds until Hooker should return. And if McClellan needed additional reasons for replacing Meade, Reynolds' own record would supply it.

As corps commander Reynolds went to work quickly. First, comfort for his men — over 5,000 pairs of shoes alone. Next, discipline: "It is resented that some of your men have crossed the river [Potomac] and have been killing sheep. . . . You will take such measures as to prevent this at once." Again, protection — this on a picket line: "How far out is it? Push it out, push it out farther! Push it out until you feel something."<sup>9</sup> No Brady photographs showing aides and orderlies hanging around a general's tent were taken at Reynolds' headquarters. Once one of his orderlies quit after three days — worn out, both himself and his horses. Yet two volunteer officers, one of whom hated West Point, had only praise for their general. Reynolds took care of his men. Marches were models of order — timing perfectly planned. Halts for meals meant exactly that: "We never left an unused fire," an officer said. Bivouacs with wood and water were supplied in advance, with every brigade knowing precisely where to file



off into camp. Reynolds' peacetime years were paying off.

On December 13, 1862, Reynolds fought his next battle under a new commander. Ambrose Burnside planned to cross the Rappahannock from the northeast bank and strike Lee in his trenches behind and below Fredericksburg. Reynolds' 1st Corps anchored the left flank four miles south of the city. Opposing him Stonewall Jackson had 47 well-placed guns, the advantage of a wooded ridge, and he looked down on a half-mile of flat ground reaching to the river. Burnside wanted Jackson pushed up behind Fredericksburg where the main Union attack would knock Lee out of his position.

Add another hazard for Reynolds. Burnside had put a wing commander over the three corps down on the left. He was William B. Franklin. This cautious general read Burnside's orders to mean that not more than a division should attack Jackson — at least until they saw how things fared. The choice went to Reynolds, and he sent in his old Pennsylvania Reserves, Meade commanding. They tore the only gap made in the entire Confederate line that day. But 5,000 men were not enough. Meade was livid when they got out: "My God, General Reynolds, did they think my division could whip Lee's whole army?"<sup>10</sup> His casualties totaled 40 percent.

By "they," Meade meant Burnside, or Franklin, or both. Franklin felt his orders did not permit supporting the attack. Reynolds, on his own initiative, got his other two divisions engaged, but not in time to help Meade. What bothered them all, especially Burnside, was the river in their rear. A maxim of warfare discourages attacking under these conditions. A greater obstacle for Reynolds was the wing command. He was forced to conform to restrictions imposed by a middle man between himself and the top. Reynolds found the role too confining, and it seemed to take something away from his usual fighting edge.

In this battle only his artillery gave Reynolds anything to be pleased about. He placed the pieces himself with an old gunner's eye. Jackson gave their "warm and well-directed fire" as his reason for not counter-attacking. He said more: "The artillery of the enemy was so judiciously posted as to make an advance across the plain very hazardous."<sup>11</sup>

Now another shake-up in the Army of the Potomac. Burnside out, Hooker in, along with other changes down the line. John Reynolds, sporting two new major general's stars, still held his corps. In just thirteen months he had moved from brigade to division and finally to corps command. Meade was not far behind. His commission as major general came after his friend's, but he also had a corps under Hooker — the 5th. Both officers would have to be reckoned with in future army command.

Hooker had a better plan than Burnside's for turning Lee out of those trenches behind Fredericksburg. It would look like another attack from across the Rappahannock, with 40,000 troops making an impressive demonstration along the Confederate front. Meanwhile the larger part of Hooker's army would cross the river above and to the west of the city. From there it would sweep down into the rear of Lee's defenses, clamp him in

a wise and knock him out. Hooker's strategy for his Chancellorsville campaign has been much admired — on paper.

And where did Reynolds fit in these ambitious plans? Down on the left again, a carbon copy of his last battle — even to Stonewall Jackson. To make it complete, once more a general stood between Reynolds and the army's head. "Uncle John" Sedgwick was a good fighter, once committed. He was less cautious than Franklin, but with orders from Hooker not to let the demonstration get out of hand, Sedgwick held off. Another maxim of war says that when an army makes a feint, it has to look convincing. Sedgwick's slow motion was not persuading Lee, who had already begun looking to the rear. And well for him that he did. Hooker had got across the river above and had begun his advance. But that was all he did. As soon as he felt resistance he lost his nerve and started shooting messages off to Sedgwick and Reynolds. Can you do more down there? Answer: Not much until you have some success where you are. After all, that was the grand plan — the big assault to come from above.

When Hooker's main attack stalled, it ended the farce below on his left. So after three days — from April 29 to May 2 — Reynolds was pulled out and marched up to Chancellorsville, ten miles west of Fredericksburg. Lee had switched to the offensive. Hooker had got him out of his trenches all right, though hardly according to plan. By May 3rd Hooker's 11th Corps had been routed, and Reynolds and Meade were formed as a reserve to protect the river crossing. There they both stayed — 37,000 troops and at least 60 guns held out of the stiff fighting that followed. Both pleaded to go in, but Hooker said no. On the 6th his beaten army recrossed the Rappahannock. Almost literally, Reynolds had missed another battle.

On June 2 the 1st Corps commander sailed up the Potomac to Washington. President Lincoln was looking for a general to replace Hooker. On the 13th Meade wrote his wife that Reynolds had come back and had said he went up to Washington because he learned he was being considered for the army command. Reynolds told Lincoln he would not accept it.<sup>12</sup> Fifty years later, in 1913, Reynolds' youngest sister put in writing the family's knowledge of what happened. She had been in Baltimore visiting another sister, when on June 2, 1863, brother John arrived from Washington. He told them Lincoln had offered him the command of the Army of the Potomac, but he had refused it because the administration could not promise him a free hand.<sup>13</sup> Though coming far after the event, Eleanor's testimony is consistent with her brother's attitude towards army operations. From the start of the war he had complained constantly about what he called interference. ". . . If the army is to be managed from Washington, I am afraid there will be nothing but failures," is only one way he put it. For Reynolds it violated a basic military principle.

The two letters, Meade's and Eleanor Reynolds', are the closest evidence so far found to show the offer was made. But the absence of official comment seems less surprising when it is recalled that no written order or notice of any kind accompanied McClellan's reappointment before

Antietam. Sometime after the war, Winfield Scott Hancock wrote that Reynolds could have had the command, both by reason of merit as well as of rank, had he wanted it.<sup>14</sup> The assumption is certainly reasonable.

Reasonable, yes — except that it seems to contradict the whole nature of the man. His history was one of ambition — the ambition to achieve major command. Did ambition come here into conflict with principle? No. This conflict was more apparent than real, because for Reynolds' ambition was valid only in terms of principle. Command without freedom and responsibility did not meet his terms.

Twenty-six days later, on June 28, Meade was appointed to replace Hooker. Meade was not asked if he would accept; he was appointed. He was eager enough to have the command, but it came at a bad time. With Lee already in Pennsylvania, Harrisburg and Philadelphia were frantic, Baltimore and Washington little less so. In fact, Washington was desperate enough on June 28 to offer — on paper anyhow — the freedom perhaps withheld from Reynolds on the 2nd.

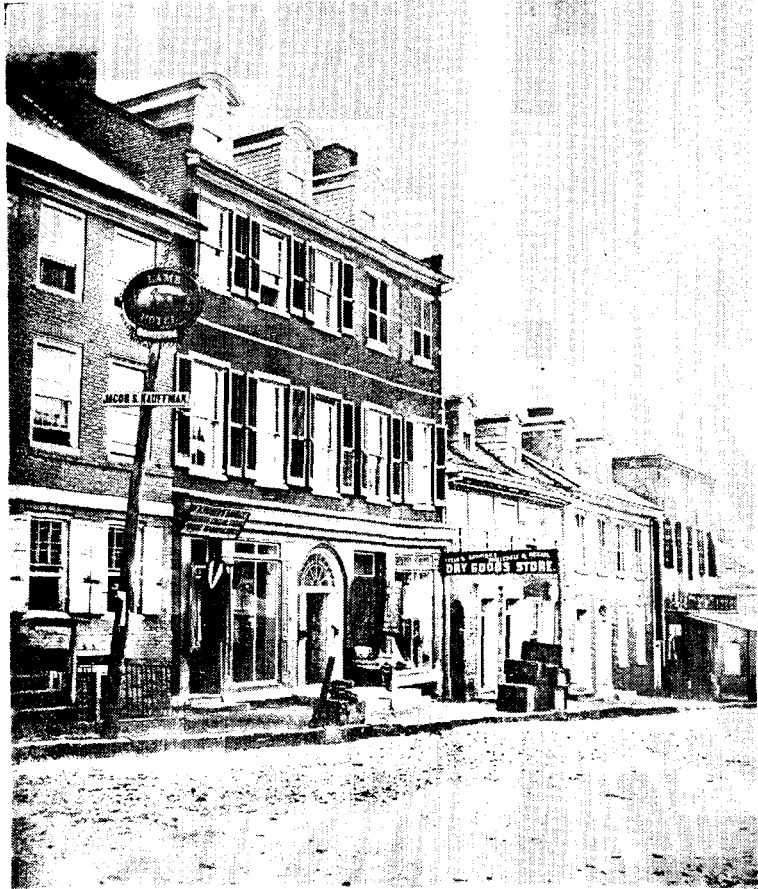
Meade was desperate too. He had seven army corps in Maryland, no two in the same place. The Confederate General Richard Ewell had laid a levy on York, had occupied Carlisle, and was threatening Harrisburg. Longstreet and A. P. Hill were concentrating in the mountains about fifty miles to the west. While the North clamored for Meade to rush into Pennsylvania, his cavalry was broken down from scouting Lee's move up through the valleys. Also his infantry was far from fresh. The chase after Lee had begun late, and the hot Virginia sun took its toll.

In this crisis Meade turned to his old friend. On leaving Frederick, Maryland, he gave Reynolds a wing command. It included the 1st, 3rd, 11th Corps and John Buford's two cavalry brigades. Reynolds now led almost half of the army's 100,000 men, and he led them toward the Pennsylvania border. By June 30, Buford was in the town of Gettysburg. Reynolds halted his 1st Corps (now Doubleday's) six miles to the south. By midnight Buford told him where Lee's army was. Next morning it would probably take advantage of the good roads converging on Gettysburg.

The new wing commander had no positive orders from his chief. For once he was largely on his own. Lancaster lay scarcely more than sixty miles to the east. Pennsylvania was homeland, and the enemy was on its soil.

But July 1 opened with familiar words from Meade: "The general believes he has relieved Harrisburg and Philadelphia, and now desires to look to his own army, and assume position for offensive or defensive, as occasion requires, or rest to his troops."<sup>15</sup> It sounded like Hooker. Give a whole army to even the bravest of corps commanders and they froze with caution. "Give rest to the troops" hell! Why march them all the way up here — and Lee in Pennsylvania.

Reynolds had got this order about four in the morning. In less than six hours he would be dead. In the meantime he more than "assumed position for offensive," which was one of Meade's alternatives. Reynolds made



The Birthplace of John Fulton Reynolds as it appeared in 1868. It is located at 42-44 West King Street, Lancaster. General Reynolds' brother, Rear Admiral William Reynolds, also was born in this house.

sure that the army would fight a battle — and at Gettysburg. And Reynolds lost his life because he would not let it fail at the outset. He hurried his 1st Corps onto the field a half-mile west of the town and made sure it held on until other troops came up. To make sure, he placed the men himself, regiment by regiment, brigade by brigade, until a thin line covered more than a half-mile north to south. Another maxim of war — single lines are vulnerable, especially if they are thin. Reynolds knew this, so he stayed out there, and when the best men he had came up — the Iron Brigade — he took them in at the fringe of McPherson's wood. Reynolds

was making sure. In a few moments a Confederate shot him, but not until *he had made sure*. The 1st Corps did hold, though barely; and once Meade knew the battle was on, he willingly pressed the rest of the army to Gettysburg. Next morning it settled into the defenses that broke Lee's invasion by the end of July 3.

It took Reynolds twenty-two years to find a battle that tested him completely. In the two and a half hours he lived at Gettysburg he satisfied the standards of a Clausewitz: 1) moral courage, 2) physical courage, 3) strategical grasp, 4) tactical skill, 5) leadership.

Reynolds met the moral responsibility of committing the army to fight. That he met the test of physical courage needs no reminder.

Strategically it made sense to check Lee's deepest penetration of the North before it caused greater panic. Reynolds knew Washington well. Give Lee a little more time and Meade would be wanted nearer and nearer the national capital. But only now was the Army of the Potomac beginning to concentrate. Meade had commanded it exactly three days. Reynolds knew his general pretty well too. Meade's last order sounded ambiguous; it grew out of irresolution. By one act Reynolds could solve both problems. Inform the general that his army was engaged in a battle. Then not only would Meade's mind be made up for him, but it would bring the army together on the double. That was how the strategy worked out.

Tactically Reynolds made every possible use of a poor position, both in his posting of troops and of the guns. In the morning hours of that July 1, Lee lost over a thousand men in captured alone. Of Reynolds' one corps on the field at the time — his old 1st, he hoarded just enough reserve. He had covered the only two roads by which Lee could advance, but his thin line might need support. Before noon it did, and Reynolds had the help to shore it where it began to give. Finally the regiments he led into McPherson's wood rounded up the Confederate Archer's entire brigade. There was no doubt that Reynolds could inspire troops.

History tends to refight wars in terms of army commanders. In the Civil War Grant, Sherman, Thomas, Sheridan; or Lee, Jackson, Longstreet, the two Johnstons, Beauregard, and Bragg are best known. But of officers who remained on corps level, only Hancock has more fame than Reynolds in the North. Even so, in many accounts of Gettysburg itself, Reynolds is not mentioned. It may be that in the last two terrible years of the war his name somewhat dimmed out. Hancock was in at the end, and there were newer names like Warren and Humphreys.

Reynolds gave history a slim hold on him in another way too. From the start of the war through Gettysburg the Army of the Potomac fought between sixteen and eighteen battles, depending on whose list is used.<sup>16</sup> Of these, Reynolds got into only six; and they include his slight service at Chancellorsville, as well as his brief effort at the end. So in a quantitative sense at least, Reynolds left a meager record.

But Generals meant a lot more to their armies than they do to history. Hooker called Reynolds his ablest officer,<sup>17</sup> even though he wasted his

corps commander's talents when they were most needed. Then shortly after the battle of Gettysburg General G. K. Warren told a congressional committee that Reynolds, Hancock, and Meade, in that order, had been the army's best corps commanders. "They were considered as fighting men by the army," he said. "They were men who handled their corps well and who stood well with their commands."<sup>18</sup> The Meade Warren referred to here was the Meade of the 5th Corps, not the commanding general who lagged in pursuit of Lee after Gettysburg.

Reynolds would have liked this praise from another professional. It stressed virtues in command that Reynolds highly prized. That his own corps swore by him also mattered. The 1st Corps was shocked when Meade instead of Reynolds replaced Hooker, but as a regimental historian wrote: "And yet all the while we felt that we wanted him with us and as our special leader rather than have him gain the higher office, for which he was so pre-eminently qualified."<sup>19</sup>

Good words came from older friends too. Reynolds' 1st Brigade of the Pennsylvania Reserves had brought a beautiful sword up to Gettysburg, but they got there one day too late. Afterwards they made the presentation to one of his sisters:

"... It would have been a pleasant task, could we have been able to present it to the brave and noble general... A strict disciplinarian [they had not forgotten that], attention to the wants of his men [nor that], and a brave and fearless commander, combined, united our hearts in willing action to his commands."<sup>20</sup>

What impresses here is that Reynolds had not led these men for nearly a year, and longer as their brigadier. How quickly soldiers can forget. But not these soldiers, respecting this man.

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## NOTES

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edward J. Nichols was born in Chicago Heights, Illinois, in 1900. He was reared in the industrial area just south of Chicago which provided the stimulus and background for the two novels he wrote: *Danger! Keep Out!* (1943) and *Hunky Johnny* (1945), both published by Houghton-Mifflin Co., Boston, Mass.

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