

Message on the 162d Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg

July 3, 2025

Today our Nation solemnly commemorates the 162nd anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, the single deadliest battle of the Civil War and a defining milestone in America's epic struggle to preserve our Union and secure the sacred blessings of freedom and democracy.

In the spring of 1863, the Civil War had been raging for over 2 years, and the future of the United States hung in the balance. Emboldened by a string of recent Confederate victories, General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia launched an invasion of the North with a set of clear goals: push the fighting from war-torn Virginia past the Mason-Dixon line, defeat the Union troops on their own soil, and force President Abraham Lincoln into peace negotiations.

With the very fate of the Republic at stake, the Union forces remained steadfast in their resolve to defend the freedom of their fellow countrymen as their last full measure of devotion. The Union Army of the Potomac—led first by General Joseph Hooker and then by General George Meade—marched north to pursue the Confederate forces. Divisions of the two forces met near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on July 1, 1863.

What began as an unplanned encounter quickly erupted into an epochal struggle with the entire war and the very fate of our Nation at stake. As Union defensive lines, known as the famed "fishhook," came under attack by Confederate forces from three directions, brother met brother amid fierce clashes in places whose names have been indelibly marked in the chapters of American history: Little Round Top, Devil's Den, and the Peach Orchard, to name but a few. With the failure of Pickett's Charge on Cemetery Ridge on July 3, the battle was won, the high-water mark of the Confederacy had been reached, and the course of the remaining years of the Civil War was set. The Confederacy would never recover from their loss at Gettysburg, paving the way to the ultimate surrender of Lee's Army at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865, and the end of the Confederacy itself.

From July 1–3, 1863, of the estimated 51,000 casualties on both sides, 7,058 souls were lost—3,155 Union and 3,903 Confederate were, making the Battle of Gettysburg the bloodiest battle to ever take place on American soil. Just months later, in November of 1863, President Lincoln would stand on these hallowed grounds and immortalize these heroic sacrifices in his historic Gettysburg Address, proclaiming that "we here highly resolve 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."

These words continue to inspire citizens all across our land. In the darkest days of our Nation's history, thousands of courageous men left behind their homes and families for the noble causes of duty, honor, and country. On the anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, we pay tribute to the patriots who valiantly shed their blood to cast out slavery and preserve our glorious Union. Their unwavering courage, selfless sacrifice, and unfailing devotion to our founding principles define the eternal triumph of the American spirit.

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