

Southern New Hampshire University

Dan Sickles: Disregarded Hero of The Battle of Gettysburg

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Abstract

Dan Sickles has been regarded by many historians as a political general who was a buffoon and led his troops into harm's way at Gettysburg for personal glory. This paper examines Sickles' early personal history, why that history has led historians to examine Sickles in a critical fashion with a historical lens, and why Sickles has been disregarded as the true hero of Gettysburg.

Sickles was a lover of women causing him to perhaps have an affair with his mother-in-law, visit prostitutes, introduce one prostitute to the Queen of England, and ultimately to murder his wife's lover in a rage that allowed him to be acquitted on an insanity defense. Sickles entered the Civil War looking to redeem his reputation and develop a military hero role for himself. Gettysburg would allow him the opportunity for that role, but events and his own future behaviors would prevent historians to view him in the role of hero.

General Daniel Sickles has largely been criticized for his positioning of his troops on Day Two of the Battle of Gettysburg. However careful review of his personal history, his military experience prior to Gettysburg and his actions during the battle are all consistent with a general who correctly interpreted the situation and moved to prevent a Union defeat at Gettysburg. This paper will examine his early development as a politician, the murder of his wife's lover and entry into the service in the attempt to recover his reputation. The paper will review the effects of prior military actions he was involved in including the Peninsular Campaign, and Chancellorsville that influenced his actions at Gettysburg. Finally, the paper will examine his actions at Gettysburg, the effect on the Confederate attack, and prove the conclusion that General Sickles correctly positioned his troops and prevented a Union defeat.

Dedication

To my daughter Taylor: Your love of learning, and passion for creativity are a driving force in my life.

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Introduction

The American Civil War is described in various terms which all consider the event to be a sentinel event in American history to date. The Civil War unlike any other war that the United States has fought in not only placed countrymen in conflict against each other by definition, it led to the beginning of freedom for all African-Americans in the United States.

The conflict began in 1861 and ended in 1865 mainly consisting of armies comprised of men from the northern states or areas where slavery was not permitted fighting against men from southern states or areas where slavery was part of the economic base. The conflict involved all of the United States, a few territories, and for a time threatened to involve England and France in particular as foreign intervention. The war was fought on over 10,000 battlefields and was estimated to have taken over 1,000,000 lives, many through disease and exposure brought on by army camp life.

Most wars have some form of political basis both in the causes of the particular war, and also in those who would profit in some way in the war. Some profit in the manufacture of arms and supplies. Some profit from direct military involvement. Many become heroes in battle and use that heroic history to propel them further in financial or political as their desires direct them. Not unusual in the American Civil War many generals on both sides of the combat used political means to obtain prominent leadership positions, in the hope that such leadership positions would allow them to become known for their honor on the battlefields of the war.

However unique to any civil war, and especially to the American Civil War due to the length and deadly battles being led by the commanders, the American Civil War presented the

opportunity for more civilians to become commanders by appointments by political means. General Daniel Sickles was one such political general, and as this paper will examine in the end made a brilliant command decision which has been overlooked by historians because of his behaviors outside of the battlefield both before and after the Civil War.

Some were gentlemen of wealth that presented the government with the opportunity to gain fighting troops without cost to the government. Nathan Bedford Forrest is one example, using his fortune to amass a cavalry unit at his own expense. Some political appointments came from the initial belief the war would be a short affair and individuals hoping to gain status applied for positions quickly and were granted as political favors by individual states.

Many commanders however came from political appointments because of their political standing within their individual state. One must remember in the case of the American Civil War the sides were essentially equal in terms of military trained commanders. Both sides had commanders that had been trained at West Point, many had fought together in the Mexican War, but at the onset of the Civil War both sides had very few commanders with what would be called military training, and both sides required more commanding generals. Unlike military units of today, many units of the Civil War were based on a state level first and fought in battle as a unit. Those units were often commanded by a General appointed by the Governor of the individual state.

Thus, both sides sought gentlemen to command the growing numbers of troops each side was amassing. Daniel E. Sickles was one of these politically appointed generals. His rise to command the Third Corps on July 2 1863 at Gettysburg is a story of corruption, adultery, murder and political appointments. However, Sickles is far more than all those descriptions, as this

paper will show, he was also brilliant in many ways, and in some ways his behavior is typical of many of the men who commanded men in either army.

The Civil War had gone as well as could be asked for the Southern States. They had brilliant generals and by 1863, none was considered more brilliant than General Robert E. Lee. Lee had created some almost impossible victories for the south particularly in Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville. However, Lee recognized that Confederate defeat always loomed large as his supplies and conscripts were always tested in comparison to the Union. Lee had grown to expect anything from his men. He therefore presented to Jefferson Davis in the spring of 1863 a plan with the hopes to generate several victories for the Confederacy. First to invade the north to relieve the south of the wages of war. To provide the Confederacy in the north and in doing so to create a peace movement in the Northern population, and to bring France, England, or both into the war in support of the Confederacy, and finally to draw troops under the command of U.S. Grant from the siege of Vicksburg to the north.

Lee will fail at all three. In fact, the Battle of Gettysburg fought on Northern soil will result in a defeat for Lee. It will leave France and England refusing to enter the war on either side, and Grant will capture Vicksburg the day following the end of Gettysburg. The battle of Gettysburg is referred to by many historians as a turning point in the American Civil War, sometimes called the High-Water Mark of the Confederacy, since the Confederacy never again invaded the north.

At the time of this battle the war was not going well for the Union. They had just suffered a huge set back at the Battle of Chancellorsville and there was not only growing Union sympathy to enter peace talks, there was consideration of intervention on the side of the

Confederacy by foreign nations. Due to the Union victory at Gettysburg the Union cause was given a boost in public support and the threat of foreign intervention dissipated.

The research topic considered here is the effect the positioning of the troops of the Third Corps had on the Confederate attack on July 2 and the effect that positioning had on the tactics of the Confederate Generals in planning for Day 3 including Pickett's Charge, and the ultimate defeat of the Confederate Army at Gettysburg.

Chief among the discussions is the particular behavior of General Daniel E. Sickles on the second day of the battle, July 2, 1863. Sickles was assigned to the left flank of the Union line and by most accounts tasked with the defense of two hills at the left flank of the Union army, Big and Little Round Tops respectively. Little Round Top had a commanding view and position of the entire Union line, and if lost to the Confederates the Union army would have been hard pressed to maintain their position on the battlefield. Sickles for reasons that are discussed here deployed his troops in a salient forward of the position causing two immediate issues, that left Little Round Top undefended against the advancing troops of Confederate General Longstreet and placed Sickles Third Corps open to attack on both flanks.

The importance of General Daniel Sickles to this battle and the future of the United States of American cannot be overstated. Bruce Catton in *America Goes to War: The Civil War and Its Meaning in American Culture*, states, "Men do not control modern war; it controls them.

It destroys the old bases on which society stood; and because it does, it compels men to go on and find the material for new bases, whether they want to do so or not.”¹

In positioning his troops of the Third Corps along the Emmitsburg Pike on July 2, 1863, General Daniel Sickles prevented the routing and retreat of the Union Army and as Catton points out the sweeping events of that battle lead ultimately to a collective reconstructed United States. A United States that as Shelby Foote points out went from being referred to the United States are to the United States is in grammar.² Slavery was abolished for all time, the rights long held to be reserved as states’ rights were slowly abandoned to a federal government stronger after the war than before. For all time the men who fought in the many battles of the war knew they had done something special and heroic regardless of which side they fought for, they created a new nation.

¹ Bruce Catton. *America Goes to War: The Civil War and Its Meaning in American Culture*. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1992), 234.

² Shelby Foote. *The Civil War: A PBS Documentary by Ken Burns. Episode 5*. (PBS: Boston, 1992).

Chapter 1: Daniel Sickles A Political Character and Murderer

To fully understand Daniel Sickles and why historically he has in general been regarded as a political general who was a buffoon, mispositioning his troops at Gettysburg in hope of fame and glory at the expense of his men, when in fact Sickles had every reason to correctly position his men where he did, one must start at the beginning of Sickles development. The importance of Sickles' early life and exports leads to two major aspects of this study. First why did Sickles want to command in the Union army beyond simple patriotic terms, and second why after the war did historians take such a dim view of sickles and basically write him off as a buffoon.

The historiography of Daniels Sickles' early life is reviewed in depth by Thomas Keneally in *American Scoundrel: The Life of the Notorious Civil War General Dan Sickles*. Keneally however leaves the question of what Sickles early development meant to his command that faithful day at Gettysburg. Sickles was born to George and Susan Sickles October 20, 1819 in New York City. But even his birthdate begins the discussion of Sickles and his questionable life. James A. Hessler in *Sickles at Gettysburg: The Controversial Civil War General Who Committed Murder, Abandoned Little Round Top, and Declared Himself the Hero of Gettysburg*, states "His birth date is of some debate, a fact often unnoticed by Gettysburg scholars. The consensus among biographers is that he was born on October 20, 1819, although varying references (some provided by Sickles himself) range from 1819 to 1825. For example, his 1914 New York Times obituary states he lived 'to almost 91', implying an 1823 birthdate. His

military record claims he was thirty-nine in June 1861, suggesting an 1821 birth year,”¹ Hessler suggests this may be a result of the possibility that “his parents may not have married until 1820, and that he post-dated his 1819 birth in order to downplay the stigma of being born prior to the wedding.”²

The shifting birthdate is the beginning of disingenuous life of Dan Sickles’. His father George made some wealth from New York real estate around 1838 his parents placed him in the household of a New York University professor Lorenzo L. DaPonte. Again, a relatively common and certainly uneventful decision for college bound sons of families of wealth. Sickles managed to turn this episode of his life into further gist for the historian’s historiography. Da Ponte’s household also contained Professor DaPonte’s father’s “adopted daughter Maria and her husband, Antonio Bagioli, a successful composer and music teacher... Given that Dan and Maria were the same age, there were rumors (as repeated in Frank Haskell’s memoir) that Dan and his future mother-in-law had a sexual affair. More important to Dan’s future was the fact that the Bagiolis had a child living under the same roof, an infant daughter named Teresa who was born around 1836.”³ Of course Sickles would come to marry Teresa in 1852, and eventually Teresa would take a lover named Philip Barton Key. However, before all this transpired Sickles had already begun to run afoul of the law.

Sickles had trained in the law and passed the New York Bar and began representing clients. “As early as 1837, he was indicted for obtaining money under false pretenses.”⁴ Hessler

¹ James A. Hessler. *Sickles at Gettysburg: The Controversial Civil War General Who Committed Murder. Abandoned Little Round Top and Declared Himself the Hero of Gettysburg.* (New York, Savas Beatie, 2015), 1.

² Hessler, *Sickles*, 1.

³ Hessler, *Sickles*, 3.

⁴ Hessler, *Sickles*, 4.

further points out “Sickles passed the bar in 1843. During these years, he continued to gain a reputation for questionable practices. He was nearly prosecuted for appropriating funds from another man, was accused of pocketing money that had been raised for a political pamphlet and charged with improperly retaining a mortgage that he had pledged as collateral on a loan.”⁵

As such this early behavior of Sickles while certainly questionable might have been ignored or glossed over by historians but as will be shown in this paper this dubious beginning, coupled with what will follow prior to the Civil War has caused historians to seriously question Sickles and any decisions he made on the battlefield, and created a historical difficulty to support such a character as a true hero in a different moral arena from what we have today.

Sickles also loved women and within the Da Ponte household Sickles would come to visit prostitutes. Keneally points out that Sickles, “was enthusiastic for prostitutes, and well aware that he lived in a racy port of limitless erotic opportunity.”⁶ One particular prostitute held Dan Sickles erotic interest longer than the rest. Fanny White described by Keneally as, “young, lively, someone in whose company Dan could be unreservedly himself,” captured Sickles’ attention.⁷ Sickles eventually as a politician would take Fanny White with him to England and allow the affair to be public and published in the press. Another incident in 1847 found Fanny White’s servant on trial for stealing from one of Ms. White’s clients. “The Charge was that the servant had entered the room where White and her ‘man’ were sleeping and had stolen the money from the man’s pocket.”⁸ In police court the servant protested, “you know, Miss White,

⁵ Hessler, *Sickles*, 4.

⁶ Thomas Keneally. *American Scoundrel: The Life of the Notorious Civil War General Dan Sickles*. (New York: Random House, 2003), 10.

⁷ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 10.

⁸ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 10.

that all I took was a bundle of keys from Daniel Sickles's pocket while both of you were asleep, and you know I took nothing else."⁹ The story that Daniel Sickles was Fanny White's man caused courtroom laughter and led to the affair being published in the New York papers.

However, Sickles did not allow his desire for a prostitute, or the possibility that he diverted funds of clients to affect his getting into New York politics. Once elected Dan Sickles invited Fanny White to come to Albany and introduced her to other assemblymen. Keneally relates that, "Even for Albany this was too much. . . . he was censured by the speaker of the assembly as a result of motion passed by the straitlaced Whig members."¹⁰ Daniel Sickles was creating press that future events would require him to downplay if he was to become a hero.

Sickles went into New York politics, which helped excuse some of his behaviors as the politics of the day had a certain expectation of corruption and political graft. More important during this early of the 1850's Sickles was married to Teresa and as his political career grew he began to travel at times for political purposes. Sickles would under President Pierce travel to London with James Buchanan as First Secretary to the American legation in London. Sickles apparently leaving a pregnant Teresa behind had invited Fanny White to come to London. "The Grievous possibility is that Fanny traveled on the same ship that Teresa waved off from the port of New York."¹¹ At some point Sickles introduced Fanny White to the Queen of England, and eventually this made it back into the New York papers as a serious breach of diplomatic propriety. By the spring of 1854 Fanny White had disappeared from the London scene and

⁹ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 10.

¹⁰ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 17.

¹¹ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 35.

Teresa had joined her husband in London. Dan Sickles and his wife returned to New York and Dan returned to politics and being a lawyer.

At this point in Dan Sickles' life essentially at worst he was a crooked politician and maybe at best a person with loose morals and a moral character of some question when it came to controlling the funds of others. Sickles was still capable of being elected to Congress and of advising the President of the United States. There is little doubt that Sickles would have continued in law or politics or both for the rest of his life had his life not taken an abrupt turn thanks to his election to congress and meeting Philip Barton Key.

Eventually in 1856, with the election of James Buchanan as President, Sickles also secured a representative seat in the U.S. Congress from the Third Congressional District of New York.¹² In Washington, Sickles became friends with Philip Barton Key, the son of Francis Scott Key author of the Star-Spangled Banner poem later to become national anthem, while Scott was United States District Attorney for the District of Columbia. Key would escort Teresa Sickles to Washington parties in Dan Sickle's absence. Sometime during this friendship Teresa and Key became lovers. Sickles found out about the affair and on February 27, 1859 Sickles sought his revenge.

Sickles attempted to shoot Key five times with two misfires. Key died of his wounds. Key was unarmed at the time of his death having only a pair of opera glasses he used to see Teresa's communications from her home while they were attempting to meet. Key had thrown those glasses at Sickles, yet Sickles continued to fire. There were numerous witnesses to the murder. Sickles' trial for murder had all the elements popular to this day. Hessler states, "The

¹² Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 58.

murder of Phillip Barton Key, and the accompanying trial of Congressman Dan Sickles, had all the scandalous elements expected to thrill the American reading public: adultery, politics, celebrity, and a handsome corpse.”¹³

Given the morality of the times, sympathy grew for Sickles. Adultery it appears even to the most vocal of Sickles’ political enemies was an excuse to murder. One such enemy was George Templeton Strong who stated Sickles, “has attained the dignity of a homicide... Were he not an unmitigated blackguard and profligate, one could pardon any act of violence committed on such provocation.”¹⁴ Sickles’ defense team provided for the first time in American Jurisprudence the concept of temporary insanity and obtain a not guilty degree for Dan Sickles. Sickles returned to his wife’s side after the trial. The murder and trial left Sickles without a political career and tarnished by his marriage with Teresa, as Key and Teresa had been meeting in a poor neighborhood of Washington and were noticed by the populace which continued to discuss the affair after the trial.

Dan Sickles needed a way to regenerate his fortunes and put the behaviors and rumors of the past behind him. As Lincoln was elected and the country talked of war, Sickles began to see the vehicle that could overcome all his woes. Becoming a war hero might just cover all the sins of the past. Thus, we find Daniel E. Sickles primed on the eve of the American Civil War to seek to recover his public reputation and escape the various reports of mishandling funds, being a corrupt politician and the murderer of his wife’s lover.

¹³ Hessler, *Sickles*, 12.

¹⁴ George Templeton Strong. *The United States vs, Daniel E. Sickles*. (New York Times April 16, 1859.) Retrieved April 10, 2018 from <http://blog.nyhistory.org/daniel-e-sickles-the-rotten-apple-from-the-big-apple/>

Chapter 2: Developing the Civil War General

The spring of 1861 would find Daniel E. Sickles and his wife Teresa unemployed in New York City. Because of the murder trial and his reconciliation with Teresa and the public exposure of her affair with Key, Sickles had not run for re-election in 1860. However, the outbreak of Civil War with the bombardment of Fort Sumter provided Sickles both employment and the chance for redemption. It is important in the historiography of both Sickles and the Civil War to recognize that commanders do not enter war void of personal feelings or behaviors. A commander especially one without the formality of training in a military academy, will bring to the military service individual goals and training.

It is entirely possible that Daniel Sickles would have volunteered to fight in one of the New York Regiments if he was a fine upstanding citizen attorney devoid of controversy. That is not the case of Daniel Sickles, therefore the background and mentality of the man must be considered as much as possible in any examination of his actions at Gettysburg. Perhaps even more important for Sickles, his historiography is affected severely for the first 150 years after the battle because the morality of those years would not support the possibility that a prostitute chasing, degenerate attorney politician who escaped a murder charge, and historians recognized the untenable position.

Daniel Sickles is reported by historians to have performed his duties from his enlistment to July 2, 1863 with military precision and to the standards of a general officer in the United States Army. While he was not formally trained at West Point as many Union generals were, he none the less commanded his troops as ordered and with bravery. From the 1862 Seven Days

campaign through Chancellorsville there are no Army reports of any failure on his part. He was part of the failed battle at Fredericksburg where Union men were commanded to attack a position that the Union commanders realized they should not have attacked, and which will prove an important lesson for Sickles at Gettysburg. There are no reports of any insubordination or failure to follow the commands of his superiors. His performance in fact glows when compared to many other politically appointed generals who had failed miserably in the first two years of the war.

Sickles however was promoted through the ranks like other generals who had no training but showed courage in battle. Neither side in the war had enough commanders with military experience to command the troops. Lincoln himself in encouraging McClellan to attack, when McClellan protested the troops needed more training responded that, "It is true your men are green, but they are green also, you are all green alike."¹ Sickles true to his nature took advantage of his positions and the fact that generals were needed in the military to advance himself through the ranks. James Hessler describes Sickles entry into the military, "Sickles claimed that he had enlisted fully expecting to serve in the ranks, but as he was getting ready to leave for camp, he was convinced by his friends 'that I could better serve the cause by raising a regiment' and 'thus rapidly was I advanced from the ranks to the grade of a regimental commander.'² This comment could be made by other commanders in both armies, however most failed to conduct the required duties and demands of military leadership and failed in command of their units in many ways, logistics, command for example, and would be replaced. Sickles was different. The rigors of law training, the political battles in New York, the effect of essentially becoming a cockled and

¹ Reinhard H. Luthin, *The Real Abraham Lincoln* (Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall 1960), 290.

² Hessler, *Sickles*, 22.

redeeming himself by murdering his wife's suitor and surviving trial had given Sickles the fortitude to lead other men. Sickles paid attention to details, he watched the military campaigns he was involved in and drew from the new-found knowledge.

Sickles military career begins with President Lincoln call for 75,000 men after South Carolina seceded from the union. Sickles petitioned New York Governor Edwin Morgan for permission to raise eight companies of volunteers. Sickles along with a Captain Wiley were able to raise far more men than they thought, Governor Morgan gave his permission to raise a full brigade not just eight companies. Sickles would begin his leadership with the initial rank of Colonel in reward for raising the initial regiment. Since enlistment grew and the governor allowed Sickles to raise a brigade this allowed him to apply for his promotion to general command. Hessler points out that even at this stage Sickles was impatient and "The excitement following the capitulation of Fort Sumter made it relatively easy to gather large numbers of men to a flag. Using speeches and calls to patriotic duty, the pair (Sickles and Wiley) recruited about 3,000 eager enlistees, which Sickles promptly dubbed the 'Excelsior Brigade' after the New York State motto. ('Ever Upward')."³

Now Sickles' political training and genius had the showcase which would allow Sickles to rise to command. Sickles understood how to handle political funds. In fact, according to some Sickles understood how to make those funds look like they were doing everything they could while lining Daniel Sickles' pockets. However, in light of the civilian events surrounding Sickles he had no intention not redeeming his character by cheap political tricks. Russell Beatie in *Army of the Potomac; McClellan's First Campaign*, states "according to Montgomery Meigs

³ Hessler, *Sickles*, 22.

who would serve as the Quartermaster General of the U.S. Army, Sickles' strict economy and untiring vigilance produced a fully armed and equipped a brigade at less cost to the government than any other similar unit. His Excelsior Brigade did not want for criticism and he had achieved recognition as an effective brigade commander,"⁴

Here Sickles demonstrates the main asset of his civilian development. Sickles had learned that public recognition both good and bad attached itself to the use of public funds of which one was in charge. While Sickles in civilian life had been accused of misappropriation of funds he also understood that frugal use of funds would lead to public approval, especially when it involved the welfare of volunteer troops fighting for the Union. No higher cause than the comfort, outfitting and training of the sons of the Union gone off to fight the rebels for the survival of the Union could be found in 1861 and Sickles draped himself in the glory.

This demonstration of Sickles desire to achieve greatness in the war and rebuild his reputation will be important to his entire war career and will come to the forefront at the battle of Gettysburg. Interestingly enough Sickles got some reinforcement that his behavior was in fact correct and rebuilding his reputation in a somewhat backward source. Sickles was a Republican prior to the war. His reputation was so damaged as a result of the murder trial as mentioned before that he was not supported by the party and did not seek reelection to any position. He went into the war with no political position to protect. Yet because of his effective recruitment speeches and his ability to influence men to enlist in the war effort, there were those in the New York Republican party that began to worry about Sickles' Democratic leanings.

⁴ Russel Beatie. *Army of the Potomac: McClellan's First Campaign, March – May 1862*. (Havertown, Savas Beatie, 2007), 28.

As noted Sickles raised a brigade of men from New York to bring to the battlefield. Sickles learned early the need for discipline on a group of volunteers. During the period in 1861 that Sickles was still gathering volunteers, Sickles was asked to take a group of troops to Philadelphia to quash a group of Pennsylvania volunteers who were threatening to desert. Thomas Keneally states, “on his return to New York, he discovered that the discipline of his brigade had vanished in his absence. Strewn across City Hall Park, the men were hungry, dirty, and some drunk and unruly. Sickles marched them to Crosby Street where every man was given a haircut and a shave for ten cents apiece. Sickles then arranged for the brigade to be transported to Long Island where an unused racetrack in Queens County could serve as a campground.”⁵ Sickles had little interest in having his brigade ruin his comeback. Sickles was savvy enough to see other politically appointed generals fail in instilling in their men military bearing and order.

Keneally continues to describe Sickles in this period, “Dan showed a daily enthusiasm for commanding and training his mass of young men, and did not fear being intimately bound to them, he was able to exercise strong command without evoking resentment, and the daily routine of reveille, roll call, morning and afternoon drill, surgeon’s call, guard mounting, evening parade, and retreat was insisted upon.”⁶

Sickles understood and instilled in his men the nature of military training and following commands blindly which would serve him well in battle, and in required of a cohesive fighting unit. While Sickles lacked formal military training both the army field manual and other papers

⁵ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 223.

⁶ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 223.

he studied trained him well. Keneally reports Sickles “was becoming a serious student of military affairs, and in his papers is found pages of memoranda that indicate as such.”⁷

The Third Corps drilled in New York until the First Battle of Bull Run. After that the federal troops mobilized to protect from further Confederate destruction and James Hessler reports that on July 20th 1861, Sickles was ordered to muster into service as many regiments under his command as possible, “armed and ready to put en route to Harpers Ferry.”⁸ Therefore Sickles would have roughly two years to learn military tactics and secure his place in Union history as a great commander and unknown at that time to become at least in his mind the hero who saved Gettysburg from Confederate defeat, or the embarrassment of a Meade retreat.

Hessler reports that after breaking camp the War Department “issued orders designating the Excelsiors as New York Volunteer troops and the five regiments were re-christened the 70th through 74th New York.”⁹ As would be Sickles mindset throughout his life whether public or military Sickles would assume the highest best outcome for himself. Therefore, in this case Sickles assumed that having raised a brigade he would become a General. However, officially he was commissioned a colonel, however Hessler notes, “but in practice he was functioning as the general of the Excelsior Brigade, and the men treated him as such.”¹⁰

As mentioned earlier, Sickles actually raised the brigade with his friend William Wiley. True to form Hessler reports, “When Sickles marched off to war he left his friend William Wiley with the bill for housing, feeding and supplying the men. The bill that came due, in Wiley’s

⁷ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 227.

⁸ Hessler, *Sickles*, 25.

⁹ Hessler, *Sickles*, 25.

¹⁰ Hessler, *Sickles*, 25.

estimate totaled \$283,000. He would later complain bitterly that Sickles had “marched off with three regiments, and paraded them before Lincoln, and said he had done all this out of his own pockets. There were piles of judgments against him in the offices...He left me in the lurch... I left him (Sickles) on account of it; denounced him then and have done so since.”¹¹

So again, we find Sickles in more legal trouble leaving behind a massive bill and more importantly for the purpose of this paper, another contemporary that would reveal Sickles as a deadbeat and crook if anyone would attempt to raise the banner of the Hero Sickles after Gettysburg. Sickles was collecting haters even as he was attempting to rebuild his reputation. This episode along with others in his life revolve around money and seem to indicate that Sickles if not a downright thief, at the minimum had very little respect or concept of a fiduciary duty to others.

Regardless Sickles trained and drilled his troops awaiting the time they would be called into action against the Confederates. Eventually Sickles Corp was called to perform some scouting duties for General McClellan in preparation for his 1862 invasion of the south to capture Richmond. Sickles wanting to prove his worth as a commander took on one such scouting assignment that even his superior officer, Fighting Joe Hooker thought was too dangerous. Russell Beatie writes: “Sickles crossed the Potomac with a thousand men to see if they could learn anything about the rebel movements prior to McClellan’s Peninsula Campaign. ... When he turned west his uncovered flank made him uncertain about continuing; but he decided to accept the risk and go far enough to confirm his belief...”¹² The intelligence obtained was used by McClellan to plan his Peninsular Campaign. It also demonstrated that Daniel

¹¹ Hessler, *Sickles*, 25.

¹² Russel Beatie. *Army of the Potomac: McClellan’s First Campaign, March – May 1862*. Pg. 28

Sickles was willing to take on a tough assignment yet remain aware of the challenges and maintain the safety of his troops.

In the spring of 1862 the Army of the Potomac was reorganized, and Sickles and his Excelsior Brigade were assigned to Hooker's division.¹³ Under Hooker the New York Excelsior Brigade would begin to see true action. The first involvement would occur without Sickles in command however.

Sickles had returned to Washington to lobby for his promotion because he had provided a brigade for the Union cause. Due to the action the brigade saw at Seven Pines, Sickles was awarded his brigadiership. He led his men into combat at Fair Oaks. Sickles had to execute a movement under enemy fire and recalled "Rebel minie balls seemed specifically directed at mounted officers, which of course would include his-self."¹⁴ Sickles by this point had become used to rebel fire and by all accounts always remained calm and was careful in directing his troops into position. It is important to realize that to this point in his military career Sickles is placing his troops as directed by his superior commanding officer in this case Hooker. However, Sickles is by all accounts capable of doing so even under intense fire. James Stevenson, an infantryman in Sickles Excelsior Brigade reports' "Here at Williamsburg, the rebels availed themselves of the advantage of the woods... Immediately on discovering this, General Sickle ordered the second regiment to charge which was complied with in a splendid manner..."¹⁵

Sickles and Hooker would remain together through the spring and early summer of 1862. Hooker and McClellan were both aware of Sickles abilities as a general, and his willingness to

¹³ Hessler, *Sickles*, 27.

¹⁴ Hessler, *Sickles*, 29-30.

¹⁵ James Stevenson. *History of the Excelsior or Sickles' Brigade*, 26.

command under fire. Hooker actually felt Sickles was his outstanding brigade commander and he would promote him to command of Hooker's own division when Hooker was promoted to corps commander. It is important to recognize Sickles had not left his political abilities in Albany or Washington. Sickles was a politician and attorney that people were drawn to and liked by all accounts. This was perhaps his greatest asset and served him well in his love life, his politics and in gaining the confidence of clients, and their forgiveness if he crossed if nothing else a moral boundary. As such it was the same for Sickles with Hooker. Sickles recognized the "Fighting" Joe Hooker possessed the fighting spirit that Lincoln desired, and General McClellan was slowly demonstrating he did not have. Sickles had connections in Washington, and Washington insiders were aware that Lincoln was not happy at all with the slow progress of McClellan and the Union defeats. Sickles could recognize that Lincoln might and eventually would replace McClellan as commander and it would be Joe Hooker he might turn to.

By late summer of 1862 Sickles has returned to New York, Hessler relates, "Sickles spent the late summer of 1862 doing what political generals did best giving recruiting speeches and ginning up support for the war effort."¹⁶ Sickles would not be present at Antietam but would return to his command in time for Fredericksburg.

Fredericksburg for Sickles was not so much a military issue as it was to become an unknown at the time political distrust issue. Up until now Sickles had despite being a politically appointed general held himself in all aspects of his military duties in good stead. At Fredericksburg Sickles was in command of the Second Division in Hooker's Third Corps. As such he was kept in reserve on the Union Left. Historians tend to deal with the Union Right on

¹⁶ Hessler, *Sickles*, 32.

that day and the unsuccessful attacks on Longstreet's men dug in on Marye's Heights. Luckily for Sickles his troops had no part of that action. Three fateful occurrences however fell upon Sickles at Fredericksburg, which will alter his chances of becoming the hero of Gettysburg. First, Burnside had planned the attack of Fredericksburg correctly but was delayed by pontoon bridges not being delivered allowing Longstreet to dig in and fortify Marye's Heights. For commanding wave upon wave of Union brigades to certain death attacking that position Burnside would be relieved of command and Fighting Joe Hooker would take his place. Sickles would become commander of the Third Corps as a result of this. Thus at least at this moment in the war Sickles had correctly positioned himself with the correct General on which his fortunes could be raised up. Second, Sickles and in fact the commanders of both armies were beginning to learn what determined troops with minie balls fitted into rifled barreled weapons from a fortified elevated position could do to attacking troops. West Point trained officers of that era were still using Napoleonic tactics where to take a position you massed your troops and therefore their fire on attack. The rifled weapon with the minie ball was effective at triple the distance and commanders were slow to understand that tactics needed to change. In fact, some commanders never understood the need for this tactical change. Sickles did understand this and as his positioning at Gettysburg will show he did not forget the lesson learned at Fredericksburg. Third, and possibly the most important for Sickles at Gettysburg had nothing to do with him at Fredericksburg.

At Fredericksburg, General Birney, who at Gettysburg would be Sickles First Division Commander would run into General Meade and leave a horrible lasting feud, a feud that by all accounts would still be an open sore at Gettysburg. General Meade at the time of Fredericksburg

was commanding a division in Reynold's First Corp. Meade had actually probed along a wooded height to the far right of Stonewall Jackson's infantry. This area was not well defended by the Confederates because they believed the woods were a natural barrier to attack. Therefore, there was actually a gap between two Confederate brigades, that Meade recognized he could open up and flank both brigades and collapse the Confederate lines. This would have collapsed the Marye's Heights defensive line also. Meade by his accounts sent multiple requests for Birney to come up and help. Hessler recounts, "Birney received one and possible as many as three requests for assistance from Meade. When neither Birney or Gibbon provided direct assistance to his embattled troops, a furious Meade reportedly rode to the rear, found Birney, and verbally castigated him."¹⁷ Birney supported Reynolds troops in fighting off a Confederate counterattack, but Meade would remain angry long beyond the battle. This anger was still present between the men at Gettysburg, Meade confided to his wife that Birney and he would "always have Fredericksburg between us."¹⁸ Even worse for Sickles, Birney was a politically appointed commander. It is reasonable in light of this that in seven months, Meade will be in command of The Army of the Potomac at Gettysburg and distrustful of the entire Third Corps command structure. Again, Daniel Sickles quest to regain his reputation and be a military hero is to be affected by events out of his control. Keneally writes about Meade becoming Commander of the Army of the Potomac, "The new commander of the Army of the Potomac was George Meade, a sober Christian and a West Pointer with a bias against men like Sickles and Butterfield."¹⁹

¹⁷ Hessler, *Sickles*, 30.

¹⁸ Hessler, *Sickles*, 39.

¹⁹ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 275.

As stated before after Fredericksburg Lincoln felt he had to remove Burnside from command and in doing so placed his hopes in Hooker. Hooker in return and thanks to the politically correct positioning by Sickles, placed Daniel E. Sickles in command of the Third Corp of the Army of the Potomac. Sickles and the Third Corp were assigned to battle on May 1 to May 3, 1863 at Chancellorsville. Here Sickles would learn a lesson in military tactics that he would certainly remember sixty days later at Gettysburg. James T. Fritch describes Sickles action on May 2, “To their right, along the Federal line, General Sickles had received intelligence that another, much larger column of rebels was passing through the forest far below the Plank Road. Through the thickening haze, several columns of enemy infantry and artillery were seen moving along a ridge to the south a mile and a half away. Sickles concluded that Lee was in retreat, and he ordered his Third Corps forward, between the Twelfth and Eleventh Corps, and out into the Wilderness to cut the enemy’s train. Slocum ordered Geary to form up his division and move out onto the Plank Road on a reconnaissance in force to discover what the rebels in front of him were up to. Like Sickles, Geary believed he was going forward to cut off an enemy *retreating* toward Gordonsville and away from Chancellorsville. As far as the Boys knew, they were going out simply to clear the woods along the road of enemy skirmishers and sharpshooters.”²⁰ This was not the case as Sickles and his Third Corps would find out, for they had discovered not Stonewall Jackson retreating, but rather his advance on the Union flank through woods thought impassable. For Sickles and his men, the next 24 hours involved close fighting and taught Sickles a valuable lesson to not assume the Confederate army could not flank his Union troops.

²⁰ James T. Fritch. *The Untried Life: The Twenty-Ninth Ohio Volunteer Infantry in the Civil War*. (Athens, Ohio University Press), retrieved May 10, 2018 from: www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1j7x6jh.23

After the battle, considered a Union defeat, although not much ground of any value was captured, Lee presented his ideas for an invasion of the north, in the hopes to relieve pressure on the Southern states during the growing season, and perhaps Vicksburg. Hooker followed the Confederates keeping himself between the Confederate army and Washington as ordered. As President Lincoln learned of the various errors of Hooker at Chancellorsville he sought out a new commander for the Army of the Potomac and eventually came to decide upon General George Meade. Thus, as the eve of the Gettysburg campaign arrived, all the main characters for Daniel Sickles to become a hero were in place. General George Meade in command of the Army of the Potomac, who distrusted political generals. General Sickles who was no longer under the command of his friend General Pope, instead under a general he was not favored by. Generals Lee and Longstreet advancing through northern territory, unfamiliar to them with the advance observations of his cavalry commander J.E.B. Stuart who was out of touch with the main Confederate army conducting a raid around the Union army. June 30, 1863 finds General Sickles occupying the town of Emmittsburg to the east of Gettysburg.

Chapter 3: Gettysburg

The Battle of Gettysburg began on July 1, 1863 initially as a skirmish between pickets of both armies and rapidly grew in a major conflict with each side rushing troops to the battlefield. Sickles stated “I would not have seen Gettysburg had Hooker not sent me a message summoning me from New York, where I was slowly recovering from a contusion received at Chancellorsville”¹ However, Sickles responded to Hooker’s request and arrived to be with his troops on June 28 near Frederick Maryland.² Sickles was in Emmittsburg on the afternoon of July 1. His “orders from the general commanding were to hold Emmittsburg at all hazards.”³ Sickles was aware that General Reynolds had fallen and that “Howard and Doubleday (sent) earnest appeals for support at Gettysburg.”⁴ At this point Sickles recounts his thoughts as, “These orders, of course, were based on the supposition that the enemy’s point of concentration would be at or near Emmittsburg, but no enemy was near. Reconnaissance and scouts for miles around gave no indication of the presence or proximity of a hostile force. The situation of Howard so pressed by superior numbers, was hard to resist.”⁵ Here for the first time we see the recollections of Dan Sickles that betray him to so many historians. For in these same recollections Sickles recounts the circular orders of General Meade for the morning of July 1 specifically stating if the enemy assumes the offensive, “The corps at Emmittsburg (Sickles’)

¹ Major-General Daniel E. Sickles. *Further Recollections of Gettysburg*. North American Review, Pg. 259 Retrieved from jstor.org April 15, 2018.

² Sickles, *Gettysburg*, 259.

³ Sickles, *Gettysburg*, 262.

⁴ Sickles, *Gettysburg*, 262.

⁵ Sickles, *Gettysburg*, 262.

will be withdrawn via Mechanicsville to Middleburg.”⁶ Sickles by his own accounting of the circular orders of General Meade, and in an attempt to bolster Meade’s failures at Gettysburg and his own heroic measures contradicts himself. Even if Meade had issued a specific order to Sickles to hold Emmittsburg at all costs, the truth was Meade and the remainder of the union army did not expect Lee at Emmittsburg and in recounting the events of July 1 Sickles attempts to indicate he was prepared for battle against the entire confederate army, knowing no such army was anywhere near him.

Regardless, Sickles continues to describe his consternation on the afternoon of July 1, “Why stay here in idle security, in formal obedience to orders? What order would Meade give if he were here in person and read Howard’s dispatch? He would say: ‘Yes; march to Gettysburg.’”⁷ Sickles responded to Howard that he would head to Gettysburg at 3:15pm.⁸ Therefore the fate of Dan Sickles for July 2 was foreshadowed by the disobedience of Sickles to his general orders and defended by Sickles as not an act of disobedience, but rather a move needed to save the vastly outnumbered Howard. Sickles arrives at Gettysburg and by his account wrote General Meade “urging the concentration of his forces at Gettysburg, expressing the opinion that ‘it is a good battlefield for us, although weak on the left flank.’ Later in the night I received from General Meade an expression of his approval of my march from Emmittsburg against orders, and also instructions to bring up the two brigades and batteries I had left at Emmittsburg under Graham and De Trobriand.”⁹

⁶ Sickles, *Gettysburg*, 261.

⁷ Sickles, *Gettysburg*, 262.

⁸ Sickles, *Gettysburg*, 262.

⁹ Sickles, *Gettysburg*, 262-263.

Again, interesting in this statement is the fact that the Left Flank of the Union Army at the time of Sickles' 9:30 dispatch was indeed Dan Sickles and his 3rd Corp. At this point Sickles settles in on the Left Flank of the Union position on Cemetery Ridge and calls for the remaining Brigades to join him at Gettysburg.

The morning of July 2, 1863 finds Dan Sickles on the left flank of the Union Army now amassed at Gettysburg in what scholars and historians describe as a fish hook formation with Sickles Corps being the eye of the fish hook. Sickles was assessing his position that morning and recognizes, "the prolongation of the line of Cemetery large, (sic) perhaps the more desirable tactical position for me to occupy, unless overruled by superior considerations, proved upon examination to be an unsatisfactory line because of its marked depression and the swampy character of the ground between Cemetery Ridge and Little Round Top. The most commanding position on the field was Little Round Top and the ridge running from it towards the Emmittsburg road. Moreover, to abandon the Emmittsburg road to the enemy would be unpardonable."¹⁰

No matter the outcome history will ultimately grant to Dan Sickles in his command at Gettysburg his actions on July 2, 1863 are forever the basic source of how historians treat Sickles. Dan Sickles on July 2, 1863 awoke to find his position on the far Union Left Flank. Sickles "had simply gone into bivouac, pretty much in the gloom on the evening (of July 1)" and that "neither the batteries nor the infantry were occupying any special posts selected for defense or offence. That awaited the light and was now to be done."¹¹ Pickets from both armies had of

¹⁰ Sickles, *Gettysburg*, 263.

¹¹ Hessler, *Sickles*, 102.

course been sent out, and the Union pickets had reported back to Sickles activity along the Emmitsburg Road.

However, in the history of the battle perhaps the more important decisions for Dan Sickles were those being made in the enemy headquarters. Lee was still unsure of his plans when morning broke. Hessler recounts, “That morning, Generals Lee, Longstreet, Hill, Hood and Heath consulted near Lee’s headquarters on Seminary Ridge. General Hood remembered Lee as being anxious to attack. ‘The enemy is here, and if we do not whip him, he will whip us.’ But Longstreet remained hesitant, because ‘the enemy was found in position on his formidable heights awaiting us’ and because he was missing his third division, George Pickett’s which was still bringing up the armies’ rear.”¹² General J.E.B. Stuart had taken his cavalry around the Union Army in the week preceding the battle and Lee was without his usual cavalry reports of enemy strength and location. While many effects of that wayward cavalry are recorded in the historiography of the battle, for Sickles the most important is that Lee sent out his staff engineer Captain Samuel Johnson to observe the Union left. Johnson “probably departed with a small party between 4:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m.”¹³ “Johnson claimed that he moved south along Willoughby Run crossed the Emmitsburg Road in the vicinity of the Peach Orchard and ‘got up on the slopes of Round Top, where I had a commanding view.’ On his return route, he claimed to have seen three or four Union troopers riding along the Emmitsburg Road. Lee was still in conference with Longstreet and Hill when Johnson returned to Seminary Ridge. Lee was surprised to hear that Johnson had reached Little Round Top.”¹⁴

¹² Hessler, *Sickles*, 121.

¹³ Hessler, *Sickles*, 122.

¹⁴ Hessler, *Sickles*, 122.

The importance of this one particular reconnaissance has not escaped historians, and as will be shown establishes all the remainder of Dan Sickles' events of that fateful day. Hessler points out correctly that, "Captain Johnson's morning reconnaissance has confounded historians since 1863. How had he bypassed John Buford's cavalry pickets along the Emmitsburg Road and the reached Little Round Top without seeing any sign of Sickles' Third Corp or any other Federal troops?"¹⁵ The scope of that question are beyond both Hessler's treatment of the battle and this paper. What is important is that Johnson did not discover the Union left Flank, and more important it discovered where it was not on the battlefield and "convinced Lee that Meade's line ended short of the Round Tops."¹⁶

Furthermore, Lee was not to be deterred from attack of the Union forces. He had won at Fredericksburg, Lee and Jackson had turned Chancellorsville into major rout of the Federal forces, and as footnoted by McPherson from Douglas Southall Freeman, "Twenty years later Isaac Trimble, one of Lee's division commanders at Gettysburg, wrote from memory an 'almost verbatim' account of a conversation with lee on June 27, four days before the battle began. When the Army of the Potomac came up into Pennsylvania seeking him, Lee told Trimble, 'I shall throw an overwhelming force onto their advance, crush it, follow up the success, drive one corps back on another, and by successive repulses and surprises... create a panic and virtually destroy the army... (Then) the war will be over, and we shall achieve the recognition of our independence."¹⁷

¹⁵ Hessler, *Sickles*, 122.

¹⁶ Hessler, *Sickles*, 123.

¹⁷ James McPherson. *Battle Cry of Freedom*. (New York Oxford Press, 1988), 655.

The importance of Lee's mindset looms large for Dan Sickles. Longstreet is well documented as not being in favor of attacking the Union forces in front of him. He after all was the commander at Fredericksburg that laid out the fields of fire that cut down corps of Union attackers at Marye's Heights. He knew very well what the rifled barreled weapon in the hands of trained troops could do. He knew what canister and solid cannon rounds could do to his men. He saw in the elevated position of the Union forces at Gettysburg the disasters he had created at Fredericksburg for General Lee, now befalling on his men. During the morning meeting of July 2, he tried again to suggest to Lee that flanking the Union forces and making them come to attack the Confederates on battle lines of their choosing was a superior choice. McPherson best sums up the situation, "Longstreet concluded that this line was too strong for an attack to succeed. He urged Lee to turn its south flank and get between the Union army and Washington. This would compel Meade to attack the Army of Northern Virginia in its chosen position. Longstreet liked best the tactical defensive; the model he had in mind was Fredericksburg where Yankee divisions had battered themselves to pieces while the Confederates had suffered minimal casualties."¹⁸

If Longstreet feared a reverse of the fortunes at Fredericksburg, Lee had his mind set on the total defeat of the Union forces in a Cannae like battle. Interestingly, McPherson points out, "Cannae was a battle in 216 B.C in which Hannibal of Carthage defeated and virtually annihilated a Roman army-which by coincidence almost equaled the size of the Union force at Gettysburg- with a double envelopment that crushed both flanks. Cannae became a byword in military history for a total, annihilative tactical victory."¹⁹, and General Lee intended to have his

¹⁸ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 655.

¹⁹ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 656.

Cannae. When Longstreet suggested the flanking movement, Lee responded “The enemy is there, and I am going to attack him there.”²⁰ Longstreet responded, “If he is there, it will be because he is anxious that we should attack him; a good reason, in my judgment for not doing so.”²¹ That exchanged locked Longstreet and Sickles into what would become a fateful battle for both men.

Based on Johnson’s observations he and Longstreet left to take two of A.P. Hill’s three divisions to attack the southern end of Cemetery ridge, as General Lee had ordered. Lee wanted the attack to occur as early as possible. The effect Lee hoped for that Longstreet could roll up the Union left and pull forces from the Union right which would allow Ewell to attack the right and fold up both flanks would require daylight, as night fighting was almost unheard of in the Civil War.

Now Longstreet’s behavior has also been reviewed throughout the last 150 years for what transpired over the next few hours. McPherson writes, “Longstreet’s state of mind as he prepared for this attack is hard to fathom. The only non-Virginian holding high command in the Army of Northern Virginia (and the only prominent Confederate general to join the postwar Republican party), Longstreet became the target of withering criticism from Virginians after the war for insubordination and tardiness at Gettysburg. They held him responsible for losing the battle—and by implication the war. Some of this criticism was self-serving, intended to shield Lee and other Virginians (manly Stuart and Ewell) from blame. But Longstreet did seem to

²⁰ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 656.

²¹ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 657.

move slowly at Gettysburg. Although Lee wanted him to attack as early in the day as possible he did not get his troops into position until 4:00 p.m.”²²

This criticism and delay regardless of the truthful cause came at a terrible cost to the South and allowed Dan Sickles the time to position his troops where his controversy would arise from. However, even more important to Dan Sickles is the fact that Longstreet left General Lee’s side with orders to attack up the Emmitsburg Road which had been observed by Johnson earlier as possible. For any visitor to the Gettysburg National Park a quick look at the topography shows itself in general to slope away from town to a low point that was the Union left flank, Dan Sickles’ area. Where Longstreet was headed was at the base of both Round Tops, an area covered with outcroppings of granite boulders, rising towards Cemetery ridge through a swampy area and eventually farm land with a peach orchard.

Longstreet was heading for the same area that Dan Sickles was looking at and coming to the conclusion that both Longstreet and Lee had come to, that the Peach Orchard offered better ground for fighting. Hessler states, “One of the reasons Sickles had occupied the Peach Orchard was because he considered it a strong position for artillery. Confederate brigades under G. T. Anderson, Kershaw, and later Semmes had to cross the low ground south of the elevated orchard to reach the Wheatfield and Stony Hill.”²³

Hessler, James A. *Sickles at Gettysburg: The Controversial Civil War General Who Committed Murder, Abandoned Little Round Top, and Declared Himself the Hero of Gettysburg* (p. 183).

²² McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 656.

²³ Hessler, *Sickles*, 183.

Casemate Publishers. Kindle Edition. Moreover, Sickles had been caught up in the Chancellorsville battle and in his belief that Jackson was retreating as described earlier. On this day Sickles was not going to be caught off guard again and he was convincing himself, in fact more with each passing moment or report that he was going to be attacked that day. This was going to be Sickles' moment in battle, he would not be embarrassed like Chancellorsville. He would place his troops in position and lead them into battle against the Confederates he was sure now were waiting to attack him in the woods about one mile away.

Sickles was not in the habit of positioning his troops without military help. He was used to Pope helping him. But Pope had days earlier lost command of the Union army to Meade and was not available to assist his friend Dan Sickles. In fact, there is speculation among many historians that Sickles was placed where he was because Meade believed there would not be an attack on the Union left and that was the best place to position non-military trained Sickles that he had not had time to fully size up as a commander in his army in the few days he was in command before this battle.

In fact, Sickles held in his hand what is referred to as Meade's Pipe Creek Circular. A set of general orders that for all the world looked to Sickles as if Meade intended to retreat from this field of battle. Sickles had the evening before pressed Meade to say and fight, indicating only the left flank appeared weak, the left flank that Sickles now held ironically. The Pipe Creek circular was to become another nail in the Dan Sickles' hero coffin. The importance of the Pipe Creek Circular to Dan Sickles future cannot be overlooked. On July 1 with Sickles in Emmitsburg, General Meade had "instructed his engineers, including Chief Engineer Gouverneur K. Warren and Chief of Artillery Henry Hunt, to 'look about and select some

general ground... by which in case the enemy should advance on me across South mountain, I might be able, by rapid movement of concentration, to occupy this position and be prepared to give him battle upon my own terms.’ His engineers discovered just such a location in Maryland along Pipe Creek between Middleburg and Manchester. Meade issued an order from Taneytown to his corps commanders on July 1 (known as the Pipe Creek Circular) outlining a plan to fall back to this line if the army was attacked.”²⁴

The mere existence of that circular would cause Meade a great amount of grief. In the years following the war Sickles and others would use that circular to increase their own fame and to attempt to disgrace Meade. However, for now, the circular presented Sickles on Day Two with the issue of whether he was to establish a line to fight along or be prepared to pull back. Remembering that Sickles was not occasioned during battle to initially position his own troops, he was somewhat confused as to what to do at present the morning of July 2, 1863.

For now, though Sickles was concerned with the positioning of his troops on ground he felt was inferior to the ground forward of his ordered position. Sickles would eventually testify to the Committee on the Conduct of the War on his thoughts that day. Harry W. Pfanz recounts in *Gettysburg-The Second Day*, “‘I took up that line because it enabled me to hold commanding ground.’ Maj. Gen. Daniel E. Sickles told the Committee on the Conduct of the War. Has he not done so and had the enemy been allowed to take the commanding ground ‘as they would have taken it if I had not occupied it in force’, he went on to testify, the Federal left would have been untenable.”²⁵

²⁴ Hessler, *Sickles*, 83.

²⁵ Harry W. Pfanz. *Gettysburg-The Second Day*. Raleigh, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 124.

The first consideration of the ground ordered to be occupied by Sickles was that no desirable battery position existed in that area. In the Civil War gunners with cannons used them much like riflemen of the day. They aimed the piece at the intended target. Later generations of gunners would use tactical cover and lob shells from hidden positions into targets once that technique was developed. But for Sickles the gunners required a relatively level area devoid of trees that cannons could be maneuvered and aimed around in. Supplies had to be brought up by horses dictating further the requirements of the area. In this case Pfanzen recounts, “The Peach orchard area provided good battery positions, as Sickles, Birney, and Captain Randolph readily recognized. This was not so with the left of Sickles’ new line. Only one place there offered the most essential requirement—a field of fire. This was the area above the boulders of Devil’s Den and behind the triangular field.”²⁶

Sickles proceeded through the rest of the morning to position his troops forward of the line of battle described by Meade, and forward of the Union army by more than a half mile in front forming a double salient, along the higher ground near the Peach Orchard and the Emmitsburg Road. Sickles continued to believe because of scout reports that he was going to be attacked at any moment through the afternoon. The movement forward of Sickles’ Third Corp has gone down as one of the great controversies of Gettysburg.

The basic facts are fairly well known: Meade had intended that the Union line extend towards the left to the Round Tops as they presented an elevated advantage from which the Confederates could if they occupied those heights shell the Union left flank on Cemetery ridge. Sickles did not place his men where Meade thought he had. From those facts the argument of

²⁶ Pfanzen, *Gettysburg*, 127.

whether Daniel E. Sickles is the hero of Gettysburg or a politically appointed buffoon general is created by the study of the historical study of that subject.

The first examination of the subject begins with the opposing forces moving against the Union left. Longstreet by all reports is moving his troops to prepare for an attack on the left flank as ordered by Lee. Longstreet has taken along with him Johnson who had earlier in the day scouted out the position of the Union army. Lee intends for Longstreet to attack as early as possible. The issue now becomes that Longstreet realizes he must move his men without being detected. Longstreet had reasons for his delay, "his two divisions had made night marches to reach the vicinity of Gettysburg and were then compelled to countermarch by a circuitous route to reach the attack position because Lee's guide led them initially on a road in sight of an enemy signal post on Little Round Top, a high hill at the south end of the Union line."²⁷ That particular countermarch led to some Union confusion in the commanding ranks. Pfanz states, "at 1:30 P.M. Capt. James S. Hall signaled Butterfield from there (Little Round Top) that he saw a heavy column of infantry, 10,000 strong, moving from the Federal 'extreme left' toward the right. The meaning of this message is vague today and must have been so to Butterfield, for at 2:00 P.M. Hall signaled clarification –the column was passing Dr. Hall's house toward Herr Tavern on the Chambersburg Pike, and a train of ambulances were following it."²⁸ Hall "had no way of knowing it, but he probably saw a portion of Longstreet's corps, perhaps Hood's division, countermarching in the course of its approach march. He had no way of knowing that when it disappeared from his sight, it would change direction and head toward the Union left."²⁹ This information had made its way to General Meade and Meade reported by wire to Washington to

²⁷ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 657.

²⁸ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 142.

²⁹ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 142.

General Halleck at 3:00 P.M.’ “that the enemy was moving on both of his flanks but that it was ‘difficult to tell exactly his movements’.”³⁰ As a further result of all this confusion Meade continued to discount that Lee intended to attack his left.

Pfanz reports, “Without a doubt, General Meade’s mind, initially at least was not on his left, and his vaunted staff served him poorly with respect to the Third Corps’ activities. In later years Captain Meade wrote that people wondered why the general himself had not gone the short distance from his headquarter to the Third Corp front and settled things to his satisfaction. To this good question Captain Meade replied that until 3:00 P.M., presumably the time of the afternoon meeting, General Meade believed the Third Corps was in position.”³¹

Thus at 3:00 P.M. on July 2, 1863 we find General Longstreet finally moving into position to attack the left of the Union army as ordered by General Lee. We find Union commanding General Meade in a state of some confusion on both the activity of the enemy and the location of the Third Corps the extreme left of his army, and we find General Sickles out of position but in a position, he believes is the best for his corps. This 3:00 P.M. meeting did have the effect of General Sickles informing General Meade of his activities and that General Meade agreed to ride out and view the location of the Third Corp himself. As Meade rode out from his headquarters General Warren came along. “As they passed over Cemetery Ridge, Warren pointed south towards the Round tops and said, ‘Here is where the line should be.’ Meade

³⁰ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 142.

³¹ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 141.

replied it was too late to place it there, and Warren, with Meade's permission or direction, left the commanding general's party to ride on to Little Round Top."³²

General Meade found General Sickles in the Peach orchard area. "according to HISTORICUS, Meade asked, 'Are you not too much extended, general? Can you hold this front?' 'Yes' replied Sickles, 'until more troops are brought up; the enemy are attacking in force, and I shall need support.'" Meade then expressed some doubt— 'his mind was still wavering'— about the extent of the ground to be occupied by the Third Corps, and Sickle was said to have observed, "general, I have received no orders. I have made these dispositions to the best of my judgment. Of course, I shall be happy to modify them according to your views."³³

However, again against the defense of Sickles as hero, another disingenuous attempt to foster his own heroic behavior is exposed. HISTORICUS, is believed by most historians to be Sickles himself or at best a friend of Sickles. Edwin B. Coddington in *The Strange Reputation of General Meade: A Lesson in Historiography*, states "'Historicus' wrote two articles which appeared in the New York Herald, March 12 and April 4. In the first one, besides condemning Meade, 'Historicus' questioned the valor of General James Barnes... There is some question about the identity of 'Historicus' Cleves believes him to be a friend of Sickles... But Meade himself was sure the author was none other than Sickles... Samberg agrees that internal evidence indicates that 'General Historicus and General Sickles would cast the same, identical, one-legged shadow.'³⁴

³² Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 142.

³³ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 143.

³⁴ Edwin B. Coddington. *The Strange Reputation of General Meade: A Lesson in Historiography*. (The Historian Vol. 23, No. 2, February, 1961), 169. Retrieved April 15, 2018 from www.jstor.org/stable/24437719.

The role of Historicus in the controversy goes further to the Meade Sickles confusion that will detract ultimately for Historians for the One Hundred and Fifty years following the battle.

“Major Biddle, Meade’s aide, whose perspective was somewhat different, gave an account that was similar in the main but with a significantly different emphasis. In it the commanding general spoke not as one who recognized that the Third Corp commander had taken the best position possible and merited all the support that could be given to him. Instead, he spoke as one who believed the Third Corp commander had made an unwise move, that it was too late to undo what had been done, and that they would have to make the best of the situation.”³⁵

Biddle further reports in response to Sickles’ explanation on why he placed his troops here and not where they were ordered Meade stated, “General Sickles, this is neutral ground, our guns command it as well as the enemy’s. The very reason you cannot hold it applies to them.”³⁶

Meade’s own recollection was, “I rode out to the extreme left, to await the arrival of the Fifth Corps and to post it, when I found that Major general Sickles, commanding the Third Corps, not fully apprehending the instructions in regard to the position to be occupied, had advanced, or rather was in the act of advancing, his corps some half a mile or three-quarters of a mile in front of the line of the Second Corps, on the prolongation of which it was designed his corps should rest.” Having found Major-General Sickles I was explaining to him that he was too far in advance, and discussing with him the propriety of withdrawing, when the enemy opened

³⁵ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 144.

³⁶ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 144.

up on him with several batteries in his front and on his flank, and immediately brought forward columns of infantry and made a most vigorous assault.”³⁷

At this point in the Battle of Gettysburg the fate of two armies lay in the hands of two men, General Daniel E. Sickles and General James Longstreet, the two men were locked in to meeting on the field of battle. Meade had chosen his field to defend and Longstreet had reluctantly accepted his. Scholars have argued throughout the last 150 years based on essentially these two men and their motivations on that day.

This viewpoint is often overlooked in the historiographic survey of this battle, and the effect of Longstreet on Sickles. Perhaps the most important destruction of Sickles as a hero had absolutely nothing to do with Sickles and everything to do with the Confederate army and James Longstreet. For no man can be a hero in battle if the argument is that the hero had no anti-hero to defeat. In all great dramas including war the hero must be opposed by the anti-hero. From the earliest Greek tragedy to today’s cinematic comic book productions, no anti-hero equals no hero. Even in the concept of love and defense of honor there must be an opposite to create the dynamics required for recognition as a hero. If at Gettysburg Dan Sickles had stood idle and defended the left flank of the Union army by mere presence on the field, then today we would not be discussing either him or Longstreet at least in regard to what occurred of the next few hours at Gettysburg. The historiographic history of Longstreet shows that despite him surviving the war, there were many who blamed Longstreet for that defeat at Gettysburg. First as mentioned before he was the only one of General Lees Army of Northern Virginia’s commanding offices to not be a Virginian. This bode ill for him as the war dragged on and

³⁷ Hessler, *Sickles*, 148.

General Lee eventually was considered practically a god at least among his Virginia troops. Secondary to a stunned nation who lost a war, Longstreet represented a relatively easy scapegoat for the press and historians early on. William Garrett Piston in *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant* paints a vivid picture of how Longstreet had been treated after the war. He writes, "Death brought no moratorium on criticism of James Longstreet. This fact is crucial for an understanding of his place in Southern history."³⁸ Piston cites from a volume written in 1966 by Reverent Jones concerning Lee's feelings about Longstreet that Lee, "did not hesitate to say in the intimacy of private friendship that he lost the battle of Gettysburg mainly because of Longstreet's disobedience of orders."³⁹ That statement was never supported by any scholar, but goes to demonstrate that 100 years after the battle, there were still writers willing to cast all the blame of Gettysburg to Longstreet.

Even other southern commanders including Jubal Early would write memoirs condemning Longstreet.⁴⁰ Even the United Daughters of the Confederacy in the 1920s sought to protect Lee and reminded readers, "General Lee's character reached the sublime in taking upon himself the faults and failures of others."⁴¹ Even 1930s textbooks presented Longstreet as the cause of Southern defeat and a 1907 account called *Half-Hours in Southern History* blamed Longstreet's delay on July 2 as the cause of defeat.⁴² Famous Lee biographer Freeman writes the battle was lost on the night of July 1 when, "in the mind of Longstreet, who was at his camp, a

³⁸ William Garrett Piston. *Lee's Tarnished Lieutenant*. (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1987), 171.

³⁹ Piston, *Lee*, 171.

⁴⁰ Piston, *Lee*, 171.

⁴¹ Piston, *Lee*, 172.

⁴² Piston, *Lee*, 172.

few miles away, was eating his heart away in sullen resentment that Lee had rejected his long-cherished plan of a strategic offensive and a tactical defensive.”⁴³

The inability or downright refusal to move quickly and engage the Union army as early as possible on July 2 had lead many discussions away from Sickles and directly into Longstreet and his delay of July 2. That discussion is beyond the scope of this paper but leads directly to the argument that Longstreet ultimately was so criticized and assigned the position of creating the defeat of the Confederate army that Dan Sickles had no role in the matter. Ironically for Sickles it is not the decisive placement of his men when the Union commanders were not sure of their plans, it is that his opponent was at fault for the defeat. Some actually describe Longstreet’s delay as intentional and his attack along the Emmitsburg Road as a lesson to Lee. Interestingly and beyond the scope of this paper, there is a school of thought that Lee may have actually conducted Pickett’s charge to prove the Southern army was capable of taking a position when properly placed and supported.

However, arguments about Longstreet discount Sickles placement and the fact that this placement is what caused Longstreet to attack and be defeated in the Peach Orchard that day. Had Sickles not placed his troops in a forward position, had Sickles remained back away from the road as expected by Meade, then in fact any delay by Longstreet is irrelevant. Yet for years that fact has been ignored and along with it the concept of Sickles as a hero. Historians have argued instead either Longstreet’s delay was the source of the stalled advanced on July 2, 1863, or that Sickles forward position was the source of a great loss of Union men and defeat staved off

⁴³ Piston, *Lee*, 175.

only by the retreat of Sickles men to ultimately the correct line of battle Sickles had been ordered to occupy by Meade earlier on July 2.

For Daniel Sickles his dream of being a war hero and rebuilding his political and personal reputations were being dashed by those seeking to protect Lee from failure in any regards, or by the poor performance if not disobedience of Longstreet. But for Sickles, who could have protected Little Round Top if he had positioned his men correctly, an even crueler fate would await. In fact, the entire battle for the Peach Orchard and the saving of the Union army was to be snatched away from both men, despite the fact that historians viewed that particular tactical battle as important to the Battle and ultimate defeat of the Confederate army. The new trend among historians and others who are educated about the battle is to carry forth the banner of Joshua Chamberlain of the 20th Maine as the hero of Gettysburg. While Oates Alabamians were part of Longstreet's Corp they were too far away from Longstreet for direct command. Oates had managed to climb to Big Round Top and seeing also as Warren for the Union army had that the Little Round Top was essentially open ground he rushed his men towards the summit. At the same moment Warren was posting the 20th Maine to the extreme left of the Union army to defend Little Round Top, commanded by Joshua Chamberlain. Now Chamberlain would after the war and until his death, lecture and visit Gettysburg many times. Chamberlain's account of the battle made him a hero, a hero that had ordered a bayonet charge against the troops of Oates and drove him off Little Round Top, for years that account was considered correct. However, by the late 1800's there had started to be some cracks in the Chamberlain story, cracks that he never ordered the heroic charge downhill, rather some of the men had advanced by themselves in an attempt to retrieve some fallen soldiers. Glenn W. LaFabtasie in *Gettysburg Heros: Perfect*

Soldiers, Hallowed Ground, examines those conflicting stories. “But even as Chamberlain spoke at Gettysburg it was becoming less certain if his great deeds, his heroic actions on little Round Top. Would endure precisely as he wanted them to.”⁴⁴ However, even though Chamberlain sought to maintain the heroic actions of the 20th Maine, after WWI his and the 20th Maine actions rested into the quiet dustbin reserved for old forgotten battles.

There it may have rested, but Michael Shaara writing in the era of the 150th anniversary of the war, decided to write a novel called *The Killer Angels*, and a portion of the book sought using the history in general provided by Chamberlain to promote his heroic charge. The book was used to develop a screen play for the movie *Gettysburg*, and forever more Joshua Chamberlain was again the hero of Gettysburg. In fact, battlefield guides have difficulty at times convincing visitors that anything, but Chamberlain’s charge is important.⁴⁵ Worse yet for Dan Sickles had he correctly positioned his men in defense of Little Round Top, perhaps all this glory and attention from a fictional novel could be his. But alas this was not to be, and several reasons that make Chamberlain a hero today elude Dan Sickles.

First, Chamberlain was a studious instructor from Maine who is portrayed as just wanting to do the right thing for his nation. Second, Chamberlain by all accounts did not ask for public praise, yes, he presented lectures about his battles, but they were more of entertainment value. Third, Chamberlain for the most part was able to continue to tell his story of the great charge

⁴⁴ Glenn W. LaFantasie. *Gettysburg Heros: Perfect Soldiers, Hallowed Ground*. (Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2008), 77.

⁴⁵ Related to the author by Battlefield guide November 2, 2017. A woman insisted to go directly to the site of the great hero Joshua Chamberlain. When the guide attempted to explain that the 20th Maine while certainly important, she became angry their marker was not as large as other monuments.

beyond the others who questioned him, and for the public a grand charge in defense of the Union was more popular than simple troop movements without grand charges of effort.

The effects of these two issues, unknown to Sickles at the moment of battle were going to affect him for the rest of his life. First, people would believe not that Sickles was a hero and interrupted Lee's plans, and second that there were more sanitized heroes to be worshipped.

Regardless of how the troops got positioned or whether they were to be supported, or if Meade had suggested that Sickles retire from the position, Longstreet had completed his march and had opened the attack on the left flank of the Union army as General Lee had ordered. Longstreet as directed began his attack up the Emmitsburg Road and against the troops of Dan Sickles who were in position along the road. For Meade and his officers there was no doubt now that the attack was against the left flank of the Union army. For that part Sickles was correct. He had used his knowledge he had gained by his mistake at Chancellorsville, and he had not failed to prepare for an attack on his unit. In fact, for his part Sickles was in many ways correct that James Longstreet was attempting to do what Stonewall Jackson did at Chancellorsville, he was attempting to roll up the enemy flank unit by unit upon itself. Here at Gettysburg there was another purpose which was the hope that Meade would have to pull so many troops off his right flank to support the left that there could be an attack and further turning of the right flank of the Union army, and possible defeat and retreat.

Sickles had selected a ground he observed by all accounts to command a position to rake the Union left flank if the Confederates had been able to post cannon on those heights. Here the battle changes to the credit of Sickles, his men and the valor but ultimately unsuccessful attacks of the Confederate.

Philip Thomas Tucker in *Barksdale's Charge: The True High Tide of the Confederacy at Gettysburg, July 2, 1863*, describes essentially the battle that ensued for the areas Sickles sought to defend and Longstreet attempted to capture. Barksdale commanded the Mississippi brigade who fought along the area designated by General Lee as his line of battle for July 2, 1863. Although Longstreet had been told by Hood that his line of attack was now occupied by Sickles and in fact Longstreet could have sent back for orders from Lee he instead committed his men exactly as Lee ordered. Therefore, Barksdale and his men attacked Sickles in the most direct manner, which had Sickles not been deployed forward they would not have encountered his men where they did. Tucker points out perhaps best of many historians that, "Another great controversy about Gettysburg has arisen over whether Longstreet was ordered to attack "at dawn," or first thing in the morning, or, as Lee might have put it, "as early as practicable." There can really be no doubt that sometime on the evening of July 1 Lee urged an attack as early as possible the next day. To these many acolytes of Lee have attested, largely for the purpose of putting blame for the next day's battle on Longstreet. However, in the absence of Stuart's cavalry, Confederate reconnaissance was pitifully poor. Longstreet was given no guides, or else faulty ones. It was not clear until the last moment where to put his men in position, and Lee's orders, "to attack up the Emmitsburg Road," displayed a complete misunderstanding of the battlefield."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Phillip Thomas Tucker. *Barksdale's Charge: The True High Tide of the Confederacy at Gettysburg, July 2, 1863* (Casemate. Kindle Edition), 48.

This misunderstanding was created by Sickles and in doing so Sickles sowed the seeds of the Confederate defeat. Regardless of Longstreet's behavior, regardless of the lack of Stuart's reconnaissance, the fact remains and cannot be argued away that Sickles by design or luck or sheer providence of the god that both armies invoked in every battle, was essentially in the right place at exactly the right time.

Tucker further describes what Sickles had done to the Confederates, "Instead of obtaining an advantageous position beyond the Union army's left and finding no enemy before them as anticipated when Lee's plans were first formulated, Claws and his officers were shocked to discover a good many Yankees ready for action on either side of a Peach Orchard barely Six Hundred yards distant. Lee's overall tactical objective was to gain the Emmitsburg Road Ridge, nestled about halfway between Seminary and Cemetery Ridges, and attack up the Emmitsburg Road to roll up Meade's weak left flank. But everything had changed by the mid-afternoon of July 2. Instead, the formidable might of the entire Third Corps was now poised on either side of the high ground of the Peach Orchard beside the Emmitsburg Road, blocking the way to Gettysburg to the northeast. With a lengthy defense line pivoting on a salient angle, nearly 11,000 Yankees of General Daniel Egar Sickles' Corps were deployed along the Wheatfield Road and toward Little Round Top, and then north along the Emmitsburg Road that led to Gettysburg. The forty-five-degree, defensive angle's point existed where the two roads intersected on the Emmitsburg Road Ridge at the Peach Orchard of farmer Joseph Sherfy."⁴⁷ Tucker continues to describe the fate of the Mississippi brigade as a result of General Sickles and General Longstreet's decision on that fateful day, "Of all Longstreet's troops, the Mississippi

⁴⁷ Tucker, *Barksdale*, 51.

Brigade now most directly confronted head-on the full might of the Peach Orchard position, bristling with artillery and thousands of veterans in blue coats.”⁴⁸

As the battle for the Peach Orchard was about to explode it is best to consider that despite the ensuing controversy between where Sickles should have been, that Sickles was posted on the high ground essentially occupying the exact area Longstreet intended to occupy when earlier he believed it was unoccupied. Tucker relates the feelings of Union artillery commanders, “Even General Henry Hunt, commanding the army’s artillery, recognized the Peach Orchard’s high ground as “favorable” for defense, especially artillery placement. Captain George E. Randolph, commanding the Third Corps’ Artillery Brigade, felt the same. Recalling how Confederate artillery perched atop the higher ground of Hazel Grove had severely punished his low-lying troops at Chancellorsville, Sickles had immediately viewed the higher ground along the Emmitsburg Road as well worth occupying, if only to deny its possession to Lee. Coinciding with the views of his top lieutenant, General David Bell Birney, whose First Division held the Peach Orchard salient, Sickles was convinced that “to abandon the Emmitsburg road to the enemy would be unpardonable.”⁴⁹

Here now we see the field military education of Dan Sickles complete and in place to allow him to position his troops in what he believed to be the best position to defend the Union left on July 2, 1863. Sickles had been at both Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville as described earlier. He had seen the attack of Stonewall Jackson at Chancellorsville rout the Union right, and he had seen the slaughter caused by men in a fortified elevated position at Fredericksburg. In fact, Sickles recognized that he had been confused by the long march on May 2 at

⁴⁸ Tucker, *Barksdale*, 57.

⁴⁹ Tucker, *Barksdale*, 59.

Chancellorsville and believed that Stonewall Jackson was retreating to the detriment of his men. Sickles was determined not to be caught again by a flank attack. As such now Sickles whether by design or luck had correctly predicted that Lee would try to again to attack the flanks of the Union army much like Chancellorsville. In fact, Lee did develop exactly a flank attack similar to the attack that routed the Union right at Chancellorsville. For Lee the concept without true scouting by J.E.B. Stuart, was simple he sought to follow up on the rout of the Union troops he had achieved on July 1, forcing them to the position they held on July 2. Ewell had been unable to capture the heights of the Union left beyond the town of Gettysburg, therefore it made sense to Lee to attack the left flank of the Union army in the hopes of success there and the possibility that Mede would weaken the Left and allow a separate attack there to succeed. Sickles had seen and learned this strategy and in moving forward to the high ground in front of him, he captured the high ground without opposition and corrected placed himself in front of the Confederate flanking attack.

Tucker describes the task in front of Barksdale as, “From Seminary Ridge, meanwhile, Barksdale’s Mississippians faced their high ground target as it stood forebodingly before them under the boiling July sun. If Barksdale could smash through this sector, especially at the salient, then the entire defensive front of the isolated Third Corps would cave in like a rotten apple hit with the full force by a baseball bat.”⁵⁰ For Sickles as described before he had seen the Union failure at Fredericksburg in troops attempting to take a fortified elevated position. His troops had battery support and while he understood and recognized they were out in front of the Union line he believed the ground worth defending. On the Confederate side Tucker describes the feelings

⁵⁰ Tucker, *Barksdale*, 96.

of a Company E private as, “These veteran Mississippians had already seen what awful destruction a good many well-placed Federal veterans on elevated and fortified position could do to assault formations. Memories of Malvern Hill, almost precisely a year earlier, still renovated. However, Private McNeily, Hurricane Rifles (Company E), 21st Mississippi, noted a crucial difference: “On just another such hot July afternoon the year before our command had assaulted Malvern hill, a position where the enemy had massed infantry and artillery [and] it was twice as distant as the Peach Orchard hill, which made a vast difference. One was within and the other beyond the rushing space, hence one was charged with full confidence of success, the other with little or none.”⁵¹ Both sides had seen their share of destruction by this time of the Civil War, amazing is the demeanor all the men took the possibility of death as a duty to their country.

Barksdale’s men recognized their duty was to attempt to roll up the Union right beginning with the floating salient created by Sickles and then smashing into the main Union force on Cemetery Ridge, as General Lee hoped. In fact, Barksdale and his men understood their deadly work could in fact result in the defeat of the Union army. Tucker relates, “Most important, the promise of decisive victory for Barksdale hinged upon a two-part tactical formula: first, overrunning the foremost high ground position of the Peach Orchard and along the Emmitsburg Road Ridge to set the stage for continuing the attack farther east to capture the other and most important key to the battlefield, Cemetery Ridge.”⁵² Within that goal also lay the Taneytown road which lead to Washington. A defeat of the Union army on July 2 would have given control of possibly a direct route to Washington, and all the lofty goals of General Lee with his invasion of the north. Suddenly for a moment the capture of Washington, opening up

⁵¹ Tucker, *Barksdale*, 103.

⁵² Tucker, *Barksdale*, 104.

peace talks, perhaps the entry of a foreign nation on the Confederate side all stood in the balance. General Daniel Sickles had positioned himself not only in the way of James Longstreet and Barksdale, he had stuck himself directly in position to save or lose the United States of America. Tucker relates that General Lee felt regarding the pending attack, “Lusting at the thought, Lee later swore to Reverend J. William Jones: “A complete victory [at Gettysburg] would have given us Washington and Baltimore, if not Philadelphia, and would have established the independence of the Confederacy.”⁵³

Tucker therefore describes the setting as,” against the Union left, it was Barksdale’s charge more than any other that would reap the fruits of victory, or else signal the failure of Confederate strategy. Never again would the Army of Northern Virginia meet the Army of Potomac on such equal terms, in an open-field battle on Northern soil, where the impact of a decisive victory for the South could decide the entire war. Much now depended on Barksdale and his men, and they were eager to meet the challenge.”⁵⁴

Barksdale would attack Daniel Sickles’ troops. Barksdale would in fact as expected by most of the Union command drive Sickles back from the elevated position of the Peach Orchard. Barksdale’s men would eventually drive Sickles so far to the rear that they would be in sight of the ultimate objective of Cemetery Ridge and the total defeat of the Union army. The victory that General Robert E. Lee desired, despite the failure of Hood to take Little Round top, despite Longstreet’s delay, and despite Daniel Sickles misposition of his troops in the way of General Lee’s hopes, Barksdale and his Mississippians almost carried the day. However, the famous fish hook design of the Union line permitted Meade to reinforce his flank, Longstreet failed to

⁵³ Tucker, *Barksdale*, 70.

⁵⁴ Tucker, *Barksdale*, 93.

completely support Barksdale, and as dusk arrived the day would find the Confederates falling back to almost the original lines and Barksdale dead on the field.

Sickles spent the majority of the July 2 battle near his headquarters at the Trostle farm. Numerous accounts placed him there or nearby throughout the day, where he kept aides like Henry Tremain busy running dispatches. Several officers remembered seeing Sickles at headquarters, such as Captain George Winslow who recalled that after being driven out of the Wheatfield, “I reported to Gen. Sickles some two or three minutes before he was wounded and was directed to get my command together and await further orders. The General up to that time supposed that my guns were lost.”⁵⁵

Sickles for his part of the battle commanded his troops and batteries as well as could be expected. However late in the fighting a stray shell tore off his leg, and reports indicate Sickles was removed from the field smoking a cigar to show his men he was still alive. Sickles in true Dan Sickles fashion recounted, “on his wounding during an 1882 return visit to the Trostle farm: A few moments before I was wounded I had, at the suggestion of my staff, passed around the farmhouse yonder. I had been standing upon the brow of the hill just above the barn, when several of my staff insisted that I had better put myself out of range of a heavy fire then concentrated upon us. ‘If you will show me a spot on this field where the bullets are not falling thick, I would like to see it,’ I replied. A few moments afterwards, I rode around through the low ground below the house and up to this knoll. I had hardly reached it when the shot struck me.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Hessler, *Sickles*, 203.

⁵⁶ Hessler, *Sickles*, 204.

Sickles also recounts, “I never knew I was hit. I was riding the lines and was tremendously interested in the terrific fighting which was going on along my front. Suddenly I was conscious of dampness along the lower part of my right leg, and I ran my hand down the leg of my high-top boots and pulling it out I was surprised to see it dripping with blood. Soon I noticed the leg would not perform its usual functions. I lifted it carefully over my horse’s neck and slid to the ground. Then I was conscious of approaching weakness, and the last thing I remembered was designating the surgeons of my staff who should examine the wound and treat it. They found that the knee had been smashed, probably by a piece of shell, and that the leg had been broken above and also below the knee; but while all this damage had been done I had not been unhorsed, and never knew exactly when the hurt was received.”⁵⁷ Sickles despite his wounding and knowing in some way that this wounding would present him with an opportunity for glory, somehow ends up muddled in confusion even at this moment. Hessler writes, “What would become one of the most influential primary accounts of Sickles’ wounding originated from the pen of Private William H. Bullard, a drummer in the 70th New York. In 1897, Bullard wrote Sickles a letter documenting his memories. The letter resulted from a reunion in Buffalo, New York, where Bullard had apparently promised Sickles to “state as near as I remember my personal experience” concerning the wounding.”⁵⁸ In this letter Bullard recounts what is now often repeated story that Sickles had a cigar lit for him and was puffing away on it to show his men he was alive and well. Bullard then recounted that Sickles upon hearing the men think he was mortally wounded stated, “General Sickles heard them, and he raised himself up and said ‘No No not so bad as that. I am all right and will be with you in a short time’ and in his old

⁵⁷ Hessler, *Sickles*, 204

⁵⁸ Hessler, *Sickles*, 204.

Clarion voice the boys knew so well, said ‘you must hold your position and win this battle, don’t waver, stand firm and you will surely win’ or something to that effect.⁵⁹ However Hessler then notes, “Of all the contemporary accounts, only Tremain and Randolph actually appear to have been on the scene for any length of time. There is no reason to doubt Bullard’s assertion that he was also there. Both Tremain and Bullard’s recollections were written decades later, however, although Tremain claimed to be relying heavily on correspondence written immediately after the battle. Tremain’s Sickles is badly wounded, pale, heavily stimulated, and potentially dying. There is no dramatic encouragement of his men. Perhaps it did indeed occur. But if it did, it was not impressive enough for Tremain to mention.”⁶⁰

Hessler at this juncture of his recounting of the battle does an excellent of reviewing the historiography of Dan Sickles to this point. He reviews that major biographers of Sickles, the main being Swanberg’s, *Sickles the Incredible*, which stood as the standard of Sickles research in the mid-Twentieth Century. Swanberg recounted the same stories of the cigar. There the history would have stayed because as Hessler points out, “No major Sickles biography appeared for decades after Swanberg, and full-scale treatments of the battle, with Sickles only one among a cast of thousands, generally treated the incident more modestly. Among the major works, Edward Stackpole’s *They Met at Gettysburg* (1956) said nothing, and Glenn Tucker’s *High Tide at Gettysburg* (1958) touched on the wounding only briefly, recounting how a small detail carried Sickles into the Trostle farmhouse. Edwin Coddington’s *The Gettysburg Campaign* (1968) offered no details in his main text, but Coddington had access to John Bachelder’s papers

⁵⁹ Hessler, *Sickles*, 208.

⁶⁰ Hessler, *Sickles*, 208.

and cited George Randolph's rediscovered letter to Bachelder as his primary source."⁶¹ Finally Pfanz and his three-volume history of the battle, brought Sickles back into the spotlight. More importantly it brought the cigar and the possible myth of Dan Sickles back to life. Hessler relates what Pfanz has done with his recounting is place the Bullard letter back into a primary source for the cigar myth. Hessler states, "Sickles assumed a more prominent role in Harry Pfanz's *Gettysburg: The Second Day* (1987): "Sickles took it [the cigar] and puffed away. Sickles' condition soon attracted attention. In order to present a brave and calming front, Sickles raised himself on the stretcher so that passers-by could see that he was alive if not well and asked them to stand firm." Pfanz's source was William Bullard's 1897 letter to Sickles. Pfanz's classic work subsequently became a definitive reference in any post-1987 study on Gettysburg's second day. As a result, William Bullard's letter inadvertently became an authoritative account of Sickles' wounding. A case in point occurs in *I Follow the Course, Come What May*, a 1998 Sickles biography by Jeanne Knoop. "To stop any rumor of his death, which would demoralize his troops," wrote Knoop, "prior to the ambulance's arrival, he kept smoking the cigar and waving to his men." Knoop's source was Pfanz's *Gettysburg: The Second Day*.⁶²

In any historiography the efforts of each historian must be considered along with the research and references used. Here, Hessler in 2008 brings out one of the main difficulties with Sickles and any evaluation of his status as a hero at Gettysburg. Sickles himself is somehow always involved in generating the story and in most cases at least exaggerating the story to make himself the hero. Perhaps any politician in some way always does the same thing to distinguish themselves from the main population. Campaign promises are often filled with hyperbole that

⁶¹ Hessler, *Sickles*, 209.

⁶² Hessler, *Sickles*, 209-210.

could never be met after the election. Perhaps through the years Dan Sickles was simply an old soldier telling tales and recounting as entertainment for his audiences the best story that could be told, within the facts as he knew them. If that was the case the public would have embraced Sickles as some kind of hero on July 2, 1863, but that is not the story. As in so many of Sickles stories the truth lies somewhere in between and this cigar myth is interesting for what has developed. Hessler states, “But as Gettysburg literature entered the twenty-first century, the image of a cigar-chomping Sickles calmly being carried off the field had fully overshadowed primary accounts. This legend may not have been invented by modern historians (we have the likes of Whitelaw Reid, William Bullard, and the 72nd New York regimental historian to thank for that), but it has been significantly perpetuated by historians and biographers who have uncritically accepted the dramatic version as being preferable to more mundane reality.⁶³ Hessler even attacks Keneally and his recounting of the cigar smoking incident, which appears to Hessler to be developed out of the Bullard story. Why Hessler’s analysis and this entire cigar myth is so important to Sickles as hero becomes immediately clear when one realizes Dan Sickles never once mentioned the incident himself. Hessler correctly points out, “In the end, an assessment of the “cigar incident” must consider at least one factor. If it occurred, then Sickles’ own initial accounts fail to mention it. His battlefield performance became the subject of much scrutiny, and certainly such a self-promoter would have brought attention to the fact that he took time, while badly wounded, to rally and encourage his men. ‘I was conscious of approaching weakness, and the last thing I remembered was designating the surgeons of my staff who should examine the wound and treat it,’ Sickles admitted in one interview. Given the shock and blood loss, Sickles may not have even remembered how he acted as he was being carried off the field.

⁶³ Hessler, *Sickles*, 211.

In his 1882 on-site interview, before a large crowd and a newspaper reporter, a veteran actually pushed his way through the crowd and gushed, ‘I want to shake by the hand the man who saved the second day’s fight at Gettysburg.’⁶⁴

Hessler among all the historians correctly points out that only after years of reflection and after Bullard remembered and wrote about the incident after meeting Sickles, then and only then did the cigar myth take place. Clearly had other historians considered in depth the self-promotion of Sickles in almost every other avenue of his life, they would have realized that it was entirely possible that Sickles used Bullard to create the story to avoid further consternation on the part of those who were already critical of Sickles performance that day? Hessler points out that Sickles was not a man who seemed to remain calm when he was emotionally distraught, as would be expected with a wound that essentially tore his leg off below the knee. He had not done so when he murdered Barton and there is much doubt that he actually remained so on the battlefield.

Sickles at least in this situation did however receive the wound that would remove his leg, and regardless of the circumstances surrounding that wound it was obtained on the field of battle and should have been his entry key to becoming a hero. Sickles fighting days ended at that point with him being taken to the rear to have his leg amputated.

⁶⁴ Hessler, *Sickles*, 211.

Chapter 4: The Hero of Gettysburg

When Gettysburg ended Dan Sickles was missing a leg and headed in an ambulance to Washington to recover. Had history stopped there with perhaps Sickles death or had Sickles quietly exited the historiography of the war, perhaps historians could have separated his was record from his private life and declared him a hero. As was shown by his trial for murder, Sickles private life as far as money and the visiting of prostitutes did not appear to completely destroy his reputation. He had been elected to congress, prior to the murder. His military record was essentially unblemished, his mistaken belief at Chancellorsville was more a tribute to Stonewall Jackson's ability and tactical sense than a Sickles error.

General Sickles was truly the hero of Gettysburg. Unfortunately for General Sickles three things contributed to the historiography of his achievements failure to recognize him as such for the next 150 years. Despite all he had desired from the war, and despite the effort he put in both military and political, his fates were tied to forces outside his control.

First, Longstreet contributed to the inability of historians to consider Sickles position as heroic. Rather the historiography of the situation considered the relationship of Longstreet and Lee at Gettysburg, and Longstreet's long asserted belief that Gettysburg was ground of little value and that Lee should have flanked the Union army and fought on ground of the Confederate choosing. McPherson observes, "Sickle's unwise move may have unwittingly foiled Lee's hopes. Finding the Union left in an unexpected position, Longstreet probably should have notified Lee. Scouts reported that the Round Tops were unoccupied, opening the way for a flanking move around to the Union rear. Longstreet's division commanders urged a change of

attack plans to take advantage of this opportunity. But Longstreet had already tried at least twice to change Lee's mind. He did not want to risk another rebuff. Lee had repeatedly ordered him to attack here, and here he meant to attack."¹

For Sickles this meant that regardless of where he had positioned his men, historians would always consider the Longstreet delay as a possible source of defeat or even victory had one occurred. The failure of the general that Lee trusted with his attacks on both July 2 and eventually July 3, 1863, has and will fill the volumes of studies of the battle of Gettysburg. Few can explain away the delay of Longstreet and many others have difficulty that after he was delayed even if that can be explained by careful troop movement to avoid enemy detection, to accept that Longstreet attacked along the line he did realizing that the situation had changed. It is those decisions of Longstreet that take away any hope of Sickles as a hero in at least that context. The errors by Longstreet created for historians the difficult position to defend Sickles as a hero rather than criticize Longstreet, and even defend General Lee and protect him from criticism for the battle.

Second, Sickles himself contributes greatly to the confusion and creates an inability of historians to create a histological record of heroic action at Gettysburg, because almost immediately after the battle Sickles begins a campaign against Meade. In general, driven by Meade's refusal to return Sickles to command after he is wounded at Gettysburg and loses his leg, the feud lasts until Sickles' death.

This feud was typical of the Sickles of political arena. He had travelled to Washington and was visited by President Lincoln. He held himself out as the hero at Gettysburg and at least on some recounting of the battle holds himself out as the hero and Meade as inept at best.

¹ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 657.

Coddington in *The Strange Reputation of General Meade: A Lesson in Historiography*, recounts Meade's detractors," said that he had no will to fight and in backing up this accusation went so far as to assert that he made 'no dispositions for battle' and had 'no plan for fighting'.² The indication was clear that Meade in issuing the Pipe Creek Circular and the 3PM meeting of July 2 would serve to prove that Meade had every intention to withdraw from the enemy, at least to his detractors. The detractors held that Sickles had pressed the battle, he had recommended the grounds, and "had been instrumental in precipitating the bitter contest on July 2 and in doing so had forestalled an enemy attempt to roll up the left flank of the Union army for the purpose of driving it from a strong position."³ Perhaps this talk would have died out except Lincoln had wanted Meade on the heels of Gettysburg to attack and crush Lee's army before it could cross back over the Potomac, something that never happened and opened Meade up for investigation by the Committee on the Conduct of the War. Meade himself must have had some notion that his brief command of the Union army prior to Gettysburg might be questioned for his command ability because he wrote to his wife in December 1863, "I presume before long it will be clearly proved that my presence on the field was rather an injury than otherwise."⁴

Sickles attack continued in his testimony to the Committee on the Conduct of the War, where Sickles, Doubleday, and Albion Howe all testified on, "the enormity of Meade's inadequacies at Gettysburg eight months previously."⁵ Again Sickles in his attempt to portray himself a hero, this time with the help of his Republican cronies sitting on the committee, and generals who had basically supported Sickles and were in fact no longer part of the operational fighting army, caused his own roadblock to hero status. Again, the historians argued about the

² Coddington, *General Meade*, 150.

³ Coddington, *General Meade*, 148.

⁴ Coddington, *General Meade*, 148.

⁵ Coddington, *General Meade*, 149.

reasons behind Sickles attempting to discredit and remove Meade from command rather than evaluate his claims before the committee. In presenting himself as the sole hero and degrading his commanding general regardless of the correctness of his claims, in the era of military discipline, Sickles demonstrated at exactly the wrong time he was a political general not a West Pointer.

Third, Sickles behavior pre-war and his immediate actions after the battle to discredit Meade were not received well by officers who were formally trained. West Point's motto has been Duty, Honor, Country since 1898, yet the concepts of that motto have always been instilled in graduates of the academy.⁶ Daniel Sickles certainly alienated the formally trained officers when he tried to declare himself a hero at Gettysburg at the expense of the commanding officer. Hessler in describing actions by the Congressional committee states, "The one-legged general was still a prominent Democrat, however, and the Radical Republicans were only interested in allying themselves with his unsavory reputation up to a certain point."⁷

Despite his testimony against Meade in Congress, Meade continued in command and dismissed Sickles returning to command. Disheartened that Congress did not outright declare Sickles a hero, and dismiss Meade, Sickles or someone in close relationship to Sickles began a public campaign for Sickles repeating essentially Sickles account of Gettysburg before Congress. As described before someone named Historicus sent two letters to the New York Herald. Hessler points out essentially most historians agree with Harry Pfanz who, "summarized the feelings of most when he wrote, 'Historicus was Daniel Sickles' alter ego, his partisan, if indeed he was not the general himself."⁸ If one has to decide who wrote the Historicus letters it is clear

⁶ USMA.Gov

⁷ Hessler, *Sickles*, 258.

⁸ Hessler, *Sickles*, 285.

that, “Historicus is obviously telling Gettysburg from Sickles’ point of view. The author arrives on Cemetery Hill on July 1 (with Sickles) and is apparently not present after July 2. Sickles is clearly the battle’s hero: ‘always reliable,’ ‘always first’ and ‘making good use’ of his time.”⁹

Ultimately most members of the general public let the matter go with the appointment of General U.S. Grant to commander of all Union armies and allowing Meade to fade from the lime light. Hessler states, “At first glance, there were no clear winners in this Second Battle of Gettysburg. Although Meade retained his command, his name and reputation had been dragged through the historical mud. The failure to prevent Lee’s escape has dogged Meade in varying degrees since 1863...”¹⁰

To this end Hessler states the premise of this paper when he states, “From a historical perspective, Sickles’ efforts to inflate his own battlefield role and hasten Meade’s removal decidedly back-fired against him. Sickles is reviled by many modern Gettysburg students because of these efforts, and he has also helped elevate Meade’s historical image as a solid professional officer who was attacked by a den of political vipers. Has Sickles taken a higher road, it is possible that he would be remembered historically in a more positive light.”¹¹

Post war Sickles returned to New York in 1867 due to the death of his wife Teresa. While the murder trial had been 10 years before at least Sickles no longer lived with the woman who has such a scandalous affair. In the early 1870’s there was some consideration of Sickles running for governor of New York. “When opponents in the *New York World* continued to remind readers of his past indiscretions by calling him a ‘pimp,’ Sickles threatened libel, causing

⁹ Hessler, *Sickles*, 286.

¹⁰ Hessler, *Sickles*, 305.

¹¹ Hessler, *Sickles*, 305.

diarist George Templeton Strong to famously comment, ‘One might as well try to spoil a rotten egg as to damage Dan’s Character.’ “¹²

Sickles represented the United States in Spain, there he continued his romantic indiscretions having an affair with the deposed Queen Isabella II. Eventually Sickles would remarry but the marriage would eventually dissolve due to Sickles continued affairs. Also, during his service in Spain, like so many positions Sickles had that began with promise, this too ended badly. Sickles attempted to foster a war with the Spanish over the execution of American blockade runners to Cuba. Eventually the Secretary of State Fish negotiated a settlement without Sickles and he became the object of jokes in Madrid.¹³

Dan Sickles would eventually be involved in saving Gettysburg as a national park, and in the initial placement of monuments. However, like every adventure Sickles had, eventually there would be accusations of misappropriation of funds. Eventually the attorney general of New York sought to have Sickles return \$28,486 in unaccounted for funds.¹⁴ Removed from the New York monument commission and in failing health Sickles suffered a cerebral hemorrhage and died on April 24, 1914, living to almost 91.¹⁵

¹² Hessler, *Sickles*, 312.

¹³ Hessler, *Sickles*, 313.

¹⁴ Hessler, *Sickles*, 372.

¹⁵ Hessler, *Sickles*, 383.

Conclusion

Historians must write accounts of history that are not only true, but that will generate interest and hopefully income. One can argue that Dan Sickles was the perfect subject for even the press of today. Throughout his life Sickles never left the press or public wanting for some scandal or argument that was designed to promote Dan Sickles. However, the late 1800's and early twentieth century morals would never permit Sickles to be a hero. Religious beliefs and public morality simple could not embrace a hero who stole money, had affairs in his marriage, visited and supported prostitutes, embarrassed the United States in foreign land, and clearly told the story of Gettysburg to place himself in the best light.

Keneally relates that Mark Twain observed of Sickles that, "Sickles' other gift, thought Twain, was to talk about nothing but himself and yet at the same time sound modest, inoffensive, and 'unexasperating'."¹ Perhaps even the usual reverence granted by the public to a medal of honor recipient did not apply to Sickles. In 1891 he would be awarded a Medal of Honor for his actions at Gettysburg, yet later he would need to be bonded out for his misappropriation of monument funds in New York. Somehow Dan Sickles could remain in the public arena, get elected to Congress again in 1892, continue in his ways and remained in politics campaigning for William Jennings Bryan in 1896.

Daniel Sickles was indeed the hero of Gettysburg and recent scholars have been released of the moral and ethically bonds that held Sickles incapable of being a hero for over 150 years.

¹ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 348.

Both Thomas Keneally in his biography and James Hessler in his review of Sickles at Gettysburg in 2003 and 2009 respectively have brought to life Sickles and his heroic role at Gettysburg.

Perhaps in discussing Sickles' family attempt to move his body to Gettysburg Keneally states the issue with Sickles with precision, "The dispute is unsettled and will probably never come to conclusion, and Dan is still in Arlington, beneath his discreet military stone, which mentions merely his name, rank, Medal of Honor, and date of death. But to arise yet again easefully from that place, Dan needs only the invocation of his name at a history seminar, at a Civil War buffs' meeting, or on an Internet Civil War chat site, and from the heat of people's breaths he rises again to full and controversial life."²

In defending Sickles as the Hero of Gettysburg one must by the very nature of the man remove the temptation to just his battlefield deeds of July 2, 1863 from his life. Many would argue that this is not realistic, or even possible but it is both realistic and possible as will be shown.

First Dan Sickles left Emmittsburg without orders on July 1 to come to Gettysburg. He left some of the Third Corp behind as a rear guard since he was ordered to hold that town. Had Sickle not come to Gettysburg as he did, then the Third Corp over 10,000 men would have arrived late on July 2 exhausted from the march on that hot day and probably unable to fight or at the very least fight at a diminished capacity from what they did. When one examines that move, it was reasonable in light of communications of the times, and the fact that neither Meade nor Lee expected a battle on July 1 for Sickles to have gone to the aid of other commands, who were

² Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 356.

having trouble holding the Union line that day. Meade himself granted permission when he arrived on the field for Sickles to bring the entire Third Corp up.

Second, Sickles recognized higher ground which would allow his Corp movement and expected a flank attack like he had seen at Chancellorsville. The orders from Meade were impossible to follow completely as the ground assigned was not fit for occupation by either infantry or cannon placement. Sickles correctly placed his men in a position to fight on elevated ground with cannon support. While he was in front of the Union line there was no expectation that Sickles could not leave that position if needed or supported if fighting broke out there. The ground he selected was also chosen by Lee and Longstreet on the morning of July 2. Both commanders saw the advantage of that elevated ridge if it could be taken to flank the Union left and assault it with cannon and eventually infantry. The interesting observation of this ground was although both armies fought desperately to hold the ground ultimately both commanders were mistaken in its value, and more so in its ability to be defended. In the end neither side held that ground, nor fought for it again in the battle. What is true without considering the other factors is that Dan Sickles stuck his troops directly in the path of Lee and Longstreet. In doing so Sickles forced Longstreet to commit troops to battle on ground of Sickles choice. He did not permit Longstreet to simply roll cannon onto that elevated ridge and blast away at the Union left flank. The effect of Sickles position caused Longstreet to alter his war strategy. Hessler points out, "Longstreet enjoyed perhaps his greatest success when he deployed eight brigades into a deep assault column and attacked a narrow segment of the Union front. By attacking in depth, one brigade behind another, he dented the enemy's line with the first wave and drove through with succeeding waves. Sickles' extended front, however, coupled with the difficult terrain, did

not offer an opportunity for Longstreet to stack Hood's and McLaws' eight brigades into a narrow column. Instead, Longstreet settled for an attack depth of just two brigades."³ That change in war strategy allowed for two things, the first and most obvious from the battle was although Sickles was forced back against the charge of Barksdale, there was not enough manpower to continue the attack once the break came, and Barksdale although highly successful was unsupported. Second, because Longstreet and his commanders were used to entering battle in this fashion, they had to adjust to the conditions and in some cases became uncoordinated in their attacks.

Additionally, the harsh light of truth without the confusion associated with all the real-life drama is that Lee and Longstreet never recognized the value of Little Round Top. First on the morning of July 2 Lee's scout returned stating he had been up to the round top and only a Federal Signal Corps was there. Second even to Meade regardless of where he thought Sickles was, the top of Little Round Top was not the anchor point of the Union left on the morning of July 2. Hessler again points out, "Strategically speaking, neither General Lee nor James Longstreet identified Little Round Top as a significant objective in their battle reports. Their objective was to envelop and drive in the Federal left flank, supported by elevated artillery positions along the Emmitsburg Road. Since Lee probably did not believe that the Federal left extended as far south as Little Round Top, there was no need for the hill to be an objective of the attack."⁴ Therefore, all the debate about Sickles and his positioning and the defense of Little Round Top being the pivotal battle of Day Two is not important to the discussion of Sickles as a hero. In fact, as was pointed out the 20th Maine while certainly valent in the defense of the

³ Hessler, Sickles, 167.

⁴ Hessler, Sickles, 174.

Union left, lost less men than many of the other Union brigades at Gettysburg, and prior to the fiction of Michael Shaara was considered another battle within the grand drama of Gettysburg.

Finally, during the battle Sickles was mounted and directing his troops in battle. There were times where the Union men held their own, there were attacks and counter attacks, the battle was not clear in who would be the victor until nightfall came. While the exact movement of each unit, and the effect some of those orders had on the Confederate charge, the fact remains that Sickles was able in the end to hold onto the Union left and Longstreet withdrew his men from battle. If Sickles had lost the battle it was quite possible the Union line would have withdrawn, and Lee would have had his victory he sought in the North.

However, in light of simply the facts it is clear Sickles is the hero of Gettysburg. Pickett's charge on Day Three was a futile attempt by Lee to make something happen. Longstreet knew as much. After all Longstreet was commanding at Fredericksburg when his men mowed down wave after wave of Union men in their attempt to take Marye's Heights. Worse Longstreet recognized the Union could replace those men, Lee could not replace the 13,000 men he would attack with in Pickett's charge. The tactical day for the battle of Gettysburg for the Confederate army was Day Two. Simply stated on that day Dan Sickles was simply a better commander than James Longstreet. Again, there is endless debate about the motives of Longstreet, hidden in the discussions of the historians. Regardless on that particular field, at that particular moment Dan Sickles was the general who was in the right place at the right time to receive Longstreet's attack and save the Union left flank.

Sickles has never gotten a fair assessment of his skills and talents on the battlefield because of the inability of the historians and public to have a hero that had such a dubious

reputation. History records the deeds of great leaders at times by the deeds they commit in life. One example would be Hitler. As a leader and military thinker for Germany in light of the bitter defeat Germany suffered in WWI, Hitler's leadership in the 1930's was outstanding in terms of rearming the Germany military and the development of weapons and tactics ahead of their time. No one evaluates Hitler in terms of military genius because of the horrific deeds he committed on mankind. Instead he is evaluated in terms of a madman who cost millions of lives for an obsessed dream. While Sickles is in no way in a class with Hitler his status as a hero is similarly dismissed by early historians because of the turmoil he himself created in his life. It would take an enlighten public, one that could forgive or overlook his deeds to consider whether it was possible that the testimony he gave to the Committee on the conduct of the War was perhaps truthful enough that he was a hero. As far as the Committee on the Conduct of the War is concerned they themselves were a political group, and almost every general who appeared in Committee at least enhanced their behavior for the Committee. Even Meade did not get all his facts correct when he testified.

As one stands on the battlefield at Gettysburg today two things beyond the scope of Dan Sickles hero status become clear quickly. First, as Shelby Foote states in the PBS series *The Civil War* the soldiers of the Civil War took valor as an expected virtue. Foote explains that for him given the order that on Day Three at Gettysburg to cross that mile-long open field and take the high ground beyond, he would have to stop and say general I don't think we should do that. But the men of the Civil War did not do that.⁵ Furthermore, looking across the fields and battlefield, you realize in some cases these men were face to face, or less than a football field

⁵ Shelby Foote. *The Civil War, Episode Five*. (PBS 1989).

apart and trying to earnestly kill each other. This is not the battlefield of today where you might be killed by a missile fired from some offshore battleship, or a tank round fired from miles away. These men looked each other eye to eye and battled for ideas and concepts foreign to today's world. Seldom heard unless in a Supreme Court argument on the Commerce Clause is the notion of state's rights. The Civil War changed that forever. At the end of the war, the United States began to centralize the government powers and state's rights were essentially a moot issue.

Additionally, the concept of African Slave trade or the continued enslavement of any person in the United States while dying in its own right at the start of the war was killed by the Civil War for all times. To be sure equality was a different matter but the enslavement of one class of people by another for economic gain passed from the United States forever. However, had Dan Sickles not defended the Union left and lost his leg in the effort there is serious question whether either of those two issues would be resolved the same today.

The concept of Dan Sickles being denied his due as the hero of Gettysburg because of his behavior was better shown some 140 years after the battle and surprisingly by two people who were heroes to many. One individual won many awards, was the pride of many children. He found fame and fortune on a national stage. He married a woman, much like Teresa Sickles who appeared loving and kind. He had children. He went onto star in productions which increased his wealth and popularity. For many years his fame grew and in general the nation loved him. He would at times generate national attention on some form or another, but in general his behavior and demeanor, much like Dan Sickles always stood him in good stead with the population. He was a true hero to many not only for his athletic feats, but also for breaking out of stereotypes, or at least making it in a world of racial inequality.

The second individual grew up in poverty like Sickles, he was even more bold and self-promoting than Sickles. He obtained fame on the national level and outrageous things that would cause the population to question whether he deserved to be a hero to the youth of America. He went against the moral attitude of his time. He was politically active and unpopular because of his beliefs. He like Sickles at one time faced jail time for his actions.

So, when we consider Sickles these two individuals prove that his behavior when considering was he the hero of Gettysburg must be limited to simply his actions of Day Two. Both these individuals also prove that to even be considered a hero you must conform to the social norms of the time you live in. Sickles did not, and these two individuals did not either at times in their lives with exactly the same result as Sickles. When one looks at the descriptions above one can see why maybe these individuals were heroes in some fashion. The proof that Dan Sickles' designation as a hero must stand alone by his actions is proved in these two contemporary individuals.

The first is O.J Simpson. A true football hero when football was growing. Heisman trophy winner, pro football star. He was married to a woman that appeared gorgeous and kind. He had stardom in films and lived an upper-class life. With the murder of his ex-wife and Ron Goldman and the subsequent acquittal Mr. Simpson is no longer a hero to anyone. Yet in fact his football greatness cannot be denied simply on the basis of his life afterwards. Exactly like Dan Sickles we deny Mr. Simpson his due on the football field because his behavior afterward, despite being found not guilty will not allow any hero worship of him. Mr. Simpson has never acknowledged the hatred towards him in any manner.

The second individual is Mohammed Ali. Perhaps the greatest boxer of all time. Certainly, through his career he created controversy and angered the population with his political stance against the Vietnam war. Mr. Ali however learned a lesson that Dan Sickles never learned, he only spoke for himself, he accepted the role he created for himself and he went on to not brag or boost of his fame. He stood apart on the war, on the treatment of blacks in the nation, and on his right to practice any religion he wanted. In the end the nation embraced him and rewarded him with a hero status that he deserved even if he didn't want it. Much like when Hessler comments on Sickles taking a quiet route after Gettysburg maybe having a different result, Mr. Ali proved that can be the case.

For Dan Sickles, the lime light of public life drew him onto the stage of world politics. Unfortunately, for Sickles, his behaviors always became an issue in whatever he sought to pursue. In many ways the murder of his wife's lover presented the most difficult scenario to overcome for Sickles, at least mentally. Sickles by all accounts was sexually active, and always had other women in addition to his wife. That point alone might have put him in favor of General Hooker, with whom he shared his enjoyment of prostitutes. However, in the 1850's a man and a woman were treated much different. A man having an affair was entitled to such in many ways just because of his station in life. A man in political office, an attorney held even more status to have an affair. While Sickles was certainly judged on his affairs, Teresa Sickles was more harshly judged. Keneally recounts a poem written towards other women published in Harpers Weekly over Teresa, "Bridle your virtue, Tether thy tongue; Pity the fair vine, Blighted so young! Why not the tomb? Sad Shattered Life; Think of her doom--- Widow yet wife!"⁶

⁶ Keneally, *American Scoundrel*, 155.

Dan Sickles presents at least at Gettysburg the interesting character that generates biographies and generates press sales. First Gettysburg amassed a cast of characters on the field of battle that has not been repeated since. Sickles was only one of the players in the grand battle. Abner Doubleday would take over for the fallen John Reynolds and for years be remembered for inventing baseball. The only issue with that was he didn't. "the Doubleday myth refers to the belief that the sport of [baseball](#) was [invented](#) in 1839 by future [American Civil War](#) general [Abner Doubleday](#) in [Cooperstown, New York](#). Abner Graves presented a claim that Doubleday invented baseball to the [Mills Commission](#), a group formed in 1905 that sought to prove whether the sport originated in the United States or was a variation of [rounders](#). Graves' evidence was accepted by the Commission, and in 1908 it named Doubleday as the creator of baseball. The claim eventually received criticism, and most modern baseball historians consider it to be false."⁷

Others at the battle have had their performance enhanced or reduced by the erosion of time and the dimming of memories. Lee despite ordering his men in a desperate final charge uphill against a fortified position is seldom held to account for that failure. It is referred to as Pickett's Charge, but Lee and Longstreet were the commanders who ultimately ordered that doomed charge. Worse for the Confederate cause, both Lee and Longstreet had seen exactly that same tactic fail miserably at Fredericksburg as they killed Union forces wholesale as they attacked Marye's heights yet at least Lee failed to recognize his folly. Longstreet appears to have at least recognized the issues of Gettysburg. Shelby Foote in an interview about Pickett's charge states. "Gettysburg is the price the South paid for having R.E.Lee."⁸ Foote is correct Lee did not

⁷ Abner Doubleday. Wikipedia, Retrieved June 15, 2018

⁸ Shelby Foote, The Civil War, Episode 4. (PBS, 1995).

believe his men could not carry a position that he asked them to. He has been so successful that the possibility of defeat escaped him. But history tends to treat Lee with respect for a leader who did much with limited supplies and men.

Stonewall Jackson died a month before the battle, yet his absence is considered in the battle because Ewell had taken over command, and Lee on Day One gave an open-ended command to take Culp's Hill if practicable. Historians have argued the point for more than 150 years that had Jackson been at the battle he would have driven the Union forces from Culp's Hill on Day One and the Union would not have held the high ground.

J.E.B Stuart takes a beating in every recounting of the battle for not being in touch with Lee's forces as ordered and causing Lee to be grouping around blindly using scouts like Johnson to develop information on enemy strength and location. Certainly, Stuart might have helped Lee understand that Longstreet was correct on Day Two and was certainly correct by time the battle commenced that moving around the enemy left was a better option.

Most importantly for Sickles, James Longstreet for whatever reason was not on time that July 2nd, and as a result suffered defeat at the hands of the Union soldiers on the left flank of the Union army. The battles to this day are called forth to school children and visitors to Gettysburg for the terrible fighting. All the men involved who survived always spoke about that day. Longstreet for his part had at least three failures that ultimately affect Sickles hero claim. The first was the delay in arriving at the point of attack. Some argue that he was avoiding detection, some that he was stalling in hopes of not attacking at all. Others suggest Longstreet was trying to show Lee the folly of his orders. Regardless, almost every Confederate general account from that day states if Longstreet had attacked earlier in the day he would have taken the field. Even Sickles account tends to support if Longstreet had attacked one or two hours earlier, Sickles

would not have been in position and would not have been able to withstand Longstreet's attack. As it was Sickles was unable to stop Barksdale at least initially and his men suffered for it.

Second Longstreet was never able to coordinate his troops in the attack. First the area was difficult terrain that did not lend itself to drill formations. Even at this late date of the war, commanders still believed that to take a position you massed your men and fire. Longstreet had difficulty moving his units in a coordinated fashion on that day.

Third Longstreet was faced with Lee and his decision to attack the Union army along the Emmitsburg Road. Lee for all his greatness could become angry at times. Certainly, he was upset that J.E.B Stuart was missing from the field, and he had already told Longstreet he would not flank the enemy as Longstreet had suggested. When Longstreet finally did arrive to the attack point the situation had changed dramatically. Dan Sickles now stood on the ground Longstreet had intended to mount his cannons and blow away the left flank of the union army. Longstreet in all likelihood should have reconsidered and at least informed Lee of this development. It is possible the delay worried Longstreet, and certainly as mentioned before, Longstreet had already been told no to his plans to slide around the enemy flank. So, Longstreet attacked Dan Sickles as ordered and attempted over poor ground to capture a position from which to roll up the Union left.

On the Union side, many of the officers were still not trusting Meade who had only taken over five days before. Orders were confused at times, perhaps Meade himself was confused and gaining experience as his army was taken into battle. One certain fact is that the Army of the Potomac suffered from a series of generals who were politically appointed and, in many cases, looking to gain politically from the war. Even McClellan a prior commander of the army would run for President against Lincoln in 1864. Those generals when given the opportunity to testify

to Congress or to tell their story to papers and magazines of the time also sought to improve their positions or support friends and peers that could suit them well.

Thus, for Dan Sickles his hopes to use the civil War to clear his name and reputation did not go smoothly. While not a total failure, Sickles did not command after Gettysburg, despite courting favor with Lincoln. He failed to turn the Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War to his side, and have Meade removed and replaced with Burnside. In fact, Meade was recognized eventually as the commander of the victory at Gettysburg and served as Commander of the Army of the Potomac through the rest of the war. Grant was a superior and accompanied him through the remainder of the war, but Meade served the army well through the war. Sickles as usual when not getting what he felt was due him continued to work whatever political and media channels he could to complain about injury to his personal life, or to point out his heroic deed. He continued to live with Teresa until she passed away from tuberculosis, at the time thought to have perhaps been a result of the lifestyle she had lived.

Sickles returned to politics and in his defense, he did recognize the significance of the Gettysburg battlefield and what it would represent to future generations. In fact, Sickles was one of the first to fight for preservation of the main portion of the battlefields. He was instrumental in providing for a New York Monument on the field. Despite his best intentions Sickles would eventually be caught once more with his hand in the cookie jar and arrested. Because of his age and the politic storm jailing Sickles for theft would cause, he never faced full prosecution for steal monument money for New York.

Any future study of Dan Sickles where possible should include a forensic psychological study to see what mental issues might have driven Sickles. Certainly, time and again Sickles fails to take a good position or vocation to the logical end. He seems throughout his life to be

unable not to sabotage himself and cause more trouble each time. Sickles truly was a hero of the first order at Gettysburg. He brought his men to the battle, he positioned his men, he positioned his cannons, he stood in the way of James Longstreet and prevented the Confederates from carrying the day on July 2. For all those actions he was wounded and lost his leg in battle. History can never predict what would have happened if Sickles was not in the position he was that day. However, because the left flank of the Union army did not collapse, then on Day Three Lee felt the center of the Union line had to be the weakest point and mounted Pickett's charge. As the few Confederates reached the copse of trees in the center of the attack, historians called this the high-water mark of the Confederacy. Truthfully, Dan Sickles had seen and defeated the high-water mark of the Confederacy on July 2, when his men and others of the Union army repelled the Barksdale attack, the true tactical high watermark of the Confederacy, and for that Daniel Sickles is an American hero.

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