

THE GETTYSBURG SEMESTER
CWES 425 – FIELD EXPERIENCES IN
CIVIL WAR STUDIES

Tuesdays 1.10 – 3.50 pm
Weidensall 402

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

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

INTRODUCTION:

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

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

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

TEXTS:

sent over the summer: John Waugh, *Twenty Good Reasons to Study the Civil War* (McWhiney Foundation Press, 2004)

1. Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Civil War* (Yale University Press, 1984)
2. William C. Davis, *Battle at Bull Run: A History of the First Major Campaign of the Civil War* (orig. pub. 1977; Louisiana State University Press, 1981)
3. James I. Robertson, *Soldiers Blue and Grey* (University of South Carolina Press, 1988)
4. James V. Murfin, *The Gleam of Bayonets: The Battle of Antietam and Robert E. Lee’s Maryland Campaign, September 1862* (orig. pub. 1965; scheduled for reprint by Louisiana State University Press, September 2004)
5. Daniel E. Sutherland, *Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville: The Dare Mark Campaign* (University of Nebraska Press, 1998)
6. Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (orig. pub. 1968; Simon and Schuster, 1997)
7. Mark Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On: The Virginia Campaign, May-June 1864* (University of Nebraska Press, 2002)
8. William Marvel, *Lee’s Last Retreat: The Flight to Appomattox* (University of North Carolina Press, 2002)
9. Thomas L. Connelly, *The Marble Man: Robert E. Lee and His Image in American Society* (orig. pub. 1977)

CLASS SCHEDULE:

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

The Friday battlefield tours are the heart of the course, so here are the basic ground-rules:

1. It is your responsibility to make sure that you have no scheduling conflicts, personal or otherwise, with these trips. More than one un-excused absence from them drops your grade one letter (for each absence).
2. We leave from the Appleford at 7.30 am and return at approximately 5.00 pm, except for the November 12-14 extended trip to Richmond.
3. We use College transportation and are provided with College meals (pre-packed); please see Chris if you have dietary needs or restrictions. The use or consumption of alcohol or other illegal or prohibited substances is, as it was for Civil War armies on the march, strictly banned. Lodgings for the November trip to Richmond trip will be provided by the College and will be overseen by the same rules.
4. These tours will, for the most part, be guided and on foot. You will be expected to cover a lot of ground, and should equip yourselves with the following:
 - good walking gear [solid shoes or boots, tall socks] – you will want to protect yourselves from ticks, insect bites, and the like
 - rain gear (poncho, raincoat, umbrella) – these tours go forward irrespective of meteorological conditions
 - notebook and ‘haversack’ for note-taking, maps, and other handouts

The Tuesday in-class session will have three aspects:

The first of these aspects comprises your reading assignments. The reading expectations for this course are significant, and involve the very best in the campaign literature of the soldiers and battles of the Civil War. Since distance limits the field-trip portion of this course to the battlefields of the Virginia/Maryland/ Pennsylvania region (the “Eastern theater”), our readings will necessarily concentrate on the East as well; but in our class sessions we will certainly be giving the “Western Theater” of the war more than just a passing look.

The second concerns the keeping a journal/notebook for the course. This journal will be composed of two elements. First, for every book assigned in the course, you will create a working outline of approximately three-to-five pages. Second, interleaved with that will be observations, notes, and impressions you gather on the field-trips (you can take these down in long-hand on the spot and then convert them into whatever word-processing format you adopt for your outlines). The object is to try to see the ground as the soldiers saw it, and with that in view, it will be helpful if you keep in mind questions like these as guides: Was this good ground on which to fight? For which side? How did the terrain affect perceptions of the action? What was the principal arm of combat (infantry

v. infantry, infantry v. artillery, and so forth)? What would have provided the most difficulty in overseeing or participating in combat on this site? In what ways does this action conform to the nine rules of war? These impressions should be about one page in length. Please turn in your journals for inspection and my notations at the end of each Tuesday class session.

The last requirement is intended to give some added point to the first two: during the first week of class, select from the Library (or, if you like, buy from one of the Civil War book stores in town) a regimental history of a unit which fought in the Army of the Potomac or the Army of Northern Virginia. Keep a running record of what your unit did on the various battlefields we visit so that, with each visit, we can from each of you about what happened to “you.”

GRADING:

Participation in class and on field (readiness with responses on reading assignments, preparedness with unit description on battlefield)	40%
Journal (neatness, attention to detail in books, serious reflection on battlefield, optional notes and outlines)	60%

SCHEDULE	TUESDAY READING for Tuesdays	FRIDAY
1-Aug 31/ Sept 3	Course introduction Waugh, <i>Twenty Good Reasons to Study the Civil War</i> (entire) Andrew Curry, “The Better Angels,” <i>US News & World Report</i> (Sept 30 2002); James McPherson, “What’s the Matter With History?” <i>Princeton Alumni Weekly</i> (Jan 22, 1997)	FREE DAY
2-Sept 7/ Sept 10	The American Way of Battle Griffith, <i>Battle Tactics of the Civil War</i> , pp. 15-27, 53-163, 189-192	Harper’s Ferry
3-Sept 14/ Sept 17	Bull Run Davis, <i>Battle at Bull Run</i> , pp. 1-89, 132-242	Manassas
4-Sept 21/ Sept 24	Informal class presentations about the unit you’ve “adopted” Robertson, <i>Soldiers Blue and Gray</i> , pp. 3-80, 122-169, 214-228	Yom Kippur - NO CLASS
5-Sept 28/ Oct 1	Antietam Murfin, <i>The Gleam of Bayonets</i> , chapters 2, 4, 7-11	FREE DAY
6-Oct 4/ Oct 8	READING DAY - NO CLASS	Antietam
7-Oct 12/ Oct 15	Fredericksburg & Chancellorsville Sutherland, <i>Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville: The Dare Mark Campaign</i> , pp. 5-194	Fredericksburg & Chancellorsville
8-Oct 19/ Oct 22	Gettysburg/First Day Coddington, <i>The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command</i> , pp. 3-25, 134-152, 209-322	Gettysburg - The First Day
9-Oct 26/ Oct 29	Gettysburg/Second Day Coddington, <i>The Gettysburg Campaign</i> , pp. 323-464	Gettysburg- The Second Day

10-Nov 2/ Nov 4	Gettysburg/Third Day Coddington, <i>The Gettysburg Campaign</i> , pp. 465-574	Gettysburg: The Boro & Pickett's Charge
11-Nov 9/ Nov 12	Wilderness, Spotsylvania & Petersburg Mark Grimsley, <i>And Keep Moving On</i> , pp. 1-160, 196-239	Richmond Nov 12-14
12-Nov 16/ Nov 19	Appomattox and the End Marvel, <i>Lee's Last Retreat</i> , pp. 3-199	Cemetery Dedication & Fortenbaugh Lecture (pm)
13-Nov 30/ Dec 3	The Soldiers in Peace Connelly, <i>The Marble Man</i> , pp. 11-61, 83-98, 102-122, 130-219	Washington
14-Dec 7/ Dec 10	final informal student presentations on their units	Mustering-out: Group Portrait @ Gibson's and Final Party