

THE HISTORY CLUB

On September 26, Mr. Frank Crotty our guest speaker spoke on "THE THREE MOST IMPORATANT DAYS in AMERICAN HISTORY." The battle of Gettysburg was fought July 1-3, 1863 in and around the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania by Union and Confederate forces during the American Civil War. It involved the largest number of casualties of the entire war. Most historians believe that it was the turning point of the war. After General Robert Lee's success in Chancellorsville, Virginia in May 1863, he led his army through Shenandoah Valley to begin his second invasion of the North- the Gettysburg Campaign. By invading Gettysburg and with the hope of penetrating as far as Harrisburg and even Philadelphia, General Lee hoped to influence the Northern politicians to give up their prosecution of the war. Also Lee hoped to gain recognition and legitimacy of the Confederacy to the British and the French.

On July 1, Union Major General George Meade's Army of the Potomac with the strength of approximately 100,000 men collided with General Robert Lee's Army of Northern Virginia with the strength of approximately 75,000 men. Both sides fought fiercely and valiantly. In the first day of the engagement the army of Northern Virginia had the upper hand. On the second day of the battle, most of both armies had assembled. The union line was laid in a defensive formation resembling a fishhook. In late afternoon of July 2, General Lee launched a heavy assault on the Union left flank and fierce fighting raged. On the Union right, Confederate attacked into a full scale assaults. All across the battlefield, despite significant losses, the Union defenders held their lines.

On the third day of the battle, fighting resumed on Culp's Hill, and cavalry battles raged to the east and south, but the main event was a dramatic infantry assault by 12,500 Confederates against the center of the Union line on the Cemetery Ridge, known as Pickett's Charge. The charge was repulsed by Union rifle and artillery fire at great loss to the Confederate army. After this most dramatic event, General Lee led his army retreat back to Virginia. Between the two armies, the casualties were 46,000-51,000 in the three-day battle, the most costly in the US history. The big question though was- why did General Meade allowed General Lee to escape? Perhaps it could have shortened the war if General Meade destroyed Lee's remaining army.

On November 19, 1863 President Lincoln used the dedication ceremony for the Gettysburg National Cemetery to honor the fallen Union soldiers and redefine the purpose of the war in his historic Gettysburg address.