SCHULTE & ASSOCIATES
Building Code Consultants
3701 Franklin Park Circle
Lawrence, KS 66046
fpeschulte@aol.com
847/312-7617

HISTORY IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR: SEPTEMBER 11TH

By Richard Schulte

On November 18th, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln took a special train north from Washington to a little town in Pennsylvania, Gettysburg. The invitation for Lincoln to speak at the ceremonies at Gettysburg to be held the next day had been an afterthought-Lincoln was not a popular president (because of the lack of success in prosecuting the War) and Lincoln was widely expected to be defeated in the election of 1864.

Lincoln's Address at Gettysburg was panned in the press afterwards. The President was ridiculed for the shortness of his remarks:

> *Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.*
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> *Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.*
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> *But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate – we can not consecrate – we can not hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*

The story of the Battle of Gettysburg began two months earlier on the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, Virginia. General "Fighting Joe" Hooker detached a portion of his army, the Army of the Potomac, for an upstream crossing of the Rappahannock in an attempt to out-flank the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia's fortifications on the hills overlooking Fredericksburg and cut the Confederate's supply lines in the rear of the Army of Northern Virginia's position.

General Robert E. Lee divined Hooker's strategy and dispatched a portion of his army at Fredericksburg to meet the flanking movement and delay Hooker's advance until General T. J. (Stonewall) Jackson's Corp could come up and then Lee and Jackson would go on the offensive against Hooker's flanking movement. On the evening of May 1st, 1863, Lee and Jackson developed a strategy of outflanking Hooker's outflanking movement.

The next day, May 2nd, while Lee attacked Hooker's Army at Chancellorsville in order to fix Hooker's forces in place, General Jackson circled Hooker's position. Near sunset, the troops under Jackson's command struck the end of the Union Army's position at Chancellorsville and the rout of Union Army at Chancellorsville began. Given the time of day, Jackson's pursuit of the routed Federal troops continued well past sundown aided by the light of a full moon. While the brilliance of the flanking movement was Jackson's greatest victory of his military career, the rout of Hooker's Army ended badly. Stonewall Jackson was gravely wounded in the battle when he was fired upon by his own troops who mistakenly took the General and his staff for Federal calvary in the darkness.

Confederate surgeons amputated Stonewall Jackson's left arm that night and the General was expected to make a full recovery and soon return to command in the Army of Northern Virginia. Eight days later, on Sunday, May 10th, General Jackson succumbed to the complications of his wounds, pneumonia, and died. The loss of Stonewall Jackson had a profound impact on the effectiveness of the Army of Northern Virginia and eventually on the outcome at Gettysburg.

General Lee and the President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, realized that the Confederacy would lose a war of attrition with the North, so Lee and Davis developed the strategy of a second invasion of the North in 1863 in order to force a settlement of the war on Southern terms, recognition of the independence of the Confederate States of America. (The first invasion of the North in 1862 had been unsuccessful because General Lee's orders for the invasion had been used to as a wrapper for two cigars by a Confederate officer and the cigars had been lost by the officer and then found by Union soldiers. The 1862 invasion had ended at Antietam with Lee's retreat back across the Potomac River into Virginia.)

After Stonewall Jackson's death, the Army of Northern Virginia once again headed north across the Potomac River through Maryland and then into Pennsylvania, while the Army of the Potomac now commanded by General George Meade (who had replaced "Fighting Joe" Hooker after Hooker's failure at the Battle of Chancellorsville) shadowed Lee's Army taking care to remain between Lee and the northern capitol, Washington. Purely by accident (because General Jeb Stuart, the commander of the Confederate Calvary, had been unable to carry out Lee's orders to return to and remain with the Army of Northern Virginia), Lee's Army stubbled into Meade's Army near Gettysburg on July 1st, 1863. The three day battle which ensued was the "high water mark" of the Confederacy and, when combined with the surrender of Vicksburg on July 4th, the turning point of the Civil War.

The Battle of Gettysburg ended with what is known as "Pickett's Charge", a headlong fully exposed charge of Confederate soldiers across the floor of a valley nearly three-quarters mile wide and then an uphill assault on the Federal infantry fortifications, all of the while being shredded by artillery fire from the rear of the Federal positions. Pickett's Charge was a desperate attempt by General Lee to win the war for the South, but the results of the infantry assault were a foregone conclusion even before the assault was attempted.

Would the results of the Battle of Gettysburg been different if Stonewall Jackson had not died from the wounds he suffered at Chancellorsville? With General Jackson's genius for the offensive, there seems to be little doubt that the Battle of Gettysburg would have been fought differently if he had been on the field in command of one of the Confederate Corps. Perhaps, it is possible that Confederate troops under the command of General Jackson would have been able to dislodge Federal troops on the second day of the battle and that the Battle of Gettysburg would have ended with a Southern victory on the second day of the battle, rather than a defeat on the third day, but we can really only speculate on that.

Even if the Battle of Gettysburg had resulted in a victory for the Confederacy, it is doubtful that the South would have won the Civil War. (The South's quest for independence from the North was probably a "lost cause" from day one.) The day following the Battle of Gettysburg (July 4th), General Grant's siege of Vicksburg, the Confederate bastion along the Mississippi River, ended with the surrender of the town. With the surrender of Vicksburg, Federal forces commanded the entire length of the Mississippi River (except for the town of Port Hudson, which surrendered five days later, on July 9th), and the Confederacy was cut in two. The victory at Vicksburg freed up the North's two best generals, General Grant and General Sherman, to find other ways to destroy the resistance of the Confederacy.

Despite the importance the Battle of Gettysburg and the surrender of Vicksburg in the history of our nation, the 150th anniversary of Battle of Gettysburg on July 1st, 2nd and 3rd, 2013, and the surrender of Vicksburg on July 4th, 2013, went largely unnoticed. More than likely, the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address will also pass unnoticed, particularly since the anniversary of the Gettysburg Address nearly coincides with the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President John Kennedy in Dallas on November 22, 1963. Given the lack of interest in the Battle of Gettysburg and the surrender of Vicksburg by the current generations, there seems to be no doubt that the events of the morning of September 11th will also recede from our collective memories soon.

Certainly, there is no comparison between the historical significance of the Battle of Gettysburg, the surrender of Vicksburg or the Gettysburg Address and the events of September 11th. At least so far, the attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon seem to have had little significant long term impact on our nation, other than the creation of the Department of Homeland Security. It would appear that the greatest threat to our nation resulting from the September 11th attacks is the threat to our freedoms caused by our attempts to prevent future terrorist attacks.

Will "*government of the people, by the people, for the people*" survive the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to secure America from terror attacks, or will America as we know it "*perish from the earth*"? At present, we don't know the answer to that question, but certainly by the 150th anniversary of the September 11th attack, we will. Let us hope that America will survive our yearning for absolute security in aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11th.

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