THE PRESS REPORTS
THE BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

By J. Cutler Andrews*

ON THE porch of a tavern in Taneytown, Maryland, Reporter Lorenzo Livingstone Crouse of the New York Times penciled a dispatch containing the first words the public would read about the battle of Gettysburg. This is what the dispatch said:

Near Gettysburg, July 1—A heavy engagement has been going on since nine o’clock this A.M. between the rebel forces of Longstreet and Hill and the First and Eleventh corps, under Gens. Reynolds and Meade.
The locality of the fight is beyond Gettysburg, on the Chambersburg Pike.
Portions of the fight have been very severe, and attended with heavy loss.
Thus far the onset of the enemy has been successfully resisted, and the Third and Twelfth are now coming up.
I regret to say that Major Gen. Reynolds was mortally wounded, and has since died.¹

What the newspaper reporters wrote about the battle of Gettysburg climaxed a four years’ outpouring of news that created a revolution in the methods of American newsgathering. From the outbreak of the war, the leading New York dailies, Herald, Tribune, Times, and World, had eclipsed the press of any other city in obtaining news of the activities of the armed forces on both sides. Among the Northern press they received competition from the correspondents of the Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Chicago, and St. Louis papers. In the South, the Richmond press was comparable to the Gotham dailies in its dominance of Confederate news enterprise. But the Richmond

*Dr. Andrews is president of the Pennsylvania Historical Association and professor of history at Chatham College. He is author of The North Reports the Civil War. This paper was read at the Association’s convention at Gettysburg, October 11, 1963.
¹ New York Times, July 2, 1863.
press had competition too, from the daily newspapers of Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, Memphis, Nashville, and one or two other Southern cities. Along with special correspondents of the leading newspapers of North and South, representatives of the New York and Confederate Associated Presses, volunteer letter writers for the newspapers of smaller towns and cities, foreign correspondents of a few English, French, and German newspapers, and a number of artists for the illustrated weeklies and photographers competed and collaborated in recording the Civil War for posterity.2

Somewhere in the neighborhood of forty-five newspapermen were on the scene between July 1 and 3 to report the battle of Gettysburg for the Northern, Southern, and English press. They included ten “specials” gathering news for the New York Herald, nine for the Tribune, four for the Times, and one for the World, three Philadelphia Inquirer correspondents, three reporters accredited to John W. Forney’s Philadelphia Press, a highly respected Boston Journal news scribe, the chief Washington correspondent of the Cincinnati Gazette, a Chicago Tribune reporter, and Theodore Barnard of the New York Associated Press. Of the nine Confederate reporters attached to Lee’s army in the Gettysburg campaign, one was an agent of the Confederate Associated Press, and three were affiliated with the Richmond press. Two of the three Richmond correspondents were accredited to the Richmond Enquirer; the third was a reporter for the Richmond Sentinel. The ace reporter of the Charleston Courier, Felix Gregory De Fontaine, was prevented from accompanying Lee’s army on its northward march into Pennsylvania by his wedding to Miss Georgia Moore on June 10, 1863, at Spartanburg, South Carolina. The able correspondent of the Savannah Republican, Peter W. Alexander, was on hand, however, with two other correspondents of the same paper to provide the Republican with an eyewitness account of the fighting. Francis E. Lawley of the London Times, the Richmond correspondent of that newspaper, had the honor of representing the English press on the bloody field of Gettysburg.

At least two journalists from small-town newspapers in Pennsylvania were in a position to report the battle. One of these was an unidentified correspondent of the Lancaster Express, well mounted and "fully equipped for reportorial duty." The other man was Robert Goodloe Harper, editor of Gettysburg's weekly Adams Sentinel, who reported the battle in person, printing his story as local news on page two of the July 7, 1863, issue of his paper.

The great majority of the press corps who reported Gettysburg had had previous newspaper experience before or during the war. Whitelaw Reid of the Cincinnati Gazette had been the editor of a country newspaper in Ohio and the correspondent of several Ohio dailies before he won his spurs as a Gazette war correspondent at the battle of Shiloh. Times man Sam Wilkeson had edited Thurlow Weed's Albany Evening Journal and headed the Washington bureau of the New York Tribune before he transferred to the Times in 1863. Charles Carleton Coffin of the Boston Journal had had nearly a decade of newspaper experience with various Boston newspapers before he embarked on his four-year career as war correspondent for the Journal. Starting as a printer's apprentice in the office of the Milwaukee Free Democrat, Lorenzo Crounse had worked his way up to become editor and part owner of that newspaper before he became a war correspondent, first for a group of Western newspapers and then for the New York Times.

At least two of the reporters at Gettysburg had had some experience at soldiering, Times man Edward A. Paul as captain of a Massachusetts company in the Mexican War and the Philadelphia Inquirer's John H. Taggart as a volunteer colonel in the

---

Lancaster Daily Express, July 2, 1863.

Time, XXXV (February 12, 1940), p. 48.


Dictionary of American Biography, IV, 265-266; W. E. Griffis, Charles Carleton Coffin (Boston, 1898).

Milwaukee Republican, July 12, 1881; undated obituary in unidentified Kingston, N. Y., paper in L. L. Crounse Papers, formerly in possession of Crounse family, Washington, D. C.
Peninsular campaign of 1862. Josiah R. Sypher of the New York Tribune had read law with Thaddeus Stevens in Lancaster and had been admitted to the Lancaster bar only about a year before the holocaust at Gettysburg. Nathaniel G. Shepherd, another Tribune correspondent, had at various times been an artist in New York City, taught writing and drawing in Georgia for several years, and dabbled in the insurance business. He also had some talent as a poet.9

No less than four Gettysburg reporters were of Pennsylvania origin. Moon-faced Philadelphia Press man Joel Cook and Taggart were Philadelphians, Sypher was a product of Perry County, and the youthful Uriah H. Painter of the Philadelphia Inquirer hailed from West Chester. The average age of the group was somewhere in the mid thirties. At 46, Wilkeson was the dean of the outfit; Joel Cook, a mere twenty-one-year-old, was probably the youngest reporter on the field.

Five of the newsmen who were present at Gettysburg are known to have been college graduates. These included Reid from Miami University in Ohio, Sypher and Wilkeson from Union College in New York State, Alexander from the State University of Georgia, and Lawley from Balliol College, Oxford. Painter had attended Oberlin College in the late fifties but had been called home before he could complete his course to take over his father's ailing lumber business.10 Distinguished careers in Journalism lay ahead of many of the reporters who told the world what they saw at Gettysburg. Crounse would head the Times bureau in Washington from 1865 to 1873; Reid was destined to become the publisher of the New York Tribune after the retirement of Horace Greeley. The year after Appomattox, Coffin would be in Europe, reporting the Austro-Prussian War for the Boston Journal. Joel Cook was the prospective financial editor of the Philadelphia


10 Biographical information about Painter may be found in C. C. Painter, Genealogical and Biographical Sketches of the Family of Samuel Painter (Baltimore, 1903), p. 45; Washington Post, October 21, 1900; Philadelphia Press, October 22, 1900.
Ledger for a long stretch of years and American correspondent of the London Times. His namesake, Tom Cook, would be remembered as the terror of the New York space men in the 1870's and as the reporter who uncovered one of the biggest frauds ever staged in San Francisco.¹¹

Perhaps the most glamorous figure among the Gettysburg reporters was the London Times correspondent, Lawley. As a young British M. P., Lawley had been selected as private secretary to Gladstone when the latter became Chancellor of the Exchequer in the early 1850's. Unfortunately Lawley had been interested in horse racing from an early age, and his disastrous involvement in gambling and speculation became known when his appointment to an important colonial office was announced in Parliament. Even more serious were charges that he had made profitable personal use of private information acquired as Gladstone's secretary. While a parliamentary investigation of the charges was still in process, Lawley left England for the United States and remained abroad for nine years. In America he became a member of the British legation in Washington, met William H. Russell at the time of the latter's American tour of duty as a special correspondent of the Times, and while on a trip to England in the summer of 1862 accepted an appointment as a Times correspondent in Richmond. How he got to Richmond is not known, but the English public apparently regarded it as a great feat for a newspaper correspondent to have made his way through the blockade to the Southern capital. Lawley's handsome appearance, pleasing voice, and seductive manner soon made him the darling of Richmond society. His resemblance to the pictures of George Washington was remarked upon wherever he went in America, rendering him even more congenial to Southerners. With Stonewall Jackson, James Longstreet, and J. E. B. Stuart he was on intimate terms, and his reporting inspired such favorable comment that his account of the battle of Fredericksburg was published separately.¹²

¹¹ Journalist, I (March 22, 1884), p. 9; New York Citizen, January 19, 1867.
The stage was set for the press to report Gettysburg when Lee convinced Jefferson Davis and his cabinet of the efficacy of his plan for the invasion of Maryland and Pennsylvania. On June 3, 1863, Lee commenced his advance northward and westward from Fredericksburg; twelve days later the first Confederate graybacks crossed the Potomac into Maryland. The New York Tribune headlined the news on June 16: “Advance of the rebels. Invasion of Pennsylvania—The Rebels Advancing in Three Columns—They Occupy Chambersburg—General Milroy Surrounded—He Cuts His Way Out and Falls Back to Harper’s Ferry.”

Robert E. Rodes’s division of Richard S. Ewell’s corps constituted the first echelon of the invasion, but it was not until a week later that the main body of Lee’s army crossed into Maryland and advanced up the Cumberland Valley to Chambersburg. The Savannah Republican reporter, V. A. S. Parks, who was attached to John B. Hood’s division of Longstreet’s corps, told about Hood halting his division for an hour after crossing the river at Williamsport and issuing a whiskey ration. Parks explained:

> While I believe a too free use of the “ardent” is injurious particularly to the soldier, I believe the troops were benefitted this time; for all the previous night and until 3 o’clock that evening they were exposed to a cold, drizzling rain. Furthermore, we had to wade the Potomac and were not allowed to strip. In thirty minutes after the whiskey was issued, Hood’s division presented the liveliest spectacle I ever saw. Good humor and wit ran high, and it was difficult even to hear one’s self talk.18

Meanwhile the Federal army under Joseph Hooker was on its way north; it crossed the Potomac farther downstream and moved on to Frederick, Maryland. At Frederick, the Northern newspaper correspondents learned of a controversy between Hooker and Major General Henry W. Halleck which brought about Hooker’s removal from command on June 28 and his replacement by Major General George G. Meade. The New York Tribune reporter T. C. Grey concluded that “the relieving of Hooker is

---

18 Savannah Republican, July 21, 1863.
received with a kind of apathetic indifference by the army although many are loud in denouncing that act at this particular moment." Herald correspondent Leonard A. Hendrick had a different conception of the army's mood. Said Hendrick:

Many liked General Hooker and had faith in him; most believe in the ability of General Meade to fill his place, but I must say that General McClellan is the man the rank and file of the army want at their head. They cannot get over worshipping him, clamoring for him.14

Up to this point Lee had been kept in ignorance of the movements of his principal adversary by the prolonged absence of his cavalry. Stuart's cavalry had left the main body of Lee's command on June 24 on one of those spectacular raids which were the cavalry leader's chief delight. Not until the night of June 28 did the Confederate commander in chief receive information from the lips of a trusted spy that Hooker's army had crossed the Potomac and advanced as far north as Frederick. The receipt of this disturbing intelligence caused Lee to alter his plan of a general advance on Harrisburg and give orders for his army to concentrate east of South Mountain in the vicinity of Gettysburg. Some of the Confederate army reporters remained at Winchester or Martinsburg, Virginia, to take advantage of the telegraph and mail facilities that were available there. The other reporters who accompanied Lee's army on its advance into Pennsylvania welcomed the opportunity to assess the opinions of the local citizenry but expressed surprise at Lee's solicitude for the property rights of those citizens. To Alexander of the Savannah Republican, the people along the line of march were like "a flock of sheep terrified and bewildered by the howl of the wolf and . . . astonished and slavishly thankful that we do not murder, burn, and ravage as we go." He added contemptuously that

these Dutchmen . . . are good farmers and livers, but otherwise . . . a stupid set, but little superior to their sleek cattle and well-fed horses. They know nothing

beyond their immediate neighborhood, and fall far below
the people of the Confederacy in spirit and intelligence.15

A reporter for the Atlanta Southern Confederacy formed a dif-
ferent impression of the demeanor and attitude of Pennsylvanians
from that entertained by Alexander. At Greencastle, he said,

we... in vain looked for some development of that peace
sentiment which we have been told existed here. War! war!
to the knife, flashed from the bright eyes and pretty
lips of the ladies, and the stern, mournful, determined
countenances of the men showed that, although captive,
the unjust spirit that has waged so cruel a war on us,
has not yet become broken or submissive.

At Chambersburg,

the whole population were at the windows and on the
sidewalks to see us, and all breathed alike, in their quiet
looks, the most unmitigated scorn and hatred to us. We
could afford to be generous. We laughed at their demon-
strations, and to the indignant blurt of beauty we had
naught but smiles and polite salutations to return....
Even amidst their sackcloth and ashes they showed every
evidence of their character and we could not help but
admire the firm, unshaken manner in which they upheld
their accursed cause.19

The British military observer Colonel James A. L. Fremantle
of the Coldstream Guards was with Lawley as they rode north-
ward from Winchester in an effort to overtake Longstreet's march-
ing column. Near Martinsburg, they stopped overnight at the
home of a surly individual who was evidently pro-Unionist. Both
men were tired from their prolonged ride, and Lawley was ill.
A downfall of rain complicated matters, and when the travelers
broached the possibility of remaining at Martinsburg an addi-
tional day, their host became even more unfriendly. Mollifying
him with "the sight of real gold instead of Confederate paper
or even greenbacks," they resumed their journey and forded the

15 Savannah Republican, July 14, 1863.
19 Atlanta Weekly Southern Confederacy, July 14, 1863; Charleston
Mercury, July 15, 1863.
Potomac at Williamsport, getting soaked in the process. When they reached Hagerstown, they learned that Generals Lee and Longstreet were still several miles ahead. To obtain lodging they threw themselves on the hospitality of a “Dutchman” who was unimpressed by the fact that they were English travelers but became a little more civil at the sight of gold. On the following morning Lawley was so ill that he could not possibly ride any farther, and so the colonel mounted his horse a little before daybreak and started out in search of the generals. After riding eight miles, he overtook Longstreet. “Old Pete” agreed to send an ambulance back to fetch Lawley and invited the two Englishmen to join his mess during the campaign.

Apparently Lawley made a quick recovery after stopping overnight at the hotel in Chambersburg. An Austrian Hussar captain told of how the London Times correspondent exasperated some of the townspeople at breakfast by showing them a twenty-dollar Confederate note and predicting that within a month it would be worth more than all the greenbacks in the North put together. Writing from near Chambersburg the next day, Lawley told of seeing a young lady posted in front of her house with a small Union flag pinned to her bosom while General Hood’s division of Texans was passing by. The marchers observed but made no comment until one of the Texans with an air of great respect remarked to the young lady: “You had better lower that flag, Madam; our boys are tigers at breast works, especially when they mount the Yankee colours.”

In that last week of June, Northern editors were as confused as their readers as to the objective of Lee’s campaign. However, the threat to Harrisburg posed by Ewell’s advance up the Cumberland Valley caused Northern newspaper correspondents to flock there from all directions. By June 28, representatives of no less than twenty out-of-town newspapers, mainly from New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh, were at Harrisburg keeping the wires of the Atlantic and Ohio Telegraph Company hot with news and rumor about the invasion. Already, however, Major

Sir J. A. L. Fremantle, Three Months in the Southern States (Mobile, 1864), pp. 227-244; London Times, July 29, 1863.

General Darius Couch, who was in charge of the defense of Harrisburg, had established a censorship over all telegrams sent from there. Then came an order from the same source forbidding any reporter to cross the Susquehanna in search of news. Thus marooned in Harrisburg, these correspondents were denied the opportunity of being on hand to report the greatest battle of the war.\textsuperscript{29}

By June 28, the managing editor of the New York \textit{Herald} had a swarm of correspondents in the Maryland-Pennsylvania campaign area, but the \textit{Tribune} was having difficulty in finding qualified men to cover the invasion. The task of reporting the campaign was complicated by the fact that there were relatively few railroad or telegraph lines in the region where the two armies were converging, and most of these had been knocked out of commission by Stuart's cavalry and other Confederate raiders. Moreover, the War Department in Washington had imposed a strict censorship on press telegrams from the national capital and installed a new censor, named S. G. Lynch, in place of the more easy-going A. A. Lovett. Writing from Baltimore in protest against the censorship to the managing editor of the \textit{Tribune}, Shepherd wanted to know whether the \textit{Tribune} could use cipher messages to circumvent government interference. The Washington bureau chief of the same newspaper complained that "these operators and censors are sharp—to too sharp by half and House being one of the craft knows where the leaks are and how to 'whip the devil around the stump.'"\textsuperscript{20}

On Sunday evening, June 28, the Cincinnati \textit{Gazette} sent a wire to Whitelaw Reid in Washington advising him to hire a horse and equipment and join the army at once.\textsuperscript{21} Sam Wilkeson of the \textit{Times} and Painter of the Philadelphia \textit{Inquirer} decided to accompany him, and at eleven o'clock on Monday morning the trio of correspondents climbed aboard the train for Baltimore.


\textsuperscript{20} N. G. Shepherd to S. H. Gay, July 1, 1863, A. S. Hill to S. H. Gay, June 21, 1863, Gay Papers. Shepherd may have been unaware of the fact that the \textit{Tribune} was already using cipher in its special dispatches from its Washington news bureau to the New York office.

\textsuperscript{21} Gortossoz, \textit{Whitelaw Reid}, I, 93; Cincinnati \textit{Daily Gazette}, July 8, 1863.
At the Relay House, just outside Baltimore, the newspaper expedition came to a sudden halt.

"Am very sorry, gentlemen," said an official of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. "Would get you out at once if I could; but—the rebels cut our road last night, this side of Frederick, and we have no idea when we can run again."

Under the circumstances it seemed best for the three reporters to return to Washington. On the following morning, June 30, they started off for Baltimore again. This time the railroad agent was able to assure them that service had been resumed between Baltimore and Frederick and that a train would be available sometime in the afternoon. In Baltimore the correspondents heard that Meade's army was concentrating at Westminster, about twenty-eight miles northwest of Baltimore, in preparation to march on York. And so, after arriving at Frederick, Wilkeson and Painter decided to return to Baltimore to ride up to Westminster on a government train via the Western Maryland Railroad.

In the meantime, Sydney Howard Gay, the Tribune's managing editor, making use of a patched up news organization, rushed A. H. Byington up to Lancaster where he found Sypher, recently returned from Harrisburg, and pressed him into service. Shepherd, who had been evicted from the army by Hooker a few days before, was reinstated. Grey, Thomas M. Newbould, Frank Bellew, an artist for the New York Illustrated News, William H. Kent, M. D. Landon, and a certain Lewis were the other members of the Tribune corps of reporters in the Army of the Potomac. A weak spot in the news organization of the Tribune was the messenger service. In the opinion of one of the Tribune reporters, the English-born R. D. Francis, the Tribune messenger in Meade's army, was too fat and too eager to be a correspondent to be of much use as a messenger and too thick headed, scary and ignorant for a correspondent. "He moreover drinks too much and too bad whiskey and is troubled with an affection in his rectum which renders hard riding obnoxious." Hill in the Washington office thought likewise that a bright lad who could ride like the devil and understand what was wanted of him would be worth 199 Francisces and cost much less.22

22 A. S. Hill to S. H. Gay, June 23, 1863, Gay Papers. For other comments on the Tribune messenger service see N. G. Shepherd to S. H. Gay, June 28, 1863, A. H. Byington to S. H. Gay, June 30, 1863, Gay Papers.
Coffin of the Boston Journal had been at Harrisburg in the middle of June and had covered considerable ground since then, dating letters to his newspaper from Baltimore, Washington, Baltimore again, and finally Frederick before he began following the army northward from that point. That same afternoon of July 1, Whitelaw Reid rode from Frederick to Meade’s headquarters at Taneytown, where he found the new commander of the Army of the Potomac poring over a map and looking much more like a thoughtful student than a dashing soldier. While Reid eyed the general, another horseman galloped up and hastily dismounted. It was the chief correspondent of the New York Times with the Army of the Potomac, L. L. Crounse. Early that morning Crounse had lost his bearings during a scouting mission. While looking for the right road, he had stumbled upon one of the Confederate columns advancing through the Cashtown Gap in South Mountain toward Gettysburg. Making good his escape, the Times correspondent hurried to Major General John F. Reynolds, the Union I Corps commander, and informed him that Lee’s men were coming that way. In the fight which followed, Reynolds had been killed, and there were rumors that the Union force had been driven back.

As Reid listened to Crounse’s exciting story, he decided to ride to the scene of action at once. Although he had covered twenty-seven miles on horseback over rough roads that day, it was comforting to know that this time he was not to repeat his unfortunate experience at Chancellorsville, where he missed the battle entirely. It was decided that he and Crounse should travel to Gettysburg together, and so off they galloped up the Gettysburg road, threading their way through the marching masses of infantry and dodging the crowded wagon trains. They met a stream of aides and orderlies coming from the opposite direction, and now and then a quartermaster, surgeon, or commissary in search of stores. Crounse seemed to know them all: from each in turn he extracted the latest news.

“Everything splendid; have driven them five or six miles from Gettysburg,” they learned from one informant.

---

"Badly cut up, sir, and falling back," shouted another.
"D----d Dutchmen of the Eleventh Corps broke and ran like sheep, just as they did at Chancellorsville, and it's going to be another disaster of just the same sort," cried a third man, who was almost breathless with excitement.

Turning off the main road into a side road which they hoped would lead to the Baltimore turnpike, the two correspondents secured lodging for the night at a private home in the village of Two Taverns, some four and a half miles to the rear of the battle line.

The Confederate reporter Peter Alexander had been in the neighborhood of Chambersburg that morning. He was sitting on the wet ground propped up against a tree writing war correspondence when General Lee and his staff came by, riding in the direction of Cashtown and Gettysburg. Alexander watched Anderson's division of Hill's corps march in the same direction, followed later by Johnson's division of the same corps. But since Longstreet's corps, to which Alexander was attached, was still four miles from the battlefield at midnight, Alexander did not reach there until the morning of the second day.

Most of the other correspondents who reported the battle had arrived on the field by that time and were ranged at various points along the battle line from Culp's Hill to Little Round Top. The man from Boston, Charles Carleton Coffin, had spent the night in Hanover, twelve miles east of Gettysburg. Early Thursday morning he headed for the Baltimore turnpike in an effort to approach the battlefield from the south. Near the cemetery he was brought to a halt by a soldier who wanted to know where he was going.

"Into Gettysburg," Coffin replied.

"Into Gettysburg! Do you know where you are? I am on the picket line. Do you see that brick house with the window open? That is full of Confederates, and they have been picking us off all the morning, and the quicker you get out of here the better it will be for you."

The picket evidently meant what he said, and so Coffin turned around and rode back to the cemetery, where he met the Union XI Corps commander, Major General O. O. Howard. Howard promptly invited him to a breakfast of cold ham, hard biscuits, and
THE PRESS REPORTS

coffee. While they ate, the general told the story of the first day's battle and described the positions of the troops.24

The London Times correspondent Lawley was up at 3:30 that morning and insisted on riding to the battlefield in spite of his convalescent condition. About two o'clock in the afternoon, General Longstreet suggested that Lawley climb a tall oak tree on the top of Seminary Ridge to obtain a better view of the battle. Lawley's lofty perch enabled him to see with the aid of a telescope the entire battlefield, and so there he remained in the company of Colonel Fremantle and another foreign military observer until the afternoon shadows lengthened into twilight. From time to time during the afternoon, General Lee came to the foot of the tree to ask questions about the movements of the enemy.25

Toward noon, General Meade and Major General John Newton, the new commander of the Union I Corps, met and conferred on Cemetery Ridge within visual range of a tall church belfry in Gettysburg. Only a few paces away from the generals stood a reporter for the New York Herald named George W. Hosmer. While Meade and the corps commander were talking, they were startled by the sharp zing of a rifle bullet which passed between their faces. Thinking it was a chance shot, they resumed their conversation, but Hosmer had already spotted the sharpshooter who had fired the "chance shot," one of several who were posted in the church belfry. Approaching Meade, the Herald man pointed out the enemy rifleman, whereupon the two generals withdrew to a safer spot beyond range of enemy rifle fire.26

With the exception of sporadic cannonading and some skirmishing near the so-called Peach Orchard, there was no action on the battlefield until late afternoon. About 4:00 p.m. Longstreet threw two divisions against an exposed salient on the Union left and all but captured Little Round Top, the key to the Union position in that part of the field. During the worst of the fighting, the

24 C. C. Coffin, Marching to Victory (New York, 1888), pp. 231-233; Coffin, The Boys of '61 (Boston, 1866), p. 289.
26 New York World, June 29, 1913.
Union III Corps commander, Major General Daniel E. Sickles, was struck below the knee by a shell fragment and his leg so badly injured that it had to be amputated at once. When he regained consciousness, he observed Tom Cook of the New York Herald standing nearby. Beckoning to Cook, the wounded Sickles looked up at him feebly and remarked with suitable piety, "Cook, in this war a man is but a cypher. God rules and directs all for the best." When Reporter Reid saw him the next morning, however, he was lying "grim and stoical" on a stretcher borne by two privates—his cap pulled down over his eyes and a cigar in his mouth!\(^7\)

Over on the Union right at about the same time, the reporters attached to what remained of the Union XII Corps watched Ewell assault the Union position on Culp's Hill and penetrate to within a short distance of the Baltimore Pike, dangerously close to Meade's rear.

Both Coffin and Reid were awakened at 4:00 a.m. on Friday, July 3 by the sound of guns on the Union right. Meade had taken the offensive in an effort to recover the position on Culp's Hill which had been lost the evening before. At seven o'clock that morning, the Tribune correspondent in that quarter of the field, T. C. Grey, completed his dispatch describing the action of the day before and stated that he had not seen Newbould since they separated at Taneytown on July 1. "I know of no other Tribune correspondent here except myself," Grey added, "and consequently feel my inability to send you full particulars of the battle at all points. I am first on the right and then on the left and gather all information possible." While waiting to give his letter to Messenger Francis to carry to Westminster, Grey added a postscript, saying: "Matters do not look particularly encouraging here. The rebels seem to be on all sides. . . . At present I am under a Knoll writing this with a perfect shower of rifle balls and shells passing over."\(^9\) By eleven o'clock, however, the Union counterattack had pushed the Confederates back and restored the Union line from Culp's Hill to Cemetery Hill.

\(^7\) New York Herald, July 6, 1863.
\(^8\) Cincinnati Daily Gazette, July 8, 1863.
There was a lull in the fighting, and then at about one o'clock Lee's artillery on Seminary Ridge cut loose with the most tremendous bombardment of the war. Eighty Union big guns took up the challenge and threw back their fiery retorts. Looking on from Meade's headquarters within range of the bombardment, Times correspondent Wilkeson recorded the fact that:

Every size and form of shell known to British and American gunnery shrieked, whirled, moaned, whistled and wrathfully fluttered over our ground. . . . Not an orderly—not an ambulance—not a straggler was to be seen upon the plain swept by this tempest of orchestral death thirty minutes after it commenced.30

On the opposite side of the battle line, a Richmond Enquirer correspondent concluded that:

I have never yet heard such tremendous artillery firing. . . . The very earth shook beneath our feet and the hills and rocks seemed to reel like a drunken man. For one hour and a half this most terrific fire was continued, during which time the shrieking of shells, the crash of falling timber, the fragments of rock flying through the air shattered from the cliffs by solid shot, the heavy murmurings from the valley between the opposing armies, the splash of bursting shrapnel, and the fierce neighing of artillery horses, made a picture terribly grand and sublime, but which my pen utterly fails to describe.31

About two-thirty the fire from the Union batteries slackened. Almost immediately Confederate troops formed for an attack upon Meade's center under the delusion that the Union batteries had been silenced. The attacking force of 15,000 men, spearheaded by George E. Pickett's division of Longstreet's corps, had nearly a mile of broad valley to cross before it could reach the Union lines. L. L. Crounse thus described the charge:

The enemy's front was that of one division in line of battle; there were two such lines, and a very heavy line

of skirmishers, almost equal to another line of battle. Out of their concealment in the woods they came across the open fields and up the gentle crest, on the top of which was our line—a weak line of men behind a line of defences hastily thrown up and composed partly of stone walls, partly of rifle-pits, and partly of natural projections of soil and rock. The first charge was repulsed; the line broke and fell back before it had reached a point two-thirds the way over.\(^2\)

Then a second line was formed which continued its advance until “expressions of fierce rage” could be distinguished on the faces of the approaching enemy. Coffin wrote:

Men fire into each other’s faces, not five feet apart. There are bayonet-thrusts, sabre-strokes, pistol shots; cool, deliberate movements on the part of some,—hot, passionate, desperate efforts with others; hand-to-hand contests; recklessness of life; tenacity of purpose; fiery determination; oaths, yells, curses, hurrahs, shoutings; men going down on their hands and knees, spinning round like tops, throwing out their arms, gulping up blood, falling; legless, armless, headless. There are ghastly heaps of dead men. Seconds are centuries; minutes, ages; but the thin line does not break.\(^3\)

Viewing the action from the Confederate side, the same Richmond Enquirer correspondent reported that:

I have never seen since the war began (and I have been in all the great fights of this army) troops enter a fight in such splendid order as did this splendid division of Pickett’s. Now Pettigrew’s command emerge from the woods upon Pickett’s left, and sweep down the slope of the hill to the valley beneath, and some two or three hundred yards in rear of Pickett. I saw by the wavering of this line as they entered the conflict that they wanted the firmness of nerve and steadiness of tread which so characterized Pickett’s men. . . . These were mostly raw troops, which had been recently brought from the South, and who had, perhaps, never been under fire—who certainly had never been in any very severe fight—and I trembled for their conduct. . . . But on press

\(^2\) New York Times, July 8, 1863.

\(^3\) Coffin, Boys of ’61, p. 247.
Pickett's brave Virginians; and now the enemy open upon them, from more than fifty guns, a terrible fire of grape, shell, and canister. On, on they move in unbroken line, delivering a deadly fire as they advance. Now they have reached the Emmetsburgh road, and here they meet a severe fire from the heavy masses of the enemy's infantry, posted behind the stone fence. . . . Now again they advance; they storm the stone fence; the Yankees fly. The enemy's batteries are one by one silenced in quick succession as Pickett's men deliver their fire at the gunners and drive them from their pieces. I see Kemper and Armistead plant their banner in the enemy's works. I hear their glad shout of victory.

Let us look after Pettigrew's division. Where are they now? . . . I turn my eyes to the left, and there, all over the plain, in utmost confusion, is scattered this strong division. Their line is broken; they are flying, apparently panic-stricken, to the rear. The gallant Pettigrew is wounded, but he still retains command and is vainly striving to rally his men. Still the moving mass rush pell-mell to the rear, and Pickett is left alone to contend with the hordes of the enemy now pouring in upon him from every side. Garnett falls, killed by a minie ball, and Kemper, the brave and chivalrous, reels under a mortal wound and is taken to the rear. . . . The order is given to fall back, and our men commence the movement, doggedly contending for every inch of ground. The enemy press heavily our retreating line. . . . Armistead is wounded and left in the enemy's hands.34

London *Times* correspondent Lawley stole a glance at Lee as the survivors of the charge came staggering back across the field and was surprised to find no trace of anxiety on the face of the general "in this the hour of our deepest gloom." Riding from one group of stragglers to the next, Lee with "kind, firm, calm words" infused confidence and spirit into his men in the midst of their frustration and defeat. Rushing up to him with tears in his eyes, Brigadier General Cadmus M. Wilcox exclaimed, "General, I have tried to rally my men, but as yet they will not stand." According to Lawley, Lee replied, "Never mind, General; the fault is all mine. All that you have to do is to remedy it so far as you can."35

34 *Daily Richmond Enquirer*, July 22, 1863.
The battle was now virtually over, and newsmen began leaving the field to communicate with their editors. Meanwhile, Byington of the New York *Tribune* had been laying the groundwork for what proved to be one of the biggest news scoops of the war. Byington was at Hanover when the battle opened. There had been a cavalry fight there between Stuart and Judson Kilpatrick the day before, and the town still showed the effects of it. Byington asked the proprietor of the hotel if there was a telegraph operator anywhere near.

“Yes,” said the hotel man, “there he is, over yonder” and pointed to a little hunchback named Daniel Trone, who was lying asleep on a bench near the door. Byington wakened the hunchback and asked him where his battery was.

“Home under the bed,” was the answer. “Wires down everywhere; no use trying to telegraph.”

Under prodding from Byington coupled with financial inducements, Trone went over to his house and fished out the battery. Byington then procured a hand car and mobilized a crew to repair the gaps in the line. As soon as the wires were hitched together, they put the battery in operation; presently the operator waved his hat in the air and shouted that he had Baltimore. It was then arranged that Byington should have a monopoly of the wire for two days along with a Philadelphia *Press* reporter who had helped in connecting the relays. As soon as this was effected, Byington headed for the battlefield. There he encountered General Howard, who gave him an account of the first day’s fight. About this time Sypher caught up with him; together they hurried back to Hanover and telegraphed to the *Tribune* at five o’clock on the afternoon of July 2 a complete story of the fighting during the first two days of the battle. Since the New York *Herald* correspondent Hosmer was still on the train carrying his story to New York in person, the *Tribune* account was the only one of any consequence to get through that night. About nine-thirty that evening the *Tribune* issued an extra, and 65,000 copies of it were sold on the streets of New York before morning.

Byington had sent his story by way of Washington and had signed his own name to it. Presently the operator received a message from the War Department stating that the President wanted to know. “Who is Byington?” The reporter wired back, “Ask
Daddy Welles,” referring to the Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles. Summoned from his bed at midnight, Welles identified Byington and expressed the opinion that the telegram was reliable. Within a little while another message from Lincoln came over the wire requesting the use of the line for dispatches between the War Department and General Meade. In return Byington exacted a promise that his dispatches should be forwarded to the Tribune via the White House. During the next few days, while other correspondents were galloping all over the surrounding countryside in search of a telegraph station, Byington kept the Tribune provided with all the latest army news.36

Striving to break the Tribune news monopoly, the mercurial Frank Chapman of the New York Herald reached Baltimore ahead of the other reporters early in the morning of Saturday, July 4. Unable to find the local manager of the American Telegraph Company with whom the Herald had a contract, he hastened to the home of James N. Worl, superintendent of the rival Independent Telegraph Company, and persuaded him to go down to the telegraph office. To hold the wire against Grey of the Tribune, who came dashing in a little while later, Chapman produced a pocket edition of the Bible and turning to the first chapter of Genesis told Worl to “keep your men busy sending this until I get back.” Chapman kept the wires hot all day. Whenever his copy ran short, the operators worked in pages from the Bible until he came back with more. The other correspondents at the telegraph were infuriated by his stratagem but were unable to improvise any counter-measures.37

Reid and Coffin left the battlefield on the morning after the battle after trying in vain to obtain access to the army telegraph and galloped nearly thirty miles through mud and rain to the railroad station at Westminster. The hospital train which took them to Baltimore moved so slowly that they did not reach the city until the following morning. From Baltimore, Coffin telegraphed a half-column summary of the battle to Boston, after which he started for New York on the evening train. Reid planned to carry

his story to Cincinnati with him, but since railroad travel between Baltimore and Harrisburg was still interrupted, he had to go the long way around through Philadelphia.

Coffin spent all day Monday, July 6 on the train to Boston, writing some of his story as he rode along and wiring leader paragraphs ahead to his paper. When he reached the *Journal* office that evening, he found Boston's Newspaper Row jammed with people awaiting his coming. While the crowd milled about outside, Coffin locked himself inside a small room at the office and wrote steadily until the *Journal* went to press, admitting only the man who transmitted the copy. When his story was finished, he collapsed on a pile of newspapers in the corner of the room and slept for almost twenty-four hours.

At eight o'clock on the Saturday morning after the battle, London *Times* correspondent Lawley accompanied Fremantle and another military observer to the front line, meeting General Longstreet on the way. He noticed that Longstreet was in a "high state of amusement and good humor." A flag of truce had just come in from the Federal army, and its bearer had made known that "General Longstreet was wounded, and a prisoner, but would be taken care of." Longstreet sent back word that he was extremely grateful, "but that being neither wounded nor a prisoner he would be quite able to take care of himself! At 10:00 a.m. the reporter learned at headquarters of Lee's decision to return to Virginia. As the Confederates trudged southward toward Hagerstown on the following day, Lawley sought shelter from the rain that muddied their track in a covered buggy belonging to the medical corps. At Hagerstown, the letters and telegrams carrying dates of July 4 and 5 which Alexander had addressed to the Savannah *Republican* were returned to him with the explanation that his courier had been unable to cross the Potomac because of the high water. Because of continuing difficulties in communication, Alexander's battle account did not reach Savannah until two weeks after the battle. There were similar delays in transmitting the battle reports of the Richmond newspapers.

---


30 Savannah *Republican*, July 21, 1863.
THE PRESS REPORTS

Most of the inaccuracies in the reporting of Gettysburg were the work of the telegraphic reporters. On the one hand telegrams sent from Baltimore and Philadelphia to the Northern press immediately after the battle gave the impression that the repulse of Lee had turned into a perfect rout and that Meade had bagged over 20,000 prisoners and 118 guns. Similarly the Richmond press printed a dispatch from a Confederate telegraph operator in Martinsburg reporting that Meade was retreating on Baltimore pursued by Lee and that in a continuation of the battle on Sunday, July 5, Ewell and Longstreet had captured 40,000 prisoners! The only clue to the identity of the author of this highly inaccurate statement was the initial "C." appended to the dispatch. It seems likely that "C." was Major J. T. Coldwell, Superintendent of the Confederate Military Telegraph, who was credited with constructing fifty-seven miles of telegraph line in eleven days during the Gettysburg campaign.

Of the Northern battle reports of Gettysburg, the accounts of Reid, Coffin, and Wilkeson were outstanding for their literary quality. Wilkeson had written his story beside the dead body of his nineteen-year-old son, an artillery lieutenant who had been killed on the first day of the battle. Another excellent Northern battle account was the product of a correspondent of the New York World who gave no other indication of his identity than the pseudonym "Bonaparte." Of the Southern battle narratives, the account written by Correspondent "A." for the Richmond Enquirer and Peter Alexander's Savannah Republican story were probably the best of a rather slender harvest. The inaccuracies of Lawley's majestic account of the battle, published in the London Times some six weeks afterward, were the subject of a splenetic New York Times editorial.

42 Daily Richmond Enquirer, July 7, 8, 1863; Richmond Whig, April 30, 1864. These telegrams were addressed to Dr. William S. Morris, President of the Southern Telegraph Company, who released them to the press and called upon his friends for the largest Confederate flag in the city to hang out of his window. J. B. Jones, A Rebel War Clerk's Diary (Philadelphia 1866), II, 370-371.
44 New York World, July 7, 1863.
45 New York Times, September 3, 1863. The editor of the New York Times was particularly critical of statements in Lawley's battle report to
One other battle account of Gettysburg published in an English newspaper deserves mention. This was a brief sketch of the campaign written for the London Daily News under a New York date line by that newspaper's special correspondent Edwin Lawrence Godkin. Godkin had reported the Crimean War of the 1850's for the Daily News in fine fashion and had a keen eye for the larger aspects of a campaign. Although he was not an eye witness of the fighting at Gettysburg, Godkin provided a very satisfactory account of what he described as one of "the decisive battles of the world" from a point of view considerably more sympathetic to the Union cause than Lawley evidenced.46

In an article published in the weekly magazine Nation shortly after the end of the war, the former Tribune army correspondent, Henry Villard, expressed the opinion that Gettysburg had been reported in praiseworthy style.47 This in considerable measure it was in spite of the difficulties of the terrain, the large-scale character of the operation, the limitations of railroad and telegraphic communication, and the prospect of sudden death. Only one reporter on either side, V.A.S. Parks of the Savannah Republican, was killed, but Crouse had a horse shot from under him, and two other (Herald) reporters were captured by Stuart's cavalry.48 To be sure, the drama of the three-day battle of Gettysburg was worthy of great reporting, and great reporting there was in full measure. As a whole, the army reporters on the scene—Northern, Southern, and British, veterans and novices, word-merchants and artists—met the challenge superbly and memorably.

the effect that Meade's army was the first to leave the battlefield, that the ground occupied by the Union forces was not deliberately chosen, and that Pickett's charge was initially successful.

48 Savannah Republican, July 22, 1863; Cincinnati Daily Commercial, July 10, 1863; New York Herald, July 17, 18, 1863.