

The Gettysburg Address

The largest Civil War battle ever waged in the Western Hemisphere was fought near the small town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The Battle of Gettysburg began on July 1, 1863 and ended two days later with the climactic "Pickett's Charge." More than 150,000 Union and Confederate soldiers were drawn into the battle. By the time it was over, there were 50,000 casualties and 15,500 deaths - 7,000 for the north and 8,500 for the south - making it the bloodiest battle of the Civil War. The Battle of Gettysburg was a major turning point in the War Between the States.

Abraham Lincoln's most famous and eloquent words were spoken in a brief speech given at the site, just four months after the battle. The Gettysburg Address was delivered at the dedication of a cemetery that held the remains of more than 3,500 soldiers who fell at the Battle of Gettysburg. After purchasing the land on Cemetery Hill, Pennsylvania officials wanted to consecrate the grounds with an appropriate ceremony. The Honorable Edward Everett of Massachusetts was selected to present the oration for the occasion. President Lincoln's appearance came as a surprise, but he was quickly added to the program. Mr. Everett spoke for nearly two hours, while Lincoln's speech, delivered at noon on November 19, 1863, lasted only two minutes. Lincoln's remarks are a moving tribute to those who died.

"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. 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. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate - we can not consecrate - we cannot hallow - this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who have 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."
