

# **General Meade Calls a Council of War**

**Gettysburg, July 3, 1863**

**By: Robert W. Alberts**

## Cast of Characters

General George Meade, General of the Army of the Potomac

Major General Daniel Butterfield, His Chief of Staff

Private David Washburn, *a young boy of no more than twelve*

General John Newton, in charge of the First Corps

General John Gibbon, in charge of the Second Corps

General David B. Birney, in charge of the Third Corps

General George Sykes, in charge of the Fifth Corps

General John Sedgewick, in charge of the Sixth Corps

General O. O. Howard, in charge of the Eleventh Corps

General Alpheus Williams, in charge of the Twelfth Corps

General Henry Slocum

General Winfield S. Hancock

General Gouverneur K. Warren

**"The discussion was very informal and in the shape of a conversation ... It soon became evident that everybody was in favor of remaining where we were and giving battle there. Gen. Meade, himself, said very little except now and then to make some comment but I cannot recall that he expressed any decided opinion upon any point, preferring, apparently, to listen to the conversation. After the discussion had lasted for some time, Butterfield suggested that it would , perhaps, be well to formulate the questions to be asked and Gen. Meade assenting, he took a piece of paper on which he had been making some memoranda and wrote down a question. When he had done so he read it off and formally proposed it to the council."**

At the close of the fighting on the 2d of July, General Meade summoned his corps commanders to assemble at his headquarters, in order to obtain from them information as to the condition of their separate commands, and to confer with them as to the action to be taken the following day. These officers could not have all assembled until 9 P.M., for the fighting on General Howard's front continued until that hour; he was present with his command until the fighting was over, and was afterwards at the conference. There were present, in addition to the commanding general, Generals Slocum, Sedgewick, Howard, Hancock, Newton, Sykes, Birney, A. S. Williams, and Gibbon. General Butterfield was in attendance, in his capacity as chief-of-staff; General Pleasonton, commander of the Cavalry Corps, was not present.

After a long conversation regarding the events of the day, and discussion of the probabilities as to General Lee's future movements, and of the most advisable action to take, General Meade finally condensed the points to be decided, and submitted them in the form of the following questions: -`\*

## QUESTIONS ASKED

1. "Under existing circumstances, is it advisable for this army to remain in its present position or to retire to another nearer its base of supplies?"
2. "It being determined to remain in present position, shall the army attack or await the attack of the enemy?"
3. "If we await attack, how long?"

## REPLIES

Gibbon 1. "Correct position of the army, but would not retreat."

1. "In no condition to attack, in his opinion."
2. "Until he moves."

3. "Till enemy moves."

Williams 1. "Stay."

1. "Await attack."

2. "One day."

Birney "Same as General Williams."

Sykes Do. Do.

Newton 1. "Correct position of the army, but would not retreat."

1. "By all means not attack."

2. "If we wait, it will give them a chance to cut our line."

Howard 1. "Remain."

1. "Wait attack until 4 P.M. tomorrow."

2. "If don't attack, attack them."

Hancock 1. "Rectify position without moving so as to give up field."

1. "Not attack unless our communications are cut."

2. "Can't wait long; can't be idle."

Sedgewick 1. "Remain"

"and wait attack"

"at least one day."

Slocum "Stay and fight it out."

- These questions and replies are taken from the original minutes of the Council at Gettysburg, of the 2d of July, 1863, and are among the papers of General Meade.

### • **Defense In Depth**

#### **"John Buford's First Day Defense at the Battle of Gettysburg"**

- The following is a brief description of John Buford's actions on the first day at Gettysburg. It was presented in a Civil War chatroom one evening by Eric Whittenburg, author of "Gettysburg's Forgotten Cavalry Battles" and John Buford's biographer. Since chatrooms do not lend themselves to large posts, it was presented in small increments over the course of about a half hour. For ease of reading it has been reformatted into the form you see here, However, very little changes were made and what you see is basically as it was presented to the group.
- The concept that John Buford employed in the initial defense of Gettysburg is called a "defense in depth". The theory behind a defense in depth is for the defending force to select a position far from the point that it ultimately wants to defend, so that there is a place to fall back to. A delaying action is fought, with the idea of slowly making a fighting withdrawal. The defending force makes use of the terrain to delay the enemy's advance.

Buford recognized the good high ground to the south and east of the town square and elected to fight a defense in depth to hold it until the infantry could come up. Buford had been consulting with John Reynolds in Emmitsburg on the way to Gettysburg on June 30, and knew how close the infantry was. He would defend the town from the west and north. Gamble on the west side, and Devin on the north.

Buford set up his videttes on an arc seven miles long. Gamble's farthest post was four miles from the town square, Devin's six. The idea of videttes is to serve as an early warning system. They make contact with the enemy, fire warning shots, delay as long as possible, and then fall back to the next chosen defensive position. Gamble covered an arc from the Fairfield Road to the Mummasburg Road. Devin covered the Carlisle, Harrisburg and York Roads. The next fall back position from the west was Herr's Ridge (which combines with Belmont School House Ridge), and then finally, the main line of battle was atop McPherson Ridge.

The vidette line of Gamble's brigade was manned by about 275 men. The farthest post was atop Knoxlyn Ridge at the Whisler blacksmith shop. Vidette posts were typically manned by three or four men, and commanded by a non-com. This particular one was commanded by Sgt. Levi Shaffer of the 8th Illinois Cavalry. Lt. Marcellus Jones of the 8th Illinois commanded the regiment's vidette line. Early on the morning of July 1, Sgt. Shaffer spotted billowing clouds of dust arising along the Chambersburg Pike, indicating the movement of a large body of men. Shaffer called for Jones. Jones watched for a moment, borrowed Shaffer's Sharps carbine, rested it on a fence post, and squeezed off the first shot of the Battle of Gettysburg. Fired at a range of about 700 yards, it hit nothing. Instead, it sent up the alarm among Heth's advancing infantry. Soon, more shots rang out along the vidette line. It was about 6 a.m. Word was sent back to Buford to let him know that the Confederates had begun to advance. While he sent for Calef's artillery, the surprised Confederates stopped and began to deploy into line of battle, a process that took nearly two full hours. Just by firing a few shots that hit nothing, Buford bought two hours' time. In the meantime, Buford sent messengers to Reynolds to try to hurry the infantry to Gettysburg.

In the meantime, the videttes fell back to Herr's Ridge. There, along with about 500 others of Gamble's brigade (total strength, about 750), they made a stand for the better part of an hour. Remember, too, that effective strength had to be reduced by 25% due to the fact that one in every four men was given task of holding horses. So, the actual strength was about 450. They stood there for about 45 minutes. Meanwhile, Calef's three sections of artillery deployed along McPherson's Ridge. Two sections (4 guns) deployed on the Chambersburg Pike and the other two about four hundred yards away, near the spot where Reynolds fell. The idea was to disperse the guns to create the illusion that Buford actually had more than 6 pieces of artillery at his disposal.

The Confederates, after driving Gamble off Herr's Ridge, then got caught in the valley created by Willoughby Run. They came under heavy fire there, and it took time for them to regroup and begin to advance up the western slope of McPherson's Ridge. By this time, it was nearly 9:15. Buford had already bought more than three hours' time by his stand. However, he grew worried, as there was still no sign of the advance of Reynolds' infantry. He went up the cupola of the Seminary to search for the head of Reynolds' column, worried--he realized that it was just a matter of time before he had to pull back or he ran out of ammo. As McPherson's Ridge was the chosen spot for the defensive stand, Buford deployed all of Gamble's brigade there, as well as a regiment of Devin's, positioned to the north of the railroad cut. There, they stood for about an hour before the Confederates began pressing them back, both by flanking the position and because Gamble's men were running out of ammunition.

As things looked most desperate, Buford's signal officer, Lt. Aaron B. Jerome,

spotted the advance of Reynolds' column, and reported it to Buford. Buford ascended the cupola again, saw it himself, and said, "Good, now we can hold the place." He sent a messenger to Reynolds, who spurred ahead to meet with Buford. Reynolds called out, "What goes, John?" Buford characteristically replied, "The Devil's to pay!" and pointed out the advancing Confederate infantry. Reynolds then asked whether Buford could hold, to which the cavalryman responded, "I reckon so." Buford then came down, and he and Reynolds conferred and rode out to the front to see the situation.

Reynolds then sent his staff officer, Capt. Stephen Minot Weld, to Meade with a sitrep, wherein Reynolds said, "Tell the General that we will hold the heights to the south of the town, and that I will barricade the streets of the town if necessary." Weld rode off to report. In the meantime, Reynolds gave orders for his infantry, led by Doubleday's division, to come up at the double-quick, which they did, advancing across the fields on the oblique. As Gamble's men were running out of ammunition, the infantry came up, and Gamble's tired troopers opened ranks to make room for them to come into line. After being relieved, Gamble's troopers took up a position on the Union left. The men of the 3rd Indiana Cavalry refused to leave the line of battle, holding a position next to the Iron Brigade. Meanwhile, Joe Davis was pressing Devin back. Since Devin had only a regiment and a half atop the ridge, their position was more desperate. Reynolds responded by calling up John Robinson's division, which arrived just in the nick of time, just before Devin's guys ran out of ammunition.

This was a perfectly planned and perfectly executed defense in depth, executed with perfect dragoon tactics. If one reads the manual for this sort of thing, what Buford did was by the letter of the book.

- A RESOLUTION expressive of the thanks of Congress to Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker, Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard, and the officers and soldiers of the Army of the Potomac.  
*Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled,* That the gratitude of the American people, and the thanks of their Representatives in Congress, are due, and are hereby tendered, to Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker, and the officers and soldiers of the Army of the Potomac, for the skill, energy, and endurance which first covered Washington and Baltimore from the meditated blow of the advancing and powerful army of rebels led by General Robert E. Lee; and to Maj. Gen. George G. Meade, Maj. Gen. Oliver O. Howard, and the officers and soldiers of that army, for the skill and heroic valor which, at Gettysburg, repulsed, defeated, and drove back, broken and dispirited, beyond the Rappahannock, the veteran army of the rebellion.
- Approved January 28, 1864.

Playwright's Comments: This is a work of fiction, based on fact. General Meade did, indeed, call a Council of War the evening of the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg, in a farmhouse much smaller than our stage. His purpose was to determine "the intentions of his fellow and junior officers." Much of the dialogue is invented, but is drawn from the actual events of the battle and the political and personal circumstances which General Meade found himself. All of the characters in the play were really at Gettysburg, and all of them were at the council.

This play is decidedly NOT a anti-war diatribe. What I have tried to do is something entirely different.

The officers present at this meeting were professional soldiers, many of them graduates of West Point. They understood quite well the horrors of war in its entirety and the Battle of Gettysburg in particular. In truth, it was a working meeting, a fact I hope comes through the story of the play. I have not put anti-war dialogue in their mouths, feeling as I do, an obligation to remain true to the men, the actual events and the story itself.

Fiction is the servant of truth.

*The curtain opens up on a darkened room. There is a long table in the room surrounded by chairs , with the longest side of the table facing the audience and nearly filling the stage. There is an unlit lamp at the left end. General Meade enters from the left (audience left) and lights the lamp at the far end of the table with great care. As he does, the stage lights come up, as if the lamp could light the room much more brightly than one would expect. He takes a seat at the head of the table opposite to the lamp. There is writing paper, a pen, and a ledger on the desk He begins writing.*

Meade: *(aloud, to himself, as he writes):* The enemy attacked me about 4 p.m. this day and, after one of the severest contests of the war, was repulsed at all points. The battle continues to progress in our favor, as we hold the more advantageous location to conduct operations. I shall remain in my current position, and fight for another day. Whether on the defensive, or on the offensive, I cannot say. *He puts the pen down, and pauses. He stares to the left (his left) of the left stage entrance, neither at the entrance, nor at the audience. He picks up the pen and continues to write and speak:* I am calling a Council of War to determine the will of my officer corps, and to obtain figures on the size of the force that I can muster. While I understand you do not approve of such war councils, Mr. President, I cannot make a sound decision on my future movements without knowing the size and strength of our forces and the resolve of my corps of officers in this matter. Sincerely, George Meade, General of the Army of the Potomac.

Meade: *(shouting, so as to be heard by someone waiting outside):* Courier!

*A very young boy, no more than eleven, enters the room. He is dressed in a private's uniform and is clearly a soldier. He comes to attention.*

Private Washburn: *(in a military tone but proudly, suitable for a private):* Private Washburn, reporting for duty, General!

Meade: *(absolutely dumbfounded, lowers his head and peers at the boy, somewhat comically. He speaks in a plain voice, removed from his usual military bearing):* Who are you?

Private Washburn *(flustered this response as he was expecting to be well received)* Private Washburn, sir. I report to Colonel Norman, your Signal Corps Officer. He sent me to be a courier, sir. Your courier.

Meade: *(his tone does not change)* Yes, I can see that. But how do you, a mere boy come to be here?

Private Washburn *(near tears at these words)* I-I've joined the Army, sir. I want to defend my state, Pennsylvania, *(regaining his composure, he answers with a flourish)* from the Rebels, sir!.

Meade: *(His tone still does not change)* And how long have you been here?

Private Washburn: Two weeks, sir. I've worked the messes and the medical stations, then as a courier, when Colonel Norman needed a courier. *(speaking quickly by way of explanation)* I proved my worth to him first, of course sir. That is, before he gave me this job. He could see I was reliable, and that's what the cook and medical officer told him as well. I've been carrying messages to and from the other officers for the last three days. This is my first opportunity to serve you sir. It's an honor, sir.

Meade: I see. And what were you before you joined the Army, son?

Private Washburn: (*Chafing at being patronized*) I was a farmer, sir. Planted a crop last year. Volunteered to defend my state from the rebels, sir. (*He clearly does not want to continue this discussion*)

Meade: Well, I see. And what do you think of our battle, son?

Private Washburn (*he is honest and speaks slowly and carefully*) It's not at all what I expected, sir! I mean-the wounded and all--(*words fail him*) There isn't any order to it, at all. Not even the cannons.

Meade: The cannons?

Private Washburn: I expected the cannons to be more orderly, sir. To move in a line. To be arranged in neat rows. To fire one after another. But its not like that, at all, its--its (*again, he is at a loss for words*).

Meade: (*calmly*) Chaos.

Private Washburn (*he does not know the word, but senses its meaning*): Yes sir, cha--chaos.

Meade: And you still want to serve?

Private Washburn (*brightening*) Yes, sir.

Meade: Well if you've been here for the last two days of the fighting, you've earned your place. (*the military tone returns to his voice--he offers the message to the boy, who comes and takes it from him*). Take that directly to Colonel Norman, only to Colonel Norman and tell him to transmit it to the President, standard encryption.

Private Washburn: (*professionally*): Only Colonel Norman, to the President, standard en-en

Meade: (*quietly, without being patronizing*): Code, private, tell him to use code. (*slowly*) En-cryp-tion.

Private Washburn: (*correctly*) Standard Encryption, sir.

Meade: Yes. And return here to me tonight with his written receipt confirming the transmission and any response.

Private Washburn: Yes sir. I'll return to you with a written receipt. And any response. (*in awe*) From the President.

Meade: Yes, fine. Dismissed, private.

*The boy turns to go.*

Meade: One more thing, Private.

Private Washburn (*turning back to the General and coming to attention*) Yes, sir!

Meade: *(quietly)* What does your father think of you, son?

Private Washburn: (honestly and in a completely straightforward manner) I don't know sir. He was killed at Fredericksburg, sir.

Meade: *(softly)*: My condolences, private. Please carry on.

Private Washburn: Yes, sir. (Salutes, waits for Meade's salute. Meade, sitting, nods, acknowledges the salute, the boy turns smartly).

*The boy exits, stage left.*

*General Gouverneur Warren enters after the boy leaves. He has his arm in a sling and is clearly very tired. They are old friends. Nevertheless, General Warren comes to attention, and salutes.*

General Warren: Good evening, General.

General Meade: Gouverneur, you've been wounded! Please, take a seat. Thank you for coming. You should have stayed back at camp and gotten some rest.

*General Warren sits down heavily, leans back in the chair. He does not speak immediately.*

General Meade: Gouverneur, I want to thank you for your work on the Round Tops. You were the savior of the Battle today.

*Warren waves off the compliment.*

General Warren: Hardly important. You've been the General of the Army of the Potomac for less than two weeks. I'm more interested in what you think of the job now.

*Warren leans forward, interested in what Meade has to say. Meade leans back, relaxing.*

General Meade: Did I tell you that when Hardie came with my orders to take command, it was 3 a.m.? I thought I was being arrested for malfeasance.

*Warren laughs.*

General Meade: Initially, I refused. I told them to give the job to Reynolds. Or Hancock. They're younger. Smarter. The men worship both of them.

*Warren laughs again.*

General Warren: Don't underestimate yourself, George. You were a leader out there, today.

General Meade: *ignoring Warren's last comment, and continuing the story.* Hardie told me that accepting the command was an order, not a request.

General Warren: And what was your response?

General Meade: I looked Hardie in the eyes and said (*doing an imitation of an indignant George Meade*), "Well, I've been tried and condemned without a hearing and I suppose I shall have to go to execution".

*Warren laughs at first, then becomes sober. He sits up straight.*

General Meade (continuing): Hooker left me nothing. Not even the daily report on the disposition of the troops. No orders of the day. No strategy. Nothing.

General Warren: And yet you've turned that around. How bad is the situation now, George?

General Meade: That's the worst of it. I don't know. I think I've lost more men than Lee. I've got the better position, but we've had problems on the front as you know. And... I don't know how the other generals are holding up. I intend to stay here and fight for at least another day. I've got to know if my staff supports me.

General Warren: (*rising painfully from his chair*) Did I tell you what happened at Little Round Top? When I arrived there were no rebels to be seen. On a hunch, I had Smith's battery fire a shell into the woods across Emmetsburg Road. The branches parted, and I could see the glint of rebel bayonets and the grim looks on the faces of the rebels through my field glasses. It was intensely thrilling to my feelings, George. And almost appalling. (*rising*) I'll not forget the look in their eyes as long as I live, with all honesty. (*pausing*)

Call your Council, George. Put the question to them, and see if they have the courage. And the strength. I'm not always sure that I do.

General Meade: Of course, you have, Gouverneur. You enjoy my confidence and I depend on you.

General Warren: (*sounding old and tired*) I'm going to sit on the porch, have a smoke and wait for the others, George. Have your Council of War....

*Warren exits.*

*Daniel Butterfield, Meade's Chief of Staff enters. He shows no deference to the General and strides up to him.*

General Butterfield: So you're determined to go through with this meeting, General?

General Meade: Yes, I am.

General Butterfield: Even though the President and General Hallock look down on these meetings of yours?

General Meade: (the anger in his voice and the volume grow as he speaks; Meade has a temper) Yes, General Butterfield, I am. I've lost my best general, General , John Reynolds, God rest his soul. I've had enormous losses on my left flank. I don't know if I even *have* a right flank. I need to know how

many men I can field, and most importantly, whether my generals still have the nerve to defend, much less attack. SO YES, I AM STILL HOLDING THIS MEETING.

*Butterfield does not flinch at Meade's anger. He circles the long end of the table and takes a place at the table at Meade's right. There is a sound of stamping feet outside the farmhouse, stage left.*

*Several officers enter stage left. They stand at attention, despite the fact that they are clearly tired. One salutes General Meade for all of the generals. Meade, despite his concern for the men, is pleased with their deference to him. He stands and returns the salute.*

Meade: *(taking his seat)*: Gentlemen, thank you for coming. Please take a seat.

General John Gibbon: *(removes a treasured cigar from his jacket. He motions toward the lamp with the cigar toward the lamp)*: By your leave, sir?

Meade: Permission granted, General.

*(General Gibbon bends and lights his cigar at the lamp, puffing for several seconds.. Several officers take out cigars and line up behind Gibbon. They are clearly men who have not had the opportunity to smoke or rest for several days. The stamping of feet is heard again. Several more men file in and they begin to take places behind the table. Meade waits to speak until they are all sitting.*

General Meade: Thank you for coming, gentlemen. As the first order of business, I need to know the number of men we can muster tomorrow. Corps leaders, please. Starting from First Corps, please give us the number of men lost and the number still available for fighting. General Butterfield, *(Meade turns to Butterfield)* General Butterfield, will you take a tally, please and give me the totals? General Newton?

General Newton: First Corps, XXXXX killed and wounded, XXXXX standing.

*General Butterfield makes notes.*

General Howard: *(surprised)* Where is General Reynolds? Doesn't he lead First Corps?

*All the men are silent. Meade breaks the news to the men.*

Meade: General Reynolds is dead. *(pausing)* Minnie ball through the neck--- by a rebel sharpshooter.

General Howard: *(clearly upset)* What a loss! He was the best of us!

General Meade: *(forgetting the meeting for a moment)*. Yes he was. He went right to the front and began observing the rebel forces as they arrived. Went right to the scene of the action, just like him.

\*\*\*\*\*tale of Dan Sickles\*\*\*\*\*

General Howard: What is the story on Sickles?

General Meade: I ordered Sickles III Corps to the left flank--to take his place along the left flank of II Corps with General Hancock.

General Hancock: Instead of squaring on my left flank, he marched a half a mile to the front of our line for a higher position--the Peach Orchard.

General Howard: Oh my God, a salient.

General Hancock (disgustedly) Exactly. Ten thousand men isolated from the rest of our Army and my flank exposed to the enemy. A Gift to the Rebels from Dan Sickles.

General Meade: When I arrived at the peach orchard, Sickles offered to withdraw his men back to the line. But the rebel artillery opened fire on III Corps (loudly, imitating himself) I WISH TO GOD YOU COULD BUT THOSE PEOPLE WILL NOT PERMIT IT! (in a regular voice) Colonel Alexander never misses an opportunity--his shells began landing around us. The sound of the shelling spooked Baldy and carried me back into our lines. We lost nearly the entire III Corps and more---- men defending the salient and our exposed flank.

General Gibbon: General Meade, why did you defend the salient if it was going to be so costly?

General Hancock (harshly to Gibbon): General Gibbon, that question is out of line.

General Meade: (calmly) No its not, Winfield. He'll never learn if he doesn't ask questions. (to Gibbon) I could not afford to have the entire army see me sacrifice III Corps. Nor could I have General Hancock's entire left flank destroyed when it was so obvious that it was all because of the flawed judgment of one officer.

Generals Birney and Gibbon (together): Thank you, General Meade.

General Howard: (softly) And how did the defense of the salient go?

General Birney: It was horrible. The III Corps line began to break. Men fell back, slowly at first, then faster and faster. We began to pour back in confusion. The enemy was upon us and among us. Our guns and our cannon fell into the hands of the enemy and were used against us. We were swept from the field.

General Hancock: (gently): That's not entirely true. General Humphreys withdrew his division in good order. He stayed on horseback--exposing himself to the fire---and rode up and down the line. His horse took six bullets and died from a seventh. Humphreys took another horse and went right back. They withdrew all the way back to my left flank. He was an inspiration to his men.

General Birney: (clearly upset and with increasing passion) The III Corps *was* swept from the field. Officers were screaming orders to make themselves heard. The enemy's cannons hurled shrapnel

shredding our men. There were death screams of the wounded horses, the sound of their wounded riders dying, trampled underfoot by the animals and the advancing cannon....a perfect hell on earth.

*No one speaks.*

General Howard: (*quietly and obviously changing the subject*) I heard Sickles was wounded.

General Hancock:(making no attempt to hide his disgust): Damn fool had his leg blown off. Best thing that could happen to the Union Army under the circumstances. He had a drummer boy apply a tourniquet, turned command over to General Birney (*who nods in affirmation*) and was carried off the field smoking a cigar--he probably thought it was good for morale.

(General Meade glares at Hancock but says nothing).

General Howard: (to Birney) Where is Sickles now?

General Birney: (recovering) He left Gettysburg this afternoon. For Washington, sir. (the rest of the generals are surprised and disconcerted)

General Hancock: (knowingly, to Meade) He'll get the President's ear again, General Meade. He'll tell his version of the story. And Lincoln will listen. Sickles can't do you any good, in Washington, General Meade.

General Meade: (shaking his head): It means nothing. He'll sound just like a man who has lost his leg on the battlefield, no doubt. And besides, there is nothing I can do about it now.

General Hancock shakes his head but says nothing.

\*\*\*\*\*tale of Joshua Chamberlain\*\*\*\*\*

General Howard: What about our left flank?

General Meade: We almost lost the left flank. If it hadn't been for the quick thinking of General Warren...

General Howard: General Warren?

General Meade: I sent him to the left flank to see how the men were doing. He directed additional troops to the xxxx where they were needed the most. Saved the day. Where is Gouvenour, anyway?

General Gibbons: He's asleep on the front porch sir. I had to put out his cigar before it set fire to the General, sir.

*The men are amused, smile but do not laugh.*

General Meade: Let him sleep. He's earned his rest. (continuing) He told me tonight that he fired an artillery round into the trees. The explosion parted the trees and he saw the rebels standing in the forest waiting for the order to charge. I heard the rest of the story this afternoon. Somehow, I don't

know how, he managed to get Strong Vincent's men into place at the foot of Little Round Top not more than ten minutes before the rebels attacked.

General Sykes: (interrupting) I hear it was William Oates' of the 15th Alabama.

General Meade: Then there was Colonel Chamberlain....

General Howard: Chamberlain?

General Meade: On our far left flank. The 20th Maine regiment---held off Oates' Alabamans--the 15th Maine poured fire into wave after wave of rebels, until they--Chamberlain's men, ran out of ammunition.

General Howard: And then---?

General Meade: Chamberlain gave them the order---

Generals Sykes and Sedgwick: (together, loud and dramatically) Fix -----Bayonets!

General Meade: Chamberlain drew his sword...someone shouted,

General Sykes and Sedgwick: (shouting) Come on, come on boys!

General Meade (calmly): The entire 20th Maine charged down the hill at Oates' Alabamans. The Confederates were shocked and immobilized--perhaps they thought Chamberlain had been reinforced. We finally enfiladed the rebels: Chamberlain in front, Strong Vincent's men from the rear and more of our men firing on their flanks---the Alabamans were broken and Oates finally withdrew.

\*\*\*\*\*The Vote\*\*\*\*\*

General Butterfield: Gentlemen, gentlemen. This is all very well, but I would like to put this discussion on a solid footing. I wish to put three questions to this group.

*Meade looks surprised, but says nothing.*

General Butterfield: I propose three questions and I will elicit answers from each of you. First, Under existing circumstances, is it advisable for this army to remain in its present position or to retire to another nearer

its base of supplies? Two, It being determined to remain in present position, shall the army attack or await the attack of the enemy? Three, If we await attack, how long?

General Meade: Junior officers first, then corps commanders. I want honest opinions from all of you.

General Newton (interrupting) Before we answer, I would like to make a point which must be considered...

General Meade: Go ahead, John.

General Newton: We need to redress our lines. While it is true that we have the superior position, and our line is more efficient than Lee's, we need to bring the men who are currently scattered, back together. Particularly on our left flank. We are vulnerable to an attack from Lee on our left flank.

General Meade: At the roundtops.

General Newton. Yes, General Meade.

General Meade: Corps Commanders, please take heed of General Newton's words. Each of you should see that the lines are redressed and any gaps in the lines are filled. Thank you, John. We may proceed with the answers.

General Gibbon: I would stay, sir. We should dress our lines as General Newton points out, but we should stay. We're in no position to attack. We should wait. Wait until he moves.

General Meade: Thank you, General Gibbon. *Butterfield makes notes.* General Williams?

General Williams: (speaking precisely). Stay. Wait for an attack. One day.

General Meade: Thank you for your brevity, General Williams. *Laughter.* General Birney:

General Birney: Same as General Williams.

General Meade: General Sykes?

General Sykes Do and Do.

General Butterfield: Pardon me General Sykes. Do and do?

General Sykes: Do Stay. Do Fight.

General Butterfield: And if we stay on the defensive, how long should we wait for an attack?

*General Sykes shrugs his shoulders.*

General Meade: General Newton?

General Newton: "I would correct the position of the army as I said, but I would not retreat. By all means not attack. If we wait too long, it will give them a chance to cut our line.

General Meade: Your point about waiting too long is well taken, General Newton. General Howard?

General Howard: We should remain here. We should wait for an attack until 4 pm tomorrow. If they don't attack us by then we should attack them.

General Meade: Thank you, General Howard. General Hancock, I should be most interested in hearing your thoughts.

General Hancock: I would rectify our position without moving in such a way as to give up our superior position. I would not attack unless our communications are cut. We can't wait long for their attack--we can't have the men idling and we can't be idle either.

General Meade: General Sedgewick, your thoughts?

General Sedgewick: Remain, and wait an attack for at least one day.

General Meade: *to Butterfield*: You're noting the times, General Butterfield?

General Butterfield: Yes, General Meade.

General Meade: General Slocum?

General Slocum: *Forcefully* Stay and fight it out.

\*\*\*\*\*Private Washburn enters.\*\*\*\*\*

Private Washburn: Private Washburn reporting as ordered sir!

General Meade: At ease, private. You have a response from Washington?

Private Washburn: Yes sir. From General Halleck, sir.

General Meade: (groaning) May I have it please?

*The boy walks over to General Meade and hands him the response. General Meade opens the envelope.*

General Meade: (reading): "Do not call a Council of War. Such councils never win battles. Given the choice your generals will not choose to fight. Signed, General Halleck."

*Meade crumples the letter noisily and slams the hand holding the letter into the table. He closes his eyes.*

General Meade: (angrily): Generals will not choose to fight? Indeed!

Private Washburn: Is there a response, sir?

General Meade: No response, private.

Private Washburn: Yes, sir. (*he turns to go*).

General Meade: One moment, private.

Private Washburn: (*turning smartly*) Sir?

General Meade: What will you be doing, tomorrow?

Private Washburn: General Gibbon said that I could carry the flag for his Corps, sir. Its quite an honor.

General Meade: No, you won't. I'm paroling you out of the Army as of today, son. With an honorable discharge. *Meade begins to write.*

Private Washburn: (*bewildered, loosing his military bearing*) But, but, why sir? General Gibbon said that I could carry his flag into battle, tomorrow.

General Meade: (*roaring*): Are you questioning my decisions, private?

Private Washburn: (*in a small but clear voice*): No, sir. (*He is fighting tears*).

General Meade (*regains his composure, speaks calmly*): You've done your duty, son. More than your duty, and more than most Pennsylvanians. Time for you to go. *Meade tears off a piece of paper, writes another.* Give this to Colonel Norman. He'll see that you draw your pay.

Private Washburn: (*choking on tears*): What will I do?

General Meade: Go home, son. (*dreamily*) Kiss a girl. Fall in love.

Private Washburn: Sir?

General Meade: (*coming back to reality*): If you're still interested in the military, come visit me in Philadelphia when you turn eighteen. This is my home address. I'll see that you get a commission to West Point. (*writes on and tears off another sheet of paper*).

Private Washburn: We both come from Pennsylvania?

General Meade: (*kindly*): Yes son, we do.

General Meade: (*offering the paperwork*): These are for you, with your nation's gratitude.

Private Washburn: (*fighting tears, he takes the papers*): Thank you, sir.

General Meade: I've told Colonel Norman to have you escorted to the safest route out of the field of fire. Godspeed, Private Washburn. Please tell General Gibbon of my decision to parole you.

Private Washburn: (*clearly upset, but determined to maintain military discipline he salutes smartly*): Yes, sir.

General Meade: I have one last task for you, private. Please send General Gibbon and General Butterfield, my Chief of Staff to see me. They should be outside, talking.

Private Washburn: General, I don't know General Butterfield. Shall I call out his name?

General Meade: That will be fine, private. (*finally returns the private's salute*). You are dismissed.

*The private exits and we hear him calling the names and 'General Meade is paroling me , sir.' We hear General Gibbon saying 'Very well son'. Finally, General Gibbon and General Butterfield enter together.*

General Meade: (*not giving either man a chance to speak or salute*): General Gibbon, will you wait outside for a moment. I should like a few minutes to speak to General Butterfield, alone. He'll send you in when we're through.

General Butterfield: You wanted to see me sir?

General Meade: Yes, General. I wanted to thank you for our questions at tonight's meeting. (pauses) I understand that you bear considerable animosity toward me--

General Butterfield (interrupting): Permission to speak freely, sir?

General Meade: (reluctantly): Granted.

General Butterfield: I bear no animosity toward you, sir. Only your appointment. You may recall that I was mentored by General Hooker, who you replaced. General Hooker was the better choice for the position you now hold.

General Meade: (*controlling himself*): The President doesn't agree with you, General Butterfield.

General Butterfield: The President notwithstanding, your fitness to hold this position remains to be seen.

General Meade: Nevertheless, I thank you for your loyalty and for your performance so far. I trust I can continue to count on your loyalty?

General Butterfield: I wish to state that the country can continue to depend upon my continued loyalty, General Meade.

General Meade: That will be sufficient for my purposes, General Butterfield. You are dismissed, General.

General Butterfield (*confused by the choice of words*) General Meade?

General Meade: (*roaring*): You may go, General Butterfield. Carry on with your duties! Send General Gibbon in to see me. That will be all for now.

*General Butterfield is clearly agitated. He turns to leave, and then regains his composure. He turns back to General Meade and salutes. General Meade nods, and General Butterfield turns and exits. After a few moments, General Gibbon enters.*

General Gibbon: You wished to see me sir?

General Meade: If Lee chooses to attack tomorrow, it will be at the center of our line, on your front.

General Gibbon: Why do you say that, sir?

General Meade: Because he has attacked my left flank and my right and failed to penetrate either flank. He will assume that my center is now significantly weakened, and attack there, on our center.

General Gibbon: Do we know who will lead the rebels?

General Meade: Based on our intelligence, General Pickett will lead the charge with his Division. He has the freshest troops.

General Gibbon: If he does, sir, we'll be ready for him. We'll defeat him there.

General Meade: Thank you, General Gibbon. Your response is very reassuring.

General Gibbon: (saluting) Good night, sir.

General Meade: Good night, General Gibbon. *Gibbon exits.*

*General Warren enters, yawning and stretching.*

General Warren: George, I fear I've slept through your Council of War.

General Meade: No matter, Gouvenour. It is all right now. We shall remain in our present position. We are all right now.

*General Warren nods but says nothing. He exits.*

*General Meade walks behind the table and positions himself behind the lamp facing the audience. He gazes outward and above the audience for a full minute. He then leaves over and blows out the lamp. The lights fall. Curtain. End.*