On July 3, 1863, just southwest of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, Robert E. Lee met with James Longstreet, commander of the Confederate Army's First Corps and Lee's most trusted lieutenant. Lee ordered Longstreet to attack the center of the Union line on top of Cemetery Hill, about a half a mile away. Longstreet tried to dissuade Lee: the Union troops outnumbered the Confederates, were firmly entrenched behind stone walls, and had ample artillery to support them. The Confederates would have to get across more than half a mile of upward-sloping fields, during which time they would be completely exposed to Union fire. "General Lee," Longstreet later recalled telling his commander, "there never was a body of fifteen thousand men who could make that attack successfully."

But Lee overruled him. "The enemy is there," he said, "and I am going to strike him."

So Longstreet summoned General George Pickett and reluctantly ordered him to lead what has ever since been known as "Pickett's Charge." At about 3:00 P.M., Pickett led forward his men (probably 12,000-13,000—the exact number is not known). It was a picture-book vision of the Civil War: a mile-wide parade of gray, flags waving, horses galloping, marching in perfect order across the gently rolling farmland. The elegant Pickett led the way, shouting: "Don't forget today that you are from old Virginia!"
And then the Union forces opened fire. A few Virginians made it to the Union line but reinforcements quickly poured in and pushed them back. When the smoke cleared, nearly two-thirds of Pickett's division was gone—dead or captured. Gone, too, was the South's hope for independence. Lee would lead his army back to Virginia, and he would not surrender until almost two years later, but, most historians agree, Gettysburg was the high-water mark for the Confederacy. After Lee's defeat there and after the fall of the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg, Mississippi, a day later, it was just a matter of time until the Union triumphed.

But a mystery remained. Why did Lee, against the advice of Longstreet, persist in ordering Pickett's charge? This was the same Robert E. Lee, after all, who a few months earlier had brilliantly masterminded the Confederate victories at Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg. Lee was renowned for his successes in drawing the Union forces into battle just when the conditions were most favorable to the Confederacy. Yet at Gettysburg he abandoned the tactics on which he'd built his reputation and plunged ahead with the doomed attack at the Union's strongest point.

Why?

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In spite of the efforts of Southern mythmakers to blame Lee's subordinates, more objective historians recognized that the critical Confederate error at Gettysburg—the plan for Pickett's charge—was made by Lee himself. Stuart was late; Ewell was timid, Longstreet was slow to carry out Lee's order. But the decision to send in Pickett's men was Lee's alone, and the brunt of the blame had to fall on his shoulders.

To his credit, Lee never denied this. Immediately after the battle, Lee rode among the dazed survivors of Pickett's brigade, telling them they'd fought well and their defeat was all his fault. On returning to Virginia, Lee wrote Jefferson Davis, the Confederate president, offering to resign: "I cannot even accomplish what I myself desire. How can I fill the expectations of others?" (Davis refused to accept the offer.)

Simply blaming Lee, however, didn't solve the mystery. The question remained: why would a general—a general whose reputation had been built on maneuvering his opponents into attacking him where he wanted—now abandon those tactics and order so desperate and dangerous a charge?

One reason was that Lee's options in Pennsylvania were much more limited than they'd been in Virginia. Having made the bold decision to invade the North, Lee had shifted the time pressure from the Union troops to his own. Now it was Lee's men who were living off
the land, cut off from their supplies. The Confederate food supplies were dangerously low—so Lee felt he couldn’t afford just to wait until the Union generals erred.

He could, of course, have retreated to Virginia—accepting that the two days of battle preceding Pickett’s charge were nothing but a bloody draw. But this would have been an admission that his invasion had failed, that the South could do no real damage to the North and was destined to spend the rest of its days fighting on its own soil, perhaps winning some additional battles but never winning the war.

As Lee saw it, he had to attack. He hadn’t come to Pennsylvania to raid a few farmhouses; he’d come for a dramatic and decisive showdown that would convince the North, once and forever, to grant the South independence. Gettysburg, though it might not be the ideal site for such a victory, was the site fate had dealt him. He’d already pushed the Union troops out of the town and, he assumed, shaken their morale. He had enough artillery, he hoped, to knock out some Union guns before the charge. At last he had Stuart’s cavalry present; it could sweep around the Union lines and cause chaos among the Union troops fleeing the scene. And, above all, he had Pickett’s men, who had not been used in the previous days’ battles and who were rested and raring to go. Lee had tremendous faith in the abilities of Confederate soldiers; they had won other battles against odds almost as overwhelming. This confidence—this overconfidence—fatally colored Lee’s judgment.

What Lee failed to take into account was that the Union soldiers were just as brave and just as committed as those of the Confederacy. The Union army had been outgeneraled in previous battles but it had not been outfought. At Gettysburg, the Union army was under the command of a new leader, General George Gordon Meade. Lincoln had appointed Meade to the top spot only days before, on June 28, but Meade was not intimidated by Lee. When Pickett’s men emerged on the valley before him, he did not retreat or panic; rather, he swiftly and calmly ordered reinforcements toward the center of his line.

This is not to say Meade was a great general. In fact, he was harshly criticized after the Battle of Gettysburg for failing to counterattack after Pickett’s charge failed. Lincoln was especially displeased. “We had them within our grasp,” lamented the president. “We had only to stretch forth our hands and they were ours.” Still, the attacks on his post-Gettysburg actions should not obscure Meade’s highly competent generalship during the battle. And the Southern historians’ focus on Lee and his lieutenants should not obscure the fact that the Battle of Gettysburg was not just lost by the South, but won by the North.

Pickett, who survived the charge that bears his name, recognized this. Asked after the war why the attack failed, Pickett responded: “I believe the Union army had something to do with it.”
In the spring of 1864, William T. Sherman was ready to put his plan of “total war” into action. This would mean destroying the resources of the Confederacy, thereby, crippling their means of continuing with war. In addition, he would take the war to the civilians and he promised to make the South pay for their rebellion. Sherman cut out a path of destruction through Georgia 40 miles wide and 400 miles long.

The Burning of Atlanta - a Portent of Things to Come! Ya'll Don't Come Now - You Heah?

When he entered Atlanta, Sherman issued an order requiring all the people to leave within five days. Hood protested against this order, and the mayor and council of Atlanta appealed to Sherman to withdraw it, pointing out that most of the inhabitants were women and children, who would suffer greatly if compelled to leave their homes. To this Sherman replied, "I have read it [the petition] carefully, and give full credit to your statements of the distress that will be occasioned, and yet shall not revoke my orders, because they were not designed to meet the humanities of the case." When all preparations for the southward march had been made and the people had been forced to depart, Sherman burned Atlanta to the ground.

The March Begins

In preparing for the long march before him, Sherman left behind all disabled or weak men, and made up a fine army of 60,000 seasoned veterans, of whom 5,000 were cavalry. The army was to feed itself on the country. Each brigade had a party of foragers, called "bummers." These men were instructed to take all necessary provisions, horses and mules, but were ordered not to enter dwellings, nor insult the people, and were told to leave a part of their property to every family, so that none would be destitute. Where the army was not opposed, Sherman ordered that mills, cotton gins and houses should not be destroyed; but they were to be burned, if resistance were made. All these orders were very badly obeyed, no effort seemingly having been made to enforce the instructions.

Milledgeville to Savannah

On November 24th the march was resumed, now in the direction of Savannah. Sherman's army visited in this section Sandersville, Tennille, Louisville, Millen and other towns. Although I cannot speak for all towns, in Louisville, where some of my kin resided, Sherman's men piled all deed books in front of the court house and burned them. The logic was that the big plantations would not be able to prove land ownership. These actions are the bane (woe) of Georgia and South Carolina genealogists. The cavalry, under Kilpatrick, passed through many places not visited by the army, such as Waynesboro. In this part of Georgia Sherman was opposed by small bodies of cavalry and infantry under various generals. These small forces did not expect to stop Sherman's army, but hoped to keep it in a narrow path, so as to limit the amount of destruction.
The Fall of Savannah, Georgia

On December 9\textsuperscript{th} the Federal army reached the neighborhood of Savannah. The city was defended by General Hardee with 10,000 men, and was well protected by forts and by the rice swamps which had been flooded. Though cannonading was kept up for a number of days between attackers and defenders, the city was not hurt. After cooperation had been established between Sherman and the Federal gunboats on the coast and in the mouths of the rivers, Hardee saw that it would be impossible to hold Savannah, and in order to save his army he withdrew across the Savannah River into South Carolina, on December 21\textsuperscript{st}. On the following day Sherman entered Savannah and sent this telegram to President Lincoln: "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the City of Savannah, with one hundred and fifty guns and plenty of ammunition, also about twenty-five thousand bales of cotton."

Sherman's Conduct in Georgia

No other campaign in the entire war has contributed more to keeping alive sectional feeling than Sherman's march through Georgia and South Carolina. The march began in November, after the crops had been gathered. The "bummers" found the barns bursting with grain, fodder, and peas, the outhouses full of cotton, the yards crowded with hogs, chickens, and turkeys. The soldiers in the Southern armies were starving, not because there was no food, but because the railroads had been destroyed and it was impossible to send supplies to the front. Sherman was not content simply to use what food and supplies he needed, but boasted that he would "smash things to the sea" and make Georgia howl. His men entered dwellings, taking everything of value that could be moved, such as silver plate and jewelry; and killed and left dead in the pens thousands of hogs, sheep and poultry. Many dwellings were burned without any justification. Sherman in his own Memoirs testifies to the conduct of his men, estimating that he had destroyed $80,000,000 worth of property of which he could make no use. This he describes as "simple waste and destruction." One of the most serious aspects of his work was the destruction of the railroads; the Central from Macon to Savannah, for instance, was almost totally ruined.