

A 2021 BGES Civil War Field University Program:

The Retreat from Gettysburg

Presented by Parker Hills

July 11–15, 2021, from Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

It had been three days unlike any in the history of this great conflict—indeed, in the history of the United States. The violence of the battles at Gettysburg had exhausted the resources of the armies and had bled them practically white. The burden on the medical staffs were unprecedented. Practically every building was a hospital, human and animal debris was everywhere. Units had lost coherence and combat resources were exhausted, as were foodstuffs. Men had been captured; others were in desperate need of surgical care. Yet the two great armies were less than a mile from each other. The challenge of disengagement was extraordinary—the roads to safety seemingly unreachable.

The Retreat from Gettysburg has long been overshadowed by the battle that precipitated it, and yet it is one of the most important case studies in leadership and logistics and the principles of war that can be constructed. What is more challenging than leadership in the face of abject adversity? Yet Lee survived and lived to fight for nearly two more years and Meade continued to pursue the destruction of Lee's army until Grant arrived nine months later to bring on the penultimate campaign of this bloody conflict.

There are very few groups that study the retreat from Gettysburg. Indeed, there are only a handful of experts on the subject and two have recently died. Only John Schildt and Kent Masterson Brown remain. Indeed, it is Brown who has given us the most exhaustive and informative narrative of the days of retreat. In 2014, BGES offered the tour for the third time, and as the first three-day tour of the event. After carefully scrutinizing what needed to be said and shown, this upcoming tour is the first four-day study of the retreat. Our leader, retired Brigadier General Parker Hills, accompanied by retired USA retired Maj. Gen. Bill Terpeluk, has finetuned it over those seven years. This will be a rare treat and very informative and provocative.

Sunday, July 11, 2021

7:30 p.m.: Meet at the Hilton Garden Inn to pick up your reading books. The opening lecture, "Retreat from Gettysburg," is a full PowerPoint presentation by Parker Hills, who discusses the enormity of the task in front of Robert E. Lee and his staff and how he went about it. We suggest you eat early; Parker's talks and post-questions have been known to run two hours.

Monday, July 12, 2021

8 a.m.: Today we will focus on the Confederate army in the wake of the battle. The debris and the residual organization are mind-bending, and while so many visitors to the battlefield find themselves understandably drawn to the engagement zones, you are going to see the Confederate army and its hospitals. There are tons of stories associated, but what you want to understand from the travels today: East, west, north, and south is how strung out Lee's depleted army was, and what types of challenges it would face getting off and away from Gettysburg.

It has been said that history buffs study battles and scholars study logistics. With a general leading the program and another supporting, you will understand the concept of collecting your marbles and going home. About this time Lee is mighty glad Stuart brought those newly captured wagons.

Lunch is included.

Tuesday, July 13, 2021

8 a.m.: So many people focus on the bloodshed at battles. The most frequently heard question is "How many were killed?" We will answer that question the way military folks answer it. We will look at those who are uninjured and still combat effective, those who have lost their accouterments of war, and those who have survived the battle and are in some form ambulatory. There are the prisoners captured and the wagons loaded with the supplies that will be needed at the next engagement or when it is time to break for chow. Bring the majority of them home and they return to fight another day. Leave them behind and it is Camp Delaware and Elmira—as good as dead or killed on the field.

We start today on the Chambersburg Pike with the column escorted by Confederate cavalryman John Imboden. We will talk about the trains, how they were organized, run, and protected. They were 57 miles in length and had to move along two routes, ultimately converging at Williamsport for their crossing back into what was now West Virginia. We follow the route of the wounded and the spoils of war. We finish at the C&O Canal in Williamsport after stopping at several spots en route to where wagons were lost and where the column is ambushed near Gearfloss at a place called Cunningham's Crossroads.

This is a high-level chess match, and Meade is aware Lee is leaving despite the heavy rains and restricted visibility. He sets his cavalry in motion to interdict and destroy as much of Lee's trains as possible. We will follow each of the two pursuits and discuss in detail the engagements.

Lunch is included.

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

8 a.m.: Today we follow Lee's combat force—such as it remains. This is the army that will have to cover the recovery of the Southern raid into Pennsylvania. Lee must return to Virginia, and he commences with a large and robust force less than two miles away. Nothing is more vulnerable than an army in column of march than perhaps a wounded army attempting to cross a major river. Lee faces both challenges. Conversely, nothing can be more dangerous to a victorious army than carelessness in the face of a wounded and depleted enemy. The imperatives are so significant that missteps could turn a resounding victory into a robust defeat or fiasco. This is Meade's challenge.

Our adventures with Lee take us along the Fairfield Road, and we alternate between Lee's direct route and the angles and efforts to catch a vulnerable portion of Lee and chop him off. Perhaps the greatest initial risk is as Lee attempts to navigate Monterey Pass. We will fight to control the narrow thoroughfare and Lee will continue. We then plunge back into Maryland along grounds that few if any tour or study groups take the time to consider. Indeed, we go through the streets of Hagerstown and fight that all but forgotten engagement. We then arrive with Lee's infantry in Williamsport and get a taste of the Federal pursuit. History tells us that rains had flooded the Potomac River and taken out bridges Lee needs to cross and return to Virginia. We close the day with Meade's Council of War. Here Lee is trapped at Williamsport—what to do?

Lunch is included.

Thursday, July 15, 2021

8 a.m.: We depart the hotel for a new thematic organization. In the first three days, you have seen the challenge to Lee, the route of his wounded and prisoners, and the route of his army. Today we detail the activities of JEB Stuart in screening and denying the victorious Federals the chance to cut Lee off from his path of relief.

From Moritz Tavern, Reynold's final bivouac, we will depart with Stuart on Lee's flank. See how many of the following names mean anything to you: Farmer's Inn, Loy's Bridge, Thurmont, Creagerstown, Franklinville Mill, Flint, Deerfield, Lantz Deerfield Station, Raven Rock, Foxville Church Road, Mt. Zion Church, Smithsburg, Vogel Home, Bell House, Boonsboro, Beaver Creek, Funkstown, Falling Waters, and Downsville Road Line? How many battles were on that list? As we get back into the vicinity of Williamsport, we realize that all roads lead to that key crossing point. We will again see that Lee has yet another tremendous challenge in front of him as he places his trains and deals with the rising Potomac and its impact on his fording sites, his pontoon crossing at Falling Waters, and the need to entrench against a lurking Meade. We will follow Lee's entrenchments, noting that he needs time to get this done. We will see Stuart buy that time at Funkstown.

At the same time, today and the day before, we see Meade is determined to hit Lee and stop his crossing, but he respects the 9 miles of earthworks Lee has constructed. We will follow Meade's opposing line only to find that during the dark night of the 13th, Lee has secretly crossed the Potomac. Only a rearguard remains. We will follow that rearguard and the fight on the hills overlooking the pontoon crossing where J. Johnston Pettigrew is mortally wounded (visiting the site) and then, if able, we will walk down to the crossing where Lee's 800-foot pontoon was taken up and Lee had escaped. We will wrap the program on the banks of the Potomac and return to Gettysburg. Lee has crossed 50,000 soldiers, 20,000 support personnel, over 4,000 prisoners, all his 57 miles of wagons, and all his artillery batteries. It is one of the most remarkable achievements of this war or any war. Unique, interesting, and intellectually stimulating.

Lunch is provided.

About the Faculty:

Parker Hills is a retired brigadier general and the principal of the Leadership firm of BattleFocus, where he teaches that "Leadership is top-down." His strength is in the analysis of a commander's leadership and planning—"Where the gray matter was burned, not the gunpowder." Hills is one of the nation's leading preservationists and the architect of many projects interpreting the Vicksburg Campaign. His leading publication is *Receding Tide*, which was published by the National Geographic Society in 2010. He is also the author of *Vicksburg National Military Park, The Art of Commemoration* and a scholarly monograph *A Study in Warfighting, Nathan Bedford Forrest and the Battle of Brice's Crossroads*.

Hotel Information:

This program is headquartered at the Hilton Garden Inn, 1061 York Road, Gettysburg, PA 17325 (717-334-2040). We have a block of rooms there at the rate of \$145 single or double, plus tax. Call the hotel and ask for the Blue and Gray Education July 2021 block.

Transportation:

The servicing airport is Baltimore Washington (BWI), although Harrisburg (MDT) may be a good alternative. Either way, you will need to rent a car unless you drive to the event.

Recommended Reading:

You will be provided with a reading book and maps upon arrival. The following books are suggested to enhance your readiness for the program. If you are a user of

Amazon and would consider signing up for [AmazonSmile](#), name Blue and Gray Education Society as the beneficiary of your purchases—we are getting a quarterly check from Amazon from supporters who shop on Amazon. A percentage of every purchase, this one and all other purchases, comes to BGES. Thank you.

Kent Masterson Brown: [Retreat from Gettysburg, Lee, Logistics and the Gettysburg Campaign](#)

Kent Masterson Brown: [Meade at Gettysburg, A Study in Command](#)

John Schildt: [Roads from Gettysburg](#)

_____ James Parker Hills and Edwin C. Bearss: *Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War*. Available through BGES for \$45 (including shipping). Please indicate here that you would like to purchase and include payment with your registration.

Registration Form

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Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Registration includes four lunches, a reading book with maps, the academic program, support of a professional historian, a tour director, and transportation appropriate to the registration. We will also provide snacks, bottled water, and a limited selection of sodas/juices.

_____ Registration \$1095

_____ Current BGES member \$995

_____ I am not a member but would like to join so that I can get the member's rate; or I am a member who is past-due to renew. Please accept my donation of \$_____ (must be \$75 or more, which is tax-deductible).

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I will pay the balance due before the event.

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_____ Charge my (circle one) MC VISA AMEX Discover \$_____

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