



# Gettysburg and Lee's Escape to Virginia

*Donald S Lowry*

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Gettysburg is the most written-about battle in American history, and yet new interpretations of what happened there have recently taken root. As this work explains, Confederate General Robert E. Lee was fixated on capturing Cemetery Hill, the high ground just southeast of the town, but he misunderstood the position of the Union line of defense. In three days of attacks, Lee lost a third of his veteran infantrymen – the heart of his army – and expended much of his ammunition. With the Union army bloodied but unmoved, Lee had no choice but to retreat, but he was a long way from home with no real supply line. President Abraham Lincoln saw this as the best chance yet to destroy Lee's army. A vigorous Union pursuit might well cut him off before he could return to friendly territory in Virginia, and rain storms caused the Potomac River to rise to unfordable depth just as Federal cavalry destroyed his only pontoon bridge. And while Lee was fighting and retreating: Union General Ulysses S. Grant was besieging Vicksburg, Mississippi, the key Confederate position on the Mississippi River ... a scratch-force Confederate army outside that city was trying to find a way to break through Grant's defenses long enough to rescue the Rebel garrison ... Confederate cavalry was raiding across southern Indiana and Ohio ... And an uprising broke out in New York City, beginning with protests against the newly instituted draft but quickly degenerating into pillage, vandalism, and race riots. Much hung in the balance of history during the first half of July, 1863. If Lee could be forced to surrender just as Grant took Vicksburg, the American Civil War would be all but over.

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