



World Heritage Battlefields

GETTYSBURG 1863 – AUDIO #6

[Brisk, elevated music]

NARRATOR

This programme is brought to you by the museum of the Second World War in Gdansk as part of the World Battlefield Museums Forum Series of audio programmes focusing on the World Battlefield Forum.

[Sombre music; G. Holst “Mars, the Bringer of War”]

Welcome. Courage – Sacrifice – and Heritage are values crucial to understanding battlefields and reflecting on the fate of man and his historic struggles. As places of remembrance and focal points to pay our respects, battlefields bring back images of the past we can explore and research. Preserving and conserving battlegrounds, artefacts and infrastructure for future generations should be our major goal. Only when this goal is achieved can we think of battlefields as open-air museums and commercial tourism destinations. After all, battlefields are guardians of memory, shaping our collective, historical identity.

[Military parade music with drum calls heard]

NARRATOR

It is 1863. America is in the grips of a civil war. The Southern States decided to leave the Union, because they were afraid that President Lincoln and the entire North wanted to abolish slavery, which was, as the vice president of the newly created Confederate States of America, Alexander H. Stephens put it, “The Cornerstone of the Confederacy”. On the other hand, Lincoln’s main goal was to preserve the Union. However, having issued a Proclamation of Emancipation, it was no longer a war for the restoration of the “Union as it was”, but the creation of one without slavery. Interestingly both sides strongly cited the legacy of the American War of Independence. This is even evident in Lincoln’s

famous Gettysburg Address delivered few months after the battle, read here by America's first African American President – Barack Obama.

BARACK OBAMA

It is rather for us, the living, we here be dedicated to the great task remaining before us. That from these honoured dead, we take increased devotion to that cause which they here, gave the last full measure of devotion. That we here, highly resolve these dead shall not have died in vain. That the nation, shall have a new birth of freedom and the government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

DR CATHERINE BATESON OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KENT

Lincoln delivered his two-minute most important speech of his life, at this point the conflict for emancipation of the Union together, would lead to the new freedom that America was now fighting for. The Confederacy were very upfront from the start about what this war was really about. Yes, it was about their State's rights, but it was about their State's rights to defend slavery and to keep slavery going. Through the 1840's and 1850's in particular, it became increasingly clear that tensions between these two regions could not be reconciled.

At the end of 1850's, Abraham Lincoln argued that America was a house divided against itself. By 1860, more than four million African Americans were enslaved in the southern States. Politicians in the South were deeply concerned that the newly forming Republican Party were going to end slavery and abolish it, and so on the 20th of December of 1860, South Carolina seceded from the Union and, with it – other states, forming the 11 Confederate States of America. In 1863, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation made sure that this court was publicly addressed for the first time, so Union and the Emancipation were hand in hand. By the time we reached the battle of Gettysburg, between the 1st and 3rd of July in 1863, this was becoming a war to completely defeat the old confederate southern slaved South.

Gettysburg became very quickly yet another brutal and horrific battle. The American Civil War, one of its many legacies, is just how this remains America's bloodiest conflict, even when you compare and combine all of its other military history, every Southern town and certain areas at the seceded South, knew somebody who would have been injured or killed at Gettysburg. There's also a huge transnational legacy of the war and it's something that's pretty apparent at Gettysburg. The war saw over 200,000 African Americans fight. The same from Ireland originally in the Union, along with 20,000 to fall of the Confederacy; 400,000 native and first-born German-American immigrants fought in the war. There were even a few key military figures who originated from areas of Poland.

The enduring legacy of the Civil War – it is about the fact of the African American right to vote. It's this movement that then pushes civil right actions all the way into the 20th and 21st century. This is a war that is not just a civil war, it is one that has touched culture and music and photographic developments and military developments, that endured to stay. That is why it is the most important part of American history, because it is something that is still with us over a hundred and fifty years on.

NARRATOR

[Drum calls incorporated in the recording]

Gettysburg, a town in Pennsylvania close to the Maryland-Pennsylvania state line with a population of just 2400 in 1863. It is adjacent to the Susquehanna River Watershed and, within the Potomac River Watershed, close to numerous streams and creeks such as Marsh and Rock. Strategically, it is at a crossroads, linking several important towns in Pennsylvania and Maryland, including Baltimore and York.

Frank Haskell, who witnessed the battle and wrote about it subsequently, stated that the geography played a key part in the battle and was to the North's advantage.

He went on to describe the landscape saying that "between these ridges, and along their slopes, the ground is cultivated, and is covered with fields of wheat, now nearly ripe, with grass and pastures, with some peach orchards, with fields of waving corn, and some farm houses, and their out buildings along the Emmetsburg road. There are very few places within the limits mentioned where troops and guns could move concealed."

General Lee's attempt to continue his successful campaign against the North, this time in the North, brought him to this otherwise peaceful town of Gettysburg in Adam's County, Pennsylvania. But what was the battle itself like?

DR PIOTR DERENGOWSKI OF THE INSTITUTE OF HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GDANSK, POLAND

[Frontline sounds: rifles firing, shooting, distant explosions; tense music building up]

On the morning of the July 1st, 1863, no one expected that a small skirmish commenced to the west of Gettysburg, a small Pennsylvanian town, between Confederate Infantry, commanded by Gen. Henry Heth and a dismounted Union cavalry commanded by Gen. John Buford, would escalate into the biggest and the bloodiest battle of the Civil War that would last 3 days, would involve 170,000 men from the armies of the Potomac (Union; commanded by Gen. George Meade), and Northern Virginia (Confederacy; commanded by Gen. Robert E. Lee), and will result with more than 50,000 casualties.

The first day of the battle belonged to the Confederates, who were able to bring more troops into the battle, and practically destroyed two Union corps, forcing federal troops to withdraw and to take defensive positions to the south of Gettysburg. However, they were unable to strike a decisive blow.

On the second day Confederates planned to launch a general assault on the Union lines. The attacks, not only started late in the day (first troops launched their attacks just after 4 p.m.), but were uncoordinated, and as a result they failed to break Union defensive positions. Despite this rather disappointing result, Gen. Lee planned to renew the attack on the next day. This time, he wanted to strike in the centre of the Union position.

As a part of the preparations, between 150 and 170 Confederate guns fired for almost 2 hours into federal positions. Historians argue this was the largest artillery bombardment of the Civil War. An assault by Confederate infantry followed, (known as Pickett's Charge), which ended in a complete disaster, and was a significant symbol of Confederate helplessness. On the very next day (July 4th), Gen. Lee ordered his army to withdraw, thus ending his offensive to the North.

[Brisk flute and drums marching music playing]

When talking about the battle of Gettysburg, it is interesting to mention the Polish connection. One of the brigade commanders in the Union XI Corps that on the July 1st defended the line to the north of the town, was Włodzimierz Krzyżanowski. His brigade was comprised of 5 regiments, including the 58th NY Volunteer Regiments (aka the Polish Legion).

Even though his troops were unable to hold the line, nevertheless they managed to slow down the Confederate advance enough to allow Union forces to form a new defensive position to the south of Gettysburg. Krzyżanowski's troops also played an important role in repelling Confederate attacks on July 2nd.

Interestingly, among Confederate troops there were also two regiments from Louisiana (14th and 15th), that were originally organized in 1861 in New Orleans as the 1st and 2nd regiments of the Polish Brigade.

[Frontline sounds: cannon firing, shooting, distant explosions, frantic battle yells]

NARRATOR

And what was happening at this time in other parts of the world?

DR PIOTR DERENGOWSKI

Of course the year 1863 was very eventful. However, I would like to mention two things in particular, mainly because they directly and indirectly affected the American Civil War. First of them was of course the January Uprising that took place on Polish lands. Poles once again took up arms and tried to restore the country that disappeared from the map of Europe at the end of 18th century. Even though the unrest on Polish lands was treated by many countries (including the USA) as an internal Russian affair, it still grabbed the attention of main European powers, e.g. Great Britain, and France, effectively distracting them from any serious involvement in the Civil War.

On the other hand it is worth mentioning that Russia was the only European empire that consistently, during the entire Civil War, treated that conflict as an internal American affair, and refused to accept any kind of European mediation to end the war. This specific, Russo-American friendship, soon resulted in the visit of two Russian fleets in the USA – Atlantic Squadron (Rear Admiral Stepan Lesovski) in New York, and Pacific Squadron (Admiral Andrei Alexandrovich Popov) in San Francisco.

Another event that was closely related to the American conflict was the war in Mexico, caused by French invasion of Mexico, and an attempt to establish regime favourable to French interests in that region. French managed to install Maximilian Habsburg as an Emperor of Mexico, but his rule proved to be short-lived. By 1867 Maximilian was captured, tried, sentenced to death and, despite international appeals to spare his life, also executed. Interestingly, the commander of the reserve firing squad was another Polish participant of the battle of Gettysburg, Col. John Sobieski, who, in his memoirs, claimed to be "lineal descendant of King John III of Poland".

NARRATOR

As the gunpowder was settling, people tried to find ways of commemorating what had happened.

***Gettysburg* - Poem by Herman Melville - 1819-1891**

O Pride of the days in prime of the months
Now trebled in great renown,
When before the ark of our holy cause
Fell Dagon down-
Dagon foredoomed, who, armed and targed,
Never his impious heart enlarged
Beyond that hour; God walled his power,
And there the last invader charged.

He charged, and in that charge condensed
His all of hate and all of fire;
He sought to blast us in his scorn,
And wither us in his ire.
Before him went the shriek of shells-
Aerial screamings, taunts and yells;
Then the three waves in flashed advance
Surged, but were met, and back they set:
Pride was repelled by sterner pride,
And Right is a strong-hold yet.

Before our lines it seemed a beach
Which wild September gales have strown
With havoc on wreck, and dashed therewith
Pale crews unknown-
Men, arms, and steeds. The evening sun
Died on the face of each lifeless one,
And died along the winding marge of fight
And searching-parties lone.

Sloped on the hill the mounds were green,
Our centre held that place of graves,
And some still hold it in their swoon,
And over these a glory waves.
The warrior-monument, crashed in fight,
Shall soar transfigured in loftier light,
A meaning ampler bear;
Soldier and priest with hymn and prayer
Have laid the stone, and every bone
Shall rest in honour there.

[Peaceful music in the background]

NARRATOR

Gettysburg is now a peaceful memorial but it is our responsibility to tell the story for future generations.

DAVID MALGEE - GETTYSBURG FOUNDATION

The Gettysburg foundation's mission is multifaceted, but quite simple. It is our noble task to support Gettysburg National Military Park with funding for education, preservation, acquisition of artefacts and protecting battlefield properties from modern development. Additionally, we are committed to running all operational aspects of the Museum and the visitor's centre. We are also committed to educating visitors about the significance of the battle and what it means today, along with the lessons of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Finally, our overall goal, is to enhance the visitor's experience at Gettysburg's National Military Park.

CHRISTOPHER GWINN - GETTYSBURG FOUNDATION

[Brisk flute and drums marching music playing]

One of the big things we like to do, is reach out to the younger generation in the local community, and we do that through a variety of ways. First off, we host hundreds of school field trips to the museum and visitor's centre to the battlefield – virtually, every month throughout the year over the course of the partnership between the National Park Service and Gettysburg Foundation. Hundreds of thousands of young learners, if not millions, have been able to engage with the Gettysburg story and here at the museum and the visitor's centre we have a world class museum exhibit that walks students through the story of the American Civil War and the battle of Gettysburg, placing that battle within a larger context to this war, also taking about its causation and its consequences.

We have an education specialist and an education team here who provide free onsite interpretive programming for school groups, we have a robust learning programme, we have special initiatives where we bring lower-income, lower-opportunity students from primarily urban areas and introduce them to the battle of Gettysburg and its significance in American history. We do it through partnerships, like the ones that the National Park Service has with the Gettysburg's foundation. We do it through outreach events.

We have a digital presence online that regardless of where you are, either in the United States or across the world, you can take a virtual tour of the battlefield or you can go to the Gettysburg Foundation website and experience a digital depiction of the Gettysburg cyclorama. So, there are many different ways in which the National Park service and the Gettysburg foundation work together to engage the younger generation's students across the country and across the world. And we're fortunate that the community of Gettysburg is a vibrant history community. We have powerful partnerships with local colleges and universities with a local historical society, and collectively and collaboratively, we've always been able to work together to communicate to reinterpret the Gettysburg story for new generations.

DR CAROL REARDON - GETTYSBURG FOUNDATION

Those of us who study military history, look at war through four different basic concepts – we look at war's causes, at war's conduct, at war's cost, and at war's consequences. Our museum here at the Gettysburg National Military Park addresses all four of those concepts.

When it comes to the war's causes, this is a matter of great controversy in the United States even today. If one follows the historical evidence provided in sources that come from the start of the war, most historians today would say that the main cause of the Civil War was slavery. There are any number of other elements that contribute to the causes of the Civil War, but a lot of them are shaped by the institution of slavery. There are cultural and economic factors that produce an understanding of why the North and the South fought each other, but when it comes down to it in the end, it usually comes back to slavery.

One of the interesting things about the way the Gettysburg National Military Park interprets the conduct of the war, is that they do not use simply a military lens to do so. Whenever this museum talks about the conduct of the Civil War, they address all the elements of national power involved in the fighting of the war. It's not just the clash of armies, it's economies at war, it's a number of other factors – political, diplomatic, social, cultural at war as well.

NARRATOR

[Elevated music in the background]

Poland also plays its role in commemorating this battle. The battle of Gettysburg is also commemorated by a huge cyclorama painting painted by Paul Dominique Phillipoteaux in 1884. This huge work of art was first exhibited at the Gettysburg museum in 1913, on the 50th anniversary of the battle but 120 years later, it needed expert repair and conservation. In 2005, the Gettysburg Foundation hired a team of conservators from Poland who had worked on a similar mega-sized battle painting, called the Raclawice Panorama. Gettysburg shows us how even though a bitter battle is fought, reconciliation is possible and great good can come as a result.

DR PIOTR DERENGOWSKI

[Overlay of tranquil music]

We have to remember that even though one of the greatest results of the war was abolition of slavery (13th Amendment to the Constitution), it was enforced not as a reward to African Americans, but rather as a punishment for white Southerners. And yes, it is true, that during the years immediately after the war, known as a Reconstruction, black population of the USA did receive many rights, that were previously denied to them (like citizenship, or a right to vote). Unfortunately this victory did not last long.

Already before the end of 19th century, white Southerners, with the assistance of terrorist groups (like Ku Klux Klan), but also different legislative bodies, and even the Supreme Court, managed to deprive African Americans of their rights and made out of them second class citizens. About the same time we could observe reconciliation between white Northerners and Southerners. The Civil War was portrayed as a tragic war of “brother against brother”, rather as a struggle to abolish slavery. A profound consequence of such narrative was that a memory of black participation and significance disappeared from mainstream historiography for almost a century.

DR BERENDT OF THE MUSEUM OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN GDANSK

[Peaceful elevated music continues]

When we were planning the 2019 War Battlefield Museums Forum, we knew that Gettysburg representatives had to be there. Gettysburg is the most preserved battlefield in America and it is also an extraordinary memorial site, a powerful symbol of reconciliation, a true legacy of modern America. We must remember that Gettysburg, the site of one of the largest battles of north American history, claimed the lives of 51,000 people. Today, it is one of the most important memorials in the USA, and the 1,400 monuments remind us of brave soldiers who fought in this battle. The 1,000,000 people who visit this site each year, is undeniable proof of how important the battlefields are in terms of culture, memory and national identity. By nurturing such memorial sites, we pay tribute to those who

fought, gave their lives and sacrificed themselves to fight for higher values, the values of freedom and a hope for a better tomorrow.

NARRATOR

Gettysburg is a powerful symbol. First and foremost, the huge sacrifice by both sides, but also the Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln shows us how one can be full of respect, without anger or the triumph of victors over the vanquished – but rather a hope for future generations.

[Alert closing music]

History is there to help us remember and learn from the past. But whoever is unaware of history is doomed to repeat it.

