

BOOK REVIEW

A Review of "Without Warning: The Saga of Gettysburg, A Reluctant Union Hero, and the Men He Inspired"

Terry Pierce, Stanwood, WA: Heart Ally Books (2020)

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In *Without Warning: The Saga of Gettysburg, A Reluctant Union Hero, and the Men He Inspired*, Dr. Terry Pierce portrays in incredible detail the events leading to Maj Gen George Gordon Meade's assumption of command of the Union Army of the Potomac and its challenge of prevailing in the Battle of Gettysburg, which followed some three days later. It's a story that documents the unusual process by which Meade replaces his predecessor, Maj Gen Joseph Hooker, and the horrific battlefield action that begins some three days later at Gettysburg. That is the context brilliantly and thoroughly portrayed by Terry Pierce. *Without Warning* is an exciting literary adventure that will bring both tears and joy to the reader.

This historically-based novel begins with President Lincoln moving to replace the commander of the Army of the Potomac, whose performance in the recent battle at Chancellorsville had been poor. It is the third such action the president has taken in the past year. Meade is also the third officer with whom the president discussed assuming the command position; the first two had declined. Meade is not given that option. No one seems surprised at Hooker's demise. Most everyone, including Meade, seems surprised by his selection as the new commander.

Meade finds himself commanding an army with a shaken morale, having recently been defeated in a major battle at Chancellorsville and having been led by a commander who has lost touch with his people, if not with his mission. The Army of the Potomac has neither a strategy nor an operational plan for dealing with the Confederate army, commanded by a beloved hero, Lt Gen Robert E. Lee. The Potomac army's situation is further complicated by several inept senior leaders, including a political appointee, Maj Gen Daniel Sickles, former Congressman championed by President Lincoln and now Commander of the Potomac army's Third Corps.

With only three days before an anticipated battle with the Confederate forces, Meade quickly begins the process of setting forth a strategy, stationing his forces appropriately, and “cleaning house” of inept senior leadership. His strategy is simple: gain high ground for his warriors, and present Lee with only two options—attack the Union forces from a disadvantaged position, or retreat back to Virginia. With only one or two exceptions (including Sickles), he replaces or reconfirms his six corps commanders and makes his expectations for each of them very clear. His leadership throughout this process is clearly portrayed by Pierce. Indeed, it is a textbook on preparation for combat, which should be studied by military professionals even today.

The battle begins, and Meade must come to grips with the greatest unknown in warfare: the moral and mental character of his people. Once again, the author presents a thorough and fascinating description of a horrific three-day fight and, in so doing, sets forth a narrative of combat leadership challenges. In rapid succession, his most skilled corps commander, Maj Gen

John Reynolds, is killed, and his least effective corps commander, Sickles, deliberately violates his orders and moves his 11,000 men a half mile in front of the Union defensive line in the hopes of achieving his personal objective of emerging from the battle as its hero.

Sickles’ unauthorized movement of his Third Corps soldiers not only fails to bring him personal fame, but also leaves a gap in the Union force defensive line, which substantially affects the outcome of the Gettysburg battle. Meade’s leadership, in conjunction with an incredible series of heroic actions by his men, brings about the first Union victory over Lee.

In the end, *Without Warning* is a brilliantly crafted story about the Battle of Gettysburg that features a positive narrative for moral and heroic leadership. For six days, against all odds, Meade “outgeneraled” the charismatic and iconic Lee.

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