

July 2, 1863, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

On the second day of battle, most of both armies had arrived. The Union line held the high ground in a defensive formation that looked like a fishhook. On July 2, Lee ordered General James Longstreet, commander of the Confederate I Corps, to attack the Union left flank as early in the day as possible.

At the same time General A. P. Hill's corps was to attack the Union center. General Ewell was to make diversionary attacks and "if practicable" attack the Union Army's right flank. Lee felt that if everything went according to his plan and the Union line was destroyed, the battle, and possibly the war, would be won on the second day. Lee's coordinated attack required getting all the infantry into position and moving up artillery to support them.

Longstreet had the furthest to go and midway in their march realized the Union lines could see them. They went back and had to take a different route. Longstreet could not get his corps into position until about 4 p.m. when he began his attack. His attack on the Union line lasted for over three hours but could not break the Union line. Hill's Corps failed to be effective in the center. Ewell did not attack Cemetery Ridge as instructed in Lee's confusing order, but made some progress in taking Culp's Hill.

Union Major General Daniel Sickles, a political general commanding III Corps, disobeyed Meade's orders and moved his troops forward to the Peach Orchard. He had been ordered to take up a position on Little Round Top connecting with Union forces on both his right and left. By doing this he left a large hole in the Union line. He marched to a position nearly 1 mile (1.6 km) in front of the Union line with no support on either side.

Within an hour, his entire III Corps was nearly wiped out by Longstreet. Sickles was badly wounded by a cannonball and lost a leg. Being wounded was all that saved him from a court-martial. Sickles' blunder nearly lost the entire battle for the Union.

On the night of July 2, Longstreet's largest division commanded by General George Pickett arrived and was placed in the center of the Confederate line. Lee's plan for the next day was to attack on both the Union right and left, just as he had done the day before. Lee was still certain he could break the Union line and win the battle. That day Stuart's cavalry had caught up with Lee's army and Lee ordered Stuart to ride around the East side of Gettysburg and attack the Union rear. Ewell had also been reinforced and was ordered to take Culp's Hill the next morning.

Meade ordered the Union XII Corps to drive Ewell's forces off the captured trenches on Culp's Hill. They were to move at daylight the next morning. He was determined the remainder of the Union Army would hold its position and wait for Lee to attack.