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# Gettysburg Day 1

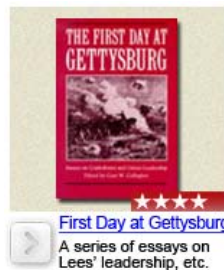
## Gettysburg Day 1 Good Ground



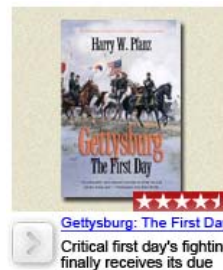
The Battle of Gettysburg day 1 began in the early morning hours of July 1, 1863 to the west of Gettysburg, PA. Two Union Cavalry Brigades under [Brigadier General John Buford](#) who had arrived in Gettysburg the day before, spotted Confederate divisions approaching the town from the west up Chambersburg Pike.



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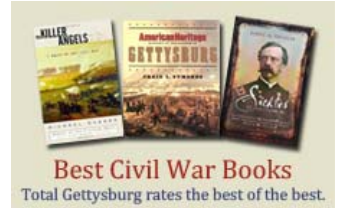
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### Buford's defenses

In an effort to protect the high ground, Buford hastily formed defensive lines along Herr Ridge, McPherson Ridge and [Seminary Ridge](#) just west of Gettysburg. General Buford intended for this defense to be merely a delaying action to keep the Confederate forces at bay until the Union infantry could reinforce and occupy the heights south of town on. Gettysburg day 1 was officially underway.

Confederate Major General Henry Heth was the first to engage with Buford's cavalry at 7:30am and at first, he expected minimal resistance. He sent two divisions under Brigadier General James J. Archer and Joseph R. Davis ahead to occupy the town and they were surprised to find such fierce resistance. Heavy fighting ensued and Buford's cavalry defended admirably against larger numbers. General Buford was able to hold out for a few hours until he was reinforced by Brigadier General's Lysander Cutler and Solomon Meredith under [Major General John F. Reynolds's](#) I Corps.

### Union reinforcements

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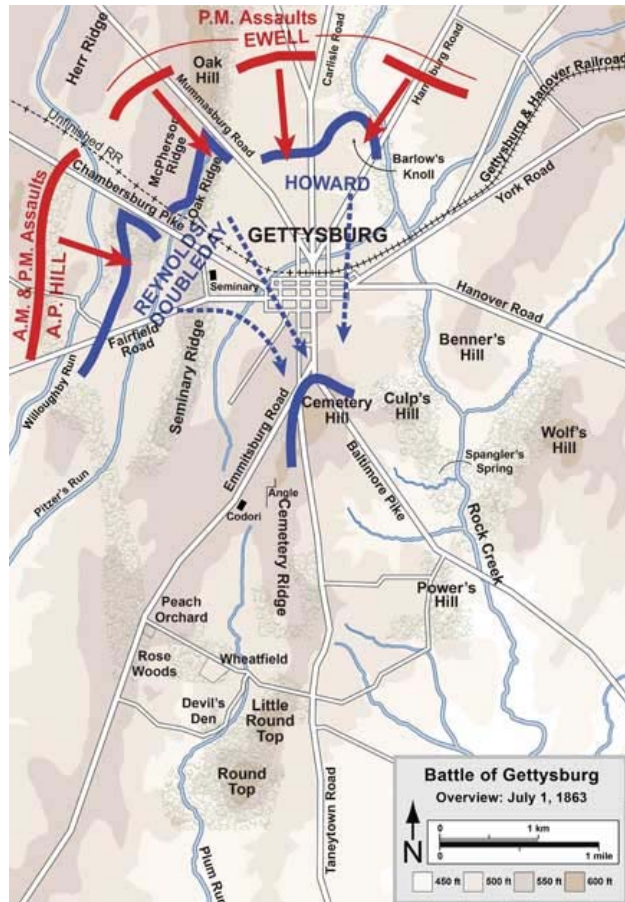
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The divisions under Archer and Davis again attacked the Union line intent on breaking through the cavalry defenses. They did not realize however that the Union lines had been reinforced and they incurred heavy casualties. At approximately 10:30am, as General Reynolds was organizing the [Iron Brigade](#) into defensive positions, he was knocked from his horse after being struck by a bullet behind his right ear and was killed instantly. Although his battlefield experience was somewhat limited as compared to others, he was considered by many to be the best officer in the Union Army. Major General Abner Doubleday being the ranking officer, assumed command of the Union defenses on Gettysburg day 1 and was immediately tested by frontal assaults from the Confederates.



\* Map by Hal Jespersen, www.posix.com/CW

**Ewell attacks from north**

North of town, Confederate Lt. General Richard S. Ewell's Second Corps which had marched west through Cashtown, took a turn south to engage at Gettysburg. His assault down the Harrisburg and Carlisle Roads forced the Union defenses to react on Gettysburg day 1.

Major General Oliver O. Howard was rushed forward from the south of town traveling up the Baltimore Pike and Taneytown Road in a northerly direction. The Union Army did not have enough troops however to defend against the Confederate assaults from the west, north and northeast of Gettysburg and hastily brought reinforcements forward when needed to maintain the lines.

Commander of the Confederate Army of Virginia, [General Robert E. Lee](#) arrived on the scene at approximately 2:30pm and ordered Lt. General A.P. Hill to join Ewell's assault. Hill sent Brigadier General J. Johnston Pettigrew to attack Unions brigades positioned on McPherson Ridge. They were able to flank and drive back segments of the Union line including Meredith's Iron Brigade through the woods toward Seminary Ridge. The Iron Brigade attempted to make a desperate stand by the Seminary, but were instead pushed back off the ridges west of town and through the streets of Gettysburg.

Meanwhile, Confederate Major General Robert E. Rhodes and Jubal Early mounted assaults against Union positions on the north and northwest of town. Early was able to capitalize on a salient created by Union Brigadier General Francis C. Barlow when he advanced XI Corps too far forward. Barlow was in a



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compromising position when he was attacked on all sides and considering his Corps was the right flank of the Union position, it put the rest of the Federal units in serious jeopardy. Barlow himself was captured and left for dead as his men retreated and the Union lines both north and west of town began breaking apart from the relentless pressure of the Confederates.

### Union retreat

Finally, Union Major General Oliver O. Howard ordered a retreat of all units to defensive positions just south of town on Cemetery Hill on Gettysburg day 1. Here Major General Winfield S. Hancock assumed command of the Union forces from Major General Abner Doubleday. This was at the request of Union Major General [George Gordon Meade](#) upon hearing that Reynolds was killed. Howard and Hancock both agreed that their current position was an excellent one for a major battle so they formed defensive lines there with infantry and artillery.

On the Confederate side, General Lee studied the situation and gave the decision to General Ewell to attack the Union positions "if practicable". Ewell made the decision not to attack, perhaps due to the heavy losses suffered by the Confederates, and this concluded the fighting at Gettysburg day 1.

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