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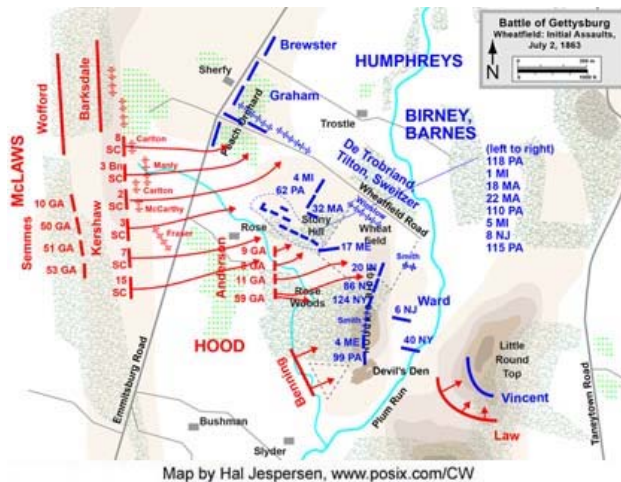
The Wheatfield

The Wheatfield at Gettysburg was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting at Gettysburg. It is often referred to as the "Bloody Wheatfield" due to the catastrophic losses by both sides in just a few hours of fighting on this 20-acre sight. Yet one cannot speak of The Wheatfield without first understanding the actions of [General Daniel Sickles](#) of the Union army's III Corps. In disobeying a direct order, Sickles advanced his entire III Corp forward to ground that was seemingly more elevated from his former position. This created a salient in the Union lines placing Sickles' Corp in The Wheatfield just northwest of [Little Round Top](#), and due north of [Devil's Den](#).



The Wheatfield

The first action started when Confederate Brigadier General George T. Anderson's brigade of Hood's division advanced through Rose's Woods and into The Wheatfield without advance knowledge that the Union lines had changed. Anderson's brigade made up mostly of Georgians smacked headlong into sections of III Corp spread out over Stony Hill and Houck's Ridge. The Union 17th Maine regiment figured prominently early on, and made a strong stand behind a low stone wall against the advancing Georgians.



Late that afternoon around 5:30pm, Stony Hill was reinforced by two brigades from 1st division of V Corps to meet the attacks of Confederate Brigadier General Joseph B. Kershaw and his South Carolina brigades under Major General Lafayette McLaws. Brigadier General James Barnes, Colonel Jacob B. Sweitzer and Colonel William S. Tilton led the Union divisions and organized their troops. For reasons unknown however, Barnes made the decision to withdraw his division off Stony Hill a few hundred yards to the rear and the 17th Maine and other divisions had to withdraw as well. Barnes had not consulted with his superiors and was widely criticized for this action that gave possession of the hill to the Confederates. Captain George B. Winslow's 1st New York Artillery, the only Union artillery in the field, were forced to limber up and vacate the field due to lack of infantry support.

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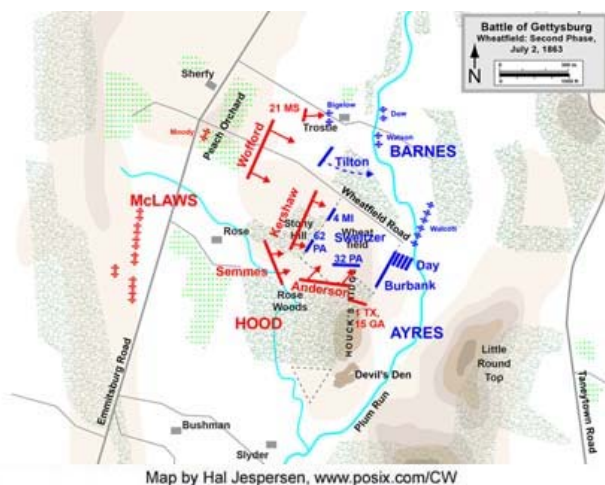
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The Confederates were able to capitalize on Barnes' error and took control of Stony Hill and eventually the Wheatfield. Earlier, Union Major General Winfield S. Hancock was ordered by [General George Meade](#) to send a division from the II Corps to reinforce the III Corps. Sickles left was in serious jeopardy had it not been for the timely reinforcements in the right location at the right time. Brigadier General John C. Caldwell advanced 3 brigades from 1st division led by Colonels Edward E. Cross, Samuel K. Zook and Patrick Kelly (Irish Brigade) with John Brooke's brigade in reserve. Colonel Cross was mortally wounded through the navel while advancing through the waist-high wheat and his second, Sergeant Charles Phelps took command. Colonel Zook was also hit in the abdomen and knocked from his horse as he advanced his men through the field and also died from his wounds. Despite the losses, the three brigades were able to push the Confederates off the hill and out of the field into Rose Woods and the Union once again controlled the battlefield.



Additional information on the Battle of Gettysburg and the American Civil War can be found in books and videos. Please find many suggestions for good reading & viewing resources throughout this site.



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At this moment the Union lines in the adjacent Peach Orchard collapsed and Confederate Brigadier General William T. Wofford continued his advance taking Stony Hill and flanking the Union troops in the Wheatfield. Sweitzer's Brigade rushed to meet the Wofford's assault and hand-to-hand combat ensued. The 2nd division of V Corps under Brigadier General Romeyn B. Ayres reinforced but were also flanked by the Confederates. Union troops dropped back to Little Round Top, reformed their lines, and waited for a Confederate assault.

Confederate troops under Kershaw, Semmes and Anderson were exhausted from the days battle but pursued. A Union reserve unit, the V Corps under Brigadier General Samuel W. Crawford ordered Colonel William McCandless to attack the Confederates and he succeeded in pushing them back through the field and beyond Stony Hill.

This ended the fighting in The Wheatfield on Gettysburg day 2. It will forever be remembered as a bloody back-and-forth battle between two determined sides, but in the end, the Confederates were not able to break the Union lines and secure the heights beyond.

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