

# Civil War And The Battle of Gettysburg Re-Enactment

By PATRICK CONNOR

*Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times*

Our new democracy, the United States of America, had its destiny imperiled and survival was uncertain during the raging Civil War. On July 1-3 of 1863, the Union and Confederate armies met by chance in a small town of 2,400 inhabitants in Pennsylvania- a place called Gettysburg. It was brother against brother, cousin against cousin, American against American in a desperate battle. After the three-day slaughter was over, there were 51,000 casualties of the 172,000 men; 5,000 dead horses; debris, wreckage and horrible grief strewn across the 25 square mile area. More than 600 cannons pummeled the soldiers in fields below with more than a million pounds of ammunition. It was a most horrendous event of war, particularly for America.

The remnants of General Robert E. Lee's broken army, originally composed of 75,000 men, retreated from the attack; shattered and spiritually smashed.

"...from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion - that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth." - President Lincoln, the Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863.

In this present day, it may seem hard to imagine, but as a re-enactor or spectator, you can step back into 1863 and witness the battle that was the turning point of the Civil War at the reenactment of Gettysburg.

This year's 140th anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg was called "Three Days of Destiny." It was the largest Civil War reenactment of the decade. Originally scheduled for July 4, 5 and 6, it was postponed to August 8, 9 and 10 because the fields were saturated by the heavy rains of June. It drew over 15,000 re-enactors and 100,000 spectators.

Spectators were able to watch the battle and enjoy the many living historical demonstrations such as music of the period, medical procedures, ladies' fashions, and camp life.

There were also the "Sutlers," traveling salesmen offering an array of authentic period merchandise.

Union and Confederate army encampments were set up for people to walk through and observe the way soldiers would cook and wind down after a rigorous day of battle.

Whether a history buff or not, there is a wealth of knowledge to be gained during this annual spectacle. From learning what our ancestors persevered, to the colorfulness of our nation's past, a trip back in time to Gettysburg, Pa. will give you a new perspective on Independence Day

weekend.

The event is something to mark on next year's vacation calendar. More information can be obtained at [www.gettysburgreenactment.com](http://www.gettysburgreenactment.com).

William Styple, an historian and author from Kearny, presented his new Civil War book at the event, "Writing and Fighting the Civil War." Mr. Styple spent over 18-months traveling across the country collecting original newspapers from the *Sunday Mercury*. He compiled and edited the best letters into his book, which provides an original perspective of the Civil War.

The *Sunday Mercury* was the father of Sunday journalism, and it helped writers like Artemus Ward and Mark Twain rise to literary fame. The newspaper was the only one written from correspondence of the actual men fighting in battle. The articles gave a true perspective of a soldier's life and how the war was being fought.

The paper was so accurate that some soldiers were court marshaled for giving valuable, tactical information to the press.

The Union feared that the Confederates might obtain a copy of the newspaper and learn of the Union's position.

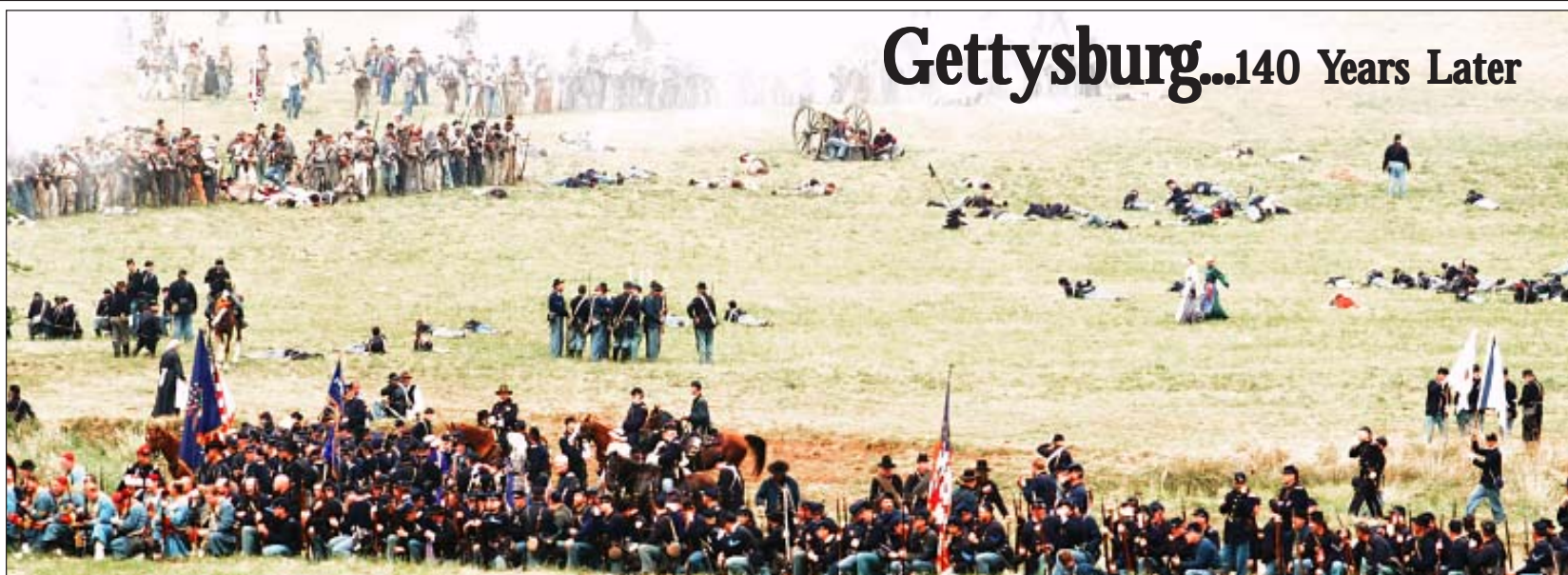
There were many other history lessons provided at the Gettysburg reenactment. Once such lesson was of the Hunley, the first successful combat submarine in history. In 1863, the Hunley sunk the USS Housatonic by torpedo, and it disappeared shortly after without a trace.

The civil war submarine was discovered in 1995 and was raised from the Charlestown, S.C. harbor ocean floor in August of 2000 by Clive Cussler.

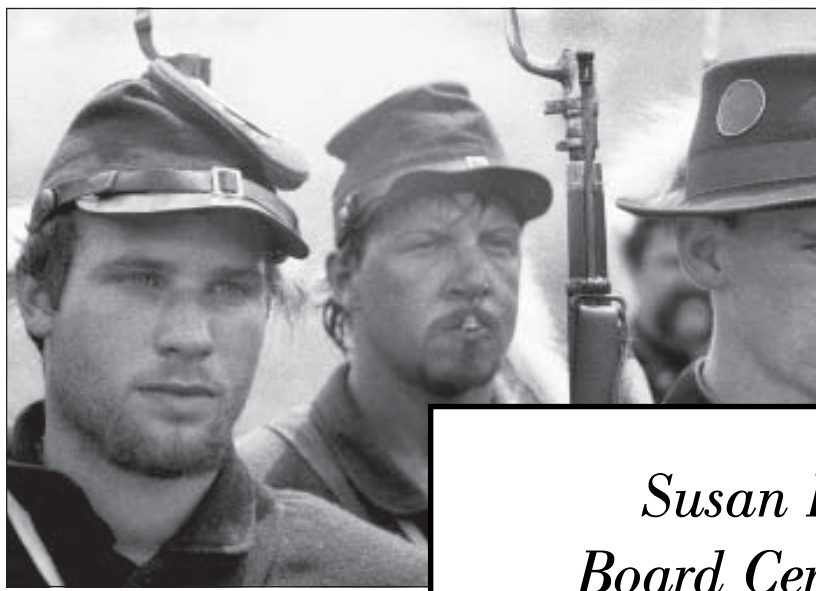
It is a time capsule holding within its hull the crew of eight and many valuable artifacts. Plans to give these men a proper burial are set for April 17, 2004 in Magnolia Cemetery in Charlestown, S.C. They will be buried next to the crew who lost their lives on two previous Hunley missions.

With modern facial reconstruction technology, it is hoped that the identity of these eight men will be possible.

Scores of photographs of the Gettysburg reenactment are available. For those interested and for more information, please contact [pconnor@goleader.com](mailto:pconnor@goleader.com).



Gettysburg...140 Years Later



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