



Nine Months to Gettysburg: Stannard's Vermonters and the Repulse of Pickett's Charge

Howard Coffin

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The compelling story of the Second Vermont Brigade and its vital role at Gettysburg (more than any other brigade they determined the fate of the battle) fills a significant gap in the history of America's Civil War.

"A Vermont brigade held the key position at Gettysburg and did more than any other body of men to gain the triumph which decided the fate of the Union," the *New York Times* reported soon after the historic battle over the Fourth of July, 1863. The citizen soldiers of General George J. Stannard's Second Vermont Brigade, only a few days short of their nine-month enlistments, occupied a sector of Cemetery Ridge, helped stabilize the line, and then shattered the right flank of Pickett's famous charge just when the outcome of the battle hung in the balance.

In this unique eye-witness account, Coffin draws on scores of soldiers' letters to relate how and why young recruits from isolated hill farms flocked to the Union colors in response to Lincoln's call in 1862. During the nine months leading up to their rendezvous with destiny at Gettysburg, they recorded, in humorous detail, foraging for food, and, in more sober terms, enduring homesickness, monotony, and often fatal diseases. We share, too, their anxieties as they are thrust suddenly into the most important infantry maneuver directed against the Confederate assault.

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