BGES Presents: A Study in Command: Hancock at Gettysburg, June 20-23, 2012

Perhaps the best way to describe Winfield Scott Hancock is to quote Ed Bearss from his and Parker Hills’ masterful work, Receding Tide. What better way to get the flavor of this program?

“Hancock has gained the nom de guerre of ‘Hancock the Superb’ from Major General George McClellan at Williamsburg. Now, Hancock is one of those men with a commanding presence. He is 6’ 2” tall; is a resident of Norristown, Pennsylvania; and is a West Pointer, class of 1844. He graduated 18th in his class of 44, so he is an infantryman. Hancock uses profanity like an artist uses oils, but he still looks every bit the part of a soldier. It’s said that men feel confident when they are around him, and this will be very important on the afternoon of July 1st at Cemetery Hill, and again on July 2nd and 3rd at Cemetery Ridge. At the age of 39, Hancock is losing the “battle of the bulge,” so he always wears a long frock coat. His other trademark is his ever-present, clean, starched, white shirt.”

Bearss describes Hancock on the first day at Gettysburg: “Ewell’s and Hancock’s methods of command couldn’t be more different. Hancock is not a vacillating old man. Ewell is only seven years older than Hancock, but Ewell is evidently far beyond his physical peak. Hancock then makes probably the most important order of the day. He sees nobody on Culp’s Hill, 800 yards to the east, and he says to Doubleday, ‘General Doubleday, I want you to send Wadsworth and the Iron Brigade over to that hill.’ Doubleday replies, ‘But, General, those men are tired and out of ammunition.’ Hancock says, sharply, and probably with an oral oil painting of obscenity, ‘General, I want you to understand that I am in command here. Send the Iron Brigade to that hill!!’

Bearss again vividly describes Hancock on the second day at Gettysburg: “This is where Hancock is a pillar of strength. He’s already used up Caldwell’s division in the Wheatfield fight. Now he’s going to reach into Gen. Alexander Hays’s division. He is going to commit Colonel George L. Willard’s brigade to the support of McGilvery’s guns. Willard’s four New York regiments were captured at Harper’s Ferry the previous September and have since been paroled and are derided by their commander as the Harpers’ Ferry Cowards. Now they want to clear the books, and Hancock personally leads them into position to oppose Barksdale’s advancing lines. When Hancock sees Wilcox’s Alabamians coming across Plum Run north of Barksdale, he looks around for help. He sees Colonel Clinton MacDougall’s 111th New York, and he sends these men from their detached position on Willard’s left flank to fill the gap on the right. Somehow, Hancock finds people and throws them into the fight, telling them that they have to do it regardless of what they might think of the chance of success. When he sees a regiment in the wrong location, he grabs a private by the arm and leads him out to the front. ‘Will you stay here?’ he yells. The private says, ‘I’ll stay here, General, till hell freezes over.’ Hancock smiles, and then has the regiment form around this private. Hancock is showing true grit and leadership.”
On the third day at Gettysburg, Bearss says: “But Hancock is an infantryman, and he doesn’t give a damn about being deliberate—he wants noise. He wants his men to know that the Yankee artillery is responding in kind to the Rebel guns. . . . A few Union guns return fire, and soon Alexander’s rounds home in on Lieutenant Frederick Brown’s First Rhode Island Battery. Brown is firing away, against Hunt’s orders, because Hancock wants flash and bang . . .”

Bearss continues: “Hancock has been up and down the line all day, and when the attack starts, one of his subordinates says, ‘General, the corps commander ought not to risk his life that way.’ Hancock looks out at the approaching Confederates and says, ‘There are times when a corps commander's life does not count.’”

If these quotes do not stir the blood, what will? BGES will follow in Hancock’s very footsteps, and see where his II Corps inadvertently caused “Jeb” Stuart to divert from the planned route, then tramp with Hancock and his II Corps all the way across the Potomac to Gettysburg. We will stand where Hancock stood, and we will hear his orders from George Meade to go to Gettysburg and determine if that place offered a good fighting position. At Gettysburg we will see Hancock’s superb performance on July 1, 2, and 3, 1863.

If there is a true hero of Gettysburg, Hancock is the man.

**Wednesday, June 20, 2012**
Check into the __________, Frederick, MD. At 6 P.M. we will register and open the program with another of Parker's highly-entertaining and informative PowerPoint lectures. Afterwards, BGES will take you to supper.

**Thursday, June 21, 2012**
Today we travel southward into Virginia to pick up the II Corps at Haymarket, VA, with Hancock, its new commander of just one month. General John Gibbon described what happened there on June 25, 1863: “On the 25th, we left Thoroughfare Gap and moved back towards Gainesville. Some slight skirmishing had taken place in the morning along our cavalry picket line and we received information of the approach of a large cavalry force from the direction of Warrenton. We were much surprised therefore, when on reaching the vicinity of Haymarket, at receiving fire from a couple of pieces of artillery, posted on the bluffs opposite that place. Placing a battery into position, we replied to the fire and an advance of my division skirmish line soon caused the enemy to withdraw. This was a part of J. E. B. Stuart’s cavalry on its way to interpose between our army and Washington. Its presence there caused a great stampede in Washington, but the effect produced was nothing commensurate with the loss to Lee of his cavalry, the absence of which deprived him of all knowledge regarding the movements of our forces.” At Haymarket, the II Corps suffered its first of many casualties to come when Private Israel D. Jones, Company G, 19th Maine, was killed by the artillery fire. We will see where Stuart’s ride, and possibly the outcome of the Gettysburg Campaign, was doomed for the Confederates by the unintended interference of Hancock’s II Corps.
We will follow the II Corps to the now-extinct town of Gum Springs where monumental things happened for them. On June 25, 1863, Brigadier General Alexander Hays reported with his brigade of four New York regiments and was given command of Major General William French’s division after French had been given command of Harper’s Ferry. In Receding Tide Bearss describes Hays: “... West Point class of ’44, a good friend of Hancock and Grant. Grant will be devastated when Hays is killed in the Wilderness. Hays is one in a million because he savors combat, but he’s smart enough to know that other men don’t.” Colonel George Willard will take command of Hays’ Empire State brigade. And, if that were not enough, Brigadier General Alexander Webb arrived sporting a new star and was given command of the Philadelphia Brigade in Gibbon’s division. What a day for Hancock’s II Corps!

As the II Corps across the Potomac River, but we will travel by ferry on the Gen. Jubal A. Early, picking up the II Corps at Edwards Ferry and follow it through the scenic Maryland towns of Poolesville and Barnesville, around Sugar Loaf Mountain, to Monocacy Junction, just south of Frederick. It was here that the II Corps encamped on 28 June, and it was here that Lieutenant Colonel James A. Hardie arrived from Washington to deliver the relief of command order for General Joe Hooker and which placed Major General George Meade in command of the Army of the Potomac. Lunch is provided but dinner is on your own.

Friday, June 22, 2012

Today we follow Hancock’s II Corps on the historic roads from Monocacy Junction, around the eastern edge of Frederick (no need to march a corps through a city), through Liberty and Union Bridge on its 30-mile hike of June 29. While at Union Bridge, we will pay our respects to Major General John Reynolds, whose body was taken to the railhead there after his death at Gettysburg on July 1. Then it’s on to scenic Uniontown, Maryland, where the II Corps encamped one mile east of town on the Babylon Farm, and where Hancock learned that “Jeb” Stuart’s cavalry was encamped at Union Mills, just seven miles to the northeast. Luckily for Stuart, Meade’s Cavalry Corps commander, Major General Alfred Pleasonton, discounted the report and failed to act on it.

After their long march on the 29th, Hancock’s II Corps got a break on June 30 and remained in camp at Uniontown; but, on July 1 marched a short 5 miles to Taneytown, where Meade had established army headquarters the day before. We will follow the II Corps to its encampment on Dr. Swope’s farm on the Taneytown Road, before going with Hancock to army headquarters to discuss Meade’s defensive scheme using the imposing terrain behind Pipe Creek. But Meade’s contingency was overcome by events because a battle had begun at Gettysburg that morning. While Hancock and Meade talked, Captain Stephen Weld rode up on a lathered horse and delivered John Reynold’s message that he would hold Gettysburg if he had to “barricade the streets.” Hancock returned to Corps headquarters, however, shortly afterwards Meade learned of Reynold’s death. Meade rode to Hancock and after a discussion of his expectations dispatched his junior corps commander to Gettysburg to take command of the I and XI Corps that were fighting there.
We will follow Hancock, who is riding in an ambulance, to Gettysburg, and see at Horner’s Mills where his party passed the ambulance bearing the body of John Reynolds. En route we will see the grave of Private George Sandoe, the first Union soldier killed in Gettysburg. Hancock, having finished his map study, continued into Gettysburg on horseback to his meeting on East Cemetery Hill with Howard and Doubleday (who took Reynolds’ place as I Corps commander).

After taking care of business at Cemetery Hill, Hancock rode back to Taneytown to report to Meade. His II Corps was en route from Taneytown to Gettysburg under the temporary command of Brigadier General John Gibbon. Realizing the need to cover the emerging Federal left flank, Hancock met Gibbon and instructed him to encamp on the Taneytown Road, in the shadow of Big Round Top. We will follow Hancock to that location and discuss the disposition of the II Corps there.

Early on July 2, the II Corps, still under the command of Gibbon, marched to its position on the Granite Schoolhouse Road to be in a reserve position in case Meade launched an attack on his right. After following the II Corps to this location, we will return to Frederick, 33 miles to the southwest. Lunch and dinner will be provided.

**Saturday, June 23, 2012**

Today we travel back to the II Corps position near Powers Hill and the Granite Schoolhouse. By 7 a.m. on July 2, Hancock returned from Taneytown and assumed command of his corps from Gibbon. While the II Corps was on the Granite Schoolhouse Road, at 10 a.m. Meade discarded his plans for an offensive on the right, and sent Hancock’s II Corps to Cemetery Ridge. We will follow the corps to Cemetery Ridge, taking advantage of the newly-cleared views, and get the divisions of Hays, Gibbon, and Caldwell into position.

In mid-afternoon on July 2, Lieutenant General James Longstreet attacked the Federal line from its left to right, and we will travel to the position of Caldwell’s division to discuss the action. Elements of Major General George Sykes’ V Corps arrived to help bolster Major General Dan Sickles’ beleaguered III Corps, but Caldwell soon had to send his brigades of Colonels Cross, Kelly and Brooke along with Brigadier General Zook into the melee. Caldwell 1st Division was chewed up badly in and around the Wheatfield, and the gap in the II Corps line caused by the loss of that division endangered the entire Union line. This was where Hancock again displayed why he was called “The Superb.” He pulled Colonel Willard’s brigade out of General Hays’ division and sent that unit into the gap, right into the face of Brigadier General William Barksdale’s Mississippi brigade. We will walk to where Willard gave his life to save the line and where Barksdale was mortally wounded in the attempt to break that line. Hancock then saw Brigadier General Cadmus Wilcox’s Alabama brigade about to hit a gap in the Union line, and he sent Colonel William Colvill’s 1st Minnesota regiment on a suicide mission to save the day.

But the day was not over, and the night attack of Lieutenant General Dick Ewell again threatened the Federal line, this time at Culp’s and East Cemetery Hill. Everyone
remembers Hancock for his actions on the afternoon of July 2, but his actions that night are often overlooked. We will again go to Cemetery Hill to see Colonel Samuel Sprigg “Brick Top” Carroll’s brigade as it crashed into Brigadier General Harry Hays’ brigade of Louisiana Tigers, knocking the Cajuns back into the streets of Gettysburg.

Hancock literally saved the day of July 2 at Gettysburg, and July 3 was no different. We will walk the lines of the II Corps on Cemetery Ridge and discuss the action. We will see the site where Gibbon is wounded and see Lieutenant Stephen Brown charge into the fray armed with only a camp hatchet. We will see Lieutenant Alonzo Cushing go down, and we will discuss Brigadier General Lewis Armistead’s brief penetration of the Union line. We will go where Hancock received his near-mortal wound, and follow his ambulance to the field hospital where he was treated before being sent by ambulance to Westminster, Maryland and thence onward to Philadelphia by train. Finally, we will go to the rarely-visited marker at the George Spangler farm honoring both Hancock and Armistead—old friends who fought one another at Gettysburg. We will follow Hancock’s ambulance to the Baltimore Pike, then return to Frederick, armed with a full understanding of Winfield Scott Hancock and the II Corps during the Gettysburg Campaign. Lunch is provided as is a special stop at the Shamrock Restaurant for pie a la mode. You can depart this evening or on Sunday morning.

The Faculty
Parker Hills is a retired brigadier general, Mississippi Army National Guard, and served almost 32 years as a Regular Army and National Guard officer. For years Hills conducted the Military Staff Ride program for the state of Mississippi and is an expert on Mississippi battlefields. Hills conducts tours for Road Scholars (formerly Elderhostel) and is a corporate leadership trainer who founded Battle Focus. He is active in the preservation of Civil War battlefields, and has served as president of Friends of Raymond and of Friends of the Vicksburg Campaign and Historic Trail. He is chair of the Mississippi Civil War Battlefield Commission and a member of the Mississippi Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission. Hills is a graduate of the US Army War College and holds a Master of Education degree in Psychology. He is the author of the BGES monograph, A Study in Warfighting, Nathan Bedford Forrest and the Battle of Brice’s Crossroads, the co-author of the Driving Tour Guide to the Vicksburg Campaign, and co-author of the prize-winning book Receding Tide, Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that Changed the Civil War. He has contributed a chapter entitled “Roads to Raymond” for Vicksburg: Mississippi Blitzkrieg, edited by Steve Woodworth, and his latest work, Vicksburg: Art of Commemoration, is a tour of the art and architecture of Vicksburg National Military Park.

Len Riedel is the Executive Director of the BGES. A retired Air Force officer, Riedel has a Master of Arts degree in history. He is the architect of the BGES’ diverse programming and of considerable preservation accomplishments in the nonprofit community.

Meeting Site and Hotel: This program will be headquartered at the Hampton Inn, 1565 Opposumtown Pike, (1-301-696-1565) Frederick, Maryland 21702. This is just off US-15 N towards Gettysburg exit Motter Avenue to Opposumtown Pike. We have a block of rooms at the special rate of $119 per night plus 9% tax, you may reserve against the block in the BGES’ name until June 1st—as for group code BGE. Sadly this region is on the Washington DC corridor
and the primary tourism corridor to the north and Gettysburg. This area is less expensive than Gettysburg and is central to our study of Hancock and the II Corps. You will need to guarantee your room with a credit card.

**Airport and Transportation Arrangements:** The servicing airports are Washington Dulles (IAD) and Baltimore-Washington (BWI). There is no public transportation means to Frederick and both airports will compel you to get a rental car to come on to the program. I recommend bidding low with Priceline.com. I have gotten as much as 40% off the normal airport rates. Enterprise is also an option.
Key Publications and Recommended Reading  (includes shipping and handling)

_____ David Jordan, Winfield Scott Hancock, A Soldier’s Life, $33

_____ Edwin C. Bearss with Parker Hills, Receding Tide: Vicksburg and Gettysburg, The Campaigns that changed the Civil War $30

_____ Almira Hancock, Reminiscences of Winfield Scott Hancock  $30

_____ Edwin Coddington, The Gettysburg Campaign, A Study in Command $25

2012 BGES Registration Form
A Study in Command: Winfield Scott Hancock in the Gettysburg Campaign, June 20-23, 2012

Name(s): ____________________________________________
Address: ____________________________________________
Phone: ___________________________ Email: ____________________________

_____ Registration  $695  _____ Additional Family Member $645

_____ Deposit only—per person  $300  Net Due on or before June 20th, 2012

_____ BGES member  $640  _____ Additional Family Member  $590

_____ Full time Teacher or student, confirmation may be required, $585

_____ I am not a member of the BGES send me membership information

_____ Send me the books I’ve indicated.  I’ve enclosed $ ____________.

Total Enclosed: $ ____________ Make checks payable to BGES and mail to PO Box 1176, Chatham, VA 24531-1176 or call 434-250-9921

Charge my  Discover  Mastercard  VISA  American Express  $ ____________

# ___________________________________________ Exp: ____________

Vin Code: ______  Signature: ________________________________

You may fax your credit card registration to 434-432-0596 or register on line at www.blueandgrayeducation.org using PayPal