
History vs. Hollywood

July 3, 1863

1. How does the opening scene we watch convey the camaraderie that soldiers form in combat?
2. What shortcomings does the Confederate artillery bombardment have?
3. The conversation with Confederate general Lewis Armistead and British observer Arthur Fremantle discusses the significance of home and honor. How so?
4. How do the scenes of Pickett’s Charge accurately depict the scale of the true event?
5. In what ways do some of the final scenes bring to life the sting of Confederate defeat?
6. Many of the shots from today’s segment were filmed on the actual landscape. What challenges do you think this posed?
7. In your view, what were the strengths and weaknesses of the portion viewed today?
8. How do you think audiences and critics responded to this movie upon its 1993 release?


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Accompanying primary source:

*Following Confederate defeat at Gettysburg, Gen. Robert E. Lee submitted the following resignation letter to President Jefferson Davis. The president refused the offer.*

Camp Orange, August 8, 1863

His Excellency Jefferson Davis,

President of the Confederate States

Mr. President,

Your letters of July 28 and August 2 have been received, and I have waited for a leisure hour to reply, but I fear that will never come. I am extremely obliged to you for the attention given to the wants of this army, and the efforts made to supply them. Our absentees are returning, and I hope the earnest and beautiful appeal may stir up the virtue of the whole people; and that they may see their duty and perform it. Nothing is wanted but their fortitude should equal their bravery to insure the success of our cause. We must expect reverses, even defeats. They are sent to teach us wisdom and prudence, to call forth greater energies and to prevent our falling into greater disasters. Our people have only to be true and united, to bear manfully the misfortunes incident to war, and all will come right in the end.

I know how prone we are to censure and how ready to blame others for the non-fulfillment of our expectations. This is unbecoming in a generous people, and I grieve to see its expression. The general remedy for the want of success in a military commander is his removal. This is natural, and in many instances, proper. For, no matter what may be the ability of the officer, if he loses the confidence of his troops disaster must sooner or later ensue.

I have been prompted by these reflections more than once since my return from Pennsylvania to propose to Your Excellency the propriety of selecting another commander for this army. I have seen and heard of expression of discontent in the public journals at the result of the expedition. I do not know how far this feeling exends in the army. My brother officers have been too kind to report it, and so far the troops have been too generous to exhibit it. It is fair, however, to suppose that it it does exist, and success is so necessary to us that nothing should be risked to secure it. I therefore, in all sincerity, request Your Excellency to take measures to supply my place. I do this with the more earnestness because no one is more aware than myself of my inability for the duties of my position. I cannot even accomplish what I myself desire.

How can I fulfill the expectations of others? In addition I sensibly feel the growing failure of my bodily strength. I have not yet recovered from the attack I experienced the past spring. I am becoming more and more incapable of exertion, and am thus prevented from making the personal examinations and giving the personal supervision to the operations of the field which I feel to be necessary. I am so dull that in making use of the eyes of others I am frequently misled. Everything, therefore, points to the advantages to be derived from a new commander, and I the more anxiously urge the matter upon Your Excellency from my belief that a younger and abler man than myself can readily be attained. I know that he will have as gallant and brave an army as ever existed to second his efforts, and it would be the happiest day of my life to see at its head a worthy leader -- one that would accomplish more than I could perform and all that I have wished. I hope Your Excellency will attribute my request to the true reason, the desire to serve my country, and to do all in my power to insure the success of her righteous cause.

I have no complaints to make of any one but myself. I have received nothing but kindness from those above me, and the most considerate attention from my comrades and companions in arms. To Your Excellency I am specially indebted for uniform kindness and consideration. You have done everything in your power to aid me in the work committed to my charge, without

omitting anything to promote the general welfare. I pray that your efforts may at length be crowned with success, and that you may long live to enjoy the thanks of grateful people.

With sentiments of great esteem, I am, very respectfully and truly, yours,

R.E. Lee,

General