



# **Battle of Falling Waters 1863**

*Custer, Pettigrew and the End of the Gettysburg Campaign*

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# Battle of Falling Waters 1863

Custer, Pettigrew and the End of the Gettysburg Campaign

- ❖ Which Falling Waters?
- ❖ July 4 – 12: Retreat and Pursuit
- ❖ July 13: Eve of Battle
- ❖ July 14: The Battle of Falling Waters, Maryland
- ❖ Why the Battle Matters
- ❖ The Battlefield Today
- ❖ Questions



# Battle of Falling Waters 1863

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### Which Falling Waters?

- ❖ *NOT* the house designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright
- ❖ *NOT* the 1861 battle in West Virginia which involved Thomas J. Jackson
- ❖ *NOT* a town in Maryland (think Antietam vs. Sharpsburg)
- ❖ **IS** the name of the final battle of the Gettysburg Campaign which was fought in Maryland on the road to the Falling Waters Potomac River crossing on July 14, 1863.



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### July 4-12, 1863: Army of Northern Virginia

**Gen. Robert E. Lee** sent a wagon train of wounded to Williamsport, Maryland on the night of July 4.

- The rest of the Army of Northern Virginia followed by a different route.
- Driving rains and poor roads hampered the movement of Lee's army.

Lee's army arrived at Williamsport only to find the Potomac River too flooded to ford and that a Federal cavalry patrol had destroyed the pontoon bridge at the Falling Waters crossing.

- Lee's army was trapped in Maryland.
  - Built defensive fortifications.
  - Began to reconstruct the pontoon bridge at Falling Waters which had been destroyed

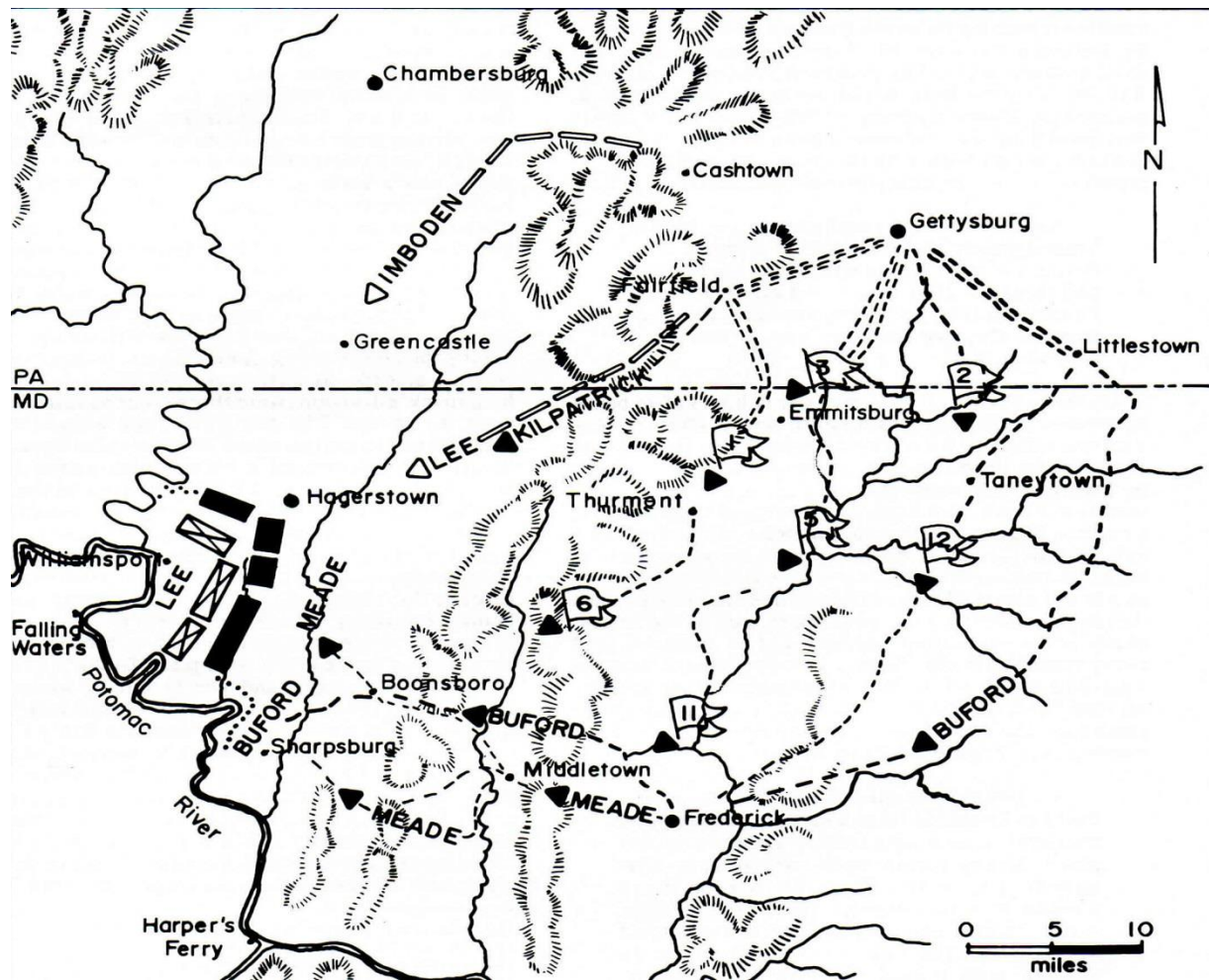
### July 4 – 12, 1863: Army of the Potomac

**MG George G. Meade**, with much urging from President Abraham Lincoln, moved his army from Gettysburg toward Western Maryland.

- Meade had several problems:
  - Had lost many senior commanders, men and supplies during the battle of Gettysburg.
  - Was ordered to keep his army between Lee and Washington.
  - As a new commander he relied heavily on his subordinate field commanders.
  - By July 12, Meade's army was in place opposite Lee's near Hagerstown; their lines were parallel.
- Similar to July 2, Meade held Council of War with his field commanders to decide if and when to attack Lee.

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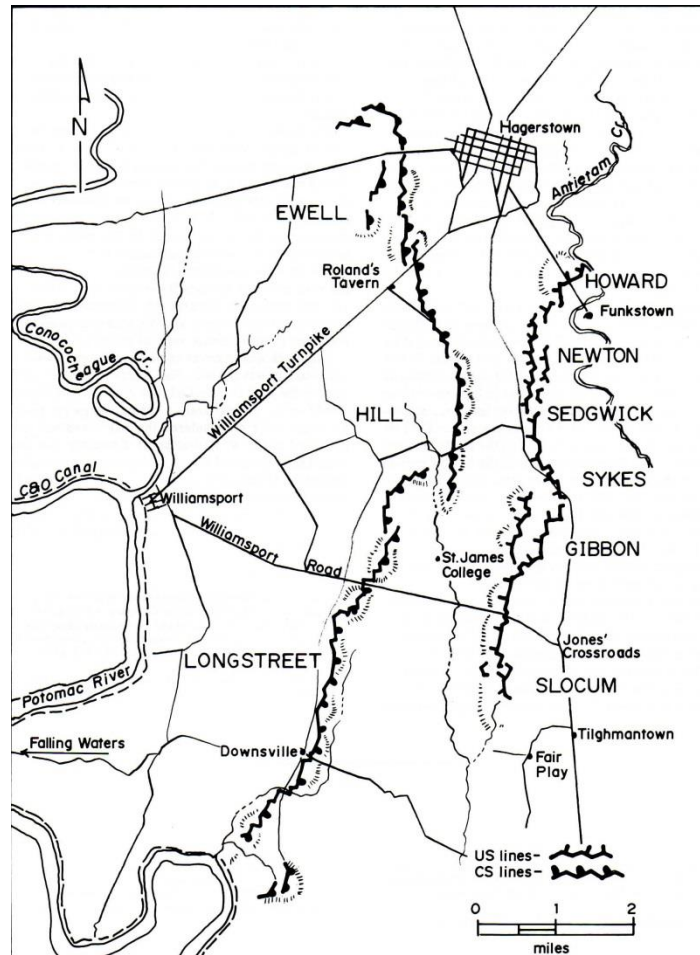
### July 4-12, 1863 Engagements

- July 4 – Monterey Pass
- July 6 – Hagerstown
- July 6 – Buford attacks Williamsport
- July 8 – Cavalry at Boonsboro
- July 10 – Funkstown (all Arms)
  
- July 12 – Lee anticipates attack by Meade



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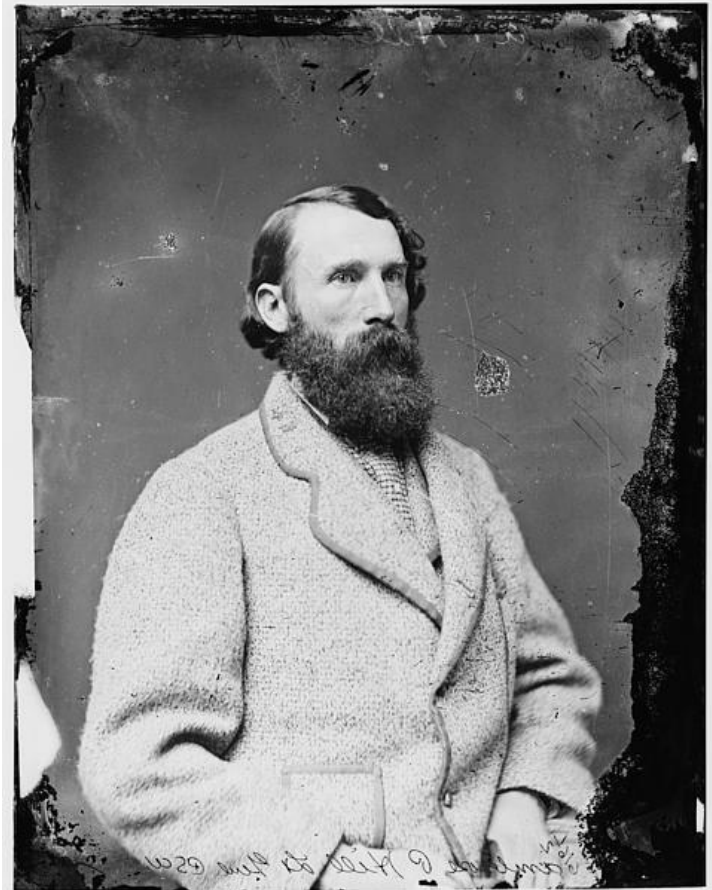
# Battle of Falling Waters 1863

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### July 13, 1863: Army of Northern Virginia

Lee's critical day during the withdrawal to Virginia:

- Potomac River was receding; the pontoon bridge was completed.
- Food and feed were running low.
- Lee ordered the fortifications to be emptied at dark and fires to be built.
- Men who left the fortifications were replaced by troopers from MG JEB Stuart's cavalry; the last Confederates to leave Maryland were to be Stuart's cavalry.
- LTG Richard S. Ewell's (Second Army Corps) men crossed by fording the Potomac River after dark at Williamsport.
- LTG James Longstreet (First Army Corps) and **LTG Ambrose P. (AP) Hill** (Third Army Corps) were to have their men move from their fortifications to Falling Waters pontoon bridge crossing.





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### July 13, 1863: Army of Northern Virginia

Lee's critical day during the withdrawal to Virginia (continued):

- Artillery and most other rolling stock was to cross on the pontoon bridge at Falling Waters.
- Mud choked road toward the Falling Waters crossing where the pontoon bridge had been reconstructed.
- Torches lit the way
- Heavy rains with lightning and thunder all night.
- Many horses were too weak to pull the wagons and the artillery.
- Early into the movement, troops began to get backed-up from the Falling Waters crossing.



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### July 13, 1863: Army of the Potomac

Meade and his commanders agreed not to attack on July 13, against the strong desires of ***President Abraham Lincoln***.

- Planned a “reconnaissance in force” on the morning of July 14, led by the cavalry under BG John Buford (First Division) and BG Judson Kilpatrick (Third Division).
- Meade was cautious due to his newness to command, his experience at Fredericksburg and his reliance on his subordinates.
- Meade unaware the evening of July 13, that Lee’s army had left their fortifications opposite his lines.
- Meade kept Lincoln and MG Henry W. Halleck in the War Department updated on his actions – or lack of – via telegraph dispatches.
- Meade’s dispatches infuriated Lincoln due to the apparent lack of action.



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### July 14, 1863: Army of Northern Virginia

- Early morning, Ewell's troops finished crossing (fording) the Potomac River at Williamsport
- Longstreet's troops and some of Hill's finished crossing the river using the new pontoon bridge.
- Stuart's cavalry is under orders to remain in the defensive fortifications until the entire army has crossed into Virginia and to screen advancing Federals.
- **MG Henry Heth** (Heth's Division) is ordered to serve as Hill's rear guard and halts on a ridge 2 miles from the pontoon bridge. 6 empty artillery lunettes (earthworks) are on the crest of the ridge. He is to wait for orders from Hill to cross.
- Many of Heth's men stack arms and sleep after the night march in heavy rain and mud.



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### July 14, 1863: Army of the Potomac

- Federal scouts find Lee's trenches are empty.
- Before the reconnaissance in force can begin, the cavalry is sent ahead to cut-off the crossing Confederates.
- **BG Judson Kilpatrick's** horsemen dash to Williamsport only to find the last of Ewell's men fording the Potomac.
- BG John Buford is ordered to Falling Waters from near Downsville.
- Kilpatrick's troopers ride from Williamsport toward the Falling Waters crossing hoping to capture Longstreet's and Hill's men.
- Kilpatrick's advance arrives approximately ½ mile from the ridge where the rear guard halted before 11AM. Leading his advance are the troopers of the Michigan cavalry under BG George A. Custer (2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade: 1, 5, 6, 7 Michigan).



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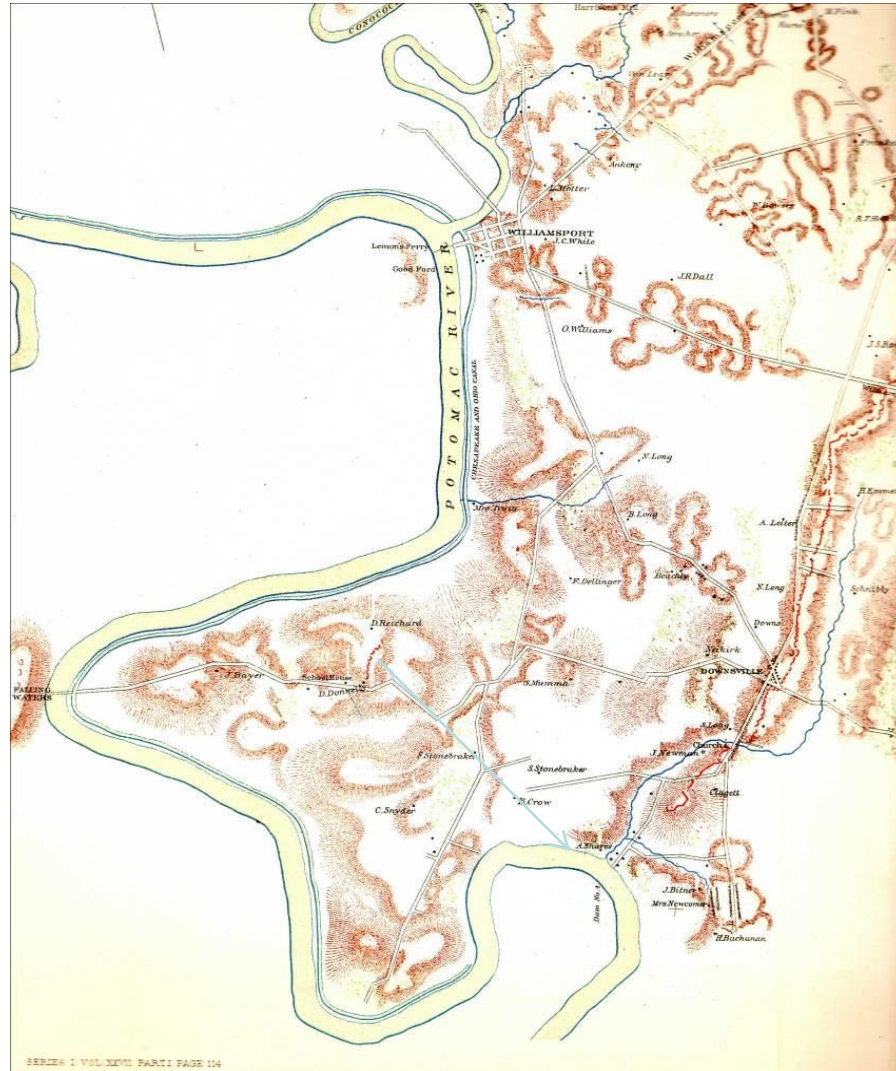
### July 14, 1863: Army of the Potomac (continued)

- **BG John Buford** communicated via messenger with Kilpatrick.
- He was not to attack until Buford had flanked and was to the rear of Lee's troops still in Maryland.
- The objective was to cut off Lee's men before they crossed into Virginia.
- Contrary to the plan, Kilpatrick ordered two companies of 6<sup>th</sup> Michigan "Wolverine" cavalry to mount and attack the Confederates on the ridge.



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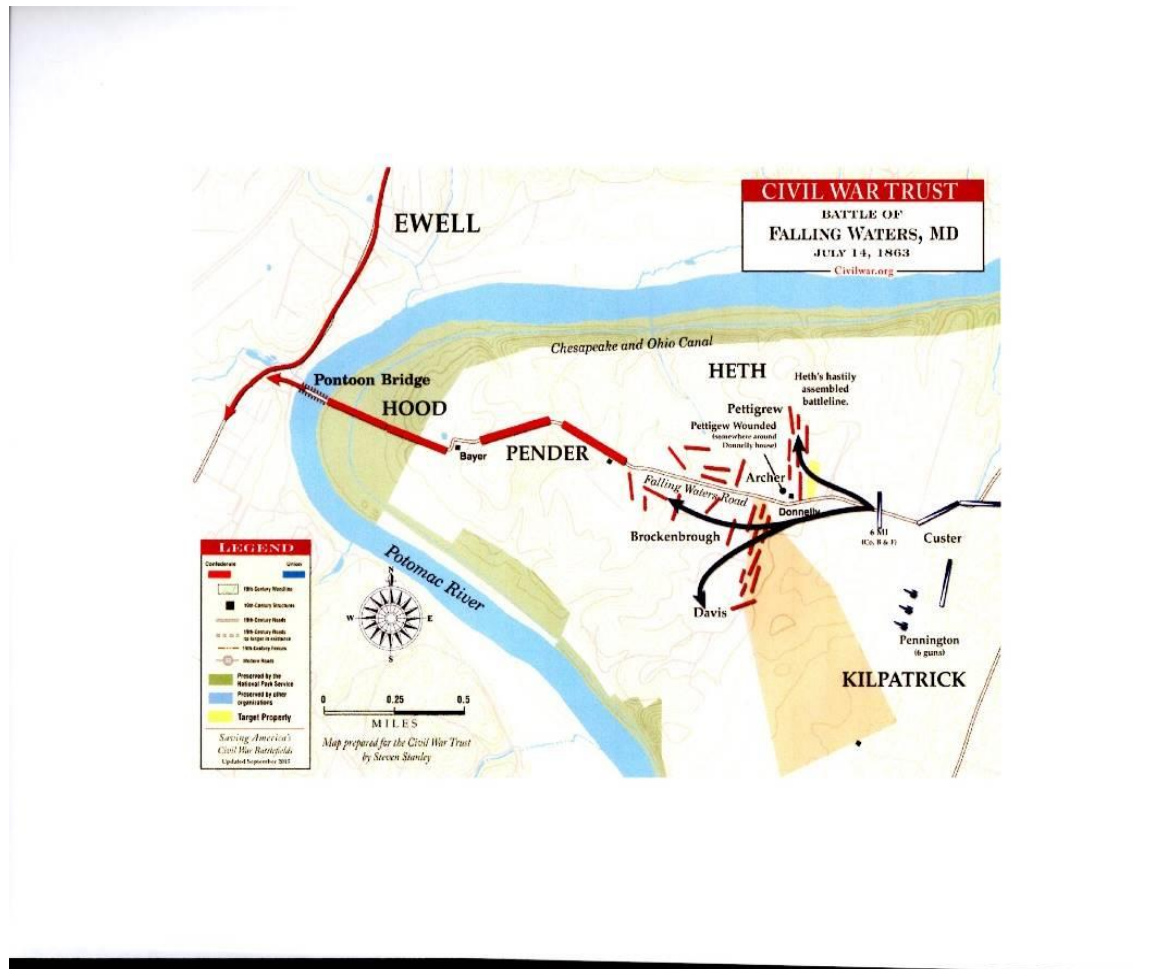
### The Battle Begins

- Heth and **BG James Johnston Pettigrew** (First Brigade: 11, 26, 47, 52 NC), saw approximately 100 mounted troopers advance toward their position.
- They were confident these were JEB Stuart's horsemen. Unaware already crossed the Potomac River.
- They ordered their men to hold their fire. At 100 yards the horsemen in blue wheeled from column into line, drew sabers and charged up the ridge into the center of the Confederate rear guard.
- Nearly half of the troopers were killed, wounded, captured or missing after the attack.
- Only 1 Confederate was killed and another mortally wounded, **Pettigrew**.
- Pettigrew is shot point blank in the abdomen and gravely wounded.



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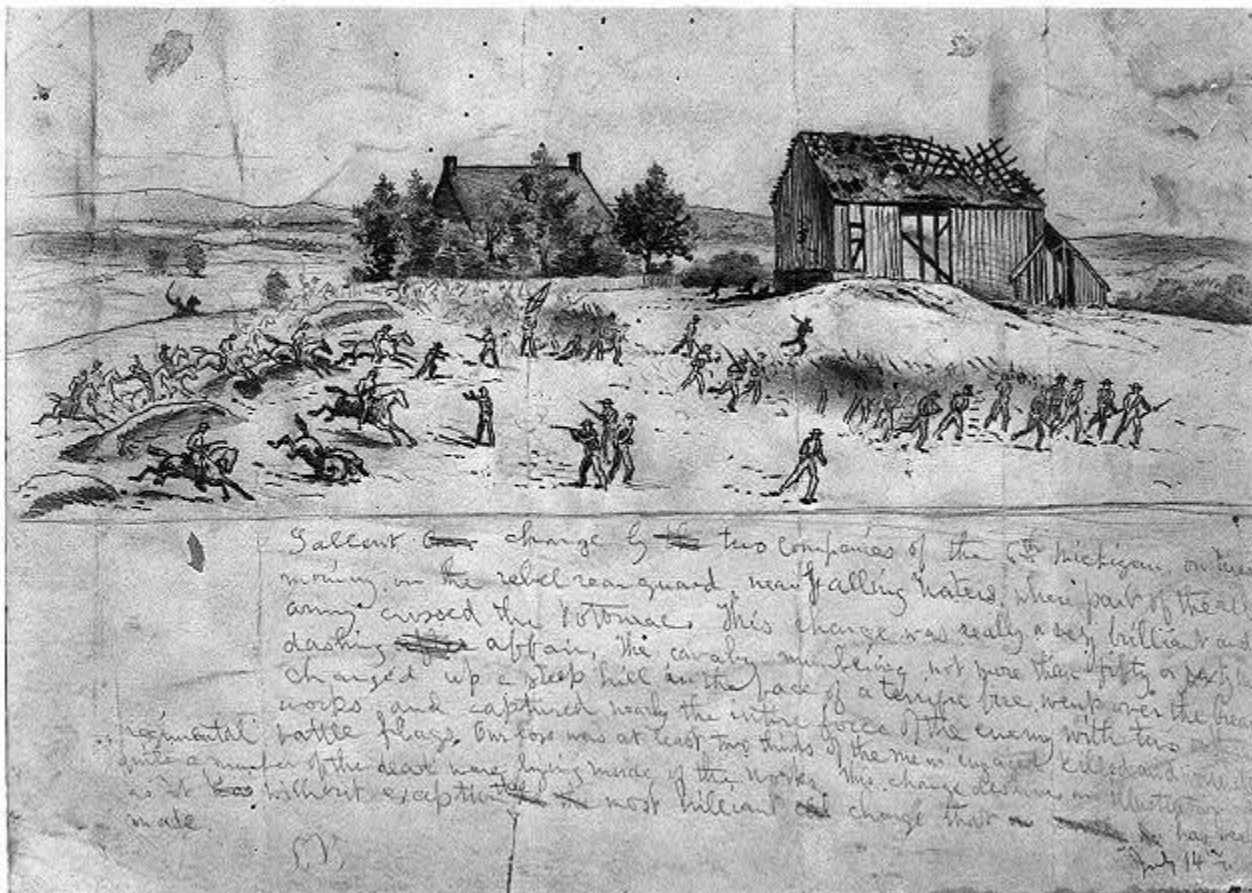
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### The Battle rages on...

- As the survivors of the charge straggle back to the point from where the attack was launched, Kilpatrick orders **BG George A. Custer** to prepare his troopers for another charge and also to deploy skirmishers on foot.
- Custer personally leads at least one of the attacks.
- Buford, leading his horsemen from Downsville, hears the sounds of battle and discovers Kilpatrick has not waited to attack.
- Buford leads his men toward the flank of Heth's line.
- Virginia troops under COL John M. Brockenbrough (Second Brigade: 40, 47, 55, 22 VA) are ordered to advance (right side of the center, to the right of the road).
- Brockenbrough and staff withdraw from the field. Many of his men and their colors are captured.



# Battle of Falling Waters 1863

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### The End of the Battle

- Attacks from ever increasing Union horsemen are complemented by artillery.
- **MG Henry Heth** sends a messenger requesting artillery to repel the Federal advance.
- Hill orders Heth to withdraw before 1PM.
- Hill sends reinforcements from the area of the pontoon bridge back up the road to support Heth's withdrawal. They are armed only with muskets fixed with bayonets but no ammunition.
- Hill's troops begin an orderly withdrawal as his men form lines of battle to the rear of the reinforcements.
- Many of Heth's men are captured in ravines as they withdraw. These are in addition to the men of Brockenbrough's command who were captured.





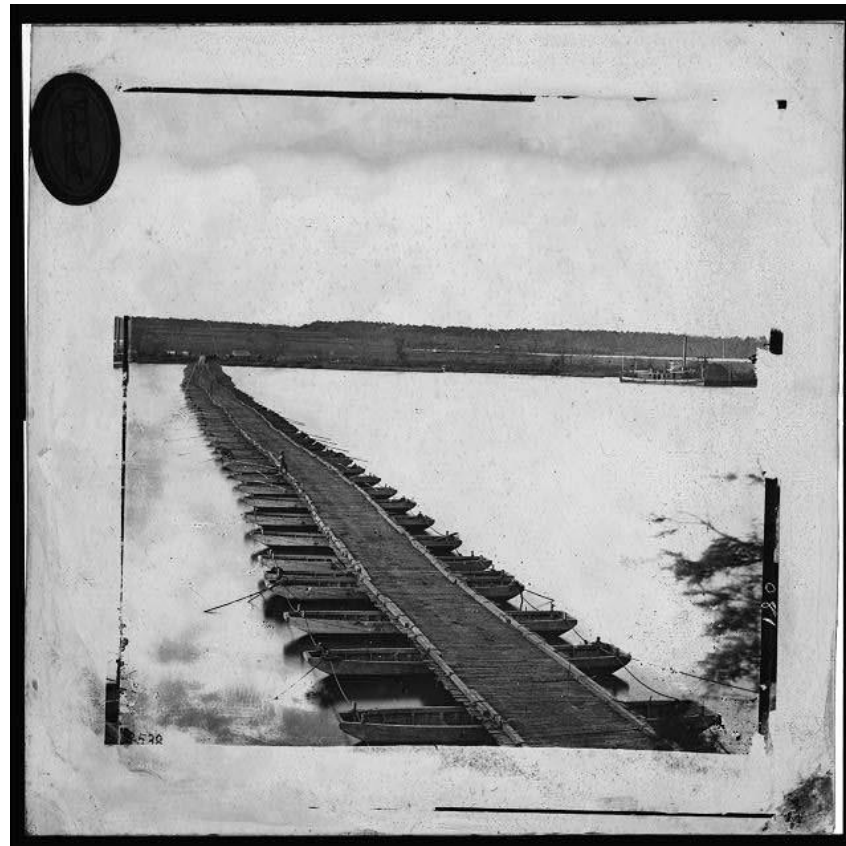
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### The End of the Battle (continued)

- Heth's force withdraws to the pontoon bridge.
- Frontal attacks and flanking movements press the remaining members of the rear guard. More Union artillery is engaged.
- **BG James Johnston Pettigrew** is evacuated in spite of advice to remain behind due to the severity of his wounds.
- As Heth's men near the pontoon bridge, both sharpshooters and artillery on the Virginia side of the Potomac provide covering fire.
- NC troops are the last to cross the pontoon bridge into Virginia and cut it loose.
- Under fire, Union troops stand on the shore of the Potomac and watch the last of Lee's army march away on the Virginia side.

***The Gettysburg Campaign is over.***

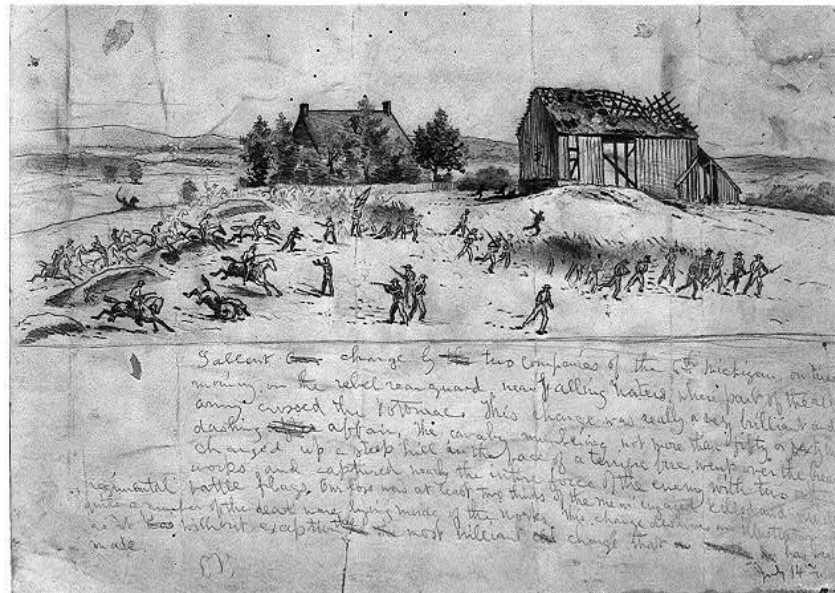


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### Why does the battle matter?

- Final engagement of the Gettysburg Campaign
- Kilpatrick threw away lives just as he had at Gettysburg
- Opportunity missed by Meade to crush Lee's army before it crossed the Potomac River
- A disregard for orders on the part of JEB Stuart and his subordinates
- Most brilliant mind in the South is mortally wounded (dies July 17)
- Lincoln loses faith in Meade (writes letter)
- Lincoln ultimately brings U. S. Grant east.
- Dispute over casualty figures after battle
- Lee dismisses the battle in the media
- Captured VA colors later returned (reconciliation)



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### Falling Waters Battlefield

- All private property
- Centerpiece of the battlefield - Donnelly House and 16 acres - purchased in 2002
- Gained a level of interest from **Civil War Trust (CWT)** beginning in 2006.
- Recognized by Civil War Trust as a “most endangered” battlefield.
- Local residents and history enthusiasts supporting preservation efforts. **Battle of Falling Waters 1863 Foundation, Inc.** taking the lead working with CWT and other preservation organizations.
- Tours by Smithsonian, noted historians, SCV, Round Tables & others.
- Please support efforts to PRESERVE the Falling Waters, Maryland 1863 Battlefield!
- **Web site:**  
[battleoffallingwaters1863foundation.wordpress.com](http://battleoffallingwaters1863foundation.wordpress.com)



# Battle of Falling Waters 1863

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*Falling Waters 1863 Battlefield  
today.*

Crest of the ridge. Photograph  
taken from the location of the empty  
Confederate artillery lunettes  
(earthworks).



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*Falling Waters 1863 Battlefield  
today.*

Crest of the ridge. Photograph  
taken from where the 6<sup>th</sup> Michigan  
Cavalry pierced Heth's rear guard  
position.





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*Falling Waters 1863 Battlefield  
today.*

Taken from behind the location of  
the barn (no longer standing). Earth  
ramp into barn remains far left.

Brig. Gen. J. Johnston Pettigrew's  
was mortal wounded between the  
barn and the Daniel Donnelly  
House (on left).





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*Falling Waters 1863 Battlefield  
today.*

Rear of the Daniel Donnelly House  
(built 1830). Witness tree is to the  
left of the house. A plank fence  
surrounded the house at the time of  
the battle.

The house and property are on the  
National Register of Historic  
Places.



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Thank you! Questions?

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