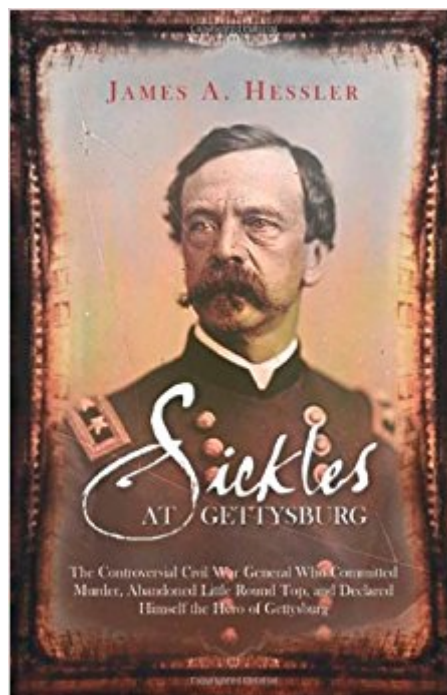




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# Sickles At Gettysburg: The Controversial Civil War General Who Committed Murder, Abandoned Little Round Top, And Declared Himself The Hero Of Gettysburg



## Synopsis

Sickles at Gettysburg: The Controversial Civil War General Who Committed Murder, Abandoned Little Round Top, and Declared Himself the Hero of Gettysburg, by licensed battlefield guide James Hessler, is the most deeply-researched, full-length biography to appear on this remarkable American icon. And it is long overdue. No individual who fought at Gettysburg was more controversial, both personally and professionally, than Major General Daniel E. Sickles. By 1863, Sickles was notorious as a disgraced former Congressman who murdered his wife's lover on the streets of Washington and used America's first temporary insanity defense to escape justice. With his political career in ruins, Sickles used his connections with President Lincoln to obtain a prominent command in the Army of the Potomac's Third Corps despite having no military experience. At Gettysburg, he openly disobeyed orders in one of the most controversial decisions in military history. No single action dictated the battlefield strategies of George Meade and Robert E. Lee more than Sickles' unauthorized advance to the Peach Orchard, and the mythic defense of Little Round Top might have occurred quite differently were it not for General Sickles. Fighting heroically, Sickles lost his leg on the field and thereafter worked to remove General Meade from command of the army. Sickles spent the remainder of his checkered life declaring himself the true hero of Gettysburg. Although he nearly lost the battle, Sickles was one of the earliest guardians of the battlefield when he returned to Congress, created Gettysburg National Military Park, and helped preserve the field for future generations. But Dan Sickles was never far from scandal. He was eventually removed from the New York Monument Commission and nearly went to jail for misappropriation of funds. Hessler's book is a balanced and entertaining account of Sickles' colorful life. Civil War enthusiasts who want to understand General Sickles' scandalous life, Gettysburg's battlefield strategies, the in-fighting within the Army of the Potomac, and the development of today's National Park will find Sickles at Gettysburg a must-read.

About the Author: James A. Hessler works in the financial services industry and is a Licensed Battlefield Guide at Gettysburg National Military Park. He has taught Sickles and Gettysburg-related courses for Harrisburg Area Community College and the Gettysburg Foundation. In addition to writing articles for publication, Hessler speaks regularly at Civil War Round Tables. A native of Buffalo, NY, he resides in Gettysburg with his wife and children.

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## Book Information

Paperback: 504 pages

Publisher: Savas Beatie; First Paperback Edition edition (March 15, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1932714847

ISBN-13: 978-1932714845

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1 x 9.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.8 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.8 out of 5 stars 63 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #272,238 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #61 in Books > History >

Americas > United States > Civil War > Campaigns & Battlefields > Gettysburg #379 in Books >

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## Customer Reviews

â solidly researched and well presentedâ |clear and easy to followâ |highly recommendedâ |for those who appreciate the combination of top-notch biography and military history. (Journal of America's Military Past)

James A. Hessler works in the financial services industry and is a Licensed Battlefield Guide at Gettysburg National Military Park. He has taught Sickles and Gettysburg-related courses for Harrisburg Area Community College and the Gettysburg Foundation. In addition to writing articles for publication, Hessler speaks regularly at Civil War Round Tables. A native of Buffalo, NY, he resides in Gettysburg with his wife and children.

The battle of Gettysburg has been one of my grand obsessions. I have read most every book about the battle that I could get my hands on, from Coddington to Pfanz. Even though I'm from California, I have walked the battlefield on several occasions. I stood where Buford's cavalry delayed the Rebel assault on the first day of battle, and I have walked the path of Pickett's Charge on the third day of battle, by myself on a hot July day. Consequently I did not need additional maps in order to understand the battlefield, which was fortunate as the Sickles' book does not contain many maps, but the details of the battle and Sickles' involvement is gripping, detailed, and well told. Major General Daniel Sickles has perpetually been a controversial figure in my mind as well as in the

minds of Civil War historians. I have stood out in the Peach Orchard, along the Emmitsburg Road, and it had seemed to me that the gentle rise in topography was not a bad place to give battle, even though it was susceptible to being flanked. Even as I was standing in the Peach Orchard and looking back toward Weikert's Woods, I could see that the woods did not provide good visibility or provide adequate fields of fire. Yes, Little Round Top needed to be anchored, but the fighting in the Wheatfield and the Peach Orchard, in my mind, appeared to prevent the Rebels from rolling up the Union left flank and overrunning Cemetery Ridge. I have always felt that Sickles was certainly not afraid of a fight. James A. Hessler, the author of *Sickles at Gettysburg* fills in all the blanks and enables the reader to comprehensively understand Sickles the man and Sickles the fighting general at Gettysburg. This is a must read for those who have an abiding interest in the Battle of Gettysburg.

I have loved history since I was a child and Gettysburg has long been a major focus of interest for me. I had purchased this book before my recent trip to Gettysburg and had only read a couple of chapters beforehand. My daughter and I had the pleasure of having Mr Hessler as our guide and I wish I had read more of the book beforehand. He was a great guide and I now know a great writer! Many historical books, even if I am very interested in the subject, can be very dry to me and my wandering mind can't stay focused for more than a few chapters at a time. This was not the case for this book. This book is a highly readable and as other reviewers noted a balanced view of the events at Gettysburg. I have read many books on Gettysburg and have always held a negative view towards Sickles. I finished the book understanding both sides. Dan Sickles was charming, eloquent, had a checkered past before he became a General. He was a classic bad boy, who wanted and generally got his own way, who was attractive to women on 2 continents, consorted with the shameless hussies of the day and was probably not a bad General. He had a lot of friends no matter the despicable things in his past. Although he had plenty of enemies, his bad boy status, and his admirable quest to save the battlefield and love of his soldiers also made him also liked and popular after the war. He was a pompous arse and his own greatest admirer, but had a fascinating war record and a place in history we cannot deny.

James Hessler's "*Sickles at Gettysburg*" is a nicely detailed biography of one of the interesting characters of the Civil War, General Dan Sickles. E was one of those "political generals" who drove West Pointers batty. He was notorious for his lavish spending and his womanizing and his deep political involvement. He was also someone who murdered his first wife's lover, got off on temporary insanity (with future War Department Secretary, Edwin Stanton, as one of his legal team), and then

scandalized all by reuniting with his disgraced wife. So, Sickles was pretty flamboyant before the Civil War even began. He recruited many troops to what came to be known as the Excelsior Brigade, which he commanded. As a "War Democrat," Abraham Lincoln was supportive of him (as with others such as Ben Butler). Sickles had little military background, but he was courageous and his troops tended to like that. After a series of promotions, this untrained soldier became commander of the Third Corps of the Army of the Potomac--to the disdain of many West Point officers. At Chancellorsville, he withdrew from a position that had some height and commanded the local terrain. Once the Confederate troops seized it, they used it as an artillery platform to punish Union forces. Some say that this experience affected Sickles' decision-making at Gettysburg. And, of course, Gettysburg is the heart of this book. On the second day (Sickles made a bizarre point that the first day was not really a part of the battle of Gettysburg), Meade wanted Sickles' corps to extend the line of Hancock's Second Corps to Little Round Top. Sickles was nervous about some higher ground -- to -- of a mile in front of the position that Meade wanted him to hold. Sickles rashly moved his forces to that new position, thinning his line, creating a salient that was less defensible than his originally more compact line, and--to make matters worse--he had too few troops available to hold Little Round Top. Thus, when Longstreet's attack began, Sickles Corps found itself in great difficulty. He was wounded, losing a leg in the process, and he never served as a battle commander after that. The book examines the extent to which Sickles' movement was worthy or not (the final judgment is, as I think it should be, negative). But there is more. The book discusses his involvement with Gettysburg after his injury and after the war's end. He used his position to attack Meade after the battle, trying to vindicate his decision. And he caused Meade a considerable amount of heartburn. Later, he became involved in the effort to create a Military Park at the battlefield. His life was long, full, and controversial. Want to get introduced to Dan Sickles? This is the place to start.

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