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The Union Generals Speak: The Meade Hearings on the Battle of Gettysburg

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The Union Generals Speak is the first annotated edition of the 1864 congressional investigation into Major General George Gordon Meade's conduct during the Gettysburg campaign. The transcripts alone, which present eyewitness accounts from sixteen participant officers at Gettysburg, offer a wealth of information about the what and the why of one of the most pivotal battles in American history; but it is the addition of contextual comments and background material by Bill Hyde that unleashes this virtually untapped resource for readers. Laden with ulterior motives, prejudices, faulty recollection, and outright lies, the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War's report is a minefield of inaccuracies. Hyde's comprehensive analysis, informed by recent scholarship, transforms it into an accessible, rewarding aid for students of the Gettysburg chapter in the Civil War.

In the course of the volume, Hyde gives thorough examination to the origins and purpose of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, the political climate and military thinking in Washington at the time of the Meade hearings, and the hidden agendas of the witnesses and seven committee members. He maintains that the JCCW's dissatisfaction with Meade went much deeper than disapproval of the general's hesitancy to pursue and cripple Lee's Army of Northern Virginia on July 4, 1863 -- a failure that dissappointed every northern citizen from Lincoln to the ordinary soldier. The bipartisan body of mostly radical Republicans who favored a ruthless defeat of the South aimed, Hyde shows, to restore power to the committee's favorite, Major General Joseph Hooker, whom Meade had succeeded as commander of the Army of the Potomac only three days before Gettysburg.

The unfolding of the Gettysburg campaign, the career of General Meade, and the North's highly politicized method of warmaking all receive new illumination in The Union General's Speak. Hyde's balanced critique of this important primary source reminds us that though Meade is remembered now mainly for his role in defeating the Confederates at Gettysburg, the JCCW hearings confirmed that he was not the leader to win the war.

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