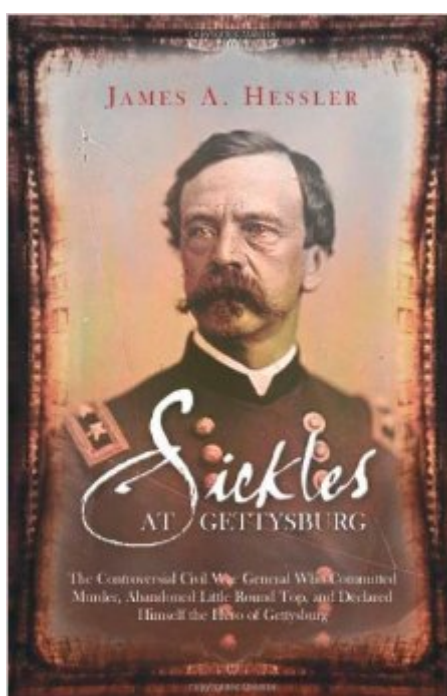


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Sickles At Gettysburg: The Controversial Civil War General Who Committed Murder, Abandoned Little Round Top, And Declared Himself The Hero Of Gettysburg



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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Customer Reviews

I picked up James Hessler's Sickles at Gettysburg last week and have had a hard time since putting it down. Even when I finished this excellent book, I was somewhat disappointed: I wanted to read more. I have met Mr. Hessler on several occasions (he lives right down the road from me), and when I see him again I will be sure to congratulate him on a job well done. Although this is his first book-length study, Hessler writes with all the skill and clarity of a seasoned professional in bringing the remarkable story of General Sickles to life. Easily one of the most colorful and controversial figures of the Civil War, Dan Sickles continues to capture our interest, earning the veneration of some, the vehemence of most others. He was (is) one of those polarizing figures: most works have either portrayed him as the villainous scoundrel or, less commonly, as the man who saved the Union at Gettysburg but who suffered the discrimination of the army's West Pointers and professional soldiers. At last, Dan Sickles and his advancement of the Third Corps at Gettysburg receive fair historical treatment in Hessler's work; the author does not set out to prove that Sickles was either wholly this or wholly that, a villain or a hero. Focusing on Sickles's still controversial move on the afternoon of July 2, Hessler instead presents both sides of the story, and leaves much of the final determination up to the reader. There is much to admire about Sickles: his resiliency, his bravery, his patriotism and love for his troops, and his efforts at helping establish Gettysburg and other important sites as National Parks.

"Colorful" is scarcely an adequate adjective to describe the tumultuous life of Daniel Sickles - soldier, politician, diplomat, lawyer and, according to his enemies, a lying, thieving, womanizing scoundrel. At best he exhibited a casual carelessness towards other people's monies that several times resulted in charges of misappropriation of funds. George Templeton Strong, the acid-tongued Brahmin diarist and fellow lawyer characterized Sickles as belonging "to the filthy sediment of the profession, and lying somewhere in its lower strata, Perhaps better to say that he's one of the bigger bubbles of the scum of the profession, swollen and windy, and puffed out with fetid gas." Although a notorious skirt-chaser himself, Congressman Sickles in 1859 shot and killed his wife's lover and then after a spectacular trial was acquitted through the novel defense of "temporary insanity". In later years Sickles, by then a diplomat in Europe, reportedly romanced the deposed Queen of Spain and gained a nickname as being the "Yankee King of Spain". Even in his old age, confined to a wheelchair, rumors still had Sickles avidly chasing women, but he was the kind of character that magnetically drew colorful and scandalous stories. After the outbreak of the American Civil War Sickles, based on his prewar militia experience and especially his strong Tammany Hall political connections and his recent acquittal on homicide charges notwithstanding, won appointment as a general of volunteers. Within less than two years, Sickles was named as the commander of the Third Corps of the Army of the Potomac. It was in that role on July 2, 1863, at Gettysburg that he achieved his greatest fame, or infamy.

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