

## *Chapter 2 - How the Devil's Den Got It's Name*

For the thousands of soldiers who fought there, and for the uncounted tourists who visited since, there is no more eerie place on the Gettysburg Battlefield than the area known as the Devil's Den. The tide of battle swirled around these monster rocks late on the second day of the Battle of Gettysburg. Here was anchored the left end of General Dan Sickles' Union defensive line. Here Confederate soldiers, commanded by General Longstreet, smashed into the Yankee defenders, trying to win for Robert E. Lee the total victory he so desperately craved. Here they fought and here many died. The rebels won the contested ground of the Devil's Den itself. But a few hundred yards to the east, the looming heights of Little Round Top were fortified by the unconquered men of the Union Fifth Infantry Corp. These blue-clad defenders formed a barrier that made the Devil's Den nothing more than just another piece of worthless ground.

The men who fought there did not know the name of this bizarre and unearthly place. Had you told them "This is the Devil's Den", surely they would have agreed. There are those who say it possessed this name long before the battle. Many say it was given that name on that bloody second of July in 1863. Others contend that it got the name years afterward. Some will tell you that this jumble of giant rocks is not the Devil's Den at all - that the name Devil's Den belongs only to a narrow, deep cave, blocked from easy view by massive stone guardians, at the southwest side of the large jumble of boulders.

But there is only one true story, and this is it. I will tell you the story as it was told to me so that you may know the who, the what, the where, and the why of the name Devil's Den.

Let me start with the "who" behind the name "Devil's Den". You will not be surprised to learn that indeed it was the devil himself, our old nemesis, Satan, who gave his name to this little piece of Hell in southern Pennsylvania. It was, in fact, on the second day of the battle that he caused his name to be given. It did not happen by the light of day, while muskets flamed and cannon roared. It was only after the sun had sunk behind the mountains and the dark of night brought an end to the mayhem of the day that the Lord of Darkness left his mark on these unholy acres.

Many people believe that Satan is a lover of war. They are right, of course, but not for the reasons you might think. Surely, they reason, Satan must be elated at the thousands of souls that war brings to his domain. Certainly, you might assume, the Battle of Gettysburg must have been a bonanza in his eyes! But think again.

The armies of both North and South had many men of the worst sort - men who would lie and steal, men who would commit grievous crimes, men who were profane, or who loved gambling and hard drink. But most soldiers were honorable men. They faithfully sent their meager pay to wives and mothers. They did not wager on cards or dice. They shared their rations with hungry tent-mates. They comforted and nursed their wounded comrades.

The armies of both North and South had their share of good and bad. These shares were not unlike that of the country as a whole. Good men do not become bad because they serve in the army, nor do the bad become good. Had there been no Civil War, Satan may have had to wait another forty or fifty years for the souls he claimed during that bloody conflict. But claim them he would, eventually. Satan has been around since the creation. He will be here until the end of time. So the receipt of a soul forty years before its natural time meant nothing to the demon king. Indeed, war could be bad for Satan's business. Many a man who had seen his first battle became terribly aware of his own mortality. Many of these men would repent and reform, at least for a time, for fear of what might become of their souls.

But the Devil was, indeed, a lover of war. Because for him war meant opportunity. And there were few days in the Civil War that offered greater opportunity than the second of July in 1863. And there were few places that offered more opportunity than the rocky arena we call the Devil's Den.

Satan arrived at Gettysburg late that night. He had a plan and he knew what tools he needed to make his plan bear fruit. He headed straight for the Valley of Death, the lowland between the boulders of the Devil's Den and the slopes of Little Round Top. Ironically, the being who is known for his mastery of fire and brimstone would rely upon a tool many would consider foreign for him. Water. Cool, clear water.

The Devil knew that the second of July was a hot and dusty day. He knew that the men who fought there were given little opportunity to quench their thirsts before the battle. Indeed, many of the Southerners marched thirty miles before the fight and went into battle with canteens empty. For hours they fought, their tongues parched by the heat, the smoke, and the taste of gunpowder. The lucky men who survived the fight finally got to quench their thirsts when the battle was over, in the relative safety of their defensive lines. But between the two lines of battle lay the wounded, scores of men with limbs and bodies shattered and torn by flying lead. Their luckier, unwounded comrades would sometimes try to go to their relief, but every attempt

at rescue was met by deadly blasts from sniper's muskets. So the wounded were left on the field of battle, to lie in agony in no-man's-land. The pain of their wounds was made more unbearable by their desperate thirst.

The Devil feared no snipers as he walked calmly through the valley between the opposing armies. Satan is invisible to the eyes of men if he wishes to remain unseen. No sentry saw the demon form that strolled among the wounded in the Valley of Death that sultry night.

"Canteens", the Devil said to himself, "should be easy enough to find", and indeed they were. The victims of the day had littered the field with great quantities of the equipment of war. He soon found several that were still intact. He brought them to the little stream that drained the Valley of Death and bent down to fill them. He stopped. "This will not do at all!", he thought. The water was dirty, brown with mud, tinged red with the blood of the battle. "Oh no, only the finest will do for my customers!" So off he went in search of clean, cool water.

At the time of the battle, in the narrow cave that many say is properly called the "Devil's Den", there was a spring. It was fed by the waters that collected and flowed underground from the ridge above. The spring no longer flows today. Some say this is because of the road that was built above the Den, that it disrupted the flow of water. Some say it was the Devil himself who caused the spring to stop flowing. In any event, the water flowed the night after the battle, and it was to the spring the Devil went.

He crawled into the depths of the cave. He came to a chamber which contained the spring itself. Here he filled the canteens with the cool, clear water. When his task was done he returned to the Valley of Death. He went looking for customers for his goods.

He soon came to a prostrate form, a wounded Yankee skirmisher. The man had been a farmer in Maine before the war carried him to this alien place. His shattered leg was nearly severed from his torn body. His frequent moans were interspersed with an occasional curse. "A good prospect", Satan thought, as he went to work.

He approached the dying man. Gently he placed a hand under the soldier's head. He turned the head so he could see the man's face. "Have courage, son, I'm here to help you" Satan said. The soldier was startled but he was too hurt to move. "Who are you?" he whispered in a frightened voice. "A friend", the devil lied. The man could not see old Satan's face. Even if he could he would only have seen what looked like another soldier.

"Would you like some water?" the Devil asked. He put the canteen to the wounded man's lips and poured a generous drink. Never had the dying man tasted a draft so refreshing and sweet. "More", he begged, "please, let me have more!"

"Well, I'd like to help you", the devil replied, "but I need to conserve the rest for myself". "Please!" the soldier begged, "you must let me have more!" The devil smiled at the poor wretch. In his agony the soldier did not know whom he faced. "Perhaps we can make a trade" the devil suggested. "Trade?" the man replied, "Yes, yes, anything, I'll trade anything! Please, let me have more water!"

Within seconds the devil completed his negotiations. Satisfied with his deal, Satan gave the man the rest of the canteen. The devil did not think the man would live long enough to finish it. That was not his concern. His thoughts were on his next customer.

Next he came to a pair of men, two brothers from Alabama. He repeated his unholy transaction. After that he came upon a lieutenant from New York, and then a corporal from the same regiment. Satan concluded his negotiations with each of the men, leaving them the full canteens. When he traded away the last of them, he gathered up several more empty ones and returned to the cave with the spring.

Deep in the cave beside the spring was a flat rock which offered the demon a comfortable seat. The devil sat and filled the empty canteens. "Business will be good tonight", thought Satan. He knew that after the horrors and the suffering they had endured there were few men among the wounded who would be able to pass up his offer. Many a dying man would be willing to trade anything for a canteen of cool, clear water. Even his immortal soul.

As the canteens filled the devil tallied his score on the rock walls. He touched his fingertip to the stone, which glowed with unearthly flame. For each of the souls he acquired in trade, Satan scorched a fiery line into the flat stone wall. Once his canteens were filled he returned to the Valley of Death.

Many times that night he made the journey between the valley and the cave. Many times he reclined on the flat rock beside the spring and etched more fiery marks into the stone walls. Hours passed, and the number of marks grew and grew as the dark spirit filled his unholy ledger.

Some Confederate pickets thought they heard the sound of laughter that night, muffled and indistinct as if it came from below the ground. Some men said they smelled strange odors like burning sulfur. But only his victims saw old Satan himself.

Shortly before dawn the demon finished his work. He knew that in normal times none of his victims would have considered his offer, not for a second. But war does terrible things to men's minds. And men whose bodies are torn and shattered are easy prey for the likes of Satan. "Indeed", thought the Devil, "war certainly does make for wonderful opportunity!"

So there you have the story - the little cave with the now-dry spring was indeed the Devil's Den that horrible night. Here Satan himself rested while he refilled his stolen canteens and tallied his infernal score. Since that night the pile of unearthly stones and boulders surrounding the cave has taken on the Devil's name.

You can go into the cave today, although few have the nerve to do so. You must squeeze between narrow walls, crawling on your belly. You must watch out for the snakes that they say are abundant there since that night in 1863. After much wriggling and squirming and skinning your arms and legs on the sharp rocks, you will come to the cramped inner chamber. You can sit upon the same flat stone upon which the devil rested. On the rock wall above the dried-up spring you can see the many lines carved into the stone by Satan's fiery fingertip. Each line represents the soul of a man that the devil was able to steal, because of the bloody opportunity made possible to him by the battle for the Devil's Den.