

‘Proto-pack journalism’ in Gettysburg’s aftermath:

Parsing the extravagant claims of the Confederacy’s ‘greatest’ war correspondent

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Historians have described Peter Wellington Alexander as the Confederacy’s “only outstanding correspondent” and as “exceptionally clear-eyed.” He was a Georgia lawyer turned war reporter for the *Savannah Republican* who became known across the South by “P.W.A.,” the initials that identified his work. This paper offers a searching look at Alexander’s dispatches filed after the bloodletting at Gettysburg in July 1863 and points out they persistently and erroneously reported the battle was a draw and that Union forces had quit the field simultaneously as the Confederates. One dispatch claimed that the rebels would have won a “crushing victory” had they remained at Gettysburg a while longer. Another said of the rebels, “In no sense of the word were they beaten.” Yet another accused the Union commander of deviously backdating his messages of victory. In revisiting the correspondent’s dispatches, the paper postulates that “proto-pack journalism” may help explain Alexander’s false assertions about Gettysburg’s aftermath.