

# **HATCHER'S RUN**

**Grant's 8th Petersburg Offensive**

**February 5-7, 1865**



**NIGEL LAMBERT**

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[www.hatchersrunbattle.com](http://www.hatchersrunbattle.com)

# Lambert Creations

Wymondham

Norfolk

UK

Email: Lambert4x@aol.com

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Cover Picture: The evocative image features Major James Coey, 147th New York Infantry, Despite a head wound, he is shown attempting to rally his command during the fierce fighting around Dabney's Mill, on the afternoon of February 6. The image derives from W. F. Beyer & O. F. Keydel (1905) *Deeds of Valor*, 483. The illustrator is unnamed. Andreas Holmström kindly provided the coloration.

## Preface

### Curious Bedfellows

The reason I, a semi-retired UK scientist, wrote a scholarly book on the Battle of Hatcher's Run is too long a story to relay in detail. My fascination with the Civil War dates back to my 1960s childhood amid the centennial activities. I have since built a sizable library on the war and have had the pleasure of visiting most of the major battlefields on several occasions. Thus, I have a sound overall knowledge of the Civil War.

I stumbled upon the Hatcher's Run battle during the COVID lockdowns of 2020. At the time, I knew little about the event. I soon realized that history had not treated this battle kindly. Thanks to the internet, many senior US historians supported my curiosity, and I built a substantial Hatcher's Run database. From 2021 to now (2025), through numerous articles and lectures, I have been at the forefront in raising awareness about the battle. The fact that such a task fell to someone like me shows how neglected the event had become. One of my proudest achievements was updating the Hatcher's Run Wikipedia page, as it's often the first stop for curious minds. Previously, the site was a derisory two pages of limited information, another sign of the battle's neglect. This book represents the most comprehensive account of the battle to date.

### Governance and Validity

When reading any non-fiction account, one should always ask oneself, how reliable is this text? Why did the author reach that conclusion? With a career spanning over 40 years in both natural and social science research, I am no stranger to concepts such as validity, reliability, and robustness. My name appears on over 100 peer-reviewed scientific articles. In my social science research, I routinely analyzed texts such as interview transcripts and formal documents employing Qualitative Research Methods. This methodology, and the accompanying philosophical frameworks, have strong connections to historical research.<sup>1</sup>

Inspection of my book will reveal numerous sources supporting the claims made. I have not simply recycled the views of modern historians. The material used in compiling the eBook mostly comes from eyewitness accounts, including diaries, letters, memoirs, the Official Records (*OR*), and newspapers. When not using direct quotes, I summarize eyewitness recollections, preserving their key words. While this improves credibility and validity, I acknowledge that American language and culture have changed significantly since the mid-19th century.

Eyewitness narratives are not perfect. In fact, participants could provide completely opposite interpretations of events! Newspapers produced partisan accounts for home-front audiences. Reporters embedded in various Army Corps had their favorite generals. Combatants wrote their accounts (sometimes many years later) within a specific political and

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<sup>1</sup> Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal*, 2009, 9:27-40; Louise A. Dibsall, Nigel Lambert & Lynn J. Frewer, "Using Interpretative Phenomenology to Understand the Food-Related Experiences and Beliefs of a Select Group of Low-Income UK Women," *J. Nutr. Educ. Behav.* (November 2002), Vol. 34, 298-309.

social context, often with an agenda to promote. Personal reputations, especially those of senior officers, and regimental honor among more humble soldiers, could easily bias accounts. Letters home might be self-censored to avoid distressing loved ones. Officers writing official reports might be eager to avoid blame and shift poor performances onto others. In many accounts, it is noticeable how it's often some "other" regiment that fails, exposing the author's regiment, which makes a textbook withdrawal.<sup>2</sup>

Far more sources depict the Union's stance. This inevitably leads to a subject bias that must be recognized. This imbalance is especially noticeable with the *OR*, a source that, despite its flaws, has an immediacy and formality that foster a high level of trust.

The renowned philosopher Karl Popper demonstrated that one cannot prove anything; one can only disprove claims. Within this paradigm, I argue that, whether in the natural or social sciences, an author constructs a narrative to persuade skeptical readers of its validity. Each assertion should be supported by evidence and conclusions derived through reason and logic.

In constructing a coherent Hatcher's Run narrative, some statements are currently uncontested. For example, the battle occurred on February 5-7, 1865; John Pegram died on February 6; the Confederates attacked Humphreys's line late on February 5, etc. Uncontested statements provide a solid foundation for the narrative. Many statements, however, are contested. Often, one can use logic and the established framework to dismiss errant claims. For instance, there is testimony suggesting that John Pegram was killed near Dabney's Mill before 2 p.m. on February 6. However, the reliable framework shows that at 2 p.m., Pegram was fighting down Vaughan Road over a mile away from Dabney's Mill, and that he died in the late afternoon.

In many places, my narrative diverges from the more common summary accounts. Bryce Suderow and I addressed these differences in a 2022 magazine article. Typically, I do not repeat these debates here; however, I do share my critical thinking on significant incidents.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes it is not rationally possible to choose between conflicting claims. For example, two memoirs from West's brigade state that it arrived just in time to save McAllister's line from Confederate attacks. Two other memoirs claim that when it arrived, the Confederates had already retreated. All these memoirs appear to have similar merit. Therefore, instead of pretending to have some "expert" insight, I present both accounts to the reader.

There remain significant gaps in the narrative where flimsy or no testimony currently exists. I freely admit these gaps. For instance, there is no record explaining why Pegram split his division on the morning of February 6. We also do not know why Crawford rashly charged the formidable Confederate works at 6 p.m. on February 7. When I propose speculative scenarios, I clearly label them as such.

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<sup>2</sup> The Civil War Institute, *Did Civil War Soldiers Hide the Real War?* Podcast June 21, 2024. [Civil War Institute: Did Civil War Soldiers Hide the Real War? Podcast - The Reconstruction Era](#).

<sup>3</sup> Nigel Lambert & Bryce A. Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run: A Re-Appraisal," *North & South Magazine* (January 2022) Series 2, Vol. 2, No. 5, 35-46.

## Co-creation

I did not create this book in isolation. I have been fortunate to receive support from many well-respected Civil War experts. Some have generously provided reviews of the work. I continually refined my narrative based on their input and discussions. A panel that included experts and armchair enthusiasts reviewed early drafts. The latter focused on how engaging the text was to read and asked the challenging “simple questions.” Although I accept full responsibility for every word in the book, the story is like a puzzle (with some pieces still missing) assembled with input from around 100 people. The work is a collaboration that fuses the words of eyewitnesses with the opinions of modern scholars and lay experts. Hopefully, the resulting text is a convincing and coherent account of those fateful events of early February 1865.

## Conventions Adopted

As with all Civil War scholarly texts, I follow standard conventions. By 1865, Union officers could hold multiple ranks at the same time. I use the brevet rank system used at the time, as documented in the *OR*. The official naming of Confederate units was complicated, being based on previous commanders of appropriate rank. However, by 1865, most of these commanders had departed. For example, Col. William R. Peck commanded what was still formally called “York’s Brigade,” The wounded Brig. Gen. Zebulon York had zero involvement with the battle. This has caused confusion in other accounts. Federal units adopted a numbering system. For example, 1st brigade, 2nd division, 5th Corps. For clarity, in my text and maps, I refer to the person actually commanding the unit at the battle as the possessive identifier for both sides.<sup>4</sup>

I hope you enjoy the following pages and believe that the Battle of Hatcher's Run is a story worth telling.

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<sup>4</sup> Nigel Lambert, “Rebel Units and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher’s Run: February 5-7, 1865,” *The Siege of Petersburg Online*, 5 parts, [Rebel Units and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher’s Run: February 5-7, 1865 — The Siege of Petersburg Online \(beyondthecrater.com\)](https://www.beyondthecrater.com). Note the capital B in York’s Brigade denoting a formal name; whereas Peck’s brigade has a small b. Note also that I do *not* use Roman numerals to label Union Corps.

## Testimonials

As highlighted in the Acknowledgements, many people have supported my research. In line with “blurbs” commonly found on book covers, several of these kind individuals have graciously written testimonials for my eBook. This plays a vital role in building trust and credibility in the work. I am very thankful for their warm words, which I share below.

“During my extensive Petersburg research, I became aware that the least understood and the most mysterious battle of the campaign was the Battle of Hatcher’s Run, February 5-7, 1865. Consequently, I was eager to help Nigel Lambert with his research on the battle. Nigel has unearthed important primary sources that reveal new details on this important battle. His writing is crucial because it addresses important questions facing Civil War historians studying the 1865 Petersburg Campaign.

The Army of the Potomac (AOP) suffered heavy casualties during the 1864 Overland Campaign and the opening battles of the Petersburg Campaign. These losses affected morale. The quality and training of the recruits that replaced these casualties were often minimal. As the AOP’s first significant fighting in 1865, Nigel’s work on Hatcher’s Run shines a light on the state of that army. In the 5th Army Corps in particular, many brigades possessed large numbers of poorly trained, raw recruits. On the second day of the offensive, this corps suffered a humiliating rout with panicked troops engaging in friendly fire. Witnesses claimed that it was the corps’s worst defeat of the war. Only nearby new breastworks and the setting of the sun saved the force.

Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia (ANV) also experienced substantial attrition during the summer of 1864, especially among its officers. During the Fall, Jubal Early’s Army in the Shenandoah Valley suffered a series of stinging defeats at the hands of Philip Sheridan. Much of Early’s demoralized army rejoined the ANV at Petersburg in December 1864. By this time, desertions were a significant problem for Lee’s army. Nigel’s work on the Battle of Hatcher’s Run examines the fighting capabilities of Lee’s army.

On February 5, Lee attacked the AOP’s 2nd Army Corps led by General Andrew Humphreys. The former Confederate Valley troops, now organized as the Second Army Corps commanded by John B. Gordon, were ordered to attack the Union left. However, these attacks were feeble and failed to penetrate the thin Union picket line. Additionally, no counter-battery tactics were used against the few Federal cannons present. Lee showed his distress at the offensive capabilities of his troops.

On the following day, in a defensive role, Gordon’s troops performed significantly better. However, it was Mahone’s division under Barney Finegan, from the Third Army Corps, that dealt the crushing attack and routed the Federal force. These troops still maintained their fighting elan and, at this stage of the war, represented Lee’s elite soldiers.

Nigel weaves all of this into a detailed and engaging account, featuring informative, colorful maps.”

**Bryce A. Suderow**, is a renowned Petersburg Civil War historian and co-author of the award-winning two-volume work, *“The Petersburg Campaign”* (2014) with Edwin C. Bearss. Suderow has published widely in magazines and online sites. He was a primary editor in compiling the *Supplements of the Official Records*. His name appears in the credits of many seminal Petersburg works.

“Retired Scientist Nigel Lambert has lent us a hand from across the water (from the United Kingdom, to be precise) to close one of the few remaining gaps in the studies of the nine Federal offensives at Petersburg. No previous historian has focused as fully on the Eighth Offensive, at Hatchers Run, February 5-7, 1865. He has diligently researched, skillfully written, and creatively illustrated a state-of-the-art account of its orders of battle and its unfolding. His exploration of the topic has brought a superior work of Civil War scholarship out of the previously prevalent mists of history.”

**John Horn**, is an award-winning Civil War author and speaker. A member of the Chicago Civil War Round Table, he has published articles in *Gettysburg Magazine*, *North & South*, *Civil War Times Illustrated*, and *America's Civil War*. His book *“The Petersburg Regiment in the Civil War”* won the 2019 Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Writing Award for Unit History. His other books include: *“The Petersburg Campaign”* (1993), *“The Siege of Petersburg: The Battles for the Weldon Railroad, August 1864”* (2015), and *Lee Besieged: Grant’s Second Petersburg Offensive, June 18 to July 1, 1864* (2025).

“Nigel Lambert's “Hatcher's Run” is the first full-length study of a much-forgotten battle. It is well researched, written, and best of all, fair in its account of the battle and its effect on the Petersburg Campaign. I highly recommend this ebook.”

**Sean Michael Chick**, has written several books concerning actions around Petersburg: *“Grant's Left Hook: The Bermuda Hundred Campaign, May 5–June 7, 1864”* (2021); *“A Grand Opening Squandered: The Battle for Petersburg: June 15-18, 1864”* (2025); and *“Unparalleled Horror: The Battles of Jerusalem Plank Road and the Crater, June 19-July 31, 1864”* (2026).

“The February 5-7, 1865, Battle at Hatcher's Run finally gets the scholarly attention it has long deserved with Nigel Lambert's excellent study on that wintertime offensive. Deeply researched and well explained, Lambert's work helps readers better understand the participants and the conditions in which this previously underexamined phase of the Petersburg Campaign unfolded. Lambert not only provides a clear picture of the general officers' strategic and tactical decisions and their results, he also includes the experiences of the common soldiers, skillfully blending both perspectives. With its completion, now each of Gen. Grant's Petersburg Offensives has its own individual study. It is a true accomplishment and a worthy addition to the growing body of Petersburg Campaign scholarship.”

**Tim Talbott**, is currently the Chief Administrative Officer for the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust in Fredericksburg. Before this, he was Director of Education,

*Interpretation, Visitor Services, and Collections at Pamplin Historical Park. He is the founding member and President of the Battle of New Market Heights Memorial and Education Association. He is a contributor and former book review editor for the Emerging Civil War blog, and has published articles in both book and scholarly journal formats.*

“Nigel Lambert’s “Hatcher’s Run” has combined his considerable research and writing skills to capture the drama and human complexity of a campaign that sets the stage for the end of the American Civil War. He writes in a lively and readable style that anyone; Civil War buffs, military strategists, and non-historian types will find enjoyable and useful. He meticulously probes all known sources; letters, journals, Official Records, and newspaper accounts to provide a fresh and well-reasoned perspective of what happened at Hatcher’s Run and has established himself as a Civil War historian destined to make a substantial contribution to American history.”

**William Thomas Venner**, *Civil War historian, author of the regimental histories; 11th North Carolina Infantry, 7th Tennessee Infantry, 30th North Carolina Infantry, Hoosiers’ Honor: 19th Indiana, and The 19th Indiana at Gettysburg.*

## Acknowledgements

The core of the book draws upon the words of the combatants and their contemporaries. Since these texts are over 100 years old, they are not subject to copyright issues unless stated otherwise. Similarly, the period photographs and images are either over 100 years old or listed as “free to use,” unless otherwise noted. The coloration of period images, including the title page, was done by Andreas Holmström. The Chelmsford Historical Society, MA, granted me permission to display their image of a 19th-century mill. Society President Fred Merriam provided that photo’s colorization. The author, family, and colleagues provided modern photos with their permission. I created all the maps. However, I am deeply grateful to George Skoch (who sadly passed away) for sharing his mapmaking wisdom and permitting me to use his Hatcher’s Run baseline maps.

Approximately 100 people have supported my research. I may have assembled the book, for which I take full responsibility, but it reflects a team effort. Listing every one of these wonderful individuals would be impossible. Indeed, the list continues to expand as new followers of the linked Facebook page regularly share new content. These contributions derive mainly from online interactions and range from junior staff at State libraries to senior historians. Some that I’ve met through Civil War forums are anonymous, known only by their “username.” All have shared valuable information that has enriched the narrative. I thank you all.

Some people, however, deserve special recognition. I would never have reached first base without Brett Schulte, host of “The Siege of Petersburg Online.” Brett was the first person I contacted with my questions about Hatcher’s Run. Expecting no reply to my unsolicited email, I was pleasantly surprised to receive a friendly and supportive response. Brett provided additional materials and contacts for me to explore. The snowball had begun to roll!

High on Brett’s list of contacts was Bryce Suderow, who, with Ed Bearss, co-wrote an award-winning two-volume Petersburg Campaign book. Bryce is well known throughout the Civil War community, with his name appearing in the credits of many acclaimed books. He has worked with me throughout my Hatcher’s Run journey, offering extensive insights, resources, and contacts.

Along with Bryce, a dedicated panel of people devoted significant time and effort questioning and reviewing early drafts. In addition to correcting historical and grammatical errors, they enhanced readability and accessibility for a broad audience. The panel included: John Horn, award-winning Civil War author and Petersburg expert; Tim Talbott, well-known Civil War author and Chief Administrator for the Central Virginia Battlefields Trust; David White, Civil War researcher with military expertise; Alan Bunch and Reg Wilson, senior UK academics and Civil War enthusiasts, with whom I’ve walked many Civil War battlefields. And last but certainly not least, Robert Keech, a senior manager and technical writing expert, whom I have known for over 60 years.

I am grateful to Alfred Young III for sharing his research on Confederate casualty data for 1865. Wisconsin historian Marc Storch deserves a special mention for advancing my understanding of Bragg’s brigade at the battle. I am indebted to the intense efforts of “jjeg’s

civilwar forum” member “5fish” for highlighting many obscure sources that have enriched my account.

I want to thank the staff at North & South Magazine, Emerging Civil War, and the UK ACW Round Table for hosting my work. I thank the members of the Petersburg Battlefield Foundation for their support throughout, especially George Fickett Jr., Jerry Netherland, and Dan Robbins, for taking my son and me around the Hatcher’s Run battlefield in 2024 and for providing access to John Pegram’s ancestral home.

Finally, I thank my family for tolerating my obsession with grace and humor. Even though probably tired of hearing about Hatcher’s Run, they've helped with text editing and supported me, a computer dinosaur, with all matters digital.

Nigel Lambert, April 2026.

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## Prelude

### Context is Everything

The Battle of Hatcher's Run occurred at a critical moment in the Civil War. An awareness of the military, political, and personal backdrop to early February 1865 is crucial for understanding why.

#### Military Context

The arrival of 1865 marked the war's fifth calendar year. Realistically, Confederate hopes of an independent nation lay in tatters. Union Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman and his army captured Savannah, Georgia, on December 21, 1864, following his ruthless "march to the sea." On January 19, Sherman's soldiers headed north into South Carolina, destroying much of the State's ability to wage war. Further west, on January 13, Army of Tennessee commander Lt. Gen. John B. Hood resigned after suffering crushing defeats at Franklin and Nashville in the final weeks of 1864. Much of what remained of this shattered Rebel army relocated to the Carolinas to help confront Sherman's advance.

Between December 23 and 27, Union Maj. Gen. Benjamin F. Butler led a botched assault on Fort Fisher, North Carolina. Capturing this fort would cut off adjacent Wilmington, the last open Rebel Atlantic seaport, starving the Confederacy of vital external supplies. Butler's importance to President Abraham Lincoln was more political than military. His value diminished significantly once Lincoln won the November presidential election. Consequently, on January 7, much to the relief of most senior Federal commanders, Lincoln dismissed Butler. Major General George G. Meade recalled that Butler's sacking "was the great subject of discussion in the army." Fort Fisher eventually fell to the Union on January 15, following a combined army/navy amphibious operation led by Brig. Gen. Alfred H. Terry.<sup>5</sup>

The Army of Northern Virginia (ANV), commanded by Gen. Robert E. Lee, was the Confederacy's main field army. Since June 1864, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's Unionist forces had bottled up Lee's men around Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia. Two Union armies featured in the area: The Army of the James operated north of the James River, and the Army of the Potomac (AOP) operated south of the river, menacing Petersburg. Located just 20 miles south of Richmond, the Confederate capital, Petersburg served as a central hub for road and rail communication. If Grant could capture the "Cockade City," Richmond would surely fall, effectively ending the war. The two armies faced each other across a 37-mile front from the Mechanicsville Turnpike northeast of Richmond to Hatcher's Run southwest of Petersburg. The lines (sometimes just a few hundred yards apart) featured an elaborate network of trenches and fortifications in what became a forerunner of the World War I Western Front campaigns 50 years later. The larger, better-resourced Union Army of the

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<sup>5</sup> Everette B. Long & Barbara Long, *The Civil War Day by Day* (New York, 1971), 613-14, 620-21, 623-27; George G. Meade, *The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade*, 2 vols. (New York, 1913), 2:255.

Potomac had probed and menaced the Petersburg defenses for months. Despite suffering appalling casualties, the Federals gradually progressed, cutting the Rebel supply lines and communications to Petersburg. By the end of January 1865, the Union army in the Petersburg sector numbered around 120,000, about twice that of Lee's army.<sup>6</sup>



**Petersburg, Around 1860**  
bygonely.com

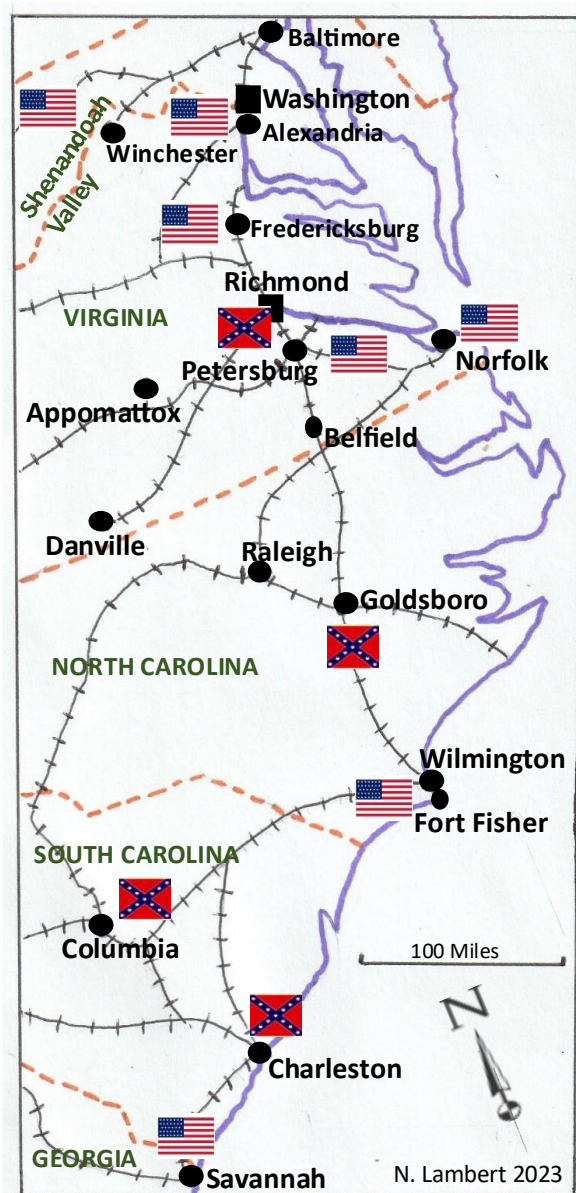
In early December 1864, Federal Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren led his 5th Corps together with a 2nd Corps division and Maj. Gen. David M. Gregg's 2nd Cavalry Division on a raid south of Petersburg. They destroyed the Weldon Railroad, an important Confederate artery, all the way to Belfield on the Meherrin River, 40 miles away. This action became known as the "Applejack Raid" because many Federal troops became intoxicated and unruly after discovering local supplies of apple brandy. By January 1865, the Confederates fully controlled just one railroad supplying Petersburg: the Southside Railroad, which ran west to Lynchburg, Virginia. The Rebel's main road artery serving Petersburg was Boydton Plank Road. This communication infrastructure would play a prominent role in the forthcoming battle.<sup>7</sup>

The Union now also controlled the Shenandoah Valley, which had supplied the Confederacy with succor throughout the war. Major General Philip H. Sheridan's Yankees had defeated Lt. Gen. Jubal A. Early's army at a series of battles in the Valley, culminating on October 19, 1864, in a Rebel rout at Cedar Creek. After this disaster and the Union's decision to transfer the 6th Corps from the Valley to Petersburg, Lee ordered the bulk of Early's battered army to join him in defending Petersburg. A residual force remained with Early to frustrate Sheridan's Federals as best they could.

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<sup>6</sup> John Horn, *The Petersburg Campaign* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 76-77; Perry D. Jamieson, *Spring 1865: The Closing Campaigns of the Civil War* (Lincoln, NE, 2015), 83.

<sup>7</sup> Noah A. Trudeau, *The Last Citadel. Petersburg, Virginia, June 1864 – April 1865* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1991), 264-85.



**Map P.1:**  
**Military Situation**  
**in the Eastern**  
**Theater by**  
**January 31, 1865.**

The main railway network and salient towns are depicted.

The Rebel divisions of Maj. Gen. John B. Gordon, Brig. Gen. John Pegram and Maj. Gen. Bryan Grimes arrived in Petersburg between December 1864 and early January 1865. These soldiers became the reformed Second Corps of the ANV, with Gordon commanding these 8,600 effectives. On January 28, Brig. Gen. Clement A. Evans took command of Gordon's old division. Gordon's Confederates went into the defenses on Lee's stressed right flank, around Burgess's Mill on Hatcher's Run. Given the mauling they had received over recent months in the Valley, questions existed about their morale and fighting capabilities, qualities they would soon need in the impending battle.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Thomas A. Lewis, "The Shenandoah in Flames" in *The Time Life Civil War Series*, 28 vols. (Alexandria, VA, 1987), 24:108-25,134-58; Lee W. Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina Infantry: A Civil War History, with a Roster of Officers* (Jefferson, NC, 2014), 405-08; Zack C. Waters & James C. Edmonds, *A Small but Spartan Band* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2010), 171-72; Richard, L. Armstrong, *25th Virginia Infantry and 9th Battalion Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1990), 85.

To Gordon's left, defending Boydton Plank Road, resided Lt. Gen. Ambrose P. Hill's Third Corps. This corps included the battle-hardened Mahone's Division. Their steely commander, Maj. Gen. William Mahone was absent sick, with Brig. Gen. Joseph Finegan taking charge. On January 31, the division returned to their camps from an exhausting six-day operation to thwart an alleged Union raid towards Weldon, North Carolina. No contact with the enemy occurred.<sup>9</sup>

Outnumbered, Lee's troops were also deserting at an alarming rate. The soldiers either returned to their homes, surrendered to the Union army, or hid in the hills and woods of nearby North Carolina, forming armed gangs. During December and January, over 1,000 Confederates left the fight. Several interrelated factors contributed to this low morale. A lack of food, essential clothing, and other supplies riddled Lee's army. The bitterly cold and wet weather during the 1864-65 winter exacerbated these deficiencies. Many Confederates believed they had lost the war, so why continue to risk sickness, wounds, or death? Others worried about families back home in the path of Sherman's army.

Keen to encourage enemy desertions, Grant issued a "special order" on January 4, offering favorable terms to those Confederates who surrendered. As a priority, Federal soldiers sent leaflets describing the inducements into enemy lines, often at significant risk to the messengers. On January 28, an order from Lee's headquarters revealed that a Virginia private had only received hard labor rather than execution for deserting a second time. This new leniency policy emboldened would-be absconders, the consequences of which would affect the forthcoming battle. Finally, the soldiers knew of political discussions in Richmond about recruiting Blacks to their ranks. Some Rebels didn't want to fight side by side with African Americans because they believed Blacks were not their equals. To help quell the hemorrhaging within his ranks, on January 27, Lee (not for the first time) appealed to Richmond for better provisions.<sup>10</sup>

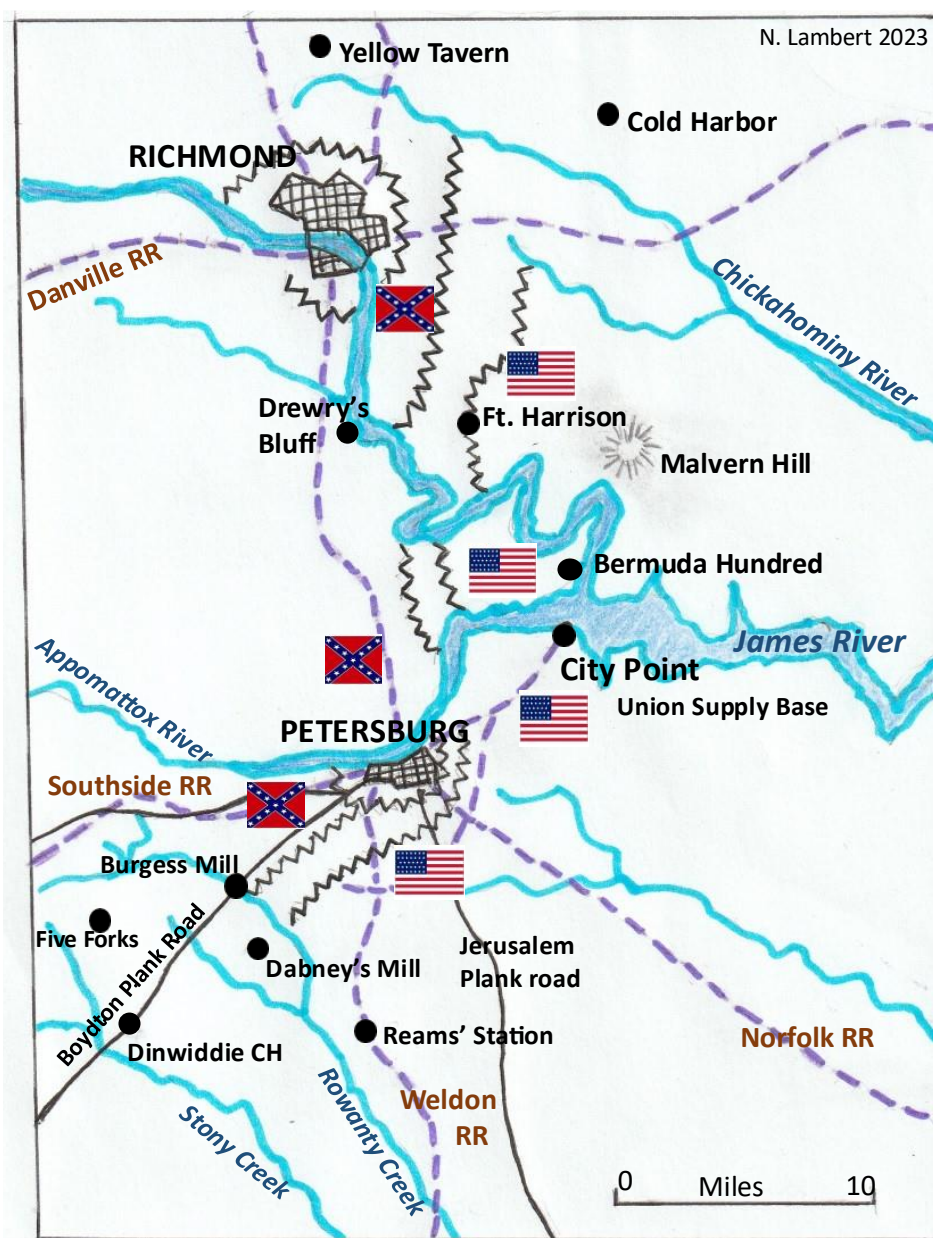
The condition of the AOP also posed challenges. Nearly four years of warfare had drastically reduced the ranks of many regiments. The veteran soldiers remaining suffered physically and mentally exhausted. Although conscripting more soldiers proved easier for the Unionists than their Confederate counterparts, the fresh Yankee soldiers harbored many "bounty-jumpers" who enlisted for the money, deserted, only to enroll elsewhere. Also, the

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<sup>9</sup> Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment in the Civil War* (El Dorado Hills, CA, 2019), 355-57; Hilary A. Herbert, "History of the 8th Alabama Volunteer Regiment C.S.A." Maurice S. Fortin ed., *Alabama Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 39 (1977), 178; Waters & Edmonds, *A Small But Spartan Band*, 175. The 6-day mission is mysterious; there is no record of any such Union raid in NC. Lee must have received significant intelligence to dispatch one of his best divisions from the Petersburg defenses to the NC border. An Irishman by birth, Joseph Finegan had moved to Florida in the 1830s and developed strong ties to that State. In January 1865, through his political connections, he had arranged a transfer back to the Sunshine State. However, duty-bound, he agreed to remain in divisional command until William Mahone returned (Mar 20) from his health-related absence.

<sup>10</sup> Sherrill, *21st North Carolina*, 408-10; John Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 353-54; A. Wilson Greene, *The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign* (Knoxville, TN, 2008), 86-87; *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vol. (Washington, DC, 1880-1901), Series 1, vol. 46, Part 2, page 828-29. Hereafter cited as *OR* 46/2:828-29. All references are to Series 1 unless otherwise noted; *OR* 42/2:1083, 1092, 1096: Lowell Reidenbaugh, *The 27th Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1993), 117; James P. Gannon, *Irish Rebels Confederate Tigers* (New York, 1998), 300-01; Long & Long, *The Civil War Day by Day*, 629.

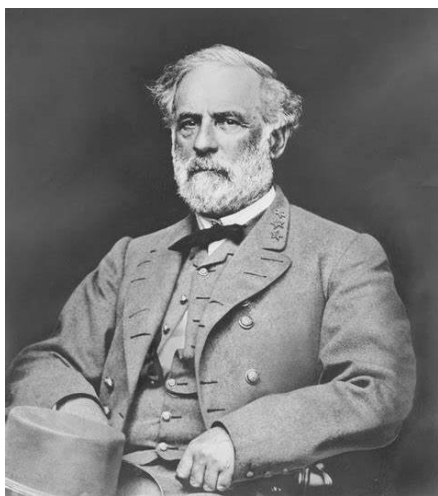
genuine recruits remained untested in battle. In one of Warren's 5th Corps divisions, for example, of the 4,707 men, 1,247 had never fired a musket. In October 1864, Warren had urged Meade against planning further operations as he needed more time to train the raw recruits. In early 1865, Maj. Gen. John Gibbon, a Union Corps commander, wrote of the wearing down of the "old soldiers and the poor performance of the draftees and substitutes." For many Yankees, Hatcher's Run would be their first taste of combat.<sup>11</sup>



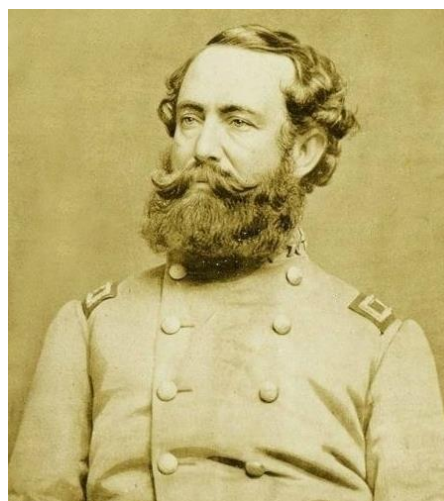
Map P2: Military Position around Richmond and Petersburg, January 1865.

<sup>11</sup> Emerson G. Taylor, *Gouverneur Kemble Warren: The Life and Letters of an American Soldier, 1830-1882* (New York, 1932), 203 note 1; James Marten, *The Sixth Wisconsin and the Long Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2025), 157-58, 161; *OR* 42/3:20; John Gibbon, *Personal Recollections of the Civil War* (New York, 1928), 229-30.

The experiences of the 6th Wisconsin were typical and nicely summarized in Marten's 2025 book of the regiment. Once part of the famed Iron Brigade, by late August 1864, their number had dwindled to 75 rank and file. By the year's end, the regiment had swollen to over 700, mostly from draftees and substitutes, many of whom were immigrants who spoke little English. Unlike the original 1861 recruits, these new soldiers did not have nearly a year of training before battle. Relatively inexperienced junior officers managed the swollen companies. Marten's book captures the limited training that these raw recruits received. Thus, soldiers from this fractured regiment went into the Hatcher's Run battle with limited knowledge of the men standing next to them. The regiment would pay a heavy price in the three-day battle.<sup>12</sup>



**Gen. Robert E. Lee**  
Library of Congress



**Maj. Gen. Wade Hampton**  
wikipedia.org

In January 1865, Lee reorganized his cavalry force, resulting in significant consequences for the Hatcher's Run battle. The ANV cavalry situation was dire. Many troopers were without mounts. With the army besieged around Richmond and Petersburg, forage for what animals they had proved limited. On January 19, Lee disbanded his Cavalry Corps, led by the charismatic Maj. Gen. Wade Hampton. Hampton, accompanied Maj. Gen. Matthew C. Butler's Cavalry Division to the Carolinas to help slow Sherman's advancing army. Lee also hoped that Hampton, one of the wealthiest and most influential men in South Carolina, could facilitate a recruitment drive to swell the dwindling Rebel ranks. With horses and forage relatively plentiful in the more spacious Carolinas, Butler left his mounts for Maj. Gen. William H. F. "Rooney" Lee's Cavalry Division, the remaining Confederate cavalry force operating south of Petersburg.<sup>13</sup>

Rooney Lee, the son of Robert E. Lee, commanded three brigades of around 3,500 troopers. He took his men to Belfield, some 40 miles south of Petersburg, to find forage for

<sup>12</sup> Marten, *The Sixth Wisconsin*, 140, 143-44, 151-52, 156-58, 160.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel J. Martin, *Southern Hero: Matthew Calbraith Butler* (Mechanicsburg, PA, 2001), 132-33; Mary B. Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 239-40.

his mounts and protect the supply hub at Hicksford just across the Meherrin River. There, they stayed throughout January and early February, hoping for some respite before the spring fighting season. Lee's degraded cavalry predicament severely limited his army's ability to gather the information needed to make critical decisions.<sup>14</sup>

#### Political Context

The winter of 1864-65 saw substantial political activity. The US presidential election in November 1864 probably represented the Rebels' last chance to achieve independence. The incumbent president, Abraham Lincoln, ran against former Union general George B. McClellan, who promised to secure peace with the Confederacy. Despite the Northerners' war weariness and especially their horror at the casualties around Petersburg, Lincoln comfortably won the election, indicating that the war would be a fight to the death.

Attention in Washington turned to how the Confederate States would return to the Union. A Bill proposing the 13th Amendment banning slavery had struggled to get through the US House of Representatives. Politicians now drove the legislation with increased vigor. On January 31, the Bill gained (just!) the required two-thirds majority in the House and went to the individual States for ratification. Illinois ratified the Amendment the next day, but it would not be until December 18, 1865 (six months after the war ended) that two-thirds of the States approved the Bill, and it entered the Constitution.<sup>15</sup>

Conscious of the nation's war fatigue, Lincoln allowed wily Democrat politician Francis P. Blair to visit Richmond on January 12 to sound out Confederate President Jefferson F. Davis regarding possible peace terms. Despite the conundrum of Davis seeking a peaceful settlement for an independent nation and Lincoln seeking a peaceful return of the seceded states to the Union, through delicate diplomacy, a peace conference was proposed. On January 28, Davis appointed three peace commissioners: Vice President Alexander A. Stephens, Assistant Secretary of War John A. Campbell, and former Confederate Secretary of State Robert M. Hunter. Speculations and rumors permeated the Petersburg trenches, both blue and gray; Yankees and Rebels swapped newspapers, most hoping and praying for the carnage to end.<sup>16</sup>

Grant ensured that the peace meeting took place and facilitated the Confederate delegation's safe passage through Union lines. His wife, Julia, notably voiced her desire for an end to hostilities. On February 3, the peace conference was held aboard the steamship *River Queen*, moored in Hampton Roads near Fortress Monroe. President Lincoln joined his Secretary of State, William H. Seward, to meet the three Confederate envoys. The five participants knew each other well, and the meeting had a convivial air. An early topic centered around the status of some four million formerly enslaved people post-war, with Lincoln open to possible compensation schemes for slave owners. The Rebel envoys, in turn,

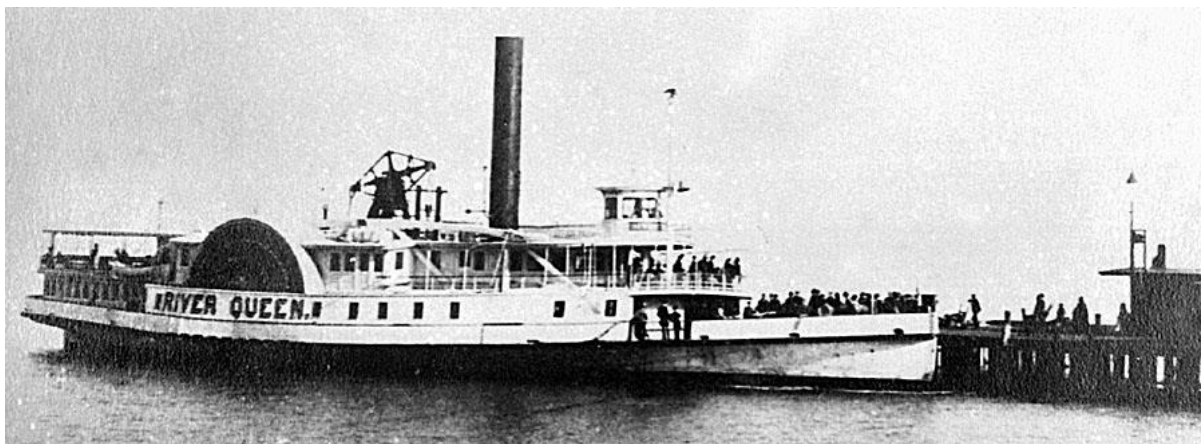
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<sup>14</sup> Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier*, 240-42; Robert J. Driver, *10th Virginia Cavalry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1993), 68-69; Richard L. Beale, *History of the 9th Virginia Cavalry, in the War Between the States* (Richmond, VA, 1899), 147. The strength of Rooney Lee's force is contentious as discussed in chapter 7.

<sup>15</sup> Long & Long, *The Civil War Day by Day*, 594, 630.

<sup>16</sup> Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 300-09; William S. McFeely, *Grant, a Biography* (New York, 1981), 198-205.

raised the fanciful idea of the Confederate and Union armies combining to invade Mexico, then under French rule. However, it soon emerged that Lincoln would not accept the notion of an independent Confederate nation under any circumstances. This being the Confederacy's sole aim, the negotiations collapsed. The Richmond delegates received a bottle of champagne for their troubles and safe passage back to the Rebel lines; the bloodshed would continue.<sup>17</sup>



**US Steamship *River Queen***  
wikipedia

With Confederate military forces faring badly, President Davis and his administration endured intense pressure; many Southerners felt Davis should resign. After months of lobbying, on January 31, Davis finally relented and appointed Lee as general-in-chief of all Confederate forces. Although widely believed to be occurring far too late to be meaningful, Lee himself saw little merit in the appointment. He assumed the position on February 6, during the Battle of Hatcher's Run. In another blow to Davis, on February 1, he reluctantly accepted the resignation of his ally and Secretary of War, James A. Seddon. John C. Breckinridge replaced the unpopular Seddon as the Battle of Hatcher's Run raged. The Richmond Congress also began to debate the divisive issue of whether to allow Black soldiers into their forces.<sup>18</sup>

### Personal Context

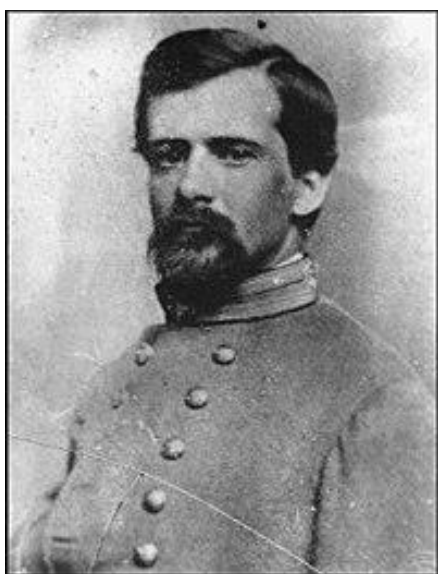
Throughout the crumbling Confederacy, despite the jingoistic talk of victory and freedom in newspapers and elsewhere, many resigned themselves to defeat. Severe domestic shortages and crippling inflation provided little Christmas cheer or comfort. However, for Brig. Gen. John Pegram, one of Gordon's divisional commanders, January 1865 brought much joy.

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<sup>17</sup> McFeely, *Grant*, 200-08; Jerry Korn, "Pursuit to Appomattox: The Last Battles," in *The Time Life Civil War Series*, 28 vols. (Alexandria, VA, 1987), 25:20-25. James B. Conroy, *Our One Common Country: Abraham Lincoln and the Hampton Roads Peace Conference of 1865* (Guilford, CT, 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Long & Long, *The Civil War Day by Day*, 630, 632; Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 307-08. Breckinridge was a former Confederate general and US vice president.

On Thursday, January 19, after a three-year engagement, Pegram (who turned 33 on January 24) married the renowned 28-year-old Southern belle Hetty C. Cary, widely regarded as one of the most beautiful women in the Confederacy. Hetty had left her native (and politically neutral) Baltimore early in the war when her overt Southern sympathies became too dangerous, and she moved to Richmond. Born into a well-to-do Petersburg family, John Pegram's youthful good looks and charm, more than his mixed military exploits, made him a favorite within Richmond society. To many, John and Hetty represented the "golden couple." Their lavish wedding occurred at St Paul's Church, Richmond, dubbed the "Cathedral of the Confederacy." Attended by many prominent politicians and military commanders, it would be the last imperious celebration within the Confederacy, giving a much-needed boost to Southern morale. However, the event didn't go without a hitch. President Davis had sent his personal carriage and horses to take the happy couple to the church; however, the horses became unruly and threatened to cause mayhem. Furthermore, Hetty tore her dress entering the church, triggering superstitious murmurings throughout the congregation.<sup>19</sup>



**Brig. Gen. John Pegram**  
Library of Congress



**Hetty C. Cary**  
Image by Thomas. C. De Leon, (1839-1914)

Several leading Union actors at the impending battle of Hatcher's Run faced various challenges as 1865 dawned. Major General Meade would be the on-field Union commander at the Hatcher's Run battle. A mercurial character quick to anger, he commanded the AOP under Grant's close supervision. With his son, Sargent, dangerously ill, Meade frequently visited his family in Philadelphia; his son would die on February 21, 1865. Meade also became embroiled with political opponents on two fronts. Firstly, the Committee on the

<sup>19</sup> Henry K. Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall* (St. Simon's Island, GA, 1940), 311; Sherrill, *21st North Carolina*, 410-411; Nigel Lambert & Bryce A. Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run: A Re-Appraisal," *North & South Magazine* (January 2022) Series 2, Vol. 2, No. 5, 44; Burton Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay* (New York, 1911), 203-05; Valgene Dunham, *Allegany to Appomattox: The Life and Letters of Private William Whitlock of the 188th New York Volunteers* (Syracuse, NY, 2013), 157; Walter S. Griggs, *General John Pegram, CSA* (Lynchburg, VA, 1993), 114-15.

Conduct of the War, investigating the disastrous July 1864 Battle of the Crater, searched for people to blame, and Meade fell in their cross-hairs. Secondly, he was frustrated by the delay of his keenly desired promotion to major general in the Regular Army. Despite rumors of a testy relationship with Grant, the latter supported and valued Meade. With Grant's help, his promotion finally occurred on February 2, and Grant defended Meade at the Crater Inquiry, with responsibility for the debacle eventually falling upon Maj. Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere, on January 25, the highly regarded Maj. Gen. D. Gregg, commander of the Union 2nd Cavalry Division, unexpectedly handed in his resignation. What motivated this drastic decision? Army gossip spoke of the allure of his "pretty wife" at home. Some speculated that an unwillingness to serve under Sheridan, soon to arrive in the Petersburg sector, was the reason. Others linked it to emotional stress and his irrational fears of believing he was a coward. His resignation took effect on February 9; thus, he still led his cavalymen into battle at Hatcher's Run.<sup>21</sup>

Another senior Union officer, Lt. Col. Edwin S. Jenney, also tendered his resignation in January. The 185th New York commander would feature prominently at the Hatcher's Run battle before leaving the army two days later. The reasons behind Jenney's resignation centered around his military status following his capture in September 1864. Although paroled, Jenney escaped before a formal exchange occurred. He thus found himself in Rebel newspapers listed as a dishonored paroled prisoner and, if captured, faced execution. He carried a vial of poison with him for such an eventuality. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton refused to change his status from "paroled" to "escaped;" consequently, Jenney resigned.<sup>22</sup>

Major General Andrew A. Humphreys had only assumed command of the Federal 2nd Corps on November 26, 1864, replacing the highly regarded and charismatic Maj. Gen. Winfield S. Hancock, who took an extended leave of absence from the AOP. Hatcher's Run would be Humphreys's first test of battle at the corps level.<sup>23</sup>

Officers typically took leave to re-energize during the less active winter months before the Spring campaign season began. Officer absences played a significant part in the Battle of Hatcher's Run. From the Confederate side, those missing included the reliable divisional commander, Maj. Gen. Mahone (due to illness), and brigade commanders: Brig. Gen. William MacRae, Brig. Gen. Robert D. Johnston and possibly Brig. Gen. David

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<sup>20</sup> Meade, *Life and Letters*, 2:256-62.

<sup>21</sup> Hickman, Kennedy. *American Civil War: Brigadier General David McM. Gregg*. ThoughtCo, Aug. 26, 2020, [Brigadier General David McMurtrie Gregg in the Civil War \(thoughtco.com\)](https://www.thoughtco.com/brigadier-general-david-mcmurtrie-gregg-in-the-civil-war-1370821/); OR 46/2:500; Edward G. Longacre, *Lincoln's Cavalymen: A History of the Mounted Forces of The Army of the Potomac, 1861-1865* (Mechanicsburg, PA, 2000), 322-23

<sup>22</sup> W. Woodford Clayton, *History of Onondaga County, New York* (Syracuse, NY, 1878), 129-30; [The Jenney Family – Skaneateles \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.skaneateles.com/the-jenney-family/).

<sup>23</sup> Jamieson, *Spring 1865: The Closing Campaigns*, 84-86. The reasons underpinning Hancock's departure were complicated. Lingering effects from his Gettysburg wound were one factor; feelings of betrayal and humiliation at his crushing defeat at Reams's Station in Aug 1864 and a desire for an independent command also fed his desire to leave the AOP. He readily accepted command of a new corps of veterans. However, this concept didn't work out as planned, and he spent the rest of the war commanding a relatively quiet military department based in the Shenandoah Valley. David M. Jordan, *Winfield Scott Hancock: A Soldier's Life* (Indianapolis, 1988), 169-175.

Weisiger (although this is contentious). Despite being present, Third Corps commander A. P. Hill probably should not have been, as he struggled to discharge his duties due to severe medical problems.<sup>24</sup>

Those absent on the Union side included 6th Corps commander Maj. Gen. Horatio G. Wright and brigade commanders: Brig. Gen. Byron R. Pierce, Brig. Gen. Edgar M. Gregory, Brig. Gen. Joseph J. Bartlett, Brig. Gen. Andrew W. Denison, Brig. Gen. J. William Hoffman, Brig. Gen. Ranald S. Mackenzie and Brig. Gen. Charles H. Smith. Brigadier General Henry E. Davies rejoined his cavalry brigade on the second day of the battle. Thus, both Blue and Gray forces would miss a wealth of battlefield experience at Hatcher's Run.<sup>25</sup>

These key military, political, and personal events formed the rich backdrop to the bloody battle that the two armies would soon fight around Hatcher's Run, Dabney's Mill, Vaughan Road, and Armstrong's Mill between February 5 and 7, 1865.

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<sup>24</sup> Nigel Lambert, "Rebel Units and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher's Run: February 5-7, 1865," *The Siege of Petersburg Online*, 5 Parts, [Rebel Units and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher's Run: February 5-7, 1865 — The Siege of Petersburg Online \(beyondthecrater.com\)](#), Parts 2-3. Regarding Hill's medical state, protracted urinary and kidney infections had developed into uremia, a potentially fatal condition. Swollen kidneys, inability to urinate, and lack of sleep made Hill increasingly lethargic. It could be a struggle at times for him to maintain attention and follow conversations. James I. Robertson, *General A. P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior* (New York, 1987), 310.

<sup>25</sup> OR 46/2:324-33.

## Chapter 1

### Grant and Meade Evolve a Plan

#### February 4, Noon - Midnight

The Hampton Roads peace conference, held on February 3, 1865, ended without a resolution. But even as the Confederate delegates trudged back to Richmond to brief President Davis, Grant's mind already turned to a new Union offensive. Grant feared waking one morning to discover that Lee and his army had slipped away, abandoning Petersburg and Richmond to fight in the Carolinas with other Confederate forces. He wanted to keep Lee busy. Encouraged by a lull in the awful winter weather, Grant searched for an opportunity to strike.<sup>26</sup>

By February 1865, the only railroad supplying Petersburg, entirely in Confederate hands, was the Southside Railroad. In December 1864, the Federals' Applejack Raid had seriously disrupted the Weldon Railroad, which went south from Petersburg into the Confederate heartland. The nearest point on this supply artery still under Confederate control was Belfield/Hicksford, straddling the Meherrin River some 40 miles south of Petersburg. Intelligence reached Grant that the Confederates unloaded trains laden with supplies at Belfield. The Rebels put the precious cargo into wagons and floated them up the Meherrin River to Boydton Plank Road before making the long trip to Petersburg. With this intelligence in mind, Grant developed his plan; Belfield would be the target.<sup>27</sup>

#### Grant's Plan

Grant wrote to Meade around noon on Saturday, February 4, describing his desired offensive. Grant visualized sending a cavalry force supported by infantry on a raid to Belfield to capture a bountiful haul of Confederate wagons, thereby exacerbating Robert E. Lee's already dire supply situation. He began:

I would like to take advantage of the present good weather to destroy or capture as much as possible of the enemy's wagon train, which it is understood is being used in connection with the Weldon railroad to partially supply the troops about Petersburg. You may get the cavalry

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<sup>26</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of General U. S. Grant*, 2 vols. (New York, 1885), 439-40.

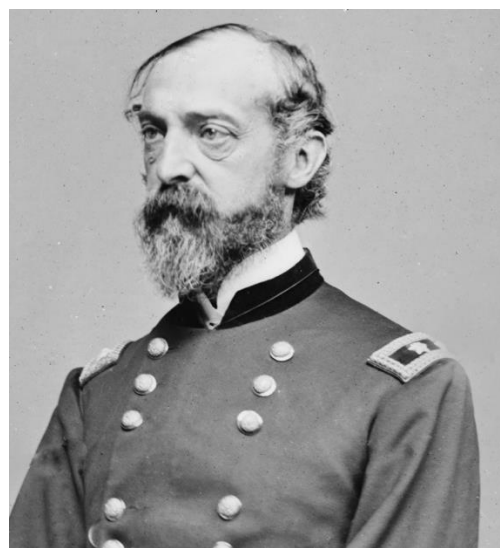
<sup>27</sup> Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 266-285; Andrew A. Humphreys, *Campaigns of the Civil War: The Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65* (New York, 1883), 311-12. It is unclear how or when Grant received the intelligence. Whether the Rebels floated the wagons down to Lawrenceville and took the road there to join Boydton Plank Road is unknown. The towns of Belfield and Hicksford merged in 1887 to form Emporia, its present-day name. Many sources at the time, both North and South, claimed that this Union offensive aimed to capture the Southside Railroad, vital to the Confederacy. Many later accounts repeated this false view, the Southside Railroad was never mentioned by either Grant or Meade in planning the operation.

ready to do this as soon as possible. I think the cavalry should start at 3 a.m. either tomorrow or the day following.

The cavalry in question was Maj. Gen. Gregg's 2nd Cavalry Division. To maximize their speed, they should take no wagons and few ambulances. Grant also stipulated that they carry only one and a half days' forage and three days' rations. Grant wanted Humphreys's 2nd Corps to move simultaneously (but remain independent of the cavalry) as far south as Stony Creek Station to support the cavalry. This would create a haven for the cavalry to return to after they had destroyed the enemy's wagon train.



**Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant**  
Library of Congress



**Maj. Gen. George G. Meade**  
Library of Congress

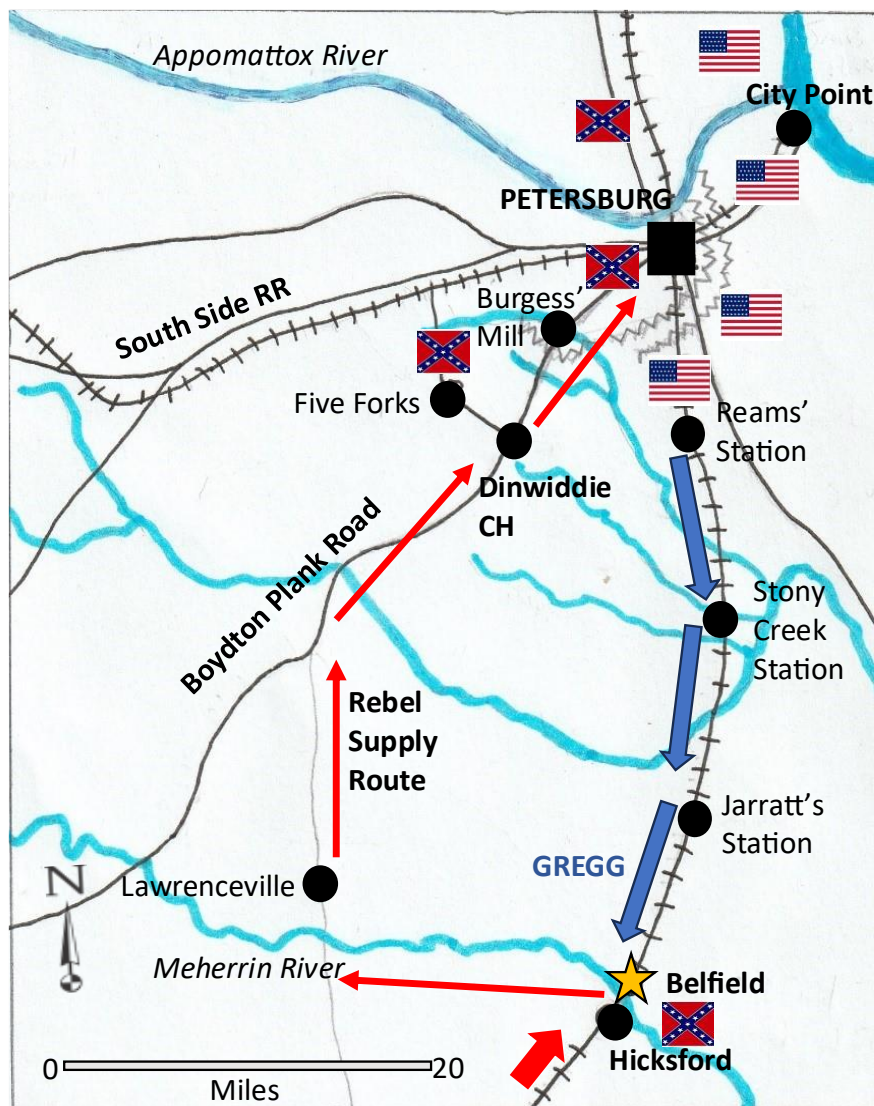
The infantry should take four days' rations in haversacks and one and a half days' forage for the cavalry in wagons. Again, with speed in mind, Humphreys should keep the accompanying artillery to a minimum, with no more than one battery per division. Warren should prepare his 5th Corps to support the 2nd Corps if the Confederates move out to attack. They should travel about halfway toward Stony Creek with resources to remain for four days.<sup>28</sup>

At 2:10 p.m., Meade replied to Grant, suggesting that he'd rather not send the 2nd Corps because one of its divisions, that of Maj. Gen. Nelson Miles currently held frontline forts facing the fortified Confederate positions at Petersburg. To remove this division would attract Confederate attention and alert them to the coming operation. Meade instead proposed sending Warren's 5th Corps to Stony Creek, and the two divisions of the 2nd Corps *not* on the frontline should go to Reams's Station. Thus, Warren's 5th Corps would support Gregg's raid on Belfield, and Humphreys's truncated 2nd Corps would support Warren if needed. From bitter experience, Meade knew the Rebels' favorite maneuver of slipping between Federal corps as they moved out on these offensive thrusts, delivering devastating flanking attacks

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<sup>28</sup> OR 46/2:367.

and capturing large numbers of Federal prisoners. Meade wanted a secure link from the fortified Union left flank through to Gregg's raiding cavalrymen.



**Map 1.1: Grant's Plan to Strike at Belfield**

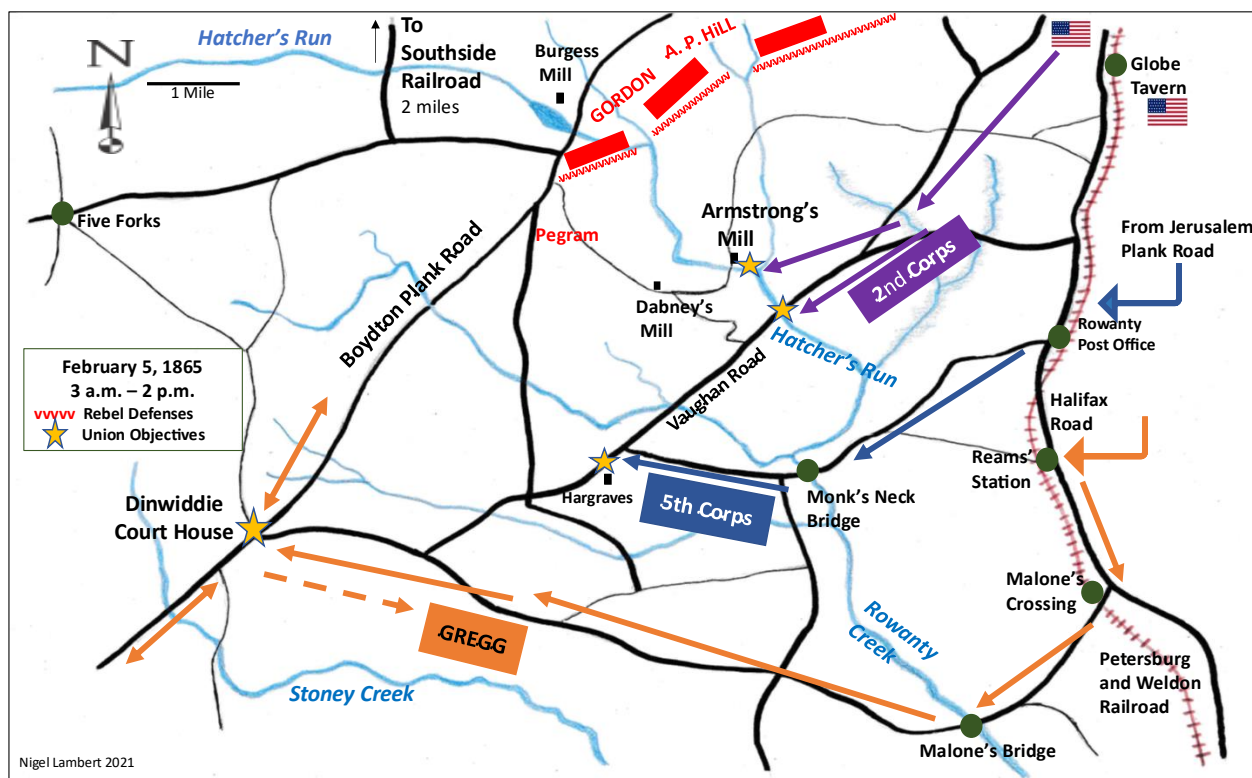
At 3:30 p.m., Grant sent Meade a brief message approving his modification, commenting that he only chose the 2nd Corps because Warren's 5th Corps had undertaken the previous expedition. However, since dispatching his initial response (2:10 p.m.) to Grant, Meade must have given the plan further consideration, possibly discussing it with senior subordinates, because, at 4:30 p.m., he wrote to Grant suggesting a substantive modification.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> OR 46/2:367. Note the spelling of Reams's Station. You will find various versions in established texts. In the Official Records and texts written around the time, it was referred to as Reams' Station. It is likely that the station was named after the "Reames" family, who owned a farm nearby. Personal communication, Petersburg National Battlefield Trust. Meade was aware, for example, of the disastrous actions of Grant's second Petersburg offensive in June 1864, Horn, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 75-95.

### Meade's Revised Plan

Rather than sending Gregg's cavalry around 40 miles south to Belfield, Meade proposed that they move south for about 10 miles before heading west to Dinwiddie Court House (CH) on Boydton Plank Road. He reasoned they could intercept Confederate supply wagons there just as easily as at Belfield. Warren's 5th Corps would march to the western end of Vaughan Road to support the cavalry. The two divisions of the 2nd Corps would move a few miles southwest down Vaughan Road and take up positions at Armstrong's Mill and the Hatcher's Run crossing. Here, they could block the Confederate forces in their substantial works defending Boydton Plank Road from moving out and cutting off either Warren or Gregg from the main Union lines. For Meade, this plan retained the same objective as Grant's initial idea but involved less risk. It required traveling shorter distances, with the three forces remaining closer together, thus reducing the chance that the Rebels would isolate one of them. Furthermore, a Confederate cavalry force, commanded by Maj. Gen. Rooney Lee, known to be in the Belfield vicinity, would have a greater distance to cover to engage the Union troops.

Meade added one final comment, asking Grant, "Are the objects to be attained commensurate with the disappointment which the public are sure to entertain if you make any movement and return without some striking result"? This illustrated Meade's acute awareness of public backlash to failed military operations and hinted at skepticism regarding the importance of the objective.



Map 1.2: The Revised Union Offensive

At 6:45 p.m., Saturday, February 4, Grant replied to Meade, agreeing to all the changes and assuring him that "The objects to be attained are of importance. I will telegraph

to Secretary Stanton in advance, showing the object of the movement, the publication of which, with the reports of operations, will satisfy the public.” Finally, Grant asked, “When do your troops start out?”<sup>30</sup>

Throughout the afternoon, Meade had notified his cavalry and infantry commanders to prepare for action early the next day. With the plans finally completed, at around 7:00 p.m., Meade issued a “general circular” to the AOP explaining the forthcoming offensive by Gregg, Warren, and Humphreys. Meade placed the remainder of the AOP on alert to move at short notice. Major General John G. Parke (9th Corps commander), Maj. Gen. George W. Getty (6th Corps commander) and Maj. Gen. Miles (commanding the 2nd Corps division in front of Petersburg) held their commands in readiness to move. They should anticipate that any movement ordered would entail the withdrawal of all troops except the minimum number necessary to maintain picket lines and the works garrisons. The chiefs-of-staff departments appointed officers to take charge of withdrawing trains and property to the entrenchments covering City Point (the main Union base) in the event of a whole army movement. The general staff officers should prepare to accompany Meade tomorrow at 8:00 a.m. The senior officer commanding the provisional brigade at AOP headquarters should hold his command in readiness for orders to move.<sup>31</sup>

That evening, Gregg, Warren, and Humphreys subsequently received their individual orders, including instructions on how they should cooperate in the forthcoming offensive. These commanders disseminated the orders down to their subordinate officers. The cavalry had to move out at 3:00 a.m. the next day, so this allowed little time.

#### David Gregg

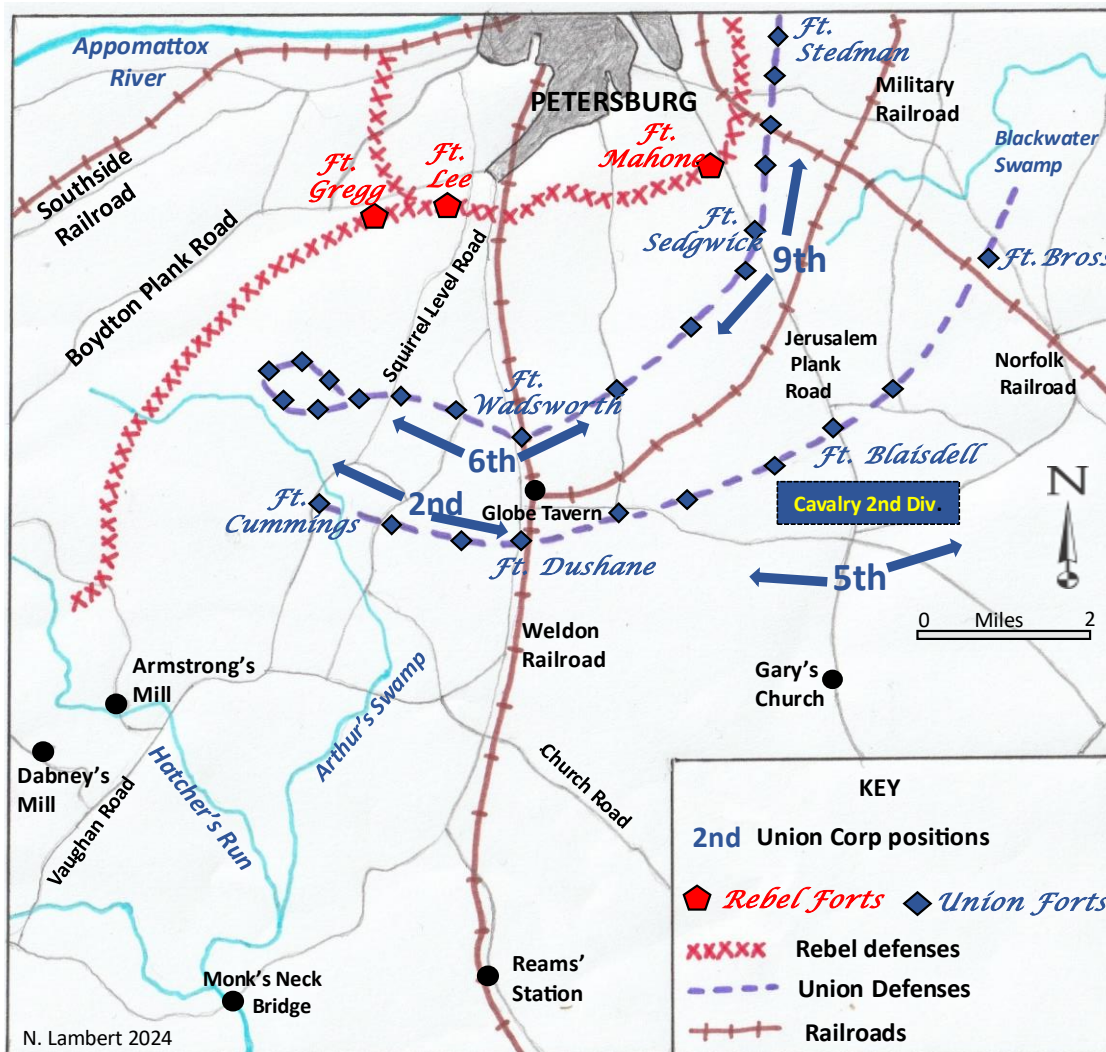
With the farthest to travel in the expedition, Gregg’s cavalry division would move out first. They would break camp at 3:00 a.m. the following day (Sunday, February 5), leaving behind the minimum number of pickets to secure the camp. With four days’ rations, Gregg’s designated route involved passing through Reams’s Station, crossing the Rowanty at Malone’s Bridge, before striking Boydton Plank Road at Dinwiddie CH. There, he should patrol up and down the plank road “to intercept and capture any wagon trains carrying supplies from Belfield, and to take advantage of any opportunity of inflicting injury on the enemy.” Upon mission completion, the cavalymen should return to Malone’s Bridge via the same route. Gregg’s orders explained that Warren’s 5th Corps, positioned nearby around the Hargrave house, would support him. Gregg received instructions to give Warren a cavalry regiment and a supply train holding one and a half days’ forage and Gregg’s reserve ammunition. Gregg should notify Warren of everything that occurred, and in the event of an engagement, he would take his orders from Warren. Finally, Gregg learned that Confederate Maj. Gen. Butler’s Cavalry Division had gone to North Carolina.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *OR* 46/2:368. AOP commanders had known that Rebel cavalry was at Belfield since late December 1864; *OR* 42/2:1092. Edwin M. Stanton was the US Secretary of War.

<sup>31</sup> *OR* 46/2:370-71. A “general circular” was an important order issued centrally to many recipients. The order was issued by Meade’s Assistant Adjutant-General George D. Ruggles. The established commander of the 6th Corps, Maj. Gen. Horatio Wright was on leave.

<sup>32</sup> *OR* 46/2:380-81



Map 1.3: The Location of Union Corps on February 4, 1865.

### Gouverneur Warren

Warren's 5th Corps' role entailed supporting Gregg's cavalry in case they encountered difficulties. Warren's orders directed him to move his corps at 7:00 a.m. the next day, taking:

two batteries, one rifled and one smooth-bore, and the usual amount of ammunition in limbers and caissons. You will be rationed for four days from tomorrow a.m. (three on hoof), with fifty rounds of ammunition on the person and forty rounds in reserve.

To maximize speed, he could take only half the usual allowance of ambulances, with one hospital and one medicine wagon to each brigade, together with only half the usual entrenching tools besides the pioneer tools. He must withdraw most of his pickets but leave enough to protect his camps from Rebel guerrillas. Warren's orders directed him to:

travel down the Halifax Road to Rowanty Post-Office, then by the road direct to the crossing of Rowanty Creek at W. Perkins', thence across Hatcher's Run to J. Hargraves on the road leading to Dinwiddie Court-House, taking a position at or near that point to support General Gregg's cavalry.

His orders summarized Gregg's expected role, detailing how Gregg would keep him posted on developments, and should the cavalry encounter difficulties, they would report to Warren. The orders also described Humphreys's role.<sup>33</sup>

#### Andrew Humphreys

Humphreys's 2nd Corps would provide a protective link between Warren and the western (Federal left) flank of the permanent Union fortifications facing Petersburg. He received instructions to move at 7:00 a.m. the next day, February 5, with the two divisions of his corps, *not* on the Petersburg line. Miles, who commanded the division facing Petersburg, would stay under his command but report directly to army headquarters anything of importance that might occur, independent of his reports to Humphreys.

Humphreys received the same instructions as Warren regarding the amounts of rations, ammunition, limited ambulances, and entrenchment tools. He had to leave as few pickets as necessary to safeguard his camp. He received orders to take two artillery batteries. His orders directed him to "move to the crossing of the Vaughan Road over Hatcher's Run and to Armstrong's Mill and hold these two points." This would block the Confederate forces entrenched in front of Boydton Plank Road from sweeping down and cutting off Warren or Gregg from the permanent Union line.

Humphreys's orders explained the proposed activities of Gregg and Warren, emphasizing that his (Humphreys') primary mission entailed supporting Warren, including furnishing him with reinforcements, should he request them. A telegraph line would run to Humphreys' headquarters on Hatcher's Run, and general army headquarters would either reside there or on the road nearby. Humphreys must maintain communications with Warren in his front and the Union lines to his rear.<sup>34</sup>

#### Final Communiques

At 7:45 p.m., Meade messaged Grant saying:

The orders are all issued; the cavalry will move at 3 a.m. and the infantry at 7 a.m. Contrabands have come in this p.m., reporting the departure last Thursday week of [Confederate Maj. Gen.] Butler's cavalry division for North Carolina. This would leave only one division, W. H. F. [Rooney] Lee's, to oppose Gregg.

No doubt encouraged by the news of Butler's departure, Grant again pushed his original Belfield idea. At 8:30 p.m., Grant asked Meade, "if Gregg can possibly go to Belfield, he probably will be enabled to destroy a large amount of stores accumulated there. The departure of one division of the enemy's cavalry will favor this."

Meade tactfully replied to Grant at 9:30 p.m. that he had now ordered Gregg to proceed to Belfield, *providing* he found upon reaching Dinwiddie CH any reliable intelligence suggesting that he could achieve anything there. Meade pointed out that the

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<sup>33</sup> OR 46/2:377-78, 381. This reference implies that Warren had initially been ordered down Jerusalem Plank Road to Reams's Station before heading west, but at Warren's request, the orders were changed to the shorter route described here.

<sup>34</sup> OR 46/2:371-72.

Rebels would store any accumulated supplies at the Hicksford depot on the other (Confederate) side of the Meherrin River from Belfield. Furthermore, Rebel artillery protected the position, as Union forces had discovered in December 1864. Meade finally added, “We also believe that W. H. F. [Rooney] Lee's division of cavalry is in that vicinity. Gregg goes without artillery.” Thus, while not directly opposing his superior’s desire to strike at Belfield, Meade effectively killed off the idea through sound reasoning.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, at 10:00 p.m., as he promised Meade, Grant sent a dispatch to Secretary of War Stanton explaining the proposed offensive. Thus, the president and his cabinet would understand the situation when reports of the operation began appearing:

I have ordered the cavalry to move down the Weldon Road tomorrow for the purpose of breaking up the enemy’s wagon train as far as they can, which is being used to draw supplies from Belfield to Petersburg. A corps of infantry goes as far as Stony Creek in support. I telegraph this so that you may know the object of the movement when you hear of it.

Curiously, this message described the Belfield offensive rather than the revised Dinwiddie CH plan. Thus, Grant gave his political masters advanced warning of the impending action without sharing any details that could be questioned or tampered with.<sup>36</sup>

#### The Union Soldiers’ Perspective

For the typical Union soldier in the ranks of Gregg’s, Warren’s, or Humphreys’ forces, Saturday, February 4, began as just another day. They had lived in relative comfort since the Applejack Raid two months earlier. Their newly built winter camps offered sound protection from the harsh weather. Camp rumors centered around the three Confederate peace delegates crossing their lines and the possibility of ending hostilities. This relative tranquility ended abruptly with the arrival of marching orders.

A 24th Michigan (Warren’s 5th Corps) history recalled the regiment happily helping to erect a chapel when marching orders arrived in the afternoon, bringing construction to a sudden close. Speculation abounded as to where they were going and why:

the night was passed as usual on such occasions, in receiving a good supply of rations and a full complement of cartridges and in reducing knapsacks to their marching weight, as well as writing letters home, perhaps farewell ones. Then too it was a source of anxiety if this mid-winter movement would result in an abandonment of their cozy and comfortable winter cabins.<sup>37</sup>

Some regiments received marching orders in the afternoon as the plans continued to evolve. Other troops received them much later, after Meade had disseminated the final orders. During that evening, Sgt. Thomas D. Marbaker of the 11th New Jersey with Humphreys’s 2nd Corps remembered that:

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<sup>35</sup> *OR* 46/2:368-69.

<sup>36</sup> *OR* 46/2:366.

<sup>37</sup> Orson B. Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan of the Iron Brigade* (Detroit, 1891), 289.

orders came to be ready to march at daylight the next morning. That night services were held in the chapel for the last time, and then the men lay down to get what rest they could, for marching orders brought with them an uncertainty as to when another opportunity would be had; and under the conditions existing in the army at that time they were almost equivalent to orders to fight.<sup>38</sup>

Corporal John W. Haley, 17th Maine, also in the 2nd Corps, received orders around midnight to be ready to move at a moment's notice. He noted how this upset the soldiers' equilibrium as they didn't know whether to start making preparations or to sleep until definite orders appeared. Most compromised, packing some belongings before resting. More disruption soon followed, with orders to send the sick and physically weak on picket duty.<sup>39</sup>

Lieutenant Samuel E. Cormany, 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry, remembered receiving orders late at night to move out at 2:30 a.m. He dozed near a fire until 1:00 a.m., before going to all company headquarters and waking the officers.<sup>40</sup>



**Lt. Samuel E. Cormany**  
*The Cormany Diaries*



**Maj. Gen. W. H. "Rooney" Lee**  
Library of Congress

The common soldier found this phase of warfare especially stressful. He faced marching to an unknown destination with the likelihood of combat and the accompanying fears of mutilation or death. Many sought rest, but sleep might not be so sound with swirling thoughts of loved ones back home and the worry that the next sunrise could be one's last.

#### The Confederate Experience

For the Confederate soldiers protecting "Bobby" Lee's right flank, their duties continued, ignorant of the extensive Union planning. The main activities during the first few days of February entailed constructing winter quarters and picketing. One bored Tar Heel with Pegram's division complained that there was nothing to relieve the monotonous routine

<sup>38</sup> Thomas D. Marbaker, *History of the 11th New Jersey Volunteers, from its Organization to Appomattox* (Trenton, NJ, 1898), 265.

<sup>39</sup> John W. Haley, *The Rebel Yell & Yankee Hurrah: The Civil War Journal of a Maine Volunteer*, Ruth L. Silliker, ed. (Camden, ME, 2014), 240.

<sup>40</sup> James C. Mohr, ed., *The Cormany Diaries: A Northern Family in the Civil War* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1982), 516.

of camp life, of roll calls, drills, inspections, and dress parade. Others noted a general gloominess around the camps, brought about by a lack of food, the prospect of losing the war, and receiving no pay. The commonplace desertions also added to the low morale.<sup>41</sup>

Camp conversations included speculation about the outcome of their peace envoys, who were known to have crossed over into the Union lines. Officers organized distractions to help boost the ebbing morale. Some regiments made formal written pledges to continue fighting until they had secured independence. On Thursday, February 2, Pegram held a dress review of his division as a treat for his new bride. All the senior Confederate generals attended, along with many ladies and “aristocrats of Virginia.” “Bobby Lee” himself sat on Hetty’s right. Corps commander Gordon and Pegram ceremoniously trooped the line of proud soldiers; for some, this was their first opportunity to see such esteemed officers as Robert E. Lee, James Longstreet, and A. P. Hill. Amid much cheering and whooping, the event nearly ended on a sour note, as upon leaving the grand display amid all the noise, Hetty’s horse became uppity and ran into a Rebel soldier. As she began apologizing, the excited Tar Heel sprang up and, removing his hat, said, “Never mind, Miss. You might have rid all over me, indeed you might!”<sup>42</sup>

On the same day, 40 miles further south, Rooney Lee’s Cavalry Division staged a mock jousting contest. Rumors also circulated of a possible Federal attack. On February 3, Pegram ordered his division to ready itself to fall in at a minute’s notice. Early on February 4, Capt. Oscar Hinrichs rode with Maj. John P. New and Pegram to inspect their outposts. In the afternoon, they crossed Hatcher’s Run and ventured to the Cummings house, where they could see the Union outposts. There, they met a Rebel spy (named George) who informed them that his contacts had not heard of any Union movements, but he believed that the Yankees were planning something. They returned to headquarters, where Hinrichs wrote in his diary about his concerns for the following day.<sup>43</sup>

### Analysis of the Union Plans

The exchange of dispatches between Meade and Grant provides a fascinating insight into their working relationship. Bold and daring, Grant always looked to seize the initiative, while Meade displayed more caution and practicality. Unlike other leaders, Grant wasn’t dogmatic about his ideas. As overall commander, Grant could have insisted that Meade carry out his Belfield plan. However, he allowed Meade to scale back his ambitious original

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<sup>41</sup> Samuel D. Buck, *With the Old Confeds: Actual Experiences of a Captain in the Line* (Gaithersburg, MD: 1983/1925), 129; Charles R. Jones, “Historical Sketch: Our Living and Our Dead” *New Bern [NC] Petersburg Siege Newspapers*, May 20, 1874, p1-2; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 410; William T. Venner, *The 11th North Carolina Infantry in the Civil War: A History and Roster* (Jefferson, NC, 2015), 195; Waters & Edmonds, *A Band of Spartans*, 169-70.

<sup>42</sup> Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall*, 311; Sherrill, *21st North Carolina*, 410-411; Lambert & Suderow, “The Battle of Hatcher’s Run,” 44; Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 203-05; Dunham, *Allegany to Appomattox*, 157; Griggs, *General John Pegram*, 115-16.

<sup>43</sup> Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 410-11, Driver, *First and Second Maryland*, 310; Neil H. Raiford, *The 4th North Carolina Cavalry in the Civil War: A History and Roster* (Jefferson, NC, 2006), 83; Richard B. Williams, ed., *Stonewall’s Prussian Mapmaker: The Journals of Captain Oscar Hinrichs* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2014), 238-39.

project. Like any prudent general, Grant accepted the advice of his subordinate closer to the situation. Given their military relationship, there is the suspicion that Grant could claim credit for any successes while having Meade available as a scapegoat for failures.

Upon reflection, Grant's initial plan appears weak and reckless. Less than two months earlier, a similar Union force had ventured to Belfield during the Applejack Raid, destroying the Weldon Railroad along the way. They had found Belfield well-fortified and defended by artillery positioned at Hicksford across the river. The Federals had quickly deemed the position too formidable to attack and withdrew. This proved a wise decision, as a Rebel force under A. P. Hill headed for their rear. Yet, despite this recent experience and lucky escape, Grant proposed a similar venture. It is unclear how long he had contemplated this raid; it seemed rather impromptu. Intriguingly, Grant's detailed memoirs said *nothing* of this offensive.<sup>44</sup>

It is doubtful that Gregg's cavalry could have captured Belfield without artillery support. As Meade pointed out, the Confederates would safely store any wagons/supplies at Hicksford across the river. Furthermore, Rooney Lee's three brigades of cavalry had recently joined the small Rebel force and artillery guarding Belfield/Hicksford, a fact known to the Federal high command. This force would have proven a formidable foe for Gregg's troopers. If Meade had followed Grant's original plan, his Union cavalymen could have met with calamity.<sup>45</sup>

Grant was desperate to do something! The planned offensive would keep "Bobby Lee" and his soldiers occupied, and thus less able to slip away, Grant's biggest fear. The mission also suited Grant's temperament, as he often didn't respond well to inactivity. However, February was notoriously a bad time for launching offensives. The wintery conditions made large troop movements extremely challenging. The forthcoming fight around Hatcher's Run was the only Civil War battle in Virginia to occur during a February. Grant's correspondence demonstrates his belief that breaking up the Confederate supply line from Belfield represented a vital military goal. Many memoirs, both blue and gray, suggested that Grant's aim for the offensive involved capturing Boydton Plank Road or the Southside Railroad, essential Rebel communication arteries. Grant never mentioned these targets in any dispatches planning the offensive. The false assumptions surrounding the mission's goal and Grant's desire to keep Lee occupied were neatly encapsulated at the time by Francis M. Wafer, a 2nd Corps acting brigade surgeon.<sup>46</sup>

With much shorter distances to travel and the three attacking forces more compact, Meade's revised plan to intercept the Rebel supply line around Dinwiddie CH entailed fewer risks. However, it still involved endangering the best part of two army corps (nearly 28,000 men) supporting the cavalry raid of 6,500 troopers.<sup>47</sup> The 2nd Corps also had to secure two

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<sup>44</sup> Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 271-284; Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 2:439-40.

<sup>45</sup> Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier*, 242; *OR* 42/2:1092.

<sup>46</sup> William H. Price, *Civil War Handbook* (Fairfax, VA, 1961), 67-69; Francis M. Wafer, *A Surgeon in the Army of the Potomac*, Cheryl A. Wells, ed. (Montreal, Canada, 2008), 133-34.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America 1861-65* (Dayton, OH, 1986), 133.

probably well-defended strategic crossings of Hatcher's Run. Meade had voiced concerns that such a large-scale offensive would need to yield substantial achievements to appease the public and politicians. Interestingly, throughout all the planning, neither Grant nor Meade mentioned that cavalry commander Gregg had recently tendered his resignation, with both apparently content for him to spearhead the raid.

With plans completed and orders and supplies issued, Grant's eighth offensive in the Petersburg sector would soon commence. No one foresaw the terrible three-day drama and carnage about to unfold.

## Chapter 2

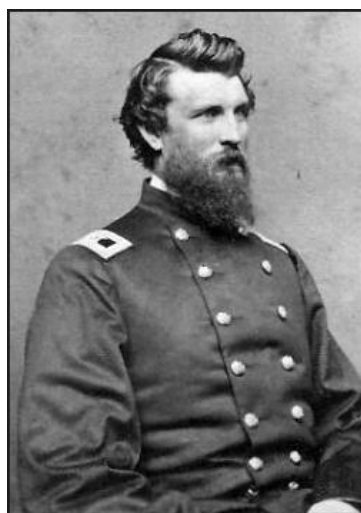
### David Gregg's Story

February 5, 3:00 a.m. – 4:20 p.m.

As ordered, at three o'clock on the cold and dark Sunday morning of February 5, 1865, Maj. Gen. David Gregg's 2nd Cavalry Division (three brigades totaling 6,500 men) moved out of their camps southeast of Petersburg. Thus began Grant's latest offensive, less than 48 hours after Confederate and Union politicians had discussed peace prospects.<sup>48</sup>



**Maj. Gen. David M. Gregg**  
Library of Congress



**Brig. Gen. John I. Gregg**  
Library of Congress

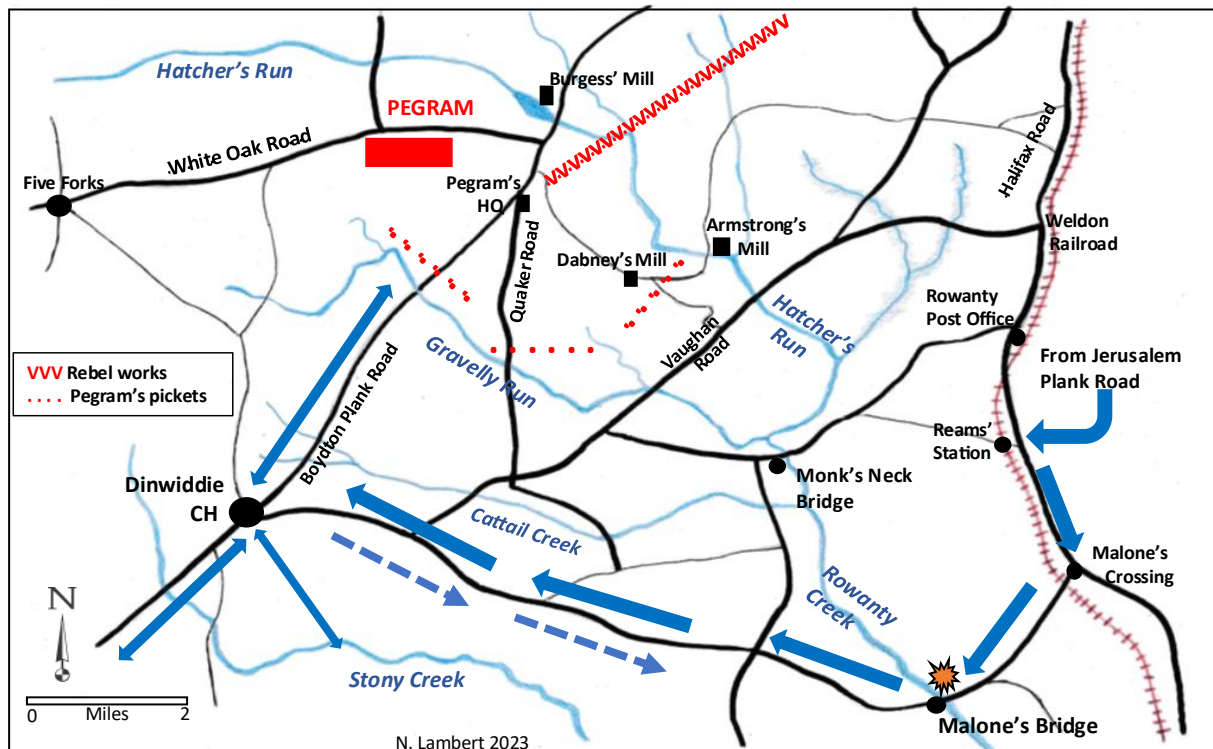
Brigadier General John I. Gregg's brigade led the way with the 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry in the vanguard. John Gregg was the cousin of division commander David Gregg.<sup>49</sup> Next came the brigade commanded by Col. Oliver B. Knowles. Then came the restricted number of ambulances and wagons, with Brig. Gen. Henry E. Davies's brigade bringing up the rear. Forage for the division's horses would travel in wagons accompanying Warren's 5th Corps for protection. D. Gregg dispatched the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry and 6th Ohio Cavalry to the 2nd Corps and 5th Corps, respectively, to screen their movements.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> OR 46/1: 365-66; Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, 133.

<sup>49</sup> With David Gregg tendering his resignation before the mission and the shared surname, several chroniclers have erroneously stated that John was the divisional commander at the battle. John Gregg did take over divisional command when his cousin David left the services on Feb 9, *after* the battle. Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 36.

<sup>50</sup> Benjamin W. Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment of Massachusetts Cavalry Volunteers* (Boston, 1891), 249; OR 46/1:371. Knowles was standing in for the usual commander Brig. Gen. Charles H. Smith, who was on leave. Davies was also on leave, returning to his brigade the following morning. Col. Hugh Janeway led the brigade out.

The Union cavalry column snaked southwards down Jerusalem Plank Road, passing Gary's Church, and headed for Reams's Station. David Gregg's mind probably held mixed emotions. His resignation from the army, tendered only a week previously, still awaited ratification. Yet here he rode, leading his troopers toward hostile territory. The large cavalry force passed Reams's Station between 7:00 and 8:00 a.m. With no enemy in sight, they continued south on Halifax Road for a few miles before heading southwest at Malone's Crossing towards Malone's Bridge, spanning Rowanty Creek.<sup>51</sup>



Map 2.1: Movement of D. Gregg's Cavalry, February 5, 3:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

### Scuffle at Malone's Bridge

At around 10:00 a.m., the Yankees encountered enemy videttes about one mile from Malone's Bridge. Upon seeing the approaching mass of Union horsemen, the Rebels quickly joined their compatriots occupying a line of earthworks on the opposite side of Rowanty Creek, dismantling the bridge behind them as they crossed. The leading 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry dismounted and deployed on either side of the road. They advanced, dislodged the Confederates from their works, and quickly repaired the bridge. Gregg called up the mounted 2nd Pennsylvania Cavalry, J. Gregg's brigade, and they charged across. The Confederates hastily made for their horses and scattered in every direction, losing one officer and 15 men captured.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Harold Hand, *One Good Regiment* (Victoria, Canada, 2000), 190; *OR*, 46/1:367-68.

<sup>52</sup> *OR* 46/1:115, 366-67; Hand, *One Good Regiment*, 190. A vidette is a mounted sentry stationed in advance of a picket line.

The Confederates in question belonged to Companies F and H, 13th Virginia Cavalry. Based at their comfortable winter quarters at Belfield, Rooney Lee's cavalry regiments took turns going on picket duty some 30 miles to the north. To vacate their cozy camp for several days held little appeal for Lee's cavalymen. The Union offensive happened to occur on the 13th Virginia Cavalry watch.

Rebel Pvt. Oscie Crump recalled how they had nearly removed all the bridge planks when the Federals charged. Upon discovering the bridge was damaged, the Union troopers fell back, but they soon returned. Rooney Lee witnessed a fierce firefight at a close distance (30 yards). The Yankees managed to repair the bridge and charged over, scattering the Rebels for half a mile across an open field. Crump claimed that the Yankees captured six Confederates out of a total of 30. Other regimental sources noted that they lost 13 men captured.<sup>53</sup>

Confederate Adjutant John E. Cooke<sup>54</sup> met some of the fleeing Rebels as he returned to Petersburg from an inspection tour at Belfield / Hicksford. As he neared Rowanty Creek, there "suddenly appeared several scattered cavalymen - gray - approaching at full gallop evidently stampeded." The horsemen told him that "a strong force of Federal cavalry had suddenly attacked the small regiment on picket at Malone's and dispersed it, nearly capturing [Rooney] Lee, who chanced to be there inspecting his lines." Cooke now had to adjust his route to avoid the Federals. Later in the afternoon, Cooke caught up with his old friend Rooney Lee. Rooney informed him, laughing, that during the fight at Malone's, he had "very nearly been stampeded for the first time in his life." His horse 'Fitz Lee' an "unruly animal of great power," had whirled round after the enemy's first volley and nearly carried Rooney off the field." As he narrated this story, Capt. Robert E. Lee Jr. (Rooney's brother) and Capt. Phil Dandridge (both of Rooney's staff) rode up and shared how, surrounded by enemy cavalymen, they had narrowly avoided capture at Malone's.<sup>55</sup>

Dandridge went on to describe a most unusual encounter. In evading the enemy, he stumbled upon some foot soldiers clad in dark blue marching south. The coats didn't look like regular Yankee uniforms, and the men carried cutlasses on their belts. As he puzzled over these soldiers and why Federal infantry would be traveling south, an officer spotted him and beckoned him forward. Dandridge nervously approached, and the mystery soon unraveled. The men were a battalion of Confederate marines on a mission to seize a Federal "ram," steam it up the James River to City Point (Grant's headquarters and supply base for all his Petersburg forces), and destroy Grant's transport fleet. The marines were *en route* to pick up "torpedoes" hidden in woods nearby. Their mission coincided with the Federal advance; remarkably, they had traveled to this spot without encountering enemy horsemen. One of the

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<sup>53</sup> Robert K. Krick, *The 9th Virginia Cavalry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1988), 43; Driver, *The 10th Virginia Cavalry*, 68; Daniel T. Balfour, *The 13th Virginia Cavalry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1986), 43; Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier*, 243.

<sup>54</sup> Born into a prominent Virginia family, John Esten Cooke was a novelist writing over 30 books between 1854 and 1886. Related to JEB Stuart's wife, (the sister of Rebel Brig. Gen. John Cooke, who also fought at Hatcher's Run) he had served with Stuart during the war and was well-known to many senior Confederate officers.

<sup>55</sup> John E. Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray; Being Personal Portraits, Scenes and Adventures of the War* (New York, 1867), 554-57; Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier*, 243.

marines later deserted and notified the Federals, thus stopping the mission.<sup>56</sup>



**Adj. John E. Cooke**  
wikiedia.org



**Capt. Robert E. Lee Jr.**  
alchetron

Meanwhile, the Federal cavalry continued west towards Dinwiddie CH, staying on the south side of Great Cat-tail Creek. In bitterly cold weather and traveling along terrible roads, they passed deserted Confederate camps but met no more Rebels. The 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry remained behind to guard Malone's Bridge.<sup>57</sup>

#### Disappointment at Dinwiddie CH

Rooney Lee gathered his scattered Rebels (the 13th Virginia Cavalry numbered 100-200 troopers) somewhere along Stony Creek. David Gregg's cavalry arrived at Dinwiddie CH, between 1:00 – 2:00 p.m., only to discover a largely abandoned supply route. The initial intelligence underpinning the entire raid had been outdated. Colonel Michael Kerwin of the 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry recalled finding "but few of the enemy there. A train of army wagons numbering 25, with 100 mules, together with 1 rebel colonel and 3 other officers (one of them having in his possession a rebel mail), were captured." A history of the 10th New York Cavalry, Davies's brigade, described "arriving at the courthouse at one o'clock, the enemy was surprised, and 40 men including a colonel, together with a number of wagons

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<sup>56</sup> Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray*, 557-58; A "ram" was a ship modified to ram into and sink enemy vessels, often using probes tipped with an explosive device (termed torpedoes). Two weeks earlier, on Jan 23, Confederate ships had tried and spectacularly failed to destroy the Union supply base at City Point in what was termed the battle of Trent's Reach. The sabotage mission stumbled upon by Dandridge shows the persistent Confederate desire to strike at the heart of the Union Petersburg operation. The mission was elegantly described in: Ralph W. Donnelly, "A Confederate Navy Forlorn Hope," *Military Affairs: Civil War Issue* (Summer, 1964), Vol. 28, No. 2, 73-78.

<sup>57</sup> OR 46/1:366,369; Noble D. Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry, New York State Volunteers* (New York, 1892), 240.

were captured.” Sergeants William H. Bentz and John Rosser of the 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry, J. Gregg’s brigade, later received gallantry awards for their deeds at Dinwiddie CH.<sup>58</sup>

As originally ordered, David Gregg fanned out J. Gregg’s troopers to see what further damage they could achieve. The 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry scouted north on Boydton Plank Road, with the 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry sent in the opposite direction. The 2nd Pennsylvania Cavalry scouted out the Stony Creek Station Road. However, these sorties yielded little, with only a few more prisoners and wagons added to the meager haul.<sup>59</sup>



**The Author Outside Dinwiddie CH, 2024**  
David Lambert

Lieutenant Samuel E. Cormany of the 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry recalled their northern sortie, capturing ten mule teams, an ambulance, and 25 Rebels. For his part, Cormany, with 20 Yankees, chased after some Rebel scouts wearing Federal overcoats. Cormany and a colleague (similarly clad to the Rebels) hailed their enemy hanging around a barn while the remainder of Cormany’s party hid in a ditch, ready to strike. One Rebel tentatively approached. Cormany pretended to be looking for his Mosby colleagues, to which his adversary replied that his party was not with Mosby but were North Carolina scouts. Enticed to come nearer, the Rebel obliged. When less than 75 yards away, Cormany sprung the trap. The hidden Yankees revealed themselves, pointing their carbines at the lone

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<sup>58</sup> Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray*, 557; Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier*, 244; claimed Rooney Lee led 80-100 troopers. *OR* 46/1:368; Preston, *10th Regiment of Cavalry*, 240. Dinwiddie was and remains today the county town of Dinwiddie County. The two-story courthouse was built in 1851 and was the most prominent building at the time. The “Rebel mail” referred to was a formal military dispatch; no further details were given. General Orders No. 11, Army of the Potomac, March 8, 1865. Philadelphia, PA.

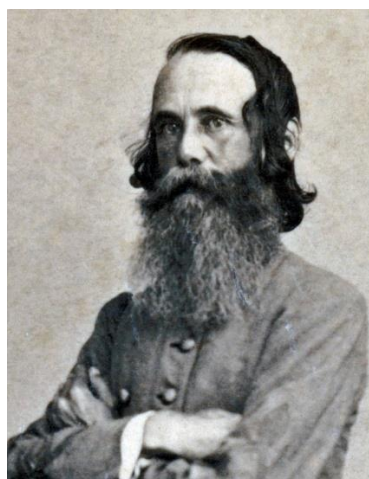
<sup>59</sup> Hand, *One Good Regiment*, 190-191; Mohr, *The Cormany Diaries*, 516-17; *OR* 46/1:370.

Confederate who duly surrendered. Cormany displayed his uniform insignia and stated his name and rank. He discovered that the Rebel was Adjutant Cook of the 24th North Carolina. After a brief exchange, Cormany ordered two men to escort the captured officer back to the regiment while he and the rest charged up to the barn to see who else they could catch. However, they only found a man of color who informed them that the Rebels had left ages ago, heading back towards Petersburg. Disappointed, Cormany's party returned to their regiment.

In one of the other patrols Sgt. Joseph Bell and Cpl. Henry Hawkins, 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry, J. Gregg's brigade, helped to capture a wagon train <sup>60</sup>



**Lt. Samuel E. Cormany**  
The Cormany Diaries page 498



**Col. William J. Clarke**  
findagrave.com

Details of what D. Gregg's troopers captured vary across accounts. However, according to Meade's official report, the Federal raid captured "18 wagons and 50 prisoners, including one colonel." A newspaper report confirmed Adjutant Oliver Cook's capture (as Cormany noted) and revealed that the captured colonel was William J. Clarke. Both these officers came from the 24th North Carolina, which at the time belonged to Brig. Gen. Matthew W. Ransom's Brigade of Maj. Gen. Bushrod R. Johnson's Division of the Confederate Fourth Corps<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Mohr, *The Cormany Diaries*, 516-17. Col. John S. Mosby and his 47th Virginia Rangers were a renowned Confederate guerrilla force. Their daring exploits and ambushes spread fear throughout the AOP, so it is not surprising for Cormany to have Mosby on his mind. In truth, Mosby typically operated further north around Warrenton in a region known as Mosby's Confederacy, Virgil C. Jones, *Ranger Mosby* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1944); General Orders No. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 36; *OR* 46/1:151; E. Crapsey, "Special Report," *Philadelphia [PA] The Enquirer*, Feb 9, 1865. Colonel William Clarke had commanded the 24th North Carolina before receiving a serious wound at Drewry's Bluffs on May 15, 1864. He was returning home to continue his recuperation when captured at Dinwiddie CH. Clarke went to prison in Delaware and was released in July 1865. William N. Rose, "The 24th Regiment," in Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina, in the Great War 1861-65*. 5 Vols. (Goldsboro, NC, 1901), 2:271, 285; William S. Powell, *William John Clarke*, Dictionary of North Carolina Biography. (Chapel Hill, NC, 1979), University of North Carolina Press, NCPedia; Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment*, 249.

### The Confederate Defenders

Recently arrived from the Shenandoah Valley, Brig. Gen. Pegram's division protected the ANV's extreme right. His meager force of 2,400 men had to guard the vital Southside Railroad, Boydton Plank Road as far south as Dinwiddie CH, and the strategic locations at Armstrong's Mill and Dabney's Mill to the southeast. The division camps were near Burgess's Mill along White Oak Road. Pegram's headquarters was just five miles northeast of Dinwiddie CH, where the plank road intersected Quaker Road that went due south. Major William P. Cooper, 31st Virginia, recalled how the Union cavalry (presumably the troopers scouting north along the plank road) made a dash on their pickets, capturing a few, and came within ¼ mile of Pegram's headquarters. Called to arms, Col. John Hoffman's brigade set off in pursuit of the Yankee cavalymen, but to no avail.<sup>62</sup>

### Gregg's Cavalymen Head for Home

With no more Confederate supply wagons to seize, Gregg's goal now entailed safely returning to Union lines. Colonel Knowles reported that his brigade remained at Dinwiddie CH for about an hour. Other accounts stated that following a short rest, at about 3:30 p.m., the cavalymen headed back towards Malone's Bridge, which was a secure location, and Rowanty Creek offered vital fresh water for both troopers and horses alike.

At 4:20 p.m., Gregg sent dispatches to Warren and Meade informing them of his day's adventures. He reported that Boydton Plank Road wasn't a significant Rebel supply route and detailed how few wagons and prisoners he had captured. Only one Rebel regiment had opposed his advance. Gregg had learned that Butler's Rebel cavalry had moved south, and the remaining Confederate horsemen remained miles away at Belfield, confirming earlier intelligence. Gregg added that a Rebel courier had allegedly passed through Dinwiddie to summon the cavalry at Belfield. Before leaving Dinwiddie, he had sent a party to the Hargraves house to contact the 5th Corps, but they were not there, although he had since communicated with Warren. He now headed back to Malone's Bridge, where he would bivouac and await further orders before adding, "The roads are so bad that my command can scarcely get along."<sup>63</sup>

We rejoin D. Gregg's cavalry in chapter 7 to discover if they succeeded in reaching safety.

### Analysis

Within 12 hours of commencement, Grant's stated objective had come to naught. There were no bountiful Confederate supplies to intercept. Whatever intelligence he had received, it was outdated. At least, thanks to Meade's intervention, the Union cavalry hadn't made this discovery at Belfield, 40 miles further south. Meade's concern about how politicians and the public would receive such a large mission resulting in few tangible gains, proved well-founded.

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<sup>62</sup> Sherrill, *21st North Carolina*, 406, 412; David W. Wooddell, *Hoffman's Army: The 31st Virginia Infantry, CSA* (Scotts Valley, CA, 2015), 425; Williams, *Stonewall's Prussian Mapmaker*, 239-40.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel H. Merrill, *The Campaigns of the First Maine and First DC Cavalry* (Portland, ME, 1866), p318; *OR* 46/2:409-10; *OR* 46/1:371.

It is illuminating to consider the speed of Gregg's cavalry. Although only approximate, according to the evidence, it took four hours to cover the seven miles to Reams's Station and then three hours to travel the four miles to Malone's Bridge. This feels relatively slow and probably reflects the poor road conditions during a harsh winter. However, they only took two hours to cover the next eight miles to Dinwiddie CH. One wonders how long it would have taken them to reach Belfield, Grant's initial plan, and how much rations and animal forage that would have needed.

## Chapter 3

### Gouverneur Warren's Story

February 5, 7:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Four hours after Gregg's cavalry vacated their camps, Maj. Gen. Warren's 5th Corps (17,000 men) left their bases as Sunday dawned around 7:00 a.m. Soldiers across the many 5th Corps regimental camps south of Petersburg recalled the morning. Some were awake at 3:00 a.m. as camps burst into life, preparing to move out. Those medically unable to march stayed to guard the bases. Tents and most of the men's equipment also had to remain behind. The retention of pickets and the "light marching" order suggested to veteran Yankees that the forthcoming operation would be brief.

Each 5th Corps soldier experienced his own personal challenges as he prepared to face the unknown. In this mass of humanity, Sgt. D. Porter Marshall, 155th Pennsylvania, was destined to march near the back of the corps. He recalled that his company commander, Lt. Benjamin Huey, was so sick he couldn't go, and Marshall led the company despite having such a bad cold he could hardly speak above a whisper. Men with the 190th Pennsylvania spotted Maj. Gen. Warren riding his old gray horse, which they took as a sure sign that fighting would occur. Nor did it escape the soldiers' attention that, yet again, a mission would begin on the Sabbath.<sup>64</sup>

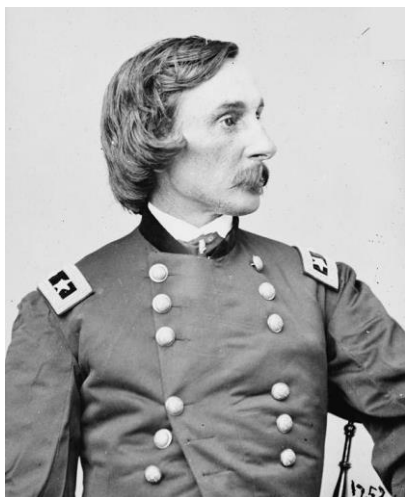
The division of Maj. Gen. Romeyn B. Ayres led the way, followed by Maj. Gen. Charles Griffin's division; 12 field pieces of artillery (with eight horses to each piece and each caisson); then Maj. Gen. Samuel W. Crawford's division, and finally bringing up the rear, a "train" consisting of half the Corps' ambulances, 50 wagons of infantry ammunition, and 56 wagons heavily loaded with forage and ammunition for the cavalry. Three squadrons of the 6th Ohio Cavalry under Capt. John Saxon rode in front, providing a screen.

The Union infantry traveled south down Halifax Road, which ran alongside the Weldon Railroad. The sun rose, bringing a bright, crisp, frosty morning. Sergeant J. Ansel Booth, 140th New York, recalled a beautiful day for action, with no snow and the ground sufficiently frozen to enable dry marching.<sup>65</sup>

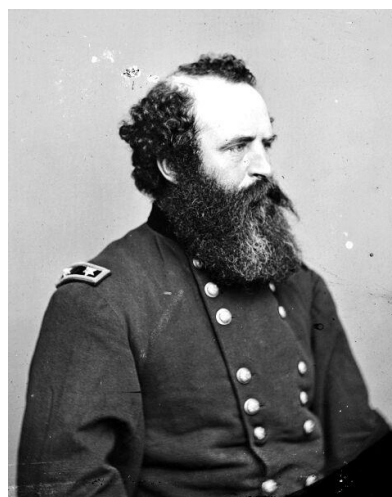
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<sup>64</sup> OR 46/1:253; Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, 133; Other data suggests a 5th Corps strength of nearer 13,500 men (Griffin's and Ayres' divisions, 4,700 each and Crawford's division of 4,000 men. Taylor, *Gouverneur Kemble Warren*, 203 note 1; Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 291-92). OR 51/1:286, 288. The order "light marching" meant that soldiers had only to carry their musket, ammunition, canteen, and haversack. Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 289-90; Richard E. McBride, *In the Ranks: From the Wilderness to Appomattox Courthouse* (Cincinnati, 1891), 147; D. Porter Marshall, *Company "K," 155th Pennsylvania Volunteer Zouaves* (London, UK, 1888), 221-22.

<sup>65</sup> Richard E. Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Unit in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC, 1994), 203; Marcia Reid-Green Ed., *Letters Home: Henry Matrau of the Iron Brigade* (Lincoln, NE, 1993), 107; Mickey Schlosser & John M. Robortella, *Writing Home: Civil War Letters from the Hinchey Family Archive* (New York, 2013), 63; Brian A. Bennett, *Sons of Old Monroe: A Regimental History of Patrick O'Rorkes 140th New York Volunteer Infantry* (Seattle, WA, 1992), 578-79. A squadron typically comprised two companies.



**Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren**  
Library of Congress



**Maj. Gen. Romeyn B. Ayres**  
Library of Congress

Upon reaching Rowanty Post Office, the Union column turned southwest along Old Stage Road towards Monk's Neck Bridge, three miles distant. Confederate obstructions placed on the road delayed the 6th Ohio Cavalry scouting ahead, such that the infantry column caught them up as they approached the stream.<sup>66</sup>

The leading elements of Warren's force reached the bridge spanning Rowanty Creek at around 10:00 a.m. The Rowanty splits into Hatcher's Run and Gravelly Run less than a mile north of this position. Despite the predominantly densely wooded terrain, a 118th Pennsylvania soldier reported that "the countryside from camp to Rowanty was fairly open with trees only skirting one side of the road at a time." Although the 5th Corps column head had reached the bridge, regiments towards the rear remained miles away.<sup>67</sup>

#### Crossing Rowanty Creek

A challenging situation confronted Warren. The enemy had destroyed the bridge, and about 100 Confederates defended the crossing in rifle pits along the opposite bank. The Federals surveyed the scene from a slight ridge about 300 yards back. Open ground sloped steeply down to the creek with a few small trees on the bank. On the other side, the more wooded land rose equally abruptly. Here, the Rebels waited concealed in their rifle pits. No more than 30 yards separated the Federal side of the creek from the Rebels' location.<sup>68</sup>

With Warren and Ayres in attendance, a 6th Ohio Cavalry squadron received orders to dismount, advance, and seize the bridgehead. However, the few Ohioans could not dislodge the entrenched Rebels; it would require more force. At the front of the 5th Corps, Maj. Gen. Ayres halted his infantry about 500 yards from the creek near the Perkins farm and prepared

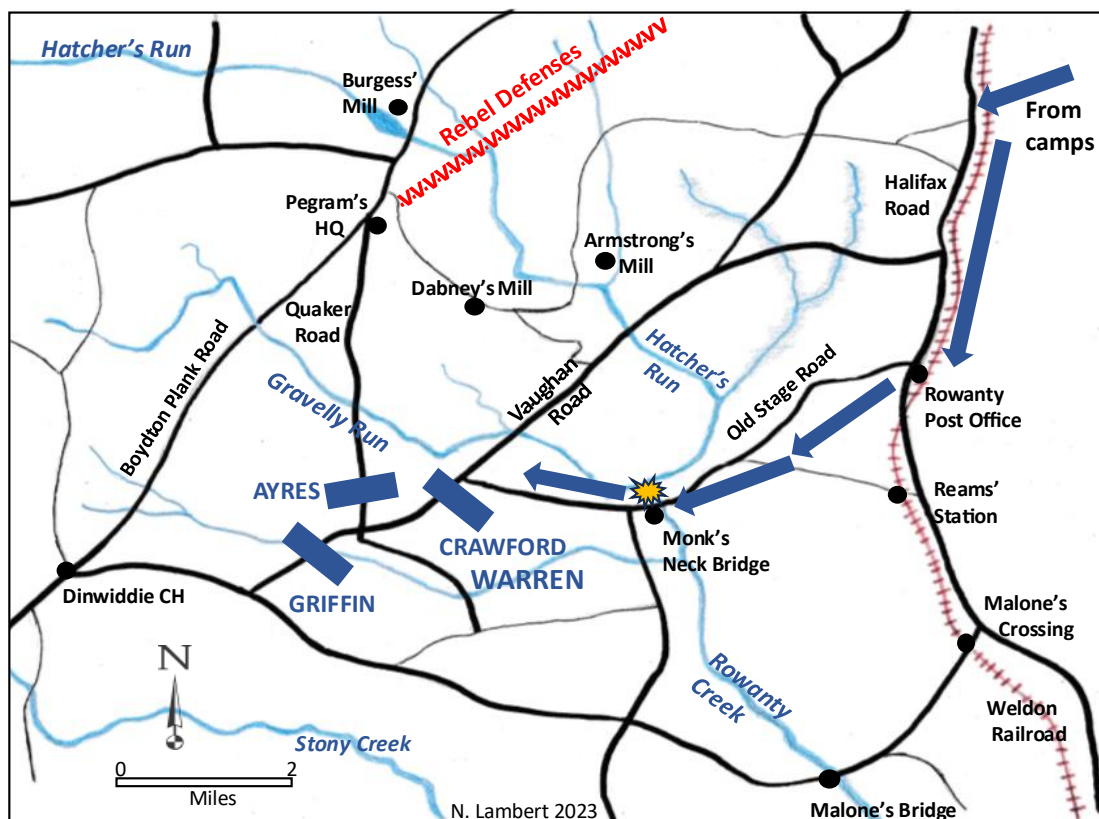
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<sup>66</sup> OR 46/1:259.

<sup>67</sup> OR 46/1:253; The Survivor's Association, *History of the 118th Pennsylvania Volunteers: Corn Exchange Regiment, from their First Engagement at Antietam to Appomattox* (Philadelphia, 1905), 548.

<sup>68</sup> McBride, *In the Ranks*, 148; OR 46/1:253, 284.

for action. He called upon his lead brigade, commanded by Brig. Gen. James Gwyn, to “force the crossing.”<sup>69</sup>



Map 3.1: Movement of Warren's 5th Corps, February 5, 7:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Accounts of what occurred next are contradictory and complicated. Witnesses agreed that Brig. Gen. Gwyn sent forward the 190th and 191st Pennsylvania to dislodge the Rebels. However, these regiments had consolidated months earlier. The Pennsylvanian Reverend Richard. E. McBride wrote a detailed account of the events, and I follow his lead in referring to the unit as the 190th Pennsylvania, commanded by Col. Joseph B. Pattee.<sup>70</sup>

McBride recalled that when the regiment reached the ridge, they halted. The Ohioan cavalymen kept a lively fire just ahead and to the right. Colonel Pattee quickly ordered the 190th forward to skirmish. Excitedly, they came running around the corner and faced toward

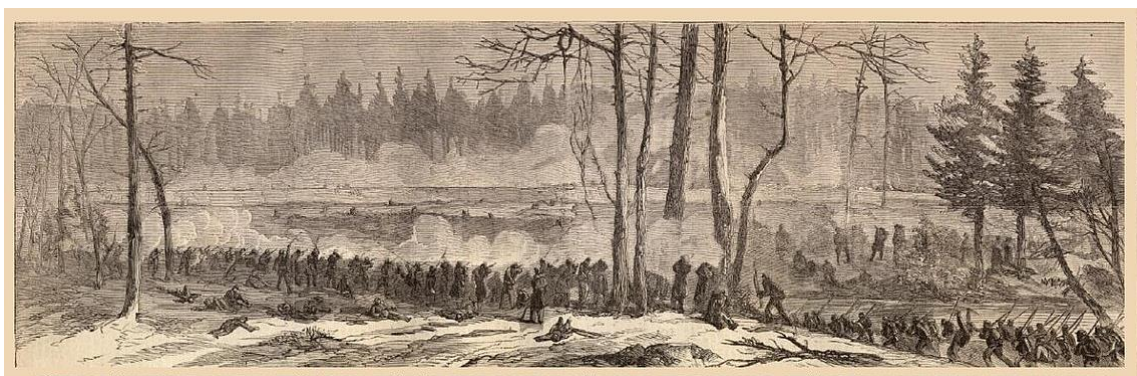
<sup>69</sup> OR 46/1:253, 277, 284. “Force the crossing” was military parlance for seizing a river crossing.

<sup>70</sup> OR 46/1:64-70, 284; McBride, *In the Ranks*, 148-51. Most of the 190th and 191st PA were killed or captured on Aug 19, 1864, during the Battle of Weldon Road. On leave at the time, Col. Pattee returned in Sept 1864 to lead a consolidated regiment, nominally termed the 190th PA. (Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-5 Prepared in Compliance with Acts of the Legislature*, 5 vols. (Harrisburg, PA, 1871), 5:279-287). However, as of Feb 1865, the OR still regarded them as two independent regiments. Gwyn's report listed both regiments and cited their respective commanders as Capt. Richard M. Birkman and Capt. Perez L. Norton. Their casualties for the Hatcher's Run battle also appear separately. The AOP Organization Report for December 31, 1864, listed both regiments but jointly commanded by Col. Pattee (OR 42/3:1118). It is likely that Pattee went on leave in Jan 1865, which was not uncommon, leaving Birkman and Norton in temporary command, but he returned in early Feb to lead the consolidated regiment into battle.

the enemy. Before the regiment's rear had left the main road, the rest were charging down through the open field. "They looked like a mob as they broke ranks and went pell-mell over the field, yelling like madmen." However, they found the stream covered with ice. A soldier at the front stepped upon it, but it instantly gave way, and down into the icy water he went. "Just the top of his head stuck out above the fragments of ice. He was fished out as expeditiously as possible, and the idea of crossing in that way was abandoned."

Some Pennsylvanians appeared with axes and began to fell trees across the creek on which to cross. The rest of the regiment, armed with Spencer repeating rifles, managed to keep the Rebels down behind their works, preventing them from firing. As the trees came down, Yankees soon began scrambling across. A loud yell went up as 40 to 50 men got safely over and charged the Rebel position. As more Federals crossed, some of the Confederates surrendered while others fled. McBride cited the Pennsylvanian casualties as 15 wounded and one or two killed.<sup>71</sup>

The above account ignored the 4th Delaware, another regiment in Gwyn's brigade. Their recollections presented a different story. Staff officer Henry Gawthrop recalled how the Pennsylvanians advanced as skirmishers but were unable to cross the creek. The Delawareans then charged across the water and routed the Rebels. He explained how they charged with bayonets, as they obviously didn't load their rifles before entering the water and hadn't the time afterward. One of their officers, Maj. Daniel H. Kent received a severe wound in the fight. Two Delaware soldiers, among the first to attempt the crossing, provided further testimony. Indeed, both received a Medal of Honor for their courageous acts that morning, although over 100 yards separated their deeds.<sup>72</sup>



**Ayres' Division Fighting Across Rowanty Creek, February 5.**

A.W. Warren Sketch, Harper's Weekly, February 25, 1865

Lieutenant David E. Buckingham commanded Company E on the extreme right of the 4th Delaware line; the movement "by the right flank" put them at the front of the regiment. As they passed Maj. Gen. Ayres, their divisional commander, they heard him say to Maj. Kent: "You are expected to carry the bridge if you lose every man"! Buckingham and his

<sup>71</sup> McBride, *In the Ranks*, 148-51.

<sup>72</sup> Justin Carisio, *A Quaker Officer in the Civil War: Henry Gawthrop of the 4th Delaware* (Charleston, SC, 2013), 127. Two shots struck Maj. Kent, one splintering an arm bone and the other grazing his breast.

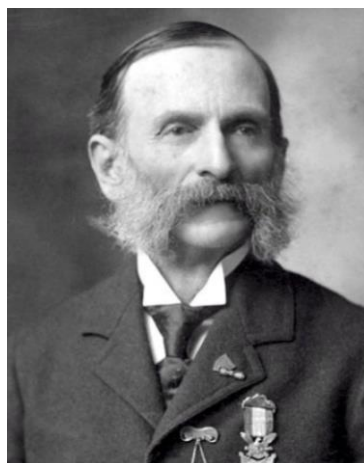
men broke into a double-quick march and came under fire. The men gave a lusty cheer as they went down the road with Maj. Kent riding alongside Buckingham. Upon discovering the destroyed bridge, they moved along the bank. The rest of the brigade (around 3,000 men), on top of the meadow and protected by trees, poured a heavy fire into the entrenched Confederates.

Buckingham dismounted and gingerly stepped on the ice, which extended only six feet from the shore. It broke under his weight, and he tried to wade to the other side. However, soon beyond his depth, he began to swim, with Minie balls skimming the water around him. Reaching the bank, he clutched a projecting stump root and assessed the situation. Harvey Durnall, John Bradford, and Holton Yarnall of his company had waded in up to their waists, but, discovering the stream's depth, they fell back. In the meantime, Maj. Kent was severely wounded while urging his horse into the water. Alone after having crossed the stream in that area, Buckingham didn't feel like scaling the bank, and he decided to wait in the icy water for reinforcements. For at least fifteen minutes, he waited.

Further upstream, his regimental colleagues scrambled across felled trees and thicker ice. Buckingham soon heard them charging the Confederate position, capturing many, with the rest fleeing; the Yankees had secured the crossing. Buckingham swam back and dried his clothes beside a roaring fire his compatriots had made.<sup>73</sup>



**Capt. S. Rodmond Smith**  
wikimedia



**Lt. David E. Buckingham (postwar)**  
cmohs.org

Captain S. Rodmond Smith, commander of Company C, 4th Delaware, recalled the events as follows. His company halted about 400 yards from the crossing and discovered that the bridge had been destroyed, with Rebels entrenched on the bluffs of the opposite bank. A Pennsylvania regiment, presumably the 190th, from the brigade advanced to force the crossing. After some heavy firing, the Rebels forced the Pennsylvanians to retire. Rodmond

<sup>73</sup> Walter F. Beyer & Oscar F. Keydel, ed., *Deeds of Valor; How American Heroes Won the Medal of Honor; History of our Country's Recent Wars in Personal Reminiscences and Records of Officers and Enlisted Men who were Rewarded by Congress for Most Conspicuous Acts of Bravery on the Battle-field, on the High Seas and in Arctic Explorations*, 2 vols. (Detroit, MI, 1905), 1:481. Pioneers were specially trained soldiers within each brigade that undertook engineering and construction tasks.

Smith stated, “our regiment, with Major D. H. Kent in command, was then detailed for the service and immediately moved down the road to the crossing.” The ground was slightly rolling and open farmland, except for a thin skirt of trees bordering the river, which afforded some cover. Under heavy fire but somewhat protected by the trees, Maj. Kent filed the regiment to the right of the destroyed bridge. The mounted Kent tried to lead the regiment across the river, but he was soon shot and carried to the rear. With lots of ice floating in the stream and seeing the depth of the water, the regiment decided not to cross but continued to move slowly to the right, keeping up a brisk fire on the enemy.<sup>74</sup>



**Swimming the Frozen Rowanty Creek**  
*Deeds of Valor*



**Monks Neck Bridge 2024**  
David Lambert

Two or three hundred feet farther to the right, Capt. Rodmond Smith saw some bushes projecting from the water; thinking this indicated shallower water, he called upon his command to follow him as he sprang into the stream. However, finding the water over six feet deep, he had to swim for it. Despite the inconvenience of a haversack, belt, cape overcoat, and enemy bullets splashing around him, he managed to reach a small island mid-stream. His men declined the invitation to enter the stream and continued moving to the right, seeking cover within the scattered trees. The Delawareans joined Smith on the island by taking advantage of fallen logs and thicker ice. From there, they managed to wade across to the opposite shore and carried the enemy’s entrenchments with a rush, capturing some 50 or 60 Rebels as the rest quickly ran away.<sup>75</sup>

In retrospect, pockets of Union soldiers from both the Pennsylvania and Delaware regiments likely managed to scramble across the stream at various points, mainly via felled trees. As Brig. Gen. Gwyn reported, “when the Rebels discovered they were being flanked,

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<sup>74</sup> Beyer & Keydel, *Deeds of Honor*, 1:479-80. The commanding status of Maj. Kent is complicated. The established 4th DE commander was Lt. Col. Moses B. Gist. Neither Buckingham nor Carisio specified that Gist or Kent commanded the regiment on Feb 5. The Delaware Historical Society kindly supplied testimony from a newspaper revealing that Gist was on leave at the time (*The Wilmington State [DE] Journal and Statesman*, February 21, 1865). As senior commander, Kent did lead the regiment at the battle. Recently promoted in Dec 1864; it was the first time Kent had commanded the regiment. Gist was back in command by the end of Feb. Adding to the confusion, Gwyn erroneously listed Maj. D. H. Kent as commanding the 157th PA. (OR 46/1:284).

<sup>75</sup> Beyer & Keydel, *Deeds of Honor*, 1:480-81.

they quickly departed, and the crossing was secured; 25 Rebels were captured at the cost of 8 wounded Federals.” Despite gaining a Medal of Honor, trying to swim across the icy creek didn’t appear to be the wisest choice. Buckingham’s award proved controversial, with many claiming that several soldiers had tried a similar feat.<sup>76</sup>

A month later, in a General Order, Meade formally acknowledged the bravery of numerous enlisted men in securing the crossing. Sgt. Peter M. Heiser, Sgt. Hamilton Vanderslice, Sgt. William S. Kelly, and Sgt. Henry L. Duel, all of the 190th Pennsylvania were recognized for “gallantry and skill in making a crossing of Rowanty Creek and capturing prisoners.” Listed as from the 191st Pennsylvania Cpl. Thomas G. Newman was “among the first to cross Rowanty Creek, over a small log under a severe fire from the enemy.” Also, from the consolidated 191st, Sgt. William H. Anderson was commended for “temporarily commanding [his] company and leading the men over Rowanty Creek and upon the enemy’s works.” Within the 4th Delaware, Sgt. Alpheus Wilson was cited for being “one of the first to cross Rowanty Creek advancing almost alone and capturing 4 Rebels.” Finally, Sgt. Samuel Treaken and Pvt. John Brown of the 3rd Delaware were commended for being among the first to cross Rowanty Creek and taking Rebel prisoners. This regiment is never mentioned in narratives regarding this action.

After about one hour of fighting, by around 11:00 a.m., the Federals had secured the crossing. The long column of soldiers and wagons had backed up, with those towards the rear, miles away, blissfully unaware of the Rebel resistance.<sup>77</sup>

Who Were the Rebel Defenders?

Testimony describing this action from the Confederate perspective proves elusive. Indeed, it isn’t clear who the Rebel defenders were. Monk’s Neck Bridge seems too far southeast to implicate Pegram’s pickets and too far north to suggest Rooney Lee’s cavalry pickets. Several Confederate cavalry memoirs support their involvement at Malone’s Bridge. It feels strange that these sources would have omitted any defense of Monk’s Neck Bridge. Warren himself was conflicted. His report stated that “100 of the enemy infantry” defended the crossing. Yet, in his communique to Meade’s chief-of-staff, he reported finding “the enemy’s cavalry defending the bridge.” Sadly, Federal reports of the captured Rebels gave no identifying details<sup>78</sup>

Building Bridges and Journey’s End

Under Warren’s personal supervision, his “pioneers” (engineers) began rebuilding the bridge to enable his corps to proceed. Allegedly 60 feet wide, neither men nor horses could ford the stream “en masse.” As construction began, a few unfortunate individuals of the lead division (Ayres) had to wade across the icy creek to cover the bridgehead. The pioneers quickly constructed a crossing suitable for infantry and cavalry by 12:45 p.m. A 24th Michigan memoir recalled:

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<sup>76</sup> OR 46/1:284; Carisio, *A Quaker Officer*, 128 (note 133).

<sup>77</sup> OR 46/1:253, OR 46/2:400; General Orders No 11.

<sup>78</sup> OR 46/1:253; OR 46/2:400.

The bridge building was simple. Two trees at the proper distance from each other on the bank were felled transversely across the stream by the pioneers. The fallen trees served as stringers upon which was constructed a solid bed of boughs.

However, they only completed a sturdy structure to support artillery and wagon trains by about 3:45 p.m.<sup>79</sup>

At 11:30 a.m., Warren messaged Meade's chief-of-staff, Maj. Gen. Alex S. Webb to report his progress, but the dispatch only arrived at 3:45 p.m. He explained how they had overcome enemy resistance at the Rowanty crossing and that a 60-foot-long bridge would need to be constructed. He added that he hadn't heard from Gregg or tried to contact him. Warren then ordered aide-de-camp Capt. Emmor B. Cope and the Ohio cavalry to push ahead. They quickly reached Vaughan Road and met Maj. Henry E. Tremain of Gregg's staff, who informed Cope that Gregg had pressed on to Dinwiddie CH. Further to the right, around 3:00 p.m., they made contact with elements from Humphreys's 2nd Corps.<sup>80</sup>

Back at the bridgehead, as fast as the regiments crossed the creek, they headed northwest towards Vaughan Road, less than three miles away. The lead elements arrived by 3:00 p.m. without encountering further Confederate opposition. However, some soldiers in Pearson's brigade, Griffin's division, observed a curious encounter on Vaughan Road. Warren and Griffin, with their staffs, approached a group (around 20-30) of soldiers dressed in Union uniforms and asked them who they were. A volley of musket fire revealed they were Confederates (reported as cavalrymen). A squad from the 155th Pennsylvania drove them away, but not before a bullet passed harmlessly through Warren's coat.<sup>81</sup>

An unsourced modern account suggested that Confederate cavalry vedettes had alerted Col. John W. Lea, one of Pegram's brigade commanders based around the Crow house, to Warren's advance. As Lea prepared to march his brigade to Monk's Neck Bridge, news arrived of a Federal strike at Armstrong's Mill, and Pegram countermanded the movement.<sup>82</sup>

A 146th New Yorker with Brig. Gen. Frederick Winthrop's brigade, Ayres's division, recalled how the entire brigade had crossed the Rowanty by 4:00 p.m. Subsequently, the men hurried forward to Vaughan Road. The brigade deployed in line of battle at the intersection of Quaker Road and Vaughan Road. With no evidence of the enemy, the men quickly built fires to prepare their dinners and dry out uniforms that had stiffened from the ice.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Bennett *Sons of Old Monroe*, 578-79; Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 290; OR 46/1:253, 258. Stringers are the lightly loaded longitudinal beams in a bridge deck, while the heavier, transverse members are known as floor beams.

<sup>80</sup> OR 46/2:400; OR 46/1:253, 258, 260.

<sup>81</sup> Marshall, *Company 'K' 155th Pennsylvania Volunteer Zouaves*, 222; Charles F. McKenna, ed., *Under the Maltese Cross, Antietam to Appomattox: The Loyal Uprising in Western Pennsylvania, 1861-1865; Campaigns 155th Pennsylvania Regiment* (Pittsburgh, PA, 1910), 331-32; Nathan S. Clark Diary 20th Maine, page 120, [diaries4 \(civilwardigital.com\)](http://diaries4.civilwardigital.com).

<sup>82</sup> Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 412-13.

<sup>83</sup> Bennett, *Sons of Old Monroe*, 579.

As the Union regiments reached Vaughan Road, they took up positions assigned in the previous day's orders. Ayres's division covered Quaker Road; Griffin's division went near the Hargrave house, only three miles from Dinwiddie CH, and covered Vaughan Road leading west; and Crawford's division occupied a field near the Old Stage Road / Vaughan Road junction with the artillery and wagons parked nearby.<sup>84</sup>

Regiments towards the back of the 5th Corps column only made camp after 5:00 p.m. in the growing darkness. At 4:30 p.m., Maj. Tremain, D. Gregg's aide-de-camp, informed Warren that they had reached Dinwiddie CH and were now heading back to Malone's Bridge, where they would bivouac for the night. Warren immediately passed this information to Meade's chief-of-staff. Soon afterward, some Confederate cavalry (undoubtedly the 13th Virginia Cavalry) unexpectedly appeared and, after observing the mass of blue infantry, captured a couple of stragglers and scampered away briskly.<sup>85</sup>

With darkness closing in, after a day's march estimated at 15-18 miles, we temporarily take our leave of the 5th Corps as they settle down by their early-evening campfires and prepare for some rest. Their story is continued in chapter 7, and we discover that their day's exertions had not concluded.<sup>86</sup>

#### Analysis

This narrative contains a few gaps and issues. The most significant is the identity of the Confederates defending the bridge. Eyewitness McBride commented that a stronger Rebel force in those entrenchments would have caused a bloody Federal repulse. One might have expected 100 entrenched Rebels to inflict more casualties than eight wounded (as reported by Warren). The Yankees had to move across open meadows and stumble over the icy stream. Although McBride put the Federal losses at 15 wounded and one or two killed. It could be that Union claims of 100 Rebel defenders were an exaggeration. The 4th Delaware, armed with repeating rifles, could have significantly helped subdue any Confederate fire. Captain Rodmond Smith's claim of capturing 50-60 Confederates was probably hyperbole; Warren's report mentioned about 25.<sup>87</sup>

The width of the Rowanty is a contentious issue. Warren and others claimed that the stream was 60 feet wide. However, other eyewitnesses mentioned a more modest distance of 15-20 feet. The former estimate feels relatively high and indicative of aggrandizement. To swim 20 *yards* across an icy river doesn't seem realistic.<sup>88</sup>

The near shooting and capture of Warren and Griffin is an intriguing story. It's not mentioned in the *OR*. The alleged Confederate horsemen were probably a 13th Virginia cavalry patrol. Mounted upon his gray horse, Warren would have presented a visible target.

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<sup>84</sup> *OR* 46/1:258, 260; *OR* 46/2:402.

<sup>85</sup> Reid-Green Ed., *Letters Home*, 107; *OR* 46/1:253, 276; *OR* 51/1:295; *OR* 46/2:401.

<sup>86</sup> *OR* 46/1:287.

<sup>87</sup> McBride, *In the Ranks*, 151-52; *OR* 46/1:253.

<sup>88</sup> *OR* 46/1:253; Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 203; Bennett, *Sons of Old Monroe*, 579; McBride, *In the Ranks*, 148; Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 290.

The killing or capture of a Federal corps commander (and possibly a divisional commander) would have provided the Rebels with a significant morale boost. The impact of such a Union loss on the following two days remains a historical “what-if.” The battle’s notoriety certainly would have increased.

The next chapter describes the exploits of the other Federal infantry corps under Maj. Gen. Andrew Humphreys.

## Chapter 4

### Andrew Humphreys's Story

February 5, 7:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

The third force in the Union offensive was Maj. Gen. Humphreys's 2nd Corps. With Maj. Gen. Miles's division remaining on the Petersburg frontline; the other two divisions pulled out of their camps at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday, February 5, emulating Warren's 5th Corps.

The division of Brig. Gen. Thomas A. Smyth (4,607 officers and men) led the way, followed by Maj. Gen. Gershom Mott's division (5,961 officers and men), Battery K, 4th U.S. Artillery under Capt. John W. Roder, followed by the 10th Massachusetts Artillery under Lt. J. Webb Adams, and the supply wagons as directed. In addition, 220 men of the 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry under Maj. Frank W. Hess, seconded from Gregg's division, acted as a screening force to prevent enemy videttes from discovering the large infantry force following just behind.<sup>89</sup>



**Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys**  
civilwarphotos.net



**Brig. Gen. Thomas A. Smyth**  
wikitree.com

Compared to Gregg and Warren, Humphreys's Federals faced a far shorter march. They had to pick up Vaughan Road and proceed to the strategically important Hatcher's Run crossing (about four miles distant), which they were to secure together with the nearby ford at Armstrong's Mill. This movement would place the Federals close to the main Rebel works protecting Boydton Plank Road. Humphreys's role involved preventing the Confederates from charging out of their positions and cutting off either Gregg's cavalry raiders or Warren's supporting infantry from the main Union defenses further east.

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<sup>89</sup> *OR* 46/1:191, 224, 251-52.

The Unionists snaked down Vaughan Road, knowing they had entered “no man’s land,” where every tree or boulder could shield a Rebel. Whereas Warren’s soldiers recalled a bright, crisp morning, one of Mott’s Yankees remembered that “the weather was cold, damp, cloudy, and cheerless.” To ease apprehensions, some in Smyth’s division started singing “John Brown’s Body,” and soon, the whole division joined in. One soldier worried that the warbling might alert the enemy, but he participated nonetheless. When the column reached the McDowell house around 8:00 a.m., Humphreys halted his force and assessed the situation. Brigadier General P. Regis De Trobriand’s brigade, Mott’s division, received orders to secure the Vaughan Road crossing of Hatcher’s Run, about two miles further down the road. His Yankees marched past Smyth’s division and set off on their mission.<sup>90</sup>

#### Contesting the Vaughan Road-Hatcher’s Run Crossing

Preceded by three cavalry companies, commanded by Maj. Hess, Brig. Gen. De Trobriand led his infantry brigade and one section of Roder’s Battery, under Lt. Edward S. Smith, toward the crossing. The cavalry flushed out several Confederate videttes who fled without firing a gun. The Federals continued their advance and soon reached Hatcher’s Run, where they found the bridge destroyed. Some Rebels on the opposite bank posted behind strong entrenchments prepared to resist any advance. Deployed as skirmishers, the 2nd US Sharpshooters commanded by Maj. James E. Doughty moved forward, quickly provoking a sharp musketry fire.<sup>91</sup>

Instructed by De Trobriand to “force the crossing,” the cavalry found the Run obstructed by felled trees and made impassable by deep holes dug in the stream bed. Major Hess reported the situation to De Trobriand, who decided to gain the crossing with part of his infantry. The 2nd U.S. Sharpshooters again deployed as skirmishers in front and right of the Confederate earthworks to maintain their attention. De Trobriand ordered the 99th Pennsylvania, Col. Edwin R. Biles commanding, supported by Maj. Isaac T. Hamilton’s 110th Pennsylvania, to make the actual assault some 200 yards below, near a broken dam, and carry the position.

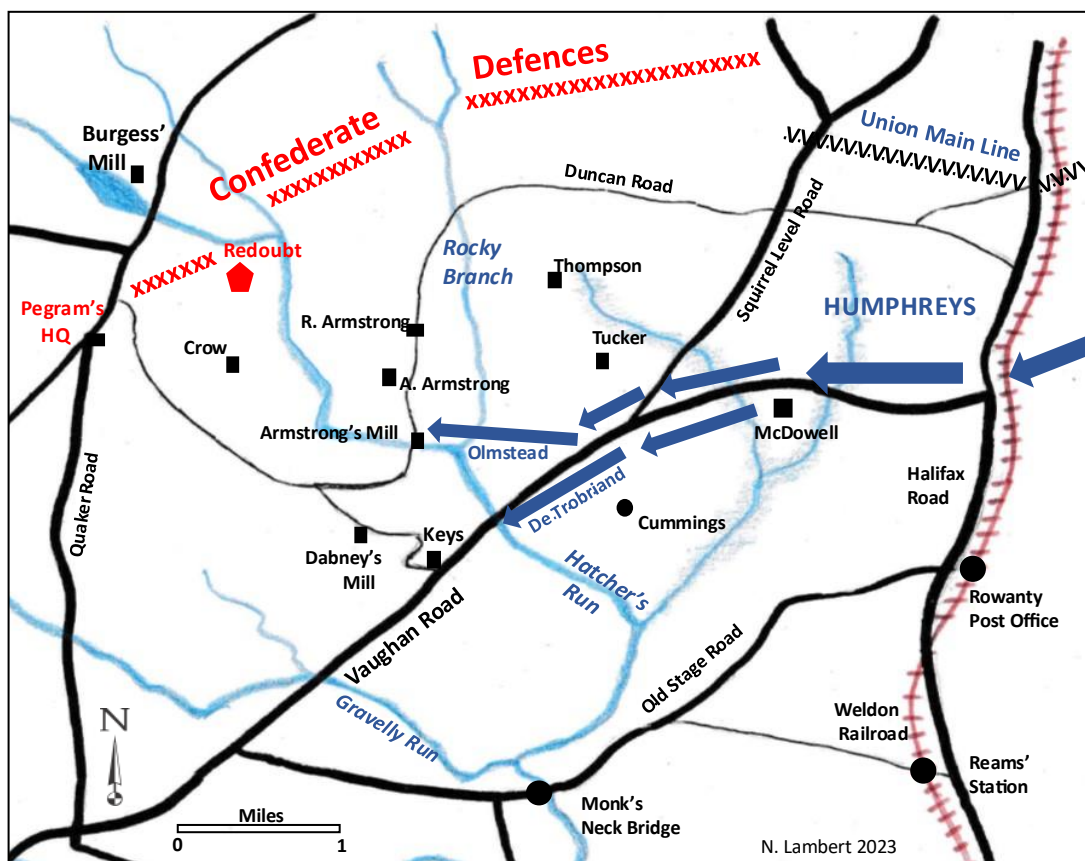
After waiting about 15 minutes without hearing from Col. Biles, De Trobriand went in person to ascertain the cause of the delay. To his astonishment, he found the two regiments lying in the woods, completely inactive. When asked why he hadn’t executed his orders, Biles explained that someone had said the Run was impassable. He supposed he had to regulate his movements on the sharpshooters. Without losing further time in explanation, De

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<sup>90</sup> OR 46/1:191; Edwin B. Houghton, *Campaigns of the 17th Maine* (Portland, ME, 1866), 257; Edward G. Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond: The 12th New Jersey Volunteer Infantry, II Corps, Army of the Potomac 1862-1865* (Hightstown, NJ, 1988), 264. Authors sometimes erroneously referred to the house as the McDougal house OR 46/1:220, 224, 226.

<sup>91</sup> OR 46/1:163-64, 224, 226, 251-52; Frederick C. Floyd, *History of the 40th (Mozart) Regiment, New York Volunteers, which was Composed of Four Companies from New York, Four Companies from Massachusetts and Two Companies from Pennsylvania* (Boston, MA, 1909), 239; Houghton, *Campaigns of the 17th Maine*, 257-58; Gerald L. Earley, *The 2nd United States Sharpshooters in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC, 2009), 200-02; On Feb 3, men of this renown but depleted sharpshooter unit learned they were to be disbanded. The battle marked their last combat, and their one killed and two wounded on Feb 5, their last blood spilled in the war. The unit split up on Feb 16.

Trobriand ordered the two regiments forward and charged with them across a small open field down to Hatcher's Run. The Rebels quickly abandoned their position, and the Federals crossed the stream unchallenged but not without some physical difficulty. One after the other, the men had to jump from log to log. De Trobriand himself had to dismount and traverse the stream on foot among his men so he could organize them once across. One source claimed 23 year old Capt. Emanuel Brallier, 110th Pennsylvania, "mounted the Rebel works first." Whereas in post-battle awards for enlisted men, Sgt. Michael Feathers and Sgt. George. W. Gooderham both of the 110th, were noted as "the first to place the colors on the enemy works."<sup>92</sup>



Map 4.1: Union 2nd Corps Movements February 5, 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

With the crossing secured by about 9:30 a.m., De Trobriand's men quickly occupied the Confederate entrenchments. The rest of his brigade moved across and began to protect the position from enemy attack, the Rebels having kept skirmishers a short distance in front of the Federals' center and right. De Trobriand advanced a strong Union picket line and placed

<sup>92</sup> OR 46/1:163-4, 226-27; Floyd, *History of the 40th (Mozart) Regiment*, 239-40; Horace H. Shaw, *The 1st Maine Heavy Artillery 1862-1865* (Portland, ME, 1903), 357-58; Charles H. Weygant, *History of the 124th Regiment, NYSV* (Newburgh, NY, 1877), 405; John E. Gable, *History of Cambria County, Pennsylvania*, 3 vols, (NY,1926), 2:1221; General Orders No. 11.

his largest regiment, the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery, in reserve to reinforce any part of the line should the enemy return in force.<sup>93</sup>

#### Contesting the Armstrong's Mill-Hatcher's Run Crossing

As De Trobriand's men seized the Vaughan Road-Hatcher's Run crossing, Smyth's division received orders to secure the equally crucial ford at Armstrong's Mill, a bit further north. The division consisted of three brigades commanded by Col. William A. Olmstead, Col. Mathew Murphy, and Lt. Col. Francis E. Pierce. From the McDowell house, marching in that order, they continued on Vaughan Road to near the Cummings house before moving to the right through woods. Up ahead, a 50-strong detachment of Pennsylvania cavalry led by Lt. George W. Ewing drove away some Rebel videttes. Olmstead's Yankees continued westward, crossing Rocky Branch and approaching Armstrong's Mill on Hatcher's Run. In front of the ford, the Confederates occupied a naturally strong location, which they had covered with earthworks. The Rebels had concentrated their greatest force between Armstrong's Mill and the A. Armstrong house.<sup>94</sup>

At 8:30 a.m., Olmstead's lead regiment, the 19th Massachusetts, commanded by Lt. Col. Edmund Rice, went forward to support the cavalry skirmishers. Five companies of the 19th deployed to the right of the A. Armstrong house, two in its front and one to the left; the remaining two companies advanced and engaged the enemy's skirmishers. After heavy fighting, they carried the works in front of the ford, driving the Confederates back to their battle lines across the stream. The commander of Company E, Lt. William Tibbetts, was shot while his men tried to traverse the Run. Rice dispatched a stretcher to him, and Companies A and B under Lt. Joseph E. Hodgkins went to relieve Tibbetts's command. They advanced at the double-quick and reached the position without injury, although Confederate bullets fell thickly about them. They got Lt. Tibbetts back safely, but he died soon afterward. He had only received his promotion from sergeant major five days earlier. In addition, Company E lost Pvt. Robert Pike killed, and three other men wounded.<sup>95</sup>

The 19th Maine, commanded by Lt. Col. Joseph W. Spaulding, advanced to support the Massachusetts men. Two companies of skirmishers managed to cross the stream, keeping out of view from the Rebel rifle pits positioned higher on the bank some 50 yards away. The rest of the regiment slowly crossed the stream, one man at a time, via a fallen tree. Once across, the Maine soldiers rushed the Rebel position, and within 15 minutes, the enemy ran from their rifle pits, which the Yankees immediately occupied. The 19th Maine remained to guard the crossing as the rest of Smyth's division marched up Duncan Road and went in line of battle beyond the A. Armstrong house. In his report, Lt. Col. Pierce claimed that his 7th

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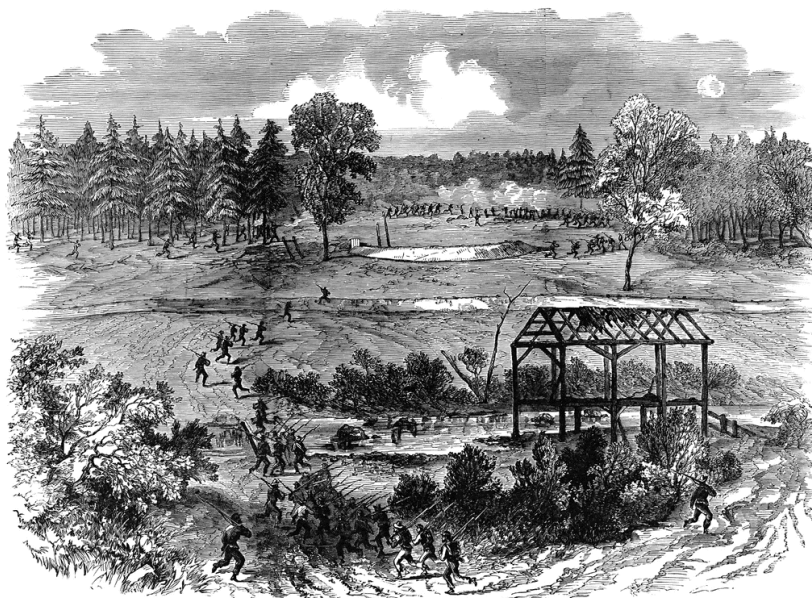
<sup>93</sup> OR 46/1:192, 227. Despite the name, this Heavy Artillery unit possessed no cannons. In the summer of 1864, the Union withdrew many Heavy Artillery regiments from fortifications and sent them to the front as infantry.

<sup>94</sup> OR 46/1:163-64, 212, 214-15, 220, 222, Ernest L. Waitt, *History of the 19th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1861-1865* (Salem, MA, 1906), 357. In moving to the right of Vaughan Road it is uncertain if Smyth's men used a trail, an old cart track, or open ground. Maps for the time showed no trail in that area.

<sup>95</sup> Waitt, *History of the 19th Regiment*, 357-58; OR 46/1:215-16.

West Virginia (comprised of only four companies) went to Col. Olmstead, who ordered them across the stream as one of the first regiments to occupy the opposite bank.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, by around 10:30 a.m., the Federals, with relative ease, had captured both strategic crossings of Hatcher's Run and incurred less than 20 casualties.



**Armstrong's Mill**

A Frank Leslie painting (1894) depicting fighting at the mill during the October 1864 battle.  
(wikimedia.org)

### The Confederate Perspective

The Confederates guarding the two crossings of Hatcher's Run were advanced pickets from Brig. Gen. Robert D. Johnston's Brigade, Pegram's division. Johnston was on leave, and Col. Lea, commander of the 5th North Carolina, led the Tar Heel brigade throughout the battle.<sup>97</sup> Lea had strict orders to "move without delay and oppose any force attempting to cross Hatcher's Run," such was the importance of these crossings to Lee's army. Around dawn, cavalry videttes reported to Lea that a large enemy force was advancing along Vaughan Road. He got the brigade under arms and marched toward the Federals. Upon arriving within

<sup>96</sup> OR 46/1:215, 222, John D. Smith, *The History of the 19th Regiment of Maine Volunteer Infantry, 1862-1865* (Minneapolis, MN, 1909), 264-65. The role of the 7th WV in securing the crossing is uncertain. They are not mentioned in any other account. Pierce claimed they crossed the stream around 11:00 a.m. under heavy fire, which is too late to fit the consensus narrative. This small regiment was equipped with repeating rifles so their use in such an advanced role was possible.

<sup>97</sup> Many accounts overlook the absence of Brig. Gen. Johnston at the battle, Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 39; Lambert, "Rebel Units and Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher's Run," Part 2. Known to his friends as "Gimlet," John Lea was a character of some notoriety. Wounded at the battle of Williamsburg 1862, he had been found and cared for by none other than George Custer (then a Federal lieutenant), an old West Point friend. During his recuperation at a nearby house, Lea fell in love with a daughter of the family household and they were married three months later. Custer frequently visited Lea during his convalescence and was a groomsman at the wedding. Daniel Davis, "Brothers at Bassett Hall," *Emerging Civil War Online*, October 25, 2011, [Brothers at Bassett Hall | Emerging Civil War](#).

a few hundred yards of the stream, Lea saw his Rebel pickets fleeing towards him. The crossings were under Yankee control. Lea formed his men in a defensive line facing Armstrong's Mill across Hatcher's Run, but no significant fighting occurred.<sup>98</sup>

News of the Union offensive, particularly the action around Armstrong's Mill and the Vaughan Road crossing, reached Robert. E. Lee in the late morning as he attended Sunday church in Petersburg. Lee rushed back to his army's lines and met his senior generals: A. P. Hill (Third Corps commander), Maj. Gen. Gordon (Second Corps commander), Brig. Gen. Evans (a Second Corps divisional commander) and Maj. Gen. Henry Heth (a Third Corps divisional commander). The advance of Humphreys's 2nd Corps Yankees to within 1,000 yards of the main Rebel works defending their essential Boydton Plank Road communication route would have particularly troubled the Rebel commanders.



**Lt. Gen. A. P. Hill**  
wikipedia.org



**Col. John W. "Gimlet" Lea**  
carolana.com

Around 2:00 p.m., Lee sent a brief message to his government in Richmond announcing that at 11:00 a.m., the Federals had crossed Hatcher's Run, and he was preparing to meet them. There is no record of what transpired at this commanders' meeting, thus robbing posterity of any insight into the Rebel strategy. Based on what followed, the Confederate high command appeared to have devoted most of the afternoon to planning a response.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Lea's battle report is in the *OR Supplements* and one of the few Rebel accounts, albeit brief, describing these actions. Janet B. Hewett, et al., eds. *Supplement to the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 100 Vols. (Wilmington, NC, 1994-2001), vol. 7, pages 803-04, hereafter cited as *ORS* 7:803-04; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 406. The 1st NC Sharpshooter Battalion served as remote pickets on the far left of Pegram's sector. Lea's brigade comprised five NC regiments; in Clark, *Histories of the Several Regiments from North Carolina*, a 5-volume anthology, none of their accounts discussed these actions.

<sup>99</sup> Susan P. Lee, *Memoirs of William Nelson Pendleton* (Philadelphia, 1893), 389. The story of "Lee at church" is often mentioned in modern Hatcher's Run narratives, although the original citation is rarely stated. Susan Pendleton Lee was the daughter of Maj. Gen. William Pendleton, Lee's chief of artillery for most of the war. *OR* 46/1:381; Richmond received Lee's message at 2:45 p.m. Lee probably sent it an hour or so earlier.

### Humphreys's Troops Consolidate Their Positions

At 3:00 p.m., AOP commander Meade sent Grant a progress report of Humphreys's activities. He noted the capture of nine Rebels, all from Pegram's division. Three activities occurred simultaneously at different locations between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., which I now describe in turn.<sup>100</sup>

#### Linking up with Warren

Back at the Vaughan Road-Hatcher's Run crossing, the brigades of De Trobriand and Brig. Gen. George W. West (Mott's division) strengthened that position. Division pioneers constructed two bridges, one at the crossing and the other at the derelict dam just further south. The latter bridge was sufficiently sturdy to support cavalry and artillery. The 3rd Pennsylvania Cavalry crossed as soon as construction allowed, and they started to patrol down Vaughan Road. At 2:00 p.m., Brig. Gen. West moved his brigade across the stream and began entrenching to the left of the road with his left flank resting on Hatcher's Run. De Trobriand's men entrenched on the right of the road with their right flank resting on the stream, creating a fortified arc. Captain Roder's battery of 12-pounders crossed over to further strengthen the position.

With communication established across the Run, corps commander Humphreys and division commander Mott arrived to inspect the position. They ordered De Trobriand to push down Vaughan Road, take possession of the Dabney's Mill Road intersection near the Keys house, and set up contact with Warren's 5th Corps near Gravelly Run. The 40th New York and 105th Pennsylvania (seconded from West's brigade) advanced to support the Federal cavalry, who had already engaged Rebel pickets. A small Rebel force posted near the Keys house retired into some woods after exchanging a few shots. With that position secured, Hess's cavalry and the 105th Pennsylvania advanced further down the road. After more skirmishing, they formed a picket line and made contact with the 5th Corps near Gravelly Run at around 3:00 p.m.<sup>101</sup>

These brief confrontations with Rebels were probably those described in Col. Lea's report: By 2:00 p.m., Pegram had brought up the rest of his division to support Lea's brigade facing Armstrong's Mill. While extending their picket line to the right, towards Vaughan Road, a squadron of Yankee cavalry suddenly charged them, capturing or killing three Rebels from the 20th North Carolina. Tar Heel Pvt. Samuel Sims, "after being wounded, refused to surrender and had his cap sabered from his head. The [Union] cavalry, the advance of a brigade . . . retired as rapidly as they had advanced."<sup>102</sup>

#### Establishing a Federal Line West of Rocky Branch

Once across the Armstrong's Mill ford, Maj. Gen. Smyth deployed the brigades of Col. Murphy and Col. Olmstead in a dogleg formation anchored to Rocky Branch on the right

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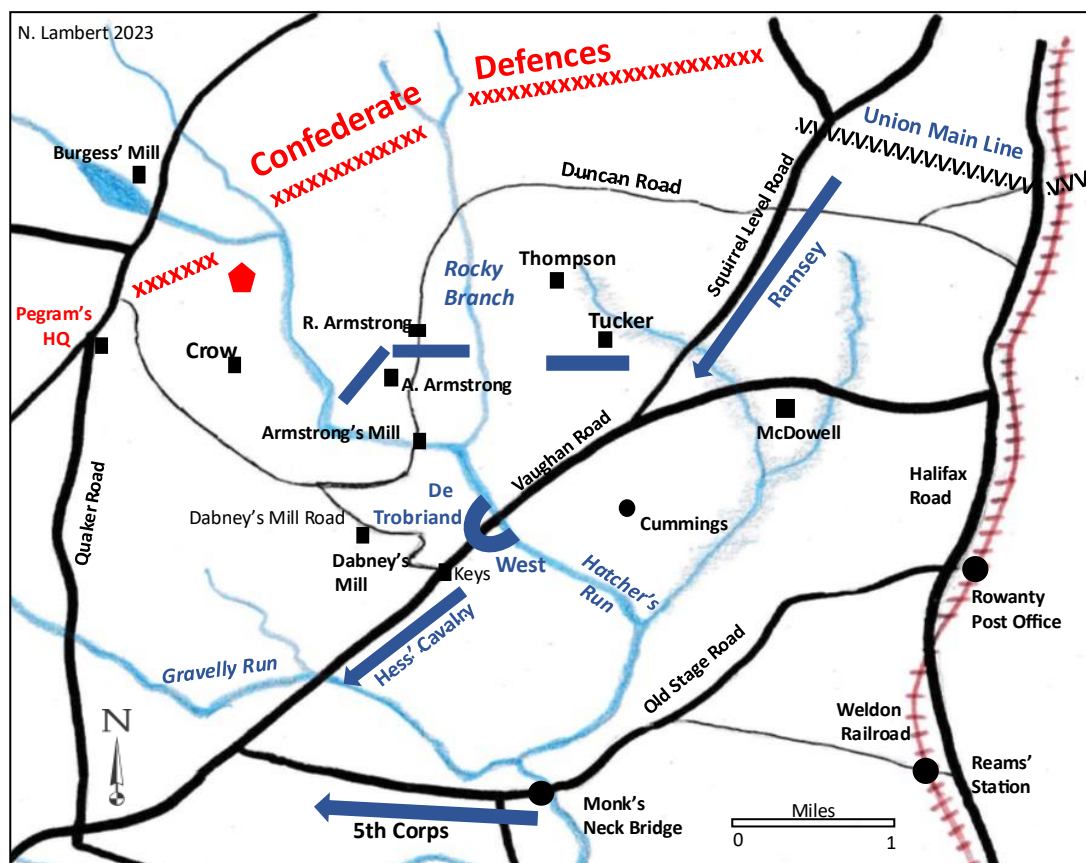
<sup>100</sup>OR 46/2:400

<sup>101</sup>OR 46/1:164-65, 192, 224, 227, 235. The 40th NY was the renowned Mozart regiment. Hess claimed to have captured five Rebels in these actions.

<sup>102</sup>ORS 7:804.

and Hatcher's Run on the left. The men quickly began building entrenchments. Regiments in Pierce's brigade acted as a reserve and went to support other troops where needed.

Murphy's battle line between the two Armstrong houses faced north, with its right flank secured to Rocky Branch. The 1st Delaware, Pierce's brigade, went to support Murphy's extreme right. The 182nd New York served as pickets just beyond the R. Armstrong house. This regiment was formed in March 1864 by reorganizing the 69th New York State National Guard Artillery (NYSNGA), a renowned Irish regiment.<sup>103</sup>



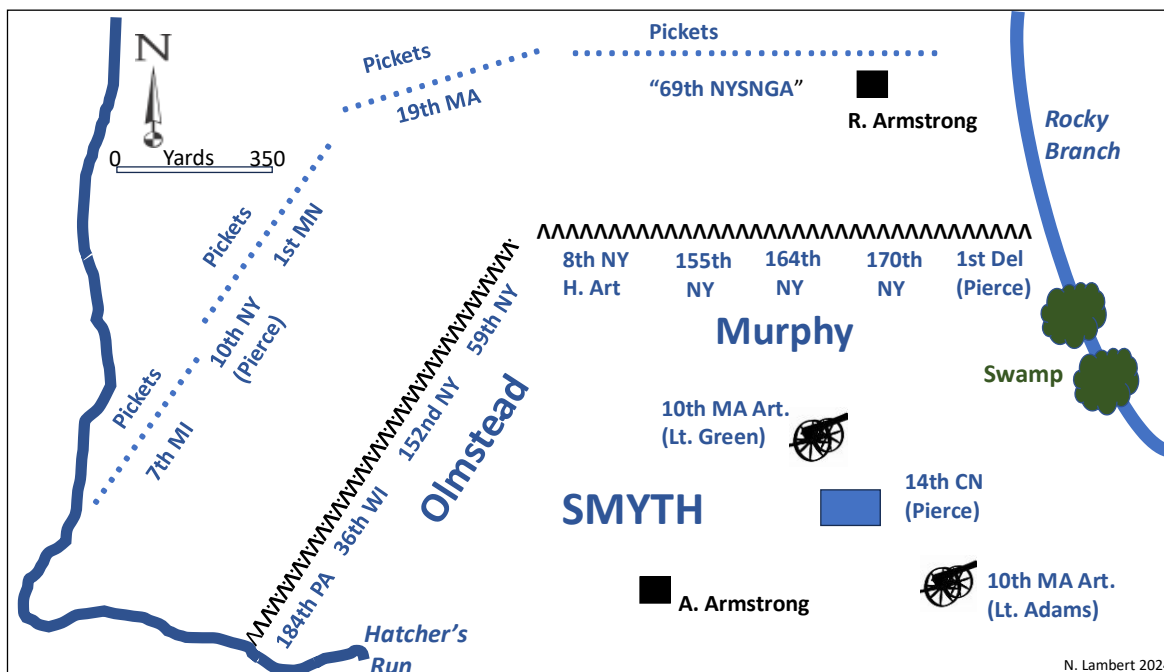
Map 4.2: Federal Positions Around Hatcher's Run, February 5, 3:30 p.m.

Olmstead's men formed a line facing northwest into woods, with its left flank resting on Hatcher's Run and its right flank connected to Murphy's left. The regimental order from the left was 184th Pennsylvania, 36th Wisconsin, 152nd New York, and 59th New York on the right. The 7th Michigan, 1st Minnesota (only composed of two companies), and 19th Massachusetts served as pickets in front of the main line.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Christopher M. Garcia, "The Forgotten 69th", M.A. Thesis, Old Dominion University, 2012, 85-87. Mathew Murphy, an important member of the Irish New York Community was a former NYSNGA commander. The renaming of the regiment caused great dissatisfaction among the New Yorkers, and in most *OR* it retained the 69th NYSNGA name. The Armstrongs were a significant family in the area, owning the mill and these two houses.

<sup>104</sup> *OR* 46/1:214. The regimental sequence of Olmstead's line is tentative; the *OR* from Smyth, Olmstead, and Pierce presented contrasting testimony. Information from memoirs also provided an incomplete picture.

Smyth placed two sections of the 10th Massachusetts Battery (four 10-pounder rifled Parrott cannons) commanded by Lt. Milbrey Green and Lt. Adams upon some elevated ground behind the Union line. This provoked a Confederate battery to open fire, but the Federals did not reply, it being evident that the Rebels were only feeling the position. The 14th Connecticut, commanded by Lt. Col. Samuel A. Moore, went to support this Federal battery. These cannons would feature prominently in what happened later that day.<sup>105</sup>



**Map 4.3: The Federal Line West of Rocky Branch, February 5, around 4:00 p.m.**

In the early afternoon, division commander Smyth ordered the 20th Massachusetts (Olmstead's brigade), 69th Pennsylvania, and 106th Pennsylvania (both from Pierce's brigade) across Rocky Branch to make contact with the Federals of Mott's division, namely Brig. Gen. Robert McAllister's brigade. These regiments served as pickets in front of McAllister's line.<sup>106</sup> At 2:00 p.m., Pierce sent his 12th New Jersey to the rear to repair muddy roads. The men resented being the only outfit called upon for this fatigue duty, as they spent the next two hours in the freezing cold, laying logs across soggy earth to allow artillery and supply wagons access to the front. Meanwhile, their divisional comrades continued creating earthworks to protect their new lines.<sup>107</sup>

Despite being within 1,000 yards of the Rebel works to the north, little fighting occurred throughout the early afternoon, apart from a few minor skirmishes and the

<sup>105</sup> OR 46/1:222-23, John D. Billings, *The History of the Tenth Massachusetts Battery of Light Artillery in the War of the Rebellion, 1862-1865* (Boston, MA, 1909), 382.

<sup>106</sup> OR 46/1:212,214. The 20th MA was the famous Harvard regiment which included many noted scholars from Harvard University such as Oliver W. Holmes. However, by the end of 1864 the unit was but a shell of its former self. The 106th PA only had three companies.

<sup>107</sup> OR 46/1:222; Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond*, 265; Waite, *History of the 19th Regiment*, 358.

occasional Confederate cannon fire. Shortly after noon, soldiers with the 19th Massachusetts, Olmstead's brigade, recalled seeing a large company of Confederates led by a mounted officer going at the double-quick to a small "redoubt" directly in front of some Yankee pickets from Companies A and B. The Federals fired several volleys, but the Rebels reached the shelter and immediately opened a terrible fire, driving the two companies back. Soon afterward, the whole Massachusetts regiment advanced and silenced the Rebels, who declined to contest the matter further. According to Smyth, at around 3:00 p.m., the Rebels made weak attacks on the left of his line, particularly to the left of the R. Armstrong house. Smyth regarded these as a feint for possible actions on the right.<sup>108</sup>

#### Establishing a Federal Line East of Rocky Branch

With the brigades of De Trobriand and West guarding the Vaughan Road crossing, the final brigade in Mott's division, commanded by Brig. Gen. McAllister set about forming a battle line east of Rocky Branch. McAllister placed his 2,000 strong brigade across a road leading past the Tucker house, his right flank anchored onto a swamp. At 12:30 p.m., he received orders from Humphreys to build breastworks. His men soon got to work, extending them toward the marsh on the right to prevent any enemy flanking attack. As described above, Smyth sent three regiments from his division to picket in front of McAllister's line. McAllister placed the remaining section of the 10th Massachusetts Battery, Lt. George H. Day commanding, behind his lines. After surveying the whole field and familiarizing himself with the roads and swamps in his front and right, McAllister returned to his command.<sup>109</sup>

Sergeant Marbaker, 11th New Jersey, recalled two fascinating tales regarding McAllister's inspections. While directing the 7th New Jersey, a soldier wearing the uniform of a Federal major approached McAllister and commented, "General, I almost took a Rebel officer." When McAllister asked why he hadn't, the stranger told him that the Rebel was well-armed. McAllister replied, "so are you," and asked who he was. The major replied that he commanded the pickets in his front. "So, you belong to the Second [Smyth's] Division," responded McAllister and thought no more of the fellow. However, shortly after, when he had a query about the picket deployment, the major had disappeared. McAllister then believed that the mysterious major may have been a Rebel spy. Sometime after the war had ended, McAllister met with Rebel Second Corps Commander Gordon. During their conversation about the battle, McAllister asked Gordon if he had sent someone in a Union major's uniform to spy on his position. Gordon replied, "most likely I did."

In another postwar conversation, Lt. U. B. Titus, an ordnance officer with Mott's division, learned from Lt. Thomas G. Jones on Gordon's staff that when McAllister and his staff rode out to inspect the picket line, Jones and a group of Rebels lay in ambush. With their guns pointed at the Federal party, Lt. Jones ordered his men not to fire, saying, "that man

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<sup>108</sup> OR 46/1:212-13; Waitt, *History of the 19th Regiment*, 358. A "redoubt" is an enclosed fortification constructed to defend a position from attack from any direction.

<sup>109</sup> OR 46/1:238, 191; OR 46/2:451; Alonzo B. Searing, *Alonzo's War: Letters from a Young Civil War Soldier*, Mary S. O'Shaughnessy, ed (Madison, NJ, 2012), 191.

looks too honest to be shot down like a dog.” Had they fired, probably not one of the Federals would have survived. Gordon corroborated the story during his postwar conversation with McAllister. An Alabama newspaper account claimed that it was Maj. Gen. Gordon himself, watching on through a field glass, that gave the order not to fire.<sup>110</sup>

In the early afternoon, corps commander Humphreys inspected Smyth’s and McAllister’s positions. Based on past experiences where the Confederates targeted interfaces between Union divisions, Humphreys felt that here, the Mott-Smyth interface, would be the probable focus of any enemy assault. Alarming, he discovered that McAllister didn’t have enough men to stretch from the swamp securing his right, to join with Murphy’s men on the left. This created a gap of several hundred yards in the Union line. After conferring with Army Commander Meade at about 2:00 p.m., Humphreys ordered 2nd Corps division commander Maj. Gen. Miles (who had remained behind in the works facing Petersburg) to quickly send a strong brigade to relieve McAllister’s right wing, thus allowing McAllister to slide left and connect with Smyth’s division. Miles hastily sent forth Brig. Gen. John Ramsey’s brigade of 1,100 men.<sup>111</sup>



**Lt. Thomas G. Jones**  
Alabama Dept. of Archives and History



**Brig. Gen. Robert McAllister**  
New Jersey State Archives

Regimental commander Col. William L. Mintzer, 53rd Pennsylvania, of Ramsey’s brigade, recalled marching about two miles to the left of their present position, moving just south of and parallel to Squirrel Level Road, before relieving McAllister’s men at the Tucker house around 4:00 p.m. Meanwhile, Mott sent McAllister instructions stating that he would soon be relieved by Brig. Gen. Ramsey, thus enabling him to move to the left and, if possible, connect with the right of Smyth’s division at Rocky Branch. However, McAllister’s report did not mention Mott’s orders. McAllister claimed that at 3:30 p.m., a staff officer from Ramsey

<sup>110</sup> Marbaker, *History of the 11th New Jersey Volunteers*, 272-73; *The Marion [AL] Commonwealth*, October 5, 1871, [Thomas G. Jones - Wikipedia](#).

<sup>111</sup> *OR* 46/1:192, 195, 207; *OR* 46/2:398. In his report, Miles claimed to have received this order at 3:30 p.m. which cannot be correct as they were relieving McAllister’s men before 4:00 p.m.

gave him a telegram from corps commander Humphreys, ordering Ramsey to relieve him from his position. At the same time, Ramsey and his Yankees began to arrive. McAllister obeyed the order and sent his adjutant-general, Capt. John P. Finkelmeier to division headquarters for further orders. McAllister massed his brigade in the rear of his original position, claiming that his order mentioned nothing about moving to the left.<sup>112</sup>

At about 3:30 p.m., Mott frustratingly learned from McAllister's adjutant-general that, on being relieved, he had massed his command in the rear of his former position. Mott instantly ordered him back to tell McAllister to deploy immediately and fill the gap between Ramsey's brigade and Smyth's division to his left. Mott also sent his aide-de-camp (Capt. Moore) to ensure McAllister executed the order.<sup>113</sup>



**Brig. Gen. John Ramsey**  
Library of Congress



**Maj. Gen. John G. Parke**  
Library of Congress

Since noon, as reports arrived at his headquarters, Meade became increasingly concerned about the exposed nature of Humphreys's Federals. At 1:40 p.m., Meade ordered 9th Corps commander Maj. Gen. John G. Parke to send Maj. Gen. John F. Hartranft's division (3,200 officers and men) from the Petersburg defenses down Vaughan Road to act as a reserve for Humphreys.<sup>114</sup>

With the Federal line east of Rocky Branch just about in place by 4:00 p.m., Ramsey hastily deployed some pickets to his front. But as Ramsey's Yankees extended their battle line towards the right to reach the swamp, a gap arose with McAllister's men on his left. To plug this gap, McAllister hastily moved his rear regiment, the 11th New Jersey, destined for the left flank, to the right flank to link up with Ramsey. In the next chapter, we discover the significant consequences of this minor adjustment.<sup>115</sup>

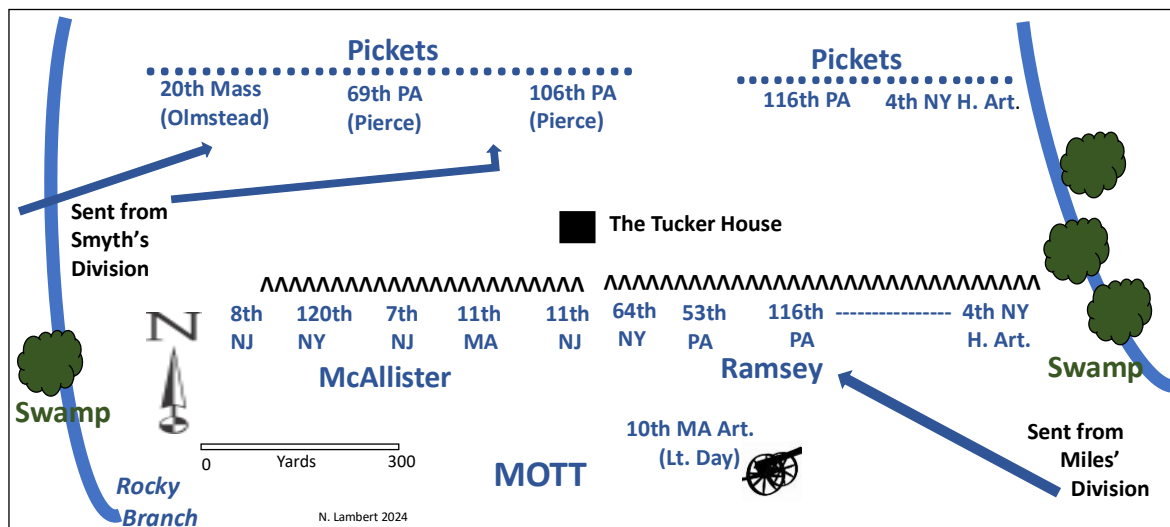
<sup>112</sup> OR 46/1: 208, 224, 238; Robert McAllister, *The Civil War Letters of General Robert McAllister*, James I. Robertson, ed. (New Brunswick, NJ, 1965), 581.

<sup>113</sup> OR 46/1:224.

<sup>114</sup> OR 46/2:407-08; OR 46/1:193.

<sup>115</sup> OR 46/1:210-11, 238-39; Marbaker, *History of the 11th New Jersey Volunteers*, 270-71. Both the 4th NY Heavy Artillery and 116th PA threw some pickets out to Ramsey's front.

With the sun low in the sky, sunset was around 5:30 p.m., a brief Rebel bombardment suggested to Union veterans that an enemy attack could be imminent.<sup>116</sup>



**Map 4.4: The Federal Line East of Rocky Branch, February 5, around 4:00 p.m.**

### Analysis

This phase of the battle involved numerous troop movements in various locations. Although a consensus exists, some details are missing or conflicting. Again, the scarcity of Confederate insight is disappointing. Given the stated importance of the two Hatcher's Run crossings to the Confederacy, Pegram's division and Lea's brigade, in particular, did a poor job defending them. The Federals easily secured both crossings, incurring fewer than 20 casualties. Less than three miles separated Armstrong's Mill from Col. Lea's headquarters near the Crow house. Lea's report showed that he knew of the Federal advance around sun-up. But those holding the crossings fled before Lea arrived to support them. Despite defending in earthworks behind a stream, the Rebel pickets appeared no match for the scores of Yankees, some armed with repeating rifles. Low morale among the cold, hungry Rebels was probably a significant factor contributing to the timid defense. Lea's report presented no sense of remorse in surrendering these valued crossings.<sup>117</sup>

In the five hours following their capture at around 10:30 a.m., Pegram made little attempt to menace the Federals around Hatcher's Run. Indeed, up to this point, 4:00 p.m., despite his responsibility for protecting Bobby Lee's right flank, Pegram's division had caused minimal inconvenience to any of the advancing Union forces.

<sup>116</sup> Mark M. Boatner, *Cassell's Biographical Dictionary of the American Civil War 1861-1865* (London, UK, 1959), 819-21; *OR* 46/1:192, 220.

<sup>117</sup> *ORS* 7:803-04.

**Table 4.1: Union Casualties in Securing the Two Hatcher's Run Crossings, February 5**

<u>Regiment</u>	<u>Brigade</u>	<u>Killed</u>	<u>Wounded</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>Total</u>
19th ME	Olmstead				0
19th MA	Olmstead	2	5	0	7
7th WV	Pierce				0
99th PA	De Trobriand				0
110th PA	De Trobriand	0	2	0	2
2nd US S' Shooters	De Trobriand	1	2	0	3
3rd PA Cavalry	Unattached	2	3	0	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>17</b>

Data taken from *OR 46/1:64-70*, which covers the entire three-day battle. As these units did not engage in further fighting, the assumption is that these casualties relate to this specific action.

The McAllister ambush anecdote is intriguing. Its authenticity is uncertain, but if true, it represented a generous gesture by Rebel Lt. Jones. Isolated acts of mercy occurred throughout the war, and fraternization among opposing forces was not uncommon. The loss of McAllister would have significantly impacted the following events.

By 4:00 p.m. on February 5, Lee's right flank looked especially vulnerable. The Confederates had to act: what would they do?

## Chapter 5

### The Rebels “Make a Vigorous and Sudden Attack”

Lee had met with his senior generals around noon to discuss the ongoing Federal offensive. Although no formal account of the meeting exists, an 1874 newspaper article reported that “the Rebel generals felt it unwise to let the enemy remain in their new position, so an attack was ordered immediately,” a view broadly supported in conventional modern accounts. For that date and place, the sun set at 5:30 p.m., and “military daylight” ended around 6:30 p.m., so time was pressing to organize a large strike. The Rebel commanders had much to consider: the objective of their attack, what units they could deploy, and the nature of the enemy forces they faced.<sup>118</sup>

Two clues shed some light on these tactical issues. In a post-war conversation, John Gordon told Robert McAllister that the Rebels employed *three divisions* in the attacks. This claim is contentious, as we shall discover. It is clear that elements from two Confederate divisions delivered most of the assaults, but other forces probably participated toward the end. In Humphreys’s memoir, he speculated that the main idea behind the Rebel assault entailed targeting Smyth’s division west of Rocky Branch, with the movement of Confederate forces east of the stream being an attempt to attack Smyth from the flank and rear. They had not expected to find any Federal forces around the Tucker house.<sup>119</sup>

#### The Broad Confederate Plan

Whatever the strategy, the Rebels prepared to attack the Union 2nd Corps. East of Rocky Branch, Brig. Gen. John R. Cooke’s Brigade of North Carolinians, Brig. Gen. William McComb’s Brigade of mostly Tennesseans and Brig. Gen. William MacRae’s Brigade of North Carolinians, all from Heth’s Division (Hill’s Third Corps), received orders to attack. This force comprised nearly 4,000 men. Heth’s other brigade, the Mississippians, commanded by Brig. Gen. Joseph R. Davis (a further 828 men) remained in the Rebel defenses as reserves.

Heth's brigade commanders featured interesting backstories. John Cooke was the brother-in-law of famed Rebel cavalier JEB Stuart. His father, Philip St. George Cooke, was

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<sup>118</sup> Jones, “Historical Sketch: Our Living and Our Dead”; Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 314-15; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:183-85; Greene, *The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign*, 102; Boatner, *Cassell’s Biographical Dictionary of the American Civil War*, 819-821; military daylight, or more specifically, “End of Evening Nautical Twilight,” was a measure of when a soldier could see sufficiently well to conduct military operations.

<sup>119</sup> Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 386; Francis A. Walker, *History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac* (New York, 1886), 647-48; Andrew A. Humphreys, *Campaigns of the Civil War: The Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65* (New York, 1883), 313.

a Union general. William McComb had only gained his promotion to brigadier general on January 20, 1865. Joseph Davis was the nephew of Confederate President Davis.<sup>120</sup> The combative Brig. Gen. MacRae was on leave throughout the battle, a fact overlooked by numerous historians. A. P. Hill bemoaned his absence and afterward opined that “if MacRae had been present, the outcome would have been different.” Exactly who commanded this brigade at the battle is unclear. The highest-ranking brigade officer after MacRae was Col. John Lane, so he seems a reasonable suggestion. Captain Louis Young, a brigade adjutant, explained how the senior commanders wanted to protect MacRae’s men from front-line action, having borne the brunt of heavy fighting in recent months. Consequently, they placed the brigade in line *behind* Cooke’s and McComb’s men.<sup>121</sup>

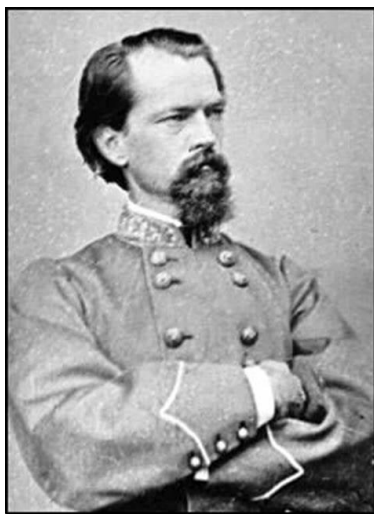
West of the stream, Brig. Gen. Evans’s division, Gordon’s Second Corps, also received orders to advance. This force of over 2,600 men comprised three brigades: Brig. Gen. William R. Terry’s Virginians, Col. William R. Peck’s Louisianians, and Col. John H. Baker’s Georgians. The former two brigades were consolidated units, with Peck’s brigade

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<sup>120</sup> Lambert & Suderow, “Hatcher’s Run,” 36-37. Cooke had a highly active war. Wounded seven times, four of which were severe, he became a brigadier general in November 1862. McComb took over command from the popular Brig. Gen. James J. Archer who had died in October 1864. Davis had gained his brigadier general’s commission in September 1862 and led the brigade through many bitter battles; Lambert, *Rebel Units, and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher’s Run*, Part 3.

<sup>121</sup> Lambert & Suderow, “Hatcher’s Run,” 36-37; Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 315; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:186, 189; Chris Calkins, “History and Tour Guide of Five Forks, Hatcher’s Run and Namozine Church,” *Blue & Gray Magazine* (2003), Special Issue, 15, 173; Greene, *The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign*, 102. As of Feb 2024, the site boards on the battlefield depict MacRae as present. This issue is discussed in detail by Lambert, *Rebel Units, and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher’s Run*, Part 3. MacRae went on leave on Jan 29 with his colleague Col. Samuel Walkup commander of the 48th NC, Samuel Walkup, *Writings of a Rebel Colonel: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Samuel Walkup, 48th North Carolina Infantry*, Kemp Burpeau ed. (Jefferson, NC, 2021), 150; Paul Branch, *General William MacRae: Lee’s Fighting Brigadier*, Cape Fear Historical Institute, [General William MacRae \(cfhi.net\)](http://cfhi.net); Earl J. Hess, *Lee’s Tar Heels: The Pettigrew-Kirkland-MacRae Brigade* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002), 284-87. Others have proposed that Lt. Col. James Adams commanded the brigade, with both Col. Lane and Col. Thomas C. Singletary absent through persistent illnesses. Adams’s diary briefly mentioned the battle but said nothing about him being in command, Venner, *The 11th North Carolina*, 196-97; Craig S. Chapman, *More Terrible Than Victory: North Carolina’s Bloody Bethel Regiment 1861-1865* (Washington, DC, 1998), 271; James Adams, “Reminiscences, 26th Regiment NC Infantry”, p18. The diary of Lt. Col. James Adams, [Civil War Diaries \(civilwardigital.com\)](http://civilwardigital.com). Some took this as evidence that Heth wanted to protect an inexperienced commander like Lt. Col. Adams, Louis Young, “The Pettigrew- Kirkland - MacRae Brigade,” in Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina, in the Great War 1861-65*. 5 vols. (Goldsboro, NC, 1901),4:567. Presumably, if Heth had desired to “protect” this brigade, he could have placed them in reserve instead of Davis’s experienced Mississippi Brigade. I had the pleasure of exchanging emails with Earl Hess, Craig Chapman, and Thomas Venner but reached no conclusion as to who commanded MacRae’s Brigade at the battle.

having only 450 men; it was a brigade in name only.<sup>122</sup> Many modern accounts mistakenly claimed that Col. John Lowe and not Baker commanded the Georgia Brigade at the Hatcher's Run battle.<sup>123</sup>



**Maj. Gen. John B. Gordon**  
US National Park Service Portrait Gallery



**Maj. Gen. Henry Heth**  
Wikipedia.org

Sometime in the afternoon, Lee called up more forces to support his threatened right flank. He ordered Mahone's Division from the Petersburg trenches to march to Gordon's position on their right. Whether they would arrive in time for the planned attack remained uncertain. With Mahone absent sick, Brig. Gen. Finegan commanded the division. These troops had only recently returned from a tiring operation to the North Carolina border.<sup>124</sup>

#### Driving in the Federal Pickets East of Rocky Branch

East of the stream, McAllister and Ramsey continued to arrange their lines. They tried to address a gap between the two brigades from Ramsey's bluecoats shuffling to the right. At

<sup>122</sup> *Inspection Reports and Related Records Received by the Inspection Branch in the Confederate Adjutant and Inspector General's Office*. (National Archives Microfilm Publication M935, Roll 14: Inspection Report 20-P-51); War Department Collection of Confederate Records, Record Group 109; National Archives Building, Washington, D.C. 1973. Hereafter cited as NARA M935, Roll 14, 20-P-51. An ANV stalwart, wounded seven times during the war, Terry gained his promotion to brigadier general in May 1864. He commanded a "consolidated" brigade made up of the remnants of 13 Virginia regiments, all that remained of three famous Confederate brigades (Stonewall Brigade, Jones's Brigade, and Steuart's Brigade). Colonel Peck had only returned to duty in December 1864 after suffering a serious wound two months previously. He took over the Louisiana Brigade from Brig. Gen. York, a long-term absentee. Also, a consolidated brigade, this force comprised only 450 men. Colonel Baker commanded what was formally known as Evans's Brigade. Evans had taken command of the division from Gordon, who became corps commander in December 1864.

<sup>123</sup> Lambert & Suderow, "Hatcher's Run," 36; Calkins, "History and Tour Guide of Five Forks," 15-17, 172; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:186-90. Lowe's name appears on the battle map used by the Civil War Battlefield Trust. Note that a capital "B" is used for formal brigade names. These issues are further discussed in Lambert, *Rebel Units, and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher's Run*, Parts 1-2.

<sup>124</sup> Ed Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray* (Cincinnati, OH, 1998), 34; Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 357.

this precise moment, the portents of a Rebel attack appeared as the Federal pickets before McAllister and Ramsey began running back.

The pickets in front of McAllister's position came from Smyth's division, namely the 69th and 106th Pennsylvania and 20th Massachusetts. Soon after 4:00 p.m., Rebels suddenly attacked them. McAllister and his regimental commanders all along the line witnessed the pickets in their front running back and crashing into their hastily formed battle line. The 7th New Jersey commander's comments were typical: "I had hardly occupied the line when the enemy made a vigorous and sudden attack on the pickets, driving them in." McAllister curtly mentioned, "The pickets in my ... front, having come running in without firing a shot, left the enemy right on us before I had my line completed."<sup>125</sup>

From the other side of the stream, Smyth watched with alarm at the attack on his three regiments. He swiftly ordered the 108th New York and 4th Ohio (composed of only four companies) of Pierce's brigade across Rocky Branch to support his menaced soldiers. Just as Pierce received Smyth's order, the 12th New Jersey returned from some fatigue work, and he sent them across the stream instead of the 108th New York, whom he dispatched to support the pickets in front of Olmstead's line.<sup>126</sup>

Some Rebel accounts described how they pushed back the Union pickets. The 27th North Carolina, Cooke's Brigade, marched over a mile to the front, turned to their right, and formed a battle line. Commanders positioned sharpshooters from MacRae's Brigade on the right to protect the flank, with skirmishers from McComb's Brigade in the front. The order to advance rang out, and after going a short distance, they struck the Federal "skirmish" line. McComb's skirmishers gave way and ran back through Cooke's men, leaving them in battle line to drive the Union "skirmishers" back over half a mile.<sup>127</sup>

One of McComb's soldiers, Lt. Samuel McCullough, 2nd Maryland Battalion, contested this view. He recalled how the various Confederate brigades got into lines of battle, crossed the breastworks, and advanced to within 800 yards of the Federals. Placed in charge of the battalion's skirmishers, McCullough, supported by skirmishers from other commands, pushed the Federals back to their battle line. Captain William H. Harder, 23rd Tennessee, on

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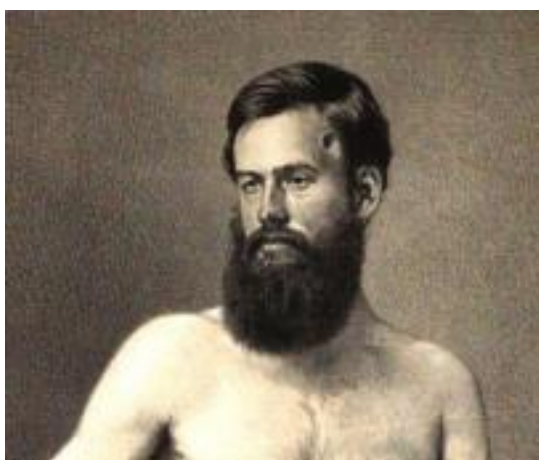
<sup>125</sup> OR 46/1:216, 238-39, 242-44, 246-48; William P. Seville, *History of the 1st Regiment Delaware Volunteers, from the Commencement of the "Three Months Service" to the Final Muster-out at the Close of the Rebellion*, (Wilmington, DE, 1884), 135.

<sup>126</sup> OR 46/1:212-13, 222-23, 238-39; Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond*, 265. Pierce stated that he sent the 12th New Jersey and 4th Ohio across Rocky Branch to connect with McAllister's brigade rather than support Smyth's pickets.

<sup>127</sup> James A. Graham, "The 27th Regiment," in Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina, in the Great War 1861-65*. 5 vols. (Goldsboro, NC, 1901), 2:451-52; John A. Sloan, *Reminiscences of The Guilford Grays, Company B, 27th NC Regiment* (Washington, DC, 1883), 109-110; Christopher Bingham, "From New Bern to Bennett Place with Cooke's Foot Cavalry: A History of the 27th Regiment of N.C. Troops, 1861-1865", M.A. dissertation, East Carolina University, 2007, 414-17. Note how eyewitness accounts used the terms "skirmishers" and "pickets" to describe the same Federal units. A picket line was a stationary guard line that provided an early warning of an approaching enemy. Hence from the defending Federal viewpoint, the soldiers in front of their battle line were "pickets." Advancing forces, as the Rebels were in this instance, typically put out a skirmish line to help "feel out" the enemy, hence the discussion of Rebel "skirmishers." One confusion is that the Rebels viewed Humphreys's force as advancing; hence they regarded the blue pickets as "skirmishers."

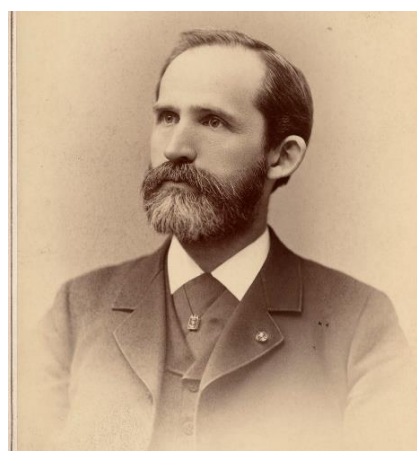
the far left of McComb's Brigade, recalled stepping out of their works at 4:00 p.m., forming a line of battle, and advancing towards the enemy. He described a furious fight involving hand-to-hand combat and several charges before driving the Yankee pickets back to their main line. An account from MacRae's Brigade reported how they sent their sharpshooters to protect the force's right flank (as noted previously). McComb's skirmishers ran into the Federal pickets, who immediately opened fire and halted the Rebels. McComb brought up his battle lines, quickly pushing the thin blue picket line back to their main defenses.<sup>128</sup>

Irrespective of the finer details, shortly after 4:00 p.m., the Rebels drove in these Federal pickets. The Confederate accounts suggested the pickets offered some resistance, and the Unionists suffered 16 casualties. McAllister's view that they ran back without firing a shot appeared to be hyperbole.



**Cpl. Edson DeWolf Bemis  
(head wound displayed)**

US National Museum of Health and Medicine



**Dr. Albert Vander Veer**  
albanyinstitute.org

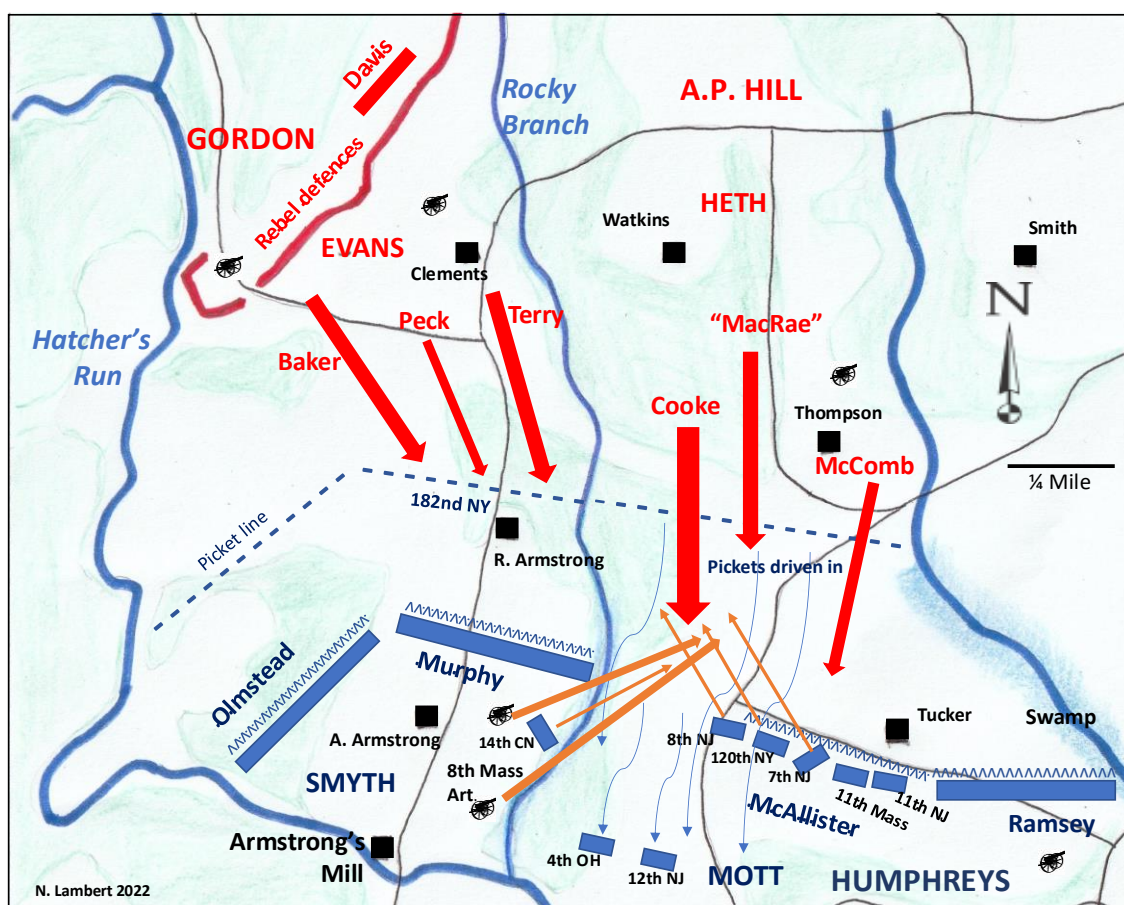
One of the Union pickets wounded was Cpl. Edson D. Bemis, 20th Massachusetts, the renowned Harvard Regiment. A Rebel minié ball entered his left temple and lodged deep within his brain. Taken to a field hospital with brain matter oozing from the wound, the surgeon issued a bleak prognosis. Remarkably, Bemis survived and lived until 1900, aged 59. Interestingly, the surgeon who performed the lifesaving, advanced operation was a young Albert Vander Veer, who, postwar, became a celebrated and pioneering surgeon.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>128</sup> Robert J. Driver, *First and Second Maryland Infantry CSA* (Bowie, MD, 2003), 311-12; William Henry Harder Memoirs, 1861-1865, Tennessee State Library and Archive, Nashville, TN, Mf. 574, p45-46; Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels*, 284.

<sup>129</sup> Bemis became a medical *cause célèbre* with several articles written about his injuries and how they impacted his life. He married in 1869 fathering four children. Neurological problems increasingly blighted his later life. Rebecca K. Sharp & Nancy L. Wing, "I Am Still in the Land of the Living: The Medical Case of Civil War Veteran Edson D. Bemis," *National Archives, Prologue Magazine* (Spring 2011), Vol. 44, No. 1, Genealogy Notes; Dillon Carroll, "The Civil War and P.T.S.D.," *The New York [NY] Times*, May 21, 2014. Dr Vander Veer went on to make significant contributions to medicine. He is credited with performing the first thyroidectomy. In 1916, he became President of the American Medical Association.

### The Rebels Attack East of Rocky Branch

Pandemonium reigned along McAllister's 2,000 strong line. Terrified Union pickets plunged into still-forming battle lines, with excited Rebels in close pursuit. The Federals needed cool heads. McAllister recalled how his troops "received a fire from the enemy and returned it, causing the left of the enemy's advancing line of battle to falter and lie down. The fire was taken up all along the line as fast as my troops were formed." Then disaster! The hastily built earthworks couldn't accommodate all McAllister's men, resulting in Maj. Henry Hartford's 8th New Jersey, on the extreme left of the line, having to stand in the open, totally exposed. McAllister proudly noted how "they stood nobly and fought splendidly." Hartford wrote, "the enemy, keeping up a desultory fire, soon made their appearance. They were greeted with a terrific volley of musketry from our men and thrown into confusion."<sup>130</sup>



Map 5.1: Confederates Attack the 2nd Corps Position, around 4.00 p.m., February 5, 1865.

A contentious issue involved the open area to the left of the 8th New Jersey position. Recall how Pierce had sent the 12th New Jersey and 4th Ohio across the stream to McAllister's left. Several testimonies suggested that they arrived around 4:00 p.m., but they fled when the Rebels advanced. Writing to his wife, McAllister claimed that these two regiments had been "lying for hours" a little to his left. He explained that he relied on these two regiments to stand firm and fill the large gap between himself and Smyth. But to his

<sup>130</sup> OR 46/1:238-39, 244-45.

amazement, they ran away as the Rebels approached and left him to fight the battle alone. McAllister added that the distance between his brigade and Murphy's brigade on his left across the swamp was at least 300 yards. He feared that the Rebels would sweep through this gap. In a letter to his sister, Pvt. Alonzo B. Searing, 11th New Jersey, echoed McAllister's observation.<sup>131</sup>

Despite McAllister's claims, others reported that Smyth's two regiments held their ground to an extent. They suffered seven casualties, indicating that they did not immediately flee. Their losses didn't compare to those of the 8th New Jersey (48 casualties), implying that, unlike the 8th, they did depart at some point, as others observed.<sup>132</sup>

To the immediate right of the 8th New Jersey, Lt. Col. Abram L. Lockwood, commanding the 120th New York, recollected:

Before I got my regiment into position fairly, the firing from the enemy became very severe, advancing through the woods with a yell, apparently making a desperate charge to break through our hastily formed line. I immediately ordered my regiment to open fire, which they did, pouring into the enemy so destructive a fire that they were driven back.

McAllister rode along his line with his adjutant-general, encouraging the men to stand firm and declaring victory would be theirs. Lockwood and other officers rose to their feet doing likewise.<sup>133</sup>

Next in line was Col. Francis Price's 7th New Jersey. McAllister formed this regiment at an angle so they could pour an enfilading fire onto the Confederates advancing towards the gap between McAllister and Rocky Branch, adding significantly to the Rebel repulse. To their right, the 11th Massachusetts opened fire, checking the advance on their front. Finally, on McAllister's extreme right resided the 11th New Jersey, Lt. Col. John Schoonover commanding. Recall how these men, moments earlier, had been destined for the now dangerously exposed left flank. Instead, they went at the double-quick to secure the link with Ramsey's brigade on their right. They came under sporadic cannon fire from a Rebel battery to the left and rear of the Thompson house and distant rifle fire from woods, but the Confederates did not advance on this front. As Sgt. Marbaker, 11th New Jersey, recalled, "being switched to the relatively quiet right flank at the last moment was indeed a fortune of war."<sup>134</sup>

A substantial factor in the Federals' success at stemming this initial Rebel assault was artillery fire from the two 20th Massachusetts Artillery sections west of Rocky Branch. As Smyth watched the drama unfold, he ordered the two artillery sections, commanded by Lt. Green and Lt. Adams, to change front and open a lethal enfilading fire across the stream into the onrushing Rebels menacing his men and McAllister's left. Artilleryman Cpl. John D.

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<sup>131</sup> OR 46/1:238-39; McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 582-83; Searing, *Alonzo's War*, 193-94.

<sup>132</sup> Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond*, 265; Seville, *History of the 1st Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 135; OR 46/1:236.

<sup>133</sup> OR 46/1:238-39, 247-48.

<sup>134</sup> OR 46/1:239, 242, 246, Marbaker, *History of the 11th New Jersey Volunteers*, 270-71. McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 582-83,

Billings recounted how the Rebel advance first appeared in view in a scattered tract of woods, mainly pines and oaks, and amid these, the havoc was greatest. Afterward, they found five men lying dead near a tree, killed by a shell which, singularly enough, first passed completely through the trunk of the tree, exploding on the further side.<sup>135</sup>

On McAllister's right, Ramsey's brigade witnessed little action. The 64th New York commander, Lt. Col. William Glenny, on Ramsey's far left, adjacent to McAllister's men, claimed they were not engaged. Ramsey himself stated that "the enemy made a determined assault upon the line occupied by the two brigades, [McAllister and Ramsey] but massing on McAllister's front and extending to my left; the fire in my front, however, was not of a very serious nature."<sup>136</sup>



**Lt. Col. John Schoonover**  
beyondthecrater.com



**Brig. Gen. John R. Cooke**  
findagrave.com

### The Confederate Viewpoint

What did the Rebels experience as they assailed the Federal position? Accounts from Capt. John A. Sloan and Capt. James Graham, both with the 27th North Carolina, Cooke's Brigade, recalled how they emerged from some woods and struck the Union line behind basic earthworks on a hill in a field. The order "charge" sounded, and when they got to within 60 yards of the bluecoats, they repeatedly heard the order "dress to the left." But Cooke's men discovered that McComb's brigade on their left did not appear, and they had to fall back into the woods from whence they came.

Sergeant George Probest, 2nd Maryland Battalion, McComb's Brigade, remembered that on the command "forward," the brigade advanced with difficulty through a swampy wood. Upon exiting the woods, they saw the Yankee earthworks some 100 yards away. The incoming fire had been light, but the Federal barrage became more intense when the Rebels

<sup>135</sup> OR 46/1:212-13; Billings, *History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 387. McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 582-83.

<sup>136</sup> OR 46/1:207-08, 210-11; Hyland C. Kirk, *Heavy Guns and Light: A History of the 4th NY Heavy Artillery* (New York, 1890), 369-371. Humphreys strangely recalled the Rebels attacking at 5:00 p.m. rather than 4:00 p.m.

vacated the trees. McComb's Brigade fell to the ground and returned the fire from behind stumps and logs. They would not advance any further. The Federals began to enfilade their lines with artillery, forcing the Rebels to retreat some 100 yards.

Another Marylander recalled how the battalion occupied the center of the attacking line and advanced across a clearing to within 20 yards of the Federals' fortifications. The brigades to their left and right gave way well before the Marylanders gained their advanced position. No other troops got closer to the enemy. To go further seemed impossible.<sup>137</sup>

Accounts from MacRae's Brigade revealed how Cooke's Tar Heels advanced to McComb's right flank, though separated by nearly 450 yards. MacRae's Brigade moved between these two lead brigades, but several hundred yards behind and amid some covering trees. McComb's soldiers advanced, and the Federal artillery waited until they got to within 300 yards before opening a blistering fire. Captain Young, an adjutant in MacRae's Brigade, recalled that the Federals' first volley stampeded McComb's troops, who fled to the woods. MacRae's men moved alongside Cooke's, and together they marched forward. Although safe from musket fire at 800 yards away, they still received heavy fire from the Federal artillery.<sup>138</sup>

In conclusion, the Rebels' first attack failed to breach the Union line east of Rocky Branch, but what of the struggle developing across the stream?

#### The Rebels Attack West of Rocky Branch

By 4:00 p.m., west of Rocky Branch, Union Maj. Gen. Smyth had his battle lines organized behind hastily formed earthworks. The brigades of Col. Murphy and Col. Olmstead awaited the Rebel attack. Murphy reported:

As soon as the enemy's artillery ceased, their infantry advanced on my right, having in their front a strong line of skirmishers. Our pickets - consisting of the 69th New York State National Guard Artillery [182nd New York] - engaged them, and, after a spirited fire of about fifteen minutes duration, drove them back.<sup>139</sup>

Thus, the three Rebel brigades of Evans's division did not penetrate the Federal picket line. Unfortunately, the *OR* does not hold any records from Murphy's regimental commanders to illuminate this crucial action. Sadly, no report exists from the 1st Delaware, Pierce's brigade, on Murphy's right flank. In theory, these Delawareans occupied a prime position to see any attacks on Murphy's line and the fighting just the other side of the stream on

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<sup>137</sup> Graham, "The 27th Regiment," in Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina*, 2:451-52; Sloan, *Reminiscences of The Guilford Grays*, 109-110; Bingham, "From New Bern to Bennett Place with Cooke's Foot Cavalry," 414-17; Driver, *1st and 2nd Maryland*, 312. A book on McComb's Brigade: Randy Bishop, *The Tennessee Brigade* (Bloomington, IN, 2005) added little, apart from mentioning that the brigade suffered heavy losses at the battle. I have corresponded with the author. Similarly, I exchanged emails with Dr. Wallace Cross, who wrote a regimental history from McComb's Brigade; it contained nothing on the battle, C. Wallace Cross, *Ordeal by Fire: A History of the 14th Tennessee Volunteer Infantry Regiment, CSA* (Clarksville, TN, 1990).

<sup>138</sup> Venner, *The 11th North Carolina*, 196-97; Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels*, 284; Chapman, *More Terrible Than Victory*, 272-73.

<sup>139</sup> *OR* 46/1:63-69, 212-13, 220; Charles D. Page, *History of the 14th Regiment, Connecticut Vol. Infantry* (Meriden, CN, 1906), 326. Recall, the unpopular renaming of the 69th NYSNGA to the 182nd NY.

McAllister's left. The regiment reported no casualties during the entire battle, consistent with its limited engagement. As Smyth directed his 10th Massachusetts Artillery to aim well to the right of Murphy's line, this implies that no vigorous attacks occurred on Murphy's immediate front. He also ordered the 14th Connecticut, Pierce's brigade, supporting the artillery, "to change front on the edge of the swamp," thereby targeting their fire east of the stream. The regiment suffered six casualties conducting this difficult maneuver while under fire.<sup>140</sup>



**Brig. Gen. Clement A. Evans**  
US Library of Congress



**Author, in Front of the Clements House**  
David Lambert 2024

To the left of Murphy resided most of Olmstead's brigade, facing northwest. Olmstead remembered no fighting on his front, even to the point of some regret, writing, "had an opportunity offered itself, they [his troops] would have done credit to the general commanding the division." All nine of his regimental commanders submitted reports, and except for the 20th Massachusetts, picketing in front of McAllister, none mentioned taking part in any fighting that afternoon.<sup>141</sup>

These limited narratives are all that I could discover about the Rebel view of these assaults west of Rocky Branch. For a fuller understanding of this crucial engagement, more

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<sup>140</sup> OR 46/1:220, 222-23; Jeffrey Biggs' acclaimed book on the 1st DE; contained scant mention of the battle. I have exchanged emails with Jeffrey who knew of no regimental sources detailing these Rebel attacks on Feb 5. Jeffrey R. Biggs, *They Fought for the Union: A History of the First Delaware Volunteers in the Army of the Potomac* (Middletown, DE, 2016).

<sup>141</sup> OR 46/1:214-20.

Confederate testimony is needed.<sup>142</sup>

Can we learn more from Confederate accounts? Colonel Peck wrote the only *OR* entry from a Rebel field officer. Sadly, Peck's report tells us little about this initial attack. Around 4:00 p.m., his Louisianians followed Brig. Gen. Terry's Brigade, marching about a mile to the front. Peck's small brigade formed a battle line with Col. Baker's Georgians on their right and Terry's Brigade on their left, and received orders to conform his movements to Terry's. The Louisianians advanced to the Confederate artillery line, where Peck threw forward his sharpshooters (2nd Louisiana). Peck's brigade rested briefly while the Rebel cannons fired. When the artillery ceased, Peck's men advanced through a field and some woods, coming under occasional musketry fire, until reaching a position level with Heth's line across the stream. Here, the Louisianians halted, in accordance with the movements on their left, and re-established their lines. Peck made no mention of attacking the Union position.<sup>143</sup>

A 42nd Virginia history described how Terry's Brigade moved through fields and dense pine woods to support Heth's Division. But Federal sharpshooters suddenly assailed the Virginians, who fled back in confusion. The commander of the 38th Georgia, Lt. Col. Philip E. Davant, recalled that due to a lack of commissioned officers in the regiment, he detailed Pvt. James Daniel to act as adjutant. Under fire, the regiment advanced in line of battle. Pvt. Daniel conspicuously encouraged the men and kept them in position, particularly at one point where the line was about to give way. A newspaper reported seven casualties from the 38th Georgia in this action in what it described as a "hotly contested fight."<sup>144</sup>

With the sun starting to set, the first Rebel assault may have stalled, but Lee's men were far from finished.

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<sup>142</sup> The Virginia Regimental Histories Series includes accounts for every VA regiment. Apart from the 42nd VA citation, none of the other 12 VA regimental books from Terry's Brigade covered the battle in detail. Respected books on Peck's regiments sadly contributed nothing to the discussion: Michael D. Jones, *Confederate State Rangers of the 10th Louisiana Infantry* (Scotts Valley, CA, 2014); Gannon, *Irish Rebels Confederate Tigers*, briefly mention the fight. Terry L. Jones, *Lee's Tigers: The Louisiana Infantry in the Army of North Virginia* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2002) does not cover the battle. A 31st GA memoir: Pharris D. Johnson, ed., *Under the Southern Cross: Soldier Life with Gordon Bradwell and the Army of Northern Virginia* (Macon, GA, 1979) offered no further insights other than to confirm that Col. Baker was in brigade command. Other books on Baker's regiments are rare and have proven elusive. I have engaged with many online Georgia history sites and social media groups, but have discovered nothing further about this attack.

<sup>143</sup> *OR* 46/1:392.

<sup>144</sup> John D. Chapla, *History of the 42nd Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1983) 53; Dale G. Nichols, *Hurrah for Georgia!: History of the 38th Georgia Regiment* (Williamsburg, VA, 2017), 215-16, I exchanged emails with Dale Nichols, who knew of no other sources linking the regiment to the battle.

## Chapter 6

### “Again, They Advanced in Strong Force”

The first Confederate assault failed to penetrate Humphreys' line. Urged on by their commanders, the Rebels regrouped and prepared to attack again. The unprotected gap between McAllister and Murphy presented a tempting target.

#### Further Rebel Attacks East of Rocky Branch

After the Confederates' first assault, division commander Mott dispatched a staff officer to see how McAllister's brigade was faring. He learned that “the General was most gallantly encouraging his command,” and despite some soldiers fighting without breastworks, he could “whip the Rebels away.” Several Union protagonists described the subsequent Rebel attacks as they experienced them from their positions.

McAllister recalled, “The well-known Rebel yell rolled out on the evening breeze, and on rushed their massed columns [second attack]. My line now opened a most destructive fire.” As McAllister rode along the line, he found Chaplain Henry Hopkins, 120th New York, “using a gun and firing constantly, and encouraging the men to stand firm.” With Humphreys watching the fight, McAllister noted how “the appearance of our corps commander inspired our men to new efforts.” His troops “struck up the song 'Rally around the Flag, Boys.' The Rebels replied, 'We will rally around your flag, boys!'" However, the Rebels soon withdrew, and the heavy firing ceased. The pause proved short-lived.

McAllister continued. “The Rebel Mahone with his famous fighting division made a rush for the gap in our lines [third attack], once more we heard that unwelcome yell resounding, which told us plainly that they were again charging our lines.” But McAllister's men stood firm and with support from the artillery they “rolled back the Rebel columns for the last time; the victory was ours.” He finished by saying, “The third attack of the enemy . . . ended in a complete rout.” The alleged presence of Mahone's Division in the final assault is contentious, as we shall discover.<sup>145</sup>

The exposed 8th New Jersey on McAllister's left flank remained firm. Their commander, Maj. Hartford reported that after repulsing the first attack, the Rebels again “advanced in strong force, and, notwithstanding the destructive fire poured into them, succeeded in gaining the shelter of stumps and fallen timber on our left front and for a time kept up a fatal fire on the exposed wing of the battalion, but they were forced to retire.” However, the Rebels returned “seemingly determined upon carrying the line [third attack], but the well-directed fire checked them when within eighty yards of our works.” The heavy fighting continued for some time but the Confederates “eventually gave way in confusion,

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<sup>145</sup> OR 46/1:223-225, 238-39; McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 583. Maj. Gen. Mahone himself was certainly *not* at the battle.

suffering severely for their temerity.” The last repulse occurred after dark and ended the engagement.<sup>146</sup>

To Hartford’s immediate right, behind breastworks, kneeled the 120th New York. Their commander, Lt. Col. Abram Lockwood, also reported repelling two further distinctive attacks and inflicting considerable Confederate losses. He lamented that they could have caused more damage if they had received a better supply of ammunition. He, too, mentioned the exploits of Chaplain Hopkins. This regiment suffered only two wounded casualties, while the exposed 8th New Jersey immediately to their left sustained 48 losses, thus demonstrating the value of the low, hastily thrown-up earthworks.<sup>147</sup>

Next in line, the 7th New Jersey continued to pour enfilading fire into the enemy advancing on their left. Their angle of fire suggests that the Rebels did not attack directly on their front. To their right, the 11th Massachusetts commander, Capt. James Mansfield reported, “The firing was continued for an hour and a half, with more or less spirit, as the enemy advanced or fell back, but at no time did he reach a point nearer than 100 yards to our line of works.” This regiment suffered no casualties during the encounter. On McAllister’s far right flank resided the 11th New Jersey. Their commander, Lt. Col. Schoonover, recalled how the Rebels did not attempt to advance across the open field on his front, but kept up a steady and scattering fire from a ravine. “At no time did I find it necessary to fire a volley but kept up a steady fire by file. This fire was continued until nearly 8 o’clock.”<sup>148</sup>

To the right of McAllister’s men was Ramsey’s brigade. They recalled little action during the afternoon, although one regiment suffered a wounded soldier.<sup>149</sup>

#### Federal Artillery Action

The two sections of artillery (10th Massachusetts Battery) west of the stream that had helped repel the Confederates’ first assault continued to pour out their destruction. Artilleryman Cpl. John Billings recounted that their fire was oblique to the enemy’s front and did great execution. “Never did shells do more effective work than did those fired by these two sections.” Their role proved invaluable in repelling the successive charges aimed at breaking the Union lines. “Although the weight of numbers was on their side, the God of Battles was on ours, and Victory perched on the Union banners.” These cannons *solely* targeted the left and front of McAllister’s brigade. The battery suffered just three shot horses during the action.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> OR 46/1:244-45.

<sup>147</sup> OR 46/1:247-48. Henry Hopkins had overseen ambulance corps at battles earlier in the war. He enlisted as a chaplain in May 1864. One well-known source claimed Hopkins received the Medal of Honor for his exploits on Feb 5. However, no such award was made, McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 584, Ed. note 14.

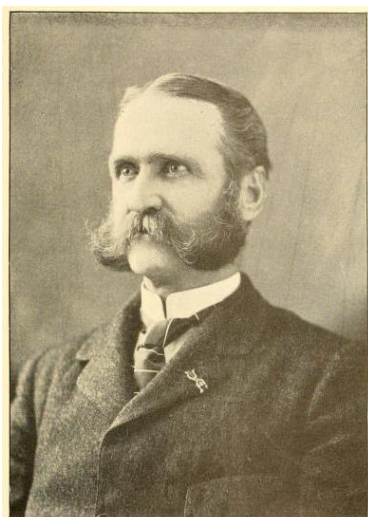
<sup>148</sup> OR 46/1:242-44, 246.

<sup>149</sup> OR 46/1:207-08, 210-11.

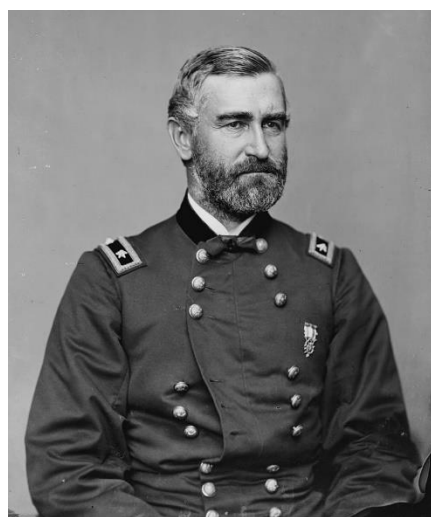
<sup>150</sup> OR 46/1:249-50; Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 387-88.

### Reinforcing McAllister's Left Flank

Despite McAllister's assurances that he "could whip the Rebels away," his exposed left flank concerned Mott, his divisional commander. At around 4:45 p.m., Mott called up elements of West's brigade, located at the Hatcher's Run-Vaughan Road crossing, to support McAllister. As West recounted, "about 5 p.m. I received an order for two regiments to report to Gen. McAllister... I immediately sent the 141st Pennsylvania and 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery ... Soon after, I received orders to report in person with the balance of the brigade and assume command of the whole."



**Cpl. John D. Billings (postwar)**  
*The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*



**Maj. Gen. Gershom Mott**  
Library of Congress

Upon arrival at the battlefield, West saw the 57th Pennsylvania in battle line in a small ravine behind McAllister's left flank. Together with the 5th Michigan, they charged into the gap between McAllister's left and Rocky Branch. West wrote, "These troops arrived just in season to check the enemy, who were making a desperate effort to make a break at this point." He praised the 141st Pennsylvania, which arrived first on the scene and withstood "a most severe musketry fire from the enemy, fighting in an open field, without any works whatever for protection."<sup>151</sup>

There are no other *ORs* from West's brigade; however, four regimental memoirs provide additional, albeit conflicting, testimony. A 57th Pennsylvania history described the regiment's charge alongside the 5th Michigan, supporting the view that without their help, the Rebels would have driven McAllister back. Captain Robert G. Carter's account of the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery painted a similar picture. He claimed they found McAllister heavily engaged, and his men "arrived just in time to help repel the assault."<sup>152</sup>

<sup>151</sup> *OR* 46/1:224-26, 235-36.

<sup>152</sup> James M. Martin & Ellis C. Strouss, *History of the 57th Regiment Pennsylvania Veteran Voluntary infantry*, (Meadville, PA, 1900), 143; Robert G. Carter, *Four Brothers in Blue, or, Sunshine and Shadows of the War of the Rebellion; a Story of the Great Civil War from Bull Run to Appomattox* (Washington, DC, 1913), 499. Captain Carter received a Medal of Honor in 1871 for actions against Comanches in Texas.

However, another 1st Massachusetts history presented a different view. It reported that after a march of about a mile, they arrived under heavy fire and formed an oblique battle line connecting to McAllister's line. "However, it was not needed as the Rebels fled just as West had finished forming his battle line." West's men chased the fleeing Rebels "until they disappeared into the darkness of the forest and the pursuit was halted." The soldier expressed surprise at the regiment's losses of only three slightly wounded despite crossing an open field under heavy fire. David Craft, chaplain of the 141st Pennsylvania, supported the view that the Rebels were already retreating as West's bluecoats arrived. He recalled, "before we arrived the enemy's infantry had retired, although their artillery kept up a fire for some time. The brigade was not actively engaged, although it came under heavy fire."<sup>153</sup>

Whether West arrived in the nick of time or not, the Confederate attacks in this sector had finished.

#### The Rebel Perspective of the Fighting East of Rocky Branch

After their failed first assault, the Confederates regrouped. Several Rebels remembered what happened next. Accounts from the 27th North Carolina, Cooke's Brigade, recalled receiving orders to advance again. The Tar Heels charged up the hill once more in sight of the Unionists lying behind their earthworks. Cooke's left remained unsupported, and they had to fall back again. They halted upon reaching the Rebel reserve line about half a mile to the rear. Fresh troops received orders to advance. Three separate narratives claimed that these reinforcements were "Cook's or Cooke's Georgia Brigade" or "a Georgia Brigade." As they advanced, three companies (B, G, and H) of the 27th North Carolina went forward with them, believing the order to advance had come from their brigade commander, John Cooke. They fought alongside these new troops for the rest of the afternoon, losing several men.<sup>154</sup>

Lieutenant Charles R. Jones of the 55th North Carolina, Cooke's Brigade, recalled how a "desperate engagement was fought," but the enemy's position supported by breastworks proved too secure, and the Confederates abandoned the idea of taking them. He described how "the command suffered heavily" with the gallant Capt. Walter A. Whitted (regimental commander) "severely wounded through the throat by a piece of shell." The 55th fell back some 200 yards to a more secure position. Private James K. Wilkerson remembered how the regiment charged the Union position several times but was unable to drive the Yankees from their fortifications. "We were fighting them until into the night. Oh, mother it

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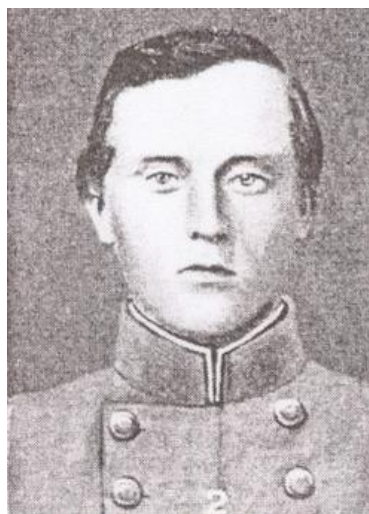
<sup>153</sup> Alfred S. Roe & Charles Nutt, *History of the First Regiment of Heavy Artillery, Massachusetts Volunteers Formerly the 14th Regiment of Infantry, 1861-1865* (Boston, 1917), 205; David Craft, *History of the 141st Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers 1862-1865* (Towanda, PA, 1885), 236.

<sup>154</sup> James Graham, "Cooke's Brigade," in Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina, in the Great War 1861-65*. 5 vols. (Goldsboro, NC, 1901), 4:508; Graham, "The 27th Regiment," in Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina*, 2:451-52; Sloan, *Reminiscences of the Guilford Grays*, 109-110.

was awful times with us.” Wilkerson claimed to have shot 50-60 rounds at the Federals that afternoon and luckily escaped death, as a shell sent shrapnel fragments through his hat.<sup>155</sup>



**Brig. Gen. William McComb**  
wikipedia.org



**Pvt. James K. Wilkerson**  
findagrave.com

From McComb’s Brigade, Sgt. Probest, 2nd Maryland Battalion, remembered that after seeking protection and regrouping, soldiers from Evans’s division advanced over them on the charge, but they did not get far. Upon their quick return, the battalion retired further, leaving Evans’s Rebels in the place they had occupied. Soon afterward, Mahone’s Division passed over the Marylanders and Evans’s men, but they only got a short distance before halting and firing. Although beyond musket range, the 2nd Maryland Battalion remained menaced by artillery fire, so they dropped back an additional 100 yards.

Another Marylander wrote, “To advance further seemed impossible: other attempts were made by other troops, but all failed. The men lay down as flat as they could ... behind stumps, saplings, and whatever ... they could find.” The Union cannons shelled them vigorously from their right and withering musket fire from the earthworks to their front, killing or wounding several men. In this exposed position and under intense fire, the battalion reluctantly retired.<sup>156</sup>

In the Confederate second line, MacRae’s Brigade was on the periphery of the initial attack. However, with elements of Cooke’s and McComb’s brigades falling back, they soon

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<sup>155</sup>Jones, “Historical Sketch: Our Living and Our Dead;” Jeffrey M. Girvan, *The 55th North Carolina in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC, 2006), 135-36. The 55th NC had only transferred from Davis’s Brigade to Cooke’s Brigade four days previously.

<sup>156</sup> Driver, *1st and 2nd Maryland*, 312-13; William W. Goldsborough, *The Maryland Line in the Confederate Army, 1861-1865* (Baltimore, MD, 1900), 144-45. The battalion suffered 4 killed, 2 wounded, and 1 missing during the engagement. Surprisingly, McComb’s memoirs said nothing of the fight, despite his brigade suffering at least 36 casualties, “Brigadier-General William McComb memoir,” *Recollections of the War, 1861-1865*, University of Memphis, TN., Digital Commons, p37.

found themselves in the thick of the fight. Memoirs from MacRae's regiments echo the experiences detailed above. In a second attack, Heth's three brigades advanced again and, despite the destructive fire poured into them, succeeded in gaining shelter from stumps and fallen timber on their left front and, for a time, kept up a fatal fire on the exposed Federal wing. The Rebels took a terrible pounding from artillery and enfilading fire and retreated to the safety of the underbrush.

After a slight pause, they pressed forward again, concentrating on the exposed Federal left flank. However, the withering Federal fire blunted the attack about 80 yards from the blue lines, and the Rebels withdrew again. Captain Louis Young met with Cooke and encouraged him to join MacRae's men in an unauthorized charge. But Cooke declined, much to the chagrin of Young and Maj. Charles M. Stedman, 44th North Carolina. Stedman approached Young with sword raised high, "calling out in loud tone, our men are ready to advance and only await the command." After 90 minutes, the fighting ended with nightfall. On retiring to their defenses, Capt. Young received a severe wound that ended his war.<sup>157</sup>

Accounts recall how some Rebels panicked, threw down their weapons, and fled the field. Even the presence of the inspirational "Bobby" Lee, observing from behind the attacking columns, could not restrain the terrified soldiers. One demoralized Confederate screamed at him, "great God man, get out of the way, you don't know nothing"! Another recalled how Lee "wept like a child" as Rebels repeatedly refused orders to charge. Cooke's Brigade bore the brunt of these attacks, suffering as many casualties as the other two brigades combined. Of their estimated 77 losses, the 48th North Carolina suffered 52 casualties.<sup>158</sup>

### The Role of Mahone's Division

Towards the end of the engagement, Confederate reinforcements arrived in the form of Mahone's Division. Recall that Maj. Gen. Mahone was absent, ill, and Brig. Gen. Finegan commanded this division. The force of around 4,900 men comprised five battle-hardened brigades: Alabamians commanded by Col. William H. Forney, Mississippians commanded by Brig. Gen. Nathaniel H. Harris, Georgians commanded by Brig. Gen. G. Moxley Sorrel, Finegan's Floridians, now commanded by Col. David Lang, and Virginians, probably

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<sup>157</sup> Venner, *The 11th North Carolina*, 197; Chapman, *More Terrible than Victory*, 273-74; Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels*, 285. In 1930, Charles Stedman became the last Civil War veteran to serve in the US Congress. Recall that Brig. Gen. MacRae was not at the battle.

<sup>158</sup> Chapman, *More Terrible than Victory*, 272-73; Sloan, *Reminiscences of the Guilford Grays*, 110; Girvan, *The 55th North Carolina*, 136; *OR* 46/2:499; *ORS* 7:721 (Diary excerpt of Capt. John Heitman, 48th NC). The established commander of the 48th NC, Col. Samuel Walkup, went on leave with Gen. MacRae at the end of January 1865 (Walkup, *Writings of a Rebel Colonel*, 150). At the battle, the regiment was probably led by Capt. John Moore (Siege of Petersburg Online, [48th North Carolina Infantry — The Siege of Petersburg Online \(beyondthecrater.com\)](#)), whether this had any bearing on their high casualties is unknown. Sadly, the regimental account in Clark, *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina*, 3:122 does not mention the battle. I have engaged with two 48th NC groups online but discovered no more information regarding the regiment on Feb 5.

commanded by Brig. Gen. Weisiger.<sup>159</sup>

Conventional accounts of the engagement claim that Mahone's men arrived too late to participate in the engagement. However, substantial evidence from both Union and Confederate sources demonstrates that elements of the division took part in the final assault.<sup>160</sup> While Col. Forney's Alabama Brigade went on guard duty, evidence shows that the Georgia, Florida, and Virginia brigades all suffered casualties that afternoon. The claim that *three* Rebel divisions took part in these attacks may not have been hyperbole after all.<sup>161</sup>

#### Which Additional Confederate Forces Fought East of Rocky Branch?

The above accounts present some anomalies regarding the identity of the Rebel forces used east of Rocky Branch. Several combatants specifically mentioned that Brig. Gen. Philip Cook's Georgia Brigade (or a Georgia Brigade) took part in the latter attacks. This brigade belonged to Maj. Gen. Bryan Grimes's Division, Gordon's Second Corps, and, in theory, resided over three miles *north* of Petersburg. Consequently, conventional battle accounts *do not* include this brigade. An obvious issue is the possible mixing up of John Cooke and Philip Cook. Is this another case of *too many Cooks spoiling the broth*? And yet, memoirs specified that the relieving brigade was Georgian

Henry W. Thomas's seminal book on this Georgia Brigade contained two brief references to the battle. The 21st Georgia account stated, "The next [after December 1864] engagement in which our regiment took a prominent part was near Hatcher's Run to the right

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<sup>159</sup> Lambert, *Rebel Units and their Commanders at Hatcher's Run*, Part 3; The strength of Mahone's Division is for the end of December 1864, NARA M935, Roll 14, 19-P-46. One source claimed that Gen. Weisiger was absent, with the brigade commanded by Col. Virginius Groner. Leslie Spence, "Old Guard of Richmond, Virginia," *Confed. Vet. Magazine* (1897), Vol. 5, 484-85. I have found no other source to corroborate his absence.

<sup>160</sup> Driver, *1st and 2nd Maryland*, 312 -13; OR 46/2:499; McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 583. The editor [note 13] claimed that McAllister was in error as Mahone's men only arrived on the next day, Feb 6. The editor said that McAllister was fighting troops under Gordon and Pegram. This is problematic on two counts: Pegram's division *was part of* Gordon's Corps, and Pegram wasn't involved in this action, Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 37; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:192; Williams, *Stonewall's Prussian Mapmaker*, 240.

<sup>161</sup> Roster data for Sorrel's Brigade revealed five casualties on February 5. US General Web Archives [Statewide County Georgia USGenWeb Archives \(usgwarchives.net\)](http://StatewideCountyGeorgiaUSGenWebArchives.usgwarchives.net). The five recorded casualties for Feb 5, 1865, were: 3rd GA – Pvt. William H. Jones, wounded, hospitalized; Corp. John Barber wounded, disabled; 22nd GA – Capt. James N. Mercier wounded; Corp. William T. Sharpe, wounded, leg amputated; 64th GA – Pvt. Richard Hasty, killed. However, Rebel roster data is not usually comprehensive and can be error-ridden, especially for late in the war. Letter, William H. Forney to Mrs. Forney, February 9, 1865, Forney Papers, #1406-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill., hereafter Letter, William Forney to Mrs. Forney. A Florida Brigade colonel (John J. Dickison) mentioned that the brigade supported these Rebel attacks and suffered casualties of one killed and two wounded, including Lt. Col. William Scott, the 10th Florida commander. John J. Dickison, "Chapter 7: Florida" in Clement A. Evans, ed., *Confederate Military History: A Library of Confederate States History*, 12 vols. (Atlanta, GA, 1899), 11.2:159-60; (Dickison was only a captain in Feb 1865); Lieutenant James Phillips (12th Virginia, Weisiger's Brigade) recalled a sharp engagement on February 5, with a few of the brigade wounded. James E. Phillips, "Sixth Corporal" ("Journal of James E. Philips"), James Eldred Philips Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA, 68. Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 37; Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 317; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:185; Marbaker, *History of the 11th New Jersey Volunteers*, 272; Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 386-7; OR 46/2:499.

of Petersburg, the enemy's sorties being repulsed in a number of instances.” The account of the 44th Georgia mentioned that their commander, Col. James Beck, “at the battle of Hatcher’s Run ... exposed himself and owing to said exposure was prostrated with pneumonia and was sent to hospital in Richmond.” A 12th Georgia soldier in Cook’s Brigade claimed they marched from Camp Rodes to the battle, but upon arrival, they were not needed and returned. With their detailed reference to Philip Cook’s brigade, the 27th North Carolina narratives are particularly compelling. It is plausible that this brigade could also have fired off a few shots at a distance toward the end of the battle.<sup>162</sup>

Sergeant Probest, 2nd Maryland Battalion, claimed that soldiers from Evans’s division (engaged west of the stream) took part in the later attacks east of the stream. This division included a Georgia Brigade, commanded by Col. Baker. However, as these troops were located on the far right of Evans’s line, they were probably not the Georgia troops mentioned. Alternatively, perhaps Sorrel’s Brigade, Mahone’s Division, was the mysterious Georgia Brigade mentioned in these memoirs.

Most narratives assume that Davis’s Mississippi Brigade, Heth’s Division, remained in reserve throughout. However, Rebel deserters (considered credible by senior Union officers) subsequently informed their Yankee captors that Heth’s attack had involved all *four* of his brigades. This view is supported by James F. Caldwell’s memoir, which appeared only a year after the battle. Caldwell, Brig. Gen. Samuel McGowan’s aide-de-camp, stated that McGowan’s South Carolinian Brigade (Maj. Gen. Cadmus M. Wilcox Division, Hill’s Third Corps) had relieved Davis’s Brigade in the Confederate works during the afternoon of February 5. The South Carolinians heard heavy firing from the Hatcher’s Run area but learned “it was a small affair” from Davis’s Mississippians returning later that night.<sup>163</sup>

Furthermore, Lt. Col. John A. Blair, commander of the 2nd Mississippi, Davis Brigade, wrote in his diary that “On the 5th [February] this brigade (Davis) made a demonstration against the enemys [sic] line on the right of Genl Cook [sic].” He wrote no more about the action, suggesting that his regiment wasn’t heavily engaged. Two seminal books about this brigade did *not* mention the battle, consistent with their playing a minimal role. The brigade reported only three casualties. It is plausible that Davis’s Brigade

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<sup>162</sup> Graham, “27th Regiment” in Clark, ed., *Histories of the Regiments from North Carolina*, 2:452; Bingham, “From New Bern to Bennett Place,” 416; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:183; Henry W. Thomas, *History of the Doles-Cook Brigade of Northern Virginia, C.S.A. Containing Muster Rolls and a Complete History of Each Regiment by one of its own members* (Atlanta, GA, 1903), 347-48, 486. The 44th GA webpage on Steven Hawks’ “Civil War in the East” database also states that on Feb 24, 1865, Beck was admitted to the Stuart Hospital Richmond ([History of the 44th Georgia Infantry Regiment in the Civil War \(civilwarintheeast.com\)](#)). Analysis of the detailed, yet incomplete, rosters of Georgia regiments within Cook’s Brigade revealed but one casualty linked to the battle, namely a Pvt. George Brown, Co I, 21st Georgia, captured at Hatcher’s Run, but on *February 6*, 1865. Georgia roster database, US General Web Archives [Statewide County Georgia USGenWeb Archives \(usgwarchives.net\)](#); Graham, “27th Regiment” in Clark, ed., *Histories of the Regiments from North Carolina*, 2:451-52. Irby G. Scott, *Lee and Jackson’s Bloody Twelfth: The Letters of Irby Goodwin Scott, First Lieutenant, Company G, Putnam Light Infantry, Twelfth Georgia Volunteer Infantry*, Johnnie P. Pearson, ed. (Knoxville, TN, 2010), 172.

<sup>163</sup> OR 46/2:422-23, 499; James F. Caldwell, *The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, Known First as Gregg’s, and Subsequently as McGowan’s Brigade* (Philadelphia, PA, 1866), 200.

may have fired a few shots toward the Federals at a distance near the end of the fighting.<sup>164</sup>

#### The Rebel Attacks West of Rocky Branch

The Rebels' first attack west of the stream hadn't penetrated the Federal 182nd New York picket line. Murphy recorded how his pickets thwarted subsequent Confederate attacks. A Minnie ball struck Murphy in the knee at this point, and comrades carried him to the rear. A newspaper report added that Murphy had just ridden the whole length of his line and was shot soon after dismounting. Initially not thought to be severe, the wound developed complications, and he died on April 16, 1865. Brigade commander Col. Mathew Murphy was the most senior Federal soldier to die due to the three-day battle of Hatcher's Run.<sup>165</sup>

Brigade command passed to Col. James McIvor, who reported:

At about 5 o'clock ... the command of the brigade devolved on me, by Col. Mathew Murphy, ... being, from a wound, placed hors de combat. On assuming command, I found the brigade in line of battle behind a rifle-pit, hastily thrown up, left resting on First Brigade [Olmstead], right resting near a tributary to Hatcher's Run [Rocky Branch], the line running in rear of and near the [R] Armstrong, jr., house. Nothing of note occurred.<sup>166</sup>

Another victim in this fighting was Murphy's assistant adjutant-general, Lt. Robert McFarish, who fell mortally wounded. The attacks on this front appeared far less intense than those over the stream; the Rebels never broke through the Federal picket line. According to the *OR*, Murphy's 182nd NY pickets only suffered *four* casualties during the entire three-day battle. Their only significant action at the battle was in holding back Evans's Rebel division on February 5. Curiously, the 8th New York Heavy Artillery in Murphy's entrenched line behind the pickets formally reported eight Hatcher's Run casualties. Other credible sources,

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<sup>164</sup> John A. Blair "The Civil War Diary of John A. Blair," M.A. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1949, 43. Neither T. P. Williams, *The Mississippi Brigade of Brig.-Gen. Joseph Davis* (Seattle, WA, 1999) nor Steven H. Stubbs, *Duty, Honor, Valor: The Story of the 11th Mississippi Infantry Regiment* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000), a 948-page tome, mention the battle. Furthermore, I have been fortunate to share emails with Mike Brasher, a 2nd MS expert, and he knew of no other sources linking that regiment to the Hatcher's Run battle.

<sup>165</sup> *OR* 46/1:220. Despite his wound, Murphy submitted his *OR* on Feb 12; *The New York [NY] Times*, Feb 9, 1865, Page 1. Mathew Murphy was a prominent Irish New Yorker, and the paper took a keen interest in soldiers from their city. The article gave a detailed account of the battle, which was inconsistent with Murphy's report that the Rebels never penetrated his picket line. Shot on his battle line many yards behind his pickets was unfortunate. Possibly, a sharpshooter targeted him because he was mounted, a common occurrence. Garcia, "The Forgotten 69th," 76-77, gives a good account of Murphy's medical decline and funeral. At least he lived to hear of Lee's surrender at Appomattox on Apr 9.

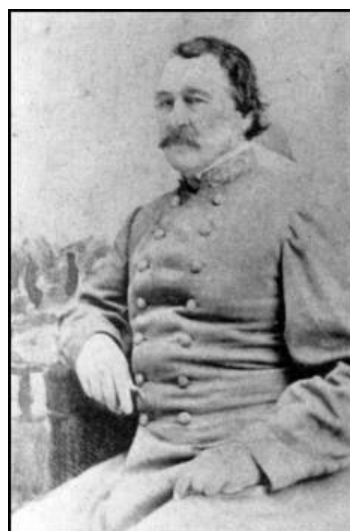
<sup>166</sup> *OR* 46/1:221.

however, reveal they lost only two men in this afternoon's fight.<sup>167</sup>

In describing the entire afternoon's engagement, Humphreys, Smyth, and others viewed the Rebel attacks as falling *upon* Smyth's right, i.e., Murphy's front. In truth, little fighting took place here. To Murphy's left, all remained relatively quiet on Olmstead's front.<sup>168</sup>



**Col. Mathew Murphy**  
Library of Congress



**Col. William R. Peck**  
wikipedia.org

Confederate accounts from this sector are minimal. Colonel Peck's report stated, "Darkness having come on, after some firing with little result, we were ordered to retire, which the command did in good order, and, in accordance with instructions, I marched the command back to their quarters." Private George W. Nichols, 61st Georgia, Baker's brigade, described "optimistically," how on February 5, they had engaged the Yankees on Hatcher's Run "and drove them back to their works after a very stubborn battle of one hour and a half." Casualty data shows this brigade lost at least 15 men on February 5, including Maj. B. F. Grace of the 26th Georgia, killed. Substantial new resources must emerge to unlock the

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<sup>167</sup> *Lockport [NY] Daily Journal & Courier*, Feb 8, 1865 page 2; *OR* 46/1:63-69; Wilbur R. Dunn, *Full Measure of Devotion: The Eighth New York Volunteer Heavy Artillery* (Kearney, NE, 1997), 483-87; James M. Hudnet, *Casualties by battles and by names in the Eighth New York Heavy Artillery, August 22, 1862-June 5, 1865, together with a review of the service of the regiment fifty years after muster-in* (New York, 1913), 35-37. The two casualties on Feb 5 were Pvt. Charles Bruyare (killed) and Pvt. William H. Brown (wounded). On Feb 6, a falling tree killed Pvt. William E. Coleman while in camp. I have been unable to find any other casualties from this regiment for the Hatcher's Run battle. Thus the eight quoted in the *OR* is rather mysterious. I am indebted to regimental expert, Kathryn W. Lerch, Park Tudor School, IN, for assisting my research. This case study highlights the limits of reported casualty data even in the *OR*.

<sup>168</sup> David W. Maull, *The Life and Military Services of the Late Brig.-Gen. Thomas Smyth* (Wilmington, DE, 1870), 40; *OR* 46/1:212-13; *OR* 46/2:422-23; Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 385; Walker, *History of the Second Army Corps*, 648.

mysteries of this battle phase.<sup>169</sup>

#### The Fighting Ends and a Post-battle Squabble Over Honors

Sunset occurred around 5:30 p.m. Many combatants reported how the attacks ended with the arrival of darkness. However, intermittent artillery shelling and long-range musket fire continued for a few more hours. The battered Confederates trudged back northward to their defenses, leaving behind many of their dead and wounded. Numerous Rebels surrendered in the darkness. McAllister reported that over 20 Rebel prisoners from *four* divisions came into his lines; regrettably, he didn't name the divisions. The prisoners claimed they had attacked in *three* lines of battle.<sup>170</sup>

After the battle, the Federal artillery received special praise:

Gen. Smyth rode up to ... lieutenants ... [Green and Adams] and handsomely complimented the Battery for its services, stating that but for it, his division must have been flanked or captured, perhaps both. Gen. McAllister also admitted his inability to hold his post unaided by [these] guns. [They] were also mentioned favorably by the Chief of Artillery and by Gen. Humphreys in his congratulatory order.<sup>171</sup>

Feeling particularly proud, McAllister believed (not unreasonably) that the victory was mainly due to his brigade. As with many battles throughout history, disputes over associated honors and blame, and a desire to establish a favorable narrative, can exist.

In a series of letters to his wife Ellen (February 11-15), McAllister shared concerns that others were trying to take the credit for "his" victory. "I fought the battle alone. Gen. Smyth had nothing to do with it but to look on. I may truly say that he has stolen my thunder." The following day, he wrote again to his wife, piqued by an early newspaper report of the battle. "The reports of this battle of mine will be corrected and that all officers in this Division and Corps . . . say that the honor belongs to me alone." He expressed annoyance that Brig. Gen. Ramsey seemed to be taking some credit for the success. Ramsey had ended his official report stating, "General McAllister's brigade held this line. I am satisfied, from the heavy assaults of the enemy, he could not have held it alone; my arrival, under the circumstances, was very portentous and opportune."

McAllister wrote in his February 12 letter: "The idea that Ramsey's Brigade saved the day! Ramsey was on my right and did not fire a gun. No attack was made on him at all." He then described how Ramsey had not used the two cannons left to him when he (McAllister) had been ordered to move to the left, demonstrating Ramsey's poor leadership and lack of

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<sup>169</sup> OR 46/1:393; George W. Nichols, *A Soldier's Story of his Regiment: (61st Georgia) and Incidentally of the Lawton-Gordon-Evans Brigade, Army Northern Virginia* (Jesup, GA, 1898), 212; US General Web Archives [Statewide County Georgia USGenWeb Archives \(usgarchives.net\)](http://Statewide County Georgia USGenWeb Archives (usgarchives.net)). Nichol's account is hyperbole, the Federals remained in their nascent earthworks throughout the fight.

<sup>170</sup> OR 46/1:191-95, 238-39, 246; Boatner, *Cassell's Biographical Dictionary of the American Civil War*, 819-821; Kirk, *Heavy Guns and Light*, 370; Girvan, *The 55th North Carolina*, 135; Driver, *1st and 2nd Maryland*, 312; Others also mentioned that the Rebels attacked in three lines (Meade Communication, OR 46/2:499). East of Rocky Branch, the Rebels initially attacked in *two* lines; subsequent assaults were more ad hoc and at a distance, presumably making it difficult to ascertain specific lines.

<sup>171</sup> Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 387-88.

ability to respond to the enemy threat appropriately. He continued, “the fight was on my front alone; I drove back the columns every time their hosts advanced against me. Justice will be done yet.”

On February 14, he wrote again that he had just received a congratulatory order from corps commander Humphreys, “this order gives me the credit. You can show it to all you please . . . have it published. It is public and can be used.” In a further letter (February 15), he wrote that “McGregor, the Associated Press correspondent, has rectified his great mistake and given my brigade the credit for the successful battle of the 5th. This correction will be published in all the papers.... Well, my brigade deserves the credit. It would be an injustice if we did not get it.”<sup>172</sup>

### Analysis

These assaults formed a critical phase of the battle, yet most historians have overlooked their strategic significance, especially the actions west of Rocky Branch. The first Confederate attack occurred shortly after 4:00 p.m. West arrived on McAllister’s left soon after 5:00 p.m. when the third and final attack neared its conclusion. Thus, the assaults occurred for just over an hour. A consistent picture emerges of three separate Confederate assaults that failed to penetrate the Federal line. The Yankees fought behind hastily created earthworks and received able support from two artillery sections.

The Federals had achieved a resounding victory, suffering few casualties. Union losses totalled 111, with 87 occurring east of Rocky Branch. Of these, 48 came from the exposed 8th New Jersey. Rebel casualties are more challenging to define. One estimate puts their losses at 156 for east of the stream alone. Humphreys claimed that the Rebels lost over six times his number, equating to over 600. While this is an exaggeration, factoring in overnight desertions, the total Confederate casualties could have approached 300.<sup>173</sup>

However, issues and discussion points remain. Extensive literature exists from the Federal perspective regarding this fight, with numerous *OR* entries and memoirs. This contrasts markedly with the meager Confederate data. Only one *OR* entry exists from a Rebel field officer (Col. Peck), which revealed little. Robert E. Lee’s curt official description of the affair stated: “In the afternoon, part of Hill’s and Gordon’s troops demonstrated against the enemy on the left of Hatcher’s Run, near Armstrong’s Mill. Finding him entrenched, they were withdrawn after dark.” Gordon’s report ignored this fight. Seminal books about R. E. Lee, John Gordon, A. P. Hill, Henry Heth, William McComb, and Clement Evans chose to

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<sup>172</sup> McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 584-86; *OR* 46/1:207. *Baltimore [MD] Sun*, Feb 13, 1865, page 1.

<sup>173</sup> *OR* 46/1:193. In a telegram to Grant, Meade claimed that Humphreys lost 300 men in the late afternoon attacks (*OR* 46/1:150-51); this was presumably provisional data or exaggeration, as it was far greater than the official casualties recorded (*OR* 46/1:63-69). The 156 Rebel casualties is a conservative estimate from data kindly provided by casualty expert Alfred C. Young III. Record keeping in the Rebel army at this stage of the war was fragile, with many of their records lost or destroyed. The Rebels fighting west of Rocky Branch fought on the following two days, making it impossible to disentangle their overall battle casualty data for this particular action. Federal data derives from the regimental losses in the *OR* and assumes they relate solely to this battle phase. We saw the limits of such analyses in the case of the 8th NYHA, however, the values presented are reasonable estimates.

overlook these assaults for whatever reason. Testimony from more junior Confederate commanders is also minimal. This situation inevitably leads to a subject bias and essential gaps in the narrative, factors one must accept.<sup>174</sup>

**Table 6.1: Heth's Rebel Brigades East of Rocky Branch**

<b>Brigade</b>	<b>Strength</b>	<b>Casualties</b>	<b>%age</b>
Davis	828	3	<0.4
Cooke	1,738	77	4.4
McComb	907	36	4.0
MacRae	1,203	40	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,716</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>3.3</b>

Strength data come from the end of January 1865 Inspection Reports, adjusted for the transfer of the 55th NC regiment (326) from Davis to Cooke just before the battle. Alfred C. Young III kindly provided the casualty estimates.<sup>175</sup>

East of Rocky Branch, in the initial assault, the Rebels in the brigades of Cooke, McComb, and MacRae totaled 3,848. They were predominantly attacking McAllister's brigade of about 2,000 men,<sup>176</sup> supported for a time by two other regiments (one being only four companies). Further to the right, Ramsey's brigade of 1,100 remained minimally engaged. West's brigade arrived around 5:00 p.m., when most of the fighting had concluded. Apart from the 8th New Jersey, fighting in the open, McAllister's brigade incurred remarkably few losses. Indeed, only six casualties occurred within regiments behind the earthworks. This suggests the value of even light, hastily constructed earthworks. It also implies an inefficiency in the Confederate assaults despite some units fighting with great resolve.

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<sup>174</sup> OR 46/2:1206; OR 46/1:390. The following seminal books on the key Rebel commanders sadly add nothing to the narrative: Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*; Henry Heth, *The Memoirs of Henry Heth*, ed. James L. Morrison (Greenwood, NY, 1974); Robert G. Stephens, *Intrepid Warrior: Clement Anselm Evans Confederate General from Georgia Life, Letters, And Diaries of the War Years* (Dayton, OH, 1992); Robertson, *General A. P. Hill*; Douglas S. Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography* vol. 3 (New York, 1934); Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, vol 3; Long, *The Memoirs of R. E. Lee*; Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*. In Clark, *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina, in the Great War 1861-65*. 5 Vols, of the ten NC regiments that took part in the engagement, only the account of the 27th NC provided any significant details.

<sup>175</sup> NARA M935, Roll 15, 8-P-53; 9-P-53; 10-P-53; 11-P-53. Interpreting Inspection Reports is complex; often, the accounting was inconsistent. I have used the aggregates of columns 42 (officers) and 43 (men) to denote those present. This figure *should* coincide with that given on the cover summarizing the brigade's strength; this was not always the case. The accounting in Davis's report was particularly problematic. The casualty data are regarded as conservative estimates.

<sup>176</sup> Maj. Gen. Mott's division was around 6,000 (OR 46/1:191); the brigades of Brig. Gen. De Trobriand and Brig. Gen. West were around 2,300 and 1,700, respectively (OR 46/2:451); thus, by deduction, Brig. Gen. McAllister's brigade was about 2,000, a number supported by Searing, *Alonzo's War*, 191.

**Table 6.2: Federal Casualties East of Rocky Branch**

<b>McAllister Sector</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Total</b>	
69th PA (Pierce)	2	3	0	5	Sent as pickets
20th MA (Olmstead)	1	5	5	11	Sent as pickets
106th PA (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent as pickets
4th OH (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent to left of McAllister
12th NJ (Pierce)	1	6	0	7	Sent to left of McAllister
7th NJ	0	1	0	1	In line
8th NJ	11	37	0	48	In line
11th NJ	1	1	1	3	In line
11th MA	0	0	0	0	In line
120th NY	0	2	0	2	In line
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>77</b>	

<b>Ramsey Sector</b>					
145th PA	0	1	0	1	
Other regiments	0	0	0	0	
10th MA Art (1 sec)	0	0	0	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>1</b>	

<b>West Brigade</b>					
1st MA Heavy Art.	0	1	0	1	
5th MI	0	3	0	3	
93rd NY	0	0	0	0	
57th PA	0	1	0	1	
105th PA	0	0	0	0	
141st PA	1	3	0	4	
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>9</b>	

**Overall Total**            **1**    **8**    **0**    **87**

Data came from the official returns for the entire battle, *OR* 46/1:63-69. These units were not actively engaged during other battle phases; thus, one can assume they occurred in this action. The 145th PA data came from *OR* 46/1:210.

Understandably, the Confederates had little appetite for repeated exposure to a withering enfilade artillery shelling and heavy fire from Federals behind basic earthworks. After the initial attack, subsequent Rebel firing occurred from a distance, with them crouched behind whatever cover they could find. This caution possibly explains the relatively low Rebel casualty figures (less than 5%) from three frontal assaults on a well-defended position.

By contrast, McAllister's men exhibited exemplary fortitude, especially the 8th New Jersey, which fought for over an hour in the open. Under such hostile circumstances, it would not have been uncommon for Civil War units to panic and flee, as McAllister alleged that the 12th New Jersey and 4th Ohio did. Had McAllister's line broken, it could have imperiled the whole 2nd Corps position.

**Table 6.3: Federal Casualties West of Rocky Branch**

<b>OLMSTEAD sector</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Total</b>	
19th ME	0	0	0	0	
19th MA	2	5	0	[7]	<b>Morning Casualties</b>
7th MI	0	0	0	0	Picketing
1st MN	0	0	0	0	Picketing
59th NY	0	1	0	1	In line
152nd NY	0	0	0	0	In line
184th PA	0	2	0	2	In line
36th WI	0	0	0	0	In line
10th NY Bn. (Pierce)	0	2	0	2	Sent to picket line
108th NY (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent to picket line
7th WV (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent to Olmstead's line
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	
 <b>MURPHY Sector</b>					
8th NY Heavy Art	2	3	3	8*	In line
155th NY	0	0	0	0	In line
164th NY	0	1	0	1	In line
170th NY	0	0	0	0	In line
182nd NY	1	2	1	4	"69th NYSNGA", pickets
1st DE (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent to Murphy's line
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	
10th MA Art. (2 sec.)	0	0	0	0	
14th CN (Pierce)	1	5	0	6	Sent to support the artillery
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>6</b>	

**Overall Total** **24**

Data came from the official returns for the entire battle, *OR* 46/1:63-69. These units were not actively engaged during other phases of the battle, except the 19th MA. \*The actual figure is probably 2 (from regimental rosters, see footnote 167).

The key to the engagement lay west of Rocky Branch. The three Rebel brigades of Evans's division, Gordon's Corps, totaled some 2,694 men: Baker (1,156), Peck (434), and Terry (1,104). Incredibly, despite some artillery support, these Confederates did not penetrate the Federal picket line of probably no more than 200-300 men. Information from this sector of the battlefield is minimal. Data for Baker's brigade suggests they engaged in fighting and suffered casualties. However, such attacks appeared rather feeble. The Federals suffered only 24 losses in this sector, although brigade commander Murphy received a mortal

wound. Aggressive Rebel attacks here would at least have eased the pressure on their comrades fighting east of Rocky Branch, particularly in diverting the Federal artillery firepower that effectively blunted Heth's attacks.<sup>177</sup>

Both Evans and Gordon had reputations for being combative. From post-war testimony, we learn that Gordon confidently expected success, claiming he "was never more certain of victory. I expected to gobble [the Federals] up, and I don't know why I did not succeed." This engagement was the first time these troops had fought since arriving from the Shenandoah Valley, where they had suffered a series of crushing defeats. Low morale and a reputation for being unwilling to fight haunted these soldiers. One reporter at the battle drily commented, "Gordon's Valley troops ... had attempted to save the Confederacy by the old maneuver of running not fighting." Perhaps poor performances during this action contributed to the post-war silence in Confederate personal memoirs.<sup>178</sup>

The Confederates failed to utilize tactics that had served them well at earlier Petersburg battles, such as Reams's Station, August 25, 1864. Sharpshooter units could have targeted the Union artillery sections, diminishing their effectiveness. The Rebel artillery could have attempted to counter the Federal cannons and soften up McAllister's line.<sup>179</sup>

In the late afternoon of February 5, the Rebels missed a golden opportunity to inflict severe damage on the Union 2nd Corps.

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<sup>177</sup> End of Jan 1865 Inspection Reports, NARA M935, Roll 14, 21-P-51; 22-P-51; 23-P-51. The low, 24 Union losses, is probably an overestimate; recall that the 8th NYHA suffered two casualties, the *OR* shows eight.

<sup>178</sup> Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 386. The troops in Gordon's Corps had formed the main part of Jubal Early's Army of the (Shenandoah) Valley. Following substantial defeats at the battles of Third Winchester (Sept 19, 1864); Fisher's Hill (Sept 21-22); Tom's Brook (Oct 9), and Cedar Creek (Oct 19); this army was broken up. Lee ordered most of the troops back to support him around Petersburg, in a reformed Second Corps commanded by Maj. Gen. Gordon (Lewis, "The Shenandoah in Flames," *The Time Life Civil War Series*, 24:100-71); Waters & Edmonds, *A Small but Spartan Band*, 171-72; "Battle of Hatcher's Run," *Atlanta [GA] Weekly Intelligencer*, April 12, 1865. Morale was particularly low in the "consolidated brigades" of Terry and Peck, where desertion was rife. Amalgamating regiments (a practical necessity owing to the few "effectives" present at this stage of the war) was very unpopular in Lee's Army, where belonging to a named unit created strong attachments. Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels*, 283; Lee A. Wallace, *The 5th Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1988), 66; Reidenbaugh, *The 27th Virginia*, 117; Chapla, *The 42nd Virginia*, 53.

<sup>179</sup> Horn, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 145-48.

## Chapter 7

### Overnight Activities

**February 5, 5:00 p.m. – February 6, 5:00 a.m.**

After the failed Confederate assaults during the late afternoon of Sunday, February 5, sporadic clashes between opposing pickets continued overnight. McAllister's pickets buried over 30 Confederates, including a commissioned officer. In the morning, they discovered many fresh Rebel graves. Overnight, Federals rounded up disoriented and demoralized Rebels and escorted them back to headquarters for questioning.

Led by Lt. Thomas Tolson, a party of Confederates from McComb's Brigade volunteered to retrieve their fallen comrade, Lt. Charles W. Hodges. Hidden in the woods and under the cover of darkness, they approached the body; however, upon reaching an opening, the moonlight betrayed them. Federal pickets opened fire, forcing the Rebels to abandon the project, losing three killed, three wounded, and two missing.

West of Rocky Branch, on Olmstead's previously quiet front, some Confederates (origins not stated) overran a portion of the Federal picket line. The 184th Pennsylvania, Lt. Col. Charles Kleckner commanding, supported by men from the 36th Wisconsin and 59th New York, drove the Rebels back from the rifle pits they had seized; the 36th lost two captured and up to three wounded.<sup>180</sup>

#### Union Troop Movements

Despite garnering a comfortable victory, AOP commander Meade felt anxious. Intelligence gathered from prisoners fueled his fear that the Confederates planned to attack Humphreys's 2nd Corps further and isolate it from the main Federal line. Meade decided to consolidate his forces around Humphreys's position. A flurry of messages between Union senior commanders initiated substantial movements in response to the failed Rebel attacks.

At 5:00 p.m., Meade informed Warren that the Confederates had fiercely attacked Humphreys, but he had so far repulsed them. Meade put Warren on alert to support Humphreys if required. Warren also learned that Gregg had been ordered to report to him at once. Warren passed on Meade's news to his divisional commanders, preparing them for the possibility of moving back up Vaughan Road. Meade, however, only sent his order to Gregg at 6:25 p.m. as the weary cavalymen returned to Malone's Bridge. Crucially, Gregg didn't receive the message.<sup>181</sup>

Meade had already summoned reinforcements, Brig. Gen. Hartranft's 9th Corps division at 2:00 p.m., but he wanted more support. Soon after 6:00 p.m., he contacted 6th Corps commander, Maj. Gen. George W. Getty requesting reinforcements. Getty replied that

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<sup>180</sup> OR 46/1:218-20, 238-39; James M. Aubery, *Thirty-Sixth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry: 1st Brigade. 2d Division. 2d Army Corps* (New York, 2015), 209, 214; Driver, *1st and 2nd Maryland*, 313.

<sup>181</sup> OR 46/2:402, 404, 409.

he would dispatch Maj. Gen. Frank Wheaton's division of 4,400 men. At 7:20 p.m., Getty informed Meade that Hartranft's 9th Corps division had just passed by, and Wheaton's troops would follow them immediately.<sup>182</sup>

At 7:10 p.m., Meade sent an anxious note to Grant informing him that the Confederates had attacked Humphreys, inflicting possibly 300 casualties (a gross overestimation). The AOP commander believed the enemy was concentrating its forces, with intelligence suggesting they planned to turn Humphreys's right. Meade explained that he had summoned reinforcements from the 9th Corps and the 6th Corps, and he'd ordered Gregg to join Warren. Grant responded immediately, telling Meade to bring Warren and Gregg back to Humphreys. However, with a broader strategic assessment of the situation than Meade, Grant saw this as an opportunity to strike. He told Meade to follow up the enemy if possible, "it may lead to getting the South Side [Rail] Road, or a position from which it can be reached. Change original instructions to give all advantages you can take of the enemy's acts."

Over an hour later (8:22 p.m.), Meade replied to Grant, saying that he'd withdrawn Warren and Gregg to the Hatcher's Run-Vaughan Road crossing (neither of which had yet occurred but were in progress). Humphreys awaited developments and would attack if the opportunity presented and push the enemy back into their works. Meade argued against Grant's idea of advancing on the Southside Railroad, saying that the Rebels had extensive fortifications blocking the way; "we can hardly reach the Boydton Plank Road or South Side Railroad without a flank movement considerably to the left." Meade surmised that the Rebels had attacked Humphreys on the right to prevent such a flanking movement.<sup>183</sup>

At 8:45 p.m., Humphreys told Mott (one of his division commanders) that Warren would relieve him (Mott) and that Mott should move back over Hatcher's Run and go behind McAllister and Ramsey, adding the latter brigade to his command. Mott should support Smyth as required. At his new position, Mott would find a strong 9th Corps division (Hartranft) to his right and Wheaton's 6th Corps division to their right, connecting to Fort Cummings, part of the main Union line.<sup>184</sup>

Warren eventually (9:00 p.m.) received orders to join Humphreys at the Vaughan Road-Hatcher's Run crossing and to prepare for any enemy concentration in the morning. Gregg's cavalry division was to join him (Warren), although AOP headquarters had proven unable to contact the cavalry commander. Meade also informed Humphreys that he'd ordered Warren and Gregg back to support him. Humphreys received orders to stay put, resist further attacks, and, if possible, drive any Rebels back into their works. Once in position, Gregg's cavalry would protect Humphreys's rear from the Confederate cavalry that Meade soon expected to appear from Belfield.

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<sup>182</sup> *OR* 46/1:193, 255; *OR* 46/2:404-06. Getty was standing in as 6th Corps commander, because Maj. Gen. Wright was on leave.

<sup>183</sup> *OR* 46/2:389-90; *OR* 46/1:150.

<sup>184</sup> *OR* 46/2:399-400.



**Brig. Gen. John F. Hartranft**  
uniongenerals.org



**Maj. Gen. George W. Getty**  
wikipedia.org

At 9:30 p.m., Warren informed Maj. Gen. Griffin, one of his division commanders, that the corps would march back up Vaughan Road, and he wanted Griffin to move his troops as soon as possible. On arriving at Hatcher's Run, unless instructed otherwise, Griffin should relieve Mott's division, holding the line at the Hatcher's Run crossing. Warren added, "all my wagon train will follow you, and I wish it parked as near the crossing of Hatcher's Run as possible and set the pioneers to repairing the bridge, if necessary."<sup>185</sup>

At 10:00 p.m., Meade messaged Grant and Humphreys, reporting that Rebel cavalry had attacked Gregg's rear guard, and he feared they might get between Warren and Gregg. Meade also wanted to know if Humphreys had heard from Warren. Half an hour later, Humphreys replied that he'd just learned that Warren was sending his trains back promptly and his soldiers would be arriving soon. He also reassured Meade that only a small Rebel force had cut off a few of Gregg's men.<sup>186</sup>

At 10:25 p.m., Grant asked Meade for an update on the situation and what he planned to do in the morning. He strongly counseled Meade against any withdrawal and to engage with any enemy outside of their trenches. Before replying, Meade sent another order to Gregg (10:30 p.m.), from whom he had heard little for hours. He wrote, "at 6.25 p.m. today, orders were sent to you to report with your command to Major-General Warren." Meade reiterated that Warren was moving to join Humphreys at the Hatcher's Run crossing and that he (Gregg) would guard Warren's trains. He explained that A. P. Hill's Corps had attacked Humphreys's right and that they would drive in Hill tomorrow. Gregg would be under Humphreys's command while supporting the 2nd Corps.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> *OR* 46/1:254; *OR* 46/2:396, 404.

<sup>186</sup> *OR* 46/2:391, 396-97.

<sup>187</sup> *OR* 46/2:410.

Meade eventually replied to Grant at 11:15 p.m., giving him a complete summary of the *entire* day's events, again (incorrectly) saying that Humphreys had lost 300 men in the Rebel attacks. He only addressed his plans for the morning in the final two lines: i.e., he would attack any enemy forces outside their defenses and drive them back. Meade displayed concern about the likely arrival of Rebel cavalry. In a message to Humphreys (11:30 p.m.), he reported that Rooney Lee's entire cavalry force had reached Malone's Crossing, and a courier (Major Jay) sent to Gregg had gone missing. Meade asked Humphreys to inform Warren of this situation and for some of Humphreys's infantry, supported by his cavalry regiment, to move to the Wyatt house and cover Halifax Road.<sup>188</sup>

At 1:15 a.m., Meade sent another panicky message informing Grant of the missing escorted courier and that Rebels had fired upon Gregg's force. Convinced that these were the actions of the Confederate cavalry moving up from Belfield, Meade feared for the safety of Gregg's cavalry. However, shortly afterward, he sent Grant another message stating that their own men had shot at and captured the courier and that the Rebel cavalry wasn't near Malone's Crossing after all. As we shall discover, the bulk of Rooney Lee's cavalry remained over 30 miles away.<sup>189</sup>

#### Warren's Night

Although ordered to move back to the Hatcher's Run crossing at 9:00 p.m., Warren needed time to organize, coordinate, and execute this tricky maneuver, especially at night. The first of Warren's divisions (Griffin's) began moving out around 11:00 p.m. Ayres's division departed about midnight, while Crawford's men only started marching around 4:00 a.m. Major General Griffin's men relieved Mott's Federals on the west side of the Hatcher's Run crossing at 3:00 a.m. As instructed, Mott marched his men to the rear of the Tucker house, near the line held by McAllister's and West's brigades of his division and Ramsey's Yankees of Miles's division. Once in position, as previously ordered, Mott added Ramsey's brigade to his command.<sup>190</sup>

Amongst the first to depart camp was Sgt. Marshall, 155th Pennsylvania, Brig. Gen. Alfred L. Pearson's brigade, Griffin's division. He recalled, "it was now sundown and it had been freezing hard all day but . . . we soon had good fires to warm us, but lying down on the frozen ground to sleep with only a few pine tops and gum blankets under us was different from the comfortable quarters we had left." They did not lie long enough to warm the ground as between 10:00 p.m. and 11:00 p.m., they received orders to move out on Vaughan Road towards Hatcher's Run.<sup>191</sup>

Ordered out last (4:00 a.m.) proved a mixed blessing for Crawford's division. While potentially gaining an extended rest, they had to endure the cold camp for longer. Chaplain

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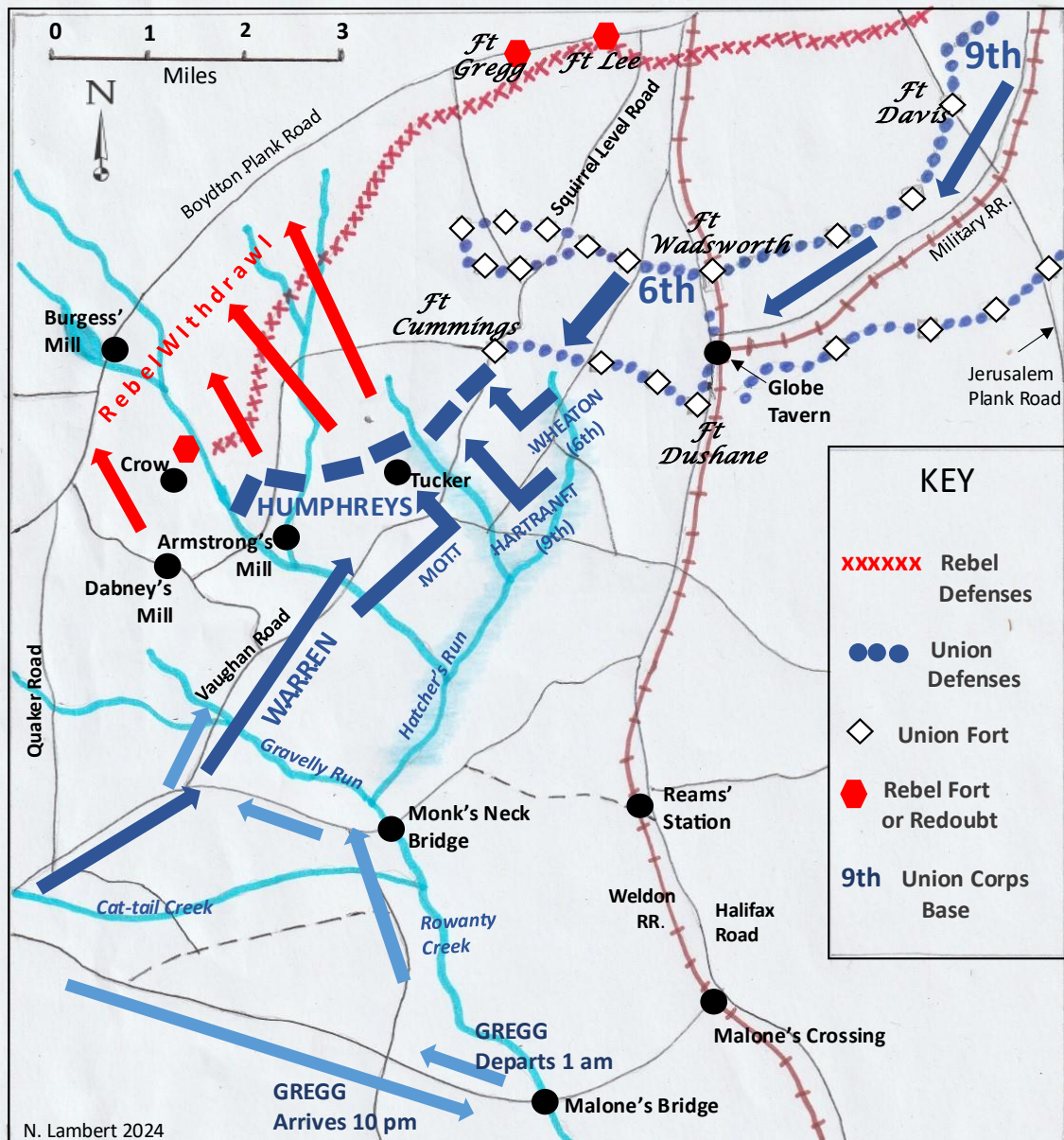
<sup>188</sup> OR 46/2:391-92, 396-97; OR 46/1:150-51.

<sup>189</sup> OR 46/1:151-52.

<sup>190</sup> OR 46/1:269-71, 280, 282, 291-92; OR 51/1:288, 290.

<sup>191</sup> William H. Locke, *The Story of the Regiment* (Philadelphia, 1868), 373-74; John D. Vautier, *History of the 88th Pennsylvania Volunteers in the War for the Union 1861-1865* (Philadelphia, PA, 1894), 205; Marshall, *Company "K,"* 222. By the war's end, Marshall had achieved the rank of major.

William H. Locke, 11th Pennsylvania, Brig. Gen. Henry Baxter's brigade, remembered the night as "a strange sight of men crowded together around the campfires, with no other protection than overcoats, and an occasional gum blanket." Many voiced their wrath at sleeping on the ground in a winter rainstorm. Whereas others simply "covered up their heads in the capes of their overcoats, and with feet to the blazing camp-fire - that was made to burn despite the rain - slept on until morning." Another of Baxter's soldiers, Pvt. John D. Vautier, 88th Pennsylvania, recalled how "the boys had to walk around all night to keep from freezing."



Map 7.1: Overnight Activities February 5-6, 1865.

### Gregg's Night

Gregg had departed Dinwiddie CH in the early afternoon, traveling back to Malone's Bridge along treacherous roads. The 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry, Lt. Col. John Robinson commanding, acted as rear guard, with Capt. Henry H. Oliphant's squadron, Companies G

and H, at the tail end of the column. About twelve Rebels followed closely, occasionally firing into them. No Federals were injured, but the Confederates captured two men of G Company. The Federal cavalymen eventually reached Malone's Bridge around 10:00 p.m. and bivouacked.<sup>192</sup>

Because he missed Meade's 6:20 p.m. message, Gregg only learned of his recall to Warren's new position at 11:00 p.m. Imagine his dismay and the reaction of his cavalymen to this news. They had been on the move in the freezing cold and wet weather since 3:00 a.m. Lieutenant Cormany, 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry, recalled how, once in bivouac, they managed to eat and doze between 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m. A Yankee in Knowles's brigade (Sgt. Maj. Edward P. Tobie, 1st Maine Cavalry) remembered Rebels unsuccessfully trying to capture some of their pickets. The regiment moved out around 1:00 a.m. into the cold, dark landscape. Gregg's cavalry eventually met up with Warren's 5th Corps near the Vaughan Road-Gravelly Run crossing around dawn on February 6, with Rebel cavalry harassing them all the way.<sup>193</sup>

### Confederate Overnight Activities

Although having no direct testimony, it's safe to assume that a dark cloud hung over the Rebel high command. They had easily surrendered significant territory, and their early evening counter-offensive had been a dismal failure. Lee's Petersburg right flank looked vulnerable, and the army's morale was questionable. After placing pickets, Lee pulled his men back into the Confederate works protecting Boydton Plank Road, where they endured a cold and miserable night under arms, hoping that they could repel any potential Union attack on these positions.

On the Confederate far right, Col. Lea, commanding Johnston's Brigade, received orders from his divisional commander, Pegram, to retire his pickets from beyond Dabney's Mill to in front of the Crow house, where they should remain throughout the night. The rest of the brigade returned to their camps behind the Crow house on the understanding that they would return before dawn.<sup>194</sup>

Recall the earlier adventures of Confederate Capt. Esten Cooke. While endeavoring to return to Petersburg, he had encountered Rooney Lee with the 13th Virginia Cavalry. Subsequently, they rode to Dinwiddie CH, which David Gregg's Yankees had recently vacated. At nightfall, Rooney gave Cooke an escort and directed him up Boydton Plank Road with some verbal information to relay to any Confederate officers he met. After three miles, he reached the Gravelly Run crossing, guarded by pickets. Uncertain whether they were friends or foes, he approached anxiously. Thankfully for Cooke, they belonged to Pegram's division, and they directed him to Pegram's headquarters at the Quaker Road intersection.

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<sup>192</sup> OR 46/1:370; OR 46/2:409-10. The Rebels were probably from the 13th VA Cavalry.

<sup>193</sup> Mohr, *The Cormany Diaries*, 517; Edward P. Tobie, *History of the First Maine Cavalry, 1861-1865* (Boston, 1887), 378-79; OR 46/1:366-68, 370; William B. Hyndman, *History of a Cavalry Company. A Complete Record of Company "A," 4th Penn'a Cavalry* (Philadelphia, PA, 1870), 275.

<sup>194</sup> Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 358; Sloan, *The Guilford Grays*, 110; Bingham, "From New Bern to Bennett Place" 416-17; ORS 7, 805.

Cooke shared a warm reunion with his old school friend and newlywed John Pegram. They rode further north to Gordon's headquarters beyond Burgess's Mill. Cooke relayed his information from Rooney Lee, and Gordon told his story of the day (sadly not recorded). Gordon opined that the Federals wouldn't attack north of Hatcher's Run but would make a heavy assault on Pegram's line in the morning, south and west of the Run. Cooke recalled that Pegram appeared melancholic and preoccupied. After carefully studying a map (no details given), the meeting broke up, and Cooke continued to Petersburg.<sup>195</sup>

### The Rebel Cavalry

Esten Cooke stated that the lack of Rebel cavalry support, particularly for the exposed right flank, "was a most unfortunate yet unavoidable situation." With no local forage, they had set up camps at Belfield, 40 miles away. The role of Rooney Lee's cavalry in the battle is intriguing and mostly misrepresented in accounts. In his post-battle report, Robert E. Lee stated that he "had to bring William H. F. [Rooney] Lee's division forty miles Sunday night [February 5] to get him in position." Recall how Gregg had learned at Dinwiddie CH that a Confederate courier had passed through heading for Belfield to call up the cavalry.<sup>196</sup>

What is known of the Confederate cavalry at Belfield? The division comprised three brigades, each commanded by a flamboyant officer. Brigadier General Rufus C. Barringer's North Carolina brigade, Brig. Gen. Richard L. Beale's Virginia Brigade, and Brig. Gen. James Dearing's mixed brigade, which also included Graham's Virginia Battery. Barringer and Beale were both favorites of the iconic JEB Stuart and possessed distinguished war records. A successful artillery commander, Dearing had taken command of a cavalry brigade in April 1864.<sup>197</sup>

The strength of Rooney Lee's cavalry division is uncertain owing to irregularities in the End of January 1865 Inspection Report. It was somewhere between 3,000 and 4,100 men. The report revealed a shortage of weapons and horseshoes, and that many of Barringer's Tar Heels had no footwear. A lot of Dearing's horses suffered from "scratches," limiting their mobility. On February 2, the troopers had entertained themselves by staging a mock jousting contest. In Barringer's Brigade, at least, morale was low due to their incessant fighting and

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<sup>195</sup> Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray*, 560-63.

<sup>196</sup> Cooke, *Wearing of the Gray*, 553-54; *OR* 46/2:409, 1210; Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 42. The strength of Robert E. Lee's words has resulted in many accounts erroneously claiming that all of Rooney Lee's cavalry division took part in the battle.

<sup>197</sup> Lambert, "Rebel Units and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher's Run," Part 4. After Barringer's capture on April 3, 1865, he gained notoriety for being the first Confederate general to meet President Abraham Lincoln. Beale had achieved recognition for his role in intercepting the Federal Kilpatrick-Dahlgren raid in March 1864. In this raid, Dahlgren was killed, and papers found on his body revealed a plot to burn Richmond and kill the Confederate president. Beale took over the brigade in October 1864, but administrators misplaced his promotion paperwork, these only came through on February 6, during the battle. Three of his sons served in his brigade. When given command of a cavalry brigade, Richmond failed to ratify Dearing's promotion, although official reports always referred to him as a brigadier general. On Feb 21, after months of conspiring, Dearing transferred to his close friend Maj. Gen. Thomas L. Rosser's Division to lead the renowned Laurel Brigade. Shot at the battle of High Bridge (April 6, 1865), Dearing died of his wounds on April 23 and is regarded as the last Civil War general to die from combat.

marching over the previous six months, as well as enduring a freezing winter with minimal food.<sup>198</sup>



**Brig. Gen. Rufus C. Barringer**  
wikipedia.org



**Brig. Gen. James Dearing**  
wikipedia.org

It is unknown when the orders arrived to move to the scene of combat. How long would it take a courier to travel to Belfield? Private Milas Cavin in Barringer's Brigade recalled an order for all men with serviceable horses to ride out and defend the supply line. He declined the order, claiming that his horse was sick. The tone of his memoir suggested that others responded similarly. How many troopers carried out the order is unknown. Cavin wrote that elements of the command left camp and only returned on February 11. However, *no evidence* supports Barringer or Dearing's brigades participating in the Hatcher's Run battle. Seminal texts on these cavaliers and regiments do not mention the battle. Records showed that they suffered no casualties during that time. No battle account is consistent with 4,000 or even 3,000 Rebel cavalry being present at the fight. Current evidence indicates that these two brigades did *not* substantially contribute to the battle.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> NARA M935, Roll 15, 1-P-58, 2-P-58, 3-P-58, 4-P-58. The cover page of the "End of January 1865 Inspection Report" recorded 3,093 men, while, inside the document, the aggregate of column 11 (those present for duty) added up to 4,152! The usually reliable columns 42 and 43 were empty as they related to infantry only; Daughtry, *Gray Cavalier*, 242-43. "Scratches" or "greased heel" was a severe inflammation above the hoof caused by prolonged standing in wet, muddy areas. Raiford, *The 4th North Carolina Cavalry*, 83; Roger H. Harrell, *The 2nd North Carolina Cavalry* (Jefferson, NC, 2011), 346-47; *The Wadesboro [NC] Argus*, February 23, 1865, page 2.

<sup>199</sup> Harrell, *The 2nd North Carolina Cavalry*, 347; A cavalry memoir claimed that orders to move to Hatcher's Run were received at noon; however, the timings in this text are unreliable (Driver, *10th Virginia Cavalry*, 69). Sheridan Barringer, *Fighting for General Lee: Confederate General Rufus Barringer and the North Carolina Cavalry Brigade* (El Dorado Hills, CA, 2016); William L. Parker, "Brigadier James Dearing, CSA," M.A. Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, 1969. Neither of these two texts mentioned the Hatcher's Run battle. I exchanged emails with Sheridan Barringer (a descendant of the Confederate general), Mary Daughtry (who wrote the Rooney Lee biography), and Cheri Todd Molter, NC Civil War & Reconstruction History Center, none knew of any evidence that placed Barringer or Dearing at the battle. The accounts in Clark, *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina*, from the six NC cavalry regiments in the division do not mention the battle. Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 42.

In contrast, testimony demonstrates that most of Beale's Brigade did make the long and arduous 40-mile journey overnight, reaching Hatcher's Run by the morning of February 6. Possibly, a few troopers from the other two brigades also went along. Reunited with Rooney Lee and the 13th Virginia Cavalry, this cavalry force played an active role in the following two days of combat.<sup>200</sup>

#### Analysis of February 5, 1865

With day one of the Union offensive concluded, how had the opposing armies fared?  
Union Reflections

The day produced mixed results for the Union. Grant's stated goal of disrupting the Confederate Boydton Plank Road supply line proved futile because no significant supply line existed to disrupt! The intelligence underpinning Grant's mission was inaccurate. The Federals endangered a cavalry division and virtually two infantry corps on a pointless mission, just as Meade initially feared.

And yet, the Federals captured the Rowanty crossings at Malone's Bridge and Monk's Neck Bridge and reached as far west as Dinwiddie CH while facing minimal resistance. They also easily gained the strategically important Hatcher's Run crossings at Armstrong's Mill and Vaughan Road. Union troops had previously captured these crossings in late October 1864, during Grant's 6th Offensive, and on December 9, 1864. On both occasions, the Federals had soon withdrawn. If Grant's men could now hold these crossings, that would represent a significant achievement.

In addition, the Federals had forced the Confederates out of their fortifications and compelled them to attack a defended Union line, which the Federals soundly repulsed with minimal losses. Grant's assault had stretched Rebel resources, resources they could ill afford to expend.<sup>201</sup>

Despite the late afternoon Union victory, the ineffectual Confederate assaults profoundly affected Federal strategy for the following days. Meade had encountered Rebels from the divisions of Heth, Evans, Mahone, and Pegram (i.e., the pickets defending the Hatcher's Run crossings). That constituted a sizeable force, and Meade understood Humphreys's and Smyth's assessment that things could have turned out very differently. Without the crucial artillery support and the tenacity of McAllister's brigade, the AOP might have lost Smyth's division. Meade also feared that Rooney Lee's cavalry division would appear at any time from their Belfield base. By seeing events in this light, one can comprehend why Meade consolidated his forces around Humphreys's position at the Hatcher's Run crossings. However, in doing so, did he surrender the initiative?

From an armchair in a warm room over 150 years later, it is easy to suggest that if Meade had been bold, he could have ordered Warren and Gregg up Quaker Road and attacked Lee's right flank. Only rudimentary fortifications and Pegram's small division guarded this

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<sup>200</sup> Krick, *9th Virginia Cavalry*, 43; Driver, *10th Virginia Cavalry*, 69. Beale's own memoir reserved one sentence for the battle: Beale, *History of the 9th Virginia Cavalry*, 147. His son's memoir in contrast provided a detailed account of the battle and his wounding; George W. Beale, *A Lieutenant of Cavalry in Lee's Army* (Boston, 1918), 197-205.

<sup>201</sup> *OR* 42/1: 263-64, 267-68, 272-76; *OR* 42/3: 890-91, 898, 900-902. Hampton Newsome, *Richmond Must Fall* (Kent, OH, 2013), Loc 4834-5414.

location. Further west lay the undefended White Oak Road and a gateway to the Southside Railroad, the capture of which would doom Richmond. With reinforcements arriving from 9th Corps and 6th Corps divisions, Meade probably had enough men to hold off any Confederate assaults on Vaughan Road. Furthermore, the Rebel cavalry was in no position or state to influence affairs. Although Grant had this offensive idea in mind, it is understandable why Meade chose the cautious option. With the benefit of hindsight, however, the Yankees may have been generous in abandoning the Vaughan Road-Quaker Road junction.

#### Confederate Reflections

The Rebels appeared unprepared for the Union offensive, thinking perhaps there would be no substantial action until the Spring. Usually, the winter months proved relatively quiet, with the roads in no condition to facilitate mass troop movements. A newspaper report claimed that the Confederates were not expecting an attack, as their Peace Commissioners had not returned.<sup>202</sup>

With over 30 miles of Petersburg trenches to occupy and dwindling numbers of soldiers, Lee's logistics and supply demands became increasingly challenging. The Confederates also faced a period of reorganization. After arriving from the Valley less than two months earlier, Gordon's men needed to familiarize themselves with protecting Lee's vulnerable right flank. The recently reorganized Rebel cavalry was in a bad state. Inadequate supplies of food, forage, and equipment for both men and mounts resulted in low morale and ailing horses. Camped far away from the area of operation, they couldn't provide Lee with the support and intelligence he desperately needed.

The important Rowanty crossings at Malone's Bridge and Monk's Neck Bridge required better defending. The main Rebel forces were too distant to support the few guarding Rebel pickets. Pegram's remit involved protecting Dinwiddie CH, an important site on the crucial Boydton Plank Road. He especially had to defend the two vital crossings of Hatcher's Run. The Federals captured all three locations, meeting little resistance. Indeed, throughout the entire day, Pegram's division hardly inconvenienced the Yankees.

Humphreys captured the crossings at Armstrong's Mill and Vaughan Road at around 10:00 a.m. It took the Rebels an additional *six hours* to contest the advancing Federals. Six hours for the Federals to organize their forces, summon reinforcements, and even create basic earthworks. The attacks, when they came, could have reversed Lee's fortunes, but the timidity of Evans's division in particular blunted any chance of success.

February 5 had been a black day for the ANV. Devoid of any meaningful cavalry support and with infantry so low on morale, many either refused to fight or deserted; the Confederates may have feared that their right flank could collapse the following day. No wonder Lee "wept like a child."

The hungry and exhausted Yankees and Rebels endured a wet and bitterly cold night, with sleep hard to achieve. As the sun rose on Monday, February 6, they could little imagine what the day might hold.

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<sup>202</sup> *Pittsburg [PA] Daily Post*, Feb 10, 1865.

## Chapter 8

### Trying to Locate the Enemy

February 6, 6:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

At 6:40 a.m., Monday, February 6, Humphreys messaged Meade, summarizing the Union's situation:

Everything remains quiet. The troops of the Sixth and Ninth Corps were got into position last night, and hold the line strongly to Fort Cummings, with strong reserves. Warren's infantry came up before morning and Gregg's cavalry are coming up now. All of Mott is now on the right of Smyth.<sup>203</sup>

By concentrating his forces overnight around Humphreys's 2nd Corps, AOP commander Meade had valid reasons for feeling more confident. At 7:15 a.m., Meade wrote to Grant saying that Warren and Humphreys were in position, with the army's right flank secured by Fort Cummings and the left flank by two 5th Corps divisions at the Vaughan Road–Hatcher's Run crossing. Gregg's cavalymen had now joined Warren's force. Meade shared with Grant how he'd ordered Warren and Humphreys to move out to determine if any enemy forces resided outside their line of works. His Federals would drive in any Rebels discovered in the open, but they would not attack Confederates within their well-prepared defensive positions. However, how Meade and his chief-of-staff, Maj. Gen. Alex S. Webb disseminated these orders, caused significant confusion and delays.<sup>204</sup>

After Meade, Warren was the senior Union officer on the battlefield, responsible for all forces present. When Warren received orders around 8:00 a.m. to probe the Rebels on his front and attack any in the open, he interpreted the dispatch as requiring him to reconnoiter on Humphreys's front. After all, fierce fighting had occurred there the previous evening, and that was where the Federals expected another attack.

Consistent with this interpretation, Warren heard from Humphreys (8:45 a.m.) that he'd deployed troops from Maj. Gen. Mott's division, 2nd Corps, and Maj. Gen. Hartranft's division, 9th Corps, to probe for the enemy on his front. Furthermore, Humphreys had directed his 2nd Corps soldiers to prepare to attack should he discover any Confederates outside their works. Warren swiftly replied, acknowledging the information, and said he had ordered one of his own divisions (Crawford's) to be ready to support Humphreys if required. Warren reported that on his front, the Rebels only had vedettes. He believed the Rebels' main line extended south to Gravelly Run about a mile west of Dabney's Mill. He added that

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<sup>203</sup> *OR* 46/2:422-23.

<sup>204</sup> *OR* 46/1:152; *OR* 46/2:417, 423. Maj. Gen. Webb had been shot through the head at Spotsylvania in May 1864 and presumed dead. He'd only returned to the army as chief-of-staff in Jan 1865. In 1891 he received a Medal of Honor for his deeds at Gettysburg.

Gregg had just reported skirmishing with the enemy on Vaughan Road. Warren concluded by saying he was preparing for anything and would await further developments.<sup>205</sup>

So instead of *both* Warren and Humphreys probing their fronts, as Meade intended, only the latter executed the order. This communication mishap arose from Meade's assumption that Humphreys outranked Warren. In Meade's defense, Humphreys was much older than Warren and far senior in the Regular Army. However, Warren outranked Humphreys in the Volunteer Army (by two months only), which determined seniority during the war.<sup>206</sup>

### Humphreys Probes His Front

At 9:00 a.m., Humphreys ordered Brig. Gen. De Trobriand, Mott's division, to conduct a reconnaissance beyond the Tucker house, discover the whereabouts of the Confederates, and learn if they had retired into their works. De Trobriand took four regiments on the mission: 2nd U.S. Sharpshooters, 20th Indiana, 17th Maine, and 1st Maine Heavy Artillery.<sup>207</sup> He deployed the sharpshooters right and left of the road running north, with an advance guard on the road and a reserve. On the left of the Thompson house, he found a side road through some woods, where he left two 20th Indiana companies to secure his rear. De Trobriand proceeded northwards unopposed, the Confederates having withdrawn their advanced picket line. Upon reaching an opening, he noticed a few Rebels occupying light works constructed across the road. A few shots swiftly dislodged the Confederates. De Trobriand saw the Watkins house ahead and beyond that, about 250 yards, a continuous line of occupied Confederate defenses. The Yankees advanced toward the house and, after trading shots, quickly ousted some Rebel outposts.

De Trobriand realized that he'd reached the Confederates' main works. He pushed forward his skirmishers to ascertain the enemy's strength. He saw a large Rebel force rushing toward the side road where he'd left the two 20th Indiana companies. De Trobriand withdrew his men, fearing that he could be cut off. He transferred his reconnaissance from the road running north to the road running west of the Thompson house. As the Rebels showed no desire to attack, he sent forward two companies under Lt. Col. Albert S. Andrews, 20th Indiana, who advanced across a swamp. The bluecoats soon found themselves before major Confederate entrenchments, including a redoubt armed with two cannons commanding the road.

The Yankees opened fire on the Rebels from Pegram's division, visible above the barricades. The Confederates briskly returned fire, and many jumped over their parapets to occupy small pits in front of their entrenchments. De Trobriand reported the progress of his

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<sup>205</sup> OR 46/1:254; OR 46/2:433.

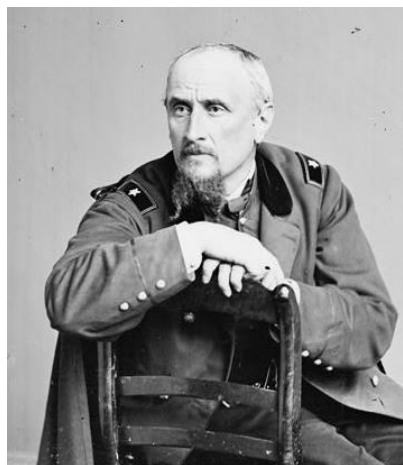
<sup>206</sup> Donald R. Jermann, *Union General Gouverneur Warren: Hero at Little Round Top, Disgrace at Five Forks* (Jefferson, NC, 2015) 19; OR 46/2:422, 430.

<sup>207</sup> We first met the 2nd Sharpshooters in Chapter 4. The Indiana regiment was the 20th in name only; the soldiers of the 20th had mustered out of service in Oct 1864. By Feb 1865, the 20th IN was a collection of officers and men remaining from the 7th, 14th, and 19th IN, the latter regiment being originally one of the famous Iron Brigade. The 1st ME Heavy Artillery acquired the sad record for losing the greatest number of killed and mortally wounded of any regiment in the Union Army in a single day of battle – June 18, 1864.

mission to division and corps commanders. With the objective fully accomplished, he followed orders and returned to the Federal lines.<sup>208</sup>



**Maj. Gen. Alex S. Webb**  
Library of Congress



**Brig. Gen. P. Regis de Trobriand**  
Library of Congress

Towards 10:00 a.m., Humphreys ordered Hartranft to send out a regiment to reconnoiter beyond the Smith and Hawks houses and determine, if possible, the position and strength of any Rebels outside of their main works. Hartranft dispatched the 200th Pennsylvania, commanded by Lt. Col. William H. McCall. One of Hartranft's staff officers, Capt. Watts, familiar with the roads in the vicinity and the location of the Confederate main position, accompanied the party. Watts soon reported that no Confederates resided outside their works except the usual pickets occupying their customary pits. Consequently, following Humphreys's orders, the regiment did not engage and returned to its division.<sup>209</sup>

#### A Perplexed Warren

Meanwhile, Warren continued to seek clarification of his role. At 9:30 a.m., he received the following confused message from Meade's chief-of-staff, Maj. Gen. Webb:

my dispatch of 7.50 a.m. was written and sent before General Humphreys' telegram of 7.20, and was considered necessary owing to the misapprehension he [Meade] labored under yesterday of your relative rank, rendering it, in his judgment, prudential to repeat the instructions given last night. General Humphreys' dispatch of 7.20 is perfectly satisfactory, and thus mine of 7.50 proves to be unnecessary.

The dispatch highlights the misunderstanding about rank seniority. It also explains the cross-over of messages with Humphreys, who had telegraphed his intention to probe his front

<sup>208</sup> OR 46/1:227-28; OR 46/2:424. The redoubt just north of the Crow house would feature prominently in the battle. A description of the redoubt is provided in *Atlanta [GA] Weekly Intelligencer*, April, 1865. In the OR, Union officers used the terms: probe, reconnaissance, reconnoiter the enemy's position, feel out one's front, interchangeably to mean the same thing.

<sup>209</sup> OR 46/1:344. The 200th PA had only formed in Sept 1864 and joined Hartranft's division on Nov 28, 1864.

before receiving Webb's 7:50 a.m. message to Humphreys and Warren ordering them to probe their fronts. However, Webb's latest message only partially resolved the matter, and Warren remained perplexed. To compound the confusion, about twenty minutes later, the communications operator at headquarters sent Warren a note stating that the message he had received around 8:00 a.m. should be timed as sent at 7:50 a.m.

Warren, known for his strict attention to detail, quickly replied (10:00 a.m.) to Meade's chief-of-staff, explaining that he had not received any dispatches with times marked on them. He had received one around 8:00 a.m. (with no time upon it), ordering him to probe to his front. Warren asked, was this the order that was now no longer necessary? He stated that he'd organized his forces according to his overnight orders. Humphreys had told him of his plan to probe the enemy and attack if possible. Consequently, he (Warren) was keeping his troops in readiness if Humphreys needed support. Warren revealed that the Rebel presence facing him appeared light, and if he probed on his front, he would be marching over the same road that Meade had recently ordered him to take. But he was happy to do so or support Humphreys, whatever Meade wanted.<sup>210</sup>

With the communication problems unresolved and Warren still unaware that Meade wanted him to probe on his front, Warren faced another issue as the cavalry skirmishing along Vaughan Road intensified.

#### Union Cavalry Actions

After marching through the night, David Gregg's exhausted cavalry started to reach Warren's 5th Corps around 4:00 a.m. Brigadier General Davies returned from leave that morning to resume command of his brigade. At 8:00 a.m., as the troopers rested near the Gravelly Run crossing, dismounted Rebel cavalry vigorously attacked their rearguard. Sergeant Major Edward P. Tobie, 1st Maine Cavalry, Knowles's brigade, recalled:

the men were generally cooking their breakfast, when there was sharp firing just in the rear. The rear guard – 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry – was attacked and the enemy was driving it in with severe loss. The 1st Maine [Cavalry] were ordered to the rescue. Leaving their cooking utensils and prospective breakfast where they were, leaving overcoats, leaving everything but their carbines the boys jumped into line.

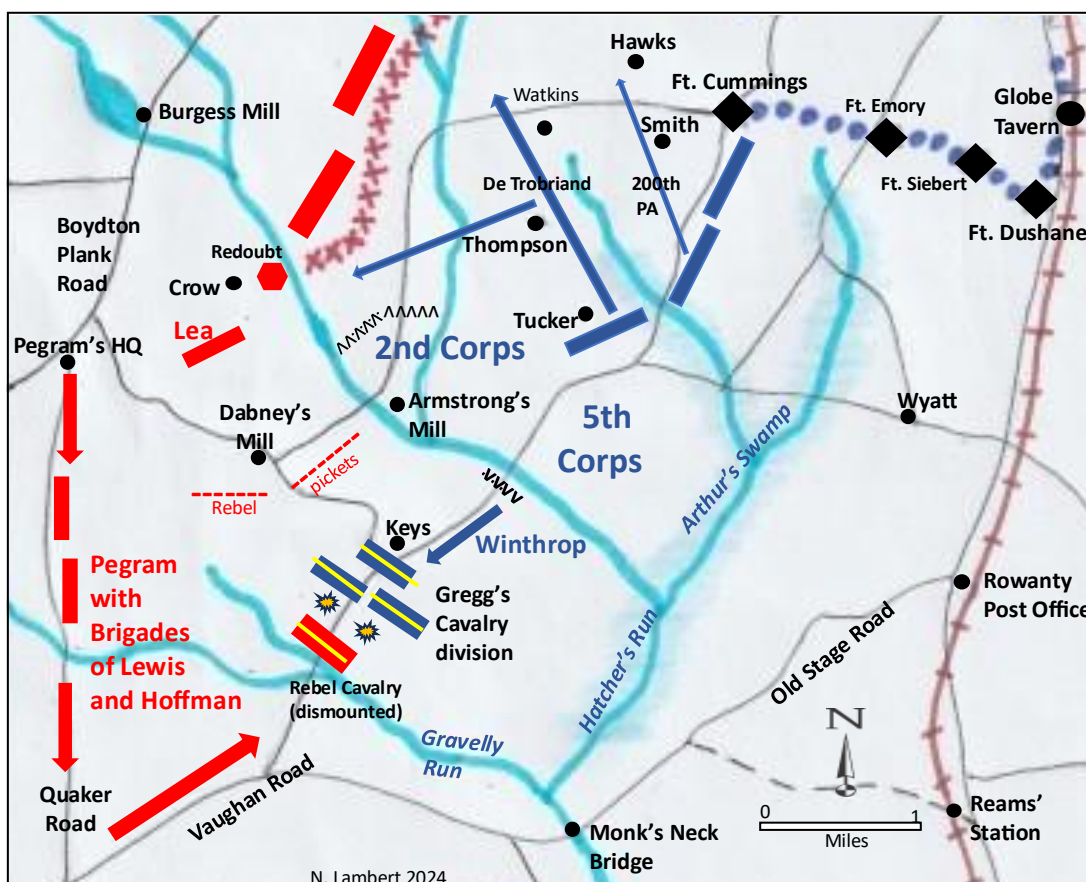
With their horses sent to the rear, Capt. John D. Myrick's battalion, 1st Maine Cavalry, led the advance and charged, checking the Confederate assault. Once relieved, the 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry retired in relatively good order. Myrick then advanced his Maine men to a crossroads where they sought cover and defensible positions. The remainder of the 1st Maine Cavalry (268 officers and men) drew up just behind on the brow of a hill. Tobie remembered "the fun they had that morning shooting at the enemy's sharpshooters, who occasionally showed themselves around some out-buildings, in the edge of the woods on the opposite side of the field." This situation continued with sporadic shooting until about 1:00 p.m.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> OR 46/2:423, 430-31.

<sup>211</sup> OR 46/2:430; Crowninshield, *History of the 1st Regiment*, 249; Tobie, *History of the 1st Maine Cavalry*, 378-79; Merrill, *Campaigns of the 1st Maine*, 318-19. Tobie received a Medal of Honor for deeds he performed during the final days of the war.

Other Union cavalymen had different recollections. They remembered how the Rebels (most likely troopers of Beale's Cavalry Brigade) had shadowed their column all morning. After halting for breakfast, Rebels drove in the rear Federal pickets and attacked the reserve. The 10th New York Cavalry, Davies's brigade, quickly formed, and following behind brigade skirmishers from the 24th New York Cavalry, they drove back the Rebels. Joined by Knowles's brigade (dismounted), they hastily constructed light breastworks across Vaughan Road near the Keys house as the firing continued. Armed with repeating rifles, the bluecoats easily held off the dismounted Rebel cavalymen. However, the arrival of Rebel infantry, from Pegram's division, around 11:00 a.m., intensified the skirmishing and threatened the Union cavalymen.<sup>212</sup>



Map 8.1: Army Movements, 8:00 a.m. to Noon, Monday, February 6.

The Union forces had to maintain control of the strategically important Vaughan Road. About a mile up the road from this skirmishing, Warren ordered Brig. Gen. Winthrop's brigade, Ayres's division, to support the embattled cavalymen. As they marched the short distance, they found Gregg's dismounted cavalry skirmishing with the enemy. Memoirs from

<sup>212</sup> Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry*, 240-41; Hand, *One Good Regiment*, 191; OR 46/1:366; Henry R. Pyne, *The History of the First New Jersey Cavalry, (Sixteenth Regiment, New Jersey Volunteers)* (Trenton, NJ, 1871), 303. Some Union cavalry claimed, in error, that the Rebel infantry arrived around 10:00 a.m.

cavalrymen remembered that infantry relieved them around 1:00 p.m.<sup>213</sup>

Winthrop reported that the 146th New York relieved the cavalry pickets. The 5th and 140th New York deployed on the right-hand side of Vaughan Road, and the 15th New York Heavy Artillery (now an infantry regiment) was on the left-hand side in a large open field. However, Sgt. J. Ansel Booth, 140th New York, claimed *they* had relieved the cavalry pickets. He noted that the cavalrymen had Spencer repeating rifles, and “half a dozen of them [were] worth a whole company of our Springfield rifles.” He continued, “advancing closely to the Rebel picket line in the woods, we soon had as much shooting as we cared to make.” This action continued for nearly an hour, allowing the Federal cavalry to regroup. Gregg’s cavalrymen had now been active since 3:00 a.m. the previous day with little or no rest.<sup>214</sup>

### Warren Finally Acts

Between 11:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. Humphreys informed Meade and Warren of his reconnaissance mission, namely that De Trobriand and Hartranft had met little resistance and found no significant Rebel forces outside their defenses. At 12:15 p.m., Warren received a dispatch (with precise timings) from Meade’s chief-of-staff, trying again to explain the communication mix-up. It stated that the plan was for *both* he (Warren) and Humphreys to determine if the enemy was outside their works on their respective fronts and, if so, to drive them in. Hence, Warren received explicit orders to conduct a reconnaissance south and west of Hatcher’s Run to ascertain the whereabouts of the enemy’s lines. Shortly afterward, Meade arrived at Warren’s headquarters, presumably to clarify the orders and personally inspect the situation on the ground.<sup>215</sup>

Suitably enlightened to Meade’s intentions, at 1:15 p.m., Warren instructed Crawford to move his division along Vaughan Road to where it met Dabney’s Mill Road and take that road toward the old sawmill. Crawford should drive back any Confederates encountered and ascertain the position of their main defensive lines, believed to be nearby. Ayres and his division received orders to follow Crawford, taking Winthrop’s brigade, currently supporting the cavalry down Vaughan Road, with him. Griffin’s division remained as a reserve in the Hatcher’s Run-Vaughan Road crossing entrenchments. David Gregg received orders to send a cavalry force down Vaughan Road and drive any Rebels across Gravelly Run. Warren believed this would be easily accomplished as he thought Gregg faced only a few Confederate cavalry skirmishers. In addition, Gregg should dispatch a small force to screen the left flank of the advancing infantry column of Crawford and Ayres and send a small

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<sup>213</sup> OR 46/1:254, 279; Schlosser & Robortella, *Writing Home*, 63; Tobie, *History of the 1st Maine Cavalry*, 379; Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry*, 241. Accounts of the skirmishing along Vaughan Road contain numerous inconsistencies. I have oriented the text around those events most supported by eyewitness accounts. In his report, Winthrop claimed he moved out to support the cavalry at 1:00 p.m.; it was probably nearer noon. One of Winthrop’s infantrymen wrote that the sun was up and “the day getting quite warm like May.” Most memoirs be it from blue or gray commented on how cold and wet the weather was that day.

<sup>214</sup> Schlosser & Robortella, *Writing Home*, 63; OR 46/1:279; Pyne, *The History of the First New Jersey Cavalry*, 303.

<sup>215</sup> OR 46/2:424, 431-32, 434; OR 46/1:254.

cavalry force to watch the road leading down the east side of Rowanty Creek to Monk's Neck Bridge.<sup>216</sup>

By 1:30 p.m., Crawford's and Ayres's divisions marched purposefully down Vaughan Road towards the Dabney's Mill Road intersection. Slightly further up the road, having been relieved by Winthrop's men, David Gregg's cavalry prepared to execute their orders and push the Confederates over Gravelly Run.

### The Confederate Situation

Throughout the morning, the Rebels had adopted a primarily defensive posture. Heth's Division rested securely within the main Confederate fortifications north of Armstrong's Mill, their advanced pickets having retreated from De Trobriand's earlier probe. These forces showed no appetite for leaving their works. Sergeant Probest, 2nd Maryland Battalion, McComb's Brigade, remembered the very cold day. At 7:00 a.m., his battalion marched 300 yards to the right of Davis's camp, stacked arms behind the breastworks, and built fires. Henry Ammen, also in McComb's Brigade, wrote in his diary at noon, "All quiet along the lines. Poor Fred Wingate [wounded the previous day] died at 10 o'clock this morning." Captain John Sloan, 27th North Carolina, Cooke's Brigade, remembered returning to their camps on February 6, where they enjoyed quiet and rested until late March. Evans's division returned to the Confederate works on Heth's right. Mahone's Division (currently commanded by Brig. Gen. Finegan), which had arrived towards the end of the Rebel assaults the previous day, lay in their lines until around noon. Upon receiving orders to return to their camps in front of Petersburg, they set off along Boydton Plank Road.<sup>217</sup>

Pegram's division, occupying the far right of the Rebel line, showed more aggressive intentions. This force included the brigades of Brig. Gen. Johnston, Col. John Hoffman, and Brig. Gen. William G. Lewis. Recall that Johnston was absent throughout the battle, with brigade command passing to Col. Lea. At about 10:00 a.m., Pegram ordered Lea to "extend his line (curving it backwards) to the works at the Masonic Lodge in front of our camp." With his 775 men, Lea received orders to hold this line (nearly two miles) for as long as possible. If compelled to fall back, he must do so slowly until reaching the defenses near the Crow house, which must be held. Lea learned that Pegram would accompany the brigades of Hoffman (631 men) and Lewis (902 men) down Quaker Road to Vaughan Road and strike the enemy there.<sup>218</sup>

At 11:00 a.m., an undisclosed Rebel commander ordered Lea to probe toward the Vaughan Road-Hatcher's Run crossing as the Yankees appeared to be retreating. Lea gave the task to the 1st North Carolina Battalion commanded by Capt. Reuben Wilson.<sup>219</sup> They

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<sup>216</sup> *OR* 46/1:254; *OR* 46/2:434.

<sup>217</sup> Driver, *First and Second Maryland*, 313; Sloan, *Reminiscences of The Guilford Grays*, 110; Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 35; Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 358-61.

<sup>218</sup> *ORS* 7:803-04; Lambert, "Rebel Units and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher's Run" Part 2; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 414. In note 9 of Chapter 45, Sherrill discussed the Quaker Meeting House and the Masonic Lodge. The location of the latter still seems uncertain.

<sup>219</sup> Reuben Wilson acquired notoriety the following month. While patrolling in western North Carolina, he allegedly took five Union sympathizers from jail and shot them. Calls for his prosecution lasted long after the

advanced nearly a mile before Yankees fired upon their front and left flank, forcing them to withdraw. Shortly afterward, Lea received orders from Corps Commander Gordon to take his brigade and strike the retreating Federals at the crossing. A seasoned veteran, Lea was aware of the large, entrenched Federal force (Humphreys's 2nd Corps) around Armstrong's Mill blocking that maneuver. He declined the order until his immediate commander, Pegram, knew the complete situation. Moments later, Maj. Giles B. Cooke, from Gen. R. E. Lee's staff, and Lt. Thomas Jones, from Gordon's staff, visited Lea, who showed them the Union's strong position. The staff officers quickly rode back to Gordon with the news while Lea awaited the outcome. Starved of cavalry intelligence, the Confederate high command may have misconstrued the withdrawal of De Trobriand's brigade from Hatcher's Run to undertake a probe (see above) as a broader Union withdrawal.<sup>220</sup>



**Maj. Giles B. Cooke**  
Wikipedia



**Capt. Reuben Wilson**  
Library of Congress

Meanwhile, Pegram rode down Quaker Road towards Vaughan Road with the brigades of Lewis and Hoffman. By around 11:00 a.m., Lewis and Hoffman were in a battle line north of Vaughan Road near the Gravelly Run crossing. They joined elements of Rooney Lee's dismounted cavalymen who had been skirmishing with the Federal cavalry for several

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war ended. On April 2, 1865, a shell tore off his left leg. Hospitalized, Wilson was paroled on Apr 21, only to be re-arrested and taken to Libby Prison, where he remained until Dec 20, 1865. David C. Williard, "Executions, Justice, and Reconciliation in North Carolina's Western Piedmont, 1865-67," *Journal of the Civil War Era* (March 2012), Vol. 1, No. 1, 31-47.

<sup>220</sup> *ORS* 7:803-04; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 414. The reports of Lee and Gordon were minimal, mentioning no specific orders, *OR* 46/1:381, 390. Sherrill claimed that Lea's orders originated from R. E. Lee. Lt. Thomas Jones was the officer mentioned in the cancelled ambush of Brig. Gen. McAllister on the previous afternoon.

hours along Vaughan Road. Pegram's infantrymen moved up to support their cavalry, intensifying the fighting.<sup>221</sup>

By 1:30 p.m., Crawford's and Ayres's bluecoats marched towards Lea's position near Dabney's Mill, and David Gregg prepared to sweep all Confederates along Vaughan Road back over Gravelly Run. Fierce fighting was inevitable.

### Analysis

Although the primary events of this battle phase are clear, some details appear baffling. With his three forces successfully regrouped, Meade planned to discover the position of his enemy and push any Rebels found in the open back into their defenses. Unfortunately, Meade's failure to recognize Warren's position as the senior-ranking field officer, combined with some shoddy communication skills, resulted in significant misunderstandings and delays. Although Warren's assumptions and actions appear reasonable, just how punctilious he was about the dispatches he received remains an open question. Warren had a reputation for altercations with his superiors. At the end of March 1865, he would again experience opaque orders from Meade, which ultimately cost Warren his army career and reputation.<sup>222</sup>

After his meeting with Meade around noon, Warren had no doubts regarding expectations. What occurred at this meeting is unknown; one might imagine the irascible Meade venting his anger toward Warren for the inactivity. One can further assume that Meade had approved the orders that Warren issued soon afterward. The scale of Warren's probe is perplexing. Humphreys used five regiments to reconnoiter his more active front, whereas Warren committed two infantry divisions and a cavalry division to "probe" his less threatened front. This seems disproportionate. No battle account has questioned this decision. A probe up Dabney's Mill Road with an infantry brigade appeared the logical tactic. If they met with substantial Confederate resistance, Warren could have sent more troops in support. The decision to dispatch a "reconnaissance of force" had significant implications for subsequent events.

Again, little testimony describes the Confederate activities for the morning of February 6. Evidence suggests that by the dawn of February 6, "Bobby" Lee considered the battle over. Lee's primary concern remained keeping the Federals from Boydton Plank Road. Heth's and Evans's soldiers returned to their works, and Lee ordered Mahone's men back to Petersburg. Not the actions of a commander planning to initiate a battle.

And yet, on the Confederate right flank, Pegram, for some reason, split his small division (2,353 men) and sent two-thirds of this force south to probe along Vaughan Road. What did he hope to achieve? Had Gordon or Lee ordered him to divide his force? This isn't evident from their brief official reports. Recall the testimony of Adjutant Esten Cooke from the previous night, stating that Gordon had warned Pegram to expect a strong Union attack on

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<sup>221</sup> I have found no detailed Rebel accounts that describe the skirmishing along Vaughan Road up to 1:30 p.m. I assume the elements of Rebel cavalry to be Beale's Brigade. Accounts from Lewis's Tar Heels, Hoffmans Virginians and Beale's cavalymen only mention this phase of the battle in passing.

<sup>222</sup> Jermann, *Union General Gouverneur Warren*, 19; Calkins, "History and Tour Guide of Five Forks," 32, 109-111.

his front in the morning. If true, splitting his force and leaving just Lea's brigade to cover the heart of his position makes little strategic sense.<sup>223</sup>

"Bobby" Lee had summoned up his son's (Rooney Lee) cavalry division from Belfield the previous day. Without them, he was operating with insufficient intelligence, leaving him virtually blind to the enemy's dispositions. It's hard to strike a foe if you don't know where they are. As discussed previously, the composition of the Rebel cavalry present at Hatcher's Run is unknown. Accounts only support the presence of Beale's Brigade along Vaughan Road. Testimony from Rooney Lee's other two cavalry brigades, commanded by Brig. Gen. Barringer and Brig. Gen. Dearing, consistently omits any discussion of the battle. It appears that few, if any, of these troopers made the 40-mile trip from their Belfield camps. Perhaps Pegram had expected to combine forces with *all* of Rooney Lee's troopers rather than just Beale's Brigade? Such a force might have held the Dabney's Mill Road-Vaughan Road intersection, thereby protecting Lea's brigade and posing a sizeable obstacle to Crawford's Federal division, which was about to occupy that significant road junction.

The three hours following 1:30 p.m. would see vicious fighting on two fronts, separated by about a mile of wooded terrain interspersed with open fields, ravines, and swamps. The following chapter describes the events along Vaughan Road before I dial the clock back to 1:30 p.m. and discuss the actions around Dabney's Mill in chapter 10.

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<sup>223</sup> OR 46/1:381, 390.

## Chapter 9

### Fighting Along Vaughan Road

February 6, 1:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Shortly after 1:15 p.m., February 6, Union cavalry division commander David Gregg received orders from Warren to drive all Rebels on Vaughan Road beyond the Gravelly Run crossing. Since dawn, his troopers had skirmished with Rebels along the road. Winthrop's infantry brigade, Ayres's division, had recently (about 1:00 p.m.) joined them. Their timely support enabled Gregg's cavalry to regroup and prepare to execute Warren's order.<sup>224</sup>

#### The Federal Cavalry Attack

Details of what followed are confusing in several instances; however, reaching some consensus is possible. D. Gregg chose his cousin's (John Gregg) brigade to spearhead the assault. The Federals expected little difficulty in driving back what they assumed were a few dismounted Confederate cavalry troopers. They were unaware that Pegram, with two infantry brigades, had arrived on the scene.

J. Gregg positioned his cavalymen on the road with Brig. Gen. Davies's brigade supporting them on the right and Col. Knowles's brigade in reserve. The troopers rode down Vaughan Road towards the Gravelly crossing and met Rebels in out-houses and rifle pits concealed in woods. The Yankees made several attempts to dislodge the Confederates, but their positions proved too strong. The Rebels counterattacked, pushing the blue cavalymen back in disarray. Several Union memoirs captured isolated actions from this period encompassing 1:30 – 2:15 p.m.<sup>225</sup>

The 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry, J. Gregg's brigade, dismounted and charged some Confederate infantry holding a group of buildings, reportedly capturing around 30 Rebels. To assist his brigade comrades, Col. Kerwin ordered a squadron from his 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry to charge. This mounted assault led by Sgt. Daniel Caldwell allegedly captured 66 Rebels. Amid the fighting, Caldwell took five prisoners and captured the flag from a Tar Heel infantry regiment. The 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry commander, Lt. Col. John K. Robinson, reported that one of his dismounted troopers shot the color bearer, but a 13th Pennsylvania trooper (Caldwell) rode through their lines and took the flag. Whatever the circumstances, Caldwell received a Medal of Honor and promotion to 2nd lieutenant for his deeds. Reportedly, the captured flag hailed from the 33rd North Carolina. Unfortunately, this Rebel regiment was not present at the battle! Captain Nathaniel S. Sneyd, 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry, died leading his squadron in a second mounted charge ordered to support Caldwell's men. The 4th and 8th Pennsylvania Cavalry, both with J. Gregg's brigade, advanced on the

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<sup>224</sup> OR 46/1:254-55, 279.

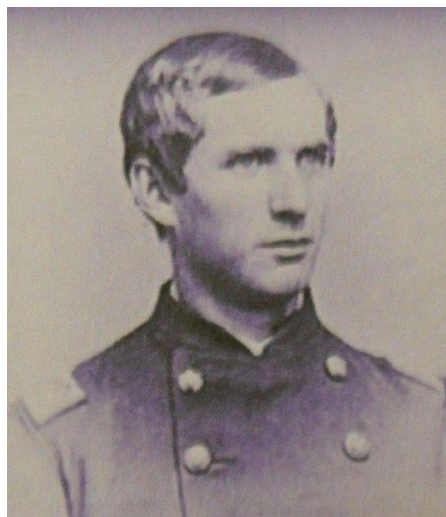
<sup>225</sup> OR 46/1:279-80, 366; Hand, *One Good Regiment*, 191; Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment*, 249.

right flank as these charges occurred. During this action, J. Gregg was wounded, with brigade command passing to Col. Kerwin.

Amid this close-quarter fighting, Sgt. William H. Russell, 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry, found himself in a tough spot. Having fired his rifle, a Confederate officer demanded his surrender. Russell quickly reloaded his piece and killed the officer. Cited for gallantry, Russell received a 25 day furlough.<sup>226</sup>



**Col. Hugh H. Janeway**  
Library of Congress



**Lt. Col. Frederick L. Tremain**  
Findagrave.com

Major Benjamin W. Crowninshield, 1st Massachusetts Cavalry, Davies's brigade, recalled hearing the order "charge," and J. Gregg's horsemen galloped towards the Rebels, determined to sweep them back over Gravelly Run. J. Gregg soon received a shot to the foot and was taken to the rear. On the journey, he met Brig. Gen. Davies and J. Gregg asked him to charge the enemy. Davies duly obliged, but he too fell with severe wounds to the breast and arm. The Rebel position proved too strong, and after fierce fighting, the blue cavalymen fled in disarray.

The engagement proved costly for the Federals in terms of senior officer casualties. Both brigade commanders, Davies and J. Gregg, received wounds. Colonel Hugh H. Janeway, the 1st New Jersey Cavalry commander, who took over Davies's brigade, was also wounded. Brigade command then fell to the next senior officer, Col. M. Henry Avery, the 10th New York Cavalry commander.<sup>227</sup>

<sup>226</sup> Hand, *One Good Regiment*, 191-93; OR 46/1:371; Beyer & Keydel, *Deeds of Valor*, 1:485; The 33rd NC belonged to Wilcox's Division. The claim of 66 captured Rebels was probably an exaggeration. The mystery of which Rebel flag Caldwell captured is explored at length in Nigel Lambert, "A Civil War Medal of Honor Mystery," *North & South Magazine* (September 2023) Series 2, Vol. 3, No. 6, 88-92. Although remnants of the flag have been tracked down, its regimental ownership remain unknown. General Orders No. 11.

<sup>227</sup> OR 46/1:280; Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment*, 249. Janeway recovered from his wound only to perish on Apr 4, at the battle of Amelia Springs, just five days before Lee surrendered; he was 22.

Mixed accounts exist regarding Col. Avery's leadership performance. Major Walter R. Robbins, 1st New Jersey Cavalry, claimed that Avery became sick and relinquished brigade command to him. Yet other reports mentioned Avery discharging his duties. Command of Avery's regiment passed to Lt. Col. Frederick L. Tremain, who also received a wound. Lieutenant Colonel Myron H. Beaumont, who took over command of the 1st New Jersey Cavalry (from Col. Janeway), also fell wounded. Sergeant John C. Sagelhurst, 1st New Jersey Cavalry, received a Medal of Honor, partly for rescuing a severely wounded (unnamed) officer while under heavy fire.<sup>228</sup>

A 10th New York Cavalry, Davies's brigade, memoir described them charging the Rebels and capturing some prisoners. It stated that Davies (and presumably Janeway) became *hors de combat*, and Col. Avery took over brigade command. Avery dispatched a rider to notify Lt. Col. Tremain that regimental command had devolved to him. The messenger reached Tremain on the far left of the Union skirmish line around 2:00 p.m. as he planned to lead his dismounted men in a charge. As Tremain turned to receive the message, a Confederate ball struck him in the hip. Comrades gently carried him to an ambulance, which transported him to a field hospital. On the way, he met Col. Avery, who described Tremain as "looking pale, and having a smile on his face." Later, his cousin, Maj. Henry E. Tremain, serving on D. Gregg's staff, rode by on a courier mission. Frederick told him about his mishap and that although serious, his wound wasn't dangerous. Frederick walked into the field hospital, where he met the wounded Brig. Gen. Davies. The following day, medics transferred Tremain to the main City Point hospital, some 20 miles away. Unbeknownst to his doctors, the wound proved more severe than initially believed, and Lt. Col. Tremain died the next day (February 8), aged 21.<sup>229</sup>

With his squadron held in reserve, Capt. John J. Van Tuyl, 10th New York Cavalry, watched the rest of his regiment fight along Vaughan Road. His joy at for once avoiding combat was short-lived as Col. Avery approached and told him to dismount his squadron and prepare to fight on foot. Ordered to retake some buildings on the skirmish line, his troopers charged and drove some Rebels out of a log house, a barn, and a corn house. With nine men, Capt. Van Tuyl took a position behind the corn house. The Rebels poured a heavy fire into the party, killing or wounding all but one. Van Tuyl took a bullet in the knee. Escorted back to D. Gregg's headquarters, Van Tuyl somehow mounted a horse and rode to an old barn serving as a hospital. The doctors said, "the leg must come off, but I insisted that it must not, and they

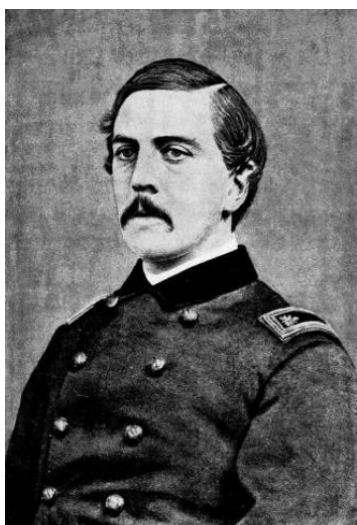
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<sup>228</sup> Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment*, 249; Pyne, *History of the 1st New Jersey Cavalry*, 302-305; Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry*, 241; Lilian Rea, ed., *War Record and Personal Experiences of Walter Raleigh Robbins* (Unknown, 1923), 105; [John Christopher Sagelhurst | U.S. Civil War | U.S. Army | Medal of Honor Recipient \(cmohs.org\)](#). The officer Sagelhurst rescued was believed to be Capt. Harper, however, in gallantry citations after the battle, Sgt. John Clark and Sgt. John [B] Dishrow [Disbrow] of the 1st NJ Cavalry were recorded as rescuing Harper, and Sagelhurst was not mentioned (General Orders No 11). Tremain was sometimes spelt Tremaine.

<sup>229</sup> Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry*, 241; Lyman Tremain, *Memorial of Frederick Lyman Tremain, Late Lieut. Col. of the 10th N.Y. Cavalry* (Albany, NY, 1865), 42-46. Maj. Tremain was carrying a request for reinforcements, presumably to Maj. Gen. Griffin, which placed the meeting at just before 3:00 p.m. as discussed below.

finally gave up.” Sent to City Point hospital for two days and then home for recuperation, the captain returned to duty six weeks later.

A staff officer, William W. Williams, 10th New York Cavalry, recalled division commander D. Gregg sending an orderly to the rear to collect the daily newspapers, which the orderly stuffed in his coat. Dispatched to deliver a message to Warren, Williams met the orderly returning: “I heard a bullet pass my left ear and I saw him [the orderly] fall from his horse.... I saw where the bullet had entered and concluded ‘shot through the heart.’ I unbuttoned his jacket pulled out the newspapers and the bullet fell out . . . right over his heart was a black spot the size of a silver dollar.”<sup>230</sup>



**Col. M. Henry Avery**  
findagrave.com



**William W. Williams**  
Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry*

The Rebel Perspective of Actions up to 2:30 p.m.

The Confederates fighting along Vaughan Road comprised two brigades from Pegram’s division and elements of Rooney Lee’s cavalry, mostly from Beale’s Brigade. Recall how Pegram had split his division in the morning. He left a brigade, commanded by Col. Lea, near Dabney’s Mill while accompanying Col. Hoffman’s Virginia Brigade and Brig. Gen. Lewis’s Tar Heel Brigade down Quaker Road. They then marched northeast up Vaughan Road and supported Rooney Lee’s cavalymen, skirmishing with D. Gregg’s Union cavalry.

Few Confederate sources describe the fighting on Vaughan Road, and those that exist summarize the entire day’s actions, making it challenging to separate the different engagements. The most detailed Rebel accounts are from historian Sherrill’s modern book of the 21st North Carolina, Lewis’s Brigade, and Capt. Samuel D. Buck’s memoir of the 13th

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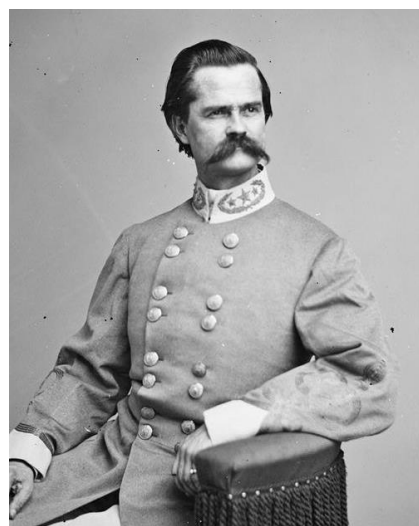
<sup>230</sup> Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry*, 242.

Virginia, Hoffman's brigade.<sup>231</sup>

The Confederates formed a line with Lewis's Brigade on the left and Hoffman's brigade to their right, with their right flank resting on Vaughan Road. Elements of Rooney Lee's cavalry were to Hoffman's right, south of the road. Captain Buck and the 13th Virginia went to protect Lewis's left flank from roaming Yankee cavalry. The left half of this regiment, commanded by Capt. George Cullen, sheltered in woods, and the right half commanded by Capt. Buck occupied an open field. Buck recalled how his men quickly dug crescent-shaped rifle pits, each sufficient for three men to occupy. The Union cavalry charged them twice but could not dislodge them. Buck remembered, "I never in all the battles I was in during the war had so many shots fired directly at me." Fifty yards behind Buck was a corn house that had attracted Rebel shirkers. With bullets hitting the house like hail, Buck grabbed the lead miscreant out of the house and forced him to the front. As he pushed him into a rifle pit, the shirker took a bullet in the shoulder. Buck had a very dim view of the soldier and "thought such cowards demoralized good soldiers." At this moment, a lieutenant emerged from the rifle pit and approached Buck. However, Yankees shot the lieutenant through the leg, and comrades carried him away.<sup>232</sup>



**Brig. Gen. William G. Lewis**  
Wikipedia.org



**Brig. Gen. Richard L. Beale**  
Library of Congress

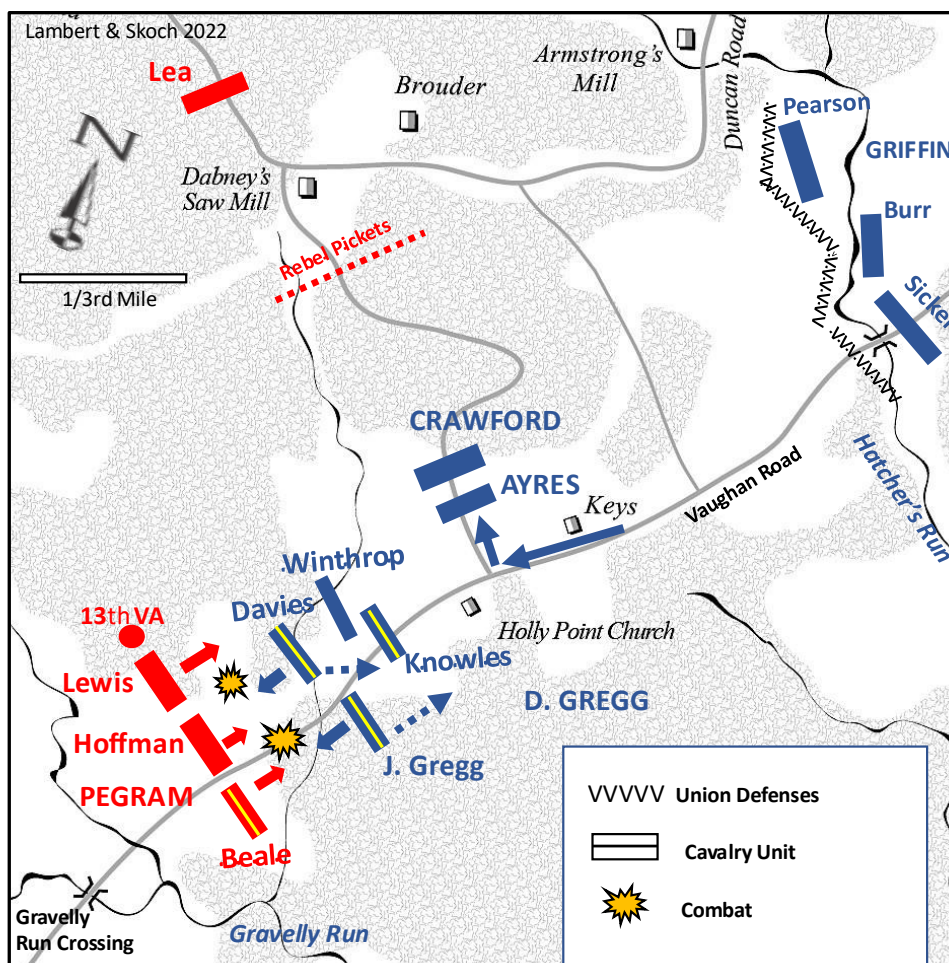
<sup>231</sup> Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 414-15; Samuel D. Buck, *With the Old Confeds: Actual Experiences of a Captain in the Line* (Gaithersburg, MD, 1983), 130-32. Among those texts notable for *not* detailing the engagement are: Richard W. Iobst, *The Bloody Sixth: the Sixth North Carolina Regiment, CSA* (Rayleigh, NC, 1965); Wooddell, *Hoffman's Army*; Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall*; James D. Cooke, "A History of the 31st Virginia Regiment Volunteers C. S. A." M.A. dissertation, West Virginia University, 1955, 74-76. Regarding the four Tar Heel regiments in Lewis's Brigade, none of their accounts in Clark, *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina* feature the engagement. Similarly, the Howard Series books covering the eight VA regiments with Hoffman and Beale don't mention the action.

<sup>232</sup> Buck, *With the Old Confeds*, 130-31; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina Infantry*, 414. Both armies possessed soldiers who would do anything to avoid military action. Loathed by most earnest soldiers, they acquired various derogatory names; shirkers, skulkers, beats. Capt. Buck used the term loafer in his memoir.

Around 2:00 p.m., Pegram received an order from his corps commander, Gordon, to move from his current Vaughan Road position to the Dabney's Mill area, where Lea was under increasing pressure from advancing Yankees. Gordon encouraged Pegram to attack the Federals' left flank from the southwest. However, heavily engaged with the enemy, Pegram could not realistically fulfill the directive.<sup>233</sup>

### Winthrop to the Rescue

Union Brig. Gen. Winthrop's infantry brigade, Ayres's division, had supported the cavalry since the morning. He watched on as Gregg's troopers charged the Rebels further down Vaughan Road. Winthrop recorded that "our cavalry advanced to the attack with two brigades and a third in support. They soon became actively engaged with the enemy's infantry and, getting rather roughly handled, retired in considerable confusion, the enemy closely following."<sup>234</sup>



Map 9.1: The Situation Along Vaughan Road, February 6, Around 2:00 p.m.

<sup>233</sup> ORS 7:803-04.

<sup>234</sup> OR 46/1:280.

Winthrop ordered his men forward at the double-quick and delivered some “very fair volleys” into the advancing Confederates. During their charge, Pvt. Henry Mogler, 140th New York, raced ahead of the regiment. As a Confederate flag bearer went down, “Mogler made a dash for the colors but came up empty and showing a slight leg wound for his troubles.”

The infantry brigade’s musketry checked the oncoming Confederates, yet the Southerners fought fiercely. The Confederates withdrew to the shelter of some woods. Once or twice they reappeared and tried to advance across the open field, “but each time were handsomely repulsed,” reported Winthrop, adding that his men fought with “great spirit.” Winthrop had “two horses shot from under him while ‘sailing in’ with the boys,” But with ammunition running critically low, Winthrop called for support.<sup>235</sup>

Between 2:15 p.m. and 3:00 p.m., the 140th New York alone suffered 20 casualties. Among them, Pvt. Myron Schemerhorn and Pvt. John Moser lay dead on the field. William Fader received a mortal wound. As Cpl. Cohler poured powder into his musket, a bullet first pierced his forearm before entering his upper arm. Shot in the groin, Cpl. Conrad Smith died that evening, allowing time to give his personal possessions to a comrade for transportation home to his mother. Elsewhere, Capt. Charles S. Montgomery, the 5th New York commander, was shot in the head. Carried to the rear, he never regained consciousness and died within minutes.

Around 2:00 p.m., Warren accompanied Crawford’s and Ayres’s divisions as they turned up Dabney’s Mill Road, fulfilling the other component of Meade’s desired reconnaissance. The plan involved collecting Winthrop’s brigade “en route.” However, reports came to Warren that a strong Confederate force had attacked Gregg and Winthrop, and they were under substantial pressure. Thus, Winthrop’s brigade could not rejoin Ayres’s forces. Warren placed Maj. Gen. Griffin in charge of operations along Vaughan Road. To compensate for the loss of Winthrop’s Yankees, Warren reserved Brig. Gen. Pearson’s brigade, “Griffin’s largest and best unit,” to be sent to Ayres if required.<sup>236</sup>

#### Sickel to the Rescue

At 3:00 p.m., an aide came rushing to Griffin, saying that on the army’s left, Winthrop’s brigade was giving way before two Rebel brigades and needed help. Within minutes, Brig. Gen. Horatio G. Sickel’s brigade began moving to reinforce the threatened position. Marching double-quick about half a mile down Vaughan Road through woods, they encountered Winthrop’s wounded traveling to the field hospitals. Soldiers remembered seeing “some hastily bandaged, some with undressed gaping wounds; some besmeared with blood,

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<sup>235</sup> Bennett, *Sons of Old Monroe*, 580; *OR* 46/1:279-80. For a month afterward, Warren’s Asst. Adj. Gen. queried Winthrop’s claim that he had exhausted his ammunition, the implication being that this was an excuse to vacate the battlefield. With support from Maj. Gen. Griffin, Winthrop eventually managed to convince the official that for a considerable length of time before being relieved, many of his men had not a single round left. Winthrop died at Five Forks, April 1, about a week before Lee surrendered; he was 25.

<sup>236</sup> Bennett, *Sons of Old Monroe*, 580-81; *OR* 46/1:254-55. Official 140th NY losses recorded for the entire battle were 4 killed and 20 wounded (*OR* 46/1:66).

others pallid as though in the grasp of death. It was a terrible ordeal for our men. Even the bravest pushed forward with blanched cheek.”<sup>237</sup>

Sickel reported finding Winthrop’s brigade upon some open ground to the right of Vaughan Road. An assault by a superior number of Rebels vigorously pressed Winthrop’s line. Captain Albern H. Barber, 185th New York, remembered arriving behind Winthrop’s Yankees in a field. The New Yorkers formed a battle line facing west and advanced about 200 yards to where Winthrop’s men were shooting behind a rail fence. As Sickel’s men reached the fighting, Winthrop’s troops retired, having exhausted their ammunition. Once relieved, Winthrop’s Yankees rested and refilled their cartridge boxes. Much later, at around 5:00 p.m., they deployed as pickets covering Dabney’s Mill Road.

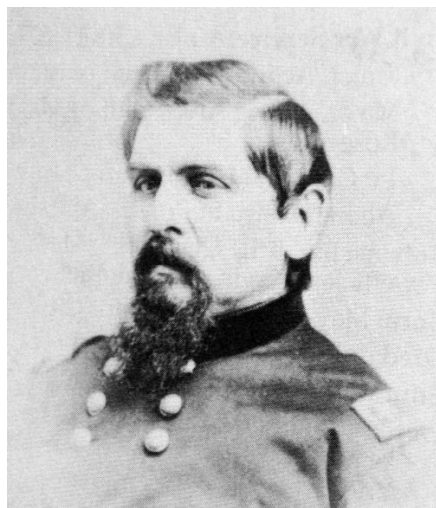
Meanwhile, a bluecoat in Sickel’s brigade recalled:

We had scarcely moved from flank in line however before a terrific fire was opened upon us by the enemy. Our brigade commander [Sickel] was one of the first wounded and as he was carried off the field sent his staff to report to Col Jenney who was thus left in command of the brigade.

Another Yankee with Sickel remembered how they immediately engaged with the Rebels as Winthrop’s men fell back through their lines. Sickel led his men with sword held high, and the brigade rushed into the longer Confederate line. An 185th New Yorker stated that Sickel was wounded in the first volley, with Col. Jenney taking over command. They charged the Rebels, located behind the brow of a hill, with several farm buildings positioned on their line.<sup>238</sup>



**Brig. Gen. Frederick Winthrop**  
wikipedia.org



**Brig. Gen. Horatio G. Sickel**  
blogspot.com

<sup>237</sup> Clayton, *History of Onondaga County*, 129; Jeffrey L. Wood, *Under Chamberlain’s Flag: The Stories of the 198th Pennsylvania and the 185th New York Volunteers* (Bloomington, IN, 2008), 173; OR 46/1:265-66. The aide was probably Maj. Tremain, whom we met earlier talking to his wounded cousin.

<sup>238</sup> OR 46/1:265-66, 280; Wood, *Under Chamberlain’s Flag*, 173-74; Clayton, *History of Onondaga County*, 129. Clayton confused Winthrop’s brigade with Ayres’s division.

Several Federal letters described the wounding of Sickel. Captain Barber, 185th New York, remembered their commander rising in his saddle “when a ball passed between his setting place and the saddle wounding him slightly.” Another noted how he received a painful flesh wound as a musket ball struck his left thigh. One soldier remembered that “the shot took away the entire seat of his trousers.” Curiously, Sickel’s official report failed to mention his wounding or that brigade command passed to Col. Jenney.<sup>239</sup>

Sickel’s report claimed that he ordered a charge upon the Confederate line, whose numbers were equal to, if not superior to, his own. His men executed the charge in a gallant style with great steadiness. At the first volley from Sickel’s men, the Confederates broke and left the field in disorder, leaving behind their killed and wounded, while others surrendered. Some of Sickel’s soldiers provided a more detailed version of events, recalling:

Col Jenney appreciated the danger of attempting to hold his open position against an enemy substantially covered, and instantly ordered the brigade forward. . . . . No command to charge was given. It would have probably been disastrous to do so, as the enemy were on both of our flanks and it was necessary to keep the troops well in hand. Forward went the brigade through the smoke and against the bullets. It was the work of a few minutes only. There was no wavering – constantly steadily forward. The firing slackened, ceased, the enemy was gone. We were the masters of the field.

Another soldier described how “[Jenney] waived his sword and shouted ‘Forward,’ and forward we went with a yell that sent dismay into the hearts of the flying Johnnies.” The Yankees crashed into the Confederate line, splitting it in half. With their line broken, the Rebels withdrew in confusion, leaving their dead and wounded behind. Captain Barber noted, “I guess they thought the whole Yankee army was after them for they did not stand five minutes but broke and ran for the woods with me after them.” Corporal McManus added, “how far we should have followed the flying enemy there is no telling, had not Col. Jenney and Col. [Gustavus A.] Sniper thrown themselves in front of the brigade and by almost superhuman exertions halted us.”

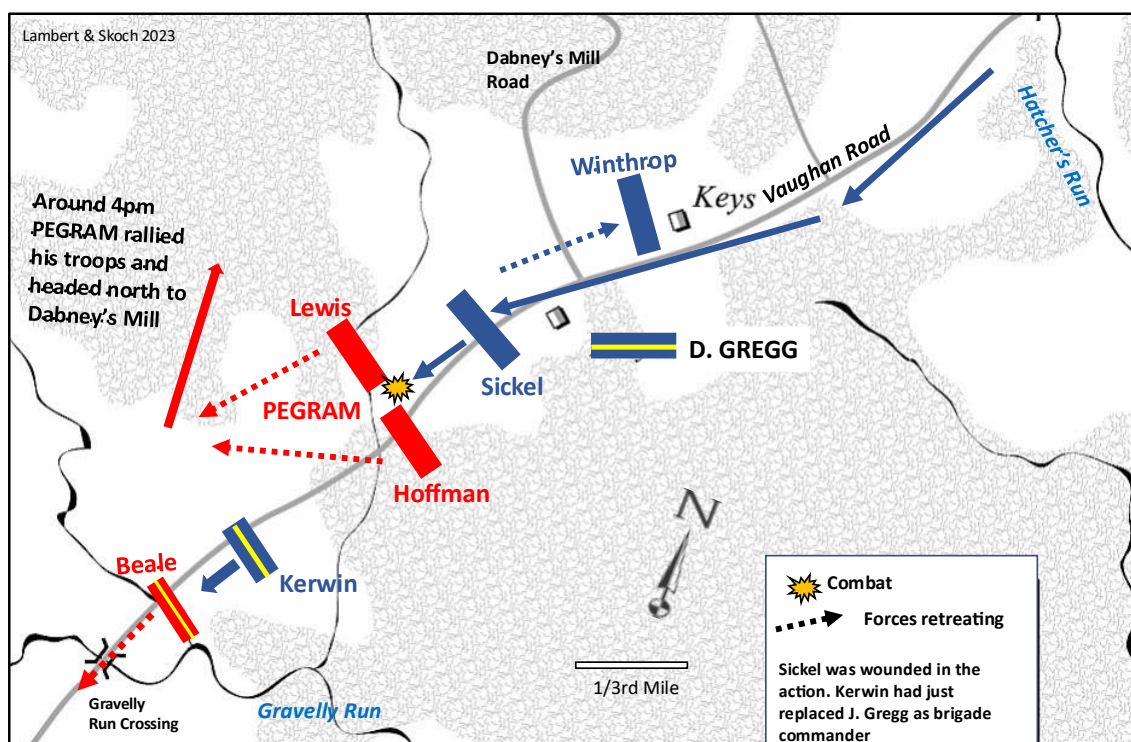
After aggressively engaging and driving the Rebels back, Sickel’s brigade began running low on ammunition. The Federals reorganized and advanced another 200 yards. They formed in some woods before sending out pickets. Captain Barber led a company of pickets and scuffled with some Rebels, killing two or three and capturing another. The divisional ordnance officer, Maj. Joseph Ashbrook, issued Sickel’s Federals with more ammunition when Maj. Gen. Griffin arrived to thank them for their gallantry personally. It was now around 5:30 p.m.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> OR 46/1:265-66; Wood, *Under Chamberlain’s Flag*, 174-75. As discussed in the Prelude, Jenney had tendered his resignation on February 4, as officials in Washington wouldn’t confirm his status as an “escaped” rather than “paroled” prisoner.

<sup>240</sup> OR 46/1:265-66; Wood, *Under Chamberlain’s Flag*, 174-75; Clayton, *History of Onondaga County*, 129. Major Ashbrook had a distinguished war record being wounded several times. He had only returned to duty in Jan 1865. After arriving shortly after 3.00 p.m., Sickel’s men quickly (within 30 minutes) dispatched Pegram’s force. Whether Pegram was conscious of Gordon’s earlier order to return to Dabney’s Mill and conveniently withdrew, is unknown.

One Federal summarized the action thus: “many brave fellows fell but the loss was slight compared to that which must have occurred if the enemy had not at once been driven from the field.” In a letter home, Capt. Barber stated that his regiment, 185th New York, only lost about 20 killed and wounded, “Capt. Listman had his leg shot off, and two of my men had their guns shot to pieces in their hands.” He attributed their slight loss to the Rebels aiming too high and not remaining long.<sup>241</sup>



Map 9.2: Fighting Along Vaughan Road, February 6, 3:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

#### The Rebel Perspective of Actions After 2:30 p.m.

Confederate accounts of these events are confused with locations and battle phases entangled. Historian Sherrill described how Pegram’s infantry comfortably pushed back Gregg’s cavalry charges and how Winthrop’s infantry then checked Pegram’s Rebels. Captain Buck recalled receiving orders from Pegram to “conform to his movements” as he planned to charge the enemy (presumably Winthrop’s line). Moments later, a Union bullet struck the messenger. As Buck prepared his men to advance, the brigade to his right, Lewis’s Tar Heels, rose, fired a volley, and fell back, much to Buck’s dismay. He held his ground for a while, but finding himself isolated with Federal cavalry in his front and threatened from the rear, Buck withdrew, crossing a swamp and passing through heavy briars. Sherrill also explained how, in trying to counterattack Winthrop, Lewis’s brigade fired one volley and fled in great disorder. The isolated 13th Virginia held its ground until dangerously threatened on both flanks. The

<sup>241</sup> Wood, *Under Chamberlain’s Flag*, 175; Clayton, *History of Onondaga County*, 129. Official 185th NY casualties were: 2 killed, 10 wounded, and 4 missing/captured (OR 46/1:65).

Virginians followed Lewis's men back into the woods along with Hoffman's other regiments. The Confederate brigades regrouped, countercharged, and regained the lost ground, presumably from Winthrop's Unionists.

Heavy fighting continued for some time. Confederate veterans with Lewis believed that the musketry fire they endured represented the heaviest they'd experienced in the war. Neither Buck nor Sherrill mentioned the arrival of Sickel's brigade and how these Yankees summarily routed Pegram's Rebels. The next action these authors described involved Pegram marching his two brigades north to Dabney's Mill in compliance with Gordon's earlier order. It would appear that once chased off the field by Sickel's Federals around 3.30 p.m., Pegram regrouped his men and headed over a mile across country to reunite with his other brigade commanded by Col. Lea. This movement is the subject of Chapter 11.<sup>242</sup>

#### Federal Mission Accomplished

By 4:30 p.m., the Federals had vanquished the Rebels along Vaughan Road. With Pegram's Rebels heading north, elements of J. Gregg's brigade followed the retreating Rebel cavalry, predominantly Beale's Brigade, until they crossed back over Gravelly Run. Lieutenant Cormany, 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry, remembered, "Emptying a great many saddles and firing furiously into the fleeing enemy," Confederate artillery fire from two cannons on the opposite bank halted the pursuing Federals. Captain William M. McGregor commanded these guns, which belonged to the 2nd Stuart (Virginia) Horse Artillery associated with Rooney Lee's cavalry division. With night approaching, the Federals withdrew to the Keys house, content at clearing the road to the Gravelly Run crossing, as instructed three hours earlier, leaving the Rebels to collect their wounded.<sup>243</sup>

#### Analysis

Mixtures of infantry and cavalry forces fought this bitter engagement. In the three-hour duel, the Federals suffered around 220 casualties, twice the number suffered during the Rebel attacks the previous day. Comparable data for the Confederates isn't available. The brigades of J. Gregg and Winthrop bore the brunt of the Union casualties, suffering 60% of the Union total. Warren had assumed that D. Gregg's cavalry would easily sweep aside the few Rebel cavalymen occupying Vaughan Road. The appearance of Pegram's infantry made D. Gregg's task far more challenging. Still, with the aid of two Union infantry brigades, they cleared Vaughan Road of Rebels up to the Gravelly Run crossing. What Pegram had hoped to achieve along Vaughan Road is unclear.

On March 8, 1865, Meade issued his General Order No 11, which cited 75 enlisted men for gallantry at the Battle of Hatcher's Run. Each recipient received a 25 day furlough. No less than 42 (56%) entailed exploits undertaken by cavalymen in the fighting along Vaughan Road on February 6. Of these, 27 hailed from J. Gregg's brigade, 12 from Davies's brigade and 3 from Knowles's brigade. This mirrors the casualties each brigade suffered.

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<sup>242</sup> Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 414-15; Buck, *With the Old Confeds*, 131-32.

<sup>243</sup> OR 46/1:367-68, 371; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:211-12; Mohr, *The Cormany Diaries*, 518. Maj. Roger P. Chew commanded Rooney Lee's Horse Artillery. How much of this force (beyond McGregor's cannons) was present at the battle is unknown.

Many of the deeds recognized involved charging enemy rifle pits, rallying troops, and reforming the line. The Union cavalry action along Vaughan Road lasted around an hour and was a spectacular failure. Why it received the disproportionate attention in General Order No. 11 is baffling. No enlisted men from either Winthrop's or Sickel's infantry brigades received commendations for gallantry in the same action.<sup>244</sup>

**Table 9.1: Union Casualties Along Vaughan Road, February 6.**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Brigade</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Total</b>
Gregg	Davies	3	26	0	29
Gregg	J. Gregg	11	53	6	70
Gregg	Knowles	0	11	7	18
Ayres	Winthrop	9	58	0	67
Griffin	Sickel	5	27	5	37
<b>Total</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>221</b>

Losses are for the entire three-day battle. However, these brigades mostly fought in this engagement, suffering minimal, if any, losses on Feb 5 and 7. Data comes from *OR* 46/1:63-69.

In the next chapter, I reset the clock to 1:30 p.m. and reveal the fate of Crawford's advance up Dabney's Mill Road.

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<sup>244</sup> General Orders No. 11. How Meade arrived at his gallantry list is unclear. May be it was a farewell gesture to David Gregg, who left the army soon after the battle. Like Meade, Gregg was a Pennsylvanian and one with political connections. Also curious is that Sgt. John C. Sagelhurst, 1st NJ Cavalry was **not** cited, but in 1906 he received a Medal of Honor for performing the same deeds attributed to others in Meade's list.

## Chapter 10

### Slaughter Around a Sawdust Pile

February 6, 1:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

We return to 1:30 p.m. on Monday, February 6. After lengthy delays following misunderstandings with AOP headquarters, 5th Corps commander Warren was about to advance toward Dabney's Mill. He aimed to locate the Confederate main line and drive any Rebels in the open back into their defenses.

Accompanied by Warren, Maj. Gen. Crawford took his Union division from their overnight camps just east of the Hatcher's Run-Vaughan Road crossing and proceeded down Vaughan Road. In marching order, the division comprised three brigades commanded by Brig. Gen. Edward S. Bragg, Brig. Gen. Henry Morrow, and Brig. Gen. Baxter. Two brigades of Ayres's division, Col. Richard N. Bowerman and Brig. Gen. Gwyn commanding, followed in support. The force of over 6,000 soldiers marched in four columns, stretching nearly 4,000 yards. After about a mile, the vanguard turned up the narrow Dabney's Mill Road. A cold, penetrating sleet fell most of the afternoon, making the ground slick and treacherous.

Hardly had Warren turned onto the mill road when he heard heavy firing further along Vaughan Road. A courier informed Warren that Winthrop and D. Gregg were heavily engaged and required support. Crucially, Winthrop's brigade could not join their divisional comrades (Ayres) as planned. To compensate for Winthrop's absence, Warren "reserved" Maj. Gen. Griffin's "biggest and best" brigade (Brig. Gen. Pearson's) to join Ayres's troops if needed. Warren placed Griffin in charge of events along Vaughan Road.<sup>245</sup>

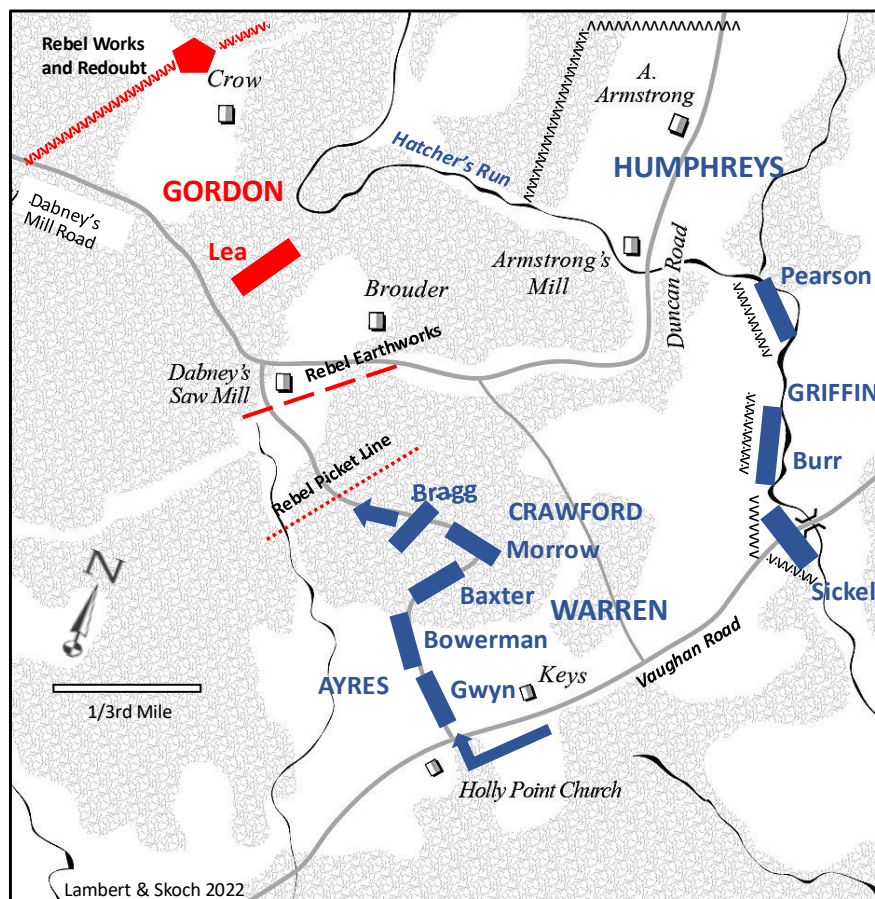
#### Crawford Pushes Back the Confederates

A 24th Michigan (Bragg's brigade) account described the march along Dabney's Mill Road. The terrain was "covered with heavy timber, the ground softened by numerous swamps and cut up by ravines. The road . . . was narrow, filled with stumps and knee-deep with mud. A slight crust of frozen surface only increased the difficulties." Some soldiers lost their shoes which stuck in the mire. Their clothing got damp, and some rifles became unfit for use. Those troops not on the road fared even worse. They stumbled through a maze of thick timber, netted with a web of undergrowth. Fatigue afflicted many men even before any fighting started. Soldiers with the 149th Pennsylvania, Bragg's brigade, described the near impossibility of maintaining battle lines as they moved cautiously through dense pine groves. The advanced regiments soon operated as independent groups. "The brigade hadn't moved . . . far when it saw puffs of smoke from the muskets of the defending Confederates." Bragg's

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<sup>245</sup> *OR* 46/1:254-55, 287, 293; *OR* 46/2:434; James W. Downey, "A Lethal Tour of Duty: A History of the 142nd Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry 1861-65," M.A. dissertation, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 1995, 56; Paddy Griffith, *Battle in the Civil War* (Mansfield, UK, 1986), 8-9. Recall the sunny morning weather previously mentioned by a soldier with Winthrop's brigade.

men surged forward and carried the Rebel picket line without difficulty. The Rebels, from Lea's Tar Heel Brigade, retreated to some rudimentary entrenchments in an opening at the old mill site. Here, more of Lea's Rebels joined them from their defenses around the Crow house.<sup>246</sup>



**Map 10.1: Dabney's Mill Road Around 2:00 p.m., February 6.**

The six regiments of Morrow's brigade maneuvered into battle line and moved up behind Bragg's line, overlapping it on the left. Baxter's five regiments formed on the left of Morrow in two lines, the 97th New York, 39th Massachusetts, and 16th Maine in the front, with the 11th and 88th Pennsylvania behind. The soldiers with Bragg and Baxter advanced.

In his battle report, Lt. Col. Hollon Richardson, 7th Wisconsin, Bragg's brigade, described deploying as skirmishers with their right resting near Hatcher's Run on Crawford's

<sup>246</sup> Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 291; Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania*, 205; OR 46/1:287; OR 51/1:286. The thick woodland made this a perfect location for timber businesses both in producing wood for fuel and the construction of buildings and roads, notably plank roads. Dabney's Mill had been a relatively modern steam-powered (as opposed to water-powered) mill owned by the local Dabney family. After years of warfare, by Feb 1865, little if anything remained of the mill itself. Bowerman noted that some old machinery was present (Richard W. Bowerman, "The Maryland Brigade United States Volunteers," page 52, in Dan Toomey's personal collection, hereafter Bowerman, "The Maryland Brigade," 52). It was however a noted landmark on maps and had a road named after it. A Dabney's Mill Road exists to this present day (Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 40).

right flank. They advanced about 200 yards and engaged the enemy skirmishers, driving them to, and then out of, their well-entrenched picket pits. “The Rebels left in such haste as to abandon muskets, rations, and knapsacks that fell into our hands.” Richardson’s men drove the enemy about a mile to their entrenchments, capturing two prisoners in the process. At which time, “our supports moved up in line of battle and engaged the enemy in their entrenchments.”

Along with many in Bragg’s brigade, for Pvt. Gottlieb Torke, 6th Wisconsin, this represented his first experience of combat. He recalled when going into the fight, “we all looked at the world through tears and I had given myself over completely to dear God.” He described how they pushed the Confederates back to their trenches. “But they fired against us so we had lain ourselves on the ground and were firing from there. It was the best of luck that we were in the woods, and could hide behind trees.”

Also in the 6th Wisconsin, on the Federal right, Lt. Henry Matrau described striking the Confederate skirmishers and pressing them back. He recalled reaching the Confederate main line (around the Crow redoubt), where they received severe musketry and artillery fire. Matrau wrote “we could get no artillery into position & therefore the rebs had a gay time cracking the spherical case and canister shot to us blue coats.” Another soldier in Bragg’s brigade, Pvt. Frank H. Elvidge, 150th Pennsylvania, remembered charging the Confederate works, before a Minie struck his left leg ending his battle.<sup>247</sup>



**An Example of a Late 19th Century Steam Sawmill with a Sawdust Pile.**

With sole permission from the Chelmsford Historical Society, Massachusetts. Colorization of glass negative 2009.9.1012 by the Society President, Mr. Fred Merriam.

<sup>247</sup> ORS,7:711-13, Gottlieb Torke to Elizabeth Torke, February 9, 1865, Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin; Thomas Chamberlin, *History of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers. Second Regiment, Bucktail Brigade* (Philadelphia, 1895) 247; Greenleaf, ed., *Letters to Eliza*, 151.

To the left of Bragg's men, Baxter's brigade also pushed forward. Two separate accounts from the 39th Massachusetts, described how it took two charges amid heavy firing to dislodge the Rebels from their light entrenchments near "the ruins of the old mill." During this fighting:

as the brigade [Baxter's] came to an opening, a formidable fort – as was supposed – presented itself to view, and a strife occurred between the color bearers of the 16th Maine and 97th New York as to which should first plant its standard upon the fort. The contestant of the 97th achieved the victory; but great was his disappointment when instead of a veritable fort he found only a huge heap of saw-dust.

The 16th Maine color bearer was probably Cpl. M. J. Grindle. He had just picked up the colors from Col. Sgt. Luther Bradford, who had been shot in the arm.<sup>248</sup>

### Sallie the Dog

During these opening Federal attacks, the 11th Pennsylvania lost their beloved mascot dog "Sallie." In his official report, the regimental adjutant noted that Sallie was in line with the file closers and perished when the regiment made its first advance upon the enemy. The men buried her under the enemy's fire. One of the men wrote home saying:

Poor Sallie fell in the front line . . . a bullet pierced her brain. She was buried where she fell by some of the boys, even whilst under a murderous fire, so much had they become attached to the poor brute, who so long had shared with them the toilsome march and perils of battle.

Two of Sallie's tentmates died by her side, and two others received wounds. Sallie was associated with Company I. From this Company, Pvt. John Einhart, and Pvt. John Good perished at the battle, while Pvt. Jesse Black was never seen again. Two of these three soldiers were probably those who died with Sallie.<sup>249</sup>

### Confederate Activities

Throughout the morning, Col. Lea had shown understandable reluctance to advance toward the Hatcher's Run-Vaughan Road crossing. At 2:00 p.m., Gordon and Rooney Lee discussed the unfolding situation with Lea at the Crow house. As they rode out to inspect the line, heavy musket fire from the 23rd North Carolina picket line told its own story. Lea sent forth the 20th North Carolina and 1st North Carolina Battalion to help defend the rudimentary entrenchments around the mill. Gordon finally realized the danger of a blue wave engulfing

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<sup>248</sup> Greenleaf, ed., *Letters to Eliza*, 151; Alfred S. Roe, *The 39th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, 1862-1865* (Worcester, MA, 1914), 272; *OR* 51/1:288, 292. Brig. Gen. Baxter reported that the 97th NY was to the left in the second line *OR* 51/1:286.

<sup>249</sup> Several texts describe the war exploits and death of Sallie. Given to the regiment as a pup in May 1861, she was described as a "brindle, bull-terrier." Sallie saw action with her regiment at most of the major battles in the Eastern Theatre. A life-size bronze statue of Sallie forms part of the regimental memorial at Gettysburg. Stouffer & Cubbison, *A Colonel, a Flag and a Dog*; Smith, *Sallie Civil War Dog*; Samuel P. Bates, *Martial Deeds of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, PA, 1875), 1098-1104; Edward S. Alexander, "Man's Best Comrade: Sallie and the 11th Pennsylvania," *Emerging Civil War Online*, February 6, 2015, [Man's Best Comrade: Sallie and the 11th Pennsylvania | Emerging Civil War](#); "RPKennedy," personal communication, Aug, 25, 2025. A file closer was a soldier whose duty entailed seeing that a marching formation stayed in close order.

the position. He ordered Brig. Gen. Evans's division to move with haste from the Confederate lines, about a mile away, and support Lea. He also ordered Pegram to move from his Vaughan Road position to Dabney's Mill and attack the Federals' left flank from the southwest. Lea's Confederates managed to hold up the Yankees' first advance at the mill site but buckled on the second charge, confirming the above Federal recollections. Lea regrouped his brigade in the sturdy Crow works, which they defended vigorously.<sup>250</sup>



**Statue of Sallie at the Foot of the 11th Pennsylvania Monument at Gettysburg**

wikipedia.org

“Bobby” Lee and A. P. Hill observed events from a nearby mound. They grew concerned by the substantial Federal advance and sought additional reinforcements. Four miles away, along Boydton Plank Road, Mahone's Division, Hill's Corps, commanded by Brig. Gen. Finegan cheerfully marched back to Petersburg, where their warm camps awaited. They had only arrived around Hatcher's Run towards the end of the previous day and supported the ongoing Rebel attacks. Imagine Finegan's disappointment as a courier handed him a note from Lee ordering the return of his command to the Crow fortifications at all haste. The division now faced a different day's end. Somewhat annoyed, Finegan “about-faced” his weary brigades and began the march back to whence they came.<sup>251</sup>

#### Evans Leads a Confederate Counterattack

Evans's division of 2,695 men comprised three brigades commanded by Col. Peck, Brig. Gen. Terry, and Col. Baker. These units had not performed well the previous day. Terry's assistant adjutant-general, Maj. Randolph J. Barton recalled the division receiving orders to move from their camps about a mile east of Burgess's Mill. A 44th Virginia Confederate recalled how Terry's men were “busily preparing lunch when suddenly orders came to move at once –many a poor soldier looked back with disappointment at his dough just ready for the oven, or his peas not yet boiling briskly; yet they moved off cheerfully.” The division marched at the double-quick down Boydton Plank Road and crossed Hatcher's Run. They arrived at the Rebel works near the Crow house and went into line on Lea's left.<sup>252</sup>

<sup>250</sup> ORS 7:806; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 414.

<sup>251</sup> Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 35; Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 358; Waters & Edmonds, *A Small but Spartan Band*, 171-72; ORS 7:717.

<sup>252</sup> NARA 1973, M935, Roll 14, 20-P-51, 0/01; Randolph J. Barton “The Battle of Hatcher's Run,” *Confederate Veteran Magazine* (1917), vol. 25, 119; Kevin C. Ruffner, *44th Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1987), 58.



### Fighting Around Dabney's Mill

Although the image depicts an engagement in the same area during October 1864, it illustrates the terrain and the type of combat involved. Henry M. Kieffer, *The Recollections of a Drummer-Boy* (1889), page 229. Colorization by Andreas Holmström.

Peck's Louisiana Brigade comprised only 440 men. He left 150 men on picket duty and moved at once to Burgess's Mill "and thence as rapidly as possible to [the Rebel works] south of Hatcher's Run." Here, Peck received orders from Gordon to support Col. Lea's men. They formed a line in the woods with Terry's Virginia Brigade on their left and Baker's Georgia Brigade to their right. Peck's few soldiers could only conform their movements to the larger commands. Evans's men soon became hotly engaged.

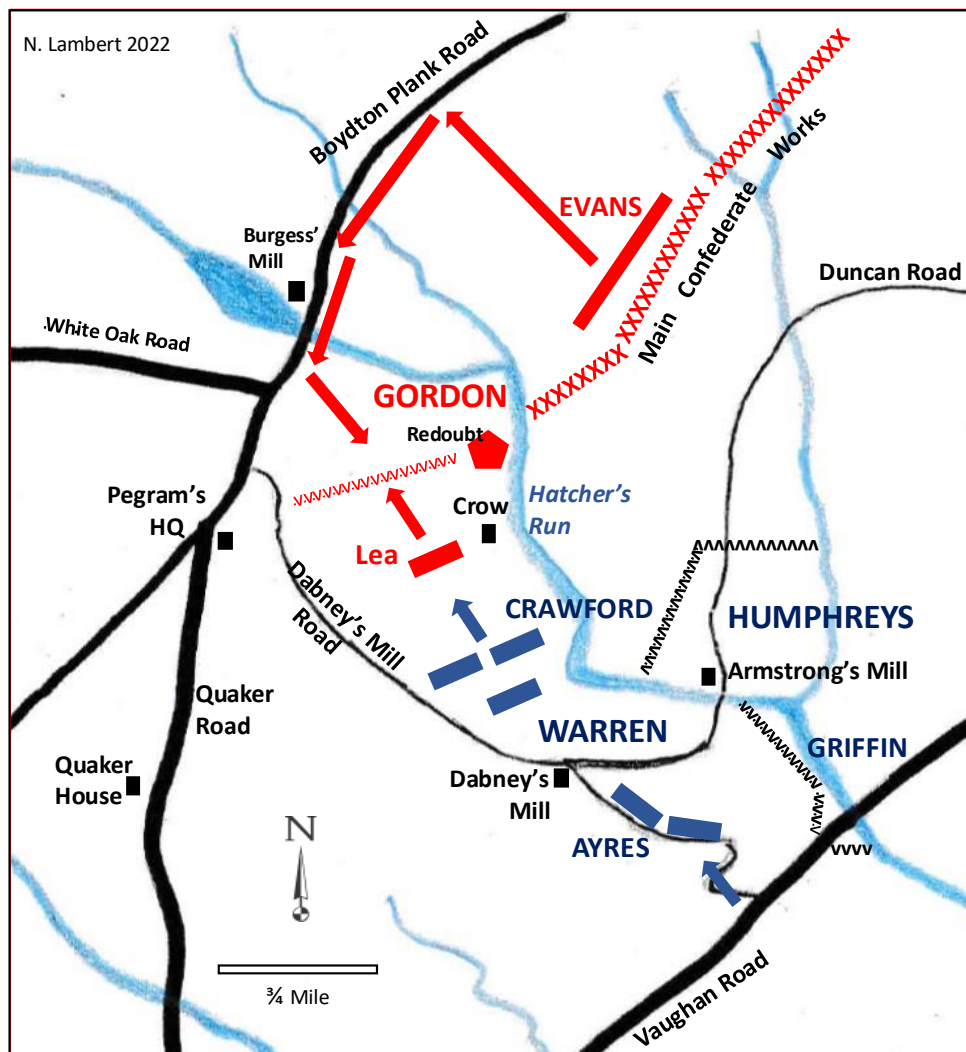
The previous day's poor showing by Gordon's soldiers likely stung the general, one of the Confederacy's most aggressive fighters. He resolved to make amends. A newspaper reporter recalled how "the fight was Gordon's and he was going to fight it out." Evans's men and Lea's brigade managed to stop Crawford's advance and mounted a counterattack, pushing Bragg and Baxter's Federals back 200 yards to the mill site. Peck recalled how they advanced twice to the edge of the woods and eventually drove the enemy from the sawdust pile in the field.<sup>253</sup>

In Baker's brigade, Pvt. I. Gordon Bradwell, 31st Georgia, commented, "We advanced into a low, swampy forest, where the ground was covered with shallow pools of water or bogs, interspersed with briars so that progress was hard to make." From the same brigade, Pvt. Nichols, 61st Georgia, recalled that:

Our brigade was, as usual, first to get into the battle. It charged their works, but failed to rout them on the first assault. It had to fall back across a little boggy branch about 100 yards in the

<sup>253</sup> OR 46/1:392; Waters & Edmonds, *A Small but Spartan Band*, 171-72; "Battle of Hatcher's Run," *Atlanta [GA] Weekly Intelligencer*, April 12, 1865; Barton, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 119.

rear. Colonel Baker was wounded. Here General Gordon met and rallied it, made the second charge, and routed the Yankees badly.<sup>254</sup>



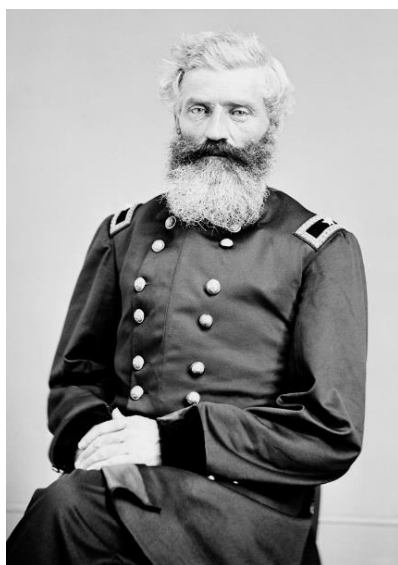
**Map 10.2: Arrival of Evans's Confederates at the Crow Defenses Around 3:00 p.m.**

The Rebels drove in the left of Bragg's brigade, which fell back considerably to the right, exposing Morrow's line to their rear. A 24th Michigan account described how Bragg's men retreated as far as Vaughan Road. Morrow recorded how in the mid-afternoon, Bragg's men fell back through his line following a Rebel charge (from Evans's reinforcements), which put Morrow's men in the front line. In his diary, Morrow specifically noted that the 6th Wisconsin gave way on the front right of his line. Morrow advanced his line and pushed back Evans's Rebels. The 107th Pennsylvania commander, Col. Thomas F. McCoy, Morrow's

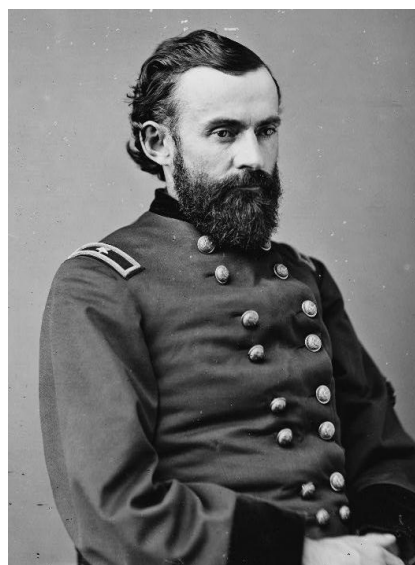
<sup>254</sup> Johnson, *Under the Southern Cross*, 222; Nichols, *A Soldier's Story of his Regiment*, 211. Col. Baker only received a slight wound and soon returned to duty. However, his war ended with a serious wound on Mar 25. The 38th Georgia in Baker's brigade, started the month with 250 men, they suffered 14 killed and 32 wounded at the battle, the majority of which would have occurred on the afternoon of Feb 6. *The Sunny South* [GA] *Atlanta*, January 10, 1891.

brigade, supported this view. He remembered how Bragg's Federals fled into his lines, rapidly retreating from an enemy charge. McCoy reported, "we had great difficulty in preserving our line, but did succeed in so doing and in pouring a heavy fire into the advancing column of the enemy, causing him to stop at the opposite margin of the field."

Chaplain Locke, 11th Pennsylvania, Baxter's brigade, remembered how Evans's fresh troops forced Baxter's Yankees back some 200 yards. With no Federal troops on their right (Bragg's brigade) from which direction the Rebels were bearing down in considerable force, the Pennsylvanians abandoned the defenses they had recently captured. Crawford's line fell back some distance to the rear."<sup>255</sup>



**Brig. Gen. Henry Baxter**  
Library of Congress



**Brig. Gen. Edward S. Bragg**  
Library of Congress

#### Attacks and Counterattacks

A period of chaotic fighting followed. In heavily wooded and swampy terrain, companies of soldiers became isolated and fought their own mini-battles. One recalled, "The men fought single-handed through the timber from tree to tree." The large sawdust pile and adjacent primitive trenches in a clearing provided an objective for the opposing combatants. Crawford's three Union brigades of primarily new recruits battled it out with four Confederate brigades (albeit Peck's brigade was only 300 strong) of mostly veteran but demoralized soldiers.

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<sup>255</sup> OR 46/1:282, 287, 392; OR 51/1:286, 290-91; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 375-76; Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 291; ORS, 7:711-13; Erwin H. Flagg, Co. E 7th Wisconsin, Civil War letters to his sister, 1864-1865, 1905, SC 3304, WI. Hist. Soc; Reid-Green ed., *Letters Home*, 108; H. A. Morrow, "The Last of the Iron Brigade," *Civil War Times Illustrated* (February 1976), Vol. 14, No. 10, 20.

The mill site changed hands several times during the afternoon. Routed by Evans's first charge, Bragg's brigade managed to regroup and continue fighting on the Federal extreme right. Matrau, 6th Wisconsin, explained how they "had it backwards and forwards driving the rebels back before they drove us back. Our regiment losing heavily as we were in an open field most of the time and Rebs were in thick woods."

Chaplain Locke with Baxter's brigade watched the Rebels occupy the trenches he and his comrades had just abandoned. Encouraged by news of strong Union reinforcements coming up in the rear, the Federals rallied, retook the works, and held them against a terrible enemy musket fire. Probably during this action, Sgt. William Sands, 88th Pennsylvania (Baxter's brigade), in advance of his company and facing a ferocious fire, grasped a Rebel regiment's colors and brought them back to his line. For this bravery, Sands would receive the Medal of Honor. Morrow recalled how his men charged across the field and into the woods, driving Evans's Rebels back to their fortifications near the mill. One of Morrow's men remembered the weather being so cold that wet clothing froze to the men, and many who fell in battle, froze to death before comrades could remove them from the field.<sup>256</sup>

The Rebels retreated in good order, regrouped, and counterattacked, forcing Crawford's Federals back past the mill again. Peck reported that each time they advanced, they were:

forced to retire by the wavering and falling back of the line on our left [Terry's Brigade]. We fell back each time in good order. The third time we advanced, a portion of Pegram's division [Lea's brigade] having come up on our right, we drove the enemy again steadily before us until we reached the field and sawdust pile.

A newspaper reporter wrote, "with a yell, Peck's Louisianans struck the heap of sawdust and carried it." Peck added, "after holding this point for a short time, the troops on my right and left gave way, and I fell back with them, reforming quickly in the woods."<sup>257</sup>

On the Confederate left flank, Terry's Brigade marched by the flank in some dense pines between Armstrong's Mill and Dabney's Mill. There, some Federal sharpshooters attacked them, and the Virginians fled in confusion. At some point in this action, the Yankees shot and killed Col. George W. Huston, commander of the 33rd Virginia. Sergeant John H. Worsham's memoir, 21st Virginia, Terry's Brigade, noted that as they fell back to reform the line, Capt. Reuben J. Jordan, with seven others, turned towards the Federals and placed themselves along the road to stop the enemy advance. "The Yankees rapidly approached and commanded Jordan and his little band to surrender. For an answer the Yankees received bullets: and when the smoke cleared, one Yankee lay on the ground, and the remainder were

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<sup>256</sup> OR 46/1:293. Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 376; Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 291; Beyer & Keydel, *Deeds of Valor*, 1:486; Abram P. Smith, *History of the 76th Regiment New York Volunteers; What it Endured and Accomplished; Containing Descriptions of its 25 Battles; its Marches; its Camp and Bivouac Scenes; with Biographical Sketches of 53 Officers and a Complete Record of the Enlisted Men* (Syracuse, NY, 1867), 329-30. The renowned 76th NY was disbanded in Dec 1864 and "consolidated" with the 147th NY of Morrow's brigade. Reid-Green ed., *Letters Home*, 108

<sup>257</sup> OR 46/1:392; "Battle of Hatcher's Run," *Atlanta [GA] Weekly Intelligencer*, April 12, 1865.

seeking safety”! At this moment, Gordon rode up and, hearing of Jordan’s exploits, offered his personal compliments. He rode back to Terry’s Brigade, and in a rallying speech, Gordon highlighted the deeds of Jordan and his band before hurrying the troops forward into battle.<sup>258</sup>

### Ayres Joins the Fight

By mid-afternoon Crawford’s left came under severe pressure. At around 3:30 p.m., Warren ordered forward Ayres’s two brigades, Col. Bowerman, and Brig. Gen. Gwyn commanding, to stabilize the position. Ayres’s men advanced in two lines through thick underbrush, ascending a ridge. Suddenly, some galloping Federal cavalry rushed into their ranks, sweeping away a large portion of Gwyn’s brigade. Although not recorded, these Union cavalymen were probably the force D. Gregg had ordered to screen the left of Crawford’s advance. Given the situation’s urgency, Ayres didn’t wait for Gwyn to reorganize his command but pushed rapidly onto the battle with what soldiers he had.

Ayres assumed that Gwyn would rejoin him as soon as he regrouped his men. However, Ayres later reported that Gwyn didn’t find his direction and moved into woods far from Ayres’s left. Here, Gwyn found his force isolated, with no one on his right or left. Gwyn gave a more nuanced account. While accepting that elements of his brigade became lost, he rallied many of his command and took them to the far left of the Union line. How attached they became to the rest of Ayres’s men remained unclear. Private McBride, 190th Pennsylvania, Gwyn’s brigade, remembered marching across the swampy ground and breaking through a crust of ice into the mud beneath. “George Dunn . . . went plunging in, halfway to his knee. When the foot was withdrawn it was found that the shoe had been left in the depth below.” Wherever these soldiers ended up, fighting on their front appeared light, with the battle raging to their right.

With the right of the Union line resting on Hatcher’s Run, Ayres and his men went into line on Crawford’s troubled left flank. Ayres soon engaged the Rebels and quickly drove them back beyond the mill, which he retook and held. Several of Bowerman’s Maryland Brigade distinguished themselves in this assault. These included Cpl. Abel G. Cadwallader, commended for planting colors on the enemy’s works at the head of his regiment, and Cpl. Andrew Carrick was praised for entering the enemy’s works ahead of his regiment and killing a Rebel.<sup>259</sup>

### Warren Requests Reinforcements

With the battle raging and the situation precariously balanced, at 4:00 p.m., Warren asked Maj. Gen. Wheaton, commander of a 6th Corps division, to send reinforcements.

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<sup>258</sup> Armstrong, *25th Virginia Infantry*, 86; Lowell Reidenbaugh, *33rd Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1987), 76; John H. Worsham, *One of Jackson’s Foot Cavalry*, James I. Robertson, ed. (Jackson, TN, 1964), 180-81. After the battle, Gordon obtained the names of the eight brave Rebels with the intention of formally citing them for gallant and heroic conduct. However, with the Confederate collapse two months later, Gordon’s account never materialized.

<sup>259</sup> *OR* 46/1: 255, 260, 277-79, 284-85; Bowerman, *The Maryland Brigade*, 52; Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 36; McBride, *In the Ranks*, 153-54. Charles Camper & Joseph W. Kirkley, *Historical Record of the First Regiment Maryland Infantry. War of the Rebellion, 1861-65* (Washington, 1871), 189. Gwyn had to resubmit his official report to clarify his brigade’s movements. Abel Cadwallader received a Medal of Honor for his deeds.

Earlier in the day, Humphreys had ordered Wheaton's men to the Cummings house (about a mile east of the Vaughan Road-Hatcher's Run crossing) to be closer to the primary area of fighting. Wheaton's last troops had just arrived near the Cummings house when he received Warren's order for reinforcements. Warren would have preferred support from Wheaton's entire division, but conscious of events along Vaughan Road, Warren settled for one brigade. Wheaton accompanied Col. James Hubbard's brigade. However, it would take them time to arrive. Warren also sent for the nearer Pearson's brigade, which he had "reserved" earlier.

Pearson crossed over his earthworks and marched west at "the double," arriving about 4:30 p.m. to support Ayres in bolstering the Federal left flank. Pearson reported:

I moved my brigade (through the line of works) by the flank through a strip of woods. The enemy at this time opened on us with a battery of 3-inch guns on my right, killing and wounding a few of my men. Was met by Major-General Warren who ordered me to place my command in line of battle, which I immediately did, my right resting in rear of center of one of . . . [Crawford's] brigades and extending along to [the] rear of . . . [Bowerman's] brigade.

In Pearson's brigade, Colonel Francis J. Parker, 32nd Massachusetts, described arriving in "a thick wood of pines where we could not see to any great distance." Also from Pearson's brigade, a 16th Michigan history noted that at about 4:00 p.m., the brigade's regiments moved out of their trenches to support their comrades. They advanced into a marshy strip of woods near the scene of the fighting at Dabney's Mill. As they waited to engage the enemy, artillery shells ripped through the branches above the soldiers' heads. Pearson's men soon formed a battle line and moved into the open, in close support behind Ayres's troops fighting near the mill site.<sup>260</sup>

The Rebel artillery in question comprised the four 3-inch rifled cannons from Crenshaw's (Virginia) Battery, commanded by Capt. Thomas Ellett, of Maj. William "Willie" R. Pegram's Battalion (part of the Rebel Third Corps' Artillery). The younger brother of John Pegram, "Willie" Pegram, was absent sick throughout the battle. The battery had traveled down Boydton Plank Road and arrived in an open field just off the road, where they found their infantry hotly engaged. Despite the artillery-unfriendly terrain, they managed to advance and made a significant contribution to the Rebel cause. The battery suffered several casualties, including Benjamin Pleasants, who lost a leg. In contrast, the Federal forces fighting around Dabney's Mill had no artillery support.<sup>261</sup>

By 4:30 p.m., the situation appeared ominous for the Confederates. The arrival of Col. Bowerman's brigade, together with elements of Gwyn's brigade and Pearson's veteran brigade, threatened to tip the balance in the Union's favor. Furthermore, Col. Hubbard's 6th

<sup>260</sup> *OR* 46/1:255, 271, 298; Francis J. Parker, *The Story of the 32nd Regiment, Massachusetts Infantry. Whence it came; where it went; what it saw, and what it did* (Boston, 1880), 242; Kim Crawford, *The 16th Michigan Infantry in the Civil War* (East Lansing, MI, 2019), 290-91.

<sup>261</sup> Peter S. Carmichael, *Lee's Young Artillerist: William R. J. Pegram* (Charlottesville, VA, 1995), 154-56; John S. Goolsby, "Crenshaw Battery, Pegram Battalion, Confederate States Artillery" *Southern Historical Society Papers*, XXVIII, 1900, 368-69. Capt. William G. Crenshaw the Battery's founder, had left in April 1863 to join the government. Pegram's Battalion was one of seven attached to Hill's Third Corps, each comprised of 3-4 batteries. Whether other Rebel artillery took part on Feb 6, is unknown; The Federals remembered the impact of the Rebel artillery and their own lack of cannons; *OR* 46/1:271, 293; McKenna, *Under the Maltese Cross*, 332; Reid-Green, *Letters Home*, 107.

Corps brigade also marched toward the scene. For the Confederates, Finegan with Mahone's Division was rushing down Boydton Plank Road to confront the Federal threat. But like Hubbard's men, they were not in sight.

However, the Rebels were about to receive much-needed support from the South. The next chapter reveals the nature of these reinforcements and their controversial impact on the raging battle.

#### Analysis

The intense and chaotic fighting around Dabney's Mill between 2:00 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. sucked in ever more regiments. The mill site changed hands three or four times. The fighting took place in a densely wooded area with deep ravines, swamps, and occasional open spaces. Any eyewitness would have struggled to comprehend what was happening at a broad level. Combatants' accounts of this action were mostly brief, with all the attacks and counterattacks compressed into a few sentences. Much of the evidence contained subjective biases, with narrators emphasizing successes and minimizing failures. In creating my narrative, I have triangulated multiple sources and anchored many snippets of testimony to the most reliable framework of events and times.<sup>262</sup>

Some notable voices are missing from the narrative. Although central to the fighting, no official reports exist from generals Crawford and Bragg. A modern biography of Crawford summarized the battle in just two sentences. In contrast, the numerous accounts originating from Baxter's brigade have advanced the evocative stories of the race to the sawdust pile and the demise of Sallie the dog. Many of the Union soldiers were raw recruits with minimal combat training. For example, the 6th Wisconsin, Bragg's brigade, went into battle with around 400 ill-trained, drafted men.<sup>263</sup>

There are more Confederate accounts of this fight compared to other aspects of the battle, but they are still far fewer relative to texts describing the Union perspective. The lack of testimony from senior Rebel commanders is particularly disappointing. One small Rebel brigade (Lea's) initially opposed *five* Union brigades around Dabney's Mill. One could have expected the Federals to bulldoze over the Confederate position and break through to Burgess's Mill on the plank road. Such an advance might have proven fatal for Lee's Petersburg right flank. However, the narrowness of Dabney Mill Road and the debilitating terrain meant that Warren couldn't easily mass his soldiers at the front. The basic Rebel earthworks near Dabney's Mill and the more substantial works around the Crow house, complete with cannons at the redoubt, enabled Lea to defend this vital position until reinforced by Evans's division.

One is left to speculate how events may have unfolded if Warren had simply "probed" along Vaughan Road and towards Dabney's Mill in the morning as Meade had expected.

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<sup>262</sup> This is a standard qualitative approach to maximize outcome credibility and validity. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," 27-40.

<sup>263</sup> Richard Wagner, *For Honor, Flag, and Family* (Shippensburg, PA, 2006), 226; Reid-Green ed., *Letters Home*, 108; Marten, *The Sixth Wisconsin*, 157-61.

## Chapter 11

### **An Appointment With Destiny: Pegram Marches Northwards**

**February 6, 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.**

#### Recapitulation

At around 2:00 p.m., Confederate Second Corps commander Gordon had ordered Pegram to leave his Vaughan Road position and head to Dabney's Mill, where Col. Lea's brigade faced overwhelming Union forces. However, Pegram and his two infantry brigades, commanded by Brig. Gen. Lewis and Col. Hoffman had been heavily engaged with Winthrop's Federal infantry and David Gregg's cavalry. Hence, obeying Gordon's order hadn't been practical. Soon after 3:00 p.m., Sickel's Union brigade had arrived along Vaughan Road and swiftly routed Pegram's Confederates.

#### Marching Across Country

Pegram regrouped his battered soldiers, and at around 3:30 p.m., he led them northwards to reunite with Gordon and the main Rebel force fighting around Dabney's Mill, as instructed earlier. The journey of about a mile required traversing rugged terrain: dense woods, swamps, ravines, and briars, with the occasional open areas. With no path or trail to follow, navigation would have been problematic. However, the noise of battle around the old mill site could have assisted their orientation. In later reports, both Meade and Warren noted the movement of Rebel forces from the Vaughan Road fighting to the action around Dabney's Mill. Pegram's men didn't attack the Federal left flank as Gordon had hoped; however, they did collide with some Yankees.<sup>264</sup>

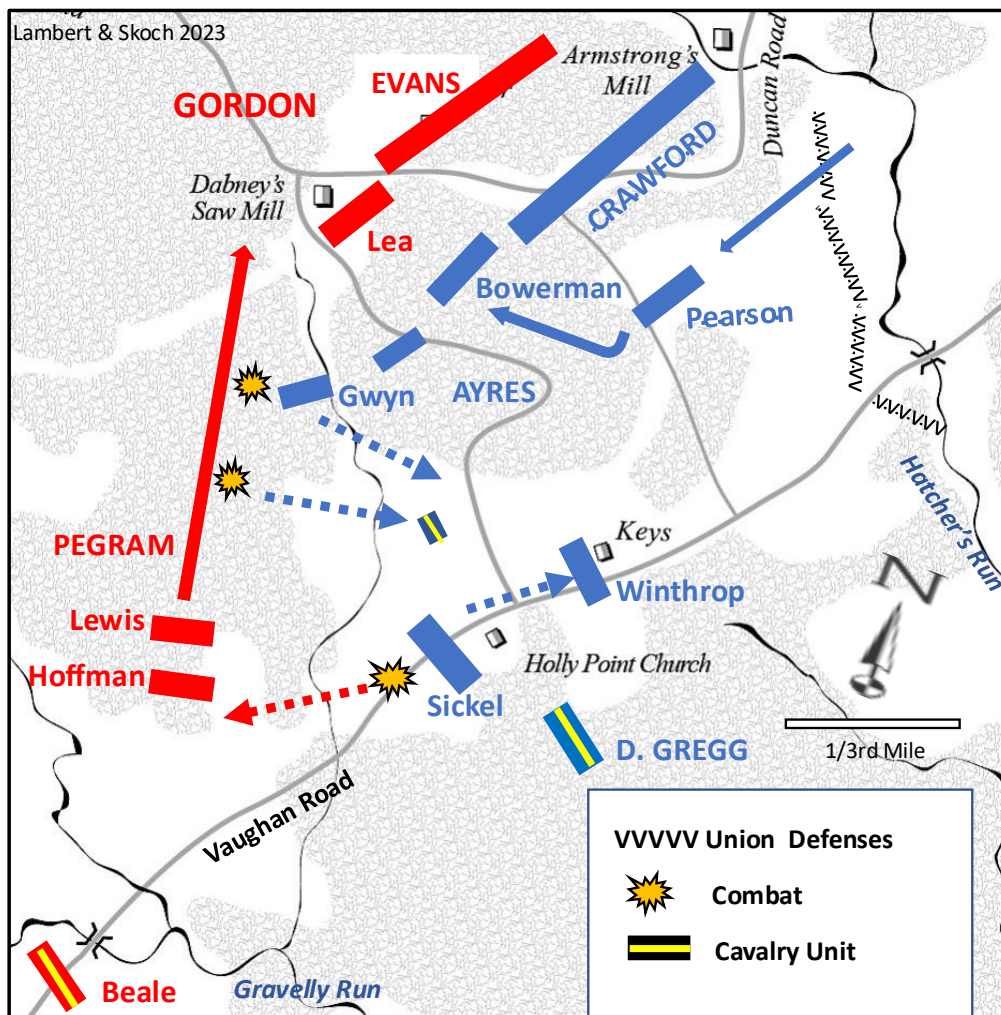
In their front, Pegram's skirmishers began trading heavy fire with unknown assailants in dense woodland. Pegram quickly called up the rest of his infantry but commanded them not to fire in case the hidden shooters belonged to Lea's brigade. Once established that they faced Yankees, they opened fire, and after a brief resistance, the Federals hastily withdrew. These Federals were probably the cavalry force Gregg had dispatched to screen Crawford's left flank. They are also probably the galloping Federal cavalry that disorganized Gwyn's brigade (Ayres's division) as they marched to reinforce Warren's troops around Dabney's Mill.

As Pegram's men pressed on, they ran into more Federals. After being stampeded by the retreating cavalry (see above), Gwyn regrouped his force and headed for the Federal left flank to rejoin his divisional comrades. However, some elements became lost in the dense forest, ventured too far to the left, and became isolated. At this juncture, they encountered unidentified Rebel troops, undoubtedly Pegram's troops moving north, whom they engaged. However, being isolated and unsupported, the Federals fled in disarray. Ayres reported: "this

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<sup>264</sup> *ORS* 7:806; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 414; Johnson, *Under the Southern Cross*, 222; Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 291; *OR* 46/1:255; *OR* 46/2:447.

command (General Gwyn's) had a fight in the woods, doubtless with the troops of the enemy which attacked ours on the Vaughan Road as they were endeavoring to pass around us to join the enemy near Dabney's Mill."<sup>265</sup>



Map 11.1: Pegram's March Northward 3:30 - 4:30 p.m.

After dispatching Gwyn's isolated soldiers, Pegram's men probably arrived at Dabney's Mill around 4:30 p.m. Once reunited with his compatriots, Pegram would have reported to Gordon and received orders. Gordon presumably wanted him to join Evans and Lea for another attack. Pegram rejoined his unit and disseminated the orders to his senior commanders.<sup>266</sup>

<sup>265</sup> Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 414-15. Sherrill's lengthy account of this action is muddled as it becomes mixed with actions that occurred along Vaughan Road. The identity of the cavalry force screening the Federal flank is unknown. *OR* 46/1:279.

<sup>266</sup> There are no records to support these specific conversations, but it seems a rational supposition.

### A Fateful Union Attack

As Pegram marched north, the situation around Dabney's Mill was fraught. Ayres reported arriving around the Mill with "mostly Maryland troops" from Bowerman's brigade. Much of his other brigade (Gwyn's) was lost somewhere to the Union left. Ayres's Yankees had pushed the Rebels beyond the mill but came under increasing pressure to hold their position. At this critical period of the battle (around 4:30 p.m.) Pearson's brigade arrived to support Ayres's division on the Union left. Regiments from Pearson's brigade went to Bowerman's left and right flanks to help hold the mill position. Bowerman had predominantly faced Lea's Confederate brigade. Reinforced by Pearson, Ayres launched another attack on the Rebels (around 4:45 p.m.). However, unbeknownst to Ayres, Pegram had just arrived with his two Rebel brigades.<sup>267</sup>

Regimental histories from Pearson's brigade provide a detailed description of this Federal assault. The 32nd Massachusetts, 155th Pennsylvania, and some Michigan skirmishers (unspecified) went to Ayres's left, where they immediately came under heavy fire, including from Rebel artillery. The Rebels captured many of the skirmishers. The rest of Pearson's brigade joined Bowerman's Marylanders as they "charged up to and over a line of the enemy's rifle pits . . . under a galling fire." Sergeant Marshall in Pearson's brigade remembered reaching the sawmill site and "some of our boys were on the sawdust when they [Rebels] charged on us . . . the bullets coming from the right and left and front, the rear was the only open place, and we started for it."



**Brig. Gen. Alfred L. Pearson**  
cmohs.org



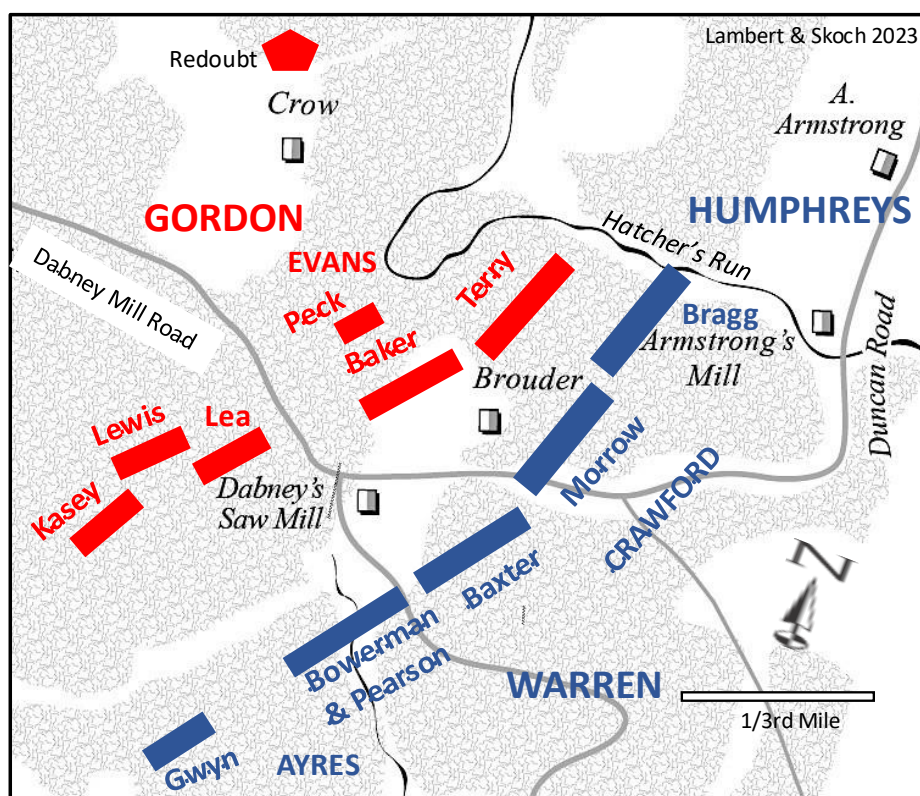
**Col. Richard N. Bowerman**  
beyondthecrater.com

At this point, Capt. John Scott, 118th Pennsylvania, fell mortally wounded. Attempts to carry him off the field failed as the Confederates (now reinforced with Pegram's two brigades) pushed the Unionists back. While trying to help Scott, his close friend, Capt. Nathaniel Bayne was shot in the cheek. Although painful, the wound wasn't severe. As Scott fell, a Minié ball struck Col. Charles P. Herring, the 118th Pennsylvania commander, just

<sup>267</sup> OR 46/1:271, 279; Powell, *The Fifth Army Corps*, 760.

below the right knee. Unperturbed, he carried on directing his men until a 20th Maine officer (unknown) noticed blood flowing from a hole in the colonel's boot and alerted him to the seriousness of the wound. Feeling faint from blood loss, Herring turned over command to Col. O'Neill before making his way to the nearest field medical station.<sup>268</sup>

It was probably during this failed Federal attack by Pearson's and Bowerman's Yankees that Pegram and his senior commanders fell in a hail of bullets. Pegram perished outright, along with Capt. John B. Snow, the 21st North Carolina commander. The 31st Virginia Adjutant, Lt. Washington McNemar, received a mortal wound. Struck on the lower left leg, his foot badly mangled, brigade commander Col. Hoffman fell from his horse near Pegram. Rumors spread that he, too, was dead, and many in his brigade lost focus as they stopped to see if their commander had perished. The other brigade commander, Brig. Gen. Lewis, fortunately, escaped unscathed.<sup>269</sup>



**Map 11.2: Position at Dabney's Mill After Pegram was Slain, Around 5:00 p.m.**

<sup>268</sup> The Survivor's Association, *History of the 118th Pennsylvania*, 551-55; Marshall, *Company "K," 155th Pennsylvania*, 223; McKenna, *Under the Maltese Cross*, 332; George Lockley Diary Oct 1864 to May 1865, George Lockley Papers, University of Michigan, Bentley Historical Library, 216. Herring's leg could not be saved and was amputated a few weeks later. He was brevetted brigadier general, US Volunteers on Mar 13, 1865, for gallant and meritorious conduct in this battle. The skirmishers came from either the 1st or 16th MI.

<sup>269</sup> Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 415; Wooddell, *Hoffman's Army*, 425-427. Given the status of those shot around him, it is plausible that Pegram was delivering orders following his meeting with Maj. Gen. Gordon when calamity struck. Kyd Douglas erroneously claimed that Hoffman was mortally wounded, Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall*, 312. Hoffman's lower leg required amputation. Capt. Snow had lost an arm the year previously.

The addition of Pegram's two brigades helped Lea's Rebels to repulse the fateful bluecoat assault and push the Federals beyond the mill site once more. The retreat of Ayres's men on the Federal left flank exposed Baxter's brigade on their right to flanking fire. With his center imperiled, Crawford urged Morrow on Baxter's right to launch an attack to help relieve the pressure on Baxter's close-to-crumbling position. The Confederates of Evans's division faced the Union center and right flank. Morrow urged his troops forward, but the battle-weary men (many were raw recruits) refused to advance, preferring to lie down and seek cover on the ground.

Major James Coey, 147th New York commander, who had supported Morrow in his pleas, took matters into his own hands. He seized the regimental colors and advanced. "The effect was magical." Inspired by Coey's bravery, regiment after regiment marched forward with a cheer. However, despite bitter fighting, a deep ditch and heavy Rebel firing thwarted Morrow's assault, and they had to retire. However, their actions relieved the pressure on the Union center, allowing Baxter's soldiers to withdraw in an orderly manner. It also created a fracture in the Rebel lines. With Evans's Rebels focused on Morrow's assault on the right and Pegram's men focused upon Bowerman and Pearson's attack on the left, a serious gap opened up between these two Rebel forces. The gap enlarged further when some of Evans's men fell back.<sup>270</sup>

The retreating Federals regrouped about 200 yards southeast of the mill and began entrenching and creating defensive positions using logs. Coey informed Morrow that ammunition was running low, with "hardly five rounds to a man being left." Morrow ordered the brigade to "meet any advance . . . with the bayonet and to go on entrenching."

Despite regaining the mill site, the Confederates were in no state to press home their advance. Stunned by the loss of two senior commanders and aware of a gap in their center, the Rebels tried to reorganize. Lewis took over command of Pegram's division, and Lt. Col. John G. Kasey replaced Hoffman as brigade commander. Thus, around 5:00 p.m., a noticeable lull in the fighting occurred as the Federals dug in and the Confederates reorganized. We continue the story of the battle in the next chapter.<sup>271</sup>

#### Pegram's Death: Confusion and Controversy

The death of Confederate division commander John Pegram near Dabney's Mill is arguably the best-known feature of the Hatcher's Run battle. The most senior soldier killed at the battle, his demise was particularly poignant. Only three weeks earlier, he had married the well-known Southern belle, Hetty Cary, in a lavish ceremony attended by most senior Rebel politicians and military. The wedding constituted one of the last moments of luxury and

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<sup>270</sup> OR 51/1:286; OR 46/1:390; Bayer & Keydel, *Deeds of Valor*, 1:482-84. Coey's bravery in this action contributed to his receiving a Medal of Honor. Ronald G. Griffin, *The 11th Alabama Volunteer Regiment in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC, 2008), 219.

<sup>271</sup> OR 46/1:390; Bayer & Kaydel, *Deeds of Valor*, 1:482-84; Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets*, 188-193; Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall*, 313; Sherrill *The 21st North Carolina Infantry*, 415-417. It is unclear who took over command of Lewis's Brigade. Wooddell, *Hoffman's Army*, 426. OR 51/1:286; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:214-15; Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 36. Various texts mentioned a lull in the fighting e.g., Smith, *The 24th Michigan*, 239; OR 51/1:286; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:214-15.

splendor experienced by the dying Confederacy. Pegram's death seemed to encapsulate the plight of the Confederate cause. Despite the event's notoriety, there are markedly different accounts of how, where, and when the 33-year-old Pegram perished. Below is a sampling of the various recollections.<sup>272</sup>

Some reported that a sharpshooter killed Pegram. A discrete sharpshooter attack appears unlikely as fellow officers fell in the same hail of bullets. Some claimed he died urging his men forward in an assault; others recorded how he died during a Federal counterattack. The eyewitness account of Maj. Kyd Douglas is well-cited. He claimed that during a Rebel attack around Dabney's Mill, "General Pegram was shot through the body near the heart. I jumped from my horse and caught him as he fell and with assistance took him from his horse. He died in my arms, almost as soon as he touched the ground." Another present at the scene, Maj. John H. New remembered him having time for some last words: "I am wounded badly. Get me off at once, if you are going to do so."<sup>273</sup>



**Author at Pegram's Marker, Hatcher's Run Battlefield, 2024**  
David Lambert

The Douglas account stated that Pegram perished *after* Mahone's Division arrived at Dabney's Mill, putting the time of death beyond 5:00 p.m. However, testimony from the son of cavalry brigade commander Brig. Gen. Beale reported that Pegram died "in the earlier stages of this day's . . . fighting" and before Evans's division arrived. This placed the event before 3:00 p.m. This scenario agrees with a Union account from Baxter's brigade, which reported that "General Pegram was killed by the first volley from our guns, and the ranks of

<sup>272</sup> Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 44; Dunham, *Allegany to Appomattox*, 157; Carmichael, *Lee's Young Artillerist*, 154-55.

<sup>273</sup> Douglas, *I Rode With Stonewall*, 312; Bergeron, "Three-day Tussle at Hatcher's Run," 36-37; Carmichael, *Lee's Young Artillerist*, 156.

his division, missing the animating voice and cheering presence of their gallant leader, were pushed back in surprise and confusion.” The account then described Evans’s men arriving. A newspaper review for the 50th anniversary of the battle also claimed that Pegram died “in the first fighting at this point [Dabney’s Mill]” before Evans arrived. Such narratives may explain why notable modern historians have also championed this version, despite overwhelming evidence placing Pegram fighting along Vaughan Road at around 3:00 p.m.<sup>274</sup>



**Maj. Henry “Kyd” Douglas**  
nps.gov



**Maj. Randolph J. Barton (postwar)**  
wikitree.com

Captain Buck, 13th Virginia, supplied a more diverse version of events. He fought alongside Pegram the entire day as part of Hoffman's brigade. His narrative implied that Pegram died while fighting cavalry north of Vaughan Road before even reaching Dabney’s Mill. One could interpret Gordon’s limited battle report as supporting Buck’s claim. Such are the hazards of historical research! The account portrayed in this chapter appears the most plausible. Supported by many accounts, it triangulates with other events and timings. We may never know the precise details surrounding Pegram’s demise; however, the affecting story is a poignant reminder of the tragedies of war.<sup>275</sup>

#### The Aftermath of Pegram’s Death

Soldiers placed Pegram’s body on a blanket and carried it off the field to an ambulance. The escorted ambulance traveled along Boydton Plank Road to division headquarters, near the Quaker Road intersection. Major Barton, an adjutant with Terry’s Brigade, witnessed the ambulance. Wounded in the battle, Barton followed behind as he returned to camp with a medic to have his wound dressed. Kyd Douglas placed Pegram’s corpse in his (Douglas’s) room at headquarters. The thorny issue arose of who would inform

<sup>274</sup> Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall*, 312; Beale, *A Lieutenant of Cavalry in Lee’s Army*, 198; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 375; Associated Literary Press, “The Civil War: 50 Years Ago Today,” *Buffalo [NY] Evening News*, February 8, 1915; Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 358; Calkins, “History and Tour Guide of Five Forks,” 18.

<sup>275</sup> Buck, *With the Old Confeds*, 131-32. OR 46/1:390.

Mrs. Pegram. Corps commander Gordon suggested Douglas, but he pleaded against the idea. "I'll lead a forlorn hope – do anything that is war – but not that." He proposed sending Maj. New as "he's married and knows women." It would seem that Maj. New similarly did not fulfill the ghastly task.<sup>276</sup>

Aware of John's demise, Capt. Gordon McCabe, a close friend of the Pegrams, awkwardly rode past Hetty's quarters. He saw her merrily entertaining John's mother as they awaited his return. As they secretly placed his body in the adjutant's room, someone sent word to Hetty that she might as well go to bed, as John would be late returning. Thus, she slept peacefully that night in a room above his corpse. In the morning, an (unknown) old civilian gentleman went up to Hetty's room and called her downstairs to where her husband lay. Consumed with grief, she knelt by his body and pulled out his watch, which was still ticking; she had wound it for him before they parted.<sup>277</sup>

### Analysis

Many authors made a common error when portraying this battle phase. They assumed that Pegram remained with Hoffman's brigade around the Crow house on the morning of February 6 and that he sent the brigades of Lewis and Johnston down to Vaughan Road. The main source supporting this view is the official report of Maj. Gen. Gordon dated February 9. This document has caused much confusion in the battle's narrative. Given its provenance, it is unsurprising that authors regarded it as reliable. It isn't easy to speculate why Gordon wrote what he did. He was present around Dabney's Mill all that afternoon. It was Gordon who sent orders to Pegram to return to Dabney's Mill from his Vaughan Road location. My only thought is that Gordon wrote his report in a rush. Compared to Union officer accounts that could stretch to pages, his report was comparatively brief and low in detail, particularly given that it covered over five hours of fierce fighting. Possibly, report writing was a low priority for Gordon at the time.<sup>278</sup>

Given that Pegram died around Dabney's Mill in the late afternoon, this erroneous narrative conveniently placed Pegram in the correct location to meet his fate. Furthermore, some misconstrued Sickel's report to suggest that he only routed Pegram's two brigades on Vaughan Road at 5:00 p.m. Thus, Pegram himself couldn't have been on Vaughan Road then if, at the same time, Yankees were shooting him over a mile further north.

The discovery of Lea's Report in the *OR Supplements*, accounts from Hoffman's brigade, and the research of Lee Sherrill confirmed that Pegram accompanied Lewis's and Hoffman's brigades to Vaughan Road. It also supported other evidence that Brig. Gen. Johnston wasn't even at the battle. As Pegram fought along Vaughan Road but perished near Dabney's Mill, he had to make that journey. Understanding Sickel's report and realizing that

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<sup>276</sup> Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall*, 312; Barton, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 119; Bergeron, "Three-day Tussle at Hatcher's Run," 36-37. Capt. Oscar Hinrichs claimed that his bed was used to lay Pegram's corpse (Williams, *Stonewall's Prussian Mapmaker*, 242); Griggs, *General John Pegram*, 117-18.

<sup>277</sup> Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 204-05; Griggs, *General John Pegram*, 117-18.

<sup>278</sup> *OR* 46/1:390. Gordon's paragraph-long report does not discuss the fighting on Feb 5 or Feb 7 in which he played a central role.

he routed Pegram's men soon after 3:00 p.m. provides the time needed for the march. The testimony from Ayres that Gwyn's brigade encountered Confederates in the appropriate location further supports this account.<sup>279</sup>

Since 2:00 p.m., fighting around the mill had been constant and intense. The lull in shooting just before 5:00 p.m. was a welcome relief for all combatants and a feature mentioned by eyewitnesses. The silence proved short-lived, as we discover in the next chapter.

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<sup>279</sup> Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 42-44.

## Chapter 12

### “Old Barney” Provokes a Yankee Skedaddle

February 6, 5:00 p.m. - 7:30 p.m.

At 5:00 p.m., during a brief lull in the fighting around Dabney’s Mill, the engagement remained delicately poised. The Rebels tried to address a fracture in their line and regroup after losing two senior commanders. The Federals, meanwhile, continued entrenching southeast of the mill. Both sides anxiously awaited reinforcements, namely, Maj. Gen. Wheaton’s 6th Corps soldiers for the Union and Brig. Gen. Finegan’s troops for the Confederates. The Rebel reinforcements appeared first.

Affectionately called “Old Barney” by his soldiers, the mounted Finegan led his men marching at the double-quick down Dabney’s Mill Road. Finegan commanded Mahone’s Division of 4,900 battle-hardened veterans. It comprised five brigades: Brig. Gen. Harris’s Mississippi Brigade (670 men); Col. Forney’s Alabama Brigade (1,110 men); Brig. Gen. Sorrel’s Georgia Brigade (1,340 men); Brig. Gen. Finegan’s own Florida Brigade (850 men), now commanded by Col. David Lang, and a Virginia Brigade (930 men), probably commanded by Brig. Gen. Weisiger.<sup>280</sup>

With rain lightly falling, Gordon directed Finegan’s brigades to form behind Evans’s brigades and the Confederate brigades formerly commanded by Pegram (now commanded by Brig. Gen. Lewis). This resolved the gap that had developed within the Rebel lines. Gordon quickly agreed a plan. Finegan would spearhead a two-wave frontal attack against the Federal position. The first wave would comprise Forney’s Alabamians on the left and Weisiger’s Virginians to their right (nearest the mill). The second wave would include Sorrel’s Georgians on the left and Harris’s Mississippi Brigade on the right. Finegan would hold the Florida Brigade under Lang in reserve.

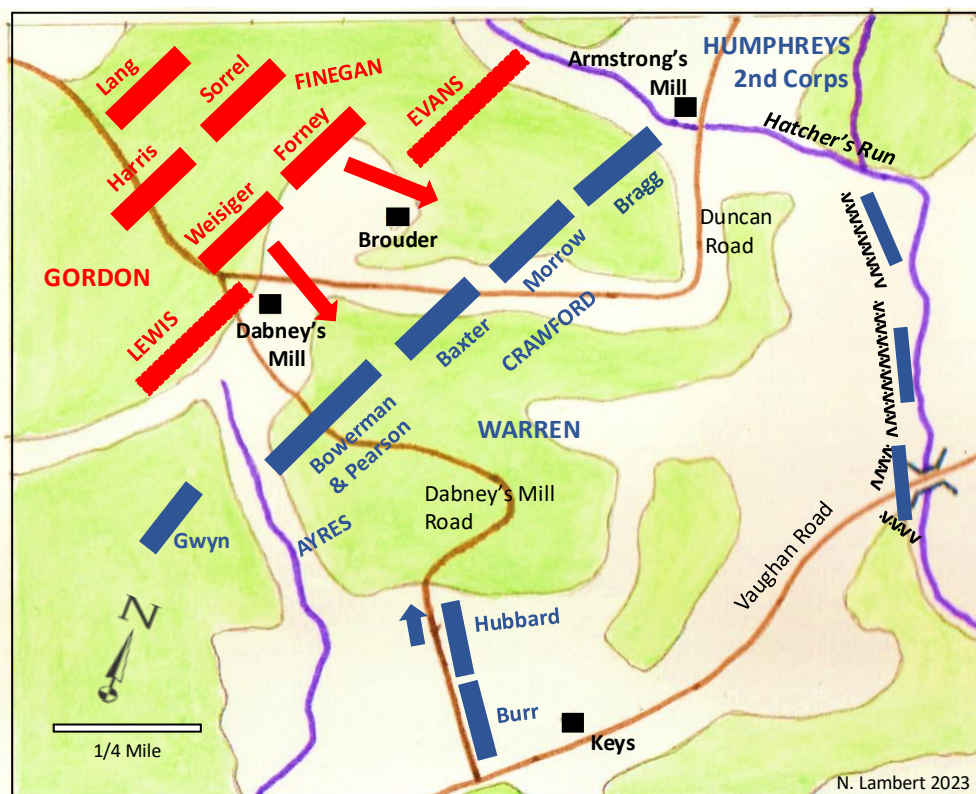
The first tactical problem Finegan faced was how to advance through the lines of Gordon’s Corps in his front. The expectation was that Evans’s and Lewis’s Rebels would join Finegan’s men in the assault. However, many of these exhausted soldiers were still returning from the woods following the previous action. As Finegan’s Confederates allowed Gordon’s stragglers to pass through their ranks, Gordon cautioned him not to “shoot into our men, but run over them if they do not go ahead and join your advance.”

Lieutenant James E. Phillips, 12th Virginia, Weisiger Brigade, recalled seeing Finegan astride his handsome sorrel horse. He wore a peculiar uniform that day, consisting of a civilian coat and a beaver hat, and he brandished a walking stick. The hatless Gordon

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<sup>280</sup> Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 35, 37. Peter Cozzens, Ed., *Battles & Leaders of the Civil War, Volume 5* (Urbana, IL, 2007), 535. Others note that Finegan was nicknamed simply “Barney,” see Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 355. Mahone’s strength came from End of Dec 1864 Inspection Reports, NARA M935, Roll 14, 19-P-46; Dickison, *Confederate Military History*, “Florida,” 11:159-60 claimed a strength of 3,500; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 412 claimed the Division comprised 4,600 men. Some of these soldiers had briefly fought on the previous day. One source claimed that Col. Groner commanded the Virginia Brigade during the battle.

galloped along Finegan's front line, acknowledging the regiments as he passed and reminding them of their former valor. The troops cheered the well-known general as he went by. Hot for the fight, Gordon commanded Finegan's division forward. Finegan guided his horse to Forney's and Weisiger's brigades, then ordered a charge. "On ye go you brave lads," Old Barney shouted. With a yell, the two brigades moved forward through the woods.<sup>281</sup>



**Map 12.1: Finegan's Force Arrives at Dabney's Mill, Around 5:00 p.m., February 6.**

#### Overview of the Following 90 Minutes

The word "pandemonium" best summarizes what followed. With darkness descending (sunset was around 5:40 p.m.),<sup>282</sup> the densely wooded terrain and smoke from musket and cannon fire made visibility terrible.

The Union position consisted of Crawford's division on the right, with Bragg's brigade holding the far right up to Hatcher's Run. To Bragg's left was Morrow's brigade and then Baxter's brigade. To their left was Bowerman's brigade, Ayres's division, supported by Pearson's brigade, Griffin's division. Further to the left were elements of Gwyn's brigade, Ayres's division, that had become isolated. After fighting for three hours, some of these 5th

<sup>281</sup> Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 358-59; Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 36; "Battle of Hatcher's Run," *Atlanta [GA] Weekly Intelligencer*, Apr 12, 1865, page 1.

<sup>282</sup> Visibility for active military operations ended around 6.40 p.m. Boatner, *Cassell's Biographical Dictionary*, 819-21.

Corps units claimed to be low on ammunition. Wagons carrying ammunition supplies had apparently become stuck on the narrow, muddy roads.

Supported by Rebel artillery and elements of Gordon's command, Finegan's first wave attacked in a northwest-to-southeast direction and crashed into the Union line. Parts of the blue line started to buckle. In Finegan's second wave, Sorrel's Brigade on the left and Harris's Brigade on the right joined the fight, heaping further pressure on the Federal position. At some point, the Union line broke. Panic and confusion gripped the Yankees, who started to flee pell-mell to the rear.

The jubilant Confederates chased the terrified Yankees, who headed for the sanctuary of Vaughan Road or their works along Hatcher's Run. Division commander Ayres tried to rally the routed Yankees on some ridges in open ground in front of the Union breastworks. His efforts proved futile. Finegan aggressively executed his attacks. His elite soldiers<sup>283</sup> were supported by elements of Gordon's Rebels. The stunning Rebel charge evoked memories of former Confederate glories. Indeed, this would be one of their last "great hurrahs" of the entire war.

And what of the Union reinforcements? As ordered, Wheaton led his 6th Corps division up the mill road as Finegan's troops struck the Federal line. Warren ordered two of Wheaton's brigades into the Union defenses along the Run and directed his other brigade, commanded by Col. James Hubbard, towards Dabney's Mill. Colonel Allen Burr's brigade, Griffin's division, then on Vaughan Road, received orders to follow Hubbard's troops. Accompanied by Wheaton, Hubbard's brigade began forming a line on open ground over 400 yards in front of the Run defenses. They soon saw many soldiers running toward them (the fleeing Yankees). In the gloom, some fired at the onrushing men, mistaking them for Rebels. A line proved impossible to form as the routed Yankees smashed into Hubbard's formation, disrupting and panicking them, and they all headed to the rear. They ran toward Col. Burr's brigade, also trying to form a line. Some Federals alleged that Burr's soldiers panicked and fired at the onrushing mass of Yankee fugitives before joining the routed mob fleeing the attacking Rebels and running toward the Union defenses.<sup>284</sup>

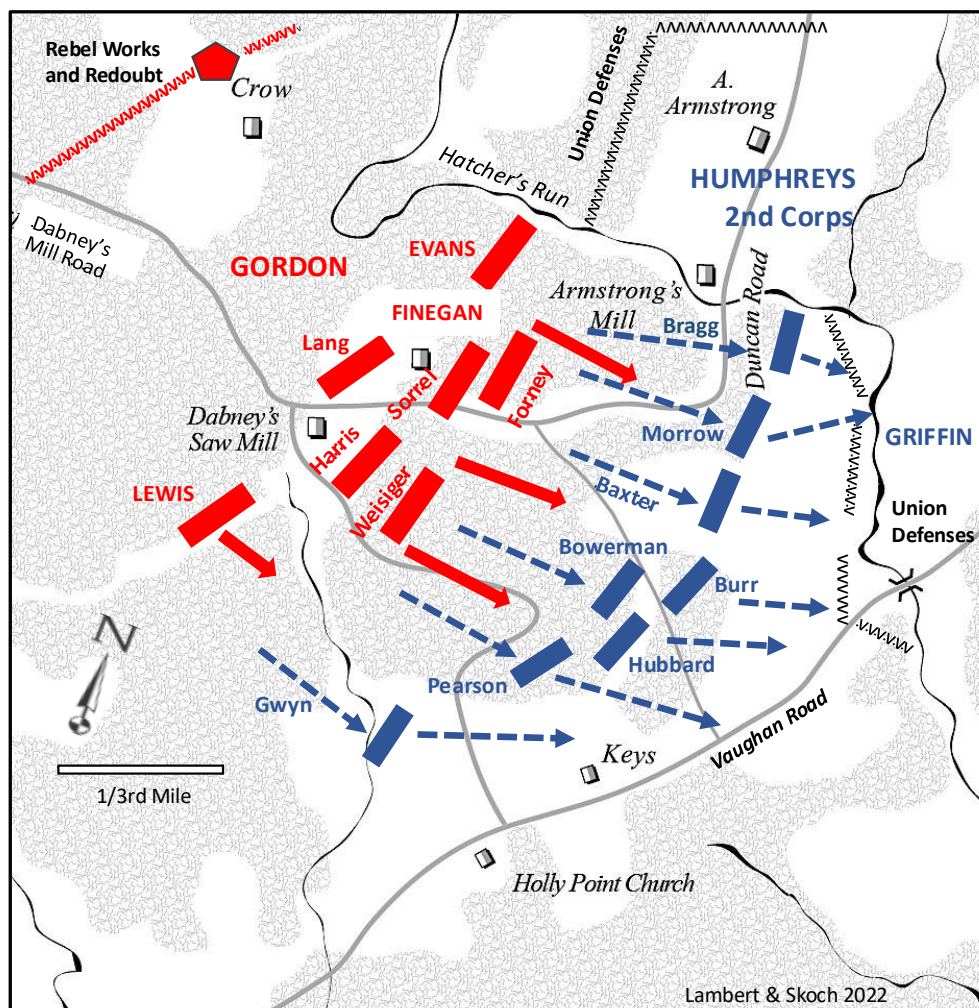
The chasing Confederates became increasingly disorganized as they charged through dense woods and swamps. In near-darkness, the Rebels became exhausted after pursuing the Yankees for nearly two miles. Once behind their substantial earthworks, manned by reserve troops and with ammunition supplies, the Federals presented a formidable force to the Rebels. In addition, across the Run near Armstrong's Mill, Brig. Gen. Smyth, of the 2nd Corps, had ordered up artillery and began firing on the advancing Confederates. These cannons were Lt. Edward S. Smith's section of Battery K, 4th U.S. Artillery.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>283</sup> By Jan 1865, Mahone's Division was regarded as among the best troops within the ANV, Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, 3:553,556.

<sup>284</sup> A basic overview of this chaotic fight can be found in any modern battle accounts (Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run" 35, 43-44). The most detailed of these summaries is that of Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:215-18.

<sup>285</sup> OR 46/1:250, 252. The Union cannons were part of the 15th Battery New York Light Artillery. They fired 82 rounds of solid shot, spherical case, and shell.



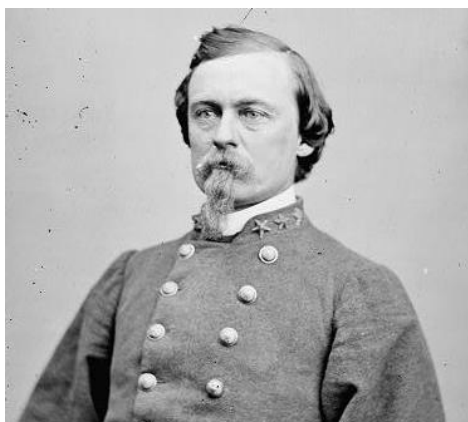
Map 12.2: The Union Skedaddle, 5:30 p.m., February 6

The fighting fizzled out, with the Rebels victorious. Although routed and stunned, the Yankees had reached safety within their works. At 7:30 p.m., AOP commander Meade messaged Grant about the situation. In a presumably challenging dispatch to compose, Meade described having a “spirited contest with the enemy” and they had steadily forced the Rebels beyond Dabney’s Mill. However, the Rebels had “opened on them with artillery . . . [and] being reinforced, Warren’s troops were . . . compelled to retire in considerable confusion.” Warren’s troops had rallied in the positions they held in the morning and had eventually halted the Rebel advance. Meade explained that the fighting had occurred in dense woods and that losses were considerable, although he couldn’t currently give an estimate. There is no record of Grant’s reply.<sup>286</sup>

This narrative summarizes the overall actions during the late afternoon of February 6. Given the chaos and atrocious visibility, a more systematic account of the fighting is not possible. Brigades and regiments quickly became fragmented and intermingled, and who fired upon whom remained largely unknown. Some Federal soldiers shot at their own men.

<sup>286</sup> OR 46/1:152.

The following two sections use eyewitness anecdotes to embellish the above narrative. Unsurprisingly, the recollections hold conflicting details. In many instances, it isn't clear precisely where and when the events described occurred.



**Brig. Gen. Joseph Finegan**  
Library of Congress



**Brig. Gen. Henry A. Morrow**  
nps.gov

### Confederate Recollections

Rebels with Weisiger's Brigade recalled allowing Gordon's stragglers through their line before advancing with a yell. During the charge, Pvt. George A. Spence, 12th Virginia, fell with a bullet in his head. His brother Leslie ran to his aid but realized George lay mortally wounded. "I went to Col. Groner commanding the brigade and asked permission to take the body off the field," Groner denied his request. However, Leslie summoned help from two other company friends, and they carried George, still breathing, to the rear, where he died soon after.<sup>287</sup>

Also, in Finegan's first wave, Col. Forney proudly recalled how his Alabama Brigade moved over Gordon's lines and pushed back the Federals. "We drove them back easily and did it handsomely." An 11th Alabama officer, Lt. Kennedy, remembered arriving at the scene and seeing an enemy flag flying triumphantly over a portion of the battlefield. Ordered to attack, he advanced across an open field. Kennedy ably chronicled his feelings and thoughts as he marched into the unknown: thoughts of home and loved ones, God, fate, and death. He continued, "We attacked the enemy with so much vigor that although [the Federals were] flushed with momentary victory [they] could not withstand the onset." A Florida Brigade account shared how "Ayres's men resisted at first, but Crawford's men, hungry, tired, and discouraged, broke almost immediately, running into the woods in confusion."<sup>288</sup>

<sup>287</sup> William H. Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets* (New York, 1911), 190; Westwood A. Todd, "Reminiscences of the Civil War," 1882, Southern Historical Collection, #722-z, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 281-82, hereafter Todd, "Reminiscences," 281-82; William H. Stewart, "The Hardships of Hatcher's Run" *Confed. Vet. Magazine* (1911), Vol. 19, 336; Spence, *Confed. Vet. Magazine* (1897) Vol. 5, 484-85; Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 359, 361. Whether Virginia D. Groner commanded Weisiger's Brigade is debatable. Testimony from W. H. Stewart and elsewhere strongly suggests that Groner commanded the 61st Virginia at the battle.

<sup>288</sup> Griffin, *The 11th Alabama*, 219; Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 37.

As Weisiger's and Forney's men chased after the fleeing Yankees, Finegan's second wave brigades of Sorrel's Georgians and Harris's Mississippians joined them. Finegan, still with the Virginia Brigade, became flushed with excitement. "Pursue them, me brave Virginny boys, they run like deer," he shouted in his rich Irish brogue. An ordnance officer with the 12th Virginia, Westwood A. Todd, recalled, "My brother George . . . slapped him [Finegan] on the leg, and told him, we'll follow you, General" which made Finegan laugh.<sup>289</sup>



**Col. William H. Forney (postwar)**  
wikipedia.org



**Brig. Gen. David A. Weisiger**  
wikipedia.org

Toward the back of Finigan's force, Brig. Gen. Harris described how other brigades had already moved into action as he arrived at the scene. Harris reported to Hill, his corps commander, who passed him on to Gordon, who instructed him to support the advance. Harris ordered a charge. His Mississippians went over the Rebel line formed by Gordon's troops and pressed the enemy from a field. Harris's Brigade swiftly joined Finegan's first wave in a forward position. Together, they advanced in a coordinated effort, pushing the enemy back two miles to the Union works. Others noted that with impeccable timing, Finegan rode with Harris's Mississippians and propelled his second line forward. This assault, coming so soon after the first wave, intensified the panic in the Federal ranks as some threw down their muskets and fled to the rear. Rebels heard Yankee officers trying unsuccessfully to turn their troops to the front with cries of "Go back, go back!"<sup>290</sup>

A newspaper account explained how Harris's Brigade bore the brunt of the battle, and made their last grand charge of the war, and characterized it "as one of the boldest, and most effective charges of the war." In this battle, Brig. Gen. Harris, mounted on his mascot horse "Yankee," was conspicuous for gallantry and dash. Harris never tired of talking of this last grand charge of the "old brigade," saying: "It was the proudest day of my command, and the old brigade, though worn thin, was invincible, and would have pulled the hinges off the gates

<sup>289</sup> Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 359; Todd, "Reminiscences," 281-82.

<sup>290</sup> ORS 7:717. Harris claimed that he was on the left of the second wave, which differs from all other accounts. Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 37; Ralph Poore, *Poore Boys in Gray* (Boise, ID, 2012), Loc 3045..

of hell if ordered.” A 16th Mississippi soldier recalled that upon arrival around Dabney’s Mill, “Gordon’s men were coming back in droves, reported the enemy in overwhelming force and their commands all cut to pieces.” With a yell, Harris’s troops charged up a wooded hill with some Virginia and Alabama regiments. The Federals made a gallant stand, “but the onslaught was so sudden and determined that they could not resist it, so they fled, leaving many of their comrades prisoners in our hands.” On the Mississippians continued, and a fresh line of Federals appeared. The Rebels fired a volley into the Federals while charging at the same time. The Yankees became demoralized and broke in confusion. With all opposition ended, the rout became a chase, and they pushed the Federals back nearly a mile before commanders halted the division near a creek.<sup>291</sup>

In his memoir, Brig. Gen. Sorrell recalled, albeit briefly, how his Georgia Brigade “made a handsome, successful charge, which dislodged and forced back the Federals.” Sergeant William Judkins, 22nd Georgia, claimed that the Mississippi Brigade on his right started a charge, and Sorrell’s men charged with them. Judkins added, “Two of our company ran out of the fight, I will not tell their names.”<sup>292</sup>

In Weisiger’s Brigade, Lt. Col. William Stewart, 61st Virginia, remembered that while charging through the woods, the undergrowth and trees broke his ranks. The soldiers became so scattered that Stewart approached a general (unknown) and suggested a halt to reform their line. Once agreed, they advanced again in close order. The Yankees broke and fled, trying unsuccessfully to rally on some ridges, before finding shelter in their earthworks near Armstrong’s Mill.<sup>293</sup>

Some accounts mentioned a third wave, in which Finegan came galloping up on his right flank from west to east with his own Florida Brigade that had been in reserve. A Richmond newspaper reporter with Weisiger’s men mentioned how Finegan’s improvised third wave in support of the Virginians and Mississippians on the Rebel right staggered the Union left again.<sup>294</sup>

Although worn out and battered after hours of fighting, some of Pegram’s (now deceased and replaced by Lewis) and Evans’s troops joined Finegan’s men in the assault. Peck’s small brigade was, however, finished for the day. When Finegan’s forces arrived at Dabney’s Mill, Evans ordered Peck’s Louisianans to the rear to some pines near the Confederate main line, where they bivouacked for the night.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Picayune, “Harris’ Mississippi Brigade at the Siege of Peterburg and Appomattox” *New Orleans [LA] Times*, September 15, 1902; Cozzens, *Battles & Leaders*, 535.

<sup>292</sup> G. Moxley Sorrell, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer* (New York, 1905), 179; William B. Judkins, *Memoir*, Sara Hightower Regional Library, Rome-Floyd County Library, Rome, Georgia, page 88, Hereafter Judkins Memoir, 88.

<sup>293</sup> Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets*, 190; Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 359; Benjamin H. Trask, *The 61st Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1988), 30. Trask reported that the 61st VA suffered few casualties in the charge.

<sup>294</sup> Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 38.

<sup>295</sup> *OR* 46/1:392.

A modern history of the 21st North Carolina, Lewis's Brigade, described how the regiment participated in Finegan's attack. A Tar Heel noted that with the familiar "yei, yei, yei of the rebel ranks" the Union forces gradually fell back towards Vaughan Road. Crawford's right suddenly broke, and the Yankees flooded back into their defenses beyond the road, effectively blocking any Union countercharge from gaining momentum. Finegan and Lewis urged their divisions forward. As the Yankees fled, it took cordons of blue cavalry across Vaughan Road to contain the routed Union troops.<sup>296</sup>

Colonel Lea noted how "General Gordon . . . ordered me . . . to attack without delay." Under Gordon's leadership "(on his horse with hat in hand), the 12th North Carolina and part of the 23rd North Carolina entered the fight in gallant style." Lea added that "*these troops were never driven back . . . and pressed on with [Finegan's] command.*" The 20th North Carolina and 1st Battalion were several hundred yards to the right, assisting in driving the enemy from the sawdust pile. Shortly after Lea led his brigade into the battle, some Rebels belonging to Terry's Brigade, adjacent to the 12th North Carolina, were driven in amid great disorder. Lea remembered that despite being scattered, his brigade fought well.<sup>297</sup>

### Union Recollections

Many ordinary Union soldiers, especially among regiments with formidable reputations, felt acute shame and dishonor from their shambolic stampede. An 1882 memoir from Pvt. Theodore Gerrish of the famed 20th Maine, Pearson's brigade, noted:

I think that I will not attempt to describe that affair [fighting around Dabney's Mill]; the boys will all remember it, and there are some facts connected with that battle which we would not want everyone to know. . . how the Rebels fired on us and how we fired in return, and how we got frightened and "skedaddled" back through the woods like a flock of sheep. We recollect it all, but for the reputation of the regiment we will not speak minutely of those things here.

He then quoted the adage, "he who wisely runs away, lives to fight another day."<sup>298</sup>

The Gerrish text offers a rare and honest insight into how combatants created favorable narratives and how they could process perceived failures. Many Union memoirs minimized Finegan's attack. Motivated by reputation management and preserving regimental honor, authors frequently described how "they" calmly retreated to the Union breastworks either because of a lack of ammunition, "other" units falling back, or "other" Federal troops shooting into them. Despite this trend, the stories below add important details to the narrative.

Bragg's brigade occupied the far right of the Union line. Several memoirs described how they held their ground until the line on their left "got broken and fell back in disorder." In the 6th Wisconsin, Lt. Matrau and Lt. Mair Pointon, both noted how the regiment remained calm and fired until out of ammunition. With the Rebels in their rear to the left, the Wisconsinites fell back to the Union works along Hatcher's Run.

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<sup>296</sup> Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 415.

<sup>297</sup> *ORS* 7:807.

<sup>298</sup> Theodore Gerrish, *Army Life; a Private's Reminiscences of the Civil War* (Portland, ME, 1882), 223-24. The 20th ME had acquired notoriety at earlier battles, especially Gettysburg.

In his battle report, the 7th Wisconsin commander, Col. Richardson, conveyed a similar story. Low on ammunition, and the line to their left driven back, he ordered his men to retire. Richardson added that at one point they found themselves nearly surrounded, so had to make a hasty retreat to the works along Hatcher's Run. Other 7th Wisconsin soldiers supported this narrative.

There is no other battle report from regimental commanders in Bragg's brigade, nor is there a report from Bragg. However, in a 1900 letter describing the fight, Bragg recalled "holding the field – until late afternoon, when fresh [Confederate] troops arrived ... under [Col. William H.] Forney & reinforced Gordon and with cartridges exhausted, unsupported & neglected – having no means of offense & none of defense but our legs – we left the field at dusk." Consistent with this recollection, Forney's Alabama brigade was on the left of Finegan's first assault, thus placing them in direct opposition to Bragg's men.<sup>299</sup>

To Bragg's left was Morrow's brigade. They struggled to maintain cohesion following Finegan's first attack. One Yankee recalled seeing Morrow on horseback with brigade flag in hand, trying to steady his line. A Rebel bullet struck Morrow in the shoulder, and he fell to the floor. Taken to the rear, Morrow passed command to Col. Thomas F. McCoy. Around the time of Morrow's wounding, another brigade officer, Maj. Coey, 147th New York, received a bullet below the left eye, the ball coming out behind his right ear. Carried off the field by two comrades, he regained consciousness. After acquiring a horse, Coey returned to the front and attempted (unsuccessfully) to rally his men while his two friends held him in the saddle.<sup>300</sup>

Baxter's brigade, Crawford's division, occupied the Union center. Lieutenant George Fowle, 39th Massachusetts, wrote home saying, "The whole Corps broke. I never see the 5th Corps do so badly before. . . They will have to stop blowing now about some of the other Corps running." At the front, Warren watched on. A 39th Massachusetts, Baxter's brigade, history recalled that many of the troops lacked ammunition, and the whole line fell back despite the urging of officers. It noted that "the best of men will not stand with empty muskets and be shot down." The line retreated but in good order. It described ammunition wagons getting stuck on the narrow, muddy road and their attempts to keep them out of enemy hands. Finally, the account explained how 6th Corps troops fired upon the 39th as they headed to the rear.<sup>301</sup>

Other Yankees in Baxter's brigade recalled that with fiendish shouts, the Rebels followed the routed Federals, who were out of bullets. The giving way of Ayres's division on the left caused the whole line to retreat. "Another disaster on the left — 'the bloody left,' as the troops called it - appeared inevitable, as the men, lost in the woods and entangled in the

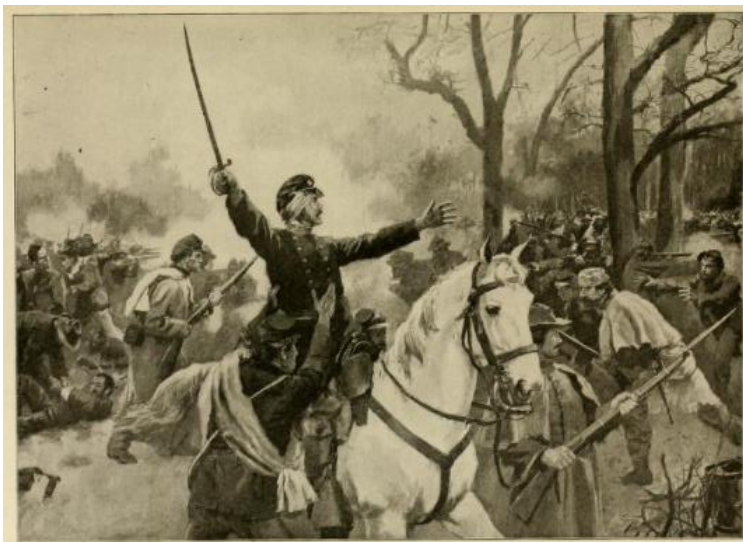
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<sup>299</sup> Reed-Green, ed., *Letters Home*, 108; Philip Cheek & Mair Pointon, *History of the Sauk County Riflemen: Known as Company "A," Sixth Wisconsin Veteran Volunteer Infantry, 1861-1865* (Madison, WI, 1909), 153-54; *ORS* 7:711-13; Charles H. Walker, *Civil War Dairy, 1861-1865*, February 6, 1865, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries; Letter, Sgt. Albert C. Morse to mother, February 14, 1865, The Morse Family Papers; Letter, Edward S. Bragg to Earl Rogers, April 11, 1900, Bragg Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

<sup>300</sup> Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 3:865; Beyer & Keydel, *Deeds of Valor*, 1:482-484. We met Maj. Coey earlier in the afternoon, bravely initiating a counterattack. For both these actions combined, he received the Medal of Honor.

<sup>301</sup> Greenleaf, *Letters to Eliza*, 155; Roe, *The 39th Regiment*, 272-73.

swamps and ravines, made their uncertain way to the rear.” One Yankee recalled how some 6th Corps troops fired on the 88th Pennsylvania. The entrenchments recently thrown up by the 2nd Corps formed a rallying point for the Federal soldiers. “From behind those works, a fire was poured into the eager Confederates that first halted their lines and then sent them back to the cover of the woods.” Darkness had descended. The roar of battle ceased, and safe within their defenses, the Federal line kept a firm hold on Hatcher's Run.<sup>302</sup>



**A Wounded Major Coey Tries to Rally His Soldiers**  
*Deeds of Valor*

Bowerman's Maryland Brigade, Ayres's division, occupied the Union "bloody left." A 1st Maryland history described how they ran out of ammunition and lay on the ground for safety as another brigade (presumably Pearson's) relieved them on the front line. Continued Rebel assaults pushed back the Yankees in front of Bowerman, and having no bullets, the Marylanders broke for the rear. They returned in good order to the Union breastworks by Hatcher's Run. During this retreat, Col. John W. Wilson, the 1st Maryland commander, perished. He was the most senior Union officer killed outright at the three-day battle. Under fierce enemy fire, Lieut. Francis M. Smith and a few others carried the colonel's body from the field at great peril to their own lives. The colonel's brother, Lt. Robert A. Wilson of the same regiment, also died in the same action.<sup>303</sup>

Ayres's other brigade, Gwyn's, had become isolated on the Union left. Amid the confusion, a lost Maj. Gawthrop, 4th Delaware, recalled meeting Warren, whose horse had been shot. Directed back to his brigade, Gawthrop discovered his men receiving heavy fire on both flanks. As they fell back in a disorganized fashion, a musket ball downed Gawthrop. Sent to the hospital, he discovered his wound, although painful, was relatively superficial. He

<sup>302</sup> Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 376-77; Michael N. Ayoub, *The Campfire Chronicles: The Words and Deeds of the 88th Pennsylvania 1861-1865* (Bloomington, IN, 2010), 323; Vautier, *History of the 88th Pennsylvania*, 205.

<sup>303</sup> Camper & Kirkley, *Historical Record of the First Regiment Maryland Infantry*, 187-90. Beyer & Keydel, *Deeds of Valor*, 1:486. Smith received a Medal of Honor for his actions.

described a tormented night in the hospital tent. He lay beside the mortally wounded Lt. Wilson (see above), whose brother's body, the 1st Maryland colonel, lay outside. Another of Wilson's brothers also lay wounded in an adjacent tent.<sup>304</sup>



**Col. John W. Wilson**  
findagrave.com



**Col. Charles D. Gilmore**  
beyondthecrater.com

Sent to support Ayres on the left, Pearson's brigade, Griffin's division, fought alongside Bowerman's troops. Recall Gerrish's damning words about their performance. Captain Amos M. Judson, 83rd Pennsylvania, described the affair as "the greatest skedaddle that has taken place yet." He blamed the generals for rushing the troops ahead too fast and not keeping them under control. The large Rebel attack carried the Federal front line and drove the Yankees back into their own men. He added, "Fortunately night was close at hand, and the rebels were not aware of the panic we were in, or it would have resulted in a disastrous defeat to us." The 20th Maine commander, Col. Charles D. Gilmore, had an exciting experience. Captured by Rebels, he managed to escape amid the battle's confusion and eventually returned to the Union lines.<sup>305</sup>

A modern history of the 16th Michigan called the events "embarrassing." Troops from the 5th Corps, the 6th Corps, or both fired into Pearson's brigade, causing them to break and run. Hundreds of inexperienced recruits who had never been in battle probably did not know whether the troops in front of them were friends or foes. Some fired into their comrades, and the Union line crumbled as soldiers fled from Dabney's Mill. A Lt. Arnold J. West recalled, "We held the ground within five rods [about 25 yards] of the enemy until the Sixth Corps, thinking they were attacking the enemy, fired on us from the right flank while the enemy was firing on the left flank and front. Under these circumstances, we were forced to retreat to the line of works we had left in the former part of the day." Other soldiers in the brigade agreed.

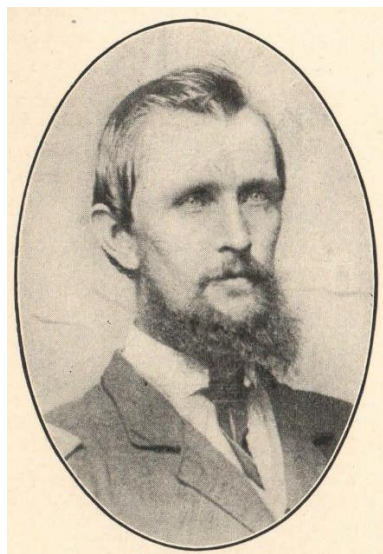
<sup>304</sup> Carisio, *A Quaker Officer*, 130-31. I have found no other memoir from Gwyn's brigade describing this engagement.

<sup>305</sup> Amos M. Judson, *History of the 83rd Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Erie, PA, 1865), 110; John J. Pullen, *The 20th Maine: A Volunteer Regiment in the Civil War* (Greenwich, CN, 1962), 244-45; Nathan S. Clark Diary 20th Maine, 122-23, [civilwardigital.com](http://civilwardigital.com), [Civil War Diaries](http://CivilWarDiaries.com).

“It became impossible for the regiments of the third Brigade [Pearson] to maintain their order, and utter confusion resulted.”<sup>306</sup>

Colonel Francis J. Parker, 32nd Massachusetts, Pearson’s brigade, remembered seeing Crawford’s troops driven back in confusion. However, in some dense pine woods with limited visibility, his regiment and the 155th Pennsylvania (another Pearson regiment) managed to hold their ground before finding themselves isolated and flanked on both sides. Parker recalled, “It required considerable coolness and some sharp fighting” to return to Union lines, suffering many casualties. Sergeant Marshall, 155th Pennsylvania, saw Rebels overtaking some fleeing Federal soldiers as they ran back. Enough Yankees rallied to fire a volley into the Rebels to halt them and provide some space. When the bluecoats neared the Union lines, they faced Burr’s brigade, Griffin’s division, in line with fixed bayonets preventing them from retreating further. Marshall explained that these were the same troops that had fired into their own men on October 27 at a similar location. While trying to form a line to meet the enemy:

Rebel bullets started to come thick and fast. Burr’s brigade became excited, some firing up in the air, some into the ground, and some into our lines, causing more casualties than the Rebels. After firing, they threw away their guns and fled for the rear. Once across our breastworks, those still with guns continued to fire at us.



**Sgt. D. Porter Marshall**  
findagrave.com



**Col. Francis J. Parker**  
findagrave.com

Burr’s men ran for the bridge on Vaughan Road. Other 155th Pennsylvania soldiers also recalled Burr’s troops shooting at them from the rear before “they [155th Pennsylvania] charged into their misguided brethren,” compounding the confusion. The “disorganized mob,” followed by Mahone’s Rebels, retreated over a ridge where Union officers had placed some cannons. “A blast of canister discouraged the pursuing Confederates, and . . . darkness

<sup>306</sup> Crawford, *The 16th Michigan Infantry*, 291-92.

brought the miserable action to a close.” When Pearson’s troops reached the same Union defenses they had left two hours earlier, they began stabilizing the situation.<sup>307</sup>

Hubbard’s 6th Corps brigade arrived late to the affair and received criticism from others for firing into their own men. In a letter, Pvt. Albert Stone, 2nd Connecticut, remembered how “the wounded kept passing us in ambulances. I kept thinking that we was going into [a fight] and sure [enough] we did.” He added that “the Johnnys was driving us [back]. They marched our division into the woods but we run pretty quick—the shot and shell came so thick—and it was lucky that we did too for the Johnnys was flanking us.” Another Connecticut soldier, Lt. Theodore F. Vaill, noted that having reached the action and gotten into position along a slight ridge, 5th Corps troops came running to the rear and broke Hubbard’s ranks. Amid great confusion exacerbated by the thick vines and underbrush that unseated some of the mounted staff officers, the 2nd Connecticut fell back another 50 yards. They reformed and poured a heavy fire, somewhat at random, to the left of their first position.<sup>308</sup>

Sergeant John F. Hartwell, 121st New York, Hubbard’s brigade, remembered that just after 5:00 p.m., the brigade came to support Warren’s Federals, who were falling back in “great disorder.” Hubbard’s men were also “driven back in some disorder” but quickly reformed and stopped the Rebel advance. Hartwell noted that “A perfect stream of fire was kept up until late in the evening when the enemy ceased firing and withdrew . . . out of range of our musketry.” The New Yorkers set up a picket line for the night. A regimental history supported this description, remarking, “as the 121st wheeled into line of battle, the Fifth Corps broke, and for thirty minutes, there was a perfect stampede.” Hubbard’s brigade (Wheaton’s division) regrouped some 300 yards in the rear. The line held, and after the firing finished, they consolidated their position and prepared to bivouac. Wheaton credited Col. Hubbard with reforming the position after Crawford’s men had stampeded their line. Captain Kidder advised Lt. Col. Egbert Olcott on where best to position the line. They calmed the troops and halted the Rebel advance. Wheaton lauded Olcott for his bravery.

Major Mason W. Tyler, 37th Massachusetts, in another of Wheaton’s brigades, watched the drama unfold. “I never saw such a rout, and it made me so mad I wanted to shoot some of the officers, who were as bad as the men – scared to death.” He claimed that 5th Corps correspondents tried to cover up the calamity, with some blaming 6th Corps troops for firing into them, which particularly angered Tyler. “The facts . . . were simply these: . . . [Crawford’s] division . . . was repulsed, and a causeless panic seized them and they ran more

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<sup>307</sup> Parker, *The Story of the 32nd Regiment*, 242-43; Marshall, *Company "K,"* 223-24; McKenna, *Under the Maltese Cross*, 322-33; Pullen, *The 20th Maine*, 244. There is no evidence supporting the presence of any Union artillery south of Hatcher’s Run. The cannons mentioned probably refer to those of Lt. Edward S. Smith, mentioned earlier. The McKenna memoir erroneously stated that Brig. Gen. Joseph Bartlett led the third brigade; he was on leave, and Pearson led the brigade. The Oct 27, 1864 action was the Battle of Burgess’ Mill, where the AOP had clashed with Lee’s ANV in the same wooded terrain around Hatcher’s Run (Horn, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 175-85).

<sup>308</sup> Letter, Albert Stone to Harriet Vallett, Feb 16, 1865, Billy Yank and Johnny Reb Letters, Spared & Shared 22, wordpress.com.; Theodore F. Vaill, *History of the Second Connecticut Volunteer Heavy Artillery. Originally the Nineteenth Connecticut Vols.* (Winsted, CN, 1868), 142.

than a mile [with] . . . no enemy of any consequence following them.” He explained how his 6th Corps colleagues had saved the day despite Warren’s soldiers shooting at them.<sup>309</sup>

Colonel Burr’s brigade, Griffin’s division, also went to support their colleagues toward the end of the fight. This brigade, of mostly new recruits, had only been created four months previously. Their commander, Brig. Gen. Edgar Gregory was on leave, resulting in Burr taking command. Their conduct received significant criticism. However, other accounts praised their performance. Chaplain William Rogers, 189th NY, recollected the regiment forming a battle line behind Crawford’s division. The Rebels poured a heavy volley into them and charged with a fiendish yell. The line in front of Burr’s men gave way in confusion. Crawford’s men, followed by the Rebels, tumbled into Burr’s line. “The rout . . . to the left and right seemed to be complete. Never did Colonel Burr and his staff exhibit greater coolness and bravery.” Amid a hail of lead, Burr rode along the line, rallying his troops to stand firm. Many portions of the line temporarily gave way but eventually reformed. Burr’s men halted the Rebels on this part of the field. Rogers concluded: “the 189th, under Capt. [John] Stocum, did gloriously.” With the arrival of night, they received orders to return to Union fortifications.

A newspaper report also presented a favorable account of Burr’s brigade and blamed the debacle on the other Federal units running back in panic. A modern history revealed how Hubbard’s men emerged from some woods and crashed into Burr’s line. Burr’s Yankees retreated 150 feet, reorganized, and then charged. Burr and his staff showed great bravery throughout. An analysis refuted the friendly fire criticisms, placing any blame on Hubbard’s troops. A few weeks later, the 189th New York soldiers took up a collection and bought Col. Burr a new horse, called Black Hawk, for his “outstanding leadership” at the battle.<sup>310</sup>

A detailed account from Robert Tilney, one of Warren’s staff officers, is particularly illuminating. Accompanied by Warren, assistant adjutant-general Col. Frederick T. Locke, and two orderlies, Tilney observed many Yankees being driven in, when 6th Corps troops coming to their aid fired into them, creating further panic. “I never saw such a stampede.” Soldiers fell by dozens, including ambulance men carrying wounded to the rear. Tilney’s group dismounted as the balls flew thickly and used their horses as shields. Some minutes later, Warren mounted, and the rest followed. Warren turned around and angrily ordered them to dismount and await orders before taking the saddle. Warren then dismounted, and with the firing getting closer, he suddenly sprang on his horse and dashed off into some woods. A surprised Locke followed, abandoning Tilney and the orderlies with no orders.

As they mounted, Tilney noticed a line of Rebels approaching, so they rode quickly back toward their defenses. In front of him, Tilney saw a Federal line deployed across the field, preparing to fire on the approaching Rebels. Caught in the middle, he dashed to his

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<sup>309</sup> Ann H. Britton & Thomas J. Reed eds., *To My Beloved Wife and Boy at Home: The Letters and Diaries of Orderly Sergeant John F.L. Hartwell* (Madison, NJ, 1997), 331; Salvatore G. Cilella, *Upton’s Regulars: The 121st New York Infantry in the Civil War* (Lawrence, KS, 2009), 365-66; Mason W. Tyler & William S. Tyler, *Recollections of the Civil War* (New York, 1912), 329-31.

<sup>310</sup> *The Pulaski* [NY] *Democrat* May 4th, 1865; William H. Rogers, *History of the 189th Regiment of New-York Volunteers* (New York, 1865), 92-95; Valgene L. Dunham, *Gregory’s New York Brigade: Blue-Collar Reserves in Dusty Blue Jackets* (Bloomington, IN, 2015), 90, 92.

Federal comrades, hoping they would let him through. He managed to cross the Federal line despite a Yankee swinging a musket, hoping to unseat him. A spent Rebel bullet struck Tilney's horse, and he careered into the woods before managing to steady his mount.



**Col. Allen L. Burr**

Mathew Brady



**Robert Tilney**

*My Life in the Army*

Upon returning to headquarters, an orderly informed Tilney that Rebels had probably captured Warren, and Locke wanted Tilney to arrange for headquarters to be packed up. Tilney passed the order onto the quartermaster, and soon the tents came down and wagons were loaded. Tilney rode off and met Col. Locke. When he enquired about Warren, Locke became evasive, which, for Tilney, added more credibility to the rumor. Tilney left the colonel and headed back into some woods, where he saw Warren riding as calmly as anything. Tilney decided not to mention the rumors and just reported on the present situation before riding off. Sometime later, a friend of Tilney came to him, saying that Warren had been furious to find his headquarters gone and demanded to know who had given the order. Warren heard that Locke gave the order, which Locke denied, and then someone said that Tilney had ordered the quartermaster to strike the tents on Locke's orders. Locke denied this, too. Thus, the friend sought Tilney out to inform him of the situation, saying, "Warren is an ugly man to deal with when he gets mad, which he frequently does." Consequently, Tilney kept a low profile for the rest of the day.<sup>311</sup>

#### Analysis

The Rebels soundly whipped the Yankees during the late afternoon of February 6. The reason why the Union troops panicked involved many factors. In addition to facing the well-executed Confederate assaults on their front, the Federals received friendly fire from their rear. A lack of ammunition further exacerbated the situation for the now unnerved Yankees.

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<sup>311</sup> Robert Tilney, *My Life in the Army, Three Years and a Half with the Fifth Army Corps, Army of the Potomac 1862-1865* (Philadelphia, PA, 1912), 178-81. Initially with the 5th New York, in summer 1864, Tilney became chief clerk to the office of assistant adjutant-general to the 5th Corps.

For many, that day represented their first taste of combat. To give three examples: in the 590 strong 6th Wisconsin, 400 were raw recruits. In the 7th Wisconsin, 100 of the 220 men had never previously fired a musket. In the 107th Pennsylvania, three-quarters of their 275 men were under fire for the first time.<sup>312</sup>

The Union force involved intermingled brigades from four different divisions. In such circumstances, coordinating areas of responsibility and fields of fire becomes extraordinarily challenging and fuels confusion. As one part of the Union line fled, adjacent troops became isolated and vulnerable to Confederate flanking fire. With firing coming from multiple directions, these exposed Federal troops hastily retreated, thus creating a domino effect. Therefore, instead of undertaking an orderly withdrawal, panic became contagious and gripped the inexperienced, confused, and frightened soldiers.

The fallout within the AOP following the “great skedaddle” is a crucial aspect of the Hatcher’s Run story, but it rarely receives any commentary. I describe this topic in the following chapter. It sheds further light on the events surrounding Finigan’s assault and points to how posterity subsequently portrayed the battle.

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<sup>312</sup> Reid-Green, ed., *Letters Home*, 108; The 6th Wisconsin Infantry End of January 1865 Inspection Report; *ORS* 7:711-713; *OR* 46/1:294.

## Chapter 13

### Union Fallout Following the “Great Skedaddle”

Spearheaded by Finegan’s attack, the Rebels had soundly whipped the Yankees late on February 6. In a message to Grant, Meade called the event a “disaster.” Artillery chief Col. Charles S. Wainwright scathingly wrote, “Our men were regularly stampeded. . . . all the officers I have talked with say it was disgraceful beyond anything they had ever seen on the part of the 5th Corps.” He accused Grant of covering up the extent of the calamity from the public.<sup>313</sup>

Poor performances on this scale threatened reputations and careers. No one wanted to be on the wrong side of any military inquest. Official battle reports from regimental, brigade, and division commanders, appearing a few days after the debacle, made for interesting reading. The carefully crafted narratives were often lacking in detail and laced with self-justification. They included some subtle and, in some cases, not-so-subtle attempts to deflect blame away from themselves and onto others. Though biased, these Union reports offer further insights into Finegan’s attacks.

#### Embarrassed Union Officers and Creating an Official Narrative

In his report (February 15), 5th Corps commander Warren tried to minimize the defeat, saying, “On the whole, it was not a bad fight and in no way discouraged me in my willingness to try the same thing again with the same men.” He accepted that “the enemy got up re-enforcements faster than I could.” Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, Warren denied newspaper reports and comments from his officers that Union troops fired into their comrades. However, Warren’s private opinions were more critical; he recorded, “We are getting to have an array of such poor soldiers that we have to lead them everywhere, and even then, they run away.”<sup>314</sup>

#### Senior Staff Officer Reports

Probably under less scrutiny than field commanders, the reports of staff officers Col. Locke and Capt. Emmor B. Cope<sup>315</sup> contained forthright testimony, although pointedly favorable to Crawford’s troops. Locke saw stragglers breaking to the rear in considerable numbers. Many, he discovered, hailed from Gwyn’s brigade, Ayres’s division. Gwyn soon appeared and said his brigade had broken after receiving only slight enemy fire. Locke suggested that Gwyn reform his brigade, advance to the woods, and deploy to stop others

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<sup>313</sup> OR 46/1:153; Allan Nevins, ed., *A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles Wainwright, 1861-1865* (San Diego, CA, 1962), 497.

<sup>314</sup> OR 46/1:255-56; Crawford, *The 16th Michigan Infantry*, 291; Taylor, *Gouverneur Kemble Warren*, 203.

<sup>315</sup> Cope gained fame for his map of Gettysburg and post-war battlefield preservation work [National Park Service: Gettysburg Seminar Papers — Unsung Heroes of Gettysburg](#).

from falling back. Locke also found some of Bowerman's men, Ayres's division. He rallied many and asked Gwyn to take charge of them.



**Capt. Emmor B. Cope**

findagrave.com



**Col. Frederick T. Locke**

Uniondb.com

Locke then saw several hundred men from Burr's brigade, Griffin's division, falling back in significant disorder, their officers displaying no positive command and control. "With the assistance of several officers, this mass of men was halted and faced to the front." However, when a few shots flew over, they became frightened and began firing into their own troops ahead; many fired perpendicularly into the air. They broke and ran, panic-stricken, to the rear. Locke reported that Hubbard's 6th Corps brigade, Wheaton's division, nearby, could do nothing to stop the flight of fugitives. Around dusk, Winthrop's brigade, Ayres's division, went up to protect the Federal left. Griffin's and Ayres's divisions went into breastworks, and Crawford's division, "which had retired in good order," massed near Vaughan Road.

Cope had directed Wheaton's troops (the reinforcements) to the mill road. Around this time, Cope saw many 5th Corps soldiers running to the rear. Amid the confusion, he found Wheaton trying to form a battle line some 200 yards behind the troops giving way. But Wheaton's men also became panic-stricken and fled, firing into their officers and among one another as they ran. Gwyn's brigade came out of the woods *en masse*, claiming they had no ammunition. "A part of [Crawford's] division came back, slowly and in comparative order," and succeeded in checking the enemy in the woods. This gave the Federals time to form a line of battle. With darkness descending, the Rebels didn't seem disposed to push further, and all became quiet. The Union troops reformed and took up their former positions in the breastworks. Crawford's men camped on the north side of Hatcher's Run.<sup>316</sup>

#### Reports from Ayres's Front

On the Union left, division commander Ayres's first report only mentioned that Federal troops on his right (presumably from Baxter's brigade) fell away when attacked by overwhelming numbers. With his right flank exposed, his troops retreated and eventually

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<sup>316</sup> OR 46/1:258-61.

withdrew to their initial positions. He then cited numerous soldiers who had acted bravely. Warren returned the report. He wanted to know whether Ayres's withdrawal from Dabney's Mill had resulted from orders received, the misconduct of troops on the right, the misconduct of his division's troops, or an irresistible force of the enemy. The dispatch continued, "the general commanding does not think there were sufficient reasons for good troops to give way." It added that the losses were not sufficient to justify a retreat. Warren's orders had been to remain and fight it out, and he wanted his troops to understand that he would not shield them in his reports:

If they won't fight the country must know it. General Warren knows that General Ayres used his best efforts to make them hold their ground and, for his honor as well as that of the commander of the corps, wishes to have it plainly stated that it was the troops and not the generals who would not fight.

Ayres replied a month later. He said that two of Pearson's regiments sent to the right of Bowerman were concealed in the woods. Some of Crawford's troops fired on them, and Pearson's men ran away, which "caused a retrograde movement all along the line . . . [and] was against all orders and authority." Ayres revealed how he had unsuccessfully tried to regroup the troops on several ridges between Dabney's Mill and the Federal breastworks. He could not stop "the contagion of fear," and the troops fled. A line of soldiers brought up in his rear (either Burr or Hubbard) started firing into his troops, hitting several. Under those circumstances, Ayres believed his men were justified in not remaining. He added that Bowerman's men had no ammunition and gave way in good order. Whether the soldiers on his right should have fallen back, he couldn't say, but he felt that superior enemy numbers had overwhelmed them. Ayres concluded that his troops had not fallen back alone.<sup>317</sup>

Ayres's two brigade commanders, Bowerman and Gwyn, also submitted reports. Bowerman's first report simply mentioned that they ran out of ammunition, "and the troops on the flank having fallen back, the brigade was withdrawn in good order." Warren returned this report, asking whether Ayres had ordered him to retreat and if there really were no troops on his left or right flanks. Warren thought it improbable that he had run out of ammunition so quickly. Given the accusations officers were reporting, Warren wanted answers. "If brigades withdrew without being ordered to do so, charges would be issued against the officers." A month later, Bowerman replied that when they withdrew, there were no Union troops to their left or right, and they faced a fierce attack from an enemy in greater numbers.<sup>318</sup>

Gwyn's report described how stampeding Union cavalry had initially disrupted his brigade, with elements struggling to find the Union left flank. Gwyn's first report only stated that, being unsupported on either flank, he'd retreated to some ridges in front of the Union breastworks. Warren deemed the report unacceptable. He wanted to know if someone had ordered the brigade to retire and whether they were really isolated. Did the enemy assail either of Gwyn's flanks, rendering his position untenable? Warren added that he made these inquiries in light of formal complaints so that his report could be specific in its allegations

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<sup>317</sup> *OR* 46/1: 277-79.

<sup>318</sup> *OR* 46/1: 282-83.

against those who had left Gwyn's brigade unsupported. "It is his [Warren's] present opinion that the brigade left the front without orders and without encountering a sufficient force of the enemy to justify it."

Gwyn replied (March 15) that he hadn't wanted to blame any of his fellow brigades but to highlight his isolation and, as such, he had to retire. He admitted to being lost on the Federal left, and with firing coming from the right and left flank, he "considered the position untenable . . . and retired to the crest of the hill in front of the [Union] breastworks."<sup>319</sup>

Pearson, Griffin's division, went to support Ayres on the left around 4:30 p.m. He reported that Rebels had vigorously attacked his left, and he then received fire from the rear by Crawford's troops and a mass of disorganized and demoralized 6th Corps troops. After much effort in reforming the brigade, a further volley from the rear caused his brigade to break. The friendly fire killed and wounded many, including Capt. Smith, 83rd Pennsylvania. They fell back a short distance, reformed, and advanced in good order to the edge of the woods, and again became engaged. The enemy, having retreated, Pearson moved his brigade to the right of a 6th Corps brigade (Hubbard), which was reorganizing. Pearson threw out some skirmishers and remained in that position until relieved by Winthrop's brigade around 7:30 p.m.<sup>320</sup>

#### Reports from Crawford's Front

Strangely, Crawford's report, the other division commander pivotal to the engagement, is missing from the records. Similarly, there are no *OR* from Bragg, or his regimental commanders; these forces occupied the Federal right flank. However, many senior officers in the other brigades submitted reports. Baxter's brigade occupied the center of the Union line; his report and that of his regimental officers were relatively minimal regarding Finegan's attack. Interestingly, Warren returned none of these reports. Baxter claimed that his troops ran out of ammunition and were awaiting a new supply. The Rebels made a massive attack, the troops on his left (Bowerman and Pearson) gave way, and his (Baxter's) brigade retreated in disorder. Baxter's troops massed and reformed on the south side of Hatcher's Run overnight. Reports from Baxter's regimental commanders glossed over the debacle. One experienced friendly fire from the rear by 6th Corps troops before they withdrew overnight. Another claimed that soldiers on his right gave way, and having no ammunition, they had to withdraw. Lieutenant Colonel John P. Spofford, 97th New York, mentioned that Ayres's troops fell back (to his left), and Morrow fell back (to his right), leaving him exposed, and thus he had to fall back to the Union works. Finally, Col. Charles W. Tilden, 16th Maine, only mentioned a strong enemy attack on his left flank.<sup>321</sup>

Morrow's brigade was to Baxter's right. He, too, claimed that his ammunition ran out, and it took the bravery of key officers to keep the men together. Around 5:00 p.m., Morrow received a severe wound and passed command to Col. McCoy, 107th Pennsylvania. McCoy's

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<sup>319</sup> *OR* 46/1:284-85.

<sup>320</sup> *OR* 46/1:271-72, 276. Recall the scathing testimony from within Pearson's brigade describing how they fled in panic.

<sup>321</sup> *OR* 46/1:292; *OR* 51/1:286, 288, 291-92. Crawford must have submitted a report, one wonders if a copy exists somewhere. The battle report of the 7th Wisconsin commander, Bragg's brigade, is in the *ORS*.

report described how the Rebels attacked with great fire, including artillery. The brigade had no ammunition and no reinforcements. The line on their left (Baxter) fell back. “We continued fighting but had to retire to save ourselves.” They retreated as quickly as possible to the safety of the Union works. He pointed out that three-quarters of his men were under fire for the first time.<sup>322</sup>

#### Reports from the Union Reinforcements

Towards the end of the day, Hubbard’s 6th Corps brigade, Wheaton’s division, and Burr’s brigade, Griffin’s division, 5th Corps, arrived to reinforce the embattled Federals. Division commander Maj. Gen. Wheaton accompanied Hubbard’s men and submitted a detailed account of the debacle. At about 5.30 p.m., when just under a mile from Hatcher’s Run, the sounds of firing increased, and stragglers from Crawford’s division grew in number. Wheaton ordered Hubbard’s brigade into line, but the mass of fleeing troops rushing through the dense woods poured into them, preventing them from forming any line. “The fugitives . . . were deaf to every entreaty of myself and staff and refused to rally on the flanks or in support of the brigade there forming.” Many of Wheaton’s men then fled to the rear despite efforts to halt them. During this confusion, Wheaton met Warren, who said that the line in front had broken irreparably.



**Maj. Gen. Frank Wheaton**  
generalsandbrevets.com.



**Col. James Hubbard**  
Dudley L. Vaill, The County Regiment

While throwing out skirmishers to check the Rebels, Wheaton’s men received several volleys from a line of Federal troops (presumably Burr’s troops) to his left rear, who, fortunately, fired too high. Wheaton withdrew from the woods to a more secure field some 300 yards in the rear. Here, he was safe from the murderous fire from his own side, who struggled to distinguish friend from foe in the growing darkness. Situated nearby, Warren managed to stop the friendly fire. As Hubbard’s troops tried to reform in the open field, Rebel skirmishers rapidly approached them. The Rebels, increasing darkness, and general confusion made it exceedingly difficult to form a line. Wheaton praised Col. Hubbard, Lt. Col. Olcott

<sup>322</sup> OR 46/1:287-88, 293-94.

(121st NY), and a regiment in Pearson's brigade for eventually creating a stable line. Deployed pickets secured the new line. Wheaton reported how Warren had expressed much gratitude for the conduct of Hubbard's and Pearson's brigades.<sup>323</sup>

Burr's official report noted how they followed Hubbard's troops to the scene of action as ordered. He formed in line of battle in an open field where a vigorous fire occurred. The Rebels forced back some of Hubbard's brigade and Crawford's division, and Burr received orders to hold them in check until they rallied. Once accomplished, Burr's brigade received orders to close up on the left flank. However, the disordered mass of Yankees broke through and disrupted Burr's ranks. Burr rallied the brigade and advanced, "driving the enemy and doing good execution." From this position, Meade ordered him back to Vaughan Road. The brigade moved as ordered, reformed in the Union works, and remained there overnight.

Warren summarily rejected Burr's report. The assistant adjutant-general noted that Warren himself had seen this brigade fire into Ayres's troops and Hubbard's brigade. Fortunately, most of this fire was too high to cause serious harm. He added:

The men fell out of line rapidly and joined the fugitives from other brigades that they were formed to stop and give cover to while reforming. The newness of the organization is the best excuse that can be given for such conduct and demands the most earnest efforts of its officers to discipline the men and make them steadier in the excitement of battle.

No follow-up reports exist in the *OR*.<sup>324</sup>

### Dealing with Failure

The Union rout late on February 6 represents a central feature of the entire battle. How senior Federal officers processed the defeat is frequently overlooked and provides a window into AOP culture. Throughout the war, the AOP had a reputation for cronyism, vindictiveness, and retribution. These traits could quickly surface following significant battlefield failures or successes. Recall how McAllister reacted when he suspected other officers of claiming credit for "his victory" in repelling the Rebels on February 5.

Despite minimizing the affair in his own report, Warren issued severe admonishments to Ayres and his two brigade commanders, Bowerman and Gwyn. In contrast, despite their involvement in the rout, Baxter, Morrow, and Pearson received no such criticisms. Bowerman's rebuke was especially severe, with threats of charges being issued. Interestingly, three of Bowerman's soldiers received Medals of Honor for their deeds that afternoon. Meade later issued a report formally praising Bowerman's brigade and issued furloughs to several soldiers as a reward for their bravery. In a dispatch to Grant, Meade included the observation that two of Wheaton's brigades had gone unused by Warren throughout the afternoon. A subtle dig at Warren, perhaps?<sup>325</sup>

Despite the strong implication of discharging friendly fire, Hubbard's 6th Corps brigade avoided any criticism. Indeed, Wheaton, Hubbard's division commander, claimed he

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<sup>323</sup> *OR* 46/1:298-99.

<sup>324</sup> *OR* 46/1:269-70.

<sup>325</sup> *OR* 46/1:153. Camper & Kirkley, *Historical Record of the First Regiment*, 189-90; Beyer & Keydel, *Deeds of Valor*, 1:479-86.

received praise from Warren. In marked contrast, the new brigade under the inexperienced Col. Burr received damning criticism.

Mostly raw recruits with a reputation for unreliability, Burr's men were convenient targets for Warren's wrath. As Burr's men tried to form a line in the near darkness, they faced many soldiers racing toward them in a complete panic. Were they friends, or were they foes? Furthermore, many Rebels wore stolen Union blue coats. Clearly, some of Burr's soldiers fired on the retreating soldiers (Federals, as it happened). They, too, panicked and fled despite none in those units admitting to such misdemeanors. They were not the only brigade guilty of friendly fire. The story of Burr's men later buying him a new horse in praise of his sterling leadership at the battle is a supreme irony. Although conjecture, it is possible that both versions of the events are accurate. A sizeable number of Burr's brigade could have fled in panic, firing wildly. Whereas many might have remained with Burr and stood firm. Crucially, the blame focused upon Burr's troops overlooked the fact that 5th Corps soldiers had been stampeded *long before* encountering this brigade.

The debacle did not reach the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. The consensus narrative settled upon by Grant, Meade, and Warren seems to have been to blame the inexperienced troops and move on. The war in Virginia ended two months later. The "great skedaddle" of February 6 did not feature in Grant's or Meade's memoirs. Swinton's 1882 acclaimed book on the AOP said little about the affair, noting that the Confederates had an "easy victory" and how the Federals retreated in confusion in what he called a "discomfiture." In his 1896 seminal book on the 5th Corps, Powell did not portray the engagement as a failure. He wrote how the Federals fell back due to a lack of ammunition and the onset of darkness before adding that Wheaton, supported by others, checked the Rebels. No mention of a chaotic stampede with friendly fire appeared in either book. Thus, even before the turn of the century, Union chroniclers had conveniently forgotten the "skedaddle" of February 6. And it has remained in the shadows ever since.<sup>326</sup>

It is reasonable to conclude that darkness and the recently created breastworks along Hatcher's Run saved the 5th Corps from a substantial disaster. Both armies could now reform overnight and plan for the coming day.

#### The Human Cost of the Afternoon Fighting Around Dabney's Mill

From 2:00 p.m. to after 6:00 p.m., the two armies had fought around Dabney's Mill virtually nonstop. The eight Union brigades involved were: Bragg, Baxter, and Morrow (Crawford division); Bowerman and Gwyn (Ayres division); Pearson and Burr (Griffin division); Hubbard (Wheaton division). The *OR* provides Union casualty data at the regimental level for the *entire* three-day battle.<sup>327</sup> Table 13.1 gives estimates for Union

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<sup>326</sup> William Swinton, *Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac* (New York, 1882), 549; William H. Powell, *The Fifth Army Corps (Army of the Potomac) A Record of Operations During the Civil War in the USA, 1861-1865* (New York, 1896), 760-61.

<sup>327</sup> *OR* 46/1:63-69

brigade casualties around Dabney's Mill on February 6.<sup>328</sup>

In summary, the Union suffered a staggering 950 casualties. The ratio of killed to wounded was low, with only 93 killed to 726 wounded. Some attributed this anomaly to the protection afforded by trees. Crawford's brigades made up over 50% of all casualties. To put the figures into context, during the Rebel assaults on February 5, the Union suffered 111 casualties. In the fighting along Vaughan Road on February 6, they suffered 221 casualties. Indeed, the Union casualties around Dabney's Mill are higher than the Union losses at several renowned battles in Virginia, for example, Balls Bluff (894), Front Royal (904), 1st Winchester (904), and New Market (920).<sup>329</sup>

**Table 13.1: Union Casualties around Dabney's Mill on February 6.**

<b>Division</b>	<b>Brigade</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Total</b>
Crawford	3 brigades <sup>a</sup>	52	406	66	524
Ayres	Bowerman	11	89	11	111
Ayres	Gwyn	4	46 <sup>b</sup>	13	63
Griffin	Pearson	17	129	32	178
Griffin	Burr	9	41	4	54
Wheaton	Hubbard	0	15	5	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>93</b>	<b>726</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>950</b>

<sup>a</sup> Data are for Crawford's three brigades combined (Baxter, Morrow, and Bragg).

<sup>b</sup> The eight wounded on Feb 5 were removed from the analysis.

Equivalent casualty data for the Confederates is unavailable. Some Rebel units fighting around Dabney's Mill that afternoon fought at multiple locations. For example, Lewis's brigade also fought along Vaughan Road. Troops in Evans's division fought on all three days of the battle. A further complication when compiling the Confederate losses was the relatively large but unknown number of soldiers who deserted during the battle. A crude estimate of Confederate casualties around Dabney's Mill is perhaps between 500 and 700 killed, wounded, and missing.

Some Confederate memoirs described losses on *an ad hoc* basis. William Forney wrote to his wife, remarking that his brigade lost 64 killed, wounded, or missing during the

<sup>328</sup> For many of the brigades, this fighting represented their sole losses in the entire battle. However, some fought at other times. On Feb 5, Gwyn's brigade incurred eight wounded in capturing Monk's Neck Bridge. Crawford's division would suffer casualties on Feb 7. Fortunately, Crawford separated out his *provisional* casualties for the two days (*OR* 46/2:489). Crawford's *provisional* casualties for Feb 6 and 7 combined were: 74K, 525W, and 569M. His official casualty tally was: 76K, 571W, and 91 M. Typically, many of those provisionally listed as missing returned to their units in the coming days. The numbers of dead and wounded increased slightly as individuals were found on the battlefield or in hospitals. The correction factors between provisional and actual losses are, therefore: +3%, +9%, and -84%. Applying these factors to Crawford's provisional casualties reported for each of Feb 6 and 7, we can estimate his actual losses for each day.

<sup>329</sup> Price, *Civil War Handbook*, 67-68; *Richmond [VA] Enquirer*, February 9, 1865, page 1.

late afternoon fighting. Colonel Lea reported 78 casualties for his brigade during the day: 6 killed, 37 wounded, and 35 missing or captured. On February 6, the 61st Georgia with Baker's brigade lost all its commissioned officers killed or wounded. Their sister regiment, the 60th Georgia, started the day with 13 commissioned officers; by nightfall, 11 were dead or wounded. Col. W. B. Jones and Lt. Rice were the only ones to escape unharmed.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Letter, William Forney to Mrs. Forney; *ORS* 7:808; Nichols, *A Soldier's Story of his Regiment*, 212.

## Chapter 14

### Enduring a Wet, Freezing Night

February 6, 8:00 p.m. - February 7, 10:00 a.m.

Darkness descended over the battlefield; the day's brutal fighting ceased. The cold and wet weather became more extreme, as driving sleet and snow lashed onto a freezing landscape. Exhausted and hungry, both armies began setting up camps. The combatants' moods contrasted markedly. The joyous Rebels basked in routing the Yankees and controlling the battlefield. The Federals, meanwhile, felt despondent and humiliated following their comprehensive defeat.

#### Overnight with the Confederates

Confederate Second Corps commander Gordon ordered most of his men back to Dabney's Mill, where they set about strengthening their entrenchments. Finegan's troops occupied the Rebel left all the way to Hatcher's Run, while much of Pegram's division, now commanded by Brig. Gen. Lewis, covered the right flank. Evans's division remained in reserve. Lea received orders to hold the defensive line near the Crow house, cover the position with videttes, and dig in.

As usual, all brigades put out pickets for the night. Gordon left a strong picket line close to their advanced position (over a mile from their main line) stretching from just south of Armstrong's Mill down to near Vaughan Road. The advanced pickets mostly came from Harris's and Sorrel's brigades. Captain Buck, 13th Virginia, in Hoffman's brigade (now commanded by Lt. Col. Kasey, following Hoffman's wounding), received orders to deploy the brigade's pickets. He met his close friend and brigade comrade, Maj. "Kyd" Douglas, who had experienced the thickest of the day's fighting. Buck said, "Major I am glad to see you alive, you bear a charmed life." Douglas replied, asking how the captain had also survived all day under such an intense fire.

Some veteran Rebel foot soldiers questioned the decision to pull back instead of holding the ground they had so bravely won. One Tar Heel, Pvt. Matthew C. Clayton, 21st North Carolina, wrote home, "We drove the yankeys back a mile or two and I don't know what caused our generals to fall back. We were not forced back." In truth, if the bulk of the Confederates had remained at their advanced position, they would have found themselves terribly exposed when the sun rose.<sup>331</sup>

In Weisiger's brigade, Lt. Col. Stewart, 61st Virginia, recalled the terrible weather and marching and fighting all day without food. His regiment pulled back to straighten and adjust their line; they expected a Federal attack the next day. The soldiers hastily threw up

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<sup>331</sup> *ORS* 7:717, 807; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 415; Buck, *With the Old Confeds*, 133; Sorrel, *Recollections*, 179. At Buck's meeting with Douglas, the latter strangely didn't discuss his role in Pegram's death.

breastworks that were scarcely high enough to lie down behind. His men made brush shelters to protect themselves as much as possible from the rain, snow, hail, and sleet. No fires were allowed in such proximity to the enemy. Between their main line and advanced pickets, Confederate work details scoured the freezing battlefield for discarded Yankee guns and other valuable equipment and food. Medical teams searched for the wounded and sent them to hospitals in the rear. Those not found quickly probably froze to death. Other detachments escorted Union prisoners to Petersburg.<sup>332</sup>

Some Rebels began stripping dead Yankees for sorely needed clothing and equipment. Lieutenant James E. Phillips, 12th Virginia, tried in vain to stop them and remembered how “their manly form stretched out on the cold, icy ground without a stitch of garment to hide their nakedness.” He added sorrowfully that “they were sometime or other some dear womans darling who thought the world of them yet this was their end.”<sup>333</sup>

As the tired but victorious Rebels moved back through the woods, the rain turned to sleet; ice covered everything. Lieutenant Phillips recalled their fear of tree limbs now weighed down with ice falling upon their heads. Ordered to the rear, the regiment reached near Boydton Plank Road and tried to settle for the night. They spread what blankets they had on the frozen ground and tried to sleep. This far in the rear, they could have built fires, but they lacked axes to fell timber. As they saw the fires of the nearby Alabama Brigade, they went over and found them all fast asleep. They picked up their axes and firewood and returned to their camps. The Virginians built fires, constructed rudimentary brush shelters, and eventually went to sleep. Phillips added that the Alabamians “lay there asleep until they became cold, fire had gone out, all dark, no axe and no nothing.” Along with many other regiments, the 12th Virginia hadn’t eaten in more than 24 hours. At about 2:00 a.m., food arrived; their three days’ rations consisted of “a small piece of corn bread about half as large as an ordinary hand and about four tablespoons of so called corned beef (nothing but corned mule).”

The sleet continued to pour down as the sun rose, around 6:50 a.m. “One could scarcely walk without falling,” Sgt. James E. Whitehorse, 12th Virginia, recalled. Those who hadn’t already eaten their rations cooked them up, although the driving wind proved problematic, “it seemed to make no difference on which side of the fire one might be the smoke went straight to them” Whitehorse noted. After breakfast, the regiment received orders to build fortifications. As morning broke, long icicles hung from tree limbs, which bent under the weight. The cold north wind was chilling and terrible to endure. With the arrival of daylight, all the soldiers could now cut down sapling trees and build log fires, bringing some relief to the shivering troops.<sup>334</sup>

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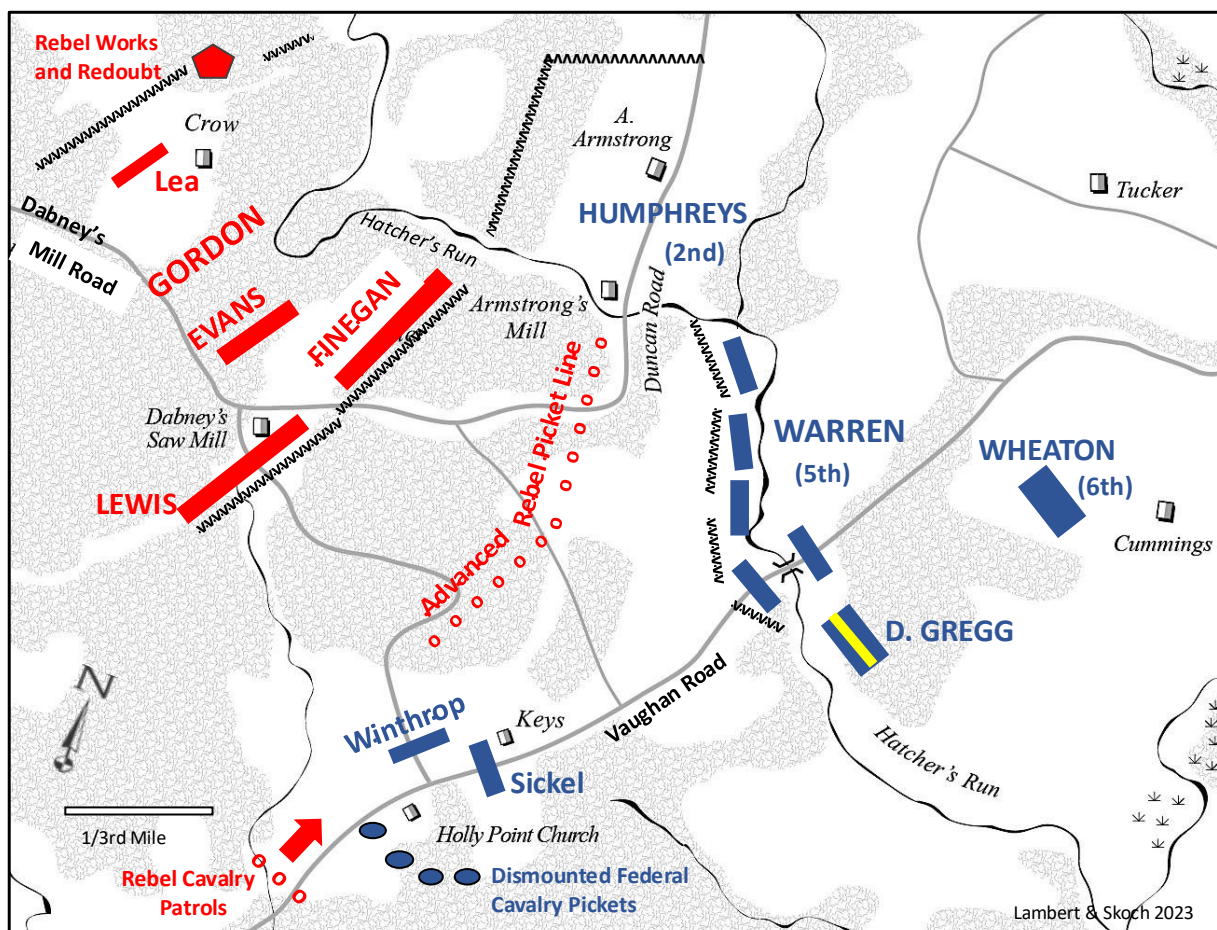
<sup>332</sup> Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets*, 191; Sherrill *The 21st North Carolina*, 415; Sorrel, *Recollections*, 179. Building fires at night revealed one’s position to a nearby enemy. Troops far in the rear were permitted to build fires. Quite how far back was deemed safe depended upon the discretion of the commanding officer.

<sup>333</sup> Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 361.

<sup>334</sup> Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 361-62; Boatner, *Cassell’s Biographical Dictionary*, 819-21; Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets*, 191.

During the evening, cooks brought the 61st Virginia men in line of battle “a small pone of bread each, the first morsel since early morning.” The soldiers wrapped their shivering frames in wet blankets and tried to sleep as best they could under the brush shelters on the frozen ground while pickets paced in front, watching for the enemy. Brigade commander Forney proudly wrote to his wife about the fighting spirit of his Alabama troops despite their plight. Many, without decent clothing, wore rags and shoes with great holes in the soles - but still, they fight. He added that they were up all night building breastworks with not a minute’s sleep.<sup>335</sup>

Other Rebel troops were less motivated. Demoralized by the brutal fighting, lack of food and provisions, the freezing weather, and the hopelessness of the Confederate situation, groups of Rebels, particularly from Terry’s Virginia Brigade, aware of an easing of sanctions against deserters, took the risk to escape their ranks and walked across into the Federal lines.<sup>336</sup>



Map 14.1: Basic Army Positions Overnight February 6.

<sup>335</sup> Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets*, 191; Letter, William Forney to Mrs. Forney.

<sup>336</sup> Reidenbaugh, *27th Virginia Infantry*, 117; Reidenbaugh, *33rd Virginia Infantry*, 106.

## Overnight with the Federals

Once secure within their entrenchments, the dispersed and disorganized Yankees started to reunite with their company, regiment, and brigade fellows. Some soldiers didn't find their way back until the following day. The cold and wet weather took a turn for the worse as sleet, snow, and a driving wind further challenged the soldiers. To compound the situation, when they vacated their winter camps on the morning of February 5, they left behind tents and camp equipment. Some soldiers had even traveled without blankets. For those who had blankets, they soon became soaked. The more fortunate had carried rubber sheets that offered some protection from the wet. As with the Confederates, units deemed close to the enemy were prohibited from building fires. Even when allowed, many companies had no axes to fell trees. And what trees were in reach were mostly green saplings, which, with the driving rain and sleet, proved challenging to ignite. For any fires successfully made, the strong wind blew all the heat and smoke away from the windward side, and the smoke choked and blinded those on the leeward side.

Union soldiers remembered the torturous night well, and memoirs captured many graphic stories. Sergeant Marshall, 155th Pennsylvania, Pearson's brigade, noted that as night began, his company commander had only reunited with two men from the company. But as soldiers drifted back, by 9:00 p.m., only three remained unaccounted for. These didn't appear until the following day. He added, "We lay on the frozen ground as the rain and sleet poured. It was terrible bad without shelter." A memoir from the same regiment noted that "In fifteen minutes after laying down the part of the body in contact with the frozen earth would become numb . . . compelling the weary soldier to turn continually."<sup>337</sup>

Captain Daniel Wilkins, 142nd Pennsylvania, Morrow's brigade, recalled how the cold and rain made a night's rest almost impossible. With tents and blankets left behind in their winter camps, the soldiers only had their overcoats. He added, "I remember I lay on my back with the cape of my overcoat drawn up over my head, with my hands run into my overcoat sleeves to protect my wrists and my cloth covered canteen partly filled with water, for a pillow."

Private Vautier, 88th Pennsylvania, Baxter's brigade, remembered how the 5th Corps bivouacked for the night amid the mud and the rain – "a most cheerless and miserable one, the men being scarcely able to keep from freezing to death. They were up all night for to have laid down and slept would have resulted in death."

Perhaps due to his surgeon status, Dr. James Kimball with Hubbard's brigade fared slightly better. "I spread my rubber blanket on the ground, put my case of instruments under my head for a pillow, had another blanket thrown over me, and I went to sleep with cap, overcoat, boots and spurs on." At 5:00 a.m., he crawled out from under his blanket, now covered by nearly an inch of frozen rain and snow. The sun rose around 6:50 a.m. as the Federals breakfasted on coffee, hardtack, and hog fat; a better provision than their

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<sup>337</sup> Marshall, *Company "K,"* 224; McKenna, *Under the Maltese Cross*, 337.

Confederate counterparts. Several noted that the weather, far from abating, worsened around daybreak.<sup>338</sup>

#### Overnight along Vaughan Road

Those soldiers involved in the fighting around Dabney's Mill were not the only troops on the broader battlefield. Further south, those who had fought along Vaughan Road also endured the bitter night.

Once relieved by Sickel's troops at dusk, the regiments of Winthrop's brigade took turns at picket duty covering Dabney's Mill Road. Parties cautiously moved forward to collect the wounded and dead. Food rations and whiskey were issued. Sergeant Booth, 140th New York, recalled, "it must have been near midnight before the boys were ready to lie down, small fires being allowed of roots, barks, stumps, such things as the boys could pick up. The ground was frozen, and it was pretty cold to lie on." Some of Winthrop's men built breastworks and slashed the timber before them. Booth noted that at 5:00 a.m., it began to rain, snow, and sleet, accompanied by a fierce wind, with nothing but hardtack and coffee for breakfast.<sup>339</sup>

After earlier routing Pegram's infantry along Vaughan Road, Sickel's brigade, commanded at that time by Col. Jenney, under cover of darkness, fell back to the main Union line, where they entrenched to the left of Winthrop's troops. Jenney sent a group under Maj. Bush to reconnoiter their right flank and station pickets. However, scarcely out of speaking distance and concealed from the brigade by dense underbrush, Rebels (presumably a cavalry patrol) captured Maj. Bush and some of his men.

Meanwhile, other soldiers from Sickel's brigade went out to recover wounded and dead soldiers. Private Augustus M. Rice, 185th New York, recalled, "We were without blankets or tents, and not being allowed a fire even to cook coffee, we passed a very uncomfortable night. Many of our wounded doubtless died from exposure, as some were found in the morning with their clothing frozen to the ground."

During the night, the 21st Pennsylvania Cavalry (dismounted) joined Sickel's troops and occupied positions on their left. At some point, Winthrop's men and the cavalry moved elsewhere, leaving Sickel's men alone and without orders. Jenney moved them to a more favorable position. He extended his picket line to join David Gregg's cavalry on the left and Ayres's infantry on the right. Here, they remained under arms for the rest of the night.

As the sun rose, Sickel, presumably now back in command after his minor wound, reported that Rebel cavalry "appeared on our left in considerable force followed by a skirmish line of infantry, which for a while seemed to threaten an attack. Sharp firing was kept up between the two lines of skirmishers for  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour in which two of my men were severely wounded." Sickel reported this to Maj. Gen. Griffin, who sent some artillery and

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<sup>338</sup> Downey, "A Lethal Tour of Duty," 56-57; Vautier, *History of the 88th Pennsylvania*, 205; James P. Kimball, *A Soldier Doctor of our Army* (Boston, 1917), 17-18.

<sup>339</sup> Schlosser & Robortella. *Writing Home*, 63-64.

cavalry to support him. With the Rebels keeping their distance at around 7:00 a.m., a severe storm of rain and hail added to the misery for both sides.<sup>340</sup>

#### Overnight with the Cavalry

By 5:00 p.m. David Gregg's Union cavalry had cleared all the Rebels along Vaughan Road beyond Gravelly Run. The troopers had been marching or fighting since 3:00 a.m. the previous day. The awful weather, no blankets, and no wood for fires meant they gained little rest overnight. They retreated along Vaughan Road to Hatcher's Run while leaving pickets around the Keys house to secure the road. A cavalryman with Davies's brigade noted, "At dusk, the Tenth [New York Cavalry] fell back a short distance with the brigade and bivouacked. A cold night, with rain, freezing as it fell, offered little opportunity for comfort or rest to the weary and hungry men." The account continued, "About midnight the horses were brought up and the regiment mounted and moved back about a mile and a half and bivouacked, but the boys were compelled to keep moving to avoid freezing." Hypothermia wasn't the only hazard. Amid the darkness and ice, Capt. Forbes, the division's commissary of subsistence, fell from his horse and died from the injuries on February 9.<sup>341</sup>

Those assigned to picket duty passed an anxious and miserable night. Major Robbins (1st New Jersey Cavalry), commanding the pickets, heard firing on the line around 10:00 p.m. He investigated, but the firing died away. Upon returning to his wet blankets, he heard firing from another direction. He rode to a picket post and found Rebels (probably some of Beale's cavalrymen) trying to attack an unguarded point. The sporadic harassment fizzled out, and he wasn't disturbed again.<sup>342</sup>

Sergeant Major Tobie, 1st Maine Cavalry, Knowles's brigade, detailed his experiences that night. Orders arrived for the men's horses carrying their overcoats, blankets, rations, axes, and rubber ponchos to go back across Hatcher's Run. In contrast, officers marched the men to some woods by the roadside and ordered them to stay there for the night. A great deal of swearing occurred at this separation. They borrowed axes from nearby infantry (Winthrop's or Sickel's men) to chop saplings for fires. The men wandered between small fires. The majority "piled themselves up cob-house fashion, at times three or four deep" to get snatches of poor-quality sleep. Morning arrived without a picket having fired a shot. Soon after daylight, the Maine regiment was "ordered on the picket line in a cold rain storm without much energy or strength for fighting, but ugly enough to fight like tigers." After an hour, the regiment withdrew and finally reunited with their horses and equipment. Despite the rain, they enjoyed a hearty breakfast.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Clayton, *History of Onondaga County*, 129; Augustus M. Rice, "185th New York at Petersburg," *Baldwinsville [NY] Messenger*, Nov 29, 1945; Wood, *Under Chamberlain's Flag*, 175-77. Whether the wounded Sickel was actually with his brigade at this point is unclear.

<sup>341</sup> Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry*, 241-42; Mohr, *The Cormany Diaries*, 518; Pyne, *The History of the First New Jersey Cavalry*, 302-03; *New York [NY] Sun*, Feb 13, 1865, page 1.

<sup>342</sup> Rea, *War Record and Personal Experiences*, 103.

<sup>343</sup> Tobie, *History of the First Maine Cavalry*, 379-81. "Cob-House fashion" means sleeping together to preserve body heat.



**Sgt. Maj. Edward P. Tobie**  
Boston Press, 1887



**Maj. Walter R. Robbins**  
beyondthecrater.com

Major Robbins, Davies's brigade, recalled being relieved from picket duty around 6:00 a.m. and having difficulty waking his men asleep in the brush. Everyone was in bad humor. Some Rebels menaced them, but they got across the Run without any serious fighting. Once in camp, they managed to eat something, their first sustenance since noon the previous day.<sup>344</sup>

Further to the west across Gravelly Run, a Confederate officer with the 13th Virginia Cavalry recalled the cold night. Tired and hungry, they occupied former infantry camps. The weather grew even colder, and during the night, snow fell, covering the sleeping men under a white mantle. "Early the next morning the bugle call roused them from their resting places on the ground, where, like occupants of so many graves in the snow, they threw it aside and came forth as in a resurrection." Very soon, the order to mount sounded, and they set off to seek the enemy. The snow, mingled with hail, continued falling, and the air was glacial.<sup>345</sup>

#### Plans from the Commanders

Little communication occurred overnight between the Union senior commanders. At 8:15 a.m. Meade asked Warren for an update on his command's condition and to promptly provide a casualty estimate. Meade directed Warren to send out skirmishers to locate the Rebels and to use his judgment in whether to attack or not. Warren immediately replied that all had been quiet overnight and remained so. His pickets reported enemy troop movements, relieving or reinforcing their advanced rifle pits. They heard the Rebels felling wood throughout the night.

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<sup>344</sup> Rea, *War Record and Personal Experiences*, 104.

<sup>345</sup> Beale, *A Lieutenant of Cavalry*, 198.

Meade relayed Warren's information to Grant. He added that, given the awful weather, the unknown state of the 5th Corps' morale, and their losses from stragglers, he had refrained from giving Warren "positive orders to attack." Instead, he had directed Warren to "push out [a] strong reconnaissance" and left it to him as to how to proceed.<sup>346</sup>

At 8:30 a.m., Warren alerted Maj. Gen. Wheaton to send a brigade to counter Rebel demonstrations along Vaughan Road. An hour later, Warren informed division commander Griffin that his first brigade (Sickel's) would return to him once relieved by Maj. Gen. Gregg. Around the same time, Ayres contacted 5th Corps headquarters, asking when Winthrop's exhausted brigade would be relieved. He added that the Rebels were felling trees and throwing up breastworks in front of Winthrop.

At 9:20 a.m., Meade told Warren to withdraw Gregg's cavalry division as soon as possible. Twenty minutes later, Warren replied that he continued to prepare his divisions. He shared that a Rebel demonstration up Vaughan Road, initially reported as alarming, had in reality been slight and added that "we have picked up some men from Mahone's division that came out to gather up arms." Warren relayed his belief that the Rebels would not make a stand east of Dabney's Mill, and he could drive them back that far. This would require one of Gregg's brigades; hence, his other two brigades could be relieved immediately.<sup>347</sup>

Only at 10:00 a.m. did substantial Union orders appear, when Warren issued a five-point circular stating: 1) Crawford's division will move out of the breastworks and capture the Rebels' advanced rifle pits. Having done so, he will push out a skirmish line towards Dabney's Mill. 2) Sickel's brigade will return to Griffin in the defenses, and the troops it relieves will relieve Winthrop's brigade. 3) An officer will go to Griffin to guide the brigade relieving Winthrop, who will return to the breastworks. 4) David Gregg will use one brigade to hold Vaughan Road and keep his other two brigades in reserve if needed. 5) Wheaton will have his division ready to move at short notice.

Given the awful weather and the recent mauling suffered by the Union forces, Warren's orders understandably avoided any major attacks. They did, however, require Crawford's division to advance over the previous day's battlefield and engage with the Rebel pickets. After their poor performance during the previous evening, this feels like a bold step. Was this a chance for Crawford and Warren to salvage some honor, perhaps? Or would their soldiers face a similar humiliation?<sup>348</sup>

Little information exists regarding the plans of the Confederate high command. One can safely surmise they did not contemplate a frontal assault on the strong Federal breastworks along Hatcher's Run. They appeared content to augment their defensive line around Dabney's Mill while maintaining a solid advanced picket line. They strengthened their works across from Gravelly Run and sent small cavalry probes down Vaughan Road.

With a new day underway, despite the harsh weather, the combatants probably expected the casualty toll to increase in the coming hours.

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<sup>346</sup>OR 46/2:447, 453. Meade communicated to Warren through his chief-of-staff.

<sup>347</sup>OR 46/2:451, 454-55, 460, 462.

<sup>348</sup>OR 46/2:458-59.

## Chapter 15

### A Final Fight Over Familiar Terrain

Tuesday, February 7, 10:30 a.m. - Wednesday, February 8, 1:00 a.m.

The overnight wintery storms showed no signs of abating. Despite grim weather hampering offensive operations, the Union army began moving into action following Warren's 10:00 a.m. circular. Two separate actions occurred during the day: a relatively minor cavalry skirmish and a more extensive infantry engagement. I describe these in turn.

#### Cavalry on the Move

At 10:45 a.m., Warren ordered David Gregg to withdraw two of his cavalry brigades (Davies and Knowles) to Rowanty Post Office, a position viewed "as the most suitable for . . . watching the Halifax road and the road to W. Perkins." With the wounding of Brig. Gen. Davies and Col. Janeway, during the previous day, Col. Avery now commanded Davies' brigade. The two brigades departed at 1:00 p.m. By dusk of February 7, Gregg reported they had reached the Halifax Road / Wyatt Road junction, with one regiment near Rowanty Post Office picketing toward Monk's Neck Bridge and Ream's Station. At 5:50 p.m., these pickets reported that a Rebel infantry brigade had marched down Rowanty Creek on the southwest side. "Their pickets hold one side of the creek, and mine the other; they show no disposition to attack."<sup>349</sup>

Meanwhile, David Gregg's other brigade (now commanded by Col. Kerwin following the wounding of Brig. Gen. John Gregg) received orders at 2:15 p.m. to send a small force down Vaughan Road and, if possible, push any Rebels back across Gravelly Run. If the Confederates appeared in strength, his troopers should fall back and not engage. The lead regiment, 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry, reached within half a mile of Gravelly Run before encountering enemy opposition. The regimental commander, Col. Samuel B. Young, explained how his troopers charged and quickly pushed the Rebels (presumably Beale's dismounted cavalymen) across the stream into their rifle pits on the other side. Two Confederate cannons opened fire, and the Federals withdrew without losing a man or horse. Young reported that the Rebels "appear to have one brigade of cavalry beyond the creek," supporting the view that only Richard Beale's cavalry brigade participated in the battle. A squadron of dismounted Confederate cavalry followed the Yankees back to the point where the Federals had attacked their pickets. However, when the Union troopers turned and faced the dismounted Confederates, the Rebels retreated and crossed back over Gravelly Run.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> *OR* 46/1:366, 371; *OR* 46/2:464-65. Davies returned home to New York for convalescence (*OR* 46/2:449). It is unclear which Rebel infantry brigade was observed at Rowanty Creek, or whether it was a smaller force.

<sup>350</sup> *OR* 46/2 465-66; *OR* 46/1:368-69. The Rebel artillery were two Whitworth guns belonging to Capt. William M. McGregor's Artillery Battalion, which was part of Maj. Roger P. Chew's Horse Artillery associated with Rooney Lee's cavalry division.

George Beale, 9th Virginia Cavalry, a lieutenant in his father's Rebel cavalry brigade, described some of this skirmishing. "My company was in advance, and we moved forward, feeling that the blinding snow would prevent our seeing the enemy until within a few feet of them." As they descended into a small valley, sheltered from the wind, they observed some mounted Union pickets who quickly dashed off and became hidden from view in the falling snow. Near the brow of the hill, they saw Yankees emerging from a grove of pines and deploying a skirmish line across a field. Beale remembered, "The snow had . . . ceased falling and we could see better. We pushed on rapidly to the ridge of the field, while the enemy's skirmishers galloped off." About a hundred yards ahead, Beale's men faced a long line of Federal entrenchments, from which came a rifle volley that struck several of Beale's soldiers and horses. As Beale recalled, "A bullet passed through . . . Ham Bispham and another through Jesse Gouldman, both at my side. One gashed my right leg, and from another, Major Pratt's horse fell beneath him."

Beale rode back and found cavalry division commander Rooney Lee and staff at the edge of some pines. The general expressed his regrets at Beale's wounding, which the division surgeon, Dr. James S. Gilliam, quickly dressed. Beale made his way to the field hospital (a small, vacant house near the road) and lay down on a blanket spread on the floor, with Bispham on his left and Gouldman on his right. He asked the surgeon about Bispham's wound and learned he had died and that Gouldman was also likely to "follow his dead comrade." Beale remained in the room, and while the attendants went to find wood for fires, he heard a courier ride to the door and gave an order to the surgeon to put the wounded men in ambulances and move them farther to the rear.<sup>351</sup>

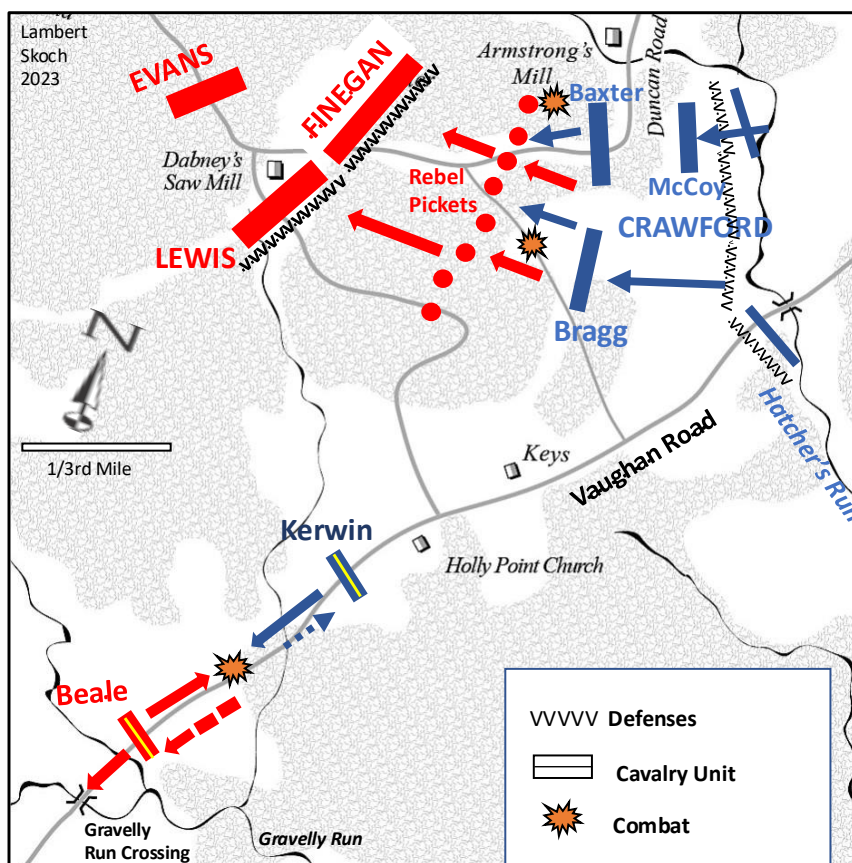
#### Return to Dabney's Mill

As ordered, from 10:30 a.m. Crawford's division began moving out of the Federal breastworks southeast of Armstrong Mill to seize the enemy's advanced rifle pits and push out a skirmish line toward Dabney's Mill. Essentially, they aimed to reoccupy the previous evening's battlefield from which the Rebels had routed them. Chilling sleet would persist throughout the day. Brigadier General Baxter's brigade led the Federals out, the brigades of Brig. Gen. Bragg and Col. McCoy (who had replaced the wounded Morrow) followed in support. Baxter deployed two lines of skirmishers, the 39th Massachusetts in front of the 11th Pennsylvania. Behind these, in battle line, came the 16th Maine, 97th New York, and 88th Pennsylvania. Lieutenant Fowle, 39th Massachusetts, wrote home, "Our regiment deployed as skirmishers and opened the ball. We soon found Mr. Johnny [the Rebels]. We drove them out of their rifle pits. Some who did not run were taken prisoner." Baxter reported how his skirmish line moved forward and met the enemy's pickets, pressing them steadily back, with his line of battle closely following.<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Beale, *A Lieutenant of Cavalry in Lee's Army*, 198-199. Beale's memoir described in detail his harrowing journey to the hospital and his experiences there. Although making a full recovery, his war was over.

<sup>352</sup> *OR* 46/2:458-59; *OR* 46/1:290; *OR* 51/1:286-88, 290-292, 415; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 377-78; Greenleaf, *Letters to Elisa*, 155-56. Two Wisconsin accounts claimed that Bragg's brigade was on the right, *ORS* 7:711-13; Civil War Dairy of Charles H. Walker, 1861-65, February 7, 1865, University of Wisconsin Libraries, Madison, WI.



Map 15.1: Federals Push Back Confederate Pickets, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. February 7.

One of Baxter's soldiers, Isaac Hall, 97th New York, remembered that "the men's hands became so benumbed that it was difficult for them to handle their pieces [rifles]." Another with Baxter's brigade, Chaplain Locke, remembered, "at the moment of marching out into comparatively open ground, as though possessed with the thought of testing the strength of our works . . . a line of the enemy's skirmishers was seen issuing from behind temporary works, and moving toward us." The contest between the skirmishers was short and decisive, as the Federals drove back the Rebels from their first line of defenses.<sup>353</sup>

The Confederate pickets came from the brigades of Brig. Gen. Harris and Brig. Gen. Sorrel, both part of Finegan's force. Harris recounted how the Yankees (presumably Baxter's men) pressed his advanced pickets early in the morning (February 7), driving them back. Sergeant William B. Judkins, 22nd Georgia, with Sorrel's brigade, remembered how one man froze to death on picket duty while the enemy killed another on outpost duty. Judkins recalled looking at Sorrel standing exposed on top of a breastwork when a Union sharpshooter shot the general.<sup>354</sup>

<sup>353</sup> Isaac Hall, *History of the 97th Regiment, New York Volunteers: ("Conkling Rifles,") in the War for the Union* (New York, 1890), 240; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 377-78.

<sup>354</sup> ORS 7:717-18; Judkins Memoir, 88-89.

Sorrel relayed the event in his memoir. “Early next morning the enemy, driving back my pickets, got too close to us, and a rifleman put a bullet through my right lung, smashing the ribs front and rear. I was down this time for good.” His breath gushing through the bullet holes, the surgeon, Dr. Wood, plastered up the holes and sent him to the rear. The roads being frozen and rough, some of his soldiers bore him on their shoulders by litter eight miles to a small shanty. While passing Rebels on the route, they asked, “who have you there?”

“General Sorrel”

“Is he badly hurt?”

“Yes, mortally wounded.”

Some newspapers also reported that he had perished. However, Sorrel soon reached comfortable quarters near Petersburg. He started his recovery under the care of his brigade surgeon, Dr. Sampson Pope.<sup>355</sup>

McCoy’s brigade received orders to occupy and strengthen the rifle pits captured by Baxter’s men. Rebel artillery shelled them as they did so, and snipers hiding in the undergrowth near Hatcher’s Run fired upon them. With his right flank threatened, McCoy sent out skirmishers, but the Rebels quickly drove them back. He reported his plight to Crawford, and some of Bragg’s brigade, commanded by Bragg himself, went to his aid and helped to secure McCoy’s flank. Around noon, Crawford ordered McCoy to send a regiment to support Baxter’s advancing line. McCoy selected the 56th Pennsylvania.<sup>356</sup>



**Maj. Gen. Samuel W. Crawford**  
Library of Congress



**Lt. Col. Albert M. Edwards**  
oocities.org

At 10:50 a.m., Meade informed Grant about the current situation and raised options for the newly acquired Hatcher’s Run line. Should he hold or relinquish it? Grant quickly replied (11:30 a.m.), instructing Meade to permanently hold the Hatcher’s Run line from

<sup>355</sup> Sorrel, *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 179; *The Buffalo [NY] Commercial*, February 11, page 1, 1865.

<sup>356</sup> *OR* 46/1:290, 295-96; *OR* 51/1:294-95; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 377; Greenleaf, *Letters to Eliza*, 155-56. There are, sadly, no *OR* accounts from Bragg or any of his regimental commanders.

Armstrong's Mill and fortify as he thought fit. Given the weather, Grant felt the troops should remain in those positions, and Warren should make no further attack unless it promised significant advantages. At 12:20 p.m., Warren informed Meade's office that Crawford had carried the enemy's rifle pits near Armstrong's Mill and was pushing his skirmish line out toward the Rebels' main battle line near Dabney's Mill.

Ten minutes later, Warren received orders from Meade saying, "In view of the weather and of instructions from the lieutenant-general [Grant] commanding, it is not advisable to make any attack to-day, unless you are satisfied that . . . great advantages will be gained." Warren also learned that Meade would withdraw his force across Hatcher's Run either that night or the following day. At 1:15 p.m., Warren informed 2nd Corps commander Humphreys of Crawford's progress and asked for artillery support to counter the Rebel artillery fire coming from the north side of Hatcher's Run and to shell the Rebels blocking Crawford's advance. Humphreys passed on the request to Brig. Gen. Smyth for action. Despite Meade's orders, Warren advanced his troops throughout the afternoon, slowly pushing the Confederate pickets back towards Dabney's Mill. They eventually overran three lines of Rebel rifle pits. Wisconsin soldiers with Bragg's brigade recalled how they drove the Confederates back, built earthworks, and then advanced again, constructing more works.<sup>357</sup>

The 24th Michigan, Lt. Col. Albert M. Edwards commanding, with Bragg's brigade, plunged once more into the woods. It received a severe hail of Confederate musketry and artillery fire, splintering the trees, adding their huge slivers to the hot metal flying through the air. A regimental account described how "a solid shot passed under Sergeant Augustus Pomeroy, which stunned him and covered him with mud. The same shot ricocheting, killed Sergeant George H. Canfield and George Wallace . . . wounded Sergeant Walter Morley . . . and took a leg off John Danbert."

Familiar with the terrain after their previous day's encounters, the regiment moved forward cautiously, determined to keep their left flank secure. A slow, sustained advance ensued, accompanied by constant skirmishing. Lieutenant Colonel Edwards noticed that his troops on the right had stopped firing. He went to investigate and found them helping comrades from the 7th Wisconsin who were burying their pet dog, which a Minié ball had just slain. Known and loved throughout the brigade, the soldiers gave their small mongrel friend a hasty but honorable burial despite the ongoing firing. Hence, the famed Sallie was not the only dog killed at the battle.

Private Vautier, 88th Pennsylvania, Baxter's brigade, remembered how "The line pushed through the woods and bogs, the rain freezing as it fell and coating everything – trees, brush, soldiers, and ground – with a sheet of ice. The men were chilled to the bone, but there was no help for it, so the line painfully and slowly swept on." The Federals slowly drove the Rebels back to their works.<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> OR 46/2:447-48, 452-53, 455; Roe, *The 39th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers*, 273-74; ORS 7:711-13; Walker diary, Feb 7.

<sup>358</sup> Donald Smith, *The 24th Michigan of the Iron Brigade* (Harrisburg, PA, 1962), 240-41; Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 291-92; Vautier, *History of the 88th Pennsylvania*, 206.

As they progressed, the Yankees retrieved their dead and wounded from the previous day. A 149th Pennsylvania (Bragg's brigade) history noted how Crawford sent his troops forward again, driving the Rebels to their main defenses near Dabney's Mill. The account described how "the men moved in open order rather than line of battle. The fight took on the character of deployed skirmish lines, firing while moving in advance or retreat." Bragg's brigade held the left flank. John Nesbitt recalled, "We advanced again . . . driving the rebel picket line from its rifle pits. The brigade formed line and built breastworks."

At about 1:00 p.m., advancing with the 39th Massachusetts, Baxter's brigade, Lt. George Fowle took a bullet in his right thigh. About four inches separated where the bullet entered from where it came out through the fleshy part, luckily avoiding all bones. Two of his comrades carried him off the field, and he took an ambulance to the divisional hospital about two miles in the rear. Although not a severe wound, it ended his fighting days.



**Brig. Gen. G. Moxley Sorrel**  
Library of Congress



**Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Harris**  
Library of Congress

Despite Meade's earlier order, at 3:45 p.m., Warren ordered Crawford to "drive the enemy just as far as you can in the daylight that is left you." Shortly afterward, Lt. Col. John P. Spofford, the 97th New York commander, was wounded during the fighting.<sup>359</sup>

Meanwhile, Confederate Brig. Gen. Harris, commanding his Mississippi Brigade, recalled that the fighting became more intense around noon. He ordered Lt. Col. Thomas B. Manlove, 12th Mississippi, to the front to take charge of the skirmishers and hold the line at all hazards. From 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Manlove achieved this feat despite fighting against superior numbers. However, the Yankees pushed back Sorrel's Georgia Brigade, exposing Manlove's left flank. The Federals tried to surround the Mississippians, who withstood the threat for a while. Nearly cut off, the force was only saved by the courageous actions of

<sup>359</sup> Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania*, 205-06; OR 46/1:261; OR 46/2:461; OR 51/1:286-87; Roe, *The 39th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers*, 273-74. Greenleaf, *Letters to Eliza*, 155-56.

Manlove. Manlove received a severe wound, and the Federals, probably the 39th Massachusetts, Baxter's brigade, captured him.<sup>360</sup>

By 5:00 p.m., the Unionists had pushed back the Confederates to their newly constructed earthworks around Dabney's Mill. Soldiers from Finegan's and Pegram's (now commanded by Brig. Gen. Lewis) divisions, supported by artillery, defended these works. The Rebel artillery was Maj. William Owens' Battalion and Col. Willie Pegram's Battalion, which belonged to A. P. Hill's Third Corps. The Confederates also had Evans's division in reserve. The Federals faced the Rebel line some 300 yards away. Lieutenant Colonel Stewart with Weisiger's Brigade remembered how his men had stood up all day, shivering over feeble fires like martyrs waiting for the enemy's attack.<sup>361</sup>

### One Final Assault

At 5:22 p.m., Meade updated Grant, saying that Warren "had recovered most of the ground he occupied yesterday and had again drawn the fire of the artillery in the enemy's works." With Warren accomplishing all that had been demanded, Meade "directed him to withdraw to Hatcher's Run, and . . . hold the line from Fort Sampson to Armstrong's Mill with the Second Corps, and post the Fifth Corps from the Vaughan road crossing back toward the Halifax road." However, events now became confused.<sup>362</sup>

Soon after 5:00 p.m., Crawford prepared to strike the formidable Rebel works just 300 yards away. He organized his three brigades in line of battle. Bragg's brigade moved to the right, with Baxter's men primarily acting as advanced skirmishers in front of McCoy's position. A 6th Corps force, Brig. Gen. Joseph E. Hamblin's brigade, sent by Warren, arrived to occupy the position McCoy would soon vacate. At about 6:00 p.m., Crawford gave the order to charge the Rebel defenses. They advanced within a few hundred yards before Finegan's Rebels, and withering canister fire from the Confederate artillery threw them back. The repulsed Federals retreated to the woods for safety. They rallied and attempted another attack, only to be beaten back again. The vanquished Federals returned to their positions some 300 yards from the Rebels and threw up breastworks. The Confederates did not pursue the Federals.<sup>363</sup>

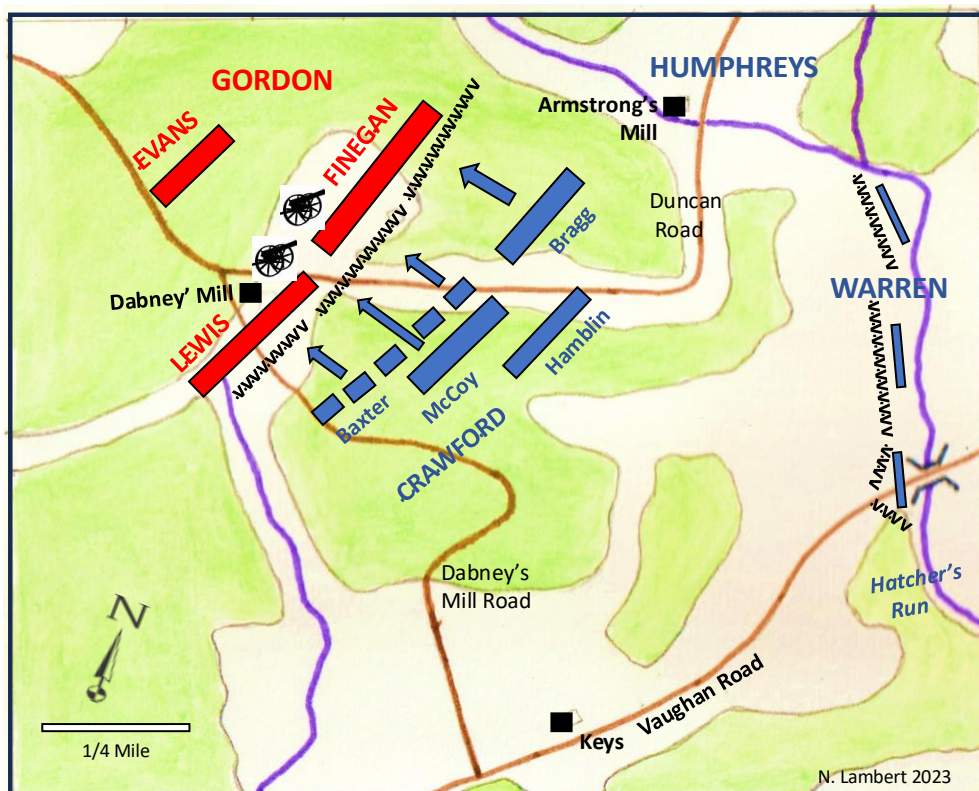
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<sup>360</sup> *ORS* 7:717-18; Frank H. Foote, "The Death Grapple at Petersburg: Last Days of Harris' Mississippi Brigade, Part 3" *Jackson [MS] The Clarion*, Sept 24, 1884; *OR* 51/1:290. Manlove had been the commander of the 48th MS for most of the war. The Federals thought that Manlove was mortally wounded and was "paroled to die in his own ranks," However, he recovered and only died in 1880, but suffered to the last with this wound.

<sup>361</sup> *OR* 51/1:286-88; *OR* 46/1:392; Smith, *The 24th Michigan of the Iron Brigade*, 240-241; Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets*, 191. Recall that Willie Pegram was absent due to sickness throughout the battle.

<sup>362</sup> *OR* 46/2:448.

<sup>363</sup> *OR* 46/1:290, 292, 295; *OR* 51/1:287, 291, 294. Joseph Hamblin had only taken command of the brigade days before the battle in a move that hadn't proven popular with the common soldiers (Tyler & Tyler, *Recollections of the Civil War*, 325-26. The 7th Wisconsin commander, Col. Richardson, reported that his men were also relieved by 6th Corps soldiers (presumably Hamblin) prior to the final assaults, *ORS* 7:711-13.



**Map 15.2: Crawford's Assault Around 6:00 p.m., February 7.**

The *OR* and memoirs provide further details of these hapless Union assaults. The commander of the 147th New York, Lt. Col. Dennis B. Dailey, in McCoy's brigade, recalled how they advanced in line of battle through heavy woods when they "came in sight of the enemy, who were advantageously posted on a rise of ground" and had an artillery battery in position. The enemy compelled his regiment to fall back to a temporary line of works thrown up by skirmishers. From this point, they advanced again, only to meet the same fate. Captain Aaron Bright, commander of the 88th Pennsylvania, Baxter's brigade, reported how they "formed [a] heavy skirmish line and charged the enemy's main works twice, and were repulsed each time with heavy loss to [the] regiment."<sup>364</sup>

One of Hamblin's soldiers, Sgt. Robert S. Westbrook, 49th Pennsylvania, recalled forming a line of battle behind Crawford's division. Under heavy shelling, as Crawford's men moved forward, they took their place and completed building the rifle pits. He added that "the Iron Brigade" (Bragg's brigade) made an advance, "but through want of pluck [it] fizzled out." In Bragg's brigade, the 7th Wisconsin commander, Colonel Richardson, reported that his regiment advanced under severe fire, maintained its position without firing a shot until the troops on the left gave way. The brigade broke and fell back about 50 paces, where they reformed.<sup>365</sup>

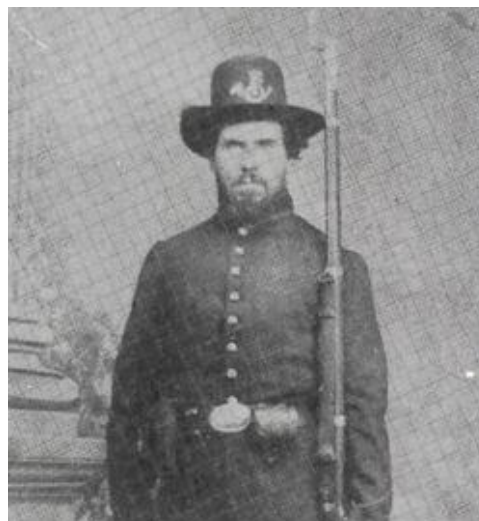
<sup>364</sup> *OR* 51/1:294-95. *OR* 46/1:292; Abner R. Small, *The Sixteenth Maine Regiment in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (Portland, ME, 1886), 211-12; Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania*, 206; Ayoub, *The Campfire Chronicles*, 324-25.

<sup>365</sup> Robert S. Westbrook, *History of the 49th Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Altoona, PA, 1898), 232; *ORS* 7:711-13.

Also with Bragg's brigade, Lt. Matrau, 6th Wisconsin, recalled that the Rebel works were on the opposite side of a ravine full of water. In drenching cold rain and under a severe artillery fire, the regiment's line of battle halted at the ravine and fired away till the brigade lost about 100 men when they fell back to their works. In the same regiment, Capt. Mair Pointon recalled a tale from their failed assault on the Confederate works. While retreating, Lt. Col. Thomas Kerr's canteen became entangled in some bushes; desperate to avoid capture, he frantically appealed to some passing men to cut him loose. Someone eventually liberated him, and he moved quickly to safety. Private Gottlieb Torke, 6th Wisconsin, recalled the attack and the Rebels firing upon them with cannon. Torke received a shrapnel wound to the head, over the left ear, and his two brothers carried him to a hospital.<sup>366</sup>



**Col. Hollon Richardson**  
wikipedia.org



**Pvt. Gottlieb Torke**  
findagrave.com

From the Confederate perspective, Sgt. Judkins with Sorrel's Brigade recalled, "the yankees attacked us that evening; we gave them a pretty warm reception, and repulsed them. We never lost any men." He added that a Federal soldier entered their lines during the charge and said he'd been sent to the breastworks where the cannons were. The Rebels quickly took him prisoner. The Yankee naively asked to return. "He was a foreigner, had not been with them [the Union army] long." On recalling the fighting of the day, veteran Lt. Col. Stewart of the 61st Virginia wrote, "These were times which tried men's souls and the most desperate days I ever experienced."<sup>367</sup>

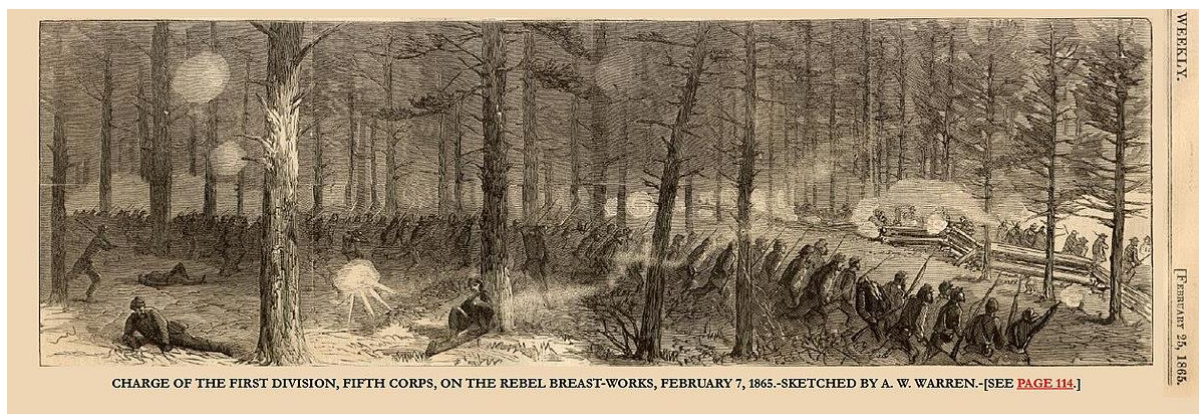
At 6:20 p.m., Crawford messaged Warren, saying he'd advanced his lines as far as possible with his now much-exhausted troops. He was deploying Hamblin's 6th Corps brigade on his left. The sound of heavy firing alarmed Meade, whose staff sent Warren a dispatch (6:40 p.m.) asking what was happening. An hour later, Warren replied that Crawford had attacked the Rebels and drawn some artillery fire. He continued, "I have had no report

<sup>366</sup> Philip Cheek & Mair Pointon, *History of the Sauk County Riflemen*, 153-54; *ORS* 7:711-13; Reid-Green, *Letters Home*, 108; Gottlieb Torke letter to Elizabeth, February 9, 1865.

<sup>367</sup> Judkins, *Memoir*, 89; Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets*, 192

from him since it began; it now has ceased.” The gathering darkness and the apparent futility of further assaults brought an end to the fighting.

Although sporadic firing occurred until late into the night, the three-day battle of Hatcher’s Run was effectively over. As Pvt. Joyce, a weary Tar Heel with Lewis’s Brigade put it, “We commenced fighting hear last Sunday morning and fite on til Tuesday night . . . I think both sides were getting tired of it, and if everybody got as cold as I did they wold a stopped it long before they did”!<sup>368</sup>



### Depiction of Crawford’s 6.00 p.m. Attack

A.W. Warren, Harper’s Weekly, February 25, 1865

#### Overnight Events up to 1:00 a.m. February 8

The Union began reorganizing and consolidating its position. Around 7:00 p.m., Warren told Meade that he could withdraw Wheaton’s division (6th Corps) as he could hold his position. At 8:05 p.m., Meade instructed Warren to send Kerwin’s cavalry brigade tomorrow to rejoin Gregg and the other two brigades. Wheaton’s division would rejoin Maj. Gen. Getty’s 6th Corps, thus allowing the 9th Corps and 6th Corps to make their new dispositions.

At 9:00 p.m., Warren received a message from Crawford saying he’d established his line and had a 6th Corps brigade (Hamblin) on his left. The Confederate line ran in a northeast-to-southwest direction, and firing only continued on his right where the lines were close. He added that his men were becoming shaken and needed rest and relief. In response, at 11:00 p.m., Warren’s aide informed division commander Griffin that Warren had ordered the withdrawal of Crawford’s division from the front line, and it would locate behind his (Griffin’s) lines. Warren added, “Please notify your pickets” of the maneuver.<sup>369</sup>

<sup>368</sup> OR 46/2:461; OR 46/1:291; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 415.

<sup>369</sup> OR 46/2:457-61. The military term for this maneuver is a "rearward passage of lines." Withdrawing through one’s own lines during darkness is a very dangerous maneuver. Both lines must be well briefed and the movement carefully coordinated. The line that is being passed through could easily shoot people in the line that is withdrawing.

During the night, Meade issued a three-point circular highlighting new dispositions for the troops.

1. The chief engineer will construct an entrenched line from Fort Sampson to Armstrong's Mill, placing works at the latter point and the Vaughan Road crossing. This line will be formed by selecting suitable positions for artillery, erecting batteries, and extensive breastworks. Dams will be built on Hatcher's Run, and the stream obstructed as much as possible.
2. Once constructed, the line will be held as follows: The 9th Corps, from the Appomattox to Fort Howard; the 6th Corps, from Fort Howard to Fort Gregg; the 2nd Corps, from Fort Gregg to Armstrong's Mill. The 5th Corps will hold the Vaughan Road crossing and picket Hatcher's Run above and below the crossing and along Vaughan Road via "Cummings' to Wyatt's." It will protect the rear and support the 2nd or 6th Corps if attacked. The cavalry division will be posted on Jerusalem Plank Road and picket from the left of the 5th Corps to the James.
3. The chief quartermaster will extend the Military Railroad to conform to the new disposition of troops. The chief engineer and corps commanders will construct the necessary corduroy roads to establish secure and prompt communications.<sup>370</sup>

As the Union high command planned future reorganizations, the tired and anxious soldiers with Crawford and elements of Wheaton's 6th Corps division remained in line on the battlefield a few hundred yards from the Confederate works. The weather remained brutally wintry, the rain freezing as it fell. The soldiers had no shelter, rations, or fires in such a forward position. In their wet clothes, they contemplated another long, miserable night. A 24th Michigan, Bragg's brigade, memoir noted, "The danger of freezing to death suddenly became a stark reality." Chaplain Locke, 11th Pennsylvania, Baxter's brigade, recalled "the sound of the axe and the spade" throughout the night as thousands of workmen threw up breastworks and whatever protection they could from the horrific weather.

Amid much joy, the soldiers received orders to withdraw at 1:00 a.m. The tired, freezing, and hungry Union soldiers moved back across Hatcher's Run. Sergeant Westbrook with Hamblin's brigade recalled the march on a bitterly cold night with "the ground . . . covered with ice and very slippery." Once safely back within Union lines, the soldiers made camp, built fires, dried their wet uniforms, and took on sustenance.<sup>371</sup>

The Confederate units also started withdrawing during the night. The 22nd Georgia, Sorrel's Brigade, left the front, went back over two miles to some woods, struck camp, built fires, and got warm. The next morning, they returned to their old camps near Petersburg. The brigades of Lewis and Hoffman (now commanded by Lt. Col. Kasey) withdrew up the plank

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<sup>370</sup> *OR* 46/2:450. Corduroy roads were a common construction in the Civil War made by placing logs perpendicular to the direction of the road, typically over a low or swampy area. They represented an improvement over impassable mud or dirt roads, yet were rough in the best of conditions and a hazard to horses due to shifting loose logs.

<sup>371</sup> Ayoub, *The Campfire Chronicles*, 324; Smith, *The 24th Michigan*, 241; Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania*, 206; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 378. *OR* 51/1:287-88, 291, 294; *OR* 46/1:291, 295; Westbrook, *History of the 49th Pennsylvania*, 232.

road towards Sutherland Station on the Southside Railroad during the night. In contrast, Forney's Alabama Brigade and the 12th Virginia, Weisiger's Brigade, remained in position during the remainder of the night and returned to their camps near Petersburg the following day.<sup>372</sup>

### Analysis

Historians frequently minimized the fighting on February 7, despite its intermittent severity. Crawford's final futile assault is intriguing. Both Meade and Grant had recommended that Warren not attack. Crawford and his subordinates knew the strength of the artillery-supported Rebel position. Gordon's force outnumbered Crawford's division. By 6:00 p.m., it was virtually dark, with sunset around 5:30 p.m., making it too late to launch any meaningful attack.<sup>373</sup>

In his official report and subsequent correspondence to Meade, Warren never admitted that a frontal assault occurred. He claimed that at 6 p.m., Crawford attacked the enemy, pushing them back to their Dabney's Mill works. Given the presence of Rebel artillery, Warren "did not think it advisable to assault the position." In truth, Crawford had pushed the Rebels back to Dabney's Mill by 5:00 p.m. Warren may have erased the suicidal frontal assault, but many formal reports and memoirs describe the futile charges. Ironically, one of the few contemporary images of this battle depicts Crawford's final-day charge. Warren's narrative, however, remains the conventional account of the February 7 fight. Seminal texts from the immediate post-war era through to recent years simply disregarded the assault.<sup>374</sup>

Who instigated this reckless assault? Did Warren order Crawford to attack, or did Crawford unilaterally decide to charge the Rebel stronghold? Why did Warren subsequently conceal Crawford's hapless charge? Recall how Crawford also fortuitously escaped any blame for the previous day's disaster, with Meade and Warren apparently commending his performance throughout the battle. As a postscript, over a month later, a delegation of 5th Corps generals met Warren and requested Crawford's removal, citing his "bungling and what not" as causing much trouble. They feared he would eventually cost Warren his command.<sup>375</sup>

Given the previous day's humiliation, one might speculate that Warren and Crawford were desperate to regain some honor. From early morning, Warren showed an eagerness to resume fighting despite the terrible weather and being under no pressure from his superiors to

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<sup>372</sup> Judkins, *Memoir*, 89; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 415; Letter, William H. Forney to Mrs. Forney, February 9, 1865, Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 362.

<sup>373</sup> Korn, *Pursuit to Appomattox*, 25:31; Greene, *The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign*, 105; are two modern examples of where the day's fighting received minimal mention. The sole exception was Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, which devoted 14 pages and a map to Feb 7.

<sup>374</sup> OR 46/1:256; OR 46/2:487. Amongst the many texts ignoring the final assault are: Powell (1896), *The Fifth Army Corps (Army of the Potomac)*; through to well-known Petersburg texts by Trudeau (1991), *The Last Citadel*, and Hess (2009), *In the Trenches at Petersburg*.

<sup>375</sup> Bates, *Martial Deeds of Pennsylvania*, 814; Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, 514. The 5th Corps generals in question were; Brig. Gen. Bartlett, Maj. Gen. Ayres, and Maj. Gen. Griffin. Their concerns proved prophetic; Crawford's performance at the Battle of Five Forks was a factor in Warren being stripped of his command. Second Corps brigade commander, Robert McAllister also shared his low opinion of Crawford in a letter to his wife. McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 577.

engage. We have no testimony on the subject from either officer. Whatever the circumstances, many Union casualties resulted from the needless assault.

Northern newspapers reported that the February 7 fighting was more substantial than initially believed, adding that the Rebels had “made a determined stand” at their Dabney’s Mill works. They claimed Crawford’s division lost 71 killed and 519 wounded; a vast overestimation. On February 7, Crawford suffered an estimated 24 killed, 165 wounded, and 25 missing. In addition, Hamblin’s brigade lost one dead and six wounded. Thus, the Union casualties for the fight were 221. This is a significant number and exceeds the 135 losses incurred by Humphreys’s 2nd Corps throughout all of February 5. It matches the 221 Federal losses suffered on February 6 along Vaughan Road. Confederate casualties for February 7 are unknown, although they would be significantly less than the Union, as they suffered few if any losses during Crawford’s dusk frontal attacks.<sup>376</sup>

As Crawford’s soldiers returned to the Union works along Hatcher’s Run in the early hours of February 8, Grant’s Eighth Offensive was finally over. What had it really achieved? And at what cost? I explore these issues and how the action fits into the broader context of the war in the following Epilogue.

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<sup>376</sup> William D. McGregor, *Baltimore [MD] The Sun*, Feb 11, 1865. Crawford reported his *provisional* losses for both Feb 6 and 7. Taking this data together with his final casualty report, through imputation, one can estimate his Feb 7 loss, *OR* 46/1:256; *OR* 46/1:63-69.

## Epilogue

The guns fell silent along Hatcher’s Run during the freezing night of Tuesday, February 7. No further substantial combat would occur around Petersburg for more than six weeks.

### Scale of the Battle

Traditional accounts report that 34,517 Union troops and 13,835 Confederates participated in the three-day battle. However, these numbers are nuanced. The Union value derives from aggregating the strengths of the 5th Corps, two divisions of the 2nd Corps, and the cavalry division. The data does *not* include the reinforcements Meade summoned on February 5. Ramsey’s brigade from Miles’s 2nd Corps division actively supported Mott’s division late on February 5. Parts of Wheaton’s 6th Corps division fought alongside the 5th Corps on February 6 and 7. Finally, Hartranft’s 9th Corps division served as reserves and occupied front-line defenses. Thus, the Hatcher’s Run battle involved *over 43,000* Union troops.<sup>377</sup>

**Table E.1: Union Troops Involved at the Battle of Hatcher’s Run**

Union Force	Troops
2nd Corps (two divisions)	10,988
5th Corps	17,032
Cavalry division	6,497
Ramsey’s brigade	1,100
Wheaton’s division (6th Corps)	4,500
Hartranft’s division (9th Corps)	3,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,317</b>

The “absolute” numbers quoted give a false sense of precision; they represent a one-day snapshot from an inspection performed a week before the battle. The “rounded” numbers give more realistic “estimates.”<sup>378</sup>

The conventionally reported Confederate strength is also problematic. The “End of January 1865, Inspection Reports” provided data for the divisions of Pegram, Evans, and

<sup>377</sup> The American Battlefield Trust, The Battle of Hatcher’s Run webpage [Hatcher's Run Battle Facts and Summary | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](https://www.battlefields.org/learn/education/summary). The Union data derives from Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, 133, which came from the *OR*. Livermore incorrectly stated that the reinforcements took no part in the battle.

<sup>378</sup> Data for Ramsey’s brigade (*OR* 46/1:192); Wheaton’s division (Warren and Humphreys both reported 4,500 *OR* 46/1:193, 255; although Maj. Gen. Getty reported 4,400 *OR* 46/2:405); and Hartranft’s division (*OR* 46/1:193).

Heth. Sadly, no such reports exist for Mahone's Division. Data for this division came from the "End of December, 1864 Inspection Report."

**Table E.2: Confederate Troops Involved at the Battle of Hatcher's Run**

Confederate Force	Strength
Pegram's division	2,353
Evans's division	2,695
Heth's Division	4,676
Mahone's Division (Finegan)	4,900
Beale's cavalry brigade	1,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,624</b>

The data comes from the front covers of Inspection Reports."<sup>379</sup>

Whether Philip Cook's Georgia Brigade (Grimes's Division) participated in the Confederate attacks late on February 5 remains uncertain. I have chosen *not* to include them in this analysis. I have also *not* included Brig. Gen. Samuel McGowan's South Carolina Brigade, which may have acted as reserves during February 5. More problematic is how to represent Rooney Lee's cavalry division. Inspection Report data exists for this force. However, the strength quoted on the report's front cover (3,093) is at variance with the 4,152 reported as "present for duty" in the body of the report. Despite Robert E. Lee claiming that he brought his son's cavalry division to the battle during the night of February 5,<sup>380</sup> there is only compelling evidence that Beale's Brigade fought at the battle. Beale's Inspection Report gives a strength of either 958 or 1,247, depending on which column one accepts. A figure of 1,000 seems reasonable. Thus, the Confederate forces involved at the Battle of Hatcher's Run probably totaled *about 15,600*, around a third of the Union's strength. Thus, the battle comprised a total of around *59,000* soldiers.

#### The Butcher's Bill

As lost and displaced soldiers returned to their regiments and exhausted medics processed the accumulated broken bodies, officials began counting the human cost of the battle.

#### Total Union Casualties

Based upon *OR* data the battle resulted in *1,540* union casualties (171 killed, 1,182 wounded, and 187 missing). Of those, 738 (48%) came from Crawford's division. The other substantial loss (178) came from Pearson's brigade, which fought alongside Crawford's men

<sup>379</sup> The conventional Confederate data came from Livermore, *Numbers and Losses*, 134, which were estimated from the *OR*. Mahone's Division was on a mission at the end of Jan 1865 and hence missed that month's Inspection Report. That data came from the previous "end of month" report. The numbers inside the reports do not always agree with the cover figure. NARA, M935, Roll 14, 16-P-51, 20-P-51, 19-P-46; Roll 15, 7-P-53, 1-P-58, 3-P-58.

<sup>380</sup> *OR* 46/1:382.

on February 6. Nearly 150 Union regiments took some part in the fighting; many suffered three or fewer casualties. Over half (54%) of the Union casualties came from 16 regiments, with over a quarter coming from just five regiments: 6th Wisconsin, 11th Pennsylvania, 107th Pennsylvania, 16th Maine, and 1st Maryland.

The 6th Wisconsin in Bragg's brigade suffered 103 casualties (11 killed, 78 wounded and 14 missing), the highest for any Union regiment at the battle. However, a thorough 6th Wisconsin roster database contained the names and details of 22 soldiers killed or mortally wounded at the battle. Matrau claimed the regiment suffered 175 casualties. Compiling casualty data is notoriously complex, and most regiments do not have such detailed rosters. The true Union cost of the battle of Hatcher's Run may never be known.<sup>381</sup>

It seems probable that the volume of inadequately trained raw recruits added to the Union losses. Large numbers of draftees in Warren's 5th Corps had never previously fired a rifle. The 6th Wisconsin (see above) entered the fight with about 400 drafted men. The 7th Wisconsin commander, Col. Richardson, reported that "the conduct of officers and men was all that I could ask or expect of the 220 men that went into the engagement. 100 were raw men who had never fired a musket."<sup>382</sup>

#### Total Confederate Casualties

As no official records exist for the Confederate losses, presenting the equivalent casualty data is limited. Alfred C. Young, III, a well-respected expert on Confederate casualty data, compiled some data for the battle, which he kindly shared. The figures are conservative estimates mainly obtained from the analysis of hospital data and newspaper casualty lists. These data reveal 443 losses for Gordon's Second Corps, 405 losses for A.P. Hill's Third Corps, and 30 losses for Rooney Lee's Cavalry division. This equates to a Confederate loss of 132 killed, 521 wounded, and 225 missing, for a total of 878 *casualties*. This conservative figure is consistent with Kyd Douglas's estimated 1,000, a figure all subsequent narratives usually adopt.<sup>383</sup>

There are some interesting features in the Confederate data. The large number (85) of "missing" from Lewis's Brigade presumably reflects those captured by the Federals along Vaughan Road on February 6. The eight "missing" for Terry's Brigade is probably low, given the reports of a significant number from this brigade deserting during the battle. McComb's 15 wounded also seems low, given that 12 were killed and the ratio of wounded to killed was usually three or more. The large number of casualties (100) in Sorrel's Brigade is intriguing.

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<sup>381</sup> The *OR* gives Union casualties at the regimental level for the entire battle, *OR* 46/1:63-69. Ramsey's brigade (one casualty) is not included in the formal *OR* list. Hartranft's division (9th Corps) suffered no casualties. One should note that the *OR* data are not definitive. As well as accounting errors, some of those listed as "wounded" would die in hospital days later. Similarly, some of the "missing" could be later accounted for as they were found in hospitals or on the battlefield. Others could eventually appear back with their regiment. Reid-Green, ed., *Letters Home*, 108; James Marten (2024) Roster for the 6th Wisconsin, [Marten 2024 | Marten | Marquette University](#).

<sup>382</sup> Gibbon, *Personal Recollections*, 229-30; Taylor, *Gouverneur Kemble Warren*, 203 note 1; Reid-Green, ed., *Letters Home*, 108; *ORS* 7:711-13.

<sup>383</sup> Alfred C. Young III, personal communication; Douglas, *I Rode With Stonewall*, 312; American Battlefield Trust, [Hatcher's Run Battle Facts and Summary | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](#).

The brigade was in the second wave of Finegan's charge on February 6; the adjacent brigade (Harris) suffered only 15 casualties. Even those brigades in the first wave, which presumably did more of the fighting, lost only half of Sorrel's number. One possibility is that Sorrel also lost significant numbers on February 5 and 7. At the Battle of Hatcher's Run, the Confederates could have suffered 1,200 losses, including desertions.

#### The Immediate Military Aftermath

With the bloody battle concluded, this section summarizes what happened militarily in the following days.

#### The Union Strengthens Its New Positions

Starting on February 8, the Union implemented the directives in Meade's overnight circular. Acquisition of the Hatcher's Run crossings at Armstrong's Mill and Vaughan Road enabled the Union to extend its left flank three miles further west. This extension required a substantial construction of fortifications and corduroy roads. Once constructed, the 6th Corps occupied the line from Fort Howard to Fort Gregg and the 2nd Corps from Fort Gregg to Armstrong's Mill. The 5th Corps held the line from Armstrong's Mill to the Vaughan Road crossing and picketed Hatcher's Run above and below the crossing and along Vaughan Road to the Wyatt's house.

The Federals quickly started plans for extending the Military Railroad to supply the newly gained territory. On Sunday, February 12, Chief Engineer James J. Moore and his assistant, C. S. McAlpine, arrived to survey the project. The most workable route for the "Hatcher's Run Branch" involved extending the line from Warren Station (next to Globe Tavern) to the Cumming's house near the Vaughan Road crossing. Construction began the following day, and the railroad was effectively operational by the month's end.<sup>384</sup>

On the morning of February 8, Kerwin's cavalry brigade rejoined the rest of Gregg's division around Rowanty Post Office. Most subsequently returned to their base on Jerusalem Plank Road. However, after sightings of Rebels, some of Kerwin's men went to picket along the Weldon Railroad near Reams's Station. They only discovered Confederate scouting parties here, so the Yankees returned to their camps early on February 9. To the shock of most of the cavalymen, their beloved divisional commander, David Gregg, departed the service on the same day. As one trooper recalled, he left without even a farewell address.<sup>385</sup>

#### Confederate Supply Issues

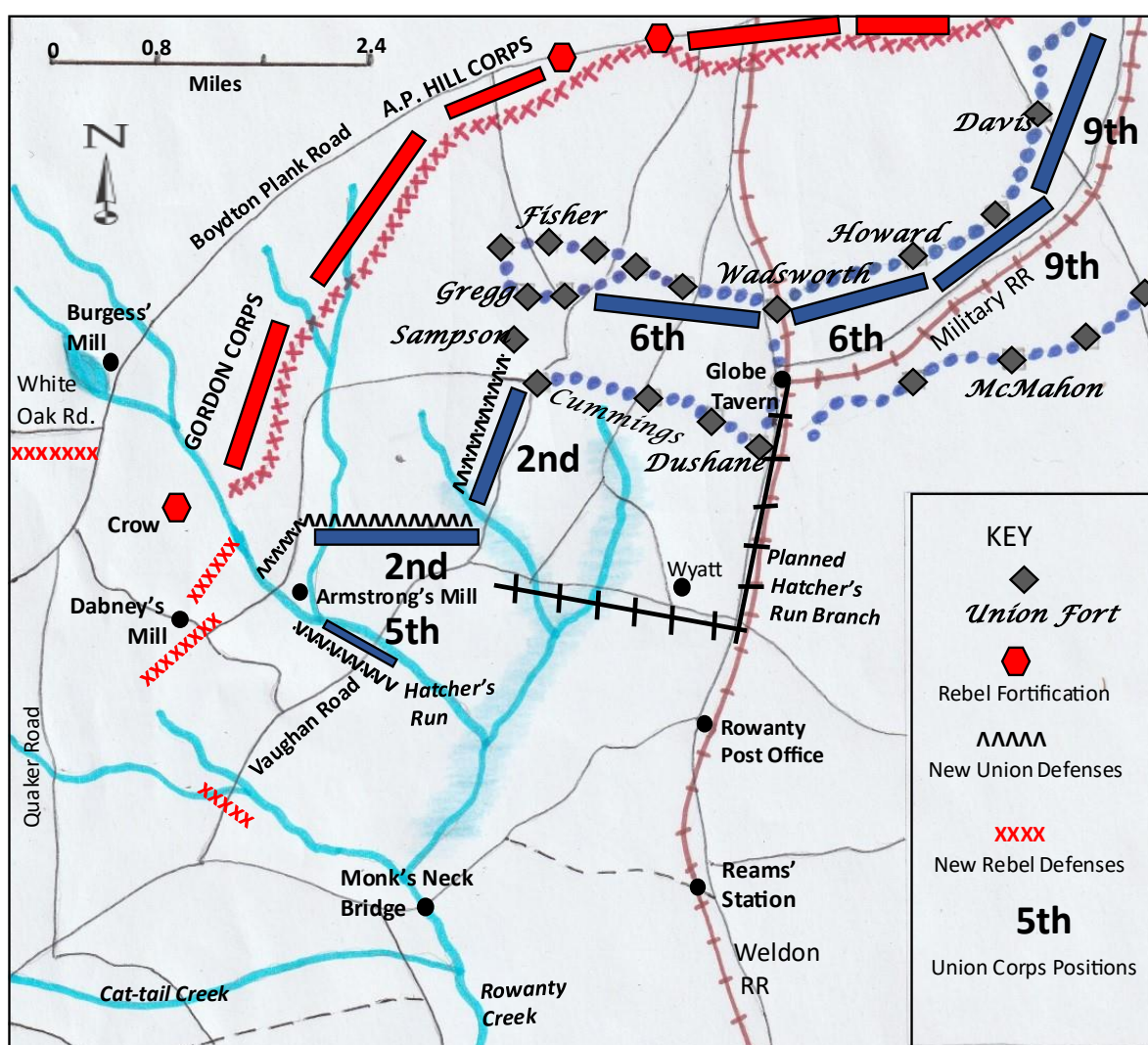
On February 8, Lee wrote to the Confederate Secretary of War John C. Breckinridge, highlighting the extreme plight of his soldiers. "Some of the men had been without meat for three days, and all were suffering from reduced rations and scant clothing, exposed to battle,

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<sup>384</sup> Mike Willegal, *Building a Railroad*, [\\*hatchers-run-book-II \(willegal.net\)](http://*hatchers-run-book-II(willegal.net)), 2022, 1-37. This public domain essay provides a detailed account of constructing the Hatcher's Run Branch.

<sup>385</sup> Preston, *History of the 10th Regiment of Cavalry*, 243; Crowninshield, *A History of the First Regiment*, 250; Merrill, *The Campaigns of the First Maine*, 319-20; Hyndman, *History of a Cavalry Company*, 278; Mohr, *The Corman Diaries*, 518-19; Hand, *One Good Regiment*, 195. David Gregg had handed in his resignation on Jan 25.

cold, hail, and sleet.” He promised to send Col. Cole, his chief commissary, to Richmond to see what improvements he could effect. Lee added, “If some change is not made and the commissary department reorganized, I apprehend dire results. The physical strength of the men, if their courage survives, must fail under this treatment.” He also mentioned that he had to disperse his cavalry for want of forage. When President Davis heard the news, he replied, “This is too sad to be patiently considered, and cannot have occurred without criminal neglect or gross incapacity. Let supplies be had by purchase, or borrowing or other possible mode.” Breckinridge had only taken up the Secretary of War post on February 6. He oversaw the removal of the inept Lucius B. Northrop as commissary general and replaced him with Isaac M. St. John on February 16. Although supplies to Confederate troops improved, it was too late to change the war’s outcome.<sup>386</sup>



Map E.1: Union and Confederate Positions After the Battle of Hatcher's Run

<sup>386</sup> OR 46/1:382. Breckinridge replaced John Seddon who had resigned on Jan. 19, 1865. Breckinridge was a former Confederate field general and a former Vice President of the USA.

The Confederates extended their Boydton Plank Road lines south beyond Hatcher's Run, including the Dabney's Mill site, to block any direct advance to the Southside Railroad. But with the Federals now controlling the main Hatcher's Run crossings, they had many options for sweeping around Lee's right flank. To frustrate these threats, Lee built a defensive line stretching several miles westward along White Oak Road just south of Burgess' Mill. However, in light of the Hatcher's Run battle, Lee realized that Grant would eventually get beyond his right flank. By February 22, Lee had plotted a retreat west should the likely evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond occur. He planned to rally his army around Burkeville (30 miles northwest of Petersburg), where the Southside Railroad joined the Danville Railroad. To this end, he moved his surplus materials to Amelia Court House, just north of Burkeville.<sup>387</sup>

### Confederate Desertions

Desertion from the ANV was already a problem at the start of 1865. However, following the Battle of Hatcher's Run, the scale of desertion increased substantially. On February 10, President Davis adopted a proposal from Robert E. Lee for a 30-day amnesty for any deserters who returned to their regiments. Those who deserted after that date would receive the full military punishment. Lee believed the root causes were a lack of food, non-payment of wages, and despondency on the home front regarding their cause. Union records show that from February 9 to February 28, they received 1,148 Confederate deserters. A Massachusetts soldier wrote, "Every night . . . brought squads of these men [Rebel deserters] in, whom we saw marched past to corps headquarters." In addition to these recorded fugitives, many Rebels deserted and returned home.<sup>388</sup>

To address the stream of Tar Heel soldiers back to North Carolina, Lee had to send valuable troops from his already stretched front line to the state border to round up deserters. Toward the end of February, both Brig. Gen. Johnston's Brigade (from Pegram's former division) and the 10th Virginia Cavalry moved to the Roanoke River on the North Carolina border for this purpose.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>387</sup> Long, *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee*, 404; Hess, *In the Trenches at Petersburg*, 234, 246; Chris M. Calkins, *The Appomattox Campaign* (New York, 1997), 10-11.

<sup>388</sup> Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 294-95; Horn, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 217-18; Billings, *History of the 10th Massachusetts*, 395.

<sup>389</sup> Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 417; Driver, *10th Virginia Cavalry*, 70. Johnston had been absent for the Hatcher's Run battle, his brigade being commanded by Col. Lea. Upon his return some days later, he temporarily took command of what had been Pegram's division. Towards the end of Feb Johnston and his brigade were dispatched to North Carolina to round up deserters. On Feb 26, Brig. Gen. James A. Walker took command of Pegram's division. Johnston's Tar Heels were called back to Petersburg weeks later so they could take part in Lee's Ft. Stedman offensive of Mar 25. Vines E. Turner & H. Clay Wall, "The 23rd Regiment," in Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina, in the Great War 1861-65*. 5 vols. (Goldsboro, NC, 1901), 2:262-63. Walter A. Montgomery, "The 12th Regiment," in Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina, in the Great War 1861-65*. 5 vols. (Goldsboro, NC, 1901), 1:650.

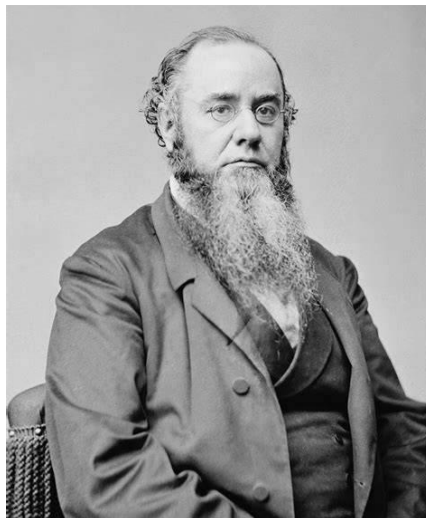
### Delight and Dejection for Some Federals

On Friday, February 10, Union Secretary of War Edwin Stanton ordered Grant to dispatch “several reliable and reduced strength regiments” to Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck (Chief-of-Staff in Washington) for special duties. Grant relayed the order to Meade, adding that the duties entailed guarding camps in the North for draftees before they went to the front. Meade disseminated the order to his corps commanders, and from Warren’s suggestions, he selected Bragg’s brigade for the assignment.

This brigade had taken a battering over the previous two days and had featured actively in recent battles, significantly reducing its strength. The brigade (78 officers and 1,261 men) comprised the 24th Michigan, 6th and 7th Wisconsin, and the 143rd, 149th, and 150th Pennsylvania. Although attached to the brigade, the independent 1st New York Sharpshooters were excluded from the assignment because they possessed specialist telescopic rifles deemed essential to the war effort. Bragg didn’t want to leave the AOP and miss the approaching conclusion of the war. Reluctant to lose a brigade, Bragg’s divisional commander, Crawford, protested the order to Meade. Crawford especially wanted to keep the three western regiments that had initially been part of the famed “Iron Brigade.” Meade refused his requests.<sup>390</sup>



**Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck**  
Library of Congress



**Edwin M. Stanton**  
Library of Congress

Oblivious to these transformative events, Bragg’s soldiers spent February 10 building corduroy roads. After an early breakfast on Saturday, February 11, they packed up camp and awaited new movement orders, fearing more marching and fighting. Imagine their shock and delight when a staff officer directed them to Warren Station, on the Military Railroad, to board “cars” for City Point and then sail to Baltimore! Bragg and his three Pennsylvania regiments arrived at City Point around 1:00 p.m., boarded the transport ship *Champion*, and set sail. The jubilant Pennsylvanians were leaving the front. The three Western regiments

<sup>390</sup> OR 46/2:513-14, 519-20; Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania*, 206-07; Smith, *The 24th Michigan*, 243-44; John Bennett, *No Word of Them: First Battalion New York Sharpshooters, 1862-1865* (Morrisville, NC, 2008), 83-87.

arrived at City Point in the late afternoon and boarded the steamer *George Weems* at dusk. A delay in awaiting baggage and final personnel meant the soldiers spent the night at anchor. The delay proved consequential. Crawford's protests had persisted, and before dawn (Sunday, February 12), officers ordered the two Wisconsin regiments off the ship and sent them back to the front. The ship set sail with just the 24th Michigan.

This turn of events evoked strong emotions. Although ecstatic at leaving the front, the Michigan boys were sad to abandon their Wisconsin comrades and dejected at the breakup of the Iron Brigade association. The Wisconsin soldiers were distraught. Some unfairly blamed "old drunken Bragg" for their cruel misfortune, unaware of Crawford's influence on the decision.

The sea voyages north proved quite an ordeal, with both ships enduring delays due to storms and thick ice. The Pennsylvania soldiers reached Baltimore late on February 13; the Michigan regiment arrived at midnight on February 15. From Baltimore, the Pennsylvania regiments journeyed to New York, and the 24th Michigan went to Springfield, Illinois, to oversee draftees. Bragg remained in Baltimore, where he supervised the transportation of conscripts until the war's end.

The two Wisconsin regiments left behind were "homeless" and without affiliation. By the end of the month, they joined what was known as "The Provisional Brigade." The 91st New York also transferred to the unit. Colonel John A. Kellogg, the 6th Wisconsin commander, took charge of the new brigade, which remained in Crawford's division throughout the war.<sup>391</sup>

#### Broader Context

In other theatres of war, the news was all bleak for the Confederacy. On February 17, Sherman's troops captured Columbia, South Carolina's state capital, and the city was torched. On the same day, the Rebels evacuated Charleston, a critical port for the Confederacy. The following day, the mayor surrendered the city to Union Brig. Gen. Alexander Schimmelfennig. The capture of Charleston represented a significant and symbolic Union victory as, militarily, the Civil War began with the Confederates capturing Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor. Many Northerners saw the city as the rebellion's birthplace.<sup>392</sup>

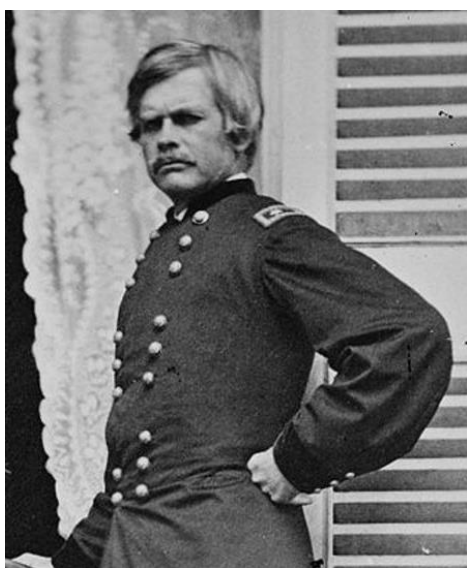
Possibly fueled by the three days of bloodletting around Hatcher's Run, on February 21, Union Maj. Gen. Edward O. Ord, the Army of the James commander, sent a flag of truce across the lines to Lt. Gen. James Longstreet, a prewar acquaintance, and Lee's senior corps commander. The Union general suggested a meeting to discuss a routine matter. Suitably intrigued, Longstreet quickly named a date and place. Nearly three weeks after the failed Peace Conference in Hampton Roads, Ord told Longstreet that Northern politicians feared the

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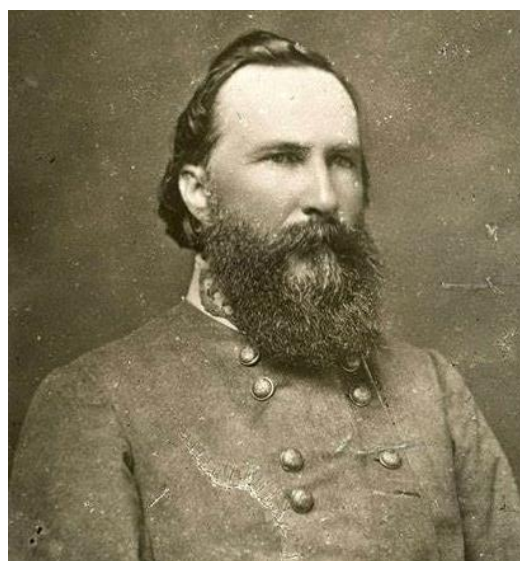
<sup>391</sup> Smith, *The 24th Michigan*, 243-45; Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 294-96; John W. Nesbit, *General History of Company D, 149th Pennsylvania Volunteers and Personal Sketches of the Members* (Oakdale, CA, 1908), 42-44; Chamberlin, *History of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Regiment*, 250-51; Charles A. Frey, *Memoirs, "Recollections of Army Life,"* chapter 21, 1886, *Spared & Shared*, Wordpress.com, [Recollections of Army Life | by Charles A. Frey \(wordpress.com\)](https://www.wordpress.com/Recollections-of-Army-Life-by-Charles-A-Frey/); Lance Herdegen, & Sherry Murphy, eds, *Four Years with the Iron Brigade: The Civil War Journal of William Ray, Company F, 7th Wisconsin Volunteers* (New York, 2002), Loc 7516-26; Cheek & Pointon, *History of the Sauk County Riflemen*, 156-57.

<sup>392</sup> Long & Long, *The Civil War Day by Day*, 640-41.

peace question and that only the two sides' military leaders could approach the subject. He proposed a cease-fire, then a meeting between Grant and Lee, followed by an exchange of social visits by Northern and Southern senior officers and their wives. He hoped the meetings would lead ultimately to "terms honorable to both sides." It transpired that the wives of Ord, Longstreet, and Grant were key authors behind the initiative. President Davis considered the proposal with Secretary of War Breckinridge, Lee, and Longstreet and agreed to pursue Ord's idea. They arranged another Longstreet-Ord meeting, at which Ord asked that Lee write to Grant and propose a meeting. On March 2, Lee wrote to Grant suggesting a military convention to arrive "at a satisfactory adjustment of the present unhappy difficulties." After receiving instructions from Lincoln, Grant replied on March 4, refusing Lee's offer, adding that he had no authority to meet him other than to accept his unconditional surrender.<sup>393</sup>



**Maj. Gen. Edward O. Ord**  
Library of Congress



**Lt. Gen. James Longstreet**  
Encyclopedia Virginia

During this failed attempt to arrange another peace meeting, the Confederates received further bad news. On February 22, the vital coastal port of Wilmington, North Carolina, fell to the Union. This had been inevitable since the fall of the adjacent Fort Fisher (in January), which protected the mouth of the Cape Fear River. Thus, another significant Confederate city had returned to Union hands. On March 2, Sheridan's Yankees destroyed the remains of Jubal Early's Confederate army at Waynesboro in the Shenandoah Valley.

On March 4, President Lincoln delivered his second inaugural address. His speech, "With malice towards none," became one of the most significant in American history and is inscribed on the Lincoln Memorial. With the Union on the cusp of victory after four years of ghastly bloodshed, Lincoln sought to rise above divisiveness and initiate the process of healing. Lincoln offered conciliatory words to citizens in both the North and the South.

<sup>393</sup> Jamieson, *Spring 1865*, 90-91. Terrienne Schulte, "A Visionary Plan? The Proposed March 1865 Peace Conference," Parts 1-6, *Emerging Civil War Online*, August 10-15, 2017, [Emerging Civil War](#).

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

On March 25, Lee desperately attempted to break the stranglehold around his army by attacking Fort Stedman. After initial success, the mission ended in total failure. Just 15 days later, following a series of battles, some of which took place around Hatcher's Run, Lee surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse on April 9.<sup>394</sup>

Three senior Union officers who featured prominently in the Hatcher's Run story perished in those final battles. Brigade commander Frederick Winthrop died at the Battle of Five Forks on April 1. Colonel Hugh Janeway, who briefly led a cavalry brigade at Hatcher's Run, perished at the Battle of Amelia Springs on April 5. Finally, on April 7, near Farmville, a sniper shot division commander Brig. Gen. Thomas Smyth through the mouth, and he died two days later. Smyth was the last Union general killed during the Civil War.

#### A Return to St Paul's Church

Seated by her husband's coffin, Hetty (Cary) Pegram returned to Richmond by train. John Pegram's casket was taken to St. Paul's, the same church where the couple had been recently married. On Thursday, February 9, exactly three weeks after their wedding day, Reverend Charles Minnigerode, the pastor at their wedding, conducted the funeral service. Predominantly the same congregation that had attended the wedding packed the church. "Bobby" Lee's eldest son, Maj. Gen. G. W. Custis Lee, John Pegram's intimate friend, accompanied Hetty throughout. Along with John's mother and younger brother (artillerist Willie Pegram), they led the cortege to Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, where John Pegram was buried.<sup>395</sup>

On February 11, Robert E. Lee wrote the following letter to Hetty:

I cannot find words to express my deep sympathy in your affliction, my sorrow at your loss. God alone can give you strength to bear the blow he has inflicted, and since it has been death by his hand I know it was sent in mercy. As dear as your husband was to you, as necessary apparently to his Country and as important to his friends, I feel assured it was best for him to go at the moment he did. His purity of character, his services to the Country and his devotion to his God, prepared him for the peace and rest he now enjoys. We are left to grieve at his departure, cherish his memory and prepare to follow. May God give us his Grace, that through the mediation of his blessed Son, we may be ready to obey his gracious Summons.

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<sup>394</sup> ["With Malice Toward None...": Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address \(U.S. National Park Service\) \(nps.gov\)](https://www.nps.gov/learn/education/primary-source-documents/with-malice-toward-none); Long & Long, *The Civil War Day by Day*, 641-42, 644-47, 657-671.

<sup>395</sup> Harrison, *Recollections Grave and Gay*, 203-05; Bergeron "Three-day Tussle at Hatcher's Run," 36-37; Griggs, *General John Pegram*, 118-20. The Pegram family suffered further tragedy two months later as Willie Pegram was killed in battle.

Truly and affectionately your friend  
R. E. Lee<sup>396</sup>

John Pegram fell in battle less than ten miles from his birthplace. John and Hetty belonged to Richmond's "high society" and were members of the elite "Mosaics" social group. The Richmond newspapers were awash with heartfelt eulogies, including, "Among the many deaths occasioned by this cruel war none will create a greater void among friends than that of Brigadier General John Pegram of this city." A modern essay on Pegram presented a more forthright appraisal of his life: "While the very model of courage and comportment, style and spirituality, Pegram was a poor leader of volunteers and a mediocre tactical commander."<sup>397</sup>

This chapter has described the military, political, and personal contexts that followed the Battle of Hatcher's Run. The concluding chapter explores the battle's significance and legacy.

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<sup>396</sup> Kate Helmsworth, *The Tragic Life of a Civil War Socialite: Hetty Cary*, 2022 Owlcation Online Blog. The original letter belongs to the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Mss2 L515 a 21.

<sup>397</sup> *The Richmond [VA] Enquirer*, February 10, 1865; Scott Laidig, "Brigadier General John Pegram, Lee's Paradoxical Cavalier," Research Paper, Ohio State University, 1998. After a period of grieving, Hetty and her mother returned to their home in Baltimore, where she taught at the Southern Home School. While traveling in Europe, Hetty met physiologist Henry Newell Martin, a professor at Johns Hopkins University. They were married in 1879. Hetty died in Baltimore on September 27, 1892.

## Conclusions

### Significance and Legacy

It is commonplace to ascribe victors to battles. However, for Hatcher's Run, as with many battles throughout history, this can be a controversial task. The fact that posterity has not treated the Battle of Hatcher's Run kindly has made such assessments even more challenging. In discussions, I often hear that nothing of consequence (or significance) resulted from the battle. But is this true?

What did the Union Achieve?

The three-day battle arose from Grant's hastily arranged Eighth Petersburg Offensive. The *stated* aim was to disrupt a significant Confederate supply line. However, by noon of day one, this objective had become meaningless as Federal cavalry discovered that the supply route no longer existed to any extent. To endanger the best parts of two infantry corps and a cavalry division on a wild goose chase seems like a failure.

However, a more nuanced evaluation is necessary. During the battle, Union forces once again captured the vital crossings of Hatcher's Run at Armstrong's Mill and Vaughan Road. Unlike earlier occasions, they held and fortified these strategic points despite intense fighting. Although never part of Grant's original plan, permanently capturing these crossings was a significant achievement. It allowed the Union to push its lines three miles further west, bringing them closer to attacking the Southside Railroad, whose capture would spell doom for Richmond. It also meant Lee's shrinking forces had three more miles to defend. After the battle, Lee realized that his right flank was indefensible and made contingency plans for the likely evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond.<sup>398</sup>

The success in extending their line was how Union commanders "sold" the mission to US politicians and the public. A more uplifting narrative than an infantry-supported cavalry raid on a largely deserted enemy supply line. Warren claimed that the battle was a draw, and he just lost out on a victory because of the poor performance of the army's new recruits.

Evidence suggests that Grant's *real* objective for the mission was to keep the ANV occupied. The previous substantial action around Petersburg had been the Union Applejack Raid on December 7-12, 1864. Grant's memoirs describe his fears that Lee might slip away from the ever-tightening noose around his Petersburg position. In a letter to his wife, 5th Corps commander Warren felt that he'd "accomplished General Grant's objective – to harass Lee and keep him busy here [Petersburg], while Sherman operates in South Carolina." Francis M. Wafer, a 2nd Corps brigade surgeon, shared the same opinion in a letter to his brother. Measured against this objective, the offensive was a success as it certainly kept Lee

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<sup>398</sup> The Union had temporarily captured these crossings during the 6th Petersburg Offensive on Oct 27, 1864, and on Dec 9, 1864. Lee's contingency plans are described in: Hess, *In the Trenches at Petersburg*, 234, 246; Calkins, *The Appomattox Campaign*, 10-11.

busy, preventing any rest bite or withdrawal. The Federals inflicted casualties on the Confederates that they could ill afford. They also weakened the resolve of many Rebels to continue fighting, as desertions surged post battle.<sup>399</sup>

#### What did the Confederacy Achieve?

The Confederates had successfully repelled yet another Union offensive. Despite losing the important two Hatcher's Run crossings, they maintained control of the vital Boydton Plank Road and the Gravelly Run crossing of Vaughan Road. Although they lost irreplaceable officers and men, the ANV proved it was still a formidable foe. The Southern home front learned how its army had foiled another Yankee attack around Petersburg. A Georgia newspaper reported that the ANV had won "one of the best fought battles of the war."<sup>400</sup>

Despite their numerical inferiority, the Rebels had chances to achieve more significant successes. Late on the first day, they could have caused severe damage to the Union 2nd Corps. However, outstanding defense from McAllister's brigade and two artillery sections, combined with timid attacks from Evans's division, thwarted that opportunity. Twenty-four hours later, the Confederates routed Warren's Federals, who only avoided disaster because of nightfall and newly created breastworks nearby, providing sanctuary.

While there was no outright victor in the battle, evidence suggests that the Union gained more from the offensive, despite technically not achieving its stated goal. With over 2,500 casualties, 14 Medals of Honor, and the consequences summarized above, it's hard to justify the view that the battle was of little significance.

#### An Incomplete Story

Although this source provides the fullest account of the battle to date, crucial gaps remain. This is *not* the definitive narrative of the Battle of Hatcher's Run. Hopefully, it will inspire others to undertake further investigations. In some dusty archive or family loft, new material awaits discovery. Below are some key aspects that require attention.

The Confederate perspective needs greater understanding. The lack of testimony from senior Rebel officers blights our knowledge of their motives and actions. Why was the Rebel response to the Union advances so slow on February 5? What transpired at the meeting between Lee and his generals in the early afternoon of February 5? Why were the Rebel attacks west of Rocky Branch on February 5 so weak? Why did Pegram split his division on the morning of February 6? Finally, more insight is needed regarding the activity of Rooney Lee's cavalry.

The *Official Records* adequately document the Union command narrative. However, knowing what transpired during the meeting between Meade and Warren around noon on February 6 would be invaluable for explaining why they ordered a "reconnaissance in force." The absence of formal reports from Crawford and Bragg, prominent Union officers during

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<sup>399</sup> Taylor, *Gouverneur Kemble Warren*, 203; Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 2:439; Wafer, *A Surgeon in the Army*, 133-34; Horn, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 217-18.

<sup>400</sup> "Battle of Hatcher's Run," *Atlanta [GA] Weekly Intelligencer*, April 12, 1865.

the final two days, diminishes our understanding of their roles. For example, whose idea was the suicide assault on the Confederate position late on February 7?

#### “An Inconspicuous Affair”

As of 2025, there is no book dedicated to the Hatcher’s Run battle. How posterity has mistreated the battle is simply a matter of record. Battle accounts filled Northern and Southern newspapers within days of the fighting. Although tailored to partisan home readers, these reports provided rich content. Union-leaning newspapers tended to mask negative aspects of their forces’ performance.<sup>401</sup>

In early works describing the war, the Battle of Hatcher’s Run featured prominently. Before the end of 1865, Eliot G. Storke and Linus P. Brockett’s two-volume work, *A Complete History of the Great Rebellion*, appeared. The battle occupied over three pages, including a map. In Horace Greeley’s 1866 two-volume book *The American Conflict: A History of the Great Rebellion in the United States of America, 1860-65*, the battle received two pages. As with the Northern newspaper reports, both these works distorted the mission’s aim and minimized the embarrassing Union rout on February 6 and the disastrous Union frontal attack the following day.<sup>402</sup>



**Ann S. Stephens (c1852)**  
wikipedia.org



**Horace Greeley (c1860s)**  
wikipedia.org

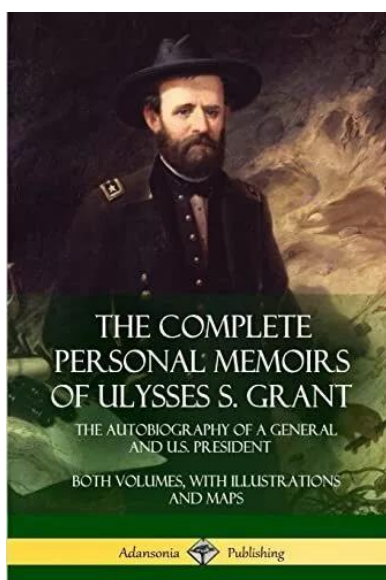
In 1866, volume two of Ann S. Stephens’s work, *Pictorial History of the War for the Union*, appeared. A renowned novelist and publisher, Stephens was a leading light on the New York literary scene. She is credited with creating the “dime novel.” Assisted by William Oland Bourne and J. J. Golder, the book proved popular with readers. Today, the book is regarded by scholars as of national importance and is still being published as of 2025. The

<sup>401</sup> A typical pro-Union article was: *New York [NY] Herald*, February 11, 1865.

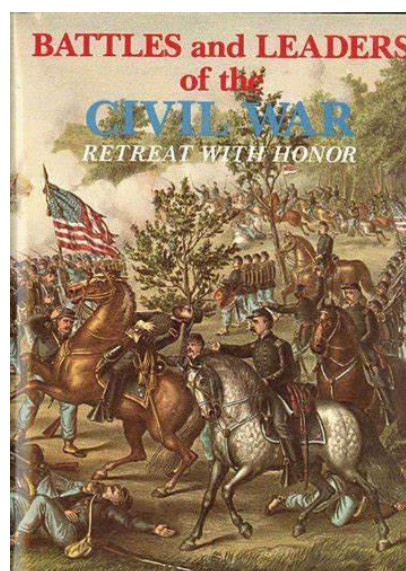
<sup>402</sup> Eliot G. Storke & Linus P. Brockett *A Complete History of the Great Rebellion*, 2 vols. (Auburn, NY, 1865), 2:1377-81; Horace Greeley *The American Conflict: A History of the Great Rebellion in the United States of America, 1860-65*, 2 vols (New York, 1866), 2:726-27. Greeley was a prominent newspaper editor and publisher. He founded the New York Tribune. Highly active in politics he helped in creating the Republican Party. He stood for president in 1872.

battle of Hatcher's Run occupied five text-dense pages, being detailed and reasonably accurate. It was portrayed as an important battle, whereas in comparison, the October 27, 1864, battle around Burgess Mill was dismissed as "trivial". The mission's aim was still erroneously portrayed as seizing territory. The Union rout late on February 6 was covered, although there was no mention of any friendly fire. Crawford's hapless assault on the following day was ignored. Surprisingly, there was no mention of Confederate Brig. Gen. John Pegram perishing, nor the death of Col. Mathew Murphy, a senior New Yorker.<sup>403</sup>

Published between 1880 and 1901, *The Official Records* included over 100 reports and many dispatches linked to the Hatcher's Run battle. These overwhelmingly came from Union personnel, as most of the 1865 Confederate records were lost. This inevitably created a narrative bias. Many seminal Unionist military books appeared around the 1880s. All misrepresented key aspects of the battle, with authors disregarding the Union forces' embarrassments. Thus, in early accounts, the Battle of Hatcher's Run had a distinct presence, albeit significantly biased.<sup>404</sup>



**Grant's Memoirs (1885)**  
Nigel Lambert



**Battles and Leaders (1888)**  
Nigel Lambert

Worse was yet to come. Ex-President Grant's influential two-volume memoir (1885) simply overlooked the action. Grant stated that "the winter ... passed off quietly and uneventfully." The following year, former Confederate general Armistead L. Long's book *Memoirs of Robert E. Lee* also omitted the battle. In 1888, the totemic *Battles and Leaders of*

<sup>403</sup> Ann S. Stephens *Pictorial history of the war for the Union: a complete and reliable history of the war from its commencement to its close...together with a complete chronological analysis of the war.* 2 vols. (New York, 1862, 1866), 2:512-16. No direct sources were provided throughout the account. The overall process of creating the text was explained in the Introduction. It was republished by Anson Street Press in March 2025.

<sup>404</sup> The 12-volume, multi-author *Campaigns of the Civil War* appeared between 1881 and 1883. The final volume, written by Andrew A. Humphreys (a Union Corps commander at the battle), described the battle. Other seminal Union military books include: Swinton, *Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac*, 547-49; Walker, *History of the Second Army Corps*, 646-50; Powell, *The Fifth Army Corps*, 754-67.

*the Civil War* was published. The Hatcher's Run battle received just one sentence in a footnote!

Numerous former combatants published regimental histories and memoirs during the 50 years following the war's end. I have analyzed over 200 such books. Many gloss over the battle. I give three examples. Confederate John B. Gordon's Second Corps played a central role in the battle, with one of his division commanders dying. Yet his extensive *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (1904) ignored the battle. Similarly, Confederate Clement A. Evans's division fought intensively throughout the battle, but the event went unmentioned in his memoirs. Charles A. Frey's regiment (150th Pennsylvania) saw heavy fighting around Dabney's Mill during the battle's last two days, yet his lengthy 1886 *Recollections of Army Life* recorded little about the fighting.<sup>405</sup>



**Douglas S. Freeman**  
wikipedia.org



**Bruce Catton**  
wikipedia.org

As the war generation passed, telling the Hatcher's Run story fell to academic historians. Published between 1942 and 1944, the three-volume *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command* established Douglas S. Freeman as the preeminent US military historian of the age. This landmark book ignored the battle. Similarly, Bruce Catton, another Pulitzer Prize-winning Civil War titan, overlooked Hatcher's Run in his 1953 work, *A Stillness at Appomattox*, a book focused on the war's final months.

The centenary crop of books in the 1960s generally forgot or trivialized the fight. In his 1960 biography of Meade, acclaimed historian Freeman Cleaves fleetingly mentioned Hatcher's Run. He concluded, "This battle ... finds no conspicuous place in the chronicles of

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<sup>405</sup> Robert U. Johnson & Clarence C. Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols. (New York, 1888), 4:578; Grant, *Personal Memoirs*, 2:439; Robert G. Stephens, *Intrepid Warrior: Clement Anselm Evans, Life, Letters, And Diaries of the War Years* (Dayton, OH, 1992).

the war." Regarded by many as the best one-volume account of the war, James M. McPherson's 1988 Pulitzer Prize-winning *Battle Cry of Freedom* disregarded the battle.<sup>406</sup>

Since the 1990s, a new narrative of Hatcher's Run has emerged through landmark books by noted historians describing the Petersburg Campaign. For example: N. Andre Trudeau (1991), *The Last Citadel*, A. Wilson Greene (2008), *The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign*, Earl J. Hess (2009), *In the Trenches at Petersburg*, and Chris M. Calkins (2003), *History and Tour Guide of Five Forks, Hatcher's Run and Namozine Church*. At over 70 pages, the Hatcher's Run chapter in Bearss & Suderow's 2014 *The Petersburg Campaign* (volume 2) is the longest battle account. Mainly based on the *OR*, the book supplied a level of detail missing from the other Petersburg texts. The book's co-author, Bryce A. Suderow, described the battle as "one of the most fascinating battles of the Petersburg Campaign," while highlighting significant gaps in the narrative.<sup>407</sup>

Despite the appearance of other Petersburg books, the status of the above authors has resulted in their accounts of Hatcher's Run echoing down the years. They are less biased and describe some of the Union's failures. However, they are only summary chapters, and many details in these works are contradictory, incomplete, and inaccurate. In particular, the problematic report from Maj. Gen. Gordon, has caused much confusion.<sup>408</sup>

Numerous modern books describe individuals or regiments prominent at the battle. For example: James Robertson's 1987 *General A.P. Hill: The Story of a Confederate Warrior*, Richard Wagner's 2006 biography of General Samuel W. Crawford, *For Honor, Flag, and Family*, and Jay C. Martin's (2016) *General Henry Baxter, 7th Michigan Volunteer Infantry*. Unfortunately, these works hold few details about the battle.

By contrast, some books held valuable information from rare Confederate primary sources, which have augmented the Hatcher's Run narrative. Good examples include Robert J. Driver's (2003) *First and Second Maryland Infantry, CSA*, and John Horn's (2019) *The Petersburg Regiment in the Civil War*. The Hatcher's Run chapter in Lee W. Sherrill's (2014) *The 21st North Carolina Infantry: A Civil War History* was exceptional and challenged many aspects of the established battle narrative. Yet, somehow, Sherrill's research did not gain mainstream acceptance. One resource Sherrill exploited was the 100-volume *Supplement to the Official Records*. Created between 1994 and 2001 by Janet B. Hewett, N. Andre Trudeau, Bryce A. Suderow, and others, volume seven included valuable Confederate reports about the Hatcher's Run battle.

The internet has spawned countless online accounts, blogs, and videos featuring the Hatcher's Run battle. Most of these "posts" recycle narratives from one of the established

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<sup>406</sup> The battle received over two pages in Shelby D. Foote's 1974, *The Civil War: A Narrative*. In the 28-volume *Time Life Civil War Series*, (Alexandria, VA, 1987), five illustrated pages on the battle appear in volume 25, which unfortunately included major errors. Cleaves, *Meade of Gettysburg* (Norman, OK, 1960), 306.

<sup>407</sup> In the vast number of Civil War magazines, prior to my recent contribution, Hatcher's Run headlined in only two articles. These recycled Trudeau's and Greene's narratives. Arthur W. Bergeron, "Three-day Tussle at Hatcher's Run," *America's Civil War Magazine* (March 2003) Vol 16, No. 1, 30-37.

<sup>408</sup> These inconsistencies were addressed in Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 35-46; *OR* 46/1:390.

Petersburg historians highlighted above. Before I updated the Wikipedia page (November 2024), it was a derisory two pages of incomplete and misleading information.

On the influential online forum, “Civil War Talk,” for its 160th anniversary, the battle didn’t merit inclusion on its 2025 “Calendar of Events.” Ironically, the calendar recognizes John Brown Gordon’s birthday; Corps commander Gordon was at the heart of all Confederate actions at the battle.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1
Albert Sidney Johnston's Birthday	2 Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell's Birthday Joseph E. Johnston's Birthday	3	4	5	6 1862 Battle of Fort Henry James Ewell Brown "Jeb" Stuart's Birthday John Brown Gordon's Birthday	7 Richard Ewell's Birthday William Tecumseh Sherman's Birthday
8	9 1861 Confederate States of America is formed with Jefferson	10 1862 Battle of Fort Donelson - Starts	11 Abraham Lincoln's Birthday	12	13 Valentine's Day Winfield Scott	14
						15

### 2025 CivilWarTalk Calendar of Events Covering February 5-7

Nigel Lambert

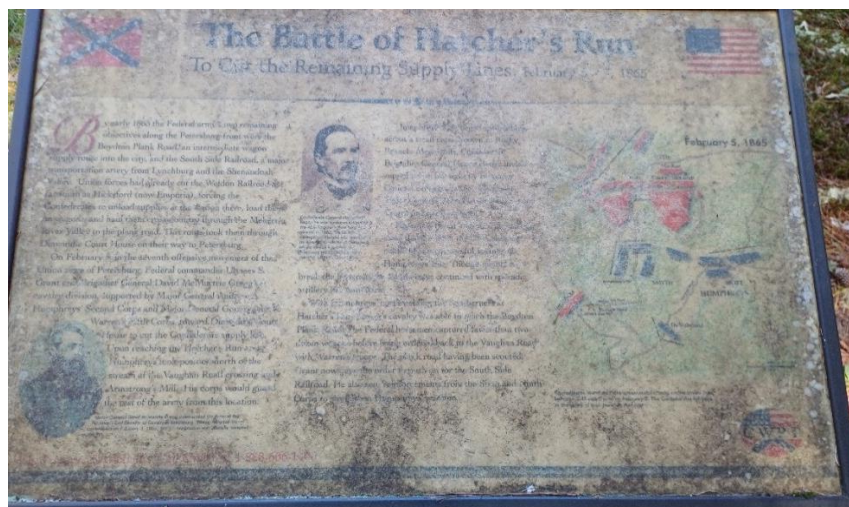
The Civil War Trust and its partners acquired nearly 400 acres of the battlefield. However, little is showcased. The Pamplin Center and Petersburg National Park Service are literally down the road from the battlefield. The two site boards at the main location next to Pegram’s memorial are virtually illegible. There are no markers at Monk’s Neck Bridge, where two Union soldiers gained Medals of Honor.<sup>409</sup>

That history has misrepresented, and in several influential works completely ignored, the battle is indisputable. It is shocking how posterity has treated the travails of nearly 60,000 soldiers during those three dramatic wintery days in February 1865. The question is “why.”

The study of how societies create historical narratives (historiography) is a substantial academic field. The Civil War story is keenly debated to this day. Postwar, combatants, often with scores to settle, sought to promote their version of the truth and contest rival narratives. In the process of creating the “established” history, there are winners and losers. As the combatant generation passed, telling the Civil War story fell to historians with their own

<sup>409</sup> The site-boards omit Confederate brigade commanders Col. John Baker and Col. John Lea. Brig. Gen. William MacRae and Brig. Gen. Robert Johnston are credited as participating when, in truth, they were absent. Some acknowledgment of the 14 Union Medal Of Honor recipients would also be helpful.

biases and social constructs. Which battles became prominent, and which generals were deemed great or hapless?



**A Worn Site Board at Pegram's Marker on the Preserved Battlefield**  
Nigel Lambert, October 2024.

Academics have identified various factors that influence why events vanish from the historical narrative. Can these help in understanding the Hatcher's Run narrative?<sup>410</sup>

Neglect is fostered if an event is absent from influential texts. Events well documented by historians, journalists, or artists are more likely to be remembered by future generations. As demonstrated above, the Hatcher's Run battle suffers in these regards.

Throughout history, preserving personal or institutional reputations has been a powerful force in creating narratives. With the Hatcher's Run battle, both sides had cause to subvert or bury embarrassing events. This applied to protecting the reputations of influential individuals and the honor of army units, such as regiments and brigades.

For the Union, the offensive was predicated on outdated intelligence and endangered over 34,000 troops on a mission to disrupt an enemy supply line that was largely abandoned. On day two, the Rebels routed a large Union force, leading to a massive breakdown in discipline and a shambolic stampede to the rear. Many panicked Union troops fired into their own men. This, in turn, exposed how Union commanders had sent many of their soldiers into combat without adequate training. On the following day, around dusk, a Union division launched a suicidal attack on a strong Rebel position with predictable consequences.

None of the above realities placed the Union command in a favorable light, and significant "reputational management" took place. Officers promoted more positive narratives. Artillery chief Col. Charles S. Wainwright accused Grant of concealing the poor performance from the public.<sup>411</sup> As commander-in-chief, Grant's reputation was particularly

<sup>410</sup> What-Is, *Why Do Some Historical Events Get Remembered While Others Are Forgotten*, Sept 9, 2024. [Why Do Some Historical Events Get Remembered While Others Are Forgotten - YouTube](#); Christopher Klein, *Eight Reasons Why We Forget Some Historical Events*, Boston Globe, Apr 26, 2015.

<sup>411</sup> Nevins, ed. *A Diary of Battle*, 497-98.

at stake. An effective way of managing negative events is to ignore them, which is what Grant did in his memoir regarding his offensive. As the former US president, Grant's account carried substantial weight in creating the accepted wisdom.

The 20th Maine found themselves caught up in the embarrassing rout on day two. The regiment had a stellar reputation, and its exploits at many battles (particularly Gettysburg) remain woven into Civil War folklore. However, by February 1865, the regiment was in poor condition, having suffered years of combat. Private Theodore Gerrish recounted in his 1882 memoir:<sup>412</sup>

I think that I will not attempt to describe that affair [fighting around Dabney's Mill]; the boys will all remember it, and there are some facts connected with that battle which we would not want everyone to know. . . We recollect it all, but for the reputation of the regiment we will not speak minutely of those things here.

This honest example of reputational management is rare but indicative of a broader trend.



**Col. Charles S. Wainwright**  
Alchetron.com



**Pvt. Theodore Gerrish**  
findagrave.com

For the Confederates, morale in many regiments was low, with desertions a huge problem. This was particularly true of Gordon's Second Corps, which had recently arrived at Petersburg from the Valley. The Rebels were ill-prepared for the Union offensive, and they failed to defend key crossings of Hatcher's Run. When the Rebels eventually threatened the Federals on day one, many of their attacks were timid and lacked proper support. As witnessed, "Lee wept like a child" at his troop's behavior.<sup>413</sup> It's easy to understand why combatants like Gordon and Lee preferred to forget the battle.

One way historical events become "forgotten" is when larger dramas of greater public interest occur around the same time. Several Civil War events suffered this fate. The victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg overshadowed the successful Tullahoma Campaign. On April

<sup>412</sup> Gerrish, *Army Life; a Private's Reminiscences*, 223-24.

<sup>413</sup> OR 46/2:499.

27, 1865, the shamefully overloaded steamship *Sultana* exploded and sank, killing 1,164 mostly paroled prisoners. It remains the worst maritime disaster in US history. The tragedy was overshadowed by events surrounding the end of the Civil War, particularly the killing of John Wilkes Booth (President Abraham Lincoln's assassin) the day before. It's only in recent years that the *Sultana* incident has attracted detailed historical attention.<sup>414</sup>

For Hatcher's Run, although occurring in the main military sector and involving the top commanders, it too was overshadowed. In early 1865, Northern interest lay with Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's army marching up through South Carolina and Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan's exploits in the Shenandoah Valley. Both had recently won stunning victories that captured the public and politicians' imagination. There were no such glorious victories around Petersburg. Southern public interest also focused on Sherman's Army and the safety of Charleston.



***Sultana* Steamboat, Helena (AK), April 26, 1865, the day before her sinking**

wikipedia.org

Some events simply don't capture the public's interest. Until recently, this was true of the Petersburg Campaign. In the mid-1970s, renowned Petersburg historian Wilson Greene described how "Petersburg had indisputably failed to capture the imagination of Americans to the degree enjoyed by Gettysburg, Antietam, Shiloh, or other major Civil War battlegrounds." Greene noted that "there existed a pervasive perception that the Petersburg "siege" was devoid of contingency, marked by endless days of stagnant, uninteresting trench warfare at the end of which Lee's demise would be inevitable." Only relatively recently have books dedicated to Petersburg appeared.<sup>415</sup> Within this unpopular campaign sits the Hatcher's Run battle, the least researched of the Petersburg battles.

<sup>414</sup> Iwan Ross, *The Sultana Disaster: America's Forgotten Maritime Tragedy and Its Haunting Legacy*, Aug 16, 2024, [The Sultana Disaster: America's Forgotten Maritime Tragedy and Its Haunting Legacy | by Iwan Ross | Medium](#).

<sup>415</sup> A. Wilson Greene, *Petersburg's Emergence from the Shadows*, June 21, 2018. UNC Press Blog, [A. Wilson Greene: Petersburg's Emergence from the Shadows - UNC Press Blog](#).

Once an event falls from the established narrative, it can be difficult to resurrect. It largely depends on a given society's openness to change and to break with the psychological comfort of the familiar. Finite attention and resources typically focus on the well-known.

The above factors help explain the troubled legacy of Hatcher's Run. The arrival of two multi-volume works covering Petersburg might hopefully fan interest in this neglected battle. It's time that the exploits of nearly 60,000 soldiers received the attention and respect they deserve.<sup>416</sup>

#### A Final Thought

On cold, wintery days, I frequently walk in my local countryside. With sturdy boots, a modern thick coat, a woolen hat, and gloves, I can reflect on the experience of the Hatcher's Run combatants. I am humbled and astonished at the young men's tribulations, enduring those harsh wintery conditions while wearing only threadbare, wet clothes and shoes with holes and no protection from the bitterly cold weather. To have eaten or slept little for 48 hours while surrounded by death and destruction and facing one's death or maiming remains a sobering and disturbing thought.

One might have thought humanity would have discovered more enlightened ways to resolve conflicts. The following 160 years sadly suggest not.

"All war is a symptom of man's failure as a thinking animal."

John Steinbeck, *"Once there was a War,"* 1958.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> A. Wilson Greene, *A Campaign of Giants* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2025); Sean M. Chick, *The Battle for Petersburg* (El Dorado Hills, CA, 2025).

<sup>417</sup> John Steinbeck, *Once There Was a War* (New York, 1958), 15.

## Order of Battle: Hatcher's Run February 5-7, 1865

This section presents the military organization of the armies fighting at the Hatcher's Run battle. The commanders of military units down to the brigade level are provided.

Confederate data are taken from Nigel Lambert "Rebel Units and their Commanders at the Battle of Hatcher's Run" parts 1-5, The Siege of Petersburg Online ([beyondthecrater.com](http://beyondthecrater.com)). Confederate units from the divisions of Maj. Gen. Bryan Grimes (Second Corps) and Maj. Gen. Cadmus Wilcox (Third Corps), that may have been in support, are **not** listed. Federal data derive from the "Organization of the Army of the Potomac, End of January 1865" (*OR* 46/2:324-333) and the official Union casualties for Hatcher's Run (*OR* 46/1:64-70).

The nomenclature for Federal officers is complicated, as many held two or more ranks, a permanent one for the Regular Army and a higher, temporary rank termed "brevet" earned during the war.<sup>418</sup> For example, in early February 1865, John Gregg held the rank of Brevet (Bvt) brigadier general, while his Regular Army rank was that of colonel. The ranks cited throughout are those used in the *OR*.

Typically, officers took some leave during the relatively quieter winter months. Hence, many unit commanders were absent from the battle. Hatcher's Run was the only Civil War battle fought in Virginia during the month of February.

Abbreviations: Bvt, Brevet; w, wounded; mw, mortally wounded; k, killed; Batt., Battery; Battn., Battalion.

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<sup>418</sup> American Civil War High Command Website, [Brevet Generals – American Civil War High Command](http://www.acwhc.com)

## CSA Forces at the Battle of Hatcher's Run

### Army of Northern Virginia – Gen. Robert E. Lee

#### SECOND CORPS – Maj. Gen. John B. Gordon

**Early's Division**<sup>419</sup> – Brig. Gen. John Pegram (k 6th), Brig. Gen. William G. Lewis

**Pegram's Brigade** – Col. John S. Hoffman (w 6th), Lt. Col. John G. Kasey  
13th VA, 31st VA, 49th VA, 52nd VA, 58th VA.

**Lewis' Brigade** – Brig. Gen. William G. Lewis  
6th NC, 21st NC, 54th NC, 57th NC

**Johnston's Brigade** – Col. John W. Lea  
5th NC, 12th NC, 20th NC, 23rd NC, 1st NC Battn. Sharpshooters.

**Gordon's Division** – Brig. Gen. Clement A. Evans

**Evans' Brigade** – Col. John H. Baker (w 6th)  
13th GA, 26th GA, 31st GA, 38th GA, 60th and 61st GA, 12th GA Battn.

**Terry's Brigade**<sup>420</sup> – Brig. Gen. William R. Terry  
2nd VA, 4th VA, 5th VA, 10th VA, 21st VA,  
23rd VA, 25th VA, 27th VA, 33rd VA,  
37th VA, 42nd VA, 44th VA, 48th VA.

**York's Brigade**<sup>421</sup> – Col. William R. Peck  
1st LA, 2nd LA, 5th LA, 6th LA, 7th LA, 8th LA,  
9th LA, 10th LA, 14th LA, 15th LA.

**Reserve Artillery:** Brig. Gen. Armistead L. Long  
6 Battalions:<sup>422</sup> Lt. Col. Carter Baxter; Maj. Wilfred Cutshaw; Lt. Col. Robert Hardaway; Lt. Col. Marmaduke Johnson; Lt. Col. Alexander Stark and the "Lightfoot Battn."

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<sup>419</sup> In the CSA, divisions and brigades were *formally* named after the last commander of sufficient rank. Thus, because John Pegram was not a Maj. Gen., the division was still named after Maj. Gen. Jubal Early, its previous commander.

<sup>420</sup> This was a consolidated brigade, made up of remnants of regiments from three older brigades: The Stonewall Brigade, Jones's Old Brigade, and Steuart's Old Brigade.

<sup>421</sup> Another consolidated brigade, it was formally named after the previous senior officer Brig. Gen. Zebulon York.

<sup>422</sup> It is unclear how many of these battalions were active at the battle.

### THIRD CORPS – Lt. Gen. A. P. Hill

**Heth's Division** – Maj. Gen. Henry Heth

**Davis' Brigade** – Brig. Gen. Joseph R. Davis  
2nd MS, 11th MS, 26th MS, 42nd MS, 1st Confed Battn.

**Cookes' Brigade** – Brig. Gen. John R. Cooke  
15th NC, 27th NC, 46th NC, 48th NC, 55th NC<sup>423</sup>.

**MacRae's Brigade**<sup>424</sup> – Col. John Lane or Lt. Col. James Adams  
11th NC, 26th NC, 44th NC, 47th NC, 52nd NC.

**McComb's Brigade**<sup>425</sup> – Brig. Gen. William McComb  
1st TN, 7th TN, 14th TN, 17th and 23rd TN, 25th and 44th TN, 63rd TN, 2nd MD Battn.

**Mahone's Division**<sup>426</sup> – Brig. Gen. Joseph Finegan

**Weisiger Brigade** – Brig. Gen. David Weisiger or Col. Virginius Groner<sup>427</sup>  
6th VA, 12th VA, 16th VA, 41st VA, 61st VA.

**Harris Brigade** – Brig. Gen. Nathaniel H. Harris  
12th MS, 16th MS, 19th MS, 48th MS.

**Sorrel's Brigade** – Brig. Gen. G. Moxley Sorrel (w 7th)  
3rd GA, 22nd GA, 48th GA, 64th GA,  
2nd GA Battn., 10th GA Battn.

**Finegan's Brigade** – Col. David Lang  
2nd FL, 5th FL, 8th FL, 9th FL, 10th FL, 11th FL<sup>428</sup>.

**Sanders' Brigade** – Col. William H. Forney  
8th AL, 9th AL, 10th AL, 11th AL, 13th AL, 14th AL.

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<sup>423</sup> The 55th NC transferred from Davis's Brigade in the days leading up to the battle. The End of Jan Inspection Report still has it listed with Davis.

<sup>424</sup> Brig. Gen. William MacRae was on-leave throughout the battle. It is not conclusive as to who commanded the brigade in his absence.

<sup>425</sup> A consolidated brigade. McComb had been promoted on Jan 20, 1865.

<sup>426</sup> Maj. Gen. William Mahone was absent ill during the battle.

<sup>427</sup> One eyewitness reported that Col. Groner was commanding at the battle, although other memoirs do not mention the absence of Weisiger.

<sup>428</sup> Since Spring 1864, two companies of Bonaud's (Georgia) Battalion were linked to the 11th FL regiment.

**Artillery:** Col. Reuben Walker

7 Battalions:<sup>429</sup> Lt. Col. John Garnett; Maj. J. Haskell; Maj. David MacIntosh; Maj. Miller Owen; Maj. William Pegram; Maj. William Poague and Lt. Col. A. Cutts.

**W.H.F. “Rooney” Lee’s Cavalry Division**<sup>430</sup> – Maj. Gen. William H. F. “Rooney” Lee

**Beale’s Brigade** – Brig. Gen. Richard L. Beale  
9th VA, 10th VA, 13th VA.

**Barringer’s Brigade** – Brig. Gen. Rufus C. Barringer  
1st NC, 2nd NC, 3rd NC, 5th NC.

**Dearing’s Brigade** – Brig. Gen. James Dearing  
8th GA, 4th NC, 16th NC Battn., Petersburg (VA) Horse Artillery<sup>431</sup> (Graham’s VA Batt.).

**Artillery:** Maj. Roger Chew  
2nd Stuart (VA) Horse Artillery, Washington (SC) Artillery.

## **US Forces at the Battle of Hatcher’s Run**

**Army of the Potomac – Maj. Gen. George G. Meade**<sup>432</sup>

**2nd CORPS – Maj. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys**

**First Division** – Bvt. Maj. Gen. Nelson A. Miles

**Fourth Brigade**<sup>433</sup> – Bvt. Brig. Gen. John Ramsey  
4th NY Heavy Art., 64th NY, 66th NY, 53rd, PA, 116th PA, 145th PA, 148th PA.

**Second Division** – Brig. Gen. Thomas A. Smyth

**First Brigade** – Col. William A. Olmstead  
19th ME, 19th MA, 20th MA, 7th MI, 1st MN (2 Cos), 59th NY, 152nd NY,  
184th PA, 36th WI.

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<sup>429</sup> It is unclear how many of these battalions were active at the battle. William Pegram was absent.

<sup>430</sup> It is unlikely that many of Barringer’s or Dearing’s troopers were present at the battle.

<sup>431</sup> The Petersburg Horse Artillery commanded by Capt. Edward Graham was mostly linked to Dearing’s Brigade, rather than under Chew’s command.

<sup>432</sup> Although the *de facto* army commander, Meade was closely supervised by Commander-in Chief, Lt. Gen. Grant

<sup>433</sup> This brigade was sent to support Maj. Gen. Mott on Feb 5, they did see action, suffering at least one casualty, although they are not listed in the official casualties.

**Second Brigade** – Col. Mathew Murphy (mw 5th), Col. James P. McIvor  
8th NY Heavy Art., 155th NY, 164th NY, 170th NY, 182nd NY<sup>434</sup>.

**Third Brigade** – Lt. Col. Francis E. Pierce  
14th CT, 1st DE, 12th NJ, 10th NY Battn. 108th NY, 4th OH (4 Cos), 69th PA,  
106th PA (3 Cos), 7th WV (4 Cos).

**Third Division** – Bvt. Maj. Gen. Gershom Mott

**First Brigade** – Brig. Gen. P. Regis de Trobriand  
20th IN, 1st ME Heavy Art., 17th ME, 40th NY, 73rd NY, 86th NY, 124th NY, 99th PA,  
110th PA, 2nd US Sharpshooters.

**Second Brigade** – Bvt. Brig. Gen. George W. West<sup>435</sup>  
1st MA Heavy Art., 5th MI, 93rd NY, 57th PA, 105th PA, 141st PA.

**Third Brigade** – Bvt. Brig. Gen. Robert J. McAllister  
11th MA, 7th NJ, 8th NJ, 11th NJ, 120th NY.

**Artillery:** Bvt. Lt. Col. John G. Hazard  
10th MA Light. Art., 4th US Batt. K.

### **5th CORPS – Maj. Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren**

**First Division** – Bvt. Maj. Gen. Charles Griffin

**First Brigade** – Bvt. Brig. Gen. Horatio G. Sickel (w 6th), Col. Edwin Jenney  
185th NY, 198th PA.

**Second Brigade** – Col. Allen L. Burr<sup>436</sup>  
187th NY Battn., 188th NY Battn., 189th NY.

**Third Brigade** – Bvt. Brig. Gen. Alfred L. Pearson<sup>437</sup>  
20th ME, 32nd MA, 1st MI, 16th MI, 83rd PA (6 Cos), 91st PA, 118th PA,  
155th PA.

**Second Division** – Bvt. Maj. Gen. Romeyn B. Ayres

**First Brigade** – Bvt. Brig. Gen. Frederick Winthrop  
5th NY, 15th NY Heavy Art., 140th NY, 146th NY.

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<sup>434</sup> This unit was still referred to by its former name, the 69th NY State National Guard Artillery.

<sup>435</sup> West was temporarily in command from Brig. Gen. Byron R. Pierce.

<sup>436</sup> Burr was temporarily in command from Bvt. Brig. Gen. Edgar M. Gregory.

<sup>437</sup> Pearson was temporarily in command from Brig. Gen. Joseph J. Bartlett.

**Second Brigade** – Col. Richard N. Bowerman<sup>438</sup>  
1st MD, 4th MD 7th MD, 8th MD.

**Third Brigade** – Bvt. Brig. Gen. James Gwyn  
3rd DE, 4th DE, 157th PA (4 Cos) 190th PA, 191st PA,<sup>439</sup> 210th PA.

**Third Division** – Bvt. Maj. Gen. Samuel W. Crawford

**First Brigade** – Brig. Gen. Edward S. Bragg  
24th MI, 143rd PA, 149th PA, 150th PA, 6th WI, 7th WI.

**Second Brigade** – Brig. Gen. Henry Baxter  
16th ME, 39th MA, 97th NY, 11th PA, 88th PA.

**Third Brigade** – Bvt. Brig. Gen. Henry A. Morrow<sup>440</sup> (w 6th), Col. Thomas F. McCoy  
94th NY, 95th NY, 147th NY, 56th PA, 107th PA, 121st PA, 142nd PA.

**Artillery:** Maj. Robert H. Fitzhugh  
9th MA Light Art., 1st NY Light Art. Batt. D, 1st NY Light Art. Batt. L.

**6th CORPS** – Bvt. Maj. Gen. George W. Getty<sup>441</sup>

**First Division** – Bvt. Maj. Gen. Frank Wheaton

**First Brigade** – Lt. Col. Edward L. Campbell  
1st NJ (3 Cos), 2nd NJ (1 Co), 3rd NJ (1 Co)<sup>442</sup>, 4th NJ, 10th NJ, 15th NJ, 40th NJ.

**Second Brigade** – Col. James Hubbard<sup>443</sup>  
2nd CT Heavy Art., 65th NY, 121st NY, 95th PA.

**Third Brigade** – Bvt. Brig. Gen. Joseph E. Hamblin  
37th MA, 49th PA, 82nd PA, 119th PA, 2nd RI (6 Cos), 5th WI.

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<sup>438</sup> Bowerman was temporarily in command from Bvt. Brig. Gen. Andrew W. Denison.

<sup>439</sup> By Feb, 1865, the 191st PA had merged with the 190th PA, although official records still cited them individually.

<sup>440</sup> Morrow was temporarily in command from Bvt. Brig. Gen. J. William Hofmann.

<sup>441</sup> Getty was temporarily in command from Maj. Gen. Horatio G. Wright.

<sup>442</sup> Although listed as discrete units in the official casualties, it is unlikely that one company would have retained independent command.

<sup>443</sup> Hubbard was temporarily in command from Brig. Gen. Ranald S. Mackenzie.

**9th CORPS** – Bvt. Maj. Gen. John G. Parke

**Third Division** – Brig. Gen. John F. Hartranft.

**First Brigade** – Col. Charles W. Diven  
200th PA, 208th PA, 209th PA.

**Second Brigade** – Col. Joseph A. Mathews  
205th PA, 207th PA, 211th PA

**Second Cavalry Division** – Bvt. Maj. Gen. David McM. Gregg

**First Brigade** – Brig. Gen. Henry E. Davies (w 6th); Col. Hugh H. Janeway (w 6th); Col. M. Henry Avery  
1st MA, 1st NJ, 10th NY, 24th NY, 1st PA (5 Cos), 2nd US Art. Batt. A.

**Second Brigade** – Bvt. Brig. Gen. John I. Gregg (w 6th); Col. Michael Kerwin  
2nd PA, 4th PA, 8th PA, 13th PA, 16th PA, 1st US Art. Batts. H & I.

**Third Brigade** – Col. Oliver B. Knowles<sup>444</sup>  
1st ME, 2nd NY Mounted Rifles, 6th OH, 13th OH, 21st PA.

**Unattached Units**

MN Sharpshooters, 2nd Company - The *OR* lists their battle casualties with Smyth's Division, 2nd Corps.

3rd PA Cavalry Battn. - Accompanied 2nd Corps on Feb 5. The *OR* lists their battle casualties with Smyth's Division, 2nd Corps.

104th NY Infantry - Worked with the 5th Corps Provost Guard, and is listed in the *OR* battle casualty data.

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<sup>444</sup> Knowles was temporarily in command from Bvt. Brig. Gen. Charles Smith.

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