

## Preface

### Curious Bedfellows

The reason I, a semi-retired UK scientist, wrote a scholarly eBook 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 eBook (v2, 12.12.25) 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 eBook 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

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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.

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 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 one must recognize. 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 you can't prove anything; you can only disprove claims. Within this paradigm, my view is that, whether in 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

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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](#).

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.

#### Co-creation

I did not create this eBook in isolation. I have been fortunate to receive support from many well-respected Civil War experts. Some have generously provided reviews of the eBook. I continually refined my narrative based on their input and discussions. Early drafts were reviewed by a panel that included experts and armchair enthusiasts. 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 eBook, 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.

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<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.

## 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 articles, [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/2015/02/05/rebel-units-and-their-commanders-at-the-battle-of-hatcher-s-run-february-5-7-1865/). 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.