

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.

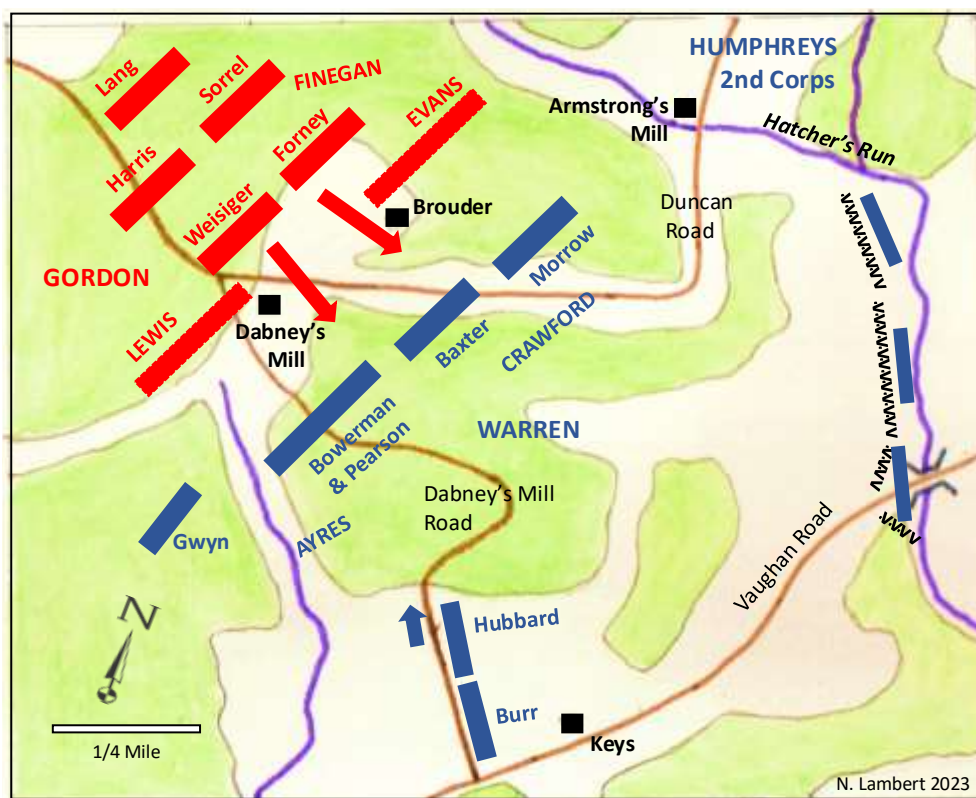
Affectionately called “Old Barney” by his soldiers, the mounted Finegan led his men marching at the double-quick down Dabney’s Mill Road. Finegan commanded Mahone’s Division of 4,900 battle-hardened veterans. It comprised five brigades: Brig. Gen. Harris’s Mississippi Brigade (670 men); Col. Forney’s 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.¹

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

¹ 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.

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."



Map 12.1: Finegan's Force Arrives at Dabney's Mill, Around 5:00 p.m., February 6.

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 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.²

² 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.

Overview of the Following 90 Minutes

The word “pandemonium” best summarizes what followed. With darkness descending (sunset was around 5:40 p.m.),³ the densely wooded terrain and smoke from musket and cannon fire made visibility terrible.

The Union position consisted of Morrow’s brigade, Crawford’s division, on the right flank. Baxter’s brigade, Crawford’s division, occupied the center, with Bowerman’s brigade, Ayres’s division, supported by Pearson’s brigade, Griffin’s division, on the left. 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 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.

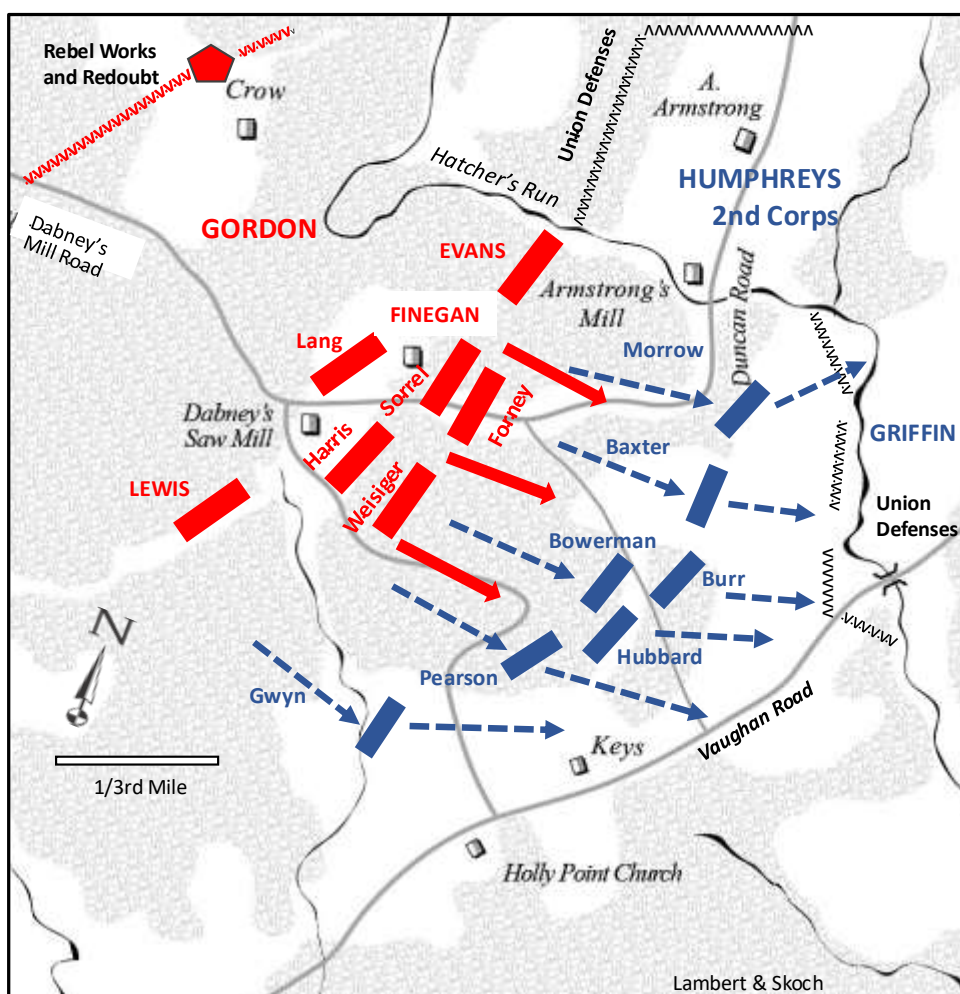
The jubilant Confederates chased the terrified Yankees, who headed for the sanctuary of Vaughan Road or their works along Hatcher’s Run. Division commander Ayres tried to rally the routed Yankees on some ridges in open ground in front of the Union breastworks. His efforts proved futile. Finegan aggressively executed his attacks. His elite soldiers⁴ 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.

³ Visibility for active military operations ended around 6.40 p.m. Boatner, *Cassell’s Biographical Dictionary*, 819-21.

⁴ By Jan 1865, Mahone’s Division was regarded as among the best troops within the ANV, Freeman, *Lee’s Lieutenants*, 3:553,556.

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.⁵



Map 12.2: The Union Skedaddle, 5:30 p.m., February 6

⁵ 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.

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.⁶



Brig. Gen. Joseph Finegan
Library of Congress



Brig. Gen. Henry A. Morrow
nps.gov

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.⁷

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

⁶ *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.

⁷ *OR* 46/1:152.

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.

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.

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.⁸

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."⁹

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

⁸ 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 Virginius 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.

⁹ Griffin, *The 11th Alabama*, 219; Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 37.

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.¹⁰



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”!¹¹

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

¹⁰ Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 359; Todd, “Reminiscences,” 281-82.

¹¹ 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..

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 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.¹²

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.”¹³

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.¹⁴

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

¹² Picayune, “Harris’ Mississippi Brigade at the Siege of Peterburg and Appomattox” *New Orleans [LA] Times*, September 15, 1902; Cozzens, *Battles & Leaders*, 535.

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷

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.¹⁸

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:

¹⁵ Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 38.

¹⁶ *OR* 46/1:392.

¹⁷ Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 415.

¹⁸ *ORS* 7:807.

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."¹⁹

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. Authors frequently described how they retreated to Union breastworks either because of a lack of ammunition, other units falling back, or other Federal troops shooting at them. Despite this trend, the stories below add important details to the narrative.

On the far right of the Union line, Morrow's brigade, Crawford's division, 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.²⁰

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

¹⁹ 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.

²⁰ 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.

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.²¹

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 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



A Wounded Major Coey Tries to Rally His Soldiers
Deeds of Valor

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.²²

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

²¹ Greenleaf, *Letters to Eliza*, 155; Roe, *The 39th Regiment*, 272-73.

²² 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.

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.²³

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 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.²⁴



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.

²³ 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.

²⁴ Carisio, *A Quaker Officer*, 130-31. I have found no other memoir from Gwyn's brigade describing this engagement.

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.²⁵

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. “It became impossible for the regiments of the third Brigade [Pearson] to maintain their order, and utter confusion resulted.”²⁶

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

²⁵ 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, [Civil War Diaries](http://civilwar.com).

²⁶ Crawford, *The 16th Michigan Infantry*, 291-92.

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 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.²⁷

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,

²⁷ 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).

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.²⁸

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

²⁸ 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.²⁹

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.³⁰

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

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ *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.

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.



Col. Allen L. Burr
Mathew Brady



Robert Tilney
My Life in the Army

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 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.

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.³¹

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. For many, that day represented their first taste of combat. 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.

³¹ 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.