

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.

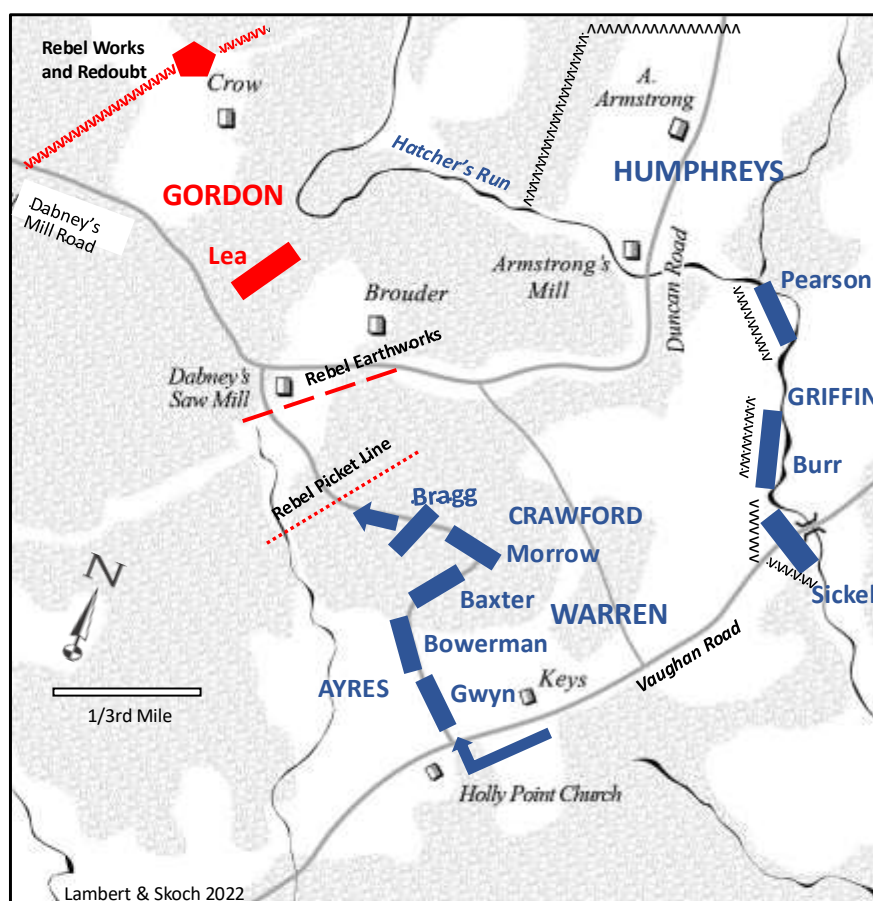
Hardly had Warren turned onto the mill road when he heard heavy firing further along Vaughan Road. A courier informed Warren that Winthrop and D. Gregg were heavily engaged and required support. Crucially, Winthrop's brigade could not join their divisional comrades (Ayres) as planned. To compensate for 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.¹

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

¹ *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.

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.



Map 10.1: Dabney's Mill Road Around 2:00 p.m., February 6.

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 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.²

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. 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.³

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 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

² 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).

³ Margery Greenleaf, ed., *Letters to Eliza: From a Union Soldier, 1862-1865* (Chicago, 1970), 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.

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.”⁴



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.

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.

⁴ *ORS*, 7:711-13, Gottlieb Torke to Elizabeth Torke, February 9, 1865, Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin.

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.⁵



Statue of Sallie at the Foot of the 11th Pennsylvania Monument at Gettysburg

wikipedia.org

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 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.⁶

⁵Several 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.

⁶ ORS 7:806; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 414.

“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.⁷



Fighting Around Dabney’s Mill

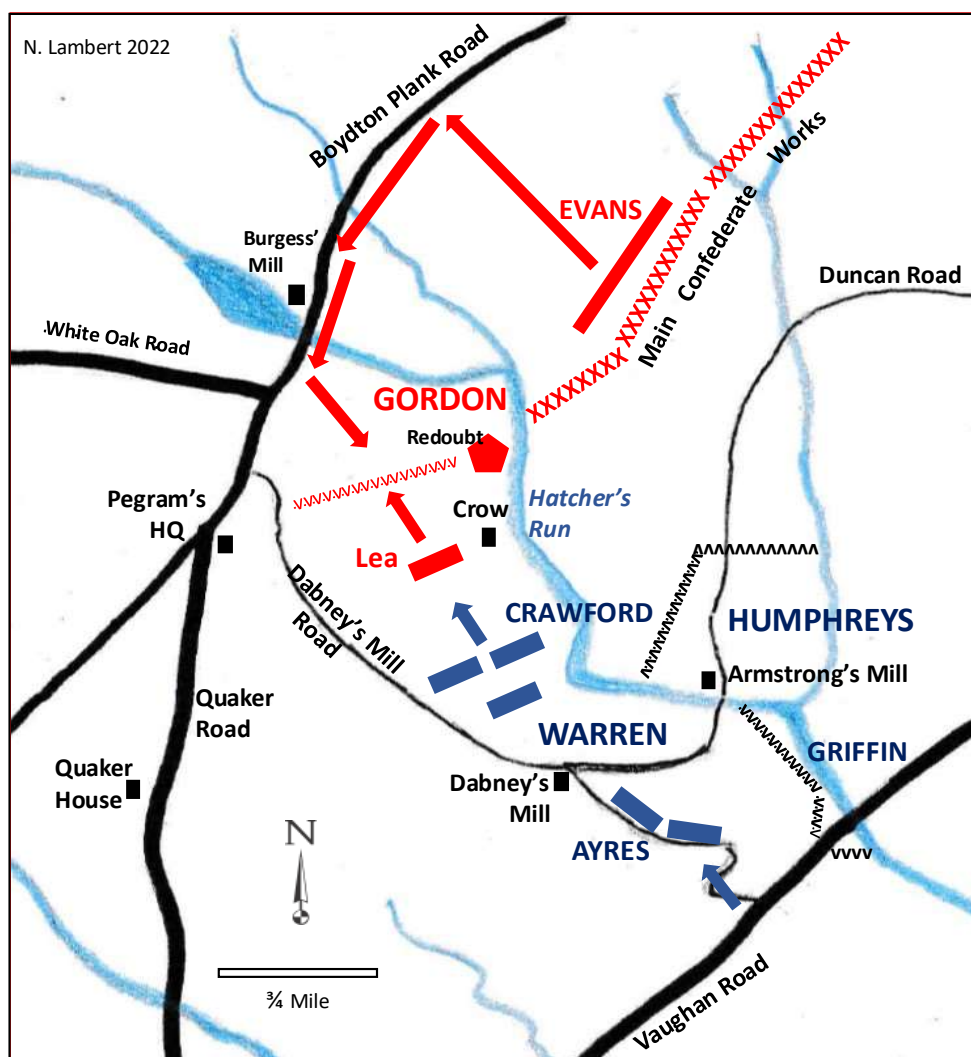
Although the image depicts an engagement in the same area during October 1864, it illustrates the terrain and the type of combat involved. Henry M. Kieffer, *The Recollections of a Drummer-Boy* (1889), page 229. Colorization by Andreas Holmström.

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

⁷ Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray*, 35; Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 358; Waters & Edmonds, *A Small but Spartan Band*, 171-72; ORS 7:717.

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 Boynton 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.⁸



Map 10.2: Arrival of Evans's Confederates at the Crow Defenses Around 3:00 p.m.

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

⁸ 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.

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.⁹

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 rear. Colonel Baker was wounded. Here General Gordon met and rallied it, made the second charge, and routed the Yankees badly.¹⁰

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. The number of Bragg's men who fled the battlefield is unknown. The 107th Pennsylvania commander, Col. Thomas F. McCoy, Morrow's brigade, 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

⁹ 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.

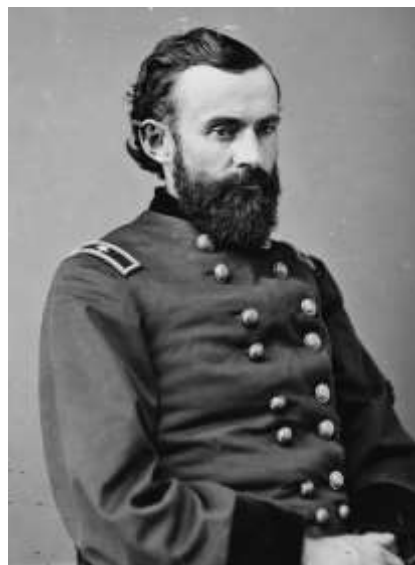
¹⁰ Johnson, *Under the Southern Cross*, 222; Nichols, *A Soldier's Story of his Regiment*, 211. Col. Baker only received a slight wound and soon returned to duty. However, his war ended with a serious wound on Mar 25. The 38th Georgia in Baker's brigade, started the month with 250 men, they suffered 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.

(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."

Several memoirs mention the routing of some or all of Bragg's troops, and they rarely feature in descriptions of the subsequent fighting that afternoon. However, snippets of testimony from within Bragg's brigade suggest that while Crawford ordered some from Bragg's left to the rear to act as provost guards to prevent stragglers, those on the right protected Crawford's right flank until after 5.00 p.m. Lieutenant Henry C. Matrau, 6th Wisconsin, described how his regiment, which included 400 raw recruits, continually advanced and retreated for much of the afternoon. They suffered heavy losses because they were in an open field while the Rebels were in thick woods. Around 4.30 p.m., the line to their left broke in disorder. His regiment remained calm and fired until out of ammunition, when it retreated to the Union lines along Hatcher's Run. The fate of Bragg's brigade during the chaotic fighting during the afternoon of February 6 remains unclear. It is possible that some of Bragg's regiments joined Morrow's troops on the Union right.¹¹



Brig. Gen. Henry Baxter
Library of Congress



Brig. Gen. Edward S. Bragg
Library of Congress

¹¹ 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.

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.

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.¹²

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."¹³

¹² 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.

¹³ OR 46/1:392; "Battle of Hatcher's Run," *Atlanta [GA] Weekly Intelligencer*, April 12, 1865.

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 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.¹⁴

Ayres Joins the Fight

With Crawford's left 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

¹⁴ 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.

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 in a field near the Brouder house covering the road to Armstrong’s Mill, Ayres and his men went into line on Crawford’s 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.¹⁵

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. 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.

¹⁵ 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.

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.¹⁶

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.¹⁷

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 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.

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ 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.

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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

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.

¹⁸ This is a standard qualitative approach to maximize outcome credibility and validity. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," 27-40.

¹⁹ Richard Wagner, *For Honor, Flag, and Family* (Shippensburg, PA, 2006), 226; Reid-Green ed., *Letters Home*, 108; Marten, *The Sixth Wisconsin*, 157-61.