

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.¹

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.²

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.

¹ 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.

² 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.

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.



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



Maj. Gen. Henry Heth
Wikipedia.org

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 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.³

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.

³ 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.

Consequently, they placed the brigade in line *behind* Cooke's and McComb's men.⁴

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 having only 450 men; it was a brigade in name only.⁵ Many modern accounts mistakenly claimed that Col. John Lowe and not Baker commanded the Georgia Brigade at the Hatcher's Run battle.⁶

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

⁴ 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.

⁵ *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.

⁶ 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.

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.⁷

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 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."⁸

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.⁹

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.

⁷ Ed Gleeson, *Erin Go Gray* (Cincinnati, OH, 1998), 34; Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 357.

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

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.¹⁰

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 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.¹¹

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.

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

¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ 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.

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.¹²



Cpl. Edson DeWolf Bemis
(head wound displayed)

US National Museum of Health and Medicine



Dr. Albert Vander Veer
albanyinstitute.org

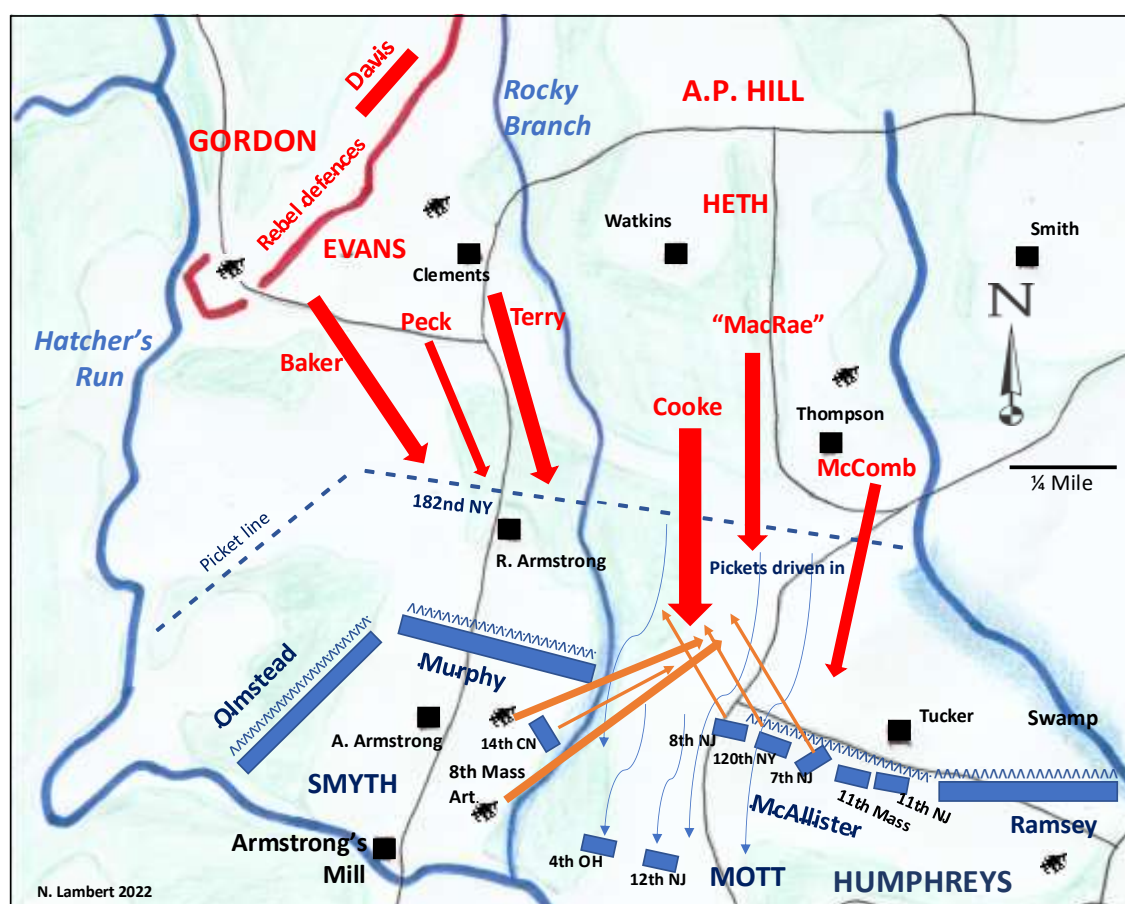
The Rebels Attack East of Rocky Branch

Pandemonium reigned along McAllister's 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."¹³

¹² 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. [Albert Vander Veer - Wikipedia](#).

¹³ OR 46/1:238-39, 244-45.

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 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.¹⁴



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

McAllister's claims were probably hyperbole; others reported that these regiments held their ground to an extent. They suffered seven casualties, indicating that they

¹⁴ OR 46/1:238-39; McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 582-83.

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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

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."¹⁷

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.

¹⁵ Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond*, 265; Seville, *History of the 1st Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 135; OR 46/1:236.

¹⁶ OR 46/1:238-39, 247-48.

¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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."¹⁹



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

¹⁸ OR 46/1:212-13; Billings, *History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 387. McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 582-83.

¹⁹ 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.

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 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.²⁰

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.²¹

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?

²⁰ 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).

²¹ Venner, *The 11th North Carolina*, 196-97; Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels*, 284; Chapman, *More Terrible Than Victory*, 272-73.

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.²²

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 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.²³

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.²⁴

²² *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.

²³ *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).

²⁴ *OR* 46/1:214-20.

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.²⁵



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



Author, in Front of the Clements House
David Lambert 2024

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

²⁵ *OR* 46/1:392.

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.”²⁶ 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 Confederate testimony is needed.²⁷

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

²⁶ 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.

²⁷ 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.