

Chapter 15

A Final Fight Over Familiar Terrain

Tuesday, February 7, 10:30 a.m. - Wednesday, February 8, 1:00 a.m.

The overnight wintery storms showed no signs of abating. Despite grim weather hampering offensive operations, the Union army began moving into action following Warren's 10:00 a.m. circular. Two separate actions occurred during the day: a relatively minor cavalry skirmish and a more extensive infantry engagement. I describe these in turn.

Cavalry on the Move

At 10:45 a.m., Warren ordered David Gregg to withdraw two of his cavalry brigades (Davies and Knowles) to Rowanty Post Office, a position viewed "as the most suitable for . . . watching the Halifax road and the road to W. Perkins." With the wounding of Brig. Gen. Davies and Col. Janeway, during the previous day, Col. Avery now commanded Davies' brigade. The two brigades departed at 1:00 p.m. By dusk of February 7, Gregg reported they had reached the Halifax Road / Wyatt Road junction, with one regiment near Rowanty Post Office picketing toward Monk's Neck Bridge and Ream's Station. At 5:50 p.m., these pickets reported that a Rebel infantry brigade had marched down Rowanty Creek on the southwest side. "Their pickets hold one side of the creek, and mine the other; they show no disposition to attack."¹

Meanwhile, David Gregg's other brigade (now commanded by Col. Kerwin following the wounding of Brig. Gen. John Gregg) received orders at 2:15 p.m. to send a small force down Vaughan Road and, if possible, push any Rebels back across Gravelly Run. If the Confederates appeared in strength, his troopers should fall back and not engage. The lead regiment, 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry, reached within half a mile of Gravelly Run before encountering enemy opposition. The regimental commander, Col. Samuel B. Young, explained how his troopers charged and quickly pushed the Rebels (presumably Beale's dismounted cavalymen) across the stream into their rifle pits on the other side. Two Confederate cannons opened fire, and the Federals withdrew without losing a man or horse. Young reported that the Rebels "appear to have one brigade of cavalry beyond the creek,"

¹ *OR* 46/1:366, 371; *OR* 46/2:464-65. Davies returned home to New York for convalescence (*OR* 46/2:449). It is unclear which Rebel infantry brigade was observed at Rowanty Creek, or whether it was a smaller force.

supporting the view that only Richard Beale's cavalry brigade participated in the battle. A squadron of dismounted Confederate cavalry followed the Yankees back to the point where the Federals had attacked their pickets. However, when the Union troopers turned and faced the dismounted Confederates, the Rebels retreated and crossed back over Gravelly Run.²

George Beale, 9th Virginia Cavalry, a lieutenant in his father's Rebel cavalry brigade, described some of this skirmishing. "My company was in advance, and we moved forward, feeling that the blinding snow would prevent our seeing the enemy until within a few feet of them." As they descended into a small valley, sheltered from the wind, they observed some mounted Union pickets who quickly dashed off and became hidden from view in the falling snow. Near the brow of the hill, they saw Yankees emerging from a grove of pines and deploying a skirmish line across a field. Beale remembered, "The snow had . . . ceased falling and we could see better. We pushed on rapidly to the ridge of the field, while the enemy's skirmishers galloped off." About a hundred yards ahead, Beale's men faced a long line of Federal entrenchments, from which came a rifle volley that struck several of Beale's soldiers and horses. As Beale recalled, "A bullet passed through . . . Ham Bispham and another through Jesse Gouldman, both at my side. One gashed my right leg, and from another, Major Pratt's horse fell beneath him."

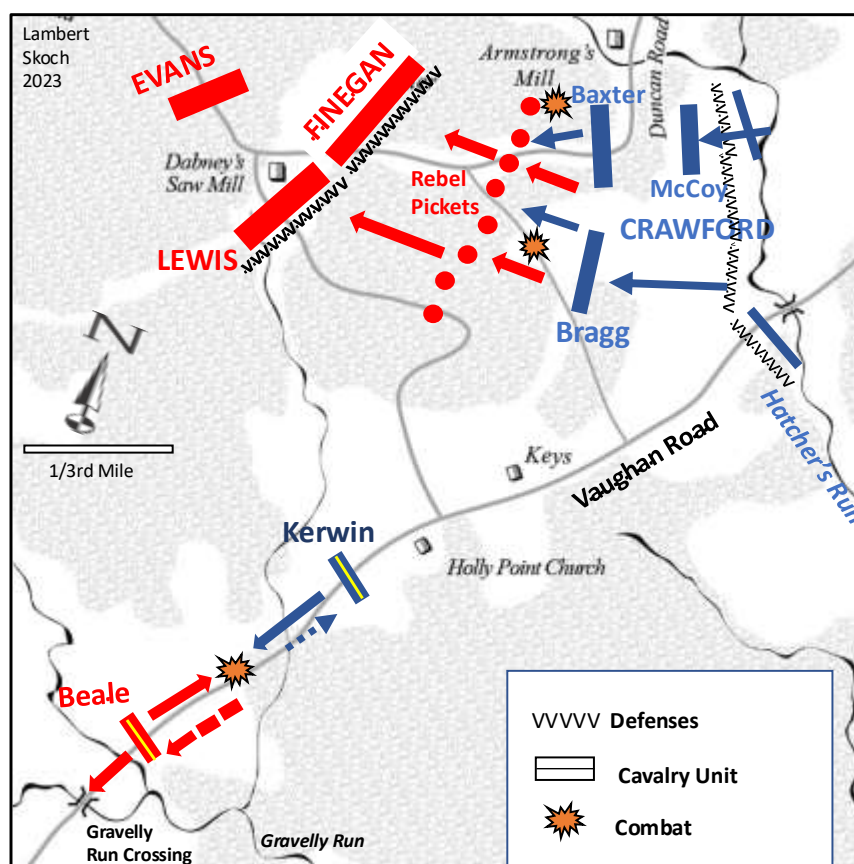
Beale rode back and found cavalry division commander Rooney Lee and staff at the edge of some pines. The general expressed his regrets at Beale's wounding, which the division surgeon, Dr. James S. Gilliam, quickly dressed. Beale made his way to the field hospital (a small, vacant house near the road) and lay down on a blanket spread on the floor, with Bispham on his left and Gouldman on his right. He asked the surgeon about Bispham's wound and learned he had died and that Gouldman was also likely to "follow his dead comrade." Beale remained in the room, and while the attendants went to find wood for fires, he heard a courier ride to the door and gave an order to the surgeon to put the wounded men in ambulances and move them farther to the rear.³

² OR 46/2 465-66; OR 46/1:368-69. The Rebel artillery were two Whitworth guns belonging to Capt. William M. McGregor's Artillery Battalion, which was part of Maj. Roger P. Chew's Horse Artillery associated with Rooney Lee's cavalry division.

³ Beale, *A Lieutenant of Cavalry in Lee's Army*, 198-199. Beale's memoir described in detail his harrowing journey to the hospital and his experiences there. Although making a full recovery, his war was over.

Return to Dabney's Mill

As ordered, from 10:30 a.m. Crawford's division began moving out of the Federal breastworks southeast of Armstrong Mill to seize the enemy's advanced rifle pits and push out a skirmish line toward Dabney's Mill. Essentially, they aimed to reoccupy the previous evening's battlefield from which the Rebels had routed them. Chilling sleet would persist throughout the day.



Map 15.1: Federals Push Back Confederate Pickets, 11 a.m. – 4 p.m. February 7.

Brigadier General Baxter's brigade led the Federals out, the brigades of Brig. Gen. Bragg and Col. McCoy (who had replaced the wounded Morrow) followed in support. Baxter deployed two lines of skirmishers, the 39th Massachusetts in front of the 11th Pennsylvania. Behind these, in battle line, came the 16th Maine, 97th New York, and 88th Pennsylvania. Lieutenant Fowle, 39th Massachusetts, wrote home, "Our regiment deployed as skirmishers and opened the ball. We soon found Mr. Johnny [the Rebels]. We drove them out of their rifle pits. Some who did not run were taken prisoner." Baxter reported how his skirmish line

moved forward and met the enemy's pickets, pressing them steadily back, with his line of battle closely following.⁴

One of Baxter's soldiers, Isaac Hall, 97th New York, remembered that "the men's hands became so benumbed that it was difficult for them to handle their pieces [rifles]." Another with Baxter's brigade, Chaplain Locke, remembered, "at the moment of marching out into comparatively open ground, as though possessed with the thought of testing the strength of our works . . . a line of the enemy's skirmishers was seen issuing from behind temporary works, and moving toward us." The contest between the skirmishers was short and decisive, as the Federals drove back the Rebels from their first line of defenses.⁵

The Confederate pickets came from the brigades of Brig. Gen. Harris and Brig. Gen. Sorrel, both part of Finegan's force. Harris recounted how the Yankees (presumably Baxter's men) pressed his advanced pickets early in the morning (February 7), driving them back. Sergeant William B. Judkins, 22nd Georgia, with Sorrel's brigade, remembered how one man froze to death on picket duty while the enemy killed another on outpost duty. Judkins recalled looking at Sorrel standing exposed on top of a breastwork when a Union sharpshooter shot the general.⁶

Sorrel relayed the event in his memoir. "Early next morning the enemy, driving back my pickets, got too close to us, and a rifleman put a bullet through my right lung, smashing the ribs front and rear. I was down this time for good." His breath gushing through the bullet holes, the surgeon, Dr. Wood, plastered up the holes and sent him to the rear. The roads being frozen and rough, some of his soldiers bore him on their shoulders by litter eight miles to a small shanty. While passing Rebels on the route, they asked, "who have you there?"

"General Sorrel"

"Is he badly hurt?"

"Yes, mortally wounded."

⁴ OR 46/2:458-59; OR 46/1:290; OR 51/1:286-88, 290-292, 415; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 377-78; Greenleaf, *Letters to Elisa*, 155-56. Two Wisconsin accounts claimed that Bragg's brigade was on the right, ORS 7:711-13; Civil War Dairy of Charles H. Walker, 1861-65, February 7, 1865, University of Wisconsin Libraries, Madison, WI.

⁵ Isaac Hall, *History of the 97th Regiment, New York Volunteers: ("Conkling Rifles,") in the War for the Union* (New York, 1890), 240; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 377-78.

⁶ ORS 7:717-18; Judkins Memoir, 88-89.

Some newspapers also reported that he had perished. However, Sorrel soon reached comfortable quarters near Petersburg. He started his recovery under the care of his brigade surgeon, Dr. Sampson Pope.⁷

McCoy's brigade received orders to occupy and strengthen the rifle pits captured by Baxter's men. Rebel artillery shelled them as they did so, and snipers hiding in the undergrowth near Hatcher's Run fired upon them. With his right flank threatened, McCoy sent out skirmishers, but the Rebels quickly drove them back. He reported his plight to Crawford, and some of Bragg's brigade, commanded by Bragg himself, went to his aid and helped to secure McCoy's flank. Around noon, Crawford ordered McCoy to send a regiment to support Baxter's advancing line. McCoy selected the 56th Pennsylvania.⁸



Maj. Gen. Samuel W. Crawford
Library of Congress



Lt. Col. Albert M. Edwards
oocities.org

At 10:50 a.m., Meade informed Grant about the current situation and raised options for the newly acquired Hatcher's Run line. Should he hold or relinquish it? Grant quickly replied (11:30 a.m.), instructing Meade to permanently hold the Hatcher's Run line from Armstrong's Mill and fortify as he thought fit. Given the weather, Grant felt the troops should remain in those positions, and Warren should make no further attack unless it promised significant advantages. At 12:20 p.m., Warren informed Meade's office that Crawford had

⁷ Sorrel *Recollections of a Confederate Staff Officer*, 179; *The Buffalo* [NY] *Commercial*, February 11, page 1, 1865.

⁸ *OR* 46/1:290, 295-96; *OR* 51/1:294-95; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 377; Greenleaf, *Letters to Eliza*, 155-56. There are, sadly, no *OR* accounts from Bragg or any of his regimental commanders.

carried the enemy's rifle pits near Armstrong's Mill and was pushing his skirmish line out toward the Rebels' main battle line near Dabney's Mill.

Ten minutes later, Warren received orders from Meade saying, "In view of the weather and of instructions from the lieutenant-general [Grant] commanding, it is not advisable to make any attack to-day, unless you are satisfied that . . . great advantages will be gained." Warren also learned that Meade would withdraw his force across Hatcher's Run either that night or the following day. At 1:15 p.m., Warren informed 2nd Corps commander Humphreys of Crawford's progress and asked for artillery support to counter the Rebel artillery fire coming from the north side of Hatcher's Run and to shell the Rebels blocking Crawford's advance. Humphreys passed on the request to Brig. Gen. Smyth for action. Despite Meade's orders, Warren advanced his troops throughout the afternoon, slowly pushing the Confederate pickets back towards Dabney's Mill. They eventually overran three lines of Rebel rifle pits. Wisconsin soldiers with Bragg's brigade recalled how they drove the Confederates back, built earthworks, and then advanced again, constructing more works.⁹

The 24th Michigan, Lt. Col. Albert M. Edwards commanding, with Bragg's brigade, plunged once more into the woods. It received a severe hail of Confederate musketry and artillery fire, splintering the trees, adding their huge slivers to the hot metal flying through the air. A regimental account described how "a solid shot passed under Sergeant Augustus Pomeroy, which stunned him and covered him with mud. The same shot ricocheting, killed Sergeant George H. Canfield and George Wallace . . . wounded Sergeant Walter Morley . . . and took a leg off John Danbert."

Familiar with the terrain after their previous day's encounters, the regiment moved forward cautiously, determined to keep their left flank secure. A slow, sustained advance ensued, accompanied by constant skirmishing. Lieutenant Colonel Edwards noticed that his troops on the right had stopped firing. He went to investigate and found them helping comrades from the 7th Wisconsin who were burying their pet dog, which a Minié ball had just slain. Known and loved throughout the brigade, the soldiers gave their small mongrel friend a hasty but honorable burial despite the ongoing firing. Hence, the famed Sallie was not the only dog killed at the battle.

Private Vautier, 88th Pennsylvania, Baxter's brigade, remembered how "The line pushed through the woods and bogs, the rain freezing as it fell and coating everything – trees,

⁹ OR 46/2:447-48, 452-53, 455; Roe, *The 39th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers*, 273-74; ORS 7:711-13; Walker diary, Feb 7.

brush, soldiers, and ground – with a sheet of ice. The men were chilled to the bone, but there was no help for it, so the line painfully and slowly swept on.” The Federals slowly drove the Rebels back to their works.¹⁰

As they progressed, the Yankees retrieved their dead and wounded from the previous day. A 149th Pennsylvania (Bragg’s brigade) history noted how Crawford sent his troops forward again, driving the Rebels to their main defenses near Dabney’s Mill. The account described how “the men moved in open order rather than line of battle. The fight took on the character of deployed skirmish lines, firing while moving in advance or retreat.” Bragg’s brigade held the left flank. John Nesbitt recalled, “We advanced again . . . driving the rebel picket line from its rifle pits. The brigade formed line and built breastworks.”

At about 1:00 p.m., advancing with the 39th Massachusetts, Baxter’s brigade, Lt. George Fowle took a bullet in his right thigh. About four inches separated where the bullet entered from where it came out through the fleshy part, luckily avoiding all bones. Two of his comrades carried him off the field, and he took an ambulance to the divisional hospital about two miles in the rear. Although not a severe wound, it ended his fighting days.



Brig. Gen. G. Moxley Sorrel
Library of Congress



Brig. Gen. Nathaniel Harris
Library of Congress

¹⁰ Donald Smith, *The 24th Michigan of the Iron Brigade* (Harrisburg, PA, 1962), 240-41; Curtis, *History of the 24th Michigan*, 291-92; Vautier, *History of the 88th Pennsylvania*, 206.

Despite Meade's earlier order, at 3:45 p.m., Warren ordered Crawford to "drive the enemy just as far as you can in the daylight that is left you." Shortly afterward, Lt. Col. John P. Spofford, the 97th New York commander, was wounded during the fighting.¹¹

Meanwhile, Confederate Brig. Gen. Harris, commanding his Mississippi Brigade, recalled that the fighting became more intense around noon. He ordered Lt. Col. Thomas Manlove, 12th Mississippi, to the front to take charge of the skirmishers and hold the line at all hazards. From 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., Manlove achieved this feat despite fighting against superior numbers. However, the Yankees pushed back Sorrel's Georgia Brigade, exposing Manlove's left flank. The Federals tried to surround the Mississippians, who withstood the threat for a while. Nearly cut off, the force was only saved by the courageous actions of Manlove. Manlove received a severe wound, and the Federals, probably the 39th Massachusetts, Baxter's brigade, captured him.¹²

By 5:00 p.m., the Unionists had pushed back the Confederates to their newly constructed earthworks around Dabney's Mill. Soldiers from Finegan's and Pegram's (now commanded by Brig. Gen. Lewis) divisions, supported by artillery, defended these works. The Rebel artillery was Maj. William Owens' Battalion and Col. Willie Pegram's Battalion, which belonged to A. P. Hill's Third Corps. The Confederates also had Evans's division in reserve. The Federals faced the Rebel line some 300 yards away. Lieutenant Colonel Stewart with Weisiger's Brigade remembered how his men had stood up all day, shivering over feeble fires like martyrs waiting for the enemy's attack.¹³

One Final Assault

At 5:22 p.m., Meade updated Grant, saying that Warren "had recovered most of the ground he occupied yesterday and had again drawn the fire of the artillery in the enemy's works." With Warren accomplishing all that had been demanded, Meade "directed him to withdraw to Hatcher's Run, and . . . hold the line from Fort Sampson to Armstrong's Mill with

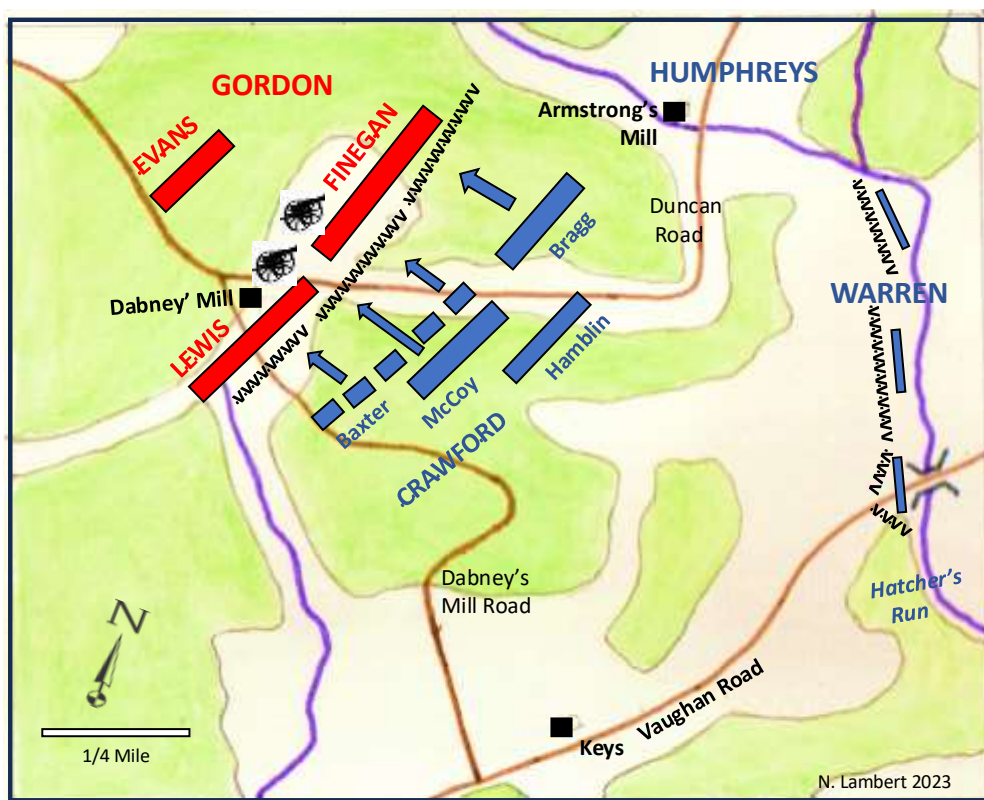
¹¹ Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania*, 205-06; *OR* 46/1:261; *OR* 46/2:461; *OR* 51/1:286-87; Roe, *The 39th Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers*, 273-74. Greenleaf, *Letters to Eliza*, 155-56.

¹² *ORS* 7:717-18; Frank H. Foote, "The Death Grapple at Petersburg: Last Days of Harris' Mississippi Brigade, Part 3" *Jackson [MS] The Clarion*, Sept 24, 1884; *OR* 51/1:290. Manlove had been the commander of the 48th MS for most of the war. The Federals thought that Manlove was mortally wounded and was "paroled to die in his own ranks," However, he recovered and only died in 1880, but suffered to the last with this wound.

¹³ *OR* 51/1:286-88; *OR* 46/1:392; Smith, *The 24th Michigan of the Iron Brigade*, 240-241; Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets*, 191. Recall that Willie Pegram was absent due to sickness throughout the battle.

the Second Corps, and post the Fifth Corps from the Vaughan road crossing back toward the Halifax road.” However, events now became confused.¹⁴

Soon after 5:00 p.m., Crawford prepared to strike the formidable Rebel works just 300 yards away. He organized his three brigades in line of battle. Bragg’s brigade moved to the right, with Baxter’s men primarily acting as advanced skirmishers in front of McCoy’s position. A 6th Corps force, Brig. Gen. Joseph E. Hamblin’s brigade, sent by Warren, arrived to occupy the position McCoy would soon vacate. At about 6:00 p.m., Crawford gave the order to charge the Rebel defenses. They advanced within a few hundred yards before Finegan’s Rebels, and withering canister fire from the Confederate artillery threw them back. The repulsed Federals retreated to the woods for safety. They rallied and attempted another attack, only to be beaten back again. The vanquished Federals returned to their positions some 300 yards from the Rebels and threw up breastworks. The Confederates did not pursue the Federals.¹⁵



Map 15.2: Crawford's Assault Around 6:00 p.m., February 7.

¹⁴ OR 46/2:448.

¹⁵ OR 46/1:290, 292, 295; OR 51/1:287, 291, 294. Joseph Hamblin had only taken command of the brigade days before the battle in a move that hadn't proven popular with the common soldiers (Tyler & Tyler, *Recollections of the Civil War*, 325-26. The 7th Wisconsin commander, Col. Richardson, reported that his men were also relieved by 6th Corps soldiers (presumably Hamblin) prior to the final assaults, ORS 7:711-13.

The *OR* and memoirs provide further details of these hapless Union assaults. The commander of the 147th New York, Lt. Col. Dennis B. Dailey, in McCoy's brigade, recalled how they advanced in line of battle through heavy woods when they "came in sight of the enemy, who were advantageously posted on a rise of ground" and had an artillery battery in position. The enemy compelled his regiment to fall back to a temporary line of works thrown up by skirmishers. From this point, they advanced again, only to meet the same fate. Captain Aaron Bright, commander of the 88th Pennsylvania, Baxter's brigade, reported how they "formed [a] heavy skirmish line and charged the enemy's main works twice, and were repulsed each time with heavy loss to [the] regiment."¹⁶

One of Hamblin's soldiers, Sgt. Robert S. Westbrook, 49th Pennsylvania, recalled forming a line of battle behind Crawford's division. Under heavy shelling, as Crawford's men moved forward, they took their place and completed building the rifle pits. He added that "the Iron Brigade" (Bragg's brigade) made an advance, "but through want of pluck [it] fizzled out." In Bragg's brigade, the 7th Wisconsin commander, Colonel Richardson, reported that his regiment advanced under severe fire, maintained its position without firing a shot until the troops on the left gave way. The brigade broke and fell back about 50 paces, where they reformed.¹⁷

Also with Bragg's brigade, Lt. Matrau, 6th Wisconsin, recalled that the Rebel works were on the opposite side of a ravine full of water. In drenching cold rain and under a severe artillery fire, the regiment's line of battle halted at the ravine and fired away till the brigade lost about 100 men when they fell back to their works. In the same regiment, Capt. Mair Pointon recalled a tale from their failed assault on the Confederate works. While retreating, Lt. Col. Thomas Kerr's canteen became entangled in some bushes; desperate to avoid capture, he frantically appealed to some passing men to cut him loose. Someone eventually liberated him, and he moved quickly to safety. Private Gottlieb Torke, 6th Wisconsin, recalled the attack and the Rebels firing upon them with cannon. Torke received a shrapnel wound to the head, over the left ear, and his two brothers carried him to a hospital.¹⁸

¹⁶ *OR* 51/1:294-95. *OR* 46/1:292; Abner R. Small, *The Sixteenth Maine Regiment in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (Portland, ME, 1886), 211-12; Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania*, 206; Ayoub, *The Campfire Chronicles*, 324-25.

¹⁷ Robert S. Westbrook, *History of the 49th Pennsylvania Volunteers* (Altoona, PA, 1898), 232; *ORS* 7:711-13.

¹⁸ Philip Cheek & Mair Pointon, *History of the Sauk County Riflemen: Known as Company "A," Sixth Wisconsin Veteran Volunteer Infantry, 1861-1865* (Madison, WI, 1909), 153-54; *ORS* 7:711-13; Reid-Green, *Letters Home*, 108; Gottlieb Torke letter to Elizabeth, February 9, 1865.



Col. Hollon Richardson
wikipedia.org



Pvt. Gottlieb Torke
findagrave.com

From the Confederate perspective, Sgt. Judkins with Sorrel's Brigade recalled, "the yankees attacked us that evening; we gave them a pretty warm reception, and repulsed them. We never lost any men." He added that a Federal soldier entered their lines during the charge and said he'd been sent to the breastworks where the cannons were. The Rebels quickly took him prisoner. The Yankee naively asked to return. "He was a foreigner, had not been with them [the Union army] long." On recalling the fighting of the day, veteran Lt. Col. Stewart of the 61st Virginia wrote, "These were times which tried men's souls and the most desperate days I ever experienced."¹⁹

At 6:20 p.m., Crawford messaged Warren, saying he'd advanced his lines as far as possible with his now much-exhausted troops. He was deploying Hamblin's 6th Corps brigade on his left. The sound of heavy firing alarmed Meade, whose staff sent Warren a dispatch (6:40 p.m.) asking what was happening. An hour later, Warren replied that Crawford had attacked the Rebels and drawn some artillery fire. He continued, "I have had no report from him since it began; it now has ceased." The gathering darkness and the apparent futility of further assaults brought an end to the fighting.

Although sporadic firing occurred until late into the night, the three-day battle of Hatcher's Run was effectively over. As Pvt. Joyce, a weary Tar Heel with Lewis's Brigade put it, "We commenced fighting hear last Sunday morning and fite on til Tuesday night . . . I

¹⁹ Judkins, Memoir, 89; Stewart, *A Pair of Blankets*, 192

think both sides were getting tired of it, and if everybody got as cold as I did they would have stopped it long before they did”!²⁰



Depiction of Crawford's 6.00 p.m. Attack

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

Overnight Events up to 1:00 a.m. February 8

The Union began reorganizing and consolidating its position. Around 7:00 p.m., Warren told Meade that he could withdraw Wheaton's division (6th Corps) as he could hold his position. At 8:05 p.m., Meade instructed Warren to send Kerwin's cavalry brigade tomorrow to rejoin Gregg and the other two brigades. Wheaton's division would rejoin Maj. Gen. Getty's 6th Corps, thus allowing the 9th Corps and 6th Corps to make their new dispositions.

At 9:00 p.m., Warren received a message from Crawford saying he'd established his line and had a 6th Corps brigade (Hamblin) on his left. The Confederate line ran in a northeast-to-southwest direction, and firing only continued on his right where the lines were close. He added that his men were becoming shaken and needed rest and relief. In response, at 11:00 p.m., Warren's aide informed division commander Griffin that Warren had ordered the withdrawal of Crawford's division from the front line, and it would locate behind his (Griffin's) lines. Warren added, "Please notify your pickets" of the maneuver.²¹

²⁰ OR 46/2:461; OR 46/1:291; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 415.

²¹ OR 46/2:457-61. The military term for this maneuver is a "rearward passage of lines." Withdrawing through one's own lines during darkness is a very dangerous maneuver. Both lines must be well briefed and the movement carefully coordinated. The line that is being passed through could easily shoot people in the line that is withdrawing.

During the night, Meade issued a three-point circular highlighting new dispositions for the troops.

1. The chief engineer will construct an entrenched line from Fort Sampson to Armstrong's Mill, placing works at the latter point and the Vaughan Road crossing. This line will be formed by selecting suitable positions for artillery, erecting batteries, and extensive breastworks. Dams will be built on Hatcher's Run, and the stream obstructed as much as possible.
2. Once constructed, the line will be held as follows: The 9th Corps, from the Appomattox to Fort Howard; the 6th Corps, from Fort Howard to Fort Gregg; the 2nd Corps, from Fort Gregg to Armstrong's Mill. The 5th Corps will hold the Vaughan Road crossing and picket Hatcher's Run above and below the crossing and along Vaughan Road via "Cummings' to Wyatt's." It will protect the rear and support the 2nd or 6th Corps if attacked. The cavalry division will be posted on Jerusalem Plank Road and picket from the left of the 5th Corps to the James.
3. The chief quartermaster will extend the Military Railroad to conform to the new disposition of troops. The chief engineer and corps commanders will construct the necessary corduroy roads to establish secure and prompt communications.²²

As the Union high command planned future reorganizations, the tired and anxious soldiers with Crawford and elements of Wheaton's 6th Corps division remained in line on the battlefield a few hundred yards from the Confederate works. The weather remained brutally wintry, the rain freezing as it fell. The soldiers had no shelter, rations, or fires in such a forward position. In their wet clothes, they contemplated another long, miserable night. A 24th Michigan, Bragg's brigade, memoir noted, "The danger of freezing to death suddenly became a stark reality." Chaplain Locke, 11th Pennsylvania, Baxter's brigade, recalled "the sound of the axe and the spade" throughout the night as thousands of workmen threw up breastworks and whatever protection they could from the horrific weather.

Amid much joy, the soldiers received orders to withdraw at 1:00 a.m. The tired, freezing, and hungry Union soldiers moved back across Hatcher's Run. Sergeant Westbrook with Hamblin's brigade recalled the march on a bitterly cold night with "the ground . . .

²² *OR* 46/2:450. Corduroy roads were a common construction in the Civil War made by placing logs perpendicular to the direction of the road, typically over a low or swampy area. They represented an improvement over impassable mud or dirt roads, yet were rough in the best of conditions and a hazard to horses due to shifting loose logs.

covered with ice and very slippery.” Once safely back within Union lines, the soldiers made camp, built fires, dried their wet uniforms, and took on sustenance.²³

The Confederate units also started withdrawing during the night. The 22nd Georgia, Sorrel’s Brigade, left the front, went back over two miles to some woods, struck camp, built fires, and got warm. The next morning, they returned to their old camps near Petersburg. The brigades of Lewis and Hoffman (now commanded by Lt. Col. Kasey) withdrew up the plank road towards Sutherland Station on the Southside Railroad during the night. In contrast, Forney’s Alabama Brigade and the 12th Virginia, Weisiger’s Brigade, remained in position during the remainder of the night and returned to their camps near Petersburg the following day.²⁴

Analysis

Historians frequently minimized the fighting on February 7, despite its intermittent severity. Crawford’s final futile assault is intriguing. Both Meade and Grant had recommended that Warren not attack. Crawford and his subordinates knew the strength of the artillery-supported Rebel position. Gordon’s force outnumbered Crawford’s division. By 6:00 p.m., it was virtually dark, with sunset around 5:30 p.m., making it too late to launch any meaningful attack.²⁵

In his official report and subsequent correspondence to Meade, Warren never admitted that a frontal assault occurred. He claimed that at 6 p.m., Crawford attacked the enemy, pushing them back to their Dabney’s Mill works. Given the presence of Rebel artillery, Warren “did not think it advisable to assault the position.” In truth, Crawford had pushed the Rebels back to Dabney’s Mill by 5:00 p.m. Warren may have erased the suicidal frontal assault, but many formal reports and memoirs describe the futile charges. Ironically, one of the few contemporary images of this battle depicts Crawford’s final-day charge. Warren’s narrative, however, remains the conventional account of the February 7 fight.

²³ Ayoub, *The Campfire Chronicles*, 324; Smith, *The 24th Michigan*, 241; Matthews, *The 149th Pennsylvania*, 206; Locke, *The Story of the Regiment*, 378. *OR* 51/1:287-88, 291, 294; *OR* 46/1:291, 295; Westbrook, *History of the 49th Pennsylvania*, 232.

²⁴ Judkins, *Memoir*, 89; Sherrill, *The 21st North Carolina*, 415; Letter, William H. Forney to Mrs. Forney, February 9, 1865, Horn, *The Petersburg Regiment*, 362.

²⁵ Korn, *Pursuit to Appomattox*, 25:31; Greene, *The Final Battles of the Petersburg Campaign*, 105; are two modern examples of where the day’s fighting received minimal mention. The sole exception was Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, which devoted 14 pages and a map to Feb 7.

Seminal texts from the immediate post-war era through to recent years simply disregarded the assault.²⁶

Who instigated this reckless assault? Did Warren order Crawford to attack, or did Crawford unilaterally decide to charge the Rebel stronghold? Why did Warren subsequently conceal Crawford's hapless charge? Recall how Crawford also fortuitously escaped any blame for the previous day's disaster, with Meade and Warren apparently commending his performance throughout the battle. As a postscript, over a month later, a delegation of 5th Corps generals met Warren and requested Crawford's removal, citing his "bungling and what not" as causing much trouble. They feared he would eventually cost Warren his command.²⁷

Given the previous day's humiliation, one might speculate that Warren and Crawford were desperate to regain some honor. From early morning, Warren showed an eagerness to resume fighting despite the terrible weather and being under no pressure from his superiors to engage. We have no testimony on the subject from either officer. Whatever the circumstances, many Union casualties resulted from the needless assault.

Northern newspapers reported that the February 7 fighting was more substantial than initially believed, adding that the Rebels had "made a determined stand" at their Dabney's Mill works. They claimed Crawford's division lost 71 killed and 519 wounded; a vast overestimation. On February 7, Crawford suffered an estimated 24 killed, 165 wounded, and 25 missing. In addition, Hamblin's brigade lost one dead and six wounded. Thus, the Union casualties for the fight were 221. This is a significant number and exceeds the 135 losses incurred by Humphreys's 2nd Corps throughout all of February 5. It matches the 221 Federal losses suffered on February 6 along Vaughan Road. Confederate casualties for February 7 are unknown, although they would be significantly less than the Union, as they suffered few if any losses during Crawford's dusk frontal attacks.²⁸

²⁶ OR 46/1:256; OR 46/2:487. Amongst the many texts ignoring the final assault are: Powell (1896), *The Fifth Army Corps (Army of the Potomac)*; through to well-known Petersburg texts by Trudeau (1991), *The Last Citadel*, and Hess (2009), *In the Trenches at Petersburg*.

²⁷ Bates, *Martial Deeds of Pennsylvania*, 814; Wainwright, *A Diary of Battle*, 514. The 5th Corps generals in question were; Brig. Gen. Bartlett, Maj. Gen. Ayres, and Maj. Gen. Griffin. Their concerns proved prophetic; Crawford's performance at the Battle of Five Forks was a factor in Warren being stripped of his command. Second Corps brigade commander, Robert McAllister also shared his low opinion of Crawford in a letter to his wife. McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 577.

²⁸ William D. McGregor, *Baltimore [MD] The Sun*, Feb 11, 1865. Crawford reported his *provisional* losses for both Feb 6 and 7. Taking this data together with his final casualty report, through imputation, one can estimate his Feb 7 loss, OR 46/1:256; OR 46/1:63-69.

As Crawford's soldiers returned to the Union works along Hatcher's Run in the early hours of February 8, Grant's Eighth Offensive was finally over. What had it really achieved? And at what cost? I explore these issues and how the action fits into the broader context of the war in the following Epilogue.