

## Chapter 6

### “Again, They Advanced in Strong Force”

The first Confederate assault failed to penetrate Humphreys' line. Urged on by their commanders, the Rebels regrouped and prepared to attack again. The unprotected gap between McAllister and Murphy presented a tempting target.

#### Further Rebel Attacks East of Rocky Branch

After the Confederates' first assault, division commander Mott dispatched a staff officer to see how McAllister's brigade was faring. He learned that “the General was most gallantly encouraging his command,” and despite some soldiers fighting without breastworks, he could “whip the Rebels away.” Several Union protagonists described the subsequent Rebel attacks as they experienced them from their positions.

McAllister recalled, “The well-known Rebel yell rolled out on the evening breeze, and on rushed their massed columns [second attack]. My line now opened a most destructive fire.” As McAllister rode along the line, he found Chaplain Henry Hopkins, 120th New York, “using a gun and firing constantly, and encouraging the men to stand firm.” With Humphreys watching the fight, McAllister noted how “the appearance of our corps commander inspired our men to new efforts.” His troops “struck up the song 'Rally around the Flag, Boys.' The Rebels replied, 'We will rally around your flag, boys!’” However, the Rebels soon withdrew, and the heavy firing ceased. The pause proved short-lived.

McAllister continued. “The Rebel Mahone with his famous fighting division made a rush for the gap in our lines [third attack], once more we heard that unwelcome yell resounding, which told us plainly that they were again charging our lines.” But McAllister's men stood firm and with support from the artillery they “rolled back the Rebel columns for the last time; the victory was ours.” He finished by saying, “The third attack of the enemy . . . ended in a complete rout.” The alleged presence of Mahone's Division in the final assault is contentious, as we shall discover.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> OR 46/1:223-225, 238-39; McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 583. Maj. Gen. Mahone himself was certainly *not* at the battle.

The exposed 8th New Jersey on McAllister's left flank remained firm. Their commander, Maj. Hartford reported that after repulsing the first attack, the Rebels again "advanced in strong force, and, notwithstanding the destructive fire poured into them, succeeded in gaining the shelter of stumps and fallen timber on our left front and for a time kept up a fatal fire on the exposed wing of the battalion, but they were forced to retire." However, the Rebels returned "seemingly determined upon carrying the line [third attack], but the well-directed fire checked them when within eighty yards of our works." The heavy fighting continued for some time but the Confederates "eventually gave way in confusion, suffering severely for their temerity." The last repulse occurred after dark and ended the engagement.<sup>2</sup>

To Hartford's immediate right, behind breastworks, kneeled the 120th New York. Their commander, Lt. Col. Abram Lockwood, also reported repelling two further distinctive attacks and inflicting considerable Confederate losses. He lamented that they could have caused more damage if they had received a better supply of ammunition. He, too, mentioned the exploits of Chaplain Hopkins. This regiment suffered only two wounded casualties, while the exposed 8th New Jersey immediately to their left sustained 48 losses, thus demonstrating the value of the low, hastily thrown-up earthworks.<sup>3</sup>

Next in line, the 7th New Jersey continued to pour enfilading fire into the enemy advancing on their left. Their angle of fire suggests that the Rebels did not attack directly on their front. To their right, the 11th Massachusetts commander, Capt. James Mansfield reported, "The firing was continued for an hour and a half, with more or less spirit, as the enemy advanced or fell back, but at no time did he reach a point nearer than 100 yards to our line of works." This regiment suffered no casualties during the encounter. On McAllister's far right flank resided the 11th New Jersey. Their commander, Lt. Col. Schoonover, recalled how the Rebels did not attempt to advance across the open field on his front, but kept up a steady and scattering fire from a ravine. "At no time did I find it necessary to fire a volley but kept up a steady fire by file. This fire was continued until nearly 8 o'clock."<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> OR 46/1:244-45.

<sup>3</sup> OR 46/1:247-48. Henry Hopkins had overseen ambulance corps at battles earlier in the war. He enlisted as a chaplain in May 1864. One well-known source claimed Hopkins received the Medal of Honor for his exploits on Feb 5. However, no such award was made, McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 584, Ed. note 14.

<sup>4</sup> OR 46/1:242-44, 246.

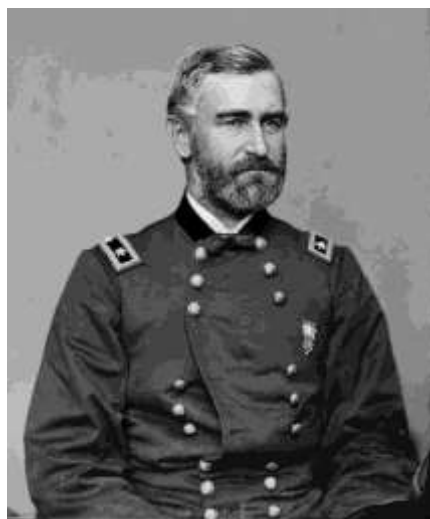
To the right of McAllister's men was Ramsey's brigade. They recalled little action during the afternoon, although one regiment suffered a wounded soldier.<sup>5</sup>

#### Federal Artillery Action

The two sections of artillery (10th Massachusetts Battery) west of the stream that had helped repel the Confederates' first assault continued to pour out their destruction. Artilleryman Cpl. John Billings recounted that their fire was oblique to the enemy's front and did great execution. "Never did shells do more effective work than did those fired by these two sections." Their role proved invaluable in repelling the successive charges aimed at breaking the Union lines. "Although the weight of numbers was on their side, the God of Battles was on ours, and Victory perched on the Union banners." These cannons *solely* targeted the left and front of McAllister's brigade. The battery suffered just three shot horses during the action.<sup>6</sup>



**Cpl. John D. Billings (postwar)**  
*The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*



**Maj. Gen. Gershom Mott**  
Library of Congress

#### Reinforcing McAllister's Left Flank

Despite McAllister's assurances that he "could whip the Rebels away," his exposed left flank concerned Mott, his divisional commander. At around 4:45 p.m., Mott called up elements of West's brigade, located at the Hatcher's Run-Vaughan Road crossing, to support McAllister. As West recounted, "about 5 p.m. I received an order for two regiments to report to Gen. McAllister... I immediately sent the 141st Pennsylvania and 1st Massachusetts

---

<sup>5</sup> OR 46/1:207-08, 210-11.

<sup>6</sup> OR 46/1:249-50; Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 387-88.

Heavy Artillery ... Soon after, I received orders to report in person with the balance of the brigade and assume command of the whole.”

Upon arrival at the battlefield, West saw the 57th Pennsylvania in battle line in a small ravine behind McAllister’s left flank. Together with the 5th Michigan, they charged into the gap between McAllister’s left and Rocky Branch. West wrote, “These troops arrived just in season to check the enemy, who were making a desperate effort to make a break at this point.” He praised the 141st Pennsylvania, which arrived first on the scene and withstood “a most severe musketry fire from the enemy, fighting in an open field, without any works whatever for protection.”<sup>7</sup>

There are no other *ORs* from West’s brigade; however, four regimental memoirs provide additional, albeit conflicting, testimony. A 57th Pennsylvania history described the regiment's charge alongside the 5th Michigan, supporting the view that without their help, the Rebels would have driven McAllister back. Captain Robert G. Carter’s account of the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery painted a similar picture. He claimed they found McAllister heavily engaged, and his men “arrived just in time to help repel the assault.”<sup>8</sup>

However, another 1st Massachusetts history presented a different view. It reported that after a march of about a mile, they arrived under heavy fire and formed an oblique battle line connecting to McAllister’s line. “However, it was not needed as the Rebels fled just as West had finished forming his battle line.” West’s men chased the fleeing Rebels “until they disappeared into the darkness of the forest and the pursuit was halted.” The soldier expressed surprise at the regiment’s losses of only three slightly wounded despite crossing an open field under heavy fire. David Craft, chaplain of the 141st Pennsylvania, supported the view that the Rebels were already retreating as West’s bluecoats arrived. He recalled, “before we arrived the enemy’s infantry had retired, although their artillery kept up a fire for some time. The brigade was not actively engaged, although it came under heavy fire.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *OR* 46/1:224-26, 235-36.

<sup>8</sup> James M. Martin & Ellis C. Strouss, *History of the 57th Regiment Pennsylvania Veteran Voluntary infantry*, (Meadville, PA, 1900), 143; Robert G. Carter, *Four Brothers in Blue, or, Sunshine and Shadows of the War of the Rebellion; a Story of the Great Civil War from Bull Run to Appomattox* (Washington, DC, 1913), 499. Captain Carter received a Medal of Honor in 1871 for actions against Comanches in Texas.

<sup>9</sup> Alfred S. Roe & Charles Nutt, *History of the First Regiment of Heavy Artillery, Massachusetts Volunteers Formerly the 14th Regiment of Infantry, 1861-1865* (Boston, 1917), 205; David Craft, *History of the 141st Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers 1862-1865* (Towanda, PA, 1885), 236.

Whether West arrived in the nick of time or not, the Confederate attacks in this sector had finished.

### The Rebel Perspective of the Fighting East of Rocky Branch

After their failed first assault, the Confederates regrouped. Several Rebels remembered what happened next. Accounts from the 27th North Carolina, Cooke's Brigade, recalled receiving orders to advance again. The Tar Heels charged up the hill once more in sight of the Unionists lying behind their earthworks. Cooke's left remained unsupported, and they had to fall back again. They halted upon reaching the Rebel reserve line about half a mile to the rear. Fresh troops received orders to advance. Three separate narratives claimed that these reinforcements were "Cook's or Cooke's Georgia Brigade" or "a Georgia Brigade." As they advanced, three companies (B, G, and H) of the 27th North Carolina went forward with them, believing the order to advance had come from their brigade commander, John Cooke. They fought alongside these new troops for the rest of the afternoon, losing several men.<sup>10</sup>



**Brig. Gen. William McComb**  
wikipedia.org



**Pvt. James K. Wilkerson**  
findagrave.com

Lieutenant Charles R. Jones of the 55th North Carolina, Cooke's Brigade, recalled how a "desperate engagement was fought," but the enemy's position supported by breastworks proved too secure, and the Confederates abandoned the idea of taking them. He

---

<sup>10</sup> James Graham, "Cooke's 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),4:508; 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.

described how “the command suffered heavily” with the gallant Capt. Walter A. Whitted (regimental commander) “severely wounded through the throat by a piece of shell.” The 55th fell back some 200 yards to a more secure position. Private James K. Wilkerson remembered how the regiment charged the Union position several times but was unable to drive the Yankees from their fortifications. “We were fighting them until into the night. Oh, mother it was awful times with us.” Wilkerson claimed to have shot 50-60 rounds at the Federals that afternoon and luckily escaped death, as a shell sent shrapnel fragments through his hat.<sup>11</sup>

From McComb’s Brigade, Sgt. Probest, 2nd Maryland Battalion, remembered that after seeking protection and regrouping, soldiers from Evans’s division advanced over them on the charge, but they did not get far. Upon their quick return, the battalion retired further, leaving Evans’s Rebels in the place they had occupied. Soon afterward, Mahone’s Division passed over the Marylanders and Evans’s men, but they only got a short distance before halting and firing. Although beyond musket range, the 2nd Maryland Battalion remained menaced by artillery fire, so they dropped back an additional 100 yards.

Another Marylander wrote, “To advance further seemed impossible: other attempts were made by other troops, but all failed. The men lay down as flat as they could ... behind stumps, saplings, and whatever ... they could find.” The Union cannons shelled them vigorously from their right and withering musket fire from the earthworks to their front, killing or wounding several men. In this exposed position and under intense fire, the battalion reluctantly retired.<sup>12</sup>

In the Confederate second line, MacRae’s Brigade was on the periphery of the initial attack. However, with elements of Cooke’s and McComb’s brigades falling back, they soon found themselves in the thick of the fight. Memoirs from MacRae’s regiments echo the experiences detailed above. In a second attack, Heth’s three brigades advanced again and, despite the destructive fire poured into them, succeeded in gaining shelter from stumps and fallen timber on their left front and, for a time, kept up a fatal fire on the exposed Federal

---

<sup>11</sup>Jones, “Historical Sketch: Our Living and Our Dead;” Jeffrey M. Girvan, *The 55th North Carolina in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC, 2006), 135-36. The 55th NC had only transferred from Davis’s Brigade to Cooke’s Brigade four days previously.

<sup>12</sup> Driver, *1st and 2nd Maryland*, 312-13; William W. Goldsborough, *The Maryland Line in the Confederate Army, 1861-1865* (Baltimore, MD, 1900), 144-45. The battalion suffered 4 killed, 2 wounded, and 1 missing during the engagement. Surprisingly, McComb’s memoirs said nothing of the fight, despite his brigade suffering at least 36 casualties, “Brigadier-General William McComb memoir,” *Recollections of the War, 1861-1865*, University of Memphis, TN., Digital Commons, p37.

wing. The Rebels took a terrible pounding from artillery and enfilading fire and retreated to the safety of the underbrush.

After a slight pause, they pressed forward again, concentrating on the exposed Federal left flank. However, the withering Federal fire blunted the attack about 80 yards from the blue lines, and the Rebels withdrew again. Captain Louis Young met with Cooke and encouraged him to join MacRae's men in an unauthorized charge. But Cooke declined, much to the chagrin of Young and Maj. Charles M. Stedman, 44th North Carolina. Stedman approached Young with sword raised high, "calling out in loud tone, our men are ready to advance and only await the command." After 90 minutes, the fighting ended with nightfall. On retiring to their defenses, Capt. Young received a severe wound that ended his war.<sup>13</sup>

Accounts recall how some Rebels panicked, threw down their weapons, and fled the field. Even the presence of the inspirational "Bobby" Lee, observing from behind the attacking columns, could not restrain the terrified soldiers. One demoralized Confederate screamed at him, "great God man, get out of the way, you don't know nothing"! Another recalled how Lee "wept like a child" as Rebels repeatedly refused orders to charge. Cooke's Brigade bore the brunt of these attacks, suffering as many casualties as the other two brigades combined. Of their estimated 77 losses, the 48th North Carolina suffered 52 casualties.<sup>14</sup>

#### The Role of Mahone's Division

Towards the end of the engagement, Confederate reinforcements arrived in the form of Mahone's Division. Recall that Maj. Gen. Mahone was absent, ill, and Brig. Gen. Finegan commanded this division. The force of around 4,900 men comprised five battle-hardened brigades: Alabamians commanded by Col. William H. Forney, Mississippians commanded by Brig. Gen. Nathaniel H. Harris, Georgians commanded by Brig. Gen. G. Moxley Sorrel, Finegan's Floridians, now commanded by Col. David Lang, and Virginians, probably

---

<sup>13</sup> Venner, *The 11th North Carolina*, 197; Chapman, *More Terrible than Victory*, 273-74; Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels*, 285. In 1930, Charles Stedman became the last Civil War veteran to serve in the US Congress. Recall that Brig. Gen. MacRae was not at the battle.

<sup>14</sup> Chapman, *More Terrible than Victory*, 272-73; Sloan, *Reminiscences of the Guilford Grays*, 110; Girvan, *The 55th North Carolina*, 136; *OR* 46/2:499; *ORS* 7:721 (Diary excerpt of Capt. John Heitman, 48th NC). The established commander of the 48th NC, Col. Samuel Walkup, went on leave with Gen. MacRae at the end of January 1865 (Walkup, *Writings of a Rebel Colonel*, 150). At the battle, the regiment was probably led by Capt. John Moore (Siege of Petersburg Online, [48th North Carolina Infantry — The Siege of Petersburg Online \(beyondthecrater.com\)](#)), whether this had any bearing on their high casualties is unknown. Sadly, the regimental account in Clark, *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina*, 3:122 does not mention the battle. I have engaged with two 48th NC groups online but discovered no more information regarding the regiment on Feb 5.

commanded by Brig. Gen. Weisiger.<sup>15</sup>

Conventional accounts of the engagement claim that Mahone's men arrived too late to participate in the engagement. However, substantial evidence from both Union and Confederate sources demonstrates that elements of the division took part in the final assault.<sup>16</sup> While Col. Forney's Alabama Brigade went on guard duty, evidence shows that the Georgia, Florida, and Virginia brigades all suffered casualties that afternoon. The claim that *three* Rebel divisions took part in these attacks may not have been hyperbole after all.<sup>17</sup>

#### Which Additional Confederate Forces Fought East of Rocky Branch?

The above accounts present some anomalies regarding the identity of the Rebel forces used east of Rocky Branch. Several combatants specifically mentioned that Brig. Gen. Philip Cook's Georgia Brigade (or a Georgia Brigade) took part in the latter attacks. This brigade belonged to Maj. Gen. Bryan Grimes's Division, Gordon's Second Corps, and, in theory, resided over three miles *north* of Petersburg. Consequently, conventional battle accounts *do not* include this brigade. An obvious issue is the possible mixing up of John Cooke and Philip

---

<sup>15</sup> Lambert, *Rebel Units and their Commanders at Hatcher's Run*, Part 3; The strength of Mahone's Division is for the end of December 1864, NARA M935, Roll 14, 19-P-46. One source claimed that Gen. Weisiger was absent, with the brigade commanded by Col. Virginius Groner. Leslie Spence, "Old Guard of Richmond, Virginia," *Confed. Vet. Magazine* (1897), Vol. 5, 484-85. I have found no other source to corroborate his absence.

<sup>16</sup> Driver, *1st and 2nd Maryland*, 312 -13; OR 46/2:499; McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 583. The editor [note 13] claimed that McAllister was in error as Mahone's men only arrived on the next day, Feb 6. The editor said that McAllister was fighting troops under Gordon and Pegram. This is problematic on two counts: Pegram's division *was part of* Gordon's Corps, and Pegram wasn't involved in this action, Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 37; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:192; Williams, *Stonewall's Prussian Mapmaker*, 240.

<sup>17</sup> Roster data for Sorrel's Brigade revealed five casualties on February 5. US General Web Archives [Statewide County Georgia USGenWeb Archives \(usgwebarchives.net\)](http://usgwebarchives.net). The five recorded casualties for Feb 5, 1865, were: 3rd GA – Pvt. William H. Jones, wounded, hospitalized; Corp. John Barber wounded, disabled; 22nd GA – Capt. James N. Mercier wounded; Corp. William T. Sharpe, wounded, leg amputated; 64th GA – Pvt. Richard Hasty, killed. However, Rebel roster data is not usually comprehensive and can be error-ridden, especially for late in the war. Letter, William H. Forney to Mrs. Forney, February 9, 1865, Forney Papers, #1406-z, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill., hereafter Letter, William Forney to Mrs. Forney. A Florida Brigade colonel (John J. Dickison) mentioned that the brigade supported these Rebel attacks and suffered casualties of one killed and two wounded, including Lt. Col. William Scott, the 10th Florida commander. John J. Dickison, "Chapter 7: Florida" in Clement A. Evans, ed., *Confederate Military History: A Library of Confederate States History*, 12 vols. (Atlanta, GA, 1899), 11.2:159-60; (Dickison was only a captain in Feb 1865); Lieutenant James Phillips (12th Virginia, Weisiger's Brigade) recalled a sharp engagement on February 5, with a few of the brigade wounded. James E. Phillips, "Sixth Corporal" ("Journal of James E. Philips"), James Eldred Philips Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA, 68. Lambert & Suderow, "The Battle of Hatcher's Run," 37; Trudeau, *The Last Citadel*, 317; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:185; Marbaker, *History of the 11th New Jersey Volunteers*, 272; Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 386-7; OR 46/2:499.

Cook. Is this another case of *too many Cooks spoiling the broth*? And yet, memoirs specified that the relieving brigade was Georgian

Henry W. Thomas's seminal book on this Georgia Brigade contained two brief references to the battle. The 21st Georgia account stated, "The next [after December 1864] engagement in which our regiment took a prominent part was near Hatcher's Run to the right of Petersburg, the enemy's sorties being repulsed in a number of instances." The account of the 44th Georgia mentioned that their commander, Col. James Beck, "at the battle of Hatcher's Run ... exposed himself and owing to said exposure was prostrated with pneumonia and was sent to hospital in Richmond." A 12th Georgia soldier in Cook's Brigade claimed they marched from Camp Rodes to the battle, but upon arrival, they were not needed and returned. With their detailed reference to Philip Cook's brigade, the 27th North Carolina narratives are particularly compelling. It is plausible that this brigade could also have fired off a few shots at a distance toward the end of the battle.<sup>18</sup>

Sergeant Probest, 2nd Maryland Battalion, claimed that soldiers from Evans's division (engaged west of the stream) took part in the later attacks east of the stream. This division included a Georgia Brigade, commanded by Col. Baker. However, as these troops were located on the far right of Evans's line, they were probably not the Georgia troops mentioned. Alternatively, perhaps Sorrel's Brigade, Mahone's Division, was the mysterious Georgia Brigade mentioned in these memoirs.

Most narratives assume that Davis's Mississippi Brigade, Heth's Division, remained in reserve throughout. However, Rebel deserters (considered credible by senior Union officers) subsequently informed their Yankee captors that Heth's attack had involved all *four* of his brigades. This view is supported by James F. Caldwell's memoir, which appeared only

---

<sup>18</sup> Graham, "27th Regiment" in Clark, ed., *Histories of the Regiments from North Carolina*, 2:452; Bingham, "From New Bern to Bennett Place," 416; Bearss & Suderow, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 2:183; Henry W. Thomas, *History of the Doles-Cook Brigade of Northern Virginia, C.S.A. Containing Muster Rolls and a Complete History of Each Regiment by one of its own members* (Atlanta, GA, 1903), 347-48, 486. The 44th GA webpage on Steven Hawks' "Civil War in the East" database also states that on Feb 24, 1865, Beck was admitted to the Stuart Hospital Richmond ([History of the 44th Georgia Infantry Regiment in the Civil War \(civilwarintheeast.com\)](http://www.historyofthe44thgeorgiainfantryregiment.com)). Analysis of the detailed, yet incomplete, rosters of Georgia regiments within Cook's Brigade revealed but one casualty linked to the battle, namely a Pvt. George Brown, Co I, 21st Georgia, captured at Hatcher's Run, but on *February 6*, 1865. Georgia roster database, US General Web Archives [Statewide County Georgia USGenWeb Archives \(usgwarchives.net\)](http://www.usgenwebarchives.net); Graham, "27th Regiment" in Clark, ed., *Histories of the Regiments from North Carolina*, 2:451-52. Irby G. Scott, *Lee and Jackson's Bloody Twelfth: The Letters of Irby Goodwin Scott, First Lieutenant, Company G, Putnam Light Infantry, Twelfth Georgia Volunteer Infantry*, Johnnie P. Pearson, ed. (Knoxville, TN, 2010), 172.

a year after the battle. Caldwell, Brig. Gen. Samuel McGowan's aide-de-camp, stated that McGowan's South Carolinian Brigade (Maj. Gen. Cadmus M. Wilcox Division, Hill's Third Corps) had relieved Davis's Brigade in the Confederate works during the afternoon of February 5. The South Carolinians heard heavy firing from the Hatcher's Run area but learned "it was a small affair" from Davis's Mississippians returning later that night.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, Lt. Col. John A. Blair, commander of the 2nd Mississippi, Davis Brigade, wrote in his diary that "On the 5th [February] this brigade (Davis) made a demonstration against the enemys [sic] line on the right of Genl Cook [sic]." He wrote no more about the action, suggesting that his regiment wasn't heavily engaged. Two seminal books about this brigade did *not* mention the battle, consistent with their playing a minimal role. The brigade reported only three casualties. It is plausible that Davis's Brigade may have fired a few shots toward the Federals at a distance near the end of the fighting.<sup>20</sup>

#### The Rebel Attacks West of Rocky Branch

The Rebels' first attack west of the stream hadn't penetrated the Federal 182nd New York picket line. Murphy recorded how his pickets thwarted subsequent Confederate attacks. A Minnie ball struck Murphy in the knee at this point, and comrades carried him to the rear. A newspaper report added that Murphy had just ridden the whole length of his line and was shot soon after dismounting. Initially not thought to be severe, the wound developed complications, and he died on April 16, 1865. Brigade commander Col. Mathew Murphy was the most senior Federal soldier to die due to the three-day battle of Hatcher's Run.<sup>21</sup>

Brigade command passed to Col. James McIvor, who reported:

At about 5 o'clock ... the command of the brigade devolved on me, by Col. Mathew Murphy, ... being, from a wound, placed hors de combat. On assuming command, I found the brigade in line of battle behind a rifle-pit, hastily thrown up, left resting on First Brigade [Olmstead],

<sup>19</sup> OR 46/2:422-23, 499; James F. Caldwell, *The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, Known First as Gregg's, and Subsequently as McGowan's Brigade* (Philadelphia, PA, 1866), 200.

<sup>20</sup> John A. Blair "The Civil War Diary of John A. Blair," M.A. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1949, 43. Neither T. P. Williams, *The Mississippi Brigade of Brig.-Gen. Joseph Davis* (Seattle, WA, 1999) nor Steven H. Stubbs, *Duty, Honor, Valor: The Story of the 11th Mississippi Infantry Regiment* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000), a 948-page tome, mention the battle. Furthermore, I have been fortunate to share emails with Mike Brasher, a 2nd MS expert, and he knew of no other sources linking that regiment to the Hatcher's Run battle.

<sup>21</sup> OR 46/1:220. Despite his wound, Murphy submitted his OR on Feb 12; *The New York [NY] Times*, Feb 9, 1865, Page 1. Mathew Murphy was a prominent Irish New Yorker, and the paper took a keen interest in soldiers from their city. The article gave a detailed account of the battle, which was inconsistent with Murphy's report that the Rebels never penetrated his picket line. Shot on his battle line many yards behind his pickets was unfortunate. Possibly, a sharpshooter targeted him because he was mounted, a common occurrence. Garcia, "The Forgotten 69th," 76-77, gives a good account of Murphy's medical decline and funeral. At least he lived to hear of Lee's surrender at Appomattox on Apr 9.

right resting near a tributary to Hatcher's Run [Rocky Branch], the line running in rear of and near the [R] Armstrong, jr., house. Nothing of note occurred.<sup>22</sup>

Another victim in this fighting was Murphy's assistant adjutant-general, Lt. Robert McFarish, who fell mortally wounded. The attacks on this front appeared far less intense than those over the stream; the Rebels never broke through the Federal picket line. According to the *OR*, Murphy's 182nd NY pickets only suffered *four* casualties during the entire three-day battle. Their only significant action at the battle was in holding back Evans's Rebel division on February 5. Curiously, the 8th New York Heavy Artillery in Murphy's entrenched line behind the pickets formally reported eight Hatcher's Run casualties. Other credible sources, however, reveal they lost only two men in this afternoon's fight.<sup>23</sup>

In describing the entire afternoon's engagement, Humphreys, Smyth, and others viewed the Rebel attacks as falling *upon* Smyth's right, i.e., Murphy's front. In truth, little fighting took place here. To Murphy's left, all remained relatively quiet on Olmstead's front.<sup>24</sup>

Confederate accounts from this sector are minimal. Colonel Peck's report stated, "Darkness having come on, after some firing with little result, we were ordered to retire, which the command did in good order, and, in accordance with instructions, I marched the command back to their quarters." Private George W. Nichols, 61st Georgia, Baker's brigade, described "optimistically," how on February 5, they had engaged the Yankees on Hatcher's Run "and drove them back to their works after a very stubborn battle of one hour and a half." Casualty data shows this brigade lost at least 15 men on February 5, including Maj. B. F.

---

<sup>22</sup> *OR* 46/1:221.

<sup>23</sup> *Lockport [NY] Daily Journal & Courier*, Feb 8, 1865 page 2; *OR* 46/1:63-69; Wilbur R. Dunn, *Full Measure of Devotion: The Eighth New York Volunteer Heavy Artillery* (Kearney, NE, 1997), 483-87; James M. Hudnet, *Casualties by battles and by names in the Eighth New York Heavy Artillery, August 22, 1862-June 5, 1865, together with a review of the service of the regiment fifty years after muster-in* (New York, 1913), 35-37. The two casualties on Feb 5 were Pvt. Charles Bruyare (killed) and Pvt. William H. Brown (wounded). On Feb 6, a falling tree killed Pvt. William E. Coleman while in camp. I have been unable to find any other casualties from this regiment for the Hatcher's Run battle. Thus the eight quoted in the *OR* is rather mysterious. I am indebted to regimental expert, Kathryn W. Lerch, Park Tudor School, IN, for assisting my research. This case study highlights the limits of reported casualty data even in the *OR*.

<sup>24</sup> David W. Maull, *The Life and Military Services of the Late Brig.-Gen. Thomas Smyth* (Wilmington, DE, 1870), 40; *OR* 46/1:212-13; *OR* 46/2:422-23; Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 385; Walker, *History of the Second Army Corps*, 648.

Grace of the 26th Georgia, killed. Substantial new resources must emerge to unlock the mysteries of this battle phase.<sup>25</sup>



**Col. Mathew Murphy**  
Library of Congress



**Col. William R. Peck**  
wikipedia.org

#### The Fighting Ends and a Post-battle Squabble Over Honors

Sunset occurred around 5:30 p.m. Many combatants reported how the attacks ended with the arrival of darkness. However, intermittent artillery shelling and long-range musket fire continued for a few more hours. The battered Confederates trudged back northward to their defenses, leaving behind many of their dead and wounded. Numerous Rebels surrendered in the darkness. McAllister reported that over 20 Rebel prisoners from *four* divisions came into his lines; regrettably, he didn't name the divisions. The prisoners claimed they had attacked in *three* lines of battle.<sup>26</sup>

After the battle, the Federal artillery received special praise:

Gen. Smyth rode up to ... lieutenants ... [Green and Adams] and handsomely complimented the Battery for its services, stating that but for it, his division must have been flanked or captured, perhaps both. Gen. McAllister also admitted his inability to hold his post unaided by

---

<sup>25</sup> OR 46/1:393; George W. Nichols, *A Soldier's Story of his Regiment: (61st Georgia) and Incidentally of the Lawton-Gordon-Evans Brigade, Army Northern Virginia* (Jesup, GA, 1898), 212; US General Web Archives [Statewide County Georgia USGenWeb Archives \(usgwarchives.net\)](http://StatewideCountyGeorgiaUSGenWebArchives.usgwarchives.net). Nichol's account is hyperbole, the Federals remained in their nascent earthworks throughout the fight.

<sup>26</sup> OR 46/1:191-95, 238-39, 246; Boatner, *Cassell's Biographical Dictionary of the American Civil War*, 819-821; Kirk, *Heavy Guns and Light*, 370; Girvan, *The 55th North Carolina*, 135; Driver, *1st and 2nd Maryland*, 312; Others also mentioned that the Rebels attacked in three lines (Meade Communication, OR 46/2:499). East of Rocky Branch, the Rebels initially attacked in *two* lines; subsequent assaults were more ad hoc and at a distance, presumably making it difficult to ascertain specific lines.

[these] guns. [They] were also mentioned favorably by the Chief of Artillery and by Gen. Humphreys in his congratulatory order.<sup>27</sup>

Feeling particularly proud, McAllister believed (not unreasonably) that the victory was mainly due to his brigade. As with many battles throughout history, disputes over associated honors and blame, and a desire to establish a favorable narrative, can exist.

In a series of letters to his wife Ellen (February 11-15), McAllister shared concerns that others were trying to take the credit for “his” victory. “I fought the battle alone. Gen. Smyth had nothing to do with it but to look on. I may truly say that he has stolen my thunder.” The following day, he wrote again to his wife, piqued by an early newspaper report of the battle. “The reports of this battle of mine will be corrected and that all officers in this Division and Corps . . . say that the honor belongs to me alone.” He expressed annoyance that Brig. Gen. Ramsey seemed to be taking some credit for the success. Ramsey had ended his official report stating, “General McAllister's brigade held this line. I am satisfied, from the heavy assaults of the enemy, he could not have held it alone; my arrival, under the circumstances, was very portentous and opportune.”

McAllister wrote in his February 12 letter: “The idea that Ramsey’s Brigade saved the day! Ramsey was on my right and did not fire a gun. No attack was made on him at all.” He then described how Ramsey had not used the two cannons left to him when he (McAllister) had been ordered to move to the left, demonstrating Ramsey’s poor leadership and lack of ability to respond to the enemy threat appropriately. He continued, “the fight was on my front alone; I drove back the columns every time their hosts advanced against me. Justice will be done yet.”

On February 14, he wrote again that he had just received a congratulatory order from corps commander Humphreys, “this order gives me the credit. You can show it to all you please . . . have it published. It is public and can be used.” In a further letter (February 15), he wrote that “McGregor, the Associated Press correspondent, has rectified his great mistake and given my brigade the credit for the successful battle of the 5th. This correction will be published in all the papers.... Well, my brigade deserves the credit. It would be an injustice if we did not get it.”<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 387-88.

<sup>28</sup> McAllister, *The Civil War Letters*, 584-86; OR 46/1:207. *Baltimore [MD] Sun*, Feb 13, 1865, page 1.

## Analysis

These assaults formed a critical phase of the battle, yet most historians have overlooked their strategic significance, especially the actions west of Rocky Branch. The first Confederate attack occurred shortly after 4:00 p.m. West arrived on McAllister's left soon after 5:00 p.m. when the third and final attack neared its conclusion. Thus, the assaults occurred for just over an hour. A consistent picture emerges of three separate Confederate assaults that failed to penetrate the Federal line. The Yankees fought behind hastily created earthworks and received able support from two artillery sections.

The Federals had achieved a resounding victory, suffering few casualties. Union losses totaled 111, with 87 occurring east of Rocky Branch. Of these, 48 came from the exposed 8th New Jersey. Rebel casualties are more challenging to define. One estimate puts their losses at 156 for east of the stream alone. Humphreys claimed that the Rebels lost over six times his number, equating to over 600. While this is an exaggeration, factoring in overnight desertions, the total Confederate casualties could have approached 300.<sup>29</sup>

However, issues and discussion points remain. Extensive literature exists from the Federal perspective regarding this fight, with numerous *OR* entries and memoirs. This contrasts markedly with the meager Confederate data. Only one *OR* entry exists from a Rebel field officer (Col. Peck), which revealed little. Robert E. Lee's curt official description of the affair stated: "In the afternoon, part of Hill's and Gordon's troops demonstrated against the enemy on the left of Hatcher's Run, near Armstrong's Mill. Finding him entrenched, they were withdrawn after dark." Gordon's report ignored this fight. Seminal books about R. E. Lee, John Gordon, A. P. Hill, Henry Heth, William McComb, and Clement Evans chose to overlook these assaults for whatever reason. Testimony from more junior Confederate commanders is also minimal. This situation inevitably leads to a subject bias and essential

---

<sup>29</sup> *OR* 46/1:193. In a telegram to Grant, Meade claimed that Humphreys lost 300 men in the late afternoon attacks (*OR* 46/1:150-51); this was presumably provisional data or exaggeration, as it was far greater than the official casualties recorded (*OR* 46/1:63-69). The 156 Rebel casualties is a conservative estimate from data kindly provided by casualty expert Alfred C. Young III. Record keeping in the Rebel army at this stage of the war was fragile, with many of their records lost or destroyed. The Rebels fighting west of Rocky Branch fought on the following two days, making it impossible to disentangle their overall battle casualty data for this particular action. Federal data derives from the regimental losses in the *OR* and assumes they relate solely to this battle phase. We saw the limits of such analyses in the case of the 8th NYHA, however, the values presented are reasonable estimates.

gaps in the narrative, factors one must accept.<sup>30</sup>

**Table 6.1: Heth's Rebel Brigades East of Rocky Branch**

<b>Brigade</b>	<b>Strength</b>	<b>Casualties</b>	<b>%age</b>
Davis	828	3	<0.4
Cooke	1,738	77	4.4
McComb	907	36	4.0
MacRae	1,203	40	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,716</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>3.3</b>

Strength data come from the end of January 1865 Inspection Reports, adjusted for the transfer of the 55th NC regiment (326) from Davis to Cooke just before the battle. Alfred C. Young III kindly provided the casualty estimates.<sup>31</sup>

East of Rocky Branch, in the initial assault, the Rebels in the brigades of Cooke, McComb, and MacRae totaled 3,848. They were predominantly attacking McAllister's brigade of about 2,000 men,<sup>32</sup> supported for a time by two other regiments (one being only four companies). Further to the right, Ramsey's brigade of 1,100 remained minimally engaged. West's brigade arrived around 5:00 p.m., when most of the fighting had concluded. Apart from the 8th New Jersey, fighting in the open, McAllister's brigade incurred remarkably few losses. Indeed, only six casualties occurred within regiments behind the earthworks. This suggests the value of even light, hastily constructed earthworks. It also

---

<sup>30</sup> *OR* 46/2:1206; *OR* 46/1:390. The following seminal books on the key Rebel commanders sadly add nothing to the narrative: Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War*; Henry Heth, *The Memoirs of Henry Heth*, ed. James L. Morrison (Greenwood, NY, 1974); Robert G. Stephens, *Intrepid Warrior: Clement Anselm Evans Confederate General from Georgia Life, Letters, And Diaries of the War Years* (Dayton, OH, 1992); Robertson, *General A. P. Hill*; Douglas S. Freeman, *R. E. Lee: A Biography* vol. 3 (New York, 1934); Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants*, vol 3; Long, *The Memoirs of R. E. Lee*; Taylor, *Four Years with General Lee*. In Clark, *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina, in the Great War 1861-65*. 5 Vols, of the ten NC regiments that took part in the engagement, only the account of the 27th NC provided any significant details.

<sup>31</sup> NARA M935, Roll 15, 8-P-53; 9-P-53; 10-P-53; 11-P-53. Interpreting Inspection Reports is complex; often, the accounting was inconsistent. I have used the aggregates of columns 42 (officers) and 43 (men) to denote those present. This figure *should* coincide with that given on the cover summarizing the brigade's strength; this was not always the case. The accounting in Davis's report was particularly problematic. The casualty data are regarded as conservative estimates.

<sup>32</sup> Maj. Gen. Mott's division was around 6,000 (*OR* 46/1:191); the brigades of Brig. Gen. De Trobriand and Brig. Gen. West were around 2,300 and 1,700, respectively (*OR* 46/2:451); thus, by deduction, Brig. Gen. McAllister's brigade was about 2,000.

implies an inefficiency in the Confederate assaults despite some units fighting with great resolve.

**Table 6.2: Federal Casualties East of Rocky Branch**

<b>McAllister Sector</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Total</b>	
69th PA (Pierce)	2	3	0	5	Sent as pickets
20th MA (Olmstead)	1	5	5	11	Sent as pickets
106th PA (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent as pickets
4th OH (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent to left of McAllister
12th NJ (Pierce)	1	6	0	7	Sent to left of McAllister
7th NJ	0	1	0	1	In line
8th NJ	11	37	0	48	In line
11th NJ	1	1	1	3	In line
11th MA	0	0	0	0	In line
120th NY	0	2	0	2	In line
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>77</b>	
<b>Ramsey Sector</b>					
145th PA	0	1	0	1	
Other regiments	0	0	0	0	
10th MA Art (1 sec)	0	0	0	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>1</b>	
<b>West Brigade</b>					
1st MA Heavy Art.	0	1	0	1	
5th MI	0	3	0	3	
93rd NY	0	0	0	0	
57th PA	0	1	0	1	
105th PA	0	0	0	0	
141st PA	1	3	0	4	
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>9</b>	
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>87</b>	

Data came from the official returns for the entire battle, *OR* 46/1:63-69. These units were not actively engaged during other battle phases; thus, one can assume they occurred in this action. The 145th PA data came from *OR* 46/1:210.

Understandably, the Confederates had little appetite for repeated exposure to a withering enfilade artillery shelling and heavy fire from Federals behind basic earthworks. After the initial attack, subsequent Rebel firing occurred from a distance, with them crouched behind whatever cover they could find. This caution possibly explains the relatively low Rebel casualty figures (less than 5%) from three frontal assaults on a well-defended position.

By contrast, McAllister's men exhibited exemplary fortitude, especially the 8th New Jersey, which fought for over an hour in the open. Under such hostile circumstances, it would not have been uncommon for Civil War units to panic and flee, as McAllister alleged that the 12th New Jersey and 4th Ohio did. Had McAllister's line broken, it could have imperiled the whole 2nd Corps position.

**Table 6.3: Federal Casualties West of Rocky Branch**

<b>OLMSTEAD sector</b>	<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>Total</b>	
19th ME	0	0	0	0	
19th MA	2	5	0	[7]	<b>Morning Casualties</b>
7th MI	0	0	0	0	Picketing
1st MN	0	0	0	0	Picketing
59th NY	0	1	0	1	In line
152nd NY	0	0	0	0	In line
184th PA	0	2	0	2	In line
36th WI	0	0	0	0	In line
10th NY Bn. (Pierce)	0	2	0	2	Sent to picket line
108th NY (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent to picket line
7th WV (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent to Olmstead's line
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>5</b>	
<b>MURPHY Sector</b>					
8th NY Heavy Art	2	3	3	8*	In line
155th NY	0	0	0	0	In line
164th NY	0	1	0	1	In line
170th NY	0	0	0	0	In line
182nd NY	1	2	1	4	"69th NYSNGA", pickets
1st DE (Pierce)	0	0	0	0	Sent to Murphy's line
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	
10th MA Art. (2 sec.)	0	0	0	0	
14th CN (Pierce)	1	5	0	6	Sent to support the artillery
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>6</b>	

**Overall Total** **24**

Data came from the official returns for the entire battle, *OR* 46/1:63-69. These units were not actively engaged during other phases of the battle, except the 19th MA. \*The actual figure is probably 2 (from regimental rosters, see footnote 23).

The key to the engagement lay west of Rocky Branch. The three Rebel brigades of Evans's division, Gordon's Corps, totaled some 2,694 men: Baker (1,156), Peck (434), and Terry (1,104). Incredibly, despite some artillery support, these Confederates did not penetrate

the Federal picket line of probably no more than 200-300 men. Information from this sector of the battlefield is minimal. Data for Baker's brigade suggests they engaged in fighting and suffered casualties. However, such attacks appeared rather feeble. The Federals suffered only 24 losses in this sector, although brigade commander Murphy received a mortal wound. Aggressive Rebel attacks here would at least have eased the pressure on their comrades fighting east of Rocky Branch, particularly in diverting the Federal artillery firepower that effectively blunted Heth's attacks.<sup>33</sup>

Both Evans and Gordon had reputations for being combative. From post-war testimony, we learn that Gordon confidently expected success, claiming he "was never more certain of victory. I expected to gobble [the Federals] up, and I don't know why I did not succeed." This engagement was the first time these troops had fought since arriving from the Shenandoah Valley, where they had suffered a series of crushing defeats. Low morale and a reputation for being unwilling to fight haunted these soldiers. One reporter at the battle drily commented, "Gordon's Valley troops ... had attempted to save the Confederacy by the old maneuver of running not fighting." Perhaps poor performances during this action contributed to the post-war silence in Confederate personal memoirs.<sup>34</sup>

The Confederates failed to utilize tactics that had served them well at earlier Petersburg battles, such as Reams's Station, August 25, 1864. Sharpshooter units could have targeted the Union artillery sections, diminishing their effectiveness. The Rebel artillery could have attempted to counter the Federal cannons and soften up McAllister's line.<sup>35</sup>

In the late afternoon of February 5, the Rebels missed a golden opportunity to inflict severe damage on the Union 2nd Corps.

---

<sup>33</sup> End of Jan 1865 Inspection Reports, NARA M935, Roll 14, 21-P-51; 22-P-51; 23-P-51. The low, 24 Union losses, is probably an overestimate; recall that the 8th NYHA suffered two casualties, the *OR* shows eight.

<sup>34</sup> Billings, *The History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery*, 386. The troops in Gordon's Corps had formed the main part of Jubal Early's Army of the (Shenandoah) Valley. Following substantial defeats at the battles of Third Winchester (Sept 19, 1864); Fisher's Hill (Sept 21-22); Tom's Brook (Oct 9), and Cedar Creek (Oct 19); this army was broken up. Lee ordered most of the troops back to support him around Petersburg, in a reformed Second Corps commanded by Maj. Gen. Gordon (Lewis, "The Shenandoah in Flames," *The Time Life Civil War Series*, 24:100-71); Waters & Edmonds, *A Small but Spartan Band*, 171-72; "Battle of Hatcher's Run," *Atlanta [GA] Weekly Intelligencer*, April 12, 1865. Morale was particularly low in the "consolidated brigades" of Terry and Peck, where desertion was rife. Amalgamating regiments (a practical necessity owing to the few "effectives" present at this stage of the war) was very unpopular in Lee's Army, where belonging to a named unit created strong attachments. Hess, *Lee's Tar Heels*, 283; Lee A. Wallace, *The 5th Virginia Infantry* (Lynchburg, VA, 1988), 66; Reidenbaugh, *The 27th Virginia*, 117; Chapla, *The 42nd Virginia*, 53.

<sup>35</sup> Horn, *The Petersburg Campaign*, 145-48.