

**The First Battles for Petersburg**

**June 15-18, 1864**

by

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(ABSTRACT)

During June 15-18, 1864, the Federal Army of the Potomac launched a series of attacks against the vital Confederate rail center of Petersburg, Virginia. Union leaders believed that capturing Petersburg would force the abandonment of the Rebel capital at Richmond. The assaults failed, however, and the opposing armies settled into a ten-month siege.

This study investigated the opening battles for Petersburg on three levels. First, the strategic dispositions and movements of the Army of the Potomac and the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia are discussed prior to and during the battles. Secondly, the study looks carefully at the tactical situation on each of the four days of fighting. Thirdly, the paper reveals the personal side of combat through the use of soldiers' diaries, letters, and regimental histories. The thesis concludes that Federal failure occurred because of poor Union leadership and staff work, a strong Confederate defense, and extreme exhaustion throughout the Northern army.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank \_\_\_\_\_ of Monroe, Wisconsin, and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of Blacksburg, Virginia, for reading various rough drafts of this thesis. Their valuable insights have made it a better work. Its weaknesses belong singularly to the writer.

\_\_\_\_\_ of Petersburg National Battlefield donated not only his time but his considerable talents as well. \_\_\_\_\_ took me on several guided tours of the battlefield and shared willingly his deep knowledge of the Petersburg Campaign. All of the original maps in the thesis, except for the first, are the result of his skilled hand.

My committee composed of Dr. Thomas Adriance, Dr. Harold Livesay, and Dr. Gustavus Williamson provided their professional insight and support.

Dr. James I. Robertson, Jr., committee chair and my advisor, graciously opened his home library to me, simplifying the task of locating sources. His superior editorial assistance is much appreciated.

Lastly, I am deeply grateful to my wife, \_\_\_\_\_. Without her love and great patience this thesis might never have been.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Maps . . . . .	v
Introduction . . . . .	1
Chapter I . . . . .	9
Chapter II -- June 15, 1864 . . . . .	44
Chapter III -- June 16, 1864 . . . . .	83
Chapter IV -- June 17, 1864, A. M. . . . .	118
Chapter V -- June 17, 1864, P. M. . . . .	141
Chapter VI -- June 18, 1864 . . . . .	173
Conclusion . . . . .	223
Selected Bibliography . . . . .	232
Vita . . . . .	243
Acknowledgements . . . . .	iii
Table of Contents	iv



## LIST OF MAPS

MAP 1. The Petersburg Battlefield, June 15-18, 1864 . . . . .	8
MAP 2. Grant's Plan of Campaign for 1864 . . . . .	11
MAP 3. The Advance to the James River . . . . .	14
MAP 4. Cold Harbor to Petersburg . . . . .	32
MAP 5. The Vicinity of Petersburg . . . . .	45
MAP 6. The Dimmock Line . . . . .	55
MAP 7. Situation about 7 p. m., June 15, 1864 . . . . .	65
MAP 8. The Battle of Petersburg, June 15-18, 1864 . . . . .	68
MAP 9. Bermuda Hundred and Vicinity . . . . .	98
MAP 10. Federal Corps Positions, June 16, 1864 . . . . .	103
MAP 11. II Corps Attacks, 6 p. m., June 16 . . . . .	105
MAP 12. Potter's Dawn Attack, June 17 . . . . .	122
MAP 13. Willcox's Assault, 2 p. m., June 17 . . . . .	143
MAP 14. Ledlie's Salient, 6-10 p. m., June 17 . . . . .	155
MAP 15. Confederate Counterattack, 10-11 p. m. . . . .	159
MAP 16. Federal Advance, 4 a. m. - 2 p. m., June 18 . . . . .	185
MAP 17. Union Assaults, 3 p. m. - 6 p. m., June 18 . . . . .	205

## INTRODUCTION

By the third year of the Civil War, Petersburg, Virginia, was extraordinarily important to the Southern nation. This railroad center of 18,000 people had become an essential ingredient to the new nation's success or failure. As Federal forces squeezed the Confederacy into a smaller and smaller area, railroads magnified Petersburg's importance. Because of this new-found significance, combined with its geographic proximity to the Confederate capital at Richmond, the opposing armies staged the last major campaign of the war in the East at the "Cockade City."<sup>1</sup>

When civil war began, Petersburg was a flourishing, variously blessed community. It had five cotton factories, seven flouring mills, and twenty tobacco factories. Two cotton-mill towns were just north of Petersburg, across the Appomattox River. Petersburg had heavy industry as well. Four iron machine casting shops did business, including one that produced steam engines for locomotives. There were hundreds of merchants and grocers, as well as numerous banks.<sup>2</sup> A Richmond woman noted that "Petersburg has something the appearance of a northern town. Everyone here seems to be engaged in active business, and for its size, there seems

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<sup>1</sup> During the War of 1812 American soldiers wore rosettes on their hats. President James Madison named Petersburg the Cockade City in honor of the fine soldiers the city produced. See William C. Davis, Death in the Trenches: Grant at Petersburg (Alexandria, Va., 1986), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Chris M. Calkins, "A Geographic Description of the Petersburg Battlefields," Virginia Geographer, XVI (1984), 43.

to be a great deal of enterprise and a great deal of dirt."<sup>3</sup>

As the Civil War progressed, Petersburg matured into a producer of war materials. Located near the city were factories for the production of gunpowder, a naval rope walk, and a lead works and shot tower. A wagon works provided wheeled vehicles for the Confederate army.<sup>4</sup>

The Cockade City was above all else a transportation hub. Water routes were important to the prewar success of the town. The Appomattox River flows by Petersburg's north side and then meanders to City Point, eight land miles east of the city, to join the James River. Shallow draft ships plied the Appomattox and docked on the eastern side of Petersburg, just downriver from the fall line. The city had been visited by domestic and foreign vessels before the war, but the Union blockade halted the city's river traffic.

Overland routes fueled Petersburg's wartime economy and took precedence over water transportation. Roads entered Petersburg from all directions. From the north came the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike. This fine road connected Southside Virginia with the capital. Several wooden planked roads also carried heavy traffic. The Jerusalem Plank Road served the area south of Petersburg. Dinwiddie Court House, to the southwest, was joined with Petersburg via the Boydton Plank Road. The City Point Road connected the Cockade City with the James River. Other routes included the Prince George Court House, Jordan's Point, Cox, and Baxter

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<sup>3</sup> James G. Scott and Edward A. Wyatt IV, Petersburg's Story: A History (Petersburg, 1960), 162.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Geographer, XVI (1984), 46.

roads.<sup>5</sup>

Petersburg's true value to the Confederacy lay directly on the tracks of the rail lines that converged there. Richmond was just twenty-three miles north of Petersburg. The Richmond and Petersburg Railroad joined the two cities. The City Point Railroad linked Petersburg with that James River town. Angling southeast out of the Cockade City was the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad. Carrying important supplies and manpower, the Weldon Railroad entered Petersburg from the southwest and connected the city with the southern Confederacy. The Southside Railroad ran east from Lynchburg, and brought food and supplies from the Shenandoah Valley and the western Confederacy (see Map 2).

Because of geography and the organization of the railroads, Petersburg was the fulcrum upon which Richmond balanced. Only the Richmond and Danville Railroad served the capital directly. As the Federal blockade reduced available Confederate supplies and manpower, Petersburg's importance increased. To the Northern armies, the city was a natural target. To the South, Petersburg was vital to Richmond's survival. Therefore its protection became first priority. Richmond was the heart of the Confederate nation, but its lifeblood pulsed through the rail lines of Petersburg.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Wayne Lykes, Campaign For Petersburg (Washington, 1985), unpaginated.

During the Civil War, great armies often clashed at places that had little or no strategic value in and of themselves. Gettysburg, Shiloh, and Antietam Creek were such places. These now hallowed sites witnessed two armies struggling to a bloody climax in an attempt to destroy the opposing force. Petersburg, however, was a Federal target with or without Confederate defenders. Union strategists knew that the prize lay in capturing the city, not in destroying an army in the field. The leaders and men of both sides recognized that if Petersburg fell, Richmond's days were numbered. As Federal forces fought to take the Cockade City on June 16, 1864, a war clerk in Richmond reflected in his diary on the importance of the battle: "To-day it is reported that they are fighting again . . . and great masses of troops are in motion. The war will be determined, perhaps, by the operations of a day or two; and much anxiety is felt by all."<sup>6</sup>

Reflecting the strategic importance of the city, this thesis is entitled "The First Battles for Petersburg," rather than the "The First Battles of Petersburg." In the second week of June, 1864, Union officers and men knew their goal to be Petersburg, not the Army of Northern Virginia or the second-rate defenders of the town. The few Confederate troops at Petersburg likewise recognized that they fought for the safety of Petersburg, and ultimately, the security of the Confederate capital.

In most accounts of the Petersburg fighting, the first attempts to take the city are either roundly ignored or treated as a preliminary to

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<sup>6</sup> J. B. Jones, A Rebel War Clerk's Diary at the Confederate States Capital (Philadelphia, 1866), II, 232-33.

the grinding ten-month siege. The first four days of battle for the city, June 15-18, 1864, deserve to be studied in their own right. These assaults are distinct both chronologically and tactically from later and better known actions around the Cockade City.

The Battle of the Crater, fought on July 30, 1864, overshadows most of the other Petersburg actions. Historians have also paid much attention to the long and difficult siege. On March 25, 1865, the last Confederate attack of the war in the East occurred at Fort Stedman on the outskirts of Petersburg. This battle is well known, as is the April 2, 1865 Federal assault that finally captured the Cockade City. While all phases of the Petersburg campaign are important, the first four days of combat require closer inspection. By understanding the Petersburg assaults of June 15-18, a more complete appreciation of events that followed may be gained.

This study is largely written from the Union side for two reasons. First, the battles for Petersburg are primarily the story of Federal success and Federal failure. As such, it is told from the perspective of attacking Yankees more so than from that of defending Confederates. Secondly, the oft-chronicled Army of Northern Virginia was absent from much of the first four days of combat. A patchwork Southern force defended Petersburg in those four days. These Rebel units had few historians. In addition, Southern participants themselves wrote little about the first Union attacks. While Confederate sources exist on the Petersburg campaign, they are far from exhaustive. Federal sources, especially regimental histories, were widely accessible and remarkably helpful. In many ways, the sources themselves determined the direction and emphasis of the study.

As is the custom in writing Civil War history, all Union corps are in Roman numerals, such as the XVIII Corps. Confederate corps are spelled out, as in Third Corps.

The study of military history, especially that of a battle on a tactical scale, requires the use and understanding of maps. Following the Introduction is a general map of the June 15-18 battleground (Map 1). Many of the key landmarks used throughout the text are on the map; the reader may wish to refer to it often. In addition, the reader might consult The Official Military Atlas of the Civil War, Plate XL. This map shows in great detail the area surrounding Petersburg. Because of its size, color, and detail, the map reproduces poorly on a copying machine and is not included.

Lastly, it is all but impossible to write military history without passing judgment on the leadership of armies and the quality of fighting men. An historian's duty is first to report and then to interpret facts. In the interpretation of the facts surrounding Petersburg, the leadership of the Federal army is often cast in a negative light. For one to evaluate the actions of men in combat more than a century ago is difficult, if not historically dangerous. Colonel Thomas L. Livermore got to the heart of this dilemma when he noted how easy it was to "stand for resolutions that ought to have been taken, and to shed the blood of faithful and brave soldiers with the point of a pen." Livermore further admonished military historians that "without the power to . . . impress the imagination with the awful responsibility of life and death which weighs upon the commander upon the field of battle, it may be possible for the critic to test the general as a military machine, but it is not possible for him to say what

the man could have done."<sup>7</sup>

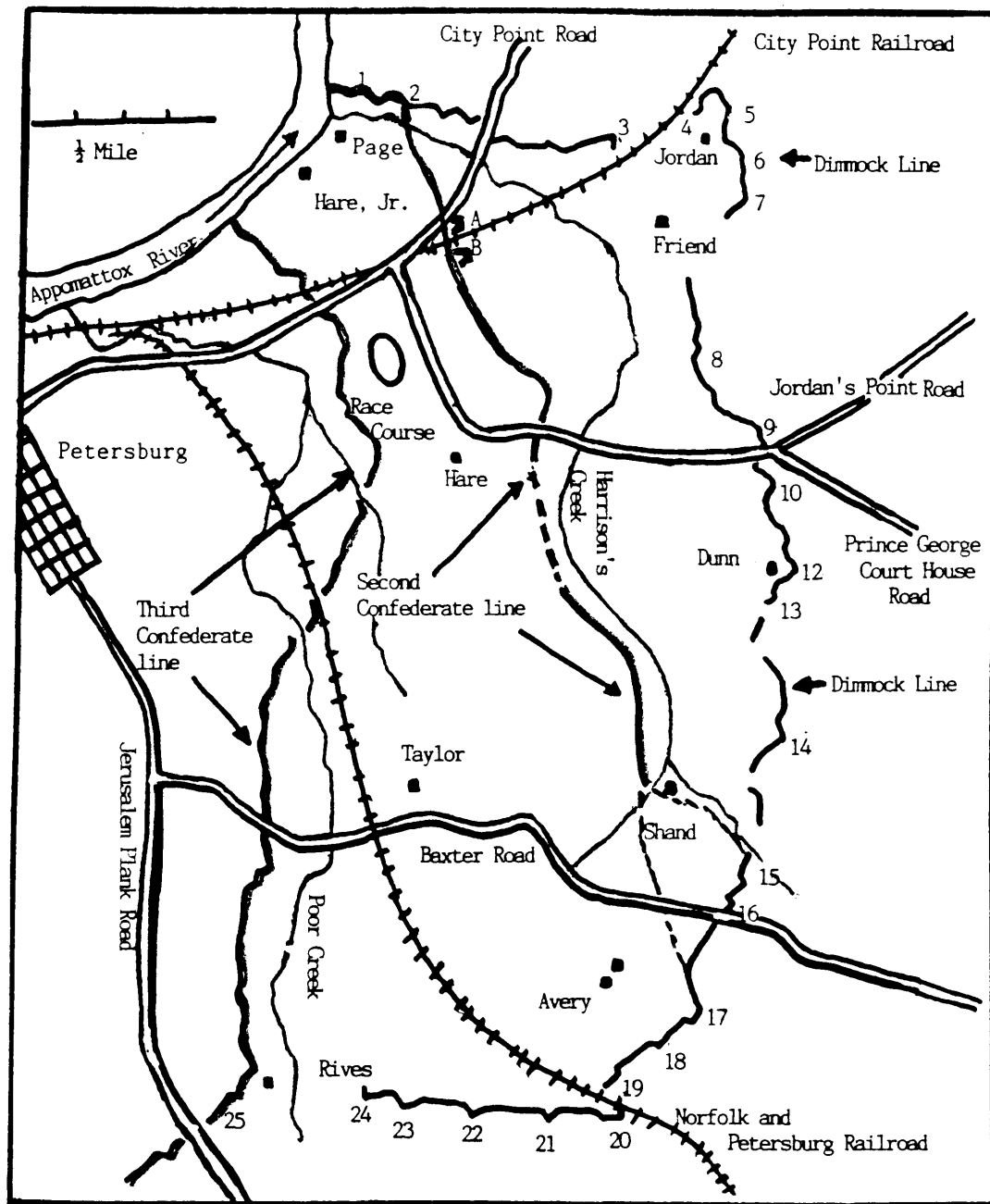
It is the hope of this writer that he has adjudged the leaders fairly and done no disservice to the gallant men of both sides who fought and died for Petersburg.

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<sup>7</sup> Military Historical Society of Massachusetts (comp.), Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg (Boston, 1906), 48. Hereafter cited as Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg.



MAP 1. The Petersburg Battlefield, June 15-18, 1864



## CHAPTER I

### "ELBOWING TO PETERSBURG"

On March 9, 1864, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant assumed command of all Federal forces. Grant established his headquarters not in Washington, D. C., but with Gen. George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac. Being with the North's premier army served Grant in two ways: it allowed him direct action against Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, while supposedly keeping him near enough to Washington to squelch political problems before they became unmanageable. Grant and Meade worked well together in an awkward situation; Grant gave general direction to movements and actions while Meade executed them with detailed orders.

Grant's new power meant a dramatic change in the prosecution of the war. No longer was Richmond the ultimate goal of the Federal army. "To get possession of Lee's army was the first great object," Grant stated. He realized that destroying Lee's army was the only sure way to force the Confederate nation to capitulate. "With the capture of his [Lee's] army," he felt, "Richmond would necessarily follow."<sup>1</sup>

To accomplish this "capture," Grant created a plan that viewed the entire war as a single battlefield. In the map board of Grant's mind,

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<sup>1</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant (New York, 1962), 371-72.

the Army of the Potomac was his center, everything west to Memphis his right, and the area south of the James River his left. Grant considered Gen. William T. Sherman's large force in Tennessee as an independent command operating behind enemy lines. This incisive ability for strategic simplification was among Grant's greatest military gifts.

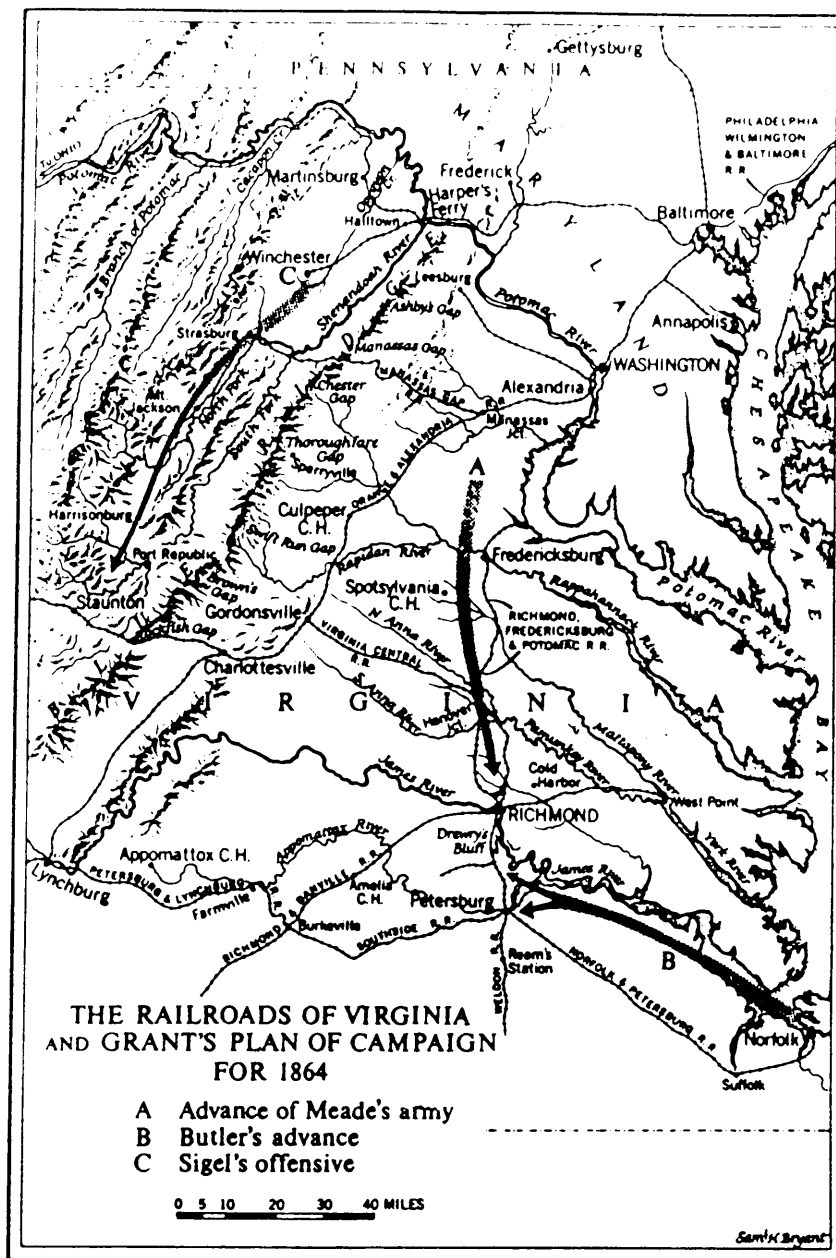
In that third spring of the Civil War, Grant designed specific objectives for the separate units under his command. General George Crook, with a column of infantry, was to march southeast up the Kanawha Valley and break the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad, a vital Confederate supply line. A corresponding action, organized under Gen. Franz Sigel, was to destroy the agricultural assets of the Shenandoah Valley. Sherman was instructed "to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can." The Army of the James, commanded by the politically placed Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, was to threaten Richmond from the south side of the James River. Butler's 25,000 men represented the Federal left.<sup>2</sup> The Army of the Potomac, Grant's center, drew the most difficult chore: fighting Lee's battle-hardened veterans. Grant was placing pressure on all fronts simultaneously, so as to weaken the Confederacy in both supply and manpower.

By early April, Grant had decided upon an overland route to Richmond. Such an approach would quiet public fear in Washington, a fear which centered on leaving the defenses open to a Confederate raid. By moving directly on Richmond from the north, the Overland Campaign--as it came

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<sup>2</sup> Sanford C. Kellogg, The Shenandoah Valley and Virginia, 1861-1865: A War Study (New York and Washington, 1903), 148-49, 152-53.

MAP 2. Grant's Plan of Campaign for 1864



Source: Bruce Catton, Grant Takes Command (Boston, 1968), 171.

to be known--would insure contact with Lee's army.

On May 4, the Army of the Potomac began a march that resulted in almost constant contact with Confederate forces until the end of the war eleven months later. The Federal army crossed the Rapidan River below (east) of the Confederate line, which had its right resting on the edge of the Wilderness. A march south and east guaranteed Grant open lines of communication by water routes in the protected rear of the army.<sup>3</sup> Grant was well aware of the danger of moving through the dense undergrowth and along the poor roads of the Wilderness. It was a nightmarish place for a large force to fight. Through rapid movement by his left flank, however, Grant expected to clear the Wilderness and smash Lee's enveloped right in the open country beyond. If the Army of Northern Virginia could be caught in open combat, rather than behind entrenchments or on ground of Lee's choosing, Grant felt sure he could bring his 52,000-man advantage to bear resulting in Lee's destruction.<sup>4</sup>

The Federal crossing of the Rapidan went smoothly. Lee, however, had no intention of allowing the Army of the Potomac to pass unscathed through the Wilderness. Just as Grant had formulated strategy for the springtime, so had Lee; his strategy mirrored Grant's in simplicity and directness. The Army of Northern Virginia was to surprise the Federal

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew A. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of 1864 and 1865 (New York, 1889), 2, 8. In Civil War terminology, communications referred to supply lines.

<sup>4</sup> The Army of the Potomac, with the addition of the IX Corps, totalled about 116,000 men. The Army of Northern Virginia counted about 64,000 men. Douglas Southall Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command (New York, 1942-1944), III, 345.

army during a march and destroy the individual corps in detail. Failing in this, Lee would do all in his power to thwart Grant in his attempt to reach Richmond. Lee, fully understanding the danger of a siege to his smaller and poorly supplied army, wished to avoid being forced into the entrenchments surrounding Richmond.

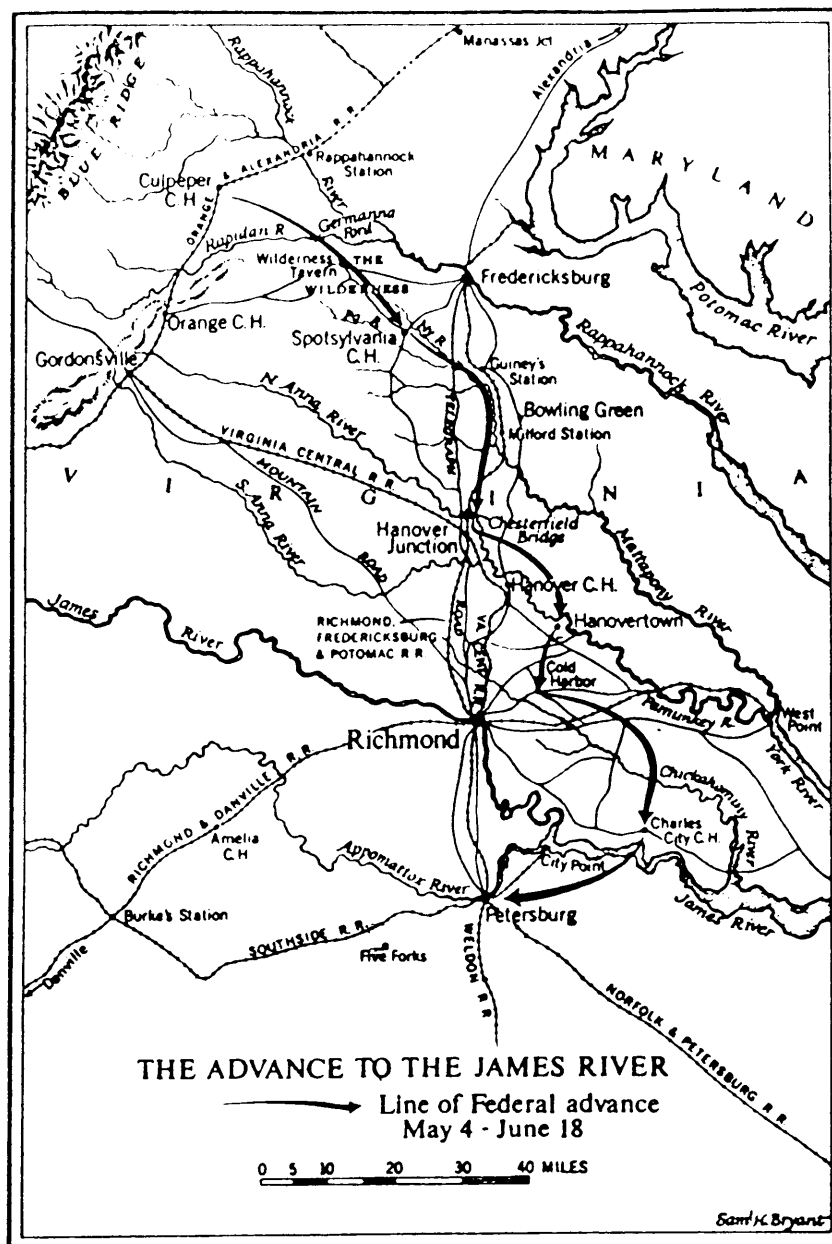
Lee recognized an opportunity to destroy Grant in the Wilderness. The limited visibility in this hardwood and bramble jungle negated the disparity in numbers. For the Army of Northern Virginia, this ground was ideal for an effective and potentially conclusive Confederate flank attack. The vicious two-day battle of the Wilderness, May 5-6, was a Confederate success, but at the cost of appalling casualties on both sides. Grant's army lost 17,666 men killed, wounded, or missing out of about 102,000 engaged. Confederate losses, more difficult to gauge, were at least 7,750 out of some 61,025 involved.<sup>5</sup> Several hundred wounded men perished in fires sparked by the fighting, adding not only numbers to the shocking casualty lists but further horror to the legacy of the Wilderness.

Grant's army had narrowly escaped destruction only two days after crossing the Rapidan. Chief among Grant's combative qualities was tenacity. On the evening of May 7, he exhibited perseverance by sending his army marching south and east of the Wilderness. This was indeed a new twist in the war. After defeats in August 1862, at Second Manassas, in December, 1862, at Fredericksburg, and at Chancellorsville in May, 1863, Federal generals and their armies had returned to Washington to lick

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<sup>5</sup> Mark M. Boatner III, The Civil War Dictionary (New York, 1959), 925.

MAP 3. The Advance to the James River



Source: Catton, Grant Takes Command, 275.

their wounds. Historian Ralph Happel called Grant's determination to continue south "one of the most important decisions in American History."<sup>6</sup> The decision baffled many Southern soldiers, for they expected a prompt Yankee return to the Rapidan. Grant's army enthusiastically greeted the new direction of march. Going south meant fighting and dying, but a new spirit prevailed in the Army of the Potomac to finish the war.

Grant's move south led to the small crossroads town of Spotsylvania Court House. A Federal army in control of the crossroads would be between Lee's army and Richmond, forcing the Army of Northern Virginia on the offensive. On May 8, the two armies raced for the strategic point, Lee's forces arriving first. In consequence, the armies faced each other for eleven days around the small village.

During the brutal fighting that took place in those eleven days, Grant exhibited his confidence and stubbornness in a wire to Chief of Staff Henry W. Halleck: "I shall take no backward steps, but may be compelled to send back . . . for more supplies . . . . We can maintain ourselves at least, and, in the end, beat Lee's army, I believe."<sup>7</sup> Grant's assertion to "fight it out on this line if it takes all summer" was made in the face of imposing Confederate works. Despite entrenchments protected by abatis and artillery positions that could enfilade attacking columns, Grant's purpose remained firm.

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce Catton, A Stillness at Appomattox (Garden City, N.Y., 1953), 402.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. War Department (comp.), War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies (Washington, 1880-1901), Ser. I, XXXVI, Pt. 1, 3. Hereafter cited as O.R. All references are to Ser. I unless otherwise noted.



On May 11, the same day Grant told Halleck he would fight Lee all summer at Spotsylvania, Lee held a conference with his generals. His statement of purpose was likewise clear: "We must attack these people if they retreat." When some of Lee's officers suggested they let Grant attack and waste his army against the earthworks, Lee again emphasized that "this army cannot stand a siege; we must end this business on the battlefield, not in a fortified place."<sup>8</sup> Lee understood that the tenacious Grant must be sent reeling under the weight of attack. Grant would not stop the offensive with an enemy in his front.

Several Federal attacks broke through the Confederate salient at Spotsylvania, called the "Mule Shoe" by the soldiers for its distinctive shape. The fighting here was so intense that even veterans "immune to the horror around them, said afterward that the entire war had offered no scene to equal that fight at the apex of the salient."<sup>9</sup> Grant broke off his direct assaults that had pierced the Confederate line but failed to break it. During May 13-17 he pursued a leapfrog movement of his corps by the left flank. The Federal corps on the right of the line moved first, marching behind the protection of the other corps to take its new position on the left. Such a movement would eventually carry Grant and the Federal army over the James River to Petersburg.

Grant's unsuccessful attacks at Spotsylvania came at a sobering cost. In the two days of most intense fighting the Army of the Potomac suffered 10,920 casualties. Confederate casualties are unknown but were

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<sup>8</sup> Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 398.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 408.

severe in relation to the original size of Lee's army. As was true in the Wilderness, the loss of competent leadership continued to be high for both armies.<sup>10</sup>

After the Spotsylvania failure, Grant decided not to "fight it out" but rather to continue moving south and east. This decision came largely because of events on his distant flanks. Failures by Gens. Franz Sigel and Benjamin Butler led to reinforcement of Lee's army.

While battle raged at Spotsylvania, Gen. Franz Sigel moved into the Shenandoah Valley. The Valley was a natural Confederate invasion route into Maryland and Pennsylvania, yet a Federal army marching south was carried away from Richmond. Because of its production of valuable foodstuffs, it was the granary of the Upper Confederacy. Grant recognized the Valley as a serious liability to the Union cause and an essential asset to the Confederacy. Sigel was therefore ordered into the Shenandoah Valley to destroy the railroads which connected Richmond with the southern and western Confederacy.<sup>11</sup>

Sigel found his objectives pre-empted by a defeat early in his campaign. A Confederate army led by Gen. John C. Breckinridge attacked Sigel on May 15 at New Market. The Confederate attack routed Sigel's army, forcing Crook's corresponding movement in the Kanawha Valley to withdraw for lack of support. This prompt Confederate action temporarily removed the Federal threat in the Valley. Grant realized that Lee might now make use of those troops freed from duty in the Valley.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 410.

<sup>11</sup> George E. Pond, The Shenandoah Valley in 1864 (New York, 1883), 9.

Butler fared little better south of the James than Sigel had in the Valley. Grant instructed Butler to advance as far up the James River as possible and invest Richmond from the south. Grant expected this action to disrupt supply lines and tie up Confederate manpower. As Grant and Lee battled in the Wilderness, Butler moved up the James. During the night of May 5-6, the Army of the James disembarked at Bermuda Hundred. Butler was in position to threaten either Richmond or Petersburg, as well as the railroad running between the two. Freeman asserted that "it was a crisis as acute as any the dreadful war had brought."<sup>12</sup>

Butler's actions rendered impotent any initial Federal threat. During May 6-10, Butler directed offensive operations primarily against the largely undefended portions of the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad. His men managed to tear up some track, but they did not range very far north or south from Bermuda Hundred. By May 10, Butler had his army tucked safely behind impressive earthworks at Bermuda Hundred.<sup>13</sup> Butler displayed abysmal tactical skill in the opening days of the spring offensive. Yet he stayed in command because of powerful political connections in New England.

To meet the growing Federal threat, Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard gathered all available forces spread throughout his Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia. By May 15, Beauregard could count about 17,000 defenders in the lines around Drewry's Bluff, and some 6,000 more at Petersburg. These troops were largely from the Carolinas, and included

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<sup>12</sup> Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 456-57.

<sup>13</sup> Humphreys, Virginia Campaign, 145.

various unattached and militia units. Beauregard's rapid organization and transfer of troops neutralized Butler's early advantage. Rather than attacking the Confederates in detail as they arrived, Butler inexplicably waited for them to congregate.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, on May 14, Butler marched north against Drewry's Bluff to apply pressure on Richmond. After taking the first line of Confederate entrenchments, the Federals devised an original measure of defense. They stretched telegraph wire in front of their lines to obstruct a Confederate infantry assault. Modern warfare had its first known use of wire as a defensive tool.<sup>15</sup> Butler scheduled an assault for May 15, but suspended it when an adequately strong attacking column could not be formed. Most of Butler's forces were widely dispersed, engaged in building defensive works for their cautious commander.

In the thick pre-dawn fog of May 16, Beauregard launched an attack against Butler at Drewry's Bluff.. The Confederates crumpled the Federal right, capturing five stand of colors and 1,388 prisoners, while inflicting 2,111 Federal casualties. Confederate success was incomplete, however, because Gen. W. H. C. Whiting failed to attack Butler in the rear and flank from his Swift Creek position.<sup>16</sup> Whiting's uncharacteristic lack of vigor probably saved the Army of the James.

Butler withdrew to Bermuda Hundred. "In the fight at Drury's Bluff two mornings ago," a Federal soldier recorded, "we lost heavily . . .

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. , 149.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. , 147-48.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. , 156-57.

Heckman's brigade was almost annihilated."<sup>17</sup> When Butler moved to the safety of his fortified line, a Confederate earthwork was promptly constructed across the neck of land. Butler's army was, in Grant's descriptive phrase, caught as if in a "bottle strongly corked."

Realizing that neither of his flank diversions would drain Lee in any way, Grant opted to move away from Spotsylvania. The Army of the Potomac moved again by the left flank, south and east and inexorably toward Richmond. Grant found Lee's army entrenched south of the North Anna River near Hanover Junction. The strength of the position, a line designed in the shape of a wide-based, inverted "V", convinced Grant to suspend any general attacks on the North Anna.

While the Army of Northern Virginia waited for Grant's assault, Gen. George E. Pickett's 5,000-man division arrived at Hanover Junction, unneeded at Bermuda Hundred to keep Butler in his bottle. Hoke's old brigade, part of Gen. Robert F. Hoke's division, was freed from duty at Petersburg, adding 1,200 muskets to Lee's tattered army. On May 20, Gen. John C. Breckinridge, fresh from his destruction of Sigel's command at New Market, brought 2,500 more men.<sup>18</sup> Grant moved from Spotsylvania

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<sup>17</sup> D. L. Day, My Diary of Rambles with the 25th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, with Burnside's Coast Division: 18th Army Corps, and Army of the James (Milford, Mass., 1884), 140. Heckman's brigade was on the extreme right of the line and bore the brunt of Gen. Archibald Gracie's attack. An excellent eyewitness account of the confusion and bloodiness of Drewry's Bluff is James A. Emmerton, A Record of the Twenty-Third Regiment Mass. Vol. Infantry in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865 (Boston, 1886), 184-99. Emmerton's regiment of 220 men lost 13 killed, 10 mortally wounded, 17 wounded, and 51 captured.

<sup>18</sup> Humphreys, Virginia Campaign, 124-25.

because he feared that Sigel's and Butler's failure would allow Confederate reinforcement. Lee's reinforcement on the North Anna line confirmed his reasoning.

Little action occurred on the North Anna line. Lee's corps commanders lacked the enterprise to destroy the isolated Federal V Corps when it was astride the river. Lee expected aggressive action from his corps commanders, especially when portions of Grant's army were vulnerable. At the North Anna Lee exhibited great displeasure with his army's seeming inability to wreck at least some part of the huge Army of the Potomac. Nonetheless, Lee's line did prove to be of great strategic value. Grant's path would of necessity swing even farther east in his approach to Richmond. This kept communications open with the Shenandoah Valley by reducing the Federal threat to the Virginia Central Railroad. The North Anna line was so important that in Freeman's estimation "no achievement of the entire campaign from the Rapidan to the James meant more in prolonging the struggle."<sup>19</sup>

While at the North Anna, Grant sent Gens. M. C. Meigs and J. G. Barnard to inspect the situation at Bermuda Hundred. If Butler could not be removed in favor of a competent field officer, the two generals suggested the removal of 20,000 of Butler's troops for use elsewhere. A final option suggested that Butler be given administrative control of the Army of the James while Gen. William F. "Baldy" Smith assume field command

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<sup>19</sup> Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee: A Biography (New York, 1934-1935), III, 361.

of the two corps. (X and XVIII).<sup>20</sup> Grant chose to leave Butler in command at Bermuda Hundred, but he ordered Smith's XVIII Corps to join the Army of the Potomac by transport. During May 26-29, Smith's 16,000 infantry and sixteen guns traveled via the James, York, and Pamunkey rivers to reinforce Grant.<sup>21</sup>

Lee, learning of Smith's movement to White House Landing on the Pamunkey, met on May 29 with Beauregard to request more troops. Beauregard courteously backed away from more transfers. He believed that only 4,000 men, not an entire corps, had left Butler's lines at Bermuda Hundred. Lee appealed for the first time to President Jefferson Davis and his military advisor, Gen. Braxton Bragg, to reinforce the Army of Northern Virginia from Beauregard's army. Davis and Bragg approved sending the remainder of Hoke's division, some 7,000 men, to Lee.<sup>22</sup>

This episode illustrates the difficulties Lee faced while working within a structure that granted autonomy to each department commander. The rapidity of Grant's movement and reinforcement resulted in large measure from the centralization of command in the Union army. Grant's position simply eliminated the interference that Lee endured.

On May 26, the Army of the Potomac left the North Anna and moved again by the left flank. Grant continued his attempted envelopment of

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<sup>20</sup> William Farrar Smith, From Chattanooga to Petersburg under Generals Grant and Butler (Boston, 1893), 19-20. Smith apparently earned his nickname while at West Point. Cadets gave him the name arbitrarily not because he was bald but rather because there were so many Smiths present.

<sup>21</sup> Humphreys, Virginia Campaign, 158-59.

<sup>22</sup> Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 501-4.

Lee's right, expecting that a decisive battle would eventually result. As Gen. Phillip Sheridan's cavalry screened Grant's march to the Pamunkey, the geography of the area alerted Sheridan to the value of the crossroads at Cold Harbor.<sup>23</sup> A road came directly from White House Landing on the Pamunkey, the destination of Smith's XVIII Corps. Most of the roads leading south from Cold Harbor radiated to bridges across the Chickahominy. A Federal army in possession of the crossroads would be in position to move on Richmond directly.

After heavy skirmishing on the Totopotomoy Creek line near Hanover town on May 31, Lee and Grant each sent forces racing for Cold Harbor. Lee won the race by moments, despite an attempt by Smith to press his men through "ten miles of forced marching under a fervid sun and through clouds of dust."<sup>24</sup> On June 1, Lee ordered Gen. Richard H. Anderson to use his First Corps to roll up the Federal left flank as it came into position. With the addition of Hoke's 7,000 reinforcements Lee was risking much, yet he was forcing the offensive to "end this business on the battlefield." Anderson's attack failed when an untested colonel led his brigade into battle without proper support.<sup>25</sup> The dearth of Confederate leadership caused by the previous month's fighting was having its negative effect.

Early that evening, Grant launched the VI and XVIII Corps into an

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Z. Starr, The Union Cavalry in the Civil War (Baton Rouge, 1979-1985), II, 118-19.

<sup>24</sup> Emmerton, Twenty-Third Massachusetts, 204. See note 23 above.

<sup>25</sup> Colonel E. M. Keitt was the novice who led Kershaw's brigade into battle. When Keitt fell dead the brigade broke and ran.



attack which cost more than 2,200 men. Although the Federal soldiers captured some works, they failed to shatter the Confederate line. A Union soldier, delivering a message through the woods where part of the attack had taken place described the carnage: "A more terrible picture of war can scarcely be imagined . . . The dead are lying everywhere . . . most lie as they fell, and are badly torn--it is a walk of sickening and unutterable horrors."<sup>26</sup> The horror was not over at Cold Harbor. Grant resolved to attack again, perhaps out of frustration growing from his inability to turn either of Lee's flanks. Grant hoped to drive the Army of Northern Virginia into the Chickahominy, leading to panic among the Confederate soldiers and the capture or destruction of Lee's army.

Instead of driving the Confederates to the Chickahominy on June 3, the Federals struck earthworks designed to enfilade attacking columns. Withering fire destroyed the Union effort within thirty minutes. General John Gibbon's division of the II Corps lost 65 officers and 1,032 men; total Federal losses are estimated at 7,000 troops. Despite such appalling casualties, the Union veterans did not flee in panic during the repulse of their attack. Just as they had done on June 1, they stopped in the face of a brutal fire, flung themselves to the ground, and entrenched. Some of these hasty, makeshift lines were valiantly dug within forty yards of the Confederate works. Grant ordered offensive operations halted and later "regretted that the last assault at Cold

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<sup>26</sup> S. Millett Thompson, Thirteenth Regiment of New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry in the War of the Rebellion 1861-1865 (Boston, 1888), 355.

Harbor was ever made."<sup>27</sup>

After the June 3 debacle at Cold Harbor, Grant considered a bold left flank march to the James. Such a move had serious risks associated with it. If Lee perceived the movement quickly, he might destroy the rear or flank of the Army of the Potomac, or travel on interior lines to Bermuda Hundred to crush Butler. That Lee might dispatch forces to fall on Hunter, isolated near Lynchburg, also disturbed Grant.

The Federal march would be challenged by physical obstacles as well as strategic concerns. To move an army of more than 100,000 men across the unbridged Chickahominy and through fifty miles of dry, unfriendly countryside on roads "which scarcely ranked with a wretched lane" required competent execution.<sup>28</sup> Grant forged ahead, believing "the move had to be made, and I relied upon Lee's not seeing my danger as I saw it."<sup>29</sup>

The march to the James continued Grant's strategy of moving by the left flank. For the time being, however, Lee's army was not the primary target, but rather Confederate lines of communication. By early June, Grant understood Lee's greatest problem to be one of supply. Petersburg became a logical target for the Federal army. Most of the supplies for the Army of Northern Virginia and Richmond came from the Deep South and the Shenandoah Valley. These essential supplies rode the rails. At Vicksburg in 1863, Grant had learned that control of enemy railroads would force capitulation. All but one Confederate railroad which served

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<sup>27</sup> Grant, Personal Memoirs, 444.

<sup>28</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 23.

<sup>29</sup> Grant, Personal Memoirs, 448.

Richmond passed first through Petersburg. These rail lines "largely accounted for the city's strategic importance."<sup>30</sup> With Petersburg in Federal hands, Lee's army and Richmond would be forced into starvation.

Grant's adoption of a strategy of exhaustion (depleting Lee's supplies) would eventually compel the Army of Northern Virginia to fight on ground of Grant's choosing, something the Union chief had wanted from the beginning. Grant's immediate objective was no longer the Army of Northern Virginia or Richmond, but rather Petersburg, which was "a fortress thrust forward on the flank of the Confederate capital."<sup>31</sup>

On June 5, Grant determined to transfer his army to the south side of the James River. To cover such a large movement, Grant resolved to place pressure on Confederate forces at several points simultaneously.<sup>32</sup> Three diversions occupied Lee before Grant made his move to the James River and Petersburg.

On June 7, Sheridan's cavalry divisions left on a raid to destroy all rail connections east of the Blue Ridge from the Valley and Lynchburg to Richmond. If possible, Sheridan was to rendezvous with Gen. Daniel Hunter's force at Charlottesville, wreck the rail lines of central Virginia, and then rejoin the Army of the Potomac.<sup>33</sup> Lee sent the majority of his cavalry, jointly led by Gens. Fitzhugh Lee and Wade

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<sup>30</sup> Scott, Petersburg's Story, 189.

<sup>31</sup> William Swinton, Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac (New York, 1866), 507.

<sup>32</sup> J. F. C. Fuller, The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant (Bloomington, Ind., 1958), 286-87.

<sup>33</sup> Starr, Union Cavalry, II, 127-29.

Hampton, to meet this threat. Although the Confederate cavalry succeeded in repulsing Sheridan at Trevilian Station, they were absent during Grant's move across the James. The essential intelligence provided under normal circumstances by a formidable cavalry command was lacking, and Lee could only obtain fragmentary reports of Grant's activity.

The Shenandoah Valley provided Grant with an opportunity for a second diversion. In late May, Gen. David Hunter, Sigel's replacement, was in the Valley, with orders to march south to Lynchburg and "destroy the railroad and canal beyond all possibility of repair."<sup>34</sup> After Hunter met and defeated a Confederate force at Piedmont, Lee sent Breckinridge on June 7 with 2,100 men to meet the Federal threat. By June 12, however, Hunter had combined forces with Gens. Crook and Averell, totalling an impressive 18,000 men.<sup>35</sup> Hunter was moving on the massive and vital Confederate supply depot of Lynchburg. Besides storing "all commissary and quartermaster stores," the city also held "many of the scant medical supplies of the Confederacy."<sup>36</sup> With this key city controlled by Union forces, Lee's army would lose communications not only with the Shenandoah Valley's agricultural riches, but with the western Confederacy as well. Out of necessity, Lee ordered the 8,000 men of the Second Corps, now under Gen. Jubal A. Early, to meet and destroy the threat posed by Hunter.

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<sup>34</sup> Military Historical Society of Massachusetts (comp.), The Shenandoah Campaigns of 1862 and 1864 and the Appomattox Campaign, 1865 (Boston, 1907), 70.

<sup>35</sup> Pond, Shenandoah Valley, 23-27.

<sup>36</sup> Southern Historical Society Papers, XXX (1902), 279-80. Hereafter cited as SHSP.

Petersburg, soon to be the last major campaign of the war, constituted the third Federal diversion. Butler's Army of the James was supposed to capture the Cockade City. On June 9, Gen. Quincy A. Gillmore led 1,800 men of the X Corps plus a part of Gen. Edward W. Hinks's Colored division against the town.<sup>37</sup> In the van were three cavalry regiments commanded by Gen. August V. Kautz, which brought the Federal attacking force to about 4,500 men.

Troops under Gen. Henry A. Wise, commander of the First Military District of Beauregard's department, met the Federal approach. Wise was in charge of all of Virginia south of the Appomattox River, including the city of Petersburg. Gillmore, approaching the city from the northeast, was to attack when he heard Kautz's guns from the south. After several hours of quiet, Gillmore became impatient and mindlessly returned to Bermuda Hundred.

Kautz, meanwhile, attacked Petersburg from the south on the Jerusalem Plank Road. Breaking through Col. Fletcher Archer's militia, the Federal cavalry met what Wise called the "patients and penitents," an assembly of boys, old men, convalescing soldiers, released prisoners, and the Petersburg Home Guard.<sup>38</sup> These men, combined with the fire from

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<sup>37</sup> In Civil War terms, all black troops were officially designated as "colored" rather than as black. Hinks's name is often spelled as "Hincks" in contemporary sources. He added to the confusion by dropping the "c" early in life and reinstating it after the war. During the war his name was officially Hinks, and will appear so in the text. See Patricia L. Faust (ed.), Historical Times Encyclopedia of the Civil War (New York, 1986), 362-63.

<sup>38</sup> Barton H. Wise, The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia, 1806-1876 (New York, 1899), 344.

Graham's battery atop Reservoir Hill, checked the Federal advance. A timely counterattack by James Dearing's cavalry drove Kautz beyond the city limits and the lines south of town.

Confederate response to the abortive Federal assault on Petersburg ranged from reinforcement of Beauregard to a concern about the city's future safety. On June 9, Gen. Matt Ransom's North Carolina brigade and Gen. Archibald Gracie's Alabama brigade left the Richmond defenses to cross the James River on the Confederate pontoon bridge at Drewry's Bluff. From this point, the two brigades could reach Petersburg quickly should it be threatened again.<sup>39</sup>

From his headquarters at Dunlop's, north of Petersburg, Beauregard told Bragg that the "enemy's attack upon Petersburg yesterday was not a raid, but a reconnaissance."<sup>40</sup> Beauregard felt the failed Federal effort was only a precursor to a larger action which would succeed in taking the city. As early as June 7, Beauregard told Bragg that Grant would move south of the James to operate against Richmond from Bermuda Hundred. Bragg, Lee, and Davis dismissed Beauregard's fears as typical of a general who spent much time concocting grand military schemes.<sup>41</sup>

Lee too had considered the possibility that Grant might again move south, but the Confederate commander still felt that the Union army was advancing toward Richmond via the roads running southeast from the

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<sup>39</sup> Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 398.

<sup>40</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 1002.

<sup>41</sup> T. Harry Williams, P. G. T. Beauregard: Napoleon in Gray. (Baton Rouge, 1954), 226.

capital. While at the North Anna, Lee warned his generals that "we must destroy this army of Grant's before he gets to James River. If he gets there it will become a siege, and then it will be a mere question of time."<sup>42</sup>

Lee apparently understood both the value of Petersburg and the danger to his army if trapped there. Yet as early as June 9, Lee convinced himself that Grant could not move to the James without being seen by Confederate forces. In a June 9 dispatch to Beauregard, Lee reassured the anxious Creole that "no troops have left General Grant's army to my knowledge, and none could have crossed James River without being perceived."<sup>43</sup> Lee logically assumed Grant's probable movement was to cross the Chickahominy and march to the north bank of the James, opposite Butler at Bermuda Hundred. Here the two Federal armies could unite at a narrow point in the river, or operate independently, assailing Richmond with cover from the powerful fleet of gunboats and monitors plying the James. Lee's ingrained expectations of Grant's behavior and his overconfidence in his ability to observe Federal movements nearly led to Confederate disaster on the south side of the James.

On the night of June 12, a Confederate picket curious about another Federal flank movement called to his Union counterpart: "where is Grant

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<sup>42</sup> Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 498. The source of the quote is Gen. Jubal A. Early in J. William Jones, Personal Reminiscences of General Robert E. Lee.

<sup>43</sup> Alfred Roman, The Military Operations of General Beauregard in the War Between the States, 1861 to 1865. Including a Brief Personal Sketch and a Narrative of His Services in the War with Mexico, 1846-1848 (New York, 1883-1884), II, 566.

agoing to elbow us again?"<sup>44</sup> The Confederate had his answer by morning as Grant began the deep turning movement to Petersburg. The 115,000 men of the Army of the Potomac managed the remarkable--they slipped away from their close lines unnoticed.<sup>45</sup>

In the early morning of June 13, Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside informed Meade's headquarters that "the last reports make the enemy firing at one of battery epaulements after our pickets were a mile off."<sup>46</sup> The two armies were out of contact for the first time in thirty-nine days. When the march started, Grant displayed "the only anxiety and nervousness of manner he had ever manifested on any occasion".<sup>47</sup> Grant's concern proved to be unfounded. The difficult march to the James succeeded without serious incident.

Smith's XVIII Corps marched from Cold Harbor to White House Landing, boarding transports for the winding 180-mile journey to Bermuda Hundred. A soldier noted that "the first thing the column met was--silence . . . for twelve days, waking and sleeping we had lived on a noisy battlefield."<sup>48</sup> The XVIII Corps had the right-of-way over other Federal units because it was rushing to Petersburg to spearhead the attack.

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<sup>44</sup> Robert McAllister, The Civil War Letters of General Robert McAllister (New Brunswick, N. J., 1965), 441.

<sup>45</sup> Grant received 40,000 reinforcements between Cold Harbor and the James, making good his losses. For a list of the units sent to the Army of the Potomac, see O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 48.

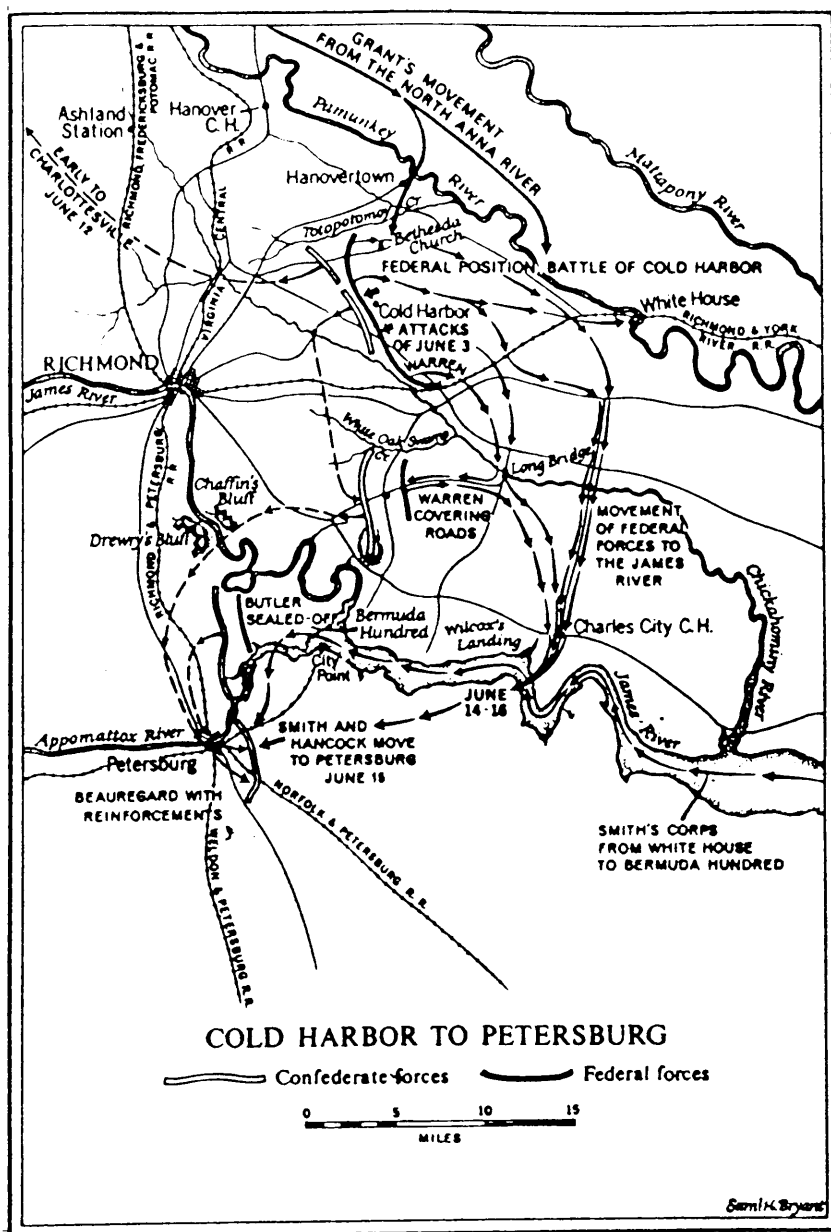
<sup>46</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Horace Porter, Campaigning With Grant (New York, 1897), 188.

<sup>48</sup> Emmerton, 23rd Massachusetts, 215.



MAP 4. Cold Harbor to Petersburg



Source: Catton, Grant Takes Command, 299.

Nonetheless, Smith's corps ran into delays and roadblocks that are inevitable when an entire army moves at once.

The rest of the army made its way overland to Charles City Court House, just north of the James. At daylight on June 13, Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren's V Corps and Gen. James Wilson's cavalry division crossed a pontoon bridge thrown at the site of Long Bridge. At the head of each corps were engineer companies; their services proved invaluable when reaching unbridged rivers, or those bridges the Confederates had destroyed (as at Long Bridge).<sup>49</sup>

Warren and Wilson placed their men on a line facing White Oak Swamp bridge and Riddell's Shop. Warren's "skirmishers were deployed and a smart peppering was kept up till late afternoon."<sup>50</sup> The "peppering" led Lee to believe that the V Corps and cavalry actions were covering an advance on the Darby Town and New Market roads leading to Richmond from the southeast.<sup>51</sup>

As the V Corps and Wilson's cavalry engaged Confederate forces, Gen. Winfield S. Hancock's II corps crossed the Chickahominy at Long Bridge. Burnside's IX Corps and Gen. Horatio Wright's VI Corps crossed the Chickahominy on a pontoon bridge at the site of the destroyed Jones's

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<sup>49</sup> William Powell, The Fifth Army Corps (Army of the Potomac): A Record of Operations During the Civil War in the United States of America, 1861-65 (New York, 1896), 678. The Engineer Corps constructed least thirty-eight bridges from the Rapidan to the James.

<sup>50</sup> Abner Small, The Road to Richmond: The Civil War Memoirs of Maj. Abner R. Small of the 16th Maine Vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959), 150.

<sup>51</sup> Fuller, Generalship of Grant, 288.

Bridge.

During June 12-14, Federal officers pushed their troops to the James. On the 13th, Warren urged his division commanders to "take every precaution to drive up stragglers" as they left White Oak Swamp.<sup>52</sup> A member of Wright's VI Corps reflecting on the June 13 march remembered "we were completely exhausted before we bivouacked for the night. Those last miles were doled out in suffering by inches."<sup>53</sup>

A lack of water and an inordinate amount of dust made the march nearly unbearable. One correspondent wrote: "The heat and dust of to-day's marching are terrible. Dirt, dust, pulverization of earth into infinitesimalities of concreted nastiness."<sup>54</sup> Both common soldier and general complained. A soldier stated flatly in a letter home that "night marching plays out more men than any other part of campaigning." A concerned Gen. Wright informed Meade that "my men are much exhausted, as the march has been a long one."<sup>55</sup>

Despite such concerns, the army drove to the James, "choked with dust and burned with heat."<sup>56</sup> One officer, watching Long Bridge on the Chickahominy, reported that "hour after hour the procession of men and

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<sup>52</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 8.

<sup>53</sup> Wilbur Fisk, Anti-Rebel: The Civil War Letters of Wilbur Fisk (Croton-on-Hudson, N. Y., 1983), 229-30.

<sup>54</sup> New York Tribune, June 17, 1864.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Goldthwaite Carter, Four Brothers in Blue or Sunshine and Shadows of the War of the Rebellion (Austin, 1978), 437; O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 9.

<sup>56</sup> George T. Stevens, Three Years in the Sixth Corps (Albany, N. Y., 1866), 355.

horses swept on, their shadows flitting strangely. . . . The whole army was on a wild, night tramp to the James River."<sup>57</sup>

In the warm evening of June 13 the head of the II Corps arrived at the James. The remainder of the army would arrive through June 17, when the crossing of the cattle herds and a rear-guard division of the VI Corps passed to the south side.<sup>58</sup>

Grant had foreseen the possibility of crossing the James as early as April 15, when he ordered Gen. Henry Benham of the Engineers to gather and hold at Fort Monroe sufficient water transport to tow enough bridge-building materials to span the James. At 9 a.m. June 13, Grant's planning realized fruition as he ordered the pontoons upriver. One hundred and fifty-five pontoons and their attendant materials went to the selected crossing point at Weyanoke Neck.<sup>59</sup>

At 4 p. m. on June 13, work began on the approaches, twenty-four hours later Major James Duane, Chief Engineer of the Army of the Potomac, began construction of the bridge. Two hundred regular U. S. engineers and 220 members of the 50th New York Volunteer Engineers completed the bridge in only eight hours.<sup>60</sup> By 11 p.m. the bridge was finished save a central section left out to allow passage of ships. At 11:30 p.m., Meade

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<sup>57</sup> William Child, A History of the Fifth Regiment New Hampshire Volunteers in the American Civil War, 1861-1865 (Bristol, N. H., 1893), 255.

<sup>58</sup> For information concerning the difficulties of crossing thousands of cattle over the James, see O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 120-21.

<sup>59</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Colonel R. A. Lindsell, "Grant's Crossing of the River James," in File #39, Petersburg National Battlefield Library.

told Benham to "complete the bridge."<sup>61</sup>

The bridge was a marvel of combat engineering. It was 2100 feet long, but only thirteen feet wide. The center of the bridge was held from swaying with the current by three schooners anchored in about eighty-five feet of water. It used 101 pontoon boats, each weighing 1600 pounds, yet it looked "so light as scarcely to be capable of bearing a man on horseback." This bridge would, in the space of forty-eight hours, facilitate the crossing of the IX and one division of the VI Corps, 4,000 cavalry, a wagon and artillery train stretching thirty-five miles, and some 3,500 beef cattle.<sup>62</sup>

The II and V Corps crossed on transports from Wilcox's Landing on the north bank of the James to Windmill Point on the south. Federal officers gathered a varied flotilla of steamers and ferries to cross the giant army. The 141st Pennsylvania of Gen. David Birney's division (II corps) crossed on the Thomas Powell, a steamer which normally cruised the less troubled waters of the Hudson River.<sup>63</sup> The marshalling of many ships and the speedy construction of the bridge insured a relatively rapid

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<sup>61</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 23.

<sup>62</sup> Theodore Lyman, Meade's Headquarters 1863-1865: Letters of Colonel Theodore Lyman from The Wilderness to Appomattox (Boston, 1922), 161; Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 22. Recent estimates place the train at fifty miles in length. About 5,000 cattle were ferried over the James; only small numbers of cattle followed individual infantry units over the bridge. See William Frassanito, Grant and Lee: The Virginia Campaigns, 1864-1865 (New York, 1983), 207. Frassanito's work contains excellent contemporary photographs of the James River bridge.

<sup>63</sup> David Craft, History of the One Hundred Forty-First Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1862-1865 (Towanda, PA, 1885), 211-12.

crossing for the Army of the Potomac.

Poor Federal morale was born of the bloody failure at Cold Harbor. After the June 3 assault, Gen. Francis Barlow, a II Corps division commander, believed that "the men feel just at present a great horror and dread of attacking earthworks again . . . they are wanting in the spirit and dash necessary for successful assaults."<sup>64</sup> Rumors persisted that Federal troops refused to attack the works after their initial charge was repulsed. "I was in the fight," wrote Robert Carter, "and saw blood flow like water . . . I tell you, father, we gained nothing and lost thousands of brave men."<sup>65</sup> Since May 4, the Army of the Potomac had fought and struggled south to the James at a cost of 55,000 casualties, more than the total of Lee's whole army at the beginning of the Overland Campaign. Yet victory was no closer than it was at the Rapidan, and morale was sinking in the fetid, fever-infested swamps of the Chickahominy.

The "noble" James provided an unexpected cure for Federal demoralization. It lifted spirits in a remarkable way. Upon viewing it, many Union soldiers commented on the river's great beauty and the greenness of the surrounding countryside. Robert Carter, so bitter and disillusioned at Cold Harbor, was able to write that "Nature is green here in all her loveliness."<sup>66</sup> Another soldier commented: "The James is a country of great beauty and fertility . . . every heart beat high with hope, and every man looked forward to what he believed would be the speedy

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<sup>64</sup> O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 3, 647.

<sup>65</sup> Carter, Four Brothers in Blue, 436.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

downfall of the rebellion."<sup>67</sup> The James affected even Meade's staff officers. Colonel Lyman asserted that "to appreciate such a spectacle you must pass five weeks in an almost unbroken wilderness, with no sights but weary, dusty troops, endless wagon trains, convoys of poor wounded men, and hot uncomfortable camps. Here was a noble river."<sup>68</sup>

The XVIII Corps, traveling by transport, was likewise positively affected by the great river. The 9th New Jersey reached Bermuda Hundred at 9 p.m. on June 14 "after a most delightful sail, greatly refreshing the wearied men."<sup>69</sup> These wearied men of Stannard's division had lost 493 of their comrades at Cold Harbor. Arriving at Bermuda Hundred, the men of the 13th New Hampshire were "very desirous to take part in another fight." This regiment lost 14 killed and 70 wounded at Cold Harbor, yet "the notion of being annihilated as a regiment had never once entered the heads of the members of the Thirteenth--some may fall--the most will survive."<sup>70</sup> Nearly all the men availed themselves of the opportunity to take "a nice bath in the noble James."<sup>71</sup> The lovely James produced emotional as well as physical cleanliness, both sorely lacking in the trenches around Cold Harbor.

Grant later recorded that on reaching the James River, "all effects

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<sup>67</sup> Craft, 141st Pennsylvania, 212.

<sup>68</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 20-21.

<sup>69</sup> J. Madison Drake, The History of the Ninth New Jersey Veteran Volunteers (Elizabeth, N. J., 1889), 222.

<sup>70</sup> Thompson, Thirteenth New Hampshire, 381.

<sup>71</sup> Austin C. Stearns, Three Years with Company K (Cranbury, N. J., 1976), 285.

of the battle of Cold Harbor seemed to have disappeared." As the 7th Rhode Island reached the James, "the brigade band surprised us with 'Ain't we glad to get out of the Wilderness'." <sup>72</sup> The band summed up the feelings of much of the army. Not only were the men away from the scene of disaster at Cold Harbor, but Richmond and victory appeared closer than ever. The Army of the Potomac was suffering few of the morale problems Barlow had reported a week earlier.

As the Federal rearguard withdrew from Cold Harbor on the morning of June 13, Confederate pickets cautiously probed ahead a mile without making contact. It was soon apparent to Lee that the Army of the Potomac was gone. General Richard H. Anderson's First Corps immediately crossed the Chickahominy and took position on the Confederate right near Glendale. A. P. Hill's Third Corps stretched from White Oak Swamp to Riddell's Shop, protecting the Confederate left. The small contingent of cavalry, composed of Gen. William Henry Fitzhugh (Rooney) Lee's small division and Col. Martin W. Gary's Richmond brigade, covered the far right at Malvern Hill. <sup>73</sup>

Throughout June 13, an anxious Beauregard continued warning Bragg of a Union troop buildup in his area. General Dearing reported seeing seven transports loaded with troops moving up the James. Earlier expressing his belief that Federal forces were going to attack Petersburg, Dearing informed Beauregard that the "re-enforcements arriving strengthen

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<sup>72</sup> Grant, Personal Memoirs, 445; William P. Hopkins, The Seventh Regiment Rhode Island Volunteers In the Civil War, 1862-1865 (Providence, R. I., 1903), 190.

<sup>73</sup> O.R., XXXVI, Pt. 1, 1059-60.



me in my opinion." Beauregard sent Bragg reports of ship concentrations at Newports News and Hampton Roads, and the news of four additional loaded transports steaming up the James.<sup>74</sup> Such information alerted Lee to the possibility that Grant was heavily reinforcing Butler at Bermuda Hundred.

As Beauregard fretted about his front, Lee had to contend with the likelihood that Grant was advancing on Richmond from the southeast. Colonel Gary reported that the "enemy indicate an advance up Charles City Road." Another courier reported to Gen. Richard Ewell, commanding the Richmond defenses, that Federals were "in sight of Riddell store . . . in heavy force--cavalry, artillery, and infantry."<sup>75</sup> On the 13th, Lee decided that the best action was to await Federal developments; it was far too early to conclude precisely where Grant was. Lee thought sending a large commitment of Confederate forces to one point, such as Bermuda Hundred, unwise and possibly dangerous.

The next day, things only became more confusing for the Confederate commander. As the Army of the Potomac neared the James, Lee had to make sense of varied and often conflicting intelligence reports. At 3 a.m., a Mrs. Minson told members of the 24th Virginia Cavalry that the "Yankees said they were moving toward the river."<sup>76</sup> Throughout the day, Beauregard pressed for reinforcement from Lee, telling of eleven large steamers, loaded with troops and moving up the James. Beauregard argued that his "position here [was] critical" without the return of Hoke's division, sent

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., XL, Pt. 2, 648-49.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 651.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., LI, Pt. 2, 1051.

to bolster Lee's army before Cold Harbor.<sup>77</sup> Near midday, Lee informed Davis that Grant "must be preparing to move south of James River."<sup>78</sup>

Just as Lee concluded that Grant intended to cross, Beauregard alerted him that some pontoons which had gone down the James earlier had returned only part way. Perhaps Grant used the pontoons to bridge the Chickahominy, planning to move nearer Butler but operate on both sides of the James. A Union deserter reported that only the XVIII and X corps were at Bermuda Hundred; if so, this meant Grant had returned to Butler only his original force. The entire Army of the Potomac might still be north of the James.<sup>79</sup> At the close of the day, Lee remained on the same line occupied on June 13, from White Oak Swamp to Malvern Hill.

Lee was dreadfully short of troops when Grant moved from Cold Harbor. Breckinridge left June 7 to protect the Valley, and most of the cavalry followed shortly after to meet Sheridan north of Richmond. In the early morning of June 13, Early's Second Corps struck out to confront Hunter at Lynchburg. Finally, to meet the possibility that Grant might attack Petersburg, Hoke's division went to the pontoon bridge at Drewry's Bluff. On June 4, Lee had at least 42,000 men in the lines around Cold Harbor; ten days later, he counted fewer than 29,000 muskets spread from White

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., XL, Pt. 3, 652-53.

<sup>78</sup> Robert E. Lee, Lee's Dispatches: Unpublished Letters of General Robert E. Lee, C.S.A., to Jefferson Davis and the War Department of The Confederate States of America, 1862-65 (New York, 1915), 227.

<sup>79</sup> Edwin C. Bearss, "The June 15, 1864, Attack on Petersburg" (Petersburg National Battlefield Library), 8.

Oak Swamp to Malvern Hill.<sup>80</sup> Lee adopted a reactive defensive posture out of necessity. He arranged his meager forces to cover all possible avenues of Federal advance.

As Lee pondered Federal designs on June 14, Grant steamed up the James from Wilcox's Landing to meet with Butler. Grant informed Butler of his plan to take Petersburg the next day. Smith's XVIII Corps, arriving by ship, would cross the Appomattox River on the pontoon bridge at Point of Rocks, and assault Petersburg at daylight. Grant instructed Butler to reinforce Smith's corps, which had suffered many casualties at Cold Harbor. Butler gave Smith Hinks's Colored division of 3,500 men and Gen. August V. Kautz' cavalry division of 2,500, bringing XVIII Corps strength to about 16,000 men. An optimistic Grant knew that the XVIII Corps greatly outnumbered the Petersburg defenders. The normally subdued Grant was in high spirits, for the II Corps was crossing the James, coming to support Smith. Hancock's men would be ready to move on Petersburg in the morning of June 15, bringing another 20,000-25,000 men to bear against the city.

By the morning of the 15th, Grant was in a position that partially justified the more than 55,000 casualties inflicted on his army since the Wilderness. Lee's army had lost at least 32,000 men in action in the Overland Campaign. This number, while considerably smaller than the Federal toll, represented forty-six percent of Lee's original strength on May 5.<sup>81</sup> A sobering thirty-seven percent of Lee's general officers

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<sup>80</sup> Freeman, R.E. Lee, III, 406.

<sup>81</sup> Boatner, Civil War Dictionary, 165.

were casualties.<sup>82</sup> Not only were Grant's forces about to attack with a decided numerical advantage, they had the added edge of fighting men who were not part of Lee's hardened, albeit battered, army.

The fighting, marching, and dying north and east of Richmond had finally created an opportunity to cut Lee's supply lines. At last, Grant's superior numbers could have their telling effect in open battle. All that remained was for Smith and Hancock, and the men of their commands, to capture the lightly held rail center of Petersburg. With success in this seemingly simple task, Grant believed his army would at last hold "the arteries of the Confederacy at the throat."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 514.

<sup>83</sup> Fuller, Generalship of Grant, 290.

## CHAPTER II -- JUNE 15, 1864

"BUT, OH! THAT THEY HAD ATTACKED AT ONCE"

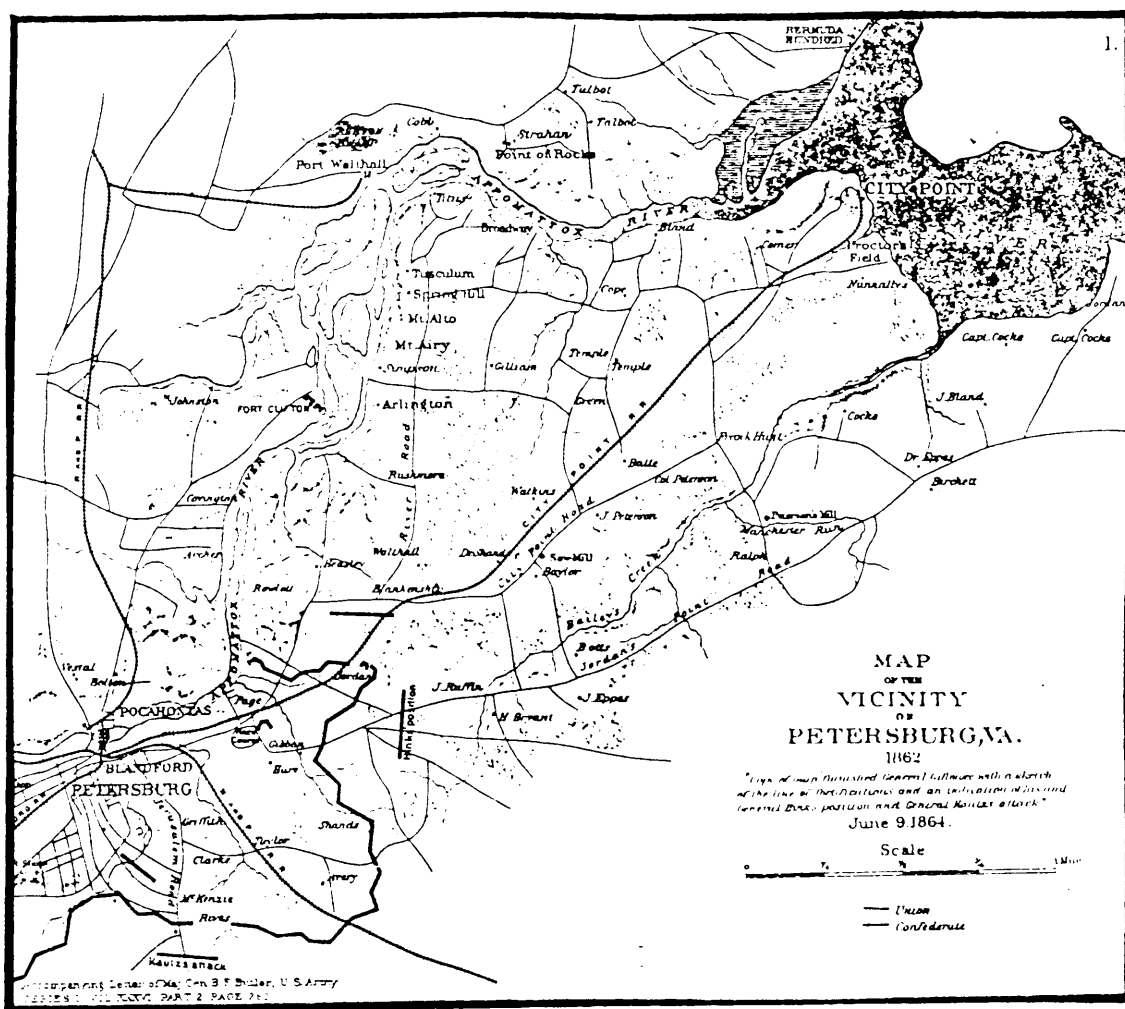
In the early morning light of June 15, Kautz's 2,500 cavalry troopers jangled across a pontoon bridge spanning the Appomattox River. Behind the cavalry, coming from Point of Rocks, were the 10,000 infantry of Smith's XVIII Corps. These men were traveling to rendezvous with the 3,500 soldiers in Hinks's Colored division waiting on the south side of the river. Eight miles away lay their goal--the vital rail center of Petersburg. With this movement, "Baldy" Smith was in a position to polish his military reputation. He was a learned soldier; many of Smith's colleagues adjudged him the best-read and perhaps most knowledgeable general in the whole of the Union army. Smith chaffed under the direct command of others, especially Butler, whom Smith characterized as a "political joke."<sup>1</sup> Opportunity now gave Smith what he most desired: control of a separate command going into battle with a chance at fame. Taking and holding Petersburg would ensure Smith's place in American military history.

Delay beset Smith's march from the beginning. The first units of his XVIII Corps embarked from White House Landing for Bermuda Hundred.

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<sup>1</sup> Earl Schenck Miers, The Last Campaign: Grant Saves the Union (Philadelphia, 1972), 127. Smith graduated from West Point in 1845. He was fourth in a class of forty-five.

# MAP 5. The Vicinity of Petersburg



Source: U. S. War Department (comp.), Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, 1861-1865 (Washington, 1891-1895), Plate LVI. Hereafter cited as O.R. Atlas.

Midway through the boarding of ships, the destination became Point of Rocks, nearer the pontoon bridge across the Appomattox River. The change of destination came too late for several shiploads of men who on June 14 arrived at Bermuda Hundred. Marching these men to a single meeting point near the bridge consumed valuable time and expended the energy of those units trudging across the Bermuda Hundred neck.<sup>2</sup> Hinks's black troops massed at the Cope House just at daybreak. These infantrymen were at the rendezvous point on time, but could not move out without cavalry in their front. Not until 5 a. m., well after dawn, did Kautz finally get his men past Hinks's command, thus beginning the march on Petersburg south of the Appomattox. In his meeting with Butler, Grant had envisioned an organized march taking place before dawn, followed by an early-morning attack on the city. The plan to take Petersburg was already awry.

Smith advanced his infantry on Petersburg in three separate prongs. Kautz was to lead the column to the main Confederate line, then spread to the south and west, threatening the works near the point where they crossed the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad. Hinks's division followed Kautz, moving on Petersburg along the Jordan's Point Road. The black division covered the Federal left flank. The division of Gen. W. T. H. Brooks, in the Union center, moved on Hinks's right near the City Point Railroad. The Federal right, a division under Gen. John Martindale, marched on the line of the River Road.<sup>3</sup> This movement insured that the XVIII Corps would arrive at Petersburg along a broad front.

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<sup>2</sup> Bearss, "June 15, 1864 Attack on Petersburg," 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 81-82.

Confederate skirmishers harassed the Federal column shortly after it crossed the Appomattox. The 89th New York, leading Gen. George Stannard's brigade of Martindale's division, first met skirmishers within a mile and a half of the bridge. Stannard deployed his men in line of battle on the left and right of the Spring Hill Road, driving Confederates ahead of him for three miles.<sup>4</sup> A Confederate battery hounded Stannard's advance. The battery would fire several rounds, quickly limber up and gallop away when the Federals got within musket range, only to repeat the procedure several hundred yards down the road. Stannard had no cavalry to chase the battery away, for Kautz's men were several miles south.<sup>5</sup> As they advanced to Petersburg, Stannard's men had no choice but to tolerate the bothersome and occasionally deadly artillery fire.

The Federal troops forged ahead, driving skirmishers on nearly all fronts. About 6 a.m., the 11th Pennsylvania Cavalry, in the lead, met and drove a body of Confederates into a line of rifle pits across the City Point Road near Baylor's Farm. A line of abatis, Gen. James Dearing's Confederate cavalry, and the four guns of Capt. Edward Graham's Petersburg Artillery made the position too strong for Kautz's cavalry to secure. The Federal horsemen held a line on the road, giving way to the left toward Jordan's Point Road as Hinks's troops came up. This hasty Confederate line was to be the first test for the black soldiers.

The Southern line ran along a ridge facing 400 yards of open, upward sloping ground. Intervening between the open ground and the Federal

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<sup>4</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 1262.

<sup>5</sup> Bearss, "June 15, 1864 Attack on Petersburg," 20.



forces was a "wood [which] deserves special mention." The forest was 600 yards deep, cut by a turnpike and the City Point Railroad at diagonal angles to the line of attack. Colonel Samuel Duncan, commanding one of Hinks's brigades, noted that the whole of it was marshy and covered with dense overgrowth and fallen timber, all of which "proved a great obstacle." Duncan reported the "enemy's occupation of this point [was] a serious obstacle to further progress."<sup>6</sup>

Butler instructed Smith to move on Petersburg with all haste. Smith ordered the raw black troops formed into line of battle to assail the Confederate line directly, rather than reconnoitering for a more time-consuming flank move. Duncan formed his brigade, from left to right, as follows: the 6th, 4th, 22nd, and 5th United States Colored Troops (USCT). The plan called for the soldiers to negotiate the tangled woods, fire a volley, reform the ranks, and charge over the remaining 400 yards of open ground to the Confederate line.<sup>7</sup>

Delays attended the preparations for attack at Baylor's Farm. The 5th Massachusetts Cavalry, part of Gen. John Holman's brigade, consisted in the main of raw recruits who knew only one cavalry formation. Dismounted at Baylor's Farm, they were unable to get into line of battle quickly.<sup>8</sup> The 5th Massachusetts, "discontented and spiritless because it was not mounted," proved of little value in an infantry action.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 265.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 265-66.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., XL, Pt. 1, 721.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas L. Livermore, Days and Events (Boston and New York, 1920), 358.

Fortunately they were in Holman's second line of battle and saw little action at Baylor's Farm.

As the black troops plunged into the woods, Confederate artillery immediately opened upon them. The spherical case and canister smashed into the woods and the Union formation, "inflicting considerable damage." The 4th USCT cleared the woods first, with some elements of the 6th to their left. Spontaneously, the center companies of the 4th charged, alone and unsupported, into the Confederate line. Musketry and a raking canister fire drove them back in confusion to the woods, the panic carrying some of the 6th with them. As a result of their brave yet foolhardy charge, the 4th USCT left 120 dead or wounded men on the field.

The panic affected even the second Federal line, massed in the woods. As the 4th and 6th USCT ran into the timber, the second line fired into their fleeing comrades, believing them part of a Confederate counterattack. The 5th Massachusetts was part of the second line anxiously waiting in the woods. These raw cavalry recruits broke and ran when they saw Duncan's officers "madly gesticulating" in their attempt to stem the panic.<sup>10</sup> The inexperience of the black troops was sadly evident.

On the right of the Federal line, the 22nd and 5th USCT cleared the woods and formed into line of battle. Colonel Joseph B. Kiddoo of the 22nd felt it necessary to advance immediately. "The effect with which the enemy's artillery was playing upon my line was the strongest

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<sup>10</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 266; Livermore, Days and Events, 357.

inducement for me to give the order," he stated.<sup>11</sup> As the two regiments raced over the open ground, they shouted their battle cry: "Remember Fort Pillow!"<sup>12</sup> The black units, an officer later wrote, "charged with great spirit, and caused them [the Confederates] to retreat so hastily as to leave one piece of artillery in the works taken."<sup>13</sup>

Despite losing a gun at Baylor's Farm, Dearing's cavalry and Graham's battery held the Federals from 6 a. m. until about 8 a. m., when the left of their line collapsed under attack. Dearing then began a slow retreat to Petersburg, harassing the Federal column as it approached the city. This delaying action gave Gen. Henry Wise, commanding in Petersburg, several hours to position all available forces in the lines. Although failing to stop the Union advance, Dearing's two regiments provided valuable time to solidify the Confederate position.<sup>14</sup>

At his Swift Creek headquarters, Beauregard received reports of Federal movements. He promptly requested reinforcement from Richmond. Beauregard felt Butler's increase in troop strength reason enough for more men, but Dearing's reports of the Federal advance on Baylor's Farm

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., XL, Pt. 1, 724.

<sup>12</sup> George W. Williams, A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion (New York, 1888), 236. The battle cry refers to an Apr. 12, 1864, action at Fort Pillow, Tenn. Confederate forces allegedly massacred several hundred Union soldiers, many of them black, after they surrendered. The controversy still rages, but whether atrocity or battle, the black troops at Baylor's Farm fought in the memory of Fort Pillow.

<sup>13</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 50.

<sup>14</sup> William L. Parker, "Brigadier General James Dearing, C. S. A." (Master's Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1969), 59.

convinced Beauregard that reinforcement was imperative. Beauregard saw the Federal advance as an "on to Petersburg" movement, as one Union prisoner had colorfully styled his army's objective.

At 9:30 a. m. , when Dearing reported elements of the IX Corps nearby, Beauregard ordered Hoke to Petersburg from his position near Drewry's Bluff. About 11:45 a. m. Beauregard learned of the loss of the Baylor's Farm line. He then informed Bragg that the situation was serious enough to warrant a choice "between the lines of Bermuda Hundred and Petersburg. We cannot hold both." Bragg reassured Beauregard that Hoke was en route, adding that Beauregard knew best how to arrange his troops for the protection of his department. Davis' military advisor was unwilling to make the difficult decision between the two lines, preferring instead that Beauregard be individually responsible for their defense.<sup>15</sup>

About noon, Hoke's division began to march south from Drewry's Bluff. Rion's Battalion, leading Gen. Johnson Hagood's brigade, reached Chester Station on the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad. With only two cars available, the quartermaster called for two companies to board the train. Instead, Major James H. Rion announced that "the whole battalion will go." He piled the eight companies, about 500 men, into and onto the cars, engine, and tender. One soldier remembered that he was "on top taking in the scenery and the pine smoke from the engine . . . by the time we arrived in Petersburg, I was black."<sup>16</sup> Both Hagood's and Gen. Alfred Colquitt's brigades were able to procure rail transportation at Chester

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<sup>15</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 655-56.

<sup>16</sup> SHSP, XXV (1897), 224.

Station. Hoke's two remaining brigades, under Gens. Thomas Clingman and James Martin, traveled on foot, taking the "shortest cut, through fields and dusty roads."<sup>17</sup>

As Dearing's men retreated westward from Baylor's Farm, Hinks used about an hour to look after the dead and wounded before putting his command back into column. Holman's brigade, in the van, advanced toward Petersburg via the Jordan's Point Road, driving skirmishers near Bryant's House. Upon reaching the main works, Hinks placed his left on the Jordan's Point Road, his right stretching about one and a half miles north to Peebles' Farm. Hinks, representing the left of the Federal infantry units, arrived at Petersburg as early as 11 a. m. Kautz's cavalry ranged even farther south and east.<sup>18</sup>

The Federal center under Brooks followed the line of the City Point Railroad and the wagon road alongside it. After the action at Baylor's Farm, Brooks arranged his division in line of battle. The command traveled a mile and a half in this line before coming under Confederate fire from the guns of Petersburg's main works. The Union infantry did not move with speed toward their destination, some of them taking up to three hours to get into position. "The dawdling was no fault of the men" wrote one exasperated captain, it being his opinion that they were only following the example of their deliberate, overcautious corps

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<sup>17</sup> Walter Clark (ed.), Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-'65 (Raleigh and Goldsboro, 1901), IV, 534.

<sup>18</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 721-22.

commander.<sup>19</sup>

Martindale pressed Stannard's brigade forward on the Federal right, trying to keep his left connected with the right of Brooks's skirmish line. Stannard's left was on the City Point Railroad, leaving considerable open ground between the brigade's right and the Appomattox River. Martindale deployed Gen. Griffin Stedman's brigade, then in the rear, to take position in line of battle on the right of Stannard. Stedman's soldiers covered the mile-long flood plain leading down to the river.<sup>20</sup> The various units worked together to join their lines which curved in an extended bow, bulging around the Confederate lines. By 2 p. m. most of the connected Federal line moved under "an unremitting and very accurate and severe fire . . . from the batteries."<sup>21</sup>

This accurate Confederate fire came from a series of batteries on an entrenched line named for its creator, Capt. Charles A. Dimmock. The engineering officer began work in December, 1862, on a ten-mile arc surrounding Petersburg. Earthworks ran from river bank to river bank on the south side of the Appomattox, ringing the Cockade City with fifty-five batteries connected by infantry trenches. Two hundred free and slave laborers, provided by the Petersburg Common Council, dug the works. In the fall of 1863 Dimmock completed the line. An appreciative and now secure Petersburg citizenry awarded Dimmock a horse, saddle, and bridle

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<sup>19</sup> Military Historical Society of Massachusetts (comp.), Civil War and Miscellaneous Papers (Boston, 1918), 107.

<sup>20</sup> Bearss, "June 15, 1864 Attack on Petersburg," 21.

<sup>21</sup> O.R., Vol. XL, Pt. 1, 722.

for his efforts.<sup>22</sup>

The Dimmock line was imposing. The City Point Railroad entered the works at Jordan's Hill, upon which sat Battery No. 5, a powerful redoubt. This battery formed a salient jutting out 600 yards in advance of the main line. In such a position the battery could enfilade attacking forces on either side. The infantry works connecting the stout batteries were six feet high and nearly twenty feet thick at their base. A fifteen foot wide, six foot deep ditch ran in front of the breastworks. Slashing, abatis, and rifle pits advanced 200 yards protected the main line. Finally, a clear field of fire existed for more than half a mile from the works.<sup>23</sup> The works were impregnable if properly manned.

To man these impressive works, Beauregard had just 2200 infantry and artillery under Gen. Henry Wise.<sup>24</sup> If Beauregard positioned his men along just the eastern five miles of the line, there would be one man for every four to five yards. Only a force of 25,000 men, Beauregard believed,

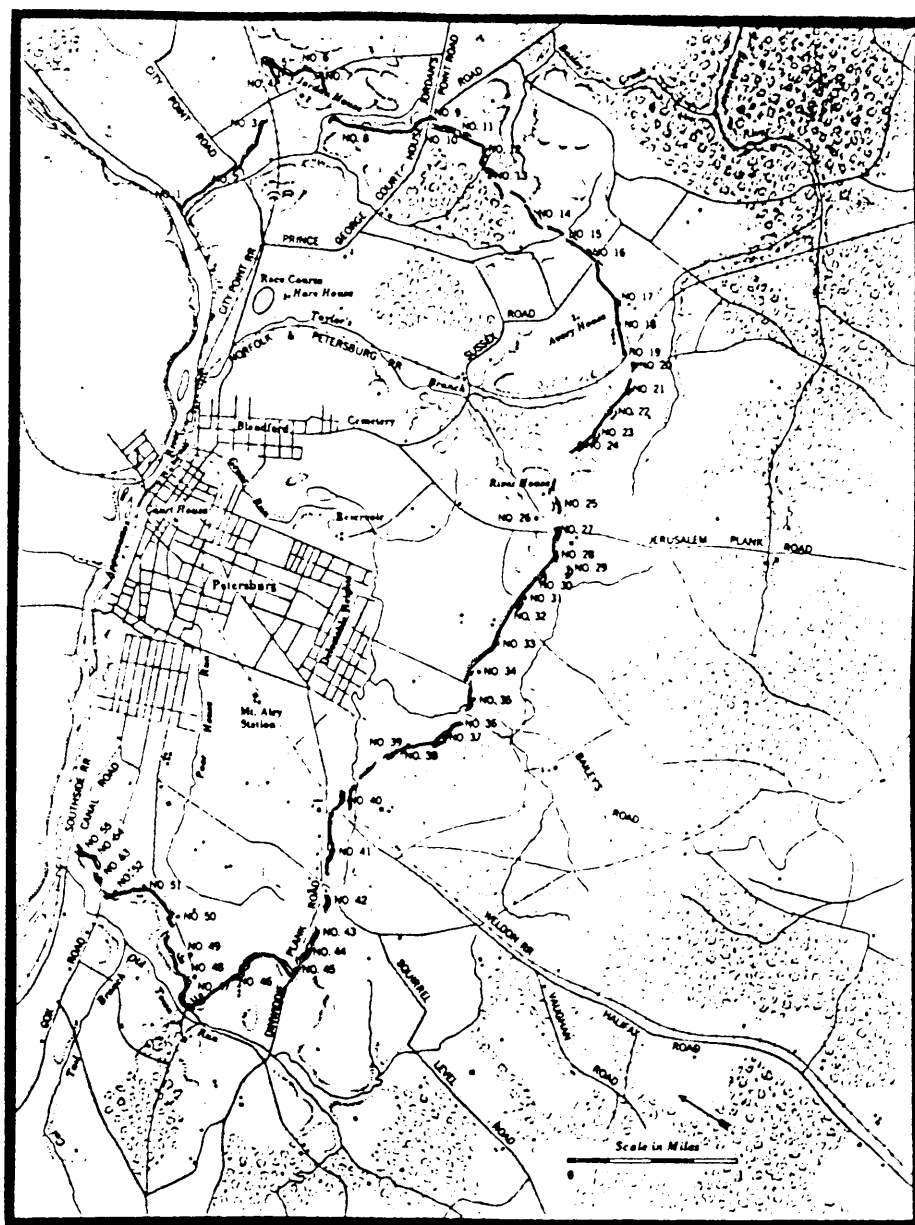
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<sup>22</sup> Scott, Petersburg's Story, 171. The Dimmock line batteries are more accurately termed redans or redoubts. A redan is an artillery position with two sides, the point of which faces the enemy. A redoubt is a three or more walled fort for artillery; it was often placed in advance of the infantry line. Battery No. 5 was such a construction.

<sup>23</sup> Catton, Stillness at Appomattox, 186-87.

<sup>24</sup> R. U. Johnson and C. C. Buel (eds.), Battles and Leaders of the Civil War (New York, 1884-1887), IV, 540. On June 15, Wise's force contained the 26th, 34th, and 46th Virginia regiments, one company of the 64th Georgia, the 23rd South Carolina, Archer's Militia, Batte's and Hood's Battalions, and Sturdivant's and Slater's Macon (Georgia) light artillery batteries. The 59th Virginia joined the line during the night of June 15. Most of these troops were reserves, and even the Virginia regiments had seen little combat. Beauregard incorrectly labeled Batte's and Hood's Battalions as Battle's and Wood's, respectively.

MAP 6. The Dimmock Line



Source: Davis, Death in the Trenches, 40.



could properly man the defenses. On June 10, a distressed Beauregard asked Bragg: "When will our engineers adopt strong detached inclosed works in preference to elongated . . . lines requiring a large army to hold them?"<sup>25</sup>

To meet the arriving Federal threat, Wise positioned his thin forces to cover the Dimmock line from Battery No. 1 on the Appomattox to Butterworth's bridge near the Weldon Railroad and Battery No. 40. The line west of No. 40 was void of defenders, save about 500 men of Dearing's cavalry. Colonel Powhatan Robertson Page of the 26th Virginia commanded the section of line from the river to Battery No. 14. Wise took the center from No. 14 to No. 23. General Raleigh E. Colston commanded the thinly held right, from No. 23 to Butterworth's Bridge. The impressive salient near Batteries No. 5, 6 and 7 was so inadequately manned that Beauregard labeled the area "ineffably and contemptibly weak."<sup>26</sup>

Beauregard's headquarters were at Dunlop's House on Swift Creek, about four miles north of Petersburg. From this point he could command both the Petersburg and the Bermuda Hundred sectors. General Bushrod Johnson's division of 5,000-7,000 men manned the lines facing Butler.<sup>27</sup> Beauregard was in the unenviable position of awaiting a Federal attack

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<sup>25</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 119; O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 998.

<sup>26</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 61; Roman, Military Operations of Beauregard, II, 568.

<sup>27</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 119. In ibid., 185, John C. Ropes numbered Johnson's division at 6,929 men. Beauregard counted the same division at 4,500. The true number probably lies somewhere between the two figures, but Ropes's evidence is convincing for the higher total.

on either of two fronts, both woefully short of defenders.

Federal cavalry skirmished most of the afternoon at the center of the Confederate line. Kautz sent his men to develop the works near the Baxter Road, protected by Batteries No. 15 and 16.<sup>28</sup> Colonel John T. Goode's 34th Virginia and Capt. C. W. Slater's Macon Light Artillery Battery opposed the Federal cavalrymen. From about noon until 2 p. m. Kautz's men tried to take the Confederate line in the face of artillery firing that "was well directed and rapid, supported by a lively sprinkling of musketry."<sup>29</sup> Slater's battery fired on the Union soldiers from Battery 16, sending "round after round of shell and canister into their ranks," making close action "too warm for them."<sup>30</sup>

In the afternoon action, Kautz's troopers expended nearly all their ammunition. Because the Union cavalry lacked proper ammunition resupply, they withdrew about 5:30 p. m. under Confederate artillery fire. The Federal troopers suffered only 43 casualties in the afternoon engagement.<sup>31</sup> In a replay of Gillmore's June 9 blunder, Kautz retired without consulting the commander of his cooperating force. The cavalry bivouacked far in the rear, out of action for the remainder of the day.

As Kautz moved against the line near the Baxter Road and the Norfolk

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<sup>28</sup> The Baxter Road is variously labeled. It appears on maps as either the Sussex Court House Road, Sussex Road, the Suffolk Road or the Norfolk Stage Road. Baxter Road seems to be the most commonly applied contemporary name.

<sup>29</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 1270.

<sup>30</sup> Richmond Daily Enquirer, June 17, 1864.

<sup>31</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 729.

and Petersburg Railroad, Duncan began skirmishing in front of Batteries No. 9 and 10, manned by part of Goode's 34th Virginia. During the afternoon Duncan's men succeeded on three occasions in taking the rifle pits in front of the works, only to be driven back each time by the Confederate defenders. Wise, realizing that the Union advance was developing on the east and northeast of the Dimmock line, closed up his lines from the right to bolster Goode. Hood's Battalion of 2nd Class Militia went to the Confederate far left to aid Page's 26th Virginia, facing Martindale and Brooks.<sup>32</sup> Wise anxiously requested more troops from north of the Appomattox while continuing to arrange his small and poorly trained force to meet the immediate threat.<sup>33</sup> Because of this closure of ranks to the left, the line west of the Jerusalem Plank Road was empty.

Despite works and defenders which Beauregard warranted as insufficient, they were enough to make Smith balk at direct and immediate assault. As Col. Duncan tried to connect with Brooks's left, the main body of his brigade came under an artillery barrage from Batteries No. 9 and 10, some 600 yards distant. Two Federal batteries came up to support the black troops, but the intensity of the direct and oblique artillery fire forced the Union cannon to withdraw. Duncan's task became increasingly difficult because of the Rebel gunners.<sup>34</sup> The commanding

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<sup>32</sup> Major Thomas H. Bond commanded Lt. Col. William Hood's Battalion. Federal forces captured Hood on June 9, 1864. For the composition of Wise's units see Lee A. Wallace, A Guide to Virginia Military Organizations (Lynchburg, VA, 1986), 109, 117, 125, 136, 221, 226.

<sup>33</sup> Wise, Life of Henry A. Wise, 348-49.

<sup>34</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 53-54.

nature of the Confederate artillery fire convinced Smith to undertake a detailed reconnaissance.

In addition to the accurate Rebel cannonading, Smith had myriad other reasons for delaying the attack. The ease with which Kautz entered the city on June 9 led Butler to reason falsely that the works "were such that cavalry could ride over them."<sup>35</sup> Butler expressed to Smith his belief that the earthworks were less than substantial. Instead of a weak line, however, Smith was surprised to find the most strongly fortified line he had ever seen. A cautious, careful topographical engineer, Smith remembered all too well the destruction of his command in front of lesser works at Cold Harbor. Smith was also aware that the II Corps was within supporting distance; he doubtless wanted both the presence of the veteran troops as well as the assistance of their capable leader, Gen. Hancock.<sup>36</sup>

From about 1 p. m. until 3 p. m., Smith personally investigated the works. "I was obliged to make it alone on foot," he wrote of his reconnaissance, "and sometimes on my knees, and it occupied nearly two hours." Smith's inspection of the works was slow partially because of the effects of a "raging" dysentery contracted from the stagnant water at Cold Harbor.<sup>37</sup> Smith then rode to the far right, a more appropriate

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<sup>35</sup> Swinton, Campaigns of the Army of the Potomac, 502.

<sup>36</sup> Livermore, Days and Events, 362.

<sup>37</sup> Smith, From Chattanooga to Petersburg, 23, 33. On June 15, Hinks was also physically disabled. While jumping a ditch as he rode toward the action at Baylor's Farm, Hinks fell from his horse. He also reaggravated a serious intestinal wound incurred in September 1862 at Antietam Creek. Hinks spent the rest of the day in agony while

duty for a staff officer, and instructed Martindale on the plan of attack. Finally, Smith rode back to Brooks's location, the center of the line, and made the last preparations for the attack. The time was 5 p. m.

Smith's battle plan revolved around his realization that the Dimmock line held impressive artillery positions, but few infantry. Smith chose to use heavy lines of skirmishers, the men parallel with the Confederate works in a single line. This formation would be less likely to suffer from artillery fire than a dense column of infantry. The normal spacing for a skirmish line was five paces, but the Union line "was reenforced so the men were only one pace apart."<sup>38</sup> Smith ordered the Federal artillery brought up as close as possible to cover the advance of his skirmishers. Yet the XVIII Corps was to endure one final error before the attack could start. Smith directed Capt. Frederick Follett, XVIII Corps Chief of Artillery, to mass his guns and direct fire at the site of the proposed attack: the salient on Jordan's Hill anchored by Battery No. 5. Follett had no means with which to position the guns, because on his own authority he had sent the horses some distance to the rear for watering.<sup>39</sup> The guns would not be in place until 7 p. m. Dawn surprise had become sunset fiasco.

Hancock's II Corps was enduring delays of its own on the day Petersburg was supposed to fall. Grant failed, almost unbelievably, to

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commanding from a sitting or lying position on the ground. See Livermore, Days and Events, 355, 358.

<sup>38</sup> Harry F. Jackson and Thomas F. O'Donnell, Back Home in Oneida: Hermon Clarke and His Letters (Syracuse, N. Y., 1965), 142.

<sup>39</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 190.

inform either Meade or Hancock of the forthcoming attempt to take Petersburg. Neither of these key officers moved with celerity on the morning of June 15 simply because they were ignorant that the II Corps was to support Smith.

The mundane chore of distributing rations caused the major setback for the II Corps. Hancock informed Meade on June 14 that his corps had three days' rations as of that morning.<sup>40</sup> After his corps spent all that day and much of the night in crossing the James, Hancock waited impatiently for 60,000 rations. By 6 a. m., June 15, the II Corps was eager to move, but the foodstuffs had not yet arrived. At 7:30 a. m. Meade, on the north bank of the James, instructed Hancock to start for Petersburg without the rations. Suddenly word arrived that the long-awaited food was just landing. This information swayed Meade in his decision; the II Corps could resupply before marching. The transport unloading rations was in fact delivering other supplies. Discovering the error, Meade sent a courier to tell Hancock to start anew. Amazingly, the ship carrying the courier ran aground in the James. A signal tower, sending a duplicate order across the James at the same time, somehow failed to transmit its message. Finally the courier reached Hancock; at 10:30 a. m. the II Corps began its march to Petersburg without rations, without knowledge of its duty, but with considerable frustration.<sup>41</sup>

Once on the road to Petersburg the II Corps faced the confusion of

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<sup>40</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 251.

<sup>41</sup> Francis A. Walker, History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac (New York, 1886), 527.

faulty maps exacerbated by the intensity of summer heat. Hancock's orders instructed him to take a position on Harrison's Creek where it intersected the City Point Railroad. Although this geographical location did exist, it was not where the map indicated. The intersection was not three and a half miles east of Petersburg, but rather well within the Confederate-held Dimmock line.<sup>42</sup> Hancock's staff soon discarded the erroneous map in favor of local, though less than reliable, guides. As the corps wound its way through the countryside, the day was "intensely hot and roads dusty; the men suffering terribly for water during the march, many of them giving out along the road."<sup>43</sup> One soldier, typical of most, said he "suffered much from thirst, and at one time my tongue actually hung out and was covered with dust; I could spit cotton without exaggeration."<sup>44</sup> Despite delay and burning heat the corps moved "at a rapid gait," making fourteen miles in four and a half hours.<sup>45</sup>

Hancock and his men heard the "sound of cannon from the direction of the town reaching us all the afternoon."<sup>46</sup> Local farmers reported the action as a cavalry reconnaissance, having seen Kautz pass by earlier in the day. Hancock, usually the consummate soldier, did not bother to solve the riddle of the firing. A note from Grant, followed immediately by

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<sup>42</sup> Humphreys, Virginia Campaign, 211.

<sup>43</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 316.

<sup>44</sup> Carter, Four Brothers in Blue, 437.

<sup>45</sup> Charles H. Weygant, History of the One Hundred and Twenty-Fourth Regiment, N.Y.S.V. (Newburgh, N.Y., 1877), 349.

<sup>46</sup> John Gibbon, Personal Recollections of the Civil War (New York, 1928), 243.

another from Smith, provided Hancock with the reason for the cannonading. In these 5:30 p. m. messages, Hancock received "the first and only intimations I had that Petersburg was to be attacked that day."<sup>47</sup> The guns were preparatory to an XVIII Corps attack; Hancock was to support Smith with all possible dispatch.

Only two divisions were in reach of Smith, those of Gens. David Birney and John Gibbon. General Francis Barlow's division and the wagon trains of the II Corps followed an "interior road" to Barlow's supposed destination near the Appomattox. Instead, Barlow became hopelessly lost and proceeded almost to City Point. His division was of little use until the following day. Birney and Gibbon arrived at Petersburg only after "orders suspending operations for the day had been executed."<sup>48</sup>

Careful Federal planning made it possible on June 15 for Hancock's corps to cross the James by 4 a. m. Smith was at Point of Rocks at the same time, poised to strike Petersburg. Yet a series of staff blunders combined with unimaginative and incompetent leadership all but destroyed the remarkable chance waiting to be seized.

Throughout the long afternoon of Smith's reconnaissance and the series of delays, the men of both sides anxiously waited for a major assault. Colonel Josiah Pickett of the 25th Massachusetts reported that his regiment "remained exposed to the scorching rays of the sun and the

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<sup>47</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 304.

<sup>48</sup> W. P. Derby, Bearing Arms in the Twenty-Seventh Massachusetts Regiment of Volunteer Infantry During the Civil War, 1861-1865 (Boston, 1883), 333.



enemy's fire."<sup>49</sup> William Russell, a soldier in the 26th Virginia, peered out from Battery No. 2 and saw "the enemy advancing in columns through the woods. we had such a small force here it made me tremble to see them."<sup>50</sup> Brooks's Union soldiers spent the afternoon dashing "forward from stump to stump, and from log to log, drawing the enemy's fire and then gaining ground before he can re-load."<sup>51</sup> Most of the Federal soldiers gained forward positions, then "lay five hours, suffering much from the well-directed fire of the enemy."<sup>52</sup> After a brutally hot afternoon of halfhearted advances and skirmishing, Smith's attack was at last ready to begin.

Just before 7 p. m., three Federal batteries opened a "furious fire" on the Jordan Hill salient at Battery No. 5.<sup>53</sup> The skirmish lines of Martindale on the right, Brooks in the center, and Hinks on the left moved forward. Smith's extensive reconnaissance paid one important dividend: it located a deep, unprotected ravine between Batteries 6 and 7. Captain William Hunt and 100 men of Col. Louis Bell's brigade, temporarily detached from the X Corps, pressed against the rifle pits in front of the main line. "Here we had to fight hard," wrote a member of the 117th New York. They took the pits and drove the Confederate defenders back to the

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<sup>49</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 719.

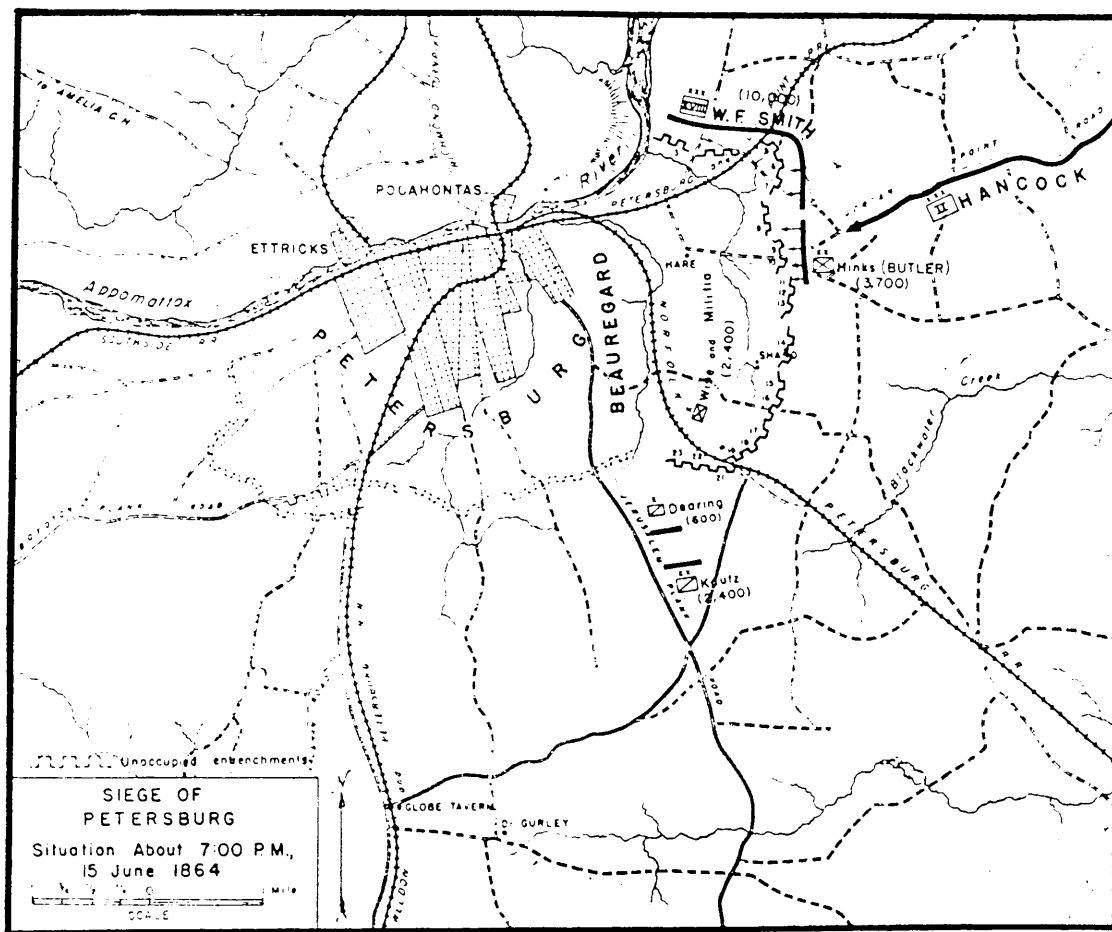
<sup>50</sup> William Russell Diary, typescript copy, Petersburg National Battlefield.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, 13th New Hampshire, 384.

<sup>52</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 267.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., XL, Pt. 1, 719.

MAP 7. Situation about 7 p. m., June 15, 1864



Source: Vincent J. Esposito (ed.), The West Point Atlas of American Wars, 2 vols. (New York, 1959), II, Map 138. Hereafter cited as West Point Atlas.

Jordan House. "When we came to them there [near the house] they gave us a volley that made terrible work."<sup>54</sup> The Federals soon poured a volley of their own into the rear of Battery No. 5, throwing the defenders into panic.

As Bell's men gained the rear area of Batteries 5 and 6, the skirmishers of the 13th New Hampshire bolted into the ditch fronting the eastern face of the fort. The dirt walls rose above them "some thirty or forty feet to the top of the parapet," but the officers believed a determined charge would take the battery. The men scaled the sides "on bayonets stuck in the sand, grasping grass and weeds to assist in climbing, striking their boots into the gravel." No more than a dozen Union soldiers scrambled into Battery No. 5. They demanded the surrender of Capt. Nathaniel Sturdivant, commanding the artillery. The confusion, noise, powder smoke, and the fire of Bell's men in the rear overwhelmed the artillery captain, and he surrendered. When realizing he lost his four guns and his men to so few Federals, Sturdivant exclaimed: "Here are my guns double-shotted for infantry, and all of us captured by a \_\_\_\_\_ Yankee skirmish line!"<sup>55</sup>

The seemingly impregnable Battery No. 5 was the first to fall, but Martindale's men had similar success on the Federal right. By 4 p. m., the men of Stedman's brigade had come within view of Batteries No. 1, 2 and 3. At the same time, Confederate forces placed two guns atop Archer's

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<sup>54</sup> Jackson, Back Home in Oneida, 142.

<sup>55</sup> Thompson, 13th New Hampshire, 387, 390.

Hill, on the north bank of the Appomattox River. The Confederate fire took the Federals in the rear, forcing them to withdraw to their left. At 7 p. m., Stedman moved forward on the City Point Road, somewhat protected from the Archer Hill battery. Stannard's brigade charged on Stedman's left, along the City Point Railroad line. This brigade forced the Confederate defenders to abandon Battery No. 3 and seized two guns in the process. Stedman drove the men of the 26th Virginia into the rifle pits covering Batteries 1 and 2, but Col. Page's Virginians remained in possession of the line. Martindale lost 184 men and the sacrifice was in vain. Smith, rather than holding Battery No. 3, ordered Martindale to withdraw to the Spring Hill Road and bivouac behind the protection of Brooks's line.<sup>56</sup>

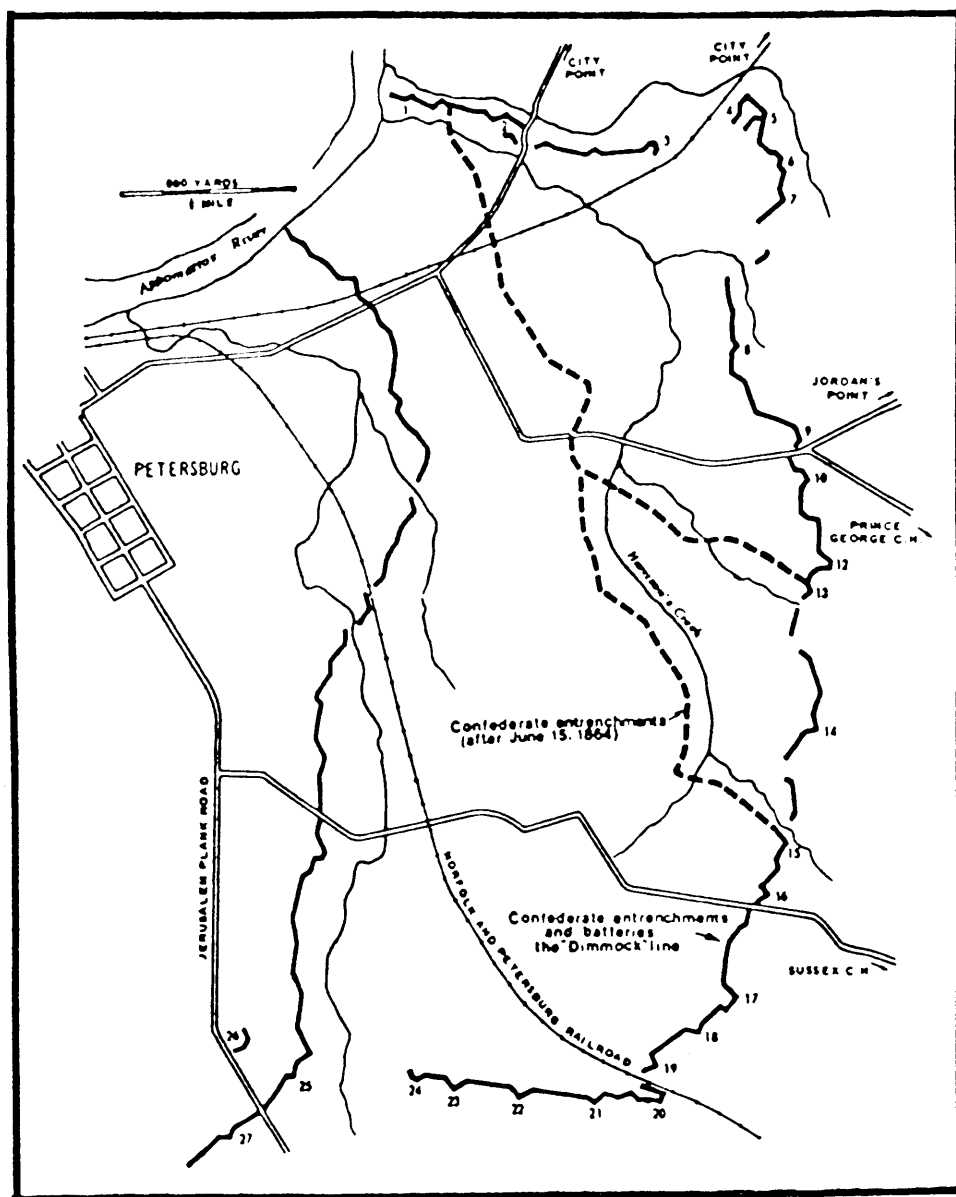
Immediately following the fall of the salient on Jordan's Hill, the Confederate line south of Battery 5 came under attack from Hinks's troops. Battery No. 6 fell to the left wing of Bell's brigade, the white troops entering it simultaneously with elements of the 1st USCT, under Lt. Col. Elias Wright.<sup>57</sup> Major John Cook and four companies of the 22nd USCT raced for the safety of the walls of Battery No. 7. The Confederate guns could not be depressed to an angle acute enough to cover the ditch in front of the works. Cook's men sidled along the wall of the parapet to the rear, capturing the fort complete with two howitzers and one iron gun. Just as Cook's men entered the redan from the rear, troops from the 1st and 4th USCT poured over the front walls.

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<sup>56</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 1256.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 264, 1248.

MAP 8. The Battle of Petersburg, June 15-18, 1864



Source: Alex L. Wiatt, 26th Virginia Infantry (Lynchburg, Va., 1984), 24.

In rapid succession Federal forces captured Batteries 5, 6, 7, and 3. Understandably, the assaults threw the Confederate line into disarray. Bell's penetration of the line near Battery No. 6 turned the right of the 26th Virginia and the left of the 46th Virginia. The 26th lost 142 men. Of the total, 111 were captured.<sup>58</sup> It also suffered the capture of Lt. Col. James Councill. The Federal attackers seriously wounded Col. Randolph Harrison of the 46th Virginia.<sup>59</sup> Smith's sudden attack with a reinforced skirmish line was having remarkable success.

Lieutenant Col. Wright, having helped capture Battery No. 6, now led his command to a lunette between Batteries No. 7 and 8. Kiddoo, commanding the 22nd USCT, led his men past Wright and the lunette and "across a deep and swampy ravine." His men "wavered at first under the hot fire," but the black troops pressed into the rifle pits and the battery beyond. Wright's men left the protection of the lunette to support Kiddoo's attack. After a sharp fight, the Federal troops pushed the Rebels out of Battery No. 8. The outnumbered Confederate defenders regrouped in Battery No. 9 and boldly counterattacked.

Kiddoo, combining the men of the 1st and 22nd USCT, repelled the tenacious Confederates, who retreated to Battery 9. Kiddoo was unable to counterattack, however, for his men had expended their ammunition. Kiddoo decided to remain in Battery No. 8. The black troops faced "heavy resistance" and suffered "considerable loss," but at Battery 8 they proved

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<sup>58</sup> The casualty count is from the muster roll in Wiatt, 26th Virginia, 46-81.

<sup>59</sup> Wise, Life of Henry A. Wise, 351.

their ability to fight.<sup>60</sup>

Smith, believing Battery 8 had not yet fallen, sent Lt. Col. Rogers and the 4th USCT to take it. Finding it captured, Rogers pushed his men toward Battery No. 9, which was "500 yards distant and commanding the positions already taken." Moving on Rogers' left was Col. John Holman and two companies of the 1st USCT. They struggled through heavy brush and fallen timber near Jordan's Point Road and cleared the obstructions in front of Battery No. 9. Immediate Confederate fire prompted Holman's order to charge the fort. In the face of the Union assault the defenders abandoned Battery 9 and fled to Battery No. 10. This redoubt "was still stubbornly held" when Roger's 4th USCT attacked on the right flank. After a brief stand, the Confederates gave up Battery No. 10 and one gun. The Southern forces, reeling from rapid and successive losses of their line, gave up Batteries 9 and 10 with little resistance. When No. 10 fell, the Confederates simply abandoned Battery No. 11 near the Dunn House.<sup>61</sup>

The attack went so quickly there was no need for a line of battle to exploit the gains. Colonel Samuel Duncan's men of the 5th and 6th USCT formed a column with a battalion front to assault the works. This unwieldy formation stumbled through stumps, timber, marsh, and slashings before reaching the main line. As they arrived at the base of the works, the men heard wild cheering and knew the line was theirs. It was 9 p. m., and Federal troops had carried Batteries 3 to 11, constituting the

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<sup>60</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 725; Ibid., LI, Pt. 1, 267. Battery No. 8 was later renamed Fort Friend.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

center three and a half miles of Petersburg's eastern defenses.

The Confederate forces had suffered at least 215 men captured, as well an unknown number of killed and wounded. Federals had captured Maj. Peter V. Batte, commanding his own battalion.<sup>62</sup> Federal forces also seized sixteen guns. The greatest Union loss was among the black troops. During the day the 4th, 5th, 6th, and 22nd USCT lost 378 men, many of them at Baylor's Farm.<sup>63</sup>

The fall of the works witnessed at least one racially motivated act of violence. A New York soldier noted that "the Niggers charged on our left and did well." A group of black soldiers tried to kill the Rebel prisoners held by Bell's white troops near Battery 6. At least one Confederate prisoner died when "a great bushy Nigger came up to him . . . and ran his bayonet through his heart. Our boys [117th New York] turned on the Niggers and kept them back."<sup>64</sup> The intense feelings produced by the Fort Pillow incident bore bitter fruit in the aftermath of Federal success at Petersburg.

In the gathering dusk, Hancock and the II Corps began arriving immediately behind Hinks's command. About 9 p. m. Hancock met Smith. Hancock waived his superior rank, assuming Smith was more familiar with the ground and understood the necessary requirements for further action that evening. Smith requested Hancock's men relieve the black division

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<sup>62</sup> Wallace, Virginia Military Organizations, 125. Batte's Battalion was designated the 44th Battalion Virginia Infantry; it was also called the Petersburg City Battalion.

<sup>63</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 268-69.

<sup>64</sup> Jackson, Back Home in Oneida, 142.



so that a potential Confederate counterattack would meet fresh troops. The II Corps was less than fresh after a day of frustrating delays and hot marching, but at least they had seen no fighting. Hancock complied with Smith's request, placing Gibbon's right at the Friend House, near Battery 7. Birney's division covered the II Corps's left, stretching to the Dunn House and Battery 11. By 11:30 p. m., the II Corps had replaced Hinks's division in the captured works.<sup>65</sup>

In one of the greatest command blunders of the war, Smith chose to go no farther than the lines just taken. Yet Smith's reasons for stopping contain some merit. In the late afternoon, Federal signalmen reported several loaded Confederate troop trains proceeding southward to Petersburg. Smith falsely assumed these were Lee's veterans hurrying to reinforce the city. Against the Army of Northern Virginia Smith believed a night assault over unfamiliar ground must result in Federal disaster in the streets of Petersburg. Smith, ever cautious, saw only the danger and none of opportunity in immediate attack. He preferred to hold the Dimmock line and wait for the whole strength of the Army of the Potomac to arrive. Lastly, Smith knew the white troops of the XVIII Corps were exhausted, while his black troops, "intoxicated by their success . . . could hardly be kept in order."<sup>66</sup>

All of these reasons aside, Smith probably would have halted under nearly any circumstances. He was a careful and precise topographical engineer, holding the earthworks necessary to secure Petersburg.

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<sup>65</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 305.

<sup>66</sup> Smith, From Chattanooga to Petersburg, 24-25.

Twenty-nine years later, Smith still believed that "we had taken the principal fortifications . . . erected to protect . . . the key to the Confederacy."<sup>67</sup> In Smith's engineer mind, the Dimmock line was the city of Petersburg. Charles A. Dana, Assistant Secretary of War, summed up this attitude when he reported on June 16 that the Confederate "position is of little comparative value." In a dispatch reflecting a terrible irony, Dana optimistically reported that the Confederates could not remain in Petersburg, for the city "lies directly under our guns."<sup>68</sup> As Smith fell asleep on June 15, he doubtless believed Petersburg would soon be in Federal hands.

The men of the II and XVIII Corps recognized the missed opportunity even if their corps commanders did not. Colonel Lyman, of Meade's staff, knowing the march of June 15 exhausted the men, still exclaimed "But, oh! that they had attacked at once. Petersburg would have gone like a rotten branch."<sup>69</sup> As the II Corps pushed toward Petersburg, an artilleryman remembered how "the booming of the cannon cheered us. We were tired, hungry, worn with six weeks of continuous and bloody fighting . . . but . . . we wanted to push on and get into the fight and capture Petersburg."

Nearing the sounds of battle caused the Union soldiers to steel themselves mentally. They were ready to be thrown into the fray "and then--and then--we went to cooking. That night was made to fight on. A bright and almost full moon shone upon us." The infantry, angered that

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>68</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Lyman, Meade's Headquarters, 162.

"they were to be sacrificed on the morrow," spewed forth "blood-curdling blasphemy."<sup>70</sup>

Soldiers of the XVIII Corps, gazing on the "silent valley and . . . the nearly defenceless city," could not understand "why we did not then go down and possess them."<sup>71</sup> Federal forces broke the main line, scattered the enemy, and were blessed with a bright moon. "The spirits of all were very high," observed one officer, "and we were willing to move on at once."<sup>72</sup> Yet there was no more fighting that day. "The night was uneventful to us," remembered a man of Stannard's brigade, "one of our men sarcastically . . . remarking, 'the Johnnies are too busy fixing another line for us.'"<sup>73</sup> The men of the two Union corps spent the hours of darkness turning the captured sections of the Dimmock line to face the city. They labored much of the night on this task, as well as constructing new earthworks on the western slope of the Dimmock line ridge.<sup>74</sup>

Realizing Petersburg's danger, Beauregard came to the city about 6 p. m., but he was unable to prevent the Federal breakthrough. General Johnson Hagood's men arrived at Petersburg about sundown, "got off the

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<sup>70</sup> Frank Wilkeson, Recollections of a Private Soldier in the Army of the Potomac (London, 1898), 127, 130-31.

<sup>71</sup> J.A. Mowris, A History of the One Hundred and Seventeenth Regiment, N.Y. Volunteers (Hartford, Conn., 1866), 115.

<sup>72</sup> Livermore, Days and Events, 361.

<sup>73</sup> Derby, Bearing Arms in the 27th Massachusetts, 335.

<sup>74</sup> Isaiah Price, History of the Ninety-Seventh Regiment, Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry During the War of Rebellion, 1861-65 (Philadelphia, 1875), 292.

cars and formed in the streets." As they marched through town toward the City Point Road, "the routed troops . . . were pouring into the town, spreading alarm on every hand."<sup>75</sup> Wise's men "were running back, some hatless, some shoeless, and nearly all without guns."<sup>76</sup> Hagood's men strode eastward out of town as Petersburg's citizens waved handkerchiefs and shouted: "God bless Hagood and his South Carolinians."<sup>77</sup>

The Carolinians hastened eastward to form a new line. It was now well after dark, and Hagood knew little of the ground or the location of the Federal army. The general and his staff nearly blundered into Federal pickets at Harrison's Creek ford on the Prince George Court House Road. Hagood returned to the junction of the City Point and Prince George Roads. Here a courier, with a map sent by Col. D. B. Harris, found the concerned general. The messenger also carried "a bit of tallow candle and matches."<sup>78</sup> The candle's meager light illuminated the natural line Hagood was seeking.

Hagood placed his left on the Appomattox River, reinforcing Batteries 1 and 2, which were still held by Wise's men.<sup>79</sup> The Confederate

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<sup>75</sup> Johnson Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession (Columbia, S.C., 1910), 265.

<sup>76</sup> SHSP, XXV (1897), 224.

<sup>77</sup> Henry Kershaw DuBose, The History of Company B, Twenty-First Regiment (Infantry) South Carolina Confederate States Provisional Army (Columbia, S. C., 1909), 73.

<sup>78</sup> Hagood, Memoirs of the War, 266.

<sup>79</sup> Colonel William Tabb's 59th Virginia arrived from the Swift Creek area about sundown. The 59th went to Batteries 1 and 2, relieving the companies of the 26th Virginia. Tabb's men would in turn be replaced

line then ran south on high ground along the west bank of Harrison's Creek. The line incorporated Batteries A and B on either side of the City Point Railroad. These railroad forts were located about a mile west of Battery No. 5.<sup>80</sup> The new line continued south, rejoining the Dimmock line near Battery No. 15 and the Shand House. Batteries No. 12, 13, and 14, although forward of Harrison's Creek, remained in Confederate hands. The Rebel forces would be on "a chord of the arc of our captured or abandoned works," Hagood stated.<sup>81</sup>

The new line, though hurriedly created, had excellent position. It fronted a cleared valley, much of it cultivated. Hagood's right did not extend as far right (south) as the Prince George Court House Road, but arriving units soon occupied the makeshift "Hagood line." Colquitt formed on Hagood's right, across the road. As Clingman and Martin arrived throughout the night, they continued the southward progression.<sup>82</sup>

When couriers informed Beauregard that the center of the Dimmock line was lost, he made the decision to sacrifice the Bermuda Hundred lines so as to save Petersburg. Beauregard ordered Gen. Bushrod Johnson's division to vacate its entrenchments under cover of darkness, leaving only brightly burning campfires and a picket line. Beauregard apprised both Bragg and Lee of his decision and asked Lee to look to the protection of Drewry's

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by the 27th South Carolina during the night. See ibid., 266-67 and Bearss, "June 15, 1864 Attack on Petersburg," 37.

<sup>80</sup> Evidence for the inclusion of these two railroad batteries in the second Confederate line is in SHSP, XXV (1897), 223.

<sup>81</sup> Hagood, Memoirs of the War, 267.

<sup>82</sup> Bearss, "June 15, 1864 Attack on Petersburg," 38-39.

Bluff and Bermuda Hundred.<sup>83</sup>

The ever-aggressive Beauregard, reinforced with only the 4,000-5,000 men of Hoke's division, considered a night assault to recapture his lost lines. The men of the 21st South Carolina lay in a corn field near the City Point Railroad, "expecting orders at any moment, [and] the clanking of a sword, passing down toward the left of the 21st regiment, suggested that the expected was about to happen."<sup>84</sup> The expected did not happen. Beauregard realized that Hoke's tiring march had removed the punch from his soldiers. After entrenching their makeshift line, the weary Confederates "fell asleep upon the ground from sheer exhaustion."<sup>85</sup> Beauregard then awaited the arrival of Johnson's men and the morning.

Throughout June 15, Beauregard kept Bragg in Richmond and Lee at Riddell's Shop well informed of events at Petersburg. Colonel Samuel B. Paul of Beauregard's staff visited Lee personally in the morning and requested the return of Beauregard's original forces. Hoke was already on his way, but at 12:30 p. m. Lee asked Richmond if Gen. Matt Ransom's 1,800-man brigade could be sent to Petersburg. Ransom's troops, part of Johnson's division, were guarding Chaffin's Bluff.<sup>86</sup> Although Ransom went to Petersburg, the nervous Beauregard continued to sound the alarm over the Federal buildup in his front. Lee understood Beauregard's concern but refused to leave Richmond open to Federal attack. The Union

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<sup>83</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 656-57.

<sup>84</sup> DuBose, 21st South Carolina, 74.

<sup>85</sup> North Carolina Regiments, IV, 534.

<sup>86</sup> Robert E. Lee, The Wartime Papers of R. E. Lee (New York, 1961), 781.

army's exact whereabouts were unknown throughout June 15, and Beauregard's information placed only Butler's Army of the James in his front. Lee had faith that Beauregard and his men would deny Petersburg to the XVIII and X Corps. Lee had no choice but to look to his own front, where the whole Army of the Potomac might be waiting to strike at Richmond.<sup>87</sup>

Poor intelligence kept Lee in the dark. Available information concerning the location of the Army of the Potomac was suspect at best. Upon assuming command, Beauregard created a system of informers and couriers who ranged south of the James to Federal-occupied Fort Powhatan.<sup>88</sup> Yet, and incredibly, this intelligence network failed to observe the massive crossing of the Union army over the James. Consequently, Beauregard's system did not identify corps designations of the Federal troops operating against Petersburg. The Federal force attacking the city remained a mystery. Union prisoners provided no clue except that "their destination was south side of [the] James."<sup>89</sup> Dearing's Union prisoners reported the potentially dangerous news that the IX Corps was in front of Petersburg.<sup>90</sup> Lee was skeptical of prisoner statements. He always preferred to substantiate them with accurate information from infantry or cavalry. Lee had no conclusive proof that

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<sup>87</sup> Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 409.

<sup>88</sup> Roman, Military Operations of Beauregard, II, 244.

<sup>89</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 1018.

<sup>90</sup> Roman, Military Operations of Beauregard, II, 570. Burnside's IX Corps would not arrive in front of Petersburg until the following day, June 16.

the IX Corps or any elements of the Army of the Potomac were operating south of the James.

Conflicting with Federal prisoner reports was Powell Hill's information that Confederate "cavalry still report the enemy steadily advancing."<sup>91</sup> General James Wilson, commanding the Federal cavalry division in front of Hill's Third Corps, later wrote that the area near St. Mary's Church was "the scene of about as much active cavalry work as took place in so contracted a space at any time during the war."<sup>92</sup> Hill correctly believed the action to be mostly that of enemy cavalry. Lee at first considered moving closer to Richmond, and thus closer to the bridges leading to Petersburg. Union activity, especially the "movements of the enemy's cavalry," convinced Lee to hold his army on a line from White Oak Swamp to Malvern Hill. Without being "better satisfied," Lee opted to wait, "as the enemy's plans do not seem to be settled."<sup>93</sup>

The Union army's movement across the James and its corresponding diversions forced Lee to make reactive decisions. Because the bulk of the Confederate cavalry was pursuing Sheridan north of Richmond, Lee could not order a reconnaissance in force to determine Grant's whereabouts. Neither could he risk using his infantry for such an advance. Lee had only six divisions in the First and Third Corps remaining, the three divisions of the Second Corps having gone to Lynchburg to intercept

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<sup>91</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 1017.

<sup>92</sup> James Harrison Wilson, Under the Old Flag: Recollections of Military Operations in the War for the Union, The Spanish War, The Boxer Rebellion, Etc. (New York, 1912), 452.

<sup>93</sup> Lee, Lee's Dispatches, 236.



Hunter's advance. Grant's strategy was working perfectly--Lee was frozen north of the James. Rather than anticipating and acting pre-emptively on Federal actions, Lee was uncharacteristically awaiting Grant's moves. Through the creation of several actions at once, Grant gave the Army of the Potomac the edge it needed to secure Petersburg.

In the event of a major assault on Petersburg, both Beauregard and Lee understood the need for rapid communication across the James. The generals separately requested that bridge material necessary to span the James be assembled. There were Confederate bridges in place above Drewry's Bluff and farther upriver at Warwick, but both would lengthen the march of an army traveling to Petersburg from the vicinity of Malvern Hill.<sup>94</sup> At midday, June 15, Lee directed Col. Walter H. Stevens to throw a bridge about half a mile below Chaffin's Bluff. Not only was this closer to Lee's army, but there would now be three bridges to speed the Army of Northern Virginia across the James should the need arise.<sup>95</sup> Despite Lee's ignorance of Grant's location, the Confederate commander endeavored to protect the capital as well as prepare the way for a rapid march to Petersburg.

On June 15, Beauregard's forces narrowly escaped disaster. Despite shattered fortifications and an impromptu, weakly-held line, Confederate leaders were doing all in their power to ensure Petersburg's safety. A Union soldier in the 117th New York reported that "Petersburg depot was a busy place. Frequently during the night, the sound of arriving trains

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<sup>94</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 653.

<sup>95</sup> Lee, Lee's Dispatches, 237.

could be distinctly heard." The soldier worried that the enemy was "straining every nerve, and crowding every avenue, to avert any further reverse."<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, all available units in Beauregard's command hurried to Petersburg. As the Federal soldiers entrenched, "the whistling of the engines" reached their ears. They "reflected that every carload of Rebels is so much the more for us to contend with."<sup>97</sup>

The apprehensive Yankees might have felt secure had they known their commanders were likewise active. Colonel Orville Babcock, Grant's aide-de-camp, interrupted Meade and his staff at dinner with news of Smith's success. Meade immediately ordered that the wagon trains then crossing the James be stopped. This would "allow the 9th Corps to pass over and push on towards Petersburg."<sup>98</sup> At 11:55 p. m., similar orders went to the V Corps. Beginning at 4 a. m. on June 16, Warren's rested men were to cross the James by transport.

So important was the crossing of the James that wounded men had to wait for treatment until the Union army passed. Wounded men from the 13th New Hampshire were put aboard the steamer Hero of Jersey after their June 15 battle. The casualties remained on deck in the middle of the James. For two days they lay exposed to the sun and largely uncared for. While watching the seemingly continuous procession of men and wagons bob over

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<sup>96</sup> Mowris, 117th New York, 115.

<sup>97</sup> John Haley, The Rebel Yell and the Yankee Hurrah: The Civil War Journal of a Maine Volunteer (Camden, ME, 1985), 170-71.

<sup>98</sup> Lyman, Meade's Headquarters, 161.

the bridge, a wounded Confederate soldier exclaimed: "Great Heavens!--is there no end to that thing?" For relief from their excruciating pain, the men had only "cold water freely poured upon gunshot wounds."<sup>99</sup> For the Federal leadership, getting all available force promptly to Petersburg outweighed even humane treatment for their own wounded.

By the light of a bright moon, the Army of the Potomac was driving for Petersburg as were all of Beauregard's available forces. The early morning darkness of June 16 brought entrenchment and reinforcement; dawn would once again bring fighting and death.

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<sup>99</sup> Thompson, 13th New Hampshire, 405-7.

### CHAPTER III -- JUNE 16, 1864

#### "A GRAND BUT TERRIBLE SPECTACLE"

Throughout the evening of June 15-16 the Army of the Potomac pressed toward Petersburg. As the IX Corps crossed the James on the pontoon bridge, the V Corps made ready to embark on transports at Wilcox's Landing. Fronting Petersburg were the men of Smith's XVIII Corps and Hancock's II Corps. The Union army was in a remarkable position. Barely two miles away the Federal soldiers clearly saw the Cockade City outlined against the horizon. By mid-morning of the 16th, Hancock and Smith would count well over 30,000 muskets. At the same time, Beauregard's hastily gathered force numbered but 14,000 men.<sup>1</sup> A Union opportunity nearly as bright as that of June 15 awaited exploitation.

Hancock was a capable and reliable fighter, perhaps the best corps commander in either army. His exceptional corps had proved its mettle in the horribly violent Overland Campaign. With Petersburg so near, and with so many men present, it seemed the city must be in Union hands by the end of the day. Yet all was not as it seemed.

Hancock's precarious health hampered his ability to lead. The Gettysburg wound on the inside of his thigh had never healed. In the inferno of Cold Harbor, the wound reopened and started to suppurate. On

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<sup>1</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 161.

the move to the James, the commander was found "sitting on the grass . . . pouring water from a canteen on the wound."<sup>2</sup> Hancock's agony increased daily as the open sore discharged blood and pus. By June 15, he was unable to mount a horse. He reluctantly accepted a more comfortable ride in a wagon or ambulance. Pain forced him to command from a stationary position. This immobility was difficult to bear. Hancock normally rode on horseback in front of his lead brigade, conspicuous as he galloped about giving orders.<sup>3</sup>

The battle-scarred commander represented his corps; they too were battered, exhausted, and frustrated. The men of Gibbon's division "were wearied, jaded, half starved and foot-sore . . . their rapid march to reach Petersburg had told heavily upon the physical condition of the men."<sup>4</sup> The II corps suffered not only heavy casualties in the Overland Campaign, it also lost many of its best and brightest line officers and men. Many of the survivors were either waiting out terms of enlistment or had recently arrived in the army as replacements. Heavy artillery units made up the bulk of these replacements. These men grumbled about infantry duty and were often less than reliable in battle. Despite such limitations, the remaining troops and officers of the once large and

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. , 19.

<sup>3</sup> Glenn Tucker, Hancock the Superb (Indianapolis, 1960), 242. Hancock would show no improvement until June 25 when his wound expelled a large splinter of bone. See George Meade, The Life and Letters of George Gordon Meade, Major-General United States Army (New York, 1913), II, 208.

<sup>4</sup> Charles D. Page, History of the Fourteenth Regiment, Connecticut Vol. Infantry (Meridan, Conn. , 1906), 286.

powerful II Corps prepared in earnest for one more battle.

At 12:25 a. m. on June 16, Hancock prepared to secure Petersburg. He told Gibbon and Birney that high ground between the Appomattox River and the Federal line was to "be attacked and taken at or before daylight." Because Hancock was unable to identify the high points exactly, he merely informed Gibbon and Birney that there were thought to be "one or two such points."<sup>5</sup> Hancock's two division commanders did not begin to reconnoiter their front until 6 a. m., well after dawn. Once again the specter of slow implementation of orders haunted the Federal army.

At daylight, weary troops of Gen. Francis Barlow's division began to trickle into the lines. The previous day these men, victims of erroneous maps, had marched nearly to City Point before discovering the mistake. They then had the wretched ill-fortune to spend the night countermarching to Petersburg. Barlow's lead brigade encountered the walking wounded of Hinks's division making their way to the rear. The bearing of the wounded men impressed Col. James Beaver. He noted that "they were in no panic and, to my amazement, each man seemed to bring his gun with him. I have never seen wounded men come out of a fight as they did."<sup>6</sup> Barlow's soldiers filed into line on the left of Birney, forming the Federal left. Because of their exhausting march, Barlow's men were strung out for miles behind the lead brigade. The entire II Corps was not yet in position around Petersburg, but representatives of the three

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<sup>5</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 305, 317.

<sup>6</sup> J. W. Muffly, The Story of our Regiment: A History of the 148th Pennsylvania Vols. (Des Moines, 1904), 133.

divisions now manned a front stretching nearly three miles. Gibbon's right joined the XVIII Corps's left at the Friend House; Birney held the center from the Prince George Court House Road to the Dunn House; Barlow extended south nearly to the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad.<sup>7</sup>

As the moon shone on Federal movements across the James, an aide awakened Lee at Riddell's Shop. At 2 a. m. Lee for the first time read the alarming news that Beauregard had abandoned the Bermuda Hundred lines to reinforce Petersburg. Beauregard gave Lee no choice in the matter. "Cannot these lines be occupied by your troops?" he asked, "the safety of our communications requires it."<sup>8</sup> If Butler secured the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad and the pike between the two cities, Lee knew that reinforcement of Beauregard would be costly, if not impossible.<sup>9</sup>

Lee promptly ordered Gen. George Pickett's division at Frayser's Farm to march as soon as possible. His 4,500-man division left for Drewry's Bluff at 3 a. m., only one hour after Lee knew the Bermuda Hundred lines were empty. Lee wished the march pursued with vigor, ordering Gen. Eppa Hunton in the van "to go through woods and cross the country without regard to roads and get to Drewry's Bluff as soon as possible." Hunton urged his men forward, believing his "march on that occasion was the fastest on record."<sup>10</sup> Once again, Lee reduced the size of his army without exact knowledge of Grant's location. Perhaps out of

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<sup>7</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 305.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Pt. 2, 657.

<sup>9</sup> Lee, Lee's Dispatches, 244-45.

<sup>10</sup> Eppa Hunton, Autobiography of Eppa Hunton (Richmond, 1933), 114.

impatience, Lee determined to go to the south side of the James and assess the situation personally. He would follow Pickett across the James at Drewry's Bluff.<sup>11</sup>

On the morning of June 16, Hancock was in charge of all Federal forces in front of Petersburg. After Gibbon's and Birney's patrols had located the strong points in the Confederate line, Hancock ordered a reconnaissance in force. This probe was to determine the best location for a general assault later in the day, pending the arrival of Burnside's IX Corps. Birney readied Colonel Thomas Egan's brigade for the duty.<sup>12</sup> Before the brigade even formed, Confederate artillery opened on the men, "killing and wounding a considerable number of the brigade."<sup>13</sup> The 17th Maine and 20th Indiana formed the attacking column, the rest of the brigade in support. Before forming his regiment, a Confederate shell fragment wounded Capt. John Perry, commanding the 17th Maine. Perry typified the condition of much of the the Army of the Potomac; captains commanded regiments, their colonels and majors already killed or wounded in the Overland Campaign.<sup>14</sup>

Egan's brigade formed among the fallen timber to the left (southeast) of the Prince George Court House Road. This belt of cut timber fronted the area from the Dunn House to the Avery House. As the brigade got into position among the stumps and slashing, Confederate artillery "opened .

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<sup>11</sup> Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 411.

<sup>12</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 161-62.

<sup>13</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 390.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., LI, Pt. 1, 235-36.



. . with extraordinary briskness." The two Federal lead regiments surged ahead through a wide field swept by Confederate fire. The 40th New York, its soldiers having only two days left in their enlistment, shirked their supporting role and placed "themselves in as safe a place as possible." The reconnaissance failed to break the Confederate line anywhere south of the Dunn House. Federals recoiled back to the shelter of their starting place. This failure occurred simply because the works fronting the Avery Farm were too strong and the attacking force was too small.<sup>15</sup>

General Matt Ransom's timely arrival strengthened the Confederate right in the face of Egan's attack. After marching all night from Chaffin's Bluff, Ransom's men hurried to the Avery Farm, held by "2nd Class Militia." Lieutenant Thomas Roulhac of the 49th North Carolina remembered crossing the Appomattox about sunrise and running to the fortifications south of town, "getting to the works before the enemy reached there." The Carolinians were "just in time to meet their charge, and drive them back."<sup>16</sup> Ransom's men, arriving "at a run though a storm of shot and shell," may have saved the Confederate right on the morning of June 16.<sup>17</sup> Hoke's division could not cover the lines that far south; and although fighting bravely, Wise's men were too few in number and too poorly trained to resist for long. Beauregard's constant demand for reinforcement, combined with Lee's accession to those demands, resulted in Ransom's dramatic sunrise rescue.

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<sup>15</sup> Haley, Rebel Yell and Yankee Hurrah, 171.

<sup>16</sup> Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 139.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., II, 621.

Rather than give up the reconnaissance, the combative Egan regrouped his men for a second attempt. A soldier who felt the attack foolhardy and wasteful characterized Egan as a "third rate idiot." Again the 40th New York avoided contact, taking "refuge behind an old line of works." The second assault fared no better than the first, save the capture of Battery No. 12, just south of the Dunn House. Egan's men failed again to break the main Confederate line, hastily thrown together the night before by Hagood. The Federal brigade then took position at right angles to the old Dimmock Line, facing southwest toward the Avery House. Here the Federals occupied a position close to the Confederate line. Because of their proximity, the Federals "hugged the earth with wondrous persistence" so as to avoid the shells and musket balls whistling overhead.<sup>18</sup>

Egan's reconnaissance was costly. The 17th Maine alone lost fifty-four men killed and wounded.<sup>19</sup> Egan himself was severely wounded, receiving "a dig in the region of his kidneys."<sup>20</sup> Hancock commented that Battery 12 was "carried by Egan in his usual intrepid manner."<sup>21</sup> Egan's soldiers, however, watched their wounded commander dragged away with "astonishing complacency . . . If any tears were shed, they were tears of joy, mingled with the hope that his wound will keep him away till our

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<sup>18</sup> Haley, Rebel Yell and Yankee Hurrah, 171-72.

<sup>19</sup> Edwin B. Houghton, The Campaigns of the Seventeenth Maine (Portland, ME, 1866), 201.

<sup>20</sup> Haley, Rebel Yell and Yankee Hurrah, 172.

<sup>21</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 305.

terms end."<sup>22</sup>

The lack of prompt Federal action at dawn allowed Beauregard to reinforce and hold his lines. Several captured members of the 148th Pennsylvania (Barlow's division) escaped from Confederate guards en route to Richmond. In the pre-dawn darkness of June 16, the escapees made their way back to their comrades in front of Petersburg. They reported that "there was not a line of battle of the enemy between us and Petersburg."<sup>23</sup>

As Barlow's men and Col. James Beaver's Union brigade formed a line opposite the Avery House, they watched Gen. Bushrod Johnson's Confederates file into the redoubts protecting the farm. One of Beaver's soldiers noted that "what appeared to be an almost empty earthwork was, before the sun was three-quarters grown, filled with guns and swarming with men."<sup>24</sup>

By 9:30 a. m. Barlow realized the Confederate right was weak, although Johnson's forces were arriving continually. Barlow wired Hancock that "another division on our left flank would be well on the enemy's right flank."<sup>25</sup> Typically, there was no immediate Federal reaction to Barlow's suggestion. Beauregard's men wisely used the time

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<sup>22</sup> Haley, Rebel Yell and Yankee Hurrah, 172. Egan's wound partially paralyzed him for two months. He returned to the army in September and received promotion to brigadier general.

<sup>23</sup> Muffly, 148th Pennsylvania, 273.

<sup>24</sup> Frank A. Burr, Life and Achievements of James Addams Beaver (Philadelphia, 1882), 158.

<sup>25</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 93.

to reinforce and strengthen their line to the south.

At 9:40 a. m. Lee crossed the James. Kneeling on the south bank, he asked God's blessing on his new operations.<sup>26</sup> Lee then informed Bragg that his new headquarters would be at Drewry's Bluff, and that all communication should be directed to that point. Five minutes later, Beauregard informed Lee that the "enemy is pressing us in heavy force." The constant Federal skirmishing, and Egan's reconnaissance, convinced Beauregard that an all-out Union attack was in the offing. Beauregard asked Lee to forward to Petersburg the division meant for the Bermuda Hundred lines (Pickett).<sup>27</sup> Despite receiving three of Johnson's brigades and Hoke's division, Beauregard asked for part of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.<sup>28</sup> Lee's reply reaffirmed that the commander did "not know the position of Grant's army." He added that he dare not "strip [the] north bank of the James."<sup>29</sup> If Grant were still north of the James, Lee had only five divisions there to confront him. Without knowledge of Grant's position, Beauregard would simply have to hold the Federals in his front.

As Egan's reconnaissance took place on the Federal left, the Union right engaged in skirmishing with the Confederates. The XVIII Corps was nearly perpendicular to the Appomattox River, the line running from the

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<sup>26</sup> Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 411.

<sup>27</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 1078.

<sup>28</sup> Bushrod Johnson's other brigade, Gen. Archibald Gracie's Alabamians, held the Swift Creek line north of Petersburg. On the morning of June 16, these 1,000 men protected Petersburg against a possible attack by Butler from the north.

<sup>29</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 659.

rear of the Friend House to the river, about a third of a mile north of Rowlett's House. The men of Hinks's and Martindale's divisions probed ahead, Brooks remaining in reserve on the high ground captured the previous night.

The terrain between the City Point Railroad and the river slowly narrowed, forcing the skirmishers together as though they were in a funnel. Hinks's men soon overlapped those of Martindale's command, who were "standing along the river's brink." Martindale "fumed greatly" at Rowlett's House over this "grievance which he could not control."<sup>30</sup>

At 10:30 a. m. Grant directed Smith to ascertain the best point in his sector for an assault and to withdraw those troops not needed to defend his front. These men would be held in readiness for reinforcement in case of a Confederate attack on the Federal left.<sup>31</sup> Before noon, Hinks's division withdrew to the junction of the City Point and Spring Hill roads. Martindale remained on the extreme Federal right between the City Point Railroad and the Appomattox River.

Hinks put his men to work building a battery on a crest of land located on the Walthall Farm. The position was nearly 1,000 yards due east of Archer's Hill, where a Confederate battery protected the northeastern approaches to the city. Howell's New York Battery took position in the newly dug earthworks and prepared to cover the advance of the Federal right.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Livermore, Days and Events, 363-64.

<sup>31</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 112.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Pt. 1, 722; Livermore, Days and Events, 364.

Throughout the hot morning of June 16 skirmishers of the XVIII Corps and Hoke's division pushed each other back and forth. Troops of the 97th Pennsylvania entrenched on the side of the ridge facing the valley of Harrison's Creek. They watched Federal skirmishers push toward some of Friend's outbuildings bordering the creek and sheltering Confederate pickets. At first the Union line wavered but the 97th bellowed out "hearty cheers" of encouragement. The Union soldiers in the valley then surged forward to capture the buildings and some of the Confederate defenders.<sup>33</sup> During the day the large 2nd Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery regiment reinforced Martindale's division.

Despite successful skirmishing and a considerable force bolstered by the large heavy artillery regiment, Martindale urged caution upon his superiors. The Confederate fire from north of the Appomattox, "which galled Stedman last night," convinced Martindale of the hopelessness of Federal action in the open flood plain next to the river. Martindale believed the reverse and enfilading fire of the Confederate batteries on the north bank of the Appomattox would make it "necessary to bear toward the railroad [City Point]."<sup>34</sup>

While awaiting action on the morning of June 16, the men of Brooks's division witnessed the reinforcement of Petersburg by Johnson's division. For the men perched atop the captured heights around Battery 5, the view through field glasses "revealed the incoming tide of gray backs."<sup>35</sup> As

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<sup>33</sup> Price, 97th Pennsylvania, 292-93.

<sup>34</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 1256.; Ibid., XL, Pt. 2, 114.

<sup>35</sup> Mowris, 117th New York, 115.

Johnson's men crossed the bridge into Petersburg, the soldiers of the 118th New York began "to fear that our further advance will be no easy matter."<sup>36</sup>

Despite their ability to see clearly the reinforcement of the city, Federal division commanders did little to block the Confederate effort on the right. The morning of June 16th saw Egan's reconnaissance in force and considerable skirmishing. Federal officers, ranging from regimental captains to corps major generals, knew that Beauregard was strengthening his lines. Yet a concerted Federal effort did not occur on the morning of June 16 largely because both Meade and Grant wanted the IX Corps in place before another heavy attack took place.<sup>37</sup>

At 10:30 a. m. , Grant left his headquarters at City Point to visit the captured works in the forenoon. He told Meade, still at the James River bridge, to take the next steamer to City Point. Grant wished Meade to be in direct command of the action at Petersburg. Believing that the Confederates were massing on the Federal left, Grant also wanted Warren's V Corps rushed to the Jerusalem Plank Road to protect that flank.<sup>38</sup>

Meade and his staff arrived at City Point about 11:30 a. m. and found Grant gone. Meade's party then rode toward Petersburg, and about midday they met the commander returning from the lines. Grant excitedly informed them that "Smith has taken a line of works stronger than any thing we have

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<sup>36</sup> John L. Cunningham, Three Years with the Adirondack Regiment, 118th New York Volunteer Infantry (Norwood, Mass. , 1920), 133.

<sup>37</sup> Humphreys, Virginia Campaign, 212-13.

<sup>38</sup> O.R. , XL, Pt. 2, 86.

seen this campaign." Grant urged: "If it is a possible thing, I want an assault made at six o'clock this evening."<sup>39</sup> Meade knew that the IX Corps was then arriving, that the V Corps was crossing the James, and that the supply trains and VI Corps (serving as rear guard) would soon cross the bridge. Meade began preparations for Grant's requested 6 p. m. assault.

As early as 10 a. m. the advance elements of the IX Corps staggered into position on the left of Barlow's division of the II Corps. By 1 p. m. two of Burnside's divisions would be on the line. General James H. Ledlie's division arrived about 6 p. m. Meade expected the IX Corps to support the upcoming attack. Unfortunately, Burnside's men were physically spent. One soldier remembered that "the march was prosecuted with great vigor . . . it proved to be one of the most wearisome of the campaign." Colonel Theodore Lyman of Meade's staff watched Burnside's men arrive. "It was pitiable to see the men--without water, broken by a severe march, scorched by a tropical sun, and covered with a suffocating dust."<sup>40</sup>

The forced march from the James combined with the brutally hot weather tore units apart. Company A of the 21st Massachusetts (Ledlie's division) lost so many men that only three answered 6 p. m. roll call.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, From Chattanooga to Petersburg, 27.

<sup>40</sup> History of the Thirty-Sixth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers (Boston, 1884), 202; Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 29. No rain had fallen since June 2 and there would not be another shower until July 19. The lack of water ravaged the men of both sides.

<sup>41</sup> Charles F. Walcott, History of the Twenty-First Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers in the War for the Preservation of the Union, 1861-1865 (Boston, 1882), 335.



The 11th New Hampshire counted just two-thirds of its men present for coffee at Petersburg. Yet this percentage present was the highest among all the regiments of Gen. Simon Griffin's brigade.<sup>42</sup> The weather enervated the strength of the corps. "The march since the night of the 15th had been terribly severe," remembered one soldier, "the roads were dusty, and during the day the mercury had stood at nearly 100 degrees." Such weather left the men "of all the regiments . . . on the road in an exhausted condition, so that when our lines were formed . . . the corps was but a skeleton compared with its former strength."<sup>43</sup> As was true with the II Corps march of June 15, a large part of the IX Corps would not arrive until the following day. By then they were too late and too tired to make much difference in the Union attacks.

Meade arrived at Petersburg totally unfamiliar with the ground but charged with the responsibility of ordering an attack. To assess the best location for a Federal charge, Meade sent two engineers on a detailed reconnaissance. The two officers, Gen. John G. Barnard and Lt. Col. Cyrus B. Comstock of Grant's staff, failed to ascertain the strength or composition of the Confederate forces. Yet they believed a successful assault possible. At 3:45 p. m. Barnard recommended that a division-sized assault be made in Barlow's front, preceded by an artillery barrage. Barnard suggested Barlow's division (II Corps) for the attack, supported

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<sup>42</sup> Leander W. Cogswell, A History of the Eleventh New Hampshire Regiment Volunteers in the Rebellion War 1861-65 (Concord, N. H., 1891), 376.

<sup>43</sup> William H. Osborne, The History of the Twenty-Ninth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, in the Late War of the Rebellion (Boston, 1877), 301-2.

by the IX Corps.<sup>44</sup>

Meade conferred directly with Burnside and Hancock. Barlow and Gen. A. A. Humphreys, Meade's Chief of Staff, personally reconnoitered perilously close to the Confederate skirmishers. By 4 p. m. Meade had decided upon a plan of attack. Birney's division, south of the Prince George Road, would assail Confederate positions on the heights of the Hare Farm. Gibbon's division would support his attack. On the right, the XVIII Corps would make a strong demonstration to engage the guns in their front so as to keep them from turning on the II Corps. Barlow's men, supported by two brigades of the IX Corps on their left, were to take the high ground and works fronting the Avery and Shand Houses. Kautz's cavalry, meanwhile, moved toward the Jerusalem Plank Road, protecting the Federal left while demonstrating against the Confederate extreme right.<sup>45</sup> For the next two hours infantry officers readied their commands for the coming battle. Artillery batteries wheeled into position to cover the field of attack. The battered II Corps was ready to meet Grant's desired 6 p. m. deadline.

As the Army of the Potomac prepared to attack Petersburg, Butler bungled another splendid Union opportunity at Bermuda Hundred.

At 7:45 a. m. on the 16th, Butler wired Grant that since the "enemy have evacuated our front," he would "try to reach the railroad."<sup>46</sup> Butler commanded nearly the entire X Corps, as well as Gen. Adelbert Ames's

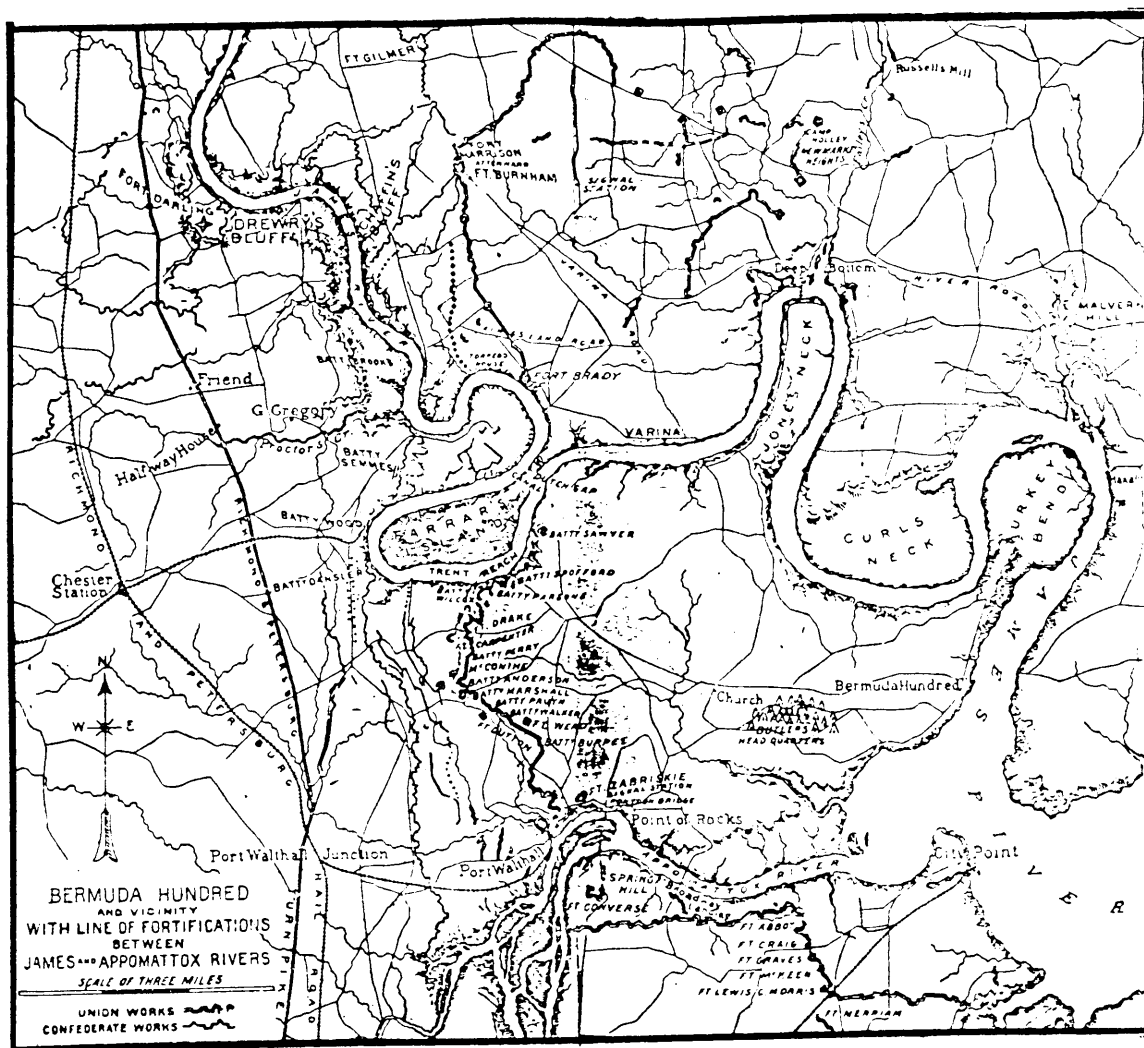
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<sup>44</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 86-87.

<sup>45</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 29-30.

<sup>46</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 97.

MAP 9. Bermuda Hundred and Vicinity



Source: Benjamin F. Butler, Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benjamin F. Butler; Butler's Book (Boston, 1892), 660-61.

division of the XVIII Corps. Yet the battle-timid general was overly concerned that Lee's forces might pounce on his isolated command at any moment. Throughout June 15 Butler had worried that dust clouds rising on the north side of the James meant that Lee was en route to destroy the Army of the James.<sup>47</sup>

Early on the 16th, Butler sent forces toward the abandoned Confederate lines. The X Corps took the line with ease from the few remaining pickets of Johnson's division. Forces under Gens. Ames and Robert S. Foster pushed forward to destroy the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad as the remainder of the men turned the newly-occupied Confederate works. Butler was at last out of his bottle, with the means to disrupt and perhaps prevent Lee's movement south to Petersburg.

General John Turner took 530 men to the railroad near Port Walthall junction and began to tear up track.<sup>48</sup> Ames's four regiments spent the morning destroying telegraph lines and burning Beauregard's former headquarters.<sup>49</sup> Late in the day, Ames began destroying track, ripping up only a quarter of a mile before retiring. Those soldiers not engaged in destroying the railroad picketed the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike near Chester. In early afternoon, Butler proudly wired Grant that his men held the newly completed Confederate battery at Howlett's House on the James and the "entire line of works." In the meantime, Grant had dispatched

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<sup>47</sup> O.R., 74. Butler's line officers shared their commander's concern. For their anxious dispatches, see ibid., 80-82.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>49</sup> Drake, Ninth New Jersey, 224.

two divisions of Gen. Horatio Wright's VI Corps to bolster Butler's force across the pike and railroad. It appeared now that Lee would have to fight his way through Butler to reinforce Beauregard.

Confederate Gen. Richard Anderson, marching with Pickett, found Butler's men on the turnpike just below the junction of the road to Ware Bottom Church. (See Map 9. The church is a half-mile south of Battery Dantzler.) Anderson informed Lee that it would be impossible for troops to move to Petersburg if the Federals held the road in force. The worried Anderson also expressed his belief that the Bermuda Hundred lines must be in Union hands.<sup>50</sup>

Lee realized the need for reinforcements to open communications with Petersburg and to put Butler back into his entrenchments. Just after 1:00 p. m. Lee ordered Gen. Charles Field's division to cross from the north side of the James to the south side at the Drewry's Bluff pontoon bridge. General Joseph Kershaw's division went to the north end of the same bridge to await orders. By the afternoon of June 16, Lee had nearly equal forces of about 22,000 men on each side of the James.<sup>51</sup> However, Lee still remained ignorant of Grant's location. His actions were based solely on the need to maintain the vital transportation link with Petersburg.

At 4:10 p. m. a hopeful Grant wired Butler to "hold a position in advance of your present line." Wright's divisions were steaming up the James to reinforce Butler. The presence of the VI Corps would add greatly to Butler's ability to delay Confederate reinforcements until Petersburg

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<sup>50</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 1079.

<sup>51</sup> Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 413.

fell. Yet it was already too late for the hapless Butler when Grant's wire arrived. At 12:30 p. m. Pickett's men had begun to drive the Federal skirmishers. By mid-afternoon the Union soldiers gave up most of the second Confederate line with little resistance. General Alfred Terry, X Corps commander, ordered his forces to fall back almost immediately after first meeting Confederate skirmishers. Information from Rebel prisoners helped form Terry's hasty decision. Captured Confederates of Pickett's division reported that they had seen Lee at Drewry's Bluff and that their division was in the van of the entire Army of Northern Virginia. For Terry, this frightening information probably decided the issue.<sup>52</sup>

At 5:30 p. m. Butler ironically informed Grant that the Confederates had made "an enormous blunder" by evacuating their lines. His forces had destroyed three miles of track, he proudly announced, but the captured lines could not be held with his present force. Incredibly, Butler used only a picket line to occupy the captured Confederate works.<sup>53</sup> He did not challenge Lee's army for control of the essential arteries of transportation between Richmond and Petersburg. Nor did he battle to hold the lines until Wright's men arrived. Rather, Butler willingly retreated back into his ignominious bottle. By late afternoon Anderson's men held all of the Confederate second line and were pushing hard on the first.<sup>54</sup>

At 6 p. m. Federal batteries opened a thunderous fire against the Confederate line at Petersburg. "The cannonade was very grand," wrote

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<sup>52</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 99, 107.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>54</sup> Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 414.

one observer. "As the sun declined, the air, full of dust and powder smoke, gave a copper hue to the scene."<sup>55</sup> The cannonade slackened, after which Union infantry all along the line sprang forward to take the Confederate line and the city beyond.

On the Federal right, the XVIII Corps pressed forward in a strong demonstration. Confederate shells smashed and splintered the trees around the newly arrived 2nd Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery. Its commander wrote that "our boys began to twist and wobble." Although Lt. Col. Benjamin Winger felt it improper to "do violence to the Third Commandment, it did seem that the only thing to be done was to do a whole lot of good, hard swearing." Winger's colorful technique coerced his men "into the charge with alacrity."<sup>56</sup> Stannard's brigade went forward as well. The 55th Pennsylvania, serving as skirmishers, drove the Confederate pickets back to their works.

Hagood's South Carolinians now met the Federal onslaught. Hagood characterized the attack as a "feeble effort," and although close fighting continued for an hour, the Federal infantry never "got nearer than seventy-five yards."<sup>57</sup> The men of the XVIII Corps held a line in front of Hagood's brigade until about 10 p. m., when they withdrew closer to the protection of the captured June 15 line. Smith's demonstration of June 16 engaged only part of Hoke's division, although Battery 3 fell into

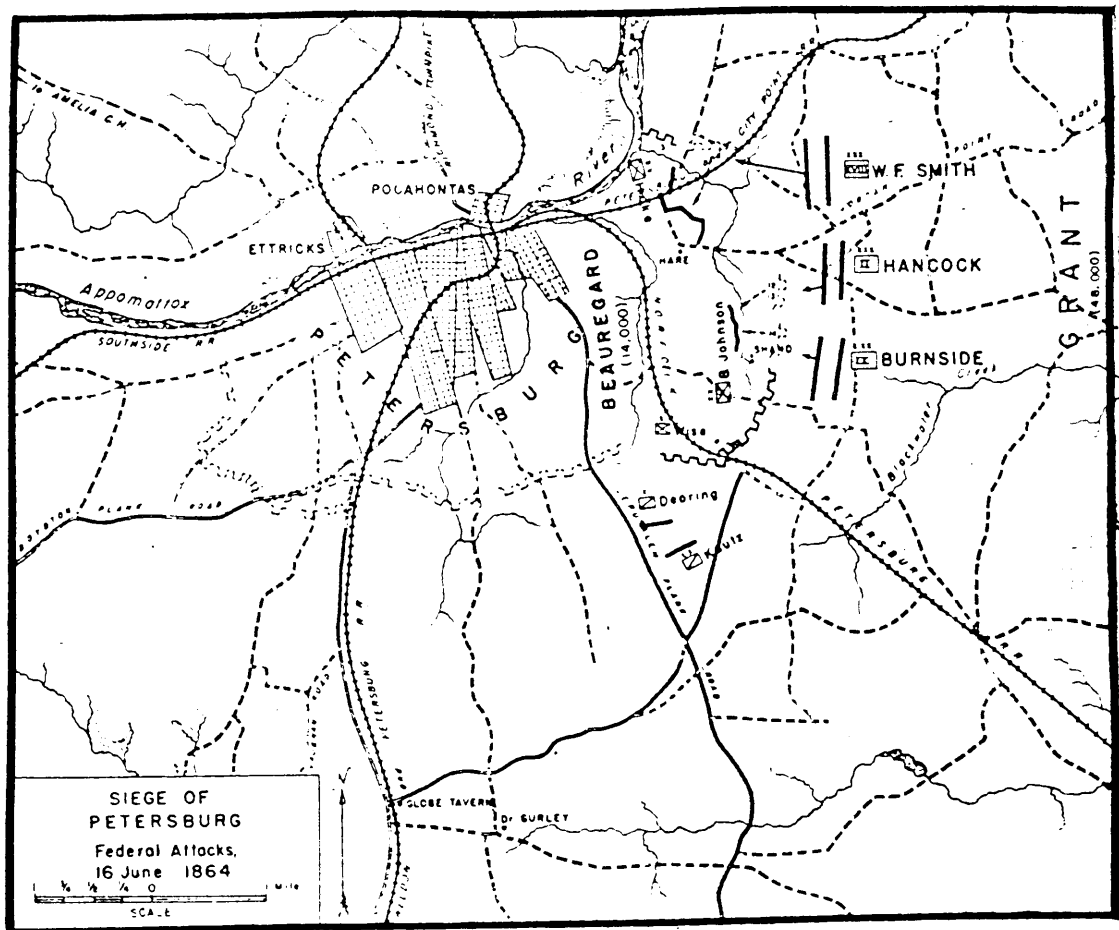
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<sup>55</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 30.

<sup>56</sup> George W. Ward, History of the Second Pennsylvania Veteran Heavy Artillery . . . including the Provisional Second Penn'a Heavy Artillery (Philadelphia, 1904), 65.

<sup>57</sup> SHSP, XVI (1888), 399.

MAP 10. Federal Corps Positions, June 16, 1864



Source: West Point Atlas, Map 138.



Federal hands once again.<sup>58</sup>

The 13th New Hampshire watched the battle develop from the captured heights west of the Friend House. Atop the ancient river bluffs, seventy feet above the valley floor, the men saw "what a heavy infantry charge means; a grand but terrible spectacle."<sup>59</sup> As the 13th New Hampshire looked to the south, they saw the troops of Gibbon's, Birney's, and Barlow's divisions attacking across the valley and into the ravines fronting the Confederate line.

Most of Gibbon's men remained in reserve, but Col. John Ramsey's brigade went forward with Birney. Ramsey formed his men into two lines on the Prince George Road, facing the Hare Farm. Protected by woods much of the way, Ramsey's men suddenly debouched into an open field. "The fire here was fearfully destructive," reported Ramsey, and "our loss before reaching this point was severe."<sup>60</sup> Despite heavy musketry and artillery fire, Ramsey's men entrenched, some at the edge of the woods, others as close as thirty yards to Hoke's line. The vicious fire wounded Ramsey and command of the brigade devolved upon Col. James P. McIvor.

Birney's division, south of Ramsey's men, attacked in column with a brigade front. Colonel Thomas Tannatt's and Gen. Gershom Mott's brigades formed the attacking column, their right guided by the Prince George Road.

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<sup>58</sup> Battery No. 3 is often labeled as No. 4 in both modern and contemporary sources. It is the redan immediately north of the City Point Railroad, several hundred yards in advance of Batteries 1 and 2. See Map 1.

<sup>59</sup> Thompson, 13th New Hampshire, 405.

<sup>60</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 377.

This map illustrates the tactical positions during the Battle of the Clouds. The Union forces, represented by solid black symbols, are positioned along the City Point Railroad and Jordan's Point Road. The Confederate forces, represented by open symbols, are positioned along the Dimmock Line and the Prince George C. H. Road. The map shows the movement of various regiments, with arrows indicating their advance or retreat. Key locations include Hagood, Hare, Colquitt, HOKE, Clingman, Wise, JOHNSON, Shand, Ramsey, GIBBON, and BARLOW. The map also shows the positions of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th regiments of the 2nd South Carolina Infantry.

J. F. Whipple, a member of the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery (Tannatt's brigade) remembered that "it was a magnificent sight to see the long lines advancing with gleaming bayonets, even though to almost certain death."<sup>61</sup> The 1st Massachusetts, Leverett Bradley wrote, "had not advanced more than a hundred yards when we were met by a terrific fire of musketry from the enemy directly in our front. . . . The fire was returned, and then began a battle royal which lasted until ten o'clock in the evening."<sup>62</sup> Tannatt's brigade lost 274 men, while the 1st Massachusetts "Heavies" suffered 157 men killed or wounded. Eight of the casualties were officers including Tannatt, who fell wounded.

Soldiers in Tannatt's brigade entrenched at their forward position, and stubbornly refused to give up the ground. The colorguard and about thirty men of the 1st Massachusetts actually reached the base of Hoke's works. Here they remained unnoticed, dangling their feet in Harrison's Creek. Silently they awaited darkness, listening to the supper conversation of the Southern soldiers above them. As night fell the Massachusetts men bolted for their lines, all arriving safely from their harrowing adventure. Their regiment was overjoyed to see them, for they feared the colors were lost to the enemy.<sup>63</sup>

Colonel Robert McAllister led Mott's New Jersey men into battle. They met with the same severe fire, "before which most of our first line

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<sup>61</sup> Alfred S. Roe and Charles Nutt, History of the First Regiment of Heavy Artillery Massachusetts Volunteers (Worcester, Mass., 1917), 179.

<sup>62</sup> Leverett Bradley, A Soldier-Boys Letters, 1862-1865 (N. p., n. d.), 41.

<sup>63</sup> Roe and Nutt, 1st Massachusetts Heavy, 173.

disappeared." McAllister urged his men on, gaining a forward position but failing to take the main line. The New Jersey regiments entrenched under fire on a hillside facing the Confederate line. Throughout the night they held this exposed position, their ammunition carried forward by the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery.<sup>64</sup>

The 5th and 8th New Jersey lost 58 killed and wounded. McAllister's 11th New Jersey suffered 40 killed and wounded. McAllister told his wife in a letter that "he was terably exposed . . . The battle ran until 12 midnight. We could not take these works but held the ground taken from the enemy."

Birney told McAllister that he would probably be promoted for his bravery. Yet the colonel was more concerned with survival than promotion. He confided to his wife that "it will be a miracle if I live through these scenes. These are terrible battles. I am more concerned in putting down the rebellion and geting home safely than I am about promotion."<sup>65</sup>

Birney's attack pushed Colquitt's and Clingman's Southern brigades into their main lines and placed Union trenches extremely close to the Confederate line. Clingman's troops, located in the center of Hoke's division on the Hare Farm, took the brunt of the Union assault. The North Carolinians repelled the attack with little difficulty, although desperate fighting occurred at some points along the line.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Thomas D. Marbaker, History of the Eleventh New Jersey Volunteers (Trenton, 1898), 193-94.

<sup>65</sup> McAllister, Civil War Letters, 442.

<sup>66</sup> Clark, North Carolina Regiments, IV, 494.

Barlow's division went in on the left of Birney. In their front were redoubts of the uncaptured Dimmock line south of the Dunn House. Johnson's division and Wise's brigade protected the fortifications on the Shand and Avery Farm as well as a line behind the Shand House. Facing such lines, Col. James Beaver, commanding Barlow's fourth brigade, understood the difficulty of his assignment. In a matter-of-fact way, Beaver called his regimental commanders together to outline the chain of command should he fall.

Beaver's command meeting proved to be prophetic. As he led his men against the Confederate works "amidst a perfect shower of shot and shell," one of the missiles buried itself beneath the commander. It exploded, hurling Beaver into the air. He was severely wounded in the side and his loss spread confusion through the brigade. As a result, most of the men retreated to their starting point.<sup>67</sup>

Some of Beaver's men continued on to the protective ravines in front of the Confederate works. "One of the colors was shot down six times" as the Union soldiers pressed to take the line near Battery No. 15. Lieutenant F. M. Kelso of Johnson's 44th Tennessee reported that some of the Federals were hiding in ravines within fifty yards of the works. These ravines protected the Yankees from the withering Confederate fire. Johnson's men called upon members of the 7th New York Heavy Artillery to surrender. The Union soldiers replied by waving their handkerchiefs and hats but refused to come into the Confederate lines. Finally the 44th

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<sup>67</sup> Burr, James Addams Beaver, 159-60.

Tennessee went out and got them.<sup>68</sup> The 7th New York "Heavies" lost their colors and about 500 men in Barlow's attack. Most of the casualties were prisoners.<sup>69</sup>

Barlow's other brigades suffered brutal fire in their attacks on the Confederate lines near the Shand House. Colonel Clinton McDougall's lead regiment, the 125th New York, met Confederate fire in an open field. "The execution was fearful," wrote one member of the regiment. Of the 44 New Yorkers who fell on the Shand Farm, 14 were killed. This one-third proportion killed was the highest ever for the regiment.<sup>70</sup>

The 57th New York of McDougall's brigade lost 10 of 12 officers engaged.<sup>71</sup> General Nelson Miles's brigade attacked on the right side of Barlow's division. Miles' men captured some of the rifle pits and fortifications. The 5th New Hampshire lost its commander when a bullet slammed through an enlisted man's body and lodged in the arm of Col. Charles E. Hapgood. The colonel had the bullet removed while still on the field. The enlisted man in front of the colonel was not so lucky--the bullet killed him.<sup>72</sup>

The IX Corps supported Barlow on the left, but saw little action. General Simon Griffin's brigade endured artillery fire and captured some

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<sup>68</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 771.

<sup>69</sup> Fred Lockley, "Letters of Fred Lockley, Union Soldier 1864-1865," Huntington Library Quarterly XVI (1952), 81.

<sup>70</sup> Ezra D. Simons, A Regimental History: The One Hundred and Twenty-Fifth New York State Volunteers (New York, 1888), 222.

<sup>71</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 347-48.

<sup>72</sup> Child, 5th New Hampshire, 256.

rifle pits. This limited action represented the extent of IX Corps action for the day. The most difficult fighting of the day fell to the already weary II Corps. As a result of the day's action, Batteries 3, 13, and 14 were in Federal hands by nightfall. Along with these gains, Birney and Barlow secured advanced positions and entrenched. However, nowhere was the Confederate line broken with its defenders reeling in panic. For this limited gain, Meade reported that "the loss has not been great."<sup>73</sup> Yet over 2,000 Federal soldiers were casualties. The war had come to such a point that the Federal leadership considered this loss small for several hours of action.

During the attack, Barlow "led one of his assaults cap in hand" in an attempt to take the main line.<sup>74</sup> Such acts of individual bravery and leadership by example on June 16 resulted in high officer casualty rates. The Irish Brigade mourned the death of Col. Patrick Kelly, killed while leading his men into battle. Lieutenant Col. Baird of the 126th New York was killed in Barlow's attack. Nineteen officers of the II Corps officers were killed or mortally wounded on this bloody day. Beaver, Egan, Tannatt, and Ramsey were wounded, their brigades given to other officers.

Regimental command likewise suffered. Colonel McCreary of the 148th Pennsylvania was captured; Lt. Col. McGee of the 69th New York, Col. Hapgood of the 5th New Hampshire, and Col. Crandell of the 125th New York all were wounded and replaced. The dearth of qualified line leadership in the II Corps was apparent to all.

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<sup>73</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 117.

<sup>74</sup> Walker, History of the Second Army Corps, 536.

Confederate losses on June 16 are unknown. It is unlikely that they were serious during the day because the Union army failed to breach the main line.

Throughout that day Beauregard maintained his line against great odds. He had less than 14,000 men facing about 50,000 Federal troops.<sup>75</sup> Despite these long odds Beauregard determined that the best course was to attack the forward Federal positions during the night. An aggressive strategy had paid handsome dividends on June 15, when the noise made by Beauregard's cavalry and artillery urged reluctance and hesitation on Smith.

After dark on the 16th, Beauregard launched "several vigorous attempts" to retake the lost batteries and drive the Union lines back.<sup>76</sup> He hoped to make his numbers appear greater than they were. These attempts were such that when the 11th New Jersey stopped firing, the "enemy would pour in a heavy volley and attempt an advance." Throughout the evening many of the Federal soldiers fired over one hundred rounds apiece to keep the aggressive Rebels at bay.<sup>77</sup>

These Confederate "superhuman endeavors" to retake the line kept Federal leaders off-guard. As a result, Meade concluded offensive operations for the night.<sup>78</sup> Meade told his wife in a June 17 letter that the heavy skirmishing and picket fire lasted "pretty much continuously

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<sup>75</sup> Davis, Death in the Trenches, 45.

<sup>76</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 306.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 421.

<sup>78</sup> Thompson, 13th New Hampshire, 404.



till 4 a. m. to-day." Eight of those hours were spent fighting in moonlight.<sup>79</sup>

Lee remained ignorant of Grant's position throughout June 16, due in large measure to Beauregard's confusion over which army he was fighting. Throughout the morning the Creole begged for more men. By 3 p. m. Beauregard believed he could hold Petersburg. However, he feared that Pickett might need reinforcement at Bermuda Hundred. Here was another wrinkle for Lee to consider: Grant might reinforce Butler to cut the railroad between Petersburg and Richmond. At 7 p. m. Beauregard wired that he still had "no satisfactory information" on Grant's crossing of the James. The II and XVIII Corps were positively identified in his front, but this only led to more confusion for Lee. Was Grant splitting his forces to operate on both sides of the James?<sup>80</sup>

During the day lack of information greatly upset Lee. One of his generals observed that "Lee was in a furious passion--one of the few times during the war . . . . He was mad because he could not find out what Grant was doing."<sup>81</sup> The evening brought one piece of good news for the angry commander: by 11 p. m. Pickett controlled the first line and new battery at Howlett's House and was pressing toward Clay's House.<sup>82</sup>

In Petersburg, the closeness of the Federal lines on Hare House Hill and the loss of the redoubts near the Shand Farm convinced Beauregard to

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<sup>79</sup> Meade, Life and Letters, II, 204.

<sup>80</sup> Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 414-15.

<sup>81</sup> Hunton, Autobiography, 113.

<sup>82</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 749.

locate a third line closer to Petersburg. At 7 p. m. he informed Lee that withdrawal was imminent. The "Hagood line" would be held as long as possible to give the engineers time to lay out the new line.<sup>83</sup> Beauregard sent Col. David B. Harris, his chief engineer, to design the new line of works. Harris was an accomplished officer and engineer. He served with Beauregard in Charleston and had designed the fortifications there.<sup>84</sup> On June 16, work began on locating and constructing the new line. Both Lee at Bermuda Hundred and Beauregard at Petersburg were doing all in their power to secure the threatened lines in their respective fronts.

Federal reinforcements continued to stream in during the night. Humphreys, Meade's Chief of Staff, urged Gen. Gouverneur Warren to "push forward your corps as rapidly as possible toward Petersburg."<sup>85</sup> The V Corps was well prepared to speed ahead. Warren's men had rested much of June 14 and 15, waiting their turn to cross the James.<sup>86</sup> They had seen little heavy combat for weeks, fortuitously escaping the slaughter at Cold Harbor. Yet as the men marched to Petersburg, they had many of the same problems--and fears--as their predecessors. In a June 16 letter to his wife, Col. Rufus S. Dawes of the 6th Wisconsin related that "we have a rumor that Gen. Hancock has taken Petersburg. If not it will cost us a bloody battle. Dust, dust, dust is our special inconvenience just

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., LI, Pt. 2, 1078-79.

<sup>84</sup> SHSP, XX (1892), 397.

<sup>85</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 94.

<sup>86</sup> Charles S. Wainwright, A Diary of Battle. The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles S. Wainwright, 1861-1865 (New York, 1962), 420.

now."<sup>87</sup>

Although Grant originally wished the V Corps directed to the Jerusalem Plank Road, Col. C. B. Comstock thought this decision unwise. He informed Warren that "a bad swamp and considerable interval" would exist between the V Corps and the IX Corps. Instead, Comstock advised Warren to approach Petersburg on the line of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad.<sup>88</sup> By midnight on June 16, the lead elements of the V Corps were behind the captured Dimmock line, near the left center of the Federal army. Warren's men would continue to arrive throughout the night.

That Petersburg did not fall on June 16 seems nearly unbelievable. Three Union corps opposed Confederate forces a third their size, inferior in training and weapons, and occupying a makeshift line. Yet numbers alone does not assure success.

Among other things, lack of imaginative leadership led to Union failure on June 16. Meade's battle plan called for attack precisely where Beauregard was the strongest. Early in the day Barlow implied the value of a flank attack on the Confederate right. Beauregard later conceded that an attack along the Jerusalem Plank Road by one corps while another held his front would have compelled the Confederates "to evacuate Petersburg without much resistance."<sup>89</sup>

Meade also failed to throw the entire weight of his army against the

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<sup>87</sup> Rufus R. Dawes, Service with the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers (Dayton, 1984), 290.

<sup>88</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 95.

<sup>89</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 121.

Confederate line. The XVIII and IX Corps played a weak supporting role and placed little pressure on the Confederate flanks. Birney and Barlow's depleted brigades attacked across a diffused front rather than delivering the crushing weight of the entire corps in one place. This lack of creative Federal leadership, combined with the aggressive Confederate resistance, resulted in limited success.

Another factor leading to the Union inability to break the main line was physical exhaustion. Historians have explained Federal failures at Petersburg as a reaction to the debacle at Cold Harbor. Union soldiers witnessed the destruction of their commands at Lee's Cold Harbor works. This horrid experience created within those Union soldiers a great dread of attacking entrenched lines. Supposedly, this "Cold Harbor Syndrome" prevented Union soldiers from charging the Petersburg lines with the necessary vigor.

At Petersburg, however, one sees not a lack of will but rather a remarkable weakness of body. After Barlow's men attacked, the captain of the 28th Massachusetts reported their condition as "utterly used up." The men "dropped asleep in the pits," and "the utmost exertions of the officers were almost ineffectual in keeping them in a wakeful condition."<sup>90</sup> A soldier in the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery remembered falling "asleep just where I was lying," despite "a battery of twelve-pound Napoleon guns . . . firing over our heads."<sup>91</sup>

Both Hancock and Meade recognized the exhaustion of the men. Meade

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<sup>90</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 334.

<sup>91</sup> Bradley, A Soldier-Boys Letters, 42.

wired Grant that "our men are tired and the attacks have not been made with vigor and force which characterized our fighting in the Wilderness."<sup>92</sup> Their lack of vigor was no mystery and it could not be blamed on Cold Harbor. The average Union soldier was too tired to fight well.

Grant remained curiously detached from the fighting of June 16. Although he considered the capture of Petersburg essential, he visited the lines only briefly in the morning. Upon his return to City Point, he expected Meade to implement his attack order. After the day's major attacks ended, Meade sent Col. Lyman to inform Grant of the failure to break the Confederate line. Lyman rode on "an elegant night, with a fine moon--quite perfect indeed."<sup>93</sup> He found Grant sitting on his camp cot in his "shirt and drawers," just ready to retire for the evening. After Lyman's disappointing report, Grant smiled and commented optimistically: "I think it is pretty well to get across a great river, and come up here, and attack Lee in his rear before he is ready for us!"<sup>94</sup>

Years later, Grant would chastise Smith for the missed opportunity of June 15. He believed that Petersburg would have fallen if the attack would have been pursued that night. Yet, on June 16, Grant was seemingly unaware of the opportunity slipping through his grasp--even unmindful that the Army of the Potomac greatly outnumbered Petersburg's defenders. The highly successful move across the James apparently fulfilled Grant's

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<sup>92</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 117.

<sup>93</sup> Lyman, Meade's Headquarters, 165.

<sup>94</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 31.

expectations, for he demonstrated little personal leadership after its success. Petersburg was to be Meade's fight. Although the Lieutenant-General was blind to a missed opportunity, the common soldier was not. In the daily memoranda of the 12th New Hampshire, Asa Bartlett wrote on June 16: "Why was not our success of last night followed up before now?"<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Asa W. Bartlett, History of the Twelfth Regiment New Hampshire Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion (Concord, N. H., 1897), 220.

#### CHAPTER IV -- JUNE 17, 1864, A. M.

##### "THE WASTING SIEGE OF PETERSBURG MIGHT HAVE BEEN AVOIDED"

The June 16 attacks by Hancock's II Corps met with limited success at considerable human cost. Yet the Federal high command received one important piece of information that dramatically increased Federal chances for success at Petersburg. At 7:10 p. m. on that day, Union Admiral S. P. Lee wired Butler that Confederate troops were moving from Malvern Hill toward Richmond. At Deep Bottom, Union sailors aboard their gunboats estimated 40,000-50,000 Confederate troops trudging northward through the dust.<sup>1</sup> To Meade this information meant one thing: the bulk of the Army of Northern Virginia was not yet within reach of Petersburg. Meade believed that one more concerted Federal attack would capture the city. Consequently, during the evening of June 16, Meade ordered a 5,000-man column to prepare for a moonlight assault on Petersburg.<sup>2</sup>

The responsibility for this new assault fell on the weary shoulders of Gen. Ambrose E. Burnside's IX Corps. The lead division, commanded by Gen. Robert Potter, would form the column for the attack. A brave and competent soldier, Potter led by example and was "always very neatly

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<sup>1</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 100.

<sup>2</sup> Lyman, Meade's Headquarters, 165.

dressed in the full uniform of a brigadier-general."<sup>3</sup> General Simon Griffin's and Col. John Curtin's brigades would make the assault on the Confederate line. Potter assigned to Griffin the responsibility of planning and executing the attack. Because of the time required to ready the brigades, the assault would go forward at dawn rather than in the moonlight, as Meade had wished.<sup>4</sup>

Federal leaders chose an island of high ground located between two deep ravines for the attack. On this high ridge, known as "Hickory Hill," was the house and outbuildings of a Mr. Shand.<sup>5</sup> The ravine fronting the Shand House had a small creek dribbling through its deep draw. After running easterly for about half a mile, the ravine met the bed of Harrison's Creek. At this point, about 330 feet north of the Shand House, the second ravine running behind the house confluent with the others. The joint waters then ran north in the general direction of Hare House Hill.

The topography of Hickory Hill made it perfect for a Federal attack. The front ravine was within 100 yards of the Confederate line, making it especially inviting as the staging area for battle lines. However, the salient formed by the Shand House was not without danger to the Federal attackers. Rebel-held Battery No. 15 enfiladed much of the ravine

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>4</sup> Augustus Woodbury, Major General Ambrose E. Burnside and the Ninth Army Corps (Providence, R. I., 1867), 409.

<sup>5</sup> Historical Stories, File #1050, Petersburg National Battlefield, 91, 95. On many maps the Shand House is labeled as Webb. The Webb House, a cottage on the Shand property, was destroyed in the siege of Petersburg.



fronting the Shand House. The key to Federal success lay in the attacking columns gaining the ravine without being detected.

Defending the Hickory Hill salient were the five Tennessee regiments of Bushrod Johnson's Third brigade. A battery of artillery located in the orchard just north of the house lent strength to the position. Captain Richard G. Pegram's Virginia Light Artillery manned Battery 15, giving the Rebels additional firepower. To Federal soldiers looking at the Shand House salient, "the position seemed impregnable, and failure would doubtless be attended with fearful loss of life."<sup>6</sup>

Despite its apparent strength, the Confederate line on Hickory Hill had several weaknesses. First, its defenders had picketed only the steep sides of the ravine rather than the draw itself. Secondly, there were two gaps in the Confederate line. On Johnson's left, Wise's men occupied a high hill on the right of Hoke's last brigade, commanded by Gen. Clingman. To the right of Wise was a deep ravine and some unoccupied ground, extending about a fourth of a mile. On June 16, Wise asked Johnson to cover this space with his northernmost regiment, the 63rd Tennessee. Johnson did not do so, and part of this ravine became a Federal causeway for attack.<sup>7</sup> On Johnson's right, a gap of about 100 yards existed from the right of the 44th Tennessee to Battery 15. Militia units should have filled this gap, but for unknown reasons they were never sent.<sup>8</sup> Beauregard's men held Hickory Hill, but the numerous ravines in

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<sup>6</sup> History of the 36th Massachusetts, 203.

<sup>7</sup> Wise, Life of Henry A. Wise, 252-53.

<sup>8</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 771.

front of the Shand House bode ill for them.

Throughout the late evening and early morning hours of June 16-17, Griffin moved his two Federal brigades into the ravine. To insure complete surprise, Union officers whispered orders to their men. In addition, all cups, dippers, and canteens were tucked in haversacks so their rattling would not alert Johnson's pickets.<sup>9</sup> The two brigades filed silently down the ravine, slowly forming into line of battle along a three-regiment front. Griffin placed his men on the right, facing the Shand House and its orchard (the north side of the salient). Left to right, the 32nd Maine, 11th New Hampshire, and 17th Vermont composed Griffin's first line. The 6th and 9th New Hampshire, the 31st Maine, and the 2nd Maryland were in the second line.<sup>10</sup>

Curtin's brigade crept into place on the left of Griffin. The 48th Pennsylvania, 36th Massachusetts, and the 2nd New York Rifles fronted the eastern face of the Shand House angle. This line, supported by the 58th Massachusetts, 7th Rhode Island, and 45th Pennsylvania, would attack on the left of the Shand House (the east face of the salient). By 1 a. m. the men were in place. The two brigades now waited, anticipating the first gray light of dawn.

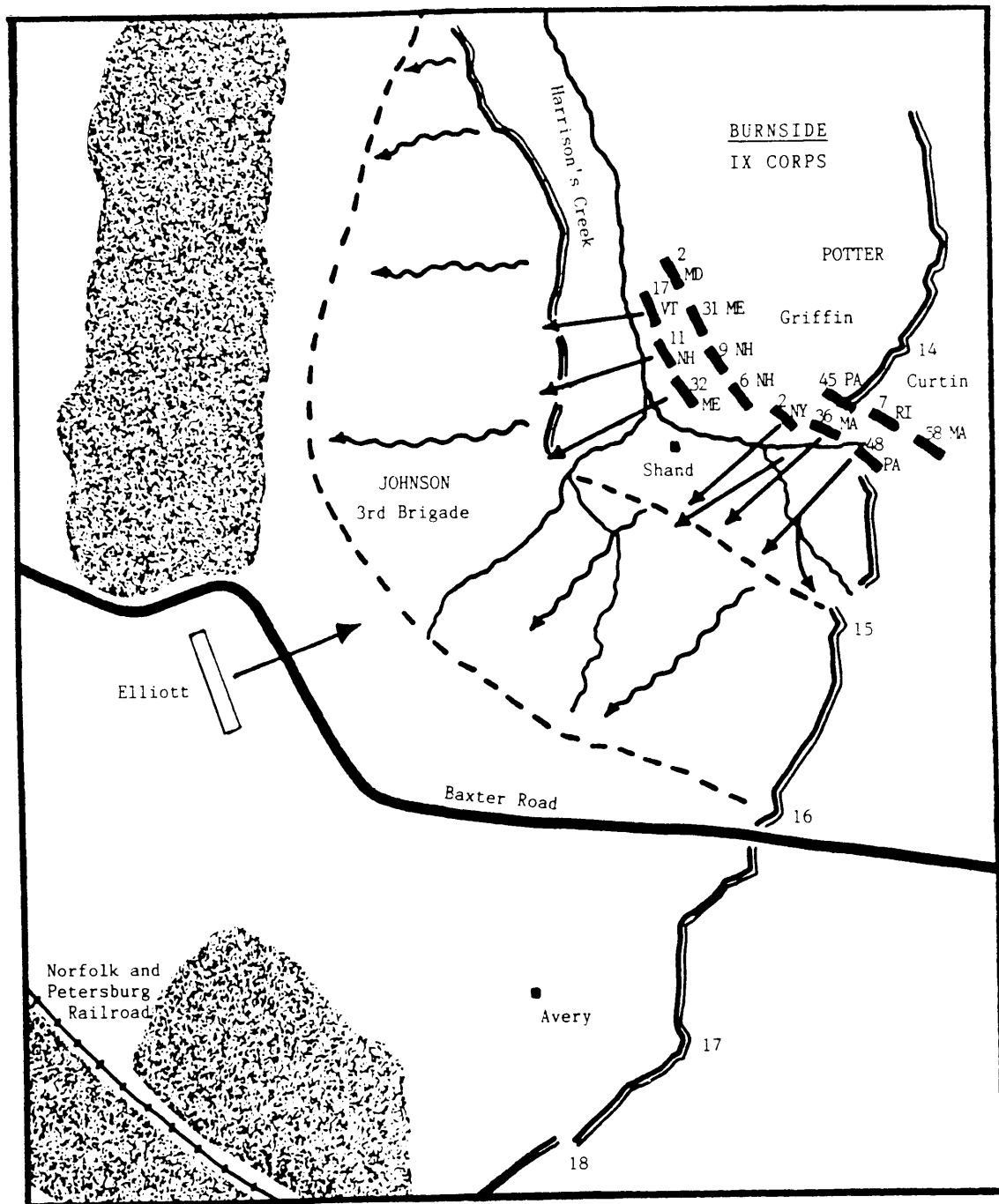
The exhausted men lay down in the damp ravine, taking their first rest in thirty-six hours. Since 1 p. m. on June 15 these men had been under arms and marching. Potter's division was "worn with hard marching and constant fighting . . . yet they took their position without

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<sup>9</sup> Woodbury, Burnside and the IX Corps, 409.

<sup>10</sup> O.R., Pt. 1, 545.

MAP 12. Potter's Dawn Attack, June 17



flinching."<sup>11</sup> James Morrill, a soldier in the 11th New Hampshire, wrote his brother that "it is very hot and dusty which made it very disagreeable marching day and night. We did not have any sleep for we went into a fight."<sup>12</sup> The Federals rested in the ravine, drifting in and out of sleep, and heard only the "distant rumble of wagons and artillery, the trickling of the brook in the ravine, and the subdued breathing of the worn and weary men."<sup>13</sup>

Before dawn, Federal officers ordered their men to load but not cap their muskets. To assure surprise, the men of the IX Corps were to carry the Confederate earthworks with the bayonet only. As the first faint light appeared after 3 a. m., Griffin's men moved "noiselessly, swiftly, powerfully . . . upon the sleeping foe."<sup>14</sup> The men of Griffin's brigade charged up the steep slopes of the ravine and attacked the northerly and northeasterly faces of Johnson's line. Many of the Confederate defenders were asleep on their arms. A single alert Confederate gunner managed to fire his piece before the line was overrun. Within five minutes, Lt. Charles E. Frost led the 11th New Hampshire into the Confederate works, shouting "surrender you damned rebels!"<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cogswell, 11th New Hampshire, 379.

<sup>12</sup> James Morrill to his brother, June 26, 1864, copy, File #39, Petersburg National Battlefield.

<sup>13</sup> History of the 36th Massachusetts, 204.

<sup>14</sup> Edward O. Lord, History of the Ninth Regiment New Hampshire Volunteers in The War of the Rebellion (Concord, N. H., 1895), 446.

<sup>15</sup> Cogswell, 11th New Hampshire, 377, 380.

The 17th Vermont, on the far right, "moved noiselessly to and over the works in front, and bayoneted all who attempted resistance." Although bayonet wounds were uncommon in Civil War battles, Capt. L. E. Knapp vouched "for many that were made that early morning."<sup>16</sup> Griffin's brigade rapidly swept the lines in its entire front, meeting with negligible resistance and suffering few casualties.<sup>17</sup>

The men of Curtin's brigade met with similar success on the eastern face of the Shand House salient. Unlike Griffin's command, however, Curtin's infantry faced a brief, sharp fight for possession of the lines. The Union soldiers edged forward just before 3 a. m., only forty yards from the Confederate pickets. As the Union soldiers maneuvered into attack position, they dropped a fence rail. The rail clattered to the ground, drawing a smattering of Confederate picket fire. The Federal line froze and "a death-like quiet reigned in our line."<sup>18</sup>

When the Confederate picket fire died down, the Federal line quietly struggled up the steep banks of the ravine. Private Robert A. Reid of the 48th Pennsylvania remembered "how my heart beat when starting on the charge, but it was forgotten in the glorious rush of the fight."<sup>19</sup> The

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<sup>16</sup> G. G. Benedict, Vermont in the Civil War (Burlington, Vt., 1886), II, 509.

<sup>17</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 569. In a coincidence no novelist would dare create, on June 17 the 17th Vermont captured the flag and men of the 17th Tennessee.

<sup>18</sup> History of the 36th Massachusetts, 205.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Gould, A Record of the Campaigns of the Forty-Eighth Regiment Pennsylvania Veteran Volunteer Infantry (Philadelphia, 1908), 202. Private Reid received the Medal of Honor for capturing the flag of the 44th Tennessee. For a list of Medal of Honor recipients June

39th Massachusetts, in the center of the line, fired early and alerted the Tennessee regiments of the attack. As they emerged from the ravine, Curtin's men met a "hot flash of musketry and smoke of cannon . . . without a shrub to shield them from the withering blast."<sup>20</sup> The 2nd New York Rifles, on the right of the line, broke under the Confederate fire. The 45th Pennsylvania rushed ahead to protect the right flank of Curtin's line, taking the place of the now-fleeing New Yorkers.<sup>21</sup> Curtin's regiments were momentarily caught in a Confederate crossfire coming from the lines in their front, as well as the guns in Battery No. 15 to their left. Undaunted, the Union troops charged "directly into this fiery ribbon, belching its leaden hail."<sup>22</sup> As a result of this courageous charge, Curtin achieved success on the left of the Shand House nearly as quickly as did Griffin on the right.

As the lines to the left of the Shand House collapsed, sunrise revealed that Confederate defenders still enfiladed the extreme left of the Federal line. Pegram's Virginia battery was firing on the 48th Pennsylvania from Battery No. 15. In the pre-dawn attack, the 48th captured the flag of the 44th Tennessee, recaptured the flag of the 7th New York Heavy Artillery, and took more Confederate prisoners than it had

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15-18, 1864, see O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 748. The record incorrectly shows that Reid captured the 44th Georgia's flag.

<sup>20</sup> History of the 36th Massachusetts, 206.

<sup>21</sup> Many sources place the 45th Pennsylvania in the first line at the beginning of the attack. It appears, however, that they became part of the first line after the 2nd New York Rifles broke. See ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Oliver C. Bosbyshell, The 48th in the War (Philadelphia, 1895), 158.

members in the whole of its regiment.

Despite their initial success, the men of the 48th Pennsylvania recognized that Battery No. 15 must be carried. Led by Col. Henry Pleasants, the Pennsylvanians charged the 100 yards to Battery 15 and seized the redoubt from the Confederates, who "ran in great disorder by squads and singly to their left and rear." Once in the fort, the 48th found two abandoned brass Napoleons of Pegram's battery. Federal soldiers quickly wheeled the guns around to fire at the retreating Rebels. The Pennsylvanians tried unsuccessfully to discharge the cannons, for the wily Confederates had filled the barrels with sand before retreating. Soon after the Federals occupied Battery 15, a Confederate battery moved into position to pound the fort. Under this Confederate artillery fire, the men of the 48th proudly dragged their two prizes to the rear by hand.<sup>23</sup>

Potter's surprise attack cost few Union casualties. The men of Curtin's brigade suffered the greatest number of killed and wounded, but their losses were extraordinarily light for a frontal assault. The 36th Massachusetts lost 3 men killed and 19 wounded out of 90 men in the regiment. The losses for the 48th Pennsylvania totaled about fifty men killed or wounded.<sup>24</sup> These light casualties reflected the totality of the Federal surprise.

Many of the Confederate defenders were captured asleep on their arms.

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<sup>23</sup> Bosbyshell, The 48th in the War, 158.

<sup>24</sup> History of the 36th Massachusetts, 207; Gould, 48th Pennsylvania, 202.

Federal infantry swept clean a mile of Confederate line stretching from Battery 15 north toward the Hare House. Union soldiers captured about 600 Tennesseans of Bushrod Johnson's Third brigade and sent the remainder reeling back in confusion. In addition, the two Federal brigades took 4 guns, 5 stand of colors, 1,500 stand of small arms, as well as horses, caissons, and the miscellaneous paraphernalia of war.<sup>25</sup> James Morrill proudly wrote his brother that he "helped take one peace and six horses and four rebels that was with the horses."<sup>26</sup>

Potter's dawn surprise was one of the most remarkable assaults of the entire Civil War. A member of the 48th Pennsylvania believed the June 17 attack "in all its results, the most brilliant engagement for the Forty-Eighth of any in which it participated."<sup>27</sup> As at the James River crossing, and on June 15 at Petersburg, careful Union planning and execution had created a marvelous opportunity. The Army of the Potomac had a mile-long section of the Confederate line in chaos; prompt exploitation of the break might well result in Federal occupation of the city.

Upon learning of Potter's success, Meade urged Burnside to press forward. At 7 a. m. Meade congratulated the men of the IX Corps, fully aware of their physical exhaustion. Despite the "wearied condition of your men from the night march of over twenty-two miles," Meade knew that Lee's army was not yet in Petersburg and thus urged immediate action upon

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<sup>25</sup> Woodbury, Burnside and the IX Corps, 409.

<sup>26</sup> Morrill letter, File #39, Petersburg National Battlefield.

<sup>27</sup> Bosbyshell, The 48th in the War, 158.



Burnside. Meade recognized it was "of the utmost importance to do all we can before they [Lee's army] get up."<sup>28</sup>

In the IX Corps's plan of attack, Gen. James Ledlie's division was to support Potter's advance. As the sun rose, Potter's men peered into the tangled woods behind them, but Ledlie's troops were nowhere to be seen. That division got a late start in its morning's work. While Potter spent much of the night threading his soliders through the difficult slashing and deep ravines leading to the Shand House, Ledlie's men slept on their arms. Ledlie knew he was to support Potter, yet apparently no staff officers bothered to inspect the ground over which the division had to advance. Most of the supporting division was at least a half-mile west of the Shand House, sound asleep.<sup>29</sup>

As Potter's attack began, Ledlie's men were quickly formed into line of battle and hurried forward. In this unwieldy formation they plunged into a forest of the scraggly, many-branched Jack Pine. The Confederates had carefully slashed the woods in anticipation of a Federal movement. The trees were cut about three feet from the ground, toppled so they would be difficult to either climb over or crawl under. Rebel soldiers trimmed the branches to sharp points that faced the direction of the Yankee line.

These obstructions slowed the Union advance to a near standstill. One man remembered that the Jack Pines were so thick "you could not see through them." As the men struggled through the half-mile of forest, the branches ripped at their clothing and flesh. A member of the 2nd

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<sup>28</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 135.

<sup>29</sup> Catton, Stillness at Appomattox, 195.

Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery remembered that "we were ragged enough before we struck that, but when we finally got through that slashing our clothing was hanging in tatters."<sup>30</sup> Because of the slashing and uneven ground, Ledlie's division failed to arrive in time to exploit Potter's success.

Barlow's division of the II Corps was to support Potter's right. Barlow's soldiers, wearied from marching and fighting for the previous five days, were also asleep on the morning of June 17. Some of Barlow's men did go in on the right of Potter, but they applied little pressure on the Confederate line north of the break. Barlow's division could have seriously threatened the entire Confederate line had it attacked promptly, in force, and with elan. It did not.<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, Johnson's shattered Southern forces fell back to a line farther west of Harrison's Creek. When news spread along the Confederate line that the Yankees had broken through, the men of Col. Stephen Elliott's brigade of Johnson's division hurried into the breach. Elliott's tired troops had spent the night working on a rear line of works well behind the Shand House. Early in the morning, Elliott's men were "ordered up and thrown into line along a wheat field and hedgerow in rear of that part of our works just captured."<sup>32</sup> The South Carolinians rapidly entrenched a new Confederate line located several hundred yards west of

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<sup>30</sup> Ward, 2nd Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery, 191.

<sup>31</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 169.

<sup>32</sup> Joshua H. Hudson, Sketches and Reminiscences (Columbia, S. C., 1903), 39.

Potter's breakthrough.

Potter believed that proper support would have resulted in complete success. In his headquarters at the Shand House, now "so riddled with bullets" it looked "like the cover of a pepper box," Potter resolved to push on with his division, alone and unsupported.<sup>33</sup> Potter's men chased the Confederates west. Yet while developing the new Confederate line, Potter's division advanced so far that he feared for its safety. Potter tightened his lines by anchoring his left in Battery 15 and pushing forward skirmishers as far as possible.

The men of the 7th Rhode Island, part of Curtin's brigade, began the task of turning Battery 15 to face the Confederate line. This duty became increasingly difficult after the Confederates had recovered from their shock. Rebel forces occupied the next redoubt, Battery No. 16, and enfiladed the Federals. Confederate sharpshooters were soon firing into the rear of Battery 15, and Capt. Percy Daniels of the 7th Rhode Island lamented his post in the newly captured redoubt as a "rather trying position."<sup>34</sup>

On the morning of June 17, Federal failure to support a successful assault wasted a valuable opportunity. After the war, one of Curtin's soldiers commented bitterly yet truthfully that "had a single corps been on the ground in position, or had the divisions which were ordered to support us been ready to advance . . . the long, tedious, wasting, bloody

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<sup>33</sup> Lyman, Meade's Headquarters, 167.

<sup>34</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 565.

siege of Petersburg might have been avoided."<sup>35</sup> Precise, overall Federal direction of the battle was sorely lacking. Meade was losing control of the fight.

After Potter's breakthrough, the Army of the Potomac covered a line from the Appomattox River to the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad. The XVIII Corps still formed the Federal right, joining the II Corps near the Friend House. The II Corps protected the Federal center, its left joining the IX Corps near the Dunn House. Burnside's men extended to the left, protecting the ground stretching nearly to the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad.

Federal movement and reinforcement continued throughout the morning. About dawn, Warren's V Corps arrived behind Burnside's men. The lead division, under Gen. Lysander Cutler, filed into line of battle on the left of the IX Corps. Warren's corps was, like the rest of the Army of the Potomac, exhausted following its night march. Colonel Charles Wainwright, Chief of Artillery for the V Corps, confided in his journal: "I do not remember ever to have seen such an amount of sleepiness on the part of both officers and men." As Wainwright walked down the road behind the IX Corps line before dawn, he observed that "both sides were lined with men sound asleep just as they had fallen down." The Federal infantrymen slept despite "the sharp whiz of bullets . . . through the still night air."<sup>36</sup>

Fifth Corps units ranged as far south as the Blackwater River, where

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<sup>35</sup> History of the 36th Massachusetts, 207.

<sup>36</sup> Wainwright, Diary of Battle, 422.

the 147th New York picketed the extreme Federal left. Cutler's men remained in line of battle, pushing forward until they were within 600 yards of the Confederate line. Cutler's men entrenched this forward position, with Col. John Hofmann's brigade left of the Baxter Road, facing the Avery Farm.<sup>37</sup> By mid-morning, June 17, the V Corps was in line with the rest of the Army of the Potomac. Meade now had twelve divisions with which to assail the city.

The V Corps went to the Federal left for several reasons. Hancock, whose judgement was highly respected, believed the Confederate right the best location for a Federal attack. On June 16, Barlow suggested that a corps or division on his left would be clearly on the left of the Confederate right flank. This information probably swayed Hancock in his belief that the V Corps should be located on the Union left. Just as important, the excruciating pain of his thigh wound affected Hancock's decision-making process. Hancock admitted in an official dispatch to Meade that "the only reason why I suggest that General Warren do this is that this morning I can barely walk or ride."<sup>38</sup> The normally combative and competent Hancock was in such pain that he felt Warren "able to do this with more justice to the service than myself." The agony inflicted by a year-old wound helped decide the placement of one corps commander and kept another from performing his duty.

Meade concurred with Hancock's opinion for placement of the V Corps.

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<sup>37</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 473; Abram P. Smith, History of the Seventy-Sixth Regiment New York Volunteers (Cortland, N. Y., 1867), 306.

<sup>38</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 122.

As he surveyed his front, Meade recognized the Federal left as the weakest part of the line. Although Lee was not yet in Petersburg, Meade fully expected the Confederate commander to unleash a counterattack upon his arrival. Therefore, Meade wanted an entire corps on the left flank to thwart any potential Confederate threat. Even though the Army of Northern Virginia was battered and distant, Union leaders still respected and feared the Southern forces.<sup>39</sup>

Union advances continued throughout the morning. The Federal right, however, was the scene of little action. Martindale spent the forenoon awaiting replacement. He expected to be relieved by either Hinks's division or a division of the VI Corps, then en route from the James River bridge. Consequently, on the morning of June 17, Martindale held his place in line and engaged in no serious offensive operations throughout the morning. Hagood, the Confederate commander whose division faced Martindale's force, reported heavy shelling and skirmishing but no concerted Union assaults.<sup>40</sup>

On the Federal right-center, Birney advanced his division of the II Corps west on the Prince George Court House Road. With the support of part of Gibbon's division on their right, Birney's men easily took the eastern side of Hare House Hill. The fighting was very light as the Confederate forces conceded the high point. Yet after taking the hill, the II Corps simply stopped its advance. The II Corps division commanders felt it imprudent to press on alone in the forenoon because the IX Corps

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., LI, Pt. 1, 1257; SHSP XVI (1888), 399.

had not attacked to their left.<sup>41</sup>

The commanders of the II and XVIII Corps focused only on the works directly in their front. After Potter's breakthrough, the II Corps might well have attacked south, on their left flank. However, Barlow and Birney only pushed their divisions straight ahead, weakly taking what was yielded to them on Hare House Hill. Martindale was likewise preoccupied with the strength of the Confederate works in his front. Had these commanders worried less about their front and more about the possibility of attack elsewhere, remarkable success might have been achieved after Potter swamped the Confederates at the Shand House.

By late morning, the V Corps was within striking distance of Petersburg. Cutler's men, south of the Baxter Road, faced west in line of battle. Behind the IX Corps position were the divisions of Gens. Samuel W. Crawford and Romeyn B. Ayres. In the rear, yet still close enough to engage in battle, waited Gen. Charles Griffin's division.

Warren wired Meade at 11 a. m. that Burnside was readying another division for an attack and that the V Corps was "ready for whatever is to be done, and have been some time." Meade responded by ordering Warren to extend his left as far as possible so as to investigate the ground and enemy in his front.<sup>42</sup> Although Warren seemed eager for action in the forenoon, Meade was not anxious to throw the V Corps into an immediate assault without proper reconnaissance. Ignorant of the defenders and the works on the Confederate right, and fearful of a possible counterattack,

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<sup>41</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 167.

<sup>42</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 125.

Meade preferred to develop the Federal left slowly. Such caution, practiced to avoid Union disaster, also stymied Union success.

Although many of the men were not engaged in direct assaults during the day, sharpshooting remained constant on both sides of the line. The 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery spent the day in the rifle pits, where "the firing was very hot, but nothing was gained on either side."<sup>43</sup> The opposing lines were very close in the II Corps sector. If a man showed his head above the works, it was "equivalent to signing his own death warrant."<sup>44</sup> Colonel Henry Madill's brigade lay in support of Birney most of the day. Even this prone position was unsafe. An officer in the 141st Pennsylvania, part of Madill's brigade, reported that "every few minutes some one to the right or left of us is hit or killed."<sup>45</sup>

Officers often fell victim to the sharpshooter's bullet. Captain R. L. Stone of the 117th New York mounted a parapet near the Friend House, located far to the rear. While observing the skirmishing in the valley below and commenting to his fellow soldiers, the captain suddenly collapsed. His comrades rushed to his side, only to find Stone "breathless and pulseless." Federal soldiers reported the Confederate sharpshooter so far away that the "report of the piece was not heard by us."<sup>46</sup>

Confederate command suffered as well at the hands of Federal

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<sup>43</sup> Roe, 1st Massachusetts Heavy, 178.

<sup>44</sup> Haley, Rebel Yell and Yankee Hurrah, 172.

<sup>45</sup> Craft, 141st Pennsylvania, 215.

<sup>46</sup> Mowris, 117th New York, 116-17.



sharpshooters. In the forenoon, P. R. Page, senior colonel under Wise, moved his command to the Confederate right near Battery No. 16. He conspicuously directed the placement of his troops in the works near the Battery. Federal sharpshooters maintained their fire against Page's men, eventually finding the commander. Charles Dimmock related in a letter to his wife how Page was killed: "He would expose himself and at last was struck down by a sharpshooter."<sup>47</sup>

About noon, under orders from Beauregard, Wise returned to the city to command his entire department from a central location rather than on the field. Perhaps Beauregard did not want Wise to risk his life along the lines. After Page's death and Wise's return to Petersburg, field command of Wise's brigade devolved upon Col. Thomas Goode, a Virginia Military Institute graduate and former Army officer.<sup>48</sup>

As the morning passed at Petersburg, Lee's and Butler's armies faced each other across the lines at Bermuda Hundred. To ensure Butler's safety, Grant dispatched two divisions of the VI Corps by steamer to Bermuda Hundred. The VI Corps had served as rear guard at the James River bridge, but by midnight June 16-17, most of the army and trains had passed. Grant left the bridge and protection of the wagon train in the

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<sup>47</sup> Charles A. Dimmock to Elizabeth Lewis Dimmock, June 30, 1864, Dimmock Papers, Virginia Historical Society. Page's burial site is one of only seven marked Confederate graves in Blandford Cemetery, Petersburg.

<sup>48</sup> Wise, Life of Henry A. Wise, 353. Meade was also interested in Wise's condition. He questioned several Rebel prisoners about the health of their commander. Meade was concerned about Wise because he wished to write and reassure Mrs. Meade that day. Wise was Mrs. Meade's brother-in-law. See Meade, Life and Letters, II, 204.

hands of Wilson's cavalry and Burnside's Fourth Division, a black outfit commanded by Gen. Edward Ferrero. At 6 a. m. on June 17, the van of Gen. Horatio Wright's VI Corps, 2,000 strong, arrived at Gen. Terry's headquarters behind the Federal line at Bermuda Hundred. The remainder of the VI Corps was en route to join Butler except for Gen. Thomas Neill's division, which was marching overland to Petersburg.<sup>49</sup>

On June 17, Butler had at his disposal the X Corps, at least one black regiment, and 2,000 veterans of the VI Corps. At 6:30 a. m. Butler wired Grant for advice on the disposition of his forces. Grant told Butler he expected him to utilize the VI Corps to hold the lines taken on June 16. Grant believed he could force Lee to abandon either Richmond or Petersburg if a heavy Union column held the railroad and turnpike between the two cities.<sup>50</sup>

At midnight on June 16, Lee was working to keep open those communications that Grant hoped Butler would close. Lee wired E. H. Gill, the Superintendent of the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad, to make ready materials to repair the break in the line. Federal forces had destroyed a half-mile of track below Port Walthall Junction and Lee desired it repaired.<sup>51</sup> When the Federals fell back on June 16, Confederates quickly secured the pike.

By 10:30 a. m. on June 17, Pickett's men held the main Confederate line at Bermuda Hundred. Their line extended from Howlett's House on the

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<sup>49</sup> O. R., XL, Pt. 2, 129-30.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 660.

James to Clay's Farm. Federal occupation of the Howlett Line (the Confederate line at Bermuda Hundred) only momentarily slowed Confederate communications between Petersburg and Richmond. By midday, June 17, Confederate forces had opened the north end of the turnpike and were repairing the railroad.

Although the Federals maintained possession of a stronghold in the main Confederate line near Clay's House, Pickett's troops had pushed the Union forces into their own rifle pits north of this point. In the forenoon, Lee moved his headquarters from Drewry's Bluff to Clay's House. From here he could closely supervise the occupation of the Bermuda Hundred line and oversee the reestablishment of the large new water redoubt (Battery Dantzler) at Howlett's House on the James.<sup>52</sup> (See Map 9. Clay's House was one and a half miles south of Battery Dantzler.)

Confederate forces made Battery Dantzler operational with scant Federal opposition. Union forces had occupied the battery throughout June 16 but failed to discover the location of the heavy guns. On the night of June 15-16, as Johnson withdrew from his lines, Col. D. B. Harris supervised the burial of the heavy guns within the battery. At Harris' order, the burial locations were carefully camouflaged. When the Confederates retook the fort on June 17, Pickett's men unearthed the huge guns and remounted them. Soon Confederate gunners were wreaking havoc on the Federal gunboats within Trent's Reach.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., LI, Pt. 2, 1010. Beauregard named the fort for Col. O. M. Dantzler, commander of the 22nd South Carolina, who fell June 2, 1864.

<sup>53</sup> Roman, Military Operations of Beauregard, II, 231.

Despite being only eight miles from Petersburg, Grant's precise location still eluded Lee. Beauregard's confusing dispatches made Lee's task even more difficult. At 9 a. m. Beauregard reported that only Hancock's and Smith's Federal Corps were in his front. Confronted by this force, Beauregard again requested reinforcement from the Army of Northern Virginia. This time, however, Beauregard's request for troops was not designed to stave off Federal assaults. Rather, Beauregard wished to take the offensive against the Union forces. Beauregard was unaware of Grant's position, yet he confidently--and blindly--believed that a Confederate attack would meet with success in front of Petersburg.<sup>54</sup>

Lee had just finished reading of Beauregard's desire to attack when he received yet another dispatch from Petersburg. In this latest communique, Beauregard requested additional reinforcement from the now baffled Lee. The message carried the news of the loss of the Shand House salient. This Confederate setback made Beauregard conservative once again. He urged immediate reinforcements, believing he needed more men to resist an overwhelming Union onslaught. If he could hold out until dark, Beauregard would withdraw his forces to a more compact, secure line. Without reinforcements, an alarmed Beauregard wired Lee, "the city will fall."<sup>55</sup>

At 11:15 a. m., Lee received from Beauregard another dispatch requesting reinforcements. Once again Beauregard's purpose had shifted. A prisoner attached to the V Corps reported to his Confederate captors

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<sup>54</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 1079.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

at Petersburg that he had no idea where his corps was. On the basis of this interesting though less than reliable information, Beauregard deduced that Grant must have sent the V Corps chasing after Jubal Early's troops in the Shenandoah Valley. With the V Corps gone, Beauregard concluded that the Army of the Potomac must be weakened. Once again, the vacillating Beauregard desired a Confederate attack at Petersburg. Beauregard, who had just worried that the city would be lost, now asked for reinforcements to "crush the enemy in our immediate front."<sup>56</sup>

Beauregard's concern for the safety of the city corresponded with the ebb and flow of battle around him. When things seemed secure, the combative Creole urged reinforcements so the enemy army in his front could be destroyed. When upsetting news arrived, such as that of Potter's breakthrough, Beauregard requested troops to save the city, speaking in tones of despair and doom.

That Lee remained skeptical of Beauregard's military intelligence and emotional responses is not surprising. Instead of becoming distraught, Lee's response to Beauregard remained consistent. At noon on the 17th, after receiving several of Beauregard's messages, Lee told Beauregard: "Until I can get more definite information of Grant's movements I do not think it prudent to draw more troops to this side of the river."<sup>57</sup> Beauregard, changing from doom sayer to aggressor and back again, had cried wolf too often. On June 17, Lee would give Beauregard no more troops until he found Grant.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1080.

<sup>57</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 664.

## CHAPTER V -- JUNE 17, 1864, P. M.

### "A DISHEARTENED AND BROKEN DOWN SET OF MEN"

While Confederate Gens. Beauregard and Lee spent the morning of June 17 trading dispatches, Federal Gen. Ambrose Burnside prepared his IX Corps for action. The men of Gen. Orlando B. Willcox's division of the IX Corps moved into position for an attack. In the forenoon, two of Willcox's brigades, under Gen. John Hartranft and Col. Benjamin Christ, had marched by the left flank from their location behind the II Corps. The two brigades filed into the ravine fronting the Shand House. Confederate artillery fire, coming from the line west of Potter's position, could not reach the sheltered Federals deep in the ravine. Willcox's men were going to attack over the ground just in front of Potter's breakthrough.

Although the Confederate lines were just then being dug, they afforded excellent defensive position. The works were "in the middle of a field of corn, then just in tassel, on the crest of a ridge." The new section of line was in the shape of a "V" with the apex to the rear of the line. Rebel artillery batteries covered both flanks and the center of the line. The two attacking Federal brigades faced an incomplete though ominous Confederate line.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. C. Eden, The Sword and the Gun: A History of the 37th Wis. Volunteer Infantry (Madison, 1865), 19-20.

Burnside ordered Maj. James St. Clair Morton, Chief Engineer of the IX Corps, to choose the best point for Willcox's attack. With Morton's assistance, Hartranft placed his brigade in two lines. These Union lines would charge the Confederate line west of Harrison's Creek to the right and front of the Shand House. Morton focused the attack midway between the Baxter and Prince George Court House roads. The 2nd Michigan, 109th New York, and 37th and 38th Wisconsin composed Hartranft's first line, left to right. Making up the supporting second line were the 8th Michigan, 51st Pennsylvania, and 27th Michigan. While organizing the lines, Federal officers made a fatal mistake. The 2nd Michigan, the directing regiment on the left of the line, was nearly perpendicular to the line of attack. Although Hartranft alerted Morton to this peculiar Federal alignment, nothing was done to correct it.<sup>2</sup>

Willcox's troops roasted under the burning midday sun as they awaited the order to attack. Confederate gunners maintained a steady cannonade throughout the early afternoon. The 37th Wisconsin was one Federal unit that endured the Rebel artillery fire. They were a new regiment, formed in the spring of 1864 and untested in battle. A soldier in the unit remembered "a round of spherical case or canister would occasionally come whistling over our heads, spattering sharply and viciously through the timber."<sup>3</sup> The novice soldiers apprehensively awaited their first charge.

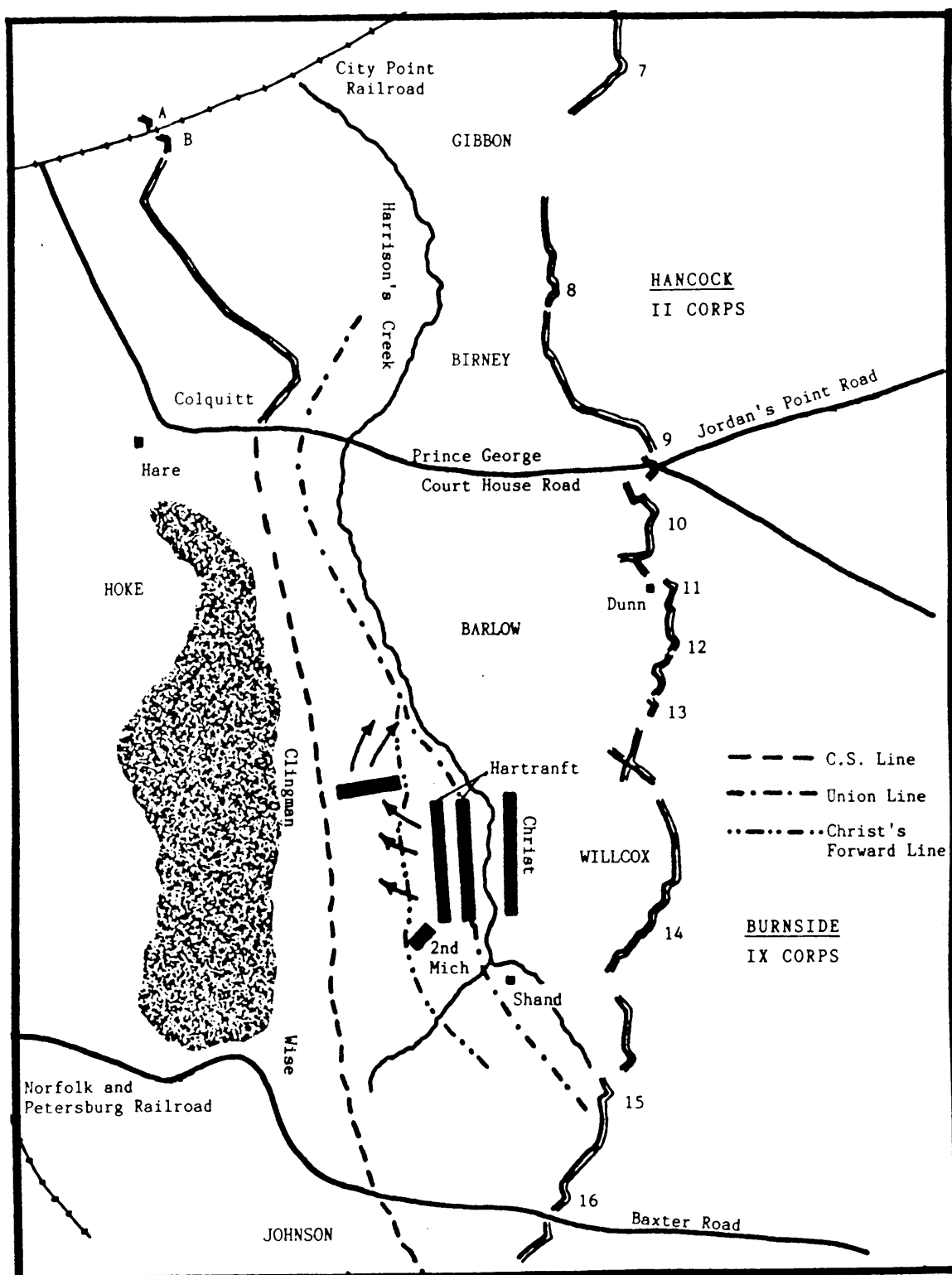
At 2 p. m., Hartranft gave the order to attack. Behind Hartranft, in support, were the men of Christ's brigade. General Nelson Miles's

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<sup>2</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 576-77.

<sup>3</sup> Eden, 37th Wisconsin, 20.

MAP 13. Willcox's Assault, 2 p. m., June 17





brigade of the II Corps supported Hartranft, with Christ on the right.<sup>4</sup> Although the V Corps was within supporting distance, no provision was made for Warren's men to help on the Federal left.

As Willcox's men cleared the top of the protective ravine, the Confederates let loose a "hailstorm of shot, shell, grape, canister and minie balls." Powder smoke enveloped the Confederate line. The tramp of men rushing at the double-quick over the dried soil of the cornfield threw dust into the air. Flying missiles pulverized the ground and clouded the air with even more dust. A member of the 37th Wisconsin noted the entire field was "obscured by a heavy cloud . . . through which the rebel works in front of us and their truculent looking butternut defenders [were] barely discernible."<sup>5</sup>

Hartranft's men pressed forward into the face of intense musketry from the front. The left side of the brigade endured enfilading canister from a battery located opposite the Shand House. With no Federal support on Hartranft's left, the Confederate artillery and infantry fired unopposed into his brigade's left flank.

Miles's brigade of Barlow's division rushed forward on Hartranft's right. It drew Rebel fire that would have otherwise smashed into the right flank of Willcox's brigades. The 5th New Hampshire, one of Miles's regiments, gained a high point of ground that was bereft of cover. From this commanding spot the New Hampshire men "maintained such a rapid,

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<sup>4</sup> Humphreys, Virginia Campaign, 218.

<sup>5</sup> Eden, 37th Wisconsin, 20.

accurate and deadly fire, that the enemy could not rise above their breastworks."<sup>6</sup> Each member of the Union regiment fired at least 160 rounds to protect comrades making the main assault to their left.

Hartranft's men neared the enemy works; victory seemed within their grasp. The Confederate battery on the left, responsible for the enfilading fire, feared being overrun. Rebel gunners started to limber up and move to the rear. Just as the main Southern line wavered, disaster struck Hartranft's formation. The first line became disoriented and turned sharply to the right. In so turning, the Union soldiers passed nearly perpendicular to the Confederate line and presented their left flank to the full fire of the Rebels. The defenders promptly poured a tearing fusillade into the exposed Union flank.

Intense Confederate fire sent Yankees reeling to their right and rear. Exposed to such fire, Hartranft's brigade "melted away in a moment."<sup>7</sup> As the Federals broke to their right, they continued past the Confederate line, receiving a galling fire on their flank and rear. The panicked soldiers from the first line carried many of those in the second line rearward with them. A good part of Hartranft's brigade ended up as far right as Barlow's sector of the II Corps.

Within moments, Hartranft's brigade disintegrated. Christ, coming several hundred yards behind the first brigade, bore to the left. When Christ saw the devastation wreaked upon Hartranft's men, he ordered his men to lay down and dig cover. Christ's men, though under a "murderous

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<sup>6</sup> Child, 5th New Hampshire, 262.

<sup>7</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 571.

fire," maintained a makeshift line about halfway between the Shand House and the Confederate line.<sup>8</sup> While holding this line, Christ was wounded. Colonel William C. Raulston took command, and sought to keep his men together between the two lines. The Confederate fire devastated Christ's brigade. Raulston soon realized he could neither form his troops for attack nor easily withdraw them. Confederate fire pinned Raulston's men down in small, scattered groups.<sup>9</sup>

For Christ's minor gain of several hundred yards of ground, Hartranft's brigade suffered horribly. Of the 1,890 men who entered the corn field, only 1,050 returned unhurt. The left companies of the 2nd Michigan lost 77 of the 95 men who started the attack.<sup>10</sup> The 37th Wisconsin, now baptized in blood, lost 138 men killed or wounded. Of these 138, 44 were dead and 14 were mortally wounded. Remarkably, the 37th Wisconsin suffered these high losses on the more protected right side of the field. The shocked Wisconsinites staggered back to the ravine where their charge began. They were stunned by their experience. "I do not suppose," wrote one soldier from the 37th, "that a more disheartened and . . . broken down set of men ever met together, than the scattered fragments of our regiment . . . after our ill-fated charge."<sup>11</sup>

Willcox's two brigades failed in their assault for many reasons. Federal staff officers made no arrangements for their artillery batteries

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<sup>8</sup> Woodbury, Burnside and the IX Corps, 410-11.

<sup>9</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 139.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Pt. 1, 577.

<sup>11</sup> Eden, 37th Wisconsin, 23.

to cover the charge. Consequently, Confederate batteries had free rein to fire into the attackers with no counter-battery fire to occupy them. Neither had Federal staff officers or commanders made provision for any kind of infantry support on the left of Hartranft's attack. The battle itself threw the Federal line into confusion. Because of the thick smoke and dust, Union line officers were unable to see their objective clearly, if at all. Major Morton, personally leading the direction of attack with "compass in hand," was killed in the assault. Morton fell just when leadership was most needed on the field.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the Confederate defenders stuck fast to their lines while maintaining a vicious fire throughout the afternoon. All of these factors contributed to Willcox's bloody failure.

Most importantly, however, Willcox's attack failed because his first line of battle was misaligned from the start. The 2nd Michigan's position almost perpendicular to the line of attack bore dire results. Once forward movement started, Col. Colwert Pier of the 38th Wisconsin reported that the regiments on the left of the line started to overlap each other.<sup>13</sup> To correct this problem, line officers moved their regiments more and more to the right. For example, as troops in the 37th Wisconsin approached the Confederate works, they heard an unbelievable order: "Half wheel to the right." The order confused the Union troops, for even the

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<sup>12</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 571, 583. The leadership of the Army of the Potomac held Morton in high regard. As the battle raged later in the day, Burnside and Meade used official dispatches to lament Morton's death and arrange the removal of his body to his family in Philadelphia. See ibid., Pt. 2, 138.

<sup>13</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 583.

novice soldiers realized they were exposing their left flank. The Federal order elicited "a yell of derision from the Rebels," followed immediately by a devastating flank fire as the Yankees executed their foolish maneuver.<sup>14</sup>

While Willcox's shattered brigades were recovering from their attack, Lee took his first active step in locating Grant's army. At 3:30 p. m., Lee finally ordered an aggressive reconnaissance to pinpoint his foe. General Rooney Lee, on the north side of the James, was to "push after the enemy and endeavor to ascertain what had become of Grant's army." Lee further instructed his son to "inform General [A. P.] Hill," commanding the infantry near Malvern Hill, of his findings.<sup>15</sup>

Beauregard's intelligence was woefully inadequate in identifying the army in his front. Lee was equally to blame for not locating the enemy. Although Grant had been gone since June 12, Lee waited a startling five days before taking assertive action to find him. Lee had masterfully arranged his forces on both sides of the James to meet any contingency, yet he failed to gather necessary intelligence. Throughout the attacks on Petersburg, Lee was uncharacteristically passive toward Federal actions.

In mid-afternoon, Pickett's and Gen. Charles Field's divisions prepared to assault the Howlett Line south of the Clay House. Confederate battle plans called for the recapture of Battery 4, a strong redoubt near the Clay House still held by the Federals. Field's division marshalled

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<sup>14</sup> Eden, 37th Wisconsin, 21.

<sup>15</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 663.

on Pickett's right. Pickett's division would attack the Union center at Battery 4 while Field's men swept back the Federals south of the Clay House. Lee wanted the Yankees driven into their old lines so they could not hamper communications between Richmond and Petersburg.<sup>16</sup> (See Map 9. Battery 4 was in the center of the Howlett Line, about one and a half miles south of Battery Dantzler.)

Just before Pickett's and Field's attack was to go forward at 4 p. m., Confederate engineers realized they could build lines around Federal-held Battery 4 near Clay's House. A message to halt the attack reached Field in time, but Pickett's division had begun the attack in earnest. General John Gregg's Texans, immediately to Pickett's right, knew the attack was cancelled. When Pickett's men charged, however, the aggressive Texans rushed in alongside them. The spontaneous Confederate charge soon engulfed most of the line, and Pickett's and Field's divisions went flying headlong at the Federal occupied Howlett Line.<sup>17</sup>

Confederate reoccupation of the Bermuda Hundred lines was quick and relatively bloodless. General Eppa Hunton remembered that he had "never seen anything done so handsomely. We drove the enemy past Beauregard's abandoned works, and in their own line, and turned our works upon them."<sup>18</sup> General John Foster, commanding two Union regiments near Battery 4, reported seeing seven Confederate battle flags carried by the host rushing the line. In the face of such an assault, the Union defenders

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<sup>16</sup> SHSP, XIV (1886), 539.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Hutton, Autobiography, 114.

gave up the line easily. Foster direly predicted in a message to his superiors that it would "require a very heavy force to recover the ground lost."<sup>19</sup>

The entire Bermuda Hundred line was once again in Confederate control from Howlett's on the James to Dunn's Hill near the Appomattox River. Federal units maintained their forward rifle pits, but these were no threat to Rebel reinforcement of Petersburg. A dispatch reflected Lee's delight over the rapid recovery of the Howlett Line. In a rare display of humor, Lee wrote Gen. Richard Anderson, in charge of the First Corps: "I believe that they will carry anything they are put against. We tried very hard to stop Pickett's men from capturing the breastworks of the enemy, but couldn't do it." By late afternoon, Lee could report to Davis that Confederate forces once again held the Howlett Line. Butler was back in his now-familiar bottle.<sup>20</sup>

At Bermuda Hundred, Butler lost the initiative to stop or even retard Lee's movement to Petersburg. The Confederates rapidly repaired the destroyed telegraph line and railroad track. A Union officer, summing up the frustration and disgust of many Federals soldiers at Bermuda Hundred, later wrote that Lee "reached Petersburg only a little later than if we had remained tranquilly within our own lines."<sup>21</sup>

Shortly after the fall of the Howlett Line, Lee received more disconcerting news from Beauregard. A citizen reported to Gen. James

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<sup>19</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 151.

<sup>20</sup> Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 418-19; O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 662.

<sup>21</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 201.

Dearing that he had witnessed the crossing of a huge body of men over the James at Fort Powhatan. Beauregard substantiated this information when he heard that a captured Union soldier reported that 30,000 Yankees were between the James and Petersburg. This Federal force was forging ahead to help take the city. Lee considered this information serious enough to warrant the movement of Hill's Corps. At 4:30 p. m. Lee ordered Hill to Chaffin's Bluff. Here the Third Corps was nearer the newly constructed pontoon bridge over the James and therefore closer to Petersburg. Nonetheless, Hill's men remained on the north side of the James, where they could still protect Richmond.<sup>22</sup> Slowly, carefully, Lee was marshalling his forces nearer the Cockade City.

At Petersburg, Burnside prepared his last unbloodied division for an assault. The attack would go forward over the same ground contested earlier in the day by Potter and Willcox. General James H. Ledlie's First Division, which clawed through the slashing after Potter's breakthrough, occupied Batteries 15 and 16 during much of the day. The division was tired but had seen little combat. Ledlie's men moved to their right to form in the ravine west of the Shand House. The brigades of Cols. J. P. Gould and Joseph Barnes formed the first line of battle, supported by Col. Benjamin Barney's 3rd Brigade.<sup>23</sup>

As Ledlie's men formed for attack, Confederate artillery batteries located on the right, left, and center of the line caused severe problems for the Federals. The artillery fire killed or wounded thirty-two

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<sup>22</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 1080; Ibid., XL, Pt. 2, 665.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Pt. 1, 532-33.



Federals before the attack even began.<sup>24</sup>

The 57th Massachusetts laid in a shallow ravine to escape the Confederate fire. Over the intervening space of 300 yards, which included "a field of growing corn about ten inches high," the Union soldiers could see the Confederate line. Rebel gunners soon adapted to the protected Union infantrymen by engaging in ricochet firing. Employing a low powder charge combined with a small angle of elevation, the Confederates sent balls skipping over the ground. The shot would bound along the ground ripping up everything and everyone in its path. Fortunately for the Federals the direction of the projectiles could be determined after the first bounce, and the men of the 57th Massachusetts "were kept dodging most of the time." While the soldiers lay in this tenuous and exposed position awaiting the order to charge, they unexpectedly received their mail. To remain safe from the ricochet firing yet still be able to read much-desired letters, the Yankees adopted a buddy system: one man served as lookout while the other read.<sup>25</sup>

Ledlie's soldiers remained under artillery fire for more than an hour awaiting the order to attack. At long last, officers ordered the men onto level ground preparatory to the charge. The men of the 57th Massachusetts handed their valuables "to one who was not going in." Captain George Barton left his watch, "scarcely expecting to see it again."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> John Anderson, The Fifty-Seventy Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion (Boston, 1896), 137-38.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 149.

As his men prepared to attack, Ledlie fortified himself as well, but in a much different manner. Staff officers confirmed that the division commander consumed so much "artificial courage" during the afternoon that he "was beyond the proper counterpoise and rendered . . . hors-de-combat." While his men suffered from the Confederate artillery fire, Ledlie remained protected in a ravine well behind the lines, safe from "all such projectiles unless they had dropped vertically from the skies."<sup>27</sup> Gould took command of the division on the field, Ledlie preferring, as one officer phrased it, "not to expose his precious life."<sup>28</sup>

At 6 p. m. Federal officers called out "Attention! Forward, double-quick!"<sup>29</sup> The Union infantry charged over the Shand and Avery farms, past the hundreds of dead and wounded men from the two previous IX Corps attacks of the day. As running Yankees cleared the protective ridge, the "whole crest of the Confederate works was fringed with fire and smoke."<sup>30</sup> Heavy Confederate artillery fire and musketry staggered the first Union line and forced the men to fall back. Ledlie's second line of battle forged ahead, racing through retreating regiments. The broken first line regrouped and attacked once again into the Confederate fire. Finally, after crossing 200-300 yards of open ground, Ledlie's division managed to drive the Confederates from their earthworks west and southwest of the Shand House. By dusk, the Federal lodgment was a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 138-40.

<sup>28</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 171.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, 57th Massachusetts, 149.

<sup>30</sup> Osborne, 29th Massachusetts, 303.

horseshoe-shaped salient bulging out north of the Baxter Road.<sup>31</sup>

The Confederate line facing the Federal attack consisted of the remnants of Bushrod Johnson's division south of the Baxter Road, parts of Wise's and Elliott's brigade in the middle, and Clingman's brigade of Hoke's division northwest of the Shand House.

Wise's 34th and 46th Virginia, and Elliott's 23rd South Carolina, met the center of Ledlie's attack. Captain J. H. Hill of the 46th Virginia reported his men fired a volley that "literally mowed them down . . . when the smoke rose only a few could be seen struggling to the rear and right oblique."<sup>32</sup>

When the Federals charged a second time, the results were much the same. At the height of battle the 23rd South Carolina, on the left of the 46th Virginia, suddenly broke and "ran like sheep." This break in the line forced the 46th Virginia to withdraw. The Federals then pushed forward, creating the salient. The Confederates, despite giving up a portion of their lines, inflicted heavy losses on the attacking Union columns. William Russell of the 46th Virginia recorded in his diary that the ground in front of his section of line was "covered with their dead. it was an awful sight to behold. they charged us with 6 colums. so you may know that they suffered severely."<sup>33</sup>

Remarkably, the Confederate right did not crumple after Ledlie's men hammered through their center. Rather, men in the 46th Virginia retreated

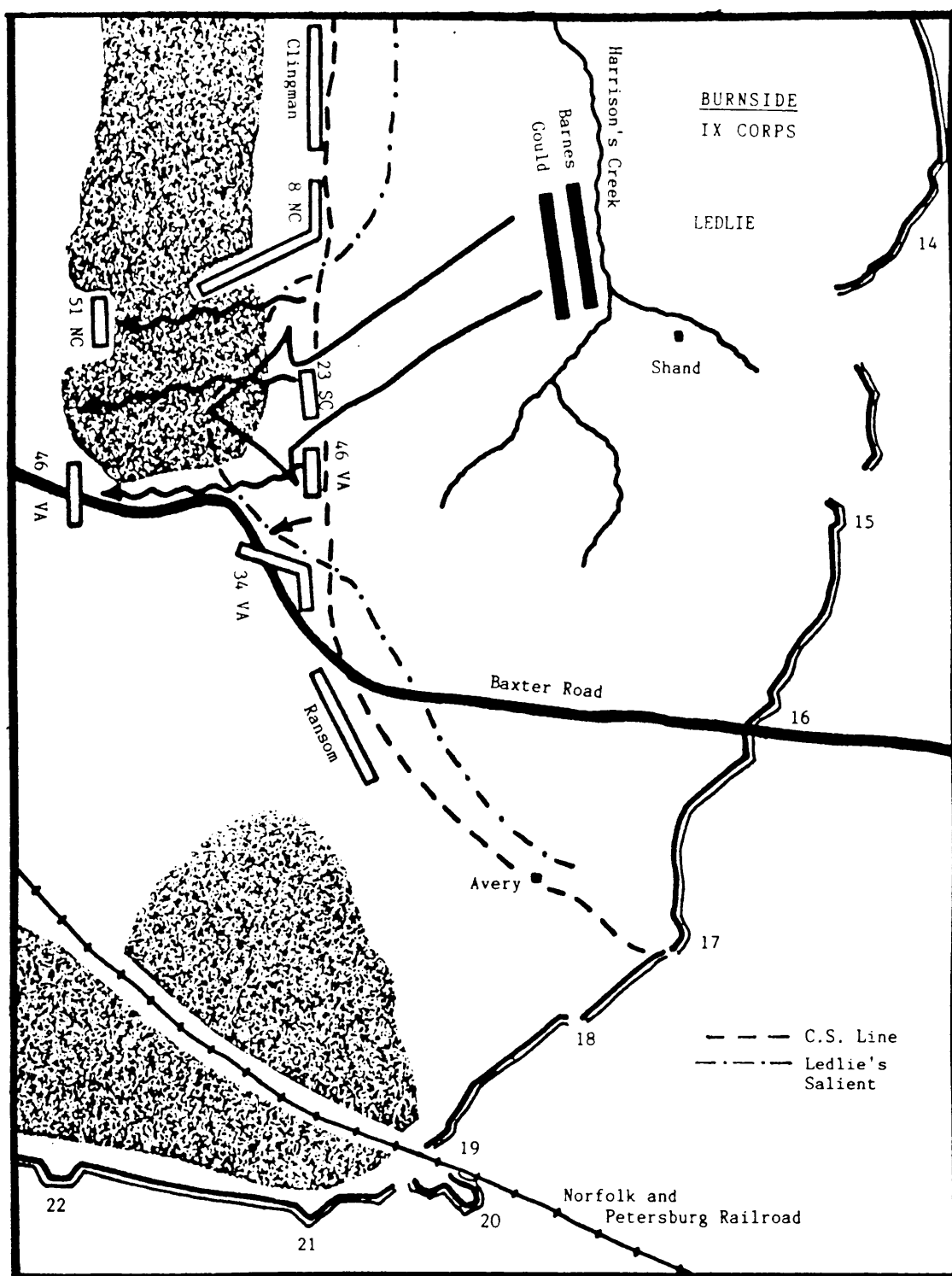
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<sup>31</sup> Clark, N. C. Regiments, II, 622.

<sup>32</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 273.

<sup>33</sup> Russell Diary, Petersburg National Battlefield.

MAP 14. Ledlie's Salient, 6-10 p. m., June 17



about 100 yards, rallied, and counterattacked. They were repelled, but this aggressive Southern response revealed the lack of panic among the defenders.<sup>34</sup> Other Confederate efforts continued on the right and left of the break, and fighting was nearly continuous all along the line after Ledlie's breakthrough.

On the north side of the Federal salient, Gen. Thomas Clingman's North Carolinians bent with the Federal onslaught but did not break. The 51st North Carolina fell back to the rear after receiving flank fire. The Yankee fire came from that part of the line vacated by the 23rd South Carolina and 46th Virginia. The 8th North Carolina, on the right of Clingman's line, simply turned right oblique and fired into the Federal salient. The 8th continued to fight along the north side of the salient for several hours in an attempt to reestablish the Rebel line.<sup>35</sup>

On the south side of the Federal salient, Gen. Matt Ransom's Confederates battled to regain their line. Much of Ransom's fighting took place south of the Baxter Road on the Avery Farm. Extremely close action continued there until well after dark. Bessie Callender, a Petersburg resident, remembered the nighttime action: "There was a hand to hand fight on some portion of our lines; it was a lovely calm moonlight, that seemed to mock the scenes going on around us." Upon seeing ambulances loaded with Confederate wounded clattering through town, Callender feared Petersburg would be lost. She recalled she "never was as frightened in

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<sup>34</sup> Wise, Life of Henry A. Wise, 353-54.

<sup>35</sup> Clark, N. C. Regiments, IV, 494; Ibid., I, 406.

my life."<sup>36</sup>

As they fought to hold off the tenacious Confederates, Ledlie's men anxiously awaited reinforcements to help them secure their gains. The V Corps was designated to come in on the left. General Samuel Crawford's division (V Corps) did advance on the left of Ledlie but failed to exploit the break. Warren did not push his men far enough to connect with the left of Ledlie's men and solidify the advanced Union line.<sup>37</sup>

On Ledlie's right, Barlow personally led his division into battle to support the IX Corps attack. Barlow's lines held very well under fire until they reached the earthworks in front of Colquitt's section of the Confederate line. Here the Federal attackers became "entangled in abattis" and were either shot, forced to withdraw, or captured.<sup>38</sup> The 66th New York actually held a small portion of the Confederate line until 9 p. m., when it was forced to withdraw because of lack of ammunition. Confederate Gen. Hagood, who watched the attack take place to his south, reported that Colquitt "repulsed them [the Federals] with considerable slaughter."<sup>39</sup> Barlow's casualties were especially heavy because many men were captured as they tried to break the Confederate line.

As night fell, Ledlie's forward regiments and the Confederate defenders continued to fight in close proximity. About 9 p. m., elements

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<sup>36</sup> Historical Stories, File #1050, Petersburg National Battlefield.

<sup>37</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 533.

<sup>38</sup> St. Clair A. Mulholland, The Story of the 116th Regiment, Pennsylvania Infantry (Philadelphia, 1894), 236.

<sup>39</sup> SHSP, XVI (1888), 399.

of Christ's brigade of Willcox's division moved forward to support Ledlie. Three of these regiments went to the right. The 1st Michigan Sharpshooters went into the salient to wrest an angle of works from the 35th North Carolina. After a sharp hand-to-hand fight, the Carolinians fell back, leaving their colors and eighty-nine men in Federal possession.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the success of the 1st Michigan, the Federal salient began to weaken as Confederate counterattacks continued. In addition to constant pressure from the enemy, Ledlie's men were also running out of ammunition. The 21st Massachusetts sent "repeated requests" to the rear for more ammunition, "but none was furnished."<sup>41</sup> Desperate men of the 57th Massachusetts, running out of ammunition in the face of repeated Confederate attacks, hastily cut cartridge boxes "from the dead who were lying upon the field."<sup>42</sup>

At 10 p. m., under bright moonlight, Ransom's brigade moved into a wood directly opposite Ledlie's salient. In this forest, just north of the Baxter Road, the Carolinians rallied and charged directly at the "heel of the salient." Men of the 35th and 51st North Carolina and the 22nd South Carolina hit the Federal line hard. The fighting was savage. A member of the 51st North Carolina remembered that "the bayonet and butts of guns were freely used, as there was not time to load and fire." The 35th North Carolina, spearheading the attack, lost seventy men killed in

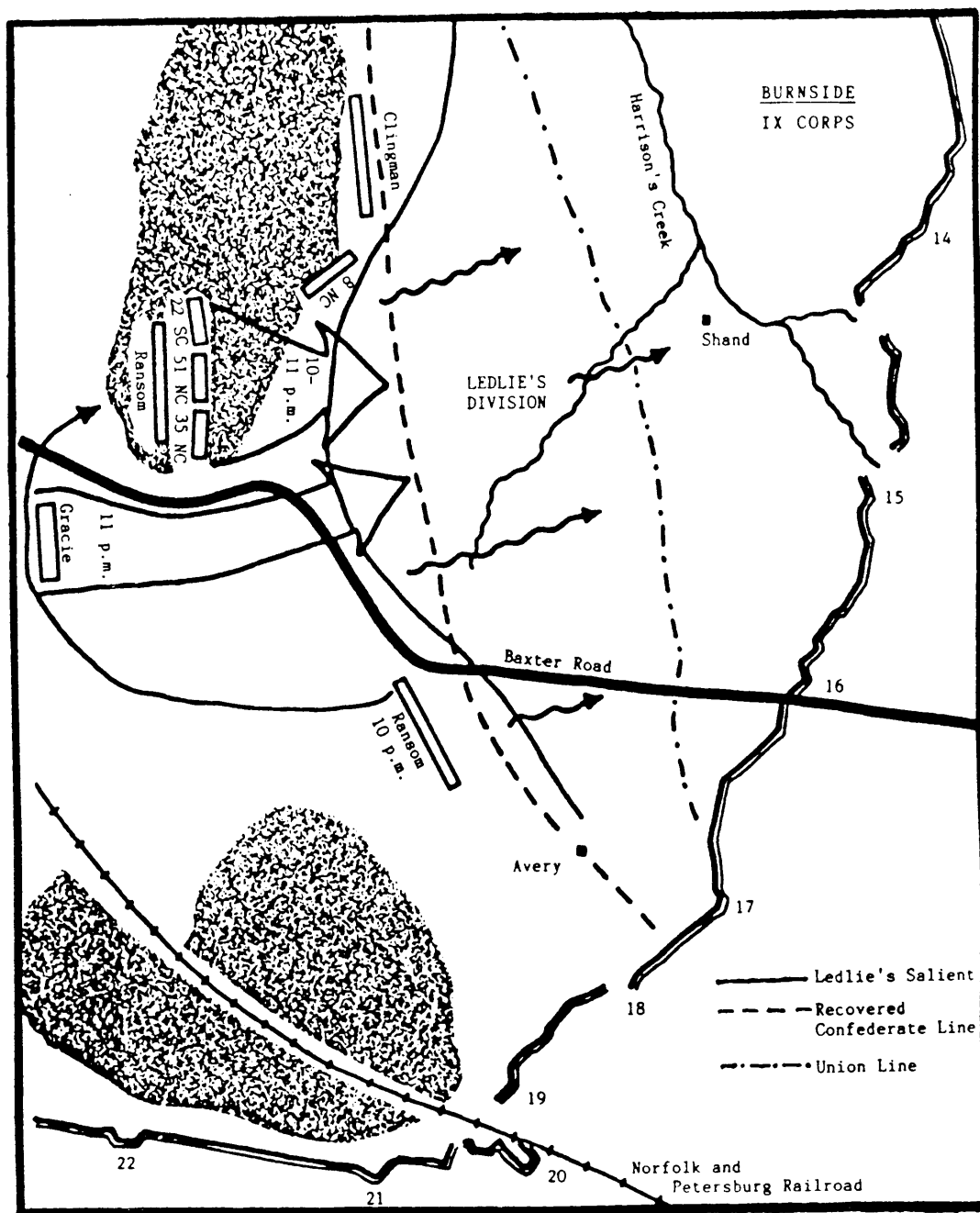
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<sup>40</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 533.

<sup>41</sup> Walcott, 21st Massachusetts, 336.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, 57th Massachusetts, 139.

MAP 15. Confederate Counterattack, 10-11 p. m.





this single action.<sup>43</sup> Captain Levant C. Rhines, commanding the 1st Michigan Sharpshooters, was killed in the fierce hand-to-hand fighting. Ironically, the Michigan regiment found itself surrounded by the 35th North Carolina and surrendered a total of seventy-eight men.<sup>44</sup>

The Federal salient gradually weakened. The front was giving way, the sides were under attack, supports were nowhere to be seen, and ammunition was nearly expended.

The final blow to Ledlie's advanced regiments came as a result of Beauregard's foresight. When Potter drove through Johnson's Tennesseans early in the day, Beauregard ordered Gen. Archibald Gracie's brigade to Petersburg from his position on Swift Creek. This fresh 1,000-man brigade arrived at the beleaguered city about sundown. As the bright moon rose, Gracie's men formed in a ravine behind Ransom's brigade. Although the Federal position was weak, it still held a serious lodgment in the Confederate lines. Shortly after Ransom's counterattack, Gracie hurled his brigade into the breach. Ransom's men joined the attack. Gracie's Alabamians charged "over the crest with fierce cries, leaped over the works, captured 1500 prisoners, and drove the enemy pell-mell from the

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<sup>43</sup> Clark, N. C. Regiments, II, 622; Ibid., III, 212, 361.

<sup>44</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 584-85. Before surrendering, the members of the 1st Michigan Sharpshooters tore their United States flag into small pieces and distributed them to the surviving members of the regiment. In this way the national colors did not fall into Confederate hands. Some of the Michigan men were Indians. Their captured muskets had stocks decorated with carved fish, snakes, and other animals. These weapons, highly prized by Ransom's men, were not given up until the surrender at Appomattox ten months later. See Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 361-62. The Indians are incorrectly identified as Minnesota troops.

disputed point."<sup>45</sup> Ledlie's men gave up the captured Confederate lines but maintained an advanced position forward of Christ's afternoon line.

Casualties were extremely high in this bloody battle that ended Union offensive operations for the night. Many of the forward Federal regiments in Ledlie's division suffered casualties averaging one-third their strength. The 39th Massachusetts, for example, entered the battle with less than 100 men in the regiment and lost 29 men killed and wounded.<sup>46</sup> Ledlie reported his division lost 841 men the entire day. Of this total, the 1st Division lost 8 officers killed, 28 wounded, and 8 missing.<sup>47</sup>

Although Confederate losses are unknown, the 35th North Carolina, engaged in much of the heaviest fighting, did report its casualties. On June 17 about 500 men and 28 officers went into battle. The next morning only 8 officers and less than 200 men remained.<sup>48</sup>

Ledlie's attack met with initial success because Federal artillery was in place to cover the assault. The ground that Christ's brigade gained in the afternoon allowed the 27th New York Artillery to move six guns in front of the Shand House. Union gunners, now within 1,000 yards of much of the Confederate line, "poured a most destructive fire into the enemy."<sup>49</sup> Federal leadership prepared artillery cover for Ledlie's

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<sup>45</sup> SHSP, II (1876), 269. The prisoner total is exaggerated.

<sup>46</sup> Osborne, 39th Massachusetts, 305-6.

<sup>47</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 535. This aggregate number is suspect because Ledlie reported only 96 missing from his division. There were certainly hundreds captured.

<sup>48</sup> Clark, N. C. Regiments, II, 622.

<sup>49</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 533, 608.

attack, yet they failed to provide other necessary conditions to achieve victory. Ledlie's men were well supported on the right when Barlow's division made its valiant attempt to carry the Confederate lines. However, there was little Union activity on Ledlie's left.

On June 17, the V Corps, located behind and to the left of the IX Corps, was curiously uninvolved in the fighting. As early as 11 a. m., Warren's lead division, commanded by Gen. Lysander Cutler, was in line on the left of the IX Corps. By midafternoon, both Warren and Meade knew that the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad was uncovered by Confederate defenders for a mile west of the bridge over the Blackwater River.<sup>50</sup> (See Map 6 for the location of the Blackwater.) Despite this knowledge, Warren neglected to drive his corps forward along the line of the railroad. The V Corps might have marched into the heart of the extreme Confederate right during Willcox's attack. Fortunately for the Rebels, Warren did not take the initiative.

As Ledlie's attack developed, Col. James Carle's brigade of Gen. Samuel Crawford's division (V Corps) went forward and captured some rifle pits and their Confederate defenders.<sup>51</sup> When Ledlie's lodgment gave way, Carle's men were forced back because of increased fire on their left flank. Warren was unwilling to commit even one division, much less his corps, to a spirited attack when it was most needed. Warren's men did move forward on the night of June 17, but they never connected with the advanced portion of the IX Corps left flank. Because of this, Ledlie's

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Pt. 2, 126.

<sup>51</sup> Small, Road to Richmond, 151.

men complained that they were completely unsupported on their left and endured heavy musketry and artillery fire from that side.<sup>52</sup> Once again, the fatal inability of the Federal corps to support one another in a critical situation resulted in bloody failure.

That Warren was noncommittal on June 17 is not surprising. Meade's greatest concern in the morning was to have a corps on the Federal left for defensive purposes. As the day wore on, the high command seemed unsure of what to do with the divisions of the V Corps which were held in reserve. Because Butler wanted the XVIII Corps returned, it was proposed at 7:45 p. m. that one of Warren's divisions go to the far Federal right to relieve the XVIII Corps. That order was cancelled at 9 p. m., it being deemed too risky to relieve the XVIII Corps at that time. By 8 p. m., Meade had learned of Ledlie's gains and urged Warren ahead. He wanted Warren to use his entire Corps to exploit Ledlie's success. At 8:30 p. m. Meade suddenly became cautious and told Warren that unless decisive results could be guaranteed, his assault should wait for morning. The anxious Warren was relieved to hear Meade's caveat, for Warren did not wish to send his men through the darkness and over rough terrain against an unknown foe.<sup>53</sup>

All this shifting of the V Corps disgusted a common soldier, who reported being "manuvered around all day." For this soldier the night was no better, simply "a succession of starting and halting, moving by

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<sup>52</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 533.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Pt. 2, 126-28.

the right flank, and then by the left."<sup>54</sup> The end result of Meade's indecision and Warren's inactivity was that the 20,000-man V Corps passed the day largely unused.

Amazingly, even the IX Corps itself failed to support Ledlie. The men in the front lines frantically requested more ammunition, yet IX Corps units in the rear did not send the desperately needed cartridges forward. Potter's division, which was understandably tired from its dawn attack, sent no troops into the night battle. This division was largely untouched by casualties, but the troops benignly remained in the lines around the Shand House in case of a Confederate counterattack. Had Burnside so ordered, Potter's men could have rapidly gone into action behind Ledlie. Among the leadership of the IX Corps, however, a strange defensive attitude developed as the day passed. The desire to hold on to what had been gained in the morning seemed more important than risking much at night.

Beauregard's aggressive tactics also thwarted Ledlie's success. Throughout the day, the II Corps found itself repulsing continual Confederate counterattacks all along its advanced line near Hare House Hill. Beauregard refused to allow the Federals to hold any advanced point unchallenged. Because of this Confederate aggressiveness, II Corps support of IX Corps assaults was often less than effective.

The Hare House was only one such example of the belligerent Confederate strategy. Another example was the Avery Farm, just south of Ledlie's breakthrough. Union infantry repeatedly drove back Johnson's

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<sup>54</sup> Stearns, Three Years With Company K, 286

division, only to see the Confederates rally and mass again for a counterattack. Lieutenant Thomas R. Roulhac of the 49th North Carolina remembered that Beauregard "would hurl his shattered but compact battalions against the Federal lines." This back and forth fighting went on throughout June 17, Roulhac's men fighting for "every foot of ground from Avery's farm to Blandford cemetery."<sup>55</sup>

As Beauregard fought to preserve his second line at Petersburg, Lee gained convincing evidence that Grant's target and location was indeed the Cockade City. At 10 p. m. Lee received a communique from Beauregard, which was written at 6:30 p. m., in the midst of Ledlie's attack. The dispatch contained none of the emotional words or flamboyant phrases of previous days. Beauregard stated that he would hold the present line until night and then withdraw to a shorter line nearer the city. Beauregard straightforwardly related his fear that Petersburg would be lost without reinforcement. If this happened, Beauregard was prepared to retreat to the Swift Creek line north of the city and there resist the enemy's further advance. Beauregard's forthright, laconic tone convinced Lee to act. Lee ordered Hill's Third Corps to cross to the south side of the James at Chaffin's Bluff and await orders. Lee directed Kershaw's division, located on the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike, to march to Petersburg.<sup>56</sup>

If the Confederate commander held any reservations about moving Hill

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<sup>55</sup> Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 140. The cemetery is immediately south of Petersburg on the Jerusalem Plank Road.

<sup>56</sup> Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 534-36.

across the James and uncovering Richmond, a dispatch from Rooney Lee soothed his concerns and confirmed Beauregard's hunches. At 10:20 p. m., Lee read the words that had concerned him for five days. His son, on the north side of the James, was in sight of the great Federal pontoon bridge over the James. Rooney Lee wrote: "Grant's army is across the river."<sup>57</sup> Although Lee was unsure of the exact disposition of Grant's forces, at last he knew that they were south of the James. Petersburg was now Kershaw's goal. In the morning Lee would visit the city and decide if the remainder of his army should be dispatched to reinforce Beauregard.

At midnight, June 16, the Confederate line at Petersburg was terribly battered, but it remained unbroken. From Page's House on the Appomattox, the Confederate line ran along the high ground west of Harrison's Creek. It then continued south until rejoining the Dimmock Line near Battery No. 19 and the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad. On the Confederate left, Hagood's works were strong and his position unchallenged. To Hagood's south, Colquitt and Clingman faced Federal forces on Hare House Hill. Here the opposing armies were extremely close, and the large Federal presence on high ground made the Confederate center almost untenable. The Confederate right was weakened but reestablished. Potter and Ledlie were unable to consolidate their initial breakthroughs, yet the IX Corps remained perilously close to Wise's and Johnson's men. As the last desultory picket firing sputtered out and an occasional artillery duel flared, Beauregard's line was intact but dangerously near the Army of the

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<sup>57</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 2, 1020.

Potomac.

This tenuous Confederate security came at great cost to the men of Hoke's and Johnson's divisions and Wise's brigade. W. B. Freeman, a member of the 34th Virginia, saw firsthand the carnage of the day's battles. As Freeman walked through Clingman's sector after the night fighting, he looked with horror upon "a scene that beggared description . . . men were piled in the trenches, some dying, many dead." The moon cast an eerie glow through the powder smoke onto the faces of the corpses. Freeman thought that "if there ever was a place on earth that looked like the infernal regions, this was the place."<sup>58</sup>

The Federal line remained much as it had throughout the day, except for changes on its right. At sunset, Gen. Thomas Neill's division of the VI Corps arrived at Petersburg "weary from want of sleep." This exhaustion resulted from a severe night march from the James River bridge the previous evening. Neill's men filled the works near the Friend House vacated by Brooks' division of the XVIII Corps.<sup>59</sup> Brooks was returning to Bermuda Hundred to rejoin his corps commander. Earlier in the day, Gen. Smith had been ordered back to Bermuda Hundred. Martindale remained in position on the extreme Federal right bordering the Appomattox River. Meade felt it too dangerous to remove either Martindale or Hinks, whose men were in reserve.<sup>60</sup> Because he expected to launch a general assault in the morning, Meade wanted the two remaining XVIII Corps divisions

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<sup>58</sup> W. B. Freeman, Memoirs of W. B. Freeman (N. p., n. d.), 39.

<sup>59</sup> Stevens, Three Years in the Sixth Corps, 361.

<sup>60</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 1257.



available to cooperate on the right.

Hancock's II Corps held the Federal center as June 17 came to a close. Meade inquired of his division commanders about their strength for an early morning assault. At 11:10 p. m., Barlow reported that he could call up his two brigades recovering from the June 16 attacks. Barlow was not optimistic. "I have not the slightest idea that these brigades could accomplish anything in the way of an assault," he stated. "There are scarcely any officers in the brigades."<sup>61</sup>

Gibbon believed he could spare two of his brigades, totaling just 2,500 men, for an attack. He felt it necessary to keep his largest brigade, numbering just 1,400 men, to protect the lines. Gibbon's command was simply gutted by the Overland Campaign and the action at Petersburg. His numbers were so small that some of the new heavy artillery regiments were as large as Gibbon's brigades.<sup>62</sup> Although the II Corps held a strong position close to Beauregard's line, Hancock's men were comparatively few in number as well as physically spent. The II Corps was nearly fought out.

The II Corps commander embodied his troops. Hancock was utterly exhausted. By midnight, June 17, he was weak and in great pain from his wound. During the night Hancock finally relinquished his command. General David B. Birney, senior division commander, temporarily took over

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., XL, Pt. 2, 123-24.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Gibbon's fourth brigade was temporarily detached to Barlow, but it suffered heavily in the June 17 attack supporting Ledlie.

the II Corps.<sup>63</sup>

On the Federal left-center, the IX Corps controlled the most threatening position to the Beauregard's line. Placing their batteries in front of the Shand House, Yankee gunners were able to shell Petersburg with frightening regularity. A Petersburg woman confided to her diary: "What a night we have had! . . . I lay till nearly one o'clock listening to the booming of guns and the sound of bursting shell, when one exploded so near that the light flashed in my very face." For the residents of the Cockade City, the Federal guns "seemed to threaten us every moment with destruction."<sup>64</sup>

On June 17, the IX Corps had fought gallantly. Yet their efforts resulted in little tangible gain at great human cost. Potter's division was still intact, but Willcox's and Ledlie's commands were badly cut up in the day's action. In a dispatch to Meade, Burnside admitted that he had been "roughly handled" and would need reinforcement to press an attack on his front.<sup>65</sup> Failure to exploit the two IX Corps breaches of the Confederate line, combined with the effects of marching and fighting for five straight days, were taking its toll. Burnside's men were exhausted and disappointed. However, the soldiers in the IX Corps had at least one more fight left in them.

The unbloodied V Corps held the Federal left. Warren had four full divisions, all of which had endured hot, long marches. However, these

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Pt. 1, 318.

<sup>64</sup> David Macrae, The Americans at Home (New York, 1952), 158-59.

<sup>65</sup> SHSP, II (1876), 270.

men had seen little combat and were poised to strike directly at the Confederate right. The Army of the Potomac expected grand things from Warren's men; they were well rested compared to everyone else, and they faced the weakest part of the Confederate line.

By midnight, Meade had on the field at Petersburg thirteen divisions representing over 80,000 men. Despite exhaustion and recent failure, one officer believed that "for all the common experiences of war, the Army of the Potomac was in good fighting trim." Perhaps the V Corps was in fighting trim, but the combat-readiness of the remainder of the army was doubtful.<sup>66</sup>

A number of significant conditions led on June 17 to the Federal failure. First, Confederate resistance, especially on the Confederate right, was inspired if not truly heroic. Second, and adding to the first, was the fact that the Rebel line never felt the full weight of several Federal divisions crashing against it at once. On the 17th, the foolish practice of attacking with one or two unsupported brigades characterized Federal tactics. Third, Federal staff work was wretched. Fundamental military practices such as ground reconnaissance and ammunition resupply went undone and caused untold suffering among the attacking brigades.

Fourth, Federal cavalry action was kept to a minimum. Kautz's men continued to guard the extreme Federal left but they did not actively engage the enemy. Federal leaders deemed Kautz's cavalry presence too small for active engagement of Confederate forces. General James Wilson's cavalry division was out of action altogether because of exhaustion.

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<sup>66</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 163-64.

After their successful screen of Grant's move to the James, Wilson's officers reported "considerable suffering of men and animals." Wilson's men and horses had moved to the south side of the James for a badly needed rest. Some the animals had been saddled and ridden continually for three days.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, throughout June 17, Federal cavalry provided little information about the Confederate right.

Inevitably, the commander of the Army of the Potomac was responsible for the June 17 failure. Meade vacillated over the proper use of Warren's V Corps on the Federal left. At first, Meade considered attacking with Warren's entire corps. He then decided it was best to merely protect the left flank from a possible Confederate onslaught. Meade did not coordinate the day's actions. Throughout June 17 no single Federal effort utilized all of the corps simultaneously. In several Union attacks, support by the next corps in line was non-existent.

This lack of aggressive leadership and planning on Meade's part was partly a reaction to the morning's disappointment. After learning of the failure to exploit Potter's sunrise breakthrough, Meade took time to write his wife. He confided to her that "we will have to go through a siege of Petersburg before entering on the siege of Richmond . . . Well, it is all in the cruise, as the sailors say."<sup>68</sup> Much of Meade's defensive strategy throughout the afternoon and evening may well have been colored by his perception that the city could not be carried by assault.

Grant's leadership was remarkably detached on June 17, just as it

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<sup>67</sup> Wilson, Under the Old Flag, 453.

<sup>68</sup> Meade, Life and Letters, II, 205.

had been on the previous day. Meade wrote his wife that Grant spent June 17 at City Point, "coming on the field for only a half an hour."<sup>69</sup> Butler alerted Grant that part of Lee's army had gone to reinforce Lynchburg against the Federal army under Gen. Hunter.<sup>70</sup> Grant was also aware that Lee's men were on the Howlett Line. The arrival of the Southern army in the Cockade City was imminent. Despite this knowledge of Rebel troop dispositions, Grant did not personally command the attempt to secure Petersburg before Lee's army arrived.

Rather, Grant played the part of administrator, giving Meade and Butler the men and the general instructions they required to accomplish their goals. Unfortunately for the Federal cause, Meade and Butler did not possess the tactical skills of their commander. Grant's detachment from the Petersburg attacks is illustrated by his confident and almost nonchalant reply to Meade's report of the day's fighting: "The news is good and I hope efforts in the morning will improve it."<sup>71</sup> On June 17, aggressive and vital command decisions essential to assure victory were absent at the highest levels of the Union army.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 205-6.

<sup>70</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 116.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 118-19.

## CHAPTER VI -- JUNE 18, 1864

### "FOOD FOR POWDER"

On the morning of June 18, a Petersburg resident recorded in his diary that from 9 to 11 the previous evening "a tremendous firing of cannon and small arms" raged.<sup>1</sup> For this resident, the end to the shooting meant a chance for rest. To Gen. George Meade, the final shots signaled a time for action. Ledlie's division had failed to smash the Confederate line on the night of the 17th. Yet Meade knew the Southerners had been terribly weakened by the hammering Yankee attacks, especially on the Confederate right.

In an attempt to take advantage of Confederate weakness, Meade issued an order for "a vigorous attack" to be made at 4 a. m. on June 18. The commanders of the II, V, and IX Corps were to organize their forces in "strong columns, well supported" in preparation for a general assault.<sup>2</sup> On the right, Martindale's and Hinks's divisions of the XVIII Corps and Neill's division of the VI Corps would remain ready to support the attack, or launch their own assault should an opportunity present itself.

Meade's orders were not solely designed to destroy Beauregard's

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Campbell Diary, typescript copy, Petersburg National Battlefield Library.

<sup>2</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 120.

weakened defenders. The Federal chief knew that the Army of Northern Virginia was very near the city, which meant that the Union assault would be doomed to failure. Meade intended his precise directive to put forth immediate, coordinated, and well-supported attacks.

An order by itself, however, will not make exhausted men fight well. At 3:45 a. m., just forty-five minutes prior to the attack, Burnside reported that Ledlie's division was so broken up that there was "scarcely anything left of it." His other two divisions were "much wearied." Burnside felt his men would fight, but he feared they would accomplish little. "Shall I attack with them?," questioned Burnside.<sup>3</sup>

Meade, desiring to hit the Petersburg defenders hard and quickly, replied: "I want the attack to go forward as ordered with all the force you can put in."<sup>4</sup>

During the evening of June 17-18, Beauregard considered moving his line closer to Petersburg. As Ransom's men counterattacked, they captured a Federal courier bearing a message from Burnside to Meade. In it Burnside reported his men exhausted and expressed his belief that the corps could not attack again until morning. This information much relieved Beauregard. He now knew that he could disengage his men and dig earthworks nearer the city. By midnight, Beauregard determined to pull back to a shorter line where his thin forces could concentrate their firepower.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 191-92.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Roman, Military Operations of Beauregard, II, 233.

The Confederate withdrawal to the new line was not a disorganized rush to safer ground. As early as June 16, Beauregard recognized that a retrograde movement was imminent. Such a move required careful preparation. On that day, Beauregard ordered Col. D. B. Harris to lay out a new line nearer Petersburg and to mark its key locations with white stakes. During the daylight hours of the 17th, at Beauregard's request, Johnson and Hoke sent staff officers to familiarize themselves with the position their commands would occupy in the new line. These staff officers would serve as guides for each of the various units. Beauregard knew the retreat to the third line would come under cover of darkness and perhaps under Federal pressure. He did not want his troops stumbling about in the night trying to find their positions.

The new Confederate line was 500-800 yards behind the June 15 line that Hagood established. It began on the Appomattox River about 200 yards west of the younger Hare's House. The line, nearly perpendicular to the Appomattox River, ran south to the Petersburg and City Point Railroad. After it crossed the railroad, the line followed a ditch running behind Otway P. Hare's New Market Race Course.<sup>6</sup> General Johnson Hagood's brigade defended this portion of the line. The South Carolinian's right fronted the race track. (See Map 1 for the location of the third Confederate line.)

General Alfred Colquitt's Georgians manned the center of Hoke's

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<sup>6</sup> Hare loved horses, loved to race them and, apparently, loved to bet on them. He built a race track on his property to pursue his pastime. See Brooke S. Blades and John L. Cotter, "Archeological Text Excavations at the Hare House Site" (Petersburg National Battlefield Library), 2-4.



line. From the race course the line ran south across the west side of Hare Hill and across Poor Creek at a point southwest of the Hare House. The remaining brigades in Hoke's division covered the line south nearly to the Baxter Road. After crossing Poor Creek, the line then traversed the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad. It remained west of both the creek and the railroad, following a high ridge toward Rives's Farm.

The line continued south and crossed the Baxter Road at nearly right angles. Here Johnson's division and Wise's brigade manned the works running south. Beauregard, believing an attack would come on the Confederate right, ordered Johnson to hold a brigade in reserve behind the center of his line. The new line continued south until finally joining the Dimmock line at Battery No. 25 on the Rives Farm, just east of the Jerusalem Plank Road. Johnson was to spread his troops as far west along the Dimmock Line as possible. Because so few men remained in Johnson's division, this portion of the Rebel line was thinly held. On the extreme Confederate right were the troopers of Dearing's cavalry.<sup>7</sup>

At 1 a. m. on June 18, Confederate pickets had their fires blazing and they appeared to Union eyes active and alert. These theatrics effectively covered the withdrawal of the bulk of Beauregard's force. Within the hour the Confederates arrived at their new line. Depending upon their location, the tired defenders found partially completed earthworks, rude ditches, or nothing at all.

In the center of the line near the Baxter Road, the men of the 34th

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<sup>7</sup> Poor Creek is sometimes referred to as Taylor's Creek or Taylor's Branch. It is also labeled Poo Creek on at least one map.

Virginia found their line "being constructed by negroes who had been at work for some time. We pitched in, helping them with bayonets, tin cups anything we could throw dirt with." Troops in Ransom's 56th North Carolina were not as fortunate as the 34th Virginia. They found their line, but by morning it was "barely inhabitable." They had no tools and wasted valuable time searching for picks and shovels in Petersburg.<sup>8</sup> All along the line Southerners entrenched as rapidly as their spent physical condition would allow.

Despite its incomplete state, the new Confederate line held a superior defensive position. Perhaps the weakest section of line was near the Hare House, where the Yankees were still only several hundred yards away. Even here, however, Federal attackers would be exposed to a clear field of fire. Likewise, any Federal charge north of the Hare House would first cross cultivated fields or the flat and open horse track.

As the Confederate line crossed the creek and the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad, it strengthened even more. Union infantry would be raked by musketry and artillery as it crossed tilled land on the Taylor Farm. If the attackers cleared Taylor's fields, they would then plunge into the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad cut. It was ten to twenty feet deep with very steep sides. Beyond the cut was yet another ravine formed by Poor Creek. Although the cut and ravine could provide temporary cover, they would also throw Federal lines of battle into disarray.

If by some chance the Union columns passed through these obstacles, they would face an uphill charge of 100-200 yards into Beauregard's

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<sup>8</sup> Freeman, Memoirs, 40; Clark, N. C. Regiments, III, 363.

waiting guns. Rebel artillery strength was high, even though many pieces were lost in the opening battles. Confederate gunners emplaced eight cannon on Archer's Hill north of the Appomattox River. From this point their guns could enfilade the entire right wing of the Union army. An additional forty-three pieces were spread along the Confederate line.<sup>9</sup> On June 18, Beauregard's command was outnumbered at least five to one. Yet the Confederates controlled immense firepower along a contracted and well-positioned line. To succeed under such circumstances, the Union army would need numerous attackers and superior leadership.

After the brutal fighting of June 17, Beauregard's concern centered on the safety of the city. In dispatches to Bragg and Lee he reported that his troops were nearly spent. Without immediate reinforcements, Beauregard warned, "results may be unfavorable."<sup>10</sup> Lee had already determined to reinforce Petersburg with Kershaw's division, but did not share Beauregard's sense of urgency.

In the early morning hours of June 18, Beauregard sent three staff officers to meet personally with Lee. These aides were to persuade the Confederate commander to reinforce Petersburg posthaste. The first officer arrived at Lee's headquarters at Clay's House (on the Howlett line) about 1 a. m., the last at 3 a. m. The officers brought prisoner reports which confirmed that a huge part of Grant's army was in front of Petersburg. Major Giles B. Cooke, the last of the three, arrived after

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<sup>9</sup> Edwin C. Bearss, "Meade's June 18 Assault on Petersburg Fails and the Investment Begins" (Petersburg National Battlefield Library), 4.

<sup>10</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 666.

Lee had gone to bed. Cooke refused to leave his materials, as Lee's staff wanted, insisting instead that the Confederate commander be awakened and meet with him personally. The Federal prisoner reports that Cooke carried at last convinced Lee that Grant was at Petersburg.<sup>11</sup>

At 3:30 a. m. , Lee stirred to action. Kershaw, bivouacking near the Bermuda Hundred line, had started for Petersburg at 3 a. m. under earlier orders. However, Field's division would now leave its position in the Howlett line and follow Kershaw to Beauregard's aid. In addition, Lee ordered A. P. Hill's Third Corps, already on the south side of the James, to march for Petersburg with all speed. A 3:30 a. m. dispatch to E. H. Gill, Superintendent of the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad, illustrated Lee's desire to reinforce Beauregard immediately: "Send all cars available to Rice's turnout. . . . It is important to get troops to Petersburg without delay."<sup>12</sup> Pickett's division alone would hold the Bermuda Hundred lines. The remainder of the Army of Northern Virginia, including Lee himself, converged on Petersburg.

Just before dawn, Federal officers roused the men of the Army of the Potomac. Most of the Union army had slept just a few hours. The weary Yankees learned they were going to make another attack against the Petersburg defenses. Lack of sleep had affected Federal commanders as well as the men. At 4 a. m. Meade was even more irascible than usual. Colonel Lyman reported that his commander was in a "tearing humor." At

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<sup>11</sup> E. P. Alexander, Military Memoirs of a Confederate (Bloomington, Ind., 1962), 522.

<sup>12</sup> O. R., XL, Pt. 2, 668.

headquarters early that morning, Burnside complained about the fighting ability of the heavy artillery units. General Charles Griffin, a division commander in the V Corps, "stormed and swore" about a commissary who had disobeyed orders.<sup>13</sup>

About 4:30 a. m. Federal skirmishers crept out toward the Confederate line. Following the skirmishers were strong columns of Union infantrymen, who at any moment expected intense fire from the Rebel works. On the right, Martindale's (XVIII Corps) and Neill's (VI Corps) divisions developed the lines next to the Appomattox River. Connecting with Neill's left was Gen. John Gibbon's division of the II Corps. Gibbon's men advanced through the area between the Prince George Court House and City Point roads. The brigades of Gen. Gershom Mott's division (previously Birney's) formed immediately south of the Prince George Road. Mott's division aimed directly at the O. P. Hare House. Barlow's division, on Mott's left, completed the line of the II Corps advance. A minor smattering of picket firing met the Union right and right-center as it pushed west toward Petersburg.

Burnside's IX Corps formed on Barlow's left. Burnside used a division front, placing Gen. Orlando Willcox's abused division in the front line. Potter's division formed a second line behind Willcox. Next in line, extending to the south, was Gen. Samuel Crawford's division of the V Corps. Gen. Lysander Cutler's men, burdened with entrenching tools, formed on the left of Crawford. Cutler's men represented the extreme left of the Union infantry line. Ayres's and Griffin's divisions of the V

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<sup>13</sup> Lyman, Meade's Headquarters, 168.

Corps were held in reserve in case of a Confederate attack on the Federal left. In this ponderous formation the Union left went forward. An eerie quiet prevailed as the blue lines crossed the open ground west of the Shand and Avery farms.

Union soldiers soon discovered why their advance was unchallenged. Repeating Grant's shrewd Cold Harbor withdrawal, Beauregard's men had sneaked away undetected in the night. Federal troops soon occupied the second Confederate line. Many Union soldiers hoped optimistically that Beauregard's forces had abandoned Petersburg altogether.

Federal officers, however, knew that Beauregard was still in their front. By 5:30 a. m., Gibbon had patrols searching for the location of the new Confederate line. In the area around the Hare House, the Confederates had pulled back only several hundred yards. The Prince George Court House Road was an important landmark in the area. After running nearly due west, the road turned sharply to the north, creating a natural line. The sunken road was conveniently parallel to the Confederate line, and it sheltered Rebel pickets.

A part of Gibbon's command, the 4th New York Heavy Artillery, unwillingly probed ahead for the enemy line. The "Heavies" were disgruntled because their service "entitled them to artillery instead of spades and muskets." Nonetheless, on the morning of the 18th, the New York artillerymen drove Confederate pickets from the Prince George Road. Upon entering the road, the New Yorkers found that the hastily retreating Southerners had left their "corn-bread breakfasts untouched."<sup>14</sup> Within

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<sup>14</sup> Augustus Brown, The Diary of a Line Officer (New York, 1906?), 75.

the hour, II Corps patrols had located the new Confederate line.

As the II Corps pushed forward, infantrymen from the V and IX Corps entered the salient west of the Shand House. Only a few hours earlier, Johnson's Confederates had battled Ledlie's Yankees for this point of ground. A Pennsylvania regiment passed the site where the 1st Michigan Sharpshooters and the 35th North Carolina had fought had hand-to-hand. A soldier remembered the bodies lay so close that "their muskets crossed each other." Shocked by the scene before him, the infantryman added that "the dead were literally piled one upon the other."<sup>15</sup>

Once in the abandoned Confederate works, the survivors in the 57th Massachusetts looked rearward at the ground of their previous day's charge. The field west of the Shand House was "thickly strewn with the Federal dead." A stand of corn which "had shown a peaceful husbandry, was now trampled into the bloody ground." Men of Ledlie's division began the sad and gruesome task of burying their comrades with no ceremony or eulogy save "the distant rumble of artillery."<sup>16</sup>

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Members of the 4th New York Heavy Artillery had every reason to complain about their duty. All day on June 14 they had cut approaches to the James River Bridge. On June 15 and 16, they loaded and unloaded transports carrying artillery across the James. They marched to Petersburg through the night of June 16-17 with no rations. After laying all day in the hot sun near Petersburg on the 17th, the New Yorkers went between the lines shortly after dark. There they entrenched an advanced line in front of Barlow's division. The "Heavies" dug through the night, finally receiving orders to lead the June 18 advance from their forward position.

<sup>15</sup> James M. Gibbs, History of the First Battalion Pennsylvania Six Months Volunteers and 187th Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry (Harrisburg, Pa., 1905), 94.

<sup>16</sup> Anderson, 57th Massachusetts, 141-42.

Beauregard's unexpected withdrawal placed Meade in a command dilemma. On the one hand, the Federal army had a new line in its front which had not been reconnoitered. Meade was blind to the new Confederate line's weaknesses and strengths. The commander of the Army of the Potomac did not desire rash action. On the other hand, Meade's troops had precious little time to develop the Confederate works because Lee's forces were ominously close. If the Army of Northern Virginia reinforced Beauregard before the Federal assaults went forward, the results could be disastrous. Consequently, at 5:55 a. m., Meade ordered all commanders to push their men ahead, "keeping up prompt communication with the troops on their right and left."<sup>17</sup>

Meade's dispatch urged haste on his commanders and their men. Privately, he was pessimistic. Aware of his army's staggering exhaustion, Meade feared that his men might be spent after their advance to Beauregard's new line. At 5:30 a. m., Meade confessed to Grant that "the men require rest, and it is probable, unless some favorable chance presents itself, that we shall not do more than envelop the enemy."<sup>18</sup>

Beauregard's clever retreat created immense logistical difficulties for the Army of the Potomac. The II Corps easily located the Confederate lines west of the Hare House. Birney's men needed to travel less than a half-mile to make contact. But the IX and V Corps had to march over a mile through difficult conditions. Open spaces west of the Shand and Avery houses exposed the Yankees to Confederate gunners. Much of the area

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<sup>17</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 161.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 156.



hidden from Rebel view held deep and numerous ravines. These draws sliced through ground choked with undergrowth and timber. Traversing this terrain took time and threw the Union columns into disarray.

Beyond this tangled topography lay Beauregard's line. It followed a ridge which drew southwest away from the Federal left. Consequently, Meade had to choreograph a huge pivoting movement, using Hare House Hill as the hinge. Right to left, Barlow's division of the II Corps, the IX Corps, and the V Corps needed to wheel their lines about like a swinging barn door. To remain on a straight line with the II Corps, the far left divisions of the V Corps would have to travel to their front and right about one and a half miles.

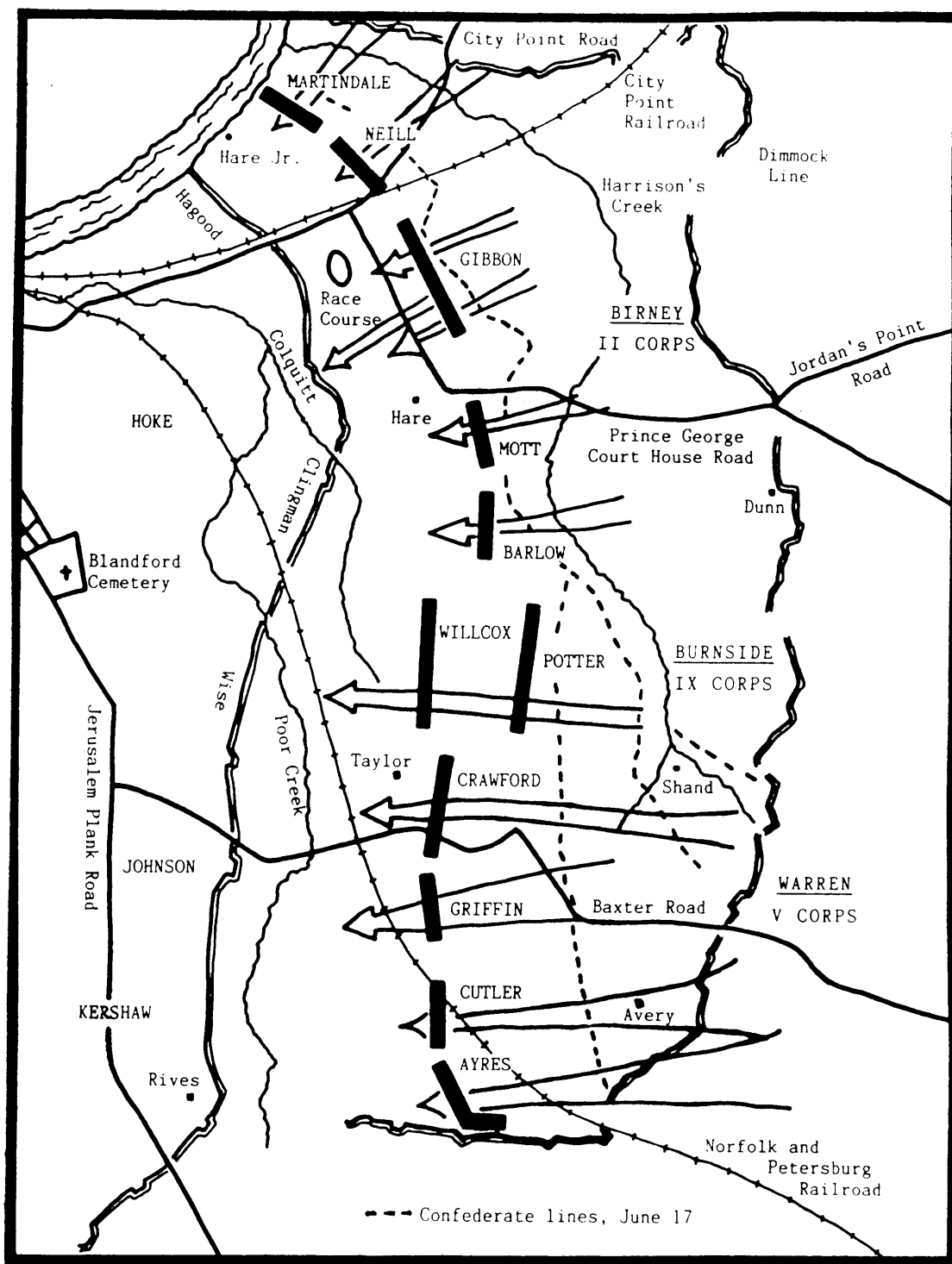
The Federal lines recovered from the confusion caused by the Confederate withdrawal, and started forward once again. On the right, Martindale's and Neill's divisions met little resistance. By 7:15, Neill fronted Harrison's Creek with the Appomattox River to the north. Meade did not know who was senior division commander on the Union right, so he ordered Capt. Charles E. Cadwalader, his aide-de-camp, to determine the senior general. Upon hearing Meade's directive, Martindale "swelled up like a turkey cock, and said in pompous accents, 'Then I will take command, as I believe I am the oldest brigadier-general in the army.'"<sup>19</sup>

Martindale continued the movement across Harrison's Creek toward the abandoned Confederate line. Rebel artillery on Archer's Hill, north of the Appomattox, shelled the Union advance. The Federal battery emplaced

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<sup>19</sup> Livermore, Days and Events, 364. Martindale was forty-nine years old during the Petersburg assaults. He graduated from West Point in 1835, third in a class of fifty-six.

MAP 16. Federal Advance, 4 a. m. - 2 p. m., June 18



by Hinks on Walthall's Farm promptly went into action. Gunners silenced the Southern batteries on the opposite bank, about 1,000 yards distant..<sup>20</sup> By mid-morning, Martindale had occupied the old Confederate works and now faced the new Confederate line.

South of the City Point Road, while connected with Neill's left, Gibbon's division developed the enemy line. The 14th Connecticut, one of Gibbon's regiments, flushed a squawking hen out of an abandoned building. The terrified chicken dashed for the Southern lines. Several Yankees, unable to resist the temptation, fired some shots at the zig-zagging target. Confederate pickets, believing the bluecoats were shooting at them, returned the fire. Soon most of the 14th Connecticut was engaged. One soldier happily reported that there were no casualties (including the chicken) and that no official report of the "Battle of the Fleeing Hen" was ever filed.<sup>21</sup>

Meade continued to urge haste upon his subordinates. At 7:20 a. m., he told Birney that "it is of great importance the enemy be pressed, and . . . forced across the Appomattox." Meade reminded his neophyte corps commander that the Federals had numerical superiority, adding that "if we can engage them before they are fortified we ought to whip them." Burnside and Warren received similar dispatches. Meade knew from prisoner reports that Beauregard had not been reinforced by Lee's army. Only a single Confederate line of battle stood between the Army of the Potomac and the Cockade City. Meade desperately tried to impress on Burnside and

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<sup>20</sup> O.R., LI, Pt. 1, 1257.

<sup>21</sup> Page, 14th Connecticut, 287.

Warren "how important it is to push our advantage before Lee gets up."<sup>22</sup>

Despite Meade's best efforts, the going was slow. Connections between Federal units were difficult to maintain in the woods and ravines. As early as 8 a. m., Burnside reported that his left and the right of Barlow's division (II Corps) were unconnected. A soldier in the V Corps wrote later that struggling through the woods and ravines west of the Avery Farm "was very laborious," which made necessary "some readjustment of the lines."<sup>23</sup>

Just before dawn, Gen. Joseph Kershaw's Confederates left their position near the Howlett line and marched for Petersburg. A soldier in Kershaw's division recalled that "the march started as a forced one, but before daylight it had gotten almost to a run." At 7:30 a. m. the soldiers crossed the Appomattox to be greeted by "waving banners and . . . words of cheer" from the townspeople.<sup>24</sup> Kershaw's men marched to the Confederate right where they supported Wise's brigade and Johnson's battered division near the Baxter Road.

Two hours later, Gen. Charles Field's division crossed the Appomattox and extended the Confederate line to the right near Rives's Farm and the Jerusalem Plank Road. As Field's men moved south, Charles Campbell observed in his diary that carpenters were "were flooring the railroad bridge just above Pocahontas bridge, for the crossing of

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<sup>22</sup> O. R., XL, Pt. 2, 158-58, 165.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Chamberlin, History of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers (Philadelphia, 1895), 213.

<sup>24</sup> Augustus D. Dickert, History of Kershaw's Brigade (Newberry, S. C., 1899), 380.

troops."<sup>25</sup> Even more Southerners were on their way to protect the Cockade City.

Some of Wise's men withdrew when Kershaw arrived. During the fighting of the previous three days, these men "had practically nothing to eat, almost no water to drink, and no sleep at all except such little as we could snatch from the few short intervals of calm." W. B. Freeman remembered that as troops in the 34th Virginia dragged themselves to the rear "we were a grimy looking set and were completely fagged out."<sup>26</sup>

Exhaustion was a factor on the Confederate side as well as the Union. Yet most of the Rebels had not marched for days to reach the city, nor had they spent three days in fruitless frontal assaults. The defenders of Petersburg were tired, but their morale remained high.

The inability of the various Federal corps to connect on one another's flanks slowed progress toward the new Confederate line. Martindale complained to Meade that his command could not advance until the II Corps pressed forward. Martindale believed that Neill's left was open to flank fire because Gibbon's division had not come up to protect it. Birney, however, argued just the opposite: Neill was not supporting Gibbon's right.

At 10 a. m., an already frustrated Meade asked Birney and Martindale to report a time favorable for a joint assault. Meade warned the two generals that "there is too much time taken in preparations, and I fear the enemy will make more of the delay than we can." Twenty minutes later,

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<sup>25</sup> Campbell Diary, Petersburg National Battlefield.

<sup>26</sup> Freeman, Memoirs, 40.

Birney announced that Gibbon's right and Neill's left had joined just south of the Petersburg and City Point Railroad. The right wing of the Army of the Potomac was finally ready to attack. However, Barlow reported that the left of the II Corps was still advancing and felt his division improperly located for an assault. Even in the II Corps sector, where the Yankees had the least distance to travel and the easiest terrain, Union lines were in disarray.<sup>27</sup>

On the Federal left, the IX Corps pushed across the open farmland west of the Shand and Avery farms. A strip of woods masked the Confederate line from the oncoming Federal troops. The forest held Rebel skirmishers from Johnson's division. They fought tenaciously over every foot of ground as they slowly retreated. When Burnside's men cleared the trees, they found themselves on a ridge running south from the Hare House. The IX Corps was now exposed on cleared farmland. Confederate sniper and cannon fire opened immediately on Burnside's men. The Rebel shots came from the line on Cemetery Hill, about 800 yards west of the Union position. Federal soldiers faced Taylor's cropland, which sloped gently down to the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad cut. Beyond the tracks ran Poor Creek, followed by several hundred yards of open uphill ground leading to the Confederate line. Burnside's men had much ground to gain before an attack could go forward with any chance of success.

Warren's V Corps faced the same hardships as the IX Corps, except it had to travel farther through more ravines and woods. Despite these problems, and as early as 7:30 a. m., the V Corps and the IX Corps knew

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<sup>27</sup> O. R., XL, Pt. 2, 165.

the exact location of the new Confederate line.<sup>28</sup> Warren was extraordinarily slow in bringing the left wing of the V Corps into line. At 10 a. m., Warren finally reported to Meade that his lines of battle were ready to assault on the north side of the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad, directly in front of the Taylor Farm. Crawford's and elements of Griffin's divisions represented this side of the V Corps. Yet south of the railroad, Warren's remaining men were still pushing through difficult ground and an "immense amount of iron and lead thrown" by Confederate skirmishers and the main Southern line.<sup>29</sup> The left of Griffin's division, as well as all of Cutler's and Ayres's divisions, were not yet on line. The giant pivot of the Army of the Potomac had turned at a sluggish pace.

Warren wired Meade at 10:30 a. m. and requested a postponement of the noon attack. The V Corps commander believed that "all the time I can get I can improve the chances of successful assault." Throughout the Overland Campaign, Warren had personally witnessed the remarkable entrenching expertise of the Confederates. Unbelievably, Warren told Meade that the Rebels could not improve their line with further digging. On the morning of the 18th, Warren apparently saw no need to rush his corps into action.<sup>30</sup>

As Meade tried to position his various units for a coordinated assault, Gen. Lee arrived in Petersburg. At midday Beauregard and Lee

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>29</sup> Wainwright, Diary of Battle, 424.

<sup>30</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 175.

viewed the battlefield from the top of Reservoir Hill, south of the city. Knowing that the entire Army of Northern Virginia was close at hand, Beauregard characteristically turned aggressive. He suggested to Lee an attack on the Federal left flank. "The Creole" argued that Confederate morale was high after three days of repulsing Federal attacks. A concerted assault could turn Grant's left and force his army against the fork of the James and Appomattox Rivers. Beauregard now and confidently expected to crush the invaders.

Lee dismissed Beauregard's suggestion. The commander believed the Union soldiers too numerous and their position far too strong to be so easily defeated. The Army of Northern Virginia was not only needed to protect Richmond, but Petersburg and the Southern supply lines as well. Without these lines, Lee's army and the capital would starve. Confederate soldiers, Lee countered, were far too important to waste in attack. Finally, Lee admitted that his army lacked sufficient men and officers to assail the Federals successfully. On June 18, Beauregard wanted to decide the fate of both armies. Lee realized such an attack too risky and chose to keep his army intact.<sup>31</sup>

Coming to Petersburg as fast as humanly possible was Hill's Third Corps. A member of McGowan's brigade remembered that the speed of the march combined with the heat melted regiments "down to the size of companies . . . brigades would stretch for miles." As Hill's troops approached Petersburg, they caught the sound of distant cannon fire. With the sound of battle, Hill's pace quickened. A soldier recalled that on

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<sup>31</sup> Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 537-38.



June 18 the Third Corps march "became pretty much a free race for Petersburg,"<sup>32</sup>

As Confederate reinforcements neared the city, Meade tried to coordinate an assault along his whole line. At 11:34 a. m., Meade outlined the noon attack plan. Martindale, Birney, Burnside and Warren were to drive their men forward, "endeavoring to have them advance rapidly over the ground without firing till they have penetrated the enemy's line."<sup>33</sup> Meade called for dense columns to hit the Confederate works at specific points. In this way Meade hoped that the Rebel line might be shattered in several places simultaneously. Meade was desperately trying to control his several corps and land a final and conclusive blow.

Birney was to assault on the right of the II Corps sector, north of the Prince George Court House Road. Gibbon's small division formed the attacking column. General Robert McAllister would lead the 2nd Brigade of Mott's division against the Confederate line to Gibbon's right. Before the attack, McAllister peered over the edge of the sunken Prince George Road and did not like the looks of the bristling line ahead. West of the Hare House and the race track the Confederate line curved like a half-moon. The points of the curve faced the Union line, each side ominously protected by cannon. An infantry unit entering the center of the curved Southern line would be enfiladed by artillery on both sides. McAllister told his wife in a letter that the Rebels works were "built

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<sup>32</sup> J. F. J. Caldwell, The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, known first as "Gregg's" and Subsequently as "McGowan's Brigade" (Philadelphia, 1866), 162.

<sup>33</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 176.

to lead us into a death trap."<sup>34</sup>

McAllister alerted his superiors to the strength of the Southern position. Nonetheless, at 11 a. m., McAllister's men went forward. As soon as the brigade left the protection of the sunken road, the Confederate line belched forth an incredible fire. "The Rebels poured down upon us lead and iron . . . that cut our men down like hail cut the grain and the grass."<sup>35</sup> After gaining only one hundred yards the brigade dropped to the ground and entrenched. Here it remained for several hours under a brutal sun and an equally blistering Confederate fire.

McAllister's immediate failure was an obvious lesson that the Confederate left was too strong to be stormed. Nonetheless, Gibbon's men remained formed for the attack, believing that the other corps would be going in as well. General Byron Pierce's brigade composed Gibbon's right. Pierce's men would attempt to maintain connections with Neill's division on their right, near the Petersburg and City Point Railroad. Colonel John Ramsey's brigade formed on Pierce's left. Ramsey's brigade kept its left flank just north of the Prince George Court House Road.

Promptly at noon, Gibbon's and Martindale's men went headlong into the Rebel fire. Martindale's men took a weakly-held line of works several hundred yards west of Harrison's Creek. After capturing this line and forty slow Confederates, Martindale's attack stopped for want of support. Martindale did not push against the main Confederate line because his

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<sup>34</sup> McAllister, Civil War Letters, 443.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 443-44.

advance quickly outstripped that of Gibbon to his left.<sup>36</sup>

Gibbon's attack vanished in a "perfectly murderous fire of musketry, canister and spherical case which swept the open field in front."<sup>37</sup> General Pierce fell wounded during the fighting. Gibbon bolstered his attacking brigades by sending in a second wave. Colonel Thomas Smyth's brigade rushed toward the Rebel line on Pierce's right. However, Smyth's brigade was quickly repulsed and had no impact on Gibbon's attempt to carry the Confederate lines.

The largely untested 36th Wisconsin made up part of Pierce's brigade. As the second charge went forward, Col. Savage jumped to the front, shouting "Three cheers for Wisconsin; forward my brave men!" Within a few moments Savage and 111 men, one-third the regiment, had fallen dead or wounded. Retreat and advance were equally dangerous, so the men of the 36th Wisconsin threw themselves on the ground and began to burrow into the earth. While laying face down, Maj. Harvey Brown of the 36th Wisconsin was shot in the back by a sharpshooter. Later that evening, Brown was spirited off the field in the darkness by his comrades. Federal casualties were so great that the army did not have enough ambulances to carry the wounded from Petersburg to City Point.<sup>38</sup>

As soldiers from the 17th Maine of Gibbon's division withdrew to the safety of their starting point, they dragged with them a seriously wounded

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<sup>36</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 178.

<sup>37</sup> Carter, Four Brothers in Blue, 441

<sup>38</sup> James M. Aubrey, The Thirty-Sixth Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry (N. p., 1900), 86-87, 91.

New Yorker who was caught between the lines. Pinned to the dying soldier's shirt was a letter to his family. Lying in pain and in the midst of the horror around him, James Martell had found the will to scratch out some final lines. Martell related that he was shot through the bowels and in the shoulder "and must die within twenty-four hours." The young soldier sadly concluded his brief note: "The battle rages terribly, but, my dears, I die for my country, and I pray God to take me to that home in heaven where I hope to meet you all. Good-bye forever."<sup>39</sup>

On the left of the II Corps, Burnside's men approached the main Confederate line but were not in proper position to attack. By midday, the IX Corps had arrived on a ridge running north from the Taylor Farm. After sharp fighting, Federal skirmishers forced their Confederate counterparts through Taylor's oat fields into the Norfolk and Petersburg Railroad cut. Willcox's division, with Hartranft's brigade in the van, prepared to wrest this deep ravine from the Rebels.

Hartranft formed his men in two lines of battle for the assault. Colonel Raulston's brigade followed Hartranft's men in support. Cheering Yankees topped the ridge north of the Taylor Farm as they headed due west for the railroad. Rushing through the oats under heavy musketry and artillery, the men suddenly plunged into the Norfolk Railroad cut. One Yankee described the cut as a "wide trench [which] unexpectedly opens before us." The 37th Wisconsin stumbled on telegraph wire that was stretched taut between stumps. Confederates had hidden this obstruction

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<sup>39</sup> John Day Smith, The History of the Nineteenth Regiment of Maine Volunteer Infantry, 1862-1865 (Minneapolis, 1909), 203-4.

in the long grass at the top of the cut. Southerners sent a "withering volley" along the line, killing a number of unlucky Yankees momentarily ensnared in the wire.<sup>40</sup>

To the left of Hartranft, V Corps units pushed into the railroad cut with equal determination. Crawford's division, immediately to the left of the IX Corps, as well as part of Griffin's division on Crawford's left, moved forward. These men charged to the front and left of the Taylor House as the Confederates loosed a "terribly destructive fire." Although many Federal soldiers fell, the V Corps took the cut "with a steady but resistless rush . . . driving the rebels into their breastworks."<sup>41</sup>

South of the Norfolk Railroad, Warren's two remaining divisions struggled to come into line with the rest of the army. Cutler's division spent part of the morning rebuilding the bridges over the Norfolk Railroad which the Confederates had burned. These bridges, located well behind the Federal lines, would facilitate the crossing of artillery over the railroad tracks.<sup>42</sup> Because Cutler's and Ayres's divisions operated south of the Norfolk Railroad, they had a greater distance to travel to reach the Rebel lines. By 1:30 p. m. Cutler finally reached a crest 600 yards from the Confederate line. Ayres's division was the most southerly V Corps unit; it was not aligned with the rest of the Corps. Ayres refused (bent back) the left wing of his division at a sharp angle. This

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<sup>40</sup> Eden, 37th Wisconsin, 26.

<sup>41</sup> John L. Parker, Henry Wilson's Regiment: History of the Twenty-Second Massachusetts Infantry, the Second Company Sharpshooters, and the Third Light Battery, in the War of the Rebellion (Boston, 1887), 472.

<sup>42</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 473.

formation protected the Union left against a possible Confederate flank attack.

Shortly after midday, Hartranft's brigade and Crawford's division were in the railroad cut. However, moving these men out of the cut became a completely new problem. The IX Corps faced ten- to twenty-foot earthen walls on the west side of the cut. To climb out of the cut, Union infantrymen hacked steps out of the dirt banks. They pulled themselves to the top of the railroad cut, only to find themselves exposed to Confederate musketry. Several hundred yards away, Rebel pickets were waiting in the Poor Creek ravine. A more dangerous marksmanship came from snipers in the main Confederate line above them. "As soon as a man showed his head above the bank," wrote one soldier, "he was a target for the rebel sharpshooters."<sup>43</sup> Yankee soldiers remained in the railroad cut, believing that they were safe.

Things became more deadly for the Federal soldiers in the cut. On the IX Corps's right, the Confederate line crossed the railroad. Confederate riflemen could fire straight down the tracks into the Union flank. A soldier from the 37th Wisconsin recalled with horror that the Rebel sharpshooters "pick[ed] off a man at every shot." The Confederates then positioned a field piece to sweep the cut lengthwise with canister. Hartranft's men frantically ripped up ties and rails and built a traverse across the cut for protection. Captain Roemer and the 34th New York Artillery braved a fierce fire to push two cannon forward by hand. The accurate fire of the New York gunners forced the Confederate piece to

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<sup>43</sup> History of the 36th Massachusetts, 211.

retire.<sup>44</sup>

Hartranft looked for help to his right. Barlow's division was nowhere in sight. Because of a strong Confederate position north of the IX Corps, Barlow was unable to push his division ahead. Barlow's main line was actually aligned behind Burnside's skirmish line. In addition, Barlow was unwilling to commit his division on his own authority. Before noon, Willcox had proposed that Barlow support Hartranft's attack. Barlow simply replied that he had received no orders to assault.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, Hartranft's men endured a brutal right flank fire. Under such fire, Hartranft pleaded for help in the cut. General Potter hurried Col. John Curtin's brigade through the fire of Taylor's fields to Hartranft's aid. In a replay of Hartranft's problems, once Curtin's men were in the cut they faced enfilading musketry and immediately built protective traverses.

By early afternoon, Federal forces had advanced all along the line. Yet Gibbon's division was the only Federal force that had actually struck the main Confederate line. There was little inter-corps cooperation; strong columns of infantry had still not smashed the Confederate line. Meade was not to blame for the Union disarray. Throughout the morning, the commander of the Army of the Potomac acted forcefully with his corps commanders in an attempt to effect coordinated assaults. By afternoon Meade's famous temper had begun to flare. One of Grant's staff officers noted that even Meade's "fits of anger and his resort to intemperate

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<sup>44</sup> Eden, 37th Wisconsin, 26-27.

<sup>45</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 572.

language" were used to drive his command into action.<sup>46</sup>

News of the noon attack began to filter into Meade's headquarters. At 1:55 p. m., Birney reported to Meade that Gibbon did not break the Rebel line. Birney judged the assault a failure because it "was not a spirited one."<sup>47</sup> Birney concluded his dispatch to Meade by indicating his intention to attack again. Meade sharply replied to his II Corps commander that "you will attack again, as you propose, with the least possible delay." Meade admonished Birney not to lose valuable time in preparations or reconnaissance.<sup>48</sup>

Information from the Federal left only increased Meade's ire. Willcox's and Potter's divisions of the IX Corps had moved forward and taken the railroad cut in sharp fighting. Warren's men pushed forward as well, but neither corps had yet assaulted the main Confederate line. Before noon, Warren had assured Meade that his corps would be in position to attack by 1 p. m. Meade responded by telling the V Corps to "attack as soon as possible after the hour designated." Yet Warren did not attack at 1 p. m. Rather, he calmly awaited evidence of Federal success on his right. Warren wired Ayres (one of his division commanders), that he was "waiting for the attack to come up from the right."<sup>49</sup> Warren had precise orders to attack as soon as his corps was prepared to do so. He chose to ignore those orders.

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<sup>46</sup> Porter, Campaigning with Grant, 209.

<sup>47</sup> O.R., XL. Pt. 1, 166.

<sup>48</sup> Walker, History of the Second Army Corps, 541.

<sup>49</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 176-77, 184.



Much of the difficulty in launching a coordinated Federal attack lay in the topography of the Hare House salient. Here the Confederates were advanced on high ground, able to enfilade attacking columns to their right or left. To Birney's II Corps fell the weighty responsibility of driving the Rebels off the high ground. Failing in this, the men of the II Corps at least needed to keep the Confederate center engaged in heavy skirmishing. Martindale to the north and Burnside and Warren to the south of the Hare House were already advanced beyond the II Corps. As early as 12:35 p. m., General Willcox (division commander in the IX Corps) reported directly to Meade that he was enduring fire from the II Corps sector. Meade responded by instructing Burnside curtly that "the best way to get out of the enfilading fire is to go ahead."<sup>50</sup>

Meade's fury reached its zenith upon receipt of a 2 p. m. dispatch from Warren, who explained that the V Corps had stopped because the IX Corps could not advance. Without protection on his right, Warren felt an attack foolish. He further explained that Burnside was unable to advance because his line already outstripped Barlow's division of the II Corps. Consequently, both of Meade's left corps were unable to attack because they lacked support on their right flank. Warren then concluded his dispatch by indicating that it "would be safe for us all to make a rush at, say, 3 p. m."<sup>51</sup>

Within twenty minutes Meade fired back an angry response to Warren: "I am greatly astonished at your dispatch . . . What additional orders

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 179.

to attack you require I cannot imagine. My orders have been explicit and are now repeated, that you will immediately assault the enemy with all your force." Meade threateningly added that "if there is any further delay the responsibility and the consequences will rest with you."<sup>52</sup> Similar stinging orders went to Burnside.

Birney's orders of 2:30 p. m. revealed not only Meade's vehemence but also his inability to coordinate his commands. Meade instructed Warren, Burnside, and Birney "to attack at all hazards with their whole force." Unwisely, and probably out of frustration, Meade found it "useless to appoint an hour to effect co-operation." He reassured Birney that "you have a large corps, powerful and numerous," and Meade added desperately: "I beg you will at once, as soon as possible, assault in strong column."<sup>53</sup> In response to Meade's tongue-lashing, the corps commanders prepared their attacking columns for a final afternoon push against the Petersburg works.

At 2 p. m., Union attacks began anew on the Federal right. Martindale determined to advance his columns across the fields west of Harrison's Creek. The Federal attack would be en echelon, starting with the right. Attacking units would strike the Confederate line, in trip-hammer fashion, from right to left. Stannard's and Stedman's brigades of Martindale's division would attack first. Martindale's position was between the Appomattox River and the City Point Road. South of the City Point Road, Gen. Frank Wheaton's brigade of Neill's division

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 167.

would assault while trying to maintain connections with Gibbon's left. Gibbon remained behind Neill owing to the strong Confederate position opposite the Hare House and the Prince George Road.

The 21st, 27th and 11th South Carolina of Hagood's brigade protected the Confederate line north of the City Point Road. These troops watched as a Yankee line of battle formed parallel to the Confederate works. In addition, a single Union regiment formed in column along the verdant bank of the Appomattox River.

About 2 p. m. the blue lines started forward. Trees and the outbuildings of the younger Hare House shielded the lone Federal regiment in column from Confederate fire. The bluecoats remained protected from fire until they were within 250 yards of the Rebel line. When the regimental column debouched from cover, the main Federal line of battle reached a point only 300 yards from the Carolinians. Hagood's men loosed a terrible volley across the waving grain fields. Confederate fire crumpled the head of the Union column and shattered its deployment. The Federal line of battle gained a mere fifty yards before it broke. Again the Yankees tried to attack; they met with the same result. Hagood remembered that "the voices of the Federal officers in command could be plainly heard" as they tried to rally their men.<sup>54</sup>

Intense fire from the Carolinians forced Stannard's men to the ground for protection. The 27th Massachusetts dropped "into the friendly cover of the grain" as Confederate sharpshooters maintained a relentless fire into the prone Yankees. "Cups and bayonets were briskly used to draw the

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<sup>54</sup> DuBose, 21st South Carolina, 77.

earth from under us," a Union soldier wrote later. A few lucky members of the 27th Massachusetts found shallow furrows in the oat field. Still others utilized their fallen comrades. The men "strengthened the human breastwork by throwing dirt against the bodies."<sup>55</sup>

Throughout the Petersburg assaults, the weather had been excruciatingly hot. June 18 was no exception. The 27th Massachusetts broiled under the sun, and the standing oats allowed no breeze to pass. E. L. Peck, surrounded by the dead and wounded, wrote in his diary: "I am half-choked. Shall die by some means or other soon, by bullets or sunstroke." Peck recalled that he could not rise above the grain to breath the fresh air. "To raise our heads," wrote Peck with horror, "is pure death."<sup>56</sup> The Massachusetts men longed for the cooling of sunset and the protection of darkness.

Neill's attack to the left of Martindale ended quickly. General Frank Wheaton reported that his brigade received a "severe front and cross-fire of musketry and canister" as he attacked.<sup>57</sup> Neill's men dropped to entrench nearly as soon as they began the attack.

From all of his brigade commanders Martindale received one overwhelming explanation for their failure--"it was impossible to proceed

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<sup>55</sup> Derby, Bearing Arms in the 27th Massachusetts, 338.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 339-40. Statistics support Peck's concern over being hit by a sharpshooter. The 27th Massachusetts lost thirty-nine men in the afternoon attack. Of those thirty-nine, eleven were killed. Eight of the eleven slain were shot in the head, most probably as they rose from the grain..

<sup>57</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 496.

on account of enfilading fire on the left."<sup>58</sup> At 3:35 p. m. , Martindale informed Meade that his attack had failed and that any further assaults required the strong support of Gibbon's and Mott's divisions.

Martindale met with little success in his day of command. His men took several hundred yards of ground, an entrenched but lightly defended line, and a few Rebel prisoners. Martindale's single tactical gain was a peninsula that jutted into the Appomattox River near Harrison's Creek. From this point, Federal cannoneers could fire upriver at the bridges crossing the Appomattox. These bridges connected Petersburg with Richmond and the north. For this limited gain, Martindale's two brigades suffered 430 casualties. Hinks's 4th and 5th USCT supported Martindale and lost thirty-six men. In comparison, Neill's division had only seventy-five men killed or wounded. This low casualty rate indicated that the assaults were not aggressively pushed, especially by Neill.<sup>59</sup>

On the Union left, Gen. Gouverneur Warren prepared his divisions for the attack. Cooperating with Warren was Burnside's IX Corps. At 3 p. m. both corps started their forward movement. Burnside's divisions, located north of the Taylor House, moved across the field to support their comrades holding the railroad cut. Warren's men were stretched from the Taylor House southward to a point about 400 yards east of the Rives Farm.

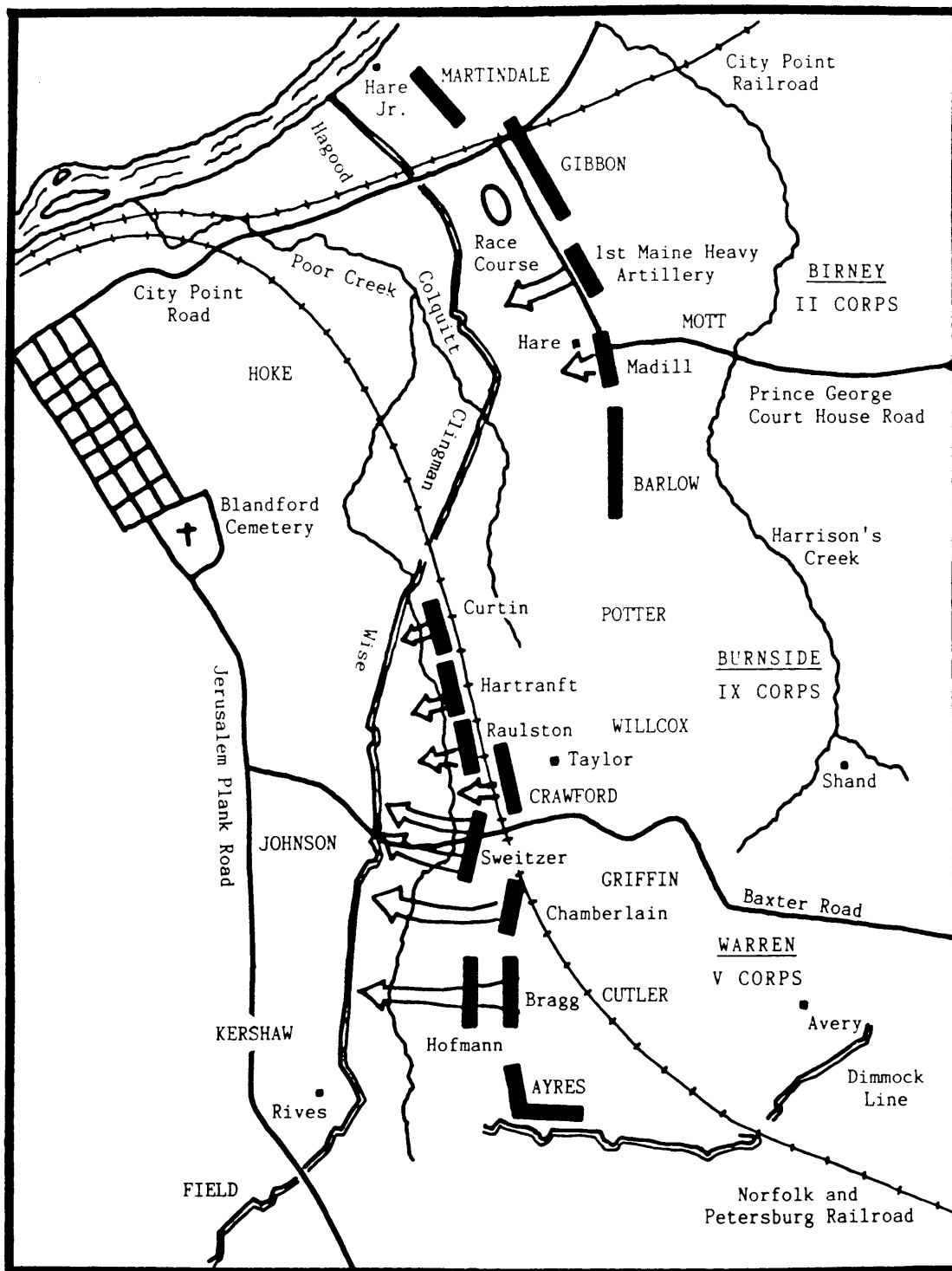
General Lysander Cutler formed his small division for the attack. Colonel J. William Hofmann's brigade led the column, followed by Col. Edward S. Bragg's men in support. Cutler's men formed behind a protective

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. , Pt. 2, 205-6.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. , LI, Pt. 1, 1258.

MAP 17. Union Assaults, 3 p. m. - 6 p. m., June 18



rise nearly half a mile from the Confederate line. On Cutler's right was Gen. Charles Griffin's division. Griffin's right fell across the Baxter road and into the railroad cut. General Romeyn Ayres's men formed to the left of Cutler, whose troops had crossed the railroad cut in the morning and formed west of it. Only two major obstacles confronted Cutler--Poor Creek and the main Confederate line.

The 1300 men of Hofmann's brigade surged over the sheltering rise. Defending Confederate forces sent musketry and spherical case into the blue ranks. As the Yankees neared the works, Rebel gunners blasted them with canister. Cutler's men pushed against an increasing volume of enemy fire. "As the line was descending into the ravine," remembered one soldier, "it broke."<sup>60</sup> Most of Hofmann's men rushed back to the protection of the ridge in their rear. Some 200 others forged ahead to the welcome cover of Poor Creek. Even in the creek bed, enfilading Rebel musketry and artillery struck Cutler's men.<sup>61</sup>

Immediately behind Hofmann's brigade came Bragg's column. In the second line, the 6th Wisconsin came over the ridge and onto the field of fire. A soldier recalled that "it seemed to us that every gun discharged a bushel of small shot through our ranks and that the interval between discharges was but the fraction of a minute."<sup>62</sup>

Confederates poured a withering fire into the Poor Creek ravine.

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<sup>60</sup> Smith, 76th New York, 306.

<sup>61</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 476.

<sup>62</sup> Philip A. Cheek, History of the Sauk County Riflemen Known as Company "A," Sixth Wisconsin Veteran Volunteer Infantry, 1861-1865 (Madison, 1909), 114.

The 7th Wisconsin, leading Bragg's attack, was pinned down in the ravine and taking fire from its right. As the 6th Wisconsin crossed the sloping hillside, it witnessed the plight of their kinsmen and turned to them. While executing a change of direction to the right flank, and all the while under fire, the Wisconsinites saw "the spires of Petersburg . . . over the hill about two miles away." After crossing the bloody hillside, the 6th Wisconsin arrived alongside the 7th in the ravine. A member of the 6th wrote sadly that while racing across the open area "the regiment lost forty-four men and never fired a shot."<sup>63</sup>

Cutler's division failed to breach the Confederate line. Scattered elements of the two brigades advanced within seventy-five yards of the Rebel works, but they got no closer. Hofmann himself never reached the far side of Poor Creek, his horse shot from under him on the bullet-torn hillside. Hofmann reported his brigade lost about 300 killed and wounded out of 1300 engaged. Cutler believed his division "lost in killed and wounded about one-third of the men I had with me."<sup>64</sup> Later in the day Cutler informed Warren that "every regimental commander in the Second Brigade [Hofmann's] is killed or wounded." In a letter to his wife, Col. Rufus Dawes of the 6th Wisconsin succinctly illustrated the carnage of Cutler's June 18 assault: "Our brigade was simply food for powder."<sup>65</sup>

Cutler's men had no support on their left because Ayres did not commit his division to an attack. Three of Ayres's brigades moved to a

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>64</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 191, 474.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Pt. 2, 188; Dawes, Service with the Sixth Wisconsin, 291.



crest between the Blackwater Swamp and Poor Creek. Ayres's division received the same vicious Confederate reception as had Cutler's division. That unit simply stopped and dug earthworks on the protected hillside.

An officer in the 6th New York Heavy Artillery, one of Ayres's units, watched his men entrench. He wrote home describing his men's ability to make their own protection: "Bayonets, spoons, hands, sticks--almost anything is used to 'scratch dirt,' and like magic a line of two or three thousand men who are one moment exposed to every shot will be pitching head foremost into the earth, like moles."<sup>66</sup>

Ayres remained largely inactive on the left, opposite the Rives Farm. With part of his division he occupied a line of works perpendicular to the V Corps line of battle. Ayres' thus refused his left to protect against a possible Confederate attack on that flank.<sup>67</sup>

That Ayres did not aid Cutler's attack is curious at best and criminal at worst. Cutler officially reported his belief that Ayres did not receive the afternoon attack order in time. However, Ayres himself gave a clearer reason why he did not thrust forward. At dark, Ayres informed Warren that the Rebel works, "if properly defended . . . cannot be carried by assault."<sup>68</sup> Ayres did not attack because he felt it was

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<sup>66</sup> Theodore Irving, "More Than Conqueror," or Memorials of Col. J. Howard Kitching, Sixth New York Artillery, Army of the Potomac (New York, 1873), 157. The intense heat made the already sandy soil of Petersburg even drier and lighter. Consequently, the men of both armies entrenched with astonishing rapidity.

<sup>67</sup> Ayres mentioned using an old line of "heavy works." These works are probably in the area of Batteries 21-24. See O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 184.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

impossible to succeed against the Confederate works in his front.

General Samuel Crawford's division anchored the V Corps right. Crawford connected with the IX Corps near the Taylor House. General Charles Griffin's division was to Crawford's left, extending south of Baxter Road. Opposite the two Federal divisions were two rises, each followed by a ravine. Poor Creek meandered its way through the second ravine. On the western side of the creek lay an upward sloping plain to the Confederate line.

Crawford's men double-quickd across the open ground toward the first ridge which lay just beyond the railroad tracks. Crawford's brigades drove Confederate pickets in front of them, across the railroad cut. Yankee soldiers then had to negotiate the steep sides of the cut, all the while under fire. One Federal soldier managed to maintain his sense of humor. In a letter home, George Fowle, one of Crawford's men, related that "it was laughable to see the men come down the bank. It was pretty steep and we were running all we knew and did not know what kind of place it was until we got there."<sup>69</sup>

When Crawford's division took the crest of the first ridge, they met a withering fire from the main Rebel line and preferred to stay put. Confederate artillery was especially strong in Crawford's sector. The 13th Massachusetts faced the Rebel works near the Baxter Road. Here one Federal soldier saw "a fort with five embrasures on the face that fronted us." This soldier, as well as the rest of Crawford's division, had little

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<sup>69</sup> George Fowle, Letters to Eliza from a Union Soldier (Chicago, 1970), 108.

desire to attack while "the muzzles of those dogs of war looked grimly down upon us."<sup>70</sup>

Griffin's two attacking brigades also took the first crest south of Crawford's position. Colonel Joshua Chamberlain commanded the left brigade and Col. Jacob Sweitzer led the men on the right. After hard fighting to gain the first ridge, Chamberlain recognized that an assault on the main line would be extraordinarily difficult. In consequence, Chamberlain called for more artillery support.

Chamberlain peered over the ridge, scanned the Confederate line, and concluded that his brigade would be destroyed if it attacked. He immediately sent back a notice to his superiors, questioning the wisdom of the attack. His brigade, Chamberlain noted, had little Federal help on the right or left. His right was in the railroad cut and Chamberlain's left was "in the air, with no support whatsoever." That a single brigade should attack such works was ridiculous. "I beg to be assured," wrote Chamberlain, "that the order to attack with my single brigade is with the General's full understanding." The Maine colonel believed that an assault against the Confederate line should be made "with nothing less than the whole army."<sup>71</sup>

Despite an articulate plea from the brave, intrepid, and intelligent Chamberlain, Warren's attack order stood. Chamberlain resolutely called his regimental commanders together to issue precise directions for the

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<sup>70</sup> Stearns, Three Years With Company K, 288.

<sup>71</sup> John J. Pullen, The Twentieth Maine: A Volunteer Regiment in the Civil War (Philadelphia, 1957), 211.

assault. He also brought up a battery of guns to provide cover for his men. The guns were placed so that their line of fire barely cleared the rise. This allowed the Federal cannoneers to work with some protection and improved the attitude of Chamberlain's all-Pennsylvania brigade. The men knew they had artillery cover. Chamberlain also ordered that the men be carefully instructed about the exact location of their assault. Because of Chamberlain's detailed planning, one veteran later stated, "our line responded to a man and went forward with an enthusiasm hardly ever witnessed in battle."<sup>72</sup>

Chamberlain placed himself in the front of his brigade, for he believed that men going into a fire-swept field "would have to be led."<sup>73</sup> The Pennsylvanians cleared the rise shortly after 3 p. m. After several terrible minutes the brigade "began to melt away under the merciless storm of iron and lead."<sup>74</sup>

Chamberlain's troops were pushing down the hill toward Poor Creek when their commander fell grievously wounded. With his side turned toward the Rebel line, Chamberlain exhorted his men onward. As he did, a musket ball smashed through both of Chamberlain's hips, ripping into his urinary tract and bladder. Chamberlain valiantly propped himself up with his sword, so that he could remain standing. He continued to urge his men

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<sup>72</sup> Horatio N. Warren, Two Reunions of the 142nd Regiment, Pa. Vols. (Buffalo, 1890), 35.

<sup>73</sup> Pullen, 20th Maine, 210.

<sup>74</sup> Gibbs, 187th Pennsylvania, 101.

ahead until he collapsed from loss of blood.<sup>75</sup>

The Union brigade pressed on without its commander. Much of Chamberlain's command crossed Poor Creek and drove to the Confederate works. Unfortunately for the Federals, negotiating the creek with its bordering trees and shrubs threw the line into confusion. Isolated elements of the Federal brigade reached the works, "only to be hurled, broken and bleeding, back to the base of the hill."<sup>76</sup> Two of Chamberlain's regiments gamely entrenched under fire on the west side of Poor Creek. Here the Federals remained until dark, within easy musket range of the Rebel line.

As Chamberlain's regiments recovered from their failed charge, Griffin's other brigade attacked. Colonel Sweitzer pushed his men against the Confederate line north of the Baxter Road. The blue lines crossed Poor Creek and rushed to within twenty yards of the Rebel breastworks. Federal success at last seemed within reach. As the Federal line battled to the edge of the Confederate works, a Yankee soldier saw "some of the enemy . . . seizing their color-standards, preparing 'to get'."<sup>77</sup>

Even though Sweitzer's men nearly gained the Confederate line, they

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<sup>75</sup> Unbelievably, Chamberlain survived his wounds. On June 18, Grant awarded Chamberlain a battlefield promotion to brigadier general, the only such Federal honor given during the Civil War. Carried by stretcher to City Point, Chamberlain was declared mortally wounded. Two surgeons refused to give up, however, and Chamberlain eventually recovered. He took an active part in the closing battles of the war and was present at Appomattox. See Davis, Death in the Trenches, 51; New York Herald, June 22, 1864.

<sup>76</sup> Gibbs, 187th Pennsylvania, 95.

<sup>77</sup> Parker, 22nd Massachusetts, 472.

failed to breach it. Chamberlain's attack had already been repulsed, and the Southern soldiers now concentrated their fire on Sweitzer's left flank. One of Sweitzer's soldiers wrote his family that "it was beyond human endurance to stand such an iron hail without stronger supports. Our men . . . came back, a bleeding, routed body of men. It was simply indescribable."<sup>78</sup> Griffin's division reached the farthest forward point of any Federal charge that day. Attesting to this fleeting accomplishment was a field of fallen Union soldiers between Poor Creek and the Rebel works.

The V Corps attacks were over. Warren was unable to press all of his divisions into the attack at once. Ayres's division, on the left, did not engage in serious offensive operations. Crawford's men, on the right, blasted away with supporting fire but did not advance on the Confederate earthworks. The center two divisions under Griffin and Cutler threw weak, unsupported, brigade-sized assaults against Rebel works armed with artillery pieces "twenty to forty yards apart."<sup>79</sup> With no concerted action between the V Corps divisions, success was not achieved on the Federal left.

At the division level of command, there was a tragic inability to put forward even two brigades at once. Both Chamberlain's and Sweitzer's brigades suffered enfilading fire from the point at which the other should have been. Such inefficiency killed and wounded hundreds of soldiers.

At 4 p. m. Gen. David Birney formed an attacking column from the II

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<sup>78</sup> Carter, Four Brothers in Blue, 440.

<sup>79</sup> Warren, Two Reunions of the 142nd Pennsylvania, 35.

Corps. These weary men were again to assault the strong Confederate line opposite the Hare House. Colonel Henry Madill's brigade massed in column behind a slight rise near the Hare House. The ground screened the Federal column from Confederate eyes. To the right of Madill, in the sunken Prince George Court House Road, Col. Daniel Chaplin's brigade balked at attack. Some of the veterans from Pennsylvania and New York yelled to Birney: "Played out! Let the 1st Maine go!"<sup>80</sup>

Among the II Corps veterans near the Hare House, a nearly mutinous attitude prevailed. These men had fought over the Hare House lines throughout the morning and early afternoon. Gibbon had tried two assaults shortly after midday and both had been bloodily repulsed. An officer lying wounded in the hospital heard reports of the obstinate soldiers. He wrote that II Corps infantrymen steadfastly refused to "advance again over the same ground where they already been repulsed four times. They loudly declared that these murderous attempts were useless."<sup>81</sup>

Thus, the huge 1st Maine Heavy Artillery became the lead column in the II Corps attack. Although the regiment had suffered 529 casualties at Spotsylvania, it was less bloodied and more enthusiastic than the rest of the corps. The Maine soldiers formed three lines in the sunken Prince George Court House Road opposite the Confederate line. Their point of attack would carry them between the Hare House to the south and the race track to the north. On the left of the Maine "Heavies" was Madill's

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<sup>80</sup> Bearss, "Meade's June 18 Assault on Petersburg Fails," 18.

<sup>81</sup> Rudolf Aschmann, Memoirs of a Swiss Officer in the American Civil War (Bern, 1972), 169.

brigade, with the 16th Massachusetts and the 7th New Jersey in the rear for support. They faced the lines held by Gen. Thomas Clingman's North Carolinians.

The Maine artillerists gazed anxiously at the curved line which had destroyed McAllister's New Jersey brigade earlier in the day. When McAllister heard that Gen. Mott's division was to attack at this point, he exclaimed: "God help them! It is a death trap. A brigade can't live in there for five minutes." One Maine soldier, nervously anticipating the attack, remembered that "the period of waiting seemed an eternity."<sup>82</sup> At 4:30 p. m. the order finally came and the 1st Maine went forward to break the Confederate line northwest of the Hare House.

The attacking columns soon found themselves in an open field covered by fire on their front and flank. Madill's brigade "became satisfied that the assault was impracticable" and retreated behind a sheltering barn. Even so, the Confederate fire was so heavy that Madill's brigade lost more than 200 men in a few minutes. The veteran units following the 1st Maine quickly returned to the cover of the Prince George Road, leaving the "Heavies" to fend for themselves. A member of the Excelsior Brigade (Mott's division) gave voice to this kind of thinking. When asked if he was going to attack the earthworks, the soldier replied: "No . . . we are going to run toward the Confederate earthworks and then we are going to run back. We have had enough of attacking earthworks."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> McAllister, Civil War Letters, 444; Horace H. Shaw, The First Maine Heavy Artillery, 1862-1865 (Portland, 1903), 122.

<sup>83</sup> Houghton, 17th Maine, 205; Catton, Stillness at Appomattox, 197-98.



The 1st Maine soon became isolated between the lines. "The field," wrote one soldier, "became a burning, seething, crashing, hissing hell, in which human courage, flesh, and bone were struggling with an impossibility, either to succeed or to return with much hope of life." Confederate fire continued so relentlessly that wounded men were hit repeatedly while lying on the ground. Within ten minutes the attack ended. The remnants of the regiment staggered back to their starting point leaving hundreds of dead and wounded men on the field. "They were laid out in squads and companies," wrote a member of the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery. This soldier realized that the human destruction before him was too great to capture on paper. He added simply, "it beggars description."<sup>84</sup>

In those ten horrible minutes, the 1st Maine lost 632 men killed, wounded, or missing out of the 850 who started the charge. Only two company commanders remained unhurt. This total represented the single highest casualty rate of the war for any regiment in any action.<sup>85</sup> "Many of the men who had not been wounded," wrote the regimental historian, "had their garments tattered and torn by bullets and shells."<sup>86</sup> For all their suffering and casualties, the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery had gained nothing.

On the afternoon of June 18th the Army of the Potomac failed to break

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<sup>84</sup> Shaw, First Maine Heavy Artillery, 122; Roe, 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, 178.

<sup>85</sup> Bearss, "Meade's June 18 Assault on Petersburg Fails," 32.

<sup>86</sup> Shaw, 1st Maine Heavy Artillery, 124.

the Confederate line. Yet there remained one untested point. Burnside's IX Corps held a position in the railroad cut northwest of the Taylor House. General Orlando B. Willcox spent the long afternoon getting his men into place there. By 5 p. m., much of Willcox's division joined Col. Hartranft's and Col. Curtin's (Potter's division) men along the tracks. One last attempt would be made by Burnside's men to take the Confederate line. Hartranft, who had fought the entire day in the area, was less than optimistic about the chances for Federal success. He reported later that "the troops of the entire division [Willcox] were in condition to make but a feeble attack; the regiments scarcely averaged 100 men."<sup>87</sup>

During the afternoon Federal soldiers cut steps from the steep dirt walls skirting the railroad tracks. At 5:30 p. m., Willcox's entire division and Curtin's brigade clambered up the steps and out of their protective ditch. Yankees rushed across an open field of fire to the cover afforded by the Poor Creek ravine, where they drove out Confederate pickets.

Once in the ravine, Hartranft's and Curtin's brigades formed for the attack. The two brigades topped out of Poor Creek and rushed up the hill toward the Rebel line. The Union soldiers got to within 125 yards of the Confederate works, but musket fire staggered and then stopped the assault. Hartranft's and Curtin's men hugged the hillside and entrenched under fire.<sup>88</sup> It was now 6 p. m. Willcox's division entrenched nearer the Confederate line than any other part of the Army of the Potomac. This

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<sup>87</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 578.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 577-78.

close line was the sole gain of Burnside's last attack.

"Considerable more ground was gained," recalled a member of the 51st Pennsylvania, "but at a great cost of blood."<sup>89</sup> Willcox sadly reported that in his division less than 1,000 uninjured men remained to erect works in the forward position. Willcox's second brigade changed commanders four times in less than two days. Colonel Benjamin Christ was wounded in the June 17 Shand House fighting. Colonel William Raulston took command, only to be wounded the next day. Command then devolved on Lt. Col. George Travers, who was hit in the afternoon attack. Finally, control of the brigade fell upon Lt. Col. Walter Newberry, who managed to survive the day unhurt.<sup>90</sup> In Potter's division, Col. Curtin was severely wounded in the shoulder as he led his men. Colonel Henry Pleasants then took command of Potter's first brigade. Such losses were representative of those incurred among line officers throughout the Federal army.

As the last of the Federal assaults ended in the IX Corps sector, A. P. Hill's corps arrived at Petersburg. General William Mahone's brigade led the exhausted Rebel column. The 12th Virginia, composed largely of men from the Cockade City, entered first. As they had marched south, the Rebels had heard rumors that the Union army occupied Petersburg. Putnam Smith, a soldier in Mahone's command, remembered entering the city "worked up to a high pitch of excitement . . . I reckon most of the command fully expected to charge the Federals."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Parker, 51st Pennsylvania, 563.

<sup>90</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 573.

<sup>91</sup> SHSP, XX (1892), 80-81.

There was no need for Hill's Corps to go into battle, for Beauregard's and Kershaw's men had already repulsed the Yankees. The Petersburg soldiers marched through town and greeted old friends. As the lean and dirty command passed through the streets, some of the townswomen rushed to their aid. One woman wrote in her diary that "their faces [were] so thin and drawn by privation that we scarcely knew them. It made one's heart ache to look at them."<sup>92</sup>

So dry and hot was the march and so driving was Hill's pace that his corps stretched along the road for miles. Those who made it to Petersburg on the evening of June 18 were weak and thirsty. One soldier gratefully recalled that the citizens "did the little they could for them [Hill's men], which consisted, primarily, in supplying them with fresh cold water. That had become a luxury."<sup>93</sup> Hill's men then marched to the extreme Confederate right and occupied the works between the Jerusalem Plank Road and the Weldon Railroad.

Confederate forces had easily repulsed the Army of the Potomac during the day. Except for the men of Kershaw's division, Beauregard did not need the Army of Northern Virginia. Although Federal accounts spoke of charges through a maelstrom of fire, the view from the other side of the trench was totally different. The Confederate forces viewed June 18 not as "a day of battle, but only of demonstrations and reconnoissance." Kershaw began to relieve Johnson near the Baxter Road when a Federal assault charged the Rebel line. The attack, probably that of

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<sup>92</sup> Macrae, Americans at Home, 159

<sup>93</sup> Caldwell, History of a Brigade, 163.

Chamberlain's or Sweitzer's brigade, was thrown back and described as "feeble" in the Diary of the First Corps.<sup>94</sup>

Confederate forces suffered few casualties that day. The 56th North Carolina narrowly averted tragedy. As a Federal artillery barrage roared near the Baxter Road, an unexploded shell plopped into the midst of Ransom's men. Had it exploded, scores of Carolinians might have been killed or wounded. Private John A. Parker quickly scooped up the still-sputtering shell on his spade. "Get out of here!" Parker shouted as he tossed it over the breastwork. The shell exploded harmlessly. Such dangerous incidents were rare for the Confederate soldier on the 18th. "The assault along the whole line was made by the Federal corps, which met with . . . a complete and bloody repulse," Confederate Col. Charles Venable wrote. "The attack made no impression whatever on our lines."<sup>95</sup>

At 5 p. m. Meade received the disheartening news of Mott's bloody failure west of the Hare House. Consequently, at 6:30 p. m., the commander of the Army of the Potomac terminated all attacks for the day. He ordered Warren and Burnside to "straighten your lines and make your connections secure." Meade added that he "was satisfied we have done all that it is possible for men to do, and must be resigned to the result."<sup>96</sup> Meade, although greatly displeased with the results of the fighting, nonetheless tried to ease his corps commanders' disappointment.

At 7 p. m., Warren suddenly became aggressive. He told Meade that

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<sup>94</sup> Alexander, Military Memoirs, 556; O.R., XL, Pt. 1, 761.

<sup>95</sup> Clark, N. C. Regiments, V, 16-17; SHSP, XIV (1886), 539.

<sup>96</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 180.

"we [Burnside's IX Corps and the V Corps] want to make another effort just at dark." Burnside was skeptical of the plan but consented to make a demonstration. Meade suggested to Warren that the V and IX Corps not attack, for Birney's weakened II Corps could not support the effort. Warren continued to insist that he be allowed to assault. Finally, at 7:30 p. m. , Meade put an end to Warren's sudden and uncharacteristic elan. Meade sharply told him "it is useless to make another attack, because I doubt your or my ability to follow it up. Secure your lines and look to your left flank."<sup>97</sup> With the day almost over and Federal failure looming bleakly, Warren wanted to atone for his lost opportunities. His sudden desire for action was a pathetic example of too little too late.

At 9:45 p. m. Meade informed Grant at City Point of the day's action. He recounted the army's limited success, and expressed the belief that Lee had now reinforced Petersburg. Meade judged the army's assaults as "well made, and I feel satisfied that all that men could do under the circumstances was done." The day's casualties were exceedingly severe, admitted Meade, adding that "it is a source of great regret that I am not able to report more success."<sup>98</sup>

Grant promptly assuaged Meade's regrets. In an almost fatherly way, Grant told Meade that he was "perfectly satisfied that all had been done

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<sup>97</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 180-81. Meade was greatly agitated over Warren's blatant non-compliance of orders. On June 21, Meade sent to Grant's chief of staff an eight-page letter requesting Warren's removal from corps command. Meade cited Warren's past mistakes as well as his inability to execute precise orders on the afternoon of June 18. See George G. Meade to Brig. Gen. John A. Rawlins, June 21, 1864, File #39, Petersburg National Battlefield Library.

<sup>98</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 157.

that could be done." From all appearances, wrote Grant, the attacks had to be made before Lee's arrival. Although Grant was disappointed over the results of the Petersburg action, he did not consider any more frontal assaults. Rather, Grant turned his mind to a new Federal approach--a strategy of exhaustion to destroy Lee's supply lines. He told Meade that "we will rest the men and use the spade for their protection until a new vein can be struck."<sup>99</sup>

Grant did not brood over the missed chance at Petersburg. Instead, he issued orders to assail the city anew. As soon as Gen. James Wilson's men and horses were rested, Grant wanted the cavalry to move south and east. Here the troopers could begin to sever Confederate lines of communication. Grant also advised Meade to stockpile food and supplies for the army. In the near future there would be no more Federal assaults on the Petersburg earthworks.

Beauregard had won.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION

As the last firing died out on the night of June 18, the Army of the Potomac had squandered more than a just a superb opportunity to capture Petersburg. Meade's army had also sacrificed 10,000-11,000 of its troops. After four days of fighting, nearly 1,300 Union men lay dead. Another 7,500 filled ambulances and hospitals. At least 1,800 were missing. Compared with other great Civil War battles these losses were modest. Yet for Meade the numbers were sobering enough. He related to his wife that the severe casualties illustrated "how hard the fighting was."<sup>1</sup>

Exact Confederate losses are unknown. Bushrod Johnson reported no casualty total for his division. Yet his men had borne the weight of the IX Corps attacks and suffered severely. Johnson Hagood's casualties were light when compared with those of other Rebel units. In four days, Hagood's entire brigade lost just 220 men killed or wounded.<sup>2</sup> Hagood, however, occupied the far Confederate left and was not seriously assailed. In contrast to Hagood's brigade, the 26th Virginia of Wise's brigade suffered 205 men killed, wounded or captured.<sup>3</sup> Estimates for Confederate

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<sup>1</sup> General A. A. Humphreys placed Federal casualties for the four days at 10,586 men, Humphreys, Virginia Campaign, 224. Thomas L. Livermore, in Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America: 1861-65 (Bloomington, Ind., 1957), 115, counted 8,150 Union casualties. Meade himself reported a four-day total of 9,665 men killed, wounded, or missing. Meade, Life and Letters, II, 205.

<sup>2</sup> DuBose, 21st South Carolina, 78.

<sup>3</sup> Total counted from muster role in Wiatt, 26th Virginia, 46-81.



casualties throughout the four days range as high as 4,700 men and dip as low as 2,970 soldiers killed, wounded, or missing.<sup>4</sup> Judging from the regimental losses and personal descriptions of the fighting, the true Confederate casualty count was probably close to 4,000 men.

For the next ten months of war, Grant and Lee faced one another across the lines at Petersburg. Ironically, both men had sought to avoid trench warfare. At the beginning of the spring campaign, Grant wanted to use his superior manpower to crush Lee's army in open combat. The Union chief realized victory would be excruciatingly slow and costly if the Army of Northern Virginia remained behind earthworks. Paradoxically, Lee feared being trapped within entrenchments. He knew that attrition and siege warfare would eventually devour his smaller army. Neither man wanted the results that ensued from the battles for Petersburg. Now both had to endure it.

Throughout the four days of combat, the Union army had a commanding advantage in numbers over the Confederate defenders. At times, Federal infantrymen outnumbered Beauregard's troops five to one. A compelling historical question is raised: Why did the Army of the Potomac fail to take Petersburg?

Standard Civil War historiography uses the Cold Harbor Syndrome to explain the riddle of Federal failure at the Cockade City. Union soldiers, the theory contends, had seen the the destruction of their units as they attacked the Cold Harbor earthworks. Consequently, when they

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander in Military Memoirs, 559, estimated the higher total. The low figure is from Livermore, Numbers and Losses, 116.

arrived at Petersburg, these Federal troops either assaulted without the necessary vigor to secure earthworks, or refused to attack them at all. The Cold Harbor Syndrome is a facile interpretation. Most important historical occurrences are multi-causal and contain complex ramifications. The battles for Petersburg are no exception; myriad conditions caused Union defeat.

Several obvious facts clash with the Cold Harbor Syndrome. First, not all of the units present at Petersburg suffered or even witnessed the June 3 slaughter at Cold Harbor. The failure of these Federal commands must be explained in a different way. Secondly, only several II Corps units refused to attack at Petersburg, and then only late on the last day. Thirdly, the Cold Harbor Syndrome ignored Federal action on June 16, June 17, and much of June 18. Civil War historians have only superficially studied the fighting of the middle two days. As a result, these historians improperly lumped the 16th and 17th together with the last day's action. Union attacks against earthworks on those days were exemplary and spirited. (On the 17th, for example, Burnside's men fought bravely and without reluctance.) Lastly, fifty miles and two weeks separated Yankee soldiers from Cold Harbor. The James River washed away many of the negative effects associated with attacking the Confederates. The only earthworks adversely affecting the morale of Northern soldiers were those in their immediate front. Other factors, and not the memory of Cold Harbor, led to the Federal disaster at Petersburg.

The Union army failed partly because the Confederate defense was both tenacious and inspired. Captain W. H. S. Burwyn of the 35th North Carolina believed that "there was no harder or better fighting during the

war than that which engaged the brigade [Ransom's] on those lines and days."<sup>5</sup> Throughout June 16-17, Confederate soldiers repeatedly counterattacked and closed dangerous breaches in their line. Superb Confederate leadership added to the competent and sometimes heroic resistance of Rebel troops. Beauregard fought his finest battle at Petersburg.

All of the Confederate lines held superior position. On June 15, Union attackers swamped the Dimmock Line only because it contained an inadequate number of defenders. However, elsewhere along the second and third lines outnumbered Confederate regiments devastated Federal brigades as they rushed across open fields. Earthworks in combination with artillery and musketry probably quadrupled Southern firepower. Except for the slashing Confederate counterattacks on the evenings of June 16 and 17, Rebels did not expose themselves to Union fire. Most of the Confederate line fortunately escaped mortal combat at close quarters.

Federal morale problems, most pronounced in the II Corps, played a significant role in the Petersburg failure. These men had seen the destruction at Cold Harbor, but far more importantly, they witnessed first-hand the lost opportunity at Petersburg. They suffered from what could more accurately be termed the "Petersburg Syndrome." The II Corps arrived on the field on June 15 and participated in repeated assaults over the next three days. Only in the late afternoon of June 18, after three bloody failures that day, did some members of the II Corps refuse to attack. They were not being cowardly, stupid, disloyal, or reflective

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<sup>5</sup> Clark, N. C. Regiments, IV, 575.

upon the Cold Harbor debacle. They plainly realized, after numerous attempts, that the works in their front could not be carried by assault.

A twist of topography also created difficulty for the Federal attacks. Because the II Corps held the center of the Union line, it had to advance and draw fire off the flanks of the other corps. Yet, on the 17th and 18th, the II Corps could not push Confederate forces off the west side of Hare House Hill.

At the time of the battles for Petersburg, Hancock's men were poorly equipped in both manpower and spirit for their crucial role. Of all Federal units, the II Corps had seen the heaviest fighting and taken great losses in the Overland Campaign. The corps was fought out. Yet to these men, because of their position on the field, fell the task of wrenching the center of the line from Beauregard's defenders. The II Corps's failure to do so led to little support between the Union corps. In consequence, Federal attacks that went forward on the right or left of Hancock's corps often collapsed because of severe enfilading fire.

Petersburg also represented the best and the worst of Federal staff work. As the army was crossing the James on June 17, Grant proudly wired Halleck that the move was made "without the loss of a wagon or a piece of artillery."<sup>6</sup> Grant was not a boastful man, yet he had reason to crow this once. Staff members of the Army of the Potomac had orchestrated a spectacular military accomplishment.

However, the same men whose impeccable staff work moved a huge army through fifty miles of enemy territory and across a wide river, botched

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<sup>6</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 115.

routine chores at Petersburg. Federal staff officers allowed troops to get lost and run out of ammunition while in battle. They ignored ground reconnaissance and artillery support. Throughout the attacks on Petersburg, Union staff work was either bumbling or completely absent. This lack of basic support and organization much harmed the Federal effort.

Missed opportunity tells the story of Northern failure at Petersburg. Often the chance was missed not by the infantryman but by his superior. Federal leadership during the battles for Petersburg ranged from courageous to inept. Unfortunately, ineptitude usually prevailed at the highest levels. In crucial moments, decisive and overall leadership did not materialize. On June 18, Grant remained at City Point. He was an administrator and never took direct command of any action during the four days. Meade vacillated on the 17th and then found it impossible to coordinate the attacks of his corps on the following day.

Despite available and rapid communication between Federal corps and divisions, unsupported brigade-sized attacks remained the norm during the four days of action. Union corps and division commanders must share blame with Grant and Meade for defeat at Petersburg. John Ropes, a military historian of the last century, summed up such leadership. He wrote that the trouble was not with the troops. "The men fought well enough--but no amount of courage will secure success in direct assaults unless that courage is both skilfully directed and well supported." Ropes continued: "The truth is that no adequate pains were taken to utilize this

courage."<sup>7</sup>

During the Civil War, successful attacks against an entrenched enemy often depended upon superior leadership. At Petersburg, however, the Army of the Potomac suffered a dearth of qualified line officers. Many of the finest combat officers were gone, victims of the savage Overland Campaign. On June 18, as Mott's division readied for its final, ill-fated charge, Birney lamented the lack of leadership in his corps. In a communique to Meade, Birney believed victory improbable because he did not have "enough good officers left to lead the attacking columns. This is the difficulty."<sup>8</sup>

Members of Grant's staff conceded that many of the soldiers had "fought as well as ever, but they were not directed with the same skill."<sup>9</sup> After the assaults ended, James Morrill of the 11th New Hampshire wrote his brother that "there is not any officers left in Co. F."<sup>10</sup> By June 18, Morrill's Company F typified much of the Army of the Potomac.

Lastly, and most importantly, the Army of the Potomac was so exhausted that it could perform only marginally in combat. Although the move across the James replenished the men's morale, their bodies were terribly depleted. For example, the 34th New York Artillery crossed the

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<sup>7</sup> Petersburg, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, 183.

<sup>8</sup> O.R., XL, Pt. 2, 168.

<sup>9</sup> Charles A. Dana, Recollections of the Civil War with the Leaders at Washington and in the Field in the Sixties (New York, 1898), 221-22.

<sup>10</sup> Morrill letter, File #39, Petersburg National Battlefield.

James on June 16 to the cheers of sailors. "To my men and myself," reflected the battery captain on the effect of the hurrahs, "it was an inspiration to do and to dare." Enthusiastic gunners then marched all night to Petersburg, which "greatly fatigued both men and horses."<sup>11</sup> Men in the 34th performed well in battle, but they were bone tired. Horace Porter, a member of Grant's staff, believed the troops at Petersburg failed in their attacks because of a "change in their physical [rather] than in their moral condition."<sup>12</sup>

Throughout regimental histories, diaries, and letters, Union soldiers repeatedly recalled their numbing weariness upon finally reaching Petersburg. As a reward to the end of the Overland Campaign and the driving march from Cold Harbor, Federal infantrymen were sent into battle against Petersburg's works. Colonel Theodore Lyman summed up the state of the Federal army at Petersburg when he wrote that "forty-five days of constant marching, assaulting, and trenching are a poor preparations for a rush!"<sup>13</sup>

Despite the weakening effects of the Overland Campaign and the march to the James, all of the Union Corps made attacks through those four hot days. Chamberlain's, Sweitzer's, and Hartranft's men attacked with spirit and courage. The Cold Harbor Syndrome did not apply to much of the Army of the Potomac, especially to units like the 1st Maine Heavy

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<sup>11</sup> Jacob Roemer, Reminiscences of the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865 (Flushing, N.Y., 1897), 219.

<sup>12</sup> Porter, Campaigning With Grant, 210.

<sup>13</sup> Lyman, Meade's Headquarters, 170.

Artillery. In point of fact, the theory of a Federal reluctance to attack earthworks insults the thousands of brave men who did just that.

The Army of the Potomac did not capture Petersburg for many reasons. Throughout the four days, Federal staff errors intertwined with poor leadership and unsupported attacks, resulting in bloody Union failure. Yet underlying all the Federal blundering and mismanagement, of which there are countless examples, lay the spent physical condition of the army. Despite valiant efforts, an army, like a man, "cannot strike a full blow with a wounded hand."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



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