

"OUR PRINCIPAL LOSS WAS IN THIS PLACE"

Action at the Slaughter Pen and at the South End of Houck's Ridge

2 July 1863

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Gettysburg National Military Park
18 March 1984

SCANNED

10/4/01

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Devil's Den. The Round Tops. Slaughter Pen. Few words evoke instant recognition of the fighting at Gettysburg in 1863 as these do. Perhaps only the Angle and the Wheatfield rival them for instant association to the battle and the battlefield. The proximity of the four former sites to each other influenced the flow and events of the battle on 2 July 1863, and neither can necessarily be treated by narrative or physical development without considering the relationships and impacts to the integral parts. At various times the renown of each of the four sites has ebbed or magnified. The Round Tops and Slaughter Pen were photographed by those early chroniclers of the battlefield before the month of July 1863 dissipated--O'Sullivan, Gibson, Gardner, and Brady. Devil's Den was not. While Little Round Top retained its prominence because of the very nature of its visibly tactical importance, the Slaughter Pen slipped into virtual obscurity, aided by annual growth of foliage which occluded it as little more than part of Big Round Top's natural environment. The group of boulders at Devil's Den, on the other hand, was and has been assigned more significance than its battle relationship accorded it, and has become a premiere battlefield stop because of its geological attractions and stories of swarms of sharpshooters. Who could resist walking and clambering about the maze of immense boulders on a summer afternoon; who could not appreciate those legends of venerable American ancestors, plying their frontier trade with the squirrel rifles?

Yet the history of this small segment of the battlefield will show that the Devil's Den proved to be more of a hindrance to movement and position and was not an asset to either Union or Confederate armies at Gettysburg. The tide of the battle flowed around this bulwark, and any who stood on its huge boulders too long became an eventual target. The southwest end of Houck's Ridge, above Devil's Den, and not Devil's Den itself, was the anchor of the Federal defense by the Third Corps. The position of Smith's Battery, and of those infantrymen of the 124th New York and the 99th Pennsylvania should be heralded

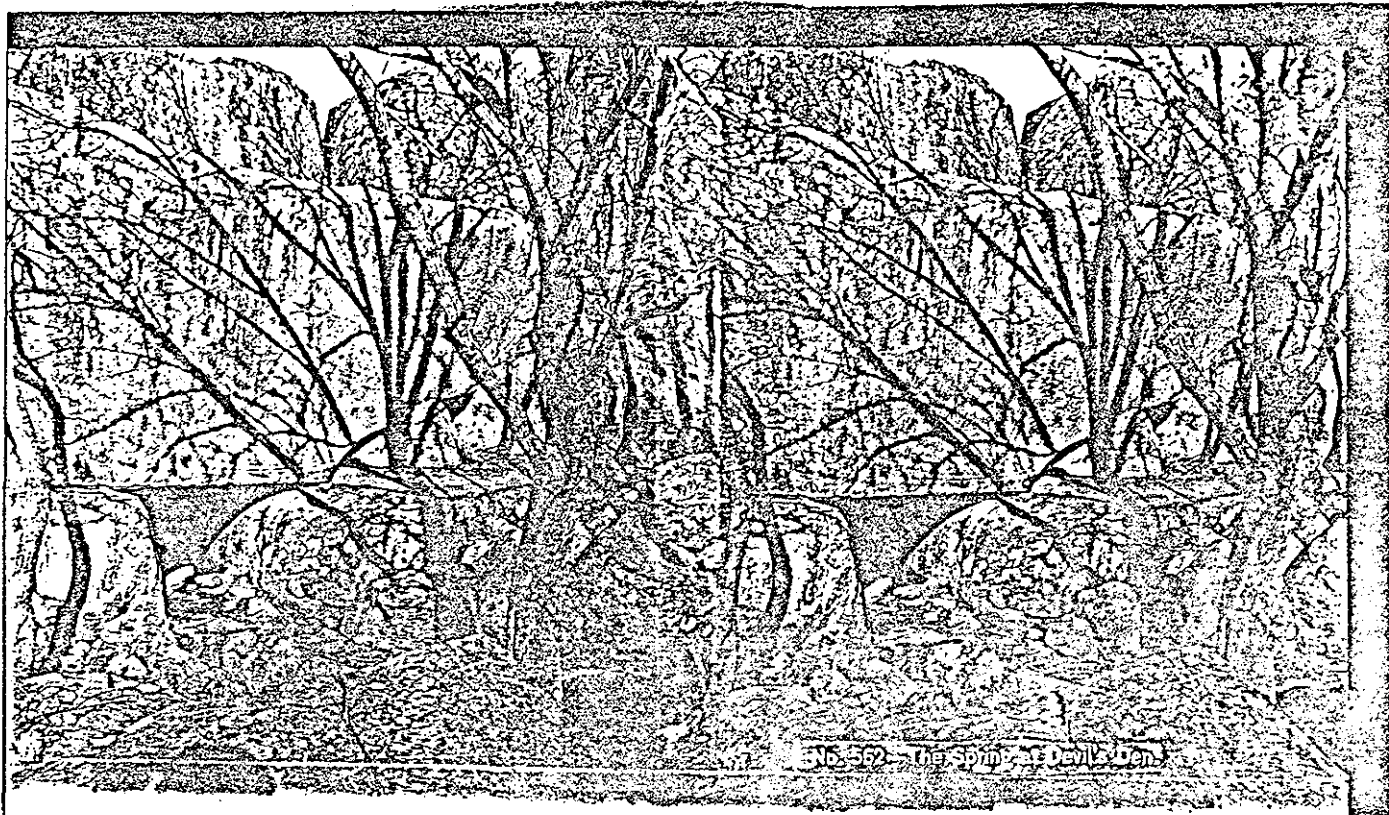
as the defensive rock and not relegated to a supporting role for the granitic rock beneath them to their left. The strewn boulders of Plum Run and the Slaughter Pen should be cleared of vegetation and made visible to the visitor as in 1863, when the site became a vast graveyard for Confederates from Alabama and Georgia, cut down by artillery and musketry fire from the Valley of Death. It was not Union dead in this valley which gave Plum Run the appellation of Bloody Run; it was the lifeblood of Lee's army that reddened the waters in their desperate attempt to turn the left flank of their enemy at Gettysburg.

The significance of the fighting in this area, the foot of Round Top (called Slaughter Pen, once again because of the numbers of Confederate dead who seemed to be literally slaughtered in that gorge) and the fields below the crest of Houck's Ridge, as well as its deadly character has heretofore not been compiled except in general terms. In most instances, the history of the area and the battle has not been site-related. The General Management Plan for Gettysburg National Military Park recommended the obliteration of a portion of Sickles Avenue and the construction of a Devil's Den by-pass, following the route of the old electric trolley bed through Slaughter Pen and below Houck's Ridge. This study is designed to record the battle events in the area of the proposed changes in the tour route so as to mitigate any impacts and to provide an interpretive base for the new by-pass route.

Before the two armies marched to Gettysburg from their different compass headings there was a Devil's Den. Although an early local resident never recollected hearing the name in his youth, he had heard stories about the place. He remembered the folks of the immediate farming community calling it "The Big Rocks" and "Raccoon Den" in the early decades of the nineteenth century. But he surely remembered stories of the den itself, a cave where once a bear dwelt before its encounter with a passing Indian. [Emmanuel Bushman in Gettysburg Compiler, 19 August 1884.] But others of the area had apparently called it Devil's Den since at least the 1840s, and the name was perpetuated in publications by Michael Jacobs shortly after the battle. [Gettysburg Compiler, 12 July 1887.] The earliest official battle-related reference to Devil's Den appears in Captain James Smith's report of the action of his New York Battery, filed 20 July 1863, in which he refers to his position on the hill at "Devil's Cave." [Official Records, vol. 27, part 1, p. 588.] According to John B. Bachelder, later acknowledged as the Government Historian of the battle because of long study of the conflict (dating from 5 July 1863), the name Devil's Den was a local designation antedating the battle. Indeed, the specific name "Devil's Den" was not a general terminology for the cluster of boulders at the southeast end of Houck's Ridge. The name itself referred literally to a den or cave within the rocks, which exists to this day. Bachelder stated, with as much truth for the 1890s as for the 1980s, that:

" . . . there is not one in one hundred who go there that ever go near it. The Devil's Den is seldom visited, and very few people know what it is. . . . The Devil's Den is a hole under ledges in which there is a spring. The front of it is masked by a big boulder, and you cannot see it until you get within ten feet of it. You see the rocks about there, and people go home and say they have seen the Devil's Den, but they have not been within a hundred yards of it. The Devil's Den is seldom visited by anyone The Devil's Den is not a new name; it was a name given to the locality before the battle. It is a gorge, or rather it

is a hole in the ground, and it is very difficult to get into it. There is a spring at its mouth, but those big rocks that stand up there are not the Devil's Den. . . . The whole gorge is the region of the Devil's Den, and the ridge in front of it, west of it, or rather the ridge which commencing at the Devil's Den extends northward, I have called in history the Rocky Ridge. . . ."
 [Testimony in the case of the US vs. a Certain Tract of Land in Cumberland Township, Adams County, State of Pennsylvania; Circuit Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, 3rd Circuit.]

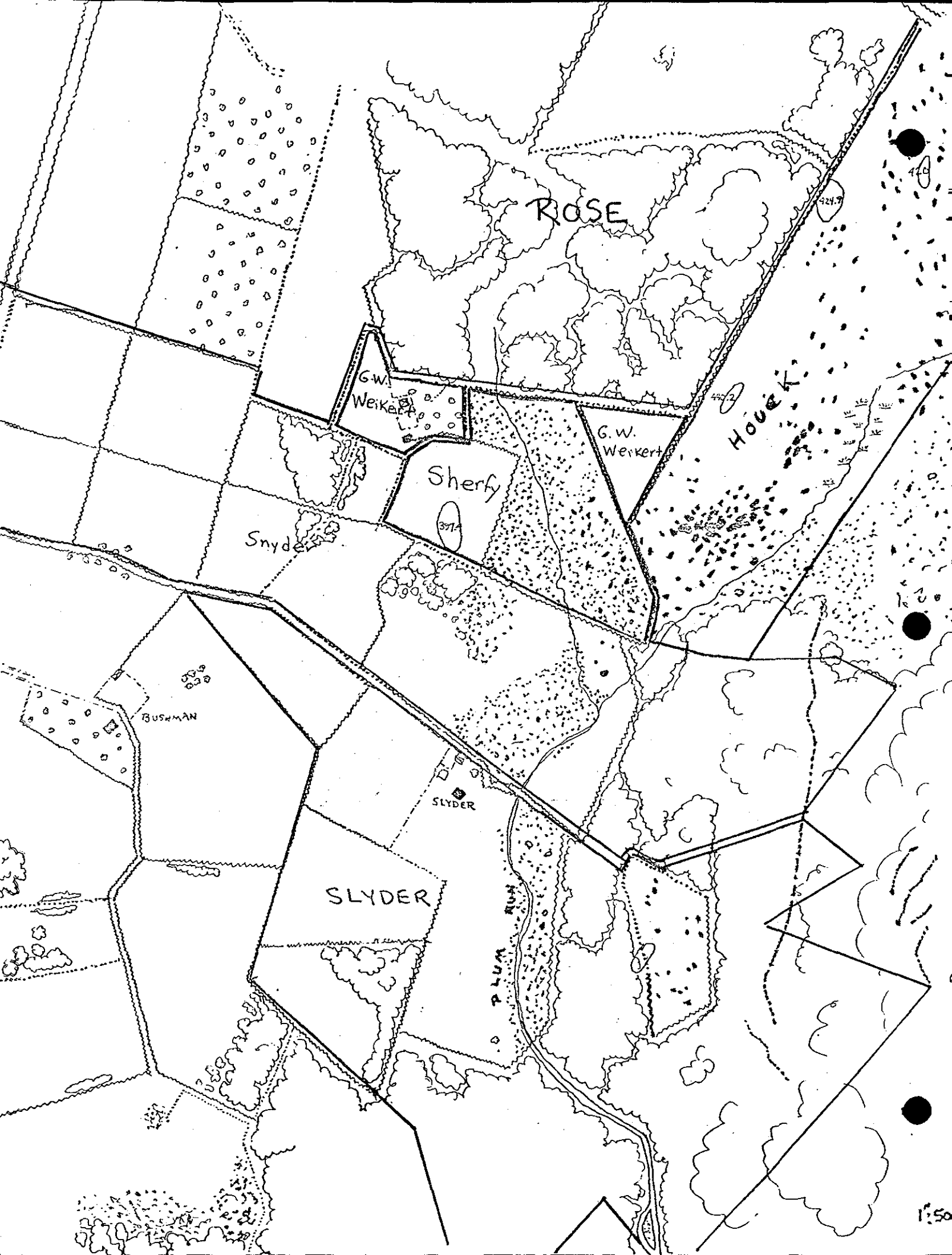


Tipton Stereo View. "The Spring at Devil's Den"

October Session, 1894, pp. 289-290.]

The spring mentioned by Bachelder appears in the above stereo photograph, but it has either been filled in or altered by avenue construction as it no longer flows. The black recesses of the small den, however, still summon up visions of a threatening demon dwelling within the caverns of this ancient stone formation.

The other sites and areas in the vicinity showed the effects of human use and development at that time in 1863 with the exception of Big Round Top. The woods of Big Round Top were natural in growth, the owner at one time publicly forbidding by fine any cutting of wood on his portion of the summit. Little



Round Top, on the other hand, had been subjected to the continuing pioneer spirit of taming a wilderness. Only a year or two before the battle the western face of it was cleared of marketable or usable timber by its owner. The steep eastern face was owned by Jacob Weikert in 1863; but the western face was owned by Ephraim Hanaway. Hanaway owned the acreage extending westward down the slope of Little Round Top to Plum Run. John Houck had purchased the 47 acres west of Plum Run with a business partner fifteen years before the battle, and apparently had cleared the area from Wheatfield Road southward to Devil's Den and the Slaughter Pen and from Plum Run to his western boundary at Rose Woods and the Wheatfield. Almost the entirety of his 47 acres was clear-cut at the time of the battle. Houck, like Hanaway, lived in the borough of Gettysburg and had no improvements on this township property. He apparently leased it during the growing months to other Gettysburg residents for pasture use of their animals. Another visible indication of man's purposeful hand in this area owned by Houck was the "Trough Rock". A trough to accumulate rain water was cut or blasted into the ledge of a large boulder by someone previous to the battle. This large boulder, just north of the comfort station at the present trolley bed appeared in an 1863 O'Sullivan photograph, with the line of the trough clearly visible therein. Perhaps Houck had the trough cut for the animals in the pasture to trap rain water when Plum Run was low or dry.

The morning of 2 July 1863 most likely dawned over these four sites with little indication of the furious activity that would occur there before the same sun set. The previous day, a battle between advance elements of the Southern Army of Northern Virginia and the Northern Army of the Potomac took place some distance north and northwest of the Plum Run area. When the impetus of and flanking attacks of Lee's Southern army dislodged the Union line, the survivors fell back to the heights just south of the town of Gettysburg. During the night, after the conflict ended, more men from both armies approached and took position on the battlefield. On the Union side, cavalry was thrown out as pickets guarding the left flank along the Emmitsburg Road extending from about the Klingel Farm southward to the Rose Farm. The reinforcements from Hancock's Second Corps and parts of the retreated First Corps filled in a line from the Cemetery Hill southward along Cemetery Ridge to the area of Patterson Woods. Sickles' Third Corps further extended the line to the left and parts of the

Twelfth Corps held the northern slope of Little Round Top that night. When the Twelfth Corps vacated the position in the morning to protect the threatened Union right flank at Culp's Hill, it was assumed that the Third Corps would continue to occupy the left, including the aforementioned north slope of Little Round Top. Indeed, General Geary stated later that he never would have abandoned so strategic a position as Little Round Top, as ordered, had he not expected to be replaced in line.

The Third Corps line, however, did not replace the Twelfth Corps line, but remained in the extension of the lowlands of the Valley of Death, between Patterson Woods and near the George Weikert Farm. As morning wore on, Sickles became more concerned about the defensability of his position, because of the elevated grounds to his front and west along the Emmitsburg Road ridge, where enemy artillery could take advantage of his position. Since a heavy force of his skirmishers were already out in that area, he authorized a reconnoissance in force into the woods opposite the Emmitsburg Road ridge to ascertain whether or not the enemy was indeed intending to extend the line in that direction and threaten Sickles' position. When the skirmishers discovered the approach of a Confederate division moving southward, it was enough to convince Sickles to abandon his weaker position and move to the elevated grounds to his front.

After noon, Sickles ordered a new line for his corps: the right along the Emmitsburg Road and then turning eastward at Sherfy's Peach Orchard, through the Wheatfield and Rose Woods with the left resting at the southern terminus of Houck's Ridge. Almost 11,000 Union troops manned this mile-and-a-half front; in some places there was no infantry at all, as at the Wheatfield Road, where artillery filled the line.

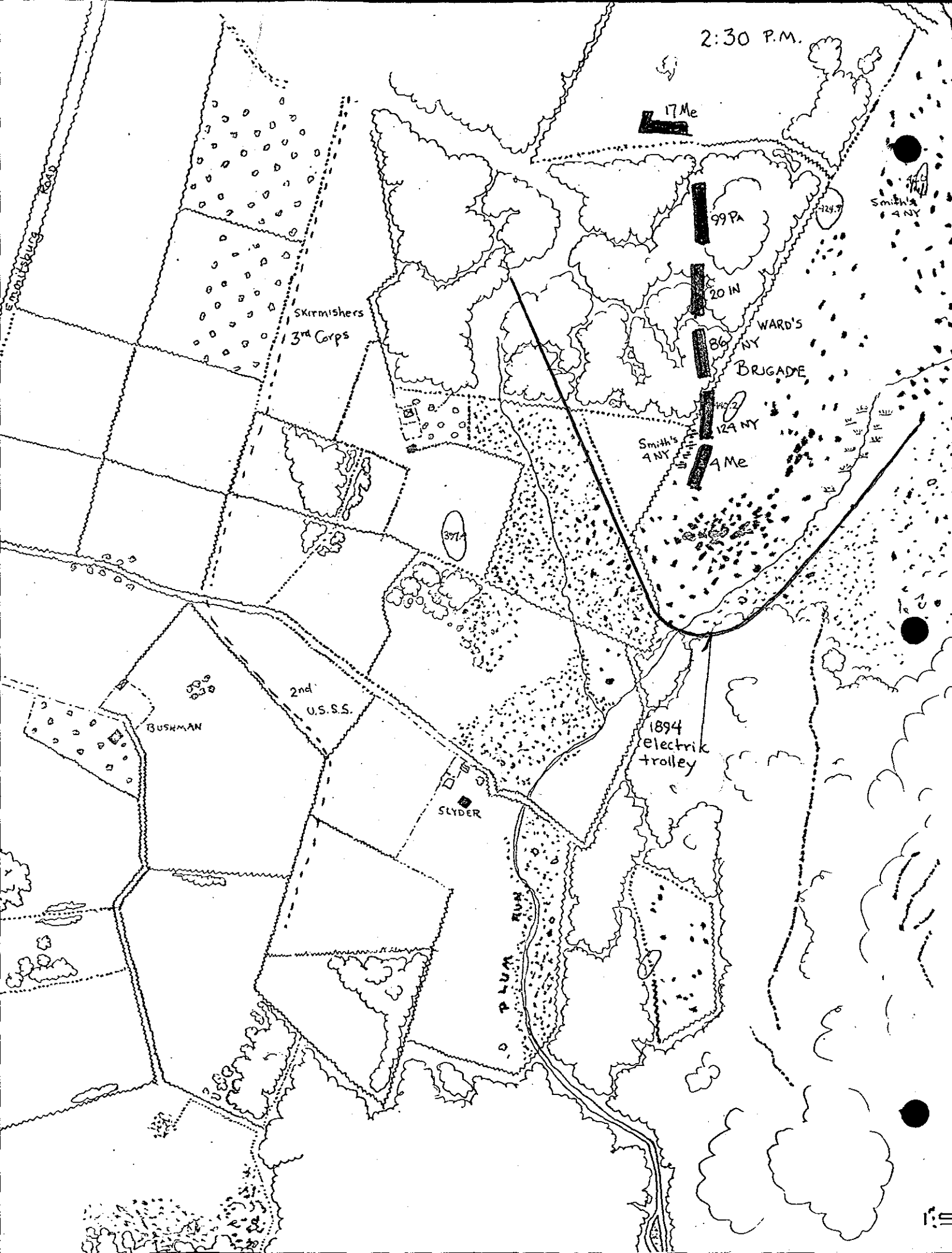
The left was defended by troops of Hobart Ward's Brigade---the 20th Indiana, the 4th Maine, the 86th and 124th New York, and the 99th Pennsylvania Regiments, as well as the sharpshooters under Berdan. The deployment of regimental skirmishers and the sharpshooters would prove to be essential in the defense of Sickles' line. The sharpshooters themselves consisted of fewer than 200 men, but they were effectively strengthened by skirmishers from almost every brigade in Sickles' line, and they were thrown out as much as 300 to 500 yards in advance of the main line, using the stone walls of the Rose, Snyder, and Snyder Farms as breastwork defences. In the interval between these skirmishers and the line of the extreme left at Devil's Den, were the fields of the Snyder and G. W.

Weikert (Timbers) farms as well as the swampy woodlot of the Sherfy Farm. Most of this low area was swampy and drained into Plum Run, which ran in a north-south direction from the Devil's Den area, and made a gorge or valley at its northern junction at Devil's Den because of the slopes of Big Round Top rising above it to the east.

The anchor of Sickles' left was Smith's 4th New York Battery, composed of six 10-pounder Parrott rifles. The chief of the corps artillery, Captain G. E. Randolph, personally led the New Yorkers to this end of Houck's Ridge, and ordered Smith to "find location thereon." From the distance created by the huge boulders at the Den to Rose Woods, Smith felt he had insufficient room to locate the entire battery. Therefore, he placed two sections only "on the crest" and the remaining two guns in the rear. Since the four front guns could not be depressed enough to cover any Confederate advance through the Plum Run gorge between Round Top and the ridge, the two rear guns were trained on the run's passage through the gorge, to the south and below the southern crest of Houck's Ridge. [James E. Smith, A Famous Battery and its Campaigns, 1861-'64.

Washington: W. H. Lowdermilk and Co., 1892, pp. 101-102.] The Union chief of artillery himself, General Hunt, visited the important position after the guns were deployed to order the front sections of open fire immediately on the guns of Cabell's Battalion, which had been pummeling the Peach Orchard position of Sickles' line, and to draw off some of that fire. Hunt's post-battle assessment was that these shots from Smith's Parrotts "very much interfered with the enemy's batteries, and relieved our right a great deal from their fire." [Committee on the Conduct of the War, Army of the Potomac, p. 450.] The post-battle report from Cabell's Battalion reflected the effectiveness of Smith's fire, in that it was supposed by the Confederates that there was more than one battery opposing their fire from the direction of the "mountain." Since Smith's Battery was the only Union battery on this end of the line during the artillery duel, there could have been only one battery occupying the "mountain," or heights, at the left of Sickles' line, and only one battery opposing Cabell's guns. Cabell, however, reported that the "enemy occupied a rocky mountain with several batteries," and because of their respective positions he was exposed to "a flanking fire from the enemy's mountain batteries." The deadliness and extent of this duel between Cabell's Battalion and the batteries along the Third Corps front

2:30 P.M.



17 Me

99 PA

20 IN

86 NY

WARD'S
BRIGADE

124 NY

4 Me

Smith's
4 NY

1894
electric
trolley

SLYDER

2nd
U.S.S.

BUSHMAN

Skirmishers
13th Corps

397

PLUM RUN

was reported by this Confederate battalion chief:

"The battalion, being first to open fire, received for a short time a concentrated fire from the enemy's batteries. The fire from our lines and from the enemy became incessant, rendering it necessary for us sometimes to pause and allow the smoke to clear away, in order to enable the gunners to take aim. During the same time, two guns were ordered to play upon the batteries on the stony mountain--I have reason to believe with great effect.

The loss of my battalion was very heavy during this cannonading. Captain Fraser, who had always in previous engagements, as in this, set an example of the highest courage, coolness, and gallantry, fell, dangerously wounded by the bursting of a shell. The same shell killed 2 sergeants and 1 man. . . ."
[Official Records, vol. 27, part 2, p. 375.]

However, Smith's gunners and his infantry supports were subjected to the return fire, which Smith assessed as "astonishing" in accuracy. [Smith, pp. 101-102.]

In support of Smith was the left of Ward's Brigade of infantry. Immediately to his rear were the "Orange Blossoms" of the 124th New York Infantry and the 4th Maine Infantry regiments. The 4th Maine originally occupied a place which put the battery to their "front and centre", but they would later be removed to a position to the left as the battle progressed. [Maine at Gettysburg, pp. 180-181.] While Smith was later pleased with the performance of his own gunners throughout this "trial of skill between artillerists" [Smith, p. 102], observers of the handiwork from the New York Battery were equally positive with their praise. In fact, it is from infantry accounts of Smith's supports that most of the battle history of the battery can be found.

The infantry supports, however, did not have such a glorious record previous to or during this cannonading. Both regiments supporting Smith's Battery admitted negligence on their part of not strengthening their position before a potential attack. The 4th Maine came into position behind Smith and spent its time satisfying a ravenous appetite:

"It was now 3 o'clock and my men were hungry, having drunk water for supper, breakfast and dinner. Fires were kindled, a heifer was found near by and slaughtered, coffee was steeped and beef impaled on sticks and warmed over the blaze. We drank our coffee and ate the very rare and thoroughly smoked meat, sprinkling it with salt, of which condiment every soldier carried a little in his pocket."
[Maine at Gettysburg, p. 181.]

The heifer may have come from one of three places in the vicinity--the pasture at the lower end of the Wheatfield to their right, the G. W. Weikert (Timbers) Farm to their front, or perhaps from the Houck's Ridge area itself, which was used as pasture. Indeed, the 99th Pennsylvania (who would eventually be moved into the same position of the 4th Maine after that regiment was relocated) sent out a detail while on duty in this general vicinity during the early hours of their occupation, to satisfy "the great demand for rations". This detail found a beef and had it killed, but the men never got a chance to eat this one, since the fight began before it could be distributed. [Pennsylvania at Gettysburg, volume 1, p. 537.]

The 124th New York, with its right extending just into Rose Woods behind Smith, spent its time before the battle opened conserving its energies for the fight:

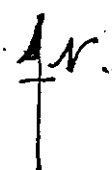
"We had not yet learned the inestimable value of breastworks, and instead of spending our time rolling loose stones into a bullet-proof line, we lounged about on the grass and rocks, quietly awaiting the coming shock, which many declared themselves ready and anxious to receive. But there were undoubtedly those among us who ardently wished and perhaps secretly prayed that when the battle opened, it might rage the most furiously along some other portion of the line."
[New York at Gettysburg, volume 2, p. 868.]

It seems rather astonishing to realize that troops that were assigned to guard the left of Meade's army were not preparing for a possible attack or flanking movement. It is most likely that, since there was no evidence of Confederate infantry concentration on their front until Cabell's Battalion opened, the men on this part of the Third Corps line had reason to believe the fury of the attack would indeed rage "along some other portion of the line."

When the 124th New York was subjected to the pre-attack artillery duel, however, the lounging on the ground ceased. The proximity of the New York infantry regiment to the battery drew fire on these foot soldiers as well. According to a member of the regiment, the left company (B) was within about "two rods" of the battery, which was slightly to the left and front of the regiment. When Smith took position in front of them, the 124th was in position to witness their actions:

99th
PA

200'



UNION POSITIONS
c. 2:30-3:00 p.m.

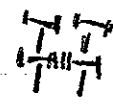
20th
IND

86th
NY

124th
NY

Smith's
4th NY

4th Me



DEVIL'S

PHUM

DEN

RUN

1894

trolley

right-of-way

Rose

". . . It was where we could see every movement and hear every order. It had hardly taken position before a rebel battery on the Emmitsburg Road opened on it. Smith's battery responded in gallant style. The rebels then brought two more batteries of six guns each in position, nearly in front of our regiment and not half a mile distant. Their efforts to silence Smith's battery made our position almost untenable. Our Colonel (Ellis) moved us by the right-flank into the woods on which our right rested,

"I judge he thought after he had got us in there that instead of the woods being a protection they made our new position more hazardous than the one we had just abandoned. We were soon moved by the left flank back to our old position, Co. B resting within a few feet of Smith's battery. During all this time the cannonading was going on incessantly from 100 pieces along the lines on each side. It lasted for about an hour. There were several casualties in our regiment from the enemy's shells."

[A. W. Tucker, "Orange Blossoms," National Tribune. (21 January 1886).]

According to both Captain Smith and members of the 124th New York, the firing ended at about 3 p.m. "as by mutual consent." [Tucker, "Orange Blossoms."] A "breathing spell" of almost half an hour elapsed before additional activity on the part of the Confederates evidenced the attack. On the Confederate side, Hood's Division had barely established position before they commenced the attack. Law's Brigade, among the last to arrive at its line of battle, had marched over 25 miles without rest to reach the field. Immediately upon getting into position the pioneer corps of Law's Brigade passed to the front of the 4th Alabama and proceeded to fell the timber there with their axes. The activity drew Smith's fire, which killed several men in the 5th Texas, just to the left of Law's Brigade. However, one of the batteries of Henry's Battalion, probably Reilly's Rowan Artillery, immediately occupied the newly cleared space and returned fire. [Captain W. C. Ward, "Incidents and Personal Experiences on the Battlefield of Gettysburg," Confederate Veteran Magazine (August 1900), p. 347.]

While the supporting brigades of Benning and Anderson were deployed in rear to support Law and Robertson respectively, the weary Alabamians were permitted about one-half hour to relax. [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 395.] This would correspond with the half-hour lull witnessed across the valley by the men in blue on Houck's Ridge between 3:00 and 3:30.

During that time, the regimental commanders of (at least) Law's Brigade were informed that they would not be permitted to undertake the attack on horseback, but would have to go in on foot. At least one objected in later years to the wisdom of this decree, believing that he at least would have been more effective had he been permitted to ride until the "rugged ground Beyond the valley was reached." Colonel Perry of the 44th Alabama believed that three out of the five regimental commanders in Law's Brigade were prostrated by exhaustion and fatigue before the battle closed. [William F. Perry, "The Devil's Den," Confederate Veteran Magazine (April 1901), p. 161.]

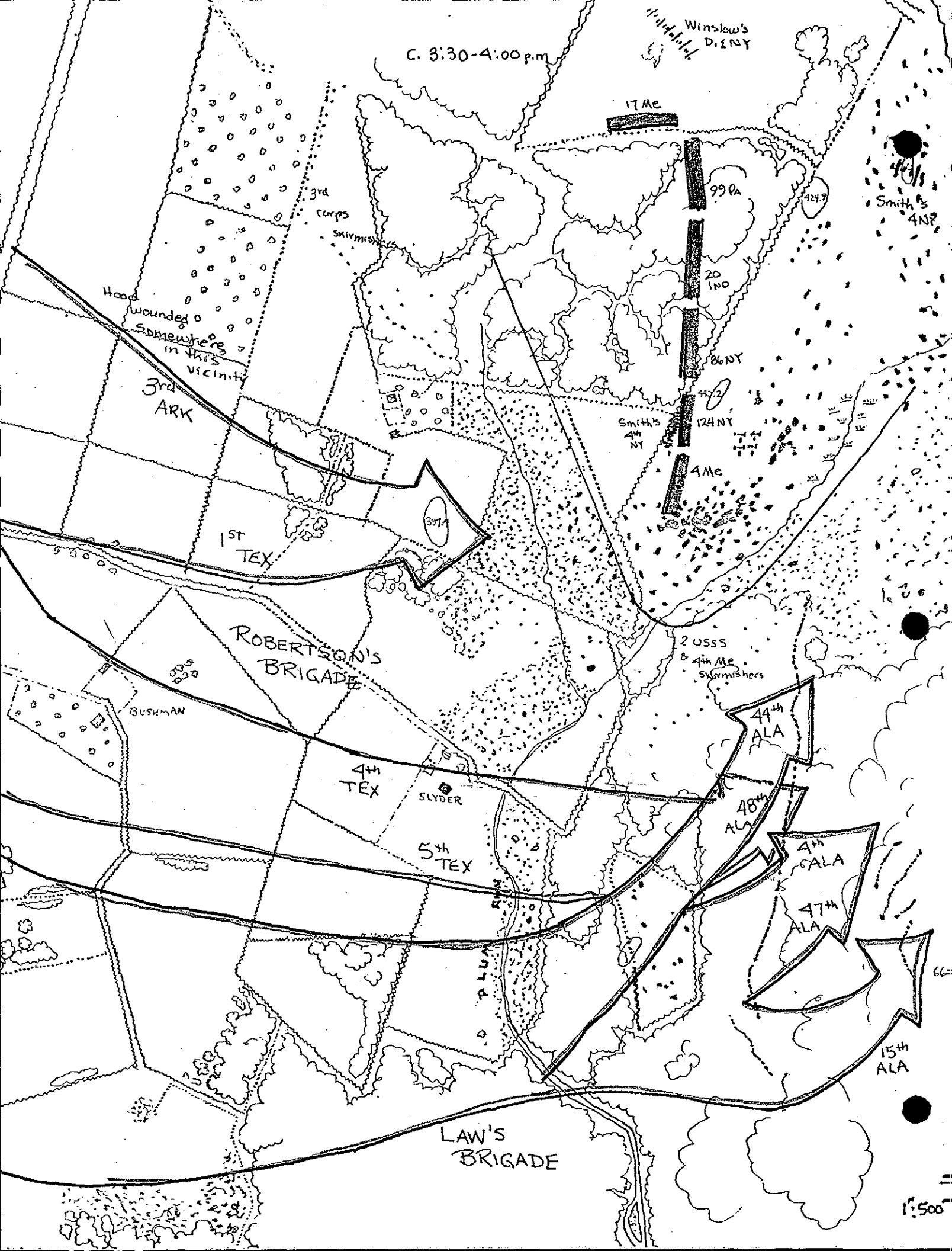
Before long, Law's adjutant general, Lee Terrell, rode to the front of the 4th Alabama Regiment and gave them the order to come to attention. According to a member of the regiment:

"The men sprang to their feet, their guns at an order. The thought that passed through the mind of the soldier was: 'O God, just for a half hour's rest!' As soon as we were at attention, the command was, 'Shoulder arms!' and then, 'Right shoulder; shift arms!' and then, 'Forward; guide center; march!' Then arose that wild, indescribable battle yell that no one having heard ever forgot. The men sprang forward as if at a game of ball. The air was full of sound. A long line of Federal skirmishers, protected by a stone wall, immediately opened fire. Grape and canister from the Federal battery hurtled over us as we descended the hill into the valley. We rushed through our own battery while it was firing and receiving the fire from the enemy's guns. Men were falling, stricken to death. . . . The younger officers made themselves conspicuous by rushing to the front, commanding and urging the men to come on, while Adjutant General Terrell was doing what he could to restrain the impetuosity of the Fourth Alabama, calling on the men to observe the Fifth Texas---how orderly they were marching to the charge. In the din of battle we could hear the charges of canister passing over us with the noise of partridges in flight. Immediately to the right, Taylor Darwin, Orderly Sergeant of Company I, suddenly stopped, quivered, and sank to the earth dead, a ball having passed through his brain. There was Rube Franks, of the same company, just returned from his home in Alabama, his new uniform bright with color, the envy of all his comrades, his gladsome face beaming as if his sweetheart's kiss had materialized on his lips, calling to his comrades: 'Come on boys; come on! The Fifth Texas will get there before the Fourth! Come on boys; come on!' He

shortly afterwards met the fatal shot. There was Billy Marshall, running neck and neck with this private soldier, each striving to be the first at the stone fence, behind which lay protected the Federal line of skirmishers, firing into the faces of the advancing Confederates."
[Ward, p. 347.]

On the left of the 4th Alabama was the 5th Texas of Robertson's Brigade, an obvious rival in prowess on the battlefield. Yet Adjutant Terrell pointed out how orderly the Texans were marching in comparison to Scrugg's 4th Alabamians, who were tearing down the slopes from the ridge towards the Bushman and Slyder Farm buildings. The difference was also noted by General J. B. Robertson, commanding the left brigade of Hood's front line. Since Robertson's orders were to keep his left regiment, the 3rd Arkansas, "on the Emmitsburg Road" and not to leave it unless it was necessary due to the progression of the battle, he was concentrating on keeping his brigade properly aligned to coordinate with the attack by the next division to the left, that of McLaws. As it turned out, the 3rd Arkansas did hold to the Emmitsburg Road for quite some distance, with the 1st Texas clinging to its right flank, as required by their particular orders. Unfortunately, in order to keep touch with Law, the two right regiments drifted off to the right, in the direction of Law's attack.

Years afterward, Robertson complained to Bachelder that he thought Law started charging too prematurely. [J. B. Robertson to John B. Bachelder, 11 May 1882. New Hampshire Historical Society.] One can only speculate as to why and how the attack by successive brigades broke down at the very outset. Law pulled Robertson off of the Emmitsburg Road anchor by his movements toward Big Round Top; his sweeping arc was obviously wider than anticipated by Lee and as ordered by Hood. Yet Law had insisted before the attack that the Round Tops were the key and should be taken; one wonders whether Law stretched the meaning of orders, or perhaps disobeyed his instructions, to pursue his individual campaign. In any case, Hood was wounded and disabled almost immediately after the charge began while with the left of Robertson's Brigade, and there was no one but the individual brigade commanders in the division to correct any problems with alignment or coordination. It was probably not until Law's forces approached the very threshold of the Union



C. 3:30-4:00 p.m.

Winslow's
D.I. NY

17 Me

99 Pa

20 IND

86 NY

124 NY

4 Me

Smith's
4th NY

2 USSS
& 4th Me
Swimmers

ROBERTSON'S
BRIGADE

1ST
TEX

4th
TEX

SLYDER

5th
TEX

BUSHMAN

LAW'S
BRIGADE

44th
ALA

48th
ALA

4th
ALA

47th
ALA

15th
ALA

Hood
wounded
somewhere
in this
vicinity

3rd
ARK

1:500

line that division command was turned over to Law. At that point it was too late to rectify the battle lines to comply with General Lee's intended order of battle. The entire attack of 2 July as planned by Lee was thus disjointed at the initiation of the attack.

As Law and Robertson advanced from Bushman Ridge, through the plowed and farmed fields of the Bushman and Slyder Farms, they made easy targets for the four rifled guns of Smith's Battery and for the sharpshooters and skirmishers at the stone wall in the valley. The captain of the New York battery remembered how his cannon were used to "oppose and cripple this attack and check it as far as possible." He could not remember when his men served their pieces so effectively as during this advance by Hood's Division, [Smith, p. 103] the first hint of whom was the "clouds of Confederate skirmishers" emerging from Bushman Woods, followed by the heavy lines of infantry. [Maine at Gettysburg, p. 161.] His infantry support witnessed the attack and the defensive measures taken by the New York battery. General Ward would remember the Confederate skirmishers, the first heavy line of infantry of Law and Robertson marching to oppose his line, and then the massed columns of Benning and Anderson in support emerging from Bushman Woods. It must have been unnerving to know that four guns (plus the bronze guns of Winslow in the Wheatfield) and a single line of infantry were all he had to oppose them. The 7000 Southerners massed for attack on his front would be a challenge to the 2000 defenders, but the brigade was determined to hold until relieved.

The men of the 4th Maine saw Law on the right of the Confederate line moving directly towards the Round Tops, while Robertson's left was aiming toward the apparent left of the Union line at the Devil's Den. [Maine at Gettysburg, p. 160.] As the two enemy brigades swept through the Slyder Farm, the sharpshooters under Homer Stoughton, who initially checked the enemy's advance, were falling back, [Ibid., p. 181] through the lines of the 4th Maine.

The 124th New York also watched as the Confederate brigades came at them from the opposite slope. They also were mindful of the weakness of

their single line as they watched the "overwhelming" display of superior numbers by Hood. They deployed into "four distinct lines of battle" as they manfully came on under Smith's fire. [New York at Gettysburg, volume 1, p. 869.] Law and Robertson's 4th and 5th Texas made one of these lines; the 3rd Arkansas and 1st Texas with Robertson himself made a second; and the two supporting brigades of Benning and Anderson the remaining two lines of battle. The men of the Orange Blossoms recalled the "splendid service" of Smith during this advance, while they lay in line of battle, with guns loaded and ready:

"The guns were worked to their utmost. The heroic Captain gave every order in a clear, distinct tone, that could be heard above the tumult. I heard him tell his gunners to give them five and six-second fuse, and when the gunners told him the case shot and shrapnel were all gone, he said,

'Give them shell; give them solid shot; d--n them, give them anything!'"

[Tucker, "Orange Blossoms."]

A sergeant of the regiment recalled the service of Smith's Battery as it changed from shell to canister, tearing "gap after gap through the ranks of the advancing foe," while Smith and his men were exposed to the increasing fire of the Confederate sharpshooters and from the front infantry line as it advanced. Since the limber chests were at the base of Houck's Ridge, behind Devil's Den and his battery (since Smith could not find a suitable location for them on the crowded crest), every round of ammunition had to be carried from there to the guns. "Man after man went down, but still the exhausting work went steadily on, the officers tirelessly falling in to fill out and work detail for the guns, and keeping up a well-directed fire" until the Confederates reached the base of the heights, and the 4th New York could not depress the guns enough to reach them. [Thomas W. Bradley, "At Gettysburg," National Tribune (4 February 1886).]

Because of the nature of the Confederate advance, Smith was rightly concerned for the protection of his guns. It was quite apparent that Law's Brigade would overlap their position on the left, and Smith implored Colonel Walker of the 4th Maine to move to the left and take a position to protect the battery and the remainder of Ward's Brigade from being turned. Walker had already sent out about 70 men to assist the sharpshooters and the other

c. 3:30-4:00 p.m.

99th
PA

1" = 200'

20th
IND

86th
NY

Smith's
4th NY

124th
NY

Co. F

4th
ME

DEVIL'S

DEVELOP

Run

189A

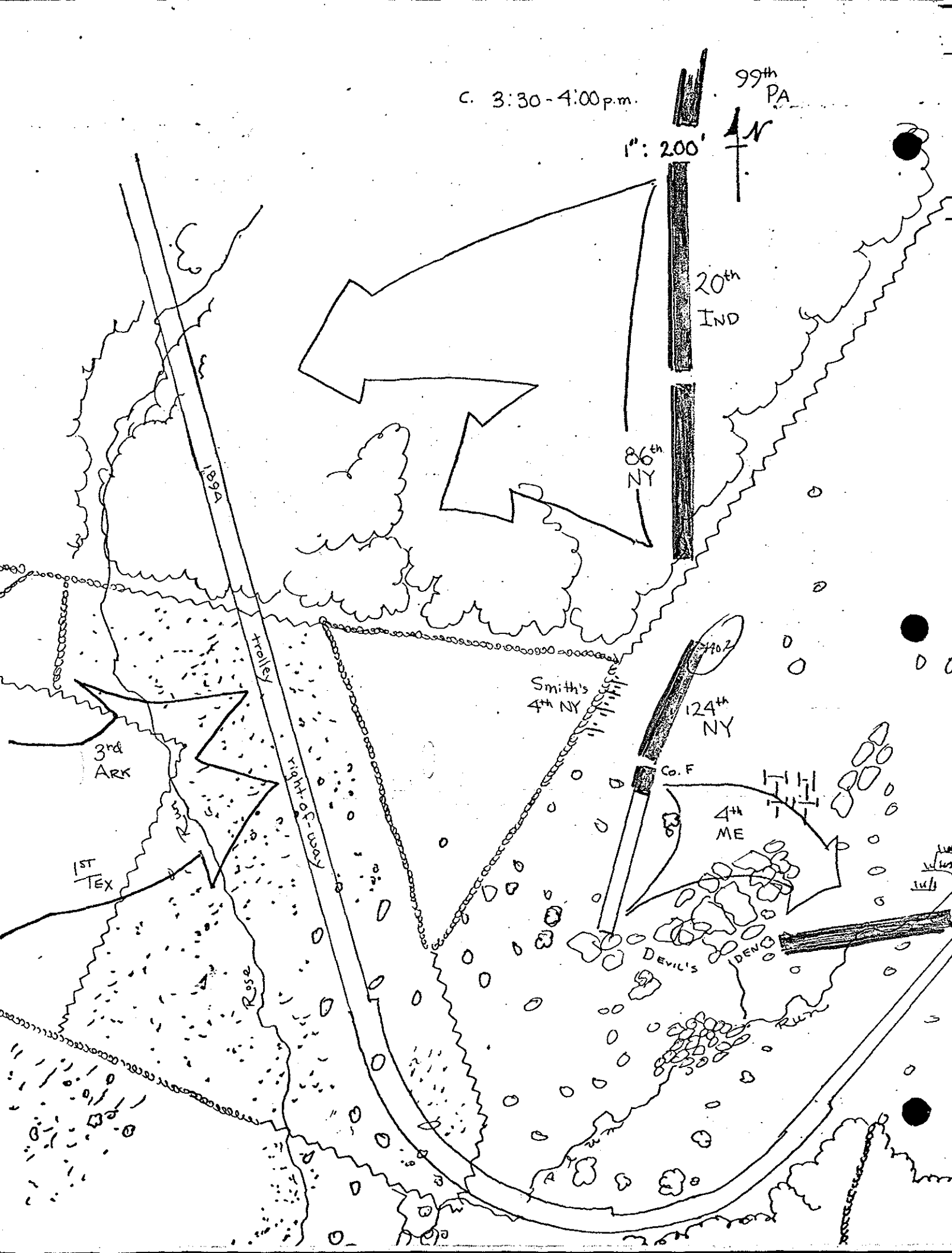
trolley

right-of-way

3rd
ARK

1st
TEX

Rose

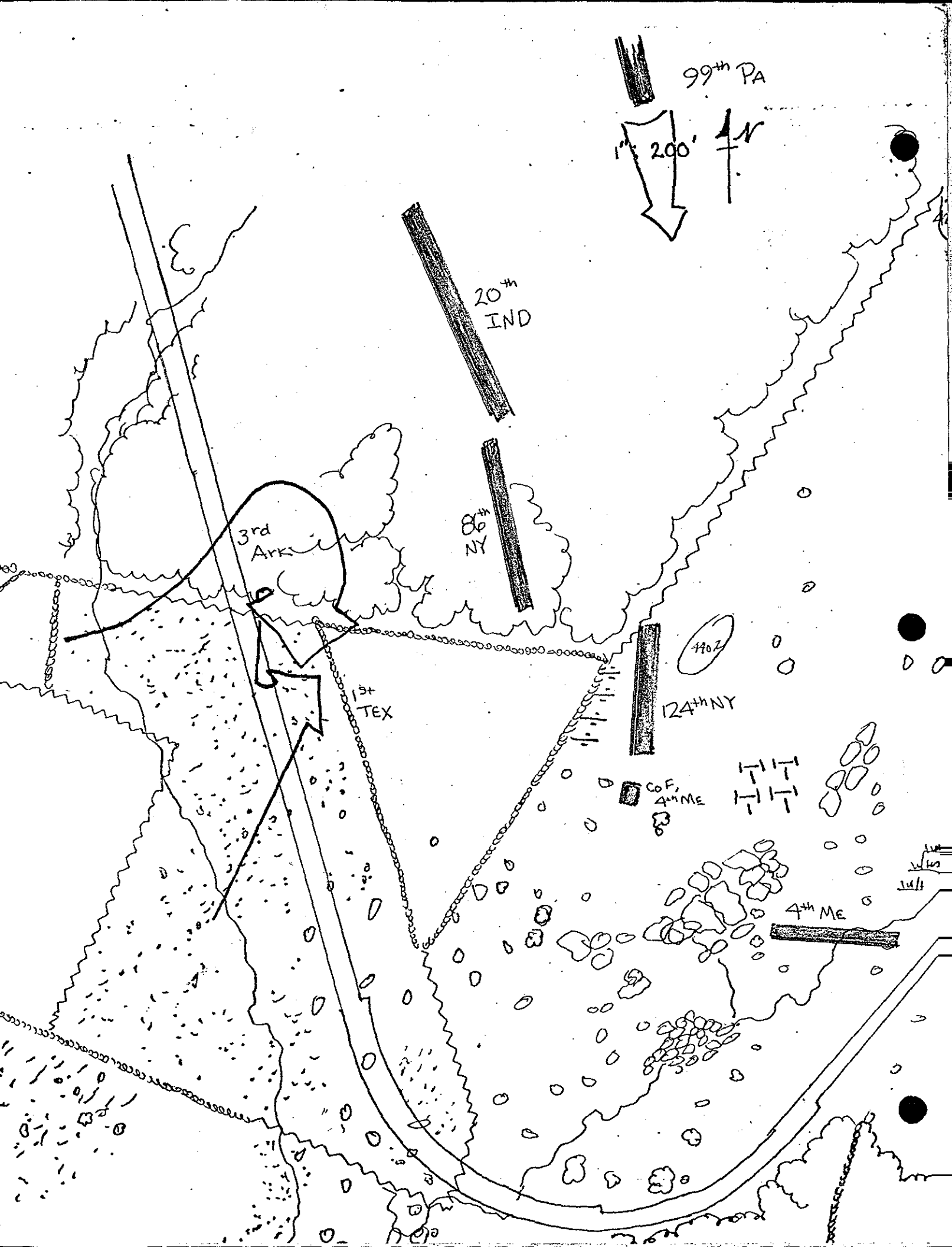


skirmishers of the brigade in the direction of the Slyder Farm, and felt that they were helping delay Hood's advance sufficiently until supports from the Fifth Corps could come up on Walker's left. [Maine at Gettysburg, p. 161.] Indeed, he pointed to a force, probably that of Vincent's Brigade, coming up on his left, which he surmised would form a junction with his line at the Devil's Den. He also had no desire to move to the low ground of Plum Run gorge, where he could be exposed to a flanking fire from cover of the wooded heights of lower Big Round Top. He felt he could more effectively defend the battery from the heights of Houck's Ridge, overlooking the Plum Run gorge, than by attempting to face a frontal attack by superior numbers within the gorge itself. He was adamant in refusing "to go into that den unless obliged to," and Captain Smith went personally to General Ward to get Walker's 4th Maine to comply. Ward ordered Walker to the left, below Devil's Den, through his adjutant general Captain John Moore Cooney, while Walker continued to remonstrate "with all the power of speech" he could summon. But he was forced to obey because it was a military order, and he so stated to Cooney. [Elijah Walker to John B. Bachelder, 6 January 1886, New Hampshire Historical Society.]

Somehow, Walker was able to leave one company (F) on the crest of Houck's Ridge near Smith's guns while the rest of the 4th Maine Regiment moved down into the ravine beside the massive boulders of the Devil's Den. [Official Records, volume 27, part 1, p. 509.] He immediately sent out scouts to his left to keep him abreast of every movement of the enemy from that direction, where the woods obscured his view. But he would soon learn more from the retreating sharpshooters in his front than he could from his scouts, as the related that Law was advancing on the wooded hill of the "Devil's Kitchen" to outflank him. Walker's suspicions were confirmed.

At the same time that the 4th Maine was deploying into the gorge (near the present parking area and comfort station), the 99th Pennsylvania was being summoned from Ward's right, in Rose Woods near the Wheatfield, to take the place of the New England regiment in support of Smith.

And at the base of the hill in front of Smith, where a stone wall enclosed the western side of the triangular field of G. W. Weikert (later Timbers), Confederates prepared to attack Smith. Captain Smith, who had ordered Walker



to the left and assured him he could take care of his own front without the assistance of the Maine infantrymen, must have regretted his choice of words. For now he had only the 124th New York in his rear, with the few men of the F Company which remained from Walker's command, and his guns could not be used to fire down so steep a slope.

These Confederates were with Robertson---the 1st Texas and the 3rd Arkansas. The Arkansas regiment, however, was having its own problems and could not devote any attention to the taking of Smith's Battery. The advance had exposed the left flank of the regiment to the concentrated fire from the right of Ward's Brigade (the 20th Indiana, 86th New York, and 99th Pennsylvania) as well as from the 17th Maine in the lower end of the Wheatfield. The 3rd Arkansas was forced to retire to a point almost a hundred yards to the rear in order to "preserve and protect its left flank," and thus uncovered and exposed the left of the 1st Texas. Lieutenant-Colonel Work dispatched Company G of his Texas regiment to assist the Arkansas force in driving back the enemy from "their threatening position" on the left. Robertson's left was unsupported, Anderson and Benning being delayed in their movements (according to Robertson, up to one hour). Without the support of troops on his left, Robertson was forced to devote most of his energies and all of those of the 3rd Arkansas to protecting his flank. [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 408.]

This took the momentum out of Robertson's attack on the battery. Yet, these preparations were momentary, and to the Federals on the crest of the hill it seemed as if the Texas regiment had merely halted "a few seconds, as if to catch its breath," before rushing at them "with a fierce, charging yell." [New York at Gettysburg, volume 2, p. 869.]

What followed in the next hour or hour and a half was one of the most desperate encounters on the battlefield of Gettysburg, with close mortal combat between participants for that entire duration. The lengthy but almost bloodless delaying tactics of Buford on the first day of the battle have gained historical significance in the story of the battle; the dramatic and drastic final assault by Lee on 3 July is known by every school child. But neither of these heralded actions could possibly compare to the upcoming

events at the southern end of Houck's Ridge and in the Slaughter Pen. The tide of battle for Smith's Battery changed so often and so rapidly that this action rivals that at the Wheatfield for not only drama and significance, but in confusion of eyewitness accounts and sequential narrative. Whereas at the Wheatfield troops from three Union corps were needed to hold back Anderson, Semmes, and Kershaw's Brigades, only Third Corps troops were used to hold this vital point against portions of Law and Robertson's Brigades, and later Benning's Georgia Brigade. In total, six Union infantry regiments alone would be responsible for guarding the left of the line, assisted by the companies of the U.S. Sharpshooters and Smith's gunners. The Union line here never connected with that which developed on Little Round Top to face Law's main force and that of the 4th and 5th Texas. The Plum Run gorge became the soft underbelly of the Union line and the best possible place for the Confederates to exploit a breakthrough which could take Smith's guns from the rear and completely outflank Ward, and its defense thus became a vital necessity if the Union line as advanced by Sickles was to remain intact.

Of these six Union regiments (86th New York, 124th New York, 99th Pennsylvania, 4th Maine, 6th New Jersey, and 40th New York) one (86th New York) was primarily involved in fighting the 3rd Arkansas in Rose Woods and is not within the scope of the area of the study, although its contributions must be mentioned in conjunction with the other five units because of its impact on the defense of Smith's guns in that they drew the power of the 3rd Arkansas from the attack on the guns and caused Robertson to call for assistance from Anderson on his left. It would be Anderson and the 3rd Arkansas that would initiate the spread of the battle all along Sickles' line, beginning at the Wheatfield. The combined Union force defending this original left of the line totalled about 2300 men, and would face over 3000 men from Alabama, Texas, Georgia, and Arkansas. [John Busey and David Martin, Regimental Strengths at Gettysburg (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1982), pp. 50, 51, 54, 55, 132, 134.]

So intense was the defense that even the Confederates were impressed. Robertson considered himself outnumbered by five or six times his strength on his own front, [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 405], when at

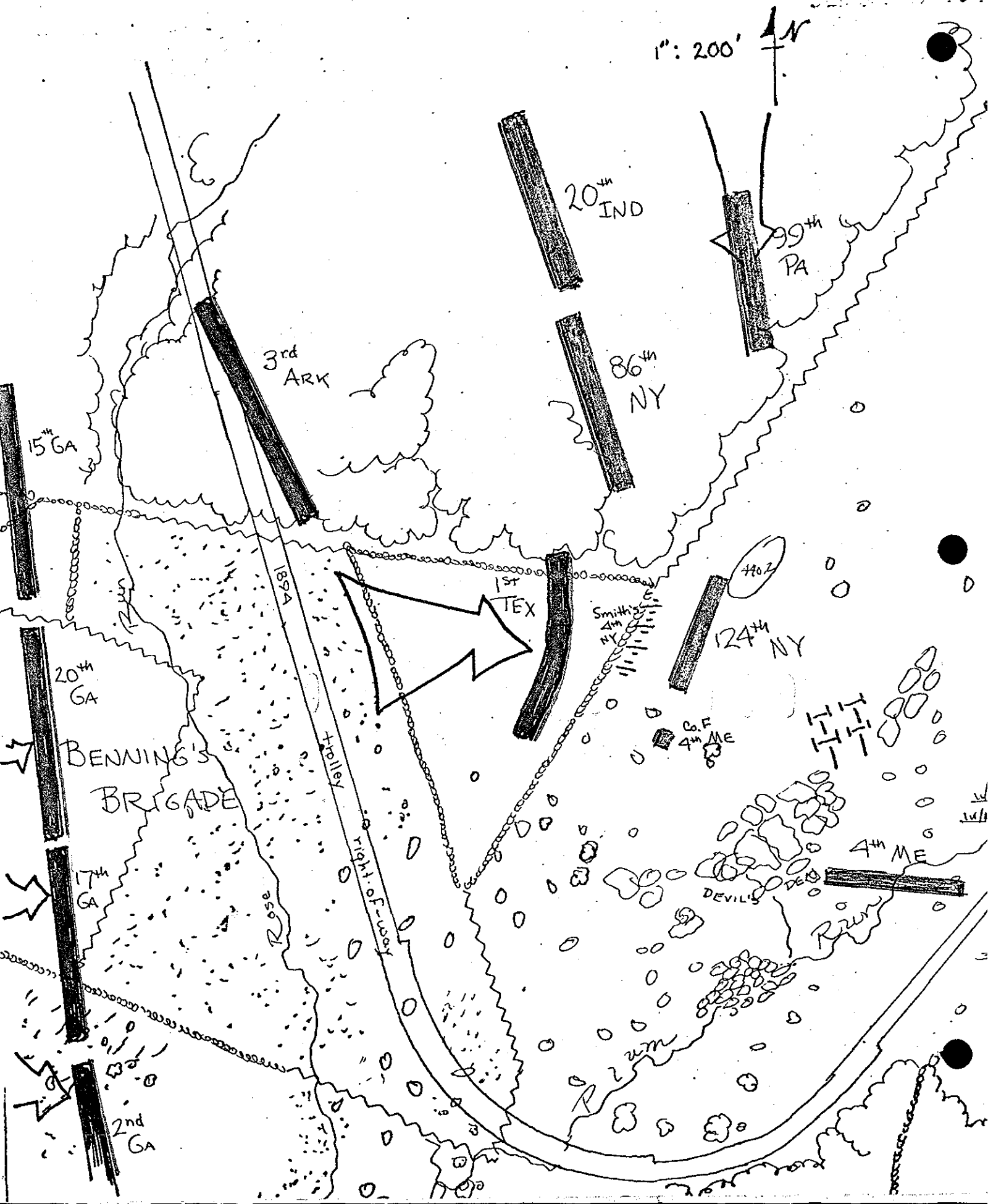
any one time he probably faced no more than equal his numbers, and never twice his strength. Even after receiving support from three of Benning's regiments, Robertson admitted his frustration at being unable to take the position. He believed that as fast as he could break one line of the enemy, "another fresh one would present itself, the enemy re-enforcing his lines in our front from his reserves at the base of the mountain to our right and front, and from his lines to our left." [Ibid.] As we shall see, the only "re-enforcements" thrown in on Robertson's front were these same four regiments of Ward's Brigade (4th Maine, 99th Pennsylvania, 124th New York, 86th New York).

Due to the conflicting post-battle reports and the post-war memorial addresses and histories, it is now virtually impossible to ascertain an unimpeachably accurate picture of the events at Slaughter Pen and Houck's Ridge/Weikert Field. Confederate accounts almost invariably claim an immediate loss by the Third Corps of Smith's Battery---almost every one of the Confederate regiments involved claimed its capture. On the other hand, Union accounts depict the loss only after several repulses of the enemy, as well as intricate movements and counterattacks by themselves, none of which are recorded by the foe. In their eagerness to cover themselves with glory it appears that the soldiers of both sides conspired to detract as little as possible from any setbacks or failures and any potential agreement in sources is thereby confounded. Nonetheless, as the following accounts of the battle in this area are related, it is undeniable that the struggle for the Slaughter Pen and the Houck's Ridge position rival all other conflicts on the battlefield of Gettysburg for importance, bitterness, sheer individual heroism, and deadliness.

Smith's Battery became the key to the action in this area. This generalization is all-encompassing, including all six guns of the battery---the four at the crest of Houck's Ridge and the two on the hillock behind them near the Wheatfield. The four forward guns were loaded with canister and were used without sponging when the 1st Texas finally undertook its

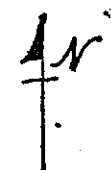
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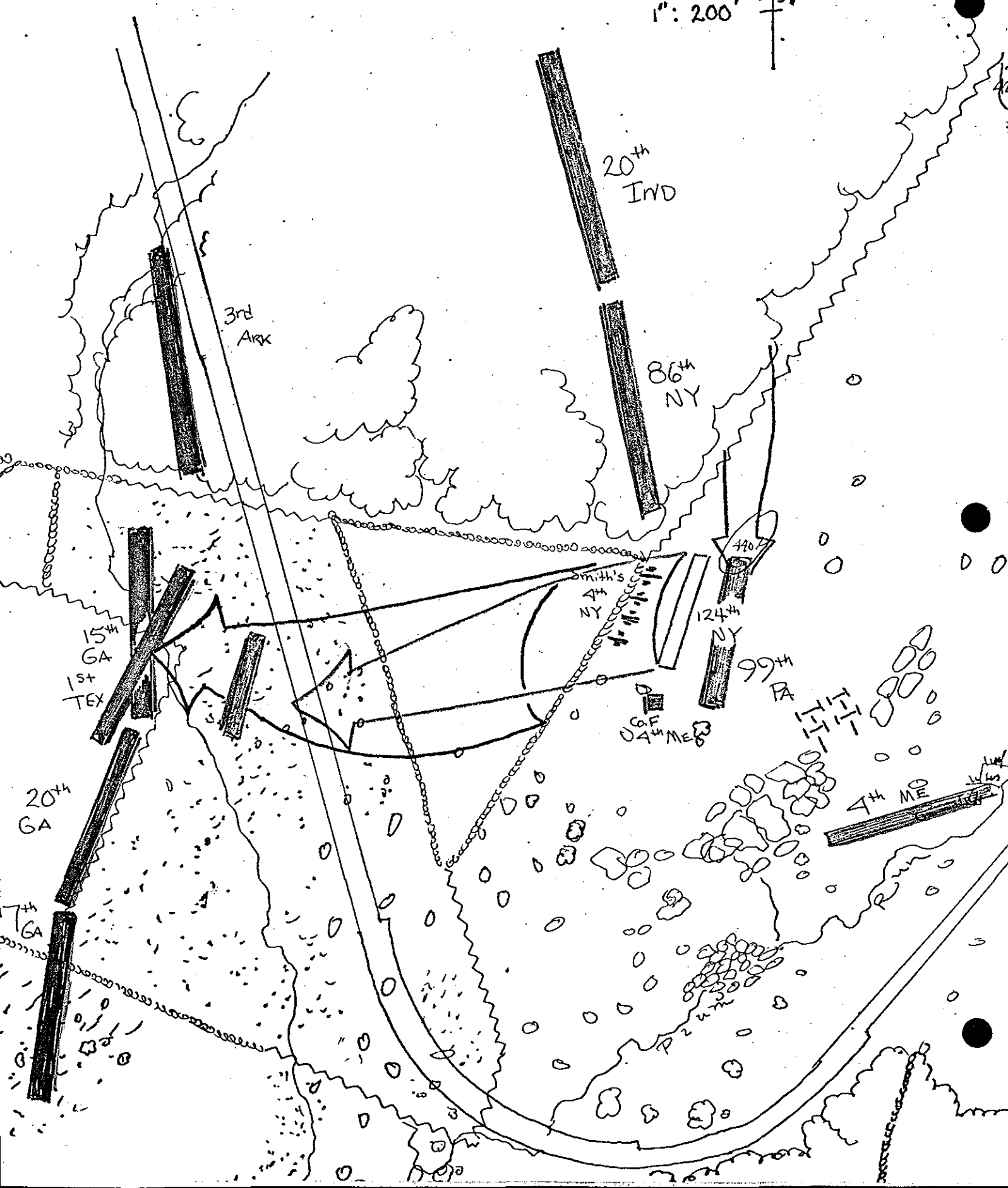
1" = 200' 



advance. [Smith, p. 103.] The Texas regiment merely reported after the battle that after driving back the skirmishers at the stone wall they then succeeded in "driving back the regiment and silencing the enemy's guns, taking and holding position of the latter." [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 408.] But the defenders on the ridge saw the advance of the 1st Texas differently. When they got within 100 yards of the 124th New York (about 50 yards from Smith's Battery), Colonel Ellis ordered the regiment to fix bayonets, but not to fire a shot until he ordered so. When the Texans reached to within fifty feet of the Parrotts, Ellis ordered the regiment to "up and fire." It was noted that this "crash of riflery perceptibly thinned their ranks and brought them to a stand." In the opinion of a member of Company B, on the extreme left of the 124th New York, "there was never a more destructive volley fired. It seemed to paralyze their whole line." But the Texans were recovering and determined to reach Smith's guns. They returned the fire and "resumed their determined advance ." But this first opposition by an infantry volley, once again created a loss of momentum and there was no longer the headlong dash with a rebel yell. Their advance was such that they could gain "but a few feet at a time." [New York at Gettysburg, volume 2, p. 869; Tucker, Orange Blossoms."]

Although neither the Texans nor Robertson mention the following events the memories of Captain Smith and survivors of the 124th were vivid. Company F of Walker's 4th Maine and Colonel Ellis' 124th New York were needed to save the guns, now approaching being captured. Major Cromwell went over to Colonel Ellis and asked permission to counterattack and lead the regiment against the Texans before they overran the battery, but was denied permission by Ellis, who believed that the defensive fire was sufficient to hold the enemy. But as they approached to within thirty feet or so of the guns at the wall, the officers' horses were brought up. Cromwell mounted against the objection of his friends, wanting to be an example to his Orange County volunteers, knowing that eventually his colonel would order the attack. It was not long after that Ellis gave the command to "Charge bayonets! Forward; double-quick---March!" [Tucker, "Orange Blossoms; another account contradicts this in stating that Ellis' command to attack was indicated by a mere nod of his head to Cromwell. [New York at Gettysburg, volume 2, p. 869.]

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The counterattack by the 124th New York was initially led by the impetuous Cromwell, mounted with waving sword, leading the left of the regiment after riding around to the front of Company B. [Tucker, "Orange Blossoms."] With their fixed bayonets, the men of the 124th ceased firing and rushed after their major. Ellis sat still in the saddle above his large iron-gray horse for a moment, as if in "admiration of both his loved major and gallant sons of Orange," but joined the regiment shortly as it rushed "into the thickest of the fray." Lieutenant-Colonel Cummins, the "old man" of the regiment, went in on foot at the right of the 124th as they swept down the western slope of Weikert's triangular field.

"The conflict at this point defied description. Roaring cannon, crashing rifles, screeching shots, bursting shells, hissing bullets, cheers, shouts, shrieks and groans were the notes of the song of death which greeted the grim reaper, as with mighty sweeps he leveled down the richest field of grain ever garnered on this continent.

"The enemy's line, unable to withstand our fierce onset, broke and fled, and Cromwell---his noble face flushed with victory, and his extended right arm waving his flashing sabre---uttered a shout of triumph. But it had barely escaped his lips when the second line of the foe poured into us a terrible fire which seemed in an instant to bring down a quarter of our numbers."

[New York at Gettysburg, volume 2, pp. 869-870.]

Up to this point the Confederate line had "withered" before the charge; a participant on the left with Cromwell caught the exuberance and assumed the Texans were like "frightened sheep." They watched the Southerners fall back almost 200 yards to a "rail fence" where the supports were just coming up, and where they were rallied by their officers. This rail fence would have been the Virginia worm fence forming the boundary between Sherfy's swampy woodlot and the cleared fields to the west of the Snyder Farm, and the supports would have been the advance elements of Benning's Georgia Brigade. According to A. W. Tucker of Company B, at least the left wing reached within 100 feet of this overwhelming combined force at the worm fence.

It was at this line that the Confederates were reorganized and able to effectively contest the advance of the New Yorkers. The fresh line of Georgians combined with Robertson's Texans to pour a "deadly fire" into

ranks of the 124th New York. [Tucker, "Orange Blossoms."] It was then that the Union regiment suffered its greatest casualties.

Cromwell's shout of victory was quickly silenced by this "terrible fire which seemed in an instant to bring down a full quarter" of the 124th. Cromwell shouted again; one wonders what emotion the shout reflected---fear, anger, encouragement, surprise? The chronicle does not shed any light on the nature of the shout, but the witness remembered the form of his major "amid the fire and smoke" yet waving his saber. Soon thereafter, however, Cromwell fell with a bullet through the heart, tumbling backwards out of his saddle as the New Yorkers began their flight back towards the battery. Ellis called to his volunteers, "My God! My God, men! Your major's down; save him! Save him!" The New Yorkers turned and rallied, causing the initial attack by Benning and Robertson to waver and then retire slightly at its suddenness; but they soon reformed and continued a frightful fire into the line of the Orange Blossoms. This fire also inflicted casualties in Smith's Battery to the rear, driving many from their guns. Lieutenant-Colonel Cummins, fearing for the safety of the battery which was entrusted to his regiment to protect, went to the guns and attempted to get Smith to withdraw them rather than suffer the indignation of losing them to the enemy. But Cummins was injured when a gun carriage was "hurled" against him when it was struck by artillery shell, and he left the field disabled. Ellis was the only field officer left after Cummins limped off, and his form was almost mystical to the men as it could be "seen in bold relief, now lost amid the clouds of powder smoke." Yet his inspiration was enough to cause them to stand their ground, somewhere between Plum Run and the crest of Houck's Ridge, and once again obey his directions to fire upon the threatening lines of Benning and the Texas regiment. As their volley took effect, the advancing Confederates once again wavered under its impact, and Ellis rose in his stirrups to observe the reaction. Just as he upraised his sword to give a command he was pierced by a ball through the forehead, and he toppled from his gray mount amid the rocks as the horse charged wildly in a wounded fury of its own into the ranks of the Confederates. Ellis fell by one of the last shots before his enemy retired back to reform behind the rail fence. The Orange Blossoms, now weakened by casualties and the duration of the conflict, without field

commanders, cannot pursue the Confederates. They are content to struggle forward enough to recover the bodies of Ellis and Cromwell, and "gathering up such as they can of the wounded, fall slowly and mournfully back to the main line" and the safety of Smith's guns. [New York at Gettysburg, volume 2, p. 870.]

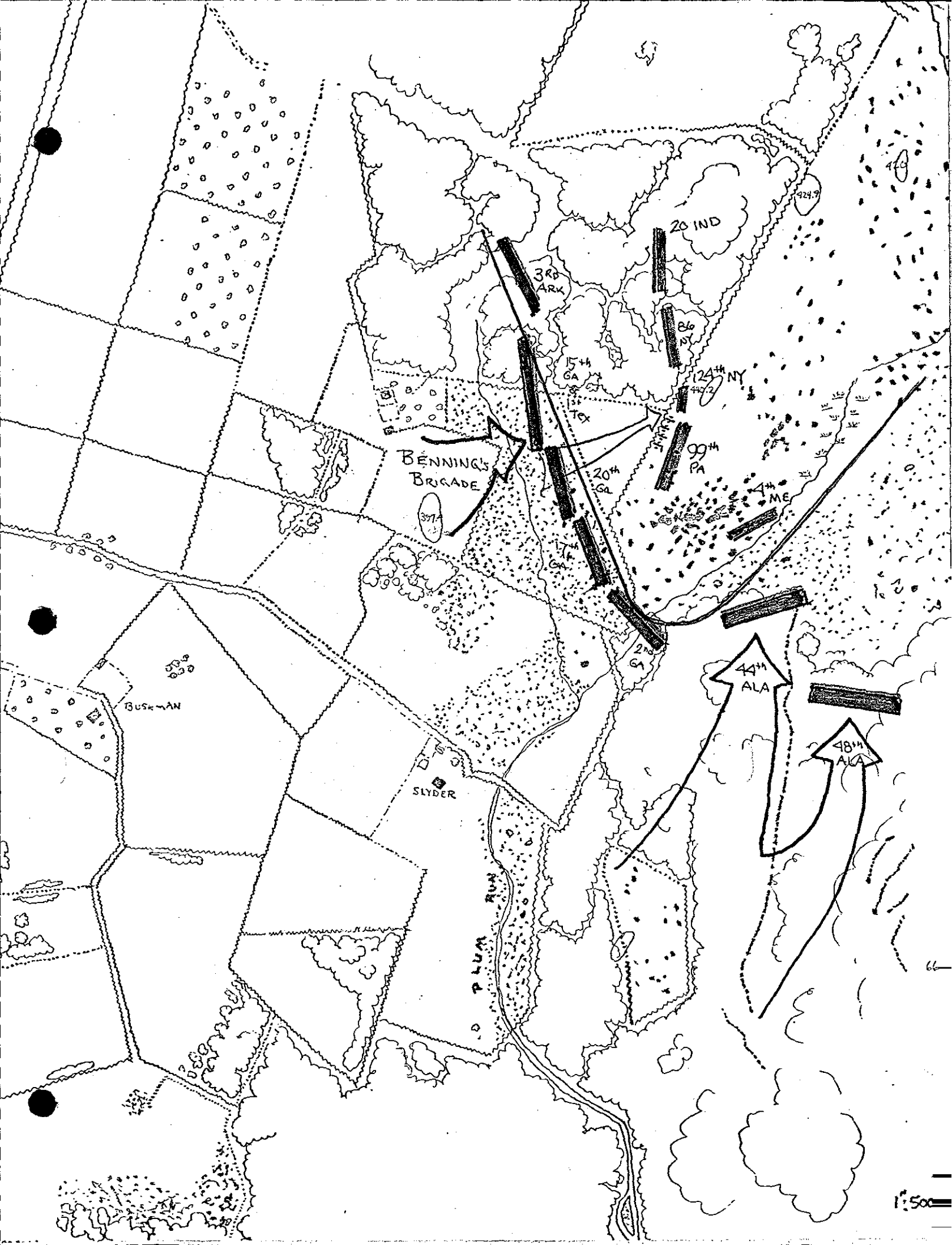
So tenuous was Smith's hold on the crest that he ordered his gunners to retire with their implements, in order to keep the Confederates from capturing his men or from using the guns against them. The 124th New York returned to the crest to find the 99th Pennsylvania had arrived to replace the 4th Maine in support of Smith, and it was a welcome sight for the depleted force of New Yorkers, who had started the conflict with over 200 officers and men and had barely 100 left when they returned from the base of the Weikert field. [Ibid., p. 871.]

It was fortunate enough that they could get away with so few casualties, since they were in danger of being outflanked and surrounded by the enemy in their advanced position and could have been captured or annihilated had they not returned to Houck's Ridge when they did, a position from which at least one believed they "never should have advanced." While in the Plum Run valley of Sherfy's sparse woodlot they almost suffered that fate as "vast numbers" of the enemy poured onto their left flank from the gorge at Plum Run and delivered an enfilading fire down their ranks. [Tucker, "Orange Blossoms."] This fire was probably delivered by the right wing of Benning's Georgia Brigade, which was greatly overlapping the small New York line.

Meanwhile, the 44th and 48th Alabama Regiments of Law's Brigade had been detached during the march to take the annoying battery. Sometime after crossing the stone fence (of the lane at Slyders?) the Alabama regiments were wheeled towards the left so as to "confront" the battery position at the south end of Houck's Ridge. The movement thus far was such that the regiments would have passed to the right of the battery, and in a northerly direction up the Plum Run valley. After disengaging himself from Law's mainline, Colonel Perry of the 44th Alabama allowed them to pass by, then ordered his direction by an oblique march (probably allowing the 4th and 5th Texas to pass as well). After entering the woods northeast of the Snyder buildings, comprising the lower slope of Big Round Top, called "Devil's Kitchen," Perry wheeled his force towards the sounds of the battery in Devil's Den.

The movement of Perry's 44th Alabama was such that it attracted the attention of the retiring skirmishers and sharpshooters, and Walker's 4th Maine soon spotted them moving rapidly to their left, not fifty yards away in the woods (above and south of the present comfort station). Walker quickly realigned his men to engage the 44th Alabama [Official Records, volume 27, part 1, pp. 509-510], but Perry, still within the woods, was apparently aware of his presence. As the Alabamians emerged from the woods into the open space between Round Top and Devil's Den (Slaughter Pen) "a sheet of flame burst from the rocks less than a hundred yards away," delivered by Walker's Maine force. Perry, however, received a lucky break in that "a few scattering shots in the beginning" of the volley warned him in time to allow most of his men to fall flat against the granitic soil and cause the main effects of the volley to sail harmlessly overhead and snip off the twigs and leaves of Round Top's trees. Perry attested that most of his men thus escaped the effect of this volley, and assumed that Walker probably thought he had killed great numbers because of the silence and the number who fell to the ground. [Perry, "The Devil's Den," p. 161.] Indeed, Walker later reported that his 4th Maine fired another four or seven rounds toward the 44th Alabama without receiving a return fire. But here the plucky Alabamians surprised Walker with their initial return volley on his front and left flank. The fighting between the 44th Alabama and the 4th Maine continued for perhaps twenty minutes or more, since Walker claimed that his men fired an average of 25 rounds apiece at this site. [Official Records, volume 27, part 1, p. 510.]

Walker, who had dearly not wanted to be placed in this predicament, found himself exposed to this fire from the fringes of Big Round Top's woods, while he suspected he would be outflanked by forces advancing on the right of the 44th Alabama. In reality, the 48th Alabama, on Perry's right flank, was attempting to do just that, continuing its advance on the wooded slopes above the 44th Regiment and toward the open ground just east of Plum Run at the foot of Little Round Top. Walker's precaution to guard his own flank had come to naught because he had misinterpreted the movements of Vincent's Brigade earlier and drew in his flankers, assuming that Barnes' Division was to connect at his left. Even before Walker espied the movement of



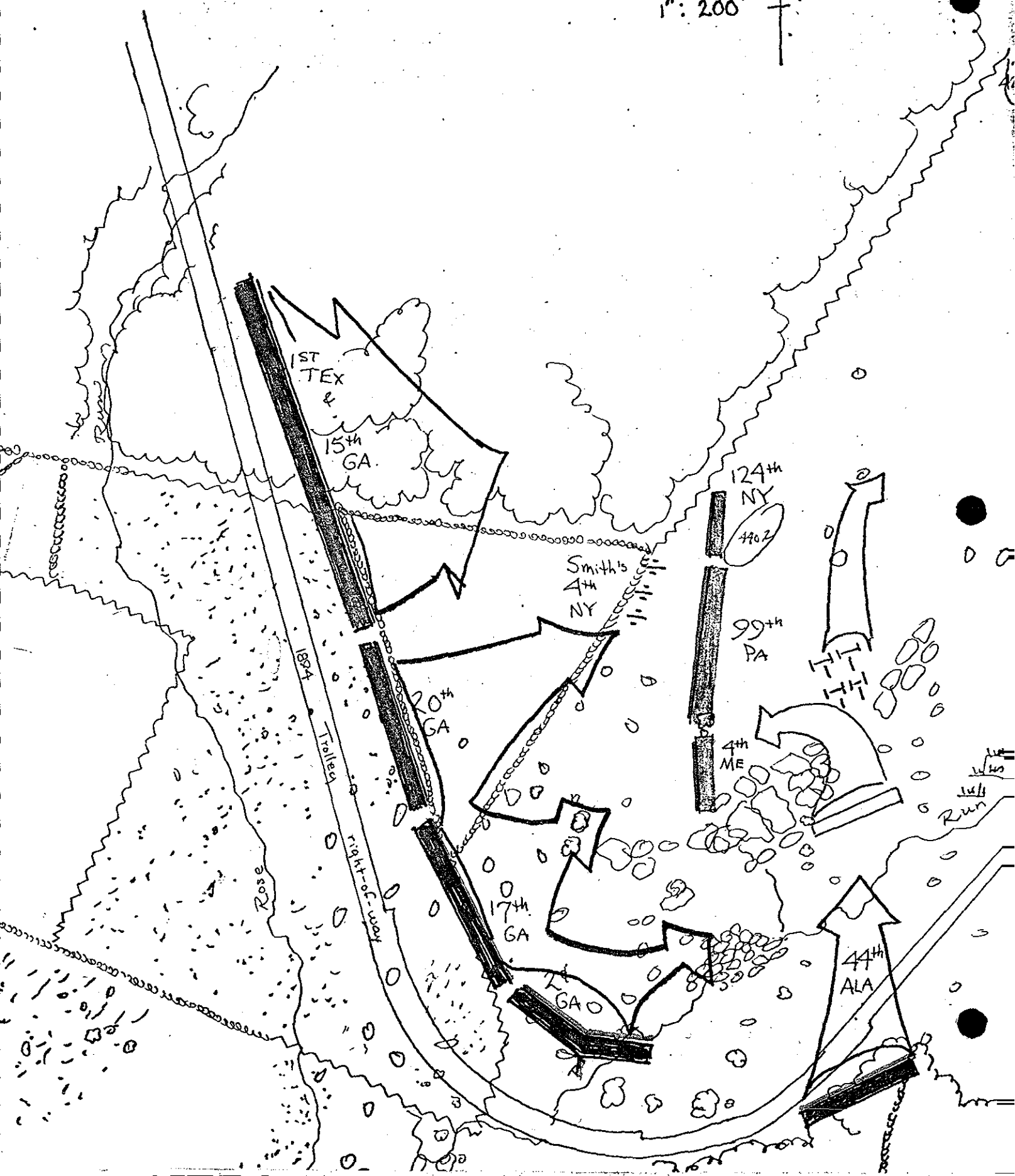
the 44th on his left and front he suspected it to come momentarily. Scattered shots up the slope to his left had already signalled the preface to the battle for Little Round Top, as the 4th Alabama and the 4th and 5th Texas struck Vincent's right flank. The fire from the "edge of the wood of small pines" was "uncomfortably" nearer than Walker would have anticipated, however, and he was hard pressed to open his destructive fire on Perry before the 44th realized the advantage of its position. The 4th Maine used the intermittent boulders at the base of Devil's Den for protection, firing across Plum Run at the Alabamians. Walker admitted that Perry's Alabama infantry "came on in a truly heroic manner" but was quick to point out that "equal firmness of the Maine men," who checked the Southern advance from that quarter and drove them back into the edges of the woods, leaving their dead behind.

When viewing the Gibson, Gardner, and O'Sullivan plates of Slaughter Pen, taken before the Confederates were buried, it is possible that many of the corpses depicted were those victims of Walker's desperate volleys. Indeed, the general O'Sullivan photograph of the many dead amongst the boulders opposite the Devil's Den is in the very region where the 44th would have emerged from the woods in its attempt to gain the glory of taking Smith's guns in reverse. Both Walker and Perry claimed their greatest losses occurred in this musketry duel across Plum Run. Walker reported his "principal loss was in this place." [Official Records, volume 27, part 1, p. 510.] He emphatically repeated over twenty years after the battle his objections to being ordered into the gorge, and regretted he obeyed the order brought by Cooney because the position caused "his entire loss of prisoners and most of the other casualties." [Walker to Bachelder, 6 January 1886.] Perry wrote that, notwithstanding the warning scattering shots before the volley of Walker's men, within a "few seconds" he lost one-quarter of his men in killed and wounded. [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 394.] Since his later reminiscences confirmed a total loss of a little over one-fourth, or 92 men killed and wounded, during the entire battle, it is conceivable that almost the whole of his casualties were inflicted by the first shots of Walker's Maine regiment at the Slaughter Pen. [Perry, "At Devil's Den," p. 162.]

And, as the 4th Maine and the 44th Alabama engaged in their own private war, the fighting had extended towards Little Round Top and the Wheatfield, so that "the whole line was alive with burning powder." [Maine at Gettysburg, p. 164.] Benning had thrown the main force of his brigade to the assistance of the very left, coming in with Robertson's 1st Texas and the 3rd Arkansas instead of supporting Law as intended. Benning had followed Robertson most of the way from the Emmitsburg Road, all the time thinking him to be Law. In reality, Law was drawn off into the woods after reaching the fields of the Slyder Farm and never was seen by Benning. Robertson, with his left wing was about 400 yards in advance, and Benning endeavored to maintain that distance, even "halting once or twice to preserve its interval." [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 415.] While Benning remained in his supporting position, Robertson was hotly engaged in attempting to not only take Smith's guns but in protecting his left from the rest of Ward's Brigade in Rose Woods. Robertson had sent at least one courier to Hood pleading for him to throw in some of the supports on his left, to protect him due to the absence of McLaws' Division coming up yet at that point. But the courier returned, informing Robertson of the removal of Hood from the field due to his wound. Robertson immediately sent another messenger to Longstreet, asking him to coordinate reinforcements and sent other messengers to Benning and Anderson, who had been watching developments from the rear, to hurry to his support. [Ibid., p. 405.] Benning, in the meantime, had perceived that Robertson was having difficulties in taking Houck's Ridge in his front and advanced [Ibid., p. 415], apparently coming up just as the Texas regiment was being hurled back across Rose Run by the bayonet charge of the 124th New York.

Benning's regiments consisted of two wings---the 2d and 17th Georgia on the right and the 20th and 15th Georgian on the left of his line. The left found itself at the base of Houck's Ridge where Rose spring poured into Plum Run, and saw the 1st Texas "struggling" to keep their assault alive. They fell in with them, much to the consternation of Colonel Work, who would rather have had Benning on his left to assist Manning's Arkansas regiment in protecting the flank from the Union regiments in Rose Woods and the lower end of the Wheatfield. Work became hopeless entangled with the 15th Georgia as Benning's Brigade came into line. After "several

1" : 200' 



ineffectual efforts upon the part of both commanders . . . to separate the men of the two regiments," it was decided the delay was not worth the price of losing even more time and momentum. [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 408.] From the base of the hill at the stone wall, orders were relayed to both regiments to advance together and take the crest of Houck's Ridge, "some 100 yards or more to the front." On their right was Colonel John Jones' 20th Georgia Regiment, whose entire force would have to advance up the cleared triangular field, whereas the 15th Georgia and 1st Texas were sheltered by the "wooded, rocky hill" of Rose Woods to the immediate left. The force of their attack would carry the 15th Georgia and part of the 1st Texas into the fighting in Rose Woods for the Wheatfield for the rest of the evening, but they were compelled to fall back to the stone wall at the base of the Weikert field at least twice to reorganize after suffering casualties in the woods and endangered by the flanking attacks from Cross' Brigade and, later, Ayres' Regulars. [Ibid., p. 422.]

Just as the 15th Georgia and the 1st Texas prepared to jump the wall at the base of the Weikert field to initiate their first attack, they heard their comrades to the right become hotly engaged as they also began their own advance. As the right ascended the hill towards Smith's Battery they were unaware that the guns were to receive additional reinforcements before they reached the crest. The 4th Maine, which had suffered severely from the 44th Alabama, abandoned its position in the Plum Run gorge and came back up the treacherous rocky slope to assist its brigade comrades. Walker later recollected that he had ordered the movement after most of his skirmishers to the right had been "swooped up" by the advance of the 2nd Georgia down Plum Run toward the Devil's Den, and after the 44th Alabama joined the attack by Benning's 2nd and 17th Georgia Regiments. [Maine at Gettysburg, pp. 165-166.]

The gunners of Smith's battery were abandoning the rifles at this point, bringing off the horses, caissons, and remaining ammunition, but leaving the guns useless to the enemy. [Bradley, "At Gettysburg."] Smith, in a quandary, looking for more supports, saw the 4th Maine being forced back (northward) up the gorge from his position by the 44th Alabama and the Georgians. He could see the enemy advancing on his front. Hunt had

contacted Smith and told him to try to hold another thirty minutes, but Smith's supports were rapidly diminishing by the attrition of the gunfire. Indeed the 124th New York was now so small that they no longer were in line as his supporting troops. By the losses incurred in Weikert's field and Sherfy's woodlot swamp the line had closed so much to the right in order to preserve its alignment that at this point their present left flank was where the right flank had been at the opening of the battle (at the edge of Rose Woods), and almost 100 yards to the right of Smith's guns. [A. W. Tucker to J. E. Smith, "From Comrade Tucker," National Tribune (4 February 1886).] Only the 99th Pennsylvania still had some semblance of strength to it in his rear. Smith had gambled that he could buy more time by keeping his guns in position with these few supports, than by withdrawing them and proving to the Confederates how weak his position was. The very fact that the guns remained could be a deterrent to an overwhelming stampede by the shot-torn troops facing them. The men of Robertson's and Benning's Brigades had felt the sting and effective fire from the four Parrotts on their long advance to this point. While eager to seek revenge and capture the battery, the Confederates were understandably hesitant about assuring that that could be done without incurring more artillery casualties. In the end, Smith weighed the benefits and the losses, and chose to leave the remaining three of his forward guns in position (one having been withdrawn shortly after the infantry conflict began because of its being partially disabled). Here they could mimic the "Quaker guns" and would at least present a "bold front" and impel the Confederates to "approach it gingerly." [Smith, p. 103.]

Captain Smith ran back to his two remaining pieces on the opposite hillock of Houck's Ridge (at the north end), to ready them to repel the impending pursuit by the enemy. His guns were trained at the Plum Run gorge between the Devil's Den and Big Round Top, through the Slaughter Pen, and he played his guns upon the soldiers of the 44th Alabama and 2nd Georgia who were just pressing the 4th Maine from its position.

Walker's Maine troops were heading up the rear of Devil's Den to see if they could be of better use in a better position. After they were

man-handled by Perry and the flanking movement of Benning's right wing, Walker had directed his regiment to fall back about 100 yards or more and fix bayonets before ascending Houck's Ridge. Walker related later that one of his vivid memories of the battle occurred at this point, as he could "never forget the 'click' that was made by the fixing of bayonets, it was as one." [Walker to Bachelder, 6 January 1886.]

The 44th Alabama continued in pursuit, inspired probably by the presence of the 2nd Georgia coming down Plum Run gorge to the left, and crossed the run at the command of Perry. Perry himself would miss the glory of the chase, however, being fagged out by the strenuous advance after so long a day and seeking refuge within the boulders along Plum Run. From his shelter, Perry tried to recover from "heat and excessive exertion" and could do little more than listen to the battle as it surged. "The incessant roar of small arms, the deadly hiss of Minie balls, the shouts of the combatants, the booming of the cannon, the explosion of shells, and the crash of their fragments among the rocks, all blended in one dread chorus whose sublimity and terror no expressing could compass." [Perry, "At Devil's Den," p. 161.] His major, George Cary, would ably represent the field command that day in Perry's stead. Leading his regiment with the colors in his own hands, Cary disappeared from Perry's view into the smoke and rocks of Devil's Den. The next time his colonel saw him, Major Cary would return with "an armful of swords as trophies of his victory," [Ibid., pp. 161-162.] primarily from the right wing of the 4th Maine.

The troops on Houck's Ridge with Smith's abandoned guns endeavored to hold the position. Throughout the hour or so since their withdrawal from the base of Weikert's field, the shattered remnant of the 124th continued to exchange shots with the Georgians and Texans who had taken their place at the wall in that valley. The New Yorkers could see many of their casualties in the open field over which they had advanced and retreated---some dead, like Captain Nicoll, whose body was wedged between boulders, and some wounded and bleeding between the two lines. They also could see the remains of their heroic Ellis and Cromwell, which had been lain on a large boulder near their line as a vivid reminder of the cost they were paying for the pile of rocks on Houck's Ridge. The men had been defending Smith's guns since 3 p.m., but

for some time now they had been fighting to protect the bodies of these two officers. After Smith abandoned his guns the acting commander ordered a detail to remove the remains of Ellis and Cromwell and see that they got safely to friends, not wishing to unnecessarily expose them to impending capture. As the lifeless forms of the field officers were carried to the rear, the men of the 124th New York saw the enemy finally advance from the wall in their direction.

General Ward, during all this, was not idle. He had recognized the deteriorating condition of his position by the time of Benning's arrival to help the 1st Texas seal the doom of the Orange Blossoms. He was able to obtain two regiments, which were needed everywhere else in this spreading Confederate strike on the Third Corps line, and had them dispatched to his support. Still convinced that Plum Run gorge was the key, the regiments were directed to that place. If only they could unite his left at Houck's Ridge with the troops on Little Round Top before a breach in his line was effected there might still be a chance to contain and turn back Hood's forces. Unfortunately, the 4th Maine was unable to hold out by itself in this site, exposed to a frontal and enfilading fire from Plum Run gorge and from the woods and rocks on the edge of the Slaughter Pen, and had retreated to the comparative safety of the rest of the Brigade atop the Den.

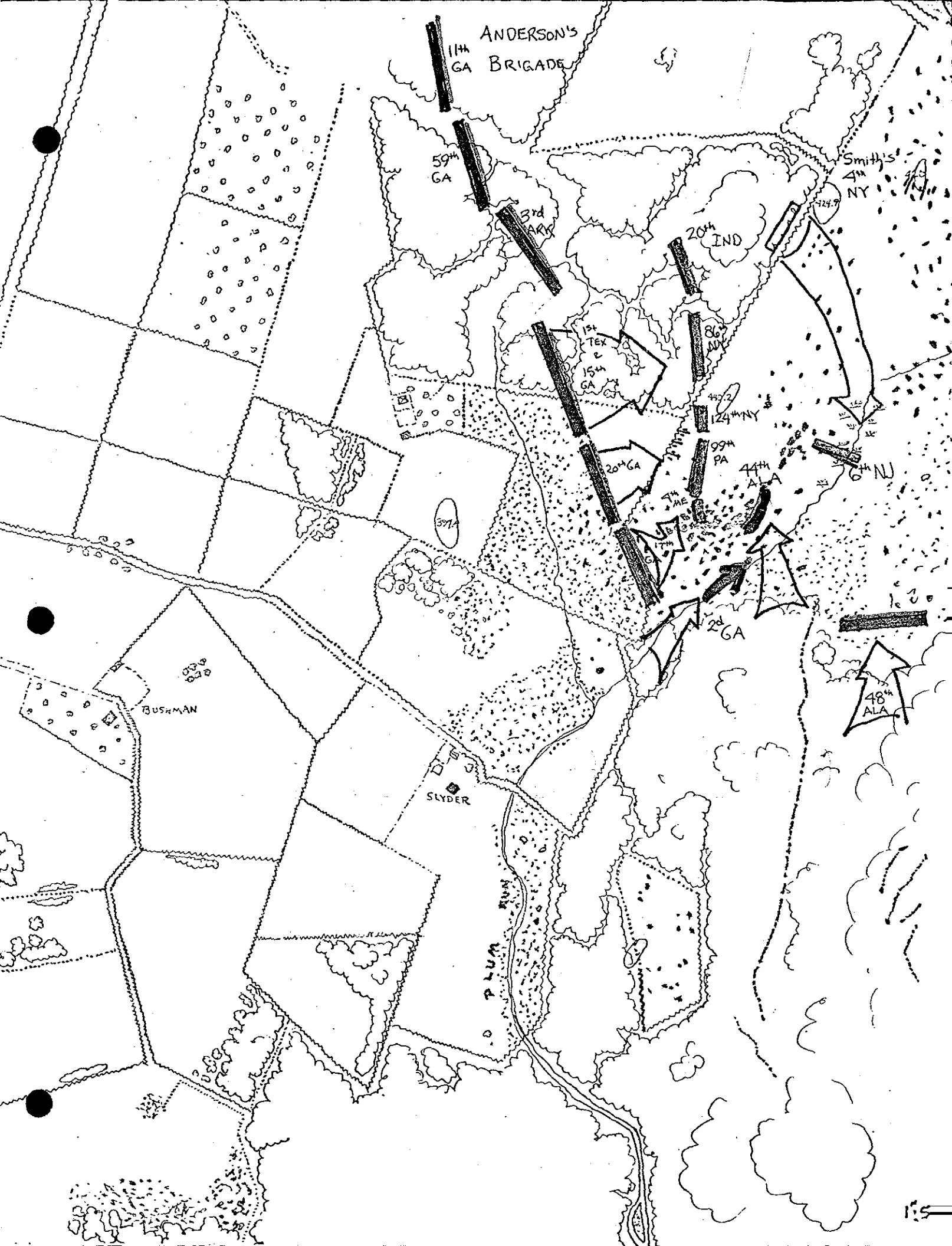
The first support to enter the fray was the 6th New Jersey of Burling's Brigade, a brigade which was disassembled throughout the conflict to bolster all parts of the line. The 6th New Jersey hurried through the Wheatfield and advanced through the Rose Woods before coming to the fence that formed the boundary separating the Rose Farm and its Wheatfield from Houck's Ridge. Not being guided to any particular position Lieutenant-Colonel Gilkyson began to fire from the fence down into the valley at the 44th and 48th Alabama Regiments and at Benning's right. Scanning the situation and the relative positions of the opposing forces, Gilkyson decided to advance his regiment to a point behind and to the left of Devil's Den, where he hoped he would form a junction with Ward's Brigade, since the 4th Maine had just retreated up that height. He moved his regiment almost 200 yards from the fence across the expanse of Houck's Ridge in front of the last section of Smith's Battery. [Official Records, volume 27, part 1, p. 577.] The move-

ment of the 6th New Jersey cut off the fire from Smith's guns [Smith, p. 104] which up to that moment had been most effective.

These two guns of Smith had proven as effective in cutting down the enemy as the other four had been during the developing stages of the Confederate attack. When he first opened fire from these two reserve guns, which were obscured from sight by the Devil's Den and the crest of Houck's Ridge, Smith took the enemy "by surprise." From the moment of his first round Smith watched the battle flag of the Confederates coming up Plum Run gorge drop three times from the effect of his deadly charges of canister. Three times he watched their line waver and forced into the shelter of the woods. [Ibid.] p. 3.

Benning had been unaware that the guns were there until he "ascertained" the fact after his right received "a terrible fire from them which swept down the gorge." [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 414.] It was the fate of the 2nd Georgia to be the troops to be baptized in the blood of Plum Run, created by the tearing wounds from Smith's artillery fire. Up to the time they reached the gorge their advance had been "splendid," but the nature of the terrain in the gorge threw the regiment out of any semblance of alignment. But with "dauntless courage" the officers and men of the 2nd Georgia continued advancing, notwithstanding the fire from the section of guns and then from the 6th New Jersey, the rocks, of the undergrowth. Indeed, they did not halt until they advanced beyond Benning's other regiments and beyond the "rock eminence on the left" (Devil's Den). Here the 2nd Georgia made a stand, near the present comfort station and across Plum Run to the Devil's Den, where it "fought as gallantly as men could fight, and did not yield an inch of ground." [Ibid., p. 420.]

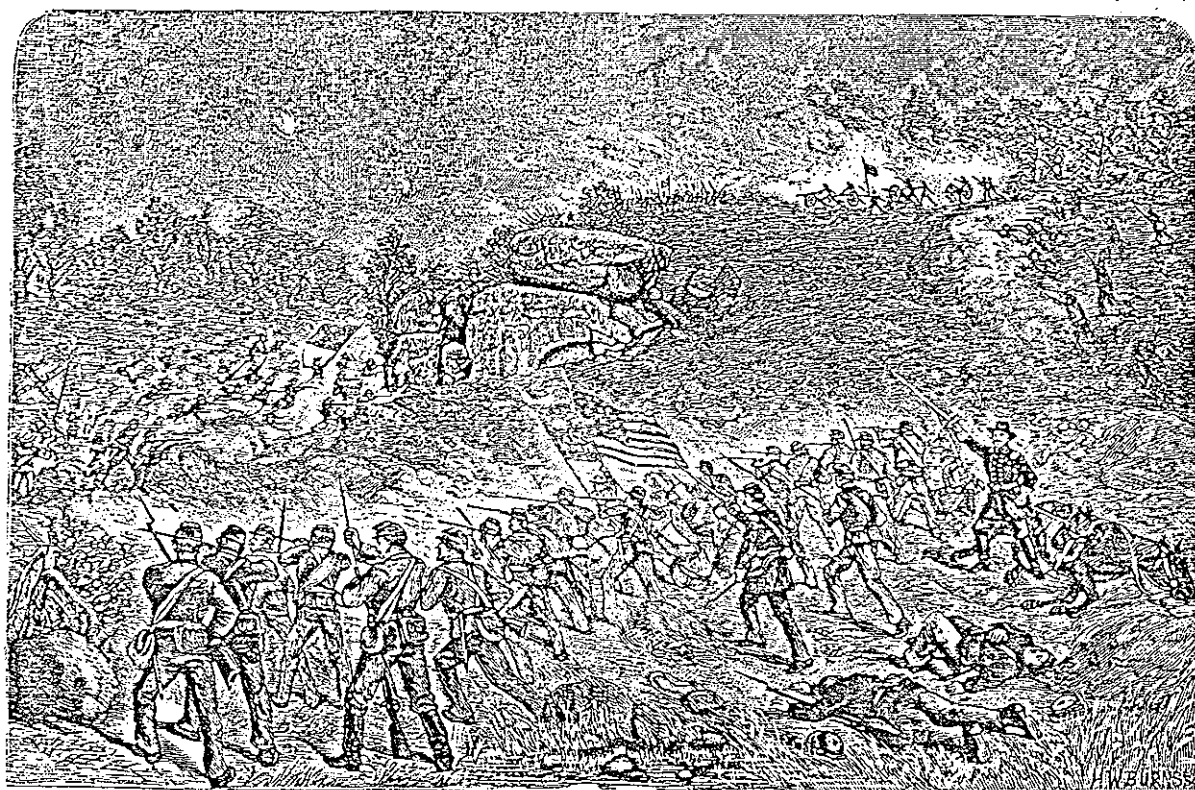
Their first opponent was the men of the 6th New Jersey, who contended fighting on this line for two hours! [Official Records, volume 27, part 1, p. 577.] The blatant error and exaggeration of the time can be proved by the sequence of events after they entered the fray. By the time the regiment arrived it had to be about 5 p.m. For them to have fought in the Valley of Death for two hours would mean that they were the only Union troops in this end of the valley at 7 p.m. Only Crawford's attack on the northern line of



Plum Run valley established any kind of Union foothold in the vicinity that evening. The 6th New Jersey would have been in Confederate-controlled territory after two hours of fighting! At most, the 6th New Jersey could have been engaged some fifteen to twenty minutes. The casualty figures for the regiment are disproportionately low, especially in comparison to the two other Union regiments that occupied this same basic area below the rocks of Devil's Den. The 6th New Jersey had only one man killed and a combined wounded and captured/missing total of forty others. On the other hand, the 4th Maine lost 144 men near this same spot and the last regiment to occupy the site (40th New York) would lose 150 more. [*Ibid.*, pp. 177-178.] Indeed, the very battle report of the 6th New Jersey stated that by 7 p.m. the regiment had already retired, reported to General Ward at the rear, and rejoined its own brigade. [*Ibid.*, p. 578.]

Following the 6th New Jersey into the whirlpool was the 40th New York, the "Mozart Regiment". It had been directed by Captain J. B. Briscow of Birney's staff to move by the left flank in front of Winslow's Battery in the Wheatfield and be detailed from DeTrobriand's Brigade. Moving through the point of woods, or northern finger of Rose Woods bordering the eastern edge of the Wheatfield, the 40th New York took their first position at "the short piece of stone wall in front of the two guns of Smith's 4th New York Battery." The regiment was met by Smith, who implored them to save his battery. [*Ibid.*, p. 526.] The regiment responded by firing a few volleys into the enemy towards Devil's Den, and charging "down the meadow to the rocky ravine below." [John B. Bachelder, (Notes on Services of Troops at the Battle of Gettysburg) (c. 1875). Huntington Library, Microfilm #NI550.] In their advance the 40th New York passed through Smith's park of horses and carriages, [Smith, p. 104.] and faded into the battle smoke as they approached Benning's Georgians and the 48th Alabama. Their advance was particularly memorable to the Mozart Regiment since they moved down Plum Run itself, straddling the creek bed at a double-quick, many of the men "up to their knees in mud and water." [*Official Records*, volume 27, part 1, p. 526.] Despite the obvious obstructions to an orderly charge, the impetuous attack of the New Yorkers created a sense of uneasiness in the Confederates in the gorge, and they fell back to the higher grounds of Devil's Den and the woods

above Slaughter Pen. Their losses during the advance were severe, however, and they could not dislodge the Confederates completely. Colonel Egan himself, leading the 40th New York, was unhorsed when his mount fell and was compelled to lead the regiment in on foot. [Fred C. Floyd, History of the 40th (Mozart) Regiment New York Volunteers (Boston: F. H. Gilson Company, 1909), p. 202.]



THE MOZART CHARGE AT GETTYSBURG.

Smith, admittedly crestfallen at the chain of events, sent his carriages and horses into Rose Woods about this time and prepared to abandon his secondary position. At his very front his four guns were being overrun by the final concerted attack of Benning's 15th, 17th, and 20th Georgia Regiments and the survivors of the 1st Texas. It had been but moments since the men of the 124th

New York saw the attack beginning on their front. They must have witnessed the last desperate defense by the 99th Pennsylvania (of which so little has been written), with its colors resting against one of the unmanned guns of Smith's Battery as a rallying point. The 99th lost more than Orange County's regiment that day---109 falling before the enemy's attack, but did not have the pens to elaborate upon their heroism in the days and years that followed. Perhaps the memory of that lone battle flag defiantly planted at the guns and the rows of dead and wounded left atop the crest of Houck's Ridge are history enough, as poignant testimony of the commitment of the 99th Pennsylvania to carrying out its last full measure of devotion. The firepower concentrated upon the advancing Confederates from these three depleted regiments was not proven by the casualties inflicted, but by the report of Lieutenant-Colonel J. D. Waddell of the 20th Georgia. He counted 87 separate holes in his battle flag after the action, 38 of which were due to Minie balls. Captain Smith and Lieutenant Hazlett were responsible for the other 49, which "from the character of the rents" were caused by "fragments of shell." [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 427.]

The only consolation for Captain Smith was that he had forestalled the Confederate advance working all six guns to his utmost. He had impeded Confederate progress and allowed his superiors the time to deploy reinforcements along the line and to take possession of Little Round Top. He told an officer of Hazlett's Battery D, 5th U. S. after the battle that he kept looking over to Little Round Top, wondering when the Federals would occupy it and relieve him and that, while firing the final shots from his reserve section, he heard the first report from Hazlett's rifles on the summit of Little Round Top. At the time, Captain Smith considered the roar from the pieces the "sweetest music . . . ever heard." [Benjamin Rittenhouse, "The Battle of Gettysburg as Seen from Little Round Top," in Kenneth Bandy, The Gettysburg Papers, volume 2 (Dayton: Morningside Bookshop, 1978), p. 522.]

It would be Hazlett's lot on the summit of Little Round Top to carry out the duties as the artillery anchor of the left. His regular army gunners were up to the task. Coming into position, the guns were immediately trained on two targets---the Confederate batteries along Bushman and Warfield Ridges which were still contesting the Union artillery and infantry at the Peach Orchard, and upon the infantry of Hood's Division in the woods and fields below.

The Confederates had as vivid a memory of the damage inflicted by Hazlett's Round Top Battery as they had of Smith's rocky ledge battery. Colonel Perry's 44th Alabama was among the first to feel its effect, when it was subjected to "an enfilading fire of grape and spherical case shot," which was momentarily deadly, but which was not as destructive later on because of the protection "afforded by the rocks." [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 394.]

The initial thrill of victory felt by Major Cary upon capturing so many officers and their swords atop Houck's Ridge was worn away quickly at the first salvos from Hazlett's guns. When Cary reported to Perry with his armful of swords, he complained that the cannon were "playing on his position." Perry ordered the regiment to withdraw from the crest and find shelter on the sides of the hill near Slaughter Pen where he was. [Perry, "At Devil's Den, p. 162.]

Robertson's and Benning's Brigades likewise felt this new firepower, especially near and on the crest of Houck's Ridge. Colonel John A. Jones, commanding the 20th Georgia in its attack on the abandoned guns of Smith's Battery and the determined men of Ward's Brigade above him, was "instantly killed at the post of duty by a fragment of shell when nearly half way up the hill, and but a moment before it was carried." [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 426.] General Benning himself reported that the "shells of the enemy from the adjacent mountain were incessantly bursting along the summit of the peak, and every head that showed itself was the target for a Minie ball." [Ibid., p. 415.] Robertson's left, having secured the crest of the hill at Houck's Ridge with the Georgians, likewise did not have much time to celebrate its victory since later throughout the rest of the evening "several pieces of artillery was playing on and literally ploughing up the ground in the meadow or flat immediately in the rear of [his] position." [Robertson to Bachelder, 11 May 1882.] The men of the 1st Texas suffered considerably in their position atop Devil's Den at the ridge after the fall of Smith's Battery. Hazlett's Battery was determined to keep the forces on the crest of Houck's Ridge from supplementing their comrades in an attack on Little Round Top, and a "terrific fire of artillery was concentrated against the hill occupied by . . . the First regiment." The

commander of the Texans attested to the severe and nasty nature of this concentrated fire by noting that "many were killed and wounded" by it, "some losing their heads, and others so horribly mutilated and mangled that their identity could scarcely be established." That Hazlett succeeded in keeping at least the 1st Texas from joining in with its sister regiments in the attack on Little Round Top can be seen in that Colonel Work was proud that his men could (at least) "heroically and unflinchingly . . . maintain their position." [Official Records, volume 27, part 2, p. 409.]

The fighting in the area of the Slaughter Pen and Weikert's Field, and at this southern crest of Houck's Ridge, ended with nightfall of 2 July. That night, and early in the morning of the following day, most of Robertson's and Law's forces moved to the south and east, throwing up stone wall breastworks in the woods at the base of Big Round Top. Benning's Brigade of Georgians stubbornly held the Houck's Ridge area until removed in the evening of the third. Most of the bodies that fell in the Slaughter Pen and near the Weikert Field were too exposed to the deadly fire from Little Round Top to be recovered, and they remained where they fell until after the Confederate Army began its retreat back into Virginia. It would be the lot of Union burial details to inter the dead from Alabama, Georgia, and Texas who were scattered about the boulders and bushes. The photographs of the dead at this end of field were recorded before these details reached these areas, and provide a striking testimony to the significance of battle action in this area. The words written by the commanders and survivors of both sides have been used in this study to clarify and describe the nature of the fighting, as well as to its relative importance, but the photographs are visible historic evidence that what these men endured was truly recorded in their narratives.

COMMENT

Various conclusions came out of this brief study, which should be used to better or more accurately interpret the battle at this area of the field. Overpowering all others is the responsibility of clearing out the over-extended vegetation in the Slaughter Pen, the Plum Run gorge, and the Sherfy Woodlot. The movements and activities in this, one of the most historic sites on the field, are obscured by vegetation to such an extent that it is not only impossible to interpret what happened there, but it is ignoring the story of the men who fought and died there.

Secondly, it is apparent from the recorded history that all six guns of Smith's Battery are presently in the wrong location, along with the monument and marker adjacent to them. Smith's guns were in front of the infantry line at the crest of Houck's Ridge, by some distance (perhaps 50 yards). The monument and guns of this forward part of the battery are now at the LEFT of the infantry line of monuments. The infantry, which was supposed to be in support of Smith, were logically behind him and not within the same line. Indeed, the position of the monument and guns indicates that Smith's Battery held the extreme left of the Third Corps line WITHOUT supports. All accounts of the battle correspond in stating that the guns were in front of the Union infantry line. If the infantry monuments of Ward's Brigade are in the correct location (and from the records of the regiments it appears that they are so) then the monument and gun location of the 4th New York is erroneous.

The section to the rear is presently on Crawford Avenue, in the Valley of Death, instead of on Houck's Ridge as it was in 1863. The Bachelder troop position maps (1863 and draft of 1880s) accurately portrayed the position of these guns on the hillock at the northern end of Houck's Ridge, as did the map prepared for the court case against the trolley. The fact that the 40th New York stopped in front of the section and then charged "DOWN the meadow" to the "rocky ravine BELOW" indicates that the guns were on a height and not within the "rocky ravine" itself as they have been since put there by the War Department in 1900. A visit to the site itself (near the division marker of

Aynes) assured the doubtful that the northern hillock is a much more advantageous position than that in the valley along the avenue, and has a commanding view of the valley and Plum Run gorge (the target of the section). It is an injustice to this, one of the most gallant and effective batteries on both sides in this battle, that we continue to mark and interpret sites on which it never stood and ignore those site where it did such deadly and effective service and where it suffered its true losses.

APPENDIX A

STRENGTHS AND CASUALTIES -- 2 JULY 1863

UNION	engaged	casualties
Ward's Brigade		
4th Maine	287	14 k, 54 w, 72 m
86th New York	287	11 k, 48 w, 4 m.
124th New York	238	28 k, 57 w, 5 m
99th Pennsylvania	277	18 k, 80 w, 11 m
1st U. S. Sharpshooters	169	1 k, 24 w, 15 m.
DeTrobriand's Brigade		
40th New York	431	23 k, c. 115 w, 7 m
Burling's Brigade		
6th New Jersey	207	1 k, 26 w, 8 m
Artillery Brigade		
4th New York Battery	126	2 k, 10 w, 1 m
(Busey and Martin, pp. 50-51, 54-55; Bachelder, Notes on Services of Troops; <u>Official Records</u> , volume 27, part 1, pp. 177-178, 512, 519, 527, 578, 589.)		

CONFEDERATE	engaged	casualties
Robertson's Brigade		
1st Texas	426	24 k, 59 w, 21 c, 1 m
3rd Arkansas	479	13 k, 73 w, 17 m
Law's Brigade		
44th Alabama	363	24 k, 66 w, 4 m.
48th Alabama	374	8 k, 67 w, 27 m.
Benning's Brigade		
2nd Georgia	c. 348	25 k, 66 w
15th Georgia	368	8 k, 62 w
17th Georgia	c. 350	15 k, 75 w
20th Georgia	c. 350	23 k, 77 w, 4 m

(Busey and Martin, pp. 132-134; Harold Simpson, Hood's Texas Brigade: A Compendium, pp. 10-89, 253-321; Official Records, volume 27, part 2, pp. 330, 424, 394, 396.)

APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHS

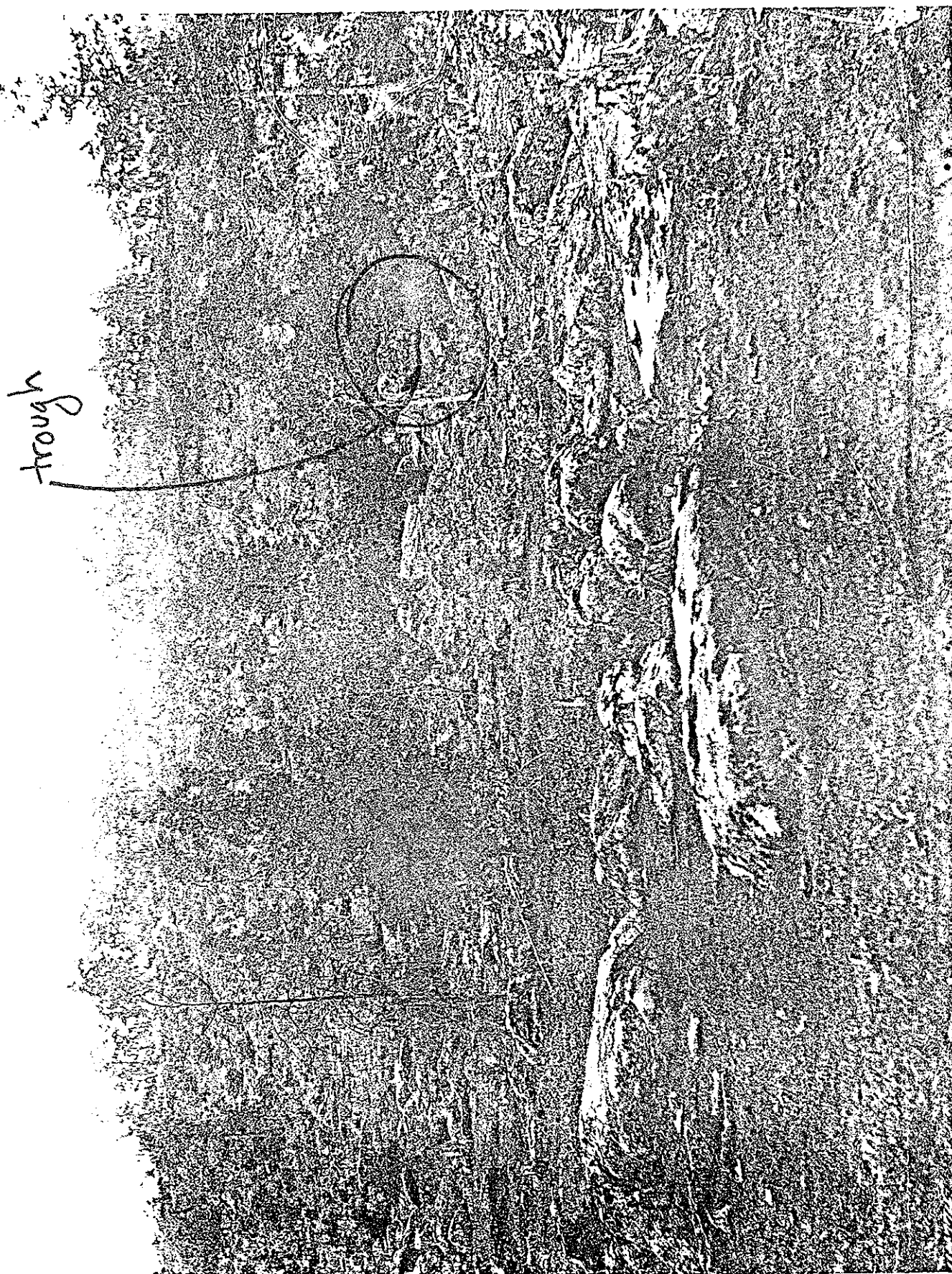


1. The Spring at Devil's Den (Tipton #2471)---the den itself is beneath the top boulder and behind the spring.

2. The Trough Rock at Devil's Den (Tipton #2466)---shown in use during the turn of the century



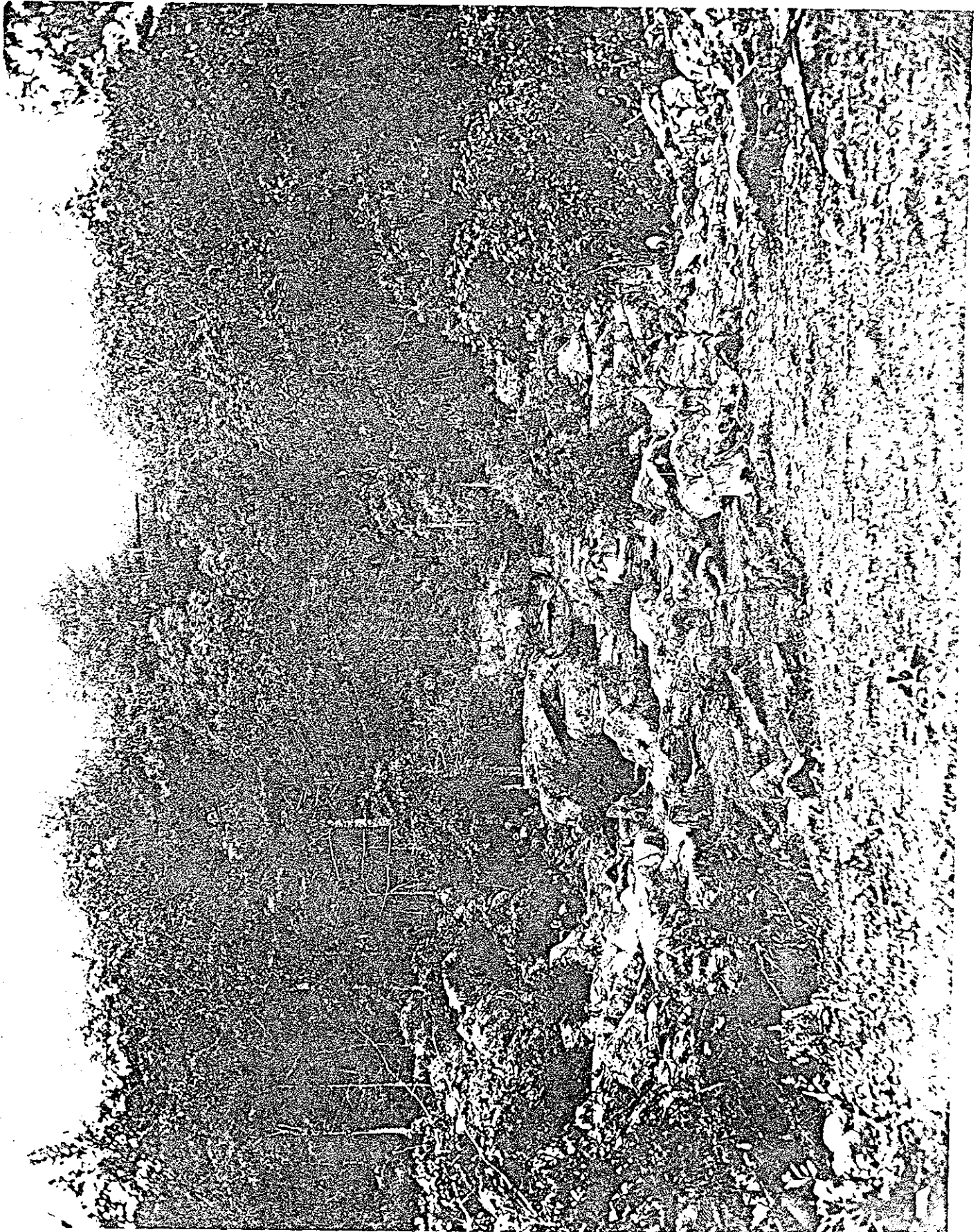
3. North end of Slaughter Pen and Plum Run Valley (O'Sullivan), 6 July 1863---
the large boulder with the trough visible in it is encircled



4. Dead Confederate soldier (Gardner #229), 6 July 1863---this stereo view most likely portrays one of the infantrymen of the 2nd Georgia Infantry, since the photograph was obviously taken in the mass of rocks and boulders of Plum Run gorge, which was the route of attack of that regiment of Benning's Brigade.



5. View in the Slaughter Pen at the foot of Big Round Top (O'Sullivan), 6 July 1863---the view is eastward from the Devil's Den, and most likely depicts the dead of the 44th Alabama and perhaps some of the 2nd Georgia. The encircled body lies immediately east of the trolley roadbed.



6. Confederate dead in the Slaughter Pen (Gardner #265), 6 July 1863---
this view shows two dead infantrymen, probably of the 44th Alabama
Infantry, which suffered casualties from the rifles of the 4th Maine
and from Smith's two guns on the hillock of Houck's Ridge. The trolley
road bed is just to the right of the picture.



7. Scene in the woods at the northwestern base of Big Round Top (Gibson #252), 6 July 1863---also identified as "in Slaughter Pen, foot of Round Top", this photograph probably depicts more of the dead of the 44th Alabama killed by the first volley from the 4th Maine, just at the edge of the woods near the clearing around Plum Run. The area would be just above the present comfort station.



8. Dead Confederate soldier, Devil's Den (Gardner #277), 6 July 1863---
this view portrays a victim of Ward's Brigade near the edge of the
G.W. Weikert field, and is most likely a member of the 20th Georgia
or the 1st Texas killed in the attack on Smith's Battery.



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