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THE BATTLE OF THE BOYDTON PLANK ROAD, OCTOBER 27-28, 1864

Chapter I

General Meade Plans an Offensive

IN STORAGE

The leader of the Army of the Potomac, Major General George G. Meade on October 23, 1864, had visited Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's City Point, Virginia, headquarters. While there, Meade had proposed that he employ three of his four corps to turn the Army of Northern Virginia's right beyond Hatcher Run and drive for the South Side Railroad. Grant told Meade that he would have to give additional thought to the subject. Meade then returned to his headquarters.

On the 24th Meade was handed a telegram from Grant, marked confidential. Unfolding the message, Meade found that he was to:

> Make your preparations to march out at an early hour on the 27th to gain possession of the South Side Railroad, and to hold it and fortify back to your present left. In commencing your advance, move in three columns...with the same force you proposed to take. [Major General John G.] Parke, who starts out nearest to the enemy, should be instructed that if he finds the enemy intrenched and their works well manned, he is not to attack but confront him, and be prepared to advance promptly when he finds that by the movement of the other two columns to the right and rear of them they begin to give way.

When the columns marched, each soldier was to carry three days' rations in his haversack and 60 rounds of ammunition on his person. Wagons and ambulances were to be parked a considerable distance in front of the rebel picket line. Another 20 rounds of small-arms ammunition per man, along with a reserve supply of artillery projectiles, were to be loaded into wagons by the ordnance people and held ready to roll when called for. Depots along the Military Railroad were to be cleared of stores, and all wagons, ambulances, and artillery horses not accompanying the corps were

SCANNED 8/3/00

to be sent to City Point on the night of the 26th.[1]

According to information wrung by Meade's officers from Rebel deserters, the Petersburg earthworks were being extended by Confederate fatigue details and Negro work gangs to Hatcher Run. These rifle-pits were to terminate at redoubts previously thrown up by Rebel horsesoldiers on the south bank of Hatcher Run, about one mile above Armstrong's Mill, and were said not to cross or extend up the run. At Burgess' Mill, where the Boydton Plank Road crossed Hatcher Run, there were artillery emplacements and some infantry parapets, but no line of entrenchments.

The Petersburg lines from the Appomattox below the city to Battery No. 31 were reportedly defended by Major General Bushrod R. Johnson's combat-ready division. Lieutenant General Ambrose P. Hill's III Corps held the remainder of the line from Battery No. 31 to Arthur Swamp: Major General Henry Heth's division on the left, Major General Cadmus M. Wilcox's on the right, with Major General William Mahone's in reserve. Major General Wade Hampton's two cavalry divisions (Lee's and Butler's) and Brigadier General James Dearing's mounted brigade were on the right of the Confederate infantry.[2]

Meade and his chief of staff, Major General Andrew A. Humphreys, prepared to alert their corps and cavalry commanders to get ready for another big offensive. Several changes were made by Meade as to the amount of rations and ammunition to be taken along by his army. The soldiers were to carry three full days' rations in their haversacks, and "three days' bread and small rations in knapsack." Sixty rounds of ammunition were to be taken on the person; with another 40 rounds per man in the ordnance wagons. The artillery was to bring along 250 projectiles per gun, using the caissons of the field pieces emplaced in the redoubts instead

of additional wagons. One-half the ambulances were to go with the troops, while each brigade was to be allotted one medicine and one hospital wagon. No baggage or headquarters wagons were to be allowed to accompany the columns, but pack mules could be utilized to bring up the officers' rations and tents. Clerks, orderlies, and others on detached or special assignment (unless their services' were deemed essential) were to be armed and instructed to report back to their units. Each corps was to designate an officer to take charge of the horses and caissons belonging to the batteries posted in the redoubts, with orders to see that they were "parked with the train of the Artillery Reserve."[3]

How to organize a striking force of from 30,000 to 35,000 infantry and still have sufficient manpower to hold the investment line plagued Meade. The withdrawal of large numbers of troops from the earthworks would have to be done with finesse to keep General Robert E. Lee and his generals from ascertaining that the Army of the Potomac was about to strike a mighty blow. Major General Winfield S. Hancock (whose II Corps held the fortifications from Battery XXIV on the left to the redoubts at Spring Hill) was to see that Brigadier General Nelson Miles' First Division relieved the Second and Third Divisions on the line. On being relieved by Miles' bluecoats, Brigadier General Gershom Mott was to mass his Third Division on the cleared ground near Southall's house. Brigadier General Thomas W. Egan was to concentrate his Second Division near Fort Bross. These movements were to begin as soon as it was dark, and Mott's and Egan's soldiers "must be massed beyond the view of the enemy by daylight" on October 25.[4]

Major General Gouverneur K. Warren was notified to have his V Corps ready to march by Wednesday night, the 26th. Meanwhile, Warren and his staff

were to see that the troops left behind "to hold the redoubts and inclosed batteries" from Battery No. XXIV to Fort Conahey were posted. According to an estimate prepared by Warren's staff, 2,200 infantry and 32 guns would be sufficient to discharge this mission. Warren was to form the rest of his footsoldiers and guns out of the Confederates' sight.[5]

Like Warren, General Parke of the IX Corps was ordered to have his men ready to move on the night of the 26th. Fifteen hundred footsoldiers and 24 guns were to be stationed in the redoubts and enclosed works from Fort Fisher on the right to Fort Cummings on the left. All other IX Corps combat personnel was to be concentrated "at convenient points for movement, out of view of the enemy."[6]

Brigadier General David McM. Gregg of the cavalry was to alert his division to be ready to ride on Wednesday night. Preparatory to taking the field, Gregg was to recall his pickets.[7]

Evidently, Meade and his staff were not too well versed in the ways of horsesoldiers. General Gregg soon notified Chief of Staff Humphreys that "it will scarcely be possible for the cavalry to carry on their persons three days' bread and small rations in addition to three days' rations in the haversacks." Since each trooper would have to take 20 pounds of forage in his haversack, there would be no room for extra rations. Gregg would therefore have his men cram four days' rations in their knapsacks, and caution them that the rations would have to last five days.[8]

As soon as it was dark on October 24, Miles' division marched from its camps, and the troops moved into the trenches, relieving Egan's and Mott's soldiers.

Upon being replaced in the rifle-pits, Egan's brigade commanders at 2:20 a.m. put their units in motion for Fort Bross. A temporary camp was established a short distance behind the redoubt. A large fatigue detail from Egan's 2d Brigade (Colonel James M. Willett's) had remained behind, till 4 a.m., strengthening the earthworks. When these men were secured, the project engineer told the officer in charge to proceed to Avery's house. The troops were kept standing in ranks at Avery's house until well after daybreak, awaiting additional instructions from Colonel Willett. Orders finally came to march to Fort Bross, but nothing was said about concealing their movements from Rebel lookouts, consequently, General Hancock was distressed to learn that when the column moved south, its line of march was in full view of the Confederates.[9]

At 10 p.m. the troops from Mott's division garrisoning Forts Sedgwick, Davis, and Alexander Hays had been relieved by units from Miles' division, and, falling in behind their guides, they hiked to the rendezvous at Southall's. Men of the Third Division posted in Forts Blaisdell, Bross, and Stevenson were scheduled to rejoin their units on the morning of the 26th.[10]

General Hancock at 9 a.m. on October 25 notified Meade's headquarters that Egan's and Mott's troops had been relieved. A 900-man fatigue detail had spent the night working on fortifications near Dunn's and Avery's houses. The Confederates at the same time had been building bomb-proofs and covered ways behind their rifle-pits opposite Fort McGilvery.

Miles during the day notified Hancock that it required 1,900 men to man the picket line. To do this, he had 6,200 riflemen which was insufficient. If the regiment currently guarding the depot at Cedar Leval were ordered to report to him, Miles was of the opinion that he would

have enough men to discharge his mission.[11]

Chief of Staff Humphreys, on learning of Miles' problems, issued orders for the regiment at Cedar Level to report to the First Division, when the depot was abandoned.[12]

Hancock on the 25th notified Egan and Mott that tents would be struck at noon tomorrow. Forage, rations, and ammunition "required from the trains must be drawn and issued by" that time. Several changes were made in the amount of rations to be taken along on the expedition. Each man was to carry four days' rations on his person instead of six, "to count from the morning of the 27th." One day's supply of salt meat was to be taken in haversacks and three days' beef on the hoof. All public and personal property in excess of what the officers and men could carry on their persons or horses were to be turned over to the corps' chief quartermaster for safekeeping. The troops were to be prepared to march at 2 p.m. To keep information as to their destination from reaching the foe, it was announced that the order of march would not be issued till the morning of the 26th.[13]

Major John G. Hazard, who bossed the II Corps' artillery, had a tough assignment getting his batteries ready to roll. On the night of the 24th, a section of the 4th Battery, Maine Light Artillery which had been withdrawn from Fort Haskell relieved the section of Battery F, 1st Pennsylvania posted in Battery No. X. The other section of Battery F was recalled from Fort Stedman, rejoining its parent unit near Baxter road in rear of the deserted house. Battery H, 1st Ohio Light Artillery was moved from Fort Sedgwick, one section being ordered into Battery No. XIII and the other into Battery No. XIV, relieving the 10th Battery, Massachusetts Light Artillery. The Massachusetts can-

noneers marched from the earthworks to the Fort Bross rendezvous, where they found Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery. Batteries C and I, 5th U. S. Light Artillery and the 1st Battery, New Hampshire Light Artillery, which had been in corps reserve, reported to General Mott at Southall's.[14]

A staff-meeting was held on the 25th in General Parke's command post at Peebles' House. With the assistance of his staff, Parke designated the units that would be left to hold the IX Corps' line. Fort Fisher was to be garrisoned by the 31st Maine and the 45th Pennsylvania; Fort Welch by the 51st New York, the 59th Massachusetts, and the 17th Vermont; Fort Gregg by the 8th Michigan and recruits from the 51st Pennsylvania; Fort Sampson by the 3d Maryland; Fort Cummings by the 46th New York. Each unit was to camp in the "immediate vicinity" of the fort garrisoned, and was expected to picket their entire front. Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Ely of the 8th Michigan, as senior officer, was to be in charge of the fortified line when the IX Corps marched out.[15]

General Meade and his headquarters people by this time had finished studying their maps. The routes that the various units were to take were plotted. Orders were drafted and distributed. On the afternoon of the 26th Hancock was to move Egan's and Mott's divisions "to the Vaughan road just outside the line of rear intrenchments." To reach this area, the troops who wore the clover-leaf were to take a route well to the rear, so as to be out of sight of Confederate observation posts. Hancock at 2 a.m. on the 27th was to march his corps via Vaughan road, cross Hatcher Run, "pass by Dabney's Mill and Wilson and Arnold's steam saw-mill on the Boydton plank road; cross the open country to Claiborne's road near its intersection" with White Oak road, and recross Hatcher Run. His column

would then march to the South Side Railroad, striking it at a point about three miles east of Sutherland Station.

General Gregg was to assemble his cavalry division (about 3,000 strong) on the afternoon of the 26th near Hatcher Run. When his troopers rode out on the 27th, they were to cross the stream by the first crossing below the one used by Hancock's corps. Upon reaching the west bank of the creek, Gregg, who was to look to Hancock for his orders, was to advance his horsesoldiers on the left of the infantry, probably following Quaker road as far as the Boydton Plank Road. Gregg's movements would be governed by Hancock's.

Parke's IX Corps was to march "at such hour" on the 27th as to enable it to surprise at daybreak the small Confederate force posted in the recently opened earthworks between Hatcher Run and Hawks'. If successful, Parke was to pursue the Confederates, wheeling his columns to the right as they forged ahead. Should Parke fail to breakthrough, he was to remain in position, keeping the butternuts pinned down, while the II and V Corps turned their right.

The V Corps was to march simultaneously with the IX Corps, proceeding to the crossing of Hatcher Run, below the Boydton Plank Road bridge, from where Warren was to support Parke. If the IX Corps broke through, Warren's was to push ahead, taking position on the left of Parke's battle line. Should Parke's assault fail, Warren was to cross Hatcher Run and endeavor to turn the Rebels' right by recrossing the run above Burgess' Mill, holding a position on Hancock's right.[16]

Wagons and extra caissons that were to accompany the expedition would not move on the morning of the 27th, but would be "left parked at the most secure point near" the bivouacs, to be ordered to the front

hen convenient. Ambulances, however, would go with the troops.

Army headquarters on the 26th would be transferred to the neighborood of Poplar Spring Church. Meade, during the early phases of the ffensive, would be with the right wing. Headquarters personnel and the engineers were to be held in reserve at Meade's Station, along with "full supply" of entrenching tools.[17]

Meade was delighted to learn that a deserter from the 27th North arolina had turned himself into the IX Corps' pickets. When questioned, e reported that fatigue parties from his division (Heth's) had been detailed to throw up fortifications to the right of Brigadier General amuel McGowan's South Carolina Brigade. While engaged in this work, the man remarked, he and his late comrades had been nearly two miles o the right of their brigade, Brigadier General John R. Cooke's, which as posted on McGowan's left. The newly dug rifle-pits to McGowan's right (which were held by dismounted cavalry) were not extensive, the North Carolinian told his interrogators, but they were fronted by an abatis.[18]

It was 2:30 p.m. on October 26 before Grant completed his review of Meade's plan of operations. He liked everything he read, except for one point. Grant suggested that if Parke on advancing found the Confederate "fortifications in defensible condition and manned," he should not attack but "confront them until the movement of the other two corps had its effect."[19]

Meade modified his master plan so as to meet partially his superior's objection. But, Meade added, as Parke was scheduled to be in front of the Rebel fortifications at dawn, he would have to make a forced reconnaissance "to ascertain the exact condition of affairs unless he waits till after daylight."[20]

Early on October 26 Hancock, as he had promised, laid out the route Egan's and Mott's divisions were to follow in gaining the area near Vaughan road, where they were to spend the night. The two divisions were to move out at 2 p.m., Mott's in advance. Mott's line of march would be from Southall's, through the pines by the Widow Smith's, Williams', and Dr. Gurley's houses, and the frowning parapets of Fort Dushane. A halt for the night would be called "just outside the line and near" Vaughan's house. Three batteries were to accompany the corps, one to be assigned to Egan's division by Major Hazard and the others to Mott's. Ambulances and wagons were to follow the division to which they belonged. When the soldiers went into bivouac, they were to be confined to their camps. No drum or bugle calls were to be sounded; the officers were to caution their men to hold down the size of their camp fires.[21]

By the designated hour, the brigade commanders had formed, mustered, and inspected their units. Mott's division took the lead as the II Corps took the field. No difficulties were encountered till the vanguard, with which Hancock and his staff rode, reached the Weldon Railroad. It was understood by Hancock that Meade expected the corps to bivouac on Vaughan road near Davis'. A personal reconnaissance satisfied the corps commander that it would take his pioneers hours to make the road from Fort Dushane to Davis' passable for his columns. Discussing the geography of the area with his scouts, Hancock learned that he could turn his troops into the Halifax road. A short distance down the Halifax road was a forks, and the road branching to the right led to Colonel Wyatt's on Church road. The road passing in front of Colonel Wyatt's was said to connect with Vaughan road at Mrs. Davis'.

Observing that the sun was about to set, Hancock determined to halt

his corps and have his troops bivouac in the fields south of Fort Dushane.

Hancock dashed off a note to Meade at 6:30, reporting that Egan's rear brigade was just coming in. He had stopped, because there was considerable confusion whether Fort Dushane or Fort Cummings anchored the left flank of the Federals' fortified line. If Meade still wanted his corps to march via Vaughan's house, the hour that the troops were to move out in the morning could be pushed ahead.[22]

Chief of Staff Humphreys acknowledged Hancock's comminication. It would be unnecessary, he wrote, for the II Corps to go by way of Vaughan's. Headquarters, as long as it was the shortest, had no objection to Hancock taking the route via Colonel Wyatt's.[23]

General Gregg during the afternoon had called in his outposts and had concentrated his cavalry at Perkins'. When he rode over to Lewis' house to report to General Hancock, Gregg had some bad news for the corps commander. Gregg had talked with several Confederate deserters. They had told him that Vaughan road, particularly near the Hatcher Run crossing, was obstructed with felled timber. This information troubled Hancock, because he didn't relish marching his columns through obstructions in the dark. Since it would not be light till 5:30, Hancock inquired of Humphreys, "Why not let the soldiers start at a later hour?"[24]

Meanwhile, Hancock had made his plans for in the morning. At 2 a.m. the corps, with Egan's division in the lead, was to move out. The line of march was to be Church road to Vaughan road, then across Hatcher Run by way of Dabney's Mill to Boydton Plank Road. Egan was to cover his column with a strong advance guard, pushed a considerable distance to the front. Great care would be taken to keep the soldiers closed up, and the cadence would be held down till daybreak.

Gregg, after detaching a squadron to reconnoiter in advance of the infantry, was to march his division via Rowanty Postoffice to Vaughan road. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, Gregg was to communicate with Hancock. When riding down the Halifax road, to avoid confusion, the cavalry was to keep to the left and the infantry to the right.

A guide, thoroughly familiar with this section of Dinwiddie County, would report to General Egan. All wagons, except the ambulances, were to be parked between the camp and Dr. Gurley's.[25]

Meade, upon receipt of Hancock's message regarding a need to reschedule the hour the march was to commence, was agreeable. The II Corps could start at 3:30, which would bring Hancock into the vicinity of Hatcher Run at dawn.[26]

General Warren was thrown into a quandary by Meade's instructions for him to "move simultaneously with the Ninth Corps, and proceed to the crossing of" Hatcher Run, below the Boydton Plank Road Bridge, because he knew of no road that would bring the V Corps into position between the II and IX Corps. Major Washington A. Roebling was detailed to explore the road network between the fortifications held by the IX Corps and Hatcher Run, but he was unable to venture beyond the Union pickets, which were but a short distance in front of the earthworks.

General Parke's pioneers, however, came to Warren's assistance. A road was opened by them through the abatis and pines to the left of Fort Cummings, through an open field, to a cart road. When Chief of Staff Humphreys relayed this information to Warren, he pointed out that this cart road would enable the V Corps to reach Duncan road, which led by Westmoreland's house. The people at army headquarters were unable to see why the V Corps could not move simultaneously with the IX Corps as

far as Duncan road. From there, it was believed that Warren's scouts should be able to locate a route to Hatcher Run.[27]

After acknowledging Humphreys' telegram, Warren issued orders for his division commanders to have their troops at Parke's house, ready to take the field at 5:30 a.m. on the 27th. Heavy battle losses and the discharge of men whose enlistments had expired had reduced the once proud and formidable V Corps to little more than a skeleton. When the corps marched, Brigadier General Charles Griffin's First Division was to have the advance, to be followed by Brigadier General Romeyn B. Ayres', with Brigadier General Samuel W. Crawford's bringing up the rear. The corps was to keep closed up, Griffin's vanguard following hard on the heels of Parke's rear division. Of his 11,000 effectives, Warren complained, 3,913 had never fired a shot in anger, while 1,649 were "ignorant of the manual." Five batteries, three armed with light 12-pounders (14 guns) and two with 3-inch rifles (10 guns), were to accompany the expedition. The earthworks from Battery No. XXIV to Fort Fisher, formerly held by the entire corps, would be entrusted to Brigadier General Henry Baxter's brigade, about 2,500 strong, and eight batteries of 34 guns. Surplus transportation and baggage had been sent to City Point.[28]

Meade, when he reviewed Warren's orders, disapproved of the starting time. 5:30 was not early enough. General Parke, having alerted his division commanders to have their troops on the road by 3 o'clock, Meade telegraphed Warren to put his corps in motion at 4 a.m.[29]

The troops of the IX Corps spent October 26 getting ready to take the offensive. Rations and ammunition in the stipulated quantities were drawn, while the units earmarked to hold the forts took position. Besides cutting a passage through the parapet and abatis to the left of Fort Cummings

or the V Corps, Parke's pioneers opened a route through the fortifications to the right of that stronghold for the IX Corps.

General Parke, before retiring, notified Brigadier General Orlando illcox, whose First Division was to have the advance, that he was to move his "command promptly at 3:30 in the morning, keeping.../ his /rigades well closed, and taking the road cut through the parapet to the right of Fort Cummings...." [30] The Third Division led by Brigadier eneral Edward Ferrero and Brigadier General Robert Potter's Second ivision, as named, were to follow Willcox through the gap opened in the earthworks. [31]

Tattoo was beaten as usual in the IX Corps' camps that evening. After tattoo, the officer of the day made his rounds to see that the en had retired and that no unnecessary camp fires were burning. At :30 o'clock the officers awakened their men, being careful to hold down the noise. The units were formed, mustered, and ready to march t 3 o'clock. [32]

THE BATTLE OF THE BOYDTON PLANK ROAD, OCTOBER 27-28, 1864

Chapter I

General Meade Plans an Offensive

Notes

1 The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 317-318.

2 Ibid., 318-319; Andrew A. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65 (New York, 1882), 294.

3 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 322-323, 325-326, 328, 330.

4 Ibid., 323-324.

5 Ibid., 325. Brigadier General Charles Griffin was on leave, but so highly did Warren value the services of the leader of his First Division that he sent him a telegram, urging him to rejoin the army. Griffin, never one to miss a fight, rejoined his division in time to lead it into battle. Ibid., 325.

6 Ibid., 328. Troops left to hold the redoubts were to be provided with 200 rounds of ammunition per person and to be supplied with rations to see them through six days. Ibid., 329.

7 Ibid., 330.

8 Ibid., 331.

9 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 295, 325; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 347-348.

10 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 345, 394; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 348. Miles' brigades were posted: the 1st Brigade from the Appomattox to Fort Morton, the Consolidated Brigade from Fort Morton to Battery No. XXI, the 4th Brigade from Battery No. XXI

to Battery No. XXIV, including Forts Sedgwick, Davis, and Alexander Hays. Ibid., 45, 48.

11 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 344, 345.

12 Ibid., 345.

13 Ibid., 345, 346.

14 Ibid., 346. The 14th Massachusetts Battery withdrew one section from Fort Bross and one from in the rear of Fort Sedgwick; the 3d Battery, Vermont Light Artillery was pulled out of Battery No. XVI; while the 3d Battery, Maine Light Artillery was relieved in Fort Rice by a section of Battery A, 1st New Jersey Light Artillery. These three batteries proceeded to City Point, where the officers in charge reported to Brigadier General Henry W. Benham.

15 Ibid., 350, 351.

16 Ibid., 340-341; Humphreys, Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65, 294-295.

17 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 341-342. Lieutenant Colonel Ira Spaulding commanded the engineers.

18 Ibid., 338.

19 Ibid., 355.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 359; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 410-411. Batteries C and I, 5th U. S. (armed with six Napoleons) reported to General Egan, while the 10th Massachusetts Battery (six 10-pounder Parrotts), and Battery K, 4th U. S. (four Napoleons) was attached to Mott's command.

22 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt.III, 358; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 230, 295, 303, 319, 325, 346, 351, 394. Fort Dushane had been

erected in late August and early September, following the battle of the Weldon Railroad, and anchored the defense line covering the railroad from the west. Fort Cummings had been thrown up in early October, after the battle of Peebles' Farm, and anchored the Union line laid out to secure the ground gained at that time.

23 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 358.

24 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 608.

25 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 359-360.

26 Ibid., 359.

27 Ibid., 361; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 434.

28 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 434; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 362-363. General Baxter commanded Crawford's 2d Brigade. The V Corps batteries left to hold the works were posted: Battery No. XXIV, two 3-inch rifles; Battery No. XXV, two 12-pounder Napoleons; Fort Howard, two 12-pounder Napoleons and two 3-inch rifles; Battery No. XXVI, two 12-pounder Napoleons and two 3-inch rifles; Fort Wadsworth, four 3-inch rifles and four 12-pounder Napoleons; Fort Keene, two 3-inch rifles and two 12-pounder Napoleons; Fort Urmston, four 12-pounder Napoleons and two 3-inch rifles; Fort Conahey, two 3-inch rifles and two 12-pounder Napoleons. O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 363-364; Humphryes, Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65, 295-296; William H. Powell, The Fifth Army Corps (Army of the Potomac), A Record of Operations During the Civil War in the United States of America, 1861-1865 (New York, 1896), 738-739.

29 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 361.

30 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 364, 365; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 548-549.

31 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 548, 580, 592.

32 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 365.

THE BATTLE OF THE BOYDTON PLANK ROAD, OCTOBER 27-28, 1864

Chapter II

Hampton Establishes a Roadblock

General Hancock at 3:30 a.m., October 27, 1864, upon learning that his divisions were formed, passed the word to move out. In accordance with Hancock's orders, Egan's division took the lead. As soon as Egan's rear regiment had moved from its camp and turned into Halifax road, Mott's lead brigade marched from its bivouac. Egan's 3d Brigade commanded by Brigadier General Thomas A. Smyth had the advance, followed by Colonel James M. Willett's 2d Brigade, while Lieutenant Colonel Horace P. Rugg's 1st Brigade brought up the rear. A squadron from the 6th Ohio Cavalry preceded Smyth's lead regiment. Rumbling along between Willett's and Rugg's brigades were the six Napoleons manned by Batteries C and I, 5th U. S. Light Artillery.[1]

For the first one-half mile of the march, the infantry had little "elbow room." Although they held to the right as directed, Halifax road was hardly wide enough for both the footsoldiers and Gregg's cavalry. Tempers flared. Insults were exchanged as infantryman and cavalryman got in each others way. The situation improved after the head of the columns reached the junction, and the II Corps took the right-hand road, while Gregg's cavalry continued down Halifax road.

General Egan and his guide rode with the troopers of the 6th Ohio. At Colonel Wyatt's, the column turned into Church road and pushed on across Arthur Swamp. Day was breaking as the vanguard entered Vaughan road. There were several sharp reports, as Confederate pickets posted at a house about 200 yards north of the road blazed away at the Ohio

horsesoldiers. Egan called a brief halt, to enable General Smyth to organize a force to dislodge the Rebels. Within a few moments, Lieutenant Colonel Frank J. Spalter had reported to Egan with his 4th Ohio Infantry Battalion. Close behind came the 7th West Virginia. Egan had Spalter deploy his Ohioans as skirmishers to the right and left of Vaughan road. The West Virginians were told to load their rifle-muskets and advance as a support to the Ohioans. By the time Spalter's battalion had taken position, the Confederates had secured their mounts and had disappeared down the road. [2]

The march was resumed. It was apparent to the veterans that their officers anticipated trouble, because they asked one another, "Why else has Egan called in the cavalry and deployed infantry to screen the advance?" There was no more delay at this time, and the column tramped rapidly along till Spalter and his Ohioans approached Hatcher Run. Spalter and his foot-soldiers sensed trouble. Here the road had been obstructed; trees had been toppled and brush thrown into the stream, so as to disorganize a force attempting to assail the rifle-pits dug on the opposite side to cover the crossing.

Without waiting for the 7th West Virginia, Colonel Spalter barked the command, "Double-quick!" The Ohioans crossed an open field and dashed down the slope. There was a crashing volley. Spalter and several of his men were knocked off their feet. Unable to cross Hatcher Run, the Ohioans took cover and returned the Rebels' fire. By this time, the 7th West Virginia had deployed as skirmishers and moved to the attack. The West Virginians stormed into the abatis, but like the Ohioans, they were repulsed.

Captain John Fordyce of the West Virginia unit, with Spalter dead, was senior officer present. After posting his men behind trees, he dashed

to the rear and hailed Generals Egan and Smyth. The generals listened as Fordyce tersely explained the situation. Egan turned to Smyth and told him to form his brigade across the road. Staff-officers galloped to the rear with instructions for Willett and Rugg to hurry to the front with their brigades and form a second line behind Smyth's. Willett was to post his New Yorkers on the right, while Rugg massed his bluecoats on the left of Vaughan road.[3]

Major Henry S. Farley of South Carolina led the small detachment of dismounted troopers from Brigadier General Pierce M. B. Young's brigade charged with guarding the Vaughan road crossing of Hatcher Run. The Confederates, their fighting blood up, had let go a terrible "Rebel Yell" as the Yankee skirmishers scrambled for cover. The sight of Egan's battle lines had a sobering influence.

Egan, having completed his dispositions, told Smyth to charge. Supported by Willett's and Rugg's brigades, Smyth's battle line swept forward. Men dropped, but on the Federals came. Tearing gaps in the abatis, the Yanks, holding their cartridge-boxes and rifle-muskets above their heads, plunged into the run. The water was waist deep. By the time they had scrambled up the slippery west bank, the Rebels had abandoned their rifle-pits and were fleeing down the road. A number of greyclads, not as fleet as their comrades, were captured.

Smyth's soldiers continued the pursuit to Young's Store, where the general called a halt to re-form his brigade. While waiting for the rest of the division, Smyth had the 1st Delaware relieve the 4th Ohio Battalion and the 7th West Virginia on the skirmish line. The men from Delaware pushed out about three-quarters of a mile, driving the Confederates before them.[4]

General Hancock, while waiting impatiently for his pioneers to remove the obstructions from the ford so his artillery could pass, dashed off a note to Chief of Staff Humphreys. He reported that his column had forced its way across Hatcher Run. At this time, 7:30, firing could be heard off to the south where Gregg's cavalry was operating, but there were no sounds of battle from the IX Corps off to the northeast. This caused Hancock to feel "some uneasiness," because he realized that his "small column could affect nothing if the enemy were permitted to concentrate against it, and that he could not even attempt to reach the South Side Railroad unless the enemy were kept busily occupied meeting the attacks" launched by Parke and Warren.[5]

As soon as the rest of Egan's brigades and Mott's division had forded Hatcher Run, Hancock told Egan to march "by the nearest road to Dabney's Mill;" Mott's column was to move out along Vaughan road a mile or so, and then strike for the mill by way of a cart road, shown on the Federals' maps of eastern Dinwiddie County.[6]

Egan, after re-forming his division, called for Rugg to take the advance. Smyth's brigade was to bring up the rear. Rugg's lead regiment (the 19th Massachusetts) was turned off Vaughan road and into the Telegraph road. At the point where the Telegraph road struck Hatcher Run, Egan had Rugg form his brigade into battle line across the road, while skirmishers of the 19th Massachusetts waded the stream. Not encountering any Confederates, they were withdrawn. As soon as Rugg reassembled his troops, the march was resumed along a cart road. The head of the column reached Dabney's Mill at 9:15, where the vanguard (two companies of the 19th Maine) captured Major Andrew R. Venable, Hampton's adjutant-general. While Egan's soldiers were halted waiting for Mott to arrive, Venable was

estioned by Egan and his staff. Venable refused to tell the Federals anything except his name and rank.[7]

Mott's division, with Brigadier General P. Regis De Trobriand's brigade leading the way, had waded Hatcher Run at 8 o'clock. Preparatory to moving out Vaughan road, Mott had De Trobriand advance the 2d U. S. Sharpshooters and the 73d New York as skirmishers. De Trobriand's advance guard, as it approached a cornfield near where the road to Dabney's Mill branched off from Vaughan road, sighted Confederates digging rifle-pits. The Yanks surged forward, and the Confederates dropped their entrenching tools, swung into their saddles, and pounded off in swift retreat. Nothing further out of the ordinary occurred to mar the march to Dabney's Mill. Since Egan's troops had reached the mill well ahead of them, Mott's soldiers were subjected to considerable good-natured guying as they tramped up.[8]

All the while the sound of Gregg's guns was getting nearer. Hancock knew that with Gregg advancing, he would have to strike rapidly for the Boydton Plank Road, if he were to intercept the Confederates that the Union cavalry was driving in. Orders were given for Egan to push on toward the plank road.[9]

Egan soon had his division in motion along a wood road, which his guide assured him led into the Boydton Plank Road at Bevill's. At 10:30 a. m. Gregg's advance debouched from the pines into a field and reached their goal. Looking up the plank road toward Hatcher Run, the Yanks could see the canvas tops of Confederate military wagons as they rolled northeastward.

Hancock, who was riding with Egan, was disappointed, because he be-

lieved that a small force of cavalry, if one were available, might have captured part of the train before it crossed the run at Burgess' Mill. As soon as the last of his footsoldiers had emerged from the woods, Egan had Rugg form his brigade into line of battle across the Boydton Plank Road. The 19th and 20th Massachusetts were sent to report to Captain A. Henry Embler of Hancock's staff. Embler deployed the Massachusetts infantrymen as skirmishers to the right of the road and advanced to feel the foe. Hancock at the same time called for Rugg to move his brigade across the Boydton Plank Road, anchoring its right on the road.[10]

As soon as Willett's 2d Brigade entered the clearing, Egan had the colonel form his troops with their left resting on the plank road. The position taken by Willett's troops was parallel with the road and faced the commanding ground, known to the soldiers as Burgess' farm. Willett was told by Egan to advance "to the support of Captain Embler's skirmishers, until his left connected" with Rugg's right.[11]

While Willett was preparing to do as directed and before the head of Smyth's column came out of the pines, a Confederate battery roared into action, hammering Rugg's skirmishers and battle line with case-shot. Two Rebel guns were quickly pinpointed on the south side of Hatcher Run, near Burgess' Tavern, while a second section had unlimbered its piece off to the west near White Oak road.[12]

The cannoneers of Batteries C and I, 5th U. S. Light Artillery heard the boom of the Southerners' cannon. Lieutenant W. Butler Beck put his "battery into a trot." Driving their teams out into the field, the regulars quickly put their Napoleons into action, concentrating their fire on the Confederate guns on the ridge near Burgess'. The range was only 800 yards, and the Federal cannoneers quickly registered on their mark. Within a few

minutes, the greyclads had had enough, and limbering up their guns they withdrew north of the run.[13]

General Hancock did not deem it prudent to continue his march for the White Oak road, while any Confederates remained south of Hatcher Run. Orders were now issued for Egan to push for the bridge at Burgess' and drive everything across. General Gregg at this time rode up and reported to Hancock.[14]

* * *

When Gregg's horsesoldiers took the field before daybreak on October 7, Colonel Charles H. Smith's brigade was assigned the advance, to be followed by Colonel Michael Kerwin's, with Brigadier General Henry E. Davies' brigade covering the rear. The cavalrymen were delighted when Hancock's II Corps left them in possession of Halifax road. A mile north of Reams' Station, the long column turned into the Dinwiddie Courthouse road, which would bring it to the Monk's Neck Bridge crossing of Rowanty Creek.

Colonel Smith, before saddling up, had assigned to the dependable 6th Ohio Cavalry the advance. A Confederate outpost was encountered by the Ohioans at J. Hargrave's, about one mile northeast of Monk's Neck Bridge. A few shots were exchanged, and the Rebel vedettes fled. The bluecoats followed, close on the Johnnies' heels.

As they approached the bridge, the Ohioans pulled up their horses, because on the opposite side, about 200 yards to their front, they could see a line of breastworks behind which crouched Rebel cavalrymen assigned to watch the crossing. Colonel Smith galloped up and made a hurried estimate of the situation. The 6th Ohio and a battalion of the 1st Maine were

dismounted. After the troopers had counted off, every fifth man was detailed as a horse-holder. Next, the men were deployed on the run as skirmishers. Several well-aimed volleys kept the butternuts pinned in their rifle-pits, and then the bluecoats charged, wading the Rowanty above and below the bridge. Pressing on, the Yanks stormed the works, capturing several prisoners.[15]

A bridgehead established, Gregg had his pioneers cut away the barricades placed on the approaches to the bridge. The division then crossed Rowanty Creek, as the horse-holders brought up the mounts, and the advance was resumed. Smith's brigade, preceded by troopers of the 6th Ohio, continued to lead. As the column forged deeper into Dinwiddie County, the Ohioans were in constant contact with the Rebel horsemen, whom they had help rout from the roadblock. Much powder was burned, but with both sides moving rapidly, there were few casualties.

Two and one-half miles west of Monk's Neck Bridge, the Federals turned into Vaughan road and crossed Little Cattail Run. Upon reaching the intersection of Vaughan and Quaker roads, Gregg's vanguard wheeled into Quaker road. As the 6th Ohio started down the slope leading to Gravelly Run, Major George W. Dickinson threw up his right arm as a signal to halt. Most of the leaves having withered and fallen, the advance guard could see a number of Rebels posted on the north side of the stream, prepared to resist their crossing.[16]

Several couriers had been bagged by the Yanks during their lightning-like ride from the Rowanty to Gravelly Run. Gregg closely questioning these men learned that two Confederate cavalry divisions were based in eastern Dinwiddie County. Major General W. H. F. "Rooney" Lee's division was said to be encamped on Stony Creek, to Gregg's left and about three

miles distant, while Brigadier General Matthew C. Butler's division was camped on Quaker road to his front.[17]

Major General Wade Hampton's Cavalry Corps was charged with guarding the area southwest of the Petersburg fortifications. The cavalry chieftain on October 24 had notified General Lee that his horsesoldiers had been employed "in assisting the infantry in completing a new line of works, which extends" to Hatcher Run. This task having been completed, Hampton had posted his corps: Seven hundred dismounted cavalrymen had been sent into the newly completed earthworks, their right resting on Hatcher Run, about one and one-half miles above Armstrong's Mill. Troopers from Butler's division picketed the countryside from the rifle-pits to Monk's Neck Bridge, while Rooney Lee's horsesoldiers watched the ground between Monk's Neck Bridge and the point where Halifax road spanned Stony Creek. Dearing's brigade was encamped at Burgess' Mill with orders, on receipt of news of a Union advance, to take position at once in the trenches on the right of the infantry.[18]

On the 24th Lieutenant General Ambrose P. Hill had joined Hampton for a ride along the recently finished earthworks. As they jogged along, Hampton suggested to Hill that if the infantry could hold the line to Hatcher Run, he could pull his dismounted troopers out of the rifle-pits north of the stream and place them in the works guarding the south bank. The cavalry corps would then be concentrated within supporting distance of the fortified zone, and if the Federals attacked, Hampton could throw a force of from "400 to 4,000 men" on their flank by crossing at one of the five dams, reserving at the same time a sufficient mounted force to cope with their cavalry. Before Hill could act on this suggestion, however, the Army of the Potomac lashed out toward the Boydton Plank Road.[19]

Shortly after daybreak, on October 27, excited couriers began reaching Hampton's command post with reports that a number of Union columns were advancing and driving in Butler's pickets from Squirrel Level road on the left to the Dinwiddie Courthouse road on the right. Next, came the evil-tidings that Union infantry and artillery had forced crossings of Hatcher Run at Armstrong's Mill and the Vaughan road crossing, while Yankee cavalry had stormed the Monk's Neck Bridge. Orders were given for Butler to reinforce his outposts. The brigade commanders ordered their regiments "to get into the saddle" without allowing their cavalrymen to attend to the "niceties of the toilette, or to breakfast...." Some dismounted men, "who were in camp, always as wretched as fish out of water, were forced, much against their will, to move in undignified haste, swearing like orthodox troopers, amid much pleasant chaff from their more fortunate comrades on horseback." Butler, accompanied by a combat patrol, rode out to engage the Union column (Hancock's corps) that was advancing via Vaughan road.

Learning from his scouts that Gregg's cavalry was driving up Quaker road, Hampton with a strong detachment from Butler's division headed south. Hampton soon encountered the pickets as they retreated before Gregg's vanguard. Reacting to this emergency with his characteristic vigor, Hampton dismounted and formed his men on a ridge overlooking Gravelly Run. Butler now rode up and reported that he had been unable to locate Hancock's column. Meanwhile, the cannoneers of the Washington South Carolina Artillery emplaced two of their 3-inch rifles on a commanding knoll.[20]

Before riding out of Butler's camp, Hampton had dispatched an aide with instructions for Rooney Lee to take the field with all his division,

except those men on picket duty. Lee was to ride from his Stony Creek camp, march up the military road, so as to strike Gregg's cavalry in the rear as it advanced up Quaker road.

Hampton, as a good soldier, knew that the gap which had opened between Butler's left and Hatcher Run would have to be covered. If not, Hancock's column would be able to make an unopposed march to Burgess' Mill. He therefore gave Major Venable the task of telling Dearing to pull his troopers out of the rifle-pits north of Hatcher Run, and to post them on Boydton Plank Road near Bevill's house. Dearing upon reaching Bevill's would have a twofold mission. Besides watching Butler's flank and rear, he was to guard the roads leading from Armstrong's and Dabney's mills to the plank road.

General Hill, as Hampton's superior, quashed the order for Dearing to proceed to Bevill's, because he did not feel that the brigade could be spared from the works. Dearing and his troopers would continue to be responsible for the defense of the Burgess' Mill crossing of Hatcher Run. It was while hastening to tell Hampton of Hill's refusal to release Dearing that Venable was captured by Hancock's vanguard. Hampton therefore did not know that the approach to his rear was unguarded.

Upon the departure of Hampton's column for Gravelly Run, the men remaining in camp quickly packed the wagons and started for Burgess' Mill. These were the vehicles seen by Hancock as he rode out onto the Boydton Plank Road.[21]

General Gregg had joined Colonel Smith and Major Dickinson on the ridge south of the Quaker road crossing of Gravelly Run. While the officers were discussing the tactical situation, the cannoneers of the Washington South Carolina Artillery opened fire. Gregg, studying the opposite slope through his glasses, was able to pinpoint a strong skirmish

line. Smith prepared to attack. The 6th Ohio and the 1st Maine were dismounted and deployed as skirmishers. Wading the run, the bluecoats carved out a narrow bridgehead. Butler's Confederates, however, held their ground along the brow of the ridge and prepared to counterattack. Smith determined to commit another regiment. The 21st Pennsylvania was called up and rode across the stream, forming on the flanks of the skirmish line. Smith's brigade, as soon as the Pennsylvanians were in position, began to fight its way up the slope. Suddenly, the butternuts broke off the engagement, secured their horses, and retired up the valley of Gravelly Run.[22]

It was not long before Gregg and Smith's bluecoats discovered the reason for the Confederates' precipitant withdrawal. Hampton had first learned that Dearing had not taken position at Bevill's, when several ashen-faced men rode up and reported a powerful Union column (Hancock's) was astride the Boydton Plank Road. If Butler's butternuts held their ground, they would be trapped between the Yank cavalry to their front and Hancock's infantry to their rear. It was mandatory for Hampton to change his front, so as to meet the Federals on the Boydton Plank and White Oak roads. After dispatching a combat patrol with one gun up Quaker road to harass Hancock, Hampton ordered Butler to disengage his division, move to the left, and take post near J. Wilson's on the plank road. Covered by a strong rear guard, Butler broke contact with Gregg's horsesoldiers and headed for Wilson's.[23]

While Smith's brigade was battling Butler's division along Gravelly Run, Rooney Lee's division came thundering up the military road from Stony Creek. General Davies' brigade, reinforced by the 2d Pennsylvania of Kerwin's brigade, was posted at the junction of the Quaker and military roads. Lee's greyclads made a spirited attack, but they were repulsed.

As soon as Butler's division had abandoned the ridge overlooking Gravelly Run, Gregg resumed his march up Quaker road. Davies' rear guard (the 1st Pennsylvania Cavalry) was cautioned to keep a strong lookout. Rooney Lee's butternuts harassed the Yanks as far as Gravelly Run.[24]

Rooney Lee was now hailed by one of Hampton's aides. The staff-officer told Lee that he was to find a wood road, south of Gravelly Run, and take his division over to the Boydton Plank Road. He would then cross the stream, advance up the plank road, and assail the Federals. Lee moved to carry out Hampton's instructions.[25]

Upon reaching Wilson's, Hampton had Butler detail a small force and post it there to draw Hancock's attention toward the southwest. Accompanied by Butler and the remainder of the division, Hampton took the wood road leading by Holliday's and connecting with White Oak road at Butler's house. Although the Confederates drove their mounts hard, they reached White Oak road with only minutes to spare. A short distance to the east, and sweeping rapidly toward them,was a blueclad skirmish line.[26]

Butler's troopers dismounted and deployed on the double. Young's brigade took position on the left, its flank resting on Burgess' Mill Pond, with an open field to its front. Colonel Hugh Aiken's South Carolina Brigade was on the right, picketing the ground to a considerable distance south of White Oak road. Butler was told by Hampton that he was to advance as soon as he heard Rooney Lee's guns. While waiting for Lee to get into position over on the Boydton Plank Road, Butler sent the horse-holders to the rear, and his cavalrymen threw up temporary barricades of "fence rails, logs and such material as...[they] could get." Captain James F. Hart had the gunners of his Washington South Carolina Artillery unlimber their six guns along the division's line,

commanding the field in front.[27]

Hancock, with the Confederates having established a roadblock on White Oak road, was especially glad to see Gregg. He told the cavalryman to form his division on the left of the II Corps--Kerwin's brigade "close upon the infantry and west of the plank road," Davies' on the plank road, and Smith's on the Quaker road. Davies' and Smith's horsesoldiers were to watch for Confederate thrusts up these roads and guard the II Corps' rear.[28]

With Gregg's division on the field, Hancock prepared to turn his command into White Oak road. Orders were given for Egan to advance his battle line down the Boydton Plank Road, driving the Rebels posted on the high ground at Burgess' across Hatcher Run. Meanwhile, Mott's column had come up. Before leaving Dabney's Mill, a lieutenant and 150 cavalrymen had reported to Mott. The general told the lieutenant "to look well after the rear and to throw vedettes well out on all by-roads; also to drive up all the stragglers." At a word from Mott, the march was resumed with flankers thrown out. Mott's lead brigade reached the plank road at 12:30.

In obedience to orders from Hancock, Mott told De Trobriand "to cover our left flank by a line of skirmishers thrown forward at a considerable distance toward the White Oak road, and a curved line of battle facing to the left and rear (west and south, across the pike)." The 73d, 86th, and 124th New York were deployed and advanced as skirmishers. De Trobriand's skirmish line connected on the right with Rugg's Second Division brigade, and on the left with Gregg's vedettes. The 2d U. S. Sharpshooters soon reinforced the three New York regiments on the skirmish line. De Trobriand's battle line (the 99th and 110th Pennsylvania, the 20th

Indiana, the 40th New York, the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery and 17th Maine Infantry) extended across the fields on both sides of a wood road leading to the northwest, and was covered on its flanks by a dense growth of pines.[29]

Brigadier General Byron R. Pierce's 2d Brigade was massed in a field, near the junction of the Dabney's Mill and Boydton Plank roads.[30] Colonel Robert McAllister's 3d Brigade was emerging from the pines as a cavalcade of horsemen rode up. One of the officers, whom McAllister recognized as General Meade, told the brigade commander to halt his column.[31]

A courier at noon had ridden up and handed Hancock a note from Chief of Staff Humphreys, drafted at 10:40. Humphreys wanted Hancock to know that the V Corps had found the Rebels "intrenched on a line running near to Armstrong's mill pond." No V Corps troops had yet forded Hatcher Run, but Warren was to cross a division at once and follow with the rest of his corps. Meanwhile, Hancock was to look out for his right and see that there is no enemy between his corps and Hatcher Run.[32]

Replying, Hancock observed that he was at Burgess' house, and that General Gregg and his cavalry had "just come up." The foe having been driven across Hatcher Run, the II Corps was about to move out on White Oak road. By the route that he proposed to follow, it was six miles to the South Side Railroad.[33]

One of Hancock's officers now told Mott to put his division in motion for White Oak road. Before Mott could do as directed, Hancock received an order from General Meade requiring him to halt where he was. While awaiting additional instructions, Hancock watched as De Trobriand's brigade formed.

Generals Grant and Meade now rode up to Hancock's command post.

Calling Hancock aside, Meade told him that Crawford's V Corps division was working its way up Hatcher Run. Meade wanted Hancock to extend his line to the right and link up with Crawford's troops.[34]

THE BATTLE OF THE BOYDTON PLANK ROAD, OCTOBER 27-28, 1864

Chapter II

Hampton Establishes a Roadblock

Notes

1 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 231, 295, 427.

2 Ibid., 295, 325, 338-339.

3 Ibid., 295, 303, 319, 325, 338-339.

4 Ibid., 231, 295, 325, 331, 333-334, 339.

5 Ibid., 231; O.R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 379; Francis A. Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road, October, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts (Boston, 1906), V, 325.

6 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 231.

7 Ibid., 295-296, 303, 306, 309, 312, 314, 319, 325.

8 Ibid., 346, 359, 367, 394.

9 Ibid., 231.

10 Ibid., 296, 303, 309, 310, 314; Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 325.

11 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 296, 319.

12 Ibid., 231, 297; Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 325.

13 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 427. 2d Lieutenant Thomas Barnes of the regular battery was mortally wounded at this time. A Confederate sharpshooter cutting him down with a minie in the abdomen.

14 Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 325.

15 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 609, 621, 648.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 608.

18 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 1161-1162. To strengthen their line behind Hatcher Run, the Confederates had erected five dams, covering them with works on the south bank.

19 Ibid., 1162.

20 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 608, 648, 949; Edward L. Wells, Hampton and His Cavalry in '64 (Richmond, 1899), 329.

21 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 949; Wells, Hampton and His Cavalry, 329-330.

22 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 608-609, 621, 649.

23 Ibid., 949; Wells, Hampton and His Cavalry, 332-333; U. R. Brooks, Butler and His Cavalry in the War of Secession, 1861-1865 (Columbia, 1909), 357.

24 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 609, 629, 641; R. L. T. Beale, History of the Ninth Virginia Cavalry, in The War Between the States (Richmond, 1899), 147.

25 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 949.

26 Ibid.; Wells, Hampton and His Cavalry, 333-334.

27 Brooks, Butler and His Cavalry, 357. Butler's 3d Brigade, Rosser's, had been detached and sent to join Lieutenant General Jubal Early in the Valley.

28 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 609, 621, 629, 641, 648.

29 Ibid., 346, 359.

30 Ibid., 346, 367.

31 Ibid., 346, 395.

32 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 379.

33 Ibid., 380.

34 Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 325-326; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 231.

THE BATTLE OF THE BOYDTON PLANK ROAD, OCTOBER 27-28, 1864

Chapter III

General Heth Prepares to Strike

General Parke's IX Corps was formed and ready to march at 3 a.m. on October 27. Parke, like the people at Meade's headquarters, was of the opinion that the Confederates' fortifications had not yet been extended to Hatcher Run, or if such a line had been marked out by General Lee's skilled engineers, the earthworks had not been completed.

Brigadier General Orlando B. Willcox's lead brigade, Colonel Bryon M. Cutcheon's, marched at 3:30, passing by Parke's Peebles' house command post, en route to Fort Cummings. Moving through the gap cut in the earthworks and abatis to the right of Fort Cummings, the head of the column was halted by Willcox at the picket line. Here Cutcheon's bluecoats waited in the darkness, while the next brigade in line, Colonel Napoleon B. McLaughlen's, marched up.

Filing to the right, McLaughlen's troops passed in front of the earthworks from which the Rebels had been driven the previous month. McLaughlen's mission was to surprise the Confederate outpost known to be stationed at the redoubt. At what he considered a secure distance from the redoubt, McLaughlen halted his troops. Major James Doherty with 40 volunteers from the 57th Massachusetts crept forward--their task was to take the pickets from the rear. One of Doherty's party was trigger-happy. There was a loud bang. One of the four Confederate sentries was knocked to the ground by a minie, and his companions

leaped to their feet and in the confusion eluded Doherty's patrol. Reaching their lines, the greyclads sounded the alarm.[1]

McLaughlen, on hearing the shot, led his brigade forward and joined Doherty at the redoubt. Here he halted his column to allow Brigadier General John F. Hartranft and his 1st Brigade to pass. Willcox now rode up and told McLaughlen to have his column follow Hartranft's.[2]

Cutcheon by this time had deployed the 2d Michigan as skirmishers along the edge of the woods east of C. Smith's house. The 20th Michigan was posted in support, and the rest of the brigade was held ready to file by the left flank. Upon hearing that McLaughlen's troops had botched their assignment, Cutcheon advanced his brigade toward Smith's house. At Smith's, Cutcheon swung his left forward, and the brigade drove westward. Contact with McLaughlen's troops to the right was soon lost, so Cutcheon directed his "skirmishers to gain ground in that direction as they advanced, until they should cover the road running westward from the Hawks house." The right of the skirmish line had a difficult time wading the branch of Arthur Swamp in front of Hawks', thus causing the left of the skirmish line to swing ahead till it was nearly perpendicular with Duncan road. Cutcheon discovered what had occurred, but 20 minutes of valuable time was lost while the alignment was corrected. When the advance was resumed, Cutcheon told Lieutenant Colonel Edwin J. March of the 2d Michigan "to push forward vigorously and attack promptly any force of the enemy he might encounter."

The Union skirmishers forged ahead. Confederate pickets from Heth's division were encountered in the pines east of Watkins'; shots were exchanged, and the butternuts fell back. General Willcox heard the musketry and had Cutcheon hold his ground, while he called up Hartranft's

people. Hartranft's brigade came up on Cutcheon's left. As soon as Hartranft's skirmishers were in position on the left of the 2d Michigan, Willcox told his brigade commanders to push on. Hartranft's and Cutcheon's brigades closely supported the skirmishers as they drove in Heth's outposts.

It had been daylight several hours, when the skirmishers emerged from the pine thickets west of Clements' house, and found themselves confronted by a line of rifle-pits "well filled with men and protected by an almost impervious slashing." March advanced his bluecoats close up to the abatis, the left of his line entering the felled timber. Seeing that the Confederate position was too strong to be assailed, he sent a runner racing to the rear to tell Cutcheon what he had discovered. Cutcheon reinforced March with the 20th Michigan and the 51st Pennsylvania. Hartranft at the same time strengthened his skirmish line. Taking position in front of the abatis, the Federals dug in.[3]

Under Willcox's eye, Hartranft and Cutcheon formed their brigades for attack. Colonel McLaughlen's brigade was called up, so it could be a ready reserve. All the while patrols from the two advance brigades probed for soft spots in the fortified line held by Heth's veterans.[4]

Brigadier General Edward Ferrero's Negro Division had followed the route pioneered by Willcox's troops through the breastworks and abatis and across the countryside beyond. When Willcox's advance came to a halt before the Rebel earthworks west of Clements' field, Ferrero jockeyed his brigades into position on Willcox's right, swinging his right flank back to link up with Brigadier General Robert R. Potter's Second Division near Hawks' house.[5]

Screened by a strong line of skirmishers, Ferrero pushed his battle line through the pines and dense undergrowth. Ferrero's people, like

Willcox's, were compelled to halt, when they came upon a line of recently dug earthworks. Obstructions (slashed timber and abatis) warned Ferrero and his officers that an attack against the sector to their front would be attended with frightful casualties. Ferrero, after notifying Parke of the situation, received permission to fortify his position.[6]

There was a glow in the eastern sky, as Potter's advance brigade (Brigadier General Simon G. Griffin's) passed Fort Cummings. Marching rapidly ahead, Griffin's troops relieved McLaughlen's at the abandoned Rebel redoubt. To cover the advance of Willcox's and Ferrero's divisions, Griffin sent a strong force of skirmishers toward the northwest. After all the soldiers had passed the redoubt, Potter brought up his 1st Brigade, Colonel John I. Curtin commanding. Potter now deployed his division, "the center on the road to the right of the Hawks house and in line with that house," his right in the abandoned Confederate rifle-pits about one-eighth mile from the slashings in front of the Union main line of resistance, and his left in contact with Ferrero's right. A picket line was established well to the front, connecting on the right with the pickets in front of Fort Welch.[7]

Potter during the afternoon had his men entrench their position. The 19th Battery, New York Light Artillery had reported to him, so Potter had the cannoneers emplace four guns near Hawks' house and the remaining section on his right.[8]

General Parke at 9:45 notified Chief of Staff Humphreys that "Willcox is up with the enemy's line, and is now engaged, skirmishing." Willcox was now extending to the left to connect with Warren, and, if he found a soft spot, he was to attempt a breakthrough. Potter at this

hour was across the road north of the Hawks house redoubt, while Ferrero occupied the interval between Willcox and Potter.[9]

Warren's V Corps as directed had marched at 4 a.m. It started to sprinkle at 4:45 a.m., and because of the overcast, it was unusually dark. Owing to the gloom, parts of the long column became scrambled; brigades lost contact with the preceding unit. It was light enough for the soldiers to see the road at 5:30, and Warren, having passed to the left of Fort Cummings, turned the head of his column into the woods. Warren was disgusted to discover that the IX Corps' people had not cleared all the obstructions from the road, so he called on General Griffin for pioneers. Keeping to the left of the IX Corps' flankers, the column moved in a southwesterly direction to R. Thompson's house.

Ascertaining that he was getting too far south, and that all roads encountered ran north and south, Warren had his pioneers cut a road through the pines in a westerly direction for one-half mile. This led the corps' vanguard into Duncan road, southeast of Clements' house. Here Warren found a cart road leading west. A short tramp down the cart road brought Warren's advance guard up against Heth's picket line.[10]

General Griffin, in response to instructions from Warren, told Colonel Edgar M. Gregory, the commander of his lead brigade, to form his men in the pines to the left of the road. Gregory deployed his unit in double line--the 188th New York Battalion and the 91st Pennsylvania in front, and the 187th New York Battalion and the 159th Pennsylvania in support. Skirmishers from the 91st Pennsylvania were advanced, while the 155th Pennsylvania in the same formation took position to cover the 2d Brigade's left. As soon as Gregory reported that he was prepared, Griffin sent him forward. The men who wore the maltese cross, although subjected to a

"lively fire," advanced through the pines, driving Heth's outposts back into their fortifications. Upon penetrating to within 100 to 200 yards of the Rebels' main line of resistance, Gregory's skirmishers encountered felled timber and came under a scathing fire from riflemen sheltered behind recently erected breastworks. A hasty reconnaissance convinced Griffin that the slashings and abatis would make an assault on the rifle-pits costly. Orders were given for Gregory's troops, who had already seen 100 of their comrades shot down, to take position and start fortifying. Contact was established at this time with Hartranft's IX Corps troops on the right.[11]

It was now 9:30. Warren had already received word from Meade that Parke's people had met the Confederates, but they would probably be unable to crack the Rebels' fortified line. Meade therefore wanted Warren to send part of his corps across Hatcher Run and communicate with General Hancock.[12]

Replying to Meade's communication, Warren told of his advance and of Gregory's repulse. All that he had seen satisfied Warren that, because of the strength of the Rebels' works to his front, it would be impractical for his corps to force a crossing of Hatcher Run above Armstrong's Mill.[13]

Hancock at the same time was notified that the V Corps was "about one mile north of Armstrong's Mill, on the Duncan road."[14]

After ordering Generals Ayres and Crawford to mass their divisions close behind Griffin's, Warren called for two of his staff--Major Washington A. Roebling and Captain William T. Gentry. Roebling was to take the general's escort (a detachment from the 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry) and feel to the left, and see if he could locate where the Rebel right

anchored on Hatcher Run. Captain Gentry was entrusted with the 9:30 message to Hancock. Pending the return of his aides, Warren would reconnoiter to his front and ascertain the practicability of forcing Heth's position.[15]

Major Roebling rode toward Armstrong's Mill. On the opposite side of Hatcher Run at the mill, he could see a regiment of troops wearing the clover-leaf badge. As Roebling and the horsesoldiers watched, the II Corps footsoldiers moved out of what looked like rifle-pits. The major assumed that these were abandoned Confederate earthworks; that they were continuous along the right bank of the stream; that they recrossed Hatcher Run somewhere opposite Griffin's left, connecting with the fortifications before which Gregory's advance had stalled. As it rode up the creek, Roebling's party was fired on by a greyclad picket, who took to his heels. Roebling reported back to Warren at 10:15, and told his general that besides being fortified the south bank of the run was heavily timbered.[16]

Generals Grant and Meade, accompanied by a large number of horsemen, rode up to Warren's command post at 10:30. After Warren had briefed his important visitors as to his dispositions and the formidable character of the Rebels' works, Major Roebling explained to the generals that Griffin's skirmish line extended a considerable distance down Hatcher Run. Captain Gentry now showed up. Questioned by Warren, he reported that the rear of General Hancock's column had passed Dabney's Mill en route to the plank road.[17]

Grant, after reflecting on the situation and checking his maps, told Warren "to send a division across Hatcher's [sic] Run, place its right flank on the run, and then move up, supporting General Hancock, and upon arriving at the enemy's right of the line in front of General

Griffin to attack it in flank, and endeavor to cause him to abandon the line, and thus open the way for the rest of" the V and IX Corps.[18]

Checking with his staff, Warren learned that Crawford's division was conveniently situated for undertaking this special assignment. Lieutenant Charles Ricketts was sent to tell Crawford to bring up his division. When Ricketts trotted up, he found the Third Division halted in Thompson's field. After listening to Ricketts, Crawford turned the head of his column into Duncan road. Before he had gone very far, Crawford encountered Major Roebling. The major, who was to conduct the division to its position, told Crawford that he was to cross Hatcher Run at Armstrong's Mill, advance up the right bank, resting his right on the stream, and link up with Griffin's left. From Roebling, Crawford learned that the II Corps was on his left and had advanced a considerable distance. While questioning the staff-officer about the topography of the area into which he was to take his troops, the general was told that if he advanced as he planned with a two-brigade front, he would "overlap" the II Corps.[19]

Meanwhile, Warren had determined to increase the force with which Crawford would cross the run. Orders were issued for General Ayres to reinforce Crawford with a brigade. Ayres detached the Maryland Brigade, Colonel Andrew W. Denison commanding. Crawford's column having been assigned a mission fraught with danger, Warren would travel with it. Griffin would be expected to employ his own division and two brigades of Ayres' to keep Heth's attention focused on his front, while Crawford maneuvered for position on the Rebels' flank or rear.[20]

As Warren trotted off, Griffin called up two regiments from his 3d Brigade (Brigadier General Joseph J. Bartlett's), sending them to the left. There they took position, their right resting on Gregory's left

and their left on Hatcher Run. The rest of Bartlett's brigade was formed in line north of the road opened that morning by the division pioneers. General Ayres massed his 1st and 3d Brigades as a strategic reserve in the pines behind Bartlett's battle line.[21]

Crawford's vanguard reached the run opposite Armstrong's Mill by 11:45 and started to cross. Because of the heavy growth of timber and underbrush on the opposite side of the stream, Crawford was compelled to leave his battery, the 9th Battery, Massachusetts Light Artillery, at the mill. Warren joined Crawford by the time his rear brigade--Colonel J. William Hofmann's had scrambled up the south bank. Colonel Denison and the Maryland Brigade overtook the division at this time. While Crawford's bluecoats were deploying, Warren reviewed for Crawford's benefit what was expected. Using a map, the corps commander indicated to his subordinate the point where the earthworks confronting Griffin's people were believed to anchor on the run. Warren wanted Crawford to turn these fortifications.[22]

In forming his command, Crawford placed Brigadier General Edward S. Bragg's brigade in advance. Bragg was told "to throw out a strong line of skirmishers, to double them, and to advance them half a mile in his front, their right resting upon the creek." Colonel Hofmann's brigade was formed in rear of Bragg's, its right anchored on Hatcher Run. In obedience with instructions from Crawford, Hofmann threw out the 147th New York as flankers to guard his left. As the dense undergrowth made it impossible to advance along the creek, two regiments of the Maryland Brigade were ordered "to advance in rear, and supporting the right flank, and two others on the left flank," and Colonel Denison was instructed to hold his Marylanders ready to reinforce any

portion of the line that might be necessary.

After checking with the brigade commanders and learning that they were ready, Crawford "broke the command by the right of companies to the front, and advanced" into the forest. Forward progress was attended with great difficulty. So thick were the trees and so tangled the undergrowth that the troops became confused as to directions. Officers were compelled to rely on their compasses. To help Crawford and his top subordinates guide their movements, Warren dispatched an aide with instructions for Griffin to have his skirmish line open on the foe to its front. Great difficulty was experienced by the brigade and regimental commanders in maintaining a semblance of an alignment. Hatcher Run made a horseshoe bend to the west, and Crawford, to avoid having his right wing wade the stream twice, filed his brigades by the flank a considerable distance to the southwest.

Reconnoitering in front of his left, Crawford rode into the clearing at Dabney's Mill, where he sighted a detachment of cavalry. Told by the horsesoldiers that the II Corps was a considerable distance to his front, Crawford urged his men on. The pace of the advance was snail-like. After what seemed like hours, Crawford reached Crow's farm--"a wide open space under cultivation." To the east, about 200 yards away, Hatcher Run made a sharp meander. Here the timber had been felled, so as to make any movement up the bank of the stream impracticable.

Crawford now lost valuable time as he mistook the branch which discharges into Hatcher Run at this point for the main stream. After the general had orientated himself, he sent Hofmann's brigade forward by the flank, while Bragg's battle line crossed Crow's field. Hofmann's soldiers, covered by a line of skirmishers, moved so rapidly that without

realizing it, they passed Bragg's battle line. Hofmann, on discovering that Bragg's troops were no longer to his front, sent out scouts. Within a few minutes, they returned and reported that because of the jungle-like-conditions, they had been unable to locate Bragg's people.

Hofmann halted his column. Before resuming his advance, he formed his brigade into line of battle, covering it with a strong force of skirmishers. A 200-yard advance brought the Federals up against a "heavy line" of Confederate sharpshooters. The Rebels banged away at Hofmann's bluecoats. An eyewitness reported, "The troops were a little scared, and many stragglers began running to the rear; but few bullets seemed to come from the enemy. Our line then commenced to cheer, and advance rapidly, firing all the while. The firing from the enemy was very feeble." The engagement which ensued was short but decisive; the greyclads being driven across Hatcher Run.[23]

Another group of Confederates at the same time had assailed Bragg's skirmish line, as it entered the woods north of Crow's farm. The blue-coated skirmishers held their ground, and, reinforced by the 150th Pennsylvania, they drove back the butternuts, capturing one of Brigadier General John R. Cooke's North Carolinians.[24]

The shooting served as a guide, and enabled Bragg and Hofmann to re-establish contact. One of Bragg's aides galloped up and told Hofmann to retire. In answer to Hofmann's inquiry, the staff-officer pinpointed Bragg's brigade as 500 yards to the left and rear. Before the order could be executed, it was countermanded. Subsequently, the order was repeated, and the brigade moved back and fell in on Bragg's left.[25]

General Crawford, on making a reconnaissance, found that Bragg's skirmishers had advanced 150 yards beyond the point where Griffin's left

anchored on the north bank of Hatcher Run. This was the reason for Hofmann's recall. After Hofmann's bluecoats had taken position on Bragg's left, Crawford "detached a regiment to examine the right bank of the creek near my present position, and to feel the enemy's works." The regiment took position and blazed away, enfilading one of Heth's units posted in the rifle-pits north of the run. This fire disconcerted the greyclads, but being veterans they did not panic easily. After redeploying to meet this threat to their flank and rear, the Confederates returned the Federals' fire.[26]

General Warren at this moment rode up to Crawford's command post. A hasty inspection demonstrated to the corps commander that Crawford's troops were just where he wanted them---"on the right flank of the enemy's position fronting Griffin." He could see that the steep banks and slashed timber at this point would make it difficult for Crawford's troops to force a crossing of Hatcher Run. Moreover, as Crawford explained to Warren, the march through the "jungle" had caused whole regiments to loose their way. Warren told Crawford to hold his ground and press the foe with his skirmishers, while he rode to discuss the situation with Meade, who was reportedly at Hancock's headquarters. As Warren galloped off, Crawford checked the time: it was 4 p.m.[27]

Major Roebling in the meantime had been riding along Bragg's skirmish line, and he found its right was on the creek, directly in front of the Rebel rifle-pits on the left bank. The breastworks near Hatcher Run had been evacuated. At this moment, a 20-man Confederate squad appeared atop a knoll north of the run and fired at the major's party, killing an orderly. As he retired downstream, Roebling saw that Griffin's skirmish line connected with Bragg's battle line. A dozen of Griffin's men were on Crawford's

side of the stream, having crossed on a log. There was no officer with them. Roebling told them to find their officer and tell him that the Rebels had pulled out of their breastworks, and "to go up and occupy them." Next, Roebling contacted Crawford and inquired, "Why have you halted when victory is in your grasp?"

"I have positive orders from Warren not to advance another step," was the reply.

Captain Dennis Dailey of Warren's staff now rode up and begged to be allowed to ford the stream, which was waist-deep, with 50 volunteers and mop-up the line of rifle-pits.

"Permission refused," Crawford snapped.

Whereupon, Roebling thundered off up a cart road to see if he could find Warren and explain to him the situation.[28]

* * *

General Robert E. Lee at this time was at Chaffin Bluff, north of the James, Lieutenant General Ambrose P. Hill having been left to look after the units charged with holding the Petersburg lines. On October 25-26 there were signs of stepped-up Union activities on the north side of the James, and on the morning of the 27th elements from Major General Benjamin F. Butler's Army of the James attacked vigorously along the entire front from the New Market to the Charles City roads.[29] Simultaneously, Lee received reports that the bluecoats had crossed Hatcher Run and were driving for the Boydton Plank Road. Colonel Walter H. Taylor of Lee's staff remarked, "It looks like a sure enough advance,"[30] while Colonel Charles Marshall, in more formal phrase, notified Secretary of

War James A. Seddon, "There...appears to be a simultaneous movement on both flanks."[31] The government was profoundly alarmed and called the last available reserves, the munition workers and the cadets, to its defense.[32]

Counter-operations on the South Side had to be left to the judgment of Generals Hill and Hampton. North of the James, Lee left the dispositions to Lieutenant General James Longstreet, who had returned to duty eight days before. Never did Lee have better reason to trust the military judgment of Longstreet. The front opposite Fort Burnham had been carefully planted with subterra shells or "land mines," after its capture by the Federals on September 29, so Longstreet had nothing to fear along that sector, which the Chaffin Bluff garrison manned. He massed two divisions (Hoke's and Field's) on the front of attack, and soon became convinced that the bluecoats might be preparing to turn the upper end of the outer line, which was undefended. Boldly shifting his infantry as far northward as the Williamsburg road, Longstreet sent Brigadier General Martin W. Gary's cavalry to occupy the fortifications on the Nine-Mile road. In the course of a few hours, he completely repulsed the foe, capturing 600 prisoners and 11 battleflags. No drive north of the James, during the entire investment of Richmond, had been broken up so readily.[33]

On the South Side, the Federals' numbers were large and their advance rapid. If he determined to march to meet the Federals, General Hill would be compelled to leave thousands of soldiers to hold the extensive Petersburg earthworks. Hill liked to fight, however, so it was not difficult for a man of his temperament to make his decision.

General Henry Heth would be placed in charge of a strong column. With this force, Heth was to cross Hatcher Run, advance into the wilderness beyond, and see if he could interpose between the II and V Corps. If he could, Heth was to assail Hancock's right, while Hampton's dismounted troopers struck the II Corps' left and rear. Dearing's dismounted troopers were to hold the rifle-pits to Hancock's front, covering the bridge at Burgess' Mill, while Heth was feeling his way into position.[34]

When Heth took the field, General Bushrod Johnson with his division (reinforced by Brigadier General Joseph Finegan's and Colonel William Gibson's brigades of Mahone's division, and Archer's 3d Battalion, Virginia Reserves) was to occupy the fortifications from the Appomattox to Battery No. 45.[35] Three brigades of General Cadmus Wilcox's Light Division held the works from a point opposite Fort Welch to Battery No. 45. Wilcox's other brigade (Brigadier General Edward L. Thomas') was north of the Appomattox and had been stationed there since July 4. It was on the night of October 2 that Wilcox's butternuts had taken position in this area, and the next morning they had commenced erecting breastworks. This was the beginning of the line of fortifications extending from Battery No. 45 to Hatcher Run. Heth's division threw up and occupied the rifle-pits on Wilcox's right. From right to left Wilcox's brigades were posted: Brigadier Generals Samuel McGowan's, James H. Lane's, and Alfred M. Scales'.[36]

General Heth's division was responsible for the defense of the newly erected rifle-pits from Hatcher Run on the right to Wilcox's left. General Cooke's North Carolina Brigade was on the right, Colonel Robert M. Mayo's Consolidated Brigade on the right center, Brigadier General Joseph R. Davis' Mississippi Brigade on the left center, while Brigadier General William

MacRae's North Carolina Brigade anchored the left. MacRae's command post was at Hart's house.

General Hill's ready reserve consisted of three of General Mahone's brigades--Brigadier General Nathaniel Harris', and Colonels David A. Weisiger's and J. Horace King's--which were camped between the Weldon Railroad and Battery No. 45. There was an air of expectancy on October 24, as Sergeant John F. Sale of the 12th Virginia, Weisiger's brigade, wrote in his diary:

> Nothing of interest has transpired for some time. Considerable artillery firing & picket firing has been going on for some time, but no movements of any importance has taken place. Large numbers of conscripts are daily being sent forward to recruit our army, and with but a few days drilling and the example of the old soldiers they will be as good as any [,] and our army will be as large as before the campaign. Where on earth the new men come from I cannot see, but they do come from somewhere is a visible certainty. Our regiment along having received about 100.
>
> Deserters are coming out of the enemy's lines to join us, some 35 or 40 persons having come to my knowledge. [37]

As soon as the outposts raised the alarm on the 27th, Generals Heth's and Wilcox's brigade commanders saw that the "long roll" was beaten. The troops were turned out on the double and the lines manned. By 9 o'clock the pickets had been driven in, and the bluecoats of the V and IX Corps had appeared before the felled timber fronting the works held by Cooke's, Mayo's, and Davis' brigades.

General Hill, upon being alerted that the Yankees were attempting to turn his right, called for General Mahone to bring up the ready reserve. Even before the order to fall out was heard in the camps occupied by Harris', Weisiger's, and King's troops, the sound of heavy firing off to the southwest told the soldiers that the much dreaded thrust toward the Army of Northern Virginia's right was under way.

At 9 o'clock Mahone told his brigade commanders to form their units. Within a short time, the troops had been turned out under arms and in light marching order. When Mahone passed the order to move out, Weisiger's Virginia Brigade took the lead. There was a 30 minute halt at Battery No. 45, while Mahone checked with General Hill. Instructions having been received to report to General Heth, Mahone turned his three brigades into the Boydton Plank Road. At Gill's plantation, the column abandoned the plank road in favor of the military road to Stony Creek. Here General Mahone was met by a guide sent by General Heth.

The guide, who was familiar with the area, led the way as Weisiger's Virginians, Harris' Mississippians, and King's Alabamans tramped along seldom frequented byroads. Off to the east and southwest, the soldiers could hear the rattle of musketry and the roar of cannon. The head of the column soon reached the dam which Confederate pioneers had built across Hatcher Run, to back up water toward the bridge at Burgess' Mill.

Not too long before Mahone's vanguard arrived at the dam, General Heth had learned that Crawford's division, having crossed Hatcher Run at Armstrong's Mill, was pressing up the south bank of that stream in a drive to establish contact with Hancock's corps at Burgess' Mill. To gain time, Heth called on General Cooke for 75 picked marksmen. Crossing the run on the double, the North Carolina sharpshooters moved off into the dense pines. Taking advantage of the terrain and ground cover, the North Carolinians stalled Crawford's division in the jungle north of Crow's clearing.

Satisfied that the V and IX Corps did not intend to make a serious assault on the Rebel works northeast of Hatcher Run, Heth called in his left flank brigade, MacRae's. To take the North Carolinians' place behind

the breastworks, McGowan's brigade extended to the right. MacRae's butternuts reported to Heth at the dam.

Generals Heth and Mahone now listened intently as several of Cooke's scouts, who had just recrossed the run, reported that there was a considerable gap between Hancock's right and Crawford's people. Heth determined to capitalize on this Union blunder. Before putting his infantry in motion, Heth contacted General Hampton. Between them, the two generals perfected their plans. As soon as the footsoldiers had crossed Hatcher Run, Heth was to notify Hampton. When the roar of battle indicating that Heth had attacked reached his command post, Hampton would send Butler's dismounted cavalrymen sweeping down White Oak road against Hancock's left.

Heth now crossed the dam with two of Mahone's brigades (Weisiger's and Harris') and MacRae's North Carolinians, and followed "an old blind wood-road" through the wilderness toward the Boydton Plank Road. Because of the dense woods, Heth had left his artillery north of Hatcher Run. Slipping his column through the gap separating Hancock's right and Crawford's front, Heth soon learned from his scouts that he had gained an excellent position from which to launch an attack on Hancock's right and rear.

A halt was called to allow the brigade commanders to form their units into line of battle. Weisiger's Virginia Brigade was posted on the left, MacRae's North Carolina Brigade on the right, and Harris' Mississippians in support. The 12th Virginia was on the extreme left, so Colonel Weisiger called for the company to which Sergeant Sale was assigned to deploy as flankers. While his butternuts were filing into position, General MacRae reconnoitered to his front, and observed that the Federals had

blundered in positioning their artillery too near the woods. As soon as skirmishers had been advanced, Heth passed the word for the assault to begin. 4,500 combat-harden veterans forged through the woods toward the fields occupied by Hancock's right flank unit, Pierce's brigade.[38]

Late in the afternoon, after it had started to rain, Heth called for reinforcements, and King's Alabama Brigade crossed Hatcher Run.[39]

* * *

For a better understanding of the tactical situation in which the Federals found themselves at the time that the Confederates were deploying for a counterstroke, we must recall that in obedience with latest orders from army headquarters, Parke, having entered a fortified zone, was to confront the foe in his works, "until the operations on the left (should) draw off the Confederates." In which case he was, presumably, to attack without regard to the strength of the Rebels' position.

Meade's alternate plan was now ready for execution, though it was not a course of action upon which he was "disposed to insist." As we shall see, Meade, with Grant's concurrence, gave the order to cancel it, although no disaster or check, except from the nature of the geography of eastern Dinwiddie County, had been experienced.

What was this "plan?" It was to employ Parke's IX Corps to keep the Rebels pinned in their defenses east of Hatcher Run and throw Warren's V Corps across that stream. Warren's people would then be left to hold the Boydton Plank Road, while Hancock struck for the South Side Railroad by way of White Oak road.

It is apparent that the revised master plan was much less sweeping in its scope. With less manpower being committed, there was less chance

of success. First, because the "active force" had been reduced from three corps to two. Second, considerable time had been squandered in "defining" the Confederates' position and in reaching the conclusion that an attack on the Rebel fortifications by Parke would be unprofitable. Hours, every minute of which was precious, had elapsed, during which a vigilant and resourceful foe was making preparations to counter the impending blow.

Reduced in size and possible importance, as was Meade's modified plan, it was soon emasculated by farther action by the Union brass. Instead of pushing Warren as far as possible across Hatcher Run with his entire corps, thus throwing upon Parke the responsibility of holding the Confederates in their breastworks northeast of the stream, Meade had informed Hancock that only one division of the V Corps, Crawford's, was to ford Hatcher Run.

What Meade hoped to gain by these new dispositions was that Crawford, by advancing rapidly up the south bank of the run, would compel the Confederates defending the rifle-pits in front of the V and IX Corps to abandon their positions. With the Rebels gone, Warren and Parke could then cross Hatcher Run, and, in conjunction with Hancock, slash deeply into the rear of the Petersburg defenses complex. Whether it was Meade's intention, in event of success, to push on out White Oak road, or to wheel his columns to the right and roll up the Confederate line, we do not know.

There was always another possibility--that General Hill, feeling the heavy hand of the foe upon the Boydton Plank Road, would seize the initiative and advance to strike the intruding force a fearful blow. This possibility, which was made a strong probability by the often and bitterly experienced audacity of the Confederates, made it imperative that Crawford

waste no time in establishing contact with Hancock. Delay on Crawford's part could result in losing a chance for victory, or worse, it could invite defeat and disaster.[40]

Promptly on being notified by Meade of the changed plan, Hancock moved to open communications with Crawford. Unknown to the Federal leaders, the Confederates were already moving to capitalize on their errors.

THE BATTLE OF THE BOYDTON PLANK ROAD, OCTOBER 27-28, 1864

Chapter III

General Heth Prepares to Strike

Notes

1 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 548, 556, 568, 576.

2 Ibid., 576.

3 Ibid., 556, 568-569; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 389; Augustus Woodbury, Major General Ambrose E. Burnside and the Ninth Army Corps...(Providence, 1867), 469-470.

4 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 556, 576.

5 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 388; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 592. Colonel Ozora P. Stearns' 1st Brigade was on the left, while Colonel Henry G. Thomas' 2d Brigade was on the right.

6 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 592.

7 Ibid., 580; History of the Thirty-Fifth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, 1862-1865, Compiled by Committee (Boston, 1884), 306; History of the Thirty-Sixth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, 1862-1865 (Boston, 1884), 271.

8 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 592.

9 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 388.

10 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 437; Powell, History of the V Corps, 739.

11 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 437, 459.

12 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt.III, 384.

13 Ibid., 385.

14 Ibid.

5 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 437.

16 Ibid., 440; Powell, History of the V Corps, 740.

7 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 437, 440.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 440, 495-496.

20 Ibid., 437.

21 Ibid., 437, 459; History of the Corn Exchange Regiment 118th Pennsylvania Volunteers...(Philadelphia, 1888), 528.

22 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 437, 496.

23 Ibid., 438, 441, 496, 507, 525. Hofmann's brigade included: the 56th Pennsylvania, 200 strong, 121st Pennsylvania, 58 officers and men; 142d Pennsylvania, 150 strong; the 76th New York, 133 rank and file; 95th New York, 213 strong; 147th New York, 179 strong; the headquarters guard and pioneers, 43 officers and men; total, 1,013. Ibid., 525.

4 Ibid., 496.

25 Ibid., 525.

6 Ibid., 496.

27 Ibid., 438.

8 Ibid., 441-442.

9 Ibid., 871.

30 D. S. Freeman, R. E. Lee (New York, 1935), Vol. III, 513.

1 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 1178.

32 Ibid.

3 Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 513. Longstreet on May 6, 1864, had been seriously wounded in the battle of the Wilderness.

34 Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the

Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 335-336.

35 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 1180.

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), 187.

Diary, John F. Sale, 12th Virginia (Virginia State Library).

38 Ibid.; Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 335-336, 348-349; Caldwell, History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, 187; Dunbar Rowland, The Official and Statistical Register of the State of Mississippi: 1908 (Nashville, 1908), 436, 450, 466, 493, 507, 511, 514; "The Forty-Fourth North Carolina Infantry," The Southern Historical Society Papers, Vol. 25, p. 343.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 457.

40 Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 327-328. People who like to "Monday morning quarterback" speculate that Meade should have pushed Warren's entire corps across Hatcher Run, throwing on Parke the responsibility for keeping the Rebels pinned in their earthworks northeast of Armstrong's Mill. With the entire V Corps across Hatcher Run, Warren could have assumed responsibility of holding the area embraced within the angle of the stream, including the bridge at Burgess' Mill. Hancock would have thus been free to strike for the South Side Railroad with his two infantry divisions, reinforced by Gregg's cavalry.

THE BATTLE OF THE BOYDTON PLANK ROAD, OCTOBER 27-28, 1864

Chapter IV

The II Corps Gamely Holds On in the Face of Heth's Onslaught

General Hancock, immediately after General Gregg and his horsesoldiers had reported, ordered General Egan's II Corps division to drive the Rebels posted on the high ground at Burgess' Mill across Hatcher Run. While Rugg's and Willett's battle lines, covered by a strong force of skirmishers, moved forward, Lieutenant Beck's cannoneers of Batteries C and I, 5th U. S. Light Artillery engaged the Rebel battery emplaced at Burgess' Tavern. General Smyth's brigade emerged from the pines flanking the road to Dabney's Mill at this time.

Hancock hailed Egan and told him to deploy Smyth's troops to cover the division's left and rear. To do this, Smyth formed his men into battle line on the left of the Dabney's Mill road, and advanced a line of skirmishers. As soon as Mott's lead brigade tramped into view, Egan recalled Smyth's bluecoats. Egan directed Smyth to redeploy his soldiers on the right of Rugg's brigade and in support of Willett's. As Smyth's men were falling in on their colors, preparatory to carrying out their new assignment, Mott's 1st Brigade (De Trobriand's) came up and assumed responsibility for guarding the II Corps' left and rear. Crossing a plantation road east of the Boydton Plank Road, Smyth promptly formed his men in an "open field on the right of and on the prolongation of Colonel Rugg's line."[1]

General Egan, as soon as he saw Smyth's column marching up the plank road, ordered Willett (whose brigade had heretofore been posted on Rugg's left) "to advance and carry the enemy's position on the hill crest near

the Burgess house." Captain Embler and the skirmishers of the 19th and 20th Massachusetts, reinforced by the 69th Pennsylvania, charged on the double, followed closely by Willett's brigade. As he would be advancing across open ground, Willett, to reduce casualties, had deployed his brigade as skirmishers. With Captain Embler riding in advance, the bluecoats stormed ahead. General Dearing's dismounted troopers were driven through a belt of timber and across a "swampy ravine." Valuable time was lost as Embler's and Willett's skirmish lines worked their way down and up the other side of the underbrush-choked-hollow.

As they scrambled up the north slope, Embler and Willett called a halt to re-form their lines. Dearing's pickets by this time had joined their comrades on the high ground at Burgess' barn, east of the plank road. Resuming their advance, the Yanks dislodged Dearing's butternuts and smashed the roadblock. The Confederates had barricaded the Boydton Plank Road at a toll-gate, but as General Egan wrote in his "After Action Report," his men failed to observe Virginia highway regulations and no toll was paid.[2]

Embler and his skirmishers sought to cut off the Rebels as they "retreated to the right and across [a] wide sheet of water, where their horses awaited them." North of the pond, the cannoneers of the Petersburg Virginia Artillery had unlimbered a gun, which opened on the bluecoats.

Colonel Willett, after his footsoldiers had mopped-up the area, redeployed his brigade into line of battle on the commanding ground from which they had driven Dearing's dismounted troopers. The brigade, except for the left wing which was refused at nearly a right angle, held the military crest of the ridge overlooking Hatcher Run. To strengthen

their position, the men turned to throwing up breastworks.[3]

As soon as General Egan saw Willett's battleflags reach Burgess' barns, he ordered Colonel Rugg's battle line forward. Rugg's brigade moved up the plank road and formed on Willett's left. Rugg, after examining the terrain, anchored his left on a ravine. The 1st Minnesota Battalion and the 7th Michigan were thrown out as skirmishers and given the task of protecting the brigade's left. The 19th and 20th Massachusetts now reported back to Rugg and were assigned positions behind the barricades being erected by soldiers of the 1st Brigade.[4]

General Smyth's 3d Brigade was now advanced and formed in an open field on Willett's right. As they hiked up the plank road, Smyth's column was shelled by the Petersburg Artillery posted north of Hatcher Run. To protect his right, Smyth saw that the 10th New York and the 12th New Jersey were positioned in echelon on that flank.[5]

Having advanced his division 800 yards, Egan called upon Lieutenant Beck to post two of his Napoleons on the ridge from which Willett's brigade had dislodged the Rebels. The right section, 2d Lieutenant Richard Metcalf commanding, was advanced and unlimbered its guns in a cornfield on the right of the plank road. Beck's left section was to be emplaced on the crest near Burgess' house. As the cannoneers of the left section drove their teams up the plank road, they came under a well-aimed fire from rifled guns of the Washington South Carolina Artillery, posted some distance up White Oak road. Beck had his regulars in action practically as soon as the trails struck the ground. While the left section fought the South Carolinians' guns, Metcalf's hammered away at Butler's dismounted troopers as they filed into position in the woods, one-half mile

to the west.

Within a short time, a second rifled Confederate battery (the Petersburg Artillery) had added the weight of its metal to the duel. The gun crew having thrown their pieces into battery near the dam. At a range of 800 yards, they enfiladed Beck's left section. Beck, after telling the section leader to concentrate on the rifles to his left, rode to the rear and brought up at a gallop his center section. The artillerists threw these Napoleons into battery at right angles to the left section, and blazed away at the Rebel rifles at the dam. Ellett's Virginia Battery now reached the field and put two 3-inch rifles into action at a point east of the dam. Beck sent word for Metcalf to take care of this threat.

The Confederate gunners did their best to drive the regulars from the commanding ground at Burgess'. But for the "bad practice of their gunners," Beck reported, he feared "there would have been but little left of my battery." As it was, most of the Confederates' projectiles either passed overhead or fell short.[6]

At 1:10 p.m., October 27, General Hancock, while the field pieces bellowed, dispatched Major Henry H. Bingham of his staff to ascertain the whereabouts of General Crawford's V Corps troops. Accompanied by ten cavalrymen, the major took a road leading to the southeast. Bingham, after a mile ride, encountered General Crawford at Crow's house. He informed the V Corps general that at the moment his people were within three-quarters of a mile of Hancock's right. On Crawford's map, Bingham pointed out the Burgess house, "designating it as a point held by the line of the Second Corps and part of its front." At the time that he had ridden off on his mission, the major continued, the Confederates still held the bridge carrying the Boydton Plank Road across Hatcher Run, but Hancock

nd his officers had been discussing the "propriety of its capture."

Crawford, in turn, indicated upon the map a point which he expected o reach. Whereupon, he planned to throw "around his left" and connect "with the right of the Second Corps." [7]

While Bingham was absent, Generals Grant and Meade and their entourge had visited the II Corps' front. As soon as Major Bingham returned and reported Crawford's position, Generals Grant and Meade took leave of ancock's command post. On doing so, they gave Hancock verbal orders to hold his position until the following morning, when he was to retire by he road over which he had advanced. [8]

It seems to this observer that the responsibility of making the connection rested on Crawford. Hancock, engaged with the foe at Burgess' ill and holding a key position, could hardly be expected to shift to the right to contact Crawford. Crawford was to advance from the southeast nd place his division on Hancock's right. To facilitate a link-up etween their commands, Hancock had ordered Smyth's brigade into position on Willett's right, and called for skirmishers to be pushed farher toward the southeast. [9]

While these dispositions were being effected, the dismounted Rebel avalry pressured Hancock's left and front. Dearing's troopers undertook a determined sortie. Recrossing Hatcher Run, they drove in Willett's skirmishers and surged up the slope toward Burgess', where the center and eft sections of Batteries C and I were emplaced. Beck waited anxiously until the greyclads had closed to within 200 yards, before he shouted for his cannoneers to shift targets. Pointing their four Napoleons at the rushing Johnnies, the regulars blasted "them with canister, and with such good effect that they halted" and took cover. For fear that Dear-

ing might renew the attack as soon as he had regrouped, Beck shifted his left section, bringing it up on line with the center section.[10]

General Hancock now sent word for Egan to throw forward his right wing—Smyth's brigade. At a word from Smyth, skirmishers of the 1st Delaware and the 108th New York advanced across the field east of the plank road. Close behind came Smyth's battle line. Dearing's dismounted horsesoldiers were dislodged from the toe hold they had secured in front of Beck's Napoleons. Continuing their push, the bluecoats compelled the Southerners to abandon their rifle-pits south of the run. Some of Smyth's soldiers followed the retreating butternuts across Hatcher Run, penetrated the swamp beyond, and started to ascend the ridge. On their left, the 164th New York of Willett's brigade had moved out. Near the bridge, the New Yorkers captured a 12-pounder gun, limber, and caisson abandoned by the Petersburg Artillery. While the Yanks were able to bring off the caisson, they were unable to locate enough rope to be used in dragging off gun and limber, which were left behind when they were recalled.[11]

As soon as General Egan saw that Smyth's bluecoats had driven the Confederates across the run, he sent an aide to recall the men who had forded the stream and another to order Colonel Willett to report to Smyth. In its advance, Smyth's battle line had inclined to the left and was now between Willett's and Hatcher Run. When Willett reported to him, Smyth placed the 170th and 182d New York in the captured rifle-pits west of the plank road, while the 164th New York and 8th New York Heavy Artillery were posted on the right of the Third Brigade.[12]

Egan, having been notified that Crawford's division was somewhere off to his right, told Smyth to see if he could establish contact with the V Corps. Whereupon, Smyth called for the 10th New York. Lieutenant

Colonel George F. Hopper was told to take his regiment and go into position on the right of the 8th New York Heavy Artillery. Although he deployed his infantrymen at 10-pace intervals, Hopper was unable to establish contact with Crawford. Shots could be heard off to the southeast, so a six-man patrol was ordered out by Hopper "to ascertain what troops were engaged in that direction."[13]

The enfilading fire of the rifled guns of the Washington South Carolina Artillery emplaced out on White Oak road, so annoyed Hancock that he called for General Gregg to capture or drive them away. Gregg delegated to Colonel Kerwin the task of dealing with the battery. Three regiments (the 8th, 13th and 16th Pennsylvania Cavalry) moved out. Before proceeding very far, Gregg told the men to halt, while he and his escort reconnoitered the Rebels' position. Gregg mistook Butler's dismounted cavalry for infantry. Seeing that the Confederates were posted behind hurriedly erected barricades, Gregg decided that it would be foolish to attack; he told Kerwin to hold his ground.[14]

Hancock at 3 p.m. determined to launch a frontal assault across Hatcher Run and establish a bridgehead. Egan, whose division held the high ground at Burgess' Tavern, would be in charge of the attacking force. First, however, Egan would be reinforced. Colonel Robert McAllister's brigade of Mott's division was ordered to Egan's support.

McAllister's brigade hiked up the plank road, turning to the right along the crest of the ridge overlooking the dam. Here McAllister reported to Egan. In obedience with instructions from Egan, McAllister formed his brigade in double line of battle in rear of the 10th New York.[15]

By this time, Lieutenant Beck had been warned by the chiefs of his left and center sections that they were running short of ammunition. If

Egan's attacking infantry were to be assured of proper artillery support, a fresh battery should be called up. Chief of Artillery John C. Hazard had arrived on the field with the 10th Battery, Massachusetts Light Artillery and Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery. These guns were parked near the junction of the Dabney Mill and plank roads. Seeing that Beck needed assistance, Hazard told Lieutenant Henry H. Granger of the Massachusetts battery to take his six 10-pounder Parrotts and place them in position alongside Beck's Napoleons.

The battery historian recalled:

> 'Twas but a moment, however, for we are wanted at the front, and leaving caissons behind, out upon the Plank Road dash the pieces at a lively trot. We have a half-mile run before us ere getting into position, and no sooner are we fairly on the road than we become the object of warm attention from the enemy's guns, whose shells crash through the trees and fence by the roadside as we go. But on we press, galloping up the rise in the road just south of where it meets the White Oak road, and wheel to the right into a field, unlimbering near a barn. We are opposite the entrance of the White Oak road....On the corner of it and the Plank Road stands...an unpretentious wood-colored hostelry, known as Burgess' Tavern or house. We at once join battle with the enemy's batteries posted across the Run near Burgess' Mill.

As they unlimbered their Parrotts, the Massachusetts cannoneers observed that the fire of the Confederate guns, which had caught Beck's regulars in a crossfire, had slowed. Egan now ordered Beck to the rear with his center and left sections. When his men parked their four Napoleons next to Battery K, Beck reported to Hazard that "he had expended all of his ammunition except canister."[16]

The Confederates at this time brought up a fresh battery, Gregg's South Carolina Battery. Gregg's cannoneers quickly threw their four Napoleons into battery and dueled with the 10th Massachusetts' Parrotts.

De Trobriand's brigade of Mott's division had continued to guard Hancock's

ft. While his skirmishers sniped at Butler's dismounted troopers, De Trobriand's battle line was shelled by the guns of the Washington South rolina Artillery, but the configuration of the terrain was such that casualties were slight.[17]

General Mott had stayed with his 2d Brigade, General Pierce's. Early n the afternoon, Mott had received instructions from Hancock to detail two regiments to support Lieutenant Metcalf's section. Pierce accordingly rdered out the 5th Michigan and the 93d New York. These two regiments were posted in the woods east of the cornfield in which Metcalf's regulars manned their two brass Napoleons. Colonel John Pulford, as senior officer, ormed the two regiments at right angles to the battery, with skirmishers well forward. Mott within a short time told Pierce to advance the rest f the brigade and position it on the left of Metcalf's guns. Here the brigade remained for one hour, while subjected to a severe shelling.[18]

Egan by 4 o'clock had completed his dispositions and was prepared o wave his men forward. After approving Egan's battle plan, Hancock dispatched one of his staff (Lieutenant May H. Stacey) to alert General rawford that the II Corps was "about to assail the bridge, for which preparations were complete."[19]

About the same time, General Smyth over on the right of Egan's bat-le line had organized a patrol with the mission of ascertaining Crawford's whereabouts. Lieutenant Charles W. Cowtan with six enlisted men was started rom the right of the 10th New York in a southeasterly direction. Before going very far, Cowtan and his people sighted a column of Rebel infantry. his force, which proved to be Heth's command, was moving by the flank ward the II Corps' rear. Retracing their steps, the New Yorkers told Smyth what they had seen. Smyth lost no time in relaying this news to an.

A fighting Irishman, Egan determined to beat the foe to the punch, he told Smyth to force a crossing of Hatcher Run at the mill dam.[20]

When the blueclads moved out, they were accompanied by Lieutenant Elisa Smith's center section of the 10th Massachusetts Battery. Little difficulty was encountered by the Federal infantry in reaching Hatcher Run. The 14th Connecticut crossed the run downstream from the bridge, while Smith and his artillerists unlimbered their Parrotts near the approach to the bridge, and hammered the Confederates posted on the ridge beyond with shot and shell. Smyth had alerted the 164th New York to be prepared to charge across the bridge, when a crashing volley of musketry off to the right and rear caused him to hesitate.[21]

Shortly before Egan told Smyth to attack, General Grant had ridden up to Burgess' Mill to get a better view of the Confederate positions north of the run. He was trailed by his own and Meade's staff. The mounted cavalcade made a conspicuous target for the Rebel batteries, and the group was shelled. Several men were hit by flying fragments of iron; one was killed.

Several of Grant's aides rode out to reconnoiter. Their reports, however, were conflicting. It seemed as if no eyes but his own could determine exactly what Grant wanted to know. Calling to Lieutenant Colonel Orville E. Babcock of his staff, Grant galloped down the plank road to within a few yards of the bridge, "exposed not only to the enemy's sharpshooters, but to the cross-fire of two Rebel batteries." The telegraph wires had been cut, and the feet of Grant's horse became entangled. Babcock was obliged to dismount and free them, while the officers on the ridge looked on in "suspense and thought how many campaigns depended on the life that now was endangered." But the general and his aide rode on,

till Grant could "clearly discern the Rebel line, the condition of the country, the course of the stream, and the nature of the banks."

Grant saw that Dearing's dismounted cavalry was in force north of Hatcher Run, with strong defenses protecting their front. The Rebels' entrenched line extended far beyond the area, where it had been presumed to veer to the north. When the Army of the Potomac had marched westward, units of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had shifted to the right to counter this movement. Grant now concluded that the Confederates' redeployment made Meade's revised plan "impracticable." While the Southerners' fortified line north of Hatcher Run might be stormed, it could only be done so at great risk. The advantage gained, in Grant's opinion, "would not compensate, while, in the event of repulse, disaster might be grave," stretched out as the army was, with its flanks six miles apart, and Hatcher Run dividing Warren's corps.

Any serious rebuff to Union arms was to be avoided with the presidential election only ten days away, and the Democrats certain to exaggerate every mishap. Politics for the moment were all important, it would therefore be unwise to take any great risk.

When Grant returned from the bridge, he had called to General Meade. After a brief conference, Meade gave verbal orders for Hancock to hold his position till morning, when he was to retire by the same road over which his column had advanced. The two ranking generals and their staffs then started for Armstrong's Mill.[22]

The volley that caused Smyth to pause had originated in the pines in front of Pierce's brigade. General Mott, a short time before, had taken cognizance of the shouts and shots in the woods east of the cornfield. A staff-officer was told to investigate. He soon returned with

ews from General Pierce that the skirmishers were shooting at stragglers falling back before Crawford's advance.

The firing got louder, so Mott instructed Pierce to reinforce his picket line. Pierce ordered out the 1st U. S. Sharpshooters. When the regulars reported to him in the pines, Colonel Pulford used them to prolong the right of his skirmish line. Hardly had the sharpshooters filed into position, before the fighting flared to a point where Pierce sent forward another regiment, the 105th Pennsylvania, with instructions to bolster the 5th Michigan.[23]

Heth's Confederate scouts, as they beat their way through the woods, ran afoul of Pierce's skirmish line. While runners raced to tell Heth what they had seen, the Confederate and Union skirmishers banged away. Mahone, whom Heth had placed in tactical command, ordered his three brigades to attack.

Meanwhile, Pierce shouted to his regiments lying in line in the cornfield, "Charge front and face the woods!" Before this could be done, the greyclad battle line charged Pierce's skirmishers with vigor. A crashing volley delivered by the blueclads caused the Confederates to their front to recoil a few steps. Mahone's battle line, however, overlapped the right [illegible] of Pierce's picket line for a considerable distance; MacRae's North Carolinians quickly enveloped the 93d New York.

At the same time, a hard-hitting Confederate detachment from Weisiger's brigade struck the right angle, where the 5th Michigan and the 1st U. S. Sharpshooters connected. Breaking through, the Virginians fanned out to the left and right. Sergeant Alonzo Woodruff and Corporal John M. Howard of the 1st Sharpshooters were posted to the left of where the butternuts had ripped the gapping hole in Pierce's skirmish line. As the Virginians

pressed forward, the two Yanks discharged their pieces. Unable to reload, Howard threw down his piece and tackled a big Reb, "who seemed to be leading that part of their line." Overpowered by the Virginian, Howard fell wounded in both legs. Sergeant Woodruff rushed to his comrade's aid. Clubbing his rifle-musket, Woodruff in a desperate hand-to-hand encounter fended off the Confederates long enough to enable Howard and him to escape.

Following the Confederate breakthrough to their left, the men of the 1st U. S. Sharpshooters pulled back and re-formed. Unable to hold their ground, the regiment then retreated to the edge of the woods, where it took cover behind a rail fence.[24]

General Pierce, seeing that the Rebels had rolled back the 1st U. S. Sharpshooters, bellowed for the 141st Pennsylvania "to charge the left of the enemy's line." As the 141st crossed the cornfield and approached the pines, the 1st U. S.Sharpshooters could be seen falling back in confusion hounded by "great masses" of Confederates. Lieutenant Colonel Casper W. Tyler ordered his Pennsylvanians to fire. The regiment was excited and difficult to control. Most of the men panicked. Tyler succeeded in holding the two or three companies nearest him at the point of the woods. Although exposed to a murderous fire, the Pennsylvanians "exchanged fifteen or twenty rounds with the enemy," before they were compelled to give way. Tyler and his men retreated and took cover behind the rail fence, where the officers of the 1st U. S. Sharpshooters had rallied and re-formed their men.[25]

The battle-hardened Confederates by now had all but encircled the troops holding the left and center of Pierce's skirmish line. With Rebels to their front, right, and left, it became "root hog or die." Facing their

footsoldiers to the rear, the officers in charge of the 5th Michigan, the 93d New York, and the 105th Pennsylvania sought to fight their way out of the woods, before the jaws of the trap snapped. Already, large numbers of Johnnies had infiltrated the ground over which they had to pass. On the left, the 93d New York lost heavily, 41 men being captured by MacRae's North Carolinians. Of these, 12 subsequently escaped, after having been stripped of their arms, accoutrements, knapsacks, and pocketbooks. The 105th Pennsylvania saw its two ranking officers slain, and the colors and many enlisted men captured. Colonel Pulford's 5th Michigan was decimated before it emerged from the woods. Retreating across the cornfield, the three regiments were finally halted along the plank road.[26]

The three regiments (the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, and the 57th and 87th Pennsylvania) which, along with the 141st Pennsylvania, had constituted Pierce's reserve were wheeling to the right as the Confederate battle lines surged out of the pines. Unnerved by the sight of their fleeing comrades, these three regiments were in no condition to withstand an assault by MacRae's and Weisiger's veterans. Very little powder was burned, before the former heavy artillerists and the Pennsylvanians took to their heels. The troops retired in disorder to the plank road, where they were rallied on their colors.[27]

Lieutenant Metcalf's brass Napoleons, upon the rout of Pierce's brigade, were left to face the Confederates' onset. Metcalf and his gunners of Batteries C and I, 5th U. S. Artillery had time to fire only a half-dozen rounds of canister from their two pieces, before MacRae's grim North Carolinians were upon them. As they drove forward, Confederate sharpshooters of Company A, 44th North Carolina blazed away at the teams,

killing or wounding all the horses. Metcalf was cut down badly wounded and captured, along with his Napoleons. Flushed with success, the butternuts rushed on toward the plank road. As soon as they had crossed the road, Mahone wheeled MacRae's brigade to the left. The sight that met the Rebels' gaze was a pleasant one, for it promised a rich harvest.[28]

The clearing formed by the angle between the plank and Dabney's Mill roads was jammed with the shattered remnants of Pierce's brigade, ambulances, led horses, and artillery. Moreover, if the Confederates could hold their grip on the plank road, it would be the end for the II Corps' Second and Third Divisions, caught as they were between Heth's and Hampton's converging columns.

General Hancock kept his head. He and his generals moved promptly to establish a new line of resistance, designed to keep the Confederates from gaining additional ground in the direction of the plank road, while a column was organized to assail Heth's right and rear. While helping Pierce re-form his shattered brigade, General Mott suddenly realized that if unchecked the Confederates would establish a roadblock on the road to Dabney's Mill. Major John Willian of Mott's staff galloped off with orders for De Trobriand to redeploy his brigade. De Trobriand effected a change of front to the rear by countermarching six of his regiments. In accordance with instructions from Mott, he posted his brigade along the road over which it had marched onto the field several hours before. The 1st Maine Heavy Artillery was stationed along the plank road. De Trobriand cautioned his men that they must hold their ground at all hazards.[29]

Upon the collapse of Pierce's command, Lieutenant John W. Roder of Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery was directed to put his four 12-

pounder Napoleons into battery on the right of the plank road, near Bevill's house. Extricating itself from the mass of ambulances, wagons, and led horses, Roder's regulars put their brass guns into battery and opened with shot and shell on Mahone's battle lines at a range of 500 yards. Lieutenant Beck, having secured ammunition from Roder, placed his four Napoleons in position on the left of the plank road, and "opened fire upon the point of woods, where the enemy broke through and captured" Metcalf's guns.

The assault on Hancock's right caused General Gregg to dismount all available regiments of Kerwin's and Smith's brigades. Two of Smith's regiments (the 1st Maine and the 6th Ohio) moved up smartly to take position on De Trobriand's right, while Kerwin's came handsomely into position on the 1st Brigade's other flank.[30]

Just as Weisiger's brigade had started forward, Sergeant Sale and his fellow flankers of the 12th Virginia sighted a Union officer riding toward them. The newcomer, who proved to be Lieutenant Colonel George Harney of the 147th New York, in the dense undergrowth had mistaken the Rebels for his own men. When called on to surrender, Colonel Harney had only one course open to him, as a dozen rifle-muskets were pointed toward him. That night, after the fight, Sergeant Sale wrote in his diary:

> He [Colonel Harney] was hurrying up his regiment to deploy them as skirmishers, when he was captured. I got a very fine haversack, sword belt, & revolver from him. He had on a fine hat & gold watch but I could not muster meanness sufficient to rob him of these. I knew that if I were captured everything I had would have been taken from me, but I have not yet become mean enough to take private property from them.[31]

Hancock, as was his custom, rushed to the point of danger. As soon as De Trobriand's infantry and Gregg's dismounted troopers were ready, Hancock planned to lead a counterattack. Just as De Trobriand and Gregg

were reporting their units formed, confusion seemed to grip the Confederates. Some of the butternuts faced about and began shooting toward their rear.

At the first sound of the Confederate onslaught against Pierce, Hancock had dispatched his senior aide-de-camp, Major William G. Mitchell, to General Egan with instructions for him to abandon the attack aimed at securing the heights beyond Hatcher Run. Egan was to face about and assail, with his entire line, the Rebel column that was driving Pierce.[32]

Egan had surmised that the Rebels were up to no good, when his right and rear were fired on. Orders were issued for General Smyth to halt his battle line and to recall the 14th Connecticut, which had already crossed the run. Colonel McAllister was instructed to countermarch his brigade and attack the Confederates that were rolling over Pierce's bluecoats. When he galloped up, Major Mitchell thus found that Egan had anticipated his superior.

Mitchell asked Rugg to charge with his brigade the Rebels that had gained the plank road to Egan's rear. Rugg refused. He based his refusal on three points. (A) He had recently received orders from Egan to hold his position at all hazards. (B) Butler's dismounted cavalry was threatening his left and front. (C) "The enemy on the road was not in force, but [only] a disorganized body...." Rugg, believing that a good-sized regiment (charging down the road in line,) would be as effective as the whole brigade, told Mitchell to take the 36th Wisconsin.

The major therefore placed himself at the head of the Wisconsin unit and moved out.

MacRae's North Carolinians had occupied a ridge and were preoccupied with preparations for storming Mott's reorganized main line of resistance,

overing the Dabney's Mill road, consequently, they were oblivious to the approach of McAllister's bluecoats and the 36th Wisconsin until it was co late. Egan's legions burst upon MacRae's right and rear like a bolt ut of the blue.[33]

Since there were a large number of recruits in his brigade and time as precious, McAllister deemed it best to have his battle line "about-face and move on the enemy with my rear rank in front." Two regiments the 5th and 7th New Jersey) would remain where they were as a support to Smyth's battle line, when the brigade advanced to dislodge the Confederates.

McAllister's battle line advanced to the "slope of the hill and halted a few moments." To their front, McAllister and his men could see acRae's North Carolinians pressing back Pierce's shattered command. cAllister shouted to Colonel John Schoonover, whose 11th New Jersey was n the right, to move against the butternuts who had blocked the plank oad. With the rest of his brigade (the 120th New York, the 8th New Jersey, the 11th Massachusetts, and a battalion of the 11th New Jersey), cAllister marched down the slope. The cheering bluecoats surged across ulleys, breaking down the thick "hazel-brush" which bounded them. Reaching the high ground beyond, McAllister called a halt and re-formed his command.

MacRae and several of his ranking officers by this time had sighted cAllister's battle line. The historian of the 44th North Carolina recalled:

> The Federal commander [Hancock], seeing that MacRae was not supported, closed in upon his flanks and attacked with great vigor. Undismayed by the large force which surrounded him, and unwilling to surrender the prize of victory already within his grasp, MacRae formed a portion of his brigade obliquely to his

main line of battle, driving back the foe at every point, whilst the deafening shouts and obstinate fighting of his brigade showed their entire confidence in their commander, although every man of them knew their situation to be critical, and their loss had already been great. Awaiting reinforcements, which long since ought to have been with him, he held his vantage gained at all hazards, and against enormous odds. No help came whilst his men toiled, bled, and died.

Wheeling part of his brigade to the right, MacRae prepared to cope with McAllister's threat to his flank and rear. McAllister's bluecoats sent several well-aimed volleys crashing into the oncoming North Carolinians. Men were cut down in large numbers, and MacRae's butternuts to McAllister's front retired into the pines.

McAllister bellowed, "Forward!" As the bluecoats charged, it appeared that the North Carolinians were attempting to get a battery into position. (Actually, the Southerners were seeking to limber up Metcalf's two Napoleons.) The 120th New York on McAllister's left tried to reach the guns, but it was beaten back by the 44th North Carolina. Heth now committed his reserve brigade. Harris and his Mississippians advanced out of the woods and rushed to MacRae's assistance. For a brief period, McAllister's brigade was all but engulfed with Rebels on all sides. "Had our line broken while in this critical situation all would have been lost," Colonel McAllister recalled.[34]

As the situation was beginning to look very bleak for McAllister, Major Mitchell at the head of the 36th Wisconsin charged down the plank road. Striking Harris' flank, the soldiers from Wisconsin swept to a spectacular success. The Rebel roadblock was smashed, and 100 greyclads grounded their arms. A stand of colors was captured.[35]

The onset by the 36th Wisconsin took the pressure off McAllister. Most of the North Carolinians and Mississippians having retired into

the pines east of the plank road. General Egan sent word for McAllister to change his front to the left and re-establish contact with Mott. As McAllister redeployed his battle line, it came under a galling small-arms fire.[36]

At the time that Egan redeployed his command to cope with Heth's assault, one of his staff-officers notified Lieutenant Smith to withdraw his two 10-pounder Parrotts, retire to Burgess' Tavern, and rejoin his battery--the 10th Massachusetts. Being without ammunition, Smith's guns stood by the barn unserviceable. Scarcely had Smith reported to his superior, Lieutenant Granger, before he was knocked from his horse, shot through the bowels--a mortal wound. Lieutenant Granger now had his gunners point the pieces of his left and right sections, to the southeast and hammer the woods into which the Rebel infantry had retired. Not having brought up the battery's caissons, the supply of ammunition in the limbers was soon exhausted. After the charge of the 36th Wisconsin had reopened communications along the plank road, the 10th Massachusetts Battery retired down the road and was massed near Bevill's.[37]

Witnessing the charge of the 36th Wisconsin, General Hancock called for Mott to counterattack. De Trobriand placed himself at the head of the 40th New York, the 20th Indiana, the 99th, and part of the 110th Pennsylvania and prepared to carry out this assignment. Cheering "lustily," De Trobriand and his men went forward, driving the Confederates before them. Within a short time, they had mopped up the field to their front.

Major Mitchell, after leading the 36th Wisconsin into battle, contacted the officers commanding the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery and a battalion of the 110th Pennsylvania. Mitchell told them to follow him. Rushing out into the cornfield, the two regiments rolled back the Confederates, who

were already reeling, because of McAllister's and De Trobriand's slashing assaults. Within a few minutes, Metcalf's Napoleons had been retaken. Not less than 150 Rebels, along with the colors of the 26th North Carolina Infantry of MacRae's brigade, fell into the onrushing Federals' hands. Fifty of the greyclads were disarmed by the 1st Maine in and around Burgess' barn, while the rest were surrounded by the 110th Pennsylvania in a cluster of pines.

Soldiers from the 5th Michigan, the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, and the 57th Pennsylvania had accompanied the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery and the 110th Pennsylvania. After the guns had been recaptured, volunteers secured ropes and drew off the two Napoleons.[38]

The two regiments led into battle by Major Mitchell now took position on the left of McAllister and on the right of the regiments that had followed De Trobriand.

The advance of De Trobriand's troops having checked the Confederates; the fire of Roder's and Beck's eight guns emplaced near Bevill's house, reinforced by the infantry's musketry, compelled the butternuts to retire into the pines. Union skirmishers followed the Johnnies into the edge of the woods. Because the infantry battle line was posted only a few yards in front of the guns, the use of canister was precluded. Following the repulse of Heth's infantry, Lieutenant Beck advanced his four Napoleons and placed them in battery at the junction of the Dabney's Mill and plank roads. In accordance with Major Hazard's instructions, Beck unlimbered his guns and shelled the point of the woods, 800 yards to his right and front. The battery held this position till 8 p.m.[39]

Meanwhile, Dearing's dismounted Rebel troopers had taken advantage of the recall of McAllister's brigade to threaten Smyth's front. Leap-

ing over the breastworks, they came down off the ridge toward Hatcher Run, only to be checked by well-aimed volleys fired by the 8th New York Heavy Artillery and the 164th New York. Recalling the 10th New York, which was deployed as skirmishers to his front, Smyth had Colonel Hopper post his men in line of battle near the edge of the pines, so they could watch the brigade's right and rear.[40]

Egan, following Dearing's repulse, contacted Colonel Rugg. The commander of the 1st Brigade was told to send his troops across the plank road and take position to the right and rear of McAllister's battle line. Before shifting his brigade across the plank road, Rugg detached the 1st Minnesota and the 7th Michigan. These two units continued to hold their ground in the woods west of the plank road.[41]

The Confederate leaders (Heth and Hampton) had failed to coordinate their movements. Heth's infantry column, which had opened the attack, had lost the initiative before Hampton's dismounted cavalry assailed the Union left. Butler's battle line, deployed to the right and left of White Oak road, now drove in from the west, while Rooney Lee's division advanced up the plank road from the southwest.[42]

Earlier in the afternoon, Hampton had lost a valuable subordinate, Captain James F. Hart of the Washington South Carolina Artillery. While engaged in the duel with Beck's regulars, Captain Hart was struck in the leg by fragments from an exploding shell and had to have the limb amputated.

When Hampton gave the word, General Butler sent orders for his battle line to take up the advance. Supported by the fire of the Washington Artillery's guns, Young's brigade on the left and Aiken's on the right bounded over their barricades and drove against the picket line defended

y four of De Trobriand's regiments--the 73d, 86th and 124th New York, and the 2d U. S. Sharpshooters. The bluecoats were posted at the "edge f a dense pine wood," an open field to their front. As Butler's dismounted troopers debouched from the pines on the opposite side of the ield, the Yankees banged away. The Confederates came on with great etermination. Dismayed by their failure to check Butler's horse-soldiers, whom they mistook for infantry, some of the bluecoats fled. uch of the picket line was thrown into confusion, and only "the exertions of officers and steadiness" of the veterans kept it from entirely isintegrating.

Rebel losses were high as they sought to smash pockets of Union resistance and reach the plank road. Lieutenant Colonel Robert J. effords was killed at the head of his regiment, the 5th South Carolina Cavalry.

As Aiken's brigade swept forward to connect its right with Rooney ee's left, General Butler missed two of his aides (Major T. G. Barker and Captain Nat Butler), and glancing to his right, he spotted them nd Lieutenant William Preston Hampton "riding in the midst of the line of advancing men, waving their hats and cheering them on. They were erhaps a hundred yards to his right and the heavy firing prevented heir hearing him." General Butler finally succeeded in getting their attention. Nat Butler wheeled his horse about, while Preston Hampton repared to return to his father's command post.

As young Hampton galloped off in one direction and Nat in the ther, he called, "Hurrah, Nat," and moments later a minie ball struck m in the groin, inflicting a mortal wound. Within a few minutes, Preston Hampton was dead.

When General Hampton "saw his dying son lying on the ground he dismounted and kissed the brave boy, wiped a tear from his eyes, remounted and went on giving orders as though nothing had happened."

General Butler now trotted up and asked General Hampton, "Who has been wounded?"

"Poor Preston," the father replied, "has been mortally wounded."

General Butler called for a one-horse wagon, so that the remains might be removed. Meantime, the Federals, observing the crowd, concentrated a galling fire on the group. One shot struck Preston's brother, Wade, in the spine, badly injuring him."[43]

Fortunately for the II Corps, Butler's attack came after Heth's footsoldiers had spent their strength. Mott, observing that the firing to his left had increased and was getting louder, instructed De Trobriand to recall the regiments of the 1st Brigade that had just beaten back the Rebel infantry. Detaching a line of skirmishers to hold the ground gained, De Trobriand marched his troops back to the position along the plank road previously held.[44]

Between White Oak road and Hatcher Run, General Young's dismounted cavalry fought Rugg's skirmishers, reinforced by the 69th Pennsylvania. Dearing, to assist his comrades to the right and left, again urged his brigade forward. Infiltrating the underbrush north of Hatcher Run, Dearing's men again opened on Smyth's battle line, posted on the ridge south of the stream. A half-hearted thrust was made at this time by Harris' Mississippians and MacRae's North Carolinians against the sector defended by McAllister's troops. Egan's division during this phase of the engagement formed a crude square--Rugg's skirmishers, reinforced by the 69th Pennsylvania, in the pines west of Burgess' Tavern; Smyth's battle

line on the ridge south of Hatcher Run and in the woods east of the plank road; Rugg's line of battle on Smyth's right, partially extended behind McAllister, whose right crossed the Boydton Plank Road.[45]

Egan's soldiers held firm on all fronts. At 5:30 Egan's division withstood another assault. Since this attack was feeble, Egan and his officers believed that the Rebels were almost ready to call it a day. Mopping up in front of their position, Rugg's skirmishers disarmed a Confederate major, several line officers, and 40 enlisted men. Sergeant Daniel Murphy of the 19th Massachusetts got himself a real prize--the colors of the 47th North Carolina Infantry of MacRae's brigade.[46]

With the redeployment of De Trobriand's brigade along the plank road, much of the steam went out of Butler's attack on the units manning Mott's picket line. This enabled officers of the 73d, 86th and 124th New York, and the 2d U. S. Sharpshooters to rally their men. Disheartened to see that the Yanks were marshaling troops to reinforce their skirmish line, Butler's horsesoldiers retired across the fields and disappeared into the pines beyond.[47]

Rooney Lee's division now struck. Advancing up the Boydton Plank Road from Wilson's, Lee's troopers encountered the 21st Pennsylvania southwest of Rainey's. To dislodge the Yanks, Lee was compelled to dismount and deploy his division--Colonel Richard L. T. Beale's brigade to the right and Brigadier General Rufus Barringer's to the left. The cannoneers of McGregor's Virginia Battery unlimbered their four 3-inch rifles on the road. General Gregg heard the clash of arms as the 21st Pennsylvania fought a stout delaying action. Wheeling his horse about, Gregg galloped down the plank road. Gregg, upon reaching the point of danger, found the Pennsylvanians resisting Lee's onset. The 6th Ohio Cavalry at this time

filed into position alongside the 21st Pennsylvania. Even so, Gregg could see that his men were badly outnumbered. Aides raced off with word for the brigade commanders to rush to Gregg all their available manpower.

The 1st Maine came down the road on the run. Colonel Smith formed the Mainemen on the right of the 21st, the Pennsylvanians having closed to the left, while the 6th Ohio was posted on the right of the 1st Maine. With the arrival of these units, Rooney Lee's progress was slowed. Nevertheless, the butternuts continued to gain ground, foot by foot. A section of guns manned by Battery I, 1st U. S. Light Artillery was called up.

Gregg dispatched a member of his staff with an urgent request that Hancock support him with all mounted regiments he could spare. Hancock sent the 2d, 4th, and 13th Pennsylvania. These units came up "successively as fast as their legs could carry them," and entered the fight. Hancock would have liked to have reinforced Gregg with infantry, but this he could not do, because he expected the Rebel infantry at any minute to renew its attacks.[48]

At the time of Rooney Lee's attack on Gregg's cavalry, Hazard, as a precautionary measure, told Lieutenant Granger to throw his 10-pounder Parrotts into battery west of the plank road,and facing the point of danger. Here Granger was cut down by a fragment from an exploding shell. The battery had lost all its officers in the day's fighting, so Major Hazard told Lieutenant E. S. Smith of Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery to take charge of the 10th Massachusetts Battery.[49]

The situation at this time was fluid. Although the assaults by Heth's infantry and Butler's and Dearing's dismounted cavalry on the II Corps' front,right,and center had been repulsed, Rebel artillery emplaced north of Hatcher Run and on White Oak road still hammered the

en who wore the clover-leaf. At the same time, rifled projectiles from McGregor's battery passed over Gregg's line and burst among the II Corps' infantry. Renewed efforts were made at this hour to establish contact with Crawford's troops, but they were unsuccessful.

At 4:50 General Hancock had told Major Bingham to communicate with Generals Warren and Crawford. He was to inform the V Corps leaders that the Rebels had assailed the II Corps' right; that the attack had been repulsed; that Hancock was in need of reinforcements; that the V Corps should advance and connect its left with Hancock's right.

Bingham sought to reach Crawford's command post at Crow's house by following the cart road he had traveled earlier in the day. Before going very far, however, the major ran into a Confederate roadblock. Wheeling his horse about, Bingham, "as expeditiously as possible struck the road leading to Dabney's Mill." Upon reaching the mill, the major was directed, by one of the cavalrymen posted there, into the road leading to the left. The trooper told Bingham that Crawford's division had tramped out that road.

After riding what he believed to be several miles, Bingham encountered Confederates, who, bringing their rifle-muskets to their shoulders, called on him to surrender. Bingham, seeing that flight was hopeless, handed over his side-arms to a North Carolina colonel. In addition to Bingham, the North Carolinians had captured three ambulances, a score of horses, and 20 soldiers of the II Corps.[50]

Because of the dense woods and a strong wind blowing from southeast to northwest, the roar of battle along the Boydton Plank Road was not audible at Warren's headquarters.

About 5:20 Hancock received a message drafted by Chief of Staff

mphreys, 65 minutes earlier. Unfolding the paper, Hancock learned that Union signal officers had observed Confederate troops en route down the plank road. Though it was feared by the people at army headquarters that the foe was massing against Hancock, the orders for the II Corps to withdraw on the following morning remained unchanged. Crawford's division was to be recalled at the same time. As the road linking Hancock's and Meade's command posts was "infested by small parties" of Rebel cavalry, Hancock was to see that it was "heavily patrolled." [51]

Meade, was seemingly unaware of what had transpired on the plank road since he had left the field, and Hancock explained to Captain Addison G. Mason (the staff-officer who had carried Humphreys' dispatch) the situation confronting the II Corps. It was starting to get dark by the time Mason started on his return ride to army headquarters.

Soon after the captain's departure, Hancock received a discouraging report from Chief of Artillery Hazard. When the corps had taken the field that morning, the wagons with the reserve ammunition, in compliance with orders, had been left at Perkins'. Of the three batteries that had accompanied the column, only one, the 10th Massachusetts, had many projectiles left. At the same time, the Massachusetts battery had lost all its officers, and Lieutenant Smith reported that he had but three men left per gun.

The corps had been marching and fighting throughout the day, and as "a consequence was in considerable disorder." A heavy rain was now falling, and the narrow cart road to Dabney's Mill (the only direct link with the rest of the Army of the Potomac) was not only threatened by the foe, but was being turned into a ribbon of mud by the precipitation.

Hancock seriously questioned whether the reserve ammunition (which was 13 miles in the rear) could be brought up and issued in time for a fight in the morning.[52]

Two staff-officers were detailed by Hancock to convey this information to Meade.

About 6:30 a courier reached Hancock's command post with two messages signed by General Humphreys. Studying these documents, which had been drafted 75 minutes before, Hancock learned that General Ayres' V Corps division had been ordered to his support. But because of the hour, it would be impossible for the reinforcing column to get beyond Armstrong's Mill before dark. Upon reaching the mill, Ayres was to report to Hancock. If Hancock could attack successfully in the morning with the addition of Ayres' and Crawford's divisions, it was Meade's desire that he do so. If not, Hancock was authorized to withdraw his troops under the cover of darkness.[53]

It is apparent that these instructions only added to Hancock's embarrassment, because they made him reluctant to abandon his position. On his shoulders had been thrown the responsibility for determining whether reinforcements could be gathered, and the needed ammunition for his corps brought up and issued in time for battle at daylight. Yet there were subjects which were in no way under his control. Certainly, if no greater energy were shown in getting up ammunition and reinforcements during the night, than had been displayed in pushing Crawford forward during the day, Hancock had reason to shake his head.

General Gregg, having checked Rooney Lee's advance up the plank road, joined Hancock at this time. It was now dark, and Gregg had further evil tidings for his superior. His cavalry, Gregg reported, "a considerable

proportion being armed with repeating rifles, had almost wholly exhausted their ammunition." Owing to the commingling of his regiments in the woods, together with the rain and extreme darkness, "Gregg did not think it practicable to get ammunition up and issued to the men during the night." [54]

Reluctant as he was to abandon the field, his conversation with "an officer so reliable and trustworthy as General Gregg," determined Hancock "to order a withdrawal rather than risk disaster by awaiting an attack in the morning only partly prepared." [55]

THE BATTLE OF THE BOYDTON PLANK ROAD, OCTOBER 27-28, 1864

Chapter IV

The II Corps Gamely Holds on in the Face of Heth's Onslaught

Notes

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 296, 326, 330, 331, 333, 335, 336, 411. The regulars had emplaced their Napoleons at the junction of the Dabney's Mill and Boydton Plank roads. A Confederate battery (possibly the Washington South Carolina Artillery) had taken position near Mrs. Rainey's and had fired several rounds, taking the II Corps' battle lines in reverse. The approach of Gregg's column compelled the Rebels to retire these guns.

Ibid., 296, 309, 310, 313.

Ibid., 296, 309, 310, 313, 337. Willett's left flank was anchored on the left side of the plank road.

Ibid., 296, 303, 306, 308, 310, 312, 314.

Ibid., 296, 326, 330, 333, 334, 335, 337.

Ibid., 296, 411, 427. Metcalf's Napoleons were unlimbered "on the crest in rear of the ravine near the tavern," while the left section was posted west of the ravine and about one-fourth mile to the left of Metcalf's section.

Ibid., 238-239.

Ibid.,232.

Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 329.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 427.

Ibid., 297, 326, 331, 334, 335, 337. Captain T. J. Burke of the 164th

New York reported, after Willett's brigade had occupied the hill on Burgess' farm, and Smyth's brigade "had united on the right, he saw the line advancing, and believing it to be the whole line he also moved forward upon the left of.../ Smyth's / Brigade, and entering the woods soon found himself, with ten men of his company, in rear of the enemy's works, who were hastily evacuating the same, and captured one 12-pounder gun and 1 small caisson, which, being unable to remove, they broke off the axles of the gun carriage, and threw the gun into the stream...; that they drew off the caisson...." Ibid., 320.

12 Ibid., 297, 326. General Smyth led the 3d Brigade, Second Division, II Army Corps.

13 Ibid., 326, 334.

14 Ibid., 232, 641; Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 330-331.

15 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 297, 395. Within 15 minutes of the time he had formed his brigade in double line of battle, McAllister redeployed his troops in single line extending his left to the plank road. Ibid., 395.

16 Ibid., 411-412, 427; John D. Billings, The History of the Tenth Massachusetts Battery of Light Artillery in the War of the Rebellion... (Boston, 1909), 356-357. So far, Beck's battery had lost 3 killed and 7 wounded.

17 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 232, 359.

18 Ibid., 346, 367.

19 Ibid., 232.

20 Ibid., 326-334.

21 Ibid., 297, 236, 330, 411; Billings, History of the 10th Massachusetts

Battery, 357-358.

22 Adam Badeau, Military History of U. S. Grant (New York, 1868-1881), Vol. III, 120-121; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 232.

23 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 347, 368, 388.

24 Ibid., 347, 368, 388-389.

25 Ibid., 368, 386.

26 Ibid, 368, 374, 375, 383-383.

27 Ibid., 347, 372, 378, 380.

28 Ibid., 412, 427; Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 336; "The Forty-Fourth North Carolina Infantry," Southern Historical Society Papers, Vol. 25, p. 343. Lieutenant R. W. Stedman led Company A, 44th North Carolina.

29 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 347, 359.

30 Ibid., 234, 412, 425, 428, 609, 641, 648; Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 336-337.

31 Diary, Sale, 12th Virginia (Virginia State Library).

32 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 234.

33 Ibid., 234, 297, 303, 326, 379. Charges were subsequently brought against Colonel Rugg by General Hancock for "neglect of duty and disobedience of orders." Tried and convicted by court-martial, Rugg was dismissed from the service. On January 26, 1865, his disability, consequent upon dismissal, was removed. He did not, however, re-enter the service. Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 338, 326.

34 O. R., Series I, Vol. XVII, pt. I, 395-396; "The Forty-Fourth North Carolina Infantry," Southern Historical Society Papers, Vol. 25, p. 343; Rowland, Mississippi Official and Statistical Register, 1908, pp. 450, 493, 511.

35 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 297, 303, 316. This stand of colors was subsequently recovered by the Rebels.

36 Ibid., 396.

37 Ibid., 412; Billings, History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery, 357-364.

38 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 347, 359-360, 370, 374, 378, 379; The Medal of Honor of the United States Army (Washington, 1948), 179. General De Trobriand charged that the battleflag of the 26th North Carolina, "in one way or other, passed afterwards in the hands of the Seventh Michigan." Sergeant Alonzo Smith of the Michigan regiment was awarded the Medal of Honor for the capture of the colors of the 26th North Carolina.

39 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 412, 428.

40 Ibid., 297, 326, 334.

41 Ibid., 297, 303, 306, 309, 310, 313, 314.

42 Ibid., 949, 953; "The Forty-Fourth North Carolina Infantry," Southern Historical Society Papers, Vol. 25, pp. 343-344.

43 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 347, 360, 949; Wells, Hampton and His Cavalry, 334-335; Brooks, Butler and His Cavalry, 358-359.

44 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 347, 360.

45 Ibid., 297-298.

46 Ibid., 298, 309; The Medal of Honor, 179. Murphy was awarded the Medal of Honor for this feat.

47 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 360, 950; Wells, Hampton and His Cavalry, 335-341; Brooks, Butler and His Cavalry, 359-360.

48 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 234-235, 609, 621, 641, 644, 648; Beale, History of the 9th Virginia Cavalry, 147.

49 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 412; Billings, History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery, 363-365. The battery had exchanged its empty limbers for full ones from the caissons.

50 O. R., Series I, Vol. LXII, pt. I, 239. The night of the 27th being very dark, Bingham succeeded in giving his captors the slip. He then made his way to Hancock's command post, where he reported that he had failed in his mission.

51 Ibid., 235; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 380.

52 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 235; Walker, "The Expedition to the Boydton Plank Road," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 341.

53 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 235; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 381.

54 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 235; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 383.

55 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 236.

THE BATTLE OF THE BOYDTON PLANK ROAD, OCTOBER 27-28, 1864

Chapter V

Meade Cuts His Commitments and Pulls Back

Not long after he had arrived at his decision to pull back, Hancock at 8:35 p.m., October 27, received another communication from General Humphreys. The staff-officers detailed by Hancock to explain the situation to Meade and his people had reached army headquarters around 6:15. Meade, after listening to what they had to say, dictated a message to Hancock, couched in a similar vein to Chief of Staff Humphreys' 5:15 dispatches. If he should retire during the night, Hancock was to "leave some force at Dabney's Mill to aid in withdrawing Crawford."[1]

Hancock at 9 o'clock notified Humphreys that orders had been issued for his corps "to return to the vicinity of the Gurley house." Egan with his division was to hold Dabney's Mill and to communicate with General Crawford.[2]

At 10:30 Humphreys replied, notifying Hancock that Meade wished the II Corps to halt as soon as it had recrossed Hatcher Run and had replenished its ammunition. Additional orders would be awaiting Hancock at that point. General Warren was to "attend to drawing in General Crawford, and will see that General Egan is notified when he can withdraw."[3]

Hancock had scheduled the retreat to commence at 10 p.m., to provide sufficient time to permit the staff-officers sent to army headquarters to rejoin the corps. Meanwhile, steps were taken to insure that the withdrawal would be orderly. All available ambulances were loaded with wounded, 155 being removed. As the narrow Dabney's Mill road was passable in only one direction at a time, and the medical officers reported

it would be impossible to bring up additional ambulances and move troops to the rear at the same time, Hancock would be compelled to leave behind a number of his wounded (about 250). So far as practicable, these men were collected and placed in Rainey's house and barns. Three competent surgeons and a number of hospital stewards were detailed to stay with them.[4]

Prior to the receipt of orders that the field was to be abandoned, General Mott, believing that the fight would be resumed at daybreak, had redeployed his division. General Pierce had re-formed his brigade along the Dabney's Mill road to the left of De Trobriand, with pickets (two regiments) advanced a considerable distance. The 1st Maine Heavy Artillery was stationed along the plank road on De Trobriand's right with orders to maintain contact with Egan's division. Four of De Trobriand's regiments (the 73d, 86th and 124th New York, and the 2d U. S. Sharpshooters) continued to picket the countryside west of the plank road. Slight breastworks were erected.[5]

About 8 o'clock Mott received orders from Hancock "to start the ambulances, pack-mules, and the two batteries" that had exhausted their ammunition for Globe Tavern. This column would be escorted by the 17th Maine. The division was to follow at 10 p.m. While waiting to put his column in motion, Mott was to recall McAllister's brigade.[6]

The ambulance train, accompanied by the 10th Massachusetts and Beck's batteries, rolled as scheduled. Beck's regulars, because of the loss of 14 horses, had to abandon one caisson, which the lieutenant had his men cut to pieces, so as to be of no service to the foe. One of the battery's limbers was also missing, having fallen into the Confederates' hands.

Except for the hard-pulling caused by muddy roads, the train escorted by the 17th Maine encountered little difficulty in reaching Globe Tavern. The sun was just breaking through the overcast, as the troops crossed the railroad.[7]

McAllister, whose brigade had been posted in support of Rugg's, reported to Mott at 8:30. While Mott was checking with his brigade commanders to insure that there would be no errors, he learned from De Trobriand that shortly after dark someone had blundered. At that hour two of the regiments deployed as skirmishers west of the plank road had "misunderstood an order to keep a close connection on their right, and reformed in line in that direction." De Trobriand, taking into consideration the extreme darkness, decided it would be not only difficult but hazardous to reestablish the picket line in the woods. As general field officer of the day, De Trobriand relocated his line of outposts much closer to the II Corps' main line of resistance, so it would facilitate their recall.[8]

Mott put his division, except the men on picket, in motion as scheduled. He had sent his provost-guards ahead to clear the road of stragglers. Near Dabney's Mill, Mott was overtaken by one of Meade's aides, who said he had orders from army headquarters for the Third Division to halt after it had recrossed Hatcher Run.

By 1 a.m. on October 28 Mott's division had crossed the stream. On doing so, the troops were massed near Widow Smith's.[9]

General Egan's division (accompanied by Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery) trailed Mott's division down the cart road. As directed, Egan halted his soldiers at Dabney's Mill. To expedite the establishment of contact with Crawford's division, Hancock's escort had reported to Egan before he left the plank road. While en route to the mill, the

escort disappeared. Since he was unfamiliar with the area, Egan, upon reaching the mill, halted his division. He would allow his men to rest and await the dawn, before attempting to connect with Crawford.[10]

Gregg's horsesoldiers left the field by way of the Quaker road at 10:30. Davies' brigade, which during the day (even when Gregg was hardest pressed) had been held in reserve at the junction of the Quaker and Boydton Plank roads, became the rear guard as the cavalry rode southward. Because of the destruction of the Gravelly Run bridge earlier in the day, Gregg's column was slowed. Only the lead brigade, Colonel Kerwin's, had succeeded in recrossing the Rowanty by daybreak. The division reached Perkins' house about 7:30, on the 28th, without having seen any signs of the foe on its return march.[11]

With the withdrawal of the cavalry, the only Federals remaining on the field were the wounded, who had been left behind, and the infantrymen manning the picket line. In obedience to Hancock's instructions, General De Trobriand at 1 a.m. recalled his outposts. All Third Division pickets, with the exception of three officers and 26 enlisted men of the 73d New York, got the word and reported to the general on the plank road. When De Trobriand had reorganized his picket line earlier in the evening, contact had been lost with the 70-man detachment from the 7th Michigan and the 1st Minnesota. These men, who were on outpost in the pines north of White Oak road, were left behind, when De Trobriand called in the Second Division pickets. De Trobriand, as soon as the pickets had fallen in, moved out after the main column. Upon reporting to Hancock, De Trobriand was told to rejoin his division, which he did.[12]

* * *

General Warren at 4:30 p.m. had left Crawford's command post to consult with General Meade, whom he presumed to be with Hancock on the plank road. As Warren neared the plank road, he encountered Major William Riddle of Meade's staff, who told him that the army commander had returned to Dabney's Mill. Warren accordingly hastened to that point, and he had been at Meade's command post only a few minutes, when word arrived that the Rebels had penetrated the gap between Hancock and Crawford and were assailing the II Corps "with great violence." Meade told Warren to rush Crawford to Hancock's support. Warren, however, countered with the suggestion that Ayres' division "could more readily be got there," because there was no direct road leading from Crawford's front to Hancock. Meade was agreeable. Orders were drafted for Ayres to march at once.[13]

Major Bingham had been at Crawford's command post about an hour ahead of Warren. Not long after Warren had ridden off, another one of Hancock's people arrived and told Crawford that the II Corps was to storm the bridge at Burgess' Mill and advance beyond it. This would explain the heavy firing that could be heard off to the northwest.[14]

About an hour before dark, as Crawford's soldiers were throwing up a "light" line of works, Confederate stragglers, who had become bewildered and had lost their way in the wilderness, began running afoul of Crawford's picket line. These Rebels, many of whom had been engaged with the II Corps, were ignorant of Crawford's position. One group of greyclads had with them (when disarmed by Crawford's skirmishers) three ambulances they had captured. Six of them had taken Captain Emmor B. Cope of Warren's staff prisoner, but finding themselves behind the Union lines, they surrendered to him, and he brought them in. All told, Crawford's troops disarmed 238 Confederate enlisted men and three officers.[15]

When questioned by Crawford's staff, the Confederates, most of whom identified themselves as belonging to Weisiger's and Harris' brigades, remarked that they had flanked and broken the II Corps. This was the first intimation Crawford had had that matters had gone badly with Hancock.

As he was returning to the Crow house, Major Roebling heard someone shout out in the pines, "Stop that man on horseback." As he reined up his horse, Roebling saw that the newcomers were eight Rebels in charge of two Yanks. All had lost their way in the wilderness. The Federals had been the Confederates' prisoners, but not one in the group knew the way, so they had agreed to follow the first man who knew where he was going.[16]

Crawford now ordered scouts out on his left. One, an intelligent officer, returned at 6:45 to report that he had spotted a strong column of Rebel infantry (probably King's Alabama Brigade) passing to Crawford's left along a cart road which crossed Hatcher Run, one-half mile above the V Corps' position. Relaying this information to Warren, Crawford warned that unless the interval between his left and the II Corps was closed, he anticipated a fierce fight in the morning. Within the past few minutes, a North Carolinian belonging to MacRae's brigade had been questioned. In addition, large numbers of Confederates from Weisiger's brigade of Mahone's division had been made prisoner, when they blundered into the Third Division's line.[17]

In event his division was unable to hold its own in face of the expected Confederate onslaught, Crawford had his pioneers at dark bridge Hatcher Run, in rear of Griffin's skirmish line.[18]

Warren, on learning that Hancock would withdraw his corps under the

cover of darkness, contacted Crawford. It would be best , Warren wrote, for Crawford to begin withdrawing his troops as soon as it was light, "taking care to bring in all your pickets, and drive in the stragglers." Not knowing that Crawford's pioneers had already bridged the run, Warren granted his division commander permission to do so. Or if he wished, Crawford could retire via the way he had come. Whichever route he took, Crawford was to make certain that the division, Egan's, that Hancock was to leave at Dabney's Mill was kept posted. If he recrossed Hatcher Run above Armstrong's Mill, Crawford was to deploy his troops into double line of battle on Griffin's left.[19]

Upon receipt of this message from his immediate superior, it didn't take Crawford long to make up his mind, as to the route his division would take. He, as well as his officers and men, had had enough of the wilderness through which they had marched. When the division moved, it would be across the bridge.

As a precautionary measure, Crawford reinforced his line of outposts. At 3 a.m. he commenced pulling his troops out of the bridgehead. By daylight the three brigades had reached the north bank of Hatcher Run. Before destroying the bridge, Crawford called in his pickets. The division was formed as directed on Griffin's left and facing the stream.[20]

Upon being notified that Crawford had retired across the run, Warren dispatched Major Roebling to convey this information to General Egan. At the same time, Egan was directed to report to Warren. On doing so, he massed his division near Armstrong's Mill.[21]

Meanwhile, Crawford had discovered, on discussing the situation with his brigade commanders, that some of their pickets had not come in. The bridge was quickly repaired, and the 7th Wisconsin sent back across Hatcher

Run. Major Hollon Richardson formed his men into line, and they beat their way slowly forward.

After leaving General Egan's command post, Major Roebling had ridden over to Crow's field, where he spotted three abandoned V Corps ambulances. Here Roebling encountered an officer and two men sent out to recall the 7th Wisconsin. As they rode through the woods beyond Crow's, Roebling and his companions rounded up 20 Union stragglers. They then encountered the 7th Wisconsin, bringing in 82 prisoners. The officer in charge explained that they had lost their way, and Major Richardson had ridden off in search of assistance. Within a short time Richardson returned, accompanied by Major Dailey. With Dailey as their guide, the regiment found its way back to the bridge. The last of Crawford's people passed the bridge at 9 o'clock, and the pioneers for the second time wrecked the structure.

At 7:30 a.m. Warren was advised that Meade wanted him to send Ayres with two of his brigades to occupy the "vacant space" between the IX Corps' left and Clements' house. Appropriate orders were issued.

Stragglers from the II Corps continued to wander into the V Corps' lines, so Warren sent ten men from his escort to Dabney's Mill. Major James H. Walsh with his battalion of the 3d Pennsylvania Cavalry would continue to picket the road from Dabney's Mill to the Vaughan road crossing of Hatcher Run. Walsh notified Warren at 10 a.m. that the road was nearly clear of wagons and stragglers.[22]

Warren now issued orders authorizing Egan and Crawford to withdraw. Screened by Walsh's horsesoldiers, Egan's II Corps division moved down the right bank of Hatcher Run to Vaughan road. Hancock, upon learning that Egan's division was in motion, instructed Mott to hold his division

ready to take up the march. The decision having been made to abandon for the time being offensive operations designed to turn the right flank of the Petersburg defenses, Hancock directed Mott and Egan to return their divisions to their old camps near the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad.

While waiting at Widow Smith's for Egan's column to appear, Mott sent Pierce's brigade to Colonel Wyatt's. It was starting to get dark by the time Egan's troops were back in the camp in rear of Fort Bross out of which they had marched 52 hours earlier. Mott's division returned to Southall's at 5 p.m., where the general massed Pierce's and McAllister's brigades, while De Trobriand's brigade camped near Chieves' house.[23]

Crawford's division was the first V Corps unit to retire from Hatcher Run, taking the road back to Fort Cummings. By 10:30 Egan's and Crawford's troops were out of sight, so Warren notified Parke that he was ready to recall Griffin's division.[24]

Chief of Staff Humphreys at 6:45 a.m. had notified Parke that he was to be prepared to withdraw during the morning into the entrenchments from which his IX Corps had marched on the 27th. Either Meade's headquarters or Warren would notify Parke when to retire, as he was to pull back simultaneously with the V Corps. Should Parke not require his artillery to cover his retrograde, it could precede him.[25]

Acknowledging Humphreys' communication, Parke announced that two batteries had accompanied his columns, one was with Potter at Hawks' and the other in Ferrero's rear at Watkins'. Orders had been given for all wheeled vehicles to start for the rear.[26]

Parke's people had spent the afternoon and evening of the 27th erecting breastworks. Willcox's division on the left had dug in within 250 yards of the fortifications held by Heth's division. Some of the blue-

coated skirmishers had advanced into the slashed timber fronting the Rebels' works. On Willcox's left, Hartranft's battle line was in contact with Sickel's brigade of Griffin's division. While Hartranft's troops were digging in, the 51st Pennsylvania held the picket line. Hartranft at dusk had recalled the Pennsylvanians, and each regiment was made responsible for manning the line of outposts to its front. Colonel Outcheon, whose brigade was in position on Hartranft's right, learned from Colonel March at 2 p.m. that the 2d Michigan was nearly out of cartridges. The 60th Ohio was advanced and relieved the 2d Michigan on the skirmish line. On the extreme left, soldiers of the 2d Michigan had penetrated so deeply into the felled timber that it was impossible for them to retire by daylight. Along toward dark, Confederates from Davis' Mississippi Brigade made a sortie and captured these people. Willcox's 3d Brigade, McLaughlen's, had been held in reserve till 5 p.m. McLaughlen at that hour shifted one wing to Wilkins' to cover the 34th New York Battery, and the other to the right to constitute a reserve to Ferrero's Negro Division.[27]

Their troops were a greater distance from the Confederates than Willcox's, so there was little activity along Ferrero's and Potter's picket lines. Large fatigue parties were kept employed throughout the afternoon and well into the night slashing timber and opening roads.[28]

At 11 a.m. on October 28 Griffin and Willcox, whose divisions were separated from the Confederate fortifications by several hundred yards of timber-strewn ground, prepared to retire. Breaking contact with an aggressive foe, such as the Army of Northern Virginia, can be a difficult task. To conceal their intentions, Griffin and Willcox had their brigade commanders push skirmishers up against the slashings. The Confederates at daybreak had rushed the outposts held by Griffin's left flank brigade

(Gregory's), but they had been repulsed. Griffin on the left encountered no difficulty in withdrawing Gregory's and Sickel's units.

A dark and stormy night had compelled General Hampton to suspend his attack, shortly after Butler's division on the left and Rooney Lee's on the right had established contact. Hampton told Lee and Butler to picket their fronts and be prepared to resume the fight with the II Corps at daybreak.

Hampton and Heth met in the rain to perfect their plans for the next day. A plan for joint-action having been agreed to, Hampton returned to his command post. One of Heth's aides rode up at 3:30 a.m., and told the cavalry leader that his general had been unable to get the reinforcements he had anticipated. Consequently, Heth would not be able to co-operate with the cavalry.

Daybreak revealed to Hampton and his troopers that the II Corps had given them the slip. Several hours passed before Hampton was able to organize a pursuit. When the Confederate horsesoldiers moved out, Dearing's brigade took the lead. A short distance beyond Dabney's Mill on the road to Armstrong's, Dearing's vanguard clashed with Walsh's troopers. The bluecoats were chased across Hatcher Run.

General Griffin sent his reserve brigade, Bartlett's, to cope with this threat. Bartlett deployed his footsoldiers to the left and right of Duncan road, advanced the 1st Michigan and the 118th Pennsylvania as skirmishers, and waited for the butternuts. Dearing's troopers crossed Hatcher Run at Armstrong's. But on sighting Bartlett's waiting battle line, Dearing called a halt. After some harmless skirmishing at extreme ranges, the Confederates melted back into the pines out of which they had advanced.[29]

The V Corps, upon Dearing's retirement, returned to its camps by way of Duncan and Squirrel Level roads, without further adventure.

Willcox's division was assigned the task of covering the IX Corps' retirement. Cutcheon's brigade extended to the right and relieved Ferrero's outposts. As soon as his skirmishers reported to their units, Ferrero put his division in motion for Fort Cummings. Covered by a strong skirmish line posted behind the barricades, Willcox's brigade commanders retired their units a short distance and re-formed them into line of battle. The pickets then pulled back. Over on the left, while Hartranft's battle line was in Watkins' field and his skirmishers in Clements' field, Davis' Mississippians charged over the abandoned breastworks with wild "Rebel Yells." They, however, chose not to press their advantage.

Continuing the retrograde, Willcox next drew up his troops near the abandoned Rebel Redoubt and waited till the V Corps' rear guard, Walsh's cavalry, had filed up Squirrel Level road. Meanwhile, General Potter had pulled his troops out of the newly erected works, posting Colonel John I. Curtin's brigade, supported by a section of the 19th New York Battery, a short distance west of Fort Cummings. As soon as the V Corps was out of the way, Willcox's troops withdrew into the fortified zone out of which they had advanced the previous day. Curtin's infantrymen, as soon as Willcox's skirmishers had passed, followed. By 6 p.m., October 28, Parke had all his troops in their old positions and his picket line re-established.[30]

The last bluecoats (not counting wounded and stragglers) to leave the area about Burgess' Mill were 70 men of the 1st Minnesota and the 7th Michigan. They had manned the picket line in the woods between White Oak and plank roads. At daybreak it was discovered that all their comrades had gone. Captain James C. Farwell of the 1st Minnesota, as senior

officer present, took charge. He and his men remained undercover till after Hampton's horsesoldiers had moved out in pursuit of the II Corps. Crossing the field north of Mrs. Rainey's on the double, the Yanks made for the pines between Quaker and Dabney's Mill roads. Avoiding roads wherever possible, Farwell and his men headed southeast, and succeeded in regaining the Union lines by way of Reams' Station. In making their getaway, the footsoldiers twice clashed with roving mounted Confederate patrols.[31]

* * *

General Nelson Miles on the evening of October 27 ordered out two combat patrols. These groups were to probe the Confederate defenses to their front to ascertain if the Rebel generals were withdrawing men to oppose the Army of the Potomac's drive toward the South Side Railroad. Captain Jeremiah Z. Brown of the 148th Pennsylvania with 100 men moved out of the Union rifle-pits in front of Fort Morton. About the same time, 130 bluecoats led by Lieutenant Colonel Denis F. Burke of the 88th New York braced themselves to charge the Rebel picket line at the chimneys, opposite Fort Sedgwick.[32]

General Bushrod Johnson, whose division held the earthworks to Miles' front, had made several changes in his deployment. Brigadier General William H. Wallace's South Carolina Brigade had been shifted to the right to relieve King's and Harris' brigades of Mahone's division in the trenches. Colonel John T. Goode's Virginia Brigade was called up from the reserve to occupy the rifle-pits vacated by the South Carolinians. These changes left Johnson holding the sector from the Appomattox to Battery No. 30.[33]

Unwittingly, Miles had selected points to be probed that were held

y troops unfamiliar with their surroundings. Brown and his Pennsylvanians had only 40 yards to cover, after they left the protection afforded y their trenches, to reach their goal--Davidson's Battery. It was the hour for posting and relieving sentries, so the division officer of the ay mistook the Yanks for pickets returning to the line. He passed the ord for his men to hold their fire. Troops posted in the rifle-pits in rear of the Crater had the impression that Brown and his Pennsylvanians ere deserters coming over to their side. A light fire, however, was opened by the butternuts stationed in the rifle-pits to the right and left of Davidson's Battery.

With their axes, the Federals in the meantime had opened a passage through the chevaux-de-frise. Pressing quickly on, they entered the battery, capturing four officers and 13 enlisted men of the 37th and 47th Virginia. The Confederates now realized that they had been mistaken. A savage counterattack was launched by one of Goode's regiments from the southwest. Before Miles had a chance to take advantage of the success scored by Brown's patrol, the butternuts had recovered Davidson's Battery, taking 15 prisoners.[34]

It was 10 p.m. when Burke's patrol charged the Confederate line of outposts west of the Rives Salient. The "intense darkness and rain" covered the bluecoats' advance, and they carried about 200 yards of picket line held by the Holcombe South Carolina Legion, capturing eight Southerners. Whereupon, the Confederate artillery opened along the entire front. The Union cannoneers replied. A furious cannonade ensued, lasting for about 30 minutes. Covered by this bombardment, General Wallace organized a 200-man detachment from the Legion and the 18th South Carolina. Headed by Captain A. V. Brown of the Legion, the

olunteers advanced to recover the line of outposts. The South Carolinians cautiously approached to within 20 or 30 yards of the picket line nd then charged, recovering the works and "capturing 14 prisoners, with their arms and accouterments, and a small lot of intrenching tools." [35]

Miles' twin thrusts against Johnson's division had immediate and important repercussions. General Hill, who had been willing to increase the strength of Heth's striking force, now had a change of heart. No einforcements would be forthcoming, and Hampton and Heth would have to forego the joint infantry-cavalry attack on the II Corps scheduled for aybreak on the 28th. Indeed, Hill was so alarmed for the safety of the ector held by Johnson's division that orders were issued recalling Mahone and the three brigades with which he had marched to meet the ederals. [36]

Under the cover of darkness, Heth had recalled the four infantry rigades that had crossed Hatcher Run to carry the fight to the Army of the Potomac. Two of the brigades (MacRae's and Weisiger's) retired in considerable disorder. When Major J. R. Lewellen mustered the 12th irginia, he found that he had lost 3 killed, 13 wounded, and 76 missing and presumed to be prisoners. [37] One of MacRae's veterans recalled, "The affair at Burgess' Mill was marred by the misunderstanding of his orders by an officer in high rank, by which he failed to reinforce as instructed" our brigade, thereby causing us to suffer a heavy loss. [38]

News that the II Corps had stolen a march on Hampton and Heth, caused Hill to fret. He feared that unless Mahone marched rapidly, he Federals would effect such a concentration in front of Johnson's ector that they would be able to score a breakthrough. Sergeant Sale reported that his brigade, along with Harris' and King's, hurried back

to our "old positions." It was discovered "on getting to our old place that the enemy had attacked in addition to our right, our extreme left, and also on the Baxter road, but were defeated in all their attempts. So ends another 'On to Richmond.'" [39]

The Army of the Potomac listed its casualties in the battle of the Boydton Plank Road as 166 killed, 1,028 wounded, and 564 missing. Of these, the II Corps had lost the lion's share--99 killed, 539 wounded, and 420 missing. [40] Confederate casualties were never completely reported. The Union provost-marshal reported that 530 Confederate prisoners from Weisiger's, Cooke's, and MacRae's brigades were sent in by the II Corps, while 148 soldiers (all from Weisiger's brigade, except for a few stragglers from Cooke's brigade) had been turned over to his people by the V Corps. Twenty Rebel cavalrymen had also been counted. [41]

Thus ended the most ambitious of the Union attempts in the autumn of 1864 to outflank the Richmond-Petersburg line. It closed with a Confederate victory. Many soldiers hoped that this would be the last great battle in this sector for the year, because of the weather, which had been mild and open in October, became uncertain with the opening of November.

It should have been apparent by now to Grant and Meade that by sending columns out to threaten the flanks of the Richmond-Petersburg line that they were playing into General Lee's hands. Each time that it was tried, the Confederates used their entrenchments to hold the Federals to their front in check with a comparatively small force, while they concentrated against the flanking column a sufficient force to buffet it back, or at least cripple its advance.

Chapter V

Meade Cuts His Commitments and Pulls Back

Notes

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 381-382.

2 Ibid., 382.

Ibid.

4 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 194, 236.

Ibid., 348, 360, 368.

6 Ibid., 348.

7 Ibid., 412, 428; Billings, History of the 10th Massachusetts Battery, 366. In the battle, Batteries C and I, 5th U. S. Light Artillery had expended 237 rounds of solid shot, 147 shells, 248 rounds of spherical case, and 34 rounds of canister.

8 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 348, 360.

9 Ibid., 348, 368, 395.

10 Ibid., 298, 303, 320, 327.

11 Ibid., 609, 622, 641, 648. Before moving out, Gregg's hospital stewards had collected all the division wounded. As all the injured could not be placed in ambulances, Doctor Elias J. Marsh utilized the wagons captured in the morning, along with two infantry ammunition wagons. In this fashion, he was able to carry off the field about 100 wounded horsesoldiers. Upon reaching Perkins', a field hospital was established, and the wounded were removed from the ambulances. By dark all the wounds had been dressed, the necessary operations performed, and the patients placed on cars that would carry them

to the big base hospital at City Point. Ibid., 622.

12 Ibid., 236, 298, 304, 360.

13 Ibid., 438.

14 Ibid., 496-497.

15 Ibid., 438, 497, 507.

16 Ibid., 442. Major Roebling at 4 p.m. had visited Meade's headquarters. While there he had explained the situation and had received an order for Crawford to take possession of the breastworks in front of Griffin, provided he could cross the run. At the time that Roebling rejoined Crawford, he was astonished to see Rebel stragglers coming in from the left and rear. They reported King's Alabama Brigade in the woods, a short distance to the southeast. Crawford, to cope with this situation, had Hofmann change his front. In view of this situation, Crawford determined against sending his division across Hatcher Run.

17 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 387.

18 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 497.

19 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 387.

20 Ibid., 413; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 497, 507, 525. Bragg's brigade was posted on the left, Hofmann's to the right, and Denison's in reserve.

21 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 298, 442.

22 Ibid., 439, 442-443, 497; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 414. The pickets brought with them between 30 and 40 Confederates.

23 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 236, 298, 348; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 413.

24 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 439.

25 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 415.

26 Ibid.

27 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 556, 561, 569, 576; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 389.

28 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 580.

29 Ibid., 439, 459, 950; Wells, Hampton and His Cavalry, 339-341; Brooks, Butler and His Cavalry, 359-360; History of the 118th Pennsylvania, 529-530.

30 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 549, 556, 561, 569, 576, 580; History of the 35th Massachusetts, 306.

31 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 236.

32 Ibid., 254.

33 Ibid., 906.

34 Ibid., 254, 906.

35 Ibid., 254-256, 906, 933. On these two raids, General Miles reported that he lost 4 officers and 63 men,killed, wounded, and missing.

36 Ibid., 906.

37 Diary, Sale, 12th Virginia Infantry (Virginia State Library).

38 "The Forty-Fourth North Carolina Infantry," Southern Historical Society Papers, Vol. 25, pp. 343-344.

39 Diary, Sale, 12th Virginia Infantry (Virginia State Library).

40 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 160.

41 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. III, 406.