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THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Part I

Grant Prepares to Strike

Following the battle of Bentonville, Major General William T. Sherman's "Army Group" moved to Goldsboro, North Carolina. Here Sherman's troops rendezvoused with the force commanded by Major General John M. Schofield. After making arrangements to have his troops take a well merited rest, Sherman proceeded to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's headquarters at City Point, Virginia.

At a meeting on March 27, Sherman explained the plan of operations which he had previously broached to Grant in a letter. Sherman stated that in case it became necessary to bring his "Army Group" to the Petersburg front to encompass the defeat of the Confederates, he would be ready to march by April 10. If he were required to make the movement, Sherman proposed first to threaten an attack on Raleigh, North Carolina. After executing this feint, Sherman's "Army Group" would veer to the right, striking the Roanoke River near Weldon, North Carolina, 60 miles south of Petersburg. At Weldon, Sherman's troops would be in an excellent position to move to Burke's Station, the junction of the Southside and the Richmond and Danville railroads. The occupation of Burke's Station would enable Sherman's "Army Group" to intercept General

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Robert E. Lee's Confederate army in the event that it should be compelled to fall back on either Danville or Lynchburg. If, in the meantime, Lee's hard-fighting Confederates continued to hold Grant at bay, Sherman would join the Union armies operating against Petersburg and Richmond.

Grant authorized Sherman to carry out his master plan. This was conditioned on the stipulation that Sherman received no further instructions. Grant, in turn, explained to Sherman the plan of operations that he had matured. The lieutenant general commanding stated that he hoped his plan would lead to an early evacuation of the Petersburg lines by Lee's army. The meeting then adjourned, and Sherman returned to North Carolina. [1]

By the afternoon of March 28, Grant had completed his dispositions. The various units of his mobile striking force had moved into their advance staging areas and the troops were eager to take the offensive. At a staff meeting in Grant's City Point headquarters, a series of orders were drafted. Grant hoped these would set into motion a chain reaction which would force General Lee's army to abandon the fortifications guarding the approaches to Petersburg. Once the Confederates were driven out of the Petersburg defenses, the Union generals believed that their superior numbers and mobility would insure the destruction of

Lee's veteran army.

In accordance with the plan of operations outlined by Grant, the commander of the Army of the Potomac, Major General George G. Meade, prepared a set of instructions for the guidance of his corps commanders. Major General Andrew A. Humphreys was to hold the troops of his II Corps in their camps until 9 a. m. on the following day, "unless previously notified" that the Army of the James was in position. On moving out of the investment line, Humphreys was to take position with "his right resting on or near Hatcher's Run and his left extending to the Quaker road". Combat patrols would then be advanced. If the Confederates were discovered outside their works, Humphreys was to attack and drive them into their fortifications. The II Corps' train was to be parked near the Cummings house. [2]

Major General Gouverneur K. Warren's V Corps was alerted to be ready to march at an hour designated by Meade. Warren was admonished not to proceed beyond the junction of the Vaughan and Quaker roads until Humphreys' troops had reached their initial battle station. Once he had received information that Humphreys was in position, Warren was to advance along the Boydton plank road. The V Corps was to take position on Humphreys' left with its left flank refused. Warren, like Humphreys, was to throw forward a

strong force of skirmishers. These would be charged with the task of driving in the Confederate outposts. [3]

The two other corps (the VI and IX) which constituted the Army of the Potomac were to remain where they were. At the moment, these two corps were holding the investment lines east and south of Petersburg. In case the Rebels should pull troops out of the Petersburg defenses to meet the Union turning movement, the VI and IX Corps were to attack. [4]

General Grant himself signed the order detailing the cavalry's role in the projected offensive. Major General Philip H. Sheridan's troopers were to be on the move at the earliest possible hour on the 29th. The cavalry's line of march was not to be "confined to any particular road or roads". Grant, however, suggested that Sheridan march "by the nearest roads" passing to the rear of the staging area occupied by the V Corps. To outflank the Confederates, Sheridan, after having passed beyond the left flank of the V Corps, was to strike for Dinwiddie Court House. Grant observed that it was not his intention to attack the Rebels in their entrenchments, but to force them to abandon their powerful fortification to avoid being encircled. In case the Southerners should leave the protection of their works and attack the cavalry column, Sheridan was to hurl his entire force against them. Grant

promised Sheridan that the remainder of "the army will engage or follow the enemy as circumstances will dictate".

If the Confederates refused to take the field, Sheridan was authorized to cut loose from his base and strike for the Richmond and Danville Railroad. Furthermore, if it should prove feasible, Sheridan was to wreak havoc on the Southside Railroad at some point between Petersburg and Burke's Station. After having wrecked the two railroads, Sheridan was given two alternatives. He could either rejoin Grant's "Army Group" using a route to the south of his line of advance, or he could join General Sherman's forces in North Carolina. [5]

After reading his instructions, Sheridan walked out of Grant's tent. The general, desiring to have a private conversation with the cavalry leader, followed. A glance convinced Grant that Sheridan seemed to be "somewhat disappointed at the idea, possibly, of having to cut loose again from the Army of the Potomac, and place himself between the two armies [Lee's and Johnston's] of the enemy". Speaking up, Grant said, "General, this portion of your instructions I have put in merely as a blind." Grant then informed Sheridan that he expected the movement that was about to begin to result in the Federals' passing around Lee's right flank. This would force the Confederates to evacuate Petersburg and Richmond and lead to an early end of the long bloody conflict. Continuing,

Grant remarked that "the nation had already become restless and discouraged at the prolongation of the war, and many believed that it would never terminate except by compromise." Grant informed Sheridan that the reason he had included the passages pertaining to the cavalry joining Sherman was that unless his plan proved successful it would be interpreted as a disastrous defeat. [6]

Under the cover of darkness on the 27th, a portion of Major General Edward O. C. Ord's Army of the James had been withdrawn from its camps on the north side of the James River. As the success of Ord's movement depended in a great measure upon its secrecy, the general took a number of precautions. Several days before the projected operation, Ord quietly withdrew from the front line most of the troops detailed to accompany his expeditionary force. After making a demonstration against the Confederate earthworks in the Darbytown road sector, Ord concentrated, in camps calculated to be concealed from the eyes of the Rebel scouts, the units slated to march to the Southside. The troops that were to be left behind were kept constantly on the move. Camps were shifted. Combat patrols were sent out at frequent intervals to harass the Confederate outposts. To deaden the sound of the marching columns, the pontoon bridges across which the troops were scheduled to pass were covered with moist straw and compost.

hen the XXIV Corps moved out, Major General John Gibbon took two of this three divisions with him. Brigadier General Charles Devens' division was left behind to hold the line of works. One division (Brigadier General William Birney's) of the XXV Corps also accompanied Ord when he moved to the Southside. Crossing the James River at Deep Bottom, the troops of the XXIV Corps, Brigadier General John W. Turner's division in the lead, marched to Broadway Landing on the Appomattox River. To avoid congestion, Birney's Negro division crossed the James River at Varina. Birney's troops rendezvoused with Gibbon's column at Broadway Landing. [7]

By 7:40 a.m. on the 28th, the last of Ord's infantry had crossed the Appomattox. Turner's division which had the lead pushed on toward the Petersburg lines without resting. Gibbon's other division, Brigadier General Robert S. Foster's and Birney's, was badly jaded by the night march. Ord, therefore, permitted these two units to halt until noon. The recent heavy rains had turned the roads into oceans of mud. Consequently, the Army of the James' trains were "much delayed". It was a number of hours before the last of the heavily loaded wagons had rolled across the pontoon bridge. [8]

Once the troops had caught their second wind, the march was renewed. Before the afternoon was over, Foster's troops were

able to overtake Turner's division. At dusk, Gibbon's troops went into camp near Fort Siebert; Birney's troops bivouacked near Humphreys' Station. The ground occupied by the Army of the James was immediately in the rear of the II Corps' staging area. General Gibbon was pleased with the way his troops had conducted the 36-mile march. He reported that his soldiers had performed "one of the most remarkable marches on record with very few stragglers". [9]

Ord's cavalry, led by hard-riding Brigadier General Ranald S. Mackenzie, departed from its encampments on the north side of the James River on the evening of the 28th. Crossing the James at Varina and the Appomattox at Point of Rocks, the cavalrymen reached Hancock's Station at daybreak. [10]

The departure of the three infantry and one cavalry division cut the Union strength north of the James River to two divisions. With this greatly reduced force, Major General Godfrey Weitzel was expected to pin Lieutenant General James Longstreet's corps in position, while the Army of the Potomac and Sheridan's cavalry turned the Confederate right. In an effort to deceive the Southerners, the regimental bands had been left behind and they played as usual. On the night of the 27th and for several nights afterwards, men detailed by Weitzel kept the fires going in the

camps of the troops who had accompanied Ord.

Before leaving for the Southside, General Ord, feeling certain that Grant's attempt to turn the Confederates out of their Petersburg defenses would be crowned with success, left written instructions for Weitzel's guidance in case Richmond was evacuated. Weitzel was informed as to the route he was to follow to avoid the Rebel torpedoes (land mines) when he marched his men into Richmond. [11]

When General Meade received reports indicating that Ord's troops would reach the area behind the II Corps by dusk on the 28th, he readjusted his time table. Humphreys was alerted to have his troops on the road by 6 a. m. Upon the receipt of this news, Humphreys drafted the orders which would govern the II Corps' movements on the 29th. In accordance with Meade's directive, Humphreys announced that his troops would be ready to move at the designated hour. The Vaughan road would serve as the corps' line of advance.

Brigadier General William Hays' division would take the lead. After crossing Hatcher's Run, Hays was to deploy his troops north of the Vaughan road. Hays' right flank was to be close enough to the stream to be covered by the artillery which would be posted at the point where the Vaughan road crossed the river. Hays' division would also cover the Dabney Mill road. [12]

Major General Gershom Mott's division would follow Hays'. After crossing Hatcher's Run, Mott's troops were to form north of the Vaughan road. The left flank of the division was to be extended in the direction of the Gravelly Run Friends' Meeting-house. Major General Nelson A. Miles' division would march behind Mott's. Once Miles' division had reached the right bank of Hatcher's Run, the general was to post his troops on Mott's left. Miles' battle line was to extend from the vicinity of the Gravelly Run Friends' Meeting-house across the Quaker road. [13]

Each division commander was to cover his front with a strong skirmish line. Once the divisions had completed their deployment, the skirmishers were to advance and drive the Confederate outposts back inside the works. [14]

Humphreys informed his subordinates that he expected troops from General Gibbon's XXIV Corps to relieve their outposts about 5 a. m. If Gibbon's troops failed to show up, Hays' troops were not to delay their march. Miles and Mott, however, would each leave a brigade behind to hold the lines until Gibbon's soldiers put in an appearance. [15]

The commissary, ordnance, and quartermaster departments spent a busy day supplying the men of the II Corps. Each soldier was issued four days' rations of hardtack, coffee, and sugar. Salt meat to last for one day was rationed to each individual. Enough cattle to last the corps for three days were cut out from the

army's herd. These would be driven with the division herds. In addition, sufficient hardtack, coffee, sugar and salt to subsist the corps for another eight days was loaded into the division supply wagons. Beef on the hoof calculated to last for ten days was allotted to the corps herd. Forage for eight days was to be carried along on the expedition. [16]

Instead of the usual 40 rounds of ammunition, each soldier would carry 50 on his person. Furthermore, enough ammunition to supply every soldier with another 20 rounds was loaded into the division wagons. [17]

Since the army expected to move light and fast, the amount of artillery to be taken along was limited. One four-gun battery of 12-pounder Napoleons and one four-gun battery of 3-inch rifled artillery were to be allotted to each division. The three batteries that were to be left behind were ordered to report to the IX Corps' chief of artillery, Brigadier General John C. Tidball. [18]

Meanwhile, General Warren had drafted a set of instructions to govern the movements of his corps. Initially, Warren worked out his plans in accordance with a directive issued by Meade on the 27th. This memorandum, for some unexplained reason, was not delivered to Warren until the following afternoon. Major General Romeyn B. Ayres' division was scheduled to take the lead

when the V Corps took the field. Two batteries and the corps' pontoon train would follow close on the heels of Ayres' infantry. After breaking camp at 3 a. m., Ayres' troops were to cross Arthur's Swamp. Gaining the stage road, the division was to seize the crossing of Rowanty Creek near the Perkins farm. As soon as a bridgehead could be established, the pioneers were to lay a "double bridge". Once the two batteries had crossed the pontoon bridge, Ayres' division would proceed to the junction of the Vaughan road and Monk's Neck roads.

Major General Charles Griffin's division was to march behind Ayres' batteries. The remaining batteries and the wagons with the entrenching tools were to follow Griffin's soldiers. Major General Samuel W. Crawford's division would come next. The corps' trains would bring up the rear.

After entering the Vaughan road, the corps would proceed as rapidly as possible by way of J. Kidd's to Dinwiddie Court House. If the enemy were encountered, he was to be attacked. To expedite the march, the officers were admonished to see that the men remained in the ranks and did not straggle. Warren warned that "any man may be justifiably shot who ... [falls out] without permission from the division commander."

As in the case of Humphreys' corps, Warren's was stripped

down so that it could travel light and fast. In this respect, Warren announced that as a battle was "expected the command must be as little encumbered as possible and prepared for action so that nothing will have to be sent to the rear when the fighting begins." [19] Only five four-gun batteries (three of smoothbores and two of rifles) would accompany the corps. The corps' four other attached batteries would be left behind. [20]

To keep the Confederates in the dark as long as possible, Warren ordered the musicians left behind. After sounding reveille at the usual hour, the musicians would rejoin their units. [21]

Shortly after Warren had issued these orders, he received an important message from GHQ. Opening the dispatch, Warren discovered that Meade had changed his plans. The V Corps was not to go beyond the junction of the Vaughan and Quaker roads until General Humphreys was in position. Upon being informed that Humphreys was ready, Warren would resume his advance. Turning into the Boydton plank road, Warren would take position with his right anchored on Humphreys' left.

Several hours later the thoroughly confused Warren received a third message from Meade's headquarters. Scanning the dispatch, Warren learned that Humphreys was uncertain of his corps' ability to reach the Quaker road. Accordingly, Humphreys had been

directed "to place his right within supporting distance of General Ord ... ." Humphreys would then deploy his corps, letting his formation determine where his left flank would rest. In view of these circumstances, Meade thought that it would be best if Warren's corps moved up the Quaker road instead of the Boydton plank road.

This placed Warren in a quendary. He had one message directing him to advance up the Quaker road and another up the Boydton plank road. Worse, Warren did not know that Humphreys' starting time had been changed. Warren calculated that if Humphreys marched at 9 a. m., the V Corps would reach the junction of the Vaughan and Quaker roads long before the II Corps was able to get into position. Warren, therefore, determined to take up a strong position west of Rowanty Creek. Here he would wait while Humphreys completed his dispositions. As a result of his previous visit to the area in February at the time of the battle of Dabney's Mill, Warren was familiar with the terrain. He knew that there was a commanding ridge on the H. Hargrove farm. This was one-half mile east of the Boydton plank road. To be prepared to meet either eventuality, Warren determined to occupy the ridge with a strong detachment. He would hold the junction of the Vaughan and Quaker roads with the remainder of his corps. [22]

General Sheridan likewise spent the afternoon of the 28th

reviewing his plans. Major General George Crook's division was to be in the saddle at 5 a. m. Moving along the Jerusalem plank road, Crook's troopers were to march by way of Gary's Church and Reams' Station. A detachment of pioneers with three pontoon boats would accompany Crook's column. The cavalry planned to cross Rowanty Creek at Malone's bridge. If necessary, the pioneers would throw a bridge across the stream. After crossing the creek, the Federals would strike for Dinwiddie Court House. Sheridan's two other divisions, Major General George A. Custer's and Brigadier General Thomas C. Devin's, were to hit the road as soon as Crook's cavalrymen had cleared the area. Custer and Devin would report to Major General Wesley Merritt.

All the cavalry's wagons were to be assembled on the Jerusalem plank road. They would be organized into a convoy and escorted by a brigade to be detailed by General Merritt. The ambulances, however, were slated to accompany their respective divisions.

During the advance to Malone's brigde, strong scouting parties would be thrown out to reconnoiter all the roads on the left of the column's line of march. After crossing Rowanty Creek, patrols would be pushed out as far as Stony Creek. [23]

The intelligence flowing into General Lee's headquarters

on the 27th indicated that the Union army was starting to stir restlessly. Lee felt that within a few days Grant would inaugurate an offensive designed to force the Confederates to abandon their Petersburg defenses. When the Federals moved out, Lee believed they would direct their movements toward the upper reaches of Hatcher's Run. This meandering stream covered the right flank of Lee's army. (Rising about 15 miles west of Petersburg, Hatcher's Run was not a part of the watershed of the Appomattox River. Instead, the stream ran roughly parallel to the Appomattox for about seven miles and then it veered to the southeast to become one of the affluents of the Nottoway.) Between Hatcher's Run and the Appomattox lay the tracks of the vital Southside Railroad, one of Lee's two essential links with the fragment of the Cis-Mississippi Confederacy not yet occupied by the Yankees. [24]

General Lee realized that the Southside Railroad would undoubtedly be Grant's prime objective, if the Federals planned to drive the Confederates from Petersburg without having to storm the powerful fortifications. To reach the railroad, Lee correctly deduced that Grant would probably cross Hatcher's Run at a point some distance from the Rebel lines. To accomplish this, the Union army would have to march westward until it reached a point beyond the Confederates' right flank, and then strike for the railroad.

Examining his maps, Lee observed that the roads which the Union army would use in gaining his right passed through a wooded area which was cut up by numerous small but troublesome streams. As a result of the recent rains, these watercourses could be expected to be running bank full.[25]

After consulting all his available sources of information, Lee decided that the Union army would probably cross Rowanty Creek at Monk's Neck Bridge. (Rowanty Creek was formed by the confluence of Hatcher's and Gravelly runs.) Having crossed Rowanty Creek, Lee believed the Federal column would strike for the Southside Railroad by way of Dinwiddie Court House and Five Forks. The marching distance encompassed was 15 miles — a day and one-half as the roads then were. If Lee endeavored to meet this thrust by merely lengthening his front, he would be compelled to extend his lines from the Claiborne road to a point several miles west of Five Forks. This would be a prolongation of four miles, a distance the Confederates could not hope to protect adequately. Already, Lee had stretched his thin line almost to the breaking point. On the twenty-seven and one-half miles held by his infantry, Lee could count an average of only 1,140 men per mile.[26]

Helping to hold the lines on the north side of the James were two divisions of Lieutenant General James Longstreet's corps.

At this time, these once formidable divisions had been reduced to about 6,400 effectives. It would take the advance elements of the two units a minimum of 12 hours to reach the Petersburg area in the event of a crisis. [27] Brigadier General Martin W. Gary's under-strength mounted brigade was attached to Longstreet's corps. Major General Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry division was stationed on the Nine-mile road guarding the crossing of the Chickahominy. This division mustered about 1,800 officers and men, but it was two days' march from the point of danger. [28] The only other troops north of the James were the heavy artillery units, the Virginia Reserves, and the Local Defense Troops. This hodgepodge of troops which were assigned to the Department of Richmond totaled about 4,250. [29] Altogether at this time, Lee could muster north of the James about 10,000 infantry, 1,800 cavalry, and 750 heavy artillerists. To do this, however, he would have to call out all the Virginia Reserves and Local Defense Troops. Without using his second line troops, Lee could deploy about 7,500 infantry. Exclusive of Fitz Lee's cavalry, only Longstreet's two divisions could be used to reinforce the Confederate right. [30]

The Howlett Line between the James and Appomattox rivers was held by Major General William Mahone's infantry division, about 4,000 strong. In addition, the big guns along Mahone's line were

manned by several heavy artillery companies and detachments from the Confederate navy. Mahone's front was nearly five miles long. The troops charged with the defense could not be reduced, because if the Federals scored a breakthrough at this point they would cut Lee's army in two and sever communications between Richmond and Petersburg. [31]

Major General John B. Gordon's corps, supported by a heavy artillery concentration, occupied the sector from the Appomattox River east of Petersburg to the point where Lieutenant's Run passed through the Confederate lines. Gordon's front was slightly longer than four miles. After deducting his losses suffered in the attack on Fort Stedman, Gordon was able to deploy about 5,500 soldiers. If the works had not been so formidable and all the ranges plotted, this would have been a hopelessly inadequate force for the task involved. [32]

Two divisions of Lieutenant General Ambrose P. Hill's corps held the earthworks on Gordon's right. Hill's front extended from Lieutenant Run to the fortifications covering the Boydton plank road at Burgess' Mill. This was a distance of more than eight miles, and it was held by approximately 9,200 officers and men. [33]

To the right of Hill's corps, guarding the White Oak and Claiborne roads, was Lieutenant General Richard H. Anderson's small

corps. At this time, Anderson's corps consisted of one division (Major General Bushrod R. Johnson's) and Colonel Hilary P. Jones' artillery. Johnson's division mustered about 4,800 officers and men. [34]

There was no cavalry on the army's right flank. The nearest mounted force was Major General William H. F. "Rooney" Lee's division which was stationed at Stony Creek Station, 40 miles away by road. There were about 2,400 troops in Rooney Lee's command. On the 28th, while the Federals were preparing to take the field, Rooney Lee's division was reinforced by Major General Thomas L. Rosser's division, approximately 1,200 sabers. Rosser's battered division had been serving in the Shenandoah Valley. [35]

The only command which General Lee could count as a reserve was Major General George E. Pickett's division. On March 14 Pickett's troops had been transferred to the north side of the James to forestall a threatened sweep by Sheridan's cavalry. When the attack failed to materialize, Pickett's troops had remained north of the river. At the time of the assault on Fort Stedman, Pickett's division was ordered to return to the Southside. Only one brigade, Brigadier General George H. Steuart's, was able to reach Petersburg on March 25 before the attack was suspended. Even so, Steuart's troops were not committed. Following the failure of

the attack on Fort Stedman, Steuart's soldiers were permitted to camp near the city. Two of Pickett's brigades (Brigadier Generals Montgomery D. Corse's and William R. Terry's) were halted before they reached Petersburg and bivouacked on Swift Creek. Pickett's other brigade, Brigadier General Eppa Hunton's, had remained north of the James. All told, the strength of Pickett's scattered command was approximately 5,000. Since the battle of Gettysburg, Pickett's troops had remained in the background. They had, in general, been assigned to quiet sectors of the front. The division had a high ratio of desertions, giving evidence of a low morale. [36]

Now, to make matters worse, Lee received an urgent dispatch from General Longstreet. "Old Pete" informed Lee that General Gary's scouts had spotted Sheridan's cavalry on the previous morning near Malvern Hill. At the time they were sighted, the Union cavalry was moving up the right bank of the James. By 3 p. m. the last of the Federal column had passed from view. (Gary's scouts were correct. Devin's and Custer's cavalry divisions had crossed the James River at Deep Bottom on the 26th.) In addition, reports had reached Longstreet's command post indicating that Sheridan's troopers had left White House in great haste. Many saddles and bridles, a large quantity of ammunition, and many sacks of oats had been left behind. Prior to the departure

from White House, it was stated that the Union cavalry had received 2,000 fresh horses from the remount service. The Confederate scouts were also told by the inhabitants that the troopers of Major General August V. Kautz's cavalry division had bragged that they had been alerted and expected to go to North Carolina. [37]

In response to this news, Lee decided to concentrate most of his cavalry on the right flank of his army. A telegram was sent to General Longstreet, directing him to send Fitz Lee's division to the Southside. Longstreet was not too impressed with General Lee's plan to counter the Union thrust with cavalry. Old Pete thought that, instead of stripping all the cavalry from his flank, it would be wiser if Lee constituted a special task force to deal with Sheridan's hard-driving troopers. Longstreet believed that this task force ought to be composed of "an efficient cavalry force with Pickett's division and two or three batteries". This command, Longstreet reasoned, would be able to watch Sheridan and keep him off the two vital railroads. If the Union cavalry joined Sherman in North Carolina, this specially constituted task force would reinforce General Joseph E. Johnston's Confederate army. Longstreet concluded, "I believe that our cavalry, supported by the infantry, will be more effective against the enemy's raiders than our cavalry alone. I believe that such a force in proper hands, will be able to frustrate object of enemy, as nearly all of his horses must be

somewhat exhausted." [38] Lee saw the logic in Longstreet's arguments. The decision having been made, Longstreet drafted orders for Fitz Lee to move his division at daybreak on the 28th to the Southside where he would report to General Lee. Since there was very little forage in the Petersburg area, Fitz Lee would take all the provender that he could collect with him when he marched. Lee's dismounted troopers were to be left behind to man the works on either side of the Nine-mile road. [39]

At the same time, General Lee had alerted Rooney Lee to hold his division ready to move to the point of danger. General Lee planned to mass all his mounted troops, except Gary's brigade, on his extreme right. [40]

In a desperate effort to increase further his cavalry force, General Lee sent an urgent telegram to Lieutenant General Jubal A. Early, the commander of the Department of Western Virginia and East Tennessee. Besides informing Early that Sheridan's cavalry was "probably on Grant's left", Lee inquired into the possibility of the departmental commander's dispatching one of Major General Lunsford L. Lomax's brigades to Petersburg. [41] Early replied immediately to Lee's communication. He reported that his department was in danger and it would be impossible to send any troops to Petersburg. [42]

The news reaching Lee's headquarters from the scouts on

the 28th was more foreboding than on the previous day. First, there was the report brought in by an 18-year old girl whose parents lived inside the Union lines. At the risk of her life, she passed through the Union picket lines and informed the Confederate outposts that strong contingents from the Army of the James had crossed the James and Appomattox rivers. Lee immediately relayed this intelligence to General Longstreet. Old Pete then sent observers to check on the report. The first scouts who returned to the Confederate line reported that the only Union force that had crossed the river on the night of the 28th was a supply train. Later several of Gary's scouts came in and confirmed the news that Sheridan's cavalry had moved to the Southside. In addition, they correctly reported that Mackenzie's division was still north of the James. Longstreet's scouts were unable to discover whether any of Ord's infantry and artillery had crossed the river. So far, the measures Ord had taken to conceal the movement of his troops were working to perfection. [43]

Lee, however, could not afford to take chances. In spite of Longstreet's failure to penetrate the cordon with which Ord had veiled his movements, Lee alerted his subordinate to be prepared to release all the troops he could spare. As the next step in his campaign to protect his right flank, Lee put into execution the

plan which Longstreet had broached on the preceding day. He would organize a special task force composed of cavalry, infantry and artillery to deal with the threat posed by Sheridan's cavalry. Lee realized that he might have to augment this force if the cavalry were supported by infantry. But if he did, Lee hoped to do so without being compelled to draw troops from the defense line in such numbers as to make a Union breakthrough inevitable. Lee's plan of operation was, in short, a compromise between the detachment of a major force and a long extension of his already attenuated defense line. [44]

Lee, therefore, asked Longstreet to designate Pickett's division as the one to co-operate with the cavalry. In acknowledging Lee's communication, Longstreet stated that he did not think he could spare Pickett. But, he continued, the danger would be much greater if Sheridan were permitted to destroy the two railroads that served as the supply lines for the Army of Northern Virginia or to rendezvous with Sherman's army in North Carolina. Longstreet felt that the Confederates' only recourse was to "put a force in the field that can contend against" the Federals' mobile striking force. Curiously enough, there is no record of any preliminary discussion between Lee and Longstreet as to who should command the task force charged with stopping Sheridan's thrust. [45]

Once the decision to constitute a special task force had been made, instructions were drafted alerting Pickett's scattered brigades to be ready to move to the right. Lee could not bring himself to send the order authorizing Pickett to start moving his brigades on the 28th. The general was still apprehensive lest the activities of Sheridan's cavalry were a feint designed to cover an attack north of the James. [46]

During the day, Lee replied to Early's message regarding the impossibility of sending one of Lomax's brigades to Petersburg. Besides expressing regret that the "paucity" of troops prevented Early from dispatching reinforcements, Lee ordered Early to send Lieutenant Colonel William McLaughlin's Artillery Battalion to the Petersburg front. [47]

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Notes to Part I

Grant Prepares to Strike

1 Andrew A. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65 — The Army of the Potomac and the Army of the James (New York, 1959), 322.

2 The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 224. (Cited hereafter as O. R.)

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 231.

5 Ibid., 234. Grant wished Sheridan to strike the Richmond and Danville Railroad near Appomattox.

6 Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, II (New York, 1917), 300-301.

7 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1160, 1173, 1179, 1236, 1238.

8 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 236.

9 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1160, 1173, 1236, 1238.

10 Ibid., 1244. When General Mackenzie's division left its camp near the New Market road it mustered 54 officers and 1,629 enlisted men.

11 Ibid., 1160, 1227. In addition to Devens' division, Weitzel's command included Major General August V. Kautz's division of the

XXV Corps.

12 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 224-226.

13 Ibid., 226.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 226-227. If it became necessary to leave the two brigades behind when the corps took the field, the one from Mott's division was to be posted near the Tucker house battery and Batteries C and D. The brigade from Miles' division was to be stationed near Battery A. Ibid., 227.

16 Ibid., 225-226.

17 Ibid., 225.

18 Ibid., 226.

19 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 797-798. The only vehicles authorized to accompany the corps across Rowanty Creek were: one medical wagon and one army wagon loaded with hospital supplies to each brigade, one army wagon with forage for each division. The ambulance train would consist of one-half the vehicles assigned to the corps. In addition to the ammunition each soldier carried on his person, another 20 rounds per man would be transported in the ordnance wagons. One sutler's wagon was authorized to accompany each brigade. Forage to last for one day was to be carried either in the spring wagons or on the horses.

The remainder of the V Corps' wagons were to be parked

near the Perkins house, and supplies brought forward as needed. Ibid., 798.

20 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 230.

21 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 798.

22 Ibid., 798-799.

23 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 234.

24 Douglas S. Freeman, R. E. Lee -- A Biography, IV (New York, 1935), 22.

25 Ibid., 22-23.

26 Ibid., 23-24.

27 Ibid., 24; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 388. The two divisions from Longstreet's corps stationed north of the James were commanded by Major Generals Charles W. Field and Joseph B. Kershaw.

28 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 24.

29 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1331.

30 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 24.

31 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 389.

32 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 25.

33 Ibid. Major Generals Cadmus M. Wilcox and Henry Heth led the two divisions from Hill's corps charged with the defense of this sector.

34 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 25.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid. The density of the infantry and the character of the various zones, as of March 27, were approximately:

Zone and command	Infantry per mile of defended line
North of the James -	
Fitz Lee's cavalry on the Nine-mile road, 1,800	
Longstreet, with Field's and Kershaw's divisions (chiefly in field works), five miles.	1,360
Ewell, with Virginia Reserves, Local Defense Troops and heavy artillery (in heavy earthworks), two and one-half miles.	740
Howlett Line -	
Mahone's division (heavy works with naval and heavy ordnance support), nearly five miles. . . .	740
From the Appomattox to Lieutenant Run -	
Gordon's Corps (heavy works, enemy very close), four miles.	1,350
From Lieutenant Run to Burgess' Mill -	
Wilcox's division of Hill's corps (some heavy works,	

chiefly field works), about four and one-half miles 1,100

Heth's division of Hill's Corps (works of the same type as Wilcox's, though not as strong, except at Burgess' Mill), three and one-half miles. 1,200

Average density of this zone. 1,150

Beyond Burgess' Mill -

Anderson's corps (light field works on extreme right), three miles 1,600

Average density (31,400 men on twenty-seven and one-half miles of line defended by infantry). 1,140

Pickett's division, a quasi-reserve 5,000

Cavalry at Stony Creek. 2,400

Ordered to Stony Creek, Rosser's division 1,200

37 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1357-1358; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1101. General Kautz had commanded the cavalry division attached to the Army of the James until March 20. On that date Kautz was detached and placed in charge of an infantry division in the XXV Corps. General Mackenzie was then placed in command of the cavalry division formerly led by Kautz.

38 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1357.

39 Ibid., 1358. There were 385 men and 5 officers in Fitz Lee's division that were without mounts and had to be left behind.

40 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 26-27.

41 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1358. At this time, General Lee ordered the 1st Maryland Cavalry, which was stationed at Gordonsville, to join Fitz Lee's division.

42 Ibid., 1362.

43 Ibid., 1359-1360; Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 27.

44 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 27.

45 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1360.

46 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 27.

47 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1362.

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Part II

The Advance Begins -- The V Corps Wins the Battle of Lewis' Farm

Long before daybreak on the 29th reveille sounded in the camps of Sheridan's cavalry corps. As soon as the troopers had wolfed down breakfast, the officers mustered and inspected their units. After the regimental commanders had satisfied themselves that each man had drawn the prescribed five days' rations, the thirty pounds of forage and 40 rounds of ammunition, the buglers sounded "Boots and Saddles". The cavalrymen then swung into their saddles. It was daybreak when Sheridan's powerful mounted force, 9,000 strong, departed from the Hancock's Station staging area. Crook's division, with which Sheridan traveled, took the lead as the troopers rode southward along the Jerusalem plank road. [1]

The cavalry column marched by way of Gary's Church and Reams' Station. At Webb's Farm, the Union vanguard turned into the Malone's Bridge road. Nothing exciting occurred to mar the march until Brigadier General I. Irvin Gregg's brigade, which was spearheading Sheridan's advance, reached Malone's Bridge. Much to his disgust, Sheridan discovered that the Confederates had burned the bridge. While Gregg's troopers were waiting for the pioneers

to throw a[illegible]e across the stream, they were fired on by a small Co[illegible]achment posted on the west bank. Dismounting, the troops[illegible]ze away with their Spencer carbines. The Rebels sca[illegible]he pioneers quickly bridged Rowanty Creek. [2]

[illegible]pers then clattered across the swaying structure. [illegible]orward, the troopers veered to the right and drove the [illegible]cross Stony Creek. Several prisoners were captured. [illegible]oned, the Southerners told Sheridan that they belonged t[illegible]'s division which was camped on the Weldon Railroad [illegible]reek Station. The information gleaned from the prison[illegible]ed Sheridan that the Confederate cavalry would not attack[illegible]ul column. Examining his maps, Sheridan observed [illegible]pushed on to Dinwiddie Court House, Rooney Lee's com[illegible]be forced "to make a wide detour" if it were to rejoin the[illegible]orthern Virginia. Consequently, Sheridan decided to [3]

[illegible] column had turned off the Jerusalem plank road, the progr[illegible] corps' wagon trains was retarded by "the almost impassable[illegible]ds of this section of Virginia. The thousands of horses[illegible]nd hundreds of wagon wheels turned the roads into ribbons o[illegible]ot wishing to be delayed by his trains, Sheridan decided t[illegible]ithout them. Custer's division was detached and remained [illegible]'s Bridge to assist and protect the trains from

Rooney Lee's cavalry. [4]

Having provided for the security of his trains, Sheridan headed for Dinwiddie Court House. Gregg's brigade continued to lead Sheridan's advance. Several times during the march, Gregg's troopers clashed with small roving mounted Confederate patrols. These were easily brushed aside by the Union vanguard. The muddy roads, however, proved to be a bigger obstacle. It was 5 p. m. before the column reached Dinwiddie Court House. Even then, Batteries C and F, 4th U. S. Light Artillery bogged down. The artillerists were unable to gain the objective of the day's march. After occupying Dinwiddie Court House, Sheridan posted the troopers of Devin's and Crook's divisions so that they would cover the Vaughan, Flat Foot, Boydton plank, and Adams roads. As soon as the officers reported that their men were in position, Sheridan permitted their units to camp. [5]

Custer's combative cavalrymen discovered that they had been given a most unpleasant assignment, when they were detached and detailed to guard the trains. It was late afternoon before the last of the wagons had crossed Rowanty Creek. To their dismay, Custer's troopers quickly discovered that the road west of the creek was worse, if possible, than it had been on the opposite side. The passage of Devin's and Crook's divisions had turned the road

into a sticky slime. In a futile effort to expedite the march, Custer organized fatigue parties. These groups were put to work assisting the pioneers in corduroying the road. Progress, however, continued to be agonizingly slow. When darkness descended, the head of the train was seven miles from Dinwiddie Court House. Since the road was too narrow to permit a night march, the wagons were parked. After picketing the area, Custer permitted his exasperated troopers to bed down for the night. [6]

As a result of the excitement engendered by the projected offensive and the necessity for making last minute preparations, there was very little sleep in the camps of the V Corps on the night of the 28th. Long before daybreak the soldiers had been fed and the units formed. As anticipated, Ayres' division was on the road by 3 a. m. As soon as the road was cleared, the other units of V Corps moved out in accordance with the march schedule established by Warren. [7] Within one hour and three-quarters, Ayres' vanguard had reached the place where the Monk's Neck Bridge had formerly stood. The few Confederates manning the outpost on the far side of Rowanty Creek fired several scattered shots at Ayres' scouts before taking to their heels. Obtaining a precarious footing on the ruins of the former bridge and the fallen trees, Ayres' infantry scrambled across the stream. After the

bridgehead was established, a company of the 50th New York Engineers speedily laid a canvas pontoon bridge. Once the bridge was declared passable for horses, Warren crossed with his escort. Hailing Ayres, Warren ordered the division commander to reassemble his troops and resume the advance. The troops on the left bank would cover the bridgehead.[8]

For the first mile beyond Rowanty Creek, the progress of Warren's column was slowed by the necessity to remove obstructions from the road. The Confederates, to impede the Union advance, had felled a number of trees. Unlike Sheridan, Warren had little trouble with "General Mud". Warren reported that, except in the boggy areas, the roads were dry.[9]

By 8:15 a. m., the head of the V Corps reached the junction of the Monk's Neck and Vaughan roads. Except for the few shots exchanged at the bridge and the felled timber, the Federals had failed to see any signs of Confederate activity. From an old Negro who had been hiding in the woods near Crawford Church, Warren learned that there were reportedly no Rebel troops at Dinwiddie Court House as late as the previous day. Warren drafted a message containing this data and handed it to Captain Gordon Winslow. The staff officer, accompanied by a ten-man escort, galloped off up the Vaughan road to deliver copies of this dispatch

to Generals Meade and Humphreys. [10]

Following the departure of Winslow and while waiting to hear from army headquarters, Warren deployed his command. Ayres' division proceeded to the intersection of the Quaker and Vaughan roads and halted. Two of Ayres' brigades took positions at the intersection; the other was formed into line of battle and sent a short distance up the Quaker road. Once Ayres' troops had moved off the road, Griffin's division occupied the commanding ground separating the headquarters of the Great and the Little Cattail runs. Griffin's troops were posted on the Chappell, Scott, and Hargrave farms. Two of Crawford's brigades covered the country road leading to R. Boisseau's farm on the Boydton plank road. Crawford's other brigade (Brigadier General Richard Coulter's) guarded the corps' train. The trains were parked at the junction of the Monk's Neck and Vaughan roads. [11]

The country into which the V Corps had marched and where the subsequent operations were to be conducted:

> ... was of the forest kind common to Virginia, being well watered by swampy streams. The surface was level and the soil clayey and sandy, and, where these mixed together, like quicksand. The soil after the frosts of winter first leave it is very light and soft, and hoofs and wheels find but little support. [12]

Upon questioning the inhabitants, Warren learned that

Brigadier General Rufus Barrington's North Carolina Brigade had passed down the Quaker road on the previous day. The farmers stated that the Confederate troopers had remarked that they were en route to Stony Creek. [13]

At 10:20 a. m. Major William Jay of Meade's staff galloped up to Warren's command post, and handed Warren a dispatch from General Meade. Opening the message, Warren found that he was to move his corps up the Quaker road to the Gravelly Run Crossing. Furthermore, Meade thought that if Warren sent out patrols on his right, he would contact Humphreys' left near the J. Slaughter house. [14]

Replying to Meade's communication, Warren gave a brief resumé of the position of his corps. He informed his superior that his skirmishers on the Quaker road had probably already penetrated as far as Gravelly Run. If they hadn't, Warren assured Meade, he would see that they did. Warren also passed on the information he had picked up concerning Barringer's activities. [15]

Warren proceeded to mark time while his patrols sought to establish liaison with Humphreys' corps. When the fiery Meade received Warren's message, he undoubtedly simmered. It was evident that Warren had misinterpreted his orders. Instead of advancing in force up the Quaker road, Warren had sent a force of skirmishers to

the Gravelly Run crossing. Meade, calling to his chief of staff, Major General Alexander S. Webb, told him to send a second message to Warren. After expressing his approval of the dispositions Warren had made to cover his left flank and rear, the general observed that "this must not prevent your moving your corps up the Quaker road across Gravelly Run ... ." Once he had crossed the stream, Warren was to form his corps facing north. He was to anchor his right on Humphreys' left. Only after this maneuver had been completed would Warren provide for the security of his left flank. If possible, Warren was to hold the Boydton plank road. [16]

This message which General Webb signed at 11:20 a. m. was entrusted to Captain Campbell D. Emory. One glance at the piece of paper convinced Warren that he had misunderstood Meade's intentions. Hailing a staff officer, Warren sent him racing to tell General Griffin to move his division up the Quaker road. General Crawford was alerted to hold his command ready to support Griffin's advance. When he had taken care of this urgent business, Warren informed army headquarters of the measures he had undertaken to implement Meade's instructions. [17]

Shortly thereafter, General Meade and his staff rode up to Warren's command post. After conferring briefly, the two generals accompanied Griffin's vanguard as it trudged up the

Quaker road. [18]

Unlike Sheridan's and Warren's corps, Humphreys' did not get started at the designated hour. It was 6:30 a. m., one-half hour after the scheduled time, before Humphreys' advance division, Hays', moved out of the Petersburg investment line. [19] Turning into the Vaughan road, the troops passed through the picket line. Hatcher's Run was crossed without any difficulty by Hays' troops.

Even before all of his troops had reached the right bank, Hays sent a strong combat patrol composed of the 7th West Virginia, the 7th Michigan, and the 4th Ohio to reconnoiter the area into which the II Corps was moving. The bluecoats advanced about one and one-half miles without discovering any Confederates. They then retraced their steps and reported their finding to General Hays. [20]

Following the return of the patrol, Hays halted his division one-half mile west of Hatcher's Run. [21] In accordance with Humphreys' instructions, Hays deployed his troops about one-half mile north of the road. Two brigades, Brigadier General Thomas A. Smyth's and Colonel James P. McIvor's, were formed into line of battle. McIvor's right flank rested near the run. The opposite side of the stream was held by the troops of General Gibbon's XXIV Corps. Hays' other brigade, Colonel William A. Olmsted's, was held in reserve. [22]

Mott's division followed Hays' across Hatcher's Run. About one mile west of the run, Mott deployed his division north of the Vaughan road. Two of Mott's brigades, Brigadier Generals Byron R. Pierce's and Robert McAllister's, were formed into line of battle; the other, Brigadier General Regis de Trobriand's, was held in reserve. The right flank of Pierce's brigade rested on the left flank of Hays' division. As soon as his troops were in position, General Mott put them to work throwing up a line of earthworks. [23]

Miles' soldiers marched out of their camp near the Squirrel Level road, close on the heels of Mott's troops. By 8:30 a. m. the last of Miles' division had crossed Hatcher's Run. Passing beyond the area where Mott was marshaling his soldiers, Miles stopped his command. Miles then formed his division north of the Vaughan road; its right rested on Mott's unit and its left on Gravelly Run. [24] Since Miles had four brigades, he deployed three of them into line of battle -- Brigadier General John Ramsey's on the left, Brigadier General Henry J. Madill in the center, and Colonel George W. Scott's on the right. Colonel Robert Nugent's brigade was held in reserve. [25] Once the troops had taken their positions, breastworks were constructed. [26]

Except for Battery B, 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery, all the artillery units attached to the II Corps were parked once

they had crossed Hatcher's Run. The Rhode Islanders, however, unlimbered their four 12-pounder Napoleons on the north side of the Vaughan road about one-half mile west of the watercourse. Once they had emplaced their guns, the cannoneers trained them on Dabney's Mill. [27]

While the infantry was forming, Humphreys sent out several mounted patrols. One of these, by 9 a. m., had succeeded in opening communications by way of the Vaughan road with Warren's corps. A second group had moved up the valley of Gravelly Run to the Quaker road. Encountering a few Confederate vedettes, the Yankees drove them up the Quaker road. Beyond the "old saw-mill", the bluecoats were fired on by an infantry outpost. Since the Confederates were protected by breastworks, the Unionists returned and reported their finding to General Humphreys. [28]

When the division commanders had completed their dispositions, they covered their fronts with a strong line of skirmishers. [29] Patrols were then sent out to reconnoiter. The scouts returned with the information that they had pinpointed the outlying Confederate defenses in this sector. They stated that the Confederate outposts were sheltered behind a line of breastworks covering the approaches to Dabney's Mill. This was about three-fourths of a mile in front of the ground held by the II Corps. [30] Humphreys, however, had to postpone his attack on these Confederate

fortifications while Warren was getting into position.

Early on the 29th, Gibbon's corps marched out of its camps behind Fort Siebert. In accordance with Grant's orders, Gibbon's troops moved into the entrenchments formerly held by the II Corps. [31] General Foster's division occupied the fortifications from Fort Sampson on the right to Hatcher's Run on the left. [32] Turner's division was held in reserve and camped east of Hatcher's Run near the Vaughan road. [33] During the early forenoon, two of Turner's regiments were sent across Hatcher's Run. These two units were posted in support of the four guns of Battery B, 1st New Jersey Light Artillery. [34]

Later in the day, Gibbon, in accordance with Ord's instructions, saw that all his troops were supplied with four days' rations which were to be carried in their haversacks. Rations to last an additional eight days were stored in the corps' wagons. To the soldiers, this was a certain indication that a period of active campaigning was in the offing. [35]

General Birney's Negro division, which had accompanied Gibbon's corps to the Southside, remained at Humphreys' Station throughout the day. [36]

The news that the Yankees had crossed Rowanty Creek reached General Lee's headquarters before noon. When the scouts brought in this information, they stated that infantry and cavalry

had crossed the stream at Monk's Neck Bridge and were massing toward Dinwiddie Court House. [37] Lee, as he informed Longstreet, was unable to deduce from these fragmentary reports the immediate Union objective. [38] The situation, however, was so critical that Lee would have to take some action. Brigadier General Samuel McGowan's brigade of Wilcox's division was pulled out of the defense lines on the east side of Hatcher's Run. Following the withdrawal of McGowan's troops, Wilcox's three other brigades had to spread out to cover the vacated rifle pits. McGowan's brigade was sent to the sector west of Burgess' Mill held by Anderson's corps. [39]

With this business taken care of, Lee directed Pickett to transfer Corse's and Terry's brigades from the Swift Creek staging area to Petersburg. At Petersburg, Pickett was joined by Stewart's brigade. The three brigades then entrained on the cars of the Southside Railroad, which the railroad authorities had previously spotted in the Petersburg yards. The troops were then sent to Sutherland's Station, ten miles west of Petersburg, where they detrained. Many hours were required to make this shift. It was late on the night of the 29th before the last of Pickett's three brigades had been shuttled to Sutherland's Station. [40]

While General Lee was busy drafting the orders for the movement of Pickett's and McGowan's soldiers, Fitz Lee rode up to

his headquarters. The cavalryman informed his uncle that his division which had left the Nine-mile road the day before was in Petersburg. General Lee told his nephew that Sheridan was striking for Dinwiddie Court House. Lee stated that he thought the Union cavalry would concentrate at Five Forks preparatory to breaking up the Southside Railroad. Fitz Lee was to go to Sutherland's Station. There he would be joined by Rooney Lee's and Rosser's cavalry and Pickett's infantry. Fitz Lee was then to attack Sheridan. General Lee was confident that the only way the raid could be stopped was to wrest the initiative from the Yankees. To insure co-operation between the three cavalry divisions, which had not been under a unified command since Lieutenant General Wade Hampton's departure from the Virginia theater of operations, Lee told Fitz Lee to take charge of the cavalry corps. No written instructions, however, were given Fitz Lee on this matter. Fitz Lee was to give a strict interpretation of these verbal orders long after the entire complexion of affairs had changed. [41]

Taking leave of his uncle, Fitz Lee rejoined his division. At an order from the general, the troopers again moved out. To reach the Sutherland's Station rendezvous area, Lee's cavalrymen took the Cox road as they rode out of Petersburg. Reaching Sutherland's Station, Fitz Lee's division camped, pending the

arrival of Rooney Lee's and Rosser's troopers. [42]

As the next item on his agenda, General Lee issued instructions for Rooney Lee's and Rosser's divisions to report to Fitz Lee. Since Sheridan's column had cut the direct line of communications between Petersburg and Stony Creek, these two divisions would have to detour to the west of Dinwiddie Court House if they were to carry out their assignment. Consequently, Rooney Lee's and Rosser's greyclads were unable to join Fitz Lee until the evening of the 30th. [43]

After having made these arrangements for the protection of the Southside Railroad, General Lee realized that steps would have to be taken to guard the Richmond and Danville Railroad. The latter railroad was almost as vulnerable to a Union raid as the former. Accordingly, Lee decided to use Pickett's other brigade, Hunton's, which was stationed north of the James, to fend off any raids the Federals might be planning on the Richmond and Danville Railroad. Hunton's brigade was to be withdrawn from the rifle pits flanking the Williamsburg road. To avoid the allurements of the Richmond streets, Hunton's greyclads were to cross the James River by way of the pontoon bridge located below the city. The brigade was to camp near Manchester. From Manchester, Hunton's troops could be shifted by rail to either Petersburg or Burke's Station,

as the situation demanded. It was late afternoon before Gary's troopers were able to relieve Hunton's infantry. By then, however, the situation had changed drastically. [44]

Lee would have preferred to withdraw additional units from north of the James to confront the Union threat to his right. But before doing this, he decided to get Longstreet's reactions. When Lee informed Longstreet of the latest developments on the Southside, he stated that Old Pete might have to come to Petersburg with Field's division. In the meantime, Lee wanted Longstreet to ascertain what Union troops were stationed north of the James. [45] Longstreet replied, "The usual force is in our front, so far as we can learn. Our scouts are in from the enemy's line this morning, and report affairs as usual." (Evidently, Weitzel was carrying out his mission. More than 60 hours had passed since Ord had led three of his infantry divisions to the Southside, and still Longstreet was in the dark regarding this movement.) Longstreet observed that if Fields' greyclads were moved, the V. M. I. cadets and all the Local Defense Troops must be called out to take their places in the lines. [46]

Meanwhile, General Anderson, whose corps was directly threatened by the Union advance, began to institute measures which he hoped would enable his command to cope with the situation.

General Johnson was authorized to recall his outposts as soon as he was satisfied that the Federals were moving in force up the Quaker road. To cover the pickets' retreat, Johnson was directed to post one of his brigades in advance of the earthworks.[47]

About noon, Johnson learned from his scouts that a strong Union force (Warren's corps) was coming up the Quaker road. Johnson immediately relayed this information to Anderson. The corps commander replied, directing Johnson to take his division, attack the bluecoats, and drive them back to the Vaughan road. Just as Johnson's buttermuts were starting to form, preparatory to moving out of the works, several excited cavalrymen galloped up. They informed Johnson that the foe was "retiring beyond Gravelly Run". Consequently, Johnson did not anticipate meeting the foe until after his troops reached the stream. When his division moved out of the works, Johnson had Brigadier General Henry A. Wise form his Virginia brigade into line of battle. One of Wise's regiments, the 34th Virginia, was detached and sent to support the cavalry patrols operating on the Boydton plank road. Brigadier Generals William H. Wallace's, Young M. Moody's, and Matthew W. Ransom's brigades marched by the flank in the rear of Wise's battle line. Wise's Virginians passed beyond the forks of the Boydton plank and Quaker roads before they encountered any Federals. As the

greyclads entered the skirt of the woods south of the junction, they were fired upon by Warren's skirmishers.[48]

Advancing up the Quaker road, Warren's vanguard soon reached Gravelly Run. To their disgust, the Federals found that the Confederates had broken down the bridge. Undaunted, General Griffin shouted for Brigadier General Joshua L. Chamberlain to deploy his brigade into line of battle. Chamberlain's troops were to cross the run and occupy the rifle pits which were visible on the far side. Plunging into the water, Chamberlain's eager troops experienced considerable difficulty in wading across the waist-deep stream. Upon gaining the left bank, Chamberlain deployed and threw forward a battalion of the 198th Pennsylvania as skirmishers. The remainder of the 198th Pennsylvania and the 185th New York were formed into line of battle on either side of the road. Once these dispositions had been completed, Chamberlain's troops advanced and drove the Confederate outposts out of the earthworks guarding the crossing. Chamberlain's troops continued to push ahead until they reached Lewis' farm. Observing that the foe (part of Johnson's division) was posted in strength on the opposite side of the clearing, Chamberlain halted the pursuit. No farther advance would be undertaken, pending the arrival of the remainder of Griffin's division.[49]

As soon as Chamberlain's troops had established a bridgehead, Warren directed Griffin's pioneers to construct a bridge. Within a short time, a usable structure was thrown across the stream. When the bridge was completed, the remainder of Griffin's division crossed the run. Warren and Meade now parted. The corps commander accompanied Griffin's division; the army commander returned to his command post. Later in the afternoon, the 50th New York Engineers, to help facilitate the crossing of the artillery, laid a pontoon bridge at this point. The banks were very steep and the artillery could not cross the pontoon bridge until proper approaches had been made. It therefore took the batteries considerable time to effect a passage of Gravelly Run. [50]

Having reached the right bank of Gravelly Run, the remainder of Griffin's division tramped up the Quaker road. The road was choked with felled timber. To secure the advance of the artillery, the pioneers were put to work clearing away the obstructions. Even so, Griffin's troops forged ahead of the II Corps. Humphreys' troops, who were advancing on the right of Warren's corps, were having a difficult time working their way through the wooded countryside between the Quaker road and Hatcher's Run. [51]

Upon overtaking Chamberlain's brigade at Lewis' farm,

Griffin ordered his subordinate to resume the advance. Griffin also had Brigadier General Edgar M. Gregory deploy his brigade on Chamberlain's left. [52] At this time, the firing on the skirmish line had practically died out. Consequently, Chamberlain re-formed his battle line on the Lewis house. After reinforcing his battalion of skirmishers with a company from the 185th New York, Chamberlain waved his men forward. The entire brigade swept ahead. Chamberlain's skirmishers were able to gain the woods on the far side of the clearing before the fire of the Confederates became very severe. The general hoped that his battle line would likewise reach the timber before the greyclads sprang into action. This was not to be the case. Before the bluecoated battle line gained the woods, Wise's Virginians started to blaze away with a vengeance. Chamberlain's troops recoiled for a brief instant. Urged on by their officers, the Yankees recovered their poise and forged ahead. Attacking fiercely, Chamberlain's troops forced part of Wise's brigade to fall back into the open ground south of the junction of the Boydton plank and Quaker roads. [53]

General Anderson rode up just as Wise's troops were falling back. The corps commander directed Johnson to have Wallace's brigade support the part of Wise's brigade that was still contesting the Union advance. At a word from Wallace, his grim South Carolinians moved into the woods on the right of Wise's

Virginians. [54]

After forcing Wise's greycoats to fall back about a mile, Chamberlain halted his brigade. Even though they had encountered only a few pockets of resistance, Gregory's Yankees were unable to keep pace with Chamberlain's troops. While Chamberlain was regrouping his brigade and waiting for Gregory to come up, Wise's and Wallace's soldiers launched a powerful counterattack. Soon Chamberlain's troops were "completely enveloped in a withering fire". Taken by surprise, the Northerners were thrown on the defensive. At the end of one-half hour's combat, Chamberlain's left began to give ground. Redoubling the fury of their onslaught, the Rebels turned Chamberlain's left flank. Falling back, the Federals took position in a clearing. Here, the line occupied by the left flank of the brigade was parallel with the Quaker road. Chamberlain's battle line, instead of being straight, was L-shaped. [55]

The Confederates quickly moved against Chamberlain's reorganized main line of resistance. So terrible was the Southerners' onslaught that Chamberlain despaired of holding his new position for longer than ten minutes. In desperation, the general sent a request to General Gregory (whose brigade had now arrived) to attack the Rebels in the right flank when they renewed

their assault on his battered command. In the meantime, General Griffin had galloped up. Griffin assured Chamberlain that if he would hold on for five more minutes, the artillery would be up. Shouting this encouraging news to his men, Chamberlain succeeded in rallying them. [56]

Two batteries had followed Griffin's division up the Quaker road. While the infantry was able to march up the timber-strewn road with comparatively little difficulty, the artillery was stopped col. Finally, however, the pioneers were able to cut a path and Battery B, 4th U. S. Light Artillery thundered up the road. Reading the Lewis clearing at a critical moment, the cannoneers limbered their four pieces. A section was emplaced on each side of the Lewis house. Going into action immediately, the artillerists hammered away at the oncoming Confederates. The two 12-pounder Napoleons on the west side of the house raked Wise's hard-charging Virginians with canister. [57]

As General Johnson observed that Wise's troops had closed to within canister range of the Union guns, he shouted for General Moody's Alabamans to move to the attack. The Alabamans would form on Wise's left and charge the guns. At a word from Moody, the waiting Alabamans started forward on the double. [58]

Startled by the fire of Battery B's four smoothbores, Chamberlain's left flank companies recovered the initiative.

Counterattacking, they re-entered the woods. Feeling for an opening, the Confederates, following the arrival of Moody's Alabamans, started to exert tremendous pressure on Chamberlain's right and center. By this time, many of the Federals had fired up all the rounds in their cartridge-boxes. In addition, the cartridge-boxes of friend and foe were rifled. Many of the troops, refusing to trust to the bayonet, began to slink to the rear. To stave off disaster, Chamberlain sent a second plea to Gregory for help. At the same time, General Griffin, sensing that his subordinate was in grave trouble, rushed three of Major General Joseph J. Bartlett's regiments (the 1st and 16th Michigan and the 155th Pennsylvania) to Chamberlain's assistance. In response to Chamberlain's plea, Gregory had sent the 188th New York. These fresh troops arrived none too soon. As they came up on the double, Chamberlain's battered brigade was falling back on the Lewis house to protect the artillery. [59]

It seemed that Chamberlain was omnipresent. The general circulated along the battle line, urging his men to hold on for a few more minutes. Naturally, the general became a prime target. Chamberlain's horse was shot from under him, and the general's arm was disabled when his steed fell. A minie ball struck him on the chest, glanced over his heart, and left a painful wound and "a

disrepu coat". Chamberlain, however, refused to relinqu nd. [60]

rough Chamberlain's retreating brigade, the fresh red to the attack. On the right, Bartlett's three red by Brigadier General Alfred L. Pearson, who had gradors of the 155th Pennsylvania, dashed straight toward trate battle line. [61] As the 188th New York emerged oods into the Lewis clearing, Lieutenant Colonel Isaac Doaw that Bartlett's battle line was sweeping forward ght. Deploying on the double, the New Yorkers joined inrge. Taking cover behind piles of sawdust which serv as breastworks, the Southerners blazed away at the oncomkees. [62]

.s time, the Southerners had had enough. When Anderson formed that the Yankees had thrown in fresh troops and stoppe advance, he ordered Johnson to recall his soldiers. Covered byrong rear guard, Moody's, Wallace's, and Wise's troops werlled out of the woods north of Lewis' farm. Falling back, the herners established a roadblock on the Boydton plank road. Pos his troops, Johnson stationed them in the edge of the woods th and east of the Bevill house. [63]

ile Chamberlain's brigade was fighting for its life,

General Warren observed that a country lane cut across the Quaker road a little south of the Lewis house. The general felt that if he sent a detachment up this road, it might be able to gain the Boydton plank road and turn the Confederates' right flank. Calling for Captain Napoleon J. Horrell, Warren directed him to take the escort company and reconnoiter the lane. [64]

Before Horrell's troopers had gone very far, they were fired upon by the outposts of the 34th Virginia. This regiment had been given the task of guarding the Boydton plank road. As soon as Warren learned that his escort company was in contact with the Rebels, he ordered General Crawford to take his division and support the cavalry. Preparatory to taking up the advance, Crawford had Brigadier General Henry Baxter deploy his brigade into line of battle. The right flank of Baxter's brigade rested on Griffin's left. Colonel John A. Kellogg's brigade was massed in the rear of Baxter's unit. Once these dispositions were completed, Crawford sent his troops forward. Passing through the escort company's skirmishers, Crawford's powerful battle line easily drove in the Confederate pickets who were covering the approaches to the Boydton plank road. By this time, Griffin's troops had broken the back of Johnson's attack. When Colonel John T. Goode of the 34th Virginia learned that Johnson was falling back, he decided to do

the same. Skillfully breaking contact with the bluecoats, the Virginians rejoined their comrades. Following the Confederates' retreat, Crawford's troops reached the Boydton plank road. [65]

Two of Ayres' brigades crossed Gravelly Run close on the heels of Crawford's troops. Since the emergency had passed, these two units were held in reserve near the Spain house. For the time being, Ayres' other brigade, which was escorting the corps' train, remained south of the run. [66]

About 4 p. m., General Humphreys received a message from army headquarters informing him that the V Corps, on his left, was advancing up the Quaker road. Humphreys was directed to advance his corps and connect his left with Warren's right. [67]

Earlier in the afternoon, several of Humphreys' subordinates had sent out strong combat patrols to feel the Confederate defenses in their sectors. On the right, one of General Hays' brigade commanders had made a forced reconnaissance. Three of Colonel Olmsted's regiments (the 19th Maine, and the 59th and 152d New York) were brought up from the reserve. Spearheaded by the 19th Maine, this combat patrol reached and occupied Dabney's Mill. [68] Like Hays, Mott also sent three regiments to explore no man's land. After advancing about three-quarters of a mile, two of Mott's units, the 17th Maine and the 93d New York, came upon a line

of breastworks held by a few pickets. General Pierce, who was in charge of the patrol, deployed part of the 93d New York as skirmishers. Springing forward, the New Yorkers put the Confederates to flight and occupied the rifle pits, which were located west of Dabney's Mill. [69] The other regiment sent out by General Mott, the 20th Indiana, failed to spot any signs of Confederate activity. [70]

Accordingly, when Humphreys received his instructions to advance, he was reasonably certain that his men would not encounter much opposition. After the staff officers had relayed the word to Humphreys' subordinates, the II Corps' battle line moved forward. Miles' left flank brigade, Ramsey's, succeeded in establishing contact with Warren's right. As a result of the dense woods and tangled underbrush, this connection was repeatedly broken. Ramsey would then have to halt his brigade while communications were re-established. [71]

Suddenly, the roar of battle became distinctly audible from the direction of the Quaker road. Shortly thereafter, Humphreys received a message from army headquarters stating that General Griffin had been attacked by two Confederate divisions. Humphreys was directed to support Griffin's right with Miles' division. [72] After relaying the necessary instructions to Miles, Humphreys rode to the point of danger. By the time that Humphreys

reached Griffin's command post, the Confederates had fallen back. Here, the corps commander was handed a message from Meade's headquarters, dated 5:40 p. m. Glancing at the dispatch, Humphreys learned that Warren was scheduled to make another attack at 6 p. m. If Miles could be spared, Humphreys was to support Warren's advance. Furthermore, if Humphreys believed he could score any additional gains, he was to send his entire corps forward. Following the receipt of these instructions, Humphreys issued orders for his division commanders to continue the advance. [73]

Two of Griffin's brigades, Bartlett's and Gregory's, pressed forward hard on the heels of Johnson's rear guard. General Warren, as usual, was up at the front with the skirmishers. The Union skirmishers gained the junction of the Boydton plank and Quaker roads without difficulty. Before the Yankees had reached the junction, Johnson's troops, in accordance with Anderson's directive, retired into the fortifications covering the White Oak road. A few outposts were left behind by the Confederates to contest the Federals' drive.

Advancing beyond the junction, the Federals approached the J. Stroud farm. A party of Confederate sharpshooters posted in the Stroud house was able to pick off several of the bluecoats. A combat patrol from the 118th Pennsylvania, led by Captain George W.

Moore and Lieutenant William T. Godwin, sprinted toward the house. Unable to stop the onrushing Yankees, the Southerners abandoned the building. Occupying the house, the bluecoats rushed to the windows and blazed away at the rapidly disappearing greyclads. A section of artillery posted behind an earthwork covering the White Oak road returned the Yankees' fire. The battery commander who stood on top of the works directing the cannoneers paid no attention to the Yankees. The first shell from the Rebel field pieces passed over the house, the second struck it, and the third exploded in the chimney, wounding two men. Brick and plaster "flew about thick, enveloping the new occupants of the structure in dust and rubbish." The house was hurriedly evacuated. [74]

If Griffin's men were to attack the Confederate battery, they would have to cross a large open field. To make matters more difficult for Griffin's troops, the thick woods which flanked the Quaker road had prevented Crawford's and Miles' soldiers from keeping pace with them. Darkness had blanketed the area before Crawford's and Miles' bluecoats were able to draw abreast of Griffin's. In the light of these difficulties, Warren decided against an attack on the Confederate earthworks guarding the approaches to the White Oak road. [75]

Thus closed the battle of Lewis' Farm. The Confederates

reported that they lost about 250 men in this engagement. General Warren listed his casualties as: 53 killed, 306 wounded, and 22 missing. If the report of General Chamberlain is to be believed, the Confederates understated their losses. Chamberlain stated that his brigade, on the 30th, buried 130 Rebels who had fallen in the battle. In addition, Warren reported the capture of about 100 Rebels. [76]

During the night, the V Corps fortified the position which they had gained as a result of the battle of Lewis' Farm. Two batteries and Bartlett's brigade dug in at J. Stroud's, which was the most advanced ground secured during the day's fighting. Griffin's two other brigades camped behind the newly erected earthworks. General Crawford's division was posted on the Boydton plank road; the division's right was at Stroud's and its left rested on Gravelly Run. Ayres' division was held in reserve. To keep Rooney Lee's cavalry from raiding the trains, patrols from Ayres' command were thrown out well to the corps' rear. [77]

In general, Humphreys' II Corps encountered very little opposition as it felt its way cautiously toward the Confederate main line of resistance. By nightfall, Hays' right-flank brigade, McIvor's, had reached Armstrong's Mill. McIvor's troops, during the advance, had maintained contact with the soldiers of the XXIV

Corps on last side of Hatcher's Run. Smyth's (Hays' left flank brigade) ked Olmsted's combat patrol at Dabney's Mill. Having gained thu, Smyth detailed the 69th Pennsylvania to picket his front. Pu forward, the Pennsylvanians collided with a Confederatol near the Crow house. After a lively skirmish, both sidesrew. Following the arrival of Smyth's soldiers, Olmsted's s shifted to the left. Covered by a strong picket line, Haysion spent the night in the rifle pits which the Confederatoccupied. [78]

ys' center unit, Mott's division, held a portion of the frolly at right angles to Hays' battle line. Mott's sector was timbered and swampy. Pierce's brigade occupied the rifle ptured earlier in the day by the 93d New York. The right fPierce's unit rested on Olmsted's left. McAllister'se was uneventful. When they had moved ahead, the terrainsed McAllister's and Pierce's brigades to diverge. T Trobriand's regiments, the 1st Maine Heavy Artillery a10th Pennsylvania, were brought up from the reserve and plng this possibly dangerous gap. [79]

EMiles' division was again in contact with the V Corps. In ahead, Miles' troops had been plagued by the thickwhile Miles' scouts had sighted a few

Confederate no shots were exchanged. The Southerners, believing discretion the better part of valor, fell back in the face of Miles' powerful battle line. When nightfall put a stop to the day's fighting, Miles' troops halted and threw up breastworks. After the two commanders had covered their fronts with a strong line of outposts, Miles' troops slept on their arms.[80]

As the day progressed, the reports reaching Lee's headquarters became more ominous. Lee was now faced with the possibility that Grant, instead of sending his cavalry to raid the railroads, extending his line toward the southwest. Late in the afternoon Lee learned that Johnson's division had been repulsed when it attacked the Union column moving up the Quaker road. To counter this threat to his right, Lee would have to extend his left flank. Consequently, Lee decided to shift Hunton's brigade to Petersburg. Hunton's brigade, instead of going to Manchester would march into Richmond and board the trains which would haul it to the point of danger.[81]

In addition, Lee had learned that the foe was using artillery, as well as infantry and cavalry. He, therefore, drafted orders for Colnel William J. Pegram's 20-gun artillery battalion to move to Burgess' Mill.[82]

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Notes to Part II

The Ad — The V Corps Wins the Battle of Lewis' Farm

1 O. R. Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1101, 1116.

2 Ibid., 1141.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 1126, 1129.

5 Ibid., 1126, 1141; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 267. Dinwiddie Court House consisted of a courthouse, a hotel, and a few farmhouses. Davies' brigade camped on the Boydton plank road; the 1st Cavalry was posted on the Flat Foot road. O. R., Series I pt. I, 1143, 1148.

6 O. R. Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1116, 1129, 1134; O. R., Series I pt. III, 267.

7 O. R. Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 799, 870.

8 Ibid., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 253, 258. Later the engineers constructed a substantial log bridge at the crossing. O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 642-643.

9 O. R. Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 799.

10 Ibid., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 254.

11 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 799, 896; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 254, 259.

12 History of the Corn Exchange Regiment - The 118th Pennsylvania Volunteers -- From Their First Engagement at Antietam to Appomattox (Philadelphia, 1881), 562.

13 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 254.

14 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 799.

15 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 799; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 254.

16 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 799; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 255.

17 Ibid.

18 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 800. Warren's command post was located at the intersection of the Quaker and Vaughan roads.

19 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 249.

20 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 766.

21 Ibid., 675, 757, 791.

22 Ibid., 757, 766.

23 Ibid., 776, 781, 785.

24 Ibid., 709-710.

25 Ibid., 714, 724, 733, 744. Miles' division, unlike the others in the II and V Corps, contained four brigades instead of three.

26 Ibid., 733.

27 Ibid., 791. The two batteries assigned to Mott's division were parked on the Vaughan road, near the Brown house.

28 Ibid., 676.

29 Ibid., 710, 714, 733, 766, 776. Among the regiments deployed as skirmishers by Miles' brigadiers were the 26th Michigan, the 126th New York, and the 140th Pennsylvania. Mott's battle line was screened by the 20th Indiana, the 17th Maine, and the 93d New York. Hays' brigadiers threw forward the 7th Michigan, the 4th Ohio, and the 7th West Virginia.

30 Ibid., 710, 776.

31 Ibid., 1173.

32 Ibid., 1179.

33 Ibid., 1214.

34 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 270.

35 Ibid.

36 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1332, 1334-1336.

37 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1362.

38 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 28.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 28-29.

42 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1298-1299.

43 Ibid., 1299; Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 28.

44 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1364.

45 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 29.

46 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1363.

47 Ibid., 1365.

48 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1286-1287.

49 Ibid., 800, 845, 847. The 198th Pennsylvania was formed on the right of the Quaker road; the 185th New York on the left.

50 Ibid., 800; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 255; Charles H. Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps on the Left, March 29, to Nightfall March 31, 1865; Gravelly Run", Papers of The Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, Vol. VI (Boston, 1907), 215.

51 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 800.

52 Ibid., 800, 853.

53 Ibid., 847, 1287.

54 Ibid., 1287.

55 Ibid., 847-848, 1287.

56 Ibid., 848.

57 Ibid., 899, 1287. So close were the artillerists to the Confederate infantry that the battery commander, Lieutenant John Mitchell, and four of his men were cut down.

58 Ibid., 1287.

59 Ibid., 848.

60 History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 563.

61 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 848.

62 Ibid., 858.

63 Ibid., 1287.

64 Ibid., 800. Company C, 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry, served as Warren's escort.

65 Ibid., 884, 892. Two of Kellogg's regiments, the 6th and 7th Wisconsin, were formed into line of battle behind Baxter's troops. Kellogg's other regiment, the 91st New York, was massed on the left of the brigade, ready to be deployed either on the left flank of the battle line or in rear of the first line, as circumstances dictated.

66 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 255, 257.

67 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 676.

68 Ibid., 759.

69 Ibid., 785.

70 Ibid., 781. The 20th Indiana had moved out on the left of Mott's division.

71 Ibid., 676, 710.

72 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 250.

73 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 676.

74 Historn Exchange Regiment, 563-564.

75 O. R. Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 245; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt., 853, 862, 1287.

76 O. R. Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 803, 849, 1287. Table of Losses forps in the battle of Lewis' Farm:

Command	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Aggregate
Escort	—	3	-	3
Artillery	1	4	-	5
Griffin's	52	293	22	367
Ayres' Div	-	-	-	-
Crawford's in	-	6	-	6

77 Ibid., 52, 899. Battery B, 4th U. S. Light Artillery, and Battery G, 5th U. S. Light Artillery were dug in at Stroud's Fa

78 Ibid., 159, 764, 766. Hays' picket line was manned by the 4th Ohio 7th West Virginia, the 69th Pennsylvania, and the 59th New Yor

79 Ibid., 6781, 785, 788.

80 Ibid., 7719, 722.

81 Freeman, R. Lee, IV, 29; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1365.

82 Freeman, R. Lee, IV, 29. The following units constituted

Pegram's battalion: Battery C, 18th South Carolina Artillery Battalion; the Purcell Virginia Artillery; Elliett's Virginia Artillery; and the Letcher Virginia Artillery. The transfer of troops that Lee had ordered during the day left the situation of the Confederate army on the evening of the 29th as follows:

Zone and Command	Infantry per mile of defended land
North of the James:	
Cavalry on the left flank, Gary's brigade, approximately 500.	
Longstreet, with Field's and Kershaw's divisions (no change)	1,360
Ewell, with Virginia Reserves, Local Defense Troops and Siege Artillery (no change).	740
Howlett Line:	
Mahone's division (no change)	740
From the Appomattox to Lieutenant Run:	
Gordon's Corps (no change).	1,350
From Lieutenant Run to Burgess' Mill:	
Wilcox's division of Heth's corps, less McGowan's brigade, density reduced from 1,100 per mile to	888
Heth's division, strengthened by McGowan's brigade from Wilcox's division, density increased from 1,700 to.	1,550

Beyond Burgess' Mill:

Anderson's corps (no change). 1,600

Moving:

Pickett, with 5,000 infantry, to join Anderson.

Cavalry, 4,200 to right flank.

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Part III

Grant Modifies His Master Plan

The favorable way in which events were developing on the 29th led Grant to change his plan of operations. He determined to have Sheridan, for the time being, forego his projected raid on the Confederate railroads. In a letter informing the cavalry leader of the day's happenings, Grant wrote, "I now feel like ending the matter [the investment of Petersburg] if it is possible to do so before going back." After telling Sheridan to forget about the raid, Grant ordered the cavalryman "to push round the enemy if you can and get onto his right rear." The cavalry would make this movement, Grant observed, in concert with the infantry. Grant cautioned Sheridan that the activities of the Confederate cavalry might cause him to modify his action. Sheridan was to put his new set of instructions into operation in the morning. [1]

At the same time, Grant addressed a message to Meade informing him that "Sheridan has received orders to push for the enemy's right rear in the morning, unless the position of ... [the Confederate cavalry] makes a different course necessary ... ." Grant also outlined for his subordinate the moves which he wanted the II and V Corps to undertake on the 30th. If Warren's advance

up the Boydton plank road should compel the Confederates to fall back behind Hatcher's Run during the night, the II and V Corps were "to wheel to the right so as to cover all the crossing of the run ... ." If the foe did not retire across the run, the Federals were to "push up close to him and feel out to ... [their] left and endeavor to force him to this course." [2]

In the meantime, Meade had already drafted a set of instructions for the guidance of his corps commanders. Warren was directed to have his V Corps resume the advance at 6 a. m. The right flank of the V Corps was to extend across the Quaker road; its left was to be pushed into the countryside west of the road. [3]

Humphreys' II Corps was slated to move forward at the same time. The II Corps' right flank division, Hays', was to advance along the road leading from Dabney's Mill to J. Crow's farm. Miles' division on Humphreys' left would continue to maintain contact with Warren's right and, if necessary, render support to the V Corps. Each of Humphreys' three divisions was expected to hold one brigade in reserve. Humphreys' and Warren's troops were to force the Rebels to fall back into their fortifications. If, however, the Confederates came out of their works, the Yankees were "to give battle". [4]

After evaluating Warren's reports of the action on the afternoon of the 29th, the Union brass were reasonably certain that in the Burgess' Mill sector Griffin's division had forced the Confederates

to retire · earthworks. This intelligence, taken in conjunctiant's orders, caused Meade to modify his previous instructioren. As soon as Warren had definitely ascertained that Meaderetation of the tactical situation was correct, he was to is line to the left. Combat patrols would then be thrown outffort to pinpoint the Confederate positions west of the Boydtoroad. This dispatch reached Warren's command post an hour beinight. [5]

same time, Grant issued orders for General Ord to have one ojivisions cross Hatcher's River at 5 a. m. on the 30th. Thears from the Army of the James were to support Humphreys'. [6]

taff officer entrusted with Grant's message regarding the changeLans reached Dinwiddie Court House on the night of the 29th. red into General Sheridan's headquarters, the aide handed the lry leader Grant's letter. Without a moment's hesitation,ridan made his plans to cope with the changed situation. eridan proposed to send General Merritt with Devin's division toain possession of Five Forks. Crook's division would be held in serve; Custer's would continue to protect the trains. [7]

Irained very hard throughout the night. When Devin mustered hi division on the morning of the 30th, the precipitation was still illing. Before taking leave of Sheridan, Merritt received

his last minute instructions. Merritt was told that Devin's division was to advance up the Adams road to J. Boisseau's. If no opposition were encountered in reaching J. Boisseau's, the Federals were to turn into the Crump road and endeavor to gain the White Oak road. Merritt then rejoined his command. When Merritt gave the word, the column moved out.[8]

Except for several brief stops to remove a few felled trees from the road, the march was routine. Two miles north of Dinwiddie Court House, Merritt halted the division. In accordance with Merritt's instructions, Devin posted Colonel Charles L. Fitzhugh's brigade at the intersection of the Brooks and Adams roads. One of Fitzhugh's regiments advanced along the Brooks road and established a roadblock on the Boydton plank road. Then the rain-drenched column continued to J. Boisseau's farm. Devin massed one of his two remaining brigades, Colonel Peter Stagg's, at the junction of the Dinwiddie and Crump roads. The general would use Brigadier General Alfred Gibbs' brigade for reconnaissance. Altogether, Gibbs sent out three combat patrols. Two of Gibbs' regiments, the 5th and 6th U. S. Cavalry, were sent up the Dinwiddie road with instructions "to feel and find the enemy". Major R. Murray Morris of the 6th Cavalry was in charge of this patrol. The 6th Massachusetts, Colonel Casper Crowninshield commanding, moved across to reconnoiter the Boydton plank road. Colonel Charles L. Leiper's 6th Pennsylvania Cavalry

advanced up the Crump road. The Pennsylvanians were to see if they could block the White Oak road. In addition, Leiper was expected to maintain contact with Morris' and Crowninshield's patrols.[9]

Within a short time the three Union patrols had established contact with the Confederate outposts. These were the first butternuts that the cavalrymen had seen since leaving Dinwiddie Court House. Attacking, the bluecoats drove the Rebel vedettes back on their supports.[10]

Although no fresh reports from the endangered right reached Lee's headquarters on the morning of the 30th, the general became convinced that he would have to send additional reinforcements if he were to take the initiative against Sheridan. Any withdrawal from the Petersburg defense line was, of course, very dangerous. But unless Lee was willing to have his right turned, there was no other alternative. Grimly, Lee issued instructions for Major General John B. Gordon's corps to assume responsibility for the defense of a two-mile section of the earthworks on the west side of Lieutenant Run. These trenches were held by Major General Cadmus M. Wilcox's division. Once Gordon's troops had relieved Wilcox's, Lee would be able to reinforce his endangered right. Gordon planned to use Major General Bryan Grimes' division to relieve Wilcox's left flank units.

Having taken care of this business, Lee rode out to Sutherland's Station. Upon his arrival at the station, Lee learned

that Fitz Lee's division was en route to Five Forks. The general was disturbed to learn that Rooney Lee's and Rosser's troopers had not arrived from Stony Creek.[11]

Under the cover of darkness, Pickett's three infantry brigades had marched from Sutherland's Station to Burgess' Mill. It was a cold rainy night. The road was a ribbon of mud; the angry little streams athwart the division's path were almost past fording. On the morning of the 30th, Anderson, Pickett, Heth, and several other ranking officers were summoned to a conference with General Lee at Sutherland's Station.

At this meeting, the Rebel brass discussed various ways of dealing with Sheridan. Only two of these seemed promising. Heth expressed the view that, from his extended front, he might be able to strike the advancing bluecoats a heavy blow. Pickett, however, seemed to have a better opportunity. He was told that he was to use his three brigades, and two of Johnson's (Ransom's and Wallace's) in the projected attack. As the initial step in Lee's battle plan, Pickett's command was to march on Five Forks. There Pickett's infantrymen would rendezvous with Fitz Lee's cavalry. From Five Forks, with the cavalry in support, Pickett was to march toward Dinwiddie Court House and assail the Yankees. Six of Pegram's guns were slated to go with Pickett. If the Confederates could drive Sheridan from Dinwiddie Court House, they would be able

to frustrate the Federal drive to cut General Lee's vital supply lines. By these orders, Lee had carried out the suggestion originally advanced by Longstreet. A highly mobile task force had been concentrated and given the mission of guarding the army's right flank. This force, when assembled, would consist of about 6,400 infantry and 4,200 cavalry. Having completed his business at Sutherland's Station, Lee returned to Petersburg. [12]

The transfer of Johnson's two brigades to augment Pickett's task force had dangerously reduced the infantry strength of Anderson's small corps. Unless units were brought from other sectors to take their places on the lines, Anderson would have to spread his remaining men very thin. The position held by Anderson's corps was important in itself, and it also constituted the sector from which troops could be drawn quickest in case additional reinforcements had to be sent to Pickett. Lee, accordingly, moved to shift additional troops into this area. Brigadier General William MacRae's brigade of Heth's division was transferred from the east to the west bank of Hatcher's Run. MacRae's troops were stationed east of Burgess' Mill. One of Wilcox's brigades, Colonel Joseph H. Hyman's, was transferred from the Lieutenant Run area to the rifle pits south of Burgess' Mill. Following its arrival on the west side of Hatcher's Run, McGowan's brigade was temporarily attached to Anderson's corps. Hunton's brigade, which arrived from

Richmond on the morning of the 30th, was assigned to hold the works near the junction of the Claiborne and White Oak roads. Hunton would receivedhis orders from General Johnson. The trenches vacated by this shift to the right were occupied by Grimes' troops. [13]

During his advance from Sutherland's Station to Five Forks, Fitz Lee saw nothing of the foe. Fitz Lee's troopers then moved down the Dinwiddie road. Before proceeding very far, the Southerners' vanguard established contact with Morris' combat patrol. [14]

In the meantime, Pickett's column had also started for Five Forks. Pickett's line of march was the White Oak road. The distance to be covered was only a little more than four miles. The road led through a flat, drab country of pine woods and small open fields. Several roads, including the Crump road along which the 6th Pennsylvania was operating, approached the White Oak road from the south. Since Pickett's column was passing across their front, the Union troopers made the most of their opportunity. In addition, the patrols sent out by General Ayres were able to establish contact with Pickett's soldiers. Colonel Pegram's adjutant, Captain W. Gordon McCabe, wrote in his diary:

> Our flank being exposed to the enemy, they harassed us with small bodies of cavalry without intermission. General Pickett, instead of pushing on, stopped, formed a regiment in line-of-battle, and awaited some attack. Much valuable time was lost in this way. A line of skirmishers marching on our flank would have been ample protection.

Pickett thought the march "necessarily slow" because of the constant skirmishing. "In front", he reported, "we had to drive the enemy out of the way nearly the whole distance". [15]

Major Morris' combat patrol was able to penetrate to within three-quarters of a mile of Five Forks without difficulty. The few Confederate scouts encountered were easily brushed aside. Suddenly, however, the situation changed drastically. The attackers now became the attacked. Fitz Lee's hard-hitting division had arrived on the scene. Seizing the initiative, the Confederates quickly surrounded Morris' regulars. Undaunted by this turn of events, the Union troopers dug their spurs into their horses and cut their way out of the trap. Nevertheless, the Federals lost three officers and 20 men. The Rebels likewise suffered several casualties. Among the Confederate wounded was Brigadier General William H. Payne. Returning to J. Boisseau's, Morris informed General Merritt that a strong force of Rebel cavalry had occupied Five Forks. [16]

The two other patrols sent out by Gibbs, Crowninshield's and Leiper's, crossed Gravelly Run. Advancing up the Boydton plank road, Crowninshield's cavalrymen succeeded in establishing contact with Warren's V Corps. Having accomplished their mission, Crowninshield's troopers rejoined the brigade. Leiper's troopers penetrated to within a short distance of the White Oak road. Here

they spotted a strong infantry column marching westward toward Five Forks. After sending back the news of his discovery, Leiper had his men feign attacks on the Confederates' left flank. These harassing tactics proved to be very effective, because the Rebels would halt and form line of battle. Once the infantry had deployed, the cavalry would fall back. The Confederates would then assemble and the march would be resumed. This operation was repeated several times during the afternoon, and the Southerners lost much valuable time. From several prisoners whom they captured, the Yankees were able to identify Pickett's command. Once the Confederates had passed beyond the point where the Crump road entered the White Oak road, Leiper's command retraced its steps and rejoined Gibbs' brigade. [17]

When General Devin learned of Major Morris' setback, he sent the 1st U. S. Cavalry and two of Colonel Fitzhugh's regiments to recover the lost ground. Advancing up the Dinwiddie road, the Union troopers were able to penetrate to within a short distance of Five Forks. By this time, Pickett's troops had reached Five Forks. Spotting a strong infantry battle line moving toward them, the cavalrymen fell back. [18]

General Crook's division remained at Dinwiddie Court House most of the day. Gregg's brigade was stationed at the point where the Boydton plank road crossed Stony Creek. If Rooney Lee's and Rosser's divisions were to rendezvous with Fitz Lee's they would have

to detour to the south of Stony Creek and to the west of Chamberlain's Bed. During the morning one of Davies' regiments, the 10th New York, rode up the Boydton plank road and opened communications with Warren's corps. When Sheridan learned that the Confederates had occupied Five Forks in force, he directed General Crook to reinforce Merritt with one brigade. Accordingly, Crook ordered Davies' brigade to move out. Reaching J. Boisseau's, Davies reported to Merritt. Since the Confederates gave no signs of exploiting the success which they had scored at Morris' expense, Merritt decided not to commit Davies' troopers. Though not called on, Davies' men remained in the saddle ready to spring into action at a moment's notice. [19]

On the night of the 30th, Devin's division, reinforced by Davies' brigade, bivouacked on J. Boisseau's farm. For security purposes, a strong line of outposts was established by the Federal officers to cover the camps. [20]

Throughout the long dreary day, Custer's troopers continued to escort the trains. The heavy rains made this task a nightmare. Even with corduroying, progress was disgustingly slow. Large details were constantly at work laying "corduroy" and lifting the wagons out of mud holes. At times, a horse or mule would be seen standing on what appeared to be solid ground. Suddenly, one of the beast's hoofs would sink out of sight. As the animal struggled to catch itself, all its feet would disappear into the

slime. The beast would then have to be pulled out of the Virginia quicksand by a detachment of soldiers. At dark, the head of the train halted four long, hard miles east of Dinwiddie Court House. [21]

The intensive scouting and patrolling carried out by Merritt's command enabled Sheridan to get a good idea of the strength of the Confederate force to his front. Between 40 and 50 prisoners, including some from Pickett's division, were bagged by the Union troopers. One of the captured infantrymen told Sheridan that the Rebel cavalry was being concentrated at Five Forks. The same individual informed Sheridan that Pickett's division had come from Burkesville. Supplemental reports reaching Sheridan's command post from the front corrected this misinformation. The Union scouts reported that Pickett's division was deployed along the White Oak road, with its right anchored at Five Forks. Sheridan relayed this intelligence to Grant, along with the news that Merritt's command was encamped at J. Boisseau's. [22]

It was almost sundown when the head of Pickett's column reached Five Forks. There, as anticipated, Pickett found Fitz Lee. The cavalryman told Pickett that his troopers were in contact with the Yankees on the Dinwiddie road. So far, Lee stated, his greyclads had more than held their own. Pickett had intended to press on toward Dinwiddie Court House. But after conferring with Fitz Lee, he decided that, because of the late hour, the weariness of the

troops, and the absence of Rooney Lee's and Rosser's cavalry divisions, he would wait until morning.

Two of Pickett's infantry brigades were moved down the Dinwiddie road about three-quarters of a mile. These units would have the task of protecting the task force from a surprise attack. Advancing, the infantry encountered the dismounted Union cavalry armed with Spencer carbines. Undaunted, the buttermats pressed ahead and the Yankees fell back. After a brisk clash, the Confederates occupied the designated ground. The other Confederate units bivouacked in the woods at the forks. Mercifully, the rain ceased about dark. During the night, however, it began to fall heavily again. The infantry were prepared for this, after a fashion. Colonel Pegram and his staff had neither blankets nor food. They had hoped to return that night to Burgess' Mill. [23]

Shortly after the Confederates had bedded down for the night, Rooney Lee's and Rosser's divisions reached Five Forks. The muddy roads and booming creeks had made the march from Stony Creek Station a nightmare. Following the arrival of these two units, Fitz Lee assumed command of the cavalry corps. Brigadier General Thomas T. Munford took charge of Fitz Lee's division. [24]

General Grant had written Sheridan on the night of the 29th, "We will act altogether as one army here until it is seen what can be done with the enemy." [25] Despite Grant's intentions,

the Union cavalry and infantry had acted independently of one another throughout the day. Humphreys and Warren were informed only that Sheridan was operating on their left. This was all. Warren had been repeatedly warned on the 29th that he must guard and protect his left, while at the same time his right would have to maintain contact with Humphreys' corps. Yet, in his letter to Sheridan, Grant had observed that, "Our line is now unbroken from the Appomattox to Dinwiddie." [26]

The only other reference to co-operation between the infantry and cavalry up to this time is found in one of Warren's numerous communications to Meade. This message was sent at 9:50 a. m. on the 30th. A short time before, one of Sheridan's staff officers, Captain George L. Gillespie, had passed by Warren's command post while bearing dispatches to General Grant. Gillespie told Warren that Merritt's command was massing at J. Boisseau's, preparatory to sending out patrols to feel for the White Oak road. When Warren informed his superior of these developments, he also reported that Ayres' division would be sent on a forced reconnaissance to W. Dabney's. Upon reaching that point, Ayres' troops would be in a position to "co-operate with General Sheridan if he comes within reach". [27]

By this time, however, Grant had decided that the operations for the day should be confined to the infantry. Taking

account of the heavy rain that had been falling since the previous evening, Grant addressed a message to Sheridan. The lieutenant general commanding observed:

> The heavy rain of to-day will make it impossible for us to do much until it dries up a little or we get roads around our rear repaired. You may therefore leave what cavalry you deem necessary to protect the left and hold such positions as you deem necessary for that purpose, and send the remainder back to Humphreys' Station, where they can get hay and grain. Fifty wagons loaded with forage will be sent to you in the morning. Send an officer back to direct the wagons back to where you want them. Report to me the cavalry you will leave back and the positions you will occupy. Could not your cavalry go back by the way of Stony Creek ... /Station/ and destroy or capture the store of supplies there? [28]

Following the receipt of this letter, Sheridan left Dinwiddie Court House and hastened to Grant's headquarters. Reporting to Grant's Gravelly Run command post, Sheridan urged the general to reconsider his order recalling the cavalry. Although the rain continued to pour down, the persuasive Sheridan succeeded in prevailing upon Grant to change his mind. The cavalry would not be withdrawn from Dinwiddie Court House. Grant expressed the hope "that some good might result from the presence" of Sheridan's troopers near Five Forks. Evidently, Sheridan was so carried away with his arguments that he told Grant that his troopers had reached the White Oak road, which was not true. When Sheridan returned to

Dinwiddie Court House, he carried an order from Grant to hold his positions on the White Oak road, even if it prevented the "sending back of any of ... [his] cavalry to Humphreys' Station to be fed." If Sheridan thought it necessary, the 50 wagon loads of forage ordered to his command would be increased. [29]

During his return trip to Dinwiddie Court House, Sheridan stopped at Warren's command post. Before continuing his journey, Sheridan told Warren that he had issued instructions for one of his divisions to advance to the White Oak road. [30]

It appears that General Meade and his corps commanders operated at a marked disadvantage. They had not been given an opportunity, as Sheridan had, to know what Grant's plans were. General Meade's position was especially embarrassing. The wings of his Army of the Potomac were separated by Ord's Army of the James, which was independent of Meade. Humphreys and Warren were under Meade's direct command, but the general could only give the two corps commanders orders as he received them from Grant.[31]

The heavy rainfall had also rendered it extremely difficult to keep the supplies of war materiel moving to Humphreys' and Warren's corps. Warren decided to have the trains, which had accompanied his troops across the Rowanty, moved north of Gravelly Run. Large fatigue parties had to be turned out to help the teamsters. Even so, it was hard going, because the wagons "were

nearly immovable in the mud". Finally, the soldiers had to resort to the time-consuming task of corduroying to get the heavily loaded vehicles to the front. During the day, the portion of the V Corps' train which had been parked at Perkins' crossed the Rowanty and moved to the intersection of the Monk's Neck and Vaughan roads. [32]

Colonel Theodore Lyman, a Union diarist, reported that the heavy rains had "reduced the roads, already poor, to a hopeless pudding". "Gravelly Run", the colonel stated, "was swollen to trebel its usual size; and Hatcher's Run swept away the bridges and required pontoons."

"So terrible were the roads", Lyman reported, "and so questionable the possibility of getting up supplies, especially forage for the cavalry, that the generals began to speculate on the necessity of drawing back. The chief quartermaster said it was the worst time to move trains he had ever seen. It took 1,000 engineers 56 hours to get a train of 600 wagons five miles." [33]

The orders for the advance of the infantry, however, were not countermanded. Before retiring on the night of the 29th, Warren prepared the orders which he hoped would enable his corps to carry out the mission which Meade had assigned it. According to Meade's directive, the V Corps was to force the Rebels back into their fortifications. In addition, Warren was to reconnoiter to the left to develop the Confederates' position in the area adjacent to the

Claiborne road. Warren, therefore, ordered his three division commanders to hold their units ready to resume the advance at 6 a. m. Warren also alerted them to be on the lookout for a Confederate counterstroke. [34]

On the morning of the 30th, while Warren's troops were preparing to move out, Grant informed Meade:

> As Warren and Humphreys advance, thus shortening their line, I think the former had better move by the left flank as far as he can stretch out with safety, and cover the White Oak road if he can. This will enable Sheridan to reach the ... /Southside Railroad/ by Ford's road, and, it may be, double the enemy up, so as to drive him out of his works south of Hatcher's run. [35]

Chief of Staff Webb reported that Grant's letter reached the headquarters of the Army of the Potomac early on the 30th. This communication was not in complete accord with the one Grant had sent to Sheridan on the evening of the 29th stating that the cavalry and infantry would "act together as one army here until it is seen what can be done with the enemy". In so far as the operations of the cavalry were concerned, Grant's dispatch to Meade was "at a decided variance with the letter to Sheridan of the same morning telling him to leave only such force as he deemed necessary to hold the left and send the remainder back to Humphreys' station." [36]

During the night, Warren had had time to reflect on the tactical situation. He did not think it would be advisable to

pursue his advance up the Boydton plank road until Humphreys' corps was able to get into position on his right. (It seems that while Miles' scouts had established contact with the V Corps, his battle line, however, had failed to draw abreast of Griffin's division before halting on the 29th.) Warren was also worried about his left. The corps commander did not believe he could extend this flank "with propriety" until he could obtain some idea of Sheridan's movements. If his left flank division (Crawford's) moved forward, its left flank would "be in the air". When Warren sent a message to headquarters at 5:50 a. m., reporting that his corps was ready to move, he called Chief of Staff Webb's attention to these difficulties. In conclusion, Warren remarked that he considered the position then occupied by his corps as the best available unless Meade proposed to assault the Rebel fortifications at Burgess' Mill. [37]

It was 8:30 a. m. before Warren received an answer from army headquarters. Meade replied through his chief of staff. When Warren glanced at the message signed by Webb, he received scant satisfaction. Webb informed Warren that General Meade did not think he occupied as much of the front as the strength of his corps warranted. Meade wanted Warren to use two of his divisions (Ayres' and Crawford's) to reconnoiter the Confederates' right. Webb was unable to give Warren much information regarding Sheridan's movements.

All that Webb could do in this respect was to state that Sheridan had been "ordered to attack or turn the enemy's right". Warren, however, was to act independently of Sheridan. If the Rebels moved out of their breastworks and assaulted Warren's left, the V Corps was to counterattack. In this eventuality, Meade promised to support Warren "with all the available force to be procured." [38]

In the meantime, Warren and Humphreys had exchanged messages. At 6 a. m. Warren informed Humphreys that he proposed to postpone his advance until such time as Miles' division drew abreast of Griffin's. Warren expressed himself as hesitant about sending Griffin's troops, unsupported, across the broad open field to their front. Since Miles' soldiers had to pass through a heavily wooded area, Warren felt it would be some time before they drew abreast of his corps. [39]

Replying to Warren's communication, Humphreys reported that his corps was moving ahead slowly through a dense and almost impenetrable swamp. In accordance with Warren's wishes, Humphreys stated that he had reiterated his instructions for Miles to re-establish contact with the V Corps. Despite Humphreys' efforts, it was almost 7:30 before Miles' bluecoats moved into position on Warren's right flank. [40]

Warren, at 6 a. m., directed Griffin to have Bartlett's skirmish line feel the Confederate front. Bartlett's bluecoats

were to ascertain if the Southerners had pulled back from the earthworks which they had occupied when darkness had put a stop to the hostilities. [41]

There was a dense fog blanketing the area, so Bartlett determined to delay his forced reconnaissance in hopes that the atmosphere would clear. It was fortunate for the Federals that the brigadier made this decision. About 6:30, when the fog lifted a little, Bartlett discovered that the right flank of his skirmish line was within 150 yards of a line of Rebel rifle pits. The soldiers manning the Union outposts decided to see if they could entice some of the Rebels to desert. Loaves of bread were thrust on bayonets and held aloft. The bluecoats then shouted, "Hey, Johnny! Come over and get some fresh bread and coffee." None of the Southerners took advantage of the offer. [42]

A slight demonstration on the part of the bluecoats drew a heavy fire. Satisfied that the greyclads held the earthworks in force, the Union skirmishers, having accomplished their mission, fell back a short distance. [43]

Following the receipt of the message signed by Chief of Staff Webb, Warren, despite grave misgivings, prepared to carry out the directive "to extend ... [his] line to the left as far as possible". Ayres' division was called up from the reserve and massed at Mrs. Butler's. Reconnaissance parties were sent out to explore the countryside west of the Boydton plank road. After these

necessary items were attended to, Warren sent a letter to Meade's headquarters acknowledging the communication. Furthermore, Warren wanted to know what would happen if he extended "his line to the left as far as possible, using both Crawford and Ayres", and the Rebels suddenly flanked him. If this transpired, Warren wondered what he would counterattack with. [44]

It was 9:55 before Warren received a reply to this dispatch. Webb observed that Meade was "very anxious" to have Warren cover as much of the front as possible consistent with the safety of his corps. Meade's intention, Webb wrote, was to have Warren deploy Griffin and Crawford to the front, while he used Ayres to cover the corps' left flank. In addition, Meade wanted the 3d Pennsylvania Cavalry which was guarding Warren's train to report to army headquarters. At this time, Meade's GHQ was located at the junction of the Monk's Neck and Vaughan roads. [45]

In the meantime, Warren had received a letter from General Webb containing information regarding the Confederate fortifications. The chief of staff reported that he had recently questioned several deserters and prisoners. From these people, Webb had learned that the Confederate fortifications covered the White Oak road. [46]

Acknowledging Webb's message, Warren replied that the intelligence gathered by his scouts corroborated the information Webb had obtained about the location of the Confederates' main line

of resistance. Continuing, Warren wrote that two deserters had stated that the earthworks flanking the Boydton plank road were strong "with two lines of obstructions in front". These men reported that a large number of Negroes had spent the 29th strengthening these works. Still thinking in defensive terms, Warren reported that Crawford's troops were throwing up a line of breastworks near the Boydton plank road. In case of a repulse, Warren observed, these rifle pits would make a good rallying point. [47]

This dispatch was received by Meade at 9:35 a. m. Ten o'clock passed and still Warren's corps did not budge. In the meantime, Captain Gillespie had passed through the V Corps' lines. From the captain, Warren was able to secure information concerning the position of Sheridan's cavalry. This news was promptly relayed to Meade. It appears that this was the first definite information that Meade had received of Sheridan's activities. [48]

At 10:15, Warren sent another message to headquarters explaining his delays. Warren told his superiors of his plans. He would push out Ayres' division in column as he had Griffin's on the 29th. If Ayres met the foe, he was to give battle. Meade was informed that, if need be, Warren would support Ayres "with nearly the whole corps and follow up any advantage gained". In the event that he was worsted, Warren wrote, he had "a good place to reform on". Warren admitted that he was "a little slow", but he believed

that it was the only way he could keep his "troops working together and conduct operations with certainty". The corps commander expressed the opinion that the roads and fields were getting too soft for artillery, and believed that Sheridan's cavalry would have trouble operating advantageously. [49]

At 10:30 a. m., Warren directed Ayres to make a reconnaissance in the direction of the White Oak road. Ayres was to take his division and move in a northwesterly direction from Mrs. Butler's toward S. Dabney's. As the column felt its way ahead, Ayres was to see that his scouts maintained contact with the corps' skirmish line, which would remain stationary. If Ayres' troops encountered any Confederates within a mile of the Boydton plank road, they were to attack and drive them back. Ayres was admonished not to advance his main force farther than one mile, unless it was to secure an obvious advantage. The division would take up a strong position with its flanks secured. Scouts were to be sent "to reconnoitar and develop the character of the country and the enemy's position". Ayres was informed that Sheridan's cavalry was massed at J. Boisseau's and was examining the Crump road. In the event that Ayres encountered a superior force and could hold on, Warren promised to reinforce him with Crawford's division. For communication purposes, a detachment of Warren's escort would accompany Ayres. [50]

Grant at this time had a different opinion of what Warren's plan of operations should be. Writing to Meade, Grant observed:

> My idea was that we should try to extend our left so as to cross the White Oak road, say at W. Dabney's, or as near up to the enemy as we can. This would seem to cover all the roads up to Ford's road, by which Sheridan might then move and get on to the ... /Southside Railroad/, and possibly double up the enemy and drive him north of Hatcher's Run. [51]

The Southside Railroad at the point where it was crossed by Ford's road remained Sheridan's objective.

For informational purposes, Webb forwarded Grant's dispatch to Warren. The chief of staff reported that Meade, after examining Grant's message, could see no reason for any change in the instructions which he had already sent to Warren. Webb reported that Meade had received "no information of General Sheridan's movements beyond the general statement that General S. is to turn the enemy's right." [52]

Warren was slightly perplexed by Grant's and Meade's messages. It seemed to Warren that Meade, on receiving Grant's communication, should have signified to him whether or not he was to extend the left flank of his corps across the White Oak road. If he were not to block the White Oak road, Warren would have liked to know just how far his left was to move out. Had Warner been in communication with Grant, he probably would have sought to obtain definite information on this subject. [53]

By 11:30, the signal corps personnel succeeded in extending the field telegraph to Warren's command post. The transmission of

messages between Meade's and Warren's headquarters was greatly expedited.

In an effort to clarify the matter, Warren, at noon, addressed another communication to General Webb. After acknowledging the receipt of the dispatch enclosing the one from Grant, Warren inquired about Meade's statement that there was "no reason to change his previous orders". Warren pointed out that Meade had "never said definitely how far ... [he] was expected to extend nor the object desired". "General Grant", Warren observed, "is definite on both points, and if I am to attempt ... [to block the White Oak road] myself at all hazards I don't shrink from it." Warren thought that perhaps General Humphreys, if required, might be able to occupy part of the front occupied by the V Corps. The corps commander knew from bitter experience that he should extend his "left toward the White Oak road with strong force and precaution against an attack from the enemy". Warren informed Webb that he had seen Sheridan, and the cavalry leader had ordered a division to the White Oak road. This, Warren believed, would greatly simplify his scheduled movement. [54]

General Warren evidently was annoyed by the vagueness of his orders. According to the word he received from Meade's headquarters, he was to extend his left and keep it well guarded -- that was all. Grant, however, wanted Warren to shift to the left

and support Sheridan's cavalry in an attempt to turn the Confederates' right. Warren was able to infer more from Grant's dispatch than Meade's. This disposition by Warren to know the object and extent of a movement directed by his superior officer was definitely a fault in his military character.

Meade was more patient than Warren. An examination of the correspondence which passed between Grant and Meade on the 30th indicates that the commander of the Army of the Potomac knew very little of the lieutenant general commanding's master plan. Furthermore, it should be observed that at noon Warren had met Sheridan. The cavalryman, at this time, told Warren that one of his divisions was scheduled to move north to the White Oak road. [55]

Shortly thereafter, Grant forwarded to Meade some definite information regarding Sheridan's activities. Grant reported that the cavalry sent out by Merritt had encountered the Confederates in considerable force. The bluecoated patrols, as they advanced up the Dinwiddie and Crump roads, found the White Oak road covered by the Rebel troopers. Pushing ahead, the Union cavalrymen were reported to have seized Five Forks. (Copies of this message were also sent to Humphreys and Warren.) [56]

Yet, as late as 2 p. m., Grant refused to commit himself on the degree of co-operation that should exist between Meade's infantry and Sheridan's cavalry. At that hour, the general telegraphed the President, who was at City Point:

> I understand the number of dead left by the enemy yesterday for us to bury was much greater than our own dead. The captives were larger than reported also, amounting to about 160. This morning our troops have all been pushed forward, and now occupy a line from what you see marked on the map as the Crow house across the Boydton plank road north of where the Quaker road intersects it. Sheridan's cavalry is pushing forward toward the White Oak road, and I think this afternoon or to-morrow may push on to the ... /Southside Railroad/. [57]

As if Warren were not having enough troubles with his left, the badgered general could not ignore his right. At 11:20 a. m., Warren received a dispatch from Humphreys. The commander of the II Corps informed Warren that, at the moment, his line of battle extended "in a straight line past the Crow house" to the V Corps' right. Humphreys stated that he had directed Mott's and Hays' skirmishers and those on the right of Miles' division to see if they could reach Hatcher's Run. Consequently, Humphreys wanted to know if Warren intended to move forward. [58]

In reply, Warren pointed out that, as the Confederates were reported to be strongly entrenched, he would be unable to advance up the Boydton plank road. The regiments on his extreme right, Warren commented, had been refused for the want of a connection the previous evening. These organizations would be able to co-operate in Humphreys' advance. General Miles, Warren continued, had his permission to make any adjustments in this sector that he thought practicable. [59]

Throughout the morning, Warren had been so busy receiving dispatches and giving orders that he had been unable to leave his command post. After eating lunch, Warren decided to visit the front. Proceeding up the Quaker road, Warren reached J. Stroud's just as Bartlett's skirmishers started to move forward. Prior to Warren's arrival, Griffin had been told by his scouts that the Confederates were pulling back. In the face of Humphreys' advance, the Southerners had determined to abandon their advance line of outposts in the Burgess' Mill sector. To take advantage of this situation, Griffin authorized Bartlett to advance his skirmish line. [60]

Following this Confederate pull back, a personal reconnaissance convinced Warren that Griffin's battle line could now cross the open field in safety. In addition, an advance would enable the V Corps to gain possession of the point where the Dabney's Mill road debouched into the Boydton plank road. This would be an important gain because it would facilitate communication between the II and V Corps. Warren accordingly directed Griffin to advance his battle line. [61]

Griffin immediately relayed this information to his brigade commanders. Within a few minutes, Bartlett's line of battle, closely supported by Gregory's brigade, moved up the Boydton plank road. On the right, Miles' bluecoats likewise forged

ahead. Within a few minutes, the Federals were able to occupy the field fortifications recently held by Johnson's outposts. Having gained their objective, the Northerners halted and took cover. A Rebel battery mounted behind a parapet near the Burgess house hammered away at the advancing Yankees with shot and shell. Two Union artillery units (Battery B, 4th U. S. and Batteries D and G, 5th U. S.) emplaced at the junction of the Boydton plank and Quaker roads returned the butternut cannoneers' fire. No opposition from the Rebel infantry was encountered by Griffin's troops. [62]

As soon as his men had gained the abandoned rifle pits, Warren rode forward. Training his field glasses on the Confederate main line of resistance, Warren found that the fortifications covering Burgess' Mill "were well located and constructed, and defended by infantry and artillery". The timber had been slashed, and where there were no trees, an "abatis had been laid". [63] It was apparent to Warren that any farther advance by the Federals up the Boydton plank road would be fiercely contested.

There was no further action along Griffin's front until late in the afternoon. At 4 p. m., Colonel Hyman's North Carolina brigade moved out of the fortifications. Driving in the Union skirmishers, the Rebels launched a sharp attack on Bartlett's battle line. Assisted by the fire of the two regular batteries posted at the junction, the bluecoated infantry easily beat off

this sortie. Several prisoners were captured by the Federals. One of these, a member of the 34th North Carolina, told the Yankees that Hyman's brigade had moved into the Burgess' Mill sector during the morning. Following Hyman's arrival, Johnson's division had shifted to the right. [64]

Upon the approach of darkness, Griffin recalled Gregory's brigade; Bartlett's troops were left to hold the captured rifle pits. Returning to the junction, Gregory's soldiers camped in the field around the Stroud house. [65] Griffin's other brigade, Chamberlain's, spent the day at Lewis' farm burying the dead and collecting the wounded from yesterday's engagement. [66]

Ayres' division moved out about noon to make its forced reconnaissance toward the White Oak road. The route selected for the divisions advance was the road which led from Mrs. Butler's house on the Boydton plank road by the Holliday house. This road entered the White Oak road near Halter Butler's residence, which was a short distance west of the Claiborne road. Ayres' vanguard reached Holliday's without encountering any opposition. The advance brigade, Brigadier General Frederick Winthrop's, crossed the booming branch of Gravelly Run that was to play so important a part in the battle of White Oak road on the next day. Observing that his troops were having considerable difficulty getting across the rain-swollen stream, Ayres ordered his two other brigades,

Brigadier Generals Andrew W. Denison's and James Gwyn's, not to cross. Taking position on the right bank of the branch, these two units, as was the custom, began to entrench. [67]

Winthrop's brigade penetrated to within 600 yards of the White Oak road before halting. Skirmishers were then pushed to within 400 yards of the road. Captain Horrell with the escort company succeeded in getting astride the road for a few brief moments. From their advance position in a small clearing, the Federals were able to observe the afternoon's activities on the White Oak road. The Yankees watched as a strong force of Rebel infantry (Pickett's command) marched westward toward Five Forks. When Griffin's troops moved to occupy the advance rifle pits flanking the Boydton plank road, the sound of battle came drifting in from the east. For a few minutes, the Confederate column paused before pressing on. During this time, Ayres dashed off a message to Warren reporting that the Rebel infantry was moving back toward Burgess' Mill. Warren, in turn, relayed this news to Meade's headquarters. [68]

After a few minutes, the Southerners resumed the march. Shortly thereafter, Captain Horrell's troopers captured a Rebel officer. The Confederate told the Federals that he belonged to Pickett's division and was in charge of a wagon train. This intelligence was promptly forwarded to Warren. [69]

Reconnoitering the area north of Holliday's farm, Ayres reported that there were no Confederate entrenchments to his front. As Ayres interpreted his front, he was correct when he made this statement. At this time, however, the general was gazing out on the portion of the White Oak road west of the Claiborne road junction. Had Ayres faced north instead of northwest, he would have observed that there was a fortified line covering the White Oak road to its junction with the Claiborne road. At the junction, the earthworks veered sharply to the right and extended to Hatcher's Run. [70]

The news that Ayres' patrols were feeling their way toward the White Oak road west of the Halter Butler house caused the Confederates to take action. General Lee issued instructions for General Johnson to deploy one of his regiments outside the works. No attack was to be made on the Federals at this time. If, however, this Union unit proved to be the left flank of the Army of the Potomac it would be assaulted at a later date. In accordance with Johnson's orders, the 41st Alabama moved out of the works, crossed the White Oak road, and took position athwart the Union line of advance. Before darkness put a stop to activities in this sector, the Alabamans were in contact with Ayres' scouts. [71]

Ayres, having accomplished his mission, covered his front with a strong line of outposts and waited for further developments.

On his right, Ayres' skirmishers were in contact with Griffin's pickets. About dusk, Warren visited Ayres' command post. After approving Ayres' dispositions, Warren rode back to his headquarters, which he reached after dark. [72]

Crawford's troops spent the day strengthening their main line of resistance which paralleled the Boydton plank road. The division's left flank rested on Gravelly Run and its right near Stroud's farm. In addition to throwing up breastworks, the troops were kept busy slashing timber. The gunners of Battery D, 1st New York Light Artillery emplaced their four 12-pounder Napoleons west of the Rainey house. They would be able to furnish support to Crawford's infantry in the case of a sudden Confederate onslaught. [73]

Before the II Corps resumed its advance on the 30th, it was reinforced by a division from the Army of the James. In accordance with an order from Grant, Ord directed General Gibbon to have one of his divisions cross Hatcher's Run and support Humphreys' corps. Before retiring on the night of the 29th, Gibbon had issued instructions for General Turner to have his division of the XXIV Corps on the road by 5 a. m. After crossing to the west side of Hatcher's Run, Turner would report to General Humphreys. [74]

Promptly, at the designated hour Turner's division moved out. After crossing Hatcher's Run, Turner's troops marched to Dabney's Mill. Within one hour after leaving his camp, Turner,

despite the terrible weather, completed his dispositions. As directed by Humphreys, Turner posted his command on the right of Hays' division. To make room for the soldiers from the XXIV Corps, Hays' troops closed to the left. Turner's left flank rested on Dabney's Mill and his right on Hatcher's Run near Armstrong's Mill. Brigadier General Thomas M. Harris' and Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Potter's brigades were deployed into line of battle. Harris' was on the left and Potter's on the right. Colonel William B. Curtis' brigade was held in reserve. [75]

The speed with which Turner had formed his division enabled Humphreys to start his attack as scheduled. At 6 a. m., the powerful Union battle line started forward. A large number of skirmishers screened Humphreys' advance. [76]

It took Hays' division about two hours and one-half to reach its objective -- the area around the J. Crow farm. Since the bluecoats had expected to encounter heavy resistance , their advance had been very cautious. At J. Crow's, the Yankees found plenty of evidence (abandoned gear and supplies) which indicated that the Rebels had hurriedly evacuated this area during the night. Having reached his goal, General Hays put his troops to work throwing up breastworks. Two brigades (McIvor's and Olmsted's) were stationed on the lines, while Smyth's were held in reserve. [77]

Once the troops had started to dig in, Hays told Colonel

Olmsted to send out a strong combat patrol and see if he could locate the Confederates' main line of resistance. Within a short time, a three-regiment patrol (the 19th Maine, the 184th Pennsylvania, and the 36th Wisconsin) moved forward. The Maine regiment, which was deployed as skirmishers, was supported by the other two units. After advancing about three-fourths of a mile through a belt of slashed timbers, the bluecoats sighted a Confederate strong point. The soldiers observed that this redoubt (Fort Powell), which was situated on the south bank of Hatcher's Run, mounted two guns. A second earthwork, in which one gun was emplaced, was also spotted. Both forts were within supporting distance of one another. After sending back news of his discovery, Olmsted had the soldiers of the 19th Maine open fire. The Mainemen had previously occupied positions within 300 yards of Fort Powell. Unable to depress their heavy ordnance enough to play on the Yankees, the greyclads had to rely on their small-arms when they returned the Yankees' fire. The Confederates and the men of the 19th Maine sniped away at one another until 4 p. m. At that hour, the 36th Wisconsin moved forward and reliefed the Maine regiment. 78

Turner's troops kept abreast of Hays' battle line as it pushed ahead. As the advance continued, Turner's division found itself squeezed out of line. The reason behind this development was the sharp meander to the southwest described by Hatcher's Run

in the portion of the channel between Burgess' and Armstrong's mills. To avoid being completely crowded out of position, Turner's division was forced to cross Hatcher's Run a second time. When the division halted and entrenched, Harris' left flank rested on the stream. On the opposite side of Hatcher's Run was Hays' right flank unit, McIvor's brigade. Potter's brigade on Turner's right was in contact with Foster's division.[79]

On Hays' left, Mott's battle line worked its way through a dense belt of undergrowth. The few Confederate pickets encountered were easily brushed aside. Mott's troops drove across the road linking Dabney's Mill with the Boydton plank road. A swampy branch of Hatcher's Run was also negotiated. After an advance of about three-quarters of a mile, the division halted and began to entrench. The right flank of Pierce's brigade was posted west of the Crow house. Pierce's troops were in contact with Hays' bluecoats. De Trobriand's brigade, as on the previous day, was held in reserve by Mott. While Pierce's and McAllister's soldiers were busy throwing up earthworks, De Trobriand was called upon to furnish large fatigue details. Some of these groups were put to work repairing the Dabney Mill road. Others were given the task of corduroying roads and building bridges to facilitate the movement of the corps' artillery to the front.[80]

Miles' division with three brigades (Ramsey's, Madill's,

and Scott's) deployed into line of battle had a rough time working its way through the thick woods and dense underbrush. Each of the brigade commanders covered his front with skirmishers. During the night, Ramsey's brigade on the left had lost contact with the V Corps. It was 7:30 a. m. before Ramsey's unit was able to re-establish liaison with Warren's soldiers on their left. At 9 a. m. Miles' troops reached the Dabney's Mill road. Here, the division halted, while the brigade commanders re-formed their units. Since Miles' battle line was now abreast of Warren's, it would be very dangerous to proceed farther without a corresponding movement on the part of the V Corps. Warren, however, refused to budge. Artillery was now brought forward. The four 12-pounder Napoleons of Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery were unlimbered at the junction of the Boydton plank and Quaker roads. The cannoneers of Battery M, 1st New Hampshire emplaced their four 3-inch rifles a short distance to the left of Battery K. [81]

General Miles employed his other brigade, Nugent's, on fatigue details. Large detachments were drafted from Nugent's command and put to work corduroying the roads. [82]

During the morning, two Confederate deserters surrendered to Miles' scouts. When escorted to the general's command post, the Southerners stated that they belonged to Scales' North Carolina brigade. (At this time, Scales was sick, and Hyman was in charge

of the unit.) The two soldiers informed the Federal officers that their brigade had been pulled out of the Petersburg lines long before daybreak. After crossing Hatcher's Run, their organization had occupied the rifle pits covering Burgess' Mill. News of this interesting development was promptly relayed to Meade's GHQ. [83]

Early in the afternoon, Humphreys received instructions from Meade to move his corps as close to the Confederates' main line of resistance as possible. When this had been accomplished, he was to entrench his command. Humphreys would then make an inspection and notify headquarters how many troops would be needed to hold the front from the Boydton plank road to Hatcher's Run. [84]

As a result of the extensive scouting and patrolling carried out by his soldiers throughout the morning, Humphreys had already pinpointed most of the Confederate fortifications. Humphreys knew that Hays' and Mott's troops had driven almost as close to the foe's works as possible. If these two units attempted to renew the advance, it would probably precipitate a general engagement. Only on the left, in Miles' sector, was there a chance of moving closer to the Confederate works without much fighting. Humphreys, therefore, issued instructions for Miles to push forward and examine the fortifications which the greyclads had erected to cover the approaches to Burgess' Mill. [85]

Following the receipt of Humphreys' orders, Miles'

division resumed the advance. Covered by a strong skirmish line, the blueclad line of battle moved relentlessly ahead through the thick undergrowth. Since Mott's division held its ground, Miles' command pivoted on its right flank brigade, Scott's. On the left, Ramsey's left flank guided on the Boydton plank road. Ramsey's skirmishers (the 53d Pennsylvania), as they pushed ahead, forced the Confederate outposts to fall back. As soon as their pickets had retired, the Southern artillerists opened fire on the bluecoats. Both Ramsey's skirmishers and his battle line were shelled by the Confederate cannoneers. This bombardment, however, proved to be so ineffective that, for practical purposes, it was useless. [86]

When they moved forward, the skirmishers covering the advance of Miles' center (Madill's) and right flank (Scott's) brigades also clashed with the Confederate pickets. The 111th New York, which was screening Madill's units, drove the Rebel skirmishers across the road linking J. Crow's with the Boydton plank road. At the same time, the regiment covering Scott's advance, the 5th New Hampshire, struck and drove in the Rebel outposts. [87]

When General Humphreys learned that Miles' division had crossed the J. Crow road and was in full view of the Rebel fortifications, he ordered the advance stopped. Miles was directed

to entrench his position. Within a few minutes after the receipt of this message, Miles had his troops hard at work throwing up fortifications. [88]

At the time that Hyman's North Carolina brigade drove in Griffin's outposts, the greycloads made a feeble thrust against the left flank of Miles' division. Ramsey's skirmishers, two companies of the 53d Pennsylvania, easily beat off the attack. About this time, Colonel Scott decided to relieve his skirmishers. The 5th New Hampshire was recalled and the 26th Michigan and the 140th Pennsylvania moved forward. Taking position near the Confederate fortifications, the sharpshooters from these two regiments exchanged shots with the greycolad snipers until darkness put a stop to the day's hostilities in this sector. [89]

Once Miles' troops had started to dig in along the Crow road, the cannoneers of Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery and Battery M, 1st New Hampshire Light Artillery limbered up their pieces. Moving up the Boydton plank road, the gunners placed their eight guns in battery near the Rainey house. Just before dark, Battery B, 1st New Jersey Light Artillery left the artillery park at the Brown house. Utilizing a road opened by the fatigue parties, the gunners headed for the front. The New Jersey battery emplaced their four 12-pounder Napoleons near the Crow house. [90]

When Humphreys reported to Meade at 4 p. m., he announced

that the right flank of the II Corps was anchored on Hatcher's Run, at a point 400 yards east of the Crow house. The corps' left flank, he stated, rested on the junction of the Boydton plank and Dabney's Mill roads. Scouting parties had located the Confederate defense line in this sector. Two large redoubts had been found. These formidable earthworks were about 800 yards in front of, and opposite the II Corps' flanks. A third strong point, which was at a greater distance from the Union lines, had been observed. This work was between the two redoubts. From time to time, the butternuts had employed the heavy ordnance emplaced in these works against Humphreys' troops. Humphreys informed his superior that his line was "already tolerably intrenched" and could be held by Mott's and Hays' divisions. This would leave Miles' command available for any other assignments which Meade might be contemplating.[91]

Throughout the remainder of the wet afternoon, the rain-drenched men of the II Corps were kept busy throwing up earthworks and corduroying roads. Altogether, 1,300 men were ordered to report to Captain Charles W. Howell for labor on the roads. The work on the Dabney's Mill road, which was the corps lateral line of communications, was hindered by a shortage of tools. By dark the fatigue parties from Nugent's brigade had laid only a mile of corduroy. When informed of this, Humphreys issued instructions for Miles to put every man he could spare on this project in the

morning. In an effort to cheer up the water-soaked troops' lagging spirits, Humphreys authorized his division commanders to send for whiskey. Humphreys cautioned, however, that he didn't know where they would be able to obtain the fiery stimulant. [92]

After covering their fronts with a strong line of outposts, Humphreys' division commanders permitted their men to bivouac. Since the corps was camped near the foe, the sentries were directed to sound the alarm in case of any unusual firing on the picket line. Before retiring, the brigade commanders were instructed to have their troops under arms at 4:30 a. m. After being formed, the soldiers were to remain at their battle stations until daylight. [93]

On the morning of the 30th, General Mackenzie's cavalry division of the Army of the James was transferred from Hancock's station to Humphreys' Station. Later in the day, the cavalrymen broke camp for a second time and marched to Monk's Neck Bridge. Here, Mackenzie's troopers were assigned the task of guarding the trains of the Army of the Potomac, which were parked in the fields east of Rowanty Creek. [94]

Throughout the late afternoon and evening, the frequent exchange of messages between corps, army, and group headquarters continued. At 4 o'clock, Warren informed Meade that Ayres' vanguard was near W. Dabney's and had the White Oak road under

observation. Warren now felt confident of his position. He reported that his troops had fortified a line extending from Griffin's right almost to Gravelly Run. If Humphreys could take over the front held by Griffin's and Crawford's divisions, Warren told Meade, he would take his "corps and block the White Oak road". [95]

Although Warren sent this dispatch at 4 p. m., it did not reach Meade until 7:30 p. m. Evidently, the military telegraph was not functioning properly. Before relaying Warren's message to Grant's headquarters, Meade added his comments. Meade expressed himself as satisfied that Warren's suggestion was "the best thing we can do under existing circumstances -- that is, let Humphreys relieve Griffin, and let Warren move on to the White Oak road and endeavor to turn enemy's right". As he understood the situation, Meade told Grant, Ayres was between the two Dabney farms, and liable to be isolated. Ayres would, therefore, either have to be supported or withdraw. If Ayres were reinforced by the remainder of the V Corps, Warren "ought to overcome any opposition the enemy can make, except from strong intrenchments", Meade wrote. [96]

In the meantime, Grant had received a number of interesting reports from other sections of the front. These messages seemed to indicate that General Lee was stripping the inactive sectors of his front of troops to counter the Union threat to his right. If this were true, Grant knew that some parts

of the Confederate defense line must be very thinly held. Accordingly, General Ord and the commanders of the VI and IX Corps were directed to ascertain the feasibility of carrying the fortifications in their sectors by assault. Both Major Generals Horatio G. Wright of the VI Corps and John G. Parke of the IX Corps reported that it was practicable to storm the Rebel defenses. Orders were issued, scheduling an attack on the Petersburg defenses for daybreak on the 31st. [97]

Evidently, Grant was beginning to despair of accomplishing anything decisive in the Burgess' Mill area. After having alerted Ord, Parke, and Wright to be ready to storm the works, Grant dashed off a letter to Sheridan. In this message, Grant broached the idea of reinforcing Sheridan with a corps of infantry. Grant wrote, "If your situation in the morning is such as to justify the belief that you can turn the enemy's right with the assistance of a corps of infantry, entirely detached from the balance of the army, I will so detach the Fifth Corps, and place the whole under your command for the operation." Sheridan was asked to let the general know his thoughts on the matter. If they were in the affirmative, Grant promised to draft the necessary orders. Sheridan was also advised of Grant's plan to hurl Ord's, Parke's, and Wright's troops against the Petersburg defenses. [98]

Grant, however, now had a change of heart. He decided

to call off the scheduled assault. In notifying Meade of this, Grant stated that Parke and Wright were to "watch their fronts and go in if the enemy strips to attack our left". Continuing, Grant informed Meade that he had "pretty much made up ... /his/ mind on the course to pursue /Refers to Grant's plan to use the V Corps to support Sheridan's thrust/, and will inform you in the morning what it is." In the meantime, Humphreys and Warren were to "secure their present position and await further orders". [99]

Meade's message endorsing Warren's plan to turn the Rebel right reached Grant's headquarters before the lieutenant general commanding sent the telegram directing that Humphreys and Warren "secure their present position and await further orders". Consequently, Grant added a postscript. Humphreys was to relieve Griffin's division, which in turn was to move to the left. Warren was to "get himself strong to-night". [100]

Grant's telegram was in Meade's hands at 8:35 p. m. Meade immediately wired Humphreys his instructions. The commander of the II Corps was to have Miles' division relieve Griffin's troops and the units from Crawford's division that were holding the fortifications covering the Boydton plank road. One of Mott's brigades would support Miles' shift to the left. [101] Shortly thereafter, a communication was sent to Warren informing him that Humphreys had been ordered to relieve Griffin and the troops

occupying "the return on the Boydton plank road". After Griffin's troops were pulled out of the lines, they were to be sent to Ayres' support. Warren was to hold his "corps ready to attack and await further orders". [102]

Next, Meade acquainted Grant with the steps he had taken to implement his superior's instructions. He informed Grant that he had not assigned Warren a specific mission. Meade had inferred from Grant's telegram that the lieutenant general commanding would do this. [103]

Replying to Meade, Grant wrote, "Your orders to Warren are right. I do not expect to advance him in the morning. I supposed, however, that he was now up to the White Oak road. If he is not I do not want him to move up without further orders." [104]

As yet, Grant had refused to take Meade into his confidence. As demonstrated by his letter to Sheridan, Grant was already thinking seriously of sending the V Corps to Sheridan. The commanding general, however, maintained a discreet silence on this subject in his communications with Meade. [105]

About 9:45 p. m., Grant received an important message from Sheridan informing him of what had transpired on the extreme left during the afternoon. Sheridan reported that Pickett's division was deployed along the White Oak road -- its right at Five Forks and its left extending toward Petersburg. [106]

This information convinced Grant that Warren would not

have the cavalry support, which he had been led to expect, on his left flank. Sheridan's troopers would be fully occupied with Pickett's soldiers. Warren, therefore, would have to be advised of this development and alerted to watch his left flank closely. After adding these comments, Grant forwarded Sheridan's communication to Meade.[107]

A few minutes later, Grant sent a supplemental telegram to Meade's headquarters. Grant observed that with the Confederates on the White Oak road and the Federal cavalry at J. Boisseau's, it was not "improbable" that the Southerners would launch an attack in the morning on Warren's left. Grant, therefore, had issued instructions for Sheridan to be prepared to push to Warren's assistance if he were attacked. Continuing, Grant wrote:

> Warren, I suppose, will put himself in the best possible position to defend himself, with the notice he has already received; but in adding to this I think it will be well to notify him again of the position of Sheridan's cavalry, what he reports the enemy's position on White Oak road, and the orders he has received.

If the Rebels seized the initiative, Grant thought it would be a good idea for Meade to direct Humphreys to help Warren. Humphreys could do this either by sending reinforcements to Warren or by going over to the attack on his own front.[108]

Before receiving Grant's second telegram, Meade forwarded

a copy of Sheridan's message to Warren. In addition, the general observed that, in view of the intelligence obtained by Sheridan, it would be necessary to alert Ayres. Meade also wanted Ayres reinforced "without delay, as the enemy may attack him at daylight". The commander of the Army of the Potomac presumed that Warren would use Crawford's division to support Ayres. [109]

Meade, when he sent this message to Warren, failed to include Grant's endorsement to Sheridan's original letter. Grant had commented, "Warren will not, from this dispatch, have the cavalry support on his left flank that I expected. This information had better be sent to him, with instructions to watch closely on his left flank." This omission on Meade's part was to have important repercussions. [110] Nor, so far as Warren was concerned, did Meade take notice of Grant's supplementary order that Warren be informed "again of the position of Sheridan's cavalry, what he reports the enemy's position on the White Oak road, and the orders he has received." [111]

Only one more message was sent to Warren from Meade's headquarters on the 30th. At 10:35 p. m., Chief of Staff Webb informed Warren that Griffin's division would be relieved as soon as possible. General Humphreys was to contact Warren as soon as Miles' division had started for the Boydton plank road. [112]

Replying to Grant's supplemental message, Meade reported that he had sent a copy of Sheridan's dispatch to Warren. Meade stated that Warren had been alerted "to put Ayres on his guard, as he might be attacked at daylight". Crawford was to move immediately to Ayres' assistance; Griffin was to take position within supporting distance as soon as relieved. By daylight, Meade reasoned, Warren "should have his whole corps in hand ready for the defensive or offensive, and ought to be secure in either contingency, particularly as he can always fall back on Humphreys". Meade, however, could not bring himself to believe that the Rebels would be able to assemble a force large enough to do the powerful V Corps any harm. In closing, Meade observed that Warren had been given "no orders to advance, but simply to strengthen and secure his position". The V Corps would not be ordered to take the initiative unless Grant gave the word.[113]

At 11 o'clock, following the receipt of Meade's order to reinforce Ayres, Warren drafted a set of instructions to govern his corps' movements in the morning. At daybreak, Ayres was to reinforce his advance brigade (Winthrop's) with his entire division. Crawford was to hold his command ready to support Ayres. As soon as it was relieved by Humphreys' corps, Griffin's division was to move down the Boydton plank road and join Ayres.[114]

In the meantime, Humphreys had been informed of the

decision to use part of his corps to occupy the position currently held by Griffin's division. At 8:50 p. m., General Webb telegraphed Humphreys that he was to have Miles' division relieve Griffin's blueclads. One of Mott's brigades would be used to support Miles. Humphreys would see that this order was executed as soon as possible. [115]

Humphreys quickly drafted and distributed to his division commanders a set of instructions calculated to implement this directive. Hays was to call up his reserve brigade (Smyth's). All of Hays' troops were to be placed on the front line. The left flank of the division would then be extended to the left and part of the breastworks held by Mott's division occupied. Hays' soldiers would also take the responsibility for holding the picket line currently held by Mott's men. Once Hays' troops had relieved his right flank units, Mott was to shift his division to the left. Miles' division would be relieved. Two of Mott's brigades were to occupy the trenches from Hays' left to the Boydton plank road. Miles' troops, in their turn, would relieve Griffin's division and hold "the return on the Boydton plank road". One of Mott's brigades was to support Miles' left flank. The three division commanders were alerted to be ready to carry out their scheduled movements at daybreak. [116]

Next, Humphreys addressed a message to Warren stating that he had been directed to relieve Griffin with Miles' division. The commander of the II Corps wanted Warren to give him a description of the position occupied by Griffin's troops. Since Warren had retired, the general's adjutant sent Humphreys a sketch and a description of the works held by Griffin's command. [117]

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Notes on Part III

Grant Modifies His Master Plan

1 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 266.

2 Ibid., 243.

3 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 803.

4 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 251.

5 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 803.

6 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 269.

7 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1102, 1116.

8 Ibid., 1116, 1122.

9 Ibid., 1116, 1122, 1128.

10 Ibid.

11 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 30-31.

12 Ibid., 31; Douglas S. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants -- A Study in Command, III (New York, 1944), 657-658.

13 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 32; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1287. MacRae's sharpshooters, however, remained on the east side of the run. The changes effected by Lee left the dispositions of the Confederate troops on the night of the 30th as follows:

Zone and Command	Infantry Per Mile of Defended Line
North of the James —	
Cavalry on the left flank, approximately 500	
Longstreet, with Field's and Kershaw's divisions (no change)	1,360
Ewell (with Virginia Reserves, Local Defense Troops, and Siege Artillery) (no change)	1,320
Howlett Line —	
Mahone (no change)	740
From the Appomattox to Lieutenant Run —	
Gordon, with two divisions, by the extension of line two miles to the right, density reduced on fronts of four miles from 1,350 to	870
From Lieutenant Run to Burgess' Mill —	
Major General Bryan Grimes' division of Gordon's corps, two-mile front	870
Wilcox's division less McGowan's and Hyman's brigades but with line shortened to about two and one-fourth miles	1,100
Heth's division, strengthened by Hyman's brigade, line approximately three and three-quarters miles in length	1,785
Average density of this zone	1,370
Beyond Burgess' Mill —	
Anderson, with Johnson's division, less Ransom's and Wallace's brigades, but with Hunton's brigade of Pickett's division and McGowan's brigade of Wilcox's division added, three mile front	1,200
Mobile task force operating beyond the fortified lines, at Five Forks, 6,400 infantry and 4,200 cavalry.	

14 Ibid., 31; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1299.

15 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 658-659.

16 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1122, 1128, 1299.

17 Ibid.; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, II, 658-659

18 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1122.

19 Ibid., 1112, 1141, 1144.

20 Ibid., 1116.

21 Ibid., 1129, 1134; Grant, Personal Memoirs, II, 302-303.

22 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 324.

23 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 31-32; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 659.

24 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1299.

25 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 266; William W. Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", Papers of the Military Society of Massachusetts, Vol. VI (Boston, 1907), 278.

26 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 278-279; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 266.

27 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 279; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 266.

28 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 325.

29 Ibid., 324; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 280; Horace Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee", Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, IV, 709-710.

30 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 280.

31 Ibid., 280-281.

32 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 803; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 298-299. The V Corps' trains were guarded by the 11th and 14th U. S. Infantry.

33 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 281.

34 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 803.

35 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 282.

36 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 282; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 266, 325.

37 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 298.

38 Ibid.

39 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 803-804.

40 Ibid., 804.

41 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 307.

42 History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 564.

43 Ibid., 308-309.

44 Ibid., 299.

45 Ibid., 300.

46 Ibid., 299.

47 Ibid., 299-300.

48 Ibid., 300; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 284. General Grant had indicated to Meade that Sheridan was moving up Ford's Church road

in an effort to reach the Southside Railroad. Furthermore, Grant had informed Meade that the cavalry was operating at too great a distance from the Army of the Potomac to effect any direct co-operation.

49 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 300-301.

50 Ibid., 309-310.

51 Ibid., 283.

52 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 807.

53 Ibid.

54 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 302.

55 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 287.

56 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 283.

57 Ibid., 280-281.

58 Ibid., 292.

59 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 806.

60 Ibid., 807, 846.

61 Ibid., 807.

62 Ibid., 807-808, 853, 862-863, 899.

63 Ibid., 808.

64 Ibid., 809, 863, 899.

65 Ibid., 853, 863. For security purposes, the left flank of Bartlett's brigade was refused.

66 Ibid., 849.

67 Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 218; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 809, 871.

68 Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 219; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 808.

69 Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 219; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 808.

70 Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 219.

71 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1287.

72 Ibid., 809-810, 871.

73 Ibid., 892, 899.

74 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 269-270.

75 Ibid., 322; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1214. In reaching Hatcher's Run, Turner's troops had marched by way of the Squirrel Level and Vaughan roads.

76 Ibid., 676; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 288.

77 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 757, 759, 764, 766. McIvor's brigade was posted on the right and Olmsted's on the left.

78 Ibid., 759, 762; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 290.

79 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1214.

80 Ibid., 776, 781, 785, 788.

81 Ibid., 676, 710, 791.

82 Ibid., 710, 724.

83 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 289.

84 Ibid., 290.

85 Ibid., 295.

86 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 744.

87 Ibid., 714, 734. The 111th New York had relieved the 126th New York on the skirmish line just before the advance began.

88 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 295.

89 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 714, 734, 744.

90 Ibid., 791. The 10th Massachusetts Battery also moved from the artillery park. Proceeding to Dabney's Mill, the Massachusetts unit parked its guns in a field.

91 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 290-291.

92 Ibid., 291, 296. Captain Howell of the Engineer Corps had been assigned to the II Corps on March 29 by the Chief Engineer of the Army of the Potomac, Colonel James C. Duane.

93 Ibid., 297.

94 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1244.

95 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 304.

96 Ibid., 284.

97 Ibid., 285; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaigns of '65, 329.

98 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 325.

99 Ibid., 285.

100 Ibid.

101 Ibid., 291.

102 Ibid., 305.

103 Ibid., 285.

104 Ibid.

105 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 293.

106 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 324.

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., 286.

109 Ibid., 306.

110 Ibid., 306, 324; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 294-295.

111 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 286.

112 Ibid., 306.

113 Ibid., 286.

114 Ibid., 306.

115 Ibid., 291.

116 Ibid., 294.

117 Ibid., 293.

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Part IV

The Battle of Dinwiddie Court House

The courier bearing Grant's letter inquiring into the possibility of placing the V Corps under Sheridan's control reached the cavalryman's headquarters early on the morning of the 31st. Replying to Grant's communication, Sheridan confidently stated that if the rain stopped and the ground dried, he believed he could either turn the Confederate right or score a breakthrough. He could do this if he were reinforced by an infantry corps. Sheridan, however, wanted the VI Corps. He observed that he "would not like the Fifth Corps to make such an attempt."

Next, Sheridan jotted off a few lines concerning the situation in the Dinwiddie Court House area. His scouts had just returned from the front with important news. They had told Sheridan that the Rebels were busy throwing up breastworks at Five Forks. From the sound of the chopping, the scouts believed that the fortifications extended at least a mile west of the vital cross roads. In addition, the noise made by the trains on the Southside Railroad was distinctly audible to the Federals. All the trains seemed to be westbound. This was welcomed news. It seems that the

Union brass was afraid lest the Confederates detach troops from Johnston's army in North Carolina and rush them to Virginia. [1]

A number of hours elapsed before Sheridan's message reached Grant's command post. When Grant drafted his reply, he informed the cavalry leader that it would be impossible to give him the VI Corps. At the moment, the VI Corps was in the center of the Union line between the Appomattox and Hatcher's Run. "Besides", Grant continued, "Wright thinks he can go through the line where he is, and it is advisable to have troops and a commander there who feel so, to co-operate with you when you get around." Grant was willing, however, to give Sheridan the II Corps instead of the V. If this were agreeable with Sheridan, orders would have to be issued in the very near future to insure that Humphreys' troops would be in position and ready for action by the morning of April 1. Before Sheridan could answer this dispatch, the situation had changed drastically. [2]

At 9 a. m. on the 31st, General Merritt reinforced his picket line. At the same time, Merritt directed Devin to send out several strong combat patrols. These groups were to undertake forced reconnaissances of the Confederate positions covering the White Oak road. In accordance with Merritt's instructions, Devin sent Colonel Stagg's Michigan brigade up the Crump road; Colonel Fitzhugh's brigade was dismounted and advanced up the Dinwiddie

road. Devin's third brigade, Gibbs', was massed at J. Boisseau's. Gibbs' unit could be used to support Stagg's and Fitzhugh's troopers in case they were unable to handle the Confederates that they encountered. [3]

Davies' brigade of Crook's division which had been ordered to the front on the previous afternoon was also posted at J. Boisseau's. Patrols from Davies' brigade were given the task of watching the countryside west of Chamberlain's Bed. Crook's two other brigades (Brigadier Generals J. Irvin Gregg's and Charles H. Smith's) were based on Dinwiddie Court House. Detachments from these two commands picketed the Boydton plank and Flat Foot roads. The crossings of Stony Creek were also kept under close surveillance by Crook's troopers. Sheridan's third division, Custer's, guarded the wagon train which was bogged down somewhere west of Malone's Bridge. [4]

Fitzhugh's and Stagg's troopers had not advanced very far up the Dinwiddie and Crump roads before they established contact with the Confederate outposts. Discovering that the Rebels held the White Oak in force, Stagg's Michiganders fell back. After relaying this information to Devin, Stagg established a roadblock on the Crump road. The ground where Stagg formed his brigade was a short distance north of Gravelly Run. [5]

As soon as his men had crossed a branch of Chamberlain's

Bed about one mile southeast of Five Forks, Fitzhugh halted his brigade. He proceeded to deploy his dismounted troopers on either side of the road. Once his men had taken up a strong defensive position, Fitzhugh advanced two of his regiments -- the 6th New York and the 1st U. S. (The 1st U. S., an organic part of Gibbs' command, had been temporarily assigned to Fitzhugh's brigade.) These two units were able to penetrate to within a short distance of Five Forks before being checked. During their advance, the bluecoats captured several prisoners. On being questioned, the captives told the Yankees that Five Forks was "occupied by Pickett's division of infantry and at least a division of cavalry". This disturbing news was immediately forwarded to headquarters. In response to Sheridan's instructions, Devin directed Fitzhugh to hold his ground and open communications with Davies' brigade which was operating on his left. A glance at his maps showed Devin that Fitzhugh occupied "the apex of a triangle, the left of which was held by Davies' brigade and the right by Stagg's".[6]

In the meantime, one of Davies' patrols had obtained some interesting information regarding the Confederate movements. A company of the 1st New Jersey Cavalry led by Captain Samuel Craig crossed Chamberlain's Bed. Passing through the Confederate vedettes, Craig's troopers swooped down upon and captured a Rebel

outpost manned by infantry. The foot soldiers told the Yankees that Johnson's infantry and Rooney Lee's cavalry divisions were moving down the opposite side of Chamberlain's Bed toward Dinwiddie Court House. If this information were true, and the Southerners were allowed to continue their march unimpeded, they would be able to turn Sheridan's left flank. [7]

Undoubtedly, this report caused Sheridan a few unpleasant moments, because it indicated that the Confederates had poured additional troops into the area. Since Sheridan had anticipated the arrival of Rooney Lee's troopers, the information that they were operating west of Chamberlain's Bed probably did not bother him very much. Sheridan, however, was troubled by the news that Johnson's troops had reinforced Pickett. The cavalryman had not calculated on this turn of events. Sheridan did not know, of course, that only two of Johnson's brigades were serving with Pickett. Now, to make matters worse, the foe had apparently seized the initiative. Instead of attacking, the aggressive Sheridan would have to use all his skill to check the Confederate effort to outflank his corps.

To counter this Rebel threat, Sheridan determined to commit Crook's division. The extensive reconnaissances carried out by the Federals had revealed that there were two roads that

crossed Chamberlain's Bed and gave ready access to their left flank. A short distance above the upper crossing, Chamberlain's Bed branched. The west fork, known as Bear Swamp, was crossed by the Scott road which connected Five Forks and Little Five Forks. Since it was presumed that the Confederates were advancing along the Scott road, the Federals, if they were to hold Dinwiddie Court House, would have to cover the two lower crossings (Danse's and Fitzgerald's). Davies' brigade which was already at the front was rushed westward from J. Boisseau's. Reaching Lewis' farm, Davies formed his brigade in the field east of Danse's ford. The 3d Battalion, 1st New Jersey Cavalry led by Major Walter R. Robbins was sent across Chamberlain's Bed. Robbins' troops were to see if they could locate the Rebel column reportedly advancing along the Scott road. Davies manned a line of outposts covering the approaches to the ford with Major James H. Hart's battalion of the 1st New Jersey. [8]

General Smith's brigade was rushed from Dinwiddie Court House to the point where the Ford Station road crossed Chamberlain's Bed at Fitzgerald's. This was about one mile south of Danse's ford which was guarded by Davies' troopers. After he had deployed his command, Smith sent the 2d New York Mounted Rifles across the stream. To insure that Smith would have a timely warning of the

approach of the Confederates, the New Yorkers established a picket line several hundred yards west of the ford.[9]

Gregg's, one of Crook's three brigades, was held in reserve. Taking their station at the junction of the Adams and Brooks roads, Gregg's troopers were ready to move to the assistance of Davies and Smith in case they were needed.[10]

After having made these dispositions, Sheridan felt confident that he would be able to cope with the situation. Sheridan's main line of resistance now faced west instead of north. Fitzhugh's brigade held the right on the Dinwiddie road, Smith's the left at Fitzgerald's ford, and Davies' the center at Danse's. Stagg's brigade, on the Crump road, guarded Fitzhugh's rear; while Gregg's and Gibbs' units constituted a strategic reserve. So certain of his position was the cavalry leader that he decided not to order up Custer's division at this time.[11]

The news that Rooney Lee's and Rosser's divisions had reached Five Forks during the night determined Pickett to press on toward Dinwiddie Court House. Pickett quickly matured a well thought out plan of operations. Between daybreak and 10 a. m., Pickett was able to complete his dispositions.

A short distance southeast of Five Forks, Munford's cavalry division took up its battle station astride the Dinwiddie road. Strong detachments from Munford's division were posted on

the Crump and Gravelly Run Church roads. Munford's mission was to hold the White Oak road and pin the Federal cavalry in position while the remainder of Pickett's task force turned Sheridan's left.

Spearheaded by Rooney Lee's and Rosser's cavalry, Pickett's infantry marched southward from Five Forks. The Scott road served as the Confederate line of advance. The Southerners crossed Bear Swamp near the E. P. Scott farm. Chamberlain's Bed protected the exposed left flank of the greyclad column as it pushed ahead. In spite of the weather and hunger, the cavalry was in excellent spirits. Fitz Lee was in charge of Rooney Lee's and Rosser's divisions. The infantry, too, were alert and full of fight. At Little Five Forks, the Rebels turned into the Ford Station road. Pickett planned to recross Chamberlain's Bed at Fitzgerald's and Danse's fords and assail Sheridan's left flank. As soon as Munford heard the sound of Pickett's guns, he was to launch a frontal attack on the bluecoats. [12]

After crossing Chamberlain's Bed, Robbins' patrol found that the road leading to Danse's ford was unprotected. Before proceeding, Robbins detached three of his companies (K, L, and M) and had them establish a roadblock. Accompanied by Company H, Robbins rode down the right bank of the stream as far as Fitzgerald's ford. Here, Robbins conferred briefly with General

Smith. The general told the major that his scouts had not yet seen any Confederates. Robbins then retraced his steps, picked up his troopers holding the roadblock, and recrossed the stream. The troopers were dismounted and their horses sent to the rear. Next, Robbins put his men to work building breastworks of fence rails. Hardly had Robbins' troopers completed the barricade before they heard the crackling of gunfire from the direction of Fitzgerald's ford. At this, the cavalrymen took cover. They then anxiously waited for the buttermuts to appear.

The rest of Davies' brigade, with the exception of Hart's battalion, was posted in a field east of Danse's ford. After Robbins' troopers had slowed the Confederate advance, Davies planned to counterattack and hurl the foe back into Chamberlain's Bed. [13]

It was almost 2 p. m. before Pickett was able to complete his dispositions. Fitz Lee, with Rooney Lee's and Rosser's cavalry divisions, was to cross Chamberlain's Bed at Fitzgerald's ford; the infantry was to force its way across at Danse's. The Confederate attack, however, was poorly coordinated. Lee's troopers were able to get into position first. Instead of waiting for the infantry, Fitz Lee attacked immediately.

Lee's vanguard (Rosser's division) established contact with the picket line held by the 2d New York Mounted Rifles as it

felt its way toward Fitzgerald's ford. Fighting a skillful delaying action, the New Yorkers retired across the stream. General Smith learned that his outposts were engaged, so he prepared to defend the ford. When the cavalrymen of the 2d New York recrossed the water course, they were dismounted. The 6th Ohio, likewise dismounted, moved into position alongside the New Yorkers. Taking cover, the Unionists opened fire on the Confederate cavalrymen when they appeared on the opposite bank. Unable to breast the fire of the repeating carbines, the greyclads recoiled.

To exploit this temporary success, General Smith sent a battalion of the 1st Maine across the creek. The Mainemen reached the right bank without difficulty. But as soon as the battalion had deployed and started to advance, it ran into trouble. Encountering a powerful Confederate battle line composed of both mounted and dismounted troopers, the bluecoats were hurled back in confusion. The panic-stricken men either sought refuge among the "led horses" or plunged into the neck-deep stream.

Rooney Lee's and Rosser's troopers pressed forward hard on the heels of the fleeing Yankees. To capitalize on the confusion engendered by the rout of the Maine battalion, the Rebels did not pause to regroup when they reached the bank. Instead, they surged across the creek with such reckless abandon

that several of the men were drowned. Gaining the east bank, the Confederates sent the 2d New York Rifles and the 6th Ohio reeling back. Within a matter of moments, the greyclads had carved out a shallow bridgehead. To save his position, General Smith called up his reserve -- the 13th Ohio and the two remaining battalions of the 1st Maine. These two units were hurriedly dismounted and deployed. The Ohioans took position in the woods on the right of the road; the Mainemen were stationed in the open field on the left of the road. Realizing that time was of the essence, Smith counterattacked as soon as the two regiments were formed. As the fresh battle line advanced, the officers of the 2d New York and the 6th Ohio rallied their men. Once these two units had been re-formed, they joined in the charge. Smith's bluecoated brigade swept forward and struck the Confederates before they could get organized. This time, the Rebels broke and fled. Before they were able to regain the west bank, the Southerners had suffered a "considerable loss". Among the Confederate casualties was General Rosser, who had been wounded slightly. [14]

Sheridan, as was to be expected, was elated by Smith's resounding success. At 2:30 he dashed off a message to Grant. The lieutenant general commanding was informed, "W. H. F. Lee attacked Smith's brigade, of Crook's division, on Chamberlain's

Creek, and got cleaned out. I will now attack him and push the First Cavalry Division [Devin's] against their infantry line." Sheridan also reported that Major General Robert F. Hoke's division and three of Pickett's brigades were at Five Forks on the night of the 30th. (The cavalry commander was badly mistaken when he reported that Hoke's division was at Five Forks. Hoke's division was in North Carolina.) General Devin's division, Sheridan stated, was in contact with the line of outposts covering the Rebel infantry's Five Forks encampments. (Sheridan was wrong again. At this very minute, Pickett's infantry was preparing to force its way across Chamberlain's Run at Danse's ford. It was Munford's dismounted troopers that Devin's patrols had spotted near Five Forks. [15]

Following this smashing success, General Smith used his entire brigade to cover Fitzgerald's ford. The troopers were dismounted and breastworks, built of fence rails and any other materials that were at hand, erected. There was no further excitement at this point until 5:30 o'clock. At that time, the greyclads emplaced a four-gun battery on the opposite side of the stream. Once they had unlimbered their pieces, the Rebel cannoneers began to hammer away at the Federals with shot and shell. Shortly thereafter, Smith learned that Pickett's infantry,

which had forced its way across Chamberlain's Bed at Danse's ford, was approaching. Without a moment's hesitation, Smith made a few changes in his dispositions and prepared to deal with this threat to his right flank.[16]

When General Crook learned that the Confederates had stormed across Chamberlain's Bed at Fitzgerald's ford, he prepared to rush reinforcements to Smith's assistance. Since no Rebels had appeared at Danse's ford, Crook ordered General Davies to support Smith. Davies would leave Robbins' battalion to hold the ford. Since the road was impassable for mounted troops, Davies' cavalrymen left their horses behind when they marched. As soon as his command had started for Fitzgerald's ford, Davies rode ahead. The general wanted to find out how things were going with Smith's command. By the time Davies reached Fitzgerald's ford, Smith's troopers had crushed the Confederate bridgehead. Davies, seeing that his command's services were not needed, wheeled his horse about. When the general encountered the head of his mud-spattered column, he ordered the troops to countermarch. An air of urgency was added to the situation when heavy firing suddenly broke out in the direction of Danse's ford. This noise could mean only one thing -- the Confederates had attacked Robbins' battalion. The troops, at a word from the general, moved off on the double.[17]

Shortly after the brigade had started for Fitzgerald's ford, Robbins' scouts reported that a strong force of Rebel infantry was approaching. Moments later, the Confederate vanguard (Corse's brigade) attacked and drove in Robbins' pickets. General Corse then formed his brigade and moved to carry the crossing. While the Southerners had the advantage of numbers, this was partially nullified by the strong defensive position held by the bluecoats. Besides being protected by breastworks, the Yankees were deployed on lower ground. Corse's butternuts had to pass across the skyline to get at the Federals. Consequently, Robbins' troopers were able to throw back the initial Rebel onslaught. Undaunted, Corse prepared to turn the Yankees' flanks. While a strong detachment of Corse's Virginians feigned another frontal attack, strong combat patrols infiltrated the woods to the right and left of the road. One of these groups succeeded in fording the stream above the crossing. Pressing forward, the patrol encountered the line of outposts manned by Hart's New Jersey battalion. Hart's troopers were easily brushed aside by the rugged Rebel infantry. Simultaneously, Corse's soldiers renewed their attack on Robbins' battalion. Robbins' troopers grimly held their ground until the greyclads had closed to within 15 yards. With his flank turned and his men unable to check this powerful

frontal assault, Major Robbins abandoned all hopes of holding the ford. He shouted for his men to fall back. As the cavalrymen started to pull back, all thought of discipline vanished. It was every man for himself as the battalion came pouring back out of the bottom. [18]

Davies' brigade came up just as the Confederate infantry started to flood across the ford. The troopers, not used to marching, were badly jaded. In an effort to contain the bridgehead, Davies threw his command into the fray. The 10th New York was formed into line of battle astride the road. Major Robbins now succeeded in rallying a portion of his command. The re-formed battalion took position on the New Yorkers' left. Corse's Virginians attacked the roadblock immediately. After delivering two or three volleys, the New York regiment fled. Major Robbins' battered battalion was left to cover the New Yorkers' "shameful retreat". Pressing on, the Confederates came close to capturing the brigade's "led horses". At the last minute, the horseholders succeeded in saving the mounts. [19]

Davies' brigade had failed to check the Confederate advance. As soon as Corse's troops had established a bridgehead, Pickett sent his other four infantry brigades wading across Chamberlain's Bed. To save his brigade from being cut to pieces,

Davies gave orders to fall back to the Adams road. The general hoped to reorganize his battered command at that point. Colonel Hugh H. Janeway was directed to cover the retreat with the 1st and 2d Battalions of his 1st New Jersey Cavalry. Janeway hurriedly deployed his two battalions across the Danse's ford road. Davies' troopers, after passing through Janeway's command, headed for the previously designated rendezvous. One of Colonel Stagg's Michigan regiments, which had been rushed to Janeway's support by General Devin, now put in an appearance. The Michiganders moved into position alongside the New Jersey unit. [20]

There was very little activity along Devin's picket line until 2 p. m. The Confederates precipitated what little action there was along the Dinwiddie road. To cover the march of Pickett's flanking column, Munford sent out several patrols. These groups carried out their assignment so successfully that the Federals kept their attention focused on the White Oak road. Devin's scouts failed to pick up any intelligence of Pickett's march down the west side of Chamberlain's Bed. When Devin learned that Five Forks was held by Pickett's division reinforced by at least a division of cavalry, he ordered Fitzhugh's troopers to fall back. Recrossing Chamberlain's Bed, Fitzhugh's brigade retired about one-half mile. The brigade took up a new position covering the junction of the

Dinwiddie and Gravelly Run Church roads.[21]

About 2:30 p. m. Devin's troopers were suddenly alerted when the sound of heavy firing came rolling in from the southwest. Shortly thereafter, Devin received an urgent request from Colonel Janeway for help. Devin ordered Colonel Stagg to send one of his Michigan regiments to Janeway's assistance. (Stagg's brigade, except for the detachment manning the roadblock on the Crump road, had returned to J. Boisseau's farm.) In an effort to discover what was happening at Danse's ford, Devin accompanied the Michiganders as they rode toward the sound of battle. Devin, arriving in the neighborhood of the crossing, found Davies' troopers "retiring precipitately". The general immediately waved the Michigan regiment into position alongside Janeway's troopers. Next, he sought to rally Davies' frightened men. Finding that this was impossible, Devin called for his adjutant, Major Amasa E. Dana. Devin told the staff officer to hasten to Colonel Fitzhugh's command post. Dana was to order Fitzhugh to move his brigade by the left flank and take position on the road leading to Danse's ford. One regiment would be left behind to hold the Dinwiddie road.[22]

As soon as Dana contacted Fitzhugh, the brigade commander hastened to carry out Devin's instructions. The 6th New York was

detached to hold the roadblock, and the buglers were ordered to sound "Boots and Saddles". Fitzhugh's column moved off at a fast trot. Leaving the Dinwiddie road, Fitzhugh's brigade turned into the road leading to Danse's ford. Some confusion ensued when stragglers from Davies' brigade broke through Fitzhugh's ranks. Finally, Fitzhugh's troopers caught up with Janeway's hard-pressed command. In accordance with Devin's orders, Fitzhugh dismounted and deployed his brigade. The troopers took position on either side of the road near the Williams house. Janeway's hard-pressed rear guard then passed through Fitzhugh's ranks. Colonel Janeway then disbanded his group. The Michigan regiment reported back to Colonel Stagg; Janeway's troopers rejoined Davies' brigade, which was being reorganized near J. Boisseau's farm.

Pressing forward hard on the heels of Janeway's rear guard, Corse's butternuts struck the fresh Union battle line. A bitter contest ensued. Fitzhugh's bluecoats were able to hold their own. Corse's heretofore irrestible sweep had been checked.[23]

The Yankees' jubilation, however, was short-lived. Munford now committed his division. Advancing down the Dinwiddie road, Munford's scouts established contact with the 6th New York. Before attacking, the general directed Colonel William A. Morgan to dismount several of his regiments. When the officers had formed

their men into line of battle, Munford sent Morgan's brigade forward. The Confederate assault wave rolled over the New York regiment. Part of one of Colonel Stagg's Michigan regiments was rushed to the New Yorkers' assistance. Between them, the two Union units were able to momentarily check Munford's drive. Quickly regrouping, the Confederates again drove ahead. The Union line collapsed. [24]

In an effort to get his stalled attack rolling, Pickett committed Terry's brigade. This increment to their strength enabled the Rebels to extend their right flank. To make matters worse for the Yankees, Devin learned that the 6th New York was in full retreat. Next, a powerful line of Southern infantry emerged from the woods to the general's front. Devin realized that, if he left Fitzhugh's brigade where it was, it would be annihilated. He, therefore, issued instructions for Fitzhugh to retire. At the same time, Devin called up Stagg's brigade. [25]

Covered by a strong rear guard, Fitzhugh's brigade retired a short distance. Stagg's Michiganders were filed into position on Fitzhugh's left. Pushing rapidly ahead, Munford's butternuts quickly established contact with Fitzhugh's right flank units on the Dinwiddie road. The Federals were able to beat off Munford's initial thrust. A second attack by the greyclads,

however, was successful, and Fitzhugh's troopers fell back. Devin's defense line had been rendered untenable. To cope with this new threat, Fitzhugh redeployed his entire brigade athwart the Dinwiddie road. Stagg's Michiganders were left to deal with Pickett's infantry. [26]

Fitzhugh's and Stagg's brigades were unable to check the Confederate advance. Munford's troopers forced Fitzhugh's bluecoats back. At the same time, Pickett's infantry hammered away at Stagg's Michiganders. The two Union brigades fell back on J. Boisseau's farm, where General Davies was re-forming his command. General Merritt sought to defend this strategic point. Devin's two brigades were deployed on the right; Davies placed his troopers on the left. Patrols were sent down the Adams road. These groups were expected to open communications with the Federal troopers covering the Dinwiddie Court House. [27]

After driving back Stagg's brigade, Pickett moved to get possession of the Adams road. A combat team was sent through the woods. Reaching the vital road, the Confederates set up a roadblock. By this adroit move, Pickett had succeeded in isolating the Union forces at Dinwiddie Court House from their comrades at J. Boisseau's.

The patrols sent out by Merritt were unable to get

through Pickett's roadblock. To extricate his men from this possibly dangerous situation, Merritt ordered Devin to take his two brigades (Fitzhugh's and Stagg's) and move across to the Boydton plank road. In case the foe continued his push toward Dinwiddie Court House, Devin was to strike him in the flank and rear. Once he had mustered his command, Devin proceeded to carry out the first part of Merritt's instructions. Since Munford's Rebel division was hovering in the area, Devin screened his march with a strong rear guard. Though the Confederates adopted a threatening attitude, they did not attack. When his command reached the A. Dabney farm, Devin formed it into line of battle covering the plank road. The "led horses" were now brought up. Devin prepared to advance along the Brooks road and establish contact with Gibbs' brigade. At this time, Gibbs' brigade was covering the junction of the Adams and Brooks roads. [28]

Davies' brigade crossed to the Boydton plank road shortly after Devin's troopers. Confederate patrols from Munford's division, both mounted and dismounted, harassed Davies' column. When Davies reached the plank road, he, as ranking officer, assumed command of Devin's troops. One of Stagg's regiments, the 6th Michigan, was sent to check the Confederate pursuit. The Michiganders easily drove back the greyclad patrols which had been

worrying Davies' men. Next, Davies issued orders suspending Devin's projected movement down the Brooks road. Instead, Devin was told to march to Dinwiddie Court House by way of the plank road. It was starting to get dark when Fitzhugh's and Stagg's brigades reached Dinwiddie Court House. In accordance with Merritt's instructions, Devin moved his two brigades to Crump's farm, where they camped. Davies' unit also marched to Dinwiddie Court House. Here, the brigade was rejoined by the men with the "led horses". The troopers had not seen their horses since they had been sent to the rear early in the afternoon. Davies' brigade camped for the night on Great Cattail Run near the Kidd farm. [29]

When the foe had first appeared at Fitzgerald's ford, Gregg's Pennsylvania brigade had been rushed to that point. Gregg posted his men in support of Smith's command. Smith's troopers, however, were able to handle the situation without calling upon Gregg for help. About 2 o'clock the sound of heavy firing began to drift in from the north. Shortly thereafter, Gregg learned that the Confederate infantry had stormed across Chamberlain's Bed at Danse's ford. Reports reached Gregg's command stating that Davies' brigade had been unable to check the greyclads' onslaught. In expectation of receiving orders to march to his comrades'

relief. Gregg alerted his regimental commanders to hold their men ready to move on a moment's notice. [30]

Despite the bad news from the front, Sheridan refused to throw in his reserves until Pickett had definitely committed himself. The cavalry leader was still uncertain of the Confederates' intentions. Dinwiddie Court House might be their objective, or they might wheel to the left and drive up the Boydton plank road in an effort to roll up the V Corps. Sheridan bided his time until Pickett's vanguard drove across the Adams road. This success enabled the Southerners to isolate three of Sheridan's brigades — Davies', Fitzhugh's, and Stagg's. Sheridan, hoping to convert this Confederate success into a disaster, ordered Merritt to march these three units across to the Boydton plank road. If the greycloaks pursued, Sheridan planned to strike them in the flank and rear. Next, Sheridan moved to organize his attacking force. Gregg's brigade was ordered to move across country and "attack the enemy in the flank and rear". Devin's third brigade, Gibbs', was to take position at the junction of the Adams and Brooks roads. Gibbs' troopers were to delay Pickett's infantrymen in case they should strike for Dinwiddie Court House. A staff officer was sent to contact General Custer. The aide was to direct Custer to hasten to Dinwiddie Court House with two of his brigades. Custer's other brigade would be left to guard the

train. [31]

Following the receipt of Sheridan's orders, Gregg's eager troopers, guided by a staff officer, rode off in the direction of the firing. After marching about a mile, Gregg halted his command. The 4th, 8th, and 16th Pennsylvania were dismounted and deployed into line of battle. There were no greyclads in sight. The Pennsylvanians, covered by a strong force of skirmishers, worked their way cautiously forward, guided by the sound of the heavy firing. Within a few minutes, the blueclads sighted Pickett's oncoming battle line. A fierce engagement ensued. [32]

A short time before Fitzhugh's and Stagg's troopers had been driven back on J. Boisseau's, Gibbs' brigade had taken position at the junction of the Adams and Brooks roads. The four guns manned by the cannoneers of Batteries C and E, 4th U. S. Light Artillery were emplaced on the hill north of Dinwiddie Court House. When Gregg's Pennsylvanians moved forward, they established contact with Gibbs' left flank companies. Gibbs planned to get in touch with the remainder of Devin's division after it had retired to the Boydton plank road, but he was not able to do so. [33]

As soon as most of his infantry had reached the junction of the Dinwiddie and Crump roads, Pickett formed his brigades into

line of battle. Covered by a strong force of skirmishers, the Rebel infantry advanced on Dinwiddie Court House. Pickett's battle line guided its movements on the Adams road. Munford's troopers covered the infantry's left flank. Within a few minutes, Pickett's soldiers were in contact with Gregg's and Gibbs' hard-fighting troopers. On the Union left, Gregg's Pennsylvanians did not wait for the Confederates to charge. Pressing ahead, the bluecoats hurled Pickett's skirmishers back. In this thrust, a number of prisoners were captured by the Unionists, and sent to the rear. The Yankees were able to hold their own for almost two hours. Finally, however, Pickett's soldiers succeeded in dislodging Gibbs' brigade. The retreat of Gibbs' command rendered Gregg's position untenable. Covered by a strong rear guard, the Federals fell back. [34]

The combative Custer was overjoyed when a staff officer galloped up and told him to march to Dinwiddie Court House with two of his brigades. In accordance with Sheridan's instructions, Colonel William Wells' brigade was detached and left to guard the wagons. Accompanied by Colonels Alexander C. M. Pennington's and Henry Capehart's brigades, Custer rode forward "at the trot". Upon reaching Dinwiddie Court House, the head of the column halted while Custer reported to Sheridan. The cavalry leader directed

Custer to place his "command in position to support and relieve" Crook's division, which was being forced back by the Confederates. Rejoining his command, Custer directed Pennington to reinforce Smith's brigade at Fitzgerald's ford. Capehart's troopers were to take position on the left of the Adams road. Just as Pennington was marshaling his command preparatory to carrying out Custer's instructions, one of Sheridan's staff officers galloped up. The aide told Pennington to deploy his brigade on Capehart's right.

By 5:30 p. m. Custer's command had taken position about one-half mile north of Dinwiddie Court House. Pennington's brigade was posted a short distance in front of and to the right of Capehart's. One artillery unit (Battery A, 2d U. S. Light Artillery) reported to Custer. The cavalry leader had the artillerists unlimber their four 3-inch rifles in the field on the left of the Adams road. His dispositions completed, Custer confidently waited for the Confederates to attack. [35]

Smith's troopers were able to hold Fitz Lee's command at bay until 5:30 o'clock. Immediately after the Confederate horse artillery started to shell his command, Smith's scouts reported that Pickett's infantry was closing in on the brigade. (The retreat of Gregg's and Gibbs' commands had uncovered Smith's rear.) If Smith's bluecoats remained where they were, they would be

crushed between Pickett's advancing infantry and Fitz Lee's cavalry. Consequently, Smith ordered his men to fall back. Before they reached Dinwiddie Court House, Smith's troopers sighted Custer's battle line. Halting his command, Smith re-formed his brigade on the left of Capehart's unit. [36]

As soon as Smith's brigade pulled back from Fitzgerald's ford, Rooney Lee's and Rosser's cavalry divisions forded Chamberlain's Bed. Once the troopers had gained the left bank, Fitz Lee massed them on the right of Pickett's battle line. The Confederate infantry, after forcing Gregg's and Gibbs' units to give way, had resumed its push toward Dinwiddie Court House. Before they had advanced very far, the Southerners encountered a fresh Union formation -- Custer's division. It was getting late and darkness was not far off. Now that Fitz Lee was up, Pickett determined to make one final effort to smash Sheridan's corps. The infantry would attack down the Adams road, while Fitz Lee turned the Union left. Munford's cavalry would cover the countryside between the Adams and Boydton plank roads. [37]

Gregg's and Gibbs' battered commands had passed through Custer's lines a few minutes before the Confederates emerged from the woods. Gregg's brigade was posted on the right of Pennington's brigade; Gibbs' was sent to the rear and rejoined Devin's division

at Crump's farm. When the Confederates attacked, Pickett's infantry first assailed Pennington's troopers. (This Union command had taken position in advance of Custer's main line of resistance.) Pennington's brigade gave way. Falling back, Pennington re-formed his command on the crest of a ridge on the right of the Adams road. This retreat enabled Pennington to re-establish contact with Capehart on his left. The greyclads failed to follow up their success. Pennington's troopers were given time in which to throw up fence rail barricades. When they did attack, the Confederates were thrown back by the troopers holding Custer's reorganized defense line. A second attempt by Pickett's infantry to storm the Union position was also repulsed. Custer's troops then counterattacked and forced the Confederate skirmishers to recoil on their line of battle. [38]

In the meantime, Fitz Lee's cavalry had assailed the Union left. Smith's bluecoats, despite heavy losses, held their "ground under the hottest fire of which the enemy was capable", losing heavily all the while, til nearly dark". Smith now learned that his men had shot up all their ammunition. Consequently, he permitted them to fall back. Re-forming on the Adams road, Smith's troopers "intimidated the advance of the enemy by presenting a good front, without a cartridge." [39]

It was now getting very dark, therefore, Pickett ordered the attack suspended. When the fighting ceased, the two contending battle lines lay very close to each other. Pickett's infantry was massed astride the Adams road, with Fitz Lee's cavalry on the right and Munford's on the left. The Confederate picket lines extended from G. U. Brooks' on the left to Fitzgerald's ford on the right. Two brigades of Custer's division held Sheridan's front on the night of the 31st. In anticipation of a dawn attack, Custer's men slept on their arms.[40]

Once the fighting had ceased, Gregg's and Smith's troopers secured their "led horses". The two units then marched to Great Cattail Run, where they rendezvoused with Davies' brigade. Once he had regrouped his division, Crook permitted his men to camp. Following Custer's departure for the front, the wagon train was parked near the junction of the Vaughan and Monk's Neck roads.[41]

While the Southerners, in the battle of Dinwiddie Court House, had failed to score any sweeping success, they had nevertheless wrested the initiative from the aggressive Sheridan. If progress had been slow, it was because the Federal cavalry had fought hard. The spirit of Pickett's hard-bitten fighters seemed as stout as ever. No reports were made by the Confederate leaders of the losses suffered by their commands in the battle of Dinwiddie

Court House. In addition to the battle casualties, Pickett had lost the services of one of his brigadiers. During the day, General Terry had received a disabling injury. The ranking officer in the brigade, Colonel Robert M. Mayo, had assumed command of Terry's brigade.[42]

Having lost the initiative, Sheridan was forced to fight a delaying action. Each time the Confederates overcame a pocket of resistance, they were confronted by another. Nevertheless, by nightfall, Sheridan's corps had been pushed back nearly to Dinwiddie Court House. Union losses during the day had totaled about 450.[43]

Late on the afternoon of the 31st, Grant sent a member of his staff, Brigadier General Horace Porter, to see Sheridan. Porter reached the junction of the Adams and Brooks roads just as Gregg's and Gibbs' brigades were falling back. At this time, Porter recalled, one of Sheridan's bands, while under a heavy fire, was "playing 'Nellie Bly' as cheerily as if it were furnishing music for a country picnic".

Porter encountered Sheridan just before he reached Dinwiddie Court House. After Porter had reported on how the Army of the Potomac was faring, Sheridan remarked that "he had had one of the liveliest days in his experience, fighting infantry and

cavalry with cavalry only". Sheridan told Porter "that he was concentrating his command on the high ground just north of Dinwiddie, and would hold that position at all hazards". Continuing, Sheridan declared "that with the corps of infantry he expected to be put under his command he could take the initiative the next morning and cut off the whole of the force Lee had detached." The cavalryman, referring to Pickett's force, commented:

> This force is in more danger than I am — if I am cut off from the Army of the Potomac, it is cut off from Lee's army, and not a man in it should ever be allowed to get back to Lee. We at last have drawn the enemy's infantry out of its fortifications, and this is our chance to attack it.

Sheridan begged Porter to hasten to Grant's headquarters and again to urge the lieutenant general commanding to send him the VI Corps, "because it had been under him in the battles in the Valley of Virginia, and knew his way of fighting". Porter repeated the information which had been forwarded to Sheridan the previous evening regarding the VI Corps — namely, that Wright's corps was on the right of the Army of the Potomac, and the only infantry force which could promptly join Sheridan was Warren's V Corps. With this business taken care of, Porter returned to Grant's headquarters. The staff officer reached Dabney's Mill at 7 p. m. and gave Grant a full report of Sheridan's operations. [44]

Evidently, Sheridan was not quite as confident of his position as he had led Porter to believe he was. When the cavalry leader composed a letter to Grant describing the day's fighting, he wrote, "This force /Pickett's/ is too strong for us. I will hold on to Dinwiddie Court-House until I am compelled to leave." [45]

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Notes on Part IV

The Battle of Dinwiddie Court House

1 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 380.

2 Ibid.

3 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1116, 1122, 1128.

4 Ibid., 1129-1130, 1141, 1144, 1154, 1156.

5 Ibid., 1122; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 303; Atlas to Accompany the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Plate LXXIV, No. 2.

6 Ibid.

7 O. R., Serier I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1144, 1148.

8 Ibid., 1141, 1144, 1148; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 334.

9 Ibid., 1141, 1156.

10 Ibid., 1141.

11 Ibid., 1129-1130; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 303.

12 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 660; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 334; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1299.

13 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1148.

14 Ibid., 1156-1157, 1299.

15 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 339.

16 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1157.

17 Ibid., 1144.

18 Ibid., 1148-1149; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 334. Major Hart was killed in the fighting.

19 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1148-1149.

20 Ibid., 1122, 1144, 1149.

21 Ibid., 1122; Atlas to Accompany the Official Records, Plate LXXIV, No. 2.

22 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1122-1123; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 303.

23 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1123, 1144, 1149.

24 Ibid., 1123, 1299. Colonel Morgan was in temporary command of the brigade formerly led by Munford.

25 Ibid., 1123; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 335.

26 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1123.

27 Ibid., 1117, 1123, 1144.

28 Ibid., 1117, 1123; Atlas to Accompany the Official Records, Plate LXXIV, No. 2.

29 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1117, 1123, 1144.

30 Ibid., 1154.

31 Ibid., 1102, 1128, 1130, 1154.

32 Ibid., 1154.

33 Ibid., 1128.

34 Ibid., 1128, 1154.

35 Ibid., 1130, 1134. Only two of Pennington's regiments, the 2d Ohio and the 3d New Jersey, were formed into line of battle on the right of the Adams road. At this time, the 2d Connecticut had not reached Dinwiddie Court House; the 2d New York was guarding the bridge which carried the Boydton plank road across Stony Creek.

36 Ibid., 1157.

37 Ibid., 1130, 1134, 1157, 1299.

38 Ibid., 1130, 1134-1135.

39 Ibid., 1157.

40 Ibid., 1130; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 336.

41 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1142, 1155, 1157; Atlas to Accompany the Official Records, Plate LXXIV, No. 2.

42 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 660; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1268.

43 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 381.

44 Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee", Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, IV, 710-711.

45 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 381.

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Part V

The Battle of White Oak Road

It had stopped raining on the afternoon of the 30th, but by 3 a. m. the next morning it had started again. The streams continued to rise, and the roads were getting steadily worse. Except where corduroyed, they were practically impassable. When Grant awoke and found that the rain had recommenced, he determined to do nothing until the precipitation ceased. The general's first order of the day to Meade, sent at 7:40 a. m., announced, "Owing to the heavy rain this morning the troops will remain substantially as they now are, but the Fifth Corps should to day draw three days' more rations." [1]

When he acknowledged Grant's telegram at 7:45, Meade inquired if there were any objections to the II Corps also drawing three days' rations. The empty supply wagons would then be returned to the railhead to be refilled. [2] Grant saw no objections. The II Corps was authorized to draw its rations. [3]

Humphreys' and Warren's troops had started taking up the positions which they had been ordered to assume the previous evening, about two hours before Grant had issued his directive

suspending all movements for the time being.

At daybreak, Ayres had started massing his division near the S. Dabney house. First, the general issued orders calling up Denison's and Gwyn's brigades. These two organizations had spent the night camped on the left bank of the rain-swollen branch of Gravelly Run, near Mrs. Butler's. After fording the turgid stream which was over three feet deep, the two brigades marched to S. Dabney's, where they rendezvoused with Winthrop's command. Next, in an effort to increase his striking force, Ayres sent an urgent dispatch to Warren. Ayres wanted the soldiers from his division who were manning the line of outposts relieved by men from some other unit. The general informed his superior that he would have already replaced the pickets from his own command, but he did not feel it would be wise to reduce his effective strength at this time. [4]

A staff officer delivered this message to General Warren at 6:10. Warren saw the logic behind Ayres' request. He dashed off a hurried reply, informing Ayres "that the matter of relieving the pickets will be attended /to/ at once". [5]

For some unexplained reason, forty-five minutes elapsed before Warren moved to secure a relief for Ayres' outposts. At 7 o'clock, Warren ordered General Crawford to recall his pickets

covering the Boydton plank road. Crawford would then concentrate his division at the Holliday house. When his troops had reached Holliday's, Crawford was to see that soldiers from his division relieved Ayres' on the picket line. Crawford's men were to picket the front from Humphreys' left to a point north of Holliday's. In case of a Confederate attack on Ayres' division, Crawford was to move to his comrade's assistance. The pioneers from two of Crawford's brigades were to be detached and left to throw a bridge across the rain-swollen branch of Gravelly Run that barred the passage of the corps' artillery. Crawford would establish his command post at the Holliday house. [6]

Warren would have liked to visit Ayres' division and superintend the operations at the front. In fact, he intended to leave for the point of danger "as soon as the giving and receiving instructions necessary for the operations of the day would permit". On the 31st, as on the 30th, the influx of dispatches received and the orders that they made necessary kept Warren at his headquarters and accessible to the telegraph until almost 9 a. m. [7]

The II Corps, as scheduled, had moved to take over the rifle pits held by Griffin's division. Since the Federals were on guard against a Confederate counterattack, they moved cautiously. Long before daybreak, General Hays issued instructions calling up

General Smyth's brigade from the reserve. Moving to the front, Smyth's troops halted in the rear of the trenches occupied by Pierce's brigade, the unit holding the right flank of Mott's main line of resistance. At dawn, Smyth's bluecoats relieved Pierce's soldiers. By this maneuver, Hays had succeeded in deploying his three brigades in the rifle pits -- McIvor's on the right, Olmsted's in the center, and Smyth's on the left. The right flank of Hays' division was anchored on Hatcher's Run; its left flank joined Mott's right at the Taylor house. Hays had no reserve.[8]

As soon as Smyth's had relieved Pierce, Mott's division shifted to the left. Mott's troops filed into the earthworks occupied by Miles' division. Two of Mott's brigades, McAllister's and Pierce's, were stationed in the breastworks. McAllister's left rested on the Boydton plank road, while Pierce's right was in contact with Hays' left at the Taylor house. De Trobriand's brigade was massed near the Rainey house, ready to move to Miles' assistance in case of an emergency.[9]

Upon being relieved by Mott's troops, Miles' division shifted across the Boydton plank road. Ramsey's and Madill's brigades relieved Griffin's troops in the fortifications. Nugent's and Scott's brigades were held in reserve. Throughout the morning, Miles gave his two reserve units various assignments. Nugent's

soldiers were organized into fatigue parties and put to work slashing timber. The 5th New Hampshire of Scott's brigade was used to man Miles' picket line. When the New Hampshire regiment moved into no man's land, it was accompanied by two companies of the 64th New York. [10]

The II Corps' batteries were not moved at this time. Three of the batteries were on the line and three were parked in reserve. [11]

By daylight, the II Corps had completed its shift to the left. When General Meade at 7:30 a. m. called for a report of the disposition of the II Corps, Humphreys replied:

> The position of my troops this morning is: Hays extending from right, near Crow house, to Taylor house; Mott from Taylor house to Boydton plank road. Miles has relieved Griffin in his position ... . I find that Miles is strong enough in Griffin's position to admit of my putting DeTrobriand's brigade in a little more central position, from which it can move in a few minutes to the left. [12]

After being relieved by Miles, Griffin received instructions from Warren to move his division from the Boydton plank road to Mrs. Butler's. Griffin would mass his division at that point. Evidently, Griffin did not move very promptly. When Humphreys reported to Meade at 7:40, he wrote, "Miles has relieved Griffin in his position, but Griffin has remained some hours." [13]

Warren, like Humphreys, was requested by General Meade at 7:30 to locate his units. The commander of the V Corps, however, hedged a little in his reply. Instead of telling where his divisions were, he indicated where he intended to post them. Warren, therefore, reported that Griffin's division would be concentrated at Mrs. Butler's, Ayres' near S. Dabney's, and Crawford's in between. In addition, Warren informed Meade of the existence of the road linking Mrs. Butler's on the Boydton plank road with W. Dabney's on the White Oak road. At this time, Warren warned, this road was "not practicable" for wheeled vehicles. To make matters worse, the road crossed "a very difficult branch of Gravelly Run". Warren reported that he had all the pioneers he could spare working on a bridge. Even so, it would "take a long time to make" a practicable crossing for the wagons.[14]

This telegram reached Meade's headquarters at 8:06. Meade immediately forwarded a copy of this message to Grant. In a covering dispatch, Meade commented that additional tools would be sent to the V Corps as soon as they could be moved to the front. Meade wanted to insure that the connecting road was rendered "passable for artillery and wagons at the earliest moment".[15]

A little before 8:30, the rattle of musketry from the direction of Humphreys' front became distinctly audible to the

officers of Meade's headquarters. Messages were immediately sent to Humphreys and Warren. Humphreys was directed to ascertain and report the cause of the firing. Besides informing the commander of the V Corps of the skirmishing, Meade directed Warren to stand ready, if called upon, to rush his reserve to Humphreys' support. Meade, in compliance with Grant's directive, took this opportunity to inform his corps commanders, "There will be no movement of troops to-day." [16]

Making an investigation, Humphreys discovered that General Miles had sent out a 60-man combat patrol from the 64th New York. Miles had done this in accordance with an order which Humphreys had issued to his subordinates. The division commanders were directed to reconnoiter the Confederate fortifications, try to capture prisoners, and ascertain the strength and identity of the units opposed to the II Corps. This information, Humphreys felt, would be invaluable in case an attack was ordered.

In carrying out this mission, Miles' combat patrol had clashed with the Rebel pickets. After a few shots had been exchanged, the Southerners fled, leaving 16 prisoners in the Yankees' hands. The Confederates then sent out a small detachment to drive back Miles' patrol, but it failed. Accompanied by their prisoners, the Yankees returned to their lines. Upon being

questioned, the greyclads stated that they belonged to McGowan's South Carolina brigade. Furthermore, they identified Hyman's brigade as the unit holding the lines on their left. [17]

Replying to Meade's communication, Warren explained that there was "a good deal of musketry firing going on in our lines by the men firing off their guns to put in a fresh loads". Warren thought that, unless he completely lost contact with Humphreys, the force (Miles' division, reinforced by De Trobriand's brigade) which had relieved "Griffin is much more than under any circumstances could be needed there". If the Confederates, however, should break Humphreys' line or threaten to do so, Warren promised not to wait for orders to assist his brother officer. [18]

Meade had also informed Grant of the firing on the left of the II Corps' front. After stating that he had directed Warren to support Humphreys if necessary, Meade thought it would be a good idea if Grant alerted Ord. Meade reported that he had issued instructions for the II and V Corps to be supplied with rations. The general, however, expressed concern lest the condition of the roads render it impossible to revictual Humphreys' and Warren's commands. [19]

Following the receipt of Meade's dispatch, Grant telegraphed Ord to hold his troops ready to support Humphreys in

case the II Corps was attacked. [20]

At 8:50 Warren received a message from Humphreys sent at 7:40. Humphreys wanted to know where Warren proposed to rest his right flank. At the moment, Humphreys reported, there was "a vacant space" on Miles' left. [21]

In answering Humphreys' dispatch, Warren stated that he was unable to "take up any regular line of battle on account of the woods and swamp". Instead, he had concentrated each of his divisions on a specified point so they could meet an attack from "any direction with the line refused". Warren did not believe that the Confederates would be able to turn the II Corps' left without Humphrey being forewarned, even if the V Corps moved away. As the troops were now deployed, Warren informed Humphreys, he could move Griffin and his supporting artillery into position on Miles' left in short order. A copy of the message to Meade locating the areas where Warren had posted his divisions, and a sketch map of the countryside west of the plank road, were also forwarded to Humphreys. [22]

At this time, Warren was not anticipating making any forward movements. Five minutes before he dictated the message to Humphreys, Warren received another telegram from Meade's headquarters. Meade again pointed out to his subordinate that "Owing to the weather no change will to-day be made in the present

position of the troops". To take advantage of this hiatus, three days' rations and forage would be brought up and issued to the command. The empty wagons were to be sent to the rear to be refilled. Warren was admonished to "use every exertion to make practicable the roads to the rear ... ." [23]

During the night, Warren had received a copy of Sheridan's message to Grant reporting that Pickett's division was deployed along the White Oak road, its right at Five Forks, and its left extending toward Petersburg. At 8:15 a. m. Warren relayed this communication to General Ayres. In his covering memorandum, Warren commented that he inferred from Sheridan's correspondence that Merritt's "small force" had been dislodged from the White Oak road. Consequently, Warren warned Ayres that he would have to be on the lookout for a Confederate attack on his "left flank from the west as well as from the north". Ayres was also informed that Crawford had been directed to mass his division at Holliday's, while Griffin's division was being concentrated at Mrs. Butler's. [24]

Although the Union brass did not know it, the left flank of Ayres' picket line extended about three-quarters of a mile beyond the point where the Rebel fortifications veered sharply to the right at the junction of the Claiborne and White Oak roads. Ayres' presence in this sector was a result of the message which

Warren had sent Meade at 4 p. m. on the 30th. At that time, Warren had written that he could take his "corps and block the White Oak road". [25] Meade had forwarded a copy of Warren's dispatch to Grant. The lieutenant general commanding had replied at 8:30 p. m., "It will just suit what I intended to propose -- to let Humphreys relieve Griffin's division and let that move farther to the left. Warren should get himself strong to-night." [26]

Later in the evening, Grant sent two telegrams to Meade. In both of these, Grant pointed out that Warren was not to attack without orders signed by himself. Since it was feared that the Rebels were about to try to seize the initiative, Warren was to strengthen his position. Grant was correct in his estimate of the situation. Not only were the Confederates about to launch a powerful assault on the left flank of Warren's corps, but Pickett's task force was preparing to move against Sheridan's cavalry. [27]

On the morning of the 31st, General Lee visited the sector held by Anderson's corps. The general rode along the White Oak road inspecting the fortifications as far to the west as the Claiborne road. Upon reaching "the return", Lee learned from General Johnson that the Union troops (Ayres' division) which were in front of the works at this point were deployed with their "left flank in the air". To take advantage of this carelessness, and to

preclude the possibility of the Federals' interposing between Pickett's task force and Anderson's fortified position, Lee determined to attack and roll up the exposed Union flank.

This would be a desperate gamble, because there were only four brigades available with which to undertake this task. To make matters worse, these four units came from three different divisions. Moody's and Wise's brigades belonged to Johnson's division, Hunton's to Pickett's, and McGowan's to Wilcox's. Accordingly, they would not be accustomed to working as a team. Johnson was placed in charge of the projected attack, under the general supervision of Anderson. The corps commander, however, seems to have taken little or no part in the subsequent engagement. [28]

Upon being given tactical control of the situation, Johnson quickly made his dispositions. McGowan's brigade, which was posted west of Burgess' Mill, was pulled out of the rifle pits. When he had formed his troops on the White Oak road, McGowan moved to join Johnson at the junction of the Claiborne and White Oak roads. Hyman's brigade extended to the left, and occupied the trenches vacated by McGowan's South Carolinians.

An air of urgency was added to the situation when Johnson spotted two Union battle lines (Winthrop's and Gwyn's) moving into the field west of Halter Butler's house. Johnson

ordered Hunton's troops to leave the protection of the earthworks and take position in the woods north of the White Oak road. The Alabama brigade was formed on Hunton's right. Since General Moody was ill, Colonel Martin L. Stansel (the ranking regimental commander) was in charge of the Alabama brigade. At the same time, Johnson notified Anderson and Heth that he would attack as soon as he could form his line of battle. McGowan's greyclads now came hurrying up the White Oak road. Johnson shouted for McGowan to deploy his men on Stansel's right. Within a few minutes, the three battle-hardened Rebel brigades had taken position in the woods north of the White Oak road. Wise's brigade was on the ground but not in line.

Johnson was encouraged when he saw that the Union left flank was still dangling "in the air". Furthermore, the woods west of Halter Butler's field would screen the Confederates' approach march. Johnson, therefore, issued instructions for McGowan to take his brigade and assail the exposed Union flank. McGowan was expected to drive the Federals across the front of Johnson's other brigades. Hunton's and Stansel's troops would then move to the attack. Following the receipt of Johnson's orders, McGowan's South Carolinians crossed the road. Before McGowan's troops were able to get into position, the Yankees

suddenly resumed their advance. [29]

In the meantime, one of Ayres' staff officers had reached Warren's command post. The aide informed Warren that the Confederates still held a line of outposts south of the White Oak road. (On the morning of the 31st, the 41st Alabama had continued to man the line of outposts which General Johnson had established covering the approaches to the White Oak road.) Warren decided that, if his position were to be rendered secure from attack by the Five Forks Rebels, it would be necessary to do something about the Rebel pickets. In addition, the general was afraid that the suspension of hostilities ordered by Grant would give the foe an excellent opportunity to reconnoiter the V Corps' position. Finally, Warren believed that his troops would not be able to obtain much rest during this hiatus in action operations unless there were "a greater distance" between his picket line and line of battle. As the situation then was, Warren felt that his men would have insufficient time to get under arms in case a strong force of buttermuts "showed itself at the advance posts". To prevent any relaxation of vigilance until after his position had been made secure, Warren did not announce that orders had been received suspending all movements.

At 9:40 a. m. Warren telegraphed Meade that he had

directed Ayres to drive in the Confederate outposts. In addition, Ayres was to see if he could ascertain the strength of the Rebel force holding the White Oak road. A copy of this dispatch was also forwarded to Ayres. [30]

General Meade approved of Warren's forced reconnaissance. At 10:30 Chief of Staff Webb informed Warren:

> Your dispatch giving Ayres' position is received. General Meade directs that should you determine by your reconnaissance that you can get possession of and hold the White Oak road you are to do so notwithstanding the orders to suspend operations to-day. [31]

Ayres' division, however, had moved forward and a desperate contest had been precipitated before Webb's communication reached Warren.

General Ayres had spent a busy morning marshaling his division at S. Dabney's. As soon as all his units were up, Ayres proceeded to form his men in accordance with Warren's instructions. The troops were deployed east of S. Dabney's place in Halter Butler's field. This field was bounded on the north by the White Oak road. [32]

Ayres had Winthrop form his brigade into line of battle north of the Holliday dwelling. The 140th New York was thrown out as skirmishers and covered Winthrop's battle line. [33] Gwyn's brigade was deployed into line of battle and took position on

echelon on Winthrop's right. [34] These two brigades faced the White Oak road, which was about one-fourth of a mile to their front. To protect his left flank, Ayres placed General Denison's brigade in a wooded ravine west of the field. The Maryland brigade faced west. Two of Denison's regiments, the 4th and 7th Maryland, patrolled the woods on the left of the brigade. [35]

It was a little after 7 o'clock when Crawford's division moved out of the breastworks covering the Boydton plank road. The muddy road and the rain-swollen branch slowed down the pace of Crawford's march. In spite of these difficulties, Crawford succeeded in massing his troops at Holliday's by 10 a. m. [36]

At the same time, General Griffin concentrated his division at Mrs. Butler's. Protected as he was by the booming branch, Griffin held an impregnable position. Therefore, when Griffin's division had taken its position astride the wood road, arms were stacked, knapsacks unslung, and the men started to prepare breakfast. It had now ceased raining and the sun, bright and warm, broke through the clouds. Blankets were spread out to dry, and the soldiers felt the "buoyancy always so distinctively dominant during the short rifts in seasons of continual contacts". [37]

Warren's artillerists would not be able to move their pieces to the front until the pioneers had completed the bridge.

The eight guns manned by the gunners of Battery D and Battery H, 1st New York Light Artillery, therefore, were emplaced to cover the spot where the Boydton plank road crossed Gravelly Run. In addition, these two units would be able to protect Griffin's left flank. Following the departure of Griffin's troops, Battery B, 4th U. S. and Batteries D and G, 5th U. S. Light Artillery had remained in position at the junction of the Boydton plank and Dabney roads. They would furnish fire support to Miles' division of the II Corps. [38]

Shortly after Ayres had completed his dispositions, one of Warren's staff officers (Major Emmor B. Cope) galloped up to his command post. The aide-de-camp told Ayres that he was "to take the White Oak road and intrench a brigade upon it". Ayres was also authorized to call upon Crawford for one brigade to support his attack. When Crawford received Ayres' request, he issued marching orders to Brigadier General Richard Coulter's brigade. When Coulter reported to Ayres, he was directed to form his brigade in the rear of Winthrop's command. While Coulter's troops were filing into position, Winthrop's moved to the attack. [39]

As soon as Coulter's brigade had moved to reinforce Ayres, Crawford hastened to form his two other brigades. Brigadier General Henry Baxter's and Colonel John A. Kellogg's brigades were

massed in column of regiments in a thick woods south of Halter Butler's field. Kellogg's organization was on the right and Baxter's on the left. [40]

In obedience to Warren's instructions, Ayres at 10:30 a. m. sent Winthrop's brigade forward. Gwyn's troops supported Winthrop's advance on the right. Covered by the skirmishers from the 140th New York, Winthrop's grim battle line swept ahead. As they advanced across the field, the Federals were greeted by small-arms fire. At first, this was scattered, but as the Yankees drove closer to the White Oak road, it increased in intensity. Lieutenant Colonel William W. Swan recalled:

> I sat on my horse between the two lines of reserves, watching /Winthrop/ go forward steadily in painful silence. Not an enemy was to be seen, not a musket was fired, until the advancing troops were half across the field, when suddenly along the edge of the wood at the other end there appeared a long blue line of smoke ... .

The bluecoats were unable to see their tormentors who were concealed in the woods north of the road. Winthrop's soldiers, however were able to drive to within "ten to fifteen yards" of the road. [41]

At the time that Winthrop's brigade had moved to the attack, McGowan's troops had not been able to get into position on Ayres' left. Consequently, when he saw the bluecoats coming

across the field toward the White Oak road, Johnson ordered his "command to advance and meet the enemy's attack". Before Johnson's message could be relayed to his brigade commanders, a lieutenant in Hunton's brigade who had been watching Winthrop's advance sprang to his feet, waved his sword, and shouted "Forward!" Hunton's eager Virginians, answering the lieutenant's call, rushed from their places of concealment. Stansel's Alabamans moved to the attack on Hunton's right. McGowan had not completed his dispositions when Johnson's attack order reached his command post. His line was not formed, but his South Carolinians, on hearing the shouts of Hunton's troops, could not be restrained. Surging forward, McGowan's brigade assailed Ayres' left flank. [42]

Hunton's Virginians and Stansel's Alabamans, in a short desperate contest, bested Winthrop's New Yorkers. To escape annihilation, Winthrop bellowed instructions for his soldiers to face about. Covered by a strong rear guard, the brigade fell back on the position occupied before the advance. [43]

When General Gwyn saw the Confederates come pouring across the road, he led his brigade forward on the double. Before Gwyn's troops were able to intervene, Winthrop's command was in full retreat. Gwyn's battle line halted and started to blaze away at the oncoming Rebels. This served to check momentarily the

Confederate drive. Encouraged by Gwyn's stand, Winthrop rallied his command. The Confederate onslaught was slowed. Reacting to this situation with his customary vigor, Johnson hurled Hunton's Virginians against Gwyn's line of battle. Stangel's Alabamans pressed against Winthrop's flank. The Alabamans' volleys struck Winthrop's brigade in the flank. Winthrop's troops then resumed the retreat. Colonel Swan recalled that:

> Winthrop's [brigade] then returned slowly to the branch of Gravelly Run. There was no order, however. Each man was looking out for himself and all were making for the entrenched line ... . The men did not run. The stream was much swollen and at places too deep for the infantry to ford. I remember that I rode with Winthrop in rear of the retreating troops. My horse was killed, shot through the neck, from side to side, just as we entered the woods.[44]

Hunton's troops found the going more difficult. The Virginians centered their attack on the left flank and front of Gwyn's battle line. Following Winthrop's withdrawal, Gwyn's position became untenable. Hunton's troops were able to turn Gwyn's flank. The regiment on the left, the 210th Pennsylvania, broke and fled. Gwyn's brigade then fell back upon Crawford's division.[45]

In the meantime, McGowan's South Carolinians had moved against Denison's brigade. Denison's Marylanders checked McGowan's initial thrust.

Coulter's brigade, which had been sent to reinforce Ayres' division, had not completed its deployment at the time that Winthrop had suffered his repulse. Observing that Gwyn's troops were already moving to Winthrop's assistance, Coulter advanced to help Denison. McGowan by this time had renewed his attack on Denison's Maryland brigade. Infiltrating the woods to the left of the ravine held by Denison's battle line, the South Carolinians compelled the 4th and 7th Maryland to fall back. This success enabled McGowan's soldiers to enfilade the left flank of Denison's line. The Marylanders were forced to evacuate the ravine. When they retreated, Denison's bluecoats came tumbling back on Coulter's command. So shaken was the Maryland brigade by this setback that Denison was unable to re-form his unit until after it had crossed the rain-swollen branch. Among the casualties in this fighting was General Denison, who was wounded. The general, however, refused to leave the field. [46]

After Denison's troops had passed beyond their field of fire, Coulter's battle line commenced to blaze away at McGowan's oncoming greyclads. Coulter's men, however, had been badly unnerved by the sight of Denison's frightened soldiers pounding for the rear. The officers of Coulter's left flank units found, much to their consternation, that McGowan's battle line overlapped

theirs. Subjected to a deadly enfilade fire, the left flank companies began to erode away, file by file. Three of Coulter's regimental commanders were cut down -- wounded. The brigade then fell back in confusion. Before reaching the run, Coulter succeeded in rallying the hard-core elements of his command for several brief stands. Each time, however, the advancing Confederates smashed these pockets of resistance. [47]

It had been General Ayres' intention to re-form his division in the edge of the woods on the south side of Halter Butler's field. When the Rebels overwhelmed Denison's and Coulter's brigades on the left, the general's plan was doomed. He then sought to rally his troops behind a ravine near the Holliday cabin, but he failed. Ayres' shattered division then retreated in confusion across the run.

In their initial surge, the Southerners had scored a sweeping success. Johnson's three brigades (Hunton's, McGowan's, and Stansel's) had routed Ayres' formidable reinforced division. Four Union brigades, mustering more than 5,000 officers and men, were in full retreat. Having cleared the Yankees out of Halter Butler's field, Johnson's troops advanced into the woods that bounded the field on the south.

General Lee had been anxiously watching the progress of

Johnson's attack. Lee was afraid that Hunton's brigade on the left of Johnson's battle line would lose contact with the troops holding the fortifications. Consequently, Lee issued orders for Wise's brigade which was held in reserve to advance and take position on Hunton's left. Wise proceeded to carry out Lee's instructions with his customary alacrity.[48]

When General Crawford learned that General Ayres, instead of being the attacker, had become the attacked, he ordered Baxter's and Kellogg's brigades deployed in the woods north of Holliday's cabin. Baxter formed his brigade on the right, Kellogg on the left.

Four of Baxter's regiments were deployed into line of battle, while the 39th Massachusetts was thrown forward as skirmishers. Observing that the Rebels were advancing in great strength, Baxter reinforced the 39th Massachusetts with the 11th Pennsylvania. Both of these regiments were composed of hardened troops. As soon as the retreating elements of Ayres' division had moved out of range, the skirmishers opened fire upon the Confederates. The buttermuts were in full view as they charged across Halter Butler's field. Although but few in numbers when compared with the assaulting column, the two regiments caused Hunton to hesitate. After a brisk fire fight, the Confederates pushed ahead. The 39th

Massachusetts and the 11th Pennsylvania were brushed aside. In this engagement, Lieutenant Colonel Henry M. Tremlett of the 39th Massachusetts was mortally wounded. The colonel was carried from the field on a tent fly by several of his devoted men. Falling back, the bluecoats expected to rendezvous with the remainder of the brigade. But upon reaching Holliday's, they were unable to find any signs of their friends. Disgusted at being left to their fate, the two regiments "fell back without much order to the branch which ... /they/ had crossed four hours before." [49]

Baxter encountered quite a bit of difficulty in forming his battle line. Hundreds of Ayres' frightened soldiers came rushing through the ranks of the brigade. By the time Baxter had completed his deployment, the skirmishers of the 39th Massachusetts and the 11th Pennsylvania were in contact with Hunton's Virginians. At first, Baxter's right flank rested in the air. Gwyn's brigade now came flooding back from the front, and the officers succeeded in rallying some of the braver souls on Baxter's right.

When the Confederates attacked Baxter's line of battle, they concentrated their efforts on his left. Within a few minutes, Stansel's Alabamans were able to force Baxter's left flank regiment to give way. Having gained an opening, the Southerners rolled up Baxter's brigade. Soon only the right

flank regiment, the 107th Pennsylvania, was left on the field. Seeing the havoc that the Rebels were raising with Baxter's brigade, Gwyn's men had also disappeared. The Southerners now prepared to knock out the Pennsylvania regiment. Colonel Thomas F. McCoy, realizing that if he permitted his command to remain where it was it would be surrounded, ordered his men to retreat. The Pennsylvanians reached the branch "with little loss". [50]

Colonel Kellogg had not completed his dispositions when Ayres' reinforced division fell to pieces. To check the rout, General Crawford directed Kellogg to deploy the crack 6th and 7th Wisconsin and arrest the retreat of Ayres' troops. The two Wisconsin regiments, however, found this impossible. Ayres' panic-stricken troops broke through Kellogg's ranks and threw the two Wisconsin regiments "into confusion". As soon as the fugitives had passed, Kellogg had the 6th and 7th Wisconsin close ranks. When his battle line was formed, Kellogg shouted for his troops to open fire on the advancing Confederates.

Kellogg now called up his third regiment, the 91st New York. The New Yorkers were formed on the left of the 6th Wisconsin. Taking cover behind a slight rise, they began to rake the Rebel battle line with well-directed volleys. This caused a number of the greyclads to veer off to the left. At the same time,

the 6th and 7th Wisconsin held firm in the face of the Rebel onslaught. The retreat of Baxter's brigade, however, had exposed Kellogg's right flank.

McGowan, observing that he was unable to smash Kellogg's brigade with frontal attacks, determined to bypass this island of resistance. Sweeping to the left, McGowan's troops passed around Kellogg's right flank. To cope with this dangerous situation, Kellogg had the 7th Wisconsin wheel to the right. Kellogg merely postponed the inevitable by this move. The Confederates had now succeeded in turning Kellogg's flanks. Worse, Rebel patrols had started to infiltrate the area in the rear of the brigade. Kellogg, confronted by this emergency, ordered his men to fall back behind the branch. The officer sent to relay this message to Colonel Jonathan Tarbell of the 91st New York was wounded. Therefore, when Kellogg's brigade retreated, the New Yorkers were left behind. Since the greyclads had already bypassed their position, Kellogg's soldiers had to conduct a fighting withdrawal. Several times, the Federals were compelled to cut their way through Confederate roadblocks. Crossing the run, the 6th and 7th Wisconsin took position near the bridge which the pioneers had recently completed. [51]

A number of minutes elapsed before Colonel Tarbell

realized that his regiment was terribly alone. Rather than surrender, the colonel decided to fight his way out of the trap. The regiment fell back to the Holliday cabin. Here, the colonel succeeded in forming part of his command on the colors. He then determined to make one final attempt to slow the Rebel advance. This last-ditch stand by the regiment failed. Overpowered by the Confederates, the New Yorkers retreated across the branch. After crossing the run, Colonel Tarbell re-formed his regiment and posted it in support of Battery H, 1st New York Light Artillery. [52]

Colonel Kellogg, in his "After Action Report", proudly claimed that his "command were the last organized troops to leave the field". This statement by the Union brigade commander is a clear indication of the scope of the Confederate success at this stage of the battle. The outnumbered Confederates had simply carried everything before them. Johnson's three brigades had swept the area between the White Oak road and the run clean of organized Union troops. (It appears that Wise's Virginia brigade, when it was finally committed, did not engage the V Corps.) Two powerful Federal divisions (Ayres' and Crawford's) had been mauled. Warren's forced reconnaissance had ended in disaster.

It was about 10:30 o'clock when General Warren left for

the front. The general intended to take charge of Ayres' forced reconnaissance. By the time Warren reached the run, Ayres' division was in full retreat. Crossing the stream, he hastened toward the point of attack. Before the general was able to reach Crawford's command post, that officer's division was also falling back. In an effort to rally the soldiers, Warren seized the colors of a Pennsylvania regiment. Warren galloped up and down the lines, brandishing the banner, but the soldiers refused to stand and fight. It was evident that the men could not be induced to stop their retreat until they had placed the branch between themselves and Johnson's terrible men. The general, therefore, recrossed the stream. Still flaunting the colors to encourage the disheartened troops, Warren, ably assisted by his more resolute subordinates, succeeded in curbing the panic. Regiments which had held together were immediately deployed on the right of Griffin's division. The remainder of Ayres' and Crawford's regiments were rallied behind Griffin's main line of resistance. Here, the routed units were re-formed and the rolls called. [53]

It was about 11 a. m. when the sound of "heavy musketry" from the direction of the White Oak road became distinctly audible at General Griffin's headquarters at Mrs. Butler's. Without a

moment's hesitation, Griffin had the "long roll" beaten. The command, "Fall in! fall in!" seemed to ring out simultaneously with the crashing volleys. This order was obeyed with alacrity. Rifles were quickly taken from the stacks and the regiments fell in on their colors. Griffin then put his division in motion toward the point of danger. When Griffin's troops reached the rise overlooking the branch, they witnessed a very melancholy sight. They saw hundreds of their comrades falling back toward the stream as fast as their legs could carry them. As the wave of fleeing soldiers floundered through the waist-deep water, General Griffin's voice could be heard, "For God's sake, let them through, or they will break our line". In his "After Action Report", Griffin stated that his troops were "met by the Third Division [Crawford's] running to the rear in a most demoralized and disorganized condition, soon after followed by the Second Division [Ayres']." In accordance with Warren's instructions, Griffin quickly formed his division into line of battle along the left bank of the stream. [54]

News that the Confederates were sweeping everything before them caused the V Corps' chief of artillery, Brigadier General Charles S. Wainwright, to shift several of his batteries. The two artillery units (Battery D and Battery H, 1st New York

Light Artillery) that had been guarding the Boydton plank crossing of Gravelly Run limbered up their pieces. When they turned off the plank road at Mrs. Butler's, the gunners found the going exceedingly difficult. They literally had to lift their guns through the Virginia mud. Reaching Griffin's main line of resistance, the artillerists placed their guns in battery. Major Charles E. Mink saw that the four 12-pounder Napoleons of Battery H were unlimbered on a commanding knoll in a small field. The gunners trained their pieces on the woods beyond the run. They had an excellent field of fire. Captain Deloss M. Johnson of Battery D was unable to find such a favorable location for his four Napoleons. He had to emplace them in a wooded area. Johnson's guns, accordingly, played but small part in the subsequent fighting. [55]

Griffin had barely completed his deployment before the Confederate skirmishers emerged from the woods on the opposite side of the branch. In general, the Rebel advance had followed the Union retreat along the wood road. The bluecoats watched as the Southerners descended a hill and crossed the swale that separated the rise which they had just left from the one occupied by Griffin's division. It seemed evident to the Yankees that the Rebels intended to force their way across the run. Actually, the

Southerners merely planned to make a forced reconnaissance. Mink's four Napoleons opened the engagement. The gunners raked the advancing Confederates with shell and canister. Moments later, Griffin's infantry started to blaze away. After a brisk engagement, the greyclads fell back about 400 yards. [56]

For the next several hours, the Union and Confederate sharpshooters sniped away at one another. Many of the bluecoats' skirmishers expended up to 80 rounds. Learning that the sharpshooters had about exhausted their ammunition, Lieutenant Colonel Henry O'Neill of the 118th Pennsylvania called for a volunteer to carry cartridges to the line. It was a perilous undertaking. Sergeant George W. Stotensburg responded. He ran along the front from man to man, dropping a fresh supply of ammunition in the rear of each sharpshooter. The daring sergeant was shot at a number of times, but discharged his dangerous mission successfully and rejoined his regiment unharmed. [57]

As soon as Warren learned of the desperate state of affairs at the front, he sent a staff officer to get in touch with General Humphreys. The commander of the II Corps was requested to make a diversion in favor of the V Corps. When he sought to obtain additional details of the extent of the setback suffered by the V Corps, Humphreys' staff officers were unable to contact Warren. One of them did see Griffin, however. Griffin assured

the aide that his division would be able to hold its line on the branch. Humphreys accordingly issued instructions for "General Miles to throw forward two of his brigades and attack the enemy." [58]

In the meantime, a large number of fugitives from the V Corps' debacle had descended on Miles' left flank brigade, Ramsey's. To cope with this situation, Ramsey established a straggler line manned by the 66th New York and the 116th Pennsylvania. These two regiments took position behind Ramsey's main line of resistance. When the frightened soldiers entered Miles' lines, they were stopped and turned back. [59]

It was about 12:30 when Miles received the orders from Humphreys to move to the relief of the V Corps with two of his brigades. Generals Madill and Ramsey were alerted by Miles to be ready to take up the advance. Nugent's brigade would support Madill's and Ramsey's attack. Scott's brigade was called up from the reserve and relieved Madill's and Ramsey's commands in the rifle pits. [60]

When Miles gave the word, Ramsey's and Madill's battle lines moved out of the works. Swinging to the left, the two brigades advanced into the woods west of the Boydton plank road. Miles' troops reached the run a short distance beyond the right flank of the V Corps. Ramsey's brigade, which was on the left,

immediately waded the stream; Madill's troops lagged behind. Near the crest of a ridge several hundred yards beyond the branch, Ramsey's troops ran afoul of Wise's Virginians. A sharp engagement ensued. At this time, three of Ramsey's regiments (the 64th New York and the 145th and 183d Pennsylvania) were on detached service. The brigade was, therefore, considerably under strength. Even so, the bluecoats, for several minutes, gave a good account of themselves. Suddenly, however, without warning, the 148th Pennsylvania gave way "unceremoniously and in confusion". The retreat of the 148th left Ramsey's right flank regiment, the 53d Pennsylvania, isolated. To escape destruction, the 53d Pennsylvania likewise retired and recrossed the run. Ramsey, realizing that it would be foolish to continue the conflict with just two regiments (the 66th New York and the 116th Pennsylvania), passed the word to fall back.

When he reached the left bank of the branch, Ramsey, in spite of the harassing fire of Wise's sharpshooters, quickly re-formed his brigade. Subsequently, Ramsey bitterly castigated the conduct of Madill's command. He reported, "Had the Third Brigade [Madill's] advanced with me, after crossing the run, instead of remaining idle spectators, the result of the assault would have been different and my brigade spared the mortification of a repulse." [61]

As soon as he had redeployed his troops into line of battle, Ramsey again led them across the run. Ramsey's bluecoats slowly closed in on Wise's battle line which was formed along the crest of the ridge. In the meantime, Madill's brigade had forded the stream. While Ramsey's troops pinned Wise's greyclads in position, Miles proposed to turn the Confederates' left flank with Madill's brigade. Madill's bluecoats, after crossing the branch, detoured to the right. Madill's scouts soon reported that the brigade's battle line had passed beyond Wise's left flank. The general now wheeled his brigade to the left. Pressing eagerly forward, Madill's troops struck Wise's command on its exposed flank. So sudden and swift was this blow that Wise's Virginians were driven back in confusion. Over 100 prisoners and one stand of colors were left behind by the Southerners. [62]

All this time, Ramsey's soldiers had been exerting heavy pressure on Wise's front. When Wise's brigade collapsed in the face of Madill's flank attack, Ramsey's soldiers dashed forward and secured the crest of the ridge. Miles decided to capitalize on his success. The mopping up operation would be left to Nugent's brigade; Madill's and Ramsey's troops would be entrusted with the pursuit. [63] --

When Miles' troops attacked Wise's brigade, Hunton's

soldiers shifted to the left to assist their comrades. This forced Stansel's Alabamans to extend to both the right and left to cover the V Corps' line to their front. Convinced that his men would not be able to fight their way across the run, Johnson ordered them to hold the ground gained.

General Lee, accompanied by General McGowan, also reconnoitered the small watercourse behind which Warren's two shattered divisions had found sanctuary. After examining the terrain, Lee approved Johnson's decision to hold it. Returning to the White Oak road, Lee tried to find some artillery and, if possible, some cavalry to send to Johnson's assistance.

It soon became evident to Johnson that his men were approaching exhaustion, and if they were to hold on, they would have to be reinforced. But there were no fresh troops available. General Anderson, upon being advised of the situation, ordered Johnson to withdraw his command. The troops were to be pulled back and occupy the line of breastworks south of the White Oak road which Ayres' troops had thrown up the previous evening. The collapse of Wise's brigade had added an air of urgency to the situation. Screened by a strong rear guard, the Rebels abandoned their gains and fell back. In the course of this retrogressive moment, Hunton's and Stansel's brigades changed positions. By 3 o'clock,

Johnson announced that McGowan's, Hunton's, and Stansel's units had moved into designated rifle pits. Stansel's Alabamans on the left held the angle which formed the connection between "the return" and the field fortifications south of the White Oak road. Wise's brigade, however, had been so roughly handled by Miles' Yankees that it was withdrawn inside the fortifications east of "the return". [64]

About the time that Madill's and Ramsey's troops marched out of the works, General Miles had trained his field glasses on the Confederate rifle pits west of the plank road. What the general saw convinced him that these trenches were unoccupied. Miles, therefore, ordered the 5th New Hampshire of Scott's brigade to charge this position. At this time, the New Hampshire regiment was manning the Union picket line in this sector. In moving to carry out Miles' instructions, this regiment became confused. Instead of attacking to their front, the soldiers from New Hampshire obliqued sharply to the left. Shortly thereafter, they overran the right flank of Madill's brigade. Before a semblance of order could be restored, the Confederates had thrown troops into the heretofore deserted rifle pits and a splendid opportunity to penetrate the defenses in this sector had been lost. [65]

Upon witnessing the rout of Wise's brigade, Miles became convinced that he could carry the Confederate fortifications if he

were reinforced by another brigade. Miles accordingly relayed this information to Humphreys. The corps commander authorized Miles to go ahead. To implement his decision, Humphreys ordered De Trobriand's brigade to support Miles' right. At the same time, the general notified Mott that he might have to rush a second brigade to Miles' assistance. [66]

De Trobriand's brigade had spent a good part of the morning massed in support of Miles' division near the Rainey house. At 9:30 o'clock, Ord had telegraphed Grant that the Confederates were marshaling troops east of Hatcher's Run. [67] A copy of Ord's message was in Humphreys' hands by 10:15. When Meade forwarded Ord's dispatch to Humphreys, he sent a covering communication. Meade left it up to the judgment of his corps commander whether to relieve the Army of the James by attacking, or send his reserve to Ord's assistance. [68]

Humphreys decided to rush his reserve (De Trobriand's brigade) to Ord's support. Consequently, De Trobriand's command was shifted to the right and stationed near the Crow house. When the Confederates attacked, they moved against Warren and not Ord. De Trobriand's presence on the right of the II Corps now became superfluous. To obtain troops to support Miles' offensive, Humphreys again issued marching orders to De Trobriand. The

disgusted troops were required to retrace their steps. Returning to the Rainey house, De Trobriand's soldiers relieved Scott's in the rifle pits west of the Boydton plank road. [69]

Following the arrival of De Trobriand's bluecoats, Scott's men moved forward. The brigade soon overtook Miles' division. At this time, the division was cautiously working its way through the woods in front of the Confederate earthworks which covered the approaches to the White Oak road. Miles had Colonel Scott deploy his brigade en echelon on the right of Madill's unit. Scott's mission was to protect the division's right flank. As the advance progressed, Scott's brigade and Madill's diverged. Miles halted his battle line. To plug this gap, Miles called up Nugent's brigade from the reserve. The sweep was then renewed. As the Federals forged ahead, they drove in the greyclad skirmishers. In this fighting, the 111th New York of Madill's brigade cut off and captured over 100 men and the colors of the 41st Alabama.

At 3:30, Miles' troops reached the edge of the abatis that protected the approaches to the Confederate fortifications. The left flank of Ramsey's brigade rested near Halter Butler's field. A glance at the formidable works and the "almost impassable slashing" convinced Miles that it would be "impossible to take them with the force available". [70]

Since his right flank unit (Scott's brigade) had lost contact with Mott's division, Miles decided he had better close to the right. The entire division then moved by the right flank. After forming a connection with De Trobriand's brigade of Mott's command, Miles put his troops to work throwing up earthworks. Several of Miles' units became scrambled in the confusion caused by the shift. When this situation was ironed out, Miles found that his brigades were deployed from left to right: Scott's, Ramsey's, Madill's, and Nugent's. [71]

When Miles' division marched off to the west in pursuit of Wise's Virginians, General Mott sought to maintain contact with his brother officer's command by extending his left flank. To do this, Mott was compelled to pull out part of De Trobriand's brigade from the earthworks. Leaving two of his eight regiments to guard the artillery, De Trobriand moved out. De Trobriand's brigade was able to accomplish its mission. The unit succeeded in bridging the gap that had opened between Miles on the left and McAllister on the right. While De Trobriand's soldiers were taking positions, they were subjected to a brisk shelling by the Confederate artillery. The brigade then dug in. [72]

In the meantime, General Humphreys had decided to have Mott make a forced reconnaissance of the Confederate fortifications

east of the plank road. This movement, the general believed, would pin the Rebels down and keep them from detaching troops to oppose Miles' advance. Mott accordingly alerted McAllister and Pierce "to assault the enemy's works on their respective fronts". [73]

Pierce's attacking force on the right consisted of the 5th Michigan and the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery. An unhappy combination of circumstances rendered Pierce's task difficult. To Pierce's right, there was a bend in Hatcher's Run. This meander would restrict the movements of Pierce's battle line as it advanced to the attack. Worse, the Rebel batteries emplaced in front of the Crow house and near Burgess' Mill (to the right and left of Pierce's front) would be able to catch the advancing Yankees in a deadly crossfire. Nevertheless, the general grimly formed his men. At 2:30 o'clock, he moved the two regiments forward. The bluecoats drove ahead on the double. Not until they reached the felled timber in front of the Rebels' works did the soldiers falter. Unable to work their way through the abatis, Pierce's men recoiled. [74]

McAllister planned to have a strong combat team feel the Confederate works covering Burgess' Mill. The combat patrol from McAllister's brigade was composed of the 11th Massachusetts, the 120th New York, and a battalion of the 8th New Jersey. This force would be supported by the 11th New Jersey. At a word from

McAllister, the combat patrol dashed forward. Working their way through the abatis, the bluecoats reached the crest of a ridge overlooking the Confederate main line of resistance. Several outposts were overrun by the Yankees and about 15 pickets captured, during the course of the advance. The Union drive ground to a stop. In addition to the musketry of the Rebel infantry, the Yankees came under an enfilade fire from the Confederate batteries. To save themselves, the bluecoats lay down. After his men had spent a very uncomfortable hour hugging the ground, McAllister received orders from Mott to recall them. The soldiers were drawn off, one by one, under a severe fire from the Southern sharpshooters. This attack had cost McAllister's command a number of casualties.[75]

Hays' division also launched a limited attack on the Confederate defense line on the afternoon of the 31st. In the morning, General Smyth with the 108th New York had made a bold reconnaissance of his front. Smyth returned with the information that the Rebels still held Fort Powell. Hays then ordered Smyth to capture this strong point. The attacking force consisted of the 1st Delaware, the 7th Michigan, the 4th Ohio, and the 7th West Virginia. After deploying his command into line of battle, Smyth moved against Fort Powell. Everything went according to plan until the Federals reached the broad belt of slashed timber fronting the

strong point. The felled timber was so thick that the battle line was unable to get through. Smyth, therefore, sent his skirmishers into the abatis. The Union skirmishers succeeded in driving in the Rebel outposts. Taking position near the redoubt, the Northerners began to snipe away at the cannoneers manning the two guns emplaced in the work. Evidently, this proved to be very disconcerting to the gunners, because they soon deserted their pieces and ceased firing. Since his battle line had been unable to penetrate the belt of slashed timber, Smyth was not able to capitalize on this situation. At dusk, Smyth recalled his sharpshooters and returned to the rifle pits. [76]

These thrusts on the part of Hays' and Mott's troops, in conjunction with the pressure which Ord's Army of the James was exerting on the Rebel positions east of Hatcher's Run, accomplished their purpose. When McAllister's and Pierce's troops moved against the rifle pits held by Brigadier General John R. Cooke's brigade east of the plank road, General Heth asked General Wilcox for help. Wilcox, however, was unable to send his brother officer any assistance. At this time, the brigade from his division, Brigadier General James H. Lane's, which was holding the fortifications on either side of Hatcher's Run, was under heavy pressure from Hays' and Ord's commands. [77]

The II Corps' batteries remained in the position which they had occupied at dark on the 30th until noon on the 31st. As the Rebel attack on Warren's corps gathered steam, Battery B, 1st New Jersey Light Artillery and the 11th Battery, New York Light Artillery were ordered up by the corps' chief of artillery, Lieutenant Colonel John G. Hazard. Captain A. Judson Clark had his New Jersey artillerists emplace their four Napoleons in front of the Rainey house; the New Yorkers relieved one of the V Corps' batteries on the knoll to the east of the house. Opening fire with their four 3-inch rifles, the New Yorkers silenced a troublesome Rebel battery located in the peach orchard west of Burgess' Mill. At the same time, Battery K, 4th U. S. and Battery M, 1st New Hampshire (These two units had been in position at the Rainey house since the previous afternoon.) concentrated their attention on the large redoubt near the Boydton plank road. These two batteries were able to gain fire superiority over the Confederate guns mounted in the redoubt.

Under the cover of darkness, Clark's cannoneers limbered up their pieces and moved to the left. Utilizing a road recently opened by the pioneers, the battery reached the rifle pits held by Miles' division. The gunners then proceeded to emplace their pieces at strategic places along Miles' main line of resistance.

What he had seen during the afternoon convinced Colonel Hazard that a smoothbore battery could be more effectively employed if mounted on the knoll occupied by the 11th New York. He, therefore, ordered Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery to change places with the 11th New York. By 11 o'clock, this shift had been effected. At 1 p. m. Colonel Hazard called up the 10th Massachusetts Battery. The Massachusetts gunners, on reaching the front, emplaced their four 3-inch rifles on the right of Battery B, 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery at the Crow house. [78]

At dusk, Mott shifted McAllister's and Pierce's brigades to the west side of the Boydton plank road. Before moving to the left, the brigade commanders detached a number of troops. These men were left behind to hold the rifle pits when their units moved to the left. [79]

By 1 p. m. General Warren was satisfied that his corps would be able to contain the Confederate attack. Griffin's division, supported by the fire of Mink's battery, had forced Johnson's vanguard to fall back. At the same time, Ayres and Crawford had succeeded in re-forming their divisions. Warren now dashed off a message to Meade's headquarters telling of the morning's disaster. Warren told of his plans to recover the initiative. Already, he wrote, his skirmishers on the left had

crossed the run. One of Griffin's brigades, supported by the reorganized portion of Ayres' and Crawford's divisions, was preparing to counterattack. When the advance started, it would pivot on the right flank of the corps. Warren calculated that his men would be ready to move forward by 1:45, unless the Rebels beat him to the punch.[80]

Warren, in announcing the time that his counterthrust was to begin, had underestimated the difficulties involved. It took longer than anticipated for Ayres and Crawford to complete their dispositions. In addition, the troops experienced considerable difficulty in crossing the rain-swollen branch. It was 2:30 before Warren gave the order to advance.[81]

Warren's failure to attack on time caused Meade to have serious misgivings. At 2:50 Chief of Staff Webb forwarded to Warren a copy of a message which Humphreys had sent to army headquarters. Humphreys reported that Miles' troops had taken prisoners from Pickett's division. This intelligence led Humphreys to assume (incorrectly) that Pickett's division was opposite Miles' center. Humphreys had concluded that if Warren's wheeled to the right it would "take Pickett on his right flank". In his covering dispatch, Webb observed:

> Since Miles is already well forward from your right flank the general commanding [Meade] considers that that must be secure. Miles is ordered to take the enemy's works supported by his own corps. You will see the necessity of moving as soon as possible.[82]

Since this communication from Meade's headquarters reached Warren after he had started his advance, he ignored it for the time being. Subsequently, Warren pointed out:

> The information about Pickett's division was erroneous, and was worse than useless to me. According to subsequent information his division was at that time some three or four miles away driving General Sheridan. Nor did Miles assault the enemy's breast-works as the dispatch led me to infer he would.[83]

When Warren set about organizing his counterattack, he and General Griffin rode to the left to confer with General Chamberlain. The two officers asked Chamberlain if, suffering as he was from the wounds incurred on the 29th, he felt able to spearhead the projected attack. Warren's and Griffin's language in this "exigency" was very strong. Chamberlain, though in considerable pain, was ready for the hazardous assignment. Griffin then gave Chamberlain his instructions. He was to regain the ground lost by Ayres' and Crawford's troops.[84]

At a word from Chamberlain, his troops forded the waist-deep run. As soon as all his men had gained the right bank, Chamberlain formed his brigade into double line of battle.[85]

Gregory's brigade followed Chamberlain's across the branch. Like Chamberlain, Gregory deployed his command into two lines of battle -- the 188th and 189th New York in front, the 187th New York in the rear. Gregory's unit moved into position on Chamberlain's right.[86] Bartlett, after crossing the stream, massed his brigade on Chamberlain's left rear. Ayres' division supported Griffin's troops on the left en echelon by brigades. Griffin's skirmishers commanded by General Pearson covered Ayres' front; Crawford's division watched Griffin's right flank. The wood road served as the axis of Chamberlain's advance. The remainder of Warren's corps guided their movements on Chamberlain's brigade.[87]

Brushing aside the few skirmishers encountered, Chamberlain's bluecoats reached Holliday's cabin with ease. When Chamberlain's troops emerged from the woods into the southern edge of Halter Butler's field, they were greeted by a heavy fire. Chamberlain observed that there was a strong force of Confederates (Hunton's Virginians) ensconced in the rifle pits, which Ayres' troops had thrown up in the field prior to their retreat. Hunton's greyclads had "turned" these trenches. Additional Confederate soldiers could be distinguished in the edge of the woods which bounded the field on the north.

Chamberlain halted his brigade and rearranged his lines,

which had been broken to some extent by the march through the ragged terrain and thick woods between the branch and Holliday's. Warren now rode up and directed Chamberlain to entrench. By this time, Chamberlain's advance line (the 198th Pennsylvania) had "gained a slight crest in the open field". Here, the Pennsylvanians were subjected to a galling fire by the Virginians holding the rifle pits. At the same time, sharpshooters posted in the woods which flanked Halter Butler's field on the east commenced to snipe away at the Yankees. It appeared to Chamberlain "that the enemy's position might be carried with no greater loss than it would cost us merely to hold our ground". Furthermore, the men seemed "eager to charge over the field". When Chamberlain told Griffin of his observations, he received permission to push ahead. [88]

Once he had readjusted his lines, Chamberlain led his cheering troops to the attack. As the Yankees surged across the field, the Rebel troops posted in the woods to the right poured several volleys into the flank of Chamberlain's battle line. In addition, the Confederate artillery emplaced in "the return" had growled into action. The 189th Pennsylvania wavered. Chamberlain called for assistance; Gregory's brigade responded handsomely. Gregory's command, advancing by battalion <u>en echelon</u> to the left, dashed into the woods. The greyclad snipers gave way in the face

of Gregory's sudden onslaught. Chamberlain's blueclads, their right flank secured, charged the works on the run. This time the determined Yankees were not to be denied. Chamberlain's troops reached the rifle pits and drove Hunton's Virginians from them in confusion. One regiment, the 56th Virginia, was cut off and captured. Pressing on, Chamberlain's and Gregory's soldiers stormed across the White Oak road.[89]

Hunton subsequently recalled, "The Federal line [the 198th Pennsylvania] wavered under the fire very decidedly, and a portion of it broke and ran. The balance of the line re-formed under my fire, advanced, and drove us back. I thought it was one of the most gallant things I had ever seen."[90]

Following the smashing Union attack, Hunton's brigade (without the 56th Virginia) retired into the fortifications. McGowan's greyclads had been isolated by Chamberlain's and Gregory's breakthrough to the White Oak road. To rejoin their comrades, the South Carolinians had to detour to the north a considerable distance to bypass the Federal roadblock.[91]

When General Hunton returned from the fray, his scabbard had been bent almost double by a missile and he had three bullet holes through his clothes. General Lee greeted the doughty fighter briskly, "I wish you would sew those places up; I don't

like to see them."

"General Lee", said Hunton, "allow me to go back home and see my wife and I will have them sewed up."

The answer amused Lee. "The idea", he replied, "of talking about going to see wives; it is perfectly ridiculous, sir." [92]

Chamberlain's and Gregory's soldiers had crossed the White Oak road a short distance west of "the return". Warren was understandably elated by the success scored by Griffin's troops. The general thought that his men might be able to carry the fortifications guarding the junction of the Claiborne and White Oak roads. If they could storm "the return" it would render the Confederate position south of Hatcher's Run untenable. Warren, therefore, ordered the advance suspended while he made a personal reconnaissance.

In the meantime, to secure his gains, Griffin had Chamberlain's and Gregory's soldiers begin throwing up entrenchments. Ayres' division, which had not fired a round during the advance, was halted just short of the White Oak road. Taking position near the W. Dabney house, Ayres' troops were faced west toward Five Forks. Like Ayres', Crawford's soldiers had not been engaged since leaving the branch. Crawford's division was posted northwest of the Holliday cabin. Its mission was to watch the gap between

Griffin's right and Miles' left. [93]

Accompanied by a strong force of scouts, Warren rode forward. As the general's party approached the works, they "drew a very severe fire from the line, particularly of artillery". Nevertheless, Warren made a thorough examination of "the return". What he saw convinced the general "that the foe's defenses were as complete and as well located as any ... /he/ had ever been opposed to". After concluding "that it would be useless to sacrifice the men in an assault", Warren retraced his steps. [94]

When Griffin's troops crossed the White Oak at 3:40, Warren had dashed off a message to Meade's headquarters, telling of his gains. In addition, Warren reported that the Rebel fortifications veered sharply to the right. Warren had also seen General Miles, who announced that his division was "close up" to the Confederate works. [95]

It was about 5 p. m. before Warren received a reply to his message. Upon opening the dispatch, which was signed by Chief of Staff Webb, Warren found that he was to secure his position and protect, as well as possible, his left flank. Humphreys, Webb observed, had been directed to extend to the left and connect with Warren's right. Webb reported that Sheridan's cavalry was believed to be advancing. (At this time, Sheridan's troopers, in the face

of Pickett's slashing attack, were falling back on Dinwiddie Court House.) Warren was authorized, if he wished, "to push a small force down the White Oak road and try to communicate with Sheridan ... ." [96]

Warren had already taken the precautions outlined in Webb's memorandum. Two of Griffin's brigades (Chamberlain's and Gregory's) were dug in along the White Oak road. Gregory's right flank was in contact with Miles' left flank unit -- Scott's brigade. The corps' left flank was guarded by Ayres' division. Crawford's division, reinforced by Bartlett's brigade, constituted the corps reserve. Wainwright's artillerists, however, had been unable to take their guns across the run. Consequently, the V Corps did not have any artillery support at the front.

The battle of White Oak road, which had begun so disastrously for Warren's corps, had ended in victory. Johnson's gallant Confederate command had seen its morning's gains wrested from it by the Union counterattack. Indeed, the Southerners were worse off than before, because they had lost control of the vital White Oak road. They were now penned up in their works. The direct line of communications between Johnson's division and Pickett's task force had been severed. Worse was the probable effect of the battle on Confederate morale. The Southerners,

after a brilliant start, had failed in their attempt to roll up the Union left. Furthermore, the Rebels had suffered losses which they could ill afford.

All told, the Yankees reported that the battle of White Oak road had cost them 177 killed, 1,134 wounded, and 554 missing. Of these casualties, the V Corps had suffered 1,407. General Johnson announced that his losses in the engagement totaled "about 800, including killed, wounded, and missing". In addition, Johnson claimed the capture of about 470 bluecoats. [97]

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Notes to Part V

The Battle of White Oak Road

1 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 334; Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 34. On the evening of the 30th, Grant moved his headquarters to Dabney's Mill. Meade's headquarters at this time were on the Vaughan road, in the triangle formed by the road, Gravelly Run, and a small tributary of the Run.

2 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 335.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 368, O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 868.

5 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 368.

6 Ibid., 370; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 812.

7 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 812.

8 Ibid., 759, 766; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 346.

9 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 766.

10 Ibid., 710, 714, 719, 724. Ramsey's brigade occupied the trenches on the left, Madill's those on the right.

11 Ibid., 791. The four guns of Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery and the four 3-inch rifles of Battery M, 1st New Hampshire Light Artillery were emplaced near the Rainey house; the four 12-pounder Napoleons manned by Battery B, 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery, were unlimbered near the Crow house.

12 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 346.

13 Ibid., 346, 361.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 335.

16 Ibid., 346, 361.

17 Ibid., 346-347. Lieutenant Colonel Welcome A. Crafts of the 5th New Hampshire was in charge of Miles' combat patrol.

18 Ibid., 361.

19 Ibid., 335.

20 Ibid., 374.

21 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 813.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 369.

25 Ibid., 304; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 315.

26 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 285; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 315.

27 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 285-286; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 315-316.

28 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 33-34.

29 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1287-1288.

30 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 813; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 362; History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 568.

31 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 362.

32 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 868; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 224.

33 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 868, 873; From right to left, Winthrop's battle line was formed: the 146th New York, 5th New York, and 15th New York Heavy Artillery.

34 Ibid., 875.

35 Ibid., 874; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 224.

36 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 883, 892, 896.

37 History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 568.

38 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 899.

39 Ibid., 868, 896.

40 Ibid., 883, 892.

41 Ibid., 873; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 225; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 319.

42 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 34; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1287-1288; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 227.

43 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 871, 875.

44 Ibid., 871, 875, 878-879; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 321.

45 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 875.

46 Ibid., 869, 874; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 227.

47 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 896; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 227. The wounded officers were: Major Dennis B. Dailey of the 147th New York, Lieutenant Colonel Horatio N. Warren,

of the 142d Pennsylvania, and Major Henry H. Fish of the 54th New York.

48 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1288; Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 34.

49 Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 227-228; Alfred S. Roe, The Thirty-Ninth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers 1862-1865 (Worcester, 1914), 281.

50 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 892.

51 Ibid., 884, 886-887.

52 Ibid., 887.

53 Ibid., 814; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 228; Roe, The Thirty-Ninth Massachusetts, 282.

54 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 814, 846; History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 569. Griffin was mistaken on one point: Ayres' shattered division reached the run ahead of Crawford's. Chamberlain's brigade was deployed on the left of Griffin's line.

55 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 899.

56 Ibid., 815, 846; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 228.

57 History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 569-570. Colonel William Sergeant of the 210th Pennsylvania was mortally wounded by a Confederate sharpshooter.

58 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 677, 815; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 348.

59 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 710, 745.

60 Ibid., 710, 714.

61 Ibid., 745, 750-751. The 145th and 183d Pennsylvania had been detailed to corduroy the Dabney Mill road; the 64th New York was on outpost duty.

62 Ibid., 710, 734, 736, 738, 740. Captain Albert F. Peterson of the 64th New York and about 50 of his men rejoined the brigade in time to participate in the second advance across the run.

63 Ibid., 710, 734, 745. Before the day's fighting was over, Madill's brigade had captured 124 prisoners, and Ramsey's 160.

64 Ibid., 1288; Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 34. When Johnson's troops took position covering the White Oak road, McGowan was on the right, Hunton in the center, and Stansel on the left.

65 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 710, 714, 719.

66 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 348.

67 Ibid., 374.

68 Ibid., 347.

69 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 781.

70 Ibid., 710-711, 714, 740. As soon as Scott's unit overtook the division, the 5th New Hampshire rejoined the brigade.

71 Ibid., 711, 714.

72 Ibid., 776, 781.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., 785. In this attack, Pierce's combat team suffered 16 casualties -- two dead and 14 wounded.

75 Ibid., 788.

76 Ibid., 766. A line of outposts was stationed in the edge of the woods fronting Fort Powell by General Smyth.

77 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 333.

78 Ibid., 791. Battery B, 1st New Jersey remained on Miles' front a very short time. At midnight, the gunners limbered up their pieces and returned to the Boydton plank road. The pieces were then parked.

79 Ibid., 785, 788.

80 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 362.

81 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 815.

82 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 362-363.

83 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 815.

84 William H. Powell, The Fifth Corps (New York, 1896), 783; History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 570.

85 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 849. The 198th Pennsylvania was in front; the 185th New York was in support.

86 Ibid., 853.

87 Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 229-230; Powell, The Fifth Corps, 783.

88 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 849; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 230.

89 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 849, 853; Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 230; Powell, The Fifth Corps, 784. Chamberlain's brigade lost "not more than 75" men in this attack. Along with the colors of the 56th Virginia, the Federals captured approximately 135 soldiers.

90 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 321-322.

91 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1288; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 334.

92 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 35.

93 Porter, "Operations of the Fifth Corps", 230-231; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 816.

94 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 816; Powell, The Fifth Corps, 784.

95 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 363.

96 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 677, 819, 1288.

Report of Casualties in the II Corps

Command	Killed		Wounded		Missing	
	Officers	Men	Officers	Men	Officers	Men
Miles' Division	5	40	12	233	1	41
Hays' Division	-	-	2	13	-	1
Mott's Division	-	6	1	58	2	42
Artillery Brigade	-	-	-	4	-	-
	5	46	15	308	2	84

Report of Casualties in the V Corps

Command	Killed		Wounded		Missing	
	Officers	Men	Officers	Men	Officers	Men
Cavalry Escort	-	-	-	1	-	-
Artillery	-	1	-	6	-	-
Griffin's Division	2	21	7	143	-	5
Ayres' Division	1	50	25	249	3	335
Crawford's Division	1	50	20	360	3	124
	4	122	52	759	6	464

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Part VI

The V Corps Reports to Sheridan

When the fighting on the White Oak road had ceased, Warren's soldiers were able to hear distinctly the roar of battle rolling up from the southwest. Warren, as well as his troops, was disheartened to observe that the distant rumble seemed to be receding. If this were true, it indicated that Sheridan had encountered a force which was giving him trouble. Instead of advancing, it seemed to the interested listeners that Sheridan was being steadily driven back by the Confederates. [1]

Warren accordingly determined to rush a force to the assistance of the cavalry. General Griffin was alerted to have Bartlett's brigade ready to move out. Bartlett was to march cross country and attack the Rebel force which was presumably driving Sheridan's cavalry on its naked left flank. Major Cope of Warren's staff was detailed to accompany Bartlett's column. [2]

Preceded by Captain Horrell's escort company, Bartlett's brigade took up the march. The orders which

Bartlett had received from Warren were very simple. He was to proceed toward the sound of the firing and attack the Rebels in the rear. After leaving the White Oak road, Bartlett's troops advanced in a southwesterly direction. It was starting to get dark when the brigade passed through the picket line. The head of the column was guided by the distant battle sounds. When the pickets shouted to the passing soldiers as to their intended destination, their inquiries were unanswered. Bartlett's soldiers were as ignorant -- except that the line of march trended battleward -- of their destination as were the men manning the line of outposts.

At first, the line of march led across a belt of open ground. When the vanguard reached a small branch of Gravelly Run, the Federals left the fields and entered the timber. Locating a "wood road", Major Cope guided the column slowly forward. Before the soldiers had proceeded very far into the timber, the firing died down. After advancing about one mile and crossing several arms of Gravelly Run, the head of the column debouched into an open field. On a hill to the soldiers'-immediate front could be seen Dr. Boisseau's house. [3]

As Captain Morrell's troopers approached the

doctor's outbuildings, they were fired on by Confederate pickets belonging to Munford's division. Quickly dismounting and deploying, Horrell's cavalrymen drove the Rebel outposts from Dr. Boisseau's farm. Pressing eagerly ahead, Horrell's bluecoats drove the Southerners down the slope and across Gravelly Run. Since the Yankees did not attempt to cross the run, the Confederate troopers halted and took position covering the ford. [4]

Since it was already quite dark, General Bartlett decided to take up a strong defense position and wait for daylight. In the meantime, the general had learned from Major Cope that the Crump road lay a short distance west of Dr. Boisseau's house. Bartlett therefore posted his brigade with its right flank anchored on the Crump road; his front and left flank covered the road leading eastward from Dr. Boisseau's toward the Boydton plank road. Outposts were sent out to relieve Horrell's troopers. Throughout the early part of the evening, the Federal and Confederate pickets sniped away at each other from opposite sides of Gravelly Run. [5]

By the time that Bartlett had completed his dispositions, it was very dark. The Federals then turned their attention to the Confederate camp fires. Major Cope reported that these fires "seemed to stretch for miles on the

south side of the run". In addition, the Yankees could hear distinctly the characteristic noises made by a large body of soldiers -- wagons rumbling, men talking and shouting, and the thud of axes against trees. Most of the officers were in agreement that the exposed position occupied by Bartlett's brigade was "a perilous one and required considerable delicacy in handling". The night, however, served to cloak the Union dispositions and helped add to the command's security. [6]

At 5:45, shortly after Bartlett's troops had moved off, Warren received a message signed by Chief of Staff Webb. It had required 30 minutes to transmit this communication from Meade's headquarters to Warren's command post. Glancing at the dispatch, Warren discovered that he was to push a brigade down the White Oak road. This force was expected to open communications with Sheridan and, if necessary, support the cavalry leader. Since the personnel at Meade's headquarters mistakenly thought that the firing was steadily drawing nearer, Webb felt that the column which Warren was directed to send down the White Oak road would not have far to go to establish contact with the cavalry. [7]

Warren, however, saw things quite different from the way the headquarters people did. He was firmly convinced

that the firing was not getting any closer. Instead, Warren correctly believed that the roar of battle was steadily receding in the direction of Dinwiddie Court House. In addition, the general had just talked with two of Sheridan's cavalrymen, a lieutenant and a sergeant, who had been cut off from their units by Pickett's attack. They told Warren that Sheridan's cavalry had been "attacked about noon by cavalry and infantry and rapidly driven back, two divisions (Crook's and Devin's) being engaged". Relaying this information to Meade, Warren reported that he had sent Bartlett's brigade to support the cavalry. Warren expressed his candid opinion that Bartlett's relief column would not arrive in time to be of any assistance. [8]

A little after 6 o'clock, one of Merritt's staff officers reached Meade's headquarters. He told Meade that two of Pickett's brigades had advanced and secured a position between Sheridan's and Warren's commands. Furthermore, by this time, it had become apparent to the officers at army headquarters that the roar of battle was not getting any closer. They now came to the same conclusion as Warren -- the firing was definitely receding toward Dinwiddie Court House.

When Meade wrote Grant at 6:35 p. m., he told of these developments. Meade observed that if Sheridan were unable to overcome the Rebel force opposed to him, he would be obliged to contract the left flank of his Army of the Potomac. Meade warned Grant that if he were compelled to reduce his front, he "must do it to-night". Grant was also informed that Meade was ordering Warren to send a force down the Boydton plank road. This command would be charged with the mission of re-opening communication with Sheridan's cavalry. [9]

While Meade was drafting Grant's message, Chief of Staff Webb sent fresh instructions to the commander of the V Corps. Warren was also informed that elements from Pickett's division had penetrated into the area between the V Corps and Sheridan's command. To cope with this situation, Warren was directed to send down the Boydton plank road the force previously ordered to move out the White Oak road. [10]

When this message reached Warren, Bartlett's column had been gone for almost an hour. If he were to recall Bartlett's troops, it would require at least two hours for them to reach the Boydton plank road. By then, it would be too dark for Bartlett's troops to accomplish anything. The

general, however, thought of another solution to the problem. Because of the muddy condition of the "wood road" leading across to Holladay's, the artillery had been parked near the Boydton plank road. Three of Bartlett's regiments had been detailed to guard the artillery and the corps' wagons. General Pearson was in charge of this force. Warren accordingly determined to send Pearson's command down the Boydton plank road. [11]

Following the receipt of his marching orders from Warren, Pearson started down the plank road. When the head of Pearson's column reached Gravelly Run, it was discovered that the stream was running bank full. The bridge had been broken down by the retreating Confederates on the afternoon of the 29th. Since Warren had been required to operate without any cavalry to cover his left flank, he had made no effort to have the bridge rebuilt.

Pearson was unable to proceed any farther until a new structure was built. After passing this information on to Warren, Pearson let his men fall out and take it easy, while waiting for the pioneers to arrive and rebuild the bridge. [12]

After he had given Pearson his instructions, Warren

sent another message to Meade's headquarters. He reported that it was too late to stop Bartlett, therefore, he had sent Pearson down the plank road. Warren promised to keep headquarters informed of Bartlett's progress. [13]

After directing his division commanders to secure the ground gained by entrenching their positions, Warren returned to his headquarters. (At this time, Warren's headquarters were at Mrs. Wilson's.) The general wanted to be near the telegraph, so he could keep in constant touch with General Meade throughout the night. By 8 p. m., Warren and his staff had reached Mrs. Wilson's. [14]

In the meantime, Meade had received a reply to his 6:15 telegram to Grant. Besides sending Meade a copy of Sheridan's 2:30 p. m. message, Grant informed the commander of the Army of the Potomac that Colonel Porter had just returned from Dinwiddie Court House. Porter had told Grant that Devin's division "had been driven back in considerable confusion south of J. Boisseau's house". At the time that Porter had left Sheridan, Crook's division was moving to the front. Sheridan had told Porter that he expected Crook to turn the Rebels' flank. Grant stated that he had hoped to get Sheridan's cavalry "onto the White Oak road west of [W.]

Dabney's house". Up to this time, Grant wrote, Sheridan had failed to carry out his assignment. Furthermore, the way things were developing, there was no assurance that the cavalry leader would succeed. In this case, it would be necessary for Warren to watch his left. Grant believed that if Sheridan were able to hold on to Dinwiddie Court House, it would discourage any ideas the Confederates might have of sweeping around Warren's left flank. Even so, Grant warned, Warren "cannot be too much on his guard".

In addition, Grant wanted Meade to have the Confederate prisoners captured in the battle of White Oak road, closely questioned. The general wanted to see if Lee had received any reinforcements from North Carolina. Sheridan had incorrectly identified Hoke's division as one of the units opposing him. This was the reason behind this request. [15]

Meade answered Grant at 7:10 p. m. He announced that he had learned nothing concerning the reported transfer of Confederate units from North Carolina to the Petersburg theater of operations. Meade added, however, that this certainly would not be an impossible move on the Rebels' part. Continuing, Meade reported that Captain Michael V. Sheridan

(General Sheridan's adjutant) had just reached his headquarters. The captain had told Meade that the Confederates were in possession of the Brooks road. If, as this news indicated, the Rebels had concentrated a large force of infantry to General Sheridan's front, Meade observed, the plank road was open to their advance. Furthermore, the captain had warned Meade that the Southerners would probably resume their attack on the cavalry corps in the morning. If they did, Meade was of the opinion that General Sheridan would either have to rejoin the army or to be reinforced. Meade did not believe it would be possible to detach any units from the Army of the Potomac to send to Sheridan. To justify his position, Meade pointed out that not only was his left flank resting in the air but that his line was dangerously extended. [16]

After waiting 30 minutes and receiving no reply to his communication, Meade sent Grant another telegram. He again announced that Captain Sheridan was at his headquarters. The captain, Meade wrote, had said that General Sheridan had fallen back on Dinwiddie Court House, after having been "repulsed" by the Confederate infantry. In the event that he was compelled to evacuate Dinwiddie Court House, Sheridan had told the captain that he would retire via the Vaughan road. [17]

By 8 o'clock, another one of Sheridan's staff officers, Colonel John Kellogg, had galloped up to Meade's headquarters. Kellogg told Meade that Sheridan would be unable to hold Dinwiddie Court House in the face of a renewed Confederate onslaught. When he relayed this information to Grant, Meade broached the subject of transferring one of Gibbon's divisions to the right bank of Gravelly Run. Meade also thought that it would be a good idea to have Turner's division of the XXIV Corps march to Sheridan's assistance. Meade had predicated this suggestion on the assumption that Grant would deny him permission to contract his lines. [18]

It was 8:45 p. m. before Grant replied to Meade's communications. When he did, Grant -- who was evidently becoming alarmed by the situation -- ordered Meade to recall Warren's corps. When Warren had massed his troops on the Boydton plank road, he was to send one division to Sheridan's relief. This column was to "start at once and go down the Boydton road". [19]

Following Warren's return to his headquarters at Mrs. Wilson's, he and Meade had been in frequent communication. At 8 o'clock, Meade warned Warren that Sheridan had been forced back on Dinwiddie Court House by a strong Rebel task

force. The retreat of Sheridan's cavalry, Meade cautioned, had exposed the rear of the II and V Corps to attack and would "require great vigilance" on Warren's part. If Warren had sent a column down the Boydton plank road (as Meade had previously ordered), it was not to go beyond Gravelly Run. [20]

Since Pearson's troops had been unable to cross Gravelly Run, Warren had already taken the step which Meade urged. When Warren replied to Meade's communication at 8:20, he conveyed this information to army headquarters. In addition, Warren announced that Bartlett had penetrated "nearly down to the crossing of Gravelly Run". Warren said that he was confident that if Sheridan held on at Dinwiddie Court House, the foe would be unable to hold their gains and be compelled to fall back to Five Forks. Expressing strong opposition to a night march, Warren observed, "I shall leave a good many men who have lost their way". Warren inquired, "Does General Sheridan still hold Dinwiddie Court-House?" [21]

At 8:35, Warren received a telegram signed by Chief of Staff Webb marked "confidential". Scanning the message, Warren learned that headquarters was of the opinion that the Army of the Potomac would have to contract its lines. Warren would be required to hold, if possible, the Boydton

plank road, resting his left flank on Gravelly Run. Hatcher's Run would be covered by Humphreys' II Corps and Ord's Army of the James. Warren was alerted to hold his men ready to carry out this order on "short notice". [22]

At this hour, Meade knew that Bartlett's brigade had taken position at Dr. Boisseau's. Nevertheless, Webb gave no intimation as to whether Bartlett was to hold his ground. Apparently, the staff, in its anxiety for the safety of Humphreys' and Warren's corps, had forgotten about this important piece of information. Furthermore, Grant, as yet, did not know that Bartlett's brigade occupied a position on the left flank of Pickett's task force.[23]

Warren hated to see the army take the step outlined in Webb's memorandum. He was afraid that a retreat to the Boydton plank road would prove to be a heavy blow to the morale of his soldiers. Furthermore, the general felt that Pickett's task force would be unable to hold its position in front of Dinwiddie Court House, because his corps threatened its left flank. [24]

Consequently, Warren, when he answered Webb's communication, argued that the Army of the Potomac should try to hold its gains. He pointed out that the fortifications

which his troops had thrown up covering the plank road were "very strong". One division, if supported by artillery, could hold this line, Warren argued. The only way the Confederates could carry this position, Warren stated, would be by a strong column operating south of Gravelly Run. The general believed that if Meade followed the course of action which he proceeded to outline, the Confederates would find plenty to keep them busy. Warren would have Humphreys, reinforced by the V Corps' artillery, hold the plank road. The V Corps would be freed to cross Gravelly Run and assail the Rebels from one side, while Sheridan attacked from the other. In case the Southerners tried to reinforce Pickett, Bartlett's roadblock would force them to detour to the west. In summing up his arguments, Warren announced, "Unless Sheridan has been too badly handled, I think we have a chance for an open field fight that should be made use of". [25]

Following the receipt of Grant's 8:45 telegram directing him to send a division of the V Corps to Sheridan's assistance, Meade had Chief of Staff Webb prepare an order implementing this decision. Warren was instructed to pull back inside the earthworks covering the Boydton plank road. Griffin's division was to be sent to Dinwiddie Court House.

Upon reaching the court house, Griffin would report to Sheridan. General Humphreys' II Corps was to occupy the fortifications northeast of Mrs. Butler's house.[26]

Webb's message which had been sent at 9 o'clock was in Warren's hands 17 minutes later. Warren was distressed to learn that the ground which had cost so much blood was to be abandoned. Nevertheless, the general proceeded to draft a set of instructions calculated to implement Grant's decision. General Ayres, who was nearest the plank road, was to withdraw his division and mass it near the Boydton plank road; Crawford was to follow Ayres and concentrate his troops behind the entrenchments southeast of Mrs. Butler's. Griffin was to recall Bartlett's brigade from its position at Dr. Boisseau's. When Bartlett had rejoined the division, Griffin was to return to the Boydton plank road. Griffin's soldiers would then move to Dinwiddie Court House, where the general would report to Sheridan. In executing this movement, the division commanders were admonished to take care and see that none of their pickets or any portions of their units were left behind. They were to put their organizations in motion immediately upon the receipt of this order, which Warren handed to his staff

officers for distribution at 9:35 p. m. [27]

At this hour, all of Warren's command (with the exception of Bartlett's brigade, Pearson's three regiments, and the corps artillery), was based along the White Oak road. Chamberlain's brigade of Griffin's division was on the north side of the road. Crawford's division was near the road on Griffin's right, and Ayres' in a similar position on his left. Accordingly, considerable time would be wasted while the staff officers were contacting the three division commanders. In addition, Griffin would have to recall Bartlett. At best, Bartlett could not be expected to withdraw his pickets and get back to the Boydton plank road before 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning. [28]

Evidently, Webb decided that his 9 o'clock dispatch to Warren needed clarification. At 9:20 he handed the telegrapher at army headquarters another message. Warren was to see that the division slated to join Sheridan started at once. In addition, Warren was given freedom "to act within the Boydton plank road" as he saw fit. Webb again informed Warren that Humphreys' II Corps would "hold to the road and the return". [29]

Warren replied to the chief of staff's communication

at 10 p. m. He pointed out that there would be a considerable lapse of time before Bartlett's brigade would be able to rejoin Griffin's division. Since Ayres' and Crawford's divisions were not engaged, Warren had determined to withdraw them first. Even so, Warren did not feel that the march of Griffin's division would be retarded, because, before the troops could cross Gravelly Run, the bridge would have to be rebuilt. The officer (Captain William H. H. Benyaurd) whom Warren had sent to examine the crossing had pronounced it unfordable by infantry. Furthermore, Captain Benyaurd had stated that a 40-foot span would be required to complete the bridge. The general informed Webb that he would exert himself to see that the bridge was passable by the time Griffin's division reached it. [30]

At this time, Warren's corps was without pontoons. The pontoon train which had started with the corps on the 29th had been used to bridge Rowanty Creek and the Quaker road crossing of Gravelly Run. To construct a span at the Boydton plank road crossing of Gravelly Run, Warren put his pioneers to work razing a house. This building would supply materials for the construction of the urgently needed bridge. Captain Benyaurd was put in charge of the project. [31]

In the meantime, Meade had been doing some deep thinking. Examining his maps, Meade came to the conclusion that Bartlett would be unable to rejoin Griffin in time for the division "to move with any promptitude" down the plank road. To facilitate Griffin's march to the point of danger, Meade issued instructions for Warren to attach another brigade to his division in place of Bartlett's. When Webb communicated this order to Warren, he reported that Sheridan had been attacked by four infantry brigades -- three from Pickett's division, one from Gordon's corps. [32]

When Warren noted that Webb's message had been sent at 9:40, he realized that army headquarters had not yet received his dispatch regarding the condition of the bridge. He trusted that, when Meade was apprised of this fact, he would agree that Bartlett would be unable to rejoin Griffin before the bridge was made passable. Consequently, Warren decided not to make any change in his marching orders for the time being. He would wait until Meade had received his telegram concerning the state of affairs at the crossing. [33]

Evidently, Warren's 8:40 message suggesting that he be permitted to cross Gravelly Run with his entire corps and attack the Rebels' rear, while Sheridan assailed them

in front, made quite an impression on Meade. At 9:45, Meade inquired of Grant, "Would it not be well for Warren to go down with his whole corps and smash up the force in front of Sheridan?" Meade agreed with Warren that the II Corps could hold the line of the plank road. Unlike Warren, Meade did not think the plank road was the best line for the V Corps to operate along. Instead, he would have Warren move his entire corps up to the position held by Bartlett's brigade. From Dr. Boisseau's, Warren's troops would advance and take the Rebel force threatening Sheridan in the rear. "Or", Meade continued, "he could send one division to support Sheridan at Dinwiddie and move on the enemy's rear with the other two". Meade neglected to inform Grant that the battle plan had originated with Warren. [34]

This was the first news Grant had received that one of Warren's brigades was at Dr. Boisseau's on the Crump road. Meade had been in possession of this information for at least an hour. Furthermore, Meade made no mention of the fact that he had already directed Warren to recall Bartlett's brigade. Grant seems to have held the opinion that at least part of Warren's corps had already returned to the plank road. [35]

Replying to Meade's communication at 10:15, Grant

tersely observed, "Let Warren move in the way you propose and urge him not to stop for anything. Let Griffin go on as he was first directed." [36] In a second telegram, Grant requested that Meade keep Sheridan posted on the dispositions being undertaken for his relief. Furthermore, Meade was to inform Sheridan that he was "to take general direction of the forces sent to him until the emergency for which they are sent is over." [37]

Shortly thereafter, Grant handed a dispatch to one of his staff officers for delivery to General Sheridan. Grant notified the cavalry leader that the V Corps had been ordered to his support. Two divisions were scheduled to march by way of J. Boisseau's; a third would move down the Boydton plank road. In addition, Grant announced that General Mackenzie's cavalry division of the Army of the James had been directed to join Sheridan. Mackenzie's troopers were to advance via the Vaughan road. Grant, without having any justification for it, informed Sheridan that the V Corps should reach him "by 12 to-night". Sheridan, Grant wrote, would "assume command of the whole force sent to operate with ... [him] and use it to the best of ... [his] ability to destroy the force which ... [his] command has fought so gallantly to-day". [38]

As soon as Grant had approved his proposed plan of operations, Meade sent another message to Warren. The leader of the V Corps was informed that he was to send Griffin's division down the plank road. Ayres' and Crawford's commands were to join Bartlett's brigade at Dr. Boisseau's. They would then attack the rear of the Confederate force which was confronting Sheridan's cavalry. According to the latest intelligence reaching GHQ, Sheridan's troopers were reportedly posted a short distance north of Dinwiddie Court House. In case the Rebels should best the V Corps, Warren's line of retreat would be by way of the Brooks and Boydton plank roads. Meade urged Warren to move rapidly, so that he would reach the junction of the Brooks and Boydton plank roads ahead of the Confederates. Meade believed, however, that the foe would fall back toward Five Forks, in the face of Warren's advance. Warren was admonished to move light and fast. Any gear that would prevent the corps from moving cross country was to be left behind. Warren was to notify Meade as soon as his troops started to move out.[39]

Meade's telegram was handed to Warren at 10:48. Upon reading it, Warren was distressed to learn that Meade still did not know about the bridge. Furthermore, Meade

seemed to be unaware that a strong force of Confederates confronted Bartlett's brigade and held the right bank of Gravelly Run south of Dr. Boisseau's. In addition, Warren had just received news from one of his staff officers, Major William T. Gentry, that a Confederate force (Roberts' North Carolina brigade) held the junction of the Crump and White Oak roads. The major, in attempting to communicate with Bartlett, had accidentally blundered into this roadblock. The major had escaped, but his orderly had been captured.

Warren knew that it had been one and one-half hours since he had issued instructions recalling his corps. The general assumed that, at this very minute, the troops were moving back along the "wood road" toward the plank road. If his orders were being obeyed, Ayres' division would be in the lead. If he followed Meade's orders to the letter, Griffin's division would have to be pushed to the head of the column, while Ayres' retraced its steps. To keep from wasting valuable time while the two divisions changed places, Warren determined to send Ayres' division instead of Griffin's to Sheridan's support. [40]

Answering Meade's message, Warren pointed out that on the receipt of Chief of Staff Webb's 9 o'clock dispatch,

he had issued instructions for his divisions to retire from the White Oak road. Ayres' divisions were to move first, to be followed in turn by Crawford's and Griffin's. Warren warned Meade that, if he altered the march order during the night, it would produce wholesale confusion which would render all his "operations nugatory". To escape from this impasse, Warren informed Meade that, on his own initiative, he had decided to send Ayres' division to Sheridan. At the same time, he would take Crawford's and Griffin's divisions and move against the Rebels' flank and rear. Warren, however, cautioned army headquarters that, with the Confederates holding Gravelly Run below Dr. Boisseau's, he could not "accomplish the apparent objects" of Meade's directive. As a result of a break in the telegraph line, this message was delayed in transmission. [41]

After he had handed the signal officer the dispatch addressed to Meade, Warren (at 11 p. m.) drafted an order implementing this decision. Instead of halting his command near the Boydton plank road, Ayres would proceed down the plank road to Dinwiddie Court House and report to Sheridan. Crawford and Griffin, upon receipt of this order, were to halt and mass their divisions. The staff officers entrusted with the delivery of these orders would report to Warren the

positions currently occupied by Crawford's and Griffin's commands.[42]

A number of problems, however, had arisen to plague the V Corps. Not the least of these was the shortage of staff officers. (On the evening of the 31st, there were only six staff officers at Warren's headquarters.) When Warren had moved to comply with Meade's 9 p. m. order, he had been forced to detail one officer to contact each of the three division commanders. In addition, Warren had to send a member of his staff, Major Gentry, to get in touch with General Bartlett. In trying to reach Bartlett's command post, Major Gentry had blundered into the Confederate roadblock. When Gentry returned to report what had happened, Warren called for Major Cope. The major had just returned from Dr. Boisseau's. Cope, who knew the way, was detailed to carry the message to Bartlett. Furthermore, Warren had to send an officer to order up the pioneers, and guide them to the plank road crossing of Gravelly Run. At the same time, another aide (Captain Benyaurd) was sent to check on the condition of the crossing.[43]

In the White Oak sector, the opposing lines were very close. If intelligence of the movement was to be kept from reaching the ears of the Confederates, the Union officers

would have to forego the use of drums, bugles, and loud commands in arousing their units. Every order had to be relayed by word of mouth from each commander to his subordinate. As was to be expected, considerable time was lost while these orders were filtering down from the generals to the non-commissioned officers. To awaken the men, the sergeants and corporals had to shake them. [44]

To make matters worse, the night was "intensely dark and stormy". At the time that the staff officers reached Crawford's and Griffin's headquarters with Warren's 11 o'clock order, they discovered that the two divisions had not moved. By 1 a. m., the aides had returned to Warren's command post with this information. [45]

In the meantime, Meade's headquarters had been in frequent contact with General Humphreys' II Corps. When the decision to recall the V Corps was made, Chief of Staff Webb telegraphed Humphreys. At 9:10 p. m., Humphreys was directed to have his men reoccupy the position held during the morning. The II Corps was to anchor its left flank on Mrs. Butler's and hold "the return". [46] Fifteen minutes later, Webb repeated this message. In addition, the chief of staff informed Humphreys, "General Warren is to be left free to act

and is to send a division to General Sheridan at once". [47]

In the wake of Meade's 10:15 communication altering Warren's orders, Webb sent another wire to Humphreys. The leader of the II Corps was informed that Warren was to move down the Crump road and attack the Rebel force opposing Sheridan in the rear with two divisions. Warren's third division was to join Sheridan by way of the Boydton plank road. In view of these developments, Humphreys was to remain on the defensive and strengthen his position. [48]

Replying to Webb's telegram, Humphreys announced that, according to the schedule he had worked out, his corps would fall back just before daybreak. His troops would reoccupy the rifle pits held on the morning of the 31st. [49]

Humphreys also dispatched a message to Warren. Besides informing Warren of the orders he had received from army headquarters, Humphreys wanted to know at what time the V Corps would march. Humphreys proposed to synchronize his movements with Warren's. [50]

Humphreys' communication reached Warren's headquarters at 12:20 a. m. Acknowledging the message, Warren pointed out that, at first, Meade had directed him to withdraw immediately the V Corps from the White Oak road sector. Subsequently, he had been advised to attack the

Rebels with two divisions of his V Corps, while sending a third down the plank road to reinforce Sheridan. Colonel Wainwright, with the corps artillery, was to remain on the plank road. Warren also expressed his belief that the position currently occupied by Bartlett's brigade would compel the Confederate force which confronted Sheridan to withdraw before morning.[51]

Since the telegraph was not functioning properly, it was 11:45 p. m. before Meade's headquarters learned that the Gravelly Run bridge had been destroyed and it would take considerable time to rebuild. Meade accordingly dashed off a message to Warren. He inquired about the possibility of using an alternate route to send the division to Sheridan's support. Meade wanted to know if any time could be saved by sending the reinforcements by way of the Quaker road. After pointing out to Warren that time was of the essence, Meade wrote, "Sheridan cannot maintain himself at Dinwiddie without re-enforcements, and yours are the only ones that can be sent." Warren was urged to, "Use every exertion to get the troops to ... [Sheridan] as soon as possible". In case it became necessary, Warren was to use both the Boydton plank and Quaker roads to rush assistance to Sheridan. After

signing the dispatch, Meade added a postscript, "If Sheridan is not re-enforced in time and compelled to fall back he will retire by the Vaughan road". [52]

At the same time, Meade telegraphed Grant. Meade informed his superior of the contents of the message which he had sent to Warren. Furthermore, Meade had apparently accepted Warren's thesis that the Confederates would fall back during the night. He informed Grant, "I think it is possible the enemy may retire from Sheridan's front to-night fearing an attack from the rear". [53]

It took Meade's 11:45 p. m. communication one hour and a quarter to reach Warren's headquarters. When he read the dispatch, Warren was shocked to discover that the Union brass was displaying "so much solicitude for General Sheridan's position and the necessity of re-enforcing him directly". Warren felt that Sheridan's plight must be desperate if Meade were willing for the V Corps to forego its scheduled attack on the Confederate rear to march to Sheridan's assistance. Examining his maps, Warren discovered that, if his troops moved to Dinwiddie Court House by way of the Quaker road, as suggested by Meade, it would require a march of over ten miles. Since the night was far advanced, Warren calculated that, if his troops marched via the route

outlined by Meade, it would be impossible for them to reach Dinwiddie Court House before 8 a. m. By that time, the soldiers of the V Corps would be too late to be of any use to Sheridan in holding Dinwiddie Court House.

In the event that the Confederates occupied Dinwiddie Court House, Warren knew that a Union attack down the Boydton plank road would take them in the rear. Furthermore, a movement down the plank road would enable the entire V Corps to march as a unit. If one division were sent around by the Quaker road (as Meade proposed), it would separate Warren's corps into three groups. A hard night march, on top of the previous day's fighting, would certainly sap the vigor of his soldiers, Warren believed. Accordingly, they could not be expected to go into action with much enthusiasm. [54]

In view of these considerations, Warren determined to disregard Meade's suggestion. Warren would hold Crawford's and Griffin's divisions where they were until such time as he learned that General Ayres' troops had established contact with Sheridan's cavalry. This time, Warren theorized, would not be wasted, because Crawford's and Griffin's badly jaded soldiers would be able to get some

needed rest. [55]

Having arrived at this decision, Warren (at 1:20 a. m.) informed Meade that he believed the pioneers would complete the bridge across Gravelly Run before his infantry could possibly reach the Quaker road. If, however, he was wrong, Warren promised to have Ayres' division follow the route proposed by Meade. Warren also informed Meade that he had heard from Captain Benyaurd, who was in charge of the work on the bridge. The captain had reported that he thought it would not take the pioneers more than one hour to complete the structure. [56]

It was about 10 p. m. when General Ayres received Warren's 9:35 order directing him to fall back to the Boydton plank road. To reach the road, Ayres' division had to beat its way through about two miles of exceedingly difficult country and cross a branch of Gravelly Run. By the time that Ayres reached Mrs. Butler's, he received the order directing him to march his command down the Boydton plank road. Leaving his soldiers to draw rations from the supply train which they met, Ayres hastened to Warren's headquarters. Here, Ayres was informed by Warren that Sheridan had been hard-pressed and needed assistance badly. It was impressed on Ayres that he must exert himself to get his division to

Dinwiddie Court House. The general then rejoined his command.[57]

At 2:05 a. m., Warren received a message from Captain Benyaurd announcing that the bridge was open for traffic. Warren immediately relayed this news to Meade and Ayres.[58]

As soon as General Ayres learned that Benyaurd's detachment had finished the bridge across Gravelly Run, he put his command into motion. Gwyn's brigade took the lead as the division moved down the plank road. According to Ayres, there had been very little delay at the bridge. The plank road was good enough, but the fatigue of the night march, in conjunction with yesterday's battle, had pushed the men to the limit of their endurance. As was customary, the men marched for 50 minutes and then were allowed to rest for ten minutes. During these stops, many of the soldiers fell sound asleep. To get the column moving again, "the officers had to use violence" to get the men on their feet. By 4 o'clock, the head of Ayres' column had penetrated to within one mile of Dinwiddie Court House. Ayres now encountered one of Sheridan's staff officers. This officer had left Dinwiddie Court House at 3:20 and was carrying a dispatch from Sheridan to Warren.[59]

Ayres was told by the staff officer that his column had arrived sooner than it was expected. In fact, Ayres' division had come a mile too far. The aide announced that Ayres should have turned into the Brooks road. If he had, the staff officer remarked, the division could have taken the Confederates from the rear. Ayres accordingly reversed his line of march. Returning to the Brooks road, the head of the division turned into it just as dawn started to break. The staff officer did not remain with Ayres to show him the way, but galloped off to deliver Sheridan's message to Warren.

Shortly after the division had started down the Brooks road, General Ayres sighted a lone Rebel picket sitting on a rail fence. Spotting the approaching column, the Confederate leaped off the fence, mounted his horse and rode off. Ayres halted his column and threw out a strong skirmish line. The skirmishers were directed to feel their way toward Dinwiddie Court House. Ayres believed that if there were any Confederates holed up in the area between the Brooks road and the court house, they would certainly be trapped between his soldiers and Sheridan's cavalry.

When the skirmishers had moved off, the column resumed its advance along the Brooks road. Colonel Swan recalled, "The march along the Brooks road was quite joyous,

A clear day was breaking, and the cavalry bugles away to the left and then nearer were playing lively airs that told that the enemy had flown." Near the junction of the Adams and Brooks roads, Ayres encountered General Sheridan. When Ayres reported to Sheridan, he was directed to mass his division in the open fields west of the junction and let his men prepare their coffee. Taking position in the designated fields, Ayres' division rested on its arms until 2 p. m. [60]

The staff officer bearing Sheridan's message reached Warren's headquarters at 4:50 a. m. Upon reading the dispatch, Warren learned that Custer's division, which was deployed astride the Adams road, was guarding the approaches to Dinwiddie Court House. Sheridan reported that the Confederate main line of resistance covered the road linking the Adams road with Fitzgerald's ford. Since Sheridan had received an erroneous scrap of information indicating that Warren had one division at J. Boisseau's, he mistakenly believed that the V Corps was in the rear and almost on the flank of this Rebel battle line. Accordingly, Sheridan proposed to hold on to his position at Dinwiddie Court House. If the Rebels moved against Custer, Sheridan wanted Warren to hurl the division based at J. Boisseau's against the

Southerners' left flank and rear. Even if the Confederates did not attack, Sheridan wanted the V Corps to go over to the offensive. The cavalry, Sheridan promised, would co-operate and try to seize the road linking Adams' plantation with Fitzgerald's ford. In case the cavalry was able to carry out its assignment, Sheridan believed that Warren would be able to bag Pickett's entire command. The aggressive Sheridan had written, "Do not fear my leaving here [Dinwiddie Court House]. If the enemy remain I shall fight at daylight". [61]

Warren was distressed to learn that Sheridan had a mistaken impression of the tactical situation. There were no elements of the V Corps at J. Boisseau's. The closest that any of the units of the V Corps had been to J. Boisseau's was Dr. Boisseau's. It was a mile and one-fourth from the doctor's to J. Boisseau's. Furthermore, during the night, Bartlett's brigade had been recalled from Dr. Boisseau's. Warren knew it would be impossible for him to carry out the plan of operations advanced by Sheridan. [62]

Following the receipt of Sheridan's message, Warren left his headquarters and returned to the White Oak road. With dawn approaching, Warren wanted to give his personal supervision to the movements of Crawford's and Griffin's divisions. [63]

It was about midnight when Bartlett's brigade evacuated its position at Dr. Boisseau's. The dark night, in conjunction with the narrow "wood road", rendered marching conditions very difficult. Almost three hours elapsed before the last of Bartlett's troops rejoined Griffin's division near the White Oak road. Bartlett's soldiers were allowed only a short rest. About 5 a. m., Griffin received his marching orders. One of Warren's staff officers rode up to Griffin's command post, and told the general "to move the First Division with all possible dispatch, via the J. Boisseau house, and report to General Sheridan". Griffin immediately alerted his three brigade commanders to hold their units ready to move. [64]

Since the Confederates were known to be occupying in force the fortifications covering the junction of the Claiborne and White Oak roads, the V Corps officers thought it would be necessary to exercise a great degree of caution in executing the shift to the left. To screen his division's withdrawal from the rifle pits covering the White Oak road, Griffin directed General Gregory to have his pickets remain in position. After the division had moved out, the pickets would be recalled and fall in behind Bartlett's brigade. [65]

Chamberlain's brigade took the lead when Griffin's division took up the march. At this hour, General Warren did not know that Pickett's task force was falling back on Five Forks. So far as Warren's information went, he expected to meet the Rebels near J. Boisseau's. They had been there, he knew, as late as midnight. Sheridan, in his 3 a. m. dispatch from Dinwiddie Court House, had distinctly informed Warren that the Confederates were still there, and that the V Corps' advance would take them on their flank and rear. Not knowing when he might encounter the foe, Griffin had Chamberlain's brigade advance in line of battle. Under the impression that he would probably strike the Confederates before he reached J. Boisseau's, Chamberlain moved with great care. Gregory's and Bartlett's brigades swung along in column by battalions behind Chamberlain's. Griffin's line of march led westward across the fields south of the White Oak road. When Chamberlain's soldiers reached the Crump road, they wheeled to the left, the Crump road now served as Griffin's line of advance.[66]

Since there was a distinct possibility of a Confederate counterstroke, Warren had to be extremely careful when it came to withdrawing Crawford's division. To cover

his retrogressive movement, Crawford formed his division for battle. Coulter's brigade took position on the left; Baxter's brigade held the center; while Kellogg's troops watched the right. Baxter's troops were the last to retire. The 39th Massachusetts, deployed as skirmishers, covered Baxter's withdrawal. Warren accompanied Baxter's command until he became convinced that the Rebels had no notion of following the V Corps. Besides watching the enemy, the 39th Massachusetts helped to check straggling.

Both Coulter's and Baxter's brigades marched in line of battle. Kellogg, who held the post of danger, had his command move in column by regiments. In the event of a Confederate attack, Kellogg could quickly deploy his soldiers to the right and rear. After detaching a strong force of skirmishers to keep the Rebels occupied, Crawford's division marched off toward the west.

As soon as the division was well on its way, the officers in charge of the skirmishers reassembled their men. They then hastened off to rejoin their units. The Confederates, however, made no effort to follow the V Corps.[67]

General Warren's escort, after the departure of the corps, retired along the "wood road" toward the plank road.

The cavalrymen had the task of turning back any men or supply wagons that had not received information regarding the V Corps' withdrawal from the White Oak road.

Warren remained with Crawford until after the head of the division had turned into the Crump road. Convinced by this time that he had been successful in his efforts to disengage his corps, Warren left Crawford. Accompanied by his staff, Warren rode forward and joined Griffin. It was a little after 9 a. m. when Warren reached Griffin's command post. [68]

At J. Boisseau's, Griffin's vanguard encountered Devin's cavalry division, which was advancing up the Adams road. It was about 7 a. m. when Griffin's troops established contact with Sheridan's cavalry. Griffin stopped his division and reported to General Sheridan as directed. Sheridan ordered Griffin to halt his troops, mass them, and await further orders. The bodies of the men and the horses killed in yesterday's fighting were scattered about the area. A soldier in the 118th Pennsylvania recalled that, as the column came to a halt:

> — General Sheridan and his staff emerged from a neighboring wood. His appearance had not become familiar to the soldiers of the 5th Corps, nor had they

> yet been impressed with that personal magnetism which roused all fighting men with whom he came in contact. [69]

When Sheridan rode up, he asked Chamberlain where Warren was. To this inquiry, Chamberlain replied that he thought Warren was at the rear of the column.

"That's just where I should expect him to be!", said Sheridan. (Warren's reason for being at the rear while disengaging his corps has already been discussed.) The imputation cast on Warren's valor by this remark to one of Warren's subordinates could not be considered productive of good discipline, even if there had been a shadow of truth in it. The officers and men of the V Corps, however, knew differently. "Warren was never the one to be in the rear when there was a fight going on. When anyone wanted to find him during a battle, they had to go to the front line to do it." [70]

Griffin, in accordance with Sheridan's instructions, massed his division across the Adams road, one-half mile south of J. Boisseau's. When Warren joined Griffin, he learned that Ayres' division was concentrated about three-quarters of a mile below Griffin's, near J. M. Brook's. Crawford's soldiers reached J. Boisseau's shortly after Warren.

The division halted, and Crawford allowed his men to prepare their breakfast and rest. [71]

While Warren was conversing with Griffin and waiting for instructions from Sheridan, a staff officer rode up. The aide handed Warren a message signed by Chief of Staff Webb. Glancing at the dispatch, Warren learned that, as soon as the V Corps rendezvoused with the cavalry, he was to report to Sheridan for orders. Furthermore, General Meade wanted Warren to submit a progress report. It was a little before 9:30 when this communication was delivered to Warren. [72]

General Webb had signed this order at 6 a. m. At the same time, Meade had sent a telegram to Grant. Meade had concluded his message with these words, "Warren will be at or near Dinwiddie soon with his whole corps and will require further orders." [73]

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, these dispatches indicate that General Warren was responsible to Meade up until 6 o'clock on April 1. Up until then, Warren "had met the intentions and expectations of his commanding officer, and had even exceeded, or anticipated them". Two divisions of the V Corps reported to Sheridan by or before 7 a. m. -- two and one-half hours before the receipt of Webb's 6 o'clock communication. [74]

Warren immediately moved to comply with Meade's request. He reported that the V Corps had crossed Gravelly Run and was massed at J. Boisseau's. Warren pointed out that, while he hadn't met Sheridan "personally", Griffin had spoken with the cavalry leader. Delighted by his success in disengaging his corps, Warren informed headquarters, "The enemy did not follow with a single man when we left the White Oak road this morning". Warren also breached the subject of re-victualing his command. He believed that his troops could draw rations by way of the Boydton plank road. [75]

Warren's failure to report directly to Sheridan might have been a contributing factor to his relief later in the day. Colonel Porter was "positive that this delay in reporting was very annoying to Sheridan". Several other commentators also subscribed to this view. In fact, after resting for several hours, it seems to have occurred to Warren that it might be a good idea to have an interview with Sheridan. About 11 a. m., when he finally contacted the cavalry leader, Warren pronounced his manner "friendly and cordial". At this time, Sheridan was dismounted. After the two officers had conversed for a few minutes, Sheridan called for his horse and rode off toward the front. Following Sheridan's departure, Warren rejoined his command. [76]

Except for a daring coup carried out by three members of the 16th Michigan, the soldiers of the V Corps spent a quiet morning. Not knowing that the V Corps had been withdrawn from the White Oak road, the three Michiganders passed to the west of the II Corps' picket line. The soldiers planned to rejoin their regiment, which was assigned to Bartlett's brigade. Encountering a captain and 14 men of the 16th North Carolina Cavalry Battalion, the Yankees forced the Southerners to surrender. Accompanied by their prisoners, the bluecoats rejoined their regiment south of J. Boisseau's.[77]

Following the receipt of Meade's directive ordering the II Corps to fall back and occupy the fortifications covering the Boydton plank road, Humphreys drafted an order calculated to implement his superior's decision. The retrogressive movement was to begin on the right by Hays' and Mott's divisions. These two units were scheduled to retire at 3:30 a. m. Hays' division on the extreme right would occupy a line extending from Armstrong's Mill to the Taylor house; Mott's command in the center was to hold the rifle pits between the Taylor and Rainey houses. General Miles' division on the left was to fall back into the trenches covering the Boydton plank road. Miles' left flank

would rest on Gravelly Run, while his right flank held "the return". This dispatch went out from corps headquarters at 1:30 a. m.[78]

At the stipulated hour, Colonel Olmsted (whose brigade had been shifted to the left on the previous afternoon to occupy the rifle pits vacated by Pearce's troops) mustered his command. By 6 o'clock, Olmsted's had reported to General Hays. The division commander had Olmsted's soldiers reoccupy the trenches on the left of McIvor's brigade, which they had formerly held.[79]

Throughout the morning and early afternoon, Hays' division took it easy. At this time, Hays had two brigades — McIvor's and Olmsted's — in the trenches, and one in reserve, Smyth's. About 2 p. m., Hays issued instructions for McIvor and Olmsted to see if they could advance their lines closer to the Confederate main line of resistance. Covered by a strong skirmish line, the two brigades pressed forward. The Confederate outposts were easily driven in. All told, the Yankees advanced their line about 300 yards. On the right, McIvor's brigade was in contact with the XXIV Corps on the east side of Hatcher's Run. To secure their gains, McIvor's

and Olmsted's troops quickly threw up a new line of earthworks. Smyth's brigade moved up and occupied the trenches recently vacated by Olmsted's troops. The ground gained by Hays' blueclads on the afternoon of the 1st would be used by the division as its jumping off point when it moved against Fort Powell. The attack on this stronghold was scheduled for 4 a. m. on the 2d.[80]

Mott's division returned without any incident worthy of note to the position which it had held on the previous morning. Upon reoccupying the breastworks between the Rainey and Taylor houses, Mott placed McAllister's and Pearce's troops in the rifle pits; De Trobriand's brigade was posted in reserve.[81]

Miles started pulling his troops back from the ground which they had seized near the White Oaks road at 3:30 a. m. The Confederates made no effort to harass Miles' infantrymen as they retired. Accordingly, the withdrawal went off as scheduled. When he reached the Boydton plank road, Miles placed Scott's brigade on the left. Scott, who would protect the II Corps' left flank, rested his left on Gravelly Run. General Ramsey's brigade held the rifle pits

on the right of Scott's command. The brigade commanded by General Madill held "the return" on the right of Ramsey's bluecoats. Madill's right flank was in contact with McAllister's left at the Rainey house. Miles' other brigade, Nugent's, was held in reserve. During the day, Nugent's command was called upon to furnish large fatigue details for work on the fortifications. [82]

Not wishing to waste the day completely, Miles saw that his men were supplied with rations and ammunition. In addition, the brigade commanders were directed to inspect their units to insure that their men's arms and accoutrements were in order. [83]

With the exception of one battery, the II Corps' artillery was not engaged on the 1st. Shortly after daybreak, the cannoneers of Battery B, 1st Rhode Island which was in position at the Crow house, opened fire on Fort Powell. The Rebels replied. After a short duel, the artillery fell silent. During the late afternoon, Battery B, 1st New Jersey was again placed in battery near the Rainey house. Since an uneasy quiet had settled over Humphreys' sector, the V Corps' artillery, which was temporarily attached to the II Corps, remained parked throughout the day. [84]

By the evening of the 31st, the last of the trains belonging to the Army of the Potomac had crossed Rowanty Creek. As soon as the last wagon had reached the west bank of the creek, General Mackenzie relayed this information to General Meade. At the same time, Mackenzie requested a fresh assignment. [85]

When Grant learned that Mackenzie's division was looking for work, he ordered Ord to send the unit to Dinwiddie Court House. [86] Upon the receipt of Grant's telegram, Ord issued instructions for Mackenzie "to get off as soon in the morning as possible". [87] Grant was not satisfied with this move on Ord's part. A terse message went out under Grant's signature, "I want Mackenzie to go to-night. It may be too late to-morrow morning." [88] Grant also informed Meade of his plans to rush Mackenzie to Sheridan's assistance. [89]

It was too late, however, to change Mackenzie's orders. Accordingly, Mackenzie's division did not get under way until early on the morning of the 1st. It was about 3:30 o'clock when Mackenzie's troopers broke camp and crossed Rowanty Creek. Marching by way of the Monk's Neck and Vaughan roads, the hard-riding troopers headed for Dinwiddie Court House. [90]

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Notes on Part VI

The V Corps Reports to Sheridan

1 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 817.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 821; Charles H. Porter, "The Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, VI, 239; History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 571-572. Bartlett's was the largest brigade in Griffin's division. At this time, Bartlett's brigade mustered nearly 2,500 officers and men. So far, in the Five Forks campaign, Bartlett's troops had not been seriously engaged. Three of Bartlett's regiments, however, were on detached duty at the time that the brigade was ordered to march to Sheridan's assistance.

4 Porter, "The Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 239-240; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 821.

5 Porter, "The Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 240.

6 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 821.

7 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 363.

8 Ibid., 364.

9 Ibid., 338.

10 Ibid., 364.

11 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 817.

12 Ibid., 818, 820. Since the plank road was the direct route over which Sheridan communicated with Grant, it seems "almost incredible" that the news that the bridge across Gravelly Run was out had not reached Grant's GHQ. Undoubtedly it had. On the 29th, 30th, and the early part of the 31st, staff officers and couriers were continually crossing the run and it was fordable. It had started to rain on the 30th and continued until the next afternoon. Streams that were easily passed on the 29th and 30th became difficult to cross on the 31st. Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 243-244.

13 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 364. By this time, Warren had thoroughly reconnoitered the Confederate defenses covering the White Oak road. He informed headquarters, "We can see the enemy's breast-works for two miles east along the White Oak road. If they are well manned they cannot be carried. I am within 200 yards of where they turn off north from the White Oak road."

14 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 818. It was about four and one-half miles from Mrs. Wilson's to Meade's GHQ. Grant's headquarters were at Dabney's Mill, four miles from Warren's. About five and one-half miles separated Warren's and Sheridan's command posts. Grant's, Meade's, and Warren's former headquarters on the Quaker road were connected by telegraph. The only contact between Sheridan's headquarters at Dinwiddie Court House and the other command posts was by courier.

15 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 338-339.

16 Ibid., 339.

17 Ibid., 340.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 337.

20 O. R., Series I, Vol. XOVI, pt. III, 364.

21 Ibid., 365.

22 Ibid.

23 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 338.

24 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 818.

25 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 365.

26 Ibid., 365-366. Meade informed Grant that he had ordered

Warren to carry out the plan of operations advanced by the lieutenant general commanding.

27 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 820.

28 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 341.

29 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 366.

30 Ibid.

31 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 820.

32 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 366.

33 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 821.

34 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 341.

35 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 343-344.

36 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 342.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 381.

39 Ibid., 367.

40 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 821-822.

41 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 367, 417. Throughout the night, there had been a continual delay in the passage of orders between Meade's and Warren's headquarters. Colonel Swan attributed the lag to the fact that the telegraph line ended at Warren's former command post on the Quaker road. Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 345.

42 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 822.

43 Ibid. The staff officers present were: Colonel Henry C. Bankhead, Majors William T. Gentry and Emmor B. Cope, Captains William H. H. Benyaurd, James W. Wadsworth, and Gordon Winslow.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 822-823.

46 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 351.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 352.

49 Ibid.

50 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 823.

51 Ibid.

52 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 367.

53 Ibid., 342-343.

54 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 823-824; Powell, The Fifth Army Corps, 794.

55 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 824.

56 Ibid.

57 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 363-364. During the halt, cattle were butchered and the beef distributed.

58 Ibid., 364; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 824.

59 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 364; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 869, 876. Bowerman's brigade brought up the rear of Ayres' column.

60 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 364-365; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 869, 871, 874, 876. The 8th Maryland was one of the regiments which Ayres deployed and threw forward as skirmishers.

61 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 419-420.

62 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 824.

63 Ibid.; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 371.

64 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 846, 863.

65 Ibid., 854; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 371.

66 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 371; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 846, 849; Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 246.

67 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 879-880, 885, 889, 896; Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 246-247.

68 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 825.

69 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 371; History of the Corn Exchange Regiment, 575-576.

70 Powell, The Fifth Army Corps, 798.

71 Ibid.; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 371.

72 Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 247; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 825-826.

73 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 385.

74 Powell, The Fifth Army Corps, 794.

75 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 418. Commenting on the Confederate failure to attack his corps as it was disengaging, Warren observed:

> It was a matter of wonder at the time, and has been ever since, how the enemy permitted our thus withdrawing without following us up to see the way we took, even if it had been with only a regiment. He would thus early have gained the knowledge that our infantry was moving toward his detached force, under General Pickett, which we beat so badly toward evening. General Lee could then have re-enforced his detached troops or timely warned them to withdraw. I kept my skirmish line halted a long while after my advance set out in the morning, so as to cover the movement as late as possible, and deployed my escort to fall back on the Boydton plank road and delude any pursuing force, if possible, into the belief that we had all retired in that direction. It was a want of vigilance that was most rare on their part and betokened that apathy which results from a hopelessness as to the use of further resistance. O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 826.

76 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 829; Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 247-248.

77 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 419. The three Michiganders were: W. K. Cronkite, A. McCrory, and William Stubel.

78 Ibid., 411.

79 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 760, 762.

80 Ibid., 757, 760, 762, 764, 766; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 411.

81 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 777, 781, 785, 789. Pearce's brigade was stationed on the right and McAllister's on the left.

82 Ibid., 711, 714, 724, 734, 744.

83 Ibid., 745.

84 Ibid., 791-792, 899.

85 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 382.

86 Ibid., 378.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid.

89 Ibid., 341.

90 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1244.

THE BATTLE OF FIVE FORKS

Part VII

The Battle

A little before 10 p. m. on the 31st, General Pickett received an important piece of news from General Munford. The cavalry officer's scouts had captured two soldiers from Warren's familiar V Corps. These infantrymen belonged to Bartlett's brigade, which had pushed southwestward from the White Oak road and occupied the high ground at Dr. Boisseau's. The position held by this Federal unit was north of Gravelly Run and on the left and rear of Pickett's task force. It is uncertain whether Pickett knew the exact location of Bartlett's command. Nevertheless, the general decided that it would be unwise for his troops to try to hold the ground gained in the day's fighting.

According to Fitz Lee, Pickett believed that Bartlett's brigade was spearheading an advance of the entire V Corps. Pickett had already determined that Sheridan's cavalry held Dinwiddie Court House in force. Now, to make matters worse, he knew that the Union leaders were rushing

infantry to Sheridan's assistance. Confronted by this situation, Pickett felt that he should not expose his force needlessly. It was better, he concluded, to take position where he could discharge his principal duty, which was to afford protection to the right flank of the Army of Northern Virginia and the approaches to the Southside Railroad. [1]

Consequently, orders were issued for the task force to pull back. The withdrawal was slated to start at 4 a. m., and would follow the line of the previous day's advance. By the hour fixed for the return march, it was apparent to Pickett and his officers that their left was being threatened by another Union column (Ayres' division) pushing down the Boydton plank road. As a result of the usual delays associated with breaking camp, it was daybreak (about 5 a. m.) before the last of Pickett's five infantry brigades (Corse's) began to slog northward through the mud. General Munford's troopers covered the rear of Pickett's retreating column. At the same time, Rooney Lee's and Rosser's divisions recrossed Chamberlain's Bed, and returned to Five Forks by way of Little Five Forks. [2]

Sheridan's vanguard (Custer's division) nipped at the heels of the retreating column. Even though the Federals

failed to attack, they always remained in sight or close enough to know what was transpiring. Sheridan, however, neither tried to force a fight nor to cut off the Rebel guns and trains which had started for Five Forks at 2 a. m. [3]

The artillery had an uneventful march through the spring mud and by sunrise was parked on the ground it had occupied before yesterday's engagement. Hungry gunners, finding no rations, had to rob their horses of some of the animals' corn. Parched over the fire, the corn constituted the artillerists' breakfast. Pickett probably fared no better. Even so, he brought back all his wounded, and his rear guard (Munford's division) watched Sheridan's movements closely. The Federals, Pickett concluded, at the moment did not aim to turn his right flank. Instead, they appeared to want to push a force between his task force and Anderson's corps on his left. Subsequently, Pickett recalled "that he sent Lee a telegram to this effect and asked that a diversion be made to prevent his isolation." [4]

When the infantry reached Five Forks during the forenoon, Pickett sent his wagons across Hatcher's Run. He would also have deployed his task force on the north bank of the stream, Pickett recalled, had he not received a telegram

from Lee urging him to, "Hold Five Forks at all hazards. Protect road to Ford's Depot and prevent Union forces from striking the Southside Railroad. Regret exceedingly your forced withdrawal, and your inability to hold the advantage you had gained."

This message was, in a sense, justification for the course Pickett had pursued: Lee recognized that the withdrawal had been forced. At the same time, the telegram from GHQ forbade a farther retreat, for compelling reasons. If Five Forks were abandoned and the Federals were able to reach the Southside Railroad and cut the wagon roads leading to the west along the south bank of the Appomattox, all would be lost. Again, if Pickett's task force gave up Five Forks, the numerically superior Unionists would be able to pass to the westward along the White Oak road, circle the headwaters of Hatcher's Run, and turn the Confederate right flank. The position at Five Forks was weak, in itself; but, strategically, it was the most important on that sector of the front. It simply had to be defended. [5]

Pickett obediently halted at Five Forks. He wrote subsequently that he assumed his telegram concerning his withdrawal had been received at army headquarters.

Accordingly, Pickett believed that Lee, in addition to making a diversion in his favor, would send him reinforcements. Operating on these assumptions, Pickett "may not have been vigilant or careful in deploying his troops to meet possible attack that day". [6]

The general posted Rooney Lee's cavalry division on the right, along the west boundary of Gilliam's field. On his left, Pickett placed a regiment of Munford's mounted division — the 8th Virginia Cavalry. This unit was to maintain contact with Brigadier General William P. Roberts' under strength brigade. Roberts' command picketed the area between Pickett's left and the Confederate fortifications covering the junction of the Claiborne and White Oak roads. Roberts' troopers were stout fighters but, like most of the Confederate organizations, the brigade had an acute shortage of experienced field officers. A stronger brigade should have been given this assignment. [7]

The Confederate main line of resistance covering Five Forks was held by the five infantry brigades of Pickett's task force. General Ransom's North Carolina brigade of Johnson's division was posted on the left. To afford protection to his left flank which was resting in the air,

Ransom refused it. General Wallace's South Carolina brigade joined Ransom on the right. Next, and extending as far west as Five Forks, was Steuart's brigade. To Steuart's right was Mayo's command. Beyond Mayo, as the right flank element, was Corse's brigade. Corse's, Mayo's, and Steuart's brigades hailed from Virginia. Two of these three units (Mayo's and Steuart's) had been with Pickett at Gettysburg. [8]

Except for the refused left flank, Pickett's main line of resistance paralleled the White Oak road. The frontage held was about one mile and three-quarters in length. To strengthen their position, the Confederate officers had their men dig in. Pegram's six guns were placed along the line wherever the cannoneers could find fields of fire in the wooded countryside. Three of Pegram's pieces were unlimbered on Corse's right; the remainder were placed in battery at Five Forks. The four guns manned by the cannoneers of Captain William M. McGregor's Battery were sent to General Ransom. [9]

The remaining units of Munford's division were stationed along the Ford's Church Road, which led northward to the railroad. Rosser's division, which would constitute Pickett's strategic reserve, was posted north of Hatcher's

Run. In addition, Rosser's troopers would watch the train. His division had been given this assignment, Rosser recalled, because the sore-backed, hard-ridden horses needed attention.[10]

Many years later, at Warren's court martial, Fitz Lee explained why the Confederates had made their dispositions along the White Oak road with less care than usual. Lee recalled:

> When we moved towards Five Forks, hearing nothing more of ... /Warren's/ infantry's move which we had heard of the night before, I thought that the movements just there, for the time being, were suspended, and we were not expecting any attack that afternoon, so far as I know. Our throwing up works and taking position were simply general matters of military precaution.[11]

Fitz Lee believed that his troopers and Pickett's infantry could handle any thrust by Sheridan's cavalry. If the Union infantry left their lines to support Sheridan, then a corresponding force from Anderson's corps would be rushed to Five Forks. Such was the reasoning of Fitz Lee as well as of Pickett.[12]

Either Fitz Lee and Pickett were ignorant of the details of the battle of White Oak road, or they failed to realize its significance. Anderson's corps was reduced by the losses suffered in the bitter fighting on the 31st, and

two of its four brigades were already serving with Pickett. It was in no condition to render any further assistance to the forces on its right. Apparently, however, neither Fitz Lee nor Pickett realized this. Along with the rest of the Army of Northern Virginia, they cherished the general belief -- a belief which helped to create a special esprit de corps -- that Lee somehow could contrive to achieve the "impossible", even though, in this case, the line was stretched to the breaking point. [13]

The good showing made by his infantry in the battle of White Oak road on the 31st had not deceived General Lee. He realized on the morning of the 1st that the situation was growing increasingly grave, even though his troops still grimly held the Petersburg lines. When he addressed a letter to President Jefferson Davis, Lee explained that when the Federals had extended their lines to Dinwiddie Court House, it had cut the Army of Northern Virginia off from the depot at Stony Creek. The general reminded the President that the forage for the army's cavalry had formerly been delivered to that point.

Furthermore, it would now be more difficult to give

up Petersburg, because Sheridan's rapid advance had deprived Lee of the use of the White Oak road. From his position at Dinwiddie Court House, Sheridan could sweep around Lee's right flank and cut both the Southside and the Richmond and Danville Railroads. "This", in Lee's opinion, obliged the Confederates "to prepare for the necessity of evacuating ... [their] position on the James River at once, and also to consider the best means of accomplishing it, and our future course." There was no longer any hope, Lee left Davis to infer, that time remained for a slow removal of supplies from Richmond. He would like to have the President's views on the subject, Lee concluded. The general, however, felt that the situation was so dark that his continued presence at Petersburg was necessary. If either the President or Secretary of War Breckinridge could come to Petersburg for a conference, Lee would be happy. [14]

Shortly after Lee had drafted this message, he received the message from Pickett telling of the forced withdrawal from the vicinity of Dinwiddie Court House. This was bad news. Looking at his map, Lee saw that it was only seven and one-half miles from Dinwiddie Court House to the Southside Railroad. If the railroad were to be saved,

Pickett could not afford to give ground. Lee accordingly sent his, "Hold Five Forks at all hazards" communication to Pickett. [15]

The one prospect of saving a desperate situation continued to be the possibility that Grant might blunder and expose his "army group" to a Confederate counterstroke. Lee accordingly proceeded to strengthen his position as far as practicable with artillery. He acted on the sound principle that this was the first essential to going over to the offensive in case Grant made a mistake. [16]

Brigadier General William N. Pendleton, Lee's chief of artillery, was ordered to transfer to the Petersburg lines a part of the reserve artillery. Seven guns belonging to Lieutenant Colonel William T. Poague's battalion which had been held in reserve near the Howlett Line were transferred to the Petersburg front. These guns were parked behind the sector held by Gordon's Corps. [17]

At this time, Gordon's soldiers were very close to the breaking point, inasmuch as more than one-half of them had to be continuously on duty. [18]

Beyond Gordon's right flank, A. P. Hill, who had returned that morning from an uncompleted sick leave, resumed

leadership of a corps that was little more than a shadow of itself. All of Gordon's troops, plus that part of Hill's corps east of Armstrong's Mill, now numbered only about 11,000 strong. They occupied -- it could not be said they held -- fully 11 miles of front, from the Appomattox to Hatcher's Run. [19]

Lee knew that this attenuation of his line was a desperate gamble with ruin, especially at a time when Pickett was retreating. To make matters worse, Confederate patrols now captured troops belonging to the XXIV Corps. This was the first definite information that Lee had received that at least a part of the Army of the James had slipped away from Longstreet and crossed the James River. Lee was quick to act on this information. The general reasoned that, if the XXIV Corps had reinforced the Army of the Potomac in front of Petersburg, and no other units had taken its place, then Longstreet could go over to the attack and force Grant to transfer troops back to the northside. If, however, Longstreet did not feel he could successfully launch an assault, he could dispatch part of his corps to strengthen the Petersburg front. A telegram presenting these alternatives to Longstreet left Lee's headquarters on the

morning of the 1st.[20]

Having completed his morning's business at army headquarters, Lee rode over to Anderson's command post. The general wanted to get a first-hand view of operations in that sector. Reaching the front, Lee learned that the Federals had "disappeared from the vicinity of the White Oak road". Scouts sent out by General Johnson had returned with the information that the Yankees had moved to the west, in the direction of General Pickett's front. So far as the records show, Lee heard nothing more from Pickett.[21]

While waiting at Anderson's headquarters, Lee received a telegram from Longstreet. "Old Pete", replying to Lee's earlier communication, announced that Colonel Robert Ould had told him that the Union troops remaining north of the James were Negroes. At this very minute, Longstreet observed, his scouts were trying to verify this information. Since he believed the Union gunboats would frustrate any offensive activities which his corps might undertake, Longstreet thought it would be better if he used the troops that could be spared to reinforce the Southside.[22]

Answering Longstreet's telegram, Lee directed "Old Pete" to get ready to rush troops to Petersburg in case the

scouts were able to confirm Colonel Ould's report.

Later in the day, Lee learned that General Roberts' brigade had captured several Union cavalrymen. Searching the prisoners, the Confederates found they had letters in their saddlebags which identified them as belonging to the 11th Pennsylvania Cavalry, a unit assigned to the division led by General Kautz. (At this time, the cavalry division formerly led by Kautz was commanded by Mackenzie.) Consequently, Lee fired off a wire to Longstreet asking him to ascertain what mounted units were on the northside. Longstreet sent Gary's brigade to investigate. "Old Pete"'s theory was "that General Sheridan may have taken Kautz's cavalry, as they were fresh, and left a portion of his own in their place". (Longstreet was wrong in his contention. All of Sheridan's corps had crossed the James on the night of March 26.) [23]

In addition to the smug overconfidence of Fitz Lee and Pickett, and their lack of understanding of the dread immediacy of the crisis, another factor entered the picture. It is probable that the third consideration, a very human one, led Fitz Lee and Pickett to assume that "general precaution" sufficed.

Before being recalled to Five Forks, General Rosser

had spent a day on the Nottoway River. The shad had been running in the stream. With a borrowed seine, the young general had made a fine catch. Some of these he had placed in his headquarters ambulance and brought with him to Five Forks. As soon as Rosser was ordered to post his division north of Hatcher's Run, he arranged to have the fish cleaned and split. Next, the shad were placed on sticks in front of a brisk fire. [24]

Assured "that this would provide a meal delectable at any time and incredible in the hungry days of bone-gnawing war", Rosser invited Pickett and Fitz Lee to the shad-bake. Hungry and probably half wet, Pickett gratefully accepted. He promised to join his host at the designated place in one hour. Fitz Lee, with equal satisfaction, also accepted. Neither general lost any time in preparing to keep his appointment. [25]

It was after 2 o'clock when Fitz Lee swung into his saddle. But before the general started for the shad-bake, General Munford galloped up on a foam-flecked horse and handed Lee a dispatch from Lieutenant Wythe B. Graham of the 8th Virginia Cavalry. (The lieutenant's unit had been given the task of maintaining contact between the left flank of

Pickett's main line of resistance and Roberts' brigade.) According to Graham's story, Roberts' brigade had been attacked and overpowered by the Yankees (Mackenzie's division) east of Five Forks. Roberts' brigade had been shattered by this onslaught. Some of the North Carolinians had been driven back on Anderson's lines guarding the junction of the Claiborne and White Oak roads; the rest had fled westward and carried the tidings of the disaster to Graham's unit.[26]

If this information were correct, then Sheridan had reached the White Oak road and had severed the direct line of communication between Pickett's task force and Anderson's corps. The "isolation" dreaded by Pickett was a reality. Reinforcements, if sent to him, would have to cut their way through a Union roadblock.[27]

Fitz Lee was either "impatiently hungry or uncritically skeptical". He read the dispatch and remarked, "Well, Munford, I wish you would go over in person at once and see what this means and, if necessary, order up your Division and let me hear from you." With that, the chief of cavalry rode off. Shortly thereafter, Munford saw Fitz Lee and Pickett riding up the Ford's Church road together toward Hatcher's Run. At this time, Munford knew nothing of the two

major generals' destination or of their reason for being together. [28]

The unannounced departure of the two senior officers for a point approximately one and one-fourth miles from the front left Rooney Lee in charge of operations. Rooney Lee, however, was far out on the right and had received no word that his seniors had left the field. Furthermore, Rooney Lee probably had not been told of the clash on the left, in which the Union cavalry had routed Roberts' brigade. The senior among the cavalrymen facing the foe who had struck Roberts' North Carolinians was Munford. Since Fitz Lee had been acting as chief of cavalry, Munford had been in charge of the First Division. The infantry, in the absence of Pickett, had "Maryland" Steuart as their commander. Colonel Pegram was the ranking artillerist on the field. [29]

None of these men (Rooney Lee, Munford, Steuart, or Pegram) knew that Pickett and Fitz Lee had ridden to the rear. The shad-bake was a social secret. Since the food was abundant, the affair was slow and deliberate, as every feast should be. If there was "something to drink", it probably was not shunned. Many of the Civil War officers did not

hesitate to indulge even in the presence of the enemy. If the three generals (Pickett, Fitz Lee, and Rosser) preceded or followed their dinner with a little whiskey or brandy, there was no evidence, then or thereafter, that any of the trio was inebriated. [30]

The time slipped by "pleasurably". While the generals were still picking the bones from the broiled shad, two pickets dashed up. Reporting to the high ranking officers, they announced that the Yankees were advancing on all the roads that the task force was guarding. Rosser recalled:

> These reports were made to Pickett and to Lee and as the position at Five Forks was considered as well chosen and strong but little attention was given to the enemy's advance. I was suffering from my wound and as I was not immediately in command of the pickets I took no steps to reinforce them. Indeed the pickets were a part of ... /General/ Munford's command and I, reporting direct to General Lee, and as he was present, felt little or no concern about them.

Perhaps Rosser and his feasting comrades were the less concerned over the pickets' reports because there had not been any sound of action from the front; the Federals evidently were approaching but were not attacking. The

officers at the front could be expected to cope with any small scale actions that might flare up. [31]

Shortly after 4 o'clock, Pickett asked Rosser for a courier to take a message to Five Forks. Obligingly, Rosser offered two, one of whom, according to Rosser's rule, would ride ahead of but in sight of the second. Pickett drafted his dispatch and gave it to one of the couriers. They started down the Ford's Church road. Doubtless, the conversation around Rosser's hospitable fire was resumed. Soon there came from south of the run a burst of rifle fire. In plain view, on the other side of the stream, the generals saw the leading courier captured by the Federals. At the same moment, a bluecoated battle line swept toward the Ford's Church road. [32]

On the night of the 31st, General Sheridan's headquarters were at Dinwiddie Court House. When Sheridan received word that the V Corps would report to him, he was told that Warren's troops were in position near S. Dabney's. Looking at his maps, Sheridan saw that S. Dabney's was in the angle formed by the Boydton plank and White Oak roads. Sheridan was of the opinion that if Warren had moved according to Grant's expectation, "there would appear to have

been but little chance for the escape" of Pickett's infantry which was deployed in front of Dinwiddie Court House. Accordingly, Sheridan, at 3 a. m., dispatched his, "I am holding in front of Dinwiddie Court House" message to Warren. [33]

In anticipation of a resumption of the fighting on the 1st, Custer's troopers had slept on their arms. Custer's division was posted on the high ground about three-quarters of a mile north of Dinwiddie Court House. About the time that the first streaks of dawn were appearing on the eastern horizon, Custer's scouts discovered that the Confederates, under the cover of darkness, had retired from the Federals' immediate front. Custer immediately communicated this information to Sheridan. [34] Upon the receipt of this important intelligence, the cavalry leader called for General Merritt. Sheridan directed Merritt to follow the retreating Rebels with Custer's and Devin's divisions. [35]

At this time, only two of Custer's brigades (Capehart's and Pennington's) were on the field. Wells' brigade was guarding the wagon train, which had parked for the night near the junction of the Vaughan and Monk's Neck roads. A staff officer was sent thundering off with instructions for Wells to rejoin the division. Custer led

his men up the Adams road. At the junction of the Adams and Brooks roads, Custer encountered Ayres' vanguard. So far, Custer's advance had been unopposed. In his "After Action Report", Sheridan attributed the rapid Confederate retreat in part to the advances of Ayres' division. [36]

Following the appearance of Ayres' column, Merritt determined to use Custer's division to turn the Confederate right. Since the countryside west of the Dinwiddie road was unsuited for mounted operations, Merritt had Custer dismount and deploy his troopers into line of battle. Pennington's brigade was formed on the right and Capehart's on the left. When Custer gave the word, his troops moved forward through the woods. The left flank of Capehart's brigade guided its movement at first on Chamberlain's Bed and later on, Bear Swamp. [37]

Only a few Confederates (mostly stragglers) were encountered by Custer's cavalrymen as they swept ahead. On the extreme left of Custer's battle line, the men of Capehart's brigade encountered a Confederate patrol guarding the place where the Scott road crossed Bear Swamp. After a brief stand, the greyclads beat a hasty retreat. The advance was then renewed and Custer's troops were able to penetrate

to within several hundred yards of the White Oak road before again encountering any opposition. This time, however, the aggressive Custer decided not to attack. It was apparent to Custer and his men that any farther advance would be bitterly contested. Reconnoitering the Confederate position, Custer reported:

> The enemy had evidently resolved to oppose our farther advance with the greatest determination. Heavy lines of earth-works were discovered, extending for miles /actually, about one and three-quarters miles/ in either direction along our front. In advance of these were strong barricades of rails, logs, and other obstructions. Every point seemed to be strongly manned with infantry and artillery. [38]

To test the strength of the Confederate position, Custer ordered his brigade commanders to send out combat patrols. Pickett's grim infantry easily beat off the sharp sorties launched by these patrols. Rebuffed in his efforts to find a soft spot in Pickett's main line of resistance, Custer ordered his men to suspend the attack but to hold the ground gained. [39]

General Devin's troopers had ridden out of their Crump's Farm encampment at an early hour. The division followed Custer's troopers up the Adams road. When Merritt

ordered Custer to move across country, he directed Devin to march up the Dinwiddie road and reoccupy his old position at J. Boisseau's. At J. Boisseau's, Devin encountered General Griffin's vanguard. [40]

When the position at J. Boisseau's had been secured, Devin led his troopers on toward Five Forks. Devin's advance brigade, Colonel Stagg's, was fired on as it prepared to ford Chamberlain's Bed. Scouts were thrown out. They soon returned with the information that Confederate infantry was watching the crossing and the position could not "be taken without a hard fight". Devin accordingly directed Colonel Fitzhugh to dismount his brigade. Fitzhugh's troopers were to wade the creek. When Fitzhugh gave the word, his blueclads stormed across the creek. Despite the galling fire of the Confederates, the dismounted troopers were able to carve out a bridgehead. Once the Rebels had started to give way, Stagg waved his mounted brigade to the attack. The 1st and 6th Michigan, reinforced by the 1st U. S. Cavalry of Gibbs' brigade, crossed the stream on the left of Fitzhugh's command; the 5th Michigan was used to protect the right flank of the bridgehead. In the meantime, General Gibbs had deployed his brigade (without the 1st U. S.) to cover the right flank and

rear of Devin's division. [41]

When the bridgehead had been secured, Devin determined to seize the wooded area between Chamberlain's Red and the White Oak road. When Devin gave the word, the division drove forward. Fitzhugh's dismounted battle line pressed up the Dinwiddie road "at the charging step". Fitzhugh's troopers were flanked on the left and right by their mounted comrades. The 1st and 6th Michigan and the 1st U. S. Cavalry were on Fitzhugh's left, the 5th Michigan on his right. Driving in Pickett's outposts, Devin's cavalrymen closed in on the Confederate main line of resistance.

As they approached Five Forks, the Yankees "developed a strong line of breast-works ... filled with masses of infantry". Before being checked by the fire of Pickett's infantry, Devin's mounted contingents in some places closed to within 20 yards of the works. In several instances, men from Fitzhugh's dismounted brigade even crossed the breastworks. Before being beaten off, the troopers were able to capture and drag off several prisoners. Convinced that the Confederate position was too strong to

carry, Devin's cavalrymen fell back into the woods south of the White Oak road. Devin then regrouped his division. Fitzhugh's brigade was posted on the left, and Stagg's on the right. At this time, Stagg also dismounted his command. [42]

Following Fitzhugh's and Stagg's repulse, Devin ordered up Gibbs' brigade. Gibbs dismounted and deployed his unit on the right of the 5th Michigan. The right flank of Gibbs' brigade rested near the Barnes house. One of Gibbs' regiments, the 1st U. S. Cavalry, remained mounted. [43]

On Custer's right, Pennington's brigade was in contact with the 1st Michigan. Following Devin's repulse, Lieutenant Colonel George R. Maxwell of the Michigan regiment informed Pennington that he had lost contact with the unit on his right. Maxwell told Pennington that he was going to try to re-establish a connection with the remainder of Devin's division. As soon as Maxwell's Michiganders rode off toward the east, Pennington, believing that it would be tempting disaster to hold his position with his right flank resting in the air, retired a short distance. Next, he shifted his brigade to the right. Near the Scott road, Pennington spotted Fitzhugh's brigade. Following his repulse, Fitzhugh had fallen back to regroup. Pennington halted and formed his

command in a thick belt of woods, about 600 yards south of the Confederate breastworks. The Scott road separated Pennington's and Fitzhugh's commands. While waiting for further orders, the dismounted Union troopers threw up log breastworks. [44]

It was about 11 a. m. when Sheridan's tardy wagon train reached Dinwiddie Court House. Colonel Wells permitted his men to rest until 1 p. m. At that hour, he had "boots and saddles" sounded and the troopers swung into their saddles. Proceeding to the front, Colonel Wells reported to General Custer near the left of Sheridan's battle line. [45]

One of Sheridan's three divisions, Crook's, saw very little action on the 1st. At an early hour, Crook's division marched from their camp on Great Cattail Run to Dinwiddie Court House. Davies' and Smith's brigades were given the task of guarding the train, following Wells' departure. To carry out this assignment, Davies and Smith posted their cavalrymen in the fields north of the village. One of Davies' regiments was also detached and sent to watch the bridge which carried the Boydton plank road across Stony Creek. [46]

Crook's other brigade, Gregg's, was given a more

active assignment. Crossing Chamberlain's Bed at Fitzgerald's ford, Gregg's troopers occupied Little Five Forks. The possession of this strategic crossroads enabled Gregg to control the roads leading to the left and rear of Custer's division. With Gregg in possession of Little Five Forks, it would be impossible for the Confederates to launch a surprise attack on Sheridan's left. After having secured the crossroads Gregg threw out a number of patrols. One of these groups moved up the Gilliam road and established contact with the 2d West Virginia of Capehart's brigade. Another patrol visited Stony Creek. Only a very few Confederates (less than twenty) were sighted by this unit. The 8th Pennsylvania made a forced reconnaissance down "the Dinwiddie Court-House road" and scattered the few Rebels encountered. By his vigorous scouting and patroling, Gregg made certain that there would be no surprise attack on Sheridan's left flank. [47]

During the morning, Sheridan learned that General Mackenzie's division had reached Dinwiddie Court House. Considering the fact that Mackenzie's men had been in the saddle since 3:30 o'clock, Sheridan ordered him to rest his command. Mackenzie accordingly halted his command in the fields north of the Adams house. After being warned to hold

themselves ready to march at a moment's notice, the cavalrymen were allowed to dismount. [48]

A few minutes before noon, Colonel Orville B. Babcock of Grant's staff reached Sheridan's headquarters. Babcock told Sheridan:

> General Grant directs me to say to you, that if in your judgement the Fifth Corps would do better under one of the division commanders, you are authorized to relieve General Warren, and order him to report to General Grant, at headquarters.

Sheridan replied that he hoped such a drastic step as that might not become necessary. The general then turned to a discussion of his plans. [49]

After Custer's and Devin's attacks had pinpointed Pickett's main line of resistance, Sheridan worked out his battle plan. Sheridan would have Custer make a feint toward Pickett's right. Simultaneously, the Confederates' left flank would be assailed by Warren's V Corps. Devin's division, bolstered by Pennington's brigade, was to make a frontal attack on the entrenchments as soon as the sound of firing indicated that the V Corps was engaged. If this onslaught proved successful, Pickett's task force would be cut off from the Army of Northern Virginia and driven

westward. [50]

Early in the afternoon, General Sheridan sent a staff officer to order up the V Corps. Major George L. Gillespie was also sent to the rear. Gillespie was directed to turn the head of Warren's column, when it came up, off into the Gravelly Run Church road. In addition, Gillespie was to "put the corps in position on this road obliquely to and at a point but a short distance from the White Oak road and about one mile from the Five Forks". [51]

It was 1 p. m. when the aide reached J. Boisseau's, where Warren had his command post. As soon as Warren learned that Sheridan wanted him to order up his infantry, he called for Colonel Henry C. Bankhead. The general told the colonel to have the division commanders bring up their units at once. Warren, in an effort to facilitate the movement, specified to Bankhead that Crawford's division would move first, to be followed by Griffin's and then Ayres'. [52]

Galloping off, Bankhead personally gave Crawford and Griffin their marching orders. Since he had been directed to see that the head of the column started off on the correct road, Bankhead sent another officer (either Major Emmor B. Cope or Captain James W. Wadsworth) to contact General Ayres.

In Bankhead's opinion, the orders were obeyed promptly, and "the troops moved out as expeditiously as the nature of the road and the crowded state it was in (being blocked up with led cavalry horses) would admit." [53]

While Bankhead was seeing that the marching orders were transmitted to the division commanders, Warren went to see Sheridan. Warren wanted "to inform ... [himself] of the use to be made of ... [his] troops, so that no time would be lost on their arrival". Proceeding up the Dinwiddie road, Warren visited Sheridan's command post. The cavalry leader tersely explained the tactical situation to Warren and what his plan of operations was. (At this time, Sheridan probably told Warren that the Confederate left flank was anchored near the junction of the Gravelly Run Church and White Oak roads.) Having satisfied his curiosity, Warren rode back to the junction of the Gravelly Run Church and Dinwiddie roads. Turning up the Gravelly Run Church road, Warren thoroughly examined the ground where Sheridan had directed him to marshal his corps. To prevent the Confederates from discovering the Union plans, Warren had his escort under Captain Herrell patrol the countryside as far north as the White Oak road. [54]

Sheridan had told Warren that he wanted him to form his entire corps before sending it to the assault. He wanted to insure a single sledgehammer-like blow instead of a series of piecemeal thrusts. Furthermore, the cavalryman had stated "that the formation was to be oblique to the road, with the right advanced, with two divisions in front, and the third in reserve behind the right division". The number of assault waves and the frontage to be occupied by the corps was left up to Warren. A reconnaissance of the area convinced Warren that it would be best if his two assault divisions advanced in the "equivalent of three lines of battle". Both of the division commanders were to deploy two of their brigades in front, each brigade formed into double line of battle. Their third brigade would be centered behind the first two assault waves. Warren's third division would be posted in column of battalions in mass behind the right division. [55]

General Crawford's division which took the lead when the corps started for the front reached Gravelly Run Church first. While marching up the Dinwiddie road, Crawford's vanguard had to clear the road of led horses and wagons to enable the column to pass. As soon as he reached the church, Crawford proceeded to deploy his division in

accordance with Warren's instructions. Baxter's brigade was formed on the right and Kellogg's on the left; Kellogg's left flank rested on the Gravelly Run Church road. Coulter's brigade was centered behind Baxter's and Kellogg's commands. Each brigade commander formed his unit into double line of battle. [56]

General Griffin's division arrived at Gravelly Run Church close on the heels of Crawford's command. As he rode up, Griffin was met by Warren. Pointing to the ground where he wished Griffin to form his division, Warren remarked that he wished the division commander "to be as expeditious as possible". Griffin would mass his division behind Crawford's. He had Bartlett and Chamberlain form their brigades in triple line of battle. Bartlett was on the left and Chamberlain on the right. Griffin's other brigade (Gregory's) was ordered to report to Chamberlain. Chamberlain had Gregory form one of his regiments (the 188th New York) into line of battle on the right of Chamberlain's brigade. The 189th New York was deployed as skirmishers and took position in front of Chamberlain's command. Gregory's third regiment (the 187th New York) was given the mission of covering Griffin's right flank. [57]

Ayres' division, the smallest in Warren's Corps, reached the marshaling area last. Warren was waiting for Ayres when he rode up. Calling to the division commander, Warren requested him "to form ... [his] troops as expeditiously as possible, as General Sheridan desired to attack the enemy immediately". While Ayres was engaged in deploying his division on the west side of the Gravelly Run Church road, Warren again urged his subordinate to hurry. [58]

In forming his command, Ayres deployed Bowerman's Maryland brigade on the left and Gwyn's brigade on the right. Winthrop's brigade was centered behind the two advance brigades. All of Ayres' brigades were formed into double line of battle. Skirmishers were advanced by Bowerman and Gwyn. The Gravelly Run Church road separated Gwyn's right from Crawford's left. [59]

General Crawford's division had been placed on the right of the Gravelly Run Church road. If "the return" in the Confederate line were located where Warren had been led to believe it was, Crawford's center would strike it and be the first to enter the works. In case Crawford was unable to carry the "return", Griffin would be there to sustain him and to take advantage of any success scored. General Ayres was

to engage the Confederate troops holding the earthworks paralleling the White Oak road and prevent reinforcements from being rushed to the unit (Hansom's brigade) holding "the return". [60]

When they moved to the attack, Warren directed his division commanders "to keep closed to the left and to preserve their direction in the woods, by keeping the sun, then shining brightly, in the same position over their left shoulders". [61]

The total length of the front occupied by the V Corps was about 1,000 yards. In the three days since crossing Rowanty Creek, Warren had seen the effective strength of his corps shrink from about 15,000 to 12,000 officers and men. In addition to the battle casualties and the men on detached service, a number of soldiers had straggled. [62]

While the division commanders were busy forming their units, Warren prepared a sketch map depicting the presumed tactical situation. Copies of this document were distributed to the division commanders. According to Brigadier-General James W. Forsyth, Sheridan's chief of staff, the cavalry leader also saw a copy of Warren's diagram and instructions. The division commanders were instructed as far

as time would permit, to explain the map to their brigade commanders. Attached to the sketch was a brief outline of Sheridan's plan of attack. Warren informed his generals that the corps was to advance in a northwestwardly direction until it reached the White Oak road. It would then wheel to the left and take a position at right angles to the road. As soon as the infantry was engaged, Custer's and Devin's cavalrymen were to charge. At this stage of the operations, Warren observed all the cavalry except Mackenzie's division was on the left of the V Corps. Mackenzie's troopers were reported to be advancing westward along the White Oak road.[63]

Throughout the time that his corps was deploying, Warren "used all the exertions possible to hasten" his troops' arrival at the point of departure. To Warren, it seened that everything was working smoothly and the soldiers "marched at once to their assigned positions without a halt".[64]

The ground on which the corps formed was rough and wooded, and cut up by numerous ravines. In addition, it was out of sight of the Confederate works, so that the direction of advance ordered depended solely upon the roadways and the supposed location of the Confederate fortifications along the White Oak road. It was about 2 p. m. when General Griffin

received his instructions to move to the marshaling area. To reach Gravelly Run Church from the position occupied, Griffin's troops had to march about two and one-half miles along a narrow, muddy road. Consequently, from the time (1 p. m.) that Sheridan issued his orders to bring up the V Corps, until Warren had completed his dispositions, slightly over three hours had elapsed. Most observers agreed that this was not an unreasonable length of time "when it is remembered that the length of the corps was such, when stretched out on the road, that the leading file must have arrived on the new ground before the rear file quitted the old." [64]

During this time, Sheridan visited Warren and expressed his "apprehension that the cavalry which continued to fire on the enemy, would use up all their ammunition" before the V Corps was ready to advance. Replying, Warren told Sheridan that it would be 4 p. m. before he would be able to complete his dispositions. Warren, however, remarked that he "was ready to move at once with whatever was at hand if ... [Sheridan] directed, and let the rest follow". Sheridan, wanting to strike one tremendous blow with his entire command, refused. Warren felt that Sheridan's "impatience was no

greater apparently" than his own. The commander of the V Corps tried, however, to repress his impatience and prevent any outburst, which "would tend to impair confidence in the proposed operations" by the troops involved. [66]

Sheridan, however, saw things differently. Riding over to Gravelly Run Church, he reported that he found the V Corps "coming up very slowly". The cavalryman observed in his "After Action Report":

> I was exceedingly anxious to attack at once, for the sun was getting low, and we had to fight or go back. It was no place to intrench, and it would have been shameful to have gone back with no results to compensate for the loss of the brave men who had fallen during the day. [67]

To the impatient Sheridan, it appeared that Warren was not exerting himself to get his corps up and into position. Sheridan felt that Warren gave "the impression that he wished the sun to go down before the dispositions for the attack could be completed". [68]

Warren, in his "After Action Report", hotly denied this implication on his military character. He wrote:

> Against General Sheridan's most ungenerous statement that I gave him the impression that I wanted the sun to go

> down, I simply place my denial, and trust that my whole conduct in life, and especially in this war, sustains me in it. The sun did not set until two hours and a half after the formation was completed. [69]

The basic trouble between the two generals was their conflicting personalities. Just because Warren, the introvert, didn't ride around "swearing and cursing at a fearful rate", he was dragging his feet, in Sheridan's opinion. [70]

While the V Corps was getting into pisition at Gravelly Run Church, Sheridan learned that Meade had pulled back the left flank of General Humphreys' II Corps. Instead of fronting the White Oak road, Miles' division now held a line covering the Boydton plank road. This retirement on the part of the left flank division of the II Corps disturbed Sheridan. He was afraid that a strong Rebel column might march down the White Oak road and strike Warren's corps in the flank and rear. If the Confederates adopted this course of action, it would certainly frustrate Sheridan's plans. To deal with this possibly dangerous situation, Sheridan ordered up Mackenzie's division. [71]

Following the receipt of the eagerly awaited

instructions to move to the front, Mackenzie put his division into motion. Mackenzie's troopers proceeded up the Adams and Dinwiddie roads to J. Boisseau's. Here, Mackenzie turned his column into the Crump road. In accordance with Sheridan's orders, Mackenzie planned to establish a roadblock on the White Oak road. If Mackenzie were able to carry out this task, he would be able to afford a measure of protection to Warren's exposed flank. [72]

As Mackenzie's division rode up the Crump road, Colonel Samuel P. Spear's brigade took the lead. Spear used Major James E. McFarlan's battalion of the 11th Pennsylvania Cavalry to screen his advance. About one-half mile south of the White Oak road, the Pennsylvanians encountered the Confederate pickets. Driving in the outposts, the bluecoats "soon developed a considerable force" of Roberts' North Carolinians. The Confederates were posted in a line of rifle pits in the edge of a wood along the White Oak road with an open field to their front. Preparatory to attacking, Major McFarlan deployed Companies G and H to the right and left of the Crump road. The troopers of these two units remained on their horses. Next, McFarlan dismounted the cavalrymen of Companies B and F. These men were posted farther to the

right and left in the woods. The remainder of the regiment closed up on the advance guard. [73]

As soon as the Pennsylvanians had completed their dispositions, General Mackenzie ordered them to engage the Rebels. Observing that the rapid fire delivered by his cavalrymen (the 11th Pennsylvania was armed with Spencer carbines) was keeping the greyclads pinned down, Mackenzie placed himself at the head of Major Robert S. Monroe's battalion (Companies A, C, E, and K). When Mackenzie gave the word, the Pennsylvanians charged in column of fours. At first, the Federals thundered through the field on the left of the road. Suddenly, the column cut across the road and struck the left flank of Roberts' position. Led on by Mackenzie, the Pennsylvanians poured over the works and into the White Oak road beyond. In the face of this onset, the North Carolinians fell back in confusion. [74]

The remainder of the 11th Pennsylvania supported the daring charge, and reached the Rebel line close on Mackenzie's heels. Following the Union breakthrough, Roberts' North Carolinians scattered. Some of the Rebels fell back to the west and joined Pickett's task force at Five Forks; the rest made their way eastward and reported to General Andersen.

After mopping up the scattered pockets of resistance, Mackenzie mustered his command. Except for the loss of several valuable officers, the rout of Roberts' brigade had cost the Yankees a relatively small number of casualties.[75]

When he was informed of Mackenzie's smashing success, Sheridan issued a new set of instructions. Mackenzie, after detaching a small force to watch the White Oak road, was to join Sheridan. After detailing a battalion of the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry to man the roadblock on the White Oak road, Mackenzie started for Five Forks. The 1st Maryland took the lead as the division rode westward along the White Oak road. Just as Mackenzie was getting ready to order the Marylanders to charge, the V Corps came pouring across the road. Mackenzie accordingly halted his command.[76]

The deployment of Warren's V Corps in the fields at the Gravelly Run Church had been bold and unconcealed. Munford, who was charged with guarding the left flank of the Confederate main line of resistance, watched these preparations. He sent courier after courier to tell either Pickett or Fitz Lee that the Yankees were getting ready to strike. Neither general could be found. Nobody seemed to know where the generals had gone; no instructions had been

left regarding the forwarding of dispatches. Captain Henry C. Lee of Fitz Lee's staff vainly rode the length of the line without learning any more than the baffled messengers. [77]

Each of the unit commanders, on his own responsibility, undertook to get ready to resist the impending onslaught. In this, they did not always co-operate with one another. Ransom refused to send any of McGregor's guns to be emplaced in an excellent position located by Munford. Subsequently, Munford recalled:

> All this time Warren's swarming blue lines were plainly visible from the /White Oak/ road, forming into line and preparing to assault Pickett's left; ... /Devin's partially/ dismounted cavalry was keeping up a sharp continuous fire along the whole of our infantry front, as if preparing to attack our right, and Custer's ... /dismounted/ Division was demonstrating. ... And I was still without orders.

To prepare for the attack that he knew was certain to come, Munford dismounted and deployed his division on the left of Ransom's refused flank. A few "pens" built of rails from nearby fences were thrown up by Munford's troopers, and the inevitable attack dourly awaited. [78]

As soon as Ayres had completed his dispositions (which was about 4:15 o'clock /within 15 minutes of the hour designated by Warren/), the order was given for the V Corps

to attack. When the advance began, Generals Sheridan and Warren, and Colonel Porter rode at the head of Ayres' division. Pressing forward, the Union battle line marched through the belt of woods north of Gravelly Run Church. Entering the fields which surrounded the Barnes house, the skirmishers covering the advance of the V Corps flushed and drove in the Confederate outposts. Before he reached the woods on the far side of the field, a staff officer told Ayres "that there were indications of the enemy off to the left front". Growing apprehensive of an attack on his left, Ayres alerted Winthrop to be ready to bring up his brigade in case the division was attacked. Shortly thereafter, Warren's troops burst across the White Oak road. Here, the corps encountered General Mackenzie's cavalry division. The troopers had arrived in this area a jump ahead of the infantry.[79] Reporting to Sheridan, Mackenzie was ordered to strike out toward Hatcher's Run. He would then move to the west and get possession of the Ford's Church road. In addition, Mackenzie would cover the right flank of the V Corps.

Warren now realized that his corps had crossed the White Oak road east of the left flank of the Confederate main

line of resistance. To make things even more perplexing, Crawford's troops (marching more rapidly than Ayres), had crossed the road first. Already the two divisions had started to diverge. Warren thought it was probable that Pickett's defense line was posted in the edge of the woods about 300 yards north of the road. He accordingly continued to lead his corps in a northwesterly direction.[80]

Almost immediately after Ayres' division had driven across the White Oak road and entered the field beyond, his troops began to receive small-arms and artillery fire from the west. This fire originated with Ransom's North Carolina brigade which was holding the refused flank of Pickett's defense line. The Federal officers now learned that the Confederate entrenchments did not extend as far east as they had assumed. Warren had been led to believe that the Rebel left was anchored near the junction of the Gravelly Run Church and White Oak roads. Apparently, neither Major Gillespie nor Warren's escort had made any effort to ascertain the exact resting place of the Southerners' left. The Federal brass evidently felt that if they undertook any reconnaissance activity in this sector, it might put the Confederates on their guard and betray the plan of attack.[81]

Fortunately for Ayres' left flank unit (Bowerman's brigade), Ransom's greyclads were stationed in a thick belt of woods which masked their fire. Furthermore, the refused flank which faced the Federals was comparatively short -- less than 150 yards. Understanding the tactical situation, Ayres immediately changed front to the left and faced "the return". In carrying out this maneuver, Bowerman's brigade was faced and filed to the left. Ayres now called up Winthrop's brigade from the reserve. Winthrop's troops moved into position on Bowerman's left on the double. His dispositions completed, Ayres led his division to the attack. Ayres' battle line of "weather-beaten" veterans moved down the slope toward the woods with a steady swing that boded no good for Pickett's task force, earthworks or no earthworks.[82]

The firing was heavy, "but less than usually destructive", Warren recalled, "on account of the thick woods". Ayres' rapid change of front had caused his right flank brigade, Gwyn's, to get well ahead of Crawford's division. Since Ayres' division was the pivot in the V Corps' wheel to the left, his troops had a shorter distance to move than the others. This was dangerous, because it exposed Gwyn's troops to possible flank attack. Gwyn's soldiers evidently sensed

this; there was some wavering in the ranks. Subsequently, Ayres confessed that he experienced considerable anxiety when he learned that his right flank was resting in the air.[83]

Sheridan seemed to be omnipresent as Ayres' troops charged "the return". When Ransom's North Carolinians first opened fire, Ayres' blueclads faltered for an instant. Observing this, Sheridan put the spurs to his horse and galloped along the battle line from left to right, shouting words of encouragement.

Colonel Porter recalled that Sheridan called out, "Go at 'em with a will. Move on at a clean jump or you'll not catch one of them. They're all getting ready to run now, and if you don't get on them in five minutes, they'll every one get away from you! Now go for them."

Just then, one of the skirmishers was hit in the neck; the blood spurted as if the jugular vein had been cut.

"I'm killed!", the soldier cried, as he slumped to the ground.

"You're not hurt a bit", Sheridan cried, "pick up your gun, man, and move right on to the front."

Such was the electric effect of Sheridan's words that the wounded soldier snatched up his rifled-musket and

rushed forward a dozen paces before he collapsed, never to rise again.[84]

At the time of Warren's assault, Sheridan was mounted on his favorite black horse, "Rienzi". This was the same steed that had carried the general from Winchester to Cedar Creek. Colonel Porter remembered that, on April 1:

> The roads were muddy, the fields swampy, the undergrowth dense, and "Rienzi", as he plunged and curveted, dashed the foam from his mouth and the mud from his heels. Had the Winchester pike been in a similar condition, he would not have made his famous twenty miles without breaking his own neck and Sheridan's too.[85]

Sheridan was watching when Gwyn's troops started to recoil. Dashing into the midst of the broken lines, Sheridan called out, "Where is my battle-flag?" As the color-sergeant rode up, Sheridan seized the crimson and white standard. Brandishing the colors, the general shouted words of encouragement to the infantrymen, and urged them to close their ranks. All this time, the minies were humming through the air, like a swarm of bees. One pierced the battle f another killed the color-sergeant, yet another wo Captain Andrew J. McConnigle (Sheridan's qu the side, others cut down two or three horses.[86]

In his successful effort to rally Gwyn's soldiers, Sheridan dashed from one part of the line to another, "waving his flag, shaking his fist, encouraging, threatening, praying, swearing, the very incarnation of battle". Porter recalled, "It would be a sorry soldier who could help following such a leader." [87]

Ayres and his officers were also equal to the challenge. Recklessly exposing themselves, they quickly had the situation under control. Drawing his saber, Ayres led his shouting soldiers forward. His veterans, "who now behaved as if they had fallen back to get a 'good-ready'", eagerly followed the general. With fixed bayonets and a rousing cheer, the infantrymen dashed toward the breastworks protecting "the return". Since the entrenched section of Pickett's main line of resistance which faced east was only about 150 yards in length, Ayres' right flank, Gwyn's brigade, overlapped it.

Even before the Yankees reached the works, a number of Ransom's North Carolinians lost their nerve and took to their heels. Realizing that it would be impossible to stop the blueclad flood, the gunners of McGregor's battery limbered up their four pieces. The artillerists, applying

the whips to their horses, pulled out of the earthworks in the nick of time. Sweeping everything before them, Ayres' combat-ready infantry came storming over the works. The color-sergeant of the 190th Pennsylvania gained the distinction of planting the first stand of Colors on the breastworks. All of Ransom's North Carolinians who declined to flee were killed or captured. Ayres' troops had seized "the return", the key to Pickett's position.[88]

Sheridan spurred "Rienzi" up to the angle. With a mighty leap, the horse carried his rider over the works, and landed in the middle of a line of Confederates who had thrown down their arms and were cowering behind the earthworks. Several of the Rebels called out, "Whar do you want us-all to go to?"

The general's "rage turned to humor, and he had a running talk with the 'Johnnies' as they filed past".

"Go right over there", Sheridan said, gesturing toward the rear. Continuing, the general kept up a steady banter:

> Get right along, now. Drop your guns; you'll never need them any more. You'll all be safe over there. Are there any more of you? We want every one of you fellows.[89]

In addition to seizing the key to the Confederate position, Ayres' troops had captured over 1,000 prisoners and a number of battle flags. The Yankees, however, had not emerged unscathed from the attack on "the return". Among the Union casualties were two of Ayres' three brigade commanders, General Winthrop and Colonel Bowerman. The former was mortally and the latter severely wounded. Colonel James Grindlay of the 146th New York took temporary charge of Winthrop's unit, while Colonel David L. Stanton of the 1st Maryland assumed command of the Maryland brigade. [90]

Shortly after Sheridan entered the works, his orderly rode up and announced, "Colonel [George A.] Forsyth of your staff is killed, sir."

"It's no such thing", cried Sheridan, "I don't believe a word of it. You'll find Forsyth's all right", he continued.

Inside of the next ten minutes, Forsyth rode up. Sheridan then learned that it was General Winthrop who had fallen in the attack on "the return". The general did not even appear surprised when he saw Forsyth. "There! I told you so", he exclaimed when Forsyth appeared. [91]

Instead of allowing Ayres to press ahead, Sheridan

ordered him to halt and re-form his division. While the officers were regrouping their units, patrols mopped up a few scattered pockets of resistance that had been isolated by the breakthrough. As soon as it became apparent that the entire Confederate line had given way, Ayres was directed to resume the advance. When the division again moved off, it swept the ground behind and on either side of the Rebel fortifications. Holding his men in hand, with Grindlay's brigade in the lead, Ayres' division marched westward. [92]

When the Confederates in "the return" opened fire on Ayres' division, Warren perceived that the fight at the angle would fall on Ayres, and not Crawford as planned. Warren therefore sent a staff officer to instruct Crawford "to oblique his division to the left and close up this interval". As soon as Warren had pinpointed Ransom's left flank, he called for Major Cope. The major was told to contact Griffin. On doing so, Cope was to direct Griffin "to bring his division toward the White Oak road, by the left flank, in order to be in better supporting distance" of Ayres' command. [93]

It seems that when Ayres changed direction to the left, Warren was not the only ranking officer who knew

Crawford and Griffin were "getting too far away". Ayres knew it. He sent a message for Griffin "to come up on his right". Griffin knew it. His practised ear told him that the battle had opened. Leaving his division for a moment, he rode at full speed to Ayres' command post and asked, "What is up?"

"Nothing much", replied Ayres, "nothing new. The same old story, Crawford had gone off and left me to fight alone."

Griffin, after promising to see if he could do something to help his comrade, hastened off after his division.

Sheridan also sent orders for Crawford and Griffin to come in on Ayres' right. [94]

In the meantime, Warren had established a temporary command post in the field east of "the return". Pending the return of his aides, Warren did not feel justified in shifting his position. Here, he "could get information from all points at once, and utilize the many eyes of ... [his] staff and those of ... [his] commanders, instead of giving" all his attention to a particular point to the neglect of all others. In Warren's calculated opinion, the time had not arrived for him to place himself at the head of an assaulting column. The dynamic Sheridan, however, had a different

opinion. He felt th t Warren should be leading and lending encouragement to his troops. [95]

After a few minutes had elapsed and he had heard nothing from the staff officers he had sent to get in touch with Crawford and Griffin, Warren became convinced that their divisions "must have passed on beyond" General Ayres' right. Leaving several members of his staff at his command post with instructions to contact him if anything important developed, Warren went to look for Crawford's and Griffin's divisions. As he approached the "Chimneys", the general was fired upon. He subsequently learned that these were the volleys which caused Gwyn's brigade to recoil. [96]

Notwithstanding Warren's diagram and orders to swing to the left on reaching the White Oak road, Crawford's division had continued to barge ahead. The division had passed several hundred yards beyond the road before it began to wheel to the left. After changing directions, Crawford's skirmishers encountered and drove in a few of Munford's pickets. The division's line of advance "led through bogs, tangled woods, and thickets of pine, interspersed with open spaces here and there". While passing through the dense vegetation, Crawford's left flank brigade (Kellogg's) lost

contact with Ayres' division.[97]

General Warren, while en route to the "Chimneys", encountered Kellogg's brigade. Just as the general rode up, Kellogg's unit had pivoted to the left and taken position at right angles to its line of advance. Warren accordingly ordered Kellogg to hold his ground -- it was in a clearing -- until another brigade could come up and form on his right. The general then passed on into the woods in search of Crawford. Warren, however, was unable to locate his missing division commander. Nevertheless, the general sent one staff officer after another into the woods. They were to tell Crawford to wheel his other two brigades to the left and close up on Kellogg's brigade.

When Warren emerged from the wood, he discovered that Kellogg's brigade had disappeared. Sheridan, alarmed at this "wandering off", had sent several staff officers to recall Crawford. One of these, finding Kellogg standing idle, had ordered him forward.

Advancing rapidly, Kellogg's brigade swept through the Sydnor field. As Kellogg's battle line approached the Sydnor house, one of Munford's combat patrols opened fire. The Confederates succeeded in momentarily checking Kellogg's

advance. In a successful effort to get his stalled advance rolling, Kellogg ordered Colonel Tarbell of the 91st New York to bring up one of his battalions from the reserve. Tarbell came up on the double and deployed his New Yorkers on the left of Kellogg's battle line. Taking position, Tarbell's battalion engaged Munford's dismounted troopers at short range. [98]

As soon as Tarbell's New Yorkers had dislodged the Rebels from the house, the advance was resumed. Kellogg's march to the west must have been very rapid, because by the time the rest of Crawford's division had entered Sydnor's field, his unit had vanished into the woods on the far side. [99]

In the meantime, Major Cope had contacted Crawford. When the major found the general, he was east of the "Chimneys". In accordance with Cope's instructions, Crawford swung Baxter's brigade around to come in on Kellogg's right, Coulter following. Unable to find Kellogg's brigade, which had moved off, Crawford advanced toward the "Chimneys". On doing so, he called up Coulter's brigade and formed it on Baxter's left. Crawford's division then moved westward, driving in Munford's dismounted troopers. This opposition, however, caused the division to continue to bear to the right. [100]

Since the countryside was heavily wooded, troops moving rapidly through it could not be readily overtaken. After Crawford's and Griffin's divisions had wheeled to the left, their commands had entered the open ground at the northern end of the R. Sydnor farm. This was about 300 yards north of "the return". It was here (at the "Chimneys") that Warren finally was able to get in touch with General Griffin, one of his two missing division commanders. [101]

General Griffin's First Division had started off from the Gravelly Run Church behind Crawford's command. As the division swept toward the White Oak road, it drifted toward the east. By the time Griffin's troops crossed the road, they had been uncovered. They now forged ahead of Crawford's division, which was at this time on their left. In accordance with the instructions he had received, Griffin wheeled his division to the left after it crossed the White Oak road. [102]

Pushing ahead, Griffin's skirmishers easily drove in Munford's outposts. After his division had advanced a mile without encountering any fortifications, Griffin began to sense that something had gone wrong. When the sound of heavy firing began to roll in from the left, Griffin halted

his division in the wood northeast of Sydnor's field. By this time, Crawford's division had dropped out of line and veered off to the right. General Chamberlain, whose brigade was on the right of Griffin's battle line, recalled:

> Our instructions were to keep closed to the left on ... [Bartlett's] brigade, and also to wheel to the left in moving, the design being to strike the enemy in flank. We advanced through an open wood with nothing but light skirmishes in our front for some time. The constant change of direction to the left made the march on the right flank exceedingly rapid.[103]

General Bartlett had also been troubled when he observed that the firing to his left was steadily increasing in tempo. Riding to the left, the general entered Sydnor's field. On the opposite side of the cleared area, Bartlett could see distinctly the Confederates' left flank.[104]

In the meantime, General Griffin had made a personal reconnaissance. From Sydnor's field, the general was able to watch the Rebel movement along the White Oak road. About this time, Major Cope rode up. Hailing Griffin, the major told the general that Warren wanted him "to bring his division toward the White Oak road, by the left flank". Griffin directed his three brigade commanders to face their men to the left. Before these instructions could reach General Bartlett, however, all of his brigade, with the

exception of three regiments (the 1st Michigan, the 20th Maine, and the 155th Pennsylvania), had drifted off to the right and joined Crawford's division.[105]

Placing himself at the head of Bartlett's three regiments, Griffin marched across Sydnor's field. When Chamberlain saw the division flag moving to the left, he followed with his command and the 188th New York of Gregory's brigade. Before Griffin had proceeded very far, he encountered Warren near the "Chimneys". Warren directed his subordinate to attack the Confederates holding the angle. The corps commander then rode back to Ayres' position. By the time Warren reached the White Oak road, Ayres' soldiers had stormed "the return".[106]

Since the capture of "the return" rendered Griffin's presence at that point superfluous, Warren decided to change the mission which he had assigned the First Division. Major Cope was sent galloping off with instructions for Griffin to alter his line of march. Griffin was to march westward and attempt to get astride the Ford's Church road. By the time Cope reached Griffin, his division had nearly crossed Sydnor's field. Following the receipt of these fresh instructions, Griffin wheeled his division to the right. When

the advance was renewed, the division's line of march was parallel to, and north of the White Oak road.[107]

After moving forward about three-quarters of a mile, Griffin's troops encountered a strong force of Confederates, posted in the woods at the western edge of Sydnor's field. On being routed from "the return", the survivors of Ransom's brigade had fallen back toward Five Forks. The collapse of Ransom's North Carolinians had rendered Wallace's position untenable. Wallace's greyclads had therefore hurriedly evacuated the rifle pits west of the angle. Wallace's retreat, in turn, had uncovered Steuart's position. In an effort to contain the Union breakthrough, the three brigadiers sought to establish a reorganized defense line in the timber on the west side of Sydnor's field. Besides protecting Five Forks, this position covered the vital Ford's Church road. The new line was at right angles to the fortifications paralleling the White Oak road. Light field works were hurriedly thrown up by the Confederates.[108]

In moving against the reorganized Confederate main line of resistance, Chamberlain's brigade (reinforced by the 188th New York) constituted the left wing of Griffin's battle line, Bartlett's three regiments the right. Two of Gregory's

regiments (the 187th and 189th New York) followed along behind. Advancing on the double, Griffin's soldiers "moved up rapidly under the crest of a hill". When Chamberlain gave the word, his eager troops charged the works. Chamberlain's bluecoats tore a gaping hole in the Rebel line. The right wing of Chamberlain's command -- the 185th New York and Major Edwin A. Glenn's battalion of the 198th Pennsylvania -- poured through the hole and drove toward the White Oak road. At the same time, the 188th New York and Captain David L. Stanton's battalion of the 198th Pennsylvania maintained heavy pressure on the greyclads' front. [109]

Bartlett's three regiments hit the Confederate line a short distance to the right of Chamberlain's breakthrough. Encountering fierce resistance, Bartlett's right flank recoiled. One of Bartlett's regiments, the 155th Pennsylvania, was bested by the Confederates in a desperate hand-to-hand encounter in which the clubbed musket was freely used. To escape the galling fire poured into their ranks by the Rebels, a number of Bartlett's soldiers sought cover behind the rifle pits carried by Chamberlain's troops.

The Union officers realized that if the frightened men were allowed to take cover in the earthworks, they would

be helpless in case of a determined Confederate counterstroke. It took "the utmost personal efforts of every general and staff officer present" to rally Bartlett's troops. As soon as the men had been re-formed, they were deployed at right angles to the captured works. When Chamberlain learned of Bartlett's difficulties, he rushed the 185th and 188th New York to his comrade's assistance. Passing to the rear of the 1st Michigan and the 20th Maine, the New Yorkers advanced to the attack. Bartlett's troops, seeing that help was on the way, took heart and pressed ahead. The thick woods, in conjunction with the ebb and flow of the battle, caused Griffin's units to become badly scrambled. Nevertheless, this fresh Union push proved too much for Steuart's, Ransom's, and Wallace's battered brigades. Abandoning the fight, the Southerners fled the field, leaving about 1,500 prisoners and several battle flags in the hands of the victorious Unionists.[110]

In the meantime, Bartlett and Chamberlain, assisted by several staff officers, had rounded up a large number of stragglers (between 150 and 200) who were cowering in the edge of the woods. These men were reorganized and pushed back into the fray. While engaged in this disagreeable business, Chamberlain sighted General Gwyn's headquarters

flag in the open field to his rear. The general sent one of his staff officers, Lieutenant George C. Fisher, to ask Gwyn to come to his assistance. Gwyn cheerfully fell in with Chamberlain's suggestion. Leading his brigade forward, Gwyn arrived in time to contribute to the Confederates' downfall.[111]

Griffin did not pause to let his men celebrate their success. Instead, he had his generals re-form their brigades at right angles to the White Oak road. Resuming the advance, Griffin's division drove westward, mopping up the die-hard Confederates as it advanced. At Five Forks, Griffin's soldiers met Fitzhugh's and Pennington's dismounted troopers, who had just carried the Rebel fortifications at this point. On the right, Bartlett's troops gained the Ford's Church road and captured a train of ambulances and wagons. Ayres' division reached Five Forks on the heels of Griffin's combat-ready bluecoats.[112]

In the meantime, Crawford's battle line had advanced across the northern end of Sydnor's field and into the woods beyond. As they forged steadily ahead, Crawford's soldiers drove Munford's dismounted troopers before them. Reaching and crossing the Ford's Church road, Crawford's bluecoats captured seven ambulances and several wagons

belonging to Wallace's brigade. These vehicles, along with a large number of prisoners, were immediately sent to the rear. The prisoners were escorted to the rear so rapidly that Crawford's provost marshal was unable to keep an accurate tally. Kellogg, whose brigade had preceded the division, now reported to Crawford. [113]

After Ayres' soldiers had captured "the return", Warren started off once more to see if he could locate Crawford. Tracing Crawford's line of march from Sydnor's field by the wounded coming to the rear, Warren finally located his missing division. When Warren found Crawford, he was on the east side of the Boisseau farm with his division in good order facing west. Without a moment's hesitation, Warren directed Crawford to wheel his division to the left and face it southward. The corps commander knew that with Crawford's division astride the Ford's Church road, he was in possession of one of the two avenues of escape open to Pickett's task force. [114]

As soon as Crawford had completed his dispositions, Warren ordered him to drive on Five Forks. The roar of the Rebel artillery was a clear indication to Warren that the Confederates still held the vital crossroads. [115]

General Coulter's brigade was selected to spearhead the attack. Coulter deployed two of his regiments (the 121st and 142d Pennsylvania) on the left of the Ford's Church road; the rest of the brigade was formed on the right of the road. Crawford's two other brigades (Kellogg's and Baxter's) were massed en echelon on Coulter's right. When Warren gave the word, the division took up the advance. As it approached the wood which bounded the Boisseau farm on the south, the Union battle line was greeted by a scathing fire.[116]

Four of Bartlett's regiments (the 16th Michigan, the 1st Maine, and the 91st and 118th Pennsylvania), after becoming separated from their parent unit, had taken position on the right of Crawford's division. Two of the regiments (the 16th Maryland and the 91st Pennsylvania) had crossed and recrossed Hatcher's Run during the course of the march to Boisseau's field. When Crawford wheeled his division to the left, these two units took position on the right of Baxter's brigade.[117] Three companies of the 1st Maine had also forded Hatcher's Run. Encountering one of Rosser's patrols, the Mainemen charged and routed the Rebel horsemen. Recrossing the stream, the three companies rejoined their comrades. Upon reaching the Ford's Church road, Warren gave the 1st

Maine and the 118th Pennsylvania the task of watching the ford across Hatcher's Run.[118]

Following his sudden departure from the shad-bake, Pickett galloped back across Hatcher's Run. A short distance south of the stream, Pickett sighted a line of Munford's grim cavalrymen facing eastward. They were falling back in the face of Kellogg's lightning advance. At this very minute, the Union skirmishers were within 100 yards of the Ford's Church road. Directing the Confederates was General Munford. He was recognized immediately by Pickett, who inquired, "What troops are these?"

Munford replied that "they were part of Fitz Lee Division".

Taking a second glance at the bluecoats, Pickett implored, "Do hold them back till I can pass to Five Forks."

A young captain in the 3d Virginia Cavalry, James Breckinridge, heard Pickett's appeal. Placing himself at the head of his command, Breckinridge charged the advancing Federals. This brief counterattack cost Breckinridge his life, but it probably saved Pickett's. The general threw himself forward on his horse, with his head on the side away from the foe, and successfully ran the gauntlet of several

hundred yards of furious infantry fire. [119]

Fitz Lee likewise tried to rejoin his troopers by using the route pioneered by Pickett. He was too late. By the time Fitz Lee crossed Hatcher's Run, Kellogg's troops had reached the Ford's Church road. Fired upon, Fitz Lee turned back and attempted to lead Rosser's reserve division toward Five Forks by way of the Ford's Church road. The Confederate troopers, however, were unable to smash the Union roadblock and fell back. Next, Fitz Lee deployed Rosser's division astride the Ford's Church road, north of Hatcher's Run. Rosser was to keep the Federals from reaching the Southside Railroad. [120]

When he reached Five Forks, Pickett, in an effort to contain the Union breakthrough, sought to organize a new main line of resistance. Already, his subordinates, on their own initiative, had established and manned a line parallel to, and east of the Ford's Church road. (At this very moment, the troops holding this position [Ransom's, Steuart's, and Wallace's] were locked in a fierce contest with Griffin's blueclad division.) Having just escaped from Crawford's troops, Pickett knew that, unless he blocked the Ford's Church road, his new defense line would quickly be rendered

untenable. He accordingly pulled Mayo's Virginia brigade out of the entrenchment west of Five Forks. Reinforced by McGregor's four guns, Mayo's greyclads moved into position on the double. The Virginians were also joined by stragglers from Ransom's and Wallace's units. Mayo's troops were deployed in the woods to the left and the right of the Ford's Church road. To reach the Confederate position, the Yankees would have to cross Boisseau's field. Captain McGregor had his gunners unlimber their four pieces near the road. Having completed their dispositions, the Rebels grimly awaited Crawford's advance.[121]

As they pressed forward, Coulter's troops "suffered severely" from the fire of Mayo's infantry and McGregor's battery. Apparently undaunted, however, they swept steadily ahead. Crawford's other two brigades (Baxter's and Kellogg's) and two of Bartlett's regiments (the 16th Michigan and the 91st Pennsylvania) supported Coulter's drive down the Ford's Church road. Entering the woods at the south end of Boisseau's field, Coulter's troops smashed Mayo's brigade. A large number of Mayo's Virginians threw down their arms, and the remainder retreated in a southwesterly direction. (When Mayo's troops broke, the Confederates still held Five Forks.)

Reaching Gilliam's field, Colonel Mayo succeeded in partially re-forming the portions of his brigade that had survived the debacle. Pickett, observing the condition of the brigade, ordered Mayo to get across country to the Southside Railroad. Mayo's troops reached the railroad without further adventure, though "in great disorder". [122]

Besides taking a large number of Mayo's infantry, Coulter's troops captured McGregor's four guns. In the fight for the cannon, Captain McGregor was killed by one of the Union skirmishers. A large number of ambulances also fell into the Federals' hands at this point. [123]

Following the rout of Mayo's brigade, Warren directed Crawford to oblique his division to the right. Warren wanted to place Crawford's troops astride the White Oak road to the west of Five Forks. If he could do this, the last avenue of retreat open to Pickett's task force would be closed. In marching through the woods, Crawford's battle line was guided by the sound of the firing which was rolling in from the southwest. (At that point, Custer's and Rooney Lee's cavalry commands were locked in a grim struggle.) In advancing to the west, Crawford's left flank passed to the north of Five Forks. As soon as Crawford's troops had moved

off, Warren started for Five Forks. Before reaching his destination, Warren encountered the 1st U. S. Cavalry, riding up the Ford's Church road. The general directed the cavalrymen to file to the left and march to Crawford's support.[124]

When General Pickett saw that Mayo could not hold his position on the Ford's Church road, he called for General Corse. He directed Corse to change front to the left and deploy his troops along the west side of the Gilliam field. When formed, Corse's main line of resistance was at right angles to the White Oak road. To attack Corse's Virginians, the Federals would have to cross an open field. Corse's task would be to hold this ground for as long as possible, to cover the escape of Ransom's, Steuart's, and Wallace's brigades. At this time, the battered remnants of these three shattered commands were pouring westward through the woods in "complete disorder". To strengthen their position, Corse's troops threw up light field fortifications. Rooney Lee's cavalry division, which had held its own in the face of Coulter's attacks, was in position south and west of Corse's greyclads.[125]

General Mackenzie's cavalry division had advanced on the right of the V Corps. Moving rapidly, Mackenzie's

troopers cut in behind the right and rear of Munford's picket line. The Confederate troopers gave way "without much resistance" in the face of Mackenzie's onslaught. On two occasions, however, the Rebel horsemen endeavored to make a stand. The first time, a squadron of the 1st Maryland led by Captain Henry C. Erich charged and broke up the Confederate combat patrol. When another pocket of resistance slowed the Union advance, Mackenzie waved a battalion of the 5th Pennsylvania to the attack. As soon as these Southerners had been scattered, the march was resumed. During the course of their sweep, Mackenzie's troopers bagged a large number of prisoners, who were turned over to Warren's infantry. With the advent of darkness, Mackenzie halted his command and reported his position to Sheridan.[126]

It was after 9 o'clock before Mackenzie heard anything from Sheridan. At that time, he received instructions to have a detail relieve the infantry of the responsibility for guarding the ford where the Ford's Church road crossed Gravelly Run. It was about 10 p. m. before the troopers reached the ford and relieved the two companies of the 1st Maine that had been watching the crossing.[127]

After being driven across the Ford's Church road by

Crawford's division, Munford mounted his division. Munford then proceeded to the Confederate right, where he reported to Pickett. Realizing that the battle was lost, Pickett ordered Munford to cross to the north side of Hatcher's Run and join Fitz Lee. Swinging to the west of Crawford's line of advance, Munford's troopers crossed Hatcher's Run at W. Dabney's. Darkness had blanketed the area by the time Munford reported to Fitz Lee.[128]

When Sheridan issued orders for Warren to assault the Rebel left, he told Merritt "that the cavalry must co-operate". Preparatory to carrying out his assignment, Merritt ordered his division and brigade commanders to have their units charge the works as soon as Warren committed his infantry. Since Custer was on the extreme left of the Union line, Merritt sent a staff officer to brief him on the role his division was to play in the scheduled assault. Custer was to engage the Rebel force on his left, while maintaining contact with Devin's division on his right. Custer was also directed to keep one brigade continually mounted, "to make the most of a pursuit when the enemy was dislodged from his works".[129]

As soon as the first crashing volley came rolling

in from the east, Devin led his dismounted division against the Confederate fortifications covering the White Oak road. Devin had previously dismounted all of his troopers except the 1st U. S. Cavalry. Captain Lord, the commander of the 1st U. S. Cavalry, had been alerted to keep his men in the saddle, so they would be ready to take up the chase in case of a breakthrough. General Merritt reported:

> The cavalry, without a moment's hesitation, rushed into close quarters with the enemy ... . The enemy's artillery in the works commenced firing rapidly, but owing to the woods obscuring the view where the cavalry line was operating, this fire was necessarily inaccurate and not very destructive. A hotter musketry fire than on this day has seldom been experienced during the war. Fortunately for us the enemy, firing from breast-works, aimed high, else the casualties in the command must have been very much greater. [130]

West of the road, Pennington's dismounted brigade of Custer's division also advanced to the attack. At the time the attack began, Pennington was absent. He was at Custer's command post, which was located near the Gilliam house. Custer had called for Pennington to tell him to send for his "led horses". The general, contrary to Merritt's orders, planned to use Pennington's brigade to support his

attack on the Rebel right. Before the staff officer could return with the "led horses", the sound of heavy volleys became distinctly audible. This indicated to the officers that Warren had engaged the foe. Within a few minutes, Pennington became convinced that firing had broken out in the sector held by his brigade. After assuring Pennington that he was mistaken, Custer rode off. Scarcely had Custer disappeared before one of Pennington's staff officers galloped up and informed the colonel that Merritt had thrown his unit into the attack. Springing into his saddle, Pennington headed for the front. [131]

In the meantime, Merritt's initial attack on Pickett's main line of resistance had been checked when Pennington's brigade gave way. Just as Pennington rode up, he found his troopers retiring in confusion. Pennington, in his "After Action Report", attributed this setback to three factors: The failure of his brigade to maintain contact with Fitzhugh's unit on the right, Custer's removal of Capehart's brigade which had been posted on the left, and finally, the fact that his men were nearly out of ammunition. [132]

The retreat of Pennington's brigade had exposed

their left, so Devin's troopers were compelled to pull back. While Devin and his brigade commanders were regrouping their commands, Pennington secured a fresh supply of ammunition from Devin's division. A team of volunteers led by Captain Albert C. Houghton, while under a heavy fire, distributed the ammunition to the men on the battle line.[133]

As soon as the brigade commanders had re-formed their units, the attack was resumed. For a second time, Pennington's right flank faltered. This time, however, Devin's troopers did not fall back. Instead, they continued to exert pressure on the sector of the front held by Stewart's Virginians and Wallace's South Carolinians. Colonel Porter was an interested observer of Merritt's attack. He reported that:

> The natty cavalrymen with tight-fitting uniforms, short jackets, and small carbines swarmed through the pine thickets and dense undergrowth, looking as if they had been especially equipped for crawling through knot-holes. Those who had magazine guns created a racket in those pine woods that sounded as if a couple of army corps had opened fire.[134]

Following Ayres' breakthrough, the Confederates were compelled to withdraw a large number of Stewart's and Wallace's troops from the earthworks. These soldiers were used to man

the new defense line which the Rebel officers had established at right angles to the White Oak road. Not until Mayo's brigade was pulling out of the trenches and sent to oppose Crawford's advance did Pennington's blueclad troopers make any headway. [135]

After Colonel Pegram posted his guns, he lay down on the field and dropped off to sleep. The crash of Warren's opening volley awakened the colonel with a start. Swinging into his saddle, Pegram raced toward the point of danger. By the time that Pegram reached Five Forks, the Union cavalry had joined in the attack. Pegram took his battle station by the three guns emplaced west of the Ford's Church road. These three pieces covered the strategic crossroads. Serving their guns with skill, the artillerists blasted away at the oncoming bluecoats. From the dismounted troopers there came a continuous storm of bullets.

Pegram admiringly watched the contest with the spirit that led General Heth to remark that the young colonel was "one of the few men who, I believe, was supremely happy when in battle". Without bothering to dismount, Pegram rode out between the guns. "Fire your canister low", he cautioned his gunners. Suddenly, Pegram pitched and fell from his

horse. "Oh, Gordon", he cried to his adjutant, Gordon McCabe, "I'm mortally wounded; take me off the field."

Adjutant McCabe found this a difficult task, because the Unionists had seized positions very near the guns. McCabe, however, finally succeeded in placing his dying friend on a stretcher. After seeing that the colonel was carried a short distance to the rear, McCabe returned momentarily to the battery. Retracing his steps, McCabe placed Pegram in an ambulance and had it started for Ford's Depot on the Southside Railroad. [136]

The detachments left behind by Mayo, Steuart, and Wallace (and their three supporting guns) found it very difficult to hold the breastworks in the face of the slashing attacks by Devin's and Pennington's troopers. Their position, however, became untenable when Griffin's infantry came rolling in from the east. Unable to stop the advance of the V Corps, the soldiers began to leave the rifle pits and drift to the rear. To capitalize on the situation, the dismounted cavalry charged the works. Spearheaded by Fitzhugh's brigade, the dismounted cavalrymen poured over the fortifications. Simultaneously, Devin committed the 1st U. S. Cavalry. Clearing the breastworks at a bound, the regulars thundered

off after the fleeing Confederates. In the mopping up operations which ensued, the cavalry leaders reported that their men captured nearly 1,000 prisoners, two battle flags, and two guns. Two brigades, Fitzhugh's and Pennington's, claimed that they reached the guns first. General Merritt, in his "After Action Report", however, gave Fitzhugh's brigade credit for this success. [137]

Griffin's and Ayres' divisions reached Five Forks immediately after the cavalry carried the position. The large number of units which had converged on the strategic crossroads caused considerable confusion. As soon as Sheridan and his officers had restored a semblance of order, a pursuit was organized. Devin wheeled his division to the left, and rested his right on Griffin's division. Ayres' division was massed behind Griffin's. Upon the completion of these dispositions, the Union battle line rolled westward. The White Oak road served as the axis of the Federal advance. [138]

Immediately before Warren's attack, Custer had massed Capehart's and Wells' brigades opposite the Rebel right. In accordance with Merritt's instructions, Custer had remounted these two units. When the sound of heavy firing in the east reached Custer's ears, he prepared to attack. To

cover his advance and draw the fire of the greyclads' artillery, Custer directed the 15th New York of Wells' brigade to feign a frontal attack on Corse's main line of resistance. After the 5th New York had engaged the Rebel artillery, Custer would lead Capehart's and Wells' brigades forward and try to turn Corse's right flank. Corse's Virginia infantry brigade had been reinforced by one of Rooney Lee's brigades which had been dismounted. [139]

When Custer gave the word, the 15th New York threw down fences in front of the Confederate works. Next, the regiment, covered by a strong force of skirmishers, charged the battery. The determined New Yorkers, despite being exposed to a "terrible cross-fire" from the Southern infantry posted in rifle pits and behind barricades, charged up to the very muzzles of the canister-belching guns. Repulsed, the New Yorkers fell back. A second attempt to reach the guns also ended in failure and the regiment retreated, leaving a number of dead and wounded scattered on the field. [140]

As soon as the 15th New York had launched its frontal attack on Corse's brigade, Custer moved forward with Capehart's and Wells' commands. Before the Confederates could shift the position of their guns, Custer's troopers had

swept around their right flank. Pushing eastward, Custer sought to seize a position in the rear of Corse's main line of resistance. Before Custer could secure his objective, Rooney Lee intercepted his column. Mounted men of the blue and the gray moved simultaneously to the attack. The fighting ebbed and flowed. Rooney Lee's troopers, however, held their position and Custer's drive to turn the Rebel right was checked. Custer was unable to smash Rooney Lee's command and cut his way through and join the Union forces approaching from the east. This must have been very frustrating to the aggressive Custer, because the roar of battle was steadily drawing near, a certain indication that Warren was driving the Confederates before him.[141]

When Warren overtook Crawford's division, he found the troops in position in the edge of the woods on the east side of Gilliam's field. The right flank brigade, Kellogg's, of Crawford's division was massed in the timber north of the White Oak road. At the same time, Custer's division was being held at bay south and west of the field by Rooney Lee's troopers. Warren was distressed to observe that Crawford's soldiers were hesitant about moving against the breastworks held by Corse's Virginians on the opposite side of the field.

It seems that the rapid advance through the woods had disorganized Crawford's formations. While there had been no order to halt, and many of the junior officers were urging their men to resume the advance, the soldiers, "not feeling the influence of their commanders", refused to budge.[142]

After allowing a few minutes for the officers to re-form their units, Warren rode into the field, the corps flag in his hand. The general was accompanied by Captain Weygaurd and the other staff members then present. As he moved, the general called for those within hearing to follow him. Everywhere along the front, the color-bearers and officers sprang forward. Emitting a mighty shout, Crawford's division drove to the attack. In spite of a scathing fire, the blueclads rolled over Corse's brigade. A large number of the Confederates were made prisoners, and the remainder dispersed. Sergeant Hiram A. Delavie of the 11th Pennsylvania (Baxter's brigade) captured the colors of the 32d Virginia. When within a few paces of the works, General Warren's horse was shot from under him. To shield the general, Lieutenant Colonel Hollon Richardson of the 7th Wisconsin leaped between Warren and the foe. The colonel was cut down, badly wounded. One of the general's orderlies was also killed.[143]

Following the defeat of Corse's brigade, Crawford's troops pushed westward along the White Oak road, mopping up scattered pockets of resistance. The column proceeded about one-half mile. There were no more Confederates in sight and it had started to get dark so Warren halted the pursuit. [144]

When General Pickett ordered Corse into position on the west side of Gilliam's field, he directed Rooney Lee to be prepared to fall back toward the Southside Railroad. Using his mounted brigade to cover his dismounted unit, Rooney Lee fought a skillful delaying action. The retreat was slow and deliberate. After the collapse of Corse's brigade had exposed his left, Rooney Lee quickened the pace of his withdrawal. Even then, Custer was unable to cut off any appreciable number of Lee's troopers. Pressed by Custer's bluecoats, Rooney Lee's troopers passed up the W. Dabney road. After crossing Hatcher's Run, Rooney Lee's division marched to the Ford's Church road, where the general reported to Fitz Lee. Custer followed the Confederates for about six miles. Darkness, however, finally compelled Custer to give up the pursuit. Retracing their steps, Custer's troopers camped upon the battlefield. Here, Pennington's brigade rejoined the division. [145]

The shattered remnants of Corse's, Ransom's, Steuart's, and Wallace's brigades made their way through the woods and fields north of the White Oak road. After wading Hatcher's Run, the survivors of the disaster gained the W. Dabney road. By the time the troops had reached the vicinity of the Southside Railroad, the officers had restored a semblance of order. After the units had been partially re-formed, Pickett moved his command toward Exeter Mills at the mouth of Whipponock Creek. He planned to ford the Appomattox at that point and rejoin the Army of Northern Virginia.[146]

As soon as he halted Crawford's division, Warren called for Colonel Bankhead. The general told the staff officer to find Sheridan and report what had happened. In addition, Bankhead was to ask for fresh instructions. When the colonel returned to Warren's command post, he told the general that orders had already been sent. Shortly thereafter, Colonel George A. Forsyth rode up and at 7 p. m. handed Warren the following message:

> Major-General Warren, commanding Fifth Army Corps, is relieved from duty, and will report at once for orders to Lieutenant-General Grant, commanding Armies of the United States.[147]

Warren's apparently lackadaisical attitude at the time that he was marshaling the V Corps at Gravelly Run Church had grated on Sheridan's nerves. Commenting on this, in his "After Action Report", Sheridan observed:

> ... General Warren did not exert himself to get up his corps as rapidly as he might have done, and his manner gave me the impression that he wished the sun to go down before dispositions for the attack could be completed.[148]

A little later, Sheridan exploded. The incident which triggered Warren's relief was the unsteadiness shown by Gwyn's brigade in the attack on "the return". Sheridan reported:

> During this attack I again became dissatisfied with General Warren. During the engagement portions of his line gave way when not exposed to a heavy fire, and simply from want of confidence on the part of the troops, which Warren did not exert himself to inspire.[149]

Sheridan accordingly drafted an order relieving Warren of the command of the V Corps. At the same time, Sheridan directed Griffin to take charge of the corps and push the Rebels down the White Oak road. (General Bartlett would assume command of Griffin's division; Pearson was to take over Bartlett's brigade.) By this time, however,

Sheridan and Griffin had reached Five Forks and the victory was complete.[150]

Little dreaming that his relief from the command of his corps had ever been thought of, Warren hastened to Sheridan's command post. His object was to try to persuade Sheridan to reconsider his action. The reply he received, "Reconsider? H...! I don't reconsider my determination."[151]

Writing of Warren's relief, Captain Charles H. Peter observed:

> Thus, on the field of battle, after the most successful day's work that he had ever taken part in, was Warren deprived of the command of the corps which he had commanded since March, 1864, and a position he had earned by the right of soldierly courage and brilliant operations on many fields. Beginning at ... [Big] Bethel, his name is associated with every field upon which the Army of the Potomac was engaged.[152]

Sergeant William A. Mentzer of the 39th Massachusetts told being:

> Sheridan at Five Forks with his staff, riding along the rear of our lines, shouting, "See the Sons of B...s run! Give them H..l, boys!" After going a little way into the woods we came to the rear of the Rebel works, where I saw a head behind the same firing at our folks. Running on my bayonet I jumped to the works and ordered him to come out; he

> looked up and had the impudence, with a smile on his face, to say, "I wish you would let me fire these five cartridges." I think I swore some and told him I'd put the bayonet right through him unless he came out at once, and he came. When going to the rear with my prisoner I saw General Warren riding the same way, but not till the next morning did I know that our great and good leader had been relieved of his command.[153]

It was not until a Court of Inquiry was convened in 1879 that Warren was cleared of the grave "accusations or imputations" leveled against him by General Sheridan.[154]

Under Griffin's direction, the V Corps kept up the pursuit until darkness put a stop to the day's operations. Sheridan now issued orders for Griffin to recall his troops. Ayres' and Crawford's divisions were to bivouac at right angles to the White Oak road, facing east; Bartlett's division was to watch the Ford's Church road. It was about 11 p. m. before the last of the tired infantry camped.[155]

Devin's troopers, who had spearheaded the final stage of the mopping up operations on the White Oak road, also retraced their steps. The cavalrymen spent the night on the Widow Gilliam's plantation.[156]

By 5:45 p. m., the news reached Grant that Mackenzie's division had driven across the White Oak road,

and Sheridan was about to assault the Confederate position at Five Forks. Grant informed Meade that it might be a good idea to have Humphreys wheel Miles' division to the left. Miles' soldiers would be used to occupy the position held by Griffin's division following the battle of White Oak road, and thus prevent the Confederates from sending reinforcements to Pickett's task force. [157]

Chief of Staff Webb immediately forwarded Grant's telegram from Meade's headquarters to Humphreys' command post. Humphreys, in turn, directed Miles to carry out Grant's suggestion. When Miles gave the word, his brigade commanders led their troops forward. A strong skirmish line covered Miles' battle line when it moved out of the works covering the Boydton plank road. Miles had three brigades (Scott's, Ramsey's, and Madill's) in front, and one (Nugent's) in reserve. The division succeeded in reaching its objective without encountering any opposition. Miles' right flank brigade (Madill's) and center brigade (Ramsey's) occupied the rifle pits which the division had thrown up and occupied the previous evening. Madill's troops were in contact with Mott's on their right. Scott's brigade, on Miles' left, was posted in the works covering the White Oak road, which had been held by Griffin's division on the night of the 31st. Since his

left flank was resting in the air, Scott refused it. Nugent's brigade was stationed behind Scott's command.[158]

A little after 4 p. m., the officers gathered at General Anderson's headquarters heard heavy firing toward the west. It was not long before General Lee received his first incomplete tidings of the debacle. As was his habit when making his first adjustments to a new situation, the general in his deep voice asked abstractedly of the cavalry officer who had brought the news, "Well, Captain, what shall we do?"[159]

The best General Lee could do was little enough, and it entailed new risks. He would have to rush infantry reinforcements to try to prevent the annihilation of Pickett's task force. At 5:45, Lee ordered Anderson to send Bushrod Johnson and three brigades (Hunton's, Stansel's, and Wise's) to Ford's Church Crossing, on the Southside Railroad. Forty-five minutes later, Johnson marched with his three brigades. This meant the virtual abandonment of that part of the Petersburg defenses within the bend of Hatcher's Run.[160]

The departure of Johnson's command left four brigades (Cook's, Ryman's, McGowan's, and McRae's) to hold the fortifications from the Claiborne road to Armstrong's Mill. A single regiment from Ryman's brigade and McRae's

sharpshooters were given the task of occupying the earthworks formerly held by two brigades -- Minton's and Wise's.[161]

Colonel Porter carried the first news of the smashing victory to Grant's headquarters. It was about 7:30 o'clock when Porter left Five Forks. As he rode off, Porter recalled:

> The roads in places were corduroyed with captured muskets. Ammunition trains and ambulances were still struggling forward for miles; teamsters, prisoners, stragglers, and wounded were choking the roadway. The coffee-boilers had kindled their fires. Cheers were resounding on all sides, and everybody was riotous over the victory. A horseman had to pick his way through this jubilant condition of things as best he could, as he did not have the right of way by any means.[162]

Traveling by way of the Brooks road, Porter turned into the Boydton plank road. As the colonel rode along, his orderly called out to a group of soldiers the news of the victory. The only response he received was from one of the men, who raised his open hand to his face, put his thumb to his nose, and shouted, "No, you don't -- April fool." It was then that Colonel Porter realized that it was April 1.

Reaching Dabney's Mill, Porter found Grant and most of his staff sitting before a camp fire. The general was

clad in his blue cavalry overcoat, and the ever-present cigar was in his mouth. As Porter approached the group, he began "shouting the good news". Porter remembered that:

> ... in a moment all but the imperturbable general-in-chief were on their feet giving vent to wild demonstrations of joy. For some minutes there was a bewildering state of excitement, grasping of hands, tossing up of hats, and slapping of each other on the back. It meant the beginning of the end -- the reaching of the "last ditch". It pointed to peace and home. Dignity was thrown to the winds.

Grant, as expected, asked the usual question, "How many prisoners have been taken?"

Porter was happy to report that Sheridan's provost marshal had estimated that over 5,000 Confederates had been captured. As Porter recalled, "this was the only part of ... [his] recital that seemed to call forth a responsive expression from ... [Grant's] usually impassive features."

After listening to Porter's description of the battle, Grant, with scarcely a word, walked into his tent. By the light of a flickering candle, he picked up his "manifold writer", a small book which retained a copy of the material written. As soon as the general had finished several dispatches, he handed them to an orderly to be sent

over the field telegraph. Emerging from his tent, the general rejoined the officers around the camp fire. Grant then remarked as coolly as if he were making a comment on the weather, "I have ordered an immediate assault along the lines."[163]

Pickett's task force had been routed with a loss, according to the Federal reports, of not less than 4,500 prisoners, 13 stand of colors, and 6 guns. Confederate dead and wounded certainly did not exceed those suffered by the Yankees. The Southerners failed to submit a return enumerating their losses from the battle.

General Warren stated that the V Corps at Five Forks captured 3,244 men with their arms, 11 regimental battle flags, and one 4-gun battery (McGregor's), with its caissons. The larger part of the prisoners were captured by Ayres' and Griffin's divisions. At the same time, the V Corps lost in killed, wounded, and missing 633, of which 300 were in Crawford's division, 208 in Ayres' division, and 125 in Griffin's division.[164]

Sheridan's and Mackenzie's cavalry commands did not suffer very greatly in the battle. Instead of submitting a return for their losses in the battle of Five Forks, the cavalry leaders listed their casualties for the period from

March 29 through April 9. The proportion of cavalry officers killed and wounded in this battle, however, was large.[165]

Pickett's task force had been terribly mauled. His cavalry had suffered slightly; his five infantry brigades had been cut to pieces. The battle of Five Forks marked the beginning of the end for the Army of Northern Virginia. By this victory, General Grant had succeeded in crushing Lee's right flank and rendered untenable the position at Petersburg which the Confederates had resolutely held since the previous June in the face of tremendous Union pressure. Lee would now have to evacuate the Petersburg-Richmond area and move into the field, where his men would not have the advantage of earthworks. The Union superiority in manpower and equipment could be used to their full advantage.

The Union victory had been sweeping and complete.

Notes on Part VII

The Battle

1 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 660; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1299; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 342.

2 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 661; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1264; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 342.

3 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 661.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 661-662; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 343.

6 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 662. It is possible, but it does not seem probable, that Lee's telegraphic orders for Pickett to hold Five Forks covered an acknowledgment of Pickett's request for reinforcements and a diversion. A report from Pickett evidently had reached army headquarters on the morning of the 1st. Indications are, however, that it covered only the events of the previous night. In his report to Secretary of War Breckinridge on the evening of the 1st,

Lee described Pickett's report of the night of March 31-April 1, but did not say anything to suggest that Pickett had appealed for assistance. See O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1263-1264. Absence of all evidence during the afternoon that Lee had any specific appeal from Pickett for help would indicate that Pickett's memory of events was fuzzy when he wrote his report, or else that his telegram miscarried. It scarcely seems possible that so important message, if received at GHQ, would have been forgotten by Lee, by Colonel Walter Taylor, and by the others who wrote of the events of April 1. Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 662.

7 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 662; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 344.

8 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 663-664; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 344.

9 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 344.

10 Ibid; Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 664.

11 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 664.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 665.

14 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 35-36.

15 Ibid., 36.

16 Ibid., 37.

17 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1280.

18 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 37.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1288.

22 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 1372. Colonel Ould was the Confederate agent in charge of the exchange of prisoners at City Point, Virginia.

23 Ibid., 1372, 1377; R. E. Lee, IV, 38.

24 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 665-666.

25 Ibid., 666.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 667.

29 Ibid., 667-668.

30 Ibid., 668.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 669.

33 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1103. (For the details of Sheridan's 3 a. m. communication to Warren, see part VI of the Five Forks study.)

34 Ibid., 1130.

35 Ibid., 1104.

36 Ibid., 1100, 1130. Sheridan also pointed out, "General Ayres was unable to get into the enemy's rear in time to attack as expected owing to the darkness and bad roads ... ." Ibid., 1100.

37 Ibid., 1117, 1130, 1135. Colonel Pennington deployed three of his regiments into line of battle, while holding a fourth (the 2d Ohio) in reserve.

38 Ibid., 1130, 1135.

39 Ibid., 1118, 1130.

40 Ibid., 1118, 1123.

41 Ibid., 1123.

42 Ibid., 1123-1124.

43 Ibid., 1124, 1128.

44 Ibid., 1135.

45 Ibid., 1139.

46 Ibid., 1144, 1149, 1157; "Map of the Battle Field of Five Forks", (files, National Archives).

47 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 436-437.

48 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1104, 1244.

49 Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee", 711-712.

50 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 344.

51 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1104. Sheridan indicated in his "After Action Report" that Gillespie had reconnoitered the area. At Warren's Court of Inquiry, Gillespie testified:

> ..., that he had made no reconnaissance of the enemy's works before the attack; that the cavalry had moved directly up the /Dinwiddie/ road and gradually pressed the enemy behind his works; that he did not know that there was a return, nor did he know its direction from the position where the Fifth Corps was formed; that he was instructed by General Sheridan to select ground which would hold General Warren's corps close under the right flank of Devin's command and beyond the observation of the enemy, as he wanted to put Warren in as a turning column. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 347.

52 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 829, 831.

53 Ibid., 831.

54 Ibid., 829.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid., 831, 880, 885, 887, 889-890, 897. Kellogg's first line consisted of the 6th and 7th Wisconsin, the 91st New York formed his second line. Baxter had the 107th Pennsylvania, the 97th New York, and the 39th Massachusetts

in his advance line; the 16th Maine and the 11th Pennsylvania formed his rear line. From right to left, Coulter's first line consisted of the 56th and 88th Pennsylvania Consolidated and the 94th New York. His second line had the 147th New York on the right, the 95th New York in the center, and the 121st and 142d Pennsylvania Consolidated on the left.

57 Ibid., 830, 832, 838, 850, 854, 860. Chamberlain's brigade was massed in three lines of battle. Bartlett likewise formed his brigade into three lines of two battalions each; one small regiment was deployed as skirmishers in front, and one regiment (the 155th Pennsylvania) was held in reserve.

58 Ibid., 832.

59 Ibid., 832, 869, 872, 874, 876. Gwyn's initial battle line was composed of: the 3d and 4th Delaware, the 157th and 191st Pennsylvania. The 210th Pennsylvania constituted the second line. The 190th Pennsylvania was thrown forward as skirmishers.

60 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 346.

61 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 830.

62 Ibid.--

63 Ibid.; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 376.

64 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 831.

65 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 374-375; Powell, The Fifth Army Corps, 802.

66 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 831.

67 Ibid., 1105.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid., 831.

70 Porter, "The Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 250.

71 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1105.

72 Ibid., 1105, 1244.

73 Ibid., 1254.

74 Ibid., 1254-1255.

75 Ibid., 1244, 1254-1255. Among the casualties were Captain William Lancaster, killed, and Major Robert S. Monroe and Lieutenant Oscar S. Mathews, mortally wounded. In addition, Colonel Spear was wounded in the mopping up operations.

76 Ibid., 1105, 1244.

77 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 670.

78 Ibid., 670-671.

79 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 832, 869. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 347; Porter, "Five Forks and

the Pursuit of Lee", 713; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 378; Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 250.

80 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 832, 869; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 347; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 378.

81 Ibid.

82 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 869; Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee, 713"; Powell, The Fifth Army Corps, 803.

83 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 832, 869.

84 Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee", 713.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 869.

87 Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee", 713.

88 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 869-876. "The return" was between 700 and 800 yards west of the junction of the Gravelly Run Church and White Oak roads, instead of in the vicinity of the junction. Powell, The Fifth Army Corps, 804.

89 Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee", 713.

90 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 569, 870-873. Colonel Grindlay reported that his brigade captured four stand of

colors. Four enlisted men (Corporal August Kauss of the 15th New York Heavy Artillery, Sergeant Robert F. Shipley of the 140th New York, and Sergeant Thomas J. Murphy and Private David Edwards of the 146th New York), were recommended for and received the Medal of Honor for capturing these flags. Colonel Stanton credited his command with capturing two stand of colors. Lieutenant Jacob Keogle of the 7th Maryland and Private Joseph Stewart of the 1st Maryland received the Medal of Honor for this feat. Gwyn's brigade also captured two battle flags.

91 Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee", 713-714.

92 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 870.

93 Ibid., 832-833, 837; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 348.

94 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 396.

95 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 833.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid., 880; Powell, The Fifth Army Corps, 804.

98 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 885, 887; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 397.

99 Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 397.

100 Ibid., 398.

101 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 349; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 833.

102 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 838.

103 Ibid., 838, 850.

104 Ibid., 861.

105 Ibid., 837-838, 861.

106 Ibid., 832, 837-838, 850. Chamberlain's brigade marched out of the woods by the left flank and, passing southeast of the "Chimneys", proceeded up the ravine in the direction of the firing. Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 398.

107 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 837-838.

108 Ibid., 839,850; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 349.

109 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 850, 854, 856. At first, the 187th and 189th New York had been deployed as skirmishers. When Griffin advanced against the new Confederate line, the skirmishers were recalled. By the time that the officers in charge of the 187th and 189th New York had mustered their troops, the rest of the division had moved off.

110 Ibid., 839, 850, 854, 861, 865, 868. The commander of the 20th Maine, Lieutenant Colonel Walter G. Morrill,

reported that his regiment captured the colors of the 9th Virginia.

111 Ibid., 850.

112 Ibid., 839, 868.

113 Ibid., 881; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 349-350.

114 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 835, 881, 897.

115 Ibid., 835.

116 Ibid., 835, 881, 897.

117 Ibid., 866.

118 Ibid., 863, 867.

119 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 669-670.

120 Ibid., 670; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1299-1300.

121 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 350.

122 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 835, 881, 897; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 402-403.

123 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 835, 888, 897.

124 Ibid., 835; Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 253.

125 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 351; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 835.

126 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1244-1245, 1251.

127 Ibid., 864-865. At 7 p. m., Major Ellis Spear with his two companies of the 1st Maine took position at the ford. When they approached the bank of Hatcher's Run, the Federals were fired on by a detail of Rosser's command, which was posted on the far side. The Yankees returned this fire. After about an hour, General Mackenzie rode up and told Spear that his men were shooting at their own comrades. Mackenzie then asked Captain Charles F. Sawyer to have his company cross the run. Sawyer refused, stating that he had seen the foe. Next, Mackenzie requested Captain William O. Howes to send a patrol across. In the meantime, the soldiers on the north bank had started answering the Mainemen's "halloos" with the cry that they were the "Ninth New York Cavalry". Sawyer, however, refused to let Howes carry out Mackenzie's request. Two sergeants (unknown to Sawyer) volunteered to cross the run. On doing so, they were captured. This convinced Mackenzie that he had been mistaken, and he returned to his camp.

128 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 353; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1300.

129 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1118, 1130.

130 Ibid.

131 Ibid., 1135.

132 Ibid., 1118, 1124, 1135.

133 Ibid., 1124, 1135-1136.

134 Ibid., 1124, 1136; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 350-351; Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee", 714.

135 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1136; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 350-351.

136 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, III, 683.

137 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1118, 1124, 1136; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 403-405. Both of the captured pieces were 3-inch rifles. Actually, the Confederates abandoned the guns; they were not taken in a hand-to-hand encounter.

138 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 839, 851, 1124.

139 Ibid., 1130-1131, 1139; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 351.

140 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1131, 1139. In his "After Action Report", Custer mistakenly credits the 8th New York with the attack on the battery.

141 Ibid., 1131, 1139; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 351.

142 Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 253; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 351-352; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 835, 881.

143 Ibid.

144 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 352; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 835, 881.

145 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 352; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1131.

146 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 355.

147 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 835-836; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 420.

148 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1105.

149 Ibid.

150 Ibid., 839, 1105; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 420-421; Swan, "The Five Forks Campaign", 405.

151 Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 254; Powell, The Fifth Army Corps, 809.

152 Porter, "Fifth Corps at the Battle of Five Forks", 254.

153 Roe, The Thirty-Ninth Massachusetts, 286.

154 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 357-361.

155 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 839, 1105.

156 Ibid., 1105-1106.

157 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. III, 396.

158 Ibid., 412; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 711, 714-715, 724, 734, 745; Walker, History of the Second Army Corps, 668.

159 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 41.

160 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 1288.

161 Freeman, R. E. Lee, IV, 41; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 355.

162 Porter, "Five Forks and the Pursuit of Lee", 714.

163 Ibid., 714-715.

164 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLVI, pt. I, 836, 840; Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 353-354. General Bartlett reported that the First Division captured 27 officers and 2,374 enlisted men in the battle. According to the statement furnished the Warren Court of Inquiry by the Adjutant-General's office, the Federals captured 2,063 Confederates at Five Forks.

General Griffin submitted the following report of casualties suffered by the V Corps at Five Forks:

Command	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
Bartlett's Division				
Chamberlain's Brigade	4	16	3	23
Gregory's Brigade	1	15		16
Pearson's Brigade	14	72		86

Command	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
Ayres' Division				
Grindlay's Brigade	4	37		41
Stanton's Brigade	10	58	12	80
Gwyn's Brigade	10	68	9	87
Crawford's Division				
Kellogg's Brigade	12	90	6	108
Baxter's Brigade	5	40	2	46
Coulter's Brigade	15	110	21	146
	75	506	53	633

165 Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '65, 354.