

“Never Have I Seen Such a Charge”

Pender’s Light Division at Gettysburg, July 1

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It was July 1 at Gettysburg and the battle west of town had been raging furiously since 1:30 p.m. By dint of only the hardest fighting troops of Major General Henry Heth’s and Major General Robert E. Rodes’s divisions had driven elements of the Union 1st Corps from their positions along McPherson’s Ridge, back to Seminary Ridge. Here, the bloodied Union regiments and batteries hastily organized a defense to meet the storm they all knew would soon break upon them. This was the last possible line of defense beyond the town and the high ground south of it. It had to be held as long as possible.

To break this last line of Union resistance, Confederate Third Corps commander, Lieutenant General Ambrose P. Hill, committed his last reserve, the division of Major General Dorsey Pender. They were the famed Light Division of the Army of Northern Virginia, boasting a battle record from the Seven Days battles to Chancellorsville unsurpassed by any other division in the army. Arguably, it may have been the best division in Lee’s army. Certainly no organization of the army could claim more combat experience. Now, Hill would call upon his old division once more to make a desperate assault to secure victory. In many ways their charge upon Seminary Ridge would be symbolic of why the Army of Northern Virginia had enjoyed an unbroken string of victories through 1862 and 1863, and why they would meet defeat at Gettysburg.

The Light Division, as A. P. Hill, its original commander, named it, was organized following the Battle of Seven Pines (May 31-June 1, 1862). It consisted of six brigades, two composed of North Carolinians, one each of Virginians, South Carolinians, and Georgians, and the last consisting of Tennessee and Alabama regiments. Hill was a fiery, aggressive soldier and his command reflected his personality. From the Seven Days battles to Chancellorsville, the Light Division found itself in the most desperate encounters of nearly every engagement. On more than one battlefield they proved the difference between victory and defeat. Their most famous moment came at Sharpsburg, where they arrived in the nick of time after a 17-mile forced march from Harper’s Ferry, and saved Lee from a disastrous defeat. But they earned their reputation at

a high cost. Of the four brigades that composed the Light Division at Gettysburg, from the Seven Days to Chancellorsville, they suffered 8,914 battle casualties, the majority of which were killed and wounded.¹ The record of the Light Division won Hill promotion to lieutenant general and command of the newly formed Third Corps in the reorganization of the army that followed the victory at Chancellorsville. The reorganization also altered the division's order of battle. The brigades of Brigadier General James J. Archer, and Colonel John Brockenbrough, were transferred to the newly created division of Major General Henry Heth. Command of the Light Division went to freshly promoted Major General Dorsey Pender.

Pender was a soldier cast from the same mold as Hill. He shared Hill's aggressive spirit, and, wrote one of his men, "was one of the coolest, most self-possessed and one of the most absolutely fearless men under fire I ever knew." Pender was 29 years old at Gettysburg. He had been born and raised in the fertile farm country near the Tar River, in Edgecombe County, North Carolina, in the northeastern part of the state. At age 16 he won an appointment to West Point, graduating with the class of 1854, ranked 19th in class of 46. After graduation he accompanied classmates James E. B. "Jeb" Stuart, and Samuel T. Shepperd to Shepperd's home in Good Spring, North Carolina for a brief vacation that the army allowed them before reporting to their respective regiments. Here Pender encountered Mary Frances Shepperd, who although only 14 years old caught the young officer's eye. Five years later, while home on a furlough, Pender married Fanny. By this time Pender was an experienced soldier with service as an officer in the 1st Dragoons on the frontier under his belt. Despite his deep love for his wife, marriage did not affect Pender's combative spirit. He was a soldier and it is clear he enjoyed his profession. After a fight with Indians in June 1860, he wrote Fanny; "Darling do not trouble yourself about the Indians. Fighting is supposed to be my profession, and my wife must get used to the idea."²

When the South began to secede in 1861, Pender did not question with whom he must serve. "I shall never regret resigning, whatever may turn up," he wrote to Fanny in March, 1861, while in Montgomery, Alabama seeking a commission with the new Confederate States Army; "I feel now as I felt then, that I could not serve in the U.S.A." In August, after serving in various positions, Pender was appointed colonel of the 6th North Carolina Infantry. He already had a reputation for being a stern, unforgiving disciplinarian, observing in a letter to Fanny, "I think every one has confidence in me, and the men rather fear me I think. I sometimes hear the men question an order, and when told it is the Colonel's directive they say no more." Under Pender's direction, the 6th developed into a crack regiment. He led it into battle at Seven Pines, on May 31-June 1, 1862. At one point in the conflict, Pender found his regiment cut off and in danger of destruction. Pender's coolness under pressure, and his professionalism, saved his command from destruction as he skillfully extricated it from its perilous position. By a stroke of fortune, the entire incident took place under the eye of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, who rode up to Colonel Pender and greeted him, "General Pender, I salute you." Davis's battlefield promotion - a rare event indeed - of Pender, gave him command of a North Carolina brigade in A. P. Hill's Division. From this point on Pender's star was in ascension. From the Seven Days to Chancellorsville he was wounded three times, but refused to leave the field each time. When Lee reorganized the army after Chancellorsville, and promoted Hill to lieutenant general, the old Light Division commander recommended Pender for promotion to major general and command of the division. Pender, wrote Hill in his endorsement to Lee, "had the best drilled and disciplined Brigade in the Division, and more than all, possesses the unbounded confidence of the Division." Lee agreed, and on May 30, 1863, Pender was promoted to major general.³

Benjamin Cathey, an officer in Pender's old brigade, recalled his former commander as this moment in his career: "He was a medium size man [five feet ten inches], round of body, closely knit and muscular; his movements were agile and strong; his complexion was tan; his eye gray and kindly, and his whole exterior indicated courage, nerve and power of endurance." A surgeon in the division, observed that his new division commander, "was brave as a lion and seemed to love danger." His letters to Fanny confirm the surgeon's estimation of Pender, yet he was not a

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reckless soldier. His battlefield record exhibited professional competency and cool judgement. Yet, not everyone cheered Pender's appointment to command. His reputation for harsh discipline likely did not sit well with the common soldier. One soldier, earlier in the war, wrote that the men of brigades adjacent to Pender had "a perfect horror" of the general. Pender gave an example of his brand of discipline in a letter to Fanny during the Maryland Campaign. After complaining that his men had become a "filthy unprincipled set of villains," he wrote, "I have had to strike many a one with my saber."⁴

To Fanny, Pender exuded confidence as he led his new command north toward Pennsylvania in June, 1863. "May we meet again in my constant prayer," he wrote, "I do not think we shall have much severe fighting this summer. We will get North for a few months but we shall have to come back by September or Oct. for their force will be increasing while ours will be decreasing, but by that time we shall probably give them such a taste of war, that they may be willing to say quit." This, we may presume, was intended to assuage the fears of his young wife. Pender had seen enough service to know that victory would not come so easily.⁵

Leaders and Men

The four brigades that formed Pender's Division, were the best of Hill's old Light Division. The heavy losses at Chancellorsville had been partially made good, and morale generally was high, a by-product of an army that had enjoyed a nearly unbroken string of successes, and believed victory was still achievable. The division numbered nearly 7,000 infantry, supported by a battalion of artillery, under an excellent artilleryman, Major William Poague. Brigadier General James H. Lane was the senior brigadier of the division, commanding a North Carolina brigade consisting of the 7th, 18th, 28th, 33rd, and 37th North Carolina Infantry. The brigade bore two somewhat melancholy distinctions; they had the highest number of casualties in the division, having lost 2,892 men since the Seven Days Battles, including 909 at Chancellorsville, and the 18th North Carolina had accidentally mortally wounded Stonewall Jackson in the latter battle. Despite these losses and the severe casualties suffered at Chancellorsville, Lane's Brigade was the second strongest in the division at Gettysburg, numbering some 1,800 officers and men. The 29-year-old Lane was a popular officer with his men, and was one of Pender's most experienced officers. A well-educated man, Lane had graduated from the Virginia Military Institute in 1854, from University of Virginia in 1857, and subsequently taught at VMI, the Florida State Seminary, and the North Carolina Military Institute. He received his brigadier's commission following the death of Brigadier General Lawrence O'Bryan Branch's death at Sharpsburg, and commanded his brigade through the battles of Shepherdstown, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville.⁶

The officers and men of Lane's Brigade represented a fair sampling of men from nearly every region of the state, from the coastal region of Wilmington, to "mountain boys" of such places as Gaston and Cleveland counties. There were two unique companies of men, both in the 18th North Carolina. Company A of that regiment was known as "The German Volunteers," the only



*Brig. Gen. James H. Lane
(CWLM)*

company from the state of distinct foreign citizenship. Company F, known as “The Scotch Boys” had an average company height on muster in of 6 feet 1 3/8 inches, and had sixty men who ranged from 6 feet to 6 feet 4 inches in its ranks. Of all the brigade’s engagements, Chancellorsville had been the harshest. Lieutenant Octavius A. Wiggins, of the 37th North Carolina, recalled, “I do not hesitate to say that it was the bloodiest battle that I have ever witnessed.” The men of Wiggins regiment all agreed that this was the hardest contested combat they experienced during the entire war. People cannot pass through such a combat - even a victorious combat - without it sapping the fighting spirit of some. A number in the 37th apparently thought it a brutal enough experience that they did not intend to take their chances in another such engagement. On May 19, 32 men from Company A deserted, taking all of their equipment and weapons with them. North Carolina had a chronically high desertion rate throughout the war - which might offer an explanation for Pender’s harsh discipline - but the 37th had suffered the highest casualties of any regiment in the army at Chancellorsville, losing 34 killed and 193 wounded. Chancellorsville also gutted the senior leadership of brigade, with twelve of thirteen field officers becoming casualties, most of them on May 3, in the repeated assaults on entrenched Union positions. The carnage among company officers was also high. Fortunately, many of these officers were able to return to duty by the time of Gettysburg, and the efficiency of the brigade remained quite good.⁷

The next in seniority among Pender’s brigadiers was Brigadier General Edward L. Thomas. Thomas commanded a brigade of four Georgia regiments, the 14th, 35th, 45th, and 49th, numbering approximately 1,400 officers and men. At 38 years old



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(CWLML)*

he was the oldest brigadier in the division. Born in Georgia and educated at Emory College, Thomas enlisted in a Georgia cavalry regiment following his graduation and served in the war with Mexico. He earned distinction in this conflict by capturing the son of the ex-emperor of Mexico during the Battle of Huemareta. Following the war, Thomas declined an offer for a commission in the regular army and returned to civilian pursuits in Georgia. At the outbreak of the war he recruited the 35th Georgia Infantry. When his brigade commander, Brigadier General Joseph R. Anderson was wounded during the Battle of Frayser’s Farm, Thomas assumed command of the brigade. In November 1862 he received his brigadier’s star and permanent command of the brigade. Thomas’s record reflects a soldier who performed his duty faithfully and well, but who may not have had the full confidence of his superior selected to attend to ca

did the hard fighting. They had lost 1,259 killed, women were the lightest losses in the division. At Chancellorsville, Thomas reported only 177 casualties or Thomas ever failed to do their duty.⁸

For promotion to brigadier general to fill the brigade recommended the colonel of the 13th North Carolina, at Chancellorsville and returned home to recover. In North Carolina, the senior colonel after Scales, whom Pender described as “the greatest old granny,” well with the division commander. Scales was an ol



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been a captain in the 3rd North Carolina, when Pender had been its lieutenant colonel early in the war. But it is unlikely that friendship played a part in Pender's recommendation of Scales's promotion. Friend or not, Pender would stand for no one who did not possess the stalwart qualities he demanded of himself and those who served under him. Scales had seen action in nearly every engagement of the army, from Yorktown to Chancellorsville, and at Fredericksburg, when Pender was wounded, he temporarily commanded the brigade. In his report of Chancellorsville, Pender described Scales as "a man gallant as is to be found in the service." Pender's recommendation was approved and on June 13, 1863 Scales was notified that he had been promoted to brigadier general. In spite of his wound, he left home and hurried to catch up with the army.⁹

Scales Brigade had been recruited almost wholly in the western half of North Carolina, where secessionist sentiments were lukewarm. But this had been Pender's Brigade since the Seven Days Battles and his stamp of professionalism and discipline was upon it. Its casualties of 2,093 officers and men from the Seven Days on spoke to its combat record. An officer from another North Carolina regiment who visited Pender once during the winter of 1862 was impressed by the appearance of his brigade. "His camp was a model of cleanliness, regularity and good orders," the officer wrote, "his sentinels and guard saluted, in strict military style, all officers wore the badges of their rank. I was particularly impressed with this, as it was not by far, universal in the Army of Northern Virginia." Yet, although this brigade had always performed their duty on the battlefield, like Lane's, it suffered the affliction of numerous desertions. In April, 1863 Pender complained to Fanny, "our N.C. soldiers are deserting very rapidly. I have had about 30 in the last 20 days." In a letter to army headquarters on April 23, Pender complained that at least 200 men had deserted from the 24th North Carolina in 30 days. Despite these numerous desertions and heavy battle casualties, Scales fielded nearly 1,500 men in his brigade for the campaign into Pennsylvania.¹⁰

Pender's fourth brigade was known as McGowan's Brigade, consisting of the 1st South Carolina Provisional Army, 1st South Carolina Rifles, and 12th, 13th, and 14th South Carolina. They were a crack outfit. At Second Manassas, the South Carolinians had made an epic stand along the unfinished railroad bed, repulsing three major Union attacks in a day of sustained and furious combat. That action cost them 722 killed and wounded almost one-half the brigade. In the Seven Days Battles they lost 929 casualties, only 4 of which were listed as missing. At Sharpsburg, they were the brigade of the Light Division that first outflanked the Union line and helped to check the last Union drive of the day. Fredericksburg cost them the life of their commander, General Maxcy Gregg, and Colonel Samuel McGowan was promoted to replace

him. McGowan went down with a bad wound in the bloodbath at Chancellorsville, where the brigade suffered 455 casualties, and command fell to the senior colonel, D. H. Hamilton, of the 1st South Carolina. But Hamilton suffered from failing health and he turned command of the brigade over to the colonel of the 14th South Carolina, Abner Perrin.¹¹

The 36-year-old Perrin hailed from the Edgefield District, South Carolina, where he was an attorney. He secured a lieutenant's commission in the 12th U.S. Infantry during the Mexican War, serving with Maxcy Gregg, the major, and future South Carolina governor, Milledge L. Bonham, the lieutenant colonel. Following the war the 12th was mustered out of service and Perrin returned to South Carolina. He offered his services to the Confederacy in July 1861 and was commissioned a captain in the 14th South



Portrait of Abner Perrin, 1864

Carolina Infantry. An officer of the 1st South Carolina described Perrin as “an officer of remarkable gallantry as remarkable discipline, and, perhaps, more distinguished than for these qualities by his devotion to, and concentration upon, the military life.” These notable qualities, combined with heavy losses among the field officers of the brigade in the campaigns of 1862 and early 1863, paved the way for Perrin’s promotion to colonel of the 14th in February 1863. Of Pender’s four brigade commanders at Gettysburg, Perrin possessed the least experience in commanding and controlling the tactical units of the regiment and brigade, but he compensated for his lack of experience in this area by his possession of superb tactical acumen and confidence in himself. As events at Gettysburg would demonstrate, Perrin performed best in moments of crisis and danger.¹²

Perrin’s Brigade contained some of the earliest volunteers of the Confederacy. The 1st South Carolina began organizing soon after that state seceded from the Union in December 1860, and part of the regiment came under fire during the bombardment of Fort Sumter. Orr’s Regiment of Rifles began its organization in the spring of 1861, while the other regiments of the brigade, the 12th, 13th, and 14th regiments, were organized as a result of Confederate President Jefferson Davis’s July, 1861 call for volunteers. The regiments were well officered, well drilled, and devoted to the cause for which they fought. The brigade’s losses of 2,670 men since the Seven Days Battles was exceeded in the division only by Lane’s Brigade, but where Lane’s casualties included 373 missing or captured, Perrin’s Brigade reported only 13 in this category. Although this figure may be low, it is suggestive of the brigade’s discipline and outstanding battle record.¹³

Preparations For a New Campaign

The Light Division spent the weeks following Chancellorsville reorganizing and readying itself for a new campaign. The latter included both physical and mental preparation. Chancellorsville had taken an emotional toll on the division and the men badly needed rest to recover from its shock. “But rest and fine weather made up, in great measure, for our losses,” wrote Lieutenant J.F.J. Caldwell, of Perrin’s Brigade. After the perils and carnage of Chancellorsville, “it seemed a positive luxury to live,” recalled Caldwell. The period from May 7 to June 9, Caldwell remembered as “a little bright island in a sea of strife.”¹⁴

The physical preparation of the division included regular drills, guard and picket duty. The latter duties were considered light duty in the pleasant spring weather, but the company and battalion drills “were sluggishly done,” wrote Caldwell. The men held an attitude “that the time for ‘pride, pomp and circumstance’ was past, and that only hard, dry fighting was of any avail.” Pender required that the men drill with their knapsacks on, which did nothing to improve his soldier’s dislike of drilling and caused much grumbling. From the perspective of a company officer, Caldwell thought drilling with knapsacks unnecessary for veteran soldiers. “They do not need the additional hardening, and it served to disgust them, not merely with the drill, but with the whole service.”¹⁵

In early June, Pender formed sharpshooter battalions in Perrin's and Scales' brigades. Such formations already existed in other divisions in the Army of Northern Virginia and had proven highly effective in carrying out both skirmish and sharpshooting duties. Each battalion consisted of approximately 120 hand picked men, divided into three companies. The men selected were “young, active, and good shots.” The term “sharpshooter battalion” is something of a misnomer, for although these battalions performed sharpshooting duties, they also constituted the skirmish line for their brigade in battle. With all the best shots of a brigade in one battalion they represented a deadly force. Since they were a tactical formation, with a battalion commander, they also provided the brigade or division commander with an elite force that could be detached for independent operations if needed. This was flexibility not enjoyed by brigades who still

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employed the traditional tactic of detaching entire companies from regiments to perform skirmish duties.¹⁶

North to Pennsylvania

“I do not suppose any army ever marched into an enemies country with greater confidence in its ability to (conquer) and with more reasonable ground for that confidence than the army of Gen Lee,” reflected Abner Perrin on July 29. Pender’s Division took up the march that would lead ultimately to Pennsylvania on June 15. They were the last division of the army to march, having remained with Hill’s Corps in the earthworks about Fredericksburg to keep the enemy under observation. An unpleasant heat wave descended upon northern Virginia when the orders to move arrived making the first three days of marching brutal for Pender’s infantrymen. Many succumbed to heatstroke and straggling was heavy. A member of the 22nd North Carolina recalled that so many straggled in his regiment on one day that all of those who did not straggle were able to find shade under a single apple tree. Marcus M. Willis, of the 13th South Carolina, was among those who could not keep up. Willis wrote his father that for two nights on the march it rained nearly the entire night, but everyone was so exhausted that they simply lay down and slept, too tired to care about the water “running under us and raining on us.” By June 20, Willis could not keep up and he found shelter with a family in Rappahannock County. “Our Gens are very hard on their men about marching,” he wrote his father, “harder than Jackson I believe.”¹⁷

Those who remained in the ranks quickly grew stronger as they became endured to daily marching again. Spirits rose as they crossed the Potomac and entered a fertile land, abundant with good things to eat and magnificent scenery. “This is the best country I believe I ever saw,” wrote a soldier in Perrin’s Brigade. On June 21, Pender wrote to Fanny; “everything thus far has worked admirably.” Seven days later, after the division had crossed into Pennsylvania, Dr. Welch, the surgeon of the 13th South Carolina, wrote, “I have never seen our army so healthy and in such gay spirits. How can they be whipped?” Welch admitted his spirits were lifted by their invasion of Yankee territory. Many in the division shared his sentiments. A feeling existed that it was their turn to make the Yankee citizens experience the treatment Southern civilians had suffered at the hand of the Union army. “It will be hard to restrain them,” wrote Pender, “for they have an idea that they are to indulge in unlicensed plunder.” For a brief period they did. “[O]ur army treats sitisens tremedious bad,” wrote Marcus M. Willis, of the 13th South Carolina, on June 28; “it is scandleous goin to their dwelling houses taking privet propperty watches money milk butter chickens anything they can put hands on.” Willis knew of 200 to 300 soldiers who were arrested for unauthorized foraging.¹⁸

Authorized foraging differed from the unauthorized variety only in that it did not permit the pillaging of people’s homes. But anything the army needed to sustain it was fair game. “We are taking everything we need - horses, cattle, sheep, flour, groceries and goods of all kinds, and making as clean a sweep as possible,” wrote Dr. Welch on June 28. Pender found no pleasure in this duty. To Fanny he admitted, “altho’ they [Yankees] have made us suffer all that people can suffer, I cannot get my resentment to that point to make me feel indifferent to what you see here.” Willis’s statement that nearly 300 soldiers had been arrested by June 28, is evidence that Pender did not take plundering civilian property lightly, and took measures to crack down on it. Besides arresting rogue foragers, Pender posted guards at private residences for additional protection. “Soldiers must have a strict and severe rein held over them,” observed Dr. Welch, “if not, they are worthless.”¹⁹

Although the bonds of discipline may have slipped slightly in the Light Division in the first day or two of their arrival in Pennsylvania, Pender moved quickly to restore order. And although discipline may have temporarily sagged, the combat effectiveness and morale of the division did not. J. F. J. Caldwell explained that “we were veterans - thoroughly experienced in all that relates to the march or the battle-field, sufficiently drilled to perform any manoeuvre at all likely

to be demanded, sufficiently disciplined to obey orders promptly and with energy, yet preserving enough of the proud individuality of Southern men to feel the cause our own, and therefore to be willing to encounter the greatest amount of personal danger and moral responsibility.” Beyond this, Caldwell noted that the health of the men who completed the march to Pennsylvania was excellent, they were “more properly equipped than at any period prior or subsequent,” in the war, and all had confidence “in the valor of their comrades and the skill of their officers.” This latter factor is crucial to understanding the confidence borne by the rank and file of the Army of Northern Virginia on the eve of Gettysburg. “The victories of 1862 and the great battle of Chancellorsville this year had led us to believe scarcely anything impossible to Lee’s Army,” wrote Caldwell, “and the management of our generals, which had wrung even from the North the highest encomiums, gave us assurance that every particle of our strength and courage would be most judiciously and powerfully applied.” No soldier from the Army of the Potomac could claim this advantage. While the Union soldier had endured a succession of five army commanders in one year, the Confederate soldier had enjoyed repeated successes under Lee’s leadership. To Caldwell and his comrades, by June 1863, they believed Lee to be “invincible, unmovable.”²⁰

March To Battle

After two days of rest around Fayetteville, Pennsylvania (about six miles east of Chambersburg), on June 30, Pender received orders to march his division toward Cashtown along the Cashtown-Chambersburg Turnpike (hereafter called the Chambersburg Pike). Pender’s orders were part of Lee’s plan to assemble his army east of South Mountain over the last days of June and the first few days of July. Accurate information about the enemy was sketchy, but what there was indicated that the Union army remained in Maryland. Soon after Pender had his column underway, it began to rain. But unlike the dirt roads of Virginia, which quickly turned to mud when it rained, the Chambersburg Pike was macadamized and, according to Dr. Welch, the soldiers consequently found the rain to be a “rather agreeable” relief. The column made its way up South Mountain into the Cashtown Gap, passing the ruins of Thaddeus Stevens iron works, burned several days earlier by Early’s Division. Pender halted his division in the area of what today is known as Buchanan Valley in the early afternoon. Even today this is a beautiful area, and Pender’s men must have enjoyed their camp here. Food, fuel and water were plentiful, and the war in this tranquil and delightful landscape, seemed almost unreal.²¹

Yet on the same day Pender’s Division made their short march to South Mountain, a foraging expedition by a brigade in Heth’s Division discovered Union cavalry occupying Gettysburg. The strength and composition of this force was not known with any accuracy; neither was it known whether Union infantry were nearby, although the intelligence reports General Lee had received indicated that they were not. To discover what force the enemy had in the vicinity of Gettysburg, and to secure that important road junction, A.P. Hill determined to send Heth’s Division toward the village on the morning of July 1. Hill and Heth anticipated that only Union cavalry were in front and could easily be dealt with by Heth’s nearly 7,000 infantry. But as a precaution, Hill ordered Pender to have his men support Heth’s reconnaissance. Pender ordered his men to cook one day’s rations and instructed his brigade commanders to have their men ready to march at 5 a.m. His divisional artillery battalion had not caught up with the division, being behind Anderson’s Division at Fayetteville, and Hill attached Major David G. McIntosh’s battalion of reserve artillery to Pender for the July 1 movement. The order to cook rations and the early march hour aroused the suspicions of Pender’s veterans that “we were about to meet the enemy.”²²

Shortly after daylight on July 1 (about 4 a.m.), sergeants and company officers awakened their men and ordered them to fall in. “We rolled up our blankets and flies in haste,” recalled J. F. J. Caldwell (the hated knapsacks, Caldwell noted, had largely been dispensed with by the men by this time), and the companies and regiments quickly formed up to march. Perrin’s Brigade led

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the column, preceded by its battalion of sharpshooters, commanded by Captain W. T. Haskell, who always marched at the head of the brigade. Presumably to guard the divisional trains, Pender detached Orr's Rifles from Perrin at this time and left them behind. Pender marched on schedule, following the Chambersburg Pike, with his infantry in front followed by McIntosh's artillery. The weather was cloudy and humid, with intermittent showers passing through. After marching two or three miles artillery fire could be heard in the direction of Gettysburg. The enemy were in front! Dr. Welsh looked into the faces of the men in his regiment and noticed "in the countenance of all an expression of intense seriousness and solemnity, which I have always perceived in the faces of men who are about to face death and the awful shock of battle."²³

Around 9 a.m. Pender halted his division, while Heth probed toward Gettysburg. The increasing volume of artillery fire from the direction of Heth's advance indicated that he had found the enemy in some strength and that hard fighting lay ahead. Pender started forward at 10 a.m., crossing Marsh Creek. When the head of his column reached the intersection of the Boyd's Schoolhouse Road with the Chambersburg Road, he deployed his brigades into line of battle. Perrin and Scales formed along Boyd's Road, south of the Chambersburg Road, with Perrin on the right and Scales left on the turnpike. Thomas and Lane deployed north of the turnpike, using Boyd's Road to align upon, with Lane's right on the turnpike and Thomas to his left. From left to right, the line extended for just over one mile. Perrin deployed his sharpshooter battalion as skirmishers to cover the right flank of the division, and no doubt, Thomas did likewise on the left flank. The ridge along which the Boyd's Schoolhouse Road travels, afforded the division a clear view of Heth's infantry and artillery along Schoolhouse Ridge and Herr's Ridge, about one mile east. "We could see Heth's cannon arranged and booming away at the Yankees, who were replying with considerable briskness," wrote Surgeon Welch, "and we could also see the infantry of Heth's Division advancing in line of battle." Welch thought it a magnificent sight. The open country provided an unobstructed view in nearly any direction. To a surgeon it offered a splendid panoramic view, but a veteran infantryman might have seen it differently. This cultivated landscape afforded the attacker less cover and greater exposure to infantry and artillery fire.²⁴

Soon after forming his division, Pender ordered it forward. In front, "the musketry would increase and falter, but, on the whole became greater." About half the distance to Herr Ridge, Pender halted his division and let his men rest, while in front, Heth stumbled into Wadsworth's division, of the Union 1st Corps and had his two leading brigades badly mauled. After an hour's rest, Pender ordered his division forward again, probably in response to Heth's defeat. An advance in line of battle across any terrain is a tedious process. Numerous obstacles, both natural and man-made disrupt the linear formations and require frequent halts to re-dress the line, or necessitate some units to quick time to catch up after clearing an obstruction. "The perspiration poured from our bodies," recalled Lieutenant Caldwell. Pender halted his brigades in rear of Pegram's and McIntosh's battalions, who were deployed along Herr Ridge, north and south of the turnpike. Scales' Brigade, for some reason, advanced in front of the artillery posted immediately north of the pike, and lay down. Their position afforded the men on the left of the brigade what one soldier remembered as the "best view of infantry fighting I ever saw." It also exposed the brigade to the occasional enemy artillery shell that burst short of the Confederate artillery line, but this proved more of an annoyance than a hazard. In fact, Confederate artillery enjoyed a rare superiority in numbers this day and Union batteries that attempted to unlimber in front, along McPherson's Ridge, were silenced and forced to change position.²⁵

Through the early afternoon Pender's men watched and waited. Little was known about the enemy, except that he was present in force strong enough to have driven Heth's initial advance back. Shortly after the division had reached the vicinity of Herr Ridge, Captain W. T. Haskell, commanding Perrin's sharpshooter battalion, reported that strong enemy cavalry and infantry forces were maneuvering in a threatening manner on the right flank of Hill's Corps. The infantry were probably Colonel Chapman Biddle's brigade, which marched north along the west bank of Willoughby Run until it reached the Hagerstown Road between 11:30 a.m. and noon, where it

turned east and marched to join the 1st Corps in the vicinity of Seminary Ridge and McPherson's Ridge. Biddle had no aggressive intentions, but the direction of his movement could easily have been misinterpreted by Haskell. The cavalry belonged to Buford, who maneuvered elements of Colonel Thomas Gamble's brigade very aggressively and threateningly south of the Hagerstown Road with the deliberate intention of causing concern to the Confederates. Pender promptly ordered Lane to pull his brigade out of line and re-deploy on Perrin's right flank. Lane marched south and re-formed his brigade south of Old Mill Road, in rear of Herr Woods, which concealed most of Heth's Division. The Hagerstown Road ran roughly perpendicular with Lane's right, about one-quarter mile to the south. Lane observed some of Buford's cavalry moving beyond this road, and he ordered Major J. McLeod Turner, commanding the 7th North Carolina, to deploy his entire regiment as skirmishers at right angles to the brigade line and to post his line well south of the brigade so that he might keep the Yankee troopers at arm's length.²⁶

Initially, Thomas' Brigade remained separated from the division after Lane had been shifted to the right. Although Hill knew that Ewell's Corps was located north of Gettysburg, until noon he had no contact with Ewell and did not know his position. Until contact was established, Hill retained Thomas to guard the left flank of the corps and keep the enemy under close observation. Around noon the advance of Rodes' Division appeared in the vicinity of Oak Hill. This relieved Hill's anxiety for his left and Thomas moved his brigade south, behind Herr Ridge, halting in rear of some of Pegram's batteries, with his right on the Chambersburg Pike, and his left resting on Willoughby Run.²⁷

From Pender's position on Herr Ridge, the ground in front descended toward Willoughby Run, which then was fringed with small trees and bushes, rather than the woods that grow there today. From the valley cut by the run, the ground rises steadily east to what is termed West McPherson Ridge, running north-south, and so called because of the Edward McPherson farm, situated just behind the ridge's crest, immediately south of the Chambersburg Pike. The barn and the top of McPherson's farmhouse were visible from Pender's position. North of McPherson's farm the ground was in cultivation. About one hundred yards south of McPherson's stood the woodlot of John Herbst. Herbst Woods, shaped somewhat like a rectangle with a broader western end, ran from the banks of Willoughby Run to the crest of East McPherson's Ridge. This latter ridge ran parallel with West McPherson's Ridge in this area, separated by about one hundred fifty yards. Perhaps four hundred yards east of East McPherson's Ridge, ran Seminary Ridge, another of the series of north-south ridges, but slightly higher than the McPherson's Ridges. From Herr Ridge, the cupola on the Seminary building was visible.

Due to the Confederate artillery, Pender's men observed few enemy troops. They were concealed in Herbst Woods, or lay behind the reverse slope of the McPherson ridges, or were under cover on Seminary Ridge. Around 1:30 p.m. Rodes' Division moved to the attack with three brigades. On Rodes' right, Daniel's big North Carolina brigade moved south, toward the unfinished railroad bed, running perpendicular with the Chambersburg Pike, and approximately one hundred fifty yards from it. Now, recalled Lieutenant Caldwell, "the battle began in earnest," as Colonel Roy Stone's brigade of Pennsylvanians, positioned around the McPherson farm opened fire upon Daniels. Scales men, in particular, watched this bloody combat with great interest. The battle rolled back and forth, and it seemed to Thomas Martin, of the 38th North Carolina, that "neither side seemed to gain much over the other."²⁸

Around 2:30 p.m. Brockenbrough's and Pettigrew's brigades of Heth's Division advanced from the cover of Herr Woods and opened their attack upon the western front of the Union 1st Corps. As they descended to Willoughby Run, tremendous musketry fire erupted. The battle now raged all across West McPherson's Ridge. "The fire and smoke and dust and noise and confusion and disorder of battle had begun," wrote Captain Washington P. Shooter, of Perrin's Brigade. Pender's soldiers did not have long to wait before they too were summoned to battle. At 3 p.m. Pender received orders to advance Scales, Perrin and Lane to within close support of Heth. Thomas was to remain in reserve and support the artillery.²⁹

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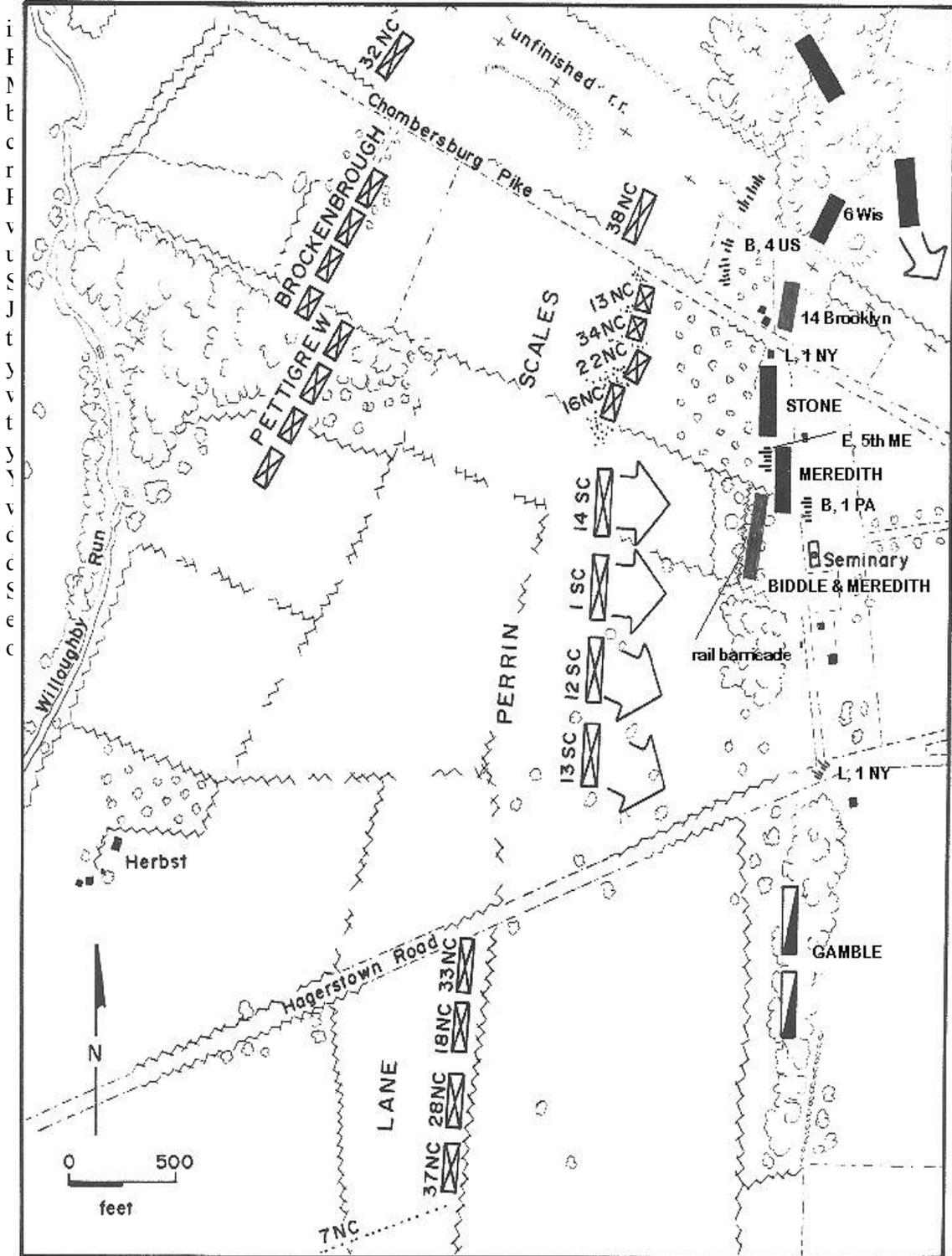
Pender's three brigades advanced slowly, passing over Herr Ridge and descending to Willoughby Run valley. At Willoughby Run, Scales' and Perrin's men encountered wounded and stragglers from Pettigrew's and Brockenbrough's brigades streaming back from the furious fighting in front. Some of Pettigrew's men, clearly shocked by the carnage they had endured, warned Perrin's soldiers, "saying we would all be killed if we went forward." Thomas Littlejohn, of the 13th South Carolina, wrote that "we did not halt [for these stragglers], but opened ranks for them to pass to the rear." On the left, Scales observed the 150th Pennsylvania, and elements of the 149th Pennsylvania, pouring musketry into Daniel's 32nd North Carolina, north of the Chambersburg Road. Scales reported, "seeing this, the brigade quickened their step, and pressed on with a shout to their assistance." With Scales close support, Brockenbrough's Virginia brigade, which had halted while Pettigrew slugged it out with the Iron Brigade in Herbst Woods, resumed their advance, and the Pennsylvanians rapidly withdrew behind the shelter of West McPherson's Ridge. Scales center regiment, the 34th North Carolina, passed directly into Herbst Woods. Unfortunately, no one from that regiment left a detailed account of this day, but the carnage they came upon in this woodlot must have sent a shudder through the regiment's ranks. Farther south, Perrin's men encountered dead and wounded from Pettigrew's right regiments, the 47th and 52nd North Carolina. "The field was thick with wounded hurrying to the rear, and the ground was grey with dead and disabled," noted Lieutenant Caldwell. But Perrin's veterans believed that Pettigrew's men, "like most new soldiers, had been content to stand and fire, instead of charging," which accounted for their heavy losses. The South Carolinians were about to discover that an uncommonly stubborn enemy lay ahead, and that only the most desperate fighting would overcome them.³⁰

A Most Terrific Fire of Grape and Shell

By 3:30 p.m., Heth's soldiers were fought out, disorganized by appalling losses, or low on ammunition. From the perspective of Perrin's and Scales' men Heth's regiments had broken the Yankee resistance along the McPherson Ridges. "We could see the Yankees running in wild disorder," wrote Captain Shooter, of the 1st South Carolina, as his regiment ascended East McPherson Ridge from Willoughby Run. General Scales observed Stone's Pennsylvanians fleeing "in great confusion to the rear," from the McPherson Farm. Now it remained for Pender's brigades to deliver the coup de grace to the enemy. Around 4 p.m. Hill gave Pender his orders; he was to "pass General Heth's division, if found at a halt, and charge the enemy's position." There was nothing fancy or deft about Hill's tactics. They relied upon the elan and courage of Pender's officers and men - and their blood; all commodities these soldiers had shown on every battlefield. Pender had kept Scales and Perrin in close support of Brockenbrough and Pettigrew in anticipation of this moment. Scales' Brigade had moved into the slight valley between East and West McPherson ridges, immediately in rear of Brockenbrough, whose brigade reported they had exhausted their ammunition, and Perrin's men were waiting in line on the west bank of Willoughby Run. Apparently, Lane's Brigade had not yet advanced from their position west of Herr Woods. Immediately after receiving his orders from Hill, Pender swung his three brigades into motion. Lane was ordered to advance. Perrin received his orders in person from Pender. He recalled that he would "move forward when I saw Gen Scales on my left move saying at the same time that his [Pender's] whole line would move, and that if we came upon Heath's [sic] Division at a halt fighting to move on and engage the enemy closely and manage my Brigade according to my own judgement." Scales did not elaborate on the nature of his orders, but they were no doubt the same as Perrin's. The final dramatic moment of the first day's battle at Gettysburg was at hand.³¹

Neither Pender nor any of his brigade commanders had any idea of the enemy's strength or his position, except that they were on Seminary Ridge. While this seems incredible today, this was not unusual in either army during the war, where attacks were ordered with only the vaguest

notion of where they enemy were and how strong they were. Pender and his brigadiers probably believed that a swift charge would clear this last line of resistance, already shaken by the fighting with Heth and Rodes. With rapidity of movement being essential, so that the enemy were not allowed to rally and organize a defense, the advance would be made without close artillery support.



Pender's attack upon Seminary Ridge. (Map by John Heiser)

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While speed was essential to follow up the enemy after Heth had driven them from the McPherson ridges, so that they would not have time to recover and reorganize, A.P. Hill's tactics with Pender's Division were nevertheless, unimaginative, expensive, and somewhat surprising in light of the experience of Chancellorsville. Had the weight of Pender's attack been shifted even one-quarter mile to the south, the entire Union line on Seminary Ridge would have been untenable and the Confederates could have obtained their objective with minimal loss. They also may have cut off a considerable portion of the 1st Corps from retreating to Cemetery Hill. This may be an unjust criticism of Hill, for he lacked cavalry to locate the enemy flank, and Buford's cavalry did a splendid job of screening the 1st Corps left flank. It is also possible that Hill did not anticipate that Pender would encounter strong resistance. Perhaps, but sending troops straight into the known strong point of the enemy is rarely good tactics, unless the objective must be obtained no matter what the cost. Seminary Ridge was not such an objective and many brave North and South Carolinians were going to pay a terrible price to take it.

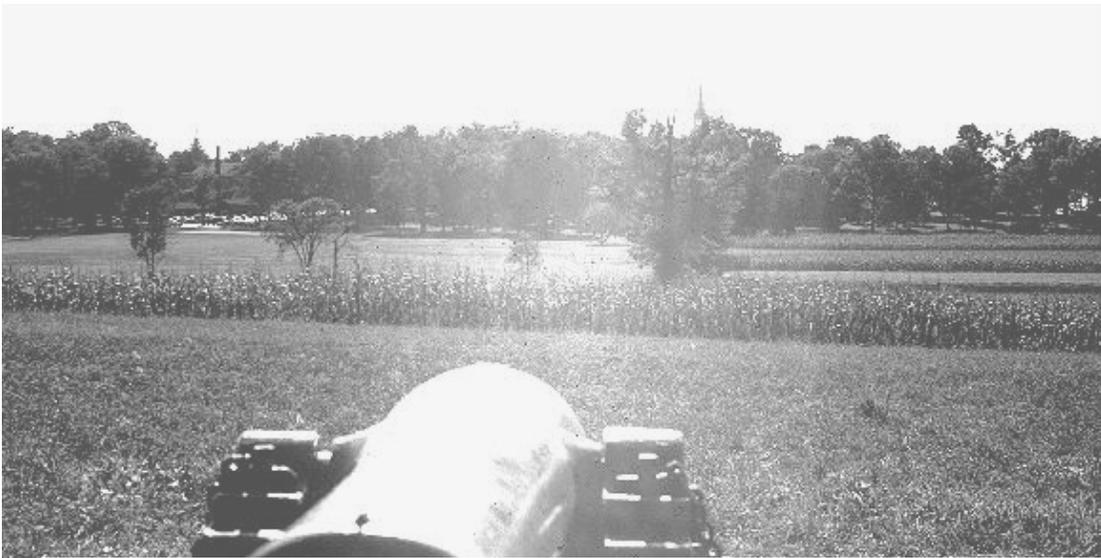
After receiving his orders from Pender, Colonel Perrin moved his brigade forward. They soon came upon Pettigrew's Brigade, lying down in line. Perrin recalled that "the poor fellows could scarcely raise a cheer for us," as his men passed over them. After clearing Pettigrew's line and before reaching the crest of East McPherson Ridge, Perrin halted his line and summoned his regimental commanders to give them their orders. Captain Joseph N. Brown, of the 14th South Carolina, recalled them:

General [colonel] Perrin gave orders to the field and staff, and then communicated to the rank and file, that they were to move forward without firing. That they were not to stop under any circumstances, but to close in, press the enemy close, and route [sic] it from its position.³³

Perrin's orders reflected his experience on other hard-fought fields. Assaults where the troops halted to return the enemy's fire inevitably failed. Only by enduring the enemy fire until the assaulting line was nearly on top of the defenders could an infantry attack hope to succeed.

On Perrin's left Scales nearly 1,500 officers and men, rose up and started forward. But Lane, whom Perrin anticipated would protect and support his right, "was not at this time in sight of me." Why Lane was so tardy in moving forward is something of a mystery. When he did move forward, elements of the 8th Illinois Cavalry, who had been hovering near his right flank, dismounted and peppered his line with an enfilading fire that caused additional delay until Lane's skirmishers drove them off. Whatever the cause of Lane's delay it cost Perrin's men dearly.³⁴

In Scales' Brigade, the command "attention" rang out along the line. George H. Mills, in the 16th North Carolina, wrote "every man rose to his feet, grasped his arms with a firm grip, and at the order 'forward, guide, left march,' we moved off at a quick step across a meadow." The line swept over West McPherson Ridge, past the bodies of hundreds of dead and wounded Federals, over Brockenbrough's Brigade, up the swell of ground that marked East McPherson's Ridge and then into the open ground extending to their objective, Seminary Ridge, about four hundred yards distant. The Union gunners, their guns loaded with canister or shrapnel, quickly sighted their tubes on the advancing line. A captain in the 2nd Wisconsin recalled that, "almost at the same moment, as if every lanyard was pulled by the same hand, this line of artillery opened, and Seminary Ridge blazed with a solid sheet of flame, and the missiles of death that swept its western slopes no human beings could endure." Scales drew the attention of nearly all of the 18 guns north of the Seminary building. "Every discharge made sad loss in the line," wrote a member of the 38th North Carolina. Lieutenant Colonel Rufus Dawes, commanding the 6th Wisconsin Infantry, supporting Stewart's Battery B, 4th U.S., near the eastern railroad cut, thought Scales regiments "maintained their alignments with great precision," despite the shell and canister that



Looking from eastern McPherson's Ridge, this is the ground over which the right of Scales' Brigade advanced. The woods in the distance are the remnants of the Seminary Woodlot.

tore their ranks. Since Scales had no support on his left flank, the right half battery of Stewart's battery pushed their guns forward so that they could enfilade the North Carolinians with canister. The infantrymen supporting the Union batteries poured in a terrible fire of musketry. Clouds of dense sulphurous smoke boiled up from Seminary Ridge. Despite this murderous fire, the North Carolinians pressed forward stubbornly. Union gunners thumped double loads of canister down their tubes and continued to pour it into the advancing line of men in gray.³⁵

With courage that seems almost unthinkable, Scales regiments continued to advance toward the blazing line in their front. The pure horror of these moments for North Carolinians can only be imagined. The 13th North Carolina offers some statistical measure of the sickening slaughter in the ranks. Of 180 officers and men carried into the attack, 150 were killed or wounded, a percentage loss of 83 per-cent. By the time the brigade reached the low ground between the two ridges, through which a small waterway known as Pitzer's Run passed, they could stand no more. In places, they were within one hundred yards of the Federals, but the Union artillery and musketry had smashed their formation. Scales reported that "our line had been broken up, and now only a squad here and there marked the place where regiments had rested." Every field officer except one had been shot and Scales was hit by a piece of shell and disabled. Many companies lost all of their officers. They were the leaders, those who inspired the enlisted men to charge into the face of danger. When they fell, the charge faltered. "The charging Confederates were brave men," wrote Captain Beecham, "in fact, no braver ever faced death in any cause and none ever faced more certain death!" The toughest survivors of the brigade, who had reached the farthest point of its advance, lay down to avoid the canister and musketry, and commenced firing upon the Union infantry and artillery. Many others, demoralized or panic-stricken by the bloody carnage and murderous Union fire, fled for the shelter of the reverse slope of East McPherson's Ridge. Of the approximately 1,400 officers and men present, 545 became casualties. Scales charge had been stopped cold.³⁶

Never Have I Seen Such A Charge

While Union canister and minie balls were mowing down Scales North Carolinians, Abner Perrin's South Carolinians were experiencing their own brand of hell as they charged on Scales right. As Perrin's regiments passed over East McPherson's Ridge, they had their first view of the enemy position. It was enough to unnerve any veteran. Captain Joseph N. Brown described it:

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“The ground from these works [Union rail barricade in the Seminary Woods] and the stone fence [where Buford’s men were deployed] presented a gradually declining slope to the valley westward; then on a level of about two hundred yards, then a like gradual ascent up the crest of the ridge [East McPherson’s Ridge], making perhaps half a mile from crest to crest, and presenting the fairest field of fire and finest front for destruction on an advancing foe that could well be conceived.” The same lethal reception that greeted Scales as he came into view, met Perrin’s regiments on their appearance. “We were met by a furious storm of musketry and shells from the enemy’s batteries to the left of the road near Gettysburg,” reported Colonel Perrin. But the brigade continued to advance until they reached a rail fence, running across the brigade front, about 200 yards from the Seminary Woods barricade. As the South Carolinians began crossing this fence, Biddle’s and Meredith’s regiments delivered what Perrin described as “the most destructive fire of musketry I have ever been exposed to.” The weight of this firepower, augmented by the 1st Corps artillery, hit the 14th and 1st South Carolina. In this first volley of canister, shell and musketry, Company K, of the 14th had 34 of 39 men shot down. The slaughter brought confusion and hesitation to the regiment’s ranks. Meanwhile, the right of the 1st South Carolina struck a post and board fence that ran from their right obliquely across their front. The men were unable to knock the fence down and this caused the right to push down upon the center and left of the regiment into what J. A. Leach described as a “solid mass.”³⁷

The murderous fire from Biddle, Meredith and the Union batteries sowed confusion and hesitation in the ranks of the 14th South Carolina. “It looked to us as though this regiment was entirely destroyed,” reported Perrin. On the right of the brigade, the 12th and 13th South Carolina had largely been spared the terrific artillery and musketry fire that swept the line of the 14th and 1st regiments. But the failure of Lane’s Brigade to advance on Perrin’s right gave Buford’s cavalymen, posted south of the Hagerstown Road, the opportunity to direct the full firepower of their breech-loading carbines on the 12th and 13th when they came within range. For a moment, it appeared that Perrin’s assault would meet the same terrible fate as Scales. On the left, the 14th wavered under a merciless fire, the 1st were crowding into a mob, and the 12th and 13th were receiving a “constant and withering” fire from Gamble’s troops carbines. Incredibly, the brigade had not fired a shot at their antagonists to this point. In this moment of extreme crisis and confusion, Perrin acted with swift action. He ordered Major C. W. McReary, commanding the 1st South Carolina, to oblique his regiment to the right, to avoid the rail barricade, then to change front to the left and fire into the flank of the barricade’s defenders. The 12th and 13th regiments were ordered to oblique to the right and charge Gamble’s dismounted cavalry. To inspire his soldiers Perrin rode his mount through the disordered ranks of the 1st South Carolina, and with waving sword, urged his men forward. “Filled with admiration for such courage as defied the whole fire of the enemy, the brigade followed, with a shout that was itself half a victory,” recorded Lieutenant Caldwell.³⁸

Observing Perrin’s advance, the commander of the Union 1st Corps artillery brigade, Colonel Charles Wainwright, would record in his journal; “Never have I seen such a charge. Not a man seemed to falter. Lee may well be proud of his infantry; I wish ours was equal to it.” The discipline of Perrin’s Brigade in this action is remarkable, particularly the ability of the different regiments to maneuver while under a heavy fire. This was the most difficult action for any Civil War unit to carry out. Perrin also enjoyed some luck in the direction of his advance. The farther he advanced toward Seminary Ridge, the less exposed his regiments were to the 1st Corps artillery north of the Seminary. Between, the rail barricade and the Hagerstown Road, a distance of nearly 200 yards, there were few Union infantry, and only the four guns of Reynolds Battery L. But these were rifled guns and their canister fire was less effective than that from the smoothbore Napoleon’s. It was this gap in the Union defenses on Seminary Ridge, that the 1st and 12th South Carolina struck in their renewed advance.³⁹

John A. Leach, of the 1st South Carolina, recalled that his regiment entered the Seminary Woodlot, south of the rail barricade, “in one solid body.” Despite crowding and confusion, the

Never Have I Seen Such a Charge

regiment built up a firing line that had a perfect line of fire on the flank and rear of the barricade defenders. Meanwhile, the 14th South Carolina, which had recovered from the shock of the carnage in their ranks, kept the full attention of Biddle's and Meredith's men in front. So pre-occupied were the Federals with the threat to their front that the 1st South Carolina were able to fire three or four rounds into their flank and rear before they realized the peril of their position. The flank fire of the 1st tipped the balance of the battle. The barricade defenders were near the end of their tether after two hours of constant combat, and their resistance swiftly dissolved as they became aware of the presence of the 1st on their flank. Biddle's and Meredith's men began to retreat, quickly, to avoid being cut off and captured, through the Seminary woodlot and past the Seminary building, leaving their artillery alone and unsupported.⁴⁰

While the 1st South Carolina discovered the gap in the Union defenses, so too did the 12th South Carolina. Despite a rapid fire from Gamble's cavalymen and Reynolds 3-inch rifles, that shot down dozens of men in the 12th and 13th regiments, their line, wrote Thomas A. Littlejohn, of the 13th, "never halted or wavered." It became apparent to the New York artillerymen that they were not going to stop the advancing line of Confederates, and when the South Carolinians were 200 yards away they began to limber their guns. With no one in their direct front, the 12th South Carolina moved up to the crest of Seminary Ridge and changed front so that they were on the flank of Gamble's cavalymen. At the same time the 13th pressed the front of the Union troopers. The Yankee horsemen began to withdraw, running back to their horses. The southern end of the Union line on Seminary Ridge had been captured, but Gamble's carbines and Reynolds cannon had exacted a terrible toll. The 12th counted 26 dead, 105 wounded and 4 missing. Among their dead were four color bearers. Two others had been wounded carrying the 12th's battle flag. In the 13th, there were 35 killed (the highest number in the brigade), 105 wounded, and 4 missing.⁴¹

Around the Seminary, the 1st and 14th South Carolina swept forward virtually unchecked. With his infantry supports in full retreat, 1st Corps artillery chief, Colonel Charles Wainwright, ordered his batteries to limber and retire. "I had little hope of getting them all off, for the rebs were close upon us," he wrote, "so near that a big fellow had planted the colours of his regiment on a pile of rails within fifty yards of the muzzles of Cooper's guns at the moment he received his order to limber up." This was undoubtedly the color bearer of the 14th South Carolina, whose identify, unfortunately, is unknown. Union musketry and canister had killed the entire color guard of this regiment, except this individual. To help the 1st Corps artillery escape, the headquarters guard of Rowley's division, consisting of Company D, 149th Pennsylvania took post around the Seminary and engaged the 1st and 14th South Carolina. General Abner Doubleday wrote later that this handful of bluecoats defended the Seminary "for fully twenty minutes." Perhaps it seemed like twenty minutes to the defenders, but Perrin reported that "it was the work of a few moments" to dislodge them. Those few moments however, allowed the Union batteries

to limber and start to withdraw. Wainwright forced them to move a walk, fearing it would create a panic among the infantry if he moved more rapidly.⁴²

Having helped clear the last resistance from the vicinity of the Seminary building, the 1st South Carolina advanced over Seminary Ridge, south of the Seminary. Wainwright spotted them, "sweeping around the south side of the college buildings." His last battery, Battery B, 4th U.S. Artillery, was just entering the Chambersburg Road when the South Carolinians made their appearance. Moments later the 14th South Carolina, flowing around the north and south side of the Seminary building, came pouring over the ridge. "The men closed upon the guns with all the rapidity their exhausted limbs

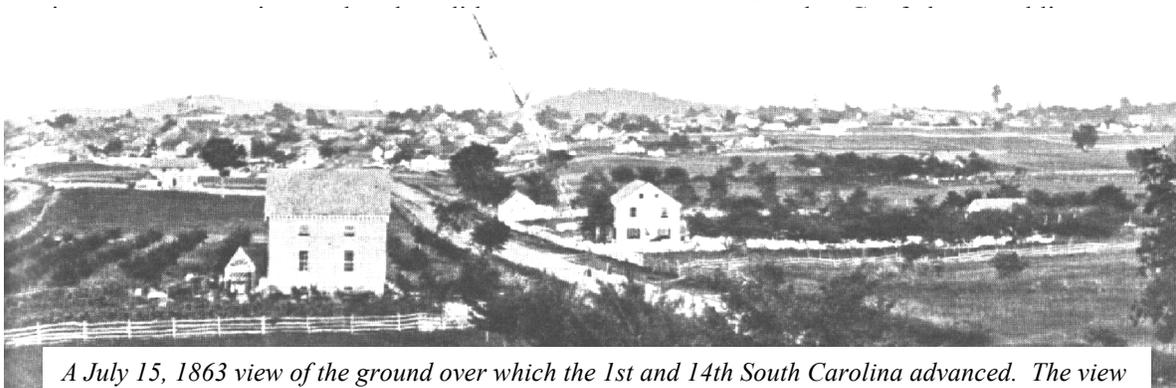


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would permit," wrote Lieutenant Caldwell. At a range of fifty yards the men of both regiments opened fire upon the artillery in the Chambersburg Road. There were large numbers of Union infantry also retreating along the road - the very men whom Wainwright feared he might panic by moving his guns too rapidly. Many infantrymen were shot by this fire and instead of replying to Perrin's musketry, the exhausted Federals scrambled off the road and sought cover behind the railroad embankment, north of the pike. This cleared the way for the 1st Corps artillery and Wainwright immediately ordered his guns to move a gallop. Despite the best efforts and bullets of the South Carolinians all but one gun escaped. This belonged to Lieutenant Wilbur's two sections of Battery L, 1st New York Light Artillery, who had been positioned near the Widow Thompson's house on Seminary Ridge. Men of the 1st South Carolina downed the off-wheeler horse on one of Wilbur's limbers and brought the vehicle to a stop. The drivers attempted to cut the dead horse from its traces, but the riflemen of the 1st shot one of the drivers, Wilbur's horse, and three more horses on the limber. Wilbur had no choice but to abandon the gun. "There was a now a race for who should first lay hand upon the piece," between the 1st and 14th regiments, recalled Lieutenant Caldwell. Which regiment won the footrace was not recorded. "Suffice it to say, the piece was captured," noted Caldwell. The gun proved to be the first 3-inch rifled piece accepted by the U.S. Army Ordnance Department.⁴³

Those of the 1st and 14th who had not been shot, collapsed from exhaustion, or straggled, pressed on along either side of the Chambersburg Pike in pursuit of the retreating Yankees, whom Perrin wrote, "literally swarmed through the streets of Gettysburg." According to Lieutenant Colonel Brown, the 1st entered town along the turnpike, while the 14th followed the railroad embankment. "All was in confusion," in both regiments by this time and Perrin ordered them to halt before entering town so that they might be reorganized. Once everyone had fallen in, Leach did not think the 1st South Carolina had more than 50 men, and it is likely the 14th had a similar number. With this force Perrin advanced into town with his line extending from the railroad embankment across the Chambersburg Pike. Sergeant Leach observed great numbers of Federal soldiers to the right and left of their line, but those he could see he thought were unarmed. Perrin called for volunteers to collect prisoners who had taken refuge in the town. A detail was formed but so many Union soldiers surrendered to it that Perrin had to form extra details from his small force to escort the prisoners to the rear. Most Union soldiers were too exhausted or disorganized to offer resistance, but some of the more hard-core of their ranks took shelter in homes along the route of retreat and fired at Perrin's detail from doors and windows. According to Surgeon Welsh the infantry would drive the Federals out then "they would rush in, turn out the families and set the houses on fire." If Welsh's statement is accepted without question, it sounds as if Perrin's men practiced unnecessarily brutal tactics. However, Perrin's men burned no buildings on July 1. In following the advance of the brigade that day, Welsh apparently passed the Emmanuel Harman farm; located south of Herbst Woods, on the west bank of Willoughby Run. After a difficult combat with two companies of the 20th New York State Militia, men of Pettigrew's Brigade burned the farm, despite the protests of the tenant family residing there. These were the only buildings burned on July 1.⁴⁴

The two regiments advanced through town as far as Washington Street. Survivors of both



A July 15, 1863 view of the ground over which the 1st and 14th South Carolina advanced. The view

While Perrin pushed on into Gettysburg, General Pender rode forward to discover the fate of his South Carolinians. He had observed their charge upon Seminary Ridge, then watched them pass over the ridge and disappear from view. Fearing that Perrin may have pushed forward too far in advance of the rest of the division and been captured, Pender rode forward to investigate. He came upon a wounded lieutenant of the 12th South Carolina who told him that the brigade "was over the hill yonder" [Seminary Ridge], and were still advancing. Pender galloped after them, coming upon the 12th and 13th regiments first, whom Perrin had ordered to join the 1st and 14th regiments in town. Pender halted them and ordered the regiments to take position between the town and Seminary where they would protect the right flank of his advanced line, then he dashed off to find Perrin and the 1st and 14th. He cut north of town, following the path taken by the 14th South Carolina, whom he caught up with at Washington Street. After complimenting the regiment for their gallant behavior he ordered Perrin to withdraw both regiments and reunite the brigade west of town. Pender then rode up to the 1st South Carolina, removed his hat in a salute to their colors, and, recalled Captain Shooter, "said our regiment had done enough for one day and ordered us to the rear for rest and get water."⁴⁶

As the two regiments withdrew from town with their prisoners, Perrin observed Confederate troops approaching town from the north. "What troops are those," Perrin asked of a staff officer who rode up. They were Rodes' Division the officer replied - Ramseur's Brigade to be exact, to which Perrin commented that he did not much like giving up a place his men had captured to men from another division.⁴⁷

During Perrin's fierce combat that dislodged the 1st Corps from Seminary Ridge, Pender and Scales, despite a very painful wound, personally rallied Scales shattered and shaken brigade. It could not have been easy considering the ordeal it had passed through, and many field and company grade officers who were casualties. But enough order was restored that when the 1st Corps began to retreat, Lieutenant Colonel G. T. Gordon, one of two field officers who had not been shot in the initial attack, led the survivors forward to Seminary Ridge.⁴⁸

On the far right of the division, Lane's Brigade approached Seminary Ridge, south of the Hagerstown Road, after the efforts of the 12th and 13th South Carolina had dislodged Gamble's cavalymen from their position near that road. The cavalymen were no doubt hurried along in their withdrawal by the approach of Lane's big brigade. Some troopers, positioned in the woodlot of the David McMillan, peppered Lane's line with carbine fire, but they quickly pulled out when the North Carolinians raised a yell and picked up their pace to a double-quick. Lane's regiments moved up and occupied Seminary Ridge, extending from near the Hagerstown Road to McMillan's woodlot. Here they were ordered by Pender to remain.⁴⁹

At a cost of nearly 1,100 killed and wounded, Pender's Division had seized Seminary Ridge and forced the 1st Corps to retreat to Cemetery Hill. Elan and courage, it appeared, had prevailed again and won the day for the Army of Northern Virginia. But among the front line soldiers of the division there was the sense that they had won an incomplete victory. Many prisoners were captured, but except for one gun and a caisson or two, the entire 1st Corps artillery brigade escaped. "The enemy returned to another range of hills behind Gettysburg," wrote Captain Shooter, "I never have been able to see why they were not pressed still farther as had plenty of daylight and some fresh troops." Abner Perrin, writing his old Mexican War lieutenant colonel, South Carolina Governor Milledge Bonham, on July 29 complained, "the very batteries which we had run off & which we saw them take off through Gettysburg, were the first to fire a shot from their new position. The first shell fired by them from that position was aimed at my Brigade." Surely, Scales men took little solace in their victory. Colonel William L. J. Lowrance, who assumed command of the brigade the evening of July 1, found it "depressed, dilapidated, and almost unorganized."⁵⁰

The heavy casualties in Scales' and Perrin's brigades also tempered the elation of victory. "The nature of the ground was such and the contest so brief that the wounded could not be moved, and were wounded twice, thrice and as many as four times, after being first stricken

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down," recalled Lieutenant Colonel Brown. The ground Perrin and Scales advanced over was a killing ground, perfectly suited to the defense. The gradual decline of the western slope of Seminary Ridge assured that the Union defenders did not fire high. "Not a foot of ground presented a place of safety," wrote Brown. The ambulance corps stood helpless during the action, unable to evacuate the wounded because of the murderous fire that swept the field. "Men never fell faster in this brigade, and perhaps never equally so, except in Orr's regiment at Gaines's Mill," Brown observed. The survivors of Scales' Brigade undoubtedly would nod in agreement with Brown's statement. Considering the intense combat Perrin's Brigade passed through during the war, Brown's statement is significant. Without detracting anything from the great courage of the South Carolinians and North Carolinians who stormed that ridge, their triumph owed much to luck (there was little artillery on Perrin's front and a gap existed in the 1st Corps defenses), and to the disorganized and fatigued condition of the 1st Corps defenders. Certainly generalship had nothing to do with their victory, but much to do with their appalling casualty lists. A. P. Hill repeated the tactics that had brought him success on other fields - bore in straight at the enemy and strike hard. Maneuver apparently was not a consideration. So, Pender's men advanced directly into the teeth of the enemy defenses and suffered the consequences. Victory had been achieved, but a more spectacular and far less expensive victory might have been earned had Hill shifted the weight of Pender's attack south of the Seminary.⁵¹

It is doubtful that Lee noted these smudges on his army's victory west of Gettysburg on July 1. The example of Chancellorsville had been repeated. Elan and courage had conquered the enemy's advantage of position. Two days later, when the battle reached an impasse, Lee sought to duplicate the success of Pender on July 1 on a more massive scale, by smashing the Union center on Cemetery Ridge with an assault by eleven brigades. This time elan and courage were not enough to overcome the Union advantage of position and the result was slaughter and defeat. When William T. Owen, a staff officer with the Washington Artillery, heard Lee say to Longstreet on the night of July 4, "I thought my men were invincible," it was an admission that brilliant victories, such as Pender had won on July 1, had bred overconfidence and ultimately contributed to the defeat of the Army of Northern Virginia.

NOTES

¹ Casualties for Hill's Division are from, U.S. War Department, The War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, (U.S. Govt. Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), 128 volumes. Hereinafter abbreviated as OR. The four brigades of the division, as it existed at Gettysburg, had reported only 456 missing or captured since the Seven Days Battles. Although some missing may not have been reported in incomplete casualty returns, the division had always been on the attack except at 2nd Manassas and Fredericksburg.

² Benjamin H. Cathey, "Sixteenth Regiment," in, Walter Clark, Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War, 1861-1865, (E. M. Uzell: Raleigh, 1901), Vol. 1, p. 765. [Hereinafter abbreviated as North Carolina Regiments]. Allen Johnson, ed., Dictionary of American Biography, (Charles Scribners Sons: New York, 1946), v. 13-14, p. 416. Hereinafter abbreviated as DAB. William W. Hassler, ed., The General to His Lady: The Civil War Letters of William Dorsey Pender to Fanny Pender, (Univ. of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, NC, 1965), p. 4-5. Hereinafter abbreviated as Hassler. Pender's letters to his wife are among the best of any Confederate officer's ever published during the war. They offer marvelous insight into Pender's most likeable personality.

³ Hassler, pp. 9, 34, 150, 241. DAB, 416.

⁴ North Carolina Regiments, pp. 764-765. Spencer G. Welch, A Confederate Surgeon's Letters to His Wife, (Neale Publishing: New York, 1911), pp. 72-73. Welch was a surgeon in Perrin's South Carolina Brigade.

Richard N. Current, ed., Encyclopedia of the Confederacy, (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1993), p.1190. Hassler, 175.

⁵ Hassler, pp. 249.

⁶ Lane's losses are derived from the official returns in the OR's. For his strength at Gettysburg see, John Busey and David Martin, Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg, (Longstreet House: Hightstown, NJ, 1986), p. 181. Encyclopedia of the Confederacy, pp. 907-908.

⁷ North Carolina Regiments, v. 2, p. 16-17, 660. OR 25, pt. 2, 814. Ernest B. Furgurson, Chancellorsville 1863: The Souls of the Brave, (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1992), p. 224.

⁸ Encyclopedia of the Confederacy, p. 1592.

⁹ Hassler, p. 251. Encyclopedia of the Confederacy, p. 1370. Clement Evans, ed., Confederate Military History, (Thomas Yoseloff: New York, 1962), v. 4, p. 350. Scales was a pre-war attorney, who held various public posts before the war, and served three terms as a U.S. Congressman during the 1850's.

¹⁰ W. G. Lewis to D. Gilliam, October 21, 1893, quoted in, Hassler, 195. Hassler, p. 227. Pender, as did other officers, attributed the desertions to a ruling by North Carolina Chief Justice R. M. Pearson, who declared the conscription law to be unconstitutional and refused to arrest deserters and men who eluded conscription officers.

¹¹ Encyclopedia of the Confederacy, p. 1195. Milledge L. Bonham, "A Little More Light on Gettysburg," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, (Notes and Review Section), v. 24 (1937-1938), Typescript copy, Vertical File V7-SC1, Gettysburg National Military Park (GNMP) Library. Actually, after Chancellorsville, the senior colonel of the brigade, Colonel D. H. Hamilton, of the 1st South Carolina, commanded the brigade. At the commencement of the Gettysburg Campaign, Hamilton, who had been ill for some time, left the brigade and turned command over to Perrin. See, Caldwell, The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, (Reprint, Morningside Bookshop: Dayton, OH, 1974), p. 90.

¹² Encyclopedia of the Confederacy, p. 1195. Caldwell, 122. Milledge L. Bonham, "A Little More Light on Gettysburg."

¹³ Caldwell, pp. 7-11. Casualties for Lane and Perrin are those reported in the Official Records.

¹⁴ Caldwell, 88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 90-91. Lane's Brigade did not form a sharpshooter battalion until after Gettysburg. It is not known when Thomas' Brigade did.

¹⁷ Abner Perrin to Governor Pickens, July 29, 1863, in, Milledge L. Bonham, ed., "A Little More Light on Gettysburg," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, v. 24 (1937-1938). Washington P. Shooter to My Dear McIntyre, July 20, 1863, Drumbeat (Charleston Civil War Round Table Newsletter), (June, 1989), copy, Vertical File V7-SC1, GNMP Library. A. J. Dula, "Civil War Incidents," Vertical File V7-NC22, GNMP Library. Marcus McKibben Willis to Father, June 22, 1863, Vertical File V7-NC22, GNMP Library.

¹⁸ Marcus M. Willis to Father, June 28, 1863, Vertical File V7-SC13 GNMP Library. Hassler, 253.

Spencer Welch to Wife, June 28, 1863, Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Copy Vertical File V7-SC13, GNMP Library.

¹⁹ Welch to Wife, June 28, 1863. Hassler, 253. J.F.J. Caldwell believed that the foraging "was not as extensive as one would have expected," and that the civilians "were amazed at our moderation." See Caldwell, p. 94.

²⁰ Caldwell, p. 95.

²¹ Spencer Welch to his Wife, August 2, 1863, Joyner Library, ECU.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Caldwell, pp. 96-97. Welch to his Wife, August 2, 1863, Joyner Library, ECU.

²⁴ John A. Leach to John Bachelder, Sept. 12, 1882, Bachelder Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society, Copy GNMP Library; (Hereinafter abbreviated as BP). OR 27, pt. 2, pp. 656, 661, 665, 668, 669. James S. Harris, Historical Sketches 7th Regiment N.C.T., (Privately Printed: Mooresville, N.C., 1893), p. 34. It is clear from the reports, letters, and recollections from the division, that Pender deployed after crossing Marsh Creek, and not along the Herr Ridge Road.

²⁵ Caldwell, p. 97. OR 27, pt. 2, p. 669. George H. Mills, History of the 16th North Carolina Regiment in the Civil War, (Reprint, Edmonston Publishing Co.: Hamilton, NY, 1992), p. 36. Autobiography of Thomas A. Martin, Typescript copy, Vertical File V7-NC38, GNMP Library.

²⁶ OR 27, pt. 2, p. 636, 661, 665.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 636, 668. Harris, 7th Regiment N.C.T., p. 34. Harris states that Ewell's approach caused some consternation initially, for it was unknown whether his troops were friendly or hostile. Thomas' position is indicated in the 1876 Gettysburg maps by John Bachelder.

²⁸ Caldwell, p. 97. Autobiography of Thomas A. Martin, Vertical File V7-NC38, GNMP Library. George H. Mills, of the 16th North Carolina, observed the fight for the colors of the 149th Pennsylvania from his vantagepoint. For his description, see; Mills, History of the 16th North Carolina Regiment in the Civil War, p. 36.

²⁹ Washington P. Shooter to McIntyre, July 20, 1863, copy, Vertical File V7-SC1, GNMP Library. Caldwell, p. 97.

³⁰ Thomas A. Littlejohn, "Recollections of a Confederate Soldier," Manassas NBP Collection, copy, Vertical File V7-SC1, GNMP Library. J. A. Leach to Bachelder, June 2, 1884, typescript copy, John B. Bachelder Papers (hereinafter abbreviated as BP), GNMP Library. OR 27, pt. 2, p. 669. A. J. Dula, "As Told By an Old Veteran," Reminiscences, Vertical File V7-NC22, GNMP Library. Dula states that his regiment, the 22nd North Carolina, the second from the right, had its left on Herbst Woods. This would place the 34th directly in the woods. Caldwell, p. 97.

³¹ Washington P. Shooter to McIntyre, July 20, 1863, GNMP Library. OR 27 pt. 2, 657, 661, 665, 669.

³² The positions of the various Union brigades and batteries are contained in the Official Records, volume 27, pt. 1, but also see, Allan Nevins, ed., A Diary of Battle: The Personal Journals of Colonel Charles S. Wainwright 1861-1865, (Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc: New York, 1962), p. 235, and, Maine at Gettysburg: Report of the Maine Commissioners, (The Lakeside Press: Portland, ME, 1898), pp. 83-84. It is interesting to note that Robinson's men did not erect the barricade along the western face of the woodlot. Since the woodlot was free of undergrowth they built the barricade within the woods, where it would be more concealed while still allowing good fields of fire in front.

³³ Varina D. Brown, ed., A Colonel at Gettysburg and Spotsylvania, (The State Company: Columbia, SC, 1931), p. 77.

³⁴ OR 27, pt. 2, 661, 665. The evidence from Lane's Brigade indicates that when the brigade commenced its advance the main body did not halt at any point. The 7th North Carolina and a company of the 37th North Carolina were the only elements of the brigade that were held up to skirmish with the threat from Buford's cavalry on the right. Either Lane received his orders late, or he did not keep his brigade as close to the front as Perrin and Scales.

³⁵ Mills, History of the 16th North Carolina Regiment in the Civil War, p. 36. Maine at Gettysburg, p. 85. North Carolina Regiments, v. 2, p. 693. OR 27, pt. 2, 670. R. K. Beecham, Gettysburg, The Pivotal Battle of the War, (McClurg Press: Chicago, 1911), pp. 79-81. Rufus R. Dawes, Service With the Sixth Wisconsin Volunteers, (Reprint, Morningside Press: Dayton, OH, 1984), p. 175.

³⁶ The percentage loss of the 13th North Carolina may be the highest of any regiment in the battle. See, W. G. Thompson to Mother and Father, July 18, 20th, 1863, Box 7, Brake Collection, United States Army Military History Institute (USAMHI). Also see, Clark, North Carolina Regiments, v. 1, p. 698. The statements of men in the 13th highlight the difficulty in accurately determining regimental strength. Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg, p. 182, credits the regiment with 232 effectives on July 1. But according to R. S. Williams, who wrote the regimental history for Clark's volume, 15 men were detached on July 1 and rejoined the regiment after the fighting that day. Possibly the difference of 40 men between Regimental Strengths and the statement of men from the regiment, were sick or on detached duty. The point is that regiment's frequently took less men into action than were reported as ready and equipped due to a variety of reasons. OR 27, pt. 2, p. 670. Beecham, pp. 79-81.

³⁷ Brown, A Colonel at Gettysburg and Spotsylvania, p. 78. D. A. Tompkins and A. S. Tompkins, Company K Fourteenth Regiment South Carolina Volunteers, (Observer Press and Publishing Houses: Charlotte, NC, 1897), p. 19. J. A. Leach to Bachelder, June 2, 1884, BP.

³⁸ OR 27, pt. 2, 661-662. Abner Perrin to Governor Pickens, July 29, 1863, GNMP Library. Caldwell, p. 97-98.

³⁹ Nevins, ed., Diary of Battle, p. 236.

⁴⁰ J. A. Leach to Bachelder, June 2, 1884, BP.

⁴¹ Thomas A. Littlejohn, "Recollections of a Confederate Soldier," GNMP Library.

⁴² Nevins, *A Diary of Battle*, p. 236. Brown, *A Colonel at Gettysburg and Spotsylvania*, pp. 202, 206, 210. OR 27, pt. 2, 662.

⁴³ Caldwell, p. 98. Nevins, *A Diary of Battle*, p. 236. OR 27, pt. 2, p. 662. Colonel W.W. Robinson, of the 7th Wisconsin, reported that his greatest loss was during the retreat from Seminary Ridge. Lt. Colonel Brown thought Major Croft, of the 14th South Carolina, and men of his wing of that regiment were the first to reach the gun, for he seized the only uninjured horse on the limber and mounted it. See, Brown, *A Colonel at Gettysburg and Spotsylvania*, p. 81.

⁴⁴ Abner Perrin to Governor Milledge Bonham, July 29, 1863, GNMP Library. James A. Leach to Bachelder, June 2, 1884, BP. Also see, Brown, *A Colonel at Gettysburg and Spotsylvania*, pp. 224-226. Spencer G. Welch to Wife, August 2, 1863, ECU. For a list of buildings burned during the battle see, *The Compiler* [Gettysburg], July 20, 1863, p. 2. A summary of the damage claim for the Harman and Herbst farms is in, Vertical File V14-26 Summary of State Claims, GNMP Library. The Confederates evidently burned the Harman buildings due to 1) the stubborn resistance put up by the companies of the 20th NYSM and 2) to make certain the Federal could not use the buildings for cover later. The Herbst barn was also burned, but this apparently occurred during the Confederate retreat.

⁴⁵ James A. Leach to Bachelder, June 2, 1884, BP. Brown, *A Colonel at Gettysburg and Spotsylvania*, p. 82.

⁴⁶ Brown, *A Colonel at Gettysburg and Spotsylvania*, p. 82. James A. Leach to Bachelder, June 2, 1884. Washington P. Shooter to McIntyre, July 20, 1863, GNMP Library.

⁴⁷ Brown, *A Colonel at Gettysburg and Spotsylvania* p. 226.

⁴⁸ OR27, pt. 2, p. 658, 670.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 665.

⁵⁰ Washington P. Shooter to McIntyre, July 20, 1863, GNMP Library. Abner Perrin to Gov. Bonham, July 29, 1863, GNMP Library. OR27, pt. 2, p. 671.

⁵¹ Brown, *A Colonel at Gettysburg and Spotsylvania*, pp. 83-84. It is interesting to compare and contrast Early's fight with Barlow's division and Pender's attack on Seminary Ridge. Early combined direct attack with maneuver to pin the enemy in place, then turn his flank, winning a spectacular victory with relatively light losses. Both attacks were successful but Early inflicted greater damage to the Federals than Pender did, and lost fewer men.