

"The Severest and Bloodiest Artillery Fight I Ever Saw"

Colonel E. P. Alexander and the First Corps Artillery Assail the Peach Orchard, July 2, 1863

Bert Barnett



The cannoneers of the First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia went into camp on the afternoon of July 1, 1863, near Greenwood, Pennsylvania. As the men tended to their animals and equipment that day, it is unrecorded whether any of them paused to reflect upon the immense strides made by the Confederacy in assembling the creditable artillery service that would shortly be called upon to fight yet another major battle. Nearly two years previous, at the battle of First Manassas, the Confederate artillery force had consisted of just forty-seven guns, mostly obsolete six-pounders of Mexican War vintage.¹

Now, with the battle of Gettysburg fairly underway, the Army of Northern Virginia boasted the firepower of some 272 cannon. Although many of these guns appeared as top-of-the-line models, they were usually the ones produced at Federal arsenals and often acquired through battlefield capture. Following the battle of First Manassas, Captain Edward Porter Alexander reported the capture of 27 guns, 19 of which were new rifled pieces. This source of supply, though erratic and unreliable, was important in the early months of the war. The paucity of manufacturing facilities, materials and experienced workmen in the Confederacy left the South ill-prepared to meet its' sudden wartime ordnance needs.²

At the outset of the war, the South had only one plant capable of casting artillery pieces. Located in Richmond, Virginia, the Tredegar Iron Works became the center of much ordnance activity. Between July 1, 1861, through January 1, 1865, the Richmond Arsenal issued 1,306 field guns, most of which were Tredegar foundry products. To gather the metal needed to produce the number of cannon required for field use was a daunting task. Brass, copper and tin were "hunted up" from all sources across the South. Numerous church-bells, candlesticks, moonshine stills and other such items made of potential gunmetal were sacrificed for the artillery service. Iron, necessary for the manufacture of projectiles and rifled guns, was secured through production in Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia and Alabama.³

Even with the additional production from such satellite facilities as the Noble Brothers foundry at Rome, Georgia, and some occasional foreign purchases, Confederate artillery was materially inferior in both number and quality of guns to its Federal adversary. The quality of domestically produced ammunition was also sub-standard.⁴ Col. E. P. Alexander commented:

The Severest and Bloodiest Artillery Fight I Ever Saw

...[O]ur artillery ammunition was inferior, especially that of the rifles. The Confederacy did not have the facilities for much nice work of that sort, and we had to take what we could get without rigid inspection. How our rifled batteries always envied our friends in the opposition their abundant supply of splendid ammunition! For an unreliable fuse or a rifle-shell which "tumbles" sickens not only the gunner but the whole battery, more than "misfires" at large game dishearten a sportsman. There is no encouragement to careful aiming when the ammunition fails, and the men feel handicapped.⁵

Such was the situation faced by Southern gunners at Gettysburg. In sharp contrast to the under-gunned Confederates, Federal artillerists were well supplied with high quality ordnance. Numerous foundries in the North kept the Army of the Potomac equipped with tough, durable guns and reliable ammunition. There were 364 cannon with the Union Army at Gettysburg, and previously, at the battle of Chancellorsville, the Federal artillery had come equipped with no less than 412 guns! Numerical superiority clearly lay with the Unionists.⁶

While superior arms and equipment were surely desirable, they themselves were not the sole guarantors of success. Other factors such as leadership, organization and command skills meant much on the battlefield. In these areas the Confederate artillerists were more evenly matched with their Federal counterparts. A brief look at a few of the Confederate officers important to Gen. Longstreet's artillery at Gettysburg may prove instructive.

Chief of all Confederate artillery at Gettysburg was Brigadier General William Nelson Pendleton. Born in Richmond, Virginia, Pendleton attended West Point. He graduated fifth in his class in 1830, and taught mathematics for three years at the Academy before resigning his commission to become a teacher and an Episcopal minister. At the secession of Virginia, he returned to arms as Captain of the Rockbridge Artillery, and was rapidly promoted. On October 22, 1861 Pendleton was named as Chief of Artillery for the Department (later Army) of Northern Virginia, a post he would hold until the final surrender at Appomattox. Pendleton's post was essentially a staff position that reported directly to the army commander.⁷



*Colonel James B. Walton
(CWLM)*

In Lieutenant General James Longstreet's First Corps, Colonel James Burdge Walton nominally commanded the five battalions of artillery attached to that organization. Born in Newark, New Jersey, Walton attended Louisiana College and became a prominent grocer in New Orleans. His artillery experience was the result of his affiliation with the Washington Artillery of New Orleans, which he joined in 1839 as adjutant. During the Mexican War, he led the 1st Louisiana Regiment, and by 1861 he commanded a battery of the Washington Artillery as a Major. On March 26, 1862, he was promoted to Colonel and became head of the battalion of four batteries. Following the battle of Chancellorsville, Walton became the chief of artillery for Gen. Longstreet's corps.⁸

Of the five subordinates commanding individual battalions in the First Corps on July 2, only one had no professional military experience prior to the outbreak of hostilities. Col. Henry C. Cabell had graduated from the University of Virginia in 1842, and established a successful law practice

The Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg Campaign

in Richmond before the war. Of the others, Major Benjamin F. Eshleman had been a student at the United States Military Academy when the war came, and, despite his Pennsylvania roots, left West Point and offered his services to the Confederacy. The other three were also graduates of the Academy. Major Mathias W. Henry and Major Frank Huger were members of the class of 1860, and Col. Edward P. Alexander had graduated in 1857, standing third in his class.⁹

Col. Alexander was the most experienced artillerist in the First Corps. Hailing from Washington, Georgia, he resigned his commission in the United States Army on May 1, 1861. After First Manassas, he was made chief of ordnance with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. He participated in all the earlier battles with the Army of Northern Virginia, and with other officers had seen the need for improved organization within the artillery. The irregular dispersing of batteries throughout the army during the early contests in 1862, along with a cumbersome reserve artillery system, made rapid deployment and concentration exceedingly difficult on the battlefield. The disaster at Malvern Hill, on July 2, 1862, drove this point home with a vengeance. The Federals, occupying commanding ground with a force of massed batteries, could not be driven off by the weak Confederate counter-battery fire, employed in piece-meal fashion, and inflicted many casualties. Alexander wrote later:



*Col. Edward P. Alexander
(CWLM)*

...[I]t was expected that artillery would act upon both flanks; but here our organization broke down. Gen. Pendleton, Lee's Chief of Artillery, had a large artillery reserve, organized in four battalions of several batteries each, including our best rifled guns; but he was not able to bring a single one of his batteries into action.¹⁰

Col. Alexander was not the only one to see and record the results of this artillery fiasco. General Daniel Harvey Hill, in his division report, recalled the failure this way:

Instead of ordering up 100 or 200 pieces of artillery to play on the Yankees, a single battery...was ordered up and knocked to pieces in a few minutes. One or two others shared the same fate of being beat in detail. Not knowing how to act in these circumstances, I wrote to General Jackson that the firing of our batteries was of the most farcical character.¹¹

General Pendleton also observed that organizational improvements were needed. In his report to Gen. Lee, he stated that:

[W]ith regard to the artillery... too little was thrown into action at once; too much was left in the rear unused. One or two batteries brought into position at a time to oppose a much larger artillery force well posted must greatly suffer, if not ultimately yield, under the concentrated fire... We needed more guns taking part, alike for our own protection and for crippling the enemy. With a powerful array opposed to his own, we divide his attention, shake his nerves, and more readily drive him from the field worsted and alarmed.¹²

Although these observations were included in a report dated July 21, 1862, it would not be until

February of 1863 that an improved plan for the better organization of the artillery service was laid before the commanding general. After consultation with Col. Alexander and others, the Chief of Artillery wrote to General Robert E. Lee on February 11 citing the many objections to the current artillery organization, and suggesting improvements. Pendleton noted that the current system of attaching batteries to brigades and divisions overburdened commanders and deprived the batteries of "that minute supervision they require". Additionally, he claimed that "...supply officers, whose chief care lies with considerable bodies of infantry, cannot devote to one or more batteries the time and attention they imperatively need." With marvelous understatement, Gen. Pendleton delicately observed that these flaws were "...most injuriously experienced in times of pressure." He also stated that the present method of organization limited mobility and restricted the massing of guns on the battlefield, noting that:

*Batteries, ...permanently attached in this way, can scarcely be assigned elsewhere, whatever the emergency, without producing some difficulty, almost as if a vested right was violated. But, most injuriously of all, this system hinders unity and concentration in battle.*¹³

To remedy this situation, Gen. Pendleton proposed that each corps have its artillery consist of approximately four battalions of four batteries each. One battalion was to be assigned to each division, with one battalion acting as a corps reserve. Apparently to prevent slighting anyone, Pendleton suggested that each battalion in each division be designated by the first letter of the last name of the division commander to whom the battalion was assigned. He selected this system, rather than the usual letters in order, "because [that] might seem like a numerical designation to assign some precedence of one battalion over another." While the battalion idea was accepted, the designation system for them was not. In practice, artillery battalions were usually referred to using the commander's last name.¹⁴

Attention was also given to the armament of the batteries and battalions themselves. Pendleton recommended that batteries be made all rifles or all smoothbores by exchanging guns with other batteries. He urged that four-battery battalions be armed with two rifle batteries and two smoothbore ones, and that larger battalions have an equal, or larger, percentage of 12-pounder Napoleon guns. He also expressed his hope that the Ordnance Department would be able to supply an adequate supply of guns before the spring campaign season opened.¹⁵

These observations were well founded, and mirrored many of General Lee's own concerns. On December 5, 1862, Lee had written to the Secretary of War to voice his ideas towards increasing the efficiency of the artillery. In his letter, Lee stated plainly that while the situation in the artillery arm was improving, the need for Napoleons and rifled guns was still critical. He suggested that, "...if metal cannot otherwise be procured, a portion, if not all, of our 6-pounder smooth-bores, and if necessary, a part of our 12-pounder howitzers, be recast into 12-pounder Napoleons." The General went on to give his opinion that the best guns for field service were the 10-pounder Parrott rifles, the Napoleons, and the 3-inch rifles. He noted that:

*Batteries composed of such guns would simplify our ammunition, give us less metal to transport, and longer and more accurate range of fire....The contest between our 6-pounder smooth-bores and the 12-pounder Napoleons is very unequal, and, in addition, is discouraging to our artillerists.*¹⁶

By the time that Pendleton's proposals appeared two months later, steps had been taken in Richmond to improve the situation. Newly cast Napoleons began to make their appearance in

The Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg Campaign

batteries by May 20, and more were coming. Forty-nine of the fifty Napoleons cast during the first four months of 1863 were bored, mounted, and turned over to Lee's artillerists in time for the spring and summer campaigns. Yet, though some guns captured at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville were also integrated into service, the opportunity to standardize guns within field batteries before the battle of Gettysburg was not embraced.¹⁷

Given the fact that commanders at the highest levels had recognized artillery standardization as a worthy goal, one is forced to wonder at the failure to implement it. This failure was awkwardly commented upon by General Pendleton on May 30, when he wrote to Gen. Lee regarding a request by Maj. Eshleman for more rifled guns for his battalion:

*...[C]onsiderable difficulty exists between the armaments of many of the battalions. Some have rifles in excess, others Napoleons...**It has been deemed a less evil to let it remain than to create other difficulties by enforcing an equalization...**It will be observed that in order to give rifles to Major Eshleman, they must be taken from some other battery...**I cannot recommend it, because the serious changes of armament now in batteries and battalions that have long used certain guns must produce regrets and dissatisfaction, which, in a case like ours, requiring the whole hearts of men, it does not seem to me wise to excite...It seems to me the least evil to let the battalions remain as they are...** (emphasis added).¹⁸*

These observations on the part of the Chief of Artillery raise an interesting question. What "greater evil" lurked out there to create "other difficulties" that made improved tactical unity in the artillery less achievable or desirable? Given the fact that the guns themselves were incapable of complaining about where they were assigned, Gen. Pendleton's concern must have centered on the artillerists and their officers. As previously noted, the general apparently took pains to avoid irritating the perceived sensitivities of his troops. Perhaps he felt that battery standardization, while desirable, was less important to the success of the army than preserving the harmony of its disparate parts. One example of this belief was evident in his communication to Gen. Lee on February 11, when Pendleton carefully balanced the number of artillery officers he recommended for promotion between Virginians and non-Virginians. If Pendleton also failed to reshuffle the guns within his batteries (which would have meant, in some cases, taking "battle trophy" guns away from units that had assisted in their capture) to the maximum extent possible because of an anticipated negative reaction by his men, it was a poor decision.¹⁹

The Confederate victory at Chancellorsville, and the splendid performance of the new battalion organization however, obscured the tactical weakness that still plagued Southern artillery. General Lee boasted in his report of the action that:

To the skillful and efficient management of the artillery the successful issue of the contest is in great measure due...The ground was not favorable, but every suitable position was taken with alacrity, and ...it bore a prominent part in the final assault which ended in driving the enemy from the field,...silencing his batteries, and by a destructive enfilade fire upon his works opened the way for the advance of our troops.²⁰

This sort of success likely further reduced the chances of serious improvements within the Confederate artillery service. Nevertheless, some re-organization was deemed necessary

following the death of General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson. The army was restructured into three corps by early June, and the artillery was divided accordingly. Each corps received three battalions with two additional reserve battalions. The Federal pieces captured at Chancellorsville were distributed among the batteries, along with more Richmond-produced Napoleons that began arriving in the last half of May. Over all, the morale of the army was high, and the artillery believed itself ready for the next engagement.²¹

If Confederate artillery organization appeared to be justified based upon its success in the field, the Federal system clearly did not. This was noted by the long-suffering Chief of Artillery for the Army of the Potomac, Brigadier-General Henry J. Hunt. The Union army still clung to the old method of dispersing its batteries, and this had contributed much to the defeat at Chancellorsville. In his report, Hunt stated that command problems alone had rendered his superior force ineffective in front of the Confederates. He stated bluntly that:

I began to receive demands from corps commanders for more artillery, which I was unable to comply with, except partially, and at the risk of deranging the plans of other corps commanders...Add to this that there was no commander of the artillery until a late period of operations, and I doubt that the history of modern armies can exhibit a parallel instance of such a palpable crippling of a great arm of the service in the very presence of a powerful enemy. It is not, therefore to be wondered at that confusion and mismanagement ensued...²²

The artillery of the Army of the Potomac was shortly thereafter reorganized into corps artillery units of from four to six batteries each. These “artillery brigades”, as they were then designated, were responsible to a corps artillery chief, usually a captain. He, in turn, was responsible directly to the commander of the corps for his orders. This new arrangement was much superior to the old system, as it provided centralized control, which made massing batteries in combat much easier. One Union gunner, Lieutenant Tully McCrea, later recalled, “The Artillery of the Army of the Potomac had at last received the same efficient organization so long in use in the Army of Northern Virginia.” Lt. McCrea was only partly right - the new Federal system was actually more efficient than the Confederate one. There were still division level commands in the Confederate system, and these produced occasional problems.²³

One of these involved Maj. Eshleman’s battalion of the Washington Artillery. During the advance into Pennsylvania Col. Walton, exercising his prerogative as chief of the Corps artillery, kept that Reserve battalion at the head of the column of guns for the entire march route. This created some tension within the battalions, as it was a generally accepted “custom of the service” to rotate the lead battalion daily. Among the troops this custom was important, for a day at the head of the line of march meant not having to dodge the droppings or eat the dust produced by animals in front of them. It also meant a much better chance, at day’s end, of locating good campgrounds and water. As Col. Alexander later commented:

I arrived with my battalion, not at the head of the column, but at the very tail of it, having marched in that honorable but unappreciated position from Culpepper to Gettysburg without once having the usual privilege of alternating in the lead on the march.²⁴

On June 22 and 23 the artillery camped in Millwood, Virginia, where this slight was the topic of much discussion among many of the battalion’s officers. While Col. Alexander empathized with those stuck behind the Washington Artillery, he observed that the custom of rotating commands

The Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg Campaign

was just that—a custom. It was not a requirement, and Alexander felt that he did not have the authority to press Col. Walton on the matter. While some of the officers reluctantly accepted this explanation, many still felt that Walton was protecting his “pets”. Captain George V. Moody, commanding the Madison Louisiana Light Artillery, became indignant and prepared to challenge one of Walton’s captains to a duel. To this, Alexander objected, and finally got a pledge from his officers that no notice of the matter was to be publicly taken. This quieted Moody and the others for a time.²⁵

Moody still smoldered, however, and was looking for an excuse to challenge someone about something. About a week later, he got an opportunity. Within Col. Alexander’s battalion, a dispute arose between Capt. Moody and Captain Pichegru Woolfolk of the Ashland Virginia battery over which unit had precedence in the order of march. Tempers flared, and Capt. Moody challenged Woolfolk to a duel. Woolfolk accepted. The conditions were to be rifle-muskets at ten paces’ distance, at dawn, on July 2. The arrival of the battle of Gettysburg, however, forced the postponement and ultimate cancellation of the match.²⁶

During these petty squabbles, Col. Alexander kept abreast of the larger strategic picture. In mid-June he had written to his father, noting that Vicksburg must inevitably be starved out. He hoped that Lee’s army would do something to counteract it in the eastern theater of the war, but cautiously stated, “I only hope for us that we won’t cross the Potomac for I don’t believe we can ever successfully invade.”²⁷

The invasion, though, was a strategic command decision beyond Alexander’s control. As the First Corps artillery approached the battlefield Gen. Longstreet called upon Col. Alexander to take tactical command of the guns for the coming fight. This was an odd circumstance, for it effectively put Col. Walton, Alexander’s direct commanding officer, out of a job during the battle. Col. Alexander recalled that on the morning of July 2,

*...Col. Walton rode on...to report our presence to Gen. Longstreet. In half an hour he returned, [and] told me that Gen. Longstreet wished me to report to him in person. I could but feel sorry for Walton, who evidently felt overslaughed and that I was going to be practically put in charge of the artillery on the field. And, as I rode off to the front, he stopped with his battalion and dismounted, and I saw him no more that day.*²⁸

Gen. Longstreet’s decision to by-pass Col. Walton and assign command of his corps artillery to one of his Reserve battalion commanders may have been made for sound military reasons. Alexander, a younger and more active man, was a highly proficient professional artillerist and engineer, a background that Walton lacked. Still, Col. Walton felt snubbed by this battlefield “de-motion”, and in 1877 wrote a letter over five pages long to the Southern Historical Society complaining that he **really was** in command. He stated:

...I never was relieved from nor did I at any time relinquish my command of all of the artillery of the First Corps [at Gettysburg]...I really regret that, in justice to myself and to the responsible, and I may say distinguished position, I had the honor to fill at the battle of Gettysburg, I find myself compelled, for the first time since the war, to present myself in print.

E.P. Alexander wrote in rebuttal to this, quoting correspondence received from Gen. Pendleton on

The Severest and Bloodiest Artillery Fight I Ever Saw

July 5, 1863. In part, Pendleton had declared that:

*You [Alexander]...are fully justified in affirming that, with care not to mortify Col. Walton, you were actually put in charge of the artillery of the First Corps on the field...That direction was given by General Longstreet, but it had my ready sanction.*²⁹

With the batteries nearby and the issue of command settled (for the moment), Alexander began to focus his energies on preparing for the day's work ahead. Upon meeting with Gen. Longstreet, Col. Alexander was instructed that the left flank of the Federal line was to be attacked. He was directed to examine the southern section of Seminary Ridge to determine appropriate locations to place his batteries in support. He was also cautioned to keep his movements out of sight of the Federal signal station on Little Round Top.³⁰

There seems to have been some confusion, however, about the time that this meeting took place. Alexander, who by his own admission noted that he did not look at his watch the entire day, claimed to have completed his reconnaissance and brought his battalion down in the valley of Willoughby Run before 11:00 in the morning. However, Gen. Pendleton's report states that Gen. Longstreet arrived "about midday" to view the ground and at that time expressed his desire to have Alexander do so as well. In any case, Alexander wrote that it did not take him much over an hour to scout the terrain. The best estimates do not place Alexander's battalion in the Willoughby Run valley until around 1:30 p.m.³¹

The lateness of the hour, even if one accepts Col. Alexander's earlier estimate, indicates that no attack was seriously considered for sunrise of July 2. However, the Confederate attempts to gather and position the requisite strength for a midday or early afternoon assault were frustrated by the desire to conceal their intentions from the Federal signal station posted on Little Round Top. Col. Alexander, on his approach to the low ground just west of Seminary Ridge, had his batteries leave the road when it at one point passed over a high bare place in full view of the Union position. They turned off the road to the right of the hill, meandered through some open fields and regained the road about one-quarter mile further down. The artillery moved to the base of the ridge relatively easily.³²

For the infantry troops of Longstreet's corps, the approach was not so simple. Col. Alexander noted that when riding back later, he found:

*...[T]he head of one of our divisions [McLaws] standing halted in sight of the signal station. It had been...told, as I had been, to keep out of view. Finding that the road brought them into view, they halted and sent back for orders or a guide. Finally, after a delay which must have been much over an hour, orders came, and, ...a guide to lead them by "Black Horse Tavern"....Of course I told the officers at the head of the column of the route my artillery had followed, which was easily seen, but there was no one with authority to vary the orders they were under ...*³³

Rather than taking Alexander's short-cut, which would have saved valuable time, the infantry was directed to counter-march. This took nearly two hours to accomplish. Col. Alexander later observed that if the attack had not been delayed those two hours, "our chances of success would have been immensely increased." While the infantry marched, the artillerists of the First Corps took up positions just to the west of Seminary Ridge to await developments.³⁴

The Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg Campaign

Only three of the First Corps four available artillery battalions accompanied the two infantry divisions. Eshlemen's Battalion remained in park west of Gettysburg, probably in the vicinity of the Herr Tavern. Two of these three battalions, Henry's and Cabell's, would eventually occupy an extension of Seminary Ridge where it pointed roughly towards the southeast. Alexander's battalion, temporarily under the command of Major Frank Huger, acted as the corps reserve. It was initially placed west of the ridge, near the Millerstown Road. To the south, behind the ridgeline, were the guns of Col. Henry Cabell's battalion of General Lafayette McLaws' division. Major Matthias W. Henry's battalion moved with General John Bell Hood's division to the east side of the Emmitsburg Road, facing northeast along Warfield Ridge.

Table 1 - Organization and Equipment of First Corps Artillery Battalions Engaged on July 2.

<p>Henry's Battalion - Hood's Division - (19 guns) Major Mathias W. Henry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Latham's Battery</i> (1 6-lb gun, 1 12-lb howitzer, 3 Napoleons - <i>Bachman's Battery</i> (4 Napoleons) - <i>Reilly's Battery</i> (2 Napoleons, 2 3-inch rifles, 2 10-lb Parrotts)
<p>Cabell's Battalion - McLaws' Division (16 guns) Colonel Henry C. Cabell</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Manly's Battery</i> (2 Napoleons, 2 3-inch rifles) - <i>Carlton's Battery</i> (2 12-lb howitzers, 2 10-lb Parrotts) - <i>Fraser's Battery</i> (2 3-inch rifles, 2 10-lb Parrotts) - <i>McCarthy's Battery</i> (2 Napoleons, 2 3-inch rifles)
<p>Alexander's Battalion - First Corps Reserve (24 guns) Colonel Edward P. Alexander</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Moody's Battery</i> (4 24-lb howitzers) - <i>Gilbert's Battery</i> (4 12-lb howitzers) - <i>Woolfolk's Battery</i> (2 Napoleons, 2 20-lb Parrotts) - <i>Jordan's Battery</i> (4 3-inch rifles) - <i>Parker's Battery</i> (3 3-inch rifles, 1 10-lb Parrott) - <i>Taylor's Battery</i> (4 Napoleons)

Col. Alexander recalled that as Henry's battalion moved into position, it was "...heavily opened on by the enemy's artillery from the Peach Orchard and beyond." Two batteries of the battalion began to return the fire of the Federal guns, who were posted in positions ranging from the high ground above Devil's Den to the Peach Orchard. Captain Alexander C. Latham's Branch (N.C.) Artillery, consisting of four 12-pounder smooth-bores and the only short-range 6-pounder left with the Army of Northern Virginia, responded along with the four rifles and two Napoleons of Captain James Reilly's Rowan (N.C.) Battery.

Captain James E. Smith, commanding the six rifles of the Fourth New York Independent Battery, stated that the Confederate fire from these two batteries against his two sections posted near Devil's Den "was astonishing" in its accuracy. Capt. Smith also recorded that this initial outburst

The Severest and Bloodiest Artillery Fight I Ever Saw

commenced about 2:00 p.m.³⁵

Some time later, Captain John Cheeves Haskell, who assisted Major Henry with the battalion, claimed that:

*As soon as we got into action, we silenced their battery quite easily. The top of the mountain seemed to be almost all rock, and when our shells struck they shattered and dashed the rock so as to be the equal of canister at short range.*³⁶

As the firing rose in intensity, the chief of artillery for the Union 3d Corps, Captain George E. Randolph, attempted to strengthen the Federal center by bringing up more guns. Captain Judson Clark moved his six 10-pounder Parrott rifles of Battery B, New Jersey Light Artillery into position near the Peach Orchard, supported by the six 12-pounders of Captain Nelson Ames' 1st New York, Battery G. Both batteries faced to the southwest and began to engage the Confederates.³⁷

To support Henry's North Carolinians, Col. Alexander moved immediately to engage the entire 16 guns of Cabell's battalion. The four batteries were positioned south of Millerstown Road, along Seminary Ridge, in the following order: The Troup (GA) Artillery, under the command of Captain Henry H. Carlton, placed its two 12- pounder howitzers on the left flank of the battalion. To the south, Captain Basil C. Manly located his 1st North Carolina, Battery A, which contained two 12-pounder Napoleons as well as two 3 inch Ordnance Rifles. The two 10 pounder Parrott rifles comprising the other section of the Troup Artillery were on the right of Manly's guns. The battalion, following the terrain of the ridgeline, extended slightly more to the south-southeast towards the position occupied by the First Richmond Howitzers, commanded by Captain Edward McCarthy. This battery, with guns identical to Manly's, stood to the left of the Pulaski (GA) Artillery, under Captain John C. Fraser. Fraser's was the only unit to be composed of all rifles, with two Parrott rifles and two 3in. Ordnance rifles. None of these guns were more than 700 to 800 yards distant from the Federal batteries.³⁸

This was good effective range for all the guns in the battalion. Once in place, sometime between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m., Cabell's guns began to hammer the Union batteries. The close distances involved, along with the open spaces and the rifled artillery of the enemy, began to take their toll on the Confederates as well as the Federals. Col. Alexander recalled:

*The Federal artillery was ready for us and in their usual full force and good practice. The ground at [Col.] Cabell's position gave little protection, and he suffered rapidly in both men and horses.*³⁹

Under these circumstances, however, the Confederates were still able to make it hot for the Union defenders. Andrew W. Reese, serving with the Troup Artillery, wrote that:

The enemy were posted in a peach orchard and plowed field immediately in our front, distant probably 600 yards...[O]ur batteries opened upon the force in the peach orchard and field...[and] the enemy's batteries responded promptly, and then the ball fairly opened. The firing was the most rapid I have ever witnessed, and the earth literally vibrated under the continuous roar...Our fire, as described by the [wounded and captured] Major of the 141st Pennsylvania,...was the most terrific he had

The Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg Campaign

*ever seen, and the mortality in [his brigade] very great. I have never seen guns better served, and right in the center of the battalion, working like beavers and covered with dust and smoke, were Carlton's brave boys...*⁴⁰

But in his report, Col. Cabell stated that:

*The battalion, being first [in that sector] to open fire, we received for a short time a concentrated fire from the enemy's batteries...The fire from our lines and from the enemy became incessant, rendering it necessary for us sometimes to pause and allow the smoke to clear away, in order to enable the gunners to take aim...The loss of my battalion was very heavy during this cannonading.*⁴¹

Under a tough bombardment, losses from enemy shells can be high. In Manly's battery severe losses nearly occurred from a malfunctioning friendly shell. They did not because of the quick action of a Private Thain. The private was stationed at one of the battery's limber-boxes setting fuses for shells to be fired:

*...[And] while adjusting a fuse-igniter, it accidentally exploded, and ignited the fuse already in the shell. He seized the shell, ran with it several yards from the limber, at the same time drawing the burning fuse from the shell with his fingers.*⁴²

General Longstreet also noticed the tough time that Cabell's gunners were having in their exposed position. As he rode along the front, inspecting the preparations for the assault of General McLaws' division, he observed the empty space at the crest of Seminary ridge where the Millerstown Road crossed it and inquired of McLaws why no battery was placed there. McLaws protested that:

*General, if a battery is placed there it will draw the enemy's artillery right among my lines formed for the charge and will of itself be in the way of the charge, and tend to demoralize my men.*⁴³

Irrespective of McLaws' concerns, Longstreet ordered that a battery be brought up to take position in the road. As predicted, it was immediately spotted and drew fire from the Federals, who had reinforced the western-facing salient with the six Napoleons of Lieutenant John K. Bucklyn's Battery E, 1st Rhode Island battery. The Federals also diverted one section of Napoleons from Ames' Battery G, 1st N.Y. to assist. Other guns, coming from the improved Federal artillery reserve system, would soon follow.⁴⁴

The battery placed at Longstreet's insistence had to have come from Alexander's reserve battalion, as all of Col. Cabell's guns had already been committed. Col. Alexander did not specifically mention any of his batteries going into action alone or on the road, but there is some suggestion that the first one to move up was the Brooks' South Carolina Artillery, commanded by Lieutenant S. Caspers Gilbert. Known also as Rhett's or Fickling's Battery, this unit mounted four 12-pound howitzers. The battery was unlimbered north of the Millerstown Road, approximately 500 yards due west of the Peach Orchard. From that location it began to take serious casualties. One source stated that..."they were said to have lost 30 men in as many minutes."⁴⁵

The concentration of Federal artillery against the Confederate batteries concerned Alexander, and prompted him to support the position by bringing up all but two of his six batteries. To the south of Gilbert's guns, the four 24-pounder howitzers of the Madison Louisiana Artillery unlimbered along the ridgeline, just north of the Millerstown Road. Commanding the unit was Captain George V. Moody, whose duel with Capt. Woolfolk had been postponed that morning. He now had more important things to shoot at.

These two batteries commanded the attention of the Federals in the orchard, as they apparently deployed first. As the firing grew more intense around Gilbert's battery, Colonel Alexander later recalled its effects upon a South Carolinian new to the big guns:

A new officer, recently elected to be a Lieutenant [with the battery] arrived from Charleston. He has never served with artillery before, and being new to the duties, asked me to let him look on for a few days, to learn the ropes, before going on regular duty. I consented and assured him that there would be plenty of time. And, the next afternoon, [July 2]...I saw him standing behind a little sapling and looking at the Federal batteries, only about 500 yards off, and knocking his battery to pieces around him as badly and as fast as I ever saw it done in my life – He stuck to it until it was over, but finally concluded that he did not fancy the artillery and returned to his old cavalry unit in South Carolina.⁴⁶

Some time after coming into position, Capt. Moody had to set about recruiting extra hands to help maneuver his guns. The battery was short of men to begin with, and the casualties from this close-range fire with the Unionists began to seriously deplete the crews. While this would have been a concern in any unit, it was especially noticeable among the big guns of the Madison Artillery. Alone, the weight of one of the heavy howitzer tubes was just over 1,300 pounds. The gun carriage added another 1,100, making these pieces very difficult to handle. When fired from the crest of Seminary Ridge, they often recoiled and rolled down the western slope of the ridge, where they were retrieved and run back up into position. This was exhausting work in the heat of an early July afternoon, and the gunners looked about for assistance. Apprised of this situation, Col. Alexander approached General William Barksdale and secured eight volunteers from a Mississippi infantry unit to help with the guns. This was hazardous duty, and Lieutenant F. M. Colston, serving as Alexander's ordnance officer, noted later that:

...[I]n the fight, two [of the volunteers] were killed and three wounded, so that we could only return three, which the regiment seemed to think a small return of borrowed property.⁴⁷

Immediately below the Millerstown Road were the four Napoleons of the Bath Virginia Artillery, commanded by Captain Osmond B. Taylor. These guns moved into action with Moody's battery and took position, according to Capt. Taylor's report, "within 500 yards of the enemy's batteries". Curiously, although his guns were strictly involved in counter-battery fire at that time, Taylor recorded that he began firing a mixture of canister and spherical case at the enemy batteries. Whether his supply of solid shot was exhausted, or whether, at that close range, he felt that the anti-personnel charges would more rapidly cripple the gun crews, he did not disclose.⁴⁸

Another mystery concerned one of the soldiers in the unit. Ordnance Sergeant Henry Wentz, who had enlisted in Martinsburg, West Virginia, had grown up in the Gettysburg area. Now, as Taylor's Napoleons deployed for the afternoon's work, Sergeant Wentz found himself with his

The Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg Campaign

battery almost directly facing his boyhood home in the Peach Orchard. Apparently this did not trouble him too much, as it is not recorded that Sgt. Wentz failed to do his duty.

Yet, there may have been some ambivalence within the man about this odd circumstance. Wentz's knowledge of the roads and hills in the area surely would have proved very helpful to Col. Alexander earlier that afternoon as the latter maneuvered his guns, but Alexander made no mention of receiving any guidance from him. However viewed the quiet of artilleryman Henry Wentz must be noted as one of the more unusual stories of that day.⁴⁹

The last guns of Alexander's to be committed in the initial advance were those of Captain William Parker's Richmond Battery. Parker, a native of Port Royal, Virginia and by profession a physician, took his battery of one Parrott rifle and three 3 in. Ordnance rifles into line on the right of the battalion, and posted them against the Federals in the orchard. One member of the battery recalled the hazards of moving up to the crest of the ridge:

*On the slope of a wooded hill our infantry were forming for a charge. Federal infantry were thick in front of them, assisted by artillery, which poured a storm of shrapnel into our ranks. Rhett's battery...was already blazing away from the crest of the hill..., but we were as yet at its base. "Cannoneers!" "Mount!" "Forward!" Quickly we rushed between the already moving wheels, and nimbly sprang into our seats – all except John Hightower, who missed his hold, and the great, heavy weight rolled over his body. Did we halt? NO! ...[T]his is the grim discipline of war! Never shall I forget the scene presented on this hill, [where] Federal shrapnel rattled like hail around us...There is an awful pause. One of our men cowers. Like lightening, [Capt.] Parker's sword circles the coward's head, and he learns that there is danger in rear as well as in front!*⁵⁰

When the cannon were positioned, Parker's rifles dropped their trails and, with the other batteries, began to hammer the Union salient. Col. Alexander, surveying the combined effect of the fire of his three battalions, had hoped:

*...[W]ith my 54 guns, to make it short, sharp and decisive. At close range there was less inequality in our guns, and especially in our ammunition, and I thought that if ever I could overwhelm and crush them I would do it now. But they really surprised me, both with the number of guns they developed, and how they stuck to them. I don't think there was ever in our war a hotter, harder, sharper artillery afternoon than this.*⁵¹

What Col. Alexander was witnessing, in part, was the result of the Confederate success at Chancellorsville. As previously observed, the Federals actually brought fewer guns with them to Gettysburg than they had to Chancellorsville, but the improved brigade system of artillery made it much easier for them to bring up fresh batteries. Against this the Southerners had fewer resources to compete with. The tactic of bringing the guns in close, as Alexander did, was effective, but it was not without cost. The Union counter-battery fire was intense against Cabell's position, and more so against Alexander's. In his own battalion, Col. Alexander reported:

Gilbert's (Rhett's) battery of four guns had had two fairly struck by the enemy's shot and dismounted. Of less than 75 men in action he had 40

The Severest and Bloodiest Artillery Fight I Ever Saw

*killed and wounded, an unusual proportion of the wounds too being noted by [the] surgeon's report as severe.*⁵²

Alexander later compared Gilbert's losses with those in Captain John Bigelow's 9th Massachusetts battery, which Union artillery chief Henry Hunt had specially noted "sacrificed itself for the safety of the line." He observed that Bigelow's battery lost 37 men out of 104, "partly in a hand to hand fight with infantry,[while] Gilbert's were almost all by artillery fire."⁵³

Artillery fire also took its toll in Alexander's other units. In its' first position along the ridge, Corporal William P. Ray of Taylor's battery, was hit and killed. Capt. Taylor, who described Ray as "one of my best gunners," recorded in his report what must have been a quietly unnerving sight:

He was in the act of sighting his guns. He never spoke after receiving the shot, walked a few steps from his piece, and fell dead.

In addition to Ray, the battery lost five men wounded, with several more listed as "slightly". Others would follow later.⁵⁴

Further down the line, in Cabell's battalion, it appears that Captain Fraser may have advanced his battery out of the line and moved it slightly more to the east. While this change presented a better target to the Confederate gunners, it likewise made better targets of them. As a result of this exposure, the battery lost thirty per-cent of its effectives. One shell seriously wounded Captain Fraser, and killed two sergeants and another man. A second shell wounded Lieutenant R. H. Couper of the same battery. The battery became so disabled that it was forced, through want of manpower, to turn over two of its pieces to Manly's battery.⁵⁵

Although their artillery losses were heavy in this short-range exchange, the Confederates were applying a great deal of pressure to the Federal salient in the Peach Orchard, and the cracks were beginning to show. The Unionists were desperately attempting to hold their positions against not only the bombardment, but also the massive *en echelon* assault of General Longstreet's attacking infantry brigades, already in action on the far Confederate right. As the attacking line began to close in, it pressed towards the orchard first from the south, then from the southwest.

Major General David Bell Birney, commanding the First Division of the Third Corps and later, the entire Third Corps, recalled the effects of the forces concentrated against the salient:

*As the fight was now furious, and my thin line reached from Sugar Loaf Hill [Little Round Top] to the Emmittsburg road, fully a mile in length, I was obliged to send for more reinforcements...My thin lines swayed to and fro during the fight, and my regiments were moved constantly on the double-quick from one part of the line to the other, to reinforce assailed points. Graham's brigade was subjected at the point of the angle of the line on the Emmittsburg road to a fearful artillery fire, enfilading his line...*⁵⁶

It was at this time that the infantry of General McLaws' division prepared to strike from the west. The northern wing of the division was composed of the Mississippi brigade of Brigadier General William Barksdale and the Georgians of Brigadier General William T. Wofford. As these troops moved through the guns of Alexander's line, Captain Parker was temporarily overcome by the spectacle of it all. When the Georgians rushed past his battery, cheered on by the artillerists, the

The Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg Campaign

sight “filled [Parker’s] eyes with tears”. A member of Parker’s battery later wrote of the advance:

Now comes the brave infantry. Wofford, of Georgia, his hat off and his bald head shining in the sun, dashes through our battery, followed by his brigade. Out flashed Parker’s sword, while the words, “Hurrah for you of the bald head!” issued instantly from his lips. “Hurrah for you of the bald head!” was repeated by the cannoneers, while the charging Georgians swept down the hillside, driving the retreating foe to the protection of the opposite hill.⁵⁷

When the charging soldiers were a safe distance ahead of the artillery line, Capt. Parker (and probably other battery commanders as well) resumed firing with their guns elevated, supporting the infantry as it closed on the enemy. The combined effect of these forces finally broke the Union line and it began to erratically fall back. It seemed, at that moment, that the momentum was shifting in favor of the Confederates.⁵⁸

To Colonel Alexander, in particular, this was a welcome sight. Earlier, he had observed that the enemy at the orchard “was in greater force than I had expected”, and had ordered his last two reserve batteries up into line, “to put in the last ounce [of firepower]I could muster”. Curiously, this ”last ounce” boasted the heaviest rifles in the battalion.⁵⁹

In addition to two 12-pounder Napoleons, Captain Pichegru Woolfolk’s Ashland, Virginia Artillery contained two 20-pounder Parrott rifles. These big guns were capable of throwing a large exploding shell over 2,500 yards. Considering their heavier hitting power, why they were not committed along the initial artillery line is something of a mystery.⁶⁰

To the left of Woolfolk’s guns the four 3-inch rifles of the Bedford, Virginia Artillery pulled into line. This battery, commanded by Captain Tyler C. Jordan, came into position at the same time as the Ashland Artillery. Now, with the Federals in his front crumbling, Alexander believed that at last “Providence was taking the proper view”, and that the war was nearly over. As the Confederate infantry began to sweep over the Union positions in the Peach Orchard, Alexander ordered his batteries forward.⁶¹

Since Woolfolk’s and Jordan’s batteries had just arrived on the ground and were ready to move, they were sent on under the temporary command of Major James Dearing, General George E. Pickett’s artillery battalion commander, who had ridden ahead of his battalion to the battlefield. Alexander’s other four batteries required a few moments to cut the dead and wounded animals from the traces before they, too, advanced into the open.⁶²

What happened next is regarded as one of, if not **the**, high-water mark of the artillery service with the Army of Northern Virginia. Col. Alexander’s vivid description of the charge gives one a sense of the excitement and anticipation of the moment when:

...[A]ll six [batteries] charged in line across the plain and went into action again at the position the enemy had deserted. I can recall no



*Major James Dearing
(CWLM)*

The Severest and Bloodiest Artillery Fight I Ever Saw

*more splendid sight, on a small scale,-and certainly no more inspiring moment during the war,-than that of the charge of these six batteries. An artillerist's heaven is to follow the routed enemy, after a tough resistance, and throw shells and canister into his disorganized and fleeing masses. Then the explosions of the guns sound louder and more powerful, and the very shouts of the gunners, shouting, "Fire!" in rapid succession, thrill one's very soul. There is no excitement on earth like it. It is far prettier shooting than at a compact, narrow line of battle, or at another battery. Now we saw our heaven just in front, and were already breathing the very air of victory. Now we would have our revenge, and make them sorry they had stayed so long.*⁶³



The advance of Alexander's battalion, as dramatic as it was, was not without incident. A number of men were lost or wounded during the charge. Captain Woolfolk was badly wounded during the advance and did not recover for some time. In Taylor's battery, the loss of Corporal Joseph T. V. Lantz, "an excellent gunner", was noted. Lantz, mortally wounded with both legs broken, reportedly implored his men to stick to the job at hand, saying, "You can do me no good; I am killed; follow your piece."⁶⁴

The fences in the field in front of the guns also threatened to impede the charge. Maj. Dearing, in the lead with the reserve batteries, saw the problem and the solution. With "energy of speech and gesture", he:

*. . . galloped up to where [a number of] captured Federal prisoners were coming in [to Confederate lines]. Waving his sword he roared out, "God damn you, pull down those fences." The frightened prisoners rushed at them and, each man grabbing a rail, the fences literally flew into the air!*⁶⁵

With that obstacle out of the way, the guns continued their rush across the field. Upon reaching the Peach Orchard area, the batteries halted, fanned out across its crest, and resumed firing. Alexander reported that his guns "occupied the enemy's original position, in time to seriously annoy their retreat to the mountain, and to assist the infantry in causing them to abandon several guns at its foot."⁶⁶

The language of Alexander's report, cited above, does not record the frustration that he and the other artillerists of the First Corps must have felt when they arrived at their new position. For far

The Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg Campaign

from pursuing their “heaven”, the Confederate gunners had “only...a moderately good time with Sickles’ retreating corps after all.” Col. Alexander later elaborated in more detail:

And when I got to take in all the topography I was very much disappointed. It was not the enemy’s main line we had broken. That loomed up near 1,000 yards beyond us, a ridge giving good cover behind it and endless fine positions for batteries. And batteries in abundance were showing up and troops too seemed to be marching and fighting everywhere. There was plenty to shoot at.⁶⁷

Indeed there was. The Federals had not only higher-quality guns and ammunition, but they had significantly more of these resources at their command. Even after Col. Alexander had committed his *reserve* battalion to the line, more Federal batteries continued to appear and deploy in the area. As General Hunt reported:

The [U.S.] batteries were exposed to heavy front and enfilading fires, and suffered terribly, but as rapidly as any were disabled they were retired and replaced by others.⁶⁸

that “as the shadows of The artillery “took part wherever it could”, although it did not make any further advances against the Federal line. It did attempt to support the infantry, firing at targets of opportunity until darkness closed in. One of the gunners with Parker’s battery remarked:

As the shadows of coming night are falling around us, the flames leap out from our guns in lovely contrast. ‘Oh! Captain, this is beautiful!’ said one of our sentimental soldiers.⁶⁹

Colonel Alexander was also briefly taken with the appearance of the night fighting, later recalling that “the fuses of the flying shells looked like little meteors in the air”. His earlier optimism, however, had faded with the daylight. He observed that “It was evident that we had not finished the job, and would have to make a fresh effort in the morning.”⁷⁰

Others felt that General Longstreet’s artillery had done well on July 2. Lieutenant F. M. Colston, Alexander’s ordnance officer, stated that, “I walked around and I never saw so much concentrated destruction as I saw in the Peach Orchard, the most of which was done by the fire of our guns.”⁷¹

Private Reese, of the Troup Artillery, concluded that:

Our loss had been heavy, but theirs much greater. For almost the first time in the history of the war, had the superiority of our artillery, when properly massed, been indisputably shown, and the reason of our failure to whip them hitherto with that arm of the service as clearly demonstrated.⁷²

Col. Alexander had no such illusions. He had massed his guns out of necessity, to compensate for poor and unreliable ammunition, the bane of Confederate artillerists. One may get a sense of the handicaps that the artillery faced by reading from the post-battle report of the Chief of Ordnance:

Lieutenant Fontaine reports that the friction-primers were very defective from improper filling, and also from the top part not being properly

The Severest and Bloodiest Artillery Fight I Ever Saw

closed...[S]ome of the 3-inch Parrott ammunition was issued [to the 2.9 inch Parrott guns]. Lt. Selden, jr., ... also reports that he received some of the 3-inch ammunition [for his 2.9 inch Parrotts]. He reports that he could not use the Confederate States fuse with Yankee ammunition. The artillery ammunition lately received from Richmond is packed in such miserably weak boxes that they are always bursting, and, in consequence, several boxes have been so much damaged as to render the ammunition entirely unserviceable. Besides, there is great danger of explosion in the wagons from the loose powder.⁷³

Even when the component parts of shell, fuse and gun seemed to fit together, there was no guarantee of improvement. Col. Alexander noted that later that fall, during the siege of Knoxville, Tennessee, Parker's battery [of four captured Parrott rifles] fired 120 shells at the enemy. Only two failed to tumble or prematurely explode. As these shells may be presumed to be roughly equivalent to those used at Gettysburg, the problem was self-evident. In addition, poor-quality guns of Confederate manufacture also presented problems. During the bombardment of July 2, one such tube, in Captain Reilly's battery of Henry's battalion, burst when fired.⁷⁴

Thus, the limited Confederate success of July 2 could not be attributed to a superior artillery service, as much as Private Reese and others might have wished that it was. The results achieved that day were the combination of an exposed Federal position, coupled with a Confederate willingness to accept high casualties in pursuit of victory. While successful in the short term, the fight had cost the cannoners dearly.

Alexander noted the losses in a letter to his father on July 17. He stated that during the fighting on July 2, four batteries in his battalion lost, in 40 minutes, as many men as had the entire battalion during the Battle of Sharpsburg, "which was the bloodiest of all previous battles." Specifically, he recalled the total losses for his battalion at 144 men and 116 horses, "two-thirds in that afternoon", or 96 men and 77 horses on July 2. The afternoon's fight had truly been "artillery hell" for Alexander's gunners⁷⁵.

The Confederates, however, **had** won the high ground of the Peach Orchard plateau, but not Little Round Top or a permanent foothold on Cemetery Ridge. Nonetheless, General Lee felt this tactical gain, along with other limited gains against the Federals at Culp's Hill, was significant. He believed that:

*...[W]ith proper concert of action, **and with the increased support that the positions on the right would enable the artillery to render the assaulting columns**, we should ultimately succeed...[I]t was accordingly determined to continue the attack...A careful examination was made of the ground secured by Longstreet, and his batteries placed in positions, which, it was believed, **would enable them to silence those of the enemy.**⁷⁶ (Emphasis added)*

It is clear from this statement that Gen. Lee expected more from his artillery than it could deliver. Superficially, the success against the Federal guns at the Peach Orchard, supported the view that the Confederate artillery might be the equal of its Union counterpart. It was this misapprehension, based upon not only the success of Longstreet's artillery at the Peach Orchard, but also upon the performance of the army's artillery at the Battle of Chancellorsville, that led some Southerners to put such faith in their big guns on July 3.

The Army of Northern Virginia in the Gettysburg Campaign

It seems that the Confederates had forgotten the lessons of the Malvern Hill disaster, exactly one year before. Writing for *The Century Magazine* in the post-war years, former Confederate General Daniel Harvey Hill recalled that more than half of the Southern casualties there were the product of Union artillery fire, and stated that this was "an unprecedented thing in warfare". In the same article, he expressed his admiration for such a feat by claiming that, "Confederate infantry and Federal artillery, **side by side on the same field**, need fear no foe on earth."⁷⁷ (Emphasis added)

Implicit in this statement, of course, is the presumption that the Confederate artillery service was inferior to its Federal counterpart. In strict terms of numbers and quality of materials employed, perhaps it was. On occasion, however, its fighting spirit overcame these handicaps and permitted a limited success against a larger, more powerful adversary. Such was the case with the artillerists of the First Corps against the Peach Orchard salient on July 2, 1863.

Notes

¹ Edward Porter Alexander, *Military Memoirs of a Confederate*, (Dayton, 1977) p. 380. Richard D. Stuart, "The Long Arm Of The Confederacy", in *Confederate Veteran*, vol. XXXV (July, 1927), p. 251.

² L. Van Loan Naiswald, *Grape and Canister: The Story of the Field Artillery of the Army of the Potomac, 1861-1865*, (Washington, 1983), p. 333. U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 128 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1890-1901), series I, vol. 2, p. 571. Hereinafter cited as *OR*. All references are to series I unless otherwise noted.

³ Josiah Gorgas, "Notes on the Ordnance Department of the Confederate Government", in Rev. J. William Jones, ed., *Southern Historical Society Papers*, 49 vols. (Richmond, 1872-1931), vol. 12, p. 71, 81. Stuart, "Long Arm", p. 251. Hereinafter cited as *SHSP*.

⁴ Gorgas, "Confederate Ordnance Department", pp. 71, 75. Stuart, in "Long Arm", p. 252, states that cannon production at Noble Brothers for the year ending Sept. 30, 1863, was only 677 pieces. Some Confederate-manufactured guns failed in the field from time to time. See, James C. Hazlett, Edwin Olmstead and M. Hume Parks, *Field Artillery Weapons of the Civil War*, (Cranbury, 1983), p. 55, for some comments on this.

⁵ Edward Porter Alexander, "The Great Charge And Artillery Fighting At Gettysburg", in Robert U. Johnson and Clarence Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, 4 vols. (New York, 1884-1889), vol. 3, p. 358.

⁶ *OR* 27, pt. 1, p. 241. *OR* 25, pt. 1, p. 252.

⁷ Ezra J. Warner, *Generals In Gray*, (Baton Rouge, 1959), p. 234.

⁸ Robert K. Krick, *Lee's Colonels: A Biographical Register of the Field Officers of the Officers of the Army of Northern Virginia*, (Dayton, 1992), p.386. *OR* 27, pt. 3, p. 859.

⁹ Stewart Sifakis, *Who Was Who In The Confederacy*, (New York, 1988), p. 45, 88. Krick, *Lee's Colonels*, p. 172, 183. Sifakis, *Who Was Who*, p. 2.

¹⁰ Warner, *Generals In Gray*, p. 3. E. P. Alexander, *Military Memoirs*, pp. 157-158.

¹¹ *OR* 11, pt. 2, p.628.

¹² *OR* 11, pt. 2, p. 537.

¹³ *OR* 25, pt. 2, p. 614.

¹⁴ *OR* 25, pt. 2, p. 615.

¹⁵ *OR* 25, pt. 2, p. 618.

¹⁶ *OR* 21, pp. 1046-1047.

¹⁷ Charles B. Dew, *Ironmaker To The Confederacy: Joseph R. Anderson and the Tredegar Iron Works*, (Wilmington, 1987), p. 190. *OR* 25, pt. 2, p. 809, 822, 838.

¹⁸ *OR* 25, pt. 2, p. 838.

¹⁹ If this does not sound plausible, recall the attempt by Confederate military authorities to standardize the battle-flags of the Army of Tennessee. In spite of orders to the contrary, many AOT units insisted on using

their old standards in battle, where the resultant confusion cost many lives. See Howard M. Madus and Robert D. Needham, The Battle Flags Of The Confederate Army Of Tennessee (Milwaukee, 1976), pp 8-9, and 63 for their (and General John Bell Hood's) observations on this point.

²⁰ *OR* 25, pt. 1, pp. 803-804.

²¹ *OR* 25, pt. 2, pp. 850-51, 836 & 838, 809 & 828.

²² *OR* 25, pt. 1, pp. 252-253.

²³ *OR* 25, pt. 2, pp.471-472. Tully McCrea, Dear Belle: Letters from a Cadet and Officer to his Sweetheart, edited by Cathrine S. Cray (Middletown, 1967), p. 211-212.

²⁴ Alexander, "Letter from General E. P. Alexander", *SHSP*, 5, p. 201.

²⁵ *OR* 27, pt. 2, p. 428. Alexander, Memoirs, p. 223-224.

²⁶ E. P. Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander, edited by Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, 1989), pp. 230-231.

²⁷ Alexander-Hillhouse Papers, University of North Carolina, Southern Historical Collection. E. P. Alexander to Father, June 14, 1863.

²⁸ Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, p. 235.

²⁹ James Burdge Walton, "Letter from Colonel J. B. Walton", *SHSP*, vol. 5 (1877), p. 51-52. Edward Porter Alexander, "Letter from General E. P. Alexander", *SHSP*, vol. 5, p. 203.

³⁰ Alexander, "Artillery Fighting At Gettysburg", p. 358.

³¹ Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, p. 236. *OR*, 27, pt. 2, p. 350., Dr. Harry Pfanz, Gettysburg: The Second Day, (Chapel Hill, 1987), p. 489, note 38.

³² The debate over a supposed sunrise attack order for July 2 is too complex to be fully explored here. The reader is directed to consult Gen. James Longstreet, From Manassas To Appomattox: Memoirs Of The Civil War In America, (Secaucus, 1988), pp. 377-384, for one view of this question, and to Jennings Cropper Wise, The Long Arm of Lee: The History Of The Artillery Of The Army Of Northern Virginia, (New York, 1959), pp. 630-633, for another. Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, p. 236. See editor's note 45.

³³ Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, pp. 236-237.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 238. *OR*, 27, pt 2, p. 428. Although Latham's Battery is listed as having the 6- pounder, its' use that afternoon seems unlikely. James E. Smith, A Famous Battery and Its Campaigns, 1861-'64, (Washington, 1892), pp. 102-103. There seems to be considerable confusion as to times that afternoon. Although Smith states that firing commenced around 2:00, other sources put it somewhat later. Jennings Cropper Wise, for example, states in The Long Arm of Lee, p. 644, that Henry's battalion became engaged around 3:45. Other battery reports speak of different times as well. Therefore, I followed the stated *sequence* of events, rather than times perhaps imperfectly recalled by the writers.

³⁶ John Cheeves Haskell, The Haskell Memoirs, edited by Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood (New York, 1960), p.49.

³⁷ *OR* 27, pt. 1, p. 582, 900.

³⁸ Cabell's Battalion Battery Tablets, *GNMP*. Battery tablets were placed on the Gettysburg battlefield by the United States War Department under the supervision of Major William H. Robbins, formerly of the 4th Alabama Infantry. A veteran of the battle and one of three U.S. War Department commissioners, Robbins researched the reports of unit commanders, corresponded with other veterans of the battle, and accompanied many of them around the field to confirm unit locations where the tablets were eventually placed.

³⁹ *OR* 27, pt. 2, pp. 384, 379. Alexander, "Artillery Fighting At Gettysburg", p. 359.

⁴⁰ Letter of Andrew W. Reese, August 8, 1863, Troup Artillery File, *GNMP*

⁴¹ *OR* 27, pt. 2, p. 375.

⁴² *OR* 27, pt. 2, p.381. Capt. Manly does not specify on which date Pvt. Thain's act occurred.

⁴³ Pfanz, Gettysburg, p. 154.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* *OR* 27, pt.1, p. 584. The Union artillery had learned its lesson at Chancellorsville, and had thoroughly reorganized its artillery. Batteries were now brigaded directly under the corps commanders' control or that of the Reserve Brigade commander. As a result, individual batteries could be (and were) much more speedily massed at the front when needed. This allowed the Federal artillery to effectively use its superior numbers against the Confederates – something they had not reliably done in the past.

⁴⁵ Royall W. Figg, Where Men Only Dare To Go! (Richmond, 1885), pp. 138-139.

⁴⁶ Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, p. 230.

⁴⁷ Josiah Gorgas, The Ordnance Manual For The Use Of The Officers Of The Confederate States Army, (Charleston, 1863), pp. 15, 67. Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, p. 240. Campbell-Colston Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, p. 12.

⁴⁸ *OR 27*, pt. 2, p.432.

⁴⁹ Pfanz, Gettysburg, p. 118.

⁵⁰ Krick, Lee's Colonels, p. 273. Figg, Where Men Only Dare, pp.138 –139.

⁵¹ Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, p. 239. Although Alexander uses the figure of “54 guns”, that number is somewhat imprecise. Only eleven guns (this includes the implausible use of Latham’s short range 6 pdr.) of Henry’s battalion were in action, as Garden’s and Bachman’s batteries (8 guns total) were in reserve and not engaged on July 2. Cabell’s battalion had 16 guns, of which only 14 were actually engaged, as Capt. McCarthy apparently did not employ his Napoleon section. (See *OR 27*, pt. 2, pp. 428, 379.) Alexander added 16 (not 18, as he states) more to the line, while still holding the eight guns of Woolfolk’s and Jordan’s batteries in reserve. This would have given a total of 41 guns *engaged in line of battle*. Add to this the 10 guns noted above as unengaged, and the total *deployed* is 51.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *OR 27*, pt. 2, p. 432.

⁵⁵ *OR 27*, pt. 2, pp. 338, 375. John Busey and David Martin, Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg, (Longstreet House: Highstown, N.J., 1986), p. 282. In *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 3, p. 335, a sketch by Charles W. Reed of the 9th Mass. Battery purports to show Confederate guns deployed east of the Emmitsburg Road. While it is probable that Fraser’s battery did move some distance to the east, it is unlikely that it moved that far. In addition to weakening Cabell’s line, the new position would also have placed Fraser’s guns in front of Henry’s guns firing towards the orchard.

⁵⁶ *OR 27*, pt. 1, p.483.

⁵⁷ Robert K. Krick, Parker’s Virginia Battery, C.S.A., (Berryville, 1975), p. 156. Figg, *Where Men Only Dare!*, p.140.

⁵⁸ Krick, Parker’s Virginia Battery, p. 156.

⁵⁹ Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, p. 240.

⁶⁰ Warren Ripley, Artillery and Ammunition of the Civil War, (New York, 1970), p. 370. Perhaps, at first, Col. Alexander felt that the shorter-range guns would be enough to do the job. He may have been concerned with conserving ammunition as well. Unfortunately, he did not state his reasons for holding the big Parrotts in reserve.

⁶¹ Alexander, “Artillery Fighting”, p. 360. In both his official report and his *Battles and Leaders* article, Alexander suggests that Woolfolk and Jordan’s commands participated in the charge without first engaging the enemy from the ridgeline. Yet, the War Department battery tablets state that both batteries fired “a few rounds” at the Peach Orchard before charging. As these batteries would have been in the act of unlimbering their pieces while the rest of the battalion was limbering up for the charge, (and therefore could not have moved out ahead of the other batteries) it seems unlikely that they fired from this position.

⁶² *OR 27*, pt. 2, p. 430.

⁶³ Alexander, “Artillery Fighting”, p. 360.

⁶⁴ *OR 27*, pt. 2, p. 430. The wounding of Capt. Woolfolk was the second in a series of events that kept the two potential combatants, Woolfolk and Moody, from ever meeting “upon the field of honor”. As Woolfolk recovered from his wounding, Capt. Moody went with his battery to Tennessee, where he was captured and held for the duration of the war. See Pfanz, Second Day, p. 156. *OR*, pt. 2, p. 431.

⁶⁵ Rev. Joseph A. Graves, The History of the Bedford Light Artillery, 1861-1865, (Bedford City, 1903), p.31. Campbell-Colston Papers, p. 12.

⁶⁶ *OR 27*, pt 2, p. 430.

⁶⁷ Alexander, “Artillery Fighting”, p. 360. Alexander, Fighting for the Confederacy, p. 240.

⁶⁸ *OR 27*, pt. 1, p.235.

⁶⁹ Alexander, “Artillery Fighting”, p. 360. Figg, Where Men Only Dare!, p. 140.

⁷⁰ Alexander, “Artillery Fighting”, p. 360.

⁷¹ Campbell-Colston Papers, p. 13.

⁷² Letter of Andrew W. Reese, August 8, 1863, Troup Artillery File, *GNMP*

⁷³ *OR 27*, pt. 2, p.459.

⁷⁴ E. P. Alexander, "Confederate Artillery Service," *SHSP*, 9, p. 107. *OR 51*, pt.2, pp. 758-759.

⁷⁵ Alexander-Hillhouse Papers, Alexander to Father, July 17, 1863. As to be expected, there are slight variations on these figures. The *Return of Casualties in the Army of Northern Virginia, at the battle of Gettysburg, July 1-3*, in *OR 27*, pt. 2, p. 340, lists total casualties in Alexander's battalion at 139. This would mean a casualty total for July 2 of around 93 men. Whichever number is used, the total is still high.

⁷⁶ *OR 27*, pt. 2, p. 320.

⁷⁷ Daniel H. Hill, "McClellan's Change Of Base And Malvern Hill", *Battles and Leaders*, vol. 2, pp.394 - 395.