

Petersburg National
Battlefield

IN
STORAGE

BATTLE OF THE WELDON RAILROAD

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BATTLE OF THE WELDON RAILROAD

Chapter I

The V Corps Effects a Lodgment on the Weldon Railroad

The summer of 1864 in eastern Virginia had been oppressively hot. No rain fell in the Petersburg area from June 3 to July 19. When it did start to rain, life in the trenches became worse; the high temperatures continued, and the atmosphere became damp and humid. Men of both armies hoped that they could get out of the earthworks. Therefore when orders came for the IX Corps of the Army of the Potomac to relieve the V Corps from the entrenchments, it was hailed with joy by the men who fought under the Maltese Cross. ¹

Major General Gouverneur K. Warren's soldiers of the V Corps were accordingly withdrawn from the Petersburg investment line on the night of August 14. ² Before another 36 hours had elapsed, the commander of the Army of the Potomac, Major General George G. Meade, had received a number of interesting reports from Major General Winfield S. Hancock, the signal officer in charge of the observation stations, and other intelligence sources. These reports indicated that General Robert E. Lee had cut his force south of the James to three divisions.

Meade on the evening of August 16 alerted General Warren to have his corps formed and ready to march at 3 a.m. The V Corps was to move by way of Strong's house and strike the Weldon Railroad near the Vaughan road crossing (about two miles southeast of Petersburg). If the entrenchments in that area were "weakly" held, Warren was to "endeavor to carry them and occupy the crest in rear of their first line of works opposite the fronts held" by the IX and XVIII Corps. Brigadier General August V. Kautz was to mass his cavalry division near the Jerusalem plank road to keep Fitzhugh Lee's cavalry division from assailing the V Corps' rear. ³

Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, wasn't altogether satisfied as to the disposition of the Confederate troops. Since he preferred to await further developments, Meade's order was suspended. ⁴

Union officers closely grilled all prisoners captured in General Hancock's offensive in the Deep Bottom sector north of the James. Two hundred and sixty-seven Rebels had been sent to City Point on the evening

of August 16 for questioning. From these men the intelligence people were able to ascertain that two and possibly three Confederate brigades had crossed the James on Sunday (the 14th) to reinforce the units opposing Hancock's thrust. Troopers from both brigades of Major General W. H. F. "Rooney" Lee's cavalry division had been bagged by the Federals. These men were in agreement that all Rebel cavalry had been withdrawn from the Weldon Railroad area. The other Confederate cavalry divisions, they said, were with Lieutenant General Jubal Early up in the Valley. 5

General Grant determined to capitalize on this situation. A telegram on the morning of the 17th was sent to General Meade. Grant wanted Meade to send General Warren with his V Corps and "a little cavalry" to destroy as much of the Weldon Railroad as practicable, but under no circumstances was Warren "to fight any unequal battles nor to assault fortifications." Warren's movement was to be a reconnaissance in force "to take advantage of any weakness of the enemy he may discover." Three or four days' rations were to be carried by the troops of the V Corps. If Warren were unable to reach the Weldon Railroad near the Petersburg defenses, he was to "strike or feel farther south." General Grant's dispatch concluded, "I want, if possible, to make such demonstrations as will force Lee to withdraw a portion of his troops from the Valley, so that [Major General Philip H.] Sheridan can strike a blow against the balance." 6

Accordingly, Warren was instructed by Meade on the afternoon of August 17 to take his corps at 4 in the morning and "endeavor to make a lodgment upon the Weldon railroad, in the vicinity of the Gurley house, or as much nearer to the enemy's line of intrenchments as practicable." Warren was to have his troops destroy the railroad as far south as possible. In addition to the destruction of the railroad, Warren was to consider his movement "a reconnaissance in force," and be prepared to take advantage of any weakness the Rebels might betray. It was not expected at headquarters that Warren would "fight under serious disadvantages or assault fortifications." If the V Corps found the Confederates dug in along the railroad, Warren was to pin them in position.

When the V Corps took the field, Warren was to see that his troops carried four days' rations on their persons. All the corps artillery, as well as part of the ambulances and medical wagons, were to accompany the

expedition. The corps train was to be parked at "convenient and secure points in rear of the army."

General Kautz would be instructed to have one of his brigades report to General Warren. The horsemen were to be used to picket the ground between the corps' left and Blackwater Swamp.

Meade notified his corps commander that according to Confederate prisoners captured in the Deep Bottom operations nearly all the Rebel cavalry had been withdrawn from the Southside, and that General Lee had "considerable less than four infantry divisions" south of the Appomattox. Warren was warned that Meade would be unable to send him any reinforcements if he got into trouble, consequently, he "must depend entirely" upon his own resources. The only help Warren could expect from the troops holding the Petersburg investment lines was that of "obliging the enemy to maintain his line." 7

Upon the receipt of his marching orders, Warren addressed a circular to his division commanders and staff officers. When the corps took the field, Griffin's division was to have the lead, to be followed by Ayres', Crawford's, and Cutler's. Batteries were to accompany the divisions to which they had been previously assigned. The reserve artillery, one-half the ambulances, and one medicine wagon per division were to fall in behind Cutler's division. Since Warren planned to move light and fast, he announced that the ordnance train, the battery wagons, traveling forges, and all baggage wagons, except the spring wagons, would be left. A staff officer would be sent to each division command post to guide the division commander. 8

As soon as they received their copies of the circular, the division commanders called staff-meetings. The officers in charge of the brigades were told to have their units formed and ready to march at the designated hour.

Long lines were soon formed in front of the ordnance and commissary tents as the troops drew ammunition and rations. Inspections were held by the regimental commanders to see that the men had the stipulated four days' rations in their knapsacks and 40 rounds of ammunition in their cartridge-boxes.

Warren's chief quartermaster informed the general that if the corps were to wreck a railroad more tools would be required. A request was forwarded to City Point for picks, bars, and shovels. By 6 o'clock several wagons had rolled out of the big City Point Quartermaster Depot with "440 sets of implements for destroying railroad." 9

During the day, Union officers had gleaned additional information through their interrogation of Rebel prisoners. It was revealed that Major General William Mahone's division and one brigade belonging to Major General Bushrod R. Johnson's division had crossed the James to oppose the Deep Bottom thrust. Grant was delighted by this news. When he relayed it to Meade's headquarters at 10 p.m., Grant observed, "This leaves the force at Petersburg reduced to what it was when the mine was sprung. Warren may find an opportunity to do more than I had expected." 10

Meade forwarded this news to General Warren. 11

Meanwhile, Meade's headquarters had contacted General Kautz. That cavalry leader was advised of the impending expedition, and that he was to assist Warren by assigning one of his brigades (two regiments) to screen the infantry's left. Kautz was to see that this force was provided "with the full amount of rations" and all the forage the troopers could carry. 12

Kautz lost no time in getting in touch with General Warren. Warren was notified that the two regiments currently picketing the army's left would be the units designated to operate with the V Corps. At the moment, the two regiments mustered between 800 and 900 effectives. Warren would find Colonel George W. Lewis, who would command the two regiments, at McCann's house near the Jerusalem plank road. Lewis had been alerted to hold his men ready to ride at 4 a.m. 13

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General Warren was in good spirits when he awakened early on August 18. Headquarters was a scene of feverish activity; staff officers were going and coming. Warren was delighted to learn that his four division commanders had completed preparations and were ready to move out as scheduled. Before mounting his horse and riding off to join Brigadier

General Charles Griffin's column, Warren telegraphed Meade that he "was exceedingly pleased" that his corps had been selected to undertake the expedition against the Weldon Railroad. The division commanders had voiced a similar feeling. Warren promised to keep in contact with army headquarters through the use of hourly messengers. Should anything "interesting" develop, a courier would be immediately dispatched. 14

A slight hitch developed; it was 5 a.m. before General Griffin's division left its camp near the Chieves house. The 1st Brigade commanded by Colonel William S. Tilton took the lead as the column moved out and turned into the Jerusalem plank road. A three mile march brought the vanguard to Second Swamp. A short distance beyond this watercourse at Temple's, a staff officer turned the head of Tilton's brigade into the Vaughan wagon road. Up till this moment, it had seemed to many of the soldiers that they were marching away from Petersburg. Now that the column had changed directions, they knew that they were striking for the Weldon Railroad. 15

The Vaughan wagon road ran almost due west and crossed the Weldon Railroad at Globe Tavern. As the bluecoats tramped along the sandy road, they began to suffer from the heat. One of the soldiers recalled, "The day was one of those exceedingly close, sultry, August dog-days, well known to every one who has served in Virginia, extremely debilitating and exhausting to both man and beast." 16

Near Gurley's house (a large, square, white house, with very red brick chimneys at each gable), General Griffin called a halt and told Colonel Tilton to form his brigade. Tilton deployed his unit into double line of battle, while one regiment (the 150th Pennsylvania) was thrown forward as skirmishers. 17 Colonel Edgar M. Gregory's brigade marched up and was formed into double line of battle on Tilton's left. Gregory covered his front with skirmishers from the 32d Massachusetts. The Vaughan wagon road separated the two brigades. 18

While waiting for Griffin's third brigade (Colonel James Gwyn's) to take post in support of Gregory's bluecoats, General Warren at 7 a.m. addressed a message to General Meade's headquarters. Upon reaching Gurley's house, Warren had questioned several of Kautz's pickets--troopers from the 3d New York Cavalry. The horsesoldiers told the general

that Rebel outposts had told them that they were to be relieved at any minute. As soon as Griffin had completed his dispositions and Brigadier General Romeyn B. Ayres' division had closed up, Warren wrote, the advance would be resumed. 19

It was a little after 8 a.m. when General Griffin notified Warren that his division was ready to resume the advance. Warren told Griffin to go ahead. Covered by a strong skirmish line, Tilton's and Gregory's brigades drove toward the Weldon Railroad, a mile to their front. On the right, skirmishers of the 150th Pennsylvania encountered vedettes from the 7th Confederate Cavalry. The Rebs retired rapidly toward the railroad, losing a score of men as they did. By the time the Yank skirmishers approached the track, the greyclads had vanished.

At 9 o'clock Griffin's battle line crossed the railroad at Globe Tavern. Before doing anything else several men snipped the telegraph wire. The skirmishers (the 150th Pennsylvania and the 32d Massachusetts) advanced another 500 yards, halted, and took post parallel to the track. Colonel Tilton stopped the 149th and 187th Pennsylvania at Globe Tavern. As soon as tools could be broken out by the quartermaster people and passed out, the Pennsylvanians were turned to tearing up the rails, stacking the ties with the rails on top, and setting them on fire. Three of Tilton's regiments (the 121st, 142d, and 143d Pennsylvania) were wheeled to the right. A battle line was formed across the railroad. The three Pennsylvania regiments advanced toward Petersburg. After proceeding about one-third of a mile, the troops were halted and put to work digging rifle-pits and slashing timber. 20

Except for the 32d Massachusetts deployed as skirmishers west of the railroad, Gregory's troops were given dual tasks of wreaking havoc on the Weldon Railroad and erecting breastworks. 21 Gwyn's brigade was held in reserve near Globe Tavern. 22

Globe Tavern was situated near the center of "a large and beautiful area of cleared ground of several hundred acres, extending east and west of the railroad and north along" the Halifax road for about one-half mile. The belt of pines which bounded the clearing on the north was about 500 yards in depth. These woods extended eastward to the open fields adjacent to the Aiken house. From Aiken's to Fort Davis, on the Jerusalem plank road,

the countryside was densely forested. Besides Globe Tavern there were three houses in the large clearing--Dunlop's to the east, Lennear's to the south, and Blick's west of the railroad. Corn was the money crop on these farms, and the stalks were beginning to turn brown.

The Halifax road paralleled the railroad. Beyond it, to the westward, about a mile was the Vaughan road. This road entered the Halifax road about one and one-half miles north of Globe Tavern. Between the Vaughan and Halifax roads timber and cultivated lands alternated. Numerous cartways and paths well known to the Confederates cut through the woods and swamps surrounding the fields about Globe Tavern. 23

The day was very hot; it was 10 a.m. before General Ayres' division reached Globe Tavern, where Warren had established his command post. Warren, when he discussed the situation with Ayres, was disappointed to learn that the surgeons, although the day was still young, were reporting "a great many cases of sunstroke." Upon relaying this information to Meade's headquarters, Warren complained, "Marching to-day is very slow." Patrols had been thrown out, Warren wrote, and as soon as he had completed his dispositions, he would "move up the railroad." 24

In accordance with Warren's instructions, Ayres deployed his division near the Blick house. Brigadier General Joseph Hayes formed his brigade in double line of battle across the railroad. The 12th U. S. Infantry, the 146th New York, and a battalion of the 140th New York were thrown out as skirmishers. 25 The Maryland Brigade, Colonel Nathan T. Dushane commanding, was posted in line of battle to the left and rear of Hayes' bluecoats. Lieutenant Colonel Michael Wiedrich's 3d Brigade would support the advance. 26 Cannoneers of Battery C, 1st Massachusetts Light Artillery threw their four Napoleons into battery near the Blick house. 27

Before Ayres had completed his deployment, the Confederates succeeded in bringing up a two-gun battery. Unlimbering their pieces about three-quarters of a mile north of Blick's, the Rebel cannoneers shelled the Federals. Gunners of Battery C replied with two of their Napoleons. 28

Reports reached Warren's command post from Colonel Tilton on the railroad north of the Blick house that the foe's guns were covered by a small force of cavalry. Shortly before 11 o'clock, Warren told Ayres to drive up the Weldon Railroad toward Petersburg. As soon as Ayres' bluecoats

passed through his line, Colonel Tilton recalled the 121st, 142d, and 143d Pennsylvania and put them to work turning over track. 29

Ayres' battle line advanced slowly. About 1,100 yards north of Elick's house, Ayres' skirmishers engaged Confederate sharpshooters. Confederate artillerists at the same time employed their guns to delay the Union thrust. Much of the ground across which the Yanks worked was covered by a dense "undergrowth of pine and oaks."

Hayes' skirmishers (the 12th U. S., and the 140th and 146th New York) drove Rebel snipers from Davis' house and compelled the greyclad artillerists hurriedly to limber up their two pieces and retire to a less exposed position. The cannoneers of Battery C, 1st Massachusetts had pulled their Napoleons out of battery and drove them up the Halifax road. Hardly had the butternuts given up Davis' house, before the Yank cannoneers thundered up and threw their four guns into battery, and resumed their duel with the Confederate artillerists. It was almost two o'clock by the time Hayes' battle line approached the edge of the dense belt of timber which bounded Davis' cornfield on the south. Screened by the tall corn stalks beyond, Union skirmishers and greyclad sharpshooters engaged in a deadly game of hide and seek. A detachment of the 146th New York led by Captain James Stewart passed through a gap in the Confederate skirmish line and was captured. The main body of the 146th New York continued to crawl about the cornfield, ducking as the minie balls sang over their heads and clipped the tops of the stalks. 30

Brigadier General Lysander Cutler's division, bringing up the corps' rear, had reached the railroad at 11 a.m. From General Cutler, Warren received bad news. Like the other division commanders, Cutler complained of the oppressive heat. Addressing a note to Meade's headquarters at this time, Warren reported, "The men give out fearfully in the sun and compel us to move slowly to keep them in the ranks. Several officers have been sunstruck...." 31

To establish contact with the IX Corps on his right, and to outflank the Confederates disputing Ayres' drive up the railroad, Warren called for Brigadier General Samuel W. Crawford. Upon reaching Globe Tavern, Crawford had massed his division, 3,000 strong, east of the railroad and awaited orders. Warren told his division commander of Ayres' activities: Crawford

was to advance his troops and take position on the left of Ayres' battle line. The division moved out promptly--Colonel Peter Lyle's brigade on the left, Colonel Richard Coulter's in the center, and Colonel William R. Hartshorne's brigade to the right and rear of Coulter's unit. 32

As the troops advanced across the clearing toward the woods, it started to rain very hard. After about 15 minutes, the downpour ceased, but by this time the bluecoats had been drenched. 33

Before reaching the thicket which bounded the clearing on the north, Crawford sent word for Colonel Lyle to deploy one of his regiments as skirmishers. Colonel Lyle halted his brigade, while he threw forward the 107th Pennsylvania. Advancing into the woods about 20 yards, the skirmishers halted. Meanwhile, the Rebel battery posted north of Davis' had turned its attention on Crawford's battle line. Within a matter of moments, the Confederates found the range. Crawford sought to get his men out of the open and under cover.

A staff officer was sent with instructions for the skirmishers of the 107th Pennsylvania to extend to the right to screen the other brigades of the division as they drew abreast of Lyle's. Crawford at the same time sent another aide into the pines to the left front to pinpoint the right flank of Ayres' division; he was to guide Lyle's brigade into position so that there would be no gap between the two divisions.

The officer soon returned with the desired information--Ayres' right flank extended a short distance east of the railroad. At this, Lyle's brigade advanced into the woods with orders to connect with the right of Ayres' command. Since the underbrush was very thick, Lyle determined to advance his brigade by successive regiments. The 16th Maine on the left moved first and established contact with Ayres' troops on its left. While Colonel Lyle was "exerting himself" to guide the rest of his units through the "thick and tangled wood and underbrush," the Confederates launched a furious counterattack. 34

* * *

Confederate Brigadier General James Dearing had notified General P. G. T. Beauregard, who (with Lee supervising operations north of the James) had

been left in charge at Petersburg, that the Yanks had driven in his pickets and reserve east of Globe Tavern. According to Colonel V. H. Taliaferro of the 7th Confederate Cavalry, the Federals were out "in force with infantry and cavalry." (Dearing, after handing the message to a courier, had headed for the point of danger at the head of one of his regiments. 35

Beauregard at 10:15 a.m. forwarded Dearing's communication to General Lee. Since he didn't have any cavalry, Beauregard inquired, "Can any cavalry re-enforcements be sent Dearing?" 36

Shortly before noon, Beauregard received further news from Dearing. The cavalryman tersely reported, "Enemy is advancing in force both upon railroad and Vaughan road." Beauregard, in view of this development, determined to act. Orders were sent through Lieutenant General Ambrose P. Hill for Major General Henry Heth to support Dearing's cavalry with two infantry brigades. The force holding the Petersburg earthworks had been cut to a minimum, so Beauregard cautioned Heth that the footsoldiers must be returned to their positions in the rifle-pits by nightfall. 37

Heth quickly organized a striking force consisting of the infantry brigades led by Brigadier General Joseph R. Davis and Colonel Robert M. Mayo, and the Letcher Virginia Artillery. As soon as the unit commanders had formed their commands, Heth's column marched out of the Petersburg defenses via the Vaughan road. 38

Shortly after Heth's column had moved out, Brigadier General Alfred H. Colquitt received orders to put his Georgia Brigade into motion for the Weldon Railroad. Washington L. Dunn of the 27th Georgia recorded in his diary, "We are out near Petersburg. It rained to-day and about ___ o'clock P.M. we received orders that the Yankees were on the Weldon road, about 4 miles from the City and we received orders to go down there and we started some thing after one and marched down on the road...."

Meanwhile, General Dearing reported that his cavalry had checked the Union advance at Davis' house. Although the Federals were exhibiting a strong line of battle, Dearing felt they were bluffing. He notified Beauregard that he doubted if the Yanks had "more than a few regiments of infantry and one or two of cavalry." 39

* * *

General Ayres, taking cognizance of the increasing tempo of the skirmishing to his front, sent instructions for Colonel Dushane to form his brigade into line of battle on the left of Hayes' command. Dushane massed his Marylanders near the edge of the wood, about 100 yards south of Davis' cornfield. The left flank of the Maryland Brigade was guarded by a few skirmishers.

Screened by the tall corn stalks and Dearing's cavalry, General Heth quickly completed his dispositions. As soon as Davis and Mayo had formed their brigades into double line of battle, Heth passed the word to attack. The Federals first sighted the greyclad infantrymen, as they stormed out of the woods beyond Davis' house. Sweeping the blueclad skirmishers before them, the butternuts struck Hayes' line "in front and flank." 40 As soon as he sighted the onrushing Rebs, Colonel Dushane called for his Marylanders to fire. Several crashing volleys caused the Confederates to the Maryland Brigade's front to seek shelter. 41 East of the Weldon Railroad, the Southerners overlapped Hayes' battle line and assailed the 16th Maine. 42

Hayes' brigade quickly gave way. Taking their walking wounded with them, the Unionists retired through the woods. 43 The retreat of Hayes' troops left the Federal units to the left and to the right in embarrassing situations. General Heth, to exploit the breakthrough, hurled Davis' fierce Mississippians and North Carolinians against Dushane's right flank. Dushane shouted for his Marylanders to retreat. 44 As the brigade started to pull back, a number of men panicked. The thick underbrush and the pursuing Confederates didn't help the situation. The Maryland Brigade retired in confusion. After the soldiers had "disentangled" themselves from the woods, the officers succeeded in rallying and re-forming them.

Colonel Charles W. Tilden of the 16th Maine was angered and at the same time distressed by the retreat of Ayres' troops to his left. He bellowed for his men to stand fast to allow Colonel Lyle to bring up the rest of the brigade. As the Maine men traded volleys with Mayo's butternuts, the 39th Massachusetts, followed by the 90th Pennsylvania, drew abreast of the Maine regiment's right. After several minutes of bitter, close-range combat, Colonel Tilden saw that the Rebs were infiltrating the woods to his left and rear. To avoid having his unit captured en masse, Tilden called "retreat!" The regiment fell back and was rallied on the left of the 104th New York. Upon the retreat of the 16th Maine, the rest of Lyle's brigade retired and re-formed at the southern edge of the woods. 45

About this time, General Crawford learned that the 107th Pennsylvania was so understrength that it was unable to cover properly the division front. Recalling the regiment, Crawford replaced it with skirmishers

from the 119th Pennsylvania. 46

As they retreated through the pines, Lyle's bluecoats encountered Coulter's brigade. (Not having fully recovered from the effect of his wounds, Colonel Coulter turned over command of his brigade to the next senior officer, Colonel Charles Wheelock of the 97th New York.) Wheelock moved promptly to stabilize the situation. Three companies of the 97th New York, the lead regiment, were pushed out as skirmishers. While these men delayed Mayo's Rebels, Wheelock formed the brigade into battle line. Since his right flank overlapped the greyclads' line, Wheelock threw forward his right regiment, the 88th Pennsylvania. The badly outnumbered Confederates halted when confronted by the fresh brigade. While the Southerners and Wheelock's troops banged away, Colonel Lyle redeployed his brigade on Wheelock's left. 47

To help stem the Confederate tide that had punched a hole in the Union line, General Ayres called up his reserve brigade. Colonel Wiedrich formed his artillerists turned into infantrymen on either side of the railroad. Hayes' and Dushane's troops as they retreated from the woods rallied on Wiedrich's command. 48

Ayres had called for help. Warren accordingly told General Cutler to reinforce the Second Division with one of his two brigades. Cutler decided to send the brigade led by Colonel J. William Hofmann.

On the morning's march, Hofmann's column had brought up the rear; fully one-half the men had straggled. By 3 o'clock, when the orders to move to the front arrived, many of these people had rejoined their units. When Hofmann gave the word, the troops fell in on their colors and took arms. The brigade tramped northward from Globe Tavern toward the sound of the guns. Reaching the woods one-half mile north of the tavern, Hofmann formed his regiments into line of battle, the left flank resting on the railroad. Soldiers of the 147th New York were deployed and advanced as skirmishers. The New Yorkers beat their way through the timber for several hundred yards, before encountering any Rebs. When they did, both sides blazed away.

At 4 p.m. Hofmann was directed to report to General Ayres. The general had Hofmann shift his troops west of the railroad and relieve Colonel Dushane's Marylanders. Hardly had Hofmann's troops taken position and

allowed Dushane's badly shaken footsoldiers to pass through their lines, before they found themselves engaged with Davis' Mississippians and North Carolinians. 49

Upon being notified that Hofmann's brigade was being sent west of the track, General Cutler had Brigadier General Edward S. Bragg form his brigade. Bragg's troops would be used to plug the gap which the Confederates had opened between Ayres' division on the left and Crawford's on the right. Arriving on the ground at the edge of the woods where Hofmann had first deployed, Bragg halted his troops. The 6th Wisconsin was thrown forward as skirmishers. Hardly had the boys from Wisconsin disappeared into the thick undergrowth, before Bragg had formed his other units into line of battle and put the soldiers to work throwing up breastworks. 50

Skirmishers from the 6th Wisconsin filed into line on the right of the 147th New York. For the next several hours, the two Union regiments battled the Johnnies to their front. 51

As soon as it was known that the Confederates were counterattacking, Colonel Charles S. Wainwright called up his artillery. Six batteries galloped up and emplaced their guns along a line running from west to east across the Weldon Railroad. The cannoners of the left flank battery (the 15th New York) unlimbered their four Napoleons a short distance west of Blick's house. When Ayres' troops retired out of the pines to their front, the gun captains put their pieces into action. The ground seemed to tremble as the 24 pieces hammered away with shot and shell at the Rebs and their supporting artillery. Within a few minutes, the Yankee cannoners had silenced the Confederate guns (the Letcher Virginia Artillery). This enabled them to give the grey-clad footsoldiers their undivided attention. Fortunately for the Southerners, they were screened by the trees and dense undergrowth. 52

General Warren at 4 p.m. dispatched a message to army headquarters. He reported that the forced withdrawal of Ayres' division had "deranged" his plans considerably. At the moment, the corps commander wrote, he was "getting things in order again." The Confederates, Warren believed, had lost heavily and had been compelled to yield some of their gains. Headquarters was advised that Ayres and Crawford, supported by Cutler,

had been ordered to counterattack. Having to rely on his own resources, Warren had been compelled to hold Griffin in reserve in case the Rebels assailed his flanks. Warren didn't feel the Confederates were strong enough to drive the V Corps from the Weldon Railroad, and if practicable, he would endeavor to push his lines closer to the Petersburg perimeter. 53

Heth's attack had been checked by the arrival of reinforcements from Cutler's division and the bombardment by Wainwright's massed artillery. While Ayres' troops, bolstered by Hofmann's brigade, held their ground, Warren planned to employ Crawford's division, supported by Bragg's soldiers, to turn Heth's left. Following the receipt of orders to throw his right forward, Crawford ordered his skirmish line strengthened. The Feds slowly forged ahead. So dense was the tangled undergrowth that it was impossible to see more than 20 or 30 feet. The fighting in this jungle was nasty. Men were struck down without warning, victims of hidden marksmen. On the right and center of Crawford's line, the bluecoats drove Mayo's butternuts from "two chains of hastily-constructed rifle-pits."

Lyle's troops on the left recovered most of the ground from which they had been driven. Wheelock's brigade in the center pressed forward and reached the edge of Davis' cornfield. Here, they found themselves within 100 yards of a strong force of Confederates posted behind earthworks on the opposite side of the rows of corn stalks. As his bluecoats emerged from the woods, Wheelock spotted the fortifications and shouted, "Lie down!" It was fortunate for the Federals that the colonel was quick-witted, because as they hit the ground, a crashing volley ripped through the undergrowth just above them. 54

General Warren at 5:30 reported to army headquarters on the progress of his counterthrust. East of the railroad, Crawford's troops were gaining ground, but the dense timber made the advance "slow and difficult," as the officers found it all but impossible to control their units. As the Federals pushed ahead, Confederate wounded fell into their hands. General Warren notified Chief of Staff Humphreys that General Hayes had lost his horse, and that the 15th New York Heavy Artillery "behaved remarkably well." 55

Since it was beginning to get dark, Crawford sent orders for his brigade commanders to halt their commands and be prepared to defend the ground gained.

At the same time, a message was addressed to General Warren. Crawford notified his corps commander that his right flank could carry Davis' cornfield in the morning should Warren deem it desirable. The Confederates, Crawford warned, were already toiling away strengthening their position. If his right were covered, a section of artillery could be employed with advantage to support a thrust against the Confederates in the cornfield. 56

"You have done very well indeed in getting forward through that difficult country," Warren at 8 p.m. wrote Crawford. Warren wanted Crawford to strengthen his position and hold on. In the morning, Warren would try to reinforce Crawford's division with Bragg's brigade, and establish contact on the right with the IX Corps' picket line. In closing, the corps commander observed, "We are going to hold on here." 57

Upon receipt of Warren's 8 p.m. dispatch, Crawford issued instructions for his troops to start entrenching. On the left, the soldiers of Lyle's brigade exchanged shots with the Rebels to their front as they dug in. Along toward midnight, the firing ceased and the bluecoats, except those detailed to keep watch, were able to get a few hours sleep. Wheelock's brigade on the right had an easier time; they were harassed only slightly as they erected breastworks. 58

General Ayres' troops, unlike Crawford's, were unable to regain the ground from which they had been dislodged by Heth's greyclads. Seeing that the sun was about to set, Ayres had his men dig in. To protect the soldiers as they threw up barricades, the unit commanders advanced skirmishers. Ayres on inspecting his line found the brigades posted from left to right: Dushane's, Hofmann's, Wiedrich's, and Hayes'. The Weldon Railroad separated Wiedrich's and Hayes' units, while Dushane's left flank veered around to the left. 59

To the right and rear of Ayres' division, General Cutler saw that the troops of Bragg's brigade dug rifle-pits. Skirmishers from the 6th Wisconsin of Bragg's brigade and the 147th New York of Hofmann's command held their position near the Confederate main line of resistance until shortly before dark, when they were relieved by Lyle's bluecoats. 60

General Warren approved Ayres' and Cutler's actions. Not knowing that Lyle had relieved the 6th Wisconsin, Warren directed Ayres to see that the Wisconsin soldiers were replaced at daylight by the 12th U. S. Warren proposed to employ Bragg's brigade to bolster Crawford's division on the right.

Ayres, along with the other three division commanders, was to put his men to work slashing timber. All trees and underbrush between the railroad and the Vaughan road, as well as other obstructions (such as houses, fences, etc.) were to be destroyed or thrown down. 61

Ayres acknowledged Warren's dispatch at 8:30. When he did, he observed that he could dispense with Bragg's brigade. He had anticipated Warren, he continued, and orders had already been issued for "intrenching and slashing." Men had also been detailed and were hard at work cutting a deep ditch across the railroad embankment and the Halifax road. Ayres was confident of holding his position in the morning, should the Southerners renew the attack. 62

Toward dusk, Colonel Wainwright redeployed several of his batteries. The gunners of the 15th New York Battery shifted their Napoleons about 100 yards farther to the west of the Blick house, while the gunners of Battery H, 1st New York Light Artillery moved their four Napoleons up from the reserve and emplaced them west of the Halifax road. Both these batteries were pointed so that they could fire to the north or to the west. Battery C, 1st New York Light Artillery was also called up from the reserve, and unlimbered its four 3-inch rifles to the right and rear of the four pieces manned by Battery B, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery. Battery E, 1st Massachusetts Light Artillery, and Batteries D and L, 1st New York Light Artillery were posted along the Halifax road facing east. 63

The soldiers of Griffin's division during the late afternoon, who were destroying the railroad north and south of Globe Tavern, were subjected to a "severe" shelling by the Letcher Virginia Artillery. Many of the bluecoats ceased work and took cover. An enlisted man in the 118th Pennsylvania, standing alongside Captain James B. Wilson, stepped aside to avoid a mud hole. The captain took the mud; a solid shot which came bounding down the line struck and killed the soldier. Wilson, except for getting his uniform dirty, was unharmed. 64

General Griffin now received instructions to use one of his brigades to reinforce Crawford's division. Marching orders were issued to Colonel Gwyn. Within a few minutes, Gwyn had assembled his brigade. Deploying into line of battle on the double, Gwyn's troops moved from the area behind Globe Tavern to Crawford's assistance. By the time they had reached

the point of danger, the tide had turned. 65

General Warren shortly before dark directed General Griffin to employ his division to protect the corps' left flank. Griffin recalled Gwyn's brigade. The troops of the First Division crossed the railroad and took position about 100 yards from the tracks, facing west. Tilton's brigade on the right anchored its flank on the Maryland Brigade. One regiment, the 150th Pennsylvania, was sent out as pickets. Gregory's brigade took position on Tilton's left; Gwyn's was on the corps' extreme left. As soon as the men had taken posts parallel to the railroad, the soldiers were put to work throwing up breastworks. 66

* * *

Chief of Staff Humphreys at 5:15 p.m. handed a message to Captain Campbell D. Emory for delivery to General Warren. General Meade, upon receiving Warren's dispatches telling of the Confederate counterattack, had determined to alter Warren's instructions. If the V Corps were unable to feel the Petersburg defenses, it was to entrench as near to the Rebel works as it could penetrate. On doing so, Warren was to extend his left "well" to the west of the Weldon Railroad. Under no circumstances was Warren to construe this communication as preventing him from taking advantage of any weaknesses displayed by the Confederates or of withdrawing his corps if in his judgment it became necessary. 67

It took Captain Emory 105 minutes to reach the Blick house. Warren, after studying the dispatch, drafted his reply. Headquarters was advised that the V Corps had already pushed its lines as close to the foe as it could and was entrenching. Warren's pickets on the right were in contact with the outposts of the IX Corps near the Strong house. According to the latest reports from the front, the greyclads were erecting breastworks between the V Corps and Petersburg. Warren felt he could hold his ground astride the Weldon Railroad in face of further Rebel attacks, provided contact with the IX Corps could be maintained.

After tersely describing the day's fighting, Warren observed, "It has been a hard day on the men and the fight to-day was severe on both sides."

When the advance had been suspended, Crawford's troops on the right had penetrated to within sight of the main Petersburg defenses, a mile and three-quarters to their front. If all went according to schedule, the signal corps people had told Warren, they would have a telegraph line in operation linking his command post with army headquarters before morning.

Warren complained that the wet weather had interfered with the destruction of the railroad. The afternoon's thunderstorm had put out the fires which Griffin's troops had kindled to bend the rails.

Warren informed Chief of Staff Humphreys, "The enemy's proximity to his fortified line enabled him to act with boldness, and I do not now think he considered us strong and made his effort to drive us from the railroad. He has taken some prisoners from us to-day and now knows our strength. If he tries again, it will have to be with a very large force to succeed." 68

At 8:30 p.m. General Warren forwarded a sketch of his position to General Meade's headquarters. At the same time, he notified Meade that the prisoners captured by the V Corps during the day's fighting belonged to the 7th Confederate Cavalry, to Heth's division, and to Hoke's brigade. When questioned, the Rebels had proved very unco-operative. Several had indicated, however, that General Beauregard had a strategic reserve within the Petersburg lines. 69

* * *

Meanwhile, one of Major General John G. Parke's staff officers, Captain George W. Gowan, had called on General Warren. Gowan learned, while at Warren's command post, that the gap between the left of the IX Corps and the right of the V Corps was too big to be sealed unless Parke's IX Corps was reinforced. To reduce the size of the interval, General Parke ordered the leader of his First Division, Brigadier General Julius White to readjust his lines. The left flank brigade which had heretofore been refused was advanced. This enabled the Yanks to shorten the interval to about one and one-half miles. Troopers from the 3d New York Cavalry were detailed to patrol this gap. 70

News of the limited successes scored by the Confederates on Warren's front caused General Meade at 8 p.m. to act. Parke would reinforce Warren. A division from the II Corps was to be rushed from Deep Bottom to replace the troops Parke was to dispatch to Warren's assistance. Parke would have one of his divisions ready to march as soon as the replacements arrived. Meade believed the II Corps troops should reach the Petersburg lines shortly after daybreak on the 19th. The soldiers ordered to Warren's assistance were to carry four days' rations on their persons and entrenching tools. Some ambulances and ordnance wagons would accompany the column. 71

Forty-five minutes later, Parke was notified that the division of the II Corps ordered to relieve his troops would be led by Brigadier General Gershom Mott. According to the latest returns, Mott's division mustered about 5,000 effectives. A staff officer would be sent to guide Mott to the sector where his troops were to take position. 72

At 9:20 p.m. Meade fired a terse inquiry to General Parke, "How many men will you be able to relieve with Mott's division and send to Warren?" 73

Parke replied at 10 o'clock that he proposed to have Mott's bluecoats replace the divisions commanded by Brigadier Generals Robert B. Potter and Orlando B. Willcox in the Petersburg investment line. These two divisions had about 4,000 men in the rifle-pits. In addition, if Meade were agreeable, Parke proposed to relieve the fatigue party that was being employed to strengthen the earthworks. 74

Meanwhile, Meade had notified Parke that Major General Edward O. C. Ord of the XVIII Corps had 1,500 men in reserve that could be utilized. Meade had telegraphed Ord to dispatch these men to Parke. This, in the army commander's opinion, would enable Parke to increase materially the strength of the contingents sent to bolster Warren. Parke was to advise Ord where he was to send the strategic reserve. 75

Meade at 10 p.m. handed one of his staff officers a letter addressed to General Warren. Warren was notified that as soon as Mott's troops arrived from Deep Bottom, the V Corps would be reinforced by 5,000 to 6,000 of the IX Corps. Fifteen hundred troops from the IX Corps, who were to be released upon the arrival of Ord's reserve, should report to Warren during the night or early in the morning, Meade added. 76

After discussing the situation with his staff, Meade learned that it would be 3 a.m. before Ord's soldiers would replace Parke's men in the investment line. When the reinforcing column started for Globe Tavern, Parke was to see that it took the shortest route. 77 A courier galloped off to notify General Warren of this development. 78

Parke at 10:30 o'clock advised General Ord that the XVIII Corps soldiers were to relieve Willcox's division. Willcox had from 1,000 to 1,200 troops in the earthworks adjoining Ord's corps on the left. Already, Willcox had been alerted to dispatch an aide to show Ord's officers the rifle-pits they were to occupy. 79

General Warren at 10 o'clock had written Parke in regard to the route the reinforcing column was to follow. The IX Corps soldiers were to turn off at the Williams house. If it were possible, Warren in the morning proposed to establish and man a picket line linking his right with Parke's left. 80

Within the hour, Warren's message was in Parke's hands. Replying, Parke announced that he would rush Warren "at least 1,500 men in the morning." At the same time, he would notify General White of Warren's intentions in regard to the picket line. 81 White was also alerted to have his division ready to march to Warren's assistance as soon as relieved by Mott's bluecoats. 82

Seven hours before, General Meade had moved to increase the strength of the mounted force assigned to co-operate with the V Corps. General Kautz at 4 o'clock was directed to give Warren a third regiment. Kautz was perplexed by this order. On checking with Colonel Samuel P. Spear, one of his brigade commanders, he learned that Warren as yet had only availed himself of a portion of one of the two cavalry regiments previously directed to report to him. The 1st District of Columbia had not moved from its camp, while only part of the 3d New York Cavalry had gone with the V Corps. Nevertheless, orders were orders. Kautz issued instructions placing the 11th Pennsylvania Cavalry at Warren's disposal. 83

* * *

General Beauregard was encouraged by the successes registered by Davis' and Mayo's brigades in the fighting north of Globe Tavern. Upon

questioning Union prisoners, General A. P. Hill had been able to identify two divisions of the V Corps. Beauregard, on relaying this information to General Lee, inquired, "Has the Fifth Corps left your front?" 84

Up to this hour, Heth had not committed Colquitt's troops. Colquitt's Georgians had taken position at Davis'. A diarist reported that as the brigade formed lines of battle, "the Yankees raised a yell and charged some troops [Davis' and Mayo's] in front of our; but they were repulsed."

About dusk, General Heth, who was in tactical command at the front, reported to Beauregard that his troops had rolled back the Federals for a considerable distance beyond Davis' house. Over 150 prisoners had been taken. When examined, troops belonging to Ayres', Crawford's, and Cutler's divisions were identified. If he could be reinforced, Heth believed, he could continue his sweep. Since he already had all the infantry (three brigades) Beauregard could spare, orders were sent for Heth to disengage his command and retire into the Petersburg earthworks. 85

Upon pulling back, Heth's troops took cover behind the trenches near the Lead Works, about two and one-half miles north of Warren's position. Part of Heth's troops were held in reserve ready to resist an attack the Confederate generals feared the Federals were about to mount on the eastern approaches to Petersburg. Along toward morning one of Colquitt's Georgians, who had spent the night near the "Iron Bridge," observed, "We did not get to rest much to-night." 86

Beauregard at 7 p.m. telegraphed this news to General Lee's headquarters. General Lee upon receipt of this message ordered General "Rooney" Lee's Cavalry division to proceed to the Southside at once. 87

BATTLE OF THE WELDON RAILROAD

Chapter I

The V Corps Effects a Lodgment on the Weldon Railroad

Notes

1 William H. Powell, The Fifth Army Corps (Army of the Potomac), A Record of Operations During the Civil War in the United States of America, 1861-1865 (New York, 1896), 710; History of the Corn Exchange Regiment 118th Pennsylvania Volunteers, From their First Engagement at Antietam to Appomattox, Compiled by Committee (Philadelphia, 1888), 497.

2 Andrew A. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65 (New York, 1882), 272-273. After the failure of the Petersburg Mine, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant planned to cut the Weldon Railroad. Hancock's II Corps, with the cavalry and a portion of the X Corps, was sent across the James. Going ashore at Deep Bottom, the Federals advanced on Richmond. This offensive had a second object--to prevent General Robert E. Lee from sending reinforcements to assist Lieutenant General Jubal Early in the Valley.

The Deep Bottom offensive was commenced on August 13 and pushed with great determination. Skirmishers were boldly thrown forward, troops moved up to the advanced lines, and demonstrations of great strength made. The deception was excellent. Lee hastened to the north side of the James, to give his personal attention to checking the Union thrust. Charles H. Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 246.

3 The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 226.

(Cited hereafter as O. R.)

4 Ibid.; Humphreys, Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65, 273.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 245-246.

6 Ibid., 244; Humphreys, Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65, 273.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 251.

- 8 Ibid., 252. Battery E, 1st Massachusetts Light Artillery and Battery D, 1st New York Light Artillery were to march in rear of Griffin's division; Battery C, 1st Massachusetts Light Artillery, Battery B, 1st New York Light Artillery, and Battery D, 5th U. S. Light Artillery would follow Ayres' division; the 9th Battery, Massachusetts Light Artillery and Battery B, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery were to follow Crawford's division. O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 540.
- 9 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 251.
- 10 Ibid., 245.
- 11 Ibid., 251.
- 12 Ibid., 260.
- 13 Ibid. The two cavalry regiments assigned to co-operate with the V Corps were the 3d New York Cavalry and the 1st District of Columbia Cavalry.
- 14 Ibid., 271.
- 15 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 458, 460, 464; Mary G. G. Brainard, Campaigns of The One Hundred and Forty-Sixth Regiment New York State Volunteers ... (New York, 1915), 237.
- 16 Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 247-248. Globe Tavern was also known as Six Mile House and Yellow Tavern.
- 17 Ibid., 248; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 458, 460. Tilton's first line was composed of the 149th and 187th Pennsylvania, while the 121st, 142d, and 143d Pennsylvania constituted his second.
- 18 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 458, 460, 466, 467.
- 19 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 272.
- 20 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 458, 460-461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466.
- 21 Ibid., 466-467.
- 22 Ibid., 467, 469.
- 23 Ibid., 503; History of the 118th Pennsylvania, 498; Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 248-249.

- 24 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 272.
- 25 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 474.
- 26 Ibid., 480; Brainard, History of the 146th New York, 238.
- 27 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 540.
- 28 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 273.
- 29 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 461, 463; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 273.
- 30 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 471, 474, 540; Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 249; Brainard, History of the 146th New York, 238.
- 31 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 273; A. P. Smith, History of the Seventy-Sixth Regiment New York Volunteers...(Cortland, 1867), 307-308.
- 32 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 491.
- 33 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 273.
- 34 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 491, 503, 508.
- 35 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1186.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Humphreys, Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65, 274; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 857, 858; Joseph P. Bashaw, "My Experiences in the War," (Unpublished manuscript, Tenn. State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tenn.) Archer's and Walker's brigades had been consolidated. Colonel Mayo led the consolidated brigade in the battle of the Weldon Railroad. O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1273-1274.
- 39 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1187; Diary, Washington L. Dunn, 27th Georgia Infantry (Georgia Dept. of Archives and History, Atlanta, Ga.).
- 40 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 474; Bashaw, "My Experiences in the War."
- 41 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 480.
- 42 Ibid., 503.
- 43 Ibid., 474; Brainard, History of the 146th New York, 238.
- 44 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 480.
- 45 Ibid., 503, 508. In this fighting, Lyle's brigade lost a number of officers and men. Lieutenant William T. Spear of the 39th Massachusetts was killed, while Lieutenant Colonel Charles L. Peirson and Lieutenant John D. Reed were wounded.
- 46 Ibid., 491.

Ibid., 509.

Ibid., 471.

Ibid., 483-484, 485, 486, 488, 490; Smith, History of the 76th New York, 308. Hofmann's troops advanced to the front in heavy marching order. Captain Thomas E. Carter of the 157th Pennsylvania reported that while his troops were lying in line of battle "a solid shot from the enemy struck in the left company tearing off the knapsack and scattering the contents of the haversack of one man...." Ibid., 490.

Ibid., 534, 535.

Ibid., 488. The 147th New York belonged to Hofmann's brigade.

Ibid., 540. From left to right the guns were emplaced: the 15th New York Battery; Battery B, 1st New York Light Artillery; Battery H, 1st New York Light Artillery; Battery D, 5th U. S. Light Artillery; 9th Massachusetts Battery; Battery B, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 274.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 492, 503, 510, 517; Bashaw, "My Experiences in the War."

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 274-275.

Ibid., 278.

Ibid.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 492, 502, 510, 515, 517, 522.

Ibid., 471, 474, 480, 483, 484; Brainard, History of the 146th New York, 239.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 488, 535.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 277.

Ibid.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 540-541.

Ibid., 461, 466, 467; History of the 118th Pennsylvania, 500.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 461, 466, 467.

Ibid., 461, 463, 465, 467. The left flank of Gwyn's brigade rested near where Fort Dushane was subsequently erected.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 274.

Ibid., 275.

Ibid., 275-276.

Ibid., 281, 282.

Ibid., 281.

Ibid.

- 73 Ibid., 282.
- 74 Ibid.
- 75 Ibid., 282, 289.
- 76 Ibid., 276.
- 77 Ibid., 283.
- 78 Ibid., 276.
- 79 Ibid., 290.
- 80 Ibid., 283-284.
- 81 Ibid., 284.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 Ibid., 290-291.
- 84 Ibid., 1187.
- 85 Ibid.; Diary, Washington L. Dunn, 27th Georgia.
- 86 Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 254; Diary, Washington L. Dunn, 27th Georgia.
- 87 Douglas S. Freeman, R. E. Lee, III (New York, 1935), 485.

BATTLE OF THE WELDON RAILROAD

Chapter II

The Confederates Hammer the V Corps

General Warren before retiring for the night on August 18 issued instructions that Bragg's brigade be employed to establish and man a picket line connecting the V and IX Corps. The staff officer entrusted with the delivery of this dispatch reached Bragg's command post at 2 a.m. Inside of an hour, Bragg had aroused, mustered, formed his brigade, and reported to General Crawford. Crawford told Bragg to take his command, about 760 strong, and take position on the right flank of the Third Division and there await further orders. Crawford sent one of his staff officers, Captain Walter T. Chester, to guide Bragg's column. ¹

It was daylight before Bragg's brigade reached the extreme right flank of Crawford's division. Before doing anything else, Bragg called for the 1st New York Sharpshooters and a battalion of the 7th Indiana. These troops were sent forward to relieve the 88th Pennsylvania, which had spent a long, miserable night on picket. The left flank of Bragg's line of outposts connected with Hartshorne's brigade, while the right which rested in the air was "slightly refused." The remainder of the brigade dug in at a crossroad about 100 yards in rear of the picket line. ²

Captain Emmor B. Cope of Warren's staff rode up to Crawford's command post about this time. Calling to Crawford, Cope said that Warren wanted Bragg to extend his brigade to the right until contact was established with the IX Corps. Crawford dispatched Captain Chester, who had returned after successfully discharging his previous mission, to assist Cope. ³

Cope and Chester reached Bragg's headquarters at 7 o'clock. Bragg was told that beginning at Crawford's picket line, he was to advance skirmishers by the flank toward the northeast until they engaged the foe. The skirmishers would then retire a short distance and "push on by the flank as close [to] the enemy as could be and join the picket of the Ninth Corps." ⁴

Bragg shook his head. He told Cope that it would be very hazardous to "push out" a skirmish line, "not knowing where they were going and what was in their front."

Pointing to the road on which they were standing, Cope asked where the road led.

Bragg replied that he "thought from the general direction it would lead to the Gurley house road."

"I think from the orders we have," Captain Chester interrupted, "General Warren desires that we shall make our picket-line across the shortest line to connect with the Ninth Corps pickets."

At this, Cope pulled out a map and said he thought the direction ought to be northeast, but he wasn't certain.

Captain Chester reaching into his pocket took out another map, and remarked that the connection should be made nearer the Jones' house.

"Well, we will do it," Bragg retorted.

Stepping aside, Bragg called for his regimental commanders to deploy their men as skirmishers and get ready to move. A staff officer was dispatched to see if he could locate the IX Corps' picket line.

While the officers were breakfasting, it was determined that the IX Corps' picket line was posted on a road near Aiken's house, about a mile and one-half to the southeast.

Bragg instructed his troops to move out. Advancing down the road, Bragg's soldiers struck the IX Corps' outposts about 80 rods northeast of Aiken's house. The men of the brigade were deployed along the road to cover a "long train of ambulances." 5

Accompanied by Captain Chester, General Bragg rode along the IX Corps' line as far as the Strong house. Bragg wished to see where he could "make the shortest and most feasible line" if unchecked by the foe. What he saw satisfied Bragg that he would be able to advance his right to a point nearly opposite the Strong house.

Returning to his command, Bragg gave orders for his brigade, which was deployed as skirmishers, to execute "a left half-wheel." As the troops advanced, those on the left were to maintain contact with Hartshorne's pickets; those on the right were to remain in touch with the IX Corps. As the soldiers of Bragg's brigade prepared to carry out this order, Captain Chester saluted, wheeled his horse about, and reported back to Crawford's command post. As Chester rode off, one of the officers noted the time. It was 8 a.m. 6

Bragg's bluecoats had a difficult time beating their way through the dense undergrowth. To make matters worse, a driving rain set in.

General Crawford at 8 o'clock had reconnoitered the area as far as the Strong house. The general, although he didn't see Bragg, expressed satisfaction with the steps taken by the brigade commander to secure a connection with the IX Corps. 7

Before leaving his command post, Crawford had studied the reports sent in by his three brigade commanders. As soon as it was light enough to see, patrols had been sent forward to feel for the Confederates. On the left, Colonel Lyle's scouts found that during the night the Rebel outposts to their front had pulled back about 300 yards to the center of Davis' cornfield. In advancing to the edge of the woods, the bluecoats passed several dead Rebs and a number of small-arms. The slain were buried, and the small-arms collected and sent to the rear. 8 Wheelock's position on Lyle's right remained unchanged. The pickets were about 150 yards in front of the battle line, and about the same distance from the Confederates' works. 9 Colonel Hartshorne's brigade on the division right had held its ground, within 200 yards of the Rebel outposts. 10 A memorandum containing this information was forwarded to General Warren's headquarters. 11

Crawford's troops spent the morning of August 19 strengthening their breastworks and slashing timber.

Like Crawford's bluecoats on their right, Ayres' worked to improve their fortifications. To the left of the Weldon Railroad, General Hayes advanced his picket line. The Yanks as they pressed ahead reached the southern edge of Davis' cornfield, in advance of the ground secured by Lyle's skirmishers on their right. In doing so, they counted about 50 Confederate dead. A number of Union casualties (dead and wounded) from the previous afternoon's fighting were recovered and removed. The injured Yanks reported that the Johnnies were feeling their way toward the Union left. 12

General Warren interpreted the news regarding the Confederates leaving their dead on the field as indicating that they were withdrawing into the Petersburg defenses. To check out this theory, Warren issued instructions for Ayres and Crawford to make forced reconnaissance to their fronts. 13

The men of General Griffin's division, except those manning the picket line, were kept busy erecting breastworks on the 19th. Fatigue parties were

~~sent~~ forward by the brigade commanders to fell timber. 14

Colonel Spear, who had arrived on the railroad during the night, had ~~moved~~ out about daybreak. Advancing southward down the Weldon Railroad, ~~Spear's~~ cavalrymen compelled the Confederates vedettes to retire to ~~within~~ a mile of Reams' Station. After establishing a strong roadblock ~~at~~ Crowder's, Spear received instructions to deploy his troopers to guard ~~the~~ V Corps' left and rear. Spear discharged this mission by employing ~~the~~ remainder of his brigade to patrol the roads west of the Weldon Railroad ~~from~~ White's to Crowder's. 15

* * *

It was after 2 a.m. when the troops from the XVIII Corps reached the ~~sector~~ in front of The Crater and began relieving Willcox's division of ~~the~~ IX Corps. Several of Willcox's units were exposed to a severe fire ~~from~~ Confederate artillery and sharpshooters as they assembled behind ~~the~~ line. By 3:30 o'clock Willcox was notified by his brigade commanders ~~that~~ the soldiers had been supplied with the stipulated rations and units ~~of~~ fire. Willcox then gave the word; the column moved out. Marching by ~~way~~ of Gurley's house, the division reached Globe Tavern at 7:30, where ~~Willcox~~ reported to Warren. In accordance with instructions from Warren, ~~Willcox~~ camped his men in the field east of Globe Tavern. 16

Meanwhile, General Mott had arrived at Parke's headquarters. General ~~Meade~~, upon being notified that Mott had showed up, telegraphed General ~~Parke~~, "How many men will you be able to relieve with Mott's division and ~~send~~ to Warren?" 17

Parke, after studying his returns, concluded that he would be able to ~~relieve~~ Potter's and White's divisions--about 4,000 bayonets. He would be ~~able~~ to replace White's troops at once, Parke informed Meade, but he might ~~encounter~~ difficulty in pulling Potter's division out of the works, because ~~of~~ deep puddles of water in the covered way which compelled the troops to ~~expose~~ themselves in passing to and fro. 18

It was 2 p.m. before the last of General White's troops had been ~~relieved~~ in the rifle-pits by Colonel John Pulford's brigade of Mott's ~~division~~. Prior to starting for Globe Tavern, General White marshaled

his division near Jones' house. 19

Soldiers in White's division, as they waited in ranks, recalled August 19 as "a day of drizzle, the mud deep and slippery in the fields." 20

General Warren at 11 o'clock had written Parke that Bragg's picket line had established contact with outposts of the IX Corps at the Strong house. At the moment, Warren added, Bragg's troops were being advanced so as to connect with the IX Corps at the "most western point." 21

Seventy-five minutes elapsed before Parke received Warren's message. Upon doing so, he relayed the communication to General White. In a covering memorandum, Parke pointed out that the Strong house was a short distance southwest of Jones' dwelling. This being the case, it would enable White or his replacement materially to contract his line. White or his replacement was to advance his left flank in conjunction with General Bragg, preserving the alignment and connection with the right. Parke cautioned, "Please be on the lookout for any movement of the enemy." 22

Prior to General White giving the command to move out, one of Warren's aides galloped up to Jones' and handed White a slip of paper. Glancing at the order, White found that he was to march his division to Globe Tavern by the most direct route, and camp for the present near General Willcox...." 23

When the division hit the road at 3 o'clock, the 1st Brigade (Lieutenant Colonel Joseph H. Barnes commanding) took the lead. The division artillery was left to support Pulford's II Corps troops. White's column tramped along the Jerusalem plank road, turned to the left near Williams' house, and took the "right-hand" road. Because of the rain, the secondary roads of Prince George county were very bad; progress was agonizingly slow. It was 5 p.m. before the head of the column reached Aiken's house. Shortly thereafter, the rattle of musketry was heard to the right and front.

Rising up his horse, White sent an aide galloping ahead to see where Warren wanted him to deploy his division. At the same time, the brigade commanders were ordered to move their units at the double-quick toward the sound of the guns. 24

* * *

General Grant at 8:50 a.m. from his City Point headquarters telegraphed Meade that Hancock "by detaining a large force north of the James, makes our force at Petersburg relatively as strong as it would be if he was with it." It seemed to Grant that the Confederates were very sensitive to any thrust toward Chaffin Bluff. Since Grant was anxious to compel the Rebels to withdraw from the Valley the troops recently sent to bolster General Early, he believed it best if the Federals continued "to threaten as long a line as possible." 25

At 10:45 a.m. General Meade's headquarters forwarded a copy of Grant's 8:50 dispatch to Warren. In a covering letter, Chief of Staff Humphreys pointed out that in addition to Willcox's 2,000 men, another 4,000 soldiers from the IX Corps would reach the V Corps during the day. Meade wanted to know if Warren considered these reinforcements sufficient to maintain his grip on the Weldon Railroad, and if practicable to extend his right flank to connect with the IX Corps. If possible, Warren, to shorten his lines, was to push back the Southerners toward the Lead Works. 26

Warren at 11 a.m. telegraphed Chief of Staff Humphreys that with the additional 4,000 troops, he would be able to maintain his hold on the railroad. Warren advised headquarters of his successful effort to establish contact with the IX Corps. Except for the denseness of the woods, Bragg's skirmishers had encountered no difficulty in beating their way ahead.

The reports brought in by his scouts, Warren observed, indicated that the Confederates had withdrawn their main force inside the Petersburg perimeter, "leaving a thin line in his entrenchments here." Because of the wet weather, Griffin's fatigue parties were having trouble burning the ties to heat and bend the rails. For the time being at least, the destruction of the railroad looked unpromising, Warren added. 27

Since Humphreys was out of the office, General Meade replied to Warren's telegram. As the decision had been made to maintain a grip on the railroad, its destruction had now become a matter of secondary importance. Because of the flooded covered ways, there would be "some delay in relieving" Potter's division of Parke's corps. "I am now on my way to visit you," Meade observed. 28

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Upon being notified by General Beauregard that the V Corps was astride the Weldon Railroad at Globe Tavern, General Lee returned Major General William Mahone and the units of his division which had accompanied him north of the James to Petersburg. 29

By 8 a.m. on the 19th, Beauregard had learned from his scouts that the "three divisions of the enemy" that had been "repulsed" at Davis' farm were digging in on the railroad. Contacting General Lee, Beauregard announced that he would endeavor to dislodge these Federals with the four brigades of infantry and the division of cavalry which Lee had promised to send him. The result would be more certain, Beauregard observed, if he had more infantry. To make matters worse, men manning one of the Confederate signal stations had spotted one of Mott's brigades as it marched southward on the military road in rear of Battery No. 5. 30

A Union captain captured in the fighting at Davis' farm was questioned closely by the Confederates. The Yank told the Rebels that Warren's objective was to break the Weldon Railroad and compel the Southerners to disperse their strength. As soon as the Confederates rushed troops to cope with the lodgment on the railroad, the Federal generals would launch a blow at some other point. This placed Beauregard in a quandary. If he guessed wrong and stripped the Petersburg defenses of manpower to assail Warren, and the bluecoats struck at some other point disaster could result. 31

Despite the dangers, Beauregard decided to gamble. General A. P. Hill was called in and placed in charge of the attacking force--five infantry brigades. Hill quickly organized his striking force into two divisions. General Heth would have Davis' and Mayo's brigades; Mahone would employ the brigades led by Brigadier Generals Alfred H. Colquitt and Thomas L. Clingman, and Colonel David A. Weisiger. Lieutenant Colonel William Pegram assigned three batteries to support Hill's infantry.

About noon Colonel David A. Weisiger received instructions from General Mahone to pull his brigade out of the lines. The brigades posted to the right and left of Weisiger's Virginians extended their flanks to close the gap. To conceal their departure from the people manning the Union lookout stations, the unit commanders led their men back through a ravine which debouched into Lieutenant Run. Passing by Mahone's headquarters, the column marched to the Johnson road, where Weisiger reported to General Mahone. 32

Moving out of the Petersburg defenses, Heth's column marched down the Halifax road to the Vaughan road intersection. According to Hill's battle plan, Heth's division was to launch a frontal attack on Ayres. The cannoneers who accompanied Heth's troops unlimbered six of their guns west of the Halifax road near Davis' house, and two pieces west of the railroad. General Mahone's column tramped down the Johnson road. Mahone, who was familiar with the area, planned to advance through the pines, breakthrough Bragg!

skirmish line, wheel to the right, and roll up Crawford's division. 33

* * *

It was shortly after 10 a.m., when General Warren learned that Crawford's command had established contact with the IX Corps pickets, one-fourth mile northeast of Aiken's house. 34 Warren, on studying his maps and discussing the situation with Major Washington A. Roebling, was disturbed to learn that the connection wasn't where he wanted it. Writing Crawford, Warren at 10:15 explained that Bragg's skirmish line should extend in a northeast not a southeast direction from the right flank of Hartshorne's brigade. Such a shift, in Warren's opinion, would enable Bragg's bluecoats to watch the Petersburg defenses, while at the same time it wouldn't require half as many soldiers to hold. In rectifying his line, Bragg was to supervise its movements personally. 35

Meanwhile, General Crawford had left his command post and had ridden over to inspect Bragg's right flank to satisfy himself that "it was properly established." About the time that Crawford reached Colonel James Carle's command post (Carle commanded Hartshorne's right flank regiment [the 191st Pennsylvania] which connected with Bragg's skirmish line), he was hailed by Major Roebling. The major handed Crawford a copy of Warren's 10:15 message. Accompanied by Roebling, Crawford advanced to the vicinity of Davis' cornfield. Two trees were pointed out to Crawford by Roebling. He told the general that Bragg's skirmishers were to be pushed forward to the edge of the cornfield, and from the trees indicated the picket line was to run due east.

From what he saw, Crawford was satisfied that Bragg was endeavoring to advance his line as ordered. Nevertheless, Crawford decided it might be wise to confer with Bragg. As he rode eastward, the division commander passed along the front. Crawford was distressed on reaching Strong's house at not finding any of Bragg's soldiers.

A glance at the badge worn by the soldiers posted in the rifle-pits in front of the Strong house told Crawford that they belonged to the II Corps. When he asked to whose unit they belonged, one of the officers

replied, Pulford's brigade, Mott's division. The II Corps officer explained to Crawford that soldiers from Pulford's brigade had relieved White's division a short time before. Captain Chester was sent racing off to find the officer in charge of Bragg's skirmishers and tell him to advance his men.

Crawford now prepared to return to his command post. On doing so, he decided not to retrace his steps. He took the road along which White's division of the IX Corps was marching to Globe Tavern. As the general and his staff jogged along, they passed White's mud-spattered columns. 36

It was about 2 o'clock when Captain Chester located Bragg's right flank unit--the 7th Wisconsin--in the woods west of the Strong house. 37

General Bragg in the meantime had encountered Major Roebeling. The major, who had left General Crawford at the Strong house, told Bragg to advance his skirmish line across Davis' cornfield to the two trees. Bragg was aghast. He told Roebeling that he feared if his troops carried out such a movement, they would goad the Rebels into attacking. After having registered his protest, Bragg relayed Roebeling's instructions to his regimental commanders. 38

Bragg's skirmishers found the going difficult as they beat their way toward the cornfield. As if the thick underbrush wasn't bad enough, the rain continued to beat down. While his soldiers were moving through the pines, Bragg, accompanied by Lieutenant James P. Meade and two other staff officers, rode to the left of the brigade to see "if any change in the point of connection with the line of Colonel Hartshorne was desirable." 39

While Bragg and his companions were talking with Colonel Hartshorne, several shots were heard off to the east. The firing increased rapidly in intensity and soon became very heavy. After listening a moment, Bragg put his spurs to his horse and hastened toward the apparent point of danger--the left center of his brigade. As he did, he issued orders for his reserve regiment, the 6th Wisconsin, to march to the sound of the guns. The 6th Wisconsin, 74 men in all, followed the general as he rode to the right. 40

General Mahone's division had advanced to the attack in column of four, left in front. The hard-driving Confederates struck and overran the section of Bragg's skirmish line held by the 19th Indiana. Mahone's cheering greyclads

had reached the open field near the old mill by the time Bragg arrived at the head of the panting soldiers of the 6th Wisconsin. At a word from Bragg, the bluecoats from Wisconsin took cover in the woods fronting the field and sniped at the oncoming Southerners. Assisted by the staff officers, Bragg sought to rally the panic-stricken Indianians.

Bragg within a few minutes received additional bad news. After crashing through Bragg's skirmishers, Mahone wheeled most of his troops to the right. As they pressed westward along Bragg's line, the Confederates cut off and captured the 1st Battalion New York Sharpshooters and a detachment of the 7th Indiana. One of Bragg's regimental commanders, Lieutenant Colonel Albert M. Edwards of the 24th Michigan, succeeded in extricating his men. Abandoning their position, the Michiganders retreated toward the Aiken house, capturing 12 prisoners en route.

The unit to the right of Mahone's breakthrough (the 7th Wisconsin) was joined by a number of stragglers from the 19th Indiana. Captain Chester galloped up at this time. Lieutenant Colonel Mark Finnicum of the 7th Wisconsin told Chester that Bragg's line to his left had been broken, and that he expected an attack at any moment. Chester informed Finnicum of the location of the breastworks occupied by Pulford's brigade. Moreover, he suggested that if the 7th Wisconsin were pressed too hard or flanked, Finnicum had better withdraw his command behind the fortifications. Finnicum took Chester's advice. His regiment, accompanied by a number of the Indianians, joined Pulford's II Corps troops behind the Strong house earthworks. 41

The badly outnumbered 6th Wisconsin was unable to hold its ground in the face of Mahone's onslaught. Fighting a delaying action, the regiment pulled back. The soldiers from Wisconsin were deployed into line by General Bragg several times during the retreat. Although overpowered, they twice compelled the Confederates to halt and re-form. 42

Before General Crawford reached his headquarters, he encountered several badly frightened men from the 19th Indiana. Crawford demanded to know why they had left the front. The Hoosiers replied that they had been driven back by the Rebels, and wondered why the general had not heard the firing. Calling to a lieutenant who seemed to be in charge, the general directed him to regroup his troops and return to the front. Not knowing

that Bragg had already attended to the matter, Crawford sent an aide galloping with instructions for the brigade commander to use his reserve (the 6th Wisconsin) to recapture the ground that had been lost by the 19th Indiana.

Continuing on his way, Crawford observed that the roar of battle was rapidly extending westward along the front of his division. By the time Crawford reached his command post, he learned that the Johnnies had engulfed Bragg's brigade, stormed across the road leading from his headquarters to Aiken's, and were changing front preparatory to moving against his right flank. Now to make matters worse, another Confederate force, Heth's division, launched a frontal assault. 43

* * *

Several hours before Mahone's troops overpowered the 19th Indiana, a strong force of Rebel skirmishers advanced across Davis' cornfield and into the pines beyond. These greyclads assailed the line of outposts held by the 190th and 191st Pennsylvania of Hartshorne's brigade. After a brisk exchange, the Rebs retired. 44

General Ayres heard this "picket-firing" to his right. It had ceased at 1:10 p.m., when Ayres wrote General Warren. Not knowing that the butternuts were getting ready to mount an attack, Ayres notified corps headquarters that the "picket-firing" had been suspended to allow time for both sides to bury their dead from the previous afternoon's fighting. According to the latest information brought back by his scouts, Ayres reported, the Southerners' battle line was in the pines north of Davis' cornfield. 45

About the time that Mahone's troops struck Bragg's skirmishers, General Hayes, who commanded Ayres' right-flank unit, received a report from his pickets that a strong Confederate column had crossed to the west side of the Weldon Railroad. Colonel Lyle's brigade of Crawford's division at the same time had shifted to the right. 46 This movement to the east on Lyle's part had been occasioned when Colonel Hartshorne had recalled his pickets, contracted his line to the right, and put his Pennsylvanians to work entrenching. With Hartshorne's brigade holding a reduced sector,

Crawford's center brigade (Wheelock's) closed to the right several hundred yards. As soon as they had adjusted their lines, the officers turned their men to throwing up breastworks. 47

It was about 2 p.m. when Lyle's bluecoats moved off by the right flank and occupied the rifle-pits vacated by Wheelock's troops. 48 To hold the fortifications abandoned by Lyle's brigade, General Hayes called up the 12th and 14th U. S. Infantry. The 12th U. S. on the right anchored its flank on Lyle's unit, while the 14th U. S. Infantry rested its left on the railroad. 49

General Heth's battle lines (Mayo's brigade on the left and Davis' on the right) were sighted by Ayres' scouts as they crossed Davis' cornfield. Driving the Federal outposts before them, the butternuts pressed into the woods beyond. West of the railroad, Davis' Mississippians and North Carolinians engaged the 4th Delaware, which had been deployed as skirmishers and pushed forward by Colonel Hofmann. The bluecoats retired slowly, making three stands behind crude field works. Unable to check Davis' grim fighters, the Delaware regiment rejoined the brigade behind the breastworks. 50 East of the railroad, Mayo's greyclads drove back Hayes' pickets.

On General Hayes' right, the soldiers of Lyle's brigade had been warned by their scouts that a strong force of Johnnies (Heth's division) was being marshaled in line of battle to their front. Whereupon, the men ceased talking, snatched up their entrenching tools, and started strengthening their rifle-pits. Although it was raining very hard, the rattle of musketry came rolling in from the right as Mahone's troops overpowered Bragg's skirmish line. As the minutes passed, the roar of battle on the right grew in volume and seemed to be coming closer. Lyle's troops crouched behind their breastworks. The pickets to their front now began to pepper away as Mayo's battle line rolled forward. After getting off a few rounds, the pickets retreated and took refuge alongside their comrades in the rifle-pits. Close behind the retreating bluecoats came Mayo's cheering Alabamans, Tennesseans, and Virginians.

Heth's Confederate division assailed the sector of the Union line held from left to right by Hofmann's, Hayes', and Lyle's brigades. The Confederate attack appeared to center on Lyle's troops. Three times, Lyle's bluecoats hurled back the Confederates. Taking cover, within 30 yards of the rifle-pits,

the butternuts held their ground. Undaunted by the rain, the men in blue and in grey blazed away. Although Heth's outnumbered command had failed to score a breakthrough, it kept the Federals pinned in their rifle-pits, while Mahone's division rolled over Bragg's bluecoats and wheeled to the right. 51

General Crawford reached his command post in rear of Lyle's brigade, just as Heth's troops charged across Davis' cornfield. By this time, Mahone had completed his dispositions. Confederate sharpshooters infiltrated the cornfield and woods in front of Wheelock's and Hartshorne's brigades. These daring marksmen kept the Yanks ducking. Suddenly without warning, Mahone's troops burst through the dark and dismal woods to the right and rear of Hartshorne's brigade. Within a matter of minutes, the 190th and 191st Pennsylvania had been surrounded. After a "short but determined fight," the Pennsylvanians destroyed their repeating rifles which had been issued to them several days before by breaking their stocks against trees and surrendered. General Mahone detached a small detail to roundup the prisoners and hurled his troops against the next Federal unit, Wheelock's brigade. 52

The first intimation that Wheelock's people had of the enemy being in their rear was the unexpected appearance:

of a squad of Confederates, led by a hatless and excited officer, coming directly through the woods from a direction that every man in the 88th [Pennsylvania] was fully convinced was the rear. They were immediately halted and ordered to surrender, but decidedly objected, explaining that we were the ones to surrender, as they had us surrounded; this story was not credited, and, taking the officer's sword, Sergeant John Wallace, with an escort, proceeded with the prisoners back through the woods, when they ran into a moving column of the enemy, and were in turn captured and run Dixiward without further ceremony. 53

The pines in which Hartshorne's brigade had been overpowered were so dense that the Union troops marshaled near Globe Tavern were unable to see what was happening. A short time before the Rebels struck, the V Corps butchers had been slaughtering cattle at the edge of the woods. General Warren and Colonel Wainwright had ridden out to the Dunlop house and looked for the Confederate advance, but nothing was discernable. After a short time, the sounds from the woods and the appearance of a column of troops, convinced Colonel Wainwright that the Rebels were sending a force through the woods to fall upon Crawford's Third Division.

The Union artillery now roared into action. Throughout the morning and well into the afternoon, the Federals' guns which were unlimbered in a line about 600 yards behind Warren's main line of resistance had remained silent. From his vantage point at Globe Tavern, Colonel Wainwright saw Heth's battle lines as they advanced across Davis' cornfield. Confederate cannoneers supported this attack with a sharp bombardment from the two batteries they had emplaced in the opening at Davis' house. Wainwright's spotters correctly reported that the Rebels had eight guns. Word now

reached Wainwright that Mahone's troops had broken through Bragg's skirmish line. Wainwright called for his battery captains to commence firing. At first, the Yanks concentrated on the Reb artillerists. A slow, deliberate fire was maintained. Within a short time, the Confederates ceased firing.

Wainwright now sighted the left flank brigade (Colquitt's) of Mahone's battle line as it debouched from the woods. The Johnnies, showing one battleflag, moved across the open ground in front of the Union Batteries toward the railroad. Up to this moment, only a few of Crawford's bluecoats had come out of the woods. Wainwright recalled that on the previous evening, General Warren had told him that in case of emergency, the Union infantry would retire by the flanks, thereby unmasking the fire of the batteries. Since the foe was within 400 yards of his guns, Wainwright, after studying the situation, decided that Crawford's division was retreating westward across the railroad. Wainwright ordered his captains to turn their guns on the woods east of the railroad. 54

The shells crashed into the timber and exploded, causing consternation to friend and foe. Projectiles smashed into the breastworks behind which Lyle's and Wheelock's troops crouched "killing some officers and men and wounding many others." As if this weren't bad enough, Mahone's sharpshooters had infiltrated the woods between the rifle-pits and the field in which Wainwright's artillery was emplaced. The cry, "The enemy is in our rear!" was raised. Troops on the left of Lyle's brigade began to melt away; they were quickly joined by the rest of the unit. A number of men panicked. Several of the regimental commanders, such as hard-bitten Colonel Tilden of the 16th Maine, kept a tight rein on their men. As they fell back, a number of men were cut down by shot and shell from Wainwright's artillery which continued to hammer the woods.

Before the Federals reached the field, Mahone's battle line was encountered. Striking swiftly, the Rebs had cut off Lyle's line of retreat. Seeing that they were all but surrounded, most of the officers and men of Lyle's brigade grounded their arms. Before giving up, Colonel Tilden saw that the national colors carried by his regiment were destroyed. In the confusion which accompanied the capture of his brigade, Colonel Lyle, although compelled to abandon his horse, escaped. 55

Upon reaching Globe Tavern, Colonel Lyle rallied and re-formed the remnant of his brigade. 56

The retreat of Lyle's brigade had left Wheelock's troops in an embarrassing situation. All the while, Wainwright's artillery continued to pound the woods "with great accuracy," many of the projectiles crashing into the works. To add to Wheelock's problems, one of Crawford's staff officers galloped up and excitedly directed his left flank regiment, the 97th New York, to follow Lyle's troops. Wheelock observing what was happening, rode to the left, and succeeded in preventing any other units from following the 97th. 57

Realizing that the artillery was playing havoc with his command, Wheelock shouted for the troops to leap the breastworks and take cover on the opposite side. Hardly had the men taken position before a strong force of Mahone's greyclads appeared to their front. The officer in charge called for the Yanks to surrender. Wheelock refused. Instead, he bellowed for his men to fire. Several volleys proved sufficient to turn the tide in this sector.

The Confederates now found themselves in a ticklish situation. Besides being exposed to the small-arms' fire of Wheelock's troops, they were harassed by the projectiles from Wainwright's artillery. The greyclads soon gave way. Many of them, along with 13 Yanks whom they had captured, took cover alongside Wheelock's troops in the rifle-pits. After the Rebels had been disarmed, Wheelock ordered out his right flank units in an effort to cut off the Johnnies' retreat. His men were too slow. The Yanks soon returned to the works with several prisoners and a stand of colors. Wheelock, realizing that he was surrounded, cautioned his men to remain where they were. 58

Wheelock and his men stayed where they were until the Confederates had disappeared. All was now quiet in the area except for the explosion of the shells from Wainwright's artillery. To avoid these projectiles, Wheelock decided to pull his men out of the rifle-pits. Moving cautiously through the pines, the brigade gained the open field north of Globe Tavern without further adventure. As soon as he saw Wheelock, General Crawford had him re-form his brigade. Having reorganized Lyle's shattered command, the general ordered Lyle to take post on Wheelock's left. 59

The collapse of Lyle's command and the retreat of Wheelock's exposed the right flank of Hayes' brigade. Up to this time, Hayes' bluecoats had been more than holding their own against the slashing frontal attacks delivered by Heth's greyclads. Earlier, Hayes had sent orders for his two regiments, the 12th and 14th U. S., posted east of the railroad to hold their ground at all hazards. After smashing Lyle's brigade, Mahone's troops, spearheaded by Colquitt's Georgians, drove against the rifle-pits held by the Regulars. Observing that their commands were all but encircled, the regimental commanders shouted for their men to withdraw. Before they had gone very far, the Regulars discovered, much to their dismay, that a strong force of Southerners had driven across their line of retreat. The Regulars sought to cut their way through. Some succeeded, but a large number were taken prisoner.

General Hayes was shocked to learn that his two regiments posted east of the railroad were encircled. Accompanied by his assistant adjutant general, Lieutenant George K. Brady, the general tried to reach the isolated units. Hayes and his aide found themselves engulfed in a surging Rebel tide. Seeing that escape was impossible, Hayes and Brady surrendered themselves, their swords, side-arms, and horses to Sergeant Richard H. Powell of Company C, 6th Georgia. Powell proudly escorted the two officers to General Colquitt's command post.

Meanwhile, Major James M. Culpepper of the 6th Georgia had placed himself at the head of 50 men. Culpepper and his Georgians dashed forward and captured a large number of Hayes' troops. The Yanks soon saw how few their captors there were. Taking advantage of the fluid nature of the fighting, the bluecoats endeavored to turn the scales by capturing Culpepper. The major, however, succeeded in escaping with most of his men and a few prisoners. 60

To keep the remaining regiments of Hayes' brigade from being enveloped and destroyed, General Ayres ordered a retreat. Accompanied by soldiers of the 15th New York Heavy Artillery, the 5th, 140th, 146th New York, and the 10th, 11th, and 17th U. S. Infantry abandoned the breastworks and fell back about 700 yards. General Ayres, upon being notified that Hayes was missing, placed Colonel Frederick Winthrop of the 5th New York in charge of the brigade. Winthrop, aided by Ayres and the regimental commanders,

re-formed the brigade on the rising ground behind Wainwright's artillery. 61

Colonel Hofmann's troops, posted in the rifle-pits to the left of the 15th New York Heavy Artillery, were able to hold their own. Undoubtedly, they (like the troops to their right) would have been enveloped but for the presence of General Willcox's division of the IX Corps. General Mahone, on sighting a battle line in the field near Globe Tavern, sent word for his heretofore victorious troops not to cross the railroad.

Meanwhile, Colonel Wainwright had watched with interest as his batteries shelled the woods east of the Weldon Railroad. Soon after the guns had growled into action, the Confederates (Colquitt's Georgians) who were sweeping across the fields south of the pines and paralleled to the batteries took to their heels. The retreating Johnnies were followed by several hundred bluecoats. Shortly thereafter, Wainwright learned that the attacking Confederate columns were between his guns and Crawford's main line of resistance. Wainwright, though the damage had already been done, now called for his gun captains to cease fire. 62

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General Willcox had had the "long roll" beaten as the firing to his front and right increased in intensity. The troops fell out under arms in the double. The division was formed in double line of battle about 800 yards in rear of Crawford's earthworks. The left flank of Brigadier General John F. Hartranft's brigade rested about 400 yards east of the railroad. Before very long it was evident to Willcox and his bluecoats that the V Corps was getting the worst of the fighting. Large numbers of stragglers began to make their way to the rear.

Willcox soon learned that Crawford's division was in full retreat before the victorious Confederates. At this, Willcox ordered Hartranft's brigade (1,100 strong) forward to Crawford's succor. With a loud cheer for the Union, Hartranft's soldiers stormed forward. Confederate officers saw the fresh battle line approaching out of the gloom and mist. Recalling his men, Mahone massed them in line of battle in the cornfield at the southern edge of the pines from which they had driven Crawford's soldiers. 63

The left four regiments of Hartranft's battle line charged across

an open field, while the three right regiments were screened by a copse of woods east of the cornfield. After the four regiments on the left were engaged, the right of Hartranft's brigade drove deeper into the woods, where they were counterattacked. The Yanks more than held their own, and the Rebels were hurled back, leaving between 50 and 60 prisoners in the Federals' hands. At the same time, Hartranft's left flank units (the 27th Michigan, the 109th New York, the 51st Pennsylvania, and the 8th Michigan) had cleared the greyclads from the cornfield. Hartranft's left wing sought to follow the retreating Southerners into the pines. Before the Yanks reached the timber, the Johnnies rallied and charged. Halting, the bluecoats sent several well-aimed volleys at a range of 75 yards crashing into the onrushing battle line. This blunted the counterthrust. Mahone's fighters retired back into the woods. 64

Colonel William Humphrey's brigade of Willcox's division had marched in support of Hartranft's battle line. Following the repulse of Mahone's second counterstroke, one of General Warren's aides hailed Willcox. Warren, the staff officer crisply announced, wanted Willcox to rush Humphrey's brigade to the left to recapture the rifle-pits flanking the railroad from which General Ayres' division had just been routed. When he relayed these orders to Colonel Humphrey, Willcox directed him to make his attack in double line of battle. 65

Humphrey accordingly faced his brigade to the west. As soon as his right flank had passed beyond Hartranft's left, Humphrey halted his troops, faced them to the right, and formed his brigade as directed. 66

By this time, General White's division of the IX Corps had arrived in the field. White, taking account of the firing which seemed to be getting steadily nearer, formed his division into line of battle, the right flank of his lead brigade (Barnes') rested on a country road. 67 The staff officer sent racing ahead to contact Warren returned with instructions: White was to connect his left with the right flank of Willcox's division. To accomplish this, White marched his division by the left flank. 68

As the regimental historians of the 35th Massachusetts recalled:

we came out into wide cornfields with woods to the north-west and south-east, and, hearing musketry, the double-quick step was taken, and a series of

hurried but well executed field movements ensued. We came by flank into line of battle and went forward over fences toward the western woods, the regiments keeping their lines remarkable well, then halted and wheeled about in retreat a few rods, then fronting moved more to the left and again forward, all in accordance with orders from General White, who appeared on horseback in front of the regiment, waving his light felt hat and calling upon the men to remember Campbell's Station and Knoxville, at which the boys cheered vociferously. It was the most inspiring scene for many a day. 69

Before White's division came up, however, Hartranft was directed to close to his left and seal the gap which had opened between his brigade and Humphrey's. Skirting the pines to their front, Hartranft's bluecoats shifted about a brigade front to the left. Before Hartranft's troops could get into position, Humphrey's had disappeared into the timber on either side of the Weldon Railroad. The troops, fearing an ambush, worked their way cautiously ahead, until they were within sight of the breastworks formerly held by the Regulars, but now defended by Mayo's Virginians and Tennesseans. Humphrey had the charge beaten. The brigade stormed ahead. At least one regiment, the 1st Michigan Sharpshooters, gained the rifle-pits without firing a shot. Humphrey's cheering troops rolled back the Johnnies, capturing about 100 prisoners and the colors of the 47th Virginia. 70

General White's troops in the meantime had moved into the sector formerly occupied by Hartranft's command. Orders to advance were received from Warren's headquarters. The division marched toward the woods. The left flank of Barnes' battle line encountered Colquitt's Georgians in the cornfield, while his right flank regiments and Lieutenant Colonel Gilbert P. Robinson's brigade engage them in the pines. 71

Soldiers of the 35th Massachusetts reported:

The Confederates--Colquitt's brigade...--were coming through the woods upon the charge. Kneeling in the mud, the word was, "Fire, and give them hell!" and at it we went, firing and loading as rapidly as nimble fingers could. The only command of the officers was, "Fire low, men, fire low!" and the carnage was deadly.

As soon as our line of fire became distinct, the artillery in rear opened, throwing the shells so closely to our heads that the boys asserted they cut the tops of the corn-stalks. A steady

fire was maintained for over half an hour, officers taking the guns of the wounded and adding their shots to the storm of bullets.... 72

Warren hearing the clash of arms from his right, sent word for Hartranft to march to White's assistance. Hartranft's brigade retraced its steps, moving along the edge of the pines until its right was within 75 yards of White's left. At the same time, Crawford, having re-formed Wheelock's and Lyle's brigades, moved forward. Crawford's battle line took position on Hartranft's left. 73

By the time Hartranft's and Crawford's troops were in position, White's bluecoats, after 30 minutes sharp fighting, had broken the back of Confederate resistance to their front. When they retreated, Colquitt's Georgians left their dead, a number of wounded, and many small-arms behind. White's soldiers in mopping up the area rounded up about 60 Confederates, and collected 516 stand of small-arms, about one-half of which were of the type issued to the Rebels. 74

As soon as the fighting in front of White's division ceased, Crawford's and Hartranft's battle lines pushed into the pines. Since it was starting to get dark, the woods were unusually gloomy. An advance of 200 yards brought the Federals to the breastworks from which Crawford's troops had been dislodged earlier in the day. Since the Confederates had withdrawn from this area, the Yanks encountered no resistance. Crawford's troops on the left moved more rapidly.

Before Hartranft's brigade entered the earthworks, Crawford dashed off a note to General Warren reporting that his troops had "retaken the intrenchments but there is no connection with my right." Crawford begged Warren to order the IX Corps forward. Long before this message reached V Corps headquarters, Hartranft's soldiers filed into the earthworks on Crawford's right. After occupying the rifle-pits, the Union officers covered their fronts with a strong line of pickets. 75

White's division had failed to advance in conjunction with the battle line to its left. A possibly dangerous gap was opened between Hartranft's and White's commands.

Darkness closed in almost before the smoke "had lifted through the misty air." Since White and his officers anticipated a renewal of the fight, the division closed to the left into "a bow in the woods, where, upon

corn-stalk beds, the men got such sleep as the care of watching and the dripping rain allowed." 76

Because of the thick undergrowth and the pockets of Union resistance, Colquitt and Clingman had lost control of their units. They were accordingly in no condition to offer effective resistance, when Warren brought the IX Corps divisions into action. Taking cognizance of this situation, General Hill ordered the regimental commanders to collect their men and return to their camps. Weisiger's Virginians were detailed to cover the withdrawal of Colquitt's Georgians and Clingman's North Carolinians.

John F. Sale of the 12th Virginia, Weisiger's brigade, recorded in his diary:

The order to forward was soon given and...[we] went forward driving the enemy until...[we] came to their first line of works when they made a stand and from the confused state of our brigade we were forced to retire with considerable loss. After retiring the Brigade was brought to and occupied their old position in the line of works. 77

General Heth remained on the field with Mayo's and Davis' greyclads.

Meanwhile, General Ayres had led Colonel Winthrop's brigade back into action. Winthrop's troops reoccupied the rifle-pits west of the Weldon Railroad from which they had been driven. As the troops took position behind the barricades, several wounded Confederates fell into their hands.

General Heth now launched a thrust to cover the withdrawal of Mahone's division. Davis' and Mayo's brigades stormed ahead. On the Union left, Hofmann's Yanks repulsed Davis' Mississippians and North Carolinians.

Private T. J. Jennings of Company K, 56th Pennsylvania captured the colors of the 55th North Carolina. 78 Simultaneously, Winthrop's and Humphrey's bluecoats repulsed several attacks by Mayo's Virginians and Tennesseans. Although they stood fast in the face of the slashing Confederate thrusts, Winthrop saw that his men were fought out. A runner was sent to ask Ayres for reinforcements. 79

About the time that Crawford's and Ayres' troops fell back in confusion before the Rebel onset, General Warren had sent word for General Griffin to pull two of his brigades out of the breastworks west of the railroad. Griffin responded to the emergency with his characteristic alacrity. Marching orders were issued to Tilton's and Gwyn's brigades. While these units were being

formed and mustered, Gregory's troops extended to the right and to the left to occupy the vacated rifle-pits. Tilton's and Gwyn's brigades marched up the Halifax road and were massed in line of battle in support of Ayres' battered division. At 7 p.m. the tide of battle having shifted, Gwyn's troops were returned to their former position. Tilton's battle line, its left flank anchored on the railroad, advanced into the pines. 80

Just at this moment Ayres called for help. Colonel Tilton rushed him the 187th Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvanians took cover in the rifle-pits to the right of the 5th New York.

Shortly after the reinforcements arrived, Heth made a night attack on the sector of the Union line to either side of the railroad. This thrust was easily repulsed. At 8:30 the Confederates fell back and "quiet reigned" in the woods. 81

Ninety minutes later, General Ayres called up the rest of Tilton's brigade. He used the fresh troops to relieve Winthrop's command. Upon being replaced, Winthrop's brigade was posted in the second line of works. 82

About dark, there was a flurry of activity on the railroad south of Globe Tavern. A company of Dearing's Rebel cavalry charged the center of Spear's picket line and was "handsomely repulsed." Two Confederates were unhorsed and captured by the blueclad troopers. When he questioned these men, Colonel Spear learned that there were three regiments of Southern cavalry on the Vaughan road to his front. Spear, to be on the safe side, strengthened his outposts. When he reported this affair to Warren, Spear promised to make a forced reconnaissance at daylight and seek to verify this report. 83

* * *

General Warren during the battle kept Meade's headquarters posted as to the situation. At 4:15 Meade was notified that Mahone's troops had overrun Bragg's skirmish line. 84 The crisis had passed before Meade replied to this message. When he did, Meade wanted to know if Warren had re-established his picket line. 85

A little before 8 o'clock headquarters was shocked to receive a communication from Warren dated 6:50, reporting that Crawford's and

Ayres' divisions had been outflanked and rolled back. Headquarters felt better to learn that Warren's troops had counterattacked and had regained the lost ground, taking many Confederates. Union losses had been heavy, Warren reported, especially in prisoners. 86

Acknowledging this telegram, Chief of Staff Humphreys informed Warren that Meade felt that he should utilize the reinforcements from the IX Corps to establish a connection with the entrenchments at the Jerusalem plank road "to-night" and dig in. 87

Meanwhile, Warren had received good news. The day was well along before the last of Potter's troops had been relieved by Mott's II Corps people. As Potter's men were leaving the trenches, they were exposed to a sharp fire. The route taken by Potter's column was circuitous, and the soldiers marched nearly six miles over a road turned into a ribbon of mud. Potter's vanguard reached Aiken's about the time that Mahone's Confederates were withdrawing. While at Aiken's, Potter was given instructions by a staff officer to use his division to close the gap which the Rebels had punched in the Union line.

Potter's brigade commanders formed their men in a clearing and pushed forward into the woods about a quarter mile, and took position across a wood road. Inside of ten minutes, the troops had thrown up "a good protection of logs." Colonel Zenas R. Bliss' 1st Brigade wasn't allowed to enjoy the protection afforded by the barricades, as orders were received to deploy as skirmishers. Considerable time was squandered as the regimental commanders maneuvered their men in the woods to establish contact with White's division on their left. 88

Warren promptly notified Meade's headquarters that Potter's division was on the field. Arrangements had been made, the corps commander reported, "to connect my picket-line to-night along the road by Aiken's." 89

At 8:15 Warren telegraphed Chief of Staff Humphreys additional details of the afternoon's fighting. On checking rolls, it had been ascertained that "nearly all the Pennsylvania Reserves" were missing, while losses in Crawford's two other brigades had been heavy. Ayres' division had been hard hit; General Hayes was among the missing. His counterattack had been successful, Warren reported. The troops had regained "all ground fought over," besides capturing numerous prisoners, and two stand of colors.

Warren advised army headquarters that he didn't think it would be "possible to establish the line across" to the Jerusalem plank road, as suggested by Meade, before daybreak. With the arrival of reinforcements from the IX Corps, two divisions of which had been employed in driving back the foe, Warren felt he would be prepared to continue the engagement if the Rebels resumed their attacks in the morning. In any case, Warren didn't believe it would be wise for the Federals to reoccupy the picket line from which Bragg's troops had been expelled. 90

Meade replied personally to Warren's 8:15 communication, and announced that he was "delighted to hear the good news ..., and most heartily congratulate you [and] your brave officers and men on your success." Meade felt that the successes scored by the Federals in the day's fighting would "serve greatly to inspirit the whole army, and proves that we only want a fair chance to show our capacity to defeat the enemy." Meade hoped the Confederates would attack again. If possible, Meade informed Warren, he would try to get the IX Corps "to prepare a line and slash it well, so as to secure the connection with the plank road." 91

General Meade at 10:30 forwarded to Warren a copy of a message which he had just received from General Grant. The lieutenant general commanding had wished to know if Meade could spare Mott's division to reinforce the IX Corps. Reports reaching Grant's City Point headquarters from the front had led him to believe that the Rebels would employ all their reserves in an effort to dislodge Warren from the Weldon Railroad. 92

In a covering letter, Meade informed Warren that it would be impossible to withdraw Mott's troops as Grant had suggested, because it would seriously weaken the investment line. Upon evaluating the stories told by Confederate prisoners and deserters, Meade concluded, correctly, that Warren was probably confronted by "a division and a half, say 10,000 men." In view of this intelligence, Meade inquired into the possibility of Warren attacking the Rebels in the morning, before they could draw reinforcements from north of the James. 93

Warren when he acknowledged Meade's communication, announced that he had "given orders to advance at daylight in every direction." He promised to govern his movements according to Meade's instructions. 94

When they mustered their commands and checked their rolls, the Union officers found that in the day's fighting, they had lost 94 killed, 457 wounded, and 2,596 missing and presumed prisoners. 95

* * *

A. P. Hill's columns retired within the Petersburg perimeter during the evening. The Confederates made no report of their casualties in the fighting on August 19, although General Beauregard wrote Secretary of War James A. Seddon early on the 20th that they were not believed great. A soldier in Colquitt's brigade agreed with the general, "We did not do but little fighting: we got badly scattered. I do not think there were many killed on either side." General Warren claimed in his "After Action Report" that the Rebels' losses in killed and wounded must have been heavy. At the same time, General A. P. Hill reported that he had captured about 2,700 prisoners, including one brigadier general--Hayes. One Confederate general, Clingman, had been badly wounded in the leg in the day's fighting. 96

"All was joy" in Petersburg on the night of August 19. While the Federals still held on to the Weldon Railroad, two Union divisions had been terribly mauled. In the morning, the Confederate generals planned to resume the attack and drive the bluecoats from their position astride the vital railroad. 97

BATTLE OF THE WELDON RAILROAD

Chapter II

The Confederates Hammer the V Corps

Notes

1 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 429, 492, 535.

2 Ibid., 535.

3 Ibid., 492, 536, 538. Cope and Chester were accompanied by Lieutenant James P. Mead.

4 Ibid., 536.

5 Ibid., 535, 536, 538-539.

6 Ibid. This road ran from a point on the Halifax road, about three-quarters of a mile north of Davis', in a southeasterly direction toward the Aiken house, and entered the Johnson road, one-half mile north of Aiken's dwelling.

7 Ibid., 492.

8 Ibid., 504; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 313-314.

9 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 314.

10 Ibid., 313.

11 Ibid., 314.

12 Ibid., 313.

13 Ibid., 311-312, 313.

14 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 461, 463, 464, 465, 467.

15 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 305.

16 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 589, 593, 595, 596.

17 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 315.

18 Ibid., 215-216.

19 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 557. At 10:30 Parke had inquired of army headquarters, "Shall I order... [Potter's and White's divisions] to move to Warren as soon as relieved without further orders." O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 316. Acknowledging Parke's telegram at 10:50, Chief of Staff Humphreys observed, "Potter and White should move to Warren as soon as relieved, without waiting the one for the other or for further orders." Ibid.

20 History of the Thirty-Fifth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, 1862-1865,

Compiled by Committee (Boston, 1884), 285.

21 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 319.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 320.

24 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 550, 557; History of the 35th Massachusetts, 285.

25 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 293.

26 Ibid., 305-306.

27 Ibid., 306.

28 Ibid.

29 Humphreys, Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65, 275.

30 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 858.

31 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1190.

32 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 858, 940; Diary, John F. Sale, 12th Virginia (Virginia State Library).

33 Humphreys, Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65, 275; Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 254-255; Diary of John F. Sale, 12th Virginia (Virginia State Library).

34 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 314.

35 Ibid., 314-315.

36 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 492-493, 538.

37 Ibid., 538.

38 Ibid., 539.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 535, 539-540.

41 Ibid., 536, 538. As the afternoon progressed, a number of Confederate stragglers (two officers and 25 enlisted men) were captured by Pulford's pickets. O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 317; Diary, Washington L. Dunn, 27th Georgia (Georgia Dept. of Archives and History).

42 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 536, 540. In this fighting, the 6th Wisconsin lost one-third of its men.

43 Ibid., 493.

44 Ibid., 492.

45 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 312.

46 Ibid., 313.

47 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 510, 515, 517, 518, 522.

48 Ibid., 504.

49 Ibid., 479; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 313.

- 50 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 484, 485; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 313; Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 256. The 190th and 191st Pennsylvania consisted of men from the Pennsylvania Reserves who had re-enlisted, when their original terms of service had expired.
- 51 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 471, 474, 484, 504; Brainard, History of the 146th New York, 239.
- 52 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 493-494; Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 256-257, 259-260.
- 53 John D. Vautier, History of the 88th Pennsylvania Volunteers in the War for the Union, 1861-1865 (Philadelphia, 1894), 197.
- 54 Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 256; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 541.
- 55 Ibid., 504, 508-509. Altogether the Confederates captured 33 officers and 721 enlisted men of Lyle's brigade. Among the field officers captured and taken to Petersburg were: Colonel G. G. Prey of the 104th New York, Colonel C. W. Tilden of the 16th Maine, Lieutenant Colonel J. R. Strang of the 104th New York, Lieutenant Colonel William A. Leech and Major Jacob M. Davis of the 90th Pennsylvania. The "State colors" of the 16th Maine fell into Confederate hands.
- 56 Ibid., 505.
- 57 Ibid., 510, 517. The 97th New York succeeded in reaching the open field in which Wainwright had emplaced his guns "with but little confusion, though with a considerable loss." Ibid., 571.
- 58 Ibid., 493, 510, 515, 518, 520-521, 522; Powell, History of the V Corps, 714.
- 59 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 494, 510.
- 60 Ibid., 472, 474, 479; Wendell D. Croom, The War History of Company "C", (Beauregard Volunteers) Sixth Georgia Regiment, (Infantry)...(Fort Valley, 1879), 25-26; Diary, Washington L. Dunn, 27th Georgia (Georgia Dept. of Archives and History).
- 61 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 472, 474; Powell, History of the V Corps, 714; Brainard, History of the 146th New York, 239.
- 62 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 541.

- 63 Ibid., 589, 593. From right to left Hartranft's battle line was formed: the 37th and 38th Wisconsin, the 13th Ohio Cavalry (dismounted), the 27th Michigan, the 109th New York, the 51st Pennsylvania, and the 8th Michigan.
- 64 Ibid., 593.
- 65 Ibid., 590, 595.
- 66 Ibid., 590, 593, 595.
- 67 Ibid., 550, 557. From left to right Barnes' brigade was formed: the 59th and 57th Massachusetts, the 100th Pennsylvania, the 21st, 35th, 56th, and 29th Massachusetts.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 History of the 35th Massachusetts, 285. The division had been heavily engaged in the fall of 1863 at Campbell's Station and Knoxville in East Tennessee.
- 70 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 595, 596-597, 598.
- 71 Ibid., 550, 557. One of Robinson's units, the 3d Maryland Battalion, didn't reach the area in time to participate in the fighting.
- 72 History of the 35th Massachusetts, 285-286.
- 73 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 494, 593.
- 74 Ibid., 550, 557; History of the 35th Massachusetts, 286.
- 75 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 494, 594; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 315.
- 76 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 594; History of the 35th Massachusetts, 287.
- 77 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 940; Diary, John Sale (Virginia State Library).
- 78 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 472, 475, 585; Powell, History of the V Corps, 714.
- 79 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 475, 590, 596; Brainard, History of the 146th New York, 239.
- 80 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 458, 461, 467; History of the 118th Pennsylvania, 500-501.
- 81 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 472, 475.
- 82 Ibid., 461, 475.
- 83 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 325-326.

- 84 Ibid., 307.
- 85 Ibid., 308.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 76; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 310; History of the Thirty-Sixth Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, 1862-1865, Compiled by Committee (Boston, 1884), 248-249.
- 89 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 308.
- 90 Ibid., 308-309.
- 91 Ibid., 309.
- 92 Ibid., 295.
- 93 Ibid., 309-310.
- 94 Ibid., 310.
- 95 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 430, 595, 596.
- 96 Ibid., 858, 940; Ltr., F. H. MacRae to Sister, Aug. 22, 1864 (Thomas Strayhorn papers, Civil War Collections, N. C. Dept. of Archives and History); Diary, Washington L. Dunn, 27th Georgia (Georgia Dept. of Archives and History).
- 97 Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 260.

BATTLE OF THE WELDON RAILROAD

Chapter III

The Confederates Abandon Their Attempt To Dislodge the Federals From The Weldon Railroad

The night of August 19 was "cheerless and dismal"--the rain beat down in torrents, and the ground was soaked with water. During the night, all was still "except the groans and cries of the Confederate wounded in the dark forest, who had to wait until daylight before they could be moved." 1

At the "first glimmer of daylight," the Union officers turned out their commands. General Potter, whose division was posted at Aiken's, advanced his skirmish line. After pushing forward one-half mile and not encountering any Confederates, the officer in charge began to fret. A runner was sent to the rear to acquaint General Potter with the situation. If the troops to the left (White's) would advance, the skirmishers could continue to feel their way ahead. In addition, the skirmishers as yet had been unable to establish contact with Mott's men of the II Corps on their right. 2 Potter relayed this information to Warren's headquarters.

Within a short time Potter received a reply. Potter was to hold his skirmishers in check until Major Roebling had established a picket line. 3 By this time, Potter's skirmishers had established a connection on the right with the 7th Wisconsin and the detachment of the 19th Indiana that had been cut-off from the V Corps by Mahone's previous afternoon's breakthrough. Colonel Finnicum of the 7th Wisconsin told Potter's men that his troops were in contact with Mott's division. Upon receipt of this news, Warren breathed a sigh of relief, because the gap punched in the Union line by Mahone's troops had finally been sealed. 4

The 36th Massachusetts of Bliss' brigade spent a busy morning:

At half-past eight o'clock the order was given "Forward! Guide Left!" The dense undergrowth rendered it very difficult to maintain a good line as the regiment covered considerable ground. After advancing about three hundred yards we reached a cornfield about one hundred yards wide, with woods beyond. We moved across this field and halted in the edge of the forest, and connected out left with the right of ... [White's]

Division. We were then ordered to build a line of breastworks. We had just completed a fine line of works, and were eating our dinner of roasted corn, gathered from the cornfield, when we were ordered to the left to reinforce that portion of the line, as an attack was anticipated. We accordingly moved a distance of about a hundred yards to the left, to that portion of the line which had been held by the Second New York Rifles, which had moved further down. Although they had occupied the position two hours, not a tree had been cut, and no protection whatever had been secured. Our men went to work with a will and soon had a good line of breastworks. We had just nicely settled down for the second time when the Adjutant-General came up at a gallop to order the regiment to extend to the right, as the enemy was threatening in that direction. We moved back to the first line of breastworks we had built, not a little angry at being obliged to build intrenchments for the Second New York. 5

Meanwhile, General White had advanced his division and had established contact with General Hartranft's troops on his left, thus closing a possibly dangerous opening in Warren's front which the Confederates might have exploited. As soon as his troops were in position, White put them to work throwing up breastworks and slashing timber. 6

On White's left, General Hartranft threw forward a "thin line" of skirmishers, supported by a strong "battle line." After advancing about 200 yards, the bluecoats sighted Rebel outposts. The Federals stopped, and as if by mutual consent both sides held their fire. 7

Colonel Humphrey as his first order of business, following an early reveille, dispatched a detail to gather the arms and accouterments that were strewn along the breastworks occupied by his brigade and through the woods. Five hundred and thirteen stand of arms were collected. Most of the rifle-muskets were found standing along the rifle-pits, with the accouterments hanging across the muzzles of the pieces, or in a line of stacks some distance in the rear of the breastworks. This indicated that the V Corps soldiers posted in this area had been taken by surprise. 8

Along Ayres' front west of the railroad, Yank and Reb pickets sniped at one another. An inspection showed Ayres that his front was "about as strong as it can be as a single line." 9 Talking to several cavalrymen who had just returned from patrol, General Ayres learned that the Rebels

were felling timber beyond the Vaughan road. Shortly thereafter, an excited scout dashed up and told Ayres that he had spotted greyclad infantry marching out the Vaughan road. 10

When General Warren was notified of this development, he advised Ayres that it was his opinion the Confederates planned to emplace artillery to shell the Union headquarters area about Blick's house. If this were correct, the artillery wouldn't constitute a threat to Ayres' position, as the projectiles would be unable to reach the Second Division's line. 11

Chief of Staff Humphreys at 9:10 a.m. telegraphed Warren that Meade was desirous of learning the state of affairs in the Globe Tavern sector. Specifically, Meade wanted to know if Warren had attacked, and if he had the results. 12

General Warren being absent on a tour of inspection, Lieutenant Colonel Frederick T. Locke replied for his chief that "all was quiet at daybreak this morning." Since then there had been some banging away on the picket line. Patrols had pinpointed the Confederates, and they occupied the same ground as they had when fighting had ceased on the 19th. 13

Warren returned to his command post by 10 o'clock. On doing so, he notified Meade that he was redeploying his troops in case the Rebels resumed their efforts to dislodge the Federals from their stranglehold on the Weldon Railroad. Unless he was reinforced, Warren didn't believe he could hold a line across the area where Mahone had overran Bragg's skirmish line. At the moment, the picket line ran east and west by the Strong house. His visit to the front had satisfied Warren that the Confederates, except for their outposts, had retired into the Petersburg perimeter. 14

A brigade from Brigadier General David McM. Gregg's cavalry division at this time reported to General Warren. The officer in charge, Colonel William Stedman, told Warren that his troopers had left Deep Bottom late the previous afternoon, and they had been in the saddle much of the time since then. When he informed Meade of Stedman's arrival, Warren wanted to know if he should send the cavalymen to Reams' Station. If he were reinforced by Stedman's brigade, Spear, in Warren's opinion, would have enough troopers to drive the butternuts away from the station. 15

General Humphreys replied at 11:30 to Warren's communication. Army headquarters was in agreement that Stedman's brigade, plus Spear's troopers,

would be sufficient to clear the Confederate horsemen from Reams' Station. In addition, Humphreys wanted to know if a 200-man working party from the Quartermaster's Department at City Point had reached Warren's command post. These people were being sent to assist in wrecking the railroad, and Humphreys wanted them to accompany the cavalry to Reams' Station. 16

About the same hour, Warren telegraphed Humphreys the latest news from Colonel Spear. Scouts ordered out by Spear were convinced that the Confederates only had a small brigade of cavalry on the Union left. According to the best information, the Rebels had evacuated Reams' Station. Spear had advised Warren that he was eager to start for Reams' with his 700 men. Stedman's troopers, although tired from their long ride, were also to march. 17

General Humphreys at 1:30 notified Warren that as soon as the railroad wreckers arrived, they would be put to work twisting rails and burning ties. The pioneers were to work their way southward, while Colonel Stedman employed his brigade to cover them from Confederate raiders. Spear's troopers were to be used to feel toward the west. 18

It was late in the afternoon, when the pioneers reached Globe Tavern and reported to General Warren. The general lost no time in turning them to tearing up the Weldon Railroad. 19

Warren took advantage of the lull in the fighting to redeploy his troops and readjust his lines. West of the railroad, Colonel Tilton's brigade was relieved of duty on Ayres' line and reported back to General Griffin. Tilton's troops reoccupied the rifle-pits which they had previously held. Upon the return of Tilton's brigade, Gregory's troops closed to the left. 20

Early on the 20th, General Ayres issued a special order assigning the 15th New York Heavy Artillery to Winthrop's brigade. 21

There was a brief flurry of excitement during the day along Dushane's picket line. Lieutenant Colonel John W. Wilson, who was in charge of Dushane's skirmishers, led a charge which compelled the Rebel pickets to retire. The blueclads of the Maryland Brigade recovered the outposts from which they had been driven on the afternoon of the 19th, capturing one Confederate officer and 13 enlisted men. 22

Shortly after 2 o'clock, General Warren received an interesting

communication from army headquarters. According to Chief of Staff Humphreys, the signal officer at Gibbon's house had sighted a column of Rebel infantry, about 2,000 strong, marching southward from Petersburg. ²³ Meanwhile, General Willcox's troops had captured a talkative member of Company A, 22d Virginia Infantry Battalion, Private James Crowley. When questioned by Union officers, Crowley announced that the Confederates to Warren's front had been reinforced by Brigadier General Montgomery D. Corse's division and would before dark renew the fight.

After talking with Crowley, Warren at 2:40 telegraphed Chief of Staff Humphreys that he felt certain the Rebels would attack. But he added, "I think we ought to be able to hold against everything." At the moment, he observed, he was preparing to resist an attack from any direction and to contract his main line of resistance. ²⁴

At 5:20 o'clock Humphreys advised Warren that the signal officer at Gibbon's house had spotted three Confederate infantry regiments, as they tramped out of Petersburg by way of the Halifax road. ²⁵

Warren, upon evaluating this data, alerted General Ayres to be on the lookout for a thrust against his left--Dushane's brigade. If the Confederates didn't attack, the troop movements reported by Humphreys and Crowley could mean that the foe was extending his fortifications to the west to prevent the Federals from tightening their investment of Petersburg. ²⁶

Grant and his generals knew that the Confederates would do everything in their power to drive the V Corps from its position astride the Weldon Railroad. Unless they were able to dislodge the Federals, the Southerners would be compelled to unload the supplies formerly shipped into Petersburg via the Weldon Railroad at Stony Creek Station. A 30 mile haul in wagons by way of Dinwiddie Courthouse would then be necessary for all supplies that before had reached the Petersburg defenders over the Weldon Railroad.

Expecting another attack, Warren determined to draw in his northern and northwestern defenses to adjust them better to insure artillery support. As the sun was struggling to pierce the overcast, Warren and his engineers marked out a new line in the fields south of the woods. The line was to follow a slight crest from near the Dunlop and Lennear houses to the pines where disaster had befallen the troops of the V Corps on the previous day.

Griffin's division on the left would continue to hold the breastworks covering the approaches to Globe Tavern from the west. 27

East of the Weldon Railroad, General Willcox regrouped and redeployed the units of the IX Corps which had reinforced Warren. Both brigades of the Third Division (Hartranft's and Humphrey's) were recalled from the pines. General Hartranft, before retiring from the woods, detailed the 51st Pennsylvania, supported by the 27th Michigan, to remain behind and hold the picket line. Willcox posted his division in the field northeast of Globe Tavern; the left flank of Hartranft's brigade rested about 400 yards east of the railroad. 28 After detailing soldiers to man the picket line in the woods, White's division pulled back and entrenched in the open field on Willcox's right. 29 On their right, White's bluecoats maintained contact with Potter's division. 30

General Crawford's battered division was pulled out of the pines east of the railroad. The troops were re-formed and posted in support of Wainwright's artillery--Lyle's brigade on the right and Wheelock's troops on the left. 31

As soon as it was dark, General Ayres put his soldiers to work throwing down their breastworks west of the railroad and slashing timber. By midnight, this work had been completed. Covered by a strong skirmish line, Ayres withdrew his division from the pines. The troops retired about 700 yards. Ayres' division (Winthrop's brigade on the right and Dushane's on the left) occupied the crest of a gentle slope in the large open field north of Globe Tavern.

Large details were turned to throwing up earthworks. Abatis were hurriedly erected in front of these trenches, and trip wires stretched just above the ground. Although the men were badly jaded by the past 72 hours of fighting and building fortifications, a call was made for pickets. Very reluctantly the men detailed for this task filed slowly out "to fight fatigue and keep a watchful vigil over the camps of their sleeping comrades." 32

General Cutler was delighted to learn that his two brigades were being returned to him. With his divisions, Cutler was to take position on Ayres' left, refusing his left "so as to form a line nearly parallel with the railroad."

Bragg's brigade reported to Cutler during the afternoon and went into position west of the Weldon Railroad, fronting the Vaughan road. As soon as they put in an appearance, Cutler saw that Bragg's soldiers were turned to throwing up rifle-pits to the left of the batteries. It was after dark when Hofmann's brigade showed up. The brigade filed into position on Bragg's left along a crest extending south from the Blick house, and paralleling the railroad at a distance of one-fourth mile. Hofmann's troops spent the night, which was cold and rainy, entrenching. 33

* * *

On the evening of August 19, a staff officer rode up to Brigadier General Johnson Hagood's command post. The aide told General Hagood to turn over command of his brigade in "the trenches" to the senior officer present and report to General A. P. Hill. On doing so, Hagood was to take charge of a brigade from Major General Bushrod R. Johnson's division and be prepared to reinforce the troops striving to dislodge the Yankees from the Weldon Railroad. Since Bushrod Johnson was in the habit of holding a regiment from each of his four brigades in reserve, he ordered these units to the designated rendezvous near the Lead Works.

The first of the units from Johnson's command reported to Hagood at 11:30 p.m. By 3 a.m. Hagood had effected a brigade organization, "appointing haphazard an acting staff" and jotting down "their names and those of his regimental commanders, for it was too dark to see their faces." Hagood then reported to General Hill, who was asleep in his ambulance which was parked nearby. When Hill learned of the "heterogeneous character" of Hagood's "brigade," he declined to receive it. Orders were issued for the regiments to report back to General Johnson. 34

This faux pas played hob with Confederate plans to renew on the 20th the battle for the Weldon Railroad.

Beauregard at 8:15 on August 20 telegraphed General Lee that the latest news from A. P. Hill was that the Federals were maintaining their grip on the Weldon Railroad. To make matters worse, the bluecoats were continuing to dig in. If it were practicable, Beauregard promised to make another attempt during the day to dislodge them. 35

It was apparent to General Lee, however, that if the Yanks were to be driven from the railroad, Beauregard would have to act promptly. Lee urged Beauregard to throw in additional troops. Upon receipt of these instructions, Beauregard advised Lee that from Union prisoners it had been ascertained that troops from the II Corps (Mott's division) had relieved the IX Corps in the Petersburg trenches. Information sent in by officers in the signal stations seemed to confirm this intelligence. Beauregard assured Lee that every man that could be spared from the trenches had already been withdrawn and concentrated for another attempt to drive the Federals from the Weldon Railroad. The attack was scheduled to take place in the morning. Beauregard, as authorized, promised to call on Major General Cadmus M. Wilcox for a brigade to strengthen Hill's attacking column. 36

Along toward dusk, Beauregard telegraphed Lee that he expected "to attack early in the morning." To increase Hill's striking force, Beauregard had called on Major Generals Robert F. Hoke for two brigades (Hagood's and Kirkland's) and Bushrod R. Johnson for one (Ransom's). To replace these units in the Petersburg trenches, the brigades to their right and left extended their lines to the "utmost." When Hill moved out to attack, no reserves would be left. 37

General A. P. Hill spent the afternoon and evening of the 20th organizing his striking force.

Weisiger's brigade relieved Brigadier General Joseph Finegan's Floridians in the trenches on the 20th. During the day, General Mahone marched all of his division, except Weisiger's Virginians, to Battery No. 42. To enable Hill to assemble a powerful striking force, the Virginia Reserves, clerks, musicians, "in fact every man who could be gathered up by any means were put into the breastworks."

During the afternoon, Hagood's South Carolina Brigade was pulled out of the trenches. To fill its place, the units on either side extended to the left and right. As the brigade marched through Petersburg and went into camp near Battery No. 45, Hagood checked the returns and found that he had "but 59 officers and 681 men." When Hagood reported to Hill, he told the general that 67 days and nights in the rifle-pits had cut the effective strength of his brigade by two-thirds, while the remainder were so enfeebled that "they tired badly in the short evening march." Consequently,

Hagood asked and received a promise from Hill that if it could be avoided, the South Carolinians would "not be used in the next day's work." 38

The change from "the cramped and noisome trenches to the freedom of the bivouac, and the call for action, instead of endurance," bolstered the men's morale. Although it rained throughout the night, the camp fires "crackled merrily, and there was once more heard the light laugh, the ready joke, and the busy hum of voices as the men prepared their suppers or smoked their pipes stretched at length before the exhilarating blaze." 39

The brigades which had participated in the fighting on August 18 and 19 had suffered heavy casualties. Beauregard accordingly determined to have them replace units in the trenches. As soon as it was dark, these combat weary commands moved into the Petersburg perimeter and relieved MacRae's, Ransom's, Kirkland's, and Cooke's brigades. 40

Beauregard and Hill spent much of the night organizing their attacking force. Once again, the brigades were organized into "provisional divisions." General Heth was given four infantry brigades (Cooke's, Ransom's, MacRae's, and Kirkland's) and two four-gun batteries from Pegram's Artillery Battalion; General Mahone's "provisional division" included Wright's, Sanders', Jayne's, and Hagood's brigades, supported by 12 guns from Pegram's battalion. 41

Roger A. Pryor, who had resigned his brigadier general's commission in the Confederate army the previous August, was still eager to help the cause. Being familiar with the area, Pryor spent considerable time reconnoitering the woods in front of Warren's left. Pryor climbed a tall tree and studied Ayres' line. Satisfied that Ayres' left flank was unsupported, Pryor returned from his scout and relayed this information to A. P. Hill. 42

When they made their plans for their attack on the 21st, the Confederate generals relied heavily on the information gleaned by Pryor. They didn't know, however, that under the cover of darkness, Ayres had retired to a new and stronger position. Once again, General Heth was to advance down the Halifax road and make a frontal attack, while Mahone was to swing to the west and fall upon the Union left. 43

General Heth put his column into motion at daylight. Passing through the Petersburg earthworks, Heth's brigades tramped down the Halifax road.

Heth halted his troops at Davis' house to allow the cannoneers to throw their eight guns into battery. While the artillerists were unlimbering their pieces, the brigade commanders formed their units into line of battle--Kirkland's on the right, Ransom's in the center, MacRae's on the left, and Cooke's in reserve. After the brigade commanders had completed their dispositions, Heth told them to have their men take it easy while waiting for Mahone's division to get into position. 44

At 2 a.m. on August 21, Mahone's brigade commanders held reveille. After wolfing down a hurried breakfast, the troops moved out at half-past three. Hagood's brigade brought up the rear as the long column turned into the Squirrel Level road. The rain which had fallen throughout the night and continued to beat down made the march especially "toilsome."

General Mahone halted his division near Poplar Spring Church. All the brigades, except Hagood's, were formed into battle line facing east. Hagood was directed to halt his South Carolinians by the roadside and remain in reserve. 45

The rain delayed the Confederates. When the precipitation ceased shortly after daybreak, the rain was succeeded by fog. It was 8:30 before the mist gave way to sunshine. Within the next half hour, Mahone had completed his preparations. Meanwhile, the three batteries, which had accompanied Mahone, unlimbered their 12 guns in a field near Flowers' house. Upon learning that Mahone's infantry was ready, Colonel William J. Pegram had his 20 guns open fire on the Federals. 46

Rooney Lee's cavalry division had reached Petersburg on the previous day. As Mahone was jockeying his division into attack formation west of the Weldon Railroad, Lee's troopers took position to cover the footsoldiers' right. 47

* * *

Shortly after daybreak on August 21, General Warren notified army headquarters that he had "disposed" his "command on three sides of a parallelogram with a view to prevent the possibility of being turned, and the whole command is about here in the space of little over a square mile." Till such time as the Federals gained a better understanding of

the local terrain on which to establish an entrenched line, Warren suggested that the II Corps be massed at some point between Globe Tavern and the Jerusalem plank road. The corps would then extend their lines until they joined. The country, in Warren's opinion, was so heavily timbered that it would "take some time to select the proper line," and while the engineers were reconnoitering the troops could be resting. Warren reminded Chief of Staff Humphreys that "long lines in the woods" could be easily broken. Moreover, it was "impossible for the commander to provide against it if done while the line is being established, unless it is securely intrenched...." 48

About 8 o'clock several excited scouts dashed in and reported to General Warren that a strong column of Confederates had been sighted on the Vaughan road. A few scattered shots were heard. Moments later, bluecoated skirmishers were sighted as they retired out of the woods to the north and west of Globe Tavern. 49

The trip wires strung by Ayres' troops proved very embarrassing. Shots on the picket line had alerted the soldiers posted behind the breastworks. Soldiers in the 146th New York:

could see the pickets running towards [sic] us and recognized several of our comrades among them. Suddenly a number of the men fell flat on their faces and we thought that they had been hit by the enemy's fire. To our surprise, they hurriedly scrambled to their feet again and continued toward us. A few steps more and again they plunged to the ground. It dawned upon us then what was the cause of their strange behavior. They had tripped over the telegraph wires stretched about a foot high along the ground. The men, too, realized what was the matter and they carefully picked their way the rest of the distance, being greeted with laughter as they approached. They, however, were in no mood to enjoy the merriment.

When the Rebel skirmishers debouched from the pines, Winthrop called for the 5th and 140th New York to pepper away at them. On Winthrop's left, the soldiers of the Purnell Legion, who manned Dushane's picket line, were heavily engaged. 50

On the 20th Colonel Wainwright had seen that his artillerists improved their emplacements--parapets were thrown up, embrasures cut, and platforms

laid. Wainwright, at the first alarm, sent his gunners scrambling to their battle stations. The cannoneers took their positions not a moment too soon. Twenty Rebel field pieces manned by the cannoneers of Pegram's battalion roared forth. By watching the flashes and smoke, Wainwright placed 8 of the Confederate guns at Davis' house firing south, and 12 near the Vaughan road shooting east. The Federal gunners found themselves caught in "a very ugly cross-fire." Wainwright's cannons hammered back at the Southerners. Pegram's artillerists were at a disadvantage, because the Union guns were protected by parapets. 51

The projectiles from the massed Confederate artillery passed over the rifle-pits held by Ayres' division. Colonel Winthrop recalled that his brigade was "subjected to a most deadly cross-fire of artillery, but, as usual, fully sustained its old reputation for calmness and steadiness." A shot from one of Pegram's guns took off the head of Colonel Dushane. Upon Dushane's death, the senior colonel, Samuel A. Graham of the Purnell Legion, took charge of the Maryland Brigade. 52

A soldier in the 36th Massachusetts of White's division reported that the Rebel guns posted west of the railroad enfiladed our earthworks, and the Confederates:

commenced pitching over round shot in the most lively manner. The men of ... [Willcox's] Division, to our left, were obliged to get over on the outside of their intrenchments for cover. Had the enemy thrown shell their bombardment would have been murderous; as it was, it proved a game of long bowling in a style which was quite amusing to the regiment. The shot would strike the ground once, usually, before reaching us, then rebound, skim our line, or rebound again, before or behind us, sometimes in the midst of us. One of the peculiarities was that the ball could be seen before it reached us, its line of flight calculated with accuracy, and by stepping forward or back the missile avoided, as one would a wild base-ball or foot-ball. Some remarkable dodging was done, and more than one roar of laughter rose at some quick movement on the part of officer or man to escape the cold iron. We had two or three hit and badly bruised. 53

Mahone, satisfied that Pegram's cannoneers had shaken the Federals, moved his battle line forward. The cheering Confederate infantry swept past the Flowers house.

At this time, the house was occupied by Mrs. Flowers and her teenage son. A Confederate officer, instead of joining his men as they pressed ahead, sought safety along with the mother and son in the cellar. The Union artillery played mercilessly on the house, one shot ripping through the walls. Mrs. Flowers had stood the ordeal up to this moment with stoicism, but at this shot she began weeping. The officer, in a very unmanly manner, "chided her tears and taxed her with her weakness." At this, the son spoke up and told the officer to remember that if he had been where duty called he would have had no opportunity to see "his mother's tears." This cut silenced the shirker, and "the mother, nerved by her son's manly speech, soon recovered" her poise. 54

Union gun spotters sighted Mahone's battle line as it emerged from the pines near Flowers' house. Men of Battery H, 1st New York and the 15th New York Battery wheeled their eight Napoleons to the left, and with a "well-directed fire" scattered the Confederates. When the Rebel officers sought to rally and re-form their lines, the gunners of Battery L, 1st New York and Battery E, 1st Massachusetts brought their eight 3-inch rifles into play. A storm of shot and shell proved too much for flesh and blood. Colonel Pegram rushed one of his batteries to the hard-pressed infantry's assistance. The butternuts, however, were unable to put their guns into action.

A Confederate combat patrol infiltrated the pines west of Blick's house. Suddenly, the Johnnies debouched from the woods within 150 yards of the 15th New York Battery. Switching to canister, the Yanks sent the butternuts reeling back into the woods. 55

Meanwhile, Colonel Wainwright had given Lieutenant George W. Dresser a special assignment. The lieutenant was to gallop to the right, get Battery C, 1st New York, and "post it toward the left of our line" so it would be able to deliver an enfilading fire upon the guns which Colonel Pegram had massed in the Vaughan road sector. Dresser discharged his mission successfully. Unlimbering their four 3-inch rifles, the New Yorkers, in conjunction with several other batteries, compelled the Rebels (with whom they were dueling) to shift their guns. 56

Not having any batteries south of Globe Tavern, Wainwright feared that the Confederate officers, as soon as they realized this omission would push

for the Union left, called for Lieutenant William J. Canfield. Canfield raced off to see General Potter; he was to ask for the two batteries Potter had previously placed at Wainwright's disposal. A section from the 11th Massachusetts Battery sent in response to Wainwright's call rumbled across the road, just as Griffin's skirmishers on the left were being driven in. 57

Warren was satisfied with the way the fight was developing. At 9:30 he notified Chief of Staff Humphreys that he didn't think he could be "whipped if dispositions will save me, for my line extends well around, with considerable reserves." Should the Confederates penetrate the area where they had broken through on the 19th, Warren would like to see their rear harassed. Warren considered the day's action up to this point as a demonstration designed to obtain information as to his position. 58

Mahone's initial thrust was directed against the sector held by Griffin's Union division. Pressing forward, the Rebels drove in the pickets covering Tilton's and Gregory's brigades. The Yanks retired, falling back slowly. An officer and 16 enlisted men from the 143d Pennsylvania were cut off and captured by the butternuts as they drove toward the breastworks held by Tilton's brigade.

A soldier in the 118th Pennsylvania recalled:

Lines of gray three and four deep emerged from ... [the woods], and with flaunting battle-flags bore down on the pickets. Batteries were run out on commanding eminences and thundered away effectively with an oblique fire. The pickets that were not captured fell back slowly, fighting.

The Confederates came up through the standing corn in four lines of battle. Six times the flag of the first line of Confederates fell, and six times a color corporal picked it up and was killed. After that it laid on the ground until it was captured. The corn-stalks were cut off by the bullets as if with a knife. 59

It quickly became apparent to Mahone's soldiers that it would be suicidal to attempt to storm the breastworks behind which Tilton's bluecoats crouched and blazed away at them. The Southerners veered to the right in an effort to turn Tilton's unsupported flank. Tilton, to cope with this threat, pulled the 121st, 143d, and 187th Pennsylvania out of the works and sent them dashing to the left. Here, the Pennsylvanians were joined by two guns of the 11th Massachusetts Battery. The cannoneers threw their two 3-inch rifles into battery west of the White house. Between them, the

Yank artillerists and footsoldiers blunted and then repulsed Mahone's drive to turn the Union left. As the sullen Confederates pulled back, they were followed for a short distance by the Federals. The Massachusetts artillerists were able to get off a few rounds from their rifled guns, before the greyclads regained the cover of the pines. Tilton's blueclads in repelling this thrust had inflicted telling losses on the Rebels, while losing very few men themselves. 60

At 5 a.m. Hartranft's brigade, except the 51st Pennsylvania and the 27th Michigan which continued to occupy the picket line, had moved up from its camp and took position across the railroad. The brigade's left rested on the 9th Massachusetts Battery in front of Blick's house and its right on Battery D, 5th U. S. Light Artillery. Hartranft put his men to work throwing up breastworks. By the time the Confederate artillery opened, the fortifications were nearly completed. Soon after the Rebel attempt to turn Griffin's left had failed, Heth's division drove in the Union pickets (men from Willcox's and Ayres' divisions) posted in the pines north of the clearing, where Warren had massed his troops. As they forged ahead, the butternuts overran the outposts, capturing a number of skirmishers. 61

Everything seemed to be working against the Confederates on the morning of the 21st. Heth had ordered his troops forward, as soon as he learned that Mahone's battle lines were in motion. But by the time they reached Davis' cornfield, north of Globe Tavern, Mahone's attack had been smashed. Heth called a halt. A soldier in the 11th North Carolina remembered, "We lay between our batteries...and theirs during the [artillery] duel which opened the ball, and came in for some pretty severe shelling." Heth's North Carolinians were surprised at the ease with which they swept across Davis' cornfield and into the woods beyond, where they had been led to understand they would encounter the Federals' main line of resistance. Overrunning the picket line, the Confederates were chagrined to discover that they had been hoodwinked--the Federals had abandoned their breastworks in the pines in favor of a strong position in the fields beyond.

Captain Thomas Strayhorn of the 47th North Carolina reported, we "soon came upon the enemy's works which the most of them had left very hurriedly and in bad order [,] leaving their tent-flies, blankets, meat and even their cooked breakfast for our men, with some three hundred prisoners." 62

Pushing on, Heth's battle lines reached the edge of the clearing. Wainwright, observing this new Confederate threat, decided that he needed to replace Battery C, 1st New York which had been rushed to the left. Just at this minute, another of Potter's batteries (the 19th New York) rumbled up the road leading from the Gurley house. Wainwright ordered the IX Corps battery to occupy the emplacement vacated by Battery C. As soon as the first of Heth's greyclads (the Rebels were advancing in three waves) emerged from the pines, the cannons to their front opened with canister and case shot. Except for the sharpshooters, Hartranft's and Winthrop's troops held their fire. 63

According to Captain Strayhorn, Ransom's brigade, which was on MacRae's right, debouched into the clearing first. Upon leaving the pines, the North Carolinians found themselves within "two or three hundred yards" of the Union fortifications. The Yankees, the captain wrote:

turned such a hot fire of...canister into...[Ransom's troops], they were compelled to retire which they did in no very good order. Our Brigade [MacRae's] suffered more I expect from ...canister than Ransom's--It passing over their heads and striking in our portion of the line which then had been thrown in their rear. Our Brigade learning that Ransom's had been ordered to fall back to the first line of the enemy's works [,] also fell back to the same line which was only a few feet in our rear. While crossing over the works I lost just one half of the men I carried into action.

I hope that I may never be called on to go through just such another fiery ordeal while I live. Just the same I was on the top of the works--on right and left front and rear were lying the dead and dying which had been struck down in the twinkling of an eye, and only a few minutes before were the very pictures of health. 64

Within a few minutes, Heth's thrust had been smashed by a fearful hammering from 26 Union guns.

Colonel William J. Martin of the 11th North Carolina, MacRae's brigade recalled, "We lost some men killed and a number wounded, and if Warren had known how few we were in front and had sent out an adequate force, he might have captured the most of these two brigades, isolated as we were."

Patrols thrown forward to re-establish the picket line captured a number of Confederate prisoners. When questioned, the North Carolinians swore "the attack was formed in three lines of battle, but that the first line was broken by the fire of...[the Union] batteries before it emerged

from the woods," while the second didn't get within 300 yards of the Yankee breastworks before it was shattered. 65

* * *

On the morning of the 21st, General Lee directed Major General Wade Hampton to move Brigadier General Mathew C. Butler's cavalry division south of the Appomattox. Orders were also issued for Major General Charles W. Field to send two of his five brigades to Petersburg, provided the Federals had reduced their strength in the Deep Bottom sector. The superintendent of the Richmond & Petersburg Railroad was directed to have enough cars at Rice's Turnout to shuttle two brigades to Petersburg. 66

Lee now determined to leave his temporary command post at Chaffin Bluff to go to Petersburg and see for himself what was happening on the Weldon Railroad. The general arrived on "an excessively hot" morning, in time to witness a gallant but futile attack by Mahone west of Globe Tavern. 67

Through a misunderstanding on the part of Hill and Mahone, Jayne's and Hagood's brigades assailed the works held by Cutler's division and Griffin's right flank brigade--Tilton's. 68

Hagood's South Carolinians were resting alongside the road and listening to the roar of battle as it rolled in from the east, when an aide with a message from General Hill galloped up on a sweat-lathered horse. The staff officer directed Hagood to move his brigade to the front and report to General Mahone.

Guided by the courier, Hagood utilized a short cut to gain the Vaughan road. The brigade followed the Vaughan road toward Petersburg till within 600 yards of Flowers' house, when it turned to the right and marched across a field toward the Weldon Railroad. As the South Carolinians hurried along, they saw a number of Pegram's guns. The cannoneers, many of them stripped to the waist, were working their pieces. Unseen Union guns emplaced beyond the woods to the Confederates' front were replying vigorously. Hagood's brigade, moving in column of fours, passed across this field on the double, suffering some casualties from exploding shells.

As the head of the brigade reached the woods east of the field, a general rode up and introduced himself to Hagood as General Mahone. Taking charge, Mahone formed the brigade into line of battle along the edge of the pines, facing east.

"Now," Mahone remarked to Hagood, "you are upon the flank and rear of the enemy. I have five brigades fighting them in front and they are driving them. I want you to go in and press them all you can."

About 50 yards to the brigade front within the woods was a small, swampy branch; beyond nothing was visible. All this time, the roar of artillery and the rattle of small-arms could be heard. Before riding off, Mahone told Hagood, "when you have crossed the branch swamp you will come upon a clearing in which some 300 yards further is the enemy's line, and they are not entrenched." 69

Colonel Joseph M. Jayne's Mississippi Brigade had formed some distance to Hagood's left. Just as Hagood was completing his dispositions, Jayne's Mississippians surged out of the pines about 400 yards to the front of the breastworks held by Bragg's and Hofmann's bluecoats. Letting go a wild "Rebel Yell," the grim Mississippians swept back the Union outposts. The greyclads moved steadily through a cornfield to within 50 feet of the works held by Cutler's division. All the while, the butternuts were exposed to the crashing volleys of Federal infantry. Repulsed, the Mississippians fell back, losing heavily in killed, wounded, and prisoners. Captain Charles P. Hyatt, who was in temporary command of the 6th Wisconsin, accepted the surrender of Colonel E. C. Council of the 16th Mississippi. Moments later, Hyatt was struck in the left leg by a fragment from an exploding shell. The limb was so badly mangled that it had to be amputated. When he filed his "After Action Report," General Bragg claimed that his brigade captured "6 field officers, 15 line officers and 101 enlisted men, 2 stand of colors. [One of which belonged to the 16th Mississippi], a number of wounded, and a quantity of small-arms." 70

Hagood's brigade advanced to the right of the Mississippians. When the general gave the order to attack, the South Carolinians' battle line made its way across the swamp. Upon arriving on the opposite side, Hagood's troops found themselves in the clearing, but they were unable to see the foe. What had happened was at this point, the Confederates were under a

hill and the Yankees were on a plateau "sufficiently far above" to be out of sight. Hagood's advance had not gone unnoticed by the Federals, however.

The brigade's line had been "much broken" in wading the swamp. Hagood now halted his troops, while he pushed skirmishers up the hill to his front. A member of the general's staff accompanied the skirmishers. At the same time, Hagood and his adjutant, Captain P. K. Maloney, re-formed the battle line.

Within a few minutes, the brigade was again formed. Word now came back from the skirmishers that the Yanks had been spotted a short distance to the front, and they were in rifle-pits. Hagood, "cautioning his men to move only at a quick step till he himself gave the order to charge," advanced his South Carolinians. The general dismounted from his bay horse, and, placing himself in front of the center to study the troops and repress excitement, "moved backward in front of the line for a short distance as if on a drill." Before reaching the crest, Hagood halted, the line passed, and he followed with his staff behind the right of the 21st South Carolina. The 25th South Carolina was on the left of the 21st, and the three other units on its right.

As soon as the brigade topped the rise, a rapid fire was opened on it. Holding their fire, the South Carolinians marched forward steadily at quick time with arms at "right shoulder shift." The bluecoats holding the rifle-pits took to their heels as the Rebels approached. At this, the Confederates gave out with a "Rebel Yell," and the men, as if by command, broke into "double quick." General Hagood now made a shocking discovery. The line to his front had only been an entrenched skirmish line, and 250 yards beyond were the main breastworks, "crowded with men and artillery, extending right and left as far as he could see." To make matters worse, the five attacking Confederate brigades were "nowhere visible." 71

The South Carolina Brigade had advanced against a "re-entrant" in the Union line to the left of Hofmann's brigade and to the right of the breastworks held by Tilton's troops. Hofmann's right flank regiments, the 3d Delaware and the 76th New York, banged away at the advancing greyclads until they reached "a point a little in our rear." 72

Colonel Wainwright saw that the guns emplaced west of the Weldon Railroad were turned on Hagood's South Carolinians as they charged. Hardly

had the Johnnies emerged from the pines to the left and rear of Hofmann's line, before they found themselves exposed "to a cross-fire of musketry" from the 3d Delaware and the 76th New York to the left and Tilton's troops to their right. As if this weren't bad enough, Battery E, 1st Massachusetts, and Batteries D and L, 1st New York Light Artillery hammered them with canister, while Battery C, 1st New York shelled the woods from which they had charged. 73

Observing at a glance the hopelessness of an assault under such conditions, General Hagood halted. Again and again he shouted for his men to stop. But the crash and rattle of 16 guns and 2,500 rifle-muskets drowned his voice, and the fury of the battle was upon his men. "Moving forward with the steady tramp of the double quick, and dressing upon their colors," the South Carolinians, "intent only on carrying the position before them, neither broke their alignment until it was broken by the irregular impact upon the enemy's works, nor stopped to fire their guns until their rush to obtain the parapet was repelled."

When General Hagood saw his soldiers rushing into what seemed certain destruction, "he felt that if they were to perish he should share their fate." Accompanied by three members of his staff (Captain Maloney, Lieutenant Benjamin Martin, and Orderly Dwight Stoney), Hagood followed the advancing line. Before they had gone 50 yards, Lieutenant Martin fell, shot in the knee; a few steps farther Captain Maloney was cut down, a minié ball through the head. Hagood and Stoney, the orderly hit in the shoulder but not disabled, reached the works.

Meanwhile, the 25th and 21st South Carolina, being on the left from the oblique direction of the advance, had struck the works held by the 3d Delaware and the 76th New York of Hofmann's brigade. While these two regiments struggled to force an entry, the three other units of the brigade swept on. When these commands reached the ditch fronting the trenches held by Tilton's troops, there was a gap of about 100 yards separating the two wings into which the brigade had broken. 74

General Hagood joined the commander of the 21st South Carolina, Major S. H. Wilds. The major, realizing that success was the key to safety, exhorted his men to make another assault. Hagood, glancing to his right, saw to his horror that about 200 of his soldiers had entered the "re-entering

angle," between the breastworks held by Hofmann's and Tilton's brigades. Exposed as they were to a deadly crossfire, these troops panicked.

"Some ran into the low ground and held up their hands and the butts of their guns in token of surrender, while some made a rush backward and got away." 75

Suddenly, a Union officer, Captain Dennis Dailey, galloped out of "a sally-port" and seized the colors of the 27th South Carolina from the bearer. The Yank called on the South Carolinians to lay down their arms. Several officers and men complied with the Federal's orders. General Hagood was dismayed by what he saw. At this moment, the fight still raged to Hagood's right and left; except for the knot of soldiers gathered about Captain Dailey, the men in blue and in grey seemed disposed to continue the fight.

General Hagood called for his men to shoot the Union captain and retreat. Either they did not hear their general, or bewildered by the surrender of a number of their comrades, failed to obey. It was a critical moment and demanded instant and decisive action. Within a few moments, the disposition to surrender would spread and the entire brigade be lost. Although "exposed to a regular fire by file from the enemy's line, scarce thirty yards off, Hagood dashed toward the spot where the Union officer was brandishing the colors. As he ran up to Captain Dailey, Hagood demanded the return of the colors, and warned the bluecoat to return to his lines. The Yank argued with Hagood, pointing out that the South Carolinians were in a desperate plight. Hagood cut Dailey short, and demanded a categorical reply--yes or no.

Dailey was a man of "fine presence and sat with loosened rein upon a noble-looking bay that stood with head and tail erect and flashing eye and distended nostrils, quivering in every limb with excitement, but not moving in his tracks." Answering this abrupt demand, Captain Dailey raised his head and said, "No!" Hagood shot him through the body. As Dailey reeled from the saddle, Hagood sprang into it from the other side. Orderly Stoney snatched the colors of the 27th South Carolina from Dailey's falling hands. 76

While Hagood and Dailey argued, Colonel Wainwright, acting under the impression that the Confederates had surrendered, called for his gunners to cease fire. 77

There was no thought of surrender now. The shout from the brigade told Hagood that his troops were once more in hand and would go wherever ordered. Calling for them to face about, Hagood led them back across the ground over which they had advanced. Stoney held aloft the recaptured colors of the 27th South Carolina, which he had torn from its staff.

Before he had gone very far, a scrap of iron from a bursting shell tore open the loin of Hagood's bay. As the steed fell, the general jumped clear. In struggling to rise, the horse kicked Lieutenant William Taylor of the 7th South Carolina Battalion in the head. The lieutenant was stunned and had to be led from the field by one of his men. 78

Union Colonel Hofmann saw that a number of the South Carolinians had thrown away their arms, and, "as they still moved forward," he concluded that they intended to surrender. Like Colonel Wainwright, Hofmann had called for his soldiers to stop shooting. 79

As soon as Hofmann saw that the Rebels were attempting to escape, he shouted for his men to blaze away. Adjutant Manuel Eyre of the 3d Delaware led a sortie. Leaping out from behind the barricades, Eyre's combat patrol raced after the retreating South Carolinians. Two stand of colors were captured by the men from Delaware, one by Eyre and the other by 1st Sergeant John Shilling of Company H. To the right of the 3d Delaware, Captain J. C. Hatch of Company G, 76th New York jumped over the works as the Johnnies retired and brought off the colors of the 25th South Carolina. All told, Hofmann's brigade claimed the capture of two lieutenant colonels, a number of line officers, and nearly 300 men. 80

Troops from Gwyn's left flank unit, the 18th Massachusetts, likewise followed and harassed the South Carolinians. Besides capturing 60 prisoners, the soldiers from the Bay State brought back the colors of the 27th South Carolina. 81

Upon re-forming his brigade near Poplar Spring Church and checking the rolls, Hagood discovered that out of 681 officers and men carried into action, only 292 answered when their names were called. 82

As soon as Hagood's troops had reached the shelter of the pines, Ingram's artillery went back into action. The gunners' fire was very erratic. After a few minutes, the Confederate guns fell silent. 83

General Mahone, following this repulse, rode out and reconnoitered the Federals' position. Returning, he encountered General Lee near Davis!! Notwithstanding the ease with which the Federals had repulsed his attacks, Mahone lost his head and told Lee that if he were given two fresh brigades, he would guarantee to drive the Yankees from the Weldon Railroad. Lee assented and sent for the reinforcements, but when they failed to arrive in the stipulated time, the commanding general concluded that the bluecoats had too firm a grip on the railroad to be shaken loose. 84

General Warren and his officers were delighted with the way the fighting on the 21st had gone. Mustering their commands, the officers reporting to Warren listed their casualties as 41 killed, 263 wounded, and 232 missing. 85

For the first time since the beginning of the 1864 campaign, Colonel Wainwright was satisfied that his guns had played a prominent part in winning a victory. As the artillery chief observed:

Our lines being formed entirely in open ground, though within short range of the surrounding woods, afforded the very best opportunity possible for an effective artillery fire, which was so well employed that the infantry had comparatively little opportunity to take part in the fight. Particular instructions had been given the day before that in firing into the woods only solid shot should be used, and fired at so low an elevation as to strike the ground at the edge of the woods and enter on the ricochet. The appearance of the woods and enemy's dead left there gave ample testimony to the excellence of this practice. 86

Shortly before 10:30 a.m., Warren telegraphed Chief of Staff Humphreys that his troops had just repulsed an attack by "Mahone's division from the west of the railroad."

"Whipped it easily," he added. 87

Warren by 10:50 had spoken with his provost marshal. That officer told the general that the V Corps had captured several hundred prisoners. Men belonging to Mahone's and Hoke's divisions had been identified. 88

Meanwhile, the division commanders had advanced a strong force of skirmishers and reoccupied the line of outpost from which their pickets had been driven earlier by the Confederates.

At 11:10 Chief of Staff Humphreys forwarded to Warren a dispatch General Meade had just received from Grant's City Point headquarters. Grant observed

that without being on the field it was difficult to say what ought to be done. It seemed to Grant that when the Rebels came out of their works to attack and were repulsed, they should be "followed vigorously to the last minute with every man."

"Holding a line," Grant wrote, "is of no importance whilst troops are operating in front of it." 89

Humphreys in a covering memorandum noted that the First and Second Divisions of the II Corps, having recrossed the James on the evening of the 20th, were en route to the Strong house. The II Corps soldiers were to fortify the sector between the Strong house and the IX Corps' right flank. If an emergency developed, Hancock was to march to Warren's assistance. At the same time, General Parke had been directed to reinforce Warren with Brigadier General Edward Ferrero's division. 90

It was 3 p.m. before Warren acknowledged the receipt of Humphreys' message. When he did, Warren assured headquarters that if the Rebels attacked him so as to get "a crushing repulse," he would take advantage of the situation. Warren expected the Confederates to make one more push to dislodge his troops from the railroad, and he had alerted his officers to be on the lookout for such a move. To his front, Warren explained, the Southerners had retired into their entrenchments. But, if he marched west with his corps, Warren explained, he would have to make a detour to keep the greyclads from following on his flank. Moreover, if he moved he would "lose all the advantage" of his artillery and "get the effect" of the Rebels'. Taking a pot shot at Grant, Warren observed, "I believe I have fought against the army opposed to me [enough] to know pretty well what to do here on the field." 91

General Parke reached the Glove Tavern sector during the afternoon. The general had been accompanied as far as Strong's house by Ferrero's division. Halting, Ferrero put his troops to work entrenching and slashing timber. Parke, upon his arrival, resumed command of the three divisions of his corps which had been reporting to Warren since the 19th. 92

* * *

South of Globe Tavern, all had been quiet on the night of the 20th along the line of outposts manned by Colonel Spear's troopers. Late the previous afternoon, Spear had made a forced reconnaissance west of Reams' Station. A 100-man Confederate detachment which had been encountered at Reams' Station was scattered by the hard-riding bluecoats. Before returning to his camp, Spear satisfied himself that Confederate horsemen were patrolling the Vaughan road. The best available intelligence indicated that General Dearing's three-regiment brigade was camped three miles west of the Weldon Railroad. 93

Colonel Spear on the morning of August 21 moved out with three regiments. The Union horsemen regained the Vaughan road without difficulty, the Confederates having pulled in their pickets. 94 Pushing on, the bluecoats reached Colonel Wyatt's house. Here, they encountered a Confederate outpost. The Yanks attacked and drove in the Johnnies. From several prisoners, Spear learned that General Rooney Lee's cavalry division had reinforced Dearing's brigade. The shoe was on the other foot; the Federal cavalry in the Globe Tavern sector was now outnumbered. All the roads in the area had been barricaded by the greyclads, and if Spear advanced farther it would cost him many men. 95

Leaving a strong force of vedettes on the Vaughan road to watch the Confederates, Spear doubled back and headed for Reams' Station. Thundering into Reams' Station, the Yanks routed a 70-man Confederate detachment.

While most of the Unionists pursued the fleeing Rebs several miles down the railroad, Spear had his demolition teams destroy two large watertanks, pumps, and burn a large storehouse. Before returning to their base at Perkins' house, the horsemen cut and rolled up several miles of telegraph wire. At the same time, Lieutenant Euphronous P. Ring with a raiding party had attacked and routed a Rebel detachment on the Brent road. 96

Spear's scouts about dark discovered that the Confederate force which had assailed Warren's left had disappeared. The ground northwest of Flowers' house was found "vacant." The cavalymen were unable to discover where the greyclads had gone. 97

Stedman's cavalry spent the day guarding the pioneers as they wrecked the railroad south of Globe Tavern. By nightfall, the working party had demolished a mile and one-half of track. 98

General Gregg, accompanied by Colonel Charles H. Smith's brigade, had recrossed the James and Appomattox rivers on the night of the 20th, and marched to Prince George Courthouse. The troopers reached the courthouse early on the 21st and camped. At 10:15 Chief of Staff Humphreys notified Gregg that Warren held the Weldon Railroad at Blick's. Spear's brigade of Kautz's division and Stedman's troopers were picketing Warren's left flank and covering the pioneers engaged in destroying the railroad. Meade wanted Gregg to march out to the Weldon Railroad and co-operate with Warren. If in Gregg's judgment part of Spear's command should return to the left bank of the Blackwater River, he was to give the necessary instructions. 99

Upon receipt of this directive, Gregg turned out Smith troopers. The column proceeded by way of Sturdivant's Mill to the Jerusalem plank road. Halting early, Gregg notified Humphreys that he had established his command post on the plank road below McCann's. 100

General Meade and his staff during the day visited Warren's headquarters. They were there when they learned that Gregg had gone into camp at McCann's. Meade told Humphreys to have Gregg immediately march Smith's brigade to Globe Tavern, and assume the responsibility of guarding the army's left with his division. Kautz's troopers in the future were to cover the area from the Jerusalem plank road to the James. Since the roads in the Globe Tavern area were hub-deep in mud, Humphreys warned Gregg to leave his artillery and train behind. 101

* * *

During the four days of fighting, the Federals had lost 251 killed, 1,149 wounded, and 2,879 missing; but they had maintained their grip on the Weldon Railroad. 102

The contingency General Lee had anticipated from the time he moved into the Petersburg defenses was at hand. The northern section of the Weldon Railroad from Reams' Station to Petersburg was lost. The defense of Richmond and the subsistence of the Army of Northern Virginia from now on depended on the full employment of the South Side and of the Richmond and Danville Railroads. There were rumblings in Richmond that the Weldon

line need not have been lost if Beauregard had met Warren's initial advance with a larger column, ¹⁰³ but Lee knew both the limitations under which Beauregard fought and the inevitability of the breaking of the railroad by the Federals. With the simple assertion that "the smallness of the attacking force prevented it from dislodging" the foe, ¹⁰⁴ Lee devoted himself to making the most of the lines of supply left him.

The loss of the Weldon Railroad came, unfortunately for the Confederates, at a time when there was no corn either in Richmond or at the army depots around Petersburg. ¹⁰⁵ Lee at once set wagon trains to hauling supplies over the 30 miles of road that lay between Petersburg and Stony Creek, which was a station on the Weldon Railroad below the point where it had been wrecked by the Federals. He believed that by a wise use of these trains, and of the remaining railroads, with perhaps some importation of grain by way of Wilmington, it would be possible to subsist the troops until the Virginia corn crop was harvested. ¹⁰⁶ In a broader view, with an eye to the approaching presidential campaign in the North, Lee believed the failure of the Yankees to drive the Confederates from Petersburg, after so much sacrifice, would have a dispiriting effect on the people of the United States. ¹⁰⁷

BATTLE OF THE WELDON RAILROAD

Chapter III

The Confederates Abandon Their Attempt To Dislodge the Federals From The Weldon Railroad

Notes

1 History of the 35th Massachusetts, 287; History of the 36th Massachusetts,
249; William P. Hopkins, The Seventh Regiment Rhode Island Volunteers
3 in the Civil War, 1862-1865 (Providence, 1903), 212.

2 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 347.

3 Ibid., 347-348.

4 Ibid., 348. During their advance, Potter's skirmishers had picked
up a few stragglers. Potter at this time moved his command post
to the center of the large field near Gurley's house.

5 History of the 36th Massachusetts, 250. The sector of the front
occupied by Bliss' brigade, Potter's division, had been the scene
of a fearful struggle on the previous day. Ibid., 250-251.

6 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 551, 552; History of the 35th
Massachusetts, 287.

7 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 594.

Ibid., 596.

9 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 344.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 338.

13 Ibid. Colonel Locke was Warren's assistant adjutant general.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 338-339.

16 Ibid., 339.

Ibid.

18 Ibid., 340.

19 Ibid., 342.

20 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 458, 461, 467.

21 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 345.

- 22 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 481. In this attack, the Maryland Brigade lost 14 men, all wounded.
- 23 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 341.
- 24 Ibid., 340, 341. Humphreys informed Warren at 2:15 that Corse commanded a brigade in Pickett's division which had been operating in front of Bermuda Hundred. The chief of staff was of the opinion that this was the column sighted by the officer.
- 25 Ibid., 341.
- 26 Ibid., 345.
- 27 Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, and 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 261; History of the 118th Pennsylvania, 502; Brainard, History of the 146th New York, 240.
- 28 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 590, 594, 596, 597.
- 29 Ibid., 552, 590; History of the 35th Massachusetts, 287.
- 30 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 72.
- 31 Ibid., 505, 510, 518, 521. Lyle's troops were posted in support of the 9th Massachusetts Battery.
- 32 Ibid., 475; Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, and 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 261.
- 33 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 484, 486, 488, 534, 536; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 536; Smith, History of the 86th New York, 308.
- 34 Johnson Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, From the Original Manuscripts of Johnson Hagood, Brigadier General, C. S. A. (Columbia, 1910), 288-289.
- 35 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1191.
- 36 Ibid., 1192; Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 485-486.
- 37 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1192.
- 38 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 289.
- 39 Ibid., 289-290.
- 40 Ltr., Strayhorn to Sister, Aug. 22, 1864 (Strayhorn papers, Civil War Collection, North Carolina Dept. of Archives and History).

- 41 Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, and 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 262; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 359. Sanders', Jayne's, and Wright's brigades had been recalled from the north side of the James. These three brigades had reached Petersburg at 8 a.m. on the 20th.
- 42 Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, and 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 261-262.
- 43 Ibid., 262.
- 44 Ibid.; Ltr., Strayhorn to Sister, Aug. 22, 1864 (Strayhorn papers, Civil War Collection, N. C. Dept. of Archives and History).
- 45 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 290; Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, and 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 262.
- 46 Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, and 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 262-263.
- 47 R. L. T. Beale, History of the Ninth Virginia Cavalry, in the War Between the States (Richmond, 1899), 141.
- 48 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 366-367.
- 49 Ibid., 367.
- 50 Brainard, History of the 146th New York, 241; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 472, 475, 481.
- 51 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 367-368; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 541.
- 52 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 472, 475, 481.
- 53 History of the 35th Massachusetts, 287-288.
- 54 History of the 118th Pennsylvania, 505. The cellar walls of the Flowers dwelling extended two or three feet above the ground; the rest of the building was frame.
- 55 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 541-542; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 368.
- 56 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 542.
- 57 Ibid.

- 58 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 368.
- 59 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 461, 464, 465, 466, 467, 542, 600; History of the 118th Pennsylvania, 502.
- 60 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 461, 464, 465, 466, 467, 542, 600.
The second section of the 11th Massachusetts Battery, which had bogged down, reached the Union left after the fighting had died down. Confederate General Sanders was shot through the thighs in this attack, the ball severing both femoral arteries. In a few minutes he bled to death.
- 61 Ibid., 590, 594, 596.
- 62 Ltr., Strayhorn to Sister, Aug. 22, 1864 (Strayhorn papers, Civil War Collection, N. C. Dept. of Archives and History); Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, and 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 263; W. J. Martin, "History of the 11th North Carolina Regiment," Southern Historical Society Papers, XXIII, 52-53.
- 63 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 542, 594, 596, 597, 598.
- 64 Ltr., Strayhorn to Sister, Aug. 22, 1864 (Strayhorn papers, Civil War Collection, N. C. Dept. of Archives and History). Captain Strayhorn reported that the regiment, the 47th North Carolina, "lost some twenty five or thirty killed and wounded." Out of that number, his company lost five. Strayhorn's company had carried only "ten guns" into action. Two of his men had been detailed as skirmishers, one as color guard, while the rest were on sick report.
- 65 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 542; Martin, "History of the 11th North Carolina Regiment," Southern Historical Society Papers, XXIII, 52-53.
- 66 Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 486-487; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1192-1193.
- 67 Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 487.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 290.
- 70 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 484, 486, 534, 536, 939; The Official and Statistical Register of the State of Mississippi, 1908, (Nashville, 1908), 450, 466, 514. Brigadier General Nathaniel H. Harris being sick, Colonel Jayne led the Mississippi Brigade on the 21st. Out of the 450 men carried into action, Jayne's brigade lost 254 killed, wounded, and missing.

- 71 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 290-292.
- 72 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 483, 484, 486, 488-489. The breastworks held by the 3d Delaware, Hofmann's left flank unit, were refused at a 45 degree angle to those occupied by the rest of the brigade.
- 73 Ibid., 542.
- 74 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 292, 294.
- 75 History of the 118th Pennsylvania, 507.
- 76 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 294-295; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1196.
- 77 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 542.
- 78 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 295.
- 79 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 484.
- 80 Ibid., 483, 484, 486-487; Smith, History of the 76th New York, 308-309. On the 22d, 300 stand of arms were collected and 50 Confederates buried in front of the works held by Hofmann's brigade. Ibid., 484.
- 81 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 467, 468.
- 82 Ibid., 936.
- 83 Ibid., 542.
- 84 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1194; Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 487; Porter, "Operations Against the Weldon Railroad, August 18, 19, and 21, 1864," Papers of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, V, 265.
- 85 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 431, 595, 596.
- 86 Ibid., 542-543.
- 87 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 368.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 Ibid., 355.
- 90 Ibid., 368-369.
- 91 Ibid., 369.
- 92 Ibid., 369, 374; O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 80, 590.
- 93 O. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 389.
- 94 Ibid.
- 95 Ibid.

- 96 Ibid.; Q. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 833.
- 97 Q. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 833.
- 98 Q. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 369-370, 375.
- 99 Ibid., 374-375.
- 100 Ibid., 375; Q. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 617.
- 101 Q. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 375.
- 102 Q. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. I, 128.
- 103 Q. R., Series I, Vol. XLII, pt. II, 1198.
- 104 Ibid., 1194.
- 105 Ibid., 1195.
- 106 Ibid.
- 107 Ibid.