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X Marks the Spot

The Fate of Two Confederate Artillerymen in the Second Richmond Howitzers

THOMAS L. ELMORE

Long after the war, many aging veterans returned to Gettysburg to reminisce and relive the battle. A few among them conceived the idea of marking particular boulders or buildings to document their location and participation in the epic struggle or to perpetuate the memory of fallen comrades. A number of such carvings have to date been identified on the field and are often sought out by curious visitors. However, one unique mark was made before the fight ended. Until now it has apparently eluded generations of historians and tourists alike. It was chiseled on a rock by a Confederate artilleryman to record the gravesite of two fallen comrades, in order to facilitate their eventual recovery and reburial. These men were members of the Second Richmond Howitzers, one of seventy artillery batteries in the Confederate army that marched into Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863.

Officially formed in May 1861, the Second actually dates back two years prior. In late 1859, in response to John Brown's infamous raid on Harper's Ferry, the Richmond Howitzer Company was established by George Wythe Randolph, a grandson of Thomas Jefferson. When war erupted, the company rapidly increased to 225 members, large enough to be divided into three separate batteries. Each would contribute its fair share to the fame of the Army of Northern Virginia.¹

The Second Richmond Howitzers was initially placed under the command of Capt. John Thompson Brown, from Petersburg. An alumnus of the University of Virginia who lacked prior military experience, Brown nevertheless proved capable

and courageous and rose steadily in rank. Put in charge of the First Virginia Artillery battalion, he led it with distinction in the battles of Antietam (Sharpsburg) and Fredericksburg. At Chancellorsville, Brown served as acting chief of artillery in Stonewall Jackson's corps. When the army was reorganized just prior to the Gettysburg campaign, Colonel Brown was chosen as chief of artillery for the Second Corps. As such he reported directly to the army's overall artillery chief, Brig. Gen. William N. Pendleton. Brown's old battalion was assigned to Capt. Willis Dance.²

Willis Jefferson Dance was born on June 21, 1821, in Powhatan County, Virginia. Educated at Hampden-Sydney College, as well as the University of Virginia (1837–39), he established a law practice near Powhatan Courthouse, where his father had served as clerk. With the war's arrival, Dance raised a company known as the Powhatan Light Artillery, which was attached to Brown's battalion.³ When Captain Dance was assigned command of the battalion in the spring of 1863, some grumbling arose in the ranks. In a private letter home, Quartermaster Sgt. William Y. Mordecai referred to him as an "old nanny."⁴ Yet Dance apparently met the expectations of his superiors—although he afterward reverted back to command of his battery, he was entrusted to lead the battalion on future occasions when the need arose.

¹ Clement A. Evans, ed., *Virginia*, vol. 4 of *Confederate Military History*, ext. ed., 19 vols. (Atlanta GA: Confederate Publishing, 1899; Wilmington NC: Broadfoot Publishing, 1987), 742–43. Citations refer to the Broadfoot edition.

² Wikipedia, s.v. "J. Thompson Brown," last modified December 13, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._Thompson_Brown; Rev. John Lipscomb Johnson, *The University Memorial: Biographical Sketches of Alumni of the University of Virginia Who Fell in the Confederate War* (Baltimore MD: Turnbull Brothers, 1871), 560–69.

³ Jean L. Cooper, "Dance Family (Powhatan County, VA)," *Students of the University of Virginia, 1825–1874* (blog), June 21, 2011, <http://uvastudents.wordpress.com/2011/06/21/dance-family-powhatan-county-va/>.

⁴ William Young Mordecai, Second Richmond Howitzers, letter, June 1, 1863, MSS 2M8117b, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond VA.



Capt. John Thompson Brown, Second Company, Richmond Howitzers. Courtesy of the author.

The First Virginia Artillery battalion carried four batteries into Pennsylvania, each with four guns of various types, for a total of sixteen cannon. Besides the Powhatan Artillery and Second Richmond Howitzers, the battalion included the Third Richmond Howitzers (also drawn from the original company) and the Salem Artillery. In the estimation of artilleryman George L. Christian, the battalion was as well manned and equipped as any in the Confederate army.⁵

The Second Richmond Howitzers was commanded at Gettysburg by Capt. David Watson. Born November 25, 1834, in Louisa County, Virginia, Watson graduated from the University of Virginia in 1855. He was known for his modesty and sense of humor—a helpful attribute in the army. Enrolled as a second lieutenant on July 3, 1861, Watson was elected captain upon taking command of the bat-

tery in late April 1862. At Fredericksburg his efforts were commended by Maj. Gen. J. E. B. Stuart. Watson also had a good relationship with his superior and mentor, John Thompson Brown.⁶

During the early stages of the Gettysburg campaign, a mere two weeks before the great battle, nearly two dozen artillery pieces were captured from Union general Robert H. Milroy's ill-fated force at Winchester. Watson's battery received a fine pair of ten-pounder Parrotts, along with some excellent leather harness for the teams. Simultaneously, the battery swapped out their two three-inch Ordnance Rifles with another battery, in exchange for two additional Parrotts, giving them four capable guns of the same type. With the barrel elevated seven degrees, the Parrott could shell targets a mile and a half away.⁷

On June 17, 1863, after departing Winchester, the battery passed through Martinsburg in Berkeley County, Virginia, which was about to become part of the new state of West Virginia. Martinsburg was a railroad town with a population of about three thousand, and it was deeply divided. An estimated 60 percent of the town sided with the Union cause; the remainder held Southern sympathies.⁸ Split loyalties among the people of the border region would be a feature of the landscape well into Maryland.

Watson's men crossed the Potomac near Shepherdstown on June 22, following Jubal Early's infantry division. Strict orders were issued against the pillaging of private property of northern civilians, which was more or less observed. And in certain commands, including Watson's battery, it was diligently enforced. While passing a farmhouse along the route, Pvt. William J. Mann thought to stash a chicken into his haversack that another soldier had managed to corner against a fence. Mann thought himself safe with his prize; but at roll call that night he was called out and, upon relinquishing his feathered companion, was punished with ten successive nights of guard duty.⁹

As the battery approached the field on the

⁵ George L. Christian, letter, January 4, 1898, J. W. Daniel Papers, Gettysburg National Military Park, Gettysburg PA.

⁶ Ancestry.com, "Compiled Service Record of David Watson," *Fold3*, <http://www.fold3.com/image/7908368/>; Johnson, *University Memorial*, 570–78.

⁷ John Henry Vest, diary entry, June 16, 1863, Brockenbrough Library, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond VA; R. P. Parrott, *Ranges of Parrott Guns, and Notes for Practice* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1863), 13.

⁸ Vest diary, June 17, 1863.

⁹ Vest diary, June 22, 1863; William Jackson Mann, "A Few Reminiscences about the Civil War," Mss 5.1M 3159:1, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond VA, 14.



This sketch of the Richmond Howitzers in action was drawn by Pvt. William L. Sheppard, Second Company. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

Chambersburg Pike, a wheel rolled off one of the guns, bringing it to a sudden halt. As its crew stopped to make emergency repairs, two rather brave young girls came up to taunt them, saying, “You are in a big hurry to get there, but you will be in a bigger hurry to get away.” The battery arrived on the battleground just before sundown on the eventful first day. A bivouac was made near a line of lifeless soldiers, perhaps dead North Carolinians who constituted the carnage inflicted on Brig. Gen. Alfred Iverson’s brigade earlier in the afternoon. Before daylight the next morning, the artillerymen were up, and the guns were soon moved forward a short distance to Seminary Ridge, immediately north of the railroad cut.¹⁰

In the fighting on the second and third days, Watson’s battery expended a total of 661 rounds. Cpl. John Henry Vest reported that his gun alone fired eighty-three rounds during a three-and-a-half-hour period on July 2, which equates to one round every two to three minutes.¹¹ Extrapolating, it would appear the battery expended about 330

rounds each day. However, the battery was restricted to firing only solid shot on July 3, to avoid inflicting casualties on Confederate infantry posted in the intervening lane (Long Lane) that runs southwest from the town.¹²

Captain Watson and the sixty-three or so other members of his battery entered Pennsylvania in high spirits. Their number included two highly regarded privates, James Maupin and Tom Pendleton, who worked well together on one of the gun teams. Their immediate supervisor, Cpl. William H. (“Billy”) McCarthy, was responsible for assigning various positions at the gun and accompanying ammunition caisson.¹³ James Rawlings Maupin was born on January 30, 1843, to Socrates and Sally Maupin; he was the third of nine children, of whom six survived childhood. From 1854 until 1868 his father served as chairman of the faculty at the Uni-

¹² U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), ser. 1, vol. 27, part 2, 604.

¹³ John W. Busey and David G. Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg* (Hightstown NJ: Longstreet House, 1994), 170, 289; William F. McCarthy to Samuel Heisler Pendleton, n.d., in Samuel Heisler Pendleton diary, mss-9878, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville VA.

¹⁰ Mann, “A Few Reminiscences,” 15.

¹¹ Vest diary, July 2, 1863.



Socrates Maupin. University of Virginia Autograph Album, RG-30/17, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA.

versity of Virginia. James, the oldest son, matriculated at the university in October 1860. But by June of the following year, as war fever stirred the students to action, James secured his father's permission to leave school to join up with a local company that was accepting volunteers. A year later, in July 1862, James transferred to the Howitzers, and he afterward participated in the heavy fighting at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville.¹⁴

Hugh Thomas ("Tom") Pendleton was born in 1842 to James and Annaethia (née Carter) Pendleton. He was a nephew of General Pendleton. Tom enlisted for one year on June 14, 1861, under Maj. George Randolph; and when his time was up, he immediately reenlisted. Tom was absent, sick in Richmond, from March until October 1862, but thereafter he was always at his post. Like James Maupin, Tom had also served at Chancellorsville. During the course of that battle, Tom recovered a

fine bible from a dead Federal soldier.¹⁵ Tom's brother, Samuel Heisler ("Sam") Pendleton, was also at Gettysburg, serving as a first lieutenant in the Morris Artillery of Virginia, in the battalion of Lt. Col. Thomas H. Carter. Sam's battery was led by Capt. Richard Channing Moore Page, who belonged to one of Virginia's prominent families.¹⁶ On several previous occasions, Sam was called on to lead the battery in Captain Page's absence. Sam evidently cultivated close ties with his former superior, John Thompson Brown, which was perhaps reciprocated due to Sam's family connections. On June 29, two days prior to the battle, Sam accompanied Colonel Brown on a stroll through the well-kept streets of Carlisle. Both officers must have been pleased with their surroundings and improved provisions, unlike the citizens they encountered, who all appeared quite glum. That day the Confederate flag was hoisted up the mast pole at the nearby U.S. Barracks.¹⁷

After spending the entire day of July 2 north of the railroad cut, Watson's battery was ordered to move at an early hour on July 3. A new position was taken up just south of the Fairfield Road, where they could more effectively support the Pickett-Trimble-Pettigrew charge to be launched later that afternoon. As soon as James and Tom helped to maneuver their gun into place, Billy turned to Tom and directed him to join the caisson in the rear. But Tom preferred to remain at the very front, where the action was certain to be more intense. He pleaded to stay with the gun. Billy finally relented and agreed to exchange places with him.¹⁸ Of course, all knew that war showed no favoritism. Caisson duty was every bit as hazardous as being up on the firing line. Yet in this instance the decision would spare Billy and seal Tom's fate.

Around one o'clock in the afternoon, at the given signal, Confederate batteries along the entire length of the line unleashed an intense artillery barrage intended to pulverize the Union center prior to the infantry charge. Federal artillery batteries respond-

¹⁴ Family data taken from the 1860 census; Scott Hutchison, "Pvt James Rawlings Maupin," Find a Grave Memorial, August 6, 2005, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=11486490>; Johnson, *University Memorial*, 464–70.

¹⁵ Ancestry.com, "Compiled Service Record of H. T. Pendleton," *Fold3*, www.fold3.com/image/20/13776190/. Hugh Thomas Pendleton is no stranger to the pages of this magazine, see Steven M. LaBarre, "As Fate Would Have It: The Bible That Brought North and South Together," *Gettysburg Magazine* 46 (2012), 50–57.

¹⁶ Pendleton diary, July 2 and 4, 1863; Richard Channing Moore Page, *Genealogy of the Page Family in Virginia* (New York: Jenkins and Thomas, Printers, 1883).

¹⁷ Pendleton diary, June 29, 1863; William Erskine Ardrey, diary entry, June 29, 1863, Archives and Special Collections, Davidson College, Davidson NC.

¹⁸ McCarthy to Pendleton, n.d.



An unidentified member of the Richmond Howitzers.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

ed immediately, and the duel raged fiercely for an hour and a half. During the height of the bombardment, an enemy solid shot struck close to one of the Confederate guns. James Maupin was killed instantly. The same shot passed through Tom Pendleton's body, but somehow he maintained a tenuous hold on life. A friend carried Tom away and gently placed him under a shady tree. While Tom lay here in intense pain, Captain Dance passed by, perhaps on horseback to check on the status of his batteries. Tom called out to him. He asked the captain to tell his mother that he had died doing his duty and that he wished to die because he was suffering great agony. Tom's wish was soon granted. One account says he died within thirty minutes; another suggests he held on for nearly two hours.¹⁹ In either case a direct strike by a solid shot was inevitably fatal, and Tom never learned the outcome of the battle, having drawn his last breath.

Meanwhile, a short distance away the men of Watson's battery watched the epic infantry struggle unfold. Third Corps commander Lt. Gen. Ambrose Powell Hill walked up and stood among them. When

the outcome seemed doubtful, Hill's countenance expressed confusion and shock. As Federal reinforcements swept down on the flank of the attacking column, the men of the battery appealed to the general to let them reopen their guns. But Hill declined, stating that ammunition was too scarce.²⁰ The battle had been decided. For James Maupin and Tom Pendleton, the outcome was no longer of any concern. Word of their deaths soon spread up the chain of command until it reached John Thompson Brown.

Despite the loss of two good men, the battery was indeed fortunate at Gettysburg. Only one other man was wounded (Cpl. Joseph C. Angel), besides several sick men who were taken captive in the wagon train during the retreat.²¹ A last sad duty of the survivors was to bury their compatriots side by side on the battlefield. The bodies were aligned in an east-west direction, with James occupying the north grave and Tom, the south. Headboards were prepared and inscribed to mark the graves—Tom's read "H. T. Pendleton." But Cpl. Billy McCarthy went a step further, perhaps feeling guilty over his earlier decision to grant Tom his last request. He tried to chisel Tom's name on a large rock that lay at the foot of his grave. But the stone was too hard, and he could only manage to make a cross mark.²²

After Captain Page was wounded in the first day's action, Sam Pendleton was called on to take his place. However, his battery remained inactive for the rest of the battle, parked behind the college north of town. At the close of the third day, just before darkness descended on the bloody field, Sam received word from Colonel Brown of his brother's death. At first daylight the next day, Sam visited the freshly dug graves. He minutely detailed the location in his diary. Sam indicated that the grave was south of the Fairfield Road and also south of Dr. Schmucker's place, beyond a house and barns possibly belonging to a man named Haupt. It was past a little skirt of trees, beside a grove, "and just inside from the field towards the town."²³ Indeed, several years after the war the bodies were readily found and exhumed. James was initially buried with his maternal kinfolk in Washington DC, but he was af-

¹⁹ Johnson, *University Memorial*, 464–70; Florence McCarthy Jr. to Jane E. McCarthy (sister), July 10, 1863, Mss1 M1275a, McCarthy Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond VA; McCarthy to Pendleton, n.d.

²⁰ Christian letter, January 4, 1898.

²¹ Ancestry.com, "Compiled Service Record of Joseph C. Angel," *Fold3*, www.fold3.com/image/10944675/.

²² McCarthy to Pendleton, n.d.

²³ Pendleton diary, July 4, 1863.



A close-up photograph of the X rock. Courtesy of the author.

terward reburied in the family plot at the University of Virginia's Cemetery and Columbarium. Tom's final resting place is at Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery.²⁴

But was the chiseled rock still there 150 years later? It was initially feared that it might have been destroyed during the construction of Confederate Avenue. By coincidence, two isolated graves in the general vicinity appear on Elliott's map, raising hope that the marked rock might be found in

the woods west of the avenue.²⁵ An unsuccessful attempt was made by the author in the fall of 2013 to find the X rock. The search focused around the marker to Watson's battery, placed behind a stone wall just west of Confederate Avenue. On April 4, 2014, the author launched another effort after enlisting fellow enthusiast (and eyewitness) Randy Drais. On this occasion the search was initiated much closer to the Fairfield Road as indicated on the Elliott map. Once again, no luck.

But attention was now directed to an orchard that extends northward from the McMillan house, replanted thanks to efforts to restore the area to its 1863 appearance. Could this be the grove described by Sam Pendleton? Sure enough, after only a few minutes, a rock overlaid with vines was uncovered

²⁴ Johnson, *University Memorial*, p. 469; Hutchison, "Pvt James Rawlings Maupin." As for the survivors, more war lay in store. David Watson was promoted to major in February 1864. He fell wounded on May 10, 1864, at Spotsylvania Courthouse, and died four days later. John Thompson Brown was killed by a sharpshooter on May 6, 1864, during the Wilderness fighting. Willis Dance made it through the conflict and returned to his law practice in Powhatan; he died on February 13, 1887. William N. Pendleton served as rector of Grace Episcopal Church in Lexington after the war; he died in 1883 and was interred at the Stonewall Jackson Memorial Cemetery in Lexington. Sam Pendleton became a grain merchant on Pearl Street in Manhattan after the war; he was last heard from in 1890 in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

²⁵ Map circa 1864 by S. G. Elliott, Philadelphia, on file at Gettysburg National Military Park, Gettysburg PA.

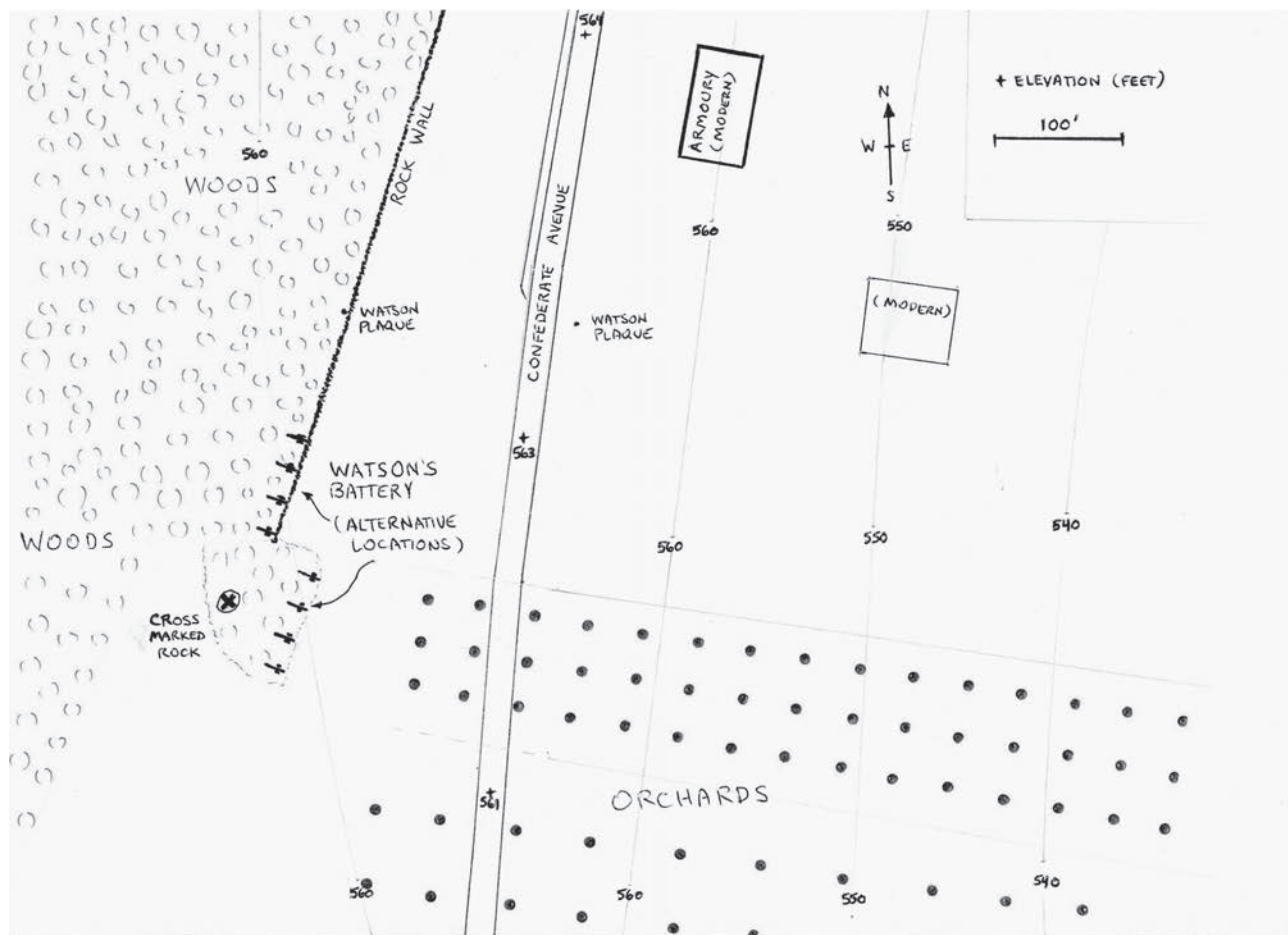
and divulged a carving! But a closer examination disclosed the outline of a heart, enclosing the apparent initials “RN + TM.” It must have been difficult to carve, and it was certainly an odd place for an expression of love. Illegal too, unless it was made before the park acquired the land. Unfortunately, it was also of no obvious relevance to our goal. Then, pulling back the vines from an adjacent rock, yet another carving was disclosed—this time a small but deeply cut cross mark. The location of this boulder is about eighteen yards south-southwest of the southern end of the rock wall. Northward, another 200 feet or so behind the wall, is a plaque to Watson’s battery. A second plaque to the battery is located about 170 feet east of the first, adjacent to Confederate Avenue. Both plaques are nearly identical in wording with regard to the third day’s action: “July 3 Moved to this position. Took part in the cannonade preceding Longstreet’s final as-

sault and continued firing for some time afterwards. Moved at night to rear of this line.”

Now a complication exists, because a sketch prepared a few years after the war places Watson’s guns rather close to the chiseled X rock: “Their comrades in arms buried them side by side on the field of glory, not twenty yards from where they fell. The graves were so located and marked that the spot was afterwards found and identified with difficulty.”²⁶ Thus the X rock not only records the initial burial site of two Confederates, but it also pinpoints the July 3 position of Watson’s guns with a high degree of accuracy. The most obvious location is behind the southernmost end of the rock wall. But there is another interpretation.

The newly discovered X rock is currently in a cleared area that would have exposed the burial party to observation at a considerable distance.

²⁶ Johnson, *University Memorial*, 469.



Sketch showing the location of the X rock and alternative positions for Watson’s battery near Seminary Avenue. Courtesy of the author.

However, the 1876 Warren map of the battlefield does appear to show some trees (since removed) extending a bit farther south and east of the wall that would have served to screen the burial site from view. It likewise suggests the alternative possibility that Watson's guns were posted along the edge of this former tree line—twenty yards due east of the chiseled rock (see sketch on previous page).

Can it be said with certainty that the original carving has been rediscovered, or is it just a most improbable coincidence to have uncovered another cross-marked rock in the general vicinity? In the absence of additional confirming evidence, it is left for the reader to decide. One thing is clear; following a diligent search, no other marked rock was found near to the extant markers to Watson's bat-

tery. Regardless, what is beyond dispute is the compelling human-interest tale from a battlefield that still holds secrets and surprises after 150 years.

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Thomas L. Elmore began a serious study of the Battle of Gettysburg at the age of thirteen, having been inspired by an earlier visit to the battlefield with his parents in July 1963. Graduating from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1977, he retired from the Central Intelligence Agency in 2013. Using primary source materials amassed over many years, he has written a number of articles for the *Gettysburg Magazine* and is grateful for contributions that others have found useful or interesting. He is a proud member of the "Friends" (Gettysburg Foundation), which has done many good works in support of the National Parks at Gettysburg. Tom lives with his wife, Linda, near Richmond, Virginia.