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“More Loss Than Success”

Nicholls's Brigade in the Gettysburg Campaign

WILLIAM E. WELSH

Night fighting in the American Civil War presented soldiers and officers with some of the most challenging situations they would experience throughout the conflict. These actions were inherently fraught with confusion, both marching to the objective and in the assault itself.¹ As the war progressed and the Confederate states became increasingly desperate for victories that might lead to independence, the Confederate high command deemed night operations a risk worth taking.

Brig. Gen. Francis Nicholls's brigade of Maj. Gen. Edward "Alleghany" Johnson's division of Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell's Second Corps was called on to make a night march and attack on June 14–15, 1863, during the Stephenson's Depot phase of the Second Battle of Winchester. Nicholls's brigade also participated in a three-brigade attack on the night of July 2, 1863, against Culp's Hill. The two circumstances shared little in common other than they occurred at night. In the case of Stephenson's Depot, Johnson conducted a night march to intercept the retreating army of Maj. Gen. Robert Milroy. On June 14 Maj. Gen. Jubal Early's division had forced Milroy to abandon Winchester and conduct a fighting retreat north. In contrast, when Nicholls's brigade and two other brigades of Johnson's division attacked a Union brigade on Culp's Hill on July 2, they found themselves pitted against a force that was well led and strongly entrenched.

This article chronicles the experience of Nicholls's

brigade, also known as the 2nd Louisiana Brigade, which fought under the temporary command of thirty-two-year-old Col. Jesse M. Williams of the 2nd Louisiana Volunteers. At the time the Gettysburg campaign began, Brig. Gen. Francis T. Nicholls was in no condition to lead his brigade, having suffered his second serious wound of the war at the Battle of Chancellorsville. Army of Northern Virginia commander Gen. Robert E. Lee had serious reservations about Williams's qualifications to lead the brigade through the campaign. One concern was that Williams had no formal military training. Another concern was whether Williams could control his troops in combat, because he had experienced substantial difficulties leading Nicholls's brigade in the closing phase of Chancellorsville after Nicholls was wounded. But owing to attrition among suitably qualified commanders, Lee could not find a replacement for Nicholls after Chancellorsville, and therefore he left Williams in command of Nicholls's five Louisiana regiments.²

To fully understand the capabilities and limitations of the 2nd Louisiana Brigade in the Gettysburg Campaign, it's necessary to trace Williams's rise through the ranks and to assess his performance during the campaign. Fortunately for Williams, the regiments that made up the 2nd Louisiana Brigade had fought together for one year by the time the Gettysburg Campaign began. Lee established the 2nd Louisiana Brigade in the reorganization in July 1862 that followed the Seven Days Battle. Four of the five regiments (the exception being the 14th Louisiana Volunteers) that

¹ Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 329. Sears describes the July 2 night fight for Culp's Hill as "chaotic." Paddy Griffith, *Battle in the Civil War: Generalship and Tactics in America 1861–1865* (Mansfield, UK: Fieldbooks, 1986), 44. Surprise was a prerequisite for success in night fighting. Night marches occasionally were successful. "Troops who tried to maneuver at night usually got lost, mistook friends for enemies, and became disastrously short of sleep."

² Larry Tagg, *The Generals of Gettysburg: The Leaders of America's Greatest Battle* (Campbell, CA: Savas, 1998), 281–82. Tagg says that Lee "did not entertain great expectations from the Louisiana colonel."

eventually would constitute Nicholls's brigade were banded together under the command of Brig. Gen. William Starke at the outset of the Second Manassas Campaign.³

Williams was born in Alabama on January 11, 1831, most likely in Pickens County.⁴ His family subsequently moved to Mansfield, Louisiana.⁵ His close family ties to Alabama undoubtedly led to his attending the University of Alabama. When the war broke out, he was a store clerk in Mansfield.⁶ He entered the war as captain of Company D, the "Pelican Rifles," when the 2nd Louisiana Volunteers was mustered into service at Camp Walker, Louisiana, on May 11, 1861.⁷ Williams fought with the regiment during the Seven Days Battle as part of Brig. Gen. Howell Cobb's 2nd Brigade of Maj. Gen. John Magruder's division. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel on May 1, 1862. Following the death of Col. Isiah T. Norwood at Malvern Hill on July 1, 1862, Williams was promoted to colonel and given command of the 2nd Louisiana.⁸

Williams led the 2nd Louisiana Volunteers of Brig. Gen. William Starke's brigade through the battles of Cedar Mountain, Second Manassas, and Antietam.⁹ In the harrowing fighting at Antietam, where six generals were killed during the bloodiest single day of the Civil War, Starke was mortally wounded while leading his Louisianans forward from the West Wood in a counterattack against Union forces advancing along Hagerstown Pike. In the same counterattack, Williams was struck by a minié ball that passed clear through his chest but missed vital organs. He was captured by the Yankees and exchanged shortly afterward.¹⁰

As a field officer commanding a regiment, he performed ably. Col. Edmund Pendleton, the acting commander of the 2nd Louisiana Brigade after Antietam, praised Williams in his report on the battle. "Williams was severely wounded . . . while gallantly leading his regiment in the first charge," wrote

3 Terry L. Jones, *Lee's Tigers: The Louisiana Infantry in the Army of Northern Virginia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), 112.

4 Bruce S. Allardice, *Confederate Colonels: A Biographical Register* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 398.

5 Allardice, *Confederate Colonels*, 398.

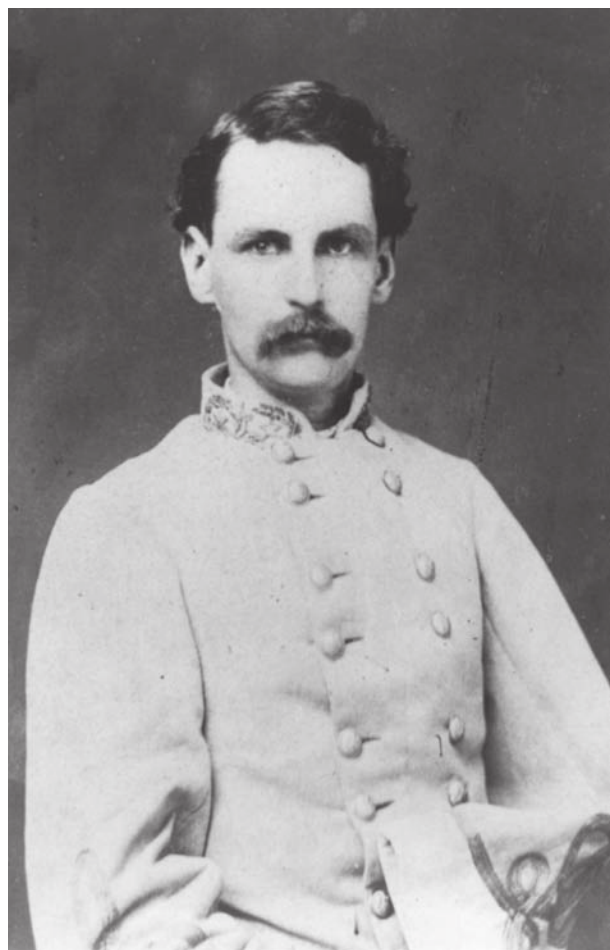
6 Allardice, *Confederate Colonels*, 398.

7 Robert Krick, *Lee's Colonels: A Biographical Register of the Field Officers of the Army of Northern Virginia* (Dayton, OH: Morningside, 1992), 343–44.

8 Allardice, *Confederate Colonels*, 398.

9 Tagg, *Generals of Gettysburg*, 282.

10 Tagg, *Generals of Gettysburg*, 282.



Brig. Gen. Francis Redding Tillou Nicholls. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Pendleton.¹¹ Because of his injury, Williams would sit out the Battle of Fredericksburg later that year.

After the Battle of Antietam, the 9th Louisiana was transferred to Brig. Gen. Harry Hays's 1st Louisiana Brigade in exchange for the 14th Louisiana, which joined Starke's brigade, which gave the brigade its composition that Williams eventually would lead to Gettysburg.¹² No replacement was immediately found for Starke, so Pendleton commanded the brigade at Fredericksburg.

Lee's eventual replacement for Starke was Nicholls, who was a West Point graduate, albeit with practically no battle experience predating the Civil War. While serving as lieutenant colonel of the 8th Louisiana Volunteers at the First Battle of Win-

11 Tagg, *Generals of Gettysburg*, 282.

12 Jones, *Lee's Tigers*, 133. It is unclear why the 9th and 14th Regiments exchanged places in the two Louisiana brigades in Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, says Jones.

chester on May 25, 1862, Nicholls lost his left arm.¹³ Afterward, he convalesced in the Deep South and wound up doing temporary duty in Texas.¹⁴ But on October 14, 1862, Nicholls received a promotion, as well as orders to return to Virginia and take command of the 2nd Louisiana Brigade. Nicholls returned to the Old Dominion in January 1863, which gave him ample time to get acquainted with his regiments before Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker crossed the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers, forcing a battle at the hamlet of Chancellorsville.¹⁵

On the afternoon of May 2, Nicholls led the 2nd Louisiana Brigade forward as part of the second line of Lt. Gen. Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's flank attack on the Union Eleventh Corps. During heavy fighting on the Confederate left, Nicholls was leading his troops on horseback when a cannonball went through the side of his horse, tearing off Nicholls's foot in the process.¹⁶ At that point, command of Nicholls's brigade devolved to Williams.

With Jackson being severely wounded by friendly fire that evening, Lee gave temporary command of the Confederate Second Corps to Maj. Gen. Jeb Stuart. Stuart hurled his troops against the Union horseshoe-shaped line at Chancellorsville in an ef-



Maj. Gen. Edward "Allegheny" Johnson. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

fort to overrun it. Williams had the difficult task of launching a frontal attack on two Federal batteries supported by infantry.¹⁷ The Louisianans charged into the teeth of the guns, took heavy losses, and fell back, unwilling to continue the fight.¹⁸ The brigade had suffered frightening losses in the attack. One regiment, the 2nd Louisiana, had lost about 70 percent of its men.¹⁹ When the Federals counterattacked, Williams was unable to rally his men.²⁰ Lee learned of this, and it was a black mark against Williams. But Williams's poor performance wasn't

the only one. Other Confederate generals performed badly, and some were relieved of command as a result.

Nicholls's brigade had been part of Maj. Gen. Raleigh Colston's division of Jackson's Second Corps at Chancellorsville. In the reorganization of the Army of Northern Virginia into three corps after the death of Jackson, Lee sacked Colston, who had performed poorly at Chancellorsville, and replaced him with a West Point graduate, forty-seven-year-old Johnson.²¹ Lee put Johnson's division in Ewell's newly created Second Corps.

Following the Battle of Chancellorsville, Johnson's division had been posted at Hamilton's Cross-

13 Terry L. Jones, "Francis Redding Tillou Nicholls," in *The Confederate General*, ed. William C. Davis and Julie Davis Hoffman (Washington, DC: National Historical Society, 1991), 4:197.

14 Jones, "Francis Redding Tillou Nicholls," 4:197.

15 Jones, "Francis Redding Tillou Nicholls," 4:197.

16 Jones, "Francis Redding Tillou Nicholls," 4:197.

17 Jones, *Lee's Tigers*, 148.

18 Tagg, *Generals of Gettysburg*, 282.

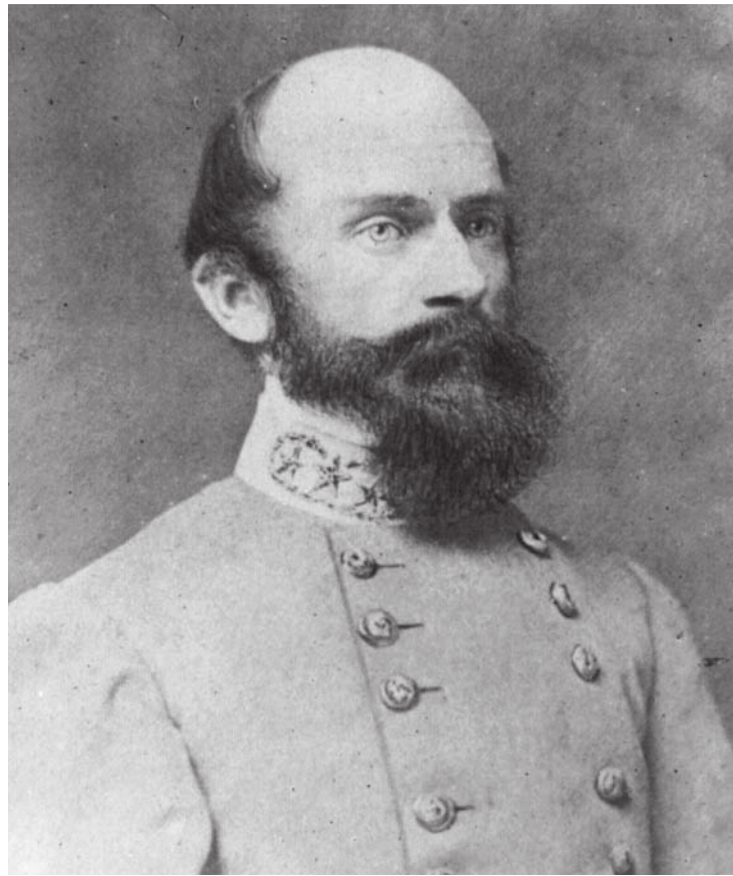
19 Stephen W. Sears, *Chancellorsville* (Boston: Mariner, 1996), 343.

20 Tagg, *Generals of Gettysburg*, 282.

21 Robert K. Krick, "Raleigh Edward Colston," in Davis and Davis Hoffman, *Confederate General*, 2:13. Colston was unable to control his division at Chancellorsville.

ing on the Rap-
pahannock River
downstream from
Fredericksburg to
guard the Confed-
erate right flank.²²
While the Army of
the Potomac was
recovering from its
stinging defeat at
Chancellorsville,
Lee took advan-
tage of the situa-
tion, to launch his
second invasion of
the North. On June
5 Johnson's four bri-
gades broke camp
and marched west
toward Culpeper
Courthouse. The
various commands
in the division were
"in good condition
and excellent spir-
its," wrote Johnson,
as they moved into
the higher eleva-
tions of the Virginia
Piedmont.²³ On June 12 Johnson's columns crossed
the Blue Ridge Mountains at Chester Gap and
camped about five miles north of Front Royal.²⁴

Blocking the Confederate army's advance north
to the Potomac was Maj. Gen. Robert Milroy's
8,324-strong Second Division of the Union Eighth
Corps at Winchester, Virginia.²⁵ On June 13 Johnson
deployed a portion of his troops to drive in Mil-
roy's pickets south of Winchester. Williams's bri-
gade spent most of the day in line for battle in the
woods south of the town. The following day, Ewell
sent Maj. Gen. Jubal Early on a wide flanking march



Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

west of town to
catch the Feder-
als by surprise. To
assist Early, Ewell
ordered Johnson
to make a strong
demonstration east
of the town to dis-
tract the Federals.
Williams's brigade
once again spent
the day serving as
part of the division's
reserve.²⁶ But that
night, the Louisian-
ans would be called
on to perform a key
role in the effort to
trap Milroy.

On the night of
June 14, Ewell or-
dered Johnson to
march his three bri-
gades (minus Jones's
brigade, which was
guarding the divi-
sion's right flank)
north to a point
along the Martins-

burg Pike where Johnson could intercept Milroy's
division if it chose to retreat under cover of dark-
ness. Ewell suggested a point two and a half miles
north of Winchester at which Johnson could block
Milroy's escape north, but Johnson felt the enemy
would discover his movement unless he positioned
himself farther away from Winchester.²⁷

Based on information from a local guide, John-
son believed a better position for an ambush lay
five miles north at Stephenson's Depot on the
Winchester and Potomac Railroad. At that loca-
tion, Johnson could deploy his men, he wrote, in "a
railroad cut masked by a body of woods, and not
more than 200 yards from the turnpike . . . which
would afford excellent shelter for troops in case of
an engagement."²⁸

²² 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, 499 (hereafter cited as *OR* and followed by the volume, part, and page numbers, with all subsequent citations referencing series 1).

²³ *OR*, 27.2:499.

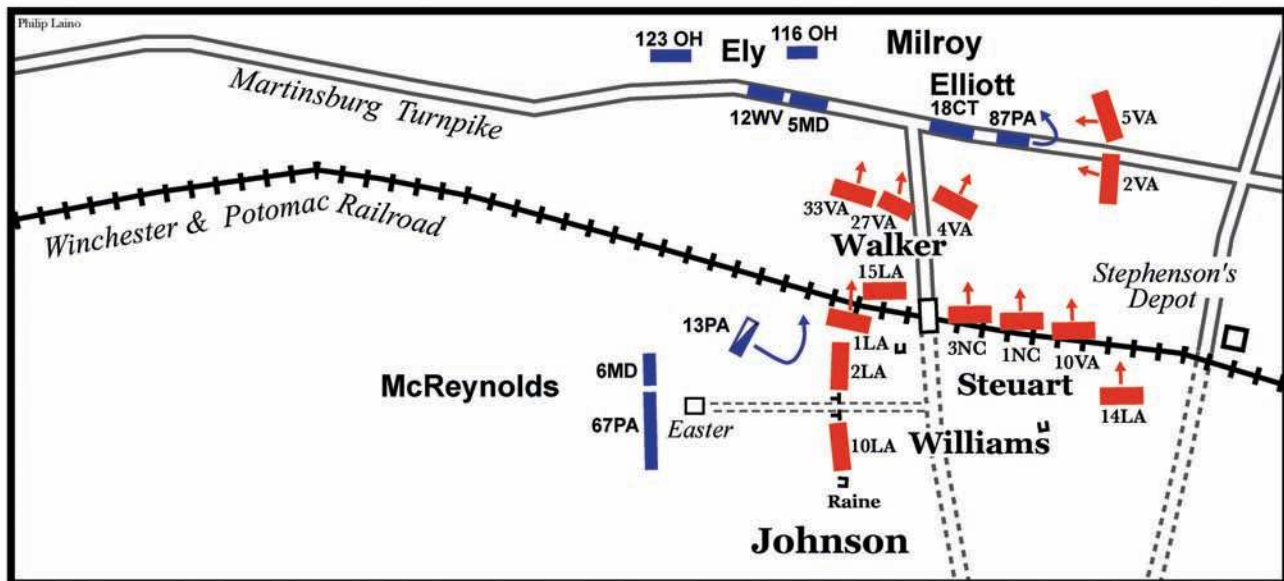
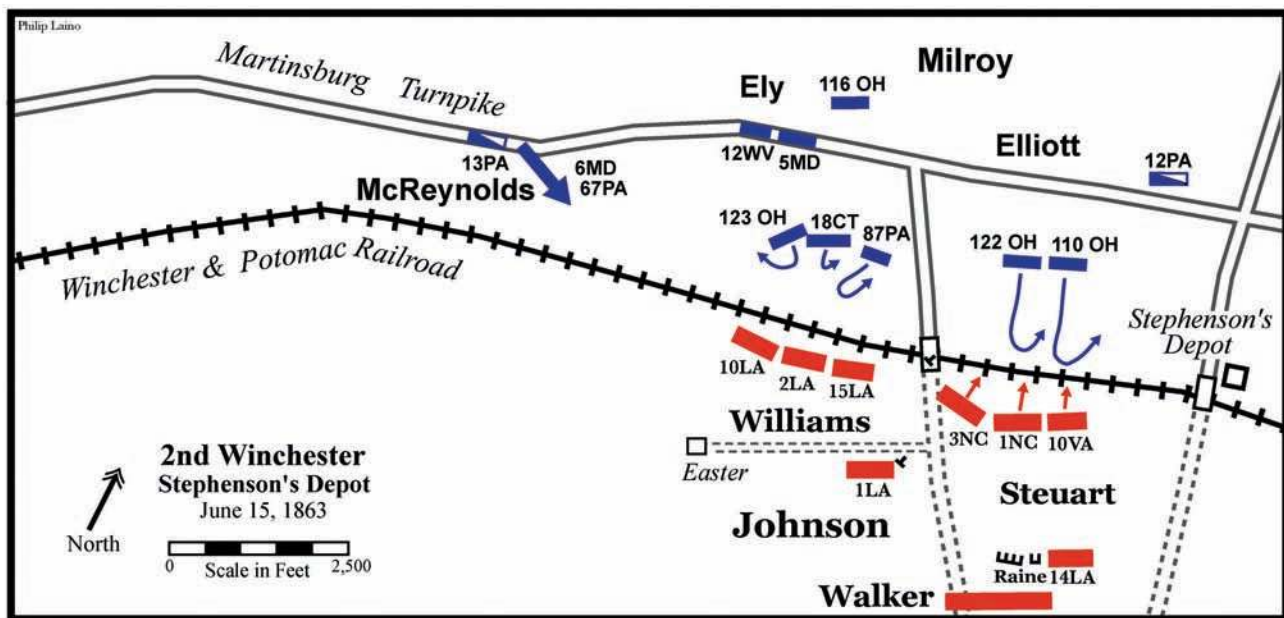
²⁴ Gregg S. Clemmer, *Old Alleghany: The Life and Wars of Ed Johnson* (Staunton, VA: Hearthside, 2004), 442.

²⁵ J. David Petruzzii and Steven A. Stanley, *The Gettysburg Campaign in Numbers and Losses* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beattie, 2012), 15–16.

²⁶ Petruzzii and Stanley, *Gettysburg Campaign in Numbers and Losses*, 15–16.

²⁷ *OR*, 27.2:500–501.

²⁸ *OR*, 27.2:500–501.



The Second Battle of Winchester. Courtesy of Phil Laino.

Johnson intended to march to Stephenson's Depot via the hamlet of Jordan Springs. He set off after dark with Williams's brigade and Brig. Gen. George H. "Maryland" Stuart's brigade. The third brigade designated to participate in the march belonged to Brig. Gen. James "Stonewall Jim" Walker, but the Virginian was still engaged with the enemy following the feints conducted that afternoon. Walker had orders to disengage from Milroy as soon as possible and join the column.²⁹

²⁹ OR, 27.2:500-501.

At midnight Milroy's division began its retreat north. Milroy issued orders for the artillery to be left behind so it would not slow the march. If he ran into a blocking force, Milroy planned to fight his way out if necessary. Johnson and Milroy were old nemeses. They had fought each other in the Battle of Camp Alleghany and also the Battle of McDowell. Johnson had a strong desire to vanquish Milroy.

Johnson reached Stephenson's Depot at 3:30 a.m. after a march through a moonless night.³⁰ When Al-

³⁰ OR, 27.2:500-501.

leghany and his staff reached a small wooden bridge over the Winchester and Potomac Railroad just south of the station house, the division commander rode forward with his staff in an effort to locate the enemy. The sound of neighing horses on the pike to the south indicated to Johnson that the head of Milroy's column was approaching the depot. Union cavalry at the head of Milroy's column fired on Johnson and his entourage, and the Confederate horsemen galloped back to their column.³¹

Haste was necessary if the ambush was to work. Johnson barked orders to both of his brigadiers. He told Steuart to deploy three regiments on the right of the bridge and Williams to deploy three regiments on the left of the bridge. The Confederates had ample protection not only from the railroad embankment but also from stone wall along the pike.³² If Milroy was to continue in the direction of Harper's Ferry, he would have to fight his way through Johnson's rebels.

The Louisianans of Williams's brigade filed in behind the stone wall, as did the North Carolinians and Virginians of Steuart's brigade on their right. Williams's regiments on the front line were deployed left to right as follows: 10th Louisiana, 2nd Louisiana, and 15th Louisiana.³³ The other two regiments, the 1st Louisiana and the 14th Louisiana, were ordered to support artillery, which began to unlimber on a ridge east of the depot.³⁴ Johnson had brought three batteries attached to his division. Six guns unlimbered on the ridge, and two guns were incorporated into the front line.³⁵

The Federals' first instinct was to meet the Confederate challenge head-on. In the predawn darkness, the Yankees went from column to line of battle as quickly as possible. On the Federal right, Col. William Ely hurled his 2nd Brigade at Williams's brigade, but the Louisianans stood their ground.³⁶ Volleys of musket fire rang out in the dark night. Seeing the enemy was difficult, so troops on both sides corrected their initial fire by aiming at the muzzle flashes of the enemy.

On the Federal left, Brig. Gen. Washington El-liott's 1st Brigade also launched a frontal attack on Steuart's brigade, but it too was repulsed.³⁷ "The enemy came bravely on in our front, cheering and firing," wrote Lt. Randolph McKim, one of Steuart's aides. "Their fire passed for the most part over the heads of our infantry posted in the railroad cut."³⁸

The Yankees then launched a second attack, more desperate than the first, against the Confederate line. But the results were the same. "My infantry and artillery fired with such rapidity and effect as to repulse them with considerable loss," wrote Johnson.³⁹ At that point, Milroy assembled a flanking party composed of 600 infantry from Andrew McReynolds's 3rd Brigade and 300 horsemen of Colonel James Gallagher's 13th Pennsylvania Cavalry. Williams observed the Federals attempting to turn his flank and took immediate action. "Riding then to the front, I observed that the line of the enemy, which was moving on the [Martinsburg] pike, was changing direction so as to flank my left," Williams wrote.⁴⁰ Williams ordered Maj. Thomas Powell's 10th Louisiana and Lt. Col. Ross Burke's 2nd Louisiana, totaling together about 550 men, to move by the left flank and thwart the flank attack.⁴¹ To do this, Powell's 10th Louisiana would have to move at the double-quick to thwart the Federals. "After a race of about 200 yards we faced into line, jumped over a fence, fired into the enemy and charged them, completely routing them," wrote Capt. Henry Monier of the 10th Louisiana.⁴² To assist the detachment, Capt. Charles Raine's Lee Battery turned its guns to the south.⁴³ The artillery fire soon demoralized the flankers. By that point, the Louisianans had exhausted their ammunition, a potentially disastrous situation given that the ammunition wagons were seven miles behind the attacking force.⁴⁴ As if on cue, Walker's veteran brigade arrived, crossed

³¹ OR, 27.2:500–501.

³² OR, 27.2:500–501.

³³ OR, 27.2:512.

³⁴ Petruzzini and Stanley, *Gettysburg Campaign in Numbers and Losses*, 15.

³⁵ OR, 27.2:500–501.

³⁶ Petruzzini and Stanley, *Gettysburg Campaign in Numbers and Losses*, 15.

³⁷ Petruzzini and Stanley, *Gettysburg Campaign in Numbers and Losses*, 15.

³⁸ Randolph H. McKim, *A Soldier's Recollections: Leaves from the Diary of a Young Confederate with an Oration on the Motives and Aims of the Soldiers of the South*, electronic ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, 1999; reprint of 1910 book), 149.

³⁹ OR, 27.2:501.

⁴⁰ OR, 27.2:512.

⁴¹ Jones, *Lee's Tigers*, 162.

⁴² Napier Bartlett, *Military Record of Louisiana: Including Biographical and Historical Papers Relating to the Military Organizations of the State* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 46.

⁴³ OR, 27.2:501–502.

⁴⁴ OR, 27.2:501–502.

the railroad, and advanced on the Federals, firing strong volleys.⁴⁵

About two-thirds of Milroy's division escaped north across fields and farms, but Johnson's division captured 2,500 Yankees.⁴⁶ Of that number, the Louisianans rounded up about six hundred prisoners.⁴⁷ As for Williams's casualties, they numbered about fifteen killed and wounded. It was a good thing that Williams's losses were so light, because he would need every musket he could get for the difficult assignment awaiting his brigade at Gettysburg.

Johnson and his three brigadiers had reason to be proud of their achievement. The troops had been well managed at the division, brigade, and regimental levels in the fight at Stephenson's Depot. Lee spoke glowingly of Johnson's performance, mentioning specifically the 2nd and 10th Louisiana and their good work repulsing the attack on Johnson's left.⁴⁸ Lee concluded his report by stating, "The number of prisoners taken in this action exceeded the force engaged under General Johnson."⁴⁹

Williams's men remained in the lower Shenandoah Valley until June 18, when they tramped through Shepherdstown, crossed the Potomac River at Boteler's Ford, and bivouacked near Sharpsburg.⁵⁰ Johnson's division stayed in camp at Sharpsburg for five days while Ewell waited for Lee's other two corps to close up with his corps.⁵¹ On June 23 Johnson's corps resumed its march and the next day crossed the Mason-Dixon Line into Pennsylvania. The division continued north through the Cumberland Valley to Carlisle, where it arrived on June 27.⁵²

Lee initially had intended for Ewell's Second Corps to capture Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; but when he learned on June 28 that the Army of the Potomac, under its new commander Maj. Gen. George Meade, was at Frederick, Maryland, Lee issued orders cancelling the attack on Harrisburg.⁵³ Instead, Ewell was to counter march to Chambersburg. Lee revised his orders the morning of June 29. The revised orders instructed Ewell to march

south on the east side of South Mountain through Heidlersburg toward Gettysburg to prevent the Federals from reaching Cashtown Gap.⁵⁴ But Ewell did not receive those orders until late in the day. Since Johnson had already started south toward Shippensburg, Ewell sent orders for Alleghany to march southeast from Shippensburg and cross South Mountain at Cashtown Gap to rejoin the corps.⁵⁵

Having camped the night of June 30 at Scotland, Pennsylvania, Johnson's division marched east the next morning on the Cashtown Pike. When Johnson's men were held up behind Maj. Gen. Lafayette McLaws's division of Longstreet's First Corps, the matter of which division had the right of way went all the way up the chain of command. Lee ordered McLaws's division to step off the pike to allow Johnson's division to pass, and Allegheny's march continued.⁵⁶ Coupled with the circuitous route that Johnson took to Gettysburg, the delay would contribute to a tardy arrival on the first day of the Battle of Gettysburg that would have a profound effect on the outcome of the battle. "The last day's march was 25 miles, rendered the more fatiguing because of obstructions caused by wagons of Longstreet's corps," wrote Johnson.⁵⁷

Lee was with the First Corps, which was behind Johnson on the Cashtown Pike. The Confederate commander had sent, as was his style, discretionary orders to Ewell instructing the Second Corps commander in the wake of the rout of the Union First and Eleventh corps at midafternoon on July 1 in Gettysburg. The orders instructed Old Baldy to carry out a follow-up attack on Cemetery Hill south of the town "if he found it practicable"; but if it was not practicable, Ewell was to wait for the rest of the army to arrive at Gettysburg.⁵⁸ Feeling uncertain as to what to do, Ewell told Douglas to tell Johnson that when he "got well to the front to wait for orders."⁵⁹

After a brief meeting with Ewell, Johnson led his division east along the unfinished cut of the Gettysburg–York Railroad to a position in an open

⁴⁵ OR, 27.2:501–502.

⁴⁶ OR, 27.2:501–502.

⁴⁷ Jones, *Lee's Tigers*, 148.

⁴⁸ OR, 27.2:314.

⁴⁹ OR, 27.2:314.

⁵⁰ OR, 27.2:503; Henry Kyd Douglas, *I Rode with Stonewall* (St. Simons Island, GA: Mockingbird Press, 1979), 235.

⁵¹ Clemmer, *Old Alleghany*, 454.

⁵² Clemmer, *Old Alleghany*, 458; Bartlett, *Military Record of Louisiana*, 46.

⁵³ Sears, *Gettysburg*, 134.

⁵⁴ Sears, *Gettysburg*, 134.

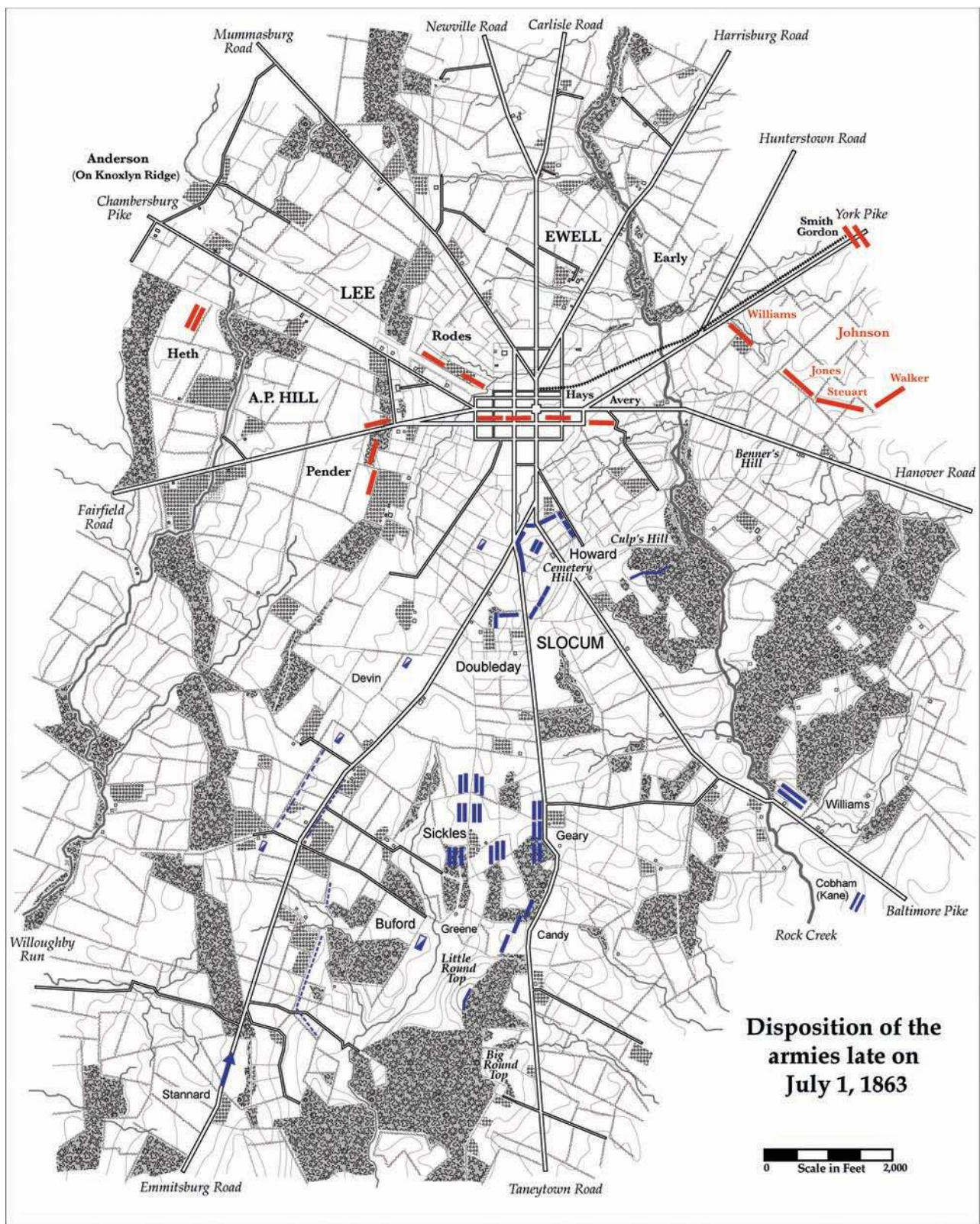
⁵⁵ Clemmer, *Old Alleghany*, 459; Sears, *Gettysburg*, 134.

⁵⁶ Clemmer, *Old Alleghany*, 461.

⁵⁷ OR, 27.2:504.

⁵⁸ Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 315.

⁵⁹ Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 272.



The alignment of forces on the evening of July 1. Courtesy of Phil Laino.

field north of the Hanover Road facing Culp's Hill, which lay east of Cemetery Hill and was connected to it by a low ridge.⁶⁰ "Our division reached Gettysburg about 5 p.m. passing by the town we learned Hay's Brigade had engaged the enemy and driven them through the streets toward Cemetery Hill," wrote Lt. Col. David Zable, the commander of the 14th Louisiana Infantry of Nicholls's brigade, Johnson's division. "As we arrived at our position at about 6 p.m. there was still quite two hours of daylight. We thought it strange that we were not taken into action at once having learned the success of the other divisions in our corps."⁶¹

Before Johnson's division arrived, Ewell had ordered two members of his staff—Lt. Thomas T. Turner and Lt. Robert D. Early (the general's cousin)—to scout Culp's Hill to see whether the Federals had occupied it.⁶² The two scouts found the hill unoccupied and reported their findings to Ewell. Just how much of the hill they scouted is suspect, because Brig. Gen. Solomon Meredith's Iron Brigade of the Union First Corps had marched up to the crest in the late afternoon with orders to hold it.⁶³ But it's possible that the pair left the hill just as the Iron Brigade was ascending it.⁶⁴

Lee wanted Ewell to shift to the Confederate right toward the south of Gettysburg, but Ewell vehemently objected, on the grounds that his men would be giving up ground they had captured, which he believed would be demoralizing.⁶⁵ By allowing Ewell to remain north of Gettysburg, Lee ensured that the second day of the battle would get off to a bad start. That's because the Second Corps was positioned on poor ground for offensive operations. Colonel E. P. Alexander, who led an artillery battalion in Longstreet's First Corps and was an excellent judge of terrain, summed it up best in his memoirs. Ewell had "no reasonable probability of . . . accomplishing any

good on the enemy's line in his front [because part of it was] almost unassailable."⁶⁶

After conferring with Lee, Ewell returned to his headquarters at 11:00 p.m. He promptly sent orders to Johnson to occupy Culp's Hill that night. Johnson had anticipated the request and, even before receiving the orders, had sent a twenty-man squad from Brig. Gen. John M. Jones's brigade to reconnoiter Culp's Hill as a preliminary step to a larger movement.⁶⁷ But by that time, Brig. Gen. Lysander Cutler's brigade (the other brigade of Brig. Gen. James Wadsworth's First Division of the Union First Corps) had joined the Iron Brigade atop Culp's Hill. Cutler's brigade easily drove off the small group of rebels.⁶⁸ Johnson gave Ewell the bad news the following morning: Union troops had firm control of Culp's Hill.

Maj. Gen. Henry W. Slocum's Twelfth Corps arrived on Culp's Hill the following morning. Brig. Gen. John W. Geary's Second Division of the Twelfth Corps extended the Union line southeast to Spangler's Spring to prevent a flanking move.⁶⁹ The job of Wadsworth's division was to defend against an attack on Culp's Hill from the north, and Brig. Gen. John W. Geary's Second Division of the Twelfth Corps was to defend against an attack from the east. Holding the highest part on Upper Culp's Hill was sixty-three-year-old Brig. Gen. George S. "Pop" Greene's Third Brigade, which was composed of five New York regiments totaling 1,421 muskets.⁷⁰ Greene's left flank adjoined Cutler's brigade.

Greene received permission from Geary for his men to entrench along the eastern crest of the heavily wooded ridge.⁷¹ A West Point graduate, Greene had been employed as a civil engineer for twenty-five years after retiring from military service.⁷² Greene closely supervised the construction of the breastworks. The Yankee felled trees and snatched cord wood and fence rails from the Spangler farm.⁷³

60 Clemmer, *Old Alleghany*, 465.

61 David Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, Reminiscences subseries, Civil War Papers, Louisiana Historical Association Collection, Louisiana Research Collection, Tulane University, 2.

62 Sears, *Gettysburg*, 229; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 79.

63 Sears, *Gettysburg*, 229. Union Second Corps Maj. Gen. Winfield Hancock astutely observed that Culp's Hill was important to hold and ordered it occupied shortly after he arrived at 4:00 p.m.

64 Sears, *Gettysburg*, 229; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 79. Sears suggests the two Confederate scouts did not see the Union soldiers atop Culp's Hill either because of the thick tree cover or because they went up the hill just before the soldiers of the Iron Brigade arrived. Pfanz holds that the two scouts reconnoitered the hill after the Iron Brigade arrived, giving credence to the theory that they were on a different part of the hill.

65 Coddington, *Gettysburg Campaign*, 364.

66 Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personnel Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander*, ed. Gary Gallagher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 234.

67 Coddington, *Gettysburg Campaign*, 367.

68 *OR*, 27.1:285.

69 Sears, *Gettysburg*, 325.

70 John Busey and David G. Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg*, 4th ed. (Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House, 1982), 278–82.

71 Thomas L. Elmore, "Courage against the Trenches: The Attack and Repulse of Steuart's Brigade on Culp's Hill," *Gettysburg Magazine*, no. 7, July 1992, 83–85; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 114; Sears, *Gettysburg*, 325.

72 Sears, *Gettysburg*, 325.

73 *OR*, 27.1:856.



Culp's Hill seen from Cemetery Hill in 1863. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Where possible, the infantrymen incorporated boulders and rock outcroppings that dotted the hill into their log breastworks, which they called “pits.”⁷⁴ Greene’s line extended about four hundred yards south to the northern end of the connecting saddle.⁷⁵ Even though at the time another brigade deployed on his right, Greene had the foresight to build a short breastwork at a right angle (a traverse) to the main line on his right flank overlooking a saddle that connected Upper Culp’s Hill to a knoll known as Lower Culp’s Hill.⁷⁶ Greene was keenly satisfied with his men’s work. “By 12 o’clock we had a good cover for the men.”⁷⁷

Brig. Gen. Thomas L. Kane’s Second Brigade extended the Twelfth Corps line across the saddle and onto Lower Culp’s Hill.⁷⁸ Other units of the Twelfth Corps took up positions behind Greene and Kane and occupied low ground south of Spangler’s Spring

in McAllister’s Woods.⁷⁹ To the north, Johnson’s Confederates listened intently to the sounds of the Union infantry to their south felling trees with axes.⁸⁰ The sound was unsettling. “Twelve hours time had been given to the Federal forces to prepare for our assault—they made good use of their time,” wrote Zable.⁸¹

Lee planned on July 2 for Longstreet to launch a major attack against the Union left supported by Lt. Gen. A. P. Hill’s Third Corps. In an effort to prevent the Union high command from shifting troops from its right flank to its left flank, Lee ordered Ewell to “make a demonstration upon the enemy right, to be converted into a real attack should the opportunity offer.”⁸² A major assault that seized Culp’s Hill might force the Union army to abandon Cemetery Hill or, even better, cut a swath through the Union lines to link up with Longstreet.⁸³

⁷⁴ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 211.

⁷⁵ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 211.

⁷⁶ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 211.

⁷⁷ *OR*, 27.1:856.

⁷⁸ Elmore, “Courage against the Trenches,” 85.

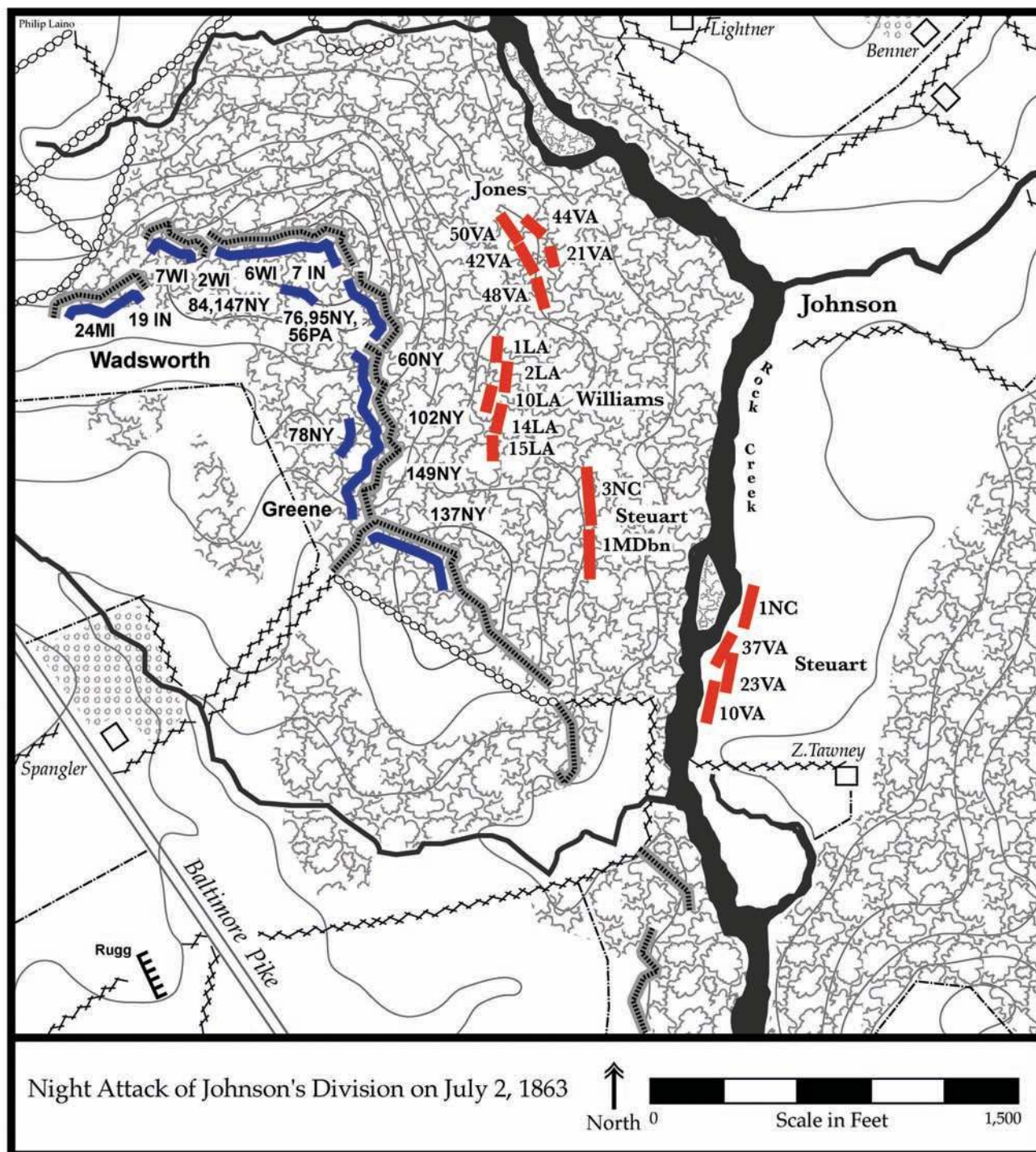
⁷⁹ Elmore, “Courage against the Trenches,” 85.

⁸⁰ Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, 2.

⁸¹ Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, 2.

⁸² *OR*, 27.2:314.

⁸³ Glenn Tucker, *High Tide at Gettysburg* (Dayton, OH: Morningside Books, 1983), 303; John D. Cox, *Culp’s Hill: The Attack and Defense of the Union Flank, July 2, 1863* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1983), 42–43.



The attack on Culp's Hill, July 2. Courtesy of Phil Laino.

Lee hoped Longstreet would be able to launch his attack in the morning, but he was not ready to begin until 4:00 p.m. Ewell's attack began with an ill-conceived artillery demonstration at 4:00 p.m. Over the course of the next hour, nineteen-year-old Maj. John W. Latimer, commanding Maj. Richard Snowden Andrews's artillery battalion, waged an uneven contest against superior artillery forces on the Union right flank. Latimer's guns were crammed together on Benner's Hill, and they had to stand up against Federal guns positioned on higher ground at East Cemetery Hill, as well as against additional supporting guns on Stevens's Knoll and Culp's Hill. The Union guns were able to bring converging fire to bear on Benner's Hill, whereas the Confederate guns had to shell widely dispersed positions from one location.⁸⁴ As he was supervising the withdrawal of the battalion's guns, Latimer was mortally wounded. It was a bad omen.

Ewell planned to launch infantry attacks in echelon with each of his divisions that evening, moving from left to right (west to east) beginning with Johnson.⁸⁵ Alleghany had surveyed Culp's Hill and he believed it was a challenging tactical objective. Culp's Hill was "a rugged and rocky mountain" that served the enemy as "a natural fortification," wrote Johnson.⁸⁶

Johnson issued orders at 6:00 p.m. for a general advance against Culp's Hill. Alleghany intended to attack with all four of his brigades. But one would fail to participate. Brig. Gen. James Walker had become bogged down as the day progressed in a heavy skirmish with Union infantry and cavalry. Johnson told him to break off the fighting as soon as practicable and join the attack on Culp's Hill, but Walker used poor judgment and followed too late to participate. It was a costly mistake that weakened Johnson's attack.⁸⁷

The three brigades that participated in the night attack—Jones, Williams, and Steuart—gave Johnson a total strength of 4,678 men.⁸⁸ Johnson ordered Jones to advance once Williams had formed his brigade on Jones's left. A lull occurred in the fight-

ing while Williams and Steuart's brigades marched south to the staging area on the east bank of Rock Creek to join Jones's brigade, which Johnson already had advanced to support Latimer's artillery on Benner's Hill. Johnson's attack began at 7:00 p.m. when his advancing lines of infantry drove the Federal skirmishers across Rock Creek.⁸⁹

Working to Johnson's advantage, Meade at 6:00 p.m. ordered all but Greene's Third Brigade of the Twelfth Corps to march to the support of the Federal left, which had been weakened by Longstreet's attack. When Kane's brigade on Greene's left pulled out, Greene sent Lt. Col. Herbert von Hammerstein's 78th Regiment over the hill as skirmishers at 6:00 p.m. to replace the 28th Pennsylvania, which belonged to one of the brigades scheduled to march to the Federal left. Greene ordered his regiments to shift to the right. Deployed left to right (north to south) were the 60th, 102nd, 149th, and 137th New York Regiments. Once the battle began and the skirmishers had returned to the main line, the 78th New York would take up a position behind the 102nd New York to assist it as needed. Col. David Ireland's 137th New York on the right flank filed into the saddle between Upper and Lower Culp's Hill.⁹⁰

No Union troops were available to occupy Lower Culp's Hill, and those pits were unoccupied as the Confederate assault began. Greene could only stretch his line so much. Normally, entrenched troops were shoulder to shoulder, but Greene decided that he would break regulation and have his men stationed a foot apart. However, Pop deemed it impractical to try to extend his line south to McAllister's Woods, because that would have meant four feet between each man, which was akin to a skirmish line.⁹¹

As for Johnson's division, Jones held the right, Williams the center, and Steuart the left.⁹² The tempo of the musket fire quickened after Johnson's infantry crossed Rock Creek just before 7:00 p.m. and drove the Yankee skirmishers up the slope to-

⁸⁹ Cox, *Culp's Hill*, 117.

⁹⁰ OR, 27.1:856, 865; David Cleutz, *Fields of Fame and Glory: Col. David Ireland and the 137th New York Volunteers* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010), 144; Sears, *Gettysburg*, 326. The 78th had been on Greene's left before Greene ordered it forward for skirmishing. Capt. Lewis Stegman in his battle report says that when the 78th returned, it formed behind the regiment's right wing. Some sources indicate that the 78th was positioned between the 102nd and the 149th when it returned.

⁹¹ Tucker, *High Tide at Gettysburg*, 303.

⁹² Sears, *Gettysburg*, 327–28.

⁸⁴ Coddington, *Gettysburg Campaign*, 429; Bradley M. Gottfried, *The Artillery of Gettysburg* (Nashville, TN: Cumberland House, 2008), 162.

⁸⁵ Sears, *Gettysburg*, 326.

⁸⁶ OR, 27.2:504.

⁸⁷ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 167; Clemmer, *Old Alleghany*, 475.

⁸⁸ Busey and Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses*, 278–82.



Attack on Culp's Hill as sketched by Edwin Forbes. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

ward their main line at the crest of the hill. Atop the hill, the Yankees peered into the gloaming as Jones's and Williams's men, who had a shorter distance to traverse to reach the Federal line than Stuart's brigade, pushed steadily up the hill, screaming the blood-curdling rebel yell. When all the Yankee skirmishers had made it back to the main line and the rebels were within eighty yards, the Federal officers gave the order to fire. "Out into the murky night like chain-lightning leap[ed] the zig-zag line of fire," wrote Capt. Jesse H. Jones, Company I, 60th New York.⁹³

Jones's brigade of six Virginia regiments numbered 1,453 men.⁹⁴ The men on Jones's right had to ascend a steep hill to reach the federal breastworks. Their task was slightly less daunting than that facing the left side of Jones's line. The Virginians on the left of Jones's line had to first pick their way over a knoll full of rocks that rose like blisters from the tortured terrain and then had to descend into a dip and make an even steeper climb uphill.⁹⁵ Jones's attack faltered on the left, and Jones rushed over to sort it

out. While Jones tried to straighten alignments, a minié ball struck his thigh. Bleeding profusely, he was carried to the rear.⁹⁶

At one point, the Virginians on the far right almost reached the breastworks, but they were driven back by steady fire.⁹⁷ Jones's Virginians fought determinedly against Col. Abel Godard's 60th New York, which anchored Greene's left flank. The fortresslike nature of the ground in front of the 60th New York intimidated the Virginians. The terrain was so steep in some places that it "could scarcely be surmounted without scaling-ladders," wrote Capt. Thomas Buckner of the 44th Virginia.⁹⁸

The Virginians hurled themselves three times at the 60th New York, but each attack was repulsed by heavy fire from the breastworks. Afterward, the Virginians withdrew to a line three hundred yards from the Union position.⁹⁹

As soon as he realized that a major Confederate attack was under way, Greene requested assistance from the First and Eleventh Corps. As many as seven regiments (6th Wisconsin, 84th New York, 147th New York, 61st Ohio, 45th New York, 157th New

⁹³ Bradley M. Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo, 2002), 566; Jesse H. Jones, "Saved the Day: Greene's Brigade Behaves Nobly at Gettysburg," *National Tribune*, March 7, 1895.

⁹⁴ Busey and Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses*, 278–82.

⁹⁵ John M. Archer, *Culp's Hill at Gettysburg: The Mountain Trembled* (Gettysburg, PA: Ten Roads, 2011), 46.

⁹⁶ OR, 27.2:532.

⁹⁷ OR, 27.2:539.

⁹⁸ OR, 27.2:538.

⁹⁹ OR, 27.2:533.

York, and 82nd Illinois) responded.¹⁰⁰ Most of these regiments were well under strength, having been in the thick of the action on the first day of the battle. Some supported Greene's left wing by augmenting or relieving his regiments on Upper Culp's Hill, while others were directed to assist Greene's vulnerable right flank in the saddle.¹⁰¹

The 1,104 men of Williams's brigade made their way uphill against the center of Greene's brigade.¹⁰² They went into action against Col. James Lane's 102nd New York on their right and part of Col. Henry Barnum's 149th New York on their left.¹⁰³

Williams's brigade was deployed right to left (north to south) as follows: 1st, 2nd, 10th, 14th, and 15th Regiments.¹⁰⁴ These were confident veterans. Some of them had stormed Malvern Hill in the face of murderous artillery fire. They had thrown stones at the Yankees, rather than retreat, at Second Manassas when they ran out of ammunition. They would do their duty that night, regardless of how daunting the task.

The New Yorkers in the center of Greene's line braced for the attack. "The blaze of fire which lighted up the darkness of the valley below us; the desperate charging yell and halloo of the rebel troops, convinced us of an immediate engagement," wrote Capt. Lewis Stegman of the 102nd New York.¹⁰⁵ The Louisianans advanced, "yelping and howling in their peculiar manner," wrote Capt. George K. Collins of the 149th New York.¹⁰⁶

Nightfall had descended abruptly under the thick canopy of oak and hickory. Large boulders interrupted the Louisianans' regimental alignments; and exposed roots and rock outcroppings, which were impossible to see in the dark, made the men trip and stumble as they steadily made their way uphill.¹⁰⁷ At the outset, Lt. Col. Michael Nolan leading the 1st Louisiana was shot dead. He was replaced by Capt. Edward Willett, who rallied the right flank

regiment and led it forward again.¹⁰⁸ All along the line, the Louisianans struggled through the woods up the steep slope in a determined effort to blast or fight their way into the Federal pits. "With a yell our men rushed forward as best they could up a steep hill side over rocks and through the timber up to the enemy's line of works," wrote Zable.¹⁰⁹

Over the course of the next four hours, the Louisianans made four major assaults against the Federal works on their front. Between charges, they maintained a steady rate of fire from behind trees, boulders, and ledges to weaken the Yankee line before the next assault. Some even fired prone from behind the bodies of fallen comrades. The brigade maintained "an almost incessant fire for four hours," wrote Williams.¹¹⁰

Although there are at least two accounts by Louisiana soldiers that maintain that the brigade fought its way inside the Federal breastworks for a brief time, these claims are not substantiated in the regimental, brigade, or division reports by either side.¹¹¹ Therefore, it is unlikely that there was hand-to-hand fighting in the pits.

Two officers from the 14th Louisiana maintain in their memoirs that the Louisianans got over the Federal breastworks temporarily. Zable said, "The right of our line—the First Louisiana—penetrated their entrenchments, but owing to the conformation of the hill, and the angle of the Federal line, our troops became massed upon the center and our efforts to dislodge the enemy failed."¹¹²

Capt. Nathan Rawling states that the 14th Louisiana, in which he fought, penetrated the breastworks in the final charge. The hand-to-hand fighting at the breastworks by the 14th Louisiana was of a desperate nature involving the use of bayonets, according

¹⁰⁰ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 213–14.

¹⁰¹ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 213–14.

¹⁰² Busey and Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses*, 278–82.

¹⁰³ Cox, *Culp's Hill*, 122.

¹⁰⁴ Philip Laino, *Gettysburg Campaign Atlas* (Dayton, OH: Gatehouse Press, 2009), 269; Petruzzi and Stanley, *Gettysburg Campaign in Numbers and Losses*, 94. Petruzzi and Stanley offer a different alignment for Nicholls's brigade. They believe the 1st, 2nd, and 10th Louisiana Regiments constituted the first line and the 14th and 15th Louisiana Regiments were in a second line.

¹⁰⁵ OR, 27:1:865.

¹⁰⁶ George K. Collins, *Memoirs of the 149th N.Y. Infantry* (Syracuse, NY: printed by author, 1891), 138.

¹⁰⁷ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 216.

¹⁰⁸ Clemmer, *Old Alleghany*, 476.

¹⁰⁹ Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, 3.

¹¹⁰ OR, 27:2:513.

¹¹¹ See Archer, *Culp's Hill*, 60; Cox, *Culp's Hill*, 123–27; Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg*, 559; Jones, *Lee's Tigers*, 170; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 216. The group of historians writing about Culp's Hill is divided over the issue of whether Nicholls's brigade briefly breached the Union line in the sector where it attacked. The absence of battle reports for Gettysburg from the regimental commanders of Nicholls's brigade greatly complicates the matter of determining whether the Louisianans temporarily breached Greene's line on the crest of Culp's Hill. Historians Gottfried and Jones accept that the 1st Louisiana, based on Zable's reminiscences, did breach the Union line. Pfanz holds that they did not. Cox says, "Although it is possible, it is unlikely." Archer concedes that "they may well have" breached Greene's line but trenchantly observes there is no mention of it in the Federal battle reports. Furthermore, Colonel Williams does not mention it in his report.

¹¹² Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, 3.

to Rawling. "Three times we charged the breastworks and were repulsed, but the fourth time we succeeded after a heroic struggle and a loss of many men," wrote Rawling.¹¹³ "I was shot in the leg and bayoneted in the left breast," he continued. "I don't know how I got out of the breastworks, but the next morning I was in the [woods] with a number of other wounded men."

What likely accounts for these contentions is the wounded pride of the Louisianans, who gave everything they had in the attack on the breastworks but were repulsed like Jones's Virginians. Another explanation is that a melee might have occurred between the Louisianans and the New Yorkers when Greene's men sallied forth to capture colors and prisoners just outside the pits.

Even though they tried desperately, the majority of Williams's troops got no closer than forty yards of the Federal works, owing to the severe musket fire.¹¹⁴ "Several attempts to carry the works by assault . . . were attended with more loss than success," wrote Williams.¹¹⁵ In his battle report, Williams undiplomatically accused Jones's brigade of not supporting his brigade's attack, probably because Lt. Col. Robert Dungan, who took command of Jones's brigade after its commander was wounded, broke off his attack an hour before the Louisianans.¹¹⁶

Rather than pull back a safe distance down the hillside, Williams kept his men close to the Federal works. He issued an order for his men to seek cover and lie down. "We did so, securing positions behind numerous rocks to be found on the side of the mountain," wrote W. G. Lloyd of the 2nd Louisiana.¹¹⁷ In some places, the Louisianans were so close to the breastworks that they had to speak in whispers so as not to give away their position, according to Zable.¹¹⁸ Although the rate of fire decreased, intermittent firing continued deep into the night. Brave souls among the Louisianans who survived the whirlwind of musketry that swept the slopes that evening risked their lives combing the hillside in the darkness after the battle died down in search

of wounded in need of attention. Just as the firing began to die down at 11:00 p.m. and Lloyd had positioned himself behind a rock, he was struck in the right leg below the knee by a Federal minie ball. A couple of friends escorted him to the bank of Rock Creek, where many of the Confederate wounded were carried for first aid or transfer to a hospital.¹¹⁹

One episode is representative of the severity of wounds suffered by some of the Louisianans. Twenty-four-year-old Lt. Charles Batchelor, who commanded Company E, 2nd Louisiana Volunteers, wandered through the woods looking for wounded men in his company and especially for his eighteen-year-old brother, Albert. After sending several walking wounded to the rear, Charles found his brother bleeding from wounds to the face and leg. A bullet that struck Albert in his left cheek and exited his right temple left a ghastly wound.¹²⁰ "Poor fellow, it was his first fight and he made me proud of him," Charles wrote to family. "It was about 8 o'clock at night when [Albert] received his wound and laid under a heavy fire until the firing ceased at 11 o'clock."¹²¹

Charles summoned a captain from an adjacent company, and together the two men carried Albert six hundred yards through the dark woods in search of an aide to take him to a hospital. "Finally the ambulance corps came," Charles wrote. "Taking him in my arms, I assisted him in the stretcher dropping a tear of grief upon his bleeding face as I bade him goodbye and returned to the field to take command of my company."¹²²

Surprisingly, Albert survived his wounds and died at the age of sixty in 1905.¹²³

What neither Jones's Virginians nor Williams's Louisianans could accomplish, Steuart's men were able to achieve because of the withdrawal of Kane's brigade to assist the hard-pressed Union left flank. Although the two regiments on the right of Steuart's line, the 3rd North Carolina and the 1st Maryland Battalion, were pinned down in a severe crossfire from the 149th and 137th New York

113 "Account of Captain Nathan Rawling," drawer 7, file 7-LA14, Vertical File, Gettysburg National Military Park, Gettysburg, PA, cited in Archer, *Culp's Hill*, 60.

114 Jones, *Lee's Tigers*, 170.

115 OR, 27.2:513.

116 OR, 27.2:513.

117 W. G. Lloyd, "Second Louisiana at Gettysburg," *Confederate Veteran*, no. 6 (1898), 417.

118 Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, 3.

119 Lloyd, "Second Louisiana at Gettysburg," 417.

120 Charles Batchelor to James Batchelor, August 6, 1863, Albert A. Batchelor Papers, Mss 919, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, LA.

121 Charles Batchelor to James Batchelor, August 6, 1863.

122 Charles Batchelor to James Batchelor, August 6, 1863.

123 Jones, *Lee's Tigers*, 171; Pauline Bizette Brandy and D. N. Pardue, records of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church cemetery, Innis, LA, on USGenWeb Archives, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/la/pointcoupee/cemeteries/ststeve.txt>.

Regiments, the three regiments on the left had the good fortune of finding the Federal pits on Lower Culp's Hill empty.¹²⁴

After occupying the empty entrenchments, Steuart's left wing attacked the 137th New York's flank. After a desperate fight in the black of night, Ireland's New Yorkers retreated to the traverse wall that Greene had ordered constructed on the north end of the saddle.¹²⁵ Helping to blunt the flank attack against Ireland were the 6th Wisconsin and the 84th New York (14th Brooklyn).¹²⁶ Greene directed the two regiments to Ireland's aid, and the Yankees from those regiments ran down the south slope of Upper Culp's Hill just in time to help Ireland's men repulse Steuart's troops. When Geary's division and Brig. Gen. Thomas Ruger's division began returning to the Spangler farm area at 11:00 p.m., they exchanged fire with Steuart's men.¹²⁷ With this development, Steuart broke off his attack for the night.

Ewell planned to resume the attack the following morning. He designated three additional brigades from his other divisions to reinforce or, if necessary, relieve those brigades already engaged.¹²⁸ During the night, Walker's brigade finally arrived in the area. The other brigades would arrive at 7:00 a.m.¹²⁹

The Louisianans renewed their attack on the Federal breastworks shortly before dawn on July 3. "It was decided . . . that our best plan to mask our weakness would be to open fire on the enemy before daylight in the morning so as to cause them to believe that we were about to make another effort to capture their works," wrote Zable.¹³⁰

Moving through Williams's brigade to attack Greene's center was Col. Edward O'Neal's brigade of Maj. Gen. Robert Rodes's division. Most of Williams's men had found decent cover during the night, and they watched in horror as the Federal musketry felled large numbers of O'Neal's Alabam-

ians as they advanced up the slope at 8:00 a.m.¹³¹ Smoke engulfed the hillside, making it difficult for both sides to see the exact location of the enemy despite the sunlight. As four fresh brigades joined the fight, the firing became so loud that "it was useless to attempt to give command unless shouted into the men's ears," wrote Zable.¹³² The Alabamians were exposed to "a terrific fire" as they assaulted Greene's breastworks, wrote O'Neal.¹³³ Having no more success than Williams's Louisianans, the Alabamians broke off their attack after three hours.

Johnson issued orders at 1:00 p.m. for his brigades to begin pulling back to Rock Creek; at the same time, Confederate artillery on the opposite side of the battlefield began bombarding Cemetery Ridge to soften up the enemy before an attack on the Union center at Cemetery Ridge.¹³⁴ The best chance Ewell's Second Corps had for success on its front that morning had been with Johnson's reinforced division. But Steuart's brigade was cut to pieces in its suicidal charge across Pardee's Field, which was adjacent to Lower Culp's Hill. Steuart's advance was doomed in large part because his position was shelled by five unopposed Federal batteries positioned to the west and south.¹³⁵

Williams's brigade, which numbered 1,104 present for duty at Gettysburg, lost 389 men killed, wounded, or captured, amounting to a 35 percent loss.¹³⁶ Of the 6,366 men of Johnson's division that fought against the Union right flank, 2,005 were killed, wounded, or captured, amounting to 31 percent of its forces engaged.¹³⁷

The men in the gray ranks were embittered by what they deemed as Johnson's failure to find a way around the Federals rather than launching costly frontal attacks against a heavily fortified position. They blamed Alleghany for not realizing once the fighting began the night of July 2 that the attack was doomed to failure and recommending

124 Cleutz, *Fields of Fame and Glory*, 149; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 217; Sears, *Gettysburg*, 328.

125 Cleutz, *Fields of Fame and Glory*, 149–50. Ireland's right flank was held by Companies A and F.

126 Elmore, "Courage against the Trenches," 88.

127 Elmore, "Courage against the Trenches," 88.

128 Donald C. Pfanz, *Richard S. Ewell: A Soldier's Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 319. On July 3 Johnson's heavily reinforced division equalled three-quarters of the force that would attack Cemetery Ridge later in the day.

129 Jeffrey D. Wert, *Gettysburg: Day Three* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 60.

130 Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, 3.

131 Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, 3.

132 Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, 3.

133 *OR*, 27.2:314.

134 Coddington, *Gettysburg Campaign*, 475; Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 354. In the absence of any Confederate record of exactly when Johnson ordered his troops to pull back from Culp's Hill, Union reports state the Confederates abandoned their positions at 1:00 p.m.

135 Sears, *Gettysburg*, 361.

136 Busey and Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses*, 278–82.

137 Busey and Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses*, 278–82.



The devastation of the intense musketry can clearly be seen in this photograph taken on Culp's Hill. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

to Ewell that he call it off.¹³⁸ But that simply was not Johnson's style. A fighter by nature, Johnson did not give up easily.

As military engineer Alexander said afterward, Culp's Hill was "unassailable." The rugged terrain on both sides of Rock Creek prevented a wide flank-

ing move around the Union right.¹³⁹ What is more, the heavily wooded, boulder-studded east slope of Culp's Hill made coordinated attacks against the Federal position on the crest of the hill impossible. If the Union position had lacked entrenchments or if the troops defending it—particularly Greene's

¹³⁸ Tagg, *Generals of Gettysburg*, 270. The men of the Stonewall Division did not like Johnson because of his stern nature and his inclination for head-to-head fighting rather than maneuvering.

¹³⁹ Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy*, 234–35. "The ground is still there for any military engineer to pronounce whether or not Ewell's corps and all its artillery was not practically paralyzed and useless by its position during the last two days of the battle," wrote Alexander.

brigade—had not been well led, the results might have been different. But as it stood, the pits were a marvel of construction, and Greene’s leadership instilled confidence in his men. When the majority of the units in the Twelfth Corps returned to the area and artillery was designated for their support, the fresh Confederate brigades were heavily outgunned.

Williams performed well. There was no criticism of him, although he showed a lack of decorum by openly criticizing Jones’s brigade in his report.¹⁴⁰ Johnson praised the performance of his officers and men. His brigades had attacked with “great vigor and spirit,” wrote Johnson of the July 2 night attack. His division’s attack that night was “as successful as could have been expected considering the superiority of the enemy force and position,” he wrote.¹⁴¹

On the whole, Johnson’s three brigades had performed well in the night fighting. Darkness offered advantages to both sides. For the Union troops, it broke up the cohesion of the Confederate brigade attacks and made it difficult for the regiments with-

¹⁴⁰ OR, 27.2:513. Williams wrote that his brigade’s assaults were “entirely unsupported on the right” by Jones’s brigade.

¹⁴¹ OR, 27.2:504.

in those brigades to coordinate with each other.¹⁴² But at the same time, the darkness made it difficult for the Union riflemen to see their targets. Another downside for the Confederates was that the night fighting produced friendly fire casualties among Stuart’s brigade.¹⁴³

Just before dawn on July 4, Johnson ordered his units to cross Rock Creek. The long retreat from Gettysburg had begun. When the Louisianians reached the banks of the Potomac River, Zable wrote, “No objection was made to our returning to Old Virginia.”¹⁴⁴

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¹⁴² Archer, *Culp’s Hill*, 45. In the woods where large boulders were strewn, “the neat ranks gave way to ragged lines and separated regiments,” writes Archer.

¹⁴³ Elmore, “Courage against the Trenches,” 86. The 1st North Carolina of Stuart’s Brigade, when moving forward from its reserve position to support the 3rd North Carolina and 1st Maryland, mistakenly fired into the backs of the Marylanders.

¹⁴⁴ Zable, untitled paper on Gettysburg, 5.