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# “Show Them Your Colors!”

The 1st Delaware Volunteers and the Gettysburg Campaign

JEFFREY BIGGS

As the Confederate artillery opened fire along Cemetery Ridge on the afternoon of July 3, the 219 officers and men of the 1st Delaware—located just to the right and only yards away from the focal point of the Copse of Trees—desperately hugged the ground, seeking any cover or advantage that the well-trod earth could provide. While the cannon fire slackened and the butternut Confederate infantry under Gen. J. Johnston Pettigrew advanced toward the Federal lines from the distant wood line nearly a mile away, the Delawareans could not help but feel that they alone were the unluckiest of all regiments on that hot Pennsylvania field—as if the gods of war themselves had deemed in some red-lined war ledger that these slave-state volunteers must pay a larger cost than others for every drop of blood drawn with the lash. For better or worse, the 1st Delaware seemed to always be found at the worst possible position, at the worst possible moment, on the worst of all Civil War battlefields.

Under the command of its first colonel, John W. Andrews, a wealthy New Castle gentleman farmer, the regiment saw no significant military action in its first year of service as a three-year regiment. Until September 1862 the Delawareans would see only garrison duty in the various points like Havre de Grace, Camp Hamilton near Fort Monroe, Norfolk, and Suffolk. Recruited throughout the summer of 1861 in all three counties of the tiny border state, many of the soldiers had reenlisted from a three-month Delaware regiment recruited in April 1861 under the command of the West Pointer Henry Lockwood. Promoted to brigadier general in August 1861, Lockwood later served in a number of

department posts and briefly led a brigade in the Twelfth Corps during the fight on Culp’s Hill.

The Delaware regiment’s opportunity to prove its loyalty would come as George McClellan cobbled together a fighting force to pursue the Army of Northern Virginia as it crossed the Potomac following the defeat of John Pope’s army at Second Bull Run. Recalled from garrison duty at Suffolk, Virginia, on September 9, the regiment was attached to the Army of the Potomac’s Second Corps, commanded by William “Bull” Sumner. On September 17, 1862, during the regiment’s baptism under fire, the 1st Delaware was on the right flank of William French’s first line of attack on the Sunken Road at Antietam. Ordered to advance with fixed bayonets and without the cover of skirmishers, the regiment was devastated from a well-timed volley from Confederate arms at a distance of only fifty yards. Fire coming from the rear from an inexperienced Connecticut regiment and from the front by Col. John B. Gordon’s Georgia regiment hidden behind the natural trench of a dug-out farm lane, the 1st Delaware soldiers were nearly destroyed in a hailstorm of fire from all directions. After the hairbreadth recovery of their regimental colors, a handful of survivors under the leadership of third-in-command Maj. Thomas Smyth managed to regain some semblance of order and to support a nearby Rhode Island battery pounding away at the Confederates in the Sunken Road. The 1st Delaware’s first battlefield experience was shocking; the killed and mortally wounded equaled fifty-six with over 40 percent total casualties.<sup>1</sup>

The regiment fared little better three months lat-

<sup>1</sup> William J. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War, 1861–1865* (Albany, 1898), 306–7; William Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers* (Wilmington, DE, 1884), 48.



Col. Thomas Alfred Smyth. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

er on the plains opposite of Fredericksburg. Once again, the 1st Delaware seemed to draw the short straw of the lot; it was detached from the 3rd Brigade, now under the command of John Andrews, and assigned temporarily to Gen. Nathan Kimball's Gibraltar Brigade. As part of the first wave of attacks on Marye's Heights, the 1st Delaware along with two Ohio regiments were ordered to "deploy as skirmishers, and lead the advance on the enemy's works."<sup>2</sup> The combination of double canister fire from atop Marye's Heights and belching musketry left the ground a virtual killing field mixed with Ohio and Delaware troops. Left unsupported for nearly an hour, some clung to a stagnant canal while others dug into a slight ripple in the ground opposite the Confederate forces; the men were forced to remain prone on the ground until the dark of night, which "allowed the regiment to escape from its hazardous situation and fall back to town."<sup>3</sup> The butcher's bill for the 1st Delaware was again in triple digits—one hundred casualties, including twenty-two killed or mortally wounded.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 57.

<sup>3</sup> Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 57.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Augustin O'Reilly, *The Fredericksburg Campaign: Winter War on the Rappahannock* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 251; Fox, *Regimental Losses*, 307; Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 57–60.

The only redemption that was found in the twin defeats at Antietam and Fredericksburg was the emergence of new leadership in the 1st Delaware in the guise of an Irish carriage maker turned soldier, Thomas Alfred Smyth. Born a farmer's son on Christmas Day 1832 in Ballyhooly, County of Cork, Ireland, Smyth seemed to have had been born with a restive spirit. In his youth, Smyth traveled extensively through England and Scotland and managed for a "considerable stay in London and Paris."<sup>5</sup> At the age of twenty-one, Thomas Smyth had seen enough of the old world and set out for the new one. Settling in Philadelphia, Smyth "followed the business of carving" until the excitement of a military life called him. In 1855 Smyth joined William Walker's force in the ill-fated attempt to capture Nicaragua. Returning to his adopted home, Smyth married a Philadelphian in 1858 and established himself as a carriage maker in Wilmington, Delaware, where he joined a Wilmington militia company known as the First National Guards. With his military background as an asset, along with his ease with the Irish soldiers, Smyth was appointed major of the 1st Delaware in October 1861. John Andrews assumed brigade command after Antietam, and Smyth was promoted to lieutenant colonel of the 1st Delaware on December 30, 1862. With the resignation of Lt. Col. Oliver Hopkinson, opportunistically accepted on the eve of the Battle of Fredericksburg, Smyth assumed formal command of the regiment in February 1863.

The regiment was led by Colonel Smyth during the Chancellorsville Campaign but fared no better than their other engagements. As part of General French's morning attack of May 3, the 1st Delaware met initial success as it advanced a half mile beyond the Bullock House, driving two Georgia regiments back to the Confederate entrenchments. The counterattack was not fully supported, and the 1st Delaware and the 132nd Pennsylvania were left abandoned with "connections broken on each flank."<sup>6</sup> As the late morning Federal attack lost momentum, the 1st Delaware was nearly captured in full, saving itself only by changing front in an arcane maneuver known as "changing front to the rear on the tenth company."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> David W. Maull, *The Life and Military Services of the late Brigadier General Thomas A. Smyth* (Wilmington, 1870), 6–7.

<sup>6</sup> Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 67.

With the promotion of Thomas Smyth to brigade command, the leadership of the 1st Delaware fell into the hands of the twenty-five-year-old Lt. Col. Edward P. Harris, the fourth commander of the Delaware regiment. Enlisted as a first sergeant on May 16, 1861, he proved a popular officer and was later elected the captain of his company in July 1861. As the regiment morphed into the three-year regiment, Edward Harris recruited a company of Sussex County boys and was naturally elected its captain. Captain Harris was missing from the regiment during the Antietam Campaign. As the 1st Delaware was still in Suffolk but preparing to enter the war for the first time, Harris solicited Delaware's sole U.S. congressman George Fischer's assistance in getting a leave of absence. "I would most respectfully ask your influence with the Secretary of War in procuring me a leave of absence for 15 or 20 days to attend to pecuniary interests of great importance to myself," the Delaware captain wrote.<sup>8</sup> On September 8, as the regiment was boarding a steamer for the war front in Maryland, Harris was ordered to return home to Delaware on a plum recruiting service assignment in Sussex County. Edward Harris's performance at Fredericksburg and Chancellorsville proved no less inspiring. It was an inauspicious precursor to events that would culminate in Edward

8 "Harris, Edward P.," Company G, 1st Regiment, Delaware Infantry, Compiled Military Service Records, M537, roll 2, National Archives, Washington, DC. Recovered from <http://www.fold3.com>.



Brig. Gen. Alexander Hays. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Harris being placed under arrest by General Hancock for battlefield cowardice on July 2.

On the first day of the three-day Battle of Gettysburg, the 1st Delaware saw no action. Attached to General Hays's division of Hancock's Second Corps, the Delawareans were bivouacked approximately three miles south of Gettysburg near Taneytown.

The regiment had reached the small Maryland village about noon on July 1, when a halt was ordered; the first indication that trouble lay ahead was the cannon fire, which reminded Sgt. John Dunn, 1st Delaware, of "the distant thunder of an approaching storm."<sup>9</sup> At 2:30 p.m. a hurried cavalryman brought the news that General Reynolds had been killed; later that same evening, the Pennsylvanian's body was hurried past the regiment in an ambulance on its way to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the hometown of the late general. Although fully aware that the battle was now approaching,

the Delaware soldiers were completely unaware of the direction from which to expect the enemy. "We trudged along our weary way," wrote Sergeant Dunn, "not knowing where the enemy was, and scarcely knowing where we were ourselves."<sup>10</sup> Chaplain Murphy of the 1st Delaware seconded the opinion that the regiment was going into battle blindly,

9 John M. Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee, to Mark the Positions Occupied by the 1st and 2nd Delaware Regiments at Battle of Gettysburg, July 2nd and 3d, 1863* (Dover: State of Delaware, 1881), 805.

10 Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 806.



“as the troops were entirely ignorant of our destination, or the whereabouts of the enemy.”<sup>11</sup>

After marching the thirteen miles from Taneytown, Alexander Hays’s division, numbering 2,600 men spread among thirteen regiments and five batteries, neared Gettysburg by the evening of July 1. William Seville wrote that the regiment “halted for the night about two miles from Gettysburg, and during the latter part of the march the sound of cannonading had been heard until nightfall.”<sup>12</sup> The division was halted on the Taneytown Road just on the east side of the two Round Tops. The rest would be brief for the 1st Delaware; reveille was heard at first light on July 2. The division was ordered to march three miles farther toward Gettysburg where it was halted just short of the town near Meade’s newly established headquarters at Lydia Leister’s farmstead. The soldiers, still tired from their daylong march, were expecting a late start and cursed their officers as they quickly formed ranks in the darkness. Fed up with the sour mood in the column, Pvt. Gus Annis, Company H, 1st Delaware, shouted out to all the grumblers, “Why don’t you curse Columbus too! If he had not discovered America, there would have been no war!”<sup>13</sup>

Hancock’s Second Corps was ordered to occupy Cemetery Ridge, which would ultimately form the left center of the Army of the Potomac’s three-mile fishhook defensive position. Being the first reinforcements to arrive on the field, General Hays’s Third Division was ordered to relieve the worn out soldiers of the First Corps. The right of the division was posted in a grove of trees known locally as Ziegler’s Grove. The line then extended southward for approximately six hundred yards along Cemetery Ridge with its left ending near an abrupt angle in a stone wall that followed along Cemetery Ridge. General Hays would later report that the stone wall “gave much strength to the position,” but in reality it served more of a psychological barrier than any real defensive one.<sup>14</sup> A recent scholar refers to

it as a “stone fence,” rather than a wall: “It was not tall enough to block the movement of animals but was intended to be a boundary marker.”<sup>15</sup> The real advantage was the “open space a half a mile in our front [which] afforded the artillery posted on the right and left flanks a fair field of fire for effective service.”<sup>16</sup> After Hays’s line ended at the angle in the wall, the Second Corps position continued farther southward with General Gibbon’s division taking the center and General Caldwell occupying the left of the battle line.<sup>17</sup>

The ground in front of the brigade was rolling terrain that provided some cover to the men, but there were no major obstacles, such as a creek or woods, separating the Federal line from the Confederates’ position three-quarters of a mile to the west. One particular landmark was the Bliss farm, which laid an equal distance from the Confederate position on Seminary Ridge and from the Delawares on the opposite ridge. It would become a particular sore spot in the regiment’s favorable reputation and would become conveniently forgotten in the official action reports of the regiment’s officers and the regimental postwar histories. The farm owned by William Bliss, a New England farmer who moved to the Gettysburg area five years earlier, was located on perhaps the worst place on the battlefield—in the no-man’s-land six hundred yards from each of the opposing armies. The family left on the afternoon of July 1 as the battle raged west of town, “evidently in a hurry as they left the doors open, the table set, the beds made.”<sup>18</sup> The six hundred-acre farm was situated on the relatively flat terrain west of the Emmitsburg Road and directly opposite of the 1st Delaware troops. In the thick morning mist, the men would have been able to make out two distinct structures on the farm. A two-story, wooden-frame farm building housed the four-member Bliss family; the more significant building was the barn that would take on the appearance of a bastion. Located eighty yards southwest of the farmhouse, the stone struc-

11 Thomas Murphey, *Four Years in the War: The History of the First Regiment of Delaware Veteran Volunteers* (Philadelphia, 1866), 114.

12 Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 80.

13 Richard Knox, *History of Company H, First Del Vols.*, Delaware Historical Society, Wilmington.

14 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: 1, 453 (hereafter cited as *OR* and followed by the volume, part, and page numbers, with all subsequent citations referencing series 1).

15 Earl Hess, *Pickett’s Charge: The Last Attack at Gettysburg* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 118.

16 *OR*, 27:1:453.

17 Francis Walker, *History of the Second Army Corps* (New York, 1886), 272; James Stine, *History of the Army of the Potomac* (Washington, DC, 1893), 494–95.

18 H. S. Stevens, *Souvenir of the Excursion to the Battlefields by the Society of the Fourteenth Connecticut Regiment* (Washington, DC, 1893), 16.

ture was described as “a citadel in itself.”<sup>19</sup> The barn was seventy-five feet long by thirty-three feet wide. Constructed with a ten-foot basement, the barn would be an excellent sharpshooters’ nest, with five doors in the front wall and three windows on each end and convenient “vertical slits in the upper story front and two rows of windows in each end.”<sup>20</sup> The strategic importance of the outbuildings was apparent to all. If the barn were held by even a small Confederate force, the position along Cemetery Ridge—just opposite the farmstead—would have been risky to hold.

As one of the first brigades to arrive on Cemetery Ridge that morning, General Smyth ordered his old regiment to advance as skirmishers six hundred yards in advance of the Federal line to secure the Bliss farm. In his first combat role as commander of the regiment, Lt. Col. Edward Harris had been entrusted with the task of holding this strategic point at all hazards. Ordered to establish a skirmish line of two hundred yards in length to overlap the barn and the farmhouse, the 1st Delaware was well suited for this assignment as it began its westerly advance shortly after dawn. Perhaps as a sign of no confidence in the young twenty-four-year-old who was so new to command, both General Smyth and General Hays accompanied the advance of the 1st Delaware as far as the Emittsburg Road.<sup>21</sup>

The Delaware skirmish line was late in arriving to the farmstead. At early dawn on July 2, the depleted troops under Brig. Gen. Alfred Scales were ordered “to a position on the extreme right of the [Confederate] line.”<sup>22</sup> Scales’s men were handled roughly on July 1, driving the Federal forces off Seminary Ridge. General Scales reported, “Every field officer of the brigade save one had been disabled.”<sup>23</sup> Despite their “depressed, dilapidated, and almost unorganized condition,” the men were ordered to protect what was then the extreme right flank of the Confederate army.<sup>24</sup> The brigade consisting of five North Carolina regiments could barely scratch together five hundred men. The Con-

federate skirmishers covered a wide front of nearly a mile, extending from McMillan’s Woods along the crest of Seminary Ridge southward through the Bliss orchard and then arcing back west to Spangler’s Woods.

The left flank of the Delaware skirmish line extended south from the Bliss barn into a wheat field. The right stretched the skirmish line northward beyond the farmhouse. The outnumbered and outgunned North Carolinians were no match for the fresh Delawareans, who quickly secured the barn and house. The Confederates put up little resistance around the outbuildings and quickly retreated back through the orchard. With the 1st Delaware in control of the fortresslike barn, a makeshift regimental command post was established in the lower level of the barn.<sup>25</sup>

According to Lieutenant Brady’s account, shortly after the Delaware skirmishers had secured the Bliss home and barn, a “brisk fire” opened between the skirmishers as both lines settled in at a distance of perhaps one hundred yards.<sup>26</sup> The Confederates sought whatever cover could be provided by the trees in the Bliss orchard. And the Delawareans defended a skirmish line between the two buildings; those not concealed within the farmhouse or barn were largely in the open. With the abruptness of the 1st Delaware’s advance halted, Scales’s skirmishers were reinforced and initiated a counterattack about 8:00 a.m. The main Confederate thrust was on the right of the Federal skirmish line that slowly pushed the Delaware skirmishers south and toward the Bliss farmhouse. In Brady’s words, the right wing was being “sorely pressed by an overwhelming force in its front.”<sup>27</sup>

The weight of command was heavy on Edward Harris. With Colonel Smyth and General Hays six hundred yards away and no apparent sign of relief being sent from Cemetery Ridge, the Georgetown native was left to his own devices. No eyewitnesses to the early morning encounter on July 2 at the Bliss farm left detailed accounts except for Lt. John Brady. Lieutenant Brady writes that after a search for the commanding officer of the 1st Delaware, Lieutenant Colonel Harris was found “in the

19 Elwood Christ, *The Struggle for the Bliss Farm at Gettysburg, July 2nd and 3rd, 1863* (Baltimore: Butternut and Blue, 1994), 5.

20 Stevens, *Fourteenth Connecticut Regiment*, 16.

21 Bradley Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg: The Union and Confederate Brigades at the Battle of Gettysburg* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2003), 169.

22 Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 10.

23 OR, 27.2:670.

24 OR, 27.2:671.

25 Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 14.

26 Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 14.

27 Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 16.

basement of the barn”; apparently unaware of the seriousness of the situation, Harris’s reaction was to “flee precipitously toward our main line, leaving that portion of the field,” to the junior lieutenants.<sup>28</sup> The other lieutenant to whom Brady is referring in his account is 1st Lt. Charles Tanner, the savior of the regimental colors at Antietam. Tanner and Brady both watched helplessly as their commander made off in double-quick time for the safety of the Federal lines. The two junior officers gathered whatever force they could muster on the northern wing of the command and formed them along a fence that ran back to the Emmitsburg Road.<sup>29</sup>

With the reorientation of the right wing now facing north, contact with the left wing of the 1st Delaware was broken, allowing the enemy skirmishers the opportunity recapture the Bliss barn. Companies K, E, and H manned the left wing and soon were taking flanking fire from Confederates who began to mingle within the barn. Positioned on the left flank, Company K was left isolated and cut off from the rest of the line. It was at this point that Capt. Martin Ellegood, Company E, fell mortally wounded just south the Bliss barn. Ellegood’s death was not instant. Wounded in the chest, Ellegood was soon overrun by the advancing Confederate skirmishers. A North Carolinian found the dying Delawarean and raised his bayonet to finish off the captain. A Confederate officer stopped the killing of the dying officer, calling on the private to halt while threatening to do the same to the Southerner if he ever caught him again attempting to injure a wounded enemy. Captain Ellegood was not destined to die alone among the enemy at the Bliss farm; he survived until July 6 and died in a field hospital in Gettysburg.<sup>30</sup>

By 9:30 a.m., with the right flank collapsing and the center of the skirmish line breached at the Bliss barn, the 1st Delaware made for the safety of Cemetery Ridge. One particular hanger-on was Pvt. Anthony Cheever, who defiantly shouted, “I will not fall back for the whole Rebel army!”<sup>31</sup> Somehow the five-foot, three-inch private inspired a small cabal

of Delawareans to remain behind. Led by Capt. Ezekiel Alexander, Company H, Richard Knox wrote of the incident in his memoirs, *History of Company H*: “Captain Alexander said ‘boys, I will stay with you.’ He and eight others were captured. Captain Alexander was confined at Richmond and paroled at City Point, VA on March 21, 1864. [Alexander] said Cheever gave right up as soon as captured and in a short time died on Belle Island.”<sup>32</sup> For his defiant act on the morning of July 2 at the Bliss farm, Private Cheever died at a Richmond army hospital on November 8, 1863, of diarrhea.<sup>33</sup>

By 10:00 a.m. the 1st Delaware had reached the safety of Cemetery Ridge. With the Confederate troops now firmly in control of the Bliss buildings and orchard, General Hays ordered fresh troops to retake the property that the Delawareans had gained and then lost to the Rebel counterattack. General Hays ordered elements from ten fresh companies from New York and Ohio to stabilize the fluid situation in the division’s front. These troops too saw early success and dislodged the Confederates from the Bliss property; but like the Delawareans before them, the northern troops were pressed within an hour when additional Confederate skirmishers arrived, this time under the command of Brig. Gen. William “Scrappy Billy” Mahone and Brig. Gen. Ambrose Wright.<sup>34</sup>

Determined to regain control of the Bliss farm and buildings, General Hays would once again call on the 1st Delaware to return to the advanced position. Hays assembled whatever troops were available: the 1st Delaware, the 12th New Jersey, and three companies of the 125th New York. Shortly before noon, the reinforcements commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Harris—numbering approximately six hundred men—charged to regain control of the farm. The charge of the skirmishers was supported by artillery fire from Capt. John G. Hazard’s Second Corps battery. Despite the confusion of the fire from the Union batteries, the charge of the fresh skirmish line cleared the Confederates, and the Bliss buildings were once again in Union control. A quiet afternoon lull suddenly overtook this portion of the battlefield

<sup>28</sup> Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> John Michael Priest, “Stand to It and Give Them Hell”: *Gettysburg as the Soldiers Experienced It from Cemetery Ridge to Little Round Top, July 2, 1863* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas Beatie, 2014), 70.

<sup>30</sup> Murphey, *Four Years in the War*, 117; Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 16.

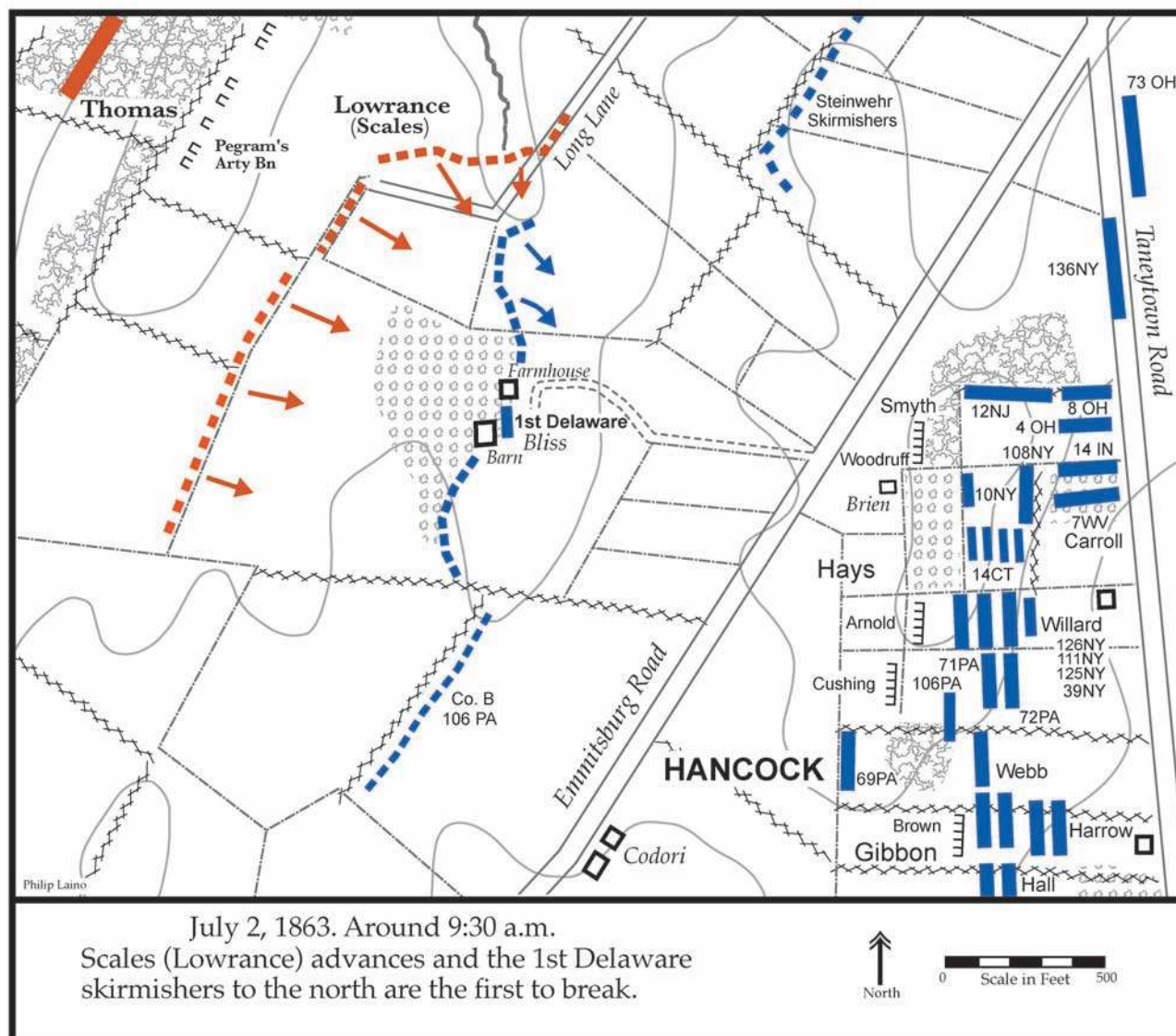
<sup>31</sup> Knox, *History of Company H*.

<sup>32</sup> Knox, *History of Company H*.

<sup>33</sup> “Cheever, Anthony,” Company H, 1st Regiment, Delaware Infantry, Compiled Military Service Records, M537, roll 1, National Archives, Washington, DC. Recovered from <http://www.fold3.com>.

<sup>34</sup> Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 21.





Position of the 1st Delaware at 9:30 a.m. on July 2. Courtesy of Phil Laino.

as both sides took stock of the situation in the deadly space between the two gathering armies.<sup>35</sup>

A brisk fire continued between the 1st Delaware and the Confederate skirmish line now manned by soldiers from Gen. Carnot Posey's brigade. Elements of the 19th and 28th Mississippi had been deployed about 250 yards in front of Seminary Ridge—the same distance from the outer ring of the Delaware skirmishers. As part of the preparation for Lee's echelon attack that began at approximately 4:00 p.m. on the southern end of the field, Posey was ordered to reinforce this "thin line of skirmishers" and advance "until I encountered the enemy's

skirmishers and drive them back."<sup>36</sup> The Confederate skirmishers advanced through a wheat field at the double-quick and, according to Col. Nathan Harris, 19th Mississippi, "found the enemy occupying the orchard directly in my front."<sup>37</sup>

Mississippians under the advanced skirmish line paused until General Wright, who was ordered to continue the hammer blows of Longstreet's attack, was in line and ready to attack. Confederate guns issuing shot and shell were directed at the Bliss house; it became apparent to the Federal soldiers that the reinforcement of the skirmish line was simply a precursor to a larger attack. According to

<sup>35</sup> Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 22–23.

<sup>36</sup> OR, 27.2:634.

<sup>37</sup> OR, 27.2:634.



Capt. Henry Chew, 12th New Jersey, the Mississippi skirmishers invented a novel approach to masking their buildup. The reinforcements did not arrive in mass, but “a few men were sent down at a time, so that our attention would not be attracted until they had enough men to drive us away from the barn.”<sup>38</sup> Captain Chew was located in the Bliss barn and began to grow concerned with the developing storm about to be unleashed on the skirmish line. In a similar vein as Lieutenant Brady, the New Jersey officer sought out Lt. Col. Edward Harris to report on the ominous developments and advised Harris that Federal reinforcements should be called for. Harris reportedly snapped to Captain Chew “that he understood his business” and that since he outranked the captain, the officer would be best served to keep his comments to himself.<sup>39</sup> “[You] are under me, and I will take all the responsibility,” Harris reportedly chided the officer.<sup>40</sup> Twenty-five years later, the rebuke still stung; Henry Chew recalled, “he was my superior officer and I had to submit.”<sup>41</sup>

The brisk fire began to take its toll on the ammunition of the skirmish line. With calls for ammunition ringing in his ears and the growing threat from the gathering Confederate host, the same fight-or-flight reaction from the morning triggered in Edward Harris’s mind. Without any authority, Colonel Harris withdrew the Delaware right wing from the skirmish line and for the second time that day fled for the rear. Captain Chew recalled, “Seeing the men all running for the rear I [took] out after them, soon catching up to Lieut. Col. Harris of the First Del. who was getting to the rear as fast as he could . . . he swung his sword around, called me a hard name, telling me to go back . . . this I did not do but made a detour around him.”<sup>42</sup>

It was uncharacteristic to see the 1st Delaware flee a battlefield in sheer panic. The determination seen at Antietam and the stubbornness at Fredericksburg seemed to be conditioned on the superior leadership and control found in the commanding officers. The breakdown was clear for others in the Army of the Potomac to witness. A soldier of the

106th Pennsylvania who was posted to the left of the 1st Delaware had a good opportunity to witness the debacle and recalled that “Posey’s Mississippi Brigade had been advanced to the Bliss House, a little to the right of our Brigade skirmish line, and had dislodged the First Delaware Regiment that had been occupying it: this regiment fell back.”<sup>43</sup>

With the Bliss barn and farmhouse back under Confederate control, the Delaware skirmishers withdrew back toward Cemetery Ridge. From the standpoint of Edward Harris, the sight of Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock mounted on a horse waiting for Harris to report may have been more unsettling than facing Posey’s Mississippians. General Hancock had a reputation for being one of the most profane generals in the army. The general’s verbal outbursts would become legendary to the men of the Second Corps; years later, soldiers would recall his “extravagant indulgence, at times, in harsh and profane language.”<sup>44</sup> After witnessing the second retreat in one day by the 1st Delaware, the general stood in his stirrups and unleashed against Edward Harris “forcible language deemed suitable for the occasion.”<sup>45</sup> Harris was placed under arrest on the spot for “cowardice in the face of the enemy” and was, at least temporarily, removed from command of the regiment.<sup>46</sup>

The fighting for control of the Bliss farm would continue until nightfall; however, the soldiers of the 1st Delaware would contribute little else to the effort. A charge by the 12th New Jersey around 4:30–5:00 p.m. would once again put the farm in Union control. Carrying .69-caliber smoothbore muskets equipped with “buck and ball”—buckshot along with a musket ball—two hundred Jersey men muscled their way back into the barn, demanding the Confederates’ surrender. The charge of the 12th New Jersey would net ninety-two prisoners, including seven commissioned officers; the cost of the charge to the Garden State was two officers and forty men killed and wounded. Federal control of the farm would be short-lived though. By 6:30 p.m., as the tide of the Confederate attack continued to drift

<sup>38</sup> Henry Chew, letter, February 2, 1887, in *Final Report of the Gettysburg Battlefield Commission of New Jersey*, commissioned by James N. Duffy, Gottfried Krueger, and William H. Corbin (Trenton, NJ: John L. Murphy, 1891), 110.

<sup>39</sup> Chew, letter, February 2, 1887, 111.

<sup>40</sup> Chew, letter, February 2, 1887, 111.

<sup>41</sup> Chew, letter, February 2, 1887, 111.

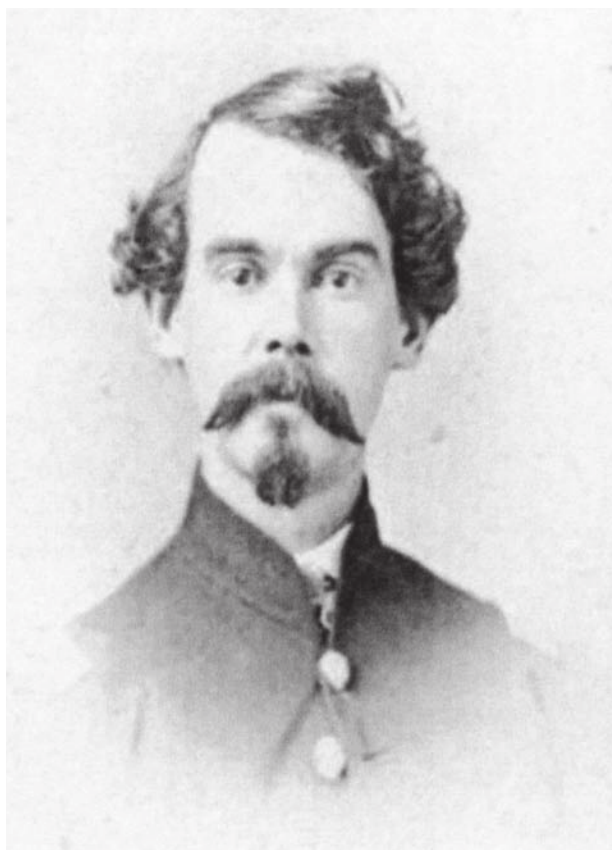
<sup>42</sup> Chew, letter, February 2, 1887, 111.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph R. C. Ward, *History of the One Hundred and Sixth Regiment* (Philadelphia: F. McManus Jr. and Co., 1906), 190.

<sup>44</sup> David M. Jordan, *Winfield Scott Hancock: A Soldier's Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 37.

<sup>45</sup> Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 30.



**Capt. William Seville, who later wrote a history of the 1st Delaware. Courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives.**

slowly toward the north, the New Jersey soldiers were at risk of being cut off and fell back toward the Union lines. Posey's men advanced once again, and the Bliss farm changed sides for the eighth time. But the Mississippians could not advance any farther as the Confederate battle lost steam. Ohio troops posted behind a worm fence and occupying a rise of ground northwest of the Bliss farm poured enfilade fire on the Confederates, preventing Posey's men from advancing past the Emmitsburg Road. To the east of the Bliss farm, Gen. Ambrose Wright's soldiers surged as far as Cemetery Ridge, briefly occupying a segment of the coveted Federal line, but were forced back by Federal guns blasting canister into Wright's left flank and by the timely counterattack from soldiers of General Webb's brigade.<sup>47</sup>

The morning and afternoon of July 2 would be

<sup>47</sup> Christ, *Struggle for the Bliss Farm*, 36; OR, 27.1:470; Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The Second Day* (University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 382–83, 387–88; Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg* (Boston: Mariner, 2004), 323.

one of the few stains on the record of the Delaware regiment and one that was glossed over in the after-action reports and regimental histories written after the engagement. The 1st Delaware's official report, written by Lt. John T. Dent, described that on July 2 the regiment "was deployed as skirmishers some 500 yards in front of the main line, where we remained actively engaged during the entire day."<sup>48</sup> The topic of Harris's arrest is handled diplomatically: "About 4 p.m., the ammunition of the men being exhausted, Lieutenant-Colonel Harris withdrew the right wing of the regiment from the skirmish line, for which he was placed under arrest by General Hancock."<sup>49</sup> William Seville's regimental history is even less direct, preferring to summarize the July 2 action in one sentence: "The regiment was on the skirmish-line all day, but in the evening it was placed in position behind a low stone wall at the end of an apple-orchard."<sup>50</sup> The day's action was not without cost to the regiment. Lieutenant Dent reported that on July 2 the regiment lost five men killed, sixteen wounded, and eleven captured. Chaplain Murphy, who watched the action from Cemetery Ridge, summed the day up as follows:

At the close of the day, the battle being over, one inquired of another as to the result of the fighting. Nothing seemed to have been gained or lost as to advantage, and we rested that night where and as we could, anxiously awaiting the result of the next day.<sup>51</sup>

The soldiers of the 1st Delaware slept on their arms the evening of July 2–3. After midnight the temperature dropped below the dew point. For those men who had not cast aside their wool blankets during the march to Gettysburg, the warmth of a blanket was welcome; those without a blanket would shiver all night in the cold, damp air. With the fighting still raging that evening on the right of the brigade at Cemetery Hill and Culp's Hill, the notion of a night attack was a real threat. A soldier of Smyth's brigade would write, "That night as we lay, our knapsacks plumb up to the base of the stone wall and pillowed our heads thereon, not being allowed to divest ourselves of any other arms or

<sup>48</sup> OR, 27.1:469.

<sup>49</sup> OR, 27.1:469.

<sup>50</sup> Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 80.

<sup>51</sup> Murphey, *Four Years in the War*, 119.

equipment, we sought for the rest and sleep we so much needed.”<sup>52</sup> The next day’s heat would steadily increase as Friday wore on. By late afternoon, the temperature had risen to eighty-seven degrees, tempered only slightly by a light breeze from the west. The view from Cemetery Ridge that morning would reveal dark stratocumulus clouds along with patchy fog mixed with the ever-present smoke from the hundreds of fires warming the morning’s coffee. A Massachusetts soldier to the left of the Delaware regiment looked back and forth and was awed by the site of such idle military power, “seventy thousand muskets, with bayonets fixed [and] stacked in a row four miles long.”<sup>53</sup>

As early as 4:00 a.m., the occasional artillery shell was lodged, signaling to all that the conflict from the day before was still far from being decided. At dawn the Confederate snipers were back at the Bliss property, practicing their deadly trade. “A dropping fire of skirmishers began at daylight,” wrote William Seville, “and continued with an occasional shot from a battery.”<sup>54</sup> Once again, General Hays ordered “to take and hold the barn at all hazards.”<sup>55</sup> The command scratched together thirty soldiers, including twenty-seven from Company D; the 1st Delaware; and dozens more from the 12th New Jersey. According to Lieutenant Brady, the squad of soldiers formed up in the Bryan farm lane, “and after divesting of all superfluous articles, as haversacks, swords, scabbards, we proceeded at a full run to within fifty feet of the barn, where we were checked by a withering fire from the various vents or air holes in its walls.”<sup>56</sup> With the Confederates secure in the fortresslike barn, the attack was futile. During the July 3 assault on the barn, two Delawareans of Company D were killed: Cpl. John B. Sheets and Pvt. William Dorsey. Both men were natives of Philadelphia and enlisted for three years’ service in Milford, Delaware, in September 1861. Of the twenty-seven Delawareans involved in this morning’s action, “with the possi-

bly three or four exceptions, [they] were more or less [all] wounded.”<sup>57</sup>

With the farm exchanging hands again multiple times the morning of July 3, General Hays finally grew weary of the continuous skirmish game. At noon Hays ordered a detachment from the 14th Connecticut to lay fire to the barn and burn it to the ground. The two Bliss buildings, which for decades lay silent in peaceful pastures outside a sleepy Pennsylvania town, were consumed by fire within minutes—a testimony to the indiscriminate destruction of war. John L. Brady watched with fascination as “flames were seen issuing from its roof”; and as the “fire spread with great rapidity and falling into the hay and straw stored beneath, the barn was soon enveloped in one vast sheet of flames.”<sup>58</sup>

In the early afternoon, a lull over the battlefield was observed; it was only the calm before the storm, as the Confederates were making final adjustments for what General Lee hoped to be the last and best chance for winning the field at Gettysburg. While attacks on the left and right of the Federal position the day before yielded mixed results, Lee decided that an attack on the Union right center along the ground held by the Second Corps was the only viable alternative to force Meade out of his defensive position. The attack on the Federal works would be preceded by a massive artillery bombardment in order to disable the Union guns and demoralize the Federal infantry. The attack would be commanded by Lee’s “old war horse” General Longstreet and would consist of the fresh division under Gen. George E. Pickett and six brigades detached from Gen. A. P. Hill’s corps. As the commands lined up on the opposite side of Seminary Ridge under cover of trees, General Pickett’s division was assigned to the Confederate right with the brigades of General Kemper and General Garnett aligned left to right, with General Armistead in support. General Pettigrew’s division, of Hill’s corps, was posted to the left of Pickett and was aligned left to right with the brigades of Brockenbrough, Davis, Marshall, and Archer (commanded by Colonel Fry). The two brigades of Scales and Lane under the command of Isaac Trimble supported Pettigrew.<sup>59</sup>

52 Charles Davis Page, *History of the Fourteenth Regiment, Connecticut Vol. Infantry* (Meriden, CT: Horton Printing, 1906), 142.

53 Quoted in Allen C. Guelzo, *Gettysburg: The Last Invasion* (New York: Vintage, 2013), 373. See also Thomas L. Elmore, “Torrid Heat and Blinding Rain: A Meteorological and Astronomical Chronology of the Gettysburg Campaign,” *Gettysburg Magazine*, no. 13 (1995): 14.

54 Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 81.

55 David L. Ladd and Audrey J. Ladd, eds., *The Bacheider Papers: Gettysburg in Their Own Words* (Dayton, OH: Morningside, 1995), 3:1394.

56 Ladd and Ladd, *Bacheider Papers*, 3:1394–95.

57 Ladd and Ladd, *Bacheider Papers*, 3:1395.

58 Ladd and Ladd, *Bacheider Papers*, 3:1395.

59 James Longstreet, *From Manassas to Appomattox* (New York, 1895), 388–89.



John Dunn recalled that after the burning of the Bliss buildings, “the balance of the morning the men spent watching the fall of the blazing rafters, filling up their diaries, or chatting over the events of the previous day.”<sup>60</sup> There were events aplenty for the men to gossip about. The questionable debut and later arrest of Lt. Col. Edward Harris would have left tongues wagging; the defiant stand of Private Cheever, along with the fate of the captured Delawareans, and the burning of the Bliss house were mulled over and dissected. By noon, as the sun continued to heat up, some of the Delaware boys constructed crude shelters “by fastening one end of their tents to the rails in the low works” while securing the other end to “a stick, sapling or inverted gun.”<sup>61</sup> The Delawareans’ hiatus would be interrupted when the opening salvo of the final act in the Battle of Gettysburg was heard.

According to Professor Michael Jacobs, an instructor of mathematics and chemistry at Gettysburg College, the artillery bombardment began exactly at 1:07 p.m. Two artillery guns, which fired shells toward Hays’s position, were the signal for the Confederate guns to open. Suddenly the ground seemed to shake under the weight of 150 guns firing projectiles toward the Union lines. Some officers recognized what it all meant and shouted “Down! Down!” as the men scrambled for cover. Soldiers of all ranks would recall where they were when the Confederate cannonade began. General Hancock’s inspector general, Lt. Col. Charles H. Morgan, was “taking advantage of the quiet” while eating lunch from General Gibbon’s ambulance.<sup>62</sup> While General Hancock was in the process of dictating an order, “at almost one o’clock the rapid discharge of artillery began, and shells commenced falling about us and in our middle as though every gun was trained on us.”<sup>63</sup> Ch. Thomas Murphy was assisting with removing the wounded from field hospitals to the rear. As the Delaware minister was moving the last of the wounded into a waiting ambulance, it seemed that the heavens themselves began to fill with fire and brimstone. “When we were nearly through

loading the ambulance and sending off those who could walk,” Murphy recalled, “there burst over and around the barn, in which our division were, a terrific storm of shells.”<sup>64</sup> Sergeant Dunn had just returned from army headquarters at the Leister farmhouse, where he had replenished his empty canteen from a nearby well. While looking enviously at the New York troops formed in the shade of Ziegler’s Grove, Sergeant Dunn suddenly forgot about the heat of the afternoon sun.<sup>65</sup>

In a few minutes over two hundred guns belched forth as one. The air was filled with flying missiles—screaming, whizzing, bursting shells—a perfect hailstorm of iron and wooden splinters torn from our sheltering rails. The deep roar of the artillery shook the earth to its very foundation. It sounded as if all the furies of the lower regions had been let loose. Wild and heated currents blew from every quarter of the compass, and what but a short time before had been a dull and lazy air was now turned to a dark, wild and sulphurous atmosphere.<sup>66</sup>

The Federal troops under fire of the Confederate cannons did whatever was possible to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible. Colonel Smyth’s three regiments lined along the stone wall—the 14th Connecticut, 1st Delaware, and 12th New Jersey—were adjacent to the point of concentration of fire near the Copse of Trees, but ironically they were better suited to survive the cannonade than others in the rear. The most deadly place during the bombardment was between Cemetery Ridge and General Meade’s headquarters at the Leister home. The army headquarters would prove to be in such a precarious spot that it was at least temporarily broken up; Meade and his staff took to their mounts and found safety nearer the line of battle. The cannon fire tended to overshoot and passed over the heads of the troops behind the wall; the Rebel fire was most effective at sweeping the slope behind the ridge. Not surprisingly, then, the rank and file of the 1st Delaware suffered very few casualties during the artillery bombardment. One 12th New Jersey soldier remarked, “Most of the shells went over our heads although it

<sup>60</sup> Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 811–12.

<sup>61</sup> Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 811–12.

<sup>62</sup> Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1360. See also Edwin B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (New York: Touchstone, 1968), 493; Hess, *Pickett’s Charge*, 125.

<sup>63</sup> Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1360.

<sup>64</sup> Murphey, *Four Years in the War*, 120–21.

<sup>65</sup> Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 812–13.

<sup>66</sup> Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 812.



seemed as though every one would hit us.”<sup>67</sup> The men and horses located on the reverse slope had no hillside, ravine, or natural barrier to take cover against “high-flying or ricocheting shot and shell.” The infantry in ranks along the wall “remained firm, hugging the ground very closely.”<sup>68</sup> The men of the 1st Delaware were ordered to pull down their makeshift shelter tents and to lower their colors, due to the belief that their presence only attracted the gunner’s attention. The Delawareans sought whatever cover the two-foot stone wall provided and “laid low and hugged mother earth.”<sup>69</sup> Any advantage that could be found—a rock, a slight declivity in the ground—were used to their fullest effect.<sup>70</sup>

One casualty of the cannon fire was the former commander of the 1st Delaware, Col. Thomas Smyth. At some point during the latter part of the hour-long cannonade, the Irish colonel was struck by the fragments of a shell burst while rallying the New York troops in Ziegler’s Grove. By the time Smyth’s staff could get to him, another shell struck a fence rail, spraying wooden splinters through the air. Surg. David Maull described that Colonel Smyth was struck in both the head and the nose; he was bleeding profusely from the head wound and soon became nearly unrecognizable by the swelling of his face. As General Hays found the colonel weakened by the loss of blood, Smyth was ordered to leave the field for surgical assistance. “Any man who was bleeding as you are,” commanded General Hays, “was a fitter subject for the hospital and for the field.”<sup>71</sup> Reminded that his fine Irish features could be “somewhat marred by the wound,” Thomas Smyth responded defiantly, “I am perfectly willing to sacrifice [my] nose for the sake of [my] country.”<sup>72</sup> The wounds would not prove to be serious and were quickly dressed, but Smyth would not return to the field until the matter of Pickett’s charge was resolved.

Exhibitions of personal courage while under fire were a job requirement for fighting generals of the

Civil War. The pugnacious Gen. Alexander Hays was in his glory as the shells were flying. Hays spent most of the cannonade mounted, shouting, exhorting, threatening the men, and maniacally laughing as he went down the line of the Delaware troops, “Hurrah, boys, we’re giving them hell.”<sup>73</sup> While less vocal, Winfield Hancock still struck an inspiring pose as he rode along the line, with his staff close behind. One chronicler recalled that “thousands of soldiers, crouching close to the ground under the bitter hail, looked up at that calm, stately form, that handsome proud face, and found courage longer to endure the pelting of the pitiless gale.”<sup>74</sup> General Hancock’s Second Corps needed all the inspiration that was on hand. The men were tasked with defending 1,600 yards of ground from the crest of Cemetery Ridge down to the Codori farm. With the piecemeal funneling of Second Corps regiments to fill in gaps during the second day of fighting, Winfield Hancock was left with only four intact brigades to defend this sector. The 3rd Brigade, the “Harp-er’s Ferry Cowards,” were posted on the right in Ziegler’s Grove while Smyth’s brigade continued the line south to the first angle in the stone wall. Two brigades in General Gibbon’s division—the Philadelphia Brigade commanded by Alexander Webb and Norman Hall’s culled brigade of New York, Massachusetts, and Michigan men—extended the line south while maintaining contact with the stone boundary wall, which abruptly jutted at a hundred-yard angle westward toward the Emittsburg Road. All told, these four brigades, numbering approximately 3,500 men, would be left carrying the lion’s share of turning back the tide of the Confederacy.<sup>75</sup>

The length of time of the artillery bombardment that preceded the infantry advance is estimated anywhere between forty-five minutes and two hours. Edwin Coddington estimates the length to be a bit less than two hours, ending at 3:00 p.m. A modern historian of Pickett’s charge suggests that the majority of cannon fire ended by 2:00 p.m., but several batteries continued firing for a time. It may be arbitrary as to when the bombardment ended and the infantry

67 Paul J. Lader, “The Personal Journey of Pvt. David Ballinger, Company H, 12th New Jersey Volunteers,” *Gettysburg Magazine*, no. 24 (2001), 91. See also Coddington, *Gettysburg Campaign*, 493, 495; Walker, *History of the Second Army Corps*, 292.

68 Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1360.

69 Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 812–13.

70 Maull, *Life and Military Services*, 15.

71 Maull, *Life and Military Services*, 15.

72 George Washburn, *A Complete History and Record of the 108th Regiment New York Volunteers* (Rochester, NY, 1894), 52.

73 Blake A. Magner, “Hancock’s Line at Gettysburg, July 3, 1863,” *Blue and Gray* 26, no. 4 (2009): 24.

74 Guelzo, *Gettysburg*, 389.

75 Coddington, *Gettysburg Campaign*, 502; Hess, *Pickett’s Charge*, 162–63; Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 813; Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1396; Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 80.

assault began. Given that there was no uniform way of synchronizing various timepieces, the recollections of the 1st Delaware accounts vary widely. John Dunn wrote that the cannonade stopped shortly after 2:30 p.m. William Seville places the time at 4:30 p.m. Lt. John Brady in his account of the battle is widely outside reason, stating that the cannonade lasted four hours, until 5:30 p.m.<sup>76</sup>

With the timing inconsistencies set aside, it was likely sometime around 3:00 p.m. that the Delaware troops along Cemetery Ridge first caught a glimpse of a long line of infantry emerging from the distant tree line along Seminary Ridge into the bright daylight. Estimates of the Confederates who made the three-quarters-mile charge vary, but the general consensus is somewhere between twelve thousand and fifteen thousand men formed for the attack. To the now barely two hundred soldiers of the 1st Delaware, the first troops seen to emerge from Seminary Ridge were those Southerners under General Pettigrew on the Confederate left and directly opposite of the position held by the 1st Delaware. General Pickett's Virginian troops were farther to the Confederate right and remained initially outside the Delawarean's view. With the arrest of Lieutenant Colonel Harris, the killing of Captain Ellegood, and the capture of Captain Alexander, the command of the regiment was now placed in the hands of an untested twenty-three-year-old lieutenant, William Smith, Company A. As the former Morocco leather dresser from Wilmington glanced up and down the depleted ranks of his Delaware regiment, one can only imagine the doubt resting with the men. The battlefield experiences at Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville did not bode well for them. Reduced to a single line of infantry covering 160 feet of Pennsylvania ground, the Delaware soldiers glanced anxiously between the 14th Connecticut on its left and the 12th New Jersey on the right. Perhaps more reassuring to the men would be that this would be the first battle in which the Delawareans had the advantage of defending a position while setting aside for the first time the more familiar role of the attacker. On July 3 there would be no attack-  
ing over open fields to confront seasoned troops

<sup>76</sup> "Smith, William," Company E, 1st Regiment, Delaware Infantry, Compiled Military Service Records, M537, roll 2, National Archives, Washington, DC, <http://www.fold3.com>.

protected by sunken roads and stone walls or sheltered by the blackness of the wilderness.<sup>77</sup>

As the North Carolinians emerged from the woods in front of Smyth's brigade, there was heard up and down the Federal lines the cries of "Here they come!" and "Here comes the infantry!" General Hays remained in his element, exhorting the men to aim low and hold their fire until the Confederates reached the Emmitsburg Road—a distance of two hundred yards from the 1st Delaware. For this final act in the Battle of Gettysburg, Alex Hays left his mount and stood with his men, calling out, "Now boys, look out; you will see some fun."<sup>78</sup> William Seville described in his postwar memoir the scene as the Confederate lines emerged from the wood line: "We were cautioned to hold our fire until the rebels began to climb the fence along the Emmitsburg Road." Seville continued, "Not a straggler or skulker could be seen; every man was in the ranks."<sup>79</sup>

As soon as Pettigrew's men emerged from the woods, problems developed in coordination of the various Confederate commands. Pettigrew deployed his men some two hundred yards behind and four hundred yards to the north of the Virginians. Pettigrew's four brigades formed as a single front, with each regiment in a double line of battle with five companies in two ranks, while Pickett drew a two-brigade front with one brigade in reserve. For reasons that to this day remain unknown, only two of Pettigrew's brigades—Fry's and Marshall's brigades—worked in concert; the brigades of Davis and Brockenbrough were late in starting the assault. The brigade under Davis would eventually catch up to the other two but coordination suffered. Brockenbrough's brigade never made a firm connection with the division and only lightly pressed the attack, never advancing much past the now burned-out Bliss farm. The old Marylander Isaac Trimble formed in the rear of Pettigrew and had no difficulties in aligning Scale's and Lane's brigades 150 yards to the rear of Pettigrew. As soon as the Confederates emerged from the woods, the Southerners came under a hail of artillery fire from

<sup>77</sup> Sears, *Gettysburg*, 410.

<sup>78</sup> Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 81, 83. See also Winfield Scott, "Pickett's Charge as Seen from the Front Line," (paper, California Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, February 8, 1888), Gettysburg Discussion Group, <http://www.gdg.org/research/OOB/Union/July1-3/126ny.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Sears, *Gettysburg*, 415–16; Hess, *Pickett's Charge*, 183–85.

a mile away atop Cemetery Hill. General Pettigrew was injured early on, with a painful injury to his left hand, as the Confederates dressed their lines. The same shell injured his horse, forcing the general—perhaps more wisely—to make the advance on foot. As Pettigrew’s half of the charge slowly picked up momentum, the Rebel lines came under fire from Federal skirmishers hiding among the smoldering ruins of the Bliss farm.<sup>80</sup>

The skirmish fire did little to slow the advance of the determined Confederate infantrymen. Positioned in the rear of Pettigrew, Isaac Trimble commented that “notwithstanding the losses as we advanced, the men marched with deliberation and accuracy of men on drill. I observed the same in Pettigrew.”<sup>81</sup> Despite the impending attack, Federal accounts of the beauty of the Confederate charge were generally awe inspiring. Alex Hays was standing behind the 1st Delaware and commented later of the Confederates’ advance: “as steady as if impelled by machinery, unbroken by our artillery, which played upon them a storm of missiles.”<sup>82</sup> As Lt. John L. Brady awaited the impending attack, he could not suppress his admiration for such foes: “Indeed it was needless for me to say they were the flower, the chivalry of the south, as brave men as were ever offered as a sacrifice to the God of War.”<sup>83</sup> Sgt. John Dunn was front and center of the regiment with the color guard during the advance. Twenty-five years later, the image was ingrained in his memory.

As if on review, with stately tread and measured step in full battle array, the assaulting column moved forward, a sight glorious, grand, and imposing. For no where in the annals of the world’s history can you read of anything more glorious than the heroism of twelve thousand Confederate Veterans, as like a wall of iron they moved forward to the assault.<sup>84</sup>

The Federal troops in the front line defending Cemetery Ridge were kept occupied during the Confederate advance, repairing the makeshift works along the stone wall and reforming their lines. The

126th New York were shifted to Ziegler’s Grove while two other New York regiments, the 39th and 125th, were moved in line behind the New Jersey, Delaware, and Connecticut troops; in many places, the troops mixed and fought side by side. It was an unorthodox tactic to intermingle two brigades, but by doing so General Hays was able to maximize his firepower while improving its defensibility. The men on the front line were ordered to secure all the extra rifles and cartridges that could be found. The New Yorkers behind them would load. The securing of the guns and ammunition from the dead and wounded was apparently widespread in the 1st Delaware. Lieutenant Brady wrote, “Our men collected all the unused arms, left behind our works, by those who were previously killed or wounded, had them properly charged, and distributed along the line in readiness for immediate use, thus forming an embryo arsenal.”<sup>85</sup> William Seville commented on this unconventional tactic: “The dreadful execution in our front was owing to the fact that the men of the First Delaware, Fourteenth Connecticut, and Twelfth New Jersey had collected all the spare guns, had prepared a large supply of cartridges, and laid them in rows behind them, and the men in the rear rank loaded the muskets as fast as those in front could fire them.”<sup>86</sup>

The Emmitsburg Road made a diagonal gash from the northeast to the southwest and served as a psychological, if not physical, barrier between the opposing armies. The road was lined in many places with “stoutly built posts and rails about five feet high.”<sup>87</sup> Suddenly falling within range of rifle fire and the continuing artillery and canister, the Confederates suffered greatly while crossing the road. Large numbers of infantry would crowd in the openings of the fence, offering a tempting shot to artillerists. Those choosing to “halt in order to climb the fences” would also prove to be an inviting target.<sup>88</sup> One North Carolina soldier commented, “We came to a strong fence running diagonally across the field and as we had to climb, deranged

80 J. William Jones, “Letter from General Trimble, October 15, 1875,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 9 (1881): 29.

81 *OR*, 27.1:454.

82 Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1397.

83 Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 815.

84 Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1398.

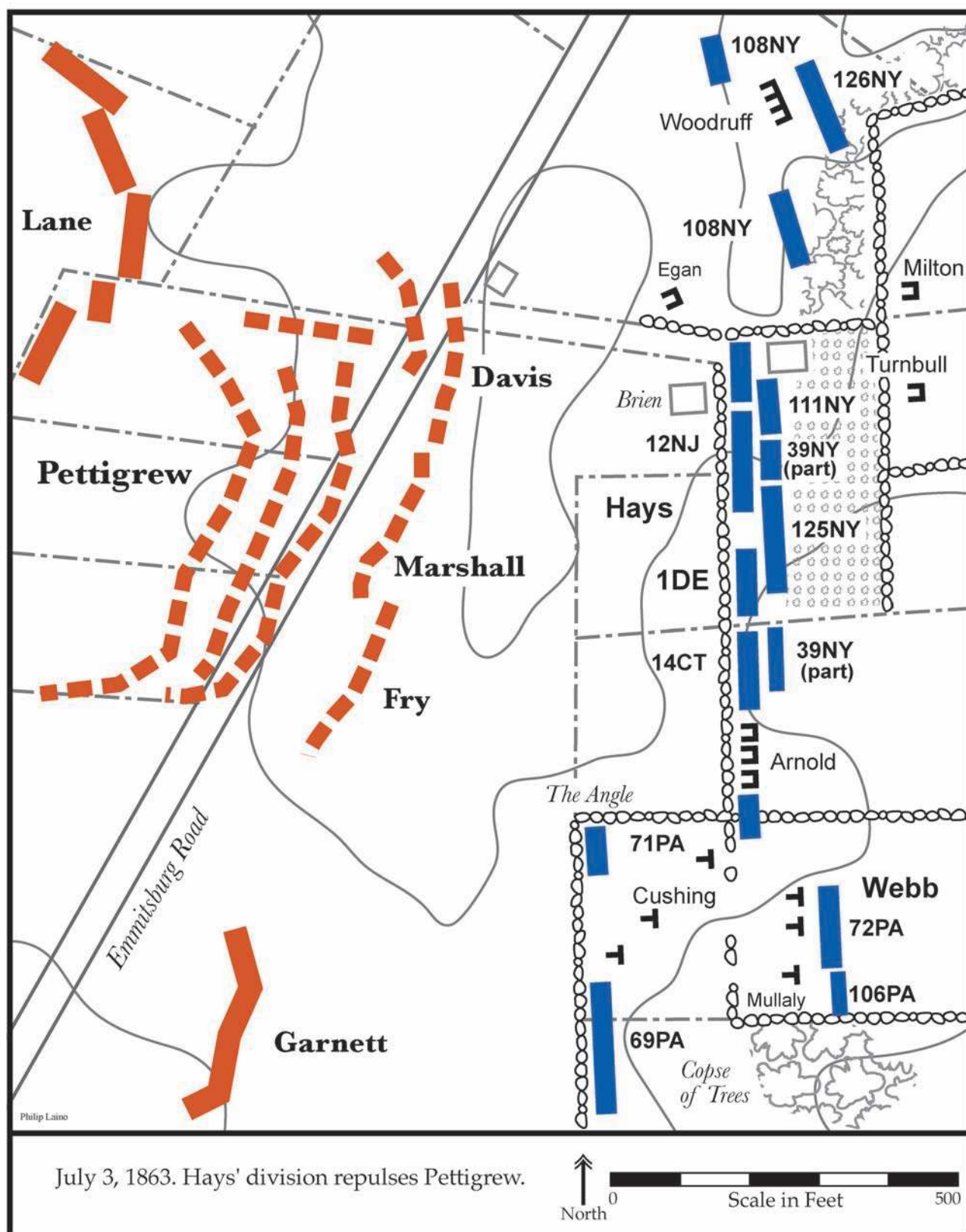
85 Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 81–82; See also George Stewart, *Pickett’s Charge: A Microhistory of the Final Attack at Gettysburg*, July 3, 1863 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 166.

86 Coddington, *Gettysburg Campaign*, 503.

87 J. William Jones, “Accounts of Colonel Rawley Martin and Captain John Holmes Smith,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 32 (1904), 188.

88 Richards Rollins, ed., *Pickett’s Charge: Eyewitness Accounts at the Battle of Gettysburg* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2005), 284.





The repulse of Pettigrew's command on July 3. Courtesy of Phil Laino.



our lines very much. We were now greeted with heavy doses of canister.”<sup>89</sup> Separated by four hundred yards at the beginning of the advance, Pickett and Pettigrew were forced to conduct a series of maneuvers in order for the columns to meet and storm the Federal works as one combined force. After marching halfway toward the Union lines, the connection between Pickett and Pettigrew was made just beyond the Emmitsburg Road. In a slight depression that gave the Confederates partial cover from the increasing fire, the forces dressed their ranks for the last push up to the ridge.<sup>90</sup>

Prepared and positioned to unleash its first volley, the soldiers of the 1st Delaware held their fire until the Confederates reached Emmitsburg Road. The soldiers were cautioned to resist the waste of ammunition and to hold their fire until the Confederates struck the road. The Confederates were now close enough that the shouted orders of “Steady men!” and “Guide centre!” could be heard over the increasing canister fire.<sup>91</sup> General Hays was standing erect with arms folded, behind the Delaware regiment, when the orders were given to unleash a fiery hell on J. Johnston Pettigrew’s Confederate soldiers. “We were cautioned to hold our fire until the rebels began to climb the fence,” described Seville, “when this obstacle was reached their ranks were thrown into some confusion, when, at the word ‘Fire’ shouted by General Hays, such an appalling sheet of flame burst from our line that the rebel ranks melted away like wax.”<sup>92</sup> John L. Brady offers up the same Victorian language to describe the unthinkable: “Under this solid sheet of withering fire, the first column melts away like frost before a mid-days sun.”<sup>93</sup> Sergeant Dunn recalled twenty-five years later that “they melted away as snow before a tropical storm.”<sup>94</sup>

Differing accounts from soldiers of Hays’s division suggest that other regiments held their fire longer than the impatient Delawareans. A later historian of the 12th New Jersey chronicled that “some regiments opened on the Rebels as soon as they crossed Emmitsburg Road, but most of Smyth’s

men held their fire till the front rank was within fifty yards of the stone wall.”<sup>95</sup> Seville clearly has company in his statement that the 1st Delaware at least fired its first volley at two hundred yards as the Confederates were tangled with or just exiting the road. “Under orders we reserved our fire,” described John Dunn, who continued, “Their first and second lines had crossed the Emmitsburg Pike, when up rose grand and gallant old Alexander Hays.”<sup>96</sup> With a trumpet like voice, Hays gave the command to “show them your colors and give them hell boys.”<sup>97</sup> John L. Brady seconds these reports: “Onward the enemy advances . . . they commence to scale the fence, when in Stentorian voice, the fatal vocable, ‘Fire!’ rings out along the line.”<sup>98</sup>

Despite the inconsistencies in the timing of each regiment’s first fire, within minutes the firing was general and intense along the entire Federal line. With the increase of white smoke, the Federals could only catch a glimpse of the effect of the fire; but by all accounts, it was devastating. By the time the Confederates reached within fifty yards of the stone wall, the Delawareans had likely fired three, perhaps as many as four shots. Where there was once a solid line of Confederate infantry, suddenly huge gaps appeared as each salvo was fired across the stone wall. To the right of the 1st Delaware, the destruction was just as fierce in front of the 12th New Jersey. One New Jersey soldier had to avert his eyes as the enemy fell in droves. “It looked like murder,” he wrote home to his wife.<sup>99</sup> General Hays later reported in a rare poetic moment, “The angel of death alone can produce such a field as was presented.”<sup>100</sup>

Despite the hellacious scene and carnage falling around the Confederate troops, Pettigrew’s soldiers could still wage a modest defense; Trimble’s men in close support aided in laying down fire on the Union troops. One fatality was that of Cpl. Thomas Carey, Company E. A Sussex County volunteer, Corporal Carey was killed instantly when he was

<sup>89</sup> Coddington, *Gettysburg Campaign*, 503.

<sup>90</sup> Stevens, *Souvenir of the Excursion to the Battlefields*, 29.

<sup>91</sup> Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 81.

<sup>92</sup> Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelor Papers*, 3:1398.

<sup>93</sup> Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 816.

<sup>94</sup> Edward G. Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond: The Twelfth New Jersey Volunteer Infantry* (Highstown, NJ: Longstreet House, 1988), 135.

<sup>95</sup> Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 816.

<sup>96</sup> Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 816.

<sup>97</sup> Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelor Papers*, 3:1398.

<sup>98</sup> Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond*, 135.

<sup>99</sup> Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond*, 135.

<sup>100</sup> Alfred B. Carey, “The Civil War Record of the Four Carey Brothers of Indian River Hundred Who Served in Co. E, 1st Del. Infantry Vols.,” 1960, RG 9270.004, box “Civil War, 1,” Delaware State Archives, Dover, Delaware.

shot through the head. Thomas Carey had a reputation for being reckless—"an impulsive fellow," one family member recalled.<sup>101</sup> Told to keep low as he fired, Carey did just the opposite and "continued to look over the top."<sup>102</sup> His recklessness caught up with him at Gettysburg, where he now rests in perpetuity at the Gettysburg National Cemetery, between two others of the regiment, Pvt. John S. Black, Company K, and Cpl. John E. Sheets, Company D. Cpl. Adam Huhn, Company A, was handed a rifle during the close exchange at the stone wall, "with the request that he try his luck" at bagging a rebel.<sup>103</sup> Corporal Huhn's luck in surviving three major Civil War battles was gone; he was killed instantly with a "minnie ball to his right temple."<sup>104</sup> Sgt. Thomas Seymour, Company B, a member of the 1st Delaware color guard, was ordered to hold the colors at all costs but to "assume a kneeling attitude and thus while partly shielding his body behind the crest of the works."<sup>105</sup> The ruse worked for about two minutes before Seymour was "struck in the breast by a solid shot and killed."<sup>106</sup>

It was all over in a matter of minutes. Only a handful of soldiers of Marshall's and Fry's brigades ever came within reach of the stone wall held by the 1st Delaware, and they were either brought down shortly after by Federal balls or captured for their effort. Many were struck down when they turned their backs and were shot while retreating toward Seminary Ridge, having recognized that the attack to carry the works had failed. Elements of troops under Trimble's command from Scales's brigade—the same troops the Delawareans tangled with at the Bliss farm—were returned the favor from the prior day's battle. Trimble's supporting troops, too, had no more chance of success than Pettigrew's men and soon were killed or clung to any relief the ground could provide, hoping to hold out long enough to be captured rather than killed.<sup>107</sup>

"There lay the dead, dying and wounded, mingling their groans with the shouts of the victors,"

wrote John Dunn.<sup>108</sup> In front of the Federal lines lay dead and wounded Virginians, Mississippians, Tennesseans, Georgians, and North Carolinians by the score. Dunn recalled twenty-five years later, "I never saw dead and wounded men lay so thick. . . . From a space about seventy feet back to the opposite side of the pike you could walk over the dead bodies of men." William Seville equally wrote of the quick work made of the Southerners' doomed charge, "None of them reached a point in our front nearer than fifty yard. . . . Although ordered to crouch close behind the low stone wall, most of the men stood upright, as unsheltered as the enemy, and fired with regularity and deadly precision."<sup>109</sup>

The act of capturing an enemy's flag in battle was a rare opportunity, and the officers and soldiers of the 1st Delaware pounced on the chance of partaking in the spoils of victory. On their own initiative, individual soldiers crossed the wall, paying no attention to the Confederates with their hands raised and instead searching for the enemy's colors. Hays's division on July 3 captured a total of fifteen battle flags. The 1st Delaware were credited with capturing two Confederate battle flags. Pvt. Bernard McCarren, who just months before had been fined five dollars on account of being "so much intoxicated as to be unfit for the proper discharge of his duties," was the first to reach the flag of the 13th Alabama of Fry's brigade, thus later earning himself the Medal of Honor.<sup>110</sup> Pvt. John B. Mayberry, Company F, also received the medal, after he recovered the flag of the 7th Tennessee, also of Fry's brigade, which attacked the Delawareans' left flank behind the stone wall.

Lt. William Smith, the temporary regimental commander, also captured a battle flag, though in less glamorous fashion. During the chaos after the repulse, Lieutenant Smith spotted a flag "standing lone and unprotected to the southwest corner of the meadow."<sup>111</sup> Smith made it safely to the flag, which, along with its staff, lay in the open and apparently abandoned by its owner. Anxious to get credit for his good fortune, the commander of the regiment

101 Carey, "Civil War Record of the Four Carey Brothers of Indian River."

102 Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1398.

103 Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1398.

104 Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1398.

105 Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1399.

106 Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond*, 135.

107 Dunn, *Report of Joint Committee*, 817.

108 Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 81–83.

109 *First Delaware Regimental Orders Book, General Orders No. 21*, May 17, 1863, Delaware Historical Society, Wilmington.

110 Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1399.

111 Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, 3:1400.



Color guard of the 1st Delaware. Courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives.

crossed back across the stone wall and was last seen rushing toward General Smyth's headquarters located three hundred yards in the rear. Lieutenant Smith's good fortune ended there; somehow at this late stage in the battle, he was cut in two by a Rebel shell likely fired by the Confederates providing cover to the retreating Rebels. Attesting to the chaos following any Civil War battle, Lieutenant Smith's body was not identified until two days later. According to Lt. John Brady, the Delawarean's body was "cut in twain by either a piece of rail-road or pig iron, and [had been] spoiled or robbed of all exterior marks of immediate identification, including a captured battle flag, his sword, etc., by some cowardly thief."<sup>112</sup> Years later the robbing of the captured flag and of Lieutenant Smith's personal effects still rankled Brady, who disparaged "the cowardly

<sup>112</sup> Ladd and Ladd, *Bachelor Papers*, 3:1400.

ghoul who thus not only robbed our late comrade, but despoiled our regiment of an honor, which the gallantry of our companion had prompted him at the risk of his life to secure for it."<sup>113</sup>

With the repulse of the Confederate charge in the waning afternoon of July 3, the Battle of Gettysburg was effectively over. A heavy rain fell across the battlefield the next day that allowed both sides to restore some order to their ranks. Late that evening, the Army of Northern Virginia stole away in the night, burdened with a miles-long wagon train of wounded and scarce supplies. The men of Smyth's brigade departed the stone wall at Gettysburg—their home for nearly four long days—at 4:00 p.m. on July 5, heading southeast on the Baltimore Pike. By that evening, they reached Two Taverns, where they remained until July 7. Despite a

<sup>113</sup> Longacre, *To Gettysburg and Beyond*, 143.



lackluster pursuit of General Lee's retreating army, the Army of the Potomac nearly trapped Lee with the rain-swollen Potomac River behind him, but Meade's delays allowed the Confederates to put the river between them. A rear-guard action at Falling Rivers on July 14 would include the 1st Delaware moving into position for a final attack, but a reconnaissance in force was ordered instead, which effectively ended the Gettysburg Campaign.<sup>114</sup>

While its losses at Gettysburg did not reach the height of those experienced at Antietam and Fredericksburg, the 1st Delaware's record at Gettysburg deserves to be recognized. The final arbitrator of all Civil War casualties, William F. Fox, places the number of killed and mortally wounded from the 1st Delaware at thirteen. Another thirteen soldiers were captured at the Bliss farm on July 2; their wounded from the entire battle numbered fifty-nine. With the ranks of the 1st Delaware numbering 232 officers and men at the start of the battle, casualties were greater than 35 percent for the regiment.

The battle history of the slave-state volunteers from Delaware did not end with the decisive repulse of Pettigrew's division at Gettysburg. Throughout the fall of 1863, the regiment would take part in the pursuit of Lee's army to the Rapidan River. After participating in Battle of Bristoe Station and Mine Run, the 1st Delaware Volunteers was discharged on December 18, 1863. A regiment of 980 souls barely two years before had been reduced to 200 enlisted men and only 10 officers and were willing to reenlist again for three years as veteran volunteers. The 1st Delaware was the first to take part in the government's offer of veteran-volunteer status. Induced to enlist with a bounty of three hundred dollars, the men of the 1st Delaware were finally being compensated for their duty in repairing a broken country. In exchange for reenlisting for another three years, the men were given the bounty and a thirty-day leave of absence. For some of the regiment, it was a given that they would reenlist; for others, three years of Civil War service was enough. Capt. William Seville, who later appointed himself historian of the regiment, apparently had enough and chose not to reenlist, but the majority of enlisted men, anxious for the monetary reward and to

see the thing out, agreed to the terms offered by the War Department.

With the coming spring of 1864, the newly formed 1st Delaware Veteran Volunteers took the field for the first time and participated along with the Second Corps in all the major battles of Grant's Overland Campaign. Lt. Col. Edward Harris would not be taking part in the 1864 campaign. The Delaware officers, apparently on their own initiative, recommended that the Sussex County native resign his commission. "We told him that [he] ought not to have run in all the engagements," one officer wrote.<sup>115</sup> The beloved commander of the 1st Delaware, Gen. Thomas Alfred Smyth, suffered one of the cruelest of all Civil War deaths. On April 6, 1865, Smyth was mortally wounded near Farmville, Virginia, as he was leading a skirmish line to secure one of the last bridges over the Appomattox River. The ball fractured a vertebrae resulting in paralysis; the native Irishman who was "perfectly willing to sacrifice his nose for the sake of his country" died on April 9 at 4:00 a.m. as the last general and one of the last soldiers to die in the American Civil War.<sup>116</sup>

In closing, perhaps it is best to allow Capt. William Seville to finish the tale of the 1st Delaware at Gettysburg. On the bitterly cold day of January 29, 1884, the colors of the 1st Delaware were returned to Wilmington and deposited for safe keeping with the Delaware Historical Society. Now a bureaucratic War Department clerk, the captain made the trek north from Washington, DC, to deliver a few appropriate remarks. The ceremony was informal and apparently not well attended due to the inclement weather, but perhaps the late adjutant of the regiment stated more than he and the audience anticipated:

The story of the achievements and sacrifices of the First Delaware Volunteers in the great war of the Rebellion is now told, briefly and imperfectly. . . . Let us hope that coming generations, when they assemble to congratulate themselves on the liberty, happiness, and prosperity they enjoy, will not fail to honor the memories of the

<sup>114</sup> Fox, *Regimental Losses*, 307.

<sup>115</sup> William F. Smith to his mother, William F. Smith Papers, November 6, 1863, U.S. Army History Education Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

<sup>116</sup> Maull, *Life and Military Services*, 15. See also Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 140–41.



daring men who paused not to consider selfish interests . . . when powerful and thoroughly-organized treason clutched the throat of the nation, and it cried out in agony, "Save me or Die!" they sprang to the front . . . and when the enemy was stretched out and exhausted and harmless, they laid down their arms and returned modestly to their former stations of industrious and law-abiding citizens.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Seville, *History of the First Regiment Delaware Volunteers*, 154.

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