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The 13th Massachusetts on July 1

The Repulse of O'Neal's Brigade on Oak Ridge

BRADLEY M. FORBUSH

Brig. Gen. Gabriel R. Paul. Courtesy of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

Late in the morning, July 1 at Gettysburg, after severe fighting faded out along the Chambersburg Road, reinforcements arrived for the two opposing armies. Gen. Robert Rodes's large Confederate division of five brigades approached Union lines from the north on Oak Ridge. Brig. Gen. John C. Robinson's 2nd Division of the First Corps was rushed north to oppose them. Of Brig. Gen. John C. Robinson's two brigades, Henry Baxter's and Gabriel R. Paul's, Baxter's brigade has received all the glory at Gettysburg. Paul's brigade certainly fought long and hard, but Baxter had the distinction of destroying Brig. Gen. Alfred Iverson's Confederate brigade of North Carolinians, a well-documented tragedy of epic proportions.

The general consensus today is that Brig. Gen. Henry Baxter's brigade quickly dispatched the attack of Col. Edward A. O'Neal's Alabama brigade from the north and then changed front to face west and destroyed Iverson's brigade of North Carolinians. Stopped dead in their tracks with nowhere to turn, Iverson's shattered troops raised white handkerchiefs to signal surrender. Several of Baxter's regiments charged forward to gather in the Confederate prisoners; but while doing so, they were taking fire on their right flank from the north. When they returned to their line, Paul's brigade had arrived to reinforce them. Then Baxter's tired brigade, out of ammunition, moved south toward the railroad cut to support Lt. James Stewart's 4th U.S. Artillery, Battery B, while Paul's brigade remained on the ridge and opposed Maj. Gen. Robert Rodes's final Confederate assault. For this last push, Rodes used elements of all his five brigades and attacked in unison. This massive assault was successful in

This printed envelope was used by members of Company G, the Stoneham Rifles, of the 13th Massachusetts. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

finally driving both Paul's and Baxter's men from the field around 4:15 p.m.¹ Surrounded, the Union lines broke for the town and safety at Cemetery Hill, where Union army reserves of the Eleventh Corps were posted. Hundreds were captured trying to escape.²

The current interpretation brings regiments of Paul's brigade into the action quite late in the fight, after O'Neal's attack was already beaten back. But because Confederate casualty reports and logic dictate that the 13th Massachusetts and 104th New York regiments opposed O'Neal's troops, repeat attacks by the Alabamians must be invented for this interpretation to work. Historians have to do contortions with the source material to support this narrative.

1 David G. Martin, *Gettysburg July 1* (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Books, 1995), 589–91; report of Maj. Gen. O. O. Howard, in U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), ser. 1, vol. 27, part 1, 704 (hereafter cited as OR and followed by the volume, part, and page numbers).

2 John M. Vanderslice, *Gettysburg Then and Now, the Field of American Valor: Where and How the Regiments Fought* (1899; repr. New York: G. W. Dillingham, 1983), 127. For Robinson's 2nd Division of the First Corps, Baxter's brigade reported 352 missing and Paul's brigade reported 630 missing, for a total of 982 missing for the division. Brig. Gen. James S. Wadsworth's 1st Division reported 624 missing, and Brig. Gen. Thomas Rowley's 3rd Division of the First Corps reported 509 missing.

Author David G. Martin in his *Gettysburg, July 1*, a 1995 study of the battle, often struggled to define these events. He wrote, "The exact order of events during Rodes' initial assault is not entirely clear. Some sources indicate that O'Neal attacked first, while others seem to indicate that Iverson moved to the attack first."³ Martin believes there were up to three or four separate attacks by O'Neal during the day, when reports suggest that only two occurred.⁴

Harry W. Pfanz, in *Gettysburg: The First Day*, states, "Like the Alabamians, Baxter's men left little information about O'Neal's attack."⁵ This is because they did *not* repulse O'Neal's attack. That is, to say, the correct story is this: Baxter's brigade first deployed facing north along the Mummasburg Road. It encountered Confederate skirmishers that were driven into the woods with light loss. Then, General Robinson, commanding both Baxter and Paul's brigades, observed Iverson's and Daniel's Confederate troops approaching from the west and ordered Baxter to change front to oppose them. Baxter did

3 Martin, *Gettysburg July 1*, 220.

4 Martin, *Gettysburg July 1*, 251, 253; report of Col. O'Neal, in OR, 27.2:591–93.

5 Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: The First Day* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 166.

Austin C. Stearns, 13th Massachusetts (c. 1864). Austin C. Stearns, *Three Years with Company K*, ed. Arthur A. Kent (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1976).

this as Iverson advanced. Meanwhile, O'Neal's brigade advanced from the north. O'Neal's attack was repulsed by part of the 90th Pennsylvania and 12th Massachusetts regiments of Baxter's brigade, which refused their right flank to face north. While this was happening, the 13th Massachusetts and 104th New York of Paul's brigade came forward with destructive volleys to assist. So O'Neal's bloody attack was sent reeling back toward McLean's red barn by two regiments of Baxter's brigade and two regiments of Paul's brigade after Baxter had changed front west to face Iverson. The 45th New York and Hubert Dilger's Battery I, 1st Ohio Light Artillery of the Eleventh Corps, assisted Baxter and Paul with heavy fire on the left flank of Colonel O'Neal's advancing line. It is interesting to note that this interpretation is not new.

In *Gettysburg, Then and Now*, published in 1899, John M. Vanderslice, a member of the Executive Committee of the Gettysburg Battlefield Memorial Association (GBMA), published a concise history of

the battle for that group. For thirty-three years the GBMA was responsible for maintaining the battlefield and placing the monuments until the National Park Service assumed those responsibilities in 1895. Vanderslice was a member of the Executive Committee of the GBMA for sixteen years, most of that time associated with the Location and Inscriptions of Monuments Committee. The association elected him to write the history of the battle because of his familiarity with the work. Vanderslice described his mission in the foreword of his history.

It is proposed to briefly and accurately describe the position, movement, services, and losses of every regiment and battery engaged in the battle, as established by the information gathered and collated by the Association by the official reports, and by statements of officers and men of both armies, who, by its invitation upon several occasions, met and conferred upon the field for the purpose of marking the lines of battle, which statements have been most carefully examined, compared and verified.⁶

What follows is Vanderslice's brief description of Colonel O'Neal's attack.

Baxter's brigade moved rapidly to the Mummasburg Road and formed along it in this order: 90th Pennsylvania, 12th Massachusetts, 88th Pennsylvania, 83rd New York, 97th New York, and 11th Pennsylvania Infantry, just as O'Neal's Alabama brigade was advancing to it. Baxter's command had just encountered the Alabama brigade when it had to change front to the left to meet an attack by Iverson's North Carolina brigade—12th, 23rd, 20th, and 5th Infantry. Taking position behind a stone wall along the crest of the hill, it poured destructive volleys into the North Carolinians and then charged them, while the right regiments of Cutler's brigade, which had been withdrawn to the ridge, swung around upon their flank. . . .

O'Neal's brigade was now advancing against the right, when the 90th Pennsylvania was put in position along the Mummasburg Road at right angles to the rest of the brigade, and Paul's brigade of the division—13th Massachusetts, 104th New York, 16th Maine, 107th Pennsylvania, and

⁶ Vanderslice, *Gettysburg, Then and Now*, 24–27.

94th New York Infantry—moved to the support of Baxter’s, extending and strengthening its line, a portion of the line being nearly parallel with the Mummasburg Road and the rest at right angles with it along the ridge. O’Neal’s Alabama brigade—12th, 26th, 6th, and 5th Infantry—attacked the right and was driven back in confusion.⁷

The destruction of Iverson’s brigade by Baxter is well documented in regimental histories and the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*. But O’Neal’s attack is not. The source material is conflicting and often lacks detail; but careful analysis of reports and regimental writings, along with some recently discovered primary-source material from the 13th Massachusetts, reveals a different narrative from the one commonly accepted today. This alternate narrative is supported by the majority of primary accounts and is similar to the summary of events as described by Vanderslice. In an attempt to clarify events, the following analysis of the action is presented using Union and Confederate reports with additional unpublished source material from soldiers in the 13th Massachusetts Infantry. The examination begins with a look at contrary evidence from the narratives of the 45th New York and the 88th Pennsylvania regiments.

The Case of the 45th New York

A well-documented piece of O’Neal’s attack is the devastating fire it received on the left flank from Dilger’s Battery I, 1st Ohio Light, and volleys from the 45th New York skirmishers of the Eleventh Corps. O’Neal’s left flank collapsed under the barrage, and soon the rest of his regiments retired from the field. In *New York at Gettysburg*, the history of the 45th New York makes some surprising claims.

The Alabama Brigade alluded to, advanced steadily to the left without heeding our fire much, whereupon Captain Irsch sent word to Dilger’s Battery, asking them to engage the Confederate infantry if possible with canister or shrapnel (while we laid down again), which they did so successfully that the massed enemy began to halt and waver. The supporting balance of our regiment moved obliquely to the left toward the gap

between the First Corps right and our left, while Dilger’s Battery worked all their guns on O’Neal’s Brigade, jointly with our fire. This brigade had meantime, in a wavering and half resolute manner, passed our right and received a galling fire upon their flank and rear from our four companies. A few regiments of the First Corps near the Mummasburg Road, faced about behind a stone wall to the left of the Mummasburg Road, and fired at the enemy’s advance column. Our other six companies, under Lieutenant Colonel Dobke, also opened fire. The enemy began to break and run up the slope of Oak Hill towards McLean’s barn, and the Virginia Battery limbered up and hastily retired. Our four companies of skirmishers immediately charged them in flank and rear, capturing many prisoners and finally took McLean’s red barn, with many more prisoners.⁸

So far so good, but then we have this:

While we were sending about 300 prisoners to the rear another Confederate brigade came charging down the hill near the Mummasburg Road (Iverson’s North Carolina Brigade), driving in the right of the First Corps. Dilger’s Battery, and six companies of our regiment in their front, and the four companies on Oak Hill and at McLean’s barn, now in their flank and rear, as well as several regiments of the First Corps to the left of the Mummasburg Road, gave them simultaneously fearful volleys in front, on both flanks, and rear. Iverson’s Brigade broke and ran for cover; we all charged them from every quarter simultaneously, and drove part of them upon the right of the First Corps and up to and across the Mummasburg Road, where three entire regiments surrendered with their battle flags, mostly to the First Corps, now in their front, and to the six companies of our regiment, our four companies of skirmishers in their rear picking up about 300 prisoners more.⁹

The official report of Lieutenant Colonel Dobke of the 45th New York, dated August 21, 1863, makes no mention of Iverson.

8 William F. Fox, *New York at Gettysburg*, in *Final Report on the Battlefield of Gettysburg*, vol. 1 (Albany, NY: New York Monuments Commission for the Battlefields of Gettysburg and Chattanooga, 1902), 379, for the 45th New York historical sketch.

9 Fox, *New York at Gettysburg*, 379.

7 Vanderslice, *Gettysburg, Then and Now*, 22–27.

The traditional rendition of the defeat of O'Neal's assault. Courtesy of Phil Laino.

At about 1:30 p.m. a long line of the enemy moved on the extreme right of the First Corps, passing the left of the Forty-fifth, and offering the flank to the Forty-fifth Regiment New York Volunteers, the left wing of our regiment at once gave fire at very short distance (50 or 100 yards) with such terrible effect that, in result with the combination of the fire from the extreme right of the First Corps, the whole of the enemy's line halted, gradually disappeared on the same spot where they stood, and the remainder, finding they could not retrace their steps, surrendered, partly to the First Corps and a great number to the Forty-fifth Regiment, which prisoners were at once sent to the rear, but in the heat of the battle no account could be taken. In the most raging fire and the most horrible scenes, when 8 comrades, one after another, were killed, and some shattered to pieces, not a single man flinched, but all were cheering and fulfilled their duties nobly.

So we remained under fire until about 4 p.m., when the First Corps, on our left, gave way, and exposed our left flank, and at the same time heavy columns were moving on us in front and on the right, when the Forty-fifth Regiment was ordered to retreat.¹⁰

The fact that soldiers of the 45th New York advanced to McLean's barn and captured several prisoners is undisputed, but the additional narrative regarding Iverson's attack seems to be an embellishment written for *New York at Gettysburg*.¹¹ It is not mentioned in the regiment's official report, nor is there any mention of capturing three hundred prisoners in addition to those captured from O'Neal. It is possible they witnessed the advance of Iverson's line or perhaps that of Daniel's brigade, which advanced in support of Iverson, because as James Beale of the 12th Massachusetts described it, three Confederate lines advanced from the west: "Three battle lines were visible on our west front. The nearest surrendered, and proved to be a large part of Iverson's brigade."¹²

In his book, *Gettysburg July 1*, David G. Martin writes of this claim, "There is physically no way that the 45th captured any of Iverson's men; the prison-

ers referred to must have belonged to O'Neal's command, though this brigade could not have lost 600 prisoners to the 45th New York alone."¹³ That statement, at least, is discredited, yet the embellished account also raises the difficult question of who attacked first, Iverson or O'Neal.

The action as described by Vanderslice and this paper rather favor the view that Iverson's attack reached the Union lines first, while the majority opinion today holds that the reverse is true. There is enough evidence to support either opinion, but it is difficult to untangle. Gen. Robert Rodes stated that he ordered the two brigades to advance at the same time: "I caused Iverson's brigade to advance, and at the same moment gave in person to O'Neal the order to attack."¹⁴ More importantly, the *New York at Gettysburg* report does not mention a "change of front" by the First Corps troops south of the Mummasburg Road, implying that the Union lines facing Iverson were already in position and being "driven in." Thus, the New York story does not discredit the theory in which elements of General Paul's brigade arrived on the field and assisted in the rout of O'Neal's brigade.

Another historical embellishment occurs in author John Vautier's history of the 88th Pennsylvania.

88th Pennsylvania Volunteers, Baxter's Brigade

John Vautier was a tireless promoter of the record of the gallant 88th Pennsylvania and kept its memory alive by authoring numerous newspaper articles and the official regimental history—*History of the 88th Pennsylvania Volunteers in the War for the Union, 1861–1865*. He was a soldier in Company I of that unit; and though he studied the battle of Gettysburg carefully and was a member of the 88th Pennsylvania Gettysburg Monument Commission, he was not with the regiment at Gettysburg. He was at a hospital in Washington, DC, since November 1862.¹⁵

¹³ Martin, *Gettysburg July 1*, 264.

¹⁴ Report of Maj. Gen. Robert Rodes, in *OR*, 27:2:553.

¹⁵ Information on John Vautier from *The Diary of John Dominique Vautier*, transcribed on "John Dominique Vautier (1843–1912)," WikiTree, accessed May 11, 2016, http://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Vautier-28#Transcript_of_John.27s_Civil_War_Diary. He took sick in camp on October 3, 1862, shortly after the battle of Antietam. On November 4, with the army on the move, all the sick were ordered to hospitals in Washington, DC. Vautier remained at Island Hill Hospital on 6th Street and Virginia Avenue until January 4, 1863. While recovering, he assisted with hospital operations. When the hospital closed on January 4, he was ordered to East Lincoln Hospital, where he was assigned nursing duties and later baggage room duties. He remained at this hospital until August 10, 1863, when he was allowed to rejoin his regiment in the field camped along the Rappahannock River. Vautier's diary was transcribed by his great-great-grandson Robert Weaver.

¹⁰ Report of Lt. Col. Adolphus Dobke, 45th New York, in *OR*, 27:1:734.

¹¹ Pfanz, *Gettysburg*, 169–70.

¹² James Beale, *The Statements of Time on July 1 at Gettysburg PA 1863* (Philadelphia: James Beale, 1897), 24.

Vautier's account differs somewhat from other regiments in the brigade when he credits O'Neal's heavy casualties to Baxter's skirmishers. He uses Confederate reports to support this idea, but he does not use any evidence from Union accounts to verify it. In all the reports from other regiments of Baxter's brigade, skirmishers, facing north, advanced and drove an approaching Confederate line back into the woods with the loss of one man killed and a few wounded. Although Confederates state O'Neal's attack was repulsed quickly, this does not sound like the repulse of an all-out attack. O'Neal's brigade took heavy casualties. Vautier writes,

Here, after some preliminary skirmishing by the advance, the regiment [88th Pennsylvania] formed line of battle near the road, facing north-east. After alignment, skirmishers were sent into the woods to ascertain what the rebs were about; but no extended investigation was necessary, as the boys from the other side were coming right along, supported by O'Neal's Alabama brigade in line of battle, cocked and primed for a fight. . . .

When O'Neal's lines came in view the skirmishers at once opened upon them, and the enemy soon fell back into the woods, having sustained considerable loss. After these troops had been repulsed another line was observed approaching the road, through Forney's farm, taking Baxter directly in the left flank; this movement necessitated a change of front to the top of the hill, bringing the brigade behind a low stone wall nearly perpendicular to the road. And none too soon, for the field in front was swarming with Confederates, who came sweeping on in magnificent order, with perfect alignment, guns at right shoulder their colors to the front,—to many the dead march.¹⁶

So far this does not differ much from other accounts in Baxter's brigade, with the exception of the claim that it was these skirmishers who inflicted "considerable loss" on O'Neal.

Included in Vautier's regimental history is a chapter titled "A Discursive Chapter on the First Day at Gettysburg" in which he expounds on this

idea with more quotes from the Confederate side but still nothing from the Union side to back it up.

Baxter says that he carried into action less than 1200 men, and Paul had about 1300. Opposed to these, O'Neal was swinging around on his right with 1800, Iverson with 1500, and Ramseur in reserve with about 1200 more. If this blow had been delivered as intended, it is safe to say that Robinson's retreat would have been forced in short order. But O'Neal had many difficulties to overcome, marching over the hill, through the brush, over fences and rocks, and being in the advance, he came in collision with Baxter before Iverson came up. To meet O'Neal Baxter changed front to right, forming along the road and presenting a firm front. His men received the enemy courageously, and the result was, to quote Rodes's words, "that the whole brigade was repulsed quickly and with loss."¹⁷

Vautier follows this paragraph with two quotes from O'Neal's brigade.

O'Neal reports,—“They found the enemy strongly posted, and after a desperate and bloody fight of about half an hour were compelled to fall back.”

Colonel Pickens, of the 12th [Alabama] says that they were engaged about fifteen minutes, and were flanked and in danger of being surrounded, so they had to get out. This flank fire came largely from the 45th New York and Dilger's battery, of the 11th Corps. O'Neal's soldiers hurriedly made for the rear, and were with difficulty rallied beyond the range of the Union fire.¹⁸

The rest of Vautier's narrative describes, in detail, Baxter's change of front and the destruction of Iverson's brigade, with quotes from several Union participants. But such quotes are missing from the repulse of O'Neal.

Vautier's use of these Confederate quotes is valid if we accept his account of O'Neal's rout by Baxter's brigade, but the evidence does not exist on the Union side to support this story. The use of Confederate quotes is misplaced and consequently misleading. Confederate accounts are vague but

¹⁶ John D. Vautier, *History of the Eighty-Eighth Pennsylvania Volunteers in the War for the Union, 1861–1865* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1894), 105–6.

¹⁷ Vautier, *History of the Eighty-Eighth Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 134.

¹⁸ Vautier, *History of the Eighty-Eighth Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 134.

agree that O'Neal's attack was bloody. The scenario described in Vautier's narrative only infers a bloody engagement with heavy loss in prisoners. Brigade commander Henry Baxter's report omits any mention of a bloody engagement during his initial deployment.

There is also a problem with another of Vautier's statements:

As soon as the remnants of Iverson's and the shattered battalions of O'Neal's brigade were rallied, they were aligned with Ramseur and a Gen. advance made on Paul's exhausted troops, holding the hill formerly occupied by Baxter, who was now reforming near the cut.¹⁹

He says that Paul's brigade was exhausted. But no reason is given for their exhausted condition. Clearly this is an artistic flourish, but a reader could rhetorically ask of the above statement, What was it that exhausted Paul's troops? Perhaps they were exhausted watching Baxter's men do all the work.

Vautier's statement that Baxter repulsed O'Neal's attack before changing front to face Iverson is unsupported.

Examination of Brig. Gen. Henry Baxter's Report

Regarding his deployment, General Baxter says two regiments were sent forward as skirmishers and drove an approaching enemy line back into the woods. This is not the description of a bloody engagement.

An order arriving from Gen. Robinson, commanding division, before the brigade had halted, to send forward two regiments at once, the Eleventh Pennsylvania Volunteers, Colonel Coulter, and the Ninety-seventh New York, Colonel Wheelock, continued their march, moving to the front. The remaining four regiments were ordered forward in a very few moments, and formed on the right of the two regiments already sent forward, which were on the right of the First Division (Gen. Wadsworth).

This would be his first position (facing west or northwest). He continues,

Indications being that we should be attacked on

our right flank, I at once changed front by filing to the right and forming forward on first battalion, a division of the Eleventh Corps being on our right at least 400 yards. I immediately sent skirmishers forward.²⁰

This would be his second position, facing north, where he viewed indications of an impending Confederate attack, most probably from Colonel O'Neal's brigade of Alabamans.²¹ It seems Baxter's skirmishers and the change of front drove the rebel skirmishers back into the woods. Baxter's report continues,

but the enemy now appearing on our left flank, I had again to change front to the left, and moved forward to the crest of the hill, bringing us before the enemy, when the brigade opened on the advancing foes a most deadly fire, soon causing them to recoil and give way.²²

This maneuver brought Baxter's line to the crest of Oak Ridge, facing west. This is where all the monuments for Baxter's Brigade stand today. It is the first time General Baxter mentions being in direct combat with the enemy. He is describing Gen. Alfred Iverson's attack. Capt. Isaac Hall commanded the skirmishers in the 97th New York. He writes about this action in his history of the regiment:

To the front, away to the crest of a hill skirted by woods, north of the Mummasburg road, the colors and a part of a Confederate line could be seen (supposed to be O'Neal's brigade) an advance line from that direction being lodged in a field of grain between the aforementioned fence and the road, its left resting in the road, which was sunken. This line began firing upon the detachment from Baxter's brigade and was supposed to be creeping up in the grass which waved gracefully over the field. Meanwhile our skirmish line advanced over the meadow, driving the enemy back, losing one man of Company F killed, and some others wounded. When the fence was reached it seems the object of advanc-

²⁰ Report of Brig. Gen. Henry Baxter, in OR, 27:1:307.

²¹ Beale, *Statements of Time*, 24–25. Beale wrote, "The skirmishers dislodged by the 12th Massachusetts may have been sharpshooters from the 5th Alabama, but as I afterwards found dead of the 12th N.C. in that vicinity, I think they belonged to Iverson's brigade, which was 'in the advance of Gen. Roden division.'"

²² Baxter's report, OR, 27:1:307.

¹⁹ Vautier, *History of the Eighty-Eighth Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 143.

ing this skirmish line was attained, for pending this advance the 12th Massachusetts (Col. Bates) came up and the 97th flanked to the right and forming on this regiment, immediately changed direction by the left moving along the east crest near to a strip of timber aforementioned, when a change of direction of our regiment to the left was again made, and marching upon the crest it halted in rear of a stone wall on J. S. Forney's east line—facing west—and Colonel Wheelock now ordered the commandant of his skirmish line to march his command by the right flank and rejoin the regiment.²³

Isaac Hall has just described the so-called repulse of O'Neal's brigade. But with "one man of Company F killed, and some others wounded," this does not sound like a flat-out assault by the Confederates. Keep in mind Colonel Dobke's observation regarding O'Neal's brigade: "A long line of the enemy moved on the extreme right of the First Corps." In fact, the advance line described was repulsed back into the woods by a skirmish line from Baxter's brigade. O'Neal's brigade lost at least three hundred casualties during his assault.²⁴

Baxter and Hall do not report a heavy engagement before facing Iverson's attack. They report driving enemy skirmishers into the woods. This cannot be the full force of O'Neal's attack. Reports from various regiments in his brigade, including the 97th New York and 12th Massachusetts, indicate that when Baxter changed front to face west, a steady fire was annoying their right flank, coming from the north and McLean's barn. Because of this fire, the right flank regiment, the 90th Pennsylvania, bent a part of their line back to face north. General Baxter writes,

Another line immediately took the place of that repulsed, and at this time they appeared on our right flank, making it necessary for the Ninetieth Pennsylvania Volunteer Regiment, Colonel Lyle, to change front to meet them, which they did in perfect order, receiving meanwhile a very severe fire.²⁵

After changing front, a severe fire of the enemy hit Baxter's right flank, and the 90th Pennsylvania changed front to meet them. None of the regiments in Baxter's brigade report a heavy attack before changing front to the west. Excerpts from the histories of the 97th New York, 11th Pennsylvania, and 83rd New York of Baxter's brigade confirm this observation.

The 97th New York

Lt. Col. R. S. Egelston of the 97th New York wrote,

After the regiment, in connection with the 11th Pennsylvania had reached Seminary Ridge, north of the seminary and of the railroad cut, it fronted north for a while, but pending the movement northerly of a skirmish line across a meadow, it changed front or flanked to the east forming on first battalion (12th Massachusetts) which had now come up, and facing again northerly, marched along the easterly slope a short distance, when it changed direction, facing west; and marching up near the crest halted sixteen yards to the rear of where the 97th monument now stands. Here the regiment remained more than an hour, and during this time a Confederate line on our right flank, and to the right of our front in an adjoining field, occupied the attention of the 97th, and a desultory fire was kept up in this line till the charge of Iverson's brigade in our front. This charge was repulsed by a destructive fire of the 97th, a well directed steady fire of a regiment or more to the left; while the 12th Massachusetts poured a deadly fire on the enemy's flank, which caused him to retreat and seek shelter in a gully about 150 yards to our front, from which he raised white emblems in token of surrender. [Iverson] A charge by the 97th, and a regiment or more on its left immediately followed, which resulted in the capture of about 400 prisoners, and the flag of the 20th North Carolina regiment by the 97th New York Regiment.

A skirmish line from an adjoining field on our right flank was kept up with galling effect on our line during our advance; also, in returning, this fire was not relaxed on our left while bringing the prisoners from the field; some of whom were wounded by their own men.²⁶

²³ Isaac Hall, *History of the Ninety-Seventh Regiment New York Volunteers* (Utica: Press of L. C. Childs and Son, 1890), 135–36.

²⁴ Casualties of Rodes's division at Gettysburg, in *OR*, 27.2:562.

²⁵ Baxter's report, *OR*, 27.1:307.

²⁶ Hall, *History of the Ninety-Seventh Regiment New York Volunteers*, 139–40, account of R. S. Egelston, Atlanta, GA, February 16, 1889.

Egelston is describing a heavy attack from Iverson that occurred sometime after the brigade changed front to face west, and a steady fire from the north on the regiment's right flank is described during the charge on Iverson's surrendering soldiers. If O'Neal's brigade had already been repulsed, these would have to be reinforcements sent out to prepare for the final push of General Rodes's Confederate division. This is a possibility, but Egelston's account makes no mention of repulsing a strong attack from the north in their initial deployment. He only describes waiting for a skirmish line to complete its movement, which suggests that O'Neal did not attack until after the 97th changed front to the west.

Lt. Ebenezer B. Harrington, Company C, 97th New York, wrote,

Baxter's brigade was ordered forward, and after crossing the railroad bed it was halted, and during the advance to the north of a skirmish line from the right of the 97th, under the command of Captain Hall, of Company A, our regiment and that of the 11th Pennsylvania were ordered forward and took position on the westerly slope, just north of a piece of woods, west of the present dwelling of Robert Sheads. We here faced a meadow covered with a rank growth of timothy—and here these two regiments remained for some time. At length the 11th Pennsylvania was advanced from the left of the 97th a few yards and was halted and ordered to lie down, and a skirmish line from the right of the 97th, commanded as before was ordered across the meadow to a high rail fence about 200 yards distant, to the north. Pending this movement the 12th Massachusetts came up, and the 97th flanked to the right and forming on this regiment changed direction immediately to the left, and moving along east of the crest, nearly to a strip of timber, the 97th changed direction again to the left and marching up near the crest, halted in rear of a stone wall and here remained about two hours—fronting west—and after the skirmish line which had marched across the meadow now in our front, and had joined us on our right, a good deal of skirmishing was kept up by the 97th with a Confederate skirmish line on our right flank, and in some bushes off to the front of our

right. Finally a little to the left and in our front a rapid firing was heard and a yell from a charging force of Iverson's brigade. The 97th sprang up and moving up to the wall fired over the crest upon this Confederate line as it approached. The troops to our right wheeling into line, poured a volley with a most destructive effect upon the flank of Iverson's brigade, which caused it to seek shelter in a gully in our front. Here the Confederates raised tokens of surrender.²⁷

Again, Lieutenant Harrington describes a strong fire from the north and northwest, striking the regiment on its flank when they were facing west toward Iverson's attack. He mentions rapid fire against Iverson but does not specifically mention repelling O'Neal's attack.

11th Pennsylvania Volunteers

Col. Richard Coulter, commanding the 11th Pennsylvania, wrote the following in his official report:

The First Division [Wadsworth's] had been for some time engaged when this brigade, about 11 a.m., was massed on the west side and near the embankment of the railroad. At this point I was directed by the general commanding the brigade to proceed with the Ninety-seventh New York Volunteers, Colonel Wheelock, and my own, Eleventh Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers, which I did, deploying both regiments, and moved with skirmishers about a quarter of a mile beyond the railroad track.

He changes front to the left . . .

Discovering that the enemy's movement was being directed against the left flank, I changed front to the left, and took position on the ridge (where the fighting subsequently took place), connecting the left of my command upon the right of General Cutler's brigade, of the First Division. I was here joined on the right by General Baxter, who resumed command of the entire line.

The skirmishers had been a short time engaged, and about 12:30 p.m. the firing became general along the entire line. The enemy, after several attempts, finding it impossible to force

²⁷ Hall, *History of the Ninety-Seventh Regiment New York Volunteers*, 140–41, account of Ebenezer B. Harrington.

our position, commenced moving his troops toward the left, under a galling and effective fire from our line. While this was being done, a sally was made by part of the brigade (the Ninety-seventh New York Volunteers and my own regiment engaging in it), which resulted in the capture of about 500 of the enemy.²⁸

Colonel Coulter's account has less detail regarding the direction of movements and the actions of the skirmishers; but when he writes "I changed front to the left, and took position on the ridge (where the fighting subsequently took place)," he is referencing the position where the troops faced west.

83rd New York Volunteer Infantry (9th New York State Militia)

This summary of comments from Baxter's brigade concludes with the 83rd New York, or as they preferred, "The Ninth New York Militia."

Deployment

The Eleventh Pennsylvania and Ninety-seventh New York did not halt with the brigade, but had been sent out towards the front line; the balance of the brigade was soon moved forward to patch out the line. This brought the Ninth into the fight. Leaving Gen. Paul with his—First—brigade at the Seminary, Robinson and staff hurried after Baxter. Meanwhile, the brigade had been posted by its commander in the edge of a strip of woods along the Mummasburg Pike, and facing north, in order to oppose the enemy, who were advancing on his right flank.²⁹

Change of Front

At the moment of Robinson's arrival he noticed the advance of a body of the enemy towards this open space, which if unopposed, would penetrate to the left and rear of Baxter's line. *Directing Baxter to change front to meet this pressing emergency, Robinson sent back for Paul's brigade, and, upon its arrival, placed it to oppose the enemy, which he now saw about to form on Oak Hill,*

at the north end of the Seminary Ridge, and less than a quarter of a mile distant from the Pike.³⁰

Iverson's Attack

Baxter had hardly time to form his new line, facing west, with the Ninetieth Pennsylvania on the right, and across the Pike, its right refused to face the enemy on Oak Hill, from which point O'Neill's brigade of Rode's division, Ewell's corps, was then advancing. The Ninth was on the right center of the brigade line. Fortunately for the command, a stone fence in front afforded some protection, and behind this the men awaited the advance of Iverson's brigade—also of Ewell's corps. *The stone wall along the Pike protected the line some what from an enfilading fire from O'Neill's command, but that danger was soon averted by the arrival of Paul's brigade, which also relieved the Ninetieth Pennsylvania from the double duty of guarding its right and rear at the same time.* Iverson's brigade was allowed to approach within close musket range. The men seemed unaware of Baxter's line behind the stone wall, until the order was given, "Up men, and fire!"³¹

This clearly states that Paul's brigade arrived in time to repulse O'Neal's attack from the north. Again, there is no mention of repulsing O'Neal before changing position to face Iverson.

More from the 83rd New York can be found in *New York at Gettysburg*. Here are the historical notes by Capt. George A. Hussey:

The Ninth New York, under command of Lieut. Col. Joseph A Moesch, belonged to Baxter's Brigade of Robinson's Division, First Corps. It was first put into line of battle facing the Mummasburg road; but the appearance of several brigades of the enemy, to the left and rear, necessitated a corresponding change of front and it was then formed on the top of Seminary Ridge, protected by a stone wall which, for a while, concealed the men from the enemy's view.

The enemy, advancing in line of battle, opened fire on the Ninth, charging up the hill with desperation. The men of the Ninth stood their

²⁸ Report of Col. Richard Coulter, 11th Pennsylvania, in *OR*, 27.1:292.

²⁹ William Todd, ed., *History of the Ninth Regiment (83rd New York Volunteers) 1845–1888* (New York: George Hussey, 1880), 269–70.

³⁰ Todd, *History of the Ninth Regiment*, 270, emphasis added.

³¹ Todd, *History of the Ninth Regiment*, 270, emphasis added.

ground like heroes, encouraged by the bravery of their lieutenant colonel, who rode along the line cheering on his men. The men displayed great coolness, reserving their fire until the enemy came within fifty yards, when a murderous volley was poured into their ranks, which sent them reeling back in utter confusion, followed closely by the brigade, whose cheers rent the air.

The enemy at this point consisted of the North Carolina Brigade of Iverson, supported by Ramseur, and to the right by O'Neal, of Ewell's Corps, whose men marched as on parade towards the boys in blue. Such a concentrated fire was poured into Iverson's troops that they became at once totally demoralized, and lost a large number of prisoners.³²

To repeat the summation of the previous regimental accounts, none of Baxter's regiments report repulsing a bloody attack from the north before changing front west to face Iverson's brigade. They only repulsed skirmishers. What do the Confederates say?

Confederate Accounts of Colonel O'Neal's Attack from the *Official Records* and Other Sources

There are few details about Colonel O'Neal's attack—only that the fight was short and bloody. Excerpts from the reports of division commander Rodes, brigade commander O'Neal, and regimental commanders Col. John C. Goodgame and Col. J. M. Hall follow. In his report, Maj. Gen. Robert Rodes wrote of O'Neal's attack:

The Alabama brigade went into action in some confusion, and with only three of its regiments (the Sixth, Twelfth, and Twenty-sixth).

... The three first mentioned regiments moved with alacrity (but not in accordance with my orders as to direction) and in confusion into the action. *It was soon apparent that we were making no impression upon the enemy*, and hence I ordered forward the Fifth Alabama to their support; but, to my surprise, in giving this command to its colonel (Hall), I found that Colonel O'Neal, instead of personally superintending the movements of his brigade, had chosen to remain

with his reserve regiment. The result was that the whole brigade, with the exception of the Third Alabama was repulsed quickly, and with loss.³³

Could General Rodes be referring to the initial check of O'Neal's advance line by Baxter's skirmishers when he says, "It was soon apparent that we were making no impression upon the enemy"? Colonel O'Neal's report states,

Our artillery having been withdrawn, we were ordered forward (that is, the Sixth, Twelfth, and Twenty-sixth Alabama Regiments), and found the enemy strongly posted and in heavy force, and, after a desperate and bloody fight of about half an hour, we were compelled to fall back.³⁴

Lt. Col. John C. Goodgame, commanding the 26th Alabama, wrote,

We engaged the enemy about 12 m. on July 1. The enemy made a stubborn resistance, but was finally driven from the field.

The loss of the regiment was heavy. Some 40 were taken by the enemy, but it is my opinion that every man could have escaped being captured had they done their duty.

The loss in killed was 7; wounded, 58; missing, 65.³⁵

Col. J. M. Hall of the 5th Alabama wrote,

When within 500 yards of the enemy, the four regiments on my right were ordered forward, and the Fifth Alabama Regiment was halted in reserve, to protect the right flank of Gen. Doles and the left flank of that part of Rodes' brigade [O'Neal] which was then advancing. After resting in this position a half hour, orders were sent to me to advance on the enemy, composed of two heavy lines of infantry in front and a line of sharpshooters, supported by infantry and artillery on my left flank. The enemy in front was engaged by the right wing, the left having been thrown back at right angles with the rest of the line, to engage the flanking party. The regiment fought in this position until I was informed that the troops on the right were falling back, when I

³³ Rodes's report, *OR*, 27.2:553, emphasis added.

³⁴ O'Neal's report, *OR*, 27.2:592.

³⁵ Report of Lt. Col. John C. Goodgame, 12th Alabama, commanding 26th Alabama, in *OR*, 27.2:601.

³² Historical notes on the 83rd New York by Capt. George A. Hussey, in *New York at Gettysburg*, 678.

ordered a retrograde movement to the position I previously occupied. This was done the more conscientiously because the odds opposed were very great, and my command was under a front and enfilading fire, with no support, and suffering a very severe loss.³⁶

These reports suggest strong resistance from the Union troops, unlike anything recorded from Baxter's regiments before they changed front. The following is a list of casualties reported by the regiments in Colonel O'Neal's brigade:

5th Alabama; 21 killed, 121 wounded, 67 missing, (July 1 casualties only) total 209.

26th Alabama; 7 killed, 58 wounded; 65 missing (40 captured by the enemy) total 130 (combined losses for two days of heavy combat, July 1 and July 3).

12th Alabama; 2 officers and 10 enlisted men killed; 6 officers and 65 enlisted men wounded; total 83 (combined losses for two days of heavy combat, July 1 and July 3).

6th Alabama; lost 162 men of 350 (combined losses for heavy fighting on July 1 and 3).³⁷

These casualties represent losses in two heavy engagements, on July 1 and July 3. O'Neal still lost a lot of men July 1. Even if these numbers are cut in half, O'Neal lost at least 396 men in this confrontation.

There are few personal narratives of O'Neal's attack, but Samuel B. Pickens of the 5th Alabama (not to be confused with Col. S. B. Pickens, commanding the 12th Alabama) recorded the following vivid account:

Left camp this morning at 6:30 a.m. & marched 7 miles on the Chambersburg road to Middletown, where we turned to the left on the Gettysburg road. As we approached the town we heard the cannonading & formed a line of battle about 2 miles off & advanced upon the Yankees. Our Regt. was on the left of the Brigade & as it moved forward it made a partial right wheel & thus kept us at a double quick march all the time; & as it was an excessively hot day & we were

going through wheat fields & ploughed ground & over fences, it almost killed us. I was perfectly exhausted & never suffered so from heat & fatigue in my life. A good many fell out of ranks being completely broken down & some fainted. We halted & lay down for some time at a fence & witnessed an artillery duel between one of our batteries stationed about 150 yds. in front of us & a Yankee battery away to our left. 5 or 6 dead horses & 1 or 2 broken caissons or gun carriages were left by our battery when it moved off. Our Regt. then went forward, for the rest of the Brigade had gone on while we had been left to guard the space between our Brigade & Doles' which was on our left & prevent either from being flanked. We came up with the Brig., however, at a fence where it had halted and there our company was sent forward to a barn to act as sharpshooters. There were some N.C. sharpshooters there who had shot away all their cartridge. Wm. Stokes was wounded before getting to the barn, & Joe Brown while in it. We kept up pretty brisk firing at the Yankees, but it seemed as if we could do very little execution as they were so far off & behind a fence in the wood, though they made the bullets whistle over us. After the Brig. passed on we ran out of the barn & through an open field where the bullets were flying thick & went down on the left to a lane where the Regt. was. I never saw troops so scattered & in such confusion. We were under a heavy fire from the front & a cross fire from the left & pretty soon had to fall back to a fence where the Brig. was rallied by Col. O'Neal & Gen'l. Rodas.³⁸

To summarize the Confederate reports, all the regiments in O'Neal's attack force mention heavy losses in captured and wounded. This does not sound like the action described by the men of Baxter's brigade when first deployed. But there was an attack from the north, where the two right regiments of Baxter's brigade, the 12th Massachusetts and 90th Pennsylvania, refused their right flank to oppose it. Here are accounts from those two units.

³⁶ Report of Col. J. M. Hall, 5th Alabama, in *OR*, 27.2:595.

³⁷ For the 5th Alabama, see Hall's report, *OR*, 27.2:595, 597; for the 26th Alabama, see Goodgame's report, *OR*, 27.2:601; for the 12th Alabama, see report of Col. S. B. Pickens, 12th Alabama, in *OR*, 27.2:600; and for the 6th Alabama, see the report of Capt. M. L. Bowie, in *OR*, 27.2:599.

³⁸ From the diary of Samuel B. Pickens, in G. Ward Hubbs, ed., *Voices from Company D, Diaries of the Greensboro Guards, Fifth Alabama Infantry Regiment, Army of Northern Virginia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 182.

Reports from the 12th Massachusetts and 90th Pennsylvania

The report of Adj. Gen. William Schouler for the 12th Massachusetts Volunteers, dated December 1863, states,

Arriving near the town of Gettysburg, we learned that the First and Third Divisions were already engaged, and that the whole rebel army was advancing. After a few moments rest, awaiting orders, the Second Brigade [Baxter] advanced through the suburbs of the town, and crossing the field took position on the right of the line of the First Division, but forming a right angle with that line [facing north]. At this time no enemy was visible in our immediate front, *except a line of skirmishers*, whose position behind a stone wall gave them an opportunity to annoy us considerably. They were handsomely dislodged by Company K, Captain Hazel, who, deploying his company moved forward at double-quick, and drove them at the point of the bayonet.

The enemy making a demonstration on our left flank, the brigade rapidly changed front forward on its left [facing west], occupied the crest of the hill, and each regiment opening fire as soon as in position, the whole line was soon engaged.

The position of the regiment was near the right, between the Ninetieth Pennsylvania and Eighty-Third New York. A second change of front by the regiment enabled it to deliver a destructive enfilading fire, into the advancing lines of the enemy at short range, while the troops on its left received them with a steady and rapid fire in front.

This soon brought the enemy to show the white flag, and to cease their fire, and the rapid change of part of the brigade resulted in the capture of some four hundred prisoners.

The enemy were now observed bringing up heavy reinforcements against our front, and advancing a brigade against our right [north], making another change of front of a part of the line necessary to prevent our right being turned. This was quickly and handsomely done by the two right regiments, (Ninetieth Pennsylvania and Twelfth Massachusetts,) and we were thus

enabled to hold our ground against a vastly superior force for more than an hour.³⁹

So part of the 12th Massachusetts changed front to face north with the 90th Pennsylvania. Of this change of front facing north, the veterans of the 90th Pennsylvania wrote,

O'Neal's troops felt confident of turning our right—the force of the attack fell upon the 90th P.V., your regiment—but they were repulsed with heavy loss and the remnant thereof hurled back; no longer did they attempt an advance, until we were later on ordered to a position near the Seminary under cover of the woods.⁴⁰

It is interesting to note that this quote says the brigade from the north only attacked once before the final Confederate thrust. The following is also from the 90th Pennsylvania: “Our line of battle here indicated an angle, one-third facing the west, the remainder facing the north, and in this position stood the shock of the terrible onslaught.”⁴¹ This quotation is important for alluding to the fierceness of the enemy attack. The previous accounts from Baxter's brigade claim that skirmishers only repulsed an advancing Confederate line. That repulse was only temporary—the main thrust came after Baxter had changed front.

Another account from the 90th Pennsylvania explicitly states the 13th Massachusetts assisted the regiment in the repulse of O'Neal's attack.

We went over the field of the first day's fight, stopping where our regiment, in matchless splendor, resisted the assault of O'Neal's Alabama Brigade, *aided, however, by the destructive volleys of the 13th Massachusetts*. The more the historian studies out the part enacted by Reynolds' men on the first day, the more impartial will be the criticism, and “honor bestowed where honor is due.”⁴²

So two regiments from Baxter's brigade refused

³⁹ William Schouler, *Annual Report of the Adjutant-General of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, December 31, 1863* (Boston: Wright and Potter State Printers, 1863), 603–4, emphasis added.

⁴⁰ Dedication of the Tree Monument, address of Col. A. J. Sellars, in *Souvenir, 90th Pennsylvania Volunteers, Reunions of the Survivors of the Ninetieth Penna. Vols. (Infantry) Battle-field of Gettysburg* (Gettysburg: Survivors Association, 1888–89), 20.

⁴¹ Speech of Lt. Hillary Beyer, in *Souvenir, 90th Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 12.

⁴² Alfred Jacob Sellers, *Souvenir, 90th Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 56, emphasis added.

their right flank to repel an attack from the north (credited to O'Neal's Alabama brigade), and the 90th Pennsylvania said the 13th Massachusetts assisted them. This proves my case. Further evidence is provided in the reports of the 13th Massachusetts and 104th New York of General Paul's brigade. Following these reports are three previously unpublished narratives from soldiers of the 13th Massachusetts—Lt. William R. Warner, Sgt. George Henry Hill, and Pvt. Bourne Spooner, all of whom were present at the battle. The 13th Massachusetts and 104th New York of Paul's brigade advanced to the Mummasburg Road under a heavy fire that correlates to Confederate descriptions of O'Neal's advance. Both regiments captured a combined total of 132 prisoners, which sounds more like the attack described by Sam Pickens, with the casualties sustained per Confederate reports.

Lt. Col. N. Walter Batchelder of the 13th Massachusetts wrote the following in his official report:

We left the road, and moved out to the front of Gettysburg, and soon came under the fire of the enemy. The enemy so far outnumbering us, our brigade was sent into action by regiments

Lt. Col. N. Walter Batchelder, 13th Massachusetts. Courtesy of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

and with so great an interval between my regiment and the one on my left [104th New York] that we were not able to properly support each other. My regiment was on the extreme right flank of the division and the edge of the woods in which the action commenced. . . .

A steady fire was kept up by the men for upward of an hour. At last, being seriously annoyed by the fire of a regiment of the enemy sheltered behind the banks of Chambersburg pike [Mummasburg] road, I ordered a charge on the road, which resulted in driving the enemy from their positions, leaving in our hands 132 prisoners, 7 of whom were commissioned officers. They were safely sent to the rear and turned over to the provost guard.⁴³

104th New York

The narrative of the 104th New York (Paul's brigade) corroborates Lt. Col. Batchelder's statement. Col. John R. Strang writes in *New York at Gettysburg*,

About 1 o'clock the Second Brigade of our division, under Gen. Baxter, was thus used to prolong the line of battle to the right, along the ridge and to the west of it, finding the Rebel troops already

⁴³ Report of Lt. Col. N. W. Batchelder, 13th Massachusetts, in *OR*, 27.1:299–300.

nearing, and in position to prevent their further advance along the road. At about the same time the Eleventh Corps began to arrive upon the field, and leaving a division upon Cemetery Hill as a reserve, two of its divisions were pushed out on the north of the town to oppose the expected advance of Ewell's corps from that direction.

Iverson's Rebel Brigade had the advance down the road, but was handsomely repulsed by Baxter's Brigade, aided by Cutler's Brigade of Wadsworth's Division, a large part of Iverson's men being killed, wounded or captured. The check was, however, only temporary, and reinforced by the brigades of Daniel and O'Neal the Rebels again advanced, and partly seized the stone wall running along the ridge, southerly from the road. . . .

To repel their attack and hold the line at this point the First Brigade under Gen. Paul, which was the sole remaining reserve of the First Corps, was double-quickened to the right, and ordered to take position to the right of Baxter's Brigade, facing partly to the west and partly to the north. The Thirteenth Massachusetts was on the right of the brigade, with our regiment next to it.⁴⁴

Considering all the discrepancies in the various reports, I think the 104th New York account comes closest to describing what really happened.

The Confederates Captured in the Road were from O'Neal's Brigade

The Confederate troops captured in the road by the 104th New York and 13th Massachusetts were from Alabama. Charles Davis Jr., the regimental historian of the Massachusetts regiment, erred twice when he wrote that "the Thirteenth bagged one hundred and thirty-two prisoners, including seven commissioned officers, all belonging to a North Carolina regiment."⁴⁵ Half the prisoners referenced by Davis were brought in by the 104th New York. Lieutenant Colonel Batchelder of the 13th Massachusetts inappropriately credited them all to his regiment. Davis picked up this error from Batchelder's official report. Both William Warner and George Hill of the 13th say eighty prisoners were taken in the road, which agrees with the 104th New York report. Also,

⁴⁴ Oration by Col. John R. Strang, in *New York at Gettysburg*, 752–53.

⁴⁵ Charles E. Davis Jr., *Three Years in the Army* (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1894), 227.

Lt. William Warner, 13th Massachusetts. Courtesy of Bradley Forbush.

Davis probably erred in stating that the captured men were from North Carolina. They were more likely from Alabama, as recorded in Lt. William Warner's diary.

Then, orders came to move, and we quickly crossed a road (on our right from Seminary) keeping under the slope which was thinly covered with woods. . . . Passing through the woods, we attempted to form a line at a stone wall—possibly we were halted there a few moments to allow stragglers to get up—then across an open field to another piece of woods, and hardly before we could realize it we were in the midst of a battle.

. . . One can hardly tell how long we remained at this point, but at the time Morris fell we were pushing toward the road which lay in front of us, & where we swept in a body of rebel prisoners of an Alabama Regt.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Lt. William R. Warner, unpublished manuscript, author's collection, courtesy of Eric Locher.

Sgt. George Henry Hill, Company B, 13th Massachusetts. Courtesy of Carol Robbins, in Bradley Forbush personal collection.

If O'Neal's attack had previously failed, it is difficult to explain why or how these Alabamans came to be in the road putting up such a stiff resistance to the advance of the 104th New York and 13th Massachusetts. Sgt. George Henry Hill of Company B provides another insight to these events. In a letter to his father dated August 4, 1863, Hill wrote,

We left the road and marched across the fields and immediately took up our position in line of battle and commenced firing. I find I cannot explain myself without the use of a diagram and therefore I have drawn out a quick one which will answer the purpose. At the place marked "A" the Rebel skirmishers were posted behind a stone wall. After about half an hours firing during which our Regiment suffered considerably the

Rebels (what were left) hoisted white towels and hankys and we rushed up and captured about 80 and obtained possession of the road in our front. Some of the boys went forward and took about a dozen Rebels out of the barn. We were now face to face with the Rebel line of battle.⁴⁷

Remember the barn mentioned by Colonel Dobke of the 45th New York? The soldiers pursued O'Neal's men all the way to McLean's barn, where they captured a number of prisoners. Could Sergeant Hill be referencing the same incident in his letter? It is difficult to imagine Union soldiers proceeding to the barn later during the battle considering the sequence of events that followed the repulse of Iverson and O'Neal.

The Lull in the Fight and Ramseur's Attack

The officers of O'Neal's regiments and General Iverson in his report mention a short lull in the fight after their respective attacks failed. Col. S. B. Pickens commanding the 12th Alabama said it most succinctly.

In half an hour after we fell back, we were again ordered forward, together with the entire division. We then drove the enemy before us with little loss, and were among the first to enter the town, and passed through it. Fought no more during the day, although exposed to a heavy artillery fire.⁴⁸

Sgt. George Henry Hill's letter continues,

We held our position on the road about half an hour when the battery in the woods on the left opened upon us with grape and canister and as we were in complete range we fell back and took up position no 2. Here we fought over an hour and with good success little thinking that all this time the enemy was getting in our rear and into the town.⁴⁹

Sergeant Hill and others in General Paul's brigade describe falling back to a second position behind a stone wall in the woods, before Robin-

⁴⁷ Sgt. George Henry Hill to his father, August 4, 1863, author's collection.

⁴⁸ Pickens's report, *OR*, 27.2:600.

⁴⁹ Hill to his father, August 4, 1863.

son's division collapsed under General Rodes's final assault, which utilized elements of all five of his Confederate brigades, O'Neal's included. Colonel O'Neal says in his report that Fry's battery assisted in driving the enemy during this final assault.

A few minutes after we had fallen back, Gen. Ramseur with his brigade arrived. I had sent my aide (Lieutenant [A. H.] Pickett) for him before I gave the order to fall back. An advance and charge was immediately ordered. Captain [C. W.] Fry moved up his battery, and by his energy, coolness, and skill aided materially in driving the enemy across the plain and through and beyond the town.⁵⁰

So, according to these reports, events transpired in this order: Iverson and O'Neal were repulsed, a short lull in the action occurred, and General Rodes then led a final assault with his entire division en masse, which after close to an hour's struggle succeeded in driving General Robinson's division from its strong fallback position on Oak Ridge. These reports and recollections, carefully considered, support the idea that Paul's brigade assisted in the repulse of O'Neal's attack. Yet another unpublished resource from the 13th Massachusetts has surfaced, that of Pvt. Bourne Spooner, Company D, which supports this scenario.

Reminiscence of Bourne Spooner, Company D, 13th Massachusetts

Bourne Spooner was on the battlefield until the end of Rodes's final assault. His remembrance is the most complete account from the 13th Massachusetts. Excerpts with occasional comments follow, beginning with the regiment's deployment on Oak Ridge:

Well, after moving a piece to the right we then turned more to the right and formed an extension of the line of battle in the form of an obtuse angle, the missiles still flying thickly around us. The 13th was on the right regiment of the brigade, and we halted and faced to the front on the right slope of the ridge and just behind a small grove in which the trees were large and widely separated. After waiting a moment for

⁵⁰ O'Neal's report, OR, 27.2:593.

Sgt. George Henry Hill, Company B, 13th Massachusetts.
Courtesy of Carol Robbins, in Bradley Forbush personal collection.

the skirmishers to get in, we opened fire with musketry—first a sudden crash, and then a continuous roar. Owing to my nearsightedness I could not discern the enemy but was probably none the less useful on that account. The boys say that when the action opened there were two or three cows between the opposing lines and that their carcasses were afterwards seen riddled with bullets. However, I was not a witness to this incident.

It is worth mentioning regarding this last statement of Spooner's that if a bloody confrontation had already occurred between Baxter and O'Neal, the cows mentioned would have already been killed when his regiment arrived in position. Spooner continues,

The exact spot on which our fight took place can be readily seen on any plan of the battlefield. It was along the apex formed by the Mummasburg Road and Oak Ridge, an extension of Seminary Ridge, and about a mile northwest from the

village of Gettysburg. No sooner had the firing begun in real earnest than my previous nervousness completely vanished, and the very idea and words came into my mind, "I rather like this." The firing however, was not all on one side. Our opponents, it seemed, fired very low, and I could see that a large proportion of their bullets struck in the ground and among some rails lying a rod or two in front of us. Company D formed the right of the regiment and fortunately did not suffer proportionally with the rest of the regiment. As the men on our left were being rapidly killed and wounded we were continually closing up to keep our line intact. "Close to the left, close to the left" was the constant order. As we sidled to the left we soon got in the region of the killed and wounded. Some were lying prone on back or face, dead with bloody gashes in their heads, others were severely wounded and imploring aid to take them to the rear. I recollect one in particular sort of half recumbent upon his side, who was looking with a very piteous and disturbed expression at his cartridge-box which in some way had caught fire and was smoking. He was evidently shot through hip or legs and could not help himself.

We still kept up our fusillade and closing to the left, but our ranks gradually became more and more disintegrated. . . .

Just how long we had been fighting in this manner it would be impossible for me to tell, but after a while there came a cry of "Forward! Forward!" Whether it emanated from an officer or in the ranks I don't know but it was quickly taken up by the men, and after being repeated once or twice the body moved forward with a rush. . . .

Our sudden dash, it seems, had completely overpowered the rebs who were ranged behind a fence, and they succumbed at once.

The rebs threw down their arms, climbed over the fence towards us, and there at once began a Gen. shaking of hands between captor and captured. Our prisoners heartily praised our "charge" and said it had been "well done." After a brief interchange of these courtesies (rather out of place an unmilitary reader would suppose) they were directed to the rear as prisoners of war. For a brief space there was a lull in the firing. The

rebel artillerists probably did not care to endanger friend as well as foe in promiscuous shooting, and so we had a breathing spell and time to look about us.

. . . The spot where we found ourselves after this charge was at the very apex of where the ridge and road above mentioned join. It was a sort of open promontory projecting a short space beyond the woods which covered most of the ridge in the rear. Our brigade, however, was now completely disorganized. The several regiments were inseparably commingled, and there was no officer present with sufficient skill to bring order out of the confusion. Gen. Paul was wounded in the fight and probably before this time. There was a crowd of men in the midst of which were the several regimental flags, but there was no effectual attempt made to rally the men around their respective standards. We were so flushed with the recent success, and the separate organizations having been broken up, we were for the time more inclined to fight "on our own luck" than otherwise. Some of the rebs tried to escape when the charge was made, and one fellow was bearing off a Confederate flag when Major Gould raised the attention of the men to him, and he at once fell, probably pierced by many bullets. For myself, after the charge I went into the road which forms a cutting diagonally through the ridge, and, using the further bank as a protecting earthwork, I fired several shots at moving bodies of the enemy.

It seems that beyond us was quite a distance of cleared open space and beyond that a line of woods. The Confederates, having a force greatly superior to ours, were able to bring up fresh men to repair the disaster they had suffered at our hands, and, after I had taken up my position in this cut, I could see their regiments moving along the edge of the woods towards our right. [This would be General Ramseur's brigade.] I noticed in particular a mounted officer, probably a Colonel, riding to and fro. I fired three or four shots at him, which he did not appear to notice in the least, though some of them must have whizzed near him. After a few minutes I abandoned the cut, which was a short distance in advance of the majority of our men. The men

The author's interpretation of the actual assault of O'Neal's brigade on July 1. Courtesy of Phil Laino.

Veterans of the 13th Massachusetts, at Westboro, gathered for their fiftieth anniversary reunion, June 29, 1911: (left to right) John C. Thurston, William R. Warner, Lyman Haskell, Ira L. Donovan, Melvin H. Walker, A. E. Chamberlain, John D. Plummer, Francis A. Brigham, Frank P. Willson, Charles W. Comstock, Austin C. Stearns, Lowell T. Collins, Warren W. Day, George W. Clifford. Courtesy of Bradley Forbush, from the collection of William R. Warner.

were still excited, disorganized, and there was a cry for re-enforcements. About this time, the 16th Maine, which temporarily retired from the fight after their skirmish duty, came up and were welcomed with great delight.

Up to this time things had gone well. Every portion of the First Corps had gone into the fight with spirit and captured its quota of prisoners.

To comment on this last statement, if Spooner is not describing the repulse of O'Neal's attack, it must be some other action following O'Neal's attack and Iverson's attack. But Spooner's comment disputes this interpretation. The men captured by the 13th Massachusetts and 104th New York at the Mum-

masburg Road have been interpreted to be a body of skirmishers collected from O'Neal's defeated regiments sent forward before General Ramseur's final attack began. But Ramseur's attack opened with artillery after a lull in the fight.

Spooner's account picks up with a long discourse on the collapse of the Eleventh Corps troops to the east. Skipping over this discourse, his account resumes with the final stand made by Robinson's division on Oak Ridge.

Well after the Eleventh Corps had been driven a piece rearward a rebel battery was trained upon our position on the ridge. Canister was the material mainly used, but as luck would have it, it

Veterans of the 13th Massachusetts gathered at the dedication of their monument. Courtesy of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

crashed and wir-r-r-d into the branches over our heads and then fell harmless at our feet. Had the pieces been aimed lower they would have undoubtedly done great injury. Our men now drew back a few rods to where the woods were thicker and took a stand behind a stone wall. As there was no one controlling present to direct movements each one was left pretty much to his own resources. A good many of course took so good an opportunity to skedaddle, but the great majority held their ground with considerable stubbornness. Some attempt was made to straighten out matters a little but with not much success.

... Our retreat along this ridge was very slow.

There was no rearward movement to the body as a whole, but the crowd appeared to gradually thin out—drawing away by little knots of three or four as the hopelessness of the fight became apparent. We must have been a good part of an hour in making our short retreat. All this while we were in woods and kept up a desultory firing as we fell back. While standing among them and looking in the direction of the enemy a soldier a pace or two at my right suddenly received a bullet, probably in the groin. He dropped his piece, clapped his arms around his stomach, uttered the exclamation “Oh!” and sank to the ground. This incident so startled me and filled me with

such dread of a similar injury that I at once abandoned further resistance, which had now, indeed, become wholly useless.⁵¹

The stone wall where the division made its last stand may be the same stone wall mentioned in Maj. W. W. Sillars's report from the 30th North Carolina, Ramseur's Brigade.

The part taken by the Thirtieth Regiment North Carolina troops in the battle of Gettysburg having been under the eye of Brig.-Gen. Ramseur, it is unnecessary to go into details. The regiment (excepting as to its sharpshooters) was actively engaged only during the early part of the afternoon of Wednesday, July 1. It participated in the charge upon the enemy which resulted in driving him from a strong position behind a stone wall on elevated ground to the plain below in front of Gettysburg.⁵²

Bourne Spooner's detailed description of the last part of the fight with the jumbling together of all the regiments and the slow withdrawal of the 13th Massachusetts provides continuity missing from other regimental accounts. The completeness of his description maps more clearly the regiment's movements over the field. And with the accounts of Sergeant Hill and Lieutenant Warner added, a better understanding of General Paul's brigade emerges.

With references to the toughness of the fight and indications of the heavy Confederate casualties recorded in Southern reports, these new primary sources from the 13th Massachusetts regiment

strongly suggest they were on the field to resist Colonel O'Neal's advance. Upon close analysis, there is very little evidence in the reports of General Baxter's regiments to suggest they repulsed O'Neal's attack when first deployed facing north. Not until Baxter changed front west did his two right regiments refuse their flank to meet the attack from the north. Misleading embellishments to regimental histories have unintentionally muddled the current interpretation of the Union repulse of O'Neal's advance and the part played by General Paul's brigade in the fight for Oak Ridge. This has caused modern interpreters to do contortions in order to sort things out. New source material from the recruits of the 13th Massachusetts shed light on the regiment's work and, in turn, on Paul's brigade and, by extension, the battle narrative for July 1, 1863.

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Brad Forbush has been researching the 13th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in depth since 1999. He has gathered together an extensive amount of primary-source material from libraries, historical societies, collectors, historians, and descendants of soldiers. These include soldiers' letters, photographs, and unpublished memoirs from the regimental rank and file. This research is shared with the public through his website 13thmass.org, where he is working his way chronologically through the regiment's three-year history. He has lectured on the regiment for various groups and institutions in California and the Chambersburg Civil War Seminars.

Acknowledgment

The author has donated copies of the George Hill letter, the Bourne Spooner memoirs, and the William Warner account at Gettysburg to the Gettysburg National Battlefield Park Library for future researchers to reference them.

⁵¹ Bourne Spooner, unpublished manuscript, c. 1872, transcribed by Maxine Glenn, January 1984, author's collection, courtesy of Will Glenn and Emma Glenn.

⁵² Report of Maj. W. W. Sillars, 13th North Carolina, in *OR*, 27.2:591.