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Gettysburg Magazine, Number 57, July 2017, pp. 15-28 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/get.2017.0011>

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“A Most Obstinate Resistance”

The Defense of Blocher’s Knoll

JAMES S. PULA

It was early afternoon in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The mercury hovered in the mid-70s, but for troops who had labored along in heavy woolen uniforms over thirteen miles of rutted roads, through a pelting rain shower, racing the last mile at the double-quick, the chance to throw themselves upon the ground for a brief respite came as a welcome relief. Brig. Gen. Francis Channing Barlow had pushed his men hard, William Paynton in the 17th Connecticut recalled that “straggling was strictly forbidden—

that the ranks must be kept closed up, and regimental and company commanders would be held accountable for the violation of said order.”¹ Barlow’s aides rode up and down the marching column to enforce the edict. By the time they reached town the men were out of breath, thirsty, their legs tired with the weight of many hard miles. But here

Brig. Gen. Francis Channing Barlow. Library of Congress.

they were, in an open field just north of a little crossroads town in southern Pennsylvania thankful for the chance to rest if only briefly.

Barlow ordered his men to remove their knapsacks and load their weapons, a sure sign that deadly work was not far off. To their left, smoke arose from troops engaged on and near Seminary Ridge. Artillery shells arced through the air looking for someone to claim. As each regiment arrived the first sergeants called the roll to determine how many had kept up during the grueling

march. In the 153rd Pennsylvania, a nine-months regiment from the Northampton county area, Maj. John Frueauff gathered his men about him. He had a special message for the friends and neighbors he led that day. Their term of service had expired on June 22, the major announced. Their enlistment obligation had been fulfilled. None of them had to be there if they did not want to be. Frueauff ex-

¹ William W. Paynton, “From Virginia to Gettysburg and Back,” manuscript, GNMP.

Rueben Ruch, 153rd Pennsylvania. Kiefer, *History of the One Hundred Fifty Third Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry*.

plained the situation and the obvious danger they were marching toward. Rueben Ruch listened intently, recalling that Frueauff closed by announcing that "If there was a man in ranks who did not wish to go into battle; he should step out, that it was no disgrace; but that the enemy was in our native state, and that the people of Pennsylvania looked to us for relief, and that it was our duty to protect our homes." Immediately the men gave three rousing cheers. Not a one stepped out.²

² Chapman Biddle, *The First Day of the Battle of Gettysburg* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1880), 118; William R. Kiefer, *History of the One Hundred Fifty Third Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry* (Easton: Press of the Chemical Publishing, 1905), 209–10. In reality, the term of the 153rd had not expired, but apparently the major and many, if not most, of the men believed that it had since there was a squabble following the battle when the men determined to head home only to be told they had a few additional days of service remaining.

Col. Leopold von Gilsa. U.S. Army Educational Heritage Center.

Maj. Gen. Carl Scurz had ordered Barlow to place his men in echelon to extend the Union right flank east to Rock Creek, but Barlow believed he knew better than his corps commander. Instead he ordered his entire division forward, past the complex of buildings known collectively as the almshouse, out toward a small rise in the terrain known as Blocher's Knoll, named for the family whose land it occupied. While it has been argued by some writers that the upward sloping ground north of the almshouse, if left for the rebels to occupy, would give the Confederates a potential advantage for their artillery, there were very sound reasons why Barlow should *not* have occupied the more advanced position. Confederate guns already on Oak Hill enjoyed much better positions. Converging fire from those and the batteries of Gen. Jubal Early's Southern division which was just then beginning

Nevertheless, at the time they believed they were free to decide whether to go into battle or not. It is to their credit that no one refused.

to arrive off to the right, would make the seeming “high ground” exceptionally difficult if not impossible for any federal force to hold. Further, Blocher’s Knoll itself faced wooded area to its front and right flank, seriously limiting the field of fire of any Federal infantry deployed there. Finally, since Barlow’s forward move severed connection with the rest of Schurz’s command both of his flanks would be completely “in the air.” He had created at the division level essentially the same untenable position that Maj. Gen. Daniel Sickles would do at the corps level the following day.

To begin the move Barlow ordered Col. Leopold von Gilsa to seize the knoll. Seeing the advance, Confederate gunners sighted their pieces on this tempting target. Capt. Friedrich Otto von Fritsch, a member of von Gilsa’s staff, recalled advancing “over an open field, toward the Harrisburg road, where we were heavily bombarded. Large shells and six-pounders passed close over our heads, many officers dismounted or bent low whenever they felt the pressure of the air created by the shot.”³ Despite the shelling, von Gilsa’s skirmishers quickly drove back their rebel counterparts to seize the prize. With the objective in his possession, von Gilsa realized that the woods to his front offered a protective screen to the enemy so he pushed his skirmishers forward into the trees reinforced by the 54th New York on the right, the 68th New York in the center, and Companies A and B of the 153rd Pennsylvania on the left, all deployed in skirmish order to cover the amount of ground and to better deal with Confederate skirmishers to their front and in the wheat fields to their left. Covering almost 750 yards through heavy underbrush, this advanced line was thinly held with an average of one man every two yards.

The remaining eight companies of the Pennsylvania regiment, by far the largest in the brigade, formed toward the crest of the knoll, some 100 to 130 yards behind the skirmish line, drawn up in conventional battle array but with its field of fire seriously restricted by woods that provided cover to an approaching rebel force until it was within almost a hundred yards of the federal position. Von Gilsa, still mounted, rode behind the skirmish

line where Reuben Ruch clearly heard the colonel shouting encouragement. “He told them not to shoot unless they saw something to shoot at, as ammunition was worth money, and they must not waste it. Just at this time the bullets commenced to whistle and some of the boys on the skirmish line were trying to dodge them. The general told the boys to never mind those that whistled, as long as they whistled they were all right.”⁴ Miraculously, von Gilsa was not hit despite making quite an inviting target.

Leading the skirmishers of the 68th New York, von Fritsch found no safety in the woods beyond the knoll. It was “a hot place for us. Trees were felled everywhere by the cannon balls, and one unfortunate soldier was nailed by a six-pounder against a big tree. I got hold of his bushy hair and pulled him down, as he presented a ghastly appearance. . . . But now I noticed heavy columns approaching in front, and from the right. We fired, and then I ordered the commanding officer of the skirmishers to fall slowly back into the woods and fire from tree to tree.”⁵ Von Fritsch reported a large rebel column approaching. It was von Gilsa’s brigade that had absorbed the full initial force of Stonewall Jackson’s flank attack at Chancellorsville and he needed no one to point out the danger facing his command. Wisely, he sent an aide to Barlow for support.

Whether he realized it by now or not, Barlow had placed his entire division in a completely untenable position. With Brig. Gen. Adelbert Ames’s brigade aligned some distance behind von Gilsa, and no significant force of any size to guard the division’s flanks, Barlow’s division was positioned in a vulnerable salient approachable by Confederates on three sides and also from the rear by any of Early’s troops who bypassed Barlow’s right flank east of Rock Creek. Further, the separation caused by Barlow’s precipitate move exposed Schurz’s entire force to possible defeat in detail. Barlow’s division stood no chance against the approaching Confederate tide that outnumbered him in total by about three to one. Whatever modest advantage he may have felt he was gaining from the small rise was more than offset by the completely exposed position in which he left his own division, and by extension, Schurz’s entire force.

3 Joseph Tyler Butts, *A Gallant Captain of the Civil War* (New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1902), 75–76.

4 Kiefer, *153rd Pennsylvania*, 210–11.

5 Kiefer, *153rd Pennsylvania*, 211; Butts, *Gallant Captain*, 75–76.

About this time nineteen-year-old Lt. Bayard Wilkeson arrived to reinforce Barlow with his Battery G, Fourth U. S. Artillery. Wilkeson left one section under Lt. Christopher F. Merkle south of the York road near the almshouse where he immediately opened fire with solid shot against one of the Confederate batteries. The other two sections unlimbered east of the almshouse where they too opened fire. Within the rebel lines, Gen. Early and his aide, Major John Warwick Daniel, sat astride their horses next to Capt. A. W. Garber's battery watching the federals deploy. From their vantage point they saw "A Federal Battery, plainly in sight, galloped to meet [Early's deployment]. . . . One of its earliest, if not its first shot, struck a brass Howitzer of Garber's company in the mouth, and that ended its military service."⁶ Yet, while Wilkeson's opening shots proved accurate, his guns immediately came under fire from rebel infantry and two batteries which shifted their attention to him. Almost immediately a shell fragment tore into the lieutenant's right leg. Four of his men carried him from the field mortally wounded. Lt. Eugene A. Bancroft, a bookkeeper from Chicago, took command, wisely shifting the position of the pieces regularly to prevent the Confederates from blanketing his guns.⁷

Receiving von Gilsa's request for reinforcement, Barlow ordered Ames to send Col. Seraphim Meyer's 107th Ohio forward. Von Gilsa placed it in a refused position on his left to protect that exposed flank. As the Ohioans advanced, Frederick Nussbaum was horrified to see a shell take off the arm of Maj. Augustus Vignos then bounce up and kill the horse of another officer. Another missile almost completely severed the leg of Lt. William Fisher. The regiment went into position stretching southwestward to the Carlisle Road, the total flank position covering some 550 yards with an average of only one man per yard (or one every two yards if in a standard double line). To prevent being flanked even more, von Gilsa deployed half of the 68th New York as skirmishers to the left of the Ohioans, but a gap existed between their right and the left of the

107th Ohio. To make matters worse, the Buckeyes found most of their front obstructed by an orchard.

Meanwhile, on the other flank, seeing Early's guns across Rock Creek and infantry beginning to form behind them, General Ames sent an aide, Lt. Charles E. Doty, to order Lt. Col. Douglas Fowler of the 17th Connecticut to seize a small wooden bridge and occupy a brick house east of the stream. Fowler asked for volunteers. Companies F, A, B, and K were the first to respond. Major Allen G. Brady, whom Fowler placed in charge of the mission, had already been passed over for promotion twice, the second time after Chancellorsville where he led the regiment after his colonel was seriously wounded and lieutenant colonel killed. But Fowler, his junior, had been promoted over his head. Apparently Governor William Buckingham had something against Brady, but the major appears not to have held it against Fowler. Brady dispatched two companies to occupy the bridge while the other two continued on to take possession of Josiah Benner's home. Once across the creek they immediately ran into Early's skirmishers. A hot fire fight began with Brady's men pushing the rebels back, with one company proceeding around each side of the Benner home. Lt. Col. Hilary P. Jones's rebel artillery opened with "shot, shell, grape, and canister" that stalled progress. Brady dismounted to continue the advance, but Jones's artillery soon set fire to the house. Unable to advance any farther, Brady spread his men out behind whatever cover they could find.⁸ Over time, as more rebel infantry arrived, Brady's men were gradually pushed back.

With the situation obviously growing more critical by the minute, Barlow next sent the 25th Ohio to strengthen von Gilsa's inadequate second line and support Merkle's section positioned on the left. Their arrival raised von Gilsa's main line to a total of about 620 men deployed in two lines covering a little over 150 yards. In short order, Barlow ordered the remainder of Ames's division, the 75th Ohio and the remaining six companies of the 17th Connecticut, forward to form a reserve immediately behind

6 OR, 27.1:756-57; John Warwick Daniel account, Jubal Early Papers, Box B-41, GNMP.

7 OR, 27.1:756-57; Bert Barnett, "If Ever Men Stayed By Their Guns": Leadership in the 1st and 11th Corps Artillery on the First Day of the Battle of Gettysburg," *I Ordered No Man to Go When I Would Not Go Myself: Leadership in the Campaign and Battle of Gettysburg* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg National Military Park, 2002), 92.

8 Charles P. Hamblen, *Connecticut Yankees at Gettysburg* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1993), 18, 20-21; John Niven, *Connecticut for the Union: The Role of the State in the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 234; *17th Connecticut Volunteers at Gettysburg, June 30th, and July 1st, 2nd and 3rd, 1864* (Bridgeport, CT: The Standard Association, 1884), 10; OR, 27.1:717.

The defense and attack on Blocher's Knoll, July 1, 1863. Phil Laino.

von Gilsa on Blocher's Knoll.⁹ This added another 650 men, but they were kept behind von Gilsa's force as a reserve rather than joining his line in an attempt to meet the growing threat to both flanks.¹⁰

Justus Silliman and his comrades in the 17th Connecticut "were obliged to pass through a raking crossfire from a rebel battery on our right, but most of their shells passed over us."¹¹ While Brady's hugely outnumbered men contested Early's advance beyond Rock Creek, von Gilsa became increasingly concerned by reports from his skirmishers that large numbers of infantry were massing to his front and right flank. Early's division was forming, connecting with Brig. Gen. George Doles's brigade from Gen. Robert Rodes's division deployed in the lowlands east of Oak Hill. The vulnerability of the position Barlow chose quickly became evident. Doles brought to the field about 1,300 men, now aligned directly on the exposed left flank of von Gilsa's small force of less than 900 men. To the north of Blocher's Knoll, Early began deploying Brig. Gen. John B. Gordon's Georgians, 1,800 strong, in his first line, supported by Brig. Gen. Harry Hays's 1,200 Louisianans, and Col. Isaac Avery's 1,200 North Carolinians with Brig. Gen. William "Extra Billy" Smith's 800 Virginians in reserve. Doles and Gordon alone outnumbered von Gilsa by about three and one-half to one. And this does not count Jones's artillery battalion of sixteen guns. With these pieces, Early outnumbered Bancroft's guns by more than two and one-half to one and could also count on the guns from Oak Hill that were within range of Barlow's positions.¹² Yet Barlow could do no more. All of his units were committed and time had run out.

"Forward, Georgians!" With Gordon's loud yell his brigade sprang forward. Looking from near the Benner home Maj. John Warwick Daniel witnessed a scene he would never forget: "And steady-

⁹ Jacob Smith, *Camps and Campaigns of the 107th Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry 1862-1865* (Navarre, OH: Indian River Graphics, 2000), 225; Browne letter to John Bachelder, Apr. 8, 1864, in David L. Ladd and Audrey J. Ladd, eds., *The Bachelder Papers: Gettysburg in Their Own Words* (Dayton, OH: Morningside House, 1994), I, 148; Bradley M. Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 311.

¹⁰ Kiefer, *153rd Pennsylvania*, 140.

¹¹ Edward Marcus, ed., *A New Canaan Private in the Civil War. Letters of Justus M. Silliman, 17th Connecticut Volunteers* (New Canaan, CT: New Canaan Historical Society, 1984), 41.

¹² OR, 27.1:756; Bradley M. Gottfried, *The Maps of Gettysburg: An Atlas of the Gettysburg Campaign, June 3-July 13, 1863* (New York: Savas Beatie, 2007), 298, 492, 496, 501, 507, 523.

Capt. Friedrich Otto von Fritsch was on Col. Von Gilsa's staff. Joseph Tyler Butts, *A Gallant Captain of the Civil War*.

ly forward across the yellow wheat fields we saw the line of Georgians, Louisianans, and Carolinians roll, their burnished bayonets making a silver wave across a cloth of gold. Now they disappeared in the copse of woods along the stream; then comes the wild cheer, and the crashing volley, and a cloud of smoke wraps the combatants."¹³ On the receiving end of the assault Capt. von Fritsch peered north to see a sight he would also never forget. "The Confederates approached slowly and in magnificent order, and after the first volley of our men they sent a strong volley in return. Our men, now standing, fired twice more, then the Confederates charged through the creek, screaming savagely."¹⁴

¹³ John W. Daniel, *Speeches and Orations*, 81, Jubal Early Papers, Box B-41, GNMP.

¹⁴ Butts, *Gallant Captain*, 75.

As Gordon's men burst upon von Gilsa's skirmish line, Doles's Georgians rushed across the fields and orchards east of John Blocher's home to throw their weight against the flank held by the 107th Ohio and a portion of the 68th New York, the defenders outnumbered by about two and one-half to one. Von Gilsa's skirmish line fell back up the slope where it rallied behind the battle line. Gordon's Confederates followed closely behind, while Doles pressed his attack against the left flank and Hays's brigade began fording Rock Creek behind von Gilsa's right threatening him with encirclement. Despite the shock of the assault and the impossible position von Gilsa's men found themselves in, they fought back desperately. In the forefront of Doles's assault, the 21st Georgia was subjected to what one veteran described as "a galling fire" that Henry W. Thomas of the 4th Georgia recalled "doing considerable execution." Advancing against what Maj. W. H. Willis of the 4th Georgia called "stubborn" resistance, Col. D. R. E. Winn fell mortally wounded as did Col. Samuel P. Lumpkin at the head of the 44th Georgia.¹⁵

In Gordon's Brigade, Capt. W. L. McLeod leading the 38th Georgia was killed crossing Rock Creek as the rebels charged into what George W. O'Neal in the 31st Georgia described as "stubborn resistance."¹⁶ G. W. Nichols in the same regiment was surprised by the determined federal opposition: "We met the enemy at Rock Creek. We attacked them immediately, but we had a hard time in moving them. We advanced with our accustomed yell, but they stood firm until we got near them. They then began to retire in fine order, shooting at us as they retreated. They were harder to drive than we had ever known them before. Men were being mown down in great numbers on both sides."¹⁷ "As my command charged across the ravine and up its steep declivity," Gordon later wrote, "the fight became on portions of the line a hand-to-hand struggle."¹⁸ The conflict was so fierce that Capt. William J. Seymour, viewing

the assault from his position with Hays's Brigade, described von Gilsa's resistance as "a heavy fire. The musketry was very severe and we feared that Gordon would be borne back."¹⁹ Gordon called the Federal stand "a most obstinate resistance."²⁰

In the 153rd Pennsylvania's skirmish line, Lt. J. Clyde Millar "ran back up the slope to report" rebels moving through the woods. Along the way he met Adj. Howard J. Reeder who ordered him "Go back and hold your line at all hazards."²¹ While Millar and Reeder spoke, skirmishers from the 31st Georgia pushed forward against the advanced position of the 68th New York twice, only to be driven back both times by accurate federal fire. But all was not well. When Millar returned to his company he was surprised to see some of his men wounded by musket balls coming from behind. Angrily, he ordered a corporal to rush back to the main line to stop the friendly fire. But when the soldier returned he brought even more disturbing news. The seemingly errant fire was not coming from friendly forces, but from Confederates who had worked their way around the flank and rear of Barlow's position.²² With rebels attacking from three sides, the entire division was in imminent danger of being surrounded.

With the situation deteriorating by the minute, Barlow ordered up his second line in a desperate attempt to stabilize his position. Receiving the order, Brig. Gen. Adelbert Ames turned to Col. Andrew Harris of the 75th Ohio, ordering him to "fix bayonets, pass to the front between the 107th and 25th Ohio, and if possible check the advance of the enemy."²³ A graduate of Miami University in Ohio, Harris would one day become governor of the state. "We passed to the front as ordered," Harris explained. "It was a fearful advance and made

15 Henry W. Thomas, *History of the Doles-Cook Brigade of Northern Virginia, C.S.A.; Containing Muster Roles of Each Company of the Fourth, Twelfth, Twenty-first and Forty-fourth Georgia Regiments, with a Short Sketch of the Services of Each Member, and a Complete History of Each Regiment, by One of its Own Members* (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing and Printing, 1903), 7–8; 4th Georgia File, GNMP; OR, Series 1, Vol. 27, Part 2, 584.

16 Hudgins manuscript, 38th Georgia File, GNMP; O'Neal manuscript, Co. G, 31st Georgia File, GNMP.

17 G. W. Nichols, *A Soldier's Story of His Regiment* (Kennesaw, GA: Continental Book Company, 1961), 116.

18 John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 114.

19 Jones, "A Louisiana Tiger," manuscript, Hays Brigade File, GNMP.

20 Gregory C. White, *"The Most Bloody and Cruel Drama": A History of the 31st Georgia Volunteer Infantry, Lawton-Gordon-Evans Brigade, Army of Northern Virginia, Confederate States of America, 1861–1865* (Baltimore: Butternut & Blue, 1997), 92. It is difficult to ascertain Confederate losses since sources are contradictory and the same author sometimes cites different figures. Further, some units either did not submit casualty reports or they were lost. Then too, the Confederates tended to count "wounded" differently than the Union forces, thus reducing the number of actual rebel casualties.

21 Kiefer, *153rd Pennsylvania*, 140–41.

22 Kiefer, *153rd Pennsylvania*, 211; Millar to Bachelor, Mar. 2, 1886, Bachelor Papers, GNMP; OR, 27.2:492; Nichols, *A Soldier's Story*, 116.

23 Harris to Bachelor, Mar. 14, 1881, Bachelor Papers, GNMP; William B. Southerton, "What We Did There," unpublished memoirs as told to Marie W. Higgins, dated 1935, 75th Ohio, VFM 3177, Ohio Historical Society, 5; Harris to Bachelor, Sept. 18, 1882; Baumgartner, *Buckeye Blood*, 49.

Col. Andrew Harris, 75th Ohio. U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

at a dreadful cost of life. The enemy was close and still advancing. We checked them in our immediate front, but they continued to press on around both flanks. Our situation was perilous in the extreme.”²⁴ Thick, swirling musket smoke covered the battle line, artillery roared along both flanks, the din of battle magnified by the screams of the wounded and the constant discharge of Bancroft’s supporting guns to the rear. William Southerton recalled, “How frantically we gnawed paper from cartridges! Loaded rifles! Oh, golly! The Johnnies were coming! And coming fast! A large force of infantry was coming right at us. . . . What a horrible roar of battle! Smoke and fumes thick and acrid. One could scarcely see the comrade beside him. Casualties were terrible. Oh, so many were killed or wounded there.”²⁵

At one point Lt. Col. Jeremiah Williams of the 25th Ohio saw his color bearer and a rebel coun-

²⁴ Harris to Bachelder, Mar. 14, 1881.

²⁵ Southerton, “What We Did There,” 6.

Lt. Col. Douglas Fowler, 17th Connecticut. U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

terpart striking out at “each other with their flag-staffs!”²⁶ Confederate General Gordon never forgot the incident, writing in his memoirs more than forty years later about “This lion-hearted color bearer” who “stood firmly in his place, refusing to fly, to yield his ground, or to surrender his flag. As the Confederates crowded around him and around the stalwart men who still stood firmly by him, he became engaged in personal combat with the color-bearer of one of my Georgia regiments. What his fate was I do not now recall, but I trust and believe that his life was spared.”²⁷ Caught in a deadly cross-fire between Doles’s and Gordon’s brigades, the Ohioans suffered the effects of the enfilading fire. Shot down, Lt. Col. Williams was unable to escape and fell into the hands of the Confederates, destined to spend eight months in Libby Prison.²⁸

²⁶ Williams to Bachelder, June 18, 1880, in Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, I, 668.

²⁷ Michael Dreesse, *Never Desert the Old Flag! 50 Stories of Union Battle Flags and Color-bearers at Gettysburg* (Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 2002).

²⁸ Ethan F. Bishop, *The Gettysburg Battlefield: The Union Regimental Command-*

In the 17th Connecticut, as shells shrieked overhead, occasionally bursting to spray the waiting men with hot shrapnel, Lt. Col. Fowler sat atop his white horse joking with his men to keep up their spirits, calling on them to only “Dodge the big ones boys.”²⁹ When Ames’s order arrived, the colonel directed his men forward. Lt. C. E. Doty watched as “Colonel Fowler at once rode to the front and gave the command to deploy columns, and swinging his sword, said: ‘Now, Seventeenth, do your duty! Forward, double quick! Charge bayonets!’ And with a yell, which our boys know how to give, they charged.”³⁰ Almost immediately the regiment ran headlong into the Confederates. Fowler’s officers called to their commander “to persuade him to dismount during the battle, but he refused, fearing he might be deemed cowardly.”³¹ In minutes, a shell fragment nearly decapitated him splattering his blood and brains onto Adj. H. Whitney Chatfield.³²

Two color bearers were killed in quick succession carrying the state flag, as was Color Sgt. Edwin D. Pickett when he grasped the fallen stan-

Capt. Edward Culp, aide to Gen. Barlow. U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

dard and Cpl. Henry Burns after him. Lt. James Mayne bent down, rolled Burns’s body off the fallen colors, picked them up, and carried them to safety. Similarly, when Sgt. Cyrus T. Batchelder dropped the national colors, John Hayes retrieved the banner, only to be quickly wounded. Daniel S. Garritt picked it up, dropped it, and the ensign was transferred to Jimmy Hayes. In minutes thirty-three men fell. One was Justus Silliman, knocked unconscious by a minie ball that “glanced across the top of my head.”³³ Seeing the command caught in a crossfire, Ames sent

Lieutenant Doty through the maelstrom with an order for the regiment to retire. We were “cut to pieces” recalled Lt. Albert W. Peck, “and having no troops in our rear to support us, we fell back.”³⁴ Adjutant Chatfield and Sgt. Maj. Fred Betts tried to drag Fowler’s body to the rear, but had to abandon it or be surrounded themselves. Just as they gave up, Jimmy Hayes came by carrying the regiment’s national colors, only to be shot through the leg. Betts scooped up the colors, as he had at Chancellorsville two months before, and carried them from the field. Somehow in the chaos someone remembered to send an order to Major Brady east of Rock Creek to retire back through town to the

ers Who Were Casualties in the Battle (Westminster, MD: Heritage Books, 2008), 49.

²⁹ 17th Connecticut web site, <http://members.aol.com/clonch/the17th2.html>

³⁰ Hamblen, *Connecticut Yankees*, 23–24.

³¹ *Seventeenth Annual Reunion of the 17th Regiment Connecticut*, 23; Peck, “First Day at Gettysburg”; Paynton, “From Virginia to Gettysburg,” manuscript, GNMP.

³² *Seventeenth Annual Reunion of the 17th Regiment Connecticut*, 23; Peck, “First Day at Gettysburg,” manuscript, 1887, GNMP; Paynton, “From Virginia to Gettysburg”; Hamblen, *Connecticut Yankees*, 23–24; Dreese, *Never Desert the Old Flag!*, 43–44.

³³ *Seventeenth Annual Reunion of the 17th Regiment Connecticut*, 23; Peck, “First Day at Gettysburg”; Paynton, “From Virginia to Gettysburg”; William Warren, diary, Bridgeport Historical Society, Bridgeport, Connecticut; Hamblen, *Connecticut Yankees*, 23–24; Dreese, *Never Desert the Old Flag!*, 43–44.

³⁴ Albert Peck, “First Day at Gettysburg” and “Second Day at Gettysburg,” manuscript, 1887, GNMP.

rallying point on Cemetery Hill.³⁵

Amid the chaos, Barlow sat atop his horse directing his men, shouting words of encouragement. Capt. Edward Culp, an aide, rode alongside him, noting the large mass of Confederates whose numbers appeared to increase every moment. Barlow turned to Culp, ordering him to rush to Howard to request more artillery support. Culp had not yet covered twenty rods when “Gen. Barlow was severely wounded, and all but one of his staff officers and orderlies killed or wounded.”³⁶

Ames assumed command, but the situation was hopeless. Walking wounded were drifting to the rear, rebels were encircling what was left of the position on the exposed knoll, Barlow and several other key officers had been killed or wounded. Some units still held out but how much longer they could stand without being completely encircled could be measured in minutes—or less.

With the situation deteriorating, Lieutenant Bancroft’s guns switched from spherical case to canister. Merkle’s section had been “engaged [with] one battery of the enemy for a few moments with solid shot, and then directed my attention to the rebel infantry as they were advancing in mass upon us.

³⁵ Paynton, “From Virginia to Gettysburg”; Peck, “Second Day at Gettysburg”; Warren diary.

³⁶ Edward C. Culp, “Reminiscences of the Great Fight by a Participant,” *National Tribune*, March 19, 1885.

Brig. Gen. Adelbert Ames. U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

I used shell and spherical case shot at first, and, as the line of the enemy came closer, and I ran out of shot, shell, and case shot, I used canister.”³⁷ Merkle, with the Confederates approaching uncomfortably close, “fired two double rounds of canister . . . then limbered up.” When orders arrived to retire to Cemetery Hill, Bancroft proceeded in good order back through town, even stopping along the way to replenish the ammunition chests on his limbers. In addition to Wilkeson, the battery lost one man killed, five severely wounded, and four missing, along with

seventeen horses killed, but successfully brought off all of its guns.³⁸

With Ames busy trying to rally his wavering line and no further reserves at hand, Colonel Harris found his position untenable. “Four of the twelve officers who made the advance with us were dead or dying. Half the residue were dangerously wounded and lay bleeding on the ground. One fourth of the men were dead or dying, and at least half of the residue were wounded and unable to stand in rank. Without orders I began to fall back,”³⁹ covering the retreat with his regiment as best he could. “The whole division was now retiring . . . My regiment

³⁷ OR, 27:1:757.

³⁸ OR, 27:1:756–57.

³⁹ Harris to Bachelder, Mar. 14, 1881, Bachelder Papers, GNMP.

being in the rear drew most of the enemy's fire, but as we retired in the skirmish line, our loss on the retreat was slight. It was while we were thus retiring, and while I was walking along side of my color bearer that Gen. Ames notified me that I must turn over the command of my regiment and take command of the 2d brigade, which I did at once."⁴⁰

In the wake of the federal retreat, C. D. Grace, advancing with Doles's Brigade, marveled at the "fearful slaughter, the golden wheat-fields, a few minutes before in beauty, now gone, and the ground covered with the dead and wounded in blue."⁴¹ Maj. Andrew Pitzer of Early's staff noticed an officer lying on the field. Dismounting, he found the man to be Barlow with what appeared to be a mortal wound. Pitzer ordered some men to carry the general to the shade of the nearby woods, gave him a canteen of water, and went on his way to do his duty with Early's division. Later, some of Barlow's men who had been captured placed him on a blanket and carried him to the home of Joseph Benner where he was placed in a bed and attended by two Confederate surgeons along with a captured federal surgeon.⁴²

Ames had no other option than retreat to avoid complete encirclement. Falling back to the vicinity of the almshouse he, along with Harris and von Gilsa, attempted to rally enough men to cobble together a defense from the remnants of several regiments from different commands, including survivors from Col. Włodzimierz Krzyżanowski's brigade which had been roughly handled, its colonel knocked unconscious, attempting to come to Barlow's aid. Watching Ames struggle to form an organized defense, Adj. Peter Young of the 107th Ohio was mightily impressed with the general's demeanor. "Allow me here to state that such imperturbable coolness as Gen. Ames displayed in the trying

hours of the first day under the most galling fire, I but seldom saw in my army experience; he has the highest admiration and regard of all under his command who ever fought under his guidance."⁴³ Von Gilsa was there also, still astride his horse, encouraging the men to hold out. Reuben Ruch was struck by how the colonel "rode up and down that line through a regular storm of lead, meantime using the German epithets so common to him. I could hear the words 'rally boys.'"⁴⁴

Somehow, miraculously, they patched together a new defense, but an unequivocal order from Gen. O. O. Howard, commanding the field, arrived directing them to fall back to Cemetery Hill. The order to retire must have come as a relief, but it did not mean the killing and maiming would stop. As Schurz explained, "the task . . . of breaking off an engagement . . . becomes very difficult in a fight at very close quarters. Still, the [men], when ordered to do so, fell back in good form, executing its retreat and fighting, step by step, with great firmness."⁴⁵

Arriving in town, the 17th Connecticut and 107th Ohio halted in the square to support an artillery battery firing along the street leading in from the north. Maj. Allen Brady, whose four companies of the 17th Connecticut were still skirmishing with Confederates east of Rock Creek, received an order from Ames to withdraw into town and take command of the regiment since he was now the senior surviving officer. Brady successfully "fell back in good order, skirmishing with the enemy, who advanced as we retreated, and tried to cut us off and capture us before we got to the town, but we foiled them in this attempt by making a circuit and entering the town near the upper end, and soon joined the remainder of the regiment."⁴⁶ By the time Brady arrived in the village, he found the rebels already penetrating its streets. Ordering his men into line, he "fired several volleys into the ranks of the enemy, which thinned their ranks and retarded their advance."⁴⁷

When they at last made it to Cemetery Hill they found Gens. Howard, Schurz, and others busily

⁴⁰ Harris to Bachelder, Mar. 14, 1881.

⁴¹ Grace, "Rodes's Division at Gettysburg," *Confederate Veteran*, n.d., Vertical File 49-e, GNMP.

⁴² Richard F. Welch, *The Boy General: The Life and Careers of Francis Channing Barlow* (Kent & London: Kent State University Press, 2003), 86; Barlow account, Vertical File 5, GNMP. In Gordon's memoirs he describes himself as finding and aiding Barlow without any mention of Pitzer (Gordon, *Reminiscences*, 151), but Barlow does not mention Gordon in any of his contemporaneous writings and does mention Pitzer. Although it is possible both Gordon and Pitzer came across Barlow, given the lack of any mention of Gordon by Barlow at the time it may well be that it was Pitzer who rendered the aid. Perhaps Gordon came along as this was in progress and either ordered the general attended to or simply became aware of it as he passed along in the process of directing his brigade. Capt. James A. Scrymser appears to confirm Gordon's story in his *Extracts from Personal Reminiscences of James A. Scrymser in Times of Peace and War* (1915 by Scrymser, 5-6), but this appeared well after the fact and after the publicity surrounding Gordon's claims.

⁴³ Young to Bachelder, Apr. 12, 1867, in Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, I, 311-12.

⁴⁴ Kiefer, *153rd Pennsylvania*, 215.

⁴⁵ Carl Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz* (New York: The McClure Co., 1907-1908), III, 11.

⁴⁶ OR, Series I, Vol. XXVII, Part 1, 717-18. Brady's four companies resisted Early's advance all afternoon, losing two officers wounded, three men killed, and four men captured.

⁴⁷ OR, 27:1:718.

Maj. Allen G. Brady, 17th Connecticut. U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center.

forming the retreating men into units and placing them for defense. When Howard approached the 17th Connecticut Major Brady heard him ask “if he had troops brave enough to advance to a stone wall across a lot toward the town, and said he would lead them. We replied, ‘Yes, the Seventeenth Connecticut will,’ and advanced at once to the place indicated, remained a few moments, and again advanced across another lot still nearer the town and behind a rail fence at the upper end of the town, which position we held until late in the evening, exposed to a galling fire from the enemy’s sharpshooters.”⁴⁸ Lt. Albert Peck recalled that “General Howard took our colors and moved forward, and our boys followed with a cheer.”⁴⁹ Major Brady was impressed that the general “was in the thickest of the battle, regardless of danger.”⁵⁰ Von Gilsa was there too, doing a kind

⁴⁸ *OR*, 27.1:718.

⁴⁹ Peck, “First Day at Gettysburg.”

⁵⁰ *OR*, 27.1:718.

of triage as the men arrived, sending the wounded on to the hospital and rallying the others to their colors.⁵¹

Thankful to have reached Cemetery Hill, Corp. Frederick Nussbaum of the 107th Ohio stopped to retrieve something from his knapsack when Gen. Howard approached. “General Howard did all he could to get the boys to rally again. . . . sabre in his only hand, he entreated the boys by yelling at the top of his voice, ‘Rally Boys! Rally Boys! Let us regain the name we lost at Chancellorsville.’”⁵² As he watched, Schurz and Gen. Abner Doubleday from the First Corps joined Howard in rallying the men and determining where they would be placed.⁵³ With surprising quickness, Howard, energetically assisted by the other surviving officers of both the First and Eleventh Corps, was able to stop the general retreat and direct the fire of batteries atop Cemetery Hill against rebels attempting to skirt the eastern side of the village. He also placed men in strategic buildings on the southern edge of town where they could command the approaches to the hill from that direction, and he established a solid line of troops behind the stone walls and rail fences stretching from Ziegler’s Grove on the left to the base of Culp’s Hill on the right.

The fact that the First and Eleventh Corps were able to occupy Cemetery Hill and its environs and hold the key position until the rest of the army came up was due to the steadfast courage of the men in each corps who bought the time necessary to preserve that ground. In Barlow’s division the cost was high. When the roll was called later that evening, the 107th Ohio counted only eight officers and 171 men out of the 458 it took into action but a few hours earlier—a loss of 60.9 percent.⁵⁴ The 17th Connecticut lost its colonel and of the 369 who answered to their names at the roll call that morning, 207 became casualties—a loss of 56.1 percent. The 75th Ohio reported bringing 292 men onto the field, losing sixty-three killed, 106 wounded, and thirty-four captured and missing—a total loss of 203 or 69.5 percent. The 153rd Pennsylvania had taken about 550 men into the fight north of town. It lost 267—47 percent. In the 25th Ohio, which suffered

⁵¹ Kiefer, *153rd Pennsylvania*, 216.

⁵² Richard A. Baumgartner, *Buckeye Blood. Ohio at Gettysburg* (Huntington, WV: Blue Acorn Press, 2003), 66.

⁵³ Baumgartner, *Buckeye Blood*, 68.

⁵⁴ Baumgartner, *Buckeye Blood*, 68.

a loss of 188 men, all of the field officers and every captain were among the casualties. The senior surviving officer was 1st Lt. John H. Milliman. By evening the other regiments in the brigade each numbered less than one hundred.⁵⁵ In the succeeding weeks, years, and decades their sacrifice would be forgotten, their stubbornness denied. They would be called cowards who ran away rather than fight.

The author of the “bible” of Gettysburg historiography, Edwin B. Coddington asserted that “The old hue and cry about ‘heavy masses’ of the enemy overwhelming the thin lines of the two small divisions of the Eleventh Corps makes better rhetoric than historical truth.”⁵⁶ Yet, Barlow’s division was in fact greatly outnumbered. Nor does Coddington account for the numerical superiority of the Confederate artillery, which also enjoyed positions allowing it to direct a converging fire on the single battery Barlow had at his disposal, or the terrible disadvantage in position that the division occupied because of Barlow’s disobedience of orders. Any military officer or serious historian of military affairs is well aware of the inherent weakness of a salient for defense, but it seems to have escaped Coddington. Likewise, he seems to have paid no attention to the other inherent weaknesses of the position Barlow occupied or the fact that the Confederates enjoyed such an advantage in numbers at the point of attack that they could envelop both federal flanks at once. All of this eluded Coddington’s shallow attempt at analysis.

One of the early historians of Gettysburg whose works have been widely used by others was Glenn Tucker. In his *High Tide at Gettysburg: The Campaign in Pennsylvania* he asserts that on July 1 the battle north of town was “fought by two divisions of the Eleventh Corps mainly against two Georgia brigades, the Confederates were heavily outnumbered, even after Hays and Avery had brought their brigades into the attack.”⁵⁷ This was patently false.

55 *Pennsylvania at Gettysburg Ceremonies at the Dedication of the Monuments Erected by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to Major General George G. Meade Major General Winfield S. Hancock Major General John F. Reynolds and to Mark the Positions of the Pennsylvania Commands Engaged in the Battle* (Harrisburg: W. S. Ray, State Printer, 1904), I, 430; Harris to Bachelder, Mar. 14, 1881; Browne to John Bachelder, Apr. 8, 1864, in Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, I, 148; “Seventeenth Regiment,” 34; Young to John Bachelder, Apr. 12, 1867, in Ladd, *Bachelder Papers*, I, 310; Kiefer, *153rd Regiment*, xxv.

56 E. B. Coddington, *The Gettysburg Campaign: A Study in Command* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968), 304–05.

57 Glenn Tucker, *High Tide at Gettysburg: The Campaign in Pennsylvania* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), 160.

First, Confederate brigades and divisions were on average larger than their Union counterparts. Second, the Eleventh Corps was also in action against O’Neal’s brigade, not just the “two Georgia brigades,” as well as Hays and Avery. Third, Tucker does not mention the great numerical superiority the Confederates enjoyed in artillery. Fourth, he does not take into consideration the relative positions of the opposing forces. Fifth, even his basic comparison of infantry forces is flawed. Using the numbers from John Busey and David Martin’s *Regimental Strengths at Gettysburg*⁵⁸ if one looks at the critical portion of the battlefield where the assault on the Union right flank took place, von Gilsa’s infantry was outnumbered by 3.4 to 1. Including Ames the federals were still outnumbered by 1.4 to 1, and if one includes Hays and Avery, who took part in the struggle that afternoon, then it becomes 2.5 to 1. The most important factor, aside from the untenable position assumed by Barlow, was that the superiority of numbers enjoyed by the Confederates at the point of attack allowed them, as at Chancellorsville, to easily outflank the Union lines and attack them from the flank and rear.

There were, as there always are, grandiose statements about sweeping the enemy from the field, of valiant charges that left the enemy panic stricken, and other such boasting. But of those veterans who wrote serious descriptions of what they saw this was portrayed as no cakewalk. Gen. Richard Ewell, commanding the corps to which most of the attackers belonged, described it as an “obstinate contest.”⁵⁹ Gen. Jubal Early leading the attacking division portrayed it as a “hot contest.”⁶⁰ Gen. John B. Gordon, leading the assault, recalled meeting “a most obstinate resistance.”⁶¹ In a letter home on July 7 he wrote of “a desperate fight.”⁶² They were not the only ones who believed the conflict to be desperate. Sidney Richardson Jackson, Company I, 21st Georgia called it “a hard fight. . . . Our loss was very heavy . . . I think they fight harder in their own Country, then they do in Virginia.”⁶³ To Joseph Hil-

58 See John Busey and David Martin, *Regimental Strengths at Gettysburg* (Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House, 2005).

59 OR, 27.2:445.

60 OR, 27.2:469.

61 OR, 27.2:492.

62 Gordon to wife, July 7, 1863, Gordon Family Papers.

63 Jackson to parents, July 8, 1863, 21st Georgia File, GNM.

ton, 26th Georgia it was “a stubborn fight.”⁶⁴ Marcus Hefner, Company H, 57th North Carolina asserted “I can inform you that the army met there it was the hardest fite [sic] I ever was in.”⁶⁵ George W. O’Neal, Company G, 31st Georgia, met “stubborn resistance.”⁶⁶ Michael O’Connor, Company F, 6th Louisiana experienced “a heavy fire of artillery and infantry . . . a stubborn resistance.”⁶⁷ William J. Seymour of Hays’s brigade staff encountered “a heavy fire. . . . The musketry was very severe and we feared that Gordon would be borne back.”⁶⁸ Patrick McGee, Company E, 9th Louisiana, recalled “The fighting was fast and furious.”⁶⁹ And this is only a sampling, there were more.

Even the most novice student of military history knows that being outflanked is a serious matter that usually causes a defending force to retire. This is exactly what happened to both the First and Eleventh Corps on July 1. They both held out until flanked by a larger force of enemy troops. In a speech given in 1896, Confederate Gen. John Gordon explained that Early was able to throw his division “squarely on the right flank” of the federals. “Every man who was in that war on either side knows exactly what that meant—squarely on the flank—and the fact that that portion of Meade’s army melted was no disparagement of his courage, for the Old Guard of Napoleon himself would have been as surely and swiftly shattered.”⁷⁰ In his memoirs Gordon asserted that “Any

troops that were ever marshalled would, under like conditions, have been as surely and swiftly shattered. There was no alternative for Howard’s men except to break and fly, or to throw down their arms and surrender. Under the concentrated fire from front and flank, the marvel is that any escaped.”⁷¹

The Eleventh Corps was defeated on July 1, as was the First, but there is no doubt that both fought. The casualty lists of both prove this, as do the comments of their foes that attested to the tenaciousness of the contest. The two corps paid for precious time with their blood, saving the position that Howard had chosen to fight the battle until the rest of the army could come up. As Schurz observed, “Would not the enemy, if we had retreated two hours, or even one hour earlier, have been in better condition, and therefore more encouraged to make a determined attack upon the cemetery that afternoon,—and with better chance of success?”⁷²

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64 Hilton to Cousin, n.d., 26th Georgia File, GNMP.

65 Hefner to wife, July 10, 1863, 57th North Carolina File, GNMP.

66 O’Neal, reminiscences, 31st Georgia File, GNMP.

67 Quoted in Gannon, “The 6th Louisiana,” 90.

68 Quoted in Jones, “A Louisiana Tiger,” manuscript, Hays Brigade File, GNMP.

69 Letter of Patrick McGee in *Confederate Veteran*, November 1906, 499.

70 Speech given by Gordon at Keystone State Normal School in Kutztown, October 24, 1896.

71 Gordon, *Reminiscences*, 151.

72 Schurz, *Reminiscence*, 18.