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Gettysburg Magazine, Number 58, January 2018, pp. 2-21 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/get.2018.0001>

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For a Few Minutes the Fighting Was Terrific

Dodson Ramseur's Forgotten Attack at Oak Ridge on July 1

ROBERT J. WYNSTRA

Although it saved Maj. Gen. Robert E. Rodes' division from a day of disaster, Brig. Gen. Stephen Dodson Ramseur's brilliant attack against the Federal troops from Gabriel Paul's brigade, who were deployed just north of Gettysburg along Oak Ridge, remains largely forgotten amid the controversies surrounding the corps commander's subsequent decision not to assault Cemetery Hill. The action there began during the mid-morning on July 1, when Rodes' troops, who formed part of Lt. Gen. Richard S. Ewell's famed Second Corps in the Army of Northern Virginia, arrived on the field along the road running south from nearby Middletown. The division included the brigades commanded by Brig. Gens. Ramseur, George P. Doles, Alfred H. Iverson, Junius Daniel, and Col. Edward A. O'Neal.¹

While the skirmishers from three of his brigades were engaged with some Federal cavalry videttes on their front, Rodes led the rest of his men to the right along the main ridge line toward "a prominent hill" that overlooked the area northwest of town. "On arriving on the field, I found that by keeping along the wooded ridge, on the left side of which the town of Gettysburg is situated, I could strike the force of the enemy with which Gen. Hill's troops were engaged upon the flank, and that, besides moving under cover, whenever we struck the enemy we could engage him with the advantage in ground," Rodes stated in his official report.²

The general based that decision on a reconnaissance report from Lt. J. Coleman Alderson of the 36th Virginia Cavalry Battalion in Brig. Gen. Albert

G. Jenkins' cavalry brigade, who was temporarily attached to the division staff. "About ten o'clock on the morning of July 1 I rode up to the top of Oak Hill, some distance north of Pennsylvania College, and saw that it commanded the whole Federal army," the cavalryman recalled. "I immediately reported this fact to Gen. Rodes in the presence of Gen. Ewell." Soon after Alderson's return, Rodes' troops began filing off along the high ground that extended southwest from Middletown Road to nearby Oak Hill.³

The soldiers pushed on for almost a mile before arriving about noon in the area around the hill. The wooded outcropping rose to a height of about eighty feet above the Moses McLean farm on the east and nearly sixty feet above Mummasburg Road on the south. The eastern slope of the hill formed a steep ridge that extended south past Chambersburg Turnpike. Although connected to the longer Seminary Ridge, this section of high ground was commonly known as Oak Ridge. Another smaller ridge with two distinct branches ran south from Oak Hill through the area of the Edward McPherson farm, which was located about a half-mile to the west of Seminary Ridge.⁴

Gen. Doles quickly deployed his Georgian troops on the open plain to the left of the hill. Col. O'Neal moved his Alabama brigade into place on the eastern slope of the ridge. With Iverson's troops in the lead, the three North Carolina brigades from the division proceeded into the woods that covered most of Oak Hill at the time. Iverson's brigade immedi-

¹ United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 70 Vols. in 128 parts (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), Vol. 27, pt. 2, series 1, 287. Middletown is known today as Biglerville.

² *OR*, 27.2:552.

³ J. Coleman Alderson, "Lee and Longstreet at Gettysburg," *Confederate Veteran*, 12 (1904), 488.

⁴ David G. Martin, *Gettysburg July 1* (Conshohocken, PA: Combined Books, 1995), 584.

ately formed on the southwestern side of the summit, while Daniel's brigade took up a position behind and slightly to their right. The soldiers from Ramseur's brigade halted near the rear of the hill as a reserve force.⁵

With Rodes' troops in place, Ewell quickly sized up the unfolding situation on the battlefield from his vantage point at the front of Oak Hill. From there, the entire right flank of the Federal First Corps was clearly visible about a mile away to the south. The enemy troops were

deployed in a long line of battle that extended along the main section of McPherson's Ridge all the way to an unfinished railroad bed just north of Chambersburg Turnpike. Opposing them on Herr Ridge directly to the west were Henry Heth's and William Dorsey Pender's divisions from Lt. Gen. Ambrose Powell Hill's Third Corps.⁶

By then, Gen. Robert E. Lee had already notified Ewell that, "in case we found the enemy's force very large, he did not want a general engagement brought on till the rest of the army came up." Despite those orders, Ewell decided that the exposed flank of the Federal troops presented an opportunity that was impossible for him to forgo. Rather than waiting, he quickly moved ahead with plans for an attack. "It was too late to avoid an engagement without abandoning the position already taken up, and I determined to push the attack vigorously," he

⁵ OR, 27.2:553.

⁶ OR, 27.2:553.

Brig. Gen. Stephen Dodson Ramseur. National Archives and Records Administration.

declared in his official report.⁷

After conferring with Ewell, Gen. Rodes decided to launch an attack with O'Neal's, Iverson's, and Daniel's brigades against the Federal troops spread out along his front. Doles' brigade would hold off another enemy force moving forward from town on his left until Maj. Gen. Jubal Early's division could arrive on the field along Harrisburg Road. The men from Ramseur's brigade, who were posted toward the rear of the hill, would serve as the re-

serve force. Those troops would be called on to provide needed support for any of the other brigades if they ran into major trouble during the advance.⁸

The Federal force on nearby Oak Ridge included six regiments under the command of Brig. Gen. Henry Baxter. His brigade formed part of Brig. Gen. John Robinson's Second Division in the First Corps of the Army of the Potomac. Baxter's troops rushed into action just past noon from the vicinity of the town's Lutheran Seminary. Three of those regiments established a line along the south side of Mummasburg Road opposite the McLean farmhouse on the east side of Oak Hill. The other two regiments moved into place on the crest of Oak Ridge behind a long stone wall that faced west onto the John S. Forney farm field at the foot of the hill.⁹

⁷ OR, 27.2:444.

⁸ OR, 27.2:553.

⁹ John D. Vautier, *History of the Eighty-Eighth Pennsylvania Volunteers in the War for the Union, 1861-1865* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1894), 105.

Despite some careful planning, the Confederate attack aimed at dislodging those troops was plagued with problems from the start. Before it got underway, Rodes ordered the 3rd Alabama under Col. Cullen A. Battle into action on the right with Daniel's brigade rather than moving it forward onto the eastern slope of Oak Hill, where the rest of the O'Neal's regiments had formed. At the last minute, Rodes also decided to hold the 5th Alabama on the left of the brigade in reserve under his immediate command to defend the gap between O'Neal's and Doles' brigades.¹⁰

Because of those questionable decisions, O'Neal launched the assault against the right of Baxter's line with only three of his regiments. Despite the enthusiasm of his men, the attack bogged down almost immediately as withering volleys poured into them from Baxter's troops along Mummasburg Road and the lead elements from the Federal Eleventh Corps, which had moved forward on their left. Only after it became apparent that they were "making no impression upon the enemy" did Rodes finally order the 5th Alabama to their support on the far left at the bottom of the ridge. After a brief flurry of fighting, the undermanned Alabama brigade finally fell back in disarray to the rear.¹¹

Rodes placed most of the blame for this failed effort directly on O'Neal. He noted with obvious annoyance that the brigade had "moved with alacrity (but not in accordance with my orders as to direction) and in confusion into the action." The general expressed further surprise that "Colonel O'Neal, instead of personally superintending the movements of his brigade, had chosen to remain with his reserve regiment."¹² O'Neal acknowledged that his men were compelled to pull back "after a desperate and bloody fight of about half an hour."¹³ According to Rodes' official report, the result was that the entire brigade, with the exception of the 3rd Alabama, was "repulsed quickly, and with loss."¹⁴

The outcome proved even worse for the men in Iverson's Tar Heel brigade. The final arrangements called for Iverson to direct his attack against a line

Maj. Gen. Robert Rodes. National Archives and Records Administration.

of enemy troops on the Forney farm field, which appeared to be moving against two of the division's batteries on the south slope of Oak Hill. Gen. Daniel "was instructed to advance to support Iverson if necessary; if not to attack on his right as soon as possible." In a rare display of tactical ineptness, Rodes had completely misread the situation on the field. The men who appeared to be threatening his batteries turned out to be nothing more than a skirmish line. Iverson set up for the attack without deploying any skirmishers because the line he was attacking remained clearly visible in the nearby field.¹⁵

By the time Iverson's Tar Heels were finally in position, the Federal skirmishers in the field had halted well short of the Confederate lines and showed no inclination to attack the batteries on the hill. Henry Baxter, meanwhile, remained busy realigning his men to meet the impending threat on his left flank. After repulsing O'Neal's brigade, he

¹⁰ Brandon H. Beck, ed., *Third Alabama! The Civil War Memoir of Brigadier General Cullen Andrews Battle, CSA* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), 82.

¹¹ OR, 27.2:553.

¹² OR, 27.2:553.

¹³ OR, 27.2:592.

¹⁴ OR, 27.2:553.

¹⁵ OR, 27.2:553.

hastily shifted all four of his regiments from their positions along Mummasburg Road into place behind the stone wall that ran along the top of the ridge on the southeast end of the Forney field.¹⁶ While Iverson stayed safely in the rear, his men moved forward in parade formation across the field along their front, with no hint of the danger that loomed in front of them.¹⁷

When the Confederates reached within about eighty yards of their position, Baxter's troops suddenly rose up from behind the wall and unleashed a ferocious blast of gunfire that carved a swath of destruction through the advancing Tar Heels.¹⁸ Iverson's men were instantly cut down in heaps right where they stood.¹⁹ The Federal troops eventually rushed forward and captured nearly all the survivors, who had taken refuge in a shallow depression that jutted across the field. Three of Iverson's four regiments

Brig. Gen. Henry L. Baxter. National Archives and Records Administration.

were nearly wiped out in the attack.²⁰ The heaviest losses came in the 23rd North Carolina, where only one officer and about sixteen enlisted men escaped from that part of the field unharmed at the end of the day.²¹

Rodes' bungled attempts to overwhelm the right flank of the Federal First Corps left Ewell's plans in shambles. The sharp repulse of O'Neal's disjointed attack, coupled with the stunning disaster that struck Iverson's beleaguered command, threatened to eliminate the advantage in terrain and position that Oak Hill provided. The unexpected arrival of five fresh regiments from

Paul's brigade on Oak Ridge during Iverson's attack only added to their mounting problems. Even so, the apparent Federal tactical victory proved short-lived. Just as the situation appeared lost, Ramseur's brigade, which had been held in reserve, suddenly entered the spreading fight on Oak Ridge.²²

Few doubted that Ramseur was up to the task of dislodging the enemy from Oak Ridge. His performance during the recent fighting at Chancellorsville had cemented his growing reputation as one of the

16 George W. Grant, "The First Army Corps on the First Day at Gettysburg," in Ken Brady and Florence Freeland, eds., *The Gettysburg Papers* (Dayton, OH: Morningside House, 1988), 255.

17 W. E. Montgomery, "Twelfth Regiment," in Walter Clark, ed., *Histories of the Several Regiments and Battalions from North Carolina in the Great War 1861-'65*, 5 Vols. (Goldsboro, NC: Nash Brothers, 1901), Vol. 1, 634-35 (hereafter cited as *NC Regiments*).

18 Vautier, *History of the Eighty-Eighth Pennsylvania Volunteers*, 105-07.

19 Benjamin Robinson to Zebulon Baird Vance, July 9, 1863, *Raleigh Daily Progress*, July 24, 1863.

20 Louis T. Hicks, "Memoirs," *Raleigh State Journal*, April 27, 1917.

21 D. H. Hill Jr., "North Carolina," in Clement A. Evans, ed., *Confederate Military History: Expanded Edition* (Wilmington, NC: Broadfoot Publishing Company, 1987), Vol. 5, 335.

22 *OR*, 27:2554.

most brilliant brigade commanders in the Army of Northern Virginia. The twenty-six-year-old general was universally known by his middle name, Dodson. Born and raised in Lincoln County, North Carolina, Ramseur attended Davidson College for a short time before winning an appointment to West Point. Following his graduation in the class of 1860, he briefly served as a lieutenant in the US Army.²³

After resigning his commission at the outbreak of war, Ramseur entered the Confederate service as a captain of artillery. He took over as colonel of the 49th North Carolina in the spring of 1862 and sustained a severe wound in the arm at Malvern Hill. Ramseur's reputation as a hard fighter eventually earned him promotion as the replacement for Brig. Gen. George B. Anderson, who had died in October from wounds he sustained at Sharpsburg. His new brigade included the 2nd, 4th, 14th, and 30th North Carolina. Although his appointment dated from November 1, 1862, Ramseur did not join the brigade until mid-January in 1863 due to continued problems with his wounded arm.²⁴

Because Ramseur came from outside the brigade, many of the men greeted his selection with less than complete enthusiasm.²⁵ Among the most troublesome issues were his young age and penchant for rigid discipline. "Our Brig. Genl. is quite a strict young man, not more than twenty-seven," Col. Francis M. Parker from the 30th North Carolina commented to his wife. "He is a very strict disciplinarian. Drills are very hard."²⁶ Sgt. William A. Adams from the 4th North Carolina complained in a letter home during early spring that "Ramseur is giving us the very devil on drilling." While describing him as "a good general," the Tar Heel griped that he was "as tite as the very devil."²⁷

23 Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 251.

24 Larry Tagg, *The Generals of Gettysburg: The Leaders of America's Greatest Battle* (Campbell, CA: Savas Publishing Company, 1998), 290–91. For a detailed account of Ramseur's career, see Gary W. Gallagher, *Stephen Dodson Ramseur: Lee's Gallant General* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

25 Francis M. Parker to My dear Wife, April 12, 1863, in Michael W. Taylor, ed., *To Drive the Enemy from Southern Soil: The Letters of Col. Francis Marion Parker and the History of the 30th Regiment North Carolina Troops*, (Dayton, OH: Morningside House, 1998), 235.

26 Francis M. Parker to My dear Wife, April 27, 1863, *To Drive the Enemy*, 244. Ramseur was actually only 25 years old at the time.

27 William A. Adams to My Dear Sister, March 20, 1863, McClelland Family Papers, Wilson Library, Southern Historical Collection (SHC), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Brig. Gen. Gabriel Paul. US Army Heritage and Education Center

Any worries about their new commander quickly evaporated following Chancellorsville, where Ramseur won praise throughout the army for his unmatched skill and bravery in spearheading Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson's famed flank attack in the woods. Brig. Gen. Pender from A. P. Hill's division reported to his wife soon after the battle that Ramseur had "covered himself and brigade with glory."²⁸ Even Col. Parker, who had been cool to Ramseur's promotion, admitted in a letter home that "our own Brigadier is a very gallant officer." By the time the advance to the North got underway, Ramseur was acknowledged throughout the army as someone who was destined for higher command.²⁹

28 William Dorsey Pender to My Dear Wife, May 7, 1863, in William W. Hassler, ed., *One of Lee's Best Men: The Civil War Letters of General William Dorsey Pender* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 235.

29 Francis M. Parker to My dear Wife, May 9, 1863, in Taylor, *To Drive the Enemy*, 273.

Brig. Gen. Alfred Iverson. US Army Heritage and Education Center.

After witnessing the twin disasters unfold along his front, Rodes called for Ramseur to send two regiments in support of O'Neal's brigade and the other two to assist Iverson's troops. The 2nd and 4th North Carolina on the left of the line initially launched an attack toward the southeast.³⁰ According to a soldier from the 4th North Carolina, the troops moved forward only "a few hundred yards" before they were suddenly "recalled by Gen. Rodes and formed on a hill to repel an attack." The sudden appearance of Paul's brigade, part of which took up position on the south side of Mummasburg Road, likely prompted this last-minute decision to halt the advance.³¹

Once it became clear that the Federal troops along the road were not moving to the attack,

³⁰ OR, 27.2:589.

³¹ James Columbus Steele, "Sketches of the Civil War," 20, North Carolina State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History (NCOAH), Private Collection, Raleigh, North Carolina.

Rodes ordered the 440 officers and men from the two left regiments to resume their advance. The brigade's other two regiments, the 14th and 30th North Carolina, moved into action from the area of the Forney farmhouse across the same field where Iverson's troops had been slaughtered little more than an hour before. This force consisted of nearly 600 officers and men. The five fresh regiments from Brig. Gen. Paul's brigade in Robinson's division, which by then had completely replaced Baxter's tired troops behind the stone wall, loomed directly on their front.³²

While maneuvering his men into position, Paul suffered a horrendous wound from a Minie ball that tore out both his eyes. Despite the loss of their commander, the five regiments in his brigade still represented a formidable obstacle. Their final position formed an L-shaped salient that extended north in the area of the stone wall and east along Mummasburg Road. The 94th New York and the 107th Pennsylvania moved into place directly behind the wall at the crest of the ridge. The 16th Maine held a crucial position at the apex of the brigade's formation near the junction of the fence and the road. The 104th New York and the 13th Massachusetts occupied the far right of the line along the road, fronting directly on Oak Hill.³³

Although the earlier attack against the stone wall had failed miserably, Rodes clearly expected a far different outcome once his most determined fighter entered the fray. "Ramseur's Brigade, which under my orders, had been so disposed as to support both Iverson and O'Neal, was ordered forward, and was hurled by its commander with skill and gallantry for which he is always conspicuous, and with irresistible force, upon the enemy just where he had repulsed O'Neal and checked Iverson's advance," he declared in his official report. Unlike Iverson, Gen. Ramseur led the way at the front of the assault.³⁴

The situation his troops faced as they swept onto the field about 3:30 p.m. appeared far from promising. "I found three regiments of Iverson's command almost annihilated, and the Third Alabama Regiment coming out of the fight from Iverson's right,"

³² John W. Busey and David G. Martin, *Regimental Strengths and Losses at Gettysburg* (Hightstown, NJ: Longstreet House, 1986), 168.

³³ Bradley M. Gottfried, *Brigades of Gettysburg: The Union and Confederate Brigades at the Battle of Gettysburg* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 62.

³⁴ OR, 27.2:554.

Col. Cullen A. Battle, 3rd Alabama. US Army Heritage and Education Center.

Ramseur explained in his report. The Alabama troops had only recently arrived on that part of the field after being detached from O'Neal's brigade and ordered to accompany Daniel's men on the far right of the Confederate line in an advance against Col. Roy Stone's brigade, which was posted south of their position along Chambersburg Turnpike.³⁵

The Alabamians under Col. Battle initially joined the 53rd North Carolina from Daniels's brigade in an attack against Brig. Gen. Lysander Cutler's troops, who occupied a strip of woods on their left, just south of Baxter's location. As the remainder of Daniel's brigade pressed forward toward the unfinished railroad bed along the north side of Chambersburg Turnpike, Battle's men found themselves in a difficult situation. One soldier from the regiment acknowledged that their location along the edge of the woods was "now fearfully exposed" to gunfire from two different directions. "The line in the R.R. cut was directly on our flank while those in our front was making it lively for us," he explained.

³⁵ OR, 27.2:579.

"Our Col realizing our extreme danger ordered us to fall back."³⁶

Once his troops finally withdrew, Col. Battle remained isolated on the field without any orders. "I did not know where to find Rodes or O'Neal and as my orders were to conform to movement of Daniel I sent Private Raban of Company D to him for instructions," Battle recalled. "That gallant officer said in reply to my messengers, 'Tell Colonel Battle that I have no orders for him. He must act on his own responsibility.'" After receiving that response, he halted his regiment to the right of Iverson's position and waited patiently for further instructions from his superiors.³⁷

All that maneuvering proved frustrating for the men in the ranks. "After some time spent in ineffectual efforts to get our regiment engaged in connection with our forces on our right, Col. Battle finally moved us by the left flank to another part of the field," one of the men from the 3rd Alabama remarked in a letter home. From there, the Alabama troops watched helplessly as the battle continued to rage along the south slope of Oak Hill.³⁸ Despite the action all around them, Capt. William H. May noted that Battle's men "could not leave the field and had nothing to fight."³⁹

The soldiers finally received some much-needed directions as Ramseur's men rushed forward toward the Federal troops behind the stone wall at the east end of the Forney farm.⁴⁰ The sight of the beleaguered Alabamians caught at least some of the advancing Tar Heels completely off guard. Capt. James Harris from the 30th North Carolina encountered the 3rd Alabama, which had a strength of about 350 officers and men, just as his regiment entered the field. His understanding at the time was that "Rodes' old brigade did not come up to the scratch—as they ought—that day, and this Regt. by some means was cut off."⁴¹

³⁶ "War Memories by an Old Hornet," 101, 3rd Alabama File, Confederate Regiment Files, Gettysburg National Military Park (GNMP) Library, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

³⁷ Beck, *Third Alabama*, 83.

³⁸ "Letter from the 3rd Ala., from a member of the Gulf City Guards," July 9, 1863, *Mobile Daily Advertiser and Register*, July 24, 1863.

³⁹ W. H. May, "Reminiscences of the War Between the States," Georgia Archives, Morrow, Georgia (hereafter cited as GA).

⁴⁰ OR, 27.2:554, 587.

⁴¹ Busey and Martin, *Regimental Strengths*, 166; James I. Harris to Dear Friend Burton, Aug. 24, 1863, in Michael W. Taylor, ed., "Ramseur's Brigade in the Gettysburg Campaign: A Newly Discovered Account by Capt. James I. Harris, Co. I, 30th Regt., N.C.T.," *The Gettysburg Magazine*, 17 (July 1997), 31.

Ramseur immediately “requested Colonel Battle, Third Alabama, to join us, which he cheerfully did.”⁴² Capt. May claimed that the Alabamians actually shouted to Ramseur for permission to attach themselves to his force as he passed nearby. According to May’s account, the general replied that “N. C. will stay with you.” Still frustrated by the earlier lack of response for guidance from Gen. Daniel, one of the men yelled back that “they haven’t been a doing it.” Despite those concerns, the soldiers from the 3rd Alabama instantly joined in the attack against the Federal position along Oak Ridge. “Away we went with him charging a stone fence,” May declared.⁴³

Another soldier from that regiment reported that they quickly “moved forward with a shout” across the field. “The enemy was in our front, behind a stone fence,” he remarked. “We could see them; they were ‘pegging away’ at us like good fellows, and Gen. Ramseur said they had to be driven from there.” He noted that “Gen. R., riding up to the front, clapped spurs to his horse, and waving his hat, cried out for us to follow him.”⁴⁴ Their advance took them right through the same hollow where Iverson’s men had sought shelter during the earlier attack. “We now began to notice our men laying on the field,” one Alabama veteran recalled. “Some one yells our boys have charged here and been repulsed.”⁴⁵

About the same time, Ramseur directed the 12th North Carolina from Iverson’s brigade on his right to “push the enemy in front.” That regiment had somehow remained largely intact after barely escaping the worst of the slaughter in Iverson’s attack across the Forney field.⁴⁶ According to Sgt. Walter Montgomery, his regiment “fared better than the others because of its being protected by a slight rise in the ground, though the loss of its left companies was severe.”⁴⁷ He noted that “its line was slightly refused and partly sheltered by the knoll there; so that the flank fire of Cutler’s brigade on the right did not strike this regiment, which was also too remote to

be much hurt by the union fire on the left flank of the brigade.”⁴⁸

Much of the credit for its survival went to Lt. Col. Williams S. Davis, who reacted to the first volleys by shifting all but two of the companies from the 12th North Carolina away from the stone wall to “a little bottom in a wheat field” opposite the woods on the north side of the railroad bed. “On my left there was a gap made as far I could see,” he said. “On the right there was a considerable gap between us and Daniel’s Brigade.” The only Federal troops in sight consisted of a few skirmishers from Cutler’s brigade, who moved tentatively only a short distance away along the edge of the woods.⁴⁹

Although most of the regiment escaped from the main killing ground, Davis remained cut off at one of the most crucial times in the attack. “I was left alone without any orders (our general in the rear, and never coming up), and with no communications with the right or left, and with only one hundred seventy-five men confronting several thousand,” he complained.⁵⁰ The situation failed to change when Capt. Don Peters Halsey, who served as Iverson’s assistant adjutant general, reached there soon afterward. Davis noted that the staff officer made “it distinctly understood that he came without orders from General Iverson.”⁵¹ While the fighting continued to rage in the hollow on their left, the regiment “remained in suspense.” Most frustrating for Davis was that “no order came from any source.”⁵²

By the time of Ramseur’s arrival, the Tar Heels had held their position on the Forney field for more than an hour without assistance. Capt. Weldon Davis from the 30th North Carolina in Ramseur’s brigade insisted in letter home that “the 12th Regt actually clothed itself in honor [in] this fight.” He noted that “three regiments of their brigade were taken prisoners, but the 12th kept fighting, would not surrender, and by itself held the line marked out for their whole brigade.”⁵³ Lt. Medicus M. Ward bragged to his parents that their regiment “alone

⁴² OR, 27.2:587.

⁴³ May, “Reminiscences.”

⁴⁴ “Letter from the 3rd Ala., from a member of the Gulf City Guards,” July 9, 1863, *Mobile Daily Advertiser and Register*, July 24, 1863.

⁴⁵ “War Memories by an Old Hornet,” 104, 3rd Alabama File, Confederate Regiment Files.

⁴⁶ OR, 27.2:587.

⁴⁷ Montgomery, “Twelfth Regiment,” Vol. 1, 637.

⁴⁸ William M. Robbins Journal, Entry for Sept. 12, 1897, GNMP.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Montgomery, “Twelfth Regiment,” Vol. 1, 637.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Montgomery, “Twelfth Regiment,” Vol. 1, 637.

⁵¹ William S. Davis to Dear Walter, Feb. 2, 1897, William Smith Davis Papers, James I. Robertson Jr. Civil War Sesquicentennial Legacy Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond Virginia, Virginia Memory Digital Collections, <http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections/cw150>.

⁵² Quoted in Montgomery, “Twelfth Regiment,” Vol. 1, 638.

⁵³ Weldon Davis to Dear Ma, July 8, 1863, in Lafayette Claud Eaton Jr., ed., *Rebecca’s Letters: A Saga of a Confederate Family* (Vallejo, CA: n.p., 2000), 69.

Capt. Don Peters Halsey, Assistant Adjutant General for Iverson's Brigade. Library of Virginia.

Col. Francis M. Parker, 30th North Carolina. From *North Carolina Troops, 1861–'65*.

held the enemy in check until Daniel's and Ramseur's brigades came to our assistance."⁵⁴

Lt. Col. Davis responded to Ramseur's request for support by ordering his men to let out a yell and "charge rapidly" at the Federal troops in the woods opposite their position.⁵⁵ Within minutes, they could see the soldiers there moving to the rear. "So completely surprised were the enemy that they fled in confusion without firing a gun," he declared. Unknown to the men in the 12th North Carolina, the troops from Cutler's brigade in the woods were running low on ammunition and had already begun pulling back toward the unfinished railroad bed before the attack even began.⁵⁶

Farther north, the 30th North Carolina briefly halted on the field while the troops from the 3rd Alabama and the 12th North Carolina moved into position. From that vantage point, Capt. Harris caught a glimpse of the fighting underway between his position and the area south of Chambersburg Turnpike. "During all this time a warm engagement had been going on just to our right between the enemy, who held position in a thickety woods, and

the 12th N.C. Troops," Harris said. He observed that "still farther to the right Daniel's brigade was hotly engaged and further still was Pettigrew's Brigade."⁵⁷

After charging the woods, the men from the 12th North Carolina quickly moved to assist Ramseur's troops in the attack against the stone wall. "The 12th was badly used up, but part of it joined us in the chase," Col. Parker from the 30th North Carolina vividly recalled. "But just how many companies of the 12th N.C. went in with us I do not know. In fact, I am not sure that any organized part of the 12th N.C. was in that charge." The colonel noted that "it was such hot and close work that a fellow had to attend pretty closely to his own business."⁵⁸ Adj. Fred Phillips from the same regiment remembered that "every man was at his post, and some of the gallant men of the 12th N.C. Regiment of Iverson's Brigade which had been driven back joined us."⁵⁹

As Ramseur's 14th and 30th North Carolina moved in for the attack, some of the survivors from Iverson's brigade hurriedly advised them to file off to the left and strike the Federal right. The warning came from Lt. James A. Crowder from the 23rd North Carolina, who was stationed nearby with Iverson's sharpshooter detachment, and Lt. Edward M. Duguid from the 5th North Carolina, who had escaped from the field on Iverson's left. Ramseur did not miss a beat. Col. Parker recalled that the young brigadier immediately "wheeled the line to the left and then sent us forward at the double quick, or, rather, run."⁶⁰

In an ironic twist, Iverson, who had failed to accompany his troops in the attack, claimed that he was the one who caused Ramseur to alter the direction of his assault against the stone wall. He insisted that the encounter came just as Ramseur's troops first moved onto the field. "Gen Ramseur came around from our left saying that he was ordered to attack, but wanted to learn the exact position of the enemy," Iverson remembered. "I showed him the stone wall and how useless it would be for me [to] try to force it." According to Iverson's account,

⁵⁷ Harris to Burton, Aug. 24, 1863, in Taylor, "A Newly Discovered Account," 34.

⁵⁸ Francis M. Parker to David Schenck, May 29, 1891, Stephen D. Ramseur Papers, NCOAH.

⁵⁹ Fred Phillips to David Schenck, Oct. 27, 1891, Stephen D. Ramseur Papers, NCOAH.

⁶⁰ V. E. Turner and H. C. Wall, "Twenty-Third Regiment," in Clark, *NC Regiments*, 2:237. Turner identified the second officer as "Lieutenant Dugger of another regiment." This officer almost certainly was Lt. Edward M. Duguid of the 5th North Carolina.

⁵⁴ Medicus M. Ward to Dear Ma and Pa, July 7, 1863, *Raleigh Weekly State Journal*, July 22, 1863.

⁵⁵ *OR*, 27, pt. 2, 587.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Montgomery, "Twelfth Regiment," Vol. 1, 638.

Ramseur replied that “he would flank it and move them so I could get formed.”⁶¹

However it occurred, Ramseur’s troops quickly shifted to the left along Mummasburg Road toward the main enemy position. “We were ordered to left flank, which threw us into the road leading directly into the city,” one soldier from the 14th North Carolina explained. “We marched down the road through a copse of woods.” He noted that they were then “ordered by the right flank, which changed the direction of the Brig throwing us in rear of the Yankees behind the rock fence.” From there, the Tar Heels pushed forward into the ranks of the enemy troops posted along the north end of the ridge.⁶²

Ramseur, who continued to display remarkable courage and presence of mind throughout the attack, directly supervised all that maneuvering on the field.⁶³ Adj. Phillips from the 30th North Carolina reported that the general “led the charge and he was the only officer on the field who had a horse under him.” A major tragedy nearly ensued when “the fine gray mare upon which he rode fell from bullet wounds within a few yards of the stone fence.” Shaken but unhurt, the gallant Ramseur barely hesitated as he continued to lead the main thrust from in front of the wall.⁶⁴

The outcome proved much worse for Ramseur’s crippled horse. Some of the men led the injured animal back to the field hospital on the David Schriver farm, located about a mile north of the battlefield on Mummasburg Road. They eventually tethered the horse to a tent that housed several officers, who had been wounded in the attack. “The gray mare, which Genl. Ramseur rode, was shot very near the wall, but did not die until just at night,” one of the officers recalled. “She was placed just in rear of the hospital tent, in which they placed me, and when she fell, came very near falling on me. She threw the tent completely over.” Although they suffered a close call, the men managed to free themselves without any further injuries.⁶⁵

Despite the mounting casualties, Ramseur’s men pressed ahead with a rush toward the northern sec-

tion of the fence along Oak Ridge. “Col. Parker of the 30th Regiment was badly wounded in the face just as we reached the wall,” Adj. Phillips recalled. “The bullet ridden flags of the 14th and 30th were planted there, and for a few minutes the fighting was terrific.”⁶⁶ Pvt. A. F. Harrington from the 30th North Carolina griped to his brother that “the Yankees was behind a Rock fence whare they give us fitts.” Although the Federal soldiers “poured” a deadly volley into their ranks as they approached the wall, Harrington and the rest of the troops in the attack quickly “charged it” and began dislodging the defenders.⁶⁷

The first signs that the enemy line was faltering came as welcome relief for Col. Battle from the 3rd Alabama. He admitted that his regiment was in “critical condition” until then, with a mass of Federal troops extending far beyond their position on both flanks. By all indications, the prospects for the attack were far from good. “But there was no time for hesitation,” the colonel remarked. “Forward Third Alabama!” was the order. Not a man flinched. The regiment was melting away in the furnace of battle, when to my surprise, the enemy’s right began to waver and fall back.”⁶⁸

Capt. May reported that they soon “drove the enemy troops from the fence,” forcing them to retreat by their left flank under cover of the stone wall. “This threw them to our right,” he said. “Gen. Ramseur here halted the right, and threw around his left to confront them, and charged.”⁶⁹ Another member of the regiment noted that “on our right the enemy had held their ground with more stubbornness or success than in our front.” He pointed out “that when we had driven them from the stone fence the line had to halt till the forces on our right could push them from a wood, from which they were enveloping us.”⁷⁰

The added support from the troops in the 3rd Alabama on Ramseur’s right proved critical in dislodging the Federal force from behind the stone

61 Alfred Iverson to M. S. O'Donnell, June 27, 1894, William P. Palmer Collection, Library and Archives, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

62 “Memoir,” 14th North Carolina File, Confederate Regiment Files.

63 OR, 27.2:587, 554.

64 Phillips to Schenck, Oct. 27, 1891, Ramseur Papers.

65 Parker to Schenck, May 29, 1891, Ramseur Papers.

66 Phillips to Schenck, Oct. 27, 1891, Ramseur Papers.

67 A. F. Harrington to Dear Brother, Aug. 10, 1863, in Zeb D. and Martha Harrington, eds., *To Bear Arms: Civil War Information from Local “Folks” Chatham County and Adjacent Counties* (Moncure, NC: n.p., 1984), 157.

68 Beck, *Third Alabama*, 83.

69 W. H. May, “First Confederates to Enter Gettysburg,” *Confederate Veteran*, 5 (1897), 620.

70 “Letter from the 3rd Ala., from a member of the Gulf City Guards,” July 9, 1863, *Mobile Daily Advertiser and Register*, July 24, 1863.

Ramseur's successful assault on the Union First Corps, July 1, 1863. Phil Laino.

wall. Dodson Ramseur credited much of the success in the assault to the outstanding leadership provided by their commanding officer. The general declared, in fact, that Col. Battle rendered "brilliant and invaluable service" during the attack. "Attaching his regiment to my command on his own responsibility, he came in at the right place, at the right time, and in the right way," Gen. Ramseur commented in his official report.⁷¹

As the main battle line pressed on toward the Federal position, Asst. Adj. Gen. Halsey gallantly stepped forward to rally the surviving troops from Iverson's brigade. Halsey was a native of Lynchburg, Virginia. He graduated from Emory and Henry College in Virginia at the age of nineteen.

⁷¹ OR, 27.2:587.

After briefly attending the University of Virginia, Halsey spent several years studying law and ancient languages at major German universities in Bonn, Berlin, and Heidelberg. The young Virginian spoke fluent French, German, Spanish, and Italian. Following the outbreak of war, he briefly served as a cavalry officer and later as a staff officer with Gens. James Longstreet, Samuel Garland Jr., and Iverson.⁷²

Besides being one of the most brilliant men in the army, the twenty-seven-year-old staff officer was an imposing figure at nearly six-feet-two-inches in height. His physical presence was matched by

⁷² "Speech of Captain Robert D. Yancey Presenting the Portrait of Major Don P. Halsey," Confederate Memorial Association Collection, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Virginia; Don P. Halsey Jr., "A Sketch of Capt. Don P. Halsey," *Southern Historical Society Papers* (SHSP), 31 (1903), 193–197; Rosa Faulkner Yancey, *Lynchburg and Its Neighbors* (Richmond: J. W. Fergusson and Sons, 1935), 116–18.

his bravery in battle. In his report on the action at Seven Pines in late May of 1862, Garland noted that Halsey, “having attracted universal applause throughout my entire command by his handsome behavior, was rallying a disorganized regiment and leading it forward with their colors in his hand when he received a dangerous wound in the head.” Although the injury left him blind in one eye, he soon returned to duty and was standing by Garland’s side when the general received a fatal wound a few months later at South Mountain.⁷³

Under Halsey’s leadership, the troops in the hollow quickly joined Davis’ regiment in the assault against the stone wall on the Forney field. “The Twelfth North Carolina, which had been held well in hand by Lt. Colonel Davis and the shattered remnants of the other regiments of Iverson’s Brigade, which had been rallied and organized by Capt. D. P. Halsey, Assistant Adjutant-General of the brigade, made under his guidance a dashing and effective charge just in time to be of considerable service to Ramseur and Daniel, and with them pressed closely after the enemy,” Rodes stated in his official report.⁷⁴

While all that was going on, the men from the 2nd and 4th North Carolina moved “promptly up” on the other part of the salient and began to overwhelm the 104th New York and the 13th Massachusetts along Mummasburg Road.⁷⁵ “Our gallant Brigadier, Ramseur, seeing the advantage in the face of a torrent of bullets, wheeled our entire brigade to the right,” the 2nd North Carolina’s Capt. John Gorman proclaimed. “And before the Yankees could think, we were pouring showers of rifle balls into their right flank and rear.” He reported that “their whole line broke and fled and at one time I was fearful their running troops would crush our little brigade.”⁷⁶

After encountering a “severe, galling, and enfilading fire” from a strip of woods directly behind Paul’s brigade, the 4th North Carolina under Col. Bryan Grimes changed front to the right before attacking across Mummasburg Road. “We then

advanced upon the enemy, joining our brigade, and driving them in great confusion,” the colonel explained. “And, but for the fatiguing and exhausting march of the day, we would have succeeded in capturing a very large number of prisoners.” Despite those concerns, they still seized more enemy soldiers “by far than the number of men in the command.”⁷⁷

As their right wing collapsed, the rest of the Federal troops farther south began abandoning their position along the wall. Lt. William Calder, who served in the 2nd North Carolina, noted in a letter home that “when we appeared on their flank, the dark mass of the enemy could be plainly seen to waver, break and finally fly headlong toward town, as we rushed after them pouring a deadly hail of balls into their confused columns.”⁷⁸ Adj. Philips from the 30th North Carolina reported that “the retreat of the enemy assumed the character of a rout” as they emerged from the cover of the wall. “Quite as many were captured as we had in the attacking column,” he declared.⁷⁹

Among the last of the Federal troops to pull back were the men from the 16th Maine, who endured repeated attacks before finally giving way. “With anxious hope we looked again to the rear for support—and saw that the other regiments of our brigade, our division, were falling back rapidly toward town,” Adj. Abner Small recalled. “The rebels were sweeping in through the fields beyond our right.” By that point, it became obvious that they could no longer hold the ridge. Despite mounting casualties, the men maintained their position as long as possible. Small insisted that they were simply “sacrificed to steady the retreat.”⁸⁰

About that time, the remainder of O’Neal’s brigade and part of Lt. Col. Thomas H. Carter’s artillery battalion, which was attached to Rodes’ division, also entered the fight from the area around the east slope of Oak Hill. “O’Neal’s shattered troops, which had been assembled without order on the hill, rushed forward, still without order, but with all their usual courage into the charge,” Rodes stated in his official report. “Fry’s battery, by my order,

⁷³ OR, 11.1:966.

⁷⁴ OR, 27.2:554.

⁷⁵ OR, 27.2:587.

⁷⁶ George Gorman, ed., “Memoirs of a Rebel: Being the Narratives of John Calvin Gorman, Captain, Company B, 2nd North Carolina Regiment, 1861–1865, Part II: Chancellorsville and Gettysburg,” *Military Images*, 3, No. 6 (May–June 1982), 24. The Gettysburg portion of Gorman’s memoirs is based on a letter to his mother that was originally published as “Battles of Gettysburg,” *North Carolina Standard*, Aug. 4, 1863.

⁷⁷ OR, 27.2:589–90.

⁷⁸ William E. Calder to Dear Mother, July 8, 1863, Calder Family Papers, SHC.

⁷⁹ Phillips to Schenck, Oct. 27, 1891, Ramseur Papers.

⁸⁰ Harold Adams Small, ed., *The Road to Richmond—The Civil War Memoirs of Major Abner R. Small of the 16th Maine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1939), 101.

Col. Bryan Grimes, 4th North Carolina. Library of Congress.

Lt. Col. Williams S. Davis, 12th North Carolina. Library of Virginia, James I. Robertson Jr. Civil War Sesquicentennial Legacy Collection, Williams Smith Davis Papers.

was pushed closely after Ramseur.”⁸¹ Col. Risdin T. Bennett, who commanded the 14th North Carolina in Ramseur’s brigade, claimed that he “could almost hear their bones crunch under the shot and shell” as Capt. Charles Fry’s Orange (Virginia) Artillery repeatedly fired into the rear of the retreating troops.⁸²

A soldier from the 3rd Alabama gloated that “soon we had the satisfaction of seeing the whole Yankee line fleeing like frightened wild beasts toward town, followed closely by our boys.”⁸³ Capt. May from the same regiment insisted that the attack became “almost a slaughter” as the Confederate forces pursued the Federal troops along the railroad embankment and through a nearby apple orchard.⁸⁴ “This was the most murderous assault I saw during the four years,” he remarked. “They were making no attempt to fight. Right there I saw five stands of colors from first to fifth no more than 100 yards [away].” He noted that as fast “as room was made for them to run they did it.”⁸⁵

The entire Federal line was soon in full flight for safety along Chambersburg Turnpike. Capt. Gorman pointed out that Ramseur’s troops “had them fairly in a pen, with only one gap open—the turnpike that led into Gettysburg—and hither they fled 20 deep, we all the while popping it to them as fast as we could load and fire.”⁸⁶ Lt. Col. Davis from the 12th North Carolina recalled that the enemy’s “right and left flanks were badly mixed, flying in utter confusion, and disorganization.”⁸⁷ Lt. Ward from the same regiment bragged that their whole line “drove the enemy pell mell from their strong position beyond the town.”⁸⁸ According to Ramseur, the Federal troops “ran off the field in confusion, leaving his killed and wounded and between 800 and 900 prisoners in our hands.”⁸⁹

Pvt. Rufus Delano Stallings from the 30th North Carolina in Ramseur’s brigade was equally pleased with the outcome. While admitting that they had “a hard time of it,” he gloated to his fiancée soon after the battle that their brigade gave “the yanks a good

whipping” and captured several hundred prisoners during the attack on Oak Ridge. The Tar Heel remained most impressed with the skill and bravery that Ramseur displayed in leading the assault. After witnessing him in action there, Stallings boasted to his future wife that “we have got the best general in the Confederate States.”⁹⁰

While Ramseur’s troops were driving the Federals off the central portion of Oak Ridge, Daniel’s men pressed forward against Stone’s brigade along Chambersburg Turnpike. After some ferocious fighting, they joined with Heth’s and Pender’s divisions from Hill’s Corps in dislodging the Federal troops from their position around the McPherson barn and sending them into a headlong retreat toward town.⁹¹ The results were just as stunning on the other end of their line, where George Doles’ troops, together with those from Gen. Early’s division, overran the Federal Eleventh Corps in the area north of Gettysburg. Rodes reported that Doles “succeeded in driving them before him, thus, achieving on the left, and at about the same time, a success no less brilliant than that of Ramseur in the center, and Daniel on the right.”⁹²

The troops from O’Neal’s and Ramseur’s brigades, along with the remnants of Iverson’s command, continued pursuing the panicked soldiers from the Federal First Corps who were escaping from Oak Ridge into Gettysburg along Chambersburg Turnpike. Some of the sharpshooters from Ramseur’s brigade led the way at the front of the chase. “Into town we rushed pell-mell after them, our brigade in the advance,” Capt. Gorman explained in a letter to his family. “I was with my company in the skirmish line, in front, and when the Yankees got into town, they hid in houses and barns, and I had the felicity of capturing any number.”⁹³

Their stunning success was marred only by the tragic death of Lt. Frank M. Harney, who commanded Ramseur’s sharpshooter detachment in the attack.⁹⁴ “The sharpshooters who were in front pressured them, pursued them into the town and fought

81 OR, 27.2:587, 554.

82 R. T. Bennett, “Fourteenth Regiment,” in Clark, *NC Regiments*, Vol. 1, 719.

83 “Letter from the 3rd Ala., from a member of the Gulf City Guards,” July 9, 1863, *Mobile Daily Advertiser and Register*, July 24, 1863.

84 May, “First Confederates,” 620.

85 May, “Reminiscences,” GA.

86 Gorman, “Memoirs,” 24.

87 Davis to Walter, Feb. 2, 1897, William Smith Davis Papers.

88 Ward to Ma and Pa, July 7, 1863, *Raleigh Weekly State Journal*, July 22, 1863.

89 OR, 27.2:587.

90 Rufus Delano Stallings to Dear Friend, July 17, 1863, Rufus Delano Stallings Papers, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina, East Carolina University Digital Collections, <https://digital.lib.ecu.edu/3340>.

91 OR, 27.2:587.

92 OR, 27.2:554.

93 Gorman, “Memoirs,” 24–25.

94 OR, 27.2:555.

them through the streets,” Lt. Calder said. “We captured one of their colors, but lost our gallant commander Lt. Harney of the 14th who fell mortally wounded.” He noted that, “after the last one had been driven from town, the enemy fled to a commanding hill that overlooked the town and all the surrounding country and there rallied and formed their shattered ranks.”⁹⁵

Harney’s dying wish was that the captured battle flag of the 150th Pennsylvania should be presented in his name to the president of the Confederate States. Ramseur fulfilled the request by sending the banner to Richmond, where a delegation delivered it to Jefferson Davis.⁹⁶ Following the ceremony, the president informed North Carolina Governor Zeb Vance that the flag “is in my possession and will be treasured by me as an honorable memento of the valor and patriotic devotion which the soldiers of North Carolina have displayed on many hard fought fields.” The banner was among the items seized from Davis when Federal troops captured him while he was fleeing for safety at the end of the war.⁹⁷

Ramseur’s gallant conduct that day stood in stark contrast with Gen. Iverson’s behavior. Although Iverson claimed to have assisted in the final attack, Ewell bluntly stated in his report that Capt. Halsey had “rallied the brigade and assumed command” of the brigade by that point in the fight.⁹⁸ Iverson, who had finally joined his advancing troops, seemingly acted as more of a spectator than an actual leader. As the Tar Heels rushed into Gettysburg in pursuit of the enemy, even the general acknowledged that he had lost effective control of his regiments. “Arriving in the town, and having but very few troops left, I informed General Ramseur that I would attach them to his brigade and act in concert with him,” he declared in his report.⁹⁹

According to Rodes, his entire division pursued the enemy “closely into and through the town, Doles and Ramseur entering in such close contact with the enemy that the former, who penetrated the heart of the town first of all had two sharp, and suc-

cessful encounters with the enemy in the streets.”¹⁰⁰ Maj. Eugene Blackford, who commanded O’Neal’s sharpshooters in the attack, reported that it became “truly a wild scene” as the troops rushed forward “capturing prisoners by the hundreds” in the town. “A squad of us would run down a street and come to a corner just as a whole mass of frightened Yanks were rushing up another,” he recalled. “A few shots made the whole surrender, and so on until we caught them all.”¹⁰¹

Pvt. James Z. Branscomb from the 3rd Alabama, who led the way at the front of his brigade with Blackford’s sharpshooters, found the chase just as exhilarating. “As they retreated through town our men pressed them so close they rushed in to the houses, and were taken there,” the young Alabamian wrote to his father about a month after the battle. “I had the pleasure of ordering some of the scamp out of the houses.” His only complaint was that “some men were by this time so worn out they could harass no further, and no fresh troops were there and none arrived until night or by the next morning.”¹⁰²

To everyone’s surprise, Rodes suddenly ordered his men to stop in the middle of town. “The troops, being greatly exhausted by their march and somewhat disorganized by the hot engagement and rapid pursuit, were halted and prepared for further action,” he explained in his official report. A major factor in his decision was information from Ewell that “the general commanding did not wish a general engagement brought on.” Despite calling a halt to the advance, Rodes anxiously awaited orders to renew the attack against the retreating enemy troops who had taken refuge on nearby Cemetery Hill.¹⁰³

Rodes’ worries about the broken-down condition of his troops appeared to be well justified. “I believe I was more completely exhausted this evening than I ever was in my life,” Lt. Thomas Taylor from the 6th Alabama in O’Neal’s brigade acknowledged to his parents. “I thought I would faint. I could not shut my mouth but panted like a dog on a hot sum-

95 Calder to Mother, July 8, 1863, Calder Papers.

96 R. T. Bennett, “Fourteenth Regiment,” in Clark, NC Regiments, Vol. 1, 725.

97 Jefferson Davis to Zebulon B. Vance, Aug. 19, 1863, in Joe A. Mobley, ed., *The Papers of Zebulon Baird Vance*, Vol. 2 (Raleigh: North Carolina Division of Archives and History, 1995), 240–41.

98 OR, 27.2:445.

99 OR, 27.2:580.

100 OR, 27.2:555.

101 Eugene Blackford, “Memoirs,” in Noah Andre Trudeau, ed., “5th Alabama Sharpshooters: Taking Aim at Cemetery Hill,” *America’s Civil War*, 14, No. 3 (July 2001), 50.

102 James Z. Branscomb to Dear Father, Aug. 3, 1863, in Frank Anderson Chapell, ed., *Dear Sister: Civil War Letters to a Sister in Alabama* (Huntsville, AL: Branch Springs Publishing Company, 2012), 213.

103 OR, 27.2:555.

mer day.”¹⁰⁴ Pvt. Oscar Whitaker, who also served in O’Neal’s brigade with the 12th Alabama, complained to his mother that “a great many men fainted that day from exhaustion, having been obliged to go into battle without water.”¹⁰⁵

While the weary men halted in town, Rodes and Early met with Ewell at the central square to discuss what their next move would be. “General Early and General Rodes came with great earnestness and animation to tell of the advanced position,” Lt. James Power Smith from Ewell’s staff recalled. “They desired General Lee to be informed that they could go forward and take Cemetery Hill if they were supported on their right.” During the meeting, Smith also got his first clear look at nearby Culp’s Hill. He noted “that to the south of the cemetery there was in sight a position commanding it which should be taken at once.”¹⁰⁶

Both subordinates initially urged Ewell to press ahead with the attack against Cemetery Hill. Rather than acting immediately, he sent Lt. Smith to locate Lee and obtain clarification of his orders before making a final decision. During his absence, the corps’ commander received new instructions from Gen. Lee “to carry the hill occupied by the enemy, if he found it practicable.” That order, however, seemed to directly contradict the army leader’s earlier directive “to avoid a general engagement until the arrival of the other divisions of the army, which were ordered to hasten forward.”¹⁰⁷

On his return, Smith informed Ewell that Gen. Lee still wanted him to seize the hill if practical. The report left him in a quandary about what to do next. Ewell was well aware that several of the brigades in Rodes’ division had already sustained some heavy casualties during the attack on Oak Ridge. In addition, much of Early’s division remained widely scattered. By then, both Brig. Gen. John Brown Gordon’s brigade and the brigade commanded by Brig. Gen. William “Extra Billy” Smith had already shifted about two miles to the east of town along York Turn-

pike as the result of an erroneous report that some Federal troops were threatening their left flank.¹⁰⁸

While awaiting clarification of his orders, Rodes expressed concerns about the increasing number of Federal troops who were assembling on the high ground along their front. “Before the completion of his defeat before the town, the enemy had begun to establish a line of battle on the heights back of the town,” he remarked. The general noted that “by the time my line was in condition to renew the attack, he displayed quite a formidable line of infantry and artillery immediately in my front, extending smartly to my right, and as far as I could see on my left, in front of Early.” Rodes insisted that “to have attacked this line with my division alone, diminished as it had been by the loss of 2,500 men, would have been absurd.”¹⁰⁹

With no word from Gen. A.P. Hill about providing assistance for a new advance, Ewell anxiously awaited the arrival of Edward “Old Allegheny” Johnson’s division from his corps, which had encountered major delays in reaching the field due to congestion on the road leading through Cashtown Gap.¹¹⁰ As darkness loomed, he turned his attention to the possibility of using Johnson’s division to take Culp’s Hill, which occupied a dominating position just southeast of Cemetery Hill. The continued lack of a response from A.P. Hill to his requests for support on the right in launching a new attack further complicated the situation.¹¹¹

Although Rodes remained ready to push ahead once his men were rested, the order from Gen. Ewell to resume the attack against Cemetery Hill never came. Even Ewell’s substitute plan of having “Old Allegheny” Johnson’s late-arriving division seize control of nearby Culp’s Hill failed to materialize. “Receiving no orders to advance, though my superiors were upon the ground, I concluded that the order not to bring on a general engagement was still in force, and hence placed my lines and skirmishers in a defensive attitude, and determined to await orders or further movements either on the part of Early or of the troops on my right,” Gen. Rodes stated in his report.¹¹²

104 Thomas S. Taylor to Dear Father and Mother, July 17, 1863, Thomas S. Taylor Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

105 “Extract of a letter from a member of the ‘Southern Foresters,’ 12th Alabama Regiment to his mother,” July 8, 1863, *Mobile Evening News*, July 24, 1863.

106 James Power Smith, “General Lee at Gettysburg: A Paper Read Before the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts, on the Fourth of April, 1905,” *SHSP*, 33 (1905), 144.

107 *OR*, 27.2:445.

108 *Ibid.*, 469.

109 *Ibid.*, 555.

110 *Ibid.*, 318, 445.

111 Smith, “General Lee at Gettysburg,” 144.

112 *OR*, 27.2:555. For a detailed account of the decision not to attack Cemetery Hill, see Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp’s Hill and Cemetery Hill* (Chapel

For many of those who had served under Stonewall Jackson, Gen. Ewell's failure to send them forward that day against the retreating enemy troops seemed nearly inexplicable. Typical of the complaints among the men were those of Cpl. John A. Stikeleather from the 4th North Carolina in Ramseur's brigade. He pointedly recalled that "there was a little restlessness exhibited by the soldiers on account of the halt first evening of the fight, the impression seeming to obtain among them, that, had Stonewall Jackson been with us, before we slept that night, Gettysburg heights would have been ours."¹¹³

The decision to halt in town without attacking Cemetery Hill caused at least some of his men for the first time to question the leadership of their new corps' commander, especially in comparison to the lamented Stonewall Jackson. Their comments about the contrast between the two generals were far from flattering for Ewell. Capt. Gorman from Ramseur's brigade reported about a week after the battle that they had clearly "missed the genius of Jackson" that day. "The simplest soldier in the ranks felt it, and the results have proven it," he remarked in a letter home. "But, timidity in the commander that stepped into the shoes of the fearless Jackson, prompted delay."¹¹⁴

Lt. Calder found the lack of action just as frustrating. He insisted to his mother that Ewell's failure to take Cemetery Hill was "the great mistake" that lost all the advantage they had gained during the hard fighting on the first day. "Our generals should have advanced immediately on that hill," Calder argued. "It could have been taken then with comparatively little loss, and would have deprived the enemy of that immense advantage of position which was afterwards the cause of all his success."¹¹⁵ After making it safely to Virginia, Maj. Blackford grumbled to his father that "if old Jack was but here we would have been in Baltimore this day." He added that it was "sad to hear the men longing for him."¹¹⁶

Sgt. Alexander S. "Sandie" Murdock from the 2nd North Carolina in Ramseur's brigade echoed those

sentiments in a letter to his brother. "By the time we got into Gettysburg, it was about 6 o'clock, and here was when the failure was made (and if Jackson had been with us it would not have been done)," the Tar Heel remarked. "We ought to have marched right into the heights that night and we would have taken them."¹¹⁷ Edward A. O'Neal Jr., who served as a volunteer aide on Rodes' staff, summed up the prevailing mood among the men. "The troops realized there was something wanting somewhere," he wrote in his notebook. "There was an evident feeling of dissatisfaction among our men [that] we were not doing [it] Stonewall Jackson's way."¹¹⁸

Those remarks, however, all came with the benefit of hindsight. The actual decision whether or not to attack Cemetery Hill proved much more difficult to make. Over the years, Ewell's supposed hesitation would become one of the central controversies surrounding the battle, with vehement arguments on both sides of the issue. Maj. George Campbell Brown, who was Ewell's stepson and served on his staff, emerged as the most outspoken supporter of his decision not to attack the hill. At the same time, Jubal Early and other steadfast defenders of Gen. Lee's reputation directly blamed the newly appointed corps' commander for failing to seal the victory by boldly seizing the high ground at Gettysburg.¹¹⁹

Rodes also faced some major criticism for his performance that day. Many questioned his decision to allow his two weakest brigade commanders to lead the initial assault on Oak Ridge. He then severely crippled O'Neal's attack by detaching the 3rd Alabama from the brigade. He compounded that error by allowing Iverson's brigade to advance onto the field without a screen of skirmishers along its front, resulting in one of the worst slaughters in the war. Only the supreme gallantry of Ramseur and the intrepid leadership of Daniel and Doles saved their new division commander from a major disaster.¹²⁰

Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 76–80.

¹¹³ John A. Stikeleather, "Memoirs," 43, Military Collection, NCOAH.

¹¹⁴ "Battles of Gettysburg," *North Carolina Standard*, Aug. 4, 1863. A slightly different wording was published in Gorman, "Memoirs," 25.

¹¹⁵ Calder to Mother, July 8, 1863, Calder Papers.

¹¹⁶ Eugene Blackford to William M. Blackford, July 16, 1863, quoted in L. Minor Blackford, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 221.

¹¹⁷ Alexander S. Murdock to My Dear Brother, Aug. 10, 1863, Alexander S. Murdock Letter, Musselman Library Special Collections, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

¹¹⁸ Edward A. O'Neal Jr. Notebook, John Coffee and Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹¹⁹ For a discussion of the controversy, see Gary W. Gallagher, "Confederate Corps Leadership on the First Day at Gettysburg," A. P. Hill and Richard S. Ewell in a Difficult Debut," in Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *The First Day at Gettysburg: Essays on Confederate and Union Leadership* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1992), 47–56.

¹²⁰ Robert K. Krick, "Three Confederate Disasters on Oak Ridge: Failures of Brigade Leadership on the First Day at Gettysburg," in Gallagher, *The First Day at Gettysburg*, 138–39.

No matter how it came about, Rodes' men remained on hold in the middle of Gettysburg as the day drew to a close. With no further attack forthcoming, the general finally ordered Daniel back to the vicinity of the unfinished railroad cut where his troops went into camp "under cover of an embankment."¹²¹ Col. O'Neal led the troops from his brigade to the west of town beyond the railroad bed near the Lutheran seminary.¹²² The few survivors from Iverson's brigade joined Ramseur's and Doles' troops in town along East and West Middle Streets, facing directly on "the heights beyond Gettysburg

¹²¹ OR, 27.2:555.

¹²² OR, 27.2:567.

occupied by the enemy." Despite all that Dodson Ramseur had accomplished that warm July afternoon, the outcome at Gettysburg would still only be decided after two more days of ferocious fighting.¹²³

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¹²³ OR, 27.2:580.