

MAJ. GEN. GEORGE G. MEADE  
*Com. Army of the Potomac, June, 1863 — June, 1865*

# GETTYSBURG

## THE PIVOTAL BATTLE OF THE CIVIL WAR

BY  
CAPTAIN R. K. BEECHAM  
OF THE FIRST BRIGADE, FIRST DIVISION, FIRST CORPS,  
ARMY OF THE POTOMAC

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAP

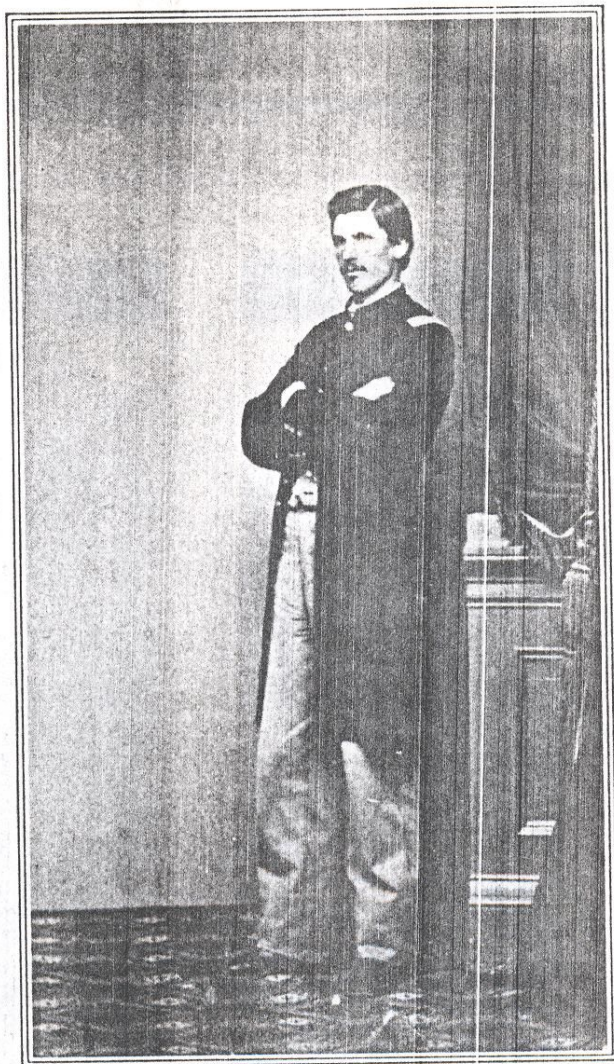


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CAPTAIN R. K. BEECHAM

*(From a war-time photograph)*

## CHAPTER VIII

JULY FIRST, 1863

WHEN dawned the morning of July first, General Buford occupied this unique position: With one small division of cavalry numbering about three thousand men, he was guarding the crossings of Willoughby Run on two highways leading into, and from a mile and a half to a mile and three-fourths northwest of, Gettysburg; Lee's whole army was from four to twenty-three miles away, every division and brigade of which was marching steadily and rapidly toward him; only two corps of the Union army were in position to support him, one of them numbering 8,500 men (Stannard's brigade of the third division not being with the First Corps in the first day's battle) being six miles away, and the other (the Eleventh Corps) 9,500 strong, at Emmetsburg, thirteen miles distant; while the balance of the Army of the Potomac and the commanding General thereof were far out

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COL. WILLIAM GAMBLE  
*Com. 1st Brigade, 1st Division, Cavalry Corps*

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of reach for that day, and in blissful ignorance of his situation. But Buford quailed not; and Heth, with the leading division of Lee's army, found him at his post. The Eighth Illinois Cavalry of Gamble's brigade, out on the Chambersburg Pike about a mile west of Willoughby Run, opened the battle with Archer's brigade of Heth's infantry, about eight o'clock in the morning. The First Corps of the Union army was early astir, and as we were marching along the Emmetsburg Road in the direction of Gettysburg, our ears were saluted with the first cannon-shot of the opening battle. The shots sounded far away, and we had no idea that we were coming almost immediately into the presence of the enemy. We were within a mile of Gettysburg and could see the fair city to the northeastward, reposing in peace that summer morning ere the battle began that was to shake the very stones of her foundations.

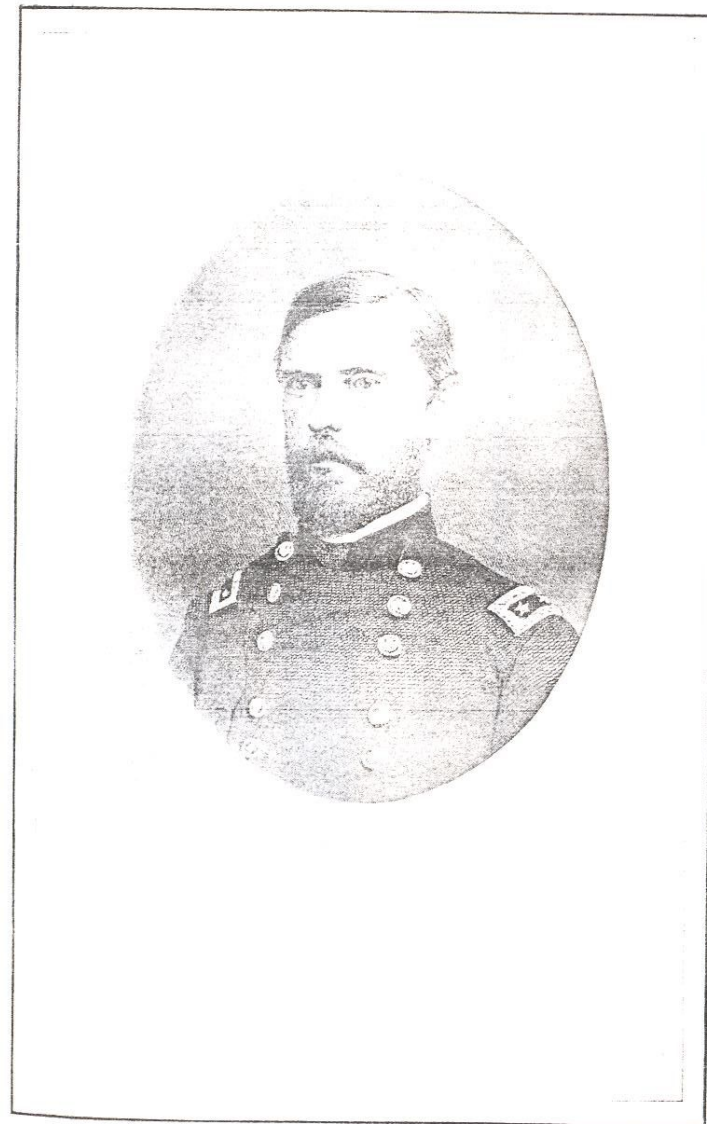
It was just before nine o'clock, and here we were met by General Reynolds, who had returned to urge us forward with all possible speed to the support of Buford. General Reynolds sat upon his horse on the west side of the highway facing us, and as we

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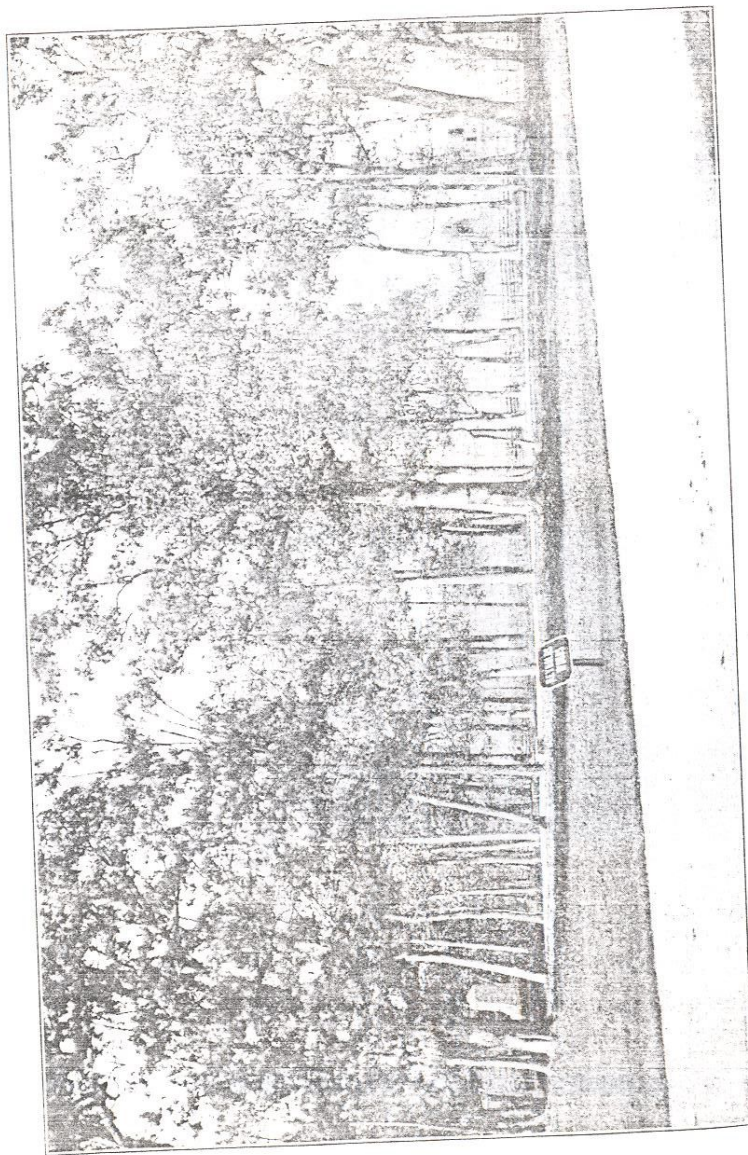
marched near the head of the column we had a fair view of his features. The General looked careworn, and we thought, very sad, but the high purpose of his patriotic soul was stamped upon every lineament. It was the last time we saw him. He directed the turning of our column to the westward and then rode rapidly toward Gettysburg to confer with Buford at his headquarters at the Seminary. Within a short half-hour thereafter he had given his life for his country.

As we turned from the Emmetsburg Road westward, scattering solid-shot tore through the tree-tops above our heads, reminding us that the battle was on in earnest, and much nearer than we had supposed. Then Fairchild, our Colonel, sprang from his horse, which he gave to the care of Sanford, his hostler, as he shouted his command, "Non-combatants to the rear!" We marched rapidly forward, loading our guns as we advanced. Within five hundred yards from the point where our Colonel dismounted we reached the crest of Seminary Ridge. Five hundred yards farther, and we entered the edge of McPherson's Woods—afterwards called

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MAJ.-GEN. JOHN E. REYNOLDS  
*Com. 1st, 3d, and 11th Corps, July 1*



REYNOLDS' WOODS  
Spot Where General Reynolds Was Killed

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Reynolds' Woods — on the crest of a second ridge, where Buford's thin line was heroically holding Archer's infantry in check, which was advancing steadily through the woods from the westward.

At the Battle of Gettysburg, and long before, "all quality, pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war" had disappeared from the American armies on either side. A few regiments or brigades wore some distinguishing feature of dress besides the corps-badge, by which they were recognized, but there was to be seen among our embattled ranks nothing to compare with the pomp and show of war, as portrayed by Hugo, on the field of Waterloo:

"The flaming calbacks, the waving sabre-taches, the crossed shoulder-belts, the grenade cartridge-boxes, the dolmans of the huzzars, the red boots with a thousand creases, the heavy shakos festooned with fringe, the almost black infantry of Brunswick united with the scarlet infantry of England, the English soldiers with great white circular pads on their sleeves for epaulets, the Hanoverian light horse with their oblong leather caps with copper bands and flowing plumes of red horsehair, the Scotch with bare knees and plaids, and the large white gaiters of our grenadiers."

In our whole army there was no more distinguished brigade in the matter of dress than the old Iron Brigade of the First Corps, which was the first

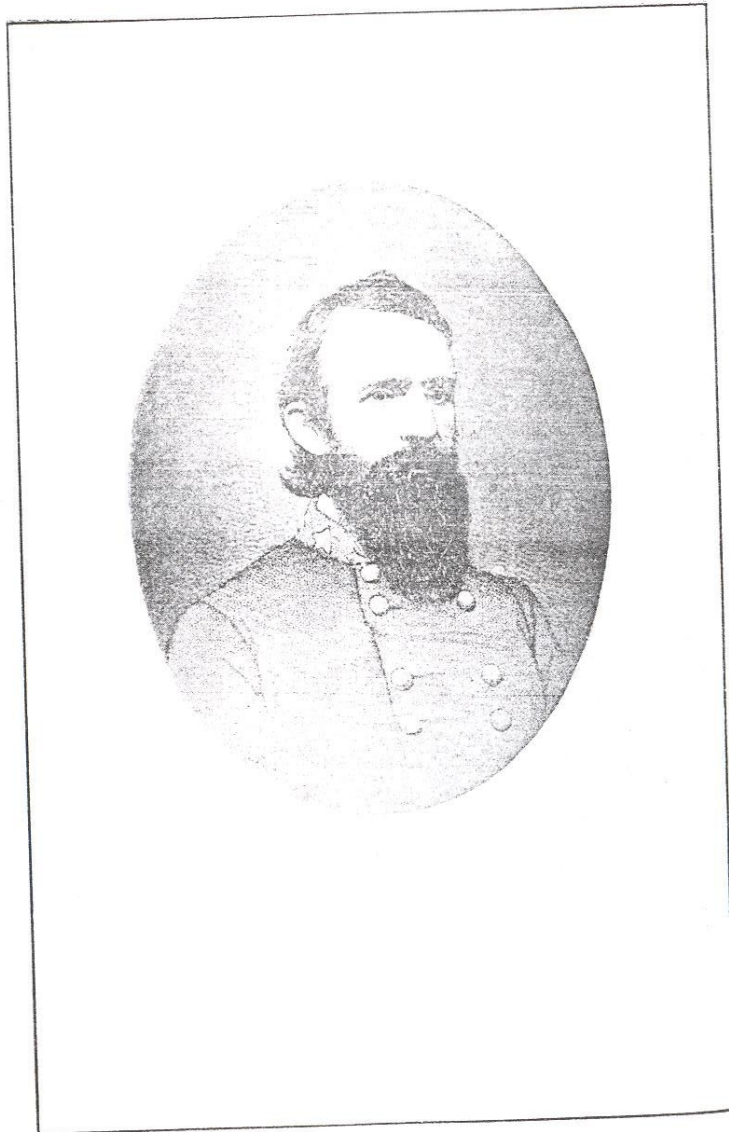
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Before we had advanced thirty yards into the woods, our Colonel received a severe wound, from which he lost an arm; and immediately after, our Lieutenant-Colonel was killed. We held our fire until within ten yards of the Confederate line, and then gave them a volley that counted; for Archer's line gave way, retreating slowly and stubbornly through the woods and finally across Willoughby Run. We followed closely upon their heels, and, crossing the run about a moment later, captured General Archer and several hundred of his men who had taken shelter behind a clump of willows. In the charge across the Run this willow-clump, very compact and interwoven, divided the second regiment into two parts, our veteran being in the right battalion or division. The left division was led by Captain Charles Dow, and to him General Archer surrendered and offered his sword. But Captain Dow replied: "Keep your sword, General, and go to the rear; one sword is all I need on this line." So General Archer passed in front of the willow-clump toward our right before crossing the Run to the rear. When within about forty yards of us he was met by

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CAPTAIN CHAS. C. DOW  
*(From a war-time photograph)*



BRIG. GEN. J. J. ARCHER  
*Hill's Division, 3d Corps, Army Northern Virginia*

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a lieutenant of the second regiment then serving as a staff officer, who demanded of Archer his sword. At first the General refused, trying to explain his right to retain it by the order of Captain Dow, but the lieutenant insisted, and to save further trouble the General surrendered his sword to the man who had no right to receive it. It is not always that the man on the outmost line receives the reward which is his due.

Just as General Archer and his captured men were crossing the Run to the rear, under a hastily improvised guard, and it became certain that we had won the first heat of battle, a sergeant of our company, Jonathan Bryan by name, was shot through the heart by a Confederate from the edge of the woods beyond a field in our front, while waving his hat and cheering for victory. He was by birth a Pennsylvanian, and one of the best and bravest among the soldiers of the Second Wisconsin. Comrade Bryan was the only man of our regiment killed west of Willoughby Run.

When the old veteran visited Gettysburg in 1900, he found no stone marking the spot where the brave



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common-soldier fell, nor yet a monument or marker to show the place where we captured Archer, nor a line on our regimental monument telling to the world the important fact in the history of the regiment, that the Second Wisconsin Infantry crossed Willoughby Run on the first day of July, 1863, and there captured General Archer of the Confederate army. Why this oversight or neglect?

A few moments after comrade Bryan was killed, our line was withdrawn to the east side, and we took up a defensive position with Willoughby Run in our front at close rifle-range. Our brigade comprised five regiments, but the Sixth Wisconsin, being on division rear-guard during the march of the morning, was not with us. It followed the second brigade, coming upon the field a little later, and with that brigade it passed by our rear and engaged in the morning's first battle with Davis's Confederates, who were also of Heth's division farther to the right, extending our battle-line beyond or north of the Chambersburg Pike.

Immediately after forming our battle-line east of Willoughby Run, we threw out a skirmish or picket

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line well screened by the bushes on the bank of the Run, and then proceeded to call the roll of companies and take an inventory of our losses. We went into that morning skirmish with a total strength of three hundred and two men in our regiment. The battle did not last more than thirty minutes, but our loss in killed and wounded was one hundred and sixteen, or thirty-eight per cent. This fact shows, as heretofore stated, that the Confederate soldiers were expert marksmen and used good powder. The other regiments of our brigade did not meet with so heavy a loss, for the Confederate fire was concentrated upon us, as we charged down the slope through the grove; but their prompt and active support enabled us to drive General Archer to cover, and, as Longstreet tells us in his "Memoirs," page 354, "captured General Archer and one thousand of Heth's men." Herein Longstreet gives us greater credit than belongs to us, a generosity unusual for him. We captured Archer and more men than the second regiment took into battle; but our brigade did not capture a thousand at that time, though during the whole day the two

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brigades of Wadsworth's division captured a thousand or more of Heth's men. Our second brigade — Cutler's — was also victorious on our right; and between the two we humbled the pride of Archer's and Davis's brigades, thoroughly.

Following this sharp skirmish of the morning, there was a lull in the battle, lasting from half to three-fourths of an hour. The second and third divisions of the First Corps arrived during the lull and extended our lines to the right and left, making the battle-front of the First Corps a mile or more in length, facing nearly westward, and in that line we mustered 8,500 men, before our losses of the morning, which were severe.

Buford's cavalry, which had fought Heth's infantry for an hour before being relieved by our First Corps, and had lost heavily in the engagement, then moved to the northward to protect our right. On the other hand, the Confederates, under A. P. Hill commanding their Third Corps, were re-forming their lines for the renewal of the battle. Archer's brigade was commanded by Colonel Fry, and reinforced with Pettigrew's and Brockenbrough's

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brigades. Hill was also reinforced by Pender's division; Thomas's brigade on his left supporting Davis, and Lane's, Scales', and Perrins' brigades supporting his right and overlapping the Union left. This gave the Confederates' strength in our front at eight brigades, as against our six, each of which was numerically stronger than ours.

While we lay in battle-line during this lull, our wounded were assisted to the rear, but the dead were left where they fell,—in fact we had no men to spare from our ranks for any purpose where the absolute necessity did not exist; and we noticed a soldier of our company who had been wounded, some distance to the rear, as we came through the wood. He had secured two muskets from the field, which he was using as crutches, and when we last saw him he was far up the slope, making his way off the field without assistance, though so severely wounded that his leg was afterwards amputated above the knee. He lived for many years after the war ended.

Before the battle reopened, word was passed along our line informing us of the death of General

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Reynolds. He was killed a few moments after he went into action in the morning, a little to the right and about fifty yards in front of the point where we entered the wood. A granite monument marks the spot where he fell, and the grove is now renamed "Reynolds' Woods."

About half-past ten o'clock our pickets reported the advancing of the enemy in strong force, and soon thereafter the battle reopened all along the line.

In the immediate front of the position held by the Second Wisconsin in the wood, Willoughby Run ran in and out among the willow-clumps, leaving many rocky spaces free from cover; and as the Confederates advanced to cross the Run, we tried to make it lively for them, and so far succeeded that they were a full hour in forcing the passage; but they were brave and determined, and after desperate resistance we were obliged to concede them the privilege of crossing. However, we did not then surrender the grove, but held on to it for hours, yielding it only foot by foot, and inch by inch. The grove was our citadel, and it in itself furnished the means of strong defence. Every tree was a breast-

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work, every log a barricade, every bush a cover and concealment, and we made good use of every defensive object.

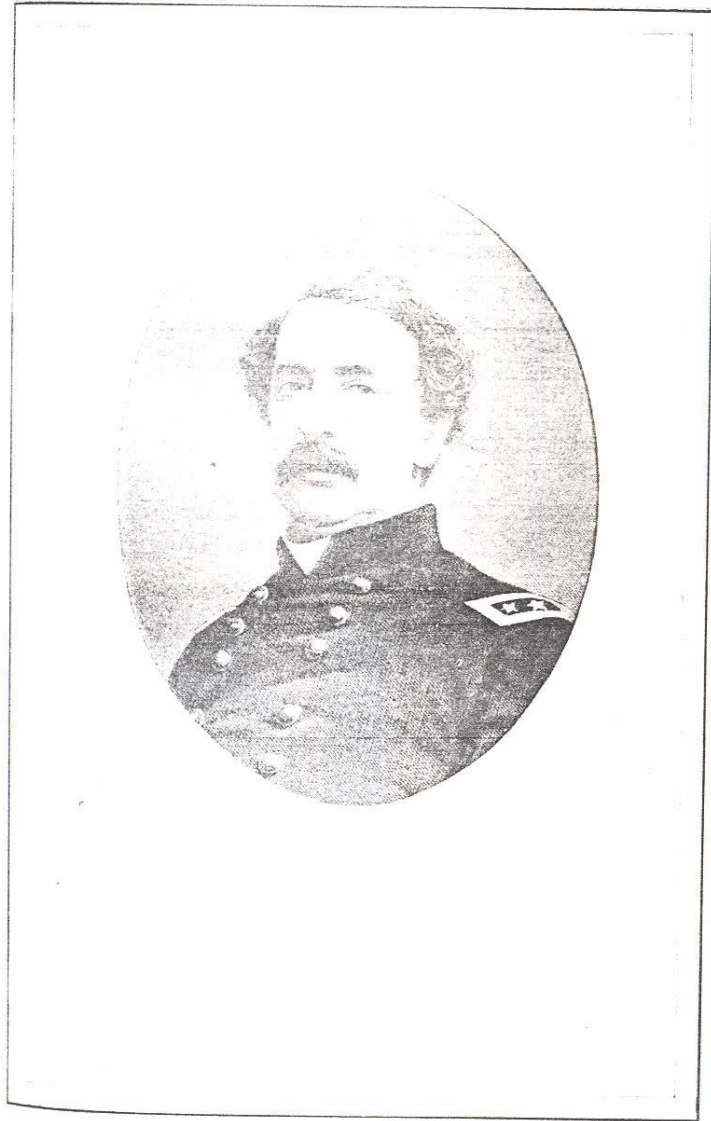
From Willoughby Run to Seminary Ridge the distance is not great. It is 475 yards from the creek to the ridge at the eastern edge of the woods, where our battle with Archer began in the morning; and 500 yards from the edge of the grove to the crest of Seminary Ridge. We measured this ground carefully in 1900, because we remembered it as a good long two miles in that day of battle. The whole distance is less than a thousand yards, but it took Hill's Confederates five weary hours to travel it, and then they did not quite reach the goal of their ambition until after we had abandoned it from other causes.

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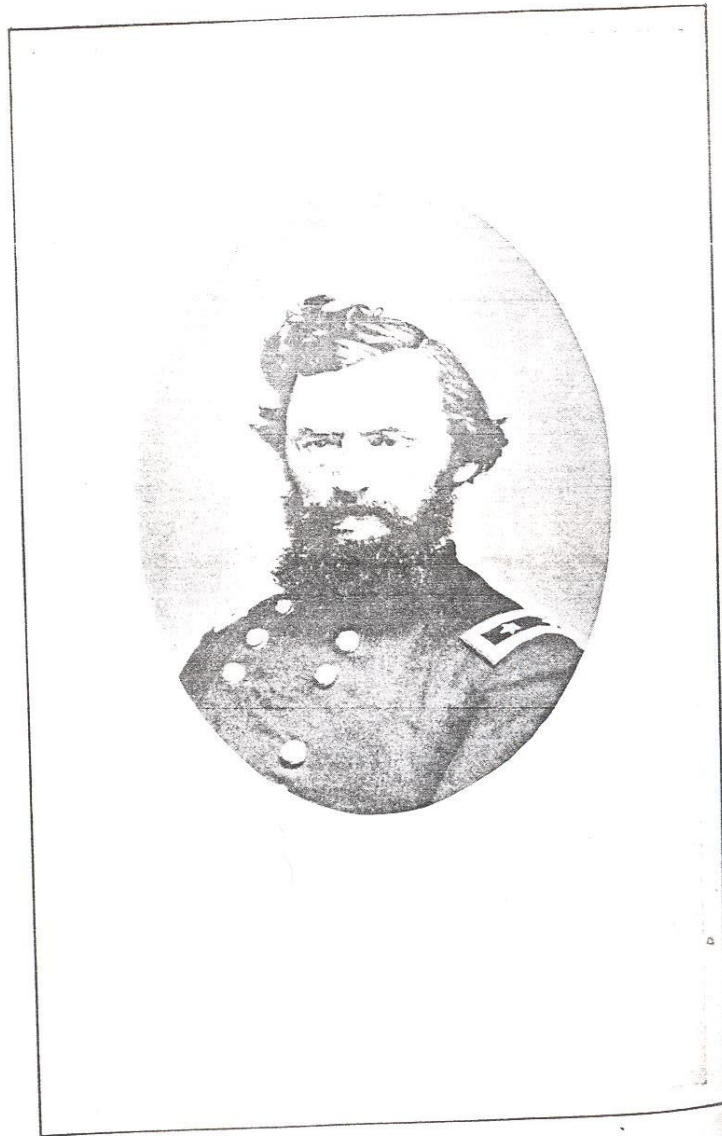
Ridge, and which we had left in position — knowing well the ability of the artillery to get out of there faster than we could — and also Battery B of the Fourth U. S. passed us, their horses on a full run, and the cannoneers clinging to the caissons and limber chests; but we saw nothing of General Doubleday and his staff waiting in the fence-corners along the pike.

Of course it stirs the heart of an old veteran to have his General speak in words of commendation of himself and comrades; nevertheless, we must conclude that a number of us left Seminary Ridge some time after our General, for when we arrived in the city, there were no “pale and frightened women on the streets,” with coffee and cookies for us. They had exhausted their supply before our arrival and had gone into their houses, as any sensible lady would have done about that time and under the same circumstances. In fact the streets were not the places for women then. It was all right and a good thing for the First Corps and the army, that General Doubleday did not remain too long on Seminary Ridge, nor in the city, for he was

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MAJ. GEN. ABNER DOUBLEDAY  
*Com. 1st Corps, July 1*



MAJ. GEN. CARL SCHURZ  
Com. 11th Corps, July 1

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a good soldier, and the army and the country needed his services; but it is one of the facts of history that we lost in prisoners taken by the enemy that first day of July from the First and Eleventh Corps, about 2,500 men, most of them captured on that retreat and in the city, after General Doubleday had ridden through and out of it.

The boys said afterwards that they got tangled up in the names of the brigade commanders of Schurz's third division of the Eleventh Corps, General Von Schimmelfennig and Colonel Krzyzanowski. These officers were from the *Vaterland*, or from some other foreign country, and they had brought their own names with them. As General Von Schimmelfennig commanded the third division when Schurz took command of the Eleventh Corps, there really was some cause for the entanglement in the streets of Gettysburg in addition to Early's flank movement; and the soldiers will have their jokes. We were surely greatly hurried and badly tangled in the streets of Gettysburg on that retreat, however, and many a brave Union soldier went to Richmond and to his death on that account.

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When we reached the city the Confederates were already in possession of the northern and eastern portions of it. Generals Howard, Doubleday, and Schurz were then on Cemetery Hill, where they should have been, re-forming their shattered commands to meet Lee's expected attack on their new position that afternoon, and long before the sun went down; but had they, or any of them, taken the precaution to plant a few pieces of artillery in positions to sweep the streets of Gettysburg, supported by detachments of infantry under officers with staying qualities, to cover our retreat, many of our men might have been saved from captivity, who, conditions being otherwise, were lost. The fact is, that our generals as well as ourselves were badly tangled.

When we reached the city the Confederates were having everything their own way. Those of us who could run the gantlet rejoined our commands and rallied on Cemetery Hill, and those who could not, but were cut off and picked up by the Confederates, went to Richmond. It was 4:30 o'clock P.M., and the battle and retreat of July first were over.

## CHAPTER XI

### LEE AND HIS MISTAKES

LEE arrived on the field of Gettysburg, probably about four o'clock of July first. He was, says Longstreet, "in time to view the closing operations of the engagement. His headquarters were on Seminary Ridge at the crossing of the Cashtown or Chambersburg Road. After surveying the enemy's position, noting movements of detachments of the enemy on the Emmetsburg Road, the relative positions for manœuvre, the lofty perch of the enemy, the rocky slopes from it, all making the position clearly defensive, I said, 'We could not call the enemy to a position better suited to our plans. All that we have to do is to file around his left and secure good ground between him and his capital.' I was not a little surprised at his impatience as, striking the air with his closed hand, he said, 'If he is there to-morrow I will attack him.' I answered, 'If he is there to-morrow it will be because he wants you to