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THE BATTLE OF THE JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD
JUNE 21-24, 1864

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by

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THE BATTLE OF THE JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD, JUNE 21-24, 1864

Chapter I

General Meade Sends Two Corps Across The Plank Road

After their failure to breakthrough the reorganized Confederate Petersburg defense line on June 18, 1864, the Union generals determined to invest the city partially by a line of entrenchments aimed at the South Side Railroad. These earthworks were to consist of redoubts connected by rifle-pits, fronted by abatis, from which entire divisions could be withdrawn at any time, leaving a sufficient force to hold the fortifications. The corps pulled out of the works would be free to assail General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia "in unexpected quarters south, or even north, of the James." [1]

Major General George G. Meade on June 20 determined to redeploy his Army of the Potomac. The works assigned his army would be held by the V, VI, and IX Corps, while the II Corps would constitute a strategic reserve. When he notified Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant of this, Meade reported that prisoners and contrabands questioned by his people were of the opinion that General Pierre G. T. Beauregard had been reinforced by two divisions of Lieutenant General Ambrose P. Hill's III Corps, Army of Northern Virginia. Patrols sent out by the V Corps on Meade's left had discovered that the Confederates' fortifications continued to the west farther than they had been able to reconnoiter. [2]

General Meade's information was correct. General Lee had reached Petersburg on the 18th with General Hill's III Corps and two divisions of the I Corps, Major Generals Charles W. Field's and Joseph B. Kershaw's. Field's division which arrived first marched out the Baxter road, and

moving into the rifle-pits relieved the soldiers of Major General Bushrod R. Johnson's combat-weary division. When Field's butternuts reached the trenches," they filed into position on Kershaw's right.[3] It was after dark when Hill's corps crossed the Appomattox River and moved into position on the extreme right, thus extending the front well beyond the railroad that led from Petersburg to Weldon, North Carolina.[4]

General Lee had reached Petersburg about 11 a.m. and rode out to the front to join Beauregard. Together they inspected the line that Beauregard's chief engineer, Colonel D. B. Harris, had laid out the previous night. It was so close to the city that when Grant organized his front, the city could be shelled. Otherwise, Lee could find no fault with it. Colonel Harris had excelled himself in selecting the best available ground, when he had scarcely a moment to spare. Beauregard was so elated with the ease with which the evacuation had been carried out, and so reassured by the arrival of Kershaw and Field that he proposed an attack on the left flank of the Army of the Potomac. Lee rejected Beauregard's idea, contending that the troops were too exhausted to seize the initiative.[5]

Although "No" was said to him on June 18, Beauregard soon learned that Lee "never lost an opportunity of delivering a blow when he saw a fair opening." For four reasons, it was difficult for the Confederates to strike soon or heavily at Petersburg. Because of the strength of the Federals' position and the weight of numbers, the Rebels could not afford to attack Union entrenchments unless the situation was desperate. The Army of Northern Virginia at the same time had to guard the approaches to Richmond as well as of Petersburg and, third, cost what it might, the army must keep open lines of supply from the Southern Heartland. "If this cannot be done," Lee wrote, "I see no way of averting the terrible disaster

that will ensue." From this statement Lee had to except the Petersburg & Weldon. That line was doomed, though sound logistics demanded its protection and use as long as this could be done without excessive loss of life. Whenever other railroads were assailed by Union cavalry, they must be defended to the limit by Rebel horsesoldiers. Finally, in the planning and execution of this difficult military course, the Confederates were crippled by lack of manpower and by the loss of leaders. [6]

Meade on the 20th visited Grant's City Point headquarters. There the two generals discussed steps for forcing the Confederates out of Petersburg. To increase the strength of the projected strategic reserve, Grant determined to order the leader of the Army of the James, Major General Benjamin F. Butler, to extend his lines to the left and occupy ground now held by the VI Corps. When he moved to the left, Grant cautioned Meade, "it will be advisable to do it by rapid movement, and with as heavy force as possible."

Butler would be told to see that the redeployment of his XVIII Army Corps was completed by noon the next day. The heavy artillery companies ordered to report to the XVIII Corps, Grant hoped, would be able to destroy the railroad bridges spanning the Appomattox, and possibly silence the Confederates' big guns north of the river. [7]

After returning to his headquarters, Meade forwarded a memorandum to Grant, reviewing the master plan agreed upon at the City Point meeting. The left of Major General Gouverneur K. Warren's V Corps at the moment was anchored on the Jerusalem Plank Road. During the night the [illegible] Corps would be relieved, the IX Corps extending to the right to relieve the men of the II Corps. The II Corps would then be massed on the left and rear of the Fifth. As soon as the VI Corps was relieved

by Butler's troops, Meade would advance westward with his strategic reserve and endeavor to reach the Appomattox west of Petersburg.[8]

Major General David B. Birney (who had assumed charge of the II Corps on June 18, when Major General Winfield S. Hancock had been compelled to relinquish command, because his Gettysburg wound had become very painful) had been notified at 8:45 a.m. that the VI Corps was to relieve the division of his corps on the right, while Major General Ambrose E. Burnside's IX Corps was to relieve the remainder of his troops. Upon being pulled out of the works, Birney was to camp the II Corps in rear of the fortifications held by the V Corps, "at some point easily accessible from all parts of the position now held by the army, and from the crossing of the Blackwater." [9]

Upon receipt of this message, Birney alerted his division commanders to hold their units well in hand and be ready to march as soon as relieved.[10]

Meade's headquarters at 10:45 o'clock notified Birney that it would be after dark before his corps could be pulled out of the lines.[11]

Staff officers spent much of the day reconnoitering the area behind the V Corps to select ground where Birney could mass his divisions. Chief of Staff Charles H. Morgan, after studying the terrain, informed Birney that their corps' left should rest on the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad, which would place it between Baxter road and the tracks. The only good "camping-ground" in this area was near Avery's house.[12]

With the hour at which his soldiers were to be relieved at hand, Birney at 7:40 p.m. inquired of Meade, "Is it essential that my corps take position exactly in rear of General Warren's left, or will it do [illegible] in this rear?" All that he had heard from Colonel Morgan indicated that the terrain to the rear of the V Corps' left was "very much

obstructed," and at night it would be difficult to march across.[13] Within 25 minutes Birney had his answer. He could mass his troops at any point behind Warren, provided his divisions could be shifted rapidly and without confusion into position on the left of the V Corps.[14]

General Meade at 8:15 a.m. had alerted Major General Horatio G. Wright of the VI Corps that he was to have his troops hold their ground until notified differently, as he was to relieve part of the Second Corps.[15] Fifteen minutes later, Wright learned what he was to do. He was to replace one of Birney's divisions, and hold the earthworks from Hare's house to the Appomattox. One VI Corps division was to watch the river, while the earthworks facing the Confederate fortified zone were to be strengthened.[16]

By 2 p.m. Wright had prefected his plans. As soon as it was dark, troops of Brigadier Generals David A. Russell's and Thomas H. Neill's divisions, currently posted in the rifle-pits, were to extend to the left and relieve Major General John Gibbon's II Corps division. Before undertaking this movement, Russell and Neill were to consult and determine the sector of the line for which each would be responsible. Brigadier General James B. Ricketts' division would continue to be in reserve. Three hundred men were to be detailed by Ricketts to patrol the banks of the Appomattox from the emplacements where the cannoneers of Battery H, 1st Ohio Light Artillery and Battery E, 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery had mounted their guns to the fleet anchorage.[17]

Meanwhile, Meade had got in touch with the commander of his IX Corps, General Burnside. The IX Corps was to extend to the right and relieve Birney's troops as far as Hare's house.[18] Later in the morning, Meade's Chief of Staff, Andrew A. Humphreys, informed Burnside that he would also extend his left and occupy as much ground currently held by the V Corps as possible.[19]

Burnside as his first order of business inquired of General Birney, "How many troops are needed to occupy the trenches from the IX Corps' right to the Hare house?"[20]

"Four thousand men," without any reserves, could hold the first line, Birney replied.[21]

This shocked Burnside, because he had only 3,800 available, and he knew there were two II Corps divisions and six batteries (not less than 10,000 men) posted along that sector of the front. Examining his morning reports, Burnside saw that exclusive of Brigadier General Edward Ferrero's division, which was under orders to report to General Butler, his entire corps did not muster 10,000 effectives. Now, to make matters worse, he had received instructions to relieve part of Warren's line. Burnside protested that a too great extension of the frontage held by the IX Corps, such as contemplated by army headquarters, could jeopardize its safety.[22]

Acknowledging Burnside's message, Meade's headquarters observed, the IX Corps was "to hold the position defensively," and that the orders for Ferrero's division to report to Butler had been canceled. Moreover, the directive for Burnside to extend his left to relieve part of Warren's right was "conditional" upon his "finding it practicable to do so."[23]

Burnside at 7:20 p.m. notified Meade that the two divisions slated to replace the II Corps troops were ready to march. Once again, he wanted the people at army headquarters to know that he would be unable to throw anywhere near the same number of troops into these rifle-pits as had formerly occupied them. At the same time, it was important that a strong force be kept in the works currently held by the IX Corps, which were very important.[24]

Grant, following Meade's departure from City Point, got in touch with General Butler. Butler was informed of the design "to envelop Petersburg so as to have the left of the Army of the Potomac rest on the Appomattox...." Such an undertaking would make offensive operations along the Bermuda Hundred Line impracticable until the new position had been taken up and fortified. To release as many VI Corps troops as possible for this movement, Butler was to extend his left. The force posted between the James and Appomattox was to be reduced "to the lowest number" necessary to hold the trenches. The troops thus relieved were to cross to the south bank of the Appomattox. Butler was urged to see that this redeployment was expedited, so as to relieve the VI Corps by noon on June 21.[25]

In accordance with Grant's directive, Butler at 7:30 p.m. directed Major General William F. "Baldy" Smith to get the troops of his XVIII Corps "ready to cross the Appomattox at daylight...." Units from the X Corps were to relieve soldiers of the XVIII Corps on the Bermuda Hundred Line. When he marched, Smith was to take with him two batteries of artillery.[26]

Orders were drafted at Smith's headquarters for the XVIII Corps division commanders to have their units ready to march at the designated hour.[27]

At 8 p.m., on June 20, the telegraph key in Burnside's headquarters tapped out the message, "Relieve General Birney at once. If necessary put your whole corps in position."[28] Burnside, after reading the communication, shouted for several staff-officers. One was told to tell Brigadier General Orlando B. Willcox that he was to relieve the II Corps' Third Division, while Brigadier General James H. Ledlie was to put his troops in motion for the sector held by Brigadier General Francis C. Barlow's men.

Guided by a staff-officer, who had previously reconnoitered the line of march, Willcox's division started north from its camp in the pines, east of the ruins of the Taylor house. As the column approached the rear of the trenches held by Brigadier General Gresham Mott's II Corps bluecoats, via the Prince George Courthouse road, the officers cautioned their men to be quiet.[29] Ledlie's troops at the same time had moved up from their camps near the Shand house toward Barlow's sector. The IX Corps troops by midnight had replaced Barlow's and Mott's veterans.[30] Ferrero's Negro Division had been advanced and occupied the line of rifle-pits overlooking Poor Creek. Here the Negroes would be in close support of the soldiers of Brigadier General Robert B. Potter's Second Division, IX Corps, who held the ground west of the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad, gained by Burnside's people in the bloody fight of June 18.[31]

Simultaneously, General Neill's VI Corps division had extended to the left, relieving Gibbon's II Corps soldiers in the earthworks north of the Hare house.[32] Orders were given in whispers, as the brigades of the II Corps moved back from the ground seized on the 18th. After the division commanders had notified General Birney that all their units had reported, the columns were put in motion for the area Colonel Morgan had selected for the rendezvous. Birney at 5:10 a.m. on the 21st notified Meade's headquarters that his corps was "massed in rear of Warren's left," and he was awaiting further orders.[33]

Although nominally "in reserve," the soldiers of the II Corps did not "found on this fact any great expectations for a long rest," for they had never forgotten the remark of a member of the Irish Brigade on the occasion when Brigadier General George H. Caldwell formed his division

in a line of battalions in mass, behind Major General Daniel Sickles' III Corps at Gettysburg, and the men were told that they were to be in reserve. "In resarve; jis, resarved for heavy fightin'." This remark, emphasized as it was by Caldwell's experience in the wheatfield, had become proverbial in the II Corps. Consequently, the troops were not surprised in the least, when orders came to move out. [34]

At 7:15 Meade instructed Birney to shift his corps farther to the south, and to take position on the left of Warren's V Corps. On doing so, Birney was to extend "as far to the left as practicable, enveloping and keeping as close as possible to the enemy's line." When Birney carried out this movement, it was hoped at army headquarters that the II Corps would gain possession of the Weldon Railroad. The VI Corps during the night would be pulled out of the works, posted on Birney's left, and endeavor to breakthrough to the Appomattox west of Petersburg. [35]

The only cavalry in the immediate neighborhood was a detachment led by Captain Benjamin W. Crowninshield. Since these horsesoldiers were picketing the V Corps' left, Meade at 8:25 directed Warren to turn Crowninshield's detachment over to the II Corps. Birney would have the cavalry advance into the region between the Jerusalem Plank and Halifax roads, and see if it could pinpoint the Confederates' defenses. [36]

As soon as Birney passed the word, the corps moved out--Barlow's division, screened by Crowninshield's troopers, took the lead, followed by Gibbon's and Mott's bluecoats. The sun had reached its zenith by the time Barlow's vanguard, which had taken the road leading by Southall's, struck the Jerusalem Plank Road, one-half mile east of R. Williams' house. Here Barlow called a short halt, while he conferred with his brigade com-

m[illegible]ders. The absence of any commanding elevations limited visibility. Before reaching the plank road, the Federals had passed three open f[illegible]lds on their right and one on their left. Water was short; many of t[illegible] soldiers had emptied their canteens. There were several large fields west of Williams'. These fields drained to the south into Second Swamp. T[illegible] woods to the west and northwest had not been reconnoitered, so Birney w[illegible]s concerned lest he blunder into a trap. He therefore directed Gibbon [illegible] Mott to mass their divisions in Williams' fields, west of the plank r[illegible]ad. Barlow was to employ his infantry and Crowninshield's cavalry and undertake a forced reconnaissance toward the Weldon Railroad. [37]

Spearheaded by the horsesoldiers, Barlow's division moved out, taking the road to Globe Tavern. By 1:10 p.m. the lead brigade (Brigadier [illegible]neral Nelson A. Miles'), with which Barlow rode, had penetrated to within two and one-half miles of the Weldon Railroad. For the past ten or 15 minutes, Crowninshield's troopers had been in contact with dismounted Rebel [illegible]valrymen of Brigadier General Rufus Barringer's North Carolina Brigade. Although the firing was light, Crowninshield called for help. Whereupon, [illegible]rlow told Miles to deploy and throw out as skirmishers two regiments--[illegible]e 61st New York to the right and the 81st Pennsylvania to the left. [38]

Crowninshield and his troopers seemed unwilling to close with the [illegible]e, so Barlow used them to cover his flanks, as the rugged footsoldiers [illegible] the 2d U. S. Sharpshooter Regiment took the lead. By the end of an[illegible]her hour, the head of the division had penetrated to within two miles [illegible] its goal. To delay the Federals, the Confederates had brought artil[illegible]ry into play. The cannoneers of McGregor's Virginia Battery employed [illegible] of their guns against the Federals. Barlow's advance guard cap[illegible]ured prisoners from three North Carolina Cavalry Regiments, the 1st, 2d,

and 3d.

Barlow, when he had committed his infantry, had been under the assumption that he would be supported by Gibbon's division. Learning now that Gibbon's division had been halted after crossing the plank road, Barlow decided that he had better get in touch with Birney. A staff-officer thundered off with an inquiry. Barlow would leave it to Birney, "to decide whether it is safe for us to advance so as to separate this division farther from the rest of the corps." It was impossible, Barlow wrote, for his troops to continue to press toward the Weldon Railroad and "keep up connection with the rest of the corps." [39]

Upon the receipt of this message, General Birney recalled Barlow's column. When his troops pulled back, Barlow had them file into position on Mott's left, near Williams' house, and dug in. From right to left Barlow's brigades were posted: Fraser's, MacDougall's, Moroney's, and Miles'. [40]

Gibbon's and Mott's divisions in the meantime had taken position. Gibbon's bluecoats were on the right and had entrenched west of the Jerusalem Plank Road, connecting on the right with the V Corps and on the left with Mott's division. The soldiers had erected a double line of rifle-pits in the dense pines fronting the Rebels' works. Brigadier General Byron R. Pierce's and Major Timothy O'Brien's brigades held the front line, Pierce on the right; Colonel Thomas A. Smyth's and Colonel William Blaisdell's brigades occupied the reserve trenches. Under the cover of darkness, the cannoneers of the 12th Battery, New York Light Artillery emplaced their four 3-inch rifles on the left of Pierce's foot-soldiers. [41]

Mott, like Gibbon, positioned his division in double line of battle.

Colonels Daniel Chaplin's and William R. Brewster's brigades held the front line; Colonels Henry J. Madill's and Robert McAllister's were posted in reserve. Soldiers of the 5th Michigan occupied the line of outposts covering Mott's main line of resistance.[42]

When the II Corps marched from Avery's, it was accompanied by six batteries. Except along the front held by Gibbon's division, Chief of Artillery John C. Tidball was disappointed to see that pines and oaks limited his artillerists' fields of fire. Lieutenant James Gilliss of Batteries C and I, 5th U. S. Light Artillery had his men unlimber their Napoleons in the interval between Mott's and Gibbon's divisions. Southwestern Prince George County being unsuited for the employment of artillery, Colonel Tidball had his four remaining battery commanders park their guns near Jones' house.[43]

General Birney about dark had ridden out to inspect the line taken up by his corps. According to reports brought in by scouts, the Rebel works that they had reconnoitered seemed to be a continuation of those stormed by Baldy Smith's corps on June 15. A salient (Battery No. 32) had been spotted in front of Gibbon's left.

When he visited Gibbon's left, Birney, looking across the fields to his front, sighted a strong column moving through the pines beyond. The greycloads were marching southwest, and Birney theorized that the Rebel generals had dispatched a strong force down the railroad to cope with Barlow's thrust. Relaying this information to Meade's headquarters, Birney observed, it would "not be prudent" for him to throw forward his left until the VI Corps was "in position or ready to go into position."[44]

At 9:10 a.m., on June 21, General Meade had issued orders that as fast as VI Corps units were relieved by elements of the Army of the James,

General Wright would march his soldiers into position on the left of the II Corps.[45] At the time that this telegram reached Wright's command post (9:30 a.m.) only one division of the XVIII Corps, Brigadier General George J. Stannard's, had arrived from Bermuda Hundred.

Stannard had started his division for the Point of Rocks pontoon bridge at 4 a.m. When he reached the Appomattox, he was compelled to call a halt to wait for Brigadier General James H. Wilson's cavalry to get out of the way. The bridge was free of cavalry within 90 minutes, and the footsoldiers crossed the Appomattox and tramped southward down the Point of Rocks road. Because of their proximity to the Confederate lines, Wright and Stannard were satisfied that it would be unwise for the XVIII Corps troops to relieve the VI Corps people in the rifle-pits before dark. When he notified Meade of this decision, Wright telegraphed that he had ordered staff-officers to locate and explore a road to Birney's left. As soon as these officers returned with their report, Wright promised to put his reserve division, Ricketts', in motion.[46]

At 11:45 Meade notified Wright that he "need not move any part" of the VI Corps "until the whole is ready to move."[47] This message, however, arrived too late, because Ricketts had already put his two-brigade division on the road.

Apparently, the Confederates suspected the Federals were up to something. At 1:30 p.m. the batteries emplaced to the right and front began hammering the VI Corps' lines with shot and shell. Union cannoneers replied with all their guns that would bear.[48]

After a short while the guns fell silent, and Wright and his officers went back to work preparing for the night's march. A request was forwarded to the chief engineer for a guide, who could show Wright the "shortest road

to Chieves' house, on the Jerusalem plank road." [49]

Just before dark, Wright was handed an urgent message from Meade's headquarters. As soon as his corps was relieved by Baldy Smith's troops, it was to move to the left of the II Corps, "and take position there, pressing up against the enemy and driving them into their main works, but not taking the offensive so far as to assault their works." For his guidance, Wright was informed that the II Corps was forming on Warren's left, which rested on the Jerusalem Plank Road, and would extend as far to the west as feasible. The object of this move to the west and the extension of the lines, Meade informed Wright, was to invest Petersburg and cut ingress and egress via the Weldon and Lynchburg Railroads. Wright would therefore extend his line from Birney's left "as far as practicable consistent with its security as a defensive line." [50]

Ricketts' division reached the area to the left and rear of Barlow's command at a most opportune time for the Federals. Just as it was getting dark, Barringer's North Carolinians, who had followed Barlow's column as it retraced its steps, charged Crowninshield's cavalry. There was a great amount of powder burned, but very few casualties as the Union horsesoldiers retreated. Barlow shouted for General Miles to countermarch his brigade and deploy to the left and right of the Globe Tavern road. Several crashing volleys from Miles' footsoldiers rocked the Confederates, and they drew back. Ricketts' vanguard by this time had reached Williams' house.

Hailing Ricketts, Birney told him to move his division out the Globe Tavern road. Colonel Benjamin F. Smith's 2d Brigade took the lead as the column started forward. The 6th Maryland and the 9th New York Heavy Artillery advanced on the double and relieved the hard-pressed cavalry,

while Colonel Smith formed the rest of his brigade into double line of battle across the road. The soldiers broke out their entrenching tools and began throwing up earthworks. At 10 p.m. the 110th Ohio reported to Colonel John W. Horn of the 6th Maryland on the picket line. The New York heavy artillerists turned infantrymen were armed with smoothbores, so Horn had the Ohioans relieve them. [51] Ricketts' 1st Brigade commanded by Colonel William S. Truex was positioned to close the gap that had opened between Barlow's left and Smith's right and dug in. [52]

Colonel Tidball heard the firing occasioned by the attack by Barringer's dismounted cavalry on the Union left and rear. Not knowing that Ricketts' VI Corps troops had intervened and had checked the Confederates, Tidball was understandably concerned lest the foe reach his artillery parked at Jones' house. To guard the rear, the cannoneers of Battery B, 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery unlimbered their six Napoleons at the forks of the road. Infantrymen of the 4th New York Heavy Artillery were posted in support of the guns. There was little rest for the cannoneers during the night as their battery commander had them throw up a parapet and cut embrasures. [53]

The thrust by the Confederates against the Union left caused Birney to get in touch with General Mott. The commander of the Third Division was told to "keep up" his connection with Barlow on the left and Gibbon on the right. Mott was to hold his two reserve brigades ready to march to Ricketts' assistance should it become necessary. [54]

Barlow in obedience to orders from Birney had put three of his brigades into line of battle, with his left in contact with Ricketts' right. To do this, Barlow was compelled to spread his men so thin that he feared he would be unable to resist an attack if made in strength. Barlow shortly

after midnight protested that his division had to cover a mile of front, while Ricketts was responsible for about one-fourth mile. At the moment, there was a gap between Barlow's right and Mott's left, which he understood Mott was to close.[55]

It was after dark when the 15,000 soldiers and eight batteries of Baldy Smith's corps advanced and relieved Wright's First and Second Divisions. Stannard's division moved to the right, assuming responsibility for the rifle-pits between the Appomattox River and the Petersburg & City Point Railroad, formerly held by Russell's VI Corps troops. Brigadier General Hiram Burnham's 2d Brigade replaced Brigadier General Emory Upton's in the trenches next to the river, while Colonel Guy V. Henry's 3d Brigade filed into the rifle-pits on the left heretofore occupied by Colonel William H. Penrose's 1st Brigade. The soldiers of Colonel Edgar M. Cullen's 1st Brigade, except for one regiment, were assigned to the second line. The detached regiment was detailed to support the 7th Battery, New York Light Artillery on the right of the ravine.[56]

Brigadier General John H. Martindale's division replaced Neill's bluecoats in the sector between the railroad and Hare's house.[57]

In compliance with Baldy Smith's instructions, Brigadier General Edward W. Hinks camped his Negro Division a short distance behind the rifle-pits held by Stannard's and Martindale's reserve brigades. The XVIII Corps would look to Hinks for fatigue parties and for details to picket the south bank of the Appomattox downstream to the gunboats' anchorage. Moreover, Hinks' division would constitute a strategic reserve in case of a Rebel counterstroke in this sector.[58]

During the day there had been a change in the command of Wright's Second Division. General Neill was relieved and directed to report to

the Army of the James. For the time being, the senior brigade commander, Brigadier General Frank Wheaton, would lead the division, while Colonel John F. Ballier of the 98th Pennsylvania took charge of the 1st Brigade.[59]

General Wright, as soon as Russell and Wheaton had reported all their troops off the line, passed the word to take up the march. With a guide detailed by the chief engineer leading the way, the long column moved out. Progress was slow; it was after 2 a.m. when the advance crossed the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad. The eastern horizon was starting to pale by the time the rear guard passed the Jerusalem Plank Road. Wright at 4 a.m. called a halt near Jones' house, and he told Russell and Wheaton to allow their soldiers to take a well-deserved break. Within a few minutes, the men had stacked their arms, shucked their knapsacks, and had turned to preparing breakfast.[60]

General Warren was not to be left undisturbed by the redeployment. At 7:15 a.m., on June 21, Warren was notified that Birney's II Corps was to take position on the left of his V Corps, "enveloping the enemy." The V Corps' role in the forthcoming offensive was to be passive, but Meade wanted Warren to extend his left to hold as much ground as possible.[61]

Three of Warren's divisions (Ayres', Crawford's, and Cutler's) were in trenches at this time, and one, Brigadier General Charles Griffin's, in reserve. Warren made his plans accordingly. Orders were issued for Griffin to move forward and take position on Brigadier General Romeyn B. Ayres' left, "reaching out to the plank road."[62]

Griffin's troops had broken camp by 10 o'clock. As they moved out, the columns headed south, and two hours later they halted on Chieves' Plantation. After the division had been formed into line of battle with Brigadier General Joseph J. Bartlett's brigade on the right, Colonel William

S. Tilton's on the left, and Colonel Jacob B. Sweitzer's in support, Griffin called for skirmishers to be advanced.[63] The officer in charge of the skirmish line was told that his mission was to drive the Rebel outposts to his front into their works. As he advanced, his left was to anchor on the plank road and his right on Ayres' left. Griffin's battle line was to give the skirmishers close support and seize ground as near the foe's works as possible, "without suffering from random bullets and overshooting." At dark Griffin was to see that his men entrenched.[64]

When Griffin gave the word, his skirmishers swept toward the foe. The Confederate pickets were forced back about one-half mile, before Griffin, seeing that his men were getting too close to the frowning Rebel breastworks, called a halt. Entrenching tools were issued, pickets posted, and rifle-pits dug. Riding to his left, Griffin was delighted to see that Gibbon's II Corps division was holding the ground west of the Jerusalem Plank Road.[65]

General Meade at 9 a.m. had written Grant that the II Corps was en route to take position on the left of the V Corps, "the Fifth extending as far as the Jerusalem plank road." West of the plank road, Meade's scouts had reported the Confederates occupying earthworks previously marked out. As these rifle-pits were about three miles south of Petersburg, Meade, after studying his maps, saw that the Rebel line from the plank road to the Appomattox above Petersburg would be considerably longer than from the plank road to the river below. To check his enveloping columns, Meade forecast, Lee would have to throw the entire Army of Northern Virginia, except the units holding the Howlett Line, south of the Appomattox.[66]

Meanwhile, Grant back at his City Point headquarters had been study-

ing a map on which the engineers had plotted the troop positions. Grant's attention was drawn to the Jerusalem Plank Road. There the Confederate line which had been running from north to south turned west, creating a salient angle. Writing Meade of what he had discovered, Grant at 10 a.m. suggested that Meade have Warren mass his artillery and use it to pin the Rebels in their earthworks, while the II and VI Corps crossed the plank road. As soon as the two corps had taken position, Grant felt confident the Confederates would be unable to hold their present line, because the Federals would be able to take it in reverse.[67]

Meade was unable to understand what Grant intended, and at 11 a.m. so informed him.[68]

Replying, Grant telegraphed Meade that he wanted Petersburg "enveloped as far as possible, without attacking fortifications, and the way the position of the two armies is marked [on the engineers' map] it looks as if the front of the enemy can be swept from about Warren's left or left center, thereby giving our troops the position desired without exposure, unless the enemy exposes himself equally."[69] This message reached Meade's headquarters about the same time as Chief Engineer John G. Barnard. The engineer explained to Meade that Grant wanted him to occupy ground from which the Confederate works covering the Jerusalem Plank Road could be enfiladed. Meade at 1 p.m. notified Grant that he was riding to the front to see that this was done.[70]

Grant, besides keeping up with the activities of the Armies of the Potomac and James, had other important business. His commander-in-chief, President Abraham Lincoln, had decided to visit the troops before Petersburg. Disembarking at City Point from the steamboat that had carried him up the James, the President called on his general. Grant at 11:40 a.m.

telegraphed Meade that he and the President planned to leave for the front at 3 o'clock. They would go as far as the house where Baldy Smith had had his headquarters on the 16th.[71]

THE BATTLE OF THE JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD, JUNE 21-24, 1864

Chapter I

General Meade Sends Two Corps Across The Plank Road

Notes

1 Andrew A. Humphreys, The Virginia Campaign of '64 and '65: The Army of the Potomac and the Army of the James (New York, 1882), 226; Francis A. Walker, History of the Second Army Corps in the Army of the Potomac (New York, 1886), 543.

2 The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 231.

3 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 761, 766. At this stage of the conflict, Beauregard commanded the Department of North Carolina and Southern Virginia, with headquarters in Petersburg.

4 Douglas S. Freeman, R. E. Lee, III (New York, 1935), 425.

5 Ibid.

6 Freeman, Lee's Lieutenants, A Study in Command, III (New York, 1944), 538; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 690.

7 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 233. On June 20 Company I, 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery, with three 30-pounder Parrotts, moved into position along the lines of the XVIII Corps. Company I was followed on June 24 by Company D, 1st Connecticut Heavy Artillery, with four 30-pounder Parrotts and four 8-inch siege mortars. The mortars were turned over to Company I. O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 672.

8 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 233.

9 Ibid., 238. With Birney in command of the corps, Brigadier General

Gershom Mott, as senior brigade commander, took charge of the Third Division, II Army Corps.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., 239.

12 Ibid., 240.

13 Ibid., 241.

14 Ibid., 242.

15 Ibid., 248.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 249.

18 Ibid. Like Wright, Burnside would see that his men strengthened their works.

19 Ibid., 250.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 251.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 252.

25 Ibid., 258.

26 Ibid., 264-265.

27 Ibid., 265.

28 Ibid., 252.

29 Ibid., 250; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 107, 573, 578, 585.

30 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 195.

31 Ibid., 594; Augustus Woodbury, Major General Ambrose E. Burnside and the Ninth Army Corps...(Providence, 1867), 419-421. On the 17th the army's trains having reached the south bank of the James, Ferrero had

crossed the river and camped for the night near Wilcox's. The next day, moving in rear of the trains, the Negro Division had marched to Bailey Creek, where Ferrero reported to Meade for instructions. Meade replied, directing Ferrero to leave the dismounted cavalry to guard the trains and to report with the rest of his command to General Burnside. Pressing on, the division camped on the night of the 19th a short distance in rear of the IX Corps' sector.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 495.

Ibid., 318; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 273. For the time being, corps headquarters would be at Avery's house.

Walker, History of the II Corps, 543.

35 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 274.

Ibid.

Ibid., 274, 275.

36 Ibid., 275, 276.

Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 758. General Mott at 10 a.m. had been ordered to have the 2d U. S. Sharpshooters report to General Barlow. Birney had established corps headquarters in front of Jones' house. O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 318.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 333, 335, 337, 339, 340, 342, 348, 354. At dark the 5th New Hampshire moved out and occupied the picket line.

41 Ibid., 366, 372, 374, 375, 382, 386. The earthworks occupied by Pierce's and O'Brien's brigades were along a wood road veering off at an angle of 25 degrees in a southwesterly direction from the Jerusalem Plank Road.

Ibid., 391, 394, 396, 401, 402, 418.

Ibid., 424, 431, 443. When the corps moved out, the 11th New York and Battery K, 4th U. S. had marched with Barlow; Battery B, 1st New Jersey

and the 12th New York with Gibbon; Battery A, 1st Rhode Island and Batteries C and I, 5th U. S. with Mott.

44 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 275-276.

45 Ibid., 281.

46 Ibid., 281; O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. I, 1250. General Stannard had assumed command of the First Division, XVIII Corps, on the evening of June 20.

47 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 281.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 282.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid., 275-276; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 506, 507-508.

52 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 505.

53 Ibid., 424, 429, 430, 433, 435, 436, 439, 441, 443.

54 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 277.

55 Ibid., 310-311.

56 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 712, 715, 718; O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. I, 1250.

57 O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. I, 1259. Martindale's division had been relieved by the VI Corps on the night of June 19. The next day the division returned to Bermuda Hundred. There the division was reorganized. On the morning of the 21st, Martindale was ordered to return to Petersburg.

58 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 215, 216.

59 Ibid., 496.

60 Ibid., 495, 496.

61 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 278.

62 Ibid., 279; William H. Powell, The Fifth Army Corps...(New York, 1896), 703.

63 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 457, 461.

64 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 280.

65 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 457, 461, 465, 469.

66 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 267.

67 Ibid., 268.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., 269. Meade at 11 a.m. had asked Grant to send either General Barnard or Colonel Cyrus B. Comstock to explain what he wished.

71 Ibid.

THE BATTLE OF THE JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD, JUNE 21-24, 1864

Chapter II

Mahone Staggers the II Corps

General Birney about daybreak on June 22, 1864, called for Colonel Morgan and told him "to order the advance of the lines until the position of the enemy was enveloped," in accordance with Meade's master plan. Both Meade and Birney had been apprised by this hour that General Wright had massed Russell's and Wheaton's divisions at Jones' house, and was preparing to move out along the road to Globe Tavern reconnoitered by Barlow. Birney therefore planned to advance his left and center divisions. Barlow, whose First Division constituted the II Corps' left, was to "conform" to the movements of the VI Corps, advancing his line as General Wright advanced his. As the Union line swept forward, it was presumed at corps headquarters that it would be "considerably contracted," consequently, Birney wanted Barlow "to close in to the right from time to time to give General Mott an opportunity to get part of his command in reserve." [1]

Mott was directed to advance his division in conjunction with Barlow's, particularly his left, so his new position would be nearly parallel with the earthworks to his front defended by the Confederates. [2]

The advance of the II Corps being dependent upon the VI Corps, Colonel Morgan rode over to Jones' house. When he reached Jones', he found General Wright and his staff busy redeploying the VI Corps. General Russell's First Division was advanced and took position on Ricketts' [illegible]. This enabled Barlow, whose II Corps division held a mile of front, to close to the right. After occupying the breastworks thrown up by Barlow's left flank brigade, Russell covered his front with a strong force of

skirmishers and turned his men to deepening and strengthening the rifle-pits. [3]

General Wheaton's Second Divison was marched down the plank road till the head of the column reached Globe Tavern road. Here Wheaton called a brief halt while he conferred with Colonel Ballier. The colonel was told to mass his brigade, the 1st, in rear of Ricketts' division. [4] As soon as Ballier's brigade had fallen out, the march was resumed. A staff-officer now rode up and told Wheaton that he was to have two of his brigades take position on Ricketts' left. Brigadier General Lewis A. Grant's "Green Mountain Brigade" filed to the left and formed into line of battle perpendicular to the rifle-pits held by Ricketts' bluecoats. Brigadier General Daniel D. Bidwell's 3d Brigade was posted in support of the Vermonters, with its left refused toward the Jerusalem Plank Road. [5] Wheaton's 4th Brigade, Colonel Oliver Edwards', marched down the plank road another one-half mile before halting and establishing a roadblock, south of Second Swamp. Edwards' mission was to ward off any Confederate columns that might come rolling in from the southeast. [6]

One of Wright's aides explained to Colonel Morgan that the VI Corps officers were encountering some difficulty in pushing out their skirmish lines. Meanwhile, General Birney at 7:30 had dictated a second dispatch addressed to General Barlow. The commander of the First Division was notified that Mott had been "directed to take the position pointed out to him yesterday," and to advise Barlow when he advanced. Barlow in turn would begin closing in on Mott, and swinging forward his left, keeping Wright advised as to his movements. [7]

Before Barlow could act on this order, Colonel Morgan received a report from Captain Crowninshield of the cavalry. The horsesoldier wrote

that at 7:15 his men were picketing the plank road to a point two miles beyond Williams' house. No Confederates had been seen since midnight. Information gleaned from local planters led the captain to conclude that Dearing's cavalry was holding the Weldon Railroad. Confederate vedettes were said to be operating within one mile of the plank road. To check on this report, Crowninshield had sent a patrol westward along the Globe Tavern road.[8]

About 9:30 Colonel Morgan, as he rode through the woods, encountered General Barlow. The general looked worried. He showed Morgan the 7:30 order from II Corps headquarters. A glance was all that was needed to satisfy the chief-of-staff that this message was quite different in its tenor from the order he had drafted at 4:50. Morgan began to fret, because it appeared to him "that the later order imperiled the corps." There must be a mistake, he told Barlow, as he wheeled his horse about, preparatory to returning to corps headquarters to ascertain what had happened.

On his arrival, Morgan learned from General Birney that the II Corps would "make our movement independent of any by the Sixth Corps.". When he returned to Barlow's command post at 10 a.m., Morgan carried a message:

> The major-general commanding directs that you move forward your division, connecting with General Mott on your right, swinging forward until your whole line is in close proximity to that of the enemy. You will not be dependent on any movement of the Sixth Corps. Having attained the position above indicated, you will strengthen it by intrenching. If General Wright is not able to connect with you, you will have to look out for your left.[9]

Prior to Morgan's arrival at the First Division's command post, General Meade had been there. When Barlow explained that there was a misunderstanding as to whether he should hold his connection to the right or left, Meade becoming impatient replied, "You cannot connect with both;

keep your connection to the right; each corps must look out for itself." [10]

The question as to whether Barlow should guide left or right had been settled, so the II and VI Corps prepared to go separate ways. According to Birney's revised battle plan, his right flank division (Gibbon's) would remain in the earthworks, while Mott's and Barlow's lines wheeled toward the Confederate fortifications that extended westward from the plank road.

Covered by a strong skirmish line, Mott's and Barlow's divisions left the protection afforded by the barricades and advanced into the pines to their front. As the troops scrambled over the low parapets, a number of officers glanced at their watches: it was 2 p.m. [11]

Mott, like Gibbon and Barlow, had two brigades (McAllister's and Chaplin's) in advance and two (Madill's and Brewster's) in support. Screened by the skirmishers from the 5th Michigan, Mott's bluecoats forged ahead--McAllister's brigade on the right gained nearly three-quarters of a mile. [12] It was soon apparent to Barlow, whose right flank brigade (Fraser's) guided on Mott's left, that it would be impossible to maintain contact with the VI Corps. Throwing his line forward, Barlow effected nearly a "right half-wheel" through the dense woods. But as his men swept ahead, the gap which had opened between his left brigade (MacDougall's) and the VI Corps troops increased. To guard his left and rear which had been exposed by this movement, Barlow refused his two small, left flank brigades--MacDougall's and Moroney's. Barlow rode with his skirmishers. [13]

A mile advance was registered before Barlow's skirmishers encountered resistance. Rebel sharpshooters now opened on the skirmishers covering the left. Barlow urged his men on; they responded with their characteristic élan. The Confederate snipers were rolled back by the blue-

coats protecting the division's refused flank. Barlow, however, was worried. He sent word for MacDougall to deploy several regiments as skirmishers to prolong the "return," and endeavor to re-establish contact with the VI Corps. The firing having ceased along the skirmish line, Barlow wheeled his horse about and rode toward his reserve brigade, Miles', which during the advance had followed several hundred yards behind Fraser's battle line. Barlow wanted Miles to change his formation. [14]

One of Meade's staff (Lieutenant Colonel Theodore Lyman) in the meantime had galloped up to General Wright's command post. Wright at this hour (12:10) was with Ricketts' advance brigade. From Wright the aide learned that Ricketts' left extended about 200 yards south of the Globe Tavern road. Wheaton's division was massed behind Ricketts, "ready to act in the required direction...." Scattered shots could be heard off to the north along Russell's skirmish line. Wright told Lyman to tell Meade that he was "advancing his picket line preparatory to a general advance." [15]

Before ordering a general advance by his corps, Wright told Ricketts and Russell to move their skirmish lines forward. The skirmishers pressed ahead through a heavily forested area. Ricketts' men had gained about one-half mile, when they were assailed by a strong force of Rebels deployed as skirmishers. The bluecoats recoiled a few steps, recovered their wits, and pressed cautiously ahead. Within a few minutes, the fighting which had begun along Ricketts' front had extended to the left of Russell's picket line.

Wright and his officers, after conferring briefly, decided that the Confederates had advanced to the attack, because scouts, who had just returned from the area where contact had been established, reported that they

had seen no Confederates. Wright instructed Ricketts and Russell to have their skirmishers carry the fight to the enemy, and to advance their battle lines.[16]

* * *

Two divisions of General Hill's III Corps and a part of a third had reached Petersburg on the afternoon of June 18. After crossing the Appomattox, Hill's division commanders placed their men in the works. Major General Cadmus Wilcox's division was posted on the right; its right flank brigade anchored on the Weldon Railroad and its left on Wilcox Creek.[17] Brigadier General William Mahone's five-brigade division relieved Major General Charles Field's right flank units in the rifle-pits between Wilcox Creek and Battery No. 29.[18] Two of Major General Henry Heth's four brigades had accompanied the corps to Petersburg. The brigades (Kirkland's and Fry's) which had accompanied the corps to Petersburg were responsible for the defense of the Rives Salient. General Heth with Davis' and Cooke's brigades had remained with Pickett on the Howlett Line.[19]

Hill's artillery was placed along the earthworks to the right of the I Corps' guns. Lieutenant Colonel Charles Richardson's artillery battalion, less Lewis' Virginia Battery, occupied the Rives Salient. The other III Corps artillery battalions, reinforced by the Washington Artillery Battalion, mounted their guns along the fortifications from the Jerusalem Plank Road on the left to the Weldon Railroad on the right.[20]

June 19 was Sunday. A brigade historian in Hill's corps recalled, "We were not disturbed, but lay and slept or heard preaching as we chose.

We were in quite an exposed place to the sun, but we managed to construct arbors which afforded some protection." [21] Not so fortunate, depending on one's spirited needs, were the men of Colonel Daniel A. Weisiger's brigade. John Sale of the 12th Virginia noted in his diary:

> Remained in same position which we took last night. Its a shame that having 3 chaplains, the Brigade can not have services at least on the Lord's Day, and more especially when there is no more danger than there is today, but they are so careful of their precious bodies that they care not for our souls which is their business. No one would expect them to needlessly expose themselves, but many and many a day one is in position in which there is no danger and they will never come near. Such men can do more good with a musket than otherwise. Our Chaplain, on being asked to do so, did manage to carry a gun for about 100 yards and he had no baggage whatever to encumber him. [22]

Hill's troops on the 20th remained in or near the works. Nothing of interest occurred to their front, but off to the northeast, they could hear the roar of artillery. [23]

The advance of the II Corps across the Jerusalem Plank Road on the afternoon of the 21st had immediate repercussions. General Hill, on learning that Barringer's horsesoldiers were in contact with the Yankees east of Globe Tavern, issued marching orders to General Wilcox. Within a few minutes, Wilcox's brigade commanders had turned out their units. When the division moved out, it wheeled into the Halifax road at the Lead Works and headed south. Wilcox called a halt near Globe Tavern, and the men were soon busy "arranging a temporary breastwork." A number of Barringer's troopers came in and reported that they had been compelled to retire by Union cavalry. The cannoneers of McGregor's Virginia Battery threw their 3-inch rifles into battery and shelled the woods east of the tavern.

Reports were now received that the Federal horsemen (Crowninshield's

detachment) were retiring. Wilcox ordered his men forward. Crossing the field, the butternuts entered the pines beyond Dr. Gurley's. Skirmishers were advanced, and Brigadier Generals Samuel McGowan and E. L. Thomas moved their brigades by the flank along a narrow cart road.

McGowan's South Carolinians, as they pressed toward the Jerusalem Plank Road, began to wonder when they would meet the foe. Suddenly there was a sharp volley ahead, "which sent a pretty good shower of balls whizzing over our heads." Here there was a little clearing on the left of the road along which McGowan advanced. Across this opening, the South Carolinians saw Thomas' Georgians advancing in line. The skirmishers in front cheered lustily and fired freely. Most of the soldiers thought that a battle was at hand. Thomas' Georgians advanced into the woods beyond, and the tempo of the firing increased. McGowan shouted to his South Carolinians, "Lie Down!" The troops threw themselves down in the dusty road, "fronting almost at right-angles with the line of Thomas' brigade."

The minies, one of McGowan's veterans recalled, "came over us by spells, sometimes quite thickly; but they were very high." At dark Wilcox recalled his troops. The division retraced its steps, returning to the sector of the Petersburg defenses from which it had marched ten hours before. [24]

The next morning, the 22d, when General Lee rode to his right, he learned from the people at General Hill's headquarters that Union infantry was again pressing toward the Weldon Railroad. Lee, who like all great captains believed that "offensive movements are the foundation of a good defense," had Hill send for General Mahone. As a civil engineer, Mahone had surveyed the area and "knew every inch of the ground hidden by the tangled chaparral."

Mahone thought he saw an opening for a flank attack and asked permission to deliver it. Lee and Hill were agreeable. Instructions were issued at 1 p.m. for Brigadier General J. C. C. Sanders and Colonels Daniel Weisiger and William Gibson to hold their units ready to move out in light marching order at a moment's notice. To hold the rifle-pits vacated by these units, Mahone's two other brigades (Finegan's and Harris') were to extend to the left and right. One of Weisiger's veterans observed, "Everyone instantly commenced surmizing where was our probable destination. No ones [sic] knows it, everyone could form some idea that it met a fight."

At 2 o'clock Mahone passed the word, and the three brigades took up the march. To screen his approach from Federal pickets, Mahone led his troops up the hollow through which Wilcox Creek meanders. As the head of the column approached Johnston's farm, Mahone was delighted to learn from his scouts that the Union generals had blundered. The ever widening gap that had opened between the left division of the II Corps and the right division of the VI Corps had been spotted by the greyclads. Mahone determined to capitalize on the Yankees' mistake. While aides raced to the rear to urge the men forward, Mahone deployed and advanced his sharpshooter battalion. Moving into the woods beyond, the sharpshooters established contact with Barlow's skirmishers. In accordance with the information supplied by his scouts, Mahone formed his three brigades into line of battle in the field fronting Johnston's house—Sanders' Alabamans and Gibson's Georgians in front, Weisiger's Virginians in support. The cannoneers of the 1st Maryland Battery, who had accompanied Mahone's column, threw their four 12-pounder Napoleons into battery on Sanders' left. While the soldiers were moving into their battle

formation, they could hear scattered shots and shouts in the pines to their left and front. This told them what Mahone and his brigade commanders already knew, they had gained a position on the II Corps' left and rear.

Mahone now waved his men forward. As the long battle line entered the woods, Weisiger moved his brigade into position on Gibson's right. Sanders' Alabamans on the left were the first to make contact with Barlow's II Corps division. [25]

Wilcox had been ordered by General Hill to co-operate with Mahone. As on the previous afternoon, the "Light Division" left the protection afforded by the earthworks and hiked down the Halifax road. Once again, on reaching Globe Tavern, Wilcox turned his column eastward. As the division approached the woods, Wilcox called a brief halt. Skirmishers were deployed and thrown forward. McGowan's sharpshooters screened the division as it moved in route column down the road leading from Globe Tavern to Williams'. Wilcox had told the officer in charge of the sharpshooters, he was to advance till he reached a "small farm house."

The skirmishers covering Wilcox's division had a difficult time beating their way through the tangled brushwood. North of the road, Captain Charles E. Watson's company of sharpshooters clashed with Union pickets. Watson and his men drove the bluecoated skirmishers before them. [26]

Within a few moments, Union resistance stiffened. The dense pines and underbrush, along with the absence of any commanding elevations, made the fighting somewhat akin to blindman's buff. After about 90 minutes savage combat with Wilcox's sharpshooters, Ricketts' skirmishers had gained perhaps 100 yards. The officer in charge reported

that he could advance no farther unless General Wright was willing to commit his battle lines. This, Wright was not prepared to do without Meade's sanction. All that he had seen and heard, however, satisfied Wright that the Rebel skirmish line did not extend very far north of the Globe Tavern road. Orders were therefore given for Russell to redeploy his skirmishers, so that they would be able to turn Wilcox's left flank. When he notified Meade of his actions at 2:55, Wright pointed out, if his "supposition" that the Rebels had only committed a small force were correct, a frontal attack by Ricketts' skirmishers, in conjunction with Russell's flanking movement, would compel the foe to retire. According to his people on the left, their flank rested on Second Swamp, an impassable barrier. Wright inquired of his chief, "Do you wish me to attack in force?" [27]

Before Meade could reply, disaster had engulfed the II Corps. Barlow's and Mott's skirmishers, closely followed by the battle lines, were now approaching the Confederate fortifications. While Barlow was absent communicating with Miles, Mahone's column penetrated the gap that had opened between Barlow's left and Russell's right. The interval between the II and VI Corps "had become so great as to prevent any timely or intelligent co-operation." General Wright was first to sense that the Confederates were endeavoring to exploit the blunder on Meade's part that had caused the corps to lose contact. Wright forwarded this information to Colonel Morgan. Upon receipt of these evil tidings, Morgan rode to warn Barlow that his division was in grave danger. Morgan, however, was too late. [28]

Preceded by a large number of skirmishers, Mahone's battle line swept in on Barlow's refused flank. The butternuts quickly overran

MacDougall's picket line, scattering those who were not killed, wounded, or captured. Pressing on, the Rebels assailed MacDougall's battle line from the front, flank, and rear. Moroney shouted for his brigade to rush to MacDougall's assistance. It was like trying to sweep back the tide with a broom, as the grim, greyclad infantry drove ahead. First, MacDougall's and then Moroney's brigades dissolved into panic-stricken mobs. Each soldier, intent on saving his own skin, thought only of regaining the safety afforded by the breastworks.

As he galloped through the pines, Colonel Morgan sighted remanents of several shattered regiments fleeing before Mahone's onslaught. He called for the men to re-form on their colors, but the men refused to heed; shouting that their units "had been 'captured' or 'cut to pieces'." [29]

Barlow, as soon as he learned that MacDougall's and Moroney's brigades had been overwhelmed, ordered General Miles to have his troops double-quick back to the rifle-pits from which they had advanced. Miles was to deploy his brigade and attempt to re-establish contact with the VI Corps. As Miles' bluecoats hurried to the rear, the Confederates closed in on Fraser's brigade. Captain Burton H. Davis of the 66th New York, whose unit was deployed as skirmishers, saw that the Rebels had infiltrated the ground between his New Yorkers and the brigade battle line. He bellowed for every man to fend for himself. It was evident to Colonel Fraser that his brigade was in a precarious situation. Orders were given for the troops to oblique to the left to meet the onrushing Rebels. The regiments on the left of Fraser's line panicked. Fraser, seeing that it was hopeless to remain where he was, passed the order to retire into the rifle-pits. As the Yanks faced toward the rear, they came under a scathing fire. Like MacDougall's and Moroney's brigades, Fraser's collapsed in

face of Mahone's slashing assault on its left. [30]

In the wild retreat, a large number of Federals, including Colonel Fraser, were surrounded and captured. The survivors emerged from the woods and reached the breastworks shortly after Miles' grim veterans had filed into position. Assisted by Colonel Morgan, Barlow struggled frantically to re-form his three shattered brigades. As the general sought to calm the men, he heard them speak of "overwhelming numbers" of Rebels and "three lines of battle." These tales, he discounted. Before Barlow could reorganize his shattered brigades, a Confederate battle line (Weisiger's Virginians) debouched from the pines and advanced against the breastworks. Miles' troops held; the attack was repulsed. As the Virginians retired, Miles ordered the 2d New York Heavy Artillery to follow. Mopping up the area in front of the barricades, the New Yorkers bagged 40 Rebel stragglers. [31]

It was mid-afternoon when Colonel Tidball was notified that Barlow's division had broken. To help stabilize the situation, marching orders were issued to the 4th New York Heavy Artillery and Battery K, 4th U. S. Light Artillery. The battery moved out at a trot to the field where Miles' footsoldiers were taking position in the rifle-pits. Unlimbering the two Napoleons of the right section, the regulars shelled the woods to their front. [32]

Meanwhile, Sanders' Alabamans and Gibson's Georgians had moved against Mott's left, which had been uncovered by the rout of Barlow's division. Mott's left flank brigades (Chaplin's in advance and Madill's in support) were unable to adjust to an attack from an unexpected direction. It was like rolling up a carpet. The Union officers involved made little effort to change front to meet Mahone's onset. Subsequently, General Mott re-

called that his "first intimation of an attack" was when Barlow's panic-stricken men engulfed his left.

Along Mott's skirmish line, the soldiers of the 5th Michigan at 2 p.m. had "heard heavy picket-firing at some considerable distance" to their left. At this time there was almost no activity to their front. Captain David S. Root was shocked and dismayed to see Barlow's skirmishers take to their heels. To keep his men from being gobbled up by the Rebels, Root called, "Retreat!"

Meanwhile, Mott's two advance brigades (Chaplin's and McAllister's), having gained the day's objective, had started digging in. McAllister's brigade on the right was in contact with Gibbon's division. In reaching this position, McAllister's right flank regiment, the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, had had a number of men cut down by Rebel snipers. While Gibbon's line ran north and south, the line McAllister's troops were fortifying ran east and west. While entrenching, the brigade "suffered much from the enemy's fire, both artillery and musketry." Near a knoll on McAllister's left, the soldiers found the soil so hard that they had to dig rifle-pits with pick and shovel, as it was impossible to chop or drive stakes.

Colonel Chaplin's troops occupied the area to McAllister's left. At the time Barlow's division was overpowered, Chaplin's men had started to entrench, but they had made little progress. The soldiers were understandably startled by the sudden crash of small-arms volleys off to their left. A few minie balls now whistled in from the rear. Dropping their entrenching tools, the bluecoats snatched their rifle-muskets. Within a few minutes, soldiers from Barlow's division charged toward Chaplin's, yelling, "The Rebels are in our rear!" Chaplin called for his officers

to form their regiments for battle. While the soldiers were dressing their lines, Gibson's Georgians sent a volley crashing into their rear. The brigade faced about, but the panic was contagious, and Chaplin's troops broke. Moving to the right a short distance, the brigade rallied behind a breastwork thrown up by other troops.[33]

Colonel McAllister had established his command post near the angle. At first, McAllister and his staff believed the heavy firing off to the left resulted from Barlow advancing his line. As the roar and shouts came nearer, McAllister had second thoughts and called his men to attention. "Very soon," he recalled, "a retreating mass of the First Division came running along in my rear, with the rebels on their flank and rear." It was impossible for the 2d Brigade to open fire without cutting down their comrades. With the retreat of Chaplin's brigade, Mahone's battle line bore in on McAllister's left, as well as his front, following the withdrawal of the 5th Michigan. McAllister had only one alternative--he ordered the brigade, except the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery on the right, to fall back into the earthworks from which it had advanced. Upon reaching the rifle-pits, McAllister and his officers re-formed the troops and braced themselves to await a new Confederate attack.[34]

Mott's reserve brigades (Madill's and Brewster's) likewise melted away and retired to the protection afforded by the earthworks erected during the night.

The Confederates so far had scored heavily--Barlow's division and all of Mott's command, except the 5th Michigan and the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, had been sent reeling back through the pines. Mahone now directed his grim fighters against the fortifications held by Gibbon's

division. Gibbon's bluecoats, unlike Mott's and Barlow's, had held their ground on June 22. Two brigades, O'Brien's on the left and Pierce's on the right, defended the advance line of rifle-pits facing west, while Blaisdell's brigade supported O'Brien's and Smyth's was posted behind Pierce's.[35]

The cannoneers of the 12th New York Battery had unlimbered their four 3-inch rifles in the interval between O'Brien's and Pierce's brigades. Captain McKnight and his artillerists had spent the morning strengthening this emplacement. The 4th New York Heavy Artillery and Battery A, 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery having returned to the artillery park, near Jones' house, Colonel Tidball reinforced McKnight's battery with a detachment from the 4th New York. The ex-heavy artillerists were turned to fashioning gabions. About noon a four-gun Confederate battery emplaced in Battery No. 29 roared into action. Shells burst with uncanny accuracy above McKnight's position, as well as the rifle-pits to the artillerists' left and right. McKnight had his men change the embrasures so that their pieces would bear on Battery No. 29.

General Pierce, learning what the New Yorkers were doing, sent word for McKnight to return the Rebels' fire. At 2 p.m. the Yanks put their guns in action. The greyclads replied with eight cannons. To make matters more embarrassing for the bluecoats, sharpshooters had infiltrated the woods to their front, and banged away whenever a head popped above the breastworks. General Pierce, who was at the battery, saw that McKnight and his men were hard-pressed. Hoping to relieve the pressure on the New York artillerists, Pierce galloped to the extreme right of his brigade. Here where his brigade anchored on the plank road, the

general hailed Captain A. Judson Clark of Battery B, 1st New Jersey Light Artillery. Clark was told "to open at once on the enemy's battery." When Clark gave the word, his men began to hammer the Rebel batteries with shot and shell from their Napoleons. [36]

General Pierce reined up his horse, while he gauged the effect of Clark's opening rounds. Now instead of the occasional report of a rifle-musket off to his left, there came the terrible full-throated roar that told Pierce that a battle had opened. As Pierce rode down his line toward the 12th New York Battery, he found the road jammed with frightened refugees from Mott's division. Pierce called for the officers to rally their men behind the works occupied by Blaisdell's brigade. [37]

The rifle-pits defended by O'Brien's brigade had been subjected to an hour's bombardment by Confederate guns emplaced in Batteries Nos. 29 and 32, before the men picketing the far side of the wheatfield fronting the trenches sent word that a Confederate skirmish line had been sighted to their left front. From his command post near the brigade's left, Major O'Brien now sighted Sanders' Alabamans advancing through the pines in front of Mott's sector. Moments later, O'Brien was dismayed to see Mott's division disintegrate. A staff-officer pounded off to warn General Gibbon that the division to his left had abandoned its position and was in wild retreat. [38]

Within ten minutes, Sanders' battle line came surging across the wheatfield. O'Brien's bluecoats, in conjunction with the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery and the 5th Michigan on their left, beat off this frontal assault. The Alabamans pulled back, reorganized, and came on again. Once again, they were repulsed. Meanwhile, Mahone's center and right brigades closed in. O'Brien, to meet this challange to his left

and rear, pulled his left flank regiments (the 69th Pennsylvania and the 152d New York) out of the rifle-pits and filed them to the left oblique. Several volleys delivered at pointblank range by these units caused the Confederates to recoil.

Word now reached O'Brien that McKnight's guns were in danger. When he gained his right regiment, the 72d Pennsylvania, O'Brien found the soldiers closely engaged with Sanders' Alabamans to their front. He remained with the 72d until it had repulsed this, the third frontal attack made on the brigade. While O'Brien was thus employed, Gibson's Georgians routed the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery and the 5th Michigan from the rifle-pits to the left of the 2d Brigade. From the protection afforded by these earthworks, the Georgians sent volley after volley crashing into the 69th Pennsylvania and the 152d New York. These two regiments gave way in confusion. Having broken the 69th Pennsylvania and the 152d New York, Mahone's butternuts outflanked and smashed the 184th, 106th, and 72d Pennsylvania. [39]

Captain McKnight, at the time of the Rebel assault on O'Brien's brigade, bellowed for his cannoneers to enlarge the embrasure of his left piece. Opening fire with canister, the New Yorkers enfiladed and helped repulse the initial frontal attacks on O'Brien's infantry to their left. McKnight was unable to employ his other three 3-inch rifles against the Rebel infantry to his left, because the embrasures faced Battery No. 29, to his right. The artillerists learned that disaster had overtaken the units to their left, when infantrymen came running past their emplacement, crying, "We are flanked on the left; the left is broken!"

The brave gunners manning the left piece, however, held their ground

and sent round after round of canister and case-shot without fuse ripping into the Confederates, until the 72d Pennsylvania collapsed. The butternuts stormed down the abandoned rifle-pits and planted a stand of colors on the parapet protecting the left 3-inch rifle. A Rebel officer called for the cannoneers to surrender. In a final effort to save his guns, Captain McKnight ordered, "Fix prolonges!" It was too late, for Alabamans and Georgians were pouring over the works in overwhelming numbers. McKnight at this time was on the right of the battery with his 1st sergeant.

The 1st Minnesota to the battery's right broke on seeing O'Brien's brigade fall to pieces. The troops were quickly rallied by their officers and fired one volley, before taking to their heels a second time. Lieutenant Henry D. O'Brien of the 1st Minnesota collected a handful of his men and joined Captain McKnight and several of the artillerists in a struggle to save the right 3-inch rifle. Just as the Yanks were affixing prolonges, the Confederates poured in a "heavy volley," killing the 1st sergeant and several men who were pulling the piece. Simultaneously, the Rebels called for the Federals to give up. Whereupon, Captain McKnight shouted for the men to scatter.[40]

As he rode toward his left, General Pierce inquired of the frightened troops encountered, "What has happened?"

They replied, "We were flanked."

Pierce urged the men of O'Brien's brigade to re-form, but in the woods and in their panic-stricken condition, the soldiers refused to heed. As they came out on the plank road, most of them were halted and regrouped in rear of Blaisdell's brigade by Captain A. Henry Embler of Birney's staff. Pierce now learned from Captain McKnight of the loss of the four 3-inch rifles.

An aide was dispatched with orders for Captain Clark to bring up his teams, which had been sent to the rear. As soon as the horses arrived, the left section of Battery B, 1st New Jersey was shifted across the plank road, so it could register on the area where McKnight's guns had been positioned.

Intermixed with the artillerists of the 12th New York Battery, Pierce encountered infantrymen of the 1st Minnesota and the 19th Maine. Considerable difficulty was experienced by the general in halting the men and getting them to re-form on their colors. The two regiments were deployed across the road. Pierce received another blow as Major I. Harris Hooper of the 15th Massachusetts rode up and reported that the Confederates (Weisiger's Virginians) had come up in his rear and captured most of his regiment. Grave fears were voiced by Hooper that the regiments to the left and right of his unit (the 19th Massachusetts, and the 42d, 59th, and 82d New York) had also been gobbled up by the onrushing Rebels.

When called upon to surrender by the butternuts, these regiments had grounded their arms and surrendered their colors. Much different was the conduct of the 20th Massachusetts, the unit to the right of the 59th New York. Captain Henry L. Patten, taking advantage of a slight turn in the breastworks, had his regiment execute a partial change of front, thus checking any farther advance by Mahone's brigades up the rifle-pits toward the plank road.

General Gibbon at this hour joined Pierce. The division commander directed Pierce to advance a strong skirmish line--the 1st Minnesota. He then called up two small regiments (the 155th New York Infantry and the 8th New York Heavy Artillery) from Blaisdell's brigade and told Pierce to recapture McKnight's battery. The two fresh regiments were posted on the left of the 19th Maine. As soon as the men were in position,

Pierce launched his counterattack.

By this time, Mahone had been reinforced by Brigadier General Nathaniel Harris' brigade, one of the two that had been left behind when the division moved out, and a section of guns manned by Clutter's Virginia Battery. Harris and his Mississippians were advanced by Mahone and told to hold onto the captured guns and rifle-pits, while Sanders, Gibson, and Weisiger re-formed their brigades,and detailed fatigue parties to collect arms and accoutrements thrown away by the Federals in their wild flight. Large detachments were organized to guard the hundreds of bluecoats captured during the advance.

The counterattacking bluecoats drove to within 100 yards of the captured guns, before the 1st Minnesota became hotly engaged with Harris' Mississippians posted behind breastworks. One of the skirmishers reported to Pierce that the Rebels had drawn off the cannons and were in "force behind our works."

Captain Embler now galloped up, and he informed Pierce that the troops he had re-formed on the plank road were coming up. Pierce had Embler form them as a second line. The charge was sounded, and the "lines went forward with a will until within fifty yards of the works, when they received a volley from the enemy." Whereupon, the first line broke, rushed through the second, carrying part of it away. It required the greatest exertion on the part of Pierce and his staff to check the rout.

Just as Pierce succeeded in re-forming his battle lines, Colonel Blaisdell reported to him with the 170th and 182d New York. Pierce told Blaisdell to have his units take post on the right and left of the second line. While Pierce was conferring with Blaisdell, Captain Walter Gale rode down the line with orders from General Gibbon to attack immediately. The first charge on Harris' Mississippians had broken from right to

left, Pierce directed Lieutenant Ansel L. White of his staff to go to the right with a few men and ascertain the whereabouts of the 20th Massachusetts, which was said to be holding its own astride the works. Pierce hoped to connect with the 20th Massachusetts, "get a flank fire on the enemy, and fill the works in succession from the right...."

Before Pierce could perfect his arrangements, Captain Embler galloped up and handed him an order signed by General Gibbon placing him under arrest. [41]

Colonel Blaisdell, who superseded General Pierce, assailed the Mississippians, but he was repulsed. Gibbon in relieving Pierce maintained that his failure to counterattack promptly had enabled the Confederates to cement their grip on the captured earthworks. Unless heavily reinforced, Gibbon was now of the opinion that it would be impossible for his battered division to recover the lost ground. [42]

Colonel Tidball was distressed to learn of the loss of McKnight's guns. To stabilize the situation, two batteries (Battery A, 1st Rhode Island and Batteries C and I, 5th U. S.) were rushed from the Jones' house artillery park to Mott's assistance. The guns rumbled down a cart road and were thrown into battery behind the breastworks in which Mott's infantry had taken cover. A short distance in front of the fortifications were the pines out of which Mahone's butternuts had routed the Third Division. Hardly had the trails of his six Napoleons struck the ground, before Lieutenant James Gilliss' regulars were engaged in a duel with the 1st Maryland Battery at range of 300 yards. After firing about 50 rounds, the Federals gained the upper hand, and the Confederates brought up their teams and withdrew their guns. [43]

At the time that the Confederates were sweeping all before them,

five batteries were positioned along the plank road.[44] The cannoneers of the 11th Battery, New York Light Artillery at dusk moved their four 3-inch rifles into position to the right of Captain Clark's Napoleons.[45] Several hours later, the 6th Battery, Maine Light Artillery was advanced and relieved Clark's exhausted cannoneers.[46]

General Meade, as soon as he learned that the II and VI Corps had encountered the foe, got in touch with Generals Warren and Burnside. Should the Confederates be present in strength, the V and IX Corps were to be ready to advance against the fortifications to their front or rush reinforcements to the left.[47]

Replying, Warren notified Meade that his two divisions nearest the plank road (Griffin's and Ayres') would each send a brigade. Warren was of the opinion that it would be wiser for him to send men to bolster the left, rather than assail the works to his front. Because of the configuration of the terrain in the Rives Salient, Warren felt confident his artillery could keep the foe pinned in position during the daylight hours.[48]

Meade at 4 p.m. wrote Warren that he had better mass his two reserve brigades behind Griffin's left. The II Corps in the fighting had been broken and hurled back. Counterattacks, however, had checked the Confederate surge. If the Rebel generals committed additional troops, the II Corps would require massive assistance. The commander of the relief column was to report to General Birney near Jones' house.[49]

Twenty minutes later, the situation along the II Corps' front had deteriorated to the point, where Meade messaged Warren to send the two brigades "on the double-quick."[50]

The two V Corps brigades (Colonels Nathan T. Dushane's and Jacob B.

Sweitzer's) moved out smartly at 5 p.m. At Jones' house, they were met by several of Birney's staff-officers. Dushane's Marylanders were conducted to Barlow's support, while Sweitzer's brigade were massed behind Gibbon's sector. [51]

Along the front held by Wright's VI Corps there had been heavy skirmishing throughout much of the afternoon between Union skirmishers and Wilcox's sharpshooters. News that disaster had overtaken the II Corps caused Wright to issue instructions for his units to pull back to positions held in the morning. This would enable him to re-establish contact with the II Corps. As Russell's division on the right retired, orders were given by Wright for Wheaton to rush his reserve brigade (Ballier's) "to Russell's right to re-enforce him or Barlow." Before the order was received, General Grant on the right of Wheaton's battle line received orders to reinforce the division skirmish line with Walker's Battalion of the 11th Vermont. When Ricketts' division on their right started to pull back, Grant's Vermonters did likewise. Orders now arrived for Grant to march to Birney's assistance, but they were immediately countermanded, and the "Green Mountain Brigade" took position near Williams' house and entrenched. The 3d Vermont was thrown out to picket the area from Walker's left to the Jerusalem Plank Road. By 5:25 p.m. the VI Corps troops were back where they had been in the morning. [52]

Wilcox's sharpshooters followed Wright's VI Corps skirmishers as they withdrew. As they closed in on the breastworks into which the Yanks had retired, the Confederates were received with a galling fire. Nevertheless, the Rebels pressed on, only to be repulsed with considerable loss. The historian of McGowan's sharpshooter battalion recalled:

> Captain [William H.] Brunson...received a painful wound in the foot, which caused him to retire, and from which he was disabled for some two months. The command of the battalion, therefore, desolved upon Captain [Ingraham] Hasell, who dropped back to a safe position, from which he continued to fire and contented himself with holding the Federals close under their guns. [53]

After the VI Corps had retired, orders were received from Meade authorizing Wright to hold his advance position. Writing Meade at 5:25, Wright observed, he considered his "present position, on the whole, the better of the two for defensive purposes, though not for attack."

"Indeed," he continued, "an attack from my present lines would be very injudicious," as the VI Corps would be compelled to carry the works constructed earlier in the day. [54]

Meade, upon being notified that the two V Corps brigades were on the field, issued orders for Birney and Wright to "make every arrangement for attacking" with their entire corps. The counterstrokes were to be launched at 7 o'clock, or as soon as they were ready. [55]

Upon receipt of Meade's message, Wright sent for his three division commanders to give them their instructions. He was afraid, however, he warned Meade at 6:10 that his troops would be unable to advance at the designated hour. [56]

The II Corps moved out first, Gibbon on the right advancing at 7:05. Barlow on the left took up the advance several minutes later. Because of the dense woods, Barlow employed a "heavy skirmish line." By 7:25 Mott had started forward, employing the same formation as Barlow. [57]

Gibbon on the right reported that he had found the Confederates, and they (Harris' Mississippians) were in such force as to preclude an attack. Mott's and Barlow's reinforced skirmish lines encountered only isolated pockets of Confederates, as they drove back into the pines. On the right

Mott's skirmishers charged across a cornfield and took cover in the edge of the woods, while Barlow's on the left gained 400 yards, before darkness put a stop to the clash of arms along the II Corps' front.[58]

General Mahone by 7:20 p.m. had checked with his brigade commanders. Since establishing contact with Barlow's skirmishers, his troops had rolled back the II Corps "more than a mile to his trenches on the plank road." Four 3-inch rifles, along with a large number of small-arms and entrenching tools, had been captured. So far, over 1,600 prisoners had been counted. Scouts, who had made their way through the pines, had returned with information that the position into which the Federals had retreated was "strongly fortified." Relaying this information to General Hill, Mahone reported that he had re-formed his division in the captured rifle-pits, within 300 or 400 yards of the plank road. Several Union counterattacks, which he described as feeble, had been repelled. General Wilcox's division had finally come up, but with darkness closing in, it was "too late to push farther." In addition, "a change of programme of mode of attack would be necessary." Mahone was of the opinion that it would be unwise for the Confederates to hold on to the ground gained by his troops.[59]

Hill accordingly issued orders authorizing Mahone and Wilcox to retire into the Petersburg perimeter. Before doing so, however, they were to see that their wounded were collected and evacuated.[60]

At 10 p.m. Mahone recalled his four brigades. Covered by Harris' Mississippians, Mahone's column returned to the position held before the attack. The division, as evidence of its sweeping success scored at the expense of the II Corps, brought with it McKnight's four 3-inch rifles, over 2,000 stand of arms, and eight battleflags. 1,742 Union

prisoners were escorted into the Confederate lines by a detachment led by Mahone's inspector-general.[61]

By the time, Wright's corps moved forward, Wilcox had recalled his sharpshooters. On the right Russell's division, supported by Ballier's brigade, reoccupied the breastworks on which the soldiers had been working at the time of their recall.[62] Ricketts' bluecoats "moved forward very handsomely and carried the enemy's advance position with little resistance." Pushing on, the Third Division continued to forge ahead till darkness compelled Ricketts to call a halt. As soon as lines could be adjusted and outposts established and manned, the soldiers stacked their arms and began erecting breastworks. When he checked with his staff, Ricketts was delighted to learn that his division had gained almost two miles.[63] Grant's and Bidwell's brigades of Wheaton's division co-operated with Ricketts.

Grant's Vermonters were strengthening the rifle-pits near Williams' house, when the command to advance was passed. As the brigade moved forward, steps were taken to cover Ricketts' left. It was 11 p.m. when Grant posted his troops in good position, about one mile east of the Weldon Railroad. The 4th Vermont was deployed as pickets to connect with the left of Walker's line of outposts. Bidwell's brigade had shifted to the right and followed in close supporting distance of Ricketts' soldiers.[64]

Cannoneers assigned to three VI Corps artillery units (Battery E, 1st Rhode Island Light Artillery; the 3d Battery, New York Light Artillery; and the 4th Battery, Maine Light Artillery) emplaced their guns in support of Ricketts' division, near Williams' house.[65] The men of Battery A, 1st Massachusetts Light Artillery unlimbered their six Napoleons near Jones' house, on the Jerusalem Plank Road.[66]

The recall of Wilcox's division disturbed the men of McGowan's Sharpshooter Battalion. It was theorized that the "failure of the Light Division to attack may have been part of the program; to hold Wright while Mahone skinned Birney."

When Wright's men moved out at dark, the sharpshooters, who were covering the Light Division as it pulled back, found themselves in deadly peril. For a few minutes, it seemed to the Rebels that the Bluecoats would reach the Globe Tavern road to their rear, if so their retreat would be cut off. According to the unit historian:

> The darkness was intense and the underbrush thick and tangled, yet, when the purpose of the foe was discovered, the sharpshooters delivered a stinging volley and made a dash for the road, with the Federals upon each flank and close upon their heels. A furious race ensued, in which a number of vicious curs from the Federal lines participated, but the light weighted, clean heeled Confederates won by half a neck, and made good their escape.... 67

"One little sharpshooter," a veteran recalled:

> straggled into my line just after dark. He was still panting and laughing. "L - d G - d!" said he, "you ought to see them fat Yankees run. They run arter me, a-hollin' 'Stop you d - d rebel! Cut off the d - d rebels!' I heerd 'em blow. Say I to myself, 'You too fat Yankee! You get too much to eat over your side. You don't catch me!' And you ought to 'a seed me as I slid past em!'" 68

General Meade was disappointed that darkness had put a stop to the attack, just as his Army of the Potomac was recovering the initiative. Writing Grant at 9 p.m., Meade observed, "On the left and the center the enemy have been pressed back considerably; on the right no advantage was gained." The II and VI Corps' lines were now secure. A "general advance" had been scheduled for daylight, and Birney's and Wright's troops would endeavor to push the Rebels back into their fortifications. In the day's fighting, the Army of the Potomac had taken about 100 prisoners. Meade at the same time thought that when all the reports were in, he

would find that his casualties would be light.[69]

With the situation stabilized, Meade at 9:03 notified Warren that the two V Corps brigades rushed to bolster Birney would be returned during the night. It was after midnight before Sweitzer's and Dushane's troops were back in their camps.[70]

Wright by 10 o'clock had made his plans for the next day. His corps would attack at 3:30 a.m., in double line of battle, covered by a strong skirmish line. Ricketts' division was to be on the left and Russell's division, reinforced by Ballier's brigade, on the right. Grant's Vermont Brigade would be held in reserve, under orders to guard the left as the battle lines surged toward the Weldon Railroad. Bidwell's and Edwards' brigades of Wheaton's division were to hold their ground. Before taking up the advance, General Russell was to exert himself to link up with the II Corps on his right. Corps headquarters would be in rear of Ricketts' division, near the Globe Tavern road.[71]

THE BATTLE OF THE JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD, JUNE 21-24, 1864

Chapter II

Mahone Staggers the II Corps

Notes

1 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 325, 327-328.

2 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 311.

3 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 328, 492, 493, 494, 501.

4 Ibid., 497.

5 Ibid., 501, 504.

6 Ibid., 495.

7 Ibid., 325.

8 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 310. Crowninshield complained at this time that his command was nearly out of ammunition, while the horses hadn't been unsaddled for four days.12,000 rounds of Sharps' carbine cartridges, 6,000 of Burnside, 1,000 of Spencer, and 3,000 rounds for Colt's Army Revolvers were needed.

9 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 326, 328.

10 Ibid., 328.

11 Ibid., 326.

12 Ibid., 388, 391, 401, 402, 411. At 11 p.m. Madill's brigade had been called up from the reserve and sent to the left to relieve one of Barlow's brigades.

13 Ibid., 328-329, 330, 333, 350, 354.

14 Ibid., 330.

15 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 313. Wright's command post at this time was on the Globe Tavern road. The staff-officer informed Wright

at this time that Colonel Edward S. Jones' cavalry and General Meade were at VI Corps headquarters.

16 Ibid., 313, 314; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 506, 508, 511, 512. At this time, Wright's line was "somewhat over a mile beyond the Jerusalem plank road," on the Globe Tavern road.

17 J. F. J. Caldwell, The History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, Known First as "Gregg's," and Subsequently as "McGowan's Brigade" (Philadelphia, 1866), 163.

18 Diary, Sergeant John F. Sale, 12th Virginia Infantry (Virginia State Library).

19 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 680; O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. II, 1024, 1026. Heth with Cooke's and Davis' brigades on June 21 was sent back across the James to Chaffin's Farm.

20 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 757.

21 Caldwell, History of a Brigade of South Carolinians,163.

22 Diary, Sale, 12th Virginia Infantry (Virginia State Library).

23 Ibid.; Caldwell, History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, 163.

24 Caldwell, History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, 163-164; Frank Edwards, Army Life of Frank Edwards, Confederate Veteran (La Grange, 1911), 7-9. Colonel Gibson, as senior unit commander, led Wright's Georgia Brigade in the battle of the Jerusalem Plank Road.

25 Diary, Sale, 12th Virginia Infantry (Virginia State Library); William Gorden McCabe, "Defence of Petersburg," Southern Historical Society Papers, II, 272-273.

26 W. S. Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters: or, The Forefront of Battle (Little Rock, 1899), 125; Caldwell, History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, 164; Spencer G. Welch, A Confederate Surgeon's Letters

to His Wife (New York, 1911), 100. Caldwell did not accompany the brigade on the 22d; he was among the group detailed by the brigade commander to picket the works.

27 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 314.

28 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 326, 328.

29 Ibid., 326, 328, 329, 330, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352-353.

30 Ibid., 354, 357, 359, 360, 363.

31 Ibid., 328, 329-330, 333, 337, 339, 340, 342, 344, 345.

32 Ibid., 424, 441. Because of the heavy growth of timber, the battery commander (Lieutenant John W. Roder) was unable to see how much effect the projectiles had, although the Confederates soon retired from his front.

33 Ibid., 401, 402, 414, 416-418, 420.

34 Ibid., 401, 402, 403, 404, 412. The soldiers of the 5th Michigan reinforced the 1st Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, as they came in off the picket line.

35 Ibid., 366-367, 369-371. From left to right, Pierce posted his men: the 1st Minnesota, the 19th Maine, the 19th Massachusetts, the 42d and 82d New York, the 15th Massachusetts, the 59th New York, the 20th Massachusetts, the 36th Wisconsin, and the 7th Michigan.

36 Ibid., 369, 424, 431-432, 436.

37 Ibid., 369.

38 Ibid., 376, 385-387. From left to right, O'Brien's brigade was deployed: the 69th Pennsylvania, the 152d Ne York, and the 184th, 106th and 72d Pennsylvania.

39 Ibid., 375, 376, 385-386, 387.

40 Ibid., 436-437.

41 Ibid., 327, 367, 369-370, 372, 374, 382, 432; Dunbar Rowland , The Official and Statistical Register of the State of Mississippi, 1908 (Nashville, 1908), 450, 466, 493, 514; O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. II, 1026; A Historical Sketch of the Quitman Guards, Company E, 16th Mississippi Regiment, Harris' Brigade... (New Orleans, 1868), 69.

42 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 367. Pierce was released from arrest on June 24 and transferred to the Third Division, II Army Corps.

43 Ibid., 424, 439, 443, 758.

44 Ibid., 424. Emplaced along the plank road were: Battery B, 1st New Jersey; the 11th New York; Battery A, 1st Rhode Island; Batteries C and I, 5th U. S.; Battery K, 4th U. S.

45 Ibid., 424, 435.

46 Ibid., 424, 427.

47 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 311.

48 Ibid., 311-312.

49 Ibid., 312.

50 Ibid.

51 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 187-188, 459, 470.

52 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 316; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 492-493, 495, 497, 500, 501, 506.

53 Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters, 125-126.

54 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 316.

55 Ibid., 309.

56 Ibid., 316.

57 Ibid., 309.

58 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 363, 402.

59 O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. II, 1026

60 Ibid., 1025-1026.

61 Ibid.; Diary, Sale; Sale to Aunt, July 9, 1864 (Virginia State Library); McCabe, "Defence of Petersburg," Southern Historical Papers, II, 273. Sergeant Sale of the 12th Virginia reported that Weisiger's brigade "did not get as hotly engaged as the Balance of the div. The movement was well planned and executed, we entering the Yankee lines in the rear of their breastworks." Kirkland's brigade of Heth's division spent the afternoon and evening at General Hill's headquarters.

62 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 492, 493, 497.

63 Ibid., 506, 508, 510, 512; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 316.

64 O. R.,Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 495, 501, 504.

65 Ibid., 514, 517, 520.

66 Ibid., 515.

67 Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters, 126-127; Welch, Confederate Surgeon's Letters, 101; Caldwell, History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, 164-165.

68 Caldwell, History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, 165.

69 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 304.

70 Ibid., 312; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 459, 470.

71 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 316-317.

THE BATTLE OF THE JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD, JUNE 21-24, 1864

Chapter III

General Wright is Paralyzed by the Confederates

Birney's II and Wright's VI Corps advanced as scheduled at daybreak on June 23, 1864. Under the cover of darkness, General A. P. Hill had withdrawn Mahone's and Wilcox's divisions. The Rebels took their captured booty and prisoners with them. Consequently, no opposition, except on Gibbon's front, was encountered by the blueclad skirmish lines as they pressed ahead. By 6 a.m. Barlow's skirmishers had gained a mile without seeing a single Confederate. Gibbon's troops reoccupied the rifle-pits from which they had been driven the previous afternoon, but they were disappointed to discover that Mahone's butternuts had made off with McKnight's 3-inch rifles. In front of Gibbon's left, shots had been exchanged as the Federals closed in on the Confederate picket line covering Battery No. 29.[1]

General Birney at 6:35 notified Meade that on the right Gibbon had forced back the Rebel outposts. In this fighting, Colonel Blaisdell was mortally wounded by a sharpshooter. Mott's right by this hour had recovered the earthworks from which it had been routed by Mahone's onslaught. At the moment, the II Corps was continuing to advance "as rapidly as possible through the dense woods...."[2]

Within the hour, Birney was able to report that Barlow's left was in contact with Russell's VI Corps division. Russell's troops, Birney advised Meade, had not advanced since daybreak, and Barlow would have to hold his ground till they did. Barlow's skirmishers by this hour had passed through the woods and had reached the edge of a field, a mile

in advance of the earthworks occupied by their comrades. To their front, they could see spoil and abatis, a sure indication that the greyclads' main line of resistance crossed this field. Their advance had been so rapid that Barlow's skirmishers had outdistanced those from the divisions to their left and right. Barlow, in relaying this information to headquarters, wrote that it would be impossible for his skirmishers to press any farther "without coming upon the enemy's works."[3]

By 8:30 Meade had seen Barlow's communication. On doing so, he notified Birney that he did "not wish any attack on the enemy's works." As soon as Birney could advance his "line in connection with Wright to envelop the enemy's line," Meade wanted it done. The corps would then entrench "in the strongest manner possible."[4]

Meade also got in touch with General Wright. He wanted the VI Corps' commander to detail "a staff-officer to ascertain exactly the position of Barlow's skirmish line...." This information would be used to govern Ricketts' and Russell's movements.[5]

Meanwhile, Colonel Lyman was writing Meade. He had reached a point a mile and one-half west of Williams'. Here the road forked, one branch leading to the Weldon Railroad, two miles beyond, and the other north toward Petersburg. Colonel Timothy M. Bryan and his cavalry had taken the road leading to the railroad, while Ricketts' division was on the other road, his line facing north. According to all that he had heard, Russell's division looked west. A prisoner from Wilcox's division, whom Lyman had just questioned, explained that the Light Division on the 22d had marched down the Halifax road to Globe Tavern and had then struck eastward across the open fields north of Aiken's house.[6]

Prior to starting on his raid against the South Side and Danville

Railroads, General Wilson on June 21 had organized a provisional cavalry brigade to be commanded by Colonel Bryan. That evening the units assigned to the provisional brigade were detached and rendezvous at the camp Colonel Bryan had established in rear of the V Corps. On the 22d Bryan reported to General Wright, and deployed his troopers to cover the left of the VI Corps. Outposts were established and manned on the Jerusalem Plank and Lee's Mill roads.

Colonel Bryan on the morning of the 23d had taken the field at the head of two battalions of the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry. Turning into the Globe Tavern road, Bryan rode westward--his goal the Weldon Railroad.[7]

Colonel Lyman at 10 o'clock, having examined Ricketts' and Russell's positions, addressed a second note to his chief. He had found the divisions posted as indicated in his letter of 8:30, except that their lines were "rather crooked by reason of going through thick woods." Captain Alexander M. Beattie of the 3d Vermont with about 90 sharpshooters had gained the Weldon Railroad, seeing only a few Confederate horsemen as they pushed ahead. After cutting the telegraph, Beattie had had his men pry loose a number of rails. Ricketts' left at this hour rested on a large field, one and one-half miles east of the tracks. Orders had been given for Ricketts and Wheaton to see that a line of skirmishers was established linking Ricketts' left with Beattie's sharpshooters at Globe Tavern.

Lyman had also resolved the difficulty between Russell and Barlow. Russell had been a little in advance of Barlow and to "resume connection," he had to draw back his right flank slightly.[8]

Fifteen minutes later, General Wright notified Meade that all that he had seen and heard indicated "the general direction of my line is not

far from right, though it will probably be advanced somewhat." Beattie's patrol had reached the railroad, so Wright inquired, "Would it be worth while to attempt destroying the road at that point?" [9]

It was noon before Wright's message was read by Meade. Replying immediately, Meade observed that the part of Wright's dispatch reading, "the general direction of my line is not far from right, though it will probably be advanced somewhat" was unclear. It had been Meade's intention to have the VI Corps press ahead till it encountered the foe, and then press the Rebels back into their works. Barlow's skirmishers were known to be before the Confederate fortifications, consequently, Meade felt that Wright should advance his skirmishers as far as Barlow's, and then advance his battle line. [10]

Two hours before, Meade had written Wright that it would be a wise move to put Colonel Bryan's horsesoldiers to work wrecking the Weldon Railroad on either side of Globe Tavern. An officer had been sent to Bryan with two wagon loads of tools. [11]

At 11 a.m. a signal officer posted in a tall tree near Jones' spotted a Confederate column moving down the Halifax road toward Wright's left. When he warned Wright of what could be a dangerous development, Meade inquired, "What progress are you making in your advance?" [12]

A staff-officer, who had ridden with Bryan's horsesoldiers to the railroad, was disappointed to discover that Wright had merely detailed some of the troopers as pickets to guard his left. When Meade was apprised of this, he ordered Wright to "throw out strong parties of the cavalry on the roads crossing the railroad, in advance of your left, and feel for the enemy." [13]

Wright replied at 12:10 p.m., informing his chief that he had

detailed a small force of cavalry to watch his left, while dispatching the rest in two columns to "feel the enemy, and get information." At the time that Meade's latest two messages had been received, Wright was en route to see Birney "to arrange an advance, having previously ordered my picket-line forward." Wright was of the opinion that the two corps could not co-operate effectively in an advance, unless the commanders could meet to coordinate their plans. In view of Meade's concern regarding his movements, Wright promised to "continue on with my own command alone, without regarding the connection with any other corps." [14]

Colonel Bryan's column as it rode westward had encountered a few Rebel horsemen near Dr. Gurley's. Dismounting, the Federals drove back the butternuts and pushed on toward their objective--the Weldon Railroad. [15] Bryan turned his men to prying up rails. The wagons with the tools having failed to show up, Bryan forwarded a request to Wright to lend him some. [16]

A signal officer at 12:45 sighted a column of Rebel infantry "at least a mile long, with two batteries of artillery, moving out of the enemy's works along the Weldon railroad." Meade, to guard against a repeat of what had occurred on the 22d, wanted Wright to advance his pickets and "push out parties of cavalry, so as to give you...notice of the enemy's position as you advance." [17]

Besides advancing his skirmish line, General Wright made several other changes in the dispositions of his VI Corps brigades. Early in the day orders were given for Ballier's brigade to move up from the reserve and plug a gap that had opened between Russell's and Ricketts' divisions. After the brigade had moved to the point indicated, Colonel Ballier was informed by General Russell that his and Ricketts' troops had readjusted their lines and the opening had closed. The brigade then

reported to Wheaton's command post near Ricketts' left. News that a strong Rebel column was tramping south, caused Wheaton to tell Ballier to advance his bluecoats and post them on the left of Grant's brigade. As his troops filed into position, Ballier found that his battle line was within one-fourth mile of Aiken's house and faced west. While the rest of the infantrymen were turned to throwing up breastworks, Ballier ordered out the 62d New York, with instructions to extend the skirmish line.[18]

General Grant was likewise very busy. Shortly after Beattie and his sharpshooters had arrived on the railroad, the brigade pioneers were ordered out to rip up rails. Next, came a call from General Wheaton "for 200 men, properly officered," to report to the brigade officer of the day--Lieutenant Colonel Samuel E. Pingree. The detail was made from the 11th Vermont, and the men deployed to form a picket line from the right of the 4th Vermont to the Weldon Railroad. Their mission would be twofold--besides protecting the pioneers, they would maintain a connection with the main force. Soon thereafter, Grant received a call for another detachment "to support the line." Major Charles K. Fleming of the 11th Vermont was sent out in charge of this force, which was posted about one-half mile in front and to the left of the brigade. Thus by 3 p.m. the strength of the Vermont Brigade had been sapped by details to man the picket lines and for fatigue parties.[19]

Bidwell's brigade of Wheaton's division was held in reserve near Williams' house, while Edwards' continued to hold its position across the Jerusalem Plank Road.[20]

All of Ricketts' men, except those on the skirmish line, were kept employed entrenching.[21]

The strong Rebel column sighted and reported by personnel of the signal corps belonged to Mahone's command. Mahone's brigade commanders,

taking cognizance of the hard work of the afternoon of the 22d, had let their men sleep in. Sergeant John Sale of the 12th Virginia reported that he "slept till ten o'clock at which time [we] were waked to go on picket. Relieved a portion of the 6th [Virginia] Regt. While on post learned that our Brigade had been ordered to march out." [22]

General Lee, on learning that the Federals were again feeling their way toward the Weldon Railroad, had got in touch with the leader of his III Corps, A. P. Hill. A strong column was to be pushed down the Halifax road and attempt to dislodge the Union force that had reached the Weldon Railroad at Globe Tavern. If fortune continued to smile on Confederate arms, the Yankees might well be dealt another punishing blow.

Hill determined to entrust command of the column that was to be ordered out to General Mahone. Wilcox was still in hot water with his immediate superior, because of his failure to co-operate with Mahone in the attack on the II Corps. Wilcox in his defense had claimed that his orders from Hill were contrary to Mahone's battle plan, so he had held to his instructions and had accordingly done little to contribute to the sweeping success scored by Mahone's troops at the expense of the II Corps. [23]

Except for the men on picket duty, Mahone was accompanied by his entire division, when he took the field at noon on June 23. Mahone's striking force was materially increased, when Brigadier General William W. Kirkland reported to him with his four-regiment North Carolina Brigade. After marshaling his troops near the Lead Works, Mahone put his six brigades and two batteries in motion down the Halifax road. [24]

Upon reaching the woods three-quarters of a mile north of Globe Tavern, Mahone called a halt to form his brigades into double line of

battle. It was mid-afternoon before the Rebel officers had completed their dispositions in the cornfield north of the pines and were ready to strike. Covered by a strong force of skirmishers, the butternuts drove down the railroad, scattering Beattie's sharpshooters and Grant's pioneers. As soon as they could collect their wits and regroup, the Federal foot-soldiers retired eastward toward Aiken's house. Pressing on, the Confederates cleared Bryan's cavalry from the right-of-way. Bryan's horse-soldiers pulled back along the road leading to Dr. Gurley's. Before being routed from the railroad, Bryan reported that his men had wrecked a quarter mile of track and burned one culvert. [25]

To cope with this Confederate thrust, Wright thought it a good idea to recall part of Ricketts' division. Ricketts' men would be deployed to assist Wheaton to hold the Army of the Potomac's left flank. Hoping to gain time, orders were issued for Bryan and his cavalry "to again advance and attack anything but a line of battle." [26]

At 4 p.m. Wright warned Meade that according to latest advices from the front, a second Confederate battle line had crossed the railroad, on the left of the one that had driven in Beattie's sharpshooters and Bryan's cavalry. The way the situation was developing, it looked as if his left would be subjected to major attack. If there were any troops in reserve, Meade had better put them in motion, because the VI Corps' left was weak. For the time being, the forward movement by the VI Corps' skirmish line toward the Petersburg defenses had been suspended. Orders had also been issued recalling Edwards' brigade from the Jerusalem Plank Road. [27]

Upon receipt of Wright's message, Meade fired off a barrage of telegrams. Birney was to notify his "division commanders to be prepared in the event of General Wright being obliged to throw back his left to meet

the attack of the enemy, to make corresponding movements so as to withdraw to the line occupied last night, should it be necessary." [28] Warren was to rush two of his V Corps "brigades at once to the Williams house...." [29] Wright was told to "take the initiative and attack the enemy if, in your judgment, this course is advisable; if not, that you withdraw your left flank so as to secure it...." In case his movements affected his right, Wright was to keep Barlow informed. Word that Warren had been instructed to send all the reinforcements he could spare to bolster the VI Corps was relayed to Wright. [30]

Wright's proposal to recall Edwards' troops was frustrated when Union vedettes reported, "Confederates advancing up the Jerusalem plank road." [31] Subsequently, it was discovered that this tale was a wild rumor.

Within moments of the receipt of Meade's 4 o'clock telegram, Warren had contacted Griffin and Ayres. They were told to turn out their reserve brigades--Sweitzer's and Dushane's. Having been called out on the 22d, the officers and men knew exactly what to do. After being formed and mustered, Sweitzer's and Dushane's bluecoats moved out, turning into the Jerusalem Plank Road. The V Corps brigades by 5:40 had reached Williams' house. [32]

Meanwhile, Bryan's cavalrymen had endeavored to delay Mahone's thrust, but they failed. Skirmishers covering the advance of Harris' Mississippi Brigade by 5 o'clock had driven the Union horsesoldiers back upon the picket line held by Grant's Vermonters. One of Meade's staff-officers (Captain W. W. Sanders) was so disgusted by the way the troopers behaved that he notified his chief, our cavalry "does not now appear to be worth anything as far as fighting goes." General Wright,

who was on the scene, called for Colonel Bryan to dismount his two battalions of the 18th Pennsylvania and put the troopers into the rifle-pits.[33]

Meade at 5:40 notified Wright that the two V Corps brigades were near Williams' house. Staff-officers had been detailed to post the reinforcements in support of the VI Corps batteries.[34]

The Rebels now assailed Grant's picket line. As soon as the cavalry had fallen back before Mahone's advance, Major Fleming had had his men strengthen their position by erecting barricades of fence rails. It was believed by Wheaton and Grant that the foe would assail Fleming's skirmish line, but the greyclads (Harris' Mississippians) bore to the "left around a skirt of woods." At the same time, Ricketts advanced his pickets, so they would be abreast of Fleming's right. The 4th Vermont was called forward as skirmishers and took post on Fleming's left. But the Mississippians swept farther to the left, closing in on the right of Walker's battalion of the 11th Vermont. Wheaton committed two of Ballier's regiments to cope with this threat to his left.

General Grant, fearing for the safety of his command, galloped to General Wright's command post. After listening attentively to his subordinate, Wright accompanied Grant to the sector of the picket line held by Fleming's battalion and the 4th Vermont. As they rode along, Grant told Wright that if the picket line gave way in front of Walker's battalion, the Rebels would take the 4th Vermont and Fleming's soldiers from the rear. Wright replied, "The division officer of the day has his instructions."

"What are they?"

"In case the Rebels broke through on the left," Wright answered, "the

4th Vermont and Fleming's battalion were to retire to the right and come in on Ricketts' skirmish line."

Shortly after the two generals parted, Harris' Mississippians smashed through Walker's battalion, occupying a field in rear of the 4th Vermont and Fleming's men. When they sought to withdraw to the right as planned, the Vermonters found to their horror that General Mahone had committed Brigadier General Joseph Finegan's Florida Brigade. Seeing an opening, Mahone had advanced Finegin's Floridians. Advancing through the pines and dense undergrowth west of Aiken's, Finegan's brigade quickly rolled back Ricketts' skirmish line and infiltrated the woods beyond. The jaws of the Rebel pincers quickly snapped. Except for a few men who were able to hide in the pines, Fleming's battalion and the 4th Vermont, 400 strong, surrendered to Finegin's Floridians.[35]

Wright was understandably distressed to learn that the Rebels had broken Wheaton's picket line. Alarmed for the safety of his left and rear, he called frantically for reinforcements. At the same time, General Wheaton was authorized to call up Bidwell's brigade from Williams' house. Meade on being apprised of Wright's fears sought to calm his corps commander. At 6:30 he sent the message, "Do not let the enemy turn your left flank; either attack or withdraw; the former is most preferable." If there were no Confederates in front of his right, the VI Corps' leader could use troops from Russell's division to beef up his left. If his attack were unsuccessful, Wright could take advantage of the late hour and retire. Only in "case of extreme emergency" would the two V Corps brigades be committed.[36]

Acknowledging Meade's communication, Wright inquired, "Shall I abandon what has been my front line and put all the troops between my

left of this morning and the Williams /house/?" But, Wright cautioned, "the attack on my left may be a feint to cover a major assault on my present front." [37]

Meade, however, urged Wright to attack at once. Bidwell's brigade was en route to support the VI Corps' left, and another could be called up if necessary. There was no time to change position, Meade messaged, and not much for an attack if Wright continued to drag his feet. [38]

At 6:55 Meade learned from Colonel Lyman, who was at Wright's headquarters, that pickets had reported that the Confederates were advancing south of Second Swamp, and well to the left of the VI Corps. This column, it was theorized, was striking for the Jerusalem Plank Road. Consequently, Russell had been told to rush two brigades to bolster Wright's left. [39]

Wright at 7 o'clock in reply to Meade's latest telegram complained, "So far it has been as much as I could do to prevent my flank being turned and quite impossible to form a column of attack." The Confederates were undoubtedly present in force, but where they would strike remained uncertain. Till then, Wright was of the opinion that the correct role for his corps was defensive. In this stand, he was supported by two of his three division commanders. [40]

Five minutes later, an increasingly jittery Wright warned Meade, "I imagine that all the disposable rebel force is moving round our left for a general flank attack." The sooner Meade called up and posted heavy reinforcements, extending beyond the plank road, the better. If Meade were unable to do this, the VI Corps should withdraw as soon as it was dark. [41]

Meade, after reflecting on the information supplied by Colonel Lyman, suggested at 7:15 that if the Rebels were driving toward the plank road, Wright should cross Second Swamp and take them in the flank. The army

commander feared that if Wright continued to procrastinate it would "prove disastrous", because the VI Corps could not extend its left, and the army commander had no reinforcements to send to the point of danger. [42]

Growing more agitated by the minute, Meade at 7:20 wired Wright that as there was no time to form columns, he was to attack in line of battle. If the Confederates interposed between the VI Corps and the plank road, Meade fumed, he would hold Wright responsible. [43]

This note, as expected, served as a goad. At 7:30 Wright replied tersely, "I will attack shortly from what may be considered my present right. The left toward the Williams house must stand fast." [44]

Meade at 7:35 notified Wright that from the time the Confederate threat had materialized, he had urged his corps commander "to decide promptly, either to attack or to withdraw your left to the position of last night, extending from the Christian house to Strong's." Focusing his ire on Wright, Meade wrote, "Your delay has been fatal." Meade would "not blindly order" Wright to attack, but the responsibility for not doing so must rest on the corps commander's shoulders. [45]

Seventy-five minutes later Meade had his answer. Wright would withdraw his corps to the "position held last night, and shall commence the movement at once." When he redeployed his troops, two divisions would be in line, one in reserve, with the two V Corps brigades "still farther to the left extending over the plank road." [46]

Wright had failed to give him any data on which to form a "judgment," either as to the strength or position of the foe, so Meade decided it would be unwise to overrule his subordinate. Permission was therefore granted for the VI Corps to retire. Wright, however, must be prepared "to take the offensive to-morrow at early daylight." The corps' pickets were to

be left as far out as possible, when the troops were pulled back, and extended on the left a considerable distance down the plank road. General Barlow was to be kept advised of the retreat of the VI Corps, so that he might "conform to it." [47]

Wright, when given the green light, lost no time. Orders were prepared for the officers' guidance. Russell's division on the right was to reoccupy the rifle-pits "commencing from the Strong house, and connecting with the Second Corps." Ricketts' troops were to move into the works on Russell's left. Wheaton's division was to take position on Ricketts' left, with at least one brigade between Second Swamp and the plank road. The two V Corps brigades were to occupy the "first open field on the other side of the plank road in rear of the prolongation of General Wheaton's lines to the left."

When the corps took up its new positions, the pickets were to be kept at least one-half mile to the front. Outposts from Wheaton's division were to connect with those from the V Corps. Chief of Artillery Charles H. Tompkins was to have one battery report to Wheaton, and "whatever can be used" to the senior officer present with the V Corps brigades. Colonel Bryan was to advance his cavalry down the Jerusalem Plank Road at least three miles, and watch all the roads coming in from the west. [48]

Immediately after the overwhelming of Wheaton's picket line by Finegan's and Harris' brigades, Wright called on General Ricketts for help. Ricketts told the commander of his advance brigade, Colonel Benjamin F. Smith, to detail three regiments to report to General Grant. Smith named the 6th Maryland, and the 110th and 122d Ohio. Within a few minutes, orders arrived for Smith to recall the rest of his brigade and mass it to

the rear of Wheaton's hard-pressed division. Colonel William S. Truex's brigade moved up from the reserve to occupy the rifle-pits vacated by Smith's bluecoats.

When the Maryland and two Ohio regiments reported to Grant, he posted them alongside his Vermonters. The officers were instructed to hold their men ready to charge the Confederates, whom they could hear moving about in the pines and underbrush to their front. At first, it seemed to the Federals as if the Rebels were massing for a frontal assault. Several light thrusts were made and parried by Wheaton's pickets. Then the sounds reaching the Yanks seemed to indicate that the greyclads had moved around their left and were striking toward the plank road.[49]

Wright encountered no difficulty in breaking contact with the foe, because the Confederate leaders, several hours before, had determined to return to their lines. By midnight the VI Corps had retired and taken up the positions described in Wright's memorandum.[50]

Unknown to Wright and his generals, General Hill, who had spent most of the day with General Mahone, had determined late in the afternoon to recall the column. After telling Mahone to collect his troops and retire into the Petersburg lines, General Hill, accompanied by his staff, headed back up the Halifax road. Reaching his headquarters at 9 p.m., Hill telegraphed General Lee a terse report of what had occurred up till the hour that he had left Globe Tavern. According to the corps commander, "We did not accomplish anything; about 100 prisoners of the Sixth Corps. It was so hot, the undergrowth so thick, and the enemy retiring all the time, our men did not press forward. Indeed, could not sufficiently fast to get up with their main body."[51]

Sergeant Sale, along with the other pickets left to hold the works

when the division moved out, was relieved at 5 p.m. The men of the 12th Virginia started looking for their brigade, Weisiger's. Sergeant Sale recalled that at first this appeared to be a hopeless task, "as no one knew anything about what direction they had taken. By some means heard their direction and took" the Halifax road. After proceeding about two miles, the soldiers encountered General Hill's party. Hill told them to halt and rest as the division would soon be "coming up."

Mahone and his brigade commanders at dark recalled their troops. As soon as all the brigade commanders had reported in with their units, Mahone put his column in motion up the Halifax road.

Sergeant Sale and his comrades heard the division as it approached. Glancing at his watch, Sale noted the hour: it was 10 p.m. As Weisiger's brigade passed, Sale and his men fell in. Mahone and his troops, after re-entering the Petersburg perimeter, camped for the night near Battery No. 35. Before retiring, the butternuts were issued rations. [52]

Reporting to General Hill on his return, Mahone explained that shortly after the corps commander had left the front, Finegan's Floridians had enveloped a portion of the VI Corps picket line, forcing a large number of bluecoats to ground their arms. All told during the day's expedition, the division had captured 600 prisoners, including 28 officers. [53]

Wilcox's division on the 23d had been redeployed. The Light Division was pulled out of the rifle-pits near the Weldon Railroad and marched a mile to the left, where the brigades relieved the troops holding the works to the right and left of the Jerusalem Plank Road. As this movement was made during the daylight hours, with part of the route in "full view of the foe," McGowan's brigade came under fire from a Union battery as it approached its new position. Since these guns enfiladed this sector of the line, "a rapid plunge into the works behind the traverses saved the brigade

from any casualties." Skirmishers were then advanced to occupy and hold the picket line, which at this point was about 400 yards in front of the main line of resistance. [54]

Along the II Corps' front on the night of the 22d, Colonel Tidball had repositioned one of his batteries. The cannoneers of Battery F, 1st Pennsylvania Light Artillery were called up and emplaced their 3-inch rifles east of the Jerusalem Plank Road, and to the right of the 6th Maine's Napoleons. A company from the regular engineer battalion was called up to throw up emplacements to cover these guns. Colonel Tidball shortly after daybreak had the 4th New York Heavy Artillery report to General Gibbon, who placed the artillerists turned infantry-men in the rifle-pits to the left of the plank road. The Confederates had the plank road under observation, and when their spotters reported the two V Corps brigades as they marched for the Williams' house, their guns opened fire. Before the Rebel gunners could seriously interfere with the column, three II Corps batteries (the 11th New York, the 6th Maine, and Battery F) roared into action, quickly demonstrated a marked superiority, and silenced the greyclads' cannons. [55]

* * *

Before catching a few hours sleep on the night of the 23d, General Wright issued orders for his division commanders to see that their picket lines were advanced at 6 a.m., "for the purpose of feeling the enemy (if they still remain in our front)...." The skirmishers were to push forward till they reached the ground from which the corps had just retired. Colonel Bryan at the same time was to throw out mounted patrols to see

if he could ascertain the Confederates' position. [56]

A change of officers along the picket line occasioned some delay, but by 6:30 the VI Corps' skirmish line had moved out. Within 75 minutes, one of the patrols organized by Colonel Bryan had advanced two and one-half miles to Dr. Gurley's, without encountering any Rebels. Pushing on, the horsesoldiers crossed the railroad at Globe Tavern.

In front of the VI Corps, the skirmishers, as they worked their way cautiously forward, saw few greyclads. Most of these had a good headstart and were able to elude the Yanks. Fifteen butternuts, who had straggled when their brigades retired into the Petersburg perimeter, were captured by the VI Corps' picket line. None of these proved to be very "intelligent or communicative." About all the Union intelligence people could learn on questioning them was that while most belonged to Finegan's Florida Brigade, several came from other brigades of Mahone's division, with one or two from Kirkland's brigade of Heth's division. [57]

Wright's skirmishers by 10:15 had advanced to the position occupied by the picket line on the 23d, which was two and one-half miles beyond the breastworks currently held by the corps. Notifying Meade of this development, Wright inquired, "Do you wish them to continue to go forward?" [58]

At 10:30 Chief of Staff Humphreys replied for Meade. The pickets were to push on, and they were to be supported. As they did, they were to maintain contact with Birney's skirmishers, which had also been ordered forward. When his pickets had "secured sufficient ground," Wright was to advance his battle line, "connecting with General Birney's, whose left will be moved to correspond with your right." Wright was to leave the two V Corps brigades where they were, and post his left to give security to his main line of resistance. [59]

In response to this directive, Wright at 11:45 alerted his division commanders to "be prepared to move as soon as orders to that effect are received by them." These instructions were to be sent as soon as notice from the Corps' officer of the day was received that the picket line had reached the area held on the 23d, and connection made with that of the II Corps.[60]

Before this order could be implemented, General Grant visited Meade's Jerusalem Plank Road command post. After learning that the fight on the 22d had resulted in a stampede by the II Corps, Grant determined to abandon for the time being his efforts to invest Petersburg. Meade was to refuse his left flank, while the II and VI Corps "strongly fortified" the ground gained west of the plank road.[61]

In view of this decision by Grant, Meade at 12:40 notified Wright and Birney that they need not advance beyond their present lines until directed differently.[62] Wright, after conferring with Meade, notified his division commanders, as it was possibly they could remain where they were for "a day or two" that they have their soldiers "strengthen the works already thrown up."[63]

Since there would be no attack, Wright had the corps officer of the day make several adjustments in the picket line. The outposts on the right were to maintain contact with Barlow's skirmishers, "to advance with them, and halt when they do." By nightfall the picket line was as far advanced as safety allowed. Depending on ground cover and terrain, it was from one mile and one-half to two miles in front of Wright's main line of resistance.[64]

Meade's headquarters had suggested at 9 a.m. that Wright see that "a small reconnoitering party of cavalry" was advanced down the "old

Norfolk road," which paralleled the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad. [65]

General Wright saddled Colonel Bryan with the responsibility for seeing that this task was carried out. Marching orders were accordingly issued to the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry. [66]

Chief of Staff Humphreys at 10 o'clock inquired of Wright, "Have the cavalry scouts...been as far down the plank road as its intersection with the road from Prince George Court-House?" [67]

Wright replied to this dispatch immediately. A patrol from Bryan's command had been down the plank road at least five miles beyond the Second Swamp crossing. Scouts had examined all roads leading into the plank road from the west, without seeing any Confederates. [68]

The 18th Pennsylvania guided by a Negro who was familiar with the area, rode down the old Norfolk road about seven miles. Although no Rebels were seen, the horsesoldiers were told by Negroes, whom they questioned, that there were about 2,000 Rebel cavalrymen operating in Sussex County. [69]

Grant, on learning that Meade had run into difficulty west of the Jerusalem Plank Road, had got in touch with General Butler. At 4 p.m., June 23, Grant had directed Butler to give Baldy Smith as many reinforcements as he could. Smith was then to relieve as much of Burnside's IX Corps as possible, hopefully at least one division, so Meade could "extend and protect his left." If feasible, Grant would like to see Burnside's division relieved by "to-morrow morning." [70]

At 4:35 Butler replied, "Dispatch in regard to re-enforcing Smith received. It shall be done." Butler would pull Brigadier General John W. Turner's X Corps division out of the Bermuda Hundred Line and have it cross to the south bank of the Appomattox. With the departure of Turner's troops, it would cut the strength of the force holding that line to 4,000. [71]

Baldy Smith was notified that he would be reinforced during the night by Turner's division, described by Butler, as "one of the best divisions I have got." As soon as Turner's blueclads arrived, Smith was to see that his XVIII Corps assumed responsibility for as much of Burnside's front as possible.[72]

At 6 p.m. Meade's headquarters advised Burnside of what was coming. As soon as Baldy Smith's bluecoats had relieved his right flank division, Burnside was to have the troops thus freed march to the left, where they were to replace Warren's right flank division in the rifle-pits.[73] Simultaneously, a telegram was delivered to Warren, notifying him that as soon as the IX Corps division had relieved one of his divisions, he was to replace Birney's right flank division.[74]

Warren at 9 p.m. inquired of Burnside, "When will the IX Corps replace my right division?"[75]

"I will relieve your division just as soon as Smith relieves mine, which I hope will be very soon," Burnside countered. The IX Corps' commander wanted to know the strength of the division he was to relieve, Crawford's.

3,551 officers and men, Warren answered.[76]

General Turner, as soon as it was dark, pulled his troops out of the Bermuda Hundred Line. Soldiers belonging to Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry's X Corps division replaced Turner's. After the units had been formed and mustered, Turner passed the word to move out, the division crossing the river on the Point of Rocks pontoon bridges. While en route down the Point of Rocks road, Turner was joined by several of Smith's and Burnside's staff-officers. Guided by these men, Turner turned his division into the Prince George Courthouse road, and at 1 a.m. on June 24, his troops

began relieving Willcox's IX Corps bluecoats.

The position now held by Turner's division was on the left of Martindale's XVIII Corps division. Turner's right center was dug in immediately in front of the Hare house, while his center and left, passing over Hare House Hill, extended down the slope and across a branch of Poor Creek, and connected with the IX Corps in "a piece of woods a short distance beyond."[77]

Willcox's troops, on being relieved by Turner's, marched rapidly to the left. Having fought and marched over much of this ground, Willcox was able to push his men hard. The rifle-pits occupied by Crawford's V Corps division, which they were to relieve, were a short distance to the right of the sector where Willcox's men had attacked on June 18. Willcox's division by daybreak had replaced Crawford's behind the works.[78]

Crawford's division, as it crossed the Jerusalem Plank Road and prepared to relieve Gibbon's troops, came under a galling fire of artillery and small-arms. Crawford at 11:40 a.m., June 24, notified Warren that his troops had replaced Gibbon's. On doing so, Crawford had been shocked to see that Gibbon's people were still in a "very bad state of demoralization," as a result of their stampede on the 22d. Crawford had heard that four of Gibbon's regiments at that time had surrendered to one Confederate. When he examined the rifle-pits into which his troops had just moved, Crawford shook his head, because he considered the line laid out by Gibbon to be "a bad one."[79]

Upon being relieved by Crawford, Gibbon assembled his four brigades and marched them down the plank road to Williams'. Two batteries (the 10th Massachusetts and Battery G, 1st New York) accompanied Gibbon's column. Near Williams', they relieved the two V Corps brigades that had

been posted there since the previous evening's emergency.[80] Sweitzer's and Dushane's brigades then returned to their camps in rear of the fortifications held by the V Corps.[81]

THE BATTLE OF THE JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD, JUNE 21-24, 1864

Chapter III

General Wright is Paralyzed by the Confederates

Notes

O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 338.

2 Ibid., 339, 342; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 367. With Colonel Blaisdell dead, Colonel J. P. McIvor assumed command of the 2d Brigade, Gibbon's division.

3 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 339, 341.

4 Ibid., 339.

5 Ibid., 348.

6 Ibid., 349. Two trains had headed south from Petersburg on the tracks of the Weldon Railroad that morning, Lyman learned from several VI Corps scouts, but they had been compelled to return. This was a certain clue that General Wilson's cavalry had wreaked havoc on the railroad somewhere south of Globe Tavern.

7 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 640; History of the Eighteenth Regiment of Cavalry, Pennsylvania Volunteers (163d Regiment of the Line) 1862-1865, Compiled by Committee (New York, 1909), 25, 54. Assigned to the Provisional Brigade were: the 3d New Jersey Cavalry, two battalions 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry, and a detachment 22d New York Cavalry.

8 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 349.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 351.

11 Ibid., 350. The tools had been slated to be used by General Wilson's

column, but news that the Confederates were hot after the Union raiders had caused Meade to change his mind.

12 Ibid. A Negro had been picked up by Wright's troops and questioned. He told Colonel Lyman that he had left the city via the Halifax road the previous day. As he had walked south, the Negro had seen about 800 Rebel soldiers near the road about a mile from the city. There were fortifications thereabouts, but no guns mounted therein.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 351.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 352; History of the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry, 25, 54.

17 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 351-352.

18 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 497, 499, 500.

19 Ibid., 502.

20 Ibid., 495, 504.

21 Ibid., 506, 508.

22 Diary, Sale, 12th Virginia Infantry (Virginia State Library).

23 Freeman, R. E. Lee, III, 453-454; Caldwell, History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, 166.

24 Diary, Sale, 12th Virginia Infantry (Virginia State Library); Rowland, Mississippi Official and Statistical Register, 450, 466, 493, 514.

25 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 497, 502; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 352; History of the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry, 25-26, 54.

26 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 352.

27 Ibid., 352-353.

28 Ibid., 340.

29 Ibid., 343.

30 Ibid., 353.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 355; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 459, 470.

33 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 353-355; History of the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry, 25-26, 54.

34 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 355.

35 Ibid., 355, 685; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 495, 497, 502-503; Rowland, Mississippi Official and Statistical Register, 450, 466, 493, 514; O. R., Series I, Vol. LII, pt. II, 1028.

36 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 334, 356.

37 Ibid., 356.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 357.

40 Ibid. Wright had not talked to his other division commander.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 358.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., 358-359.

48 Ibid., 359.

49 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 495, 506, 508, 510, 511, 512.

50 Ibid., 493, 494, 495, 497, 503, 506.

51 O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. II, 1027.

52 Diary, Sale, 12th Virginia Infantry (Virginia State Library).

53 O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. II, 1028; McCabe, "Defence of Petersburg,"

Southern Historical Society Papers, II, 277.

54 Dunlop, Lee's Sharpshooters, 131; Caldwell, History of a Brigade of South Carolinians, 166.

55 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 397, 424, 427, 435, 438.

56 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 392. Colonel T. O. Seaver of the 3d Vermont was named corps officer of the day, and would report to Wright's headquarters at 5:30 a.m.

57 Ibid., 376, 386, 387.

58 Ibid., 388.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 393.

61 Ibid., 372, 373-374, 389, 393. Meade's command post was west of the plank road, just beyond Jones' house.

62 Ibid., 381, 389.

63 Ibid., 393.

64 Ibid., 391.

65 Ibid., 387.

66 History of the 18th Pennsylvania Cavalry, 54.

67 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 387.

68 Ibid., 388.

69 Ibid., 392.

70 Ibid., 362.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 369.

73 Ibid., 360.

74 Ibid., 344-345.

Ibid., 345.

76 Ibid.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 696-697.

Ibid., 197, 198; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 397.

O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 190; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 381, 385.

80 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 381.

O. R.,Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 459, 470.

THE BATTLE OF THE JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD, JUNE 21-24, 1864

Chapter IV

Hagood's Brigade Takes a Beating

General Beauregard, upon the arrival of the Army of Northern Virginia at Petersburg, remained in immediate charge of the Petersburg lines held by troops from his District of North Carolina and Southern Virginia.[1] The troops from Beauregard's command committed to the defense of Petersburg were organized into two infantry divisions (Major Generals Bushrod R. Johnson's and Robert F. Hoke's) and one cavalry brigade--Brigadier General James Dearings'. Nightfall on June 18 found one of Beauregard's divisions, Hoke's, holding the earthworks from the Appomattox on the left to the area where the Norfolk & Petersburg Railroad passed through the defenses. Johnson's division, having been relieved by Kershaw's troops, was posted in reserve.

On the 19th Beauregard issued orders redeploying two of his brigades. Brigadier General Archibald Gracie's brigade of Johnson's division was to recross the Appomattox and resume its position at Fort Clifton, while Colonel John S. Fulton's brigade was to join Major General George Pickett, who was in charge of the force holding the Howlett Line. Dearing was to report to Major General W. H. F. "Rooney" Lee on the Jerusalem Plank Road, where he would be assigned to protect the Weldon Railroad.[2]

Forty-eight hours later, on the 21st, Beauregard, having observed that the salient occupied by Brigadier General Alfred Colquitt's brigade was hammered unmercifully by Union artillery, determined to let another unit share the hazards. Orders were accordingly issued calling up from the reserve Brigadier General Matt W. Ransom's brigade of Johnson's division.

Upon being relieved by Ransom's North Carolinians, Colquitt's Georgians were to report to General Johnson.[3]

The Confederate generals knew that with the II and VI Corps operating west of the Jerusalem Plank Road, the force holding the investment line between the Appomattox and ... Baxter road would have been weakened. They also knew that the Union supply line linking the II and VI Corps with their base at City Point passed behind the works held by the IX and XVIII Corps and along the river. General Lee, in conjunction with General Beauregard, determined to seize the initiative, roll back the Union right, and cut Grant's supply line. Lee and his officers were also encouraged to note the low morale displayed by many Union units in the fighting west of the Jerusalem Plank Road.[4]

General Lee placed Beauregard in charge of the attacking force. Meeting with his staff on Dunn's Hill on June 23, Beauregard drafted his plan for a powerful thrust against the lines held by Baldy Smith's XVIII Corps. At daybreak on the 24th the batteries emplaced north of the Appomattox were to go into action, hammering the Union lines and emplacements in front of General Hoke's sector. This bombardment was to continue for one-half hour. The guns would then cease firing for five minutes, as a signal for Hoke to advance his infantry. The cannons would then roar back into action, concentrating "on batteries and distinct lines and masses of the enemy," such as can be fired upon without endangering Hoke's footsoldiers. As their fuses weren't too reliable, the Rebel cannoneers were to employ "mostly solid shot."

At the same time, Confederate troops posted near the Weldon Railroad were to feign an attack on the VI Corps, so the Federals would be pinned down and thus be unable to reinforce the XVIII Corps.

When Hoke assaulted, he was to maneuver his right, so as to take the Yankees' first and second lines in the flank, and move rapidly against the Union position near the Hare house. Having captured Hare House Hill, Hoke was to push on and retake the works abandoned on the 15th.

Field's division, which under the cover of darkness would be relieved by Johnson's, was to be positioned to support Hoke's attack and protect his left. As soon as practicable, Brigadier General George T. Anderson (who led Field's 1st Brigade) was to throw his Georgians into the rifle-pits from which Hoke had driven the bluecoats, on which shall rest Hoke's left. The Georgians were to follow Hoke, and Anderson would "fill up with other troops the gap between the river and Hoke's left until the whole line shall be occupied." Should he discover the opportunity, Anderson was to advance and assault the old Confederate line from Battery No. 2 to Battery No. 9. As soon as Hoke's right had uncovered his front, Kershaw's division was to advance, to be followed by Johnson's. Johnson's mission would be to retake the old line of works between Batteries Nos. 19 and 24.[5]

General Hoke during the evening told Brigadier General Johnson Hagood to be ready for a movement at daylight. No other officer in the division was told of Beauregard's plan, because Hoke wanted to be certain the foe was kept in the dark as to Confederate intentions. At this stage, as on the 18th, Hagood's South Carolinians held Hoke's left. The 27th, 21st, and 11th Regiments held the rifle-pits from the Appomattox to the City Point road, and the 25th Regiment and 7th Battalion prolonged the brigade front south of the road. Four hundred yards to Hagood's front, and parallel to it, were the Union entrenchments. An open field with "a rank growth of oats" lay between. Each side had thrown up a line of slight

rifle-pits to shelter their pickets, a short distance in front of their main line of resistance.[6]

Following the fighting on the 18th, General Hagood, taking into consideration that most of his units were without field officers, had divided his brigade into wings. Lieutenant Colonel Patrick H. Nelson was placed in charge of the regiments north of the City Point road.[7]

As soon as it was dark on the 23d, Bushrod Johnson marched his division up from the reserve. Not wishing to alert the Federal outposts, the Confederates moved slowly and quietly. It was well after midnight before Johnson's greyclads had relieved the last of Field's division in the works between the Baxter and Jerusalem Plank roads. After assembling their brigades well behind the lines, Field's brigade commanders put their columns in motion for the previously designated rendezvous--Iron Bridge on the City Point road.[8]

Shortly before daybreak on the 24th, Hoke returned to Hagood's command post, and gave him detailed instructions as to the part the South Carolinians were to take in bringing on the battle. When the guns which were about to open fell silent, Hagood was to have his left wing (the 27th, 21st, and 11th South Carolina) take up the advance. When they left the shelter afforded by their works, the greyclads were to be formed into two heavy skirmish lines. Hagood's brigade was to be closely supported by General Anderson's Georgians. After Hagood's South Carolinians had driven the Yankees from their first line, Anderson was to occupy it till his supports arrived, when he was to press on against their second and third line. Meanwhile, Hagood was to pivot his left wing to the right, call up the right wing, and re-form his men along the City Point road, his brigade perpendicular to its initial

position. He would then sweep forward, rolling up the Union line on the slope of Hare House Hill and clear Ransom's front.

While Hoke and Hagood were discussing the situation, Lieutenant Andrews of Anderson's staff rode up and reported that the Georgia Brigade had filed into position in rear of the earthworks held by Hagood's left, and were concealed from the Federals' view by a knoll. Close behind was another of Field's brigades, Colonel Dudley M. Du Bose's.[9]

The artillery (44 guns) opened as soon as the morning's mist had cleared, pounding the lines held by the XVIII Corps with "unusual severity." At 7:30 the cannons ceased fire. General Hagood at 7:20 had sent Lieutenant Andrews to tell General Anderson that the South Carolina Brigade would advance in five minutes. After holding their fire for five minutes, the Rebels' big guns reopened, directing their attention upon the Yankee batteries. General Hoke recalled, "as far as I could see," this was the only service rendered by our guns. Indeed, he feared, "we were injured more than we gained by the use of our guns, as it notified the enemy of our intended attack."[10]

Because of some unforeseen difficulties, it was 7:42 before Hagood's forward line of skirmishers, 400 picked officers and men, advanced. Close behind came the second line of skirmishers, about 550 strong. Colonel Nelson of the 7th Battalion led the first line, General Hagood the second.

Nelson had been standing beside Hagood, when Hoke's aide brought the order to advance. The men, who had been told to follow Nelson, were watching him, and when he was ordered to go, without speaking, he drew his handkerchief from his breast and raised it aloft. The South Carolinians sprang over the parapet with a yell and rushed out into the oat field. Nelson's skirmishers carried the Union picket line, capturing

about 30 bewildered bluecoats. To General Hagood it appeared that the "enemy's whole line" was "seriously shaken." While awaiting the advance of Anderson's troops, the South Carolinians, in accordance with orders from Hagood, laid down in the oats. When the fresh brigade came up, they would go in with it. [11]

The picket line captured by the South Carolinians had been occupied during the night by troops from General Stannard's XVIII Corps division. When the Rebel artillery ceased firing at 7:30, Stannard, suspecting that an attack was impending, told Colonels Henry and Cullen to recall their outposts. As in all wars, some of the pickets didn't get the word and were overrun. The troops posted behind the Union main line of resistance waited until the outposts had retired and then opened with a "rapid and telling fire." [12]

General Hoke, seeing the Federal pickets scatter, waited impatiently for Anderson's battle line to come up. Realizing that a moment's delay would be fatal, Hoke asked General Field to order Anderson's brigade forward. A staff-officer was sent galloping to the rear with an urgent message for Anderson to put his Georgians in motion. When Anderson failed to show up, Field repeated his order. This time, Field received an answer. Anderson reported that the entrenchments to his front were occupied by Hagood's South Carolinians. Looking about, Hoke could see that in making this statement, Anderson was in error. The only troops in the trenches referred to were stragglers. Colonel Du Bose's brigade by this time had marched up. After reaching the trenches, Du Bose's troops moved down them by the left flank and occupied the position General Anderson was to have taken. [13]

Instead of advancing over the knoll to support the attack, Anderson,

when compelled by repeated orders to move, went to the rear by file as far as Iron Bridge, nearly one-fourth mile. He then led his column up Poor Creek hollow, till he reached the shelter of the entrenchments near Colquitt's Salient, and then came "stumbling along them already crowded with men," until he reached the sector Hagood had left. Anderson was more than one hour getting to a position to which he had little more than 150 yards to march straight ahead, and with nothing in his way but "the usual hazards of hostile fire." Meanwhile, Du Bose's brigade had come up three-quarters of an hour before the brigade that was to precede it.[14]

Long before Du Bose's men put in their appearance, Stannard's troops had seen that Hagood's soldiers were unsupported. Volley after volley crashed into the Confederates. No soldiers in the world could have long withstood the terrible punishment to which the South Carolinians were subjected. The Rebels were trapped. Some of the men scrambled to their feet and retired into the rifle-pits, out of which they had so confidently charged a few short minutes before. Colonel Nelson had to calm his men. Getting to his feet, he walked along his line through the oats. Shortly after reaching the left, he was cut down by a Union sniper. Seeing that their situation was hopeless, a number of the butternuts got to their feet and grounded their arms. A captain and 60 enlisted men surrendered to Henry's men, and 4 officers and 130 soldiers to Cullen's brigade.[15]

About one hour after the repulse of Hagood's three regiments; General Field put two brigades in the trenches on the left of the City Point road with a view to resuming the attack. Hoke, however, advised against it, as the Federals had had ample time to prepare for "us." At this time orders were received for Hoke and Field to report to General Lee.

After ascertaining the facts, Lee told Field to forget his projected attack.

After his officers had reassembled and mustered their units, General Hagood found that this fiasco had cost his brigade 25 killed, 72 wounded, and 209 missing.[17] Union losses in this engagement were 72: 57 in Cullen's brigade and 15 in Henry's.[18]

It is not difficult to see why the Confederate attack failed. Hagood's troops, who were to spearhead the thrust, and the supporting units looked to different division commanders for their orders. General Field was on the field, and no blame appears to have attached to him. If it were impracticable for the assault to be made and supported by the same division, a common superior should have been on the spot to co-ordinate the operations of the divisions. Generals Lee and Beauregard were near the batteries across the river in close view of the field, but without means of direct communication, and therefore unable to take tactical direction of the affair.

Hagood was understandably incensed at Anderson. He was of the opinion that "Anderson should have been shot." For some reason, Lee failed to order a court of inquiry, "though the common sense of that portion of the army that knew anything of the affair kept afloat for two or three weeks the daily rumor that one had been ordered."[19]

* * *

The battle of the Jerusalem Plank Road ended on June 24 with the Army of the Potomac grimly digging in to hold the ground gained west of the road. Grant and Meade had extended their lines a considerable distance, but not to the west as they had hoped. The Federals' first

attempt to invest Petersburg had failed.

On the 22d the Confederates had sent the II Corps reeling. Mahone had followed up his initial success scored at Barlow's expense with "an enterprise, audacity and shrewdness rarely exhibited, even by their able commanders." The entire affair of that day had been short, swift, and decisive. Birney's II Corps had been "defeated almost without being engaged." There had been very little fighting, and comparatively small loss, except in prisoners. Of these, the II Corps had lost 1,700: more than it had on the Peninsula; more than it had at Antietam, Fredericksburg, and Chancellorsville combined. Four guns, the only ones taken from the corps by the foe till this stage of the conflict (except those abandoned, disabled, on the banks of the Po) were carried off as trophies by Mahone's terrible men. The entire operation had been like that of an expert mechanic who touches some critical point with a fine instrument, in exactly the right place, producing an effect seemingly altogether out of proportion to the force exerted. [20]

The performance of the VI Corps on the 23d was almost as dismal. Once again, General Mahone and his officers were able to take advantage of their knowledge of this section of Prince George County to deal the Yankees another punishing blow. Indeed, the Confederate movements were conducted with such skill as to all but paralyze General Wright. For several hours, Wright was unable to make up his mind. Should he attack? Should he hold his ground? Should he retreat? This situation became so acute that an examination of the correspondence passing between Wright and Meade at this time leads one to believe that Meade was on the verge of relieving the commander of his VI Corps.

On June 24 the assault by the Confederates on the XVIII Corps was a fiasco, which partially nullified their successes of the previous 48 hours. The net advantage of the current operations depended on the outcome of the cavalry raid led by General Wilson against the Weldon, South Side, and Danville railroads. Wilson's horsesoldiers had moved out simultaneously with the advance of Birney's infantry on the 21st.

THE BATTLE OF THE JERUSALEM PLANK ROAD, JUNE 21-24, 1864

Chapter IV

Hagood's Brigade Takes a Beating

Notes

1 Alfred Roman, The Military Operations of General Beauregard in the War Between the States 1861 to 1865..., Vol. II (New York, 1883), 259.

2 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 668-669. At this time the 64th Georgia, which was posted on Swift Creek, was relieved by Gracie's troops and assigned to the brigade led by Brigadier General Alfred Colquitt.

3 Ibid., 678.

4 Johnson Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession...(Columbia, 1910), 271.

5 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 804-805.

6 Ibid., 797, 802-803.

7 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 278.

8 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 761, 766; C. W. Field, "Campaign of 1864 and 1865," Southern Historical Society Papers, XIV, 549. Brigadier General John Bratton's South Carolina Brigade of Field's division on the afternoon of the 18th had been posted in the works to the left and right of Battery No. 34. Bratton at dark had marched his troops to the left and relieved one of Kershaw's brigades in the works covering Baxter road. Bratton's left now rested on Pegram's Salient. During the period, June 19-23, Bratton's men worked hard strengthening the works they occupied. On the night of the 23d they were relieved by Brigadier General Stephen Elliott's brigade of Johnson's division.

9 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 797, 803.

10 Ibid. The cannoneers of the four artillery battalions assigned to Beauregard's command had posted their pieces along the line and at commanding points in its rear to aid in the defense. Two of Beauregard's batteries, the Confederate Guards and Wright's, had unlimbered their guns north of the Appomattox. Most of the guns which shelled the XVIII Corps on the morning of the 24th were north of the river. These pieces were mounted in three sectors. Emplaced on the commanding bluff at Archer's house were the rifled guns of Battery A, Sumter South Carolina Artillery and Lewis' Virginia Battery. One-half mile up the Appomattox from Archer's were the rifled guns of Clutter's and Thompson's Virginia Batteries. The cannoneers of Poague's Battalion had unlimbered their guns farther upstream, alongside the three 20-pounder Parrotts manned by the Confederate Guards Artillery and the five field pieces served by Wright's Virginia Battery.

On the night of June 23, eight 24-pounder Coehorn mortars were emplaced in rear of Hagood's left. Two Napoleons were emplaced on Hagood's line, where it crossed the City Point road. O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 757; Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 281.

11 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 803; Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 278.

12 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 716, 718; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 401; O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. I, 1250-1252. Stannard's troops, since occupying the works between the river and City Point road, had spent many hours "remodeling and rebuilding their lines." Two covered ways were started, linking the front and rear lines. On the 23d a Negro Brigade led by Colonel Nelson Ames had reported

to General Stannard. The general placed the Negroes in his rear line of works, thus freeing Burnham's brigade, which was sent a mile to the rear to rest. Colonel Cullen's brigade replaced Burnham's troops in the rifle-pits on Stannard's right.

13 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 797, 803; Field, "Campaign of 1864-1865," Southern Historical Society Papers, XIV, 550.

14 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 277.

15 Ibid.; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 716, 718, 803; O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. II, 401.

16 O. R., Series I, Vol. XL, pt. I, 797-798.

17 Ibid., 804.

18 O. R., Series I, Vol. LI, pt. I, 1251. Twenty-four dead Confederates were found in front of the rifle-pits held by the Spenser-armed 40th Massachusetts.

19 Hagood, Memoirs of the War of Secession, 276-277; Field, "Campaign of 1864 and 1865," Southern Historical Society Papers, XIV, 551.

20 Walker, History of the II Corps, 545-546.