

## 150 Years Ago in the Third Infantry

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### June 1862

#### June 2, 1862

From his headquarters near New Bridge, Virginia, Major General George McClellan issues an address to his soldiers in the aftermath of the recently concluded Battle of Fair Oaks. The tone of the address is both congratulatory and encouraging so as to ease any doubts in the minds of his men, and his own mind as well, regarding the ultimate success of the Army of the Potomac: "I have fulfilled at least part of my promise to you. You are now face to face with the rebels, who are at bay in front of their capital. The final and decisive battle is at hand. Unless you belie your past history the result cannot be for a moment doubtful. ... Soldiers, I will be with you in this battle, and share its dangers with you. Our confidence in each other is now founded upon the past. Let us strike the blow which is to restore peace and union to this distracted land." But if the final battle is at hand, it will not be General McClellan who strikes the blow, at least not until he receives massive reinforcements.

Captain John D. Wilkins of Company F is impressed by these spirited orders and the beneficial effect they have on the troops. About the Regular infantry, which has yet to go into combat in the campaign, he has no doubts as to their bravery or skill. He is less sure about the neighboring volunteers, even though he describes the Third Brigade under the command of Colonel Gouverneur K. Warren, a Regular officer, and the First Division under the command of Brigadier General George Morell as the best volunteers he has ever seen.

Captain Wilkins also gives some thought to his own courage and concludes that "I feel like whipping my weight in wildcats and hope to give a good account of myself." Still, he confides to his wife that should he fall on the field to remember that "I did so fighting for my country and, I believe, my God. Death must overtake us all sooner or later but it is sweet to die for one's country." (OR I 11(3):210; Wilkins 5/26/62)

#### June 5, 1862

The steam transport *Philadelphia* arrives in New York Harbor with Companies C and E of the Third Infantry under the command of Captain John McLean Hildt. The two companies spent 13 months defending Fort Pickens at the entrance to Pensacola Bay, Florida, and are enroute to join the remainder of the regiment. The men are given very little opportunity to enjoy the return to civilization as the companies depart the next day for the Virginia Peninsula. Despite the short stay, 20 of the 156 enlisted men present with the companies manage to desert. Eight of the deserters are returned to the regiment at Harrison's Landing in July. (Regt Return; RG393 E1101)

#### June 6, 1862

While the Regular infantry has yet to engage the enemy, they are hardly idle. Work parties are regularly drawn from the Fifth Corps to perform fatigue and picket duty. Captain Wilkins characterizes the duties of the Regulars as very disagreeable: "We are called out on all sudden alarms, compelled to do almost all the fatigue, and I may say under arms all the time. ... We frequently go out at a moment's notice, and move to particular points to sustain the different corps that engage the enemy, but so far have not had a regular 'get to' with them." He is not the only Regular soldier to chafe at their current reserve role. The Cincinnati Commercial reports that the Regulars have begun to complain of restraint. (Wilkins 6/6/62&6/14/62; RR 5:241)

### **June 10, 1862**

One of the typical tasks assigned the troops is the performance of picket duty to prevent the secret advance of the enemy against the camps or working parties of the Army of the Potomac. Detachments from the various divisions of the Army are assigned the duty for every 24-hour period in sufficient numbers to serve as the first line of defense. Among the Regular troops at Camp Lovell, an enlisted man who is present for duty can expect to serve on picket duty for the Second Division at least once a week.

While picket duty was always uncomfortable and could be dangerous at times, the Confederate pickets were in the same position and both sides readily refrained from firing at individual pickets. In fact, conversation and even trade occurred between the lines. Captain Wilkins write his wife that his post in the Chickahominy swamps was so close to the enemy that the pickets talked to each other and one of the Confederates asked Captain Wilkins for permission to come over and give the men some tobacco. "He also wanted to exchange a Richmond paper for a New York Herald which I respectfully declined." (Wilkins 6/14/62; Meyers 220-222)

### **June 13, 1862**

The Confederate Army of Northern of Northern Virginia is now under the command of Major General Robert E. Lee, who has no intention of letting McClellan undertake a leisurely siege of the Confederate capital. Lee dispatches three regiments of Confederate cavalry under the command of the flamboyant General J.E.B. Stuart to determine the vulnerability of the right flank of the Army of the Potomac preparatory to beginning offensive operations. Starting in Ashland, Virginia, almost 1200 troopers move out at dawn in the direction of Hanover Court House.

Near Old Church, the Confederate force overwhelms a detachment of the Fifth United States Cavalry. The commander of the detachment sends word of the incursion to the Union cavalry commander, Brigadier General Philip St. George Cooke. Cooke sends this information to Brigadier General George Sykes, the nearest divisional commander, who immediately sends his Third Brigade in the direction of Hanover Court House with the available cavalry. Unsure of the intentions or the location of the enemy, General Sykes also orders his First Brigade, including the Third Infantry, to form line of battle north of Gaines Mill. The day is excessively hot for standing in a field and Captain John D. Wilkins recalls that "I thought I would have melted into my boots whilst waiting for the enemy." Still, they are lucky compared to the Third Brigade which will be forced to march almost 42 miles over a 38-hour period.

No enemy appears, however, and the First Brigade returns to Camp Lovell late in the evening only to be turned out at 2:00 am the next morning when Confederates are reported to be within two miles of Old Church.

Companies C and E of the Third Infantry step into this pandemonium when they arrive at White House from New York City en route to join the rest of the regiment. Lieutenant Colonel Rufus Ingalls, commanding at White House, has only 600 men of all services to defend the post and he gladly accepts the assistance offered by Captain John Hildt, the officer in command of the companies. The two companies and a portion of the 95th New York are posted to protect a battery covering the roads by which the Confederates are expected to make their appearance. Fortunately, the Confederates make no move against the lightly-defended depot and are already en route to rejoin their Army. Rather than return in the direction of any Union pursuit, General Stuart crosses the Chickahominy River south of New Kent Court House and follows the James River to Richmond, thereby entirely circling General McClellan's Army. (OR 11(1): 1006-1008, 1031-1033; B&L 2:271; Regt Return; Wilkins 6/14/62; RR 5:200)

### **June 16, 1862**

In the aftermath of Stuart's celebrated ride around the Union Army and the feeble performance of the Union cavalry, Fifth Corps commander General Fitz John Porter asks his friend Major Henry B. Clitz of the 12th Infantry to inquire into the circumstances attending the ineffectual pursuit of the Confederates. Major Clitz was formerly the commander of Company E of the Third Infantry before his promotion upon the enlargement of the Army in May 1861, and is considered one of the rising stars of the Army. However, his appointment is hardly appreciated by the commander of Union cavalry. Brigadier General Philip St. George Cooke, who also happens to be General Stuart's father-in-law, complains that "after six or seven hours, constantly receiving, considering, and sending dispatches to out parties, Major Clitz called on me with the astonishing communication that he was sent to investigate some parts of my conduct."

Major Clitz submits his report on June 18th. He generally lets the various reports submitted with regard to the matter speak for themselves, but notes that had General Cooke "pursued with vigor", he probably would have overtaken the enemy. Of course up until now, no part of the Army of the Potomac has been noted for its vigorous pursuit of the enemy. (OR 11(1):1006-1008, 1012)

### **June 20, 1862**

Captain John D. Wilkins of Company F enjoys a rare day off duty by riding along the Fifth Corps lines. The Fifth Corps is now the only Union Corps on the north side of the Chickahominy River, General Franklin's Sixth Corps having been transferred to the south side of the river the previous day. The Fifth Corps lines extend from the camps of the First and Second Divisions on Gaines' plantation as far north as Beaver Dam Creek near Mechanicsville.

Mechanicsville is only five miles from Richmond and a popular excursion for off-duty soldiers. From a clearing near an abandoned beer hall, soldiers can actually see a single church spire from the city rising above the trees in the distance. This glimpse of the Army's goal is the closest most of the soldiers of the Army of the Potomac will ever get to the Confederate capital, unless they are unfortunate enough to be captured in the next two weeks. (Wilkins 6/14&22/62; Cullen 69)

### **June 21, 1862**

Companies C and E join Companies B, D, F, G, H, I, and K of the Third Infantry at Camp Lovell, bringing the total number of companies in the field under Major Nathan Rossell to nine. Only Company A, which is still being reorganized at Fort Columbus, New York, remains absent. The battalion at Camp Lovell is the largest assemblage of the regiment in one place since the end of the Mexican War.

Only one officer from the two companies is now present with the battalion at Camp Lovell, namely Second Lieutenant Woods McGuire of Company E. Two of the officers, Captain Henry Freedley and First Lieutenant Richard G. Lay of Company C, are still on parole as prisoners of war since their capture in Texas more than a year earlier. The second lieutenant of Company C, James Snyder, serves as Aide-de-Camp to Brigadier General George Sykes. Captain Alexander McDowell McCook of Company E is on detached service in Tennessee as a brigadier general of volunteers and First Lieutenant Daingerfield Parker of Company E is absent sick.

Lieutenant Woods does not assume command of Company E upon its arrival. Captain Hildt has commanded the company at Fort Pickens and chooses to retain command of it rather than take command of Company D, which is commanded by Captain Francis A. Davis of the 16th Infantry. Lieutenant Woods is instead given the command of the officerless Company C.

Captain John D. Wilkins of Company F, who was the first lieutenant of Company E for many years before the war, also expresses an interest in commanding 'Old E', but is likewise refused.

The arrival of the two companies at Camp Lovell causes a great deal of interest and amusement among their comrades as the new arrivals use an old version of manual of arms, known as Scott's tactics, when coming to a halt in the camp. The rest of the regiment, in fact the entire Army of the Potomac, is schooled in a light infantry drill known as the Hardee's tactics. While Hardee's tactics were first adopted by the Army in 1855, much discretion regarding use of manuals was left to the commanders of the isolated frontier posts. Apparently no change in drill was made while the two companies garrisoned Fort Pickens with several artillery companies armed as infantry. Note however, this story was related years after the war by Lieutenant Parker, who, regimental records indicate, was not present when the two companies arrived. In his story, Parker says the companies arrived when the regiment was camped in July 1861 at Harrison's Landing, but he has both the dates and location of the incident wrong. (Regt Return; Parker 4; Wilkins 6/22/62)

### **June 23, 1862**

Confederate General Robert E. Lee instructs three of his divisional commanders, Generals James Longstreet, A.P. Hill, and D.H. Hill, to assemble at General Lee's headquarters on the Mechanicsville road. The three officers are joined at headquarters by General Stonewall Jackson, who has secretly arrived from the Shenandoah Valley where he has been confounding three separate Union commands. Lee informs the commanders that he has determined to attack the Federal right wing north of the Chickahominy River and has selected their commands to execute the movement. According to Lee, the opportunity to defeat the Union Army in detail and sever its supply line along the Richmond and York River Railroad to White House justifies a plan that necessitates dangerously reducing the number of Confederate soldiers facing the remainder of the Union Army. Jackson is given the opportunity to fix the time for the attack and picks June 26th, an ambitious timetable since his three divisions must first arrive from the Shenandoah Valley.

Union General George McClellan has followed a less ambitious timetable. Although McClellan assured President Lincoln on June 18th that his attack against the Confederate lines would occur "as soon as providence permits", he has done little to encourage providence to give its permission. For the past week his activity has been limited to adjusting the Union lines south of the Chickahominy River, not preparatory to an immediate attack, but only to "be in position to reconnoiter the lines carefully [and] determine the points of attack." The news of Jackson's approach ends even these tentative steps toward offensive operations.

On June 25th, McClellan obtains reliable information that the Confederate Army of General Stonewall Jackson is enroute. By this time, only the Fifth Corps remains north of the Chickahominy River. In instructions to Brigadier General Fitz John Porter, McClellan assures his good friend and commander of the Fifth Corps that in case of attack north of the Chickahominy River, the troops on the south side will be held ready to either support the Fifth Corps directly or attack the enemy in their front. General McClellan prefers the latter option, "counting upon your skill and the admirable troops under your command to hold their own against superior numbers long enough for [General McClellan] to make the decisive movement which will determine the fate of Richmond." When the time comes, however, few troops are available to either reinforce the embattled Fifth Corps or make a frontal attack against the Richmond defenses.

McClellan's plan to save the Army requires abandoning White House on the Pamunkey River as the Army's supply depot and taking up a new base and line of supply on the James River. On June 18th, the day he wrote the President regarding his imminent attack against Richmond,

General McClellan secretly ordered supplies to be sent to the James River in anticipation of the movement. The change of base, as the movement becomes known, permits the concentration of the entire Army on the south side of the Chickahominy River. Of course, the movement also requires the withdrawal of the Army from before Richmond to the new base so as to begin the advance along the new line of supply. (OR I 11(3):233, 238, 247; B&L II:178-180, 347)

### **June 25, 1862**

The First Brigade of Regular infantry of the Second Division of the Fifth Corps, which includes the Third Infantry, marches about 10 miles northward toward the Old Church at Totopotomoy Creek and the small country crossroads of Hall's Shop. After bivouacking near the shop for the night, the brigade returns to Camp Lovell at Gaines Mill on the morning of June 26th. (Regt Return; OR I 11(2):363; Wilkins 6/22&7/15/62)

### **June 26, 1862**

After waiting impatiently for much of the day for the sounds of General Stonewall Jackson's appearance on the right flank of the Union Army, two Confederate divisions cross the Chickahominy at Mechanicsville about 2:00 pm to frontally attack the Union positions behind Beaver Dam Creek. Two separate Confederate assaults are repulsed with frightful loss to the attackers, and artillery duels and desultory skirmishing continue until 9:00 pm. Because of the absence of Jackson's command, the attacking Confederates are forced to present both their front and flanks to a murderous fire from Union artillery and infantry safely posted behind entrenchments. The Confederates suffer almost 2000 casualties in the failed attacks, while the Union defenders suffer less than 400.

The Beaver Dam defenses are so exceptionally strong against direct attack that only two brigades of General George McCall's Pennsylvania Reserve Division are required to occupy the entrenchments overlooking the creek. Still, the rest of the Fifth Corps is rapidly brought to a close supporting distance as Corps commander Brigadier General Fitz John Porter had previously issued instructions to his division commanders in anticipation of the Confederate attack: "The infantry division and cavalry commanders were directed to break camp at the first sound of battle, pack their wagons and send them to the rear, and with their brigades, to take specified positions in support of troops already posted, or to protect the right flank."

Everyone is convinced that the morning of June 27th will see a renewal of the contest. Other than the soldiers of the nine companies of the Second and Third Infantries who participated in the Battle of Bull Run or the Battle of Santa Rosa Island, the Regular soldiers of the Second Division face their first serious encounter with the enemy.

About 4:00 am on June 27th, after "a hasty breakfast without coffee", the Third Infantry and the rest of the Second Division are withdrawn from their advanced position and return to Camp Lovell. By this time, the heavy guns at Hogan's and Gaines' houses are already being moved across the Chickahominy River. General McClellan also hopes that most of the wagons of the Fifth Corps, heavily laden with supplies, will be saved by being sent south. Still much equipment and supplies must be destroyed, including regimental and company property of the Third Infantry, although it is unclear just what is included among this property.

The soldiers of the Fifth Corps continue eastward across Powhite Creek and through New Cold Harbor to a new line selected by General McClellan's chief of engineers. Like the position at Beaver Dam Creek, the new line takes advantage of the obstruction and protection afforded by another tributary of the Chickahominy River, Boatswain's Creek. This stream does not give its name to give to the imminent battle. Instead, the fighting on June 27th is called the Battle of Gaines Mill, even though the mill is both behind the Confederate lines and located on nearby Powhite Creek rather than Boatswain's Creek.

The Fifth Corps assumes a purely defensive posture in taking this new position, and General McClellan does not anticipate offensive operations against the Confederates north of the Chickahominy River. The lone corps north of the river is intended merely to protect the major bridgeheads and cover the further withdrawal of siege guns and supplies to the main part of the Army of the Potomac. General McClellan is now completely committed to his plan to change bases and risks the possible sacrifice of the Fifth Corps "to give time for the arrangements to secure the adoption of the James River as our line of supplies in lieu of the Pamunkey."

Porter likewise acknowledges that his corps is expected to act on the defensive on the north side of the Chickahominy River. His troops are guided by several general principles that he felt guided the Fifth Corps throughout the period of his command: "Under no circumstances should the men expose themselves by leaving their entrenchments, or other cover, merely to pursue a repulsed foe; nor, except in uneven ground which would permit the fire of artillery to pass well over their heads, was infantry or cavalry to be posted in front of a battery, or moved so as to interfere with its fire. Bullet, shot, and shell were to be relied upon for both repulse and pursuit." (OR I 11(1):54-55; (2):361, 363; (3):260; B&L II:326, 329-331, 336; Regt Return; Meyers 225-227; Wilkins 7/9/62; Powell 83, 85)

### **June 27, 1862 -- The Battle of Gaines Mill**

Since dawn, the soldiers of the Fifth Corps begin converging on high ground six miles downstream of yesterday's battlefield to further contest the advance of the Confederate Army against the right flank of the Army of the Potomac. The new defensive position, selected by General Barnard of the Engineers, follows the semicircular sweep of Boatswain's Creek, a short tributary of the Chickahominy River. The stream rises between the McGehee House and Old Cold Harbor near the main road from Old Cold Harbor to the river crossings of Alexander's Bridge, the Grapevine Bridge, and Sumner's Upper Bridge. After proceeding due west for roughly 3000 yards, the stream gradually curves south across the New Cold Harbor road toward a junction with the Chickahominy River. The high ground embraced by the stream upon which the corps assembles, Turkey Hill, is mostly cleared, but the many undulations of the ground and numerous fences and ditches give ample cover to the arriving infantry and artillery.

It is a long line to defend and until the arrival of the First Division (Slocum) of General Franklin's Sixth Corps after 3:00 pm, Corps commander Brigadier General Fitz John Porter has only his own command at hand. Still, the Fifth Corps is the largest corps in the Army of the Potomac. With the recently attached Division of Pennsylvania Reserves under Brigadier General George McCall and a Cavalry Division under Brigadier General Philip St. George Cooke, General Porter has over 34,000 soldiers present for duty. They will face at least 50,000 Confederates in six divisions.

Along the edge of the semicircle, General Porter deploys two of his three divisions. The north-south axis of the stream is assigned to the First Division under Brigadier General George Morell. The east-west axis of the stream and the open ground surrounding the McGehee House is filled by the Second Division of Brigadier General George Sykes. The Pennsylvania Reserve Division, having been engaged the day before at Beaver Dam Creek, is held in reserve behind the First Division. The cavalry of General Cooke occupies the lowlands between the left of Morell's division and the Chickahominy River. After overseeing the deployment of the arriving forces, General Porter initially makes his headquarters at the Adam's house. He soon moves to the Watt's house, which is located on higher ground immediately behind the lines of the First Division and from which "he could more readily command all parts of the field".

With almost 11,000 enlisted men present for duty, the First Division is the largest of Porter's three divisions. The three brigades of this division (Butterfield, Martindale, and Griffin) deploy along the higher ground above the stream and take full advantage of the natural trench it provides. The bed of the stream is nearly dry, and its west bank gives excellent protection to the soldiers posted behind it to receive any enemy troops descending cleared fields sloping down to the stream. The stream's east bank is lined with trees and underbrush, which provides additional cover for men and artillery posed to contest any advance from the direction of Doctor Gaines' plantation and New Cold Harbor.

Sykes' Second Division of three brigades is responsible for defending the approaches to Turkey Hill from the direction of Old Cold Harbor. On the west side of the Old Cold Harbor road, much of the course of Boatswain's Creek is a tangled series of brushy swamps. Instead of placing his troops in this quagmire, General Sykes deploys two brigades on the sloping ground above the stream and uses the swamps as a natural obstacle to inhibit any swift advance by the enemy. The Third Brigade consisting of the Fifth and Tenth New York Infantries under Colonel G. K. Warren forms the left of General Sykes' position. The brigade occupies an advanced position facing the heavy woods of Boatswain's Creek, with its left flank near the road from New Cold Harbor and its right covered by the Second Brigade.

The Second Brigade of the Second, Sixth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Seventeenth Infantries is also west of the Old Cold Harbor road. The brigade is held in reserve in the bed of the New Cold Harbor road, which ends a short distance to their right at an intersection with the main road from Old Cold Harbor. Years of use have depressed the bed of the road several feet, and the soldiers take advantage of this natural breastwork. The ground in their front gradually slopes to the woods along the stream about 300 or more yards away. The brigade has been under the command of Lieutenant Colonel William Chapman of the Third Infantry, but that very morning he is determined to be too unwell to continue in command. The brigade surgeon orders Colonel Chapman to the general hospital at Army headquarters across the Chickahominy River. Command of the Second Brigade is relinquished to Major Charles S. Lovell of the Tenth Infantry who learns of the command change from one of Chapman's aides while the brigade passes the old camp at Gaines Mill. Major Lovell will command the Second Brigade throughout the Seven Day's Battles, except for the evening on June 30th, when Chapman resumes command, only to relinquish it the next morning before the final Battle of Malvern Hill.

In his report on the battle, Major Henry Clitz of the Twelfth Infantry noted, without explanation, that "had General Sykes been permitted to hold with his division the line of road it would have been almost impregnable to any attack in front, for then the enemy would have been obliged to leave the shelter of the woods and approach us over an open space varying from 300 to 600 yards in width". There is nothing in the official reports to indicate that General Sykes did not have permission to deploy his division as he considered appropriate, but it is possible the initial deployment was dictated at the Corps level.

The right flank of General Sykes' division, and indeed the whole of the Fifth Corps' line, is held by the First Brigade under Colonel Robert Buchanan. The flank is anchored upon the high ground east of the Old Cold Harbor road surrounding the McGehee House. The McGehee House, which serves as a hospital during the battle, is in the immediate rear of the First Brigade. The troops occupy the crest of the hill in open fields, but fences and the "inequalities of the ground" provide some cover. General Sykes refers to this high ground as the commanding point of his position. On the right flank, the potential approach routes of the enemy are drier, but also open, and General Sykes strengthens the position with several batteries of Regular artillery. Battery I of the Fifth U.S. Artillery under Captain Stephen Weed is posted on the far right to contest any attempt to turn the Union flank. About 12:30 pm, Weed's battery is joined on the right by Battery A of the Second U.S. Artillery under Captain

John Tidball. The Fourth Infantry of the First Brigade is posted between the two batteries as their support in case of infantry attack. The Twelfth and Fourteenth Infantries are posted in a corn field in front of the Old Cold Harbor road, where the ridge along which the road runs slopes toward the stream. The line of the Twelfth is almost perpendicular to the line of Warren's brigade, but separated by a large interval.

According to Captain Thomas W. Walker's after-action report, the Third Infantry "took up position near the right of the line of battle, with Weed's and Tidball's batteries to our right and Griffin's [Edward's] battery on our left, Twelfth and Fourteenth Infantry to our left". Captain Weed records that the position of the Third Infantry is "covered by the neck of the woods on our left of the road". The brigade commander, Colonel Buchanan, stated that the regiment was in position "along the head of the road", from which it could observe both the road and a "skirt of timber in front, through which the enemy might advance".

As the different Union regiments arrive on Turkey Hill throughout the morning, the soldiers deposit their knapsacks for later retrieval and move to their assigned positions along the defensive perimeter. It is not known where the men of the Third Infantry left their knapsacks, but the Second Infantry left their knapsacks in the near near the Adams house with a small guard. Amazingly, the regiment had time to retrieve them during the retreat, but, in the darkness and rush, there was no opportunity to find one's own knapsack. The men were ordered to simply grab a bag and keep marching. Apparently some units kept their backpacks with them. Corporal Augustus Meyers of the Second Infantry remembered seeing soldiers of the Fifth New York Infantry of Sykes' division use their knapsacks as portable breastworks while fighting in the woods later that afternoon.

Company K of the Third Infantry, under the command of Second Lieutenant John Whitney, is detailed on picket duty soon after the regiment deploys and has no further involvement with the regiment during the entire battle. Captain Joseph B. Collins of the Fourth Infantry discovers Lieutenant Whitney and his company on the right and front of the Fourth Infantry's position. "He was doing such excellent service that I directed him to remain there". Company K spends the entire battle serving as the advance guard on the right flank of the Fifth Corps. Fortunately, Captain Collins doesn't forget about Company K and has the company recalled that evening after the batteries withdraw. Company K will remain with the Fourth Infantry until the next morning. The Fourth Infantry is so efficient that the four enlisted men killed by enemy artillery fire during the battle are actually buried on the field while the regiment covers the Union batteries.

The Confederate plan for the day's movement is the same as the failed effort at Beaver Dam Creek: Hold the enemy's front while turning its right flank to force and fall upon the retreat. To put the plan into practice, General Lee orders the divisions of Generals James Longstreet and A.P. Hill to advance parallel with the Chickahominy River to find the new Union line. The turning movement is again entrusted to General Stonewall Jackson with his three divisions and the division under General D.H. Hill. The theory is sound, but like yesterday's attempt, the plan will quickly go awry because General McClellan has no intention of withdrawing the Union Army across the front of the enemy toward White House. Consequently, General Jackson will find no right flank capable of being simply bypassed and line of retreat cut. Just as was the case at Beaver Dam Creek, General Jackson wastes valuable time waiting for others to take the initiative, writing after the battle that he believed Longstreet and A.P. Hill "would soon drive the Union forces toward him". The Fifth Corp's semicircular defense line is designed so that any withdrawal is toward the Chickahominy River bridge crossings, rather than eastward toward White House landing.



The Confederate advance is cautiously conducted on account of a lack of familiarity with the area, several destroyed bridges, and a harassing Union rear guard. It is noon before the lead brigade of General A.P. Hill's division passes Gaine's Mill. The division of D.H. Hill, the first of Jackson's troops, reaches Old Cold Harbor about 1 p.m. and the fields to the left of the Old Cold Harbor Road. Their appearance animates the artillery of Sykes' batteries near the McGehee house. At first, only a single Confederate battery is brought out into the open south of Old Cold Harbor to feel out the strength of General Sykes' line along Turkey Hill. The Union batteries posted about McGehee's House badly cripple the Confederate battery so that General Hill orders it to withdraw. For the next two hours, these same batteries toss occasional shells into the woods along Boatswain's Creek to break up several feeble attempts by Confederate infantry to test the center and right of General Sykes' line.

It is 2:30 p.m. before the Confederate battle lines of Longstreet and A.P. Hill advance against the lines of the First Division of the Fifth Corps. However, Gregg's South Carolina brigade on the far left of these divisions advances along the axis of the New Cold Harbor Road and engages, first, Warren's two-regiment brigade of Sykes' division, and then the Twelfth and Fourteenth Infantry of Buchanan's brigade. The Third Infantry is also advanced to cover the flank of these two Regular infantry regiments. In its fight with the "vaunted 5th New York Zouaves and Sykes' regulars", Gregg's 1st South Carolina Rifles suffer a loss of 81 killed and 234 wounded out of 537 engaged.

The sounds of the heavy firing on the Union left do not get any closer, and Jackson finally realizes that Longstreet and Hill are not driving anybody. About 3:00 pm, Jackson decides to commit his four divisions to join the attack. The strong Union batteries near McGehee's House counsel against any attempt to turn General Sykes' right flank so General D.H. Hill's division is recalled from the far Confederate left. General Jackson forms his lines on the west side of the Old Cold Harbor Road in order to take advantage of the sheltering woods and ravines in their front and avoid the open fields in front of the McGehee House. There is about an hour break in the fighting, which Sykes refers to as "only the lull that precedes the storm".

Eventually Jackson's troops extend as far as the New Cold Harbor Road and several units are sent to assist the battered troops on the Confederate right. While the heavy woods and swamps shelter the forming columns, they also slow, disorganize, and spread out the advance with the result that the Second Division defenders on Turkey Hill face a series of uncoordinated attacks throughout the late afternoon. One Confederate brigade does not even make its way out of the swamp to take part in the fight.

Anticipating the Confederate attack, Sykes directs Colonel Warren "to throw forward his skirmishers and feel the enemy in the ravine". They quickly confirm the presence of a large attacking force. "Desultory firing began, which soon deepened into a continuous roar, unvarying and unceasing until darkness set in and the conflict ceased." The first Confederate assaults are repulsed all along the line with heavy losses to attackers. The repulse is not without losses to the Union defenders, and General McCall's division is brought forward to relieve the First Division regiments on the left whose ammunition is already exhausted.

The Union troops do not remain purely on the defensive. The Twelfth and Fourteenth Infantry and Colonel Warren's Fifth and Tenth New York Volunteers follow up the unsuccessful Confederate attack by Gregg's brigade by advancing "in the most perfect order in line" and drive the enemy from the "left and center far into the woods beyond". To support the advance, the Third Infantry is ordered to move from its original position to the right and rear of the Twelfth and Fourteenth Infantry. Captain Thomas W. Walker reported that the Third Infantry advanced to the front under a heavy fire to a position along the edge of the woods to prevent the enemy from turning the flank of the Twelfth and Fourteenth Infantry. Unfortunately, the

flank of the Third Infantry is itself endangered. Major Nathan B. Russell of the Third Infantry orders Captain Walker "to report to General Sykes that the enemy's cavalry and infantry in large force were attempting to turn our right flank." It is his last act as commander. General Sykes recorded in his report that "while in this exposed situation, boldly resisting the foe, the gallant major lost his life". Captain Walker returns from his errand to find Major Russell mortally wounded and the "whole left wing of the regiment exposed to a murderous fire from the front, flank, and rear, and almost surrounded". As senior officer of the regiment present, Captain Walker assumes command of the Third Infantry. Seeing the Twelfth Infantry in retreat and not seeing the Fourteenth Infantry at all, Captain Walker's first command is to withdraw the regiment slowly back to its original position in support of the batteries, with the Twelfth Infantry to the regiment's left.

Fortunately, the Fifth Corps is finally reinforced by troops from the other side of the Chickahominy River, although it is only a single division from the Sixth Corps under Brigadier General Henry Slocum. The division first moves to the support of the First Division. About 4:30 pm the Second Brigade of Slocum's division under Colonel Joseph Bartlett and Kingsbury's battery of the Fifth United States Artillery are sent across the length of the battlefield to the right to reinforce General Sykes. The battery unlimbers to the right of the McGehee's house near Weed's and Tidball's batteries, and Colonel Bartlett, under General Sykes' direction, posts his regiments "in front of and around McGhee's house".

At about 5:30 pm, the Confederates renew their attack, which is especially severe along the road from New Cold Harbor toward the Adam's House where the left of General Sykes' division meets the right of General Morell's division. The fighting in this area draws available troops from both sides. Gradually, the numerical superiority of the Confederates troops makes itself felt here, further to the Union left, and in Sykes' front. According to Sykes, the Twelfth Infantry is attacked in overwhelming numbers and decimated. Captain Walker also used the term "decimated", reporting that "the enemy appeared suddenly in front of the Twelfth in the woods and almost decimated the regiment at a volley". Captain Walker responds by sending four companies of the Third Infantry (Companies C, D, H, and I under Captain Davies and Lieutenants Sheridan, McGuire, and Eckert) to their relief. The remnants of the Twelfth reformed on the left of the four companies and together "vigorously attacked the enemy and drove them back into the woods".

This is the final time the Confederates are driven back into the woods. Instead, the Twelfth Infantry and the four companies of the Third Infantry are forced back by superior numbers. Fortunately, as soon as the Union troops exit the woods, the twelve guns of Weed's and Tidball's batteries are turned obliquely upon the enemy and pour in "a tremendous fire of canister", which quickly diminishes both the fire and progress of the enemy. According to Captain Walker, the Third Infantry reforms and then holds its position until after nightfall and until all troops on the left hand have fallen back. The Third Infantry slowly falls back to a new line of batteries established about 600 yards in the rear of the McGehee House and takes up a position on the right flank in support. General Sykes reported that his entire division "sullenly retired along the slope in rear of McGehee's" and reunited at the base of the hill. "At this point, half a mile from the battlefield, my command remained until relieved, about 9:30 pm". The Confederate troops hold the line originally held by the Fifth Corps, but no more.

There is no rout. The only break in the Union lines occurs about nightfall on the far left where a brigade of Texas troops crash through part of General Morell's depleted and exhausted ranks. A cavalry charge by troopers of General Cooke's command in response adds to the confusion and several guns are captured on the left. On General Sykes' side, the Union troops withdraw slowly and in order, although a couple of Sykes' officers admit to exceptions from the party line. Captain John Edwards of Batteries L and M of the Third U.S. Artillery refers to "our troops

breaking and running to the rear". When it was nearly dark, Major George Andrews reformed the Seventeenth Infantry in the roadway along the crest of the hill, intending to use its slightly sunken bed as a defensive position, but a regiment rushed up the road and through his unit like a "whirlwind": "Officers and men were carried with resistless power to the rear of the houses, where they were rallied by their officers in such numbers as could be got together".

The Third Infantry had retired to the right flank of Kingsbury's repositioned battery at the foot of Turkey Hill. Captain Walker claims the Third Infantry is the last regiment to pass the hospital in rear of the battle ground. This is apparently a different hospital than the one established in the McGhee house. Sykes' Second Division bivouacs for a few hours, still on the east side of the Chickahominy, near Woodbury's Bridge. While the battlefield and hence the victory goes to the Confederates, there is no shame on either side. General McClellan intended no more than a holding action north of the Chickahominy River to buy time for his change of base, and in performing this task the Fifth Corps was completely successful. It is idle speculation to consider what might have been the result if they had been reinforced to pursue victory instead.

It is only after the battle that Confederate General D.H. Hill learns that the troops opposing his division were Regular infantry under the command of General Sykes. Sykes and Hill were roommates twenty years earlier while cadets at the United States Military Academy, and after the war General Hill fondly remembered his former friend and forced enemy as "a man admired by all for his honor, courage, and frankness, and peculiarly endeared to me by his social qualities." The seriousness of war does not prevent a brief moment of levity between the adversaries. General Hill takes advantage of the negotiations regarding an exchange of prisoners following the Seven Days Battles to send a message to General Sykes that "had I known that he was in front of me at Cold Harbor, I would have sent some of my North Carolina boys up to take him out of the cold." General Sykes returns the compliment with the reply that he appreciates the sarcasm, but that next time the tables will be turned. Twenty years after the war, General Hill ruefully reflected how true a prophecy General Sykes uttered.

In addition to the death of Major Rossell, who is the only officer of the Third Infantry killed or wounded in the battle, six enlisted men were killed: Corporal George Lee and Private Thomas Kennedy of Company C, Private Peter Bingle of Company D, Privates Patrick McDonald and James Kessons of Company H, and Private Thomas Dalton of Company I. Another 19 soldiers are wounded, including First Sergeant David F. Grier of Company E, but able to withdraw with the regiment. Finally, another 19 privates are reported as missing. Of the missing soldiers, eight are from Company K, which had been detached on picket duty when the regiment arrived on Turkey Hill and withdrew with the Fourth Infantry. They are the only losses sustained by Company K in the battle. The casualties of the Third Infantry pale in comparison with those of several of the other regular infantry regiments. The Sixth, Twelfth, and Fourteenth Infantries, which all advanced into the woods in the afternoon's fighting, lost an aggregate of killed and wounded in the entire Seven Day's Battles of 121, 217, and 255 men, respectively. The Second Infantry, which was about the same strength as the Third Infantry, but fought in the woods and conducted the final ill-fated charge, had 139 casualties. (OR I 11(2):31, 224-225, 349-381; (3):238; B&L II:331-333, 354-355; Regt Return; Regt Movement Report 1862 (M665, Roll 33); Meyers 226-239; Cullum 2:#1266; Shaw 293-295; Powell 84, 85, 88-94, 101, 106, 107, 117, 121-22)

### **June 28, 1862**

Shortly after midnight, General George Sykes, commander of the Second Division of the Fifth Corps, is ordered to bring his division across the Chickahominy to join the rest of the Army of the Potomac on the west bank. Sykes reports that the crossing "was accomplished without confusion", and the troops move to the heights formerly occupied by General McClellan's headquarters (Camp Lincoln). According to Captain Thomas W. Walker of the Third Infantry,

the regiment left its temporary bivouac near Woodbury's Bridge at 1:20 a.m. to cross the river. Company K of the Third Infantry spent the previous day on picket duty in front of the Fourth Infantry and the batteries on the Union right flank and withdrew with that regiment. Cut off from the main line of retreat, the Fourth Infantry supported Weed's and Tidball's batteries as they withdrew and bivouacked in a position covering the approach to Grapevine Bridge. The order to cross the Chickahominy doesn't reach the Fourth Infantry, and Captain Joseph Collins advances the regiment toward the McGehee house, until he learns from some wounded soldiers that it is the only Union force north of the river. It then retires, in view of the enemy's pickets, via Alexander's Bridge. Second Lieutenant John Whitney with his Company K finally rejoin the regiment in the morning.

The Regular troops remain under arms during the day, but the Confederates do not attempt to cross the river, all of the bridges in the area having been destroyed. The soldiers use the respite to boil their first coffee in two days and try to sort out the jumble of knapsacks. Throughout the morning, "stragglers and men who had lost their way in the woods the evening before" rejoin their units, and the first sergeants of companies finally have an opportunity to call the roll to get a more accurate count of the soldiers still present for duty and the extent of the casualties.

At first, it isn't at all clear there will be a retreat. The Union Army is reunited on the Richmond-side of the Chickahominy River, while that river now divides the greater part of the Confederate forces from the remaining troops in the Richmond defenses. According to Meyers "even the rank and file knew this and we fully expected to be led on to Richmond with every chance of success in our favor". In the afternoon, heavy firing is heard from the direction of Richmond, and Meyers said the soldiers believed "our opportunity had arrived", but it turns out to be a "minor engagement". These minor engagements (referred to by General Fitz John Porter as "active spurts") "created the false impression that they designed to attack the Second, Third, and Fourth Corps, and thereby succeeded in preventing an attack upon them." General McClellan is committed to the plan of changing his base of operations and has no plans to test the strength of Rebel defenses. The supply train, to the number of about 5,000 wagons, and the reserve artillery are already en route to the James River.

The men of the Second Division of the Fifth Corps spend the afternoon laying around in the hot sun, getting but little shade, and awaiting orders that arrive that afternoon. Ammunition and one day's rations are issued and, about 3 p.m., the Third Infantry and the rest of the First Brigade of Sykes' Division receive orders to "fall in". They will lead the march of the rest of the division, which starts out about 5 p.m. and is followed by McCall's Division at 9 p.m. The First Division left earlier to assist the engineers in building bridges and causeways through the swamps along the route.

The enlisted men and most of the officers have no idea where they are bound, but they arrive at Savage Station about dusk. While halted at Savage Station, the soldiers notice "great fires burning up supplies and military stores of all kinds which left no doubt in our minds that we were retreating from Richmond". The destination of the Fifth Corps is the cross-roads of Glendale. (OR I 11(2):350, 361-366; OR I 11(3):272; Meyers 240-243, 254; Wilkins 7/9/62; Powell 117; B&L II (Porter 407))

### **June 29, 1862**

About dawn, Sykes' Division, including the Third Infantry, resumes its march to and through White Oak Swamp, crossing at what is known as Brackett's Ford. Shortly after crossing, the soldiers are given an opportunity to eat breakfast and boil coffee, although the stagnant water of the swamp is the only water source. The division eventually continues its march to a point near the junction of the Charles City Road and the New Market and Quaker roads. Captain

Joseph Collins of the Fourth Infantry of the First brigade reported that the brigade reached "near the head of Quaker road" at 8 a.m. Because of conditions of the road and the crowds of wagons and herds of cattle, the Third Division of the Fifth Corps (McCall) won't reach the Glendale crossroads until midnight. By then, the lead elements of Sykes' Division are preparing to depart, but at least they had a temporary reprieve from the stops and starts of marching. However, it is hardly an afternoon of rest, Captain John Wilkins reported that there was firing to their front and right, and the Third Infantry is ordered to take a position on the right of the road. The regiment remains in line of battle the remainder of the day while the rear guard action at Savage Stations rages. (OR I 11(2):350, 358-366; B&L 2:407; Meyers 243)

### **June 30, 1862 -- Battle of Turkey Bridge**

During the night, Sykes' Division of the Fifth Corps resumes its march after being relieved from its position near the junction of the Charles City Road and the New Market and Quaker roads. Although guided by a cavalry officer who rode the route and professed to know it, Sykes's Division makes a wrong turn and actually takes the Long Bridge Road toward Richmond. Writing years later, General Fitz John Porter, commander of the Fifth Corps, noted that, fortunately he was at the head of the column to give the necessary orders, so that no delay occurred in retracing our steps". Augustus Meyers, one of the soldiers caught in the countermarch, is not so generous. Calling it "another distressing night", Meyers wrote the error resulted in a "countermarch for a long distance" and, instead of an early morning arrival on the heights of Malvern Hill, they didn't arrive until nearly noon. (OR I 11(2):350, 360-364; B&L 2:407-08; Meyers 244-46)

There is no delay in deploying the forces. Pursuant to the orders of General Porter, and assisted by Colonel Warren, every available piece of artillery, including some of the siege guns, are posted to control the approaches to the front. The Third and Fourth Infantries are posted into "a clump of pines" on the extreme right of Sykes' line. Colonel Robert Buchanan, commanding the First Brigade of the division, reported that the two regiments "were posted in a wood on the side of a hill to the right of the line and somewhat in advance, which it was considered it was most important to hold." The Twelfth and Fourteenth Infantries of the same brigade occupy a position on the plain near the Malvern house, which serves as headquarters for General Porter, a signal station to communicate with the gunboats, and a field hospital. These regiments support Weed's Battery I of the Fifth Artillery, attached to Sykes' Division, and the Fourth New York Independent Battery, detached from the Third Corps. The New York battery, under the command of Lieutenant Joseph E. Nairn because of the absence of the battery's captain, figures prominently in the history of the Third Infantry.

The Second Brigade extends the line to the left, serving as supports for four additional batteries. Warren's brigade, and the Eleventh Infantry, occupy bottomland to the left and below Malvern Hill to block the enemy from advancing along the River road from Richmond. The soldiers of the Second Division rest on their arms as other Army corps arrive to extend the lines on Malvern Hill to the right or concentrate in the rear. The men rest, or even sleep, in the hot sun, "thoroughly tired out after our night's marching". Water details are sent out to water sources at the base of the hill to refill canteens. Fires are prohibited, so no coffee, but shortly after the troops' arrival, "a gill of whiskey was served to each man who wished to take it, also three pieces of hard tack." After the next day's battle, Meyers and some other soldiers will find a portion of this whiskey supply "unguarded and probably forgotten". Filling his canteen and quart-tin cup with whiskey, Meyers was "for that day at least the most popular member of the company".

General Sykes wrote in his report that "nothing could be more commanding than the line I held". Malvern Hill, actually more like a plateau had steep slopes and fields in front that finally ended in woods about a thousand yards away. The commanding position wasn't lost on the

rank and file either. Meyers wrote that "we hoped the enemy would attempt to assault it." Late in the afternoon, the enemy (part of Wise's brigade of Holmes' division) makes their first appearance to test the strength of the Union position, appearing below Sykes' Regular brigades and near Warren's brigade. A Confederate battery advances from the woods to a position within 800 yards of Sykes' line and opens fire, with some of the shells passing over the Regular brigades and some dropping among Warren's brigade. By standing up, Meyers can plainly see the enemy batteries out in the field, "as well as a large body of infantry at the edge of the woods supporting them". The massed Union artillery responds, and General Sykes proudly reported that "our artillery smashed his batteries to pieces, compelled him to leave two guns and six caissons on the ground, and drove his infantry and cavalry ignominiously in retreat".

Even the gunboats take part, hurling 200 pound shells toward the woods. Meyers recalled that the shells "sounded like a train of cars in motion at great speed and the explosion shook the earth". Meyers believed the explosion of these shells among the enemy in the woods must have been terrifying. A few of the gunboat shells fell short in the fields in front of the Union troops, although fortunately none exploded. They "spun around, threw up dirt and dug holes in which it seemed a horse could have been buried". Meyers estimated the the entire affair lasted less than 30 minutes. General Porter confessed after the war that during the heavy artillery fire, with guns placed within 100 yards of his headquarters at the Malvern House, he slept soundly: "For weeks I had slept with senses awake to the sound of distant cannon, and even of a musket-shot, and would be instantly aroused by either. But on this occasion I had gone to sleep free from care, feeling confident that however strong an attack might be made, the result would be the repulse of the enemy without much damage to us."

Casualties among the Union troops are light. According to Captain Weed of the Fifth Artillery, "the fight was too unequal, and was apparently so considered by the New York battery on my right". Captain Weed complains to General Sykes and the adjutant-general of the Army of the Potomac regarding the incompetence of the Fourth New York Independent Battery under Lieutenant Joseph Nairn. In his official report written on July 5th, Captain Weed renews the charges: "It fired quite rapidly, making considerable noise and smoke, but it fired canister at a distance of from 1,500 to 1,800 yards. Round after round of canister was fired, and, so far as I could observe, nothing else was until long after both friend and foe had ceased firing. This irrepressible battery threw several case-shot or shell, which struck somewhere, certainly much nearer our own troops than the point at which the hostile battery had been posted." In fact, Captain Weed refers, without clarification, to the "amplest evidence" that the battery "killed an officer and 2 enlisted men of our own."

These casualties are from the Third Infantry: Second Lieutenant Woods McGuire, commanding Company C, Corporal Malcolm Montford of Company D and Lance Corporal Frederick Jansen of Company H. Colonel Buchanan recorded in his report on the First Brigade that the men were killed when the New York battery, firing through the woods in which the Third Infantry was posted, cut away the branches of trees that fell upon the three soldiers. Amazingly, no other soldiers are wounded in the incident, although Private Frank B. Thomas of Company B ends up missing by the end of the night. Captain Thomas Walker is very specific in his report of the battle, stating that the soldiers were killed about 4 p.m. "by the firing of a battery posted on the hill immediately in rear of the Third Infantry, and commanded I believe, by Lieutenant Nairn. Captain John Wilkins is more noncommittal in his report, written several weeks later, stating only that the men were killed, "supposed to be by a shell from one of our batteries posted in our rear".

Thirty years later, Captain James E. Smith of the Fourth New York Independent Battery, in his book "A Famous Battery and Its Campaigns, 1861-64", provided a defense of his battery's conduct during the Battle of Malvern Hill. First, Captain Smith acknowledged that, when the

battery was formed in the fall of 1861, "we were all lamentably deficient in knowledge of our duties, but we possessed the means of informing ourselves, viz: a book of instructions in artillery tactics". The battery trained, passed reviews and inspections, and participated in its first battle at Williamsburg, Virginia. It was not subsequently engaged until the Battle of Malvern Hill. Captain Smith was not with the battery during the battle, having left on sick leave on June 12, 1862. According to Captain Smith, upon his arrival at Harrison's Landing on July 5th, Colonel Henry J. Hunt, Chief of Artillery of the Army of the Potomac, informed him verbally of the allegations of "two or three officers" against the battery and "desired me to investigate the matter". Regarding the alleged use of canister beyond effective range, Captain Smith wrote that he verified that a full compliment of canister was on hand for each gun, "while none had been drawn on requisition". As for the charge of friendly fire deaths, "every man in the company emphatically denied even the possibility of such a catastrophe, explaining to me the position of the enemy and the direction of the Battery's fire". Convinced another battery was "responsible for such gross mismanagement," Captain Smith informed Colonel Hunt and believed the matter was closed. Captain Smith didn't learn of Captain Weed's official written report until the release of the official records in 1890. Unfortunately, Captain Weed was killed at Gettysburg and Colonel Hunt had passed away by this time, so Captain Smith concluded that the defense of his battery "is in the shape of an explanation, the only course left to us."

Except in the Third Infantry, where a burial detail is dealing with the bodies of Lieutenant McGuire and the two enlisted men, it becomes fairly quiet along Sykes' line during the evening and throughout the night. Meyers recalled that it was the only night of "unbroken rest" during the retreat: "I was so weary that even the certainty of a battle the next day could not keep me awake, and I slept soundly until awakened at daylight." While he and others slept, the last of the Union forces arrive on Malvern Hill. (OR I 11(2):350, 355, 358-366; B&L II (Porter 407, 408, 411); Meyers 243-46, 251, 253; Smith 40, 78-80)