

COMPANY FRONT

THE HISTORICAL MAGAZINE OF THE TWENTY-SIXTH NORTH CAROLINA

VOLUME 25, ISSUE 2

JULY 2012



1862

IN THE MOST GALLANT MANNER

More than sixteen hundred North Carolina soldiers died in 1861, a comparative few in battle at Big Bethel, Manassas, and Hatteras, and the remainder from the diseases that ravaged the new regiments. Worse was to come: by the end of 1862 another seven thousand North Carolinians were dead from disease, and more than thirty-six hundred had perished in battle.

This issue of *Company Front* explores the history of two North Carolina regiments in 1862. David McGee's continuing history of the 26th North Carolina covers slightly more than a year: from the aftermath of the New Bern debacle and reorganization for the war until orders were received to join the Army of Northern Virginia in May 1863. Bob Williams's article focuses on the 1st Regiment N.C. State Troops during the Seven Days campaign, and particularly the part played by that command at the Battle of Malvern Hill. Bob is preparing another article on the 1st North Carolina and its sister unit, 3rd Regiment N.C. State Troops, that will explore the history of the two during the Maryland Campaign and the Battle of Sharpsburg.

We are particularly pleased to offer a copiously illustrated article about the Alfred May Collection at the North Carolina Museum of History, one of the most important collections extant of items used by the Confederate enlistedman. The author is Tom Belton, retired Curator of Military History, North Carolina Museum of History, and a man well known to many of us through the regiment's joint efforts in historical preservation with the Museum of History.

Greg Mast



Marquis (Marcus) D. Herring, Company C (the "Lilington Rifle Guards"), 1st Regiment N.C. State Troops. Private Herring served with his regiment throughout the bloody Seven Days Battles. He performed detached duty at General D. H. Hill's headquarters during the Malvern Hill fighting. Herring was a close friend of color bearer Cal Jones, mortally wounded in the engagement.

Confederate Veteran magazine, January 1914

Front Cover

The officers of Company A (the "Albemarle Guards"), 1st Regiment N.C. State Troops: Captain Tristram Lowther Skinner (*center*), First Lieutenant John Avery Benbury (*left*), and Second Lieutenant Lemuel Creecy Benbury (*right*). Skinner was promoted to major in April 1862, and in May 1862 wrote his wife that "I will go into the action however with as brave a heart as I can command, determined cheerfully to come up to the mark." At Mechanicsville, on June 26, 1862, Skinner helped lead the charge of the 1st North Carolina until he was shot down. He ordered his men to "rally around the flag," and died on the field. John A. Benbury succeeded Skinner as captain of the "Albemarle Guards," and led the company until he was mortally wounded at Malvern Hill on July 1, 1862. He died of his wounds on July 3, "beloved and mourned by the entire regiment." Image: N.C. Division of Archives and History.

Back Cover

Issued in September 1863, this battle flag was captured on May 12, 1864, during the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House when Federal troops overran the position held by the 1st Regiment North Carolina State Troops. The flag was returned by the U. S. War Department to the State of North Carolina in 1905. The Society for the Preservation of the 26th Regiment North Carolina Troops selected this flag as its seventh project with the North Carolina Museum of History and will dedicate it during the Annual Business Meeting on January 19, 2013.



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CONTENTS

“For the Duration of the War”

4

The 26th Regiment North Carolina Troops: March 1862-April 1863

By David McGee.

“On a Hot Trail”

22

The 1st Regiment North Carolina State Troops at the Battle of Malvern Hill

By Bob Williams

Old and Sad Associations

38

The Alfred May Collection: North Carolina Museum of History

By Tom Belton

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For the Dur

26th Regiment North Carolina Troops, March 1862-April 1863

By David McGee

Following the Confederate defeat at New Bern, the 26th North Carolina remained at Kinston through early June. During this period, the regiment underwent a number of organizational changes. The first came on March 17, when a reorganization of Confederate troops in eastern North Carolina transferred it from Branch's command to the brigade of General Robert Ransom. Those men who did not like the leadership of General Branch soon had a chance to experience service under a different general. Along with the 26th North Carolina, Ransom's brigade included the 24th, 25th, 35th, 48th, and 49th North Carolina regiments.¹

Although the new brigade was composed of units with little if any combat experience, Ransom moved quickly to bring a fighting edge to his troops. A West Point graduate and former Regular Army officer, he believed in having a well-disciplined unit. Ransom conducted numerous drills and strictly enforced camp regulations while the unit remained at Kinston.²

The men of the 26th North Carolina quickly tired of their daily routine at Kinston. They wanted something more exciting to occupy their time other than two drills and a dress parade each day. While the enlisted men may have been bored, officers remained busy trying to solve a number of ongoing problems.³

The first obstacle to overcome involved clothing and equipping the regiment. When Federal forces broke the Confederate line at New Bern, they captured the camp of the 26th North Carolina (located close behind the lines) and took everything except what the men had with them during the battle. Quartermaster J. J. Young reported that all the tents, blankets, overcoats, and extra clothing for the men were gone. In addition, the regiment lost 879 knapsacks, 806 haversacks, 524 canteens, 569 cartridge boxes, and 495 muskets. Young attributed this "great loss" in guns (and presumably cartridge boxes) to the fact that many men were sick or at home on a reenlistment furlough, and their gear was in camp when the enemy captured it.⁴

Immediately after arriving at Kinston, Colonel Vance appealed to the people of the state for assistance. He pleaded through the Raleigh *Standard* for clothes; his men were "in a most destitute condition" and the government would be unable to supply the regiment with clothing for weeks. Within a week after Vance's call, garments poured into camp. On April 2, the *Standard* needed a full column to print a list of all the goods sent to the regiment. The assistance did not end there, as clothing continued to arrive for several weeks.⁵



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Vance also had to rebuild the numerical strength of his troops. Late in March he told his wife that although the men were in good spirits, the regiment was much reduced by “sickness and loss in battle.” Disease again swept through the unit, this time killing and disabling a number of soldiers. From the middle of March through the end of May, sixty-two men died from typhoid fever and other illnesses. The poor campsite at New Bern, the ongoing exposure to the elements, and the poor sanitation habits of the soldiers all took their toll.⁶

To attract recruits to the regiment, Vance began an ardent enlistment campaign. This included newspaper advertisements in which Vance stated the number of troops needed by each company. He also warned that “men liable to draft in those counties had better come along at once like white men, and not wait for the sheriff to bring them to me.”

While it is not possible to determine what attracted the new men--the recruiting campaign, the threat of conscription, or the lure of the \$65 bounty--they flocked to the regiment. Fifty-four men enlisted in Company K alone. From March 20 to March 30, the regiment received 114 recruits. Ninety more joined over the next two months.⁷

Two recruits brought a touch of notoriety (and humor) to the regiment. On March 20, Keith and Samuel Blalock, from Caldwell County, enlisted in Company F. The Blalocks served for one month before Keith contracted a rash from rolling in poison sumac. The rash proved severe that the doctors could not diagnose the cause and, fearing he had a contagious disease, dismissed him from service. Samuel then went to Colonel Vance and asked to be dismissed as well--on the grounds that he was a woman. On examination, the surgeon verified the claim, and she received a discharge along with her husband Keith. According to a newspaper account, Malinda (Samuel's real name) had “drilled with her company and was learning fast . . . it was unanimously voted that Mrs. Blaylow [sic] was ‘some punkins’.”⁸

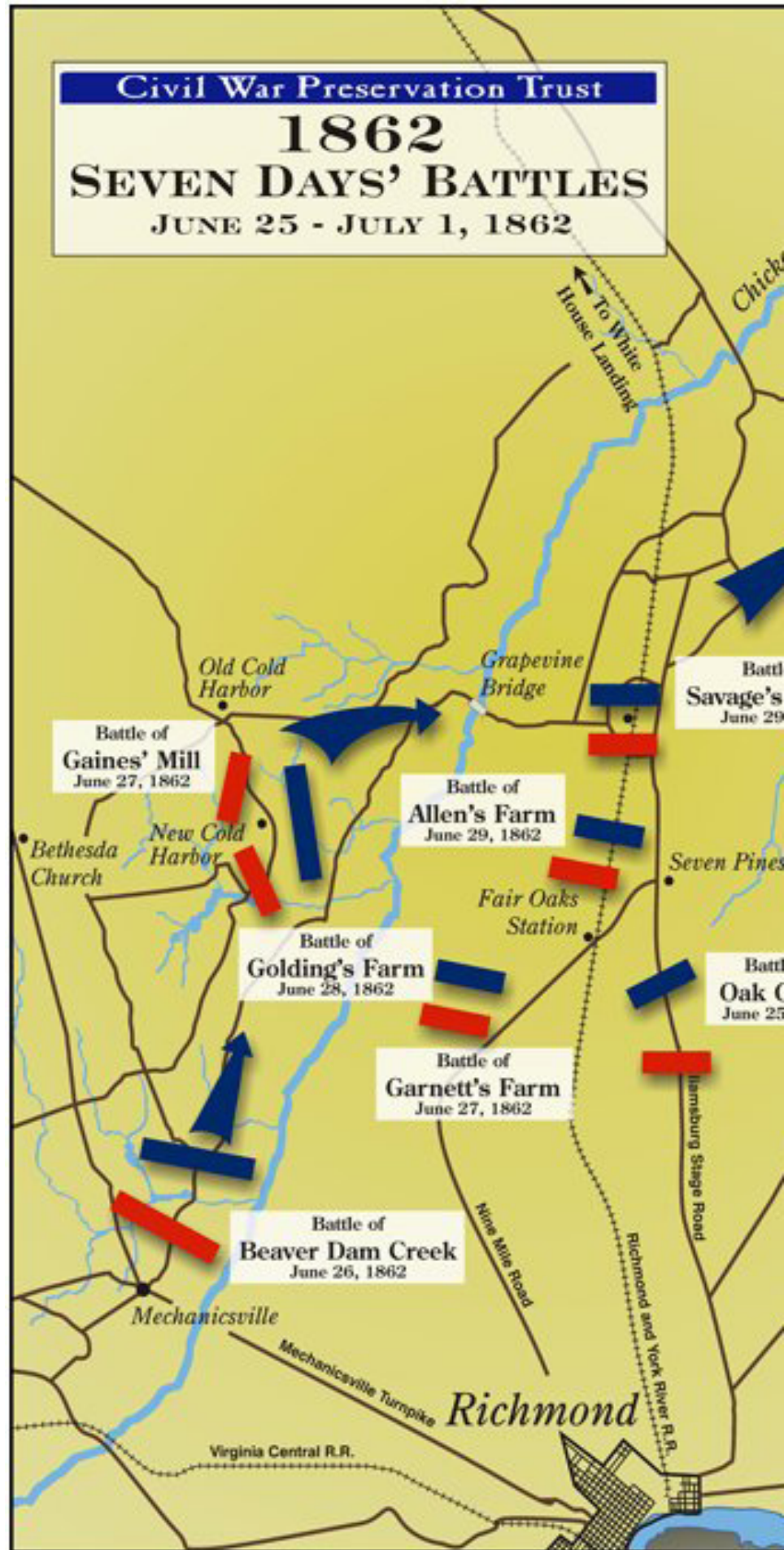
In addition to bringing in new recruits, the officers had to convince their men (who had originally enlisted to serve for twelve months) to reenlist for the duration of the war. The reenlistment process had begun

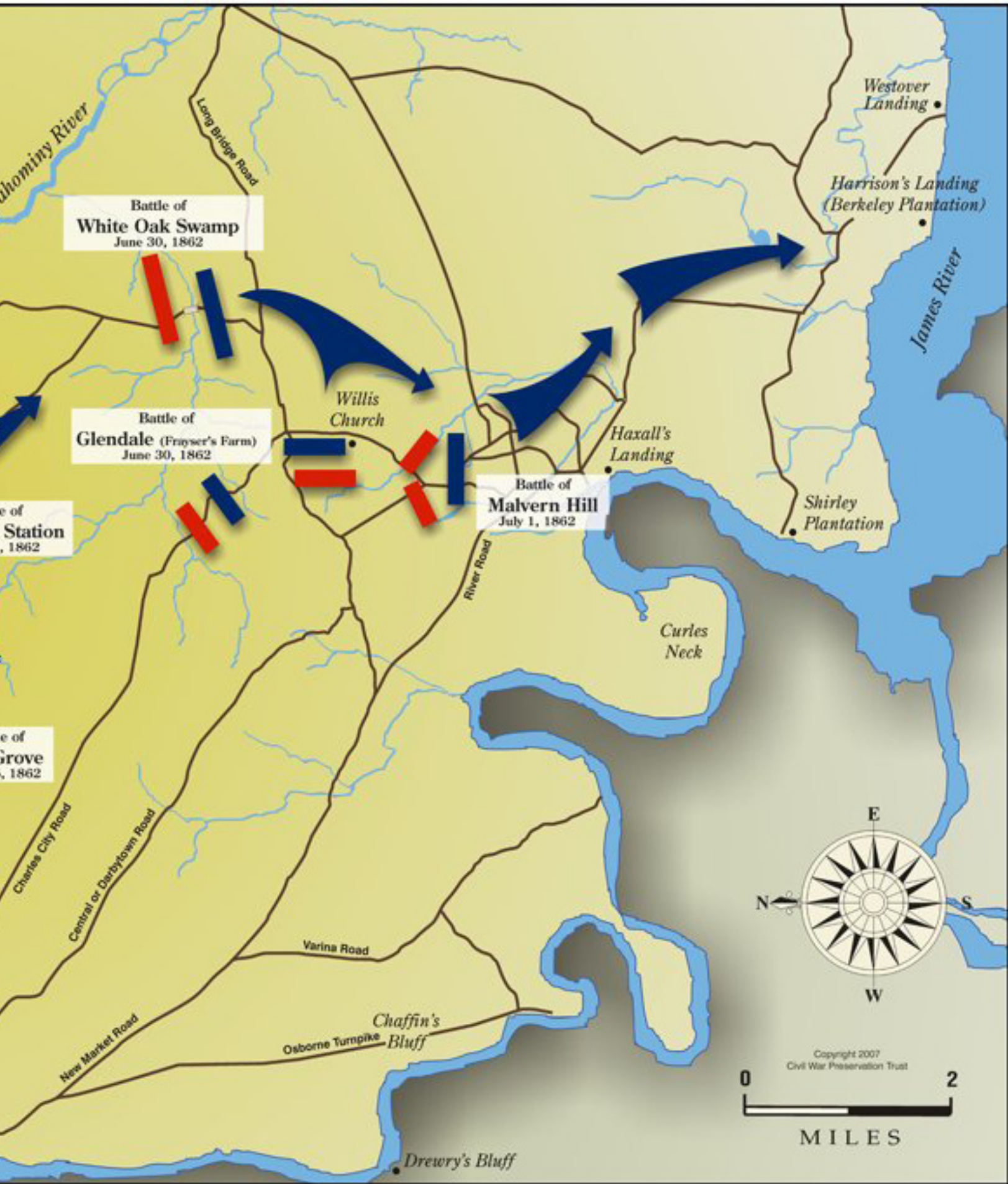
back in February and continued while the unit remained at Kinston. Colonel Vance, an excellent speaker, entreated his troops to remain with the regiment. His appeal, along with the threat of conscription, helped bring a number of reenlistments. By April 22, a sufficient number of men signed up to fight “for the duration,” allowing the 26th North Carolina to reorganize officially for the war.⁹

As part of reorganization, soldiers received the right to elect their company officers. Company officers would then choose the field officers. During this process, a number of changes occurred in the regiment’s leadership. Six companies received new captains. At the same time, Major Nathaniel P. Rankin resigned and Lieutenant James S. Kendall was elected to replace him.¹⁰

Vance’s popularity with his soldiers brought him easy reelection as colonel. For Lieutenant Colonel Burgwyn, the issue remained in doubt for some time. His reputation as a tough drillmaster made him unpopular with the troops. This was offset to a large degree by his performance at New Bern, where he consistently led the rearguard of the regiment as it retreated. In the end, Burgwyn won reelection by a majority no more than four votes.¹¹

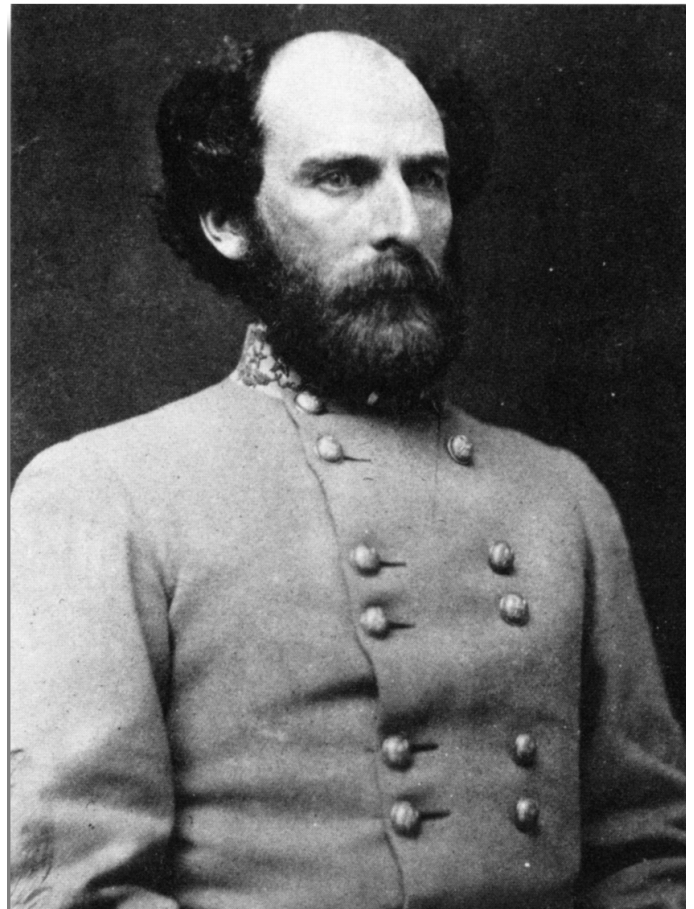
Ransom’s brigade remained in the area around Kinston and Goldsboro until the middle of June. During that period it saw limited skirmish action as Burnside consolidated his hold on New Bern. At the same time, in Virginia, General George B. McClellan began his Peninsula Campaign







N.C. Division of Archives and History



Mast, *State Troops and Volunteers*, 128

The extreme youth (twenty-one years old) of Colonel Henry K. Burgwyn (*left*) caused a conflict with his superior, Brigadier General Robert Ransom (*right*), a West Point graduate and former U.S. Army officer. Burgwyn’s petition to remove his regiment from Ransom’s command was successful, and the 26th North Carolina became part of the brigade commanded by Brigadier General James Johnston Pettigrew.

against Richmond.

As reports from Richmond reached eastern North Carolina, the soldiers prepared to depart for Virginia. On the evening of June 19, Vance addressed his troops: “Fellow soldiers, it gives me great pleasure to announce to you that we will leave for Richmond, Va., tomorrow morning by daylight to take part in the vital struggle now pending before its walls.” The soldiers greeted Vance’s speech with “shouts of exultation.”¹²

When the regiment reached the railroad the next morning, they found that the train had room for only eight companies. The other two waited for a later train. Nonetheless, the troops began their trip to Virginia. On reaching Goldsboro, one car broke down and several others jumped the tracks. The men got the train moving again after several hours’ work. Heavily loaded, the train moved slowly, at one point covering only eleven miles in nine hours. On the evening of June 21, the troops debarked at Petersburg after enduring a thirty-hour journey.¹³

The 26th North Carolina, along with the remainder of Ransom’s brigade, remained at Petersburg for several days. During that time Ransom kept his soldiers ready to march. He ordered that each man have “light knapsacks, 40 rounds of cartridges, and 4 days rations” prepared.¹⁴

On the morning of June 24, the regiment received orders to board the train for Richmond at one o'clock that afternoon. The troops marched to the depot, only to learn their departure would be delayed. About 9:00 p.m. they boarded. Nearly 900 men had to be "pushed . . . shoved, and crammed" into only seventeen cars (including stable cars with horses) to make room for the entire regiment. Reaching Richmond at 1:00 a.m., the men bivouacked on the grounds of Capital Square.¹⁵

After a few hours' rest, the regiment and the rest of Ransom's brigade joined General Benjamin Huger's division near King's School House, some five miles from Richmond on the Williamsburg Road and opposite the battlefield of Seven Pines. Huger's position was under attack by Union General Joseph J. Hooker's division. Huger brought up Ransom's troops to help stem the Federal advance.¹⁶

As troops filed into their position a mile and a half behind the advance forces, heavy artillery and rifle fire broke out on the front lines. While the men of the 26th North Carolina waited for orders to move forward, they saw ambulances and stretcher bearers pass carrying the wounded. An occasional "suppressed groan" certainly informed the new recruits that "war was no pastime."¹⁷

The regimental band played the stirring strains of "Marseilles" as the men moved forward to a position close behind the front lines. While they awaited further orders, the troops endured a bombardment in the woods all around them. After nightfall, the unit, along with Colonel Matt Ransom's regiment, started out on picket duty. Vance took five companies and moved through the woods to find the Georgia regiment he was to relieve. He ordered Burgwyn to follow with the balance of the men and to post them "as best possible."¹⁸

The lieutenant colonel took his men into the woods; but before they went 200 yards, they became entangled in a swampy area. Burgwyn repeatedly tried to find his way to Vance's position. Limited visibility ("10 paces") hampered the effort. Giving up the search, he posted his men as best he could in the dark. Unfortunately, Burgwyn placed some of the troops "entirely within the enemies [sic] lines." He then made another effort to locate Vance.¹⁹

Scarcely had Burgwyn found the other half of the regiment when shooting began from where he had left his men. Almost immediately, firing erupted along the entire line of the 26th North Carolina. While some of the men lay behind a rail fence, "Yankees poked their guns through the cracks to fire at them." In Burgwyn's sector, men received fire from front and rear, often at distances of less than ten yards. Some had their beards singed by rifle blasts. As the musket balls flew among them "thick as hail," most of the troops fell back in disarray, reforming at some distance to the rear of the picket line. Only Companies G, H, and K held their positions.²⁰

At this point Lieutenant Colonel Burgwyn became irate with his brigade commander. Informing Ransom that the pickets were driven in, he requested further instructions. Ransom simply told Burgwyn to retake his former position. Burgwyn fumed at being ordered to go back to a spot he did not think he could find "to save myself from the gallows, and in hunting which I was liable at any moment to run upon a concealed foe." Nonetheless, he led the men who regrouped (about 100) back into the woods. He remained there until morning, when he united his force with that of Vance.²¹



At daylight on June 26, the reformed regiment moved forward with other troops and retook the picket lines which the Federal troops had abandoned sometime during the night. Around 9:00 a.m., orders reached Vance to advance 300 yards and extend the regiment. This meant that the 26th North Carolina formed a skirmish line that covered the front of the Confederate line for about three-quarters of a mile. The weary troops settled down in their new position and tried to rest. Except for killing two Yankees who wandered too close to the picket line, little happened for the remainder of the day. Confederates stripped one of the dead men of his Enfield rifle and accoutrements. His boots became the property of a “not over sensitive Confed. who required just such an article.”²²

About 5:00 p.m., another regiment relieved the 26th North Carolina from picket duty. As the men reached their camp they heard a “terrific cannonading” break the stillness of the evening. On the north side of the Chickahominy River, General Robert E. Lee’s offensive against the George McClellan’s Army of the Potomac had begun in earnest near Mechanicsville. Although the rifle fire could not be heard from that distance, the roar of the artillery continued until around 9:00 p.m.²³

Early the next morning the men moved forward in support of a Georgia regiment. As they advanced, word came that Lee’s army had taken possession of Mechanicsville, “completely defeating the enemy.” Continuing on, they passed over ground where much of the June 25 battle had been fought. According to Burgwyn, “guns and equipments and bits of clothing, and finally unburied ghastly bodies met our gaze at every step. The sight was one calculated to excite reflections of the most serious nature.”

After going about 400 yards, the troops met scattered fire. Skirmishers moved out to discover the exact location of the enemy. Commands, coming from the Federal lines, indicated that an attack was forthcoming. As the enemy formed, Confederate artillery opened fire on the Union position and stopped the threatened ad-



Typical swampy terrain near the old Seven Pines battle-field east of Richmond over which Vance and Burgwyn struggled to maintain the Confederate picket line on June 25th. From a photo taken in 1912

www.thepastwhispers.com

vance. The regiment remained in place until nightfall, when another unit relieved it.²⁴

The troops spent most of June 28 resting and preparing rations. At 4:00 p.m., Vance received orders to support a Virginia regiment on picket. Advancing down the Williamsburg Road, he split the regiment in two, sending Burgwyn with four companies to the left of the road while keeping six companies on the right. During the night the men heard “rumblings of wagons and apparently a great commotion in the enemy’s camps. Large fires were seen to burn brightly.” The “commotion” the troops heard came from McClellan’s army as it burned its stores and continued its retreat.²⁵

Shortly after daybreak, the men pushed forward rapidly and found the Federal entrenchments around Seven Pines abandoned. Evidence of battle lay in abundance. Trees marked by artillery and rifle fire, human and equine bodies laying unburied, and discarded equipment remained in plain view of the soldiers. Officers kept the troops in their ranks and did not permit them to enjoy the bounty of the abandoned camp. A few somehow managed to gather relics “by which to remember the Yankees.”²⁶

The regiment received orders to return to camp as quickly as possible, get breakfast, and to proceed down the Charles City Road in pursuit of the enemy. Around 10:00 a.m., shortly after the unit began its march, General Huger received orders from General John B. Magruder to protect the right of his force. Huger’s troops remained in support of Magruder for almost three hours before General Lee ordered the division to proceed down the Charles City Road.²⁷

After bivouacking the night of June 29 along the road, the men of the 26th North Carolina broke camp and continued their march. Around 4:00 p.m., they reached White Oak Swamp. The soldiers could hear the sound of fighting a mile ahead of them. Although firing continued until dark, Huger did not commit his troops

to battle. The soldiers camped that night along the swamp.²⁸

While the troops moved forward, the musicians followed behind and assisted the regimental surgeon. Band members dressed the wounds of the slightly injured, and helped the surgeon with more serious cases (such as amputations). They also attended to a number of other medical tasks.²⁹

Early on the morning of July 1, the men broke camp and resumed their pursuit of McClellan's army. By noon, they reached the battleground near Frayser's Farm (Glendale) (the battle the men had heard the previous day), where many of the wounded still lay pleading for assistance. Burgwyn stated that the smell of the "putrid air," the sights and sounds, all conspired to make a vivid impression on his memory.

The soldiers would confront much worse before the day ended. Soon after passing Frayser's Farm, Ransom's brigade moved to support the flank of Magruder's division as it assaulted the Federal position on Malvern Hill. McClellan had posted a strong artillery force, supported by infantry, atop the hill. Magruder's plan called for his troops to attack across "gentle slope of cleared land laid out in clover and corn" for about a mile.³⁰

As the men of the 26th North Carolina watched, Confederate regiments moved forward only to be "mowed down . . . with their artillery." At 7:00 p.m., the brigade received orders to move into position to charge the enemy. Ransom halted the regiment before it advanced far. While the shells fell around them, he made the troops form in close order before he sent them forward.³¹

The men advanced up the Quaker Church Road (which cut through the middle of the battlefield). They had not gone very far when they came to a point where the road forked, and they took the wrong branch. Pushing forward, they met "skulkers from all states" retiring from the battle. Burgwyn grabbed one skulker and threatened to kill him with a sword unless he guided the lieutenant colonel into battle. The man agreed.³²

The regiment remained under fire from Union artillery the entire time. As Vance led the troops forward, they took advantage of a "little swell in the ground" to stop and reform their line of battle. Darkness fell, but men scrambled over a fence and continued the charge. They kept their course by relying on flashes from the Federal cannon. As the soldiers got closer to the enemy, they came upon other Confederates laying on the ground. These men told Burgwyn not to fire because friendly troops lay in front of the regiment. He stopped the unit and ordered his troops to lay down.³³

After the fighting ceased about 10:00 p.m., Ransom ordered his brigade to move quietly off the field. Part of the regiment did so in good order. Earlier however, Vance with a portion of the unit had been ordered into a small piece of woods. In the confusion they became separated from the others. During the night the men lay on or near the battlefield listening to the cries of the wounded. Burgwyn could distinctly hear them call, "3rd Alabama come and take me off; 2nd Louisiana give me some water."³⁴

As a cold rain fell on the morning of July 2, the Confederates looked over the grisly battlefield at Malvern Hill and saw that McClellan's army had left during the night. The officers of Ransom's brigade spent the remainder of the day collecting stragglers and organizing their units. They also struggled to care for the numerous wounded men (Confederate and Federal) as best they could.

The regiment remained near the battlefield for two days, then made its way back toward Richmond. On July 6, the troops received “a much needed rest.” The next day they resumed their hot, dusty march. By July 9, the men reached their new camp at Drewry’s Bluff.³⁵

Because Huger’s Division was not heavily engaged during most of the Seven Days, the 26th North Carolina suffered lightly in comparison to many other units in the Confederate army. During the campaign the unit lost 15 killed (or mortally wounded), 56 wounded, and 2 captured. With the exception of being partially routed the night of June 25 at King’s Schoolhouse, the regiment performed the limited tasks assigned it during the campaign. The men knew they had played a role in defeating McClellan and their morale remained strong.³⁶

The regiment remained at Drewry’s Bluff for three weeks. On July 29, it moved to Camp French, near Petersburg. The men spent much of this time building breastworks to make the area easier to defend against enemy attack. On one occasion the unit marched down to City Point. From there the men could see McClellan’s camp across the river. Near dark, Gus Jarratt ventured down to the edge of the water and got a look at the “celebrated Monitor.”³⁷

Two major changes took place in the regiment at Petersburg. In mid-August, Vance left the unit. A short time later, the 26th North Carolina was transferred from Ransom’s brigade.

In early June, 1862, a number of people pushed Vance’s name forward as a gubernatorial candidate. On June 15 he accepted the nomination. Vance won the election by a landslide, beating his opponent by more than a two-to-one margin (almost four-to-one among the soldiers). With his election, governor-elect Vance left the regiment. On August 11, the officers presented him with a ceremonial sword. The evening before he departed, Vance made a speech to his troops that “brought the tears to many an eye that had long been a stranger to such a thing.” The next morning, Vance left the 26th North Carolina.³⁸

During his time as colonel, Vance performed his duties reasonably well. Although lacking the military knowledge of Burgwyn, he brought to the position a number of other skills. Among these were the ability to recruit and inspire troops with his oratory skills, and his evident concern for the men who served under him. While Vance and Burgwyn did not always get along with each other, together they formed an effective team. In many instances Vance treated Burgwyn as a co-commander rather than a subordinate. One dealt with organizing and caring for the soldiers; the other handled the drill and discipline necessary to create an efficient military unit.

The issue of who would be the next colonel precipitated the second major change for the regiment. Burgwyn appeared the logical replacement for Vance, but he soon ran into strong opposition from outside the unit. General Ransom made quite clear his view that he considered Burgwyn too young to make a competent commander. Over the objections of the regiment, he nominated the lieutenant colonel of the 1st North Carolina Cavalry (Ransom’s first command) to lead the 26th North Carolina. Ransom even went to see President Jefferson Davis concerning the matter. Davis told him that the conscription act (which allowed units to choose their officers) would not allow Burgwyn’s promotion to be blocked. Thus, at age twenty, Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., became the “boy colonel.”³⁹

Because of the tension between Ransom and Burgwyn, the latter petitioned to have the regiment transferred to another brigade. Orders soon came from Richmond to shift the 26th North Carolina to a brigade commanded by General J. Johnston Pettigrew. On August 27, as Ransom's troops marched out of camp heading north, the regiment marched south to Camp French near Petersburg. There it joined with the 11th, 44th, 47th, and 52nd North Carolina regiments.⁴⁰

The 26th occupied a unique position in Pettigrew's brigade: it was the only unit which had seen any combat. Despite this advantage, Burgwyn labored to improve what he believed was a "disorganized" unit. Every day the troops practiced battalion maneuvers for two hours in the morning and two more hours in the evening. Following the second drill, the troops formed for dress parade. The colonel also worked to keep his men physically fit. Three times a week the troops went on six mile marches.⁴¹

During the fall of 1862 the regiment grew in number. At one time, Captain John R. Lane travelled to Raleigh and returned with 110 volunteers and conscripts. In mid-October, Burgwyn informed his father that the unit had 1,172 men. He may have been correct in stating that it was "perhaps the largest regiment in the C.S.A."⁴²

The final task Burgwyn faced in shaping the unit to suit him was to fill the vacant offices of lieutenant colonel and major. He wanted either Captain Oscar Rand or Captain John T. Jones as his second-in-command. Objections from his senior captains forced him to change plans. After nearly two months of dispute, the vacancies were finally filled. Captain John R. Lane received the appointment to lieutenant colonel and Captain Jones became the major. Although Burgwyn showed some disappointment in Lane's promotion, he expressed his pleasure at the overall situation of the regiment.⁴³

For the most part, soldiers fared well at Camp French. Moderately cool fall weather allowed the men to drill and work on entrenchments without suffering as they had during the hot, humid summer months. They also enjoyed visits from family and friends. In addition to bringing a touch of home to the camp, these visitors often brought clothes, food, liquor, and other delicacies.⁴⁴

The major complaints of the troops concerned a lack of food and shoes. L. L. Polk told his mother that he ate all he could, "for it is precious little. We are living very hard so far as eating is concerned." The problem came not from a scarcity of food so much as high prices. According to William Glenn, soldiers with money used most of it to feed themselves, while those without "must beg" or go hungry.⁴⁵

A lack of shoes presented another problem. In September, when Pettigrew's brigade advanced on Suffolk, Burgwyn had to leave behind those without shoes. On October 16, he told his father that not less than 200 men were without shoes and many more nearly barefoot. The problem remained a month later. As the regiment campaigned in eastern North Carolina, a number of troops marched barefoot through mud and snow.⁴⁶

The 26th North Carolina participated in a number of minor campaigns during the fall and winter of 1862-1863. The first of these came in the middle of September, when Pettigrew's brigade (and several other attached units) advanced on the Federal base at Suffolk. Confederates progressed as far as the Seaboard and Roanoke Railroad, twenty-five miles from Suffolk, when word came to halt the movement and return to Peters-



Image: Mr. L. R. Gorrell

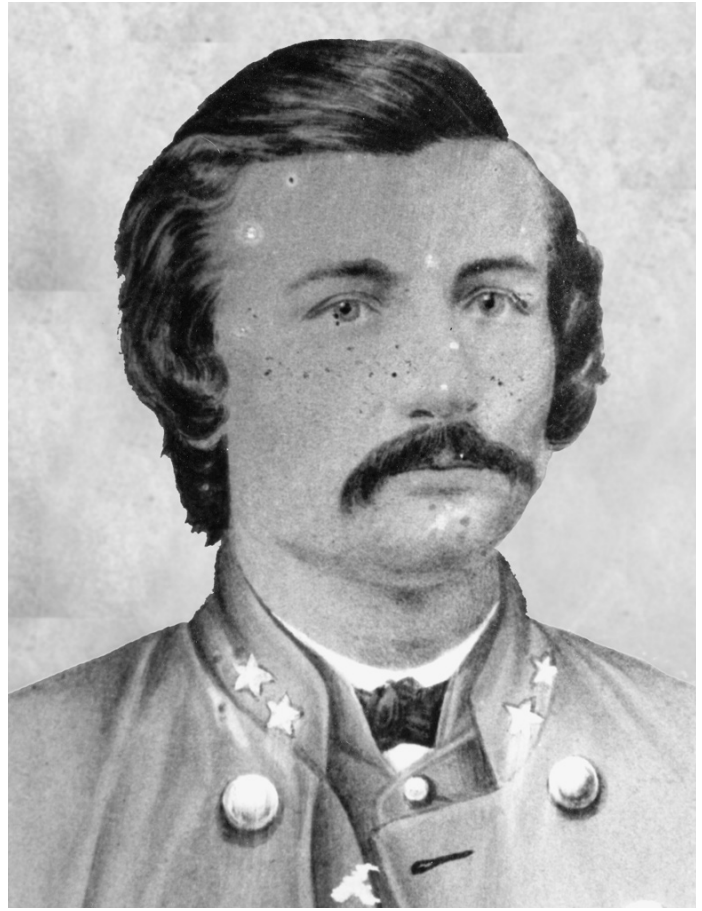


Image: N.C. Division of Archives and History

The death of Major Abner Bynum Carmichael at the Battle of New Bern and the election as governor of Colonel Vance left two field officer vacancies in the 26th North Carolina. Captain John Randolph Lane (*left*) of Company E received the promotion to lieutenant colonel, and Captain John T. Jones (*right*) of Company I became the major.

burg. Soldiers trudged back to camp in “a bad humor because we had to march so far and did not get to whip the yankees.”⁴⁷

After remaining in camp for nearly a month, the regiment received orders to proceed to eastern North Carolina. There it worked with the 17th and 59th North Carolina regiments in an operation against the Union garrison at Plymouth. As the Confederates neared the town, Colonel Radcliffe, commanding the expedition, detached the five companies of the 26th North Carolina to watch the Federal forces at nearby Washington. Radcliffe’s move turned out to be prudent. While he attempted to capture Plymouth, General John G. Foster moved up to Washington with over 5,000 men in an effort to trap the three Rebel regiments.⁴⁸

On November 2, Foster’s troops moved out from Washington. A short time later they encountered two companies from the 26th North Carolina at Little Creek. The Federal commander pushed a brigade forward to drive them back. For nearly an hour, the Tar Heels (reinforced by two more companies) held their ground at the creek. Realizing they would soon be overrun, Burgwyn pulled them back to another position behind a creek and pond at Rawls’ Mill. There the troops delayed the Union advance for a half-hour. As the sun set, the Confederates burned the bridge at the mill and withdrew into the darkness. Although forced to retreat, the five

companies delayed Foster's advance long enough to allow the other two North Carolina units time to pull back from Plymouth.⁴⁹

The regiment returned to its quarters at Camp French. Except for a brief trip back to North Carolina in mid-December, when Foster threatened to cut the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad at Goldsboro, the troops remained at their base for the next six weeks. The men quickly erected log houses for their winter quarters. Each building measured approximately sixteen by eighty feet, and was divided into six rooms. The dwellings were "chinked and daubed" and had a chimney for every two rooms. From eight to ten enlisted men shared a room. The officers had a house for themselves, which allowed them more room than the privates.⁵⁰

Yet like the previous year, the men did not get to enjoy their quarters very long. Less than six weeks passed before the regiment was ordered to join the rest of Pettigrew's forces in North Carolina. At the time the brigade operated from Magnolia, south of Goldsboro, on the Wilmington and Weldon line.⁵¹

Although the troops had no tents, they got along well in their new location. A plentiful supply of food, clothing, and blankets helped compensate somewhat for the exposure. Men even built "houses" out of brush to serve as a wind break. Drilling and marching consumed most of their time. To some enlisted soldiers, marching from one place to another, then back, seemed quite pointless.⁵²

During this period, Captain Louis G. Young, Assistant Adjutant General for the brigade, inspected the regiment. He evaluated the men on the basis of discipline, instruction, clothing, military appearance, weapons, equipment, and officer capability. Young rated Companies H and K as the best in the regiment. He stated that Company I was the "most indifferent Company . . . but not so bad as to be reported for its deficiencies." Young also noted that many companies were equipped with both muskets and rifles, and suggested they be armed with the same type of weapons if possible.⁵³

The most serious complaint of the soldiers concerned furloughs. For troops in the 26th North Carolina, along with those in many other Southern regiments, the Confederate Army's system of granting leave became a tantalizing morsel that remained out of reach for most. According to regulations, only one out of every twenty-five men in an outfit could go home at any given time. Yet a catch existed. Companies which had deserters or men absent without leave did not receive any furloughs. In Burgwyn's regiment, desertions disqualified all ten companies from receiving any furloughs under the rules.⁵⁴

The outrage of the soldiers over the lack of furloughs became tangible. "An Officer" and "A Private" from the regiment wrote letters to the *Raleigh Standard*. They angrily denounced the system for granting leave. The officer argued that a "few unpatriotic, cowardly" deserters kept all the men in the unit from getting a furlough. He pleaded in the name of common sense and humanity for passes for the "gallant men . . . who have braved the storms of two wintry campaigns . . . barefooted and nearly naked."⁵⁵

More than leave was at stake in this issue. Desertions and absences without leave had become a major problem for the army. A variety of reasons appear to have led to the defections. Some men worried about the welfare and safety of their families. Leonidas L. Polk confided his unease in a letter to his mother, telling her that he believed his wife and children would not be safe living in their isolated house by themselves. Another

soldier worried about his family having sufficient food. He reminded his wife to claim her share of food provided to soldiers' families by county.⁵⁶

Other men undoubtedly left because they did not identify with the Confederate cause. A strong pro-Union sentiment remained in the northwestern mountain and central piedmont counties. Although these counties responded strongly to the state's first call for recruits, many people now argued that the war had become a "rich man's war and a poor man's fight." Such sentiments expressed in newspapers and letters from home did not strengthen a soldier's resolve to remain with his unit.⁵⁷

Confederate authorities hoped the system of furloughs would induce soldiers to remain with their units. In February, General Gustavus W. Smith, commander of the district, and Governor Vance issued proclamations granting a full pardon for deserters if they would return to their units immediately.⁵⁸

The 26th North Carolina had its share of deserters. On January 21, the *Standard* printed a notice from Colonel Burgwyn offering a reward for the "apprehension and delivery" of sixty-two deserters from the regiment. To prevent further desertions, Burgwyn made the threat of a firing squad very clear to his troops. In December, 1862, Sgt. Andrew Wyatt of Company B deserted. He was soon captured and a court-martial condemned him to be shot. On January 26, Pettigrew's entire brigade assembled to witness the execution. An officer read the death sentence as the firing squad (formed from Wyatt's company) took its position in front of the condemned man. Although the same officer then read another order granting Wyatt a reprieve, the point got through to the soldiers. Desertions, which had peaked in December and January, dropped dramatically over the next three months.⁵⁹

The daily camp routine ended in March when General Daniel H. Hill took command of Confederate forces in eastern North Carolina. Hill decided to attack the main Federal garrison at New Bern. His plan called for General Junius Daniel's brigade to march on the town by a road along the Trent River, and for the brigade under Pettigrew to proceed down a road to Barrington's Ferry on the north side of the Neuse River. That way, the brigades would assault the garrison from two directions at the same time.⁶⁰

On March 9, Pettigrew's men left Goldsboro. During the morning a heavy rain fell and turned the roads to mud. For four days the troops continued their fatiguing march through rain and mud. Bridges over creeks often broke under the weight of wagons and heavy artillery accompanying the brigade. At one point, the men of the 26th North Carolina had to ford a creek some thirty yards wide. Soldiers joked that wading provided a good way to get rid of the mud. At dark on March 13, the infantry stopped eight miles from the ferry. Everything was set to attack the Federal fort next day.⁶²

At daybreak on March 14, Confederate artillery began to shell Fort Anderson. The only way to attack the fort was across a causeway "a quarter of a mile long and wide enough for a small wagon." Pettigrew advanced the 26th North Carolina to a point where it could storm across the causeway. He then brought up four twenty-pound Parrot rifles to shell the fort and Union gunboats on the Neuse. The bombardment lasted only a short time. The barrel of one gun burst, the axle of another broke, and the shells from the other two were defective. Pettigrew, realizing he could not counter the fire from the gunboats, ordered his men to pull back.⁶³

When Pettigrew began his withdrawal, he ordered the regiment to remain in place and cover the retreat. For six hours, Burgwyn's men held their position in front of the causeway and endured shelling from the gunboats. At last, the order to retreat came, and the men fell back under fire.⁶⁴

Although Pettigrew and Burgwyn highly complimented the way the regiment withstood "the furious shelling of the enemy without flinching," the soldiers again felt let down. They suffered seventeen casualties during the attack and "accomplished nothing." Exactly one year before, they had been driven from their defenses below the town. Now, when they had a chance to retake it, the failure of the Confederate artillery stopped them.⁶⁵

For the next month, the regiment moved through the eastern part of the state. During this period it had several small skirmishes with Federal troops. The unit also participated in an aborted siege against Washington. Finally, on April 18, it reached the town of Hookerton, where the men rested for ten days. According to W. E. Setser, the soldiers seemed to be in "good hart," but tired of eastern North Carolina.⁶⁶

Setser and his fellow soldiers would soon get a chance to leave the state. While they operated against New Bern and Washington, Union General Joseph Hooker prepared to attack the Robert E. Lee's army near Fredricksburg, Va. On April 30, Colonel Burgwyn wrote his mother that he expected the 26th North Carolina to be called to Virginia within a week. The next day he received orders to proceed to Richmond.⁶⁷

The regiment had been in service for nearly two years. Although it could not be classified as a "veteran" combat unit, the troops possessed battle experience. While many Confederate units lost some of their best officers and men, the soldiers of the 26th North Carolina had grown in number and received countless hours of drill and discipline. The regiment now stood ready to rejoin the Army of Northern Virginia.

ENDNOTES

¹Clark, *N. C. Regiments*, II, 328. Both Orren A. Hanner and Lieutenant Colonel Burgwyn expressed contempt for Branch, referring to him as a "political general." O. A. Hanner to John Harrington, Feb. 26, 1862, John McLean Harrington Papers, Duke; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Mar. 17, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC.

²Mark M. Boatner III, *The Civil War Dictionary* (New York, 1988), 679; Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 328.

³*Sentinel*, June 20, 1914.

⁴Report of Capt. J. J. Young, Regimental Quartermaster, Box 53, Folder 14, Civil War Collection, NCDAH; W. E. Setser to W. A. Setser, Mar. 21, 1862, in Mast, "Setser Letters, Pt. 1," 33.

⁵*Raleigh Standard*, Mar. 26, Apr. 2, and Apr. 23, 1862; *Raleigh State Journal*, Apr. 9, 1862.

⁶Zebulon Vance to wife, Mar. 23, 1862, in Johnston, *Papers of Vance*, I, 131; Jordan, *North Carolina Troops*, 463-601.

⁷*Raleigh Standard*, Apr. 30, 1862; *Charlotte Western Democrat*, Apr. 15, 1862; *Wadesboro North Carolina Argus*, June 6, 1862; Jordan, *North Carolina Troops*, 463-601. The only two companies which did not advertise for recruits were F and I, from Caldwell County. Those two had already received a number of men as part of Vance's plan to build a legion (discussed later). Many of the recruits for F and I did not remain with the regiment long, transferring to the newly formed 58th North Carolina.

⁸Jordan, *North Carolina Troops*, 535; Clark, *N. C. Regiments*, II, 330-31; *Charlotte Western Democrat*, May 6, 1862. The Blalocks were known in their community as Unionist sympathizers. They probably joined the 26th North Carolina in an attempt to reach Federal lines in the eastern part of the state. When that failed, they obtained their discharges and returned to

Caldwell County. There Keith quickly joined up with Union guerilla forces led by Colonel George W. Kirk. During much of the time Keith served with Kirk, Malinda rode with him. William R. Trotter, *Bushwhackers: The Civil War in North Carolina, the Mountains* (Winston-Salem, 1988), 147-54.

⁹William H. Glenn to Elizabeth Glenn, Feb. 18, 1862, Elizabeth Glenn Papers, Duke; *Sentinel*, June 20, 1914; I. A. Jarratt to father, Apr. 22, 1862, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke.

¹⁰Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 328, 330.

¹¹*Ibid.*; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to father, Apr. 23, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC. According to Burgwyn, considerable maneuvering took place to have another person elected as lieutenant colonel.

¹²*Sentinel*, June 20, 1914; letter from S. P. Dula in the *Raleigh Standard*, July 16, 1862.

¹³*Sentinel*, June 20, 1914; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to father, June 22, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Sentinel*, June 20, 1914; letter from S. P. Dula in *Raleigh Standard*, July 16, 1862; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, July 14, 1862. Burgwyn wrote this thirty-eight page letter in the form of a journal, covering the period from June 24-July 3. Unless otherwise noted, narrative and quotations concerning the regiment's activities during this period come from this journal.

¹⁶Joseph P. Cullen, *The Peninsula Campaign, 1862: McClellan and Lee Struggle for Richmond*, (Harrisburg, PA, 1973), 84-85.

¹⁷*Raleigh Standard*, July 9, 1862; *O.R.*, XI, pt. 2, 787, 791-92.

¹⁸*Sentinel*, June 20, 1914; Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 331-32.

¹⁹Cullen described the land around King's Schoolhouse as being heavily wooded with a belt of swampy soil running through the middle of it. Cullen, *Peninsula Campaign*, 84-85.

²⁰William H. Glenn to Jane Glenn, July 14, 1862, Elizabeth Glenn Papers, Duke; Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 332.

²¹Ransom was less than pleased with the regiment's performance at King's Schoolhouse. *O.R.*, XI, pt. 2, 793.

²²Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, July 14, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC.

²³Although the battle at Mechanicsville began between 3:00-4:00 p.m., the men of the 26th evidently did not notice the firing until later. For a description of Lee's attack at Mechanicsville, see Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command* (New York, 1942-44), I, 510-14.

²⁴Ransom attributed the repulse of the Federal force to the brisk fire from the 26th North Carolina. *O.R.*, XI, pt. 2, 793.

²⁵Cullen, *Peninsula Campaign*, 128-30.

²⁶Letter from S. P. Dula in *Raleigh Standard*, July 16, 1862.

²⁷*O.R.*, XI, pt. 2, 789.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 789-90.

²⁹*Sentinel*, July 20 and July 27, 1914.

³⁰*O.R.*, XI, pt. 2, 794.

³¹*Ibid.*; I. A. Jarratt to mother, July 9, 1862, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke.

³²Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, July 14, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC. According to a map in Cullen, *Peninsula*

Campaign, 153, the Quaker Church Road forked about a quarter-mile from the Federal artillery batteries. If the 26th North Carolina took the wrong branch, it was for a time proceeding away from the battlefield (toward Richmond).

³³I. A. Jarratt to mother, July 24, 1862, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke. According to Burgwyn, one company (most likely Company I) failed to hear the order to halt and advanced right up to the edge of the artillery batteries. The body of one man was “found next day within 15 yds of the guns.” Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, July 14, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; *Raleigh Standard*, Aug. 27, 1862.

³⁴*O.R.*, XI, pt. 2, 795. Even with the cries of the wounded all around them, some of the men were so exhausted that they fell asleep “amongst the dead and wounded.” I. A. Jarratt to mother, July 24, 1862, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke; Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 333.

³⁵*Sentinel*, June 27, 1914; W. E. Setser to parents, July 16, 1862, in Mast, “Setser Letters, Pt. 2,” 27.

³⁶Jordan, *North Carolina Troops*, 463-600.

³⁷W. E. Setser to parents, July 16, 1862, in Mast, “Setser Letters, Pt. 2,” 27; John T. Jones to Edmund W. Jones, Aug. 16, 1862, Edmund W. Jones Papers, SHC; I. A. Jarratt to father, Aug. 14, 1862, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke.

³⁸*Raleigh Standard*, June 11, June 25, and Aug. 27, 1862; *Wadesboro North Carolina Argus*, June 26, 1862; J. T. Jones to Edmund Jones, Aug. 16, 1862, Edmund W. Jones Papers, SHC.

³⁹John T. Jones to Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr, Aug. 11, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; Joseph J. Young to Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., Aug. 22, 1862, *ibid.*; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Aug. 24, 1862, *ibid.*; Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 334.

⁴⁰Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Aug. 17, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 334-36; *Sentinel*, July 4, 1914.

⁴¹Davis, *Boy Colonel*, 195; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Sept. 2, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; L. L. Polk to wife, Sept. 9, 1862, L. L. Polk Papers, SHC; L. L. Polk to mother, Oct. 17, 1862, *ibid.*

⁴²Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to father, Sept. 27, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to father, Oct. 16, 1862, *ibid.*

⁴³Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to father, Sept. 9, 1862, *ibid.*; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Oct. 14, 1862, *ibid.* Although Burgwyn seemed content with the regiment’s situation, Sgt. Major Leonidas L. Polk stated that “the Regt. is very much dissatisfied. We all want old Zeb back with us.” L. L. Polk to mother, L. L. Polk Papers, SHC.

⁴⁴Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Sept. 7, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; L. L. Polk to wife, Sept. 9, 1862, L. L. Polk Papers, SHC; J. L. Henry to wife, Sept. 11, 1862, J. L. Henry Papers, Duke; W. E. Setser to family, Dec. 31, 1862, in Mast, “Setser Letters, Pt. 3,” 10-11.

⁴⁵L. L. Polk to mother, Oct. 17, 1862, L. L. Polk Papers, SHC; William Glenn to mother, Sept. 3, 1862, Elizabeth Glenn Papers, Duke.

⁴⁶W. W. Edwards to unidentified, Sept. 16, 1862, typescript in possession of Greg Mast; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to father, Oct. 16, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; W. E. Setser to family, Nov. 15, 1862, in Mast, “Setser Letters, Pt. 3,” 10.

⁴⁷The anger over the aborted advance extended from the privates all the way up to Pettigrew. Clyde N. Wilson, *Carolina Cavalier: The Life and Mind of James Johnston Pettigrew*, (Athens, 1990), 172-73; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Sept. 23, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; I. A. Jarratt to brother, Sept. 25, 1862, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke; William Glenn to brother, Sept. 24, 1862, Elizabeth Glenn Papers, Duke.

⁴⁸Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to father, Oct. 27, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 337; *O.R.*, XVIII, 20-21.

⁴⁹At one point, the fire from Companies K and I at Little Creek became so heavy that the Union officers reported they were coming under artillery fire. *O.R.*, XVIII, 20-23; Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 338.

⁵⁰Orren Hanner to John Harrington, Nov. 30, 1862, John M. Harrington Papers, Duke; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Dec.

8, 1862, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC.

⁵¹Wilson, *Carolina Cavalier*, 176.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 177; I. A. Jarratt to mother, Mar. 5, 1863, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke; *Sentinel*, July 11, 1914.

⁵³Lewis G. Young to J. J. Pettigrew, Mar. 2, 1863, quoted in Davis, *Boy Colonel*, 244. Young failed to note, and most likely did not see, that some of the enlisted men carried revolvers. Under army regulations privates could not carry pistols because they might, “in a fit of passion, at some supposed insult, shoot those in command.” George Glenn to mother, Apr. 11, 1862, Elizabeth Glenn Papers, Duke; *Charlotte Western Democrat*, July 30, 1861.

⁵⁴Richard Bardolph, “North Carolina Troops and the Deserter Problem,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, LXVI (January, 1989), 70-71; Jordan, *North Carolina Troops*, 495-600.

⁵⁵*Raleigh Standard*, Feb. 18 and Apr. 15, 1863.

⁵⁶Leonidas L. Polk to mother, Oct. 17, 1862, Leonidas L. Polk Papers, SHC; James Wright to wife, Jan. 8, 1864, John Wright Family Papers, NCDAAH.

⁵⁷Bartlett, *Civil War in North Carolina*, 181-86; Bardolph, “The Deserter Problem,” 62; Richard Reid, “A Test Case of the ‘Crying Evil’: Desertion Among North Carolina Troops during the Civil War,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, LVIII (July, 1981), 247-49.

⁵⁸Bardolph, “The Deserter Problem,” 71-72. February 10 was set as the initial deadline. Vance later extended it another month. *Charlotte Western Democrat*, Feb. 3 and Feb. 24, 1863.

⁵⁹*Raleigh Standard*, Jan. 21, 1863. Vivid descriptions of the near execution of Wyatt can be found in the letters of L. L. Polk to wife, Jan. 27, 1863, L. L. Polk Papers, SHC; William Glenn to mother, Jan. 27, 1863, Elizabeth Glenn Papers, Duke; *Sentinel*, July 18, 1914. Andrew Wyatt remained with the regiment and was killed “bravely doing his duty” on the first day at Gettysburg. Clark, *N.C. Regiments*, II, 400-01. Desertions in December and January totalled thirty-seven. That number fell to nine during February through April. Jordan, *North Carolina Troops*, 495-600.

⁶⁰Hill coordinated his demonstration against New Bern at the same time Gen. James Longstreet advanced on the Federal garrison at Suffolk. One of the reasons for these operations was to gather food supplies from eastern North Carolina and Virginia. Daniel H. Hill, *Confederate Military History: North Carolina*, (Wilmington, 1987), 151-52.

⁶¹Map from *O.R. Atlas*, Plate XCI, 3.

⁶²*O.R.*, XVIII, 192-94; *Sentinel*, July 25, 1914.

⁶³*O.R.*, XVIII, 192-93; Wilson, *Carolina Cavalier*, 183.

⁶⁴*O.R.*, XVIII, 193-94; I. A. Jarratt to mother, Mar. 17, 1863, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke; Davis, *Boy Colonel*, 242.

⁶⁵*O.R.*, XVIII, 194; I. A. Jarratt to mother, Mar. 17, 1863, Jarratt-Puryear Papers, Duke; Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Mar. 15, 1863, quoted in Davis, *Boy Colonel*, 242.

⁶⁶William Fleming to W. A. Setser, Apr. 13, 1863, in Mast, “Setser Letters, Pt. 3,” 11; W. E. Setser to family, Mar. 24, 1863, *ibid.*; *Sentinel*, July 1, 1914; Muster Roll, Company B, Apr. 30, 1863, Civil War Collection, Box 49, Folder 17, NCDAAH. Apparently, the men of Company K shared Setser’s desire to leave the state. A soldier from the 43rd North Carolina passed the regiment as it prepared to leave for Richmond. He said the men in his regiment could “easily perceive that the ‘Wild Cats’ didn’t much regret to exchange the frog-ponds, mud-holes, mosquitoes, and stagnant water of this section for the hills, clear skies, and pure water of the Rappahannock.” *Wadesboro North Carolina Argus*, May 21, 1863.

⁶⁷Henry K. Burgwyn, Jr., to mother, Apr. 30, 1863, Burgwyn Family Papers, SHC; Davis, *Boy Colonel*, 258.

HONOR HOT TRAIL

The 1st Regiment North Carolina State Troops at the Battle of Malvern Hill

By Bob Williams

“If General McClellan is there in force, we had better let him alone.” So Confederate Major General D. Harvey Hill admonished General Robert E. Lee, commander of the newly formed Army of Northern Virginia, on the morning of July 1, 1862. Following an unprecedented six days of combat among the fields, swamps, and tangled woods east of Richmond, Major General George B. McClellan’s Army of the Potomac had been doggedly driven by Lee’s legions onto a broad, elevated plateau in Henrico County, Virginia, just north of the James River. From a local resident, Hill learned that the purported Federal position, known locally as Malvern Hill, was one of daunting strength if not impregnability.

Yet, over the past week, Lee had seen his best laid plans to destroy McClellan’s army repeatedly go awry in the hands of unseasoned generals with inferior maps. He was particularly shaken by the previous day’s bloody failure to crush the Federals at Frayser’s Farm (Glendale). Ignoring the cautious advice of Hill, an individual normally contemptuous of the fighting qualities of Yankees, Lee allowed his intense frustration to override his usual sense of strategic perspective. He must try to strike the enemy once more! ¹

Corporal Patrick H. Jenkins, Company F ("Hertford Grays") 1st Regiment North Carolina State Troops. Jenkins was Killed in action at the Battle of Mechanicsville, June 26, 1862
Mast, *State Troops and Volunteers*, 302





Mast, *State Troops and Volunteers*, 28



Cdv, Author's Collection

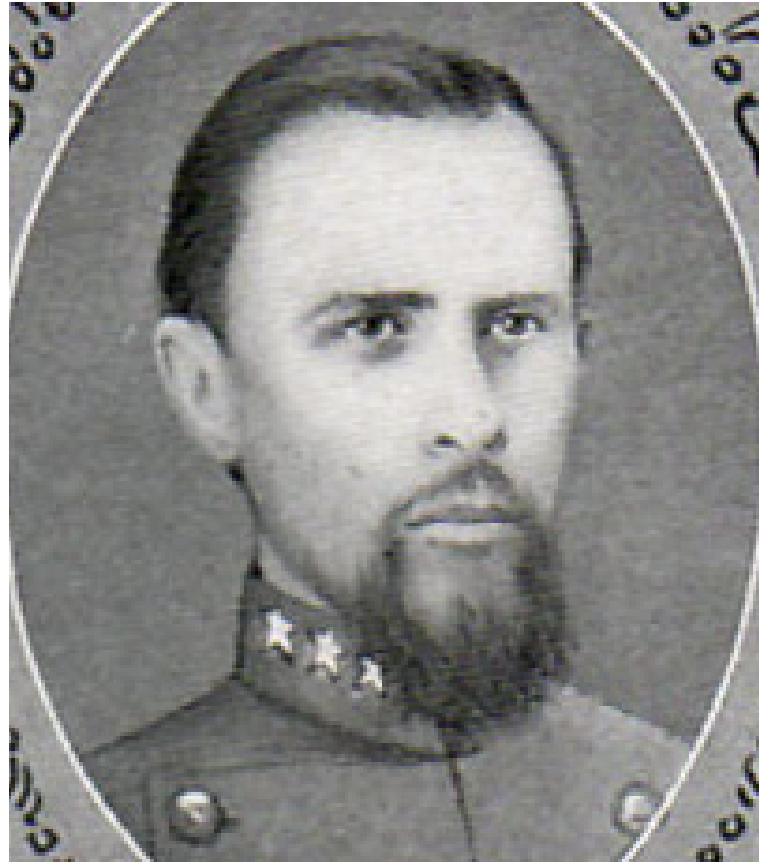
The division and brigade commanders of the 1st Regiment North Carolina State Troops. Generals D.H. Hill (*left*) and Roswell Ripley (*right*).

sands marching towards Malvern Hill, observed a milestone of sorts. Private Calvin Leach of Company B (the “Wilkes Valley Volunteers”), 1st Regiment N.C. State Troops, inscribed in his pocket diary: “Tuesday [July] 1st. This is the commencement of a new year with me in the history of this war. This day twelve months ago I left home for the field of war. During the past year the Lord has been with me and graciously delivered me from the hands of my enemies, but during the past year I have not been as faithful to my Lord and master as I should have been, but the Lord who is righteous and just to forgive is always with us to smile upon us in all our troubles. Oh Lord Thou art righteous, deliver me from trouble.”²

Private Leach and the surviving officers and enlisted men of the 1st North Carolina had reason to be grateful for deliverance, considering the traumatic events of the past week. As part of Brigadier General Roswell Ripley’s Brigade of D. H. Hill’s Division, the regiment had been brutally mauled in its baptismal engagement at Mechanicsville on June 26th. Nine officers, including Colonel Montfort Sydney Stokes, were either killed outright or severely injured. Casualties among enlisted men amounted to more than 150, with more than



Clark, *North Carolina Regiments*



www.cfspress.com/sharpshooters/gallery.html

Colonel Montfort Sidney Stokes (*left*) and Captain Hamilton Brown (*right*) who effectively took command of the regiment upon Stokes' death.

thetic.”³

The loss of cohesion was only temporary. Ripley noted in his official report: “Captain [Hamilton] A. Brown, of the 1st North Carolina, rallied the troops of his regiment, with other officers, after all the field officers had been lost, and led the regiment until relieved . . .” Although Ripley temporarily assigned official command of the battered 1st North Carolina to Lieutenant Colonel William P. Bynum of the 2nd North Carolina, Brown’s performance in this campaign and others would eventually earn him the regimental colonelcy and 13 war wounds!

Comprised of eager volunteers mustering from eleven different counties, the regiment was officially organized at Warrenton on June 3, 1861. It was one of ten regiments of “State Troops” authorized by law whose term of service was to be for three years or the duration of the war. One Confederate staff officer thought the organization exhibited “something of the esprit, called by some ‘uppishness,’ of regulars.”⁴

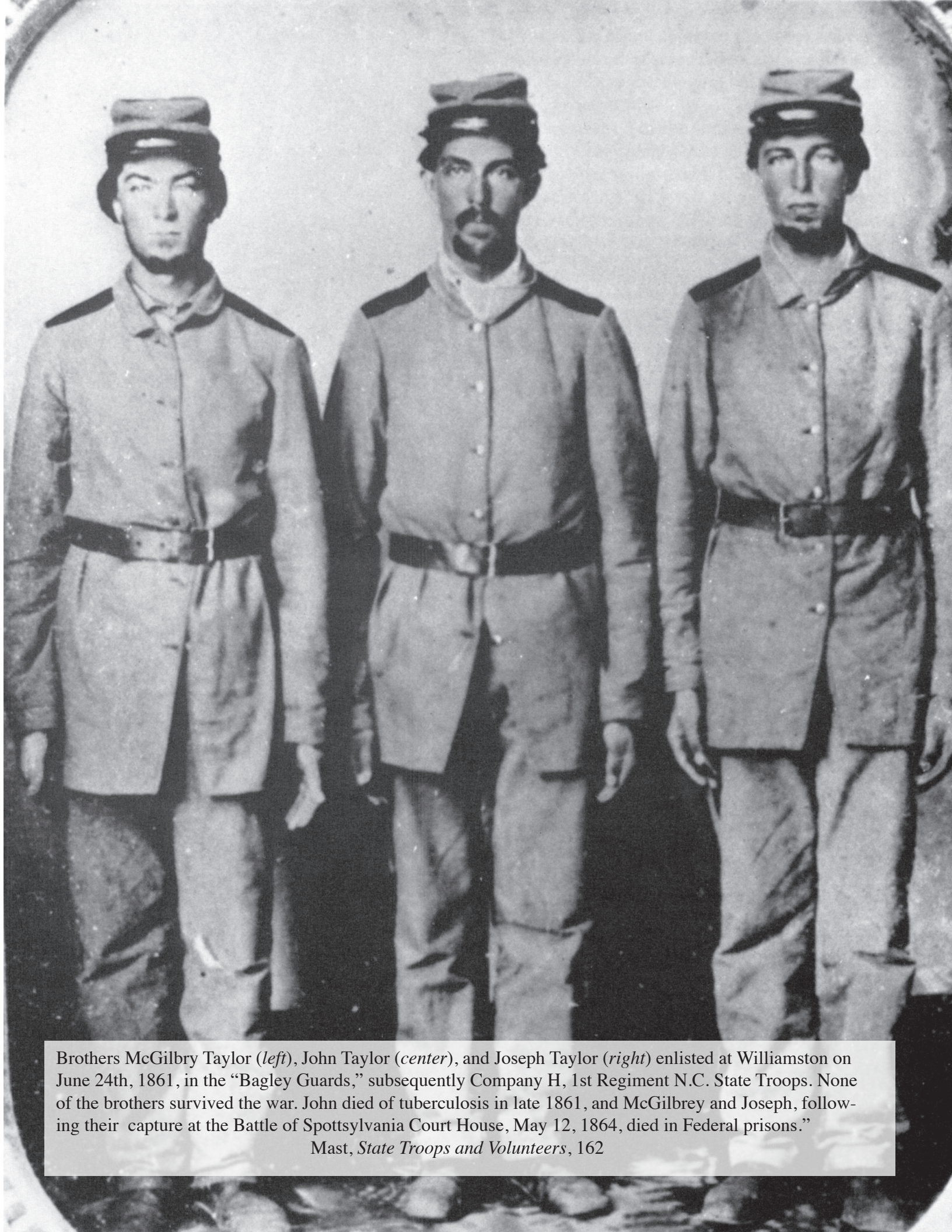
On June 27th, as Union forces withdrew from their prepared positions at Mechanicsville, the 1st North Carolina (minus a small detachment left behind to guard the Chickahominy River bridge) and Ripley’s Brigade

had joined the rest of Hill's Division in pursuit. The regiment played only a minor role in the ensuing Battle of Gaines's Mill, despite heavy casualties among the balance of Hill's troops. While Private Leach might have attributed the 1st North Carolina's light losses of 4 killed and 16 wounded to divine protection, Harvey Hill clearly faulted the Georgia-born Ripley for not keeping his brigade closer to the front. ⁵

Marcus Herring of Company C, the "Lillington Rifle Guards," provided this private's-eye view of the day's exertions: "We marched hour after hour in the broiling hot sun, and when the time came for five minutes rest, there was no shade; the little old field pines seemed but to increase the heat. Water on the road was scarce, hence we suffered greatly . . . but when we got near the battle line we forgot all about heat and thirst. We were ordered to occupy a line in the rear of the firing line, where D. H. Hill's other brigades were doing some other stunts . . . while shot and shells made discordant music over us . . . Soon fighting was renewed in front with great vigor, and receiving the order, 'Forward, guide center!' we forgot for the time all about wanting water or anything else while getting into the open in the rear of the firing line we lay down under fire . . . The charge [by the 20th North Carolina] in front was great, for after a desperate struggle, the Federals were driven from their strong position. Then we moved forward to be in position to render assistance if needed. It was dark when the regiment halted on the ground where the late charge had been made, and there mixed up were dead and wounded of both sides. Surrounded by such horrible evidences of war, we lay all night with slumbers disturbed by constant wailing of the wounded . . . So ended . . . the second battle of the Seven Days before Richmond." ⁶

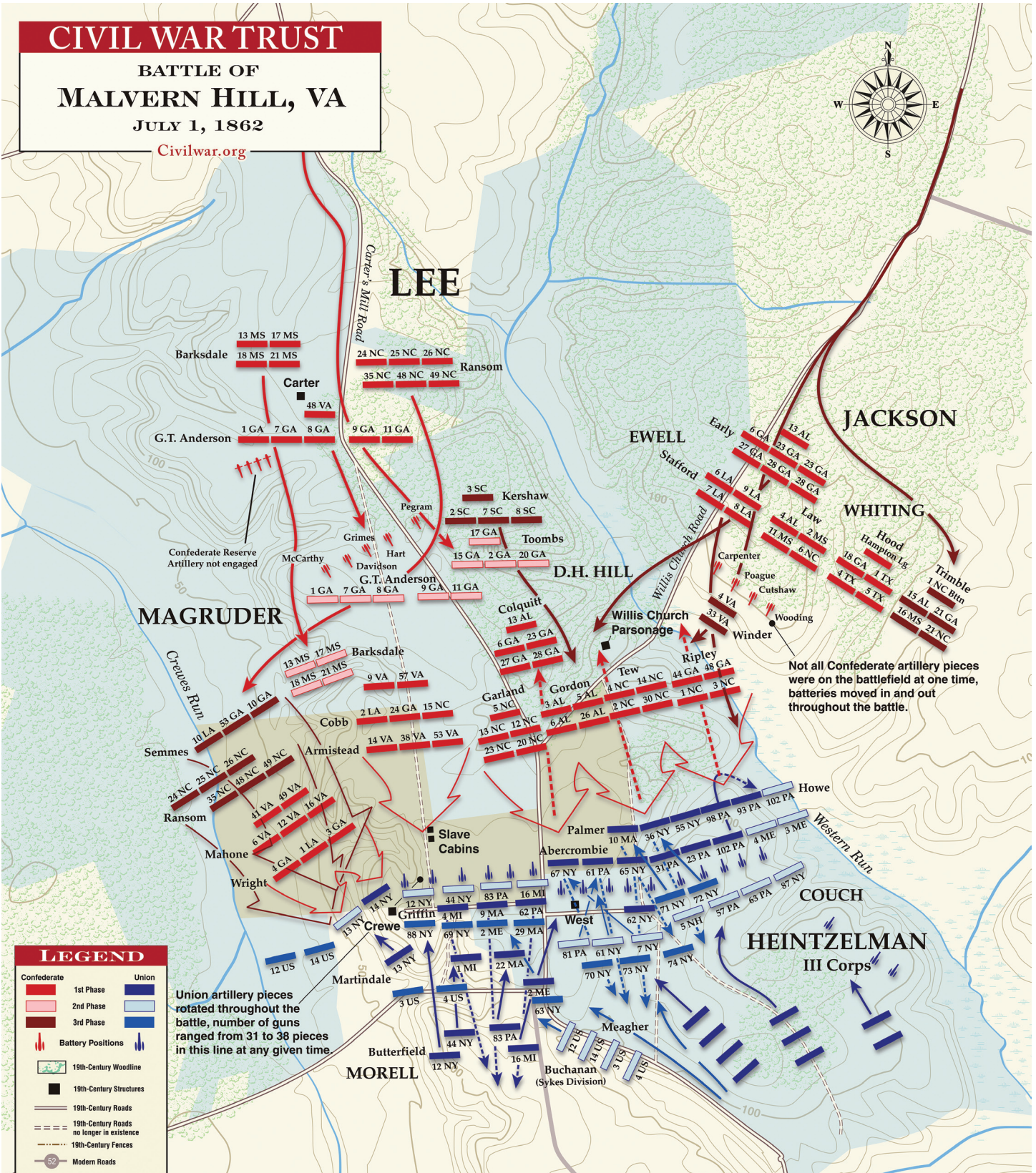
The next three days had been fatiguing but uneventful for the men of the 1st North Carolina. After burying the dead of both sides at Gaines's Mill, the regiment's activities were succinctly chronicled by Private Leach: "[Continued] in pursuit of the enemy, passed by many of their camps which was deserted by them. The enemy hastened to the cover of their gunboats. They burned all the commissary stores they could not take away with them." ⁷

The Federal position on Malvern Hill, which Lee's army now faced, was indeed under the protection of Union gunboats, to name one of its many strengths. Through personal reconnaissance, D. H. Hill found McClellan's Army to be "strongly posted on a commanding hill, all the approaches to which could be swept by his artillery, and were guarded by swarms of infantry securely sheltered by fences, ditches, and ravines. Tier after tier of batteries were grimly visible on the plateau, rising in the form of an amphitheater. One flank was protected by Turkey Creek and the other by gunboats. We could only reach the first line of batteries by traversing an open space of from 300 to 400 yards . . . [Such] examination now satisfied me that an attack could not but be hazard-



Brothers McGilbry Taylor (*left*), John Taylor (*center*), and Joseph Taylor (*right*) enlisted at Williamston on June 24th, 1861, in the "Bagley Guards," subsequently Company H, 1st Regiment N.C. State Troops. None of the brothers survived the war. John died of tuberculosis in late 1861, and McGilbrey and Joseph, following their capture at the Battle of Spottsylvania Court House, May 12, 1864, died in Federal prisons."

Mast, State Troops and Volunteers, 162



ous to our arms.”⁸

However, not all of the Confederate high command were convinced of the negative outcomes of such an endeavor. Hill’s cautionary advice to Lee to “leave McClellan alone” drew a sarcastic rejoinder from Major General James Longstreet: “Don’t get scared, now that we have got him whipped.” Later, Hill would bluntly

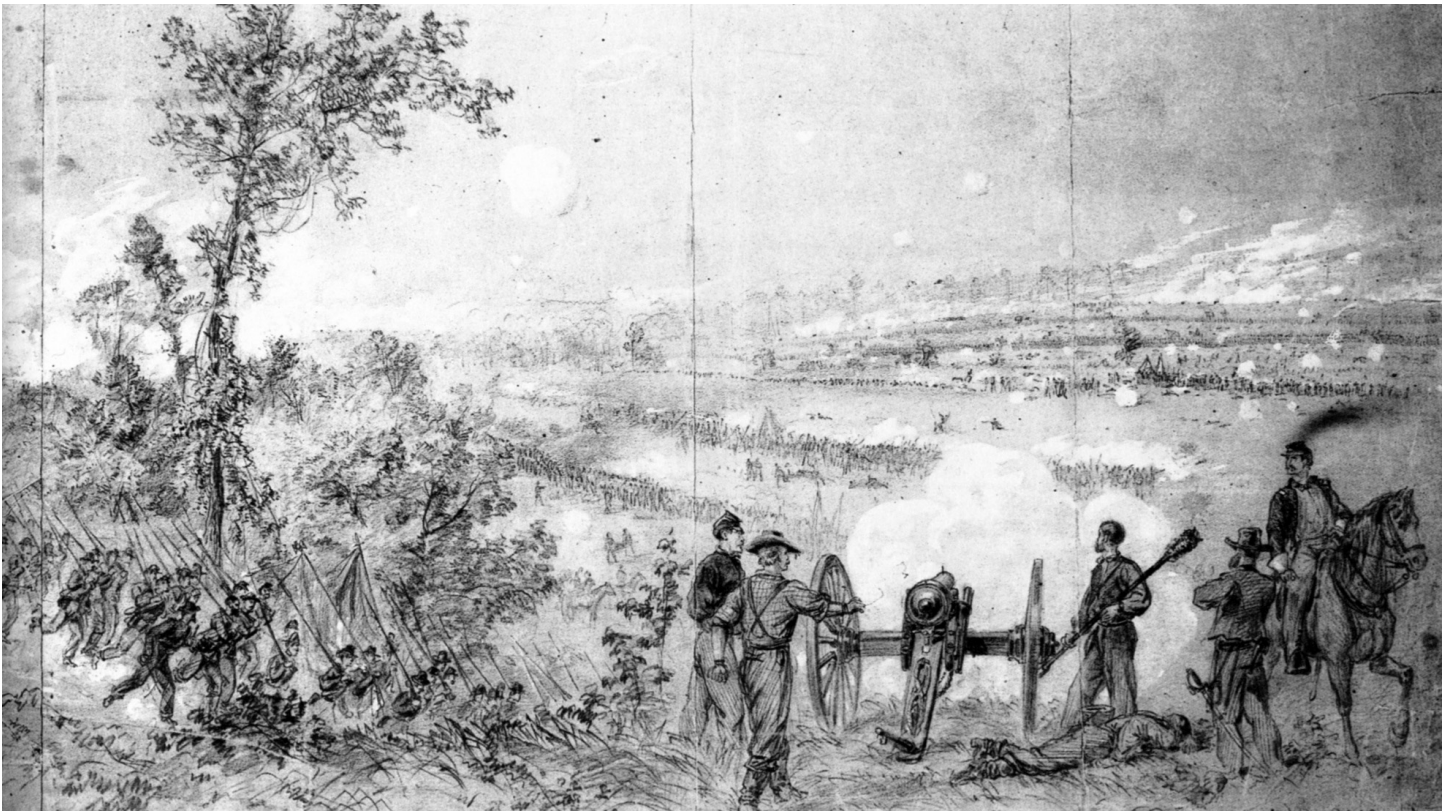
assert: “It was this belief in the demoralization of the Federal army that made our leader risk the attack.”⁹

Clearly, the large quantity of abandoned war material was manifest evidence of disarray in the retreating Union Army. A Virginia artillerist marveled how “there were enough blankets and tents [left behind] to supply 100,000 men.”¹⁰ Lee also had nearby three relatively fresh columns of troops. Should the Federals display any further signs of weakness, perhaps their formidable bastion could yet be compromised. What was needed was a plan, before McClellan’s forces could slip away!

Ironically, it was James Longstreet, the one Confederate commander with no troops on the field, who put forth a proposal that Lee found intriguing, since it presented options. cursory examination of the ground by “Old Pete” had identified two admirable artillery sites that afforded a direct line of fire on McClellan’s position. With Lee’s large force of reserve artillery among the troops nearby, could not two “grand batteries” be created to concentrate their metal on the Union lines? If the Confederate cannon were successful in “suppressing” the enemy, a coordinated infantry assault might then be launched to win the day. Lee assented.

Marching orders were hastily issued. The four divisions of Major General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson’s command would advance south along the Willis Church Road. This included D. H. Hill’s Division, which had been temporarily attached to Jackson. Three additional divisions of Major General “Prince John” Magruder’s Corps would follow and form on Stonewall’s right. Major General Benjamin Huger’s Division, then moving down the Charles City Road, would be split: two brigades would come in behind Jackson, and two would move via a woods track to the Long Bridge Road, and thence south. This should bring them into line squarely on Magruder’s right. Finally, west of the Malvern plateau, portions of Major General Theophilus Holmes’s Division would assume a blocking position along the River Road.

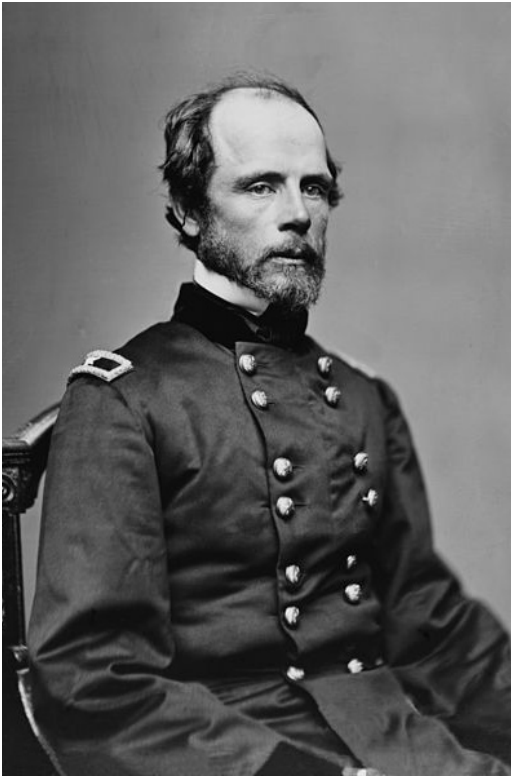
The discretionary nature of the Confederate plan highlighted one major consideration: How were the brigade and divisional commanders to know if the Southern bombardment worked, and how were orders for an assault to be conveyed? Responsibility for that decision fell squarely on the back of Virginian Lewis A. Armistead, one of Huger’s brigadiers. Armistead’s location on the right of the Confederate battle line was presumed to provide a clear view of the Federal position on Malvern Hill. Accordingly, the following poorly drawn order went to all division commanders from R. H. Chilton, Lee’s assistant adjutant general: “Batteries have been established to rake the enemy’s lines. If it is broken, as is probable, Armistead, who can witness the effect of the fire, has been ordered to charge with a yell. Do the same.”¹¹



Combat artist Alfred Waud, who frequently travelled with the Federal Army, sketched this illustration showing the Federal artillery positions atop Malvern Hill during the battle, July 1, 1862.

Deploying the gray infantry proved time consuming. Federal gunners had begun plying the Confederate front with shells as early as 1 p.m. in anticipation of a contest. Nonetheless, Jackson and D. H. Hill, including Ripley's Brigade and the 1st North Carolina, marched down the Willis Church Road "through a heavy fire of artillery, to a dense wood in close proximity to the enemy's position."¹² Huger likewise managed to bring his brigades on line as proposed, despite some floundering in the Virginia thickets. Magruder was not so fortunate. An order from Lee based off a faulty map sent "Prince John's" divisions scurrying down the wrong road. Much of the remaining afternoon was frittered away with irksome marching and countermarching. When the misdirection finally got sorted out, Magruder's late arrival on the field would be announced in decidedly unexpected fashion.¹³

Massing the Southern long arm into "grand batteries" proved to be another problem altogether. For his part, Stonewall Jackson resolved to begin the cannonade with only a handful of available field pieces placed in an open wheat field on the Poindexter Farm, northeast of the Federal position. Jackson's opening salvos drew a swift and violent response from Union "redlegs" on Malvern Hill. D. H. Hill reported that Jackson's guns were "knocked to pieces in a few minutes." Batteries sent to reinforce them "shared the same fate of being beat in detail."¹⁴ Efforts to achieve fire superiority by Confederate gunners on Huger's front elicited a similar



Federal General Darius Couch who commanded the Federal positions atop Malvern Hill that the 1st North Carolina assulted
www.wikipedia.com

deadly reaction. Some captains refused to unlimber their cannon in the face of such fury. Others sat patiently by, awaiting orders.¹⁵ “The firing of our batteries was of a most farcical character,” Hill concluded.¹⁶ He, himself, was painfully bruised by an exploding shell just after remarking to a solicitous officer: “Don’t worry about me . . . I am not going to be killed until my time comes.”¹⁷

The iron rain of shell and solid shot persisted. Larger caliber “lampposts” hurled by Union gunboats on the James River also searched the Southern lines. Hill sought to shelter his division and improve its position by obliquely crossing Western Run in his front near a house known as The Parsonage. Once past the stream’s steep slopes and swampy bottomland, his line of advance was clear of any further natural obstacle.¹⁸ It also brought him into general alignment with Huger’s brigades on his right. Magruder was yet nowhere in sight. Ripley’s four regiments constituted the left of D. H. Hill’s battle line, and deployed from right to left as follows: 48th Georgia, 3rd North Carolina, 44th Georgia, and 1st North Carolina. Protected to some degree by the ravines and foliage along Western Run, they awaited circumstances.¹⁹ Absent from the ranks of the 1st North Carolina this afternoon was Private Leach, who “became so sick I could not go any further and my commander gave me permission to go to the rear.” Leach’s prayer for deliverance had been heard, at least for the present.²⁰

By now, the devastation wrought by the superbly served Union artillery was enough to convince even the most sanguine Confederate that a general assault was unwise. Several probes of the Federal lines by gray clad infantry, including one of Harvey Hill’s brigades, corroborated this. When Hill appealed to Stonewall Jackson for guidance, he received the terse reply: advance when you hear shouting from Armistead’s men, as ordered!²¹ Dutifully, Hill resumed a watchful vigil, keeping eyes and ears open.

At around 6 p.m., events suddenly erupted. D. H. Hill remembered: “While conversing with my brigade commanders shouting was heard on our right, followed by the roar of musketry. We all agreed that this was the

signal agreed upon, and I ordered my division to advance.”²² However, far from being the calculated signal from Armistead, the commotion heralded the tardy arrival of Magruder’s errant troops. “Prince John” did not possess a clear understanding of the existing tactical situation and was initiating an assault. Magruder felt he was complying with a peremptory order from Lee to “advance rapidly” and “press forward your whole line.” Unfortunately, these misdirected actions precipitated the very engagement that many had hoped to avoid.²³

Obeying Hill’s order to charge, Roswell Ripley set his regiments in motion. Their line of advance passed through the Parsonage yard and outbuildings, producing some momentary confusion as these obstructions were navigated. One North Carolinian recalled how “the line . . . moved forward through a dense jungle up the hill to [the Willis Church Road] just in front of and within 600 yards of the enemy’s batteries. From the fact that several . . . companies had to move by a flank and file around the thickets, when we reached the road they were in considerable confusion. Here, after firing several rounds, we learned that a regiment of our own troops was in advance of us, and an order to cease firing was given. [We] were then ordered to lie down to protect [our]selves. While in this position, with little or no protection but what the naked ground afforded, we were exposed to a most terrific fire of every description . . .”²⁴

The Comte de Paris, one of McClellan’s foreign volunteer staff officers, described the scene from a Union perspective: “Hill advanced alone against the Federal positions . . . The woods skirting the foot of Malvern Hill had hitherto protected the Confederates, but as soon as they passed beyond the edge of the forest, they were received by a fire from all the batteries at once, some posted on the hill, others ranged midway, close to the Federal infantry. The latter joined its musketry fire to the cannonade when Hill’s first line had come within range, and threw it back in disorder on the reserves.”²⁵

Confronting the Southern onslaught on this sector of the battlefield was a veteran division from the Federal IV Corps led by Brigadier General Darius N. Couch. His right flank unit consisted of three Pennsylvania and two New York regiments under Brigadier General Albion P. Howe. These men had been roughly handled at the Battle of Seven Pines in May, and were eager for a payback. Howe likewise recorded the clash: “When the attacking force came within range of our arms our whole line sprang to their feet and poured into the enemy a withering fire. The rebels stood up well to their work and largely outnumbered us . . . but the fire of the enemy, being generally too high, did us comparatively little injury. Soon the advantage of our grounds and the superiority of our arms became evident in the effects of our fire upon the enemy.”

Seeing Hill's columns begin to waver, Howe called up his reserves. He launched a bold counterstroke through an oat field in his front. Howe described the result: "The impetuous dash of our men the enemy could not stand, but gave way, and were sent back, much cut up and in disorder, over the ground on which they advanced. This success gave us much advantage of position, by allowing the left center of the brigade line to rest . . . some 800 yards in advance of our first position . . . affording us a cross-fire upon . . . the enemy."²⁶ D. H. Hill admitted that most of Ripley's men were soon "streaming to the rear". Hill's other brigades fared little better.²⁷

Yet, ensconced on a narrow finger of the broad Malvern plateau, overlooking a ravine just south of the Willis Church Road, the sturdy farm boys of the 1st North Carolina refused to yield. Casualties mounted as Enfield rifled muskets warmed to their work in the gathering darkness. First Lieutenant John A. Benbury of Company A was struck mortally. Third Lieutenant James J. Terrell of Company I received a nasty leg wound that would later require amputation. Two additional line officers, Captain John L. Wooster of Company E and Second Lieutenant Francis W. Bond of Company A, sustained painful if not debilitating injuries. Time and again the regiment's colors fell to enemy fire, only to be resurrected by a new bearer. Particularly conspicuous for gallantry in carrying the flag until gravely wounded was "young, brave, heroic" Corporal James C. "Cal" Jones from New Hanover County²⁸

Captain Hamilton Brown was everywhere, exhorting the Carolinians to hold firm. Feeling "hotly pressed" by the added weight of Federal fire, Brown urgently appealed to the nearby 3rd North Carolina for assistance. Wilmington lawyer-turned-Colonel W. Gaston Meares and approximately 100 members of his regiment promptly responded. Utilizing the steeply worn banks of the Willis Church Road as cover, they moved by the left flank in support. Yet, the road was scant protection from the storm of exploding Federal ordnance above. One soldier sadly recalled that Meares "had not moved more than 30 paces before he was instantly killed by the fragment of a shell in the head."²⁹

Elements from successive Confederate assaults soon reinforced the beleaguered Carolinians. Brigadier General Charles Winder coaxed two regiments of his celebrated "Stonewall Brigade" across miry Western Run and onto the hillock under extremely trying circumstances. Maryland-born staff officer Lieutenant McHenry Howard recounted the scene: "It was now dark . . . for nothing could be seen beyond a little way, except the flashing of the guns. But there was no cessation or diminution yet of the enemy's fire—musketry here—which swept the field to such an extent that it was difficult to believe anything could escape unhurt. But we found here

some men of the 1st and 3rd Regiments of North Carolina State Troops, holding their ground in the most gallant manner, to whom were now added parts of our 33rd and 4th Virginia.”³⁰

Naturally, the various regiments became inextricably mixed, posing a nightmare to the officers. Winder assumed field command of the 1st and 3rd North Carolina.³¹ Lieutenant Howard noted how “General Winder passed up and down animating the men and endeavoring to form a more regular and orderly line. A few were demoralized and were loading and firing their pieces without bringing them to the shoulder, and the impression made on us at the time was that in some instances they shot their comrades in front. I remember . . . Winder seizing a man by the shoulder and exclaiming, ‘Scoundrel, you have shot one of your own friends, I saw you do it!’”³² One of the affected North Carolinians confirmed that: “Several volleys were fired into us by a regiment of our own troops in the rear, from which we suffered much.”³³

The advent of darkness only heightened the pandemonium. Shellfire and musketry coupled with the smoke and confusion tried the courage of even the most stalwart soul. “Sometimes there would be half a dozen or more men in a long single line behind one tree,” Howard wrote further, “and it was comical . . . how the line would swing to the right or to the left when a shell passed by. But I wish not to do any injustice to men who were availing themselves of shelter at hand in such a trying time . . . [since] the advance was being held by men stubbornly standing under as terrific fire as can well be imagined, and mixed up as they were, each one sustained by his own individual courage.”³⁴ “Stonewall” Jackson recognized the futility of the situation. To one of his brigade commanders who determined to join the fray, Jackson cautioned: “I guess you had better not try it. General Hill has just tried it with his whole Division and been repulsed. I guess you better not try it, sir!”³⁵

Mercifully, the contest finally ground to a halt. “Night closed upon us still fighting,” Union General Couch acknowledged, “the opposing forces were known only by their lines of fire, that of the rebels gradually slackening until 8:30 p. m., after which an occasional cannon-shot from our batteries only broke the stillness that pervaded this bloody field. Thus ended the battle of Malvern Hill, which caused great carnage and demoralization among the enemy, with comparatively small loss on our side.”³⁶

Couch’s assessment of the engagement was starkly accurate. Along the entire Confederate front, brigades had been committed to battle piecemeal and slaughtered in turn. Southern valor could not sustain itself against the massed Federal artillery and infantry. The approaches to Malvern Hill were littered with the wreckage of war, and more than 5,000 of Lee’s men had fallen. Roswell Ripley’s North Carolina and Georgia brigade

accounted for about 260 of these. The gallant 1st North Carolina's offering to the casualty lists totaled 9 killed, 60 wounded, and 6 missing.³⁷

Leaving behind a small rear guard, McClellan that night surprisingly abandoned his powerful position and retired toward the James River. To one of the remaining Federal cavalry videttes, dawn revealed an "appalling spectacle upon the slopes down to the woodlands half a mile away . . . Dead and wounded men were on the ground in every attitude of distress . . . [but] enough were alive and moving to give the field a singular crawling effect. The different stages of the ebbing tide are often marked by the lines of flotsam and jetsam left along the sea-shore. So here could be seen three distinct lines of dead and wounded marking the last front of three Confederate charges of the night before."³⁸ Captain Brown gained some consolation from the fact that "the dead of the [1st and 3rd North Carolina Regiments] were found nearer to those of the enemy than those of any other troops on this part of the line."³⁹ Jackson immediately ordered the detritus of the battlefield to be cleared and the slain buried, contending "it won't do to march the troops over their own dead."⁴⁰

While most of Lee's forces took up pursuit of McClellan, D. H. Hill's Division remained behind. Jackson had advised him "your men require rest," and Lee obviously concurred.⁴¹ It began to rain. A recovered Private Leach and surviving members of the 1st North Carolina spent the day "occupied in carrying the wounded off the field."⁴² Marcus Herring took pains to locate his injured "hero comrade" Corporal "Cal" Jones. He was found in a makeshift field hospital, "simply a level space of ground [with] no bunks, no seats." Sadly, Herring remembered, Jones "talked about the charge, of the color bearers who fell, and of his taking the colors, which he could hold but a very short time." Jones would succumb to his wound in a Richmond Hospital several days later, but not before having a tearful reunion with his distraught father. "I would have raised that flag [even] if I had known I would be killed," Jones declared before dying. Private Herring concluded: "This shows the character of the rank and file of our Southern boys."⁴³

Efforts to fix or absolve blame for the disaster on July 1st were not long in forthcoming. Truthfully, there were few Confederate senior officers present on the field who did not warrant some degree of culpability! Was the Army of Northern Virginia not, after all, a fledgling organization learning a new and dangerous business? One Southern brigadier probably echoed the sentiments of many when he opined: "Malvern Hill . . . was fought without reconnaissance, or rather without detailed reconnaissance. The excuse . . . was, we were on a hot trail."

⁴⁴ For the now veteran 1st Regiment North Carolina State Troops, such was the story of the Seven Days Battles.

ENDNOTES

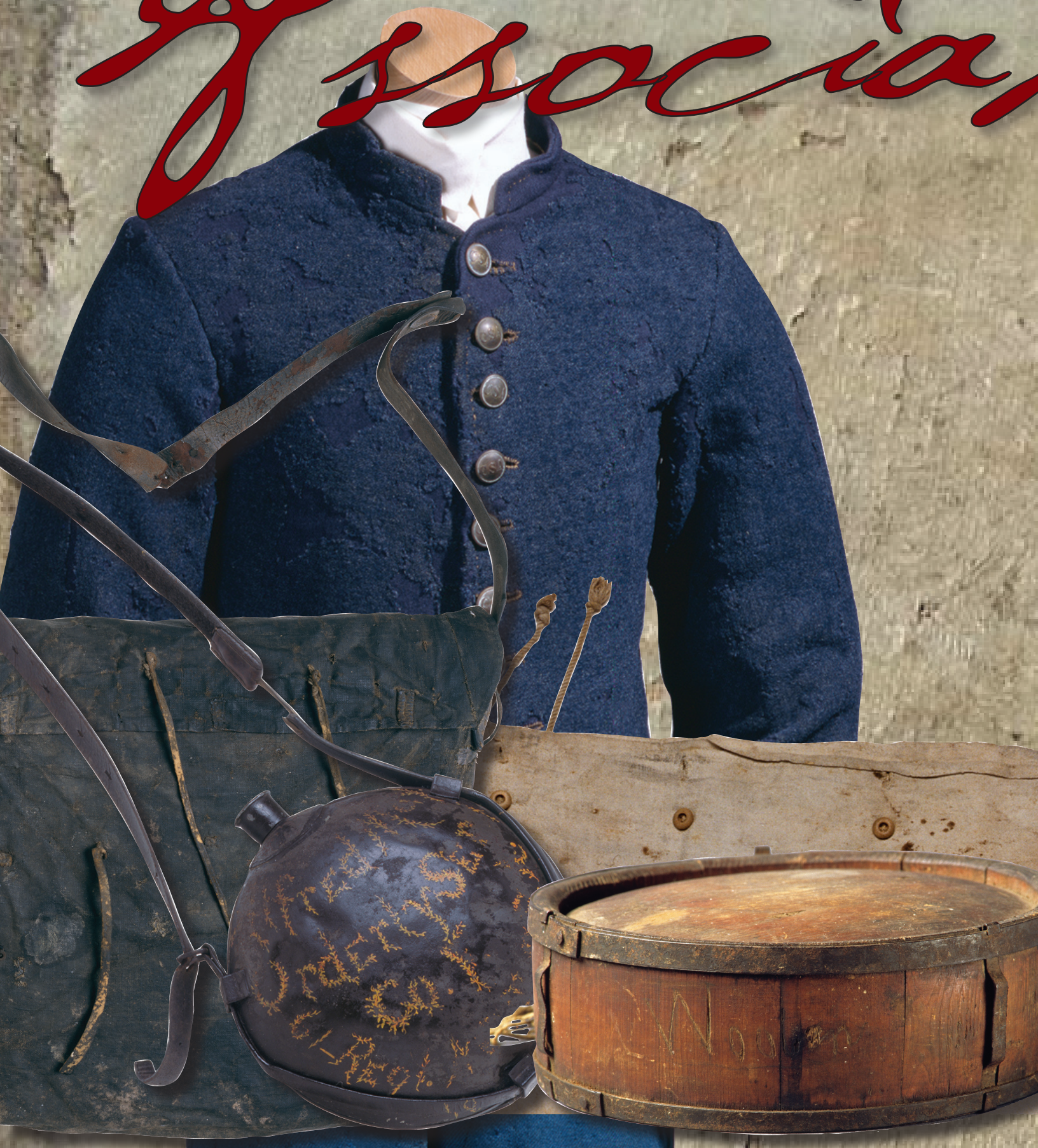
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**OLD &
SAD**

THE ALFRED MAY COLLECTION: N

Association



Troops



By Tom Belton,

Former Curator of Military
History,

North Carolina Museum of
History

First at Bethel, Farthest at Gettysburg and Chickamauga, Last at Appomattox” is a slogan that has become a proud part of North Carolina’s military heritage. While recent research may revise North Carolina’s casualties there is no doubt that North Carolina lost more men than any other Southern state during the American Civil War. Since its founding in 1902 the North Carolina Museum of History has acquired a substantial collection of Civil War artifacts such as uniforms, edged weapons, and firearms. However, the majority of these objects are associated with high-ranking officers; such as colonels and generals. Consequently, the lack of artifacts associated with enlisted soldiers has made it especially challenging to illustrate in a museum exhibit the scope of accouterments used by the ordinary Tar Heel soldier.

In 1994 I received a phone call from a resident of Farmville, North Carolina, who stated he had a number of objects associated with an ancestor named Alfred May who had served in the Civil War. He invited me and other museum staff to visit his home to see if the museum had any interest in receiving all or part of the May items as a donation. Little did I realize at the time the importance of this phone call. In 1922 when famed British Egyptologist Howard Carter entered the tomb of Tutankhamen for the first time a fellow archaeologist behind him repeatedly asked the stunned Carter what he could see in the dim light of the tomb. According to a popular story at the time, Carter could only utter over and over again, “wonderful things, marvelous things.” I felt much like Howard Carter when I saw the extensive number of artifacts associated with Alfred May. In the following weeks a series of trips to Farmville led to the acquisition of the largest collection of objects associated with a North Carolina enlisted soldier and probably any Confederate enlisted soldier.

Alfred May was born in Pitt County in eastern North Carolina in March 1843, one of nine children born to John “Captain Jack” May and Elizabeth Tyson May. Alfred’s father received the title “Captain” when he raised a volunteer group to fight in the Mexican War. The family lived in a house constructed in 1823 by John May and family slaves with additions added in 1825. The house still stands today and was lived in by Alfred’s descendants until a modern brick home was constructed nearby in the 1960s. In the 1860 census John’s occupation is listed as a farmer and Alfred’s as a student. John May, however, was not your typical North Carolina yeoman farmer. Based on the census he would be considered a planter since he owned twenty-eight slaves (eleven male and seventeen females) who worked his farm. John May died on May 25, 1861, just five days after North Carolina signed an ordinance of secession. A year later nineteen year-old Alfred journeyed to Wilmington and in August 1862 enlisted in Company F (known as the “Trio Guards” as they were composed of men from Pitt, Wil-son, and Greene counties), 61st Regiment N.C. Troops. The regiment became part of Clingman’s Brigade com-

posed of the 8th, 31st, 51st, and 61st North Carolina. Alfred joined his two brothers Robert (age 23) and Benjamin May (age 30) who had enlisted earlier in the “Trio Guards”. Robert May would not survive the war. He died in a Richmond military hospital in October 1864 of unknown causes and Benjamin returned home at the close of the war with a head wound received at Petersburg, which tormented him for the remainder of his life.

As part of General Thomas L. Clingman’s Brigade, the 61st North Carolina fought in eastern North Carolina in 1862, helped construct Fort Fisher, and in 1863 saw action at Battery Wagner near Charleston, South Carolina. In 1864 the regiment participated in several engagements around Richmond before being sent back to North Carolina. The 61st was at Wilmington in January 1865, Bentonville in March 1865, and the few remaining members of the regiment were paroled near High Point, North Carolina, after General Joseph E. Johnston surrendered the Army of Tennessee at Bennett Place. At some point, Sergeant May came home armed, wearing his uniform, and carrying many of the trappings of a Confederate soldier.

After the war, Alfred May farmed the family land for the rest of his life. On October 17, 1875, he married Ida Eugenia Wooten, and the couple had eight children during their marriage. When May died in 1906, he was buried in the family cemetery, just a few hundred yards from his birthplace. Alfred’s wartime objects remained in the family hands until donated to the North Carolina Museum of History. All of the artifacts needed at least some conservation attention while some of the items such as his jacket, trousers, leather objects, and canteen required extensive conservation from outside contract conservators. The entire collection was initially displayed in the exhibit “North Carolina and the Civil War” which opened in 1999 and later closed in 2005. Now the May objects are again on display again at the North Carolina Museum of History in the Civil War section of the “The Story of North Carolina” exhibit which opened in November 2011. There, they illustrate that the typical Tar Heel enlisted Confederate utilized uniforms, arms, and accoutrements from three main sources: (1) those captured from the Federal army; (2) war goods made abroad and brought through the blockade; and (3) those produced within the Confederacy.

May’s Uniform

May’s jacket is all hand sewn and constructed of a gray-blue plain weave wool with an unbleached cot-







May's Fayetteville rifle



Close up of lock plate showing
Enfield nipple protector and
leather sling.



ton lining. It has a five-piece body, no center back seam, and a short stand-up collar. The sleeves are made in one piece with a slight gathering at the shoulder. Inside the jacket lining are two breast pockets and the jacket has two side belt loops. Instead of the more typical six or nine button front, the May jacket has eleven “CSA” general service buttons marked “S. Buckley & Co. Birmingham.” Confederate uniform authority Les Jensen examined May’s jacket and stated it showed construction traits of known North Carolina made uniforms and was likely made in North Carolina. Indeed, a letter from the 61st North Carolina assistant quartermaster dated March 27, 1864, requested an issue of “grey English cassimere jackets such as the other three regiments of Clingman’s Brigade have...” The trousers may have been made in North Carolina, at the Richmond Clothing Depot, or by a private tailor for retail sale based on the trousers high quality. Found inside one of the jacket pocket was a small sea shell which Alfred may have carried as a good luck charm while his trouser pockets still contained grains of sand.

Weapons and Related Items

May’s rifle was made at the Fayetteville Arsenal and Armory in Fayetteville, North Carolina, using captured rifle machinery taken from the United States Armory at Harpers Ferry. Fayetteville eventually became the second most important site for weapons production in the South. May added a nipple protector from a British Enfield rifle to protect the cone from damage along with a Federal issue sling to make carrying the rifle easier. Consequently, May carried a rifle manufactured in the Confederacy, with a British rifle accessory, and a sling made by a private Northern contractor for the United States War Department. May outlined on the reverse side of the rifle stock first in pencil and then with a sharp pointed object, “Sergt. Alfred May Co. F, 61st Regt. NCT 1862.” Based on the lock plate stamped “1862” May



May’s Colt pistol (*above*) and holster and waist-belt (*inset*)

Field made haversack



probably received the rifle soon after his enlistment in August 1862. A gun tool that came with the collection does not match any examples in the R. Stephen Dorsey publication, *Gun Tools: Their History and Identification*. After examining the gun tool through photographs, Dorsey speculated it was either from an unknown United States manufacturer or possibly an experimental design being worked on at Harpers Ferry and sent to Fayetteville with other items after Harpers Ferry was captured by Confederate troops. Dorsey later included the gun tool in a second volume of his book on gun tools.

May carried a Colt Pocket Navy revolver manufactured in 1861 by the Colt Firearms Company in New Haven, Connecticut. The pistol may have been taken from a Federal prisoner or even purchased by Confederate arms merchants during the early days of the war. For a time after the Confederacy was formed Colt agents continued to sell and ship their products to Southern states. As with his rifle, May placed his name on the pistol so it could be identified as his property. Pistol accessories include a holster and belt, tin for percussion caps, and two bullet molds; one for a single round ball and the other for both round and conical shot. When donated, the pistol was loaded with three rounds in the cylinder plus percussion caps on three cones. It is not known if the three loaded chambers date to the final days of the war or if May continued to use the pistol around the farm until his death. The State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) used compressed air to remove the bullets from the cylinder without causing damage to the pistol.

The cartridge box carried by May is a captured US M1855 and came complete with belt, sling, and a tin insert for ammunition. Showing typical Confederate usage, the brass “US” cartridge box plate, the brass “US” belt plate, and brass eagle plate from the sling have been removed. The cartridge box contained ammunition made in England and from both Federal and Confederate arsenals. Also found in the cartridge box was a packet of percussion caps and a well-used cleaning rag.

Infantry Accouterments

An assortment of accouterments were part of the May Collection—a knapsack, haversack, a Confederate shelter half made of heavy cotton duck material, a wooden Confederate made “Gardner” pattern canteen with



May's North Carolina made shelter half



Painted canteen of Edward Wooten



Painted canteen of Alfred May and stopper

the name “Wooten” carved on it, and a colorful US M1858 painted canteen. The knapsack is a US M1853/55 and the haversack was field made using a section from another Federal knapsack. The shelter half with its wooden buttons is probably the most important single object in the May Collection. It is the only known surviving Rebel shelter half and has been examined by numerous museums and collectors. Archival quartermaster records indicate that tents were being manufactured during the war in a mill in Concord, North Carolina, and were being supplied to Hoke’s Division in 1864, the year the 61st Regiment N.C. Troops became part of the division. The May family originally believed that Alfred had only carried the wooden canteen early in the war until he acquired the more substantial tin canteen. This Northern manufactured canteen is the most striking object in the May collection with a Confederate first national flag, battle flag, and Confederate second national flag painted on the obverse side. Painted on the reverse of the canteen is “Alfred May Orderly Sergt., Co. F 61 Reg. NCT CSA.” Even the canteen stopper is painted with a first national flag. In what I believe was an act of providence another Federal canteen with identical painted flags came to the museum as a donation only months after the acquisition of the May Collection. The name of its owner, Edward Wooten, is painted on the reverse side of the canteen. Genealogical information shows that Edward Wooten’s sister, Ida Wooten, married Alfred May in 1875. Wooten served in Company B, 5th Regiment N.C. Cavalry (63rd Regiment N.C. Troops). It is almost certain that the wooden canteen found in the May home with the name “Wooten” carved on it belonged to Edward Wooten. In the post-war years Edward Wooten became an Episcopal minister and served in numerous locations. His final assignment was Wilmington where he is buried in Oakdale Cemetery. In a letter written in 1891 from Bolivar, Tennessee, Edward thanks his sister for painting his canteen. It is likely Ida painted her husband Alfred’s canteen at the same time.

Bolivar Tenn

18th September

Dear Ida,

The dear old “Canteen” with the beautiful and appropriate ornamentation came par express today. It awakens old & sad associations of the dark days of war. The hardships & the many thirsts that its contents have quenched. Yonge* thinks the work beautiful & we shall prize & treasure it. Many thanks to you for your thoughtfulness & taste & c—I had lost sight of the dear old friend & should probably never thought of it again. My sabre I gave to the Iredell Blues at Statesville N.C. some years ago. They had my name & rank & c carved on it & it hangs in their Armory as a Memento of the late “lost cause” & the poor services that I rendered in that sacred cause. The dear old canteen with its beautiful adornings hangs in the Parlor here & is admired by all who see it. My children will prize it after I am gone to rest where the unnumbered and & unknown dead have gone before. Many mouths have sipped from the contents of this dear old canteen, whose lips are now still & whose parched & dry mouths will never again crave the cool & refreshing draughts that it so often contained dipped from a thousand springs & wells from which we quenched our thirst. This letter if preserved by you may at some distant day be read by a generation yet unborn & so the story now told of 1863 be new to those who may live in 1963 it may be. At any rate I thank you for yr handiwork that so beautifully adorns the dear old canteen of well nigh a generation ago. God bless you dear Ida for the old reminiscence of 28 years ago.

Affcty yr brother

Edward Wooten

***Yonge was the maiden name of Wooten’s wife. He apparently used it as a term of endearment.**



Wooden canteen inscribed with the name “Wooten”

Personal Items

In addition to May’s uniform, weapons, and accoutrements, the collection included several personal items. A broken folding comb came wrapped in a piece of paper inscribed in pencil “Alf. Mays Comb Purchased in Petersburg VA paid \$10.00 for it. Carried through the war C.S.A.” Like most Civil War soldiers May attempted to maintain at least elementary hygiene despite the hardships of military life. A small oilcloth pouch contained not only the pouch button, but also seven fragments of soap. The pouch material may have been taken from the same cannibalized Federal knapsack that May had used to make his haversack. A brass stencil was found with May’s name cut into it but its use is uncertain since none of his wartime objects are marked with the stencil.

Souvenirs

Since the beginning of warfare soldiers have carried home souvenirs from their wartime service. Brought home by May in an oilcloth pouch (again, possibly made from the same knapsack as May’s haversack) were five Spencer carbine cartridges and a scrap of Confederate newspaper. Other souvenirs included a lone



Wooden canteen inscribed with the name "Wooten"

Federal Burnside cartridge, two pieces of artillery shot, and a cloth bag containing a solitary cartridge paper and four Confederate made Enfield bullets. One Enfield was so poorly cast it would have fragmented the moment it was fired. It is not known what importance May attached to the souvenirs that he carried home. Perhaps he planned to share the story of these and his other items with his future children or grandchildren when he related his life as a Confederate Tar Heel.

May returned to the family farm at the close of the war and worked and lived there until his death in 1906. The farm remains family property today and is now farmed by his grandson who donated the collection to the museum on behalf of the May family. He stated the family had managed to keep the collection intact since "the objects were only brought out for viewing at family reunions and the children were never allowed to play with them." Today the May Collection is among the most significant holdings in the museum's Civil War collection. It is important as it shows not only the different sources for objects carried by a North Carolina Confederate soldier but the collection also gives an almost complete picture of how one North Carolina soldier looked in the field.

The author would like to thank the staff of the North Carolina Museum of History for allowing access to the records relating to the Alfred May Collection.

The author wrote a similar version of this article that appeared in the *Cornerstone* publication, vol. 3, no. 3 (December 1995), copyright N.C. Museum of History.

Images, N.C. Museum of History

Comb with note from May



Pouch with soap fragments



135

Handwritten notes on a small paper tag, including the number 7 and some illegible text.

MECHANICSVILLE.
COLD HARBOR.
MALVERN HILL.

BOONSBORO.
SHARPSBURG.

FREDERICKSBURG.
CHANCELLORSVILLE.

1
N.C.

WINCHESTER No 2.
GETTYSBURG.

