

To Fight Like the Devil: John Buford and his Division in the Gettysburg Campaign

Presentation by: Larry Myers

July 10, 1995

It is probably more than fair to say that the Battle of Gettysburg has been the catalyst for more people to become lifelong students of the Civil War more than any other event in that four year struggle. This should really come as no surprise as Gettysburg has been recounted and refought innumerable times since the evening of July 3rd, 1863. The number of books, articles, theses, dissertations, board games and most recently a motion picture about this battle would fill a small library to overflowing. The battlefield itself is the most well marked in the world and is visited and revisited each year by people numbering in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions. And what of the images conjured up by the mere mention of Gettysburg? The Westerners of the Iron Brigade going toe to toe with Hill's Corps on McPherson's Ridge, Barksdale's Mississippians crashing through the Union line at the Peach Orchard on the second day and young Lt. Alonzo Cushing, though horribly wounded, literally holding himself together while continuing to lead his battery in fending off the most spectacular infantry assault in history, Pickett's Charge. The common thread of all these images is that they are infantry and artillery actions. But what of the cavalry? With the exception of Jeb Stuart's controversial ride, the cavalry's role in the campaign has been at best, treated as an afterthought. Bruce Catton best summed up this feeling in his book "This Hallowed Ground" with the following passage: afterward all anyone would say was, "Oh yes, the cavalry fought at Gettysburg too, didn't it?"

Indeed they did. In the period spanning from June 9th to July 14th, 1863 the cavalrymen on both sides, in addition to the myriad number of other tasks they performed in support of their foot-bound counterparts, fought over a dozen separate engagements, two of which were full blown cavalry battles. All this work fell upon 20,000 men, which is really a relatively small number when one considers that 150,000 took part in the five week campaign. In the story to follow, we will take a look at one of the divisions that made up this small, yet vital part of the opposing armies and their role in one of the most crucial campaigns of the Civil War. The division is the 1st Division of the Cavalry Corps of the Army of the Potomac and its commander, Brigadier General John Buford.

The Pursuit To Pennsylvania June 26th-30th

On June 26th, Buford's Division was put in motion northwards towards Edward's Ferry on the Potomac, it's mission to cover the left wing of the army as it crossed the river while General Gregg would perform the same function on the opposite flank. Hooker had finally decided to set off in pursuit of Lee.

Crossing at Edward's Ferry the next day, one trooper wrote that "Getting out of old Virginia was like getting out of a graveyard and into Paradise." Buford receiving orders to move in advance of the infantry and scout out the enemy and report any findings moved out promptly. His march, however was hampered by poor roads and the wagon trains belonging to the soon to be

unemployed Julius Stahel, at last reached the Monocacy River, there going into bivouac at the base of the Catocin Mountains near Jefferson, Maryland.

June 28th would see the men in the saddle at first light, making a short march north towards Middletown where they would again make camp, there to tend to their mounts as well as themselves before moving on again the next morning. While Buford's men enjoyed their brief respite, events elsewhere would mark this as a momentous day for the Army of the Potomac. For one, Stahel's command was finally incorporated into the Cavalry Corps and redesignated the Third Division with the brash Judson Kilpatrick assuming the top spot. The 28th also saw the rapid and almost unprecedented elevation to brigadier general of three men in the Cavalry Corps: Captain Elon Farnsworth of the 8th Illinois, Captain Wesley Merritt of the 2nd United States and 1st Lieutenant George Custer of the 5th U.S. Farnsworth and Custer would respectively take over command of the 1st and 2nd Brigades of the new Division while Merritt would replace Starr as head of the Reserve Brigade. Lastly, the army itself would experience yet another change in command. Hooker, frustrated in a dispute with Halleck over the status of the garrison at Harper's Ferry, handed in his resignation, which was readily accepted. Stepping into his shoes at this critical time was the unspectacular but steady George Gordon Meade of the Fifth Corps, a Pennsylvanian and West Point graduate of the Class of 1835.

If Pleasanton was unsure as to what was expected of him in the coming days, Meade was quick to make it plain, for on June 30th he sent orders to his cavalry chief telling him that it was vital that the army commander receive "reliable information"; "your cavalry force is large and must be vigilant and active. The reports must be those gained by the cavalry themselves, and the information sent in should be reliable...Cavalry battles must be secondary to this object." Meade's ascent to command of the army would also effect Alfred Pleasanton in another way: General Dan Butterfield, Hooker's chief of staff and at present a holdover from that general's tenure, did not get along well with his new boss. Meade, sidestepped this problem by making Pleasanton in effect, his chief of staff in everything but name, ordering the cavalryman to set up his tent nearby. Pleasanton would be kept too busy with staff work over the next two weeks to exercise field command, resulting in his divisions now operating more or less independently.

June 29th was incredibly hot with the 1st Division making a march of some 35 miles over rough terrain and dusty roads. Buford was continuing with his mission of screening left wing's westward flank, the wing constituting some 30,000 infantry and artillerymen of the 1st, 3rd and 11th Corps under John Reynolds. Early on, he received orders from Pleasanton to detach the newly promoted Merritt northeast towards Mechanicsville for the purpose of guarding wagon trains and providing security on the right flank. Buford himself was to make for Gettysburg, a sleepy village just north of the Mason-Dixon Line in Pennsylvania. Once there, he was to go ahead with his assignment of protecting the army's flank as well as sweeping the countryside for the enemy, who from a letter from a prominent local citizen, was known to be currently around Cashtown, just eight miles to the west. In addition, Confederates were also seen gathering horses around Gettysburg. In light of these developments, Buford was also directed to "Hold Gettysburg at all costs until supports arrive."

Setting off northwest with Devin's and Gamble's Brigades, Buford moved west through South Mountain at Turner's Gap to Boonsboro, then northwards to Cavetown and Monterey Springs, where he again passed through South Mountain, marching east. That evening, exhausted from their hard and wearying march, both brigades finally went into camp near Fairfield, Pennsylvania.

Along the way, an incident occurred that serves as an illustration of Buford's tough, nononsense character and ironic sense of humor. While passing near Frederick his men collared a spy, who after a expeditious court martial was dispatched to the hereafter, being hung from the nearest tree. On his person was pinned the following: "This man is to hang three days; he who cuts him down before shall hang the remaining time." A group of local denizens came to the general to make known their displeasure but Buford was quick to make it known "that the man was a spy and that he was afraid to send him to Washington because he knew that the authorities would make the spy a brigadier general."

Despite this gruesome event and the heat and fatigue they had to endure that penultimate day of June, the march was not without it's lighter moments for in every town along the route, loyal citizens came out to cheerfully greet and indulge the troopers with food and drink and not the sullen hostile stares they had often seen in the desolate Virginia countryside. For the men of Colonel Josiah Kellogg's 17th Pennsylvania, this day had a special meaning for they were coming home. Near the end of the day's journey, the Keystoneers rode the stretch of road that ran through Monterey Gap towards Fairfield. Sitting astride his horse alongside the road was the bearer of the regimental guidon. The symbolism of the moment wasn't lost on Kellogg's men who quickly let loose with deep-throated cheers and charged swiftly across the state line.

Gettysburg: June 30th

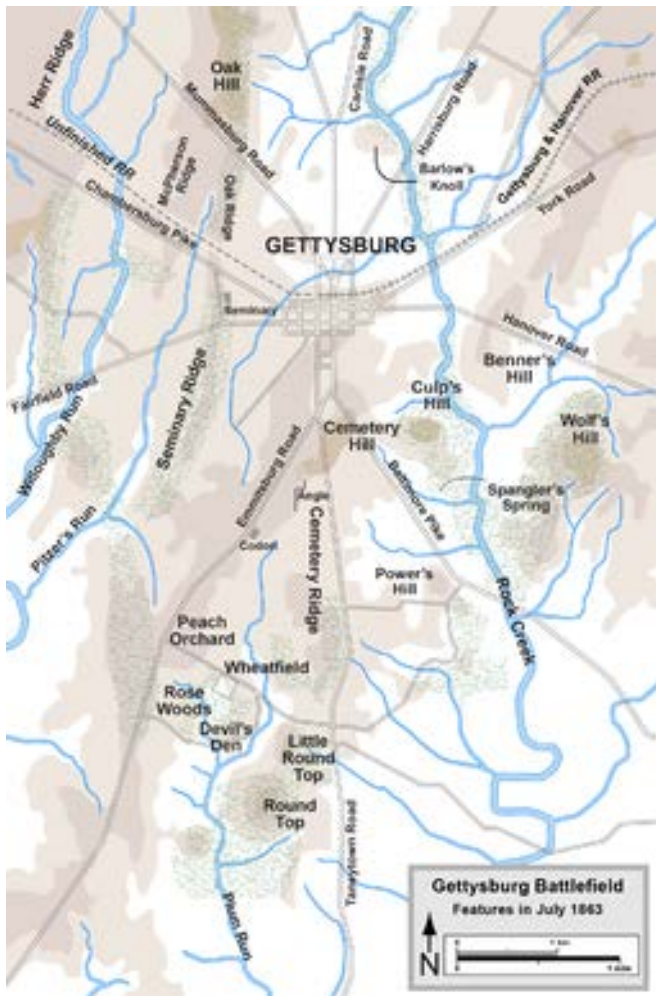
Even though Fairfield was on friendly soil, Buford set up strong picket lines to guard against surprise and went about quizzing the local residents for any information about the enemy but without success, the civilians being fearful of Confederate retribution if they talked. The lack of such information would cause Buford some discomfort the next morning when Gamble fought an inconclusive little skirmish with a enemy force from General A.P. Hill's Corps estimated at 2 regiments of infantry with a section of artillery in support. Although surprised, the Yankee cavalymen put on a good show before breaking off the action, Buford not wanting to upset Meade's plans by bringing on a general engagement.

Continuing his march towards Gettysburg, Buford first made a short stopover at Emmittsburg to consult with Reynolds, telling him of the morning's fight with Hill and discussing with his old friend the enemy's possible location and designs. Upon taking leave of the wing commander, the division resumed its advance northwards along the Emmittsburg Road reaching the vicinity of Gettysburg around 11 o'clock finding the town "in a terrible state of excitement" as Early's Division had come through four days earlier, levying demands on the city fathers for supplies. At this very moment another Confederate force was seen approaching from the west, apparently for the same purpose. Colonel Chapman's Hoosiers quickly rode out in that direction along the Chambersburg Pike, encountering foragers from General J. Johnston's Pettigrew's Brigade, scouring the farmland west of town searching for everything and anything that may be of some use to the army. Catching the enemy off guard, the 3rd Indiana swept up some prisoners while the rest of Pettigrew's men withdrew slowly westwards in the direction of Cashtown, the Federal cavalry following warily behind, each side exchanging fire without visible results.

Taking up position along what would soon be forever known to the world as Seminary Ridge, both Devin and Gamble immediately dispatched scouts to all points of the compass to learn what else they could find out about the enemy. Buford having sent off a rider to tell Reynolds of Pettigrew's presence, set up his headquarters at the Blue Eagle Hotel just west of the town square on the corner of Washington and Chambersburg Street. That done, he then set off with his staff

to eyeball the surrounding countryside in order to make plans to entertain the Confederates if they chose to return. He liked what he saw. This was a good place to offer Lee battle.

Established in 1780, Gettysburg lies among a series of gently sloping ridges generally running north to south with the town itself the center of a road net composing of eight main and two branch roads extending in all directions. Running westnorthwest towards Cashtown was the Chambersburg Pike while just to the north the Mummasburg Road also stretched out in a northwesterly direction. Continuing clockwise was the Carlisle Road branching out due north, then the Harrisburg Road to the northeast, the York Road to the east-northeast, the Hanover Road to the east-southeast, the Baltimore Pike to the southeast, the Taneytown Road due south, the Emmittsburg Road to the south-southwest and finally the Hagerstown Road to the westsouthwest. If one was to step back and view the region in a larger context, they would see that this series of roads lay open the path not only to the Capitol and Baltimore, but also to all the large industrial centers in the Northeast, a tempting prize for any invading army.



As for the immediate area around Gettysburg, sited about 3/4 of a mile west of town is the aforementioned Seminary Ridge, presently serving as the temporary home of Buford's two brigades. Situated south of the Pike was the Lutheran Theological Seminary, founded some 20 years earlier located about midway between the Chambersburg Pike and the Hagerstown or Fairfield Road. To the north of the pike was heavily forested Oak Ridge, which lay just beyond a then unfinished railroad cut that ran from east to west. The ridgeline itself stretched northwards from the cut, ending at a small prominence by the name of Oak Hill.

About a quarter mile further west is McPherson's Ridge with the namesake's farm lying just south of the pike and the rather open ridge extending to the northeast also term-inating at Oak Hill. South of the farm buildings was a 17 acre woodlot also named after Mr. McPherson, which in those days was the town's picnic ground, while just a short ways further on was the easily fordable stream of Willoughby Run.

Nine hundred yards beyond was Herr Ridge, named after the owner of the tavern which was located south of the pike. Herr's was also a rather open piece of ground with scattered woodlots along it's crest and slopes. Also sited along the ridge was a narrow crossroad which ran at a right angle to the pike, bisecting it near the tavern.

The last notable terrain feature west of Gettysburg was the Belmont Schoolhouse Ridge, sited some 400 yards from Herr's with the classic redbrick schoolhouse lying north of the pike, not very far from where the pike intersects with the Knoxlyn Road.

North of the town was a small wooded prominence located on the west bank of Rock Creek known in the days before July 1863 as Blocher's Knoll. This piece of ground along with Oak Hill lying a short distance to the west would form part of Tom Devin's line while they awaited the arrival of Ewell's Corps the next morning.

But it was the fishhook shaped line of hills south of Gettysburg that really caught the Kentuckian's eye. Here was good ground that once entrenched with infantry and artillery would dominate the surrounding countryside and offer any attacker a difficult nut to crack. Starting with Power's and McAlister's Hills, the line ran west to a tree studded hill by the name of Culp's, then further west to another, upon which laid the town's burial ground, hence the name Cemetery Hill. From there the line ran southward along a shallow ridge bearing the name of Cemetery Ridge before ending at another pair of hills, soon to be known as the Round Tops.

While Buford was making plans to hold off the enemy which he felt would indeed return, eight miles to the west in Cashtown, General A. P. Hill listened rather skeptically to Pettigrew's report of the day's march and run in with enemy cavalry near Gettysburg. Pettigrew had not developed the situation, having been ordered not to bring on a fight since the Army of Northern Virginia was still scattered all over southern Pennsylvania. But the North Carolinian, not a stupid man by any definition, was thoroughly convinced that what he encountered were advance units of the Army of the Potomac and not as Hill put it, a mere "detachment of observation." In an effort to persuade his immediate superior General Henry Heth and Hill, he called on Captain Lewis Young of his staff to back him up. Young and Hill were familiar with each other, the captain having served with the general's division during the Seven Days Campaign the previous summer. Pettigrew had hoped that what Young had to say would influence his superiors into taking a more cautious stance, but to no avail. Despite Young's opinion that the Federal cavalry acted like "well trained troops and not that of a home guard" Hill replied in a rather cavalier fashion that he had just come from a conference with General Lee who told him that the Yankees were still massed some distance to the south in the vicinity of Middleburg, Maryland. Hill went on to say that even though he doubted that any part of the Union Army was at Gettysburg, he hoped that they were for that is where he wanted them to be. Heth too had failed to grasp the import of what Pettigrew was telling him, turning to Hill and asking the corps commander if had any problems with his taking his division to Gettysburg the next morning. Hill replied "None in the world."

By late evening it was apparent from information gathered from prisoners and now returning patrols that a large number of Confederates, many times the Federal's own, were nearby and concentrating in their direction. Buford, faced with the mission of holding on until the main body of Reynolds' wing came up, had two options. One was to place his men along the heights south of the town and hope that Reynolds would be quick to move up and relieve the cavalry before they were pushed off. The second was to take up a defensive line in an arc running from south of the Fairfield Road and extending northeast of the town itself. While the first offered the advantage of good position from which to hold off the enemy, Buford had only 2,750 men and six guns on hand, which would provide him with a very thin line, every fourth man being relegated to the usual cavalry practice of horseholding. This would also rob him of mobility and flexibility, the heights being the main object of his defense of Gettysburg. His second choice was to establish a defense in depth, so as to delay the Confederates and make them pay for every yard

of ground gained, in other words to trade space for time. While giving him the needed flexibility and mobility, stubborn resistance would also force the enemy into line of battle, not only giving Buford the needed time but also presenting the cavalryman with a good idea as to the enemy's strength, something that General Meade might find useful in the days to come.

Gamble's Brigade would defend the western approaches to Gettysburg, from south of the Fairfield Road to the Railroad Cut, the main body taking up position on McPherson's Ridge. An NCO and 4 to 5 men made up the forward outposts or what were called in those days, videttes. Set up along Marsh Creek, just beyond the Knoxlyn Road-Chambersburg Pike intersection they were under orders to open fire and withdraw slowly eastwards if advanced upon by the enemy. Reserves were stationed a short distance behind, ready to move to the aid of the videttes if the need arose. Being that the Pike was the most likely avenue of approach, the vidette posts were spaced only some 150-200 yards apart along this part of the line while further south the intervals widened to 500-600 yards. In addition there was the vidette patrol, consisting of an officer, an NCO and four men which acted as a sort of roving outpost which rode along the line, watching for any breaks.

Southernmost along Gamble's main line was Lt. Colonel Markell's 8th New York, covering the Fairfield Road while Major Beveridge's 8th Illinois watched the center to include the Chambersburg Pike. The combined companies of the 12th Illinois and 3rd Indiana under Colonel Chapman would complete the line north of the Pike ending at the Cut with each regiment being tasked to picket their own front.

Tom Devin had the responsibility of covering the approaches to the northwest, north and northeast of Gettysburg with his advance pickets as far out as Belmont School house Ridge and Keckler's Hill, this line running in a semicircle as far east as the York Road. Starting north from the Cut was Captain Conger's squadron of the 3rd West Virginia, followed by Lt. Colonel Crocker's 6th New York, Colonel Sackett's 9th New York and ending with Kellogg's 17th Pennsylvania watching the far right flank, the brigade accompanied by Lieutenant Calef's battery in position on both sides of the Carlisle Road. By nightfall, the men had settled down in their positions with 1/3 to be awake at all times and half of the mounts fully saddled and ready to ride. Some of the men, however, chose to partake of the local's hospitality and went into town for a few hours of enjoyment.

With everything in readiness for the fight that was sure to come the next morning, Buford called together his senior subordinates for one last conference. Standing around the campfire near Tom Devin's headquarters that evening, Buford again went over the plans for the following day. His mood, as observed by his signal officer Lt. Aaron Jerome was one of uneasiness. Tom Devin also picked up on this and in keeping with his pugnacious character, attempted to reassure his boss, "You are unduly excited General, I'll agree to take care of all the rebels that come from the directions you indicate for the next 24 hours." Buford however, was more realistic admonishing the brigade commander, "No, you won't," he said "They will attack you in the morning; and they will come 'booming'--skirmishers three deep. You will have to fight like the devil to hold your own until supports arrive." To drive home his point, at the end of the meeting Buford went on to say "The enemy must know the importance of this position and will strain every nerve to secure it, and if we are able to hold it we will do well." The events of the following morning would prove him right.

Gettysburg: July 1st

Dawn came at 5:20 that morning, misty with a light wind coming in from the south. The night had passed without incident, no shots having been fired along the picket lines during the hours of darkness.

This stillness was not to last, for 20 minutes earlier 7,500 men of Henry Heth's Division along with the 15 guns of Pegram's Battalion, had shook themselves out of their bivouac and were already on the move eastwards, marching in a column of fours along the Chambersburg Pike. Their mission this day was to perform a reconnaissance in force as well as secure more supplies for the Confederate Army with the proviso that they were not to bring on a general engagement if they encountered Federal infantry. General Lee was most anxious to avoid such a confrontation until his corps were up and concentrated around Cashtown, some eight miles west of Gettysburg.

Princeton educated General James Archer's brigade of Tennessee and Alabama boys formed the vanguard, Archer remaining blissfully unaware of what lay in front of him, also having discounted the warnings given to him the day before by his fellow brigade commander, Johnston Pettigrew. The videttes of the 8th Illinois stationed west of Knoxlyn Ridge however, were vigilant, easily observing the cloud of dust kicked up by the graycoated infantry. Quickly riders were dispatched with messages to both the vidette reserve and the main body warning of the enemy's approach. It was now seven o'clock.

Serving as part of the vidette reserve along this section of the line was one time carpenter Lt. Marcellus Jones of the 8th Illinois. This DuPage County native was also what would be called in America's later wars a "mustang", having recently risen from the ranks. Writing of that day thirty four years later, he would recall:

"I saw one of the men from the main picket post, George Heim, coming full speed who said that Sergeant Shafer wanted me at once. Springing into my saddle, which my servant had not had time to put in my other horse, I was soon there and could see a cloud of dust rising above the trees some distance up the mountain. Taking a leaf from my memoranda book, I reported to Major Beveridge that there was evidently a heavy column approaching. How well we knew when the orderly reached camp. "Boots & Saddles" sounded by our regimental bugler was taken up by every bugle in the division. By this time, a little after 7 o'clock, the enemy's advance composed of Archer's Tennessee brigade followed by Davis' and Brockenbrough's brigades, appeared in sight on the hill west of Marsh Creek a mile or so away. Upon sighting our picket post, they deployed skirmishers on either side of the road with the precision of veterans, marching steadily down the pike to the stone bridge. I had sent the horses and onequarter of the men to the rear. Asking Sergeant Levi Shafer, who was in charge of the picket line on the pike for his carbine, I took aim at an officer on a white or light gray horse and fired--The first shot at the Battle of Gettysburg."

And didn't hit a damned thing.

Jones and Shafer were promptly joined by the rest of the vidette reserve lead by Capt Amasa Dana, who swiftly went into position along Knoxlyn Ridge. Spacing his small band of men at 10 yard intervals behind post and rail fences, Dana's men soon took the enemy under heavy carbine fire. Buford's plan to stall the Confederate advance quickly bore fruit as Heth's men were forced to pull up and call for artillery.

A section from Captain E.A. Marye's Fredericksburg Artillery came up and opened with a fire from across Marsh Creek that was more noisy than accurate, the shells landing to Dana's rear. Despite this, the captain was soon forced to pull his men back to the next ridgeline when enemy pressure was applied to his front and both flanks. Such was the nature of the fighting for the next hour, the cavalymen taking up one position after another and holding on till the last minute before yielding and retreating to the next rise of ground.

The Confederates remained for the most part in column as they crossed Marsh Creek, but would soon push out skirmishers on the both sides of the pike with Joe Davis' Brigade fanning out to the north while Archer's boys advanced on the south side of the road.

Back along McPherson's Ridge, a young Gettysburg native by the name of Leander Warren was visiting the camps of Gamble's Brigade and was given of what he considered the privilege of watering the horses from a nearby stream when "Boots and Saddles" were sounded. Discretion being the better part of valor, young Warren and his friends thought it best to head for home. Other boys were witness to Tom Devin rushing out of his tent when the first shots were fired, there to be met by a courier who told him of the fight along Knoxlyn Ridge. Devin, after taking this all in, quickly ordered the man to report to General Buford at the Eagle Hotel. It was now 8 a.m.

Buford's prediction of the night before had come true and he was ready. Without hesitation he ordered Devin and Gamble to move forward and strengthened the skirmish line along Herr and Belmont Schoolhouse Ridges to the Mummasburg Road near Oak Hill. From this point, videttes from Devin's Brigade would continue this line eastwards, watching the roads to the north and northeast, while Calef's Battery was to be brought up to give support to the forward line. With these dispositions having been made, Buford sent a rider off towards Reynolds' latest position along Marsh Creek five miles south of Gettysburg with an urgent message to come up with his infantry.

With both brigades now advancing forward, the Union cavalry facing Heth would soon number approximately 2,000 men, but all their weapons could not be brought to bear as every fourth man would be detailed to serve as horseholder, thus decreasing the total effective strength by one quarter. Also the length of the line dictated that it would be thinly manned with the interval again being about one trooper every 30 feet. On the plus side, the ground was favorable for defense with fences and trees dotting the landscape, offering good cover. Also working in Buford's favor was the Sharps carbine which could be rapidly loaded and fired from these positions while the Confederate infantry were armed with single shot muzzleloaders which while possessing longer range had nowhere near the Sharps' rate of fire and had to be loaded standing up.

The Union cavalymen poured out a tremendous amount of lead at the advancing Rebel skirmishers, bringing them to a dead halt and as Buford had hoped forcing Heth to deploy his regiments into line of battle, thereby buying him more time. According to the tactical manuals of the day, this should have taken only a half hour to accomplish. Reality proved otherwise, the Confederate advance being stalled for an hour and fifteen minutes.

Calef's Battery was understrength that morning with sergeants commanding two of out his three sections along with the mounts being rather worn and thin. Moving out at a quick gallop from their bivouac along the Carlisle Road at 8 a.m. they soon reached McPherson's Ridge where Colonel Gamble briefed the young artilleryman on the situation and then told him to set up

anywhere he thought best. This freedom of action would be shortlived for as Calef moved to deploy his 3 inchers north of the Pike, General Buford came up and directed the guns to be set up with one section on each side of the road and the third to be positioned about a half mile to the south behind the 8th New York in order to cover as wide a front as possible. Calef speedily complied with Lt. Roder's team going into battery to the north of the Pike while First Sgt. Newman's section unlimbered on the opposite side and the pair under Sargeant Pergel made their way towards the southern end of the ridge.

His section unlimbered and ready for action, Lt. Roder spotted a group of mounted gray horsemen to his front and coolly gave the order to load. After taking careful aim, both guns opened fire, marking the first Federal artillery shots fired at Gettysburg. A dozen rebel artillery pieces under the command of the nearsighted but very able Major William Pegram immediately replied from a range of 1300 yards, making it very warm for Roder and Newman. The Yank gunners however were not easily cowed and would continue to stand by and work their guns with as Buford would later write "great judgement and skill, and with wonderful effect upon the enemy."

With the resumption of the Confederate advance at about 9:15, the fighting began in earnest, making things very dicey for Gamble's and Devin's men along the Herr Ridge-Belmont Schoolhouse line, the sheer weight of the enemy assault threatening to overwhelm both brigades with casualties beginning to mount for the defenders. One, Corporal Cyrus James of G Company of the 9th New York suffered a particularly grisly death, having been shot out of his saddle only to have his foot caught in the stirrup, his frightened mount dragging his body back into Gettysburg, where he was finally released by a man who would that day become a legend, old John Burns.

Forty-five minutes later, with enemy pressure on the verge of cracking his line, Buford fired off the following dispatch to General Meade:

"The enemy's forces are advancing on me at this point and are and are driving my pickets and skirmishers very rapidly. There is also a large force at Heidlersburg that is driving my pickets from at that point from that direction. General Reynolds is advancing; and is within three miles of this point with his leading division. I am positive that the whole of A.P. Hill's force is advancing."

John Reynolds was by habit an early riser and this first day of July was no different. He had gone to bed at midnight and was awakened again at 4 a.m. when one of his aides, Major Riddle, returned from Meade's headquarters at Taneytown with orders for the general to proceed to Gettysburg with the First and Eleventh Corps. Strangely enough, despite receiving Buford's dispatch the night before telling him of Hill's Corps being only 9 miles to the west and Ewell's Corps possibly marching south from Carlisle, he expected no fighting this day, only to move up to "within supporting distance of Buford, who was to push out further." Not that John Reynolds wasn't an aggressive soldier, quite the contrary, for this campaign had become a very personal affair, his hometown of Lancaster being only 50 miles to the east.

Around 9 a.m. the First Corps finally began their march northwards along the Emmittsburg Road with Reynolds and his staff leading the way. Following the First was the "damned Dutchmen" of General O.O. Howard's Eleventh Corps, still smarting over their disasterous showing in the Wilderness two months earlier when Jackson put them to flight, causing the Federal right flank

to collapse and leading to another humiliating defeat. Dan Sickles' Third Corps, in the meantime was to remain near Emmittsburg, ready to move at a moment's notice. The day was already getting hot with high humidity to add to the discomfort but the men marched at a good, if leisurely pace.

Two miles from Gettysburg, Reynolds was finally met by Buford's courier bringing news of the fighting now raging west of the town. Hurrying ahead, he met an excitable local citizen who told him much the same story, after which he rode through Gettysburg arriving in the vicinity of the Lutheran Seminary around 10 o'clock.

Even the most casual students of Gettysburg could recite by heart what supposedly happened next: Reynolds would arrive at the Seminary and after spotting Buford scanning the field from his post in the cupola, going on to inquire:

"What goes John?"
"The devil's to pay!"
"Can you hold?"
"I reckon I can."

This dramatic exchange, originating from the pen of Buford's signal officer, Lt. Jerome, certainly makes for good reading and good cinema, but in all probability is apocryphal for the following reasons: in a letter written in 1864, Reynolds' orderly, Sgt. Charles Veil, told of his experiences that morning and specifically remembers the General catching up with Buford near Roder's section on McPherson's Ridge, making no mention at all of the incident at the Seminary. Another member of Reynolds' staff, Captain Stephen Weld was also present, he too having no recollection of the episode. Both of their accounts were more contemporary than the lieutenant's, besides the fact that it was more in keeping with Buford's character to be out on the firing line and not a half mile to the rear when things got tough. Here Buford briefed Reynolds, explaining his defensive plan of delaying the enemy until the heights south of the town were firmly entrenched with infantry and artillery. The trust and respect these two men felt for each other was confirmed with Reynolds fully acceding to Buford's plan, his only order being that the cavalryman was to hold off the enemy as long as possible. That order being given, Reynolds sent off messages to Doubleday and Howard to come forward at the double quick and another to Meade informing him of his intention to fight at Gettysburg.

On Herr's Ridge, the military maxim that "mass has a quality all its own" began to make itself felt with Harry Heth's battle lines surging forward, requiring Gamble's men to start withdrawing across Willoughby Run to take up another defensive line along McPherson's Ridge. North of the Pike, Devin's Brigade, along Chapman's combined Indiana and Illinois regiments, were forced to fall back with the Yankee troopers again turning on their pursuers once they reached the northern section of Herr's Ridge. Here, in an effort to buy more time, they continued to put up a stubborn defense, again placing the enemy under heavy fire. Such tenacity however, came at a stiff price with about 17 men of Chapman's command being killed or mortally wounded.

By 10:15, the plight of Buford's Division had reached a critical point, the cavalryman quickly running out of room after a holding action lasting over two hours. Archer's Brigade had gained Willoughby Run and were making ready to push the Federal line once more, seeking Gamble's southern flank. The old Irish dragoon, had at this point suffered 100 men killed, wounded or missing and 70 horses lost. The situation was growing more desperate causing Gamble to call out

to General Reynolds as he came up, "Hurry up, General, hurry up! They are breaking our line! They are breaking our line!" Young Calef was also feeling the pressure, his guns now coming under rifle fire in addition to his continuing duel with Pegram's batteries, making things very hot for the Blue cannoneers. To the north Devin, too was having his troubles, among them a shortage of ammo and another assault by Davis' Brigade that stood to cave in his line and jeopardize Gamble's right. As is this wasn't enough, the videttes covering the roads to the north were now reporting increased enemy activity from that quarter in the form of Robert Rodes' Division of Ewell's Corps then seeking to drive the troopers from the 17th Pennsylvania out of their positions at Keckler's Hill and the Cobean Farm along the Carlisle Road. This accomplished, they would uncover the Union right flank and place both brigades in danger of being destroyed, consequently paving the way for the possible seizure of the heights to the south before Reynolds could organize a cohesive defense.

But help was on the way with General Lysander Cutler's Brigade of Wadsworth's Division, First Corps coming up fast, followed by Hall's 2nd Maine Battery and the black hatted Westerners of the "Iron Brigade" rushing into line of battle along McPherson's Ridge. Most of the cavalymen fell back, urging the infantry to go in and give the Rebs hell. It is said that the foot soldiers made no reply to these shouts of encouragement, but neither did they respond with their usual caustic jibe, "Who ever saw a dead cavalryman?" there perhaps being more than enough present to silence even the most fervent critic. Some of Buford's men, despite being relieved by the infantry, had by choice refused to quit the field and retire, especially Colonel Chapman's Hoosiers who instead found horseholders and took up muskets to fight alongside the foot soldiers.

For Sgt. Charles Pergel, leading the left most section of A Battery, the day was not yet over, his guns continuing to pour a heavy and destructive fire upon Archer's Brigade moving forward from Willoughby Run. The 13th Alabama and 1st Tennessee on Archer's right were given the task of taking these guns and while attempting to do so came under a withering fire from a large element of Markel's 8th New York south of the Fairfield Road. Posting themselves in the orchard belonging to a Mr. Meal, they proved to be a real thorn in the enemy's side, causing the Alabamians to detail a company to deal with them. The 1st Tennessee would soon run into bigger trouble for in addition to Pergel's cannonade, boggy ground across their line of march would slow them down and eventually halt to seek refuge from Union canister rounds. Shortly after Pergel, seeing that he was about to taken in flank by the Alabamians, finally decided to withdraw.

But the Confederates could not yet claim ownership to McPherson's Ridge, not if John Reynolds could help it. Calling on the Westerners to "drive those fellows out of the woods!" Reynolds personally lead the Black Hats forward, hitting Archer's right flank and driving them into headlong retreat, in effect causing upwards of 400 casualties, including the capture of the brigade commander. This little triumph however, was marred by the death of General Reynolds, who fell dead from his horse after being struck by a stray bullet with command of the Left Wing now falling upon General Abner Doubleday of the First Corps.

Now that Hall's Battery was up, Buford rode over to Lt. Calef and gave orders for the battery to withdraw his guns each section by piece, Roder's section retiring without incident. First Sgt. Newman's section however had a close call as he had four horses killed from the team pulling his left gun and Reb infantry advancing just to his front. Calef quickly dispatched a limber to help haul the piece off, but Sgt. Newman exhibiting great strength as well as nerve, managed to pull

the gun back with only two horses, but in getting away lost 4 sets of harnesses, which were in rather short supply at the time. Newman, a dutiful NCO, later went back and managed to recover 2 of the 4 sets. Calef then galloped over to Pergel's section, then in the midst of it's slugging match with the 1st Tennessee and 13th Alabama described earlier and ordered him back, as the section was in a very exposed position with little cavalry support. The entire battery fell back to the Seminary, where they immediately went about replenishing their ammunition chests. The Regulars would be needed again soon enough.

Davis' Brigade north of the Pike fared no better than their comrades to the south, their advance being parried by the arrival of Cutler's Brigade around half past ten. Now relieved of defending the western approaches to the town, Devin hurried northward to brace up the skirmish line held mainly by Kellogg's Pennsylvanians who at that moment were sparring with General Alfred Iverson's Brigade along the Carlisle Road. Buford's "Hard Hitter" dismounted his men and threw everyone into the fight with the exception of the Ninth New York which he kept in a supporting position near Oak Hill. Again the Yankee horse soldiers displayed the same resolve seen earlier that day forcing Rodes to deploy more and more men to push them back. In an action that has unfortunately received little notice from historians, Devin's troopers, without the benefit of commanding terrain like that west of Gettysburg or artillery support, still managed to delay the Confederates for two hours, using the same "fall back and fight" tactics used in the morning's fight against Heth. By 12:30 p.m. the first elements of Oliver Howard's Eleventh Corps had come on the scene to contest the Rebel thrust with the cavalrymen ordered to support the infantry on their right flank along the York Road. While there, they became victims of a problem as old as warfare itself: "friendly fire". Spotted by Capt Wiedrich's New York Battery from Cemetery Hill, Devin's command came under what he described as a "very hot and persistent" bombardment, causing him to conclude that the enemy had gotten behind him. He then withdrew towards Gettysburg, under fire the whole way, after which the battery started to shell the pickets still watching the York Road also forcing them to pull out. Devin was then ordered to take up a line along the Emmittsburg Road with the town on his right flank. This whole comedy of errors now left the York Road as well as Howard's right wide open. Sometime between half past 2 and 3 o'clock, General Jubal Early's Division took advantage of this breach and attacked the Eleventh Corps on that flank and drove it back in a disorderly retreat through the town. Responding to this threat, Devin sent forward a dismounted squadron from the 9th New York who placed Early's butternuts under a heavy stream of carbine fire, forcing them to fall back and for the time being, restoring the right flank. But Confederate pressure soon proved unrelenting, causing Devin's men to join the chaotic exodus through the village streets, finally going into line on the extreme Union left.

While Tom Devin was kept busy delaying Ewell's advance, most of Colonel Bill Gamble's brigade was moved to Seminary Ridge south of the Fairfield Road to provide security for that flank. As more infantry from the First Corps arrived, Gamble was instructed to send two companies of the 8th New York to McPherson's Ridge to watch Colonel Chapman Biddle's left flank near the road, Biddle's infantry currently taking up position alongside the Iron Brigade to their right. The New Yorkers resumed their old position on Mr. Meal's property just west of Willoughby Run, only to find themselves out on a limb a short time later, Colonel Biddle having pulled back his infantry after taking small arms and artillery fire. General James Wadsworth, commander of the First Division of the First Corps soon appeared and ordered the 80th New York Infantry to advance and clean out the Harmon Farm, the source of the enemy rifle fire. Following a short but brisk firefight, 2 companies finally carried the farm and reestablished the line.

At about the same time that Early was savaging the Union right, Buford's adversary from the day before, J. Johnston Pettigrew attacked the ridgeline with his brigade, the 52nd North Carolina retaking the Harmon place after another fierce contest with the New Yorkers, both companies making their way south through the lines of the 8th New York with the Tarheels in hot pursuit. The 8th came under heavy rifle fire but held their ground for about 30 minutes before falling back towards McMillian's Woods along Seminary Ridge south of the Fairfield Road. Again Buford's men bought time for more infantry to come up and fortify the line, Biddle sending forth the remainder of the 80th New York along with 121st Pennsylvania. Beveridge's men of the 8th Illinois also got into the act, setting themselves up in another orchard south of the road to the infantry's left. Pettigrew's Brigade again went on the attack, shattering the Keystoneers and the New Yorkers, the Tarheels soon going on to taking the whole Union line in flank, forcing a general retreat to Seminary Ridge, Buford's men having to cover the fleeing Federal infantry with carbine fire.

Again the battle west of Gettysburg had entered a critical stage, causing an anxious Buford to sent off the following signal to Alfred Pleasanton at 3:20 p.m.:

"I am satisfied that Longstreet and Hill have made a junction. A tremendous battle has been raging since 9:30 a.m., with varying success. At the present moment the battle is raging on the road to Cashtown, and within short cannon-range of this town. The enemy's line is a semicircle on the height, from north to west. General Reynolds was killed early this morning. In my opinion, there seems to be no directing person.
P.S.-- We need help now."

Meanwhile, north of the Chambersburg Pike, Lt. Roder's right piece was back in the thick of things, having been ordered forward again from the Seminary by General Buford to take care of some Rebel infantry in the Railroad Cut. Hall's Maine Battery had recently left the field after having a very bad time of it, coming under fire from the railroad cut in addition to having it out with a half a dozen enemy guns 3/4 of a mile to the west. To add to their troubles, Hall had looked on in horror as he lost his infantry support, the foot soldiers hightailing it in column eastwards. Seeing that, Hall then decided that it was high time for him to leave and did so retiring by section, but with only five of his guns, the sixth rendered immobile due to its team being cut down by enemy bullets. Hall had attempted to haul off the piece, but was ordered by General Wadsworth to move his battery to the heights south of Gettysburg and prepare to cover the infantry's withdrawal. Now it was Roder's problem and he wasted no time as things were happening fast. No sooner had he set up to fire on the Cut when a group of Rebels spotted him, one shouting, "There's a piece, let's take it!" Roder, however would have none of that, quickly cutting loose with a canister round. The enemy then came rushing forward out of the Cut, fully intent on their prize. Again the lieutenant ordered canister, Corporal Watrous grabbing one of the deadly rounds, but was then waylaid by a Minie ball in the leg. Moving fast, Private Slattery took the round from Watrous and hastily loaded the weapon. The cannon again went off, stopping the enemy in their tracks and sending them posthaste back in the direction of the Cut.

Having no artillery now that Hall had left the field, Wadsworth went casting about and soon sighted the rest of Calef's Battery, commanding the lieutenant to take over Hall's position north of the Pike in order to cover the Corps' right flank. Calef soon had his center and left sections on line and firing, himself becoming the target of three enemy batteries to his right front along with heavy rifle fire that that would result in twelve men wounded and thirteen horses killed. Things would get worse. Fifteen minutes into his fight with the opposing batteries, Calef came under

artillery fire from his right along with additional batteries opening up to the south, resulting in a terrible cross-fire, forcing him to withdraw southwards to the swale between the ridgelines. Using McPherson's Woods as cover, the Regulars remained there until relieved by Reynolds' Battery L, 1st New York Light Artillery, afterwards moving to the extreme Union left, going into bivouac around nightfall.

Back on Gamble's part of the line, the Confederate assault resumed after the fresh troops of Major General Dorsey Pender's Division came up and passed through Pettigrew's Heth's men to make the next push against the final Union line on Seminary Ridge. The 37th North Carolina of Lane's Brigade, being posted on the far right of the line, became the recipients of a rather rude surprise when fired on by the 8th Illinois who still occupied the orchard south of the Fairfield Road. This fusillade delayed the 37th's advance causing the Tarheels to change front and fire back before continuing forward. The 8th, now faced with greatly superior numbers, discreetly withdrew eastwards to Gamble's main line on Seminary Ridge, just south of the road. There half the brigade sheltered itself behind a low lying stone wall while the rest remained mounted a short distance to their rear. Lane's Brigade, now rid of the nuisance on it's right, continued to move forward, seeking once and for all, to sweep the Union left and drive the Federals from the field. Crossing the Fairfield Road, they were now on a collision course with Gamble's men and the stone wall.

What happened next has been a matter of controversy for the past 132 years as no two accounts seem to agree on the action that was about to take place between Lane's butternut infantry and Buford's horse soldiers. Perhaps comments from a paper presented in 1887 by Major E.P. Halstead of Doubleday's staff may shed some light, Halstead being dispatched by General Howard that afternoon with orders for Buford to hold the Union left:

"He [Buford] rose in his stirrups upon his tiptoes and exclaimed: "What in hell and damnation does he think I can do against those those long lines of the enemy out there?!"

"I don't know General, but those are General Howard's orders."

"Very well, I will see what I can do"

The account goes on to tell of Buford moving out his men and forming up to make a charge, with Lane's Brigade reacting by coming to a halt and forming what would have been very familiar to a Scottish Highlander or British Guardsman who fought on the fields of Waterloo a half century before: hollow squares. While this was a prescribed method found in most tactical manuals for meeting a mounted charge, it also presented the attacker with large and very hard to miss, compact targets.

Colonel Gamble, leading the 8th Illinois along with elements of the 8th New York, moved forward while the rest of his brigade remained behind the stone wall, supplying covering fire. General Winfield Scott Hancock, commander of the famed Union 2nd Corps and no novice in the military arts, would later recall Gamble's advance as "one of the most inspiring sights" of his career. The Confederates, letting loose with a ineffective volley that failed to stop the advancing Union cavalry, then formed into the squares. Such an opportunity was too good to pass up inasmuch as Gamble's men both mounted and dismounted, began to blaze away with pistols and carbines at the massed infantry, one trooper later writing that the Rebels "fell like rain. The ground was soon covered with them." Again, John Buford's men had not only delayed the enemy, but severely punished him, so much so that Lane's Brigade saw no further action on July 1st.

Their task completed, Gamble fell back to Seminary Ridge, there to continue supporting the Union left flank while the bloodied 1st Corps, their line finally caving in to severe enemy attacks, retreated through Gettysburg to the relative safety of Cemetery Hill. The First Cavalry Division followed, first taking up position on the extreme left between Cemetery and Seminary Ridge to guard against further Confederate attacks, shifting south later that evening to the vicinity of the Peach Orchard when additional Union infantry came up and set up defensive lines along Cemetery Ridge.

Buford went among his troopers that evening. They were dirty, hungry and in all likelihood ready to drop where they stood, but they had done it. And was probably never prouder of them than he was at that moment, but he also knew that now was not the time to rest on their laurels, for there was still much work to do. That night, pickets were sent to the area west of the Peach Orchard to watch for any signs signaling an enemy advance, there were also mounts to be groomed and hopefully fed, as forage was practically nonexistent, weapons to be cleaned and if time permitted, maybe a few hours of precious sleep.

Gettysburg: July 2nd-3rd

Another hot, humid day greeted Buford's men when they awoke that morning. By 5:00 a.m. Colonel Devin's men were already at work, sending out a company sized patrol from the 9th New York under Captain Coffin to scout the area west of the Emmittsburg Road. In this they were successful, collaring a contraband who claimed to be the servant of one of Longstreet's staff and told of the the Confederate 1st Corps being only a short way off to the west, something that was previously unknown to the Federals. A second much smaller patrol from the 9th New York consisting of seven men under First Sergeant William Bradshaw went out later that morning reaching the area beyond Pitzer's Ridge (the southern extension of Seminary Ridge) there spying Wilcox's Brigade from Hill's Corps going into position to the north. A short time later, a firefight broke out between Wilcox's skirmishers and the 6th New York Cavalry with Calef's Battery offering artillery support from the Peach Orchard. The New Yorkers weren't alone for long, for Sickles' 3rd Corps soon arrived on the field and sent men from the 1st U.S. Sharpshooters forward to assist the cavalry and the 5th Michigan Infantry to protect Calef's guns. Enemy pressure increased and drove back the combined infantry-cavalry force to Sickles' main line along Cemetery Ridge after sharp fighting, the 2nd Brigade adding another six men to the casualty roll.

This was the last fighting Buford's men would see at Gettysburg. Before midday, General Pleasanton ordered the division except for a squadron from the 9th New York assigned to watch Sickles' left, to pull out, their destination being Westminster, Maryland a Union railhead 30 miles to the southeast. Once there, they were to guard the army's wagon trains as well as make themselves ready for further service. Gamble's Brigade lead the way with Devin trailing behind, both to go into camp that night at Taneytown, finally reaching Westminster on the third.

That same day, newly minted Brigadier General Wesley Merritt saw his first combat action as brigade commander. On the 2nd he was ordered north from Mechanicstown, Maryland where the Regulars had spent the past 3 days scouting, picketing and patrolling the countryside, reaching Emmittsburg that evening. Noon on the third found the Reserve Brigade again on the move northwards with instructions from Pleasanton to strike the Rebel right and rear near Gettysburg. While on the road north, Merritt was informed by a local citizen of the presence of a large and ill guarded Confederate wagon train near Fairfield, seven miles to the northwest, where Buford skirmished with the Mississippians on the 30th. Seeing an opportunity to wreak a little havoc on

the enemy's supply lines, Merritt tabbed Paddy Starr's 6th United States to go forward to seek out and capture or destroy the train. The old Regular moved out, reaching Fairfield an hour later after an uneventful march. Halting south of the town, Starr split his 400 man force, sending Captain George Cram with two companies totaling 60 men, off to the left to scout the South Mountain Range and protect that flank. Starr with the rest of his command, pressed on towards Fairfield, where they saw only a few wagons that had just left the town, heading up the valley. Starr quickly ordered a squadron under 1st Lieutenant Balder to give chase to this quarry, the cavalymen moving out and soon running into a narrow north-south road bordered on both sides by fenced in fields. Continuing north the column was bought up short the the sight of a large body of graycoated cavalry coming from the opposite direction, causing Balder to fall back on the village and warn Major Starr.

What Balder saw was their old nemesis from Brandy Station and the Loudon Valley, the 7th Virginia Cavalry of "Grumble" Jones' "Laurel" Brigade. The brigade had been earlier ordered to the Fairfield area by General Lee to "form a line to the right of and rear of our line of battle", there presumably to guard the Confederate right and guard Lee's line of communications. Starr, his command 10 miles from the nearest support and faced with an enemy force of undetermined size, nevertheless decided to make a stand, quickly deploying his men along a ridgeline that ran perpendicular across the north-south road. The position was a good one offering excellent fields of fire and sturdy fences running along the road and in the fields alongside that would slow down any enemy advance as well as provide good cover for his carbineers.

No sooner than the Regulars were ready than Jones ordered the 7th Virginia to charge, the regiment galloping forward in column along the road until the inevitable happened. Once within carbine range, they came under a viciously accurate crossfire which threw the 7th into horrible confusion, bringing their attack to a dead halt and finally forcing them to retreat back down the lane. Jones, realizing the terrible mistake he had made, sending a lone regiment attacking along a narrow front, was determined not to repeat it. Directing Chew's Battery to set up in the fields east of the road and shell the ridgeline he made ready for another attack, placing the 6th Virginia in column along the road with the now reformed 7th Virginia in line abreast in the fields on both sides, tearing down fences to clear the way. Jones' last remaining regiment, the 11th Virginia, was placed behind the artillery, there to act as a reserve.

Starr in the meantime, was very happy with the results of the first attack, but for reasons not readily understood, was determined to go on the offensive himself, instructing Lt. Paulding's squadron on the right to get ready to charge. Paulding soon moved out only to come hightailing it back when Jones launched his second assault.

The Federals never had a chance, the Virginians quickly overrunning the 6th's line and routing them, Lt. Balder going down with a mortal wound and Starr himself suffering a saber cut to the head along with catching a bullet in his right arm, which he would eventually lose. Captain Cram's squadron was soon on the scene having rushed towards the ridge when the fight began. Cram attempted to counterattack, but his squadron was swept away by the onrushing Confederates, Cram being taken prisoner. 2d Lt. Nicholas Nolan then took over the squadron and ordered a retreat, making it back to Mechanicstown that evening. There the true extent of the disaster visited upon the Sixth U.S. was soon made evident, Nolan discovering that he was now the senior officer and having to assume temporary command of the regiment until relieved by Captain Ira Claflin when they rejoined Merritt's column at nightfall. The 6th had been thoroughly whipped, its losses totaling 242 men along with their mounts, reducing their effective strength to

less than a hundred men. It is with small wonder that "Grumble" Jones would later comment in his report calling the "6th U.S. Regular Cavalry now numbers among the things that were."

The rest of the Reserve Brigade reached the Gettysburg area at about 3 o'clock that afternoon, coming under the operational control of General Judson Kilpatrick, commander of the Third Cavalry Division. Kilpatrick at this time had only one of his two brigades on hand, that of Brigadier General Elon Farnsworth who like Merritt had just won his star five days before. The other brigade, composed of four Michigan regiments under George Custer was at that moment some five miles away, going toe-to-toe with Jeb Stuart in a classic cavalry battle in the fields east of Gettysburg, so Merritt's men would make welcome additions to Kilpatrick's weakened command.

Merritt was placed just east of the Emmittsburg Road with Farnsworth some 300 yards to his right and at 4:30, after 90 minutes of skirmishing between the lines, the order was given to advance northwards and attack the Confederate right. The attack was made dismounted across open level ground with the 6th Pennsylvania on the pike itself supported from behind by Graham's Regular Battery and the 1st, 2nd and 5th United States on both flanks. Initially, the attack met with some success, the 5th U.S. driving in skirmishers from Anderson's Georgia Brigade from their positions running at a right angle and west of the road. Anderson's superior, General Evander Law was quick to rush reserves to the spot and hit Merritt hard on his left flank, causing the attack to falter and then ultimately fail, Merritt forced to retreat southwards. Farnsworth would fare even worse on his flank, his attack not only being made on horseback over rocky terrain, but was not in concert with Merritt's assault, leading to the defeat of both brigades in detail and the untimely death of the young, promising Farnsworth.

So ended the third of July. Despite the repulse of Lee's grand assault against the Union center along Cemetery Ridge, ending the three day battle with a Northern victory, it had been a day of disaster for Wesley Merritt. It also served as a clear warning to the Yankee cavalry that their showings at Brandy Station, the East Cavalry Field and on July 1st notwithstanding, they still had much to learn and that Stuart's men were still very dangerous opponents, not to be taken lightly.

Conclusions

The First Division and its commander had performed many missions in the preceding five weeks and had done superbly. At Brandy Station they had gone toe-to-toe with the finest cavalymen in the Confederacy and though there were many problems in coordination and a lacking of understanding of their mission on the part of General Pleasanton, they gave a good account of themselves. They were to bring the enemy to battle and in General Hooker's words "destroy and disperse" him, not as Pleasanton later asserted perform a mere reconnaissance in force. Nevertheless Buford and his men displayed an aggressiveness and spirit that won the admiration of their opponents and when told to retire did so in good order. June 9th was, if not a tactical victory for the Federal cavalry, was at least a moral one.

As for the clashes in the Loudoun Valley, here the mission was to gather intelligence concerning the strength and whereabouts of the then advancing Confederate Army and in this they failed. Again the responsibility for this lies with General Pleasanton who demonstrated a reluctance to move forward, instead relying on unreliable sources such as deserters and local citizens. When he finally moved into the Valley, the cavalry chief ironically seemed more concerned with bringing Stuart to battle than performing the cavalry's classic and most vital function, being the

"eyes and ears" of the army. All this aside, Buford and his men again showed commendable tactical skill and dash in the battles around Middleburg and Upperville. That Buford had to pass off the main thrust of the attack to Gregg on the 21st is no reflection on him, as he was given only two hours in which to prepare, finally going forward without benefit of a proper reconnaissance, food for his men, forage for his mounts for even enough time to brief his senior commanders.

At Gettysburg, Buford proved that he was at his best when given a free hand. In a fight lasting 10 hours he and his troopers had performed the classic cavalry mission of delaying the enemy by using the terrain and available weapons to good advantage. By falling back slowly and offering stubborn resistance, they forced Confederate commanders to deploy earlier than planned and inflicted casualties at a rate favorable to their own. By choosing an active defense, Buford traded space for time, the natural barriers west of Gettysburg fitting the situation perfectly. In doing so, the Federal cavalry held off a worthy opponent many times their own number, enabling the rest of the army to come up and fortify the high ground that would help forge the desperately needed victory that would be theirs two days later. Controversy however surrounds Buford's withdrawal from the field on July 2nd, some taking him to task for this as it was felt that his division wasn't as bad off as he pictured. There is some truth to this argument as the casualty figures amounted to only 135 for both the 1st and 2nd of July out of some 2750 men present. This does not take into account the fact that the Reserve Brigade was on detached duty and not yet committed to the battle. Also, if one reads Buford's dispatches of June 30th, he tells of his command being overworked and in dire need of forage and rations. However, there exists no documentary evidence of Buford asking to be relieved, he instead being given that order by General Pleasanton. That Pleasanton let him go is another issue because this left that flank open without benefit of cavalry support for almost 24 hours as Gregg's and Kilpatrick's Divisions were still miles to the east would not arrive at Gettysburg until noon on the 2nd. Even then the left would be still devoid of support as both divisions got caught up in battles east and northeast of the town with Farnsworth's brigade not going into position near the Round Tops until early on the 3rd.

Also sparking debate is the length of time Buford's men actually held off Harry Heth's Division until the arrival of the 1st Corps. Historians have gotten caught up in a sort of numbers game since 1863, but the plain fact of the matter is that whether Buford delayed Heth for 10 minutes or 2 hours is beside the point. What is important is that Buford's aim was to delay the enemy long enough so the heights south of Gettysburg could be secured by forces heavier than his own. And in this, he was undoubtedly successful.

In the days following the battle, it fell upon the Cavalry Corps to harass the retreating Confederates by destroying wagon trains, blocking roads and demolishing bridges in order to slow them up long enough for the Army of the Potomac to come within striking distance and bring their numerical superiority to bear. Again the First Division performed well in spite of a habitual lack of understanding as to the cavalry's role by their chief General Pleasanton. Pleasanton had fragmented the Corps during the march northwards, particularly the 2nd Division, leaving Gregg without the services of one brigade and part of another for the duration of the main bout around Gettysburg. He would continue this unsound practice during the pursuit of Lee, scattering the 2nd Division and in effect making Gregg a commander without a command. One can't help but wonder that what if Gregg's Division was available along the Potomac to help fight Stuart? In another controversy, Buford has come under fire for his failure to break through Imboden's defense line during the fight at Williamsport on July 6th. When one considers that Imboden's strength was equal to that of his attackers plus the fact that he had the

advantage of good defensive ground and plenty of artillery to back him up, this criticism seems utterly baseless.

Overall, the Cavalry Corps, and especially the First Division, had done well. But in contrast to one believing that the Federal cavalry had things all their own way in this campaign, the evidence does not hold up. As demonstrated by the battles at Fairfield, Funkstown and south of Gettysburg on July 3rd, the Cavalry Corps had much to learn. The Confederate horse soldiers under Jeb Stuart were still and would forever remain dangerous opponents. It wouldn't be for another year and the coming of a diminutive, hot tempered Irishman named Phil Sheridan and the arming of the Corps with the Spencer carbine that the Union cavalry would finally come into its own and become the formidable force that led the way to Appomattox in the spring of 1865. But in the summer of 1863, that force was coming into being, with John Buford deserving a large share of the credit.

* Larry Myers is a founding member of the Robert E. Lee Civil War Round Table