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AT GETTYSBURG

The Eighty-Eighth Pennsylvania Infantry in The Battle.

By JOHN D. VAUTIER

(With Illustrations by the Author)



The Skirmisher

On June 12, 1863, the 88th Pennsylvania, attached to Baxter's brigade, Robinson's division and Reynolds' First Army Corps, broke camp at White Church, Virginia, and took up the march for the Potomac. On the 13th the brigade bivouacked at Bealton, and on the 15th were in line of battle at Centerville, expecting the Confederate Army to debouch from the mountain gaps to advance on Washington. No enemy appearing, the line of march was resumed, the Potomac being crossed at Edwards Ferry on the 25th, the Monocacy near Jefferson on the 26th, and the division encamped near Middleton on the 27th. Resuming the march the column passed through Emmettsburg on the 29th, crossing the Pennsylvania line on the 30th, the boys meanwhile singing and shouting for joy as they tramped the soil of the Keystone State again.

On the night of June 30th the regiment was detailed for picket duty, and on the morning of July 1st some delay occurred before the division was assembled and ready to march, but at length the head of the column was directed upon Gettysburg, where the other divisions had already gone.

Upon reaching the vicinity of the town the low rumbling boom of distant cannon came reverberating over the hills, and above the trees the little balls of white smoke

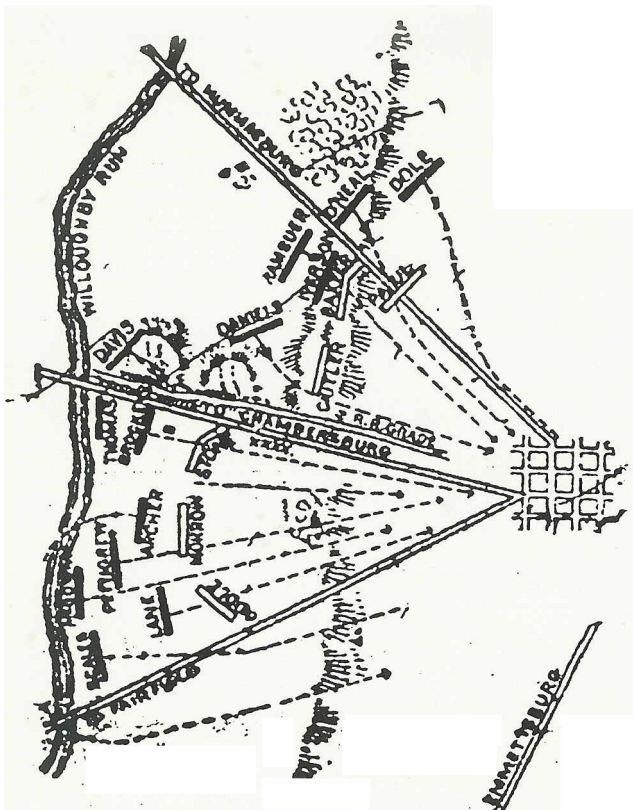
indicated to the experienced eye of the veteran that the conflict had already begun. Along the moving line all was excitement as the orders of the line officers came quick and sharp: "Close up men, close up."

A way down the road an officer was approaching, urging his foaming horse to its utmost speed, leaving a broken trail of dust behind him, and, galloping up to General Baxter, gave him a verbal order, when the command was passed down the line, "Double quick, march!" and as the soldiers went bounding along the pike they lustily sang "Glory Hallelujah," keeping time with their feet to the words and notes of that inspiring song.

As the brigade neared the field of battle the detonations of the bursting shells and the sullen roar of the cannon were intermingled with the sharp crack of the rifles, and ever and anon the rattle and roar of the volleys became more and more distinct, and the wounded, dripping in blood, began to appear, limping slowly and painfully to the rear in search of the field hospitals.

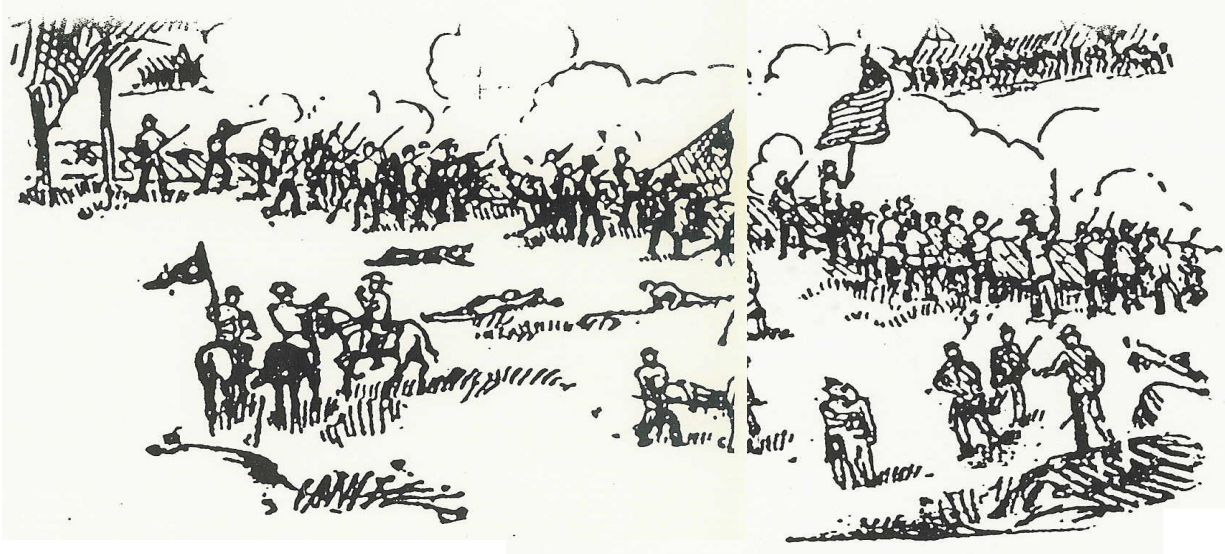
The regiment, with the brigade, passing over the fields, halted near the seminary, the noise of battle being back of the building, the manly hurrahs of the Union troops being plainly recognized from the screeching yi yi of the Rebel yell. About noon heavy columns of the enemy were discerned moving over to the right in the direction

of the Mummasburg Road, necessitating a corresponding prolongation of our line on that flank. Accordingly, Baxter's brigade, preceded by Colonel Dick Coulter in command of the skirmisher, were ordered to that point, and marching along the ridge took position on the road, facing about Northwest. Baxter quickly dressed his line and received the Confederate fire, as their lines of battle, covered by a cloud of busy skirmishers, came driving through the woods from the right of Mummasburg Road. Waiting until they were in easy range, the order was given, "Commence firing." With the sharp crack of the muskets a fleecy cloud of smoke rolled down the front of the brigade and the Minnie balls zipped and buzzed with a merry chorus toward the Southern line, which halted, and after a brief contest, retired to the shelter of the woods. This force was O'Neil's brigade, the 3rd, 5th, 6th, 13th, and 36th Alabama. After they had been repulsed another Confederate column, consisting of Iverson's brigade, the 5th, 20th, 23rd, and 12th North Carolina,



Dotted Line: Confederate Advance
Archer's brigade was captured in the woods
Davis in the railroad cut and Iverson in front of Baxter

were discovered coming in on Baxter's left flank, which caused a change of the front of part of the brigade to meet the attack. The order was given, "About face, right half wheel, halt; dress right; front." The regiment now had an admirable position behind a low stone wall, and dropping on one knee quietly awaited the command to open on the "Johnnies" coming on in brigade front across the open field toward our line.



BEHIND THE STONE WALL – JULY 1ST.

Iverson's men with arms at right shoulder came on in splendid array, keeping step with an almost perfect line. They reached and descended a little gully or depression in the ground, and moving on ascended the opposite slope as orderly as if on brigade drill, while behind-the-stone wall the Union soldiers, with rifles cocked and fingers on triggers, waited and bided their time, feeling confident that they could throw back these regiments coming against them.

When the North Carolinians were about fifty yards distant the command to fire was given, and a sheet of fire and smoke belched from the wall, flashing full in the faces of the Confederates, who at once halted, and though their men were falling like leaves in a storm, they attempted to make a stand and return the bitter fire that Baxter's men poured in their decimated ranks. But no troops could long withstand that pelting fire, and the Confederates soon fell back, taking shelter in the ravine before mentioned, where they were still exposed to a wicked fire from Baxter's line and also to an enfilading fire from Cutler's brigade on the left, who, taking in the situation, promptly advanced out far enough to make their shots tell. A rapid

fusillade was then kept up between the opposing lines, but the advantage was all on the Union side, they being well sheltered, and by laying low could keep the graybacks down. Behind a low pile of stones kneeling side-by-side, Sgt. Evans (Co. "B") and John Witmoyer, (Sgt.) of Company H, loaded and fired at the enemy in their front. A Rebel color-bearer, as he lay behind a tree, was waving his battle-flag in derision at the encouraged the men by their bravery and personal example. All these officers had won their straps by conspicuous conduct in battle, and earned fresh honors by their unflinching courage on this hopeless field.

The attack on our front was checked, but as the fire on our right came so near it became evident to the exhausted soldiers that they had no further business there, having held on already to long, and it was time to be going. But here a new danger was met and fresh trouble commenced, as it was discovered that Rhodes, having broken through the Eleventh Corps, had disrupted the Union line and was marching in battle array almost in our rear, threatening to cut us off from the town and the ridge beyond. As a matter of course the right of the First Corp[s] was turned, the line of retreat being directed along the ridge toward the seminary, but every effort was made to retard the Confederate advance so artillery could be withdrawn in safety. The cannoneers stood manfully by their guns as the infantry rallied by their side, and when the horses were disabled, ropes were tied to the trails, and the men, manning them, pulled the cannon safety away. But any hope of a successful stand was out of the question, the Southern troops being so numerous that they not only pressed our front, but came in on both flanks, and if the cavalry had not checked them on the Fairfield Road it is probable that they would have gobbled up all the rear of the First Corps.

The Infantry ever after felt conscious of owing those gallant cavalry men a debt of gratitude that they were unable to repay, Lieutenant Sylvester H. Martin was probably one of the last of our officers to leave the hill, and as he came down the slope in front of the seminary he ran the gantlet of the Confederate fire, and, though repeatedly shot at and called upon to stop, he made a rapid and masterly change of base, reaching the hill unscathed.

Sergeant Charles Barber received a painful wound in the leg, which paralyzed his side, causing him to fall like a log. While lying helpless on the ground, the rebel line of battle approached and he raised his hand for them not to shoot again. Their lines halted near him and an officer exclaimed: "Don't be afraid, my man, will not hurt you," and kindly directed two of his soldiers to assist the disabled sergeant to a safer place.

In retreat many of the troops reaching the town passed safely through, reforming their lines on the hill, but others, becoming entangled in the confused mass of soldiers, wagons, ambulances and what not, were captured by Early's men, who entered in by the York Road about the same time the fragments of the First Corps

came in the other side.

Lieutenant Boone of B Company, had reached the town, and by vaulting fences almost reached the cemetery, when, stepping from the alley to cross the last street, he ran against a rusty-looking “reb,” who drew a bead on the officer and ordered him to surrender. The Lieutenant was taken at a disadvantage, his sword being sheathed and, more “Johnnies” appearing, he threw up his hands as the only course safely left for him to pursue.

“Now tote me that sword” was the next request, but being an inferior in rank Boone positively refused to comply and as the situation was getting desperate he unbuckled his belt and threw them on the ground. He was then ordered to “git to the rear,” and, passing around the corner, bolted up the first alley in a futile attempt to flank the enemy, but was compelled to fall behind the bayonets of the soldiers of the man whom he had earlier in the day, in the song, threatened to “hang on a sour apple tree.”

Captains E.A. Mass, Schell and many other officers and privates were also captured, the officers being incarcerated in Southern prisons until the termination of the war. The adventures of some of the men who were not able to get out of the town is interesting, and none more so than that of Lieutenant R.B. Beath, of Company D (past commander-in-chief G.A.R.). While retreating he saw Private William Little, of his own company, shot in the stomach, and in response to his piteous appeals assisted him to a hospital in the Lutheran Church.

The chaplain of Colonel Lyle’s 90th Regiment had been shot and killed and his body lay near the door, and, stepping over his corpse, Beath placed his charge in a pew.

Little, though a brave soldier, was one of the “toughest cases” in Company D, being about half the time under arrest for some act of insubordination, and when the surgeon examined his wound he informed him that it was useless to waste time on him, he would be dead in two hours. This verdict aroused the ire of the wounded man, and though he could not straighten himself up, so excruciating was his pain, yet he emphatically dissented from the surgeon’s judgment and in not very elegant language would tell every one he knew what the physician said and would boast that he would live to bury old “sawbones” yet. He did not die, the ball having passed over and by his entrails without puncturing them.

Beath, by meritorious service, had just won his commission and did not wish to be carried South as a prisoner, and seeing so much misery on all sides, he volunteered as an assistant to the surgeon, when, tying a white band around his arm, he was recognized by the Confederate as a member of the hospital corps. On the second

day, learning that Sergeant Ramsey and other personal friends were lying wounded and uncared for, on Seminary Ridge, he determined to find and assist them. Upon reaching McPherson's barn, he found it full of bleeding and mangled soldiers in a most distressed and sickening condition, without a surgeon to dress their festering wounds and bind up their splintered bones. Many of the unfortunates were so shockingly lacerated that they were unable to move, being in some cases glued to the floor by the blood flowing from their gaping wounds congealed in pools under them, and all were in torment, suffering from thirst and hunger. These pitiful cases awakened all the sympathy in the Lieutenant's heart, and he at once set to work to alleviate their sufferings. He found a man wounded in the arm, and, putting him to work carrying water, he spent the day washing the wounds and, tearing up his own underclothing in ribbons for bandages, bound up the torn bodies of his comrades as best he could and in the evening he returned to town and sent a surgeon to the assistance of the neglected soldiers.

During the occupation of the town by the enemy the hospital attendants slept in a yard attached to the church. On the night when the Confederates evacuated the village they made a thorough search in every house and yard for Union officers, hurrying Southward without ceremony all they found unwounded. Their rear guards, in search for officers, came into the yard where Beath was sleeping with the other attendants, and lifting the blanket uncovered his shoulder, and holding the lantern down looked for the insignia of an officer, but seeing the bit of white on his arm they threw the blanket over him again, and after inspecting all the other sleepers withdrew, to the great relief of the Lieutenant, who, though assuming to be in a heavy snore, was on the alert all the time, and when the guards had passed out of sight he quickly scaled the fence, and eluded their skirmishers reaching the federal line safety.

Corporal Lewis W. Bonnin was badly wounded, and, being unable to reach the hill, took refuge in a house and narrowly escaped being shot by an infuriated rebel, who accused the wounded soldiers in the house with firing upon them.

However, what was left of the regiment, having reached the hill somehow, were rallied behind their colors and a position assigned them to repel the Confederate advance if they should make an assault. On the morning of the 2nd the regiment, with the brigade, lay in reserve back of the cemetery, and when Longstreet made his furious onslaught against the left flank the brigade was hurried over in rear of the Third Corps, taking a position on the spot now marked by the granite tablet erected to locate the position of the regiment on July 2nd.

In the evening the battalion was pushed out to meet the Confederate line, assisting to check and throw back their advance, and remained on the skirmish line part of the night.

On Friday the 3rd the Regiment lay part of the day back of the cemetery, and later

on were in line of battle in Zeigler's Grove. (In the Cyclorama of the Battle of Gettysburg this grove is to the right of Bigelow's guns.) A neat granite tablet, similar to those marking the first and second days position, indicates this spot. Among the boulders and in the field the regiment hid the best they could, but there was an uneasy feeling manifest that the "Johnnies were not licked yet," and that Lee was concentrating his forces to strike a crushing blow somewhere, and we were all anxious to know just where that stroke would fall.

About 1 o'clock the heavy growl of artillery was heard away over in the Confederate line to our left, and at once, as if they were waiting the signal, a terrible tempest of shot and shell came whirling and shrieking over to the Union position.

Our artillerists were silent for a few moments, and we supposed they were appalled by the terrific storm of shot that, ripping and tearing among them, filled the air with bursting fragments of iron, but they manned their guns and opened in full blast upon the foe.

The concussion of the cannon shook the ground, while the air was cut by every form of missile, whistling, hissing and screaming in their terrible course, striking the earth sending up immense clouds of dust, smashing the rocks into splinters, ripping through the trees, demolishing the tombstones, bound and ricocheting among the men, cannon and horses, and carrying terror and death in every nook and corner of the ground in range. No, place was safe from their infernal courses and horses and men were knocked to pieces, and scattered fragments of mutilated limbs of man and beast covered the ground. The unearthly screech of the cannon balls appalled the stoutest and bravest in the ranks, causing the very blood to chill in their veins and the heart to cease beating in terror of the horrible sounds.

To the crouching men in blue it seemed as if the hellish concert were never to cease when for an hour, an hour and a half, the destructive fire was continued, but about 3 o'clock our cannoneers ceased firing, throwing their begrimed forms on the ground by their smoking guns.

The Confederate gunners at length also let up, very likely because their cannon had become so hot that they were unable to handle them. Every man in the Union ranks knew that now the tug of war was coming, and rifles were examined, nipples carefully reprimed, cartridge boxes filled, and then all eyes were directed to the ridge to see where they would first appear. "Here they come!" ran along the line, and away off beyond the Emmetisburg Road, through the clouds of smoke, their lines could be seen debouching from the timber, with their mounted officers and color bearers in advance. In the distance they appeared like a line of long gray ribbon with their crimson flags fluttering in the breeze and the Western sun glaring in quivering flashes from their rifle barrels as in superb array they emerged line after line from the woods, directing their course directly towards our position.



Their massed brigades tramped on in a magnificent style, stretching from the direction of the seminary along and beyond Codori's farmhouse. presenting a front more than a mile long. After they had advanced a few hundred yards every available piece of artillery in the Federal line opened a merciless fire upon them, first with solid shot, then with shell and finally with single and double charges of canister. The shot and shell tore through their ranks with fearful effect, throwing dismembered limbs and mangled bodies high into the air, and it appeared as if all the known machinery of destruction was concentrated upon these men in gray coming over the fields in their hopeless task to take the crest in their front.

Upon reaching the pike their center was obliques directly toward the grove, but they changed direction by an oblique movement which brought the middle of them to our left, where the Philadelphia Brigade received them with a withering fire.

Our line was at once ordered in, and rushing forward mingled in the melee near the grove. That the spirit of their charge had been broken before we got there, though we captured many prisoners and several battle flags with slight loss to our

own regiment. When the fire slackened a tremendous hurrah went up with a mighty shout, extending along the Union lines, and all knew the assault had failed and the battle of Gettysburg had been beaten back. The hitherto invincible gray veterans of Lee's army had been utterly, and completely repressed in all areas and the Union soldiers felt assured that in their fight they were the equals of their Southern antagonist.

In the subsequent campaigns of those two armies the Army of the Potomac, though often foiled and checked, were never driven from the battlefield.

On the 4th the battalion was advanced out on the skirmish line and had quite a spirited action with the Confederate sharpshooters. Sunday, the 5th, was spent burying the dead, and on the 6th the pursuit of Lee's fugitive army was commenced.

The loss of the 88th Regiment in the three days struggle was ten killed, the wounded and missing bringing up the total to about a hundred, more than one-third of the number that followed the flag of the 88th into the contest on the morning of the 1st – John D. Vautier, February 1886.

ROSTER OF REGIMENTS ENGAGED JULY 1, 1863, OF FIRST CORPS

Wadworth's Division – Meredith's Brigade – 2nd Wisconsin, 6th Wisconsin, 7th Wisconsin, 24th Michigan, 19th Indiana. Cutler's Brigade – 7th Indiana, 56th Pennsylvania, 76th New York, 95th New York, 147th New York, 14th New York State Militia. Robinson's Division – Paul's Brigade – 16th Maine, 13th Massachusetts, 94th New York, 104th New York, 107th Pennsylvania, 11th Pennsylvania. Baxter's Brigade – 12th Massachusetts, 83rd New York, 97th New York, 88th Pennsylvania, 90th Pennsylvania. Doubleday's Division – Biddle's Brigade – 121st Pennsylvania, 142nd Pennsylvania, 151st Pennsylvania, 28th New York. Stone's Brigade – 143rd Pennsylvania, 149th Pennsylvania, 150th Pennsylvania.

Total: Twenty-nine regiments, eleven being from Pennsylvania.

John D. Vautier

CONFEDERATE REGIMENTS ENGAGED WITH THE FIRST CORPS, JULY 1, 1863.

Rhode's Division – Daniel's Brigade – 32nd, 43rd, 45th, 53rd, and 2nd North Carolina. Dole's Brigade – 4th, 12th, 21st, and 41st Georgia. Iverson's Brigade – 5th, 12th, 20th, and 23rd North Carolina. Ramsuer's Brigade – 2nd, 4th, 14th, and 30th North Carolina. O'Neal's Brigade – 3rd, 5th, 6th, 12th, and 26th Alabama.

Pender's Division – McGown's Brigade – 1st, 12th, 13th, and 14th, North Carolina Regiments. Lane's Brigade – 7th, 18th, 28th, 33rd, and 37th Georgia. Thomas's Brigade – 14th, 35th, 45th, and 49th Georgia. Scale's Brigade – 16th, 22nd, 34th, and 38th North Carolina.

Heth's Division – Pettegrew's Brigade – 42nd, ..., 28th, 44th, 47th, 52nd, and 17th North Carolina. Brockenborough's Brigade 40th, 55th, and 47th Virginia. Davis's Brigade – 2nd, 11th, 42nd, Mississippi and 55th North Carolina. Archer's Brigade – 1st, 7th, 14th Tennessee and 13th Alabama.

A total force of fifty-seven regiments of Confederate infantry who were engaged with the First Corps at Gettysburg on July 1, 1863.

John D. Vautier